

Northern Section.

NELSON LEE

2¢



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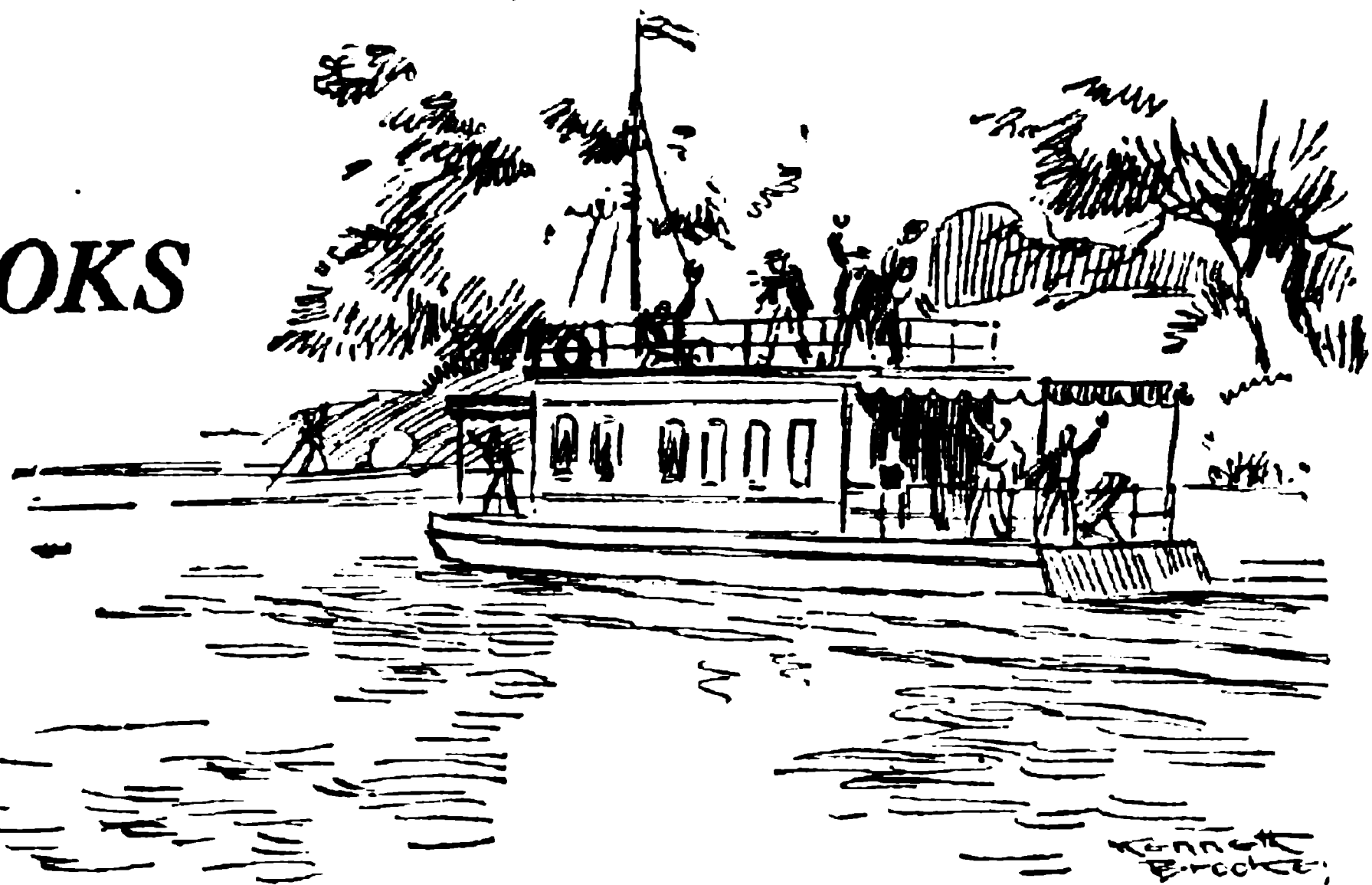
New Series No. 28.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

August 2nd, 1930.

THE RIVER RIVALS!

By
EDWY
SEARLES BROOKS



*All aboard E. O. Handforth's
bouseboat for a mirthmaking trip!*

CHAPTER 1. Good News!

"**H**OW about Brighton?" asked Church.
 "Too crowded!" replied Edward
 Oswald Handforth, shaking his
 head.

"Margate, then?"

"More crowded than Brighton!"

"What about Bournemouth?"

"Too far!"

"Folkestone?"

"Too quiet."

"Oh, there's no pleasing him," said McClure, with a grunt. "He doesn't know where he wants to go!"

The famous chums of Study D at St. Frank's were sunning themselves on the Ancient House steps. It was a bright summer's morning, and the one topic of conversation was the coming week-end.

The Head had announced that the whole school was to have a holiday, prior to the ceremonial re-opening of St. Frank's in its old entirety. The last touches were now being put to the Modern House and the East House.

Naturally, everybody was talking on that all-absorbing subject. Even cricket had lost a good deal of its attraction.

"Letter for you in the rack, Handy!" remarked Vivian Travers, as he strolled out. "Didn't you notice it?"

"By George! I didn't even think of looking," replied Handforth, running indoors. "Not that I'm expecting anything important."

He found his letter, tore it open, and looked

very disappointed when no banknotes made themselves evident. .

"It's only from Uncle Greg," said Handforth, after a glance at the signature.

"Oh!" said his chums.

They had met Uncle Greg—otherwise General Gregory Bartholomew Handforth, D.S.O., of Handforth Towers, North Walsham, Norfolk. He was a good sport—one of the best. However, he might have enclosed a tip in his letter!

"My only sainted aunt!" ejaculated Handforth, his eyes gleaming, his face flushed.

"Something good?" asked Church hopefully.

"Rather!" replied Edward Oswald. "We know where to go for the week-end now."

“Where?”

"Kingston-on-Thames," replied Handfort triumphantly.

"That's not much of a place!" said Church disparagingly.

"But wait a minute!" continued Handforth. "Uncle Greg has a houseboat that he's going to give me. Uncle Greg is going abroad for a few months—and he's a bachelor, so he's offered me the loan of the giddy."

"My hat! That sounds pret-

McClure, becoming interested.

"Pretty good!" echoed Hand
gilt-edged! Here's the key!" he
ing out a small Yale Key from
the envelope.

"How many of us can go?" asked [REDACTED] eagerly.

"Uncle Greg says there's plenty of accommodation for at least a dozen—perhaps more,"

replied Handforth, as he consulted the letter. "Listen to this—I shall trust you, of course, to see that no damage is done; the Merryweather isn't a bad boat, and you ought to be able to have a nice holiday on her. But don't expect too much, Edward, my boy. She's a good boat, but she's not exactly a millionaire's palace. However, boys are not very particular, are they?" Good old Uncle Greg!" concluded Handforth. "I didn't even know that he owned a houseboat!"

Footsteps sounded from the Remove passage, and a moment later K. K. Parkington, Harvey Deeks, and Clement Goffin appeared. Handforth frowned when he saw them. He always did frown when he saw them. They were his deadliest rivals.

"Good news, sweetheart?" asked Kirby Keeble Parkington politely. "Do I not detect an eager glow in your eagle eye?"

"We're only discussing our week-end vac," replied Handforth airily.

"Ah!" nodded K.K. "A half-day at South-end, no doubt?"

"Fathead!" retorted Handforth. "As a matter of fact, we're going on a luxurious houseboat on the Thames—quite a crowd of us."

K.K. & Co. stared.

"A houseboat?" repeated Parkington, after an appreciable pause. "Really? You interest me strangely."

Handforth grinned.

"You mean I'm making you green with jealousy," he replied promptly. "My uncle's houseboat, you know. She's called the Merryweather, and she's moored on the Thames just below Kingston."

"Kingston?" repeated K.K. "Most interesting."

"Of course, we don't expect you fellows to go on such a ripping holiday," said Handforth indulgently. "It isn't everybody who can have the use of a houseboat on the Thames. But we believe in being classy."

Swanking was foreign to Handforth's real nature; but, somehow, he couldn't help himself in front of K.K. & Co. Besides, it was such an excellent opportunity for crowing.

Long before the morning was out, everybody in the Remove had read General Handforth's letter, and by that time it was looking a bit tattered and dirty. All sorts of juniors were hoving round Handforth, making themselves very pleasant. Not that this had any effect.

Edward Oswald had already made up his mind who to invite; and he invited them on the spot: such stalwarts as Reggie Pitt, Travers, Harry Gresham, Potts, and Waldo. Needless to say, these juniors gladly accepted the invitation; the prospect of a trip on the Thames in a houseboat was enticing.

Handforth even went a step further. That evening he went over to the Moor View School and asked Irene Manners and Doris

Berkeley and the other girls—in fact, a crowd of them—to come over on Monday for the day. The ceremonial re-opening of St. Frank's was to take place on Tuesday.

"Get there early!" he urged. "Get there to breakfast, if you like. We'll go on a ripping picnic up the river, and we'll have a topping time."

"We'll be there so early that we'll knock you up," replied Irene, smiling. "A day on the river sounds too glorious for words."

"On your Uncle Gregory's houseboat, too," said Winnie Pitt. "My only hat! Aren't some of these chaps lucky!"

K.K. & Co. were going about with long faces; they did their utmost to hide their chagrin, but it was no good. It was as clear as daylight that they were green with envy. Not one of them received an invitation; Handforth wanted this holiday to be peaceful.

CHAPTER 2.

All Aboard!

"I ought to be along here somewhere," said Handforth briskly.

He was striding along the river side, and with him were numbers of other Removites. All were in flannels, all were wearing straw hats, and all carried suit-cases.

Kingston-on-Thames was not looking its best this Sunday evening; for there were dark clouds in the sky, and already there had been more than one rumble of thunder. A few drops of rain pattered down. Somehow, the river did not look so inviting as the juniors had expected. The water was grey and sullen.

It had been Handforth's idea for the holiday party to congregate on the Sunday evening. They would spend a quiet night on the houseboat, and get up bright and

early in the morning so that they could have a full day.

"That might be her over there!" said Church, pointing to a palatial vessel on the opposite side of the river—a floating palace of white and gold.

"No, she's on this side," replied Handforth, frowning. "It says so in Uncle Greg's letter. She ought to be just about here."

Until twenty minutes earlier everybody had been in the best of spirits, eager and happy at the prospect of the river holiday. The threatening storm and the failure to find the houseboat, however, had cast a depression over the party.

"Well, you ought to know her, Handy," remarked Gresham. "You've seen the houseboat before, haven't you?"

"Never," replied Handforth. "I don't know any more about her than you do—"

"Hallo, hallo! What's this?" interrupted Travers, with a curious note in his voice. "You said that your uncle's houseboat is called the Merryweather, didn't you?"

Extra-Long ST. FRANK'S YARN Next Week!

See page 9

"Yes."

"Well, here she is," said Travers ominously, and with a significant wave of his hand.

Handforth looked and nearly turned pale. A peal of thunder boomed out, echoing and re-echoing.

"It's going to rain!" said Reggie Pitt.

It wasn't a brilliant observation, but Reggie felt that he simply *had* to say something. The situation was becoming strained.

Moored close to the bank, and near at hand, was the Merryweather. The juniors had been preparing to walk straight past; they had hardly given this craft a second glance. She wasn't worthy of it. They were looking for a houseboat—a structure of white paint and polished brass rails and artistic green awnings. The thing they now regarded was a mere apology for a houseboat.

At one time, no doubt, it had been the Pride of the River; but her glory had long since gone. She was old; she was doddering; she listed slightly to starboard, and was down a bit by the stern. Her paintwork was not white, but an ugly, depressing kind of mottled grey, with, here and there, great rusty stains. Her brasswork was tarnished. Many of the rails were bent, and in parts a section was missing altogether.

Handforth pulled himself together with an effort.

"Well, we'd better go aboard, I suppose," he said awkwardly.

"Wouldn't be at all a bad idea," replied McClure, as he glanced up at the clouds. "Here comes the rain, unless I'm mistaken."

Boom—oom!

Another peal of thunder crashed out, and almost immediately afterwards the rain began to fall in torrents. There was an immediate stampede.

The Merryweather was moored close to the bank, so it was easy enough to get aboard. Handforth had been hoping that there was some sort of mistake; but the vessel's name was clearly painted on the board which was affixed to her superstructure.

"Get the key out quick, Handy!" urged Church. "The sooner we can get under cover the better."

"Where's the door?" demanded Handforth, pushing forward.

He clumped over the deck, and there was an ominous crackling sound. The next second Handforth pitched forward, his left foot having gone clean through the deck.

"Ahem!" coughed Reggie Pitt, looking across the river. "Have you fellows noticed the curious cloud effect over there?"

Reggie winked at the others, and they understood. Handforth's discomfiture—indeed, his agony of mind—was sufficient without the fellows making it worse. For days he had been talking and boasting about his uncle's magnificent houseboat on the Thames. And this was it! One heavy footstep on the deck, and a fellow went clean through!

The door was found for'ard, and Handforth groaned when the Yale key turned sweetly in the lock. This clinched it. Edward Oswald's

thoughts, regarding Uncle Gregory, were positively scandalous.

"Come in, you chaps," he said thickly. "Well, thank goodness we've got a roof over our heads now! Just our luck to have all this rain as soon as we arrive!"

"What did you say about a roof?" murmured Travers politely.

They found themselves in the big saloon—which occupied two-thirds of the deck space. In the distant past, no doubt, this saloon had been a very splendid apartment. Now it was dingy and drab and stuffy; and water was dripping down through the ceiling from at least a dozen different points.

"I have a feeling," murmured Travers, "that this is going to be a short—a very short—holiday!"

CHAPTER 3.

The Limit!

EVERYBODY worked hard to make Handforth feel comfortable—whilst feeling terribly uncomfortable themselves. They studiously refrained from making any disparaging remarks about Uncle Gregory's houseboat. After all, any remarks from them were needless. The Merryweather spoke for herself.

Fortunately, there was plenty of food. A number of boxes were found outside on deck. Groceries and other foodstuffs had been delivered according to Handforth's orders. As quickly as possible, a meal was prepared.

The trouble was, the cooking arrangements were very nearly nil. There was an oil range aboard in the galley, but it was so rusty and out of condition that by the time the amateur cooks got it going the whole houseboat, from stem to stern, was filled with choking fumes. The food, when it was prepared, tasted strongly of paraffin, and it was mottled by many blacks.

"After all, the seaside's best," said Handforth, when the terrible meal was over. "They crack up the river, but they don't know what they're talking about! Give me the seaside every time!"

"Oh, it's not so bad, Handy," said Gresham. "The rain's stopped now, and it's a glorious evening. Supposing we go on deck?"

"We'd better be careful how we walk, then," said Handforth gruffly. "I'm a bit disappointed in Uncle Greg, you know."

"Disappointed?" repeated Church politely. "Is that all?"

"He warned me in the letter that the houseboat wasn't exactly a palace, but, dash it, we didn't expect this!" said Handforth, waxing indignant. "You chaps have been jolly decent—but I've got to speak out! What do you think of this houseboat?"

"Don't ask us," said Travers. "Dear old fellow, we don't blame you——"

"It's nothing but a rotten old hulk!" went on Handforth ferociously. "At any moment it might sink under us! If it wasn't so late I should suggest that we went home. But I suppose we'd better stay the night now—and things might seem better to-morrow."

Going to bed was a worse farce than supper. There were cabins, it was true, and there were beds; but there wasn't a sheet to be found on the boat, and the blankets were moth-eaten and ragged. However, it was summer time, and the blankets, at all events, were bone-dry. Everybody had to go to bed practically in the dark, for there were only one or two candles available, and no lamps.

Handforth and Church and McClure found themselves in one cabin, and Edward Oswald's chums felt like unburdening themselves now that they were in private, but they hadn't the heart to do so. Their leader was so dejected that they suffered in silence. They had already adopted a motto—"Never Again." Being healthy, active youngsters, they soon got to sleep. It wasn't long before they were awake again; for Handforth created a disturbance.

"Why can't you chaps keep to your own beds?" he demanded irritably. "What's the idea of tickling my feet?"

"We haven't touched your feet," mumbled Church. "Fathead! You must be dreaming."

"Eh? I could swear I felt— There you are," gasped Handforth. "I say, there's something in the cabin with us!"

He hastily felt for the matches, and struck one. The yellow light blazed up. Handforth saw two twinkling eyes at the foot of his bed. A big rat took a leap to the floor and scuttled away through a hole. At the same moment two other rats shot out from beneath McClure's bed. And McClure himself gave an excellent imitation; for the manner in which he shot out of his bed was masterly.

"I've had enough of this!" he panted. "My only sainted aunt! Rats as big as fox terriers!"

"And one of them was nibbling my giddy toe!" babbled Handforth.

They fled, only pausing to take their blankets. In the saloon they ran up against Gresham and Travers and Potts.

"Hallo! You, too?" asked Travers politely. "I don't mind moths in my bed-room, and I'll even put up with a spider or two; but I bar rats."

"I say, I'm awfully sorry," said Handforth earnestly. "You wait until I write to my Uncle Gregory! I'll tell him off about this!"

"Don't be too hard on him," said Gresham. "He hasn't used this houseboat for years, by the look of it, and perhaps it never occurred



Handforth clumped over the deck, and there was a splintering sound as his foot went through the rotten woodwork.

to him that she's somewhat the worse for wear by now."

"We'll clear off to-morrow," said Handforth emphatically. "We'll just have breakfast, and then we'll make other plans. And we'll spend the rest of the night on deck. Thank goodness it's mild!"

On deck they managed to get some sleep, but they were all up by six o'clock, thankful to be active again. They indulged in a glorious bathe. There was nothing wrong with the river itself, anyhow, and when they came out, fresh and invigorated, their appetites were enormous. Somehow, even the old Merryweather did not look so ramshackle now.

"It's a bit of fun, when you come to think of it," said Reggie Pitt, grinning. "Later on we'll all yell with laughter over this affair. Now, what about brekker? Who's going to lend a hand with the eggs and bacon?"

"Wait a minute!" said Handforth, with a curiously suppressed note of horror in his voice. "I've just thought of something, you chaps!"

"Well, out with it," said Church, staring.

"The girls!" breathed Handy, in a hollow voice.

Everybody jumped, and the old deck groaned.

"The girls!" repeated Handforth huskily. "We invited them to come—to-day! And they said they'd be here early! Ye gods and little fishes! I'd forgotten all about 'em until this minute!"

Vivian Travers strolled up.

"Never mind the girls now," he said smoothly. "Cast your eyes across the river, dear old fellows. There's something else to look at."

"We can't be bothered with looking at anything now!" ejaculated Handforth desperately. "What are we going to do? If only we can stop the girls from coming, we could keep this—this tragedy to ourselves."

"Yes, but——" began Travers.

"We've got to keep it a secret!" went on Handforth grimly. "You chaps have got to promise me! By George! If Parkington and his gang heard a whisper of this, they'd chip us throughout the whole of next term."

"They would—after the way you bragged and boasted," nodded Church bitterly.

Travers sighed.

"Isn't this a waste of breath?" he asked. "Look across the river, dear old fellows—and then you will understand."

Something in his tone caused the others to stare over the sparkling, sunlit waters. Then their attention became fixed; a look of horror came into Handforth's face.

Gliding slowly and smoothly down the river was a super-houseboat—a magnificent, luxurious vessel, gleaming with white and polished brass. And leaning over the rails, resplendent in white flannels, were—Kirby Keeble Parkington and the other eleven members of the Carlton Gang!

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Handforth leapt from the houseboat into the dingy—and went right through into the river. Splash!

CHAPTER 4.

Poor Old Handy!

“O H, help!” moaned Handforth miserably.

The worst had happened. His deadly rivals had seen! Now, in a flash, he understood the meaning of Parkington’s attitude when Handforth had first spoken of the Merryweather. Unknown to the Old-Timers, the Red-Hots had also planned a houseboat holiday on the Thames. That was why Parkington had been so interested. The super-houseboat glided alongside.

“Old-Timers, ahoy!” sang out a cheery voice. “How goes it, you chaps?”

The Old-Timers waved feeble hands.

“By jingo! You’ve got a smart craft there, Handy!” came Parkington’s voice. “Uncle Gregory’s houseboat, eh?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

The other Red-Hots yelled with laughter.

“The Pride of the River,” chortled Harvey Deeks. “Better be careful with that rail, Handy; if you lean against it too heavily it’ll break!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

The rival boat glided by, and Handforth took a deep breath.

“We shall hear about this all next term!” he said miserably. “I’m sorry, you chaps! But, dash it, it’s not my fault. I didn’t know—”

“There’s something else you don’t know,”

interrupted Church. “You don’t know that we’re adrift, do you?”

“Adrift?” yelled Handforth, spinning round.

“Must be the tide,” said Church. “All these old ropes are rotten, and they’ve busted.”

It was true enough. The Merryweather, sluggish and lopsided, was gradually edging out from the bank and getting nearer to the centre of the river. Just then a number of other hails sounded from the bank. Handforth nearly jumped a foot into the air, and the deck planks splintered.

“Look!” he gasped faintly.

A number of girls were on the bank—gaily attired girls, fresh and trim in their summery frocks. They were waving. Irene & Co. had arrived!

“You chaps stay here!” said Handforth desperately. “They can’t come aboard! Thank goodness we got adrift—that’s one thing to be grateful for, anyhow! I shall have to make some sort of excuse, and we’ll all go to the Zoo, or to Madame Tussaud’s, or somewhere. Where’s the boat?”

A small dingy was drifting astern, attached by a painter. Handforth swarmed over the side, dropped into the boat, and promptly went clean through. There was a splintering of wood, a mighty splash, and the famous Edward Oswald had gone.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Even the Old-Timers yelled with laughter.

It was unsympathetic, but they couldn't help it. The sight of Handforth going clean through the bottom boards of that boat was too funny. Every single thing connected with the Merryweather was so rotten that it was practically falling to pieces.

Handforth came up, gasping and spluttering. The wreckage of the boat was just drifting away, nearly submerged.

"Shan't be long, girls!" gurgled Handy. "Something—something's gone wrong!"

"Really?" asked Irene politely.

"Wait there a minute, and I'll join you!" went on Handforth, as he started swimming. "I'm afraid we can't go for that houseboat trip to-day, but perhaps we'll make some different plans."

The girls had made their plans by the time Handforth scrambled aboard the Merryweather's deck. The rival houseboat had glided to the bank in the meantime, and Parkington & Co., immaculate and smiling, had jumped ashore. Irene & Co. found themselves surrounded. Almost before they knew it they were escorted aboard that super-craft.

"It's all right, you Old-Timers!" sang out Parkington cheerily. "The girls tell us that you've scratched your trip; so we're taking them instead. You don't mind, do you?"

"Don't mind!" howled Handforth wildly. "Of course we mind! You rotters, those girls are our guests, and—and——"

"Better dry up, old man," interrupted Church. "We promised the girls a good time on the river—and we can't give it to them. Parkington & Co. can—and it wouldn't be playing the game if we made a fuss."

Handforth sank down weakly.

"I give up!" he said, in a thin, small voice. "The worst has happened!"

"Telegram for you, Handy," said Travers, strolling up. "The post office messenger just brought it over in a boat."

"Telegram?" said Handforth, seizing it feverishly. "What the dickens—— Why, hallo—— Oh, my hat!"

The pink form drifted from his fingers, and the others grabbed it up. The words ran:

"Good luck! Hope you're having a nice holiday on the faithful old Merryweather."

"UNCLE GREGORY."

CHAPTER 5.

All's Well That Ends Well!

BEFORE Handforth could make any comments on his uncle's message, a neat little motor-launch drew alongside. A man in smart uniform smiled up at the boys.

"Master Parkington's compliments, young gentlemen, and he would very much like you all to come across to the White Swallow for breakfast," he said cheerily.

The Old-Timers cheered up.

"Good old Parkington!" went up a shout. "Will we go to breakfast? By Jove! Will we not!"

It was a sporting action on Parkington's part, and Handforth, after swallowing some-

thing which persisted in sticking in his throat, set his jaw firmly.

"Yes, we'll go," he said thickly. "It'll mean eating a bit of humble pie, but that's better than eating eggs and bacon fried in paraffin!"

The others thought so, too—especially after they had got aboard the luxurious White Swallow. Breakfast was first-class. It was served in a sunlit saloon, where the fresh river breeze came floating through the open windows.

Parkington & Co. very sportingly made no comments regarding the Merryweather. Perhaps it was because Irene and her girl chums were present. Anyhow, it was a very merry breakfast party, and the spirits of the Old-Timers rose tremendously. Many of them were beginning to hope, in fact, that Parkington would invite them to stay aboard for the day.

But it didn't come off. For when breakfast was over, and they all went up on the spacious white decks, Kirby Keeble Parkington extended his fist to Handforth.

"Well, cheerio, old man," he said heartily. "You'll be getting back to your own houseboat now, I suppose."

"Why—er—yes," said Handforth awkwardly. "I—I suppose so."

"We'll take you along," offered Parkington. "In fact, we're gliding in that direction now. Perhaps we shall see something more of you later on in the day, eh?"

"Not on the river," replied Handforth, shaking his head.

"No?" said Parkington politely.

"We've changed our minds," replied Handforth. "Don't be an ass, Parkington! You know jolly well why we've changed our minds, too!"

"I don't—at least, I can't see why you shouldn't have a really splendid day on the Merryweather," said Parkington, looking across the sparkling water. "In my opinion, she's a first-class craft. In fact, every bit as good as the White Swallow."

"You silly ass!" said Handforth gruffly. "You know jolly well—— Eh? Why, what the——"

His eyes goggled. The White Swallow was gliding gently nearer to a splendid spick and span houseboat which was moored against the river bank. She was every bit as smart and as luxurious as Parkington's craft. And there, on her stern, was the name—"Merryweather."

"But I don't understand!" gasped Handforth, finding his voice.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Red-Hots, letting themselves go.

"This—this is the Merryweather?" babbled Handforth.

"Of course," said Parkington smoothly. "And I rather think, Handy, sweetheart, that it's up to the Red-Hots! We owe you one or two japes, you know; and we thought this was a good opportunity of working one off."

"No!" repeated Handforth, his throat catching up and down. "But—but——"

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS' LETTER TO "N.L." READERS

Next week the NELSON LEE will once more contain an extra long story featuring the famous Chums of St. Frank's. The popular Author of these yarns has a few words to say on the subject.

My Dear Readers:-

It is now over six months since you last heard from me in a personal sense---that is to say, since "Gossip About St. Frank's" last appeared---and as I now sit at my typewriter, tapping out these words, it is already beginning to feel like old times.

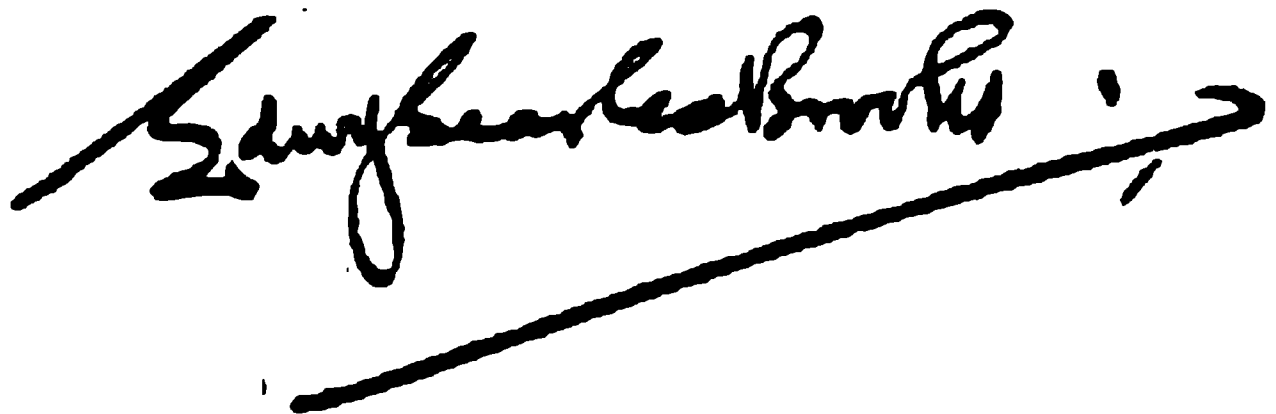
But you can bet that it'll feel much more like old times next week, for all you faithful old readers, as well as for me, when the St. Frank's yarns go back to their old length. There have been many indications that lots of you have missed the long school stories; and I can assure you that I have missed writing them.

Still, never mind. We're going full speed ahead now. The Editor and I have had several long chin-wags together, and the result is you will have the full length school story as of yore, and just occasionally a full length detective thriller yarn.

There's not much more that I can say here---I expect you'd much rather be reading the story, if you haven't read it already---except that I'm buckling into these new yarns with tremendous enthusiasm.

Both the Editor and myself are naturally anxious to know what you think of these new full length yarns, the first of which, as I have said, will be in your hands next week. So we want you to write to us and let us have your candid opinions.

Cheerily.



"As soon as we knew that you were coming on this river trip---particularly when we found out that you'd never seen the Merryweather---we thought it a good opportunity for a wheeze," confided Kirby Keeble Parkington coolly. "We were coming on a river holiday, too---only we kept it dark."

"You---you bounders!"

"We were here yesterday, of course," went on Parkington. "And when we found a ramshackle, deserted old houseboat doing nothing, we jumped at it. It was only a matter of taking off the nameboard and removing the lock, and putting it on the old hulk. We got a proper locksmith to do it, so you needn't worry---and there's a new lock on your boat, Handy. Nothing's been touched."

Handforth was so pleased at the sight of the real Merryweather that he was ready to forgive Parkington anything.

"Hurrah!" he yelled excitedly. "I knew it! I was sure, all the time, that Uncle Greg wouldn't play a trick on us like that! This is the real Merryweather, you chaps---and she's ours!"

"Hurrah!" the Old-Timers yelled.

They went aboard, and Irene & Co. went with them. As Parkington said, the girls had come as Handforth's guests, and it was only fair that the Old-Timers should have the pleasure of their company. So everything in the garden was lovely.

The Merryweather was a superb craft---a floating luxury. Handforth and his chums had a glorious time. Irene & Co. voted it one of the happiest days they had ever spent. Everybody was sorry when the day came to an end, and when they had to wend their way homeward.

For the St. Frank's fellows, however, there was plenty of excitement in store. On the morrow there was to be the full re-opening of their school. Buster Boots and the other Fourth-Formers would be returning, and the Removites looked forward with eager anticipation to many stirring encounters with their old rivals.

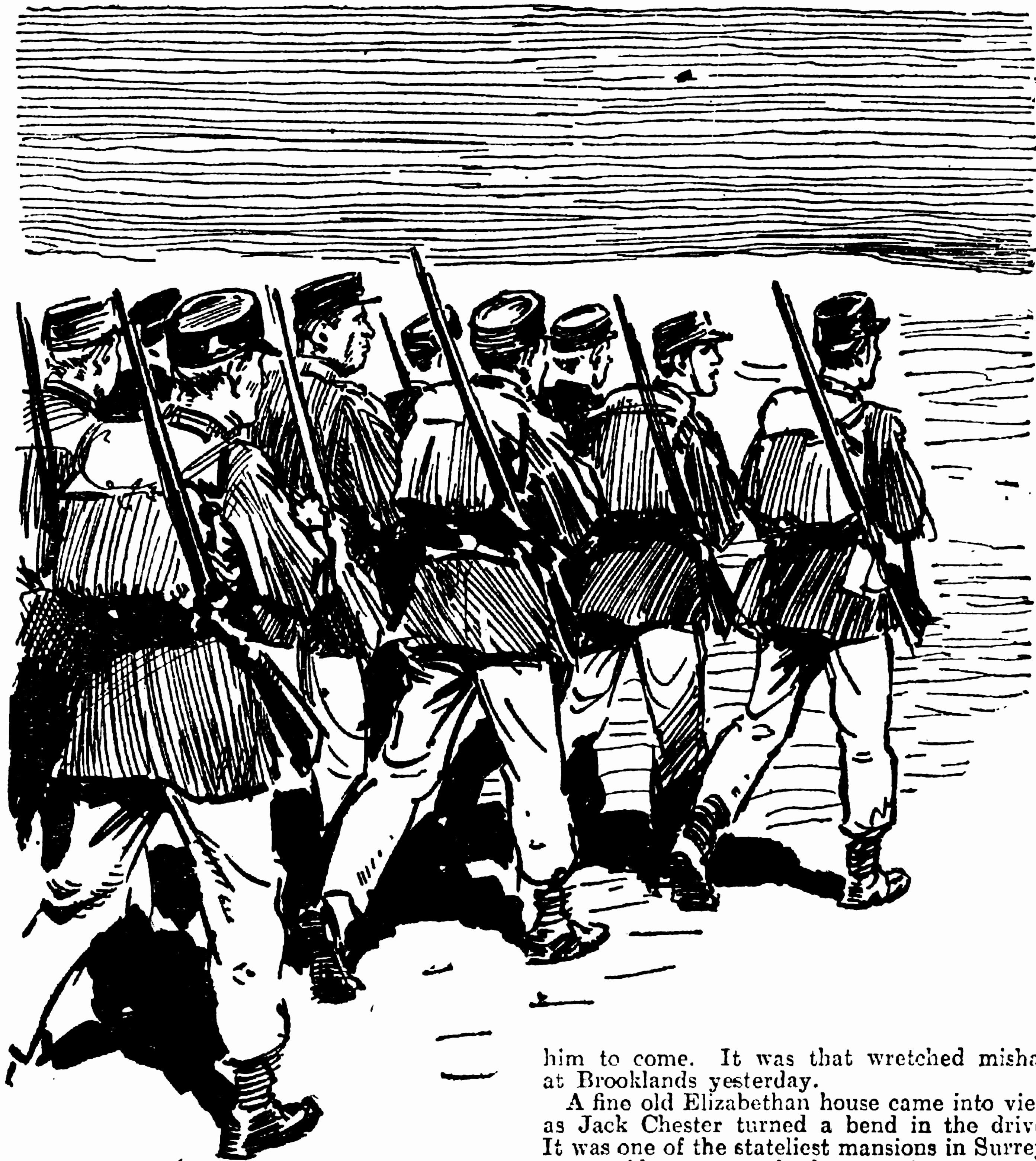
And what interested Handforth and his chums even more, perhaps, was the fact that Nipper & Co. would also be returning to the Remove fold once more. Things had never seemed quite the same in the Remove without Nipper; the Form had sadly missed his inspiring leadership.

But now that was all at an end. Re-united as of old, the Remove was determined to make things hum at St. Frank's. Yes; the famous old school was booked for some stirring times in the very near future!

THE END.

(Hurrah! Long St. Frank's yarn next week, chums. Look out for the title: "As You Were" at St. Frank's! Make sure you order your NELSON LEE in advance.)

THE LEGION OF



CHAPTER 1.

A Quarrel—and Its Results!

JACK CHESTER was not feeling happy as he climbed out of the sports two-seater. He had a shrewd idea that trouble lay ahead.

The summons from his uncle had been curt. He could picture Sir George now, pacing up and down his study, waiting. Of course, it was obvious why Sir George had commanded

him to come. It was that wretched mishap at Brooklands yesterday.

A fine old Elizabethan house came into view as Jack Chester turned a bend in the drive. It was one of the stateliest mansions in Surrey, set amidst some of the prettiest scenery. Dorking was only a mile or two distant, and all round there were the glorious hills.

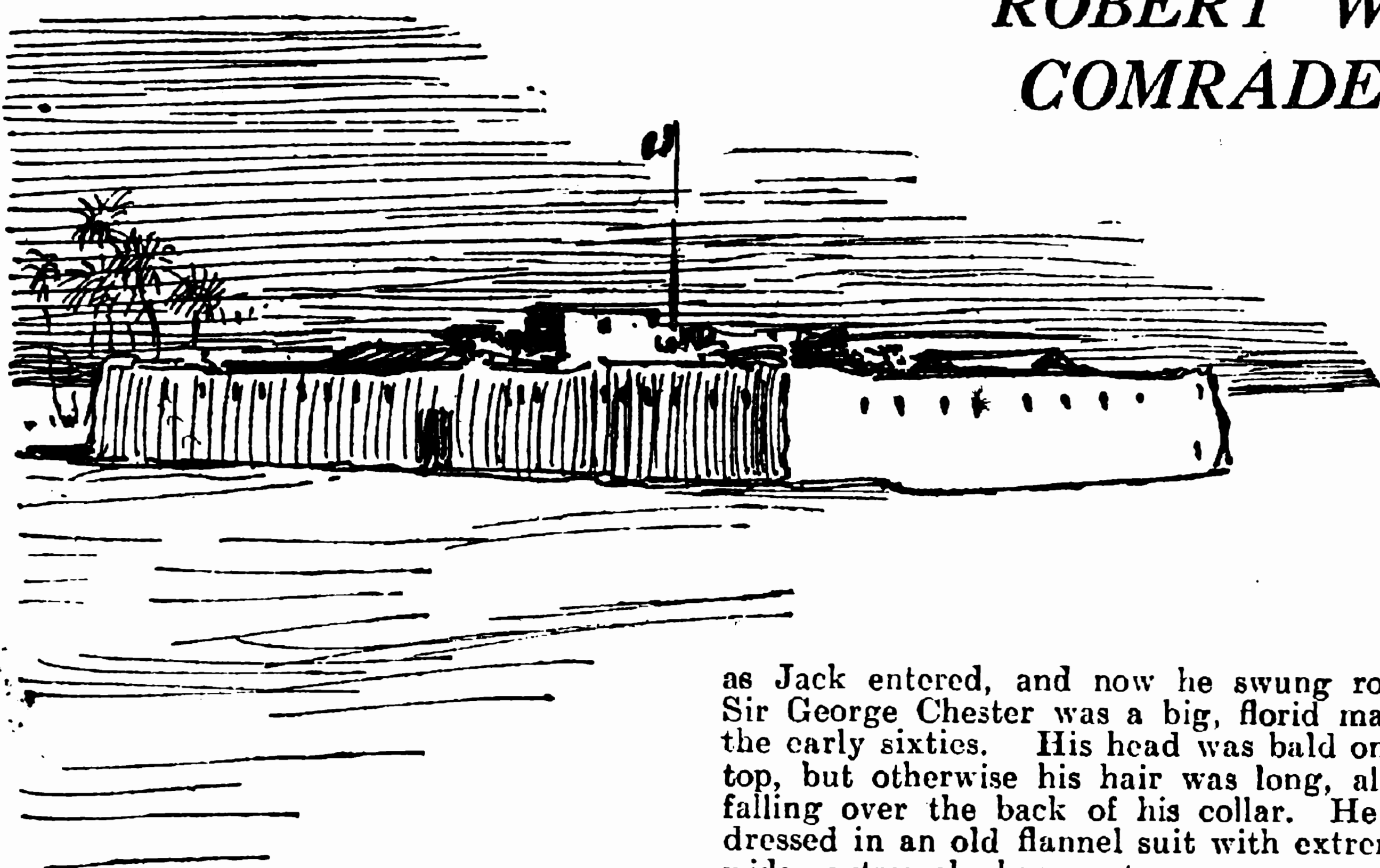
"Oh, well!" muttered Jack philosophically. "He can't eat me, anyway."

It wasn't the first time he had had trouble with his uncle. Sir George had a heart of gold, but he also had strange prejudices. He hated motor-cars, especially racing motor-cars. It was therefore unfortunate that Jack should love racing motor-cars with a whole-hearted passion.

—Which will Grip you From the First Chapter!

THE LOST!

By
**ROBERT W.
COMRADE**



Jack reached the big front door, opened it, and found an elderly, dignified butler attending to an old-fashioned standard lamp which stood in a corner of the big hall.

"Hallo, Bates, old cherub," said Jack cheerfully. "How's the rheumatism? If you're still troubled with it, I've got a certain cure for you."

"Good evening, Master Jack," said the old butler, eyeing the tall, stalwart young fellow with misgiving. "Never mind about my rheumatism, sir—"

"But I do mind," interrupted Jack. "All you've got to do is to get a potato, and carry it about with you in one of your pockets. Of course, the cure will be all the more certain if I pronounce a few magic words over the potato before—"

"Begging your pardon, Master Jack, I shouldn't advise you to keep up this flippant mood," said Bates, shaking his head. "Sir George is very angry with you, sir."

"Thanks for the tip, Bates," smiled Jack gratefully.

As the big old grandfather's clock was striking, he walked across the hall, tapped on the library door, and entered. Sir George was a great stickler for punctuality.

Only one lamp was burning in the room; a shaded reading lamp on the desk. A figure was standing at the open French windows

as Jack entered, and now he swung round. Sir George Chester was a big, florid man in the early sixties. His head was bald on the top, but otherwise his hair was long, almost falling over the back of his collar. He was dressed in an old flannel suit with extremely wide, extremely baggy, trousers.

"So you've come!" he said ominously.

"Yes, sir; dead on time."

"So much the better for you, young man," retorted Sir George, advancing into the room with his hands clasped behind his back, and with his head thrust aggressively forward.

"What's the trouble, Uncle George?" asked the young man. "I haven't done anything very wrong, have I?"

"You've done nothing at all—nothing worthy," replied Sir George angrily. "That's just the trouble, boy. I'm disappointed in you—I'm tired of your indolent ways. You're nothing better than a wastrel."

Jack flushed, bit his lip, but said nothing.

"A wastrel, sir!" shouted Sir George, coming nearer. "Instead of settling down to a good steady job, you fritter your time away on your infernal motor-cars. Only yesterday you nearly got yourself killed at Brooklands."

"But I'm interested in cars, uncle," urged Jack earnestly. "I'm hoping, one day, that I shall be allowed to have a shot at the world's records. I'm designing a car of my own—"

"I don't want to hear it!" broke in his uncle harshly. "You're not going to tell me

that you can make a career for yourself with these confounded automobiles! If you keep up with it—and you won't do so with my consent—you'll kill yourself. I read all about your accident yesterday—"

*Under the pitiless sun, over the
burning sand, suffering hard-
ships—Nelson Lee and his
"cubs"—Legionnaires—on the
track of their man!*

"The papers exaggerated it, sir," protested Jack. "A wheel came off while I was doing a hundred and twenty miles an hour, and I'll admit it was a nasty smash. The funny thing is, I wasn't even bruised."

"Fools seldom hurt themselves," said Sir George impatiently. "But there comes a time when even their luck deserts them. I've brought you here this evening because I want to have a straight talk with you. Unless you consent to give up all this track-racing nonsense I'll discontinue your allowance. That's final. You've got to give me your word—your promise—that you'll settle down to something safe and solid, that you'll never drive in a race again."

Jack breathed hard, and a hot retort sprang to his lips. In the nick of time he choked it back. After all, Uncle George was a cantankerous old buffer—but he meant well. Jack read him easily. That narrow escape of his at Brooklands yesterday had shaken the old man; and he was taking this measure to ensure that there should be no recurrence. But Jack had a will of his own, too; and, inevitably, there was a clash.

"I'm very sorry, uncle, but I think you're a little unreasonable," said the young man quietly. "I've set my heart on taking up motor-racing as a career. I've had several successes, and there are fine prospects for me. I'm sorry, but you're asking too much of me to give all this up—"

"What's that?" roared the old man. "Are you telling me, boy, that you're defying me?"

"It's no defiance, uncle," replied the young fellow. "You've given me my choice—and I've taken it. I prefer to continue with motor-racing. I can get a job as a mechanic—"

"Upon my soul!" gasped Sir George. "You're nothing but an arrogant, impertinent, independent young hound! And I meant what I said—you don't get another penny of allowance from me! Go! Go to your confounded motor-cars, and, mark my words, you'll only break your neck!"

"Good night, uncle," said Jack curtly.

He strode across the library to the French windows, and passed out. Sir George gazed after him, opened his mouth, and then closed it like a trap. He glared out into the gloom, and breathed hard.

JACK went across the lawn, taking a short cut to the drive. His thoughts were bitter. And then, abruptly, he halted in the shadow of some trees. Was it his imagination, or could he see a figure lurking against those bushes, a hundred yards away? Yes; his eyesight had not deceived him. The figure was now running across the lawn, and, to Jack's surprise, it entered the windows of the library.

"Funny!" muttered the young man, frowning. "Who the deuce could that have been?"

The incident disturbed him. There had been something so furtive—so mysterious—in the movements of that figure. He turned and walked back across the lawn. He could hear his uncle shouting.

"Get out of here!" came Sir George's infuriated voice. "You impertinent young dog! You'd threaten me, would you? I've never heard of such effrontery in all my life!"

Jack moved nearer, considerably startled.

"Money?" came Sir George's voice again.

"Not a penny! How dare you? How you can have the insolence to come here and demand a thousand pounds passes my comprehension! Get out—or I'll throw you out!"

And then Jack understood.

Nearer to the French windows, he recognised a second figure in the light of the reading lamp. A tall, slim young man: Cyril Mansell, Jack's cousin!

For a moment, Jack could hardly prevent a grin from coming. Mansell had chosen a bad moment for his visit; he had caught Sir George in a perfectly vile temper. Well, all the better. Mansell was a bad lot—a dissolute, gambling rascal. It was about time that Sir George spoke plainly to his other nephew.

Then, suddenly, Jack was startled anew. Fresh sounds had come to his ears—a thud, a choking gasp, followed by a gurgling, strangled cry.

Jack leapt nearer to the window. He stared in. He was horrified to see Sir George sprawling back in his chair; Cyril Mansell was bending over him, both his hands to his uncle's throat.

"I've wanted to do this for years!" he was saying, in a snarling undertone. "So you're throwing me over, are you?"

Horried, Jack dashed into the library. He realised, in a flash, that Cyril was half drunk. The other swung round as he heard the footsteps, and he dropped his victim. Sir George flopped back, limp.

"Have you gone mad?" asked Jack hoarsely.

"Who told you to interfere?" panted Cyril Mansell. "What have you come back for?"

"It's a good thing I did come back," retorted Jack. "What have you done to Uncle George? You've killed him—"

"Killed him, he hanged!" interrupted the other. "He's all right—only fainted! And, as for you—"

He broke off, hurling himself upon Jack at the same moment. The attack was totally unexpected. Cyril had seized a heavy paper-weight, and he brought it down with stunning force on Jack Chester's head.

Jack's knees sagged, and he sank to the floor without a sound. Cyril gave him one look, turned round, and went to the big open safe. Crisp banknotes rustled between his fingers. Sheaf after sheaf he stuffed into his pocket. Then, breathing hard, he crept out into the gloom of the late summer's evening.

CHAPTER 2.

Circumstantial Evidence!

IT was the dull clang of the safe door which aroused Jack Chester. He opened his eyes listlessly, aware of a throbbing headache. He caught a glimpse of his cousin as the latter ran out into the night.

Jack was effectually awakened. He struggled up, and was in the act of following when he caught sight of his uncle. He checked, turned, and stared at the still, limp figure in the chair. The next moment he lurched forward, and took hold of Sir George's coat lapels.

"Uncle!" he panted desperately. "It's all right, uncle! I'll soon——"

He broke off, the words choking in his throat. His uncle's eyes were staring—staring glassily. Almost in a panic, Jack placed a hand over the old man's heart. There was not a trace of a movement.

Sir George was dead! Jack started back, bewildered and horrified. Dead! And Cyril Mansell had murdered him!

It never occurred to Jack to shout for help—to arouse the household. Mansell was escaping! With a hoarse cry Jack wheeled round, sprang through the French windows, and ran madly across the lawn. Faintly on the air of the summer evening he could hear the purring of a motor-cycle engine.

He ran as he had seldom run before; he reached the drive, found his car, and sprang into the driving-seat. The self-starter whirred, the engine sprang into life, and Jack engaged the gears.

With a lurch the car started off, and he switched on the headlights. Out of the drive he careered at a dangerous speed, the near side wheels almost coming off the ground as he turned into the main road. The one idea which obsessed him was to overtake Cyril Mansell—and to bring him back to answer for his dastardly crime.

BATES, very uneasy, hovered about the hall. He was not the only member of the household who had heard the shouts from the library, and their abrupt cessation, and the absolute silence which now reigned, made the old butler more uneasy than ever.

While he was still wondering what to do, a sharp, imperious rat-tat sounded on the door. The old butler started, pulled himself up with dignity, and went to the door. A burly rural constable stood there.

"Well, what is it?" asked Bates.

"I don't want to disturb Sir George, Mr. Bates," said the constable. "P'r'aps you can tell me who it was who went off in a racing car five minutes ago? Came out o' the drive like a madman, he did. Nearly knocked me inter the ditch. I reckon it's my duty to report 'im——"

"That must have been Master Jack, Sir George's nephew!" ejaculated Bates.

"Then I think I'd better see Sir George, after all," said the constable.

There was no answer to Bates' discreet knock on the library door; neither was there an answer to his louder knock.

"Out on the lawn, I suppose," muttered the butler, as he opened the door.

He glanced in, and then stiffened. In the light of the reading-lamp he could see something beyond the desk. A figure sprawling in the chair: an ominously still figure.

"Sir George!" shouted Bates, running forward. "Help! Help!"

The burly figure of the constable appeared in the doorway.

"Anything wrong 'ere?" he asked sharply. "Why, 'ullo, what the——" The constable broke off with a gasp as he saw the still figure in the chair. He strode across the library, elbowed Bates aside and bent down over Sir George. "This is bad," he said, after a quick examination. "Sir George is dead!"

"Dead!" echoed Bates, in horror.

"Murdered!" announced the constable, and pointed to the ugly marks on the dead man's throat. "Yes, I think it's murder, right enough. Better get on the phone as quick as you can for the doctor. And I'll have to get in touch with the station——"

He was interrupted by the arrival of a big, broad-shouldered man at the French windows. The newcomer wore gaiters, and he carried a double-barrelled gun in the crook of his arm.

"Did I hear somebody calling for help?" he asked. "Beggin' your pardon, Sir George——"

"You're just the man, Smithson," said the constable, turning to the gamekeeper. "Can you run down to the police-station for me? Ask Inspector Marshall to come up at once. Sir George is dead—murdered!"

The gamekeeper jumped.

"Sir George murdered!" he repeated dazedly. "Then that's why Mr. Jack was running so 'ard across the lawn."

"Mr. Jack?" said the constable sharply.

"Goin' for help, I expect," said the gamekeeper. "Running like mad, he was, an' he jumped in his car and dashed off at full speed."

"Oh!" said P.-c. Robbins. "So Mr. Jack Chester ran across the lawn like mad, did he? This looks significant, Mr. Bates."

CHIEF DETECTIVE - INSPECTOR LENNARD, of Scotland Yard, hated his job.

He regarded the white-faced lady compassionately. Mrs. Chester was dazed by the dreadful news; a warrant had been issued for the arrest of her son, Jack, on a charge of murdering Sir George Chester.

"It is absurd—ridiculous!" she said, forcing herself to speak calmly. "My son has not done this thing. You are making a terrible mistake."

"If we are, Mrs. Chester, nobody will be more pleased than myself," said the Yard man gently. "You assure us that your son has not returned since he motored down to Dorking?"

"I have not seen him since then."

"You have not heard from him, either?"

"No, I have not heard."

"Well, I'm afraid I shall have to leave a man here, Mrs. Chester," said Lennard. "We want to find your son as quickly as possible, and there's a remote chance that he may return here or communicate with

you. If he is innocent he has nothing to fear——"

"Whether he is innocent or guilty, you will bring your charge!" interrupted Mrs. Chester hotly.

Lennard and his assistant discreetly retired to another room. Mrs. Chester, left to herself, went to the telephone with a fierce, fighting light in her eyes. She gave a number, and within three minutes she was talking to Mr. Nelson Lee, the celebrated criminologist in Gray's Inn Road.

As a direct result of that talk a powerful Rolls-Royce Special drew up in the quiet Streatham road barely twenty minutes later. Nelson Lee and Nipper climbed out.

"Well, well!" said a soft, pleasant voice. "If it isn't our old pals! So this is why Mrs. Chester was telephoning?"

"The good lady told me that you were here, Lennard," said Nelson Lee, as they shook hands. "I've no desire to butt in, but Mrs. Chester was so deeply concerned——"

"That's all right!" interrupted the chief inspector. "No need to apologise, old man. But I tell you frankly that you can't do much good here."

Nelson Lee went inside, and he was met by a very pale-faced Mrs. Chester.

"I'm frightened, Mr. Lee," she said, when she had told him the few details. "I'm terrified! My son couldn't have done this dreadful thing, but the police will get him! Something must have happened—something unexpected and awful. If not, why did Jack run away like that? And why hasn't he communicated with me?"

"We mustn't indulge in any guesswork, Mrs. Chester," replied Lee gently. "What I want to do is to get hold of the facts. Perhaps you will tell me some more details about your son—of his relations with Sir George, and so forth?"

Before Mrs. Chester could begin, the telephone-bell rang sharply. Mrs. Chester flushed slightly, and in a half-frightened way she went over to the instrument. It seemed that she was gathering all her courage together before she lifted the receiver from its hook.

"Yes?" she asked, her voice low and quivering. Then her pallor returned, and with it a great weariness. "It is not Jack," she said, turning to Lee. "Those people at Scotland Yard want to speak to Mr. Lennard."

"I'll tell him," said Lee, nodding.

The chief inspector was brought in, and he listened intently for some moments. Then, when he replaced the receiver on its hook, he did so with a decisive little click.

"Something, anyhow," he said briskly. "You'll be getting rid of us now, Mrs. Chester——"

"What has happened?" broke in the lady quickly. "Oh, tell me! Have—have you arrested my son?"

"No; but his car has been found abandoned in the Charing Cross Station

approach," replied the chief inspector, "and inquiries have shown that he took a ticket for Paris and left by the evening mail so that he can catch the night boat."

JACK CHESTER'S car revealed nothing of interest—at least, to Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard.

It had been found in the station approach, and, of course, after the matter had been reported to the local police-station, it became obvious that this was the wanted car. There was no direct evidence that Jack had got on the boat-train, but a booking-clerk and a ticket-collector both remembered a hatless, agitated young man answering to Jack's description.

"Well, there's no chance for him now, guv'nor," said Nipper, as he and Lee stood looking at the car. "The police have wired to Dover, of course, and he'll be nabbed before he can even get on the boat."

"It looks very much like it," said Lee thoughtfully. "H'm! Very curious!"

"What's curious, guv'nor?"

"Don't you notice something unusual about the tyres?"

Nipper looked more closely. There had been several showers that evening, and all four tyres were bespattered with curious little fragments of a brownish, fibre-like material.

"What is it?" asked Nipper, bending down, puzzled.

"It is always profitable, Nipper, to retain seemingly unimportant little things in one's mind," replied Nelson Lee. "Now, as far as I know, there is only one road in the whole of London which has a patch of this fibre. I noticed it in Clarges Street as I was walking through this afternoon. There are even some splashes of the fibre on the body-work. The assumption is that this car was stationary for some time in Clarges Street, and that other cars splashed it as they passed. It seems to me that Jack Chester paid a call."

Lee made up his mind quickly. Within a minute he and Nipper were back in the Rolls-Royce Special, threading their way through the traffic to Clarges Street. The patch of fibre-covered road was quite small, and it only took Nelson Lee a few moments to make the necessary inquiries. In a quiet set of chambers he learned, from the porter, that a semi-racing car had stopped for some minutes earlier in the evening.

"It was Mr. Chester, that young fellow who nearly got killed at Brooklands yesterday," said the porter, without in the least realising that the police were after the young man. "He came to see his cousin, I think."

"Oh!" replied Lee, with no trace of surprise.

"Yes, Mr. Cyril Mansell," went on the porter. "Mr. Mansell lives in one of these flats, sir. Unfortunately Mr. Mansell had gone out five minutes before young Chester arrived. Told me he was going over to Paris by the night boat."

Panic-stricken, Mansell gave his cousin a push. He fell right in front of the approaching taxi-cab.



"And did you tell this to Mr. Chester?"

"Yes, sir."

"I see," nodded Nelson Lee, giving the man half-a-crown. "Thanks! Well, young 'un, I'm afraid we shall have to see Mr. Chester on another day."

They went back to the car, and Lee was intensely satisfied with the result of his little inquiry.

CHAPTER 3.

Human Derelicts!

JACK CHESTER, knowing absolutely nothing of the hue-and-cry after him, was engaged upon a relentless mission.

His uncle was dead—murdered. Cyril Mansell was the murderer, and Jack was

grimly determined to hunt down his rascally cousin.

Upon arriving at Mansell's chambers he had learned that Mansell had been in and had gone out again, carrying bags, saying that he was taking a trip to Paris. The porter had heard him instruct the taxi-driver to go to Charing Cross Station. Jack had gone there, too, and had taken his ticket.

It was at this point when he encountered his first snag. Once on the train, Jack felt that his hunt was over. He went from compartment to compartment, but Cyril Mansell was not on the train. Jack waited until the last moment—until the train was on the point of pulling out—and then, like a flash, he remembered something.

Mansell always flew to Paris!

His cousin was in the habit of making the trip fairly often, and for at least three years past he had invariably travelled by the Imperial Airways liners. Considering that his present trip was in the nature of a flight from justice, it was more than ever likely that Mansell was making the journey by air. And, knowing that Jack was on his track, he had deliberately laid the false trail to Charing Cross.

Thus Jack Chester was not on that train after all, and the police, at Dover, failed to nab him. Not that Jack had given up the hunt. He was more than ever determined to track down his cousin. On such a clear, moonlight night as this Mansell would have no difficulty in chartering a 'plane.

Jack's next move, therefore, was to run out of the station towards his car. There was a policeman standing by it, however, inspecting the licence plate. Jack paused, startled. While he looked another policeman came up. Jack became alarmed. To get mixed up with the police might mean a delay. He walked rapidly away, got into a taxi, and told the driver to take him straight to Croydon Aerodrome.

At the aerodrome he learned that Mansell had, indeed, hired a 'plane, and had taken off for Le Bourget. The hue-and-cry after Jack had not yet reached Croydon Aerodrome.

When he applied for a 'plane, the facilities were instantly forthcoming. He was a popular figure, especially amongst airmen. His exploits at Brooklands, and on other famous race tracks, had made him well known. It was not until after the 'plane was well in the air, on its way to Paris, that the aerodrome authorities were warned to keep a strict look-out for Jack Chester.

It was curious how fate was taking a hand in this queer game. Normally Jack would have been arrested upon his arrival at Le Bourget. Warnings were flashed over the wires, and the French police were ready. Jack, without the slightest suspicion that he was a badly wanted man, thought only of his probable movements when he arrived in Paris. Somehow or other he had to get on the track of his cousin, and this ought not to prove so very difficult.

He was terribly annoyed when an unexpected check came; but it was this unexpected check which saved him from arrest. The 'plane, less than ten miles from Paris, was compelled to make a forced landing owing to a failure in the engine's oil supply.

The pilot brought her down safely in a field, and Jack was lucky enough to get a lift from a passing motorist on the neighbouring main road. Thus he was in Paris almost as quickly as if he had travelled all the way to Le Bourget—and all the careful preparations of the police were set at naught.

It was late now, and Jack began to realise the hopelessness of his quest. The first fire of the hunt had gone. He was in Paris, late

at night, and it came to him with overwhelming force that his search was very much like looking for a needle in a haystack.

But in the morning, perhaps, things would be different. He could make inquiries—he could go round the hotels. Sooner or later he would be bound to come across Cyril Mansell. The blood throbbed with fresh fire through his veins when he remembered his poor uncle, lying back in that chair—and when he remembered how Mansell had had his fingers at Sir George's throat.

He even thought of going to the police, but he dismissed this. No: he would find Mansell himself—and force him to go back to England to face the charge. He had started on this hunt now, and he was not going to give it up.

Jack went to a small hotel, but he scarcely slept. He was out by seven-thirty, and Paris was looking its best. The August morning was hot and sunny; the boulevards were gay with colour. Yet Jack, who loved his Paris, had no eyes for anything of this nature now. The one thought which still obsessed him was to find his cousin—and to drag him back to England.

It had almost become a mania now. It filled his mind to the exclusion of all else. The horror of finding his uncle dead had gripped him as in a vice. Curiously enough, his own danger—the danger of his being implicated—never struck him.

He made inquiries at the great hotels on the famous boulevards. His spirits became more depressed as the morning advanced and he met with no success. Then, in that manner so familiar to us all—which proves how small the world is—he suddenly saw his cousin on the other side of one of the state-liest of Paris's boulevards.

Reckless of being run over, Jack sped across the wide thoroughfare, dodging hurtling taxis and gliding limousines. He arrived on the opposite pavement, ran round a group of American tourists, and pulled at his cousin's sleeve.

"Just a minute, Cyril!" said Jack grimly.

Cyril Mansell spun round, all the colour draining from his face.

"Why—hallo!" he said awkwardly. "I—I didn't expect—"

"You're coming with me," interrupted Jack fiercely. "You hound! You murderous devil!"

"For Heaven's sake, keep your voice down!" urged Mansell. "Do you want to attract a crowd?"

But in Paris crowds do not collect so easily. Strange things happen in the streets of the French metropolis—and people take little or no notice.

"There'll be no scene if you come with me quietly," said Jack tensely. "I'm going to take you back to England—"

"Who the deuce do you think you are?" interrupted Mansell savagely. "Mind your own infernal business!"

"Uncle George—"

"What the devil do I care about Uncle George?" broke in Mansell. "He's all right by now. I didn't hurt him——"

"Didn't hurt him!" snapped Jack Chester, seizing his cousin more firmly. "Why, you scoundrel, you killed him!"

Mansell stared. For a moment he seemed stunned.

"Killed him?" he repeated stupidly.

"Uncle George is dead—killed by your hand!" said Jack. "And you're coming back to England with me—to answer the charge. By this time the police must have been informed, and I expect they're searching for you."

"Police!" faltered Mansell. "It's a lie! I hardly touched him! He can't be dead."

"You killed him," insisted Jack relentlessly.

Mansell became panic-stricken. He suddenly gave his cousin a violent push. Jack was unprepared; he staggered back, reeled, and sprawled heavily in the roadway.

Shouts went up, the brakes of a taxicab screeched; there was a thud.

In the confusion, Mansell had no difficulty in slipping away—leaving Jack Chester lying in the road, unconscious!

JACK awoke, two hours later, in hospital. His injury was not severe—merely an ugly bruise on the head, with a patch of sticking plaster to remind him of it—to say nothing of a madly-throbbing headache.

He got out of the hospital without difficulty; for the authorities were none too anxious to keep this "mad young Englishman" in bed. If he insisted upon getting up, well—*ma foi!*—let him!

Feeling strangely weak, Jack Chester once again wandered through the streets of Paris. He was despondent now. The reaction was severe. He thought of his home—his mother. What a fool he had been not to telephone to her before! But in the excitement of the hunt he had forgotten all else. Well, perhaps he had better send her a telegram at once, assuring her that he was all right and that he would soon be home. There was very little chance of his getting hold of Jack Mansell again. He had found him once, but——

Was he really mad, or did he see this thing? Weary, he had taken a seat in a quiet backwater within sight of the Arc de Triomphe. Listlessly his gaze had rested upon a nondescript group of men which marched down the boulevard, attracting very little attention. At the head strode a French officer, smart and neat in his uniform, with two stripes on his tunic which denoted that he was a lieutenant.

But it wasn't at the officer that Jack Chester looked. He was gazing at one of the men—one of that crowd which shambled along behind. There was between twenty and thirty of them—some shabby, some retaining

a certain smartness. They were evidently soldiers, although they wore no uniform.

Two were negroes, several were Germans or Scandinavians, and the rest were nondescript—an Englishman or two, an American here and there, a Greek, a Portuguese, and a few Frenchmen.

Jack had seen this sort of thing before, and he knew at once what it meant. These men were recruits for the famous—or notorious—French Foreign Legion. They were being marched to the railway-station. And in their midst was a figure which attracted the whole of Jack's attention—a tallish, rather weedy young man with his hat drawn closely over his face. Cyril Mansell!

"No!" panted Jack, springing up. "He shan't escape me like this! He's joined the Legion—he thinks that he can escape the responsibility——"

He broke off, running. Excitedly he fell into pace with the French officer, who gave him a sharp, unfavourable glance.

"These are recruits for the Foreign Legion, aren't they?" asked Jack quickly.

"Pardon, monsieur, it ees not good that you should make the disturbance," replied the lieutenant.

"You've got a man there I want!" panted Jack. "That one in the centre, wearing light-coloured tweeds. He's my cousin——"

"Mon Dieu! This I cannot permit!" said the officer angrily. "Voilà! Gendarme!" He beckoned to a French police-officer. "Halte!" he commanded, and the recruits shuffled to a standstill.

The gendarme came over, looking very important as he twirled his big moustache.

"This man—this English fool—commits the nuisance of interfering with my duty," said the lieutenant curtly. "You will be good enough to take him away."

The gendarme was looking at Jack very closely.

"Pardieu!" he muttered. "What is your name, monsieur?"

"My name doesn't matter," said Jack. "But it happens to be Chester——"

"Venez-vous!" broke in the gendarme, clapping a hand on Jack's shoulder. "You come with me. Marchez!"

"But, hang it, I've done nothing!" protested Jack. "I tell you that there's a man here—amongst these recruits—who is my cousin."

"You must come with me, monsieur," said the police-officer. "You are Monsieur Jack Chester, hein? The English police look for you. It is for murder that you are wanted, and I—I—arrest you. *Ma foi!* You will come with me!"

Jack recoiled.

"Murder!" he panted, as he was led off—and as the Foreign Legion recruits continued on their way. "But—but I don't understand!"

Yet, even while he was thinking, he did understand. The thing hit him like a blow



Nelson Lee ran forward to intervene, but he was too late. The sergeant swung his rifle and the butt thudded on the side of Jack Chester's head.

between the eyes. He remembered his quarrel with Sir George—he remembered how he had run out across the lawn. The police had blundered. They had concluded that he—and not Cyril Mansell—had committed the murder. And now he was under arrest. This thought did not worry him half so much as the knowledge that Mansell—the real culprit—was escaping.

He made a sudden desperate move. His knowledge of ju-jitsu was fairly comprehensive. With a sudden movement he gripped the surprised gendarme, and that worthy uttered a wild howl. The next moment he went clean over Jack's head, and thudded to the pavement with such force that every ounce of breath was knocked out of his body.

Jack bolted. Before people could rush to the gendarme's assistance, the young Englishman had got completely away.

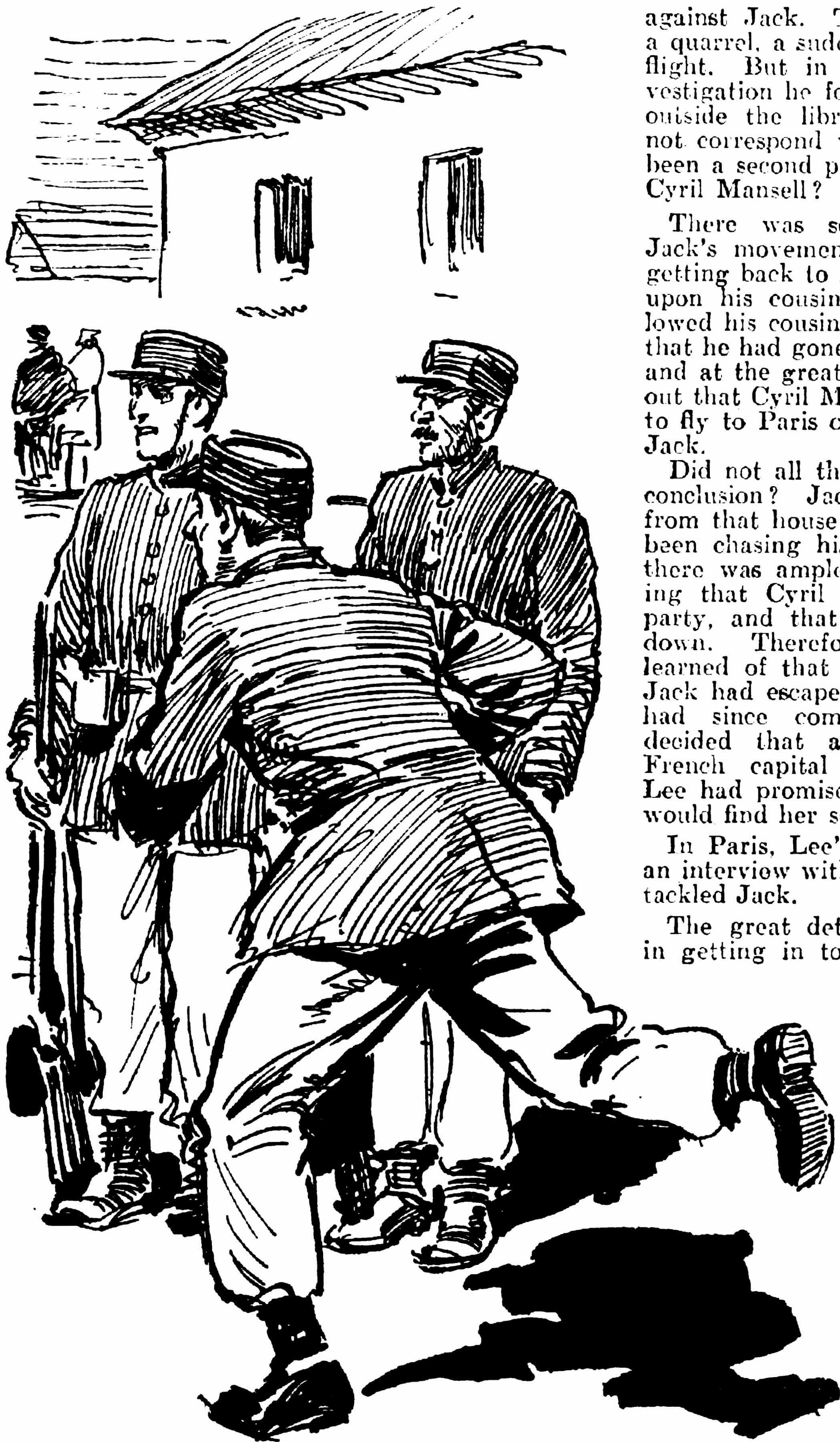
AN hour later there was another recruit for the French Foreign Legion. Under a false name, Jack Chester enlisted. He had two reasons for doing so—firstly to keep on the track of his cousin; and secondly to elude Justice. Once under arrest, there would be little or no hope of his bringing home the crime to the real murderer.

And as a Foreign Legion recruit, under a false name, Jack Chester completely and absolutely vanished!

CHAPTER 4.

Nelson Lee—Legionnaire!

NELSON LEE arrived in Paris that same afternoon. With him were Nipper, Browne, and Stevens. The great detective had formed a shrewd



against Jack. The case seemed plain—a quarrel, a sudden assault, robbery, and flight. But in the course of Lee's investigation he found traces of footprints, outside the library window, which did not correspond with Jack's. Had there been a second party? If so, what about Cyril Mansell?

There was something significant in Jack's movements. His first object, on getting back to London, had been to call upon his cousin, and then he had followed his cousin to Charing Cross. After that he had gone to Croydon Aerodrome, and at the great air-port Lee soon found out that Cyril Mansell had hired a 'plane to fly to Paris only a short while before Jack.

Did not all this lead to one inevitable conclusion? Jack had not been fleeing from that house in Dorking, but he had been chasing his cousin! In that case, there was ample justification for believing that Cyril Mansell was the guilty party, and that Jack was hunting him down. Therefore, when Nelson Lee learned of that incident in Paris—when Jack had escaped from a gendarme and had since completely disappeared—he decided that a personal trip to the French capital was clearly indicated. Lee had promised Mrs. Chester that he would find her son.

In Paris, Lee's first task was to have an interview with the gendarme who had tackled Jack.

The great detective had no difficulty in getting in touch with the gendarme who had been so near to arresting the young Englishman.

"But yes, monsieur," he declared excitedly, "I recognised him at once."

"You are sure he was Jack Chester?"

"Certainment!"

"Did anything happen especially to draw your attention to him?"

"But yes," replied the officer. "I was called by a lieutenant of the Foreign Legion.

This young Englishman was molesting him."

"Indeed," said Lee thoughtfully. "Wasn't that a very curious circumstance? Why should this young Englishman molest an officer of the Foreign Legion?"

The gendarme shrugged his shoulders.

"Me, I should not know that," he replied. "Your fellow-countryman was interested, it seems, in the recruits."

Nelson Lee did not betray the sudden interest which the man's words had aroused in him.

theory as to what had actually happened at Dorking, and he was determined to press his inquiries to the utmost.

Further talk with the porter of the Clarges Street chambers had revealed the fact that Cyril Mansell had been away that evening, and that he had returned, not only in a great hurry, but in a state of agitation. He had departed again within twenty minutes. Then Jack Chester had arrived.

Lee had paid a brief visit to Dorking, and the evidence there was overwhelming

"Now, let us get this more exact, if we can," he said. "Was Monsieur Chester interested in all these recruits, or in one particular man?"

The gendarme twisted his big moustache for a moment.

"Pardieu! It was in one particular man, monsieur," he replied. "Me, I remember. Monsieur Chester was talking excitedly with the lieutenant, and he was pointing to one of the new legionnaires. Ma foi! This man was no Frenchman—either an Englishman or American."

"Was he dressed in light grey tweeds, and wearing a soft hat? Was he slightly round-shouldered?"

"Oui, monsieur," said the gendarme in surprise.

Nelson Lee's eyes gleamed.

"Thank you very much," he said smoothly.

HE was very satisfied with the result of that little interview. There was no doubt in his mind now that Jack Chester had recognised his cousin in the ranks of those Foreign Legion recruits. Lee himself had obtained Cyril Mansell's description from the Clarges Street porter. Cyril Mansell, then, had joined the Legion, and Jack Chester had vanished.

This led Nelson Lee to an inevitable line of inquiry, for he knew well enough that Jack was hot on his cousin's trail. Lee went forthwith to the headquarters of the French Foreign Legion.

The great English detective was not without a certain amount of influence, even in Paris. He was soon ushered into the presence of Colonel Lemaire, a short, dapper little man, with a brisk, alert manner. Colonel Lemaire was a highly-placed officer of the Legion.

"You may, or may not, have heard that your French police are on the look-out for an Englishman named Jack Chester, a man who is wanted in London on a charge of murder," said Lee, after he had introduced himself. "I have every reason to believe, Colonel Lemaire, that you can help me."

"I?" said the other. "But I am not the police, Monsieur Lee! Surely you should have gone to the Sureté?"

"Perhaps, but I rather fancy that my quest will meet with a better fate here," replied Nelson Lee. "I think it is a fact, colonel, that some recruits have recently left Paris for Marseilles?"

"But yes—earlier to-day."

"May I ask if one batch of newly-recruited legionnaires left—or more?"

"I cannot see how this affects your inquiry, but there is no reason why I should not be frank with you," replied Colonel Lemaire. "Two batches of men have been hurried south to-day, and a third batch, if it will interest you, is being sent this evening."

"No, I do not think I am interested in

the third batch," replied Lee. "As a result of my inquiries, Colonel Lemaire, I have every reason to conclude that Jack Chester, the man to whom I have referred, has joined the Legion. I believe that he was included in one of these consignments of men which has already gone south."

The colonel frowned.

"Of that I know nothing," he replied shortly. "But I can soon tell you."

He rang a bell, and he gave some low orders to the man who entered. Very shortly the telephone rang, and Colonel Lemaire answered it. When he looked up he shook his head.

"No, Monsieur Lee, no recruit of the name of Jack Chester has enlisted in the Foreign Legion," he said.

Nelson Lee looked at him very straight.

"You surely did not think, colonel, that Chester would enlist under his own name," he said pointedly. "This man is wanted by the British police, and there is another man—one who left in that earlier batch—whom I should very much like to get into touch with, too. If you can help me—"

"I am sorry, monsieur," interrupted the colonel, with a shrug.

"Surely you will allow some inquiries to be instituted—"

"These men have gone—they are now on their way to Marseilles," interrupted the other. "It is too late."

"But if I go to Marseilles at once," urged Lee. "If I identify this man—"

"It is still too late," said Colonel Lemaire coldly.

"This man is wanted by the British police for murder—"

"So you have already informed me," said the colonel. "But, Monsieur Lee, I beg of you to remember that every Foreign Legion recruit has taken an oath to serve France for five years, with honour and fidelity. We do not make inquiries regarding the antecedents of recruits for this branch of the service. We are not interested. They offer themselves, and if they are fit we take them. I do not admit that the man you are searching for has joined the Legion; but, if he has, it is too late to take him back. He has sworn his oath—he is a legionnaire."

Nelson Lee bit his lip.

"Are there no exceptions to this rule?" he asked impatiently. "Would it not be possible for you to stretch a point—"

"Mon Dieu! At such a time as this?" broke in the colonel, with equal impatience. "There is trouble in Africa, monsieur. Great trouble. Men are wanted urgently. Otherwise, why are these recruits being rushed south so quickly? I beg of you to regard this matter as closed."

Nelson Lee was up against a snag, and he knew it. But he wasn't beaten yet. By hook or by crook he must get in touch with Jack Chester—and also with Cyril Mansell. He must discover the full truth of what had happened at Dorking.

"Colonel Lemaire, you must do me a favour," said Lee briskly.

It was more of a statement than a request; and the colonel looked at him with raised eyebrows.

"You must have your way, of course, regarding your Foreign Legion recruits," continued Lee. "If they are committed to the service for five years—well, that is their own concern. But you can at least help me to get into touch with this man, Jack Chester. And so that there shall be no irregularities, I propose that I should join the Legion myself—with two or three of my assistants!"

Colonel Lemaire was amazed.

"But what is this you ask?" he said. "Ma foi! Such a thing is impossible——"

"Nothing is impossible," interrupted Nelson Lee. "By joining the Legion and mixing with the men, I shall very soon be able to find the particular man I am after. If I have to travel to Oran—or even to Sid Bell Abbes—well, I am prepared. As I have said, you can help me."

"But how, monsieur?" said the colonel, spreading his hands.

"You are a responsible officer on the staff of this branch of the service, are you not?"

"Mais oui! This is so," murmured the colonel.

"Then I want you to provide me—and my assistants—with special papers," replied Lee briskly. "We will enlist in Marseilles—and, if possible, travel to Oran in the same boat as these new recruits."

"You cannot reach Marseilles in time for that."

"Not by train, perhaps—but there are fast aeroplanes to be had," replied Lee. "Well, colonel? Can I rely upon your co-operation? I do not, of course, desire to take the oath of fidelity—neither do my assistants. We only want to join the Legion as a temporary measure."

It was no mean task, but in the end Nelson Lee succeeded. It was very seldom indeed that the great detective did not succeed when he had once set his mind upon an objective.

When he left the military headquarters he carried with him special papers, officially stamped, which could be produced at any time and which would secure the immediate release from the Legion of his cubs and himself.

CHAPTER 5.

Brewing Trouble!

SO it came about that four new recruits for the Foreign Legion presented themselves in Marseilles. They were just in time to be sent aboard the same boat for Oran which would be carrying Jack and the other recruits who had been sent post haste from Paris.

Nelson Lee and his three assistants had changed into shabby clothing, and the boys, at all events, had taken measures to make themselves look older. They had, of course, enlisted under false names.

This latest batch of recruits was in charge

of a burly sergeant, who lost no time in bullying his men; and most of them took the insults sullenly and meekly. What was the good of resisting? Without compunction, the sergeant would deliver a back-hander across the face of a recruit who dared to answer back.

The voyage was in no way pleasant. The recruits were treated like cattle, and when night came they were shepherded into evil-smelling sleeping quarters.

By keeping aloof, Lee and his cubs managed to avoid the attentions of the bullying sergeant. They even found it possible to remain on deck after most of the other recruits had gone below. Nelson Lee had been keeping his eyes very wide open; and he had already picked out Jack Chester.

Jack had remained on deck, and Lee soon found an opportunity of lounging up to him. The offer of a cigarette, and its acceptance, served as an introduction. After that, for some moments, the two recruits stood leaning over the rail, watching the foam as it slid past the vessel, to vanish into the blackness astern.

"Your name Chester?" asked Lee suddenly.

"Yes, I——" Jack broke off, gulping. "No, no!" he went on quickly. "My name is John Thompson. Can't you mind your own business?"

Lee chuckled and took hold of the young man's arm.

"Easy, old man—easy!" he murmured. "I'm very keen on having a quiet little chat with you—and this is an excellent opportunity, unless that foul-mouthed sergeant comes along."

Jack Chester stared.

"Who are you?" he asked tensely.

"Your mother has sent me on this mission," explained the detective.

"My mother!" gasped Jack. "But—but——"

"My name is Nelson Lee—although I beg of you not to call me by that name just at present," said Lee. "I want you to tell me——"

"Nelson Lee!" panted the young man. "Lee, the detective? You've tracked me, then! Well, what are you going to do?" he went on fiercely. "Take me back to England with you?"

"Steady, my dear fellow," murmured Lee. "I am not in any way connected with the police; so you have nothing to fear. All I want from you is your own story. To help me, I will say that I know you came to Paris in search of your cousin, Cyril Mansell. There is a charge of murder hanging over your head, but that does not necessarily imply that I believe you guilty."

Jack Chester clutched at Lee's arm.

"I'm not!" he panted. "It was my cousin who killed Sir George! You seem to know such a lot, Mr. Lee, that—that——"

"That you'd better tell me everything, and fill in the gaps, eh?" nodded Nelson Lee. "Well, let us get down to it!"

Figures sidled up out of the gloom, and

they turned out to be Nipper and Browne and Stevens. Lee welcomed them, for there was less likelihood of attracting unwelcome attention if four or five recruits were clumped together like this, apparently exchanging yarns.

Jack Chester told his story, ending up with his desperate move in joining the Foreign Legion.

"Is Mansell on this boat?" asked Lee.

"No, worse luck," replied Jack. "He went by an earlier boat. They're rushing batches of recruits over as quickly as they can now. Nothing much is being said—the public knows very little—but I understand that there's some big trouble in the desert. The Riffs, or something. Men are badly wanted."

"We couldn't have enlisted at a better time," said Lee dryly.

"But I don't understand it," went on Jack. "You say that you've enlisted, Mr. Lee? That means five years of this unbearable existence."

"Don't worry about me—or these youngsters," replied Lee in a low voice. "We have a special arrangement, and we can return to England just when we please. The experience will not do the boys any harm—in fact, it might harden them and do them a world of good. As for you, I'm afraid that you have taken the oath, and that there is no escape for you. But if I can establish your innocence, and get this murder charge dropped, my sojourn in the Legion will not be entirely unsuccessful."

"What about Cyril?" asked the other.

"Ah, there we have the snag," replied Lee slowly. "I must tell you candidly, Chester, that your story is thin."

"But you believe it?" asked the young man anxiously.

"I believe it," replied Lee. "And your only chance, so far as I can see, is for us to get hold of Mansell and force a confession out of him!"

THEY got some sleep that night, and in the morning Jack Chester was a much happier man. Somehow Nelson Lee's presence comforted him. It was good to have the responsibility shifted on to such capable shoulders.

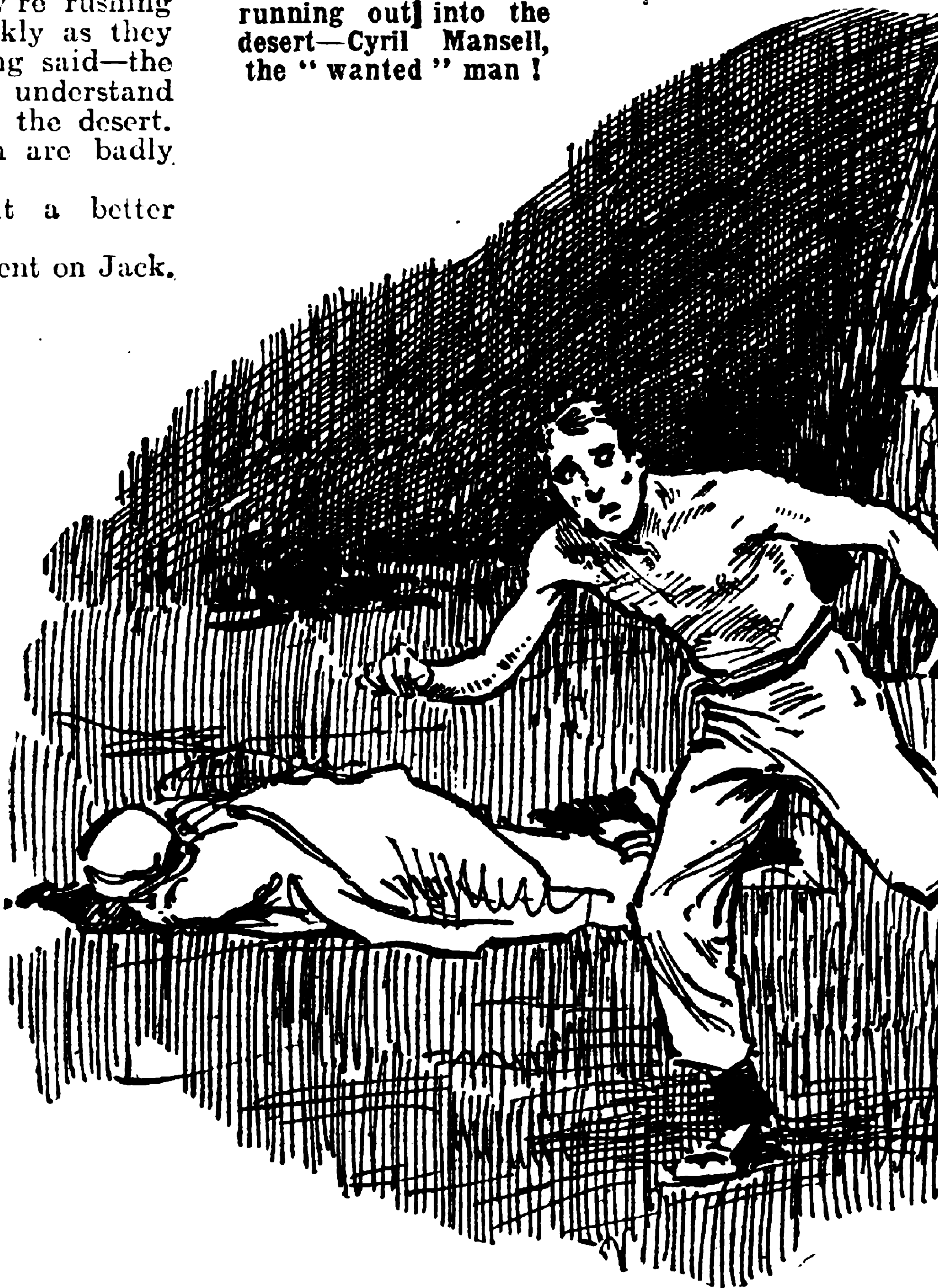
The food on the ship was not so bad, and the sea air sharpened the appetites of the adventurers. When "la Soupe" was sounded they were ready enough to set to.

Oran was reached in due course, its tall buildings gleaming white in the sunshine. The recruits were disembarked and lined up

on the quayside. There was a roll call, the numbers tallied with the official list, and then the men were marched to barracks.

They left Oran at midnight. This was really something to be thankful for, for if the journey had been undertaken in the day, the heat would have been appalling. Even as it was, that journey from Oran to Sidi Bel

Nelson Lee saw a figure running out into the desert—Cyril Mansell, the "wanted" man!



Abbes was akin to a nightmare. The recruits were hustled into what seemed to be open cattle trucks. Food was thrown to them as though they were so many animals. Then the train started on its slow, tedious journey, and an occasional glimpse of the surrounding landscape could be dimly discerned in the gloom of the hot night. Desert—nothing but desert, broken only here and there by stretches of scanty vegetation.

Dawn was breaking when the train laboured into Sidi Bel Abbes. The men piled out upon the platform, and were immediately marched to the Caserne. Sidi Bel

Abbes is the headquarters city of the Foreign Legion, and just at present it was the scene of intense military activities.

Nelson Lee and his companions were glad enough when they were at length marched to the barrack square of the Caserne. Here, at least, they would probably be stationed for some weeks. And during these weeks

Mansell yet. He's here somewhere, though, and one of these days the Chief will run across him."

That week at Sidi Bel Abbes was one which the cubs would long remember. It seemed ages since their uniforms had been given to them, and since then there had been days of intensive training. Men were being rushed off for unknown destinations as quickly as possible. There were many rumours about serious trouble with the Riffs.

Nipper and Browne and Stevens were now sitting in a corner of the mess-room. It wasn't a pleasant place. Most of the tables were bespattered with the relics of past meals, and the air was filled with a babel of various tongues. Legionnaires were taking their leisure in that crowded apartment. Nelson Lee himself joined the cubs a few moments later.

"I don't think we shall have to wait much longer now," he confided. "I have definitely ascertained that Mansell, under another name, is quartered in another section of this establishment."

"Can't you get at him, sir?" asked Stevens.

"Not easily—at least, not without causing comment," said Lee. "We could use our secret privileges, but by doing so we might jeopardise success. If Mansell gets any idea that he is being searched for he will close up like an oyster. Remember, there is only Chester's word that Mansell was at Dorking that fatal night, and Chester's word will not

be of much use, considering his own peculiar position. No, we must act with caution, and we must trap Mansell."

"And we can only do that by getting into close touch with him," nodded Browne. "The prospect, then, is that we might be residents in this place for another week or more?"

"The experience is doing us all good," said Nelson Lee dryly. "When we get home we shall appreciate what freedom really means."

THEN dramatically came an unexpected incident.

A number of legionnaires were parading, including Nelson Lee and Jack Chester. The sun was blistering hot, and the air quivered with the heat. Some distance away another batch of men were at drill. Everywhere throughout the great



he felt that he would be able to conclude his inquiries.

CHAPTER 6.

Face to Face!

"I'm fed up!" said Nipper rebelliously. "We must always remember, brother, that we are improving our knowledge of the great world," said William Napoleon Browne. "I will grant that the past week has been a period of diluted torment, but we must always remember that we are not, like these other wretches, bound to the Legion for five years. That, I venture to suggest, is a great comfort."

"Besides, there's been no help for it," said Stevens. "We've been here all this time, and we haven't seen a glimpse of

military camp men were being trained at express speed. Legionnaires of many years standing declared that they had never known anything like it.

It was Jack Chester who saw Mansell first. Mansell was amongst those other recruits, drilling. At the sight of him Jack stiffened, and his eyes blazed. In that second he forgot all Nelson Lee's strict injunctions. This was the first glimpse he had had of his cousin since that dramatic meeting in Paris.

And Jack, who was hot-headed, acted rashly.

Breaking ranks, he dashed hot-foot across the intervening space. Orders were shouted at him, but he took no notice; he did not even hear them. He ran right up to his cousin, and Mansell, who had seen him coming, fell back with a startled exclamation, fear in his eyes. At last they were face to face.

"I want you, Cyril!" said Jack harshly. "You escaped me in Paris, but I've got you now!"

"You fool!" panted Mansell. "You'll only get yourself put into prison for this!"

"I want the truth from you—now!" shouted Jack. "You've got to confess in the presence of an officer! Do you understand? I daren't return to England until——"

"Sacre! What is this?" shouted an excited lieutenant, as he dashed up. "Stand back, you English dog!"

Jack turned upon him ferociously.

"This man is my cousin, and I am charged with a crime that he committed," he said. "I want you to——"

"Silence!" thundered the officer. "Par-dieu! Is this the discipline we teach you? Attention!"

A heavily-built sergeant came up, and he hastily saluted.

"This is one of your men?" asked the officer.

"Oui," growled the sergeant. "Fool, you will come with me!"

"Keep your hands off me!" shouted Jack recklessly. "Ask this man if he is not my cousin! Ask him——"

"Tiens!" broke in the sergeant savagely.

He brought the back of his hand across Jack's face, and the young Englishman staggered. Next moment, mad with rage at the brutal blow, he flung himself forward. His right fist swung round, and the knuckles crashed with a jarring thud against the sergeant's heavy jaw.

Immediately there was an uproar.

Cyril Mansell stood by, silent and at attention. Cunningly he knew that he was safe so long as he pretended to regard Jack as a stranger.

The sergeant, swearing violently, picked himself up. He grabbed his rifle and whirled it round.

Crash!

The butt struck Jack Chester on the side of the head, and he fell limply to the

scorched ground. Nelson Lee, running over—for the detective could now see that his intervention was essential—arrived just too late to prevent that cowardly attack. He was in time, however, to stop the sergeant from brutally kicking his victim.

"One moment!" said Lee in French. "You are forgetting yourself, my friend."

"Sacre!" gasped the sergeant. "What is this—mutiny? Get back to the ranks, you dog!"

"An Englishman does not stand by and see his fellow-countrymen kicked in the ribs," replied Lee steadily. "Where is your commanding officer? I insist upon seeing him."

"You insist?" gasped the sergeant, his eyes glittering with fury.

He swung his rifle again, and it was at this moment that Nipper and Browne and Stevens felt that they ought to join in. They ran up, and the sergeant was bowled over.

CHAPTER 7.

Unexpected Disaster!

ORDERS rang out sharply. The lieutenant was now taking a hand. Up till this moment he had stood by, content to let the sergeant have his fling. Within three minutes Nelson Lee, Nipper, Stevens, Browne and Jack Chester were placed under arrest. An armed escort took them into the barracks.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Lee," murmured Jack, as they marched.

He was weak and groggy—and he knew, now that it was too late, that he had blundered. He had done no good by his outburst; in fact, he had done harm. For Cyril Mansell was now on his guard; he probably guessed that these other Britishers were Jack's friends, ready to help him.

"Don't worry," said Lee softly. "If I can see the commandant, I daresay I can help you."

Any other conversation was impossible, for within the barracks the prisoners were separated. They were flung into filthy, stifling cells. Nelson Lee found himself with Browne as a companion. The others were in adjoining cells.

"A somewhat scaly incident, Chief," commented Browne, after the key had been turned upon them. "And I cannot say that I am deeply impressed with the accommodation. Without wishing to be pessimistic, I nevertheless predict that one month of this will be the minimum punishment that we can expect."

"And yet I fancy we shall be free within one hour," replied Lee smoothly.

Forty minutes elapsed before a key turned in the lock, and a corporal appeared. He had come, apparently, to see if the prisoners were supplied with water.

"I am anxious to see the commandant—or, at least, a responsible officer," said Nelson Lee, in French. "You, my friend, will take a message——"

"Bah! I take nothing!" interrupted the corporal. "For what you have done you will be flogged—and after that, solitary confinement. English fools!"

"You will take this to your superior officer," said Nelson Lee, hastily scribbling on a scrap of paper. He handed it to the surprised corporal—with a fifty-franc note. The man was so astonished that he could only stare for a moment. "I am always prepared to pay for services rendered," explained Lee smoothly.

"Ma foi! This money is for—me?" ejaculated the corporal.

"Yes—if you take this message to your officer," said the detective.

The message was taken; and the result was magical. Within ten minutes an escort appeared, and Nelson Lee was removed from the cell. He was marched down hot corridors, and at length he arrived in a big, airy room, where there was a degree of comfort. At a huge desk sat a heavily-built man in scrupulously neat uniform. Lee did not like the look of his face. There was something cruel and crafty about it.

"Leave the prisoner here," he ordered. "Remain outside."

The escort saluted, and retired. Lighting a long cheroot, the officer regarded Lee with insolent minuteness, as though he were examining some animal.

"You are English?" he said, at length.

"I am," replied Lee. "You, I take it, are the commandant?"

"I am Colonel Hautet," replied the other. "I am not the commandant, however. The commandant has been called away on urgent service. It may be some weeks before he returns, and in the meantime I am deputising. Is there anything else you would like to know?" he added, with a sneer. "Mon Dieu! You English are audacious! You send me a note saying that you are not what you seem to be, and that you have papers to prove it. Let me tell you, my friend, that you are a common soldier of the Legion."

"You are mistaken, colonel——"

"Silence!" shouted the other violently. "When I want you to speak, I will tell you to speak! You are guilty of mutiny, and for

that offence you shall pay the full penalty."

Nelson Lee decided to let the man have his say.

"You and one other are to be flogged," continued Colonel Hautet, "and after that——" He shrugged his shoulders. "After that, you shall see! And now we'll deal with this matter of your identity. Let me tell you, at once, that I am not interested. Many men change their names before offering themselves to the Foreign Legion."

"In my case the circumstances are totally different," replied Nelson Lee. "If you will glance at these, Colonel Hautet, you will understand the better."

He placed his papers before the colonel—the papers which he had obtained from the Legion headquarters in Paris. The colonel looked through them with indifference, and then glanced up.

"Well?" he said. "What do you expect me to do?"

"You will see that my real name is Nelson Lee, and that I have three young men with me——"

"Yes, yes, I see that," interrupted the colonel. "But, my friend, you have joined the Legion."

"We did not take any oath," replied Lee. "Our entry was arranged. And those papers will definitely show you that we are to be allowed to return to France at any moment we choose."

Colonel Hautet laughed unpleasantly.

"And you expect me to believe these—forgeries?" he sneered. "Ma foi! Am I a

fool to be so deceived?"

"They are not forgeries, colonel," said Lee angrily. "Have you not had corroborative information direct from Paris? I was assured——"

"La, la! Enough!" cut in the colonel. "For my own curiosity I had you brought in. Now you will go. Of these papers I take no notice."

"But I was assured in Paris——"

"Silence!" thundered the other. "I tell you that we have received no information concerning you." He shrugged. "There is much confusion and delay," he added. "Perhaps you have told me the truth—perhaps you have not. I do not propose to investigate this matter at all."

THREE NEW CHUMS FOR YOU!

Here they come, trundling their truck along the dusty highway—Eric, Tony and Bloop, three of the cheeriest lads alive. Tramp, tramp—on, on—searching for fun and adventure—finding it.

You simply must meet Eric, Tony and Bloop, chums. They're due to arrive in the NELSON LEE next week in a new rollicking series of yarns entitled:



He prepared to tear up the precious papers, and Lee leapt forward.

"No, colonel, you cannot do that—" he began.

"Stand back, you accursed mutineer!" snarled the officer. "So! I prefer to treat these papers as forgeries. Bien! They go into the waste-paper basket! So! And you—you go to the front!"

"What!" shouted Lee.

"Oui, monsieur—you go to the front!" said Colonel Hautet, sitting back in his chair and laughing. "Men are badly needed. The Riffs are troublesome. Many of our desert forts are undermanned. You understand? You and your friends are liable to cause trouble here. So! You depart for the front at dawn to-morrow!"

"This is outrageous!" protested Lee. "Those boys are not trained—"

"In times of war we must take unusual measures," said the colonel. "And now, my friend, this interview is over."

Two minutes later, Nelson Lee was surrounded by the escort and marched away.

IT was a staggering blow.

Never for a moment had Nelson Lee believed that a responsible officer would discredit his statements. Those precious papers were no more! And without them Lee and his cubs became just ordinary legionnaires—without any special privileges, without any hope of escape from the Legion!

Later that day, the cubs and the rest of the soldiers were paraded in the barracks square, and there they witnessed the flogging of Nelson Lee and Jack Chester. Under the blazing sun the merciless punishment was carried out, and the two victims suffered acute agonies. Sickened, Nipper and his companions were compelled to watch, writhing as they realised how helpless they were to assist their respected Chief.

At dawn the next morning, Nelson Lee and Chester—both showing signs of their terrible ordeal—the boys and a number of other half-trained recruits were assembled in the square. Bugles sounded, orders were shouted, new kits were issued. A hurried draft was being sent to Morocco—to the war zone!

They were off to fight the Riffs, and their minds were full of the stories that the older legionnaires had told them. Stories of merciless Arabs; of curved knives and dum-dum bullets; of the appalling fate which befel any legionnaire who happened to fall into the hands of the enemy; stories of terrible hardships in the desert!

CHAPTER 8.

The Desert Outpost!

PORT LA PEROUSE was not a pleasant place; but as the weary, thirsty legionnaires approached it, that gaunt building was very akin to heaven.

It stood out from the desert, an ugly, squat building of stones and sun-baked clay. It stood there, scorched under the blistering heat of the noonday sun. All round, as far as the

eye could see, stretched the desert. A vast sea of sand, undulating and monotonous. Overhead there was the brazen sky, with the sun blazing down pitilessly.

It had been a bitter, heartbreaking journey for Nelson Lee and the cub detectives. Eight days in the desert—two days by train, and then the march across the endless sands. And now, at last—Fort La Perouse; an outpost of the desert; an isolated garrison of the Foreign Legion.

An order rang out, and the footsore men halted. A challenge came from a sentry, far up on the wall of the fort. The officer in charge of the new detachment strode forward, and a few moments later a big gate was opened.

In marched the new arrivals. This fort was to be their home for the future. Here they were to live—and, most probably, to die. For there was ample evidence that the fort had recently been hard pressed.

The garrison was meagre—a mere handful. Rumours soon got round amongst the newcomers. The Arabs, it seemed, had been attacking, and as recently as two days ago there had been a desperate fight. Only by grim and determined efforts had the fort held out. Many men had been killed, and these reinforcements were badly needed.

"Looks like trouble, old man," remarked Stevens. "By Jove! What a life! Bunged into a desert fortress like this—and made to fight!"

"It is certainly a scaly outlook, brother," admitted William Napoleon Browne. "Valiant as we Brownes are, however, I trust that Brother Arab will not attack until at least forty-eight hours have elapsed. A certain amount of recuperation after that march is indicated."

"I'm afraid there won't be much recuperation, old man," said Nelson Lee, in a low voice, as he joined them. "According to all I can hear, the enemy is likely to attack at any minute—particularly in view of the fact that reinforcements have arrived."

"Funny thing they didn't go for us on the open desert, sir," remarked Stevens. "They could have wiped us all out."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"The officer of this fortress never expected to see us," he replied. "We are lucky, indeed, to have arrived in safety."

"But what of our departure, Chief?" murmured Browne. "I trust you have sounded the commandant of this mud dump?"

"It's no good thinking of that, Browne," replied Nelson Lee. "We are just ordinary legionnaires—and the officer in command of this mud dump, as you call it, would not listen to me. No: we must carry on as best we can. There is at least one consolation in this situation."

"And what's that, guv'nor?" asked Nipper.

"Mansell is here," replied Lee grimly. "Here, out in the desert, we may learn the truth about that murder in far-off Dorking. Both our men are here with us—Mansell and



Disguised as Arabs, Nelson Lee and Nipper set out into the desert on the trail of their man.

Chester. It will be surprising if we do not fathom our little mystery."

"And having fathomed it, Chief, what then?" asked Browne. "There doesn't seem to be any big hope of returning to civilisation. I'm all in favour of the wide open spaces; but, personally, I regard this one as far too wide open for real comfort."

LIFE at Sidi Bel Abbes had been strenuous enough; but it was a mere holiday in comparison with the conditions which prevailed at Fort La Perouse.

Cleanliness is no part of the French efficiency code; and as long as these legionnaires were good fighters, not much else was

required of them. Cleanliness was neither expected nor provided for.

Nelson Lee and his cubs found things very much to their distaste. In that one building there were barracks, store-rooms, officers' quarters, and even stables for the few animals which were kept on hand. There were also swarms of rats. They literally overran the place.

The atmosphere within the fort was close and heavy, and the heat seemed even more terrific than outside. It was overpowering; it was devastating. The food was not calculated to improve matters. It was rough and ready. The rations were liberal—a greasy, thick soup, with chunks of hard bread, and plenty of rough wine. But greasy

soup is not the ideal diet when the temperature is well above the hundred mark.

That night the new arrivals slept like logs. Even the heat could not keep them awake. Early next morning, however, Lee and his cubs were on duty—after partaking of their breakfast. This was merely coffee and bread. Later on, at about eleven, there would be soup; at four o'clock there would be more soup, and that would be the last meal of the day.

But Lee had other matters to think about. He was trying to get into touch with Mansell. Mansell, for his part, knew well enough that this lean, grim-faced Englishman was interested in him. He did his best to avoid the great detective.

And so the day passed, without Lee being successful. Mansell, for one thing, was stationed in a different part of the fortress, and the regulations were stringent. Lee could not leave his own duties without arousing the attention of his superior officers. It was now a waiting game, anyhow; and Nelson Lee was a patient man.

It was clear that the commandant expected trouble with the enemy at any minute. After their one good sleep, the reinforcements were drilled relentlessly; and a keen look-out was kept.

Some excitement was occasioned that night by the arrival of a solitary legionnaire, mounted on a camel. He had evidently brought dispatches; for soon afterwards the order went round that an extra guard was to be kept. But nothing happened during the night. Just as dawn was breaking, however, Nelson Lee sat up abruptly. He had only been off duty for an hour, and he was dog-tired. A bugle was sounding.

In a moment the barrack-room was fully awake; men were scrambling into their uniforms, and excitement ran high. The bugle was calling them to their posts. Was an attack coming? Men grabbed at rifles and hastily strapped belts round their bare waists. Mostly half-dressed, they dashed to their posts.

"Looks like trouble!" said Nipper breathlessly.

A loud-voiced sergeant was roaring out orders, and soon Nipper found himself at one of the defence stations. There was a

loophole in front of him, through the hard-baked wall. He could see out upon the desert. His eyes glittered. Over the sun-drenched sands hundreds of mounted Arabs were advancing upon the fort.

"Vive la France!" yelled one of the legionnaires, half-mad with excitement.

Crack-crack-crack!

Rifle shots rang out. In a moment, it seemed, the battle was at its height. The Arabs, riding superbly, thundered down upon the fort, firing rapidly as they rode. Bullets whistled overhead, some pattering ominously against the walls near the loopholes.

Nelson Lee experienced something of a shock when he saw the strength of the enemy. The desert seemed to be alive with them. In every direction the Arabs were in evidence, riding hard, thundering round the fort in a continuous body. There were thousands; and this garrison, cut off so completely from civilisation, did not number more than seventy or eighty all told.

The attack was organised cleverly. The enemy used tactics very similar to those of the old-time Indians in attacking an emigrant wagon train. They circled round and round the fort, firing continuously.

Nelson Lee and his cubs—in fact, everybody—caught the fighting fever. Within five minutes everything else in life had been forgotten. Everything else became insignificant. They were now legionnaires, fighting not only for the safety of Fort La Perouse, but for their very lives.

"For France—for France!" shouted an excited lieutenant, as he dashed about. "Shoot to kill, men! The enemy is in great strength, and if Fort La Perouse falls it will be death to us all! It will also be a moral victory for these Arab dogs which will have far-reaching effects. So, fight! France expects victory!"

"Vive la France!" went up a roar.

Nelson Lee almost forgot that he had never taken any vow to serve La Legion Etrangere; the excitement of battle was in his blood. All these other legionnaires, too, were behaving splendidly. Many were gaolbirds, many were untrained, uncouth ruffians; but they were good fighters. In the crisis they did soldiers' work—and they did it admirably.

"They're drawing in closer, gov'nor!" shouted Nipper.

"Yes—be careful," warned Lee. "Keep your head well back, young 'un."

Crack-crack-crack!

He fired as he spoke, and an Arab toppled from his horse and fell into the sand. Other Arabs were falling continuously; a devastating fire was poured out from the walls of the fort. Not many of the enemy's bullets found a victim, for those loopholes were very small. Only stray shots found a mark.

The Arabs, however, seemed utterly regardless of the danger. They held life cheaply. Already the sands were strewn with the white-clad figures of the dead and dying. Horses without riders were gallop-

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ing wildly hither and thither. Still the enemy pressed round, creeping nearer and nearer, relentlessly closing in.

Zurrrrrh-zurrrrrh!

Machine-guns were getting to work now, and the devastation they caused was terrific. Arabs fell by the dozen—horses, too. Before long the enemy seemed to realise that the attack was hopeless. Suddenly the Arabs drew off, galloping away and leaving a smother of sandy dust behind them.

"Mon Dieu!" ejaculated a burly sergeant, wiping a smear of blood and perspiration from his forehead. "They go—but soon they will return."

"We gave the dogs a surprise, Roux," said an officer, with relish. "They knew nothing of our reinforcements, hein? Well fought, men!"

There was no respite, even now that the enemy had withdrawn. Many wounded men had to be attended to, and some of the others were sent down to obtain food and refreshment.

A sudden roar from Sergeant Roux attracted Nelson Lee's attention.

"Canaille!" the sergeant was bellowing. "What's this? Sacre! A cold rifle! Cur and coward, you haven't fired a shot!"

The man he was addressing was Cyril Mansell. Mansell, white to the lips, was cowering back.

"No, no!" he panted. "My rifle jammed—"

"Liar!" roared the sergeant. "Your rifle is cold because you were afraid to risk your dirty life! Mon Dieu! You shall fight when the next attack comes! There is no room in the Legion for cowards!"

Jack Chester, who was close by, bit his lip. He hated to hear his cousin thus addressed by this brutal French sergeant.

"Steady, old man," murmured Lee, pressing a hand on Jack's bare arm. "The sergeant's quite right. Your cousin showed the white feather."

"An Englishman!" muttered Jack fiercely. "It makes me sick! An Englishman—cultured and well educated—showing fear before all these foreign riff-raff!"

They found themselves in the barrack-room, and Mansell was with them.

"For Heaven's sake, pull yourself together, Cyril!" said Jack fiercely. "That other matter's forgotten now—we're all in a pretty fine mess here."

Mansell waved his hands excitedly.

"It's murder!" he panted. "I didn't join the Legion to be sent on active service without any training! What do I know about fighting—or you, either, if it comes to that?"

"You can at least handle a rifle, even if you can't shoot straight," retorted Jack Chester hotly.

"I'm going to appeal to the officers," went on his cousin, becoming wild. "It's an outrage. It's—"

"You'll be well advised to make no complaint, young man," interrupted Nelson Lee

grimly. "This Riff rising is serious, and another attack may come at any moment. You had better pull yourself together and prepare to fight for your life. And if we are spared I may have something to ask you—later."

"What do you mean?" demanded Mansell tremulously. "I don't know you—"

"This is Mr. Nelson Lee, the great detective," interrupted Jack. "And you know well enough what he wants to question you about, Cyril. You'd far better tell him the whole truth."

If possible, Mansell went a shade paler. He looked ghastly, with the perspiration streaming down his pallid face.

"I know nothing!" he said hoarsely. "And I don't care how much Mr. Lee questions me, I'm not going to answer him. Why should I?"

He turned away, and there was no further opportunity of conversation, for Sergeant Roux came in, shouting raucously.

But Nelson Lee had seen enough. He knew full well that Cyril Mansell was indeed the murderer of Sir George Chester. As for the proof of his guilt—well, that did not seem so very important now.

CHAPTER 9.

Missing!

NELSON LEE was on guard duty towards evening when he beheld the enemy. Hundreds and hundreds of mounted figures had become visible in the distance.

The word rapidly went round, bugles sounded, and every available man was sent to his post. That the French authorities were justified in sending hurried reinforcements to Fort La Perouse was evident. This new detachment had only arrived in the nick of time to save the little garrison.

Lee did not know much about the military situation, but he was convinced that Fort La Perouse was of big importance to the enemy. The Riffs were intent upon capturing it, and in spite of their former heavy losses they were now preparing for another onslaught.

None of these legionnaires was really fit to fight. The old soldiers who had been in the fort were exhausted and weak. The new arrivals were raw to battle. The majority of them had never seen active service before, and they were only partially trained.

The odds, therefore, were overwhelmingly in favour of the Arabs. Nelson Lee and his cubs said little, but they exchanged one or two glances as they went to their posts, glances which meant "good-bye." There was no telling how this fresh battle would end.

Major Gallais, the commandant of the outpost, personally addressed the men. He was a smallish, dapper little officer, with keen, intelligent eyes. There was nothing of the brute or bully about him.

"Fight, men—fight for France!" said the commandant earnestly. "This outpost is of vital importance, and the enemy must never take it. While you have strength to fire, you must fire! There are rifles in plenty, and ammunition in abundance. So it is upon you that I depend. Acquit yourselves well."

He went from group to group, talking quietly and gravely. And all the time the Arabs drew nearer.

"They mean business this time all right, guv'nor," said Nipper, as he watched the approaching hordes through the loophole. "The beggars don't care how many lives they lose so long as they gain their objective."

"If these recruits fight as well as they fought this morning, we may repel the enemy," said Lee. "Keep your eyes wide open, young 'un, and don't take any chances."

THE battle developed an hour later, after a period of suspense. Everybody had expected the Riffs to charge down at once, but they held off for some reason. It was not until darkness was almost upon the fort that the excitement began.

The air was still and close. The thudding of horses' hoofs as the enemy advanced came to the defenders at the loopholes like the sound of distant thunder. Then came the rattle and crack of rifle fire. Bullets spattered on the walls, others hissed overhead. There were more of the Arabs now; they circled round and round, shouting, screaming, firing.

From every loophole poured a devastating hail of lead. The Riffs fell with relentless regularity, but all the casualties were not on their side. Man after man in Fort La Perouse threw up his arms and fell back, groaning or shrieking. Some fell without a sound. Whenever an Arab bullet found a mark, it invariably found a fatal mark. For only the heads of the defenders were exposed.

Nelson Lee and Nipper and Browne and

Stevens were fortunately close together, and although Lee was fighting hard, he found time to keep his eye upon his young companions. Occasionally he would utter a sharp note of warning, and he was proud and gratified to see that they were fighting gamely. So far they had escaped scot-free, except for a bullet furrow on Browne's neck, which was bleeding rather badly.

"It is nothing, Chief," declared Browne, when Lee shot a question at him. "A mere trifle, I assure you. We Brownes think little of such battle scars."

Ping!

A bullet came through Browne's loophole at an oblique angle, struck the wall, and glanced off. Browne almost felt the wind as it shot past his ear.

It was one of the last bullets to come close, for the enemy were retiring again, leaving many dead all round the walls of the fort. But the hard-pressed Foreign Legion soldiers knew only too well that the Riffs were retiring in order to reform—and then they would come charging back with ever-increasing ferocity and determination.

It was just at this critical period that Lee saw something which had escaped the notice of Sergeant Roux and the officers. In the gloom a man was running out from the wall of the fort. He was a white man, naked to the waist. Lee stiffened and watched. The man suddenly stooped over a dead Arab, removed the white robes, and flung them over his own shoulders.

"Mansell!" muttered Lee, taking a deep breath.

In the confusion Cyril Mansell had escaped—had deserted! It was utter madness, of course, for he could hardly hope to escape the enemy. But in his panic he was making a bid for freedom. Even as Lee watched, Mansell leapt upon the back of an uninjured stray horse and galloped away into the gloom.

It was his long training which caused

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Nelson Lee carefully to note the exact line of Mansell's flight. He marked it by the palm-trees of the oasis near at hand.

"What is it, guv'nor?" asked Nipper, noticing Lee's expression.

The detective did not reply. He left his post and quickly made his way down the stone steps to another part of the fort. Men were strewn everywhere, some dead, some wounded.

In the lull the garrison was doing its best for the injured. Lee would have helped under ordinary conditions, but in view of Mansell's escape he dashed to the officers' quarters, and a minute later he was in the presence of Major Gallais. He saluted smartly as the little major regarded him with angry surprise.

"Pardieu! What is this?" asked the commandant. "Why have you left your post?"

"A man has deserted, sir," replied Lee. "I saw him escaping—"

"The dog!" interrupted the major bitterly. "Well, we are better without him—and he is as good as dead. Does the fool think that he can get through?"

"I would like to go after this man, sir," said Lee quietly.

"What!" ejaculated the major. "You, too, wish to die out on the desert? Sacre! You are all mad, you English! Do you not know what the Arabs will do to you—"

"It is not that, sir," broke in Nelson Lee. "That man is a murderer, fleeing from English justice. I am an English detective, and if he gets clear away and is killed by the Riffs, I shall never be able to produce evidence of another man's innocence. And this other man will be hanged unless the murderer—"

"La, la!" said Major Gallais, with an impatient shrug. "Is this a time to speak of such things? But you say you are a detective?"

"My name is Nelson Lee."

"Mon Dieu!" said the major, staring. "Now I know! When I saw you first I recognised you, but I could not place you. Yes, Monsieur Lee, I have seen your photographs—often." He seemed greatly impressed. "How is it, then, that you join our Foreign Legion?"

"I did not join. My presence in the Legion was purely a matter of arrangement," replied Nelson Lee. "But your commandant at Sidi Bel Abbes—Colonel Hautet—was pleased to tear up my papers. It is within your power to help me, major, and I urge you to do so."

"But what you suggest is suicide!" protested Major Gallais. "Is it not sufficient for this man to go to his death? If I give you this permission, I send you to your death, too."

"I am reputed to be something of an expert at disguising myself," said Lee steadily. "There is ample Arab clothing at hand—horses, too. I am willing to take the risk."

The little major stared harder than ever.

"Sit down, mon ami," he said, indicating a chair. "You and I, we will talk. So! You are the great Monsieur Lee? Had we more leisure, I would entertain myself at your expense. For I am greatly interested in criminology. Have I not good reason to be? We get queer fish in the Legion. I could tell you many strange stories. Oui, monsieur! Stories that would make even you flinch and quiver."

Lee controlled himself. Major Gallais was evidently a garrulous fellow, and if left to his own devices he would waste a great deal of precious time. It was fortunate that he had recognised Lee, or he might not otherwise have believed the detective's statement. It was also fortunate that he should be interested in criminology, for it was this fact which caused him to treat Lee on equal terms.

"You must tell me of this case, Monsieur Lee," he went on eagerly. "Later, of course. Now we are too pressed. You must return to your post, and I must do the same. And if le bon Dieu spares us, then we will have our talk. But now—fighting! These accursed Riffs are—"

"They are drawing off for a spell, and that will give me my opportunity," interrupted Lee. "Listen, Major Gallais! I will give you a few details of this case—now."

He did so, briefly, concisely. The major, impatient at first, was soon enthralled.

"Mon Dieu! And this man—this innocent man—is here?" he asked, at length. "And the guilty one, the cowardly assassin, deserts? Bien! Now I understand! But, mon ami, if you go out into the desert in pursuit, you can do no good."

"If I start at once—taking one of my assistants with me—I may overtake Mansell before he falls into the hands of the enemy," replied Lee. "Don't you see, major? If he does fall into their hands he will be butchered, and thus the proof of Chester's innocence will be for ever destroyed. I know something of the psychology of men; and if I can overtake this wretch and face him with his crime he will confess. In any other circumstances he would probably refuse."

Major Gallais waved his arms.

"Then go!" he shouted. "Why do you waste time here? Every man is needed, but you are right, Monsieur Lee! Go! But I fear you go to your death!"

WITHIN twelve minutes Lee and Nipper were ready.

Lee had managed to get a word to the other cubs, and although they were gravely concerned they accepted the situation. As Browne remarked, it wouldn't make much difference, anyhow—since it seemed probable that they would all be wiped out before the dawn.

Arab clothing had been easily obtained, and there were plenty of horses. Lee and Nipper set off in the gloom of the night, and

one would not have imagined that there was a warlike Arab within a hundred miles. The desert was tranquil. Stars gleamed overhead in the purple sky. But just over the everlasting dunes the Riffs were lurking—preparing to charge to the attack once more.

Lee struck out in the direction he knew Mansell to have taken. To pick out any particular trail within the vicinity of the fort was, of course, impossible, since the sand had been churned over and over by the Arab hordes during the attack. After the first mile or so, however, the trackers found their task easy.

The Arabs had retired in a north-easterly direction and Mansell, who had had no desire to run into them, had headed for the south. Soon Nelson Lee and Nipper struck the trail left by the fugitive's horse. It stretched away into the distance, so obvious that there could be no mistaking it, and, since there was no wind, no chance of its being obliterated. Lee kept a constant watch for the enemy, but there was no sign of the Arabs.

On and on rode the trackers, relentlessly following the trail which stretched before them. Towards the end of the third hour Lee suddenly checked. He pulled in his horse, and raised a warning hand for Nipper to do the same.

"What is it, guv'nor?" whispered Nipper.

"I heard something," muttered Lee. "I'm not sure——"

Crack-crack!

Out of the mysterious distance ahead came the report of a rifle.

CHAPTER 10.

The End of the Trail!

"SOUNDS like trouble," whispered Nipper tensely.

"But not a great deal of it, or there would be more firing," replied Lee. "We had better go ahead—very cautiously. Friend Mansell may be mixed up in this affair, or he may not. We shall soon see."

They continued onwards at a canter. After about ten minutes, Lee sharply drew rein. Directly ahead, and unexpectedly revealed, was a deep hollow in the desert. The moonshine was flooding into it slantingly, so that half the hollow was visible, and the other half was in deep shadow.

Leaving their mounts behind, Lee and

Nipper crept forward until they were on the edge of the basin. A ruddy spurt of fire came from the black shadows, and a sharp report sounded. Over on the opposite rim a few figures were stealthily moving.

"It's Mansell down there," whispered Lee. "The beggar's ambushed, or I'm a Dutchman. While he keeps in this hollow, he's comparatively safe. There are plenty of sandhills for cover—and the enemy daren't expose themselves too much or they'll be direct against the sky-line."

"You mean the Riffs?" breathed Nipper.

"Far more likely that Mansell ran into a wandering band of Toureg," replied Lee softly. "I don't think these beggars are Riffs. Anyhow, we'll give them a surprise. Fire when I do, young 'un."

Lying flat on the sand, they unslung their rifles, and Lee took careful aim at the vague humps on the opposite side of the rim. Nipper did the same.

Crack-crack-crack-crack!

They fired half a dozen rounds with lightning-like speed. A scream sounded, followed by hoarse shouts. Running rapidly round the hollow, Lee had the satisfaction of seeing a number of camels loping off at full speed. Lee's guess had probably been right; no doubt the enemy was a wandering band of Toureg, or gipsies of the desert.

"Hallo, down there!" shouted Lee, turning his attention to the hollow.

"Thank heaven!" came a muttered gasp.

"It's Mansell!" said Nipper, with satisfaction.

They found Mansell sprawling in the sand behind a small hummock. He had discarded his Arab disguise, and an ugly stream of moisture was trickling down his right side.

"My shoulder!" he panted hoarsely. "The devil's got me! Give me water!"

He greedily gulped down some water from Lee's container; and after that the detective made a quick examination of the wound. It wasn't serious, unless complications set in, which was by no means unlikely.

"How—how did you know?" panted Mansell, after a while.

"You were seen leaving," replied the detective. "I suppose you know what this means, Mansell? A man who deserts his post is shot. My orders are to take you back to Fort La Perouse."

"No, no! You can't do that!" gasped Mansell. "They'll kill me! Take me anywhere else! I want to get out of this accursed Legion!"

"We're all right where we are—for the moment," replied Lee evenly. "I want to have a quiet little chat with you, Mansell. You know who I am, and you know why I joined the Legion. Now, my young friend, we're alone in this desert, and I'm going to take drastic measures with you. I shall give you your choice. Either you make a statement now, confessing that you killed Sir George Chester, and sign it, or Nipper and I will get on our horses and leave you in this hollow!"

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Nipper stared. He knew well enough that the great detective would do no such thing. This was merely a ruse to force a confession out of Mansell.

"I tell you I know nothing!" insisted the wounded man frantically. "I didn't go near Dorking that night——"

"Come, Nipper," said Lee curtly.

He rose and walked swiftly away, Nipper following.

"You dogs—you curs!" shrieked Mansell. "Leave me some water, anyhow!"

"In the desert it is every man for himself—and our water supply is only sufficient for ourselves," retorted Lee. "You must pay the penalty for your own folly, Mansell. I am sorry for you. When the Toureg find you again—as they will on the morrow—hanging will be a pleasure in comparison to the tortures that will be wreaked upon you. These wandering Arabs are not squeamish."

He plucked at Nipper's arm, and they plodded on out of the hollow.

"Come back—come back!" screamed Mansell madly.

"No!"

"Come back!" pleaded the wretch. "I—I'll confess!"

Lee was by his side within a minute.

Slowly Mansell wrote his confession, explaining everything that had happened at Dorking on that fatal night, completely exonerating Jack Chester. With a snarling oath, he signed it. That done, Nelson Lee dressed his wound, found his horse, and then the trio started on their journey back to the fort.

Towards dawn came a welcome surprise.

Figures were seen in the distance—a long, slow-moving column. Men, hoses, camels by the hundred. At first Nelson Lee displayed caution. He and his companions concealed themselves behind a handy dune. Then, as the light grew, they were able to see better.

This column was no Riff force, but a big detachment of the Foreign Legion. Riding up, Lee found that a Lieutenant Bertrand was in command. At first the lieutenant was sceptical; he evidently regarded these three ragamuffins as deserters. However, Lee's sincerity at last dispelled his doubts.

"We are making for Fort La Tene," said the lieutenant. "There is not much fighting there, but relief is badly needed——"

"You are an officer, and I am a mere legionnaire, but I prefer to speak to you now as man to man," interrupted Lee. "I urge you, Lieutenant Bertrand, to ignore your orders and to take your men at once to the relief of Fort La Perouse. If you do not do so, every man there will be wiped out. The Riffs are attacking in strong force."

The officer twirled his little moustache.

"And what if your story is wrong?" he asked dubiously. "For me it means a court-martial—degradation."

"However, there was something so impressive in Lee's tone and manner that Lieutenant Bertrand was won over. Ten minutes later

the entire column changed its course, and made for Fort La Perouse. Incidentally this decision of the young officer's was to earn him promotion within a month.

IF the lieutenant had any doubts, they were dispelled when Fort La Perouse was sighted. A big attack was developing, and the Riffs were evidently determined to smash the defence. These reinforcements, however, arriving so unexpectedly, turned the tables.

The legionnaires, weary as they were, charged gamely. The battle was fierce and grim, but it was short. Many men fell; they died worthily. They gave their lives, but Fort La Perouse was saved.

Nelson Lee was overjoyed to find that his cubs had come to no harm. Major Gallais was full of praise for their fighting qualities, and so impressed was he by Nelson Lee's action in bringing these reinforcements that he took immediate steps to undo the work of Colonel Hautet.

On his own responsibility, he sent Lee and his cubs back to Sidi Bel Abbes—and Jack Chester and Cyril Mansell went with them. At Sidi Bel Abbes Lee was relieved to find that Colonel Hautet had been sent back to France. The real commandant had returned to duty, and those tardy papers from Paris had arrived. These, in conjunction with Major Gallais' report, worked the oracle.

"We of the Foreign Legion are not so harsh and brutal as fiction would have you believe," said the commandant earnestly. "You, of course, Mr. Lee, may return to Paris forthwith, and it is your duty to take your prisoner with you. And Monsieur Chester shall go, too."

Cyril Mansell never lived to see English shores. He had arrived at Sidi Bel Abbes a wreck, and on the boat from Oran to Marseilles he took a sudden turn for the worse, and died. But his confession was all that was needed to prove the innocence of Jack Chester.

Great as the excitement had been on the desert, however, Nelson Lee's cubs found greater excitement at home. It was sprung upon them like a bombshell that they were to return to St. Frank's—that St. Frank's was re-opening in all its old glory. And it was the governors' earnest desire that Nelson Lee should resume his former position in the school.

"Well, I need a rest, young 'uns," said Lee, with a smile, as he chatted with his cubs. "I shall go back to St. Frank's for a rest-cure, but only on the understanding that if I fancy any particular case I shall take it up."

"But you'll be there, guv'nor—that's the main thing," said Nipper happily.

THE END.

(Nelson Lee and Nipper & Co. back at St. Frank's next week—in a superb, extra-long school yarn featuring all your old favourite characters.)



Jokes from our readers wanted for this feature ! If you know of a good rib tickler send it along now—and win a prize ! A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke ; all other readers whose efforts are published will receive a pocket wallet or a penknife. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

NOT FOLLOWING FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS !

Burglar Parent (about to chastise son):
"Mind you, it's not so much for pinching the jam that I'm going to thrash you, but for the careless way you left your fingerprints about !"

(H. Watts, 18, Mayfield Avenue, Good Rest, Worcester, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

THE MONEY-MAKER !

Tenant: "Sir, the walls of my house are bulging outwards."

Landlord: "H'm, that makes the house bigger. I must raise the rent."

(C. Lant, 2, St. John's Lane, Halifax, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

TIRING WORK !

Kind Old Lady: "And are you really content to spend your life walking round the country begging, my good man ?"

Tramp (wearily): "No, lady ; many's the time I've wished I had a motor-car."

(J. W. Lowdell, The Hollies, Stone Street Road, Petham, Kent, has been awarded a penknife.)

PROMPT ATTENTION !

Plumber: "Did you want a plumber, mum ?"

Lady: "Want one, indeed ! I wrote to you last July."

Plumber (to his mate):
"Wrong 'ouse, 'Arry. The lady we're looking for wrote last May."

(J. Garrett, 35, Daphne Street, Donegall Road, Belfast, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

THE EXPLANATION !

It was the first time he had visited the local football ground. Just before kick-off, he noticed a large number of cats of all descriptions hovering around one of the goals. Turning to his neighbour, who was an habitual spectator, he asked :

"Are those cats over there the team's mascots ?"

"Oh, no," replied the other. "We always

have 'em round when Bill Hawkins, the local fishmonger, keeps goal for us."

(W. Farr, 42, York Street, Cardiff, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

CERTAINLY NOT !

Small Boy (in men's outfitter's shop):
"I want a collar for my father."

Assistant (pointing to his own collar):
"One like mine ?"

Boy: "No, a clean one."

(H. Beardall, 9, South Terrace, Chesterfield, has been awarded a penknife.)

HIGH SPEED !

First Motorist: "I went so fast that the trees appeared like a fence."

Second ditto: "I drove so fast that the mile-stones made a wall."

Third ditto: "My car went so fast that I could see the number on the back of it."

(F. Pemberton, 69, Highcross Street, Leicester, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

NO LOSS !

"Mr. Chairman," cried the candidate in the middle of his election address, "I have been on my feet nearly twenty minutes, but there is so much noise I can hardly hear myself speak."

"Don't worry," came a voice from the gallery. "You're not missing much."

(J. Aspden, 30, St. David's Road South, St. Annes-on-Sea, has been awarded a penknife.)

THIS'LL MAKE YOU LAUGH !



NO HOPE !

"Fortune Teller: "You will suffer much from poverty until you are thirty-five."

Poet (eagerly): "And then——"

Fortune Teller: "You will get used to it !"

(G. Pritchard, Brown Rock Farm, Tickenham, Bristol, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

BAD MEMORY !

Teacher: "Who laughed ?"

Jack: "I did, sir ; but I didn't mean it."

Teacher: "Didn't mean it ? Explain yourself."

Jack: "Well, sir, I laughed up my sleeve, but I forgot there was a hole in the elbow."

(Joyce Grierson, West Street, Harrietsham, Kent, has been awarded a penknife.)

HARD-HEADED !

Guard: "Keep your head in there."

Passenger: "Why ?"

Guard: "We don't want any of our bridges damaged."

(E. Rothwell, 275, Litherland Road, Bootle, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

UP AND DOWN !

Dad: "I hope you're sharing your sleigh with Percy ?"

Jackie: "Yes, dad. He has it uphill, and I have it downhill."

(L. Hunt, 44, Carsic Lane, Sutton-in-Ash, has been awarded a penknife.)

A SLIGHT MISTAKE !

Visitor: "Is this what you mix your colours on ?"

Artist: "What do you mean ! This is my greatest masterpiece."

(H. Aldwinckle, 9, Stamford Street, Ilkeston, has been awarded a penknife.)

This splendid KNIFE and Sheath



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Another episode in the hilarious life of Dusty the Dino!



DICK and his DINOSAUR

Thwacker the Dino Trapper!

DUSTY, the dinosaur, sniffed, and then a smile broke out on his reptilian features. Dusty was noted for the extreme variety of his appetite. He would eat anything from a Latin Primer to a master's cap and gown, but if there was one thing he liked better than anything else it was a bunch of bananas.

And Dusty, strolling around the quadrangle of Skinton School, had come across a bunch of bananas lying on the ground. In two seconds they were no longer on the ground—Dusty had seen to that. He licked his chops in a satisfied way, and then smiled again.

For a little farther along lay another bunch of bananas, and yet another. Dusty began to think it must be his birthday. The bananas vanished at a terrific rate. Dusty, as became a prehistoric animal, was not over-endowed with brains, otherwise he might have seen that the bunches of bananas had been laid to form a trail, a trail which finished up in the ancient gate-house of the school. In mediæval days that gatehouse had been a prison, complete with portcullis, and if Mr. Thwacker, the master of the Fourth, had anything to do with it, it was going to be a prison again—a prison for Dusty!

It was Mr. Thwacker who had laid the trail of bananas, which finished in a large pile of that delicious fruit right in the shelter of the gatehouse. And it was Mr. Thwacker who, as soon as Dusty was safely in the old

stone building, pulled the lever which sent the portcullis crashing down and made Dusty a prisoner.

It had cost Mr. Thwacker a lot of thought—and a lot of money—to lay that trap for Dusty. But Mr. Thwacker was thoroughly satisfied, and showed his satisfaction by doing a little war-dance of triumph as Dusty, realising that he was captured, gave vent to a snort of anger.

Mr. Thwacker did not like Dusty, and Dusty did not like Mr. Thwacker. Previously it had been Dusty who had always triumphed, but now the tables were turned, and Mr. Thwacker had the prehistoric beast where he wanted him.

"Now you'll stay there, you brute!" he chortled, and, turning to a number of interested boys who had hurried to the scene, he went on: "If any boy lets this monster loose again, he'll be expelled. You hear that, Darling?"

Comedy No. 3:

DUSTY'S DUST-UP!

Dick Daring nodded ruefully. Dusty was Dick's pet, and Dusty had often saved Dick from punishment. Now, with Dusty out of the way, Mr. Thwacker intended to make up for lost time. During morning lessons Dick collected a couple of "sixers" from the bad-tempered Form-master, to say nothing of lines innumerable.

By lunch-time Dusty was feeling indignant—and considerably hungry. The old stone gatehouse was a solidly-constructed building, and showed no signs of yielding to Dusty's violent onslaughts upon it. Then, just as

Dusty was wondering whether he would ever get anything to eat again, it seemed that manna dropped from the heavens. It landed just outside the portcullis, and within easy reach of Dusty's long neck—in the form of Mr. Sprouts, the greengrocer, who had arrived at the school with a cart full of vegetables, and who had stopped just inside the quad. to have a yarn with his old friend, the school porter. And when old Sprouts and the porter commenced yarning, wild horses would not stop them.

Dusty knew nothing of that, but he knew that greengroceries were good to eat, and he promptly commenced work. Thus, when Dick Daring and his chums of the Fourth rushed down after morning lessons, they saw an empty greengrocer's cart, and a thoroughly satisfied Dusty peering out from between the bars of the portcullis.

They also saw an indignant Mr. Sprouts laying down the law to the dinosaur, and making such a row that Dr. Beatem, the Head, and Mr. Thwacker were soon brought to the scene.

Mr. Thwacker purpled with rage as he saw what had happened, and he turned on Dick with an angry glint in his eyes.

"You'll pay for this, Daring!" he roared. "Your pocket-money will be stopped for the rest of the term. This—this monster of yours can't do anything now. He's there for good, and he can't escape. Now we'll see who's master here!"

But Mr. Thwacker had forgotten one thing. Dusty was a growing youngster. So far he was only about twenty feet long, and dinosaurs grow to a length of sixty feet or so. Given good food Dusty grew—and he had tasted plenty of good food that morning!

The gatehouse was only twenty-five feet long, so that when Dusty grew another five feet he filled the entire place. Had he stopped growing at that moment all would have been well, but Dusty did not stop growing.

It was the old story of trying to get a quart into a pint pot.

Cr—ack! Crash!

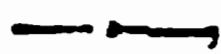
It seemed that a miniature earthquake had suddenly struck the old gatehouse. Great cracks appeared in its stonework, and the iron bars of the portcullis bent outwards under the strain of the growing Dusty. Something had to go—and the gatehouse went.

Crash! Crash!

Down thundered the old stones that had often resisted the attack of mediæval enemies, and the rough usage of time. The gatehouse had been constructed to hold back attacks from the outside, but not to resist the growing of a dinosaur from the inside.

In a few minutes it was a heap of ruins, and Dusty, shaking himself like a dog,

sniffed the air for a second, and then started off across the quad. in the wake of his two enemies, Dr. Beatem and Mr. Thwacker, who at the first signs of the collapse of the gatehouse had beat it as fast as their legs would carry them.



A New Statue for Skinton!

IT was, perhaps, a good thing for the Head and Mr. Thwacker that the entrance door to Skinton School was only some six feet wide. Dusty had grown so much that he was now unable to force his bulk through the door, greatly to the relief of the two masters.

So long as Dusty was outside the school he could not interfere with the discipline inside. Dusty, annoyed at his fruitless efforts to get inside, suddenly bethought himself of Mr. Sprouts, who had turned his horse and cart and was making off rapidly back to the town. Dusty had taken a fancy to Mr. Sprouts. Perhaps there was more food to be obtained by following him, and so Dusty, forgetting all about the Head and Mr. Thwacker, went off after Mr. Sprouts.

Dick would have followed him, but Mr. Thwacker saw him going.

"Come back at once, Daring!" he ordered. "Don't you dare follow that animal! Perhaps he's gone for good."

That was what Dick was thinking. He did not want to lose Dusty, but he dare not disobey the master now that Dusty was no longer there to protect him from the anger—and the cane—of Mr. Thwacker. Unwillingly he went back to the school, and once inside was seized by the irate Form-master and made to "bend over."

"This is getting a bit thick," he confided to his chum, Jack Jackson, when, Mr. Thwacker having finished, Dick was ruefully rubbing the fleshy part of his anatomy. "I've a jolly good mind to clear out. Old Thwacker's got it in for me properly, and if only I can find Dusty——"

"Daring!" yelled a voice at that moment—the voice of Dr. Beatem. "Follow me to my study!"

"That's put the tin hat on it!" growled Dick. "Thwacker's bad enough, but when the Head gets going—Here, I'm off!"

"Where are you going?" asked Jack.

"I'm beating it—to avoid being beaten in another sense!" said Dick. "I don't feel safe now that Dusty isn't here to protect me. I shan't be able to sit down for a fortnight if I stay here."

The next moment he was off, streaking across the quad. He heard a yell behind him, and, looking over his shoulder, saw that Dr. Beatem and Mr. Thwacker were after him—and both brandished their

strongest canes in their hands. That was enough for Dick. Once outside the school he cut off in the direction of the town, hoping to find Dusty before the grip of vengeance descended upon him.

After him tore Dr. Beatem and Mr. Thwacker, but Dick had often won the school half-mile, and he had no doubt that he would outdistance his pursuers. Once in the town he could mingle with the crowds and hope to avoid capture until he found Dusty.

His heart sank when he arrived in Skinton town, however. He looked all over for Dusty, but saw no signs of him. The dinosaur had vanished; and with Dusty's going, so had Dick's hopes gone! Unless he found Dusty the vials of the masters' wrath seemed likely to be poured on his unhappy head.

He looked all over the town, but there were no signs of Dusty. Then, as he turned a corner, he found himself face to face with Dr. Beatem and Mr. Thwacker.

"Stop, boy!" yelled the Head. "Stop at once!"

But Dick was not having any. Like a hare he turned and streaked back in the direction from which he had come. After him went the indignant masters. Vengeance was hot on his track when he turned into the market-place.

Something was happening in Skinton that afternoon, for the market-place was crowded. Dick was glad to see the crowd; it meant a possible means of escape. He dashed in amongst them, and forced his way to the front. Then he saw that the crowd were gathered before a platform, on which stood the Mayor of Skinton and a large number of local celebrities.

Behind the platform was a skeleton scaffolding, wreathed in canvas, and Dick suddenly remembered that this was the day when the Mayor of Skinton—an egregious, self-opinionated personage—was to unveil the statue of himself which he had presented to the town, a generosity which was entirely unappreciated by the townspeople.

"Thank goodness I can dodge old Thwacker in this crowd," said Dick to himself, and edged as near to the platform as he could.

The mayor was just finishing his speech, and already his hands had closed around the cords which would unveil the statue. It was at that moment that Dick felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned—to find that he was in the grip of his pursuers.

What happened then was like a nightmare. Dick seemed to hear dozens of people talking at once.

"I now unveil this marvellous statue!" That was the mayor speaking, but his words were drowned in Mr. Thwacker's roar of triumph at having caught Dick.

"Now, my boy, you'll pay dearly for your insubordination and——"

A terrific burst of laughter from the assembled crowd made Mr. Thwacker pause, and he wheeled around. The statue had been unveiled, but there was no statue there. In its place, calmly sitting on the pedestal in place of the statue, was——

"Dusty!"

Dick yelled the word, and the dinosaur pricked up its ears and looked in Dick's direction. The next moment, with one bound, it had sprung from the pedestal, scattering the outraged mayor and his corporation to right and left.

And Mr. Thwacker, dropping his hand from Dick's shoulder, made a wild bolt for safety, closely followed by the headmaster. Again Dusty had come to Dick's rescue in the very nick of time!

—

The Departure of Dusty!

THE inhabitants of Skinton had never before witnessed a scene like that which followed. The crowd parted as Mr. Thwacker and the Head dashed through, pursued by Dusty, and after Dusty went the Mayor of Skinton.

The mayor could not help himself. As he had been sent sprawling by the dinosaur, his hands had shot out and caught the first thing they could grab. It happened to be Dusty's tail. Then, as he felt himself being jerked into the air, the mayor had been unable to let go. He hung on grimly, and off went Dusty, with his worship hanging on like grim death, and rousing the echoes with his loud shouts for help as he sailed through the air.

What had happened to the statue only Dusty knew. It had been a warm day, and Dusty, tired of following Mr. Sprouts, had decided that the shade of the statue's coverings was preferable to the open street.

It was not until the excitement had died down that the statue of the mayor was found to have been placed on the top of the spire of the town hall, where, as there was no fire-escape large enough to reach it, it had to remain, hanging over at an angle of forty-five degrees.

But, meanwhile, the townspeople were treated to the spectacle of two elderly schoolmasters tearing through the streets pursued by Nemesis—in the shape of Dusty, the dino.

Remembering that Dusty could not now force his way into the school, Dr. Beatem and Mr. Thwacker made in that direction. The nearest way to the school led over an old, ramshackle bridge which spanned the extremely muddy river of the Skint, and it was just as they reached this bridge that Dusty caught up with them. They were half-way over when Dusty put his heavy bulk

on the bridge, which, because of its ramshackle condition, was closed to traffic.

Dusty apparently did not consider himself as coming under the category of traffic. At any rate, he dashed on to the bridge.

Crack! Crash! Bang!

Down went the bridge, broken in the middle. And down went Mr. Thwacker and Dr. Beatem, to end with a loud splash in the centre of the muddy river. Dusty made a spring back to dry land, and as he did so his tail swung around. The mayor could hold on no longer. Like a stone from a catapult he shot through the air, to strike the surface of the river as Mr. Thwacker and Dr. Beatem, spluttering with rage and muddy water, broke the surface.

Down they all went again, and the crowd on the river banks howled with laughter. The Skint was not very deep, but its bed was composed of a rich brown mud which clung to the three unfortunate men.

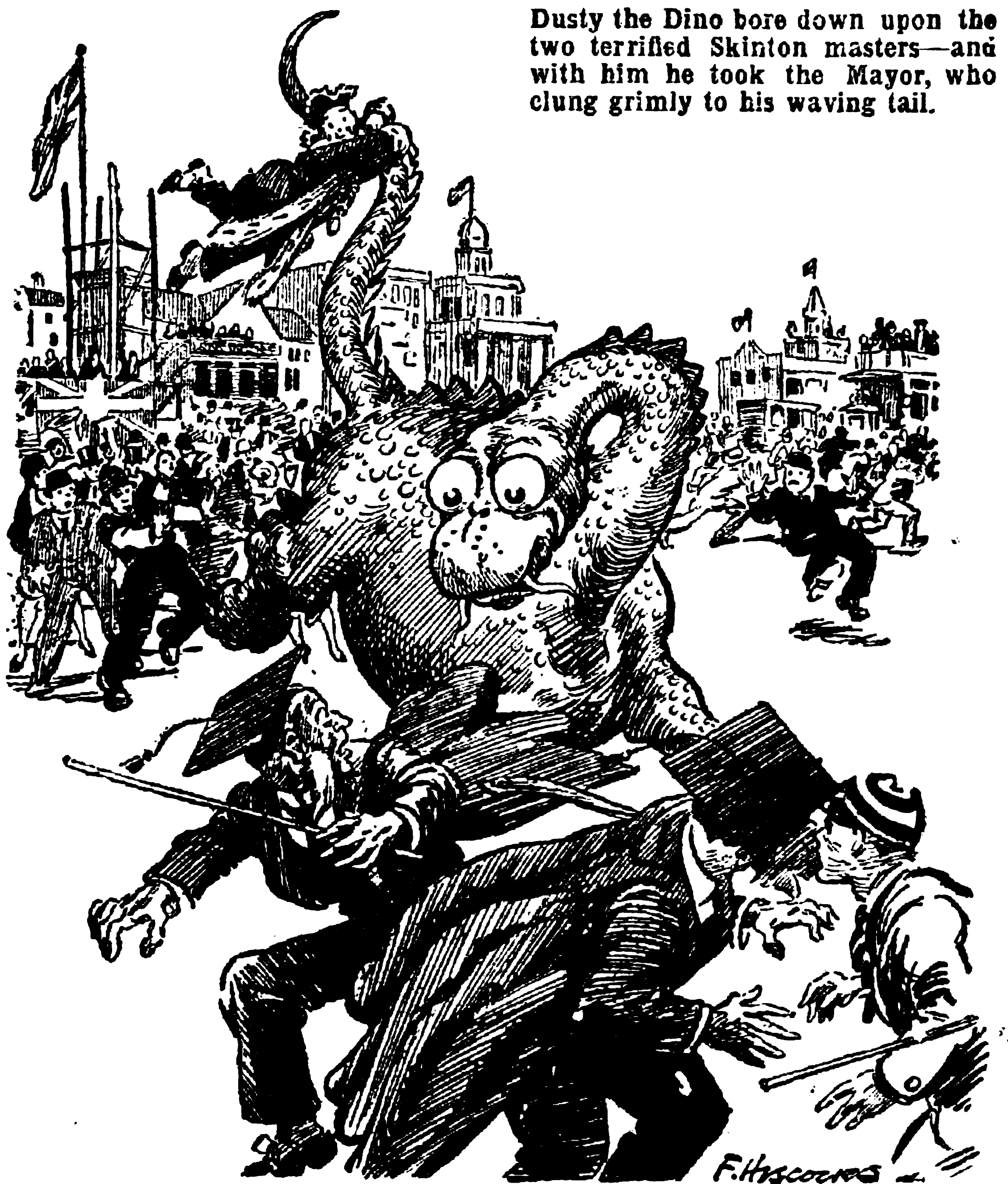
As they struggled to the surface again they presented a spectacle that was decidedly humorous. Dr. Beatem's luxurious side-whiskers were festooned with weeds, which also hung around his neck lovingly. Furthermore, the mud, which encased all of them, gave them the appearance of having been cast in solid bronze. In fact, instead of one statue, it looked as though three had been presented to Skinton town that day!

Dusty seemed to think so, at any rate, for, stretching his long neck over the river, he seized all three of them by the backs of their collars, and then, carrying them gently in his capacious mouth, led the way back to the market-place, followed by Dick and the townspeople.

Then—one, two, three—all of them were swung into the air and deposited upon the pedestal of the missing statue, while the crowd howled and rocked with laughter.

"Call out the police!" screamed the mayor. "Call out the Territorials! Where's

Dusty the Dino bore down upon the two terrified Skinton masters—and with him he took the Mayor, who clung grimly to his waving tail.



the fire-brigade? Get some machine-guns! Shoot that animal, do you hear me?"

Dick's face grew grave. Dusty could stand a lot, but if the local Territorials were called out and brought a machine-gun, things would go badly with the dinosaur.

"Dusty, old man," he yelled, "this is where we do the vanishing trick!"

Dusty, as obediently as a dog, trotted to him. Dick made a motion with his hand; Dusty lifted him into the air and deposited him on his back.

"We've made this little old town too hot to hold us, Dusty," said Dick. "Off we go, and head out of this place as quickly as you can! I guess we don't come back here again until this excitement has died down."

And Dusty, giving a snort, started off at a loping run, heading for the country beyond, and shaking the dust of Skinton from his feet as he took his young master off in search of further adventures!

THE END.

(More about Dusty the Dino next Wednesday—and look out for a new series of breezy yarns featuring The Hikers.)

David Goodwin Continues his Magnificent Serial in Thrilling Style!

Knights of the Road!



At Cross-Swords With Turpin!

“WHY, Dick,” cried Cicely Mainwaring, “is it you in truth, and have you taken to the road? We used to play at the highwayman and the maid in distress when we were children, but have a care, and keep yourself from the gibbet!”

“No gibbet shall hold me,” laughed Dick, “if it would grieve you to see me there!”

“Ay, it would,” cried Cicely, “though you are a wicked boy, and deserve it. So you have taken to the road through Uncle Vane. Ay, I know all the story. It is a shame! No matter. I hope

you’ll soon hold the curmudgeon at your pistol’s end, and strip him of his illgotten guineas. And is yonder the famous Dick Turpin? I am honoured!”

She bowed laughingly to the highwayman, who returned the salute, busy as he was in taking the gold that was destined for the brewery; after which he turned his black pistol on the clergyman.

“Your purse, sir, I pray you!” he said. “The shepherd needs not gold for his flock, and yours is a fat living. Quickly, I beg!”

“Turpin!” cried Dick, horrified. “You can’t mean it, man! Not the parson, for mercy’s sake!”

“Fie, sir! Shame on you!” cried the vicar, terrified at the thought of losing his gold. “Respect my cloth, sir—respect my cloth!”

Dick experiences his first hold-up—which leads to startling developments!

“That for your cloth,” replied Turpin, snapping his fingers. “And do you hold your tongue, Dick. I warrant his portly reverence has the best-lined purse of them all. Come, sir, out with

it, or there will be a vacancy for your starveling curate to step into!”

Without more ado the vicar, muttering under his breath, handed a well-filled purse to Turpin. The others were allowed to get in, the door closed on them, and the two highwaymen lowered their pistols.

“Away with you, Sam!” cried Turpin to the driver. “Give ’em their heads, set the

Riders on soon as you get to Norwich—and to the pleasure of our next meeting. Good-bye!”

The whip cracked, off went the horses, and Cicely Mainwaring waved a gloved hand to Dick as the coach rattled away with four very discontented travellers inside it.

“As good a haul as I have made for many a day,” said Turpin, as the two paced their horses along the road together, the elder man busy running over the spoils. “And what a pretty girl! If we always did as well, Dick, there would be little to grumble at.”

Dick Forrester made no reply. Turpin talked busily as they rode, but he got no answer from his young companion, and presently silence reigned between the two, broken only by the beat of the horses’ hoofs. They cut across country through the woods, and pulled to a walking pace again when well away from the scene of the robbery.

Dick looked glum. Reckless as he was—in many ways even more so than Turpin—he had scruples which did not trouble the famous highwayman. Stopping the coach was exciting enough, and for the danger either from gallows or bullet he cared not a jot, nor did it trouble his conscience at all when the miserly linen-draper and the wealthy brewer were eased of some of their profits, but the robbing of the clergyman filled him with horror and dismay.

The stormy, turbulent race of Forresters had always won and held their own by the strong hand; but they had a deep respect for the Church. It seemed to Dick a fearful thing to threaten with a loaded pistol a pastor in holy orders. It was that which caused Dick to remember his gentle mother, dead years since, and her sacred teachings, to which he had given little enough heed of late. His thoughts grew still more moody as he rode along, and at last he pulled up with a jerk.

“We must part here!” he said abruptly to Turpin. “The path leads two different ways. Do you take the one, and leave the other to me!”

Turpin had been riding along whistling a merry air; but now he turned in astonishment to Dick.

“Why, plague it, Dick, what ails you?”

“I will ride with you no longer!” said Dick shortly. “The stopping of the coach I take no objection to—it is my trade now—but to rob a pastor in holy orders, the thing sticks in my gullet!”

“The fat parson!” cried Turpin in cheerful amazement. “Why, man, what are you talking about? I assure you his purse was the fattest of any!”

“Enough!” said Dick hotly. “Go your road; we will separate, for you are no fit companion. I thought you respected the decencies, but to threaten a clergyman is little better than blasphemy. A tinker would not do it. You are no highwayman, but a common robber!”

Turpin suddenly clapped his spurs to the mare and made her leap on to a stretch of level sward a few yards away. There he wheeled round, dismounted, and whipped out his sword. The cheery, devil-may-care look was gone, and his face was livid with fury.

“We have here,” he said, his voice quivering with passion, “an excellent level piece of turf whereon to argue the matter. Out with your rapier and make good your words!”

It was an invitation that no Forrester ever refused. Dick descended from Black Satan, walked up to the highwayman, drew his sword and saluted. He saw the speechless anger in the outlaw’s face, and read the threat of death in his eyes.

The moment the steel grated together, fine swordsman as he was, Dick Forrester knew that he had met his match—and more.

The swords of the duellists had scarcely met when Turpin feinted skilfully, and then made a lunge that would have ended Dick’s career on the road in a very short time had it not been deftly turned by the boy, who instantly replied with a thrust that the highwayman barely parried.

That one stroke made, Dick stood on the defensive, and watched his adversary like a cat, to get some idea of what Turpin would do. Dick was a worthy pupil of his father, who had been the finest swordsman in England and a man whom none dared beard. But the boy, skilful as he was, had had no experience of serious fighting, and he realised the highwayman would prove a more tricky swordsman than he could manage.

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

DICK FORRESTER learns upon the death of his father that all the vast Fernhall estates and fortune, with the exception of a hundred guineas, have passed into the hands of the rascally uncle,

VANE FORRESTER. The latter refuses to give the boy his money, and, appointing himself guardian, states his intention of sending Dick and his brother,

RALPH FORRESTER, to Duncansby School—a notorious place in the north of England, from which, once they arrive there, they are not likely to leave. Travelling north by coach, Vane and the two boys are held up by

LICK TURPIN, the famous highwayman. Dick joins forces with Turpin, and after bidding Ralph to be of stout heart and promising to fetch him soon, the two ride away. Vane sets the King’s Riders on their track, and Dick is only saved from capture by the resourcefulness of his companion.

Later they receive news that the Norwich Mail is due to pass Gunton Heath, and thither they hie themselves. They hold up the coach, and Dick discovers that one of the occupants is Cicely Mainwaring, whom he knew before he took to the road as a highwayman.

(Now read on.)

Dick set his teeth and did his very best. Turpin failed to get through his guard, and as soon as he was used to his rival's ways, Dick began an attack that gave the highwayman plenty of work to ward off. But the boy felt he was not his adversary's master, and that the odds were against him, and in the outlaw's eyes he read the bitter, burning anger that nothing but blood could wipe out.

Yet the robber gave his young enemy one chance. He delivered a deadly thrust, which Dick turned aside; but the point missed by but an inch, and ripped the sleeve of the boy's sword arm.

"I have you!" cried Turpin hoarsely, redoubling his attack. "Apologise, you viper-tongued stripling! Apologise for that insult, and own me the better man before I run you through!"

"The Forresters do not apologise," replied Dick coolly, "save to ladies, or to a gentleman!"

The bitter retort made the blood leap to the highwayman's face. He swallowed an oath, and the merciless hate in his eyes grew still more savage. His rapier played like chain lightning, and Dick was put to his utmost to keep his skin whole. He knew he had jested in the face of death, and he said no more. The vicious tricks of sword-play that were brought against him were more than even his skill could counter for more than a minute or so.

In despair, he gave up the defensive and made a lightning-like attack on Turpin, which forced the latter to play more cautiously, and pressed him hard. Suddenly a thrust got home, and the first blood fell to Dick. His point wounded the outlaw's sword arm.

It was a slight hurt, but it goaded Turpin to madness, and he played with a ferocity that slowly began to drive the boy back. The pitiless hate from the outlaw's eyes seemed to burn into Dick's brain. The boy made one last desperate attempt to attack, and then—how it happened he did not know—his rapier was sent spinning from his grasp, and he was left defenceless.

Dick Forrester was worsted and at his enemy's mercy, but he was not afraid to die. He drew himself up, stiffened his lip, and threw a last defiance at his conqueror.

"Strike!" he said. "Why do you wait? Strike home, and avenge the insult!"

But Turpin, whose sword was raised to run the boy through, paused a moment. His burning eyes seemed to devour Dick's face. The cruel point hung poised within a foot of the boy's breast.

Suddenly the highwayman lowered his weapon, and his face changed. He sent his rapier into his sheath with a vicious snap.

"Enough," he said fiercely. "Put up your bodkin, and go your way! I do not take your life, but you are too nice a companion for a knight of the road. Join the Church, boy—that is your right profession!"

Turpin turned on his heel, swung himself on to Black Bess, and dashed away at a gallop, never looking behind him. The greenwood path closed behind the black mare's heels, and the famous outlaw was gone.

Dick stood as though rooted to the spot, wondering if he was dreaming. Knowing the pitiless character and indifference to honour of his former companion, he had expected nothing less than to be run through instantly. There were men of good position and repute, Dick knew, who would have done it in similar circumstances, remembering the insult. The boy picked up his sword and sheathed it.

"A strange fellow," he muttered, as he called Satan to him and mounted. "I cannot understand him. In return for his courtesy I would have apologised; but he goes off like a whirlwind, with a gibe on his lip. Well, if I insulted him, I stood up to give him satisfaction, and my part is done."

Dick rode away slowly along the other path than the one Turpin had taken, and his thoughts were strangely mingled. Within a mile of the scene of the fight he found himself regretting the loss of his comrade, although it was Dick who had first called for a parting.

In spite of himself, he missed the outlaw's company, and found himself looking aside, as though to see Black Bess abreast of him as before. Scoundrel as Turpin was, there was something likable about him. Such a thorough rogue, and yet so cheerful over it, utterly without conscience or reverence for anything; frankly dishonourable, yet with such a quiet turn in telling his rascally deeds, hiding nothing, fearing nothing; a cut-throat, and a very prince of good fellows. He risked his skin to save another's without a thought, and when the gallows claimed him at last, which he richly deserved, no doubt he would go to them with a joke on his lips. A villain, and yet a very debonair villain.

"He will hang, and he ought to hang, but 'tis a pity," mused Dick. "And I—I shall come to the gibbet, too. Nay, not that. I will die in the saddle, and no man shall take me alive!"

The Drugged Ale!

IT was growing late, and Dick felt the need for food. He touched Satan on the shoulder, and they cantered away till the woods gave place to a road which led to a small village on the main highway at the outskirts of the wooded country.

"The Lincoln road, or I am mistaken," said Dick to himself. "Now, if that rascal Turpin were with me he would know where we might sup safely, and where it would be perilous to go. A fig for the latter question—is not that a hostelry whose lights are shining through the trees? Come, Satan, we need our corn, both of us."

He rode down to a coaching inn on the high road, a comfortable place enough, that

ing out the sign of the Three Staves. He led Satan to the stable, and waved the ostler aside.

"If you value your life, man, do not go near him," said Dick, and he fed and rubbed down the great black horse with his own hands. Then he went into the common room of the inn.

"The best meal you can raise, and quickly!" he said to the landlord, a red-haired, narrow-eyed man, who bowed obsequiously to the young land-owner on his travels, as he took Dick to be. Dick ordered a flagon of home-brewed ale while the meal was preparing, and passed into the parlour.

There was one person who took even more interest in Dick than the landlord when the young outlaw first strode into the common-room, though Dick did not notice him. It was a lean, lank, black-haired man in neat, bottle-green clothes, like a body-servant, and he had little, red, ferret eyes. He was sitting in a dark corner, mumbling over his drink, but he stared when Dick entered, and his little red eyes fixed themselves cunningly at the boy. He watched Dick as a terrier watches a rat-hole, and when the young highwayman passed into the parlour, he rose quietly.

"Don't draw that for a moment," he said in a low voice to the landlord, who was about to fetch the home-brewed. "Do you know who yonder boy is?"

"Nay," said the landlord. "Some young

blade of the squirage, doubtless with more guineas than wit. I will relieve him of one or two of the former before he leaves my roof, eh, Slink? My wares are not cheap."

"You are wrong both ways," said Samuel Slink, for it was in truth Vane Forrester's body-servant. "He has more wit than guineas, and is more like to take yours than you to take his. 'Tis young Dick Forrester, the highwayman, lately entered to the road, and there is a price on his head. Would you not like to finger—half of it?"

"Do you say so!" muttered the landlord. "Why, in truth, I like nothing better than the feel of coin; but he should be a woundily dangerous blade to tackle, if all they say is true. I love gold, but I love a whole skin. What is the price?"

"My master himself offers two hundred guineas," said Slink. "It is worth more than that to him to put the cub out of the way."

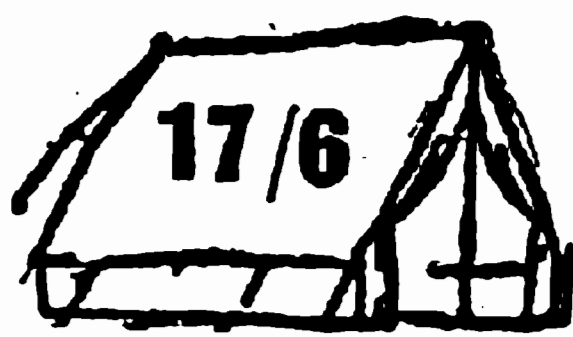
"Landlord!" called Dick's voice impatiently from the inner room. "Am I to wait all night for the ale?"

"There is your way!" whispered Slink to the innkeeper, taking a small blue paper from his pocket. "This is a weapon surer than steel, and one I always carry and often find useful. Give me the pewter!"

He took the jug from the landlord, and shook a white powder into it from the paper!

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