

"BY SUBMARINE TO THE POLE!"

Special
DOUBLE-LENGTH
School Yarn Inside.

NELSON LEE

2^d



"BEAR UP,
HANDY!"

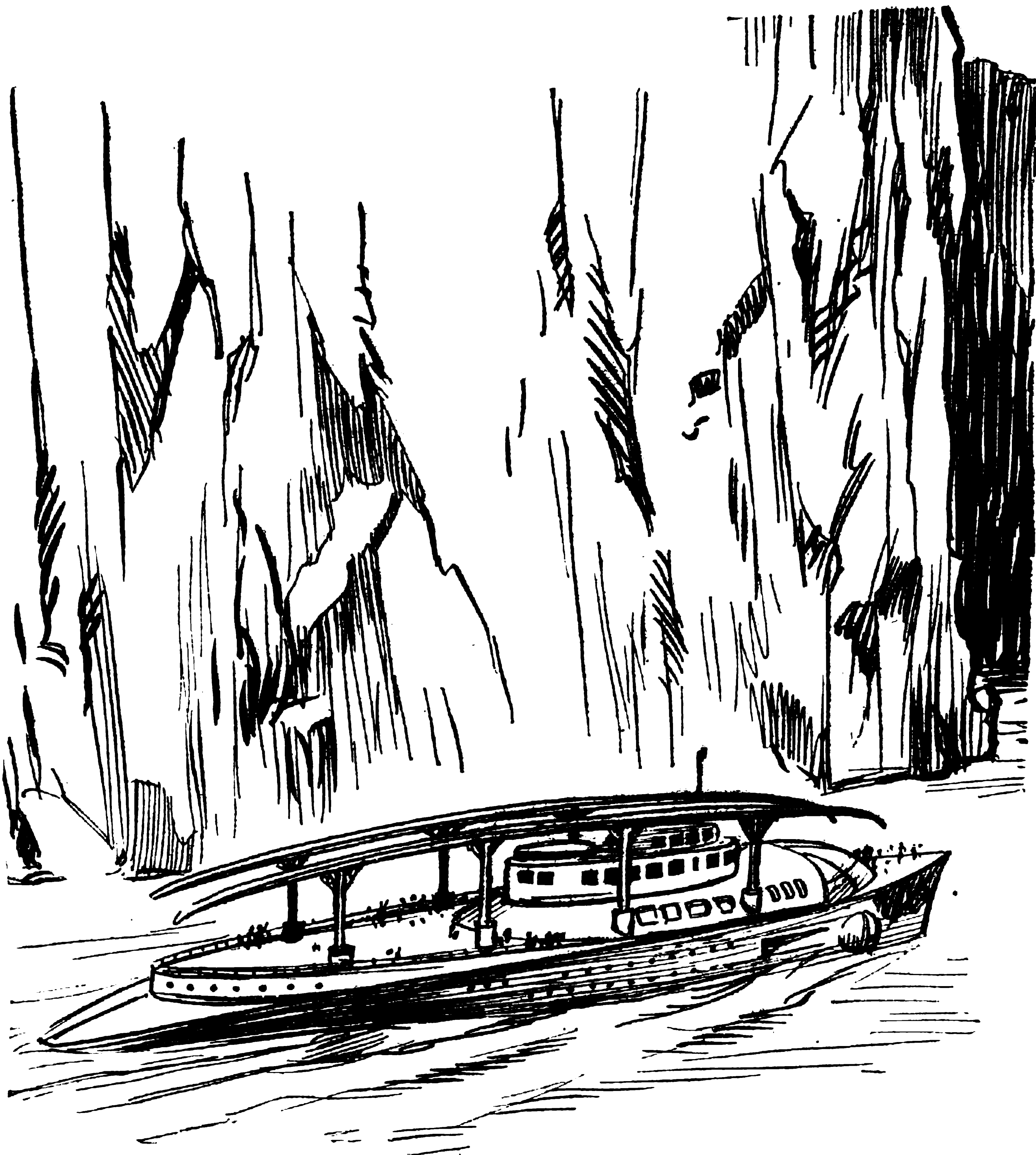
SPECIAL DOUBLE-LENGTH yarn of the Famous Chums of St. Frank's this week.

New Series No. 65.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

April 18th, 1931.

By SUBMARINE To



CHAPTER 1.

The Cruise of the Pioneer.

“NOT a bad old tub—eh, boys?”

Lord Dorrimore, smiling and genial, joined a group of St. Frank's fellows who were leaning over the rail of the promenade deck, watching the blue-green waters of the North Sea as they swirled past.

“She's wonderful, sir!” said Handforth enthusiastically. “By George! The most marvellous boat in the world, I should think!”

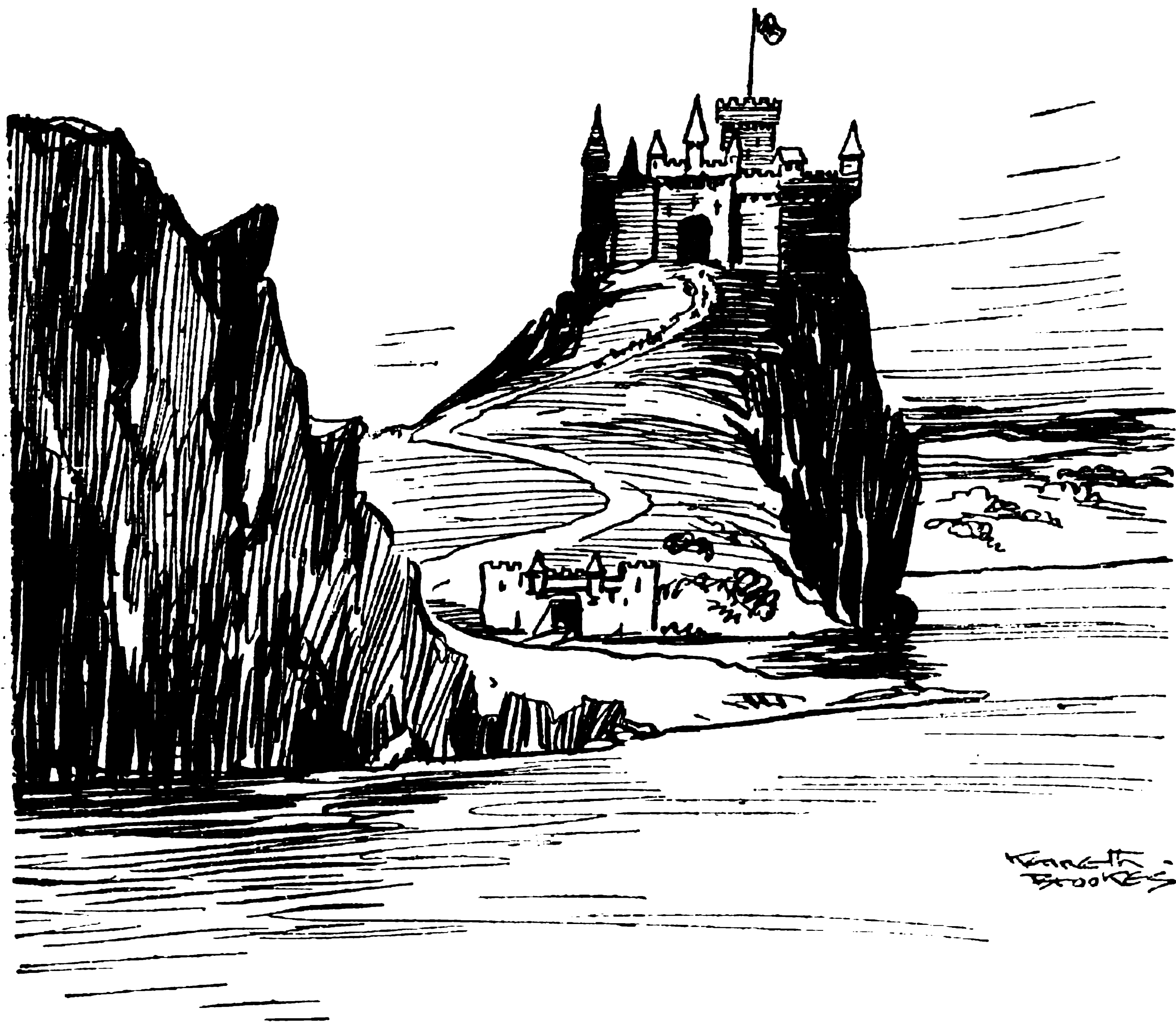
“Rather, sir!”

“She's pretty good,” admitted Lord Dorrimore, grinning. “Not that you know anything about her, yet. Just wait a bit, my sons! The Pioneer is going to give you a few more surprises!”

Opening Book-Length Yarn of an Amazing New Adventure Series!

The POLE!

By EDWY SEARLES
BROOKS



Edwy Searles
Brooks

Once before the Boys of St. Frank's have visited Northestria, that country of medieval wonders set amid Arctic snows and ice. Fresh thrills, exciting action and extraordinary adventures await Nipper & Co. upon their return trip to this amazing land.

"I don't see how you can give us many more surprises, Dorrie," said Nipper. "This trip, alone, has taken our breath away so much that we're still gasping."

"Better get your breath back, then," advised Lord Dorrimore cheerfully. "You'll have to do some more gasping presently."

He walked off, chuckling to himself, and joined Mr. Nelson Lee and Mr. Alington Wilkes farther down the deck.

"I wonder what Dorrie has got up his sleeve?" murmured Nipper, frowning.

"Do you know, Tommy, I believe there's something more in this trip than we know of."

"Dash it, how can there be?" protested Tommy Watson. "Isn't it exciting enough to know that we're off to the North Pole—and by submarine?"

To the Pole by submarine!

It was a thrilling, fascinating thought! And as the boys looked round the spacious promenade deck, they found it almost impossible to credit that this craft was, indeed, a submarine.

She was the Pioneer, owned by Lord Dorrimore, the multi-millionaire sporting peer; she had been designed by Sir Hobart Manners, and it was general knowledge that she was the first of a great fleet of similar boats.

The Pioneer looked so little like a submarine that it was difficult to believe that she could submerge. She was on the surface now, surging along smoothly, her great motors so vibrationless that hardly a quiver could be felt.

She was the most novel submarine ever built—a craft which entirely shattered all preconceived notions of submarines. She did not look like one except in the fact that the greater part of her hull was under water. She was of an immense size, and she had been primarily designed for passenger carrying. She was a commercial vessel, pure and simple.

The promenade deck, on which the boys were standing, was spacious. Overhead there was another deck, much smaller, reserved for the ship's officers and men. There was no conning-tower, such as can be seen in the conventional submarine; neither were there any funnels. She was low and lean and rakish in design.

Below, her accommodation was more like that of a luxurious private yacht, or an Atlantic liner, than a submarine. She had spacious saloons, lounges, smoking-rooms, private suites, and in every respect she was surprising.

Lord Dorrimore, who was a personal friend of Sir Hobart Manners, had insisted upon financing this pioneer boat. The money meant nothing to him; he was a millionaire many times over. But he was not a reckless man, and he had sufficient business instinct to know that his money was soundly invested.

THE surprise of the submarine herself, however, was insignificant compared with the surprise which had been sprung upon the excited crowd of St. Frank's fellows who were aboard. Instead of going back to St. Frank's, at the end of the brief Easter holidays, they found themselves aboard this wonder craft, off on an expedition of super thrills.

The passenger list included Irene & Co., of the Moor View School. There were ten girls, all told, and they were under the personal care of Mrs. Alington Wilkes, the wife of the Housemaster of the Ancient House at St. Frank's. Mr. Wilkes himself was aboard, too, as gleeful and as excited as any of the boys.

The boys were mostly juniors—Removites and Fourth-Formers. There were a few Nags, too, and one or two seniors.

The whole party numbered about thirty; that is to say, thirty St. Frank's fellows. In addition, there were the officers and crew of the vessel herself, numbering well over one hundred. There were stewards and stewardesses. Even Phipps, Archie Glenthorne's valet, was aboard.

Lord Dorrimore, with his usual coolness, had sprung the surprise just when the boys and girls were thinking of returning to their respective schools. Dorrie had had no difficulty in persuading Nelson Lee to make the necessary arrangements; and all the boys' and girls' parents had cheerfully concurred. The "old crowd" had been with Lord Dorrimore on many an adventure, and he had never failed to bring them back safely. Lord Dorrimore was trusted—and with Nelson Lee in nominal charge of the youngsters, no anxiety was felt regarding their security.

"It's going to be a purely commercial trip," Lord Dorrimore had said. "Nothing exciting about it, nothing spectacular. The Pioneer is prepared for any emergency, and there's not one chance in a thousand that there will be any dangers. As for taking the old tub under the ice, it will be easy. Some people think that it's a hazardous project, but that notion can be dismissed at once. And when this route is officially opened—as it will be on this trip—the Manners Submarine Navigation Company will open up a regular service."

For over six months, Lord Dorrimore and Sir Hobart had been planning; they had sought the advice of experienced Polar explorers; they had mapped out the entire route to a mile. In the Pioneer's navigation-room there were many wonderful new instruments; scientific marvels which would enable the voyagers to keep on their course with uncanny certainty.

One feature which the boys and girls were not so keen about concerned school work. Two of the lounges had been fitted up as class-rooms, and for certain hours of the day Mr. Wilkes took the boys, and Mrs. Wilkes took the girls. They were not to be allowed to neglect their studies.

Lord Dorrimore insisted that the mission was as safe as a rock; the cruise, he insisted, would be a practical lesson in geography. And on this epoch-making pioneer trip it was a fad of his to have the "old crowd" with him.

"Isn't it too glorious for words, Ted?" asked Irene Manners, as she came along the deck with some of the other girls, and joined the Removites. "We're really off! We've started on the great adventure."

"Yes, it's pretty good," admitted Handforth.

"You don't sound very enthusiastic!"

"Eh? Oh, well, I've been thinking," said Handforth slowly. "Dorrie says there'll be absolutely no danger in this trip."

"Is that why you're looking so bored, dear old fellow?" chuckled Vivian Travers.

"Dorrie says that this trip under the ice will be accomplished without the slightest risk," continued Handforth discontentedly. "Well, what's the good of that? I was hoping that we'd meet with all sorts of adventures. Where's the fun of cruising in a submarine under the Polar ice unless there are thrills and dangers?"

"If Dorrie hadn't assured our people that the cruise was safe, we wouldn't be aboard now," said Doris Berkeley pointedly.

"There's that, of course," admitted Handforth.

"You're never satisfied, Ted," said Irene severely. "Isn't it enough to know that we're on board the first ship ever to make the attempt? The Pioneer is to open up a wonderful new trade route to the Pacific."

"Pacific?" repeated Handforth. "We're going to the North Pole!"

"That's rather an elastic term, old man," said Nipper kindly. "I don't suppose we shall actually go near the Pole itself. Dorrie has been scheming this thing out very thoroughly, and he reckons that the Northern Route can be successfully opened—a route to the Pacific which will take ships round by Spitzbergen, then under the Polar ice, and out into open water by the Bering Sea, and so on to Alaska. It's a short cut, and if it can be commercially opened it will be an absolute triumph."

"Dorrie isn't the only one who is attempting the experiment, either," said Nipper. "But he means to be the first—and that's why he's starting early. If he can prove his theories, it won't be long before huge cargo-carrying submarines will be plying unhampered under the Arctic and saving millions of pounds in fuel costs, canal tolls, and freight rates."

"It's difficult to believe that there won't be any danger," said Marjorie Temple thoughtfully. "Supposing we get stuck under the ice?"

"Impossible," replied Nipper. "This ship is provided with special ice-boring apparatus, so that we can easily get to the surface at any moment."

"But supposing we hit an iceberg?" asked Tommy Watson. "Some of those

whacking great icebergs go down for thousands of feet into the water!"

"But there aren't any icebergs in the Arctic," replied Nipper.

"Cheese it!"

"Dorrie says so, anyhow—and he's had all the available information on the subject," went on Nipper. "Polar explorers all declare that the thickest ice cake, in the Arctic, can't extend more than a hundred and twenty feet below the surface. You've heard of Professor Nansen, haven't you? Well, he reports that the thickest ice he ever found on his Arctic travels was fourteen feet. And in a great submarine like this one, cruising below the ice cap will be child's play."

"After we've done the trip, your pater—who was knighted only a few months ago—will be more famous than ever, Renie," chuckled Reggie Pitt.

Irene flushed.

"My father is one of the cleverest engineers in the world," she said proudly. "But we mustn't forget that Lord Dorri-more has as much to do with this voyage as my father."

"Well, it's a bit of a swindle, all the same," said Handforth gruffly.

"Swindle, Ted?" asked Irene, her voice indignant.

"Everybody's been saying that we were going to the North Pole by submarine—and now it seems that we shan't go anywhere near the Pole!" grumbled Handforth. "All we shall do is to submerge, go under the ice, and come out in the Bering Sea. I don't call that much of a thrill!"

"Don't take any notice of him, you girls," chuckled Nipper. "He's as excited as anybody, but he can't help grumbling."

Which was quite true. Edward Oswald was, indeed, as much agog with excitement as any of the other youngsters.

By submarine to the Pole! It was a fascinating prospect.

CHAPTER 2.

Dorrie Springs a Surprise!

ALTHOUGH the voyage was calm and uneventful, it was, nevertheless, a continual round of joy for the young passengers.

The weather continued calm as the days passed, but as the Pioneer cruised farther and farther north, so the cold increased. But only on deck was the cold noticeable; the vessel herself was the last word in comfort and splendour.

Neither the boys nor the girls minded the daily lessons. They were rather keen on them, in fact, and their hours of liberty were all the more enjoyable because of their hours of work. Everything was going very smoothly.

It was difficult to believe that they were passengers aboard a submarine. So far the Pioneer had kept to the surface and she would remain on the surface until it was absolutely essential that she should submerge. She was, in fact, essentially a surface craft, but she possessed the enormous advantage of being able to dive when the necessity arose.

One evening, at dinner, when the Pioneer was getting well up into the Arctic zone, Lord Dorrimore intimated that he had something of rather special importance to say. Immaculate from head to foot in his evening clothes, he sat next to Captain Williams—a man whose experience of submarine craft was second to none in the world. On the captain's other side sat Mrs. Wilkes. At the same table were Nelson Lee, Mr. Wilkes, Sir Hobart Manners, and Mr. Morley, the first officer.

The saloon was ablaze with softly-shaded electric lights, and all the other tables were occupied by the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls. It was a scene of glittering splendour. The richly-decorated walls, the sumptuous furniture, the soft carpets, the dazzling linen—all this, and a hundred and one other details, went towards the making of a scene such as one might expect to find aboard a luxurious private yacht.

"Not many of you will regard me as a dreamer," said Lord Dorrimore, as he settled himself well back in his chair, and lit a cigarette. "I suppose I'm more a man of action than anything else. I like doing things—and I've done most things that are to be done. I've explored in every corner of the globe; I've driven racing motor-cars and aeroplanes and speed boats. I've done so much, in fact, that there's precious little left for me to do. Don't run away with the idea that I'm boasting; all I'm trying to prove is that I am a man of action. Yet, for once, I'm a dreamer, too."

"Get it off your chest, Dorrie," smiled Nelson Lee.

"It's not on my chest, old man," replied Lord Dorrimore. "To tell you the honest truth, I've got something up my sleeve. And I thought this was rather a suitable occasion to spring it on you all. For six months now, I've been dreaming—dreaming of a project which will possibly strike you as fantastic. I'll be frank

and tell you straight out that there's something behind this submarine dash to the Pole. I've kept it in the dark so far, but I fancy I'm safe in letting the cat out of the bag now."

The boys and girls, particularly, were agog. Any surprise of Dorrie's was liable to be a red-hot one.

"I'm wondering if any of you youngsters remember a place called Northestria?" asked his lordship abruptly.

A wave of excitement passed round the tables, and Handforth even leapt to his feet.

"Northestria, sir?" he repeated breathlessly. "By George, rather! Ethelbert the Red and the Princess Mercia, and Kassker the Grim! Do we remember, you chaps?"

"We're not likely to forget," said Nipper, with conviction.

Lord Dorrimore smiled.

"Well, we're going up into the Arctic," he said smoothly. "And that quaint country of Northestria happens to be within the Arctic zone. Now, I thought——"

"But, man alive, you're not dreaming of making a return trip to that extraordinary oasis?" asked Nelson Lee quickly. "You gave no hint of this, Dorrie, when you proposed this trip."

"I thought it would be safer to spring it on you after we were well on the way," explained Dorrie mildly.

He was obviously pleased by the sensation he had caused. The St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls were looking flushed and eager. Mr. Wilkes and Captain Williams were frankly puzzled.

"I seem to remember something about a place called Northestria," said the captain.

"I'll tell you all about it," said Dorrie. "The old crowd, here, needs no telling—for most of them were with me on that earlier adventure. But there are others present in this saloon who did not go on that trip, and for their benefit I think it would be as well to go into a few details."

Nelson Lee was looking more than a little startled. He knew, from past experience, that the millionaire peer was an incorrigible adventurer. Dorrie was both reckless and foolhardy; he would cheerfully go headlong into dangers, heedless of the consequences. But this trip had seemed so scientifically sound that Lee had had no qualms. Now, apparently, the real secret of it was to be revealed!

"We discovered this extraordinary country of Northestria by sheer acci-

dent," said Lord Dorrimore reminiscently. "It was during an airship trip, into the Polar regions. No need to go into details. It's enough for me to say that the airship got out of control, that she came within an ace of disaster time after time, and that finally she became absolutely unmanageable in a welter of fogs and blizzards tens of thousands of feet up. Helplessly crippled, but with every soul on board mercifully alive, she was at last catapulted out of the everlasting disturbances into a quiet zone beyond this unknown Arctic mountain range.

"Well, we found ourselves in an enormous oasis—enormous, that is, as oases go. Yet I suppose this fertile tract of land is an insignificant pin-point compared with the vast wastes of the frozen Arctic zone."

"I remember reading of it at the time," said Captain Williams, nodding. "This oasis is quite a considerable valley, is it not?"

"There is an enormous ring of impassable peaks—a barrier of mountains in the form of a great irregular circle," replied Lord Dorrimore. "Some scores of these peaks are volcanic, and are in a state of constant eruption. At least, the craters are molten, and the reflection from these volcanic fires is eternally cast upon the mists which form the ceiling, so to speak, of the oasis. The usual Arctic day and night does not exist in Northestria. There is a continual false daylight from these volcanic fires.

"This zone within the circular mountain barrier is some hundreds of miles across, and, roughly, I should say the entire fertile tract is about half as big as England. In fact, quite a tidy country, with an inland sea—actually a huge lake—to separate the two main portions. And all round, the towering peaks, their summits lost in the eternal mists. A marvellous place, ladies and gentlemen—a place of never-ending wonders."

"But we can't go back there, Dorrie!" exclaimed Nipper, in his excitement. "You know jolly well that our airship only escaped destruction by a miracle."

"I'm not talking of airships now, sonny," replied Lord Dorrimore. "I

know perfectly well that it would be madness—almost suicide—to attempt another entry from the air. There's not a chance in a million that we should succeed. We only found that lost land because our dirigible got out of control.

"This time I propose to do things deliberately—scientifically," he went on. "There'll be no chance about it—no accident. If we get in, we get in—if we don't—no harm will be done. I want to emphasise, at once, that we shan't undertake any foolhardy risks."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Dorrie," observed Nelson Lee dryly. "But how much can we believe it?"

"Wait until I've finished before you slang me," said Dorrie cheerfully. "In any case, I'm going to put it to you all after I have outlined my scheme. And I rather fancy that the voting will be in my favour."

"But if this strange country is so ringed by volcanoes and by dreadful blizzards, how did you manage to get out?" asked Mrs. Wilkes curiously.

"We got out by reason of another lucky chance," replied his lordship. "That's where this present trip is so totally

different. There'll be no luck about it, one way or the other. As I told you at the first, I've been dreaming of this project for over six months, and I have got one or two practical notions up my sleeve, of which I will speak later.

"You know what a geyser is, don't you, Mrs. Wilkes? There are some geysers which burst into activity at set intervals. Well, this particular fellow is fairly lazy, and he only becomes active at thirty-year periods. It was just our good fortune that one of these periods happened while we were there. This enormous geyser, bubbling and surging with boiling water, froze the Arctic ice over a considerable expanse on the outer side of the mountain ring. And it caused a flow through a great tunnel into the oasis. We escaped by means of that tunnel, and were later picked up by naval seaplanes and brought home. Naturally, we were compelled to abandon the wreckage of the airship, and practically everything we possessed. It was a costly

"Handforth's Weekly!"

E. O. Handforth—and Handforth alone—has always fancied himself as a budding author. Now he threatens to become an editor. The first issue of a new magazine, edited and written by the one and only Handforth, will be incorporated with next week's number of the NELSON LEE. Don't miss this unique new feature—a sure cure for the blues—A RIOT OF LAUGHTER AND FUN!

voyage—in many ways, a disastrous voyage.”

“We had some jolly good times in Northestria, sir,” said Handforth eagerly. “But I’m jiggered if I can guess how you’re thinking of getting back. That geyser won’t erupt again for another thirty years, so there’s no way through the tunnel. And it’s impossible to get over the mountains.”

“We’ll see,” said Lord Dorrimore smoothly. “No need for me to remind you boys of the people we found in Northestria; but the others present might be interested. Everything in that lost land has stood still for centuries. Northestria is, in effect, England as it was in the Middle Ages.”

“It seems unbelievable!” exclaimed Mrs. Wilkes.

“Yet it is really easy to understand,” replied Dorrie. “A branch of the Anglo-Saxon race migrated perhaps to the Netherlands many centuries ago, was caught in a storm and carried northwards by hurricanes and adverse currents. Eventually, it got lost in this Arctic oasis. We don’t know—there’s no possible means of finding out—but it seems likely that a great earthquake, or super volcanic eruption, opened a way into this oasis, which was afterwards closed. And so these good people were shut in, and, having no intercourse with the outer world, they remained stationary throughout the centuries. They made no progress whatsoever. Thus their customs have not altered; their language has not altered. There is even a second race within this oasis—people who were entrapped some centuries earlier than the Anglo-Saxon crowd. They call themselves Gothlanders, and there can be little doubt that they are descended from the ancient Goths. They are brutal and coarse people, and for two or three hundred years the Northestrians used them as slaves, afterwards banishing them to the smaller country on one side of the lake, which is now known as Gothland. Northestria, the greater part of the oasis, is by far the richer.”

“We happened to arrive at a most interesting point,” continued Dorrie reminiscently. “The Gothlanders, under a brutal overlord known as Kassker the Grim, was preparing an invasion. The Northestrians, peace-loving people, were unprepared. They had never even considered the possibility of the Gothlanders attacking them. Yet attack they did, and they came within an ace of conquering their former masters. It was our intervention which saved the day, and

which brought peace to that oasis. When we left, the trouble was over. Gothland was subdued, and Northestria was ruled by a young girl known as Princess Mercia.

“Now, it is my object to get back into that oasis, if it is humanly possible.”

Dorrie paused, looked round at the flushed faces, and his own was grave.

“It is not idle curiosity which prompts me to return,” he went on impressively. “There is something else—something which makes me eager and impatient to try the experiment I have been planning for so many months. I will leave you to judge whether I am justified in my dreams or not.”

CHAPTER 3.

The Earthenware Bottle!

EVERYBODY in that luxurious saloon was thrilled.

The St. Frank’s fellows and the Moor View girls were frankly flushed with open excitement. The prospect of getting back into that warm, fertile oasis of the Arctic took their breath away. They well remembered that amazing adventure. And, without exception, they all believed that Northestria was cut off for ever from the outside world.

Lord Dorrimore’s talk had revived their memories. They well recalled the fall of Kassker the Grim; and with that brutal overlord’s death, so the Gothland armies had suffered an overwhelming defeat.

Ethelbert the Red, the grave, gentle Regent of Northestria, had assured the adventurers, before they left, that his fair country was now safe for all time.

Why, then, was Dorrie so fixedly determined upon this return visit?

“What I am going to tell you now, ladies and gentlemen, will surprise you more than anything I have yet said,” continued the sporting peer quietly. “Seven or eight months ago, before the idea of this trip entered my head, a quaintly-shaped earthenware bottle came into my possession. It had been picked up, its neck securely sealed, by some fishermen off Nova Scotia. These men naturally opened the bottle, and they found within an astonishing document. They thought very little of it, convinced that it was only a practical joke. But as my name was mentioned, and as I am a fairly well-known chap, they were good enough to send the document on to me, earthenware bottle and all.

Standing on the ledge, with the ground yawning far beneath her, Princess Mercia defied Cedric the Cruel. "Carry out your commands," she exclaimed, "and I will fling myself from this ledge!"



"Here it is," he continued, taking a large, folded sheet of coarse-looking parchment from his pocket. "As you will see, the paper is quaint, and the writing even quainter. But that bottle was well sealed, and not a drop of water, or even dampness, penetrated to the interior. In my personal opinion, this communication is absolutely genuine."

The Dorrie the boys knew so well was changed. He was no longer flippant and jocular. As he sat there, the centre of all eyes, he spoke earnestly and soberly. Everybody was listening to him with bated breath.

Nelson Lee, taking that parchment, was struck by the curious nature of the

writing upon it. It was different from anything he had ever seen; although it strongly smacked of the medieval style. It was difficult, at first glance, to decipher the handwriting. But Lord Dorrimore, who had read it a hundred times, now proceeded to read it again--aloud:

"To our good friend, the Lord of Dorrimore, in the Countrie of Eng-lande.

"'Tis a forlorn hope, good Dorrimore the Brave, that thou wilt ever receive this message of despair. But wondrous things have happened in the past, and perchance wondrous

things will come to pass yet again. Mayhap, our noble friend, Lee the Lionheart, will also hear this call. Thou didst leave us in peace, brave Dorrimore, with our fair countrie well rid of the Gothlander menace. Thou didst go back into the outer world, deeming that all was well with the fair Princess Mercia and her people.

"Alas, the Gothlanders, under a ruthless new leader named Cedric the Cruel, an overlord of vast possessions and great riches, hast fallen upon our sweet lands of Northestria.

"These dogs of Gothlanders did accept their defeat with ill grace after thou didst take thy leave; and, with renewed strength and with ferocious determination, did they once again attack. And such was their brutality that the whole of Northestria has fallen into their uncouth hands.

"They are the masters of Northestria, oppressing our good people and enslaving them throughout the length and breadth of the land. The gentle Princess Mercia and her brother, Prince Oswy, have been banished into Gothland. Here, too, do I languish. In the grim walls of the Gunmarc Fortress, on the Gothland coast, we are kept as prisoners.

"Thus, in this dire exile, do we continue to exist by the will of Cedric the Cruel. We know aught of what takes place in Northestria, beyond the great waters. But rumours reach us at times, and we do know that our people are downtrodden and enslaved.

"And in our extremity, good Dorrimore the Brave, we turn to thee for succour. Yet we do know that there is but little hope of this message ever reaching thy hands.

"Yet, mayhap, there is a slim chance. The earthenware bottle into which this message will be placed, is to be cast down from my window into the moat. Now, this moat is filled with running water; for, unlike other moats, that of the Gunmarc Fortress is fed by a stream. This stream of which I write does not empty itself into the lake, but surges through the Gothland countryside, gaining speed until it vanishes underground into the grim mountains.

"'Tis said that this stream finds an outlet beyond the great ranges, into the ice and snow of the desolate country beyond. And should this tale be true, then 'tis possible that the

bottle will float under the ice, and thus reach the open sea of the great outer world, of which ye told me so much, and of which we know so little.

"That ye should know of our despair, and that ye should well understand our extremity, I will tell ye that this maketh the six hundred and twenty-first message thus sent floating upon the waters. For many months now, twice—sometimes thrice—daily, these sealed messages have been cast into the moat, always with the hope that one will find its way into thy hands.

"So, good Dorrimore the Brave, I conclude my message. Perchance, if ye cannot come, then Lee the Lionheart may hasten hither in thy stead. Our need is dire, our distress acute

ETHELBERT THE RED."

A LONG murmur, not unlike a great sigh, went round the saloon after Lord Dorrimore had ceased reading aloud that remarkable document.

"Extraordinary!" commented Mr. Wilkes mildly.

"It sounds like so much nonsense to me," said Captain Williams, in his blunt way. "Are you quite sure, sir, that you are not the victim of a practical joker? Messages in bottles are always open to suspicion——"

"No, captain! This message is genuine!" declared Lord Dorrimore, rising to his feet and speaking vehemently. "I know it! Good gad, man, can you doubt the truth of this appeal? You boys! You girls! What's your opinion?"

"We believe it, sir!" chorused the boys and girls excitedly.

"They've been in this country of Northestria—and they know!" said Dorrie, turning back to the captain. "This man, Ethelbert the Red, was our friend. Never for an instant can we doubt the authenticity of this message."

"I am inclined to believe in its genuineness, too, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Poor Ethelbert! By now he must have sent a thousand such messages down that stream—always hoping against hope that one of them would come into your hands—or mine."

Lord Dorrimore's face was flushed.

"Can we ignore this appeal?" he demanded, looking round with defiance in his eyes. "Can we let those Northestrians suffer the despotism of the Gothlanders and do nothing to help?"

"I admire your spirit, old man, but what exactly can we do?" asked Lee

practically. "You have yourself admitted that any re-entry into the oasis by air is out of the question."

"Absolutely!" agreed his lordship. "It would be madness—suicide—to make any such attempt. That's why I'm making this trip by submarine!"

"Yet you cannot hope to get into the oasis in this craft," protested Sir Hobart. "The Arctic may stretch its frozen wilderness up to these great mountain ranges—indeed, it certainly does, as your story has proved. But what then? Even supposing that the Pioneer reaches such a point, how can you get beyond that impregnable barrier?"

"We'll talk about that later, when we get there," replied Dorrie briskly. "I have my own plans—I think you'll guess what they are, Sir Hobart. By traveling under the ice, we can reach the nearest point to the oasis. I have been thinking things out for months past—I have been planning. We go, not to the North Pole, but to Northestria, to carry succour to those gentle people who are oppressed by the Gothland brutes."

"Hurrah!" yelled Handforth excitedly.

The other St. Frank's boys cheered, too. But Captain Williams, Sir Hobart, and Nelson Lee were looking rather startled. And, for that matter, so were all the grown-ups of the party.

"All this is at variance with the promise you made before setting out from England, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee gravely. "You assured the parents of these boys and girls that they would suffer no dangers——"

"And neither will they," interrupted Dorrie promptly.

"Yet you propose to go into this oasis again, to give battle to the Gothland oppressors?"

"I do," replied Dorrie defiantly.

"And you say that there will be no danger?" insisted Lee. "What of our former adventures? Man alive! It was touch and go——"

"There is no comparison between that occasion and this," interrupted his lordship. "Then we were unknown—we were suspected. Our airship was crippled, we were at the mercy of all. But if we can get the Pioneer into the oasis, what then? All the might of Gothland cannot harm us! This ship will be a veritable floating fortress upon the lake, secure from any attack. You and I, perhaps, will have some adventures, but there is no need for the boys or the girls to take the slightest risk."

"Oh, I say!" protested Handforth. "If there's any fighting, we want to be in it, sir!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Bloodthirsty young beggars!" said Lord Dorrimore, frowning. "All the same, I admire your spirit, by the Lord Harry! Not that we need go into any such discussion now. Wait until we get there!"

With blazing eyes he looked round the saloon again.

"Can't you all see what this will mean if we succeed?" he went on enthusiastically. "This land of Northestria can be converted into a kind of 'half-way house' to the Pacific. A northern port for all shipping on this new route!"

"By Jove, sir, it is a dazzling vision," said the captain warmly.

"Northestria can be modernised, it can be made prosperous," continued Lord Dorrimore. "Who can tell? Before many years have passed, it may be the next fashionable holiday country! Rich people, instead of going to the Riviera, will winter in Northestria! Great hotels, service stations for shipping, will be established. You may think it's a dream of mine—but it can easily become a reality."

They were all breathless at the picture which Dorrie's words brought into their minds.

"But first of all we've got to investigate this trouble, and rescue Northestria from the oppressor," added Lord Dorrimore coolly. "That done, there will be a chance of Northestria taking its rightful place on the map of the world. Other men are planning to reach the Pole by submarine, but my own plans are a trifle different. I want to be first in Northestria—by the newly-opened route. I want to plant the British flag there, and so add this fair tract of country to the Empire!"

"Hurrah!"

"It is a land of amazing resources—a land of wonders," shouted Dorrie. "Are we to lag behind and let foreigners secure it? By gad, no! We were first there, and we thought we should never be able to get back. But now, owing to the marvels of modern science, there is more than a chance that we shall succeed in opening up a recognised route."

He poured out some wine, and bade the others follow his example. Then he held his glass aloft, his eyes ablaze.

"On—to Northestria!" he shouted. "We're the same old crowd—loyal, eager,

enthusiastic. Here's success to our venture!"

"Hurrah!"

"On to Northestria!"

The toast was drunk amid wild excitement and enthusiasm.

CHAPTER 4.

The Exiles!

THE grim fortress of Gunmarc, in the country of Gothland, raised its forbidding walls direct from the wide moat which entirely surrounded it. The turrets and battlements were constantly patrolled by guards; the single gateway, which was the only access to the fortress, was barred and bolted. The heavy drawbridge was seldom lowered.

Originally, there had been no moat round this sinister fortress; but when it had been turned into a prison for the exiles from Northestria, Cedric the Cruel had set hundreds of men to work, and the widest moat in the land was dug; the river was diverted from its course, and the waters of that river now flowed round the fortress, to surge onwards, beyond, through the picturesque valleys and gorges.

Built some miles inland, the fortress only commanded a view of the fertile valley in which it was situated, although from the topmost battlements the lake could be seen—a great body of water which stretched out into the dim, vague distance like a veritable sea.

From these battlements, too, the towers of Hunric Castle could be glimpsed—Hunric Castle, the former home of

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Kassker the Grim and Cedric the Cruel. The red roofs of the village of Vertilla, nestling in the adjoining valley, were also visible beyond the tree-tops. But the fortress itself stood alone, isolated, impregnable.

The whole landscape was reminiscent of the England of medieval days. The only notable difference was the paleness of the greenery; due, no doubt, to the fact that there was never any darkness in this astounding oasis.

Far overhead were the eternal mists from the circular volcanic range of mountains which formed an impenetrable barrier. The volcanoes were invisible, hidden by the mists, but the fires from them were reflected through the vapours, and the oasis itself was everlastingly bathed in the soft radiance.

This country, although far, far in the Arctic north, knew nothing of snows and blizzards. Tranquil peace always reigned here, for the atmospheric conditions seldom, if ever, varied. So equable was the climate that the temperature was always akin to that of a sub-tropical country.

There were never any rains, but the land was well watered by a natural system of irrigation, the mountain streams and brooks bubbling down in a net work of waterways, and mostly emptying themselves into the great central lake.

At one of the upper windows of the fortress, far above the moat, sat a slim, girlish figure, her eyes gazing out upon the deserted valley.

She was a young girl of exquisite beauty, attired in a quiet, sombre gown. Her richly golden hair fell in tresses over her shoulders; her eyes were of the deepest blue, and her skin so fair that it looked like the most delicate porcelain.

Such was the Princess Mercia, exiled from her own land of Northestria, and imprisoned in this Gothland fortress.

Near her sat a boy, reading. He was very young, slim, and even delicate. He, too, was dressed in sombre garb, and golden hair hung about his shoulders, like that of his sister's. Prince Oswy was indeed a comely youth.

Both the boy and the girl looked round as the door of the crudely furnished apartment was opened. A tall man entered—a man of middle age, with a red beard. His face was lined and even haggard, and his expression was one of gentleness and kindness. In his hands he carried a crudely-made earthenware bottle, the neck of which was tightly sealed.

"Yet again, good Ethelbert?" asked the princess gently. "I' faith! 'Tis the third this day, I vow!"

"Ay, and thrice daily shall I continue to cast these messages into the flowing waters of the moat," replied Ethelbert the Red, his eyes a gleam. "Gaze not upon me with such pity, fair princess."

"'Tis not pity, my Ethelbert," said Mercia softly. "I but marvel at thy patience."

"Is it not said that patience is a virtue?"

"Methinks we must all be wondrous virtuous, then," said the princess. "Alas, Ethelbert, naught can change the fact, that we are exiled from our own country. Cedric and his soldiers hold our people in subjection. 'Tis only by his favour, indeed, that we live."

"By my bones!" growled Ethelbert the Red. "We desire no favours from Cedric! The dog keeps us alive, not because he favours us, but because 'tis good policy. Even our peace-loving people must not be goaded too far."

"There will come a day, sister, when we shall be put to the death," said Prince Oswy listlessly. "Sometimes, I vow, I long for that day!"

"Hush, brother!"

"Is not death better than this languishing exile?" asked the boy, with some defiance. "What do we live for? Naught! 'Tis better to die than to see our country under the yoke of this ruthless tyrant!"

Ethelbert the Red came nearer, and placed a hand on Oswy's shoulder.

"Thou art young, good Oswy," he said gently. "All thy life is before thee. When times change, and Cedric is overpowered, thou wilt mount the throne of Northestria. Think ye of our friends of the outer world. If they but hear our call, they will come. There are no marvels of which they are not capable. Think ye of Dorrimore the Brave, of Lee the Lionheart, of Handforth the Bold, of all those goodly souls who once before saved us from the Gothland menace."

"Thou thinkest of naught else, my Ethelbert," said the princess, shaking her head. "I fear 'tis an obsession with thee. Yet how canst thou even hope? Think ye, in thy heart, that one of these messages will get through to the outer world? I would that I could share thy faith, regent."

"One day they will come!" declared the regent.

He walked to the window, watched wistfully by the prince and the princess. Making sure that none could observe him,

he dropped the earthenware bottle into the moat below. It splashed dully, bobbed up, and commenced floating away sluggishly.

"Thus goes another message, with all my prayers," said Ethelbert quietly. "I sometimes wonder— By St. Attalus! Who cometh here in such splendour?"

His tone changed, and there was even a note of alarm in his voice. The others, concerned, joined him at the window.

"See!" said Ethelbert the Red, pointing.

From this lofty casement they could see well across the valley. A dusty, winding road led through the trees towards the lake—which was itself hidden by an intervening hill. Along this dusty road came a brave cavalcade.

There were forty or fifty men, all mounted, all wearing chain-mail or armour. Gleaming and glittering, they rode on towards the fortress. And now, below, came the sounds of hurried preparation. The massive drawbridge was being lowered, bugles were sounding, and the entire garrison was agog.

"By my faith! 'Tis Cedric himself!" whispered the princess, her voice faltering.

"How now?" growled Ethelbert the Red. "What wantest this base knave? Why cometh he here? Thou must be of stout heart, good princess, for the coming of this man can mean naught but evil."

"I fear him not!" said the Princess Mercia scornfully. "Do we fear those whom we despise?"

With fast-beating hearts, they watched the cavalcade thunder across the now lowered drawbridge. They all vanished under the great stone arch, riding into the spacious courtyard. From below, within the fortress, the prisoners could hear the distant sounds of commotion.

Presently the door was flung open, and a giant of a man, imposing in his splendid chain-mail, strode into the apartment. His face was cunning, crafty, and cruel; his great black beard fell thickly upon his breast-plate. When he spoke his voice was deep and rumbling.

"I give thee greeting, fair princess!" he said, looking at Mercia with greedy eyes, and ignoring the others. "Nay, shrink not thus! I come, not to taunt thee, but to give thee liberty!"

And Cedric the Cruel, the self-crowned King of Northestria, strode forward with a jangling and a clattering of his accoutrements.

CHAPTER 5.

The Threat!

PRINCESS MERCIA, standing upright and dignified, was scornful as she returned Cedric's hateful gaze. She felt nothing but contempt and loathing for this brute of a man who had conquered her country.

"By the bones of Sarus!" swore Cedric. "As haughty as ever, I vow! Exile in this lonely fortress seemeth to strengthen thy spirit! 'Tis well! I would not like my queen to be a craven."

Ethelbert the Red took a step forward.

"Thy queen?" he repeated thickly.

"Ay, dog!" retorted Cedric. "Thine ears did not deceive thee."

"Beshrew thee for a knave!" shouted Ethelbert. "Thou art mad! Thinkest thou that the fair Mercia would—"

"Silence, or I'll have thee flogged!" snarled Cedric savagely. "I came not to argue or entreat—but to command!"

He swaggered farther into the apartment, a veritable giant of a man. But not by an inch did Princess Mercia flinch. She stood her ground, as defiant and as proud as ever.

"'Tis not the first time, my fair one, that thou hast spurned my advances," said Cedric, as he gazed gloatingly upon her. "But, by the bones of Sarus, I grow tired of these delays! So I come from my Kingdom of Northestria, and I come with a command."

He swept a hand towards the windows.

"Yonder, by the lake, lie my big galleys," he continued. "One of them, fair Mercia, is in readiness for thee. There are hand-maidens aboard, goodly dresses, and all that should please thy maiden heart. I am come to carry thee away to my Castle of Dunstane."

The young Prince Oswy, his eyes flashing, stepped in front of his sister.

"Thou shalt not take Mercia from me!" he shouted fiercely. "What indignity is this that thou art suggesting?"

"Indignity, forsooth!" thundered Cedric. "'Tis my will that Mercia shall become my queen. Am I not generous? Thus shalt my diplomacy triumph! The peoples of Northestria shall have their rightful queen, and complete peace will be upon the land."

"To be Queen of Northestria is one thing, Cedric, but to be thy queen is but a hideous mockery!" said Mercia scornfully. "Rather would I die!"

"Ay, and I by thy side!" vowed Ethelbert the Red.

"Thou shalt die ere the wedding celebrations are over," replied Cedric. "But, for the present, 'tis my decree that thou shalt remain here, in this fortress. So prepare, fair one. Get thee to thine own chambers, and be ready for departure within the hour."

The Princess Mercia shook her head.

"Kill me, if it is thy will, Cedric," she replied; "but never will I consent to become

thy queen. Rather would I die a thousand deaths from a thousand torturers!"

Her tone was so bitter, so full of loathing, that Cedric half-recoiled, his face working.

"But I offer thee thine own kingdom!" he urged. "Such a union will unite the peoples of Gothland and Northestria."

"Never will the people of Northestria unite with the infamous brutes of Gothland!" said Mercia quietly. "'Tis but a foolish dream, Cedric—the dream of a power-crazed tyrant who thinkest that he has but to make a command for that command to be obeyed. Thou art foolish, arrogant, and surfeited with pride!"

"Have care!" snarled Cedric the Cruel. "Thy words lack nothing of frankness, methinks!"

"'Tis my desire to be frank," replied the princess, gazing at him with defiance. "I am at thy mercy, Cedric. Call thy soldiers and have me dragged hence! In no other way will I depart! Carry me to the Castle of Dunstane, if thou art mad enough to do so. But, by my faith, I will kill myself before I become thy queen!"

Such was the vehemence of her words that Cedric the Cruel knew that she was in deadly earnest. He was staggered. In his insufferable arrogance and pride, he had thought that she would be eager to seize this chance of becoming the queen of her own land. But now he was left in no doubt regarding her feelings for him.

"Thou vixen! Thou spitfire!" he said harshly. "I can see that thy spirit is indeed as stout as ever! Græmercy! It shall be tamed, or I am no king!"

He turned to his guard, evidently with the intention of giving some orders. But at that moment one of his junior officers came excitedly into the apartment.

"My lord! My lord!" shouted the newcomer.

"How now?" thundered Cedric. "Who is this fool, blundering into my presence so uncouthly?"

"Thy pardon, my lord, but a strange discovery has been made!" panted the officer, abashed. "This earthenware bottle was found floating upon the moat!"

"Oh!" murmured the princess, turning pale.

Cedric, his curiosity getting the better of his anger, bade the officer step forward. The earthenware bottle in his hand was broken, and a rolled sheet of parchment was revealed.

"By my marrow and bones! What is this discovery, then?" asked Cedric impatiently. "Give me the parchment, fool!"

He took it, and his brow grew blacker and blacker as he read. Finally, with a bellow of fury, he turned upon Ethelbert the Red.

"So!" he grated. "This is thy doing, dog!"

Ethelbert, pale but defiant, made no answer.

"So thou hast cast such a message as this thrice daily into the moat!" went on Cedric, glancing at the parchment. "By the soul of Sarus! Thou shalt suffer for this, thou treacherous scum!"

He turned to his soldiers.

"Where is the commandant of this fortress?" he thundered. "What hast he been doing, to allow this? Are my soldiers asleep, that these bottles can be cast into the moat thrice daily, month in and month out? I'll have every man flogged!"

"Blame not thy soldiers, Cedric," said Ethelbert the Red. "They were in no way lax. But for thy coming this day, none would have discovered the parchment that is in thy hand. But I will confess that I have grown careless."

"Careless, i' faith!" stormed Cedric. "Thou shalt grow weary of tortures before I have finished! Fool! Think ye that these messages will reach thy friends of the outer world?"

"Perchance one such message is already in the hands of my friends," replied Ethelbert defiantly.

"Thou dog!" sneered the tyrant. "For us there is no outer world. This land, hemmed in by the eternal mountains, is all the world we know. For ever more we are hemmed in by these impassable barriers. None can enter."

"Yet what has happened once, may well happen again."

"Nay, thou art wrong!" swore Cedric. "'Twas by the purest chance that those dogs entered; and never will there be such another chance. By my bones! Thou art in ill case, indeed, if thou art relying upon help from the outer world!"

He laughed contemptuously, and then burst into another fit of fury, turning upon his guard.

"Seize this man!" he ordered. "Seize him, take him to the battlements and fling him to death!"

"Nay, not that!" cried the princess in agony.

"Take him!" snarled Cedric.

Ethelbert the Red remained dignified and calm as the soldiers closed round upon him. And the Princess Mercia, with a sudden movement, ran to the open casement. In a moment she had leapt upon the wide stone sill, the abyss yawning at her feet.

"Sister!" panted Oswy in fear.

"Take Ethelbert as thou has threatened, and I will fling myself down!" said Mercia, her voice steady and calm. "If he is to die, brutal Gothlander, so will I die also!"

Cedric, taken aback, stared at her stupidly.

"Such spirit!" he muttered. "I' faith, 'tis a waste in the body of a Northestrian! Come, child, this is but folly."

He moved nearer, and the princess raised her hand.

"Stay!" she commanded imperiously. "Move one step nearer, Cedric, or order thy

soldiers to come to this window, and I will throw myself down!"

"Fair Mercia, 'tis madness!" said Ethelbert tremulously.

Suddenly Cedric the Cruel gave a great, raucous laugh. He placed his gloved hands

desire death! By the bones of Offa! Then shall they have death! Am I not a kindly monarch, ready to fulfil the wishes of my loyal subjects?"

He roared with laughter afresh, and suddenly flung out an arm.



Anxiously the St. Frank's juniors looked and shouted for Handforth. They had not seen him disappear into the blizzard which was howling and shrieking across the Arctic wastes.

upon his hips, threw his head back, and roared unrestrainedly.

"Marry, a fine comedy, forsooth!" he shouted. "I marvel that the young Oswy does not also threaten to sacrifice his life."

"If my sister and Ethelbert are killed, then will I kill myself!" cried Oswy.

"Oh-ho! So we have the three!" roared Cedric, "Hear ye, my soldiers? They all

"Release the good Ethelbert!" he commanded. "Come, princess, step down from the casement. 'Tis an ill setting for such a gem. I give thee my word that Ethelbert shall not be flung from the battlements."

Ethelbert the Red was released, and Princess Mercia, after a moment of hesitation, jumped down lightly. Cedric was now taking no notice of the exiles.

"Let these, my orders, be obeyed!" he said to the captain of his guard. "See to it that a proclamation is posted in Dunstane, and in every town in Northestria! On the sixth day from now a great spectacle will be held on the shores of the lake, before

"Death at the stake is preferable to becoming Cedric's queen," replied Mercia quietly. "For one is but the agony of a few fleeting minutes, whilst the other would be a lifelong torture!"

CHAPTER 6.

Under the Ice!

THE Pioneer, advancing ever northward, ploughed her way through the ice-floes. Several days had elapsed, and the voyage was fast approaching that point which all the youthful passengers had been eagerly awaiting.

But for Lord Dorrimore's startling announcement that the real objective of this trip was the strange land of Northestria, the voyage had been uneventful. Good weather had been encountered, and the Pioneer was making amazing progress. She was the fastest submarine vessel afloat.

And now at last she was well within the Arctic Circle, near the eternal ice. Within her saloons and cabins, the comfort was supreme. Only when the passengers went on deck did they realise that the coldness of this region was extreme. But, overcoated and muffled, the St. Frank's fellows were as much on deck as below. They wanted to miss nothing.

"Well, we're getting close to the ice now," said Handforth contentedly. He was leaning against the rail, watching the bleak seascape, with the floes becoming ever more congested. "We shan't be able to keep on the surface much longer."

"I wonder if we'll succeed?" asked Church. "I mean, it seems an awful risk to me, diving under the surface and cruising right under the ice!"

"Risk be blowed!" said Handforth scornfully. "The submarine is as safe as a rock! Hasn't Dorrie told us so? Hasn't Irene's pater assured as that there's no danger?"

"All the same, they're enthusiasts," said Church. "This is their boat, as it were, and their faith in her is supreme."

"I suppose you're getting nervous?" asked Handforth tartly. "If I were you, I'd go to Dorrie and ask him to turn back!"

"Fathead!" growled Church.

"Well, it is a bit of a knockout, Handy," put in Nipper, as he joined them. "You mustn't forget that we're attempting some-

Dunstane. Let the proclamation state that the Princess Mercia, the Prince Oswy, and Ethelbert the Red are to be burnt at the stake, in the sight of all Dunstane!"

"Thou art jesting, my lord!" gasped the captain.

"Fool! I speak in earnest!" roared Cedric. "These three desire death—and so shall they have death! As a reward for their treachery, they shall be burnt at the stake, as I have decreed! On the sixth day from now this spectacle shall be given. Let the proclamations be sent forth!"

And Cedric the Cruel, with another raucous laugh, strode noisily out of the apartment. As the door closed behind the guard, Princess Mercia found Ethelbert's arms round her shoulders.

"Be thou of stout heart, child," murmured the regent sadly. "Let us show these dogs that we, of Northestria, can meet death bravely."

thing that has never been accomplished. When the Pioneer dives and goes under the ice, she'll be penetrating the unknown."

"I think it's perfectly thrilling!" said Mary Summers, who was with Nipper.

"I'd go anywhere in this boat," said Irene Manners proudly. "My father invented her, and, if he thought there was the slightest risk, he wouldn't let me be aboard—or any of the other girls, either."

"You see, there are all sorts of safeguards," said Nipper. "The Pioneer will only go forward as long as the sea ahead is clear. There will be terrific searchlights, penetrating the gloom, and if there's any unexpected ice we shall spot it before we can run into any danger."

"How about getting trapped under the ice?" asked McClure.

"That's impossible," replied Nipper. "We can always retreat, and give the thing up as a bad job—although that's about the last thing that Dorrie and Sir Hobart want to do. There's an air manufacturing plant on this craft which will keep us well supplied with fresh air for weeks, if necessary."

"We shall do it!" declared Handforth. "We shall get under the ice, and, what's more, we shall get into Northestria, too! We're going to the rescue of Princess Mercia and her downtrodden subjects!"

The others chuckled, and Handforth suddenly started.

"What's the joke?" he demanded.

"You were rather keen on the princess when we were there last time, weren't you, Handy?" grinned Nipper.

Handforth turned red, but he was reassured when he saw that Irene's eyes were twinkling merrily.

"It was the princess who 'fell' for me," he growled. "How could I help it if she took a liking to me?"

"She must have been smitten by your rugged geography, old man," murmured Nipper. "A modern example of Beauty and the Beast."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you calling me a beast?" demanded Handforth wrathfully.

"Let's change the subject," said Nipper, grinning. "Hallo! Look what's afoot!"

Many of the Pioneer's sailors were at work. By going well forward, the boys and girls could see above the promenade deck. A queer superstructure was taking shape now—enormous steel girders had mysteriously appeared from nowhere, being worked by electric power. Many members of the crew were active, with Lord Dorrimore and Sir Hobart Manners directing the operations, and with Nelson Lee and Mr. Wilkes as interested spectators.

Before the day was out, that superstructure had taken a definite shape. The entire top of the Pioneer was now changed. She was fitted with what looked like enormous runners, extending from bow to stern. These toboggan-like fixtures were there for a definite purpose.

"We're reckoning to start on the real ad-

venture to-morrow, young 'uns," said Lord Dorrimore, as he chatted with an interested group of boys and girls. "That toboggan arrangement overhead is a sort of safeguard. The boat won't dive more than is absolutely necessary, and we shall keep her close against the surface ice. In a way, she'll run along it, those toboggans making contact with the under side of the ice."

"How long do you reckon we'll be under the ice, Dorrie?" asked Nipper.

"It all depends," replied the millionaire peer. "The entire Arctic isn't ice-covered, you know. After a number of hours we might come to the surface again. It's impossible to tell. In a way of speaking, we're taking a leap into the darkness."

"And do you really think we'll get through, sir?" asked Fullwood breathlessly. "I mean, right through into Northestria?"

"If all my theories are right, and if my plans work out as I reckon, we'll do the thing on our heads," replied Lord Dorrimore lightly. "And once we're there—well, there ought to be some fun."

"By Jove, rather, sir."

"Fighting the Gothlanders, you mean?" asked Handforth keenly. "By George, think of it, you chaps! We shall go as deliverers—to free Northestria from the grip of a tyrant!"

"It's a pity we didn't bring a lot of war material with us," said Fullwood. "I seem to remember that the Gothlanders are savage brutes."

Dorrie winked.

"Not a word, my sons, but I've still got one or two surprises up my sleeve," he murmured. "There's more than one ace in the pack!"

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Handforth, staring.

"Well, I knew what this trip really was before I started—although you didn't," replied his lordship. "And down below I've got quite a number of handy machine-guns and a few other trifles of a similar nature."

"My only hat!"

"Good old Dorrie!"

"Motor-boats, an areroplane or two, and things like that," said his lordship cheerfully. "Oh, yes! I knew what we were in for, and I've made my plans pretty thoroughly. But, of course, the first thing is to get there."

And Dorrie strolled away, leaving the boys more thrilled than ever.

NEXT morning the young passengers received a surprise.

When they were called at the usual hour, they found the electric lights glowing, and when they tumbled out, excited and curious, they learned that everything was going on as usual. Breakfast was nearly ready in the saloon, and it was being served at the same hour.

"But why all the lights?" asked Handforth. "Let's go on deck—"

"There'll be no going on deck yet, Handforth," interrupted Nelson Lee, entering the

lounge where the boys were congregated. "Every water-tight door is sealed. We're under the surface."

Great Scott! And we didn't know anything about it!" ejaculated Handforth indignantly.

"I'm afraid that Lord Dorrimore and the captain neglected to inform you of the fact," said Lee dryly. "We've been under the surface for seven or eight hours now, boys. So far everything is going splendidly."

"But—but we're not actually under the ice, sir?" asked Reggie Pitt, in wonder.

"Yes, under the ice," replied Lee. "The last patch of broken water was left behind some hours ago. We are well beneath the Arctic ice-cap."

Excitement reigned supreme for some time. The girls were just as eager as the boys. They found it difficult to believe that the Great Adventure had begun. During the night they had received no hint; there had been no sensation of diving.

And when breakfast was served in the usual way, and Lee announced that lessons must be taken at the customary hour, the boys calmed down considerably. Everything was so matter of fact.

"It's a giddy swindle!" grumbled Handforth, after breakfast. "I thought this trip under the ice was going to be exciting! But there's nothing in it at all!"

He was wrong.

Although there was no change in the routine, everybody aboard the Pioneer was inwardly thrilled. There was that queer feeling of uncertainty—a feeling which scarcely anybody expressed.

They all knew that the vast ice barrier was above them, a solid cap of frozen water, imprisoning the submarine below. And, ahead, lay the unknown.

It was small wonder that the boys and the girls had no enthusiasm for lessons that morning. They were rather indignant, indeed, that lessons were held. But Nelson Lee was determined that there should be no departure from the normal routine.

The submarine, of course, was now proceeding with caution—at a much slower speed. She crept along smoothly, her motive power now being supplied by electric motors.

Right fo'ard, in her bows, there was a curiously-shaped bulge, which gave her a quaint appearance when cruising on the surface. The bulge was actually a control-room, separate and apart from the normal control-room amidships. It was only used when the Pioneer was under the surface.

Towards midday Lord Dorrimore, making his way fo'ard, found Sir Hobart Manners in charge. This room was comparatively small, but in total darkness except for a number of illuminated dials. The entire front "wall" of the room was a massive window made of toughened glass of incredible thickness. Yet it was crystal clear.

"Nothing to report, Dorrie," said Sir Hobart. "We're still going ahead very nicely."

Dorrie joined him at the window.

On either side of the control-room, operated from separate compartments, were two enormously-powerful searchlights. Their beams cut through the greenish gloom of the sea, and it was possible to see ahead for some distance.

Staring upwards, Lord Dorrimore could see a vague something. It was the under surface of the ice.

"We're forty to fifty feet below the ice," said Sir Hobart, "so our toboggan structure is now in use. There have been very few inequalities so far—just a thickening of the ice here and there, necessitating an occasional dip. It seems that our theories are right, Dorrie. The cruise under the ice is as safe as surface travelling."

He operated a wheel in front of him as he spoke—for in this room the submarine could be accurately controlled without any telegraphing to the engine-room—and the Pioneer dipped her bows slightly, and plunged deeper. It had seemed to Sir Hobart that overhead the ice was closer than it had been.

"As long as we keep going like this, we shall be all right," said Dorrie. "In fact, we shall get bored stiff. By this time tomorrow, we'll have to reckon out our exact position."

"We're keeping a strict log, hour by hour," replied Sir Hobart. "And with all our wonderful instruments, Dorrie, we know to a mile precisely our position."

His manner became rather tense a moment later, and he peered ahead anxiously. Dorrie, who had noticed nothing, now felt the bows of the vessel give a curious dip, followed by a movement that was almost a lurch to starboard.

"What's the idea?" asked Dorrie, glancing at his companion.

"I did nothing," replied Sir Hobart quickly. "But the controls are—queer. I believe we've hit an undercurrent of some sort. I have felt something similar once or twice before, and Captain Williams tells me that— By heaven, Dorrie! Did you feel that?"

Dorrie had felt it—a lurch which caused the Pioneer to swing giddily over to port. Sharply Sir Hobart operated the controls, stopping the engines altogether. He did not like this experience.

"There's something nasty here, Dorrie," he said quickly. "This current is stronger than any we have yet encountered."

Captain Williams came in with Nelson Lee, and both were looking serious.

"Anything wrong, sir?" asked the captain. "We felt a big lurch—"

"I say, we seem to be swinging round, don't we?" interrupted Lord Dorrimore abruptly. "She's down by the stern, Manners!"

But Sir Hobart needed no telling. Neither did anybody else. They could all feel the movement of the vessel, and they were all rather helpless. That unexpected current

had caught the Pioneer in its grip, and, slowly but surely, she was being dragged down into the depths, stern first!

CHAPTER 7.

Undersea Peril!

IT was a moment of dreadful anxiety.

Sir Hobart, at the controls, started the engines again, and with every atom of his skill he attempted to correct the fault. But the racing engines and the whirling propellers seemed to have no effect. Relentlessly the submarine was being dragged down deeper and deeper into the unknown depths of the icy sea, stern first. Then suddenly, with tremendous force, she spun round, throwing nearly everybody in the control-room off their balance.

In the body of the vessel, it was just the same. The St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls, in the big saloon, were wondering what was happening. Then, abruptly, they were all thrown down; and when they got to their feet again they could feel that the Pioneer was reeling giddily. The floor was at an acute angle.

"We're diving—backwards!" gasped Fullwood frantically.

"She's out of control, isn't she?" asked Doris Berkeley, her pretty face pale. "Oh! What's going to happen now?"

But nobody could answer her. None of them pretended that they were indifferent, or that they were confident that the danger would soon be over. For a great many hours now they had been cruising into the unknown, and they were all suffering from the strain. They were frankly alarmed—fear-stricken when they realised that the submarine was diving, uncontrolled, to the bottom, and that a vast field of ice stretched overhead, imprisoning the vessel.

Lord Dorrimore and Sir Hobart Manners had been prepared for strong currents in the Arctic, but they had never anticipated any such current as this. It was alarming.

By skilful handling, Sir Hobart managed to bring the Pioneer back on an even keel. But she was still in the grip of the current, and Sir Hobart knew that she was some hundreds of feet down.

In the saloon, shouts of relief and excitement went up when the floor assumed its normal level. Yet the swaying and lurching of the vessel told the passengers that all was not yet right.

At the controls, Sir Hobart, with perspiration streaming down his face, was staring fixedly through the window into the search-light-flooded sea.

"Look!" he shouted thickly.

"Good gad!" breathed Lord Dorrimore, a catch in his voice.

Almost directly ahead, but some points to starboard, something solid and menacing was



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looming up. They needed no telling that it was a great wall of ice—the side of an enormous berg, perhaps. The Pioneer was drifting straight towards the mass, and a collision seemed inevitable.

"Look out!" panted Sir Hobart.

With reversed engines, the Pioneer swung round, answering her rudder. The wall of ice seemed to shift its position, but nothing could avert the collision. A sudden, jolting, jarring crash as the metal plates of the vessel collided with the ice wall, and next moment she was slithering alongside it. By a miracle, it seemed—but really because of Sir Hobart's brilliant handling of the vessel—a violent collision had been averted.

The Pioneer had only grazed the wall of ice, and now she was being forced along by the strong undercurrent. Although her engines were reversed, she still advanced. Never in his whole life had Sir Hobart felt so helpless.

On the port side another ice wall loomed up in the glare of the searchlights. The Pioneer was being trapped in a kind of ice bay. Mercifully, she still retained an even keel, and, in that respect, she was under control.

There was another jarring thud, and she came to an abrupt stop. She was trapped, jammed between the walls of ice. It was impossible to proceed—and retreat was out of the question, since the current held her too strongly in its grip.

"This is nasty, Dorrie," said Sir Hobart quietly.

"By Jove, old man, you were splendid!" said his lordship enthusiastically. "Nasty or not, we're still safe, and I don't think we've come to such harm."

Reports soon came in that none of the plates had been damaged. At least, the vessel was taking no water. She was just jammed there, with ice ahead and on both sides. Even the temperature in the vessel, maintained so accurately until now, had gone down a great many degrees.

"Thank Heaven we've suffered no material damage," said Captain Williams. "What do you think we'd better do, sir? Get her to the surface?"

"If we can," replied Sir Hobart Manners. "It's the only thing, captain. The powerful current has jammed us against this wall of ice, and there seems no retreat. We're a good way down, and I don't think it would be safe to dive farther. There's no telling how far this ice descends."

"No chance of getting under it?" asked Dorrie.

"There might be—but before we try any such experiment, we'll see what there is above us," replied Sir Hobart. "We'll have to get to the top, if it's at all possible."

Nobody could hazard any guess regarding the nature of the situation. These Arctic seas, below the ice, were uncharted. No man had ever been here before. Men might have flown overhead, men might have trudged

through the snows on the surface of the ice; but no man had ever cruised these seas.

The Pioneer was rocking and swaying gently, clear evidence of the strength of the current which gripped her. And now the mechanism was put into operation which would enable her to rise.

It was a ticklish business. When she did rise, she scraped along the ice, and there was always the danger of some serious damage being caused. Slowly she rose, foot by foot, Sir Hobart and Captain Williams watching the indicators anxiously.

"She's doing it all right, sir," said the skipper with satisfaction. "We're not completely jammed, anyhow."

"She's easier now, too," said Sir Hobart. "By Jove, captain, she's answering her screws! She's retreating free from the ice wall."

They had ascended for over a hundred feet, and it was with a great breath of relief that Sir Hobart found that the Pioneer was now free from all obstructions. That deadly current had lost its strength in higher waters.

At last, with a gentle thudding, the toboggan-like superstructure of the Pioneer came to rest against the under surface of the great ice cap.

"We'll get the boring apparatus into operation at once," said Sir Hobart. "We might as well try the experiment now—it is the first opportunity. Furthermore, we shall be able to have a look at our position. I'm rather keen on seeing the nature of the icefield above."

Nelson Lee, in the meantime, was with the boys and girls, assuring them that no great damage had been done, and that there was every reason to expect that the submarine would soon be out of her temporary difficulties. Men were going all over the vessel, on the look-out for leakages; but she was a stout craft, and she had suffered no vital damage.

Very soon a strange sound echoed and re-echoed throughout the ship. Overhead, an enormous electrically-operated machine was getting to work—a species of drill. Controlled entirely from within the vessel, this drill was boring a great circular hole through the ice above.

The boys, of course, were tremendously interested, and they waited eagerly for the result. The boring of the hole was not a long task. It was accomplished well under the hour.

The mechanism was then withdrawn, and the great toboggan supports were all lowered into the vessel simultaneously. She clung tighter and tighter to the surface ice.

And then a circular metal arrangement, like a funnel, was projected upwards through the hole in the ice, and tests soon proved that the operation had been successful, and that the metalwork was projecting into the open air.

A great watertight door was opened, a ladder was automatically fixed, and the passage way into the upper air was open.

Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee, wrapped in huge furs, were the first to go up. They experienced rather a shock. For as they emerged into the open they found that a fierce, bitter blizzard was raging—a hurricane which, had this been the open sea, would have caused the waters to be mountainous.

But the Pioneer, lying under the surface of the ice, was as smoothly at rest as though she floated in a pond. Yet above, the terrific Arctic blizzard raged. Snow was hissing down in whirling masses, and the wind swept across the everlasting ice with a shrieking roar.

"I think it's better down below!" shouted Dorrie, as he pressed close to Lee.

"Not much good being up here, old man," replied Lee, yelling above the gale. "We can't see more than twenty yards in any direction. By Jove! What a storm!"

They could well appreciate the enormous difficulties of the ordinary methods of Arctic exploration. A party of humans, caught in this blizzard, would indeed be in dire straits. But the party in the submarine was in warmth and comfort.

The Spring Equinox had, of course, begun, and the Arctic "day," lasting for half a year, was well under way. The whole scene, on that icy waste, was gloomy. A continuous twilight prevailed, the visibility being confined to fifteen or twenty yards.

Other figures were emerging from the submarine now—Handforth, Nipper, Mr. Wilkes, and some of the other boys. They saw no reason why they should be left out of this. They wanted to have a look into the open for themselves.

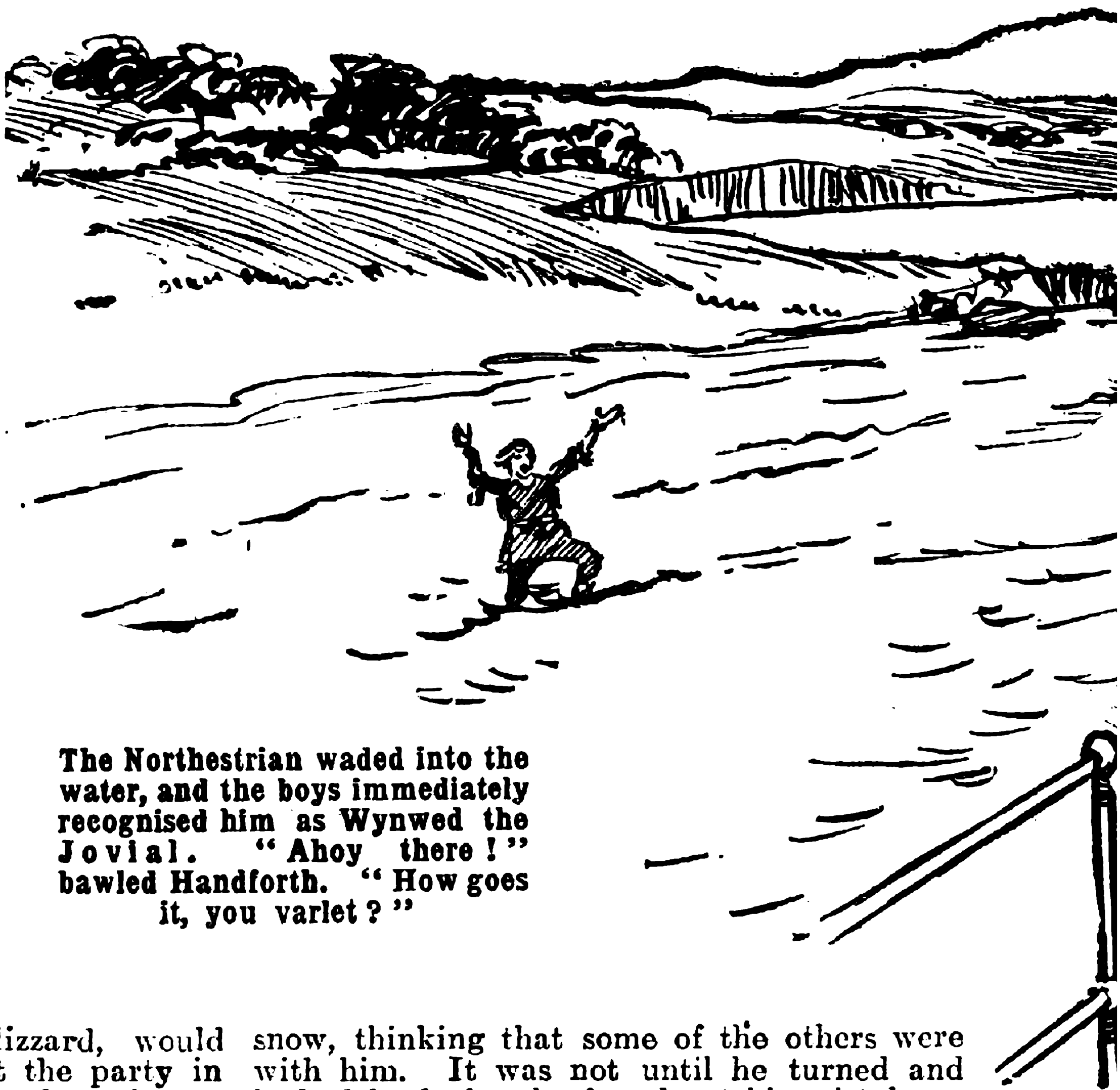
"By George!" gurgled Handforth, as the full force of the blast struck him. "What's—what's this?"

"A sample of the Arctic, by the look of it!" gasped Church. "I say! We'd better get in again!"

"Not likely! I want to have a look round!" said Handforth. "Well, I'm jiggered! Who ever would have thought it? There was no sign of this down in the ship!"

"Hey, you boys!" yelled Lord Dorrimore urgently. "Mind you don't wander away! The visibility's pretty limited, and you could soon get lost!"

Church and some of the other fellows heeded Dorrie, and they turned. And in that very moment Handforth vanished into the snow smother. It was rather unfortunate. He blundered on over the ice, knee deep in



The Northestrian waded into the water, and the boys immediately recognised him as Wynwed the Jovial. "Ahoy there!" bawled Handforth. "How goes it, you varlet?"

snow, thinking that some of the others were with him. It was not until he turned and looked back that he found out his mistake.

"Hallo! Where are you?" he yelled. "I say, I thought you chaps were with me!"

He walked back towards the submarine without a qualm. He knew that he had only travelled a few paces, and it would be a matter of moments only before he joined the rest.

But Handforth had neglected to take a note of his direction, or of the direction of the wind. Instead of walking back to the submarine, he wandered farther afield. It was absurd—fantastic. Yet it was an absolute fact that within three minutes Handforth was utterly lost!

CHAPTER 8.

Lost in the Blizzard!

"WHAT rot!" grunted Handforth discontentedly.

He felt no alarm. He knew that the others were close at hand, and the idea that he could be lost did not even occur to him. Actually, he was not fifty yards away from that funnel-like projection which marked the submarine's position.

But it was a very small mark, now rendered almost invisible by the snow which had quickly drifted round it. The blizzard was raging with terrific fury, and Handforth found it difficult to keep his balance.



"Where the dickens have you chaps got to?" he bawled.

He moved on again—not in the direction of the Pioneer, but away from it. The snow was coming down more thickly than ever, driven by the hurricane. Handforth was half-blinded and already numbed by the intense cold.

"Ahoy, there!" he shouted at the top of his voice.

He stopped, his heart beating rapidly. Only the roar and rush of the gale came to his ears. The wind was sweeping over the great icefield with terrifying intensity. And suddenly panic seized the burly junior.

He felt utterly alone.

Never in his life before had he felt so isolated—so cut off completely from the world. He ran madly, shouting as he did so. He changed his direction, running again. But nothing loomed up out of the murk, save the driving snowflakes.

"Help! Help!" bellowed Handforth frantically. "Hi! Where are you?"

His voice was practically flung back into his throat, for he was facing the wind. And when he turned in the other direction and shouted, his voice seemed to be swept away from him, and carried into the upper air by the force of the gale.

"Great Scott!" gasped Handforth, aghast. "I'm—I'm lost!"

He was staggered—bewildered. And he was not afraid to admit to himself that he was terrified. Yet this very terror calmed him. He gripped himself, and again took stock of his position.

"This is dotty!" he muttered into his muffler. "They can't be far off! No need to get into a stew, you idiot!"

But he was in a stew. He was frightened. The loneliness of this Arctic ice filled him with horror.

"**Y**OU boys should not have come up!" said Nelson Lee sharply. "Get back into the ship at once—all of you!"

"We only wanted to see what it was like up here, guv'nor," said Nipper.

"Well, you've seen—now you can return," retorted Lee. "We shall all return,

in fact. With this storm raging we can do nothing. We can take no observations——"

"I say, you chaps, where's Handy?" burst out Church, blundering up.

They were all clustered together near the opening, which meant warmth and comfort. Lord Dorrimore, who was in the act of climbing to the ladder, was impatient.

"He's there somewhere!" he exclaimed. "Handforth, you ass! Where are you? We've got to get back, Lee! Some of these youngsters will be frostbitten unless we're careful. And there's another danger. It won't take long for the old tub to get frozen to the ice—and if that happens we shall be in a nasty mess!"

"Handforth's gone, sir!" said Church frantically. "I saw him blundering away, but I thought he came back with the rest of us. He must have got lost in this blizzard! Handy!" he added, raising his voice. "Hi, Handy!"

"Don't move away, boys!" warned Nelson Lee. "It would be madness to venture away from this spot. Upon my soul! Of all the individuals aboard the Pioneer, Handforth is the only one who could have lost himself in this blizzard!"

"You can always trust him to do something dotty, sir," said McClure. "But I don't think he went off deliberately. Can't we search for him?"

"You'll do nothing—except get back into the submarine," replied Nelson Lee promptly. "If there is any searching to be done, Dorrie and I will do it."

"Couldn't we send up a rocket? He might see it!" suggested Nipper. "Or what about lighting a flare? I mean, he can't be far away. He's probably near enough to hear if we all shout together."

They all shouted, but their voices seemed to fade into insignificance compared with the howl of the hurricane.

"**C**RUMBS!" said Handforth breathlessly.

The fact that he was lost was becoming more and more certain. The absurdity of the thing was beginning to lose its point. Absurd or otherwise, it was terrifying.

For the first time, Handforth realised how easy it is for Arctic explorers to lose one another, although they may be marching practically side by side. One moment of carelessness, and one's companions are swallowed up in the blinding murk.

To make matters worse, Handforth now found himself floundering through snow which was waist deep. He knew, by this very fact, that he must have wandered some distance afield. He turned back, plunging on with the wind behind him. Presently he found himself slithering and sliding on a great stretch of icy surface which was almost clear of the snow. The wind was sweeping it with tremendous force, and keeping it clear.

Suddenly Handforth halted, his heart jumping. Vaguely, in the distance, he could see a figure moving. In spite of the bad visibility, he knew that his eyes were not deceiving him.

"Oh, thank goodness!" he panted, breaking into a run.

But he didn't run far. Abruptly he came to a halt—when only two or three yards separated him from the other figure. And Handforth stood as though frozen.

It was no human figure which faced him—but a huge Polar bear!

It is difficult to say which of the two was the more surprised—Handforth or the bear. At all events, they both seemed nonplussed; they stood there, staring at one another, motionless. And Handforth was quite certain, as he afterwards declared, that his heart missed a couple of beats in every bar for five solid minutes. At least, it seemed like five minutes to him before the bear

made a move. Actually, it must have been a dozen or so seconds.

Handforth saw the bear raise itself on its hind legs, and it towered above him like a living mountain. Valiant as Handforth undoubtedly was, this monstrous creature struck him as being too much of a handful to tackle. Wisely, he spun round on his heel and bolted.

He ran blindly; he ran as he had never run before. And the bear, with a fearsome growl, gave chase!

Handforth could hear its thudding footfalls close behind him—he could even feel its hot breath on the back of his neck. At any second he expected to receive a death-dealing blow from one of those mighty paws.

Was he mad, or dreaming, or what?

It seemed to him that a lurid red light was glowing through the blizzard, over to his left. It was like a tremendous fire, flickering and blazing.

He veered towards it mechanically, instinctively drawn in that direction. He was certain that he must be going mad. How could there be a fire in all this smother of snow?

And then, as he grew nearer, the truth came to him.

He could see now—he could see human figures, illuminated by that reddish glare. He knew in a flash that a great flare had been lighted by his companions, so that he should be guided.

With thankfulness in his heart, he ran harder than ever; but even now he doubted if he would be able to win through to safety. The bear's thudding footsteps were drumming in his ears; the bear's hot breath was beating on his neck like the exhaust from a blast furnace.

"Handy!" came a yell out of the storm.

"Hurrah! It's Handy!"

Figures came towards him, apparently unaware of the monstrous thing which was so close in his rear. He plunged on, and they grabbed at him.

"Look out!" he gasped. "The bear! It's—it's on me!"

Nipper was seizing him on one side, Lord Dorrimore on the other.

"Steady, young 'un—steady!" said his lordship. "What's all the panic about? You're safe now."

"The bear!" gasped Handforth.

"Pull yourself together, young 'un—there's no bear!" said Lord Dorrimore sharply.

Handforth twirled round, his eyes goggling. And Dorrie was right. There was no trace of the Polar bear whatever! The thudding footsteps, that hot breath on his neck, had been sheer imagination!

Handforth was so relieved that he almost collapsed.

"I—I came face to face with a whacking great Polar bear!" he panted. "I thought it was close behind him! I bolted—and—and——"

"You've been dreaming, my son," interrupted Lord Dorrimore. "A fine fright

you've given us! We thought we'd lost you!"

"It—it was that flare which guided me," said Handforth breathlessly. "I say, thanks awfully! I don't know about your having a fright—I've been scared stiff!"

He fairly tottered into the submarine, and the others soon followed.

There was little doubt that the bear had been as frightened as Handforth, and, instead of chasing him, had gone off in the other direction. Later on, of course, Handforth found it possible to laugh at the incident, but at the moment it was by no means a laughing matter.

He was thankful, indeed, when he felt himself within the grateful warmth of the submarine. The great manhole had been clamped down, and the other mechanism withdrawn. The adventurers had seen quite enough of the Arctic for the moment!

CHAPTER 9.

Northward Ho!

"**Y**OU lunatic!" said Church wrathfully. "You fathead! You blundering ass!"

But while he was saying these things he was hugging Handforth's arm with all the warmth of their close friendship. And McClure was doing the same. They were back in the saloon; they had shed their overcoats and mufflers, and that brief spell out in the blizzard seemed remote.

"I don't know how it happened, you chaps," said Handforth, as he found himself surrounded by a crowd of schoolboys and schoolgirls. "I only took about three paces, and then I suddenly found myself alone. I thought I was going back towards the others, but I must have taken the wrong direction."

"You would!" said Travers feelingly.

"All the same, you needn't have got a dotty idea into your head that you were being chased by a bear!" said Church.

"But I was!" insisted Handforth. "In fact, if it hadn't been for that bear, I might never have found you again! I bolted like a rabbit, and while I was running I saw that flare!"

"You're terribly reckless, Ted," said Irene Manners half-angrily. "You don't know what a scare you gave us."

Nobody quite believed in the bear story, and even Handforth himself wondered, now and again, if his imagination had played him false. Yet, upon due reflection, he knew perfectly well that he had been face to face with that monarch of the Polar ice.

"I'll tell you one thing, you chaps and girls," he said tensely. "It's made me realise the advantages of travelling under the ice to the Pole! It's calm down here—it's warm and comfortable. But up there it's too awful for words!"

"We're not out of the wood yet, either," said Nipper. "We only came to the surface because the submarine was jammed against

an ice wall. Nobody can quite make it out. It has always been believed that the ice could not extend more than about a hundred feet below the surface. The ice we bored through wasn't more than a dozen feet. Yet there's this enormous——"

"Hallo! We're moving!" interrupted Tommy Watson eagerly. "Didn't you feel that rummy sensation?"

They had all felt it, and they knew that the Pioneer was diving.

Slowly, under perfect control, she was descending into the depths again. But this time she was edging away from that mysterious ice wall, her engines running smoothly, her propellers sending her farther and farther away from the danger zone.

Sir Hobart Manners and Captain Williams had had a consultation, and they had decided to make this attempt. Here, near the surface, that deadly current was not strong, and thus the Pioneer was enabled to break away from the menace.

Soon she was cruising gently, moving out of her course in a detour, but getting away from danger.

AFTER several hours, it was discovered that the Pioneer could now be got back on to her proper course. The mysterious mass of ice, descending for hundreds of feet into the depths; was left behind. Once again the vessel was on her voyage; and an examination had shown that she had suffered little or no real damage.

The excitement was over for the time being. There were no more alarms. The rest of the day passed uneventfully, and the night, too.

Next day the routine of the ship went on uninterruptedly. The St. Frank's fellows, much to their disgust, were compelled to attend lessons under Mr. Wilkes. The girls were more patient.

During this time the Pioneer had progressed ever northwards, a slow cruise, but a sure one. There had been no more encounters with mysterious ice masses; she was on her proper course, and Lord Dorriamore, for one, was filled with jubilation.

"By gad, Lee, our theories are proving right!" he declared in the smoking-room. "Except for that one little mishap—which may never occur again—the cruise has been as safe as an Atlantic crossing."

"It's not over yet, Dorrie," said Lee, smiling.

"I'm convinced that we shall succeed—beyond all our dreams," replied Lord Dorriamore. "Manners agrees with me, and so does Williams. According to our calculations, we're not such a great distance away from our destination now."

"The one drawback to this kind of travel is, of course, the impossibility of making observations," put in Sir Hobart. "Even the compass is an unreliable instrument in this zone. But we have other instruments aboard, uncannily accurate, which enable us to maintain our true course."

"Before long, we're going to put the thing to the test," said Dorrie, his eyes gleaming. "We've charted the whole cruise out, and we calculate that we're not more than two hundred miles from that Arctic mountain range which cuts off the Oasis of Northestria. Now, if we bore a hole through the ice, and the weather happens to be clear, those mountains should be just visible in the distance. And, if we can prove that we have actually kept to our course, it will be a triumph for all concerned."

"But this time we'll come to the surface after the boys and girls are soundly asleep for the night," said Sir Hobart dryly.

It was some time after midnight that the experiment was made, when all the young passengers were soundly asleep. Once again the Pioneer rested her inverted toboggans against the surface ice; the boring apparatus was brought into service; the conning-tower was raised.

Lord Dorrimore, who was the first out, gave a great shout of satisfaction. He found himself looking across a great Arctic waste—and apparently endless vista of snow and ice.

"Come on, Lee!" yelled Dorrie excitedly. "By the Lord Harry! This is better!"

Nelson Lee and Sir Hobart Manners and Captain Williams joined him. There was no blizzard now. The air was perfectly calm and crystal clear. Low down on the horizon the sun was shining dazzlingly, and overhead the sky was of a clear, transparent blue. It was good to feel the intense crispness of that icy atmosphere.

"Look over there!" exclaimed Dorrie exultantly. "Gad, Manners, doesn't it make your heart jump?"

He was pointing to a vague, shadowy outline against the distant horizon—a vast range of mighty mountains, raising their peaks tens of thousands of feet into the air; and the summits of those peaks were hidden in mysterious mists.

"The Northestrian range!" said Nelson Lee, nodding.

"This means success!" shouted Sir Hobart, his voice throbbing. "Our instruments have kept us true on our course. We travelled under the ice, but we're not a mile off our true route! It's amazing, considering that this is the first attempt at any such voyage!"

"A triumph, Sir Hobart!" said Captain Williams warmly.

Lord Dorrimore pointed.

"Beyond that range lies the warm Oasis of Northestria, with its quaint peoples," he said impressively. "Our job is to get beyond that range—to the succour of Princess Mercia."

"And if that proves impossible, our voyage will still be a success," said Sir Hobart. "For, by skirting this mountainous coastline, we continue under the ice until we finally reached the Bering Sea. Thus the Northern Route will be opened for commercial traffic."

"To blazes with commercial traffic!" said Dorrie bluntly. "You're a business man,

Manners, and I'm not. I'm all for this adventure. On—to Northestria!"

The submarine dived again, then proceeded northwards once more—getting ever nearer and nearer to that vast range of impassable peaks.

BYOND those mist-shrouded mountains a grim drama was beginning.

In all Northestria, with its hundreds of miles of fair countryside, its many fair-sized towns and its innumerable villages, the populace was stricken with horror and fear.

Throughout the land the proclamations had been posted.

Northestria's young prince, the fair princess and Ethelbert the Red, the deposed regent, were to be burned at the stake.

Once again had Cedric the Cruel given the oppressed people an example of his ruthlessness.

There had been many executions in Northestria during these past grievous months. Many overlords and other loyalists had been publicly beheaded. Northestria, under the brutal rule of Cedric, had become numbed by the repeated atrocities.

And now—this proclamation!

The people were stunned. Any attempt at a rising was impossible, for Cedric's grip on the land was like a stranglehold. Dunstane, the capital, and every town of importance, had its newly erected fortress and its garrison of Gothland soldiers. Every village was patrolled daily by Cedric's ruthless guards.

If an insurrection occurred in any district, it was quelled in an hour; it was nipped in the bud by the summary execution of the ringleaders. Hundreds of unfortunate men had been put to death for the mere murmuring of half a dozen incautious words. The Northestrians, learning these lessons, were a people subdued.

Princess Mercia's contemptuous spurning of Cedric the Cruel had aroused his worst passions. If he could not have her for his queen, so he would have the satisfaction of seeing her burnt at the stake!

This exhibition of his power, before all Dunstane, would set the seal on his absolute monarchy. With the Northestrian Royal Family destroyed, the people would know that all hope was gone, and they would lie down meekly at the lash of the oppressor.

So the burnings were dictated as much for diplomatic reasons as for Cedric's own brutal satisfaction.

On the fourth day after Cedric's voyage to Gothland, an impressive expedition set out across the lake. A dozen of Cedric's greatest galleys, propelled by Northestrian slaves, went forth to take the prisoners from the Gunmarc fortress.

With a lavish display of Cedric's power, with pomp and ceremony, the prisoners were escorted from the fortress to the lake shore. They were surrounded by hundreds of men in chain-mail and armour.

And so the exiles returned to Northestria.

But there was no rejoicing over their coming—only fear. Thousands of the Dunstane townspeople lined the lake shore when the fleet of galleys came in. There was no demonstration when the prisoners were brought ashore; for the people were afraid to demonstrate. Even so much as one cheer might result in the wholesale massacre of the crowd.

Escorted by hundreds of soldiers, the prisoners were contemptuously paraded through the principal streets of the town, and then taken out to Athelstone Castle, just beyond the limits of the capital, to languish in noisome cells until the hour of the execution.

Intensive preparations were afoot for the "celebrations."

Dunstane itself did not actually come down to the white-sanded beach of the lake. The quaint city, surrounded by its towering walls, stood on the rising ground overlooking the inland sea. Stretching from these city walls, down to the water, were picturesque slopes, with little clumps of woodland here and there.

On these grassy slopes three great stakes had been erected, and nearby were vast piles of wood. It was a fitting arena for such a grim drama. For on those slopes, and all round about, tens of thousands of spectators could stand by and watch. Cedric the Cruel was determined that every inhabitant of Dunstane should be there—and people from the inland towns, too. If morbid curiosity did not bring them, then they would be forced.

"'Tis well, good Guntha!" vowed Cedric, as he inspected the scene on the eve of the executions. "The burning of these flowers of Northestrian nobility will subdue the populace for ever!"

The king's companion was frowning.

"Art sure 'tis a wise step, your Majesty?" he asked gravely.

"Wise? By my bones!" said Cedric. "What words are these, from thou, Guntha?"

The king was surprised. Guntha the Crafty was, next to Cedric, the most powerful overlord of all Gothland. His soldiers and his serfs numbered tens of thousands. His riches were tremendous. He was a man nearly as big as Cedric, and every bit as ruthless. He was the king's right-hand man, and had been throughout the campaign. Now that Northestria had been subdued, Guntha was the commander-in-chief of all Cedric's armies.

"Methinks, noble Cedric, that this act verges upon rashness," said Guntha the Crafty. "'Tis true that these dogs of Northestrians are subdued; but is the time yet ripe for the execution of the Royal Family? Burn them, aye! But is it wise to burn them so soon after the conquest of the country?"

Cedric's face became ugly in its cruelty.

"'Twill be an object lesson that these Northestrian rats will never forget!" he de-

clared. "Death to all those who plot against me, Guntha! That is my decree! Think ye that the people will rise? Pah! Their spirit has been broken, and these burnings will shatter it beyond all repair! Northestria shall see, my good Guntha, that its new king is a man of iron!"

CHAPTER 10.

Modern Magic!

LORD DORRIMORE, flushed of face, eager as a schoolboy, turned his excited eyes upon the group of men who were standing just outside the Pioneer's strange conning-tower, which protruded from the ice.

"Well, what do you think of this for a piece of perfect navigation? Right on the very spot!"

"Congratulations, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee, smiling.

"Naturally, we're all very pleased," said Sir Hobart Manners cautiously. "Notwithstanding the fact that this cruise was undertaken beneath the sea, we have arrived at the very spot we intended. It is really a triumph for the uncannily accurate scientific instruments with which this submarine is fitted."

"You're too modest, old man," said Lord Dorrimore. "It is your submarine which deserves most of the honours. Well, here we are!"

He waved his hand. They were standing on the ice, within a kind of deep bay, close inshore. Not half a mile away the snow-covered mountains rose almost sheer. Their summits were lost in the vague mists of the upper air. The coastline, on either hand, was just the same—a vast mass of mountains which towered into the blue of the sky.

"Yes, we're here," said Captain Williams. "And I understand, sir, that this queer land of Northestria lies beyond these mountains."

"Exactly."

"Yet it seems to me that we're just as far from that land as ever," went on the captain. "I've seen a few impassable barriers in my time, but this beats everything! Climbing Mount Everest is child's play compared with these beauties!"

"They couldn't be climbed," replied Dorrie. "That's out of the question. And I'm not proposing that we should climb them, either. Look over there, Lee," he went on, pointing. "Do you recognise that black cavity?"

"It is the entrance to the great tunnel which leads through these mountains into the oasis," replied Lee, nodding. "I recognised the spot as soon as we came out into the open, Dorrie."

"Well, we're all getting back into the old tub," said his lordship. "We'll creep on as far as we can—and, if possible, get right into that cavern entrance. After that, we'll start doing things."

Captain Williams was looking puzzled.

"You say that you came through a tunnel?" he asked. "But how could you? It's frozen solid—the entrance is, at all events."

"I dare say it's frozen solid down half its length," replied Lord Dorrimore. "But you see, Williams, we were lucky. As I have told you before, our entry into the oasis was more or less accidental. You remember how our airship was tossed by the blizzards and air currents, and practically pitchforked into the calm air? Well, that sort of thing couldn't be attempted again. It would be plain suicide. And when we got out of the oasis, it was by luck, too. There's a tremendous geyser in this very bay, and it operates once in about thirty years. That geyser happened to operate while we were here, and it thawed all this water and caused a flow through the tunnel. That's how we got out."

"But there's no geyser now," said Sir Hobart.

"And won't be for nearly thirty years," replied Dorrie. "So I've come prepared this time. No chance work—no luck. If we get into the oasis, we shall get in by scientific methods."

SOME hours later, the Pioneer had crept farther into the bay, and when she came to the surface again she was actually within that vast cavern entrance. The frozen tunnel lay directly ahead.

This time the boys were allowed to come out to have a look round. They were all very excited and very mystified. They found themselves in the entrance of a gigantic cave, the entrance to which was frozen solid. How were they to penetrate through this into the heart of the mountains beyond?

"Dorrie's got something up his sleeve, the bounder!" said Nipper. "He wouldn't be so confident otherwise. For the life of me, I can't understand how he means to do the trick—but I've never seen a man more certain."

Lord Dorrimore, with Captain Williams, and with two or three keen-faced young men—special officers of the Pioneer—stood some distance away, inspecting the ice. He and his companions were talking earnestly.

"I'm convinced it can be done," Dorrie was saying. "And once this passage is opened, there may be some way of keeping it open. Not that that matters to us now. Our object is to get into the oasis. I suppose you're all ready to begin operations as soon as I give the word, Blair?"

"Waiting for you, sir," said one of the young men.

"Good! There's no reason why we shouldn't start immediately."

"But how do you know that this tunnel will be big enough to accommodate the Pioneer?" asked Captain Williams. "We shall be in a pretty nasty pickle, Lord Dorrimore, if we get stuck half-way!"



Jokes from readers wanted for this feature! If you know a good rib-tickler, send it along now. A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke; pocket wallets, penknives and bumper books are also offered as prizes. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

A TACTICAL ERROR.

Footballer (to referee, who has just ordered off one of the players): "Now you've bin and gorn and done it! You've ordered off the bloke what owns the ball!"

(T. Wilson, Invermere, Frinton-on-Sea, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

THE RIGHT WRONG.

The schoolmaster dictated this sentence and told the boys to punctuate it:

"In came the soldier, on his face a fierce look, on his feet his sandals, on his back his armour, shouting aloud his war cry."

The dunce wrote: "In came the soldier on his face, a fierce look on his feet, his sandals on his back, his armour shouting aloud his war cry."

(L. King, 15, Brook Street, Woodbridge, Suffolk, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

HE WASN'T FRIGHTENED.

Employer: "Well, what did Mr. Jones say when you asked him for the money?"

Office Boy: "He said if I ever went near his place again he'd break every bone in my body."

Employer (indignantly): "Did he? Then just go back and tell him he's made a mistake if he thinks violence will frighten me!"

(A. O'Brien, P.O. Box 679, East London, South Africa, has been awarded a book.)

DISTRESSING.

Burly Bill: "Got a penny on yer, mate?"

Little Man: "C-c-certainly. But what do you want with a penny?"

Burly Bill: "Me and my mate wants to toss up to decide which of us has yer watch and which yer money."

(J. Ware, The Corner Stores, Holders Hill Road, Mill Hill, N.W.7, has been awarded a penknife.)

A WASH-OUT.

"Do you like your new school?" inquired an interested lady.

"No," replied Johnny. "They made me wash my face, and when I went home the dog bit me because he didn't know me."

(T. Hutchinson, Box 4609, Johannesburg, South Africa, has been awarded a book.)

"We shall have to take the chance—and it's not much of a chance, at that," replied his lordship. "I've been through this tunnel before, and it's huge. The water is deep, the roof is high, the walls are wide. I'm pretty sure that a much larger ship than this could get through."

He was bubbling with impatience, and he walked away to give further instructions.

"I dare say you youngsters are wondering how we're going to manage it, eh?" chuckled Dorrie, as he passed a group of the boys and girls. "All right! You'll soon see. The Pioneer is full of surprises!"

THE surprise which came next, however, was a staggerer.

Everybody was ordered back into the vessel, and once again the conning-tower was withdrawn, the watertight door was sealed, and the Pioneer lurked just under the surface of the ice.

To penetrate farther into the cave was out of the question, for tests had proved that the water was not more than ten or fifteen fathoms deep, and it was certain to be shallower in the tunnel proper.

The St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls, crowding in the saloon and lounges, were soon aware of a strange, roaring noise. It was unlike anything they had heard before. Then they were astounded to feel the Pioneer rising, and from overhead came the thudding and crashing of the ice.

The submarine was breaking through in her entirety—until, indeed, she was in her normal surface-cruising position.

The watertight doors were opened, and when the boys crowded out on the promenade deck they found the ship floating peacefully amid the shattered ice. Dark gaps of water were showing here and there, and immense chunks of ice were butting dully against the ship's sides.

"But how was it done?" gasped Handforth.

"From now onwards, my son, we travel on the surface," said Lord Dorrimore. "And you'll soon see how it was done. Our special ice-annihilating apparatus works far better when the old tub is on the surface. If we don't get through this tunnel as easily as a hot knife melts through butter, you can call me a cross-eyed Dutchman!"

"You are a bounder, Dorrie!" protested Nipper. "You might tell us how you propose to work this miracle!"

"You're right—a modern miracle," said Lord Dorrimore. "And if it succeeds we shall get through into the Middle Ages! Rather unique, eh? Well, there's no mystery about it. Most of you youngsters have heard that flame-throwers were used in the Great War, eh?"

"Of course, Dorrie."

"And you know how an oxy-acetylene flame will cut through the toughest steel," continued his lordship. "Well, right in the

TOMMY WAS RIGHT.

The teacher was explaining miracles.

"Tommy," he said, "if a man fell from the top of a skyscraper, and then climbed up and did it again, what would you call it?"

"A bad habit, sir," said Tommy.

(*C. Thackeray, 101, Esselen Street, Pretoria, S. Africa, has been awarded a book.*)

A PLEASANT PASTIME.

Dentist: "Why do you wish to have this tooth I've pulled out, my lad?"

Boy: "I want it take it home, cram sugar into it, and watch it ache."

(*H. Harrison, 3, Nobles Yard, Woodhouse Street, Leicester, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

FORCE OF HABIT.

Drowning man: "Quick! Throw me a life-belt!"

Rescuer (a tailor): "Yes, sir. What size round the waist?"

(*J. Dunn, 490, Crown Street, Glasgow, C.5, has been awarded a penknife.*)

A SAD FATE.

Bertie was very fond of dates, and his mother was afraid he would make himself ill.

"Do you know what will happen to you if you eat so many dates?" she asked.



"Oh, mummy, will I turn into a calendar?" asked Bertie, in a scared voice.

(*J. Short, 87, Overton Road, Hillsborough, Sheffield, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

UNCERTAIN.

Tommy's father had been away on business, and when he returned home the first person he met was his young son.

"Well, Billy," he said, "have you been a good boy in my absence?"

A thoughtful look came over the boy's face. "Well, daddy," he replied, "fair, with bright intervals."

(*F. Higon, Rose Cottage, Tissington, near Ashbourne, Derbyshire, has been awarded a penknife.*)

BOW-WOW!

Jimmy Smith was reading aloud to the class when he came to a word he did not know.

"Barque," prompted the teacher. Jimmy looked confused. "Barque, Jimmy," then teacher repeated impatiently.

Jimmy glanced nervously at his class-mates, and then cried out: "Bow-wow!"

(*Miss I. Stratford, 54, Cambridge Road, King William's Town, South Africa, has been awarded a book.*)

bows of this ship there are two searchlights, one on either side of the control-room. Now, above these searchlights there are also two metal arms, as it were, which can be telescoped outwards, and worked from inside. These telescopic arms are really gas-jets."

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"The gas is not oxy-acetylene, but something far more powerful—something of quite a different nature, since the flames can be thrown for a considerable distance," went on Dorrie. "And these flames are hot enough to melt steel. What do you suppose this ice is going to do when it tries conclusions with such flames?"

"By Jove! It sounds all right," said Nipper eagerly.

"It is all right, too," nodded Dorrie. "The way those flames boiled the water at our bows just now was staggering—and the way they cut through the surface ice was a real eye-opener."

There was a big chorus of excited comment.

"And was it your idea, Dorrie, to do all this?" asked Travers.

"It was my idea to fit out this expedition, but Sir Hobart and several other experts helped me with all the planning," replied Dorrie. "We were at it for months, young 'uns, before this trip commenced. We mapped things out very thoroughly—and we made all sorts of experiments, too. There was nothing hurried about the preparations."

"And supposing we get through, sir?" asked Handforth breathlessly.

"Perhaps we shall be in time to be of some assistance to Princess Mercia and her down-trodden people," replied Dorrie, his eyes eager. "But I'm looking beyond that. I'm dreaming of a great new Port of Northestria. This will be the main entrance, and by scientific methods it will be quite possible to keep the water free for shipping. Hallo! We're making a start!"

A devastating roar had suddenly commenced, and the great cavern was filled with a lurid, greenish-violet light. The boys and girls, crowding on the deck, stared in wonder.

Two great flames, one on either side of the Pioneer's bows, played upon the ice ahead. They stretched for many yards, but it was difficult to see the actual flames owing to the dense clouds of steam which arose, and which soon enveloped the entire cavern, like the exhaust from a giant boiler. The greenish-violet glare turned the gloom into a dazzling brilliance. The searchlights were almost unnecessary.

"Look! We're moving!" yelled one of the Removites.

"Good gad!" breathed Archie Glenthorne. "So we absolutely are! The old engines are on the job!"

It was true.

Those powerful flames, playing upon the ice, had a magical effect. The ice melted into

water and steam at the first touch of the flame. Ice ten or twelve feet thick just vanished. And the Pioneer, under perfect control, moved forward into that black, mysterious tunnel.

CHAPTER 11.

Northestria!

HOURS passed—hours of enthralled wonder for the boys and girls.

Never once had the Pioneer faltered. Slowly but continuously she moved forward along the tunnel which cut clean under the great mountain range. The flame-throwers were working perfectly, melting the ice in preparation for the vessel's passage.

Occasionally there was an anxious moment. For the tunnel walls would close in, and only by the narrowest margin did the Pioneer slide through. The possibility that one of these "narrows" would prove too small for the vessel's passage was an ever-present source of anxiety.

Some pretence was made of keeping up the ordinary routine of the ship. Meals were served at the ordinary times, but nobody felt like eating. Too much depended upon this daring experiment.

Would the Pioneer get through?

Everybody had grown accustomed to the continuous roaring of the flame-throwers by now. On deck the effect was eerie as the greenish-violet light from the bows mingled with the dense masses of steam which enveloped the submarine from stem to stern.

The heat from those flames was such that the entire atmosphere was warmed. It was possible to walk about the deck without any special protective clothing. And as the Pioneer penetrated deeper and deeper into the tunnel, so the warmth increased.

"We're making better progress, Dorrie," remarked Nelson Lee, as he met Lord Dorri-more on the small forward deck.

"Man alive, we're going at double the speed!" exclaimed Dorrie enthusiastically. "Don't you know? The ice is thinning amazingly. It's not more than three or four feet thick here, and young Blair reckons that there'll be no ice at all after another mile."

"That's quite understandable," nodded Lee. "The farther we penetrate, the farther we get away from the Arctic influence. Melting the ice at the entrance was the real test."

"And we've done that," gloated Dorrie. "By the Lord Harry, we're as good as through!"

Nelson Lee caught some of his enthusiasm.

"I'm beginning to think you're right, old man," he said, with a deep breath. "By James, what an achievement!"

Their theories proved correct. For presently the flame-throwers were no longer

Excitedly Nipper & Co. plunged into the water and swam ashore. Would they be in time to rescue the fair Princess Mercia and her unfortunate companions from a terrible death?



needed. The ice was so thin that the vessel herself could smash through it without feeling any effect.

And here the tunnel was wide and deep and lofty. The submarine cruised on cautiously, her powerful searchlights illuminating the tunnel for a great distance ahead.

The boys and girls were clustered on the decks, watching with bated breath. They could talk now—and they could see. There were no longer clouds of steam or that devastating roar.

"We're doing it, you chaps!" exclaimed Handforth. "By George! How long do you think it'll be before we get right through?"

"Goodness only knows!" said Nipper. "I had a word with Dorrie five minutes ago, and he says that we might get through within two or three hours."

"Hours!" ejaculated Fullwood. "I thought we should take a day!"

"The distance isn't so far, and we're making pretty good speed," said Nipper. "Don't forget that this tunnel cuts clean through, almost in a straight line. I say, there's practically no ice at all now—and the air is a lot warmer."

"What's the time?" asked Church wonderingly. "I've lost all count."

"Blow the time!" replied Handforth. "What does it matter? I'm not going below until we're through—until we're in Northestria!"

ONE hour—two hours—three hours! Still the Pioneer cruised on through that black and forbidding tunnel which seemed everlasting. By now a great change had come about. The last vestige of ice had vanished. The waters were clear—and comparatively warm. The air was pleasantly mild, and such things as overcoats and mufflers were discarded. As the vessel neared the inner end of the tunnel, so the conditions rapidly changed.

The success of this feat was a marvel of modern science. Just as an aeroplane can cover a hundred miles of jungle that would take many weeks to cover on foot, so the Pioneer had forced a way through that ice by means of the flame-throwers. And now the main problems of the voyage were over.

An excited cheer, long and husky, went up when a gleam of pale light appeared in the distance—far along the tunnel. A gentle curve had been negotiated, and that pale light was clear to all.

"It's the exit!" shouted Dorrie. "Great Scott, Lee! Do you see it? We're nearly through!"

"It ought to be plain-sailing now, Dorrie," smiled Nelson Lee. "As we know from our former experiences, this end of the tunnel is wide and lofty."

The boys and girls cheered madly when they saw. Members of the crew—some neglecting their duties—hurried on deck and

joined in the general tumult. It was indeed a moment for rejoicing.

Another half-hour—every minute of which seemed like an age—and then, at long last, the Pioneer's bows nosed out of the rocks, and overhead there was the clear air.

On either side rose precipitous masses of rock. The submarine was in a great gorge, and the channel of water, like a river, wended its way through the rocky pass.

"But it's daylight!" ejaculated Captain Williams, who was on the fo'ard deck with Lee and Dorrie.

"Not daylight, captain," replied Lee. "This is a false light that you see. It is the reflection of the vast volcanic fires which form an almost complete ring round the oasis."

"Amazing!" muttered the submarine commander.

"It is, indeed," agreed Lee. "The craters themselves cannot be seen, for they are eternally enshrouded in dense mists, tens of thousands of feet above. These mists extend over the entire oasis like a ceiling—indeed, a false sky. And thus the light is reflected down, to all intents and purposes as good as daylight itself."

They stared up, marvelling. The sky looked very much like any ordinary sky, except that it was not blue. The entire vault of the heavens consisted of misty clouds.

Everybody was greatly excited. They were through—they were actually in Northestria! The apparently impossible had been accomplished.

The Pioneer was now moving at a faster rate down the wide, imposing gorge.

On either side were monstrous, overpowering cliffs, which rose into the mists above, stretching for untold thousands of feet. Amid such surroundings, the Pioneer looked a tiny toy vessel.

The grandeur of the scene was overpowering. And now that the first excitement was over, the watchers on the decks were silent—awed by the mighty work of Nature.

There was no fair landscape within view; only these great walls of rock. The awe-inspiring masses of crag were widening, however; the gorge itself was spreading out, and when the Pioneer took a turn round a frowning promontory of rock, shouts of fresh excitement went up.

For now, in the distance, rolling tracts of green country could be seen—meadows, forests, hills and valleys. The end of the gorge had been reached, and the submarine was now cruising out into the open waters of a great lake which stretched away like a veritable inland sea.

For hundreds of miles could be seen the fair countryside of Northestria, the horizon dim and distant. When the vessel had left the gorge well behind, and was cruising along parallel with the lake shore, those on the decks could see the towering mountains in the far distance, hemming in the entire landscape—north, south, east and west.

Before them stretched this gem of the Arctic—this astounding little country, with its equable temperature, its almost sub-tropical vegetation.

Now the red roofs of villages and towns were visible amongst the trees, whilst occasionally a forbidding feudal castle raised its battlements and towers on a hillside.

"This is incredible!" said Captain Williams huskily.

"That's what we first thought, sir," said Nipper, who was by his side. "But we've been here before—we know Northestria, and we know the people. Just like England of medieval times. You'll get a lot more surprises yet."

"I doubt if I can be more surprised than I am at this moment," declared the captain.

Lord Dorrimore was like a pleased child. He prattled about his future plans—how Northestria would be converted into the world's most wonderful winter resort. There was every reason for Dorrie to believe that his dream would, indeed, come true.

THEN came a little fresh excitement.

So far, no human figures had been seen, although curls of smoke in the distance, inland, spoke eloquently of life. But now, as the Pioneer cruised slowly past a little promontory, a figure came into view on the grassy headland. For some moments the figure stood still; then, dancing madly, it commenced waving its arms.

"Hallo! We've given that fellow a fright!" grinned Handforth. "I wonder—I say! Look at him! He's running down to the beach now!"

Lord Dorrimore, who was with Nelson Lee, was levelling a pair of powerful binoculars, and he suddenly uttered an ejaculation.

"Gad! I know the man!" he exclaimed. "I'm hanged if it isn't Wynwed, the fellow who used to be the captain of the princess' bodyguard!"

Nelson Lee took a look, too.

"You're right," he said quickly. "There's no mistaking that short, stoutish figure. I shall be quite pleased to shake Wynwed the Jovial by the hand. A stout fellow, Dorrie—in more senses than one. But I am afraid he has lost his high station in life. He is no longer dressed in the uniform of the Royal Bodyguard, but in rags and tatters."

"Sure enough proof that Ethelbert's appeal was genuine," said Dorrie grimly. "Those dirty Gothlanders must have made some changes in this country, Lee! I'm hanged if that fellow isn't plunging into the water!" he added suddenly. "Surely he isn't trying to swim out to us?"

At Dorrie's orders, the Pioneer changed her course slightly, and edged nearer and nearer to the shore. Her engines were now stopped, and she glided smoothly.

The distance was not great, and Handforth, cupping his hands, leaned over the rail.

"Ahoy, there, Wynwed!" he bawled. "How goes it, thou varlet?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Northestrian, who was now up to his waist in water, waved a frantic hand.

"By the bald scalp of Joseph!" came his ejaculation. "'Tis none other than Handforth the Bold!"

"Once seen, never forgotten!" grinned Travers.

"Stay there, Wynwed—we'll send a boat for you!" shouted Lord Dorrimore.

"By my bones! 'Tis the voice of Dorrimore the Brave!" came Wynwed's shout. "I wait not for the boat!"

He plunged in excitedly and commenced swimming; and such were his efforts that he was very soon alongside the submarine. Willing hands grasped at him, and he was hauled aboard.

He now proved to be a big, red-faced, happy-looking man. But there could be no mistaking the lines under his eyes or the terror which lurked at the back of them.

"Well, well!" said Dorrie as he wrung Wynwed's hand. "Well met again, old friend!"

Wynwed, gasping for breath, looked at Dorrie very much as a faithful dog might look at its master.

"By the soul of Calwold! 'Tis no dream, then!" he panted. "It is truly thine own self, Dorrimore the Brave! The god of St. Attalus must have sent thee—for, beshrew me, Northestria needs help as it never needed it before!"

"That is why we are here, good Wynwed," said Dorrie. "We know of your country's danger."

"We've come to help!" said Handforth eagerly. "We're all here to help, Wynwed, old man!"

"Rather!" shouted the others.

"But this is a miracle!" gasped Wynwed, staring. "How couldn't thou know? Thou art truly magicians in that great world beyond!"

"There's no magic in this," said Nelson Lee. "The explanation is quite simple."

"Marry, 'tis good to see ye again, Lee of the Lionheart!" said Wynwed gladly. "Perchance my country can yet be saved. But how didst know?"

"We knew through the ingenuity of Ethelbert the Red," replied Dorrie.

And he explained how that message, in the earthenware bottle, had been picked up many months earlier.

"Thou art a man, indeed, to hurry to our aid," said Wynwed fervently. "Northestria is conquered by the dogs of Gothlanders. They over-run us like vermin. They murder and massacre, and the people are no better than slaves."

"You seem to have met with bad times, old friend."

"No longer am I a soldier," growled Wynwed. "I am but a serf under Guntha the Crafty. Had I been seen as I signalled to this wondrous ship, I should have been put to death. But not many soldiers remain in

this quiet part of the country. All have gone to Dunstane, for the hideous celebration."

"What hideous celebration is that?" asked Nelson Lee. "Another public execution, organised by this new ruler?"

"A foul crime, in sooth!" vowed Wynwed fiercely. "My fair princess, whom it was my privilege to serve, is in peril!"

"Look here, Wynwed, you're a serf no longer—you're one of us," said Dorrie briskly. "You're safe on this ship, and you're with friends. Out with it! What's the trouble in Dunstane? Perhaps we can do something to spoil Cedric's game."

Wynwed almost jumped.

"Beshrew me for an ignorant dog!" he panted. "In my excitement, I forget that thy ship, with its marvels, can travel with the speed of a bird on the wing! Methinks ye can be in time!"

"In time for what?" asked Lee.

"This very day—this very hour—the Princess Mercia, by Cedric's decree, is being burnt at the stake!" said Wynwed tragically.

CHAPTER 12.

Outside Dunstane.

"**B**URNT at the stake!"

"Good heavens!"

"That lovely girl—tortured like that!" exclaimed Dorrimore savagely. "It's hideous!"

"Ay, good Dorrimore the Brave, thou hast used the right word!" said Wynwed. "And young Prince Oswy is also to die—and Ethelbert the Red! For full four days, Northestria has been ringing with the tragic news!"

Handforth grabbed Wynwed fiercely.

"Did you say that they're to be burnt at the stake within the hour?" he asked. "Where? At Dunstane? We've got to get there and stop this horrible thing! Why didn't the people rise? Why didn't they do something to—"

"Thou art young, good Handforth—and as impulsive and as reckless as of old," interrupted Wynwed sadly. "Think ye that the people of Northestria can rise? Terrible changes have taken place since ye were last here. I vow my country is under the heel of the tyrant."

Nelson Lee was wasting no time. Talking quickly with Lord Dorrimore, a decision was made.

"Everybody below!" ordered Dorrie crisply. "We're going to dive!"

"But why, sir?" shouted Handforth. "Can't we go quicker on the surface? Every minute is of importance—"

"It is more important that our approach should not be seen," said Nelson Lee. "If these Gothlanders know of our arrival—if they witness our approach from afar—they are likely to hurry the executions."

"By George! That's true!" admitted Handforth breathlessly.

"So far, we seem to have escaped notice—except by Wynwed," continued Lee. "And

that can be understood, because most of Cedric's soldiers are in the capital, attending this diabolical affair. Now then—everybody get below, please!"

"But what is this?" asked Wynwed, bewildered.

"You'll understand soon, old man," said Nipper, taking his arm. "This ship is going to dive under the surface of the lake."

"By the bones of Offa!" gasped Wynwed. "Ye mean that the vessel sinketh?"

"It sinketh, but not in the way you think," replied Nipper. "We can travel just as easily under the water as on the surface."

"'Tis devil's work, i'faith!" muttered Wynwed, awed. "I vow I am affrighted!"

The decks were cleared within two or three minutes, the watertight doors were closed, and the Pioneer dipped gracefully beneath the surface. Only a ripple remained to show her position—and that ripple would mean nothing to the people of Northestria.

The ripple itself was caused by the slim periscope which had been projected upwards, beyond the surface. A periscope was now necessary, so that the commander would know his exact position.

At full speed the submarine sped up the lake towards Dunstane, between fifty and sixty miles distant.

If Wynwed's story was true—that this was the exact hour—then the rescue would be impossible. But Wynwed was by no means certain of the time, and there was an excellent chance that the submarine would arrive before the "ceremony."

Fraught with anxiety as Wynwed was, he nevertheless found time to marvel at the luxuries of the Pioneer's saloon—and at the wondrous electric lights, the like of which he had never before seen. The people of Northestria had not advanced since the time of the Middle Ages. Cut off from the rest of the world, they had remained practically dormant throughout the centuries.

"Do you know the reason for Cedric's ruthless decree?" asked Lee.

"'Tis said in the proclamations that Ethelbert the Red and Princess Mercia and Prince Oswy have acted traitorously towards the new king," replied Wynwed. "None know more."

"But we can guess," said Lee. "Cedric must have discovered, by some means, that Ethelbert was sending out those messages. And, as a punishment, he has passed this death sentence."

"Can't we get up more speed?" asked Dorrie impatiently. "There are no obstructions in the lake—the water's deep. We can go all out!"

"We're going all out now, old man," said Lee. "All we can do is hope for the best. And if our first act on our return to Northestria is to rescue the prince and princess, we shall do well."

The St. Frank's fellows, of course, were in a fever of impatience. They wanted to help—and yet they felt helpless.

With the submarine cruising under the surface, everybody seemed bottled up. They all wanted to gaze upon the countryside as they

passed along, but it was far better that the vessel should remain hidden until the last possible moment.

The news that Wynwed had imparted was terrible enough. And it proved conclusively how justified Lord Dorrimore was in sending out this rescue expedition. It proved, too, the urgency of Northestria's need. Ethelbert the Red had not exaggerated.

OUTSIDE Dunstane, on the grassy slopes of the lake, a brave and glittering spectacle was being staged.

Banners and flags were flying, and the soldiers, in their picturesque uniforms,

COMING NEXT WEDNESDAY



formed a gay picture. One might have thought that some jollification was toward. It pleased Cedric the Cruel's heart to treat this triple execution as though it were an occasion for rejoicing.

A great staging had been erected, facing the execution ground, and in the centre of it was an open-air throne, upon which sat Cedric in all his glory.

Round about, a picture of dazzling splendour, were the lords and ladies of the Court of Dunstane. They were Gothlanders all, these lords and ladies—for Northestria was now ruled entirely by the cruel people from the other side of the lake. Yet it is certain that many of those ladies would have preferred to stay away. The women of Gothland were not so gentle as their Northestrian

neighbours, but they were certainly not as brutal as their menfolk. But they were here by order of Cedric, and no man or woman, noble or otherwise, would dare to disobey his will.

Crowding on the grassy slopes were the townsfolk of Dunstane, swelled into an enormous concourse of people from the neighbouring towns. It was, indeed, the greatest multitude that had ever been congregated in one spot in this country. Cedric was determined that half Northestria should witness the burning of Princess Mercia.

The crowds stood silent and fearful. Many hundreds, indeed, were sobbing, particularly

From the walls of Dunstane now came a great cavalcade of soldiers, their armour gleaming, their lances decked with gay ribbons. Between them walked Princess Mercia, Prince Oswy and Ethelbert the Red.

The hour of execution was at hand.

A great murmur went up from the concourse as the three figures were seen. Men and women sprang to their feet. Some would have shouted, but the Gothland soldiers pressed nearer, snapping out sharp commands for silence.

Cedric was scornful of the Northestrian people. Yet Guntha the Crafty was not far wrong in his fears. Even then it was a matter of touch and go. If there had been one among that crowd with courage to lead the rest, there would have been a terrible riot in which the multitude would have got out of hand and overwhelmed the king and his nobles—but not before a horrible massacre resulting in the loss of hundreds of lives.

Guntha was clearly uneasy, but he looked relieved when he saw that the soldiers were successful in their attempts to maintain order. The prisoners were led right up to the stakes. Soldiers came and bound them. Each was placed on a kind of platform, high up the stake. Then other soldiers sprang forward at the word of command and piled the faggots round.

An absolute silence now fell; for even the Gothlanders were awed by the ruthlessness of this scene.

Cedric the Cruel, leaving his "throne," swaggered with exaggerated step towards the stakes. A group of nobles had made as if to accompany him, but he waved them back. Alone he faced the central stake, to which the Princess Mercia was bound.

"Alas, fair one, I mourn to see ye in such desperate plight," said Cedric mockingly.

The young princess did not deign to reply; she only gazed upon Cedric with unutterable loathing. There was no fear in her eyes. She was defiant and brave to the last. Ethelbert the Red, on her left, was also defiant; and the young Prince Oswy, to his credit, maintained a stiff upper lip.

"For a woman, thou art wondrous unwilling to talk," sneered Cedric. "Yet will I make thee talk. I am constrained to be merciful. 'Tis not too late, even now, for this ceremony to be cancelled."

Still she was silent.

"I offer life," continued Cedric. "Consent to become my queen, fair Mercia, and thou shalt be released. Thy slightest wishes will be commands. The Court of Dunstane will grovel at thy fair feet."

A flush had come over Mercia's pale face, and at last she spoke.

"I will wed thee!" she said, almost in a whisper.

"Oh-ho! A change of tone!" shouted Cedric. "Did I hear ye aright, sweet one? Didst say, in all truth, that thou wilt wed me?"

"On one condition," said the princess.

"INVADERS OF NORTHESTRIA!"

By E. S. Brooks.

War declared in Northestria!

St. Frank's adventures clash with Cedric the Cruel in conflict!

The brutal Gothland invaders have been able to subdue the Northestrians—but they find Nelson Lee and his small "army" a mighty different proposition. Axes and lances and arrows are of little avail against such modern marvels as machine-guns, rifles—and tanks!

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the women. Others were kneeling in prayer.

In the open space facing the big staging stood the three great stakes, surrounded by piles of faggots. Soldiers were ready at hand to do the foul work when the right moment arrived.

A great fanfare of trumpets sounded, and Cedric the Cruel smiled evilly.

"Now for our amusement, good Guntha," he said.

Guntha the Crafty glanced at the sullen multitude.

"By my soul, I shall be glad when 'tis all over, your Majesty!" he muttered. "I like not the looks of these vermin."

"Pah! They shall learn obedience from me," retorted Cedric contemptuously.

"What now?" demanded Cedric, staring. "Bound to the stake, with torch-bearers at hand, ye would make conditions! By my bones, I am amused! State, then, thy condition, and I will give it my royal hearing!"

"Preserve the lives of my brother and Ethelbert the Red, and I will become thy queen," said Princess Mercia quietly. "Let them live here, in Northestria, in peace and——"

"Nay, thy condition is too severe!" interrupted Cedric, frowning. "Ethelbert the Red is a traitor, and he must die! Prince Oswy is a menace to the peace of Northestria, and he must die also. But if thou wouldst save thine own life, Mercia, the way is easy. But say the word——"

"Never!" cried Mercia, her voice trembling. "Thou Gothland dog! Beast and cur! Think ye that I care aught of my own life? I would rather die a thousand deaths than become thy queen! Let the torch-bearers apply the flame that will consume me!"

This time Cedric recoiled, his face working with savage fury.

"Marry, but methinks I was rash in offering thee marriage!" he snarled. "I should but have a shrew for a wife! 'Tis better that ye should die!" He turned, raising his arm imperiously. "Let the execution proceed!" he thundered. "Come, sluggards!"

He strode back to his "throne," enraged. And the Gothland soldiers, springing to the order, advanced upon the piles of faggots with their flaming torches.

CHAPTER 13.

The Rescue!

HANDFORTH was like a cat on hot bricks.

"I can't stand this much longer!" he muttered feverishly. "It's awful! When shall we get there? We can't see anything—we don't know anything!"

"Steady, old son," said Nipper gently. "We can be quite certain that Dorrie is doing all he can. And it's a jolly sensible wheeze to rise out of the lake at the last moment—right opposite the city."

"And what then?" asked Handforth. "What can we do? You can be jolly sure that Mr. Lee won't allow us to join in! Oh, no! Our lives are too precious!" he went on sarcastically. "We mustn't take any risks! We're made of sugar-candy, or something!"

"Don't yell, you ass!" murmured Travers, seizing his arm. "When the moment comes we'll be in the excitement. They can't stop us from jumping overboard and swimming ashore, can they?"

"By George!" breathed Handforth. "You—you mean——"

"I mean that we'll be in it—by hook or by crook!" declared Travers. "By Samson, I should like to see them keep us out of it!"

Irene Manners and some of the other girls, who were also in the lounge, had heard.

"But you boys mustn't do that!" said Irene. "There are plenty of men on this ship."

"For goodness' sake, Irene, don't spoil everything!" pleaded Handforth. "You don't seem to understand that Princess Mercia is in danger of being burnt at the stake! Perhaps she is dead already!"

"She's a lovely girl!" said Irene softly. "We know her, Doris, don't we? When we were here before we served as her ladies-in-waiting. I don't blame you, Ted, for wanting to do something. If I were a boy——"

"We're easing down!" interrupted Reggie Pitt excitedly. "I say, perhaps we've arrived!"

There was no doubt on the point a minute later. For the Pioneer was slowly and gracefully emerging from the lake. As she rose, the water splashed off her decks, and she floated so close inshore that the beach was hardly more than a stone's throw away.

Dorrie, dashing from the control-room, encountered Nelson Lee.

"Got my gun, old man?" panted his lordship.

"Here you are," said Lee crisply. "Ready?"

"Waiting for you!"

They raced up, and at the same moment the watertight doors were automatically opened—Dorrie having given orders previously. Everything would depend, now, upon speed.

The boys and girls were not to be foiled, and they were the first out on the decks. The scene which met their gaze, so near at hand, filled them with astonishment and awe—and fear.

On the grassy shore immediately facing them were congregated thousands of people, in the centre of which was a great staging filled with soldiers and nobles and ladies. Some little distance away stood three stakes, surrounded by great piles of faggots, and to which three figures were bound hand and foot.

Smoke was curling up from the faggots at the base of the stakes, and soldiers were moving away with flaring torches. If the rescuers had timed their arrival by pre-arranged plan, they could not have come at a more dramatic second. For the victim's of Cedric's cruelty were even then at the commencement of the torture.

"Come on," yelled Handforth. "Back up, St. Frank's!"

"Hurrah!"

"Boys—boys!" shouted Nelson Lee. "We have made our plans, and there is no need for you——"

He broke off, helpless. Every St. Frank's fellow on the boat, even including Willy Handforth and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon of the Third, had leapt into the lake. They were now swimming like fish for the shore.

"Good luck to 'em!" roared Dorrie. "It's the spirit I like to see. For heaven's sake, be quick, Lee! I doubt if we shall be in time, even now!"

Men were running about, and the girls were startled to see that machine-guns were being set up on the decks. Other guns, too.

Lord Dorrimore, Nelson Lee, Mr. Wilkes and a number of the submarine's officers and men were swimming ashore—and every man carried automatic pistols; weapons which would not be put out of action by their immersion in the water.

If the submarine's passengers were surprised at the sight they saw, the great concourse on those grassy slopes was no less astounded. Shouts were already going up—shouts of fear, and even terror.

These people had never before seen a submarine, and a vessel that could come up from the lake bottom in this fashion was terrifying. Most of the simple people were superstitious, and they stared, aghast.

While they were staring thus, dumb-founded, the rescuers were acting. The boys were the first ashore, and they ran like mad. Close behind them came the armed men. Swiftly they all raced up the slopes.

Lee and Dorrie knew how perilous this enterprise was—yet it stood a chance of success by reason of its very speed. It was a surprise attack, and, with any luck, it would succeed.

Cedric the Cruel and his surrounding officers and nobles sat as though frozen. The whole thing bewildered them.

Before the king could recover himself, before he could give any command, the men and boys were at the stakes. They had run boldly through the Gothland soldiers, who had scattered in disorder before the rush.

"By the sacred soul of St. Attalus!" panted Ethelbert the Red. "Our friends from beyond the great mountains!"

"Thou wert right, Ethelbert!" cried the princess. "Oh, they come as though sent from Heaven!"

Below her the boys were flinging the burning faggots away, careless of being scorched and burnt. Kicking frantically, the faggots were cleared. Two or three minutes later, and it would have been impossible to effect any rescue.

Like monkeys the boys swarmed up the stakes, and it was only a matter of moments for them to slash through the prisoners' bonds.

"Good Handforth the Bold!" murmured Mercia, as she recognised her own rescuer.

"We've done the trick, and nothing else matters!" panted Handforth. "By George, princess, you're prettier and lovelier than ever! I mean— Look out, you chaps!"

The others were ready, and they deftly caught the princess as she jumped down. Prince Oswy and Ethelbert the Red were already on the ground, surrounded by their rescuers.

But by now Cedric the Cruel was standing on his feet, roaring like a wild animal. At

last he had come to his senses—at last he had recognised these intruders.

"Seize them!" he thundered. "By my marrow and bones! They are the dogs from the outer world—whom Ethelbert appealed to for aid! They are come to defy my rule! Seize them!"

The soldiers, flustered and bewildered, rushed to the attack. Lee and Dorrie and the other men gripped their automatics.

Boom-boom!

Two reports, loud and devastating, sounded from the Pioneer. The soldiers, startled afresh, gazed round in fear. They forgot their king's orders. Great puffs of smoke were appearing from the submarine.

"Now's our chance!" yelled Dorrie.

Nelson Lee was already leading the way, taking the princess with him. She was surrounded by a quickly-formed bodyguard, and they all went tearing back to the beach. Cedric the Cruel and Guntha the Crafty were shouting orders, the soldiers were running hither and thither, and everything was in a state of confusion. Many of the Gothlanders rallied, however, and they began to given stern chase. Archers were letting fly with their arrows.

Crack-crack-crack-crack-crack-crack!

The men, covering the retreat, made their automatics speak. Soldier after soldier fell, screaming. The others, panic-stricken by this strange method of dealing death, wavered.

Plunging into the lake, the rescuers swam back towards the submarine, taking with them the three who had just been saved from the stake.

Then, with a rattling, shattering roar, a quartet of machine-guns started barking. The men who were operating them took care to send the hail of bullets harmlessly into the open sea. But the noise was sufficient—particularly as it was accompanied by the booming of more guns.

Willing hands were ready to haul the swimmers aboard, and one after another they were dragged over the rail to safety.

By now the scene on the lake shore baffled description. The Gothland soldiers were running about at random, the officers were giving conflicting orders, and the great multitude was shouting in a voice of thunder. Hopeless confusion and disorder reigned.

"Well, we've done it!" grinned Lord Dorrimore cheerfully as he clasped Lee's hand. "Good work, old man!"

A minute later the Pioneer was moving out into the lake, with everybody safe and secure.

The rescuers from the outer world had already dealt a devastating blow at the ruthless rule of Cedric the Cruel!

THE END.

(Many thrilling adventures await Nipper & Co. at Northestria. Look out for another double-length St. Frank's yarn next week, chums. Entitled: "Invaders of Northestria!")



BETWEEN OURSELVES

Edwy Searles Brooks, popular author of the St. Frank's stories, chats with readers of the "Nelson Lee."

WELL, what do you think of the Old Paper this week? Back to the Good Old Times, eh? This week's long yarn is the kind you all want, I am sure. It marks the beginning, so to speak, of a new era—and yet, at the same time, it is a return to the old order. Anyhow, it gives you a good opportunity of writing up to slang me, or praise me, just as the case may be.

In case you have lent last week's issue to the chap next door, or the girl in the house opposite, or in the unlikely event of its having slipped by accident into the w.p.b., here's my address again: Edwy Searles Brooks, Care of The NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

I want to say here that all readers who enclose a stamped addressed envelope will make certain of getting a personal reply from me. Even if you don't enclose a s.a.e. you *may* get a personal reply, for there are some letters which compel answers. In any case, the names and towns of correspondents will be mentioned on this page, so that you may know I have had your letters, and also from what parts of the world others are corresponding with me.

When this feature of mine was running before, we had a system of Merit Stars, and I'm going to revive that. All readers' letters of exceptional merit will be set aside in a special file, and these readers' names, when printed on this page, will carry a star against them. Like this—Tom Jones* (Birmingham). Other readers will therefore know that Tom Jones has written a particularly good letter. The merit may be in the composition, or in the neatness of the handwriting, or in the general theme of the letter.

It is, of course, not necessary to write me a letter full of praise to get a star! I am just as likely to star the name of reader who has written up with a grumble. If the grumble is justifiable, that is an excellent

cause for honouring the reader with a star. Occasionally I receive letters of really outstanding merit, and the writers of these letters will know of my appreciation by seeing a double star against their names, in addition to getting a personal reply by post.

I wonder how many of the old crowd are sitting at our Round Table at this minute. Dozens of names of regular correspondents spring to my mind, such as Mick Sullivan (Harringay), "Prairie Maid" (Toronto), Reggie Staples (Walworth), and "Betty" (Melbourne). When I was previously running this page, these readers, and hosts of others were always writing to me. I'd like to hear from them again—all of them.

It'll still be a week or two before I receive any letters in response to the invitation I made a fortnight ago, when "Between Ourselves" was revived. When those letters begin to roll in, I shall have plenty of matters to discuss here, and we shall soon be in the old swing again. Meanwhile, many loyal readers have continued to write to me "for old time's sake," and I'll acknowledge here those which have come to hand so far during the year. Elsie Satchwell (Walsall), John J. Fowler (Liverpool), Jack Braham (Canonbury), Eric J. Robson (Caswell, N.S.W.), John Brooks (Montreal), Cedric L. Woods* (Brandon), Walter Carter (Cambridge), Harry Temple (Toronto), Leonora Baber* (Portsmouth), Dorothy Napper (Victoria, B.C.), Ralph Clarry (Toronto), Mauritz Kachelhoffer (Kimberley, S.A.), Frank R. Dayman (Miramar, N.Z.), Jack Fearn* (Blackpool), J. M. Keith (Ilford), C. Chaplin (Halstead), J. O. Y. Barnes* (Tottenham), T. Armitage (Horbury, Yorks), J. Herman (Tarkastad, S.A.), Maisie Foy (Albert Park, Vic., Aus.).

Edwy Searles Brooks

Continuing LADBROKE BLACK'S Exciting Yarn of Adventure in the Arctic!

The VALLEY of HOT SPRINGS!

(Opening chapters re-told
on page 41.)



The Ceremony of Fire!

ELOQUENTLY the professor addressed the guards, explaining the treachery of Imatuk and his companions, and the fate that had overtaken them at the Angekok's hands, ascribing his conduct to the inspiration of Tormansuk himself. Watching the men's faces, Eric realised the effect that had been produced. They looked like men thoroughly cowed as they carried out their comrades.

Nearly an hour elapsed before the four adventurers could sit down in peace to the

meal of which they all stood badly in need. When he had eaten his fill, the professor pushed back his stool and looked round the table.

"I should be glad of your attention a moment," he remarked with solemnity, addressing his companions. "We have established our authority here, but we must remember why we are here. In the interests of science, gentlemen!"

"Speaking for myself, you can have the science, professor, as long as I get my hands on the gold and platinum."

"I wish you wouldn't interrupt me!" the professor remarked, turning to Jackson severely. "This expedition has been very costly, and it will be necessary to recoup ourselves with some

of the immensely valuable minerals in the Valley. We have precisely four weeks in which to make our preliminary investigations and secure sufficient of this gold and platinum to reimburse ourselves and pay the expenses for another expedition next year."

He turned to Eric and Danny, who had been listening intently.

"Jackson, on account of the sacred office he has assumed, will not be available to help us. I shall have to entrust to you two the task of seeing that some of the gold and platinum is transported to our

War Declared!

People of the Valley rise in rebellion—Eric Denning and fellow-explorers faced with disaster!

landing-place. I shall be too busily engaged to give you any more than casual assistance."

He spread a notebook on the table and began to make some hasty calculations with a pencil.

"I intended to employ the guard, and not the civilian population, for the transport of the treasure. It occurs to me that they will be all the better for a little hard work. As their captain, and after the lesson they have had to-day, they will carry out my instructions. I must leave the details, Eric, to you and Danny." He looked round the table. "Is that quite understood?"

Eric and Danny nodded, but Jackson retained a sullen silence.

"I have certain duties to perform as the Captain of the Guard, I understand," the professor went on, "about which I shall have to consult the very pretty and intelligent young lady who has already been of such service to us."

ERIC found himself wishing rather that he, too, had some excuse for consulting the Daughter of the Sun. It was in the hope of some such opportunity occurring that in the days which followed he devoted all his spare time to acquiring the Skrelling tongue. Jackson, too, seemed curiously fired by the same ambition, and eventually they called in the services of the girl with the golden hair and the smiling blue eyes, asking her the name of various articles and repeating the words after her.

Meanwhile, under the directing influence of the professor, the valley was surveyed from end to end, the mines were explored, and more than justified the professor's remark that they had found the treasure house of the world. The platinum alone, if thrown on the market, would reduce the price of the most expensive metal to that of tin, and the gold was in such abundance that it was employed in the houses for the articles of the most ordinary domestic use.

The assistance Eric expected to receive from Danny in getting a portion of that vast mineral wealth out of the Valley of Hot Springs was not forthcoming. At the first parade of the guards Eric missed the old pugilist. He was looking round when his eye lighted on a burly figure in golden mail who was standing immediately in front of the professor. The youngster's jaw sagged in astonishment as he saw the battered face which looked out from under the gold helmet. It was Danny, clutching an immense golden battle-axe in one hand, while in his chain-belt was stuck the holster of an automatic.

"I ain't going to let the guv'nor wander around by himself," he explained afterwards to the boy. "That's why, in a manner of speaking, I've joined up. I don't trust these here panto soldiers overmuch, and that's a fact."

With Danny in his golden armour following the professor everywhere, Eric had to tackle the problem of transport alone. The

guards, he realised, resented the servile employment which had been thrust upon them. But with the fate of their five companions still fresh in their memories, and with the authority of the Angekok and the professor behind him, Eric managed at last to get them busy.

And his uncle didn't help. He was filling numerous notebooks, measuring the heads of the inhabitants—searching for records—prying geological formations. When Eric asked him if he had any ideas about the transport of the platinum, or how much they should take, he looked at him dreamily.

"Platinum, my boy, is one of the heaviest and most valuable metals in the world. It is usually found allied with iridium osmium, ruthenium and palladium. To make use of it, it has to be melted in any oxyhydrogen furnace——"

But that piece of encyclopædic information didn't help Eric at all, and he had to fall back on his own unaided efforts. No timber being available, the boy obtained numbers of skins from the hares with which the valley abounded, and having had these stitched together, employed them for the transport of the ore.

The organisation of this task filled the whole of his time; and it was a worrying task for the boy, too. The men were sullen, and more often than not on the verge of mutiny.

Three weeks went by, during which time the heavy ore was transported down the tunnel and across that desolate frozen valley beyond to the head of the great waterfall. Arrived at the head of the waterfall, the treasure was simply decanted over the edge.

The fourth week Eric intended to devote to carrying the collection from the foot of the waterfall through the narrow Valley of Steam to the head of the fiord, where they had left the kayak.

The job involved all sorts of side problems—rations for the men, the exact weight which four could carry the full distance—and when he staggered back to his quarters in the temple at the end of the day, he was usually fagged out. Nobody but Danny seemed to take an interest in what he was doing. The professor was working like a starving man who sees Time about to snatch from him the food he longs for. As for Jackson, he had certain religious functions to perform, which alone interrupted his steady progress in the tongue of the Skrellings.

One evening Danny drew Eric aside and beckoned him down the passage into the vast hall of the temple.

"I want to have a word with you, Mr. Eric, where we can't be overheard. What's got Jackson?"

There was something suspicious in Danny's voice which, coupled with the mysterious surroundings in which they were holding their conversation, made Eric start.

"What on earth do you mean, Danny?"

"He seems all right, but he don't talk same as he used to. I'm not saying that he isn't doing his job as Angekok of this valley—he is. Now he's got Miss Sun to teach him, he can spill quite a lot of words in this lingo."

He inserted a hand under the gold chain flap of his helmet and tickled his ear.

"I paid particular attention to him to-day, Mr. Eric. The guv'nor was reading some runes he found on a stone, and going off like he does, you know. And Jackson comes along to do one of them ceremonies. Some of the geysers had stopped playing, and it's the Angekok's job to turn the tap on again so as everybody keeps warm and cosy. The guv'nor put him wise what to do. You just throw a stone in, and the fountains play."

"Well, what of it?" asked the boy impatiently. "What's the trouble?"

"It's the way Jackson carries on with the guards—same as if he was their particular pal. I dunno, but I've got a kind of hunch that he's playing a game of his own. Has he asked you anything about the stuff you've been shipping?"

"I told him I'd heaved about two ton of platinum over the edge of the waterfall, and about the same quantity of gold, and that to-morrow I was going to start trying to ship it down to the beach. We've only got a week more, you know."

Danny fingered his chin, and then suddenly his body grew rigid.

"Quick, Mr. Eric! There's somebody coming!"

At intervals along the wall there were niches or embrasures, and into one of these the two crowded. As they did so, from the opposite side two hundred of the guard raced at the double, and, forming up at the centre of the hall, stood motionless. There was an interval, and then the curtains concealing the passage down which they had come was drawn aside, and Jackson, in his shining ceremonial robes, appeared.

Danny nudged Eric as, at a slow, dignified pace, that stately figure stalked across the floor. The golden mail-clad guard divided, making a passage for him. Then he halted, turned and faced them.

"What's he saying, Mr. Eric?" Danny whispered.

Eric was straining his ears to listen, but only now and again could he understand a word. Presently Jackson touched the concealed lever in the pavement at his feet with the end of his gold wand. The great stone revolved, and the subterranean fires leapt luridly upwards. And then, one by one, the guards thrust the points of their spears into the orange and crimson flames.

When the last man had performed that rite the great stone slipped back into its place and the subterranean fires vanished. Jackson raised his hand, and, once more at the double, their fur-clad feet making no noise upon the pavement, the guard disappeared from the great hall.

Jackson was moving slowly back to the curtained entrance to the passage. He was only a few yards away when Danny slipped behind him and laid a big, broken-knuckled hand upon his arm.

"What's the game, my lad? What's the great idea? What stuff have you been handing out to those guys? You'd better speak quick and spill the truth, or I'll smash that ugly mug of yours!"

The Traitor!

JACKSON turned a white, twitching face and a pair of little baneful eyes upon Danny.

"I'm doing my job," he snapped, "the same as the rest of us. To-day is the day on which the guard renew their oath of allegiance. It's called the Ceremony of the Spear—just the usual sort of bunk. What do you think I've been doing?"

"That's what I wanted to know, and you've told me, I suppose. The guv'nor know anything about this show?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. He's busy writing, and I didn't like to disturb him. He's seen enough of these ceremonies, anyway. Any other questions? If not, I'd like to get rid of this rig and have a spot of dinner."

Over the meal Danny asked the professor a question.

"Know anything of this Ceremony of the Spear, guv'nor, they were holding to-night?"

HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

ERIC DENNING, a cheery, adventure-loving youngster, lives with his uncle, **PROFESSOR DENNING**. The professor, absent-minded and interested in nothing save his studies, is expecting a visit from John Peters, an Arctic explorer who has discovered a narwhal's horn, on which is written in Runic writing the key to tremendous treasure, in Greenland. The horn arrives, but not Peters. For Peters is dead—murdered by one of a gang of scoundrels, the leader of which is

BOSS MAUNSELL. Maunsell attempts to capture the narwhal's horn, but is frustrated, largely owing to the activities of

DANNY, the professor's man-of-all-work and an ex-pugilist. The professor deciphers the writing on the horn, and he and Eric and Danny travel to Greenland, and start out for the Valley of Hot Springs. They capture Maunsell, who has been trailing them; he gives his name as Jackson. Passing through a tunnel in the glaciers, they arrive at the mysterious valley. They are captured by the Angekok, or ruler of the valley, but he is killed by Jackson, who assumes his place of office. They make an enemy of Imatuk, captain of the guard, and Eric and Jackson find him torturing a girl whom they have befriended. A fight results, in which Imatuk and a number of other guards are killed.

(Now read on.)

"I wasn't aware they were holding it to-night, but I have some very exhaustive notes on the whole of the magic-religious ceremonies, including the particular one you've mentioned. I'll read you them."

"Don't bother, guv'nor," Danny interrupted hurriedly. "I've got to go out, anyway, and you'll get indigestion if you start jumping up in the middle of a meal."

Afterwards, pulling at a pipe and lying on his bed, Danny presently gave vent to the reflection with which he had been occupied.

"I know what the guv'nor's like, Mr. Eric. He's just the spit of one of them geysers. He ain't doing anything, but sitting quite mum and quiet, and you come along and throw a stone in the way of a question at him, and he comes bubbling up with all the information in the world. He gives you a whole blessed water-works, and all you're asking for is a drop at the bottom of a cup."

Eric, who was just settling himself down to sleep and thinking of the task that lay before him on the morrow, and how he could have a word with the Daughter of the Sun before he descended the waterfall and would be absent from the valley for at least four days, grinned.

"You've got it, Danny. That's my uncle to a 'T.' I've heard a perfect stranger ask him when the next train from Chalcombe to London leaves, and before he managed to get away from him he'd have had the whole history of steam and all the great railways chucked in."

"All I wanted to know from him was whether Jackson had really put him wise about the ceremony he performed to-night. That guy worries me, Mr. Eric."

But the boy was too sleepy to listen any more. He was dimly conscious of Danny presently slipping from his bed and walking soft-footedly across the floor. Then, the very next moment, it seemed he was awakened from a dream by feeling a hand on his shoulder and Danny's voice in his ear.

"Jackson's hopped it," he whispered. "He ain't in his room or any of the other rooms, and all them fancy clothes he wears has gone, too!"

Eric sat up with a start and, springing out of bed, began to dress. He was conscious of a curious feeling of alarm.

"It's my belief he's trying to double-cross us, Mr. Eric. That's why he's been so particular to learn this heathenish lingo, so as he could do without the guv'nor."

"Where is my uncle?"

"Ho's still writing. He nearly bit my nose off when I tried to speak to him."

At that moment there was a rustle, and the curtains were parted, and there, on the threshold, stood the Daughter of the Sun. Her lovely face was more than usually pale, and her blue eyes were full of alarm.

"The Angekok has gone!" she said quickly. "He fled by the way of the Temple, taking with him the sacred symbols!"

So much Eric could gather of what she said. The next moment he had taken her

small hand and was racing with her down the corridor to the room where the professor was working.

"Uncle, you must listen to what she has to say. It's important. Jackson's disappeared, and Danny thinks he may be up to some treachery."

With an impatient gesture the professor continued to write for some moments. Then very reluctantly he closed the notebook.

"It's extraordinary the number of unnecessary interruptions to which I am subjected. I have a bare week in which to complete my investigations, and there seems to be a conspiracy to prevent me having any peace. What is it now?"

His eyes wandered to the faces of the two men, and then cleared as if by magic as they finally settled on the girl's.

"Oh, Tuluwit," began the girl. "He-Whom-You-Made-Angekok is wholly evil. The truth is never on his lips. To you he shows one face—to others another. I have seen him talking with those who were leagued with Imatuk. He has learned our tongue. Everywhere he has been trying to make friends. To-night he has left the Temple with the sacred symbols. I am afraid, O Tuluwit."

The professor frowned thoughtfully at the speaker.

"An unpleasant character, that man Jackson. A self-seeker—and worse. He made a solemn compact with me, but if he is now trying to break it——"

He stopped abruptly, then turned to his young nephew.

"Eric, you slip outside and see if you can see anything of him. Meanwhile, Danny and I will make what preparations for defence are possible. As for you, my dear," he went on, dropping into the Esquimaux tongue as he glanced at the girl, "you'd better get out of harm's way. I can't have you being dragged into our quarrels, and probably suffering for it."

The Daughter of the Sun held out her hands to him.

"I stay with you," she said simply. "Your quarrel is my quarrel."

Eric would liked to have seized her hand and shaken it, but the situation was too serious to waste any time. Slipping out of the Temple by the Angekok's private door, he raced to the end of the Pyramid. There he halted, realising that he need go no farther.

Standing on the summit of the Assembly Stone, which was ringed by the listening guards, was the Angekok, the glow of the half-vanished sunlight glittering on his fantastic helmet and golden coat. At that distance it was impossible to hear what he was saying, but it was easy to see the effect of his words.

He was exciting his audience to fury. Eric could see the men shaking their spears, and hear them every now and again giving vent to a savage shout. Presently the Angekok paused and pointed dramatically towards

the Temple. Then, very slowly, he began to descend from the rock. The boy saw the guards turn and face the great building, something in their attitude suggesting a dog straining at the leash.

As soon as Jackson had reached the ground they raised another furious shout, and with brandished arms followed him across the plain. Without waiting to see anything more, Eric, keeping in the shadow of the Pyramid, raced back to the Sacred Apartments. The only person he found there was the Daughter of the Sun.

"They're coming!" he exclaimed. "I think you must be right. He's got the guards to side with him, and now he's leading them against us to kill us."

The girl put her hands to her lips.

"And he has taken the lightning, O Tuluwit, with which you strike. He, Whose-Face-Tormansuk-Has-Broken, told me so!"

In spite of his anxiety, Eric felt an almost uncontrollable desire to laugh at that description of Danny.

"Where are they?" he demanded.

Before she could answer, the professor came clanking into the room, clad in complete armour of golden mail, with a spear in his right hand and an oval shield in the other, looking a bizarre figure with his bristling beard.

"They are coming, uncle!" said Eric quickly. "Jackson was haranguing the guards from the Assembly Stone—getting them all worked up—and when I saw him last he was leading them across the plain."

"Good! An open foe we can face is better than a treacherous friend. We will give them a reception they don't expect. As Jackson has succeeded in stealing all the ammunition, you'd better arm yourself like me, my boy."

Knowing where the armoury was situated, Eric bolted out of the room and, finding Danny, got him to help him put on a coat of mail. Then he selected a shield and spear.

"Look slippy, Mr. Eric. The guv'nor and me's decided upon how we're going to tackle this job. He hopes to scare them out of the Temple by swinging back that stone and letting the fire loose. It won't scare Jackson, though. He won't be taken in with this Tormansuk stuff—so we've blocked the passage from the Temple with all the goods we could chuck there."

The ex-pugilist jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"In a manner of speaking, Mr. Eric, we've decided to fight in a twelve-foot ring instead of an eighteen-foot one. We're going to hold just the one door—that one outside—and the passage. We'll give 'em something to think of before we're through!"

Ho made the battle axe he was carrying sing in the air, his blue eyes lighting up with the joy of battle.

"I'll get that Jackson—you watch me, Mr. Eric. And now, just in case one of us shouldn't be there when the last round comes and the gong goes——"

He stopped abruptly and held out his

hand. Without a word Eric gripped it, looked his old friend steadily in the face and then followed him out into the passage.

With the assistance of the attendants, the passage, which was nearly twenty yards long and only wide enough for two men to pass at the same time, had been already partially blocked with the heavy metal furniture of the Temple.

Danny and Eric took up their positions. The ex-pugilist glanced worriedly over his shoulder to where the professor was standing behind the barricade, a spear in his hand.

"I've looked after the guv'nor for these past ten years—ever since I've come out of the Army—and I can't bear to see 'im landed in this fix. I've taken all his notebooks off him, so if I don't get through, Mr. Eric, you'll tell him where they are."

But Eric was no longer listening to him. His quick ears had detected the tread of armed men.

"They're coming, Danny!" whispered the youngster.

"Right, Mr. Eric. You keep that side of the archway and I'll keep this. Leave the spare weapons lying on the floor between us, where we can get at 'em. Now then—seconds out—first round——"

He paused as, from outside, came the muttered sound of voices. Evidently the barricade had been discovered and the guard had realised that their surprise had failed. Then Jackson's voice rang out, speaking in halting Esquimaux.

"On with you, men! Sweep that stuff away. I, the mouthpiece of Tormansuk, promise you great honour and glory when these men, who have made a mock of our mysteries, have been fed to the sacred fires!"

The guards charged forward to the attack!

(Eric and his two companions against a horde of soldiers! What will be the result of the battle? Look out for a top-notch exciting instalment next week. Also the first of a side-splitting new feature, "Handy's Weekly.")

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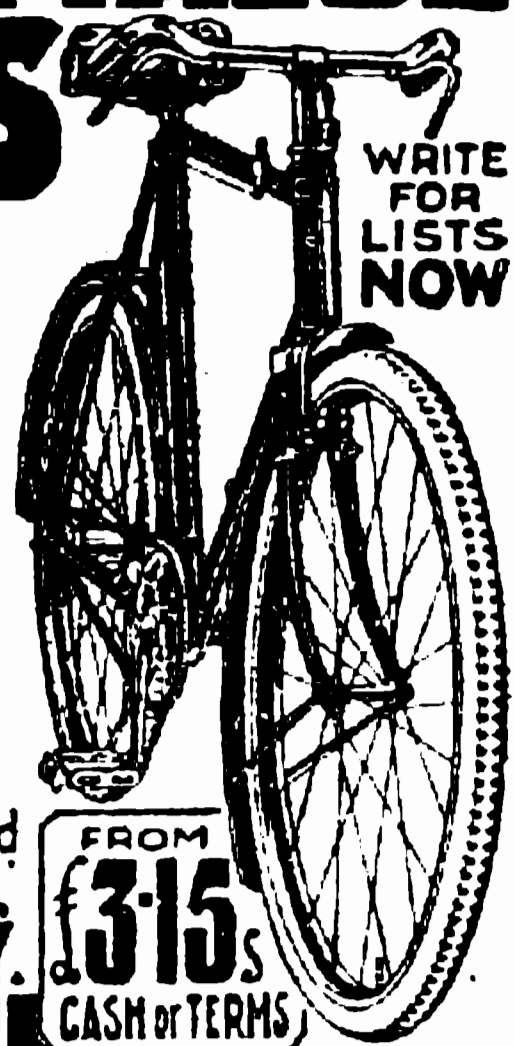
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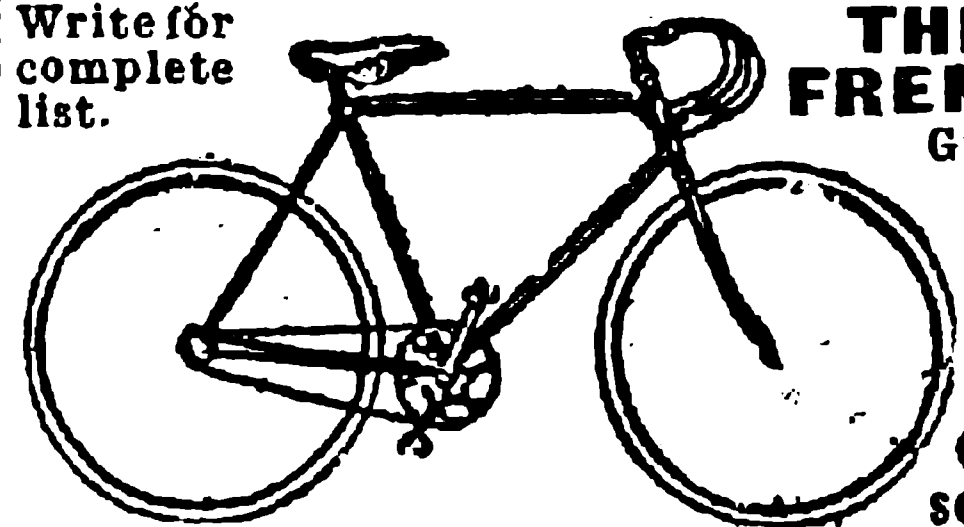
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