

Special DOUBLE-LENGTH St. Frank's Yarns Every Week!

NELSON LEE

2^d



**ST. FRANK'S
IN THE LISTS!**

The great tournament—St. Frank's schoolboys in combat! Read this week's stirring extra-long yarn featuring the famous Chums of St. Frank's in Northestria.

New Series No. 67.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

May 2nd, 1931

More Thrills for Nipper and Co. in Northestria!

St. FRANK'S In



CHAPTER 1.

Cedric's Armada!

“**WHAT-HO!** The good old cup that cheers!” said Archie Glenthorne, of the St. Frank’s Remove. “Thanks most frightfully, Phipps, old thing. Always on time with the mixture, what?”

“I thought a cup of tea would be refreshing, sir,” said Phipps smoothly.

“Good gad! Rather!” said Archie,

**Nipper and Co. FIND trouble—
and nearly LOSE their heads!**

sitting up with alacrity. “Refreshing isn’t the word, old life-saver! Kindly watch the young master lower the priceless stuff into the abyss.”

And Archie, in a series of grateful sips, proceeded to lower it.

He was reclining in a deck-chair, and, in his own terms, he had just been indulging in a slight dose of the dreamless.

It was rather quiet on this portion of the promenade deck. Sitting up, Archie could glimpse the water, and there was

Smashing Double-Length Schoolboy-Adventure Yarn!

The LISTS!

By *EDWY SEARLES*
BROOKS



a general view of the countryside. The Pioneer was anchored only a mile out from the shore.

Lord Dorrimore's super-submarine, which was far more like a private yacht, was at rest off the coast of Northestria. There had been plenty of excitement recently, but during the past hour or so all had been quiet.

As Archie was finishing his tea, Handforth and Nipper and Travers and two

or three other St. Frank's fellows strolled along the deck. They were looking eager, and Handforth, for one, was talking excitedly.

"Oh, I say!" protested Archie. "Dash it, dear old chappies! You don't absolutely mean to say that you're going to park yourselves on this bally spot? I was rather thinking of indulging in another spoonful of the old dreamless. Kindly fade away, laddies, and leave me

"There'll be no peace for you, Archie," said Handforth briskly. "Cedric's fleet is out."

"Odds disturbances and bothers!"

"It looks like dirty work to me," said Travers, with relish.

"But the blighter isn't absolutely going to give battle, is he?" asked Archie, getting to his feet with reluctance. "I say, what rot! Right-ho, Phipps! Here's the dashed cup. Another dose wouldn't be at all off the mark."

"I'll refill your cup, sir," said Phipps.

"Stout fellow!" beamed Archie. "The young master's nerves are in need of restoratives."

The valet glided away, and Archie, drifting to the rail, stared across the water, fixing his monocle firmly in his eye.

It was certainly a fact that a large number of queer-looking boats were setting out from the Northestrian shore, coming into sight from a sheltered cove.

"If Cedric is bent upon giving battle, laddies, then all I can say is that Cedric is heading for a great deal of bother," observed Archie. "But perhaps the poor fish doesn't know what he's up against?"

"That's about the size of it," said Nipper. "At any rate, we've nothing to worry about."

THE St. Frank's fellows may not have worried; but they were certainly thrilled.

This trip was just one excitement after another. The boys were enjoying themselves hugely aboard Lord Dorrimore's great submarine. So much had happened recently that they had almost forgotten their thrilling trip under the Polar ice, and their breathless journey through the underground tunnel into this Arctic oasis.

It was really a place of wonder. For, although it was situated far within the Arctic Circle, the air was temperate, and very much like England during summer.

The oasis was enormous—almost half as big as England—and it was encircled by giant mountain peaks, which raised their summits into the eternal mists. A great many of these peaks were active volcanoes, their craters everlastingly boiling with white-hot fire. The reflection from these many fires, cast down into the oasis by the mists thousands of feet above, provided a false daylight.

More extraordinary still, there were two distinct countries in this oasis, separated by a great central lake; Gothland on the one hand, and the bigger country, Northestria, on the other.

Ages ago, a lost tribe of the ancient Goths had found their way here, and, later, a great number of people of Anglo-Saxon stock. From these had descended the brutal Gothlanders and the simple, peace-loving Northestrians.

The Northestrians had built towns and cities. They had made the country what it was. Owing to their total lack of intercourse with other nations of the world, they had practically stood still throughout the centuries. So, to all intents and purposes, they were still in the Middle Ages. In Northestria, there were overlords and feudal castles; there were serfs and barons. But by now the submarine party had grown well accustomed to the novelty of their surroundings.

The Northestrians, by virtue of their industry and determination, had turned this once-barren oasis into a land of fair meadows and woods and agricultural charm. And now, because of their brutal, aggressive methods, the Gothlanders had conquered their former masters.

For centuries the Gothlanders had been held in subjection; had been used as slaves. Then, at last, the Gothlanders had gained power. Under the cruel leadership of Cedric, they had fallen upon their more powerful neighbours, and had conquered them. The peace-loving Northestrians, ruled by the young Princess Mercia, had been unprepared for war. Thus Northestria was now overrun by the Gothland hordes, and the people were under the tyrant's heel.

Cedric the Cruel had proclaimed himself King of Northestria, and he had a stranglehold on the land. But things were not going all his own way now; for, since the coming of Lord Dorrimore's party, the Gothland tyrants had met with several reverses.

DOWN below, in the Pioneer's luxurious saloon, Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore, Sir Hobart Mannors and Mr. Alington Wilkes were holding a council of war. Ethelbert the Red was with them, and Captain Williams, the submarine commander, was an interested listener.

"Well, we come back to the same point," said Nelson Lee. "We're at a deadlock. While we hold Guntha as a hostage, Cedric dare not take any hostile action against the Northestrian populace."

"But that doesn't prevent us from carrying on the good work," said Lord Dorrimore. "I shan't be satisfied until Cedric is driven out of Northestria altogether—he and all his breed."

"'Tis a dream, I fear, good Dorrimore the Brave," said Ethelbert, shaking his head.

"Don't you believe it!" replied Dorrie. "Before we leave here, we'll see that things are put straight."

Ethelbert the Red, an elderly, kindly man with a big auburn beard, was the ex-Regent of Northestria. When Cedric had seized the throne, Ethelbert had been banished to a fortress in Gothland—together with Princess Mercia, and her brother, Prince Oswy. They had been rescued by the submarine party.

"Nothing much has happened yet," said Nelson Lee. "When we arrived we found that the prince and princess, and you, Ethelbert, were to be burnt at the stake. We saved you from that dreadful fate—and as a reprisal, Cedric swore to burn three hundred innocent Northestrians."

"I'faith, a dastardly plan," said Ethelbert.

"He would have carried out his threat, too—for the people of Northestria are on the point of rising," said Lee. "That move of Cedric's would have had a tremendous moral effect throughout the country. But by capturing Guntha, we have bound Cedric's hands."

Guntha the Crafty, the commander-in-chief of the king's armies, was one of the most powerful overlords of Gothland. Indeed, a great many of Cedric's troops had been supplied by Guntha, who, in his own right, was a sort of petty king.

And Guntha was down below, securely locked in a cabin, with guards outside. He was a prisoner of war, and he was being held as a hostage.

The conference was interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Moreley, one of the submarine's officers.

"I think you gentlemen had better come on deck," he said. "There's a big fleet of galleys setting out from Dunstane, and they're coming in our direction."

The young officer was grinning, fully realising the absurd nature of the situation. He knew that Cedric's galleys were no match for the war-equipped Pioneer. For the submarine carried guns which could blow those galleys out of the water; machine-guns which could rake them with deadly fire.

"We'd better go up and see," said Nelson Lee, rising.

They went on deck. The galleys, picturesque and impressive, were now sweeping out from the shore in a majestic, crescent formation, and there seemed

little doubt that they were advancing towards the anchored submarine.

"But what's the big idea?" asked Lord Dorrimore, in wonder. "By the Lord Harry! This tyrant doesn't expect to defeat us on the water, does he?"

"Perhaps he thinks the very strength of his fleet will impress us," smiled Sir Hobart.

"But, man alive, these galleys wouldn't last two minutes if we once started popping at them in earnest," said Dorrie.

"You mustn't forget that Cedric is cunning," said Lee thoughtfully. "He undoubtedly intends an attack—and it may not be so foolish as it looks."

"But we could blow those galleys to smithereens!"

"I know we could, Dorrie—and blow hundreds of innocent Northestrians to smithereens, too," retorted Lee.

"Gad! I'd forgotten that!"

"But Cedric hasn't," continued Lee. "Chained to the oars of those galleys are hundreds of helpless young Northestrians—the stalwarts who were formerly the flower of Princess Mercia's army. Cedric made them his galley slaves. If we fire upon those ships, we kill friends as well as enemies. And Cedric, in his cunning, was certain that we would not commit that slaughter."

"Well, hang it, it's easy enough for us to up anchor and sheer off," said the millionaire peer. "Cedric knows perfectly well that the Pioneer is capable of great speed—he's seen us moving about the lake. Does he expect us to wait here until his fleet gathers round?"

"I think he does."

"Then he must be a fool as well as a tyrant."

"Not such a fool, Dorrie," replied Nelson Lee. "It is merely another example of his craftiness—his cunning. Don't forget that hundreds of Northestrian eyes will be watching this encounter—to say nothing of the Northestrian galley slaves. What effect would it have on the people if we turned tail and fled? Don't you see? The Northestrians would assume that we were afraid—that we were scared by Cedric's might. He is relying upon our joining in this battle—and he is relying, too, upon his superior numbers to overwhelm us. We could easily dive, and thus get out of his way—but that would be almost the same thing. We should be avoiding the encounter."

"I'm not sure that he even knows that this ship can dive," put in Mr. Wilkes, with a smile. "I don't think these Goth-

landers quite realise the wonders of the Pioneer yet."

"That's true," said Lee thoughtfully. "And it may come in useful to us, too. A good point, Mr. Wilkes. Not that it really makes any difference. Our only course is to remain on the surface, to hold our ground—or, rather, water—and to accept this challenge of battle."

CHAPTER 2.

The Ruse!

THERE was no doubt that Nelson Lee's convictions were justified.

Cedric the Cruel was relying upon the "Deliverers" to hold their position, and to accept the battle. And Cedric was hoping, too, that his overwhelmingly superior numbers would prevail. Certainly, if the submarine fled, Cedric would broadcast it throughout the length and breadth of Northestria that these people were afraid of him.

The Northestrians regarded "Lee the Lionheart" and "Dorrimore the Brave" and all the others as gods, capable of performing miracles. If they turned out to be but ordinary men, fleeing in the face of superior numbers, the moral effect upon the downtrodden populace would be disastrous.

And it was highly important that the Northestrians should maintain their morale. If only a general rising could be precipitated, Cedric and his hordes would be swept out of the country.

The great fleet of galleys swept on, and Nelson Lee and Dorrie, giving quiet orders, saw that the Pioneer's machine-guns were got ready. Men were stationed at them.

"We'll show 'em something!" said Handforth, as he stood watching with the other boys. "By George! They must be mad to advance on us like this! They'll never get really near—our machine-guns will wipe 'em out!"

"And what of the galley slaves, poor chaps?" asked Church.

"That's just where Cedric has made a bloomer," replied Handforth. "Our machine-guns can pepper the Gothland soldiers without touching the slaves. Those men at the oars are low down, practically out of reach, and the soldiers, if they're going to attempt to board us, will have to crowd on the upper works. They won't stand an earthly!"

Nipper was frowning.

"There's something rummy about it, to my mind," he said. "Cedric isn't such

a dull fool as that. He knows we've got weapons that he can't hope to equal."

"Then what's the idea of sending this fleet on us? I believe there's something behind it—some dodge. Anyhow, we'll soon know."

Although everybody aboard the submarine was confident, a general excitement prevailed. Nelson Lee was clearly of the opinion that there could be no danger, for he had not suggested that the boys should go below. He even allowed Irene Manners and Doris Berkeley and all the other Moor View girls—there were ten of them with the party—to stay on deck.

While yet a good distance away, the fleet checked. The great sweeps, each manned by several slaves, ceased to operate. But one small galley continued to advance, and now it was seen that this vessel was running up a white flag.

"So they want to parley, do they?" said Dorrie. "Better be on the look out for treachery, Lee, old man."

"I'm on the look out for it all the time," replied Nelson Lee. "And I believe there is some treachery afoot, Dorrie. This whole affair looks fishy to me."

"Same here," agreed his lordship. "It's too good to be true. We can capture this whole fleet with ease—and, somehow, I don't think Cedric wants us to do that."

The small galley came on, and it could now be seen that it contained only a group of Gothland officers in addition to the galley slaves. It swept on majestically, and at a word of command from one of the officers the slaves raised their oars, and the galley drifted. She was now scarcely more than twenty yards away, and all eyes were upon her.

"In the name of his Majesty, Cedric, King of Gothland and Northestria," shouted the spokesman impressively, "I bring ye, strangers, a message of peace."

The officers were fine-looking men in their chainmail and helmets and full war regalia. They looked like true knights of old. Most of them were bearded, and they all bore the stamp of the Gothland race—coarse, big, brutal-looking men.

"What is your message from Cedric?" asked Nelson Lee.

"His Majesty desires ye to deliver the person of my lord Guntha into our keeping," replied the officer. "We come to take my lord Guntha."

"And if we deliver him up?"

"Then wilt this powerful Gothland fleet retire," replied the officer, with a sweep of his hand. "'Tis not his

Majesty's desire to force ye into battle; but should ye resist his wishes, then will the fleet sweep upon your vessel and overwhelm it."

"Says you!" murmured Dorrimore.

"Go back to your king, and tell him that we shall not deliver Guntha," called Nelson Lee. "We will keep Guntha aboard this vessel as a hostage; and let Cedric be warned that if there is any brutal violence in Northestria, Guntha will be put to death. Cedric will thus know that he is responsible for Guntha's safety."

The Gothlander officer stiffened.

"Thou art a bold man, Lee the Lion-heart!" he said angrily. "Thou art a rash man! By this refusal, thou hast enforced the battle!"

"Let the battle proceed," said Lee coolly. "We are ready for you, my friend. Be it upon Cedric's own head if disaster befalls his fleet."

"Ay, and by your action in using violence upon his Majesty's fleet, so shall ye kill hundreds of the young men of Northestria!" mocked the Gothlander officer. "How will Ethelbert the Red and Princess Mercia thank ye for such a massacre?"

The man's words, uttered in anger, proved conclusively that Lee's judgment had been sound. Cedric was relying upon the submarine party not to resist—lest the Northestrian slaves should be involved in the death-roll.

"You have our answer—and we have no more to say," called Lee.

"By St. Attalus! Then this rashness is final?" asked the officer haughtily.

"It is final!"

The galley, under some sharp commands from the officer, veered off. The slaves dipped their great sweeps in the waters of the lake, and the parley was over.

Yet it was hardly credible that Cedric could really have anticipated that Guntha would be so tamely handed over. More than ever, Lee suspected that there was some treachery behind all this—some ruse.

The galley returned to the main fleet, and then after a brief wait, in which many signals were exchanged, the whole fleet advanced once more.

It came on in perfect formation, so that when the moment of attack arrived the

galleys would half surround the Pioneer, sweeping upon her in a semicircle.

"Asking for trouble—that's what they're doing," said Dorrie gruffly.

"It won't be a battle at all if we fire upon them," said Mr. Wilkes, with some uneasiness. "I don't like the look of it at all. It'll be nothing short of a massacre."

"Well, it's their own doing—we didn't want them to attack," replied his lordship.

Nelson Lee was moving amongst the boys.

"Now, you chaps, don't call me a spoilsport," said the schoolmaster detective, "but I want you all to go below."

"Oh, cheese it, sir!"

"Have a heart, sir!"

"We shan't come to any harm up here!"



He's Happy, Lads!

He's just been round to his news-agent and secured his latest issue of the **NELSON LEE**. No disappointing "Sorry, sir, sold out!" That's because he always

orders his favourite paper **IN ADVANCE!**

"The girls have readily consented to go down into the body of the ship," continued Nelson Lee. "They're just as eager as you are to watch the 'fun.' There may be some danger—I don't know yet. These Gothland soldiers use very powerful bows, and a well-directed arrow can be just as dangerous as a rifle bullet."

"But they're not within range yet, sir!" protested Handforth.

"That's why I want you to go below now," replied Lee. "Everybody else is going—except Lord Dorrimore, Mr. Wilkes, Sir Hobart, myself, and some of these officers. The less we have on deck, the better. Now, be good sports, and do what I want."

Appealed to in that way, the boys could not refuse. They felt, however, that they were being done out of the best part of the fun. Their only consolation was that some of the upper cabins had tiny port-holes which were just above the level of the water; and through these the boys would be able to watch.

With the decks almost cleared, Lee made his final arrangements. There were several machine-guns ready for instant action, with men behind them. The guns were trained upon the oncoming galleys.

"If they really do mean business, Dorrie, we shall have to give them a taste of lead," said Lee. "It may be that they

are arrogant enough to believe that they can really swamp us by sheer weight of numbers. You see how the galleys are increasing their speed now—they're sweeping down with a rush. I should think one burst of machine-gun fire will be enough."

"They'll be completely disorganised," agreed his lordship. "I can't see, even now—— Hallo! What's wrong? Why are you staring so hard?"

"By James!" ejaculated Nelson Lee, a gleam coming into his eyes. "I'm beginning to understand now, Dorrie! This tyrant of Northestria should be called Cedric the Cunning!"

"What have you spotted, old man?" asked Dorrie eagerly.

"Look! Don't you see?" asked Lee, pointing. "There are numbers of men on the upperworks of all these galleys—accurate marks for our bullets."

"I've spotted 'em," agreed Dorrie. "That's why I thought the whole game so mad."

"But look again," insisted Nelson Lee. "Those men on the upperworks, so fully exposed, are not Gothlanders at all."

"Eh?"

"They're not even soldiers," continued Lee. "The cunning of it, Dorrie! The treachery! Those men are Northestrian peasants."

"What!"

"And they're bound and helpless, too," pursued the detective. "Now can you spot Cedric's game? Not only are the galley slaves Northestrians, but these harmless peasants have been thrust to the fore—whilst the Gothland soldiers skulk behind. Any attempt on our part to resist this attack must inevitably mean the massacre of hundreds of harmless Northestrian civilians."

"The scoundrel!" roared Lord Dorrimore. "Then we're helpless! We can't fire a single shot!"

"We can, but it'll be hard luck on those poor wretches," said Lee, frowning. "It's a ruse, Dorrie—so that these galleys can sweep right upon us unscathed. So that they can come alongside, and allow the soldiers to flood aboard us."

"And take it by sheer weight of numbers, eh?" said Dorrimore. "Well, let 'em come! What do we care? If it's a case of hand-to-hand fighting——"

"Oh, no, Dorrie," said Lee coolly. "There'll be no hand-to-hand fighting. There's no earthly reason why he should take such unnecessary risks. I have an idea that we can turn the tables very sweetly on Cedric. This ruse of his is

clever, but he has over-reached himself. We'll teach him a little lesson."

"But I don't——"

"Let them come!" said Lee contentedly. "My dear fellow, Cedric is playing right into our hands! But I'll tell you what," he added. "It wouldn't be a bad idea for us to appear panic-stricken—scared. Let's dash about a bit, and give every sign of being thoroughly frightened."

"What on earth——"

But Nelson Lee had dashed off, and, after a few hurried words to Sir Hobart Manners and Mr. Wilkes and the machine-gun officers, he commenced the little comedy.

He and the others ran about, shouting wildly, pointing to the galleys. Then, with one accord, everybody ran helter-skelter down the decks and fled into the interior of the ship.

And the Gothland fleet, with a final burst, came sweeping triumphantly upon the now deserted Pioneer.

CHAPTER 3.

The Defeat of Cedric!

THE soldiers of Gothland, yelling with excitement and triumph, leapt from behind their human cover.

For it was now seen that Nelson Lee and his companions had fled into the strange vessel. The decks were left deserted—free for the Gothlanders to sweep aboard. The Pioneer was theirs.

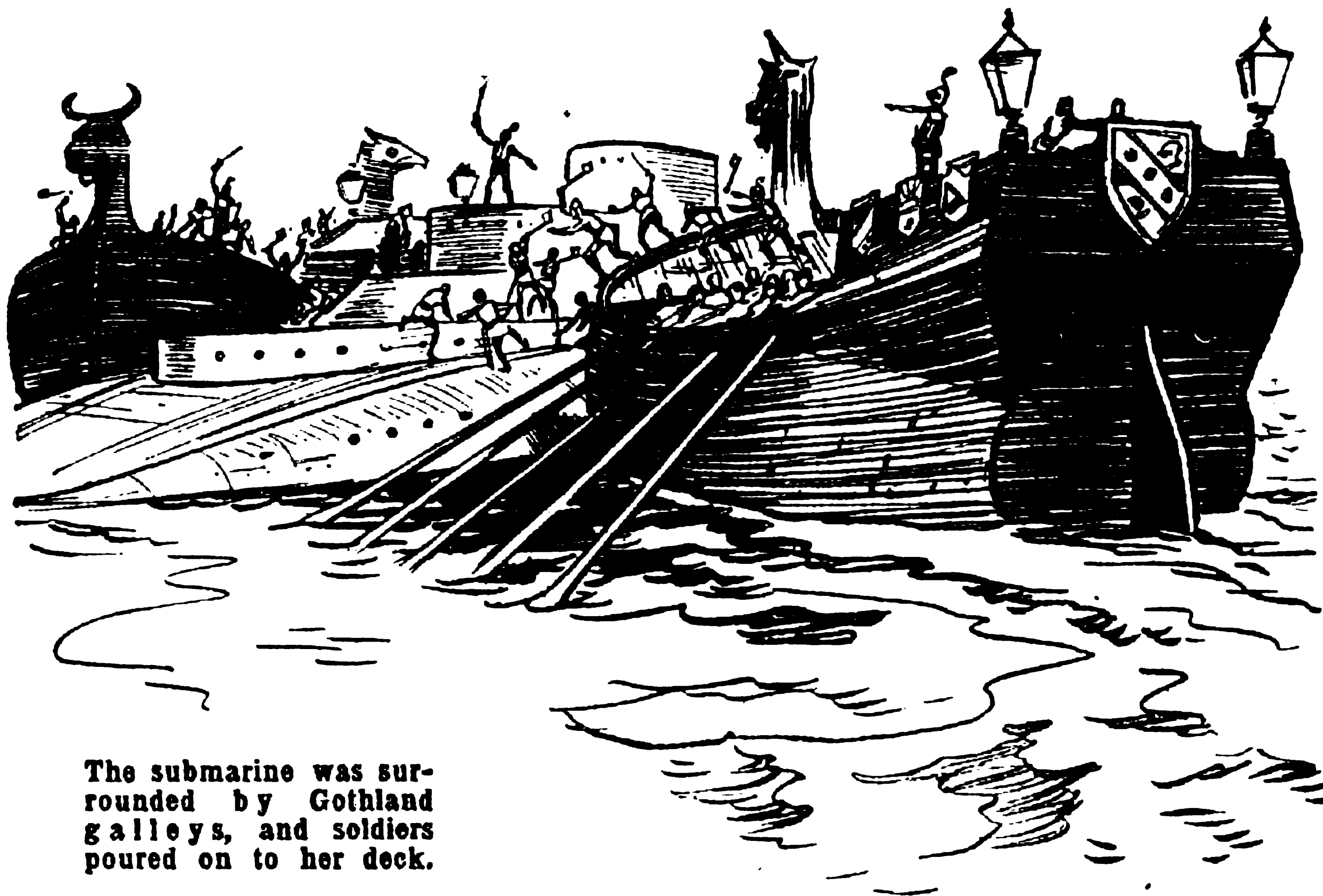
"By my bones!" roared one of the officers exultantly. "They fly before us, men! This craft is ours for the taking!"

"Ay, we will catch them like rats in a trap!" shouted one of the others. "Didst see how the dogs scuttled below? I'faith, they are not such valiants, these strangers!"

The galleys were bumping alongside the Pioneer now, and as vessel after vessel came up, they disgorged the soldiers. Armed with swords and axes, Cedric's picked men swarmed over the Pioneer's decks like a horde of savages.

They had been ordered, evidently, to rush upon the submarine, and to overwhelm her. Soon the last galley had emptied its consignment of soldiers; and now the promenade deck of the Pioneer, and every open space fore and aft, was filled with the shouting, exultant Gothlanders. They over-ran the ship from stem to stern.

"'Tis ours! We have conquered!" went up the shout.



The submarine was surrounded by Gothland galleys, and soldiers poured on to her deck.

Below, Nelson Lee was the coolest person aboard. Everybody else was feeling bewildered—and perhaps a little uneasy. The boys were frankly excited.

“I’m jiggered if I can understand it!” gasped Handforth. “Listen! All that thundering noise is caused by the Gothland soldiers running up and down the decks! They’ve come aboard in their hundreds!”

“But—but I thought there was going to be a scrap?” asked Travers mildly. “I wonder why Mr. Lee has let them board us like this?”

“How could he help it?” said Church excitedly. “Didn’t you see all those Northeastrian peasants on the galleys? Our chaps daren’t fire—for fear of killing them!”

“But we could have sheered off, couldn’t we?” demanded Handforth. “What the dickens was the idea of waiting here——”

“My dear asses, why all this commotion?” interrupted Nipper. “The guv’nor knows what he is doing—and you can bet your life that it’s something brainy. You seem to have forgotten that this isn’t an ordinary ship.”

“Eh?”

“She’s a submarine,” continued Nipper. “Her decks are of steel—her doors are of steel. There’s not a cabin window within reach from the decks—and that means that there’s not the tiniest spot where any of these Gothland soldiers can find entry.

They’re aboard all right—they’re swarming all over the decks—but that’s as far as they’ll get.”

“Good gad!” murmured Archie. “That’s absolutely right, dear old fellows!”

“Of course it’s right,” grinned Nipper. “The enemy doesn’t realise it yet—but the enemy soon will! It’s a hollow sort of victory, at the best. Cedric’s men are crowding over the submarine like a pest of ants, but they’ll never get inside!”

The Gothland soldiers were beginning to find this out for themselves.

The men with the axes were wielding them with grim determination—only to find that the doors, which looked so fragile, resisted all their efforts.

The Gothland soldiers were up against something they had never seen before. Their axes were blunted against reinforced steel; the hafts splintered!

Down below, in the body of the vessel, Nelson Lee had given some orders—and when he heard them Lord Dorrimore broke into a yell of laughter.

“What a dense blockhead I am!” he gurgled. “I never thought of it, Lee! Yet it’s an absolute brainwave! Bravo, old man!”

“It’s quite simple, Dorrie,” smiled Nelson Lee. “Don’t you think we’ll secure a great victory—and a bloodless one?”

“Old man, you ought to be decorated for this!” declared Dorrie happily.

ON deck the shouts of exultation were growing less. Cedric's officers were becoming angry and impatient. It had been one thing to board this vessel—it was quite another to force a way into her interior! And what was the good of getting on her deck unless they could smash a way in, and put all their victims to the death?

The Pioneer, lying so placidly hitherto, now showed no signs of movement. The officer in charge of the operations was the first to notice it, and he stared with frightened eyes.

"By the soul of Sarus!" he gasped. "What is this I see? The water cometh over the very decks! Back, you fools! Let me see! Am I mad?"

Many of the others thought they were mad, too. For, under their very feet, the ship was sinking! Slowly at first, but now with alarming speed, she was settling down into the lake, and the water was already swirling and surging over the decks, catching the Gothland soldiers by the ankles, rising speedily to their knees.

Confusion reigned supreme. Within another few seconds the men were plunging about madly.

"The vessel is sinking!" went up the shout. "Away! Back to the galleys!"

The frightened soldiers were fighting amongst themselves, struggling, punching, clawing. There were so many of them that they got into one another's way. To increase their panic, the Pioneer now settled down rapidly. With a terrific inrush of water, she plunged. The lake closed in over her, and the Gothland soldiers were swept off her decks into the water.

It was a devastating surprise.

Nelson Lee, by employing this ruse, had undoubtedly delivered a master stroke. The Gothland soldiers had been enticed aboard the submarine, and then they had been dragged down into the waters of the lake with her.

Lee had merely taken advantage of the peculiar circumstances. The enemy had failed to realise the peculiar qualifications of the Pioneer; they knew that she was an extraordinary vessel, but her diving qualities were an unknown quantity to them. A vessel that could safely descend beneath the water was, to these people, a miracle.

But neither Nelson Lee nor Lord Dorrimore desired the wholesale death of these Gothlanders. And death would certainly have been their fate had they been allowed to struggle in the water for long. The soldiers were wearing chainmail and

heavy impedimenta—even the men who could swim would soon have become exhausted—and there was no help forthcoming from the galleys because they had drifted some distance from the scene.

Nelson Lee therefore brought the submarine to the surface almost as soon as she had submerged. She was not under for more than a few seconds, but during that time every soldier had been flung into the water.

The Pioneer came up again, the doors were flung open, and men swarmed out on the decks. There would be no fight now; the Gothlanders were a sorry lot, without an ounce of battle left in them.

"Haul 'em aboard, men!" shouted Lee briskly. "Take their swords away if they still have them."

"Mercy!" gasped one of the Gothlanders, as he clutched at the submarine's side. "We surrender, great lord!"

"Ay, we surrender!" went up the general cry.

Whether they surrendered or not, it made no difference. All were dragged aboard, frightened and awed. Not one man was drowned. Several were in imminent danger of plunging to the bottom, but they were rescued in the nick of time. At least half the men were in a semi-exhausted condition, and the other half were scared out of their wits. A ship like this, which could sink one minute and rise the next, was a phenomenon.

And now came the real object of Nelson Lee's counter ruse.

Officers and men of the Pioneer, stripped down to shorts and vests, swam to the galleys. The work of unbinding the peasants was quickly accomplished; and it was almost as easy to unchain the slaves from the oars. All the Northestrians were freed.

Then galley after galley was brought alongside the submarine, and Cedric's picked soldiers were ordered into them, and they were chained to the oars—just as the slaves had been.

It was a triumph.

Within an hour the metamorphosis was accomplished. Cedric's men were substituted for the slaves, and the Northestrians, their gratitude knowing no bounds, almost sobbed with joy. They had been delivered from the power of the tyrant!

"A brilliant piece of work, Mr. Lee," said Sir Hobart Manners enthusiastically. "By Jove! The way you turned the tables on Cedric's fleet was wonderful!"

"I was only able to do it, old man, because of your submarine," smiled Nelson Lee.

"Nonsense," laughed Sir Hobart. "I consider this one of the neatest pieces of work I've ever witnessed."

Nipper and Handforth and the other St. Frank's fellows were in high glee. They had been allowed to play an active part in this final scene. They had helped vigorously in the unchaining of the slaves, and, with enthusiasm, they had helped to chain up the Gothland soldiers.

The entire fleet was captured, and not a drop of blood had been shed.

Presently, with the Pioneer leading the way, the galleys moved off down the lake, a majestic sight. Nearer and nearer towards the Northestrian shore swept the fleet—until all eyes could see what had happened.

It was a devastating blow to the prestige of Cedric, King of Northestria and Gothland.

CHAPTER 4.

The Storming of Ixwell!

CEDRIC THE CRUEL awaited victory.

He stood upon a prominent bluff, surrounded by his nobles.

His immediate companions were Attawulf the Terrible and Redwold the Ruthless. They were powerful overlords, and they were the king's chief advisers.

"By my marrow and bones! Did I not tell ye?" he was gloating. "'Twas more than these strangers dare do to retreat. The battle is joined, and at last these dogs will be wiped out."

"I'faith, your Majesty, I can scarce believe 'tis possible," said Attawulf.

"Thou wert ever a pessimistic dog," said the king, with a raucous laugh. "Hast no eyes to see, man? Look at my galleys! See how they swarm round this stranger ship! They swamp her—they overwhelm her!"

And, indeed, it did seem that everything was going well. The royal group had watched the approach of the galleys; they had watched the galleys sweep round the Pioneer. And now came the first shock. For the "stranger vessel" was seen to be sinking!

Shouts of consternation went up, and Cedric's comments were lurid.

Soon after the submarine rose again—and then came the boarding of the galleys, the changing of the slaves, the substitution of the Gothland soldiers. Finally, the great fleet swept down nearer to the shore, so that everybody could see precisely what had happened.

Cedric, his eyes burning, had turned pale and haggard. Where he had expected

a great victory, he had suffered an overwhelming defeat.

"Dogs! Cattle!" he snarled. "Is there no marvel that these men from beyond the Great Ice cannot perform? It seemeth that this is a miracle we have seen, Attawulf! My fleet captured under my very eyes! I vow, 'tis like a nightmare!"

"A murrain upon these strangers, my lord!" said Attawulf. "They beat us at every turn!"

"Guntha remains a captive," muttered Cedric, "and my picked soldiers become the galley slaves of these accursed interlopers! See! They parade before me in defiance!"

"Ay, and they parade before Northestria," said Redwold grimly. "Let not Your Majesty forget that! This disaster to your fleet will give heart to the rebels."

Cedric raised his hands in maddened rage.

"Let my soldiers gallop through the towns and villages like a scourge!" he raved wildly. "Let them kill—kill—kill! Death to these vermin who defy my rule!"

Attawulf and Redwold exchanged uneasy glances. The king, in his rage, would not listen to reason. It was all very well to stand there and shout: "Kill—kill!" But the Northestrians were rising against their oppressors. Numerous as the Gothland troops were, they could only hope to keep Northestria in subjection so long as the people remained passive.

The defeat of Cedric's fleet was already having a significant effect. All down the coast, the Northestrians were aware of what had happened; and the news was spreading inland—spreading like wildfire. And once again Lord Dorri-more's party was being hailed as a party of miracle-working wizards.

NELSON LEE was determined to take full advantage of the situation.

The time to act was—now. Cedric the Cruel was "rattled"; his arrogant troops were no less rattled. It was a golden opportunity to press a really spectacular attack.

"Since we've entered into this war, Dorrie, we might as well do it thoroughly," said Nelson Lee briskly. "The Northestrian people are relying upon us, and we must not disappoint them. But as long as Princess Mercia—their rightful ruler—remains aboard the Pioneer, the people will hesitate. So we must give them a lead."

"Aren't we doing that already, old man?" asked Dorrie mildly.

"In a way, yes," replied Lee. "But the people need an even more decisive lead."

Princess Mercia must be established in her own country—in a strong castle, where she can hold her court. Not until then will the people really believe that the tyrant can be overthrown.”

“Sounds pretty good to me,” said Dorrie, nodding. “But how is it going to be done?”

“I’ve been talking with Ethelbert,” said Lee. “The town of Ixwell is one of the most important in the country, after the capital. It lies only a mile or two inland, and it is naturally protected by a valley. The people of Ixwell are already in revolt, and with a little help from us the town can be easily seized. Not only the town, but a good slice of the surrounding country. This will be the first step, and once the princess is established upon her own soil, the loyalists will rally to her cause.”

“Let’s go ahead,” said the millionaire peer eagerly. “I’m all for it.”

“At Ixwell there is a fortified castle,” continued Lee. “Hundreds of volunteers will be ready to form a bodyguard for the princess. In Ixwell Castle she will be at home, too, since she spent several years of her childhood there.”

“Who’s in residence at the moment?” asked Mr. Wilkes.

“A Gothlander overlord known as Morcar the Just,” replied Lee. “But we’ll soon have him out, and send him about his business. His justice is rather warped, I believe. He is Lord High Everything in Ixwell—the Mayor, the Chief Justice, the Administrator, the Tax Collector, the Supreme Lord of Life and Death of the district. Northestria, I understand, has been divided up into so many administrative sections, with one of these Gothlander overlords controlling each. We’ll begin our operations by getting Morcar the Just on the run.”



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It was an ambitious programme, but Nelson Lee was confident of success. All the advantages of the situation were with him. This was the ideal moment to make a spectacular landing, and to seize a goodly slice of Northestrian territory. Such a devastating blow to Cedric's prestige would fire the people with an enthusiasm which would go far towards ultimate victory.

Lord Dorrimore was willing enough to leave the generalship in Nelson Lee's hands; for Dorrie knew that Lee was a master strategist.

"You're the fellow with the brains, Lee," he said complacently. "I'm a man of action. Tell me what to do, and I'll do it. But don't expect me to think. You're here for that job."

The victorious fleet of galleys, with the Gothlanders working hard at the oars, was still led by the submarine. They constituted a brave spectacle as they moved majestically down the coast line. Reaching a quiet, sheltered cove, they turned shorewards.

A spectacular landing was effected—exactly as Lee had planned.

The St. Frank's fellows, much to their disgust, were not allowed to take any part in the proceedings. There might be an attack by Cedric's men-at-arms, and Lee was not taking any chances with the boys.

On the beach there was a big whippet tank—one of the most modern examples of mechanised warfare. This tank had been recently used for the capture of Guntha the Crafty, and the great war machine was ready for instant use.

The advance into Northestria commenced.

The tank led the way, and behind came a number of the Pioneer's crew, some with machine-guns, some with rifles. With them were the rescued Northestrian galley slaves—the finest young men of Princess Mercia's late army. They were all wild with enthusiasm, and they had armed themselves with the swords and battle-axes of the Gothlanders who had been recently captured.

It was a formidable army which moved inland towards Ixwell.

But long before they came within sight of the town, the news of their coming had spread. The people of Ixwell, already rising, went mad with joy. Volunteers were ready in hundreds; the Ixwell fortress, filled with Cedric's reinforcements, was stormed. And such was the fury of the attack that the Northestrians easily prevailed. The enemy troops were

When the party from the Pioneer arrived, it was acclaimed like a conquering army. Without any delay the storming of Ixwell Castle commenced, the mighty tank still leading the way, with the machine-gunners and the Northestrian volunteers in full support.

Ixwell Castle was only held by a comparatively small number of troops—Morcar's personal guard. Already their morale had been shattered, and when they saw the formidable nature of this attack, they crumpled. Morcar the Just had already fled, terrified by the uprising in the town.

There was little or no real fighting. A hand-to-hand scrap here and there, and the soldiers were completely subdued.

When Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore marched across the drawbridge of Ixwell Castle and entered the courtyard, they found scores of the Castle servants gathered there. Many were on their knees, praying with thankfulness; others were in tears, so great was their joy. For these people were Northestrians, and they were now liberated.

"My lords—my lords!" exclaimed a nervous, elderly man, running forward. "Much have we heard of ye; many are the wondrous stories that have been whispered. And now 'tis plain those wondrous stories were true."

"Hail!" went up a great cry. "Hail, Lee the Lionheart!"

"Hail, Dorrimore the Brave!"

The scores of men and women came crowding round, and Nelson Lee and Dorrie had some little difficulty in preventing themselves from being raised shoulder high.

"Your greetings are valued, good friends, but we delay," said Nelson Lee. "I would like to talk with the master of the household."

"I am he, my lord," said the elderly man who had spoken first. "But, by my bones, my lord Morcar did reduce me to the status of a menial, placing a dog of a Gothlander above me. Morcar the Unjust, I vow, would have been a better name."

"The Gothlanders are gone," said Lee. "You, then, are the master of the household. What is your name, friend?"

"Leofric, my lord."

"Prepare, then, Leofric, for the coming of Her Highness, Princess Mercia."

Leofric started back, almost unbelievable joy in his eyes.

"Say ye, my lord, that Her Gracious Highness cometh here?" he asked hoarsely. "I'faith, such good tidings are beyond

"Yet the princess comes immediately—so it is for you, Leofric, to make new preparations," said Nelson Lee. "His Highness, Prince Oswy, will accompany the princess. And my lord Ethelbert will henceforth give you your orders."

"The princess cometh! The princess cometh!"

Already the cry was going round, and it was taken up by hundreds of enthusiastic voices. Leofric, red with excitement and joy, bustled away, shouting orders to all and sundry. Ixwell Castle was soon a hive of industry.

Every Gothlander had been ejected, and this alone was a cause for rejoicing. But the knowledge that Princess Mercia was coming filled the people with frantic delight.

Meanwhile, in the town, amazing scenes were taking place. Hundreds of liberated serfs were pouring in from every road and lane—many of them armed with scythes, pitchforks, and other farming implements. They were rallying to the cause.

The uprising was an established fact now.

Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore, and others of the Pioneer party went here, there, and everywhere; and they were acclaimed wildly by all. Taking little notice of these demonstrations, however, Lee and the others set about their various tasks. They took complete command of Ixwell.

Just outside the town a great camp was formed; and here the gathering peasants were concentrated.

A citizens' defence force was formed, and hundreds of men went forward to a number of surrounding villages and hamlets, there to construct the first defence line, in the event of an attack from Cedric's Gothlanders.

Then came the greatest event of all on this day of days.

The fair Princess Mercia was escorted ashore from the submarine, accompanied by Prince Oswy and Ethelbert the Red—and with several of the Pioneer's officers as an escort, and with the Moor View girls as the princess' ladies-in-waiting. It was an impressive scene.

On the shore a large number of nobles, from Ixwell and the surrounding country had gathered.

Most of them had been living in humble dwellings during these past months, for they had been turned out of their own castles, and all their possessions had been seized. But now, with the return of their princess, their whole outlook was changed. Mercia's first act would be to restore the possessions of these unfortunates.

For upon these kindly overlords depended the welfare of the humbler people. It was a touching, dignified scene which was enacted upon that sandy beach. As the princess set foot once again upon her own soil, she sobbed unrestrainedly. Even Ethelbert's eyes were tear-dimmed.

This plan of Nelson Lee's was another master-stroke of brilliant strategy.

It would have been safer, perhaps, to have kept the royal refugees aboard the submarine; but, by taking them ashore and establishing them in Ixwell Castle, a mighty blow was struck at Cedric's power. The Northestrians themselves were filled with a fighting spirit which was really foreign to them, but which was necessary if the country was to be freed from the invaders. And this spirit was spreading up and down the land. The princess was in Northestria! Ixwell was free! Down with Cedric and his brutal myrmidons!

CHAPTER 5.

The Eve of the Tournament!

THE entry of Princess Mercia into Ixwell was a scene which the Pioneer party was not likely to forget for many a long day.

The St. Frank's fellows, much to their satisfaction, were allowed to go into the town now. Lee had decided that the boys had better establish themselves in Ixwell Castle. The place was an absolute fortress, and there wasn't a chance in a thousand that the Gothlanders would ever seriously menace it. This part of Northestria, at least, was definitely freed from the tyrant.

It seemed to the simple people that years had elapsed since they had last beheld their sweet princess. Under Cedric's cruel rule the country had almost lost count of time; terror had stalked throughout the land, and as Cedric's grip had grown stronger and stronger, so had the people lost all hope.

So their present enthusiasm, because of its unexpectedness, was all the more fiery. Like a bolt from the blue these strangers had come from beyond the great ice, and, as though by a miracle, Northestria was being freed! Already Cedric was at his wits' end. The defeat of his fleet had been a stunning blow—and now the capture of Ixwell, coming on top of that reverse, had increased his troubles.

The town was thronged with people, and when the news came that the princess' arrival was imminent, the crowds lined the roads and almost filled the big central square, one side of which was almost wholly occupied by the castle. The moat ran parallel with this side of the square, and the impressive drawbridge was down, lined by men-at-arms, proud and happy to be once again wearing the princess' colours.

The procession was a long one. First of all came Princess Mercia, Prince Oswy and Ethelbert the Red, mounted on fine chargers and surrounded by a veritable crowd of nobles, gentry, pages and soldiers. Then came the Moor View girls and the St. Frank's fellows, and more of the Pioneer's crew, armed with rifles.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore found time to attend, and they had plenty of evidence that this move was a wise one.

The people were nearly mad with joy; the cheering was frantic. The taking of Ixwell and the entry of the princess would inevitably result in a wave of patriotic enthusiasm sweeping through the country.

But amid all this rejoicing there was nevertheless a spirit of determination. The Gothlanders had been driven out, and every loyal Northestrian swore that the Gothlanders would be kept out.

And so the procession went over the drawbridge, and Princess Mercia's eyes were dim as she entered that quaint old castle where she had spent many years of her childhood. It was almost like coming home.

"I can scarce believe 'tis true," she murmured, as she turned to the Regent. "Good Ethelbert, thinkest thou that we are come to stay?"

"Ay, by the spirit of St. Attalus!" vowed Ethelbert the Red. "Have no fear, fair Majesty. With the help of our good friends we are in excellent case to destroy these Gothlander brutes! Already they run; soon they will scuttle. This is but the first step."

"My poor, poor country!" murmured Mercia sadly. "I fear me, Ethelbert, that much blood will be spilt in the conflict."

"Gothlander blood, I swear!" retorted the Regent. "And what matter? Our people are imbued by such a spirit of battle as will make Cedric tremble in his shoes. This day, by my faith, marks the end of the Gothlander domination!"

AND while Ixwell rejoiced over the return of Princess Mercia, a nervous wreck of a man paced the council chamber in Dunstane Castle, a considerable number of miles distant.

Cedric the Cruel had lost his rage now, but he was in a condition of stark dread. The utter rout of his fleet had staggered him, and now came the alarming news that Ixwell and the country surrounding it had risen afresh. The people were massing in their thousands; they were arming themselves, and they were preparing stern defences.

"By my marrow and by my bones, I am a man in agony!" groaned Cedric. "I am surrounded by fools who can do naught but bid me remain calm—fools who suggest no solution to this terrible problem."

His advisers took little notice; the king had been talking thus for hours.

"Were Guntha here he would evolve some crafty plan," went on Cedric sullenly. "But

my commander-in-chief is a hostage, held by these accursed strangers! By the soul of Sarus! These are ill days!"

Bold, arrogant and ruthless in the full heyday of his power, Cedric was a mere whining weakling now that things were going against him. Like most bullies, he crumpled under defeat.

"Think ye what day this is, Attawulf!" he went on, turning to one of the overlords. "Well, man? Art thou witless to stare so? Remember ye not that this day was set aside for the great Passage of Arms?"

Attawulf the Terrible shrugged.

"'Tis no time, sire, for such trifles as game tournaments," he replied, almost contemptuously.

"The lists are ready, my knight challengers are prepared for the fray," continued the king. "All Dunstane was to have beheld the great tournament. And now?"

"Thou wilt do well, sire, to postpone the tournament," said Attawulf.

The king nodded gloomily. He had been relying upon that tournament to impress the populace. Moreover, he was a frivolous, pleasure-loving monarch. He loved to watch the games—to see his champions perform their great feats. And now he was denied this recreation. Like a spoilt child, he became sulky.

"My knights and my nobles come from all sides," he said, in a growl. "They gather for the great tournament. And here I stay, listening to naught but evil tidings."

He could hardly believe that things had been going so badly. A day or two earlier he had held full sway. Then these strangers had arrived—and all Northestria was inflamed. Like a thunderbolt the truth had burst upon Cedric that his position was precarious. At first he had been contemptuous of the strangers, but now he was finding out that their power was all-conquering.

IN Ixwell, under Nelson Lee's able generalship, the situation was well in hand. There had been a deal of confusion at first, as was to be expected, but now an efficient organisation was getting to work.

Wynwed the Jovial—the stout, good-natured Northestrian who had been aboard the Pioneer ever since the vessel's arrival—was once again in a position of authority. Prior to the invasion he had been the captain of Princess Mercia's bodyguard; now he was promoted to commander of the Ixwell forces. And Wynwed, fired by Nelson Lee's example, was working with a wholehearted enthusiasm which was good to see. Men were being enrolled continuously, and the majority of them needed very little training, since they formerly had been in the princess' bodyguard, or in the bodyguards of the great Northestrian overlords.

Defence works were prepared some miles from Ixwell, all along the countryside—modern defence works, suggested by Nelson

Lee and Lord Dorrmore. The Northeistriars were quickly learning, and they were adapting themselves admirably. Their faith and trust in Lee the Lionheart changed them from peace-loving men into determined warriors.

Without interruption volunteers continued to pour in from the countryside, and they brought with them encouraging tales—tales of the Gothland overlords being hounded out of the castles they had unlawfully seized. The enemy was on the run everywhere. This part of Northestria, at least, was rallying to the princess' cause.

Elsewhere Cedric's stranglehold was as strong as ever; but the loyalists were confident that the movement would spread, and that in due course the whole of Northestria would rise against the oppressor.

A great beginning had been made.

All the volunteer forces engaged in preparing the outer defences were each commanded by an energetic young Britisher. Half the officers, engineers and crew of the Pioneer had been called upon, and these men were eager enough to do their bit. They all received their instructions from Nelson Lee, and the Northeistriars were unquestioning in their willingness to carry out the necessary work.

A formidable first line defence was being rapidly organised; each of the British commanders had a supply of maroon rockets, and in the event of any determined attack by Gothland soldiers these rockets were to be fired. Reserves would then be rushed to that particular part of the line.

So Ixwell itself was doubly protected. There were not only these outer defences, but the town was ready with its own defence force.

The castle, in which the princess now held her court, with Ethelbert the Red as Regent, was safe from any attack. So secure was Ixwell, in fact, that Nelson Lee raised no objection when Dorrie suggested that the boys and girls should be allowed their liberty.

"After all, the town is safe, and there's no reason why the youngsters shouldn't expend some of their energy," said his lordship. "It's a bit thick to keep them bottled up in the castle. They might be useful, too.

Give them something to do, and they'll do it with enthusiasm."

"As long as they don't break bounds, it might be a good idea to give them a certain amount of freedom," agreed Nelson Lee. "I'll talk to them."

When the opportunity arose an hour or so later, Nelson Lee returned to the castle for a meal. He had been on the go for a long time, dashing here, there and everywhere in the handy tank—which was practically as speedy as a modern motor-car.

He had seen that everything was in order,



and that the thousands of volunteers were getting to work in the right direction.

He found the St. Frank's fellows in one of the great apartments of the castle, and most of them were looking impatient and rather fed up. The girls, of course, were more contented; they were with the princess; they were her ladies-in-waiting, and they were revelling in the whole business.

"Well, boys, we're getting along nicely," said Lee, with a smile. "With practically no bloodshed, this part of Northestria has been re-taken, and Cedric's men are well on the run. Ixwell, at least, is ours. We're managing to do a good deal, but it rests with the Northestrians themselves, of course, whether they will ever completely regain their country. I rather think that they will. But it's not going to be an easy job; Cedric and his Gothlander hordes are 'rattled' for the moment, but they are bound to recover. The real test will come then."

"And I suppose we've got to stick in this castle, sir, twiddling our thumbs?" asked Handforth bitterly. "Can't we do some-

tell your parents that we were going to war. That's what the present situation amounts to. And don't overlook the fact that you are still virtually at school, and school rules are still in force. I'm your headmaster, and I expect you to obey orders."

"Does that mean that you're going to prepare a class-room, sir, and make us sit for lessons, with Mr. Wilkes in charge?" asked Nipper. "You might as well do the thing thoroughly while you're about it."

"I'm not sure that that remark isn't cheeky, Nipper," said Lee severely. "However, we'll let it pass. We must make allowances in these peculiar circumstances. No, I'm not going to suggest lessons; but having reminded you that you are still sub-

ject to school rules, I'll just say that I want you all to promise me that you'll keep within bounds."

"Within bounds of what, sir?" asked Travers.

"You are at liberty to go out into the town if you wish," replied Lee. "But you will regard the city walls as the boundary line. You are free to move about Ixwell as you wish; but if you go beyond the walls you will be breaking bounds, and you will be punished accordingly—just as if you were still at school. Is that clear? Let's have no misunderstandings about this."

"By George! Bravo, sir!" yelled Handforth excitedly. "So we can go out into the town, can we? That's good enough, you chaps!"

"Rather!"

"Good old Mr. Lee!"

"You can make yourselves useful, too," continued Nelson Lee, smiling.

"The mere fact that you are members of our party gives you a glamour. These Northestrians look upon us as super-men. We mustn't do anything to disillusion them."

"But, dash it, old thing, you and Dorrie are super-men, what?" murmured Archie Glenthorne. "I mean to say—"

"We are only super-men, Archie, because we can do things which these simple people regard as miracles," replied Nelson Lee. "Even the striking of an ordinary match, or the clicking of a modern petrol-lighter,



Waldo seized a table and, raising it above his head, flung it at the Gothland soldiers.

thing? We're not made of glass, are we? You might as well wrap us up in cotton-wool and have done with it!"

Nelson Lee's smile widened.

"I was expecting something like that from you, Handy," he chuckled. "I'm sorry you've been kept here, twiddling your thumbs. But until Ixwell was definitely safe, I thought it advisable to keep all you boys out of mischief. You mustn't forget that Dorrie and I are responsible for your safety. When we left England, we didn't

is looked upon as something miraculous. I want you boys to go out amongst the people, to encourage them, to help in any way you can. I'll leave it to you. But don't break bounds."

CHAPTER 6.

In the Hands of the Enemy!

"**W**ELL, here we are!" said Handforth genially.

He and a number of other fellows were standing in the big central square of Ixwell. Round and about them bustled the throngs; volunteers marching to and from the castle; countryfolk laden with the produce of the fields; groups of bright-eyed young girls, excited and animated; children by the score.

Wherever the St. Frank's fellows went, they were saluted by the men; curtsies were dropped by the women and girls, and the children clustered round in reverent awe.

All this sort of thing pleased Handforth mightily, since he loved the limelight. Some of the other boys were not quite so keen about it. So much publicity embarrassed them.

"Let's see if we can't do something useful," said Nipper. "I hear that old Wynwed is busy over by the West Gate, and he might be glad of some help."

"Good man!" agreed Handforth. "I don't see why we should be mere spectators."

Church and McClure were all in favour of the suggestion. They had noted, to their alarm, that Handforth had been looking interestedly at many of the Northestrian girls, and it wouldn't take him long to get "smitten." The girls of Ixwell were, for the most part, remarkably pretty and comely. And as they regarded all the St. Frank's fellows as heroes, Handforth, with a very little encouragement, would soon have been well away.

There was much to see, much to be fascinated by, in this quaint old town. Everything was so reminiscent of medieval England. The boys were soon lost in wonder at the ever-changing panorama. And it was distinctly noticeable that all the people were flushed of face, bright of eye, and filled with a radiant hope.

"Makes you feel good to look at 'em," said Nipper. "They hardly know where they are, poor beggars, after their months of torment under Cedric's rule."

There were eight or ten fellows in this particular party—all Removites—and they were making their way through the picturesque streets towards the West Gate.

The rest had gone off on their own pursuits—Willy & Co., of the Third, in one direction; Brown and Stevens, of the Fifth, in another; and so on.

"Jolly glad to see that old Wynwed has been given a position of real authority, dear old fellows," remarked Vivian Travers.

"He's a good chap, and he's a worker. He'll do wonders."

"You mustn't forget that none of these Northestrians would have done much without Mr. Lee and Dorrie to set them an example," said Waldo. "An army, no matter how well trained, can't do much unless it has a brilliant leader. Mr. Lee's a giddy marvel. The way he has taken command of this situation——"

"Here, hold on!" interrupted Handforth suddenly. "What's that rummy sound?"

They were passing down a narrow, cobbled street, almost an alley. The quaint houses practically leaned over on either side, until their eaves almost touched. It was a short cut towards the West Gate, and, for the first time since their entry into the town, the boys found themselves alone. This street was a little backwater, well away from the "madding crowd."

"Yes, I thought I heard something, too," said Nipper, frowning. "It sounded like a girl screaming."

"My only hat!" said Handforth.

They all stood still. From beyond a wall some little distance down the alley, came a harsh, brutal voice:

"So thou wouldst answer me back, thou lazy, good-for-nothing!" it came. "I faith, I'll teach thee a lesson, wench!"

There followed the sound of thudding blows, and the sharp, piercing screams of a girl.

"Mercy, master!" came her pitiful voice. "I thought not to displease thee. Indeed, indeed, I but made a small error. Have pity, master!"

"A murrain upon thy tongue!" shouted the harsh voice. "The whip shall teach thee!"

More screams followed, accompanied by scufflings. Handforth looked at Nipper and Waldo and Travers and the others, and his face was flushed.

"We're not going to stand this, are we?" he muttered. "By George! It seems to me that some of the Northestrians are just as brutal as those rotten Gothlanders!"

"There are good and bad in all people, old man," murmured Travers.

"Come on!" panted Handforth.

He ran across the cobbles, reached the wall from which the cries were coming, and found a door. The door itself was standing slightly ajar. Handforth pushed it open with his shoulder, and then he stood glaring with indignation and fury.

He saw a small, enclosed yard, and almost in the centre of it a coarse, ill-attired man was mercilessly whipping a slim, young girl of about fifteen.

"Pity, master—pity!" sobbed the unfortunate girl.

"I have but half finished with thee!" growled her tormentor, renewing his attack.

"That's all you know, you rotter!" roared Handforth. "Come on, you chaps! St. Frank's to the rescue!"

He dashed into the yard, and the other boys swarmed after him. They considered

that this was essentially a case where they were called upon to interfere.

In a body, they fell upon the startled bully. They dragged him back, seized the whip, and flung it aside.

"By my bones!" gasped the man. "What now? Have I offended ye, good strangers?"

"Take that!" roared Handforth, delivering one of his famous punches. "What do you mean by bullying this girl?"

The man staggered back under the weight of the blow, and the next moment Handforth was supporting the half-fainting girl.

"It's all right," he muttered. "We'll protect you from—"

Handforth broke off in amazement, his jaw sagging. An astonishing thing had happened.

For, with a clattering of heavy boots, a jingling of chainmail, and a creaking of leather, a dozen powerfully-built soldiers had sprung out upon the boys. Most of them were bearded, and they were brutal, fierce-looking men.

"A trap!" yelled Nipper. "Fight for it, you chaps!"

"Great Scott!" gurgled Handforth.

Before he could raise a hand, two of the soldiers gripped him, and their strength was such that the valiant Edward Oswald was helpless. In that moment he realised that these soldiers were Gothlanders—Cedric's men-at-arms—and that scene between the man and girl had obviously been a fake to lure the St. Frank's boys into this trap!

THE fellows did not know it at the time, but these Gothlander soldiers had been cut off in the general retreat. Finding themselves trapped within the city walls, they had sought shelter in the squalid house of a man who was in Cedric's pay—a Northeastrian, but a spy.

The country was infested with such spies. Cedric paid well, and he had always found plenty of greedy, unscrupulous fellows ready enough to take his money, and to supply him with information. It was because of these spies that the people had never dared to murmur a word of treason, or to attempt any rising. No sooner was such a word breathed, than the information reached the ears of the local commandant—and the culprit was tortured or beheaded as a punishment. Cedric believed in terrorist rule.

The fight, if it could be called a fight, was over within a moment or two.

Four of the boys had been surrounded and seized—Handforth, Nipper, Travers and Waldo. Waldo, to the amazement of the Gothlanders, had put up a tremendous resistance. He managed to grab hold of a wooden table which was lying in the courtyard, and with this he put in some valiant work before finally being subdued by four of the soldiers. His strength was amazing.

The other boys escaped. Actually, they never entered the fight, for they had been delayed in getting into the yard. Fullwood, Archie Glenethorne, Church and McClure, who had been about to follow the others,

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halted. They had seen the Gothlander soldiers springing out, and they had seen their chums captured.

"Back, you chaps!" panted Fullwood. "We'd better keep out of this!"

"But Handy!" gasped Church. "Look! Handy and those other chaps——"

"What's the use?" snapped Fullwood. "There are a dozen of those soldiers—and if we butted in we should only be collared, too. We wouldn't stand an earthly!"

Church and McClure and Archie realised the truth of this. Their impulse was to dash in and go to the rescue of their captured chums; but there were only eight of them—boys—against a dozen enemy soldiers. The Gothlanders had become aware of their presence already, and they were advancing. It was not cowardice which caused the boys to turn tail and bolt; it was genuine discretion.

Something came hurtling through the air, to crash upon the cobbles close to Church's running feet—an enormous battle-axe.

"This is the best thing we can do!" panted Fullwood, as he ran. "We'll get a crowd of Northestrians—and then we'll come to the rescue! One of us had better dash to the castle and tell Mr. Lee!"

"Yes, rather!" said Church breathlessly. "Let's all yell! We'll get a hundred men in no time, and we'll soon get those chaps free! We can surround this part of the town and bottle them up!"

"They might be dead!" groaned McClure.

"Good gad!" said Archie. "A frightful thought, old lad, but somehow I don't think you're right. If those blighters meant to kill the chappies, they would have killed them at once. I can't help thinking there's some poisonous scheme afoot."

They dashed out into one of the main thoroughfares, shouting excitedly, attracting the crowds.

CHAPTER 7.

The Captives!

THE four prisoners, without delay, were hustled through a low doorway into the squalid dwelling of the Northestrian spy. All the enemy soldiers came in, and the door was closed and bolted.

"Bind them—and reduce them to silence!" ordered one of the soldiers, who was evidently an officer. "I'faith! This is a victory, indeed! I vow Cedric will reward us richly!"

"You rotters!" panted Handforth, glaring. "What are you going to do with us? How did you get here? Where did you spring from? We thought all you rotten Gothlanders were cleared out of the town!"

"Thou art not such a mighty firebrand as thou wouldest have us believe, boy," sneered the officer. "By the bones of Sarus! These stranger youths are but children! Where is their wondrous magic? Did they possess such powers they would now free themselves! Bah! They are as ordinary as the Northestrian dogs!"

The Northestrian spy was hovering about eagerly.

"Thou hast not overlooked my reward, good captain?" he asked.

"A murrian upon ye, pig!" snapped the captain. "Thou wilt come with us. Thy reward shalt follow."

"Ay, ay!" muttered the spy, abashed.

"You silly fathead!" roared Handforth. "You don't think you can get away with this, do you? You've only got four of us, and the other chaps will have hundreds of men round here in no time!"

"Silence the youth's tongue!" growled the captain. "Methinks we tarry needlessly. Let us begone!"

The boys had no opportunity of further speech, for rough cloths were bound over their faces, gagging them. Their hands and feet had already been bound. They were helpless.

The leader of the Gothlanders was Captain Elred, a man who had held a position of some authority in Ixwell Castle prior to the storming of it. But for the fact that he and his troop had been hounding out a supposed traitor at the time of the attack they would all have fled with the rest. As it was, they had been compelled to seek hiding.

But Elred was a man of resource. He had waited, believing that he could make capital out of the situation. And now, because of his patience, he had captured these four "stranger youths." It was a triumph.

The four prisoners, after their first shock, were mainly aware of a sense of relief. They had half-expected to be killed out of hand. But the conversation they had heard already informed them that they were to be kept alive—kept as captives, to be taken to Cedric the Cruel.

Yet how could these Gothlander soldiers possibly escape from Ixwell? The town was already an armed fortress, and the very sight of a Gothlander would create a riot. Besides, Church and McClure and those other chaps had got away, and it was certain that they would bring help in a few minutes.

There wasn't really much to be alarmed about. This house would be surrounded, attacked, and rescue would come quickly. These hiding Gothlanders might have achieved a temporary success, but it would surely prove to be no more.

"Hasten, ye sluggards!" commanded Captain Elred harshly. "Hear ye not the clamouring of the throng? Already the people come, thinking to seize us!"

"Ay, and should they seize us our shrift, methinks, will be short," muttered one of the soldiers.

The boys could hear the sounds, too—the echoing of shouts from outside. There was also the thudding of heavy implements upon the back and front doors and the closed shutters of the windows. The rescue party had arrived, and was smashing in.

(Continued on page 24.)

LINE UP HERE FOR A GOOD LAUGH. LADS!



HANDFORTH'S Weekly

No. 2. Vol. 1.

EDITORIAL STAFF.

MAY 2nd, 1931.

THE EDITOR'S CHIN-WAG

Editor-in-Chief E. O. Handforth
Editor E. O. Handforth
Chief Sub-Editor E. O. Handforth
Literary Editor E. O. Handforth
Art Editor E. O. Handforth
Rest of Staff E. O. Handforth

SPECIAL FEATURE INQUISITIVE INTERVIEWS

No. 1. Arnold McClure.

HALLO, everybody. Hope you're all still alive and kicking after reading Number One of the WEEKLY. By George, it's a wonder that number two has ever come out. In between times, my life has been a misery. Minute after minute I have been pestered by fellows showering criticism upon me—adverse and otherwise. Mostly adverse, I'm afraid, for I only seem to remember one chap praising the first issue of the WEEKLY. That was young Teddy Long, and he wanted to borrow two bob. He didn't get the two bob, and he went out of the editorial sanctum quicker than he came in.

However, I am in no wise worried. It's jealousy, of course. The other chaps are jealous to think that my WEEKLY has caused such a sensation in journalistic circles. I understand that there have been minor stampedes in Fleet Street. Hard-bitten journalists have fought to get a look at the WEEKLY, and when they have seen it promptly collapsed—overcome with admiration, of course.

I believe the fellows are rather hurt, also, because I wouldn't publish any of their efforts in the WEEKLY. I know it seems hard-hearted and callous, but after all, an Editor must consider his public. The public want the best, and that is why I have written everything myself. However, having been inundated with tons and tons of MSS. by the chaps, I expect I shall be able to pick out one or two worthy of publication after I have tinkered about with them. I have ordered a gross of blue pencils for this purpose, and they will appear in due course.

Yours cheerily,

E. O. HANDFORTH.

What would you do if you were headmaster of St. Frank's for six months?

Declare a six months' holiday.

Who is your favourite master?

Mr. Wilkes—he lent me sixpence yesterday.

Do you think you're good at games?

Well, I beat Churchy at tiddley-winks the other night.

Are you contented with 'life'?

No. I object to being mistaken-for a punch-ball every day.

What is your ideal?

E. O. Handforth—with his fists strapped behind his back.

What is your favourite pastime?

Dodging the aforementioned fists.

PICTURED PROVERBS



"Look before you leap." Jimmy Potts didn't—and that was his misfortune.

What do you think of the WEEKLY.

I'm a believer in "discretion is the better part of valour."

What is the best Talkie you've seen lately?

William Napoleon Browne

What would you do if you were left a fortune?

Die of heart failure.

What's been your most pleasant experience of the week?

Using Teddy Long as a football. He called me Scotch because I wouldn't give him that tanner Mr. Wilkes lent me.

And your most unpleasant experience?

Having to answer these questions when I know I'm going to get a thick ear for telling the truth.

By George! You're right there. Biff!

HANDY'S HINTS—No. 2

How to Play Cricket

THE noble art of cricket can be divided into three phases: batting, bowling and fielding. Players who excel in all three branches of the game are known as all rounders—Fatty Little is not included in this category.

I am an all-rounder myself, although Nipper, captain of the St. Frank's Junior Cricket XI, doesn't seem to realise it. He absolutely refuses to let me bowl, pointing out the fact that I am supposed to *bowl* them out not *knock* them out. By George, how potty! If I wanted to knock 'em out I should use my fists—not spoil an expensive leather ball.

BATTING

We'll take batting first. The batsman's job is to score runs. It's easy, really. All you've got to do is to hit the ball a mighty slosh with your bat. The harder you hit, the better—there are plenty more bats in the shops if you should break one or two. Scoring all your runs by means of boundaries will save you the awful fag of running.

The whole art of run-getting is to place the ball between the fielders. Easy enough if your eyesight is sufficiently good to see where they're standing. Another point to remember: the successful batsman never lets the ball hit the wicket. What the dickens is the bat for but to prevent that?

BOWLING

The bowler's job is to hit the wicket with the ball. All good bowlers do it. You must not chuck the ball; you place the ball in your hand, become a human windmill, and hurl the leather so that it shatters the wicket and the batsman's hopes at the same time.

It is a good idea to take a run up to the bowling crease to gain the necessary impetus with which to propel the ball. Classy bowlers mark the beginning of their run by digging a hole in the ground—not too big, or you might fall down it—or by placing a cap on the grass. In the latter instance it is advisable to use somebody else's cap in case you tread on it.

Practise making the ball spin so that it breaks a few dozen yards. The batsman, thinking that you're absent-mindedly bowling to somebody in the next field, won't attempt to play the ball. Watch his dial when it cuts in, whizzes past his bat and knocks the bails flying.

FIELDING

Fielding is a much neglected part of cricket—yet it is an essential factor in the winning of matches. Of course, it is easy—merely a matter of stopping the ball when the batsman hits it. It is best to do this with the hands; stopping the leather with the shins or the body or the head is useful but not to be recommended.



HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

TRACKETT GRIM, the famous detective, receives a visit from Knock-kneed Nesbitt, the King of London's underworld. Nesbitt gets Grim at his mercy, and demands the Bilton jewels, worth a cool million quids.

A CRIM TRIUMPH!

"I WANT the jewels!"

Knock-kneed Nesbitt, with the machine-gun in his hand, pointed menacingly at the heart of Trackett Grim, repeated the words harshly.

The world famous detective shrugged a magnificent shrug.

"All right, Nesbitt, you've got me beaten!" he acknowledged. "The jewels are in the safe over there. I'll get them for you."

The detective walked slowly towards the huge safe which stood in one corner of the consulting-room. He looked like one who realises he is utterly beaten—yet actually his massive, super-charged brain was working in top gear. Grim was only acting—and so marvellously that the crook was completely taken in. Little did he suspect, as he followed Grim towards the safe, that he was soon to trip over the card the detective held up his sleeve!



Something within safe and sent across the

EXCHANGE AND MART

FOR SALE.—A splendid bike, in perfect condition except for missing rear wheel and handlebars. Frame slightly bent. What offers?—Apply Tommy Watson, Remove Form.

SOMETHING FOR NOTHING.—Walter Church, of Study D, has a guaranteed nose-running, eye-watering, super-sneezing cold which he is willing to give to anybody who cares to call for it.

WANTED.—A decent second-hand cricket bat. Willing to pay 3d. down and 1½d. per week. First instalment guaran-

teed if seller calls to-morrow morning before the tuckshop opens.—Apply Chubby Heath, Third Form.

GENUINE BARGAIN.—A remarkable "Scratchit" fountain pen that writes and blots at the same time. **WILLING TO SACRIFICE** for 5½d.—Inquiries to E. Snipe, Remove Form.

SPECIMEN HUNTERS.—Add to your collection a large, antiquated kipper of **PRICE-LESS** value. Could be stuffed, and would suggest placing it in a glass case.—Call at Study B, Remove Passage.

TRACTETT GRIM — MASTER CRIMINAL!

A super-super detective-thriller story,
specially written by the world-famous
author, E. O. HANDFORTH.

Trackett Grim's whoop of triumph changed to one of consternation when he saw this.

"Hi, look what you've done, you road hog!" he bellowed indignantly to the doubled-up form of Nesbitt as it somersaulted into the adjoining room, where Splinter was indulging in his favourite meal of tripe and onions. "You needn't think you're going to get away with this, you house-wrecker. I shall send the bill to your solicitor!"

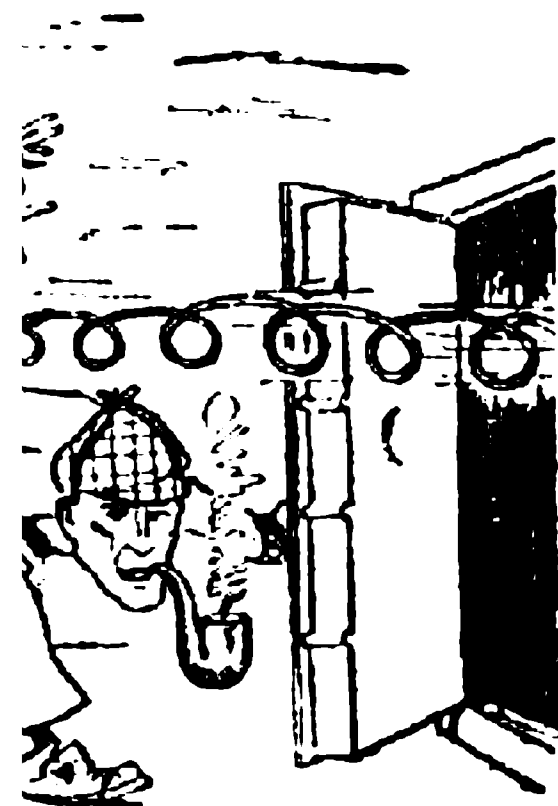
But Knock-kneed Nesbitt did not hear that terrible threat. He was "out" to the wide. Even the fact that his size ten boko was reposing ungracefully among the boiled onions failed to bring him round.

"What's happened —" began Splinter.

His famous master shuddered and stepped back ten yards as the whiff of oniony breath hit his finely chiselled nostrils and caused them to quiver as though recoiling from a sledge-hammer blow.

"Splinter," he said admonishingly, "kindly avert your head to starboard when talking, or fetch me my gas-mask."

The boy looked abashed, and twisted his neck round till it



ized out of the
the crook flying
he room.

squeaked in shrill protest.

"Sorry, gov'nor," he apologised, speaking from behind himself, so to speak. "But what's happened? What's this bloke mean by butting in and washing himself in my dinner?"

"My boy, this base scalleywag tried to steal the Bilton jewels. But he and his moth-eaten gang shall suffer for their temerity in daring to cross swords with me. Nesbitt's coming here gives me the opportunity of bringing to book the whole of London's Underworld in one fell swoop!"

Splinter took five minutes to recover his breath after this audacious statement.

"How?" he queried excitedly at last.

(Continued at foot of next column.)

CLASS-ROOM CLIPPINGS

YOUNG CHING, the Chinese junior of the Remove, is a scream when it comes to conjuring. When Mr. Crowell was called away from the class-room Ching proceeded to produce various articles out of his neighbour's ear. One of them was a fat-looking sausage. Fatty Little pounced upon it and started to chew it—and then gave a howl of dismay when he found that the "sausage" was a chunk of rubber.

* * *

Mr. Crowell's pet aversion is rats. He gets the wind up sky high at sight of one. Bernard Forrest brought a toy one into the class-room and put it on Crowell's desk when he wasn't looking. You ought to have seen old Crowsfeet when he spotted it! He gave a gurgling cry and tried to climb up the cupboard, but only succeeded in bringing the whole thing down on top of him. Forrest, the rotter, wouldn't own up, and the whole Form was detained. Rats!

* * *

Talking of pet aversions, mine is Teddy Long. My foot always itches when I see him—and the other day when I saw him copying from his neighbour's exercise book it itched (my foot, I mean) so much that I couldn't resist booting him. He yelled, of course—aloud—and I had old Crowell down on me like a ton of hot bricks. Painful memories. I say, anybody got a sure cure for the prevention of itching feet? If so, send it along.

"I shall disguise myself as Knock-kneed Nesbitt and go to his lair in Limehouse!" announced Trackett Grim thunderously. "Quick, Splinter! Bind and gag Nesbitt—although he won't recover for a week at least—and then bring me my make-up cabinet."

Half an hour later Knock-kneed Nesbitt left the detective's house. At least, it looked like Nesbitt. Actually it was Trackett Grim—no longer the master-detective, but now the master-criminal!

(To be continued.)

Stanley Waldo was demonstrating his strength the other day. He grabbed hold of Fatty Little's desk—with Fatty sitting in it—and lifted it about three feet off the ground. Somebody jokingly shouted "Cave!" Waldo dropped the desk like a hot brick on to Jimmy Potts' toe; Fatty landed with such a bump that he broke the seat; and the inkwell shot its contents over Archie Glen-thorne's brand new twelve-guinea suit. And when Mr. Wilkes came in and saw the damaged desk, he promptly ordered Fatty to go on diet and reduce his weight. Poor old Fatty!

* * *

Old Corney Trotwood gets deafer and deafer every day. It was geography lesson, and Mr. Crowell asked him to name some races of people in India. Corney looked very surprised, then walked out of the room and returned with a pair of braces. He thought Crowell had said, "Bring some braces in here." However, they came in handy, as it happened. Mr. Crowell promptly collapsed with a dozen pink fits, and broke his own braces in the process. So Corney came in useful for about the first time in his life.

A LOT OF BOSH!

By E. O. H.

THERE is no truth in the rumour—started by Teddy Long—that the wooden class-room desks at St. Frank's are to be scrapped and armchairs and small tables substituted. A jolly good idea—but what a hope!

From the same source comes a statement to the effect that Archie Glen-thorne is not buying any more toppers because I'm always bashing them in. Rot and piffle! Archie is one of the best, and he wouldn't do me out of my daily dose of exercise.

Fatty Little is not fasting, as stated by Arthur Hubbard. Fancy starting a silly tale like that just because Fatty didn't eat anything for half an hour on end!

The rumour that my minor hasn't borrowed from me for three days is utterly without foundation. I know this to my cost—literally!

ST. FRANK'S IN THE LISTS!

(Continued from page 21.)

"The taper, fool!" said Elred, swinging round upon the spy.

The man thrust a crude taper into the fire and ignited it. A yellow flare resulted, and, leading the way, the spy vanished down a dark passage, the floor of which was rough and uneven. The soldiers followed, carrying their prisoners bodily.

The passage was not long; another door was opened and the spy made his way down some ramshackle steps. He soon stood in a low cellar. The place was filled with an earthy smell, and it was damp and uninviting.

The Gothlanders followed, the captives being roughly tumbled down. They sustained one or two ugly bruises during the process, and by now they were becoming slightly alarmed. What was the meaning of this strange move? They could not understand why they were brought down into this noisome cellar.

But they soon knew the truth.

Elred was the last to enter, and he securely closed the door after him, bolting it. Down in the cellar the other soldiers were lighting a number of flaring torches from the single taper, and soon the darkness was completely dispelled. The torches flared noisily, sending forth great flames and clouds of smoke.

And now the spy heaved against the apparently solid wall, and a part of it moved back sluggishly, revealing a narrow stone passage which dripped with moisture.

One by one the boys were carried through.

They were not so confident now. There was a secret exit from this house! They were being taken along this mysterious tunnel to a more secure prison, no doubt—and this would mean that the rescue party would be baffled!

When the last Gothlander had passed into the tunnel Elred closed the door. And now commenced a march into the unknown. It was an eerie, uncomfortable experience. The air in the tunnel was foul, and made all the fouler by the noxious fumes from the flaring torches.

In places the tunnel was so low that the giant Gothlander soldiers could hardly squeeze through. Gasping and spluttering and cursing, they forced their captives along with them. By now Nipper and Handforth and Waldo and Travers had had their leg bonds cut, and they were compelled to walk. Their captors saw no reason why they should continue to carry the four boys.

The tunnel seemed endless. It was evidently of great antiquity, the sides and roof being crudely made of stone. It wound this way and that, sometimes dipping steeply, sometimes rising. But its general direction scarcely varied.

Actually this tunnel was an ancient aqueduct—a relic of bygone centuries. It had been built more or less on the Roman principle, and it had been originally used to

carry water into Ixwell. For many years, however, it had been allowed to crumble into neglect. Recently it had been utilised by the Gothlanders for spying purposes; it had provided an excellent means of getting in and out of the town in secret.

Cunningly had Elred tarried in Ixwell. Knowing that he could escape so easily by this tunnel, he had deliberately laid low. Now his scheming was rewarded, for he was escaping with four valuable prisoners. The capture of four Northestrians would have meant little or nothing. But the capture of these four English boys might well turn the whole tide of warfare in the king's favour!

NELSON LEE heard the extraordinary story after he had just come away from an audience with Princess Mercia and Ethelbert the Red.

It sounded like an absurd rumour. However, he lost no time in hurrying to that part of the town where the excitement was at fever heat. On the way he met Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Wilkes, and both of them were looking grave.

"It's pretty bad, old man," said Lord Dorrimore bluntly. "Four of our chaps have been collared!"

Nelson Lee listened with a frown as Dorrie gave him the facts.

"And these boys declare that Nipper and Handforth and Travers and Waldo were seized by Gothlander soldiers?" he asked at length. "They were set upon in a backwater and taken into a house?"

"It sounds pretty steep, doesn't it?" said Mr. Wilkes. "I couldn't believe it at first. Where did these enemy soldiers come from, anyhow? But the fact remains, Lee, that the house has been surrounded, broken into and searched—and the four boys are not there. Neither are the Gothlander soldiers. They all seem to have vanished into thin air!"

"They couldn't have escaped by the ordinary means, either," put in Dorrie. "The house has been under observation practically the whole time. It's a mystery."

When Nelson Lee arrived at the house he found it swarming with excited Northestrians. The place had been searched from attic to cellar, but nothing had been discovered.

"Looks as if you were right about keeping the boys in the castle," said Mr. Wilkes. "There's no guarantee of safety anywhere."

"I think this is a very exceptional case," replied Nelson Lee. "In the first place, the boys were tricked by a simple, but clever, ruse. And it's hardly likely that there will be any other Gothlander soldiers in Ixwell. Now, let's know exactly where we stand. The boys were brought into this house, and they were not seen to leave."

"They couldn't have left!" protested Dorrie. "There were a dozen enemy soldiers—in full uniform. If those fellows had tried to get away they would have been spotted on all sides."

"Yet they are not in the house now," said Lee. "Then it follows that they must have escaped by some secret means. We shall have to make a very thorough search."

He wasted little or no time on the house itself, but confined his attentions to the cellar. Here he did not fail to note the odour of stale burning, and he looked at Lord Dorrimore gravely.

"Torches!" he said. "The Gothlander soldiers came down into this cellar bearing torches, and we can take it for granted that the boys were with them. There's a secret exit here somewhere, Dorrie. It ought not to be difficult to find."

It wasn't.

Dorrie declared that he would never have found it in a month of Sundays; but Nelson Lee, who was experienced in such things, hit upon the secret after only ten minutes careful search.

There was a tiny, almost imperceptible crevice between some of the stones, and, tracing this crevice, Lee discovered that it almost formed a square.

Pushing and heaving, he at last hit upon the correct section which answered to pressure. The cunningly-made stone door rolled open, revealing the black tunnel.

"By the Lord Harry!" ejaculated Lord Dorrimore.

They plunged in, and Lee, with an electric torch, had a keen look round.

"This part of the tunnel is fairly new, Dorrie," he said briskly, "but further on, you see, it is quite different. An old aqueduct, by the look of it. The end of it must have been converted so that it opened into that cellar. But we needn't waste any time on conjectures; we know that the boys were taken along this tunnel, so we'd better hurry."

AT last the four captives were granted a respite.

They had been forced along this apparently endless tunnel for ages—or so it seemed to them. Half-choked by the bad air and the fumes from the torches, they had been driven along by their brutal captors. Not a moment's rest had they been allowed. The leather thongs were biting into their wrists, and they were half-suffocated by the cloths which were bound round their faces.

Now, after what had seemed an eternity, they emerged from the tunnel—to find themselves in a rocky gully, the sides of which rose steeply. All round the gully, at the summit, the edge was fringed by dense trees and bushes. The boys judged that they were a considerable distance from Ixwell. They must have travelled some miles underground—and it was a certainty, in any case, that they were now well beyond the Northebian lines.

That this was so was proved shortly afterwards by the arrival of a strong force of Gothland soldiers, all mounted. There was a number of spare horses, too.

"Thou hast done well, Elred!" one of the Gothlanders was saying in a gloating voice.

"I'faith! The king will be well pleased with ye!"

He surveyed the prisoners mockingly.

"There will be no hindrance?" asked Elred. "These cursed Northebians have not risen in the villages and hamlets through which we must pass?"

"Nay, we are beyond the limits of the Northebian forces," replied the other officer. "The road is clear to Dunstane."

"Then on to Dunstane!" shouted Elred fiercely.

Not half an hour after the cavalcade had moved off from the gully, Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore, with a number of St. Frank's fellows and crowds of Northebians with them, emerged from the tunnel.

Lee read the story that the ground plainly told him—the marks of many horses' hoofs.

"I'm afraid we're too late, Dorrie," said Lee grimly. "The Gothlander soldiers have got away."

Only Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore climbed the rocky pass which led out of the gully. From the summit they could look down upon a fair stretch of countryside. And they knew at once that they were beyond the limits of the rebel lines.

"This is bad, old man," said Lee gravely. "Those boys have undoubtedly been taken into Dunstane—to Cedric himself. I hardly dare think what will befall them."

"Cedric won't dare to harm them," said Dorrie quickly.

"He is a brutal man—a man of sudden passions," replied Lee. "He may take it into his head to vent his vengeance upon them. On the other hand, his advisers will probably make him see reason. Those four boys are valuable hostages. Let us hope that we shall be able to get them back, Dorrie. But I am afraid that this situation will make a very great difference to the whole campaign."

CHAPTER 8.

Cedric's Ultimatum!

ATTAWULF THE TERRIBLE, his eyes glowing with fierce satisfaction, patted the travel-stained Elred on the shoulder.

"Wait ye here in this ante-chamber," he said. "I will acquaint the king. I make no doubt that he will be mightily pleased to grant ye an audience, that he may hear this goodly tale from thine own lips."

"I await, my lord," said Elred, saluting.

Attawulf passed through the imposing arched doorway into the council chamber—where Cedric the Cruel sat in a great chair, moodily staring through a near-by window.

"What now, Attawulf?" he demanded, glowering upon the overlord. "Tell me not ill news! Have I not heard enough?"

"Yet, sire, it is right that thou shouldst hear the ill news with the good."

"I'faith, thou art a wit!" sneered the king. "Thou speakest of good news—and I vow there is no such thing!"

"One of my own men-at-arms, an officer of goodly record, awaits in the ante-chamber," said Attawulf. "He bringeth a story which will please thee, sire. When I tell ye that four of the stranger youths have been captured, and are even now within this castle—"

"What say ye?" shouted the king, springing to his feet.

He seized Attawulf fiercely, and Redwold the Ruthless, crossing from one of the other big windows, had an expression of amazement on his face.

"Bring this man hither!" ordered the king, his whole manner changing. "By my marrow and by my bones! If what thou sayest is true, Attawulf, then the tide is indeed turning in our favour! Bring me this knave forthwith!"

Elred was permitted to enter, and he stood awed before the king. He was uncomfortably conscious of his dusty, uncouth appearance; for the king and his advisers were attired in much finery, and this apartment was spotless.

"What is this I hear?" demanded the king, with almost fierce eagerness. "Is't a fact that four of the stranger youths have been captured and have been brought to Dunstane?"

"It is so, your Majesty," said Elred.

"By St. Attalus! Bring these youths to me!" shouted the king. "But wait! How did ye accomplish this thing, knave? And whence came ye, and how?"

"I am from Ixwell, sire."

"From Ixwell, say ye!" exclaimed the king sharply. "But I am told that Ixwell, encouraged by these strangers, has revolted."

"Ay, 'tis true, sire!" replied Elred. "But when the Northestrian rabble stormed the fortress and the castle, I deemed it my duty to stay. With a dozen men-at-arms, I concealed myself in the home of a spy. Hidden thus, I remained in the very heart of this uprising, and so I am in a position to tell ye how things stand."

Elred was making capital out of his misfortune. He and his men had been trapped in Ixwell, but he thought it unnecessary to tell the exact truth to the king.

So he proceeded to give a garbled account of what had actually happened. He credited himself with all that had passed. Gaining courage and confidence, he told his story—how he had trapped the boys, how he had brought them through that ancient aqueduct, and how, by hard riding, he had at length reached Dunstane.

"'Tis a stirring story, in all truth!" declared the king at length. "Thou hast earned my pleasure, good soldier. I will see to it that thou art well rewarded. Thou shalt be promoted, and much land and possessions shall be thine."

"Yet I deserve naught, sire," murmured Elred. "I was but serving my king."

"By wit and strategy, ye seized these stranger youths," said Cedric. "Bring them to me without delay. Methinks I can use them to good advantage." He swung round. "How now, Attawulf?" he went on gloat-

ingly. "How now, Redwold? Ere long we will make terms with these impudent rebels!"

Elred retired, and very soon he returned, accompanied by a body of men who entered with jingling spurs and rattling accoutrements. In their midst were Nipper, Handforth, Travers, and Waldo—all of them tired, weary, and dusty—but coolly defiant.

"By the bald scalp of Joseph!" muttered the king, as he advanced upon them.

Not until he saw the boys with his own eyes did he fully believe that they had really and truly been captured. They returned his gaze without flinching.

"Dogs!" snarled Cedric suddenly. "Ere I have finished with ye, I will take ye to the Torture Chamber and make ye suffer the agonies of the condemned!"

"If you harm us, you'll have to answer to our people," said Handforth bluntly.

"Silence, young fool!" thundered Cedric. "Am I not the king? Thou wilt see how I punish traitors! But be not afraid—yet! No harm shall come to ye."

He turned, and waved to Elred.

"Take them away!" he ordered. "Lock them up—and await my further orders!"

The boys were dragged out, and Cedric laughed long and loudly. He had seen them, and he was satisfied. His haggard expression had gone; the hopelessness which had so recently bowed him down was now a thing of the past.

"Bring me parchment—bring me pen!" he ordered. "See that a courier is mounted and ready. I send an ultimatum to these dogs in Ixwell!"

"Thou art wise, sire," said Attawulf quickly. "'Tis well to make use of these captives."

"Ay, I will make use of them—never fear!" vowed the king. "And when I have used them, then they will die!"

A gleam suddenly entered his eyes, and he laughed raucously.

"Give orders, Attawulf, that the Passage of Arms shall take place," he said. "Let the great tournament proceed!"

"But, sire—"

"Away with thy protests, Attawulf!" interrupted Cedric. "Art telling me that this is no time for games? Marry, but we hold the key to the situation, and the whole land of Northestria will soon be ours once more. Let the tournament proceed, I say! Have the knights prepare for the fray! Send forth the news, far and wide, that the Passage of Arms is to take place!"

Attawulf bit his lip, but said nothing further. He exchanged helpless glances with Redwold. The king was taking too much for granted. But then, he was the king, and he was not the kind of man with whom it was easy to argue.

THE special courier, riding hard, tore through towns and villages, escorted by a bodyguard of picked men-at-arms.

And when, at length, the rebel lines were reached, the courier went forward alone

under a flag of truce. He was admitted; he was surrounded by Northestrian mounted men, and thus escorted into Ixwell, and to the castle. His sealed message was taken by the Master of the Household, who passed it on to one of the ladies-in-waiting. Thus, by such steps, did Cedric's communication reach Princess Mercia's hand.

"Do thou read it, good Ethelbert," said the young princess quietly. "I doubt not that Cedric pleads for peace."

Ethelbert read, and he paled.

"By my soul!" he muttered. "This is ill news, fair Majesty!"

He told her, and she gave a little cry.

Messengers were sent out to scour the city,

so that Lee the Lionheart and Dorrimore the Brave should be informed. They arrived quickly—for Lee had even then been on his way to the castle. He had heard of the coming of Cedric's courier, and he guessed what this might portend.

"Seek no longer the missing youths, Lee the Lionheart," said the princess sadly. "Alas, they are in Dunstane, captives of Cedric the Cruel!"

"Captives?" repeated Lee sharply. "That, at least, is a measure of comfort. I had feared that the poor boys had been done to death."

He read the letter—which was in the nature of an ultimatum.

"Dorrie, old man, this is bad," he said. "Nipper, Handforth, Travers and Waldo are held prisoners in Dunstane Castle. Cedric threatens to execute them unless we obey his will."

"And what is his will?" asked Dorrie steadily. "By execution he no doubt means that he'll burn them at the stake—with as much torture as possible."

"We may be sure that he will be merciless," agreed Nelson Lee. "He says that unless Ixwell is evacuated within twenty-four hours, and Guntha the Crafty released, the four boys will die."

Calmly Waldo rode up and challenged Urstan the Valliant, mighty, unbeaten warrior, to battle in the tournament.



"Good gad! That's rotten!" said his lordship, frowning.

"And Cedric means this, good friends!" cried the princess in anguish. "He threatens not emptily. Methinks, 'twould be best for us to return to the great ship upon the lake. Let Cedric have Ixwell—if, by such means, those boys can be saved."

"Oh, no!" said Nelson Lee quietly. "We do not surrender so tamely, princess. Do you think that Cedric would keep his bond? Is he so famed, then, for honesty? No sooner did we comply with his demands than he would kill those four boys, just the same."

"But what's to be done?" asked Dorrie, rather helplessly. "Hadn't we better take the tank and make another dash into Dunstane?"

"We succeeded once, when we captured Guntha—but we are not likely to succeed again," replied Lee, shaking his head. "Cedric is prepared. No; we must think of something else, Dorrie. I don't mind confessing that I am baffled for the moment—but I'm not giving up hope."

CHAPTER 9.

The Passage of Arms!

THE scene was colourful and impressive. A great natural hollow in the hills, just outside Dunstane and practically under the shadow of the city walls, was filled with an enormous concourse of people. Most of these people were here, not because they were interested in the tournament, but because the king had given his orders. Pomp and display were Cedric's life-blood.

On the one hand were the city walls, on the other a wood; there were the gently sloping hill-sides—crowded with people—and at the bottom of the basin, as it were, the arena. The turf was perfectly prepared, and the ground itself—the lists—extended for almost a quarter of a mile, and it was nearly half as wide.

The combatants would enter at the farther extremities of the lists, and there were strong wooden gates erected here. At these gates were two heralds, with six trumpets in attendance. Then there were impressive bodies of men-at-arms, so that order should be well kept.

The poor and the rich were here. Cedric had announced this tournament for many weeks, and, but for the coming of the "Strangers from Beyond the Great Ice," the whole affair would have been a magnificent display of his power.

But with Northestria in its present unsettled state, the Passage of Arms was losing some of its glamour. The people were more interested in the events which were taking place inland. However, the king had given his orders, and the people of Dunstane were still completely under his iron rule.

Pitched just beyond the main entrance to the lists was a number of stately pavilions, flying the colours of the knight challengers. Even the cords of these tents were of the same colours.

In front of each pavilion shields were suspended—each shield being different. They belonged to the knights who occupied the tents. Squires were standing in front of the shields, most of them grotesquely attired. A slope led up from the entrance to the lists, and it was protected by strong fences, to say nothing of further bodies of men-at-arms.

Right at the other end of this great enclosure there was another space, very similar—and this was for the benefit of the knights who were to enter the lists against the challengers. Placed here and there were further great pavilions, for the accommodation of these knights. There were armourers, farriers, and a host of other such attendants.

Midway down the lists, on the side that afforded the better view, a special gallery had been erected, richly decorated. Here there was a gay canopy, and beneath it a throne; the royal arms were emblazoned prominently.

Here sat Cedric the Cruel, surrounded by his nobles, advisers, and attendants. Pages, squires and yeomen in rich liveries made the scene a picturesque one.

On the other side of the lists, practically opposite the royal gallery, were similar galleries, filled with Gothlander nobles and overlords and gentry. The multitude—the common people—filled the open spaces of turf all around.

Gazing upon this scene, it was difficult to believe that Northestria was half torn asunder by rebellion. It was a scene of gaiety, of rejoicing, of lighthearted merry-making. It pleased the king to carry on with this folly—it was an expression of his contempt for the ill rumours which continually poured into the capital.

Not only men attended this great Passage of Arms. The most noble ladies of the land were there; numbers of young maidens, all gaily dressed, were much in evidence.

Cedric was pleased as he looked upon the gay scene.

"Let there be a commencement," he said boisterously. "I faith, I am in the mood for revelry!"

Attawulf and Redwold, who closely attended him, kept silent. They were in doubt as to the wisdom of this tournament. They were irresistibly reminded of Nero, who fiddled while Rome was burning.

The king was impatient. For as yet the lists were not ready for the coming combats. The marshals of the field were riding up and down, accompanied by mounted men-at-arms, pressing the spectators back and clearing the field.

Nobles were arriving in an apparently endless train, summoned hastily hither by special couriers, for the king was determined that the lists should be attended by all.

A great overlord came, splendidly attired in crimson and gold, and attended by a host of knights and guardsmen. Others, every bit as impressive, followed.

At length the lists formed a spectacle which the St. Frank's fellows were never likely to forget. For Nipper and Handforth and Travers and Waldo were present—not as spectators, but as playthings for Cedric's grim enjoyment. Surrounded by a strong guard of men-at-arms, the boys gazed upon the scene with something like awe.

"Let the heralds give voice!" said the king impatiently. "By my bones, we begin this tournament with a novelty!"

The heralds, in a glittering procession, were already shouting their proclamations, inviting all comers to give combat to the challengers.

Nipper and the others, in spite of their precarious position, were fascinated and interested. They easily grasped the procedure.

"Just like the tournaments in England in the Middle Ages," said Nipper. "This is a pretty marvellous sight, you chaps!"

"But why are we here, dear old fellow?" asked Travers mildly. "Somehow, I can't help feeling that Cedric is going to do something dirty. I don't like the look of those blighters with the whacking great axes."

"Neither do I!" growled Handforth. "I'll bet we're going to have our heads lopped off!"

The boys were looking at several powerful Gothlander soldiers who were standing apart from all the other men-at-arms. They carried enormous axes, quite different from the ordinary battle-axe. More significant still, there were huge wooden blocks standing on the turf.

"Well, we can't do anything," said Nipper resignedly. "We're pretty helpless, my sons. Perhaps we shall be allowed to see some of the combats. It seems that any knight can come along and offer himself for a scrap. All he has to do is to touch one of those shields outside the pavilions with his lance. Then it's up to the challenger to ride forth and give battle."

"Yes, by George!" said Handforth. "Look at all those knights down at the farther end of the lists. There must be dozens of them, all waiting to enter the combats. Look at their lances and gleaming helmets! Look at the plumage and the little flags fluttering from the upraised lances."

"But they're not taking the barriers down yet," said Nipper. "It seems to me there's something else in the wind."

The king, intoxicated by this scene of splendour—by this exhibition of his all-conquering power—had come to a sudden decision.

"By St. Attalus! 'Tis an opportunity of showing the people my strength!" he said fiercely. "They shall know that Cedric is a man of purpose! Before the lists are opened, before the tournament commences, the people shall see the flowing of blood!"

"If thou art thinking of the stranger youths, sire——"

"Ay, and so I am!" interrupted the king before Attawulf could get further. "Say naught to dissuade me, my lord! 'Tis my will that the stranger youths shall die—here, in front of my eyes, in front of the eyes of the multitude. Thus shall the people know that I am unafraid."

Attawulf and Redwold were aghast. This thing the king was proposing was madness.

"Have a thought, sire!" urged Attawulf the Terrible. "Have ye not dispatched a courier to Ixwell, offering the lives of these stranger youths in exchange for Guntha? Have ye not given the rebels twenty-four hours in which to surrender?"

Cedric uttered a coarse laugh.

"The rebels will surrender," he retorted. "Who is to know that these stranger youths have already been put to the death? It pleaseth me to see them beheaded! Let the execution take place!"

"Nay, sire, this is folly," said Redwold earnestly. "Think ye that the matter can be kept secret? Like a plague the story will spread throughout the countryside, and it will reach Ixwell. Thus, instead of the rebels surrendering, they will be heartened. They will be enraged. The people will rise with even greater ferocity, and they will march upon Dunstane in their thousands. Ay, and the friends of these stranger youths will exact a terrible vengeance!"

"My lord speaks truly, sire," said Attawulf, before the king could speak. "Bear ye in mind the wondrous weapons which these accursed strangers possess. Proceed with this execution, and disaster will follow!"

The overlords were so earnest, so serious, that Cedric took heed. Frowning like a sulky child, pulling at his beard, he grunted an unwilling surrender.

"Mayhap ye are right," he growled. "But methinks three hostages will serve as well as four. Am I to be denied completely? Let one of these youths be led forth and beheaded in my presence."

"'Tis folly, sire——"

"Enough!" roared the king, in sudden rage. "This one youth shall die! Let him be brought to me, so that I may tell him with mine own lips of the fate that is to be his! By my soul! Am I not the king? Am I to be completely denied?"

Helpless, but ill at ease, Attawulf and Redwold gave the necessary instructions. A great silence fell upon the concourse when it was seen that the four stranger youths were being led by men-at-arms towards the royal gallery.

"Keep a stiff upper lip, you chaps!" murmured Nipper. "I expect we're for it this time!"

"Precious little chance of our being rescued, either," said Travers. "Let's hope it'll all be over quickly."

"Let me get one smack at that brute!" breathed Handforth thickly. "By George! I don't care what happens to me if only I can get one good old swipe—just one!"

"You silly ass!" muttered Nipper. "Don't be so excited! If you attack Cedric he'll have you killed on the spot! And don't forget that while there's life, there's hope! For goodness' sake, Handy, don't ask for trouble!"

They found themselves in front of the royal gallery now. Cedric sat upon his ornate throne, glowering upon them. They returned his evil gaze steadily, unflinchingly. No matter how rapidly their hearts thudded they were not going to show this tyrant the white feather!

"A bold front, by my soul!" sneered the king as he surveyed them. "These beardless boys have a defiant spirit, it seemeth! I'faith, 'twill not be long before that spirit is broken."

"Try and break it!" said Handforth recklessly.

"'Tis well!" snapped the king. "Thou art insolent, thou young dog! 'Tis thee I choose!"

He pointed to Handforth in fury.

"We will see, young fool, whether thy spirit will be broken or not. What think ye of this? Thou art to be taken to the executioners forthwith! 'Tis my will that thou shalt be beheaded in my sight, and in the sight of the multitude. How now?"

Handforth, who realised the diabolical sincerity of the king's edict, went pale. He was horrified. But only for a moment did he flinch; then he drew himself up, and his expression was one of contempt.

"Go ahead!" he said defiantly. "Behead me, if you want to! Do you think I'm going to beg for mercy?"

"By my bones!" snarled the king. "Even now he hath no fear! Take him away—let the headsman have him!"

The men-at-arms sprang forward, and Handforth was surrounded and seized. Nipper, exchanging quick glances with Travers and Waldo, stepped forward.

"A word, your Majesty," said Nipper steadily.

"Oh-ho! Such boldness!" mocked the king. "Plead not for the life of this youth —"

"But I do plead!" interrupted Nipper. "And I warn you, too, Cedric. Kill our friend, and our other friends will never rest until your own life has paid the forfeit."

"By the soul of Sarus!" ejaculated the king, aghast. "What now? Art threatening me, thou vermin?"

"I urge you at least to give us a chance of life," said Nipper. "There are four of us here—four helpless prisoners. It is your desire to have one of us beheaded—any one, it seems. Then let two of us enter the lists,



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.

HE GOT A START.

When Johnnie came back from school with two black eyes and a swollen lip, his mother was horrified.

"Oh, Johnnie!" she exclaimed. "You have been fighting again. Didn't I tell you that whenever you lost your temper you should count up to a hundred before you did anything violent?"

"Yes, mummie," was the rueful reply; "but the other boy's mother had told him to count up only to fifty."

(F. D. Weeks, 30, Dartmouth Cottages, Watling Street, Bexley Heath, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

WORRYING.

Landlady: "You say you have no children, no wireless, no musical instruments of any kind,

no dog and no car? Why, you're just the kind of tenant I want."

Nervous Applicant: "I think it only right to tell you that my fountain pen scratches a little when I write."

(R. S. Osborn, 21, Acacia Drive, Thorpe Bay, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

SPORTING.

Jimmy: "My brother has a gold medal for running, a cup for boxing, and a badge for wrestling."

John: "He must be a wonderful athlete."

Jimmy: "He's not an athlete at all—he keeps a pawnshop."

(J. Fitzmaurice, 52, Gains Road, Southsea, has been awarded a penknife.)

VERY TRUE.

Phrenologist (examining boy's head): "Now that is your bump of curiosity."

Boy: "Yes; I was looking in Tommy Smith's desk when the lid fell down."

(E. Bibby, Hall Carr Lane, Longton, near Preston, has been awarded a book.)

WHAT A HOPE.

Grocer: "Did you deliver the leg of ham to Mrs. Jones?"

Boy: "She wasn't in, so I left it in the dog kennel so that the dog could mind it."

(J. Brown, 41, Inkerman Street, Queen's Park, Manchester, has been awarded a penknife.)

and give battle to your challengers. If we live through the ordeal, then our lives shall be spared."

Cedric was amazed.

"Grammercy! Art mad enough to think, young dolt, that you beardless boys could give battle to my challengers?" he asked in amazement. "Faugh! 'Twould be murder!"

"No less murder than having Handforth beheaded!" retorted Nipper.

"Oh, let him have his own way!" muttered Handforth thickly. "Why argue?"

To tell the truth, Handforth was as bewildered as the others by Nipper's suggestion. If Cedric had his own way, only one of the boys would be killed; if Nipper's plan was adopted, two would be doomed. It sounded like madness.

"I'faith, the plan pleaseth me," said Cedric, after a brief consideration. "So let it be! Two of these youths shall pit themselves against the doughtiest of my challengers!"

"A word!" said Nipper quickly. "Since two of us are to enter the lists, sire, I beg that you should allow us to draw lots, to decide which of us shall go into combat."

Cedric looked upon him in wonder.

"By my bones, I like thy spirit, boy!" he said grudgingly. "So shall it be! Ye shall decide amongst yourselves."

He waved his hand.

"Take them away," he went on, "and prepare for the encounter."

CHAPTER 10.

A Chance in a Thousand!

HANDFORTH, Travers, and Waldo were looking startled.

Nipper's suggestion sounded crazy. Handforth was certainly spared from the headsman, but his fate might now be even worse—and another would be involved. Giving combat to the Gothlander challengers would be very much like mice battling against lions.

Cedric himself was already laughing with cruel anticipation. He knew that his challengers were men of iron—giants of the fray. They would eat up these two boys!

Attawulf and Redwold were relieved, too. This suggestion had come from Nipper—from one of the prisoners. Thus it could never be said that the king had slaughtered them. If they died in the lists, as they certainly would die, their blood would be upon their own heads.

Murmurs of incredulity spread round the galleries as the rumours were whispered. Two of these stranger youths were to give battle to the challengers! Here was something novel for the tournament! And intermingled with the exultant cries were many, murmurs of pity from the women.

The four young prisoners were surrounded by men-at-arms, and marched down the lists towards the further end. They were thrust into a small pavilion, and there left until the

WRECKED.

Pa: "Now, children, don't quarrel. What's the matter?"

Tommy: "We're playing at a shipwreck, an' Joanie won't go into the bath and drown herself."

(*R. Lembrey, 42, Hutton Grove, London, W.12, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

NOT COMPLETE.

Mr. Brown had bought his small son a tram-conductor's outfit.

"Now, my boy, you'll be able to play at 'buses all day," he remarked.

"Oh, no I shan't, daddy," objected the boy. "I want the 'bus first."

(*Miss F. Brazil, 221, Sladefield Road, Ward End, Birmingham, has been awarded a book.*)

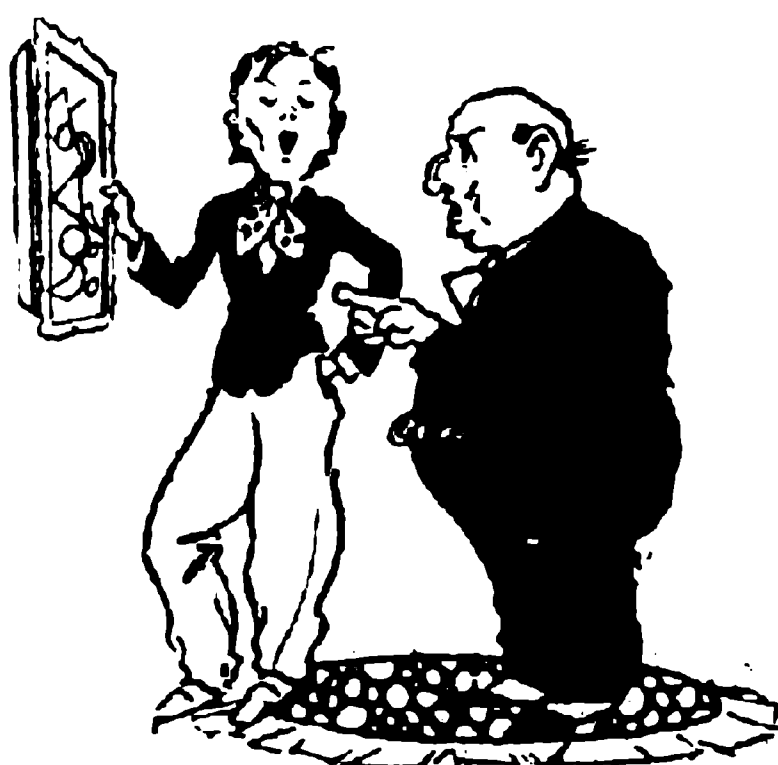
A SUPER-SALESMAN.

Business man (looking at poor paintings wonderingly): "Say, do you ever sell these paintings?"

Artist: "Why, certainly, sir, of course."

Business Man: "Then name your salary for coming into my business. I've been looking for a salesman like you for years."

(*Miss Irene Gerring, 73, Lavender Sweep, Clapham Junction, S.W.11, has been awarded a book.*)



STILL RUNNING.

A negro was a regular visitor to the local library. He always took the same book, opened it eagerly, and then burst into a hearty laugh.

The attendant's curiosity was aroused one day. He looked over the visitor's shoulder and noticed the picture of a small boy being chased by a bull. The attendant was about to ask what there was to laugh at, when the negro chuckled:

"Golly! 'E ain't caught 'im yet!"

(*D. Morley, 6, Handley Street, Sleaford, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

FUSSY!

Bill (who has fallen in river): "Help! Help! I can't swim!"

Sam (on bank): "Well, neither can I, but I'm not making a fuss about it."

(*H. Clark, 6, Manor Road, Lincoln, has been awarded a penknife.*)

BRAINY.

Ma: "Why are you painting 'T. M.' on both those footballs? One of them is your brother's?"

Tommy: "I know; but, you see, one means 'Tis mine,' and the other means "'Tain't mine."

(*S. Houghton, 55, Baxter Street, Craigieknowes Cottages, Greenock, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

full preparations should be made—or until the king signalled for the commencement.

Nipper was immediately grabbed by the other three.

"Now, you ass, what's the game?" demanded Waldo breathlessly. "Are you off your rocker?"

"Not quite," said Nipper coolly.

"Why the dickens didn't you let them take me?" demanded Handforth. "It would have been all over by now. You—you dummy! This will mean death for two of us!"

"It might," agreed Nipper. "But, as I said a little while ago, while there's life there's hope. All the delay we can cause, the better."

"Dear old fellow, you're not expecting rescue from Mr. Lee or Dorrie, are you?" asked Travers dubiously. "By Samson! I wish I could be as optimistic!"

"It's not merely that," said Nipper. "There's something else I'm thinking of. In any case, isn't it better to go under fighting than to see Handy beheaded?"

"Then why the dickens didn't you suggest that I should do combat alone?" asked Handforth warmly. "Why drag another of us into it?"

"Because I don't think Cedric would have agreed—and it'll be a lot better for two of us to enter the lists," replied Nipper. "Now look here, my sons. I thought very carefully before I made that suggestion, and it's not half so dotty as you might think. In fact, there's a really sporting chance."

They stared at him.

"Against those Gothlander brutes?" asked Handforth.

"Yes."

"But look here——"

"There's no time for us to argue, old man," interrupted Nipper. "We might be called out at any minute. Now, the advantage is with us. It's the privilege of the knights to ride up to the pavilions of the challengers and to touch any shield they choose. In other words, they can offer combat to any particular challenger."

"I don't see how that helps us," said Waldo. "All these men are experts with lances and battle-axes and swords—and we're raw amateurs. The giddy scraps won't last more than thirty seconds each!"

"And it goes without saying that they'll be fights to the death," said Travers. "Nothing else would please his bloodthirsty Majesty."

They could hear the jingling of spurs outside, and the rattling of armour.

"Oh, come on!" said Handforth quickly. "Let's draw lots."

"We're not going to draw lots," replied Nipper.

"But you told the king——"

"Forget it, old son," said Nipper. "There are only two of us in this tent who can hope to come through alive. And those two are Waldo and Travers."

"What!" yelled Handforth indignantly.

"You heard what I said."

"You—you hopeless ass!" roared Edward Oswald. "Are you leaving me out? And yourself, too? You're rotting, Nipper! You can't mean it! You wouldn't deliberately back out of a thing like this!"

Nipper looked at him very steadily.

"I don't think any of you will accuse me of being a funk," he said, his voice becoming quiet. "I'm game to take my chance. But there's no two ways of thinking in this business. You, Waldo, and you, Travers, are the only two for the job."

"I give it up," said Travers helplessly. "Waldo, of course, is a bit of a surprise-packet—he's got the strength of a professional strong man, and he's as agile as a monkey."

"Exactly," said Nipper. "But these people don't know of Waldo's qualities—and he'll give them a surprise."

"But where do I come in?" asked Travers. "What surprise do I give them?"

"Yes, answer that!" said Handforth fiercely. "How do you reckon that Travers is any better than me—or any better than yourself? We three, at least, ought to draw lots."

"No we oughtn't," retorted Nipper. "Listen here, you fatheads! You're all so excited that you've forgotten something."

And as they listened they became even more excited.

WORD had come through to Ixwell that the Passage of Arms at Dunstane was commencing.

Cedric the Cruel, to celebrate his victory, was holding the tournament. He evidently regarded the capture of the four boys as a triumph.

Rumours came, too, that the boys themselves had been taken to the arena, and that the king intended some drastic move.

"This is getting worse and worse, Lee," said Lord Dorrimore, as he stood with Nelson Lee in the courtyard of the castle. "What on earth are we going to do?"

"I don't like this news," replied Lee bluntly. "Cedric means mischief."

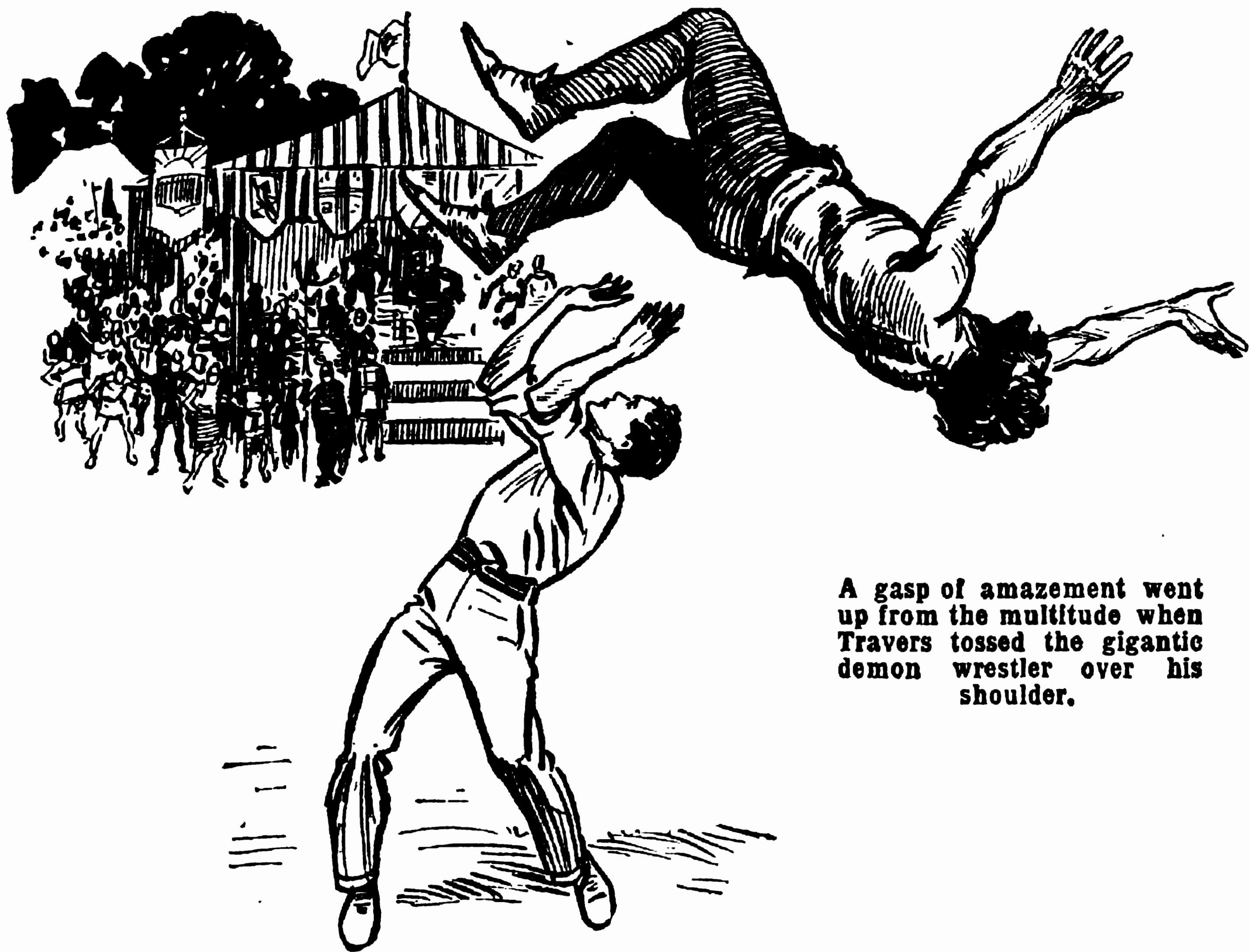
A number of the other St. Frank's fellows were crowding round, eager and anxious.

"Isn't there something we can do, sir?" asked Church breathlessly. "We're all game, you know."

"I don't doubt your gameness, young 'un," replied Lee. "But whatever is done, is a man's job. You boys must remain here in Ixwell. Dorrie and I will see if we can get through."

"Heaps of these Northeistriens are keen, too, sir," put in McClure. "You've only got to say the word, and a couple of thousand of them will be ready. Couldn't we cut a way clean through to Dunstane and take the brutes by storm?"

"It sounds very brave and bold—but such an expedition would meet with disaster," replied Lee, shaking his head. "The Gothlanders are massing in great numbers beyond the Ixwell valley. Cedric has seen to it that any further advance of the rebels is checked. His best troops are guarding Dunstane."



A gasp of amazement went up from the multitude when Travers tossed the gigantic demon wrestler over his shoulder.

"Yes, I'm afraid it would be a massacre, you chaps," said Lord Dorrimore. "We'd go a certain distance, and then the Gothlanders would make a pitched battle of it. They're not only overwhelmingly superior in numbers, but they are trained soldiers, too. Most of these Northeistrians are unskilled in war."

"But we must do something, sir," said Tommy Watson, in alarm.

"I wish to goodness I had had those aeroplanes brought ashore from the Pioneer," groaned Dorrie. "They'd come in mightily useful now. But it would take a full day—perhaps two days—to bring them ashore and have them assembled. Gad, I'll see that they are made ready as quickly as possible. They'll be no use in this affair, but they'll come in handy later."

Nelson Lee, Dorrie, and the others were surrounded, at a respectful distance, by crowds of Northeistrians. The market square of Ixwell was packed. And all were apprehensive. The news that four of the stranger youths had been captured by Cedric had filled the town with alarm. The people, moreover, were expecting Lee the Lionheart to do something spectacular.

"It's no good talking about the 'planes, Dorrie," said Lee. "We weren't to know that those boys would be captured in such unfortunate circumstances. They weren't to blame in the least—and we're not to blame for being unprepared. Thank heaven we had that second tank assembled."

He turned, and gazed upon the monster of war. There were two of these tanks now. One had already been used successfully against the Gothlanders. The second had only just been assembled.

"Well, Dorrie, there's no need for us to think long over this problem," said Nelson Lee suddenly. "The tanks are our only chance—a chance in a thousand. I think we can succeed in getting through the enemy lines. But Cedric is now ready for us—his men will no longer be terrified by the tanks. And, wonderful as they are, they have their limitations."

"I don't see it," argued Dorrie. "We ought to get clean through—just as we did before."

"Cedric is no fool," retorted Lee. "We can take the tanks—yes. But what if Cedric has prepared some traps for us?"

"Traps?"

"Easily enough," said the schoolmaster-detective grimly. "Man power is nothing to Cedric; he could easily set a thousand men to work, and deep trenches could be dug across the main road into Dunstane. A crude bridge over which horseman and troops could go with safety, but these heavy tanks would just as certainly plunge down. And then how simple it would be for the Gothlanders to pile brushwood upon the helpless tanks, and set fire to them."

Lord Dorrimore drew a deep breath.

"By the Lord Harry! I hadn't thought of anything like that!" he muttered. "But

"you're right, Lee. You're dead right! That's one way in which Cedric could spoil our game. But I don't believe it," he added abruptly. "I don't believe that that surly brute has enough wits to think of anything so ingenious."

"That is exactly what I am counting upon," said Nelson Lee. "In any case, we're going to take the risk, Dorrie. We're going off at once—and we'll attempt to make a dash right through to Dunstane."

Nelson Lee did not add that rumours had come to him that such road traps as he hinted at were being prepared by the Gothlanders. Thus he knew that this dash towards Dunstane was fraught with terrible peril.

It was, indeed, a chance in a thousand.

CHAPTER 11.

The Tournament!

A BLARE of trumpets announced to the tense, excited crowds that the first combat of the tournament was about to take place.

And from one of the pavilions strode a small figure, attired in flannel trousers, white shoes, tennis shirt and blazer. Lightly he leapt upon the charger which had been brought for his use by the men-at-arms.

Shouts of wonder arose. This boy was disdainful of armour and shield. He was going into the combat absolutely unprotected!

Stanley Waldo was perfectly cool.

He had been offered the use of armour and shield, but he had promptly refused them. He knew that such heavy impedimenta would hinder his movements. He was glad, indeed, that he and his chums were only wearing light flannels. In such clothing, his movements would be completely unhampered.

He sat his horse well, and quite alone he rode down the lists, his lance held high. He looked an incongruous figure in that setting; and from the doorway of the tent, Nipper and Travers and Handforth watched with bated breath.

"Poor chap!" muttered Handforth. "I doubt if he'll come through!"

"Don't forget that he's several kinds of a marvel," said Nipper. "He's a chip off the old block!"

It was true that Stanley Waldo took after his famous father—Rupert Waldo, the Peril Expert. Although only a slim, ordinary-looking boy, he possessed the strength of a giant, and his agility was amazing. His eyesight was so keen that—as Handy as often said—he could almost see things before they happened.

"Waldo's a Human Miracle," murmured Nipper. "That's where we might score, my sons. He's an acrobat, a gymnast, and when he likes to exert himself his movements are as lightning-like as those of a cat. This combat won't be so unequal as you think!"

And even Handforth and Travers were by now beginning to get some of Nipper's confidence.

Cedric the Cruel, on his ornate throne, laughed contemptuously. That slip of a boy, attired only in shirt and flannels, looked absurd.

"By my bones! We shall see an early death in the lists," mocked the king. "This youth will last no longer than ten seconds!"

"See!" said one of the nobles. "The youth is indeed mad! He rideth towards the pavilion of Urstan the Valiant!"

The king roared with laughter.

COMING NEXT WEDNESDAY!



"The young fool knoweth no better!" he jeered. "I'faith, the mouse would have combat with the lion!"

Waldo rode on coolly. It was a fact that he was approaching the pavilion of Urstan the Valiant. And this knight challenger, as all that great concourse knew, was the most formidable of all warriors. Never had he been defeated; many were the rash knights he had sent to the dust, mortally wounded.

Urstan himself was standing just outside his pavilion, talking with several other knights. He was a big brute of a man, a typical Gothlander with a great square brownish-black beard. He was not wearing his helmet, for he had deemed that he would not be called upon to give combat until these two youths were disposed of.

His amazement was great, therefore, when Waldo, pausing before the pavilion, deliberately touched Urstan's shield with the point of his lance.

"By my soul!" ejaculated Urstan. "The poor fool knoweth not what he do!"

But Waldo, having indicated his opponent, now turned his horse and trotted serenely back to the extreme end of the lists. There, wheeling, he waited.

"Watch closely, good Attawulf," gloated the king. "Methinks this will be a rare comedy."

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ORDER IN ADVANCE!

"The boy is dead already," muttered Attawulf.

There was a great flourish of trumpets and clarions. Urstan the Valiant rose forth from his pavilion, a magnificent figure indeed. His suit of armour was of glittering steel, and in many places it was heavily inlaid with gold. He now wore his helmet, and even the visor was closed, so that his brutal features were concealed.

He drew his horse to a standstill, and waited.

The two combatants now stood opposed to each other at the extremities of the lists. The immense crowds of people all round held their breath. They were thrilled. They were sad, too. This would be no combat at all. Unprotected as he was, the boy

would be run clean through by Urstan's deadly lance. There was no lancer in the whole land with greater skill than Urstan the Valiant.

Another blare of trumpets sounded—the signal. On the instant Urstan urged his steed forward, and he went galloping down the lists at full tilt. Waldo, at the same moment, galloped on to meet the charge.

"Now for it!" said Nipper tensely. "By Jove! It's more thrilling than a Cup-tie!"

"Will he do it?" whispered Handforth. "Oh, by George! Will he do it?"

They judged that the two would meet almost in the very centre of the lists—right opposite the king's gallery. It was as it should be, and Cedric was standing up in his gloating excitement.

On they came, their steeds' hoofs thundering upon the turf. Urstan's lance was held with deadly cunning and accuracy; Waldo's with clumsy amateurishness. And as he galloped he was watching the venomous point of Urstan's lance. Yet not by an inch did Waldo urge his steed away from the danger.

The two charged at one another; they grew nearer; then came the fateful second.

Urstan's lance was thrust straight at Waldo's chest. It seemed that the boy would be impaled. Handforth almost closed his eyes in his horror.

Then, at the last second, when it seemed too late, Waldo performed an act of agility which surprised even the St. Frank's trio. In one flash Waldo turned a back somersault, for, well in advance, he had freed his feet from the stirrups. As he rose Urstan's lance shot clear beneath him. In another flash he was down again. His galloping horse made no difference; he landed fairly on his feet, and rose onwards thus standing. Urstan the Valiant, gaping with bewilderment, did not even rein in his own horse. He had expected to impale the boy, but the boy had not been there at the fateful second.

And now, with brilliant horsemanship, Waldo reined his horse round, and, like a flash, he pursued his opponent. He was still standing, riding magnificently, with all the agility and grace of a circus performer.

Urstan had just turned his own mount, and he was in time to see Waldo charging at him.

Crash!

The point of Waldo's lance struck against Urstan's armour, and the valiant knight reeled back, slithered sideways, and fell from his horse with a clattering of metal.

A mighty roar arose—a roar of amazement mingled with awe. This boy—this unprotected youth—had unseated Urstan the Valiant!

The king cursed violently, and he raved. He showered threats and contemptuous epithets upon Urstan's head.

But Waldo had not yet finished.

He saw no reason why he should stick to the rules of the tournament. He was a stranger, anyway, and he wasn't supposed to know the regulations. His one and only de-

sire was to make Urstan look ridiculous in the eyes of the multitude; to conquer him and put him to shame. While his horse was still galloping at full speed Waldo leapt to the ground. It was a risky thing to do; but the turf was soft, and Waldo was ready enough to take risks in these circumstances. His feet touched the ground, he rolled into a ball and went over and over like a shot rabbit.

He had judged his distance well, for when he suddenly rose to his feet, apparently unhurt, he was standing alongside the fallen Urstan.

"Up, gallant knight!" shouted Waldo mockingly. "I issued the challenge, and I fight in my own way!"

He grabbed at Urstan's helmet and wrenched it clean off the man's shoulders. The challenger knight's face was red with fury and alarm, and his beard was in a tangle. The eyes which looked out upon Waldo were filled with amazement.

And now Waldo performed a feat of strength which astonished even Nipper. For, with one heave, the son of the celebrated Wonder Man yanked Urstan the Valiant from the ground. With another heave he swung him round and practically threw him upon his horse.

"And now, gallant knight, we continue our combat!" sang out Waldo blithely.

He took a leap at his own horse; he soared upwards as though his heels contained powerful springs. Like a feather-weight he landed in the saddle, swung round at the same instant, and faced his opponent. It was all done so smoothly, so brilliantly, that the crowds were breathless.

"By my soul! This boy is not human!" gasped the king, in a fearful voice. "He is the very devil himself! Didst see how he lifted Urstan and flung him upon his steed?"

"Did we not warn ye, sire, that these stranger youths are possessed of wizardry?" asked Redwold. "Have we not had evidence of their miracles before? 'Twas ill to tempt the fates thus."

In the arena the two combatants were glaring at one another. Urstan the Valiant was glaring with rage intermingled with fear; Waldo was glaring with mock ferocity.

"Are you afraid?" he jeered. "Or shall we have another try?"

"By the sword of Calwold!" sneered Urstan. "You shall die!"

He wheeled his horse about, galloped down the lists, and Waldo did the same. Then once again they tore at one another, the knight now seething with fury.

He meant to make no mistake this time. He watched his opponent keenly, and was ready to thrust his lance upwards should Waldo leap again.

But this time the youngster adopted another ruse. At the vital moment he slithered over the side of his horse, like an expert cowboy, and rode thus. Urstan had no mark at which to aim; he was bewildered, and his lance faltered.

Waldo, who was watching, took instant advantage. In a flash he was back in the saddle, and his own lance drove straight and true at Urstan's breastplate. Only in the nick of time did Urstan get his shield in front of him. There was a rattling crash, a splintering of woodwork as the end broke off Waldo's lance, but the shock had the effect of unseating Urstan completely. Once again the knight went thudding to the turf, and this time his horse galloped on. Waldo wheeled about, raising his splintered lance aloft. The crowds, mad with enthusiasm, acclaimed him the victor.

Cedric, leaping up in his seat again, pointed furiously to Urstan the Valiant.

"Take the dog away!" he bellowed. "Take him from my sight, and never let me see him again!"

Many voices were uttering words of similar purport. Urstan the Valiant was humiliated completely. Bruised and battered, filled with confusion and rage, he retired to his own pavilion. And Waldo, deeming that his job was done, rode sedately to the other end of the lists.

"Well done, old man!" said Nipper eagerly. "You were marvellous!"

"I don't know whether the thing's over yet," said Waldo. "I didn't do anything much, anyway. These Gothlanders, in all their armour, are slow and clumsy."

"Never mind that," said Nipper. "Out you go, Travers! Don't waste any time! Challenge the next beggar—and give him socks!"

"I'll see what I can do," said Travers coolly. "Well, well! What a life!"

He disdained any mount, and walked sedately down the lists, all eyes upon him. Even the king was nonplussed. For Cedric had had no time to come to any decision with regard to Waldo or Urstan the Valiant. Yet here was the next stranger youth, ready to give battle!

Most curious of all, Travers was unmounted; he did not even possess a lance. With an unconcerned stroll, he approached the pavilions of the knight challengers. And an absolute gasp of consternation went up from the eager Northestrian crowds when it was seen that Travers had touched the shield of Rodolf the Mighty!

"Nay, the youth knoweth not the man!" went up the shout. "'Tis unfair!"

"The boy will be crushed to death in the first encounter!"

"Ay, Rodolf will surely slaughter him!"

These and other cries went up. For Travers had chosen a singular opponent. Rodolf the Mighty—the demon wrestler of Gothland!

Rodolf himself was standing outside his pavilion, a giant of a man, towering full six-foot-ten, and proportionately broad and brawny. In all Northestria and Gothland, no opponents had ever been known to throw Rodolf. He had broken the bones of scores of challengers; he had crushed the life out of at least a dozen men. He was a human gorilla.

Yet this boy, this slim youngster, had challenged him to combat in the arena!

The effect was two-sided. While the people were aghast at Travers' audacity, they were also fearful. It seemed to them that here was proof, indeed, of the wizard powers of these strangers!

Travers, having touched that shield, retired to the centre of the lists, and there he waited. The air was filled with a tumult of shouting. Rodolf the Mighty, unable to believe the evidence of his eyes, had not yet moved. But his attendants recalled him to realities. Ridiculous though it seemed, he was compelled to go into the arena and wrestle with this boy. It was one of the rigid laws of the tournament. The shield had been touched!

Rodolf uttered a growl like a savage animal.

"Does this boy seek to humiliate me, too?" he asked savagely. "By St. Attalus! I will crush him as I would crush an insect!"

The very fact that he had been challenged was a humiliation; but Rodolf vowed he would remedy that by smashing the bones of this youngster in the first second or two. And he knew that he could do it. Agility and speed of action would not help this boy. For once Rodolf got his grip, the rest would be inevitable.

Travers knew it, too. At all costs he would have to avoid the giant's crushing grip. And Travers steeled himself for the ordeal. Rodolf was advancing towards him, a truly fearsome specimen of humanity.

A hush now fell; the people watched fearfully. An apparent miracle had happened in the first combat; but it was impossible that there could be two miracles in succession.

"Bah! I was a fool to consent to this folly!" growled Cedric, as he glared down upon the lists. "This will be no combat. The boy will be crushed to pulp as soon as Rodolf's arms encircle him!"

"As well die thus as by the headsman, sire," commented Redwold.

"Ay, true!" admitted the king. "Harken! Ye will hear the boy's bones crack!"

He spoke almost with relish, and he and his nobles gave their full attention to the arena.

CHAPTER 12.

Victory!

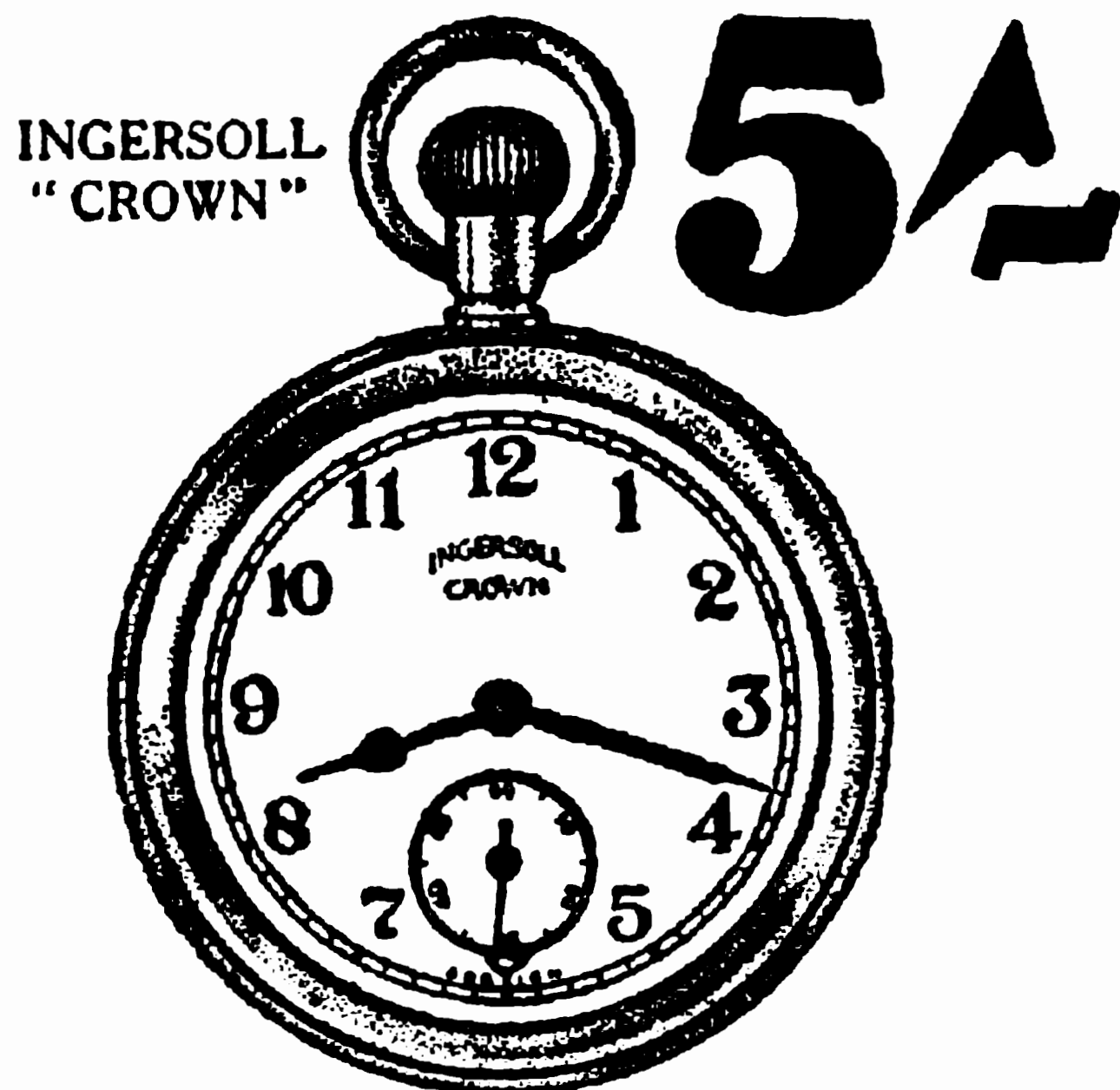
THE proverbial pin might have been heard to drop as Vivian Travers and Rodolf the Mighty faced one another in the centre of the arena.

The trumpets sounded the signal, and in the same second Rodolf sprang forward. He was impatient and angry. It was absurd that this combat should have been thrust upon him. His only course was to settle it immediately—and thus prove his contempt for the rash boy.

Travers did not flinch; he did not even attempt to dodge. Standing thus, face to face, the pair were absurdly matched. Rodolf

(Continued on next page.)

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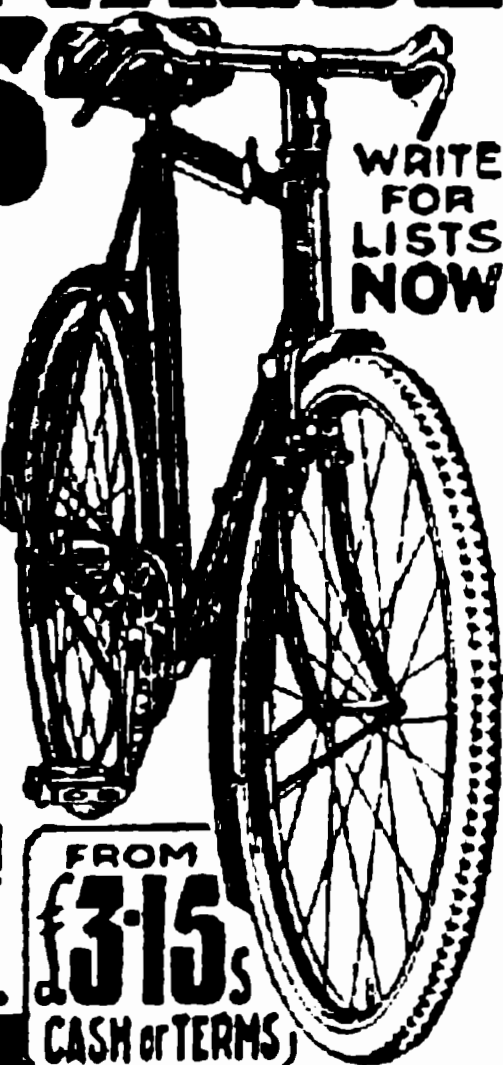
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towered above Travers, a veritable giant of strength and brawn. They gripped.

And then the second miracle of the tournament happened.

With the agility of a monkey, Travers half-turned, seizing Rodolf by the arm and by the shoulder. The amazed spectators saw the mighty wrestler soar over Travers' shoulder, to go thudding heavily to the ground. Rodolf had been thrown.

"A murrain upon the boy!" ejaculated the king. "Didst see, Attawulf? Rodolf is down!"

"In all faith, sire, these stranger youths are truly assisted by devils!" said Attawulf fearfully.

Rodolf the Mighty was on his feet again, and he rushed blindly at Travers. Again Travers held his ground. He waited, he calculated his man cunningly, and they clashed and gripped. This time Rodolf swung round, roaring with agony. Travers bent over, and Rodolf went up and up, as though forced by some uncanny power.

Crash!

Again he thudded to the turf. Yet it had been his own strength which had conquered him—his own strength, cunningly utilised by Travers. For the crowds were witnessing an art of which they knew nothing. They were watching an exhibition of ju-jitsu!

Travers happened to be a brilliant exponent of Japanese wrestling—as Nipper well knew—and he was thus well equipped for this task. By avoiding Rodolf's direct grip, Travers was easily the master. By utilising the tricks of ju-jitsu, he was able to hurl this great giant of a man over his shoulder.

But to the multitude the whole thing seemed black magic, and now jeers arose, accompanied by shouts of acclamation. Rodolf, obviously hurt, was slowly dragging himself to his feet. The jeers were for him; the joyous cries for Travers.

"The boy wins!"

"Bravo! Bravo!"

"Away, Rodolf, for thou art no longer the mighty!"

"Hail to the conqueror!"

But Rodolf the Mighty did not admit that he was defeated. Snarling savagely, he rushed at Travers again. And now he was indeed an easy victim. For in his fury he laid himself open to every one of Travers' tricks. With supreme simplicity, the boy conquered again. Rodolf seemed to take a flying leap into the air, and he soared over Travers' head, to crash like some solid monstrosity upon the turf. He lay there, stretched out, winded.

Again the cries arose. Cedric, now on his feet, pointed a quivering finger at Travers.

"Enough!" he snarled. "Are these boys to humiliate me completely?"

"They have but won their combats, sire," said Redwold.

"Ay, and now they will die!" retorted the king. "Have them dragged to the block! These two and the others! Ay, the four!"

"But, your majesty——" began Attawulf in alarm.

"Silence, dog!" roared the King. "Am I ever to be frustrated? Who art thou, Attawulf, to argue with me? I say that these four boys shall die by the block! Enough!"

Attawulf, abashed, had nothing to say.

"Seize that boy—and bring the others!" went on Cedric, nearly beside himself. "I will show ye whether they are wizards! Perchance their heads will fail to fall from their shoulders when the axe descends! Bah!"

Men ran to do his bidding. Soldiers hurried towards Travers, and Travers was seized. At the same time, Nipper and Handforth and Waldo were dragged from the tent. All four of them were hemmed in by men-at-arms.

Four great blocks had been placed in the centre of the arena, and the headsmen, with their mighty axes, were standing ready. At the word of command, the four boys were dragged towards the waiting blocks.

The king's orders were being obeyed! There was no arguing with him now; his rage was fearsome. Two of these boys had humiliated him in the eyes of the North-eastrian throngs, and death would be the penalty!

Yet it seemed that the boys were to have a brief respite before the fatal moment.

For just then, even as the executioners were preparing to raise their axes, a diversion occurred. A great cavalcade of brave knights in armour came sweeping into the lists. They made a fine spectacle in their glamorous array. But the king was not pleased; he glowered upon the newcomers angrily.

"The lists champions from Ina, methinks," he said impatiently. "Let them be checked. They can make their salutations after these executions."

It was a custom for such cavalcades to sweep right into the arena, and to give their salute to the king. The newcomers, knowing nothing of what was happening, were carrying out the usual procedure.

They advanced sedately, their fine chargers well held. With lances upraised, with pennons flying they approached the royal gallery. Near at hand stood the executioners, with the four boys waiting to be thrust forward to the blocks.

"Hold!" shouted a marshal, advancing upon the cavalcade. "'Tis the king's command that ye shall wait!"

The leading knight raised his visor.

"To blades with the king's command!" he yelled. "Come on, you fellows! Now's our chance!"

Nipper and the other boys wondered if they were going crazy. That voice! Lord Dorrimore's voice! And now, with a thundering of hoofs, the whole cavalcade of knights came sweeping down upon the executioners and their victims.

Up went other visors—and Nipper and Travers and Waldo and Handforth recognised the faces of Nelson Lee, Mr. Wilkes, Browne of the Fifth, and several officers of the Pioneer!

(Concluded on page 44.)



BETWEEN OURSELVES

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

OUR Round Table hasn't got quite into the swing of things, but I'm expecting the Big Push of readers' letters to start very shortly now. And the quicker the better I shall like it, for I can assure everybody that it gives me real pleasure to receive letters from all my chums who read the Old Paper. The following have been received during the past few days: S. Birdsall (Barnsley), Dorothy Napper (Victoria, B.C.), H. Cheesman (Sydenham), Daniel D. Haslam (Brooklands, Cheshire), Robert J. Wareing (Birmingham), Gloria Daly (Montreal), Robert J. Wareing* (2nd letter), Maurice W. Mackenzie (Christchurch, N.Z.), William Slogan (Sandwich, Ontario).

* * *

Just one little point, all you fellows—and girls, too. Some of you finish your letters with a very imposing signature. It looks fine and grand, I'll admit, but unfortunately I can't always read it. Thus it is likely that your letter gets acknowledged under a name which is not your own, and you write up and slang me for not having acknowledged your letter at all! So I shall be much obliged if you will print your full name underneath, and then I shall not make any silly mistakes.

* * *

Noys has left St. Frank's, Robert J. Wareing, but Robert Simmons and Julian Clifton are still there. They share Study No. 14 in the East House. Walter Skelton is with Eugene Ellmore in Study No. 7 in the Modern House, and Robert Canham digs with Clarence Fellowe and Timothy Tucker in Study U of the West House. So Clarence Fellowe is still at St. Frank's. I don't mention him much in the stories, because his "poetical" style of speech is liable to get tiresome. A little of Clarence, now and again, is enough. Donald Harron and Joseph Page are in Study No. 13 of the East House, and Arthur Kemp is with Cyril Conroy in Study No. 17 of the same House.

* * *

The word "Remove," William Slogan, means—when used in connection with a school like St. Frank's—a Form, or Class. The Remove Form is a sort of stepping-stone from the Lower School to the Upper School; and the word, if you come to think of it, really explains itself, for it is in this Form that the boys get their remove and become seniors instead of juniors.

It seems that your wish has already been granted, Daniel D. Haslam, with regard to a holiday series. The yarns now running are just the sort you like, I believe. We're getting right back into the "good old times," eh? As you say, I'm having to buckle into the work with a vim, as these longer stories naturally take up a great deal more time. Ezra Quirke, that peculiarly mysterious fellow who once figured as a St. Frank's boy, still lives at Market Donning. He's not very far from St. Frank's, and it's quite possible that he might butt into the lime-light again one of these days. As for Guy Sinclair of the Sixth, he is still one of the best cricketers in the St. Frank's First XI. But, as a leopard can't change his spots, Sinclair remains a bit of a bouncer. However, his prowess on the cricket field makes up for a lot.

* * *

Of course, there are exceptions to that "leopard spots" rule, for, after all, it's only the exception which makes the rule. As a notable example, there is the case of Reggie Pitt, of the West House, who arrived at St. Frank's as a very first-class rotter—such a rotter, in fact, that he became known as "The Serpent," owing to his cunning. But the companionship of such breezy, healthy fellows as Nipper and Handforth knocked most of the evil out of Reggie, and he learned the wisdom of subduing his worser passions. Another example is Ralph Leslie Fullwood, who was just as big a scamp as Pitt, but who is now as straight as a die. It's rather a coincidence that Reggie Pitt's own sister, Winnie, should have played a big part in the reforming of Fullwood's character, ably assisted by Clive Russell, the Canadian junior who now shares Study I with Fullwood and who is his boon chum.

(Edwy Searles Brooks will be pleased to hear from "N.L." readers. Send him a letter now—here is his address: c/o NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.)

The VALLEY of

By
**LADBROKE
BLACK**

The Bluff that Failed !

THERE was only one thing to be done, and that was to keep the top of the barricade clear. Again and again, with battle-axe and spear, Eric and Danny swept their defences. But still the foe came on, howling and shouting.

As a result of these repeated attacks by the enemy, the barricade gradually shifted. A chair was displaced, and there was no time to put it in position again. An overturned table moved, leaving a gap which was instantly filled by one of the mail-clad soldiers.

Danny was no longer moving about behind the barricade. Standing with his feet set a little apart, he wielded his battle axe, using it now as a cutting weapon and now as a mace, while Eric's arms ached with the thrusting of the spear he held in his grip.

It was going down, that dam which was their only protection. In another moment the flood would be loosed.

"You couldn't get the gov'nor to beat it, could you, Mr. Eric?" Danny gasped. "We can't hold 'em much longer."

But Eric had no time even to glance in the direction of his uncle. His whole attention was concentrated on repelling the attackers. Already he had reason to bless the coat of



chain mail he had put on, for though he had been wounded in the arms and in the hands, none of those savage thrusts had found any vital spot yet.

Louder and louder grew the yells of the infuriated soldiers. The vaulted roof seemed to ring with the name of Tormansuk. Death had no terrors for the guards. Bitten deep into their minds was the thought that they were fighting for their ancient faith and their ancient rites. They were like the soldiers of Mahommed, inspired by the thought that death in this battle, for the honour of their God, would win them rewards compared with which earthly prizes were of no account.

The barricade was no longer a barricade. Eric saw Danny driven back against the wall

For Sheer Excitement!

HOT SPRINGS!

—glimpsed the flash of his battle axe—and then he was down, and half a dozen of the guards had flung themselves upon him with savage shouts. The next instant, almost miraculously it seemed, the old pugilist was on his feet again, shaking his foes off him like a retriever scatters the water after a swim. With a spring he cleared a passage through his foes, the blade of his axe shining red.

Eric himself was fighting desperately. The spear he held had been reft from his hand. He had only his shield and his bare fists. He knew no fear now. He was only conscious of a determination to go on till he dropped. The boy flung his heavy shield at the face of an advancing foe, and then, side-stepping a spear thrust, crashed home his right on the jaw of another. A man closed with him. He could feel fingers clutching at his throat. He was being borne down.

"Tormansuk! Tormansuk!"

The cries of the attackers seemed to grow louder and louder. Eric could see a pair of fierce eyes looking down into his. And then suddenly the man's grip relaxed, and with a groan he rolled aside.

Panting, the boy leaned back against the wall. As he did so he saw standing by his side the Daughter of the Sun. Her golden hair was all awry, and her blue eyes were blazing. In her right hand was a spear, and in her left a shield.

"Get behind me, oh Tuluwit, and I will guard you until your strength returns!"

She had placed herself in front of him, and was thrusting at the oncoming horde. Eric stooped to pick up one of the weapons with which the floor was littered. As he did so, from down the passage came a booming voice.

His dazed brain vaguely heard and translated the words that his uncle was uttering in the tongue of the Skrellings.

"Oh, infamous children of Tormansuk, who would lay sacrilegious hands upon the Angekok himself. Beware of the wrath of your God, who speaks from the fires that never die."

Instantly there was a lull in that furious onslaught, broken by a crack, as Danny freed himself from the two men who had gripped him and were trying to bear him to the ground. An amazing figure, dressed in the ceremonial robes of the Angekok, was walking slowly and sedately down the passage. It was the professor. Even at that moment of stress, Eric felt an hysterical desire to laugh. With his bristling red beard—in that weird, glittering regalia—his uncle certainly looked a ludicrous figure.

Slowly he approached the spot where the fight had raged. Standing in the very centre of the barricade, he calmly faced the guards, who had halted as if thunderstruck.

"Do you want Tormansuk to rise and smite you? Do you wish him to let loose the fires of his wrath?"

As he spoke, he raised his hands above his head.

"Back, faithless children. I, the mouth-piece of Tormansuk, to whom now has been granted rule and authority over you—back, I say, or more terrible punishments will fall upon you!"

Not a soul moved. Eric was suddenly aware of a curious chill. Only a moment before he had been hot with the struggle of the fight. Now he was shivering. The sweat on his forehead seemed to turn to icicles. And yet he knew that the temple, warmed by

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. Jackson turns traitor, and he causes the soldiers to mutiny. Eric, Danny, and the professor erect a barricade, and a fierce battle ensues.

(Now read on.)

subterranean fires, had always retained a temperature of something approaching 90°.

Was it fancy, or had it really grown cold? Then he caught a gruff whisper from Danny, who had drawn back to his side.

"Getting a bit chilly, ain't it, Mr. Eric? It seems almost as if somebody's forgotten to stoke the stove."

The ex-pugilist was still breathless and gasping from his titanic struggle, and yet he shivered. The professor continued talking:

"Because you were misled by him whom Tormansuk has struck, I am willing to forgive you. But let each man drop the weapon he carries, and then return to his quarters. Woe unto those who lift their hands against the annointed of Tormansuk!"

Eric was glancing at the floor at his feet. Suddenly he gave a start, and nudged Danny.

"Look, Danny, something must have happened. That water you spilt has frozen."

Even as he spoke, from outside came the patter of fur-clad feet, and a murmur of voices that grew louder and louder. The professor paused abruptly in the middle of his oration. Now they could distinguish those cries, which were growing nearer.

"Oh, Angekok, save us! The geysers have stopped, and the great cold is coming down upon us."

"This looks bad, Mr. Eric. The gov'nor had better get busy throwing stones into that hot-water supply, or we shall all be frozen."

The People of the Valley were outside the doorway now, crowding among the guards. For a moment the professor seemed taken aback. Then, pulling at his beard, he lifted his great voice again.

"This is the punishment for your evil doing. Down with your weapons, and back to your quarters less worse befall you!"

A panic seemed to sweep over the guards. One man actually dropped his spear and made

THE NIGHT HAWK IS COMING!



A super-thrilling serial featuring your old pal, the Night Hawk, is due to commence shortly. Watch out for full details in next week's issue.

as if to turn. At that instant a mocking voice rang out:

"How long will you be deceived—you, who were appointed Guardians of the Valley? That is not the Angekok. These are the strangers who came from over the seas. Unless we destroy them, we are doomed. Has not that prophecy been handed down to us from our father's fathers?"

Eric recognised the man. He was the leader of the ambush which Imatuk had set to catch them as they were returning from their first exploration of the valley. His words, perhaps emphasised by the fact that the terrified civilian population were there

watching them, had an immediate effect upon the guards. With a shout they bunched together, and with level spears charged down upon the three white men.

"Bit of exercise will keep me warm, Mr. Eric!" Danny exclaimed, taking a fresh grip of his battle axe. "Now, let's get at them!"

Pushing the professor aside, he once more faced the guards. Turning aside the first spear that was levelled at him with his shield, he swung his battle axe and sent the man to the ground. Eric sprang to his side, feeling that this was the end. Everything had been tried; they had met force with force; they had invoked the terrors of superstition; all alike had failed—and now was the end.

"Good-bye, Danny!" he called. "Good-bye, old friend——"

He suddenly became aware that the Daughter of the Sun was by his side. He was about to tell her to hide herself, to escape through the Temple if she could—for even at that moment he realised what would be her fate if they fell and she were left alone and defenceless—but the words were never uttered.

Suddenly, amidst that mad confusion, there was a sound like a vast explosion. He felt the floor at his feet rock. He heard the crowd scream in terror. The passage in front of him

seemed to sway. The glow of the midnight sun vanished abruptly. There was a shriek—a last mad cry for help to Tormnansuk—and then their foes had broken and fled!

Crashing Terror!

ERIC and Danny looked at one another blankly. Where only a moment before the passage in front of them had been crowded with shouting, maddened, fighting men, now there was nobody except the motionless forms which lay on the ground. Where there had been pandemonium, there was now an ominous silence, save for the screams of the fleeing multitude, which grew fainter and fainter.

And then upon their ears there broke a noise like the steady falling of very heavy rain. The professor turned to them.

"We must get out of this—quickly. Something's happened. The temperature has fallen dangerously. We must try and escape while we can." He glanced at the Daughter of the Sun. "Find those other girls, and tell them to come along at once."

"They have fled long ago, oh Tuluwit! There is none save me left. And now Tormansuk is fulfilling the doom."

The professor frowned.

"Stuff and nonsense, my girl!" he said irritably in English. "Eric, find some furs for that child. She's quite inadequately clad, and after what's happened we can't possibly leave her behind us. Hurry!"

Making his way over the obstructions and gaining the room where he had slept, Eric returned presently with an armful of furs. In these he hastily wrapped the girl, who was shivering with the cold.

"It's all right!" he whispered encouragingly. "We'll take you with us."

Danny appeared at that moment, carrying a big fur sack.

"All correct, gov'nor."

The professor appeared to hesitate. At the same instant the floor beneath their feet heaved violently. There was a roar of tumbling masonry. Danny grabbed his employer's arm.

"Beat it, gov'nor! The whole bag of tricks is coming tumbling over our heads!"

The professor wrenched himself free.

"I can't leave that unfortunate man!" he exclaimed. "It may be a weakness on my part, but I can't bear to think of any human being, however wicked and degraded, being left to such a fate."

In spite of all Danny's efforts to restrain him, he darted down the passage and returned presently, carrying Jackson's limp figure over his shoulder.

The whole building now was shaking like a tree in a heavy gale. Eric put his arm round

the Daughter of the Sun and urged her forward down the passage. Danny, bringing up the rear, made his exit just as a great block of masonry fell with a crash on the floor behind him.

But if the scene they had just left was terrifying, that in which they now found themselves was even more dreadful. Something was happening to that strange valley set in the heart of the Greenland Mountains. It was as if outraged Nature, indignant at the immunity which had been granted to that favoured spot for so long, was now taking her revenge.

All about them was falling a fine shower of hot ashes. The ground beneath their feet was like a boat rocking on a stormy sea. The pyramid temple, shaken at its base, was dissolving before their eyes in thunderous crashes of masonry. From somewhere in the centre of the valley came a lurid, leaping flame.

"The tunnel!" the professor shouted. "We must get there before that gives way. Hurry!"

With Jackson still held in his arms, he staggered across the heaving ground, taking a course which kept them clear of the dissolving pyramid. In another moment they were in the open plain and heading south.

Glancing over his shoulder, Eric saw to his horror that where the houses had been there was now a great opening from which smoke and flame were being belched. The volcano, so long extinct—so long bridled and bitted, so that the inhabitants of the valley had been able to live there for hundreds of years in warmth and security—had broken loose at last. Unless they could get through the tunnel in time, they were trapped.

Holding the girl's hand, Eric raced with her across the grass. The cold now was intense. The geysers must first have ceased playing, he reflected, and those vents being closed, the water, which otherwise would have escaped, had been turned into steam, and the resultant pressure had caused the eruption. Now the Arctic cold was settling down. Even with the haste he made, he was chilled to the very marrow.

But the tunnel was still intact. With the girl, Eric was the first to reach it, and he shouted back the news to his uncle and Danny.

"All O.K., uncle!"

The professor came up panting. Without a word, Eric took from him Jackson's unconscious figure, and swung it over his own shoulder.

"Thanks, my boy. Now we must make what haste we can."

They rushed desperately into the tunnel. Would they be able to escape from the doomed valley?

(Don't miss next week's concluding chapters of this enthralling serial. Grand new Night Hawk yarn coming soon—full details next Wednesday.)

St. Frank's In The Lists!

(Continued from page 38.)

"Hurrah!" yelled Handforth, in a cracked hoarse voice.

"Jump, boys!" shouted Nelson Lee. "Up with you!"

"And make it snappy!" sang out Dorrie.

Never before had the four boys acted with such alacrity. Breaking free from the men-at-arms—who were paralysed into inactivity by this startling development—Nipper & Co. leapt upon the horses as they swept by long before the Gothlanders had recovered from their confusion.

It was a spectacular escape.

Right in front of King Cedric's eyes the rescuers had come into the arena—had got away with the four boys. Out at the farther end of the lists the cavalcade charged, and men-at-arms who attempted to stop them were obliged to dodge for their lives.

Away they went, rushing across the meadow lands—onwards towards the open country.

CEDRIC, gnashing his teeth and foaming at the mouth, was helpless. He was staggered—benumbed. There was no limit to the daring of these strangers! They came into the very tournament arena careless of the consequences.

"My hat, guv'nor, that was a narrow shave!" panted Nipper, as he clung to Nelson Lee. "Thank goodness you came!"

"Are you boys all right?" asked Lee, half-turning his head.

"We're all right now, sir."

"None of you hurt?"

"No, sir," said Nipper. "But how did you manage it? Where the dickens did you spring from? We'd given up all hope."

They galloped on, and although the cavalcade encountered Gothland soldiers almost continuously, none attempted to stop them. For the Gothlanders believed—until it was too late—that these men were of their own blood.

"We advanced in the tanks, hoping to get right through to Dunstane," explained Nelson Lee. "Then we had a piece of real luck. We met the real cavalcade of knights from the town of Ina. Well, to cut it short, we pounced upon them, captured them and borrowed their armour."

"I say, that was a brilliant move, guv'nor," said Nipper admiringly.

"It was a chance for us—and we took it," replied Lee. "By changing places we were enabled to ride right through Dunstane without exciting suspicion. In fact, we were escorted to the arena, and it was only the fact that we kept our visors closed that saw us safely through. Thank Heaven we were in time!"

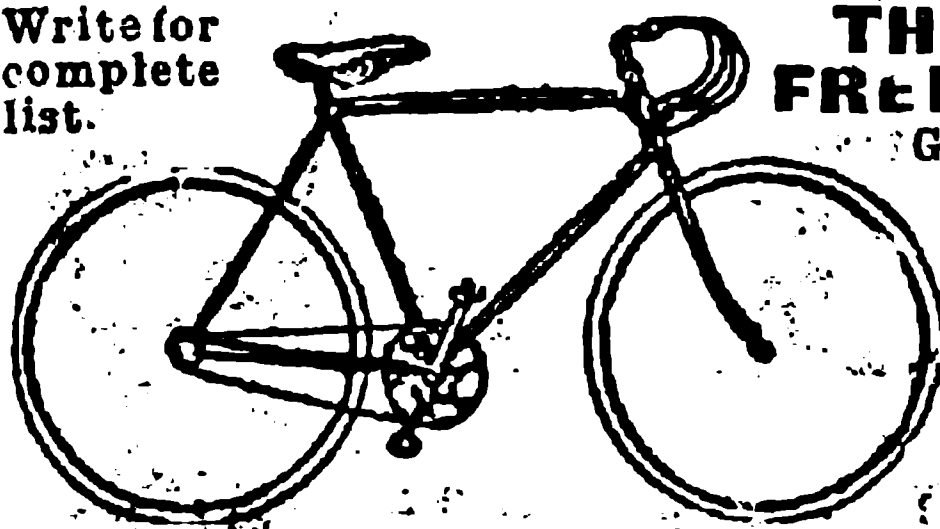
When they arrived in Ixwell there was great rejoicing. The return was a triumphant one, and the Princess Mercia prayed with thankfulness. King Cedric had failed again! In spite of his hordes of soldiers the Northestrians were still victorious!

It was another victory for the Deliverers from Beyond the Great Ice!

THE END.

(Another corking story in this magnificent schoolboy-adventure series next week, chums. Entitled: "The Valley of Fear!" Extra-long—and extra-thrilling. Order your copy NOW.)

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