

THE BATTLE OF THE GIANTS!

By
EDWY SEARLES BROOKS



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The BATTLE of the GIANTS!

By
EDWY SEARLES BROOKS



Told by NIPPER of the Remove.

War in El Dorado, the lost land of the Brazilian wilds! Giants of two primitive countries battling against each other for the supremacy of the lost world! The boys of St. Frank's, prisoners in El Dorado, are in the thick of thrills in this powerful long yarn.

CHAPTER I.

In the Hands of the Arzest

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH shook his head dolefully.

"Well, we're in a fine old mess!" he exclaimed. "Instead of things getting better, they've got worse. And if we ever get out of this place, and return to civilisation, I shall be jolly surprised!"

"An' so shall I!" said Pullwood bitterly. "A fine state of affairs this is—I don't think! Lord Dorrimore ought to be jolly well ashamed of himself for bringin' us into this business, an' allowin' us to be captured——"

"You—you cad!" roared Handforth.

"Eh?"

"You rotter!"

"You silly ass!" snapped Pullwood.

"What I said is quite true!"

"I'll show you whether it's quite true or not!" exclaimed Handforth wrathfully. "If you utter another word against Lord Dorrimore, you rotter, I'll punch your nose!"

"Why, you were just grumblin' yourself!" said Pullwood. "You were just sayin' that we should never get out of this place——"

"It doesn't matter what I was sayin'!" interrupted Handforth. "I was

simply grumbling at the luck—I wasn't growling at Lord Dorrimore. He did his utmost to prevent all this happening. It's just luck—bad luck and the williness of the Comte de Plessigny!"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood shrugged his shoulders.

"You can call it what you like," he sneered. "All I know is that we came out on this trip with Lord Dorrimore and we are now prisoners in this confounded city, cut off from civilisation by a swamp over a hundred miles in extent. There's no hope of escape, and we're simply got to sit here till we grow grey whiskers!"

"Hear, hear!" said Gulliver.

"We are absolutely doomed!" put in Bell. "We're doomed to remain here until we die! And you can't get away from the fact that Lord Dorrimore is responsible!"

Handforth rolled up his sleeves.

"All right!" he said ominously. "I'll show you what I'm going to do!"

"Hold on, Handy!" I interrupted, grasping his arm.

"And I don't want any interference from you, Nipper!" roared Handforth.

"My dear old chap, what on earth is the good of arguing with these cads?" I asked. "They came on this trip with us, and simply because things have gone wrong, they are ready to blame everybody—they can turn on Dorrie and Mr. Lee, and can do nothing else but growl. Let them growl—it doesn't hurt us."

Handforth nodded.

"Perhaps you're right, Nipper," he agreed. "I should be soiling my giddy fists if I punched their noses!"

And Handforth turned his back on the nuts of the Remove in sheer disgust. The other juniors who were present were equally fed up with the growls and grumbles of Fullwood and Co.

There were a good many representatives of the Remove Form of St. Frank's present. Sir Monte Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and Reginald Pitt were chafing together in a group, and over

in another corner De Valerie and Jack Grey and Church and McClure were having a little argument. Timothy Tucker was attempting to address the thin air in another corner, and Tom Burton was deep in conversation with the Hon. Douglas Singleton and the Duke of Somerset.

Morrow and Fenton of the Sixth were sitting together, talking earnestly, and young Stanley Kerrigan was excitedly discussing the whole situation with his two friends of the third—Chubby Heath and Owen Minor.

And all the St. Frank's fellows, including myself, were imprisoned in a huge stone apartment in a great building which was situated almost in the centre of the mysterious city of El Dorado—that wonderful city of gold and marble, which lay hundreds and hundreds of miles behind the great barrier of the unexplored forests of Brazil.

We were cut off from the outside world by an impenetrable swamp—a poison swamp, infested by snakes and reptiles and insects.

In another apartment of the same great marble house, Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and Dr. Brett, and Captain Burton and all his crew—they were there prisoners just the same as we were.

In another apartment, Lady Helen Tregellis-West was doing her utmost to cheer up the young ladies in her charge, Ethel Church, Violet Watson, and several other girls. Miss Janet Kerrigan was there, also—to say nothing of the maids from Lord Dorrimore's steam yacht, the Wanderer.

In point of fact, every single member of the yacht's company had been transported across that deadly swamp to El Dorado. Every member of the yacht's crew—male and female—they were all here. Not a single individual had been left behind. The capture had been complete and absolute.

The Comte de Plessigny had triumphed.

"What we've got to do is to look at

the position in a straightforward manner," I remarked seriously. "It's no good grumbling, and it's no good blaming anybody. We've got to make the best of things. But I'm like the gov'nor—I never give up hope. It's all set to say that we're doomed to stay here—there might be a hundred and one different ways in which we can escape—in which we can defeat the count and the Arzacs as well."

"Dear old boy, that's the way to talk!" exclaimed Sir Montie Tregella-West approvingly.

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the style!" I said. "Now then, you chaps, listen to me. We all came out to the Amazon in Lord Dorrmore's yacht. After reaching the Amazon we went up the Majarra in the hope of finding some traces of Colonel Kerrigan. We really came out to Brazil to find Colonel Kerrigan. Well, after we had got up the Majarra, we found plenty of evidence to indicate that the colonel had constructed a kind of kite, and had been blown across the deadly swamp to the unknown land beyond. What did Lord Dorrmore do then?"

"He brought out his airship from the hold of the yacht, put it together, and flew into the air!" said Tommy Watson.

"Exactly," I agreed. "Dorrie got his airship going, and then the first trip across the swamp was made—and El Dorado was discovered!"

"And what a marvellous city it is!" said Pitt. "If we weren't prisoners, and if our position wasn't quite so serious, we should all be enthusiastic over the place. El Dorado is the most amazing city in the whole world!"

"It's the city of wonders!"

"There's no doubt about that," I agreed. "El Dorado is the most astonishing city anybody could wish to enter. Well, that first trip in the airship resulted, as I have said, in the discovery of El Dorado, and the extraordinary race of white giants which we now know to be called Arzacs. They appear to be quite civilised, and are

peaceful, harmless sort of people—except when they are roused. And, then I have every reason to believe they are perfect demons."

"But what does all this matter to us?" asked Church. "We know it."

"Possibly we do," I agreed. "At the same time, we might as well talk about it—there's nothing else for us to do, anyhow. Everything went all right on that first trip, except that the count attacked the airship in his aeroplane, and caused it to come down because the gas was escaping from the bag. But Nelson Lee got out of that hole all right, and then he returned to the yacht for repairs—after leaving six of us in this queer country. And when Nelson Lee returned in order to pick us up, we fell into the hands of the white giants—and that was mainly owing to an accident. Then, when we were brought to this city, we found the colonel here, and we knew we had not come in vain."

"Meanwhile, things were happening on the Majarra," remarked Reginald Pitt grimly.

"Things were!" I agreed. "For example, the count obtained hundreds of savage Indians, and he started an attack on the yacht. It went all right at first—Captain Burton and his crew were able to beat off the Indians with ease. But then when the count came overhead in the airship, and dropped gas bombs, things became too hot. That gas caused everybody to become insensible."

"Rather!" agreed De Valeris. "You don't know what it was like, Nipper—you weren't there. My only hal! Of all the scrapes! I've never been in anything so terrifically exciting!"

"We all did our best," said Pitt, shaking his head. "After that disaster occurred, some of us went down into the store-room, and we got hold of some gas masks, and put them on. Then we went on deck, and we didn't care tuppence about the gas. We got hold of the hose pipes, and spurted hot water over these wretched Indians. But they

were too many for us, and we were overpowered."

"Yes, and the rest is easily told," I said. "Once everybody was captured, the count simply transported the whole party over the swamp in the airship—making six or seven journeys. And now we're all here—everybody, including the ladies and the girls. The count has been too clever for us."

"I'd like to punch the rotter in the eye!" said Handforth aggressively.

"In my case, why is he doing it?" asked Tommy Watson. "He must be mad, you know. Why should he want to leave all of us here—right away from civilisation, where we can never be found?"

"I think the count has a very good reason of his own," I said. "It's connected with Colonel Kerrigan, I believe. The count doesn't want any of us to return to civilisation with the story that the colonel is still alive. Therefore, in order to make things absolutely certain, he has collared the lot of us, and he means to leave us here. The only point in the count's favour is that he has treated everybody in a gentlemanly manner."

"Yes, that's certainly a point in his favour," said Tommy Watson. "My sister and all the others are in the same building, and they're well looked after—they've got all sorts of attendants, and I don't think they'll come to any harm. These Arzac women are quite decent, I believe."

Fatty Little strolled up.

"Yes, and grub's all right!" he remarked. "That's one thing I will say. The grub they've supplied us with is absolutely A.1. Those mandioca cakes are simply gorgeous, and I could eat dozens of them! We've had beans, too, and sweet potatoes, and arrowroot bread. And just think of the fruit!"

"Oh, you're always thinking of your tummy!" said Handforth.

"It's the best thing a chap can think of!" declared Fatty Little. "We've had pineapples, and para apricots, and those oval yellow things with only

one or two seeds—I think they are called abierro, or something like that. We've had bread fruit, and that stuff preserved in syrup—bacuri. That goes down lovely with some of these cakes. I'm just wondering when we shall have the next meal—I'm as hungry as a hunter already. I think this air gives a fellow a keen appetite, you know."

"Any air would give you an appetite, Fatty," I chuckled. "Why, we only had the midday meal an hour ago. We shan't have anything else for two or three hours."

"That's what I'm thinking," groaned Fatty. "My hat! I think I shall have a sleep, and then the time will pass more quickly!"

We had been captives, so far, for just one day, and we had been treated well, and our Arzac guards seemed to be more curious than hostile.

The windows of the apartment where we were imprisoned were high in the wall, so that we could not look out upon the city. The room was quite bare, except for several very comfortable couches of reeds and tropical grasses. They were very cunningly made and extremely luxurious.

So far we had seen nothing of the Comte de Plessigny—the rascal who was really responsible for the whole disaster. The comte was chief of the Arzacs, the ruling king.

This seemed extraordinary enough, but it had a very simple explanation.

When the count had arrived at El Dorado, he had come in a fast aeroplane. And the Arzacs, who had never seen anything like it before, were tremendously impressed. They believed the count to be some wonderful being from another world, and they hailed him as their king.

Therefore, when the count landed he found himself held in great awe, and he was proclaimed the ruler of the whole country. Naturally, the count lost no time in taking full advantage of his position. To begin with, he had been greatly handicapped because he did not know anything of the Arzac

language, which was quite a novel one.

However, the count had set himself to the task of learning many of the Arzac words, and—by great concentration he had succeeded. He had gained such a grasp of the language by now that he was able to make himself quite easily understood, and he could listen quite intelligently to the conversation of the Arzacs themselves.

We did not expect to see any sign of our gigantic guards until the evening came along—until the next mealtime arrived. But we were wrong. Almost at once the great stone door was opened, and twenty or thirty giants entered the apartment.

"Hallo!" said Pitt. "What's this?"
 "Perhaps we're going to be taken out to the slaughter!" said Handforth.
 "Anyhow, it isn't grab time, so it must be something special!"

"Oh, great doughnuts!" groaned Fatty. "I thought we were going to have something more to eat!"

As a rule only three or four Arzacs entered with their gold trays filled with food. For gold in El Dorado was as common as dust. Gold was everywhere—ornamenting the houses, ornamenting the bodies of the Arzacs themselves, and, in fact, gold was like grass on the prairie. It had absolutely no value in this wonderful city, for the simple reason that it could be obtained without the slightest trouble.

We had already seen one amazing lake of boiling gold—a volcanic phenomenon, no doubt. This lake was apparently the god of the Arzacs, for there were many priests in attendance, and they were worshipping the bubbling pool. The gold was all molten, and the sight was a very impressive one during the night.

These giants who had now entered our prison were huge fellows—not one of them being less than eight feet in height, and proportionately broad. They were attired in long flowing robes, gold ornaments, and sandals. They were almost white, and their features refined and well cut.

One of the Arzacs raised his hand for silence.

"Come!" he exclaimed in a deep, powerful voice.

"Hallo! He's beginning to learn the English language!" exclaimed Pitt. "I wonder what this means?"

The count had no doubt instructed the Arzacs in certain simple words, and that one word in this case was quite understandable—and it was the only word necessary. We had been told to "come," and so we had followed the Arzacs out of the apartment, and into a wide, smooth passage.

Along this passage we went until we entered a doorway of enormous dimensions. And when we got into the apartment we were greatly impressed. For it was a huge place, beautifully decorated and ornamented with gold, and there were many other people present. Nelson Lee was there, and Lord Dorrmore, and, in fact, all the members of our party. They were all there—Lady Helen Tregellis-West, Miss Janet Kerrigan, the girls, and the stewardesses from the yacht.

Nelson Lee and Dorrie and Umlost stood in a group, and Colonel Kerrigan was talking with Dr. Brett and Captain Burton. Nelson Lee looked up as we appeared, and smiled.

"I am glad to see you still looking cheerful, boys," he called out. "That is the best way—keep up your good spirits, and everything will be well."

"We're as cheerful as anything, sir!" shouted Handforth. "Why not? Why should we be depressed? We know you're here, and before many days have passed we shall be free again, and the count will be astonished."

"Good old Handforth!" chuckled Lord Dorrmore. "Never say die—that's the spirit, old man!"

"We're not downhearted, either, Lord Dorrmore!" exclaimed Violet Watson, with sparkling eyes. "We're quite cheerful, and we know that everything will come all right!"

"Splendid—splendid!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "With such a spirit

among us as this, we cannot fail to gain the day in the long run."

And then a slight flush fell on the assembly, for a figure had appeared at the end of the great apartment, a figure clothed in gorgeous robes and gold ornaments. Upon his head there rested a massive, crown-like ornamentation. But the figure was not that of an Arzac. He was smaller, and he was bearded.

The man was the Comte de Plessigny himself!

CHAPTER 2.

The Count's Programme.

THE count took his seat on a bench which was made of solid gold.

Then he adjusted his pince-nez, and looked round with a benevolent, amiable expression.

"Well, my friends, I am pleased to see you all looking so well and cheerful!" he exclaimed, in his smooth, well-modulated voice. "It is quite a surprise to me, and you must allow me to congratulate you upon your excellent self-control."

"Listen to him!" muttered Handforth. "Butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, would it?"

"Disgusting," muttered Pitt.

"The beastly old hypocrite!" said Patsy Little wrathfully.

"I do not want any interruptions, please," went on the Comte de Plessigny. "You boys will please understand that you must not talk while I am addressing you. If there is any interruption again I shall immediately clear the offenders out of this apartment."

There was a dead silence.

"I have brought you all together now because I am anxious to tell you exactly what my programme is," went on the count smoothly. "So far, all my plans have been carried out to the exact detail. Not one hitch has occurred, and I am quite confident that I shall be successful in other operations."

"I shouldn't be too sure, if I were you!" said Lord Dorrmore calmly. "You have certainly gained the upper hand, my friend, but it doesn't mean to say you'll keep it all the time. We may be prisoners, but we're not beaten."

"Wise words, O my father!" rumbled Umios, the Kutana chief. "Thou art of good spirit, and I am pleased to hear thy words. Wau! It is not for us to be of the heavy heart. For everything will come right before long. I have seen the red mist, and my snake tells me that freedom will be ours ere long. Heed my words, O my father, for I have spoken the truth!"

"Good man!" said Lord Dorrmore approvingly.

"I am afraid your black friend is rather too optimistic," said the Comte de Plessigny. "It will not be well to take too much heed of his words. I can assure you your chances of escaping from El Dorado are extremely thin—so thin, in fact, that you may as well resign yourselves to the inevitable now. In case you have been worrying I may as well tell you that I have no intention of harming you."

"Oh, good!" said Handforth. "I thought perhaps that we were going to be thrown into the giddy pot!"

The Comte de Plessigny smiled.

"The Arzacs are not cannibals, my young friend. There is no danger of your being eaten. The Arzacs are very peaceful, and it is one of their rules to kill nobody. Their religion forbids them to kill—or even injure."

"What if they are attacked by an enemy?" asked Lord Dorrmore curiously.

"In that case it is different," replied the count. "The Arzacs are only allowed to kill if they are attacked; they are only allowed to give battle in the event of danger. And then, let me tell you, these white giants are terrible people. Once they allow themselves to fight they fight with every ounce of their

strength and determination. But there is no chance of any fighting taking place. The country is peaceful, and there will be no hostility shown towards you. You will be quite happy and peaceful in this city—and you will be able to spend your lives in comfort."

"How very alluring!" murmured Lord Dorrimore. "I am quite charmed!"

"I am gratified to find that you take your position so cheerfully, Lord Dorrimore," said the count. "However, let us proceed. Perhaps you are rather puzzled as to why I should have acted in such a strange manner. I will explain to you. You came out to the Majarra for the purpose of finding Colonel Kerrigan. You have found him, and it was your intention to take the colonel back to civilisation. Well, that is totally against my wishes. I do not wish Colonel Kerrigan to return. I do not intend him to return!"

"You infernal scoundrel!" said Colonel Kerrigan hotly. "I am well aware—"

"Wait!" interrupted the count. "I have not finished. It would have been quite easy for me to kill the colonel, and thus save any further trouble. But I did not choose that course—I was most anxious to avoid any bloodshed. Therefore, I chose the most difficult course. I made my plans, and captured every one of you from the yacht. And now you are all here, safe and sound. You have been kidnapped, if you choose to look at it in that light. And here you will remain, beyond reach of civilisation."

"Don't you be so sure of that," said Lord Dorrimore. "There are many people in England who know our plans; they know we came out here with an airship, and when we fail to return, there will be another expedition sent out, and we shall be searched for."

"I have already thought of that possibility, my dear friend," smiled the Comte de Plessigny. "And if you think that you will be rescued, you are

greatly mistaken. You appear to be unaware of the fact that I shall return to civilisation before long. I shall take with me a most startling story. And that story will be of such a nature that no other expedition will come out with an airship. There is no danger of that whatever. You will be left here in El Dorado, and here you will remain."

"Within four days I shall have left this land for good, and then you will be able to roam about the city as you please. For I shall leave instructions that you are to be released, and that you are to be treated with every consideration. You will do as you like here. You will be treated as honoured guests."

Colonel Kerrigan strode forward, his face flushed, his eyes gleaming.

"One moment!" he exclaimed in a deadly voice. "I have something to say—and I intend to say it now!"

The colonel came to a halt within a yard of the count himself.

Several of the Arzac guards sprang forward, and Colonel Kerrigan was seized and held back.

"Let me go!" he exclaimed fiercely. "I intend to speak!"

He then uttered a long string of strange words, for the colonel, of course, could speak the Arzac tongue fluently. The giants who had seized him partially released their grip, and seemed uncertain.

The count waved his hand, and uttered three words in the same language—the Arzac language.

"You may as well speak, colonel. There is no reason why you should not have your say," he smiled. "No doubt you intend to tell these good people of my character. It is your desire to relate what happened on the Majarra four or five years ago. Well, well! It makes little difference whether you say it in my hearing or whether you say it later."

The Arzac guards had released the colonel, who stood before us all with blazing eyes.

"Yes, I will speak!" he exclaimed. "I intend to tell you all what this man is—what a traitorous, treacherous scoundrel you have before you! To begin with, his title is a false one—he is no more the Comte de Plessigny than I am!"

"Oh, my hair!"

"The awful spoofery!"

"When I first knew him he called himself Robert Adams," went on Colonel Kerrigan grimly. "That was many years ago, in New Orleans. Robert Adams and I happened to meet one day in the same hotel. He had nothing particular to do, and I was on the look-out for a man who would come with me for a trip to the Amazon—an exploration trip. Well, this man Adams appeared to be such a gentleman, and he was so smooth-tongued and kind that I was completely deceived. And then we started on that expedition—that trip that was to end in disaster for me. Adams is the man you now see before you here—the man who calls himself the Comte de Plessigny."

The count smiled.

"You must allow me to correct you, my dear colonel," he said smoothly. "I am not——"

"Do you deny that you are the man?" demanded Colonel Kerrigan.

"No, I do not deny that," said De Plessigny. "I deny that my name is Adams. At the time you mention, I certainly used that name, but only for purposes of my own. My real name is the name which is known to all these good people here—the Comte de Plessigny."

"If you expect them to believe that, you are evidently very hopeful," said the colonel contemptuously.

Nobody did believe it, as a matter of fact. I had suspected right from the start that the count was a fraud, and that he had no right whatever to the title, and, although he denied this, I was quite sure in my own mind that the colonel was right. The man was a mere adventurer, and he had called

himself the Comte de Plessigny for his own uses. However, that was the name we had known him by, and I shall continue to refer to him as the count.

"Well, we started on this expedition, as I have said," proceeded the colonel. "We were very successful at first, and we penetrated right up the Amazon until we had left civilisation far behind. And then, by a piece of ill-luck, I became ill. I was stricken down by fever."

"Oh, how unfortunate!" murmured Violet Watson.

"I was nearly at death's door," went on the colonel. "For some unaccountable reason, our little case of medicines had become lost—Adams informed me that it had fallen out of the canoe—but now I have every reason to believe that he concealed the medicine so that I should not recover."

"The scoundrel!"

"The awful brute!"

"Proceed!" smiled the count, with a wave of his hand. "Do not mind me in the least. I am quite an interested listener."

"Adams was exceedingly sympathetic, and he deceived me all along," said the colonel. "I had no idea of his treachery, no suspicion of his actual character. Well, he offered to go down to Manaus in order to obtain fresh supplies, and to hurry back as quickly as he possibly could. I was left in the care of some Indians, who, by the way, were by no means gentle with me. The scoundrel left for Manaus in our launch, and I did not see him again until he appeared in El Dorado several weeks ago."

"I was unavoidably detained, my dear friend," murmured the Comte de Plessigny, with a chuckle.

"I know exactly why you did not return," said the colonel. "I have learned all the facts, I know, for example, that you went into Manaus, and you posed as me. You made yourself out to be Colonel Kerrigan. And for what reason?"

"Ah," said the count mockingly, "now we are coming to it!"

"In Mexico I had left several valuable securities at the bank," went on the colonel. "They represented my whole fortune, and I had requested the count, as you call him, to recover those securities and despatch them at once to my sister in England. Instead of doing that, Adams appropriated everything for himself, using my name. And then he left me in the lurch—or, to be more exact, he came up the Majarra again—and it was his intention to finish me off, to kill me and to leave me dead in the jungle."

"You are wrong as to your details," said the count smoothly. "I certainly did come up the Majarra again, but I intended finding you and taking you back with me to civilisation. But I could not find you, colonel. I was given to understand that you were dead."

"And I can easily understand how that came about," went on the colonel. "You arrived at the spot where you had left me, and you found it deserted, and you also found a newly made grave. You evidently mistook that grave for mine, and you did not trouble to search farther."

"Exactly!" said the count. "You have arrived at the truth, my friend."

"And yet there is a very simple explanation for that grave," went on Colonel Kerrigan. "I was abandoned by the Indians who were looking after me. They left me in the jungle to die. But, then, when I was near to the point of death, another party of wandering Indians came upon me. One of their number had met with a serious accident, and he had died. They buried him, and they took me with them to their own camping ground, many miles distant. And there I recovered slowly but surely."

"I was now in the heart of the jungle, and there was no way in which I could escape—alone. It would have been madness to attempt the journey

through the forest without guides, and I could not get any of the Indians to act in that capacity."

"What did you do?" asked Lord Dornmore.

"I had heard many stories concerning a terrible swamp which existed not far distant," said the colonel. "I also heard stories of a mysterious city which lay beyond. I decided to attempt to cross the swamp, and I constructed a huge box kite, and waited for a favourable wind. Then I placed my life in the hands of the elements. As you all know, I was successful in crossing the swamp, and I reached this wonderful land; but I was severely battered when I landed. I was nearly killed, in fact. The Arzacs found me, brought me to El Dorado, cared for me, and I was treated as one of themselves."

"But you could not escape, of course?"

"There was no escape. There was no way of returning," said Colonel Kerrigan quietly. "And so I resigned myself to the inevitable and remained here. And then Robert Adams turned up in his aeroplane. He at once caused me to be imprisoned, and he became the ruler of these simple giants. That is all. You know the man for what he is worth. You now know him to be a base scoundrel, who tricked me just as he has tricked you. He intends to return to civilisation with as much gold as he can take with him, and he intends to leave you here, helpless and abandoned in this hidden city."

"You are quite right, my friend, in your last remarks," said the Comte de Plessigny. "It is my intention exactly. You will all remain here, abandoned among the Arzacs. There will be no escape for you, and there will be no rescue. Within three days I shall have departed, and then you will be able to lead a happy, peaceful life. I am not a bloodthirsty man. I am not a man who believes in violence. Therefore I shall leave you uninjured."

The count waved his hand, uttered a few words in the Arzac language, and then we were all cleared out of the huge apartment. We had no further opportunity of speech. I was taken back with my chums to the room which we knew as our prison, and the other parties were also taken back to their respective apartments.

But there was a slight change. "Whether the Arzacs got mixed up, I do not know; but, in any case, we were not placed as we had been originally.

Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West were with me. But we were somewhat surprised to find that all the other fellows did not come in after us. Instead, Colonel Kerrigan was ushered into the apartment, and he was accompanied by Lord Dorrimore and Umloch, to say nothing of Joey Brown. This latter young gentleman was a small Indian boy, who had acted as our guide. He was quite a cheerful little fellow, and we all liked him.

"Hallo!" said Lord Dorrimore calmly. "What's the messin' of this? We've come to the wrong place, colonel!"

"So it seems, Lord Dorrimore," said Colonel Kerrigan. "I imagined that we should be taken back to our original apartments, but here we are with some of the boys."

"All the better, sir," I exclaimed. "A change is good for everybody."

The colonel nodded, and he glanced round the bare apartment. Then a curious gleam came into his eyes, and he looked at Lord Dorrimore, and then he looked at me. I could see that something had rather startled him.

"Anything the matter, sir?" I asked. "No, no, my boy," replied the colonel. "There is nothing the matter, I can assure you."

He spoke in a curious voice, and I wondered what he meant, but he said no more at the moment, and so I had not pressed the matter. But why had that gleam come into his eyes? Why had he looked about him so eagerly?

CHAPTER 3.

The Secret Tunnel!

LORD DORRIMORE looked round and smiled.

"Well, this is a queer business!" he remarked. "There are only seven of us here. What's the idea of dividin' us up like this?"

"I don't know, Dorrie," I said. "At first I thought we were all coming back as we had been originally placed. I thought that the other fellows were coming in this apartment with Tommy and Montie and I. But the rest of the chaps must have been taken to another room. Anyhow, we are all in the building, so it doesn't make any difference."

"Not a bit!" said Dorrie. "It's a pity Lee isn't here, though. He's full of ideas; he's full of plans. But there's no immediate hurry, an' when he does move you can bet your boots that he'll move in a way that will open everybody's eyes. If we only had our rifles and revolvers things might look better."

"They were all taken away from us, Dorrie," I said, shaking my head. "But we know where they are—that's one thing. They're all stowed away in a room at the bottom of this building; and there are boxes of ammunition too, which came from the airship."

Dorrie smiled.

"My dear chap, you don't know what you're talking about," he went on. "Ammunition? Firearms? Why, that lot in the room beneath us only represents a handful. They're just our personal belongings. Don't you know what the count has done?"

"I can't say that I do know," I replied.

"Why, he's been over on that airship at least three times," said his lordship. "An' he's come back every time filled up with machine-guns and bombs an' ammunition. What on earth he is preparin' for, I don't know. But he's got all those machine-guns, an' enough rounds of cartridges to last out a terrific battle."

While Dorrie was speaking, a thought came into my head, and I looked rather startled.

"I wonder if the count is thinking about these other giants?" I said suddenly.

"Other giants?" repeated Tommy. "What other giants?"

"The people who live in mud huts," I replied. "Don't you remember? I told you all about it. When Handforth and I escaped in the aeroplane, we flew in the wrong direction at first, and we came upon a tremendous mud city, a place built of low, dirty-looking houses, which we examined at close quarters. All those buildings are of mud, and the giants themselves, although as big as the Arzacs, seemed to be of a lower type. They are not so white, and they are rough, savage-looking brutes."

"And they were preparing for battle, weren't they?" asked Watson.

"I believe so," I replied. "Anyhow, they were building all sorts of strange towers, and the whole place was alive with activity. It seems to me that an attack is expected on El Dorado, and the count has brought all these machine-guns in order to make the defence absolutely certain."

The colonel nodded slowly.

"There may be something in what you say, Nipper," he agreed. "I must confess that I am quite interested. These mud men are very ferocious fellows, and once they go on the war-path they are determined and deadly."

"The which?" asked Dorrie.

"The mud men."

"What a clean, healthy-sounding name!"

"They are called mud-men because they live in buildings which are composed entirely of mud," replied the colonel. "And, during the rainy season, the country where they reside is nearly all mud. In the Arzac language they are called Ciri-Ok-Baks. That means men of mud."

"Do you know much about them?" asked Dorrie interestedly.

"A fair amount," replied the colonel.

"They have been the enemies of the Arzacs for centuries. During the time I have been in El Dorado, as you call the city, the mud-men have only made one attack, and that was a very half-hearted affair, which failed utterly. You see, the tremendously high walls which surround El Dorado form a certain guard against any attack from without. If the Ciri-Ok-Baks can only conquer the wall, they will also conquer the city. And you may be sure that they will wipe out every Arzac they can. They kill everybody—men, women, and children."

"I suppose they want to seize the city for themselves?" asked Dorrie.

"That is it exactly," replied the colonel. "They are jealous of the Arzacs, and they intend to wipe out the whole tribe, if they can. Then, when all the Arzacs are dead, the mud men will occupy this wonderful city. That is their plan, I believe. But they will never succeed. It is impossible."

"It will be very cheerful if they try the game on while we're here," said Tommy Watson. "If they do happen to beat the Arzacs, I suppose we shall be killed as well?"

"There is no doubt of that," said the colonel gravely. "If the mud men ever gain a footing in El Dorado, not a soul will escape. We shall all be killed with the others. But, as I have said, there is no danger of El Dorado falling into the hands of these deadly Ciri-Ok-Baks!"

Lord Dorrimore grinned.

"I like their name," he remarked smoothly. "It's so melodious, by gad!"

"The Arzac tongue is rather difficult to get on with," smiled the colonel. "However, to return to the subject. I am very interested in what Nipper has told us. It certainly seems that the mud men are doing their utmost to get prepared for a fresh attack on the city. In that case, we are likely to have some exciting times before so very long."

"Good!" said Dorrie. "Anything to

liven things up. I'm not the kind of chap who likes a quiet life."

While he was speaking, the stone door again opened, and the two Arzaes appeared, carrying two gold trays laden with food and fruit. It was our supper. We ate heartily, and then the trays were taken away. We were left completely to ourselves, and this time it was apparently for the night. We should not be disturbed again until morning, when breakfast would be brought to us.

Our prison was not merely one apartment. I have forgotten to mention that there was an inner place, but, of course, all contained in the prison, for this inner room had no door whatever, and only one tiny window, near the ceiling. And in this small apartment there was every facility for washing.

Darkness came down at last, but we were not left in blackness. For, through the windows, streamed the strange, orange-coloured light which flooded El Dorado after nightfall.

The city was illuminated by hundreds and hundreds of huge orange balls—great flaming balls of fire which stood upon marble columns, over a hundred feet in height.

"How do they get that illumination, old man?" asked Dorrie, pointing to one of the windows.

"Eh? I—I was thinking— Oh! The light?" he said. "It is obtained by some natural gas, Lord Dorrimore. The Arzaes are a clever race, and they have succeeded in harnessing this gas, and they have used it for the purpose of illumination. By means of a special burner, the gas, when ignited, gives a huge ball of orange-coloured fire. It is quite wonderful!"

The colonel relapsed into his thoughtful mood.

"I'll give you a fiver for them, Kerrigan!" said Lord Dorrimore.

"Eh?"

"Your thoughts, I mean."

"Oh! I understand!" said the colonel. "As a matter of fact, Dorrie-

more, I intend to tell you exactly what I was thinking about. I don't wish to raise any false hopes, and I don't want you to imagine that there is any chance of our escaping. But it so happens that I have been in this apartment. I know it well. And I also know that in that far wall there is a secret door——"

"My only hat!"

"Begad!"

"A—a secret door!"

"By the Lord Harry!" said Dorrie. "Is it true?"

"Quite true!"

"A secret door!" I shouted. "Why, we can escape, then——"

"I told you not to get excited, my lad," said the colonel, shaking his finger at me. "No, we cannot escape. I want you to understand that even if we get out of the city, we shall still be prisoners, we shall have no chance whatever of returning to civilisation."

"But we can get out of this prison?"

"Yes."

"An' out of the city?" asked Dorrie.

"Exactly."

"Well, that's a move in the right direction!" I exclaimed eagerly. "Why, we might even be able to locate the airship, and——"

"No, that is impossible, Nipper," said the colonel. "The airship is within the city walls, and this tunnel leads right out beyond the city wall. Do you understand? If we go on this little expedition, we shall do it merely as a matter of pleasure—as a little relaxation. It is just possible, of course, that we may hit upon something of great interest—we may possibly find a method of defeating the count. But I do not hope for that."

"I do!" said Lord Dorrimore grimly.

"I am hopin' all the time, old man. An' anythin' is better than nothin'. There's no tellin' what we can do if we get out of the city. But how do you know about this secret door? And why didn't you tell us before?"

"It was really unnecessary to tell you earlier," said the colonel. "I thought perhaps you would be very im-

patient, and so I decided to keep my own counsel until the time arrived for me to make a move. And you ask how I know about this door?"

"Yes."

"Well, as you are aware, I was allowed to roam about the city just as I pleased, before Adams returned," said the colonel. "Or before the count returned, as you call him. And one day when I was roaming about this building—which is known as the prison house—I chanced to find this secret door. It was not properly closed, and could be opened with ease."

"But if we go through it, and then the Armaes come in here, they'll know that we have escaped, and they'll come after us," put in Tommy Watson.

"That is quite possible, of course," said Colonel Kerrigan. "But I do not think the Armaes will bother us again until the morning. In any case, even supposing they do come over us, they can only make us prisoners once more, and bring us back to this spot. So it will make practically no difference. Do you propose that we should take the trip?"

"Rather!"

"You bet your sweet life!" said Dorrie.

"Then art surely right, NKose!" rumbled Umlost. "It is well to get away from this place and into the open. One does not know what might happen. I am all eagerness to do as my master suggests."

The colonel nodded.

"Very well, we will wait about an hour longer, and then we will venture out," he said. "There is no reason why we should hurry."

"Well, let's see if the door is all right," I said eagerly. "Can you open it now, colonel?"

"Certainly, if you wish."

"Get busy, then," said Dorrie. "I am one of those chaps who don't believe a thing until I see it, you know."

The colonel smiled, and he walked across the apartment to a far corner. Then he crouched down, felt the stone-

work carefully with his fingers for several minutes, and then, quite suddenly, a square of about four feet opened out. The stone moved back, revealing a dark cavity.

"Anybody got a match?" I asked, turning round.

"Here's one," said Lord Dorrmore.

He struck a match, and he held the light through the opening. Dimly, we could see a low passage, leading downwards at an acute angle. The draught of air which came up was rather musty, but quite breathable.

"Let's go down now, sir!" said Tommy Watson intently.

"No, not yet, my lad," said the colonel. "It is not quite dark—and we do not wish to take unnecessary chances."

He waited very impatiently, but at last the hour had passed. And then the colonel decided that the time had arrived for us to venture on the little trip. We all thoroughly understood that we should return later on—that the journey was only to be a bit of excitement in order to make us tired, so that we should sleep properly.

At the same time, however, I was hopeful that something good might come of this journey. We never could tell, and anything was better than sitting still, doing nothing.

Colonel Kerrigan led the way, Lord Dorrmore went next, and then Umlost, then myself, and the others behind. It was intensely dark, and we struck matches every now and again—although the colonel said he did not require them.

He had been through the passage on two or three occasions, and he knew that there were no pitfalls.

After descending the long, steep slope, we found the tunnel was quite level, and we walked along it quickly. There were no turnings; it was one straight path.

I was feeling quite excited, in spite of the colonel's constant reminder that we should do nothing. I had a kind of feeling that we should be able to benefit

by this journey, that we should be able to do something that would bring us nearer to freedom—to victory.

The tunnel seemed interminable. We went on and on and on. But we knew, of course, that we were travelling right under the city of El Dorado—that we were going straight out towards the quiet, deserted country beyond the city walls. For, after nightfall, the gates of El Dorado were closed securely, and not a soul was allowed out.

At last, after we had been following the tunnel for what seemed a tremendous time, we distinctly felt a cold draught of air blowing in our faces. This proved conclusively that we were nearing the exit.

And, quite suddenly, we came upon it.

Our way was barred by many thick, tropical bushes. We forced our way through these eagerly, and then, almost before we were aware of it, we found the stars overhead, and the lovely countryside stretching away into the distance. After the intense blackness of the tunnel, we were able to see quite distinctly in the gloom of the night.

We had escaped from El Dorado!

CHAPTER 2.

The Traitor King!

LORD DORRIMORE took a deep breath.

"This is splendid!" he exclaimed. "Even if we have to get back to that prison, it's jolly fine to be out in the open for a spell. But are we quite safe from observation here, colonel? Isn't it possible that we shall run across some of these cheerful little gentlemen with the flowing robes an' gold ornaments?"

"Do you mean the Arzaas?"

"Yes."

"There is no chance of us running into any of them," replied Colonel Kerrigan. "It is one of the laws of the race that after nightfall every man, woman, and child shall be within the

gates. The gates are then closed and locked until dawn. There is a very excellent reason for this, for there are strange and terrible animals roaming about the country—animals that are supposed to be extinct among civilized nations."

"But what about the crops, an' all that sort of thing?" asked Dorrie. "Don't these animals have supper off the vegetables?"

"Occasionally they do," replied the colonel. "But these Arzaas have special means for protecting their crops, Dorrie-more. They have wires and poisoned barbs, and all manner of other protective instruments. It is very seldom that any of these forest brutes penetrate into the cultivated area."

"Oh, I see!" said Dorrie. "That makes it better. There's not much chance of us running across one of the merry specimens, then?"

"Not unless we penetrate into the forest," replied the colonel. "And then, of course, it is quite likely that we shall see something interesting. But I have discovered that on the average these monster brutes are afraid of human beings. They do not care to be in the vicinity where human beings exist. They are forest creatures pure and simple—and they prefer the forest."

"Begad! That's awfully interesting," remarked Sir Montie. "I'm feelin' much more comfortable, dear old boys!"

We walked on several hundred yards, until we came to a broad road. And then we looked back, standing in the shade of a big tree, and we could see the great, gigantic walls of El Dorado.

They looked like huge skyscrapers, all put together in one block. And over them there was a haze of orange-coloured light—the reflection from the thousands of pillars of light within the city.

"It's marvellous!" I exclaimed, in rather an awed tone. "Just to think of this place being here, hundreds of miles behind the deadly swamps of Brazil. It

seems more like a dream. Dorrie. I can hardly believe that it is true."

"It's more like a nightmare, to my mind," remarked Lord Darrimore. "Well, now that we're out here, what are we going to do? I propose that we take a stroll round the city walls, and we might be able to see something—"

"Hush!" interrupted Kerrigan quickly.

"But why, what—?"

"There are figures approaching!" muttered the colonel. "I do not understand it—but see!"

He pointed, and we all crouched round the tree, in complete concealment. And from the direction of the city walls we could see two figures coming out towards the road, which ran right past the tree under which we were standing. One of the figures was small, and the other gigantic.

In short, one was a normal human being, and the other a giant.

"Great Scott!" I muttered. "That must be the count!"

"Without the slightest doubt, my lad," said Kerrigan. "There is no one else sufficiently small. And there is one of the Arzac priests with him—to judge by the robes. I really cannot understand why they should be outside the city walls at this hour."

"Perhaps we shall be able to discover something, if we only wait," said Lord Darrimore. "I had a feeling in the back of my spine that we should do something on this trip. Hallo! The pair have come to a halt, and appear to be havin' a confabulation."

We watched, greatly interested, and very curious. It was quite impossible for us to hear anything that was said, of course, for the two men were too far distant. And, in any case, they were probably talking in the Arzac tongue. Colonel Kerrigan turned to us, and I could see that his eyes were gleaming.

"Wait here!" he whispered. "I am going nearer, but I shall return soon."

"My dear man, you'll be spotted," said Dorrie urgently. "Don't let yourself be seen—"

"It's quite all right, Darrimore," interrupted the colonel. "I shall be able to creep round in the cover of the bushes, and I might possibly overhear what the men are saying. It may be of intense value to us. We do not know."

Before we could say anything else the colonel was gone. We did not hear or see him. But the minutes passed, and at length fully a quarter of an hour had elapsed. And Colonel Kerrigan was still absent—he had completely vanished.

"I'm getting anxious!" I murmured. "We're simply doing nothing. Dorrie, why shouldn't we act on our own account?"

"How?" asked his lordship.

"Well, we can easily rush forward, surprise the count, and take him prisoner," I explained. "Don't you see?"

"Not exactly," said Dorrie. "We can take the count prisoner, I've no doubt. But what's the good of it? What should we gain? The alarm would be given at once, and we should be captured ourselves."

"I was thinking of collaring him, and whisking him down the tunnel," I said. "Then we can threaten all sorts of awful things unless he gives us the airship—"

"There may be something in the idea, but it's too late now," said Dorrie. "They're movin'. By jingo, they're comin' in this direction, too!"

"Shall we pounce on the rollers?" I asked eagerly.

"No, I don't think so, Nipper—we had better not be rash," said Dorrie. "Let us hear what the colonel has to say first."

The Comte de Plessigny and his huge companion came along the road, and they passed within ten yards of us, going direct away from the city. It was quite clear that they had set out on a journey, and that they were in rather a hurry, too.

By the time they had vanished into the gloom we heard a sound in our

rear, and Colonel Kerrigan was once more with us. And now he was looking grim, determined and thoroughly startled.

"Well," asked Dorrie, "did you hear anythin'?"

"I can hardly believe that it is true!" said Colonel Kerrigan, his voice quivering with emotion. "By heaven! The base scoundrel! The traitorous brute!"

"Meanin' the count?" inquired Dorrie languidly.

"Yes!"

"Oh, we knew long ago that he was a traitor——"

"But—but you don't understand. Lord Dorrmore—you don't understand!" interrupted Colonel Kerrigan. "I have been listening to their conversation—and, although the count cannot speak the language fluently, he was, nevertheless, able to make himself understood. I know the whole truth, and, frankly, I am staggered!"

"You look a bit bowled over," remarked Dorrie.

"I will tell you in a few words what is taking place," said the colonel. "The priest who is with the count is a traitor to the Arzacs—he is hand in glove with the Cri-Ok-Baks, and it is his intention to betray El Dorado to the enemy!"

"Phew!"

"Begadi!"

"By the Lord Harry!" said Dorrie blankly.

"It is true—perfectly true!" went on the colonel. "I have been suspecting something of this nature for many months past. I have known that some of these priests are treacherous, and they do not care a straw for their fellow countrymen. And this man is a base traitor—he is determined to assist the Comte de Plessigny in betraying the Arzacs to the mud men."

"Then the count is a traitor himself?" I asked.

"That is not at all surprising," said Colonel Kerrigan grimly. "Don't you realise what this means? The

Comte de Plessigny is now making his way to the mud city, and he means to confer with the Cri-Ok-Baks, and everything is to be planned for the coup to take place at dawn the day after to-morrow!"

"The day after to-morrow!" echoed Dorrie. "That doesn't give them much time!"

"But you do not realise that everything is prepared—they have their army ready, their weapons, their trained animals!" said the colonel. "They are simply awaiting the moment when they can enter the city. The count is arranging everything. He intends to give a tremendous big festival to-morrow—a feast—in which there will be eating, drinking, and dancing. By the evening the whole city will be in a state of intoxication, for a festival in El Dorado is something like the ancient festivals in Babylon. Everybody joins in and the whole city goes mad!"

"My only hat!" said Watson, in a startled voice.

"Do you realise what it will mean?" went on the colonel. "To-morrow night the city will be absolutely unprotected. There will not be a single man fit to fight. And then this attack will come from the mud men—an attack which it will be impossible to defeat!"

"Seems that we're in for some lively times, then," said Lord Dorrmore. "Ah, talkin' about Babylon, it reminds me of that cheerful individual, Belshazzar, who was caught nappin' in Babylon by Cyrus. There was a terrific feast then, if I remember history aright—and Cyrus simply walked in without any trouble."

"Yes, you are quite right," said the colonel. "It strikes me that Plessigny has borrowed a page from history; he is intending to work this affair on very much the same lines. But that is of no concern—we must think of the danger. Once these mud men gain the mastery they will sweep through the city in thousands, and they will kill

everybody—including your party, Dorrinore!"

"And including us!" said Dorrinore. "This needs some thinkin' out, colonel. What can we do?"

Kerrigan clenched his fists.

"We must give a warning!" he declared. "We must warn the Arzaacs of their peril—and of the count's treachery. It will mean everything to us, for it will place the Arzaacs on our side. But how can it be done?"

"I don't know," said Dorrinore. "We can't go into the city and shout out the news, can we? We should only be captured, and the Arzaacs wouldn't take any notice of us."

The colonel nodded.

"That is the difficulty," he said. "Perhaps it will be just as well if we follow the count and this priest. If we follow them to the outskirts of the mud city, then we shall be able to see the preparations with our own eyes, and we can take back a full and complete story of the proposed coup. If we do nothing it will be fatal to El Dorado."

"Yes, I think you're right," said Lord Dorrinore. "By gad, what a scheme! The count means to let these savage brutes in, so that we shall all be wiped out completely in the battle—and the count fondly kides himself that he won't have our blood on his hands. That's the idea. What a piece of extraordinary luck that we came out at this time!"

"This will probably mean not only the salvation of our party, but the salvation of the whole Arzac race," said Colonel Kerrigan.

We did not lose any time in setting forth on our trip. The journey, according to the colonel, was not very long—five miles at the most. This would not actually take us into the city of mud, but it would lead us to a hill overlooking the city, and from there we should be able to see everything that was going on in the valley.

By taking the road we should lose much time, for it was longer, so we

crept right through the forest, the colonel declaring that he knew every inch of the ground, and would not lead us astray. He had roamed these forests many times during the daytime, and he knew exactly which way to go.

"It is by far the better way," said the colonel. "But hurry—we have no time to waste."

He had hardly spoken when there was a terrific cracking in the jungle, near by. We all stood there, startled, and Sir Montie grabbed my arm.

"Dear old boy," he murmured. "What is it?"

"Goodness knows," I said.

And then something broke into view about twenty yards ahead of us, and it dashed across the narrow path. It was something which fairly made my hair stand on end—something which seemed utterly impossible.

The thing looked very much like a rhinoceros, but it was at least four times as big as a rhinoceros.

It was a huge cumbersome thing like a great building crashing through the forest. There were two terrific horns sticking out of its head, and there was a terrible smell wafted towards us as the thing dashed by.

But it was not the smell, it was the appearance of the animal which surprised us most. It was its appalling size. It could have trampled the whole party of us to pulp in less than one moment. We stood stockstill as it went lumbering through the forest.

"What—what was it?" asked Watson faintly.

The colonel wiped his brow.

"I think it is what our scientists would term a *titanothere*," he said. "It is a prehistoric animal belonging to the early carboniferous period. I think I am right in saying that."

"It doesn't matter to me whether you are right or wrong, old man," said Dorrinore. "I don't want to see any more of these fellows—not unless I have an elephant gun handy. I don't quite fancy coming through a forest of this

sort unarmed. I feel decidedly helpless, you know!"

"I don't think we shall be troubled by any more of these creatures," said the colonel. "I am quite surprised that we should have encountered this titanothere. As you saw, he was terrified at our approach!"

"Not so terrified as we were, by gad!" murmured Lord Dorrmore.

We went on our way, and when we came to a little clearing we were again startled to hear terrible noises, hurrah and shrieking, accompanied by a leathery flapping of wings. And then the stars were blotted out for a moment, and, looking up, we saw several gigantic shapes hovering in the air.

"Pterodactyls!" I yelled. "What horrible looking creatures!"

The great flying lizards did not hover in the air for long, but they cleared off—which was just as well. We did not forget how one of them had come down, and had attempted to carry Sir Montie off. But we were rather more safe here, for we could easily dodge under the trees, where the pterodactyls could not reach us.

But after that, we met with no more adventures. The ground became more open, and at last, after roaming miles, we came to the spot where we could look down upon the city of Ciri-Ok-Baks—the City of Mud.

And a really astonishing sight met our gaze.

The whole place was illuminated by fires—they were blazing in hundreds of different spots. And thousands of men were moving about in great activity.

Gigantic towers were being erected—huge, massive things which rose in the air like factory chimneys. And, upon the ground, there were large numbers of gigantic animals, not unlike elephants.

"My only hat!" said Tommy Watson. "What are those huge brutes down there?"

"Mammoths, by the look of them," said Dorrie.

"Their jaws seem too long for mammoths," I put in. "You remember, Dorrie, I told you about these things before? Handforth and I saw them when we flew over the place. I think they look more like manedogs, the long-jawed variety, which scientists call tetraelodons."

"My dear fellow, there's no need to crack your jaw about it!" said Dorrie. "It's far better to say mastodon and done with it. Or you can call them elephants if you like—I don't care. In any case, they seem to be quite tame, and they're used as we use horses!"

"Yes, there is no doubt that they are trained," said Colonel Kerrigan. "They will use those animals in order to assist the attack upon El Dorado. They have done so on former occasions, but with very little success. During the last ten or twenty years these people have trained the animals to a wonderful extent; and if they once succeed in getting within the city, there will be no quarter. Everybody will be killed!"

We continued looking at the active preparations which were going on, and we were vastly impressed. There was not the slightest doubt that all this activity meant the eve of a great battle. A tremendous onslaught upon El Dorado was being planned.

We did not venture to go nearer, for it would have been extremely risky. And so, after standing there watching for well over half-an-hour, we decided to make our way back. And during the return journey Lord Dorrmore and Colonel Kerrigan were determined to talk over the whole situation, and to plan out a method of warning the Azacs of their coming peril.

But as it turned out, this was not to be.

Just as we were about to make a move we heard many movements, and then we saw figures coming towards us from all directions.

Lord Dorrimore drew in his breath sharply.

"By the Lord Harry!" he exclaimed. "We've been spotted!"

Before anything else could be said, dozens of great figures dashed towards us, and we were surrounded. Resistance was absolutely useless. We had no weapons, and to use our fists would have been futile.

We were surrounded and captured. A minute earlier we had had no idea of our peril—we had had no idea that we were in any danger whatever.

But now we were captured by the mud men. We were securely in the hands of these ugly, treacherous brutes.

The colonel spoke rapidly, and he did his utmost, but it was useless. Kerrigan could talk the Gari-Ok-Bak's language, for it resembled the Arne tongue in many respects. But, although the colonel did his best, it was useless.

We were prisoners and we were held.

Our position, instead of being improved, was rendered fifty times more perilous!

CHAPTER 5.

The Feast Before the Attack!

"IT'S a mystery!" declared De Valorie, shaking his head. "Nobody seems to know what's become of them. Even Mr. Lee's puzzled!"

"Perhaps they've been taken away, and are dead by this time!" said Handforth gloomily. "I shouldn't be surprised at anything that happened in this place, you know. By what I can hear, terrific preparations are being made for something!"

The St. Frank's fellows were talking together in a big group. It was broad daylight, and the sun was shining gloriously overhead. And the juniors were not in the great building which had been their prison hitherto.

They had been taken outside, into a great courtyard, and surrounded by

high walls. And here they were at liberty to go where they pleased, for it was utterly impossible for them to scale those walls. And the juniors were not the only ones who were there, Nelson Lee and Captain Burton and Dr. Brett were also present, in addition to the officers and crew of the yacht. The ladies were still inside the building, and they had not been seen by the juniors that day.

Nelson Lee was chatting with Dr. Brett earnestly.

"I don't pretend to understand it, Brett," said the famous schoolmaster detective. "There are seven of them missing—Dorrimore, Umlosi, the colonel himself, and Nipper and his two chums, and that little Indian boy. It is really extraordinary. By what I can understand they were all missing from their prison breakfast this morning. And nothing has been seen of them, and nothing heard."

"It's a mystery, Mr. Lee," said Brett. "I'm rather uneasy, too. Things seem to be getting worse instead of better. What do you think would be the best course for us to adopt?"

"Nothing at the moment," replied Nelson Lee. "But you need not think that I intend to be idle for long. On the contrary, Brett, I intend to do everything in my power to defeat the Comte de Plessigny before he goes off in Dorrie's airship."

"I wonder what all these preparations are?" asked Captain Burton, strolling up. "It seems to me that something is being got ready, Mr. Lee. Haven't you noticed the way in which these giants are moving about? Haven't you noticed the smiles on their faces, and the signs of activity which keep coming to us from beyond these walls?"

"Yes, I have noticed everything," replied Nelson Lee. "I do not pretend to understand what it means, but it is quite evident that something is being done—something of an unusual nature."

The morning dragged on, and when

the usual dinner hour arrived, the juniors were rather startled to find that no food was brought to them. Patty Little, in fact, was in a terrible way.

"It's half an hour past the usual time!" he wailed. "They must have forgotten us, you chaps! I'm nearly starving, you know, and unless I have some grub jolly soon, I'll simply faint away!"

"Oh, dry up, you porpoise!"

"You won't come to any harm if you don't have any grub for a week!"

"After the breakfast you ate this morning, it's impossible for you to be hungry now!" said Handforth, glaring. "Why, you demolished all your own grub, half of mine, and—"

"That doesn't matter," said Patty Little indignantly. "They don't give us enough—that's the trouble. I'm not grumbling at the quality of the stuff—it's generally been all serene. But I do think they might give us a feed at the right time!"

Another half-hour dragged by, and still there was no sign of anything making its appearance.

But then something else occurred—something which made all the juniors look at one another in astonishment. For drums were sounding—deep, loud-toned drums which beat upon the air with reverberating noise. And this drum beating was kept up continuously without a pause.

"I wonder what on earth it can be?" asked De Valerio. "We've never heard anything like this before!"

"I tell you there's something special on," said Reginald Pitt. "It's absolutely obvious. There you are—listen to that!"

Thousands of voices were raised, and the air was filled with the strange cries, which appeared to be a kind of cheer.

It had hardly died away before a door in the great wall opened, and several figures appeared. All of them were clothed gorgeously in flowing robes and gold ornaments, and in the midst of the group came the Comte de

Plessigny. He was smiling genially, and he looked very harmless.

"Come, my friends—come!" he exclaimed, when he drew near. "I have much pleasure in inviting you to a great feast—the feast of El Dorado!"

"Hurrah!" roared Patty Little excitedly.

"Dry up, you ass!" hissed Handforth.

"It's a feast!" gasped Patty. "A feed, you know!"

"I am gratified to know that one of my prisoners is pleased, at least!" smiled the count. "I can assure you, my friends, that this feast will be something of an extraordinary nature. There will be dancing, there will be drinking, there will be mirth. The festivities will last right into the night."

All the juniors were naturally curious, and at the same time they were suspicious. They could hardly believe that the count was speaking the actual truth.

"However, it really seemed that such was the case. It really seemed that the count had told them the honest truth on this occasion.

For, very shortly afterwards, all the prisoners were taken through the big door in the wall, and they emerged into the vast central space of the city. It was a huge square, with massive buildings on either side, and quite bare at ordinary times.

But now the square presented an astonishing spectacle.

There were tables by the thousand—stone tables, they appeared to be, and each table was filled to the brim with food, fruit, wine! Not only this, but along every street within view there were other tables, and the Arzacs were already beginning the festivities.

Right in the centre of the great square a space had been left—a space about fifty feet across. And here, in front of this space, sat the Comte de Plessigny, in great splendour. He was surrounded by the gold priests, and he waved his hand as Nelson Lee and all the other prisoners appeared.

From the opposite direction came the ladies, attended by many of the Arzac women. Everything was certainly being done in a grand style, and the prisoners did not feel like prisoners. They were being treated, rather, as honoured guests.

The count knew, of course, that any attempt to escape would be quite hopeless, since there were so many people present that all the movements of the prisoners could be seen. They were hummed in by the thousands of guests—by the Arzacs.

And then the feast commenced. Every single person in the city had been invited. Everybody of the Arzac race—all were in the streets, in the sunlight. There was dancing, singing, eating. It was one great gay scene of festivity and gaiety.

And the prisoners sat in the place of honour, in the centre of the square, opposite to the Comte de Plessigny.

The girls were intensely interested in all they saw, and forgot for the time being that they were prisoners. They were fascinated by the whole scene. The juniors, too, were in very much the same state of mind.

Nelson Lee, although he looked interested, was very worried. He was worried concerning those who were missing—he was worried concerning me.

"I have an idea, Brett, that all this has a meaning," said Nelson Lee grimly. "I cannot think that the count has got up this feast for nothing—for mere show. There is something behind it all—something of which we do not know."

"That's how I feel, Mr. Lee," said the doctor, nodding. "But what can it be? And where is Nipper? Where is Lord Derrimore, and what has become of Colonel Kerrigan? I'm terribly uneasy, and I don't mind confessing it!"

"I do not think you are as uneasy as I am, doctor," said Nelson Lee. "I am convinced that the count has some

card up his sleeve—a card which he will produce before so very long. I wish I could guess what his plan is."

But, in spite of Nelson Lee's uneasiness, he couldn't help taking great interest in everything there was to be seen. For, truly, the spectacle was an astounding one.

The feast appeared to be never ending—much to Fatty Little's intense satisfaction. It seemed to be the idea of the guests to remain seated at the tables the whole day long, and far into the evening. There were, of course, intervals. And during these intervals there were entertainments.

On one occasion twenty or thirty men came into the square in front of the count, and there they gave some wonderful exhibitions of strength. They jumped, they danced, they engaged in a rough kind of wrestling match. And there were curious games which the boys could not possibly understand.

After this exhibition, came another bout of feasting and drinking. Then a good many Arzac girls came into the arena, attired in gorgeous robes. And they danced really entrancingly.

They were tall, but, nevertheless, they were extremely graceful and dainty.

The whole scene was one of gaiety and colour and gorgeous pagantry. And the Comte de Plessigny sat looking on with the utmost serenity.

For he knew what was coming!

He knew exactly what this feast meant. And the Arzacs themselves were in total ignorance of the truth. They had no idea that this feast had been specially arranged—that it was a blind in order to get the whole race of Arzacs in a helpless condition.

For, at dawn—which would not be many hours hence—the tremendous attack of the mud men would commence. The attack on El Dorado from without.

And once that attack started, there would be no stopping it. Once the Cli-Ok-Baks gained the advantage

they would wipe everything before them. They would assail the city walls, they would swarm over, and then the end would come swiftly.

"Well, this is a feast, and no giddy mistake!" remarked Reginald Pitt, as he attacked a portion of pineapple. "I must say that these Arzacs treat their prisoners well—if this is an example."

"It's gorgeous!" chuckled Fatty Little. "My only hat! It's simply lovely!"

"I suppose you don't care much whether you ever escape from this place or not?" asked Fullwood sneeringly.

Fatty nodded.

"It doesn't matter much to me," he said frankly. "We've got all the grub we can eat, we're as happy as anything, and there you are! Grub is the main thing in this world!"

"Oh, he's hopeless!" said Handforth. "I want to get back to the yacht again. I want to see civilisation once more. I'd give a whole term's pocket-money to see a copy of a daily paper at this moment!"

Everybody grinned, and then the juniors were greatly interested in the next event in the programme.

And, as night drew on, the whole city became a blaze of light. There were extra lights round this square—hundreds of great pillars, with the balls of orange fire surmounting them.

And from every street, and from every portion of the city came the sound of singing, of great voices raised in gaily.

While the whole race of Arzacs feasted, while they were gay, the enemy was outside the gates, waiting for the moment to strike. The enemy were even approaching, and shortly after midnight they would be in a position—they would be ready to strike the fatal blow.

And one thing was absolutely certain.

If this attack materialised—if these mad men were able to strike their

deadly blow—Lord Dorrinmore's party would go under. Nothing on earth could save them, for the Girt-Of-Baks would kill everything in their path—every man, woman, child, and animal. When on the warpath they were ruthless.

And so the evening dragged on.

The hour grew later and later, and at last midnight was near. By this time the festivities were at their height. Nobody had thought of sleep, and everybody was drinking a curious pungent-tasting wine. This wine had not been brought forward until after ten o'clock.

The giants were drinking of the wine freely. And they very soon showed how the stuff was effecting them.

The dancing grew more wild, the shouts louder, the laughter more hilarious.

Nelson Lee was anxious to get out of it all; he did not care to be here. He particularly wanted to take Lady Helen Tregellis-West and her young charges completely out of this atmosphere. But it could not be done. There was no means of getting away. Nelson Lee could not even ask permission to return to the prison, for he could not speak the Arzac tongue.

And though Lord Dorrinmore's party remained, they were all obliged to stay in their positions and to watch the festivities.

Not that there was anything unpleasant to be seen. Nobody was actually drunk; the giants were only extremely gay and lighthearted. They danced, they shouted, they enjoyed themselves tremendously. And the Comte de Plessigny sat watching—watching with great enjoyment and ease.

It was past midnight, and the comte was only waiting now—waiting for the few more hours which would elapse before the first streak of dawn would appear in the sky. And then the battle would start—the terrible battle which would result in the complete annihilation of the Arzac race.

Nothing on earth could save the city. The attack would come without warning, and the Araucos would be overwhelmed before they could even think of defending their capital.

The Comte de Plessigny was quite certain that it was impossible for any warning to arrive. But the Comte de Plessigny was wrong!

And before many minutes had elapsed he would find that out!

CHAPTER 6.

In the City of the Mud Men

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST shuddered.

"Dear old boys, this is simply frightful—it is really!" he complained. "I am quite sure there are all sorts of appalling insects crawlin' about, an' I can feel things on my neck!"

"You musn't take any notice of them, Montie," I said grimly. "This hut seems to be infested with spiders and beetles, and all manner of other things. In a tropical country a fellow has to get used to insects."

"But they're such horrible crawly things, dear old fellow," protested Sir Montie. "I feel shockin'ly uncomfortable. Bein' prisoners in El Dorado—it's not at all bad, begad! But this is different!"

It was different!

We had been taken down into the city of the mud men—it was, as a matter of fact, only a huge mud village. By this I do not mean to imply that the whole place was simply smothered with mud.

The ground was quite dry, and there were all sorts of tropical trees growing on every hand. But all the houses in the town were composed of mud—baked by the sun. They were wretched places, and hardly any better than the hovels occupied by the most primitive Indians in the Brazilian forest.

It was daylight now, and we had spent practically the whole night in this wretched insect-infested hut.

The morning sun streamed in through a crack in the wall—a crack which extended almost from the top of the building to the bottom. It was quite impossible for us to widen that crack, for the mud was baked as hard as a brick, and we could do nothing. But it provided a kind of window, through which we could watch and look at the preparations which were being made.

We had not slept during the whole night, and this was not surprising, considering our position.

The mud building was not at all large, and its smell was very distasteful.

In the darkness we had not cared to lie down, for we instinctively felt that the place was not clean—that it was swarming with beetles and spiders and other tropical insects.

"What are we goin' to do—that's the question?" said Lord Dorrimore. "We know exactly what is happenin', an' we know what will happen to El Dorado unless we move. Everybody in the city will be wiped out—everybody will be killed once these mud men get on the spot."

"You are quite right, Dorrimore," said Colonel Kerrigan. "There is no doubt about that whatever. During to-day these people are making the final preparations, and to-night, as soon as darkness falls, they will move on towards the city. They will get everything into motion, and by dawn they will be fully prepared for the onslaught."

"And the Araucos will be unprepared!" I said miserably. "Oh, my goodness! What a position! Even if we succeeded in getting out of this hut—and that's practically impossible—we should never get out of this place. We should be spotted and stopped. What I can't understand is why we have been saved—why we haven't been killed out of hand."

"I think there is one explanation for that," said Colonel Kerrigan. "We were captured after the Comte de

Plessigny had taken his departure, and, therefore, these savage giants do not know what to do with us. They are waiting to communicate with the count before taking any drastic steps. Probably they are afraid to injure us, knowing that we are a different type of being."

"Thank goodness for that!" said Dorrie. "I noticed they looked at Umlozi in a very peculiar way. I think they thought he'd been smearin' his face with soot, or somethin'!"

"It is well to see that thou art cheerful, O N'Kose!" rumbled Umlozi. "It is well. Methinks it will be impossible for us to take any great action. We must wait until luck turns our way—as it surely will. Heed my words, my father."

We managed to get some sleep somehow, two or three of us sleeping at one time, and the others remaining awake.

I had only just dozed off when a tremendous great spider came crawling over my head, and I jumped to my feet with a terrific yell.

"Look at it!" I gasped. "Why, it's six inches across!"

The spider was indeed a monster—a terrific great thing with a hairy body and enormous, hairy legs. It scuttled away to the side of the hut, and then disappeared through a crevice. After that I decided to sleep sitting up, but even then I could only doze.

The others were just the same. It was impossible for us to have any comfort in this terrible building.

Some food was brought to us, but we could not touch it. It was ghastly stuff, unfit for a pig to eat.

The day passed somehow or other, and, at length, the dusk descended over the city of mud. And then the flames began to blaze out again, and the signs of activity were increased.

There had been very little doing during the heat of the day, and I judged that the mud men were sleeping in preparation for the great battle which was coming.

But now that dusk had come—now

that night was nearly upon us—the savage giants were getting ready. Outside, in the city itself, tremendous activities were in progress.

Huge parties of men were getting towers ready—those gigantic towers which we had seen in course of construction. They were supplied with wheels—great wooden wheels made from sections of round tree-trunks. I had no doubt that the Comte de Plessigny had instructed these people in the art of manufacturing wheels.

Through that crack in the wall we could see a great deal of what was going on. And we were greatly interested, in spite of our discomfort.

Hours passed. Ten o'clock had already gone, and it was getting on towards eleven. By this time the Cir-Ok-Baks' army was on the move.

Men, mastodons, and implements of war—they were all streaming out of the city in a never-ending line—and they were taking the road towards El Dorado.

There must have been hundreds of these tame mastodons in the hands of the mud men. And the animals, though fierce, were well under control. Now and then one of the gigantic brutes would break out, and he would prove rather troublesome. But, on the whole, the mud men had the great animals in control.

Curiously enough, it was one of these mastodons that brought salvation to us, opening the way for us to go to El Dorado and give warning of the coming attack.

Through the crack in the wall we could see many of these animals being prepared for the march. They were quite close to us, and their keepers were shouting at them, and the backs of the mastodons were filled with various implements of war. Stones, and all manner of other articles.

One of the great brutes was rather troublesome, and he would not move in line with the rest. And we could see two of the great mud men jabbing pointed sticks into the animal's flesh.

The brute did not seem to like this, for he trumpeted shrilly—with a noise which rang through our ears.

And then the animal seemed to go mad.

He dashed round, knocked two of the Cri-Ok-Baks flying—killing them on the spot—and then the mastodon came charging straight towards our host.

"Look out!" I gasped.

Crash!

The whole building shook and shivered as the monster struck the wall. Pieces of mud came dropping down on our heads—hard caked mud like lumps of brick. And then the mastodon charged on, causing great havoc through the streets of the strange settlement.

Lord Dorrimore looked at that crack in the wall, and a gasp came from his lips.

"Look!" he exclaimed, with unusual emotion. "Look, ye cripples!"

We looked, and there we saw something which made our eyes open wider.

The crack had extended, and there were other cracks near to it. The whole section of the wall, in fact, had been shattered, and it was only holding itself in position by a few shreds of dried grass—with which the mud was liberally mixed.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Colonel Kerrigan, his voice rather unsteady. "Providence has come to our aid!"

Dorrie dashed at the wall, and he touched it with his fingers. Lumps of dried mud came away, and dropped to the floor. Within two minutes there was a hole sufficiently large for all of us to crawl through. And everything in front was darkness—there were no mud men near—those who had been on the spot had rushed off in chase of the unruly mastodon. Our chance had come.

One by one we stepped through the hole in the wall of the But, and less than a minute later we were dashing away through the darkness, towards the forest. And we escaped.

We got completely away from the

city of the Cri-Ok-Baks! There was no pursuit, for the giant savages did not know that we had got free. And then we ran as we had never run before.

We raced through the forest—intent upon reaching El Dorado in time to give warning.

CHAPTER 2.

The Enemy at the Walls!

THE Comte de Plessigny glanced at his watch.

"Dawn will be here within three hours!" he murmured. "Everything is going well—no hitch has occurred and no hitch can occur now!"

He was speaking to himself, and he gazed out over the scene of gaiety with much approval.

The Arzacs were still making merry. The feasting was still going on, the drinking continued, and there were parties of the giants dancing and making gay.

Nelson Lee and the other members of Lord Dorrimore's party were still present—since they had been unable to leave. The Comte de Plessigny intended them to be there when the attack came—so that they would be among the first to fall.

The count was pleased with everything. He knew well enough that the Arzacs had no idea of their coming peril.

This great festival had been arranged on purpose. With such scenes of gaiety going on, it was impossible for the Arzacs to know what was occurring outside the city walls. As a rule a kind of watch was kept, but there was no watch being kept to-night.

It was a night of festivity.

And outside the walls of the city the attack was being prepared!

Even now many of the great towers were being placed in position, so that the mud men should have them in perfect readiness when the right moment arrived. The mastodons were there in large numbers—for these great crea-

tures were to be used to batter down the great gates, and to sweep through the city, dealing death and destruction as they went.

And then came the surprise.

Shouts were heard down one of the main streets of the city, out of sight of the big square. Many of the Arzacs were seen running, and there was quite a lot of excitement. The Comte de Plessigny did not know what it meant, but there were others who did. I, for example, was well aware of the truth.

For I was running through that main street of El Dorado with Lord Dorrimore, Umloot, my chums, and Colonel Kerrigan. We had succeeded in gaining admittance—but only because of the colonel's presence.

He had taken us to a tiny door, low in the wall, which was a private door—a door only known to a chosen few.

We had entered by that way, and were now within the streets of the city—making our way towards the central square.

At last we were within sight of the great arena. We had not been molested during our run through the city. The white giants had stared at us, but we had not been stopped.

And now we burst suddenly into view. Nelson Lee rose to his feet with a shout, and all the other juniors rose, too.

"It's Nipper!" roared Pitt at the top of his voice. "Nipper and Lord Dorrimore and the others!"

"Hurrah!"

"Thank goodness they've come!"

"Oh, hurrah—hurrah!" shouted all the girls, in one voice.

But we did not take any notice of our friends. I hardly gave the gov'nor a glance, in fact. We were rushing straight towards the Comte de Plessigny—who was now on his feet, looking rather startled. We dashed across the space, and Colonel Kerrigan simply hurled himself upon the Comte de Plessigny, and grasped him by the throat.

"You infernal rascal!" he shouted

thickly. "I'm going to choke the life out of you!"

"You fool—you mad fool!" gasped the count.

He shouted some words to the Arzacs who were near by, and a moment later Colonel Kerrigan was dragged off, and held securely.

"Tell them!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore intently. "Tell them of their peril—tell them that the city is about to be attacked, and that they were betrayed by their king!"

But Colonel Kerrigan did not need any prompting—he was already shouting at the top of his voice, speaking in the Arzac tongue. And he spoke so vehemently, so grimly, that the Arzacs were compelled to listen to him.

We could see the white giants gazing from the colonel towards the Comte de Plessigny, and it was quite clear they were in a state of doubt.

And then, from outside, came some curious sounds. At the very first sound a hush fell over the city, a deep hush which was wonderfully impressive.

And then we heard.

There was the shrill trumpeting of those great mastodons. There was the grinding of wheels upon hard ground.

From every side came shouts of anger and fury from the Arzacs—the shouts of amazement and consternation.

For they knew now what had happened!

They knew that the Chri-Ok-Baks were making an attack—and those who were near enough were quite certain that Colonel Kerrigan was telling the truth. The Comte de Plessigny had turned traitor—he had delivered the city over to the enemy!

If the Arzacs had any doubt with regard to this point, that doubt was very soon dispelled.

For, abruptly, the count whipped out a revolver and pulled the trigger again and again.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Three of the Arzacs fell to the ground, writhing with pain. They had been shot down by their king—and this

was a positive indication that the count was their enemy.

"Do you think I care?" yelled Pleasigny. "No! It is too late now! You are all going to be wiped out!"

Still shooting with his revolver, the count dashed away, and those who tried to stop him were shot down ruthlessly. And he disappeared behind one of the great buildings.

And then confusion reigned supreme.

The Arzaes were running about in all directions, many of them too dazed and bewildered to know what to do. But we were not interfered with. We had brought the alarm, and therefore we were respected. From that moment onwards there was no danger of the Arzaes harming us. We had proved ourselves to be their friends—and they would not turn on us now.

But what of the attack on the great city?

It had been arranged by the count that the attack should commence at dawn—that the white giants should be surprised while they were still making merry and feasting. But the time was now only just after twelve-thirty, so there was at least two hours in which to make hurried preparations, for the Ciri-Oo-Baks were not yet ready—they themselves were preparing.

But what could be done in two short hours?

I hastily explained to Nelson Lee and the others all that had happened to us and what we had seen.

"It's terrible, guv'nor—it's terrible!" I exclaimed breathlessly. "There are thousands of those mud men outside the city walls—they are coming along full of determination to conquer El Dorado."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"And if they do conquer the town, Nipper, they will slaughter everybody within it," he said grimly. "There is no doubt at that point. These mud men are deadly and savage; they will give no quarter. It will be death for everybody if they gain the upper hand."

"My only hat!" said Handforth blankly.

"But they won't win!"

"Of course not!"

"We can easily beat off a parcel of savages!"

"Rather!"

The juniors who were standing by, in an excited group, were unanimous in their opinion.

Umlozi, the giant Kutana chief, raised his hand, and his eyes were blazing with delight.

"Wad! I am happy, Umtagati, my master!" he exclaimed, in his rumbling voice. "This is a day I have been waiting for—I have been long waiting for! It will be an affair for men, this battle! Thou wilt be wise to place these boys in a place of safety, for it would be wrong to endanger their young lives."

"You need have no fear, Umlozi; I shall look after the boys—and the girls, too," said Nelson Lee. "At the moment I think it is far more important for us to see after the machine-guns and ammunition."

"The machine-guns, sir?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"We haven't got any, sir!"

"We have not got them at the moment, but I know where they are kept," said Nelson Lee. "The count seized all the machine-guns on the yacht, and he transported them across to El Dorado in the airship. He also brought many cases of ammunition, rifles, cartridges, and a great assortment of bombs. It is only too obvious now that the count intended them for his own purposes, to use against the Arzaes. But the count has fled, and we shall be able to make use of those guns and the ammunition!"

"Hurrah!"

"Do you know where this store-house is, sir?" asked Mr. Hudson, the first officer of the Wanderer.

"Yes, Mr. Hudson, I do."

"Then, sir, let me advise you to go to it as soon as possible!" said Mr. Hudson grimly. "Don't you think it is possible that the count has gone

there first—that he intends to take that ammunition away? He knows well enough that we shall use it if he does not——”

“You are right, Mr. Hudson!” said Nelson Lee quickly. “Come! We must not lose another second!”

The gunner hurried off, and with him went Dr. Brett, Mr. Hudson, and Lord Dorrimore. I followed with Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson, Handforth & Co., and one or two others.

We didn't know what the rest of the party were doing. All was confusion.

Colonel Kerrigan had had a conference with the Arzac chiefs, and they had gone off in various directions, issuing orders as fast as they could get them out. Men were running about like mad things—shouting, gesticulating, and doing their utmost to get defenders for the walls.

Every single man would be needed—every able-bodied individual, in fact. The Arzacs knew well enough that this was to be the most terrible battle within their history, and it was to be a life-and-death struggle. They had awakened to the fact that death was near by, and they were galvanised into action.

And while all this terrific activity was going on, Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and the others hurried straight down one of the wide streets, in the direction of a small building which contained the stores of machine-guns and ammunition.

As I have said, the whole city was brilliantly illuminated. At regular intervals along the great, wide streets there were huge, massive pillars, with balls of fire surmounting them. These powerful lights were caused by gas—a curious gas which came naturally from the ground.

“There's going to be some big events happening soon, my sons!” I panted, as we hurried along in the rear of Nelson Lee and his companions. “We'll help to get the machine-guns on to the walls, and we might be able to carry

the ammunition—we can all be of some use in a crisis of this sort!”

“Rather!” said Handforth. “We'll all fight, too—I'm ready to do my bit!”

“Hear, hear!”

“Any old thing, dear old boys!” panted Sir Montie. “I'm quite game, you know!”

We hurried on, and presently we saw that those in front of us had turned out of the wide street, and were now going down a long, narrow paved path, with a marble building at the end. Just in front of this building there was a great fountain playing, with a huge basin of water at its foot. This fountain was placed on an imposing position, with white marble steps leading downwards in all directions.

But we had no eyes for the beauty of the scene at that moment. We were intent upon the building, and when we looked round we received a shock.

For we could see smoke issuing out of the windows of the building which stood at the foot of the marble steps. The smoke was coming out in dense clouds, and Nelson Lee and the others were just entering by the doorway.

“My only hat!” shouted Handforth, “The place is on fire!”

“Good heavens!”

“Then Mr. Hudson was right!” I shouted. “The count must have been here—he has set the whole place on fire, so that the ammunition will blow up, and the machine-guns be destroyed!”

“Oh, my only hat!”

“But, dear old boys, do you realise what it means?” gasped Sir Montie, with horror in his voice. “Mr. Lee has already entered the place—and so have Dr. Brett and Mr. Hudson. They will be blown to atoms!”

He said no more, for just at that moment we had arrived at the doorway, and we blundered in. It was almost impossible to see anything, for the whole place was smothered with smoke, and we could see a dull red glow coming from the other side of the big, open apartment within.

"Guv'nor!" I shouted.

"Go back, Nipper—go back!" came Nelson Lee's voice, in urgent tones. "The count has set the place on fire!"

"I can see that, sir!" I gasped. "Why don't you come out? You'll get killed!"

"It's all right, young 'un—don't fear!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore.

"The fire hasn't got to the ammunition boxes yet. That infernal rogue has set light to a lot of grass and other stuff which is on the floor, here. He hadn't got time to do much, you see. If we can only put it out we shall be all right—the ammunition cases are stacked away at the farther wall!"

"Well, it seems terribly risky to me!" said Handforth.

Nelson Lee appeared in the doorway, and he was looking alarmed.

"Boys, I command you to go back—to stand at least three hundred yards distant!" he ordered curtly.

"But, sir——"

"Do as I tell you!" commanded the guv'nor.

It was impossible to argue further. We backed away, and hurried off. As a matter of fact, we were expecting the whole building to blow up into a thousand atoms at any moment. We took up a position on the steps of the fountain and watched anxiously.

"Can't we do something? Can't we do anything to help?" I muttered.

"It doesn't seem like it!" said Handforth. "Oh, why don't they come out?"

And we stood there, gazing at the smoking building with apprehension and fear.

What was to be done?

CHAPTER X.

The Beginning of the Battle

IT was impossible for me to keep still. Knowing that the guv'nor was in deadly peril, I wanted to be with him.

I was gazing at the fountain.

And my heart began to beat faster. There was the fountain, and there was the great basin of water, containing thousands of millions. I gave a shout, for a sudden idea had come to me.

"Look!" I gasped. "Look there!"

"Where?" gasped Handforth, rather startled.

"All this water here!" I went on. "Don't you see it? If we can only break this barrier, the water will go rushing down these steps, it will enter the building, and it will swamp that floor, putting the fire out in less than five seconds!"

"Bogus!"

"Great Scott!"

"But we can't do it, Nipper—it's impossible!" shouted Tommy Watson.

"This stonework is as hard as iron!"

"Yes, that's the difficulty!" I said. I looked round desperately.

"Unlucky!" I shouted. "Here—I want you at once!"

The Kutana chief, who was near by, came up at the double.

"Thou art calling me, O Nimble one!" he rumbled. "Methinks thou art in trouble!"

"I haven't got time to explain, Unlucky, but I want you to smash this wall, if you can, so that the water can rush out down the steps!" I exclaimed urgently. "Do you think it is possible?"

Unlucky looked at the stonework with keen eyes. He did not understand what was in the wind, but he knew by my tone that the matter was very important, and that there was not a second to waste. He shook his head slowly and deliberately.

"Nay, Manzie, I fear that it is impossible!" he exclaimed. "It would require a mighty weapon—but stay! I see something which might be of assistance!"

He darted off, and we looked in the direction he had gone. We saw him stoop down and pick up a heavy marble block. It must have weighed at least

two hundredweight, but Umlooi picked it up, and came running back as though the stone block only weighed a mere stone.

"Do you think——" I began.

"Watch, Manzie—do thou watch!" shouted Umlooi in a powerful voice.

He mounted the steps, swung the stone high above his head, and then, with every ounce of his terrific strength, he sent that block of solid weight hurtling at the ornamental wall of the basin.

Crash!

The stone block struck with a terrific splintering crack. It had been sent with appalling force, and it could not fail to do some damage. But whether it would break the wall down was the question. We had not long to wait.

Several jagged cracks appeared in the white marble, and from these the water began hissing in furious spurts. But it was only a trickle, after all, and the water went splashing down the steps harmlessly.

"It's failed!" gasped Handforth. "We shall be too late!"

"Wait, O thou impatient one!" shouted Umlooi. "The wall is cracked—it is but a simple matter to finish the task!"

Umlooi commenced tearing at the marble work with all his strength. He tugged and pulled and exerted every ounce of energy.

Crash!

A portion came away, and the water went pouring down in a cascade. But this did not satisfy Umlooi. He pulled again and again—and then, with a mighty roar, a huge portion of the wall came away, disintegrating into a hundred fragments.

And with a tremendous roaring, splashing noise the whole contents of that fountain rushed down the steps.

"Hurrah!" I shouted huskily.

The main body of the water was rushing straight towards the doorway of the building which was on fire. And at that moment Nelson Lee and Lord

Dorrimore came staggering out through the smoke, and I knew by their very attitude that they had given up the task as hopeless—that they had come out in order to escape from the explosion which was liable to occur at any second.

They were caught by the terrific rush of water, bowled over, and swept into the building again. Had the matter not been so deadly serious we should have roared at that incident. Nelson Lee and the others were simply taken off their feet and swirled away.

The basin was emptied in less than two minutes, but the whole floor of that burning building was now flooded, and the water was swirling about, filled with charred grasses, and ashes and dirt. Dense clouds of steam came out of the doorway and out of the windows.

We rushed down the steps and splashed through the water until we were inside the building. And there we found Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and the others picking themselves up—drenched to the skin, but looking extremely relieved.

"The fire's out!" I roared. "By jingo! We succeeded, after all!"

Nelson Lee clapped me on the back with a wet hand.

"Splendid, Nipper—splendid!" he exclaimed. "That idea of yours was great. A minute longer, and this building would have been blown to atoms—destroying all our ammunition, machine-guns and bombs. My boy, you have saved the situation!"

"It was Umlooi who did it, sir!" I said quickly.

"Nay, thou art surely wrong. O Nimble One!" put in Umlooi, in his rumbling voice. "I was merely the instrument—it was thy brains that thought out the scheme. I used my strength—that is all. The credit is due to thee, Manzie."

"Credit!" snorted Lord Dorrimore. "A fat lot of credit is due to Nipper. I don't think! Look at my beautiful white suit? Look at it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

We could not help roaring at Dorrie's appearance, for he was certainly a very bedraggled sight. But he was only joking, and he grinned at us cheerfully. He was tremendously relieved by what had happened, and he clapped us on the back vigorously.

"Jokin' apart, young 'un, you deserve half-a-dozen paddy medals!" he declared. "That waterfall came in the nick of time. Another fifty seconds, so, we should have gone up into the clouds. By the way, I hope you haven't ruined all the giddy ammunition?"

"It's waterproof, Dorrie — a n d, besides, it is out of reach," said Nelson Lee. "One or two cases have got wet, but they contain cartridges, and they will come to no harm. But there is not a moment to waste—we must get these goods out of this place as soon as possible, and they must be mounted round the walls of the city, at the most important points. We need men—dozens of them!"

There were plenty of men ready. Colonel Kerrigan had given precise instructions, and the Arzacs were only too willing to obey. They knew well enough that the position was terribly serious, and that their best course was to allow Nelson Lee and the colonel and the others to take command. It was the colonel who did most of the ordering, since he could speak the Arzac tongue, whilst we could not.

And everything went on smoothly and rapidly.

Case after case of ammunition was brought out with the guns, and these were rapidly taken up to the battlements. There were hundreds of men on the job, and they worked in parties. Captain Burton and every member of his crew were hard at it. They were placed in command of large parties of Arzacs, and these gigantic men were only too willing to do anything they were told.

And while this work was proceeding—the work of placing the bombs and the ammunition and the machine-

guns on the city walls—other large parties of Arzacs were preparing their own weapons. They were swarming over the battlements in hundreds and thousands, getting ready for the fray which was almost due to start.

The whole city was one vast hive of activity. Men were running hither and thither, but now there was very little confusion. After that first terrible half-hour, order was restored, and the Arzacs went about their business in a keen, active manner.

They were alive to the fact that their peril was deadly, and that they must use every effort if the city was to be saved from the savage attackers.

For the extent of the danger was now known.

Scouts had been sent out in all directions, and they had come back reporting that the city was surrounded—that the Ciri-Ok-Baka were in tremendous force on every hand—north, south, east and west. They were intent upon making a vast onslaught on the city walls, an onslaught which would take place simultaneously on every side.

At the same time, the main attack was to be directed against the gateway of the city. This was obvious, by the huge number of savages who were collecting there. Once the main gates were passed, the enemy would pour into the city in a deluge.

For these gates were of tremendous size. They were of stone, and were almost as massive as the wall itself. How they had been erected was a puzzle to me, a puzzle which I could never understand. It was an engineering feat of the most astounding character.

The other gates of the city were smaller, and could be held with ease. It was these main gates which caused anxiety to the Arzacs. But there were plenty of machine-guns, plenty of men. And we were all confident that the enemy could be driven back.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrinmore were in command of the operations at

this most important point. Nelson Lee had three machine-guns on one side of the gate, and Dorrie had three on the other. These guns were mounted right on top of the battlements, hundreds of feet from the ground. And from that advantageous position it was possible to pour a devastating fire into the ranks of the enemy.

The wall which entirely encircled El Dorado was a wonderful piece of work. It was tremendously high, and so wide that a railway train could have been run along the top with ease. Hundreds of men could be accommodated, and it was quite possible that fierce hand-to-hand encounters would take place on that wall during the course of the battle.

The Chi-Ox-Baks were not quite ready for the attack. They had intended it to begin at dawn, and it was still an hour from dawn even now.

Of course, the enemy knew well enough that their surprise had not come off. They knew that the Arzacs were preparing to defend the city. And preparations were now greatly hastened.

They no longer attempted to move silently, or to act in secret. They pressed forward as hard as they possibly could.

They did not mean to wait until dawn. They intended to attack at the earliest possible moment.

I found myself on the battlements, gazing down into the darkness beyond the city. I could see dim movements, and I could hear many voices, and the rumble of heavy vehicles.

At regular intervals round the walls there were great staircases, up which the Arzacs would run at the double.

But these staircases were cunningly contrived, for they could be drawn back flush with the wall, and so rendered useless. Thus, if the enemy swarmed over the battlements in large numbers, they would be unable to get down into the city streets.

I was rather dazed by all the noise

and bustle. It was a scene of amazing activity, a scene of feverish energy.

The air was filled with shouts, men were moving about in hundreds at the double. The Arzac women had been sent into the houses in order to be in safety. But many of them were helping, too. They were bearing great baskets of huge stones to the foot of the wall, where they were carried up to the battlements by the men.

As for Lord Durrimore's party—the members of the yacht's crew, the girls, Lady Helen Tregellis-West, and all the others—they were parted. They were in many different parts of the city.

The members of the yacht's crew, for example, were helping with the defences. They were doing their utmost to get everything prepared for the onslaught when it came.

The juniors, including myself, were dodging about all over the place, trying to help, eager to do something.

As for the girls, in charge of Lady Helen Tregellis-West, they were still in the great central square, rather frightened, and considerably excited.

But they did not remain there long. They were taken into a large building not far from the centre of the city. And there, behind massive walls and tightly closed doors, they were told to remain. They were safe there, even in the event of the fighting penetrating right into the city streets.

I staggered up to the top of the great wall near the gates, and I found Nelson Lee in his shirt-sleeves, perspiring freely.

"Anything I can do, sir?" I asked briskly.

The gov'nor looked round.

"Yes, Nipper, you can go and collect all the boys—every member of the St. Frank's party," he replied. "Then you will take them all into the big central building."

"What for, sir?" I asked.

"I have no intention of allowing any of you boys to take part in this fighting," said Nelson Lee grimly. "I want you to understand that now. The

battle is going to be too deadly for any of you boys to take part in it."

"Oh, I say, guv'nor," I protested, "I want to be with you!"

Nelson Lee laid his hand on my shoulder.

"I dare say you do, my lad," he said quietly. "But it cannot be. Really, you must do as I say."

"But, guv'nor—"

"Now, Nipper, there is no time for arguments," said Nelson Lee. "I want you to be with the other boys because you are their leader in a way. I want you to look after them, and see that they do not get out of the building. It is most essential that you should all remain there. Do not forget that Lord Derrimore and I are responsible for your safety, and we cannot afford to take any risks."

"I suppose you're right, sir," I said. "At the same time, it's rotten! I badly wanted to be up here, so that I could see the whole fight!"

"My dear kid, you can see everything," put in Lord Derrimore. "In that central building there is a flat roof, and it towers high above these walls. You'll be able to see the fighting from there, and in safety, too."

Fearing that the juniors would not take any notice of me, Nelson Lee came down into the city with me, and together we rounded up every member of the St. Frank's party—the Removites, the fags, and Morrow and Penton of the Sixth. Even those two seniors were not allowed to take part in any fighting.

And we were hustled away to the central building just as the battle was beginning. We were placed there, behind closed doors, and we were told we were not to move in any circumstances.

"It's rotten—it's absolutely rotten!" declared Handforth grimly. "What's the good of a fight like this if we can't take part in it? I've always had a tremendous respect for Mr. Lee, but now I think he's—"

"It's no good grumbling, Handv." I

put in. "I'd like to be out there, too, but you must realise that it is impossible. If things get really bad—if it becomes a case of every man to the pumps—well, perhaps we shall have a chance. But at present we must stand idle, and watch."

"That's about all that we can do," said Pat disconsolately. "But we can see everything rippingly from the roof, that's one consolation!"

We lost no time in getting up to the roof. And there, stretching out before us on all sides, we beheld the amazing spectacle.

The walls were crammed and crowded with Arzacs, all of them ready and waiting to engage the enemy when he made his onslaught. It was an astounding sight, and we gazed upon it spellbound.

The great glaring orange-coloured lights were all over the city, casting a terrific glare over the scene. And from beyond the walls we could hear the shrill trumpeting of the giant mastodons; we could hear the rumbling of the great towers as they were moved up into position. And we could hear the shouts of the Ciri-Ok-Baks.

The battle was beginning!

And as we watched I wondered if we should win the day. I wondered if the Arzacs would be successful in their defence.

CHAPTER 5.

The Fall of El Dorado!

"WE shall be in the thick of it in less than five minutes, Dorrle!" exclaimed Nelson Lee quickly. "You'd better get back to your guns at once! There is no telling when these brutes will begin in earnest!"

Lord Derrimore nodded.

"I'm all right!" he exclaimed. "I've got three jolly good men on my guns, and these Arzacs are willin' to help in any direction. As you say, we shall soon be in the thick of it."

Near the great gateway, on the top

of the huge walls, Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrmore were waiting for the battle to commence in their section. It had already begun in other parts of the city, and the Arzacs were fighting in grim earnest.

Several of the great portable towers had already been brought into position, and they were literally swarming with the determined mud men.

Those towers were smothered with these savage giants as a pot of jam is smothered with flies. They were clinging all over it in swarms—up the sides, and on the great platform which formed the top.

The towers were extremely cunningly constructed, ladders being provided on all sides, and a tremendous platform on the top, which came exactly level with the top of the wall.

Thus, once the tower was in the right position, it was a comparatively simple matter for the attackers to charge straight on to the battlements and engage the defenders.

And this was already happening in two or three parts of the city walls. At least six of these great towers had been placed in position, and the Cur-Ok-Baks were attempting to gain a footing on the wall.

So far they had not succeeded, but the battle had only just commenced.

Nelson Lee stood looking on, ready for action at any moment. He was deeply impressed by all he saw. The noise of strife filled the air, and there were shrieks, cries and yells from both sides. Down below in the gloom at the base of the wall many dim figures could be seen. The whole ground for hundreds and hundreds of yards away seethed with humanity—thousands of the mud men being there ready to go to the attack when the word came.

Nelson Lee had with him three members of the yacht's crew, and they were all capable of using firearms, and, what was more important, they were able to manipulate the machine-guns.

So far, Nelson Lee was reserving his

fire. He was waiting until the attackers came in force.

Lord Dorrmore, on the other side of the gate, was waiting in just the same way. But it was not destined that they should wait for long. For the battle was growing fiercer with every moment that passed. The attackers were coming on in swarms—in droves.

And with them were the mighty mastodons, trained for battle by these strange savage giants. The mastodons were used to haul up the great towers, and to do anything that demanded strength and brute force.

Whizz-z-z-z!

Nelson Lee started. Something huge had just whizzed past his head—within a foot. It was something tremendously large—quite as big as a football. And it went crashing down into the city, and splintered to fragments in one of the main streets, causing a party of Arzacs to scatter precipitately.

Nelson Lee saw it clearly, and he whistled.

"A stone!" he muttered. "A stone weighing every ounce of half a hundred weight! These fellows must have some very powerful catapults to throw stones of that size to this tremendous height!"

Whiz!

Another stone came, and Nelson Lee knew well enough that these stones were being directed towards him and his party. And, gazing down keenly, he could see dimly a group of great figures about thirty yards away from the wall. They had with them a great, cumbersome structure which Lee had not been able to understand so far.

But now he knew what it was.

"Did you see that, Smithson?" asked Nelson Lee, addressing one of the men.

"I did that, sir!" replied the man grimly. "It nearly took the hair off my head. They must be using a kind of giant catapult, sir—"

"No, Smithson, it is not a catapult,"

interrupted Nelson Lee. "I take the thing to be a ballista."

"And what's that, sir?"

"The ballista is an instrument of war which was used by the Romans, and by earlier peoples," said Nelson Lee. "It was used extensively in the Middle Ages, too—sometimes called by another name. It is a gigantic arrangement with springs, which is capable of throwing large stones a great distance."

There were a good many of the ballistas round the city walls, and now they were all getting into operation. They were hurling stones over the walls with a regularity which was disconcerting.

Many of them struck the defenders as they stood there. Others fell into the city streets, killing anybody they happened to fall upon.

The ballista which menaced Nelson Lee and his little party on the battlements near the gates was working at full pressure, and the great stones were hurling up one after another.

"This won't do," said Nelson Lee grimly. "You'd better send a volley into the crowd, Smithson."

Rat-tat-tat!

The machine-gun roared.

And from below there came many shrieks and yells of terror. And after that the ballista was quiet. Not another stone came up for some considerable time. But other men were now upon the instrument of war, and the stones were again hurled up to the battlements.

But the machine-gun was now going almost continuously, sending a devastating rain of bullets down among the mud men.

The battle, in fact, was growing fierce at all points.

Nelson Lee had taken a machine-gun himself. And now, with keen eye and steady hand, he was operating the gun to the best advantage.

Lord Dartimore, on the battlements on the far side of the gateway, was

working just as hard. So far no towers had reached this section of the wall. There had been no hand-to-hand fighting.

But all along the wall, in other places, the towers were in position, and the mud men were swarming on to the walls, and they were fighting fiercely with the Arracs.

And then, out of the gloom, came two towering, huge forms. Nelson Lee knew what they were. They were two towers being placed in position as rapidly as possible. They came lumbering over the ground, and then, with a double crash, they joined up with the wall. And at the same time, in spite of the terrible fire from the machine-guns, hundreds of mud men came swarming up the towers, with the intention of driving all before them.

The machine-guns were now useless. It was a hand-to-hand tussle. Revolvers and rifles were spitting viciously, and although they caused tremendous havoc, there were such numbers of attackers that it was impossible to drive them all back.

Others came on when their fellows fell—others swarmed up the towers, charged over the platform, and hurled themselves at the wall.

These men were desperate, they fought with a bravery which was amazing. They cared nothing for death.

And Nelson Lee was in the thick of the fighting in a moment. His revolver was now useless, and he was using the butt hitting out with all his strength to right and to left. It was a grim, deadly tussle.

But Nelson Lee was showing the Arracs what a magnificent fighter he was. The great giants even paused in the middle of the fight to watch this white man—to watch this man who had come from the unknown lands beyond. He was tall, slim, but he looked frail. Indeed, to the Arracs, Nelson Lee was a mere pigmy.

And yet he was fighting as though

he was a bigger giant than ever. His clothing in tatters, his face grimy and smeared with blood, he fought with amazing energy.

Time after time it seemed as though nothing in the world could save Nelson Lee from instant death. The giants were all round him—coomy and friend. It was almost impossible to distinguish one from the other in the general melee.

The Arracs were busy on all sides, using their hands mostly, although many of them possessed great clubs, which they wielded with terrific strength and determination.

And then Nelson Lee went down.

He had been struck by the fist of one of the mud men. The fellow had taken the great detective from behind, and Lee had not been able to turn in time to defend himself. He went down, and a terrific axe was whirled aloft.

There was a shriek of warning, which was really a cry of terror. It seemed as though nothing could save Nelson Lee. The axe was wielded by a towering giant, and he was intent upon killing the detective in one blow.

But a black figure rushed forward, roaring at the top of his voice. It was Umlool, and he grasped the mud man round the waist, whirled him aloft, as though he had been a mere child, and sent him flying over the battlements.

The giant went down like a stone, screaming wildly.

"Waa!" roared Umlool. "This is indeed a fight, my master!"

Nelson Lee staggered to his feet and gripped Umlool's hand.

"Thanks, old man!" he said huskily.

"Nay, Umtagati, thou art wrong in thanking me," said Umlool. "It is just as well that I should—"

He got no further, for he found himself surrounded. And then Umlool let himself go in a manner which was really astounding. Giant after giant he attacked, and every one of them went flying into space. Umlool was in

his element now; he loved nothing better than a fight. He was a warrior to the backbone, and this affair was absolutely to his liking.

His intervention had just come in time to turn the tide. The mud men were rather taken aback, and they had lost so many in this short encounter that they fell back on to their platform, momentarily terrified.

And then Nelson Lee got his machine-gun going again, and the fire he poured on to that platform was so terrible that it was impossible for any living being to remain there.

And just then Mr. Hudson came dashing along the wall, and he carried over his shoulder a heavy bag.

"I've got bombs!" he shouted. "We'll soon deal with this tower, Mr. Lee!"

Boom, boom!

Several of the bombs were thrown with deadly effect. The platform of the tower simply vanished into a thousand splinters, and the giants were carried down with the wreckage. Another tower was treated in the same way, and the fight at that point of the wall was for the moment over.

But the respite was only short.

Other towers were brought up, hundreds of other Ciri-Ok-Baks came charging into the fray. There was not a moment's rest for anybody. It was one deadly, breathless fight all along.

Nobody was allowed a breathing space. The battle was fiercer and fiercer with every moment that passed. And not only here, near the gateway, but in all other parts of the giant walls.

The scene was one which almost staggered the senses, it was so appalling. Daylight had now come in full, and the sun was shining gloriously; it shone upon a scene of bloodshed and warfare.

Already there had been many casualties; hundreds had been killed, but the majority of the deaths had been on the Ciri-Ok-Baks' side.

The noise was tremendous. Clouds

of smoke arose on all sides—smoke and dust. And the air was filled with the shrieks of the wounded and the yells of the fighters.

Nelson Lee was still holding his point with tenacity—and the same applied to Lord Dorrinore. They were doing fine, and the attackers had had no chance of gaining a footing on that section of the wall which was held by Lord Dorrinore and his party.

The battle continued without a moment's respite all through the morning. Nobody was allowed a second's rest; it was one long fight, desperate and determined.

And at noon the Ciri-Ok-Baks made their greatest effort—an effort which was successful in many ways.

It might have been supposed that the attackers would be exhausted after such a long period of fighting.

But the mud men were grimly determined. At noon it was seen that some large operation was being put into practice, which demanded very special means to defeat it.

Reserves were brought up in great numbers—thousands of men who had not been in the fighting hitherto, and they came on with shouts of fury and excitement.

Nelson Lee, who was watching intently, and with much anxiety, saw that at least thirty of the great storming towers were being brought forward. The huge mastodons were hauling the towers along, and it was obvious that a great concerted effort was being made.

At the same time other towers were being placed in position against the sections of the great wall farther round the city. These thirty towers were being directed against the gateway—fifteen towers on either side—and they were operated so smartly, and placed against the wall with such rapidity, that it was impossible to stop them.

The machine-guns were barking viciously, rifles were spitting, and hundreds and hundreds of stones were being cast down.

But it made no difference.

The Ciri-Ok-Baks came on like a great flood. They swarmed up the towers in hundreds, they over-ran the walls, and the fighting became very fierce.

Hand-to-hand encounters were in progress on all sides, and Nelson Lee and his own men were fighting as they had not fought before.

And, meanwhile, hundreds more of the enemy were down below at the gates, with the battering-rams, and they were pounding upon the great stone gateways with terrific energy.

Owing to this new attack from the towers, it was impossible to give full attention to the storming party at the gates. The Arzacs and Nelson Lee and the other members of Dorrie's party were compelled to use all their efforts to protect the wall. It was really a covering movement—these towers were only brought up so that the defenders would be compelled to give battle to them—and, meanwhile, the great gates were being battered down.

Crash, crash, crash!

There was a sudden commotion, a terrific amount of noise, and clouds of dust arose. Nelson Lee, pausing for a moment in the battle, found himself unattacked. He had an opportunity of planning down, and he saw the Ciri-Ok-Baks converging on the gateway, shouting with triumph.

The massive gates were almost down!

Nelson Lee bit his lip.

He knew what this meant. He was under no false impression regarding the terrific disaster which had occurred. The Ciri-Ok-Baks had conquered! Soon they would be entering the city in their thousands!

Nelson Lee knew well enough that it would be utterly impossible for him and his companions to remain in their present position. Within fifteen minutes they would be completely encircled, and then would come the end.

There was only one thing to be done.

"I'm afraid we're in a tight corner, Brett!" said Nelson Lee, breathing hard. "We must retreat. It is absolutely hopeless to remain here, on this wall. These mud men will soon be surrounding us. And then there will be no hope whatever. I detest retreating, but it must be done!"

"Yes, it's the only way——"

Crash, crash!

Two of the great towers were sent toppling over, and they fell amid the shrieks and cries of the attackers.

The confusion was tremendous. It was the height of the battle now, and it was impossible for the defenders to know exactly what was happening. But it was known by all near the gates that a retreat must be made. And so, much as it went against Nelson Lee's grain to do so, he fell back.

He and his men, carrying their machine-guns and ammunition, descended from the wall, and then they took up their position in the main street, a considerable distance from the gateway. Here, ambushed by tall buildings, they prepared to send a devastating fire into the mud men as they approached.

Happily, there was only one way of entering the city now. The great gateway led on to a wide road, which passed straight through the city into the central square.

There were no side turnings in this road—the buildings were flush on either side, forming a great avenue. Thus it was impossible for the invaders to spread out on either side. They must come along that one roadway—they must charge straight through into the centre of the city.

And so there was just a slight possibility of the road being held. But Nelson Lee was doubtful. Even with the machine-guns he felt that it would not be possible to check the advance for long.

Hundreds of the enemy would fall—but thousands would get through. And that was just the position. El Dorado had fallen, and the position seemed

hopeless. What was to be done? Nelson Lee was rather desperate, and he was looking anxious and pale.

If something could be done to stop that advance all might yet be well. But would it be possible? How could the mud men be held back? They were through the gateway, and they were pouring into the city.

In any case, if they were to be stopped, not a second was to be lost. And as Nelson Lee stood there, waiting for the onslaught, he suddenly found a slim figure beside him. That figure belonged to me. I had come up knowing full well what had occurred and I was terribly anxious.

"Guv'nor," I gasped, "it's no good stopping here, you'll be overwhelmed in less than ten minutes! You'd better come back, and take up a position in one of the buildings——"

"Why have you come, Nipper?" demanded the guv'nor curtly. "Go back—there is danger here!"

"I know there is danger, sir, that's why I've come!" I said huskily. "You've got to retreat, sir. It's no good!"

"I am remaining here, Nipper," said Nelson Lee grimly. "There is just a chance that with our machine-guns we can hold the advance back. See! The invaders are already coming along this wide street, and they are coming in a body!"

"It's impossible to hold them back, sir!" I gasped.

"It seems so, Nipper, but—— By James!"

"What's the matter, sir?" I asked sharply.

Nelson Lee did not reply. There was a queer light in his eyes. And I knew he had got an idea. He looked at me and his fists were clenched.

"There is just one chance, Nipper!" he exclaimed tensely. "But we must not lose a fraction of a second!"

"But—but what's the idea, sir?" I gasped.

"Come," said Nelson Lee, "I will tell you!"

CHAPTER 10.

The Turn of the Tide!

COLONEL KERRIGAN, dusty, grimy, and perspiring, joined us a moment later.

"I'm afraid the worst has happened, Mr. Lee," he said huskily. "The brutes are in, and there will be no stopping them now! It won't be long before the end comes!"

"We mustn't give up hope just yet, colonel," said Nelson Lee grimly. "I know the position is serious, but there is just one chance that we shall be able to frustrate the mud men after all."

The colonel shook his head.

"I don't see it, Mr. Lee," he said.

"I will explain myself," went on Nelson Lee. "You were telling me a day or two back of this wonderful lighting gas, which supplies El Dorado with illumination."

"Yes," said the colonel.

"I think you told me that the gas was natural, and that the Arzacs have succeeded in harnessing it, and thus supplying the city?"

"That is quite correct," said Colonel Kerrigan. "But why should we discuss that question now, Mr. Lee, with all this danger on hand?"

"Our safety depends on it," said Nelson Lee. "Colonel, I want you to tell me about that gas. I think I understood you to say that, a day or two back, the Arzacs had laid tremendous pipes under the city, along the tunnels which abound underground."

The colonel nodded.

"That is quite correct, Mr. Lee," he said. "The source of this gas is a most natural fissure, just outside the city. The gas roars out of that fissure at a tremendous velocity, and it has never been known to decrease in power. The Arzacs have succeeded in conducting this gas along specially laid pipes, and thus to the pillars where we see all over the city. You will naturally have noticed that the

lights are burning constantly—day and night. This is necessary, the gas is always coming, and cannot be stored."

"Yes, I have observed that," said Nelson Lee. "You said something about an old supply pipe which was disused——"

"Yes, exactly," said the colonel. "Many years ago these pipes were laid in a different way, but it was proved unsuccessful, for there were many leakages. It was soon after I arrived in El Dorado that the Arzacs laid the fresh pipes down, and altered the whole system. The old pipe runs almost beneath this very road, as a matter of fact, and there is a gaping hole just near the main gateway. The gas was in the habit of escaping there, and it caused deadly havoc to those people who were constantly coming in and going out of the city."

"That is just my idea!" said Nelson Lee keenly. "Is it possible to divert this gas, colonel?"

"To divert it?"

"Yes."

"But I don't quite understand——"

"I think you will in a moment," interrupted Nelson Lee grimly. "Don't you see? If we can only divert this gas back into its old piping, it will run straight along, and there will be a large escape of the vapour through holes near the gateway——"

"A large escape!" shouted the colonel. "Why, man alive, that pipe is riddled—the gas would simply pour out in one terrific volume, enveloping the whole street——"

"My only hat!" I roared. "I can see the idea now!"

"Precisely!" agreed Nelson Lee. "If we can only divert this gas, colonel, it will rush along the old pipe, and it will come out in a tremendous stream near the gateway enveloping the street, as you say. These Cur-Ok-Baks will be overwhelmed by the gas fumes, and they will be unable to make their advance along the street, and so——"

"By heavens! It is a great scheme!"

exclaimed Colonel Kerrigan, his face suddenly flushing. "Yes! The gas can be diverted!"

"Hurrah!" I roared.

"It can be diverted with the greatest ease!" went on the colonel excitedly. "Come with me! I will show you!"

Colonel Kerrigan turned abruptly on his heels, and ran with all speed down the great street, until, at length, he came to a tall building. Into this he plunged, and we soon found that it had been converted into a kind of hospital. Here there was a great number of wounded Arzacs, being cared for by their women folk. The place, in fact, was filled to overflowing with the injured.

We dashed on, following the colonel, until at length he turned into another doorway, and then plunged down many steps. At last we found ourselves in a wide tunnel, and the colonel was hurrying along with all speed.

A few minutes more elapsed, and then Colonel Kerrigan came to a halt. The tunnel was quite light, for here and there, against the walls, there were tiny burners, and these burners were supplied with strange orange-coloured lights.

The colonel halted against a terrific stone structure, with many levers near it. Away to our left stretched a square sectional tunnel, but not large enough to admit the passage of a human being. The colonel pointed, and he was breathing hard.

"You see?" he exclaimed. "This is the spot where the gas was originally diverted. At one time it passed along this square tunnel, Mr. Lee, but was then altered until it now goes straight ahead, as you will observe."

"I don't understand," I said, looking puzzled.

"Yet it is quite simple," went on the colonel. "This great stone door is really the end of the gas pipe. If we swing this door round, the gas will be immediately diverted into this other square tunnel—and thus it will roll

along and find its exit near the gate-way as you have suggested. It will put out all the lights in the city, but that does not matter a toss—since the sun is shining. And by to-night we can divert the gas back to its original course."

"But we shall get smothered while we are doing it, sir," I protested.

"No, Nipper; the arrangement is very cunningly contrived," said the colonel. "The Arzacs were prepared, in case of emergency, to divert the gas to the old pipe. And so this door is on a sliding principle. It simply moves along, and no gas is allowed to come out in our direction. But if we shift this door eight feet to the right, the present pipes will be closed, and the old one reopened. If you will examine the structure you will understand exactly what I mean."

I was too excited to examine anything. I was fairly dancing with impatience, and I urged the colonel to be quick about the alteration. But this was rather a difficult task, for the stone sliding-door worked slowly. It required the united efforts of the three of us to shift it at all.

But, gradually, inch by inch, we succeeded in moving the door. And then, when we were about halfway through the task, we found that the lights in our tunnel were becoming dim.

"Good," panted the colonel, as he worked. "You see it? The pressure is already decreasing, and that means that a great portion of the gas is going along this disused tunnel. In another minute or two these lights will be extinguished completely."

The colonel was right.

After we had pulled at the door for another three minutes we succeeded in getting it right over. And by then we were in total darkness. The gas had been diverted, as Nelson Lee had planned.

We did not waste any time, although we were exhausted after our efforts. We wanted to get out into the open

and see what the result of this experiment would be.

It was necessary to grope our way back, for we were in total darkness, and we did not carry any matches on us. But, at length, we arrived at the end of the tunnel, and we once more found ourselves in the building which had been transformed into a hospital.

We hurried through, and emerged into the open street. Then we rushed along towards the main gateway, back to the spot where Lord Dorrimore and Captain Burton and Mr. Hudson were all waiting with the machine-guns—waiting to pour a devastating fire into the Ciri-Ok-Baks when they advanced towards the centre of the town.

So far nothing had happened of an extraordinary nature. The sounds of strife were still coming from every hand, and, although we were in comparative quiet, it was quite clear that the battle was progressing with ever-increasing fury.

I glanced round me with great interest.

There, on the tops of the great walls, hundreds of grappling figures could be seen—clear-cut against the sky-line. Gigantic figures, battling fiercely.

Great stones were coming over into the city with a regularity which was rather disconcerting. They fell in every direction, cracking to the ground, and splintering into fragments.

And there, along the great main highway, a vast number of the enemy were pouring, many of the mastodons being with them.

"Well, what's the idea?" asked Lord Dorrimore as we came up. "The position is still the same, as far as I can see."

"Wait!" said Nelson Lee grimly. "Don't you see? Ah! There is already confusion among the ranks of the enemy. Colonel, I think our plan has succeeded. I am sure that the effect will be stupendous!"

Nelson Lee was staring down the great, broad street towards the gate-

way. Coming along that street were thousands of the mad men, and they were all carrying great stone axes and heavy chunks of wood. They were determined to push straight forward, and to capture the city.

But, in the rear, and quite near to the gateway, where the Ciri-Ok-Baks were pouring in in one continuous stream, there seemed to be a confusion. Men were staggering, the mastodons were getting out of hand, and there was a tremendous commotion.

Shouts and yells filled the air, and I knew only too well what it meant. I knew why those men were staggering—I knew why the mastodons were becoming maddened.

The gas was affecting them! The gas, pouring up from the roadway, was poisoning the atmosphere.

And then something of rather an appalling nature took place.

There was a terrible, devastating explosion, which struck the air like a thousand thunder-claps / rolled into one. I had a dim, momentary vision of a great, blinding sheet of flame roaring up from the roadway to a height of a thousand feet. It simply blotted out the whole atmosphere for that one second.

And then I was flung backwards by the terrible concussion which came along the street. I struck the ground, and rolled over and over, picking myself up considerably dazed.

On all sides other figures had fallen—had been flung. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were together in one heap, with Colonel Kerrigan close by.

A terrible sound filled our ears—the yells and shrieks of wounded men, cries of utter terror. Buildings on all sides had tottered, cracks were appearing, and the air was filled with dust and terrific clouds of smoke.

And there, right in front of us, rose a great wall of flame—farther along the street, and near to the main gateway. This wall of flame rose into the air to a height of about three hundred

feet, and it was making such a noise that it was utterly impossible to hear oneself speak.

"Great heavens!" I gasped. "What—what has happened?"

"The gas!" said Colonel Kerrigan huskily. "It exploded!"

"By the Lord Harry!"

Yes, that was the truth of it. The gas, pouring out from the broken paving-stones of the road, had somehow become ignited, and after that one terrific explosion the gas, being alight, was roaring up in a terrific flame from the road.

And that flame barred the way—it made it impossible for anybody to enter the city by means of the main gates—and it made it equally impossible for anybody to leave.

The result was staggering.

It was far greater than we had even hoped for. The mud men were prevented from entering as they had planned, and those who had succeeded in getting into the city were unable to retreat. A great number of the enemy were trapped—hopelessly trapped!

And every ounce of fight had been knocked out of them. They were too terrified by that terrible explosion to fight any more. They ran helter-skelter in every direction, screaming and yelling and waving their hands. They fell easy prisoners, and at least seven hundred of them were captured and rendered helpless.

The other Ciri-Ok-Baks, who were already entering the city, were compelled to fall back in confusion. The magdons ran riot, and they alone caused terrible havoc among the ranks of the enemy.

Hundreds and hundreds of the mud men had been killed outright by that explosion.

And on the walls of the city the effect of this disaster was soon felt. The mud men there knew well enough that disaster had occurred—that their comrades had not succeeded in getting

through as they had hoped. It was known through the whole city in less than five minutes that the enemy had been beaten—that they were being driven back, and that the battle had been won.

There was not the slightest doubt with regard to this.

Not so long before El Dorado had fallen. But this affair had altered the whole aspect of the battle. The deadly explosion had caused confusion among the Ciri-Ok-Baks, to say nothing of hundreds of deaths.

And the way was barred. The great sheet of flame, rising up from the roadway, made it utterly out of the question for any enemy to pass.

There was danger of fire, of course—a great danger. Many of the buildings, in fact, were already blazing.

But what did this matter?

Even if fifty buildings were destroyed, it would be a very light loss, compared with what might have happened but for that explosion.

Outside the main gateway there was terrific confusion. The enemy was falling back in utter rout. They had failed, and this failure soon made itself known throughout the entire forces of the enemy.

It echoed round the city walls, and the Ciri-Ok-Baks lost heart. They fell easy victims to the determined Arzacs.

And that last half-hour of the battle was the most deadly of all.

The great storming towers were sent crashing over one after another, carrying with them hundreds of the enemy.

And, finally, the Arzacs made certain of their victory.

They poured out of the city in hundreds by means of the smaller gateways—which, of course, could be easily held. And now there was no danger in venturing out.

For the enemy was routed—the enemy had no fight left in him, and the Arzacs gave chase. They had got the enemy on the run, and they were triumphant.

The Aztecs had won—they had defended their city to the last, and they had beaten back the savage giants who had attempted to bring about the overthrow of El Dorado.

The Aztecs, left to themselves, would have been beaten—they would have been wiped completely off the face of the earth. It was we who had saved the day—and the Aztecs were well aware of this fact!

CHAPTER 11.

The Heroes of the Hour!

"**HURRAH!**"

The Remove fellows came swarming down from the top of the building where they had been watching the battle, and now they rushed into the streets, shouting wildly. They had been able to see everything from the roof—they had seen that the enemy had been routed, and that victory had come to the defenders.

"They're beaten!" roared Handforth.

"They're whacked!"

"Hurrah!"

"It was touch and go, though!" exclaimed Reginald Pitt. "I thought we were all going to be wiped up not less than an hour ago. It was that terrific explosion which turned the tide! I wonder how it happened?"

"Well, I'll bet it wasn't an accident!" said Tommy Watson. "It was done deliberately, or I'll eat my hat!"

Fatty Little came puffing up.

"What's that about eating?" he asked anxiously.

"I was only talking about eating my hat, you ass!" grinned Watson.

"Oh, that ain't any good!" said Fatty. "I was just wondering when we should get some more grub! I'm starving, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I haven't had anything to eat since last night!" exclaimed Fatty, in a distressed voice. "Just think of it!

Last night, you know! That's hours and hours ago! I don't know how I've survived—but there's been so much excitement that I forget all about eating——"

Handforth staggered.

"You—you forgot?" he gasped.

"Yes, you ass!"

"It isn't possible!" said Handforth faintly. "It isn't possible for you to forget about grub, Fatty! Why, if there were volcanoes and earthquakes and tornadoes raging, you'd remember your grub! We're all feeling a bit peckish, but we must wait a little longer. There's too much confusion now to——"

"Hallo, you chaps!" I exclaimed, rushing along. "What do you think of it?"

"Grand!" said Pitt. "Those rotters are completely whacked!"

"Yes, thanks to the gov'nor!" I said.

"Mr. Lee?"

"Yes—it was he who saved the city!"

I replied. "Didn't you see that explosion—don't you see that terrific wall of flame over there?"

"Yes—what about it?"

"It was the gov'nor's idea to divert the gas, and to use it to stop the enemy," I said. "But Mr. Lee didn't think of the possibility of the gas exploding—that was more or less an accident. But it's a good thing it happened, because it has finally clinched the matter. The enemy is routed, my sons, and he is fleeing in the utmost disorder, after suffering terrible losses."

"Hurrah!"

"Good egg!" said Fatty. "But I'm just wondering about some grub!"

"Well, boys, thank goodness it is all over!" exclaimed Nelson Lee, coming up at that moment. "We have succeeded, and El Dorado is safe."

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for Mr. Lee!" roared somebody.

"Hip—hip—hurrah!"

The cheers were given with a terrific gusto.

The juniors were very excited and light-hearted. They rushed about with flushed faces, doing anything they possibly could to assist. But the battle was over now—it was completely finished.

Only a few *Carl-Ok-Baks* remained in the city, and these were our prisoners. The others were fleeing before the victorious *Arzacs*—they were being chased back to their own valley, and it was quite certain that *El Dorado* would not be troubled by another attack for many years to come. This affair had been a lesson to the savage mud men, which they would not forget for generations.

Almost immediately afterwards we were extremely gratified to see Lady Helen Tregellis-West and the girls come hurrying out of a building near by. They were accompanied by the stewardesses from the yacht, and all the other lady members of the party. And there were a good many *Arzac* women, too.

"Oh, Tom!" exclaimed Violet Watson, rushing up to her brother. "Wasn't it simply dreadful?"

"It was glorious!" said Watson.

"Oh, you wicked boy!" said Violet, her pretty face flushed, and her eyes gleaming. "It was awful! But we have won—and that is everything."

"There been a heap of excitement, but it's all over now," said Tommy Watson. "I'm not sure that you ought to be out here, sis."

"Why not, Tom?"

"Because there are some horrible sights!" said Watson.

It was the truth. There were many bodies lying about the streets, but not in this immediate vicinity. They were mainly near the gates, and at the foot of the walls. The centre of the city, where we were standing was quite clear. The fighting had not penetrated to this point.

The girls were not allowed to remain out for long. They were soon taken back into their place of safety, and then food was brought to them. Food was also brought to the jurers, and

they were rather glad of it, for they were tremendously hungry. *Patty Little* absolutely surpassed himself. He demolished more food than he had ever been known to demolish during one meal before.

Confusion reigned throughout the afternoon—and this was only to be expected.

There was much to clear up—there was a great deal to be done.

The great sheet of flame which had barred the main gateway of the city was soon extinguished. It had easily been done by simply shifting the great sliding door back to its original position, and thus diverting the gas on to its proper course once more. Then the hundreds and hundreds of burners had to be ignited throughout the city—otherwise the gas was going to waste, and blowing down and poisoning the atmosphere.

But it was all accomplished by the evening. And by that time, too, the victorious *Arzac* army had returned—after inflicting terrible punishment upon the mud men. The *Carl-Ok-Baks*, in fact, had been defeated completely.

Men were working at double pressure throughout the afternoon and throughout the evening. The city was being cleared up—the marks of the fighting were being eradicated.

And this was a long task.

Lord Dorrimore's party had collected together once more, and Nelson Lee was looking quite clean and fresh—with one or two bandages and portions of plaster. *Dorrie* himself had hardly been touched, and he was extremely cheerful and light hearted. *Unlost*, however, was suffering from several deep gashes, and he presented a somewhat remarkable appearance with his great patches of plaster and his many bandages. But *Unlost* was happy.

"Was, O Nimble One!" rumbled *Unlost* into my ear. "Was it not a great fight?"

"It was!" I replied.

"Was it not a fight which a man could revel in?" demanded *Unlost*.

"It was!" I said in a solemn voice.

"Thou art surely right, O Manzie!" said Unkool. "It was a fight such as I have never had the pleasure of being in before. Wau! It was a battle of men—a battle of giants. I would not have missed this day for my kingdom even!"

"I wonder what has become of the Comte de Plessigny?" put in Lord Dorramore, strolling up. "We haven't seen anything of him during the whole day—not since the fight started. I don't suppose the beggar is in the city at all!"

"My dear Dorrie, surely you know what happened?" asked Nelson Lee. "The count escaped in the airship—he went right away over the swamp—and I judge he has returned to the Majarra. It is very doubtful if we shall see anything of him again."

"Oh, so that's the game, is it?" said Dorrie calmly. "The blighter not only pinched my yacht, but he's pinched the airship. If you ask me, old man, we're in a pretty kettle of fish!"

"Bush, Dorrie!" said Lee, quietly. "There is no need to talk of our own troubles just now. Let us get over this excitement first."

Dorrie nodded, and said no more.

But it was quite true that the Comte de Plessigny had escaped in the airship. As soon as he discovered that he had failed he had fled from the city in the airship, and it was highly probable that he would never return. For the count knew only too well that once he was seized by the Arzacs, he would receive no mercy.

He had betrayed them—and they knew it. Therefore, death would be his reward if ever he descended in El Dorado again.

The Arzacs were very grateful to us. Colonel Kerrigan, of course, was able to speak the Arzac language, and it was to him that the chiefs of the race expressed their feelings. They were very flattery in their words, and they invited us to remain in El Dorado for the re-

mainder of our lives. They wanted to honour us for saving them from their enemies.

And the next day, after we had had a long, welcome sleep, there was a tremendous feast in our honour. It was a feast which really surpassed that original feast by far.

For now we were the guests—and not the prisoners.

But, although we enjoyed ourselves—although we appreciated everything that was being done by our hosts—we could not help feeling uneasy.

For we knew that the count had gone, and he had taken the airship with him. There was no means of getting back to civilisation. We were imprisoned in El Dorado, for there was no way out of it.

And, during that feast, the juniors could not help discussing the subject. Everything was gay around them. The feast of Victory was a tremendous affair, and the Arzacs were letting themselves go.

"Well, it's all very well, you chaps," said Handforth. "But what's to become of us? That's what I want to know."

"We're all right!" said Fatty Little, attacking a pineapple. "What's wrong with this?"

"I'm not thinking of to-day!" said Handforth. "How are we going to get back to England? What about the new term?"

"Dother the new term!" said Fatty.

"I suppose you want to see your pater again, don't you?" asked Pitt.

"Well, rather!" said Fatty Little. "Of course I want to see the pater again. Don't talk rot!"

"Well, it seems very probable that you won't see your pater again!" said Handforth. "Don't you realise, you ass, that we are imprisoned in El Dorado?"

"Rats! We're guests now!"

"Yes, we are the guests of the Arzacs—I'll admit that!" said Handy. "But how are we going to get out?"

"We're in a pretty tight hole, if you ask me!"

"Who's talking about holes?" inquired Lord Dorrimore, strolling up.

"We are, sir!" said Pitt. "We're in a frightful hole. We can't get out of this country now, and it seems that we shall be compelled to remain here for the rest of our lives!"

Lord Dorrimore chuckled.

"Don't you believe it!" he said calmly.

"Why, have you got any plan, sir?"

"Not a ghost of one," said Dorrie. "But Umlosi has been seein' things in his dreams again—he's been seein' red mists, and all that sort of rot, an' he declares quite positively that we're goin' to have a terrific lot more excitement yet—that there'll be floods, an' fire, an' goodness knows what else. An' ultimately, we shall get back to the Majarra, an' to the dear old Wanderer!"

"Oh! Umlosi says that, does he?" I said slowly. "I wonder what it means, Dorrie?"

"Goodness knows!"

"Well, there's no sense in worrying," I went on. "All we can do is to sit tight and wait for something to happen. Personally, I can't possibly believe that the situation is hopeless—that we shall never be able to get away."

It was all very well to remain in that wonderful city for a time—to stay there in order to see the sights, and to enjoy ourselves. But the thought of being compelled to stay—to stay until we were old men and old women—well, that rather took the pleasure out of it.

Umlosi simply would not accept the view that we were doomed to remain in this strange land.

He was convinced that we should be able to escape—and that we should escape very shortly. Now, he did not know. When pressed for information, Umlosi could say nothing.

And while we were talking there, Colonel Kerrigan was in deep conver-

sation with three members of the Arrac race—the three chief men of the government—for, of course, El Dorado had its own government, in a way.

The colonel was in conversation with these giants for some time, and, at last, he came away and joined us.

"I have been asking the Arracs if there is any possibility of getting away," he said quietly. "I'm afraid that nothing can be done."

"Nothing at all, colonel?" asked Dorrie.

"No, Lord Dorrimore. I have questioned the giants closely with regard to the swamp," went on the colonel. "I have asked them if there is any known method of getting over—if there is any channel by which we might possibly be able to reach the outside world."

"And there is nothing?"

"Nothing at all," said the colonel. "The swamp extends entirely round this country, and it is a swamp which is poisonous and deadly. The Arracs themselves have attempted time after time to cross it in order to find out what lay beyond. But every one of their attempts has failed, and they have been compelled to give it up as hopeless."

"That seems very cheerful!" said Lord Dorrimore. "The ship has gone, and we can't cross the swamp on foot—so what is there to be done?"

There was no answer to Dorrie's question. Abandoned as we were on this unknown tract of land, far away beyond the forests and swamps of Brazil, what chance was there of our being rescued?

CHAPTER 12.

The Lake of Gold!

THE next day, after breakfast, Colonel Kerrigan suggested that we should take a trip to the golden lake for the purpose of viewing it. It was a lake of molten gold—a volcanic phenomenon which the Arracs did not attempt to understand.

The golden lake was really the god of the Aztecs, and they worshipped it. Suspended over the lake was a precarious-looking bridge with a platform in the centre. From this platform, priests constantly threw little golden discs into the molten mass. Why this was done we don't know; but it was evidently a religious rite.

Not many of the juniors had seen the golden lake. I had been there with Nelson Lee and some others, when we were first captured by the Aztecs. So when Colonel Kerrigan made his suggestion the juniors were quite eager to go.

"It will occupy the morning quite comfortably," said the colonel. "I can promise you an enjoyable time."

"Thank you, sir!"

"We'll come, sir!"

"Rather?"

"I'll be awfully interesting, sir!"

He was doing his utmost to keep the boys engaged—to fill up their time throughout the day. For, while they were interested in something, they did not think. And once they got thinking, they would probably become despondent.

And so everything was being done to keep the whole party in a constant state of activity. It was the same with the yacht's crew, and with the girls.

Even while we were going to view this lake of gold, other parties were setting out for different sections of the city in order to examine interesting scenes and objects.

I went along with the rest of the fellows, mainly because I was quite keen on seeing this lake of molten gold again.

I had only viewed it by night, and it had been a very impressive sight—a great glowing mass of molten metal, which cast a ruddy glow up into the heavens.

I was of the opinion that the lake would not be so impressive in the daytime; but, nevertheless, it would be extremely interesting.

We walked down one of the great main streets of the city, and, although we were accustomed to the great buildings on either side, we could not help pausing every now and again in admiration. For these buildings were of marble, pure, white, and wonderful to look upon, and here and there were great marvellously wrought plates of gold.

The streets of the city were clean, so clean that it was hardly possible to realise that they were generally used. There was no dust here, no dirt. And upon either side of the wide roadways there were graceful palms, beautiful flowering shrubs and other tropical growth.

We walked on leisurely, and at last we came within sight of the lake of gold. The heat here was really overpowering. What with the glare of the sun and the warm breezes, the ordinary city streets were quite warm enough for anybody's liking. But in the vicinity of that molten lake the air was close and humid, and almost overpowering.

But the juniors did not care.

They were greatly impressed by the sight, and they stood there gazing down upon the bubbling mass of metal with awe and wonder.

Hardly anybody spoke at first; they were altogether too full of wonder to say anything.

We were standing upon the summit of a great basin, a basin which was fully three hundred yards across. Great steps made of solid gold led down to the very edge of the pool. And this pool was glowing and bubbling constantly. The gold was never at rest. The molten mass was spraying up and down like boiling water in a gigantic cauldron.

And swung right across that terrible pool was the swaying bridge, with the platform in the centre. There were two figures upon that platform, both of them attired almost entirely in gold—a kind of armour, which must have been unbearably hot and heavy to wear. But these gigantic gold priests

were well accustomed to their apparel, and they did not even seem to mind the great waves of terrible heat which came surging upwards from the surface of the deep lake.

"My only hat!" said Handforth, with much awe. "What a sight, you chaps! Just fancy all this gold being in London! What a rush there'd be to get a cupful!"

"People would come with palls," grinned Reginald Pitt. "Why, if ever we get back to civilisation we shall be able to take enough gold with us to make us all millionaires for life!"

"Rather!" grinned Fatty Little. "And then we shall be able to buy all the grub we want—all the delicacies and dainties one's heart could wish for!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Always thinking about your tummy, Fatty!" chuckled McClure. "I've never known such a chap in all my life! It's a wonder you don't go searching for grub now, instead of looking on with us!"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I am a bit peckish!" admitted Fatty Little. "I didn't have much breakfast, you know."

"Only about four times as much as everybody else!" put in Tommy Watson. "But still, we don't want to talk about grub now. Isn't this lake simply marvellous? Look how the gold bubbles and boils! It's a wonder it doesn't boil over sometimes and overflow its banks, so to speak."

Colonel Kerrigan turned his head.

"On one occasion, two years ago, there was a rather startling incident, boys," he said.

"A startling incident, sir?"

"Yes," said the colonel. "Owing to one volcanic phenomenon, the gold surged over its normal level, and there seemed to be danger of a general swamping of the whole city with molten gold. But fortunately the mass subsided, and everything was well again. But for a time the Arzacs were in a terrible state of doubt and misgiving."

I looked at the lake in rather a fas-

cinated way. And then as I looked something rather queer happened.

The gold seemed to surge into a mighty wave in the very centre of the lake. Then the wave burst, with a dull report, and great heavy splashes of the molten metal were thrown upwards, almost to the level of the swaying bridge.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the colonel. "I have never seen anything like that before!"

"I thought it was going right over that bridge, sir!" said Handforth.

The colonel was looking rather startled. And then, before he could say anything else, a second wave formed itself on the surface of the lake, and this wave was at least four times as large as the previous one.

Boom!

That wave burst with a report which sent us staggering backwards in alarm, and a mighty spurt of molten gold went soaring skywards to a tremendous height.

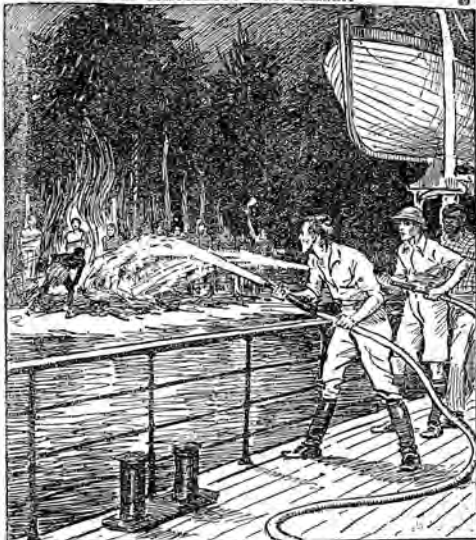
"Look out!" yelled Handforth, in alarm.

"Stand back, boys—back!" shouted Colonel Kerrigan, his voice hoarse with apprehension.

But the juniors did not need any telling. They dashed away as hard as ever they could. Then with terrible thuds and splashes the gold came down into the lake once more; but a great deal of it descended upon the steps of the basin opposite. It was a stroke of luck that the molten mass had gone in that direction, instead of our direction. Otherwise we should have been smothered, and maimed horribly.

When we had arrived at a safe distance we turned and looked back. The whole aspect of the lake had undergone a change. It was no longer placid.

Instead, the whole surface was boiling like a furious cauldron. Great masses of gold were being flung up with every second that passed, and the two giant priests on the platform had forsaken their duty; they had made a break for safety. This was the first occasion



As the Indians set fire to the brushwood round the stakes to which Captain Snugg and his men were tied, two powerful jets of water went hissing out from the hoses held by Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrinore. Swish! Swish! The columns of water splashed on the burning wood, extinguishing the flames almost at once.

within memory that the Arracs had ceased to throw their metal discs into the gold.

And it was extremely lucky that those two men had deserted their post.

For not twenty seconds later a great column of gold rose upwards from the boiling mass below, and that column enveloped the bridge and carried it down with it.

Boom! Boom!

Two more terrific reports sounded, and then I started back with a hoarse cry. For a huge tower of gold rose into the sky like a column. It went up to about fifty feet, tons and tons of molten metal, and then it fell back with a thud which could have been heard half over the city. Huge splashes of metal were flung in every direction, one or two of them only just narrowly missing the juniors.

"We must leave this place, boys!" shouted the colonel huskily. "Heavens above! What can it mean? This lake of gold is turning into a volcano!"

"Great Scott!"

"My only hat!"

"Do—do you think it'll be serious, sir?" panted Pitt.

"It is serious already, my boy," replied the colonel. "Once a slumbering volcano of this type bursts into activity, there is no telling what might happen. For, of course, this golden lake is really a volcano; but we had all thought it to be quite harmless. Now it appears to be waking up, and heaven only knows what the result will be!"

The juniors were rather scared, to tell the truth. They hurried away from the vicinity of the golden lake with all speed, and when we arrived in the centre of the city we found a great number of people gathered.

There were many Arracs, and all were looking in the direction from whence we had come. Nelson Lee was there, too, and Lord Dorrimore and many of the other guests. They eagerly inquired as to what was occurring.

"It's that lake of gold, sir!" I panted,

grasping Nelson Lee by the arm. "It has suddenly become active!"

"Active!" echoed Lee. "What do you mean?"

"Why, the gold is going up into the air in great masses!" I exclaimed breathlessly. "I can't understand—Great Scott! Look there! Look—look, sir!"

A huge booming explosion had sounded, and as we gazed across the houses we could see a terrible fountain of molten gold ascending into the air. It was really a magnificent sight, for when the mass reached its height it burst into a thousand particles, and came splashing down.

And now the Arracs were becoming rather excited, and panic was spreading in the streets near the gold lake. Men, women and children were rushing towards the centre of the city, screaming and shouting at the top of their voices.

I stood there, watching in a fascinated kind of way, and I could not help remembering a volcano I had once seen in activity in a far corner of the world. At first that volcano had been a mere smoking mountain, quite harmless and inoffensive. But then, without warning, the crater commenced gushing forth tons of lava, and with every second that had passed the volume of lava had increased, until at length the volcano was belching forth thousands of tons of liquid death.

I wondered if this phenomenon would be of a similar nature.

So far the golden lake had done no real damage, and if things did not get any worse this startling development would not matter. But I could not help thinking that matters would get worse, and even as I was thinking in that strain events became terrifying.

The masses of gold did not go surging skywards at irregular intervals, but they went up in one continuous stream—a huge, molten fountain, reaching to a height of fully two hundred feet. And the gold was sent down in glowing cascades, scattering itself over an area of hundreds of yards. Every house

and dwelling-place in the vicinity of the lake of gold became uninhabitable. The streets were rapidly becoming flooded with the creeping, molten mass. The Araacs came shrieking along the streets in a state of absolute panic.

"Dear old boy, this is terrible—it is frightful!" murmured Sir Montie Tregellis-West, with his face pale and drawn. "There is no telling what might happen. The whole city will be flooded, an' then——"

"Good heavens!" gasped Handforth. "Did—did you feel——"

He said no more, for at that moment the very earth beneath our feet trembled in the most unmistakable manner. I distinctly saw some of the buildings nearby shaking and shivering as the shock made itself felt.

"An earthquake!" I gasped.

And there was no doubt that I was right. That tremor had been the first sign of an earthquake.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The volcano was now sending forth volumes and volumes of molten gold—thousands and thousands of tons! It was the most startling thing that I had ever seen in all my experience. Lord Dornimore and Nelson Lee were looking startled, and they hardly knew what to do.

Great splashes of gold came thundering down on every hand. One splash, indeed, fell between Handforth and two other juniors, and they were sent back yelling and shouting.

"We must get indoors, boys!" shouted Nelson Lee urgently. "It is madness to remain out here. This dreadful fountain of molten metal may get worse at any moment, and then we shall be submerged and killed before we can make a move at all. You must get indoors at once!"

The juniors did not need telling a second time. There was a tremendous rush for any building—it did not matter which. The Araacs themselves, too, were seeking cover.

And in less than five minutes not a single inhabitant remained out in the

open streets. The whole town looked deserted. Everybody had sought refuge under cover of the great buildings.

And even now we did not know whether this would be safe.

For, if the earthquake grew worse, the buildings would crash down over our heads, and we should be buried in the debris.

Only twenty minutes earlier the morning had been placid and calm—a beautiful tropical morning, with the sun shining down gloriously.

And now——

And now we were in the thick of a terrible inferno!

"This is awful!" exclaimed Pitt, in a scared voice. "Can't we do something? Don't you think we ought to rush away—to get completely out of the city? It might be madness to remain here!"

"My dear boys, we must stick tight where we are!" interrupted Nelson Lee. "It would be madness indeed to leave this refuge and go out into the open streets. Perhaps this deluge will die down very soon——"

Boom! Boom!

The gov'nor was interrupted by two terrific explosions, and the earth trembled again. Gazing out through the windows, we could see the vast fountain of gold flinging itself into the sky. And now we noticed the difference—great masses of smoke and steam were accompanying the gold, and a kind of powder was being sent up into the sky—a great, thick, dense mass of smoky powder.

And this great cloud commenced spreading itself over the city like a deadly pall. It was quite clear that the gold was exhausting itself, and lava and smoke was taking its place. This was a sure indication that the volcano was active and that there was very little chance of its dying down yet awhile.

We stood at the windows, watching—watching with beating hearts, and hardly daring to say a word.

The whole spectacle was awe-inspir-

ing and terrible, and somehow we knew that this was only the beginning; we felt instinctively that something of a far more terrible nature was shortly to occur.

Umlosi was looking really scared. He was a great warrior, and he feared no man; but this was different—this was something which he could not understand.

"Wan! I am uneasy, my father!" mumbled Umlosi, turning to Lord Dorrmore. "I am sorely troubled, and I fear that thou art troubled, too. I like not this vast upheaval of nature. It is bewitched, methinks!"

"I'm not so sure about being bewitched, old man," said Lord Dorrmore quietly; "but there's no doubt about it that we're in a pretty pickle now. It's not so much a question as to whether we shall be able to get back to civilisation, but whether we shall ever live to get out of El Dorado!"

The lake of gold was now sending forth dense volumes of molten material in tons. It rose into the sky in a great glowing mass, and there were volumes and volumes of dense smoke accompanying it.

The sun was already blotted out.

And this great smoke-cloud was spreading over the entire city, forming a kind of blanket, through which the daylight could not penetrate. Within a very few minutes we were in a kind of semi-darkness; the great pillars of light, with their orange-coloured balls surmounting them, did not glow with their usual brilliancy. This was because of the smoke which ascended, and which curled around in dense, eddying masses.

Through the windows of the buildings the smoke came, half-choking us. It was acrid, and strongly charged with sulphur; the dust caught in our throats, and made us cough.

"This is getting awful, gov'nor!" I panted. "What on earth can we do?"

Nelson Lee looked at me grimly.

"We can do nothing, Nipper; we can

only watch, and trust in Providence!" he replied quietly.

Boom! Boom! Crash!

There came an explosion which fairly sent us staggering backwards. It deafened our ears.

The building we were in rocked and swayed, and I expected it to come down over our heads; but it was well-made, and it withstood the shock.

That explosion had come from the volcano, and now we saw a terrible change.

Gazing out of the window, I looked over the city with rather startled eyes.

I saw buildings collapsing like houses of cards; they toppled, crumbled, and went to pieces with terrific crashes, and large volumes of dust arose.

"Oh, isn't it terrible?" exclaimed Violet Watson, in great distress. "Just think of all those poor people being buried alive among the ruins! Can't we do something, Mr. Lee—oh, can't we do something?"

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"My dear young lady, we are helpless!" he replied. "Any efforts on our part would be useless."

"But it seems terrible——"

"You need not fear that anybody has been buried among those ruins," went on Nelson Lee. "Those houses are in the immediate vicinity of the volcano, and they are quite deserted. Nobody stayed there, Miss Violet."

"Oh, that is splendid!" exclaimed the girl. "I was afraid—— But look—oh, do look!"

We stared out of the window, and then we saw that the character of the discharge had altered. It was no longer a mass of molten metal, with lava and smoke.

But now, instead, a vast roared column of steam was going into the sky—like the escape from the safety-valve of a locomotive, only a thousand times greater.

This column of steam rose up into the heavens to a height of fully two thousand feet, until it was almost lost in the sky itself. And the roar was

deafening—a devastating roar which filled our ears, and which made conversation practically impossible.

But this vast column of steam did not last for long.

It changed its character again, and turned to water—a huge fountain of boiling water was being thrust up into the sky, and it was splashing down in a terrible cascade, which was rapidly flooding the streets and causing everything to throw up clouds and clouds of dense steam.

And beneath our feet the earth was again rumbling. It quivered as I stood, and I could distinctly feel the shakings of the ground.

The sky was dark and overcast, and the air was so hot that we were perspiring as we stood. It was breathless—there was not an atom of fresh air. We could hardly breathe, for the very atmosphere was suffocating and stifling.

"Isn't it terrible?" muttered Tommy Watson, grasping my arm.

"Terrible isn't the word, old man!" I replied. "And I am afraid things are going to get worse!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Great doughnuts!" muttered Fatty Little. "I—I don't even feel hungry!"

"Then things must be serious!" said Handforth grimly. "For you to lose your appetite, Fatty, is absolutely unheard of!"

Fatty groaned.

"How can a fellow have an appetite with all this going on?" he demanded.

"I'm expecting to be blown up every minute, you know. I shouldn't be at all surprised if this giddy floor opened and let out masses of boiling water——"

"There is very little likelihood of this floor opening, as you suggest," said Nelson Lee. "I believe the eruption will remain confined to the other section of the city. We are fairly safe here, I believe—at least, I sincerely hope so."

"We all hope that, sir!" said Handforth.

We watched, fascinated. The water

was still pouring down into the streets, and we could see it coming along towards the section of the city where we had sought refuge. The streets, in fact, were rapidly becoming flooded, and now there were many distressing sights to be witnessed.

For the inhabitants in other parts of the town were becoming panic-stricken, and they were leaving their houses; they were dashing farther afield, in order to get out of the flood. Hundreds and hundreds of the Arzacs were staggering along in the boiling hot water, shouting and nearly mad with panic.

It was very gloomy in the streets now, and the sun was completely obliterated by the vast pall of smoke which hung overhead.

And the active volcano kept up a continuous roar, and at irregular intervals there were dull, rumbling explosions, each one seeming to be worse than the last.

We wondered how long these would last; how long it would be before one of those explosions sent the city toppling over into a mass of ruins.

"It can't last long, surely, sir!" I said, looking at the gov'nor.

"My dear lad, there have been many volcanic disasters a thousand times worse than this," said Nelson Lee. "This affair has only just commenced, by all appearances. I do not wish to be pessimistic; but, on the other hand, I do not want to raise false hopes. You must be prepared for something far worse—and I fear that something far worse will happen."

"Yes, I suppose you're right, gov'nor," I said. "I don't know what—— Great Scott!"

Another terrible explosion had sounded, and again the building shook with the concussion. And now, to my horror, I saw gigantic flames leaping upwards into the sky—flames and water intermixed—if such a thing could possibly be. The clouds of steam were increasing, and now I observed that great cylinders were falling in the streets outside—white-hot

enders which fell and scattered to atoms on the white roadways.

What was about to occur?

And what could we do? Nothing!

We could do nothing except wait there, helpless and apprehensive.

CHAPTER 11.

Disaster and Confusion!

NELSON LEE was looking rather pale.

Lord Derrimore, although he attempted to remain as calm and collected as ever, was not looking himself by any means. The effect of this terrible disaster was making itself felt upon all of us. It was the uncertainty which caused us to be nervous, and which bereft us of our usual coolness.

This appalling upheaval of nature made us feel how insignificant we were in the world.

We did not know when the building would come crashing down over our ears, burying us all, and killing us instantly.

It would be madness, of course, to venture out into the street now—to attempt to escape from El Dorado.

For, in doing so, we should surely lay ourselves open to sudden death. All we could do was to wait and watch.

And this we did, with fast beating hearts, and with pale, drawn faces.

There were, of course, many Arzacs with us, for we had all rushed into various buildings helter-skelter, without caring where we went, so long as we got under shelter.

And we were not all together, either.

Many of the juniors were missing from the crowd I was with. They had probably gone into other houses, with members of the yacht's crew, and with the Arzacs.

Handforth, who was looking out of the window, suddenly uttered a strange cry, and then he pointed with a finger which was quivering.

"Look at the columns, you chaps!" he gasped. "Look at 'em!"

"The columns?" I repeated.

"Yes, the lights!" said Handforth.

"Five minutes ago they were burning as brilliantly as ever, but they're getting dim now!"

"That's because of this smoke that's hanging about——"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "The lights are smaller—they are almost dwindling away to nothing!"

We all centred our attention upon these great columns with the orange coloured balls of fire at the top.

And we could see that Handforth was right.

Those brilliant lights were now becoming dim, and as we watched, the colour changed. They were no longer orange, but were rapidly altering to a violet hue. This violet became more and more vivid as we watched, until every pillar was blazing with a wonderful violet light.

"What does it mean, sir?" I asked.

"Why have those lights changed their colour?"

Nelson Lee looked thoughtful.

"There seems to be only one explanation, Snipper," he replied. "These lights, as you know, are supplied by a natural gas, and it is now fairly obvious that this gas has become affected by the volcanic disturbances. And the gas has changed its character, causing the light to alter, too. See! It is changing again, even while I am speaking!"

The gov'nor was quite right.

The vivid, glorious violet had altered very rapidly, and now it became a thin light, which was almost invisible. We watched wonderingly, and then we saw that the lights had gone out completely—they were quite extinguished.

And vapour rose out of those great burners—clouds of steamy vapour which rapidly changed into fountains of boiling hot water!

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Handforth. "Water! All those pillars have become fountains!"

This was only one more of the many remarkable incidents which occurred

morning that terrible, never-to-be-forgotten morning.

The gloom was oppressive; the air was stifling to a degree. We could hardly breathe as we stood there, and we longed to get out into the open.

But, of course, the open was just as bad. The air everywhere was charged with sulphur fumes, steamy vapour, and intense heat.

Nelson Lee looked round at us.

"I am afraid there is only one thing to be done, and I hardly like taking such a course," he said. "If things get any worse on the surface, I shall take all you boys down into those tunnels far underground. The air will be cooler, at all events, and the danger might not be so great."

"It might be greater, sir," I put in.

"How could it be greater, your ass?" demanded Tommy Watson.

"Well, if there's a volcanic eruption—and an earthquake combined—those tunnels will be converted into solid ground in less than a second," I said grimly. "They will collapse, and if we are down there we should be buried alive. Personally, I'd prefer to remain on the surface—where I can see what is going on!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We'd rather stay up here, sir."

"Perhaps it would be as well, boys," said Nelson Lee. "To tell you the truth, I don't know what to do for the best. I am worried concerning your safety."

"Don't you worry about us, sir," said Handforth. "We're all in the same boat. Nothing can be done as far as I can see. We've simply got to trust to luck!"

"Wise words, my son!" rumbled Umbel. "Thou art speaking words of wisdom, and I am filled with admiration for thy courage. Thou art taking this deadly peril with much calmness and bravery. Wau! It is good to be among such courageous youths!"

"There's not much courage about it, Umbel," said Handforth. "What can we do? It's no good bewailing our fate,

and yelling with terror. The only thing we can do is to sit tight, and watch, and hope for the best!"

"Splendid, Handforth—splendid!" muttered Lord Dorrimore. "That's the spirit, my lad!"

Fullwood, who was standing near by, uttered a growl.

"It is all very well to be like that," he said nervously. "What's the good of it to us? We are doomed—we shall all be killed in this infernal place! It was madness to come here!"

"Dry up, Fully," muttered Gulliver, with chattering teeth.

"Why should I dry up?" demanded Fullwood, rather hysterical with nervousness. "All this trouble is the fault of Lord Dorrimore! He brought us into this! He brought us to the Majarra, and he caused us to be captured and brought to this place! It's all Lord Dorrimore's fault!"

"You cad!" shouted Handforth fiercely.

"Let him talk on, my lad!" said Dorrie quietly. "Perhaps he is right, after all. It is my fault—I will admit it. I ought not to have brought you boys up the Majarra. I ought to have left you on the Amazon, where you were safe."

"That's wrong, sir!" shouted Pitt. "We all wanted to come."

"Rather!"

"Don't you take any notice of that cad, sir!"

Handforth pushed back his sleeves.

"Unless you apologise to Lord Dorrimore within twenty seconds, Fullwood, I'm going to smash your nose!" he said fiercely. "Now, then—are you going to apologise?"

"No, I'm not!" snarled Fullwood. "What I said was the truth!"

"You contemptible cur!" snapped Handforth angrily.

Crash!

His fist blundered into Fullwood's face, and the cad of the Remove staggered back, howling.

"Yarrah!" he roared. "You—you—
— Ow—ow!"

He picked himself up with his face livid with fright and anger.

"It's the truth!" he snarled. "Lord Dorrinmore is responsible for all this—and if ever I get back to England I'll—"

"Stop him!" I snapped. "We're not going to have any nonsense from that coward now! Things are bad enough without Fullwood making them worse. He's nearly mad with terror—that's what's the matter with him. He's got no more pluck than a mouse!"

"Don't insult the mouse, Nipper!" said Pitt witheringly.

Fullwood was subdued, and he slunk away into a corner, pale and trembling.

Meanwhile, the vast upheavals of nature were continuing.

And now we felt more distinct earthquake shocks. We felt the floor under our feet rocking about in a most terrifying manner. Now and again there would come a loud splintering crash, as if one of the walls would part. But, so far, the building held firm, and we were safe.

But, looking out through the windows, I saw other things which caused me to be very apprehensive.

Several buildings on the far side of the city were rocking in flames—and collapsing in heaps of ruins, with terrific roars.

And the streets themselves were suffering. Great cracks were opening, and there were yawning chasms in the streets, chasms out of which came volumes of steam and smoke.

It seemed that the very heart of the city was alive—burning and blistering with intensity. By what we could see, El Dorado was undermined by living fire—by volcanic matter which was seeking to find an outlet.

And, during all this ghastly turmoil, came news of fear and panic from the Arzacs. Many of them were rushing about the streets, half mad with terror.

I could almost have cried with sheer misery as I saw the havoc that was being caused. El Dorado was un-

doubtedly the most beautiful city that I had ever set eyes on. And here it was, crumbling to dust before my eyes.

Many sections of the great marble town were becoming heaps of ruins. Buildings were crashing to dust and powder on every side.

It was hardly possible to gaze on over the city without seeing some disaster or another. The most dangerous zone was without doubt that part of the town in the new vicinity of the volcano—the volcano which had been, only a short hour before, a harmless lake of molten gold.

So far, Lord Dorrinmore's entire party was safe—every single member of it. We were all in this part of the town which had not been affected, and we were alive and well.

But we felt sure that the earthquake had yet to come—that something of far more serious nature was in store for us.

In the terribly oppressive air, it was almost impossible to remain normal. Personally, I was perspiring from every pore, my throat was parched, and I was suffering from a ghastly headache—caused, no doubt, by the sulphur fumes which filled the atmosphere.

But I had no time to think of the inconveniences. I was so impressed with everything that I saw that I could only gaze out of the window, and watch—and I wondered how long would be before the climax arrived.

As it happened, it was not necessary for me to wonder for long.

Boom! Boom!

Again came the dull, rumbling explosion. And, as a result, the volcano sent up great masses of water, lay and smoke. And there were flames, too—great livid flames which lit up the whole city with a terrible lurid light which only made the whole affair more terrifying.

I could see the flooded streets on every side—flooded with boiling water, ashes and lava.

Rumble—rumble—rumble! Right beneath our feet came a low, muttering growl like that of thunder. We felt the stone flooring quiver and crack, and I expected to see the walls come tumbling down all around us.

But this did not happen.

Yet there, on the far side of El Dorado, an amazing thing took place. As we watched, we saw a portion of the town rise up—we saw it leave the level, and form itself into a steep hill.

It seemed impossible—grotesque.

For El Dorado was flat—a perfect level plain of houses. And there, within full view, we could see quite a large section of the city rising up, yard by yard, until at length there was a great hill, reaching on its summit to the very level of the great outer wall.

Houses collapsed on every side. They were sent crashing down amid clouds of dust and thousands of tons of falling masonry.

It was a sight that staggered our senses, and left us limp and weak. The buildings were falling everywhere, crashing down, causing a commotion which filled our ears with the most terrible noises.

And there stood that hill, raised up as a blanket out of a bed is raised when one brings his knees up under the bed-clothes.

But this was not the only astounding sight.

I found myself looking at the city wall—that wall which rose to a height of close upon a hundred feet.

And as I watched, I saw this wall tottering for the space of at least two hundred yards. It hovered in the air, dragging away from the other portions amid a cloud of dust and falling stone-work.

"Look!" I shouted huskily. "The wall is collapsing!"

"Good heavens!"

"Oh, my only hat!"

"Good!"

And then, with a devastating roar which came to our ears above all else, that section of the wall simply faded

away. It fell outwards, crashing down, and sending up clouds of dense, thick dust.

A gash had been made in the city wall two hundred yards wide—and it had all happened in the space of a few seconds.

"It's getting worse, sir!" I panted. "It's getting altogether worse! Before long the city will be in a heap of ruins!"

"Look there!" shrieked Handforth. "Water—water in millions of tons!"

There was every reason for Handforth's hysterical excitement.

For, without warning that newly made hill had burst asunder. One side of the hill opened out in a terrific chasm, and from this chasm there poured water—not a trickle, and not merely a little stream, but an overpowering cascade which was like Niagara.

And the water went tearing down the hill, over the ruins of the city, straight towards the gap in the wall.

It was extremely fortunate that this was the case.

Otherwise those great walls would have enclosed the water, and the whole city would have been flooded in less than ten minutes.

As it was, the water rushed straight down this hill and out through that two hundred yards gap. Out into the open country beyond.

It was a flood—a tearing, roaring flood of water. Not hot water, but ordinary river water, foaming and bubbling and casting out showers of spray on every side.

The earth had opened up, and it was giving up this water—a rushing river which was every bit as large and powerful as the Majarra itself—and that was quite a considerable river.

"This—this is stupendous, sir!" I gasped. "Look at it—look at all that water!"

"My dear lad, it seems too amazing to be true," said Nelson Lee. "There is only one explanation."

"And what's that, sir?"

"How can you explain it, old man?" asked Dorrie.

"Far below, right down in the earth, there is an underground river—a great stream," said Nelson Lee. "Underground rivers are fairly common, as you know. We have seen many examples in many parts of the world, Dorrie."

"Yes, that's quite right," said Lord Dorrimore.

"Well, here we have an underground river which has suddenly found its way to the surface," said Nelson Lee. "A subterranean earthquake is probably responsible for all this. The water was forced upwards, and in its course it came into contact with this other volcanic matter—the molten gold. You can imagine the result when the water met the boiling metal. There was, of course, an instant upheaval. And we have seen the result."

"Yes, I believe you've hit the nail on the head, old man," said Dorrie.

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I can think of nothing else," he said. "This water was compelled to find an outlet, and so, after causing all this terrible trouble, it has forced up the earth here, and now the river is surging forth—it is coming out of the earth in volumes, and, by all appearances, it is increasing in violence. The underground river has been released."

"And when will it exhaust itself, sir?" I asked.

"It is quite possible that it will never exhaust itself, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "This river has been flowing underground, but now that it has found the surface, it will remain on the surface. That is only natural. The water will run away down the valley, flooding everything—but, finally, it will find its own course, and then it will continue indefinitely."

"Then—then this river will always flow right through El Dorado?" asked Handforth.

"Yes, I think so, my lad," said Nelson Lee. "The city, as it originally

was, will never be in that state again. It will be impossible to build the wall up again, since the river has occupied that tremendous gap. It is all very wonderful, and all very terrifying. But now I believe that the worst is over."

"Hurrah!" exclaimed many of the juniors in one voice.

"But we must not be too sure," warned Nelson Lee. "I am only basing that statement on the facts. This river has found its outlet—the bubble has burst, so to speak. Therefore, the trouble will not be so great now. Indeed, there is every likelihood that there will be no further earthquake and no further explosion."

"Let us hope you are right, governor," I said fervently. "But just look at—just look at all that water, surging forth! I—I feel that I am dreaming, you know."

"I don't wonder at it," said Lord Dorrimore, passing a hand across his brow. "We're living in strenuous times, by gad! But, see! Am I right or am I wrong?"

"About what, Dorrie?"

"Is the volcano subsiding, or do my eyes deceive me?" asked Dorrie. "It seems to me that the smoke and steam—all the rest of it—is decreasing. What do you make of it, Nipper?"

I looked intently.

"I think you are right, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "The volcano doesn't seem half so fierce now—and, what is more, the sky is clearing."

This was quite true.

The great volume of smoke and vapour from the volcano was clearing away, for a breeze had sprung up, and it seemed that the terrible nightmare was coming to an end. But how long would it last? How long would it be before a fresh outburst of nature's fury made itself apparent?

I could hardly believe that so much had happened in such a short space of time. And that great river was surging forth, and it was flowing straight out through the gap in the wall, and going into the valley beyond.

CHAPTER 12.

Nelson Lee Comes to a Decision.

DREW in a deep breath.

"Thank goodness!" I exclaimed.

"How lovely it is to get a breath of fresh air!"

"Rather!"

"Isn't it glorious, you chaps?" asked handforth.

"It's—it's given me quite an appetite again!" said Fatty Little.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was really nothing to laugh at, but many of the juniors were slightly inclined to be hysterical, and they were ready to laugh at anything. After the ordeal through which we had just passed, it was rather astonishing to find ourselves still alive and well.

I know for a fact that many fellows had believed that their last hour had come, and that nothing on earth could have saved them from destruction, with the rest of the city.

We were all standing out in the open, and the streets were also full of the Azacs. For it seemed that the fury of nature was satisfied for the moment. The earth no longer trembled, and the extraordinary volcano was now fairly quiet.

It was, of course, still belching forth great volumes of steam and lava, but in nothing like the quantities it had been doing just recently.

The most amazing feature of all, however, was that river.

It was surging out of the ground as water escapes from a gigantic main pipe.

The power of that water was simply staggering. It had washed everything before it already. In its path there was not the slightest trace of any building or any portion of masonry. It had washed the way absolutely clear.

And the river went surging out into the valley in one terrific roar of foam and spray.

And, by what we could see, the river was increasing in size with every minute that passed. It was certainly not decreasing. The water came out

of the ground so swiftly that it seemed impossible for the rest of the city to be saved from destruction. It was as though that hole was a safety-valve, through which this mighty underground river was pouring its water.

The sun was shining again now, and a cool breeze was blowing into our faces—a breeze which was extremely welcome to everybody. It had come just in the nick of time to save us from complete suffocation.

"What shall we do, sir?" I asked, turning to Nelson Lee, who was standing there, gazing round with a very thoughtful expression on his face.

Nelson Lee turned to me.

"I hardly know yet, Nipper," he replied. "I am just viewing the ruins of the wonderful city as we knew it only an hour or so ago."

"Yes, sir, it's a terrible shame!" I said. "The place is simply nothing more or less than a mass of ruins now."

"Hardly that, Nipper," corrected Nelson Lee. "Many houses have been demolished, many streets have been utterly disfigured, but it is not correct to say that El Dorado is in ruins. The damage is very considerable, but the city, taken as a whole, is still intact."

"There must have been a terrible loss of life, sir," I said. "I reckon there are thousands of people buried under those demolished houses."

Nelson Lee nodded gravely.

"I am afraid you are right, my lad," he said. "However, it cannot be helped—in a disaster of this kind there is bound to be a serious loss of life. We must be very thankful that we are all safe. As far as I know at the moment, not a single member of our party has come to any harm."

"We mustn't speak too soon, of course," put in Lord Dorrimore. "The earth may take it into its head to turn upside down within a minute or two."

Undest, who was standing by, solemnly shook his head.

"You are wrong, O N'Kose!" he rumbled. "Even as I said, many days ago, we are passing through a period

of fire and water. Dost thou remember how I reminded thee of what was to come?"

"You did, old son!" said Lord Dorrimore. "How you know these things is a mystery to me. I think you must have a sixth sense, or somethin'."

"I know not why it is, my master, but I am permitted to see these things," exclaimed Umlosi. "Methinks we are yet a long way from safety. My snake tells me that we shall pass through many perils before we again reach the great floating kral which lies far beyond on the river."

"Oh! So we are goin' to reach the yacht again?" asked Dorrie, with interest.

"Undoubtedly, my father," said Umlosi. "Even as thou sayest, we shall once more see the yacht and the River Majarra. But there are many perils to be encountered before then."

"Well, there's nothin' like bein' cheerful!" said Dorrie calmly. "A great many perils to go through, eh? What do you call these? Haven't we been havin' a lively time this morning, you black lump of anthracite?"

"Thou art using strange words, my father!" exclaimed Umlosi. "I must confess that I do not understand thy meaning. However, it will pass. We have indeed been passing through many strange and wondrous adventures this morning, but there will be others. Heed my words, N'Kose, and be prepared."

"My dear man, I'm prepared for anythin' after this," said Lord Dorrimore. "Nothing that can possibly happen will make me flicker an eyelid. I've got past bein' surprised. But I'm terrifically interested in that river, you know. I want to see where it's flowin' to, an' all the rest of it. What's wrong with the idea of climbing on to the wall, professor?"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I was about to suggest something of the same sort myself," he said. "From the top of the wall we shall be able to get a clear view of the valley

beyond, and we might possibly be able to see what this river is doing and where it is flowing to. I think it is fairly safe to venture upon the wall now."

"It's just as safe as standin' here," said Dorrie. "We never know what section of the place might go to blast so it doesn't matter. Come along!"

They walked off, Colonel Kerrigan and Dr. Brett and Captain Burte, accompanying them. Close behind followed, with Sir Muntie Tregella, West, Tommy Watson, Handforth, and many of the other juniors. They had no intention of being left out of the excitement.

We were all tremendously relieved to tell the truth.

After we had been expecting such disaster to overtake us, it was upland to find the sky clearing, the air becoming purer, and the fury of the volcano lessening.

Within a very short time we were mounting one of the tremendous walls. And at last we stood upon the summit. And then a wonderful sight met our gaze.

The river had broadened out tremendously beyond the city walls, and it had formed a great lake, which stretched away as far as the eye could see, with a strong current of water running straight down the centre.

This lake was smothered with wreckage of all descriptions. Trees, rooted bushes, palms, and all manner of other objects were floating down the strong current. And this great river stretched right away down the valley towards the rising ground which cut off El Dorado from the dead swamp.

Nelson Lee had brought his binoculars with him, and he gazed out across the waste of water.

"I don't very well see how this is to find any outlet, Dorrie," remarked. "This valley is peculiarly formed, and I am afraid that a tremendous lake will become existent of all this water. The whole of

valley will become inundated, and, ultimately, El Dorado itself will be under water.

"How frightfully cheerful!" remarked Lord Dorrinore.

"It is just as well to look at the facts as we see them," said Nelson Lee.

"Just look at that river from here, sir!" I exclaimed, turning round and looking down into the city. "Look at it! The water is coming out with greater velocity than ever before!"

"You are quite right, Nipper!" said Nelson Lee. "The river, instead of diminishing, is increasing. And, with such volumes of water pouring out into the valley, it is impossible to suppose that it will run away. There is no outlet."

Colonel Kerrigan, who was standing near by, talking with several Arzacs, suddenly turned and came to us.

"Did I hear you say that there is no outlet for this water, Mr. Lee?" he asked.

"Yes, I think that is the case," said the governor.

"Then you are wrong," declared the colonel. "There is an outlet, according to what these Arzacs tell me."

"An outlet?" I repeated wonderingly.

"Yes, Nipper," said Colonel Kerrigan. "This new river has made its course across the valley, and it has found its way between two hills in the distance. These hills are overlooking the great swamp, and it is highly probable that the water is going between those hills, and is emptying itself into the swamp beyond."

"Well, that's a good thing," said Dorrie. "It renders El Dorado fairly safe, in any case. There's no danger of its getting flooded out."

Nelson Lee was looking very thoughtful.

"The water is flowing into the swamp?" he repeated. "That is exceedingly interesting, colonel. I think we will take a trip across the valley at once—we will go to a spot where we can see the swamp for ourselves."

"What good will that do?" asked Dorrie.

"We do not know, but it is just as well to see things with our own eyes," said the governor. "We will start at once."

"Any old thing," said Lord Dorrinore. "I'm willing."

"But I do not think that any of the boys had better come," went on Nelson Lee. "They must remain here—"

"You'd better think again, gov'nor!" I interrupted calmly. "I don't see any reason why we should remain behind. There's just as much danger here as there is out there—perhaps a lot more."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Very well, Nipper. I suppose you will have your own way in the end," he said. "After all, what you say is correct. There is probably more danger within the city than in the open country beyond."

Ten minutes later we had started off.

There was a whole party of us, including most of the juniors, and at least two hundred Arzacs.

After leaving the city behind, our Arzac companions would not allow any of us to walk, much as we insisted upon doing so.

The great giants lifted us all up and carried us bodily. They did this as a mark of respect; they considered that it was better for them to do the walking, and for us to take the journey in ease and comfort.

There was one very good result of this arrangement. The Arzacs could go at a much faster speed than we were capable of, owing to their great height and the enormous strides they took.

And so we progressed at a very rapid pace. And the journey did not seem so very long.

At length we were at the end of the valley, and we mounted the long sloping ground which cut off the swamp from the beautiful land within the valley. We reached the summit, and we were able to look down upon that deadly morass which stretched away

for miles and miles towards the Brazilian forests.

And, as we were set down upon our feet, in a position where we could see right down the slope, there were many shouts of excitement and wonder. For there was something to be seen which filled us with hope and astonishment.

There was the swamp right enough, just as we had seen it before. But there was now something else for us to feast our eyes upon. It was something which we had not expected to see, and which came as a great and wonderful surprise.

Right away to our left, a newly formed river was surging through the valley made by the two hills, and the waters of that river were plunging down in a great cascade into the swamp.

And there plainly visible, was a great channel, fully five hundred yards in width at the opening, and all of two hundred yards farther down, as far as the eye could reach.

A channel of water, reaching right into the heart of the swamp, and probably passing through the swamp to the forests beyond.

This underground river, surging forward on its newly found course, had charged into the swamp, and had caused a channel to appear—a channel with a swiftly moving current of clear water, which was undoubtedly of some considerable depth.

My heart jumped as I looked upon it.

"Do—do you see, sir?" I shouted huskily. "There is a way open, through the swamp! There is a channel—a waterway, and if we only had some boats we might be able to get back to the forest land—back to civilization."

"Oh, my goodness!"

"It's wonderful!"

"Dear old boys, it seems altogether too good to be true," declared Sir Montie.

"And yet it is only natural," said Lord Dorrimore. "All this water has

to find an outlet somewhere, and it has come through this valley, and now it is in the swamp, makin' a course for itself right across to the other side. As you say, young 'un, there is a waterway, and if we only had a nice collection of boats we could do the trip to the Majarra with the greatest ease. But I don't much fancy swimmin' the distance."

Nelson Lee's eyes were gleaming.

"There is no need to swim, Dorrie, and there is no need for us to have boats!" he said, in a strange voice. "Upon my soul, I think it is possible that we might be able to get out of this lost land, after all. We need rafts—three or four stout rafts. Once they are constructed we can launch them, and the current will take us right down through this swamp—"

"Great Scott!" I gasped. "That's a ripping idea, sir!"

"Rather, sir!"

"It's a brain wave!" declared Handforth. "My only Sunday topper! It seems that Fate has helped us, after all!"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"You are right, Handforth," he said. "Fate has taken a hand in this matter, and it is reasonable to suppose that everything is in our favour. In any case, we will construct the rafts, and we will trust ourselves upon them, hoping that they will convey us straight through to safety."

"Hurrah!"

The juniors cheered vociferously.

"Do you think it will be quite safe, Mr. Lee?" asked Colonel Kerrigan.

"I do not know whether it will be safe, or whether it will be unsafe," replied Nelson Lee. "In a case of this sort we must trust largely to luck. But I will say that there is grave danger in remaining in El Dorado. You may be sure that the upheaval of Nature which we have seen is only the preliminary, so to speak. I am quite certain that worse is to come—far worse. And the sooner we can get

out of this doomed country the better. I have a firm conviction that El Dorado will not survive. And although this journey through the swamp on rafts is decidedly risky, it is far better than remaining in a country which might soon be sent to utter destruction."

"Well, that's sensible enough," agreed Lord Dorrimore. "I uphold your decision, Lee old man. The sooner we can get out of El Dorado the better. I'm with you all along the line. And this channel seems to stretch right out through the swamp. It might close up after a week or so, so we must seize the opportunity while we have it. How long do you think it will take to construct these rafts you are talking about—a week?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Three hours," he replied quietly.

"What!"

"Three hours!"

"Why, it's impossible, sir!" said Handforth.

"You forget, Handforth, that we have the benefit of these Arzaacs' help," said Nelson Lee. "I intend sending back to the city for at least a thousand of these giants. The rafts will be made almost before we know what is happening. And I want to leave this country to-day—this very afternoon! The longer we tarry, the greater will be the danger."

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for Mr. Lee!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"The gov'nor's going to get us out of all this trouble, after all!" I exclaimed delightedly. "Just you wait, my sons! If we don't find ourselves on the Majarra within two or three days, I shall be surprised. Everything is going to be all serene!"

We were all feeling very much better in spirits, and we thought that there was every possibility of Nelson Lee's plan succeeding. In any case, it was the only scheme to be adopted—since there was none other.

And, without any loss of time, messages were sent back to El Dorado—urgent messages appealing for help. Colonel Kerrigan went himself, too, and his duty was to bring every member of Lord Dorrimore's party back with him, the yacht's crew, Lady Helen Trevellis-West, the girls, in fact, every single soul.

Nelson Lee wanted them to be on the spot when the rafts were constructed—so that we could get on board, and push off without a moment's loss of time.

Nelson Lee's decision was one which had been come to practically on the spur of the moment. There was no time for thinking matters over. It was a case when a prompt decision was absolutely necessary.

And not only Nelson Lee, but all of us—we all thought that far greater damage was to be wrought in El Dorado. We instinctively knew that the volcanic eruptions and the earthquakes were likely to become far worse before so very long.

It would be better to escape while we had the chance, even though we were possibly going into danger.

Less than an hour afterwards, fully two thousand Arzaacs were on the spot, and they were hurrying down to the edge of the swamp, where many giant trees grew. And these were cut down in record time. Under Nelson Lee's guidance, huge rafts were constructed.

It did not matter what they looked like, or how they were built, so long as they were strong, and floated well upon the water.

This was the main thing.

And Nelson Lee was quite sure that these rafts would be perfectly safe in every way. Comfort, of course, would be impossible. But comfort was not to be expected in an emergency of this kind. Nelson Lee wanted to get every member of the party away from the danger zone—he wanted, if possible, to get through this terrible

swamp, and so on to the open country beyond.

It really seemed that a chance had now come—a chance which would probably never be repeated. For it was hardly to be supposed that this channel would remain open for always.

And while the scene of bustle and activity was going on, all the members of Lord Dorrimore's party stood watching, waiting for the time when the ralls would be ready to set into the water.

Not one of us thought of hanging back. For we knew that it would be the safer course to brave the perils of the swamp, rather than to remain in El Dorado—the city which was doomed.

And while we were there, watching the active preparations, a small object hovered far in the sky, practically invisible to the naked eye. It had been there for some little time, and that object was Lord Dorrimore's airship, the Adventurer.

On board there was the Comte de Plessigny himself, Captain Snagg, and Mr. Cradley, the latter being two members of the Sunbeam's crew. The Sunbeam was the count's steam launch, which was situated on one of the numerous tributaries of the Amazon.

The count had come on this trip with a very definite object. He was in such a fury at his defeat that he had determined then and there to return at the earliest possible moment to seek revenge.

On board the airship the Comte de Plessigny had a large stock of deadly bombs. And with these bombs he intended to do as much destruction as possible in El Dorado.

It was the count's gentle scheme to fly high over the city—well out of the range of any machine-guns or rifles—and drop the bombs indiscriminately over the town. He thought, by so doing, to wipe out Lord Dorrimore and his party.

But, while he was still a good distance off, he could see many signs of

the tragic happenings in El Dorado. He could see the gigantic fires, and he could see the collapsed buildings. The count knew, at once, that something of a very extraordinary nature had occurred. That river, which was flowing so swiftly into the swamp, proved that a big upheaval of Nature had occurred.

Therefore, the wily scoundrel changed his plans.

Far up in the air, with his engines stopped, he looked down and witnessed the preparations which were being made near the edge of the swamp.

And the Comte de Plessigny chuckled with grim amusement.

"Do you see, Snagg?" he exclaimed smoothly. "The fools! Do they imagine that they will ever get through to Brazil—to the inhabited parts of the country?"

"It seems like it, sir," said Captain Snagg. "Anyhow, they mean to take a chance by the look of it."

The count nodded.

"It is indeed a desperate chance, Snagg," he declared. "They will never see civilisation—you need not make any mistake on that point. I shall take a hand in the game, if necessary."

"What do you mean to do, sir?" asked Snagg curiously.

"I have a great many bombs here, my friend," said Plessigny. "It seems a pity not to be able to use them for the object I had intended. But since Nature has taken a hand in the game, there is no necessity for me to interfere."

"I thought perhaps you were intending to drop some of these bombs on those ralls, when they got going," suggested Captain Snagg.

The count shook his head.

"Why the necessity?" he asked. "If you will only take the trouble to look below through your glasses, you will understand what I mean."

Captain Snagg focused his binoculars and stared down at the swamp, which, through the glasses, sprang up into near prominence.

"I don't understand what the game is, sir," he said, at last.

"No?" smiled the count. "Then I will tell you, my good man. It is obvious that Mr. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrinsore hope to get through this swamp by means of the great channel which has suddenly opened."

"That's evidently the idea, sir."

"Well, as you will see, it is an idea which cannot be carried out," went on the count. "See? This channel extends for fully twenty miles—as far as they can see on the ground. It looks to them as though the channel extends right across the swamp. But such is not the case."

"No, sir, I've noticed that," said the other.

"Very well, then, you will begin to understand my meaning," said Plessigny cunningly. "We will let these rafts go on—we will allow them to get into the very centre of the swamp. For, from this height, we can observe that the channel dwindles down to a mere rickle, and then becomes nothing—right into the heart of the swamp. What will happen when they reach that point? They will be trapped, my friend—they will be absolutely trapped in the midst of this swamp. It will mean death for them all, and it will be a death which they have brought on themselves!"

"By thunder!" said Captain Snagg.

"You're right, sir!"

"Of course I am right!"

"This channel only goes on until half-way through the swamp," went on Captain Snagg. "But when they come to that point, sir, won't they turn back? Don't you think it is possible that they'll attempt to get back to the —"

"Tut, tut!" snapped the count. "How do you suppose those rafts are to get back? You know well enough that they'll drift down on the current. They have no power, and it is impossible to propel the rafts against any of the currents. Once those rafts get into the centre of the swamp, they will

slay there. No power on earth will be able to drive them back!"

"You're right, sir! I'm durned if you're not!" said Captain Snagg. "Do you intend to remain here all the while?"

"By no means," said the count. "We will return to the Majarra at once—before we are observed. Although it matters very little whether we are seen or not. But we might just as well get back to the yacht, and spend the evening and the night in comfort. At dawn to-morrow morning we'll venture out again. And I do not think we shall have any difficulty in locating Lord Dorrinsore's party. By that time it will be trapped in the swamp—helpless!"

And the count chuckled to himself with fiendish glee.

CHAPTER II.

In the Hands of Fate!

BOOM! Boom! Boom!

The rafts were constructed, and they were already afloat in the swiftly moving current, being held back by hundreds of willing bonds. And, from the direction of El Dorado, came many mysterious, dull reports—reports which only confirmed the fears which Nelson Lee had had all along.

"I am thankful that we brought everybody here, Dorrie," said the gov'nor quietly. "Do you hear those mysterious sounds? They are significant. I am absolutely certain that further volcanic disturbances are even now taking place in El Dorado. The whole city, very possibly, is being destroyed while we are standing here."

"That's what I'm thinkin', old man," said Dorrie gravely. "What an infernal shame!"

"It is indeed a pity," said Nelson Lee. "But we cannot stop to think of things in that way, Dorrie—we have all these young people to consider, if it is at all

possible. Fate has helped us wonderfully so far, and I am hopeful that Fate will continue to be on our side. In any case, we can do nothing but trust to luck."

I was standing with a group of other junkies, and we were listening to those dull reports that came from the direction of El Dorado. We were listening intently, and with a sad feeling in our hearts. It was terrible that that wonderful city should be destroyed in this horrible nature.

"It's a shame!" burst out Handforth. "What have these people done that they should be destroyed in such a way?"

"Well, we've no actual evidence that they are being destroyed, Handy," I said. "All these explosions and tremors seem to point to the fact that the volcano is far more active than it was while we were in the city. But we do not know—we can only surmise."

"Is that what you call surmise?" asked Reginald Pitt calmly.

He pointed, and, following the direction of his finger, we could see hovering in the sky in the distance a great cloud of dense smoke and steam, and, as we watched, we could see thousands of burning sparks among that smoke.

"By jingo!" I exclaimed in an awed voice. "We know what that means! We're down low here, and the ridge is between us and El Dorado. Those sparks must be a terrific height in the sky. I'm afraid El Dorado is doomed—as the guy'nar has said. It's a lucky thing we got out in time!"

"Yes, rather!"

"We do stand a chance of getting safely back to civilisation this way!" said the Hon. Douglas Singleton. "This idea of going on a raft is rather rich—what?"

"It's a chance, my son—just a chance!" I said quietly. "There's no telling what danger we shall have to pass through, and it is by no means certain that we shall be able to get to the other side of the swamp. But it is far

better to go on this venture than to remain here."

"Yes, I suppose you're right!"

Almost immediately afterwards we were called to take our places on one of the rafts.

There were three rafts, and we were evenly distributed upon them. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrington were on the raft upon which I stood, and they were looking very grim as they took their places, for they knew well enough that this venture was a great gamble.

Colonel Kerrigan was on another raft, with his sister and with all the other lady members of the party. And the colonel asked many of the Araucos to come on the raft, too, since there was plenty of room to accommodate many of the hospitable white giants.

But the Araucos refused.

They declared that they would not leave their own land, even though the country became uninhabitable. They would go back to El Dorado and share the fate with all the others.

And so at last the rafts were released. They were allowed to swing out into the powerful current, and then they went speeding down, right into the heart of the swamp. They were about one hundred yards apart, but they did not remain in this position for long. The leading raft, for example, got well ahead, whilst the other two practically joined up together.

As the time went by they constantly changed their positions, sometimes bumping into one another with considerable violence.

It was an exciting trip.

This new river was more in the nature of a flood, flowing over trees and bushes, for every now and again our rafts would foul against some object which lay hidden beneath the boiling, bubbling water. But we were never hung up, and we continued our course right through the swamp at a good speed, for the current was swift.

The atmosphere was by no means healthy. At such close quarters as this

we could see the swamp in all its ugliness—in all its hideous nakedness.

It was a terrible place, infested with snakes and insects and mosquitoes by the million.

As we passed along that curious river we could see hundred of snakes on either side of us—snakes of every description; some were thirty or forty feet in length. Others were tiny snakes, wriggling about among the bushes.

And less than an hour after commencing our voyage, we saw something which was really staggering. Fortunately, Lord Derrimore had his camera ready, and he was able to take several fine snapshots of the monstrous object which arose out of the water, and which went pounding away towards the sodden banks of the swiftly flowing stream.

Handforth was the first to see the object.

"What's that over there, Nipper?" asked Handy, pointing. "That great big thing sticking up? I thought I saw it move just now; but it can't be alive—Great pip! Did—did you see—"

Handforth paused, gasping with sheer amazement.

For there, not far from us, was an animal of a type which no human eye had ever seen—at least, no living human eye. It was a great, cumbersome brute with four legs and a huge body. From its body stretched out a great neck, with a lizard-like head at the end. The colour of the thing was a dull grey, and it had two terrible saucer-like eyes, which had an expression of terror in them.

"By the Lord Harry!" shouted Lord Derrimore. "The brontosaurus!"

"Great Scott!"

"It's—it's impossible!"

But it was not impossible—it was the truth. There before us was a perfect specimen of the brontosaurus—that huge prehistoric animal which was supposed to be extinct thousands of years ago.

It was a perfect example of the

species, and Lord Derrimore was proud of the photographs he succeeded in obtaining.

The great creature made no attempt whatever to attack us—he was, in fact, in a terrific hurry to get away.

And as we continued our extraordinary journey we met with other adventures—we saw other strange and wonderful sights.

In one portion of the swamp we caught sight of another huge animal. It was exactly the same kind of beast that had attacked Lord Derrimore and one or two others when they had landed in the country beyond the swamp for the first time.

It was, in fact, a dinosaur!

And this great creature, too, was in no hurry whatever to attack. It seemed that all the animals and reptiles were scared by the coming of the flood.

And thus we went on, meeting with excitement after excitement, and being constantly pestered by myriads of insects.

Gazing back, we could still see a terrible haze hanging in the far distant sky on the horizon. And it was noticed that the current of the river had become much swifter, indicating that the water was pouring out from that underground river in greater volumes than ever.

What was happening in El Dorado? What terrible events were taking place there?

We did not know, and it was almost certain that we never should know; but, personally, I was of the opinion that the great city was being demolished, and that every one of its inhabitants was being annihilated by this terrible upheaval of nature.

However, we had our own troubles to think about, and, much as we pitied the Arzacs, we could only give attention to our own difficulties—and these were great enough, in all conscience.

It was growing towards evening now, and the sun was shining with a glory which was something of a mockery. Here we were, in the midst of this

deadly swamp, attempting to find safety on three rafts—three rafts which could not be steered, and which were simply carried where the current fancied.

What was to be the end of this trip? Would we be able to find freedom, as we hoped?

The juniors were all cheerful, and they did not lose heart for a moment. The only exceptions were Follwood, Gulliver and Bell. These three youths—who did not possess an ounce of pluck between the three of them—were constantly bewailing their fate; they were constantly declaring that we could never get out of the swamp, and that Lord Dorrmore had brought them to certain death.

His lordship made no comment; but I know very well that Dorrle was filled with contempt for the cads of Study A. He knew their characters now right enough; he was under no misapprehension regarding the nature of the trio.

As for the girls, they were splendid.

They did not grumble once, no matter what hardships they were called upon to pass through. They were cheerful, and they made the best of everything. And it certainly was a bit of an ordeal for young ladies to go through an experience of this kind—to be placed on a rough raft, and cast upon the current of an unknown river leading into the heart of a swamp which was poisonous and deadly.

The whole adventure, in fact, called for very special courage on the part of everybody—and we were not found wanting.

The evening drew in quickly, and at length night came down upon the swamp—and with it came myriads and myriads of deadly, stinging mosquitoes; the ugly little brutes were everywhere.

And the main reason for this was because of the flares we had illuminated. On every raft were eight or nine great flaring torches, and these were highly essential, so that we should be able to see exactly where we were going. And these great lights attracted insects

in a manner which was rather disconcerting to us.

Not only mosquitoes, but flies of every description; moths as big as a handkerchief, almost, and goodness knows what else.

However, we could not spare the time to worry ourselves about these insects and mosquitoes. They were a nuisance, but we dealt with them as we could; although every one of us got stung rather severely.

This night trip was worse than anything. There was the constant thought in all our minds of meeting another brontosaurus, or some similar monster of the swamp. At night these brutes would probably be more venturesome, and they would not hesitate to attack us if they got half a chance.

Another danger was from alligators—or, as they are called in that region, caymans. But, after all, there was not much peril from this sort, for the rafts were so big and so well constructed that none of the ugly reptiles could harm us.

The darkness of the night was intense.

And away behind—far away beyond the swamp, we could see a dull red glow upon the horizon, and we knew that that dull red glow was coming from the direction of El Dorado. We were more puzzled than ever as to what was occurring there, but we knew by all these signs that something of a very dreadful nature was taking place; in fact, it was almost certain that El Dorado was being wiped off the face of the earth.

And then came a period of anxiety.

For the flares of our raft revealed the fact that the channel was becoming narrower—much narrower.

Nelson Lee, who was watching keenly, was filled with anxiety and a gnawing apprehension. He had not failed to observe this new danger. Yes, the channel was closing in, gradually but surely.

The current, too, was not so strong as it had been, and we were now moving along sluggishly. We were drifting past the solid portions of the swamp

slowly, and we could see the ground and the trees on either side of us. The channel was closing!

And just after midnight we knew the worst.

Gazing ahead, it was seen that there were trees, and there was no sign of water whatever. At first I assumed that the channel must take a sharp turn, and it went round somehow or other, twisting in between the vegetation.

But this was not the case.

Slowly and gradually the rafts came to a standstill, and then we knew the dreadful truth.

The channel had ended!

There was no further way through the swamp; there was no more water—we had come to the utmost limit. And the solid ground was still ten or fifteen miles farther on—miles which could not possibly be crossed on foot. Even to attempt such a task would mean death for all of us.

Nelson Lee acted with considerable tact.

He was on the leading raft, and a good many of the juniors were there, too. And Nelson Lee called back to the other rafts, which were close behind.

"I think we will stay here for the night," he shouted. "We will stop at this point, and wait for the dawn to come. I should advise everybody to obtain some sleep if it is possible."

"Right you are, Mr. Lee," came Captain Burton's voice from one of the other rafts. "I'll see that everybody sleeps on this raft."

"Splendid!" shouted Nelson Lee cheerfully. "We have done remarkably well so far, and perhaps we shall have the same luck to-morrow."

There was rather a sleepy cheer from the other raft; but they did not know what the position was. They did not know that the channel had closed up and that there was no further way through the swamp.

"What does it mean, sir?" I asked in a low voice.

"My dear Nipper, it is no good asking me that question," said Nelson Lee gravely. "The channel has closed, and there is no way through. Until daylight comes I cannot say anything for certain—but, between you and I, the position is rather desperate."

"You—you mean——"

"I don't mean anything, Nipper," interrupted the gunner. "It is impossible to say anything definitely. The position is bad, but I will say no more at the moment. I should advise you to get as much sleep as you can—for there is no telling when we shall have another opportunity!"

But, somehow, I could not get to sleep. And, before long, I became aware of another catastrophe—a development which we had not anticipated, and which took us completely by surprise.

For it was soon apparent to nearly everybody that the channel had not only closed its front, but it was closing in the rear! And, before another hour had passed, the channel had closed—we were absolutely hemmed in. We were imprisoned in that deadly, poisonous swamp!

It was a situation which was calculated to strike terror in the stoutest heart. But Nelson Lee remained calm and grim. He did not give up hope cheer. And he remained there, fully awake and alert, with a rifle in his grasp, in case any prowling monster should come nosing about.

And how was it possible for me to sleep? How could I close my eyes, knowing our deadly peril?

We had embarked upon this adventure because it had seemed the better of the two courses. If we had remained in El Dorado, we would probably have been killed in the general disaster. By coming on these rafts into this channel, we had taken a chance, and this was the result.

Here we were, hemmed in by the deadly swamp—unable to move forward or backward. And there was no

means of crossing the swamp. We could do nothing at all!

And thus we waited for the dawn to come. We waited impatiently and with apprehension in our hearts. What would the dawn bring? Would it bring hope?

Or would it bring sheer and absolute dismay? It was impossible to tell.

CHAPTER 16.

The Way to the Outer World!

DAWN!

The first faint streaks of the new day were appearing in the sky, far away to the east. In the dull, drab light, everything looked strange and grotesque. Shapes appeared out of the gloom on every hand—shapes which seemed like objects from another world—but which were, in reality, only bushes.

And as the light grew stronger, I noticed that very many members of the party were asleep—they were sleeping the sleep of exhaustion.

Even Dorrie was slumbering peacefully, lying full length on the hard logs, and using his arm as a pillow. Nelson Lee was awake—and he caught my eye as I looked round towards him. And I knew very well that the same thought was in his mind that was troubling me.

"Do you think there is any hope, sir?" I asked quietly.

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I am afraid, Nipper, there is—none!" he replied, in even tones.

"Good heavens!" I muttered. "And so it has come to this? After all our exciting adventures—after our escape from El Dorado, we have come out into this swamp to perish! It's terrible, guv'nor—it's absolutely ghastly! I wouldn't mind so much about us, and about Dorrie, and the others. But I'm thinking about those young ladies—and Lady Helen, and Miss Kerrigan. It's horrible for them to have to suffer all this!"

Nelson Lee clenched his fists.

"You don't know what agony of mind I am passing through, my lad," he said dully. "It was I who made this decision—it was I who declared that we should come upon this trip on the rafts. And I have made a terrible blunder!"

"Oh, rats, sir!" I put in quickly. "It wasn't your fault!"

"Perhaps not, Nipper, but I am responsible," said the guv'nor. "There is no way back, and there is no way forward. We are imprisoned in this deadly swamp, and there appears to be no way out!"

I suddenly gripped my fist tightly.

"There must be a way out, sir!" I said emphatically. "I know jolly well that we shall reach civilisation before long. We have gone through so many perils in safety. I cannot bring myself to believe that we shall succumb now. I'm not going to give up hope, in any case!"

"Good boy—good boy, Nipper!" said Nelson Lee approvingly. "That is the spirit I like to see. Never say die, young 'un!"

"Eh, what's that?" demanded a sleepy voice. "Who's talkin' about dyin'?"

Lord Derrimore sat up, blinked round, and then fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette.

"Morain', eh?" he said, rising stiffly to his feet. "I must have been asleep for two or three hours, then. By the Lord Harry! What a delightful landscape!"

He was looking out across the swamp—and it was, indeed, a drab, ugly sight.

Other members of the party were waking up, and before many minutes had passed it was known throughout the whole company that our progress was barred, and that we could neither advance nor retreat.

Our position was known to all, and the effect was rather staggering. Everybody was subdued and almost rendered dumb by the shock of it all.

"Look—look up there!" shouted one of the juniors suddenly. "I—I can see something——"

"The airship!" screamed McClure, his voice cracking with excitement.

"Hegad!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"The airship!"

"Hurrah!"

"We shall be saved, after all!"

"Hurrah!"

"Don't be too sure, my sons!" I put in sharply. "You can bet your boots that the count is on that airship, and I don't suppose he'll lend us a hand——"

"Oh, rats!" said Handforth. "You don't suppose he'd leave us here to die, do you? Even a scoundrel like he is wouldn't go to such lengths as all that!"

There was tremendous excitement as we all stared up into the sky. Yes, it was Lord Dorrimore's airship right enough. And it came on majestically, battling against a strong wind which was blowing. Somehow, I didn't quite like the weather that morning. It was intensely hot, and the wind which was blowing was hot, too. There was a very strange feeling in the air—a humid, overpowering feeling which seemed to indicate that something dreadful was about to happen.

Right over the swamp, in the direction of El Dorado, there hung a black cloud in the sky—a great cloud which stretched out over the horizon.

But, at the moment, we were interested in the airship.

It circled round and round, and then gradually came down to a lower level. And, at last, it was hovering only two or three hundred feet above us.

And, over the rail, we could see the figure of the Comte de Plessigny leaning. He looked down at us and waved his hand.

A dozen hands were waved in return.

"Oh, no, my friends!" shouted the count, in a voice which carried down quite clearly to us. "You need not imagine that I have come here to

rescue you. By no means! You have got yourselves into this little predicament, and you must get yourselves out of it—if you can!"

"Oh!"

"Does—does he mean to leave us here?" roared Handforth furiously.

"I am afraid that is the count's intention," said Nelson Lee.

"You murderous scoundrel!" roared Handforth, shaking his fists up at the airship.

"I am exceedingly sorry to find you all in such a plight as this," went on the Comte de Plessigny. "Yet, surely, you cannot blame me for this? It was your own doing entirely. You decided to venture out upon these rafts into the swamp—fondly hoping that the channel would be open right to the far end. But you were wrong, my friends. The channel has closed up, and you are now hemmed in, and I shall leave you to escape in the best way you can."

"If you were down here I'd punch your beastly nose!" bellowed Handforth furiously.

"But I am not coming down, my young friend!" smiled the count. "I came out on this trip for the especial purpose of seeing your plight. If the weather was rather more favourable I might be inclined to stay, and have a few more words with you. But this wind is decidedly treacherous, and I must get into a higher altitude."

The count waved his hand, and the airship rose swiftly and steadily. It was followed by a perfect roar of anger and dismay from those who were standing on the rafts.

The airship turned its nose back towards the Brazilian forests, and then set off at a high speed.

We all stared after it with a dull kind of feeling in our hearts. And then we noticed that a thunder cloud was almost immediately in the path of the airship—a dark, inky black cloud. And, suddenly, there was a streak of lightning to be seen. At the same time I observed that the course of the airship was altered—the count was

evidently doing his best to steer clear of that local storm.

Everybody was watching the airship, and then we saw something which rather thrilled us—and which certainly gave me some pleasure.

The airship, without the slightest warning, staggered as it flew along.

Then the nose of the vessel tipped up at an acute angle, and the next moment the airship was being whirled along at a truly appalling pace. And she was not now on an even keel—she was being swung through the air with tremendous velocity, with her nose pointing straight upwards, and with her ear hanging almost in a state of wreckage—and with the engines obviously out of order.

"Great Scott!" I gasped. "They've struck a squall—the airship has become unmanageable."

"It is retribution!" said Colonel Kerrigan grimly.

"The count will never get that vessel on an even keel again!" declared Lord Dorrimore. "He's bound for destruction, I think. He will be driven along like that for a time, then he'll come down, and the whole affair will be smashed to atoms in the trees. Somehow, I haven't an ounce of pity for the brute, though I am infernally sorry about that airship. It cost a pretty penny, and I don't like to see it destroyed in this way."

"There seems to be something happening in our rear," remarked Dr. Brett, looking over the swamp with a keen gaze. "I have been noticing it for some time, Mr. Lee. Don't you observe how the surface of the swamp seems to be heaving up and down? And there is a great volume of water coming, too, unless I am greatly mistaken!"

"Water!"

"Great pip!" shouted Handforth. "There's something else happening now—some more earthquakes, I believe!"

We all stared round, forgetting all

about the count and the disabled airship. And then we saw that Dr. Brett was quite right. There seemed to be some strange, remarkable upheavals in the swamp, about two or three miles away.

By this time we knew quite well that the swamp was really a vast floating mass of weeds and rank vegetation.

"My only hat!" muttered Tommy Watson. "What's happening?"

"Goodness knows!" I replied. "But I shan't be surprised at anything now. We've had so many shocks that I have become almost indifferent."

"Look!" shouted De Valerie. "There is a terrific volume of water coming towards us along the course of that channel—"

He did not get any further, for at that moment a terrific rumbling sound made itself heard, and our raft rocked up and down in a strange manner. We knew in a moment that an earthquake was occurring—an earthquake far below. It was all a part and parcel of the volcanic eruption which was taking place in El Dorado.

And abruptly our rafts were tossed up and down in a most sickening manner. We had the utmost difficulty in holding tight—in preventing ourselves from being flung over into the swamp.

And then everybody shouted with terrific excitement and alarm. For it was seen that a great wall of water was coming over the swamp towards us. It was coming along the channel which had only recently closed.

There could be only one explanation of this.

That mighty hidden river, which found its outlet in El Dorado, had burst forth in treble the quantity and the water had just reached us, charging down like a tidal wave. It was an impressive sight.

The crest of the waves struck our rafts with a terrific crash, we were lifted up and carried along in a dizzy, tremendous rush.

How we cling to the rafts we never afterwards knew. But nobody was flung off, and we were hurled onwards at a tremendous pace.

"Hold tight, everybody!" roared Lord Dorrimore.

"It's easier said than done!" I gasped.

But we did manage to hold tight; and at last, when the wave had expended its fury, we found, to our supreme joy and delight, that the great channel had re-opened, and we were now swinging along at a brisk pace, being carried onwards by the current. On we went, never pausing, one raft after the other.

And our faces were glowing now—glowing with hope and joy.

For it seemed quite likely that we should succeed in getting to civilisation—after all our fears, and after all the terrible troubles and trials we had passed through.

"We're going to do the trick, my lads," said Lord Dorrimore calmly. "I'm not makin' any guesses, but I'll guarantee that we are on solid ground, under the forest trees, within a few hours from now."

"Thou art true, O N'Kosc," rumbled Umlosh. "Ere long, we shall be safe—even as I have said from the start."

"Yes, you're a marvellous fellow—there's no doubt about that!" said Dorrie. "You can see into the future, and if you only set up as a fortune-teller you'd make thousands."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors laughed, in spite of the doubt which troubled them all. We were not out of trouble yet, but we were all happy.

But we went on and on, and we grew nearer and nearer to the end of the swamp, and at last we could see the great imposing trees of the forest.

We could see the spot where the swamp ended, and where the solid ground commenced. And we could also see that this wide channel of water extended to that spot.

And we were going onwards all the time—we were within sight of freedom!

We knew that we had passed through all our perils, and that our mission had been accomplished.

CHAPTER 17 Civilisation Again!

"HURRAH!" That cheer rang out joyously from a great many throats. Handforth led the cheering, and he was tremendously excited.

"Hurrah!" he roared, again and again. "Civilisation is in sight, my sons! We shall escape from the swamp, and we shall be all serene. We shall get back to St. Frank's for the new term, after all!"

"Hurrah!"

"The youngsters are gettin' rather excited, by gad!" remarked Lord Dorrimore calmly.

"Let them cheer—I like to hear it!" said Nelson Lee, with a smile. "Upon my soul, Dorrie, I did not hope for anything so wonderful as this."

"Same here, old man," said Dorrie. "Why, only a few hours ago I was practically certain that we should never get out of this swamp. And here we are with dry land in sight."

The dry forest lands were ahead of us—quite near, in fact. Within a couple of hours we reckoned to be on dry ground, and then it would not be a very difficult matter for us to go across country and reach the River Majorra, where Lord Dorrimore's steam yacht, the Wanderer, was at anchor.

And so we were all extremely light-hearted.

Many of the juniors, in fact, hardly knew how to contain their excitement. After all the perils we had passed through—after the nightmare adventures of the past twenty-four hours—it was grand to think that we were coming to a period of quietness.

It soon became necessary to keep a very sharp look-out for a decent landing-place.

For we were now practically alongside the solid country. The channel through the swamp had become a river, and on either side of us there were wooded banks.

"It is quite easy to understand what has happened," remarked Nelson Lee. "This flow of water has opened up the swamp, and it has found its own channel now—joining up with a tiny creek, which has now become a swiftly flowing river. I think it will be just as well if we allow ourselves to float along this river as far as possible."

"That's my opinion, too, old man," said Lord Dorrmore. "An' we're goin' in the right direction, I believe. In any case, this forest is impenetrable, an' I don't much fancy the task of forcing a way through. As long as we can keep to the river we shall be all right."

"But we might be going right away from the Majarra, Dorrie," I put in.

"No, Nipper; we are going in the right direction," said Nelson Lee, who had been consulting a small compass. "I think if ye keep to our present course we shall not be far wrong. According to my calculations, the Majarra is, roughly, sixty miles from this present spot, and as long as we are travelling along on the rafts it will be all for the good."

Luck was certainly with us, for throughout the day we continued to pass along that river, the rafts behaving quite decently on the whole. It was necessary, of course, to have men posted at all points in order to keep the clumsy affairs from the banks, for the river twisted and turned in all directions. And now and again we came to some rapids, down which we shot at break-neck speed. On more than one occasion, in fact, we half expected to be flung off into the water.

But these little incidents, after the excitement we had already passed

through, were quite insignificant. They did not even make us excited. And, by the evening, we had covered at least forty miles, and now Nelson Lee calculated that we were only about twenty-five miles from the Majarra itself—from the spot where the Wanderer was moored.

I wondered whether we should find the yacht still there, or whether the Comte de Plessigny's men would have taken her away. There was certainly this contingency to reckon with. We did not know what had happened to the count now, but we believed that the scoundrel had met his end over the swamp.

When evening came we camped in a broad clearing beside the river. And I suddenly remembered that I was enormously hungry. The other juniors were hungry, too; all the members of our party, in fact, were feeling the effect of the journey now.

We did not possess one morsel of food between the lot of us. We had left El Dorado in a great hurry, and nothing had been brought. But everybody was extremely cheerful, and there was not much fear of us being overtaken by starvation, in any case, for there were all manner of wild fruits to be found in the forest.

The girls were particularly cheerful and brave. They were delighted with the way everything had gone, and they looked forward with great pleasure to the thought of getting once more on board the Wanderer—back to civilisation.

Fires were blazing in all directions, and the scene was quite cheerful. Captain Burton was talking with the members of his crew, and he was optimistic.

The juniors, led by Handforth, were performing a kind of triumphant dance in the centre of the clearing, surrounded by the fires. They looked like so many Indians executing a war-dance. There was only one fellow who was not included in the scene, and that fellow was Fatty Little.

Fatty was ill—at least, he told us he was ill. He certainly didn't look it. He complained, in a hollow voice, that he was slowly, was surely, dying from starvation.

He sat on the grass, munching some berries, which we had found near by. They were not particularly luscious, but they were wholesome; he was ready to eat anything at such a time as this.

Lord Dorrmore came strolling in from the surrounding forest. He was looking quite cheerful, and he was smoking one of the last cigarettes he possessed. And in his hand he held a huge object which appeared to be of considerable weight; it was round, and it looked like an enormous coconut, only it was a different shape.

"Feeling hungry, Fatty?" he inquired cheerfully.

Fatty Little groaned.

"Hungry, sir!" he repeated in a hollow voice. "I—I've passed that, sir! I'm starving, you know. By to-morrow morning I shall be a corpse!"

Lord Dorrmore grinned.

"Don't you believe it, my son!" he said. "I think you'd be able to survive if you were compelled to go without food for about three months, you've got enough blubber on you to last weeks! What are you looking so gloomy about? Everythin' has turned out rippily, an' we're as safe as houses!"

"Rather, sir!" said Handforth, coming up. "And by to-morrow we shall be back on the Majarra—we shall be back on the yacht. By George, we'll have a jolly good feed then, I'll bet!"

"Don't!" moaned Fatty Little.

"Eh?"

"Don't make me think of it!" said the fat boy. "It's—it's awful to talk about grub when we haven't got any!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And you chaps laugh!" said Fatty, in tragic tones. "You stand there and laugh at me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

"Well, I've got somethin' decent to

eat here," remarked Lord Dorrmore calmly. "If you will wait——"

"Something to eat?" roared Fatty Little, jumping to his feet with extraordinary agility. "Did—did you say something to eat, sir?"

"Yes, my lad—here it is!"

And his lordship held out the object which was grasped in his hand.

"What—what's that, sir?"

"A Brazil nut!" said Lord Dorrmore.

"A which?"

"To be more correct, a good many Brazil nuts!" said Dorrie.

"That—that thing?" exclaimed Handforth, staring. "That thing's a Brazil nut, sir?"

"Exactly."

"It's no good trying to pull my leg like that, sir!" grinned Handforth knowingly. "A Brazil nut, indeed! Do you think I haven't seen 'em? I've eaten scores of 'em! You can't kid me that that thing's a Brazil nut!"

"No?" smiled Dorrie. "You seem very certain, my boy!"

"Well, anybody would be certain!" said Handforth. "Fancy calling that big thing a Brazil nut! We all know that Brazil nuts are little things, about two inches long, with rough shells."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Handy!" I grinned. "Don't you simply love to air your ignorance?"

Handforth glared.

"Ignorance!" he roared. "What do you mean, you ass?"

"Well, you ought to know that Brazil nuts grow in cases," I exclaimed. "They don't hang on the trees just as we see them in the shops in England. Brazil nuts are taken out of a kind of a big shell, which is crammed with the nuts like sardines are packed in a tin. You break the outer shell, and then all the nuts are revealed."

"Gimme one!" gasped Fatty, fairly dancing with eagerness. "I love Brazil nuts—and they're a ripping food!"

"I quite agree with you, my lad—"

they are," said Lord Dorrmore. "An' it may interest you to know that about eight members of the yacht's crew are at present out in the forest, gathering as many nuts as they can lay hands on. They will be here presently, and then we shall hold a nut-cracking competition. We shall have a fairly decent supper, after all—fresh Brazil nuts and sparkling water. What could be better?"

"And—and is that thing really a Brazil nut?" asked Handforth. "Well, I'm jiggered! No wonder I couldn't spot any on the trees when I was lookin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You were lookin' for the wrong sort of thing, Handy!" chuckled Lord Dorrmore. "Well, we'll sample this one, an' see what it's like. Personally, I think it will prove to be A 1. Who's got a hammer?"

Nobody possessed such a useful article; but there were plenty of big stones to be found, and very soon there was a great chorus of crackings and hammerings. And, before long, a large supply of fresh Brazil nuts was on hand. And we all enjoyed the feed tremendously, for we were hungry, and the nuts were satisfying.

"Not exactly up to a Savoy table d'hôte," remarked Lord Dorrmore, after we had finished; "but I suppose the vegetarian tribe would rave over a supper of this kind, by gad!"

"Not much to rave about!" muttered Fullwood. "Personally, I'm longing for a decent feed again—real, good old English food—steak and potatoes an' greens, an' all that kind of thing. I'm fed up to the neck with all the messes we've been eatin' lately. An' these Brazil nuts to finish up with are just about the limit!"

"Oh, rather!" agreed Gulliver.

"Anybody might think we were monkeys!" exclaimed Bell, with a sneer.

Lord Dorrmore evidently caught the last few words, for he smiled genially at the nuts of the Remove.

"Now you come to remind me, my sons, there is some slight resemblance," he said. "In a fairly dim light it would be quite easy to mistake you for monkeys!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's one for you, Fully!" said Handforth, with a grin.

"Oh, I'm not grumblin'!" said Fullwood. "I'm only sayin' that I'm about fed up with this kind of life. We came out to the Amazon for a holiday adventure. Well, we've had one—an' I'm not sayin' a word against it. We shall take a tremendous story back with us to England. By gad! Won't the papers come out in huge headlines over our little adventures among the Arzacs!"

"Yes, and if the papers told the truth, they'd say a few words about you and Gully and Bell!" said Handforth. "A miserable set of rotters—that's what you are! When everything was going all right, you were as merry as larks. But when things went wrong—when it seemed that we should be left in El Dorado for good—you were full of grumbles. You wanted to blame everything on to Lord Dorrmore, and you acted like the rotters you are. It'll be many a long day before you come on another trip with us!"

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed many of the other juniors.

Fullwood & Co. had nothing to say, but they looked very savage.

"Now, boys, this won't do!" put in Nelson Lee smilingly. "We have got out of our troubles exceedingly well, I consider, and there is no time now to commence squabbling. Some of you, perhaps, were rather despondent—and I am not at all surprised at that. I was extremely downhearted myself at one time."

"But you didn't start blaming Lord Dorrmore for dragging you into the trouble, did you, sir?" said Reginald Pitt pointedly.

"Well, no——"

"You worked like a Trojan to help

us out of the trouble, but those three rollers made things worse—"

"Now, Pitt, we must finish with all this kind of thing," smiled Nelson Lee. "We must be very thankful that we have escaped, and that everybody is alive and well. And now I think we will get some sleep before dawn, for we must be off at the first sign of daylight."

And so the argument was finished then and there. But Pullwood & Co. were not in very high favour with the rest of the fellows.

We turned in a few minutes later, and slept well, for we had had a very tiring time. In fact, I found it difficult to remember when I had last slept. Such a tremendous lot had happened. Anyhow, we all slept like logs until dawn came.

We had no beds, of course, and no blankets. We simply slept out in the open, surrounded by the camp fires. But we were so tired that we didn't care anything about blankets or anything of that nature. All we wanted was sleep.

And in the morning, when the sun was just gaining warmth, we set out on our journey through the thick forest towards the Majarra.

The distance was only just over twenty miles, according to Nelson Lee's calculations. But he reckoned that it would take us at least six hours to reach the river, at the spot where the Wanderer had been left moored.

"Six hours!" exclaimed Handforth, when he heard. "Why, it won't take us all that time, you chaps! It's only just over twenty miles, and we can walk four miles an hour."

"Well, even then, that'll only be twenty-four miles in the six hours," said Pitt. "Besides, we can't walk so fast as that in this bush. It's just about seven o'clock now. And if we reach the Majarra by half-past two or three I shall think we're jolly lucky!"

"And so shall I!" I put in.

And so we started off on the last lap of our journey towards civilisation.

CHAPTER II.

Roques in Peril

THAT journey through the forest was not merely a comfortable walk through trees and glades. For the main part of the journey we were compelled to fight our way along. We had to force our way through thick undergrowth, and through dense creepers. It was a terribly trying journey for the members of the yacht's crew. For these staunch, strong individuals led the way. And they cleared the path for the remainder of the party.

The girls, of course, were almost last. They had quite an easy time of it, considering. And, for that matter, so did we. The real hard work was left to the strong men of the party.

Monkeys chattered at us as we passed along. Strange birds with gorgeous plumage flew out of the trees on every hand, as we disturbed them by our movements. And as we went along we were lighthearted and happy. We were going back to Lord Dorramore's yacht. We were going back to peace and quietness—at least, so we supposed. But before we gained that peace and quietness, we were destined to pass through one or two more exciting adventures.

By two o'clock in the afternoon we had only traversed about fifteen miles of our journey. So Nelson Lee's calculation was rather out—as he admitted. We had all come to the conclusion that we should not reach the Majarra until the evening. And we should be very lucky if we arrived by dusk.

Towards the latter part of the afternoon, we came upon signs of human habitation. Now and again we passed through miserable native villages—Indian villages, squalid and dirty and untidy. And there was one rather remarkable fact which we noted.

In every one of these native villages we saw no men—except old Indians who were past active life.

There were boys and girls and

women in plenty—but no able-bodied men were to be seen.

We attempted to interrogate some of the natives in two or three of the villages, but we could get no satisfaction. They pretended that they did not understand.

"It's rather astonishin', old man," remarked Lord Dorrimore, just after we had passed through another village. "It strikes me that all these fellows are on the warpath. What do you think?"

"It is possible, of course," replied Nelson Lee. "I imagine that the Indians are engaged in a battle somewhere, or it may be that they are simply out hunting. It is rather difficult to tell."

We continued our journey, feeling rather uncertain, and very anxious to obtain sight of the Majarra. We should all be very glad when we arrived at our destination.

Evening was drawing near when Umlozi declared that he smelt water. I always knew that he had a pretty good kind of a nose, but I hadn't been aware that it was capable of this. None of the others could notice much difference in the surrounding forest. It seemed almost exactly the same to us. But Umlozi was positive, and his statement was justified about half an hour afterwards.

For, almost without warning, we came to the end of the thick, dense forest, and there right in front of us lay the River Majarra.

The spot was unfamiliar to us, and it was clear that we had come upon the river at a higher point than where the yacht was anchored.

"Now, the great question is, how far are we from the Wanderer?" said Dr. Brett. "If we have two or three hours' march, it seems that we shall have to camp here for the night, Mr. Lee. And camping on this spot would be far more difficult than—"

"There's no need for you to worry, my dear Brett," interrupted Nelson Lee. "Unless my calculations are en-

tirely at fault, the Wanderer is only a couple of miles down the river, just round the bend. We ought to be able to get there quite easily within an hour. And that will just suit us nicely, for I imagine there are about two hours of daylight left."

"That's about it, old man," agreed Lord Dorrimore. "By gad! I shall be jolly pleased to get back on board. There are heaps of cigars down in my cabin, an' a few thousand cigarettes. To think that I've been existing on two cigarettes a day for the last week! It's a wonder to me that I haven't pined away an' pegged out long before this!"

"Well, I don't suppose you'll have to wait much longer, Dorrie," smiled Nelson Lee. "I shall enjoy a good cigar myself."

We found it impossible to follow the river bank. The trees ran right down to the water, and the ground was soft and spongy and treacherous. The only possible method of going up the river was to force our way through the dense undergrowth six or seven hundred yards away from the river, and then we went on our journey following the river parallel.

Under the vast canopy of the forest, it was now growing very dim, and the beasts of the night were becoming active. We could hear strange cries coming from all sides, and the birds were becoming silent. The last portion of our journey was distinctly wearisome, and we were heartily glad when Nelson Lee determined to turn off to the right in order to reach the river bank once more, for he judged that we should now be very close to the spot where we had left the Wanderer.

And so, in the fast fading light of the day, we pressed on through the dense jungle, until at length, we came out into the open space again, with the wide river stretching out in front of us. The Majarra was only a tributary of the Amazon, but was a large river, nevertheless.

We came upon the river quite sud-

denly, bursting out into full view of it from between the thick trees. Many members of the party arrived before the juniors did. And we saw them pause, and heard many exclamations of astonishment.

"By the Lord Harry!" I heard Captain Burton exclaim. "What's this? What's happening over there, Mr. Lee? There's some devilry afoot, or I'm no judge!"

Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West looked at me in rather a puzzled way.

"Begad! What can it mean, dear old boys?" murmured Sir Montie. "Trouble? I thought we were getting to the end of all our worries, begad! I really don't think I could survive another night in the open. Just look at my clothin'. Nipper, dear boy. I feel more like a tramp than anythin' else. I simply must have a change of linen an' a new suit, an' some new socks, an' a fresh pair of shoes, an'—"

"Dry up, Montie!" I interrupted. "There's some more bother, by the look of things!"

I pressed on, and my chums hurried after me, with all the other juniors. And then, as we came within full sight of the river, we paused, and stared out across the still, placid water.

A rather startling sight met our gaze.

There, a little to the left of us, lay Lord Dorrimore's yacht in midstream. She was looking splendid. It was simply gorgeous to see the Wanderer again. Apparently she had not been touched, and she lay there, with her white decks trim and tidy, and with everything on board in perfect order. But there seemed to be nobody on boards. The decks were deserted—the bridge was deserted. And the yacht lay there in the quiet water, calm and untroubled.

But, although we were so tremendously pleased to see her again—to see that very tangible link of civilisation—we hardly gave the yacht

a glance. For our attention was captured by something else.

The other bank was filled with a horde of yelling, dancing Indians—savages of a very fierce type, and they were evidently enjoying themselves in their own particular way.

The whole scene was illuminated by great flaring torches, which were burning everywhere, bound to stakes of wood which were placed in the ground. These torches gave a bright light, which flickered up and down in the most eerie manner.

The Indians, half-naked, dancing round about the torches looked like so many demons as they went hither and thither.

At first, I could not fully understand what their game was, and why they were so excited. I merely thought that they were holding some kind of festival, and they were enjoying themselves as a kind of preliminary before the feast. And then, quite suddenly, I became aware of the actual truth.

Right in the very centre of the clearing, there were six extra large wooden stakes erected—stakes which rose to a height of about seven or eight feet. And bound to these thick stakes there were figures—figures which at first I took to be merely wooden images, or something of that kind.

But then, as I watched, I saw one of the figures move, and then, gazing more intently, I became aware of the truth. For I recognised those figures as men—six white men!

"Good heavens!" I muttered. "Do—do you see, guv'nor?"

"Yes, Nipper, I see quite plainly!" replied Nelson Lee. "And I think I understand, too!"

"Well, I don't understand, sir!" I exclaimed. "Why are those men bound there in that way? What does it mean, sir?"

"Well, Nipper, you know as well as I do that the Comte de Plessigny left several men in charge of the Wanderer. The count had a small

vessel of his own—a steam launch called the Sunbeam, and that vessel was in charge of a man named Captain Snagg, and he had a companion called Cradley, I believe. There were some others—half-breeds, and so forth. They were obviously in charge of the Wanderer. Well, something of a very drastic nature has occurred."

"I imagine it has!" said Lord Dorrimore grimly.

"These Indians are probably the fellows who assisted the count in attacking the yacht, before we went on our journey to El Dorado," went on Nelson Lee. "The Indians probably returned for some reason, and they swarmed over the yacht, turning against their former masters. It is quite clear to see that the savages are intoxicated."

"And there is only one explanation to be made. They took possession of the yacht and managed to get to the spirit stores. They have been drinking heavily—brandy, whisky—anything in the nature of fire-water. These native Indians are quite easy to handle, I believe, if they are dealt with properly. But it is quite apparent that they have been dealt with very unkindly. And they have got drunk—and now they are deadly dangerous. As you see, they have made the six white men prisoners, and they are now holding a kind of dance. In their present condition there is no telling what they will do."

"I think it is fairly obvious what they intend to do, Mr. Lee," remarked Dr. Brett pointedly.

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Yes, we are left in no doubt as to that point, doctor," said Nelson Lee. "These unfortunate rogues have had the tables turned upon them in a most uncomfortable manner. The Indians are dancing round their victims before putting them to death!"

"Begad!"

"Oh, my only hat!"

"Do—do you mean that these men

are to be burnt at the stake, sir?" asked Reginald, horrified.

"That, I believe, is the intention of these Indians," replied Nelson Lee. "The situation is desperate, and it seems that we have arrived in the nick of time."

"Of course we cannot allow it to proceed," said Lord Dorrimore. "But I shall be awfully obliged, Lee, if you'll tell me how we can put a stopper on the game. That crowd of Indians is a pretty considerable one, an' we don't happen to possess any firearms. I'm willin' to do anythin' possible to help those poor brutes on the other side—but I don't fancy bein' tied to one of those stakes on my own account. Mind you, I'm quite game for anythin' that's in the wind, but I'm hanged if I can see what we can do."

"Well, we must do something, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "And there is not a second to be lost. By what I can see, these Indians are nearly ready to burn their victims, and once those fires are started, no power on earth will be able to save the white men from a ghastly death."

But what could we do? How could we go to the aid of Captain Snagg and his men? How could we prevent these yelling, intoxicated Indians from doing their foul work?

CHAPTER 10.

The Rout of the Indians!

NELSON LEE was looking very grim.

"I feared that something of this kind had happened, Dorrie," he said. "When we passed all those villages bare of their male inhabitants, I suspected that the brutes were on the warpath. We must act without the slightest delay!"

"Exactly," said Dorrie. "But how are we goin' to act?"

"There is only one thing to be done," went on the gaffer grimly.

"The Indians are totally unaware of our presence, and they are therefore unprepared for any attack. I do not suppose they are even keeping a watch, so we have everything in our favour."

"Do you propose that we should swim across the river?" asked Dorrie.

"My dear man, that would be impossible."

"So I thought," said his lordship. "We might start, but I believe there are a good many caymans about this region—an' we should only get about a hundred yards before we were converted into so many suppers. What's your idea, old man?"

"We must get across to the yacht—as many of us as possible," said Nelson Lee. "You will observe that the yacht is much nearer the opposite bank than it is to this. It is, in fact, quite close to the terrible scene which we are now witnessing. If we can only get on board the yacht, we shall be able to take effective measures to rescue our unfortunate fellow creatures. Happily, it will not be difficult for us to get across to the yacht."

"It would be quite easy if we had wings," said Dorrie.

"My dear man, I wish you would be serious!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "You have apparently failed to see a good many canoes lying among the trees against the water two or three hundred yards to our right. I do not know why they were left there. But I do know that they will come in useful, and that we can use them as a means of transporting a good many of our number across to the yacht. It would be as well, in fact, to get everybody across, if possible—for we shall be fairly safe once we are on board."

"We'd better not go too openly, Mr. Lee," put in Dr. Brett. "If once we are seen by these Indians, we shall probably be surrounded in a few minutes, and then it will be a battle for life, indeed!"

"Yes, it will be necessary to main-

tain extreme caution," said Nelson Lee.

It did not take the gov'nor long to arrange matters.

Mr. Hudson, the first officer of the Wanderer, was placed in charge of the operations, and he was given instructions to take the party over to the yacht as quickly and as silently as possible, transporting them in batches—the ladies and the girls first, the juniors second, and then the other members of the party.

Nelson Lee, Dorrie, Captain Burton, Mr. McNab, and several others went in advance. They seized two or three of the canoes, and paddled silently and swiftly across the intervening space of water to the yacht's side.

Very fortunately I was able to get in one of the canoes, too—and Sir Montie Tregellis-West, and Tommy Watson were with me.

The great bulk of the vessel completely hid our movements. The Indians were surrounded by the flaring torches. It was really impossible for them to see anything beyond that great circle of flaring light.

And, being intoxicated, they were too excited to keep any watch. They apparently considered themselves quite safe from any attack, and they were proceeding with their orgy with unrestricted violence and insanity.

Our task, therefore, was not such a difficult one, after all. We climbed on board the yacht without our presence being known to the Indians. And, once upon the deck, I felt absolutely secure. I wanted to shout with joy at being once more on the planks of the good old steam yacht.

Nelson Lee, who was on the deck, turned to us as we mounted the accommodation ladder.

"I should advise you boys to remain well in the background," he said in a low voice. "There might be some danger—these Indians are probably armed with poisoned arrows, and I cannot afford to let you undergo any

risks. So you must remain well in cover, my lads!"

"Leave it to me, sir," I said softly. "I'll see that we come to no harm!"

Nelson Lee nodded, and crept forward, to the other rail of the vessel. From this point of vantage he could gaze right across the water to the bank of the stream where the scene was being enacted.

"We'll remain in cover—I don't think!" I murmured to my chums. "We're going to find a place where we can watch everything, my sons—and we're going to join in the tussle, if we can possibly find a way. I wouldn't miss this for anything!"

"Rather not!" said Tommy Watson.

"Dear old boys, I am ready to help in any way I can!" said Sir Montie.

"But, really, I don't see what we can do. And, if it comes to that, I don't see what Mr. Lee can do, either!"

"You'll see soon," I said. "The gov'nor's got some scheme in his head."

We crept along the yacht's decks until we were well forward. And then, crouching low, we at last arrived at the rail. And there we stood, watching the scene.

The Indians were now yelling more fiercely than before. They were dancing in a mad, frenzied kind of way. The torches were blazing and smoking, and the whole scene was positively revolting.

I could not help feeling sorry for Captain Snagg, Mr. Cradley, and the others. There they were, tied to the top of those great posts. They were secured in such a way that it was impossible for them to move. And, beneath them, lay piles of brushwood—all ready to be ignited when the savage Indians took it into their heads to burn their victims.

And, even as we watched, we saw something which brought a gasp to our throats. For several of the Indians were tearing down some of the torches, and they were now rushing down to-

wards the centre of the clearing, brandishing the torches above their heads, dancing and shouting at the tops of their voices. Their intentions were obvious.

"Dear old boys—they're goin' to set fire to those piles of twigs now!" exclaimed Sir Montie, in a husky voice. "We're too late—we can do nothin'! Oh, begad!"

Tommy Watson clenched his fists. "We must do something—we must do something!" he exclaimed desperately.

"We can't do anything, Tommy," I put in. "We can simply stand here and watch; but I can't believe that the gov'nor will remain idle, too. Look! They are getting ready!"

Rather to our relief, the Indians were not setting fire to the bonfires yet. They were dancing about, and the torches were being waved up and down and round, sending sparks out by the myriad. It was evidently a kind of final frenzy before the victims were put to death.

But Captain Snagg and his companions were in ghastly peril. At any moment those fires might be lighted.

And then, just as I was beginning to think it was all up for Snagg & Co., I felt a faint throbbing in the deck of the yacht.

"What—what on earth can that be?" I asked, in a husky whisper. "Don't you feel it, you chaps?"

"That—that throbbing?" whispered Watson.

"Yes!"

"Dear old boy, I'm puzzled!" murmured Sir Montie. "I felt it a moment or two ago, an' I have been wonderin'—"

"By Jingo! I've got it!" I exclaimed. "Don't you remember?"

"Remember what?" asked Watson. "The engines can't have started yet, you ass! It takes hours to light the furnaces—"

"But it doesn't take hours to set a petrol motor going!" I broke in. "Just—"

one turn of the handle, and there you are! The fire hoses are operated by a special engine—a petrol engine down below. I wouldn't mind betting anything you like that Mr. McNab has got busy on the job, and the idea is to put the fire hose into operation!"

"Begad!"

"My only hat! What a scheme!" said Watson. "Why, even if they set fire to that brushwood, it might be possible to put it out——"

"Exactly!" I exclaimed. "That's the wheeze, I expect. There you are—what did I tell you?"

I pointed along the deck, and there we saw several figures struggling up from one of the hatchways with a couple of strong hose pipes. They were rushed to the rail, and they were held in position, ready. Nelson Lee was in charge of one, Lord Dorrifmore in charge of the other.

And, just at that moment, the thing we expected took place. The Indians rushed forward with their torches, and they thrust them deep into the masses of brushwood.

"Look!" gasped Watson. "Oh, my goodness!"

At first only smoke appeared from those piles of wood, but we knew that at any moment they would burst into flame—and then——

I waited and watched, wondering if the gov'nor would act in time; and across the water came the sound of voices—English-speaking voices.

"You curs—you infernal devils!" roared the voice of Captain Snugg, hoarse and shrill with fury and desperation. "This is murder! You'll be made to pay for this——"

"What's the good, captain—what's the good of talking?" came the voice of Cradley. "We've got to stand it—and it won't do any good to rave!"

"Well spoken!" I muttered. "I didn't think those rollers had enough pluck! They're taking their medicine like men!"

Even as I was speaking, the piles of brushwood under three of these stakes

burst into flame—not big flames, but slow, licking tongues of fire, which crept up the posts towards the victims who were bound above.

And, simultaneously, came a hissing roar near by, and we saw two great streams of water come hurtling out from the yacht's side.

The hoses were powerful, and those streams of water went right across the intervening space, right into the clearing.

Swish! Swish!

The columns of water struck two or three groups of the yelling Indians, knocking them flying—yelling with fright now. The other Indians paused, turned round, and all stood still. They were taken by surprise, and they hardly knew what to do.

And those streams of water went splashing on to the burning wood, extinguishing the fires almost at once. The white men had hardly been scorched.

And then pandemonium reigned.

The fires were put out, and the six victims tied to the wooden stakes were saved—for the time being. Those columns of water from the hoses were now being played upon the Indians themselves, and the savage beggars did not appear to like the experience. They rushed about, shrieking and shouting and in a state of panic. Many of the torches were still burning, and we could see everything that was happening.

"Hurrah!" roared Handforth, rushing across the deck. "That's the stuff to give 'em, sir!"

I heaved a little sigh of relief, for Handforth's voice told me a lot. I knew that the ladies and the girls were on board, since the juniors were not due to come until afterwards.

Within a moment or two I discovered that almost every member of the party had been brought—only three canoe loads remained, and these were even now on their way over the water to the yacht's side. They would certainly

arrive before any attack could be made by the Indians.

For it was certain that the Indians would show some resistance.

It was not likely that such a great horde of savages would stand by and accept defeat without a scrap. The brutes did not lose much time.

Having got over their first surprise, and having realised fully that they had enemies to contend with, they set to work. Bows and arrows were produced from seemingly nowhere, and the natives released flights of their deadly weapons almost at once.

The arrows came hurtling against the yacht's side, some falling on deck. Everybody was ordered to take cover, for the arrows were poisoned, and one touch would probably mean death.

Fortunately, the aim of the Indians was very wild. They were intoxicated, and they hardly knew what they were doing in their excitement. The greater part of their arrows went completely astray, and either flew harmlessly overhead, or smashed against the yacht's side.

Rifles had been brought up from below—rifles in plenty, with enough ammunition to last for twenty-four hours, if necessary, and a raging fire was poured into the ranks of the Indians.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

The rifles spat out viciously, and a hail of bullets was sent across into the savage horde. The range was short, and it was almost impossible to miss. Many of the Indians went down, shrieking and yelling.

The girls, of course, were safe below.

The battle raged fiercely, but it did not last long. Everything was in our favour—we held the yacht, and two dozen men were firing repeater rifles as fast as they could load them with cartridges. The Indians were falling in dozens, and their companions were not long in getting into a terrific panic.

We were very pleased to see that Captain Snag and his men were un-

molested. They were still tied helplessly to the stakes, but they were in no danger now, for the fires were extinguished, and the Indians themselves did not seem to take any notice whatever of their late victims. They were too excited concerning the battle that they had apparently forgotten their original purpose.

A good many of the savages charged down into the water, and got into their canoes. Then they came storming towards the yacht, yelling, screaming, and defiant.

But they were soon taught a lesson.

Not one of the canoes was allowed to get within fifty feet of the yacht. A deadly fire was poured into the frail crafts, and a good many of the Indians fell writhing into the water—never to rise again.

The battle, as I have said, was short and sharp, but it was quite exciting enough while it lasted.

Finally, after finding that it was absolutely impossible to get anywhere near the yacht, the remaining canoes sped off down the stream, their occupants thoroughly scared, and their only thought was to get as far away as possible.

Those Indians who had remained on the shore were also seized with panic, and they fled into the forest. And the only Indians who remained on the scene were the dead and the wounded.

"I think that's about settled their hash, old man," remarked Lord Dorrimore complacently. "They've all scooted, I think—the whole job lot!"

"I think luck has been with us, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "We are distinctly fortunate in getting out of the battle without a single casualty. So far as I know, nobody on board the yacht has been hit."

"That's not very surprisin'," said Dorrie. "Those Indians were so drunk that they couldn't see straight, you know."

"The affair is over," said Nelson Lee, "and I think we may send a party ashore at once."

"That's the idea!" said Lord Dorrimore briskly.

And, without any further delay, a party was got ready to go ashore, in order to cut down the victims.

CHAPTER 28.

Homeward Bound!

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST adjusted his pince-nez.

"It's rather a peculiar position, when one comes to think of it, dear old boys," he remarked. "We've just been savin' the lives of Captain Snagg an' his confederates—an' only a few days ago they were hand-in-glove with the Comte de Plessigny, an' they were all plannin' to get us put out of the way for good."

"It's a case of returning good for evil, Montie," I remarked. "And, in any case, I don't suppose Captain Snagg had much to do with our former misfortunes. It was the count who planned everything, and Snagg and his men simply carried out orders. In any case, we shall probably hear the truth soon."

Quite a large party had gone ashore, including Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore, Dr. Brett, Colonel Kerrigan, and others. Everybody was armed to the teeth, for it was quite possible that some of the Indians were lurking in the bush a little way back.

But this did not seem to be the case.

After the party had landed, Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore led the way from the river bank towards the spot where the six great stakes were thrust into the ground. Everything was still and quiet—a strange contrast to the tremendous din which had been proceeding so shortly before.

"I think the beggars have gone," remarked Dorrie. "We scared the life out of them, and now they've cleared off for good, in my opinion. At the same time, it will be just as well to cut down these fellows and get them

on board the yacht without any waste of time."

"That is my idea exactly," said Nelson Lee. "One cannot be too sure with these savages, Dorrie. On the yacht we shall be quite safe, since it will be possible to keep a strict guard, and we can defend the vessel with comparative ease."

The light was not very bright now, for many of the torches were burning themselves out, and others were mere smouldering stumps.

Nelson Lee and Dorrie approached the stake on the extreme left side—the stake upon which Captain Snagg was securely tied. He looked down at them with a strange light in his eyes as they approached.

"Thank heaven you came in time, sir!" exclaimed the captain, in a subdued voice. "I thought it was all up with us. By gosh! It was a wonderful relief, sir, when those hoses got into play!"

"We apparently arrived at the right moment, Captain Snagg!" said Nelson Lee grimly. "Probably you were extremely astonished to see us—since you imagined that we were quite helpless a good many hundreds of miles away. But your employer, the count, was somewhat unfortunate in his scheming: his plans did not work out as they were intended to work out."

"I reckon I'd like a word with you, sir, as soon as I get down from this fix," said Captain Snagg. "Mind you, I ain't going to try to excuse myself in any way. I know I'm in for trouble now. But I deserve it. And I'm grateful, sir—I'm grateful for being saved from a death that would have been ghastly."

It was not long before Captain Snagg was cut down, and then the others were released, too.

Captain Snagg was as hard as nails, and he had passed through the ordeal without showing much effect. Cradley, his mate, was looking rather exhausted. The other men were natives of Brazil,

Two of them were unconscious; sheer terror had overtaken them, and they had swooned. The other two were like a couple of children—sobbing and whimpering and trembling from head to foot with the shock of it all.

"Now then—now then!" exclaimed Captain Snagg. "Pull yourselves together! There's no danger now, and there's no reason why you should act like babies. It was a bit of a stiff ordeal, I know; but it's not the first narrow shave I've had with cannibals!"

"They will be all right presently, Snagg," said Nelson Lee. "I should advise you to bring them on board the yacht as soon as you possibly can. There is a risk that the Indians may return, and we do not want to give them any chance of hurling their poisoned arrows at us from the cover of those trees."

The captain nodded.

"That's right enough, sir. These Indians are treacherous brutes, at the best," he said. "Some of them—farther down the river—are decent enough, but these up here are regular devils! By thunder! We're grateful—we're so grateful that we can't express our thanks enough. You saved us from a terrible death!"

"I thought it was all up with us!" muttered Cradley. "That fire was alight, and the flames were leaping up towards my feet—"

"All right, forget it," said Nelson Lee. "That's the best thing to do."

The men were transferred to the yacht as soon as possible, and then Captain Snagg thrust out his hand towards Lord Dorrimore.

"I don't suppose you'll take it, sir, but I mean it!" he said quietly. "I've been a skunk! But you saved my life, and I'd like to thank you!"

Dorrie took the captain's fist at once.

"That's all right, old man," he said. "I'm not the kind of fellow to bear malice. We come along an' sow you in difficulties, so we lent a hand—that's

all! There's no need to make a fuss about it!"

Captain Snagg seemed to swallow something.

"I reckon this has been a lesson to me that I shan't forget for the rest of my life, sir!" he exclaimed. "After you have taken us down the river and given us over into the hands of the authorities, I shall have time to think about it all, and I shall never cease to be grateful."

"After I've handed you over to the authorities—eh?" said Dorrie.

"Yes, sir; we expect that," said Snagg. "After what we did the other day—after we attacked your yacht, and acted like the pirates we are, it's only right to expect that you'll hand us over to the authorities. It was that count fellow who drove us on to it. He paid us well, and he led us to understand that you and your crowd were a set of rogues. I'm not trying to excuse myself, sir—nothing I can say will do that. After the way we treated you, it would have been only right if you had left us to die. But you didn't do that. You came to our rescue at considerable risk to yourselves—"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Lord Dorrimore. "There was hardly any risk attached to it, man. By the way, what has become of your own steam launch, the Sunbeam?"

"She is some way down the river, sir, moored against the bank."

"Anybody on board?" asked Dorrie.

"No, sir."

"What do you propose to do about her?"

The captain shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, sir, it's hardly a question of what I propose to do," he exclaimed. "I reckon we've forfeited all right to set foot on that vessel again. I've done wrong—a darn lot of wrong—but I am very thankful that nobody has come to any real harm, and that that scoundrel has been beaten by you. And if there's anything I can do, sir, to prove

my gratitude, I'll do it. Just say the word, sir, and I'm your man!"

"And I'm another, sir!" put in Mr. Cradley stoutly.

Lord Dorrimore grinned.

"Well, you don't seem to be such bad sorts, after all," he said. "I'll tell you what I'll do. You can remain on board this vessel for the night. I reckon you can do with a good sleep. Then, in the morning, you have my full permission to get back to your own launch, and to go about your own business."

Captain Snagg stared.

"Why, sir, do you mean that you're going to let us go?" he inquired.

"Exactly!"

"But—but we acted like pirates——"

"So you said before," interrupted Lord Dorrimore. "However, this little affair now has made a difference. I'm not a vindictive fellow, and everything has turned out all right. You can get back to your own boat in the morning, and the authorities will never know anything about the affair."

"By thunder!" exclaimed Captain Snagg. "You're a brick, sir! You're a real white man!"

"We—we don't deserve it, sir" put in Cradley, in a low voice.

Dorrie nodded.

"Quite true, you don't!" he agreed calmly. "You deserve something far more drastic. But we don't all get what we deserve in this world. I'm willin' to overlook your villainy, and there's an end to the matter. You'd better get below as soon as you can, an' find some grub. Possibly you're hungry. I have already detailed one of the stewards to look after you."

Captain Snagg and his men were altogether too overcome with gratitude to say much. They had expected to be put in irons and handed over to the authorities at Manao. And, instead, they were to be allowed to go free, and return to their own vessel.

We all slept like tops that night, and it was a supreme joy to be in cabins

once more, with clean sheets, blankets, and with every modern luxury and convenience.

"After all, my dear boys, this is better than bein' in El Dorado!" remarked Sir Montie Tregellis-West, as he lay luxuriously back on his soft cushion. "It was quite decent bein' among the Arzacs for a time, but I don't think I should fancy it for good, begad!"

"Rather not!" said Tommy Watson. "We've got back to civilisation, and soon we shall be once more upon the Amazon itself, and then we shall steam down the river out into the Atlantic, and then for home."

"Home!" I echoed. "Home and—St. Frank's!"

"Dear old boy, please don't!" exclaimed Sir Montie. "Don't bring St. Frank's into it now. It reminds me that we've got to go back to work—to the new term, you know. I wonder if we shall arrive in time?"

"I reckon we shall just about do it," I said. "Well, that's all the better. We've had a summer holiday crammed full of interest and excitement from beginning to end, and we've had really nothing to complain of. Dangers, mysteries, wonders, and goodness knows what else, all packed into these few weeks!"

And so we went to sleep peacefully, and with perfect comfort. And in the morning we arose to find the sun shining delightful. Captain Snagg, Cradley, and the other four men had already departed, and we were not likely to see them again. But I had an idea that they were converted—they would not be likely to undertake any shady work again. Lord Dorrimore's treatment of them had taught them a lesson which they were not likely to forget.

We didn't make a move that day. We simply look it easy, lolling about the decks, discussing our recent adventures, and enjoying ourselves generally.

Of course, all the members of the yacht's crew were extremely busy. They had not worked so hard since they had left British shores. The yacht was being cleaned and put into perfect trim for the return trip.

When evening came, the good old Wanderer was spick and span from stem to stern, steam was up, and she was ready to drop down the river at any moment.

In fact, everything was all serene. Our party was intact, and our mission had been successful. Colonel Kerrigan was in our midst, and he would return to England with us, there to tell his wonderful story.

A huge feast of rejoicing was held that night, and Patsy Little covered himself with glory. He demolished more grub than he had ever demolished before in the same space of time.

The girls were lighthearted and joyous. We had dances, singing, games, and goodness knows what else. We all enjoyed ourselves so much that when we retired to our cabins we were thoroughly tired out. And we knew that in the morning we should start on our trip down the river. We should be homeward bound before another twenty-four hours had elapsed. We were leaving the land of mystery behind us, and we were booked for St. Frank's.

At the end of the evening, when a good many of the juniors collected together, there was some discussion concerning the Comte de Plessigny. Had he escaped? Or was the count dead?

"Personally, I think the count died," said Handforth. "Don't you remember how we saw the airship tilt up in that sudden storm? I wouldn't mind betting anything you like that the airship came down in the swamp, or in the thick forest, and the rotter was killed. In any case, we're not likely to see or hear of him again."

"That's just about my opinion," said Reginald Pitt. "There's no reason

why we should talk about the count. We've finished with him. Rats to the count!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I've been thinking about the Arzacs and El Dorado," said Jack Grey seriously. "It makes me feel a bit rotten, you know. Those Arzacs are quite decent people, peaceful and kindly and good-natured. It seems a rotten shame, the way the city was smashed up by that earthquake. I only hope that the place was not entirely demolished."

I shook my head.

"It's really impossible for us to form any opinion, Grey," I said. "We don't know what happened after we left the country. When we took our departure we were in a tremendous hurry, and the volcano began erupting far worse. Earthquakes were happening, too, and for all we know the entire city might have been demolished, and the whole race of Arzacs obliterated."

"How awful!" said McClure.

"Terrible!" echoed Church. "It makes me feel rotten, you know. And all that gold, too! Think of it—thousands and thousands of tons of pure gold! I wonder if any of it will ever be recovered?"

"You can bet your boots there will be plenty of efforts made to find it!" I said. "But when we get back to England, Colonel Kerrigan will refuse to give the locality of this El Dorado. For it would mean that hundreds of expeditions would start out at once, all with the object of getting that gold. Still, it's no good talking about those things now. We have finished with El Dorado, and we are now back on board the yacht. It all seems like a strange dream, a kind of nightmare. The best thing we can do is to go to bed and think only of the future."

"That's the ticket!" said Handforth. "And to-morrow we shall be en route for England—for St. Frank's!"

CHAPTER 21.

The Return of the Wanderer!

ENGLAND!

The Wanderer was steaming up the Channel, and there, not far distant, lay the shores of old England. They were a welcome sight to the members of the party who had just returned from tropical climes to the old country. The promenade deck of the yacht was lined with juniors and with the others. They were all delighted to find themselves so near to home once more.

"Isn't it great?" exclaimed Handforth, looking round with gleaming eyes. "My hat! It's jolly decent to go away for the summer holidays—to go out into foreign places—but it's top-hole to come back again! It will be a rare treat to see London once again."

"Rather!" said McGuire.

"We'll have a fine old time!" put in Church.

"I don't know so much about that," I said. "You fellows seem to forget that this is the first day of term at St. Frank's. We shall be late in arriving, as it is. There won't be much time to spare when we get to London."

"Why, we're not all going straight to St. Frank's, are we?" asked De Valeria.

"Well, not at once, of course," I said. "The gov'nor will arrange everything with Dr. Stafford, and we shall probably arrive at St. Frank's about three or four days late. That will give us all a day or two at home before getting back to school for the new term."

"By Jingo!" exclaimed Somerton. "It doesn't seem possible that we have met with so many startling adventures. Now that we're back in English waters again, I can hardly believe that we actually went to El Dorado, and that we were prisoners in the hands of the Azacs, and that we were in the thick of that tremendous fight on the city walls. It seems like an episode out of an imaginative adventure story, and not a slice of real life!"

"Yes, it wants a bit of swallowing," I agreed. "Well, we did go through all those adventures, and everybody in England will soon be talking about it. We shall be famous—our names will be broadcast all over the world!"

"Good!" said Handforth. "I suppose they'll mention me?"

"Well, it's just possible—if one of the reporters happens to forget himself," I remarked calmly. "But it's not likely that we shall figure much in the reports, Handy. We shall simply be mentioned as a crowd of juniors from St. Frank's. The people who will receive all the public attention will be Lord Dorrmore, Mr. Lee, Colonel Kerrigan."

"To say nothing of the Comte de Flessigny!" put in Tommy Watson.

"Oh, yes, he'll come in for a good bit of publicity, I've no doubt," I agreed. "And I wouldn't mind betting that the public won't swallow our story, you know. They'll think we've made three-parts of it up, particularly as El Dorado has been demolished."

"I hear that Colonel Kerrigan intends to go all over the country, lecturing," put in Reginald Pitt. "That's rather a decent idea, you know—and he'll make a good bit of money out of it, too. Rather more money than T. T. will, I imagine!" he added, with a chuckle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

We all joined in the laugh. For Timothy Tucker, of the Remove, had been very little in evidence during the journey home. He had stuck tight to his cabin, and after some little time we had discovered that T. T. was busily preparing a large number of lectures. And these lectures, he declared, he intended giving when he arrived back at St. Frank's. It was his idea to delight all the other members of the various Forms by recounting our adventures from the start. But it was very doubtful whether Tucker would get any audiences.

Nelson Lee came strolling along the deck, and he smiled at us.

"Well, boys, we're near home once again!" he exclaimed. "By the way, within a very short time we shall be passing Calstowe."

"Calstowe!"

"Oh, ripping!"

"When shall we sight the sea town, sir?"

"In about ten minutes time from now, I imagine, when we have turned that headland," said Nelson Lee. "Calstowe lies just beyond, and it would be rather interesting to look at it from the sea."

There was an immediate rush for the yacht's rail, for the juniors were all eager to catch a glimpse of the seaside town of Calstowe, which was situated only three miles from St. Frank's on the Sussex coast. We had been there many a time, particularly during the hot weather, for bathes. It was almost like home to the majority of the juniors, and they were eager to catch a glimpse of the place.

Just as Nelson Lee had said, soon after we passed the headland we came within sight of the little fishing town, with its small pier and its straggling houses along the promenade. Everything was familiar to us, and we gazed at Calstowe with a kind of affectionate regard.

And when we had passed by and were once more proceeding along the Channel towards the mouth of the Thames, the juniors were excitedly discussing what they would do when we arrived at Tilbury that evening.

But they need not have troubled to discuss the matter, for Lord Dorrimore had already made full and complete plans.

We had stopped for an hour or two at Weymouth, and from that town Lord Dorrimore had sent out a batch of telegrams, instructions for all sorts of people. And when we arrived in London we should find all sorts of things prepared for our reception.

I knew what the scheme was, and I was quite pleased about it. There

would be a kind of gathering of the clans in Lord Dorrimore's town house in Kensington. Parents would be there, brothers, sisters—in fact, any relatives who liked to come. And there would be a tremendous reception—feasting and merrymaking, and all the rest of it. Dorrie was preparing a welcome home for the party, and it was to be a gorgeous affair.

We arrived at Tilbury at just about seven o'clock in the evening, and it was a great moment when we stepped off the gangway on to the solid ground of old England once again. There was much cheering on the part of the juniors, and everybody was light-hearted and gay and happy.

We found a special train waiting for us, a train which had been ordered by Dorrie. It took the whole party straight up to London without a stop, and when we arrived at the terminus we found other surprises.

A whole fleet of motor-cars was waiting outside ready to take us all to Dorrie's town residence. That ride through London was one which was long remembered by us all.

It was a glorious evening, mild and fine, with hardly a breath of wind. Overhead the stars were gleaming, and the streets of London were a blaze of light.

We threaded our way through the City itself, then up Fleet Street, through the Strand, across Trafalgar Square, up Haymarket into Piccadilly Circus, and then straight on to Dorrie's place in Kensington.

And when we arrived we found the house blazing with light. Scores of people were there waiting for us.

Mr. Montie Tregellis-West's guardian was present, Handforth's pater, and many other parents were in evidence. Brothers and sisters galore, and all sorts of friends. It is quite impossible for me to go into full details regarding that wonderful evening.

All I know is that we enjoyed our-

selves tremendously, and that we were the heroes of the hour.

Reporters swarmed round the place like bees round a honey-pot. They would not be satisfied until they had interviewed Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore and Colonel Kerrigan. The Pressmen obtained a large amount of information, and they went off happy. In the morning it was quite obvious that the newspapers would come out with flaring headlines regarding the marvels of El Dorado and the other wonderful things we had discovered.

We all stayed the night in Dorrie's brown house, and then the next morning every member of the party—I mean the juniors and the girls—all went off to their various homes for a day or two before returning to St. Frank's. Nelson Lee and I remained with Dorrie, and we were glad of the short period of rest and quietness.

As I had guessed, the morning papers came out with very exciting stories concerning our trip up the Amazon and the Majarra. The whole of England was talking about us—the whole world, as a matter of fact, since the story was flashed over the cables to all quarters of the world.

Personally I was rather anxious to get back to St. Frank's. The new term had started and there was really no reason why we should remain away for long. Nelson Lee was required, being the Housemaster of the Ancient House, and the Remove, of course, would be rather bare with so many members absent. But all this would be altered within a few days, for it was agreed upon that we should return by a certain train on Wednesday morning.

It was now Monday, and all the fellows knew of the plan. We were to meet at Victoria at a fixed time, and then we should travel down to St. Frank's on the same train.

On the Tuesday Nelson Lee found time to visit his rooms in Gray's Inn Road, and everything there was in perfect order and spick and span, for Mrs.

Jones, our worthy housekeeper, had neglected nothing.

Nelson Lee and I spent a quiet day there.

Dorrie was with us in the evening, and he was as smiling and cheerful as ever.

"Back to school to-morrow—eh?" he exclaimed, patting me on the back. "Well, my lad, I dare say you'll have a quiet time now. Rather too quiet for me, though. I don't think I should fancy your job, Lee."

"I don't think you would, old man," smiled Nelson Lee. "I'll guarantee that you do not remain in England for long."

"Not likely, old chap!" said Lord Dorrimore. "London's a fine place, but it's too gaisy and dusty and uncivil for me. The English countryside is the

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finest place in the world when a fellow wants quietness and rest. But I want to be moving about all the time or I shall go rusty. That's me all over, as you know. If I sit still for long I grow irritable and nasty tempered, and generally crochety. I don't suppose I shall be in England for more than a fortnight, at the most!"

"Sure you can stay as long as that?" I chuckled.

"As a matter of fact, I've been looking up some rather interesting details concernin' a region of Africa where there is some rippin' elephant hunting to be had," said his lordship. "Umlooi is quite keen on the trip, mainly because he wants to get back to his own country. I'm keen on elephant huntin', too, and a spell of that kind of sport would suit me down to the ground. So in about a fortnight's time Umlooi an' I will pack our trunks and we'll set out for Africa."

"I thought you'd do something of that kind, Dorrie," chuckled Lee. "You're the most restless beggar I've ever come across in all my life. If you return from this trip in one whole piece I shall be surprised. Every time you go out into the wilds I never expect to see you again. And yet you always turn up, like a bad penny!"

"That's just the way of the world," said Dorrie, lighting a cigarette.

He was quite keen about this trip to Africa. Having just got back from the most exciting trip of his life, he wanted to go straight off elephant hunting! It was just like Dorrie more.

We bade him good-bye that night, and we also bade Umlooi good-bye. The giant Kutana chief was very solemn, and he expressed an earnest wish that we should be able, at some future time, to come out to Africa and visit his own land, the land of the Kutanas. Umlooi promised us a welcome which would open our eyes.

The first thing in the morning—Wednesday morning—Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West arrived,

and we managed to go out on a little shopping expedition before turning up at Victoria in order to meet the other fellows. We were, in fact, just a little late, and we only arrived in time to get into the train as it was about to move out of the station.

However we managed it, and we were soon speeding on our way towards St. Frank's. All the juniors who had been in the holiday party were on that train, and it was rather good that we should arrive together, for we should cause a kind of sensation.

Of course, a good many of the juniors had written to their friends at St. Frank's, saying what time the train would arrive and giving all the other details. So it was fairly certain that a pretty decent crowd would be waiting on the little platform at Belton to give us a regular royal welcome.

I lolled back among the cushions in the compartment, and I regarded my chums with contentment.

"Back to St. Frank's!" I exclaimed. "Well, I'm rather glad of it; it'll be fine to get back to the old school again. The football season is just starting, and we're going to make things hum this season!"

"That's the idea!" said Handforth. "I've been thinking about football myself. If you like, Nipper, I'll be centre-forward——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Declined with thanks!" I grinned.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the giddy cackle about?" demanded Handforth. "If anybody can show me a better centre-forward than myself, I'll give him five bob!"

"Done!" said Pitt. "Here he is!" Pitt pointed to me.

"Five bob, please!" grinned Pitt.

"You—you silly ass!" said Handforth witheringly. "I'm ready to admit that Nipper is a jolly fine centre-forward—a first-class player, in fact. But if you say that Nipper is better than I am, I'll punch your nose! I can play centre-forward just as well as Nipper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, that's one way of singing your own praises!" grinned De. Valerie. "You're a great trumpet player, Handy—particularly when the trumpet happens to be your own!"

"You—you—"

"Now then, no squabbling!" I grinned. "Handy will be placed in his old position—where he is really good. He'll be goalkeeper."

Everybody was ready to admit that Handforth was not to be beaten at goal-keeping. He was a first-class custodian, and he knew it. But, although he was aware of this fact, he still cherished the idea that he would shine as centre-forward. And he was about the last fellow in the Remove whom I would select for such a position on the field.

However, it was hardly the time for us to discuss football, and I decided to leave such matters until later on—until we had settled down for a day or two. And we continued our journey to St. Frank's, happy, content, and with everything all serene.

We all expected that we should find life at the old school rather dull after the many excitements and perils we had passed through. But we did not know that very shortly after our arrival we should run up against a strange mystery. And it was to be a mystery which was to tax all Nelson Lee's ingenuity to unravel!

CHAPTER 22.

A Warm Welcome.

"HURRAH!"

"Here we are! Belton!"

"Jump out, you fellows—jump out!" roared Handforth. "I want to feel what the platform is like again!"

"By jingo! Isn't it great to be back again?"

"Rather!"

We all tumbled out on to the little platform, and then we became aware

of the fact that scores of juniors were waiting outside, in the little courtyard. They had probably been forbidden to come on the station, for they would have overflowed the little platform. They set up a terrific roar as soon as they saw us, and cheer after cheer rang out.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

The fellows yelled themselves hoarse, and when we passed through the booking office, and came out into the open, we received a bit of a surprise. Not only were there a large number of juniors, but a great many seniors, and practically half the village!

We were very much in the public eye—and this was mainly because of the startling accounts of our adventures which had been appearing in the newspapers. Every single member of the Remove was there, including the College House fellows, led by Christine and Co.

Then there were some members of the Fifth Form, and practically every fog in St. Frank's. Not only these, but Brewster and Co., of the River House School, were present, and we were surrounded by a jabbering, yelling mob. They pressed round us, yelling for information, and trying to shake our hands.

It was a welcome we had hardly expected.

"Good old Nipper!" roared Bob Christine, grabbing my fist. "By jingo! We're glad to see you back again!"

"Rather!"

"Hope you enjoyed yourself, old man!"

"Give us your fist, Nipper!"

"I think I require about two dozen," I grinned. "Well, you chaps, we're all delighted to be back, and it's fine to see you all again. We had some ripping adventures, and we've got lots of things to tell you."

"I should think you have," said Owen major. "We want to hear all about it—all the details, you know. We're not going to be satisfied with what we've seen in the newspapers."

"Rats!" put in Armstrong. "I don't believe what's been said in the newspapers! A lot of exaggerated piffle, that's what I call it! Giants nine feet high!" he sniffed. "Gold lying about by the ton! Prehistoric monsters! What utter rot!"

"Well, it happens to be true, you silly ass!" roared Handforth. "We saw it with our own eyes. I suppose you don't think we're all liars, do you?"

Armstrong stared.

"Do—do you mean to say that those newspaper reports are actually true?" he gasped.

"Of course they're true!"

"Well, my only hat!"

"True in every detail!" put in Tommy Watson. "And, what's more, the newspapers haven't told half! We can tell you all sorts of wonderful things we saw—and we're going to tell you, too; but first of all we want some tea!"

"Hear, hear!" said Fatty Little promptly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, we've had a long journey, and hardly a scrap of anything to eat on the way!" said Fatty. "Personally, I'm famished, and I'm not going to wait until we get to the school before I have anything to eat. There's a tuckshop in the village, and I propose——"

"You—you glutton!" said Handforth. "You can't eat anything else, after that terrific feed you had in the train—sandwiches, pork pies, tarts, jam puffs and goodness knows what else!"

"That was only a snack!" said Fatty.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Same old Fatty!" grinned Augustus Hart. "We thought he'd come back a bit thinner. We thought that the tropical climate would take some of his fat down, but we're wrong. He seems to be fatter than ever!"

"Good old Fatty!"

Somehow or other we managed to force our way through the crowd, and then we started on the journey through

the village to St. Frank's. The natives of Belton seemed to regard us as queer specimens from a bygone age—at least, they looked at us curiously. They stared and stared in the most solemn manner, and with an expression of awe. And behind us came all the little children of the village, shouting and making a terrific din.

The procession was a long one, headed by Christine and Co. and the other members of the Remove. It was a tremendously noisy affair, and in the bustle and excitement Fatty Little failed to break his journey at the tuckshop. He tried valiantly to get through the crowd, but he could not do so. And he was indignant during the remainder of the journey.

He informed several fellows near him that he would not be able to survive—that he would collapse in the lane before he arrived at the school. But those juniors behind him did not allow Fatty to collapse. They were quite ready to prod him up if he showed any sign of lagging.

And so, at last, we arrived at St. Frank's, at the dear old school. Everything was looking just the same as ever. Nothing had altered during the summer holidays, except that the grass had grown somewhat longer in the Triangle, and the trees were now beginning to look brown, and they were taking on their autumn coat.

Warren, the porter, was standing outside his lodge, and he regarded the whole procession with suspicion and disapproval. He guessed—and he was probably right—that there would be a good deal of work for him to do in the way of tidying up after the juniors had finished in the Triangle. Warren maintained that boys were simply born to cause other people work.

Before we reached the steps of the Ancient House, we were brought to a halt by the appearance of Mr. Crowell, the master of the Remove. A cheer went up at once from all the members of the holiday party, for this was the

first time we had seen Mr. Crowell for a great many weeks.

He had not been at St. Frank's during the term previous to our departure for Brazil. For Mr. Crowell had had a breakdown, and he had gone away for a complete change and a rest. Now, after the summer holidays, he had come back, looking as well as ever—in fact, better than ever—and quite robust and strong.

"I am extremely pleased to see you back again, my boys!" said the master of the Remove. "According to all the reports I hear, you have met with some extraordinary adventures, and it is extremely fortunate that you have all returned safe and sound. You must be thankful for your good luck!"

"We are, sir!"

"Rather!"

"And we're very pleased to see you back again, sir!"

"Thank you, my boys—thank you!" said Mr. Crowell. "I have no doubt that we shall get along very nicely together this term—that is, if you behave yourselves as you ought to. I dare say we shall soon settle down to the regular routine of things."

"Oh, rather, sir!" said Handforth. "We're going to be very good this term. We're not going to play any

japes; we're going to be good little boys generally!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suppose you mean me to take that remark as a joke, Handforth," smiled Mr. Crowell. "It would not be natural for you to refrain from japes, as you call them. However, I will not spoil your pleasure by remaining here any longer. You may, of course, do pretty much as you like for this evening. I shall turn a deaf ear to any noise I may hear coming from the juniors' studies and from the Common-room. It is an exceptional occasion."

"Good old Mr. Crowell!"

"Give him a cheer you chaps!"

"Hurrah!"

Mr. Crowell was quite flattered, and he retired into the Ancient House looking rather confused. He had not been cheered very often, and he was quite delighted to hear himself cheered now. He was quite popular and that little speech of his had made him more popular.

That evening tea parties were held in many studies in the Remove, and our adventures in the wilds of Brazil were told over and over again. It was likely to be some time before we should be allowed to forget our thrilling trip to the land of the white giants.

THE END



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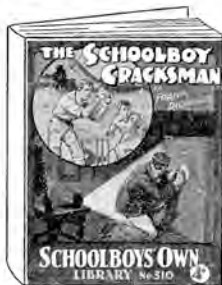
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