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The **PERIL** of
the **PACIFIC!**

A gripping long complete story of thrilling schoolboy adventure, featuring the chums of St. Frank's.

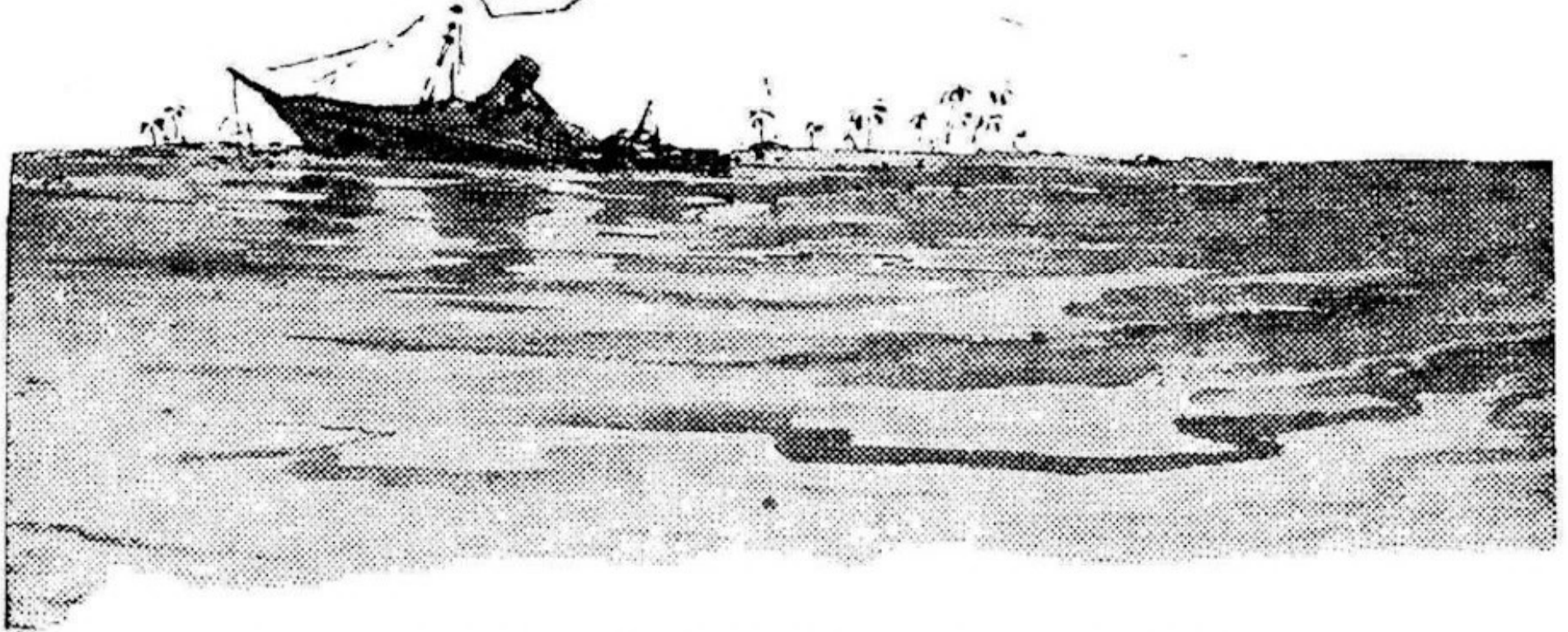
A GRAND LONG COMPLETE ADVENTURE YARN—

THE PERIL OF



—FEATURING THE CHEERY CHUMS OF ST. FRANK'S!

THE PACIFIC



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

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

A cyclone! A roaring cyclone, the like of which has not been experienced on the Pacific for years! Into one of these terrors of the seas drifts the School Ship, helpless owing to a smashed propeller. Escape seems impossible; the St. Frank's fellows are face to face with—death! This magnificent yarn will hold readers breathless; it will grip them from the first chapter. Start reading it now, chums.—ED.

CHAPTER 1.

Across the Pacific!

"**P**HEW! Feels like a storm brewing!" said Nipper, of the St. Frank's Remove. "Feels like a furnace to me!" panted Handforth, fanning himself. "Great Scott! This heat is enough to roast a chap!"

There were several Remove juniors leaning over the starboard rail of the promenade deck, where there was a certain amount of shade—but precious little air. Indeed, but for the motion of the ship, there would have been no breeze whatever, for a dead calm had descended over the ocean.

The St. Francis was churning steadily on her way across the Pacific, en route for England from New Zealand via the Panama Canal—a long voyage. The great School Ship was a fast boat, however, and she had been making splendid progress; and, according to the latest calculations, she would probably be in the canal within two or three days.

And since the vessel had been edging northwards throughout her trip, and since she was now approaching Panama, it naturally followed that she was almost on the Equator.

The voyage from Auckland to Panama was one of six thousand five hundred odd miles, and the greater part of this trip had been completed. The floating school had had a chance to get in some real hard work; and, indeed, Mr. Nelson Lee, the acting Head, was highly pleased with the efforts that the school had made.

But work of any strenuous kind had been difficult during the past week. For in this tropic zone the heat was devastating. It happened to be a half-holiday to-day, and everybody was glad of it, for the temperature was higher than ever.

"Rather a pity we missed going to Fiji and Samoa, and those other places," remarked Fulwood thoughtfully, as he joined the group against the rail. "A visit to some of the South Sea Islands would have made a break now and then. As it is, we've come on the direct route, and we've missed nearly everything."

"I think the wheeze is to get home as quickly as possible," said Nipper. "The school governors are getting impatient, I understand. Anyhow, I shan't be sorry to see old Sussex again."

"It'll be worth quids," said Tommy Watson breathlessly. "Better than this stifling heat, anyhow."

"We shall probably find it snowing!" breathed Handforth. "Oh, crumbs! Think of it! Snow!"

"A ripping thing to think about, Handy. I'll admit, but we're hardly liable to find any snow in Sussex so far into the spring," chuckled Nipper. "Still, the footer season won't be quite over, and we may have a game or two."

"Don't talk about it!" said Fullwood. "We've got days and days of this heat yet, and the only way to endure it is to forget it. Anybody coming below? It seems to cooler down there."

"Better stick here," said Nipper languidly. "I'm jiggered if I know how we're going to do our prep this evening. We shall melt if we try to sit down to work."

They gazed listlessly over the smooth, oily surface of the sea. They had been told to expect terrific heat in these latitudes, and so they were well prepared. To-day, however, had been exceptionally scorching. All wind had dropped during the morning, and the sun was a frightful orb of burning heat in the sky, sending its strength down upon the ship with incredible ferocity.

And as the day had proceeded the heat had grown worse, until now, in the afternoon, it was truly appalling. The air had become less clear. There was a kind of haze all about the ship, and it was elusive, too. Sometimes this haze seemed to be at a great distance.

"It's a rummy thing," said Stevens of the Fifth, as he paused near the Removites. "Sometimes I feel that I can't breathe properly."

Handforth started.

"I say, I've noticed that, too, but I thought it was my imagination," he said. "Now and again the air seems unbreathable. Not long ago I was fairly gasping."

"There's a storm coming right enough," said Nipper.

But Stevens shook his head.

"That's what I thought, but one of the officers just told me that the glass is as steady as a rock."

"You can't take much notice of thermometers," said Handforth disparagingly.

"I'm noticing it, anyhow," grinned Fullwood. "It's about a hundred and ten degrees in the shade just now."

"He didn't mean thermometer," said Church, in a listless voice. "He was talking about the barometer. You know how he gets things mixed up."

"I said barometer!" growled Handforth.

"We won't argue," said Church. "If the barometer's steady, there's not much chance of a change in the weather—worse luck!"

"Rot!" retorted Handforth. "As I was saying, barometers are unreliable. We've got one in the study at St. Frank's that always points to rain when it's fine."

Stevens grinned.

"My poor fish!" he said sympathetically. "At sea they use barometers—not toys! That thing in your study is only an imitation. I dare say you've been monkeying with it, and pouring treacle into the works."

And Stevens strolled away, drooping like a dying flower.

"Look over there!" said Nipper, pointing.

The others gazed into the sky. There was a peculiarly dull, unnatural glare in the heavens—almost brick-red. Yet it wasn't really apparent until one actually looked at it.

"Rummy!" said Fullwood, frowning. "Where is it?"

"In the sky, fathead!" said Handforth.

"But it seems nearer than the sky."

"Eh?"

"I mean, it's sort of between the sky and us," said Fullwood, still looking.

"You're dotty!" grunted Handforth.

"How near is the sky, anyway? The sky starts directly overhead, doesn't it?"

Nipper sagged over the rail.

"Why argue?" he asked limply. "Who cares where the sky starts? My only hat! I've never known such a chap for arguing."

"What-ho! Life-savers, laddies!" said Archie Glenthorne, staggering into view from behind a doorway, where he had been reclining full length in a deck-chair.

He had spotted a steward coming along, bearing a large tray full of iced drinks. Throughout the afternoon Archie had had no energy whatever, but he had plenty now.

So had Handforth. He barged up, slipped, and crashed into the steward. The drinks went flying in all directions, a stream of liquid shot over Archie Glenthorne's spotless flannels.

"Help!" gurgled Archie. "S O S Dash you, Handy, can't you be dashed more careful?"

Handforth was looking about him in dismay. All the juniors, wild at the thought of losing their cooling drinks, were gazing at him ferociously.

"Sorry, you chaps!" gasped Handy. "I—I slipped—"

"It's all right, I'll soon get some more, sir," put in the steward, as cheerful as ever in spite of the fact that he had been drenched.

"Thanks awfully!" said Handforth. "If you don't I can see these chaps bumping me—"

"You're right, Handy!" said Nipper sternly.

The steward walked away, and within a few minutes he was back with another tray of drinks. The juniors swooped down on him—it was noticeable that Handforth was much more cautious in his movements this time—and the iced drinks vanished like magic.

"A dashed priceless sort of bracer," said Archie stoutly. "Laddie," he added to the steward, "kindly produce one of these miniature Polar regions every ten minutes. Dash it, this one is already absorbed, and I can feel it oozing out of my dashed pores! As for you, Handy—"

"My hat! What was that?" interrupted Church suddenly.

He stood listening, and the others looked at him in surprise.

"I didn't hear anything," said Handforth.

"Perhaps it was fancy," said Church. "But I thought I heard a kind of rumbling sound in the distance—almost like a growling."

"Better give him another iced drink!" said Fullwood. "He's wandering."

But Church stood staring out over the sea, convinced that his imagination had not been playing tricks with him. It was impossible, however, for him to be certain that he had really heard anything, because of the steady, rhythmic throbbing of the engines far below.

Nobody wanted any tea. Appetites were at a discount. The very idea of eating food seemed altogether too much of a fag. Archie was about the only fellow who insisted upon tea, but even he only wanted the liquid section of the meal. So far as Archie was concerned, a day without tea was a hollow mockery.

Everybody had hoped for some relief at sunset, but none came. The heat, on the contrary, seemed worse than ever—a close, burning oppressiveness which had a choking effect. Naturally, everybody went on deck, and the boat deck, under the open sky, was the most popular of all.

"Who says there's going to be a storm?" asked Boots of the Fourth. "Look at that sunset! That's no indication of dirty weather."

"Well, I wouldn't guarantee it," said Nipper. "It looks too bright—too glorious. We haven't seen a sunset like that during this trip, anyhow."

There was certainly something awe-inspiring about the sunset this evening. It was amazing in its bewildering glory. Every-

body turned out to see it. The whole surface of the sea was lit up in the most entrancing manner.

And, much to everybody's joy, a faint breeze began to spring up, although there were precious few cooling properties about it.

Even after the dusk had fallen completely there was still a curious reddish glow in the sky, which did not seem a part of the ordinary sunset. Without doubt there was something special about all this; and in spite of the knowledge that the glass was steady, lots of the fellows were uneasy.

They were particularly so when, after night had fallen, that strange red glow remained long after the normal sunset should have faded out of the sky.



CHAPTER 2.

The Alarm!

HOVE the ink across, Tommy!" said Nipper.

He and Watson and Tregellis-West were trying to do their prep. in Study C—or, to be more accurate, in Cabin C. But it was very much of a farce. Nobody had any energy.

"Let's chuck it up," said Tommy Watson rebelliously. "Hang it, they can't be down on us for skimping our prep. to-night! It isn't humanly possible to work."

Nipper looked thoughtful.

"Yet the old ship is ploughing on, isn't she?" he asked. "The engine-room staff is working, Tommy—and the cooks and the stewards, and all the officers. We should be in a nice mess if they skimmed *their* work, shouldn't we?"

Watson was somewhat abashed.

"Where's my Latin Grammar?" he grunted.

"You've bucked me up considerably, dear old boy," put in Sir Montie, unscrewing the cap of his fountain pen. "I was feelin' too frightfully fagged to do a thing—I was, really. But when I think of the poor chaps in the engine-room, I realise that this work of ours is nothing, begad!"

"The engine-room! Phew!" breathed Watson, fanning himself. "And if the engine-room's hot, what about the giddy stokehold! It's a wonder the men are still alive!"

Nipper grinned.

"I've been thinking it would be a good idea to pop down into the stokehold," he said. "The trouble is, it's out of bounds."

"Do you want to melt?" asked Watson, staring.

"No. I want to get cool."

"In the stokehold?"

"Wonderful place!" said Nipper. "You forget that this liner is an oil-burner. She's going at a good speed, and there's a con-

tinuous draught down in the stokeholds. It must be glorious!"

"Rats!" said Watson, with a grunt. "You're only trying to be funny. Let's get on with—"

He broke off, his eyes opening wide. For at that moment a curious shock was apparent. It wasn't so much a sound as a sensation, and all three boys lurched in their chairs.

"We've hit something!" shouted Nipper, leaping up.

Instantly the cabin began to throb—throb in the most alarming fashion. The very fittings creaked, and the floor positively thudded. Then abruptly it ceased. The engines had stopped.

"Begad!" breathed Sir Montie, dumb-founded.

"What's happened?" gasped Watson. "They've stopped the engines! We must have gone aground somewhere! Didn't you feel the jolt as we hit the rocks?"

"Steady," said Nipper. "There'd have been a bigger jolt than that if we had hit some rocks, Tommy. I don't suppose it's anything serious."

They became aware of a confused shouting outside, and when they rushed out they found crowds of juniors in the corridors, all rushing up to the decks, and everybody was yelling with excitement.

Prefects came along to maintain order, and masters put in an appearance, too.

"We've struck a reef!" Handforth was yelling. "What did I tell you chaps before we left Auckland? Didn't I say that we should probably go aground on a coral atoll?"

"We're not aground, you young donkey!" said Biggleswade, of the Sixth. "We're in mid-ocean, hundreds of miles from any land. So don't be so funny!"

"But we hit something!" wailed Gulliver. "I believe we're sinking! Why don't they lower the boats?"

"That's about enough of that!" snapped the prefect. "Any more of such nonsense, Gulliver, and I'll swish you!"

Everybody was soon on deck, and it had to be confessed that the great ship seemed secure enough. But it was an undeniable fact that the stopping of the engines was significant.

Out beyond the rails the night was as black as pitch, although every now and again a bluish glare blazed out in the gloom, apparently from nowhere.

"What's that?" asked Handforth, staring.

"Lightning, of course," said Gresham.

"But it can't be—there's no thunder."

Everybody was puzzled, although in the general excitement very little notice was taken of the phenomenon. Below, nobody had been aware of the glaring flashes, but out here on deck they were incapable of being ignored.

Just the lightning, and no thunder. Not a sound from the mysterious blackness of the tropic night—a blackness which seemed to enshroud the great ship as though in a gigantic blanket of pitch. There seemed to be no distance, for out beyond the rail there

was nothing. The keenest eye could discern no trace of the sky or the horizon.

And the engines remained still.

Presently rumours got round. The ship had certainly struck something. Not a rock, because the water was miles deep in this altitude. Besides, the ship was still afloat and on an even keel. The sounds of great activity could be heard from far astern. Men were going overside, down ropes and ladders, carrying glaring lights with them.

The school seethed with excitement and anticipation and bewilderment. To these emotions, too, there was added the uncertainty of it all—an uncertainty which amounted to suspense.

Clang-clang!

"That's the bell for Big Hall!" said Nipper eagerly.

"Hurrah!"

"They're going to tell us something!"

Seldom had the school been so eager to obey the summons. Seniors and juniors went crowding into the great lounge which served as Big Hall. And when a certain measure of order had been gained, Nelson Lee himself came on the platform.

"First of all, there's no need for any of you to be alarmed," he said amid a general hush.

"So far as can be ascertained at the moment, the hull of the ship has not been damaged."

"Hurrah!"

"But what happened, sir?"

"Yes, yes! What did we hit?"

"The captain has not been able to ascertain the exact nature of the obstacle that we struck, but there can be little doubt that it was a submerged derelict of some kind," replied Nelson Lee. "But for a most unfortunate mischance, we should have escaped damage altogether. Some of the wreckage fouled the port propeller, and it is reported that one of the blades has been wrenched off."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Then we're stranded!"

"That's what caused that terrific throbbing!"

"Repairs are being put into effect at once," continued Nelson Lee, "and there is every reason to hope that the propeller will be as good as ever again by this time to-morrow evening. You may dismiss now, and I should like you all to carry on just the same as though nothing had happened. There is, I repeat, absolutely no danger."

There was further cheering, and the school drifted out of Big Hall, the seniors and juniors breaking up into groups and distributing themselves over the decks.

"A smashed propeller, eh?" said Nipper. "By Jove! We're pretty lucky. It might have been lots worse."

"But why take twenty-four hours to repair a giddy propeller?" asked Handforth. "If it comes to that, why can't they take it off altogether and fit a spare one?"

"He thinks they keep propellers on shelves by the dozen!" grunted Church. "You silly ass! The propeller of a ship like this weighs tons and tons!"

"Draw it mild!" protested Handforth.

"Churchy isn't far wrong," said Nipper. "It'll be pretty good if they fit a new blade—and they'll work wonders if they complete the job by to-morrow evening."

It was noticed that the officers, whenever they showed themselves, were wearing harrassed expressions. In fact, they were so intensely worried—not one, but all of them—that Handforth finally buttonholed one of those gentlemen.

"I say, sir!" said Handforth eagerly.

"Sorry, young 'un—can't stop now!" said the officer.

"But look here, sir—was Mr. Lee spoofing us when he said there was no danger?" asked Handforth. "You're all looking so jolly scared that I've got an idea that we're leaking!"

"Rubbish!" said the officer, frowning. "We're not taking in a drop of water. It's the weather we're worried about, not the ship."

"The weather!" ejaculated Handforth. "But the barometer's steady!"

"So it may be, but there's dirty weather coming, or I'm no sailor!" grunted the officer. "In fact, it's my private opinion that we're in the track of a cyclone—and a cyclone, in these waters, is no picnic. Bad enough under steam, but crippled as we are—Well, it doesn't bear thinking about, that's all. I hope to Heaven they get those repairs done before it's on us."

And the officer moved on, leaving Handforth with plenty of food for thought.

CHAPTER 3.

The Approaching Cyclone!



IN all probability the officer had said more than he should have done, particularly to one of the junior

schoolboys. Nelson Lee would have been greatly upset had he known.

Handforth saw no reason to keep the matter to himself, and before long it was the general talk of the Junior Common-room. Everybody got hold of the dread word "cyclone," although to many it did not signify anything particularly awful.

"I've had my suspicions, too," said Nipper. "Ye gods and little fishes! A cyclone—in these waters! If it hits us we'll be helpless, we shall be in an awful mess!"

"But a cyclone can't hurt a ship like this!" said Tommy Watson, staring.

"A really serious cyclone is one of the greatest terrors of the tropical seas," said Nipper. "In the old days many a sailing ship, becalmed, was in very much the same position as we are. Nothing else to do but wait. In fact, we're worse off, because we haven't any sails to keep us steady, even when the storm does break. We're just a hulk."

"That's why the skipper and the officers are so worried," put in Russell. "If we were on our course, it wouldn't matter so much. But what the dickens will they do if a terrific storm breaks now? They can't start the engines because of the wonky propeller."

"Let's hope for the best," said Nipper. "In fact, we'd better get to bed, and stop talking about cyclones and hulks. I don't suppose there's anything to worry about, really."

"Look at that lightning!" said Watson.

"Why isn't there any thunder?" asked one of the juniors wonderingly.

They stood for some little time, watching and listening. At intervals the blackness was split by startlingly vivid flashes, and the curious thing about them was that they seemed to be within a few hundred feet of the great ship, not vaguely in the distance, as with most lightning; and there was no thunder—not the faintest sound!

Now that the engines had ceased their beat, there was nothing to be heard but the voices of the people on the decks, and the continuous "slap-slap" of the sea against the great ship's plates.

"It's the runniest lightning I've ever seen!" muttered Gresham. "Look at that flash! My only sainted aunt! It's—it's just like a lot of liquid fire pouring down from the sky into the sea. And it's only just out there!" he added, pointing. "We can almost reach it!"

"Listen!" said Church huskily. "It's all rot! There must be thunder somewhere. It's deceptive, I expect, and the lightning's probably miles and miles away. Let's listen for the thunder."

They waited, and although another staggeringly vivid flash blazed out a moment later, there wasn't the faintest sound to follow—until Nipper held up his finger for added silence.

"What's that?" he whispered. "Can't you hear it?"

They strained their ears. One or two of them thought that their imaginations were at work, but it certainly seemed that there was a weird, unearthly moaning sound coming from somewhere across the sea.

"Did you hear it?" asked Nipper.

"I'm jiggered if I know!" said Gresham. "It sounded like a kind of wailing, but it was so vague that—"

"A wailing!" put in Watson. "That's what I thought, too."

They listened again, but there was no repetition of the eerie sound; and even Nipper began to think that his fancy had played tricks with him.

Then bed-time bell clanged out, and a general move was made for the cabins. As it happened, Handforth & Co. were some of the last to go in. They were chatting with a deck-hand—an oldish man—who had served many years of his early life in sailing ships. He was a genial old soul, named Bowles, and he was a general favourite among the juniors.

"You can take it from me, young gents, that there's something dirty coming," he was saying. "It ain't for me to put the wind up ye, but I ain't bin afloat all my life for nothin'. There's some as say it's a cyclone, and I agree with 'em."

"You seem pretty scared about a cyclone," said Handforth wonderingly.

"Not scared, young gent, but worried," replied Bowles. "Fine shape we're in, ain't we, crippled like this, to ride out a cyclone? You don't know what them things are, and I 'opes we miss it."

Suddenly he stared out over the rail, and flung up an arm.

"Look ye at that!" he ejaculated. "Gosh!"

Handforth & Co, who were just preparing to go in, gazed in astonishment. It was lightning again, but differently this time. It seemed further away, and instead of the streaks of purple fire flickering from the sky to the sea, they appeared to be rising upwards—from the sea itself.

"Well, I'm dashed!" said Handforth. "That's rummy! The lightning's going up—not down!"

Bowles shook his head.

"I've only seen that once afore!" he said impressively. "It's what they call stalk lightning. You're lucky, young gents! Like as not, you'll never see such a sight again in all your lives! And look at that queerish red glare, too!"

"Where?"

"Not now," said the old salt. "Didn't ye see it when the lightnin' happened? A kind of lurid redness, along o' the stalk lightnin'. We're in for something big, young gents. No doubt of it!"

"When—to-night?" asked the three juniors, in one voice.

"I wouldn't say to-night, but before this time to-morrow night, anyhow," declared the old sailor. "Well, I won't keep ye. Good-night, young gents!"

He stumped off, and Handforth was inclined to disagree with his views.

"He's one of the old-fashioned sort," said Handy. "Full of suspicions and all that sort of stuff. Always talking about 'old hookers' and 'wind-jammers.' I was having a talk with him the other day, and he made me roar. His superstitions are positively funny."

Church shook his head.

"But he wasn't superstitious just now," he objected. "He was talking about something tangible—a cyclone. He's been through 'em before. If you ask me, we're in a dangerous fix."

"Rot!" said Handforth. "Let's get to bed!"

And before long they were in their cabin, trying to get to sleep. But, what with the heat, the general feeling of tension, and the unfamiliar silence of the great ship, sleep was difficult. Everybody had grown so accustomed to the incessant rhythmic throbbing of the vessel's engines that the silence was now akin to a real disturbance.

"Asleep yet, you chaps?" murmured Handforth, after about twenty minutes

"No," said his chums.

"Neither am I," said Edward Oswald. "Rummy how the water keeps slapping against the side, isn't it? Everything seems so jolly dead. By George! I never thought I'd miss the throb of the engines so much!"

"It's rotten!" said Church. "I can't sleep a wink!"

Yet within half an hour the chums of Study D were all sleeping soundly. Nature, after all, would not be denied. Most of the other juniors, although they told themselves that sleep was impossible, were soon off, too.

Clang-clang!

It seemed no time before the rising-bell sounded up and down the junior quarters. Everybody turned out, eager and refreshed, half-expecting that something dramatic would have developed in the night.

"It's cooler, anyhow," said Nipper. "Not much sun, either. And there's a slight breeze. Sea's getting up."

Nipper & Co. were some of the first on deck. There was, indeed, a fresh wind blowing, and to the inexperienced it seemed apparent that the centre of the approaching storm had missed the ship altogether.

But up on the bridge the captain and one or two of the officers were gazing anxiously and gravely into the north. Overhead, a mass of slow-moving clouds was driving down from the northward—and it was from that direction that the overnight mysterious wailing had sounded.

There was a strange, unnatural glare about the sun this morning, too!



CHAPTER 4.

The Devil from the North!

LD Bowles scratched his chin thoughtfully with the stem of his pipe.

"Looks rare bad," he said heavily. "That's what it does, young gents—looks rare bad! And I'm a man wot 'as sailed the seas since I was a kid. I knows the signs when I seem 'em."

A group of Removites and Fourth-Formers stood on the boat deck, where the old salt was busy with some gear. And the fellows had naturally asked him his opinion of the conditions.

"But we've escaped the storm, haven't we?" asked Church. "There's a wind blowing now, and—"

"Escaped the storm?" interrupted Bowles. "Why, don't you fool yourself, sir! We're right in the track of it."

"I've heard that the glass is still steady," said Gresham.

"I don't care nothin' about no glass," replied Bowles obstinately. "Them as like; can comfort themselves by takin' notice of the glass. But I've seen there 'ere signs afore. And with the ship fair crippled as she is, the



At sight of the cooling drinks, the perspiring juniors displayed remarkable energy. Handforth displayed too much, in fact. He went rushing forward, slipped, and crashed into the steward. That individual, totally unprepared for such tactics, allowed the tray to fall out of his grasp, and the drinks went streaming over Archie Glenthorne's spotless flannels.

prospect ain't any too healthy. Now if we was a trim clipper, it 'ud be different. A sight different! We'd simply take the fore and mizzen t'gallants off of 'er, and ride before the wind. But wot can we do with a mass of iron like this? A bit of metal goes bust, and we're as 'elpless as the old barque Sylvia when she was dismasted goin' round the 'Orn when I was a young feller. A near shave, that was."

"They're getting on with the repairs, anyhow," said Handforth. "The engineers are as busy as bees."

The old salt shook his head.

"They won't be busy for long," he said, casting his eye to the northward. "There's somethin' comin'—and soon. Just you wait, young gents. A reg'lar devil. That's wot's comin'!"

"Our little ray of sunshine!" grinned Nipper. "Cheerful, isn't he?"

Most of the fellows were feeling quite relieved this morning. The weather wasn't half as bad as they had expected. And it was quite true that the engineers were working at feverish speed—had been working all night, in fact. Heavy tackle had been rigged up over the stern, and men were labouring precariously as the great ship sluggishly dipped and rolled to the swell.

"There's something rummy about the sun this morning," said Handforth, as he shaded his eyes and looked up. "There seems to be such a glare. Look at it! A sort of reddish

look. I don't suppose it means anything, though."

Old Bowles made no comment, but his expression clearly showed that he held different views.

Breakfast-time arrived, and the ordinary routine of the ship went on without the slightest alteration. Morning lessons commenced as usual, and it was just as well that the school should be kept to its regular schedule. Work helped to take the mind off the threatening conditions.

During the morning it was noticed that the ship was rolling much more severely. At times, in the class-rooms, pens would go rolling off the desks, ink was splashed considerably. Once or twice some of the boys were even pitched out of their seats.

It was a relief when dismissal came, and, on deck, the released school found that the sea was beginning to look choppy and menacing. A strong wind was blowing, and the overhead scud was thicker. Great waves were dashing heavily and noisily against the starboard side of the motionless ship.

"Now there's trouble!" said Nipper, as he came along and joined a group of juniors who were leaning over the rail watching the sea. "They haven't finished the repairs, and work is held up. Sea's too rough. They can't do a thing until it quietsens down. Two men were nearly killed during the morning. Fell in, and were only rescued by luck."

"My only hat!"

"Then—then we're more helpless than ever!"

"Looks like it," said Nipper. "Anyhow, we've got to wait until the storm blows over. They can't do a thing until the sea quiets, and it looks like getting a lot worse."

By the afternoon a considerable gale was blowing, and although the school went in for lessons as usual, very little work was done.

Nelson Lee went up to the bridge more than once, and on each occasion he found the captain anxious and grave. The interruption of the repair work was far more serious than any of the boys realised.

"Look bad, eh?" asked Lee, towards late afternoon.

"Infernally bad, Mr. Lee," said the captain. "If this gale was the whole trouble it wouldn't matter so much. But it's only the beginning—the fringe. I believe we're in for something special."

"A real tropical cyclone, eh?"

"Just that," said the captain. "And I don't mind telling you, Mr. Lee, that I'm confoundedly worried. I daren't start the engines. With that propeller blade gone, and the repairs only a quarter done, we should soon shake her shaft right out. We're utterly helpless. A hulk. A cyclone would be serious enough under ordinary conditions, but without sail or steam to help us— Well, it looks ugly."

"There's—danger?"

"Man alive! What's the good of beating about the bush?" said the captain fiercely. "There is danger—terrible danger! If we get into the vortex of this coming cyclone there won't be much chance for us—not in our present condition. Every available man is now engaged upon making a sea-anchor. That might help us to keep her head to the weather. Without power, we haven't even got steerage way."

Nelson Lee knew that the skipper would never have spoken as frankly as this if he hadn't been enormously worried. Naturally, the "old man" was chiefly upset because of the mishap. It rendered him helpless. Fortunately there was no damage to the ship's hull; she was taking in no water.

"There's no getting away from it—there's a cyclonic storm knocking about," went on the captain, gazing into the north. "Up there," he added, nodding. "Overtaking us pretty rapidly, too. This breeze is nothing—just a mere breath. Keep your eye to the north, Mr. Lee, and you'll see something before long. And, by thunder, you'll hear something, too!"

"I have experienced a cyclone, and I know," said Nelson Lee quietly.

The boys, who had been expecting something dramatic to develop all day, were inclined to think that the storm had drifted off in some other direction. Evening came, and although the gale was powerful there was nothing terrifying about it. The ship rolled and pitched a great deal more than usual, owing to her stationary engines.

"There's going to be no cyclone," said Handforth confidently. "You can't fool me!

Thank goodness the weather's rough—it's a lot cooler. Cyclones develop quickly, and come rushing down on a ship without warning."

"You're thinking of a squall, dear old fellow," said Travers. "Personally, I'm not venturing any opinions, because my ignorance of tropical cyclones is colossal."

"Well, I wish it would come, and get it over!" said Church bluntly.

He voiced the opinion of many. The suspense was worse than the real thing.

Bed-time came again, and to-night the school slept soundly, most of the fellows believing that the morning would find the weather quieter. But soon after dawn, in the early hours, lots of seniors and juniors were awakened by the noisy breaking of the seas against the ship's side, and by the alarming roll.

Some of them turned out on deck to see how things were going. When Nipper arrived he found the sea very strange in appearance. It was not merely choppy, but it seemed to be running up into great piles. The effect was extraordinary. The sea continually went into heaps.

"What does it mean?" asked Tommy Watson huskily. "There's not half so much wind now, and yet the sea's worse. And look at the sky over there!"

Everybody was looking at the sky. It was a flaring orange colour, almost painful to look at, an awful glare. The sea, running grotesquely into heaps, seemed to reflect the glare, until the ship appeared to be surrounded by liquid fire.

"The captain must be expecting something nasty," said Nipper. "There's a big sea-anchor rigged up. Look at the bridge. All the officers are there."

This was true. The ship's officers were evidently more worried than ever, and they gazed continuously towards the north, where there was now an immense wall of black cloud.

It wasn't until breakfast-time that anything else happened. By then the whole school had been aroused, as usual, but nobody thought of answering the breakfast-bell. The general conditions were too ominous. That wall of black cloud had disappeared, and the sky was now changing its aspect with every minute—clouds forming suddenly, hurrying erratically, and then mysteriously vanishing. And that glare was even more intense.

Then suddenly the wind completely dropped. There had been a fierce squall for over half an hour, and it died out as though some great piece of machinery had been suddenly switched off.

"This is awful!" whispered Handforth.

Somehow it was difficult to speak in an ordinary tone. Everything was so hushed that a normal voice sounded harsh and noisy. Even the sea was joining in the general hush, and had miraculously quietened during the last five minutes. But the St. Francis was still rolling heavily, sluggishly, and the creaking of plates could be occasionally heard, protesting against this treatment.

Then the sea would burst out from its murmur and become a loud roar—only to die away again. At times a wave would crash with a noise like thunder against the vessel's broadside, sending spray straight up in a foamy, hissing column.

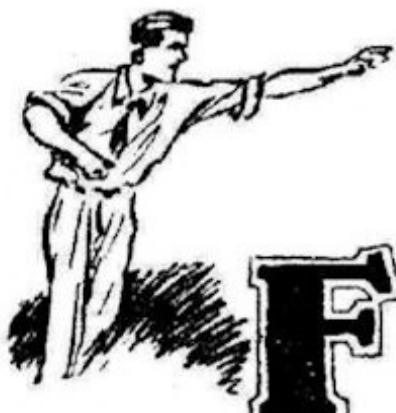
"What's that?" gasped Gresham suddenly.

Everybody heard it at the same moment—a tremendous booming sound, like an explosion, and it came from out of the north. Next instant it died away, leaving only a curious muttering growl.

"Thunder!" said Handforth, staring.

"That wasn't thunder!" said Nipper. "It was—different. By Jove! I believe it was the noise of the cyclone! It's coming, you chaps!"

And Nipper was right!



CHAPTER 5.

Stark Danger!

FENTON, of the Sixth, came running across the deck.

"Below—everybody!" he shouted

urgently. "Now, then, you juniors—look lively!"

Handforth turned, staring.

"Rats!" he protested. "We're not going below—"

"Don't argue!" broke in Fenton. "Head's orders! Everybody's got to get below. There might be danger."

"Well, if there is, we're ready to face it, dear old fellow," said Travers mildly. "Doesn't it seem beastly tame to dive below because there's a bit of danger?"

"It doesn't matter whether it's tame or not—orders are orders!" shouted Fenton. "Quick, now! You're wasting time."

Other prefects were hurrying here and there, issuing similar orders—and finding just as much difficulty in making the fellows obey. Everybody in general considered that the idea of getting below was idiotic. If there was something special to see, they wanted to see it.

However, Nelson Lee's orders were not only justified, but highly necessary. The cyclone was nearly on the point of bursting over the School Ship, and anything might happen during the next few minutes.

"What's that?" shouted Church abruptly.

He and a number of other Removites were crowding off the deck, in obedience to orders. But they paused. Mysteriously, vaguely, a strange whistling and shrieking sounded—as though coming from a great distance. The juniors turned, staring apprehensively over the starboard quarter.

"Look!" gasped Handforth, pointing.

It came—like a million yelling demons. One moment vague and distant, the next moment upon them. Everybody was so

stunned that they just stood helpless, their muscles and their very senses paralysed.

The whole sky, the entire atmosphere, was filled with a devastating YELL. It wasn't merely a shrill scream of wind, but an absolute yell. It drowned every other sound, and benumbed the senses. Some of the juniors, looking over at the sea, beheld the whole surface of the water literally torn up into the air. It was as though some gigantic suction apparatus had got to work. The sea became invisible in the masses of blinding spray. The screaming yell seemed to grow louder, and then the cyclone arrived.

The St. Francis, lying helpless, without power, and presenting an enormous bulk to the storm, heeled right over. It was a moment of stark peril, and nobody knew better than the skipper how possible it was for that great liner to be capsized during those first dread seconds. Anything was possible—and perhaps the most likely thing was that she would turn turtle.

"We're going over!" shouted Handforth.

But nobody heard him, and he seemed strangely isolated and remote from his fellow juniors—although they were crowding near him. In fact, they went slithering into heaps, thrown this way and that as the deck tilted and tilted further.

It was impossible to see anything. The air was filled with the flying spray, and everybody was drenched to the skin. There was complete confusion—utter bewilderment. Nipper, caught in the full fury of the wind, found himself beaten against a narrow iron stairway which led upwards to the next deck. He was held there as though by a vice—and it seemed to him that he was clamped, his very arms being pinned to the metalwork by the force of the wind.

The St. Francis went over, and further over, and even the captain believed that she could never recover. Then, with a sickening lurch, accompanied by the groaning of plates—which was only heard by those far below—she made an effort to right herself. Thousands of tons of water poured from her fore'deck; she lifted sluggishly at first, and then with a mighty, heaving jolt.

The first onslaught had been overcome; the School Ship was still afloat, and now she was riding the storm, head on!

The sea-anchor was helping—indeed, it was believed later that nothing but this contrivance had saved them from destruction.

A sea-anchor is a bulky object made of wood and canvas, manufactured from casks and similar materials, all firmly lashed together. This, attached to the ship by means of great hawsers, served as a brake, in addition to keeping her head to the wind. But for the steadying effect of this device, the vessel could never have ridden out the storm, for she was without power of any kind.

Striking that submerged derelict had been a singularly unfortunate mischance. For, while the vessel had received only superficial damage, she was now placed in a position of the utmost danger. Under steam, she could

very easily have got out of the track of the storm long before it overtook her.

Now, however, she was in a worse plight than an old-time sailing ship. Such a vessel, becalmed, would necessarily have waited until the storm broke, having no power to get out of the way. But once the wind came, she could at least have ridden before it, and with it. The *St. Francis* was not even able to do this. Sail-less and without steam, her only hope of winning through was to trust implicitly in her sea-anchor.

Now that the first awful onslaught was over, the storm settled down to a shouting, roaring tumult, the wind increased in violence, although the sea steadied somewhat, owing to the battering effects of the gale.

"Thank Heaven!" said Nelson Lee, as he found Mr. Stockdale near him. "I thought we should never come through that dreadful minute. But there's just a chance that we shall live through it now."

"I am bewildered—quite bewildered!" panted the Housemaster.

Lee left him in one of the wide corridors, clinging to the wall. Mr. Stockdale was an excellent schoolmaster, but he made no claim to being a sailor.

Nelson Lee found the prefects completing their interrupted task. The juniors were being herded below—and now they were only too willing to leave the spray-swept decks. Every one of them was drenched to the skin, and some were still stunned and deafened and more or less dazed.

There was a systematic roll-call, and Lee was very relieved when the news came that all were safe. Within the ship, all the doors being sealed and clamped, the tumult was not so frightful. It came in as a kind of half-subdued clamour. Up on the bridge, however, the wild screaming roar of the storm was monstrous and devastating. Yet the captain remained immovable, determined to stay on duty throughout the danger hours.

The decks were constantly swept by the masses of spray—and fore and aft there were thousands of tons of water constantly and continuously smashing down. Already much damage had been wrought—but none that affected the safety of the ship.

Breakfast was served under difficult conditions. For down in the saloons the movement was tremendous, the ship rocking and rolling alarmingly. No sooner were any liquids on the tables than they were swept off. And lessons, of course, were abandoned.

It would have been a waste of time to attempt to get any of the boys to devote themselves to work. Indeed, any kind of work would have been impossible; everybody was spending most of their time in clinging to the handiest object, in order to remain upright.

The wiser ones remained seated. Such fellows as Nipper and Travers and Handforth remained calm, although they were looking a bit haggard. Others were frankly and plainly terrified. Weaklings like

Hubbard and Teddy Long were wailing in fear, expecting the end at any moment.

"It's no good grumbling," said Handforth gruffly. "We're jolly lucky to be alive. The worst of the storm has hit us, and it'll be all over before the day is out."

"Let's hope so, anyway," said Church. "But I heard somebody saying that it might last for two or three days."

"Rats! Impossible!"

"Not so impossible, Handy," put in Nipper. "The trouble is, we're keeping with the storm all the time. These cyclones, you know, are huge things, covering hundreds and hundreds of miles. They move about bodily, quite apart from the circular movement. And we're going with it."

"What do you mean—circular movement?" asked Handforth. "And why are we going with it?"

"Because we can't get out of it, of course," said Nipper. "If we had the engines going, we could have avoided the storm altogether, and if only they were going now we might outstrip it. As it is, we've just got to wait and see what happens."

"But this circular movement—"

"My dear chap, you know what a cyclone is, don't you?" asked Nipper patiently. "It's whizzing round at a terrific rate—that's what's causing this wind now—and it's like an enormous whirlwind. And if we happen to get into the vortex of it—the centre—there won't be much hope."

"It'll be like the water going out of Saturday night's bath," said Travers whimsically. "Haven't you seen the way the water twists round and round as it goes out of the plug-hole, dear old fellow? Well, this is very much the same, only its hundreds of miles in size. And if we get in the middle of it, as Nipper says, there's going to be trouble."

Nobody believed that there was any such danger. That is to say, nobody among the schoolboys. But the captain and the older hands on board were full of doubts. To them it was inevitable that the ship would get caught in the vortex—and not many vessels, trapped in such a way, remain afloat to live another storm!



CHAPTER 6.

A Night of Terror!

WELL, it's not getting worse, and that's one comfort," said Tommy Watson.

It was nearly mid-day now, and throughout the morning the cyclone had roared and thundered. By this time, too, the boys were getting accustomed to the continuous pitching and rolling. At first it had seemed that disaster must come; but as the hours passed, and the stout ship continued to keep afloat, a reassuring effect was produced.

Reports came that most of the damage was superficial; the wireless aerials had been

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torn to shreds in the first outburst, and half the boats were ripped clean away, or smashed to matchwood. The after-funnel was badly damaged, and far for'ard the decks were literally strewn with minor wreckage.

But below everything was still sound. The ship had taken no water. She had withstood the onslaught splendidly. Crockery, of course, had been smashed by the hundred-weight, and there was even a lot of damage done to the furniture. Most of the cabins were in hopeless disorder. But these, after all, were trifles.

The juniors either remained in the Common-room or in the dining-hall, or in the lounges. The seniors had their own quarters, and very little was seen of them by the Junior School. But they, too, were spending their time in the same way.

Through the Common-room windows a glimpse could be seen of the spray-swept decks, and, beyond, the sea. Now and again, as the spray cleared, a group of fellows would shout, pointing. The sea was a sight which few would forget. It was tremendous—a tossing, wind-lashed mass of angry waters, the waves rising to mountainous heights.

“It's a good thing we're hove-to, and riding the storm out,” said Nipper. “In fact, it's the only thing we can do, in the circs. We can't run before it.”

“The professor's started again!” said Handforth tartly. “I suppose you've been

through scores of cyclones in your younger days?” he added politely. “Now that you're becoming an old salt, you naturally like to air your knowledge.”

“Fathead!” said Nipper. “It's not my knowledge at all; I'm only passing on the talk I've heard from the guv'nor, or some of the officers.”

“These officers don't know so much,” said Handforth, with a sniff. “I was speaking to one only half an hour ago, and he actually told me that we shall be lucky to be afloat by this time to-morrow. Said we're bound to hit the vortex, and that nothing can save us. Cheerful sort of chap.”

“I dare say he was right, though,” remarked Gresham. “When you come to think of it, how *can* we avoid the vortex? We're not under sail, and we can't edge the ship to leeward—that's a term that old Bowles used—and escape the centre.”

“Everybody seems to be scared of the centre,” said Handforth. “Even the officers talk about it with bated breath, as though it is going to eat us up. Personally, I'm getting fed-up with the whole thing. These storms are too long. They oughtn't to last all this time!”

“Better make a complaint to the Clerk of the Weather,” said Church, “and next time he'll probably do things differently.”

The juniors had picked up quite a lot of information from the ship's officers or men, but none of the officers had mentioned

that they all feared the worst—at least, none of them except the one man of whom Handforth had spoken.

Yet there was very little optimism on the bridge.

The captain knew that the *St. Francis* was in the track of the vortex. The barometer was falling constantly. The wind, too, was getting worse with every hour that passed. All these were positive indications that the helpless ship was drawing nearer and nearer to the middle of this gigantic whirlwind.

If the juniors had thought the sea rough at mid-day, they had reason to change their opinions by late afternoon. For by this time it really was rough. The weather was so much worse that the mid-day conditions seemed mild by comparison.

As darkness set in, the howling and screaming of the gale was becoming terrifying. There was never a lull—nothing but a continuous yelling of the elements. Even below, protected from its full force, it was necessary to speak in loud tones in order to make oneself heard.

"We can't last much longer—if this goes on!" said Church huskily, as he stood with Handforth and McClure near one of the windows, trying to catch a glimpse of the blackened deck. "My only hat! Listen to that!"

"It can't get worse—it can't!" muttered McClure.

Even Handforth had nothing to say. He stood there, his expression drawn, his eyes full of a sort of shocked surprise. **Everybody, in fact, was feeling the same sense of bewilderment.** It was too big to grasp, too stupefying.

Now and again the great ship would shudder throughout her entire length as an extra heavy sea struck her. She would dip down—down and down. Then, when it seemed that nothing could save her from plunging to her doom, she would come sluggishly and reluctantly back to an even keel. Then the whole thing would occur over again—with, occasionally, a sickening lurch to port or starboard, until everybody and every loose article slithered helplessly across the canting floors.

What, then, were the conditions on the bridge?

Here any kind of conversation was impossible. The noise of the storm was so terrific that shouting was of no avail. No words could be heard. If the officers wished to communicate with one another, they were compelled to resort to signs.

Just before complete darkness fell, there were many indications in the sky that the worst had not yet come. There had been a little optimism earlier, when the sun had shone through a rift in the clouds, and many people on board felt that it was an excellent sign; but the captain was a man of wide experience, and he was not deceived.

"We shall be in the centre of it some time during the night, Mr. Lee," he shouted, in the shelter of the wheel-house, where Nelson Lee had gone. "No chance

of escaping it now. And if we get through the vortex, it'll only be because of our size."

"You think the ship will live through it?"

"I wouldn't venture an opinion," replied the captain frankly. "The last time I was in a cyclone—in one of this ferocity, anyhow—was in my old sailing-ship days. I'll never forget it, either. How we escaped was a miracle. It was over thirty years ago, but I can see those seas now. They were like pyramids, Mr. Lee. As I say, our size may save us—but, on the other hand, it may prove our undoing. No man on earth can foretell."

Overhead, the great black masses of cloud were so low that they seemed to be almost within hand-reach. One expected to see the funnels enveloped in them. And this illusion was all the greater because the spray that constantly swept the ship was in itself like a mass of cloud.

The wind was getting stronger, although the officers themselves had said that such a thing was impossible. Yet, by the time complete darkness had fallen, the gale was developing into a hideous screaming sound that was like nothing on earth. It was abominable—it was nerve-shattering.

It was fortunate that the schoolboys could see nothing of the seas, for these were now so terrifying that even from the decks of the liner they would have seemed appalling to them. It is a well-known fact that a rough sea, from the deck of a great liner, appears comparatively slight. The self-same sea, from a sailing ship, is stupendous. But here it was stupendous from the very liner's deck—a sure enough indication of its Satanic fury. And it was getting worse, for the simple reason that the vortex of the cyclone was creeping nearer; it was overtaking the vessel.

At bed-time none of the schoolboys thought of retiring to rest, and the masters made no attempt to enforce the regulations. It was better, perhaps, for the fellows to remain where they were, congregated into big groups. There was a measure of comfort in a crowd.

"They're saying that we shall hit the real thing before midnight," said Travers, at about ten o'clock.

"What do they call this, then?" asked Tommy Watson. "My only sainted aunt! I never dreamed that there could be a storm like this! No wonder they talk about the dangers of the deep!"

"Rather a pity old Dorrie isn't with us—he'd liven things up," said Nipper. "And if we get through this safely he'll kick himself for staying behind in New Zealand. He'd go half across the world for a thrill."

The celebrated Lord Dorrimore had originally planned to go home to England in the *St. Francis*, and it was characteristic of his irresponsible nature that he had suddenly changed his mind in Auckland. He had heard that Mr. Hobart Manners was flying to Auckland in one of his huge 'planes; and Dorrie had decided to stop, so that he

could take part in another great world-flight that the inventor was contemplating.

"Hallo! What's that?" said Handforth abruptly.

He stared out through one of the deck windows, and all the others near him looked, too.

"I didn't see anything," said Nipper.

"Lightning," said Handforth. "There was a terrific blaze— There you are! There it is again!"

They all saw it this time—a strange, erratic flood of light, which did not seem like lightning at all. It came and went mysteriously, eerily. And if there was any thunder, it was, of course, inaudible through the screaming of the gale.

"Can't we go out on deck?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"We've had strict orders——"

"Blow orders!" said Handforth. "There can't be any real danger. Let's chance it."



CHAPTER 7.

Into the Vortex!

BUT Handforth's rash suggestion was squashed. At such a time as this it would never do to disobey orders. As a sort of compromise, Handforth and Nipper and a number of others went as far forward as possible, congregating behind the massive plate-glass at the forward end of the promenade deck. This was so high in the ship that there was no danger. The crashing seas could not reach this height, although the spray was slashing against the plate-glass in continuous sheets, sometimes sounding like gunshot, so great was the force with which it was flung.

"I hope they've got the boats ready," remarked McClure uneasily.

"Boats!" scoffed Handforth. "Where are they? Pretty well all smashed! And what would be the good of them even if they weren't? No boat could live in this sea, even if it could get clear of the ship's side—which it couldn't. No, my son. If we spring a leak, we're all going down."

"Here, shut up!" said Church.

"Just a minute, you fellows!" said Nipper keenly. "Look out there! There's something funny—— My only hat! Everything seems to be on fire."

They all stared fascinatedly. In spite of the pitch darkness, they could see a flame-like luminosity licking round the ship's rail near the bows, and it seemed to play round the jumbles of wreckage on the deck, too.

"It's electricity," said Nipper, in an awed voice. "Not lightning, but some kind of electrical effect. The air must be absolutely charged with it—choked with it. And look over there!"

Occasionally, as the spray cleared for a moment or two, they could see extraordinary fires in the sky, appearing and vanishing with bewildering mysteriousness. Sometimes there would be great livid tongues of green flame, with a horrible lurid red glare intermingled.

"It's—it's awful!" panted Handforth. "Lightning's bad enough, but this—— Great Scott! Look at that! I'm scared, you chaps!"

"I think we're all scared," said Nipper, breathing hard. "What's the good of denying it?"

They had been speaking in the lustiest of shouts, and yet they only just managed to hear one another's voices, for the tumult outside was appalling.

If those juniors admitted—as they did—that they were scared, they were only human, and there was nothing cowardly in such an admission. Everybody on board, including the older hands, who had sailed the seas all their lives, were feeling the same awesome fear. Many, indeed, had a feeling that they would not live to see the dawn. The very helplessness of their ship, her engines idle, her propeller useless, made the sailors anticipate the worst.

Nipper and the other Removites gathered near the plate-glass look out were fortunate enough to obtain a clear view of the sea. A great blaze of lightning flickered and hovered for a full twenty seconds, and during this time the glass happened to be free from spray. Nipper pointed, a gulp escaping him at the same moment.

They could see the sea, close at hand. It was like some vast precipice, the top of a frightful wave being almost level with the ship's bridge. It was unbelievable—terrifying in its enormity.

Then—crash!

The spray came rattling with devastating force against the glass, and the boys backed away, fearing that the glass would smash in. At the same moment the ship lurched, shuddered, heeled over, and then her bows went down and down.

"That wave!" yelled Travers.

But the shock was no greater than many that the *St. Francis* had suffered during the past few hours. She recovered as bravely as ever. More lightning came, and with it the yelling of the wind seemed to increase, if such a thing was possible. It rose to a note that was more shrill—to a screaming, shrieking note of diabolical fiendishness.

Nipper & Co. stood there, aghast.

Then the lightning came again—blazing, frightful, and so close that it seemed to strike within a few yards of them. The juniors had an impression that the sky had been literally torn in halves.

"——all my life!" came a roar from Handforth.

It was an uncanny effect. The first part of his sentence had been completely lost, but the latter words sounded loudly in his companion's ears. For at that precise second the wind ceased. It was as amazing

as it was unexpected, as sudden as it was bewildering.

The boys could hear the scream of it dying away in a long, echoing wail. And then silence—a horrible nerve-shattering silence that was a thousandfold worse than the greatest noise.

"The vortex!" choked Nipper. "We're in it, you chaps! We're in the centre of the storm!"

Handforth stared blankly.

"But we can't be!" he gasped. "It's all quiet! The storm's gone!"

"Don't you understand?" asked Nelson Lee, coming up and joining the group. "The storm is all round us—whirling in a tremendous circle of violence. The centre is calm. It's the core of the vast atmospheric disturbance. If we get out of this alive, we shall still have days of violent weather while we are getting out of the storm centre. We've come through one half, and it's inevitable that we shall have to go through the other."

"But we shall never survive, gov'nor!" panted Nipper, horrified.

The ship lurched again, and now the experience was incredibly more horrifying than ever before. For there was no howling wind to cover up the groaning of straining metal, to hide the thuds and crashes which came from the interior depths of the ship—denoting, perhaps, the shifting of cargo, or the smashing of bulkheads.

"Steady, boys!" warned Lee quietly. "Keep your nerve. This is the crucial hour. If we can survive this, all will be well. It's an experience few people in this world live to tell of."

"I never knew a cyclone could be so awful, sir," breathed Harry Gresham. "They talk of anti-cyclones in the weather reports, and we think nothing of them."

"At home, in England, the greatest gale is only the fringe of a cyclone," said Nelson Lee. "The outer edges of the vast whirling storm. So you can well imagine what a frightful ordeal we are now living through, for we are in the cyclone's very centre."

"How long will it last, sir?" muttered Church. "I've never known anything so fearful and—"

He broke off, crashing against Handforth. Four or five of them, in fact, sprawled headlong. The St. Francis had swung over and further over, until it seemed that she must inevitably go on her beam ends and turn turtle. But up she came again, and at the same moment more of those blazing flashes of lightning rent the heavens, and this time the sound of the thunder was like the crashing of massed artillery. The thunder had doubtless been just the same on the earlier occasions, but had actually been inaudible, owing to the screaming of the wind.

While that flash lasted a glimpse of the sea could be seen, accompanied by the crashing of the water as it fell in mountainous masses on the decks, fore and aft; the demoniac hissing of the foam, as it was

whipped from the tops of the giant waves, could be heard, too.

"The sea—look!" yelled Handforth hoarsely.

Only for a few moments did those startled eyes behold the scene, just while the lightning lasted. It wasn't like the sea at all. It was akin to something out of a ghastly nightmare. The sea was no longer in gigantic waves, but in hills—mountains—pyramids, foaming and boiling and thundering. It was beyond belief. Near by, a solid cliff of green was rearing itself up, its summit a mass of cream, and as the lightning flashed out the top of this mountain sloped inboard, accompanied by a vast confusion of crashing and roaring and splintering.

Then the School Ship rolled, shuddered, and actually seemed to spin round, in spite of her enormous bulk.

"We'll never last—never!" croaked Handforth. "Those pyramids of water are rising up on every side of us. We can't escape!"

"How—how big is the storm centre, gov'nor?" panted Nipper.

"Impossible to say—perhaps twenty miles, perhaps forty," replied Lee. "But, listen! The screaming of the storm again! We're nearly through the vortex—the storm is overtaking us again."

"The other side of it, you mean?"

"Yes," replied Lee grimly. "This central zone is nothing but a seething cauldron. Outside the wind controls the seas; it keeps them within the limits by the very force of it. But here the air is dead, and the sea has nothing to keep it down. That's why it pitches up into those vast mounds, erratically and without form or regularity."

Everybody could all hear the familiar shrieking of the gale, growing louder and louder, like the approach of a demon mob. Then with a yell—a ghastly outcry—the first gust arrived. It took the ship fairly and squarely, and sent her reeling. Then another brief spell of windlessness, followed immediately by the steady, unbroken howl of the elements.

The vortex had passed, and the School Ship was still afloat!



CHAPTER 8.

A New Peril!

DANGER of the most acute kind menaced the St. Francis for many an hour into the night, even after the passing of the vortex. For the sea was broken and wild, and running enormously.

The wind, in spite of its force, had not yet been able to break the terrible pyramidal waves into the normal storm seas. These were bad enough, but capable sailors knew how to handle a ship in them.



Handforth & Co. stared in amazement at the phenomenon. The lightning, instead of flashing downwards, seemed to shoot up from the sea towards the sky. Old Bowles shook his head dolefully. "There's something big coming!" he said ominously.

The captain frankly confessed that Providence alone had brought them through in safety. No skill of his had contributed—as it was contributing now. While in that ghastly vortex, the fate of the School Ship had been in the lap of the gods, for no sailor living could have handled a ship with any degree of certainty. The giant waves had been erratic, grotesque and unexpected—liable to form suddenly, without the slightest warning.

It was different now. The sea was inconceivably rough, but it was at least running in the ordinary way, and, by skilful handling, the crippled vessel was kept under control. The captain, during these hours, performed wonders of seamanship.

The school went to bed and slept soundly. Everybody felt that the worst danger was over, and there was a universal feeling of relief. Yet at any other time this storm would have kept everybody awake. It was merely a question of comparison.

When the morning broke the sea showed rough and wind-tossed—a great expanse of foaming waves, their crests lashed by the hurricane into driving spume. The *St. Francis*, with her head to the seas, was dipping and rolling continuously. Men were constantly taking soundings, and now the

pumps were going—driven, of course, from the main engines.

The vessel was taking in a little water, but not much. On the whole, she had come through magnificently. At first glance, she appeared to be much battered. Practically all her boats had gone; her bridge was badly smashed on the starboard side; far forward, she was a litter of disordered wreckage, and, below, crockery and furniture had suffered severely.

But, in the main, she was still as sturdy as ever.

When Nipper and a number of other juniors came out, they found the sky dull and stormy, and all round the wild tumble of seas. The wind was howling with the same frightful sound as before, but during the course of the day it lessened, and, as the hours passed, so the sea went down. The cyclone was passing on its way, out of the track of this ship which had won through.

By the evening, indeed, there was just an ordinary gale blowing, and the sea was only moderately rough. The sky was clearing, the clouds breaking up, and that night the stars came out clearly.

Lessons had been held that day, after a style—not because Nelson Lee expected anybody to do any work, but because he felt

that the ordinary routine would help to restore confidence.

Next morning the sea was so comparatively calm that the fellows gazed at it in wonder. The ship was dipping gently and sluggishly to the heavy swell. Overhead the tropic sun was blazing down from a cloudless sky, and threatening to become uncomfortably hot.

"Well, it's all over now, thank goodness!" said Nipper. "By Jove! It's a wonder we've come through it alive."

"I can't quite believe it, you know," said Tommy Watson. "Only a couple of days ago we were——"

"Better forget it," said Tregellis-West.

"Not likely!" retorted Watson. "I don't want to forget an experience like that! Now that we've come through it safely, it's something to talk about!"

"We must be a few hundred miles off our course, with all this drifting," said Nipper thoughtfully. "Not that it'll make much difference. Once we get the engines going again, and the ship under steam, we'll soon make up for the lost time."

Handforth & Co. and a few other juniors joined them.

"Heard any news this morning?" asked Handforth briskly.

"News?" said Nipper. "What news can we hear?"

"About everything in general," said Handforth. "Aren't they getting on with that repair work yet? What about our propeller? Time something was done," he added sternly.

"Give them a chance, old man," chuckled Fullwood. "The sea was too rough for any repair work yesterday, and they couldn't do much in the night, but I imagine they'll get busy this morning."

In this he was right. Not only were the engineers massing in all their numbers at the stern of the vessel, to continue with the interrupted repair work, but other men were busily rigging up the wireless once more, and all hands were working overtime on clearing up the general litter.

After prayers in Big Hall that morning—after the school had held a special thanksgiving service—Nelson Lee was looking his old smiling self, and when he addressed the school he did so in a voice of confidence.

"None of us quite realise, even yet, how extraordinarily lucky we are to be alive at this minute," he said. "The storm has passed, however, and although we are a considerable distance from our course, we may regard that circumstance with equanimity. To-day the engineers will work their hardest to fit the new propeller—and by evening, all being well, we shall be on our way once more."

"Hurrah!"

"That's the style, sir!"

"At the moment we are right off the track of ordinary shipping, so there is not likely to be any sail sighted during the day," continued Nelson Lee dryly. "We can, there-

fore, devote ourselves whole-heartedly to work."

"Oh!" said the school, without enthusiasm.

"There is not only some leeway to be made up, but hard work will doubtless come as a boon and a blessing after our recent excitements," continued the ship's Head. "To-day, therefore, the normal routine will be rigidly kept."

And it was, much to the school's indignation. The juniors, particularly, considered that they should have had a free-and-easy day, particularly as there were such interesting things going on astern, and, in fact, all over the vessel.

The heat, too, was getting back into its old form. By midday even the swell had decreased, and it was impossible to realise that the vessel had so recently passed through that nightmare experience.

Nipper noticed something that most of the other juniors missed. Nipper was more observant, perhaps. This was shortly after lessons were over for the day, and the heat was at its highest. Fellows were grabbing deck-chairs, and selecting the shadiest and breeziest spots. Much to the general indignation, nobody was allowed anywhere near the stern, where the engineers were still labouring and perspiring in the blazing tropic glare.

"There's something wrong, you fellows," said Nipper keenly.

"Something wrong?" repeated Watson.

"Haven't you noticed?"

"I've noticed nothing in particular," replied Watson, looking round. "If you ask me, everything seems to be right. It's marvellous how they've made things shipshape. You'd hardly think we'd been through that storm!"

They were up on the boat deck, and Handforth & Co. were there, too—Handforth expecting that he could get a better view of the operations from this lofty perch.

"I tell you there's something wrong," repeated Nipper. "The engineers are working feverishly—in spite of the heat. Haven't you seen them dashing up and down? Look at them now! And look at the bridge, too."

Handforth and the others stared wonderingly. It was perfectly true. The men, half-stripped, were not working merely hard, but feverishly. There was an air of acute tension. On the bridge the first and second officers were staring fixedly to port, and consulting every now and again. The captain was even now hurrying aft, the second engineer keeping pace with him, and talking excitedly.

"What's the matter with 'em all?" asked Handforth in astonishment.

"I rather fancy there's an urgent need for us to get the engines going," said Nipper. "Something special, I mean—something vital. Is it my imagination, or can you fellows see a kind of whitish line right over there?" he added, pointing across the sunlit sea. "It may be a reflection, but——"

"By George!" interrupted Handforth. "There is something!"

The others could see it now, too. It was so distant that nothing definite could be distinguished, yet unquestionably there was the faintest trace of a white line on the far horizon. It seemed, too, that there were several curious shadows, elusive and uncertain.

"Land!" ejaculated Handforth excitedly.

"I'm not so sure about land, Handy—but there's something there that's not too healthy," said Nipper. "A reef, by the look of it. A coral reef, perhaps—an atoll, unsuspected and unseen until a ship is close upon it. Don't forget we're right off the ordinary trade routes now."

Handforth looked more excited than ever.

"What did I tell you?" he exclaimed. "Before we left Auckland I said that we should probably have adventures on a coral island! But I'm jiggered if I can see why everybody should be so scared. The sea's big enough, isn't it? And we're miles away from it, anyhow."

"The sea's big enough, old son—but you've apparently forgotten that we're in a pretty helpless state just now," said Nipper. "My only hat! I know why they're so anxious and worried. The ship's drifting in that direction—towards that reef! And there's a chance that we shall go on the rocks!"

CHAPTER 9.



Drifting on to the Coral Reef!

At first the other juniors were inclined to scoff at Nipper's suggestion. They regarded it as "too thick for words." Hadn't they had enough peril and excitement? There was no need to make such idiotic suggestions.

Yet Nipper's shot was dead on the mark.

The others realised it later—towards the evening. For by then the danger could no longer be concealed from the schoolboys. The *St. Francis* had drifted so much nearer to the reef that it was now plainly visible to the naked eye—at least, one could see the long line of white foam where the rollers were breaking in a low, continuous roar.

The thing came as a bit of a shock, for everybody felt that there had been more than enough danger this week. It was unlucky that the *School Ship* should be menaced again—and again owing to her helplessness.

The reason for the feverish haste was apparent. Engineers were trying to get the repairs done so that the engines could be started, and then, of course, no coral atoll would hold any terrors. For the ship, under steam, could quite easily steer clear of all such perils.

But as things were now, the position was really serious. The water was so deep here that it would be idle to drop the anchors. The ship was drifting, and nothing could stop her except the propellers. And the repair work was in such a critical stage that it had to go on. It wasn't possible to hold up the job and risk the use of one propeller only.

Nelson Lee had sent the prefects round, and the prefects had casually informed the school that everything was quite all right, and that there was no need to get excited. But the boys knew well enough that this was a bit of spoof. They had heard many rumours from the officers that unless the propellers were started going within an hour or so the ship would drift on to the reef. And nothing else could save it either.

Yet although this danger was every bit as bad as the danger of the cyclone, it seemed trivial. The day was perfect—cloudless, tranquil and almost windless. The sound of the reef was quite pleasant—a continuous lulling murmur—and the sight of it was in no way alarming. Just a long line of white foam, stretching for miles, it seemed, right across the immediate view.

Now it was possible to see a low ridge of land, too—or something that looked like land. Clumps of palm-trees grew on it in isolated and picturesque groups. However, the atoll was so nearly level with the ocean itself that none of these details was apparent until the relentlessly-drifting ship was within a mile or two.

"Seems like we're having everything this trip, young gents," remarked old Bowles, the deck hand. "'Twouldn't be the fust time I've bin shipwrecked on a coral island. You can't never tell with these 'ere reefs. Nasty, tricky things, they are."

"But isn't there a lagoon beyond the reef?" asked Handforth.

"Mebbe—not as it matters to us," said the old salt. "Even if there was a channel through the reef deep enough to take this craft—which ain't likely—we could never git in without tugs to tow us in. And it's darned certain we won't drift in. Once we git on that reef, we shall be in a nasty mess!"

A fresh excitement soon manifested itself. Somebody declared that there was some wreckage to be seen some miles beyond the foaming reef. At first this wasn't believed, then as the *School Ship* continued to drift nearer and nearer, even the sceptics were obliged to alter their views.

For undoubtedly there was something in the far distance which could not be a pile of rock or a hump of sand. Moreover, columns of smoke were now beginning to rise into the evening air.

"There's somebody on that giddy island!" said Fullwood eagerly. "Some other ship must have drifted on the reef. We're not the only ones."

"Well, they can't expect much help from us, I'm afraid," said Nipper. "We've got our own troubles and they're getting worse every minute."

It was rather significant that neither Nelson Lee nor any of the other masters approached the boys. Perhaps they did not want to run the gauntlet; perhaps they wanted to be able to give reassuring answers when they actually were questioned.

The repair work continued at feverish speed. It was going to be a tight race—indeed, touch and go. Men were constantly taking soundings and reporting to the captain, and all these reports were similar. The sea was tremendously deep. That reef was probably the topmost fringe of a volcanic mountain thrust up steeply from the ocean bed.

The thunder of the surf was now becoming monotonously noisy. The boys, lining the rails, stared in fascination at the creamy foam, so comparatively near at hand. There was almost something awful in the way the ship was creeping nearer and nearer. And yet nothing could be done to stay her progress until the propeller was repaired.

It would be cruel, indeed, if the engineers were a shade too late, especially after the St. Francis had come through the cyclone so valiantly. Was she to be wrecked during this peaceful calm?

The atoll, or coral island, was a great deal larger than most of the juniors had anticipated, and very different from what they had imagined it to be. Very little land was visible.

They could see the reef now near at hand—a boiling, thundering mass of angry surf. Here and there were patches of land, with palm-trees perched on them, and this formed an erratic line for miles, with no solid land whatever. Beyond the reef there was calm water—a stretch of astonishingly blue, crystal sea, reaching far into the distance. Beyond were more palm-trees, and that pile of uncertain wreckage that might be a ship.

The atoll, of course, was of a type that is common in the southern seas—a great ridge of coral forming an irregular circle many miles in diameter. It is this rim which forms the island, and inside there is the lagoon. Sometimes there is no land at all—nothing but the submerged reef, with the white surf—a ghastly menace to shipping that gets off its course.

“Shall we do it?”

This was the question which was now going from mouth to mouth. The anxiety of the ship's officers was being shared by the hard-working crew and by the schoolboys. It was becoming a grim, desperate race against time.

The drifting vessel was making more speed now, probably due to some insidious under-current which was tugging it on to the reef. If the St. Francis was caught upon those cruel fangs, she would never get afloat again. This much was inevitable.

The situation would have been bad enough under ordinary conditions, but they were far worse now. For nearly all the School Ship's lifeboats had been lost or smashed in the storm, and so it would be impossible to “take to the boats.” When it became certain that

the ship would go on the reef, there could be no escape by the ordinary means.

If anything, the position was made worse—it was more tragically poignant—because of the prevailing calmness. It was bad enough to be thrown on to a reef during the height of a storm, but to drift on to it like this, slowly, relentlessly, was infinitely worse.

Men were already working hard on the for'ard deck making rafts—stewards, cooks and similar hands were called upon to help. It was a significant move. The boys wanted to lend a hand, too, and Handforth insisted upon leading a deputation to the captain.

“Why should we all remain idle like this?” he demanded indignantly. “We could help with those rafts.”

“I dare say we would be more in the way than anything else, Handy,” said Nipper. “If they wanted help, they would have roped in the seniors before now. For goodness' sake don't do anything rash! The officers are harassed enough already.”

“It'll be dark soon, too,” said Boots of the Fourth. “I say, won't it be awful if we go on that reef in the dark?”

“We're not on it yet, and there seems to be some fresh excitement aft,” said Nipper keenly. “By Jove! Listen! They're shouting. I wonder if—”

He broke off. Everybody was staring towards the stern. Men were shouting and waving their arms. Other men were climbing over the stern rail, and there was an answering activity on the bridge.

Clang-clang!

“The telegraph!” yelled Nipper.

“Eh?” gasped Handforth.

“The engine-room telegraph!” panted Nipper. “The engines—”

Throb-throb-throb!

Everybody held their breath as the great vessel commenced to throb to the rhythm of the engines far below. The boys stood fascinated. It seemed too good to be true. They had almost forgotten that friendly, comforting beat.

Clang-clang!

The telegraph sounded again, and this time there came the sudden churning of the propellers. Men were shouting wildly aft, and the excitement was by no means confined to the schoolboys.

“Hurrah!”

“They've done it—they've got the engines going!”

Slowly, majestically the St. Francis veered round, answering her helm. Up on the bridge the captain was looking infinitely restful, and there was a smile on his lined, haggard face. The School Ship gathered speed, swung well clear, and grew farther and farther away from the peril.

And none of the St. Frank's fellows ever knew how narrow this escape had been—they were never told that the drifting ship had been got under control when she was only a bare fathom or two from the outlying reef—hidden and submerged beneath the surface!

CHAPTER 10.

An Extraordinary
Coincidence!

DARKNESS fell almost immediately afterwards, and there was much excitement because fires could be

seen burning and flickering on the far rim of the reef some miles distant. It seemed to the astonished juniors that the School Ship was making off without attempting to rescue those unfortunate people who were undoubtedly marooned on the atoll.—Actually the ship was getting well clear of the danger zone—veering off, in fact, to leeward of the atoll. This would bring the ship nearer to the further rim of the island—nearer to the fires and the wreckage. To the boys, however, it seemed that the island was being left far behind.

“Aren’t they going to do anything?” asked Handforth, in amazement.

“Give them a chance,” replied Church. “Until an hour ago they were working like madmen to save us all from destruction. They must be exhausted, all of them. Plenty of time to go to the rescue of these people on the island.”

“Probably an old sailing ship,” remarked Harry Gresham. “A schooner, or something like that—went on to the reef in the storm. Anyhow, we’ll know later on.”

The ship was standing by now, her engines throbbing gently, her propellers revolving just sufficiently to enable her to keep her position. There was a shortage of men, for now that the acute tension was over, half the engine-room staff had collapsed.

But in spite of this the big motor-boat was launched. This was one of the few boats that had escaped damage in the storm. With crowds of fellows interestedly watching, the great davits were swung out, and the boat was lowered into the placid sea. Those fires were some two or three miles away, and it might not be easy to effect a rescue.

The boat returned after a fairly long absence—while the decks remained crowded with eager, excited boys—and it returned empty. The reef was too dangerous—too tricky to be chanced in the darkness.

“What a sell!” said Handforth. “They’re going to wait until the morning.”

“A jolly good thing, too,” said Nipper. “We’ve had quite enough excitement for today, and we all need a good sleep. Besides, we shall jump out of bed pretty quickly in the morning.”

The school felt that it was very much of a swindle, but the officers were no doubt right in delaying any rescue work until daylight. So everybody went to bed with the prospect of another thrill on the morrow.

The skipper was rather glad of the delay, because there was much work to be done—

clearing up, and making things generally shipshape. Furthermore, a party of engineers was working far, far below. One or two plates had been strained, and those were repaired.

“We’re not a great deal off our course, Mr. Lee,” said the captain, later on, in his cabin. “Nothing worth worrying about, anyway. Two or three days’ delay, at the most.”

“You don’t think it’ll be necessary to go into dry dock at the first available port?”

“According to all the reports I have had, we’ll get home safely enough,” replied the captain. “No need for delays like that. My orders are to proceed to England, and I see no reason to do otherwise. I don’t think we shall lose much speed, either.”

“The propeller will give no trouble?” asked Lee.

“They’ve made a thorough job of it,” said the captain, in a satisfied voice. “I dare say that propeller would last for another voyage round the world. All the same, there’s a lot of refitting to be done, and the old boat will have to be put in dry dock for a spell after she’s home.”

“About the boats,” said Lee. “Most of them are smashed—”

“I’ve already wirelessly to Christobal, the U.S.A. port of Panama, on the ‘Caribbean,’ put in the skipper. “Temporary equipment is being got ready so that we can ship it without delay. Upon the whole, I think we’ve done pretty well—and I don’t mind telling you, Mr. Lee, that to-day has been even more harrassing than the worst period of the cyclone.”

“I’m not surprised,” said Lee gravely. “The calmness of the weather, and the apparent absence of danger, only made the suspense worse. I believe we escaped the reef by a hair’s breadth, eh?”

The captain took a deep breath.

“I never want to have a narrower escape,” he said fervently. “Why, man alive, those infernal rocks were absolutely under our port quarter when the propeller started! Within a cable’s length. How we escaped them is a miracle—because we were drifting right down on them. See my hair?” he added grimly. “It was grey this morning. Now it’s white.”

They were both silent for a short spell.

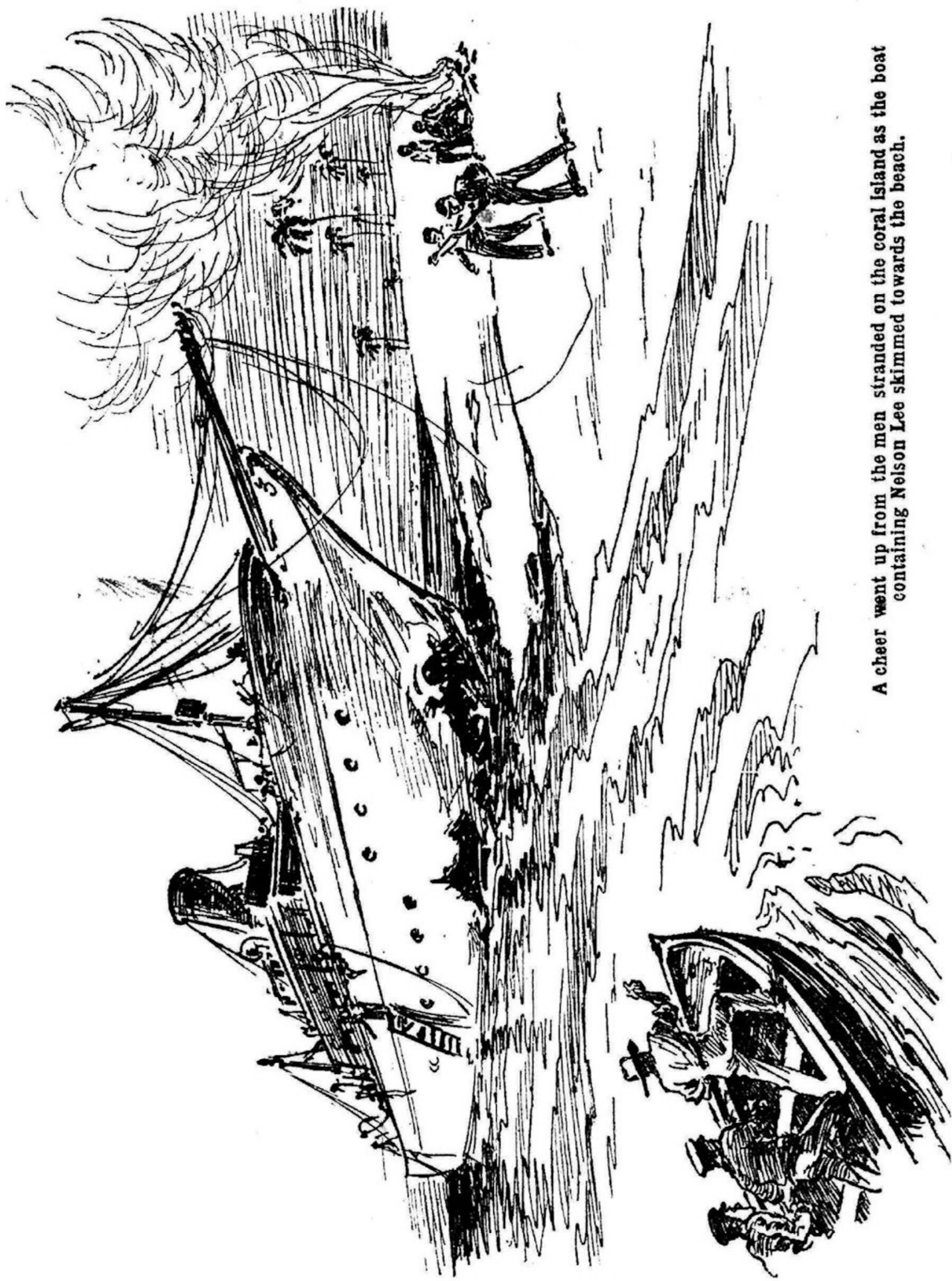
“About the wreck on the other side of the reef,” said Lee, presently. “What do you make of it?”

“To be frank, I didn’t give it a glance,” said the captain. “Until darkness I had no time for anything but my own ship. She’s probably a tramp of some kind—or, maybe, a sailing ship. We’ll know in the morning.”

“I’d like to go with the motor-boat,” said Lee.

“By all means,” said the captain. “I’ll arrange it. She’ll put off immediately after dawn.”

When the dawn came, and while the school was still sleeping, Nelson Lee went down the accommodation-ladder with the first officer



A cheer went up from the men stranded on the coral island as the boat containing Nelson Lee skimmed towards the beach.

and a couple of men. The motor-boat slipped off across the calm, placid sea.

The atoll was one of the largest Lee had ever seen, extending for some six or seven miles in an unbroken reef on one side. It proved to be shaped rather like a horse-shoe, however—a narrow ridge of coral fringed with palms, and lying so low that from the motor-boat there was an illusion of the palms growing out of the very sea.

At the opening of the horseshoe there was a clear stretch of unbroken water leading into the lagoon. And there, piled on the reef, within the lagoon itself, was the battered, listing hulk of a vessel that had once been a private yacht. There could be no mistaking her lines, although she was a helpless wreck.

"Infernally funny!" said the chief officer, frowning. "How in the name of all that's marvellous did the ship get there? She's right inside the lagoon—beyond the reef! Lucky for those aboard! If she had struck the outer reef she would have gone to pieces, and it's ten to one that nobody would have been saved."

"I imagine the yacht was caught in the cyclone in just the same way as ourselves," remarked Lee. "Look at the palms! See how half of them are uprooted, and the other half literally stripped. It seems to me that the yacht was in the thick of the storm, and was lifted clean over the reef by a giant wave."

"To crash down on the inner side of the reef, eh?" said the officer. "That's about the truth of it, Mr. Lee. In the lagoon, of course, they were more or less protected."

The motor-boat cautiously felt her way through the great opening in the reef, where the rollers were surging in undulating waves, and dying away to ripples in that protected area.

At such close quarters many figures could now be seen, both on the yacht's deck and on the narrow strip of sand near by. Many of them were waving. The air was filled with the continuous thunder of the reef.

From this distance, the School Ship, standing by to leeward, looked impressive and stately—a very monument of safety. Her appearance must have given confidence to these shipwrecked unfortunates—although, no doubt, they had been puzzled by the St. Francis' strange manoeuvres on the previous evening.

The motor-boat sped over the shallow lagoon, where the waters were so crystal that the coral bed could clearly be seen. She ran close to the sandy beach, and, skirting this, amid loud cheers from the men on the sands, she glided alongside the wrecked yacht, where other men were waiting at the ladder.

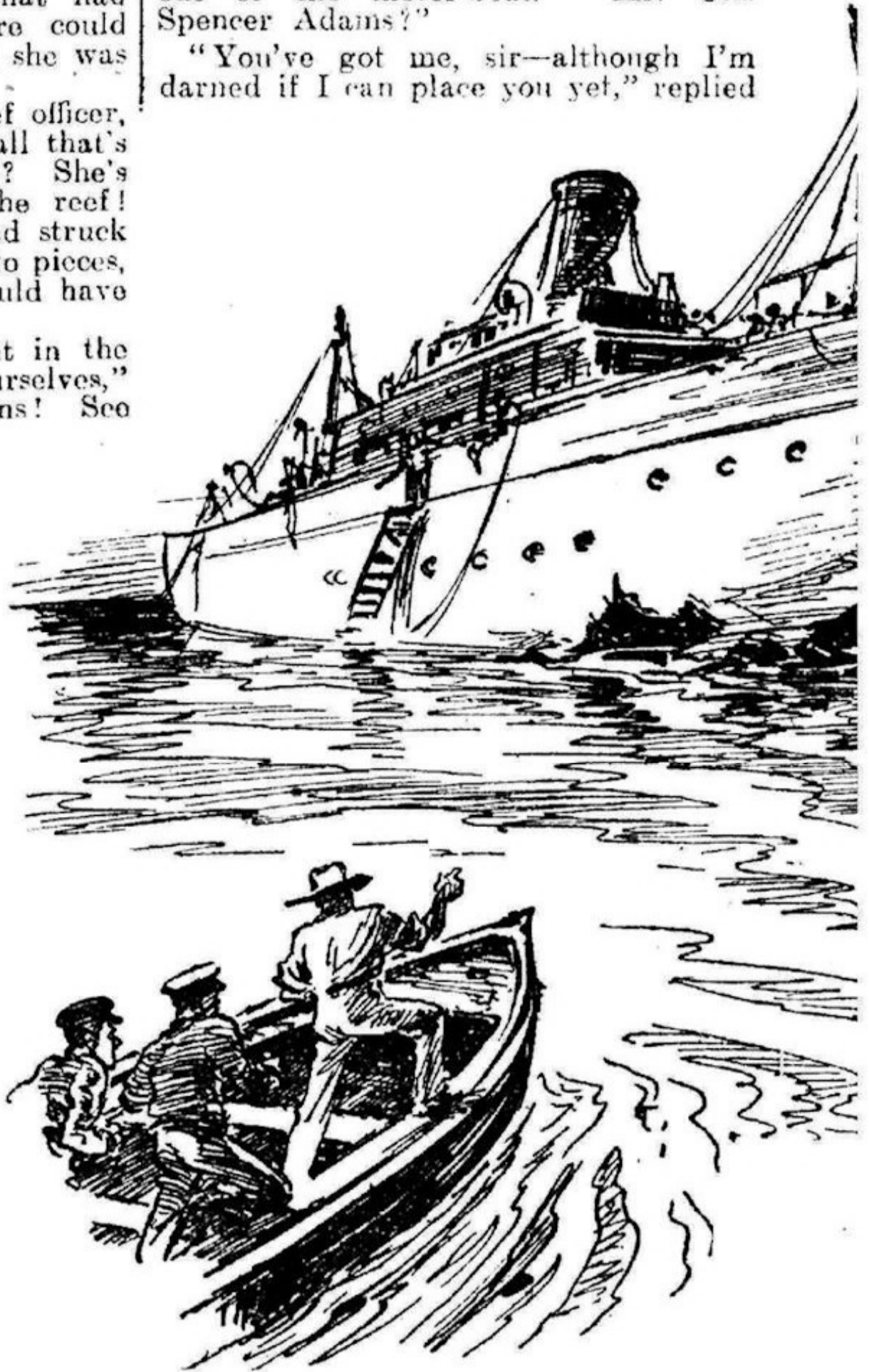
"Say, what's been keeping you?" shouted a big man in a white Palm Beach suit. "Why didn't you come yesterday afternoon?"

"Sorry, sir, couldn't be done," said the officer. "We had troubles of our own. Who's in charge here? You're not the captain, are you, sir?"

But the big man didn't answer. He was staring at Nelson Lee—just as Nelson Lee was staring at him.

"Mr. Adams, I think?" said the schoolmaster-detective, as he stepped out of the motor-boat. "Mr. Otis Spencer Adams?"

"You've got me, sir—although I'm darned if I can place you yet," replied

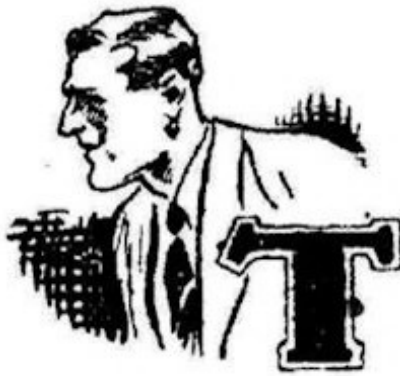


the man in the white suit. "You're British, and— Why, yes! Mr. Nelson Lee! Darn my hide! This is strange!"

It was, indeed, a remarkable meeting. Nelson Lee well remembered Mr. Otis Spencer Adams, the American millionaire. He was the president of the Adams Pimento Cheese Co. Inc., of Troy, N.Y.—and, incidentally, he was the father of Ulysses Spencer Adams, of the St. Frank's Remove!

CHAPTER 11.

A Race for Life!



THE facts turned out to be very much as Nelson Lee had anticipated.

Mr. Adams' private

been killed. But the others had all escaped. The yacht was an absolute wreck, her back broken, her plates ripped open from stem to stern like soft cardboard. She had literally scraped over the reef, tearing herself open in one enormous gash. Mr. Adams himself knew how lucky he was to be alive. But for the strength of that huge wave, the yacht would have gone to pieces on the outer reef, and no man could have lived in the boiling surf.

It seemed that the wireless apparatus was wrecked, for those on board the yacht had not received any of the signals which the St. Francis had frequently given the previous afternoon.

"We never realised your own peril," said the yacht's captain, after Lee and the chief officer had explained. "We wondered why you were coming so dangerously close to the reef."

"But your ship is sound now?" put in Mr. Adams quickly.

"Quite sound," said Lee.

"What port are you making for?"

"London," smiled Lee. "We go through the Panama Canal, and—"

"Listen!" broke in the American millionaire. "Mr. Lee, I guess you can do me a favour. Jamaica won't be so far out of your way, will it? If you can land me at Kingston, and rush your ship there at full speed—"

"My dear sir, I'm afraid you're asking rather too much," interrupted Lee, shaking his head. "And it is hardly for me to say, one way or the other. I am in charge of the boys on this vessel, but—"

"It's a matter of life or death," urged the other. "I'm not trying to hustle you into something silly. Mr. Lee. We Americans are apt to rush here and there without much cause, I know—but this is an honest-to-goodness urgency. My boy is in hospital in Jamaica—at death's door," he added quietly.

Nelson Lee looked at Mr. Adams' strained, haggard face. The American seemed to have aged twenty years. He was nervous and jumpy—his eyes were bloodshot. Indeed, he seemed feverish and more or less un-

balanced by the acute mental stress that was gripping him.

"Your boy?" repeated Lee gravely. "You don't mean the boy whom you sent to St. Frank's?"

"Surely," said Mr. Adams. "My son—Ulysses."

"But he was left at school, I thought?" said Lee. "You indicated, I think, that



from the men stranded on the coral island as the boat joining Nelson Lee skimmed towards the beach.

yacht, nearly helpless in the grip of the terrific cyclone, had hit the island without warning. The captain, believing himself to be hundreds of miles from any land, had allowed the vessel to run before the storm.

Then, without warning, without a second's indication, the yacht had crashed clean over the outer reef, lifted on the crest of a gigantic wave. Several of the crew had been injured, and three men in the stokehold had

you did not wish him to go on the School Ship to Australia—"

"I sure did," interrupted the Cheese King. "That was because I was making plans to visit England in my yacht. I was there a week or two after your ship had left, and I took the boy away for a month's holiday. Dr. Stafford didn't think much of the idea, but I'm the boy's father, and I insisted. A pity I did! He'd have been better at school."

"I am very concerned to hear of your son's illness," said Nelson Lee. "And, of course, if it is a matter of life or death, you can rely upon us to do the best we can."

By this time they had descended to the yacht's saloon—where, although the deck was tilting, and the furniture badly smashed, there was still a large degree of comfort. The captain had gone out with the St. Francis officer, but there was another man in the saloon now. He was elderly, reserved, and very studious in appearance. A slight man, with thoughtful eyes and a quiet yet alert manner.

"I'd like to introduce you to Dr. Howard Carroll, of San Francisco," said Mr. Adams abruptly. "Dr. Carroll, this is Mr. Lee—the great British detective. Associated with my boy at school, too."

They shook hands, and exchanged formal greetings.

"Dr. Carroll is the greatest expert on spinal afflictions in the United States—I was going to say in the world," said Mr. Adams. "I have been to Honolulu to fetch him, Mr. Lee—so you can imagine the state of mind I've been in during these past few days—marooned and helpless on this blamed strip of rock."

"He has been nearly crazy, Mr. Lee," said Dr. Carroll. "If you can do anything to help him, say so at once—and you'll save him from insanity."

Mr. Adams was pacing up and down with short, jerky strides.

"Listen to me, Mr. Lee!" he said fiercely. "You've got to help me—you've just got to! Gee! When I saw that ship of yours I just went mad—and when I saw you I was stunned. My boy's own schoolmaster—the very man who has the most cause to help me."

"Hardly, Mr. Adams," said Lee gently. "You took your son away from St. Frank's, and he is naturally your own responsibility—"

"Maybe you're right," interrupted the other. "But we'll let it slide. I'll tell you what happened—and you'll see it's not so much of a coincidence, after all. I knew

your plans, of course—I knew that you'd bring your School Ship through the Panama Canal. Well, I made my own plans accordingly."

"With regard to your son, do you mean?"

"Partly," replied Mr. Adams. "Your headmaster allowed me to take Ulysses away. I thought a little trip in the West Indies would do him good—Jamaica—Havana—the Bahamas—and perhaps Palm Beach. A sort of pleasure cruise, you understand."

"I quite understand," said Lee dryly. "It is not uncommon for American millionaires to spend a month or two of the winter in cruising with their own yachts to that zone."

"Business took me to England, and I grabbed my boy while I was there," continued Mr. Adams. "My plan was to be at Christobal when your ship arrived there, on her way through the Canal. You get me? I kept a line of your movements, and had the whole thing doped out. I reckoned that Ulysses could transfer to your ship at Christobal, and so go home with the school. And by then it would be time for me to make tracks for New York."

"But something went wrong?"

"I'll tell the world it did!" said Mr. Adams grimly. "Gee! To think that a flivver—a darned Lizzie—could wreck every one of my plans! I go hot when I think of it!"

"Keep cool, Mr. Adams," warned Dr. Carroll.

"It was in Kingston," continued the millionaire. "Ulysses and I were ashore, giving the town a look over. Maybe Ulysses wasn't used to the traffic out there. Anyway, he stepped in front of that blamed flivver. All over in a moment. And there was my boy—stretched on the road, his spine injured."

"Poor lad!" said Lee quietly.

"Just that, Mr. Lee—nothing else," continued the American huskily. "No bones broken—no cuts or anything. I thought he was O.K. at first. It seemed such a trifle. But when they got him to hospital they told me the truth—with brutal frankness. That boy of mine, according to the doctors, will never stand on his feet again."

His voice dropped, and his face had become almost grey.

"You get that?" he went on. "Never stand on his feet again! I go mad when I think of it. I was stunned—dazed. Then I thought of Dr. Carroll. It was a chance—a bare chance."

"I have repeatedly warned Mr. Adams against placing too much faith in my ability and skill," put in the specialist quietly. "I am hoping that I may do something for his son—but it is madness to rely upon it."

Lee could well understand Mr. Adams' acute mental agony, and his determination to do everything possible for the stricken boy.

"I wired to 'Frisko, urging Dr. Carroll to rush overland to New Orleans—where I would pick him up on my yacht," continued the millionaire. "I got a reply to say that he was on a holiday in Hawaii."

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"That must have been a dreadful shock," put in Lee.

"I wasn't beaten!" said Mr. Adams grimly. "I knew there was no other man who could help my son. I wanted to take Ulysses on board and rush off for Honolulu; but the hospital doctors wouldn't let me. Couldn't move him. Daren't! Might live for six or seven weeks. But they couldn't operate. Said that if they tried they'd kill the boy."

"So you went to Hawaii to fetch Dr. Carroll?"

"I was off within the hour," replied Mr. Adams fiercely. "Gee! How I forced the engines of this poor tub. I didn't care what happened—she had to get to Honolulu. There was just a chance that if I rushed Dr. Carroll back to Kingston, my son's life could be saved—a chance that an operation would be successful. Well, I got him, as you see," he added, indicating the doctor. "Then, on my way back, we hit that storm."

"You must be in great mental agony, Mr. Adams," said Lee quietly. "When I suggested that the St. Francis could not call at Kingston, I had no idea of the actual facts."

"You'll go? You'll take us to Kingston?"

"Of course," said Lee. "As quickly as is humanly possible."

Mr. Adams gripped Lee's hand.

"I pray to Heaven we'll be in time," he said tensely. "There's just a chance—even now! When we got on this reef I gave up hope. Our wireless was gone, and for twenty-four hours I think I was insane. No hope of communicating with the world, no chance of rescue. If you hadn't showed up, we might have been marooned here for weeks—perhaps months. Gosh! Fate's a queer thing. Mr. Lee!"



CHAPTER 12.

Full Speed Ahead!

MR. OTIS SPENCER ADAMS was agog with anxiety to send wireless messages to Kingston. His main thought now was to make inquiries as to his son's condition. As he explained, the yacht had been unable to send out any S O S calls, for the disaster had overtaken her in the space of mere seconds, and after the crash on to the reef the radio apparatus had been ruined.

So it was quite likely that the world was already reporting that the yacht had gone down with all on board. Nelson Lee promised to get the School Ship's wireless operator to work the instant they arrived on board.

And so, presently, the motor-boat returned, loaded. It would be necessary to make two or three journeys, and even this delay caused Mr. Adams to fume and fret. He did so privately, however, for it was most essential that every human being should be transferred from the wreck. It might be many, many weeks before another ship came this way.

Naturally, there was an absolute sensation amongst the boys when they heard the startling news. There were one or two rumours at first, and then they became certainties—after Nelson Lee had addressed the school in Big Hall after prayers—for by this time the last motor-boat had arrived, and the School Ship was steaming away from the atoll at full speed.

The boys had felt considerably "dished" when they got up to find that most of the rescue work had been accomplished between dawn and the sound of the rising-bell. Indeed, when some of the fellows turned out they were only just in time to see the atoll fading away into the blue distance.

"Adams!" ejaculated Nipper, after the school had been dismissed. "Well, I'm jiggered! Poor old Adams!"

"I can't believe it, you know," said Handforth. "Of all the rummy goes! Fancy coming across Adams' pater like this—marooned on a giddy coral island! It's like a fairy-tale! It's too steep!"

"Yet it's understandable," said Church. "Both ships were making for the Panama Canal, so they naturally got into trouble in the same cyclone. There's not much of a coincidence about it, although it looks like it at first sight. But fancy Adams being crooked like that—and in danger of dying!"

"Poor chap!" said Harry Gresham gently. "Alec and I know him better than the rest of you chaps. He shares the same study with us in the Ancient House."

Alec Duncan nodded.

"Adams is a good scout," he said. "Always bragging about America, but most of it was put on. He's sound enough at heart. And now he's crippled with a broken back."

"They'll never cure him," said Handforth, shaking his head. "His pater's spending thousands on this gamble, but what's the good of it? Everybody knows that a chap with a broken back is as good as dead."

"I don't think his back is broken, Handy," said Nipper. "It's an injury to the spine, and Dr. Carroll is supposed to be the brainiest specialist on spinal troubles in the whole of America. If there's one man who can help Adams, it's Dr. Carroll."

"I hope they get there in time," said Gresham anxiously.

"Kingston, eh?" said Handforth, with interest. "By George! I'm as sorry as the dickens for poor old Adams, but it's an ill wind that blows nobody good. We weren't going to touch the West Indies at all, and now we're booked for a visit to Jamaica."

"If only Adams' operation is successful, we can enjoy ourselves thoroughly," said Nipper. "Adams is a Remove chap, and it gives us a kind of personal interest in the whole business."

"And we shall see a bit of America," said Handforth eagerly. "Jamaica's an island, I know, but it belongs to America, and I expect Kingston will be full of hot-dog stands and pea-nut stalls, and—"

"You hopeless, ignorant ass!" said Church coldly.

"Eh?"

"You dunce!"

"Look here——"

"You ignoramus!"

"You'd better not call me those animal names!" roared Handforth. "What's the matter with you, you silly ass?"

"There's nothing the matter with me—but there's a whole lot the matter with you!" retorted Church tartly. "Fancy standing there and calling Jamaica an American island! Where's your geography? You're a fine Briton, I must say! Jamaica is British."

"By George! So it is!" said Handforth, with a start. "What rot! I shan't be able to punch you on the nose now! I must have been mixing it up with another of those West Indian Islands—the Philippines."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the matter now, you cackling asses?"

"Nothing much, old man," said Nipper gently. "Only I've always understood that the Philippines are in the East Indies—not the West Indies."

"But they're American!"

"Well, I believe they are."

"Then don't quibble about a mere matter of East or West!" said Handforth tartly.

"Or a mere matter of thousands and thousands of miles!" grinned Church. "It's a fat lot of good you coming on a world trip, Handy! Your geography is too awful for words!"

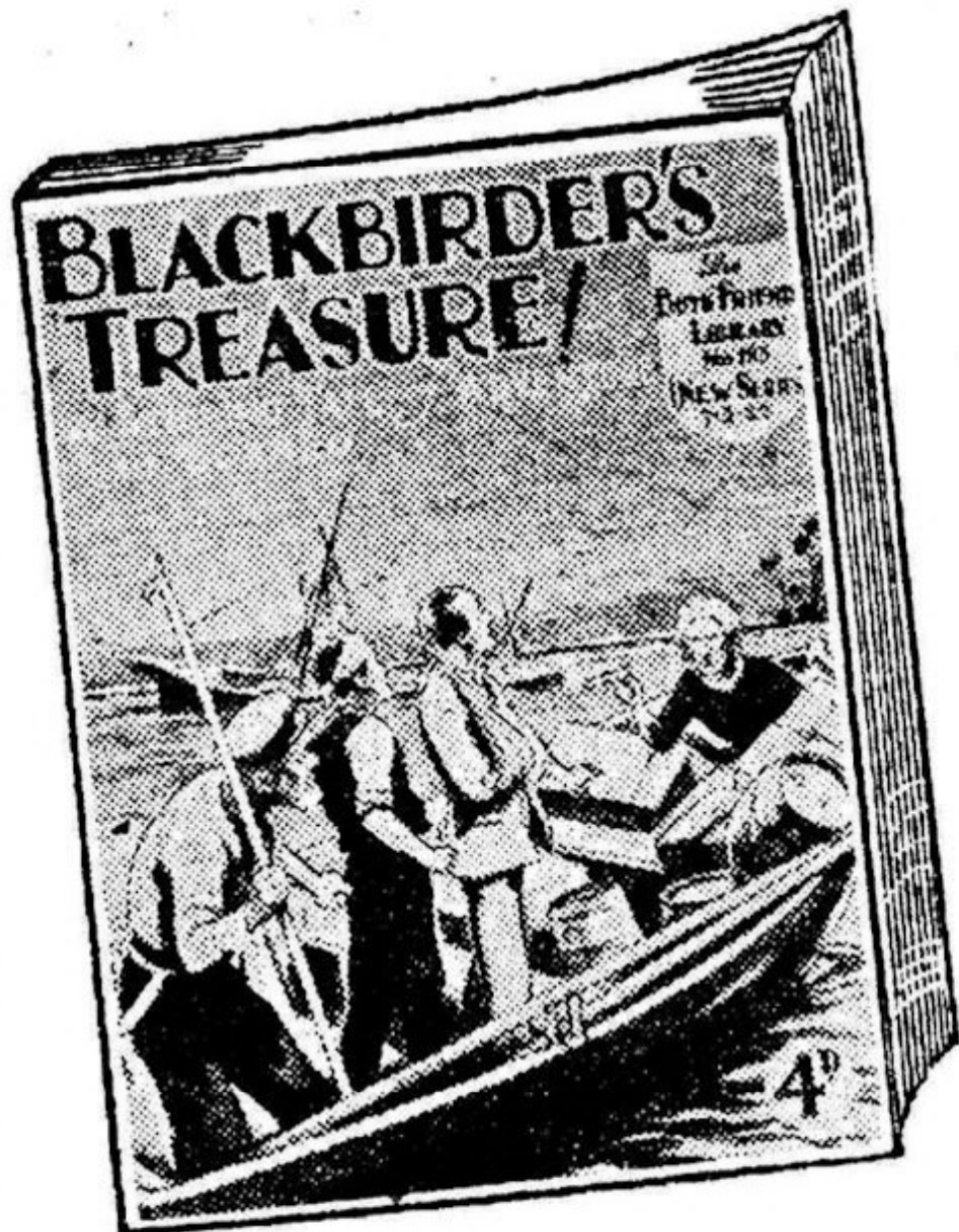
Handforth, knowing that he had not distinguished himself with his geographical knowledge, grunted and changed the subject.

Mr. Adams was hardly seen by any of the boys. He remained in his own quarters, a feverish, restless man. A measure of relief had been brought to him by the receipt of wireless messages to the effect that his son was in just the same condition—neither better nor worse. Since the accident he had not been allowed to move, and he was under the constant supervision of two or three doctors.

The School Ship's wireless operator had the busiest time of his life that day. The great cyclone had caused an enormous amount of damage over a wide area of the Pacific, and the world's newspapers were full of sensational reports of devastated islands, missing ships, and so forth. It had been generally believed that Mr. Adams' yacht had foundered in the storm.

For Mr. Adams had been in hourly wireless communication with other ships and with land stations. Then abruptly all signals from

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his yacht had ceased. The worst had been feared. But the world was soon informed, through the medium of the School Ship's wireless apparatus, that Mr. Adams was safe, and that the St. Frank's crowd had also come through triumphantly.

During the next two or three days the boys settled down once more into the normal routine, although afternoon lessons were now abandoned owing to the intense tropical heat.

Everybody was aware of a sort of tension, for although there was no danger of Adams dying, it was known that unless the operation was performed within a certain time it would be too late even to attempt it. Many precious days had been lost already. Even now Dr. Carroll might arrive to find that any operation would be futile.

Special arrangements had been asked for from the American authorities at the Canal. The St. Francis was to have first preference—to be rushed through the Canal without any delays. Mr. Adams had talked of going by rail through the Canal zone, and then chartering a special boat to rush him on the last lap across the Caribbean to Jamaica—a distance of only about five hundred and fifty miles—but it was found that he would really save time by remaining on board the School Ship.

The Bay of Panama was reached in the early morning, and crowds of boys lined the rails, watching the coastline of Balboa sweltering in the early heat. There was plenty to see, and as it happened to be a Sunday there was no work to-day, so the school would be able to spend most of its time in watching the vessel's progress through the Canal.

"We ought to do it in a few hours," said Handforth. "How far is it from one side of the isthmus to the other? About fifty miles, isn't it?"

"Forty, I think," said Church. "But the Canal is fifty."

"Then we ought to do it in three or four hours," said Handforth. "That's allowing the ship to go pretty slow, because out in the open sea she can do twenty-five miles an hour without a quiver."

"That's right—air your ignorance again!" said McClure. "We shall be lucky if we get through the Canal by this time to-morrow morning. It's an awfully slow business, Handy, going from lock to lock."

"By George! I'd forgotten the locks!"

"This Canal isn't dead level all the way," said Church. "It's even more wonderful than the Suez Canal, and it took years and years to construct. Personally, I don't think we shall be very interested in the trip. I expect it'll be as monotonous as the dickens, and there's not a doubt that it'll be beastly hot."

Church, in the main, was right. The School Ship's progress through the Canal was deadly slow, and the scenery was in no way alluring. Everything was scorched and blistered by the blazing sun, and in places the vessel's progress was so slow that she seemed to be held up for hours at a time.

After passing up the sea-level channel, a distance of about eight miles, two great

locks were encountered—the Miraflores Locks. In these the ship was raised a distance of fifty feet or more—a slow, wearisome business—and then onwards through the artificial Miraflores Lake until the Pedro Miguel Locks were reached. Here there was another "uplift" of about thirty feet. Now the ship was in the famous Culebra Cut—a section of the Canal that had given the constructors more trouble than any other part. In places the channel was only three hundred feet wide, and progress was funereal, but at one point—in the Curacha Slide—the Canal was something like two thousand feet wide.

The Cut was nine miles long from end to end, and then Bas Obispo was reached. Onwards through the Gatun Lake the ship made better speed, for here there was more or less open water. There was about twenty-five miles of lake steaming before the next locks were reached. This lake, incidentally, was over eighty feet above sea-level.

Then came the Gatun Locks—wonderful creations of concrete—in fact, some of the largest locks in the whole world. The St. Francis passed through three pairs of them, their concrete walls fifty feet thick at the bottom and eight feet at the top. They were provided with enormous steel gates over fifty feet wide and seven feet thick.

Each of those gates weighed many hundreds of tons—some as much as seven hundred and thirty tons. The ship was now taken charge of by electric traction cars, which operated on both sides of the canal. The total length of the locks was only about two-thirds of a mile, but it was a tediously slow business getting through them, notwithstanding the fact that each lock could be filled and emptied in the space of about eight minutes.

After that the canal proper was left behind. Passing through a great dredged channel, Limon Bay was reached, and here, on the shores of this bay, stood the city of Colon, with its American section, known as Christobal.

A brief stay here, during which the arranged-for lifeboats were taken aboard, and certain formalities were completed, and then the ship passed out into the Caribbean, now on the last lap!

CHAPTER 13.

Where the Bananas Come From!



"BY Jove!" said Nipper.

It was Monday morning, and crowds of fellows had hurried out immediately after the sounding of the rising bell. They found the School Ship steaming at full speed across a gloriously blue sea, and there was no sign of land.

Yet overnight the vessel had still been in the canal, and all the fellows had expected

to get a glimpse of Limon Bay and Colon this morning. Such good progress had been made, however, that the ship had left the port in the very early hours, whilst the school slept.

"We shan't be long now, anyhow," said Handforth cheerfully. "It's not far from Colon to Jamaica—at least, it's only a short jump, compared to the trip we've been making. About five hundred miles, eh?"

"Something like that," said Nipper.

"We ought to do it by to-morrow morning," went on Handforth. "Rats! At that rate we shall get into Kingston Harbour in the giddy small hours."

"All the better," said McClure. "The most tiresome business of sea travelling is getting in and out of harbours. It always seems to take such a frightful time, and everything goes so slowly. It'll be all to the good if we wake up in the morning and find ourselves gazing at the shores of Surrey."

"Surrey?" repeated Handforth, staring.

"If we're up early enough, we might catch a glimpse of the coastline of Cornwall or Middlesex——"

"You howling ass!" interrupted Handforth. "You're talking about England—not Jamaica!"

"I've been looking at the map, old man," chuckled Mac. "Jamaica has a very familiar look about it when you examine it on the map. It's divided into counties—Cornwall and Middlesex and Surrey—and you can visit places like Ipswich and Manchester and Westmorland."

"My only hat!"

"And, of course, there's Cambridge and Falmouth," said Church, with a chuckle.

"I don't believe it!" said Handforth suspiciously. "You're trying to pull my leg again, you funny fatheads! You can't kid me that——"

"Oh, show him the atlas!" said McClure patiently.

"Why trouble?" said Church. "Far better to show him Jamaica itself."

Handforth was convinced at last that this was no attempt at leg-pulling. Such places were really and truly to be found in the sunny island of Jamaica.

The juniors themselves were agog with excitement over this unexpected visit. There was not only the interest in Ulysses Spencer Adams' critical condition but everybody was keen upon seeing this sample of the West Indies—this comparatively tiny British possession in the Caribbean Sea.

Jamaica itself is one of the four Greater Antilles—the third largest. There is a chain of disconnected mountains, stretching from island to island, including such places as Cuba and Santo Domingo. The Lesser Antilles form the leeward and windward islands—including such out-of-the-way spots as Montserrat and Dominica and Martinique.

As the fellows had anticipated, Kingston had been reached by the time they awoke the next morning. Coming on deck, the school-boys found themselves in the fine harbour

of Kingston. Mr. Adams and Dr. Carroll and Nelson Lee had already gone ashore.

"What about us?" asked Boots, of the Fourth.

"We stay here, on board, I expect," said Bob Christine.

"What rot!" put in Handforth. "Aren't we going ashore? Aren't we to be allowed to have a look at Jamaica now that we're here? By George, it's a hilly sort of place," he added, as he gazed across the vista. "And Kingston looks pretty interesting."

It was found that Nelson Lee had left orders that morning lessons were to proceed as usual—a ruling that the school received with sheer disgust. The fellows found it hard to understand that this was no holiday trip, and that school work had to go on.

However, there was some consolation in the knowledge that the boys were to be permitted ashore in the afternoon. As wily as ever, however, Lee had instructed the Form-masters that all boys who slacked during the morning were to be detained. Thus a hard, determined morning's work was accomplished by all.

When dismissal came there were many eager inquiries. Had any news come on board about Adams? Had Dr. Carroll operated yet? If so, what was the result? Harry Gresham and Alec Duncan, who were Adams' study-mates at St. Frank's, and who were naturally more friendly with the American boy than any of the others, were particularly anxious.

"Sorry, kids, but there's nothing to report," said Fenton of the Sixth, who was bombarded with questions. "And we couldn't very well expect it, either. There hasn't been time yet."

"But they've had all the morning," said Gresham.

"Very likely," agreed the prefect. "But these operations can't be performed in a mere hour, you know. If there's good news, we're bound to have it."

The bulk of the school was interested to hear that Nelson Lee had not forgotten to make special arrangements ashore. A large fleet of special sightseeing motor-coaches was to be ready at two o'clock, and everybody was to go on a trip along Jamaica's famous coast road. This was splendid news, for many of the fellows had been wondering what they should do once they were ashore.

"It seems a callous sort of business to me," said Handforth sternly.

"Going for a trip while Adams is being operated upon, you mean?" asked Nipper.

"Yes," replied Handforth, with a frown. "It's—it's heartless!"

"It may seem so at first sight, but what else can we do?" asked Nipper. "If we stay on board until we hear about the operation, we can only hope for the best, and we can do that wherever we are. And you mustn't forget, Handy, that Adams is practically a stranger to all the chaps in the Fourth and Fifth and the Sixth—to say nothing of the fags."



Edward Oswald Handforth found himself seized by the indignant juniors. In spite of his struggles he found himself whirled into the air, and then he descended on the hard deck with a painful thud.

"You can't expect them to be weeping," said Church.

"All the same, it's callous," insisted Handforth. "I don't approve of it. They might at least have told us how the operation was going. Poor old Adams!"

Handforth was very soft-hearted, and it was impossible for him to enjoy any trip over the island while he lacked news of the American junior's condition. It was noticed by the others, however, that Handforth showed no inclination to remain on board when the time came for the pleasure trip.

Yet Handforth was consistent.

For, once ashore, he refused to take the slightest notice of the Kingston natives, or the general sunlit scenes. He did not even glance at the waiting motor-coaches. His first move was to drag Church and McClure into the nearest cover.

"Steady, Handy, you ass!" protested Church. "What's the idea of this?"

Handforth made no reply until he and his chums were well round an acute corner, out of sight of the rest of the crowd. They were in a deep doorway, and Handforth didn't care whose doorway it was.

"We're staying here," he said calmly, "until those buses start off."

"What!" ejaculated Church.

"All of us!" said Handforth. "We're not going on this trip, my sons."

"But we must!" protested McClure. "We've had strict orders that nobody is to wander off and leave the main party."

"That's why we're wandering off," replied Handforth, with a nod. "Do you think I care about these strict orders? All those fatheaded seniors and fags can go on their giddy trip. And the Fourth, too. But I'm ashamed of the Remove chaps," he added sternly.

"But it's all arranged," said Church blankly.

"Then it shouldn't have been arranged," replied Handforth, with a note of finality. "Poor old Adams is a Remove chap, and it's up to the Remove to rally round him when he's down."

"Oh, you hopeless chump!" said McClure, exasperated. "We're all sorry for Adams, and we all hope he'll get well, but what's the good of going on like this? What can we do? We shan't help him by dishing ourselves out of a sightseeing trip, shall we?"

"You're as bad as the rest!" replied Handforth coldly. "Heartless and callous! But I'm going to see that Study D does the right thing, my lads! As soon as these frivolous rotters have gone off on their selfish trip, we're going to buy heaps of

fruits and flowers, and then we're going to visit Adams in hospital."

"But you're absolutely mad——"

"And that's that!" said Handforth relentlessly.

And it was!



CHAPTER 14.

Handforth Means Well!

"THERE they go!" said McClure disconsolately. "And we're out of it!" murmured Church.

They were both exceedingly disappointed. They had been eagerly looking forward to this wonderful sightseeing trip, and for Handforth to ruin their enjoyment like this was tantalising.

They could, of course, have left him to his own devices, but this thought never occurred to them. They always stuck to their leader. Besides, if they had appeared without Handforth, comments would undoubtedly have been made—and then, in all probability, Handforth would have been found and forced to join the main party. And this would have been next door to sneaking.

So Church and McClure swallowed their chagrin, and waited for Handforth to make the next move. The motor-coaches had just started, and Handforth did nothing until they were well out of sight.

"All clear now!" he said briskly. "Come on! Let's find some shops!"

He had already expressed great surprise to find that there were electric tramcars in Kingston, and motor-cars by the hundred. Apparently Handforth had expected Jamaica to be a kind of wild and primitive tropical island, with blacks in rush clothing, and with an abundance of grass huts.

The famous Study D trio were soon in King Street, where the street cars were operating, and where motor-cars sped up and down. It was a busy scene. There were any number of fine shops, and one might satisfy one's wants here almost as well as in the West End of London.

"By George!" said Handforth, as he looked up and down in the bright afternoon sunshine. "It's as busy as those big Australian and New Zealand cities! Jamaica is pretty smart, my lads!"

"Never mind Jamaica!" said Church grimly. "Look here, Handy! We've let you have your way——"

"You've done what?"

"We've let you have your way——"

"You mean I've let myself have it!" interrupted Handforth coldly. "Do you think that I care about you chaps?"

"Not a bit!" replied Church, with bitterness. "We don't expect you to care about us. We know you too well. But how the dickens do you expect to gain admittance to the hospital?"

"And where is the hospital?" asked McClure. "We don't even know which hospital! Mr. Lee, in a ridiculously thoughtless mood, forgot to give us those important details. I'm afraid he's getting very careless!"

This sarcasm was entirely lost on Handforth.

"I have been thinking the same thing!" he agreed. "It certainly was careless of him not to tell us the name of the hospital. Still, that needn't worry us. I expect there's only one hospital, anyhow. Let's find a florist's, and get a big bunch of

COMING NEXT WEDNESDAY!



flowers. We'll see old Adams, and cheer him up a bit. It might be a good idea to take a few delicacies with us, too."

"Anything you like," agreed Church wearily.

Both he and Mac were getting fed-up. Their common sense told them that they would never be admitted into the hospital, or, at least, not into Adams' ward. The case was too critical for that.

"Delicacies," repeated Handforth. "Grapes, for example. And we might take him some bananas and oranges."

"And a pint of ice-cream, perhaps?" suggested McClure tartly.

Handforth promptly took the suggestion seriously.

"Ice-cream ought to do him good in this weather," he said, nodding. "They don't give a chap much in these hospitals. In

fact, ice-cream is probably forbidden, so we shall have to sneak it in."

His chums gave it up. They tried to get interested in the passing traffic, in the white-clothed pedestrians—in the many people of colour who were getting on with their own business.

"Hallo! What the dickens——"

Handforth & Co. looked round in astonishment as a familiar voice sounded in their ears. They found Gresham and Duncan standing on the pavement, staring at them. The two Removites had just appeared from

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one of the cross streets, and had practically collided with Handforth & Co.

"We thought you'd gone on that trip!" said Harry Gresham.

"And we thought you had gone!" retorted Handforth.

"Well, we dodged it," put in Duncan. "We're Adams' pals, and although we shan't be able to get into the hospital, we can at least go there and make inquiries. Nipper wanted to come with us, too, but he was grabbed by old Norton just before we dodged off. He was dished."

Handforth frowned.

"What's that you said about not getting into the hospital?" he asked. "Of course, you chaps are doing the right thing, and I'm glad to hear that Nipper had the same idea. As for the rest, I'm ashamed of em!"

"Cheese it!" said Gresham. "There really wasn't any need for you to miss the trip, Handy. Adams is our study-mate, and that makes our case different. Come on! We know where the hospital is, and——"

"Hold on!" interrupted Handforth. "We want to buy some fruit and ice-cream and flowers for poor old Adams. Might as well do the thing properly."

Harry Gresham couldn't help grinning,

"Time for that when he's convalescent—if we're within easy reach of him," he replied. "My poor old Handy! You surely don't expect the doctors to admit us to-day? You ass! We shall probably find the operation in full swing—and the poor chap hovering between life and death."

"Great Scott!" muttered Handforth. "Perhaps you're right."

He was more subdued now that this realisation came to him, and there was no further search for a florist's or a fruiterer's. The five juniors chartered a taxi-cab, and they were driven rapidly to the hospital where Ulysses Spencer Adams was lying.

"It's a fine town," remarked Gresham, as they drove along. "Look at these fine new buildings of reinforced concrete."

"How do you know they're reinforced?" asked Handforth.

"What do you think I bought this thing for?" retorted Gresham, displaying a guide-book. "Kingston is subject to earthquakes, and they've got to be pretty careful in their buildings. They have terrific hurricanes here, too."

"Don't talk to me about hurricanes," said Handforth. "I've had all the hurricane I want for years to come."

Arriving at the hospital, they found themselves on a large, airy veranda, and they were soon talking to an alert young man in a white coat—one of the doctors. He looked grave when they stated their errand.

"Well, I don't know whether I can tell you anything," he said. "Dr. Carroll is in the operating theatre now with the patient. I believe the operation is over, but we've heard nothing."

"Do you think he'll pull through?" asked Duncan.

"Well, I don't see why not," replied the young doctor. "It wasn't such a critical operation as all that. Success will mean a complete recovery for the boy—but failure won't be fatal. It will mean that he'll never walk again."

"That's critical enough, isn't it, sir?" asked Handforth.

"In that sense, yes," agreed the doctor gravely.

Handforth was about to speak again, when he closed his mouth. For he had caught sight of a figure. Mr. Otis Spencer Adams was coming out, and he did not seem to see any of the boys. He was staring dazedly, and yet his expression was not haggard. Without a word, he sat down in a cane chair that stood on the veranda, and looked out across the hospital gardens.

"They've failed!" whispered Gresham huskily.

Mr. Adams started, glanced round, and smiled confidently.

"No, they've not failed," he said. "Sorry, boys—didn't see you before. Gee! Carroll's a magician!"

"You mean he's succeeded, sir?" they chorused.

"You bet he has," said Mr. Adams dreamily. "I've spent four hours of torture—and now I'm kind of dizzy. But the operation is a success! My boy will recover!"



CHAPTER 15.

Spreading the Good News!

OMEHOW, the juniors found it impossible to make any sort of demonstration. Mr. Adams had

sank back into his chair again, and seemed to have forgotten their existence. They looked at one another awkwardly, and then moved aside.

"Well wasn't it worth coming?" asked Handforth breathlessly.

"By jingo, yes!" admitted Church. "Now we can enjoy ourselves! Good old Adams! It's fine to know that he'll get well."

None of them could appreciate the American millionaire's feelings. For weeks he had lived through a nightmare, and it was more probable that he himself would now need medical attention.

First of all, the accident, and the knowledge that his son might be a cripple for life; then the mad dash to Hawaii; the return journey, and the cyclone; the rush back to Kingston on board the School Ship. Then, finally, and most critical of all, the operation.

Now it was over, and Mr. Adams was feeling the reaction so acutely that he felt physically weak and ill. Yet, with it, he was happy. His faith in Dr. Howard Carroll was justified.

Incidentally, the Kingston doctors were very astounded men that day. Clever as they were, they had definitely decided that Mr. Adams' quest had been hopeless, that he had sacrificed his yacht in vain, and that no human power could effect a cure for that spinal injury.

Dr. Carroll, of San Francisco, had opened their eyes. This famous American specialist was perhaps the cleverest man in the world in this particular line, and the operation he had performed was a complete triumph.

"Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars!" said Mr. Adams suddenly.

The juniors looked at him.

"Speaking to us, sir?" asked Handforth.

"I'm speaking to anybody," replied the millionaire. "I'm telling you, boys, that I'm going to spend a quarter of a million on building and endowing a hospital for Dr. Carroll. Yes, by golly! I'll show the world

that I appreciate what this man has done for my son!"

"I hope he'll be able to come back to St. Frank's, sir," ventured Gresham.

Mr. Adams laughed—a strained kind of laugh.

"That boy's going back on your ship," he replied promptly.

The juniors thought he was wandering.

"Sure thing!" went on Mr. Adams, as he saw their sceptical looks. "Dr. Carroll is the guy who knows best, and although I was sure bowled over when he told me, I'm letting him have his way."

"But can your son be moved, sir?"

"I guess this climate is too hot for him," said Mr. Adams. "O.K. in the day, but blamed damp and depressing at night. The boy can be moved now, and he's going aboard to-morrow. You'll have me with you for the rest of this trip, sonnies."

Nelson Lee came out soon afterwards, and he was by no means surprised when he saw the five juniors. He led them away, however, and had a few words with them in private.

"Better not speak with Mr. Adams now, young 'uns," he said quietly. "He's rather overwrought. The tension was pretty bad."

"They haven't been fooling him, have they, sir?" asked Duncan.

"Oh, no!" replied Nelson Lee. "Adams will recover. Dr. Carroll has performed something very akin to a miracle. I'm glad—not merely for the boy's sake, but for his father's. It was a fine effort that Mr. Adams made, and it deserved this success. Not many men would have shown such determination and resource."

After that, thoroughly reassured, the juniors went their way.

"Well, we've only been half an hour," said Handforth contentedly, as he looked at his watch. "We've heard the news, and we can enjoy ourselves for the rest of the day. What price an ice-cream somewhere to start with?"

"Good egg!" said the others.

"And after that we'll go on that sight-seeing trip."

"How can we?" asked Church. "All the others have gone."

"Who cares?" said Handforth. "We'll hire a giddy car of our own, and we'll overtake those silly motor-coaches in no time. We'll show 'em!"

This plan was carried out—although Church and McClure and Gresham and Duncan insisted upon going equal shares with the expenses.

They obtained an excellent car, including a native driver, very smart in his uniform, very dusky, and very full of grins. What he didn't know about Jamaica, it seemed, was not worth considering.

He knew every road by heart. This, after all, wasn't very surprising, for Jamaica is only about one hundred and forty-four miles in length, and forty-four in width. There's a backbone of mountains running through the centre, most of the roads keeping to the coasts. The island, indeed, is literally a mass

of crumpled hills, erratic and without any particular design—the majority of these hills being forest-clad to their topmost peaks. It is an island of amazing beauty.

Once outside Kingston, the road proved to be full of interest. The juniors went through Spanish Town, which at one time the English settlers had adopted as the capital, although in those bygone days the place had been known as St. Jago de la Vega. The road meandered through Spanish Town in an astonishing fashion, and the juniors found plenty to see.

In Kingston itself they had driven through the main suburb in the neighbourhood of Halfway Tree in Lower St. Andrew. Here there were any amount of concrete bungalows of the most modern type, with flower-filled gardens. Indeed, these gardens were gay with gorgeous plants of every kind.

The road kept fairly near to the coastline, and this main road encircled the whole island, passing through the chief towns.

Handforth, at least, was very astonished to find that there was no primitive forest. At all events, there was none that he could find. Cotton-wood trees were much in evidence—giant monarchs rearing their heads above all their fellows.

And everywhere along the roads the little party beheld bamboo and orange and lemon and citron. The mango-tree, too, was common. Bananas were to be seen in abundance, for banana growing has become

one of the chief industries of Jamaica, whereas formerly sugar was the main product, and is still extensively grown.

"It's rummy the number of fruit trees growing everywhere," remarked Handforth.

"That's because the settlers for years past have planted fruit-trees all round their homes," said Gresham. "I've been having a look at this guide book, and I know. And don't forget that we're keeping to the main road, and there's not much chance of seeing the interior."

"Why not?" asked Handforth. "Let's go! We might have an adventure with some wild animals. Elephants, for example——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or tigers——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My poor ass, there aren't any wild animals in Jamaica," said Gresham kindly.

"At least, there weren't until you arrived."

"You silly idiot——"

"Jamaica is a thoroughly settled island, with heaps of industries," declared Gresham, with the air of a guide.

"They grow bananas and sugar and coconuts and coffee and tobacco, and goodness knows what else."

"Rum, for example," said Handforth. "Everybody's heard of Jamaica rum."

"But they don't grow rum, you chump—they make it."

"What do I care?" asked Handforth. "I'm not interested in rum, anyhow. By George!"

Birthday Presents!

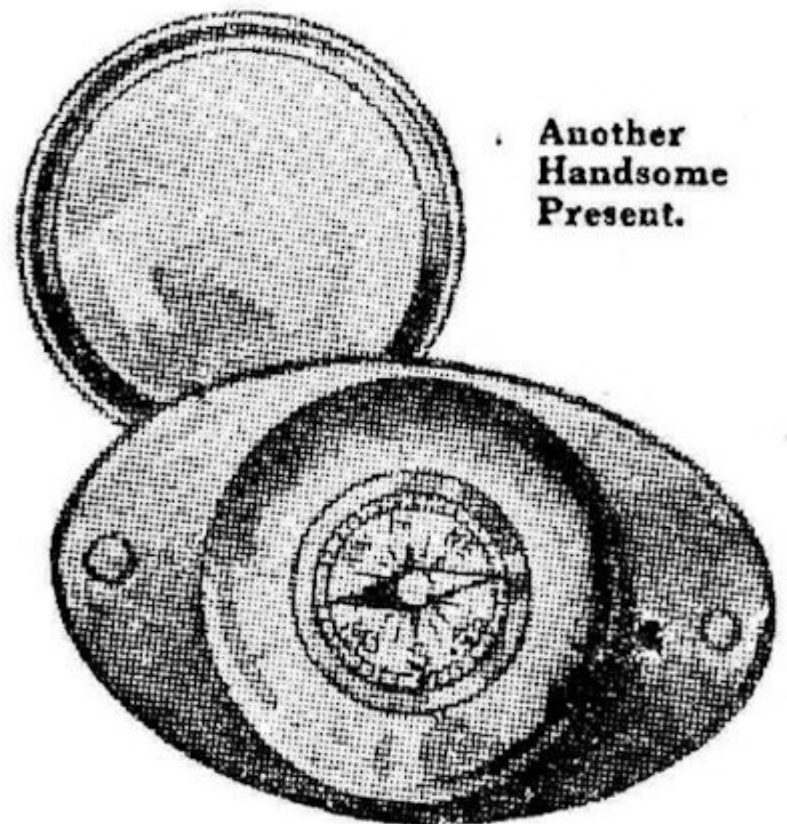
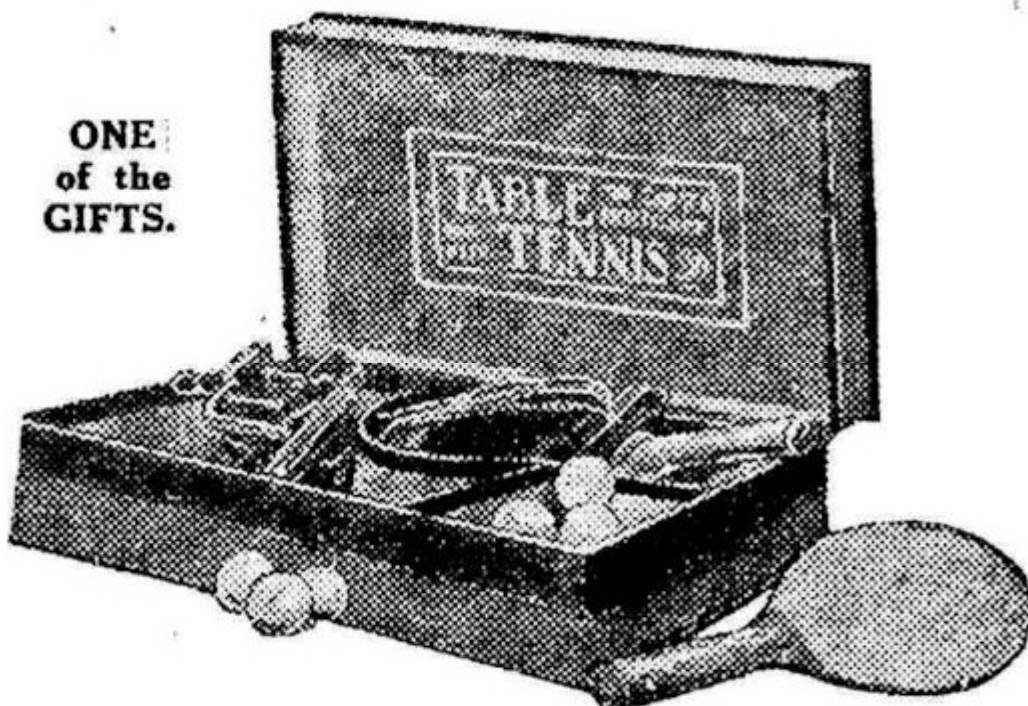
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To Readers!**

There is a list of over **TEN
DIFFERENT ARTICLES** from
which to choose.

Look at those waterfalls over there! Hi, stop!" he added to the driver. "Let's have a look at this properly."

Church sighed.

"Never knew such a chap!" he murmured. "As a rule he doesn't care twopence about scenery, but just because we're in a hurry to catch up the crowd, he's stopping practically every other mile!"

It was certainly exasperating, particularly as Handforth insisted upon stopping to look at beauty spots that were only ordinarily interesting. Some really gorgeous places left him quite cold.

But at last the main party was overtaken, and there was considerable surprise when Handforth & Co. and the other two Removites drove up in state. The news quickly passed round about Ulysses Spencer Adams, and although the seniors made no striking demonstration, the Remove, at least, gave a hearty cheer.

"We're all jolly glad—for Mr. Adams' sake," said Nipper. "The old boy was absolutely at his wits' end, and now he'll have some relief. It's good to know that we shan't lose our pet American booster either."

"He's coming home with us," said Handforth. "You can't beat old England after all. Even this American doctor reckons it's the best place."

"That American doctor is a man of brains!" said Nipper stoutly.



CHAPTER 16.

Homeward Bound!

IT was late evening before the tired but satisfied party got back to Kingston, having in the meantime seen a great many of Jamaica's beauty spots.

Many of the sightseers had gained the impression that the island was not very thickly populated. This is mainly because so many of the settlers' homes are hidden just off the main roads, surrounded by fruit-trees and other luxuriant vegetation.

Actually the island is very heavily populated, and some of the villages are almost always on the move, the communities shifting from one spot to another, mainly on account of cultivation.

In places the boys had seen quaint old buildings with loopholed walls—these latter being relics of the old buccaneer days, when it was necessary for people to protect themselves against the lawless pirates.

"By George, yes!" said Handforth, when the thought struck him. "We're on the Spanish Main, aren't we? I'd forgotten that until now. The pirates used to dodge about amongst these islands, didn't they?"

"Probably Drake himself walked over this very ground," said Nipper. "As for Morgan, he's certain to have been here."

"Rather a pity there aren't any pirates now," said Handforth regretfully. "They'd help to liven things up a bit."

"You're never satisfied," said Church.

When they all went on board they were ready enough for a hearty meal and then bed. As this visit to Jamaica was not actually in the schedule, there was to be no further visit ashore.

As Nelson Lee announced the following morning, the St. Francis would leave for England within twenty-four hours, and it was expected that she would drop anchor in Caistowe Harbour—her original port of departure—in little over a week, providing no rough weather was encountered in the Atlantic.

"A week!" said Nipper breathlessly. "By Jove! It's hard to realise, you chaps. Back in Caistowe—and at St. Frank's!"

"I'll bet we don't do it in under ten days," said Handforth.

"Well, a day or two won't matter much," said Church. "What's the date now? I'm blessed if I haven't lost count of the giddy months—going from one part of the world to another like this!"

"By George!" ejaculated Handforth. "Monday week will be Easter!"

"What!"

"Of course it will!" went on Handforth. "So even when we get back we shan't go straight to the school. We shall go home for the holidays!"

"Good egg!" declared Fullwood. "Nothing could be better. A few days at home, and then back to St. Frank's in the ordinary way. Our people are bound to want to see us, anyhow."

"They're always fussing over something!" said Handforth. "They'll expect us to come back looking like niggers—or as thin as railings. And here we are, as fit as fiddles."

"We've been jolly lucky," said Nipper. "Hardly any illness throughout the whole trip. It'll be rather good if we can get into port before Easter, won't it? Let's hope the good old ship makes record time!"

The prospect of starting off on the last lap of the world tour was one which held everybody with a thrill. They had all been eager enough to start on this cruise, but now they were just as eager to get back.

The fact was they were homesick.

And this "disease" affected them all, from the most dignified Sixth-Former down to the most excitable fag. They longed to see England again, and to get back into the ordinary routine of things.

"We shall be in time for two or three weeks of football, anyhow," said Nipper, with relish. "We've had plenty of cricket this winter, and before we know where we are our own season will start—so a bit of football in between will make a break."

Later on that day, while the school was at lessons, a launch came alongside, and Ulysses Spencer Adams was brought on board. A

special state-room had been prepared for him. Mr. Adams had insisted upon accompanying his son, and another state-room had been got ready for him, adjoining the sick-room.

Dr. Carroll was also making the trip, to say nothing of several trained nurses. Mr. Adams did things thoroughly.

Dr. Carroll had protested that his own presence was entirely unnecessary, and his retention was a needless expense, but the millionaire would hear of no refusal; he wanted his son to have the finest medical attention until he was fairly on his feet—and the cost was of no consequence.

"Well, they've got him aboard," said Gresham, after the Remove had come out of their class-room. "Everything's all serene, and we shall probably be sailing before dawn to-morrow."

"Let's go and give Adams a look-in," said Handforth briskly.

"You ass! We can't go near the sick-room," said Church. "It's right in the masters' quarters, and out of bounds."

"We'll try, anyhow," said Handforth doggedly.

Of course, his effort was a failure. Long before he got anywhere near Adams' state-room he was pulled up by a prefect and marched back. The prefect was Biggleswade, and he was inclined to be far more severe than usual.

"And the next time I catch you fooling about in that part of the ship, I'll give you a hundred lines!" he said sternly. "You young ass! Haven't you any more consideration for the patient?"

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "I was going to offer him my congratters—"

"Well, you can leave that until he's better," said Biggleswade. "It's like your nerve to go shouting about near the sick-room!"

"I wasn't shouting."

"Your ordinary voice," said Biggleswade, "is just the same as any other fellow's shout. Bear that in mind, my son."

Handforth, as usual, took an exaggerated view of Biggleswade's statement. When he returned to the Junior quarters he was full of a new idea.

"Adams has got to have complete quietness!" he said impressively. "I've just had it officially. So if you chaps are made of the right stuff, you will only talk in whispers."

"Something like yours at the present moment?" asked Travers politely.

"By George! I'd forgotten!" said Handforth, with a start. "We've got to creep about on tip-toe and keep our voices lowered," he added in a whisper that was like a miniature gale. "So don't forget!"

Remarkably enough, for several hours the juniors actually did keep their voices low, and refrained from any kind of shouting. It wasn't until Fenton, of the Sixth, noticed this that any comment was made.

"What's the matter with you kids?" asked the St. Frank's captain, as he paused near a group of Removites on deck.

"The matter with us?" said Fullwood. "Nothing."

"What are you whispering for?"

"Well, we don't want to disturb the patient," put in Boots. "We've been warned to keep our voices low and to walk about as quietly as possible."

"Oh!" said Fenton, smiling. "Who told you this yarn?"

"Handforth!" said everybody.

"Of course I did!" put in Handforth. "Biggleswade told me."

"Biggleswade is a big ass—and you kids know it," said Fenton. "There's no need to creep about and to talk in whispers. Adams isn't ill—he's strong enough physically, and he'll probably enjoy hearing you fellows yelling about as usual."

Fenton walked on, and Handforth was promptly seized, whirled aloft, and bumped on the deck with tremendous vigour. The juniors were only too glad to use some of their stored-up energy, and they were enormously relieved to know that there was no need for excessive quietness.

Indeed, three days later, when the School Ship was well on her way into the Atlantic, and speeding ever northwards, Adams himself was wheeled on deck, and his Form-fellows were allowed to gather round and congratulate him upon his fine progress.

"I've given you guys a whole heap of trouble, and I'm sure grateful for the way you've rallied round," said Adams earnestly. "Gee! You're honest-to-goodness pals!"

"Rats!" said Nipper. "What have we done, anyhow?"

"Gee! I was sure dumb when I walked into that flivver," said Adams. "Who'd think that a little slip like that could have caused all this trouble? But I guess I'm mending now. Maybe I'll be at St. Frank's again at the beginning of the new term."

"You'll be lucky if you take your old place in the Remove by Whitsun," said Nipper.

"Doc says I'll be on my feet within a couple of weeks," said Adams happily.

The weather, as though making up for its previous vagaries, remained splendid through the Atlantic crossing. The School Ship not only kept to her schedule, but gained on it. It was now common talk on the ship that she would certainly arrive on Easter Monday, at the very latest.

"Rather a pity, in a way," said Handforth, as he stood on deck, leaning against the rail with a group of other Removites—all of them overcoated and enjoying the unfamiliar coldness of the atmosphere. "If it wasn't for the hols, Reggie Pitt and Castleton and Levi, and all those other chaps would come along and give us a welcome home."

"And Brewster & Co., too, of the River House School—and perhaps the Moor View girls," said Nipper.

"By George, yes!" said Handforth dreamily. "I wonder how Irene's been getting on?"

"Probably worn to a shadow by now," said

(Continued on page 44.)



E. S. BROOKS

BETWEEN OURSELVES!

OUR AUTHOR CHATS WITH OUR READERS

NOTE.—If any reader writes to me I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed, EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE SCHOOL STORY LIBRARY, The Flectway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.



G. DESMOND RICHARDSON

SORRY to have been so long before publishing your photograph — G. Desmond Richardson (Burton-on-Trent) — but I hope you will take my word for it that I haven't held it back deliberately — in the fear, perhaps, that our circulation would be adversely affected. Nothing of the kind, old man. On the contrary, I haven't the slightest doubt that this week the circulation of the Old Paper will go up by leaps and bounds. We've got lots of girl readers, you know, and the word is bound to go round. Joking aside, though, these photos all "go through the mill," and cannot appear immediately after I receive them. First of all I've got to get the permission of the sender to have the portrait reproduced, if this isn't given when the photo is sent to me; then it is passed into the clutches of the technical department (after the Editor has given it the "once over"), who then proceed to do their worst upon it. And then, on the top of all this, the Old Paper goes to press weeks before publication. The net result is that readers are liable to gaze at their own photos, and say: "Who's this funny-looking merchant?" having forgotten, after all this time, what they looked like in their young days.

* * *

If your acquaintances have been foolish enough to suggest that you have been paid for having parts of your letters reproduced in these columns—James W. Cook (Poplar)—there is a very simple remedy for you. Ask these chumps to write to me themselves. If their letters contain matter worth quoting, I'll quote it. And they'll soon see whether they get paid for it! The very idea, of course, is ridiculous. There would be utterly no value in any quotation if I paid people for permission to use it. The worth of such quotations lies in the fact that they are sincere expressions of opinion, and not merely given for the object of gain. All such remarks that are quoted, too, are purely voluntary. Never have they been solicited. Why, if I made a point of asking readers to write to me under those conditions, I should get hundreds of letters filled with the most fulsome flattery; and in publishing such grossly insincere praise I should be laying myself open to ridicule. I should hope I'm incapable of such low-down tricks. Old readers will know perfectly well that my

general policy has been to ask readers for their grumbles, so that I can write the stuff that is wanted by the majority. I've published a great deal more adverse criticism than the other kind. And if I ever have the faintest suspicion that any letter of praise is insincere, I never publish a word from it. As for paying our readers for their opinions—or, rather, for the permission to publish their opinions—the very idea is dotty, as I have already said.

* * *

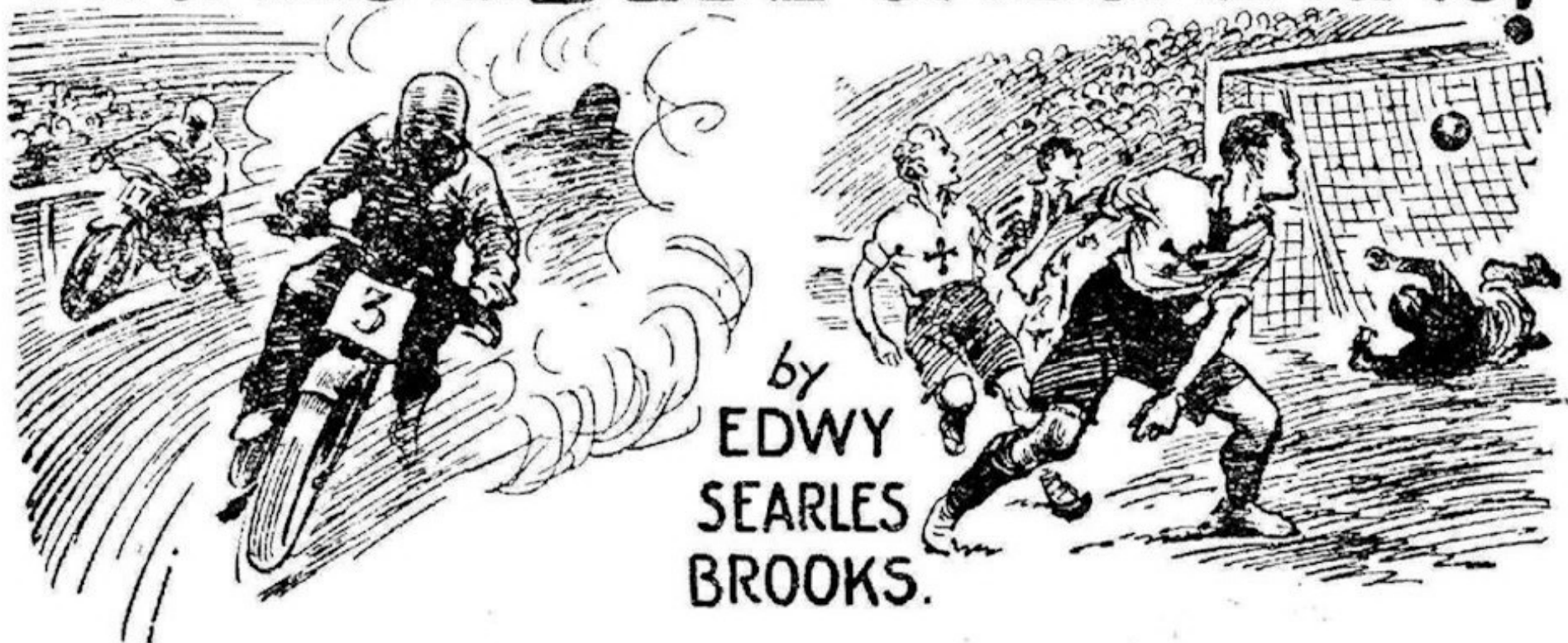
Of course it's my "phizog," as you call it, at the top of this page—Frank David Roche Ferris (Auckland, N.Z.)—and I'd very much like to see yours facing it. So don't forget to keep your promise, and let me have it by the next post. You've already given me permission to publish it. I'm assuming that you haven't already sent it by the time you read these lines, and I'm safe in asking for it by the next post, because even then it can't reach me until about the middle of June. So I've got plenty of time to fortify myself. By the way, how did you like last week's yarn? Sorry I haven't been able to oblige you with a whole series about New Zealand, but the home readers are in the great majority, you know, and I think they're getting impatient for the St. Frank's chaps to be back at the Old School.

* * *

No—Charles Barker (Windsor)—it wouldn't do at all to drop all the cads out of my stories. Unfortunately, we're not all saints in this world; and, just as cads *do* exist in real life, they must necessarily exist in my stories. If not, the yarns would be rather flat and dull, I'm afraid. In many, many cases the whole interest of a story is developed through the malicious action of some cad, and the efforts of the victim to disentangle himself from the meshes into which he has been lured. The tales wouldn't be worth reading if every character in them was angelic!

A FULL-OF-THRILLS YARN BY YOUR FAVOURITE AUTHOR!

RIVALRY OF THE BLUE CRUSADERS!



by
EDWY
SEARLES
BROOKS.

Rex Carrington's properly "in the soup." He's injured his foot and can't play footer; he owes Burke money—and now this week Piecan, manager of the Blues, springs the greatest shock of all!

Suspended!

BUT how can I pay back Piecan?" asked Rex.

"Never mind about that now. The main thing is to put Piecombe straight," replied Fatty Fowkes.

"For goodness' sake, Rex, stick to the Blues! Boy, you're needed! We're after promotion, and—"

"Hang it, I know all that!"

"You haven't been acting as though you knew it," said the big goalie sternly. "Young Corky is a brick. He's done heaps for us, Rex, and for the old club. The Blues are going to be the most famous team in the country—with the finest stadium. And next season—First Division! This dirt-track business is only a flash in the pan, and if you go in for it you'll be throwing away the substance for a shadow. Stick to the Blues, and help us to win that championship!"

Rex Carrington looked at Fatty with sparkling eyes.

"I will, old man—honestly!" he said, gripping Fatty's hand. "I've been an absolute chump—but thank goodness you're here to ram a few home truths down my neck."

Fatty was overjoyed at Rex's frank admission, and when he and Rex got downstairs, the latter lost no time in going straight to the manager's office. Fatty, in the meantime, hovered about in the passage.

Mr. Piecombe was sitting at his desk alone. Rex shut the door and advanced into the room.

"Good-morning, sir!" he said, coughing.

For a moment or two Mr. Ulysses Piecombe took no notice. Then he deliberately put his pen down, sat back, adjusted his glasses, and gave Rex a searching inspection.

"Good morning, Carrington," he said, in a voice that struck chill. "As I expected! Obvious signs of—er—dissipation. There are rings under your eyes. You are pale. Your shoulders droop. Your muscles appear to be flabby."

This, after all, was an exaggeration, and Rex, who had come here feeling so humble, began to resent the manager's criticism.

"I'm not so bad as all that, sir," he protested.

"Possibly not Carrington—possibly not," retorted Mr. Piecombe, allowing his gaunt figure to lean forward over the desk. "Nevertheless, I can detect distinct signs of your folly. Let me remind you that you have defied my authority repeatedly during the past week or so. Your play yesterday was atrocious—"

"But it wasn't my fault, sir," protested Rex hotly. "Didn't I explain to you how I found that piece of rubber in my shoe?"

"Upon my word!" flamed Mr. Piecombe. "Have you the audacity to repeat that preposterous excuse?"

Rex swallowed hard.

"I came here this morning, sir, to talk things over quietly with you," he said deliberately. "I want to stick to the Blues—to help

THE OPENING CHAPTERS

retold in brief on

Page 39

the Blues to promotion. I've got something to tell you, sir, and I shall want your help. But you're making it very hard for me."

Mr. Piccombe, who had no idea of what was in Rex's mind, and who was still smarting under the affront that Rex had offered him the previous night, gave vent to an angry snort.

"It's about time you came to your senses, Carrington," he replied. "So you want my help, do you? Huh! Only when you require my help do you come to me with this—er—humble spirit. And you have the effrontery to repeat that nonsensical story of a piece of rubber!"

"But, sir—"

"Let me finish!" snapped the manager curtly. "If you were frankly to confess that you played a bad game yesterday—incidentally causing the team to lose the match—because of your absurd track-racing, I should be inclined to listen to you. You know perfectly well that you received an injury in that ridiculous Speedway."

"That injury was a trifle, sir," said Rex hotly. "Ask Grouser."

"Grouser?" repeated Mr. Piccombe, lifting his eyebrows.

"Smart, the trainer, sir."

"If you mean Smart, you should say Smart. I object to these nicknames."

"You're being deliberately awkward, sir," growled Rex. "You've never objected to us calling him Grouser before."

"Don't be impertinent, Carrington."

"I'm not impertinent!" shouted the centre-forward, exasperated beyond all measure. "I came here in a friendly spirit, sir, and you deliberately put me into a temper."

"Well, this is beyond endurance!" snapped Mr. Piccombe, leaping to his feet. "Not content with abusing me, Carrington, you must needs accuse me of causing you to fly into these—er—passions. I'm ashamed of you! As for that false story of yours, I do not wish to hear it again."

"I tell you it's not false!" burst out Rex, his eyes blazing. "But if you don't like to believe it, you needn't! As for the club, it seems to me that you don't care whether it goes to pieces or not."

"Carrington!" boomed the manager.

"I wanted to stay on, but I don't believe you want me!" went on Rex passionately. "I dare say it'll be better if I go to the Speedway, and sign on as a track-racer. They don't call me a liar there, anyhow!"

Mr. Piccombe jumped up from his chair like a Jack-in-the-box. He leaned across the desk, knocking over the telephone as he did so. Quivering with anger, he pointed to the door.

"Carrington, leave this office!" he said grimly. "Your insolence is beyond all endurance. I have no alternative but to suspend you indefinitely—and without pay!"

"Suspend me, sir!" gasped Rex. "Just when I'm needed so badly?"

"This club does not need men who are divided in their interests," said Mr. Pic-

combe harshly. "Until you can come to me in a less truculent mood, Carrington, I have no desire whatever to see you again. Now go!"

Rex went—and the breach between these two was wider than ever!

Showing His Colours!

FATTY FOWKES looked almost comical in his dismay when he beheld Rex Carrington's flushed face, his gleaming eyes, his expression of hot fury.

"Didn't it work?" he asked quickly.

"Work!" said Rex, his voice thick and strained. "Oh, yes! It worked all right! It worked fine! I'm suspended!"

"Suspended!" yelled Fatty.

"Indefinitely!" snapped Rex. "Oh, we've had a fine old row! Piecan called me a liar, and I got wild, and we went at it hammer and tongs."

"But didn't you explain—"

"I explained nothing—he didn't give me a chance," said the centre-forward. "And in the end he suspended me. Oh, it's no good, Fatty. I tell you, the position is hopeless. I'd better clear out of the club straight away."

The big goalie looked alarmed.

"You can't do that!" he said quickly. "Oh, by glory! What a hulking great fool I was not to go in with you! When you and Piecan get together, it's like a cat and dog fight! You need a referee!"

"You couldn't have done any good," grunted Rex. "I tell you, Piecan is impossible. He just goaded me on, and it was out of the question for me to tell him anything about that affair of last night. Why, if I had explained about that card game, and my losing a hundred and fifty quid, he would have had a fit. Pity I didn't tell him!" he added sourly.

And he marched off, breathing hard, leaving Fatty Fowkes speechless with alarm and worry. For Fatty knew how imperative it was that Rex should recover his tip-top form and throw himself whole-heartedly into the fight for promotion. There was no other centre-forward who could take Rex's place—no reserve capable of adequately filling the vacancy.

In the lobby Rex came across Curly Hankin & Co. The three rascally reserves were grinning at him openly. No doubt they had heard echoes of the angry voices from the office.

"Another row?" asked Curly tauntingly. "You're getting on fine with Piccombe these days, aren't you, Carrington?"

"Mind your own confounded business!" snapped Rex.

"Keep your hair on!" said Curly. "A bit touchy, I suppose, because you made such a mess of things in the last game!"

Rex clenched his fists, and Curly Hankin & Co. dodged hurriedly out into the Triangle. By this manoeuvre they undoubtedly saved themselves from being dealt with drastically.

Rex took himself off to the gymnasium, where, in solitary state, he proceeded to let off some steam, as it were, by violently punching the punch-ball.

Grouser came in, and found him in the middle of this task.

"What's the idea?" he asked truculently. "Trying to wear your muscles out? How many times have I told you to go at it easily?"

"Help!" groaned Rex. "So you're starting now!"

He swung towards the door, but Grouser grasped his arm.

"See here!" said the trainer darkly. "None of these tricks, my lad! No temper! It's about time I took you in hand——"

"You're be wasting your time, Grouser," said the centre-forward. "Haven't you seen Piecan? I'm suspended!"

And he went out, leaving John Smart flabbergasted. Five minutes later Smart was excitedly talking to Mr Piecombe, urging the manager to rescind that rash sentence. With Rex suspended, the team would undoubtedly go to pieces.

At about this same time Curly Hankin & Co. were lounging about in Bellton Lane, near the stile which led into the wood. Apparently they were there by appointment. At all events, it wasn't long before Mr. Peter Burke made his appearance from the foot-path.

"Well?" he asked briefly, as he came up.

"Things couldn't be better," said Hankin, with a grin. "Carrington's had another row with Piecombe, and he's been suspended. He's going about like a bear with a sore head."

"Fine for breaking away, eh?" said Mr. Burke shrewdly. "Good! Hurry back at once, and tell him I'm waiting here. Tell him it's urgent."

"And supposing he won't come?" asked Brewer.

"He'll come," replied the track-manager. "If he shows any sort of reluctance, mention to him that I want to see him about a certain little document. He'll know what that means."

Ten minutes later Curly & Co. were back at St. Frank's, and they found Rex mooning about in the West Square. By this time the boys were all at their lessons, and the Triangle and the Squares were deserted.

"Burke's down the lane, and wants to see you," said Curly abruptly.

"Let him want!" retorted Rex.

"He says it's important—about a document."

"Document?" repeated Rex, with a start. "Oh! Where do you say he is?"

"Just by the stile," said Curly casually.

"All right. I'll think about it."

Rex Carrington apparently did not think for long, for within two minutes he was on his way down the lane. As Mr. Peter Burke had suspected, that mention of the word "document" had done the trick.

When Rex arrived, Mr. Burke was leaning carelessly against the stile. He straightened up, and wagged a forefinger at the footballer.

"You're very careless, young man," he said admonishingly.

"I don't know what you mean," retorted Rex.

"What about this?" said Mr. Burke, pulling a scrap of paper out of his pocket, and revealing it as the precious I O U.

"How did you get it?" demanded Rex quickly. "I missed it when I got home last night——"

"And I don't wonder at it," said Mr. Burke. "I found it on the floor in my front room. You should be more careful with such vital papers."

Rex tried to put his mind back. He was convinced that he had never dropped that I O U out of his pocket. In some way

THE OPENING CHAPTERS IN BRIEF

ULYSSES PIECOMBE—more commonly known as Piecan—manager of that famous Second Division Football Club, The Blue Crusaders, is worried. Not because the Blues are doing badly—on the contrary—but because a dirt-track has just been opened near the Stronghold, the Blues' enclosure. The players, however, seem unperturbed. Especially

REX CARRINGTON, the Blues' brilliant centre-forward. Rex is keen on dirt-track racing, and he enters for some of the races, although Piecan has forbidden him to do so. His clever riding considerably impresses

PETER BURKE, manager of the Speedway. Burke, indeed, asks Rex to chuck up footer and become a dirt-track rider, but Rex refuses. The Speedway manager is all the more determined to get Rex. Curly Hankin, of the Blues' Reserves, helps him in his scheming. Rex still continues to race at the Speedway in defiance of Piecan, and the breach between the footballer and manager widens. One night Burke invites Rex to his house. They play cards, and the centre-forward finds himself in debt to the extent of one hundred and fifty pounds! He writes out an I O U, but Burke refuses to take it. Returning home, Rex finds Fatty Fowkes, the Blues' genial goulie, awaiting him—and ~~also~~ discovers that the I O U is missing. Rex tells Fatty what has happened. Fatty advises him to go to Piecan and tell him everything. No doubt Piecan will lend Rex the money to pay back Burke.

(Now read on.)

Mr. Burke's companions had "lifted" it out of his pocket. It was merely the track-manager's policy to assert that the paper had been "found on the floor."

"Well, it's very funny, that's all," said Rex bluntly. "If I dropped that paper out of my pocket, you can call me a nigger! Did you come here especially with it?" he added, as he held out his hand.

"Just a minute—just a minute," said Mr. Burke gently. "Second thoughts, Carrington, are sometimes better than the first. When morning comes we're not so reckless. I rather think I had better maintain possession of this trifle."

Rex laughed bitterly.

"I thought it was funny—trusting me!" he said, his voice becoming hard. "All right! It's your I O U. Keep it. And I've had second thoughts, too. It seems to me, Mr. Burke, that that precious card game of yours wasn't particularly straight."

"Now, now!" said the other sternly. "You mustn't say things like that, Carrington. If you do, I might assume that you're one of those curs who repudiate their debts of honour."

"I'm repudiating nothing!" said Rex. "I'll pay you that money—just as soon as I can. And I'll take this opportunity of telling you that I'm definitely keeping away from the Speedway in future."

Mr. Burke's eyes narrowed, and he looked dangerous.

"In that case, how do you propose to meet this debt?" he said. "If you're willing to sign a contract for the Speedway, I'm prepared to tear this document up and regard it as null and void. That's generous. But if you refuse, I shall go straight to Mr. Piecombe and tell him what kind of a life you've been leading—and I don't suppose that will do you much good!"

Mr. Burke's Clever Move.

REX CARRINGTON flushed deeply. He knew that Mr. Burke was threatening him with exposure, and the very nature of the threat was contemptible, and a clear indication that the previous night's card-party had been a pre-arranged conspiracy. It had been organised for the especial purpose of getting Rex into the trap.

Rex was all the more incensed because Burke's threat was far less dangerous than he imagined. Rex had been prepared to tell Mr. Piecombe everything, and it was only by an unfortunate chance that that confidence had not been made.

Mr. Burke's threat was lacking the sting that he had hoped for, for Rex wasn't afraid of it in the least. But it had the effect of enraging him, and he realised, too, that the story from Burke's lips would be infinitely worse in Piecombe's ears than if it had come from his own.

"You hound!" he said hotly. "So that's your game, is it? By gosh! What a fool I've been to take any notice of your in-

fernal soft-soap! You're just trying to get a hold over me!"

"You'd better be careful what you say——"

"I'll say what I like!" roared the centre-forward. "You're a crook, Burke, and you don't care what methods you adopt so long as you get me for your rotten race-track! Well, I'm finished with you!"

Burke flushed, inwardly uneasy at this unexpected turn. The "lamb" was not quite so easy to handle.

"We won't quarrel!" said Burke, controlling himself with an effort. "That won't land us anywhere. I don't want to threaten you, Carrington, but you'd better realise that——"

"You can save your breath!" snorted Rex. "I can see through your game, and I'm going to knock you down! I feel like it!"

Crash!

Before Peter Burke could even attempt to dodge, Rex's fist thudded into his face. The track-manager staggered, and reeled back.

Yet, in spite of his pain, he kept his wits about him, and in that instant he performed a little manoeuvre which definitely labelled him as an opportunist.

Had he chosen, he could have completely recovered his balance, and he nearly did so. Then, as he pretended to stagger again, he brought his umbrella down, as though trying to help himself, and it was no mere chance that he directed the metal ferrule with brutal force in the centre of Rex's right foot!

"Ooooooh!" gasped Rex, agonised.

It had all been done so quickly that it really appeared accidental—a result of Rex's own punch. The footballer swayed and rolled over, and Mr. Burke fell back, breathing hard.

"You fool!" he panted. "There's no sense in fighting! You're too excitable Carrington—too impulsive. I'm making you a good offer—— What are you lying there for? What's the matter with you, man?"

"Help me up!" muttered Rex. "I'm crooked! My foot! Your umbrella went through my foot! I believe you did it on purpose, you devilish brute! You deliberately crooked me!"

"If that's your tone, I'll go!" snapped the other.

He turned on his heel and strode away, assuming a fierce indignation.

Rex was left there, aware of an acute shooting agony in his left foot. He had an idea that that thin stick of the metal umbrella had penetrated through his foot. At least, it felt like it.

He tried to get up, and did manage to reach his feet; but when he tried to walk the pain was so intense that he collapsed again.

It was lucky for him that Dave Moran and Fatty Fowkes and a number of other Blues hove in sight just then, trotting down the lane, off for a morning run. They came



Quivering with anger, Piecan pointed to the door. "Leave this office at once, Carrington!" he said grimly. "From now on you're suspended indefinitely—and without pay!"

on at an increased pace when they caught sight of Rex, and they gathered round him in concern.

"What's happened?" asked Fatty quickly.

"That rat, Burke!" panted Rex. "I knocked him down just now. His umbrella went through my foot—believe he did it on purpose! Anyhow, I'm crocked!"

"Through your foot!" shouted Dave Moran. "Quick! Let's have a look!"

They unlaced his boot rapidly, and gently drew it off—not without a suppressed gasp from Rex. Blood was oozing through his sock. The sock came off, too, and Dave caught his breath in sharply as he examined the wound.

"Great Scott!" he said, with concern.

That iron stick, driving down with great force, had penetrated Rex Carrington's foot, just between two of his toes, in the fleshy part. Apparently the bones had not been affected, but there was no doubt that the wound was a serious one—for a footballer.

"Bring him along!" said Fatty Fowkes huskily. "Carry him, boys! He can't walk like this. Grouser's got to have a look at him."

Rex protested, but in vain. He was carried up to St. Frank's, and taken swiftly into the gymnasium. Smart was quickly found, and he gave a yelp of consternation when he saw the wound.

"Better fetch a doctor!" he snapped. "I can't deal with this. It might turn septic! An umbrella, you say? Probably rusty! What the thunder do you think you've been doing, Carrington?" he added, glaring.

"You don't suppose I did it on purpose, do you?"

"You're crocked—for weeks!" said Grouser tragically. "You won't be able to kick an air-balloon until the end of the month—let alone a football."

And this was no exaggeration. Yet there was no doubt that Rex Carrington, crocked as a footballer, would find no difficulty in riding round the dirt track. His injury would debar him from football, but not from track-racing.

The trainer did all he could in the way of first aid, and in the meantime Mr. Piecombe had been informed. At least, somebody hurried to his office. But the manager, as it happened, was himself looking for Rex.

And Mr. Piecombe was in a gentle mood. He had been thinking things over, partly because of Grouser's hint, and he had come to the conclusion that Rex Carrington was a fellow who must be dealt with very diplomatically.

"Ah, Carrington, here you are!" said Mr. Piecombe crisply, as he looked into the gymnasium. "Having a little massage, eh? Good! I'm glad to see that you are so—cr—

(Continued on page 44.)

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 102.

SECTION A	READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP. I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE SCHOOL STORY LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with the Membership Number assigned to me, and Membership Badge.
SECTION B	MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS. I, Member No..... (give Membership No.), hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.
SECTION C	NEW READER'S DECLARATION. I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE SCHOOL STORY LIBRARY."
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INSTRUCTIONS.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE SCHOOL STORY LIBRARY. On one of the forms leave in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. *The second form* is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together, and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE SCHOOL STORY LIBRARY, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

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writes his name and address at the bottom of the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, providing that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

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If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.

NOTICE!

The St. Frank's League has now attained such proportions that we are compelled to discontinue the offer of gold medals in connection therewith. The silver and bronze medals will still be available, however, as heretofore, to those who qualify for them in accordance with the rules.



Our Weekly Pow-Wow!

By
The Editor.

Your Editor welcomes letters from all his readers; send him one now. Address it to: The Editor, "Nelson Lee School Story Library," Flectway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

April Fools' Day!

THE St. Frank's boys are on the last lap of their wonderful tour. Next week finds them back in England once more. Nipper & Co. have had a glorious time—they've thoroughly enjoyed their visits to Australia and South Africa and New Zealand and the West Indies—but for all that they're glad to be home. To them, after all, there's no place like England.

And now that they are back, they're looking forward to some stirring times. First of all the Easter holidays; just to put them in trim for the fray. Then St. Frank's once more; with cricket in the offing; happy times with Irene & Co.; japes against Hal Brewster & Co. of the River House School. Oh, yes, it's just great to be back in good old England!

Unfortunately for Nipper & Co., they themselves are the victims of a jape—a jape perpetrated by Irene & Co.

In the excitement of their homecoming, Nipper and his chums have forgotten one all-important point—the First of April. But Irene Manners and her Moor View school friends haven't—and don't they just give the St. Frank's fellows socks!

From the foregoing you will gather an idea of the theme of next week's stunning long complete story, entitled: "The St. Frank's April Fools!" A great yarn, this. A yarn that will make you laugh and laugh—and then laugh; a screamingly funny yarn excellently written by your favourite author; a yarn you'll all thoroughly enjoy and then want to read again.

Don't miss this treat, whatever you do, chums!

A Few Replies in Brief.

S. D., of Birmingham, and others want to know when the next St. Frank's League Form is likely to be published. I'm obliging this week, chums. Thanks very much for your helpful suggestions, "Staunch Reader," of Manchester. I'll bear them in mind. Yes, I shall always be pleased to hear from you. "Enquirer," of Thames Ditton, would like to know when the Boat Race was in-

stituted, and who won the first race. 1829; Oxford were the winners. "Gwen," of Clapton, thinks the Old Paper is getting better and better—thank you for those kind words. Gwen!—and she'd like the Moor View girls to come into the stories more frequently. Irene & Co. figure prominently in next week's yarn; write and tell me what you think of it, won't you, Gwen? Chelsea have never won the F.A. Cup, "Supporter," of Notting Hill, and they've only been in the Final Tie once. That was in 1914-15, when they were beaten by Sheffield United by three goals to nil.

THE EDITOR.

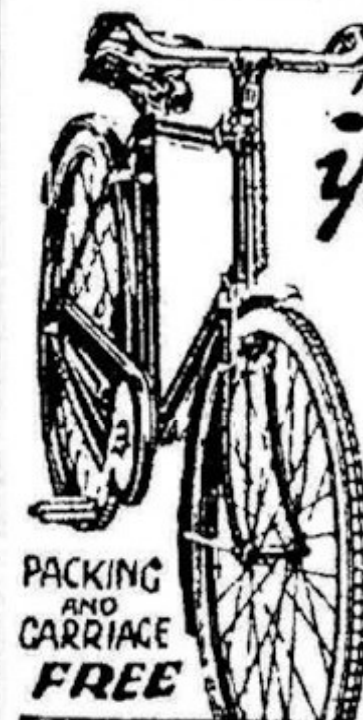
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THE PERIL OF THE PACIFIC!

(Continued from page 35.)

Church. "Think of the awful time she's had since Christmas, worrying about you."

"Yes," said Handforth absently. "I expect it's been pretty rotten for her."

Everybody yelled, and Handforth glared.

"You're spoiling asses!" he growled. "What's the idea of cackling like that? When we get to Caistowe we shall find nobody there—not even our own chaps. Why can't we go to Southampton instead?"

"What does it matter?" smiled Nipper. "Caistowe's just as good—and, personally, I shall be jolly pleased to see the old place again."

During the last stages of the voyage, everybody was eager and impatient—glad to be home after their many adventures in warmer climes. And it was good to know that they would arrive in time for Easter.

But none of them had the faintest suspicion of the overwhelming surprise that was to be sprung upon them immediately upon their arrival.

THE END.

(That's the end of this fun series. Next week Nipper and his chums are back at St. Frank's—where they get the shock of their lives. Read all about it in "The St. Frank's April Fools!" which is the title of next Wednesday's rollicking complete yarn.)

Rivals of the Blue Crusaders!

(Continued from page 41.)

assiduous in your training. I have decided to cancel your suspension."

Rex looked up rather blankly.

"We must pull together," continued Mr. Piccombe, whilst everybody stared at him in wonder. "Let us be friends, Carrington. I detest those constant bickerings and—"

"It's too late, sir," interrupted Rex bitterly.

"I'm done for!"

"Done for?" shouted Mr. Piccombe. "Smart! What is he talking about?"

"Look at this, sir," said Grouser mournfully. "He won't kick another football for a month, at the very least!"

Mr. Ulysses Piccombe went positively pale with consternation—whilst inwardly Rex felt certain that Burke had caused that injury deliberately.

Where was he now? He seemed to have fallen between two stools. He was unable to play for the Blues—and he swore that he would never ride under Burke's banner again!

The prospect was black, whichever way he looked at it!

(What's Rex going to do now? He owes Burke one hundred and fifty pounds, and the only way to get that money is to go in for track-racing. Yet he's vowed he won't do this. Will he be forced to break his word? Don't miss reading next week's absorbing chapters, chums.)

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