ST. FRANK'S JUNIORS TOUR ENGLAND AND WALES!

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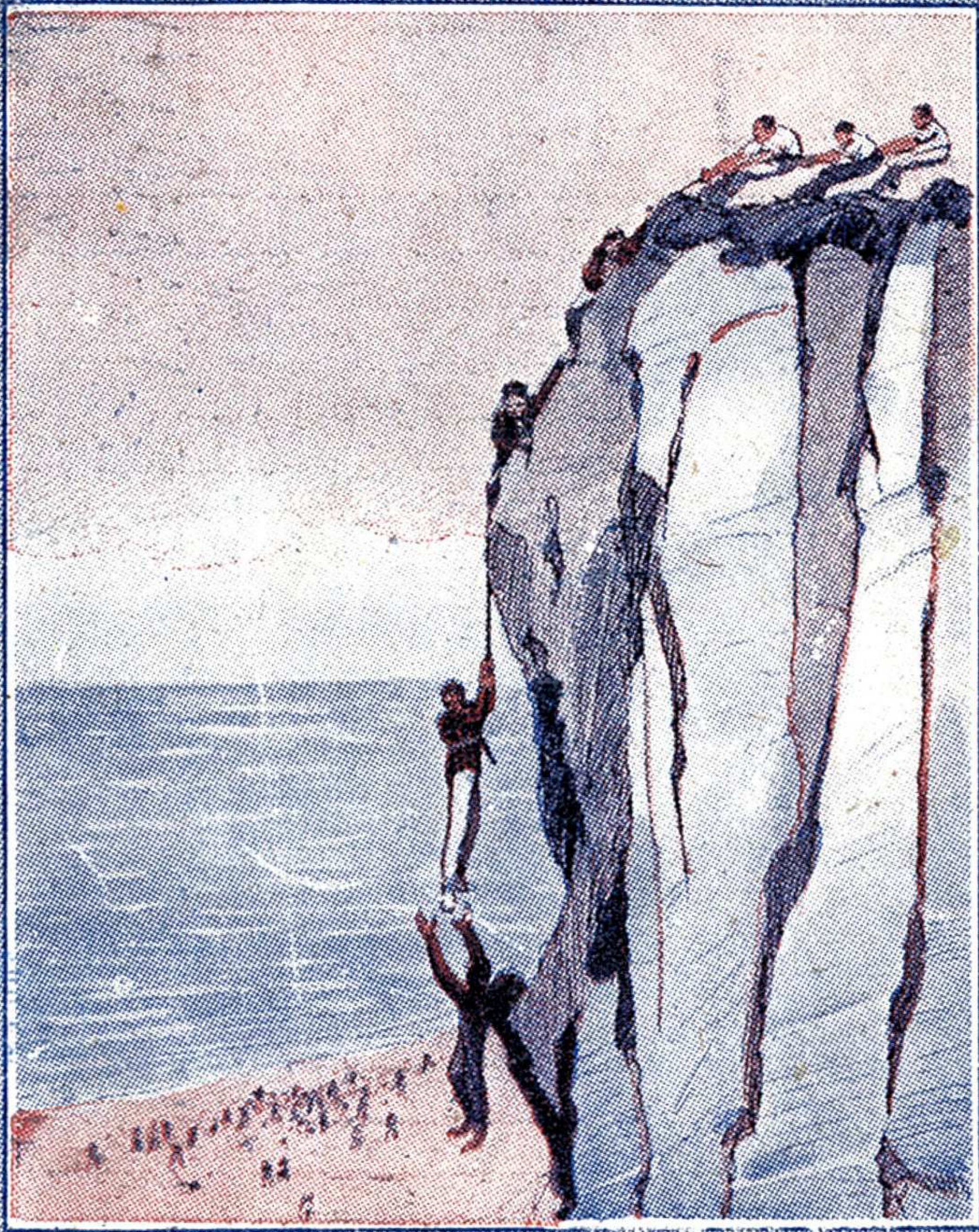
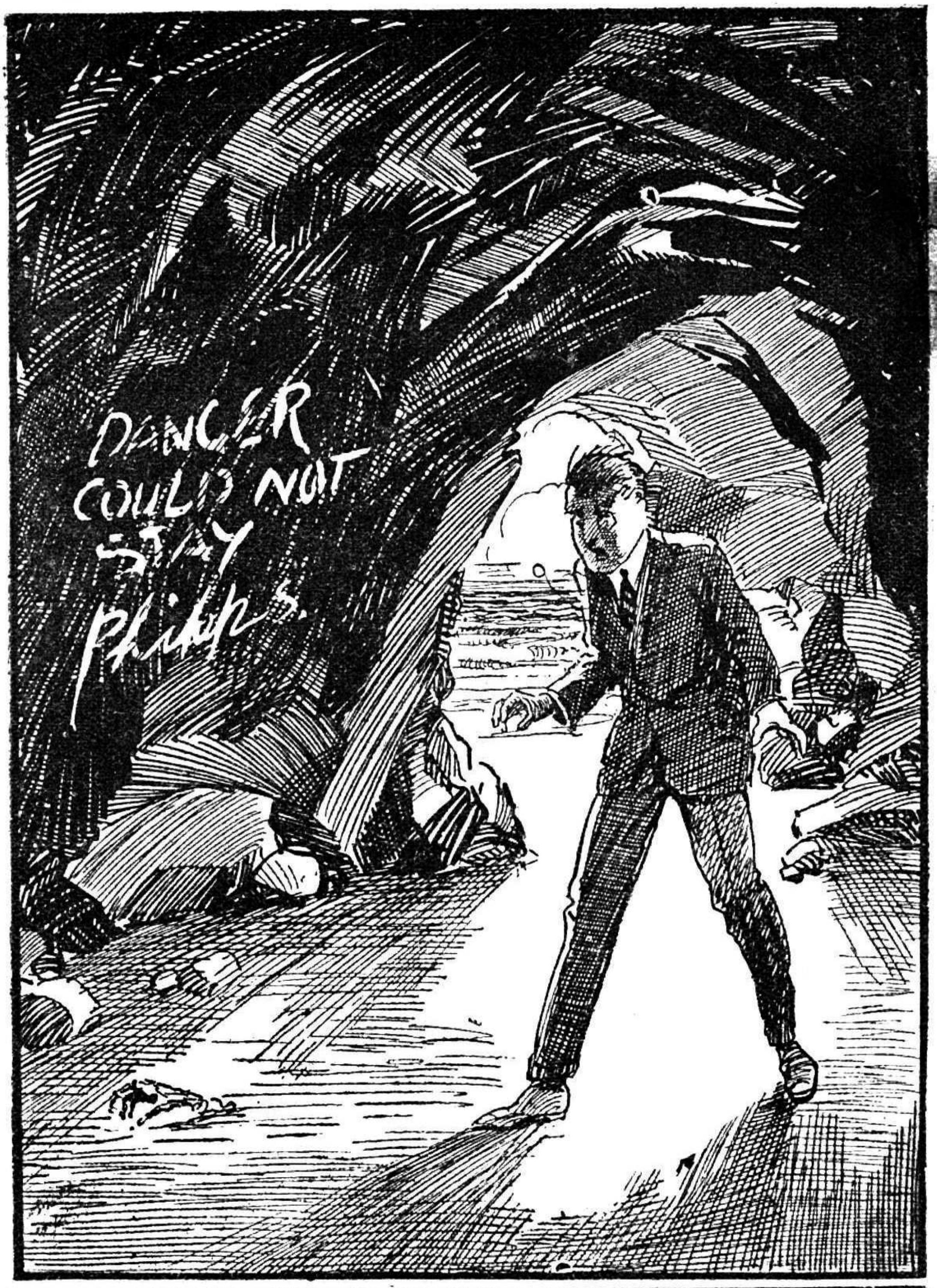


Read about the Thrilling Incident depicted above in This Week's Splendid Story :—

THE TOURING SCHOOL IN WALES;

or, The Mystery of Dead Man's Cave!

No. 421. EVERY WEDNESDAY. JUNE 30, 1923.



Archie came to an abrupt halt, his heart jumping into his mouth. For sticking well out of the sand immediately before him was the sinister hand of a skeleton!

The Touring School in Wales.

Or; The Mystery of Dead Man's Cave.

A Grand, Long Complete Story of the famous Juniors of St. Frank's as pioneers of a caravan school. This is the second story of the touring school series, and describes the boys' adventures in Wales. The school comprises the whole of the Remove, so that practically everyone of any importance is there. Lessons are carried on each day in the open, but in between there is plenty of fun and excitement. In fact, none of the Juniors can complain that the caravan school is monotonous, and by the time they get back to dear old St. Frank's again, they will have learned more about their own country than they could ever have done at St. Frank's. As you will now be impatient to get on with the story, I will conclude my remarks here and now, as they say in America.

THE EDITOR.

THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER

CHAPTER I.

HANDFORTH, THE HERO!

"GOOD heavens!"

Church, of the Remove, made that remark in a startled voice.

He came to an abrupt halt in the sands, and stared out to sea. The afternoon sunshine was streaming down over the sparkling waters of Langland Bay. The scene was very picturesque and peaceful.

Only one or two people were in bathing-dress at the moment, and these favoured the left-hand side of the bay facing seawards, where the sand was soft, and where the waves broke with tingling splashes of spray.

The cliffs and the rocks were some of the prettiest we had seen since we commenced our caravan tour, and we were enchanted by the whole scene. This part of the South Wales coast was wonderful.

Our camp was only a little way back from Langland Bay, and situated in a delightfully green little valley. The village of Oystermouth was within comparatively easy reach, with the great seaport of Swansea, five miles beyond. The famous Mumbles Head was one of the spots we intended exploring during our stay.

But at present a great many of the juniors were strolling about on the cliffs and sands near Langland Bay itself.

And it so happened that Handforth and Church and McClure, the celebrated chums of Study D, were crossing the bay close against the breaking waves. And Church

looked utterly startled as he stared out to sea.

"Look!" he panted, clutching at Handforth's arm. "Look out there!"

Edward Oswald Handforth dragged himself away.

"What's the idea?" he demanded. "Don't be such an ass! What should I look at? There's nothing to see, except the water, with a silly rowing-boat half a mile out. What's biting you, old chump?"

"No, no!" gasped Church. "There! Nearer—just out in the bay!"

McClure suddenly gave a jump.

"Great Scott!" he said blankly.

"What, have you got the jim-jams, too?" roared Handforth. "You—you babbling lunatics! Can't you speak plain English——"

"There's—there's a body out there!" panted Church.

Handforth started.

"A body!"

"Somebody's been drowned!" said McClure, his face blanching.

"Drowned!"

"Yes, floating in the water——"

"Floating!"

"Feet uppermost——"

"Feet uppermost!" repeated Edward Oswald like a parrot. "Great pip! I—I believe you're right! Quick! We've got to do something!"

All three juniors were now looking thoroughly alarmed. And there was certainly every reason for their pale faces and scared looks. Handforth, too, had seen that which had caused his chums such perturbation.

Some little distance out in the bay, two feet were sticking out of the water—human feet, encased in shoes. Even at this distance the juniors could see that they were high-heeled shoes, and quite small.

"It's—it's a lady!" breathed Church huskily. "She must have fallen in!"

"And she's dead by this time!" muttered McClure. "Oh, how awful! We'd better get some help——"

"Rot!" broke in Handforth. "How do we know she's dead? She may be just going down for the third time! It's up to us to fish her out! Here! Hold this! There's no time to lose!"

Quick as thought, Handforth threw off his cap and jacket. Then, without bothering about any more of his clothing, he plunged through the breaking waves, and commenced swimming desperately out to that grim, significant object which was floating so placidly on the surface of the water.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and I were further along the beach, and we saw Handforth's extraordinary dash into the waves. A little further away, Archie Glenthorne was walking with Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey.

"What's the matter with him?" I exclaimed, wondering. "Fancy rushing into the water like that—with all his clothes on!"

"Mad!" said Tommy Watson.

"Clean off his rocker!" declared Sir Montie. "He is, really!"

"I don't know about that," I said. "What's that out there? Why, great Scott! There seems to be somebody in difficulties——"

"Begad!"

We all paused, and stared at the scene. We, too, saw those feet sticking up from the surface of the water. And we saw Edward Oswald Handforth swimming desperately out towards them.

"I mean to say, the laddie's tailor will be somewhat shocked!" observed Archie Glenthorne, in a scandalised voice. "When it comes to plunging into the babbling briny in all a chappie's clothing—— Well, I mean, somewhat near the limit. Even the best trousers won't preserve their crease under such conditions. Absolutely not!"

"I don't think Handforth was thinking about his trousers, old man," said Pitt quietly. "This appears to be serious."

Archie nodded as he adjusted his monocle.

"Dash it!" he said. "Serious? Well, rather! Too frightfully serious for words! I mean, it gets dashed near the point of tragedy! It's nothing more nor less than foul when a fellow's trousers are drenched in seawater. And as for his waistcoat and shirt and——"

"Dry up, you ass!" said Pitt. "Handy's rescuing somebody!"

"What?" exclaimed Archie. "What? That, of course, makes a diff! Gadzooks! The old bean is beginning to buzz somewhat! In other words, I grasp the trend of your remarks! How absolutely priceless! We are gazing upon one of those scenes that a chappie is accustomed to witnessing in a bally film show!"

"Yes; but this seems to be the genuine article!" said Pitt grimly.

Handforth, in the meantime, had almost reached his objective. All sorts of people were now running up to the spot, and crowds were lining the beach—shouting excitedly. Boats were making for the spot, too.

But Handforth was there first.

He reached the legs, and grasped one of the feet firmly. Then, turning, he commenced swimming back to the shore—conscious of the fact that his clothing was dragging him back considerably. But the sea was calm, and he felt that he would be able to complete his task.

It never occurred to Handforth that it might have been advantageous to the unfortunate lady if he had turned her right side up before lugging her ashore. There was not much hope for her if she remained immersed.

But Handforth was one of those dashing, bold spirits who do things in a rush. His one idea was to get the lady ashore; time enough then to see about bringing her round.

Two or three of the onlookers yelled wildly to him, but Handy took no notice. And nobody dived in to Edward Oswald's assistance. He was doing so well that no time

would have been saved if others had butted in. Besides, it was only fair that Handforth should have all the glory.

Nearer and nearer he came to the shore. He was now feeling a sense of wonderful exhilaration. He had succeeded! He had rescued this drowning person, and all the other chaps would have to admit that he was the best of the bunch. Handforth wasn't vain, but he dearly loved the limelight. The idea of being the hero of the hour appealed to him.

It seemed to him that the lady must be very small. Certainly, she didn't drag particularly as he grew nearer and nearer to the shore. And then, at last, he felt the sandy beach under his feet.

"Good!" he muttered. "At last!"

Breathing heavily, he found that he was now able to stand up with his head and shoulders quite clear of the water. It was time, he considered, to make some effort to render assistance.

"All right, miss; don't worry!" he panted. "You'll be all right in two ticks!"

Whether he expected the lady to hear these words is questionable, for at that moment, according to all rules of human anatomy, her head must have been about four feet below the surface of the sea.

Handforth gave one heave, and then uttered a startled gasp.

"Great pip!" he exclaimed huskily. "What the—how the——"

He broke off, unable to find words to express himself, for instead of a lady, he found that he pulled out nothing but a ragged kind of bundle, all tied round with rope, with a couple of plaster legs attached to it. These legs were adorned with silk stockings and high-heeled shoes.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd on the beach burst into a roar of wild amusement. Many of the people were hugely relieved to find that they were not witnessing a tragedy. The St. Frank's chaps roared because Handforth looked so funny. But the biggest laugh of all went up from about half a dozen boys who were standing near by.

These boys were strangers to us, and they were about the same age as the St. Frank's juniors, and wore straw hats with school colours.

"Hurrah!" they yelled. "Cheer the hero!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth stared at the object he had rescued, he stared at his own drenched self, and he stared at the beach.

"I—I've been tricked!" he roared violently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Handy!"

"Better bring her ashore, and start artificial respiration!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth came splashing out, his expression something fearful. He left the "lady" still in the water, where she proceeded to stick her legs skywards with undiminished lifelike-ness—to coin a word.

"Wait!" hooted Handforth. "Just wait! Somebody's going to be slaughtered for this! By George! I'm blessed if I'm going to be messed about like that! This is all the thanks I get for risking my life!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth emerged, dripping wet, and many of the laughing onlookers dodged hurriedly aside. Handforth found that nobody was particularly anxious to remain near him. And little wonder.

For he acted like some huge member of the canine family; as soon as he got out of the water he commenced to shake himself, sending liberal splashes in all directions.

And the "lady" floated placidly.

"Where is he?" roared Handforth, glaring round. "Where's the chap who dropped that thing into the water? Where is he? I want to pulverise him!"

"Steady on, Handy! Cool down a bit!" I grinned. "It was a good joke——"

"Joke!" howled Handforth. "Do you call this a joke—all my clothes ruined?"

"Rats! Salt water won't hurt those flannels," I replied calmly. "I thought there was something queer about the whole business when I noticed how those chaps were grinning. Pitt swallowed it, too!"

Reggie Pitt nodded.

"You bet," he said. "That's why we didn't dash in to assist!"

Handforth looked round, instinctively making a move to roll up his sleeves. It was a habit of his, for it was an action he performed many times daily.

"Which chaps?" he asked grimly. "You saw them grinning? Where are they? Oh! You mean them! By George!"

The leader of Study D had turned, and had noticed the boys who were still standing in a group some little distance away. They were now calling to two other boys, wearing similar hats, who were just jumping out of a small rowing boat.

"Hi!" bellowed Handforth, like a megaphone

The strangers turned and looked at him.

"Are you calling to us?" inquired one of them politely.

"Yes, I am!" bawled Handforth, striding up. "Did you play that trick on me?"

The boy nodded.

"Indeed, yes," he replied, in the strangely melodious Welsh intonation. "It was a good joke, look you! We didn't know that you would be the one to go to the rescue. But it was funny. Yes, indeed!"

"You—you Welsh fathead!" roared Handforth. "Stand there, and I'll biff you! Of course, I knew all the time that it was a dummy! I only swam out to make sure of the thing——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth gave a roar, and charged.

But the Welsh boys scattered, and before any damage of any sort could be done, Pitt and Grey and Church and McClure and I

grabbed Handforth, and held him back. We kept him in custody.

"Lemme go!" he howled wildly.

"Steady on, old man!" I grinned. "You can't get away from it—the joke was a good one. Why not take it in the right spirit, and grin? And now that we've got the opportunity, we'll introduce ourselves."

We proceeded to do so, explaining that we were members of the St. Frank's Remove, which was touring the country. In return, the Welsh boys told us their names, and added that they were all from the Langmore Grammar School, situated a short distance away, between Langland Bay and Oystermouth.

The leader of the Grammarians was a bright-eyed young fellow named Evan Llewellyn. He was dark, well built, and there was something about him that spoke of high spirits and fun.

"You're all from the Grammar School?" asked Pitt.

"Yes, yes, indeed!" said Evan Llewellyn.

"What made you think of that wheeze?" I inquired.

"It was Evan's idea, look you," put in one of the others. "He is full of ideas like that. We wanted to spoof just the ordinary people, and never believed that you chaps would fall into the trap. Indeed to goodness, it was all the better."

"Oh, was it?" snorted Handforth.

"Yes, yes."

"Well, I don't think so," said Edward Oswald sourly. "Of all the fatheaded japes, that's about the silliest I've ever struck."

"We faked it up with a football," chuckled Llewellyn. "It was easy. The football was so weighted that it kept the right balance, and made the legs stick upwards. We are sorry if we have offended you," he added graciously, to Handforth.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Handy. "It's not a question of being offended—I'm wet! And, what's more, I'm going to biff you! Yes, indeed—look you—goodness, and all the rest of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth lunged out as he was speaking, but he was not allowed to reach his objective—which was Llewellyn's nose. We dragged him back in time. And after a while he subsided, and promised to keep the peace.

Within five minutes we got rid of him—Church and McClure hauled him off to the camp, so that he could change into fresh clothing. And the rest of us strolled up the beach with Evan Llewellyn and his chums.

The picturesque pile of the Langland Bay Hotel loomed in front of us. The hotel, in fact, was the only building of any importance in this immediate district. Upon the cliff-tops on one side of the bay there were some houses, but the Langland Bay Hotel dominated all.

As we walked, we explained to the Welsh boys how we were touring the country.

"You see, the whole Remove has left St. Frank's completely," I said. "We are still going on with lessons just the same, and Mr. Nelson Lee is in complete charge of us. We've got six enormous motor caravans, fitted up in the most wonderful way you ever saw. And when we camp for a time, we fix up a big tent which serves us for a Form-room and a dining-hall combined."

"That's stunning!" said Evan. "I've heard of you six or five times once before already!"

"What!"

"I've heard of you six or five times——"

"Oh, yes, of course," I said, with a chuckle. "Just your way of putting it, eh? It seems that our fame reached Swansea and district before our actual arrival."

"Yes, yes, indeed!" said Evan, nodding. "We saw reports of you in the papers, look you. But we never thought that we should meet any of you. We should greatly like you to visit us at the Grammar School."

"That's jolly decent of you, old man," I said cordially. "There's nothing we'd like better. That joke on Handy seems to have provided a good introduction."

"Yes, yes," said Llewellyn. "And is it true that you have been all through Devonshire and Somerset, and that you had an exciting adventure on Dartmoor, not far from Okehampton?"

"Rather!" said Pitt. "That was days and days ago, though. Since then we've been at Ilfracombe, Bath, and Bristol, and then up to Gloucester, and down through Monmouth. We've been seeing life, I can tell you."

"You went to Cardiff?"

"Yes, but we didn't stay there."

"It is a fine city indeed!" said Evan. "My uncle lives in Cardiff!"

"Oh, Cardiff's a wonderful place!" said Pitt diplomatically. "In fact, we're absolutely in love with Wales. But now, about this invite. Do we take tea with you privately, or——"

"We want you to come and have tea in our study," replied Evan. "It is big enough for many, and we will prepare something special. Shall we say to-morrow evening? Not to-day, as we are not prepared."

"Good!" we replied.

And so it was arranged.

CHAPTER II.

ARCHIE'S DREAM!

"THIS," said Archie, "is the life!"

He addressed his remark to nobody in particular, for the simple reason that there was nobody to speak to. Archie Glenthorne was quite alone. He stood there, on the edge of the cliff, gazing out over Bracelet Bay.

"I mean to say, it's just the kind of stuff to make a chappie feel that life is something like life!" Archie proceeded. "Large supplies of ozone whizzing round,

sunshine in chunks, and all that kind of rot."

It was afternoon of the following day, and Archie was taking a walk. He had strolled away from the camp, feeling that he wanted to be alone. He had no desire for anything strenuous.

To be absolutely truthful, he had an idea that he might be able to steal a little nap. The idea of lounging on the grassy tops, basking in the sun, rather appealed to him.

And now he had found the very spot that he desired. It was just near a little footpath which seemed very deserted. Archie had not met a soul for some time, and the grass hereabouts was soft and mossy and particularly inviting.

"Absolutely," murmured Archie. "Forty of the best—what? I mean to say, I feel the necessity for small supplies of slumber. The good old tissues are wilting under the influence of the afternoon sun. So here, as it were, goes!"

He laid himself down in the grass, and from this position he was able to place his hands behind his head, and gaze dreamily out over the bay. In the distance he could faintly see one or two steamers lazily pursuing their course on the ocean. And in his ears there was the dreamy, elusive sound of the waves as they broke upon the beach, far below.

"Good!" breathed Archie. "In fact, dashed good!"

He was just about to close his eyes, in preparation for sleep, when a shade of annoyance passed over his face. He sat up, adjusted his monocle, and gazed along the cliff-tops.

"This, of course, is foul!" he said plaintively.

Three figures were approaching. It was just like everything else in this life. When one expects to be alone, one finds strangers approaching. If Archie had particularly wanted someone to appear, he might have waited hours in vain.

"I mean to say, a chappie can't even indulge in the good old nap without some fearful blighter butting in," proceeded Archie, in an injured voice. "Why, gadzooks! That is to say, great Scott! I do believe that the chappies are the good old lads of the village! Absolutely! Evan Llewellyn and the other fruity sports! This is somewhat better!"

Archie made no attempt to get up as the three boys from Langmore Grammar School came up. They were Evan Llewellyn, and his two chums, Dick Price and Ivor Morgan. They paused and smiled.

"Shumai bwchan!" said Llewellyn cheerfully.

"Absointely!" replied Archie. "I mean to say—what?"

"Shumai bwchan!"

"Oh, rather!" said Archie.

He hadn't got the faintest idea what Llewellyn was saying, but he thought it a mere matter of politeness to agree. But it so happened that Llewellyn was speaking in Welsh. But I don't guarantee the spelling; I'm simply putting down my idea of what it sounded like.

Handforth stared at the object he had rescued; he stared at his own drenched self, and he stared at the beach.

"I—I've been tricked!" he roared violently.

"How are you, old chap?" asked Evan, grinning. "That's what I asked you just now, but you didn't seem to understand."

"Absoluteiy not!" said Archie. "I don't wish to be frightfully rude, and all that kind of thing, but I must confess that I thought you were in difficulties of some sort. It struck me that your teeth were getting in the way, or something!"

The Welsh boys grinned again.

"All right, we don't mind," smiled Evan. "Welsh is easy to learn—if you know how. Yes, yes, indeed! If I was about to take a drink, I should hold up my glass and say: 'Iachi dda i chwi'."

"You would?" said Archie. "How shocking! I mean to say, there's no real necessity to use such frightful language, surely?"

"That's not frightful language, you ass," chuckled Llewellyn. "It simply means 'good health to you.' But I won't bother you with any more Welsh just now. You've gone a shade paler already, look you."

Archie breathed with relief.

"I mean to say, rather!" he agreed. "The old tissues are wilting worse than ever. I have a feeling in my bones that sleep is necessary. Just a short little consultation with our friend Morpheus—what?"

"Morpheus?" repeated Evan. "What you need, old chap, is to see one of our special Welsh witches! I suppose you've heard of 'em?"

"Witches!" said Archie, starting. "But, really! I mean, dash it! I had an idea that all the witches were burned at the stake, or something! I thought the poor old gals were chased away on broomsticks, and what not! I mean, witches don't actually thrive to-day, do they?"

Evan winked at his two chums.

"Thrive?" he repeated. "You ought to go up into the hills! You won't be able to move a hundred yards without meeting a witch!"

Archie shuddered.

"How absolutely shocking!" he said. "I rather think, old lad, that I shall remain down in the good old valleys. You grasp my meaning?"

"Indeed, to goodness, you will meet witches wherever you go!" said Llewellyn, looking serious. "And, look you, you will not be able to tell which are witches and which are not witches!"

Archie adjusted his monocle.

"That, of course, is dashed lucid!" he observed. "All this witch business, I mean. I must confess that I don't quite get the hang. However, we will let it rest. Pray wander away, dear old darlings, and let me indulge in the good old nap. I am feeling weak!"

The three Welsh boys, still chuckling, went on their way.

Archie lay back with a sigh, and closed his eyes. He was not an imaginative junior, but as he lolled in the grass, half asleep and half awake, his mind dwelt upon the subject of the recent conversation.

He remembered reading stories about witches in his younger days—Welsh witches, in particular. He could remember a picture of one, wearing a black tall hat, tapering to a point at the top. And in his dozey state he went from witches to fairies and goblins and spiritualism.

And, finally, he fell into a deep sleep.

And it was hardly surprising that Archie dreamed. And the subject of his dream was, not unnaturally, Welsh witches.

Archie told me all about it afterwards, and this dream of his was so vivid and so whimsical that it deserves a better fate than to be passed over with a mere word. The dream was a corker.

It seemed to Archie that he was still lying on that cliff. He was awake, sitting up, and looking out over the sea. But, somehow, the whole scene was different—although, at the same time, it was the same. You know what dreams are.

Well, there was Archie looking about him, and wondering why on earth the Statue of Liberty should be planted in the middle of Langland Bay. Archie had seen the real Statue of Liberty in New York Harbour, while on a visit to the United States, and this one was just the same.

"That's dashed queer!" he murmured to himself. "It seems to me that something has happened. Here we are, so to speak, in the good old wilds of Wales, and—— What-ho! In fact, what-ho twice! What do we see? What is this that comes floating out of the ozone?"

Archie was greatly interested in a big figure and a number of small figures which seemed to materialise out of the very air. For some little time they hovered near the edge of the cliff like a filmy cloud of gnats, only much larger.

Then the objects took shape, came nearer, and were suddenly immediately in front of him.

"Dash it all!" breathed Archie. "I mean to say, how do you do? Or, as that chappie Llewellyn would say, shumai bwchan! Absolutely! I must confess that I first took you for a number of Conan Doyle's dashed fairies!"

Archie could see, however, that the newcomers were not fairies.

He regarded them with great interest. The foremost figure was that of a Welsh witch. There was no question about this. There was the witch, all complete—long cone-shaped hat, nut-cracker jaws, flowing gown, broomstick, and all. Indeed, the lady had apparently been using the broomstick as a kind of improvised aeroplane.

And she was surrounded by a number of attendants.

These latter ware not witches, but something in the nature of goblins. Or perhaps they were gnomes. Archie wasn't quite sure. Anyhow, they were little blighters all dressed in green skin-tights, with pointed toes. They wore little green, pointed caps, and each gnome had a wispy beard. And not one of them was any larger than twelve inches.

"This," said Archie, "is somewhat interesting.

He rose to his feet and adjusted his monocle, so that he could examine the newcomers with greater facility. The dream was so realistic that it seemed like real life. There they were, all in front of him. The witch was gazing at him with a fixed stare, and the gnomes were dancing round. Curiously enough, they danced in the air, about a foot from the ground.

"Well," said Archie. "What about it?"

The witch pointed a finger at him.

"Llanbetlyyfyllinwchillnydd y dda trytinogcoedwddywch chylleth!" she exclaimed severely.

Archie started.

"I beg your pardon?" he asked politely.

"Nynddgarth doveyllan ryswtheris dudnobalagolen harlech idris llanid!" said the witch. "Bbda y cadertowy wddach?"

Archie gave a gulp.

"I must confess, dear old sport, that I fail to comprehend," he replied.

"Fathead!" said the witch, in a voice strangely like Handforth.

Again Archie started; he hadn't expected that.

"Can't you understand plain Welsh?" demanded the witch, who had now begun to even look like Handforth. "You dotty ass!

Follow me, or I'll jolly well shove you in my pot, and make a potion of you!"

"That, of course, would be poisonous!" said Archie.

"Yes, it would be, if you were in the pot!" replied the witch. "Come on! We're going down to the beach, and I don't want any more of your rot!"

Let me hasten to explain that the language which the lady had been using was certainly not Welsh. I have simply set down what it sounded like to Archie. He was greatly relieved to find that English was now being employed.

He rose into the air, and was amazed to find that he didn't fall again. The witch had taken hold of one of his hands, and was guiding him up into the atmosphere. Archie was disconcerted by the fact that a couple of goblins insisted upon hanging on to his right ear.

And they proceeded to float down to the beach.

This was a curious experience. Archie had naturally believed that if he stepped over the edge of the cliff, his existence would be somewhat swiftly terminated. For the beach was a good way below, with large numbers of rocks.

But, somehow, instead of falling sheer, Archie proceeded to float down. The sensation was delightful. Now and again he floated up somewhat, just as though he were hanging on to some invisible balloon.

But finally the beach was reached, and the witch smiled.

"Rywstberisidri chynllth!" she said firmly.

"Absolutely," agreed Archie. "I don't know what you mean, old dear, but absolutely!"

"We're now going to my hovel," said the lady. "And once we're there, I shall lose no time in giving you a potion that will make you feel like a good 'un! We Welsh witches are pretty hot stuff!"

"So it appears," said Archie.

To his astonishment, the witch walked down the beach, and then went straight out over the sea. She experienced no difficulty whatever in walking on the surface of the water.

The sea, indeed, had now become a kind of marble slab. Archie walked on it with a sensation of peril. He had an idea that the marbie would turn into sea again at any moment. The goblins danced round, and chanted a tune which sounded very suspiciously like "Carolina in the Morning."

And the hovel which the witch had referred to did not seem to be such a fearful kind of place, after all. It was, indeed, the Statue of Liberty. But, by some extraordinary process, it wasn't the Statue of Liberty any longer.

The thing had now become a little island, a rocky crag which stood up from the sea, and contained a few houses—wonderful-looking places like one sees in the pages of a fairy-tale book.

There were spires and minarets and domes, all glistening in the sunshine. And here and there one of the round towers would jut over the edge of the rock in a very dangerous-looking manner. But, of course, fairy palaces, as imagined in the minds of book illustrators, are hardly to be described as practical efforts of architecture.

"What-ho!" observed Archie. "This, I presume, is the King's domain—what?"

"Off your rocker?" asked the witch. "This is my study!"

Archie was absolutely certain that Handforth had spoken the words. Why on earth should Handforth keep butting in like this? There was something very queer about it. Because, when he looked at the witch narrowly, she looked exactly like Evan Llewellyn.

"This is frightfully queer!" said Archie, shaking his head.

"Indeed to goodness, look you!" said the witch. "Another word, my son, and I'll biff you one on the nose!"

Archie subsided.

He now found himself at the foot of the cliffs which rose from the island. Apparently there was no way up those cliffs—no way of getting into this seemingly impregnable stronghold of Welsh witchery.

But the most remarkable thing of all was that Archie found himself inside without knowing how he had got there. It reminded him of a film at the cinema. The scene became somewhat blurred, and kind of faded out. And when it faded in again, Archie was standing quite comfortably on the balcony of one of those towers.

And instead of being made of gold, as he believed, it was really made of thousands of ginger-beer bottles. He felt strangely thirsty as he looked at them. It added greatly to his thirst to see all the bottles were full, but tightly corked.

"That's frightfully awkward," murmured Archie. "I mean to say, when a chappie feels like a second edition of the dashed Sahara. It's decidedly embarrassing to find that so much liquid should be corked up!"

He grasped at one of the bottles, and as he took it, it turned into a pot of ink. He threw it down with disgust, and the ink spread all over the floor of the balcony, and formed a pool of soapsuds.

As I told Archie afterwards, his mind must have been in a very extraordinary state, to go off at so many tangents. But he explained that he had been thinking of witches and fairies, and only that morning he had had an argument concerning ginger-beer. And somebody had spilled some ink on his waistcoat.

He was just gazing over the Triangle of St. Frank's—which, somehow, had come into the picture—when he became aware of the fact that all sorts of people were approaching.

The balcony was not very large, but as these people came, the balcony grew bigger. It was a very obliging kind of balcony—it expanded according to requirements. And,

before Archie was aware of the fact, he was actually standing in the St. Frank's Triangle.

The Ancient House had assumed large numbers of turrets and towers, and the College House looked like an Indian temple. And all the people were dressed exactly like Welsh witches, with cone-shaped hats and with sweeping brooms.

But the most extraordinary thing of all was that they looked like St. Frank's fellows.

The foremost were Handforth, Church, and McClure. Pitt was there, and De Valerie, and Tommy Watson—even I was there.

"Now then, clear out of here!" said the Handforth witch, coming up to Archie and seizing him by the back of the neck. "If you think you can butt in here, you've made a bloomer. This place is only reserved for witches!"

"But you see——"

"I don't see!" interrupted the witch. "If you like to come to my hovel, I'll tell your fortune! Cross my palm with silver, and I'll read your giddy hand! It won't take more than two minutes."

"I absolutely refuse!" said Archie firmly. "I mean to say, when it comes to reading a chappie's hand, I must confess——"

He broke off as the Handforth witch left them, and proceeded to chase all the other witches. He dealt with about twenty in one flash. He chased them up and down, seized them and tossed them into the air. Several disappeared over the Ancient House, and a few alighted on the roof of the College House.

And as this particular witch worked she grew larger and larger. Before long, Archie was staring up, and about two hundred feet above him he could see Handforth's face. The witch had now become Handforth completely—even to his Etons. But he was about two hundred times too big. He filled the Triangle.

"Now I'll deal with you!" roared Handforth.

His voice was like about ten thunderclaps, and the concussion was so tremendous that the whole school tumbled to fragments. Archie felt himself picked up, and he was whirled far into the air.

He went up and up, shooting skywards, and quite enjoying the feeling. Then, just as he was about to fall back again, an immense motor-caravan came flying through the air.

This caravan had no wings, and was, indeed, one of the ordinary caravans attached to the party. It was speeding along an invisible road a thousand feet from the ground. Archie landed inside without any difficulty.

And he came face to face with Handforth.

Considering that he had just left Handforth a thousand feet below, this was all the more remarkable. And Handforth was now attired as a chauffeur, and was driving the caravan.

Evan Llewellyn was next to him, and the pair were talking excitedly.

"Clear out of here!" said Handforth, turning round and looking at Archie. "We're bound for Langley Bay, and we can't waste time on you. You'd better clear out, before you're chucked out!"

"But, I mean to say, the fall would be somewhat frightful!" complained Archie. "I imagine that we must be about a thousand feet up, old bean! Kindly allow me to stay on the old spot."

Handforth didn't argue.

He seized Archie, and calmly threw him out. And then another strange thing happened. Instead of Archie falling down, he only descended a few feet, and then floated through one of the windows.

Before Handforth could hurl him out a second time the caravan struck with tremendous force against the old clock tower of St. Frank's. It descended with a terrific crash into the Triangle.

Archie felt himself descending into complete darkness. Then one of the Welsh witches, with a face just like Evan Llewellyn's, struck him over the head with an enormous broomstick.

And that was just a little too much. Archie woke up.

CHAPTER III.

THE SOOTHSAYER!

"WHAT-HO!" said Archie, blinking.

"Wake up, lazy-bones!" said a voice. "Going to sleep here all the afternoon?"

"Wnat?" said Archie, sitting up. "I mean, pray don't use that broomstick so violently, dear old lad! Why, great Scott! That is to say, absolutely! What is all this dashed business?"

The Genial Ass of St. Frank's looked round him, rather bewildered.

"There's no business that I know of," chuckled Evan. "I think you must have been dreaming, old chap. I simply gave you a tap on the head with this cane of mine. Yes, indeed!"

"Gadzooks!" murmured Archie.

He was still heavy, and he struggled to his feet, and felt rather thankful that the dream was over.

"The fact is, old tulip, I've had a particularly frightful kind of nightmare," he observed "To be quite correct, I should really call it an afternoon-mare. I have been seeing Welsh witches, hovels, goblins, and gnomes, and all that kind of thing. I mean to say, it's not calculated to make a chappie's nap very enjoyable. I feel somewhat sold out, so to speak."

Evan Llewellyn and his two companions chuckled.

"You've been dreaming about witches because we were talking about them half an hour ago," said Evan. "If you like, we'll

take you to one of those old ladies, and introduce you."

"That will be somewhat frightfully nice!"

"Her name's Mrs. Howell, and she's renowned as a soothsayer," said Evan.

"A which?"

"Yes, yes, indeed, a witch."

"It appears, laddie, that you don't quite grasp the trend," said Archie politely. "You made some remark to the effect that this lady is a sayer of sooths, or words to that effect."

"Yes, yes; she tells fortunes."

"Oh, absolutely," said Archie. "Fortunes, what? In other words, she's one of those persons who gaze into the good old teacup, and proceed to explain where you were born, where you will be next year, and so forth. And, finally, she probably requests the sum of five shillings, or something like that."

The Welsh boy grinned.

"Mrs. Howell isn't that sort," said Evan. "She doesn't need the money—she does it just for nothing. We shall have to take you along down by there and introduce you to her. Indeed to goodness, you will be surprised!"

"But, my dear old lad, I don't want to be surprised!" complained Archie. "I mean, I've had enough of witches for an ordinary lifetime. I've seen scores of them! And I don't believe in the ladies, anyhow!"

Evan looked serious.

"Just wait until you see Mrs. Howell," he said. "Look you, I'm not joking now. Mrs. Howell is a wonder."

"Yes, yes, indeed!" said the other boys.

"She can tell your fortune with absolute accuracy," went on Evan. "Supposing we take you along after tea? How does that go? I have told you six or five times before already! Mrs. Howell will please you, whatever!"

"The fact is, laddie——"

But Archie didn't proceed. To tell the truth, he was gradually becoming slightly interested. He had heard all sorts of things about Welsh witches, and he had seen a few in his dream. It struck him that it would be rather good to see one in real life. Then he would be able to judge perfectly.

And as he was in Wales, why shouldn't he seize the opportunity?

So, after a little more persuasion, he agreed to go. And he found himself accompanying Evan Llewellyn and Co. to the Langmore Grammar School.

When they arrived, they found that none of the other St. Frank's guests had arrived, although they would be appearing very shortly. Archie found that Llewellyn's study was very comfortable and attractive.

Evan explained all about Mrs. Howell's prowess in the art of telling fortunes. Indeed, she was renowned throughout the district as a soothsayer. What she didn't know about fortunes wasn't worth learning.

"But, mind you, don't say anything to the others," warned Evan. "We will take you on this trip secretly. Indeed to goodness, if you tell the others, it will spoil everything—for they are bound to come, too."

"Dear old lad, I will obey your wishes," said Archie gracefully.

"Good!" replied Evan.

And soon afterwards all the other St. Frank's fellows put in an appearance. They were entertained royally to tea. And after the meal was over, all the visitors were showed round the Grammar School, and the Welsh boys proudly pointed out all the places of particular interest.

They were honoured by the fact that their visitors were from such a famous school as St. Frank's College. And they were greatly delighted when they were invited to pay a return visit. They were to be entertained in the caravans before the camp was moved on to the next stopping place.

And when the time came for departure, only one St. Frank's junior remained behind. And this one was Archie Glenthorne. Evan Llewellyn had made quite certain that Archie did not get away.

"So here you are!" said Evan, as he came upon Archie in the gymnasium. "Glad you stopped here. We're now going off."

"To see Mrs. Howell?" asked Archie.

"Yes."

"That, as it were, is the stuff to give them," said Archie, nodding. "I must acknowledge, my dear old turnips, that I'm becoming dashed enthusiastic. This fortune-telling stuff has grabbed hold of me."

"Just you wait until you've heard the old lady," said Llewellyn impressively. "You will enjoy yourself. I have told you six or five times——"

"Absolutely," said Archie hastily.

They passed outside, where Price and Morgan were waiting. And the four of them left the school premises, and made their way up a narrow, winding lane to the top of a steep hill near by.

And, almost on the very summit, stood a small cottage.

It was a strange little place, deserted-looking, and cold. But little curtains at the window gave it an inhabited appearance. Evan and his chums went to the door and tapped.

"Come in!" came a quavering voice from the other side of the door.

Evan turned to the others.

"Look you!" he said softly. "Don't do any fooling! Mrs. Howell believes in everything, and it wouldn't be right to laugh at her."

"Carry on, old dear," said Archie. "I'm filled with large suppiies of frightful curiosity. Kindly lead the way."

Evan turned the door-handle, and they entered the soothsayer's cottage.

CHAPTER IV.

TELLING ARCHIE'S FORTUNE.

MRS. HOWELL proved to be very much like Archie's conception of her. She sat in a corner of the front room, huddled up in a big, old arm-chair. She was attired in a kind of cloak, and her face was wizened and lined.

Upon her grey locks there rested one of those Welsh hats, cone-shaped, and very high. In her hand she held a curiously shaped twig, which she moved up and down, droning to herself in the meantime.

The cottage was, indeed, a regular witch's hovel.

The fireplace was of the old-fashioned kind, and over some burning twigs there hung a kind of cauldron, with steam issuing from it. The whole scene looked like a picture taken out of a folk-lore book.

"I mean to say," murmured Archie. "This is the real stuff, what!"

"Hush!" warned Evan.

Mrs. Howell stirred, and looked up at the boys.

"Well, well?" she asked. "Indeed to goodness, what is it you want? Why do you come to me in this way, whatever? Look you, I am not feeling well this evening. I want you to go."

"In that case," said Archie, "we'd better retire, dear old boys!"

"Rats! She's always like that!" whispered Evan. "It's all right, Mrs. Howell, we want you to tell our friend what his fortune will be. We want you to read his hand."

"Yes, yes, indeed," said Mrs. Howell. "Show me!"

She held out one of her own hands impatiently. They were encased in thick, woollen gloves. Archie, after a moment's hesitation, sat down on a little stool, and submitted himself to the ordeal.

The Welsh "witch" took his hand, palm uppermost, and gazed at it searchingly. She continued staring at it so long, in fact, that the position became somewhat embarrassing.

Not a word was spoken for fully two minutes, and it seemed like an age to the boys. Evan and his companions stood there, looking on. And Archie perspired freely.

Somehow, he felt that the old lady was searching into his very soul. And then, at last, she began to speak.

"Your home is far, far from here," she said, in a droning voice. "Your name is Archibald, and you are the son of a man who has won fame in military operations. Your father is a colonel, look you."

"Gadzooks!" breathed Archie, startled.

"Yes, yes, I am right," went on Mrs. Howell softly. "You live near a place called Bannington, far off in England—in Sussex. Your father is a tall, upright man—a fine man. You have wealth—you have never wanted for anything, whatever. Indeed, I am right!"

"By gad, you are!" said Archie, more astonished than he could say.

It was absolutely impossible that this old woman could have known anything about it. There couldn't be any trickery, either. It wasn't even possible that Evan and his chums had primed her with facts. For they knew nothing about Archie's home or people. It was rather uncanny.

"What do I see?" proceeded Mrs. Howell. "What do I see? Indeed to goodness, this is strange! This very day you will hear of a death!"

"I mean to say, what?" murmured Archie. "A death?"

"You will hear of a death!" repeated Mrs. Howell. "But you need not be alarmed. It will not be closely connected with yourself. I see many things. Yes, yes, indeed! Your hand is not a good one!"

"That's rather foul!" murmured Archie.

"You will hear news of something," went on Mrs. Howell dreamily. "You will learn of some happening that will lead to much fighting. You will not take place in this fighting, but you will witness it."

"That, at all events, is a dashed relief!" said Archie. "I mean to say, when it comes to fighting, I'm not absolutely a second Dempsey!"

"I see other things," continued the soothsayer, rocking herself to and fro, and holding Archie's hand in a tight grip. "Ah! What is this? Let me see! What is this?"

Archie peered forward at his palm.

"Between ourselves, I rather fancy it's my hand," he said mildly.

"What is this?" repeated Mrs. Howell. "What do I see? There is a letter! Yes, yes, indeed! A letter from one who knows you well—a letter from one who is much in your thoughts!"

"Really?" said Archie. "I mean, absolutely not!"

"You will receive the letter soon—quite soon," said the old lady. "And heed my warning, O youth. Look you, it will be bad if you ignore what I tell you! You must obey. Disaster will happen if you do not!"

"Obey?" repeated Archie vaguely.

"I am reading the letter," said Mrs. Howell dreamily. "Yes, yes! Indeed, I can see all that the letter contains!"

"That's dashed queer!" said Archie. "What I mean to remark is, how the dickens can you see what the letter contains when the dashed thing hasn't arrived? That, as it were, is asking a cove to believe too much!"

"Hush, child—hush!"

"Eh?" said Archie. "Child? You don't mean——"

"I can see what this letter contains," repeated Mrs. Howell. "And you must obey everything in that letter—you must do all that is asked. If you do not, the consequences will be terrible!"

Archie was beginning to feel rather uncomfortable.

"Of course, this is all frightfully interesting, but at the same time, don't you think it's a bit too steep?" he asked. "I mean, about the death business, and the fighting, and the letter, and all the rest of it? You can't absolutely tell me that all these things will happen, old dear?"

"They will happen!" said Mrs. Howell. "Oh, yes, yes! They will assuredly happen! And before long—soon—you will awaken one morning and you will find yourself in a fever!"

"That sounds rather cheerful, don't you know!"

"A fever!" snapped Mrs. Howell. "Oh, youth, your hand is terrible! I am deeply grieved by what I see. This world is not for you."

Archie started.

"Well, to tell you the honest truth, I don't want it!" he declared. "At least, not exactly all of it. I don't mind confessing that a somewhat small slab would be sufficient——"

"You are destined elsewhere!" said the soothsayer. "When this fever comes upon you there will be one thing to do—and only one thing!"

"Take some medicine, what?"

"It will be useless taking medicine—it will be useless calling doctors," said Mrs. Howell tragically. "They will not be able to help you. Indeed to goodness, if you have property, it will be as well to make your will!"

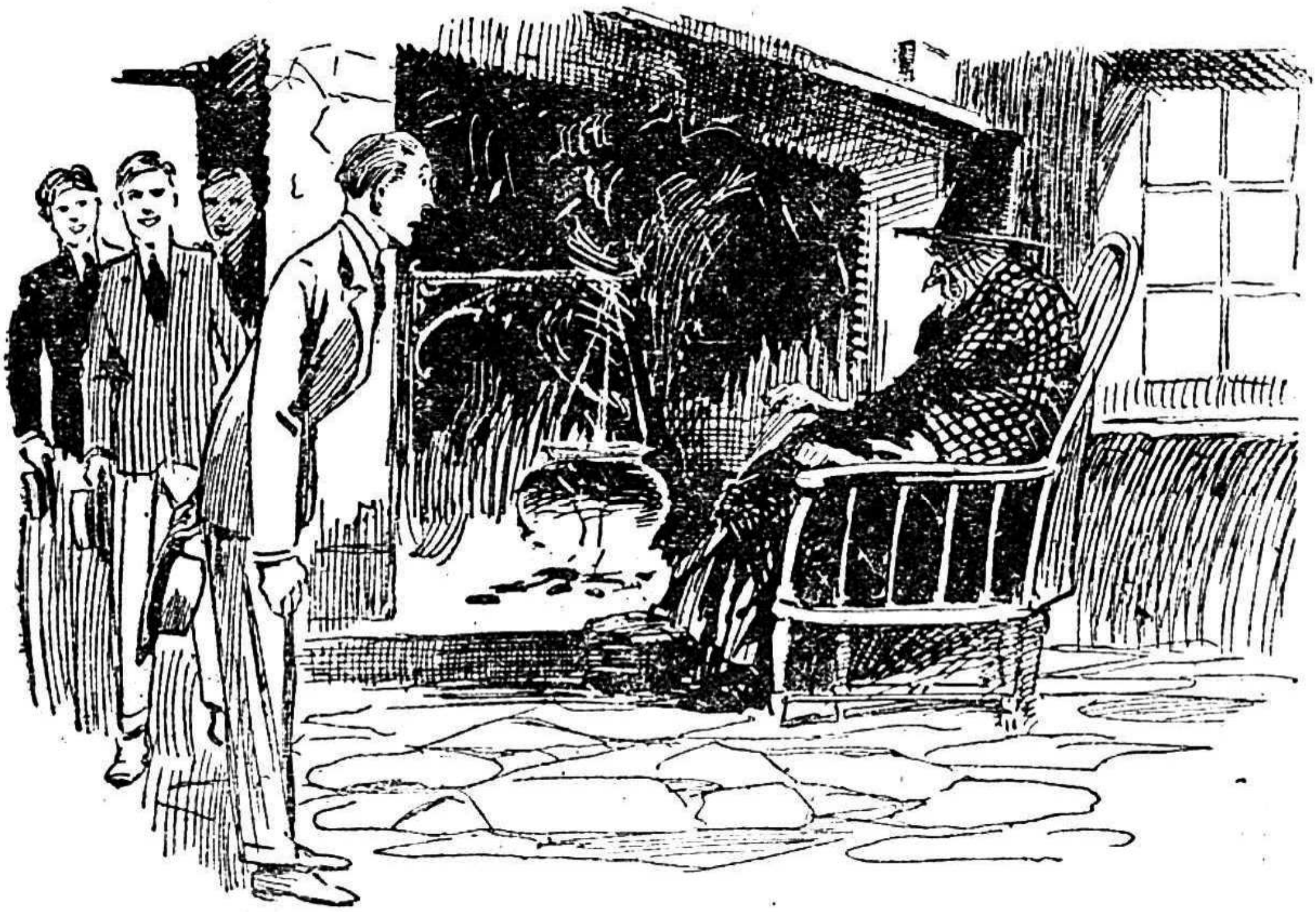
Archie nearly fell off the stool.

"But, dash it!" he protested. "To be absolutely exact, dash it with great emphasis. This is not only frightful, but poisonous. My will, what? I've got to make out the last old will and testament?"

"When this fever comes upon you, the end will be swift," said the old lady. "I am reading your hand, and I am telling what I see. And I see nothing but blackness—nothing but gloom—nothing but horrible things!"

Archie gulped.

"Well, in that case, I might just as well resign myself, what?" he asked, in a hollow voice. "I don't wish to be fearfully pessimistic, but it seems there's no hope for me.



The fireplace was of the old-fashioned kind, and over some burning twigs there hung a kind of cauldron, with steam issuing from it. "I mean to say," murmured Archie, "this is the real stuff—what!"

And that's calculated to make a chappie give up the fight!"

"I see what I see!" declared Mrs. Howell, after the manner of an oracle. "I say what it is necessary to say. Yes, yes, indeed! When the fever comes upon you——"

"Without wishing to harp on the point, don't you think we've had enough about the fever?" asked Archie plaintively. "To tell you the absolute truth, I'm feeling feverish already! Perhaps there's been a misfire! I really think I ought to make my will straight away!"

"No; you have time yet," said Mrs. Howell. "I see no more. Everything has become black. Of your future life there is no sign. You have but a few days with us!"

She dropped Archie's hand, and fell back into a kind of stupor.

"Come on, we'd better get out!" whispered Llewellyn, in a scared voice. "She always goes off like that, after telling somebody's fortune. I say, I wish we hadn't brought you now!"

"So, as a matter of fact, do I!" groaned Archie.

They managed to get out of the little cottage, and the three Grammar School boys gazed at Archie in a queer kind of way. Apparently they were affected almost as much as he was.

The old soothsayer's words had been impressive—startling. And, as Archie remarked, the outlook was somewhat foul.

CHAPTER V.

ABSOLUTELY UNCANNY!

"HALLO! Where did you spring from?" demanded Handforth. "We thought you'd got lost! And what's the matter with you, anyhow?"

Archie Glenthorne gave a feeble moan.

"Old dear, the end is near at hand!" he said faintly.

"What?"

"I shall proceed to make my will——"

"Eh?"

"I am soon passing from this spot!" declared Archie sadly.

"You'll soon pass into the ditch if you don't talk sensibly!" said Handforth. "You fathead! You ass! What's the idea of crawling into camp like a doped earwig?"

Archie revived somewhat under this stimulant.

"Dash it!" he protested. "In other words, great Scott! Without wishing to be personal, old dear, I think you are a frightful blighter to compare me to a doped earwig! I mean, it's not nice! That kind of thing isn't done!"

Handforth grunted.

"You're ill!" he said firmly. "That's what's the matter with you. You're sickening for a fever!"

Archie turned slightly green.

"A—a fever?" he breathed hoarsely. "You think so?"

"Positive!" said Handforth. "Better see Mr. Lee."

Handforth passed on, whistling—plainly indicating that he was not very much concerned about Archie's state of health. The genial ass of the Remove had just wandered into camp. It was growing dusk, and everything was peaceful and quiet in that secluded spot.

The camp consisted of all our caravans, and the neatly erected tent which served as a class-room. Our caravans were great motor vehicles, and they were fitted up in the most wonderful manner. We used them as bedrooms at night, and as studies during the day.

They were so roomy, that, once inside, one could easily imagine oneself within a large apartment, something after the style of a ship's cabin.

Archie made his way towards Caravan No. 1, which he shared with several other fellows. His little chat with Handforth had not made him feel any better. But he was not allowed to enter.

He ran into several juniors who were grouped round the doorway of Caravan No 2. Handforth had just joined this group, and had already made a few remarks concerning Archie. De Valerie, Dick Goodwin, Fatty Little, and a few more collected round Archie and hemmed him in.

"Yes, he looks bad!" said Fatty. "What he needs is a good feed!"

"Absolutely not!" said Archie. "Dear old boys, kindly allow me to proceed. My days, in a way of speaking, are numbered. I don't exactly know how far the numbers extend, but there you are!"

"What are you talking about, you ass?" demanded Pitt, pushing up.

"Explain yourself, fathead!" said Handforth.

Archie looked at him, and shuddered.

"Go away!" he breathed. "You look absolutely ghastly, old dear."

"Eh?"

"I saw you this afternoon," went on Archie. "You turned into a Welsh witch, and then into a giant! You threw me a thousand feet into the air, and all sorts of other fearful things like that! And your face reminds me of that foul experience! Kindly buzz off!"

Handforth pushed up his sleeve.

"Why, you insulting rotter——" he began.

"Don't!" put in Church. "Can't you see the poor chap's dotty? For some reason, he's taken leave of his senses!"

"Well, they've been on the point of going for ages," said Handforth. "In fact, they've said good-bye two or three times. Under the circumstances, I won't smash him! I'm always sorry for a lunatic."

Archie sat down on the steps of the caravan, and stared before him in a glassy kind of way.

"A death!" he murmured. "Then after that, fighting—much fighting."

"I suppose you mean the other way about?" asked Pitt.

"No; she distinctly said a death first!" replied Archie. "Dear old boys, I didn't believe in this sort of thing until now. In fact, I don't believe in it at all! But it's dashed significant."

The fellows had a great deal of trouble, but in the end they dragged from Archie the full story! He explained about his dream, and then he went on to tell how he had visited Mrs. Howell, and how the old lady had read his hand.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The whole crowd roared at the conclusion of Archie's tale.

"Do—do you mean to say you believe all that bunkum?" yelled Handforth.

"Well, in a way of speaking, no," said Archie. "At the same time, it's inclined to make a chappie somewhat queer——"

"Rot!"

"Don't be a silly ass!"

"There's nothing wrong with you, and that old woman's talk means nothing!" declared Pitt. "Don't take any notice of it, Archie. I thought you had more sense than to believe that kind of superstitious piffle!"

Archie brightened up a bit.

"You think it might be all wrong?" he asked.

"Of course it's all wrong," put in De Valerie, with a grin. "The old gal simply did that to get some money out of you——"

"Absolutely not!" said Archie quickly. "I didn't pay her anything."

"Then she's expecting you to go back, and she'll collect her fee then," said Pitt. "That's what these old ladies are like. In any case, Archie, you needn't take any notice of what you've heard. It can't come true."

The glassy look began to die away in Archie's eyes.

"I must admit, fruity ones, that you have bunged large doses of cheer into the old belfry," he observed. "In other words, I am beginning to get a touch of that new Kruschen feeling! That kind of push-a-'bus-over sensation!"

And Archie stretched himself, and did a few exercises, and smiled round at the chuckling juniors.

And just then one or two of the juniors set up a shout as a motor lorry arrived outside, just in the road. This lorry contained all sorts of supplies for the camp, including a great deal of eatables. It was always interesting to watch the unloading of grub.

Several of the juniors collected round as the two men in charge of the lorry carried in the first hampers. And one of these men was looking so utterly forlorn and miserable that he raised comment among the fellows.

"Anything wrong, old chap?" asked Pitt sympathetically.

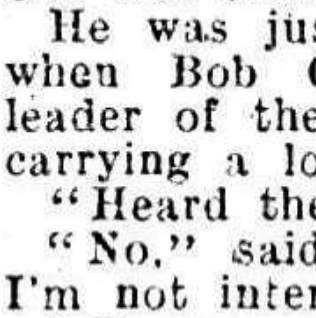
"Indeed, yes, yes!" replied the man, in a mournful voice. "Look you, this morning I heard of the death of my uncle, in Caerphilly. And I was going down by there only this week-end. The old man has left me nothing, I suppose."

Archie Glenthorne was standing near by, and he tottered somewhat.

"A death!" he murmured. "She said I should learn of a death to-day!"

CHAPTER VI.

STRANGER THAN EVER!



EVEN the sceptical juniors were rather struck by the incident.

It was curious, to say the least of it, that Archie should have heard of a death from an outside source, exactly as the old soothsayer had prophesied. There was something rather uncanny about it.

"Still, it's only coincidence," remarked Pitt. "There's no need for you to imagine things, Archie. Just because this part's come true, it doesn't mean to say that anything else is going to happen. Forget all about it."

"Dear old lad, I will!" said Archie. "At the same time, I'm worried—frightfully worried. I mean to say, who wouldn't be?"

"Rats! There's nothing in it!"

Archie walked off, and made up his mind that he would get to bed as soon as possible. Sleep was what he needed, although he didn't want to have any more dreams. One was enough for him.

He was just going to enter the caravan when Bob Christine came up. And the leader of the College House juniors was carrying a local newspaper.

"Heard the latest?" he asked.

"No," said Archie. "The fact is, laddie, I'm not interested——"

"There seems to be trouble in the Rhondda Valley," remarked Christine. "Some of the miners are on strike, and there's no telling what might happen. In fact, some of the mine officials seem to think that there'll be fighting."

Archie gave a violent start.

"Fighting!" he said weakly.

"Yes!"

"In—in the Rhondda Valley?"

"That's what it said."

"Gadzooks!"

Archie leaned feebly against the caravan. Here was the second part of the prophecy coming true. The old soothsayer had told him that he would hear some news that would lead to fighting. And, sure enough, that news had come!

At one period Archie had begun to suspect that Evan Llewellyn and his chums might have had a finger in the game, but these suspicions had long since left him. It wasn't possible for them to know of the lorry man's uncle, or to cause fighting among the miners in the Rhondda Valley.

No. The Grammar School boys had nothing

to do with it. Mrs. Howell appeared to have a marvellous faculty for seeing into the future. And the way in which all these things were coming true was almost weird.

"Why, what's wrong?" asked Bob Christine, as he saw Archie's expression. "Anything the matter, old son?"

"No, not at all!" murmured Archie, pulling himself together. "That is, absolutely! The matter, what? Well, it so happens, old dear, that I shall soon be making my dashed will!"

He was about to pass on, leaving Christine staring after him, when Fullwood and Co. arrived. The nuts of the Ancient House had just returned from Oystermouth, where they had been attempting to find a bookmaker. The three cads of Study A were up to their old games, as of yore.

"Heard the news?" asked Christine. "It seems that there's going to be some trouble in the Rhondda Valley. Archie seems quite cut up about it, and the fathead hardly knows what he's saying——"

"Archie can go and eat coke!" said Fullwood. "An' what's that you were sayin' about trouble in the Rhondda Valley?"

"There's going to be some fighting——"

"Rats!" interrupted Fullwood. "That paper of yours is ancient! I've got the latest here. There's been plenty of fighting already. Some of the extremists had a regular battle with the police, an' tons of them were arrested. Besides that, there were heaps of injuries."

"Oh!" said Christine. "That's pretty bad."

Fullwood and Co. passed on. Bob Christine walked away, too, and Archie Glenthorne just managed to crawl into the caravan. Somehow, he felt that his strength was ebbing away. This was getting altogether too much for him.

"I mean, what about it?" he breathed, as he sat down heavily in a chair. "Mrs. Howell said that I should hear something that would lead to fighting. I heard it! Then came the news of the fighting itself! This is getting too dashed steep to be comfortable!"

Archie wouldn't mind the prophecies coming true under any ordinary circumstances. He would have marvelled, but there the matter would have ceased to interest him.

But if one prophecy came true, why not others?

The next item on the programme, according to the old soothsayer, was that Archie would receive a letter. And he was to obey what the letter told him—or there would be trouble.

But what did it matter, anyhow? Because the next thing was to be a fever—and it wouldn't be necessary for him to call any doctors! The outlook, so far as Archie could see, was somewhat putrid.

Two of the prophecies had come true.

What next?

When all the other juniors came into the caravans, those who shared No. 1 with Archie found him sitting in his chair, staring straight in front of him. I could see at once that he was much affected.

"What's the trouble, Archie?" I asked. "Still worrying about that silly fortune-telling business?"

Archie didn't answer.

"Gone to sleep with your eyes open?" I asked politely.

Still no reply.

"Archie, you ass!" I said, shaking him. "Wake up!"

He started, and looked at me dazedly.

"What-ho!" he said. "What-ho! So here we all are, what? Dashing about, hither and thither, and doing this and that. That, of course, is the stuff. Pray proceed, laddies—take no notice of little me!"

"What's the matter with you?" I asked. "I thought we'd convinced you that all that soothsaying stuff was nonsense!"

Archie gave me a sickly smile.

"Oh, rather!" he said. "Absolutely."

He proceeded to undress himself in readiness for bed, and went into no explanations. He felt that it would be quite useless to do so. After all, what was the good?

He couldn't expect any sympathy, and nobody would understand. He thought it far better to keep the thing to himself. And when, at last, he snuggled down between the sheets, he had an awful feeling that he was getting feverish.

What would happen on the morrow?

Would something misfire? Would he get the fever first, or would that letter come? He was very curious. In the first place, who would write to him? He wasn't expecting any communication of any sort.

And, still thinking on the subject, he went off into a deep sleep.

He didn't dream. His sleep was perfectly sound and healthy. And he awoke in the morning, bright and cheerful, and feeling as sound as a bell. There was no sign of fever—no trouble of any kind.

He sat up in bed, stretched himself, and gazed out of the caravan window. The sun was streaming down gloriously. Archie hopped out, and proceeded to prepare for his morning ablutions.

"The sun shines, the breeze blows, and all that kind of stuff!" he said blithely. "I mean to say, the very air makes a chappie feel that life will go on for ever and ever ——"

He suddenly paused, and turned slightly pale.

He had just remembered about the soothsayer. That bit about life going on for ever

(Continued on page 15)

POWERFUL NEW NELSON LEE SERIAL JUST STARTED!

No. 30. PRESENTED WITH "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY." June 30, 1923.

THE SILVER DWARF

In this amazingly clever detective story, NELSON LEE is matched against the brains and subtle skill of Professor Mark Rymer, an exceedingly dangerous type of intellectual criminal—inhuman, crafty, resourceful and daring.

FOR NEW READERS.

Lord Easington, a wealthy Cornish peer, confesses on his deathbed to a secret marriage and of a son and heir to that marriage. He just manages to say "The Silver Dwarf" before he expires. This is assumed to be a small effigy wherein the marriage documents are concealed. Mark Rymer, a professor of science and a rascally cousin of the late peer, is determined to destroy the documentary evidence coming between him and the Easington peerage. Nelson Lee is equally determined to frustrate the professor's evil designs.

(Now read on.)

"THE SMUGGLER'S LEAP."

IT has already been explained that the "Smuggler's Leap" derived its name from the fact that in days of old a certain notorious smuggler, being hotly pursued by the Revenue men, had leaped down from the road above, and had escaped destruction by falling into an enormous clump of gorse-bushes, halfway down the face of the cliff.

On the present occasion, this selfsame clump of gorse played an equally beneficent part, for, just when Nelson Lee and his luckless companion had given themselves up for lost, these bushes arrested their downward flight, and held them suspended, for one brief fraction of a second, in their kindly but somewhat painful embrace.

It was only for an instant, for two men's weight was more than the bushes were able to support; but it served to break the force of their fall, and when at last they plunged into the sea, they experienced no more serious hurt than a sudden shock and a moment's loss of breath.

"Are you safe?"

The question rose to both men's lips, in a spluttering, breathless gasp.

"Yes; I'm all right!" panted Jack. "How are you?"

"Right as the mail!" said Nelson Lee, as he brought himself alongside Jack with a couple of vigorous strokes. "Where's the nearest place where we can land?"

"We can land here, I think," said Jack.

"There's a footpath runs down the face of the cliff, though I don't know whether I can find it in this confounded darkness."

They swam to the foot of the cliff. For two or three minutes the young engineer explored its rugged face in vain. Then a cry of delight burst from his lips.

"Here it is!" he cried.

He grasped a projecting ledge of rock, and hauled himself out of the water. The detective quickly followed his example, and five minutes later they were standing on the road at the top of the cliff.

"By Jove, that's the narrowest shave I ever had!" said Jack, as he stooped to wring the water from his trousers. "I thought it was all U P with us when that scoundrel pushed you over! Who was he, do you think?"

There was no reply. Jack raised his head, and found that he was alone!

For a moment he was thunderstruck. Then he heard the sound of hurrying footsteps farther down the road, and it suddenly dawned upon him that Nelson Lee had taken to his heels!

Like an arrow from a bow Jack dashed after him. He overtook the detective at the top of the long, steep hill which ran down into the village.

"Where are you making for?" he gasped, racing along by the detective's side.

"For the station, of course!" said Nelson Lee, without slackening his pace.

"But we can't possibly catch the train!" protested Jack. "It's in the station now. I can hear the engine panting."

"We'll have a try for it, anyway!" replied Nelson Lee. "Come on!"

But although they sprinted for all they were worth, the effort was vain; for even as they dashed into the little station, the tail-lights of the train were just vanishing round the first curve of the line.

"'Ard luck, gents!" said the solitary porter sympathetically. "I didn't see you comin', or I'd 'ave kep' her back."

"Well, it's no use crying over spilt milk!" said Nelson Lee. "The train has gone, so there's an end of it. By the way, porter, weren't you on duty here when I arrived by train this evening?"

"Yes, sir," replied the porter.

"Well, did you notice the gentleman who came with me—a thinnish man, with a big nose and stooping shoulders? He was wearing a heavy fur-lined coat, and he drove away with me in Mr. Langley's carriage."

"Oh, yes, sir, I remembers the gent," said the porter. "My mate tell'd I as 'ow the gent was Lord Easington's cousin."

"That's the man," said Nelson Lee. "Did he leave here by the 9.15 for Penzance?"

"No, sir, that 'e didn't; but 'e left by that train you missed jest now!"

"Ha! Do you know where he booked to?"

"Falmouth, sir."

"Just as I thought!" muttered Nelson Lee.

He slipped a shilling into the porter's hand, and turned to Jack.

"Come along, Mr. Langley!" he said. "We may as well get back to the Grange. Good-night, porter!"

"Good-night, sir, and thankee!"

"You'll have cause to remember my visit to Penleven Grange!" said Lee, when he and Jack had left the station and were trudging up the long, steep hill. "It has already cost you a horse and trap, and has almost cost you your life! Now, dare I make a further claim on your kindness?"

"Dare you!" exclaimed Jack half-reproachfully. "How can you ask such a question? All that I have—all that Ethel has—we owe to you! Anything we can do to help you we shall be only too delighted to do!"

Their hands met in an eloquent grip, and for a few moments no word was said.

Then Nelson Lee spoke again.

"You heard me questioning the porter just now," he said. "What do you infer from his replies?"

"That Professor Rymer was lying when he said he was going to Penzance. He has gone to Falmouth."

"Then why didn't he wait at the Grange, and drive to the station with you and me? Why did he leave the Grange at a quarter-past eight, if he didn't intend to leave Penleven until half-past nine?"

"I can't imagine."

"Can't you?" said Nelson Lee. "Then I'll tell you. Lord Easington's last words were: 'The proofs of my marriage. Go to my house. The Silver Dwarf.'"

"Now, it is perfectly clear to me that Professor Rymer knows what his cousin meant by the words 'The Silver Dwarf.' That is to say, the professor knows where the proofs of his cousin's marriage are concealed. He heard me say that I should go to Easington Towers to-night, and he knew that if I went to the Towers, and repeated Lord Easington's dying words, I should find out where the documents were hidden. He decided, therefore, to prevent me going to the Towers until he had been there himself, and had secured or destroyed those documents.

"With this end in view, he pretended that he was going to Penzance by the 9.15. After leaving the Grange he concealed himself behind that low stone wall at the Smuggler's Leap, and when we were driving past he fired at your horse. Finding that his plot had miscarried, he took advantage of my back being turned to push me over the edge of the cliff. He then walked on to the station, caught the Falmouth train, and is now on his way to Easington Towers.

"Now, when we get to the Grange I want you to lend me a suit of dry clothes

and the speediest horse in your stables. It is now a quarter to ten. It is eighteen miles, you say, from here to Easington Towers. The professor will arrive there about half-past ten. By riding hard I ought to arrive a few minutes after midnight, and may thus be in time to prevent him destroying the proofs of his cousin's marriage. It's a forlorn hope, I admit, but it's the only chance I have of nipping the scheme in the bud. Will you do this for me?"

"With the greatest pleasure in the world!" said Jack.

He was as good as his word. They reached the Grange a few minutes after ten o'clock, and a quarter of an hour later, mounted on Jack's favourite hunter, the detective was galloping down the road on his way to Easington Towers.

HOW THE SILVER DWARF STARTED ON ITS STRANGE AND ADVENTUROUS JOURNEY.

THE detective was right. It was Mark Rymer who had pushed him over the edge of the cliff. The professor had known from the first what Lord Easington had meant by his mysterious allusion to the Silver Dwarf. More than this, the professor also knew that if once Nelson Lee went to Easington Towers, and made a few inquiries there, he, too, would know what Lord Easington had meant, and would know where to look for the proofs of his lordship's marriage.

In view of these facts, the professor had determined to make a desperate effort to prevent the detective going to Easington Towers until he—Mark Rymer—had been there first, and had secured the precious documents. How he carried out this dastardly scheme the reader already knows, and it only remains to be added that, after he had pushed the detective over the edge of the cliff, he hurried on to the village, caught the Falmouth train, and arrived at Falmouth at a quarter-past ten.

It should here be explained that Easington Towers was a fine old Elizabethan mansion, standing in a well-wooded park, about a mile and a half to the west of the town. Whilst the professor had been travelling from Penleven the moon had risen, and the wind had died down to the gentlest of gentle breezes. The roads were in capital condition, and the professor decided, therefore, to walk to the Towers instead of hiring a conveyance.

No sooner had he started than two peculiar facts attracted his attention. One was that the sky to the west of the town was illuminated by a bright, red glow, not unlike the reflection of some enormous furnace. The other was that everybody he saw seemed to be going in the same direction as himself.

"There must be a fire somewhere," he mused. "I wonder where it can be?"

He hailed a burly fisherman, who was trudging along a few yards in front of him.

"Where are all these people going?" he asked.

"To see the fire, I expect," replied the fisherman.

"And where is the fire?"

"Easington Towers!"

The professor started as though he had been shot

"Is Easington Towers on fire?" he gasped.

"I should just say it was!" said his companion, pointing to the glow in the sky. "Look at that! It's the biggest blaze we've had round here for many a year."

"How was the fire caused?"

"That's more than I can tell you. All I know is that one of Lord Easington's grooms came galloping into the town about eight o'clock to-night with the news that the place was on fire. The fire-brigade turned out at once, and messages were sent to other places asking for assistance. There are four or five fire-engines there already, I believe; but from all I can hear there's not much chance of saving the place."

He had scarcely finished speaking ere a tradesman's cart came rattling past. Quick as thought the professor sprang into the middle of the road, and held up his hand.

"Are you going to the fire?" he asked, addressing the man in the cart.

"Yes, sir. Would you like a lift? I'll drive you there for a bob."

The professor clambered in beside him.

Fifteen minutes later the cart dashed through the handsome iron gates of Easington Park, and pulled up at the end of the sloping lawn in front of the house.

The professor sprang from the cart and stood gazing at the scene before him. From end to end the house was wrapped in a lurid sheet of flame. Four separate streamers, in as many different positions, were playing on the blazing pile. There were ladders reared against some of the windows, and on these ladders the helmeted figures of firemen could be seen, some with valuable books in their hands, some with gold and silver plate, some with priceless pictures.

Servants and policemen were flitting to and fro, receiving these various articles from the firemen, and all around this busy scene was a surging crowd of excited men and women, including, as is always the case at a fire, a considerable sprinkling of roughs.

As soon as the professor had taken in these details he made an attempt to elbow his way to the front. For a time the spectators refused to give way; but presently somebody recognised him, and a shout went up that this pale-faced, big-

nosed man was the new Lord Easington, the heir to the dead man's title and estates, the owner of the house which was now being rapidly burnt to the ground. As if by magic, the crowd pressed back and made way for him, and a few moments later he was standing at the foot of the terrace steps, in full glare of the flames.

"Where did the fire break out?" he asked, addressing the late Lord Easington's butler.

"In the dining-room, sir," was the reply. "By some means or other the mantel drapery became ignited, and almost before we knew what was happening the whole place was in flames."

"Let me see," said the professor, scratching his chin; "the dining-room is next the library, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was anything saved from the library?"

"Oh, yes, sir! We got most of the things out of the rooms on the ground floor before the fire-brigade arrived."

Again the professor scratched his chin.

"If I remember rightly," he said, "there was a silver statuette—quite a small thing, about ten or twelve inches high—on the library mantelpiece. It was supposed to represent a dwarf, I believe ——"

"Oh, yes; I know what you mean!" interrupted the butler. "The Silver Dwarf we always called it."

"Was it saved?"

"I couldn't say, sir. I'd nothing to do with removing the things from the library. My work was in the drawing-room."

"Who removed the things from the library?"

"Pollock and Trelawney, sir—the head-groom and the under-gardener."

"Where are they?"

The butler thought they were "somewhere round at the back of the house," and the professor accordingly set out in search of them.

"If the Silver Dwarf was left in the house," he muttered to himself, "the heat will have melted it by now, and the papers inside it will have been reduced to ashes. But I m afraid that's too much to hope for It's far more likely that some of these meddlesome idiots have rescued the thing"

After half and hour's search and inquiry he at last discovered the groom.

"One moment," he said, as the groom was about to hurry past him. "You helped to remove the things from the library, I believe?"

"I did, sir."

"What became of that silver statuette on the mantelpiece?"

"The Silver Dwarf?"

"Yes."

"I don't know, sir."

"Didn't you remove it?"

"No, sir; but I rather fancy Trelawney did. I don't remember seeing it the last time I was in the room."

"Where is Trelawney?"

"They've taken him to Falmouth. He was rather badly burnt in trying to save one of the pictures in the entrance, and they 've taken him to the hospital."

The professor crushed back a savage oath. This prolonged suspense was getting on his nerves. Yet he dared not rest until he had ascertained the fate of the silver statuette, in which, as he guessed, were concealed the proofs of the late Lord Easington's secret marriage.

He elbowed his way through the crowd again, and accosted the man who had driven him from Falmouth.

"How much to drive me back to Falmouth?" he asked. "Will half-a-sovereign tempt you?"

"It will!" said the man, with a grin. "Jump in, sir!"

The professor jumped in, and a moment later he was on his way to Falmouth.

It was half-past eleven when he reached the hospital; but the mention of his name and rank sufficed to procure him an immediate audience with the injured gardener.

"I am told that you were one of those who helped to save the things in the library," said the professor. "Is that so?"

"Yes, sir," said Trelawney. "Me and Pollock removed everything that we could carry."

"Do you remember a silver statuette on the mantelpiece?"

"The Silver Dwarf, as we called it?"

"Yes. Did you remove it?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you do with it?"

"I carried it into the coachhouse, sir, along with all the other ornaments. You'll find it on the floor, between the yellow dogcart and the brougham."

The professor slipped a coin into his hand and hurried away. Twenty minutes later he was back at Easington Towers.

The coachhouse was some distance from the house, and was approached through a large square stone-flagged yard. At one end of this yard was a big wooden door, communicating with the carriage drive; at the other end was a five-barred gate, leading into the paddock.

The professor opened the wooden door, and as he did so the stable clock struck twelve. The bluish light of the moon, mingling with the ruddy glare of the flames, gave the place a weird and uncanny aspect. The yard appeared to be absolutely deserted.

He closed the wooden door, and glided towards the coachhouse. Suddenly he perceived that the coachhouse door was open. He quickened his pace. Then a startled oath fell on his ears, and the next moment a man dashed out of the coachhouse with the Silver Dwarf in his hand, and darted towards the five-barred gate which led into the paddock.

Instantly the professor realised what

had happened. Taking advantage of the confusion, one of the roughs already mentioned had stolen round to the stable-yard in search of loot. The Silver Dwarf had evidently struck him as being both valuable and easy to carry away. Possibly he had only just laid hands on it when the professor's approaching footsteps had startled him; but, however this might be, it was only too clear that he was now in the act of making off with it.

No sooner had the professor grasped this fact than he whipped out his revolver.

The detective had just caught sight of the motionless form in the middle of the road, and had given vent to his surprise. This broke the spell of the scoundrel's stupefaction. Like an arrow from a bow, he darted across the moonlit road and vaulted over a low, wooden stile.

"Stand, or I fire!" he yelled.

Possibly the man thought he was bluffing. At any rate, he paid no heed to the warning, but sprang to the gate and began to clamber over.

The professor fired; but his bullet flew harmlessly over the fellow's head, and before he could fire again the thief had cleared the five barred gate, and was scurrying across the paddock.

With a roar of baffled fury, the professor dashed after him. Whilst he was clambering over the gate, a fireman rushed into the yard.

"That man—stolen the Silver Dwarf!" yelled the professor. "Quick—help me to catch him!"

The fireman good-naturedly joined in the pursuit; but his heavy boots and accoutrements impeded him, and before reaching the end of the paddock he gave it up and turned back.

Not so the professor, however. Revolver in hand, he tore across the moonlit paddock, clambering over a second gate, and found himself in a narrow country lane, bordered on each side by towering, leafless hedges. The thief was then about forty yards ahead, but was obviously slowing down, as though he were out of breath.

At the end of the lane was a turnpike road which led towards Penleven. By the time the thief had reached this road, his pursuer was less than thirty yards behind. At the end of another half-mile the distance had been reduced to twenty A

little later it was ten, and the professor had just decided to try the effect of a running shot, when the thief, with a swift and sudden movement, tossed the Silver Dwarf into the ditch and turned at bay.

Crack! The professor fired, and the thief fell forward on his face. Exultingly Mark Rymer darted towards him; but even as he did so the cunning rascal—who had merely been shamming—leaped to his feet, knocked the revolver from the professor's grasp, and seized him by the throat.

Though taken completely by surprise, the professor never lost his presence of mind for a single instant. Quick as thought he clenched his fists, and dashed them into his adversary's face. Following this, he flung his arms round the fellow's waist, twined one leg behind his knee, and exerted all his strength to bring him down. For a time his efforts met with no success; but at last, with a superhuman effort, he tripped his assailant up, and flung him on his back.

Nothing daunted, the fellow scrambled to his feet, and rushed at the professor a second time. A stinging blow between the eyes only served to add to his fury, and an instant later the two men were locked in each other's arms.

In point of physical strength the professor was altogether outclassed by his burly, big-limbed antagonist. Notwithstanding this, however, he defended himself with such frenzied vigour that for quite two minutes he more than held his own. Breast to breast, each with his arms around the other's waist, they reeled and staggered across the moonlit road in a fierce and desperate wrestling bout.

Then the professor's foot slipped, and in less time than it takes to tell he was lying on his back in the middle of the road, with one of his adversary's knees firmly planted on his chest, and two brawny hands encircling his throat.

Then the man suddenly raised one ponderous fist, and dealt Mark Rymer a violent blow behind the ear that deprived him of all consciousness. Flushed with triumph, he then sprang lightly to his feet, and was groping in the ditch for the Silver Dwarf, when he heard the clatter of horse's hoofs.

With a gasp of alarm he darted back into the middle of the road, and even as he did so his eyes fell on the face of Nelson Lee, who was cantering down the moonlit road on his way to Easington Towers.

For a moment the man seemed absolutely paralysed with terror. In spell-bound fascination he gazed at the rapidly-approaching figure of Nelson Lee, and then at the senseless form of the man he had stunned, and then at Nelson Lee again.

Suddenly a sharp, short cry of astonishment fell on his ears. The detective had just caught sight of the motionless form in the middle of the road, and had given vent to his surprise.

This broke the spell of the scoundrel's stupefaction, and galvanised his palsied faculties into life. Like an arrow from a bow he darted across the moonlit road, and vaulted over a low wooden stile. An instant later he was racing across the fields with the fleetness of a hunted hare.

"This looks uncommonly like foul play," muttered Nelson Lee, as he reined in his steaming horse beside the prostrate form, and sprang out of the saddle.

As he uttered these words he sank down on his knees by the side of the unconscious professor, and rolled him over on his back.

The cold, clear light of the moon, falling on Mark Rymer's pallid face, told the detective who he was.

"Great Scott, it's the professor!" he gasped. "Now what, in the name of all that's wonderful, is he doing here? What has happened? And who was his assailant?"

He unbuttoned the professor's coat and placed one hand over the region of his heart. It was beating; somewhat feebly, it is true, but otherwise normally and regularly. He examined him for injuries but discovered nothing more serious than a swelling behind the left ear, and a series of livid impressions on the throat, which appeared to be the finger-prints of a pair of muscular hands.

His examination finished, the detective rose to his feet, mounted the stile, and gazed across the fields. By that time, however, Mark Rymer's assailant was out of sight

"It's a thousand pities I didn't arrive a few minutes earlier!" he muttered to himself. "However, the fellow's gone, and there's an end of him so far as I'm concerned. In the meantime I can hardly leave the professor here. I must convey him to some place where they'll look after him until he comes round, and then I can ride on to the Towers, and try to find out what Lord Easington meant by his reference to the Silver Dwarf."

Little did he dream that the Silver Dwarf was lying at that moment less than fifteen yards from where he stood.

From his position on the top of the stile he was able to see the red roof of a small farmhouse, standing back some distance from the turnpike, at the end of a short, straight cart-road. He raised the professor in his arms and laid him across the horse's back. Ten minutes later he was at the door of the farmhouse.

And even whilst the detective was knocking at the door, a Falmouth fisherman, strolling down the road on his way back from the fire, saw the Silver Dwarf, picked it up, examined it, thrust it under his jersey, and calmly walked away with it!

The detective's knock was answered by

a raw-boned, sleepy-eyed youth of about sixteen

"Can I see your father?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Naw," said the youth. "He's gone to the fire They're all gone but me."

The detective, of course, had seen the red glow in the sky, but had never connected it with Easington Towers.

"And where's the fire, my lad?" he asked

"At the Towers," replied the youth.

"Easington Towers?" gasped Nelson Lee.

"Yes."

Without a word, the detective lifted the still unconscious professor off the horse and carried him into the house, where he deposited him on a low wooden settle, and covered him with a horse-rug.

"This is Professor Rymer—Lord Easington's cousin," he said, turning to the youth, who was staring at him in open-mouthed bewilderment. "He has met with an accident, but isn't seriously hurt. He'll be all right in an hour or so; in fact, he's beginning to come round already. When he comes round, give him this."

He thrust one of his cards into the youth's hands, hurried out, sprang into the saddle, and galloped off in the direction of the Towers.

As luck would have it, the first man he encountered when he rode into the stable-yard was Pollock, the head groom.

"Here, my man, take this horse and stable him!' he cried, as he hastily dismounted.

Pollock stared at him, with something of resentment in his glance.

"And who might you be, pray?" he asked.

"Nelson Lee," was the quiet reply.

"What! Nelson Lee, the detective?" gasped the groom.

Lee nodded his head.

"Shortly before your master's death," he said, "he instructed me to come to the Towers and take possession of certain important documents. He died before he had time to tell me where I should find the documents; but the last words he uttered were: 'Go to my house. The Silver Dwarf.'"

"The Silver Dwarf!" exclaimed the groom. "Well, I'm blowed! His lordship's cousin, Professor Rymer, was here about an hour and a half ago asking about the very same thing!"

"About the Silver Dwarf?"

"Yes. He wanted to know if it had been saved from the fire."

"If what had been saved?"

"The Silver Dwarf, of course."

"But I don't understand you. What is the Silver Dwarf?"

"It's a silver statuette, about ten or twelve inches high, which used to stand on the mantelpiece in the library. It's supposed to represent a dwarf, I believe. At any rate, it was always known to everybody at the Towers as the Silver Dwarf."

The puzzled look died out of the detective's face. The mystery of the Silver Dwarf was a mystery no longer. At last he understood the meaning of Lord Easington's dying words.

The Silver Dwarf was evidently hollow, and within its interior were concealed the proofs of Lord Easington's secret marriage!

But where was the Silver Dwarf now? Had it been destroyed by the flames? Or had Mark Rymer secured it?

He put those questions to the wondering groom.

"Oh, yes, sir it was saved from the fire," said Pollock; "but whether the professor has got it or not I can't say. All I know is this: Mr. Rymer asked me if it was true that me and Trelawney—that's the under-gardener—had removed the things from the library. I told him yes. Then he asked me if we'd removed the Silver Dwarf. I told him I hadn't removed if myself, but I rather thought Trelawney had. He asked where Trelawney was, and I told him he'd been taken to Falmouth Hospital, in consequence of having been severely burnt. I don't know whether the professor went to the hospital or not, but I was told by one of the firemen about three-quarters of an hour later—— But there's the man himself! Hi, you there! Half a minute!"

"What is it?" asked the fireman, who had at that moment entered the stable-yard in search of a ladder.

"I want you to tell this gentleman what you know about the Silver Dwarf," said the groom.

"Well, it was like this, sir," said the fireman "I was coming along the carriage-drive, just about midnight, when I heard a revolver-shot. I rushed into this yard, and was just in time to see a man jump over that gate with something bright and silvery in his hand. Mr. Rymer was running after him, and he shouted to me at the top of his voice: 'That man—stolen the Silver Dwarf! Help me to capture him!' I scrambled over the gate, and me and Mr. Rymer set out in pursuit. Before we'd gone very far, however, the weight of my accoutrements began to tell on me; so I had to give up and came back here."

"But the professor went on?"

"Yes. When last I saw him he was chasing the thief along that lane which leads into the turnpike-road."

Almost before the fireman had finished speaking, the detective was in the saddle again.

A moment later he had cleared the five-barred gate and was galloping across the moonlit paddock.

"I see it all!" he muttered excitedly. "The professor saw that fellow making off with the Silver Dwarf. He chased him for some distance along the road which leads

towards Penleven, and at last the fellow turned at bay. There was a struggle, and the professor was stunned. The thief, no doubt, had dropped the Silver Dwarf in order to defend himself, and while searching for it afterwards he saw me coming. It's more than possible that when he bolted he left the Silver Dwarf behind him on the roadway."

Fired by this hope, he galloped down the narrow lane, round the corner, and into the moonlit turnpike. As he neared the spot where he had picked up the professor he perceived a man, armed with a lantern, was groping in the ditch.

At the sound of the horse's hoofs the man stepped out into the middle of the road, and once again the cold light of the moon fell on the corpselike face of Professor Mark Rymer.

"Well met!" cried the detective, as he reined in his horse and sprang to the ground. "Allow me to congratulate you on your safe and speedy return to consciousness."

The professor favoured him with an ugly, vindictive scowl. He arched his shoulders—for all the world like a cat arching her back—and his deep-set eyes narrowed to the merest slits.

"Why have you come back?"

"To help you look for the Silver Dwarf," said the detective cheerfully. The professor started.

"Then you know?" he hissed.

"Everything," said Nelson Lee. "The Silver Dwarf is a statuette. It is hollow, and inside it are the proofs of your cousin's secret marriage. It was stolen by the man who stunned you. He dropped it when you attacked him, and afterwards he ran away, and left it behind him. You have come back to look for it. Perhaps you have found it?"

As he uttered these words he suddenly darted forward and ran his hands lightly down each side of the professor's body.

"No, you haven't found it!" he said, stepping back just in time to avoid a blow from the enraged professor's fist.

Leaving the professor standing in the middle of the road, literally paralysed with rage, he began to explore the ditches on each side. For a while he sought in vain; then his eyes fell on a well-defined impression in the mud.

"Too late!" he murmured. "This is where the Dwarf lay, without a doubt. Somebody must have picked it up whilst the professor was at the farmhouse."

He went back into the middle of the road, and vaulted into the saddle. He touched the horse lightly with the spurs, and the animal bounded forward like a stone from a catapult.

At the end of the lane he turned in his saddle and waved his hand in mock farewell. Then he vanished round the corner, and Mark Rymer lost sight of him.

NEXT WEEK'S NUMBER OF "OUR DETECTIVE STORY SECTION" WILL CONTAIN:—

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The Adventures of Gordon Fox, Detective.

CHAPTER I.

THE MURDER IN THE FIR PLANTATION—MR. HUDSON RECEIVES AN UNPLEASANT LETIER.

THERE had been a light fall of snow on Saturday night, and the following day had been dull and frosty; but at eight o'clock on Monday morning, when Gordon Fox strolled out to the cobbled yard of the Feathers Inn, smoking his after-breakfast pipe, the sun was shining from a cloudless sky, and there was every promise of fine autumn weather. The detective wore thick boots, a knickerbocker suit, and a deerstalker cap. He was on a brief holiday, taking one of his walking tours, and he had spent Sunday at the little village of Weybridge, thirty miles down in Kent.

"Off to-day, sir?" said Toby Rackstraw, the landlord, who was fondling a couple of black spaniels.

"Yes, very shortly. This is a snug little place you have, and I would like to stop longer."

"That's what all my guests tell me, sir, and they come back when they can. There's young Mr. Oakley Smith, who left last night. I've known him for a couple of year. He's a bank clerk somewhere in London—Willesden, it strikes me—and he don't get much time to——"

"I thought he was a photographer?" Gordon Fox broke in absently.

"He's that, too, sir," broke in the landlord. "An amateur fortygrapher, he calls himself, and he often runs down for a week-end trying to get pictures of wild birds on the wing. It's a well-wooded shooting country hereabouts, and especially the Palgrave estate, just beyond the village. But there are no Palgraves left now, and the estate belongs to Mr. Harry Hudson. Oddly enough, he was a Weybridge lad who went out to Australia thirty years ago, and made a fortune in sheep-farming. He came back six months ago, just when Palgrave Hall was up for sale, and he bought it like a shot. He has no family, and he must find it dull living there alone. He's not a bad sort, but he's been kind of putting on airs since he——"

Toby Rackstraw paused abruptly, and the detective uttered a startled exclamation. A constable turned into the yard, breathing hard, and mopping his brow with a handkerchief.

"What's wrong, Parchett?" cried the landlord.

"It's murder, Toby," was the reply. "A man killed over in the fir plantation. Mr. Hudson's gamekeeper found him, and sent for me, and after I'd been I remembered that Mr. Fox was stopping here. So I thought I'd better——"

"I'll come with you at once," interrupted the detective. "Sure the man was murdered?"

"Not a doubt of it, sir."

The landlord, being old and rheumatic, could not accompany the others. He promised not to spread the news as yet, and then Gordon Fox and the constable set off. The inn was at the end of the village, and they had not far to go. They hurried across two fields, through a belt of fairly open cover, and then into a dense, dim plantation, where bushes grew head high amid the crushed and yellow bracken, and the spreading boughs of Scotch fir-trees formed a matted roof. They pushed on for some distance, guided by voices, and presently entered a little glade surrounded by tangled thickets and timber.

Here were the gamekeeper and Mr. Harry Hudson, the latter a thick-set, burly man of fifty, with rugged features and close-cropped beard and moustache of a reddish hue. And sprawled on the ground, with his sightless eyes turned upward, was a middle-aged, clean-shaven man, dressed in a suit of shabby blue serge.

"This is Mr. Fox, sir, the famous detective," said the constable.

The Australian squatter nodded, but did not speak. Gordon Fox bent over the body, and as he examined it a curious expression played on his face for an instant.

"Skull crushed in," he said, rising. "The man was killed by a blow from some blunt instrument, and he has been dead for many hours, probably since yesterday afternoon. None of you know him?"

"He's a stranger, sir," declared the gamekeeper.

"That's right," said Constable Parchett. "He don't belong anywhere near Weybridge. Don't look like a poacher, either."

"I hope you will find the murderer, Mr. Fox," said the owner of Palgrave Hall.

"It seems a mysterious case," replied the detective. "The ground has been hard since Saturday, and there are no footprints. I wonder if that light fall of snow has all melted?"

"If any is left, we'll find it over here," said the gamekeeper.

He led the way for fifty yards, to the shadiest part of the plantation, and then stopped, with a gesture. In a little hollow was a thin carpeting of snow, and on the surface of it were the faint impressions of heavy, hobnailed boots. A man had crossed and recrossed, as if going to and from the scene of the tragedy. The prints were not fresh, but had evidently been made on the previous day.

"That settles it," vowed Constable Parchett. "Tom Wilgres is the party we want. He is the most notorious poacher in the neighbourhood, and I'll bet his boots will fit these marks. He must have murdered that poor fellow."

"Mistaking him for me," put in the gamekeeper. "The two must have met about twilight."

Gordon Fox had quickly slipped away. He returned to the glade, knelt by the corpse, and picked out of the wound a tiny, round flake of ivory, white on one side and yellow on the other. He penetrated the thickets, in the opposite direction to his companions, and within twenty yards he came to a small pond girdled by trees and rushes. He gazed at the still, dark water for a moment, as if wondering what secrets it might hold, and then retraced his steps. His keen eyes discovered no snow or footprints, but when he was within three yards of the glade, among high and thick bushes, he found a little cylinder that proved to contain a roll of half a dozen unused photographic films. With a low exclamation, he thrust them into his pocket, and the next instant he emerged into the open just as the rest of the party appeared.

"No need for you to look about, sir," said the constable. "When we get Tom Wilgres we'll have the right man."

"Appearances are certainly against him," admitted the detective; and, as he spoke, an odd smile hovered about his lips.

Gordon Fox declined Mr. Hudson's invitation to lunch, and returned to the inn, where he learned that young Oakley Smith had been absent with his camera most of the previous day, and had not come back till after dark. The body of the murdered man—his pockets contained nothing but some Treasury notes and silver—was removed to the Feathers, and, meanwhile, Tom Wilgres had been arrested and locked up. His boots fitted the prints in the snow, and he admitted that he had been in the plantation late on Sunday evening, but he strenuously asserted his innocence.

The detective spent most of that afternoon in the fir-wood, but without result, and after supper he announced his intention of going to London. Night had fallen when he started for the station, and as he was walking through the village street a man came out of the post-office in front of him. The light from the window revealed the features of the Australian squatter. His face was ghastly white, and in his hand he held a letter, which he crumpled savagely as he crossed the road towards the footpath that led to the Hall.

"I know what that means," reflected Gordon Fox, who had not been seen himself. "I am on the right track, though the case is by no means clear yet. I fancy Mr. Hudson will spend an uncomfortable night, from the look of terror on his face. As for that pond, I hope it won't be dragged during my absence."

It was a short walk to the station. The detective jumped into the London train, and was soon being whirled away in the direction of the metropolis.

CHAPTER II.

THE LANDLADY AT HARLINGTON CRESCENT—MR. OAKLEY SMITH TALKS TOO FREELY.

THE murder had been discovered on Monday, and the task that Gordon Fox had set himself proved less easy than he anticipated. He was engaged in making inquiries all day Tuesday, and at nine o'clock that evening he knocked at the door of a house in Harlington Crescent, Willesden. A middle-aged woman appeared, with a shrewish countenance.

"Yes, Mr. Smith lodges here, she said, in answer to a question; "but he is not in."

"When is he likely to return?"

"Ten o'clock is his usual time, sir."

"I am a friend of Mr. Smith's," said the detective, "and he promised to show me some photographs that he meant to take down in Kent on Sunday. I wonder if he took them?"

"I think he did, for when he came home to lunch on Monday, the day of his return, he got to work at his fillums, as he calls them. He must have been late at the bank, for when he had finished lunch he stopped to write a letter——"

"Yes—to me. Did he receive my answer to-day?"

"A letter came for him at supper-time, sir, but he didn't —" The woman paused, as if suddenly suspicious.

"Might I wait in Mr. Smith's room until he returns?" inquired Gordon Fox, who was anxious to make a search.

"Certainly not!" replied the landlady; and, with an indignant exclamation, the door was slammed.

The detective turned away, and walked down the narrow strip of garden to the gate. He looked up the street, saw two persons approaching, and recognised one by the light of the lamp-post. Darting back, he crouched under a clump of shrubbery, and a moment later two men stopped at the gate.

"I tell you I'm tired of fooling," said one. "I want the five pounds you borrowed from me three months ago."

"It's a'right, Emerson," replied the voice of Oakley Smith, who had evidently been drinking too much.

"Don't you worry. I'll be rich soon. You know I take pictures, eh? Well, I have a film that's going to make my fortune—a film that's worth one thousand pounds. How's that, old fellow?"

"What nonsense are you talking, Oakley?"

"No nonsense. It's true, b'lieve me."

"When will you pay?"

Within twenty yards he came to a small pond girdled by trees and rushes. He gazed at the still dark water for a moment, as if wondering what secrets it might hold.

"Lesh see. To-morrow night I go out of town—'portant business. Come to Blue Post Thursday night, Emerson, and you'll get your money."

"If I don't, you'll know something. Mind that.

The speakers separated, and the footsteps of one died away. Oakley Smith, who was a young man of perhaps twenty-seven, entered the gate and stumbled up the garden path. He ascended the steps, unlocked the door, and vanished within the house. A few seconds later Gordon Fox rose from his hiding-place. He had partly solved the mystery. He knew now, to a dead certainty, who had committed the Weybridge murder.

CHAPTER III.

THE SURPRISE AT PALGRAVE HALL—THE SQUATTER'S CONFESSION.

IT was an anxious moment for two persons who were hiding near the platform of Weybridge railway station when the London train arrived at eight o'clock on Wednesday night. But nothing had occurred to spoil the programme, for immediately Mr. Oakley Smith stepped from one of the carriages, with his cap pulled over his face and the collar of his overcoat drawn up. Little dreaming that he was being shadowed, he quickly left the station and walked a little way down the road. Then, with intent to avoid the village, he climbed a stile, and struck across the fields in the direction of Palgrave Hall.

Gordon Fox and Constable Parchett were in no particuar hurry, for theirs was the shorter route. Having watched the young man out of sight, they walked slowly through the village and a quarter of a mile

beyond it, when they turned into a dark avenue of limes.

The avenue led to the Hall, and from the cover of some shrubbery at the edge of the drive the two men saw Oakley Smith admitted to the old Georgian mansion. After waiting for five minutes, they crept round to one side. They noiselessly raised a small window, climbed through it, and found themselves in the gun-room, as the detective's pocket electric lamp showed. From this they reached a lighted passage, and a dozen steps brought them to what they knew to be the apartment they were seeking. From within could be heard faint voices.

"It is locked," whispered Gordon Fox, as he cautiously tried the handle.

"That's bad," breathed the constable. "What is to be done?"

"Break in. We must take them by surprise, before they can destroy the evidence. Ready?"

"Yes, here goes!"

A combined effort, a crash, and the door flew open, with a shattered lock. The detective and his companion rushed into the room, which was a small one, evidently used as the estate office. From a table in the middle Mr. Hudson and Oakley Smith sprang to their feet, white and dazed, and ere they could recover from their astonishment the constable levelled a revolver at them.

"Don't stir," he threatened, "or I'll shoot!"

It was a dramatic scene. A couple of servants, drawn by the noise, were standing outside the door in fright and curiosity. The young man stood still, trembling violently. The Australian squatter uttered a groan and reeled backward, dropping into a chair.

"Don't make any disturbance," Gordon Fox said quietly. "You know why we are here."

He stepped to the table, on which lay a heap of coins and notes, a photographic film, and a finished picture mounted on a card. He picked up the latter and held it to the light, staring at it with fascinated eyes.

He saw a scene that the camera had portrayed to the life—the little glade in the fir plantation, the crushed bracken, the huddled form of the murdered man; and stooping over him, with shocked and distressed features, with a walking-stick clenched in one hand, was the owner of Palgrave Hall.

The detective put photograph and film in his pocket.

"Mr. Hudson," he said, "I must arrest you on a charge of murder, and any statement you may make may be used in evidence against you."

The wretched man lifted his head, sat higher in the chair.

"I must speak," he said huskily. "It was not murder. I struck in self-defence. I will tell you all—it is not a long story. Five years ago the dead man—his name was John Baker—was my manager out in Queensland. He was a widower, and his son was a clerk down at Sydney. The boy got into trouble—embezzled some money from his employers to cover losses on betting at races. Two hundred pounds would have saved him, and Baker asked me to lend him that sum, promising to work it out. I was hard-hearted, and I refused. Several days later Baker broke into my house at night and stole a bag of gold from my desk. I caught him. He was tried, convicted, and sentenced to a term of penal servitude. Meanwhile, to save arrest, the son had shot himself.

"The years rolled on, and six months ago I came home to my native village, a rich man, and bought the Palgrave estate. Last Sunday afternoon, as I was walking in the fir plantation, I met John Baker. He told me that he had been released from prison, and that he had traced me to England to have his revenge. He drew a revolver from his pocket, and, before he could shoot, to save my life, I struck him with an ivory-headed stick I was carrying. He fell, dropped dead, and for a long time—it may have been half an hour I crouched over him, dazed with horror. Then I threw the stick and the revolver into a pond near by, and crept home in the twilight.

"That is the honest truth, Mr. Fox. I wanted to confess, but I was afraid to; and, meanwhile, on Monday night, I received a letter from this young man. He told me of the photograph he had taken, and offered to sell me the film for a thousand pounds, with the understanding that he would swear never to——"

"It was an accident," broke in Oakley Smith sullenly. "You can't blame me for yielding to the temptation. I was in the fir-wood on Sunday, trying to get a snapshot at a flying pheasant, and as I was pushing through the thickets, holding my arms high, the branch of a tree caught the camera, and it went off with a click. Later I took a couple of snap-shots, and when I went back to London and developed the films, I found the one you have there. At noon on Monday I saw the murder mentioned in a newspaper, and, knowing what a chance I had of making a pile of money—I knew Mr. Hudson by sight—I wrote to him at once."

"You are a scoundrel and a blackmailer," said Gordon Fox, "and, to my mind, your crime is the worse. And now I must trouble you both to come with me."

. . . . . .

Oakley Smith went to Wormwood Scrubbs for three months, which was getting off lightly; and Mr. Hudson, whose story was believed by the jury, was convicted of manslaughter, and sent to prison for a year. After his release he sold Palgrave Hall, compensated Tom Wilgres for what he had suffered, and then went back to Australia to end his days.

THE END.

(*Continued from page 14*)

had done it. According to all that Mrs. Howell had said, life for him was only going on for a brief period.

His blitheness vanished, and as he stood staring out of the caravan window it seemed to him that the sun went in. The whole landscape became dark and dreary. A cold blast seemed to whizz through the caravan.

"Gadzooks!" he breathed. "I'd forgotten!"

"What's the matter, old son?" asked Brent, coming into the caravan at that moment. "Cheer up! Glorious morning, and I think Nipper's fixing up a cricket match for this evening. Those Grammar School chaps, you know——"

"Kindly refrain from mentioning them," said Archie coldly. "I have nothing against the dear chappies personally, but they were the cause of my present misery. I mean to say, even if a cove is going to pass into another world shortly, he doesn't like to know about it in advance!"

Alf Brent roared.

"You—you giddy ass!" he chuckled. "Fancy believing that twaddle!"

Alf Brent and Archie had always been firm chums, and were just as pally as ever. Archie shook his head sadly, greatly shocked that his chum could descend to such levity.

"Cheer up, Archie!" grinned Brent. "You'll live to be eighty yet! Oh, by the way, I've got something for you."

"Something for me?" repeated Archie indifferently.

"Yes—a letter," said Brent. "It came by this morning's post."

He held out the letter, and Archie stared at it with a kind of fascinated horror.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERY OF DEAD MAN'S CAVE.

"TAKE it, you ass!" said Brent. "My hat! What's the matter? Don't look at the thing as though it were a giddy rattlesnake. It won't bite you!"

Archie gave a gulp.

"That—that letter came for me?" he breathed faintly.

"Yes—this morning!"

"Are you sure?"

"Of course, I'm sure, you duffer," said Brent. "It's addressed to you, and it was posted in Swansea last night. I'm not inquisitive, but I'm just wondering who the dickens could have written it."

Archie took the letter in a kind of trance. He turned it over and over in his fingers, and feared to open it.

The whole thing was becoming a nightmare. First, the news of the death—then the fighting—and now this letter! Every one of Mrs. Howell's prophecies were coming true. It was getting beyond belief.

But there it was—that mysterious letter that he had to heed!

"I'm frightfully sorry, old bean, but I trust you won't be offended," said Archie awkwardly. "I mean to say, I'm not a secretive bounder, or anything like that——"

"All right, Archie—I understand," said Alf, moving away. "A nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse."

He passed out of the caravan, and Archie sat down heavily. In fact, he sat down far more heavily than he had intended. In his preoccupation he believed that there was a chair immediately behind him, and there wasn't.

He landed on the floor with a crash that shook every bone in his body.

And that shock tended to sober him somewhat. He picked himself up, groaning, and flopped back on to his bed. All the other fellows were up and dressed. Archie had the caravan to himself.

Breakfast, in fact, was just upon ready, but Archie had been allowed to slumber on. He braced himself up, squared his shoulders, and tore the flap of the envelope open. He extracted a plain sheet of notepaper.

Although fearing to read what the message was, he gazed fixedly at the notepaper. And it wasn't so terrible, after all. For this is what he read:

"Dear Master Archibald,—Excuse me writing, sir, but it is very important I should see you. I cannot come in the ordinary way, for reasons I will explain. But I must meet you to-morrow. So please be down in Dead Man's Cave, just near the Mumbles, at four-thirty in the afternoon. I will be there waiting for you, and will tell you why I have written in this way. The matter is very, very important.—Your obedient servant,

"PHIPPS."

Archie gazed at the letter wonderingly.

"Phipps!" he breathed. "Well, so to speak, I'm dashed."

He was aware of a big feeling of relief. He had expected something far worse than this. After the things that his imagination had been busy with, it seemed ridiculous that he should be worrying over a message from his own valet.

Phipps—good old Phipps. Archie had not been able to bring the man on this tour, much to his regret. And, for some reason, Phipps found it necessary to meet Archie in dead secret.

The elegant junior carefully folded the letter up, and resolved that he would be in Dead Man's Cave—wherever that might be—that afternoon at the appointed hour. And, of course, he would say nothing to anybody else.

Archie, really, felt greatly bucked. The prospect of meeting Phipps was one that filled him with pleasure. Phipps would be able to advise him. Phipps, in fact, would

be able to drive the clouds away. Phipps was like that.

"I mean to say, when I talk to the laddie face to face, he will proceed to reel forth yards of the good old comfort," Archie told himself. "Phipps is one of those brainy coves who can do anything. I must admit that I'm feeling absolutely priceless."

And he dressed, and sallied out to breakfast with almost all of his usual good spirits. Nobody noticed that he was abstracted, and by this time practically all the juniors had forgotten about the soothsayer.

But Archie was very preoccupied during morning lessons, and more than once Nelson Lee had to bring him sharply to attention. However, he got through the day fairly well, and as soon as school was dismissed, he was off.

It was now four o'clock.

And he had to meet Phipps at four-thirty. So far he had made no inquiries concerning Dead Man's Cave. He felt that it would be inadvisable to question any of the other fellows.

So he sallied out on his own, thankful that he had escaped without being questioned. He decided that it would be a good idea for him to walk down to Langley Bay, and then climb over the rugged rocks at the foot of the cliffs, and proceed towards the Mumbles in that way.

Down on the beach he met a couple of native youngsters who had been paddling.

"Just a moment, dear old fruits!" he said gracefully. "Possibly you will be able to direct me to a spot known as Dead Man's Cave?"

"Never heard of it!" said one of the boys.

"But, dash it, it's somewhere near the Mumbles!"

"Never heard of it!" repeated the youngster stolidly.

And Archie could get no'hing further from him. He was puzzled, and not a little worried. He particularly wanted to find where this cave was—otherwise it would not be very easy for him to keep the appointment.

He was proceeding to climb over some of the rocks when he observed that another youngster was near by. He would try again. This youngster was even smaller than the others, and appeared to have been shrimping. He was whistling cheerfully and decidedly out of tune.

"Looking for something, mister?" he asked, as he gazed at Archie.

"As a matter of fact, I'm trying to find Dead Man's Cave," said Archie.

"Dead Man's Cave?" repeated the boy. "Why, look you, that is just along the beach. I have been in Dead Man's Cave once before already!"

Archie seized a shilling in his pocket, and held it ready.

"What-ho!" he said. "Kindly proceed with the directions, old lad!"

The youngster pointed.

"See that queer-shaped rock?" he said. "That one that looks like an arch? Dead Man's Cave is exactly opposite, look you. You can't mistake it, because the entrance is like a doorway, going to a point at the top."

"Good man!" said Archie. "Kindly allow me to hand across a small token of my regard. In other words, baksheesh!"

The shilling changed hands, and Archie went on his way, rejoicing.

Under any other circumstances, he would have been greatly interested in the beach. The rocks were exceedingly quaint, and some of the formations were really extraordinary.

On his left, as he walked, the cliffs rose up at all angles—rugged picturesque, and beautiful. And the beach itself was strewn with all kinds of big rocks, with the sea splashing vigorously and musically further away.

But Archie saw nothing of this.

His whole attention was on Dead Man's Cave. At length he arrived, and found the place to be exactly as the boy had described. Arriving at the cave entrance, he plunged in—noting that the time was just after four-thirty.

"What-ho, within!" sang out Archie. "Phipps, old lad, kindly emerge from the shadows, and greet the young master! I am here! I mean to say, Archie has arrived! Come forth, old tomato!"

The only reply was his own echo.

The cave went in deeply, and all was black beyond. At least, it was black at first. But Archie's eyes soon became accustomed to the gloom, and he began to see the shape of the cave in a dim, uncertain kind of way.

The floor was sandy, without any trace of seaweed. And the rocksides, although rugged, were clear to him now.

"Phipps!" he bleated. "I say, Phipps, old lad!"

But Archie's voice was like that of a lost lamb.

"Dash it!" he went on feebly. "This, don't you know, is getting more frightful every moment! Where, Phipps, are you? Don't keep so bally silent! The young master is longing to hear your voice!"

But it seemed that the young master would have to long.

For no soothing voice came out of the cave. Then Archie, as he looked round, gave a start. He had noticed something on the side of the cave. There were chalk marks there.

He turned to them eagerly, and found that these chalk marks were writing. And he read the words with strange misgiving. There, in plain lettering, were the words:

"Could not stay. Danger.—PHIPPS."

"Great Scott, and what not!" breathed Archie, "I'm dashed if I know what to do. I'm dashed if I know——"

He came to an abrupt halt, his heart jumping into his mouth.

His eyes, now thoroughly accustomed to the gloom, were capable of seeing all sorts

of things that had been previously invisible. He could see something sticking out of the sand, just a little way further up towards the end of the cave. And Archie gazed at it, horrified.

For it was the hand of a skeleton!

"This—this is frightfully frightful!" he breathed.

But he braced himself up grimly, and approached the fearsome object. Yes—he was right—he had made no mistake. The thing was the hand of a human skeleton. Just a hand, sticking up out of the sand! The whole thing was uncanny, and unaccountable.

He remembered the name of the cave, and this was no comfort to him. Gingerly he bent down and grasped that horrid relic. It came away, much to his relief, proving to be a hand and nothing else.

There was a string attached to it, and when he pulled at this string, it withstood his efforts. There was something buried in the sand! And he now saw, with even greater relief, that the skeleton hand was merely an anatomical specimen. It was mounted, and very similar to two or three that were in the St. Frank's museum—or the museum of any other big school.

Obviously, this skeleton hand could not have been left there by accident. The cave was visited by all sorts of people during the course of the summer, and it was only safe to assume that many holiday-makers had already penetrated its depths.

"Dash it all!" breathed Archie. "What am I to do? Phipps—where is Phipps? I wonder why the dear laddie was compelled to trickle away so hastily? There is something fishy about this."

And, having come to that conclusion, Archie gave his full attention to the string which was attached to the skeleton hand. He tugged at it with considerable force, but could not pull it out of the tightly packed sand.

So he commenced digging with his hands, and after a while had succeeded in excavating to a fairly deep extent. He had made a big hole in the floor of the cave, and he was concerned about the state of his fingers.

And then, just as he was deciding that the game wasn't worth the candle, he felt something solid. Again he pulled on the string, and this time he was successful in freeing a small, square object.

It came away from the sand, and lay there, revealed as a metal box. The lid was tightly closed down, and the whole thing was bound up with cord. Archie didn't waste any time.

He was growing tired of these mysteries. So he pulled out his pocket-knife, slashed through the cord, and opened the lid of the box. He stared into the opened cavity, and gave a little gasp.

"I mean to say," he murmured dazedly. "Doubloons, and what not! Pirates' hoard, and the good old pieces of eight. This, I imagine, is what the chappies in Treasure Island were after!"

For the box contained hundreds of glittering gold coins!

They gleamed, even in the gloom of that cavern. Taking one of them out of the box. Archie could see that the design upon it was unfamiliar. They were not British coins, but Spanish, by the look of them.

By now Archie was feeling somewhat weak. All these surprises, one after the other, were rather too much for him. For the life of him he couldn't understand why this box had been left here.

And how was Phipps connected with it?

When would Phipps come back? What should he do with the box of gold and the skeleton hand? Was it his duty to inform the police?

After due consideration, he decided that it would be far better for him to keep his own counsel for the time being. He would wait a bit and see how things developed.

And it occurred to him that he would be conspicuous if he went marching down the beach, carrying a skeleton hand and a jingling box. But he didn't quite like the idea of leaving the gold there.

After due thought, he decided to bury the hand in the sand again, and he would carry the box. If he was careful it wouldn't jingle, and nobody would be suspicious.

So he carried out this programme.

But he was more astonished than ever, and inclined to be despondent. Once again Mrs. Howell had proved that she had been able to see clearly into the future. And the next item on the list was for Archie to make his will.

That was rather a job for the genial Archie.

The interest he might have felt in the treasure was now only lukewarm. He didn't even tell anybody about it. When he arrived back at the camp he found that most of the fellows were over at the Grammar School, where a cricket match was in progress.

The Remove Eleven, in fact, were playing the Welsh boys. And it may be as well to state that the match was a huge success. Evan Llewellyn and his chums gave us a great game. And we only won through sheer effort. The Welsh boys were quite hot stuff.

Archie didn't wait for the cricketers to come home, in the dusk of the long June evening. Instead, he went straight to bed, and soon fell asleep. He was firmly convinced that his future had been foretold, and that it held nothing but disaster for him.

When he awoke in the morning he found that he was one of the first. It was earlier than the usual hour for rising, and all the other fellows in the caravan were still in bed.

But Archie couldn't sleep.

It was a fine, clear morning, and the air was invigorating. It was just before seven o'clock, and Archie felt that he couldn't lie

in bed any longer. He felt stuffy. And while he was dressing he glanced at himself anxiously once or twice in the mirror.

He came to the conclusion that he was looking somewhat awful. His face had an unusual flush, and it seemed to him that his eyes were unnaturally bright. He wanted to get into the fresh air.

By the time he was outside most of the other juniors were dressing. And Archie came face to face with Handforth as the latter was leaving his own caravan.

"Hallo, Archie," said Edward Oswald. "Up pretty early this morning, ain't you? What's been the matter with you lately? All you can do is to moon about, looking as though you're going to a funeral!"

Archie smiled wanly.

"Absolutely," he agreed. "I have an idea, dear old lad, that I shall go to a funeral. In fact, I shall be the most important item on the programme, and I shall occupy the leading carriage!"

Handforth stared.

"Eh?" he said blankly. "You—you mean——"

"Absolutely," said Archie sadly.

Handforth regarded the elegant junior critically.

"Well, you ought to know best!" he observed. "And now that I come to look at you squarely, I must admit you seem a bit groggy. Those bright spots in your cheeks ain't healthy! You're in for a fever!"

"Fever!" said Archie, with a violent start.

"Of course!" said Handforth. "You'd better be careful—it might turn to pneumonia or housemaid's knee, or something!"

"Really?" said Archie, listlessly. "That's frightfully interesting. I didn't know that a chappie actually could get housemaid's knee, old lad. But we'll let it pass. As you say, I've got the fever!"

Archie wandered on, with a dull expression in his eyes. As a matter of fact, he wasn't suffering from fever at all, or anything like it. It was imagination more than anything else, and imagination can go a long way. But he was convinced, and he felt that his last hours were near at hand.

CHAPTER VIII.

MAKING HIS WILL!

"ANYTHING wrong, Archie?"

Questions of this kind were getting quite common lately, and Archie scarcely turned as Reggie Pitt made the inquiry.

"What's the matter, old man?" went on Pitt, slapping Archie on the shoulder. "What are you looking so miserable about?"

Archie sighed.

"The fact is, Pitt, old scout, the end is drawing near!" he said. "But no matter; I am resigned. I am ready!"

"Ready?" repeated Pitt. "Resigned? What for?"

"The end!"

"What end, you dummy?"

"Dear old boy, I should soon be passing into the land that the Red Indians describe as the happy hunting-ground," said Archie. "I don't know that I shall absolutely do any hunting; but there you are. I shall go. I sincerely trust that you will refrain from spending any of your good money on flowers."

Pitt grinned.

"What's the joke?" he asked cheerfully. "What's the idea of trying to kid me?"

"Dash it all!" protested Archie. "I mean to say, I ought to know whether I'm going to die or not! Can't you see the fever spots? Didn't the old soothsayer declare that when I became feverish it would be time for me to make my will?"

"My dear chap, you mustn't take any notice of that——"

"But everything else has come true!"

"How do you mean?"

Archie explained about the various prophecies, and Pitt listened with great interest. And when Archie had done he pursed his lips, and nodded. Pitt was by no means convinced.

"There's something rummy about this," he declared. "It deserves some attention."

"Absolutely," agreed Archie. "I mean to say, certainly not! It's all obvious, and there's nothing more to be said. This is where I leave you, laddie. I don't suppose I shall last out to-day!"

Archie went towards the caravan which he shared, and lay himself down in the grass near by. It was very comfortable there, for the morning sun was warm and cheerful. And Archie simply allowed himself to relax.

Juniors crowded round him, and plied him with questions.

"Kindly refrain from bothering me, old onions!" said Archie. "You may not believe it, but the old strength is ebbing."

"Ebbing!"

"Absolutely," said Archie. "I'm frightfully sorry, and all that, but I'm dashed if I can understand what all the fuss is about. Please allow me to die in peace! You might as well be sporty!"

"The fathead's gone dotty!"

"Absolutely off his nut!"

"Clean loony!"

Handforth pushed through the crowd.

"Leave him to me!" he said. "Look here, Archie, you're a double-barrelled fathead! Not long ago you were talking to me about pegging-out; and that's all rot! You're just as healthy as I am."

Archie shook his head, and smiled.

"You don't seem to understand, old dar-

ling," he said softly. "You see, this isn't a matter that I have any control over. Whatever I do, it won't make any difference. I've just got to let things take their own course."

"You really think you're pegging out?" I asked wonderingly.

"Absolutely!"

"But, my dear chap, you'd better see a doctor——"

"That will be useless," interrupted Archie. "I mean, didn't the old lady say that doctors would be no good? The only thing to do is to make my will—— Gadzooks! I'd nearly forgotten it!"

He started up, alarmed.

"Kindly dash about and get me some paper and a pen!" he pleaded. "I've got all sorts of things, and I want to distribute them fairly. A chappie can't very well pass out of this world without leaving a will behind him!"

Archie opened the lid of the box and stared into the cavity. He gave a gasp. "I mean to say," he murmured dazedly. "Doubloons and what not! Pirates' hoard, and the good old pieces of eight!"

Archie was so serious about it all that we ceased to smile. He really seemed to take it for granted that he was going.

"You ass!" I said. "You don't really believe all that piffle?"

"I do!"

"Then you admit it's piffle?" demanded Handforth.

"That is to say, I believe everything that Mrs. Howell told me," proceeded Archie. "You see, it's all coming true—absolutely! Every dashed thing! I shall leave my gold watch to Alf. I've got some pound notes in my pocket, too. I think you'd better share them, you know!"

"Oh, well, if it's a question of divvying-up your personal property, we'd better have it all cut and dried!" said Handforth. "We don't want any fighting about it after you've gone! Here you are; here's my pocket-book. And a pencil, too. Grab hold of 'em, and get busy!"

Archie proceeded to write out his will. And we all stood looking on, inwardly amused, but outwardly astonished that he should have taken the thing so much to heart.

And he wouldn't be convinced.

No matter what we said, no matter how we talked to him, he still remained of the fixed opinion that his end was drawing near.

"There's the box of gold, of course," he said thoughtfully. "I'm dashed if I know who to will that to! I suppose the Government will want some of it, as it was treasure trove. It's frightfully unfair that the Government should pinch any of it at all; but Governments, somehow, have a fearfully taking way about them! They take everything they can lay their bally hands on!"

"What are you talking about?" asked Pitt. "What box of gold?"

"The one I found in Dead Man's Cave."

"Dead Man's Cave?"

"Absolutely!"

Handforth touched his head significantly.

"He's wandering!" he said, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Poor chap, I think we'd better get some flowers ready, after all. When a chap starts to wander, it's about time to give up hope!"

"Look here, we've got to inquire a bit further into this," I said grimly. "Archie isn't wandering. What about this box of gold? Where is it?"

"In my locker, dear old lad."

"Fetch it, Reggie, will you?" I asked. "Now, Archie, you say you found this box of gold in Dead Man's Cave? Let's have the facts."

In a dreamy voice, Archie told us all about it.

"Let's have all the details," I said. "To begin with, you haven't explained why you went to this old witch, as you call her. You've simply told us that you paid a visit to her. How did you know where she lived?"

"Those Grammar School chapples took me," said Archie feebly.

"What!" I yelled.

"Absolutely!" replied Archie. "They introduced me——"

"They introduced you!" I roared. "You—you dummy! You—you silly ass! You've been letting those Welsh chaps pull your leg!"

Archie gazed at me dazedly. And just then Pitt came up with the box of gold. He grinned hugely as he allowed some of the coins to trickle through his fingers. They fell back into the box with a metallic clang.

"Counters!" he ramarked. "Solid brass, and worth about ten a penny!"

CHAPTER IX.

GETTING AT THE FACTS!

"BRASS!" repeated Archie, in a faint voice.

"Of course they are!" said Pitt. "Fancy you believing that this stuff was gold! And where the dickens did you find it?"

Archie sat up, recovering rapidly.

"Why, in the cave!" he said. "The letter from Phipps——"

"What letter?"

"The one I got this morning!"

"But you haven't told us anything about that yet."

"As a matter of fact, old dear, I didn't think it was of any particular concern to you," said Archie. "However, you might as well read it. It's from Phipps. It isn't much like his writing; but perhaps he was feeling bad at the time!"

We took the letter from him and examined it.

"You dummy!" I said. "This isn't from Phipps at all; it was written by Llewellyn, I expect. It's all a fake! It's all a big practical joke, just to spoof you! They thought you looked easy, I expect, and they were pretty well right!"

"Gadzooks!"

Archie stared at us blankly.

"Then—then about the other things coming true——" he began.

"All prepared," I said grimly.

"Prepared?"

"Of course," I said. "I suppose these chaps primed up the old girl in advance; they told her exactly what was required——"

"But they went into the cottage with me," declared Archie.

"Very likely—but they've got plenty of chums," I pointed out. "Some of the other chaps went on in advance, I expect. Anyhow, we'll find out the full truth as soon as we see the rotters."

"Rather!"

"We'll teach them not to spoof a St. Frank's chap!"

"The nerve!"

"We'll jolly well put the bounders in their right place!"

Handforth looked round grimly.

"Who's with me?" he asked. "I vote we go straight away to the Grammar School and get busy! We'll slaughter the whole crowd, and then——"

"We won't do anything of the sort," I interrupted. "There'll be plenty of time to deal with the chaps to-night. And that'll give us an opportunity to think out something fitting. Any ordinary scrap won't be sufficient. We'll try and make the punishment fit the crime!"

"Rather!"

"That's a good idea!"

"In the meantime, we'll go on just as if nothing had happened," I continued. "Archie had better remain in his caravan as much as possible, and if any of us see the Grammar School chaps, we'll hint that Archie is feeling a bit unwell—we'll make them believe that their scheme has worked."

"But I don't see the object of it yet," said Tommy Watson.

"Neither do I—but we'll make them give an explanation," I declared. "Anyhow, you can be quite sure that this stain is going to be wiped out. We're not going to have a Grammar School crowd having the laugh over us."

"Not likely!"

"We'll show them what's what!"

"We'll have our revenge, too."

Archie looked round at the excited juniors, and adjusted his monocle.

"Kindly come to me with large chunks of assistance," he exclaimed. "I mean to say, I want you to rally round vigorously. If this is all spoof, how do you account for the lorry chappie saying that his uncle had died?"

I laughed.

"I expect Llewellyn stopped the lorry on the road, and tipped the chap half-a-crown to say it," I replied. "Nothing easier."

"And the fighting in the Rhondda Valley?"

"Easier still," I replied. "These Welsh chaps know all about that trouble, and it wasn't much of a long shot to guess that some fighting would soon take place. The prophecy about the letter came right because they sent it themselves. So there you are! The whole thing's evaporated into thin air!"

Archie gazed at me, and his expression grew grim.

"But this is frightful!" he declared.

"Such deceit, don't you know! I'm beginning to regard these Grammar School chappies as nothing better than a bally bed of stinging nettles! I mean to say, a patch of rank vegetation."

I grinned.

"Of course, that's your point of view," I chuckled. "But, if we care to admit the truth, it was a pretty good joke. Somehow, it misfired—and we can easily guess how."

"How?" asked Watson bluntly.

"Why, they reckoned that Archie would find that box of gold, and would come dashing up to the camp, spreading the yarn that he had found some buried treasure. And look how foolish we should have appeared when the truth came out—providing we all went into hysterics over the marvellous find. Even the papers would have got hold of the yarn, and we should have had to sing small, and the Grammar School chaps would have been top dogs."

"My hat!" said Pitt. "You're just about right. "It was all a wheeze to spoof the lot of us—through Archie. Thank goodness Archie had enough sense to keep quiet. And now we've got to think about our revenge."

"Yes." I agreed. "It so happens that the Grammarians are coming to tea this evening—just Llewellyn and his own chums. They're the fellows who instigated this plot, and we'll put them through it."

"We can't very well touch them while they're our guests," said Pitt doubtfully.

"Can't we?" snorted Handforth.

"No, we can't," I said. "But there'll be plenty of time afterwards. Leave it to me, you chaps—I shan't let you down."

Everybody was satisfied except Handforth—who had a great idea to dash off to the Grammar School on his own. In fact, he almost made up his mind on this point. It was only Church and McClure who brought him to his senses.

"You can't do it, you ass!" said Church.

"Why can't I?"

"Because you'd be slaughtered—that's why," said Church. "If you went there on your own, you'd stand no chance at all. Those Welsh chaps would pile on you, and you'd be finished."

It took a long time before Handforth saw reason, and only Church and McClure knew how difficult their task had been.

Evan Llewellyn and his chums turned up in the afternoon, as previously arranged. They had come to tea, and they were given a big welcome. For this occasion we were having a special kind of feed inside the tent.

And the Welsh boys enjoyed themselves immensely.

There were only six of them, for we had only invited Evan and his own particular chums. We couldn't very well have a whole crowd. They were taken round the camp, and everything was shown to them.

"By the way?" asked Evan, after a while. "Anything special been happening lately?"

"Special?" I repeated, knowing that he was fishing.

"Yes, look you," replied Evan. "Any excitement?"

"We've been as quiet as bees in clover," I replied. "Why?"

"Oh, nothing."

Llewellyn dropped the subject, realising that he was getting no satisfaction. And then I made a suggestion to him.

"We've got the evening before us," I said. "What about going on a little exploration trip on the rocks near the Mumbles? You fellows know it better than we do, and you can show us all the interesting spots."

"Indeed to goodness, that is a good idea," said the Welsh boy. "Yes, yes, we will go. My chums will be only too pleased, whatever."

"All right—that's fixed!"

And soon afterwards, the others being agreeable, we started out on the trip. Archie was the only fellow who remained behind. He complained of feeling rather fagged, and decided to sneak forty of the best.

Quite a good number of us went—for when I say that we all went except Archie, I don't mean the whole Remove. Only Handforth and Co., and Pitt and Grey and De Valerie and our own crowd.

But we were in sufficient force to deal effectively with the six Grammarians.

Little did they imagine what was in store for them!

CHAPTER X.

A SURPRISE FOR LLEWELLYN AND CO.

MUMBLES HEAD looked very picturesque, with the lighthouse perched high upon the rocks, and with many holiday makers in the near vicinity. But we all took care to go in a part of the rocks where there was no fear of interruption.

For some time we pretended to be extremely interested in the scenery. And it was not until we were absolutely to ourselves that I commenced operations. We had all paused to take a rest on the grassy bank.

"By the way, there's something I'd like to tell you chaps," I said, looking over at Llewellyn and his chums. "I don't know whether you'll be interested, but I think it's just possible."

"Indeed to goodness, we shall be interested."

"Well, we've heard something about a Welsh soothsayer," I said. "Some queer old girl who tells fortunes, and looks into the future."

The Welsh boys exchanged glances.

"Yes, yes, indeed," said Price. "What of her?"

"Nothing much, but I thought you might like to hear about an English soothsayer,"

I went on calmly. "We've got one quite near here, and we're going to introduce you. You'll be very entertained."

Llewellyn looked at me queerly.

"I don't understand," he said. "Indeed, I didn't know there were English sooth-sayers—particularly here, in Wales."

"That's one of the things you're going to find out," I replied. "And while we're on the subject, I'd like to ask a few questions concerning Mrs. Howell."

"Mrs. Howell!" snorted Handforth. "If I got hold of her, she would howl!"

"Help!"

"Spare us, Handy!"

"Mrs. Howell?" repeated Llewellyn. "Yes, yes, of course. You know her?"

Say a word to me, and I'll chuck you over the edge of the cliff into the sea! I've got nothing against you personally. In fact, I think you're a set of good sportsmen—but that makes no difference. I've a good mind to take you one by one and biff you into the middle of next week!"

Llewellyn grinned.

"You seem to know all about it," he remarked. "Did Glenthorne tell?"

"Not until we began to suspect something," I replied. "And don't imagine that we're willing to let it drop. You fellows are going to be punished—and in a fitting manner. But we'll go into that later."

"Look you, it was only a joke——"

"I admit that, but you've got too much

"We've heard about her," I said. "She appears to be a remarkable kind of person. To be absolutely exact, we'd like to know how you had the nerve to spoof one of our chaps?"

The Welsh boys looked startled.

"What—what do you mean?" asked Evan, with a sickly smile.

"I think you know what I mean," I replied, grinning. "I don't mind admitting that it was a pretty good joke, but it missed fire. And you chaps have got to understand that you can't mess about with St. Frank's."

"I should think not!" snorted Handforth. "For two pins, I'd wipe the lot of you up!

nerve to think you can play japes on St. Frank's!" I said severely. "Why, it's nothing more nor less than cool cheek! How did you spoof Archie about the old lady?"

"She wasn't an old lady at all—she was one of our chaps dressed up," said Price. "I say, go easy! Indeed to goodness, it was only a little joke——"

"Little!" I interrupted. "In my opinion, it was pretty elaborate."

"You see we heard all about his dream, and we thought we had a good chance to spoof him," said Llewellyn. "Indeed to goodness, he asked for it! It was easy enough for one of our fellows to dress up

like an old witch—there isn't such a person as Mrs. Howell, anyway! That little cottage has been empty for weeks, and we easily faked it up. Of course, we thought that Glenthorne would tell everybody about his wonderful treasure, and then we meant to come along and yell with laughter."

"Oh, did you?" said Bob Christine. "Well, you'll yell, but in a different way. The game's pretty good, but two can play at it. But it so happens that we're not going to do any deceiving."

The Grammar School boys began to look uneasy.

"What is your plan?" asked Evan. "I have told you six or five times once before already that it was only a joke——"

"Exactly—and this is only a joke, too," I grinned. "My sons, you have walked into the trap beautifully. And I think our scheme will work out better than yours. Although yours was a jape, it was a bit of a dirty trick to choose an easy-going simple chap like Archie. He's one of the best, and you've really upset him. Why, he absolutely thought he was going to peg out!"

Llewellyn laughed.

"He shouldn't be such an ass," he said. "He asked for it—yes, yes, indeed! And it must have been rather funny to have seen him preparing his will."

"It might have been funny for you, but it wasn't to him," I said. "It was lucky that Archie is a strong, healthy chap. Why, a thing like that might have sent a weakling half crazy. It was dangerous. And we're going to make you rotters pay for it."

The Grammar School boys clumped together defensively.

"Look you, don't be unreasonable——" began Price.

"Not a bit of it—we're simply going to provide you with some entertainment," I said sweetly. "And it's no good trying to offer any resistance—we're three to one. We've got you here, and we mean to get busy!"

"Let's stop all this talk, and do something!" said Handforth impatiently.

Llewellyn looked round in desperation.

"We—we didn't mean any harm!" he protested. "I say, don't be mean! Let's call it off, and I'll bet Archie won't mind——"

"Archie won't, but we do!" I declared grimly. "It's got past the personal point. This is a matter of honour for the school. We're not going to let a bunch of giddy Grammarians get the better of the St. Frank's Remove."

"Rather not!" said Pitt. "You didn't try to spoof Archie alone—you tried to get the lot of us into your wheeze."

"Grab them!" I said briefly.

"Good!" roared Handforth.

Within a minute all the Grammar School boys were firmly held. There was no chance for them to fight, for they were completely outnumbered. They tried to smooth matters over by expressing their regret—but it was useless.

And finally, when they found that we were firm, they became defiant.

"All right—do your worst!" said Llewellyn. We don't care—we had the first laugh, anyway."

"Line them all up!" I commanded. "That's right—facing this way!"

The six prisoners were held tightly, and compelled to face a big rock which projected out of the grass. I mounted upon this rock, and Pitt then stood forward, after the manner of a lecturer. He indicated me with a sweep of his hand.

"Allow me to present the King of Wizards, Professor Nipperino!" he exclaimed grandiloquently. "Here we have the most wonderful soothsayer in the world! He will foretell exactly what will happen during the next half-hour—even to the minutest detail!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" commanded Pitt severely. "This is a serious occasion. Professor Nipperino, the wondrous soothsayer, will now proceed to start on the job! Pray, O wise one, commence the operations! We, your willing slaves, will obey! Silence for the great oracle!"

"What's all this rot?" asked Llewellyn, glaring.

"Wouldst thou dare to interrupt, while the great soothsayer is preparing his thoughts?" demanded Reggie. "Let me explain further. You fellows had your own soothsayer, and we've got ours! And I think that ours will be a better prophet than yours was!"

I gave a preliminary cough, and the proceedings commenced

CHAPTER XI.

TURNING THE TABLES.

"LET me see your palms!" I commanded. "If they don't hold out their hands, make 'em! To do the thing right, I've got to see their palms!"

The Welsh juniors didn't quite like it, but they were compelled to extend their hands, face upwards, towards me. I examined them carefully.

"A bit grubby, but we'll let that pass," I observed. "H'm! I can see all sorts of trouble coming. This is very bad! The trouble will be swift, sudden and somewhat painful."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Curiously enough, you will all suffer from the same fate!" I went on. "I can see into the future! Lo! I am possessed with marvellous sight, and I can foretell what will happen next!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Exactly five minutes from now you will all be frogsmarched round and round in a

circle!" I went on. "You may not believe this, but I can see! Being a soothsayer, I am allowed to see these things!"

"That's the stuff!" chuckled Pitt.

"If you think this is funny, we don't!" growled Llewellyn. "Of course, you know what's going to happen—you've planned it all!"

"Don't dare to interrupt the soothsayer!" I said severely. "And when it comes to planning, you were pretty smart at that game yourselves! Don't interrupt like that! At destroys the 'fluence.' I can see clearly into the future—I can see that after the frogsmarching there will be a heavy bumping!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Every one of you will be bumped six times!" I declared. "It's rather queer that I should know the exact number; but when we're supplied with second sight, it's marvellous what we can do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There will be something else in the immediate future," I declared. "Listen! I will tell you what I can see!"

I raised my head dreamily, and gazed up towards the sky.

"I can see a road!" I exclaimed abstractedly. "I can see a road that leads between green hedges. Along this road six Grammar School boys are marching, and they are all roped together, and tied with their hands behind their backs."

"What!" gasped Llewellyn. "Look you, if you do that——"

With their hands behind their backs!" I repeated. "I can see them arriving at the Grammar School. I can see them being delivered over to their companions in the school courtyard. There is much shouting—much excitement. And I can see all sorts of——"

"I reckon you've seen enough," said Handforth. "Let's get busy!"

"If we wait much longer, the first prophecy won't come true," grinned Pitt. "That five minutes is nearly up."

I rose to my feet.

"The soothsayer has now finished!" I said. "Let us see if he has **fore**told the future accurately."

He had.

Without any delay, all the Grammar School fellows were frogsmarched round and round in a wide circle. And after that they were bumped until they gasped for a rest.

"Look you, make it pax!" gasped Llewellyn, with a feeble grin. "We're not wild against you chaps for doing this—it's only what we can expect. But, indeed to goodness, we have had enough."

"That's your opinion," said Pitt. "But it isn't ours!"

And the six Grammarians were securely roped together—exactly as I had so wonderfully "foreseen." We had brought the stout cord with us, and we didn't see any reason why it shouldn't be used.

As Pitt remarked, it seemed a shame to bring that cord for nothing. Besides, the prophecy had to come true. And very soon afterwards the six Grammarians were in a long line, separated by about ten feet each. Stretched out, with the rope tight between them, they made a long single-file procession.

"I think we'll have mercy on you regarding your hands," I said. "I don't think we'll tie your hands behind your backs——"

"Rats!" said Bob Christine. "That's got to be done, otherwise you're a rotten soothsayer. You distinctly saw their hands tied behind their backs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

So, in spite of what I had said, preparations were made to tie the Grammarians' hands with separate ropes. The one long line had been passed round each waist, and Llewellyn himself led the procession.

And while some of the juniors were preparing these extra ropes, Handforth was engaged in a slight argument with Church and McClure. It had commenced because Church and McClure disagreed with Handforth regarding the punishment which had been planned for the Welsh boys.

Handforth declared that they ought to have something stronger than frogsmarching and being roped together. He scoffed at the idea. And Church and McClure were unwise enough to declare that there was no necessity to do anything more drastic.

"All right! If I can't punch Nipper, I'll punch you!" said Handforth grimly. "I've been waiting all this time to biff somebody on the nose. It's going to be you!"

"Look here——" began Church desperately.

Biff!

Handforth's fist thudded into Church's face before the latter could dodge. McClure thought it wiser to get out of the way before his turn came. He turned like lightning, and scooted.

"Hi!" bellowed Handforth wrathfully. "Come back!"

He gave immediate chase. McClure was rushing over the grass at full speed, and he suddenly pulled up with a tremendous jerk, pale to the lips. He had received a fearful shock.

Only in the nick of time had he pulled himself up. Until he was actually upon it, he had not realised that there was a sheer cliff just there—a cliff which dropped straight down into the cruel rocks below.

The ground was so formed that it seemed that the grassy bank sloped down. But it didn't—it ended abruptly. McClure was only just able to prevent himself from going over by digging his heels into the turf, and falling flat.

Even then he slithered, and his legs overhung as he lay sprawling.

"Now I've got you!" roared Handforth triumphantly.

He came blundering up at full speed.

"Stop!" shrieked McClure. "You'll go over——"

He ended up in a perfect scream of horror, for Handforth, in his ramheaded way, took no notice of the warning. He came dashing up at full speed, and found it utterly impossible to stop in time.

Edward Oswald saw the danger, but he was going faster than McClure, and although he made every effort to pull up, he failed. McClure made a wild attempt to grab at his leader.

But it was all over in a second.

Handforth hovered on the edge of the cliff, and actually managed to half regain his balance. Then the grass slipped from under him, and he vanished. He dropped out of sight with a gasp of alarm.

McClure lay there, nearly dead with fright.

"He's gone—he's gone!" he moaned thickly.

Other fellows were shouting madly now. Church, forgetting all about the punch he had received, tore up, and assisted McClure back into absolute safety. Both the juniors were deathly pale.

"Where's Handforth?" screamed Church, his voice cracking with anxiety.

"He—he went over!" sobbed McClure.

Tears were welling into his eyes—and he didn't care. Both he and Church were very fond of their leader, in spite of the dance he generally led them. And the thought that he had gone to his death was awful.

I came rushing up, my heart beating madly. I knew that it was useless to scold, or to ask the juniors why they had allowed their headstrong study mate to blunder so near the edge of the cliff.

I didn't say a word.

But I flung myself face downwards in the grass, and gazed over the edge, expecting to see Edward Osward's remains lying down there on the rocks, mangled and lifeless.

But a sob of joy came into my throat as I stared down.

Handforth was within thirty feet of me!

By some extraordinary chance, he had caught against a ledge about a third of the way down the cliff. The rocks were very sharp and treacherous, and I wondered how on earth he had managed it.

Then, with a gulp, I saw that it had been providential.

Handforth had done nothing to save himself—he had not had the chance. And there was no ledge, after all, as I had at first imagined—just those jagged spurs of rocks sticking outwards.

Handforth's jacket, flying open by the force of his descent, had caught fairly and squarely on a sharp point of rock. And by some miraculous chance, the material had held.

I could see that the jacket was torn and liable to tear further; but, for the moment, Handforth was safe. But he was caught in such a position that his back was towards the cliff, and he could do nothing to assist himself. He could not even clutch at the rocks with his hands.

More than anything else, he looked like

Handforth hovered on the edge of the cliff, and actually managed to half regain his balance. Then the grase slipped from under him, and he vanished.

a monkey on a stick. Any attempt on his part to shift his position would probably be fatal. The rocks were a hundred feet below him—cruel, treacherous, jagged things.

"Don't move!" I shouted desperately. "Keep still, Handy!"

"The—the coat's tearing!" came an agonised voice from Handforth.

It was not like his usual shout at all, and it contained a note of horror in it. It seemed that he knew that he was doomed. The very fact that he kept perfectly motionless proved that he was fully aware of the awful peril.

If Handforth had attempted to turn, so that he could grasp at the rocks, his weight would have caused the coat to tear like a piece of paper. And there he was, thirty feet below us.

I leapt to my feet, my eyes gleaming.

"There's only one thing!" I shouted. "He may not last a minute! Unfasten that rope!"

"By jingo, yes!"

"It's the only chance!"

"Thank Heaven we brought it with us!" said Reggie Pitt. "It seems like Fate! I

never dreamed that anything like this was going to happen——"

"Don't talk—don't talk!" I gasped. "Quick! Get the rope free! If we lower it down, Handy might be able to grip hold of it."

All the juniors rushed feverishly round the roped-up Grammarians. And their hearts sank. Those knots had been tied securely. Even as they were about to commence their task, they realised how long it would take them.

Evan Llewellyn came rushing up to me, dragging the other Welsh boys with him. His face was flushed and excited.

"Look you!" he shouted hoarsely. "Why should you take this rope off? There are six of us! Three of us can go down the cliff, and you can hold the other three of us on the top. We are roped—all ready. We will rescue Handforth!"

I took a deep breath.

"By Jove!" I said. "What a great idea! But—but the risk——"

"Never mind the risk!" interrupted Evan quietly. "Are we not ready for it?"

"Yes, we'll do it!" shouted the other boys from the Grammar school.

"Then get at it! Don't waste time!" I breathed.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Wales!"

But those cheers were only very subdued. The tenseness of the situation was such that any shouts were impossible.

And it flashed through my mind, as the Welsh boys commenced their dangerous task, that Fate had taken a hand in this affair. These six fellows had been roped together merely for the purpose of a jape. And yet they were ready—on the spot—when there was a crying need for rescuers. That they were ready and willing to undertake the risks spoke volumes for their pluck.

Not a second was lost.

Llewellyn himself was the first one to be lowered over. His face was set and grim, and slightly pale, but there was no sign of fear in his eyes. Yet he knew full well that he was risking his own life.

And the other Welsh boys knew the same. That rope had never been brought for such a terrible test as this. It was strong, certainly, but there was no guarantee that it would hold.

And if, by any chance, there was a weak spot——

But I closed my eyes and shivered slightly as I thought of the consequences. Not only Handforth would perish, but two or three of these brave lads as well. And, without a moment's notice, they had been ready to risk their lives for another.

Price was the next one over.

They descended foot by foot, lowered by those above. Where it was possible they relieved the strain on the rope by grasping on to the rocks, grazing their arms, and tearing their fingers.

And they were being lowered just near the spot where Handforth hung.

And, at last, after the third Grammarian had been compelled to go over the edge, Llewellyn found himself next to Edward Oswald. Now would come the supreme test of all.

Up above, the remaining three Grammarians were being held securely by the St. Frank's juniors. They were safe enough, but the rope now had a fearful strain upon it.

For there were three sturdy boys hanging to that one line. And, presently, Handforth's weight would be added.

That would be the dread moment.

Would the rope hold?

Handforth was a big fellow, and his sudden weight on the rope would mean everything. If it held, the efforts of the Welsh boys would be crowned with glorious success.

But if it broke there would be a quadruple tragedy. The thought was appalling.

"Steady now!" said Evan quietly, as he reached out his hands towards Handforth. "I think the best thing you can do is to grab hold of my feet, if you can get a grip."

"All right; I can manage," muttered Handforth chokingly.

'If you take my hands, we shall tip up, and that might spoil everything," went on Evan. "Look you, grab my ankles—and hang tight!"

Handforth was already doing so. Llewellyn was in such a position that Handforth could seize his ankles firmly. And then, at that very moment, the last atom of his jacket gave way.

The shock on the rope was terrific.

Handforth swung down, and it seemed to Evan Llewellyn that his legs were being pulled out of their sockets. And Handforth was hanging there, desperately gripping at his rescuer's ankles.

But the rope held!

"Now, up—gently—gently!" I said, my heart beating wildly.

Inch by inch, the other Grammar School boys edged away from the cliff. And Reggie Pitt and I, at the very edge, eased the rope as much as we could. It was one of the most trying ordeals that could be imagined.

But at last it was over.

Llewellyn came over the edge, with Handforth still clinging there. Ready hands were reaching over. Pitt and I were held by others, and we secured a firm grip of Handforth as soon as he came within our reach.

"Got him!" I breathed. "Oh, thank heavens!"

The rest was easy.

Handforth was fairly yanked on to the cliff top, and we all lay down, exhausted by the physical and the mental strain. And from far below came the rousing echoes of many cheers.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

And then I realised, for the first time, that crowds had been watching from the beach below. They had witnessed the whole dramatic rescue.

Our reaction did not last long. In a few

moments we were on our feet. And even Handforth recovered sufficiently to stagger up. The first thing he did was to grasp Evan Llewellyn's hand.

"You're a brick!" he said huskily. "I wanted to biff you on the nose, and you saved my life! By George! What a good 'un! I— I'm not much good at thanking people!" he went on awkwardly. "I hardly know what to say!"

"Indeed to goodness, you need say nothing!" interrupted Evan shakily. "It is over—and we are all safe. There is nothing to worry over whatever!"

He turned to me before Handforth could say anything further.

"You didn't foresee everything accurately, did you?" he asked quietly. "As a soothsayer, you weren't very successful, look you!"

"By Jove, I wasn't!" I replied. "I saw you chaps marching up to the Grammar School in a roped line, but that was all wrong. You're not going to do anything of the sort!"

Evan smiled.

"I thought we should have earned our freedom," he said simply. "I'm glad this has happened, for now we are all friends, and the hatchet is buried!"

In less than two minutes the Welsh boys were all free.

"Now then, you St. Frank's chaps!" shouted Handforth enthusiastically. "We've got to give three cheers for these giddy Welsh chaps! They're heroes! They're some of the best fellows I've ever known!"

"Hurrah!"

"Better than that!" roared Handy. "Let it rip!"

"Hip, hip——"

"Hurrah!"

The St. Frank's fellows fairly let themselves go; and the cliffs rang with the echo and re-echo of the tremendous cheer which arose. And from down below, on the beach, came an answering cheer.

"Look you, this is all silly——" began Price.

"Rats!" said Pitt. "You deserve every bit of it!"

Handforth, in spite of the terrible narrowness of his escape, was hardly hurt at all, and the manner in which he recovered his usual spirits was remarkable. Within ten minutes he was practically his old, aggressive self.

But his feelings towards the Grammar School boys were warm and friendly. And so were the feelings of all the others. That perilous episode had sealed a bond between us which made us friends and comrades for good.

And as we returned through Oystermouth to the camp we found that the news had preceded us. There was a good deal of excitement in the village, and the next morning the Swansea papers were full of the whole affair.

And we were never likely to forget our little tussles and dealings with the boys of Wales. They had proved themselves to be grit to the backbone, and we departed on our further travels with warm feelings towards Wales in general.

And so—on to Lancashire!

THE END.

Editorial Announcement.

My dear Readers,

A few days ago, while glancing through a daily paper, my eye alighted upon a paragraph entitled, if I remember rightly, "The Floating School." The writer of the paragraph was a schoolmaster, and strongly advocated the same idea embodied in the present series of stories now running in this journal. Old readers will recall, of course, that this is not exactly a new departure in the St. Frank's stories. Every summer for some years we have made a feature of sending the boys on a cruise to some remote part of the world. This year, our author is making a special tour of America—and at the time of writing is in California—getting first-hand copy and material for the coming summer holiday series. But I will say more about this anon.

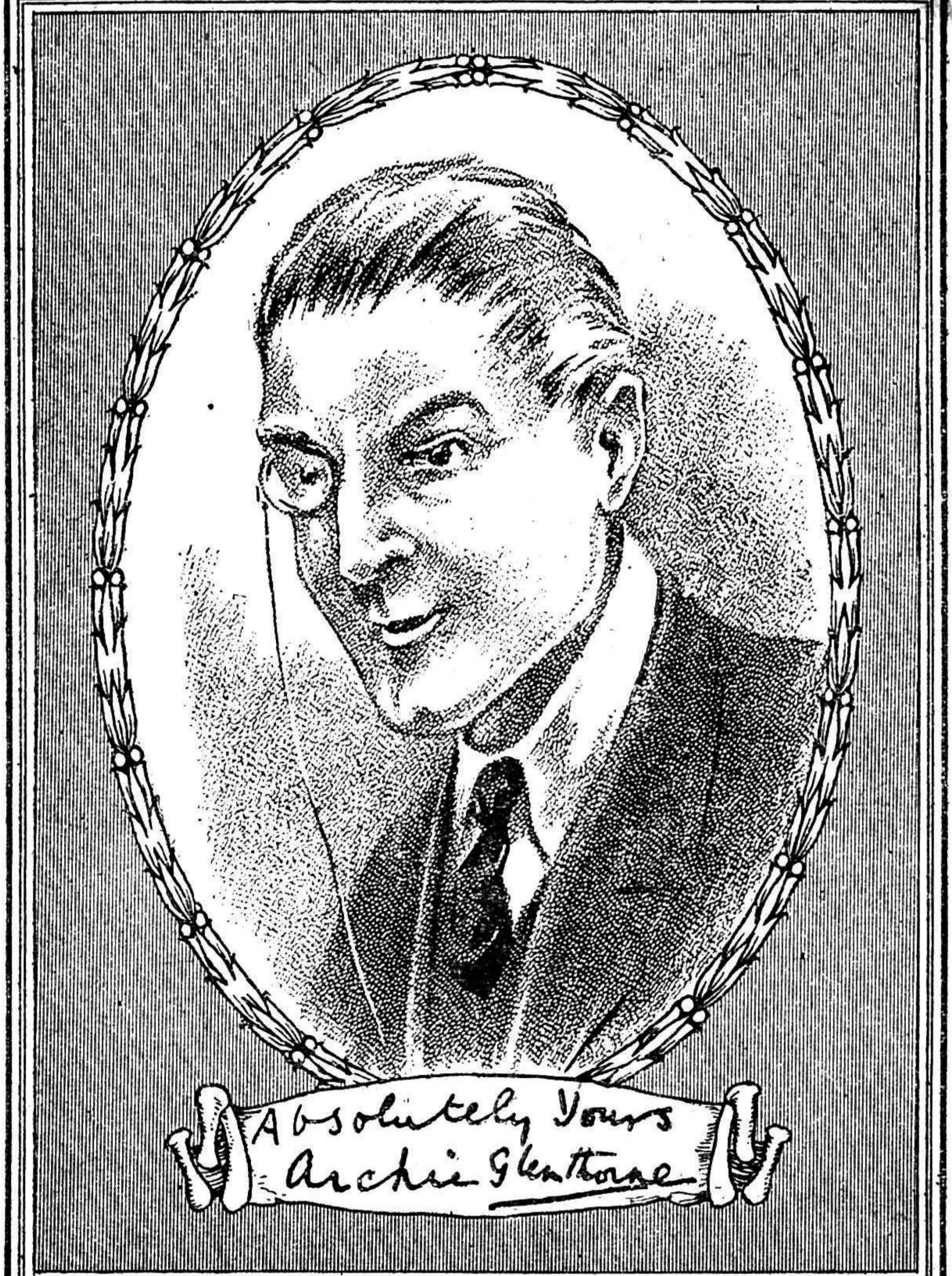
The present travelling school series has aroused a great deal of interest both among masters and boys in various schools throughout the country. Next week the Remove will tour the North of England, and their adventures should be warmly applauded by our admirers in the north, in another fine story, entitled, "The Lads of Lancashire."

THE EDITOR.

OUR STUDIO PORTRAIT STUDIES

OF FAMOUS ST. FRANK'S CHARACTERS.

No. 4. Archie Glenthorne.



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