BEHIND THE SCENES IN FILMLAND—SEE THIS WEEK'S STORY!

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HANDFORTH ACTS FOR THE MOVIES!

From This Week's Grand Holiday Story:—

ST. FRANK'S IN FILMLAND;
or, The Los Angeles Mystery!

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Baxter looked at his companion in a dull, listless way. Then he, too, collapsed. Ten seconds later, the pair were utterly helpless, as though dead. And Captain Hurricane had stood there the whole time watching!

ST. FRANK'S IN FILMLAND!

or,

The Los Angeles Mystery!

You have all heard of Los Angeles, the home of the movies. While staying in this fascinating spot the Author has written this wonderful story about Filmland, introducing Charlie Chaplin and that other comedian, Edward Oswald Handforth, who will keep you in a state of continuous laughter in his novel role of a film actor. In the course of this story the Author tells you exactly what happens behind the scenes in the making of a movie picture. Besides Nelson Lee and the Boys of St. Frank's, our old friend Lord Dorrimore turns up as cheerful as ever.

THE EDITOR.

The Narrative Related Throughout by Nipper.

CHAPTER I.

HANDFORTH'S LATEST!

"QUICK!" gasped Church. "Handy's gone mad!"

"What!"

"Clean off his rocker!" said Church frantically.

McClure stared.

"He's always mad!" he replied. "Handforth's been mad ever since he was born! That's nothing new!"

"It's not the ordinary madness—he's really gone crazy this time!" exclaimed Church, with a kind of gulp. "Just come and look at him! He's in the bedroom now! I went in there, and nearly had a fit!"

The two famous members of the St. Frank's Remove were standing in one of the corridors of the Bainton Hotel in Los Angeles, California. It was morning, bright and early, and this was really the Remove's first day out there.

All the fellows had arrived on the Santa Fe Railway, the previous afternoon. And Lord Dorrimore, the famous sporting peer, had made full arrangements for the Remove's accommodation.

We were all present, with one extra fellow as a kind of makeweight. The extra one being Willy Handforth, of the Third. It was quite early as yet, and Handforth and Co. were among the first to rise.

Church and McClure had just visited one of the bathrooms, and had come out fresh and fit. Church had been a little in advance of McClure, and had gone back to the bedroom which the famous trio of Study D shared.

Now they both hurried there.

Opening the door, the two juniors entered. McClure opened his eyes wider as he looked in, and a sad expression came into Church's face. For many a day he had feared that the worst would happen to Edward Oswald Handforth. And now it appeared that the fatal moment had come.

"Must be the climate!" muttered Church. "It's jolly soon acted!"

Handforth was standing in front of the big mirror. He was gracefully attired in

his pyjamas, but this was not sufficient. He had removed one of the blankets from the bed, and this was wound round him in the most grotesque fashion. Not content with this, he had actually stuck strips of paper in his hair.

And there he was, mouthing at himself in front of the mirror.

He struck several attitudes, and his jaws worked continuously, just as though he were really speaking—but no sounds came. That was the uncanny part of it. And the expressions he managed to contort his face into were really startling.

"Better fetch some of the others in!" muttered McClure after a bit. "He looks dangerous! If we interfere ourselves, it's quite likely he'll chuck the giddy dressing-table at us!"

Church didn't wait—he fled along the passage and entered the first door. As it happened, the room was occupied by Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson and myself. We were just in the act of turning out.

"Hallo! What's the violent rush for?" I asked, as Church burst in. "I didn't know that the Californian climate put such a lot of pep into a chap. I've always thought it was the opposite——"

"You've got to come at once!" panted Church. "Handforth's gone mad!"

"Begad!"

"He's standing in front of the mirror, making the most horrible faces at himself," went on Church. "He's acting just as though he had been bitten by a mad dog! It's awful! We're afraid to go near him!"

Church was really alarmed, and I could see there was no spoof about it.

"Oh, rot!" I said. "You're worried over nothing. You know what an ass Handforth is. He's quite capable of standing in front of the mirror making faces at himself. There's nothing in that!"

"But he's wrapped blankets round himself!" gasped Church. "He's stuck pieces of paper in his hair——"

"I think we'd better come!" I interrupted grimly.

Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West hurried out with me. McClure was still at the door when we arrived. He turned a pale, scared face towards us.

"Sshh!" he whispered. "I think we'd better send for a doctor before we go in. He's worse now! He's picked up one of the pillows, and he's bashing it! And there's a horrid look on his face!"

McClure was right.

Peeping in, I could see Edward Oswald Handforth engaged in a kind of terrific wrestling match with one of the pillows. He was still mouthing fiercely, without making any sounds.

I strode into the room.

"Hi, pull yourself together, Handy!" I commanded.

He paused, looked at me, and glared.

"Wow!" he said. "Ugh!"

"What?"

"Black Thunder kill plenty much!" said Handforth gruffly.

"My only hat!" I ejaculated.

Handforth gave a start, and seemed to recover himself, and the light of intelligence came into his eyes. He threw the pillow on to the bed, and gazed at us with entire disapproval.

"Who the dickens told you to come butting in?" he roared violently.

"My goodness!" breathed Church. "He ain't mad, after all!"

"Mad!" howled Handforth. "Who said I was mad?"

"Well, dear old boy, you certainly looked mad just now," said Sir Montie. "You did, really. You were making the most frightful grimaces——"

"I don't want to be rude, but if you fellows don't go out and mind your own giddy business, I'll biff you," said Handforth. "It's a pity if a chap can't do a bit of practising without a set of chumps interrupting."

I was quite interested.

"Without being inquisitive, I should really like to know what the idea is," I suggested. "For example, why did you grunt at me when I came in, and talk about black thunder?"

Handforth started.

"That's queer!" he said. "I don't remember it! The fact is, I was so deeply engrossed into the character that I must have acted automatically. All good actors do that, you know—they simply get inside a character like a skin!"

We all stared.

"Actors!" I exclaimed. "Were you acting?"

Handforth opened his mouth, gulped, and turned red.

"Was I acting?" he hooted. "What do you think I was doing?"

"Well, it certainly seemed that you were just getting ready to pay a visit to the county asylum!" I grinned. "My mistake, of course—but if you will do these things, you mustn't blame people for getting a wrong impression."

"You—you dotty lunatics!" said Handforth, with withering scorn. "I'm just doing a bit of practising for the films!"

"Films!"

"Of course! I'm going into pictures!" said Handforth. "I was supposed to be a Red Indian killing a Paleface.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

We howled.

"The pillow, I suppose, was the Paleface?" grinned Watson. "You ass! Now I can understand the pieces of paper in your hair! I expect they're meant to be feathers, ain't they?"

"Any ass can see that," retorted Handforth, removing the blanket from his person. "I mean to keep it a dead secret, but you rotters are sure to butt in!"

"Just a minute," I said politely. "When we butted in, as you call it, we found you saying all sorts of things to yourself. You were sneaking without making any sound."

"Well, that's what they do on the pictures," said Handforth. "Haven't you seen 'em? You jolly well know they never make any audible noise!"

"Well, seeing it's a picture, it would be a bit of a miracle if they did," I chuckled. "But, my dear ass, when they make films, the actors and actresses speak their part just the same as people do on the stage. Sometimes they even shout and make an awful noise."

Handforth stared.

"Why, I thought they only moved their lips!" he said blankly. "Of all the dotty ideas! What's the good of speaking loud when nobody can hear it? Anyway, I'm going into films! That's settled!"

"Oh, it's settled?"

"Absolutely!" said Handforth firmly. "Los Angeles is the place where they make all the films—all the big studios are here. Famous Players-Lasky, Metro, Universal, Cosmopolitan, Mary Pickford—all of 'em! It'll be a pity if I can't get a job somewhere. They'll be only too glad to take me on as a star."

"Poor old Handy!" I said sadly. "You're not the first who's had that delusion. People with famous reputations have aspired to become stars before now—and yet they've never done much."

Handforth was not discouraged.

"It's chiefly a matter of personality," he said. "When I start, I shall make history! In fact, I've made up my mind to stop here for good! What's the good of going back to St. Frank's? In a few weeks' time I shall be earning about two thousand quid a week!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All right—you can laugh!" said Handforth tartly. "He laughs best who laughs last! Why, just think of the rotten films we see! Some of them are absolutely duds, and the chaps in 'em can't act for toffee! There's every chance in the world for a good man!"

I nodded.

"I won't spoil the happy dream," I said softly. "Go ahead, Handy, and surprise the natives! But be on the look out for disappointments! I think you'll find that making films is a little bit different to looking at them! But you never know your luck!"

We left the bedroom, chuckling.

"There's going to be some fun over this," I confided to my chums. "Handy's latest is going to provide us all with the laugh of the season. Fancy the ass getting film struck? Of course, it's only because he's come to Los Angeles—nothing else. He'll get several terrific shocks when he goes to the studios."

Within half an hour the whole Remove was cackling over the joke. Handforth was the only fellow who couldn't see it. And quite a number of juniors ceased to cackle after Edward Oswald had made drastic use of his fist. At breakfast-time, at least, six fellows bore Handforth's well-known trade mark.

He had, in fact, several trade marks—and had inflicted them all. Church had a black eye, McClure was adorned with a thick ear, and Teddy Long suffered from a nose that was nothing if not swollen. One or two other chaps were variously decorated. And Handforth's decision to "go into the films" was not even discussed over the meal.

Breakfast was served in the big, pleasant dining-room of the hotel, overlooking Westlake Park. This park, situated in the famous Wilshire district of Los Angeles, is by no means large. But what it lacks in size it makes up for in beauty.

There are magnificent palm drives, and a truly beautiful lake in the centre, upon which one can paddle in canoes to one's heart's content. Everywhere in this section of the city one sees the graceful, impressive Californian palm trees. They line most of the streets and avenues, and afford general relief from the dazzling rays of the noonday sun.

But during breakfast, conversation was somewhat marred by the noise of the street cars, as they proceeded up and down West Sixth Street, upon which the Bainton Hotel is situated.

The Los Angeles street cars are useful. They cover an immense area, stretching out from the city in every direction. But to any sensitive person, residing in a quiet hotel like the Bainton, the clanging of their gongs is apt to be irritating. The noise they make is surprising.

The juniors, of course, hardly noticed. Boys like noise, anyhow. They were all eager to get out. For they had seen nothing of this wonderful "city of sunshine"—the city they had heard so much about.

Lord Dorrimore was in his usual jovial mood.

"Well, kids, what about it?" he said, as breakfast neared its end. "Who votes for a drive round the bally city, to see the sights? I'll charter some motor-coaches if you like——"

"Hurrah!"

"We do like, sir!"

"It'll be fine to go round in motor-coaches."

"Rather."

Dorrie grinned at the enthusiasm.

"Then the motion is carried?" he inquired.

"Absolutely, sir!"

"That's just as well, because I've already ordered the coaches," said Dorrie drily. "I was pretty certain what your decision would be, so I wasn't taking much of a chance. An' unless I'm not mistaken, the coaches are outside already. Better make haste, Fatty, or you'll be left behind!"

Fatty Little gulped down a huge mouthful of buttered roll.

"Great grapenuts!" he gasped. "I've only just started, sir!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Somehow or other, this Californian climate gives a chap a terrific appetite," said Fatty. "I feel as fit as a fiddle, and—— Hi! Don't leave me here alone, you chaps! I've got to eat a lot more yet, or I shall collapse in the middle of the morning."

"That's better than collapsing in the middle of the road!" grinned Reggie Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

All the fellows went outside and passed down the wide, sweeping flight of stone steps to the road. On either side of these steps were wondrously green lawns—soft and velvety, like carpets. As a matter of fact, these beautiful lawns were to be seen everywhere in the city.

"Never seen anything more artistic!" declared Armstrong admiringly. "We don't get lawns like that in England. Even the smallest houses have got beautiful stretches of green grass. It's a wonder how it grows."

I chuckled.

"No wonder at all, my lad," I replied. "You probably don't know that these lawns would be as brown as anything—all dried and withered up to nothing—unless they were absolutely soaked in water three or four times a week."

"What!" said Armstrong.

"Fact!" I assured him. "Los Angeles looks a glorious city, but it happens to have a very perfect water supply—which isn't surprising, considering the enormous number of mountains in the district. And people can water their lawns and gardens all the summer through, without any unpleasant notices from Water Boards and officials regarding possible droughts."

"Oh!" said Armstrong.

"Take Westlake Park, for example," I went on, glancing across the road. "Doesn't it look a dream? But how'd it look if it didn't get water from dozens of hose-pipes practically every day? It would be nothing but a dried-up blotch. Remember, they don't get any rain here all the summer through—possibly not a drop from April to October. You've only got to look at any piece of wasteland—or vacant lot as they say here—and you'll understand."

"Well, anyway, it looks jolly nice now," said Armstrong.

He was correct. But, as I had told him, the green beauty of Los Angeles would have been somewhat lacking if the water supply were not so perfect. Indeed, during that morning, we saw not dozens, but hundreds of hose-pipes in action. One can scarcely walk a hundred yards in Los Angeles without seeing them. And the water is allowed to soak into the green lawns for hours at a stretch. No wonder the grass looks nice.

As Lord Dorrimore had said, the motor-coaches were waiting—three of them. They were very similar in design to the char-a-bancs of England, but not quite so luxuriously equipped as ours. The Remove

tumbled in, and the sight-seeing tour commenced.

CHAPTER II.

THE CITY OF SUNSHINE.

SUNSHINE!

Blue skies, without a cloud to be seen, and a cooling breeze from the sea. A vision of the mountain peaks in the distance.

That was the accompaniment to our trip round the famous metropolis of Southern California. And, the month being August, it can be readily understood that the heat was somewhat intense.

But the juniors didn't care much for this. Everything was new to them, and they were enormously interested in what they saw. And they didn't have to expend much energy. One can stand a little heat, riding in comfort in a big motor-coach.

And this trip was intended to take in the city, Hermosa Beach, Redondo Beach, Long Beach, and then home.

This would occupy the morning. And after lunch we should enter the coaches again, and go out in the opposite direction —towards the hills, through Pasadena, and then on to Hollywood—the famous centre of the film industry.

Most of the fellows were particularly keen upon going to the seaside. They had heard a great deal about the wonderful Pacific rollers, the surf-bathing on the Californian beaches, and the perfection of the seaside towns.

"It's rather a pity we're not going to Hollywood straight away," remarked Handforth, as he sat between Church and McClure in the coach. "What the dickens do we want to go about seeing the sights for? Simply a waste of time! All I'm keen upon is making films!"

Church and McClure sniffed.

"Better forget it!" suggested Church.

"Eh?"

"Lots of people come here thinking about making a fortune in the films," said Church. "They've got an idea that they've only got to come to Los Angeles, and they're fixed. But it's only the privileged few who manage to make any money at the studios."

"Rot!" growled Handy.

"It's a fact!" said McClure, coming to Church's support. "We were talking to some man in the hotel lounge. He said there are hundreds of people in Hollywood half-starving. Good actors and actresses, too—all waiting for a chance. And if they can get an opportunity to appear in a film as an 'extra' they grab at it. And perhaps it only means a few dollars."

"Extras?" repeated Handforth. "What's an extra?"

"Oh, somebody who just walks on," said Church. "I suppose in England we'd call 'em supers. And these people, don't forget, are trained actors and actresses. So it doesn't look as though there's much chance for you, old man. Better give it up, and——"

"Rats!" said Handforth curtly. "Catch me giving it up! When I make up my mind, I'm firm! And I've decided to go into films—and nothing's going to stop me. I'm going to be a great dramatic actor."

Church and McClure didn't continue the discussion. They gave it up as hopeless. They confined their attentions to watching the passing panorama.

The heat was just about bearable, although trying. But most of us found the sunshine itself a rather questionable delight. One thinks of California, and the glorious sunshine, and longs to be there.

But the actual thing is not so perfect, after all.

There's no doubt about the sunshine. If anything, there's too much of it. One can easily have too much of a good thing—and in Los Angeles, after a stay of several weeks, one begins to find that the sunshine itself begins to pall. One longs with a heartfelt longing for some real, honest black clouds, and a good old rain-storm.

The sunshine is perfectly dazzling, and almost painful to the eyes. That the natives themselves suffer is easily appreciated when one sees green or smoke goggles on sale at practically every drug store in the city.

Before going out towards the sea we passed right through the down-town section of Los Angeles. The three motor coaches went along West Seventh Street, straight into the heart of the city, and we were able to obtain a good look at such famous centres as Olive Street, Hill Street, Broadway, and Spring Street. Beyond Spring Street one gets towards the East Side—Main Street, and the lower and poorer section of the big town.

The traffic down here is controlled in a peculiar way.

As one passes down Seventh Street there are little signal posts at the various crossings. A bell rings, and red arms shoot up with the word "Stop" on them. All the traffic on Seventh Street comes to a standstill, and the cross traffic proceeds.

Then the bells ring again, the red arms disappear, and white arms take their place, marked "Go." And then we proceed. And traffic policemen are on duty all the time.

When one is in a hurry this system is not only irritating, but positively exasperating. Indeed, it is out of the question to get anywhere quickly in the busy section of Los Angeles. It is far more speedy to walk. The constant stops brought about by these automatic controls are enough to make a fellow go grey.

And the street cars are everywhere—the yellow Los Angeles cars, with their narrow-gauge tracks, and the red Pacific electric cars, with their wider gauge tracks. They clang through the city, longways and sideways—and anywhere down on Broadway or

Hill Street or Spring Street is a little better than torture.

The clanging of the cars, the glaring sunshine, the dust, and the heat rising up from the roads—all combine to make as much discomfort as possible. But there are some magnificent department stores and shops. We were rather glad to get out of the busy section of the city, and to find ourselves upon an open road—travelling in the direction of Inglewood and Hermosa Beach.

But it must not be imagined that this open road was deserted—like any main highway outside of London. When I say "deserted," I mean deserted compared to the crowded thoroughfares of any big centre.

This main road was thronged with motor-cars—cars in streams, going each way. In the whole world there are not so many cars in a given space as in Los Angeles and district. And we were going along now in the early part of the forenoon. At about six o'clock in the evening the motor-cars are so numerous that they simply go in one continuous succession, a few yards apart. To obtain any pleasure from an automobile is practically out of the question. One simply has a car to get about in.

If a street car stops in Los Angeles, to take on or discharge passengers, all other traffic on the road must stop also. And whenever this happens—particularly in the evening—one will see a long line of cars come to a halt—motor-cars stretching two or three hundred yards—a continuous line, all at a standstill. And when the tram starts, they start.

It is all very nice to own a motor-car, and to obtain petrol at tenpence a gallon, but, personally, give me the English highways with space and room, and an opportunity of seeing some scenery.

For when all is said and done, there is very little scenery in or around Los Angeles. I don't want to offend any loyal Californians, but the truth is the truth. There are the mountains, it is true, but they are many hours' run from Los Angeles. All the country about that city is practically flat—the few hills being either barren or with just a few clumps of ordinary-looking trees that are not picturesque in the least.

And there are no hedges—no meadows and fields as we know them in England. Just great wide stretches of flat land, divided up into lots, and liberally sprinkled with wooden shacks. They are probably called bungalows, and quite a good proportion of them are pretty in their own way—but one gets very tired of the utter monotony.

All the bungalows are the same—all with their little green lawns, devoid of all hedges and dividing lines. There are no such things as private gardens, and a surprising lack of flowers. Trees in plenty line the various avenues and streets, but they are all of a sameness.

While many of the roads are perfect, others are the opposite. And in many sections of the city the tramcars run along ordinary railway lines—not tram lines as we know them. And in places these railway tracks stand out in the most ugly fashion from the road surface. Cycling would be a somewhat trying proposition. But nearly everybody in Los Angeles owns a motor-car, the greater proportion being Fords, and these bump along over everything.

But I'm afraid I'm getting dull.

There was very little to see on the way to Hermosa Beach—miles and miles of land with wooden shacks dumped down by the hundred and thousand. And at last we arrived at the sea.

The juniors had not made much comment, but I believe, in their hearts, they were just a little disappointed. Having seen the vicinity of Westlake Park as a commencement, the rest of the place was not quite keeping up to the standard.

And Hermosa Beach did nothing to fill the fellows with delight.

It is a glorious place for bathing, no doubt—for the sands are smooth and as perfect as anyone could wish them to be. And the sea comes rolling in fresh, green, and foamy.

But unless one is actually in the water, I should imagine Hermosa Beach somewhat depressing. There is a long main street, with the street cars plying to and fro—a street without the sign of a single tree, and nothing but sand—dazzling, burning sand.

Of green there is practically no sign. Summer bungalows fill the place—all of them temporary-looking, and quite a number stuck on the very beach itself, within a few yards of the sea. And the sand smothers everything.

On the particular morning of our visit the heat was staggering.

We didn't stop for a bathe, but went straight along the front to the next town—Redondo Beach. This is somewhat larger, with an excellent public library, bright shops, etc. But there is the same temporary appearance about it.

And then we went on cutting across to Long Beach—the famous seaside resort of Los Angeles. We cut off the big headland, losing sight of the sea, and passing San Pedro and Los Angeles Harbour without viewing either of these spots.

We came to Long Beach, and perspired.

"My hat!" said Handforth. "This ain't Long Beach, is it?"

"Of course it is?" said Pitt.

"But I always thought Long Beach was a glorious place—something like the beautiful towns of the French Riviera!" went on Handforth. "Great Scott! I'm getting a bit disappointed in California."

"Don't speak so loud, you ass!" murmured Church.

Handforth glared.

"I'm always being told not to speak loud!" he roared. "What's the matter? Ain't this a free country?"

"Shush!" said Dorrie, turning. "A free country? Well, old man, they say it is—but

between you an' me an' the carburettor, a fellow has to be rather careful. The hundred-per-cent American is rather a touchy animal, you know."

Handforth grunted.

"In England we can say what we like, and people only grin in a good-natured way," he retorted. "But here, unless you praise everything, they jolly well jump on you! And I always thought they were sportsmen!" he added witheringly.

Of course, Handforth was an ass, and nobody took any notice of his rather strong views. Justin B. Farman, the American junior in the Remove, was only a few seats from Handforth, and he grinned.

"I guess it's because you fellers are new out here," he remarked good-naturedly. "But, say, I'm just hugging myself! I was born out in this country, an' it's sure good to be back again."

"No accounting for tastes!" grunted Handforth, mopping his brow.

Edward Oswald was a true example of the grumbling Englishman. Somehow or other, the English are famous for growling aloud at everything they don't like. And Handforth was the sort of fellow who spreads the impression. But, in spite of his grumbles, he was one of the best. Long Beach is a fair-sized city, with astonishingly wide streets, and any amount of first-class shops and restuarants. We didn't go all over it, and it is unfair to give any real description. But, frankly, we were not struck dumb with fascination.

The part of the actual beach we visited struck us as being common in tone—with popcorn stalls, ice-cream counters, sausage-stands, and so forth. And there appeared to be a lack of any real comfort—no green esplanades with flower-beds, etc., as one sees at many English seaside resorts. At Long Beach there was nothing but heat and dust and, to our view, discomfort.

We returned to Los Angeles by a different route, and arrived at Westlake Park in good time for luncheon. It was quite a relief to see the beautiful green of the park, with its waving palm-trees. It was like coming back to a real beauty spot. And we were quite ready for food.

Let me add that there are many wonderful boulevards in Los Angeles. There is Wilshire Boulevard, with its graceful palms and magnificent private residences. Some of these beautifully paved streets are almost too good to be true. One drives along them, and it seems like some fairyland.

It is very much like this opposite the Baiaton Hotel, for Westlake Park itself is a gem.

But one fellow, at least, took no interest in scenery. This fellow was Edward Oswald Handforth, for he made a remarkable discovery. He was just passing up the steps of the hotel when he observed some activity a little further along, at the corner of Lake Street.

Handforth was standing in front of a big mirror. He was gracefully attired in his pyjamas, but this was not sufficient. He had removed one of the blankets from the bed, and this was wound round him in the most grotesque fashion. Not content with this, he had actually stuck strips of paper in his hair.

Instead of going up into the hotel with the rest, Handforth strolled along to the corner. A little crowd was there, watching the activities of certain gentlemen with peculiar-looking tripods and other apparatus.

"Anything happening here?" asked Handforth, as a telegraph messenger passed him. "Why, sure!" said the boy. "They're shootin' some scenes."

"They're doing what?"

"Gee! Ain't you dumb!" said the telegraph messenger. "They're makin' films—get me? And Charlie Chaplin himself is directing!"

CHAPTER III.

FILM FEVER!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH stood stock still.

"By George!" he muttered tensely. "Charlie Chaplin directing! My only hat! This is my chance!"

Church and McClure came up and took Handforth's arm.

"Come on, old man," said Church. "Lunch-time, you know."

Handforth turned, and attempted to wither his chums with a look.

"Lunch!" he repeated sourly. "Who cares about lunch? They're making a film here! A shooting scene, I understand! And who do you think is directing the giddy picture?"

"Goodness knows!"

"Charlie himself!" said Handforth impressively.

"Charlie Chaplin?" asked McClure, with a start.

"Yes!"

Handforth's chums began to evoke a big interest. It only took them about two minutes to verify their leader's statement. Several people assured them that Charlie Chaplin was on the spot. He wasn't acting in the scenes himself, but he was doing all the directing work.

Church buzzed into the hotel and spread the news. Accordingly, lunch was delayed for a while, whilst the Remove hastened outside to catch a glimpse of Charlie in person. An opportunity like this might not occur again.

Handforth, by this time, was well to the front of the crowd, for even the native inhabitants evinced great interest in the proceedings.

There wasn't a great deal to look at. Two or three cameras, with energetic young gentlemen in charge of them, some official studio cars by the side of the pavement, and a number of "props." These latter included a lamp-post which was obviously French in design. And on the other side of West Sixth Street, just against the park, stood a property newspaper kiosk, such as one sees liberally sprinkled over the streets of Paris—a small, tower-like structure, with just room for one individual, to say nothing of the said individual's wares.

A policeman in khaki uniform was on duty ready to stop all the traffic at the sound of a whistle—for the police in Los Angeles are very obliging when it comes to making films. They'll readily bring all the traffic to a stop on a busy street while scenes are being "shot" for a picture.

"It's all bunkum!" said Handforth loudly. "I can't see Charlie Chaplin!"

Several people near by looked at Handforth, and smiled. Considering that the famous Mr. Chaplin was within earshot, and right in full view of Handforth, his remark was somewhat humorous.

Charlie himself glanced across, and gave one of his well-known smiles. But he didn't interrupt his work. He was busily instructing two or three of the actors exactly how they should perform.

There was some excuse for Handforth's remark.

Charlie Chaplin was not the Charlie Chaplin that we are accustomed to seeing on the silver screen. Devoid of his make-up, his funny clothing, and his famous walk, Charlie was a changed being.

A smallish, bronzed man, with dark hair slightly turning grey—that was Charlie. He was clean shaven, attired in a neat lounge suit, and a soft collar. He smoked cigarettes incessantly, and was a real bunch of live-wires. His whole energy and attention was given to the job in hand.

Indeed, one had to look twice before recognising him as the world-famous comedian.

"My goodness!" muttered Church, giving Handforth a nudge. "Are you dotty? That's Charlie—with the paper in his hand! He's talking to those two men——"

"All ready—camera!"

Church was interrupted by Charlie himself, and a moment later one of the scenes was ready to be shot. Two young gentlemen came round and urged the crowd to stand back a little further. And the crowd readily obliged.

Handforth, however, remained—like a piece of flotsam, left by the receding tide. He was so interested in the proceedings, in fact, that he hardly noticed the retreat of the throng.

"Just a little further back, young 'un, if you don't mind," said one of the studio crowd. "You'll be in the picture if you stop there."

"Good!" said Handforth.

"Eh?"

"Just what I want!" said Handy enthusiastically. "I'll tell you what. I'll do you a good turn if you like, and be in the picture!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd roared.

"Sorry, but I'm afraid Charlie might object," grinned the studio man. "Now, come along—that's the way! You're holding up the whole picture, I guess!"

Gently, but firmly, he pushed Handforth back, and for a moment or two Handy remained there. The camera men commenced turning the handles, and the actors began their work.

It was quite a simple scene.

Just two men walking along the pavement, talking together, and a third man shadowing them. The first two had to enter a doorway, and the shadower noted the number above it.

But the scene was only about half-way through when Handforth strolled forward, in order to get a better view. In fact, he walked right into the field of vision, and there were several shouts.

Charlie Chaplin threw up his hand, and the camera stopped.

"If it's all the same to you, young man, we'd rather take this scene without your manly form adorning it!" said Charlie, using a persuasive tone, and seizing Handforth by the arm. "In other words, please keep on this side of the chalk line."

"Oh, sorry!" said Handforth, turning red. "I forgot."

He now observed that a line was chalked upon the road, and he had unconsciously crossed it. The fact was, that he was so fascinated by the whole subject that he was in a kind of day-dream.

"Oh, you hopeless duffer!" murmured McClure. "For goodness sake stop here!"

"How the dickens was I to know?" demanded Handforth. "I'm trying to find Charlie! I can't spot him anywhere——"

"Why, you ass, he just spoke to you!" said Church.

"What?"

"That was Charlie Chaplin, who took you by the arm."

"You—you poor fathead!" said Handforth pityingly. "That chap Charlie Chaplin? Why, he's got no moustache, he walks as straight as I do, and he's not a bit funny! Don't be so dotty!"

"All right, if you don't believe me, ask him," said Church abruptly.

"By George! I will!" snorted Handforth.

To Church's horror, Handforth strode forward. Church had never believed that Edward Oswald would be so rash. The scene was just about to be taken again, but all operations were held up as soon as Handforth moved.

"Just a minute!" said Handy, striding up to Charlie Chaplin. "Sorry to interrupt the game, but are you Charlie?"

The famous film comedian smiled.

"I may not look like it, but I've got to plead guilty," he replied.

"You—you're really Charlie Chaplin?" gasped Handforth.

"I'm sorry it's such a disappointment, but things like that are always happening in this life!" said Charlie Chaplin soothingly. "Is that all? Because, if so, we'd rather like to get on with the business in hand!"

Again he gently led Handforth away, and this time Edward Oswald was seized by half-a-dozen juniors, who wisked him out of the crowd, rushed him round the corner, and breathlessly hustled him up the steps of the Bainton Hotel.

"And now, my lad, you'll stop here!" said De Valerie grimly.

"You—you silly idiot——"

"You're positively dangerous!" declared Pitt. "Of all the asses! Going up to Charlie and asking him that!"

"But—he didn't look a bit like Chaplin!" said Handforth blankly. "I can't believe it you know!"

"If you realised that you merely were showing your ignorance, you wouldn't talk so much!" said Pitt severely. "Everybody's cackling at you, and setting you down as a duffer! Take my advice, Handy, and say nothing."

Handforth was rather subdued during luncheon. He didn't eat much. He was thinking of films all the time.

"Why, there's nothing in it!" he declared at length. "Did you notice those actor chaps? They simply strolled along doing nothing! Any ass can act for the films! It's as easy as winking!"

It may look so—but it's a bit of a gift!" said Bob Christine. "And when you've got to express all sorts of emotion right in front of a camera—well, give me any other job!"

But Handforth was not discouraged. He was absolutely certain that it would only take him a few weeks to make his fortune as a film actor. And he bucked up considerably when luncheon was over, and a start was made for Hollywood.

Lord Dorrimore had arranged everything, and we were to be shown round the famous studios of the Celebrated Players' Co. We should not go to Hollywood direct, but detour through Pasadena and Glendale.

But the prospect was very attractive, and although the afternoon was frightfully hot, we set off with enthusiasm.

CHAPTER IV.

HANDFORTH SIGNS HIS CONTRACT!

"ABSOLUTELY priceless!"

That was Archie Glenthorne's opinion of Pasadena. And it was an opinion which was shared by practically all the other fellows. For, indeed, Pasadena is a town of beautiful homes and wonderful scenery. It is known as the millionaire quarter, and some of the palatial residences are little short of wonderful. There is an air of grandeur about the place that almost awes one.

From Pasadena we went through Glendale, and then on to Hollywood. Hollywood interested us all, as we had heard such a great deal about it.

Quite a number of the fellows expected to see enormous film studios at every street corner.

But unless one actually looks for the studios, they are not at all apparent. Hollywood is a thriving town—or, to be more exact, a rapidly growing suburb of Los Angeles City. It has many fine shops and stores, superb hotels, and excellent picture theatres.

In most respects it is very much like any other new Californian city—full of apartment houses, bungalow courts, and wooden dwellings. Palms and other trees are in abundance, and the heat is all powerful. The bungalow courts interested us a great deal.

They are picturesque arrangements—a number of detached or semi-detached bungalows arranged in the form of a court—with an open frontage on the street, leading direct into the court. There are small lawns, flower-beds, and perhaps a fountain play-

ing. The bungalows are tiny affairs, so close to one another that any real privacy is out of the question. And in most cases these bungalows consist of one living room, one bedroom, a bathroom, and a kitchen.

Almost before we knew it, our motor-coaches pulled up in front of a long, rambling building, with its end towards the road. It was nothing much to look at, but it proved to be the studio of the Celebrated Players' Company. The productions of this firm go to every corner of the world.

"Well, here we are," said Lord Dorrimore, jumping out. "We'll be rather a big crowd, invadin' the place, but there's plenty of room. Personally, I shall be rather glad to get this sightseein' business done with. Too bally faggin'."

We entered the main doorway, and found ourselves in a kind of big, outer office—very similar to the office of any business house. We were expected, and several members of the staff were ready.

And we were divided up into different parties, and each party was provided with an escort. I was fortunate enough to be in the first batch, which included my own chums and Handforth and Co.

It is hard to imagine one of these enormous studios. Once inside, one finds oneself in a kind of indoor city. There are large numbers of buildings, mainly with glass roofs, one leading into the other.

And every one of these studios is packed with scenery. The sets are placed here and there, apparently in a haphazard fashion; but, to the trained eye, really in order.

There is the setting for a big lounge hall, for example. Sumptuous furniture, oak-panelled walls, and a grand staircase leading upwards. In the film it looks solid and absolutely real. But there is no illusion when you're in the studio itself.

Glance upwards, and you find that the scenery ends abruptly, with bare poles, or pieces of flapping canvas, and unfinished woodwork. These sights, of course, never appear in the pictures. The eye of the camera confines itself to that portion which is apparently solid.

You will see the interior view of a bedroom, for example, in many a film. And if you saw the actual scene where the film was made, you would scarcely recognise that bedroom. For, in all probability, it is only two sides of a room, ending in nothing but some rudely constructed props in order to fix it up.

The studio sets are very interesting to look at.

As we went round we found various films in the course of manufacture, so to speak. Well-known stars were hard at work. But it was all done so quietly, and in such a matter-of-fact way, that we hardly realised it at first.

Absolutely ignoring all watchers, and all who hovered in the vicinity, the actors, directors, and camera men would go about their task. A certain scene would be prepared, the actors would get ready, and then the actual photographs would be taken, the cameras clicking, and the sun arcs showering their peculiar bluish-violet light upon the scene.

For very few modern pictures are taken by sunlight—even out in California. All the interior scenes are illuminated with these tremendously powerful sun arc lights. And exterior scenes, too.

For we came across a garden, perfect in every detail.

It was a reconstruction of an Italian garden, with hedges, flowering creepers, lawns, flower-beds — everything. Rustic arches, playing fountains, and every single thing that one would expect to find under the open sky.

And it was all imitation!

Viewed quite closely, as we viewed it then, we could easily see that it was not the actual thing. But as the background for a scene in a film, no human being on earth would be able to detect the deception. With the sun-arcs casting realistic shadows, one would be prepared to swear that the film itself was taken under the sky, in the open air.

A tour of one of these vast studios is an eye-opener.

We presently came to an enormous space —a building so large that we really did seem to be in the open. But all this was enclosed, just the same as the other studios. And we were just in time to see some important scenes being shot of a super-production.

There were hundreds of people employed for these scenes.

And they were present now. Judging by the costumes, the picture was of a somewhat fantastic type, depicting an imaginary country, or a fancy costume ball, or something of that sort.

Actors and actresses were standing about in groups, or sitting here and there awaiting the word from the director. They were attired in every kind of costume imaginable —flowing silks, muslins, and so forth. Some of the men were attired as clowns, some as pierrots, others as Oriental potentates.

We learned that the production was a big comedy, and these particular scenes were supposed to take place during a dream. The actual scene itself was laid in the open—in a fairy glade.

And the way in which it had been done was remarkably clever.

Standing there, we saw a great rocky background, reaching up for twenty or thirty feet, with ferns, trees, and even a splashing waterfall. Below there was grassland—all imitation, of course—with a deep, miniature lake, the waters of which bubbled and gurgled with a central fountain.

"My hat!" muttered Tommy Watson. "It's wonderful!"

"Wonderful!" echoed Handforth. "I should think it is! As for acting, there's absolutely nothing in it! Why, I could do this on my giddy head! And to think

these people are getting thousands a week for it!"

I grinned.

"Don't you make a mistake," I said. "The majority of these are extras, and only getting a few dollars. It's a pretty hard game, and I'll bet there are heaps of people in Hollywood who wish they'd never been attracted by the films."

But Handforth only scoffed.

He literally ate everything. With huge interest, he watched all the proceedings, and was particularly engrossed when the director called upon the crowd to get ready.

The director himself was one of the famous men of the company—a gentleman named Mr. Robert Fisher. He was attired in a light-coloured tweed suit, a kind of tennis shirt with an open collar, and no necktie. He was perfectly free and easy in attire, and needed to be, for it was considerably hot in the studio, and the work was strenuous.

It didn't appear to be so at first glance. The director was perched upon a kind of stand, armed with a big megaphone, and smoking a cigar. For some time he sat there, apparently doing nothing.

An then he called upon the crowd to prepare. Sun arcs were turned on from half-a-dozen spots—just like huge searchlights. But instead of giving a blinding glare of white light, they filled the studio with that subdued, tinted radiance—which photographs like real sunlight.

It is not particularly brilliant, but inclined to be injurious if exposed to it for too long. The cameras were prepared, and the company itself got ready.

Mr. Fisher quietly gave them directions.

And almost before we knew it, the scenes were being shot. A procession was making its way up the rocks into the sylvan glen beyond. Two members of the company were instructed to slip and fall, and to plunge headlong into the lake. They did this with great success.

At least, so it seemed to us. But the whole thing had to be gone through again. The director ordered that the scene had to be shot once more. And, indeed, this is the customary thing.

Practically every scene that we see in a film play is taken time after time—sometimes a trivial, unimportant incident in a picture is taken as many as six times. But viewing it in the completed form as we do, we never realise this. It is difficult to imagine the monotonous nerve-trying work that goes into the making of one film—the thousands and thousands of feet of negatives that are used, only to be wasted

From afar, the making of films is fascinating. There is a glamour about the subject that has a singular attraction. But when you see the thing actually being done—when you are on the spot, and can use your own eyes—then you realise that the making of films, is, after all, just a job of work.

And in some aspects it is depressing almost to the point of being sordid. You lose the glamour when you are there. You see it in the cold light of actuality. It becomes what it really is — wearying, monotonous work of the hardest kind.

But, even with this before his very eyes, Handforth was just as enthusiastic as ever. He still looked at the scene through rose-tinted spectacles. He could not see the true side.

"Why, there's nothing in it!" he declared vigorously. "Did you see those chaps? All they did was to walk on! Just climb up those rocks, and fall into the water! Jolly nice on a hot afternoon like this, too!"

"It's not so easy as it looks," said Pitt.

"Oh, isn't it?" said Handforth. "Anyhow, I jolly well know I can do it! What's more, I'm going into the films in earnest!"

"Better go and ask the director for a job!" suggested Hubbard sarcastically.

Handforth's eyes suddenly gleamed.

"By George!" he declared. "I'll do it!"

It was always risky to make such a suggestion to Edward Oswald—for he was inclined to take a fellow at his word.

The particular scene we were witnessing switched off, and the various members of the company were lounging about once more—trying to kill the time until the next "shot." That is the most wearying part of the business—waiting between scenes.

The director was chatting amiably with Lord Dorrimore. Like most Americans, he was extremely gratified to be talking with a real live lord—particularly one who was so famous internationally as Dorrie.

Handforth marched up, as bold as brass

"Sorry to interrupt, sir," he said. "Are you the owner?"

"The owner?" repeated Mr. Fisher inquiringly.

"Well, the man who's in charge," explained Handforth.

"I'm directing this production, if that's what you mean," said Mr. Fisher. "But I'm not the owner of the company—I kind of wish I was!"

"Oh!" said Handforth, disappointed. "Then it's not much good? You see, I wanted a job!"

"A job?" repeated the director. "All right—we'll fix you up."

"These gentlemen are frightfully obligin', you know," said Dorrie languidly. "Why, they even offered me a part in the next big picture, but somehow it doesn't appeal to me. I prefer the genuine thing."

Handforth had turned red with excitement. He hadn't heard Dorrie's remarks. He was staring at Mr. Fisher.

"You—you'll fix me up?" he asked eagerly.

"Sure!"

"But—but I want to play a decent part, you know!" said Handforth. "I couldn't

think of accepting anything smaller than the lead!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The other juniors, who were listening, yelled.

"The lead, eh?" said Mr. Fisher gravely. "Well, that's a little out of the usual, you know. It's not the rule to put an inexperienced actor in a position of that sort—but we do make exceptions sometimes."

"Well naturally, you'll make one in my case," said Handforth. "I'm not an actor at all, really——"

"We quite understand that!" said Mr. Fisher, without a smile.

"I mean, not yet!" said Handforth hastily. "You see, I belong to St. Frank's—I'm an English chap. But I'm willing to stay out here if you like. I'll go into pictures, and play leading parts!"

Mr. Fisher nodded.

"Say, you seem to be a very obliging sort of fellow," he remarked. "All right! We'll see what can be done. When would you like to start?"

"Why, straight away."

"We're beginning a new production to-morrow, and it so happens we haven't got a leading man," said the director, winking at Dorrie with his off side eye. "Somehow, I think you'll just fit into the part. You've got the right figure, and just that imposing, aggressive presence."

Handforth visibly expanded.

"Well, of course, I knew. I was always cut out for the films," he said modestly. "I don't want to boast—that's not my line—but I'll guarantee I fill this part pretty well. We start to-morrow, eh?"

"Sure!"

"What about money?" asked Handforth. "Might as well get all the business details fixed up, you know. I don't want to go into the thing blindfold! I suppose it'll take about a week to make this picture?"

"Two months!" said Mr. Fisher gravely. "It's going to be one of the big films of the year, so I shall want you to do something particularly good. Come along—we'll go to the office straight away and fix things."

"Oh, good!" said Handforth.

Fairly bubbling over with enthusiasm, he followed Mr. Fisher over to the other side of the big studio, and they entered a poky little office—with a desk at one side. If Handforth had had any experience at all, he would have wondered that a big director like Mr. Fisher should have had such an insignificant office. But Handforth was blind to everything, except the fact that he had been engaged.

Mr. Fisher pulled out an official looking form.

"Of course, I shall require you to sign this contract," he declared. "We pay big money, and we've got to have a guarantee that our stars give good return. Do you agree to fulfil every obligation we require?"

"Of course," said Handforth promptly. "But look here—I couldn't think of accepting anything less than twenty quid a week."

Mr. Fisher looked thoughtful.

"Twenty quid?" he repeated. "Hm! I guess you mean twenty pounds? Well, that's around a hundred dollars."

"Of course, I might go a bit less to start with," said Handforth, fearing that he had opened his mouth too wide. "Somehow, a hundred dollars sounds more than twenty quid! I'll accept eighty, if you like. But later on—after I've been here a year, say, I shall expect about a thousand."

Mr. Fisher took a deep breath.

"Gee!" he remarked. "Who's doing this fixing-up business, anyway? You can talk pretty fluently, my lad! When you'll allow me to get a word in, I'll tell you that we don't pay less than five thousand dollars a week to our stars."

Handforth clutched at the desk.

"Fi—five thousand dollars?" he repeated dazedly.

"Yes."

"A week?"

"Sure thing!" said Mr. Fisher. "That's what we figure on paying you, Mr. Handforth, and I've no doubt that we shall be well repaid. Just sign your name here. You receive your first week's salary next Thursday. Report yourself to our main office to-morrow morning at nine o'clock, and we'll start right in."

Handforth left the office in a kind of a daze. He hardly remembered signing the contract. He only knew that Mr. Fisher—a man with a world wide reputation—had addressed him as "Mr. Handforth." And he had signed a contract which meant that he was going to receive five thousand dollars a week.

Handforth returned to the other fellows on air. And, as walking on air is an unusual proceeding, he was just a little bit unsteady. His face was flushed, and his eyes were gleaming.

"I've done it!" he said, in a husky voice.

"Of course you've done it!" growled Church. "Made us all look silly, I suppose?"

Handforth came to himself with a start. The familiar voice of his own chum had brought him round, so to speak. He was now standing on solid earth. But he was wild with inward exuberation.

"I've signed the contract!" he declared triumphantly.

"Contract!" gasped McClure.

"I start work on the film to-morrow!"

"My only hat!"

"Five thousand dollars a week!" said Handforth carelessly.

"What!" howled his chums.

"Roughly speaking, that's about five hundred quid!" said Handforth.

"You're doing yourself out of half your pay!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "Of course, if you're satisfied with five hundred, all well and good, but five thousand dollars happens to be a thousand pounds."

Handforth shrugged his shoulders.

"Good old Handy!" shouted Pitt. "The first St. Frank's chap to become a film star!"

"Congratulations, old man!" I said heartily.

And Handforth was surrounded by fellows who insisted upon shaking his hand, patting his back, and showering congratulations galore upon him. Never for one moment did the unfortunate Edward Oswald suspect that the humorous Mr. Fisher was indulging in a little joke—a joke, by the way, which had been suggested to him by Dorrie.

The developments promised to be interesting!

Biff!
Handforth managed to get one of his famous lefts in before the two actors could be aware of the junior's intentions. They were just a couple of extras, who were being paid a few dollars for the work.

"Well, it's all the same to me," he said casually. "After all, what's money? If I can get a thousand a week to start with, I shall be making ten thousand quid a week before long."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass! You can't spoof us like that!"

Lord Dorrimore came up, looking severe.

"You young asses!" he said, winking violently. "The contract's all signed—Mr. Fisher just showed it to me. Handforth starts work in the mornin'!"

The juniors observed that wink, and they did not fail.

CHAPTER V.

THE BEGINNING OF A MYSTERY!

So far as Handforth was concerned, there was nothing further to live for—until the morning. He didn't want to do anything in the meantime. His one desire was that the time should pass as rapidly as possible.

But ordinary life had to go on, nevertheless.

It wasn't possible, by a magic word, to bring the morrow in a flash. And that evening a big party of us were taken out

to Los Angeles harbour—guests of Lord Dorrimore, for dinner on the Wanderer.

We had enjoyed the day immensely, and were looking forward to other days. For example, Dorrie had planned a big affair for us at the magnificent Ambassador Hotel.

Without exaggeration, this hotel is one of the most wonderful in the whole world. Quite apart from being a palace amongst hotels, it is a veritable city in itself.

Situated in the heart of the Wiltshire district of Los Angeles, the Ambassador Hotel is the mecca of all who require luxury supreme—and can afford to pay for it. The building is a palatial one, and right beneath it, so to speak, one can find almost every kind of shop imaginable. One need not go out of the hotel precincts to obtain almost every known variety of commodity—from a pin to a suit of clothes.

The hotel provides every sport—golf, tennis, and so forth. There is a private picture theatre, a concert hall, and other advantages too numerous to mention. And the Coconut Grove is a veritable paradise in itself.

But this was a future treat for us. At present we were just going to a quiet dinner on the good old Wanderer. Dorrie's famous steam-yacht was almost like home to us. We had been on the vessel so often that we knew almost every inch of it.

The trips we had made on the Wanderer were numerous, and we had also passed through many stirring adventures with Dorrie's yacht as a companion.

The Wanderer was looking her best, as she lay at anchor.

She was always spick and span. I couldn't imagine her being anything else. Trim in every line, with her white, holystoned decks, it was a very real pleasure to run up the accommodation ladder, and stroll on board.

Nelson Lee was with us, and we enjoyed ourselves immensely.

"Come, come, Handforth," said Lee, towards the end of dinner. "You appear to be eating nothing! Has the climate affected your appetite?"

Handforth looked up dreamily.

"Five thousand dollars a week!" he murmured. "Of course, it's a pretty decent screw, but if I wasn't worth it, they wouldn't suggest—— Eh? Did—did you speak to me, sir?" he added, coming to himself with a start.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Still think about films, Handforth?" chuckled Nelson Lee. "You will have to drop all that soon, you know. We shall be sailing away in this yacht within a few days——"

"Not me, sir!" said Handforth firmly.

"Indeed?"

"I've been thinking about it, sir," said Handforth. "Of course, it'll be a pity for me to separate myself from the crowd, but it's got to come some time or other. I'm going to stay in Hollywood, making films."

"Dear me! You have really decided?"

"Yes, sir," said Handy. "In fact, I can't do anything else. The contract's all signed, and everything. I've got to. The film people are relying on me to take the leading part."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"In that case, Handforth, we couldn't think of taking you away," he said gravely. "Well, we shall see. Perhaps you will change your mind."

"Never, sir!" said Edward Oswald stoutly.

Fortunately, he failed to observe the grins that went round the beautiful saloon, and he also failed to hear the chuckles. In his present state, Handy was blind and deaf.

After dinner, while the bulk of the fellows were on deck, the guv'nor and I went with Dorrie to the latter's private state-room.

"Now, old man, I've nailed you down," said Nelson Lee firmly. "What is this trip you are contemplating? You have been rather mysterious about it so far. You have referred to some excitement——"

"Plenty of it comin'," yawned Lord Dorrimore. "But just now I don't think I'll tell you anythin' further. Be a good little boy, an' wait an' see. I'll explain when we're really off."

"That means you won't let us into the secret, you bounder?" I demanded warmly.

"Absolutely."

And his lordship wouldn't change his decision. Later on we tried to pump Umlosi, the famous African chief. But Umlosi, had evidently been primed, and he confined himself to generalities.

"Wondrous days are in store, O, my young masters," he declared. "'Tis well that thou art of brave heart, for much peril looms near."

"What brand of peril?" demanded Pitt.

"Ere long we shall be crossing the great waters," went on Umlosi. "Wau! 'Tis not to my liking when the house that floats tips this way and that! It makes troubles within me, and sad is the day when the waters rise in anger."

We couldn't get the slightest satisfaction out of the old bounder, and we had to content ourselves with waiting. Dorrie assured us that we should all be in the secret in less than a week—when we should sail. In the meantime, we were to enjoy ourselves in Los Angeles and district.

Possibly Nelson Lee was taken into Dorrie's confidence, but if so, he didn't say anything about it. I only knew that all sorts of active preparations were being made. An adventurous trip of some sort was in the wind.

It was practically dark when we went ashore.

Two of the Wanderer's crew escorted us—

(Continued on page 15)

GRAND NEW NELSON LEE SERIAL NOW RUNNING!

No. 37. PRESENTED WITH "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY." August 18, 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.

If the rascally cousin of the late Lord Easington, Professor Mark Rymer, can destroy certain documents hidden inside the silver effigy, known as the Silver Dwarf, he will inherit his cousin's title and wealth. There is a son living by a secret marriage of the late peer, evidence of which is contained in the documents aforementioned. So far, the Silver Dwarf has eluded the clutching fingers of the unscrupulous professor. Nelson Lee, who is determined to frustrate Rymer's evil designs, is also in quest of the effigy. Owing to a fire at the late peer's house, the effigy is lost. The quest takes Lee and Rymer to Paris, and from there to Spain and Algeria. After many exciting adventures with the wily professor, Nelson Lee discovers that the Silver Dwarf has been given to Dr. Olsen, a Swede, by the Kaid of Kelelin. Olsen has gone to Gibraltar, and Lee awaits his return to Kelelin.

(Now read on.)

TWELVE days elapsed. It was half-past eleven on a Saturday morning. The steamer from Gibraltar had just arrived from Tangier. Achmed, brother of the Kaid of Kelelin, was standing on the wooden pier, idly gazing at the disembarking passengers.

Suddenly Achmed started. Amongst the arriving passengers was a sturdy, flaxen-haired Swede, with a knapsack strapped to his back.

"Dr Olsen!" muttered Achmed.

He turned on his heel, and sped back to the Spanish Legation. He saddled his horse and filled his water-bottle. Ten minutes later he had left the white-walled town behind, and was galloping towards Kelelin.

Through the day, through the darkness of the night, he rode without drawing rein. At midnight he sprang from his jaded horse, and staggered into the house of the Kaid.

"Wake, oh my brother!" he cried, as he strode across the echoing courtyard. "Wake, and tell the Nazarene that the man to whom thou gavest the silver image is now in Tangier!"

• • • • • •

Six hours later Achmed was on his way

back to Tangier again. By his side, mounted on one of the horses of the Kaid, was Mark Rymer. He was going to Tangier to interview Dr. Olsen.

They met the Swedish explorer midway between Kelelin and Tangier, a little after sunset.

They talked with him for upwards of half an hour. Then they spurred on their horses towards Tangier, whilst Dr. Olsen continued his lonely ride towards Kelelin.

A VISIT FROM DR. OLSEN.

IT was one o'clock on Monday afternoon. Nelson Lee had been lunching with the consul at the latter's house in Tetuan. They had adjourned after lunch to a cosily furnished "den" for coffee and cigarettes.

Presently a Moorish servant entered the room, and handed the consul a visiting-card. The consul glanced at it, and tossed it over to Nelson Lee. The detective read the name, and leaped to his feet with a shout of delight.

"Dr. Olsen!" he cried. "Where is he?"

"Here!" said a gruff but cheery voice. And the Swedish explorer strode into the room, nodded to the consul, and shook the detective warmly by the hand. "I have bad news for you, I'm afraid, Mr. Lee," he said, as he dropped into the chair which the consul pushed towards him. "I regret to say that when I received your note I had already done the very thing which you said in your note I was not to do!"

"You have seen Professor Rymer?"

"Yes."

"And you have given him the Silver Dwarf?"

"No; but I have told him where it is."

"Where is it?"

"Let me see," said the doctor, "it is now the fourth of March. If all has gone well, the Silver Dwarf will just about be going ashore at Colombo now."

The detective sank back into his chair with a groan of despair.

"Perhaps I had better tell you my story from the very beginning, and then you will understand exactly how the matter stands," continued Dr. Olsen. "In the first place, I must tell you that my only sister is married to an Englishman named Harvey Howard, who is the manager of an extensive tea-plantation at Ulapane, in Ceylon. For some time past she has been living in England; but on the eleventh of last month she sailed from London on the P. and O. boat Himalaya, with the intention of proceeding to Ceylon.

"The Himalaya was advertised to call at Marseilles on the eighteenth of last month. As I had not seen my sister for several years, I decided to run across to Marseilles, to join the Himalaya there, and to go with my sister as far as Naples. With this object in view, I arranged with the captain of the Marie Antoinette, which is a cargo steamer——"

"I know all about the Marie Antoinette," said Nelson Lee, interrupting him. "You left Tetuan in the Marie Antoinette on the fifteenth of February, and you arrived at Marseilles on the eighteenth."

"I did," said Dr. Olsen. "Before I left, however, the Kaid of Kelelin came running into my tent, and thrust a silver statuette into my hand. He told me he had purchased it in Tangier, but had afterwards repented of his purchase, as he knew it was not lawful for a true believer to possess an image of any kind whatever. He begged me, therefore, to accept it as a present; and, never doubting that his story was true, I thanked him for his gift, and made up my mind on the spot that I would give it to my sister as a little souvenir of Morocco!

"I arrived at Marseilles on the eighteenth, went on board the Himalaya, saw my sister, gave her the statuette, and travelled with her as far as Naples. From Naples my sister went on to Port Said and Colombo, at which latter place she is due to arrive to-day. I remained in Naples until the twentieth, when I returned by Orient boat to Gibraltar, where I arrived last Tuesday. I left Gibraltar on Saturday morning, spent the day in Tangier, and started out for Kelelin at daybreak yesterday morning.

"Half-way between Tangier and Kelelin I met Professor Rymer and the Kaid's brother. Needless to say, I knew nothing at that time of the true history of the Silver Dwarf, and consequently I had no hesitation in telling the professor everything that I have told you.

"After hearing my story, the professor announced his intention of following my sister to Colombo at the earliest moment. I gave him her address, and a letter of introduction, and then we parted. At noon to-day I arrived at Kelelin, and found your note awaiting me. I immediately saddled another horse, and rode down here to tell you the news.

"The professor went on to Tangier, I suppose?" said Nelson Lee.

"Yes," said Dr. Olsen. "He would reach Tangier about midnight last night, and would cross to Gibraltar this morning. He will sail for Colombo in the Orient steamship Ormuz, which is due at Gibraltar on Wednesday."

"And it is now Monday afternoon," said Nelson Lee reflectively. "Is it possible for me to reach Gibraltar in time to catch the Ormuz?"

"It is absolutely impossible," said Dr. Olsen. "The only boat you can possibly catch is the P. and O. boat which calls at Gibraltar on Wednesday week."

"Which gives the professor a clear week's start of me!"

"That's so; but it can't be helped. You cannot catch the Ormuz; that's certain. But I'll tell you what you can do. The professor will not arrive at Colombo until the twenty-fifth, three weeks from to-day, and in the meantime you can cable to my sister that you are coming by the following boat, and that she is not to part with the Silver Dwarf

to anybody, on any pretence whatever, until you arrive."

The detective shook his head.

"You don't know Professor Mark Rymer!" he said. "If he gets to your sister's house a week ahead of me, and if the Silver Dwarf is there, neither telegrams nor anything else will prevent him getting hold of it. No, no! Unless I can catch the Ormuz, I may as well acknowledge that I have failed!"

For several minutes the three men smoked in doleful silence; then the detective turned to the consul.

"When is the Marie Antoinette due at Tetuan?" he asked.

Before the consul could reply, Dr. Olsen sprang to his feet.

"The very thing!" he cried excitedly. "What duffers we were not to think of that before! The Ormuz is due at Marseilles on Friday afternoon. The Marie Antoinette is due at Tetuan to-morrow (Tuesday). It is a three-days' voyage from here to Marseilles. If you leave here in the Marie Antoinette at noon to-morrow, you will reach Marseilles an hour or two before the Ormuz arrives."

"LEFT BEHIND AT PORT SAID!"

FOR once in a way the Fates were kind to Nelson Lee. Leaving Tetuan at noon on Tuesday, he arrived at Marseilles before the Ormuz was even signalled, and consequently he had ample time to wire to Mrs. Howard that he was coming, and to book his passage at the Orient Company's offices, as well as to replenish his wardrobe with certain much-needed articles of attire.

When the Ormuz arrived, he delayed his embarkation until the vessel was on the point of resuming her voyage, when he quietly slipped aboard and wended his way to the smoke-room.

He had scarcely taken his seat ere Mark Rymer strolled in, and the look which came into his face at sight of the detective was ugly in the extreme.

"So you have followed me, have you?" he asked harshly. "How have you managed it?"

"Came aboard by wireless!" replied Nelson Lee airily.

Mark Rymer swayed his head from side to side, and softly rubbed his hands.

"This is sheer stupidity—reckless foolhardiness!" he said. "You are forcing my hands! You are compelling me to destroy you!"

"Then why don't you do it?" retorted Nelson Lee. "You have had several chances, you know."

The professor gazed at him in silence for a moment; then turned on his heel and departed from the cabin without another word. Nelson Lee saw him again at lunch, and yet again at dinner; but after that saw him no more until the Ormuz arrived at Port Said.

She anchored opposite the Custom House at about eight o'clock on the evening of Wednesday, March 13th. The passengers were informed that she would remain there for twenty-four hours in order to coal, and that they were at liberty to go ashore if they chose.

A few of them took advantage of this permission; but the great majority, knowing that there was nothing very attractive to be seen in Port Said, remained aboard.

The following afternoon, however, an event occurred which had the effect of clearing the Ormuz of every single passenger aboard. One of the colossal coalstacks which line the wharves on the east of the town suddenly burst into flame, and by six o'clock in the evening the fire had spread with such appalling rapidity that the whole of the coal supply of Port Said, amounting to over a million tons, was in imminent danger of being reduced to ashes.

Needless to say, the chance of witnessing a conflagration of this magnitude was one which even the most seasoned traveller was unable to resist. Within an hour of the news being received on board the Ormuz, the whole of the passengers, including Mark Rymer and Nelson Lee, had left the vessel, and had flocked to the wharves on the east side of the town.

The detective's object in going ashore was simply to see the fire. Not so with Mark Rymer, however. Although he had studiously avoided Nelson Lee ever since their conversation in the smoke-room, he had never for an instant abandoned his resolve to seize the first opportunity that presented itself of removing the detective from his path, or, at least, of preventing him securing the Silver Dwarf.

On board the steamer no such opportunity had presented itself; but the moment he saw the detective preparing to go ashore, the thought flashed into the professor's mind that now at last the chance for which he had been waiting had arrived. He determined to follow Nelson Lee ashore, and to take advantage of the confusion and excitement which prevailed to make another attempt on his rival's life.

The Ormuz, as already described, was anchored opposite the Custom House, on the west side of the entrance to the Suez Canal. The fire was on one of the wharves on the east side of the entrance. In order to reach this wharf the passengers were compelled to embark in little row-boats, each of which was manned by a dark-skinned Arab. The professor made a desperate effort to secure a place in the same boat as Nelson Lee, in order that he might not lose sight of him. The boat, however, was already full when it came to his turn to embark, and the consequence was that he had to be content with a place in the next boat. There was some delay in getting this second boat off; so that by the time the professor stepped ashore, the detective had already landed, and was lost to view.

For upwards of an hour the professor wandered to and fro along the crowded wharf, hunting for his hated rival. Twice he caught sight of him, less than a dozen yards away; but on each occasion, by the time he had

elbowed his way through the surging crowd, the detective had moved away, and once more vanished from view.

At half-past seven the passengers began to flock back to the Ormuz, which was due to resume her voyage at eight o'clock. By that time, too, the Arab firemen, aided by willing hands from the various vessels in the harbour, had isolated the blazing coal-stack, and were rapidly reducing it to a heap of smouldering embers. In consequence of this, the rest of the spectators also began to disperse, with the natural result that the crowd on the wharf grew thinner and thinner with every passing moment.

At a quarter to eight the professor abandoned his search.

"The Fates are against me!" he growled. "He must have gone back to the steamer, and I may as well follow his example. In any case, I'm only wasting time by remaining ashore, for even if I found him now——"

Suddenly he paused, for at that moment his eyes fell on the well-known figure of the man he sought.

Nelson Lee was standing, somewhat apart from the rest of the crowd, on the very edge of the wharf. His back was turned towards the water, and his eyes were fixed on the fiercely glowing coalstick. A half-smoked cigarette was between his lips, and his hands were thrust into the pockets of his tightly buttoned coat.

"At last!" muttered the professor.

And even as the words burst from his lips a dense black cloud of smoke and steam swept over the wharf, and enveloped it in impenetrable darkness.

Quivering with excitement, the professor glided across the wharf in the direction of the spot where he had seen Nelson Lee standing. At the same instant the detective turned on his heel, with the intention of retracing his steps to the landing-stage and returning to the steamer. Ere he had taken a couple of strides, however, a dark form suddenly loomed up in front of him, and before he had even time to remove his hands from his pockets, Mark Rymer seized him by the throat and hurled him backwards over the edge of the wharf.

There was a stifled cry, followed by a splash. Then a tongue of flame leaped out of the top of the burning coalstack, and revealed the figure of Mark Rymer racing down the wharf towards the landing-stage.

"Seen anything of Mr. Lee?" asked the purser, as he stepped aboard the steamer.

The professor shook his head.

"Hasn't he returned yet?" he asked.

"No," said the purser, with an anxious glance towards the wharves on the opposite side of the harbour. "He's the only one of the passengers unaccounted for. Don't know what he's thinking about to remain on shore so long. He knows that we leave at eight o'clock, and that it is impossible to wait for him."

He had scarcely finished speaking when a bell began to clang.

"That's the last bell," said the purser irritably. "If he doesn't turn up within the next five minutes we shall have to go on without him."

Five minutes passed—five minutes that seemed an eternity to Mark Rymer—but still there was no sign of Nelson Lee. Then the clatter of the donkey-engine as it heaved up the anchor added its din to the hoot of the steamer's siren. Punctually on the stroke of eight o'clock the steamer's screws began to revolve, and a moment later she was slipping through the sluggish waters of the great canal, whilst the purser was entering in his book, opposite the name of Nelson Lee: "Left behind at Port Said."

THE PROFESSOR DRAWS A BLANK.

EARLY on the morning of March 25th the Ormuz arrived at Colombo.

She dropped her anchor in the bay, some distance from the pier, and the services of a small steam-tender were requisitioned for the purpose of conveying the passengers and their baggage ashore.

As soon as his luggage had been "passed" by the Custom House officials, Rymer made his way to the Grand Oriental Hotel, just opposite the landing-stage.

"I want to leave my baggage here whilst I make a short trip up-country," he said to the proprietor. "I shall probably stay some time here when I return. You have no objection to taking charge of my things in the meantime?"

"None whatever, sir. When do you propose to start up-country?"

"As soon as possible," said the professor. "Do you happen to know a tea-planter of the name of Harvey Howard?"

The hotel proprietor shook his head.

"He is the manager of the Kanapediwattee Tea Estate," continued the professor, after consulting the letter of introduction given to him by Dr. Olsen. "He lives, I believe, at Ulapane. Is that far from Colombo?"

"About sixty-five or seventy miles."

"Can I get there by train?"

"Yes. There are two trains a day to Ulapane. The first has already gone. The second leaves at half-past one."

The professor consulted his watch. It was not yet ten o'clock. He engaged a rickshaw, and went for a two-hours' jaunt round the town. He returned to the hotel for lunch at noon. At half-past one he took his seat in a luxurious double-roofed railway-carriage, and started on his journey to Ulapane.

For the first two or three miles after leaving Colombo his route lay through level and comparatively uninteresting country. Then the railway began to ascend, and to wind its way in and out amongst lofty hills and mountains.

With every succeeding mile the scenery became more gorgeous and more diversified. Forests of cocoa-palms alternated with vast plantations of cinnamon and cinchona. At one time there would be nothing to be seen but an endless succession of tea and coffee estates, with here and there a bungalow, or a line of tea-pickers' huts. Then a sudden bend of the line would change all this, as if

at the touch of a wizard's hand, and would reveal a panorama of rugged mountain-peaks, interspersed with swiftly rushing rivers and foaming cascades.

It was half-past six, and growing dusk, when the train reached Ulapane, which was a little wayside station half a mile from the village. The professor was the only passenger to alight, and the stationmaster—who was an Englishman—regarded him with mingled curiosity and surprise. It was not often that a European arrived at Ulapane, and when one did it was still less often that he was not met at the station by one of the neighbouring planters.

"Do you know where Mr. Harvey Howard lives?" asked the professor.

A dangerous light gleamed in the professor's eyes, but he merely bowed, replaced the letter in his pocket, and turned on his heel and glided away.

"Yes, sir," said the stationmaster.

"Is it far from here?"

"About five miles."

"Can I hire a horse, or a trap, or a rickshaw?"

The stationmaster laughed at his simplicity.

"You can't," he said. "This isn't Colombo—it's Ulapane!"

The professor ground his teeth with vexation.

"Then I shall have to walk, I suppose," he said. "Can you direct me to the house?"

Before the stationmaster had time to reply, a tall and well-proportioned native strolled into the station. He was barefooted; but in addition to the usual loincloth, he wore a short white linen jacket.

"The very man!" exclaimed the stationmaster. "You see that chap at the other end of the platform? Well, his name is Rawana, and he's one of Mr. Howard's native foremen. If you give him half a rupee he'll take you to Mr. Howard's bungalow, and will carry your bag into the bargain."

The professor thanked him, and hurried to where the Cingalese was standing.

"Your name is Rawana, I understand," he said, "and you are one of Mr. Howard's foremen. Is that so?"

The man's face suddenly took on a vindictive scowl.

"No, sar," he replied, "you make one big mistake. Me work no more for Massa Howard. He call me drunken thief—before de pickers, too!—and he say dat if he find me any more on de estate he beat me wid his whip. But I make him smart for dat one time! You tell him so from me!"

Mark Rymer instantly grasped the situation. Rawana had evidently been discharged from his employment for drunkenness and theft. Apparently, too, Mr. Howard had humiliated him before the rest of the coolies by threatening to horsewhip him if he found him on the estate again. All this had evidently roused the baser passions of Rawana's nature, and transformed him from a

cringing and obsequious servant into a bitter and vindictive enemy.

A gleam of satisfaction illumined the professor's deep-set eyes as he realised these facts. As the reader will remember, the Kaid of Kelelin had given the Silver Dwarf to Dr. Olsen, who had given it to his sister, Mrs. Howard, who was the wife of the manager of the Kanapediwattee Tea Estate. The professor had stolen a march on Nelson Lee, and had interviewed Dr. Olsen first. The doctor had given him Mrs. Howard's address, and had also given him a letter of introduction, in which he had asked his sister to allow the professor to examine the Silver Dwarf, and take away whatever papers it might contain.

So far so good. Since then, however, the professor had discovered that Nelson Lee had also interviewed Dr. Olsen, and had got Mrs Howard's address. Such being the case, the professor argued to himself that the detective would probably have wired to Mrs. Howard, telling her not to part with the Silver Dwarf to anybody but himself. Moreover, the cable would probably have been sent off from Marseilles, so that even if Nelson Lee had been drowned in the docks at Port Said, the mischief would still have been done.

Under these circumstances, the professor was quite prepared to find that Mrs. Howard would refuse to give him any information concerning the Silver Dwarf. If she did refuse, he meant to resort to violence—to burn the house down, if necessary—sooner than allow the Silver Dwarf to fall into the hands of Nelson Lee.

And if he had to resort to violence, it would manifestly be useful if he could count upon the assistance of somebody who knew the house and district — somebody who would not be disposed to stick at trifles.

"And here's the very man!" he muttered to himself, glancing at Rawana.

He thrust his hand into his pocket and pulled out a couple of rupees.

"I want to go to Mr. Howard's house," he said. "He is no friend of mine. Possibly he is my enemy; I know not yet. His wife has a silver image which I wish to possess. I am going to ask her to give it up to me. If she refuses, I shall have need of help to take the thing by force. I have much money, and those who help me will be well rewarded. You understand?"

Rawana nodded, and bared his gleaming teeth in an evil smile.

"Then take my bag and lead the way to the house," said the professor.

They left the station and started up the steep and rugged road which led to the village, a straggling collection of whitewashed huts, thatched with straw. After passing through the village, they emerged into more or less open country, a broad and rapid river being on their left, and tea plantations on their right. Two miles from the station they came to a roughly-constructed swing-bridge, which Rawana explained had been built by Mr. Howard. They crossed this bridge, doubled back along the riverside, and ultimately struck a bridle-path.

"Me go no farder now!" said Rawana suddenly. "Me no want Massa Howard to see me and beat me wid his whip. You follow dis path for one, two mile, den you come to de huts where de tea-pickers live. Soon as you have passed dem, you see one little hill, and on de top of dat is Massa Howard's bungalow. Me wait for you here."

"Very well," said Mark Rymer, as he took his bag from the other's hand.

Then he glided away through the gathering gloom.

After trudging along the bridle-path for about two miles, he came to the rows of picker's huts. Half a mile beyond these was a steepish hill, on whose summit stood a long, whitewashed bungalow, with a verandah in front.

It was eight o'clock when Mark Rymer reached the foot of the verandah steps. At the top of the steps was an open door, leading into a spacious entrance-hall, which was furnished as a drawing-room and illumined by a couple of paraffin lamps.

Both Mr. Howard and his wife were sitting in this apartment. The former, upon hearing footsteps on the verandah, laid down his paper and advanced to the door.

"Good-evening!" said the professor, raising his hat. "Mr. Harvey-Howard, I presume?"

"That's my name," said the young tea-planter, regarding him with a keen and penetrating stare. "Am I right in supposing that you are Professor Mark Rymer?"

The professor started, but recovered his composure in an instant.

"How did you recognise me?" he asked.

"I didn't recognise you," said Mr. Howard bluntly; "but we had been warned that a Professor Mark Rymer would probably pay us a visit, and therefore I guessed that you must be that gentleman."

A venomous look crept over the professor's face.

"Your warning, as you call it, came from Nelson Lee, I presume?" he asked.

"That's so," said the planter.

"Then you know what has brought me here?"

"Yes. You have come to make inquiries about a silver statuette which was given to my wife by her brother, Dr. Olsen."

"Exactly!" said the professor, as he drew out Dr. Olsen's letter. "I have a letter of introduction here from Dr. Olsen ——"

"I do not wish to see it," said the planter, waving it aside.

"Pardon me; it is addressed to your wife."

"Do you wish to see it, my dear?" asked Mr. Howard, turning to his wife.

"No, thank you!" she replied, without raising her head.

A dangerous light gleamed in the professor's eyes, but he merely bowed, replaced the letter in his pocket, and turned on his heel and glided away.

PLOTTING TO ATTACK THE BUNGALOW.

"YOU back soon!" exclaimed Rawana when Mark Rymer rejoined him at the end of the bridle-path. "Me tink you surely stay for tiffin at de bungalow."

"Curse him! He never even asked me inside the house!" replied the professor, white with rage. "He treated me like the veriest dog!"

"Dat Massa Howard's way," said the native, with a grin. "You make him smart for dat, I tink?"

"By James, I will!" hissed the professor.

"Good—good! Me like to hear dat!" chuckled Rawana, rubbing his hands. "Massa Howard your enemy well as mine. We pardners now. You help me get revenge, me help you get dat silver image you tell me of. But how do it? What your plan?"

"We won't discuss our plans here," said the professor. "Is there no place near at hand where we can talk without any danger of being overheard?"

Rawana pondered for a moment in silence. "De old rest-house!" he exclaimed. "Come wid me, and I show it to you."

Resthouse, it should here be explained, is the Cingalese name for a wayside inn. On the other side of the river, almost opposite the swing-bridge already described, there had once been one of these wayside inns, but it had long since been abandoned, and now was little more than a crumbling ruin.

"How many persons are there in Mr. Howard's bungalow?" asked the professor, when he and Rawana had taken refuge in the ruined rest-house.

"Four," replied the native. "Massa Howard and his wife, and de two servants."

"Are the servants men or women?"

"Men," replied Rawana. "Dey are Tamils, like myself."

"Will they help us if we raid the house?"

"No, no, no!" said Rawana, with a vigorous shake of his head. "Dey not lift a finger against Massa Howard. Dey die for him!"

"Can we bribe any of the tea-pickers to help us?"

Again Rawana shook his head.

"De tea-pickers am fools!" he said. "Dey kiss Massa Howard's hand, and call him good, kind gentleman. Dey hang us on de nearest tree if dey hear us say wrong word about him."

"Well, we're bound to have help from somewhere," said the professor testily. "It is impossible for you and me to overpower Mr. Howard and the two servants, to say nothing of Mrs. Howard. Besides, I don't want to appear in the business unless I'm absolutely compelled."

"What your plan, den?" asked Rawana, for the second time.

"My plan is this," replied the professor. "I have three revolvers in this bag, and any amount of cartridges. If you can find five other men to help you, I will lend you the revolvers, and I will give you a hundred rupees apiece. With the help of your five confederates you must break into the bungalow to-night, and secure all the inmates. When you have bound them, you must lock them up in the stables. I shall then enter the house, and search for the silver image. When I have found it, I shall go down to Ulapane and return to Colombo by the first train in the morning. After I have left you, you can loot the house and help yourself to anything you may take a fancy to. But the first thing to be done is to find five suitable men to help you. Can you do so?"

"Me find five time five for a hundred rupees apiece!" replied Rawana.

"Where will you find them?"

"In Ulapane village. Me go dere now and bring dem back. What say?"

"By all means!" said Mark Rymer. "I will wait here until you return."

Rawana accordingly took his departure. It was midnight when he returned, bringing with him five stalwart, evil-looking natives. In a few brief sentences the professor explained his plans; and then, with Rawana at their head, and the professor bringing up the rear, the little band marched out of the ruined rest-house, and turned their faces towards Harvey Howard's bungalow.

The night was so dark that nothing could be seen of the bungalow until they arrived at the garden-gate. The faintest of faint breezes was rustling the leaves of the acacias which fringed the carriage-drive, and somewhere in the distance a hungry jackal was howling. With these exceptions the silence was complete.

After passing through the garden-gate, Rawana bade his companions halt whilst he went forward and reconnoitred. In five minutes he returned.

"All well!" he said, addressing the professor. "No lights, no noise; everybody in bed. You give us de pistols."

The professor opened his bag and drew out the three revolvers. He loaded them, and handed one to Rawana.

"To whom shall I give the other two?" he asked.

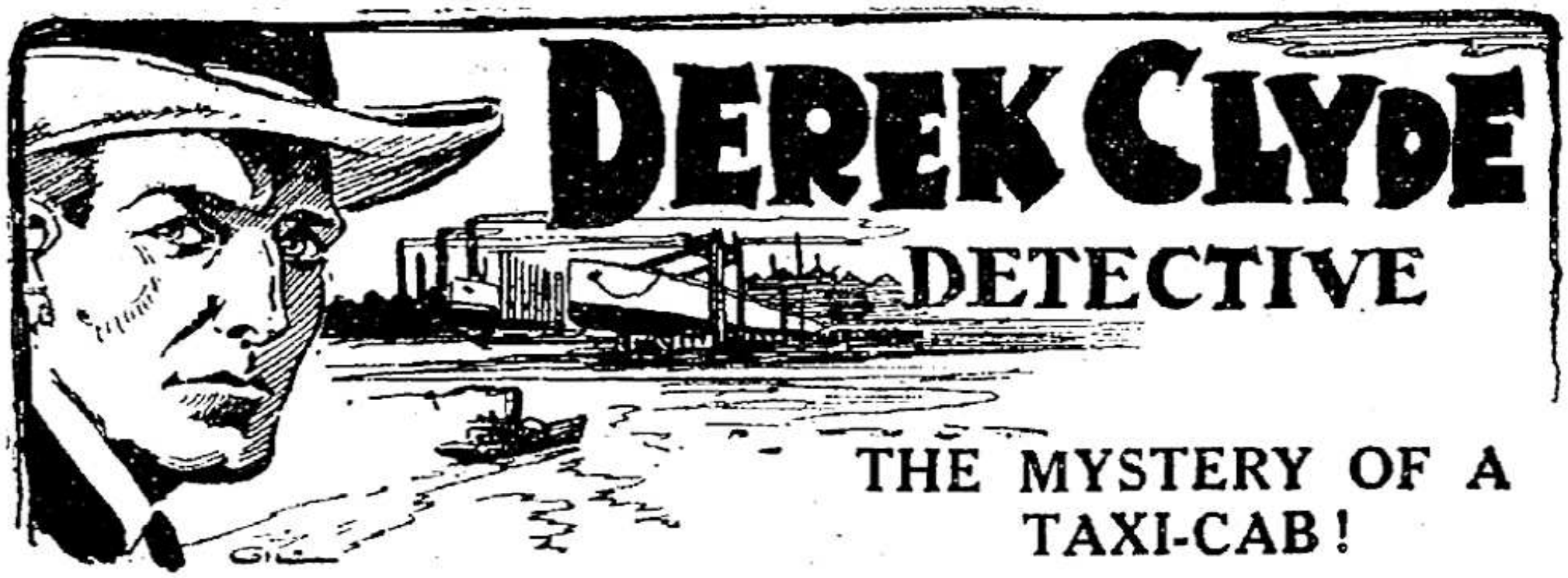
"Give Ramasamy one," said Rawana, pointing to one of the natives, "and give Kangarny de other."

The professor obeyed.

(Another Thrilling Instalment Next Week)

OUR DETECTIVE STORY SECTION

GRAND NEW COMPLETE TALES OF THE FAMOUS SCOTS DETECTIVE!



DEREK CLYDE
DETECTIVE

THE MYSTERY OF A TAXI-CAB!

CLYDE'S THEORY.

"IT is a queer business, though," remarked Inspector Murdoch, as he and Superintendent Brent, with Derek Clyde, were driving to the scene where a deserted cab had been found, bearing indisputable evidence of a desperate struggle having taken place recently.

The car had rapidly covered a distance of three miles. It swung round a bend and stopped close to the abandoned taxicab, which was standing in the middle of the road. To the right were dense woods, and to the left a bare and rugged slope fell steeply to a wooded valley through which ran the Calder. The detective and his companions stepped from the car and went forward to the cab, which was indeed in a terrible state.

"By Jove!" Clyde murmured.

The door was open, and the window of it was shattered. There was a bullet-hole in the opposite window, and there was blood inside of the vehicle. It was spattered on the glass, on the cushions, and on the floor; and in front of the seat was a silver-mounted stick, also blood-stained, that had been broken into three pieces.

"Is everything as you left it?" Clyde asked of the superintendent.

"Yes; nothing has been disturbed," Mr. Brent replied. "Nobody could have been here since."

A scrutiny of the interior of the cab having revealed nothing to the detective, he followed a thin trail of blood that ran from it for two or three yards to the edge of the declivity on the left. A dozen feet almost sheer below him was a projecting ledge.

On this he perceived some stains of blood and a clump of grass that had been crushed flat, and, gazing farther down, he saw a grassy slope that stretched to the stream beneath. There was nothing to be seen on its bare surface, and it was obvious to Clyde that, if a body had fallen on to the ledge, and slid off, it could not have rolled all of the way to the bottom of the valley.

Inspector Murdoch and the superintendent had been watching him. He returned to the cab, and his companions walked behind him as he held to another trail of blood that led for a dozen yards along the road towards the glen.

It ended abruptly, and where it ended was a pale, crimson patch. A little pool of blood had soaked into the earth here, but there were no further signs of blood, and no traces of footprints were visible at all, the ground being very hard and dry.

"Well, what do you think of it?" Mr. Brent inquired.

Clyde shook his head absently. He was filling his pipe, and when he had put a match to it he remarked that he had finished with his investigations for the present.

"I will reconstruct for you exactly what happened, to the best of my belief," he continued. "Having brought his fare to this lonely spot, by the latter's instructions or otherwise, Jim Galbraith got down from his seat, went round to the door, and opened it, and immediately attacked the man.

"There was a desperate struggle in the cab. The man used his stick on the chauffeur—you will bear in mind that it belonged to the fare—and Galbraith finally wrenched it from him and broke it to bits. The man then presumably drew a revolver, fired at Galbraith, and wounded him. There was another brief fight between the two outside of the cab. They scuffled to the edge of the hill, and the man pitched over and landed on the ledge.

"Galbraith staggered along the road for a short distance, and fell from exhaustion and loss of blood. He presently recovered, bandaged his wound by some means so that it stopped bleeding, and went off. And either before or afterwards, the man with whom he had fought also regained his strength. He climbed up to the road, and got his bag, which I dare say was in the cab. And then

ne, too, disappeared, taking with him the bag and his revolver."

The inspector was inclined to be sceptical. Mr. Brent had been listening to the conversation with close attention and interest.

"Assuming that you are right, Mr. Clyde," he said, "Galbraith's motive was, of course, robbery, and perhaps murder as well."

"I am doubtful as to that," Clyde answered—"very doubtful. I have known the chauffeur for a year, and I took him to be a steady, honest, and respectable fellow. I can't easily believe that he could have been capable of such crimes."

"Then why did he bring the gentleman to this seeluded neighbourhood?"

"He may have been told to bring him here, Mr. Brent."

"If robbery was not his motive, why did he attack him?"

"That is the question. I imagine there was some reason which I cannot fathom."

"There is another point, Mr. Clyde. Since both of the men were able to walk off, why has not one of them—the one who was attacked by the other—reported the matter to the local police?"

"That is the mystery, sir—or rather, one of the mysterious features. It is a baffling case, and an interesting one. I am glad to have had the opportunity of investigating it. I have no clue as yet, apart from my vague deductions, but——"

Clyde paused abruptly. He looked around him, puffing his pipe, and turned to the superintendent.

"Are there any dwellings in the immediate neighbourhood?" he asked.

"Only one," Mr. Brent replied. "It is a place called Orange Firs, and it lies a quarter of a mile back in those woods yonder, which belong to the estate. A Mr. Edward Harridge lives there."

"How many are in the family?"

"Two only. Mr. Harridge and a young lady, Miss Charlotte Maxwell, to whom he is guardian?"

"Did you make inquiries there?" Clyde resumed.

"Yes, I called this morning," the superintendent answered, "and I saw a servant, who said that his master was in London. He also stated that neither he nor Miss Maxwell, nor the other servants, had heard a pistol-shot last evening."

"In driving from Glasgow with his fare, Brent, would the chauffeur have passed the entrance to the grounds of Orange Firs?"

"Yes, Mr. Clyde, he would have done so. Why did you want to know? Of what importance can the fact be? Galbraith's fare could not have been going to Orange Firs. The servant told me that no visitor was expected."

Clyde evaded the questions. It was from mere curiosity that he had inquired. He did not even suspect that there might be a link between Orange Firs and the affair of the cab. The case fascinated him, and he wished to be alone to pursue his investigations, judging that he would thus have a better chance of success.

"You and Brent go back to East Kilbride in my car, Murdoch," he said. "I will have a look round, on the chance of making some discovery, and I will walk on to the town later in the day."

THE PEERING FACE.

INSPECTOR MURDOCH was accustomed to the detective's somewhat peculiar methods, and so was the superintendent. Knowing that he wanted to be rid of them, and that he would have his own way, they got into the car and drove off, vanishing round a curve.

For a few moments Clyde stood in the middle of the road gazing idly about him, a gleam of speculation in his eyes. He looked over the valley, and as he turned from it to the woods on his left he gave a quick start. For a fleeting instant he saw a face peering at him from the tangled cover, and he was sure it was that of a woman or a girl. It was a pale and frightened face. It disappeared at once, but Clyde hadn't a doubt that the person still had him under furtive scrutiny, as he heard no rustling of bushes, no patter of retreating footsteps.

"By Jove, that's a curious thing!" he murmured.

The frightened face he had seen had a significance for him. He had stumbled on a clue to the mystery, and he must be very much on his guard. His first step must be to deceive that invisible person, to allay her fears.

He looked across the valley of the Calder again, standing motionless for a short interval. He tapped the ashes from his pipe, and filled and lit it; then walked briskly away in the direction of East Kilbride, whistling cheerily as he went.

When he had gone for a couple of hundred yards, and had got well beyond the bend of the road, he slipped into the woods and began to retrace his course. He crept back under cover of the deep foliage until he was opposite to the deserted cab, when he stopped to listen.

All was quiet. He could not hear a sound. Satisfied that nobody was lurking in the vicinity now, he pressed warily and slowly across the plantation. He soon knew that he was on the right scent. He presently observed on a blade of grass a drop of dried blood, and a short distance beyond it he paused to scrutinise a patch of soft, damp earth, and perceived on it the faint footprints of two persons, one clearly a man and the other a woman.

He went on for nearly a quarter of a mile, until he saw through the trees and shrubbery a stately old dwelling, clothed with ivy, and surrounded by firs. He gazed at it for a brief interval, seeing no sign of life there.

And then, elated by his discoveries, he rapidly returned to the road. What he had learned had not thrown much light on the mystery. He had by no means solved it, but he knew that it would not be long until he had.

"I have cleared up one point," he said to himself. "I know where one of the missing men is, but I can't be sure whether he is the chauffeur Galbraith or the man who hired the cab. I will ascertain that later. My job now is to find the other man, though it is doubtful if I shall succeed. And yet there is a very good chance of it."

His mind absorbed in what he had discovered, Clyde descended from the brow of the hill to the projecting ledge below, where he paused to examine the crushed grass and the bloodstains. Then he started down the bare and rugged slope beneath him, noticing more traces of blood at intervals; and when he had reached the bottom, and dived into the thickets that grew here, he observed on the moist earth by the edge of the stream a vague trail of footprints that led to the south, in the opposite direction to East Kilbride.

"Ah, I'm in luck!" he murmured. "I am pretty sure now that I shall find my man. He has probably sought shelter in some lonely cottage. If he was badly hurt—and I imagine he was—it is not likely that he has got away by rail."

Clyde went steadily on, but at a slow pace, now losing the slender trail, and now finding it again. It led him gradually into a wilder part of the valley, amongst boulders and stunted trees, through dense coppices, here climbing the hillside and now dipping to the level.

Thus he held to the scent for a mile, and for another mile. He had no intention of abandoning it, though he was beginning to think that there was not much chance of the injured man being still in the neighbourhood.

At length, as he paused to fill his pipe, he heard a rustling noise to his left. He looked up, and saw a face gazing at him from a thicket that was a couple of yards above him—a ghastly face distorted with terror, pale as ashes, scratched, and bruised, and bloodstained. There was a flash of steel, a jet of flame, a sharp report. A bullet whistled by Clyde's ear, and the next instant he leapt with one agile bound to the spot where the smoke was curling, and plunged into the cover.

A man was crouching there, and he was in the act of firing a second shot when the detective seized him, and wrenched the revolver from his grasp. The two grappled, and after a brief struggle they pitched out of the bushes and fell. They toppled down the slope, and rolled across the narrow path, and slid and rolled farther down to a grassy glade by the brink of the Calder Water.

The man had been fighting desperately, with insane fury, raving and cursing. His strength had now failed him, and he loosed his grip. Clyde rose, breathless and panting, and took a close look at his prisoner.

He was a man of about thirty, well-dressed, with a black moustache. His clothes were muddy and dishevelled, and one sleeve of his coat was torn nearly off. He was not the chauffeur.

He had evidently been thrashed by Jim Galbraith, and he had been so badly hurt that he had not been able to come any farther than this lonely spot, where he had been hiding in the thickets since the previous evening. He was a pitiful sight, his features battered and cut, one eye blackened and swollen. With a helping hand from the detective he scrambled to his feet, and swayed against a boulder, trembling like a leaf.

"Is he dead?" he gasped. "Did—did I kill him? I hope not!"

"Did you kill whom?" asked Clyde. "The chauffeur you fought with?"

"I—I mean Angus Harridge," was the husky reply. "That's who he was, though I didn't recognise him at first!"

"Angus Harridge—eh? What relation to Mr. Edward Harridge of Orange Firs?"

"His—his son."

"Indeed! You have told me something I didn't even suspect."

"Why don't you say whether I have killed him or not? Don't keep me in suspense! I knew the police would be after me! You're one of them, I suppose? I saw you following my tracks! I am sorry I fired at you! I was half-mad, and didn't realise what I was doing! If Harridge is dead it isn't my fault! I swear it isn't! He attacked me first, and I didn't shoot him until—until——"

The man's voice faltered and choked. He reeled forward, and fell heavily on the ground, where he lay in a state of utter collapse. It was only by superhuman efforts, prompted by terror, that he had been able to offer so strenuous a resistance. Kneeling by him, Clyde felt his pulse, and found that it was scarcely beating. He shook his head gravely.

"Angus Harridge!" he murmured. "What can it mean? I am wiser than I was before, but not as regards the solution of the mystery."

He glanced helplessly around him, wondering what he should do. He climbed up to the copse of bushes on the hillside, and after a short search there he discovered a small brown bag. He did not open it. He descended to the stream, and tore his handkerchief into strips, with which he bound the unconscious man's wrists and ankles, though he knew there was little likelihood that he would have the strength to escape. He dragged him back from the water, into the shade of a tree. And then he retraced his steps down the valley, taking the bag with him.

"I will return with Murdoch in the car,

and drive the fellow to East Kilbride," he said to himself. "He is in a bad way, and I doubt if he will be able to tell his story for a few days. But I won't have to wait until he recovers. I shall learn the whole truth at Orange Firs."

THE MISSING CHAUFFEUR.

IT was late in the afternoon of the same day when Derek Clyde walked up the winding drive that led to Orange Firs, and rang the bell. A manservant opened the door. Clyde asked to see Miss Maxwell, and the servant took him to a sitting-room, where he waited for a few moments.

When Miss Charlotte Maxwell appeared he recognised her at once. It was her face he had seen peering at him from the thickets. She was a very pretty girl, tall and slim, with fair hair and blue eyes. She was evidently apprehensive. She looked uneasily at the visitor, who introduced himself briefly.

"I have called," he continued, "to inquire about Mr. Angus Harridge. I trust he has not been seriously injured."

The girl drew a deep breath. The colour faded from her cheeks, and she pressed her hands to her bosom.

"Angus Harridge!" she repeated. "I—I don't know anything of him, sir!"

"I am sure you do," said Clyde. "He is in this house. You brought him here last evening."

They toppled down the slope, and rolled across the narrow path, and slid and rolled further down to a grassy glade by the brink of the Calder Water.

"Oh, no; you are mistaken! Won't you believe me? I—I have told you that——"

"You have told me what is not true, Miss Maxwell. I am well aware that Mr. Edward Harridge's son is here, and I insist on seeing him."

Charlotte Maxwell trembled, and turned

whiter. She was on the verge of tears, but by a strong effort she controlled herself.

"Yes, Angus is here," she faltered. "I admit it. I will take you to him. But please be very quiet. The servants know nothing, and I don't want them to know. Not until Mr. Harridge returns. He is in London, and he won't be back for several days."

The detective followed her to the hall, and she led him noiselessly up the stairs to the second floor of the dwelling, and along a passage. She took a key from her pocket, and unlocked and opened a door. And Clyde stepped through it into a bed-chamber, where a clean-shaven young man, with his arm bandaged, was reclining on a couch by a blazing fire.

"Somebody to see you, Angus," said the girl. "It is Mr. Derek Clyde. He discovered that you were here. I was afraid he would. I had to bring him up."

Angus Harridge sat erect, at a loss for words for a moment.

Clyde nodded to him, and seated himself on a chair by the couch.

"This is a queer business, Galbraith," he said. "I haven't got to the bottom of it yet, though I have succeeded in tracing you and also your fare."

"You have found him?" exclaimed the young man. "He—he isn't dead, is he?"

"No; far from it. He will recover from his injuries in a day or so."

"Thank Heaven for that, sir! Thank Heaven! It is a great relief to me!"

"I dare say it is. Let me hear the whole story, and if you are not to blame I will do what I can for you."

"I am not to blame, Mr. Clyde—not in a way, though I took the law into my own hands. I was justified. When you have learned all——"

The chauffeur paused. He was silent for a few seconds, and then, while Charlotte Maxwell stood in suspense by his side, he went on with his narrative.

"Angus Harridge is my real name," he said, "and I am the son of Mr. Edward Harridge. He and I quarrelled three years ago, and it was on account of Lottie here, who is his ward. He wanted me to marry her, and I refused. I was young, and I wanted to see a bit of life before I settled down. It was a bitter quarrel we had, and it ended in my going off in anger.

"And now to tell you what happened last evening, Mr. Clyde. It was in the afternoon that a gentleman who had a small bag hired my cab near St. Enoch Station. I didn't observe him closely. He told me to drive him to East Kilbride, and to go on from there by the lonely road that skirts the estate of Orange Firs, and from those instructions I felt pretty sure that he was the man Raeburn who was paying attentions to my father's ward.

"I meant to listen to his conversation with Lottie, if I could, and put a stop to the business. That is what was in my mind. But when I had stopped on the road yonder and got down from the cab, and my fare had opened the door, I suddenly recognised him as the cardsharper Morland, who had cheated me out of all my money when I was in London. It wasn't until I spoke that he knew who I was, as I had changed since I had seen him last.

"I was in a fiery passion. I snatched the fellow's stick from him, and swore I would thrash him within an inch of his life. We had a terrible fight, inside of the cab and out of it.

"He fired two shots, one hitting me in the fleshy part of the arm, and the other shattering a window of the cab. We reeled to the edge of the road, where we had another short fight. Then Morland toppled over, and fell on to a ledge below. He lay there motionless, and I was afraid he had been killed.

"I was exhausted by my efforts, and weak from loss of blood. I staggered along the road and dropped. I was unconscious for a little time, and when I recovered Lottie was with me. She had been in the grounds, and had heard the pistol-shots. I told her everything, and she begged me to come home with her, saying that my father was in London, and that it would be safe for me to hide in my old bed-chamber.

"With her assistance I walked to the house, and none of the servants saw us as she helped me upstairs. She dressed and bandaged my wound, and it is doing nicely. That is my story, Mr. Clyde. And now tell me of that scoundrel Morland. Where did you find him?"

Clyde gave a brief account of what he had done, speaking of his discovery of the injured man, and of his desperate struggle with him.

"There is no reason for either of you to be worried," he said. "As for the man Morland, he has been sufficiently punished, and it will be best to let him go free on the condition that he holds his tongue, which I am certain he will be more than willing to do."

* * * * * *

In the course of a few days Harry Morland recovered from his injuries and departed for London, glad to be let off so easily. And a week later, when Clyde had ceased to think of the affair, he received a letter from Orange Firs that ran as follows:

"Dear Mr. Clyde,—I am writing to thank you for what you have done for both of us. Mr. Harridge returned last week, and when he had learned everything he freely forgave his son. I have always cared for Angus, and he cares as much for me. We are to be married in the spring, and we hope that you will come to our wedding. Thanking you again for the happiness we owe to you,

"Very sincerely yours,

"CHARLOTTE MAXWELL."

THE END.

(Continued from page 14)

two burly fellows who hailed from one of the little Essex sea-coast towns. They were genuinely interested in their stay in California—for Dorrie allowed his crew plenty of liberty when in port. They were all tried and trusted men.

These two men were named Jim Harding and Tom Baxter. They belonged to the engine-room staff, but nobody would have thought it at present, for they were extra smart in their shore-going uniforms.

"Nice and cool now, Jim, after the heat of the day," remarked Tom Baxter, as the pair paused along the dock. "Shan't be sorry to get away from here, though it's nice enough, takin' it altogether."

"We've been in many a worse spot than this, Tom," declared Mr. Harding. "Shan't come to no harm if we never strike a worse port. And you can say what you like, it ain't every place that has these nice, cool evenings."

"No, you're right there, Jim," said the other.

They lit their pipes, and nodded to a seafaring man who was about to pass them. The latter was the mate of the schooner, which was docked some little distance. He had spoken to Harding and Baxter once before.

"Doing anything just at the minute?" asked the man, pausing.

"Not much, as the saying is," said Harding. "Just taking a breath of fresh air. I reckon we'll be sailing inside of a week."

The newcomer nodded. He went by the somewhat curious name of Seelig, and hailed from 'Frisco. And his schooner was named the Henry R. Cane, after her owner and skipper, Captain Harry Cane.

"Might as well walk along with me," suggested Mr Seelig. "You guys come from a British boat, and I don't know how you stand regarding liquor. Got plenty on board, I dare say?"

Baxter grinned.

"May be, but we don't get much," he replied. "Not as we're particular keen. A drop tastes good now and again——"

"I've got some rare old Scotch in my cabin," said Mr. Seelig invitingly. "Come right along, and we'll have a nip together."

"The genuine stuff?" asked Harding doubtfully. "Some feller gave us a tot two days ago, and it was like poison——"

"Plenty of that about, but mine's the real article," interrupted Mr. Seelig. "Some of the best whisky that was ever brought across. Come on, let's go. I've kinder took a fancy to you guys."

Harding and Baxter hardly liked to back out, and they good-naturedly accompanied the mate of the Henry R. Cane. Moreover, they were not at all averse to a little taste of good old Scotch. It was scarce enough in any American port.

So within ten minutes they were sitting down in Mr. Seelig's little cabin. The schooner was a fairly comfortable old boat, and she plied regularly between some of the nearer islands of the South Seas group and San Francisco, occasionally dropping into Los Angeles Harbour by way of a change.

The two members of the Wanderer's crew were not disappointed. The whisky was, indeed, of the very finest quality. Neither of the men were drinkers—Dorrie wouldn't have had them if they were that kind. At the same time, there could be no possible harm in taking a drop now and again.

"I guess you've got a pretty soft job on that yacht," remarked Mr. Seelig, as he sat back in his chair. "I've seen that Lord Dorrimore guy. Looks one of the reg'lar English swells—I figure he's got more money than sense, eh?"

Baxter shook his head.

"Don't you believe it," he said loyally. "Lord Dorrimore's one of the best that ever breathed! Good money—good quarters—plenty of shore leave—and many a tip now and again. And his lordship is dead square—as brave as they make 'em, and brainy, too."

"Is that so?" said Mr. Seelig, raising his eyebrows. "Guess you surprise me. One wouldn't think it to look at the feller. I dare say he goes cruising about a bit, eh—taking it just as he likes?"

"Yes, and he gets into some very hot adventures now and again," said Harding. "He's got something on the go now, as the saying is. None of us exactly know what the game happens to be, but it looks like some excitement on one o' these Pacific islands."

Mr. Seelig nodded, and helped himself to another drink. He offered his guests a refill, too, but they refused. They certainly did not imagine that they were being systematically pumped. Seelig seemed so pleasant and so genial that they didn't guess the purport of his friendliness.

"One of these Pacific islands, eh?" repeated the mate of the schooner. "Something to do with the blacks, no doubt. A girl, may be——"

"Not likely!" said Mr. Baxter quickly. "His lordship ain't that kind. Besides, this island is uninhabited—as bare as a cricket ball! Blessed if we know what the guv'nor can see in it."

"Just one o' them deserted atolls, hey?"

"Well, not exactly an atoll," said Baxter. "This island's a queer-looking one—kind of a hump in the middle, with a couple of palm-trees stuck at the top. Maybe you've sighted it? A longish island, without much of a beach, and——"

"Gosh!" said Seelig abruptly.

His two guests were rather surprised. The man was staring at them intently, and his eyes had narrowed considerably. But he pulled himself together with a start, and took a quick drink, in order to hide his expression.

"Can't say as I've seen it," he said, with

an attempt at carelessness. "A longish island, with a hump?"

"Yes."

"Two palm-trees on the top?"

"Yes."

"Any other special feature?"

"Well, not much, except that there's a sort of a cove where a ship might find decent anchorage," said Baxter.

He paused almost abruptly as he caught a further glint in Seelig's eye. Somehow, the mate's behaviour was just a little suspicious. He was now evincing rather too much interest in the description of this island. And the two members of the Wanderer's crew decided that it wasn't up to them to talk. Dorrie had, indeed, warned them against speaking too freely with strangers.

They were about to arise, in order to take their departure, when Mr Seelig glanced up towards the open hatch. The sound of a footstep had made itself heard above, on deck.

"Guess that's the skipper," said the mate. "Stay right here. The old man'll be kinder pleased to meet you guys. I'll bring him in."

And Mr. Seelig left the cabin, and closed the door after him.

CHAPTER VI.

INTRODUCING CAPTAIN HURRICANE.

CAPTAIN HENRY R. CANE was something of a character.

Up and down the Pacific Coast, and on many of the South Sea Islands, he was known by no other name but that of "Captain Hurricane." This nickname was partially derived from his own surname, and partly because of the fact that he was, indeed, a kind of human hurricane.

In many ways he was notorious. Strong men who knew him well quailed at the very sound of his name. In earlier years Captain Hurricane's reputation was of the ugliest possible description.

At those times, when in the prime of his life, he had been widely known as one of the greatest brutes and bullies that ever sailed a ship. He was utterly heartless, and had been frequently known to knock a man senseless with one blow of his gnarled fist.

If he gave an order that order had to be obeyed—no matter what the conditions, no matter what the cost. During a storm at sea he was one of the most capable shipmasters any vessel could boast of. What he didn't know about navigation was not worth the trouble of learning. He had sailed the seven seas in earlier times, and he had knocked about in every corner of the world.

But of late years he had confined himself to the Pacific coast, and was reputed to be worth quite a lot of money—obtained from his various means of trading. And now that he was getting past fifty, his brutality was not so outstanding, and men were beginning to forget his evil reputation.

All the same, Captain Hurricane was a character to deal with. There wasn't a man in the whole of 'Frisco who would dare to stand up to him—even now.

And it was to this man that Seelig went.

The skipper was in his cabin, having just arrived there. And Seelig fairly burst in, his eyes gleaming, and his face flushed.

"What in blazes is the idea?" growled the skipper.

He looked up, frowning, in the act of pouring himself out a little tot. He was a big, burly man, with a countenance that was absolutely rugged. It was brown almost to the colour of mahogany—scarred, marked as the result of tropical fevers, and expressive of mighty power. His eyes were deep set, and almost pitch black in colour. His mouth was big, coarse-lipped, revealing one or two protruding teeth. Altogether, a somewhat unhandsome specimen of humanity.

"Say, listen, cap.!" ejaculated Mr. Seelig softly. "I've got two guys in here off the Wanderer——"

"What!" rasped out the skipper. "That swell English yacht?"

"Yeah! I hooked 'em in good——"

"Then I guess you'll hook 'em out again—and slick—unless you want to feel the weight of my fist!" snarled Captain Hurricane. "Good gosh! Ain't I told you to be careful?"

"But say!"

"Men from a craft like that ain't the kind I want!" broke in the skipper harshly. "Gosh-dingit, you know my orders! It's too all-fired risky to take men like that! They're too swell—too easily traced! We want hoboes—soaked guys what don't know a durned thing——"

"Gee! You make me tired!" fired up Mr. Seelig. "Don't I know what your orders are? But this is different, cap.! I got these guys aboard just to pass a few minutes—not because I wanted to pinch 'em, like the rest. And, say—listen! They figure that this Lord Dorrimore is kinder interested in No Man's Island!"

Crash!

Captain Hurricane's glass descended upon the table with such force that it shivered to fragments. The skipper leaned over the table, and half rose from his chair.

"Lord Dorrimore's interested in No Man's Island!" he repeated tensely.

"Yeah!"

"Darn my hide!" breathed the skipper. "Let's hear some more!"

"I got the guys talkin', and I figure they know a heap more," said Mr. Seelig. "Seems like their boss, Lord Dorrimore, stopped at No Man's Island on the way here. And they reckoned that this blamed English lord is going back there on some stunt."

Captain Hurricane rose to his feet.

"Leave it to me!" he said harshly.

Without another word, he strode into the mate's cabin, and found Harding and

Baxter standing up, and ready for departure. The two English seamen looked at Captain Hurricane with interest.

"All right, men—just sit right down," said the skipper, his voice genial and inviting. "I guess I'd like to have a little talk with you. It ain't often we get the opportunity of having a few pleasant words with folks from England. Kind of interesting."

"We'll have to be getting back——" began Mr. Harding.

"You don't need to be in any hurry," interrupted Captain Hurricane, sitting down and seizing the whisky bottle. "Take another drink—guess I've got plenty more in the stores below. It's an honour to have guests like you on board. I'm figgerin' on drinking your health."

Without being positively rude, the two guests could not possibly leave. So they sat down again, feeling rather uncomfortable, and picked up the glasses which Captain Hurricane had liberally filled.

"Here's the best of health to ye!" said the skipper heartily.

He gulped down his whisky, and Harding and Baxter did likewise. To tell the truth, they were rather anxious to get away. They did not quite like the look of this rugged-faced old shipmaster. His evil character was written on every line of his face.

"Mr. Seelig's been telling me about the little island you spoke of," said the captain, after a minute. "I guess you'll think I'm inquisitive, but I'm kind of interested in that island. One o' my men went ashore there, and we buried him in the sand. Fever, you know," he added, by way of explanation. "Guess it must be the same spot. Did you happen to notice a big kind of rock at the edge of the cove—a rock shaped like a triangle?"

"Yes!" said Mr. Baxter. "I saw it."

Captain Hurricane nodded.

"Did you go ashore while you were in those waters?" he asked.

"No, but his lordship and Mr Barry did."

"Mr. Barry?"

"Our second officer," explained Baxter.

"They went ashore, did they?" said Captain Hurricane thoughtfully. I thought, maybe, they might have seen that grave. How long was they ashore?"

"I reckon it must have been twenty-four hours," replied Baxter.

"Gosh!" said the skipper. As long as that?"

"Yes, and there was something queer happened, too," said Baxter. "There was a kind of gas that nearly choked them. They couldn't quite figure it out, and so his lordship and Mr. Barry took some gas-masks with them next time, and went at night. They stopped on the island all the next day, and came back when it was dark. That's about all we know—because we couldn't ask no questions."

A grim light had come in Captain Hurricane's eyes.

"Gas-masks!" he muttered. "They went ashore at night, stopped the whole next day, and came back to the yacht on the next night! Say, do you know if Lord Dorrimore figgers on going back to that island."

"We don't know a thing," replied Harding. "Maybe he does—there's no telling with his lordship. But, anyway, he's gettin' in all sorts of stores, and we reckon there's going to be a bit of excitement."

Both the members of the Wanderer's crew had made up their minds independently that they would not give any information. But there was something about Captain Hurricane that dragged the words out of them almost against their own will power.

And the men did not know it, but the heavy doses of strong liquor they had consumed had begun to take effect—their tongues loosened, although they had not intended them to be. While both men were as honest as the day, and soundly reliable under ordinary circumstances, their present peculiar position placed them at a disadvantage.

Captain Hurricane slowly nodded his head.

"Well, anyways, the matter don't interest me much," he said. "I guess we'll have one more drink together, and you men can get back to your own ship. What's that? No more? Pshaw! Ain't babies, are you?"

No British seaman can stand ridicule, and to have these Americans think they couldn't stand another drink was out of the question. Captain Hurricane reached for his own flask, which he had drawn out of his pocket, and placed on the table. He unscrewed the cap, and poured out two small tots into his guests' glasses.

"Rum!" he explained. "Best you ever tasted!"

Baxter and Harding drank the spirit down. It was fiery, but of undoubted quality. And, although they wanted to leave at once, Captain Hurricane kept them talking for several minutes.

And then, almost at the same moment, both the men became unsteady. They seemed to reel, for they were on their feet in readiness for departure. Harding sagged at the knees, and fell to the floor.

Baxter looked at his companion in a dull, listless way. Then he, too, collapsed. Ten seconds later, the pair were utterly helpless—as though dead. And Captain Hurricane had stood there the whole time, watching.

The mate entered by the doorway.

"Pick these boys up, and take them below!" rasped out the skipper. "Risk or no risk, they can't go back to the Wanderer after what we've heard. Look lively, Mr. Seelig!"

"I was right, then, sir?"

"You bet you were right!" said Captain Hurricane. "And, say, that English guy means to go back to the island—he's found out something. He's keeping it mum, but his being there all night speaks for itself!"

"You said it!" declared Mr. Seelig.

"And, listen!" went on the captain.

"We're doing a risky thing, but it can't be helped. Do any other members of the Wanderer's crew know where these two came?"

"No."

"You're sure?"

"Positive!" said Mr. Seelig. "Why, it was practically dark when I met 'em, and they came straight along with me. There wasn't a soul saw them come on board."

"Good!" said Captain Hurricane. "Then as like as not we shall be able to keep them without any suspicions getting around. Get them below at once, and see that they're put in the sound proof hold. They're safe for three hours, anyway—I doped 'em pretty good."

Mr. Seelig was assisted by the skipper himself, and the two men were taken down into the hold of the schooner, and placed in a very curious apartment. It was fitted up with every convenience for living purposes—with running water, sleeping bunks, and many other conveniences. Not only this, but it was constructed in such a way that no sound could get beyond it.

And Harding and Baxter were left there.

There was something very sinister about this innocent-looking trading schooner. And when the skipper and the mate had returned to the former's cabin, they sat down and faced one another.

"Well, Mr. Seelig, it's always been my way to deal with a difficulty as soon as ever it crops up," declared the captain curtly. "Seems like we've got to hustle some. And I figger we'll have to watch that all-fired English yacht."

"Watch it?"

"Sure!" said Captain Hurricane. "And, what's more, we'll need to take some active measures. When the Wanderer leaves this port she won't reach any other. Do you get me?"

The mate looked rather startled.

"You mean—sink her?" he asked.

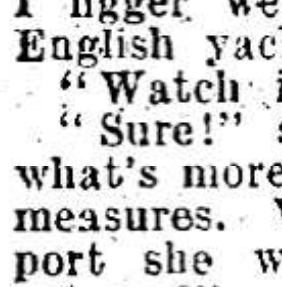
"You've sure said the right thing," declared Captain Hurricane. "Yes, Mr. Seelig, we've got to sink her! And I'll get busy on fixing up that dope right away. I guess I'll let no man interfere with my plans. We've found out the truth in time, and, with a little brain work, we can stop any further trouble."

And the villainous skipper and the rascally mate talked long into the night.

There was the beginning of some grim mystery here.

CHAPTER VII.

HANDFORTH, THE FILM STAR!



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH looked round disapprovingly.

"I'm blest if I know why all you chaps should come bothering here!" he said, with a frown. "Who told you to come, anyhow? Go back and mind your own giddy business!"

"But we want to see you acting, Handy," said Reggie Pitt innocently. "It'll be so wonderful that we can't resist it!"

"Rather!"

Handforth looked at the crowd of juniors suspiciously.

"Oh, all right!" he growled. "But don't start interfering—that's all! I don't mind you looking on, but that's all! But if Mr. Fisher says you've got to go, there's an end of it."

It was the following morning, and quite a good few members of the St. Frank's Remove were outside the Celebrated Players' Studio. Handforth had come, strictly in accordance with his marvellous contract. And he was to begin work on the big film production that Mr. Fisher had referred to.

The morning was hot and sunny—as, indeed, all mornings in Hollywood are. I was there, for I had no intention of missing the fun.

And Dorrie had come, too—in fact, he had brought us all in two or three big, hired motor-cars. Dorrie explained that he had a fatherly interest in Handforth, and wanted to see how he got on.

Inside the main office, Handforth inquired for Mr. Fisher.

"Well, young man, Mr. Fisher's only just arrived, and I don't know that he'll see you now," said the man at the desk. "Still, I'll give your name——"

"You—you ass!" said Handforth witheringly.

"What's that?"

"I'm the new star!" said Handforth, drawing himself up.

"Gee whizz!" exclaimed the man. "The new star?"

"Of course!" said Handforth. "I'm taking the leading part in the big production. Tell Mr. Fisher that Mr. Handforth has arrived, and is ready to start work. If I'm going to get five thousand dollars a week, I want to earn it."

The man, looking rather dazed, sent Handforth's name in. And two minutes later Mr. Robert Fisher bustled out, and gripped Edward Oswald warmly by the hand.

"Fine!" he exclaimed, with enthusiasm. "Here right on time! That's the kind of man I like! Morning, Lord Dorrimore! Glad to see you! Brought the crowd again, I see?"

"In a way of speaking, yes," admitted Dorrie. "But I rather fancy the crowd would have brought itself in any case. The youngsters are quite keen upon seeing how your new star shapes."

"Why, sure thing!" said Mr. Fisher heartily. "Bring them right in!"

Another wink passed between Mr. Fisher and Lord Dorrimore—which Handforth completely failed to notice. And they all went through into the big studio behind. The other members of the Remove followed.

Handforth didn't know it, but this was one of Mr. Fisher's slack mornings. The big scenes on his present production were over,

and he had no real work planned until the following day.

So he intended to have a little amusement this morning. He had given the tip to various other people in the studio, and they did not mean to miss the fun. Several gentlemen strolled up as we all entered the studio.

They expressed great interest in Mr. Fisher's new star. They entered into conversation with Handforth, gravely making inquiries concerning his future plans and aspirations. And Handforth took it all with perfect seriousness.

That was the best of Edward Oswald.

You could pull his leg with such ease that he absolutely asked for it to be done. And these gentlemen connected with the studios were great practical jokers.

Handforth's utter ignorance of all matters connected with the making of films made Mr. Fisher's task supremely easy.

"I guess we'll start right in!" he said briskly.

"That's just what I want," said Handforth. "No sense in hanging about. And I don't want these chaps butting in, either!" he added, glaring at the crowd of juniors. "Blessed if I know why they're grinning!"

"I'll see that they stand well clear," said Mr. Fisher. "But you mustn't mind people looking on—every big star has to put up with that. What you've got to do is to detach yourself completely. Don't let anybody bother you. Just follow my directions, and you'll be all right."

"Good!" said Handforth. "What's the first thing to be done?"

Mr. Fisher pulled a big, important-looking manuscript from his pocket, and made a big pretence of consulting it.

"Ah, yes!" he said. "Here we are! We'll start at scene No. 12. I'll just explain the details of it, and you've got to follow me closely. Then I'll give you directions, and we can begin shooting the scene straight away."

The cameras clicked, and before Handforth could even look round the two men dressed up as roughs made a dash. They grabbed him, forced him backwards, and sent him flying backwards into the lake.

"But why the twelfth scene?" asked Handforth. "Why not start at the first?"

"Say, young man, I'm directing this," said Mr. Fisher. "You don't seem to understand that a picture is made in pieces. Sometimes it's convenient to take the last scenes before we take the first! Where are those camera men? Mr. Smith! Get a hustle on! We'll need the cameras pretty soon."

"Right, sir!" said one of the grinning onlookers.

He bustled off, and presently returned with three men carrying the cameras. These were set down, and the men made a big show of adjusting them. In the meantime, the throng of studio officials had increased.

Dorrie had merely suggested this thing as a little joke, but the humourists of the studio were apparently planning to make quite an elaborate thing of it.

Again Mr. Fisher consulted his manuscript.

"Here we are!" he said. "In the twelfth scene, you've got to fight two East Side toughs! You're the young hero—and you look the part to perfection. No need to change, or anything."

"That's ripping!" said Handy.

"And there are practically no lines to say, so it'll be a good beginning for you," continued the director. "These two toughs will appear, and as soon as ever they cross the chalk line, you've got to fight! Knock them both out, and drag them by the scruff of their necks out of the scene!"

Handforth looked rather doubtful.

"I suppose they'll be all ready for it?" he asked.

"Sure! I've fixed up everything!" said Mr. Fisher briskly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Quite a number of juniors yelled with laughter. Handforth turned round, and glared at them.

"You rotters!" he hooted. "Clear off, or I'll biff you. How do you suppose a star's going to work with all that cackling going on? Look here, Mr. Fisher, if those fatheads can't keep quiet, I'll refuse to start the picture!"

The director started violently.

"Good heavens!" he gasped. "We can't allow that! We've contracted to pay you five thousand dollars a week, and you've got to earn the money! I'll see that the boys don't worry you."

"All right; you'd better!"

"And I'll advise you to be not quite so sensitive, Mr. Handforth," continued the director severely. "You mustn't mind a little laugh now and again. In fact, it ought to encourage you. Well, let's get busy!"

He blew a shrill whistle, and the camera men jumped to their posts. Handforth was so intent upon his work, that he failed to observe that the sun arcs did not come into operation. A joke was a joke, but it would be rather an expensive one if they used those intensely powerful arc lights.

As the camera men went to their posts, two burly ruffians appeared from behind one of the other "sets." Handforth glared at them, and started. The men were extremely hefty.

"Great pip!" he gasped. "Have I got to fight the two?"

"Sure, you have!" said Mr. Fisher. "What do you think we pay you for?"

Handforth took a deep breath, and clenched his fists. He apparently imagined it was to be a real fight. And he had a momentary vision of the five thousand dollars he would draw at the end of the week. After all, he couldn't expect to earn a sum like that without working for it.

The two burly men came forward.

"All ready now—camera!" shouted Mr. Fisher. "And put plenty of pep into it! Go it, lads!"

Handforth didn't wait for the toughs to cross the chalk line. He had forgotten all about those instructions. He simply charged at the enemy, and they paused, waiting for him.

Biff!

Handforth managed to get one of his famous lefts in—before the two actors could be aware of the junior's intentions. They were just a couple of extras, who were being paid a few dollars for the work.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

One of them staggered back, gasping. But the next moment the pair of them had to look after themselves in real earnest. For Handforth was fighting with all his celebrated vigour. He completely forgot that this was a mere piece of acting, and that he had to play a part. He had been told to knock the toughs out, and he meant to do it!

But they weren't having any.

They were powerful men, and they seized Handforth firmly. Between them, they proceeded to treat the unfortunate Edward Oswald with such terrific roughness that he hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels.

He was flung this way and flung that way—rolled over, squashed, and generally battered about until he scarcely had an atom of breath left in him. But he wasn't actually hurt, there was no brutality.

And the cameras clicked all the time, although there happened to be no film in the spool box. But Handforth wasn't aware of this interesting fact. He sat up at last, utterly dazed.

"My only hat!" he gasped. "Did—did I win?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Fisher rushed forward, and grabbed Handforth's fist.

"Fine!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "Just the right stuff! Best acting I've seen in months. Gee, boy! That's just the kind of material we want! Splendid! Wonderful!"

Handforth staggered to his feet, glowing.

"Then—then I did it all right?" he asked breathlessly.

"Oh, boy! I'll say you did!" declared the director. "And now we've got to hustle up, and get the next scene! This is a comedy, don't forget, and it's got to be brisk action!"

Handforth tried to get his breath.

"Don't—don't I have a bit of a rest?" he asked, dusting himself down.

"A rest?" exclaimed Mr. Fisher. "I'll say not! No time for rests in a comedy! Get ready right now!"

He feverishly examined a script, and half turned to Dorrie.

"I've a darned good mind to take some real shots!" he chuckled in a very low

voice. "This kid's worth it! The stuff would be a scream!"

"By gad! So it would!" said Dorrie.

Handforth was so rushed that he had no time, now, to notice the chuckling juniors, or any of the other grinning spectators. He was compelled to carry on with the next scene immediately.

"You've got to jump into that lake!" explained Mr. Fisher, pointing to the lake that had been used the previous afternoon. "Or, to be more exact, you've got to be pushed into it by those two toughs."

"Pushed into the lake!" said Handforth blankly.

"Sure! And as you try to get out, they'll push you back," said the director. "There are one or two other little things, but we needn't go into them now. All ready, there? Good! Camera!"

It was all one terrific rush—very different from any actual film making. But Handforth wasn't to know this. Indeed, he had no time to think.

The cameras clicked, and before Handforth could even look round, the two men dressed up as roughs made a dash. They grabbed him, forced him backwards, and sent him flying backwards into the lake.

Splash!

"Gug—gug—gugggh!" gurgled Handforth, disappearing.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody in the studio was howling with merriment.

Handforth came to the surface, scrambled up the bank, and was promptly hurled into the water again. He was discovering that the life of a film actor was a strenuous one!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth didn't hear the yells. He was too much occupied in getting himself out of the water. And this wasn't so easy as it looked. For as he hauled himself up for the second time the two "extras" stood steady.

"If you touch me again, I'll slaughter you!" gasped Handy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, old man!"

"You've got to earn your five thou., you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth made a sudden rush. This time he succeeded in climbing out of the little lake. But if he imagined his ordeal was over, he was very greatly mistaken. It had hardly begun!

Mr. Fisher ran up, clapping, his face glowing with enthusiasm.

"Great!" he shouted. "That's the idea! No, don't speak to me—you're still in the picture! You're still acting!"

"Great pip!" said Handforth. "Ain't the scene over yet?"

The question was unnecessary, for just then the two toughs grabbed him firmly and grimly. He couldn't very well resist, because he was soaked to the skin, and quite out of breath.

Handforth was whirled across to the other side of the studio. The camera-men made a pretence of following with their instruments, but they were laughing so much they could hardly move at all.

But the latest star was thinking nothing of the camera.

He found himself dumped suddenly into a great pile of choking dust—white dust, which he had no difficulty in recognising as whiting. It was almost like flour, and arose in clouds as Handforth vanished in the middle of it.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, Handy!" sobbed Pitt. "You'll be the death of us yet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fine!" said Church, with tears running down his cheeks. "My hat! It's the jape of the season! I'll bet he won't want to be a film star after this! It's about time somebody took him down a peg or two!"

"Rather!" said McClure heartily.

De Valerie grinned.

"Better not let him hear you saying that!" he chuckled. "If you do, there'll probably be a little trouble on the side."

Handforth, at that moment, was not capable of hearing any remarks whatsoever. He was just staggering to his feet, lost. He didn't know where he was, for he was practically blind, choked, and his time was fully occupied in sneezing.

And he presented a ludicrous sight.

He was smothered from head to foot in whiting and dust. Considering that he had been wet before being dumped on that heap, the stuff clung to him tightly. He was white from head to foot. His hair was caked with it.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Fisher, the director, was nearly collapsing.

"Say, I ought to have taken some real shots of this!" he said with a gasp. "This boy's as funny as a professional comedian. The only danger is that he might suddenly attack the camera-men, and ruin the negatives!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Carry on!" said Lord Dorrimore cheerfully. "My dear man, you don't think he's cured, do you?"

"He ought to be," said the director.

"You don't know Handforth!" chuckled his lordship. "He'll come up bright and smilin', ready for anythin'. He needs two or three more spasms yet, before he gets the full cure. Carry on the good work, old man!"

Mr. Fisher nodded.

"All right!" he chuckled. "We'll see what can be done."

He was quite ready to keep up the joke—particularly if Handforth was prepared to stand any more of it. For most of the officials of the company—who could spare

time to get away—were gathered round, looking on.

Edward Oswald Handforth had had the audacity to imagine that he was capable of taking a leading part in a real film—he really thought that he could earn big money at making pictures.

And he was just being taught his lesson!

CHAPTER VIII.

COMPLETELY CURED.

HANDFORTH was more like himself.

He had managed to wipe some of the awful stuff off his face, and he could now see. He could breathe, too. And he stood there, panting hard, spluttering, but looking far more ludicrous than ever.

"My goodness!" he breathed. "I—I'm going to biff somebody for this! All my clothes ruined——"

"Never mind your clothes, Mr. Handforth!" interrupted the director crisply. "We'll compensate you for those. Gee! What are a few clothes compared to the value of the picture you make? It was fine!"

Handforth blinked.

"Well, that's one good thing, anyway," he growled. "But this giddy film-acting is a bit more difficult than I thought it would be. It's a bit thick when a chap has to go through all this!"

"Rubbish!" said Mr. Fisher. "This is nothing! Some of our men have to suffer ten times as much—and they're only getting a thousand a week! What do you expect to do—with a salary like yours?"

Handforth breathed hard.

"Yes, it's a pretty big screw, so I mustn't grumble," he admitted. "But don't you think we've had enough for one day?"

Mr. Fisher started.

"Enough!" he repeated. "Why, we've only just commenced the day's work!"

"What?" howled Handforth.

"And, see here—if you don't like the job, you'd better quit it straight away!" continued the director, his tone becoming stern. "Say, you're a snappy feller, aren't you? As soon as ever you start you want to quit! We don't want men of that kind on our payroll! So you'd better say at once if you'll keep to the terms of the contract, or——"

"All right!" gasped Handforth hurriedly. "I'm game!"

"Good! Then we'll get on with the next scene, I guess."

Handforth's heart was rather heavy. He wouldn't admit for the world that he was disappointed—that film-acting had been cracked up for more than it was worth. Again he remembered the huge amount of his salary, and that was some consolation.

Not for the slightest minute did he suspect that the whole thing was a put-up job, and that he was really the joke of the studio.

"What's the next scene?" he asked.

"Can't tell you now—you've got to change," said Mr. Fisher. "Here, Smith! Take Mr. Handforth to the dressing-room, and give him one of the best costumes. Rig him out in that hobo stuff."

"Sure!" grinned Mr. Smith. "This way, sir!"

Handforth stiffly followed the gentleman out of the studio, assuming as much dignity as he could under the circumstances. The sight he presented was so screamingly funny that nearly all the spectators died on the spot. Handforth, stalking along with whiting dropping from him in lumps, with his face all smeared, and his hair caked into knots.

Mr. Fisher held a hand over his heart.

"I guess I'm nearly through!" he admitted. "I don't know what to do next."

Lord Dorrimore looked thoughtful.

"I saw some interestin' things outside," he remarked. "Couldn't we take the next scene in the open air? It's got to be something even worse than the whitewash. Handforth needs a lot of convincin'."

They talked together for a few moments, and then Mr. Fisher grinned.

"Wonderful!" he declared. "We'll do it."

By the time Handforth reappeared the company had regained full control of itself. Mr. Fisher and his assistants were grave and full of business. The St. Frank's fellows were looking greatly interested without smiling.

"Good old Handy!"

"You'll be famous within a week!"

"You'll startle the world!"

Handforth looked at the crowd with a superior air.

"Thanks!" he said loftily. "Decent of you to appreciate what I've done, but it worries me to have all these interruptions. Better dry up, and let me get on with the business! Can't be bothered with you all day!"

It was as much as the fellows could do to refrain from howling. Although changed, Handforth was still funny. Not without great protest to Mr. Smith, he had attired himself in a ragged costume which seemed to consist mainly of tears and patches. The jacket was three times too large for him, he had no collar, and a slouch hat was pulled over the back of his head. His toes protruded through the caps of his shoes.

"Well, say, you look fine!" declared Mr.

Fisher briskly. "It seems to me, Mr. Handforth, that you can take any part. You're what we call a first-class all-round man."

"Of course I am!" said Handy. "When it comes to acting, I'm ready for anything. And, look here—couldn't you put me in a detective picture? I'm a ripping detective, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, you can cackle, you jealous idiots!" hooted Handforth, glaring at the juniors. "But it's a fact," he went on, turning to the director. "I'm simply a marvel at detective work. I can find out anything. I thought about starring in a film where the detective has to trail his quarry right across the world. We can take scenes as we go along—in America, Japan, Australia, India——"

"You're a bit too speedy!" interrupted Mr. Fisher. "We haven't finished this film yet, young man. I don't want to discourage you, but I'm afraid that chase around the world wouldn't be quite feasible. Most of our films are taken right here, on the spot. Still, we'll think of it."

"Good!" said Handforth. "But, of course, that'll be when I'm earning about twenty thousand a week, eh?"

"Yes—not before," replied Mr. Fisher truthfully.

A move was made outside. The director declared that the next scene was a most important one, and had to be enacted with great care. Handforth, in short, was to do the extremely brave deed of rescuing a child from certain death.

"That'll suit me fine!" said Handforth. "Better than this silly stuff with the lake and the whitewash! Rescuing a kid from death is the hero's real job. I'm all ready for it."

They found themselves at the rear of the studio. It was rather quiet out here, but extremely hot, with the morning sun beating down with great intensity. The place was really a kind of vacant plot, but had been used quite recently for some important scenes in a drama.

There was one spot, with a faked background, representing a kind of morass. And, just near by, there was a big entrenchment dug in the ground—this entrenchment being filled with black, sticky, clinging mud. It was about four feet deep, and of a puddingy consistency.

In the film which had been made—the scenes, indeed, had been shot only the previous day—the villain of the piece had supposedly gone to his doom in the bog. He had been drawn down into the morass, inch by inch. And the camera had registered his last agonised moments.

The actor on the job had simply sunk lower and lower into the mud, until, finally, he was kneeling down, so that his head vanished underneath. At this point his part was over, so he had simply scrambled out, and had been vigorously hosed down by a couple of colleagues. Making films of this kind is simply a mere matter of business, after all.

When you see the thing on the screen it looks very realistic. You see a close-up of the bog, probably supposed to be in some desolate region—never dreaming that such a scene was actually taken within sight of the very studio itself. You see the unfortunate villain dragged down into the mire, struggling helplessly against his fate. And at the crucial point when he dies, the scene either changes, or else fades out. If the camera had continued on the job, you would see the "dead" man calmly scrambling out, very hale and hearty indeed.

And Handforth was about to test the delights of this bog.

Mr. Fisher was choosing the most unpleasant tasks he could think of for Handforth to perform—the general idea being that the worse they were, the more effective would be the cure.

Again the director consulted his script.

"Now, here we are—scene thirty-six!" he said crisply. "This is the big scene of the picture, Mr. Handforth, so I call upon you to do your best."

"Rather!" said Handforth. "Trust me!"

"In this scene you are supposed to have sunk to the lowest dregs," continued Mr. Fisher. "And here you earn your redemption."

"I should think I earned some salary, too!" said Handforth, looking at the bog.

"Exactly," agreed the director. "That goes without saying. All through the story you have been going down and down, until you are nothing but a common hobo. But here, in this scene, you see a little child struggling for its life in the bog. You junip in——"

"An' he continues to go down an' down?" asked Dorrie mildly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth looked sternly at his lordship.

"Sorry, sir, but this is serious!" he said disapprovingly.

"Oh! Apologies, old man!" gasped Dorrie. "I stand corrected."

Mr. Fisher resumed.

"What you've got to do is to act with emotion," he said earnestly. "This child is sinking in the bog—a pitiful spectacle. For one moment you hesitate. You stand in front of the camera, and you must register fear, the sudden revival of courage, and, finally, you square your jaw and shout out that you are coming at once. Then you dash into the bog, and rescue the child.

Handforth's eyes gleamed.

"That's fine!" he said. "I can just see it on the screen. The audience will roar with joy when they see me dashing in."

"They'll roar with something, anyhow," agreed Mr. Fisher. "You've got the right idea, Mr. Handforth. Well, let's go to it!"

The director had, indeed, given Handforth directions regarding his part in very much the same manner as he would have spoken

to a real actor in a real part. It is generally done in the way I have described.

"Half a minute!" said Handforth. "Where's the kid?"

"The kid?"

"The child," said Handforth. "Don't be an ass! Didn't you say I've got to rescue a child? Where is he?"

"It's a little girl," said Mr. Fisher gravely.

"A girl!" repeated Handforth, startled.

"Sure—here she is," said the director.

The obliging Mr. Smith came forward, holding in his hands a huge dummy—a representation of a little girl of five or six. Attached to her feet was a big weight—this, the director calculated, would drag the dummy down in a realistic fashion.

Of course, a contrivance of this sort would never have been adopted in an actual film—but Handforth wasn't to know this. He was relieved.

"Oh, so I don't rescue a real girl?" he asked.

"Not at all—too risky," said the director. "This bog is awfully dangerous, and I wouldn't trust a living child in it. You'll be safe, of course, because it's only four feet deep. Now then—all ready? Come on! Put plenty of pep into it! Camera!"

Mr. Fisher shouted his orders loudly.

The "child" was placed in the bog, and Mr. Smith hurriedly got out of range. Unfortunately, the dummy didn't sink at all, but remained there, at an oblique angle, looking extraordinarily unlifelike. The cameras commenced clicking, and Mr. Fisher put a big megaphone to his mouth.

"Now, Mr. Handforth!" he shouted. "Get ready!"

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start.

"Walk in front of the cameras, and follow the directions I gave you!" roared Mr. Fisher, his voice sounding so enormous through the megaphone that Handforth was startled. "First of all—fear! Then the awakening courage, and then the determination to risk your life for the sake of a child. Go to it!"

Handforth hesitated. This was different to the other scene—he had to act! And, for the life of him, he didn't know how to register fear or courage! Now it came to the actual thing he was flabbergasted. But never for a moment would he admit it, even to himself.

The rest of us stood looking on, caring nothing for the heat or the sunshine, and only keeping our faces straight by supreme efforts. This was funnier than any comic film we had ever witnessed.

And it so happened that Mr. Fisher had got real film in his cameras this time. He intended to take Handforth really and truly. The chance was too good to be missed.

Handforth still hesitated.

"Hurry up!" roared the director. "Make it snappy, Mr. Handforth!"

Handforth charged forward. He stood there, in front of the camera, registering fear. At least, this is what he imagined he was doing. He stood as straight as a rod, in the most awkward position, and proceeded to roll his eyes and make the most horrible grimaces.

"Great!" roared Mr. Fisher. "Now the awakening of courage."

Quite abruptly, as though a tap had been turned off, Handforth pulled his face straight and squared his shoulders. He smiled—a kind of soft, sloppy smile. But this was rather ruined by the fact that he continually glanced towards Mr. Fisher for fresh directions. None came. And the soft smile gradually died out, and Handforth stood there, flummoxed.

"Great pip!" he gasped. "I've forgotten what to do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dash to the rescue!" shouted Mr. Fisher.

"Oh, yes!" panted Handy. "I remember now!"

He suddenly turned to the bog, and started back with wildly exaggerated surprise. He stared at the dummy child, flung up his hands and proceeded to mouth vigorously. No words came.

Then he plunged to the rescue—literally.

In his excitement he went in head first. But he managed to save himself from this disaster, and he seized the dummy and proceeded to haul him out, making no attempt to dive into the bog fully.

"That won't do—that won't do!" shouted Mr. Fisher. "Go right in!"

"Right in?" repeated Handforth, stopping all action and turning.

"Yes! Keep on—don't stop in that way!"

Handforth took a step forward, and plunged right in. And this time he sank into the black mud up to his shoulders. The unfortunate "child," by this time, had been pushed completely under. Handforth had thoughtlessly retained his hold of it, and had taken it down with him.

"Now, right under—head and all!" shouted Mr. Fisher. "Splendid! This'll make a great scene. Don't spoil it by stopping now. Right under!"

Thus encouraged, Handforth proceeded to dive.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd of onlookers nearly collapsed into one another's arms. And Handforth slowly reappeared—a black, horrible proposition. And the cream of the joke was that he pulled himself out of the mud and overlooked the very important fact of bringing the "child" with him.

"Gug—gug—gurrrrh!" said Handforth thickly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Smith was ready with a hose, and he suddenly turned it on and drenched Handforth to the skin. The mud flew off, and Handforth reappeared. Gasping, spluttering, he staggered near—and Mr. Fisher and Dorrie and a few others made a hasty retreat.

"My hat!" said Handforth. "It was a bit rotten to do, but I think I acted the part fine!"

"By the way, where's the child?" asked Mr. Fisher politely.

Handforth started.

"The—the child?" he asked blankly.

"Good Heavens! You've forgotten it!" roared the director. "You've spoilt the whole scene!"

Handforth simply stood there and gaped.

"I—I must have forgotten the kid," he said faintly. "That rotten mud was so thick that I thought I was suffocating. Well, it doesn't matter much—it's only a dummy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Doesn't matter!" shouted Mr. Fisher. "But we cannot show that scene unless you really rescue the child. It's got to be done all over again."

"What!" yelled Handforth.

"All over again!" said Mr. Fisher firmly.

Handforth was nearly ready to drop. It was only by a supreme effort that he kept his temper. This was getting altogether too thick. But argument was useless—protests were in vain.

Washed down by the hose, he had to go through the whole business a second time. It was a little more successful than the first. Because, when Handforth emerged from the mud, he hauled the dummy with him feet foremost.

He apparently forgot that it was supposed to be a real child, for he gave the dummy a heave, and threw it about six yards. No film hero, rescuing a child, would treat it in that brutal manner.

And Mr. Fisher was quite firm.

"No good!" he said decidedly, after Handforth had been hosed.

"Wh—a—at?" breathed Handforth faintly.

"Not a bit of good!" declared the director. "The whole scene's wrong. It's got to be done again, and this time you'll have to stop under for two or three minutes."

"Look here, I'm getting fed up with this!" howled Handforth violently.

"What's that?"

"Fed up!" roared the film star. "Do you think I'm going to be messed about like this? I've done the scene twice, and I'm jolly well not going to do it any more! Rats! I'm fed up! Blow the contract!"

"But, say, listen——"

"I wouldn't be a film actor for ten thousand quid a week!" snorted Handforth, disgustedly. "Do you think I'm going to spend all my time diving into mud pools? Blow you! You can jolly well tear your contract up and eat it!"

And Edward Oswald Handforth strode away.

Mr. Fisher gracefully expired into Lord Dorrimore's arms. And the rest of the spectators proceeded to go into various kinds of convulsions. They had all been expecting something of the kind, but it had come rather earlier than was generally anticipated.

Without a doubt, Handforth's film fever was completely cured.

"Doesn't matter!" shouted Mr. Fisher. "But we cannot show that scene unless you really rescue the child! It's got to be done all over again!"

"What!" yelled Handforth.

"All over again!" said Mr. Fisher firmly.

CHAPTER IX.

OFF ON THE GREAT ADVENTURE!

"TO-MORROW is the day," said Lord Dorrimore genially.

"We sail?" asked Pitt.

"Yes—or, to be more exact, we steam," replied his lordship. "We leave this wonderful country, and start off for the good old Pacific—for adventures unknown, and excitements by the pint!"

"Hurrah!"

There was quite a lot of enthusiasm in the Remove. Lord Dorrimore's announcement was greeted with joy. Almost a week had passed since Handforth had been cured of his film fever.

And during this week we had practically exhausted the sightseeing possibilities of Los Angeles and district. We had been everywhere—Beverly Hills, San Bernardino, San Diego, Santa Monica, Venice, and various other places.

And, although we had had a fine time, the heat had been somewhat trying. In San

Bernardino, particularly, the sun shone with a concentrated power that was nearly killing.

We had had a great deal of enjoyment, and our memories of California would be of the very finest. But it has to be admitted that the majority of the juniors were not quite so enraptured as they thought they would be. Similar to most other American spots, Los Angeles has been boosted to such an extent that one expects to find something much better than the actuality. The result is inevitable. One is disappointed when it is discovered the dreams are only dreams.

Handforth was himself again.

Films had no interest for him. He even refused to go to a picture theatre, and never wanted to see Hollywood again. He vigorously declared that the whole industry was a swindle.

And if any of the fellows dared to mention Mr. Fisher's name to him, that fellow was certainly booked for one of Handy's swift lefts. For, by this time, Handforth was aware of the ghastly fact that his leg had been pulled all along the line. He knew that the contract was merely a spoof, and that the whole film colony of Hollywood was still chuckling over the joke.

So Handforth, for one, was quite glad to be off.

Exactly as Lord Dorrimore had said, early on the following morning we left the Bainton Hotel, and bade good-bye to Westlake Park without very many regrets. It was very curious, but the loveliness of that park did not seem so apparent now that all the fellows were used to it.

And they had certainly been vastly disappointed with the band. Every evening, a band plays on the lake. And, considering the tropical beauty of the surroundings, it seems rather a pity that this band should be one of the jazz variety, perpetrating nothing else but a series of fox-trots, with an occasional waltz. This kind of thing is inclined to be monotonous—particularly when the jazz band is not of a very high order. And it certainly does seem a shame that a beauty spot like Westlake Park should be made to suffer this abomination.

Lord Dorrimore had arrived on board the Wanderer earlier. Nelson Lee was with him, and they were both having a chat with the skipper—a hardy, reliable old fellow named Captain McDodd.

"Two men missin', eh?" Dorrie was saying. "How do you account for it?"

"It's a mystery," said the skipper. "They've been missing for days—over a week. Harding and Baxter they are—men belonging to the engine-room staff. The chief's mighty upset, too."

"So I imagine," said Dorrie. "I'm disappointed. We picked this crew very carefully, and I had no fear that any of them would desert."

"That's just the point, sir," said Captain McDodd. "I would have staked my life that our men were loyal. I can't help thinking that they've met with some kind of foul play."

All Dorrie's crew addressed him as "sir." Dorrie simply hated being called "my lord," every moment. He preferred to be just an ordinary man. His title, indeed, was a bit of a worry to him.

"Well, old man, it's no good concerning yourself," said Nelson Lee. "The fact that two men have deserted is not very serious. There may be a hundred reasons for their absence."

"Then you don't think it's foul play?"

"It is impossible to say," replied Lee. "The police have been fully informed, and they have made every effort to trace the men. Surely, if they had been kidnapped, or shanghaied, or anything of that sort, the police could have found some clue? There is every indication that the men went of their own accord. Possibly they became fascinated by some of the stories concerning these oil wells."

Even Nelson Lee did not dream of the truth.

He would, for example, have been greatly astonished if he had known that the unfortunate Harding and Baxter were even at that moment no more than a few hundred yards away—still closely imprisoned in the secret hold of the Henry R. Cane.

The schooner was just about to leave.

She had taken on her usual cargo, and was setting sail at one. She was due to leave Los Angeles twenty-four hours before the Wanderer. And while Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee were talking on the yacht's deck, the schooner was making out to sea.

Down in that secret chamber, Harding and Baxter were despondent.

During the days of their imprisonment they had been fed well, and had no cause to grumble at their general treatment. But they were worried and puzzled, and horribly galled.

Their prison was like a vault.

Shout as they would, they could not make themselves heard outside. Right down in the bottom of the ship, surrounded by soundproof walls, they were cut off completely from the world.

And what was the meaning of this special chamber—which, as the men could see, had been in regular use for months? What was this floating prison? And where were they being taken to?

If they had been shanghaied they would not have been so surprised. Even to-day incidents of that kind do take place. But this! To be held as prisoners! It was staggering.

On deck, Captain Hurricane was talking with Mr. Seelig, as the schooner's sails filled with the brisk wind.

"Well, we're off," said the skipper, a grim note in his voice. "And not a durned soul suspects what became of those two guys we've got below. By heck! We've done well, Mr. Seelig."

"I guess so, cap," said the mate, nodding.

"And I've taken such steps that the Wanderer will never reach another port!" went on the skipper. "She starts off soon after

us, and I guess she'll be at the bottom within two days."

"It was a pretty big proposition."

"Well, it had to be," said Captain Hurricane. "Rather a pity them boys had to go, but we can't afford to be squeamish. This thing means either success or failure to us—and I guess we're not going to allow a bunch of infernal Britishers to spill the beans!"

"We're sure not!" agreed Mr. Seelig.

What had these two men done?

What were these steps they hinted at—steps that would prevent the good old Wanderer from reaching port?

There was some sinister mystery here.

And, although the Remove didn't know it, they were embarking upon a perilous voyage. Outwardly, it was just a pleasure trip. Even Lord Dorrimore himself had not the faintest inkling that danger and adventures of the most thrilling description were looming near.

"Well, boys, we're off at last!" said Dorrie—when the Wanderer started out from San Pedro. "An' we're goin' to have some good times!"

"Where are we bound for?" asked several juniors.

"England!" replied Dorrie.

"What!"

"England!" repeated his lordship, with a chuckle. "Possibly, we shall make a few stops on the way—and we might have a few adventures. But England is our ultimate destination."

"Are we going all the way home on the Wanderer, sir?"

"Absolutely," said his lordship. "I've been cautioned by Mr. Lee that we've got to get the English coast pretty early in September—so that all you fellows will be in time for the new term at St. Frank's. I've figured it all out, an' I think we'll be able to do it comfortably."

"Hurrah!"

"We're off on a world trip!"

"And we've done with films!" grinned De Valerie.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth glared.

"Any more of that rot, and I'll biff you!" he said sternly. "My hat! Ain't I ever going to get any peace? Films! I never want to see another one as long as I live! After all, they're only fakes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And all this fuss about oil, too!" went on Handforth, with disdain. "Everybody in California seems to think they can make a fortune out of oil! And as soon as ever they find a well, they jolly well shove hundreds of others up in the same place! No wonder they peter out so quickly!"

"My dear ass, you don't understand!" I grinned. "Just think of Signal Hill, at Long Beach. Remember it? All those derricks crowded together, looking like some fantastic dream?"

"Of course I remember it," said Handforth.

"Just now there's a pretty big oil boom

(Continued on page iii of cover)

OUR STUDIO PORTRAIT STUDIES

OF FAMOUS ST. FRANK'S CHARACTERS.

No. 6. Dr. Malcolm Stafford.

Sincerely Yours
Malcolm Stafford

St. Frank's in Filmland

(*Continued from page 27*)

on out there. Of course, hundreds of people will get sucked in—but plenty will make their fortunes, too. But, on the whole, I think I'd prefer to invest money in England—in something solid. There's too much of a chance about these oil propositions."

And so we left California—we had come across the United States from New York; we had seen, and we had been just a little bit disappointed. But it would be idle to say that we had not thoroughly enjoyed ourselves.

The one fact which a good many of the fellows seemed to regard as a grievance was that there was no Wild West—no romance, as the boys had been led to believe, through reading exciting fiction.

Western America is no different to Eastern America, in all main essentials. There is no wilderness left—except for the fact that Los Angeles certainly appears to be the Mecca of hundreds of crooks. It is a beauty spot of Southern California—but it probably has more crime and violence than any other city in the United States. Perhaps Los Angeles will grow out of this in the course of time.

And we had left it now—we were off on new adventures.

Little did we realise the nature of the events that were in store!

THE END.

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