

THE ADVENTURES OF A SCHOOLBOY CIRCUS !

THE
NELSON LEE
LIBRARY *And St. Frank's Magazine*



Before we could clear the caravan from the line the express came roaring upon us.

Read about the St. Frank's Circus in This Week's Great Story :—

UNDER THE CANVAS DOME !



Mr. Simon Snayle went up into the air like a rocket, legs and arms waving wildly. He described an almost perfect arc in the air, and I momentarily shut my eyes, expecting to see him crash, battered and mutilated, to the ground.

UNDER THE CANVAS DOME!



**A LIVELY SCHOOL STORY OF THE BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S AND HOW
THEY RUN A CIRCUS.**

Shortly after their return from the Easter holidays, the famous Remove Juniors of St. Frank's assist the Onions Brothers to run their father's circus, which is touring the district near Bannington. It came about through the bad management of Simon Snayle, who had been put in charge by Onions Senior. Snayle had goaded the performers to go on strike, and the circus was faced with financial ruin. Since the Onions Brothers were well known to the St. Frank's Juniors—they were boys at the River House School last term—the Juniors offered their services. This they did with considerable success, advertising the show, managing it and providing many of the turns. Indeed, the St. Frank's Circus created quite a stir, and was destined to lead to many thrilling and unique experiences for the Juniors, as you will discover when you read the following story.

THE EDITOR.

The Narrative Related by Nipper and Set Down by E. Searles Brooks

CHAPTER I.

AFTER THE SHOW.

ZURR-WOOSH!

The great folds of canvas came billowing down as the last section of the great tent collapsed under the experienced hands of the circus workers. Great naphtha flares illuminated the scene with a lurid, flickering glow, and a group of St. Frank's juniors stood watching with considerable interest.

"Pretty clever how they do it," observed John Busterfield Boots.

"I'll tell the world!" agreed Adams, nodding. "Of course, over in America this circus would be two cents! We've sure got some dandy shows out there. Say, I once saw a circus way up State in New York—"

"About twenty times as big as this, eh?"

put in Handforth. "Yes, we know all about it! There's a bit too much spoof about you, my son! Onions' Colossal Circus and Menagerie wants a bit of beating!"

"You said something!" said Ulysses.

"Of course I said something—did you think I'm gargling?" demanded Handforth tartly. "There we go! My hat! The way these chaps get the work done is worth watching!"

All the circus hands were hard at it, and the great canvas dome of the circus—the big tent—was now nothing but a great sea of billowing material in the centre of the dark meadow. Men were crawling over it like ants, dealing with the canvas with experienced hands.

All the other tents were down, and the greater portion of the circus was ready for departure—waiting to start the midnight

trek to the next pitch. There was something rather fascinating about it all.

The lines of caravans and waggons, with horses harnessed, and ready to move—the flaring lights—the forms of the men, flitting hither and thither in the gloom.

It was a scene that attracted the St. Frank's juniors. They had been with the circus for two whole days now, and were getting to know the ins and outs of a showman's life. But this was the first time they had seen the circus being dismantled in readiness for "a moonlight flit"—as Handforth somewhat unkindly put it.

"Just after half-past eleven," I said, glancing at my watch. "Johnny says that we ought to be in Bannington by six, at the latest."

Handforth snorted.

"Six o'clock!" he echoed. "Ain't we going to start in half an hour?"

"About that."

"Midnight until six! That's six hours!" said Handforth.

"This man is a mathematical marvel!" exclaimed Reggie Pitt, amazed. "He did that calculation in under two seconds! And for months and months we've had this magician under our eyes without knowing his powers!"

Handforth glared as the knot of juniors grinned.

"That's right—be funny!" he sneered. "Six hours! Why, it's ridiculous! Everybody knows it's only eighteen miles from Helmford to Bannington. Why, that's—that's only three miles an hour!"

"He's at it again!" said Pitt. "You'll strain your brain, old man——"

"Three miles an hour!" roared Handforth, drowning the chuckles. "Do you mean to tell me that the horses can't go faster than that? Why, I could walk the distance in almost half that time!"

"Dragging a caravan?" asked Pitt. "If the road was level all the way, we might average five miles an hour—but you seem to forget that the road is pretty hilly, and these caravans are heavy."

"Can't they make up time going down hill?" growled Handy.

"Nay, O youth of vast ignorance!" said Pitt. "Dost thou not realise that horse-drawn vehicles are compelled to go even more slowly down hill than up hill? You've been speaking for five minutes, and you've said nothing!"

Handforth grunted, and walked off, feeling that he had got the worst of the argument. And in the meantime the preparations for departure went on regardless of Handforth's advice—for he was not satisfied unless he went round telling everybody how to do the work.

Johnny and Bertie Onions were just as active as their employees. The St. Frank's fellows had offered to lend a hand, but Johnny had particularly requested them to stand by and watch.

Mr. Simon Snayle, the manager of the circus, was lolling in his own caravan, en-

gaged in the occupation of imbibing whisky. He was taking no part in the activities. Owing to his mismanagement, the circus had nearly become a financial disaster.

The St. Frank's remove had stepped in, and had saved the situation at the last moment. And Mr. Snayle was filled with hatred against these boys—these junior schoolboys who had shown him how to run his own business.

He held his position as manager by virtue of a fixed agreement with Professor Onions, the father of the young circus owners, who was lying helpless in bed as the result of a stroke. Unexpected reverses on the Stock Exchange had swallowed up the professor's fortune, and the blow had prostrated him.

And his two sons, instead of returning to the River House School for the new term, were running the circus on their own—handicapped by the mismanagement of Mr. Snayle—who had cunning ideas of his own for making the circus a failure, so that he could snap it up for a mere song. With Professor Onions helpless in bed, the traitorous manager schemed to serve his own ends. But Johnny Onions had seen through his perfidious plan, and Mr. Snayle was now sulking in his own quarters.

He had had nothing to do with the show for the last two days, and had sworn not to do a thing for a week, or until these St. Frank's boys cleared out and left the show to run on its own.

The circus had started badly at Helmford. The artists were cheap and incompetent, and the main part of the show had been a deplorable fizzle. We had seen it—and we knew.

The only acts worth looking at had been those of Johnny Onions himself—and he was a brilliantly clever acrobat and tight-rope walker—and Tessa Love, the pretty bare-back rider. She still remained with the show, for she was Mr. Snayle's niece, and absolutely indispensable. She was, in fact, the only lady artist in the whole circus.

Owing to Mr. Snayle's plotting, the whole company had struck work, walking out an hour before the evening performance was due to commence, and thus leaving the show helpless.

There had been no circus that night, and there might have been serious trouble with a crowd of the Helmford roughs but for the timely intervention of Archie and Handforth and Reggie Pitt and myself. And after this little trouble had been successfully dealt with, Reggie had had the idea of the season.

In short, he had suggested that the Remove should run the show! Instead of getting new artists—and only cheap talent could be procured, owing to shortage of cash—it would be far better to get talent for nothing!

So, on the following afternoon, the most extraordinary circus performance in history had been given, and the success had surpassed all expectations. Buster Boots had flooded Helmford with such startling pub-

licity that the big tent had been packed, and everybody had gone away delighted.

The evening show had been just as victorious, and on the following day big money had been taken. And now the stay at Helmford had come to an end, and the circus was shifting on to its next stand—Bannington.

On the morrow we should open amid familiar surroundings. And the morrow had other interests, too, for it was the first day of the new term at St. Frank's—and there was much to be done.

The amateur circus performers had been enjoying themselves hugely, and the principal stars were Justin B. Farman, Jerry Dodd, Handforth major, and Handforth minor, Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey. They were all a bit dubious about the immediate future.

"You seem to be pretty confident that we shall get permission to carry on in the circus," remarked Grey, turning to me. "But it's my opinion that the Head will put his hoof down pretty hard on the whole scheme."

"I've promised Johnny that we'll stand by him during the week in Bannington—and later on in Caistowe," I replied. "And we'll keep that promise, my sons. I don't exactly know how it's going to be done—but determination is everything. Where there's a will there's a way!"

"It's all very well to quote proverbs, but there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip!" said Reggie Pitt sagely. "Still, we won't worry about that to-night. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof!"

CHAPTER II.

ON THE ROAD.



"ALL ready?" sang out Johnny Onions. "Yes, guv'nor—last load just roped up," replied one of the men cheerily.

It was just after midnight, and the long procession of caravans, cages, and waggons were standing on the moonlit road, and in the meadow, waiting for the command to be on the move.

The last naphtha lamps were being extinguished, and only the twinkling lights on the vehicles themselves now lit the scene. Handforth and two or three other juniors had perched themselves on one of the leading caravans, and the rest of the fellows were also making themselves comfortable.

Archie Glenthorne was about the only junior who preferred to sleep during the journey. The rest wanted to experience the novelty of travelling through the mild May night.

Only about a third of the Remove was present. The remainder had returned to their

various homes on the previous day. But those who performed in the circus were compelled to remain, and it wasn't worth while going back to-night.

For St. Frank's opened on the morrow, and the circus was going within a couple of miles from the school. There was no sense in travelling up to London, only to come back again in the early morning.

I was standing with Johnny Onions and Reggie Pitt and Tessa. The girl was enthusiastic about the whole programme, and bitterly opposed to her uncle because of his rascality. It was difficult to believe that such a sweet girl as Tessa could have a bullying blackguard like Mr. Snayle for an uncle. She never complained to any of us, but we could easily see that her love and respect for Mr. Snayle were non-existent. She probably hated him. But he was her guardian, and she was compelled to suffer.

"It's foolish of you boys to stay up all night," she was telling us. "You'll be awfully tired to-morrow if you don't get any sleep. As soon as we start, I'm going into my caravan, and I don't suppose I shall wake up until we're in Bannington."

"Oh, we shall be all right, Miss Tessa," I said. "You mustn't think that we'll all stay awake. Half the fellows will soon get sleepy, and they'll doze off. I expect we shall all get a few hours."

"Mind you do!" said Tessa firmly. "To-morrow's an important day—"

"Oh, here you are!" interrupted a rasping voice. "It's time you were in your caravan, my girl—and long past time! Young ladies oughtn't to be out at this hour of the night!"

Tessa turned to her uncle, and tossed her head.

"You know well enough that we're all late on moving nights," she replied coldly. "I don't see why you should be so nasty, uncle. I'm going to my caravan now, anyhow."

"Then be off with you!" said Mr. Snayle. "I'll see you into it, and lock the door! Then you won't be able to get out again!"

"I can lock the door myself, thank you!" said Tessa shortly.

"Yes, and let Mrs. Simkins in as soon as my back's turned, so that the pair of you can gossip half into the night!" snapped Mr. Snayle sneeringly. "I know your tricks, young lady! Come with me!"

There was a nasty insinuation in his tone, implying, as it did, that Tessa could not be trusted to lock herself in her own caravan securely. The girl flushed, then turned and bade us good-night.

"Rotten shame!" muttered Pitt, as she went off. "That beast of a Snayle is always insulting her! It's a wonder she stands him!"

Tessa accompanied Mr. Snayle to her own picturesque little caravan, and entered. And her uncle, without giving her a chance to speak, pulled the key out of the door,

slammed the door to, and locked it. He put the key in his pocket.

"I'll let you out in the morning!" he called, with an unpleasant laugh.

Within the caravan, Tessa sat down on one of the lockers, and stamped her foot. She was fifteen, and hated being treated as though she were five. And it was humiliating to be locked in like this. But it was not the first time that Mr. Snayle had treated her with such short shrift.

He walked away, chuckling. He knew that Tessa was a prisoner, for it was impossible for her to escape by one of the windows, even if she wanted to. That caravan had been especially constructed for her by Professor Onions, and it was different to other caravans.

Tessa's wheeled home was fitted with eight tiny little openings, four on each side of the caravan, and all could be opened—but were altogether too small to admit of any entry or exit. Even a child could not have squeezed through.

Professor Onions had thoughtfully planned the caravan in this way for the girl's protection. She had only to lock her door, and could keep every window open without any fear of intrusion. And a circus is the gathering-place for all manner of human derelicts. It was necessary for a pretty girl like Tessa to have some adequate protection.

Mr. Snayle entered his own caravan, had another drink, and then came out and took his place in the driver's seat. There was no necessity for him to drive at all, but it pleased him to see all that was going on. His was a bullying nature, and he was known to be a terror when the circus was on the road.

Soon afterwards the big move commenced.

First of all went the traction engine, hauling two heavily laden waggons in its rear. There were bright headlights fixed to the engine, so that oncoming traffic should have clear warning of the procession. This engine also served the purpose of supplying electric current for the circus when the latter was pitched.

Next in order came the living caravans, Nelson Lee's racer, with myself at the wheel, and then the animal cages, followed by property waggons, and trailing away to smaller vans and carts behind—with the elephants bringing up the rear.

It was quite an impressive and imposing parade, stretching along the road for a considerable distance.

Helmford was passed through rather noisily, for the houses and shops echoed the rumbling of the traction-engine, and the stamp of horses' hoofs, and the grinding of the wheels. Many windows were opened along the High Street to watch the procession as it passed.

But once the town had been left behind, the long train of vans settled down to crawl. And it wasn't long before many of the juniors began to get drowsy. They nodded as they sat or lounged on the tops

of the vans, and two or three of them fell into deep slumber.

All the same, there was something fascinating about this steady move through the night, with the knowledge that hard work must follow the very instant the new ground was reached. There would be no rest for the majority of the circus men until all the tents were pitched.

There was no doubt that a favourable reception would be waiting the circus in Bannington. The town had already been billed under Mr. Snayle's instructions, but Johnny had not been satisfied with that.

Buster Boots had been so successful with his publicity in Helmford, that he had paid a flying visit to Bannington on the following day—which was the last day of the show's sojourn in Helmford.

Boots and a crowd of Removites had employed very much the same methods in Bannington, but without the help of any circus parade. They had laid the foundations for what was to come—by getting the people interested.

All the juniors were well known in Bannington, and, of course, the story of the Helmford exploit had long since leaked out. Bannington, therefore, was mildly interested, and this was a very good beginning. By the time the circus arrived, and the parade had appeared through the town, there was little doubt that a big crowd would turn up for the show.

So everybody connected with the circus was in the best of spirits. The good business at Helmford had provided the brothers with plenty of cash to make a good many minor improvements—matters that had long needed attention. And the prospect of remaining on one pitch for three days—with the almost certainty of extending the sojourn for a week—was very alluring. Mostly accustomed to one night stands, the circus men were in luck.

But Mr. Simon Snayle did not share the universal cheeriness. He sat on his caravan, savage with himself, savage with the men, savage with the St. Frank's boys, and savage with the plodding horses.

Again and again he used his whip unnecessarily. It pleased him to do so. It always made him feel better when he was inflicting pain upon some helpless animal that could not retaliate.

"You lazy mongrels!" he rapped out, giving the two horses a powerful, vicious cut with the whip. "Get on!"

He had been thinking of his own position, and he slashed at the horses without reason. The two animals, stung by this unexpected punishment, reared up, and broke into a gallop.

"Confound you!" roared Mr. Snayle frantically. "What the blazes—"

A collision seemed inevitable. He wrenched at the reins, and made things worse, for he jerked so violently that the bits jarred in the horses' mouths.

Thoroughly frightened, they became unmanageable.

But, somehow, Mr. Snayle managed to swing the pair partially round. The turn was not enough, and the rear wheels of Mr. Snayle's caravan collided with terrific violence against the rear of Tessa's!

CHAPTER III. IN DEADLY PERIL.

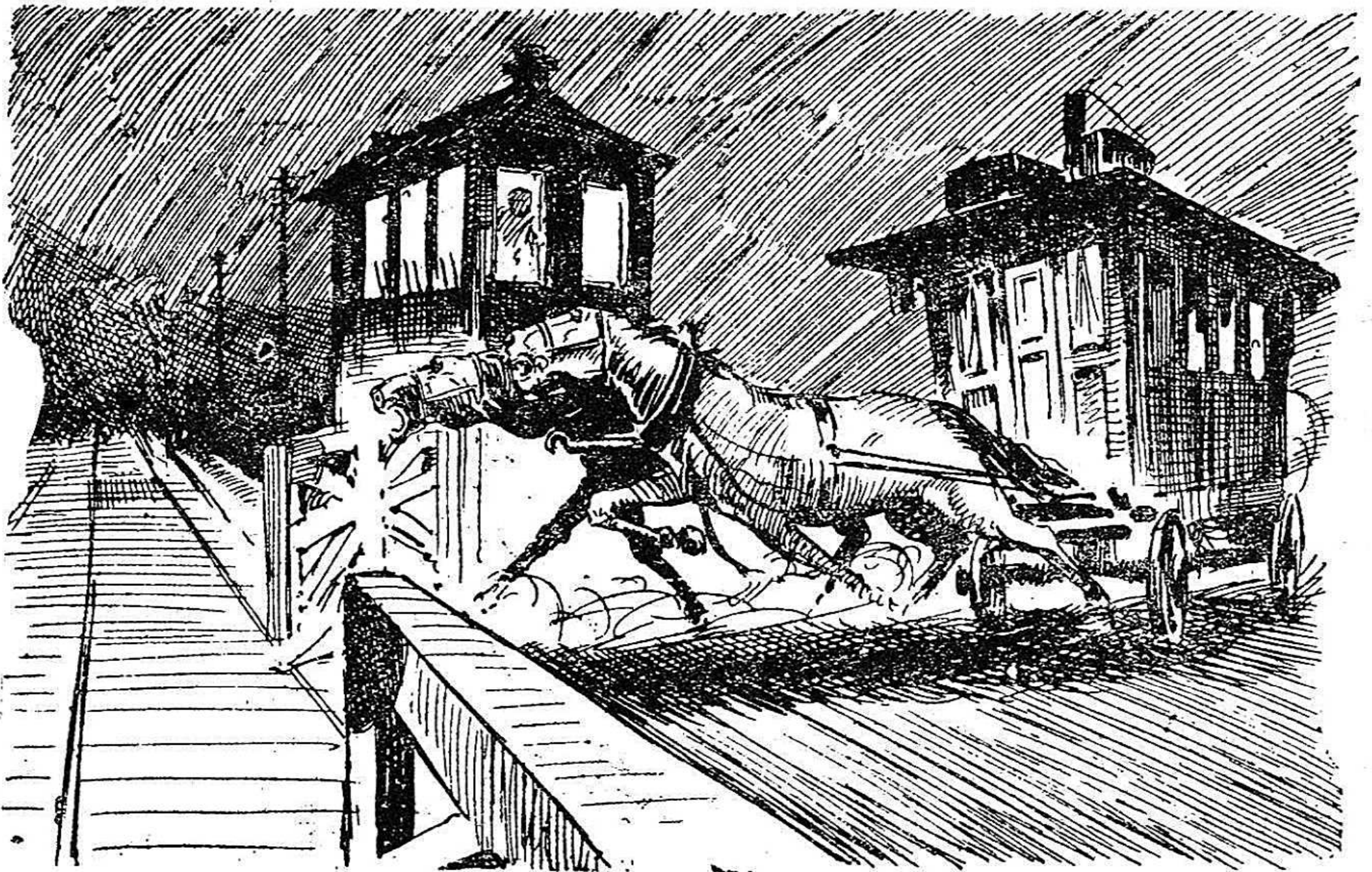


CRASH!
The shock was so great that Tessa's caravan nearly overturned, and then gave a lurching swing forward, surprising the horses into startled activity. They pranced wildly, in

himself. With a cry, he plunged down, struck the road, and was extremely fortunate to roll clear of Mr. Snayle's horses, which were still excited. The man had been half asleep, to tell the truth, and in his semi-dazed condition he was off almost before he knew it.

And Tessa's horses, without any controlling hand on the reins, plunged madly forward. But even now it did not seem that any serious consequences could ensue. For the whole line of caravans ahead blocked the road.

But it happened that at this exact point there was a branch road which forked off into the heart of the hilly, wooded country. And Tessa's horses, in swerving, had a way clear for them.



The signalman touched a lever and the gates flew open to allow the caravan to pass. He caught one glimpse of the steaming, foaming horses as they thundered over the level crossing.

spite of their driver's efforts to calm them. Inside, Tessa was nearly thrown off the little locker, upon which she had been sitting, deep in thought—and still fully dressed. She started up with a cry of alarm.

And matters became worse on the instant.

Her two horses had taken fright by that collision, and might easily have been calmed, but for the unfortunate mishap which occurred to the driver. In making a wild grab for his whip, the fellow overbalanced.

The caravan had given a sudden jerk at the moment, or he might have saved

They swung off, and a moment later the caravan was roaring and swaying down the side lane. And the horses now fairly had the bits between their teeth, and the caravan was tearing along amid clouds of dust and showers of stones.

It had all happened in a mere flash, it seemed.

Tessa, within the caravan, realised that something grave had occurred. The furniture and fixtures were rattling and shaking and being jerked down in showers. The lamp fell, went out, and Tessa was in darkness—which did nothing whatever to increase her peace of mind.

But she knew that the horses had bolted.

Instinctively, she forced her way to the door, and wrenched at the handle, having a half-formed idea of throwing herself out on to the road before the caravan met with disaster.

But the door refused to budge.

"Oh, it's locked!" breathed Tessa, in sudden fear. "It's locked!"

She remembered her uncle's action, and a kind of horror swept over her as the full realisation of her position flooded into her mind. There was no escape from this runaway caravan!

The door was strong, and the lock stout. It was impossible to smash it down, even if such an attempt could have been made.

question that the results for her would be grave.

The windows were useless—she couldn't escape by that means. And she lay on the floor, her heart beating wildly, frightened almost to the point of fainting. Tessa was a plucky girl under ordinary circumstances, but this experience was calculated to unnerve the strongest.

In the meantime, consternation reigned in the circus procession.

All the vans were pulled to a halt, and Mr. Snayle only just succeeded in preventing his own caravan from overturning into the ditch. He brought his horses to a halt,

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And this was out of the question, for the van was swaying and lurching so alarmingly that Tessa could not keep her feet.

She was thrown down, bruised and half-dazed.

And there she lay, clutching at anything her hands came upon. The roar of the tearing wheels sounded dreadful to her, and she knew perfectly well that the van had no driver. Somehow, he must have been thrown off! If he had been there, she would have heard his shouts to the maddened steeds.

At any moment she expected the caravan to overturn in the ditch, or meet with some similar catastrophe. And there was little

"Stop that caravan!" he shouted wildly, shivering and palpitating in every limb.

"Quick! Those infernal horses have bolted! Where's the driver? The confounded fool—"

"I was thrown off, sir!" gasped the man, running up, as pale as a sheet and covered with dust. "And Miss Tessa, sir! She's inside—"

"Locked in!" shouted Pitt breathlessly. "You locked her in, Mr. Snayle!"

"Good heavens!" muttered Snayle, dazedly.

"What are we going to do?" asked Handforth, rushing to the side of the road, and

gazing down that side lane. "We can't overtake the van by running! And it may be overturned by this time——"

"Nipper's car!" rapped out Pitt swiftly. "What?"

"It's the only way!" said Pitt desperately. "Where's Nipper? Where's——"

But I had discovered that something was wrong by this time, and had driven the racing car up to the spot, there being just sufficient room to allow of my passing.

I was driving with Tommy Watson and Willy Handforth in the car, which was the gov'nor's own racer. And it only took me a few moments to learn what had happened.

"Jump in!" I shouted. "There may still be time!"

Handforth and Pitt leapt on to the running board, and I slipped the clutch in. A moment later we roared off down the side lane. As we did so, a short, stumpy figure came running up from the advanced caravans.

"Dippy help!" panted the figure. "Dippy help save Miss Tessa——"

"Clear out of the way, you mis-shapen reptile!" snarled Mr. Snayle, half mad with fright and anxiety.

Dippy recoiled, cowering. The dwarf was the manager's slave, and it was Mr. Snayle's custom to treat the unfortunate relic of humanity with less consideration than he would have treated a dog.

"But Dippy anxious about Miss Tessa!" exclaimed the dwarf, in his peculiar way.

"Dippy want go in chase——"

"Go to blazes!" snarled Mr. Snayle.

Dippy slunk away, but after a moment or two he broke into a swift run, and vanished down the side lane at an incredible speed. His legs were short, but they moved so rapidly that he looked like some enormous spider scuttling over the ground.

And what was happening to the caravan now? What was happening to those who were in chase of the runaway?

In the car, I "stepped on the gas" until the racer was roaring along at a dangerous speed. And in a few minutes we caught sight of the rocking, rushing caravan.

Handforth and Pitt were still clinging to the running board, and they gazed ahead with intense anxiety in their eyes.

"There's going to be a smash!" muttered Pitt. "Look at this hill! Nothing can avert disaster at the bottom! And—look! I thought I saw a red light! What on earth——"

He broke off with a kind of gulp.

The caravan, just ahead, was careering along in a mad flight down the hill, the horses now utterly terrified by their rush, and growing wilder every second. And I felt something like an icy clutch at my heart as I realised what that red light was—the light that Reggie had referred to.

At the bottom of this long hill there was a railway—the tracks crossing the road. And the red light was fixed in the centre of the gates at the level crossing.

And this meant only one thing!

A train was coming—and the gates were closed against traffic! Tessa's caravan, pulled by its maddened horses, was tearing straight down towards that ghastly peril!

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE PATH OF THE EXPRESS.



HANDFORTH gave a bellow of alarm and excitement.

"Put some speed on!" he roared. "We've got to stop that van——"

"It's no good, old man!"

I panted. "This road's too narrow—we can't pass! There's nothing we can do—nothing!"

Even as I said the words, my hand instinctively touched the knob of the electric siren. And I pressed the knob fiercely. A long, raucous, discordant note wailed through the night air.

I had told Handforth the truth. The road was so narrow that any attempt to pass that caravan would lead to double disaster. We should not only wreck ourselves, but endanger Tessa's life as well. And there was just a possibility that the horses would keep to the road, and rapidly wear themselves out.

I thought of all this in a flash.

The night was moonlight, and I could see a long hill rising up beyond the level-crossing. The railway, in short, ran in a valley, this line cutting down into the dip, crossing the tracks, and then rising steeply.

If only the level-crossing could be negotiated in safety, there was a distinct hope that the long drag up the hill would automatically bring the exhausted horses to a halt.

And there was only one chance of saving Tessa now.

Continuously, feverishly, I pressed the knob of that electric horn. And the night was made hideous by the continuous hoots.

It was now a matter of seconds. The caravan was already within two hundred yards, the horses pulling more slowly than before, but still absolutely out of control, and wildly maddened.

The signalman who controlled the crossing gates from his box was startled out of his wits when he saw in the moonlight a driverless caravan tearing straight on towards the crossing, pulled by horses that were obviously beyond all control.

"Darn my skin!" he gasped huskily.

Long experience of the railway told him that this was an occasion for instant action. The swiftness of glances up the line showed him that the express was not yet in sight, and there would be time for the caravan to cross, and to avert disaster. He touched a lever, and the gates flew open to allow the caravan to pass.

He caught one glimpse of the steaming, foaming horses as they thundered over the level-crossing, dragging the van behind them with a roaring rattle. One of the rear hubs caught the gate, but only a mere graze, and no harm was done. And the caravan was over—safe!”

“Nearest thing I ever see!” said the signalman faintly.

Only at the last second did I jam on my brakes, and pull the racer up a mere foot from the glaring red danger lamp. I was feeling wildly relieved, but still anxious.

“It’s over! Tessa’s still safe!” gasped Handforth.

“Open these gates!” I shouted. “There’s a runaway pair——”

“I can’t open ’em—the express just coming!” shouted the signalman urgently. “Don’t touch them gates or you’ll be killed!”

I sank back, rather limply.

“It’s no good!” I muttered. “We’ve got to wait!”

“But—but——”

“Let’s hope the horses pull up on that steep hill,” I went on. “Anyhow, we’ve done the best we can. Thank Heaven those gates were opened in time. There would have been a terrible smash otherwise.”

We were trying to peer through the gloom beyond the gates, for the lane on that side of the railway was lined with trees, and the moonlight failed to penetrate. But we could see that a hill rose with startling steepness.

If we had known exactly what was happening to Tessa’s caravan our anxiety would have been greatly increased.

The horses were more maddened than ever. The red light at the crossing, the thunderous jolting of the wagon as it crossed the tracks had done much to send the two animals into an absolute frenzy.

And they tore up that steep hill with renewed energy. But the incline served a part of its purpose, for the speed of the rocking caravan was decreased. And Tessa within prayed that the end of this nightmare was at hand. Little did she realise that the worst was yet to come!

The hill rose steeply for only a hundred yards, and then took a sharp right angle turn. Straight ahead lay the open gateway of a meadow. And the two horses, terrified beyond all measure, galloped straight on, perhaps taking that gateway for the road in the uncertain light.

Crash!

Without the slightest pause the frantic animals rushed through the gateway, and there was a splintering crash as the caravan failed to get through. The gateway was narrow, and by an extraordinary chance the van was headed dead true in the centre. And both the front hubs smashed into the posts.

The resultant jerk was so terrific that Tessa was flung from one end of the interior

to the other, and she lay huddled on the floor, bruised, and only half conscious.

And there was another startling result.

The shaft hinges proved unable to stand that terrific strain—that sudden jarring jolt. They snapped, accompanied by the pistol-like parting of the harness. And the two horses tore away across the meadow with the debris trailing behind them.

But the caravan had halted, and Tessa breathed a sigh of heartfelt gratitude that the ghastly experience was over. She could hardly believe it. Expecting to be overturned, it was amazing that no worse disaster should have happened than this.

And then, as she attempted to get up, she felt a movement. The caravan was in motion again! And this time it was running backwards. Tessa caught her breath in with fresh alarm.

In an instant she realised the truth.

The van had not jammed, and as the incline was steep, and the brakes were free, the vehicle was now moving backwards! It gathered speed rapidly, and in a few seconds was rushing down the steep hill.

All this had happened in the briefest possible space of time; and now the peril was a hundredfold intensified. There was nothing to stop the runaway coach. With ever-increasing speed, it hurtled down towards the level-crossing, keeping to the centre of the road by some demoniac miracle.

The signalman gave a hoarse shout of fear as he saw the van coming. And we, in the car, held our breaths with suddenly renewed fear.

With a splintering roar, the rear of the caravan struck the gates and crashed clean through, amid a litter of broken wood. We expected to see the caravan overturn, but it didn’t.

Instead, it slewed drunkenly round, and halted, its wheels parallel with the up track—head on, and full in the path of the oncoming express!

CHAPTER V.

ALMOST A TRAGEDY.



A LONG, shrill whistle shrieked through the night.

The express was approaching—near at hand. It was only a matter of mere seconds before that train, thundering along at sixty miles an hour, would crash into the helpless caravan and render it into insignificant matchwood.

And Tessa!

I shuddered, and felt utterly sick. No earthly aid could get to her. Locked in, she couldn’t even help herself. And I knew that we had no more than twenty-five or thirty seconds at the utmost.

And then I caught a glimpse of her pale face at one of the tiny windows.

"Tessa!" yelled Handforth wildly.
 "Oh, help me—please!" she cried, her voice breaking.

"Come on; there's just a chance!" I gasped. "If we fail—"

"But I don't understand—"

"Quick! There's only one way! Tip the caravan on its side and get it clear of the track!" I shouted. "Come on—it's a chance!"

Even as I leapt over the gate, with the others following me, I realised that our mission was almost certainly doomed to failure. With such a short space of time at our disposal it seemed impossible that we could succeed.

As for the train, it could never be stopped in time. That whistle we had heard was not because the driver had seen the obstruction, but the ordinary nightly whistle which always sounded near the crossing.

Even if the driver found out the danger and jammed his brakes on to their utmost capacity, he would never be able to halt that heavy train in such a short distance.

But the express was thundering on at full speed—relentlessly.

There was another aspect of the situation which I did not overlook. Our own peril was enormous. If we failed and were forced to abandon the effort, there would scarcely be time for us to dash for safety.

There would not be much peril of being run down by the train itself, but the flying debris, as the engine smashed at full speed into the caravan, would probably catch us and inflict grave injuries.

It was even possible that the train itself would be derailed by the impact, and that an appalling disaster would result. It was not only Tessa's life that we were attempting desperately to save, but perhaps the lives of scores.

"Quick! Oh, quick!" cried Tessa feebly.

But there was nothing of panic in her tone. She realised the danger as much as we did, although it was probably a fact that she did not know how near the train was.

As we dashed on to the permanent way the gatekeeper ran across the down rails, waving his arms.

"Go back—go back!" he shouted hoarsely.

We took no notice of him.

"You'll be cut to pieces!" panted the man. "You can't do anything; you can't shift it! Run for your lives!"

The gatekeeper halted as he stood, terrified by the fact that we took no notice of him. For a moment he was paralysed by fright. Then he stumbled back towards safety, too utterly dazed to take any further action.

"Come on; all heave together!" I panted hoarsely.

The five of us used all our strength, but to our horror the heavy caravan resisted, being jammed in the rough gravel of the track. Again we heaved, but still with the same result.

And above us Tessa was at one of the little windows, watching in despair.

"Go back!" I gasped. "We're going to tip you over! Hold tight to something, or you'll be hurt!"

"The train!" whispered Watson. "It's nearly on us!"

We could hear the roar of the express thundering in our ears. At any moment I expected death. For there is nothing more deceptive than the approach of a fast train. Perhaps we had miscalculated! Perhaps the express was within twenty yards of us already!

But now there was a different note in that roar.

We heard the continuous shrieking of the whistle, the grinding scream of locked wheels; and out of the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of sparks flying in myriads from the rails, a long distance up the line.

The driver had seen the obstruction and was making a desperate effort to pull up—an effort that was doomed to failure, as he knew better than we did. But, mercifully enough it gave us a few seconds more, and it was now a matter of moments.

Our task was a simple one, if we had enough strength.

The caravan had slewed round so completely after the impact with the gates that it was now facing the rushing train. And the caravan was hardly scratched by the collision. The gates had been wrecked by that impact, but the van had escaped untouched.

By tipping the obstruction completely on its side we should thus hurl it upon the down track, leaving the up rails clear for the rushing monster of the iron road.

But our efforts were useless; we heaved in vain.

And as this knowledge was forced upon me I could have sobbed with sheer horror and helplessness. For, in order to save our own lives, we were compelled to flee, leaving Tessa to her fate. In my mind's eye, I had a vision of her strained, pretty face at the window.

It had gone now, for she had obeyed my injunction to hold tight in expectation of the crash as the caravan overturned. Instead of that crash there would be one mighty, splintering—

I couldn't think of it—and the next second I was filled with a blind, furious rage against Simon Snayle. It was he who had locked Tessa in—he, in his malicious spite! But for that one fact, the girl would have been able to escape.

It was time we wanted—time! If only we had had a full minute we might have succeeded. But the seconds had gone—and now the express was practically upon us.

"Back!" I shouted hoarsely. "Back for your lives!"

"But we haven't—" began Handforth, horrified.

"It's too late—we haven't got time!" screamed Pitt.

The thunder of the express was throbbing in our ears, and I knew well enough that we should never be able to get clear of the scattering wreckage. And then, in that dreadful moment, a short, stumpy form rushed up like a gnome of the night.

"Dippy help!" it panted sobbingly.

Without waiting to hear from any of us, the dwarf flung himself at the caravan and heaved with the strength of a giant. He had rushed up a moment or two before, and had grasped the situation with a swiftness that proved how unjust it was to call him half-witted.

"All together!" I yelled desperately.

It spoke volumes for the courage of the fellows that they all leapt to the caravan as one man. Yet they must have known that they were possibly signing their own death warrant by that act.

"Now!" I gasped.

With the addition of Dippy, the difference was apparent in a flash. That heave sent the caravan toppling over drunkenly. The air seemed filled with thunder, the ground shook, a million sparks flashed and glittered right upon us.

I caught a fleeting vision of the caravan toppling over as I shot back, and flattened myself against the closed gate. The others did the same, clinging there with all the breath knocked out of them.

And in that same breath the express roared by with a devastating sound that left us nearly stunned and senseless!

CHAPTER VI.

THE NEW PITCH.



CHOKED with dust, and practically blinded, we swayed drunkenly away from the gate as soon as the train had passed. But I was just able to see that we were all intact, including

Dippy, and I cared for little else.

The caravan was safe, as I knew—lying across the down rails, little more than grazed and scratched. In falling, it had jerked completely clear of the oncoming train.

And so we had all escaped—the danger was over!

"Oh, thank Heaven!" murmured Pitt, clutching my arm. "I thought—I thought that—"

"Never mind, old man," I said softly. "About the narrowest thing I've ever known. Thank goodness we're all safe now—"

I broke off as a sudden thought occurred to me. And although I had been sick and dizzy a second before, my brain abruptly cleared. The prospect of further peril acted like a stimulant.

"The van's on the down track!" I said hoarsely. "There may be another train—"

Without waiting for any of them to speak, I rushed at the gatekeeper.

"Is there any other train coming?" I demanded, grasping his arm.

"All right, young gent—all right!" he muttered. "No other train for nigh on two hours—neither up nor down. I thought ye was all killed, so I did! I'll remember this night all the rest of my life!"

The others were recovering by this time, and proved to be unharmed except for the shock and one or two minor cuts and jags caused by flying splinters of wood that had whirled up as the train ran over the loose fragments of the smashed gate.

"Tessa!" said Pitt. "We've got to get her out."

He needn't have spoken, for I was bending over the caravan at the moment. One side was now pointing to the sky, and I crawled up and looked in one of the "ports."

"Miss Tessa!" I called urgently.

"I—I'm here!" she replied. "Oh, Nipper! Please—please get me out! I'm so frightened! I thought I was going to be killed! That train rushing by—"

"Are you hurt, Miss Tessa?" I asked anxiously.

"I—I don't think so," she replied, her voice almost inaudible.

By this time Handforth and Pitt had found a heavy piece of the smashed gate, and they quickly used this as a battering-ram. After the second crashing blow the lock of the door gave way, and the door flew open.

"We ought to have done this at first," panted Handforth.

"There wasn't time, old man," I said. "You don't realise that everything happened in a few seconds. It seemed hours, but it wasn't. By the time we could have found that piece of wood, the train would have been on us."

As soon as the door was open, Pitt and I crawled through the opening, and assisted Tessa out into the cool night air. She was looking as pale as a sheet, and a trickle of blood was showing on one of her white arms. Her hair was all loose and tumbled, and she could hardly stand.

"Better bring the young lady in my little cabin," said the gatekeeper, who had gazed open-mouthed as Tessa had appeared. "Mebbe she'll feel a bit better later on. I've got some hot tea, too."

Tessa was assisted into the cabin, and she declared that she would soon be herself. She was rather bruised and shaken, and there was a slight cut on the upper part of one of her arms, caused by a piece of broken glassware. At first we thought her injuries were worse.

But by the end of five minutes she was showing a little colour in her cheeks, and the wild look in her eyes had calmed down.

"It was Dippy who saved you, Miss Tessa," I declared. "We tried to get the

caravan over, but couldn't manage it. Dippy came up in the nick of time."

The dwarf, who was hovering in the rear, pushed forward.

"Dippy do nothing!" he declared. "Without young gentlemen, Dippy helpless. They save you, Miss Tessa. Dippy joyful!"

Tessa looked at the deformed creature with grateful eyes.

"I've got to thank you all," she said softly. "Oh dear! I can't realise it happened—it was so dreadful! Oh, so dreadful! Please let me stay here for a little while—"

There was a bustle at the door of the

Tessa's caravan. That set her horses on the run, and they bolted. And if you hadn't locked Miss Tessa in, and taken the key away, there would have been no danger at all! You're nothing but a bullying cur!"

"Hear, hear!" said the other juniors excitedly.

Mr. Snayle recoiled under the general outburst.

"They're right—you know they're right!" said Tessa indignantly. "Oh, uncle, how can you? You don't know what happened—it was only by a miracle that I was saved—"

"All right—we'll say no more about it!"



The girl dashed into the building, nearly exhausted, and the tramp followed. We lost sight of them both, and we all increased our speed, running with every ounce of energy.

cabin, and Mr. Snayle appeared, hot, dishevelled, and panting.

"Oh, so you're safe?" was his greeting, as he caught sight of Tessa. "I'd begun to think—" He broke off, and his old manner returned. "I've got to thank you infernal boys for this business!" he went on. "You interfering upstarts—"

"Hold on!" shouted Handforth fiercely. "Another word, you cad, and I'll knock you down!"

"Why, confound your impudence—"

"Don't you accuse us!" roared Handforth. "You know as well as I do that it was your fault! Everything was your fault! You frightened your horses by whipping them, and collided with Miss

muttered Mr. Snayle. "There's a crowd outside now, and you'll be wanted, my man," he added, addressing the gate-keeper.

As a matter of fact, the express had pulled up nearly half a mile away, and two of the guards had come back with the fireman to find out what all the trouble was about.

There was a good deal of talk, of course, but the train wasn't delayed for long. And, in the meantime, Tessa's caravan had been placed on its wheels again and dragged off the tracks on to the road. Strangely enough, the damage was slight. The interior was in a state of hopeless disorder, and a great many of the fixtures were

smashed, but nothing was damaged beyond repair.

Over a dozen of the circus men had turned up, too, as well as the rest of the juniors. Half a dozen men went off in search of Tessa's horses, and they were found in a meadow about half a mile away, with most of their harness gone and in a thoroughly exhausted condition.

The juniors got to work with a will, made Tessa's caravan as tidy as possible, and she was persuaded to get some rest. Temporary shafts were soon fitted, and fresh horses brought up.

And so, after the delay of just over an hour, Tessa's caravan rejoined the circus procession, although nobody had really expected to see it intact again. And the trek through the moonlit night was resumed.

CHAPTER VII.

BACK AT ST. FRANK'S.



WILLY HANDFORTH sat up, rubbing his eyes. "My hat!" he murmured. "Daylight already!"

A minute earlier he had emerged from beneath a huge pile of blankets and sacking on the top of one of the big caravans. And Willy was still somewhat sleepy.

After the restart, he had seen no reason why he shouldn't indulge in forty winks. And so, instead of getting back in the car with me, he had crawled under the blankets on the top of the van. It had been his intention to have just a little nap in order to refresh himself.

And now he looked round, and blinked.

The sun was beating down with some heat, and near by there were shady trees, and the sparkling waters of a river flowed gently and serenely between its green banks. The twitter and chirrup of birds filled the air.

Willy stared in the other direction—and started.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he muttered blankly.

There, in the centre of the big meadow, stood the great circus tent, vast and imposing, with bunting gaily fluttering in the breeze. Close by were other tents, and a group of men were busily engaged in putting the final touches to them.

Caravans were dotted about here and there, and smoke was issuing from the chimneys of two or three. The traction-engine was lazily at work, operating the electrical installation.

In fact, the whole circus was pitched, everything was peaceful, and it had all happened without Willy knowing a thing about it. He felt indignant. He had slept through the whole business!

"What rot!" he growled, as he stood up and stretched himself. "Some of those asses might have had the decency to wake me up! I was awfully keen to see how they got that big tent fixed. Of course, we open to-day—"

A rather pained expression came into the fag's eyes.

"To-day!" he said, in a hollow voice. "Thursday! First day of term. Oh, my goodness! There's always something cropping up to spoil a chap's enjoyment! School's a rotten idea, anyhow."

He prepared to descend, having caught sight of two or three juniors hovering near an adjacent caravan—the Onions brothers' caravan, in fact. And Willy suddenly sniffed the air with relish.

"Bacon!" he murmured. "Never knew bacon smelt so topping!"

The appetising odour made him realise that he was enormously hungry, and he fairly leapt to the ground and dashed off on the tract of the invisible bacon. He had no difficulty in running it to earth.

For as he approached that other caravan he came face to face with Dippy, the dwarf. And Dippy wore a large smile on his peculiar face, and he carried an enormous tray filled with piles of bread, a great dish of bacon, poached eggs, and a huge jug of coffee.

"Talk about Trackett Grim!" said Willy. "Why, I'm as good as Pedro. I followed the scent—"

"Oh, here you are!" said Handforth, coming to the door of the caravan and eyeing his brother. "Where the dickens have you been to, you young sweep? And what's the idea of looking like a scarecrow? Go and wash yourself, you grubby bounder!"

Willy grinned.

"Eating is more important than washing," he replied calmly. "There'll be plenty of water in half an hour's time—but it's any odds that the bacon will be gone! I want to be on the safe side!"

"Something in that," grinned Reggie Pitt. "Better feed now, Willy, and take no chances. We're all like lions!"

Breakfast was soon served—some of it in the caravan, and some of it outside the caravan. The fellows didn't particularly care about their surroundings, as long as they got the grub. Circus life had made them less particular, and even Archie Glenthorne was perfectly content to sit on the steps with a plate on his lap and a hunk of bread on a piece of newspaper.

"The simple life, what?" he observed cheerily. "I must confess, old companions, that it has certain charms. Dash it, I haven't had such a frightful appetite for years! Kindly buzz over the bacon, somebody!"

"Just in time for the last slice," said Buster Boots.

Johnny Onions was looking rather concerned. He was pleased with the new pitch, and he was delighted by the fact that Tessa

had turned out, hardly any the worse for her startling adventure. But Johnny was worried, nevertheless.

"It's all very well for you fellows to promise that you'll appear this afternoon, but what on earth am I going to do if you don't?" he asked. "I may seem a bit selfish—in fact, I am selfish—but I'd like to be more certain. I wouldn't mind betting a quid the Head puts the snuffer on the whole scheme!"

I shook my head.

"Don't you worry," I said. "We'll fix it. Anyhow, you can be absolutely certain that we'll all turn up for to-day's performances. We shan't let you down, Johnny."

But I could see that my reassurance was not sufficient. Both the Onions Brothers had a constant, gnawing fear that Dr. Stafford would fail to see eye to eye with us in this enterprise.

The circus was pitched in Bannington for a week, and we were just as keen upon helping the show as Johnny was for us to rally round. We had watched the erection of the tents with interest, and the work of the circus men had seemed almost like magic.

It was still comparatively early, and we had all managed to get a certain amount of sleep. The weather was perfect, and this new pitch was even better than the Helmford ground.

The circus was occupying a meadow on the outskirts of Bannington, right on one of the main roads, with motor 'buses passing the gate. At the other end of the meadow the River Stowe flowed peacefully on its course—providing an ample and constant water supply.

A finer pitch could not have been found, and Bannington was quite large enough to support the circus for a whole week. It was only a question of publicity, and giving the public a good show in return for their money.

We had seen no sign of Mr. Snayle.

The manager had retired into his caravan after that thrilling escape at the level crossing, and he was probably sulking. He must have known that he had nearly brought about Tessa's death by his actions. And the manner in which the whole circus was prospering enraged him.

He had made his plans so cunningly, and they would certainly have succeeded but for the intervention of the Remove. Mr. Snayle spent nearly all his time trying to evolve schemes whereby he could get his own back.

Soon after eight-thirty—just when Bannington was beginning to wake up for the day—John Busterfield Boots commenced his publicity campaign. A parade was formed, and all the St. Frank's fellows joined in—to say nothing of the elephants and the lion, and the other animals.

Willy once again got inside his lion's skin, and paraded through the town chained in

the back of the racer, which I drove. And this alone was enough to create widespread interest.

New posters and handbills had been printed, and the latter were distributed broadcast. We wanted to ensure a record crowd for the first performance. If only the tent was filled in one afternoon, the public themselves would provide the show with plenty of advertisement.

It was all over by eleven o'clock, and we had received sufficient indication that the town was agog. Of course, all sorts of stories had come in from Helmford, and the fame of the circus had reached Bannington well in advance. The publicity, in fact, was good.

"Well, that's over," I said, glancing at my watch. "It's after eleven. We'd better be making a move for St. Frank's. We shall just catch the eleven thirty-five train, if we hurry. Of course, we'll come back on our bikes."

"That's a good idea," said Johnny. "It's only just over two miles, and you'll be able to nip backwards and forwards in no time."

Soon afterwards they were off—every St. Frank's fellow accompanying me. We caught the train all right, and duly arrived at St. Frank's just as noon was striking.

All was bustle and confusion.

It was the first day of the term, and everything was upside down. Moreover, the whole school was talking about the Remove's latest stunt. The old Triangle was crowded with fellows who could talk of nothing else. Chambers of the Fifth came over to me and nodded.

"Glad to see you back," he said condescendingly. "What's all this I hear about a circus? Isn't it about time you Remove kids thought about the dignity of St. Frank's?"

"You're jealous!" I said, grinning. "It wouldn't be a bad idea, Chambers, to introduce you into the show as a comedian—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is what comes of being familiar with juniors!" said Chambers sourly. "Well, thank goodness the new term's started! This circus rubbish is finished!"

"Is it?" I said sweetly. "I wonder!"

CHAPTER VIII.

NELSON LEE PUTS HIS FOOT DOWN.



"HALLO! Hallo!" said Handforth, staring round. "They've been tittivating things up, by the look of it. About time, too! This lobby always looked like the entrance to a convict prison!"

We were standing just within the Ancient House doorway, and there was certainly a

reason for Handforth's comment. The lobby was hardly recognisable as its old self. Instead of being distempered, the walls were richly papered, all the paintwork was renewed, and the whole place looked superior.

"We've got to thank old Cyclone Smith for this," remarked Armstrong. "You remember how we had to leave school a few days before the term was over. That riot seems like a nightmare now—ages old! And yet it was only a week or so ago! Old Smith had his uses, after all."

During that riot which Armstrong had referred to, St. Frank's had suffered severely. Most of the windows had been broken, the junior Common-room and more than one Class-room had been burnt and gutted, and nearly all the junior studies had been wrecked.

And during the holidays a great army of workmen had taken command of the school, and had transformed it completely. The Governors had evidently thought it an excellent opportunity to make improvements, too.

"I say! Seen the Common-room?" yelled Teddy Long, rushing up excitedly.

There was a rush for the Common-room, and the juniors were freshly delighted. This celebrated apartment was now a place of dignity and comfort. Luxurious lounges had been supplied, bookshelves, writing tables, and all sorts of other conveniences that the juniors had never before enjoyed.

And the studies were similarly improved.

All were re-papered and re-painted, and completely new furniture had been supplied—uniform furniture. Each study had its own little table, its own easy chair, and its own bookcase. If any of the fellows liked to add to these articles they were perfectly welcome to. But even the neediest Removites were guaranteed a nice amount of comfort.

"It ought to have been like this all along," said Handforth, looking round Study D. "I don't quite like the hearth-rug, and that easy chair's too small. Still, we mustn't grumble."

"I don't know, but it seems good to be back again," said Church, gazing round the study lovingly. "It seems years since we were in this room! And now this circus is going to mess things up again—"

"Mess things up?" repeated Handforth, staring.

"Yes. You'll always be away—"

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Reggie Pitt and Grey and myself.

"I want you fellows to hold yourselves in readiness," I said briskly. "The gov'nor's here—arrived ten minutes ago—and I'm going to beard him in his den straight away. If there's any trouble, you've got to be on hand to make up a deputation."

"Why not all go straight off?" asked Handforth.

"I don't think it would be wise," I said. "I want to put it to the gov'nor quietly and forcibly. Somehow or other, we've got to have our afternoons free for the next week or so. We can't perform in the circus and do lessons at the same time. So lessons have got to go by the board."

They looked dubious.

"It sounds terribly thick!" remarked McClure. "Somehow I can't see Mr. Lee agreeing! And then what are you going to do? You've given Johnny your promise, and—"

"I shall keep it," I put in firmly. "Wish me luck!"

They did so, and I hurried off at once, presenting myself in Nelson Lee's study a few minutes later. I had already greeted him, of course, although I had said nothing about the circus as yet. He was sorting out some of his books and papers, and regarded me with interest.

"Busy, gov'nor?" I asked casually.

"Very!" he replied.

"Ahem! Well, I—I won't keep you long, sir," I said, trying to appear unconcerned. "The fact is, we—I should say, us—"

"You have come to me about the circus, eh?" interrupted Nelson Lee amusedly. "Yes, Nipper, I've heard all about it. You need not be nervous—even the Head himself was entertained by a recital of the facts. But it is over now, and the new term has commenced. I am quite proud of the Remove for the manner in which it showed the true sporting spirit and went to the assistance of the two Onions youngsters."

"Thanks, gov'nor," I said. "But—er—you're a bit wrong about the circus affair being over. The show's in Bannington now, and I've promised Johnny Onions that we'll still be able to stand by him and carry on."

Nelson Lee looked at me in surprise.

"You've promised?" he repeated.

"Yes, sir."

"Then you had no right to do so," said the gov'nor coldly. "You know well enough, Nipper, that neither you nor the others can be doing two things at one and the same time. I cannot have this circus interfering with your school duties."

"But it won't, sir," I put in quickly.

"Indeed! Then how do you propose to carry on?"

"Well, you see, sir, the circus is in Bannington for a week, and then it'll go on to Caistowe for two or three days, and stop at one or two of the smaller places—"

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"According to this, you will all be required for nearly a fortnight?"

"About that, guv'nor."

"And you are suggesting that you should be allowed to attend this circus—indeed, to perform in it—for the first two weeks of the term?" asked Nelson Lee, in a voice that gave me no encouragement. "Is that it, Nipper? We might as well have the thing quite clear."

"Yes, sir, that's clear enough," I said. "But I don't see why you should make any objection. You see, I've promised Johnny, and we want to do all we can to help him over this stile. If only we keep on without interruption, he'll have time to get some new acts, rehearse them, and have the show in thorough working order, so to speak, by the time we quit."

"It is all very simple, and all very nice—from your point of view," said the guv'nor. "But remember, Nipper, that the Remove is now at school, and that your time will be occupied with lessons."

"But the evening performance starts at a quarter to seven, sir, and it's all over by a quarter-past nine—at least, the Remove fellows will be able to leave by then. I dare say it can be arranged so that they shall leave by nine o'clock. This gives us plenty of time to get home for bed."

"And your prep.?"

"Oh, we'll do that before we start," I replied. "We shan't need to leave until half-past six."

"H'm! You have mapped it out very nicely, I must confess," said Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "Perhaps I shall have no objection to your appearing at the evening performances. After all, it is your own time, and I will grant the concession of allowing you out after locking-up."

"Thanks awfully, guv'nor," I said eagerly. "Now, there's—there's just a little question of the afternoons—"

"The afternoons!" echoed Lee. "Ah, yes, to be sure!"

"You see, sir, they always give two shows daily, so it's absolutely necessary for us to have our afternoons off," I went on boldly. "Of course, it's only temporary, after all. Just for this two weeks we want to be excused lessons in the afternoons. Say the word, sir, and everything will be O.K."

"How many are there of you in this extraordinary scheme?"

"How many, guv'nor?" I repeated. "Why—er—sixteen."

Nelson Lee looked at me grimly.

"And you have the audacity to suggest that sixteen of you shall be excused afternoon lessons for two weeks?" he asked. "The idea is preposterous. I might have been agreeable, perhaps, if only two or three boys were involved. But sixteen—nearly a third of the Form! No, Nipper! The thing is absolutely impossible!"

CHAPTER IX.

ONE WAY OF DOING IT.



"IMPOSSIBLE, sir?" I echoed blankly.

"You have my permission to attend the evening performances—and that is a big concession—but under no circumstances can I

allow you to miss your afternoon lessons for a whole fortnight," said Nelson Lee. "You are asking too much, Nipper. You are unreasonable."

"But—but if we give the evening shows, we've got to give the matinées!" I protested. "The circus is helpless without us!"

"Then I am sorry for the circus," broke in the guv'nor curtly. "I have told you my decision, Nipper, and I will not depart from it. You have suggested that sixteen boys shall miss two hours of school work daily for the coming fortnight. Do you realise what the Head would say if I gave my consent?"

"Would he be wild, sir?" I asked, scratching my head.

"I don't think he would be wild—but he would certainly be amazed," replied the guv'nor drily. "No, Nipper, it won't do. If you could put in your two hours of school work for the afternoons, and still attend the circus, it would be a different matter. But there are so many hours in each day, and they can only be used once. The Head is particularly strict just now on account of the time lost over that recent barring-out. The Junior School has got to buckle to and make up for lost time. Your scheme is most inopportune, and I must finally and forcibly put my foot down."

"But look here, sir—"

"We are merely wasting time, Nipper," interrupted Nelson Lee firmly. "You may attend the evening performances, but that is all. Argument is absolutely useless."

"Yes, sir," I said meekly. "Thank you, guv'nor."

I went out, deeply concerned. And just round the corner of the passage I ran into fifteen anxious juniors. They were all the others who were concerned in this enterprise. One glance at my face was sufficient to tell them the worst.

"Squashed?" asked Pitt sadly. "Ky-boshed?"

"Not exactly," I replied. "We can go in the evenings—"

"Good!"

"But not in the afternoons—"

"Rotten!"

"The guv'nor says that we shall be losing two hours of school work daily, and when you come to consider it, he's right," I went on. "Until I had actually asked him for afternoon leave, I didn't quite realise the nerve of it. But it's a bit thick, you know."

The juniors were greatly worried.

"But, look here, what about my publi-

city?" demanded Buster Boots warmly. "I need the afternoons——"

"And what about our performance?" put in Farman. "Gee whiz! Those poor guys will sure be worried stiff when they hear this. They're counting on the afternoon shows."

"Without 'em, they won't be able to meet expenses," I said grimly. "The evening performances alone will be insufficient. Look here, there must be a way out——"

I broke off, and a gleam came into my eyes. I felt myself flushing, and the rest crowded round and looked at me with growing interest.

"Don't worry him!" whispered Pitt. "He's just getting an idea! I can see it taking shape! Let the great man think!"

"Oh, rot!" growled Handforth. "I never heard of such piffle. Just as if a few measly afternoons are going to make any difference! We can easily make up for lost time later on."

"Yes, it's possible," I said abstractedly. "Of course, it'll mean a bit of a wrench in the mornings, but it's worth it. Two hours—six till eight. It comes to just the same thing."

"What the dickens are you gassing about?" asked Handforth bluntly.

I gazed at the crowd fixedly.

"Are you fellows game to get up at half-past five?" I demanded.

"Half-past five! But what on earth——"

"We can be in the class-room by six, and do two hours' work before eight," I went on crisply. "There's our afternoon's work! If we promise to do that, surely we can have the afternoons off? It all depends upon you fellows turning out."

"It's a great idea!" said Buster Boots enthusiastically.

"Yes, but who's going to call us?" demanded Dodd.

"I will," I said promptly. "At least, I'll call our own chaps."

"And I'll guarantee to get the Monks out," put in Buster Boots. "I've got an alarm-clock, and what's better than getting up at half-past five at this time of the year? Glorious mornings, sunshine, fresh air! And there's always the knowledge that we're earning our free afternoons!"

"Good!" I said. "Then it's a go!"

They all agreed—being, in fact, quite enthusiastic. It seemed a simple way out of the difficulty. And the prospect of getting up two hours before the rising-bell had no terrors.

Without delay, we marched back to Nelson Lee's study, and I tapped, and led the way inside. The other fellows crowded in, pushing me in front of them.

"Oh, sorry, sir!" I said. "I thought you were still alone."

"Good gracious! What is this remarkable flood of humanity?" demanded Nelson Lee, gazing at us severely. "Do not imagine

for one moment that I shall alter my decision, Nipper——"

"But we've got an idea, sir," I said eagerly.

"Don't mind me," put in the Sports master, who had been chatting with the guv'nor. "Go right ahead, young 'un!"

"It's about the afternoons, sir," I said, before he could stop me. "We'll get up at half-past five, and put in two hours' work between six and eight—every morning! If we do that, it'll be just the same as afternoon lessons."

Nelson Lee had been about to interrupt me, but he paused, and a slight smile flitted across his face. It was a hopeful sign. Mr. Clifford was grinning broadly.

"You will do two hours' work before breakfast?" asked Lee.

"Yes, sir—all of us!" put in Handforth. "We'll be in the class-room by six o'clock, and do our afternoon's work straight off. If we do that, sir, can't we be free for the day after morning lessons?"

"Come on, guv'nor—it makes no difference so long as we do our full amount of school work, does it?" I asked, pressing our advantage. "And we'll give you our work to inspect, and if that isn't satisfactory we'll give up the whole scheme. We can't say fairer than that, sir."

Nelson Lee's eyes twinkled.

"I will admit that you are very persevering," he said drily. "And the suggestion is not without its ingenious side. Providing you do your full daily work, I can hardly refuse. And I shall certainly do nothing to dissuade you from early rising. But the plan is immature."

"How do you mean, sir?" I asked quickly.

"If you can find a master who will be on duty at six o'clock in order to take you at lessons, then I will agree to the suggestion," replied Nelson Lee, to our consternation. "But I shall certainly not allow you boys to play at lessons without anybody in authority. Produce your master, and I will offer no further objection."

All the juniors looked utterly blank, and Mr. Clifford laughed.

"Well, that's easily settled," he said. "I'm game for the job. If it's going to help you youngsters, I'll be on duty at six o'clock every morning, and I'll make you work like niggers until eight. How's that?"

CHAPTER X.

JEALOUSY IN THE REMOVE.



MR. HAROLD CLIFFORD'S sporting suggestion took our breath away.

"You mean it, sir?" asked Reggie Pitt breathlessly.

"Of course I mean it," laughed Mr. Clifford. "It's up to Mr. Lee to endorse the suggestion, or kill it."

"I shall certainly not kill it, Mr. Clifford," smiled Nelson Lee. "Indeed, I regard your offer as a complete solution to the problem, and I congratulate you on your generous spirit. You may count yourselves lucky, boys, that Mr. Clifford is so large-hearted."

"Rather, sir!" shouted Handforth. "Hurrah!"

"Thanks awfully, sir!"

"You're a brick, sir!"

"Are you referring to me, or Mr. Lee?" grinned the Sports master.

"Both of you, sir!" yelled half the juniors.

"In that case, you're a set of young asses!" said Mr. Clifford. "And don't forget that I shall be as hard as nails when I'm acting as your Form-master. And bear in mind, too, that all your work will have to go before Mr. Lee and be passed before you have your afternoons free."

"All right, sir—we're ready for that."

And, highly delighted, the fellows crowded out of Nelson Lee's study, and hurried out into the Triangle—victorious. Nelson Lee lay back in his chair and laughed heartily.

"That was very splendid of you, Clifford," he said.

"Oh, I don't know, sir," said the Sports-master. "The kids are so confoundedly eager to carry on this circus stunt that I hadn't the heart to refuse. It's all in a good cause, and they're doing no harm. But I'm afraid the rest of the Remove will have something to say."

Mr. Clifford was right.

The rest of the Remove had a good deal to say. There was quite a lot of indignation as soon as the story got about. By this time practically all the Junior School had arrived, and the news that sixteen fellows were to be allowed their afternoons free went round like wildfire.

"I never heard of such a thing!" snorted Owen major hotly. "'Tain't fair! Why should these chaps have such privileges? If they're let off in the afternoon, we all want to be let off!"

"Hear, hear!" said Griffiths excitedly.

"We're not going to stand it!" declared Merrell. "Not likely! There'll be a giddy row about this, you mark my words!"

Handforth pushed up his sleeves.

"All right—I'm ready for a row!" he said promptly. "Who's the first chap to object? Come on! I'm waiting!"

"Steady, old man—no scrapping in the Triangle," I said.

"But these rotters want to make a fuss!" roared Handforth. "What the dickens have they got to grumble at?"

"Everything!" snorted Owen major.

"You've got permission to have free afternoons for a fortnight—sixteen of you! Why shouldn't we have the same privilege?"

"Don't be unreasonable," said Buster Boots. "We're all connected with the circus—and you're not—"

"Yah! Rotten Monk!" yelled Teddy Long.

Buster grinned.



He had just caught sight of two rough-looking characters lounging in the meadow a short distance from a big barn.

"If you're going to descend to common abuse, there's no argument left," he remarked. "And you fellows seem to forget that we sixteen will do our afternoon lessons just the same."

"How can you do your lessons if you're at that circus?"

"We shall do 'em in the morning," growled Handforth. "We're not lazy bounders like the rest of you—we're going to be up at half-past five, and start lessons at six. There's no reason why you fatheads should be jealous!"

But they were jealous, all the same. They considered they had a grievance—that a certain proportion of the Remove was receiving concessions which were denied to the others.

And quite a commotion followed, practically the whole Remove gathering in the Triangle, and forming a sort of indignation meeting. In the middle of it, Nelson Lee suddenly appeared.

An immediate hush fell, and the gov'nor looked round rather grimly.

"Anything wrong here?" he asked.

"It's not fair that these chaps should have their afternoons off, sir!" protested Gulliver. "We want our afternoons off, too!"

"Hear, hear!"

"It's nothing else but favouritism!"

"We won't stand it!"

"Calm yourselves, boys—and let there be no more of this nonsense!" said Nelson Lee grimly. "It may interest you to know that I have consulted with Mr. Stockdale, and also with the headmaster. They are both quite agreeable to the plan—but only on the understanding that it does not extend for more than two weeks."

"Hurrah!"

"We don't want more than two weeks, sir!"

"If any of you boys are foolish enough to be jealous, you have a very simple remedy," continued Nelson Lee pleasantly. "What is fair for one is fair for another. Neither Mr. Steekdale nor myself will offer the slightest objection if the entire Remove rises at five-thirty, and works from six until eight. It is for you to choose."

"Oh!"

The discontented ones were startled by this announcement.

"You will quite understand, however, that there can be no trifling with this matter," went on Nelson Lee. "All boys who are not in the class-room by six o'clock will be rigidly excluded, and must attend afternoon lessons under Mr. Crowell in the usual manner. I cannot allow any slipshod concessions. All boys who attend in the class-room on the stroke of six will be eligible for a free afternoon. But at six the door will be locked, in order to exclude laggards."

And Nelson Lee, having made this point clear, walked away.

"Jolly good!" I said approvingly. "Of course, you can understand why the gov'nor's given orders to have the door locked at six. If he didn't make some rule like that, half the chaps would be crawling in at seven o'clock, do an hour's work, and then expect to have an hour off in the afternoon. And that would mean hopeless confusion."

Jack Grey nodded.

"Mr. Lee's jolly cute," he agreed. "Just that one little order makes everything smooth. If we get there at six we're safe. But if we're even a minute late, it means staying for the ordinary afternoon lessons. Nothing could be clearer than that."

And the Remove considered that the whole position was eminently satisfactory.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. SNAYLE'S ANNUAL.



"HERE we are again!" I said cheerfully.

I had dismounted from my bicycle, and a crowd of other juniors were with me. Of course, this particular afternoon was

free in any case, for it was the first day of term, and lessons were not to be thought of.

Johnny Onions came running up.

He had spotted us as we dismounted against the gateway of the circus meadow. And his face was filled with anxiety as he approached. But our cheerful smiles told him the truth.

"Is it all right?" he asked breathlessly.

"Everything fixed and settled," I replied.

"We are here for the afternoon show, and we've got permission to carry on dur-

ing the whole stay in Bannington and Caistowe."

"All of you?" gasped Johnny Onions.

"All of us!"

"I wouldn't have believed it—it seems too good to be true!" ejaculated Johnny. "I say, you're not spoofing me, I suppose? It's really official—from the Head himself?"

"You're very particular!" grinned Pitt. "As a matter of fact, it's official from Mr. Lee. But he's talked it over with the Head, so there's nothing to worry about. We've had dinner, and there's still nearly an hour before the show. If you don't mind, Jack and I will do a bit of rehearsing."

"Same here!" said Willy. "Ted and I are getting up a new trick."

And the various amateur circus performers went away to different tents, and were soon busily preparing for the afternoon show.

It was like a lengthening of the holiday to be back among the tents and caravans, and it must not be supposed that the Remove fellows were extremely unselfish in providing their services. They enjoyed themselves hugely, and looked upon the whole affair as an attractive recreation.

Mr. Snayle stood at the door of his caravan and glared savagely at the juniors. He could tell by their very appearance that they had obtained the necessary permission, and that they had come back full of enthusiasm for the afternoon performance.

"There's no getting rid of these cursed boys!" he muttered savagely. "But I'll put a spoke in their wheel! By thunder, they shan't defy me much longer!"

He entered his caravan, and kicked savagely at Dippy, who was tidying up. The dwarf reeled back, cowering.

"Get out of this!" snarled Mr. Snayle.

"Dippy not finished," said the dwarf. "Boss let Dippy stay. Want to finish making shipshape for boss. Dippy not be in way."

"Oh, all right, you reptile—go ahead!" grunted Mr. Snayle. "Hanged if I know why I keep you around this show. You're enough to scare the public, anyway! An ugly cuss like you ought to be taken away and smothered. You're no good in this world!"

"Dippy can't help being dwarf," said Dippy, in an aggrieved tone. "Always been like this, boss. But Dippy work hard—"

"Hard?" sneered Mr. Snayle. "You don't know what hard work is, you loafing mongrel! You don't earn the crusts I chuck at you! You ain't so valuable to the circus as a caged gorilla. But mebbe you'll be able to do something before long, Dippy."

"Dippy always do something," said the dwarf.

"Ay, but this time it'll be something different," went on Mr. Snayle. "Those boys have got to be cleared out. They're too big for their boots—and I won't stand them much longer."

"Boys very clever—make show go good,"

said Dippy stoutly. "Young bosses taking big money. Very good. Dippy always think that boys good for show."

"Then clear out of here, and don't let me set eyes on you for another two hours!" shouted Mr. Snayle harshly. "And remember this, Dippy—I can always make you suffer, if you don't please me. As long as you do as I order, I'll let ye alone. Now get out!"

The dwarf escaped hurriedly, expecting a spiteful punch or a kick. But, fortunately, he was able to escape without either of these blows. And he went off to his own ramshackle caravan, his eyes gleaming, and his hatred for Snayle even more intensified. Dippy was the man's slave, but there would probably come a time when Mr. Snayle would regret his brutality.

After a while, the manager left the caravan, walked about the meadow, and strolled to the river-side. A little distance away, the elephant-trainer was permitting his charges to have a very welcome bathe in the cool waters of the Stowe.

The two elephants were splashing about joyously, and they finally lumbered out on to the bank, splashing water in cascades. It chanced that Mr. Snayle was walking by at the moment, and he received a great surge of spray over the back of his neck.

"Keep these infernal beasts out of my way!" he shouted harshly.

Slash!

In his foolish rage, Mr. Snayle raised his cane, and brought it down heavily on the trunk of the offending elephant. It was a misjudged blow. Mr. Snayle had intended hitting the animal's leathery leg.

"Better be careful, sir!" exclaimed the trainer. "He ain't in the best of tempers this morning, and——"

Zizz—swoosh!

He was interrupted by a curiously sounding rush of water. The big elephant had raised his smarting trunk, and he directed it full at Mr. Snayle's face. A devastating stream of water shot out, and the manager went flying backwards with the force of the impact.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A number of juniors had witnessed the incident from the other side of the meadow, and the sight of Mr. Snayle receiving this drenching was quite amusing.

"Serve him right!" said Buster Boots. "He asked for it, the beast!"

Mr. Snayle had not been with a circus for years without learning that an enraged elephant is a dangerous brute. He picked himself up with surprising alacrity, and bolted.

And the elephant, with a shrill trumpeting sound, lumbered in chase.

"Go it!" yelled Handforth. "Catch him, Jumbo!"

"There's nothing to laugh at!" I said grimly. "This is likely to be a tragedy! When an elephant gets wild like this, he's

a terror. It seems that Mr. Snayle has gone too far for once."

We watched with sudden alarm and anxiety. Not that we had any particular affection for the rascally manager. But, much as we disliked him, we hardly cared to witness a tragedy.

Mr. Snayle was now thoroughly terrified—for as he had commenced to run, the elephant thundered along in chase. The keeper's shouts were unheeded, and the enraged animal overtook the fleeing man in a very short time.

Snayle was making a grim, desperate attempt to reach a caravan which stood near by. Once inside that haven of refuge, he would be comparatively safe. But he was not allowed to get inside.

The pursuing elephant reached him while he was still ten yards from the caravan, and the next moment it had grasped him in its trunk. He was whirled aloft, screaming and kicking.

"Good heavens!" I muttered. "He'll be dashed to the ground, and smashed to pulp!"

I was horrified, and so were all the other spectators. Mr. Snayle had certainly asked for this punishment, but nobody cared to see him in such a ghastly predicament.

Still screaming for help, he was like a toy in the grasp of that enraged brute. The elephant stood quite still now, and was swaying backwards and forwards in that curious way which is characteristic of the beast. Mr. Snayle was still held high in the air.

And then, with a snort that sounded very much like disgust, the elephant lowered its trunk, and raised it again with lightning speed, releasing its victim at the same moment.

Mr. Simon Snayle went up into the air like a rocket, legs and arms waving wildly. He described an almost perfect arc in the air, and I momentarily shut my eyes, expecting to see him crash, battered and mutilated, to the ground.

Instead, there was a mighty splash, a vast cascade of water, and a general gasp went up from the spectators as it was seen that Mr. Snayle had fallen into the river!

CHAPTER XII.

THE AFTERNOON SHOW.



"H A, ha, ha!"

A loud yell of laughter went up from everybody in the meadow when it was observed that Mr. Snayle was making frantic efforts to reach the opposite bank of the river. The very energy of his movements was clear evidence of his uninjured condition.

Handforth and a crowd of other juniors rushed up breathlessly.

"Serve you right!" roared Handforth. "You got off lightly, you rotter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The jeers and the laughter did nothing whatever to sweeten Mr. Snayle's temper. He was thankful to be alive, but he absolutely hated this ridicule. His humiliation was complete. And to appear in such a ridiculous light in front of these boys was gall and wormwood to the ill-natured man.

He managed to crawl out on the opposite bank, and he stood there, with water dripping from every inch of him, and he quickly recovered his composure. He shook his fist at the trainer.

"Take those cursed elephants away!" he raved.

The trainer needed no urging. Much as he detested Mr. Snayle, he had no desire to attend an inquest. The chances were that he would be held responsible, entirely innocent though he was.

The man went up to the big elephant, talked to him, and soothed him in quite a remarkable way. And, finally, both the great animals were taken away, and they vanished into their tent.

Not until then did Mr. Snayle venture to return.

About two hundred yards away, in the direction of the town, there was a foot-bridge, and he reached this, crossed over, and went to his caravan—where he disappeared, and was not seen again for the rest of the afternoon. Perhaps he thought it wise to lie low and let the matter blow over.

In the meantime, it was getting close to show time.

The people were beginning to stream up, and the hearts of Johnny and Bertie Onions were gladdened when they observed the continuous succession of patrons. Ten minutes before opening time the crowd was considerable, the side-shows were well patronised, and the big tent was filling steadily.

"By all appearances we're going to have a fine crowd," remarked Johnny, as he stood watching. "Nearly as good as Helmford! That's ripping, considering this is our first show here."

"Wait until opening time," declared Buster Boots. "If you've got any empty seats left by then, I'll buy every giddy one out of my own pocket-money! Publicity is the whole secret!"

"Not the whole secret," said Johnny. "There's got to be a good show as well, Buster. You can swindle the public now and again, but it won't work for long. We're building up a reputation for giving the best show on the road—and that's what counts."

"I'll admit there's something in that," confessed Buster. "It's queer, too, when you come to think of it. The best show on the road, and three parts of the acts are performed by the giddy Remove!"

"Yes, it's startling," said Johnny.

Buster was nearly right. By the time the orchestra struck up its opening melody—or

discord—the cheaper seats were completely packed, and there were only one or two vacancies in the most expensive enclosure. The big tent, in fact, was in that condition which is known as packed.

And it wasn't so much Buster's publicity that had brought about this much desired effect as the fact that the fame of Onions' Circus had arrived well in advance from Helmford. And the association of the St. Frank's juniors with the show had also created wide-spread local interest.

As we had long suspected, the secret was beginning to leak out. People were beginning to whisper that most of the turns were St. Frank's juniors—and it didn't matter now.

If the public had known this at first, they would have treated the show as a joke, and wouldn't have paid for admission. But people had been talking—people had declared that the performance was first-class. And the curiosity of the public was aroused—they wanted to come and see for themselves.

And the very element of mystery was healthy for the show. It was only rumoured that the St. Frank's boys were performing. Nobody knew anything for certain. And, of course, the circus would never admit the truth. It was left to the public to form its own conclusions.

Anyhow, the afternoon performance was an unqualified success.

By this time, Handforth and Farman and Dodd, and the other amateur artists had got well into their stride, and they gave a rattling show—a show that was brimming over with ginger and talent. And the juniors were so disguised in their circus get-up that when the show was over half the public went away declaring that all the performers were professionals, and that it was only a rumour concerning the Removites.

A big crowd for the evening was assured, and everybody was feeling happy and pleased. The arrangements were running on oiled wheels, and there was no reason why they shouldn't continue to do so.

"Of course, you chaps'll stop to tea, won't you?" asked Johnny.

"No, thanks!" I replied briskly. "We've got our bikes here, and I think it's better from every point of view that we should get back to St. Frank's. Looks better for the school, you know. We shall hardly be missed—besides, we're longing to get into our old studies again."

"Rather!" agreed Church dreamily. "Tea in Study D! Fine! I've almost forgotten what it's like."

"Marvellous chap!" said Reggie Pitt. "As far as my recollection goes, tea in Study D generally consists of thuds, yells, flying pastry, broken crockery, black eyes, and thick ears!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That is when Handy is presiding," went on Reggie amiably. "There's no account-

ing for tastes, of course. Personally, I should prefer a quiet bowl of skilly in the local prison!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fathead!" said Handforth sourly. "My only hat! And the audience laughs at your silly jokes in the ring! It doesn't take much to make people laugh, and that's a fact!"

"They'll laugh at absolutely nothing!" agreed Pitt. "They'll laugh at you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth glared, tried to speak, but words failed to come. So he flung himself on to his bicycle, and rode off. At least, he intended to ride off. But he jumped on the machine so violently that he flew completely over it and landed in a heap on the other side.

"Great!" said Pitt. "With a little more practise, you'll be able to put that in the show! By the way, why not do a cycling act?" he added. "You're pretty good at trick cycling, Johnny—I've seen you!"

"It's an idea," agreed Johnny. "I'll practise up a bit."

We were soon off, and we arrived at St. Frank's well before five—in nice time for tea. And as we shouldn't be required to start back before six-thirty we had ample time to partake of the meal, and then do our prep in readiness for the early morning lessons.

Appearing in the circus curtailed all our usual recreations, and reduced our leisure time to a minimum. But none of the fellows cared. The whole thing was a great adventure, and the schoolboy performers revelled in it.

I was just a little worried about the cricket, but in spite of our busy hours, I could see that we should be able to put in some brief practise daily. And, fortunately, we had no important fixtures until the second week of term. So things could be wangled.

We enjoyed tea in our studies immensely—far more than Mr. Snayle enjoyed tea in his own caravan. He had watched this departure from the circus field with ever-growing hatred in his heart.

The success of the afternoon show had made him even more bitter than before. And a letter that had arrived for him during the performance made his fury complete. His cup of hatred was filled to the brim.

For that letter was from Professor Onions, and it announced the professor's wholehearted approval of Johnny's action in taking the schoolboys into the show. And the letter concluded by stating that the professor relied upon Mr. Snayle to do everything in his power to help.

Thus, Mr. Snayle's last prop was gone. He had virtually received orders to carry on, and to lend his own aid to the scheme. It was now impossible for him to openly oppose Johnny and Bertie Onions. For they, too, had heard from their father, and they confidently expected an immediate change of front in Mr. Snayle.

Their expectations were realised. Mr. Snayle himself came to them, showed them Professor Onions' letter, and expressed his regret for having opposed them previously.

"It's all right, boys—we'll finish with these squabbles, and get along peaceably, eh?" he said, as genially as his brutal nature would allow. "You've proved that the idea is a good one, and so we'll carry on with it."

"I am glad, Mr. Snayle," said Johnny, "jolly glad!"

Mr. Snayle nodded and walked away, leaving the two brothers more content than they had been for many days. Perhaps they would have been less easy in mind if they had observed Mr. Snayle's expression as he walked out of the meadow, and strode away towards the town.

His face was grim, and his eyes were glittering. There is one word to describe his appearance—dangerous. Openly, he dared not oppose Johnny or Bertie or their father. He must allow the St. Frank's boys to remain with the show.

But there were other methods—methods that Mr. Simon Snayle was perfectly familiar with. Scarcely more than ten minutes later, he was in close conversation with two disreputable-looking men, and they all made their way into the back parlour of one of Bannington's most ill-famed inns.

Mr. Snayle, apparently, had something up his sleeve.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DECOY.



"READY?" I asked briskly.

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne.

"Lead on, old gargoyles, and the lads of the village will follow!"

There were about eighteen of us altogether, for one or two other fellows had elected to ride into the town with us. And the time was just six-thirty, and we had a comfortable amount of time for the trip.

The show started at a quarter to seven, but as none of the schoolboy performers were due to enter the ring until about eight-fifteen, we should be able to get to the ground with heaps of time to spare.

The evening was a bit cloudy, and decidedly close and warm. Hardly a breath of wind stirred, and there was a certain appearance in the sky which was suggestive of thunder.

"It'll ruin the show if there's a storm," growled Handforth, as we started off. "Just our luck, of course!"

"There's no chance of a storm to-night," I replied, glancing at the sky. "But the barometer is absolutely steady, and if this sultry weather continues there'll probably be some local thunderstorms in a day or

two. But it's no good looking for trouble—especially where the weather's concerned. All the science of the world, lumped together, is powerless to change the weather."

We had learned that a number of seniors had decided to see the show, and the majority of these had gone on by train. But it was better for us to use our bicycles for there could be no failure then. A missed train might result in the non-appearance of several artistes in the ring. And we couldn't let the circus down like that.

It was rather dull and gloomy as we cycled steadily along the Bannington Road after having passed through Bellton. And we certainly had no idea of possible excitement on the road.

It came as a shock, therefore, when we suddenly heard a girl's piercing scream.

"Great Scott! What was that?" asked Handforth blankly.

We stared round, slowing down automatically.

At the moment, we had just emerged from a thick belt of trees which lined the road on both sides. And we were just in time to see the figure of a young girl running madly across an adjoining meadow. An ill-kempt, brutal-looking tramp was rushing after her, wielding a heavy piece of wood.

"Well I'm jiggered!" roared Handforth, leaping off his machine. "It's one of the Moor View girls! That rotter is after her!"

"Help—help!" came the cry, in a frenzied, girlish voice.

We had all leapt from our machines, and the next moment the bicycles were piled up against the hedge, and we streamed through every available gap, and rushed to the rescue.

This tramp, obviously, had waylaid the girl, and he had no suspicion that help was so near at hand. We could see that the girl was dressed in white, with a gaily coloured sports coat. She had probably been returning from a tennis party, and had been attacked unawares.

"Come on!" I said grimly.

The girl was absolutely terrified—and small wonder! The man was a hulking brute, and by his reeling gait, it seemed more than likely that he was drunk. Once in that brute's clutches, it would go badly with the young lady. And even now the man seemed to have no idea that he was being pursued. He was so madly set on his villainous task that he didn't even turn round.

"Help—help!" screamed the girl.

The tramp was overtaking her steadily, and we could now see that the girl was making for a farm building which stood isolated in the extreme corner of the large meadow—a big, stoutly built barn.

The girl dashed into the building, nearly exhausted, and the tramp followed. We

lost sight of both of them, and we all increased our speed, running with every ounce of energy.

"My goodness!" panted Watson hoarsely.

Scream after scream came from the barn—pitiful, piercing shrieks. These sounds filled us with dread, and we rushed up in one enraged body. Without a doubt, the tramp had captured the girl, and now had her in his clutches. We began to suspect that he was a madman.

And, close as we were to the scene, a dreadful suspicion occurred to me that we should be too late. For those screams broke off abruptly—dramatically. The significance of this was appalling.

I remembered the man's heavy club, and it occurred to me that he had battered the girl into silence. How often one reads of such cases in the papers! And perhaps this man was an escaped lunatic—perhaps we ourselves should have a desperate fight with him.

With one rush, we poured into the barn, hard on one another's heels, even Archie being in the thick of it.

Entering that barn was like going from daylight into darkness, and in the momentary confusion we could see very little. We hardly knew what we expected to find, but we were certainly prepared for a scene of horror. We had pictured the girl lying senseless, with that brute bending over her in evil triumph.

But the foremost of us came to a halt, for we could see nothing. The barn appeared to be empty. The rest of the fellows came crowding in, pushing us further into the barn.

Slam—slam!

Two crashing thuds followed in quick succession, and daylight was abruptly shut off. I twirled round, and saw that the heavy double doors of the barn had been crashed to. And in that same second came a loud metallic snap as the iron catch was dropped into place.

There was a tense, startled silence, just for a brief second or two. And that silence was broken by a harsh, jeering laugh from outside!

CHAPTER XIV.

PRISONERS!



"TRAPPED!" I said hoarsely. "Oh, what fools!"

"Trapped!" echoed Handforth, gulping for breath. "But—but—What about the girl—she was one of the Moor View girls—"

"Just as much a Moor View girl as you are!" I said bitterly. "Oh, my hat! We walked into it blindly, and yet with our eyes open! If I ever tell the gov'nor about this he'll call me every name under the

sun! Oh, what a hopeless idiot to swallow that piece of decoy acting!"

"Acting!" gasped the others.

"Yes, acting!" I retorted. "It was done deliberately—just to draw us into this barn. Eighteen of us—eighteen collared by two! Ye gods, what a fiasco! Don't you understand? We're prisoners!"

"Prisoners?" yelled Jerry Dodd. "By Jings! But what for?"

"Say, this has kinder got me beat!" panted Justin B. Farman. "What in the name of mystery does anybody want to imprison us for? I guess there's something almighty queer about this, pard! It's got me all mussed!"

The gloom of the barn interior was now accustoming itself to our eyes, and we could dimly see one another. Most of the juniors were still puzzled and bewildered. It had all happened so suddenly, and so unexpectedly.

But there was not the slightest doubt that my statement was correct. We had been decoyed into the barn for the one and only purpose of being imprisoned. And, although I bitterly accused myself of being a fool, mature consideration caused me to reconsider this harsh condemnation. After all, the thing had been so cleverly done that suspicion of the real object had been almost out of the question.

"But that girl came into this barn, and she must be here now!" said Handforth obstinately. "The tramp came in, too! There's no other door—"

"Yes there is!" interrupted Pitt. "Look! A small one up in that corner! Of course, they ran straight through, and closed the door after them. I say, it was pretty cleverly done, you know. Must give 'em a bit of credit!"

"Credit!" hooted Handforth. "Credit for making us prisoners!"

"Come and look here!" I said tensely.

I had found a crack between two of the great door supports. And with my eye applied to this spyhole, I looked out and saw two or three figures. There were some rough men—fellows of the type that were usually found in the tough, riverside quarter of Bannington. And the girl was standing there, too.

At first glance, she looked quite charming in her dainty sports attire. But one look at her face was sufficient. At close quarters she was obviously of the same type as these men—a kind of gipsy girl, with coarse, unhandsome features, and a sneering smile. We had been unable to see any of these details earlier.

"Fooled 'em proper, didn't we, Bert?" she was saying breathlessly. "Crikey! I never thought them young kids were such knight errands! A gal's only got to scream, and they chucks themselves to her blinkin' rescue!"

"Hear the beautiful accent of the Moor View girl?" I said grimly.



"Quick!" panted Willy. "I want you and a few constables! Kidnapping case! Forcible detention! Get a hustle on!"

"Well I'm jiggered!" gasped Handforth. "Of all the swindles!"

"Hey, you in there!" shouted a loud voice through the door.

A yell went up from eighteen throats—a yell of fury.

"It ain't no use makin' a fuss," went on the man outside. "There's six of us out here, an' we're watchin' the barn all round. See? If any of you attempt to break out you'll be stopped in less than a tick, and tapped on the 'ead with a chunk of tree trunk!"

"You—you awful rotter!" yelled somebody.

"You'll be kep' 'ere until 'arf-past nine!" went on the man. "Arter that you'll be allowed to go free, without 'avin' 'ad a 'air of your 'eads touched! So you ain't got nothin' to grumble at, me lads! It's only a joke, so you'd best take it quiet like!"

"A joke?" I shouted. "Whose joke?"

"Oh, somebody who wanted to be funny," replied the man.

He walked away, and we could get no more out of him.

"Fullwood!" said Handforth, clenching his fists. "I'll bet this is Fullwood's idea of a jape! Remember how he was sneering at the circus at dinner-time? The awful cad—"

"Steady on!" I broke in. "There's no need to accuse Fullwood without the slightest scrap of evidence. Be fair, old man. Here's no earthly reason why Fullwood should descend to a thing like this.

He's a bit of a beast, but he's not responsible for this, I'll swear."

"Then who is?"

"Mr. Snayle!" I replied grimly.

"Snayle!"

All the juniors repeated the name in one voice.

"Of course!" I said bitterly. "He's the only enemy we've got—at least, the only one who'd do a trick of this kind. You know as well as I do that he hates us being in the show, and that he'd do anything to put a spoke in our wheel. This is his work."

"By Jove, I believe you're right!" said Pitt.

"No doubt about it," I went on. "It's an old dodge, of course—as old as the hills. But what does it matter as long as it's successful. And there's no question about our position. It's nearly seven o'clock, and the show's just started."

The juniors were utterly blank.

"But—but we've got to get there!" exclaimed Jerry Dodd. "I'm due in the ring by half-past-seven—"

"And Handforth and his minor are due in the ring soon after eight," I interrupted grimly. "But don't you understand? Snayle's worked this so that we shan't turn up for the show."

"My only hat!"

"There's bound to be a big crowd," I continued. "If we can take this afternoon's audience as any indication, the big tent ought to be jam packed by now. And the show will be a fiasco—an absolute frost! The people will go away disgusted, and the rest of the stay in Bannington will fizzle out. It'll mean nothing short of ruin!"

"We'll put Snayle in prison for it!" roared Buster Boots.

"How?" I asked quietly. "We know, in our minds, he's the instigator of this, but where's the proof? Naturally, he'll deny all knowledge of it, and accusations are absolutely useless without evidence. Oh, he's a cunning rascal! While pretending to do all he can for the show, he's messing it up!"

"What do you mean—doing all he can?" growled Jack Grey.

"I wouldn't mind betting that he's changed since this afternoon," I replied. "He's probably filled with anxiety now, discussing with Johnny and Bertie what could have happened to us. If I know anything of his character, he'll play his part to the end."

The dismayed juniors made desperate efforts to escape. But they might just as well have saved themselves the trouble. The barn was a brick building, with no windows. The big double doors were so stout that a battering-ram would have been required to beat them down. And the small door at the rear was blocked by heavy tree-trunks on the other side.

And outside the barn were half a dozen

men, waiting there to fall on any fellow who tried to get out. Therefore, even if a breach was made, it would be useless. It was not a bit of good having false hopes. We were prisoners, and there was no escape.

And the evening performance of Onions' Colossal Circus and Menagerie seemed doomed to absolute failure on its very first night in Bannington!

CHAPTER XV.

WILLY HANDFORTH TUMBLES!



WILLY HANDFORTH cycled along easily and leisurely, and as he went he whistled with all his usual carelessness. He fooled himself into believing that he was whistling the latest tune, but nobody could have recognised it but himself.

He disturbed the echoes of the trees and meadows as he progressed, and many were the birds who stirred uneasily in their nests. Even the squirrels and the rabbits scuttled away in terror at that sound.

Willy had started out half an hour after the others.

He had had a little argument with his chums of the Third, resulting in tea being decidedly late. But it didn't matter, because Willy wasn't due in the ring with his major until a quarter past eight, and it was only just about seven now. So he went on his way blithely.

Willy had a rather curious way of riding his bicycle. The machine was fitted with an extremely comfortable saddle, but for some extraordinary reason Willy preferred to sit on the hard, springless carrier. And he progressed in this way, his body strained, his arms stretched, and in a state of supreme discomfort. Yet he appeared to like it.

He was nearly half-way between Bellton and Bannington when he came to the conclusion that sitting on the carrier was not all that it was made out to be. His rear wheel had just descended into a nasty pot-hole, and the jar had reminded Willy that springs are a comfortable accessory, after all.

He assumed a more human position on the machine, and at this moment he observed one or two bicycles leaning against the hedge which divided two meadows, and a little distance from the road. It was almost as though the machines were half-concealed.

"Rummy!" thought Willy. "There's no body about—Hullo! I'm wrong! Who are these handsome gentlemen?"

He had just caught sight of two rough-looking characters lounging in the meadow, a short distance from a big barn. The light was failing, and Willy couldn't see anything very distinctly. And there was certainly no reason why he should be suspicious.

"Poachers, I'll bet," he murmured. "A

whole gang of them, after rabbits, or something! No wonder they sell rabbits in the Bannington market-place at sixpence a time! Still, they're not mine, so why should I care?"

And with this philosophic thought, he continued on his way.

He saw the circus long before he arrived—a blazing glare against the night sky. The whole circus meadow was a lurid blaze of arc lamps and flares. The entrance to the big tent was quite dazzling, a row of six arc lamps casting a wealth of light which seemed quite unnecessary, but which was, in fact, designed to attract people just as moths go to a flame.

A circus without any brilliant lights is almost doomed to failure. It's very much the same as a shopkeeper in a busy street. He soon realises that a blaze of light is the best attraction for his window. At least, he realises this if he is a business man.

Willy had only just turned into the meadow when Johnny Onions came running up, his face anxious and concerned. He nearly pulled Willy off his machine, much to the fag's astonishment.

"Where are they?" he asked quickly.

"Eh? Where are what?" asked Willy, in surprise. "What's the matter with you, Johnny? How's business? Tent full?"

"Jammed—packed!" panted Johnny. "We had to turn hundreds away! And—and those Remove fellows haven't turned up yet! Bertie's in the ring now—trying to keep the people quiet for a bit, and I'm going on next. But Jerry ought to be here with his pony——"

"But—but I don't catch on!" broke in Willy. "Do you mean to tell me those fatheads haven't turned up yet?"

"Not a sign of them!"

"But they left half an hour before I did!" said Willy. "About eighteen of them altogether! I didn't see anything of them on the road, and it's a giddy mystery! Where can the fatheads be?"

"I thought they might have had a puncture," said Johnny anxiously.

"Oh, rot! Eighteen bikes couldn't puncture all at once," said Handforth minor. "And if one or two had had an accident, the rest would have come on. Besides, they could have walked it by now!"

"That's what I thought," said Johnny. "It's serious, you know—it's terrible! If those chaps don't show up, the whole performance will be a fizzle, and goodness knows what the public will do! Burn the place down, perhaps!"

Willy looked grave.

"But they must be here—they must!" he insisted. "I tell you, they started out half an hour before I did! You can't fool me! I suppose this is a little joke?" he added suspiciously.

"It isn't—honour bright!" urged Johnny.

"Then the fatheads must be in the dressing-tents, or somewhere," said Willy crisply.

"Let's buzz round and have a look. Anyhow, I'll bet anything you like that my major's the cause of the delay! He wouldn't care tuppence if he kept the King waiting!"

Willy rushed on into the dressing-tents, and Johnny remained near the gate, anxiously scanning the road. The situation was becoming desperate.

Willy rushed into Tessa just within the big entrance tent, and the girl was all ready for the ring. Her eyes lighted up as she caught sight of the fag.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she exclaimed.

"Nothing to be glad about!" retorted Willy. "Those idiots haven't appeared yet! I suppose you haven't seen them lying about anywhere? What fatheads to go and get mislaid like this!"

"I'm going into the ring soon—anything to keep the show going," said Tessa. "Oh, Willy, can't you find them? It'll be perfectly dreadful if they don't turn up. And all these people, too——"

"Oh, my hat! Don't keep harping on it!" said Willy impatiently. "I'm frightfully sorry, Miss Tessa, but I'm not a giddy magician! I can't say 'Presto!' and produce the beggars out of the turf! Something must have happened, and I'm going to make it my business to——"

"Ah, so you've arrived, eh!" interrupted Mr. Snayle briskly, as he bustled into the tent. Splendid! I was beginning to fear you'd be too late!"

"You're wrong, uncle—it's only Willy who's come," said Tessa.

"Only Willy?" repeated Mr. Snayle. "Good gracious! That's terrible! What on earth shall we do now? I'm afraid there'll be some trouble in the tent unless the full show is given!"

Willy was staring at Mr. Snayle with his mouth wide open, and his eyes large and round. The change in the manager was indeed startling. Here he was actually expressing deep concern about the show!

Willy didn't know anything about that letter from Professor Onions, neither did he know that Mr. Snayle had promised to work heart and soul with the show. But Willy certainly did know that Mr. Snayle was a scoundrel.

"Oh!" he said softly. "This looks fishy!"

"What did you say?" asked Mr. Snayle, turning with a smile.

Willy made no reply, but walked out of the tent. He hadn't failed to observe the look of malicious pleasure behind that assumed anxiety. Mr. Snayle knew more about this than he would care to admit!

And Willy's wits began to work overtime. It was the change in Mr. Snayle that gave him the first clue. The manager was looking pleased—he was even looking triumphant. Why? Obviously, because he had been doing some plotting! He was responsible for the non-arrival of the Remove fellows.

"I'll bet they were ambushed on the

road!" muttered Willy shrewdly. "That's about the size of it. Collared, and forcibly detained——"

He suddenly gave a great gasp. He recalled those bicycles he had seen, half-concealed against the hedge—the ruffianly-looking men—the barn! And Willy Handforth gave a whoop.

"Got it!" he yelled. "And, thank goodness, there's still time!"

CHAPTER XVI.

ALL SERENE!



JOHNNY ONIONS turned sharply as he heard quick footsteps, and he saw Willy dashing towards him at express speed. The fag was greatly excited, although he had himself well

in hand.

"It's all right—I know where they are!" he said breathlessly.

"What! Look here——"

"Fact!" panted Willy. "It's Snayle's doing!"

"Snayle's!" gasped Johnny. "What on earth——"

"No time to talk now—I'll explain later!" interrupted Willy. "But haven't you noticed Snayle's greasy smile? He's done it deliberately—to mess up the show! But we'll diddle him! Just keep the programme going for half an hour, and I'll have the whole crowd here!"

And, without another word, Willy rushed off, leaving Johnny Onions in a state of bewilderment and uncertainty. Even now he wasn't relieved of his anxiety—indeed, it was intensified, since he felt certain that some plot had been engineered. Willy had said just enough to alarm him.

Handforth minor himself was on his bicycle again, and he wasn't foolish enough to go single-handed to the scene of the trouble. He had plenty of confidence in his own abilities, but this affair was too important to be jeopardised.

Arriving in the High Street, he went straight to the police-station, leapt off his machine, and rushed into the building. By a piece of luck he ran into Inspector Jameson.

"Quick!" panted Willy. "I want you and a few constables! Kidnapping case! Forcible detention! Get a hustle on!"

The somewhat pompous inspector stared.

"Now then, young man—now then!" he said severely. "This sort of thing won't do! You can't come running in here with your jokes——"

"It isn't a joke!" snapped Willy. "Eighteen of our chaps have been detained in an old barn along the Bellon Road—or if they aren't in the barn, they're near by!"

"Good gracious!" said Jameson. "This is extraordinary! Where did you get your information from, my lad? What causes you to suspect——"

"Oh, my hat!" interrupted Willy "You're wasting time! These chaps are wanted for the show—don't you understand? If they don't turn up the whole performance will be ruined! Somebody's done it maliciously—on purpose to spoil the show! Quick! It's your duty!"

The inspector frowned.

"There's no need for you to tell me my duty, my boy!" he said tartly. "I'm not sure that I can take your word about this matter. You've probably got hold of a ridiculous story——"

"I haven't!" interrupted Willy. "Look here, let me explain! Eighteen fellows started out from St. Frank's at half-past six. They ought to have been on the circus ground by ten minutes to seven."

"Well?"

"Well, I started out at seven o'clock, and arrived at half-past, and those fellows hadn't even shown up," declared the fag. "Doesn't that look fishy?"

"Not at all," said the inspector. "The boys must have gone somewhere else. There's no accounting for what boys'll do. I can't waste my time on looking into a mare's nest of this kind. Your information is absolutely trivial, young man!"

"Oh, is it?" exclaimed Willy grimly.

As quickly as possible, he explained what he had seen on the road—the half-hidden bicycles, the lurking men near the old barn. And at last the inspector began to realise that there was something behind all this.

"Well, as it happens, I've got my car outside," he said at length. "I'll go along to this meadow with two constables. But if there's nothing there when we arrive, I'll take you to your headmaster and have you soundly flogged for attempting to fool the police."

"Anything you like," said Willy. "I don't care!"

He was only too glad that he had awakened the inspector into activity. And two or three minutes later the car was speeding through Bannington on its journey.

It was only a matter of a few minutes, for the distance was little over a mile, and the car went quickly. It came to a halt in the road at the spot which Willy indicated. And the fag had pulled it up just against a little spinney, so that those men near the barn should have no knowledge of its approach. The inspector looked round him doubtfully.

"Well?" he asked. "Where's this barn?"

"This way," said Willy briskly. "And go cautiously. If possible, we want to catch these men red-handed, and then we'll probably find out the name of the scoundrel who put them up to it."

They went along the road, and as soon

as the spinney was passed, Willy dived through a gap in the hedge, and came within full sight of the meadow. It was dim and shadowy, but the barn could be easily seen, and also the figures of one or two lurking men.

"There you are!" hissed Willy. "See 'em?"

But Inspector Jameson was not going to be hustled into any action that might make the police look foolish. He advanced deliberately, with no haste, and no attempt at concealment. Even now he was half-afraid that the whole journey was a fool's errand.

But this impression was soon removed, for suddenly a shout rang out.

"Hey! Coppers!" exclaimed the voice hoarsely. "Bunk, mates!"

"Look out!" yelled Willy. "You'll lose 'em!"

They caught a glimpse of fleeing figures—five or six men rushing away into the gloom of the evening and vanishing towards the wooded country beyond the meadow. Inspector Jameson rapped out an exclamation, and then started running forward.

"St. Frank's, ahoy!" roared Willy. "Remove! Anybody there?"

A yell came in reply.

"Help! We're in this barn—locked in!" came the chorus.

"There you are!" shouted Willy triumphantly. "What did I say?" He regarded the inspector with contempt. "And a fine mess you've made of it!" he added. "Those men have bunked now, and you'll never collar them!"

Jameson swore under his breath, for he knew well enough that Willy was right. He realised that he ought to have taken more

notice of this schoolboy. He ordered his men to give chase, although he knew it was useless.

Willy had rushed up to the barn, and with one heave he lowered the great iron rod which secured the double doors. Then he swung the doors open, and a flood of juniors swarmed out.

"All here?" panted Willy. "Good!"

"My minor!" said Handforth blankly.

"Yes, and you've got to thank me for being saved!" said Willy. "My hat! Eighteen Remove chaps—and you've got to be rescued by me! You'd better not crow over the Third after this!"

"What's the meaning of all this?" demanded the inspector tartly.

"Meaning of it!" I said with anger. "We were deliberately trapped, Mr. Jameson. It's a police job, too!"

And I quickly related the facts to him, while a crowd of the other juniors were rushing about and locating the bicycles. The inspector made copious notes, and promised to search for the culprits.

Of course, we had no confidence in the police capturing the culprits, and we felt that it would be better if nothing further came of the affair. We knew that Mr. Snayle was the prime mover—Willy's information satisfied us on that point.

And we didn't care much, anyhow.

For we were able to find our machines and tear into Bannington at full speed. And we arrived in the nick of time—and Onions' Colossal Circus was saved!

As for Mr. Simon Snayle, he watched our arrival with inward alarm and burning hatred. He had failed! He flung himself away to his caravan, and swore a mighty oath that he wasn't beaten yet!

THE END.

Editorial Announcement.

My dear Readers,

Another thrilling story of this splendid circus series will appear next week, entitled "SCHOOL AND CIRCUS!" Thanks to Nipper's brilliant suggestion to Nelson Lee the Remove performers will now be able to take part in the afternoon shows. Getting up at five a.m. in order to put in a couple of hours at lessons before breakfast is not such a great hardship on these bright, early summer mornings, and when it means having the afternoons free, it is worth that extra trouble. Once they are used to this novel programme, the Juniors will probably want to keep it up throughout the summer.

MORE TROUBLE FROM SNAYLE.

In this coming story, Snayle will make more attempts to get rid of the St. Frank's circus performers and to spoil the show, and this leads to many more exciting adventures, apart from the thrills in the

Ring. But there will be many amusing incidents throughout the story by way of a comic relief to the dramatic situations.

THE AUTHOR'S PHOTOGRAPH.

At last Mr. Brooks' photo has arrived, and now it will not be more than two or three weeks before it will make its appearance in "The Nelson Lee Library," together with a personal interview of appreciation of this popular writer of boys' stories. It is a long time since I promised you Mr. Brooks' photo in the paper, and I must apologise for keeping you waiting so long. I knew that Mr. Brooks would not fail me ultimately, and I am sure you will readily forgive him the delay when you know that it has been entirely due to the amount of time he has devoted to the stories you read every week and the difficulty of leaving his work for an afternoon to visit the photographer's.

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.



MY AMERICAN NOTE-BOOK

By the Author of our St. Frank's Stories.



No. 22. The Revolver Menace in New York.

THE peaceful, law-abiding citizens of London and other great English cities have really no idea of the peril that stalks abroad in New York and the majority of American centres.

New York is a great city, and outwardly it bears a close resemblance to London, with its great stores, its shops, its trams, and motor-buses, its hustle of traffic, and a hundred-and-one other familiar, everyday features. New York is rather prosaic and ordinary—if one glances at the surface.

But, actually, there is an enormous difference between New York and London. One has only got to observe, and a few startling distinctions will be clearly apparent. For example, while London goes about its everyday business freely and without fear of molestation, New York is constantly armed and ready for gunmen and crooks of every kind.

You don't see these things at first. And if you are unobservant, you may not see them for quite a long time—although they must necessarily obtrude themselves upon your subconscious attention.

In London, the great banks are open and practically unprotected. That is to say, when a customer enters a London bank, he finds himself facing the cashiers across a polished mahogany counter—which, in many instances, is quite unprotected by any sort of grille. And even when this safeguard is provided, it is only a protection against comparatively innocuous snatchers. Our banks are freely open to the menace of armed criminals, and their very openness proves that this menace is practically non-existent.

Not so in New York. Over there, the menace is acute, constant, and always evident. The banks are literally fortified against any and every kind of attack. There are no counters as we know them, but massive, elaborately-constructed grilles, and the cashiers in most cases even have this grille completely surrounding them—back, front, sides and overhead. The cashier's only intercourse with the public is conducted through a tiny pigeon-hole.

In addition to these drastic precautions, fully-loaded revolvers are kept constantly at hand. And all this clearly goes to prove that New York must contain a far greater population of desperate criminals than London does.

One day, I was walking down West 45th Street, between Broadway and Eighth Avenue, and it was comparatively early in the forenoon. The street was busy, with plenty of pedestrian and vehicular traffic. And without warning a man sped out of a doorway, followed by a constable. The fugitive only progressed a few yards before he turned round, and fired several shots with a revolver, missing the policeman, but injuring two or three passers-by.

Naturally, I did not feel particularly secure, for it was only by chance that I stood on the other side of the street. The man ran off, still chased, and I lost sight of him, and a few minutes later the thoroughfare was looking its normal self again.

I have mentioned this incident just to show that one never knows when one is safe in New York. And such affairs are by no means uncommon. And this is only natural, for practically every crook in New York carries a revolver, and so does every policeman. If there happens to be a chase, they cheerfully blaze away, and the crook, at least, cares little whether he shoots down innocent pedestrians or not.

One can hardly imagine such incidents in London, except in very exceptional cases such as the famous Sidney Street affray (when, if my memory serves me right, the crooks were foreigners), but in New York acts of drastic violence are of everyday occurrence, in one section of the city or another.

It is illegal to carry a revolver in New York without a licence, but I don't think this law applies to many other American cities, and I don't think it has proved much of a check in New York, either. Having had experience of that city, I cannot imagine a crook going about unarmed. And, when all is said and done, a professional crook is about the last man in the world who would apply for a licence!

SPECIAL ARTICLE FOR CRICKETERS!

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St. Frank's Magazine



FAMILIAR PHRASES FROM FICTION

As Seen By Our Artist

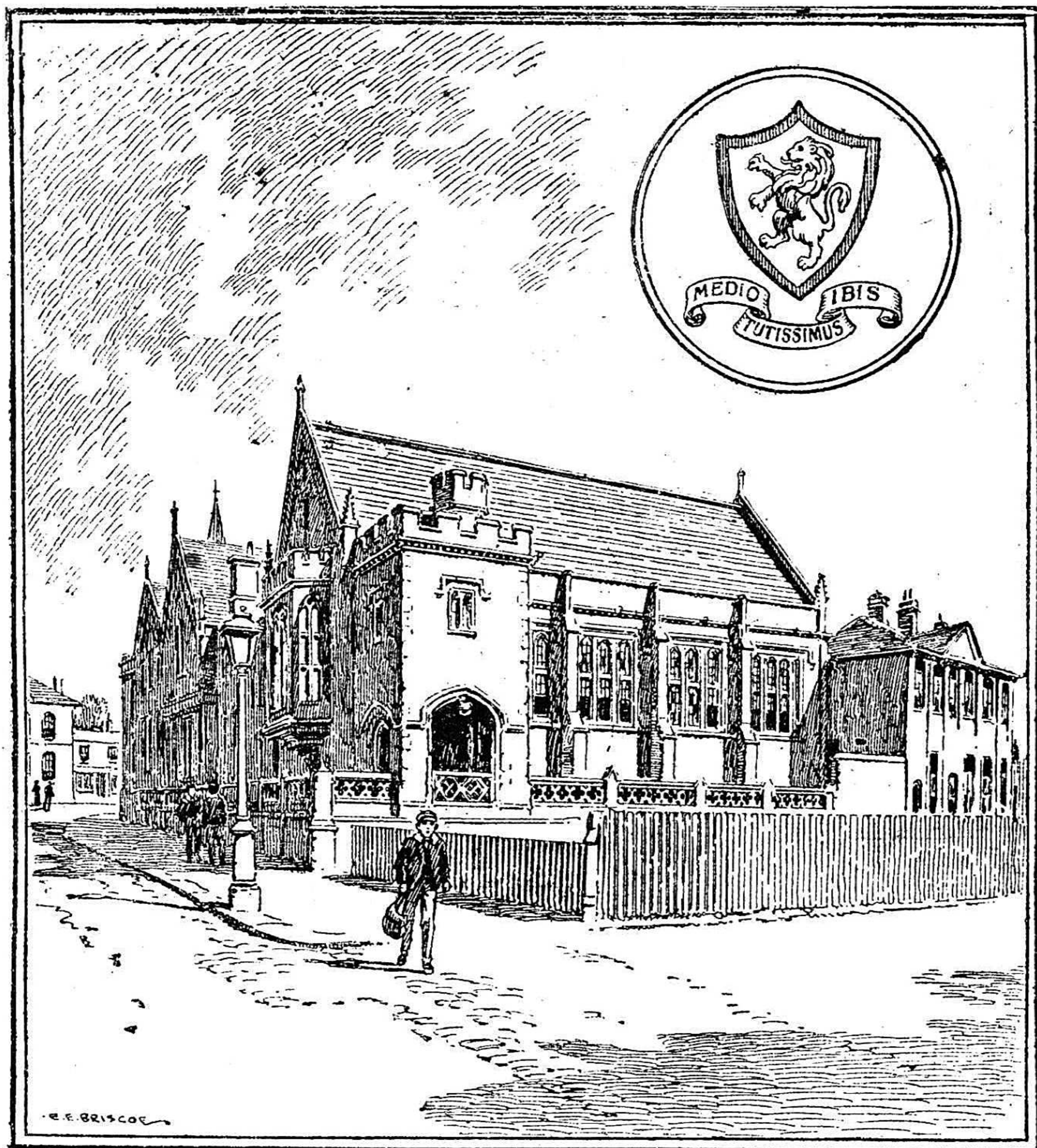


"IT WAS AN AWFUL BLOW TO HIM!"

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

SPECIAL SERIES OF ART SKETCHES BY MR. E. E. BRISCOE.

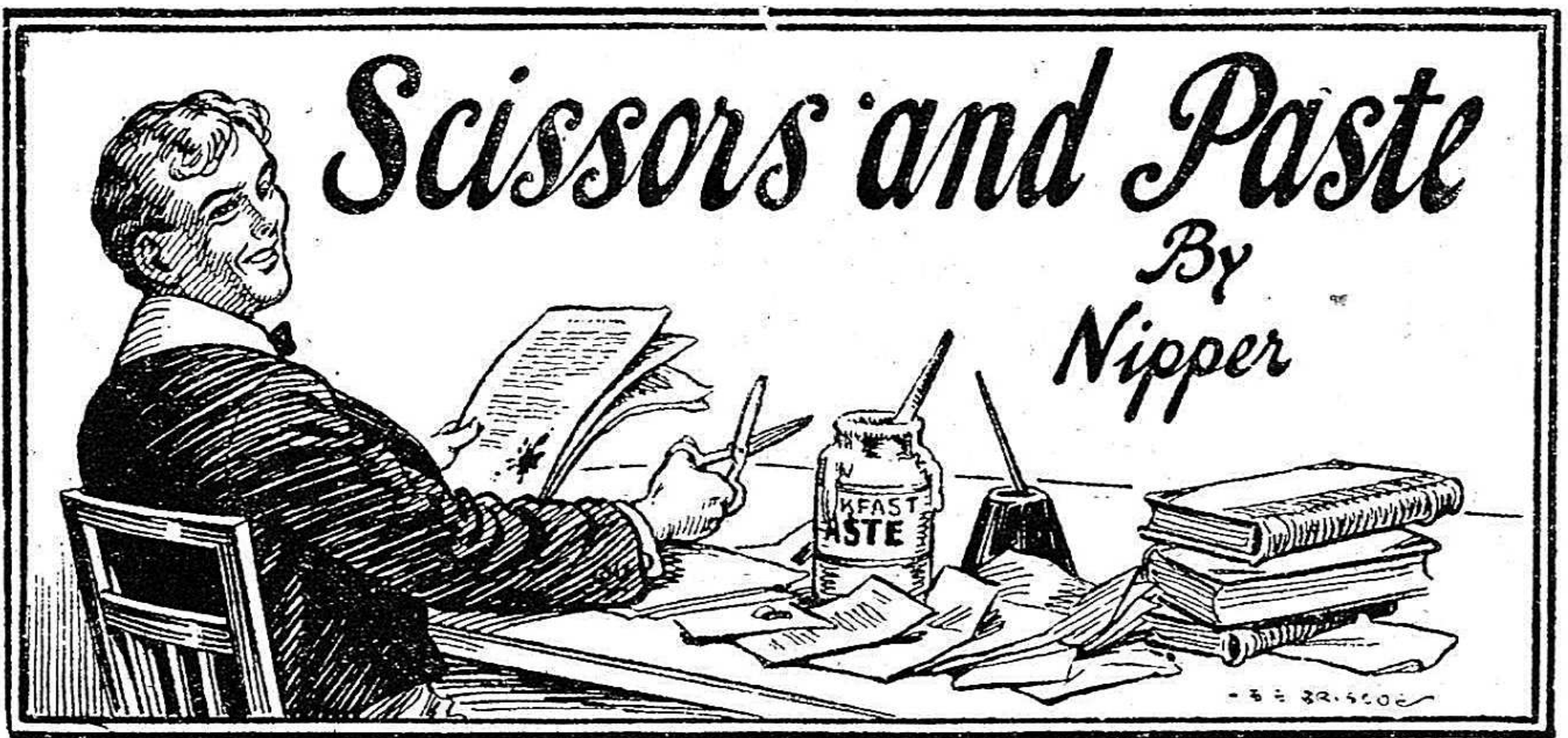
No. 26. The Orme Boys' School.



The history of this school dates back to 1602, when it was founded by Richard Clayton, beginning as a small grammar school. A hundred years later, the Rev. E. Orme rebuilt the school, and from that time it became known as the Orme School. The school accommodates over four hundred boys, and is presided over by Dr. T. F. Rutter, the present headmaster. The school motto, "Medio Tutissimus Ibis," means literally, "The middle course is the safest." Under the able captaincy of H. C. Roberts,

the Orme School turns out a formidable "footer" eleven.

I am indebted to a reader for the above information, and I am accordingly sending him the original sketch of the Orme School. If your school has not yet appeared in this series, send along photo, badge, and particulars of its history to the Editor of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, and should a drawing be made of it, the original sketch, signed by Mr. Briscoe, will be presented to you.



Editorial Office,
Study C,
St. Frank's.

My dear Chums,

There is absolutely no truth in the rumour that Farman is to take part in exhibition stunts as a broncho-buster at Wembley. He is wanted by another kind of Buster for our own show at Bannington. Altogether, I think we can congratulate ourselves on the great success of the circus. Snayle must be feeling very sick about it, and I shouldn't be surprised if he causes a packet of trouble before long. There is quite enough danger and thrills in some of the acrobatic turns, without the presence of an enemy in our midst who will not stop at anything to bring disaster upon the performers.

HANDY'S HARRY TATE MOUSTACHE!

Some of the fellows are wanting to know why Handy tried to disguise himself with a Harry Tate moustache in his recent roles of lion-tamer and strong man. I am sure I don't know, for if Handy thought that he was hiding his identity behind a bush, he didn't succeed in deceiving anybody—not even Irene. But I would not advise anyone to ask him. It would neither be diplomatic nor safe.

OUR COMPETITION SERIAL.

The third instalment of this intriguing tale, with six more characters, whose identities await your ability to detect, appears this week. After this, there will only be one more instalment to follow, and then if you succeed in filling in the names on the coupons correctly, the guinea will be yours—unless, of course, more than one competitor sends in correct solutions, in which case, the prize will be divided accordingly. But apart from the intrinsic value of the prize, I hope as many as possible of you will send in attempts, for

I shall be able to discover from the results how much you, my chums and readers of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, are acquainted with the famous characters of our school.

HANDY'S LATEST RIVAL.

In publishing a detective story by Archie this week, I am afraid I have invited criticism from a certain individual residing in Study D. The author of the Trackett Grim adventures has now a serious rival. Nevertheless, the two writers have very little in common. They are both screamingly funny in their own way, though their styles are as widely different as the Poles are apart. One good effect of publishing this story of Archie's has been to spurt Handy on to do a Trackett Grim story for our next issue, which, he says, will absolutely put Archie in the shade. There is nothing like a little competition between authors, for it is the reader who benefits.

CRICKET AGAIN.

With the long evenings and the extra hour of summertime, I hope to see the Remove turn out as often as they can for some good hard practice at the nets. By the way, I shall be glad to hear what my cricketing chums think of Mr. Clifford's new series of articles, which begins in this number of the Mag. Mr. Clifford tells me that his only difficulty is to select from his vast store of material that which interests you most concerning the great summer game. Therefore, will you write to him, c/o the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4., saying exactly what you would like to know about cricket. Unfortunately, the space at his disposal is very limited, and the cricket season is all too short to enable him to write as fully about the subject as it deserves.

Your faithful chum,

NIPPER.



Correspondence Answered by Uncle Edward

R. L. FULLWOOD.—It is rather a change to get praise from you, and I therefore appreciate it. I am glad you like the way I am shaping at cricket practice, but cannot understand why you should ask if I would like a packet of Player's. You don't refer to cricketers as a packet.

SINGLETON.—Your letter has been burnt. I don't agree with your remarks about spending money. You are altogether too rash, and I advise you not to throw your cash about so recklessly. Remember the old saying that if a penny is wise, a pound is foolish.

REGGIE PITT.—Thank you for standing up for me in the way you mention. I can understand your indignation when you heard me referred to as "a hopeless ass," and I appreciate your assertion that I am not hopeless at all.

VEGETARIAN.—Yes, certainly. I am a great believer in eating plenty of fruit. But I am not sure that I recommend half a grape-fruit every morning. This doesn't seem to be quite enough. For any real benefit to result, you should eat at least a whole bunch.

HUMORIST.—Your riddle is silly. Which Removite is like a cheap lead pencil? You say the answer is Tommy Watson, because he is always so blunt but never gets to the point. Personally, I can't see where the laugh comes in, because Watson doesn't look like a pencil a bit.

INQUIRER.—Your ignorance is appalling. Everybody knows that the Eiffel Tower is situated in Paris, and that it is celebrated for the wonderful lemonade that is manufactured there.

SHUBBY HEATH.—Your crystal set obviously fails to work because the valves want cleaning. You can't expect even a crystal set to give good results unless the accumulators and batteries are kept constantly charged. I shall be happy to answer any other wireless questions you care to ask, as I am an expert on this subject.

HUBERT JARROW.—How the dickens do you expect me to answer about twelve pages of closely written questions? I've got something better to do than reply to lunatics. I can only assume that you are green with jealousy because you've been chucked out of the Mag. I always thought your contributions were rotten, and as for your silly remarks about the Trackett Grim stories, I ignore them with disdain. Trackett Grim will live in spite of every setback. He is the most popular character in modern detective fiction.

TESSA LOVE.—Thanks for your letter of appreciation about the Mag. I am glad you like the illustrations so much. I assume that you are referring to the work of a friend of mine named Handforth, whom you have had the pleasure of meeting. I am surprised that you like the Fables, because these are rank drivel which the Editor only puts in to fill up space.

ERNEST LAWRENCE.—Your application for the post of Fighting Editor is useless. I will admit that you are the best boxer in the College House, but the present Fighting Editor has no intention of resigning, and is willing to meet any would-be rival with or without the gloves. You may be the College House champion, but I could lick you with one hand.

CURIOUS.—Can I give you a definition of the term "When May marries December?" This simply means that the wife's birthday falls in May, and the husband's birthday in December. I don't care for these silly, obvious questions, and I must discourage the habit of asking them.

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE.—You haven't written to me, but I want to give you a word of warning. I understand that you're going to edit the Mag. for a week, and if you don't give me all the space I require in that issue I shall punch your nose until it's flat with the rest of your face.

UNCLE EDWARD.

DESPERADO DICK!

A Priceless Yarn of the Secret Service and London's Underworld, Absolutely Invented and Put Down by

Archie Glenthorne

IT was as black as night.

I mean to say it was pitch dark, and all that stuff. As a matter of fact, it was latish. About eleven p.m., as it might be. Most people were in bed and what not, all over the country.

But in London it was different. London never sleeps! There were people travelling home on the Underground, and all that. And having late supper in the restaurants, and what not.

But two men at a little table in the Hotel Majestic had finished the jolly old doings, if I can put it like that, and were about to leave.

One was a thick-set man of about forty-five, who was wearing a false moustache. He was Detective-inspector Keen of Scotland Yard. The other man was a boy, if you follow me. He was Don Dareless of St. Doughnut's.

At the moment this story opens, Keen was paying his bill at the cash-desk, and Don was feeling absolutely thrilled. Absolutely! I mean, he was a frightfully brave kind of old bean. He was a laddie who liked adventure and all that strong kind of stuff.

Detective-inspector Keen was a great friend of his. They often went out together on hazardous enterprises and what not. And they usually came back together except when Keen got kidnapped by crooks, and all that rot.

When that happened, Don Dareless usually rescued the detective or rang up the police, or what not. You see, Don was a brainy lad, as well as brave. Brave and brainy. That's rather a tophole remark, what?

So there they were, as one might say, absolutely on the trail of a gang of terrible rotters. At least, they were just going to get on the trail. For Desperado Dick, who was boss of that jolly old show, had been having a cup of coffee in the restaurant.

And Keen suspected that he was going to join the gang later and carry on with his nefarious enterprise. What?

Desperado Dick was simply a priceless kind of rotter. He was over six foot ten in his rubbers, and he had a blue chin. I mean to say, he was rather a bad hand at shaving and all that bizney.

Also the old chappie had villainous eyes. They were frightfully small and set awfully close together, so to speak. And he always wore a knotted handkerchief round his neck, and no waistcoat.

Altogether, as it were, he was a most dreadful kind of laddie, and all the police and so forth could never capture him. He and his gang used to rob and plunder and steal, and all that rot, like anything. And so, of course, the police of every country in the world were on his track.

But no one had caught him, so it was absolutely up to Keen to get hold of the jolly old rotter. That was why Keen was on his trail to-night.

As Desperado Dick hurried through the swing doors, Keen and his young assistant were hot upon his track. Don was palpitating with excitement. I mean, his heart was simply thumping, and all that. His eyes positively shone, and his smile shone through his disguise.

Don was disguised, too, because it would have been too much risk to assist Keen without any disguise. So Don was disguised as a professional footballer.

It was a brainy wheeze. Who would suspect that he was Keen's assistant if they saw him? He wore an Aston Villa vest, a pair of knickers borrowed from the 'Spurs, and Newcastle United stockings.

I mean to say, it was a perfect disguise. And more than that. Over his arm he carried a coat, and in his pocket he had a police-whistle. If he should be recognised he



Desperado Dick was a priceless kind of rotter. He was over six-foot-ten inches in his rubbers, and he had a blue chin.

had only to put on the coat and blow the whistle, and Desperado Dick would think he was the referee.

"Good lad!" said Keen, patting him on the shoulder.

"Not a bit, thank you, guv'nor!" replied the smart laddie.

By this time Desperado Dick had set off at a terrific pace along the street. The West End still had a few lamps alight, so it was not difficult for Keen and his young master—I mean to say, a s s i s t a n t—to follow him.

But the old bird was trotting along at such a pace that he soon left the West End behind. And a moment

later Keen noticed that they were in the East End.

Don Dareless noticed it, too, because his eyes were quite as sharp, and all that, as Keen's. But he knew better than to speak.

And now Desperado Dick simply tore along the deserted streets. Don was very glad he was in footer things, otherwise the pace would have been a bit too much for him. As for Keen, he was absolutely the goods. He could walk faster than he could run, if you follow me.

By this time it had got foggy and all that. A great gloomy murk, if I can put it so, hung over the City. And through it Don suddenly saw a big wall.

"We are lost, guv'nor!" panted Don Dareless.

"Not a bit, old fruit!" responded the Secret Service man. "We are now in London's Underworld."

Keen spoke the truth. Dark and all that as it was, he had recognised that they were now in the underworld of the great city. Over to the right of them lay the Docks.

And the river was there, too, if I may be allowed to say so.

Keen and his assistant skirted the jolly old wall, and it led them into a terrible-looking alley full of fog and criminals, and all that. He was not a moment too soon!

"Crouch in this shadow!" the old bean hissed.

Don did so, and together the two waited in the darkness. And at that very moment Desperado Dick dived into a doorway and dived out again. Absolutely! And when he dived out he was followed by six hefty great chumps as big as a jolly old house!

The rotters all carried whacking big sacks over their shoulders, and they walked slowly down the alley.

"What's in the sacks?" asked Don. "Is it their dinner?"

"No, old laddie," whispered Keen. "It's the swag!"

Don absolutely collapsed back into the shadows. He was frightfully upset that the Secret Service man should have used such a common word, and all that.

In all the years that he had known him, Keen had always behaved like a gentleman. Don was awfully pained, and that sort of stuff. But he pulled himself together, as it might be, when Keen took his arm.

The next moment they were following Desperado Dick and his six assistants down the alley. It was quite a short kind of affair and came to an end almost at once.

Keen, slightly ahead of the other chappie, saw the six assistants disappear. He began to trickle along at a run, and was just in time to hear a splash.

"Gadzooks!" he ejaculated. "The rotters are buzzing off in a boat. Follow me, Dareless, old pineapple."

Keen had made no mistake. Absolutely not!

The moon began to stir out of the clouds, and all that. A great chunk of brightness flashed out of the sky, and all became easy to see. It showed the murky river and on it a boat. And in the boat were Desperado Dick and his six jolly assistants.

They had laid down their loads and were rowing away like lightning at their oars.

Some men might have hesitated what to do; but not Keen, that brainy old lad. And not Don. "Brave and Brainy," was his motto. Almost without a thought, as it might be phrased, the two dived into the wetness with a couple of loud splashes.

They swam like otters, and that rot, and soon bobbed up absolutely under the bows of the boat.

"Hands up, you chappies!" shouted Keen, treading water.

"Rot, old fish!" retorted Desperado Dick, with a savage grin. "You can't frighten me."

"We've got a million pounds' worth of swag in these jolly old bags, and we're not going to give in to you. Hands off the boat! We're all armed."

"That was a nice kind of thing! What? Here were these dastardly rotters, all in the boat and all armed. I mean to say, it was absolutely unfair. It was not a bit sporting, and all that."

Scarcely had Desperado Dick spoken than six revolver shots rang out. But Keen and Don ducked and no harm was done. Keen was as cool as ice.

"There's only one way," he said to Don. "We must upset the boat!"

Don got on to the wheeze in one guess. With a shout, he and Keen suddenly swam to the side of the boat and put their shoulders to it!

It was absolutely a wonder brain-wave! And it worked. The boat tipped over, and all its occupants and the swag were jolly well spilled into the river.

But Keen had not won his case yet. Not by long chalks, as it were. For Desperado Dick struck out for the shore, followed by the other desperate laddies.

They were all topping swimmers, and their jolly old arms simply cut through the water like knives and all that.

But Keen and his young assistant could swim like fishes. They followed the gang at a colossal pace.

"They are heading for the under-world again!" hissed Keen.

"Absolutely!" replied the clever laddie.

There was no more time for words, if you follow me. With terrific great strokes, Desperado Dick and his six assistants gained the bank of the under-world.

It was a horrid kind of bank. Greasy and oozing with slime, and so forth. And when the villains tried to climb up it, they all fell back, with great quantities of splash, into the river!

Keen was so jolly excited that he nearly cheered. I mean to say, he was certain he had got them fixed.

But for once the priceless old bean was wrong. Absolutely!

For the next second the villains all dived under the wetness. Vanished, as it were, into thin water!

It was most baffling! Utterly weird! Positively uncanny, as one might put it. Even Keen could make nothing of it for a sec. But he was not beaten yet!



The boat tipped over, and all its occupants and the swag were jolly well spilled into the river.

No jolly fear! Not likely, I should say.

"It's a secret tunnel!" he shouted. "Follow me, old Greengage!"

Like one man, the two dived under the briny, and so forth.

Keen had been right. As they swam beneath the surface, they saw before them the gaping black muzzle of a tunnel. It led straight into the heart of the jolly old under-world!

Keen and the brainy lad scrambled out of the water, and chased along the tunnel like the wind and all that.

They were far too swift for the villainous gang. Keen led the way, and with one sweep of his strong arm he collared three of the assistants. I mean to say, it was wonderful! He simply bumped their heads together, and they fell to the floor!

The rest of the gang absolutely gave in. They pleaded for mercy and all that. Keen gave it to them, but not before he had handcuffed Desperado Dick.

Then he let the assistants trickle off. They were no use to him. Absolutely not!

As for Desperado Dick, he was taken away to prison and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment and what not. The swag, as Keen had called it, was fished out of the river. And Keen and Don Dareless were suitably rewarded.

So the case was rather successful, as you might say.

THE END.



E. Sopp's Fables

By
Edgar Sopp of the Fifth

No. 23. The Fable of the Boy Who Had Ten Uncles.

ONCE upon a time there lived an Optimistic Youth who had no less than Ten Uncles, these relatives being Sprinkled Liberally over various sections of the Land, engaged in Divers Pursuits. The name of this Optimistic Youth was Dick Goodwin, and he hailed from a far-distant and remote Section of the Country known as Lancashire. And he was Much Given to the habit of referring to anything which Pleased Him as Champion. And, behold, it chanced that Goodwin Hit Upon

A REET CHAMPION IDEA.

And he outlined his scheme to a certain Business-like Youth who shared the End Study with him, and whose name was Solly, and known Far and Wide as a Wise Guy. Now, Goodwin was in that Unhappy Condition experienced by many, being, in fact, Down to his Last Eighteenpence. And, forsooth, there was Little Prospect of receiving a supply of the Good Old Ready for many moons. His weekly pocket-money was inadequate, and for long Goodwin had felt that

SOMETHING WOULD HAVE TO BE DONE.

And he remembered his Ten Uncles, and realised that here was a Great and Glorious Chance to rake in some cash. For at this period of History, Solomon Levi had set in a store of Wonderful Silver Pencils, which he had purchased from Bankrupt Stock at the price of Eightpence Each, and was re-selling to All and Sundry at the round figure of One Shilling. And, behold, trade was slack, and

CUSTOMERS WERE CAUTIOUS.

And this was not without reason, for it had been observed that the Silver was only alleged, and that the pencils, after a Brief Period of wear, failed to live-up to their Early Promise. Thus it came to pass that Solomon, for all His Wisdom, was left with a Full Dozen pencils on his hands

—which represented, unless the pencils were sold, a Dead Loss of Eight shillings. And so Solly listened With Patience to

DICK GOODWIN'S SCHEME.

And the idea promised to be Successful. It was simple and cunning. For, behold, Dick proposed that Solly should supply him with ten silver pencils on that arrangement which is known as On Tick. These pencils would be Evenly Distributed among the ten Unsuspecting Uncles, and each accompanied by a carefully worded letter to the effect that while Dick presented a Slight Token of his regard, he did not wish the recipient to jump to The Conclusion that he was Flush. On the contrary, the letters would be Most Careful to add that the cupboard was Somewhat Bare, and that

TIMES WERE LEAN.

And Goodwin went into Complicated Figures, explaining to Solly that the postage would Cost Him a mere fifteenpence, and as for the Paper and Envelopes, he had these In Stock. Being possessed of one-and-sixpence, he would still be threepence to The Good. All that was necessary was for Solomon to Hand Over the ten pencils On Credit, and Dick would pay for them as soon as the cash Rolled In. He was

OPTIMISTIC OF THE RESULT.

And Solomon, momentarily forgetting that Dick's uncles were Lancashire Men—and therefore Wise, Shrewd, and Careful—handed over the pencils on the chance that he would be paid for them later. For, as Dick declared, if his uncles only sent a mere Five Shillings each, which was the Lowest Estimate, he would Rake in the Total Sum of two Pounds ten, thus having the Ten Shillings for Solly, and Two Pounds clear profit For Himself. The scheme appeared to be Not Only safe in Every Way, but

CAST IRON AND GILT-EDGED.

And the letters were forthwith written, and duly dispatched. And then ensued a period of anxious waiting. As before mentioned, Dick was an Optimistic Youth, and he was foolish enough to believe that replies would Pour In by return of post. Great was his disappointment, therefore, when three days elapsed without the slightest indication that his camouflaged appeal for funds had been received. And his anxiety Grew Apace, more particularly as

SOLOMON WAS BECOMING SUSPICIOUS.

And then, lo, on the Fourth Morning, two letters turned up. And with much rejoicing in his heart, and with his Face Glowing, Dick opened them. But, behold, the envelopes contained nothing but note-paper. And Dick, who had been searching for notes of a Different Kind, perused the letters with Failing Heart. They were mere notes of thanks, but No Mention was made of cash. And it came to pass that, on the Following Morning

FOUR MORE LETTERS ARRIVED.

And the Optimistic Youth began to lose his optimism, and his Faith in Human Nature suffered a Jolt. For after pouncing on the letters, and rending them asunder, he discovered that there was not even so much as a Sixpenny Postal Order in the Whole Batch! And Solomon Levi looked on with Growing Apprehension, although, being a Decent Fellow, he refrained from making any Caustic Remarks as yet. By the noon post, the last four replies Came to Hand, and with a Final Flicker of hope, Dick Goodwin

FEVERISHLY SEARCHED THEM.

And his disgust was speechless when he discovered Nothing More Valuable than one lonely, solitary postal order for Half a Crown! And he reviled his Ten Uncles, and Spoke Harshly of their ancestors and antecedents, even going to the length of calling them Mean Bounders. And Solomon Levi at last Gave Voice, demanding the Postal Order, and declaring that he would take the remainder of his money at the rate of One Shilling per Week. And such was his compassion for his unfortunate Study Mate that he refrained from demanding Interest. And Dick Goodwin was sad, and could not be Consoled.

MORAL: IF YOU COUNT YOUR CHICKENS BEFORE THEY'RE HATCHED, YOU ARE TAKING THE MAIN ROAD TO DISAPPOINTMENT.



PAINFUL PARODIES

PERPETRATED
By
Clarence Fellowe

THERE IS A TAVERN IN THE TOWN

(To be sung to the tune of the well-known ballad.)

There is a tavern in the town, in the town,
And there Ralph Leslie sits him down,
sits him down,
And plays at cards 'mid laughter free,
His money singing this ditt-ee:

Fare thee well, for I must leave thee,
Do not let the parting grieve thee,
And remember that card playing is a
risk, a risk,
Adieu, adieu, you ass, adieu, adieu,
adieu!
And don't look quite so glum and blue,
glum and blue,
I am lost to you for ever, ever more,
And may you have some sense in store!

There is a tavern on the map, on the map,
And there Ralph Leslie meets a chap,
meets a chap,
And backs a horse for heavy odds,
And here's the song of Fully's wads:

Fare thee well for I must leave thee,
Do not let this shark deceive thee,
And remember that all betting is just
mad, just mad,
Adieu, adieu, you chump, adieu, adieu,
adieu!
I'm in the bookie's grip like glue, grip
like glue,
And you'll never, never see me e'er
again—
You ought to be upon a chain!

THE COMRADES OF THE CRIMSON CROSS!

:: *A Competition Serial—By the Editor* ::

£1 : 1 : 0 FOR TWENTY-FOUR NAMES.

Here are six more characters for you to identify in this, the third instalment of our Competition Serial, particulars of which have already appeared in the Mag. When you have discovered the names represented by the numbers, write them clearly and in ink against their proper numbers on the coupon provided on page iii of cover. Next week the last instalment will be published, together with final instructions for sending in.

NIPPER,
Editor of "St. Frank's Magazine."

CHAPTER III.

THE HOODED BOXER.

THE Honourable Aubrey de Vere Wellborne strolled out of the gateway of the River House School, and cautiously made his way to a footpath which led towards Bellton Wood.

He failed to observe two lurking figures in the shadows—two mysterious figures who watched his every movement, and shadowed him carefully and as noiselessly as aboriginal trackers.

The Hon. Aubrey was the leader of the River House "Honourables"—a comparatively small but notable clique of young rascals in every way opposite to their self-designated title. A more caddish collection of snobs could hardly be named.

And Wellborne was the worst of the lot, for in addition to being an unmitigated rotter, he was a contemptible bully. It was one of his favourite habits to catch St. Frank's fags when they were alone and unprotected, and to twist their arms, pull their ears, clout them, and generally behave in a manner that made him feared.

Retribution was nearer to the Hon. Aubrey than he realised.

For he had already been marked down by the Comrades of the Crimson Cross—the mysterious new Secret League which had just been brought into being by twenty-four members of the St. Frank's Remove.

The Comrades of the Crimson Cross had divided themselves up into four parties of six, and on this particular evening they had

gone out upon different expeditions—the first party to Lumpy Bill, the second party to Farmer Holt, the third party to the Hon. Aubrey, and the fourth party had remained behind to deal with Kenmore of the Sixth.

It was Wellborne's turn.

He had come out without his chums, and his reason for taking the footpath was apparently a guilty one, for he presently produced a packet of cigarettes, and lit up with apparent relish. But he had hardly taken two puffs at his cigarette before a pair of mysterious figures seemed to materialise out of the very gloom.

"Mum-my goodness!" stuttered the Hon. Aubrey, frightened.

"Quick—the rope!" hissed one of the figures.

Instantly a rope was sent swirling over the Hon. Aubrey's head, it looped over his shoulders, and was suddenly pulled tight, fastening his arms to his sides. And the two strangers, who were unrecognisable—since they wore black hoods over their heads—regarded their victim with pleasure.

The pair were Comrades 13 and 14 of the Crimson Cross, and they had performed their allotted task with complete success. The Hon. Aubrey De Vere Wellborne was helpless in their clutches.

"By gum!" said Comrade 13. "We've got you this time, you cad! March! Don't ask questions, but—"

"Who—who are you?" gasped the Hon. Aubrey.

"I'll tell thee nowt about who we are," said Comrade 13 grimly. "You're our prisoner, tha knows, and, by gum, if you try to get away you'll be gagged and bound!"

"You—you rotters!" panted Wellborne. "I believe you're only St. Frank's chaps! Lemme go, confound you!"

"We simply can't do that, so move along, you rat!" said Comrade 14, who was quite a tall figure. "We've caught you on the hop, and off we're going to pop! You're going to stand your trial—for all your misdeeds vile!"

"Ay, lad, that's reet champion," declared Comrade 13, nodding his hood.

(Continued on page 12.)



Forming a Cricket Club.

We meet again, but this time I see many new faces among you, and I notice the absence of many faces that attended eagerly at my football pow-wows. Some of you, of course, are keen on cricket and football; others prefer one code to the other. For a few weeks, at any rate, these will be cricket pow-wows, and in these, as in football, I want you to follow closely what I tell you and to practise it in your games. I also want you to write and tell me your cricket difficulties, and your problems, so that I may be able to help you out. In cricket, as in any other game, if it is to be played properly, there is much to learn.

Form Your Own Club!

Now this week I am not going to devote my chat to the style and method of this game. I realise that many of you here, while being unattached to cricket clubs yourselves, have an honest desire to play the game regularly, but are restricted because you do not belong to a club.

There is a remedy for that, of course, and it is a very simple one. If there is no club to which you may belong in your district, it becomes necessary for you, of course, to establish one yourself. So this week I intend to devote this chat to a discussion on cricket clubs, and to give the unattached cricketer a few hints as to how to go about forming his own club.

How to Start.

There are many districts without cricket clubs, I know—more's the pity!—but this is not because lads in those districts are not sufficiently enthusiastic about the game, but simply because they have not the organising ability to start a club of their own, or have never thought about it. To such lads, these notes, I hope, will prove of value.

Many of you have cricketing pals. These pals know other lads who are interested in the game, and between you, you should have no difficulty in raising an eleven. If you have no pals, and are still desirous of forming a club, a little advert. in your local

paper, you will find, will soon bring a shoal of enthusiastic co-workers to your door.

Getting Together.

Once set the ball in motion, and you should encounter little difficulty in starting the club. And now, having collected your members, the next thing to think about is, of course, equipment.

It's no good setting out to play cricket without the necessary tools—i.e., bat, balls, etc., and to get the tools money must be forthcoming from somewhere. If there is the proper amount of enthusiasm about your eleven, this is another obstacle that should be bridged with little difficulty.

Get your pals to tell their parents about the club, and solicit the interest of local trades-people on its behalf. If they are the right sort, they will realise that this is the sort of scheme to be encouraged, and will cheerfully hand out a little cash with which to help you get together your equipment.

In the same manner as you interest your parents and your pals' parents, you should endeavour to foster enthusiasm in the breast of somebody in the district who has a suitable ground which he might be inclined to lend you to play upon.

Let people see that you mean business, and don't be discouraged by first rebuffs, and success is bound to be yours in the end. If there is no landowner or leaseholder to whom you may appeal, you should write to your local parks authority for a pitch, which costs, I believe, something like three to four shillings a match. Half of this amount will, of course, be shared by the visiting team.

Be Business-Like!

Make your club a business-like affair. Elect a chairman, a secretary, and a treasurer to fix the amounts each member must pay. Also, you will find, it will be necessary to draw up a set of rules, which all members of the club must guarantee to strictly observe under pain of expulsion or fines.

The next great item for your consideration is fixtures. If you know of neighbouring clubs your task here should be easy; but if you do not, a good idea is to insert a few lines in some paper which makes a speciality of small sports adverts.

Then, of course, there's the club-room. You must have a room in which to meet once a week, in order to discuss the club's affairs, and choose the elevens for forthcoming matches. This, again, is where mother and dad play a part, and where you must use your persuasive powers to coax them into the loan of a room for one night a week. When you've got so far, however, the club-room question should be an easy matter.

That, briefly, is an outline of how to form a club. There is a lot more I could say about it, but space already runs away, and I find I must conclude. If you embryo county cricketers who are forming clubs, however, experience any difficulty, do not fail to write to me about it.

After all, I am here to help you, and you are entitled to ask questions. To fellows who already belong to established clubs, but who are experiencing difficulties, I shall also be pleased to give advice. Perhaps, at a later date, I shall return to this subject, when I can tell you many of the things I have omitted here, and enlarge upon facts I have already mentioned.

In any case—get busy!

(Continued from page 10.)

"Come on, Wellborne, we've got to move, tha knows!"

"I won't!" snorted Wellborne fiercely.

"Then we shall have to shove you, for none of us love you!" said Comrade 14 sharply. "Now, move on pretty quick, or you will get the stick!"

Between his captors, the Hon. Aubrey was forced along the footpath, then across a meadow, until a quiet spot was reached—just between Bellton Wood and the river.

Here there were four other figures, and they stood there like grim sentinels. They pointed four accusing fingers as the others approached. All were hooded in the same way.

Wellborne was held firm as he faced the mysterious figures.

"Hot dog!" said Comrade 16. "Say, that was sure nifty work, boys! Gee! This poor fish sure gets my goat! I guess he ain't feeling better than two cents, right now!"

"What—what are you going to do with me?" gasped the prisoner.

"Aw, gee! For the love of Mike," said Comrade 16. "We're gonna make you feel punk, you big stiff! This is sure where you watch your step, you mutt! We've gotta line on you all right!"

"This is where you answer for your sins, Wellborne," remarked Comrade 15. "We shall probably spoil your beautiful suit—but that's just as well, because I don't believe in this dandified dressing. I go in for comfort, and never care how I look."

"Goodness knows, you're not particular about your appearance," said Comrade 17, with a cackle. "Don't blame me for this, Wellborne. 'I'm not really against you, you know—I was dragged into it.'"

"Dry up, you little worm," said Comrade 18. "Let's get on with the business. Now, Wellborne, it's up to you to choose. Crikey! We ain't 'arf goin' to put you through it—"

"Don't get excited, Comrade 18," inter-

rupted Comrade 15. "You're still a bit liable to drop into your Cockney talk—"

"Thanks for nothing!" grinned Comrade 18. "Now, Wellborne, you are facing six members of the Comrades of the Crimson Cross! Choose which one you will fight! And choose quickly, for you have only fifteen seconds!"

"Fight!" said Wellborne thickly. "You—you fools—"

"Unless you choose you will be turned over and spanked like a naughty kid!" put in Comrade 15. "Point to the one you want to fight."

In desperation, Wellborne pointed at random, and there came a yelp from Comrade 17 as he saw Wellborne's finger directed at him.

"Not—not me!" he wailed. "I'm not going to fight—"

"Coward!" shouted all the other hooded figures in unison.

And so, much against his will, Comrade 17 was forced to fight with Wellborne. But it was soon over. Wellborne had quite an easy task, and after a few exchanges, he delivered an upper-cut that knocked Comrade 17 into a yelping, wailing heap.

"This doesn't seem to be going reet, lads!" whispered Comrade 13. "It's a pity that Wellborne chose Comrade 17; he's not much of a champion."

"We must stand by our plan—we've done all we can!" said Comrade 14. "Wellborne's in luck, for Seventeen lacks pluck!"

"Sure!" said Comrade 16. "It's our own idea, so we'll have to stick to it."

And the Hon. Aubrey was allowed to go—and, somehow, the expedition wasn't regarded as much of a success. But this was chiefly because of the cowardice of Comrade 17.

Then and there, his companions sternly declared that he would be reported to the Chief and expelled from the Secret League.

And the Comrades of the Crimson Cross faded away into the gloom.

(Final Instalment next Week.)

CHARACTER NAMES COMPETITION.

In the spaces provided below write against the numbers the names of the St. Frank's characters represented by corresponding numbers in this week's instalment of "THE COMRADES OF THE CRIMSON CROSS." Particulars of this competition are given on page 10 of the ST. FRANK'S MAGAZINE.

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14.

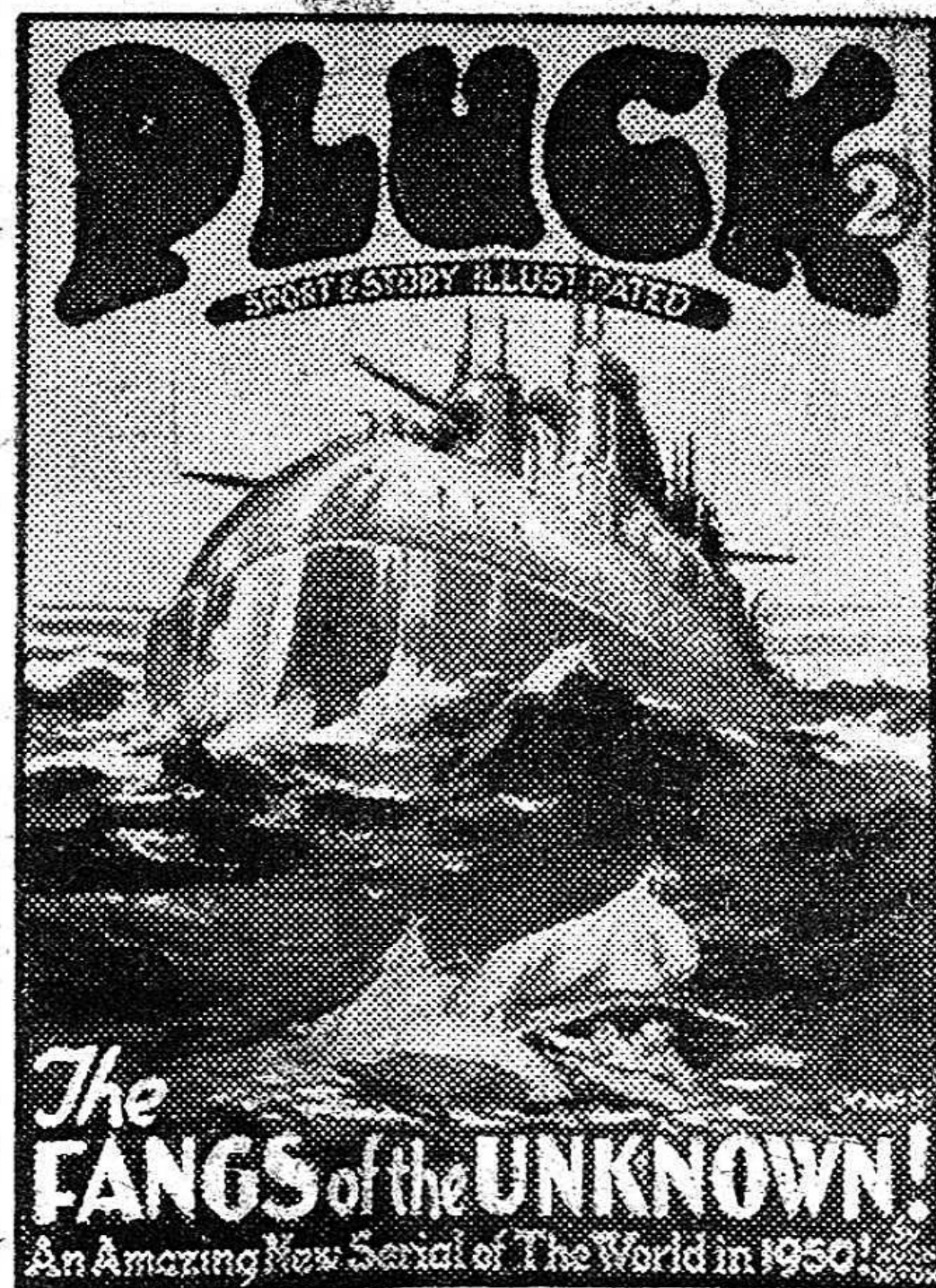
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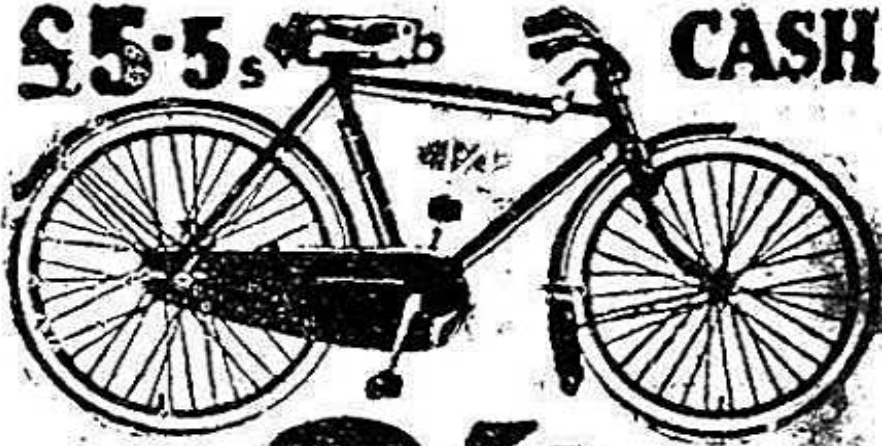
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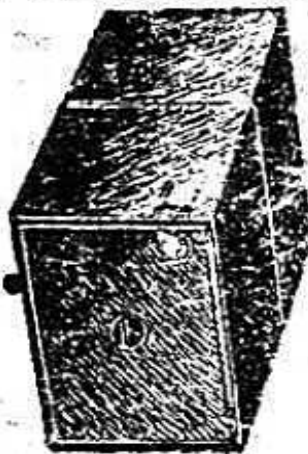
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