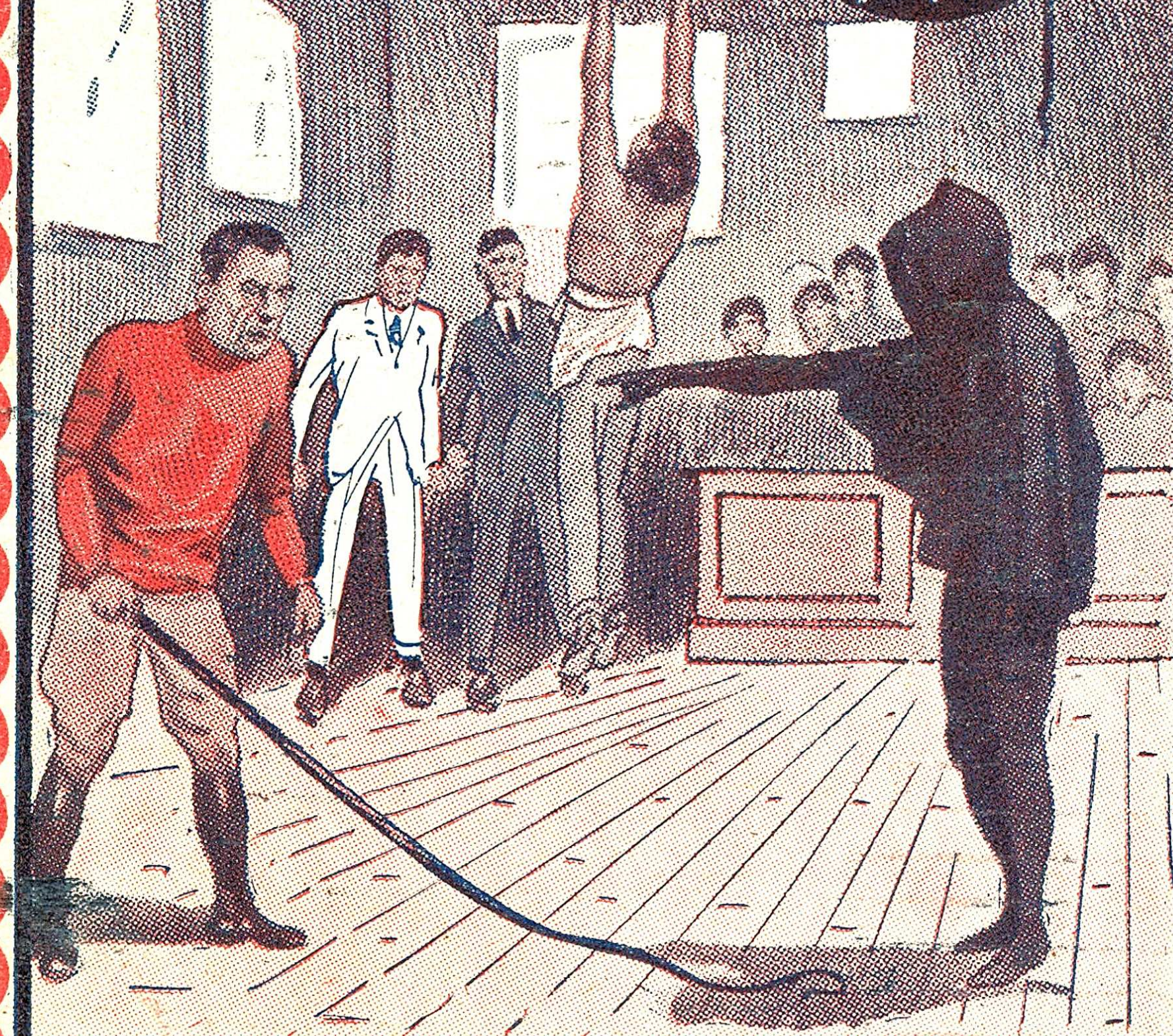


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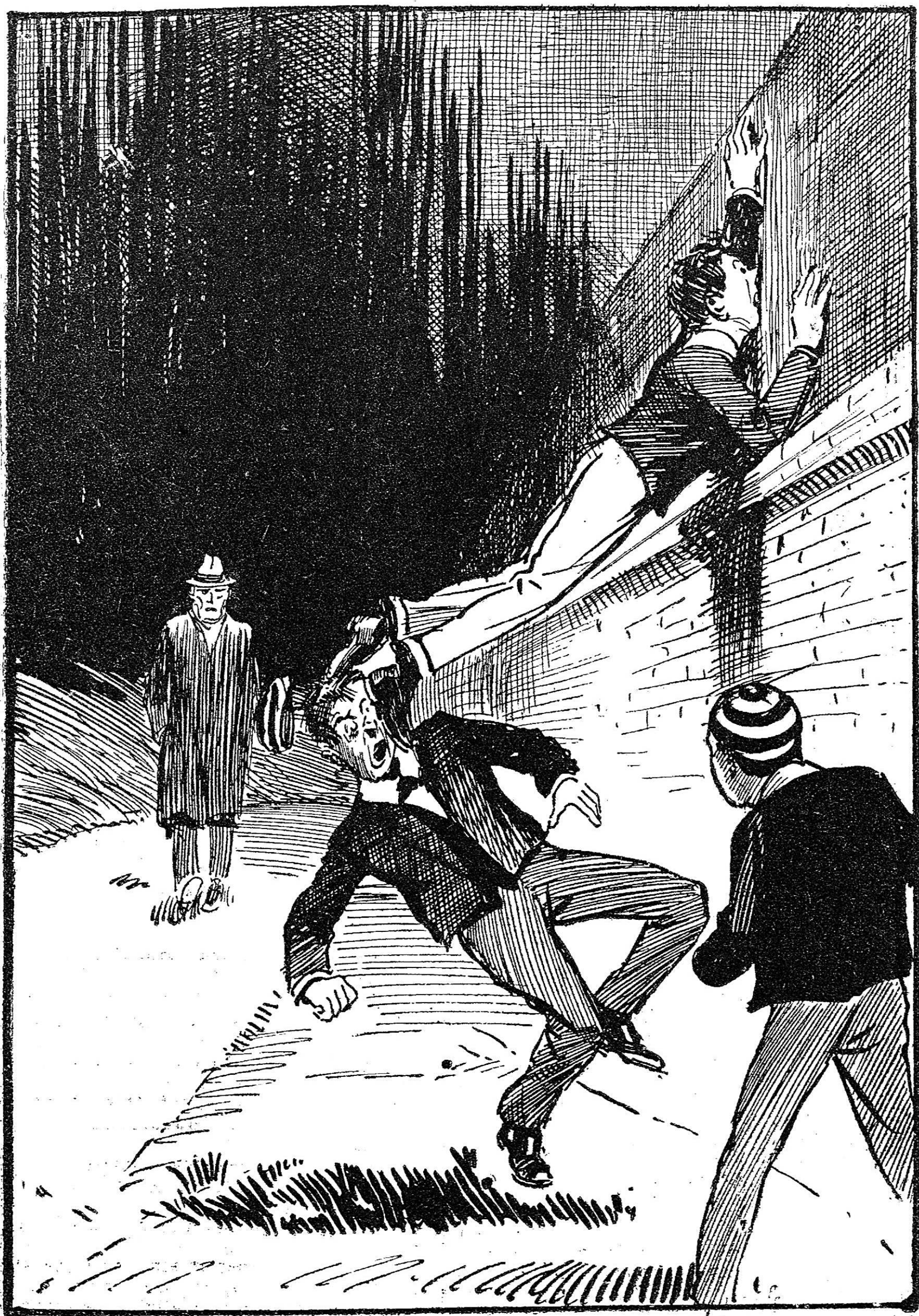
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Mr. Creepe's eyes opened wide as he beheld the Phantom Protector standing before him.

(A dramatic incident from this week's grand long story of Moat Hollow School.)

**The MARK
of the
SAVAGE.**



"Great Pip!" muttered Handforth. "Old Pie-face!"
He was so agitated that he accidentally kicked Church in the left ear.

The MARK of the SAVAGE!



Tommy Watson, a former boy at St. Frank's College, is sent to Moat Hollow School because the fees are much lower, and his father, Sir Vivian Watson, having lost a big fortune, cannot afford to keep his son at St. Frank's. Moat Hollow is a new school situated near Bellton, which is in the same locality as St. Frank's. Tommy Watson's school is very different from what Sir Vivian Watson was led to believe by Mr. Grimesby

Creepe, the rascally principal, who conducts the school as though it were a prison, keeping the boys under the constant supervision of monitors. The boys are half-starved and ill-used. A deep moat and a high barricaded wall surround the school, thus making escape next to impossible. But Watson has staunch friends at St. Frank's who are determined to come to his aid. With this end in view, Reggie Pitt has succeeded in getting into Moat Hollow disguised as a nurse. More about Mr. Creepe's villainy, and the part played by the St. Frank's juniors in the exciting adventures of Tommy Watson at Moat Hollow are told in the story below.

THE EDITOR.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

LAYING DOWN THE LAW.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH banged his teacup into the saucer with so much force that he nearly cracked it.

"What I want to know is this!" he exclaimed tensely. "Am I, or am I not, to be ignored?"

"Never!" said Church stoutly.

"Am I to be contemptuously flouted?"

"Not likely!" said McClure.

"Then why am I left out in the cold to-night?" demanded Handforth, with the air of a politician propounding an unanswerable argument. "Why, I repeat, am I left out in the cold?"

Church helped himself to some cake.

"Echo answers why!" he murmured.

"Fathead!" snorted Handforth. "I'm asking you a question——"

"But you're not left out in the cold," argued McClure, as he stirred his tea. "Stick to facts, Handy. It's freezing outside, I know, but this study is warm and cosy, and the fire's cheerful——"

"I'm not talking about this study, you giddy ass!" roared Handforth. "I was speaking in metaphor!"

"You were speaking where?" asked Church. "Metaphor? I never heard of the place."

Handforth failed to observe that his leg was being gently pulled. He preferred to adopt a lordly, superior air. And the atmosphere of Study D, in the Ancient House of St. Frank's, became slightly electric.

"Naturally, I make allowances for your ghastly ignorance!" said Handforth de-

liberately. "We'll let the incident pass. We're here, having tea, and Pitt is down at Moat Hollow, disguised as a nurse. Did you ever hear of a more ridiculous idea? Did you ever come across such a dotty, mad-brained scheme? A nurse, mark you!" added Handforth with a snort.

Church shook his head.

"I don't see anything silly about it," he said. "Reggie Pitt looked the part to the life. If I hadn't known him, I—I— Well, I shouldn't have known him—you know what I mean!"

"Marvellous!" said McClure, grinning.

"Don't argue!" said Handforth, with a lordly wave of his hand.

"All right—anything to oblige," agreed Church peacefully. "As a matter of fact, that idea of Pitt's—going down to Moat Hollow dressed as a nurse—is mad. As you say, it's dotty and ridiculous—"

"That's just where you're wrong!" interrupted Handforth. "It's a wonderful scheme—a masterpiece of strategy!"

"Eh?"

"But you just said—"

"Never mind what I just said!" declared Handforth. "The idea's good—it's the working out of it that I object to. Instead of Pitt going, I ought to have gone! Why should he take it on just because he's Form captain? I'm the only amateur detective in the Fourth, so it was up to me to do this investigation."

Against this argument, Church and McClure had nothing to say. They felt that it would be better to humour their celebrated leader on the point. After all, it was very cosy in Study D, and tea wasn't half over yet. They didn't welcome the idea of a sudden upheaval. With only the slightest provocation, in his present mood, Handforth would rise to his feet, and the subsequent proceedings would closely resemble the passage of a cyclone.

"It's no good complaining, old man," said McClure diplomatically. "Even if the other chaps fail to appreciate your qualities, we know 'em. Don't we, Church?"

"We do!" said Church feelingly.

Handforth beamed.

"Now and again, you fellows reveal a spark of common sense," he remarked. "One of these days I may even hope for a little brilliance. But about this Moat Hollow stunt. Let's go over the facts."

"But we know 'em—" began Church.

"All good detectives repeat facts again and again," said Handforth firmly. "It's the only way they conduct cases. Now, lemme see! Pitt has gone down to Moat Hollow in the hope of getting a word with Tommy Watson."

"Poor old Tommy!" said McClure reflectively. "One of the best chaps in the Fourth last term. And now he's in that rotten school of Grimesby Creepe's! Kept like a prisoner—bottled up day in and day

out! I can't help thinking that Creepe is a beast."

Handforth laughed scornfully.

"I've thought it from the very minute he opened his giddy school!" he said with a sniff. "And, what's more, Grimesby Creepe isn't everything he seems."

"You mean he's more than he seems?" suggested Church.

"He's a scamp!" declared Handforth. "If he wasn't a scamp, why should he keep his pupils bottled up behind high walls? Why hasn't Tommy Watson been up to see us? Again and again I've suggested a raid on Moat Hollow, but I've been ignored. My voice is like a faint whisper wafting through the wilderness!"

Church grinned.

"If that's your idea of your own voice, I wonder what you'd call a real shout?" he asked blandly. "As for making a raid on Moat Hollow, I don't see the sense of it—"

"You don't see what?"

"I—I mean, it's a topping idea, of course!" said Church hastily.

"Of course it is!" went on Handforth. "But Pitt's always against sensible schemes. Instead of going at a thing direct, he works round corners and turns in circles! My method is to drive straight at the root of the trouble in one tremendous thrust."

Church and McClure made no comment. They were well acquainted with Handforth's "tremendous thrusts." In certain circumstances, his policy was the only one to be adopted, but it could hardly be used for any and every occasion. That was where Handforth failed to reveal a sense of proportion. So far as he went, circumstances never altered cases. He had the same law for every problem.

CHAPTER II.

ALL READY FOR THE JAPE, BUT NO VICTIM.



"DISGUSTING!" said Chubby Heath disconsolately.

"Scandalous!" declared Owen minor.

"Disgraceful!" said Juicy Lemon, with deep indignation.

Willy Handforth grunted as his faithful henchmen uttered these remarks. He wasn't feeling exactly cheerful on his own account. He peered across the dark Triangle, and shivered slightly.

"Jolly cold out here," he remarked. "What's the time? After six, ain't it? I suppose we'd better go in and have some tea—"

"Good!" said Chubby Heath, moving off.

"Wait a minute—I haven't given the order yet!" said Willy tartly. "There's just a chance that we can jape somebody

else. We've got everything ready for the professor, but he's a back number now."

"Just our luck!" sighed Lemon.

The fags groaned in chorus. They were standing near one of the leafless chestnuts in the Triangle, and a more unhappy quartette could scarcely have been imagined. Even Willy was glum. He idly fingered some lengths of cord which trailed down from the tree branches overhead.

"The best jape we've planned for months!" he said bitterly. "And all for nothing. All our preparation work is wasted—cast to the winds! If this isn't enough to make a chap give up in despair, what is?"

"Don't talk about it!" said Chubby Heath, in pain.

"Remember how we spoofed the professor at dinner-time?" went on Willy Handforth reminiscently. "He thought my wireless set was wonderful, and fairly gloated over the giddy loud speaker."

Chubby Heath gave a faint grin.

"He didn't know that Owen minor was hidden in the cupboard, speaking through a giddy tube!" he remarked. "I must say you've got some marvellous ideas, Willy, old son. It's a sin that this jape should be wasted!"

"A sin?" repeated Willy bitterly. "It's a criminal offence! Just think of the way we kidded the old chap about astronomy. He thought somebody was lecturing on the stars over the radio—he swallowed our yarn whole! He firmly believed that a marvellous new star was due to appear in the sky at half-past six."

"And it's ten past six now," groaned Owen minor.

"Don't rub it in!" snapped Willy. "I've never known such a frost in all my giddy life! Nothing could have been better for the jape—a clear sky, no clouds, and brilliant stars. The fates are with us, my sons, but Professor Tucker isn't. That's just the tragedy."

Willy & Co. had seldom been so unhappy. They had planned this jape for days, and until an hour ago everything had apparently gone smoothly. The idea was to pull the leg of Professor Sylvester Tucker, the short-sighted, absent-minded science master. The professor literally went about asking people to pull his leg. He was a genial old fellow, and a general favourite. His pet hobby was astronomy, and Willy Handforth had struck the right note in this particular jape.

But fortune was apparently against the enterprise.

For news had come, some little time earlier, that the chief actor in the scene would be unable to appear. In brief, the unfortunate professor had inadvertently walked into the moat at Moat Hollow. And now he was in bed, in Mr. Creepe's school.

Not only in bed, but actually tended by Dr. Brett, and watched over by a nurse.

The chances of the professor turning up seemed so remote that even Willy Handforth gave up hope, and he was the most fatalistic optimist in the entire Third.

"Oh, well, it's no good!" he said, shaking himself. "After all, what's the use of crying over spilt milk? The jape's a fizzle, and there's an end of it. Let's clear away the ropes and things, and buzz indoors for tea. Better luck next time."

"Wait a minute!" whispered Lemon. "Somebody coming!"

The fags glanced round at the gateway, and observed a figure moving across the Triangle in their direction. It was, in fact, Mr. Horace Pycraft, the unpopular master of the Modern Fourth.

"Old Pieface!" muttered Willy with a grunt. "What does he want? Why can't he use the proper path, instead of cutting across here? We'd better make ourselves scarce—he's a beast!"

All fags made a point of avoiding Mr. Pycraft on every occasion. The gentleman had an unpleasant habit of stopping Third-Formers and criticising their attire. Not infrequently, he inflicted lines, or reported fags to their Form-master.

Mr. Pycraft had an eagle eye for a rent, a missing button, or a crumpled collar. In his opinion, fags ought to have gone about scrupulously tidy and neat. Mr. Pycraft made no allowances for leapfrog accidents, football disasters, and similar minor catastrophes.

Therefore, Willy & Co. dispersed until the enemy should have passed into the Modern House. But Mr. Pycraft didn't pass into the Modern House. He didn't even pass the chestnut-tree. Something coiled about his legs, and he uttered a startled exclamation. And the next moment, before he could save himself, he tripped headlong to the ground.

Mr. Pycraft's mortar-board went flying in one direction, a couple of books in another, and his gown enveloped him like a cloud. He hit the ground with considerable violence.

"Good!" murmured Willy approvingly. "In fact, jolly good! Mr. Pycraft has come along to cheer us up. I didn't know he was such a sport. But listen—what do we hear? What strange words are these?"

Mr. Pycraft was attempting to pick himself up. His language was incoherent, for he was so startled and angry that lucid words failed to come. Willy, in the gloom, sighed with relief.

"It's all right; he's only talking Hindustani, or something," he whispered. "I was afraid your delicate young ears would be offended by noisome expressions; but you're spared. It seems that Mr. Pycraft is getting into a bit of a tangle!"

The master of the Modern Fourth was, in fact, hopelessly mixed up with a collec-

tion of cords which had maliciously wound themselves round his legs. The more he tried to escape the more confused they became.

Willy & Co. felt that they were slightly compensated.

CHAPTER III.

AN UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL.



MR. PYCRAFT tripped over for the third time in succession.

"Good heavens!"

he panted desperately.

"Somebody shall suffer for this! It is a trick—a deliberate attempt to insult me! Help! Help! I demand assistance—"

"Shall we go?" breathed Chubby Heath.

"Not on your life!" whispered Willy. "If we do he'll drop on us like a ton of bricks. We'll leave him to his fate. Let's hope he doesn't tear those giddy cords down!"

The fags had spent a long time fixing up the arrangement for the jape on Professor Tucker. Everything, in fact, was in readiness. It had been sheer carelessness to leave some lengths of left-over cord lying about loose under the tree.

At last Mr. Pycraft freed himself.

"A trick—a deliberate trick!" he repeated harshly. "I shall make it my business to inquire fully into this disgraceful affair. I am only thankful that there were no witnesses!"

He started, for it seemed to him that a chorus of gleeful chuckles wafted through the evening air. Mr. Pycraft's suspicions were doubly increased. He peered round him inquisitively.

"Who is there?" he demanded sharply.

But nobody answered; no sounds came to his ears save the rustle of the breeze overhead and the sounds of noisy talk from the junior quarters of the Modern House.

"Make no mistake!" barked Mr. Pycraft. "I am aware of your proximity, you impudent young rascals! And I shall ascertain your identity, and see that punishment falls upon you!"

He paused, listening, but still there was no sound.

"Outrageous!" he declared savagely.

With a swish of his gown he strode towards the Modern House, stamped indignantly up the steps, and vanished within. Willy & Co. emerged from their retreat grinning. They felt rather better.

"Not bad; but it might have developed more entertainingly!" murmured Willy. "The old owl only tripped over three times. Just when we were beginning to enjoy it, too. Sheer selfishness!"

"Hadn't we better get indoors?" suggested Chubby. "Pycraft may come out with a

lantern, or something, you know. He's capable of any frightfulness. We might as well be on the safe side."

"And it's no good staying out here, anyhow," added Juicy.

Handforth minor nodded.

"All right; just as you like," he agreed. "I'm fed-up! I've been fed-up on other occasions, but this time—"

He paused, for at that moment another figure had appeared in the gateway. It was walking briskly, with short, toddling footsteps. And Willy caught his breath in with a gasp. His gloomy utterance trailed away.

"Is it?" he breathed. "Can it be possible? Look, you chaps—gaze! Is it a ghost, or—"

"The professor!" whispered Chubby Heath incredulously.

"The fates have heard our lamentations—and the professor has been sent to us!" exclaimed Willy, recovering himself with rapidity. "It's old Tucker—sure as a gun!"

"But it can't be!" protested Owen minor. "He fell into the moat—"

"I don't care if he fell into the Red Sea!" interrupted Willy. "He's here—as large as life, and pretty excited, by the look of him. My only hat! He's looking for that star already!"

Professor Sylvester Tucker, having reached the centre of the Triangle, paused and gazed upwards. He was obviously excited, and he took absolutely no notice when the fags surrounded him. They were all gleeful. Their great jape was still in the programme.

"Good-evening, professor," said Willy brightly.

"Don't bother me!" said Professor Tucker. "Go away! I won't be pestered and hindered—"

"Not at all, sir; we've come to help you to look for that star!" interrupted Willy.

"You remember, sir? We heard some chap on the loud-speaker saying the star would appear at six-thirty."

"Yes, yes—exactly!" said the professor. "I am in a fever of anxiety—a perfect tumult. My glasses—my spectacles. I have lost them, and I can see nothing of the sky. But wait—wait! I have other spectacles! Go indoors, young man, and fetch me some!"

The professor peered at the fountain closely, evidently expecting the fountain to reply. It didn't. It remained quite passive.

"Do you hear me, boy?" snapped the scientist.

"Just a little mistake, sir; the fountain's got very bad manners and ignores everybody," said Willy, tugging at the professor's sleeve. "I called it all sorts of names this morning, and it didn't even answer back."

"The fountain?" snorted the professor. "Confound the fountain! Eh? Dear me!

Have I been in error? A lamentable state of affairs. If only I had my glasses——”

“It’s all right, sir—don’t worry,” interrupted Willy. “It’s only a quarter-past six. The star isn’t due for another fifteen minutes. Plenty of time. It’ll show itself prompt on the minute!”

Professor Tucker breathed a sigh of relief. “Splendid—wonderful!” he declared. “Then I am in time? I had feared the worst; I had certainly feared the worst. I shall even have time to prepare my instruments for minute observation.”

He was completely changed. His anxiety left him, and he became cheerful, light-

aristocratic brow was much wrinkled. The schoolboy baronet was having a pretty bad time.

One object occupied his thoughts to the exclusion of all others.

Tommy Watson, his bosom chum, had not been near him for two or three weeks. And Montie shared the growing general conviction that Tommy was being forcibly detained at Moat Hollow. Montie knew that Reggie Pitt had gone down to Mr. Creepe’s school on a rather desperate investigation, and he was like a cat on hot bricks.

Several times Montie had decided to go down to Moat Hollow and hover about

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hearted and gay. Willy & Co. stood round in an admiring circle. Professor Sylvester Tucker, attired in one of Mr. Creepe’s tweed suits, was well worth looking at.

CHAPTER IV.

STARTLING NEWS.

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST was unusually worried.

He hovered about in the Ancient House lobby, pacing this way and that, and incapable of keeping still for more than a few seconds at once. His

outside the high wall. But he had realised the futility of this procedure. He could not do better than wait.

There was a footstep on the staircase, and he turned, slightly irritated. In his present humour he wanted to be alone. The genial, urbane Sir Montie was hardly himself.

“What-ho!” observed the newcomer. “Greetings, laddie! Isn’t it somewhat dashed chilly, pacing the old lobby in this fash? I mean to say, the good old study and the priceless fire seems to be what the doctor orders. So how about trickling?”

Sir Montie frowned.

“Pray don’t trouble, dear boy,” he said shortly. “I’d rather be here.”

"Oh, well, just as you like, of course," remarked Archie Glenthorne, with a yawn. "I wouldn't dream of pressing you, old teacup. I may be wrong, but it seems to me that certain foul worries are bothering you, what?"

Tregellis-West adjusted his pince-nez and gave Archie a cold glance.

"Yes," he agreed. "I am frightfully upset!"

He and Archie were study-mates—not permanently, but as a temporary measure. Until to-day they had got on famously. But Montie was now very irritable. He considered that Archie was displaying an almost criminal lethargy in this present crisis.

"Upset?" repeated Archie, staring. "Good gad! You don't mean to say so, old darling! How absolutely mouldy! Kindly allow me to rally round with all sorts of sympathy. In other words, Montie, old cheese, pour the floodgates of trouble upon me."

Tregellis-West half-turned away.

"Oh, it's no good, Archie—you don't understand!" he growled. "You know as well as I do that Tommy is havin' a frightful time at Moat Hollow! An' now you ask me these questions. I think you'd better go off an' have some sleep!"

Archie Glenthorne looked pained.

"Oh, I say!" he murmured. "I mean, dash it. Somewhat harsh words, laddie. I'm not so dashed sure it doesn't amount to abuse. The fact is, you're worried—"

He broke off as some quick footsteps sounded on the steps outside. The next moment the door was flung open, and a nursemaid appeared. She was quite attractive, and had obviously been running. Her cheeks were flushed, and her hair disordered. Both the juniors regarded her with unconcealed astonishment.

"Oddslife!" said Archie, feeling for his eyeglass.

"Reggie!" said Sir Montie, rushing forward. "We—we didn't expect you back until to-morrow—"

"Something's happened!" interrupted the nurse briskly. "We can't talk here—come along to Study E. It's important!"

Sir Montie was all agog with excitement. He was anxious, too, for Reggie's unexpected return boded ill. Without doubt his escapade at Moat Hollow had miscarried in some way.

They hurried off to Study E, leaving Archie gaping. The genial ass of the Fourth had his limitations, and this speed took him off his guard. He suddenly awoke to the fact that he was alone.

"Good gad!" he breathed. "I shall have to see into this dashed business! Absolutely!"

He moved into the passage at a great pace. In fact, for him it really amounted to a reckless dash. He found Pitt and

Tregellis-West at the door of Study D talking to Handforth & Co.

"What, back already?" Handforth was saying. "There you are! I knew you'd make a mess of the whole business—"

"Hold on, Handy!" interrupted Church. "Give him a chance!"

"Professor Tucker was the one who made a mess of it!" said Pitt grimly. "I felt that I could sit down and weep. Of all the obstinate, self-willed, fatheaded old lunatics he's the worst! And yet, at the same time, I can't help grinning—and I can't help liking him!"

"But what's happened?" asked Tregellis-West urgently.

"Collect the chaps together, and I'll tell you!" replied Pitt. "Get the gang into Study E, and I'll be down in five minutes."

He hurried off upstairs to change. For now he was back in the school, and it was urgently necessary for him to resume his own identity. One of the masters might have asked awkward questions if he had spotted Pitt in his feminine get-up.

It was a good move on Reggie's part, too. He didn't want to tell his story two or three times—as he would be compelled to do if some of the "gang" were missing. There had been a regular committee debating on this Moat Hollow question, and they were all roped in.

Study E was packed, and the celebrated apartment buzzed with conversation. Everybody wanted to know what had happened, and nobody could explain. But one thing was certain.

Reggie Pitt's great investigation had collapsed.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT HAPPENED AT MOAT HOLLOW.



HANDFORTH shrugged his shoulders.

"Mind you, I'm not saying a word!" he exclaimed carelessly. "I'm not even grumbling. But what did I tell you all along? Didn't I say from the very start that this Moat Hollow business ought to have been left in my hands?"

"You did!" said Cecil Valerie, nodding.

"And didn't I say that Pitt would make a mess of it?"

"Well, yes, in a way—"

"Rats! I said it plainly and boldly!" declared Handforth. "And I say it again! If I had gone down to investigate, instead of leaving it in Pitt's hands, everything would have passed off smoothly—"

"Is this what you call saying nothing?" asked Jack Grey. "Is this refraining from grumbling? It wouldn't be a bad idea to wait until Reggie comes, and explains things!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Dry up, Handy!"

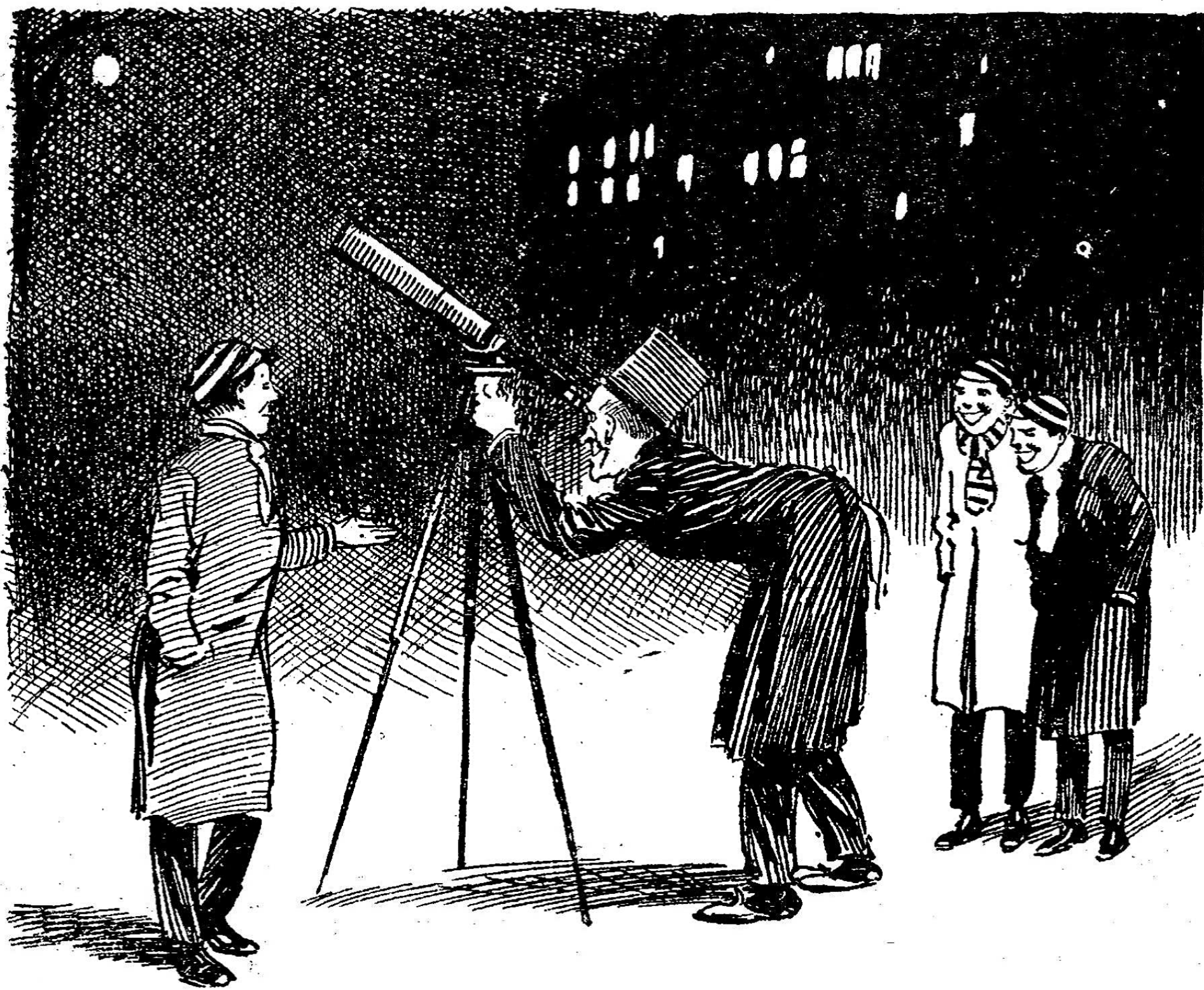
"Oh, all right!" roared Handforth. "I know you're all against me—I know you're all prejudiced! Do you think I care? I'm used to this jealousy and favouritism!" he added bitterly.

The juniors grinned. They could always rely upon Edward Oswald trotting out the same arguments and grievances. He was a good chap, and in many ways he was a contradiction. One never knew what he would do next, and yet he was as unchanging as the stars.

"What about old Tommy?" demanded Tregellis-West.

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Kindly spout out the old yarn, laddie."

"Well, it won't take long—although quite a number of things have happened during the last hour," said Pitt. "You know I went down to Moat Hollow with Dr. Brett's permission? Well, old Brett was a brick—he introduced me as the nurse, and left me by Professor Tucker's bedside, with instructions to stay there until to-morrow."



There, overhead, in the clear sky, gleamed a truly magnificent star.

The door opened, and Reginald Pitt strode in. He was himself again now—dressed in Etons, and with all signs of his disguise removed. The Form skipper was looking unusually anxious.

"All here?" he asked briskly. "Good! Sit tight and listen!"

"Handy says you've made a ghastly failure——" began Jack Grey.

"Never mind what Handy says," interrupted Pitt. "He always judges by appearances, and never waits for facts. My investigation has been successful in one way, and a failure in another."

"And why didn't you?" demanded Handforth.

"Because Professor Tucker bolted!"

"He bolted?"

"Well, it practically amounted to that!" growled Pitt. "But we're getting on too fast. I found the professor in bed, and there wasn't much wrong with him. They'd taken prompt measures, and rolled him in blankets, and the old boy didn't even have a temperature. I believe the doctor left him there more for my sake than anything else, because he knew I wanted to prowl about during the night. But I hadn't been

there more than ten minutes before I heard a terrific scream."

"My hat!" said Jack Grey. "A scream?"

"I knew it!" said Handforth excitedly. "I told you that old Creepe tortured his victims——"

"Hold on—don't anticipate!" interrupted Pitt. "As a matter of fact, it was Tommy who was screaming——"

"Tommy!" muttered Tregellis - West huskily. "Begad!"

"Why the dickens won't you wait?" asked Reggie tartly. "I dashed out of the sick-room and buzzed downstairs. The boys were all passing through the hall, it seems—on their way to tea, probably. And Tommy Watson was on the floor, writhing about, and shrieking."

"Good gad!" said Archie.

"I thought he was in a fit, and so did old Creepe," went on Pitt. "But he wasn't—it was only a ruse. He did it on purpose to attract my attention and to get a word with me on the quiet."

Montie's anxiety fled.

"I say, that was frightfully cute of the old boy!" he observed.

"Yes, up to a point," agreed Pitt. "Unfortunately, Tommy gave himself away——"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"He wanted me to bring a message to St. Frank's—thinking, of course, that I was a nursemaid," said Pitt. "His message was only brief—he wants to be rescued from Moat Hollow. He's a prisoner there, and old Grimesby Creepe is a tyrant and a slavedriver!"

"Great Scott!"

"Just what we said!"

"The old beast!"

"Poor old Tommy!"

Study E fairly buzzed with excited comment, and all the Fourth-Formers looked flushed and eager. They had always entertained grim suspicions about Mr. Grimesby Creepe and Moat Hollow. Here, for the first time, their worst fears were being confirmed by an actual eye-witness! Tommy Watson, late of the St. Frank's Fourth, was virtually a prisoner!

"Perhaps it was my fault that things went wrong," said Pitt thoughtfully. "I told Tommy who I was, and he was so surprised that he forgot himself. And Mr. Creepe, who's got eyes like gimlets, spotted the fake. But he didn't say anything at the time."

"What did he do?" asked Montie eagerly.

"Watson pretended to recover, and I was sent upstairs to my patient," replied Pitt. "But I guessed there was something in the wind, because Creepe took Tommy off to his own study."

"And what then?"

"I—— Well, I don't mind admitting that I listened at the door," said Reggie. "It was spying, of course—but that's what I went to Moat Hollow for. I was justified. I only call it really spying when a fellow listens at doors out of sheer curiosity, or

with some malicious motive. I was listening in order to help Tommy."

"Of course!" said Jack Grey. "What did you hear?"

"I heard enough!" replied Pitt grimly. "Creepe was railing on at Tommy—he guessed the whole truth. And he was commanding Watson to reveal what he had whispered to me. Watson refused, and Creepe plainly told him that unless he loosened his tongue by seven o'clock he'd be tortured!"

CHAPTER VI.

HANDFORTH MEANS BUSINESS.



"TORTURED!" echoed Tregellis - West, aghast.

"By seven o'clock!" ejaculated Handforth. "Why, it's—it's nearly half-past six already!"

"Good gad!" said Archie, dropping his monocle. "Tortured—at seven o'clock! I say, that seems to be a dashed foul sort of business! I mean to say, the old tissues absolutely wilt at the thought!"

"But look here!" burst out Jack. "This is terrible! You just said that Creepe guessed the whole truth, Reggie. Do you mean that he spotted your disguise?"

"No," replied Pitt. "When I said the whole truth, I meant about the fake fit. Creepe thought I was a nursemaid—and thought so all the time. Even when he dismissed me he had no inkling."

"Yes, but why did he dismiss you?" asked De Valerie.

Reggie made a wry face.

"That was the professor's fault," he replied. "If he hadn't suddenly got a bee in his bonnet, I should be at Moat Hollow still. In fact, I'd made up my mind to be on hand so that I could rescue Tommy at the crucial moment. Then the professor spoils the whole bag of tricks!"

Handforth snorted.

"What's the idea of bringing in the professor as an excuse?" he demanded. "You weren't dependent upon him for anything, I suppose?"

"If you suppose that, you suppose wrong," replied Pitt promptly. "As long as the professor remained in Moat Hollow I was safe—I had to stay there to nurse him. But the old boy scooted!"

"Scooted!" ejaculated Church.

"Scooted!" insisted Pitt. "Just that, and nothing more. I went back to his room, expecting to find him asleep, and there he was wide awake. He asked me the time, and I told him, and then he suddenly went off the deep end. He's remembered that a new star is going to be visible to-night. You know he's dotty on astronomy!"

"My only hat!"

"He insisted upon getting up, and when I argued he started shouting at the top of

his voice," said Reggie, grinning at the recollection. "I can't help smiling—the old bounder was too funny for words! Think of it! There he was, recovering from his ducking, and just because he'd remembered some problematical star, he dressed himself and buzzed off!"

"You ought to have kept him in bed!" said Handforth judicially.

"Wild horses wouldn't have kept him in bed!" growled Pitt. "Besides, old Creepe came, and he was as pleased as a dog with two tails. He was naturally glad to get rid of the professor, particularly as it meant getting rid of me, too. He even lent the professor a suit of clothes. I was turned out into the cold, cold night."

Tregellis-West looked thoughtful.

"Under the circe, dear old boy, I think you've done wonders," he declared. "I do, really! A trained detective couldn't have done more, begad! At least, we do know for certain that Tommy is bein' kept a prisoner, an' we know that he's goin' to be tortured at seven o'clock."

"Tortured?" repeated Archie slowly. "Dear old chappies, I feel absolutely frightful at the very thought! I mean to say, there's only one thing to be done. Forty of the best are urgently required!"

And Archie lounged out, and made for his own study.

"Lazy slacker!" growled Handforth. "Fat lot he cares!"

"Oh, leave him alone," said Reggie. "Archie was built for comfort, not for speed! In a business of this kind he's as much use as a tailor's dummy! Let him sleep! I'm afraid we're pretty helpless, too," he added reflectively. "We can't do anything to help Tommy, anyhow."

Tregellis-West looked startled.

"Can't do anythin' to help?" he repeated quickly. "But we must, Reggie boy—we must, really! We can't let Tommy——"

"It's no good getting excited," interrupted Pitt steadily. "There's hardly any time, and it's impossible to force our way into Moat Hollow."

"Rats!" growled Handforth. "We could get in by storm!"

"Yes, we could do that, but it would only mean a brief delay in Tommy's torturing," said Pitt. "And we should show our hand and let Creepe know everything. I'm sorry for Watson, but Creepe can't kill him. We shall have to think of some fresh scheme, and put it into operation as soon as possible. It's no good getting into a panic, and it's worse than useless to apply diastolic measures."

Handforth frowned.

"All right—blow you!" he growled. "I've made up my mind, and I'm going to act on my own account! I mean business."

Pitt looked serious.

"For goodness' sake, be sensible, Handy," he said urgently. "I've already told you how fatal it will be to show our hand. We

can't do it—we mustn't! It'll only make things ten times as bad for Tommy!"

"I'm not so sure of that," said Handforth obstinately. "Still, have your own way—but don't blame me afterwards! I'm fed up with the whole business—understand? I give my advice, and it's ignored!" he said bitterly. "I wash my hands of you!"

And Edward Oswald marched out, dutifully followed by Church and McClure. There was a brief silence after they had gone.

"He'll get over it," said Pitt slowly. "I feel just the same as he does—I want to dash down to Moat Hollow, and raid the place, and rescue Tommy Watson."

"Then why don't you?" asked Montie desperately.

"Because it would be foolhardy," replied the Form captain. "Impulse tells me to act like that—but prudence holds me back. And don't forget that we need tact and discretion more than we ever needed it before."

And the other fellows, including Tregellis-West, realised that Pitt's cool, well-considered judgment was right.

In the meantime, Handforth & Co. had reached the lobby. Church and McClure were fully prepared to deal gently with their disappointed leader. But, as usual, he sprang a surprise on them. He faced them grimly.

"Well, I've fooled Pitt and the others!" he declared. "They think I'm resigned. But I'm not! We're going down to Moat Hollow—and we'll rescue Tommy Watson off our own bat!"

Church and McClure were staggered.

"But look here!" began Church frantically.

"Not a word!" commanded Handforth curtly. "I've made up my mind—I'm determined! We're going out on the trail—and we're going now!"

CHAPTER VII.

TWINKLE, TWINKLE, LITTLE STAR!



PROFESSOR SYLVESTER TUCKER was on the alert.

It was on the stroke of six-thirty, and the Triangle was empty, save for Willy & Co. and the professor. The air was frosty, and the stars were gleaming with a hard, metallic brilliance in the purple sky.

"Splendid—splendid!" declared the professor, as he busied himself with a tripod. "The conditions could not be more favourable! I only trust that this remarkable star will show itself."

"Bound to, sir," said Willy Handforth. "That chap on the loud speaker wouldn't tell fibs!"

"Not likely!" grinned Owen minor.

Considering that the appearance or non-appearance of the star depended upon Willy, Owen minor's confidence was easy to understand. The fags little realised what this jape really involved. But for their harmless foolery, Professor Tucker would have still reposed peacefully in bed at Moat Hollow—and Tommy Watson would have had Reggie Pitt on hand to help him in his extremity. It is upon such trifles that great issues revolve.

The professor had obtained a reserve pair of spectacles, and he was himself again. Upon the tripod a huge telescope was fixed, and the science master was in a great state of excitement. Willy & Co. were almost startled at the success of their practical joke.

"As far as I can understand, sir, this star's going to be a whacking big one!" said Willy. "It'll probably appear all at once—"

"Fiddlesticks!" interrupted the professor. "Go away! What are you doing here? If it comes to that, who are you?"

"I'm Handforth minor, sir."

"Indeed!" said the professor. "I don't know you, my boy—I've never heard of you! Don't bother me now!"

Willy grinned.

"Just as you like, sir," he replied. "All right, Chubby—you'd better switch on!"

"Fathead! He'll hear you!" hissed Chubby Heath.

"He wouldn't hear me if my voice was like a thunderclap!" grinned Willy. "I could call him all sorts of names, and he wouldn't take any notice! Go on, you ass—switch on! When we provide stars, we provide 'em properly!"

Willy was speaking quite openly, and with perfect safety. Professor Tucker was near by, and he heard every word—but not a single syllable of Willy's remarks sank into his mighty brain. The absent-minded science master was wholly engrossed in his own preparations.

Chubby Heath hurried to one of the chestnut-trees, and felt upwards until his fingers came in contact with a loose wire. There were, in fact, two loose wires, and Chubby twisted the two ends together. The contact was made and the circuit completed.

"There it is!" exclaimed Willy tensely. "My goodness! What a star! Look, sir! It's bigger than Jupiter! It's brighter than Mars!"

Professor Tucker started, and gazed upwards.

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated hoarsely.

There, overhead, in the clear sky, gleamed a truly magnificent star. It was far more wonderful than anything the professor had dreamed of—a great, dazzling star of stupendous brilliance. Compared with all the other celestial bodies, it was like a miniature sun.

"This—this is stupefying!" panted Professor Tucker, his voice quivering with excitement. "There is no star in the whole hemisphere like this one! Where has it come from? Where has it developed?"

"I bought it at old Sharpe's, sir," said Willy calmly.

The professor didn't even hear him.

"My telescope!" exclaimed the science master. "Good gracious! I must make observations at once! The whole astronomical world will be aflame with this extraordinary discovery!"

"Look, sir—it's moving!" shouted Juicy Lemon excitedly.

"Moving?" repeated the professor. "Nonsense! Don't bother me—why, what in the name of— This—this is too amazing for words!"

He was fairly panting—and small wonder. For the brilliant new star was actually moving across the sky! Certainly, Professor Tucker knew of no other star in all the constellations of the heavens that could jerk its way across the zenith as this one was doing!

The star, indeed, was behaving in a most unstarlike manner. One could understand a comet making a dash across the milky way—one could appreciate the eccentricities of a meteor making a flying leap for the horizon. But one could hardly forgive any self-respecting star for progressing across the sky in a series of positive hops.

Yet this star was certainly doing so. And Professor Sylvester Tucker was so amazed that he forgot all about his telescope, and nearly jerked his spectacles off his nose.

"This must be the beginning of the end!" breathed the professor tensely. "A planet must have broken loose from its orbit, and is coming nearer and nearer to the earth! My telescope! Where is my telescope?"

He gazed round grimly, failing to observe the tripod behind him.

"Somebody has stolen my telescope!" he shouted desperately.

Then he paused with a gulp. For the star, in a most obliging manner, was returning across the sky in its own track, and was now gliding along in a leisurely fashion.

Willy Handforth & Co. were aching with suppressed mirth.

CHAPTER VIII.

HANDFORTH GETS AN IDEA.



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH strode out of the Ancient House with a determined step.

"It's no good—don't argue!" he said curtly.

"We're going straight down to Moat Hollow! It's half-past six already—and

there's no time to lose! By George! We'll show the Fourth what we can do!"

Church groaned, and McClure nearly sobbed.

"For goodness' sake, be reasonable, Handy!" gasped Church. "We can't do everything alone—we shall only get ourselves into trouble!"

"It'll mean a flogging all round!" said McClure tensely.

Handforth waved his hand imperiously.

"Rot!" he snapped. "Another word from you, my lads, and I'll biff you! Am I leader, or am I not?"

He suddenly paused, and turned abruptly.

"Look here, you insubordinate rotters!" he snorted. "I've had about enough! Who's in command of this investigation?"

"Why, you are——" began Church.

"Then let me hear no more of this piffle!" snapped Handforth. "I'm fed up with it! And remember—one word of objection, and I'll biff you over! Don't say I haven't warned you!"

Church's exasperation overcame him.

"You obstinate, pig-headed mule!" he roared. "You get a potty idea, and cling to it like a dying man clings to a straw! You ought to be locked up—you ought to be shoved in a padded cell! You're not fit to roam about loose—you're dangerous!"

Handforth drew his breath in with a gulp.

"Why, you—you——" he began.

"Steady on!" panted Church. "Hit me, and we'll both desert you on the spot! Back me up, Clurey!"

"Rather!" said McClure promptly. "We'll walk off and leave you, Handy! And then where will you be? I suppose you'll raid Moat Hollow single-handed? I wish you luck!"

Handforth gripped himself with difficulty.

"All right!" he said thickly. "All right! So this is the way you treat me! And we three are supposed to be pals! Clear off! I don't want you! You can jolly well go to the dickens!"

He stalked off in a huff, and Church and McClure glanced at one another in dismay. Now that Handforth had taken them at their word, they didn't want to desert him. Church and McClure were very human. They suddenly felt a keen desire to accompany their leader.

"We'd better go, I suppose," growled Church. "Oh, the ass!"

"He means well—I'll always give him that credit!" said McClure sadly.

In the meantime, Handforth stamped across the Triangle, and blundered full-tilt into Professor Tucker's telescope. The telescope went one way, the tripod another, and Handforth nearly ended by sending the unfortunate professor backwards into the fountain. It was only Willy's presence of mind that averted the catastrophe.

"Good heavens!" gasped the professor,

as he was jerked into safety. "What—what is this? How dare you come——"

"Sorry, sir!" panted Handforth, startled. "I didn't see you in the dark! Anything the matter? What's all this rubbish lying about?"

"Rubbish?" roared the professor. "Do you realise, boy, that you have wrecked my telescope?"

Church and McClure hurried up, and, aided by Handforth, they picked up the tripod and fixed the telescope up again. Fortunately, it had come to no serious harm.

The chums of Study D moved hastily aside after this, since it was apparently dangerous to disturb Professor Tucker. Then they noticed the dazzling star overhead.

"What the dickens is that?" asked Handforth blankly. "Who's fixed that light up there? What's the silly idea?"

"Shut up, you chump!" hissed his minor. "We're playing a jape on the professor—he thinks he's discovered a new star."

"Star!" repeated Handforth, staring. "Do you mean to tell me that the professor mistakes that giddy thing for a star? Why, anybody can see it's an electric light!"

Willy grinned.

"The professor's short-sighted," he replied calmly. "Even with his glasses he can't see properly—and we've spoofed him beautifully. When he looks through the telescope he'll spot the trick—but up to now we've prevented him. Not a bad wheeze, eh?"

Handforth looked at his minor with stern disapproval.

"One of these days, my lad, you'll come to a bad end!" he said savagely. "You'll come to a sticky finish. Haven't you got any respect for your elders?"

"Come off it!" said Willy calmly. "If you were a sportsman, you'd join in the laugh. Imagine it. We got Professor Tucker out of his giddy bed at Moat Hollow to come and squint at this star."

"What!" said Handforth faintly.

"It's only an electric-torch, too—hanging up there bulb downwards!" grinned his minor. "We fixed it up with strings, on pulleys, and there's a wire leading down so that we can switch it off."

"You—you——"

"In a minute or two we're going to yank the giddy thing down while the professor's back's turned, and when he looks up again the star will have vanished!" chuckled Willy. "Then he'll write an article for the 'Astronomer's Friend,' and tell the whole graphic story. There'll be a sensation for weeks."

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled the other fags.

"You—you young bounders!" said Handforth thickly. "So it was you and this rotten jape that made Professor Tucker

get up? Do you realise that you've brought torture upon—"

"Shush, old man!" whispered Church. "Don't give it away!"

Handforth started. He was reminded just in time. The truth about Moat Hollow was a secret, known only to a select few in the Fourth. Placed in the possession of the fags, it would be a secret for about four minutes, and after that the whole school would know about it.

Edward Oswald Handforth grunted and moved away. And as he did so he gave a kind of jump. That imitation star had given him a sudden idea. He had been thinking of rockets, and from rockets he went to Roman candles, and from Roman candles to maroons.

He came to a sudden halt, quivering.

"Got it!" he murmured tensely. "Quick, you chaps!"

"What's wrong—hurt yourself?" asked Church. "You sound in pain!"

"Fathead! I've just got an idea!" said Handforth.

"Oh, well, of course—then you were in pain," said Church.

"Fireworks!" breathed Handforth, failing to notice the insult. "Cannon crackers! Maroons!"

"This is the result of too much worry," said McClure. "He's dotty!"

"Old Sharpe's got lots of 'em left—I saw a box on one of his shelves only last week," went on Handforth. "Don't you understand, you chumps? All we've got to do is to buy a lot of maroons, light the fuses, and chuck 'em over the wall at Moat Hollow."

"Do what?" asked Church and McClure, staring.

"While old Creepe is investigating the explosions, we'll drop over the wall in another spot, and get into the house," said Handforth triumphantly. "How's that for an idea?"

Church and McClure were too overcome to give any lucid reply.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MARTYRS OF MOAT HOLLOW.



MR. GRIMESBY CREEPE entered his study with an expression of kindly benevolence on his heavy, ponderous face. His little eyes gleamed as though with

pleasant anticipation, and in his mouth he held a big quill toothpick.

"Seven o'clock, Watson," he said purring. "I trust you have been quite comfortable during my absence? I trust, also, that you have calmed down into a reasonable, tractable mood?"

Mr. Creepe went over to the fireplace,

rubbed his hands before the blaze, and then turned.

Tommy Watson was sitting in a chair with a set, sullen, obstinate expression on his rather drawn face. Behind the chair stood Kirby, the chief monitor of Moat Hollow.

"I think he's as pig-headed as ever, sir," remarked Kirby.

"Indeed?" said Mr. Creepe, removing the toothpick from between his teeth. "Dear, dear! That's very unfortunate! Tut, tut! We can't allow this, Watson—we can't allow this! Come, come, my boy—remember what your continued silence entails. I should be greatly pained if I am forced to adopt methods of—er—persuasion."

Tommy Watson held himself in check with difficulty. Mr. Creepe's snaky manner, and his purring voice wrought the junior up to such an extent that he wanted to fling himself out of the chair and to fly at Mr. Creepe's stumpy figure.

"I've nothing to say!" muttered Watson thickly.

Mr. Creepe shrugged his shoulders sadly.

"A pity—a thousand pities!" he said regretfully. "I cannot tell you, Watson, how your words grieve me. So you have nothing to say? You still find it impossible to tell me precisely what you said to our mutual friend, the nursemaid?"

Tommy Watson remained silent.

"Surely you have had time to consider the matter?" went on Mr. Creepe, still using the purring tone. "I have no wish to be hard with you, Watson—it grieves me to punish my scholars. I am a kindly man—I love nothing better than peace and goodwill. My one aim is to induce a tranquil comradeship in this establishment. Indeed, I like to regard my house as a home rather than a school."

Watson choked back a hot, bitter retort that came to his lips. And Kirby, behind the chair, gave a soft chuckle. He always liked to hear Mr. Creepe in this mood. He was in his most dangerous state. It generally meant a painful period for some unfortunate wretch.

In this instance, the unfortunate wretch was Tommy Watson, and Kirby was particularly anxious to see Watson suffer. The ex-St. Frank's junior had been a continual source of trouble to the monitors since the day of his arrival. Nothing could break down the barriers of his obstinacy—no amount of hard work or persecution could quell his spirit. He was one of the hardest nuts the Moat Hollow monitors had ever had to crack.

Mr. Creepe was a brute and a tyrant. But it pleased him to pose as a kindly, benevolent man with a fatherly interest in his boys. He was about the biggest humbug Tommy Watson had ever had the misfortune to meet. He and his school were a disgrace to the countryside.

The hapless boys of Mr. Creepe's establishment were drudges—practically slaves.. For the most part, they were unwanted children, boys whose parents or guardians were only too willing to forget. They paid Mr. Creepe's modest fees, and left their offspring to his tender mercies without question.

Tommy Watson's case was an exception. His father, Sir Vivian Watson, had been tricked and duped by Mr. Creepe's humbug. Sir Vivian had been fooled all along the line; and none could blame him, for the headmaster of Moat Hollow was also a master of duplicity—a past-master, indeed, in the art of deception.

There had been a financial crash—a company had collapsed, and Sir Vivian had sacrificed his personal fortune in order to meet the demands of many small investors. Although not legally obliged to recoup the sufferers, Sir Vivian had given up his fortune and had saved his honour. And now he and Tommy's mother were on their way to Australia. They firmly believed that their son was in safe hands.

According to appearances at the present moment, Mr. Creepe's hands did not look any too safe!

CHAPTER X.

MR. GRIMESBY CREEPE'S WAY.



"COME, come, Watson—I am still waiting!" said Mr. Creepe, consulting his watch. "Dear me! Seven-five. This won't do—this won't do! Haven't you made up your mind yet?"

"Yes, sir," said Watson steadily.

"Splendid! That's the style!" said the schoolmaster, rubbing his hands together. "So you have decided at last?"

"I have decided to say nothing!" put in Tommy, controlling his voice with difficulty. "You can't make me speak—I won't be forced! I've done no harm—I've done nothing wrong—"

"Tut, tut!" interrupted Mr. Creepe. "What's this? Mutiny? It grieves me, Watson, to observe this recalcitrant spirit. It is such a simple thing I ask—merely a few brief words. You see, I do not even demand. I love to treat my boys kindly."

"You—you torturing fiend!" burst out Watson passionately.

"Good, gracious!" gasped Mr. Creepe, starting back. "This—this outburst—"

"Why don't you get it over and done with it?" panted Watson, his face burning with emotion. "Why can't you birch me—or put me to any other torture? I won't speak—I tell you I won't! I don't care if you kill me!"

Mr. Creepe compressed his lips, and his

eyes took on a hard, cruel glint. He had expected this attitude, and, in a way, it gave him a certain amount of pleasure. For he now felt that he had full justification for the step he had in mind.

"Very well, Watson—we will not argue!" he said pleasantly. "I regret that I must deal drastically with you, but it is entirely your own fault. I have given you the opportunity, but you refuse it!"

The junior shivered slightly. His outburst had been brief, and now the reaction affected him. Watson was a stolid, blunt sort of youngster, and it took a great deal to move him. But when he was moved the effect left him trembling.

He vaguely wondered if Reggie Pitt would do anything. It was certain that Mr. Creepe was still in the dark regarding the nursemaid's identity. He merely wished to force Watson to reveal what he had whispered to the supposed girl.

If Mr. Creepe had known the full truth, his attitude would have been even more dangerous. As it was, the schoolmaster was glad of an excuse to torment this obstinate new boy.

"Remain here, Kirby—watch the young hound closely!" said Mr. Creepe, moving towards the door. "I will prepare the school. I shall return within a few minutes, bringing Tarkington with me. Watson will then be transferred to the school-room."

He went out, and Kirby grunted.

"Young idiot!" he snapped. "Why can't you speak? Take my tip, and change that obstinate mind of yours!"

"I won't—I won't!" muttered Watson. "And supposing I did tell? Mr. Creepe wouldn't believe me—he'd say I was lying. He's only too glad of an excuse to torture me!" he added bitterly.

"There's something in that," admitted Kirby with a nod. "The Head's a caution when he likes. But you'll make things easier if you tell the truth. But I won't press you."

Watson felt desperate. Yet he knew better than to lose control of himself. To make a break for liberty would be a mistake, for he had no chance of getting away. And he swore to himself that he would maintain a bold front. Never would he show the white feather.

He held Mr. Creepe in utter contempt. The man was a scoundrel—a brute who made his boys slave from morning till night. He forced them to do all the household work, and to labour away at other tasks. Mr. Creepe ran a mail order business—using an office in Bannington—and his boys provided all the necessary labour. Mr. Creepe did a big business, and he paid not one penny in wages. He was a rascal to his finger-tips.

He returned shortly, accompanied by a big, ugly-looking youth—Tarkington, another monitor.

"Bring the boy to the school-room!" ordered Mr. Creepe shortly.

Watson was pulled out of the chair by Kirby, and then he was marched between the two monitors like a prisoner in the charge of warders. They went downstairs, through the dismal, ill-lighted hall, and into the school-room.

All the Moat Hollow boys were present, sitting in their places, and looking awed and frightened. Mr. Creepe always conducted his punishments before the entire school. In this way, he struck terror into the hearts of the stubborn, and broke the spirits of the obdurate.

The boys were a poor-looking lot. Many of them were deformed, others were weakly and ill-nourished. Food at Moat Hollow was plain and scanty. There were no healthy games allowed, and the scholars, in consequence, had little opportunity for exercise.

"Boys, I regret that I have a very painful duty to perform this evening," said Mr. Creepe solemnly. "You all know how it grieves me to inflict corporal punishment. But, alas, I am sometimes compelled to make an object-lesson of an unusually insubordinate scholar."

Mr. Creepe spoke with a kind of break in his voice. But he must have known all the time that he deceived nobody. These boys were too well acquainted with his character to misread him.

"The physical suffering of the boy I punish is a mere trifle compared to my own mental agony," went on Mr. Creepe sadly. "But what can I do? I am a schoolmaster; I must maintain discipline. And I am determined to teach this misguided boy the error of his ways. Kirby! Tarkington! Place Watson in position!"

"Yes, sir!" said the monitors promptly.

Tommy Watson clenched his teeth, and resolved that he would not make the slightest outcry, whatever happened. They could torture him as they chose, but never would he show the white feather!

He was roughly pushed over to the end of the schoolroom, just beside the lecture platform. Two thick ropes were hanging down from the beams above. Watson had seen them before, and had idly wondered what their purpose could be. He was now to learn.

He was placed upon a chair, standing, and his coat and waistcoat were rapidly removed. He was, in fact, stripped to the waist. Then his wrists were forced up, and the ropes bound round them. And finally the chair was pushed from beneath his feet, and he hung there, swinging, clear of the

floor. The strain on his wrists was painful in the extreme.

"Now, Watson—one more chance!" said Mr. Creepe purringly. "I am anxious to avoid the infliction of this punishment. It is within your power to save yourself. What did you say to that nursemaid?"

Watson opened his mouth to speak, but he suddenly flushed and compressed his lips tightly. He wouldn't even answer—he wouldn't even admit that he had heard.

Mr. Grimesby Creepe shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well!" he said resignedly. "So be it! You bring your punishment on your own head. Kirby, the whip!"

Kirby produced a wicked-looking horse-whip from the cupboard, and passed it to Mr. Creepe. With a glitter in his eye, the schoolmaster cracked the whip in the air, and advanced to the platform.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PHANTOM PROTECTOR.



CRACK!

The whip flicked through the air, and the cruel end of it just touched Watson on the shoulder. It was like the sting of a hornet. The slightest touch—leaving scarcely any mark, and apparently harmless from the onlookers' point of view. In reality, it was torturing.

But Watson made no sound—he bore it with grim stoicism. And the school looked on breathlessly, each boy sitting so quiet that scarcely a sound disturbed the uncanny silence.

Flick, flick!

Again and again the whip cracked, the frayed end of the cord touching Watson with apparently gentle caresses. Mr. Creepe had had so much practice in this sort of thing that he was an expert. There was nothing brutal in this form of punishment—to look at.

But the torture of it was well-nigh unendurable. Therein lay the diabolical cruelty. A hard, deliberate flogging with a birch would have looked brutal, but would have been ten times more merciful.

"Well, Watson—well?" murmured Mr. Creepe softly. "How now? Am I loosening your tongue by these preliminary touches?"

Tommy Watson made no reply.

"Dear, dear! A pity—a thousand pities!" purred Mr. Creepe. "I am afraid I must increase the punishment! You are very obstinate, Watson—and I cannot tell you how pained I am!"

Crack! Crack!

The whip curled round Watson with cruel force this time, and a gasp escaped his lips—although nobody knew how hard he tried to keep it back. It seemed to him that a white-hot iron had seared his flesh.

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY...PRICE 2:

"What, still obstinate?" asked Mr. Creepe in pained surprise. "This won't do, Watson—this won't—"

In the act of raising his whip for another stroke, Mr. Grimesby Creepe fell back a step, and his eyes opened wide. Something extraordinary had happened—something utterly unexpected.

A rope had come coiling down from the big skylight in the centre of the school-room. It stopped, swung idly for a moment or two, and then an amazing figure slithered down the rope with such speed that he seemed to drop sheer. It was a marvellous exhibition of dexterity.

"What—what—" began Mr. Creepe blankly.

He nearly choked. Startled, frightened cries were coming from the boys, and even the monitors fell back aghast. For the figure that had dropped so dramatically, from nowhere was a curious one.

The mysterious unknown was dressed entirely in black—dull black—from head to foot, and his garments were close-fitting except for a short cloak which covered his shoulders. The face was entirely disguised by a snug-looking hood. There was, indeed, no face to see—only two gleaming eyes. The hood was pointed at the top.

The rope ended ten feet from the floor, and the uncanny interrupter finished his descent in a light, well-judged spring. And having landed, he lost no time.

His first move was to slash through Tommy Watson's ropes and release him. Then, with quick, springy strides, he advanced upon Mr. Grimesby Creepe, and snatched the horsewhip from the schoolmaster's hand. Mr. Creepe was pale and shaky, his heavy cheeks quivered and shook as he jerked back.

"Who—who are you?" he demanded hoarsely.



The explosions were almost like a bombardment. Two of the things went off next to Mr. Creepe, and he leapt a clear foot into the air, and danced about madly.

"I am the Phantom Protector!" replied the figure, in a clear, grim voice. "Thus I shall appear when you seek to torture your helpless victims! And punishment will always fall upon you!"

Slash! Slash! Slash!

The whip cracked hissingly, and each time its cruel end flicked round Mr. Creepe's legs. The way in which he leapt into the air was startling. For so heavily built a man he displayed astonishing agility.

"Yow! Help!" he screamed. "Stop! You—you madman—"

He broke off with another shriek, for the sting of the lash was sheer torture. Never before had Mr. Grimesby Creepe realised the cruelty of this form of punishment. Never before had his brutality been brought home to him so forcibly.

He broke into a run—frightened, panic-stricken. And round the schoolroom he

bolted, with the mysterious black figure in close attendance. The whip lashed him incessantly.

"Kirby, Tarkington, Fryer!" howled Mr. Creepe wildly. "Help—help! Seize this—this—"

His words finished in an incoherent scream, for his own medicine was too caustic for him. He stumbled against something, fell sprawling, and lay moaning on the floor. The school was standing, thrilled and awed by this unexpected exhibition.

"Enough!" said the Phantom Protector contemptuously.

He flung the whip down and gave a soft laugh.

"A taste, Mr. Creepe—just a sample, remember!" he exclaimed, his voice sounding uncannily clear amid the tense silence. "I am watching—I am always near! My duty is to protect these unfortunates. Beware of your future actions! I shall be watching!"

Mr. Creepe gave a half-sobbing gulp.

"Fryer—Tarkington!" he croaked. "Seize this intruder! Kirby! Fools—fools! Why don't you move? Are you paralysed?"

The monitors came to themselves at last, and made a rush at the black-clothed figure. But it was a half-hearted assault, at the best. The Phantom Protector leapt forward invitingly.

Crash! Crash!

With supreme ease he sent Kirby somersaulting backwards. His fist seemed to be like a sledgehammer. Tarkington sampled the Unknown's left—and that sample was sufficient.

"Boys, be of good heart!" sang out the Phantom Protector, swinging round to the school. "I am always ready to help—to protect! Have no fear of the tyrant! I will be ready when I am needed!"

With three strides he reached the centre of the room. A clean leap upwards carried him to the dangling rope. He swarmed up like a monkey, vanished through the skylight, and was gone!

CHAPTER XII.

EXCITEMENT AT MOAT HOLLOW.



CONFUSION reigned supreme.

The entire school-room was in an uproar. For now that the tension was over, the boys shouted with excitement and wonder. They even forgot to be terrified by Mr. Creepe's presence. For once their latent spirit had been aroused. For a brief spell they became human boys, and not listless slaves. For the first time since entering this school they had witnessed an act of justice. It had a magical effect.

The incident was over—the Protector had gone.

And he had gone without leaving a trace. Even the rope had been pulled up, and the

skylight was now closed. The whole affair seemed akin to a flight of imagination. Many of the boys could hardly believe that it had actually happened.

But there was Tommy Watson—cut down from his position of torture—and this was sufficient evidence. Mr. Creepe was still on the floor, too, although he was now rapidly recovering.

The startled schoolmaster pulled himself upright, and stood there trembling in every limb. He was still frightened. He was in agony, too—for those lashes had been effective.

Mr. Creepe gave a wild look round. Except for the excitement among the boys, everything was normal. He hardly even glanced at Tommy Watson. The monitors eyed him uncertainly.

"Outside—all of you!" bellowed Mr. Creepe, his voice cracking with excitement and rage. "Do!ts, imbeciles, fools! Rush outside and capture that intruder before he can scale the wall!"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Kirby.

"Take lights—anything!" screamed Mr. Creepe. "But capture him! Understand—capture him! By Heaven, I'll make him pay for this!"

Without even thinking of his boys, Mr. Creepe rushed to the door, flung it open, and charged out. He literally hurled himself across the hall, and the monitors went after him.

Somehow, the bridge was placed across the moat, and the schoolmaster and his allies spread themselves over the grounds. The evening was cold and dark, with the stars still twinkling brightly.

In the rush, only two lanterns had been brought, and these shed a faint radius of light around them. Everything was still. There was not the slightest indication of an intruder.

"It's no good—we'll never find the fellow!" muttered Tarkington pantingly. "I can't make it out—it's a mystery! Who was he? How did he get over the wall—"

"No good asking me," said Kirby uneasily. "I don't like it—"

"Come on—come on!" shouted Mr. Creepe. "Search, you idiots—search!"

They went over every inch of the grounds, but looking for a needle in a haystack would have been more profitable. The mysterious figure in black had vanished as utterly and completely as though he had been a mere spectre of the night.

And Mr. Grimesby Creepe's rage and panic subsided. Perhaps the cool night air served to calm him somewhat. At all events, he called the monitors together, and they halted near the front of the school.

"It's no good, sir," said Kirby. "He's gone!"

"Gone!" echoed Mr. Creepe huskily. "Gone! But who was he? In the name of all that's mysterious, who was he? By glory, this is the most staggering thing that has ever happened!"

"Did he hurt you much, sir?" asked Tarkington tactlessly.

"Hurt me?" repeated Mr. Creepe, with sudden rage. "Hurt me? You infernal young fool! Do you think—"

"Sorry, sir," said Tarkington hastily.

"Something's got to be done!" went on Mr. Creepe. "We can't leave the affair in this condition. I suspect a trick—some confounded practical joker is responsible."

"Practical joker?" repeated Kirby. "I don't think so; it wasn't exactly a joke. And don't forget what the—the figure said. He'll be watching. He'll always be on guard."

Creepe uttered an exclamation.

"Rubbish!" he snapped. "Theatrical rubbish!"

"Oh, all right, sir; just as you like!" growled Kirby sullenly. "But what about that affair, about a week ago?"

"What affair?"

"Don't you remember when Watson fell off the roof?" asked Kirby. "He plunged into the moat, and you thought you saw a dim figure pull him out. He was pulled out, in fact, and the affair's been a mystery all along. It seems to me that this protector chap was on the watch even then!"

Mr. Grimesby Creepe stroked his chin nervously.

"Perhaps you're right, Kirby—perhaps you're right!" he muttered. "It certainly looks very significant. Good gracious! That—that mysterious figure may be watching us even now!"

"We'd better get indoors!" said Tarkington, with a shiver.

"Yes, yes, of course!" snapped Mr. Kirby. "The boys! What about the boys? Good heavens! Didn't you leave somebody in charge? You young dolts! Can't I trust you for anything?"

Mr. Creepe made a move towards the moat. And at that very moment something whistled through the air near him and fell to the ground a few yards further on. Sparks flew in miniature cascades.

"What the——" began Mr. Creepe.

Other bunches of sparks appeared. And then, almost simultaneously, a series of deafening devastating explosions awoke the echoes of the school grounds. And for a brief spell the scene was lit by dazzling flashes of fire.

CHAPTER XIII.

INVESTIGATIONS.



BOOM, boom, boom! The explosions were almost like a bombardment. Two of the things went off next to Mr. Creepe, and he leapt a clear foot into the air, and danced about madly. The monitors

scattered as though they had been hit by a cyclone.

"Fireworks!" yelled Tarkington.

"Fireworks!" screamed Mr. Creepe. "I knew it! It's a trick—some of those young hooligans from St. Frank's, I'll stake my life! This—this is becoming intolerable!"

"Better search, hadn't we, sir?" asked Kirby, grimly.

"Yes, of course—search at once!" commanded the schoolmaster. "Take the lanterns and make a thorough circuit of the grounds. Don't miss a single inch. One of you go outside and examine the walls!"

By this time the bombardment had died completely away. Mr. Creepe hurried off with Tarkington and Fryer and Roberts, whilst Kirby went to the gates. And some little distance along the wall, three dim spots abruptly dropped out of sight.

"It's no good, Handy—can't be done!" murmured Church anxiously. "Didn't you hear what old Creepe said? They're going to search, and one of the rotters is coming out here!"

"We'll be spotted unless we scoot!" breathed McClure.

Handforth grunted with disgust.

"Blessed if I know why the thing went wrong!" he grumbled. "I told you from the start that it was a first-class idea. We got the fireworks, we lit the fuses, and we chucked 'em over, and—and everything. And now we've got to bunk."

"It's your own fault; I warned you!" said Church. "You ought to have waited until everything was quiet. Fancy chucking the maroons over while Creepe and his gang were actually in the grounds!"

"Quick!" gasped McClure.

They bolted—for even Handforth had no particular desire to be caught by Mr. Grimesby Creepe or one of his henchmen. It would probably result in a painful interview with Dr. Stafford. Discretion was the better part of valour, so the chums of Study D dived across the road, plunged through the hedge, and crouched down.

"It's all right; we've only got to wait until things quieten down, and we can carry on!" panted Handforth, whose optimism could never be quenched. "Anyhow, I mean to force my way into Moat Hollow. I've made up my mind, and nothing's going to stop me!"

For one dreadful moment Handforth was in fearful peril of being pitched backwards down the bank and into the cold waters of the River Stowe. Church and McClure were so exasperated that they were keyed up to such a deed. But Handforth was saved by Kirby.

The latter came along the road with a lantern, so any movement in the hedge was perilous. Handforth & Co. were not afraid of Kirby, far from it; but they mutually decided that no good could possibly come

by a face to face encounter. So they waited in silence.

Kirby soon went in, and after relocking the door, he joined forces with Mr. Creepe and the other monitors. All the reports were the same. No strangers had been seen.

So, beaten, Creepe & Co. went back into the house. The school-room was still in a state of disorder, most of the boys being out of their places and excitedly discussing the unprecedented events.

Tommy Watson was looking almost himself again. A crowd of boys had helped him to dress, and he now stood waiting—more than a little bewildered at the surprising manner in which he had been rescued. He had an idea that Mr. Creepe would not renew the torture.

And Watson was right.

The schoolmaster came in, grim and forbidding. His usual air of benevolent kindness was entirely gone. Mr. Creepe did not feel like maintaining his pose under the present circumstances.

"To bed—everybody!" he commenced harshly. "And let there be no talking. If anybody dares to discuss this affair, he will be flogged. Kirby, see the boys upstairs!"

"Yes, sir."

"And report to me the names of any wretched boys who dare to say as much as two words!" went on Mr. Creepe. "I may have something else to say to-morrow; but for the moment I must have time to think."

Within five minutes the entire school was hustled off to the dormitory. Significantly enough Mr. Creepe absolutely ignored Tommy Watson. He didn't even glance at the junior. The torture was definitely abandoned.

And shortly afterwards, as soon as the school was quiet, Mr. Creepe called Kirby, and they went along to the attic staircase. Mr. Creepe was carrying a lantern.

"We are going to examine the roof, Kirby!" he declared grimly. "I mean to thresh this matter out, and I shall not be satisfied until I have discovered exactly how that mysterious intruder gained admittance to the school grounds."

Kirby nodded.

"Yes, sir; we shall sleep more comfortably if we know," he admitted.

They passed out on to the roof and proceeded to investigate.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. CREEPE DRAWS IN HIS HORNS.



"EXTRAORDINARY!" murmured Mr. Creepe huskily.

"It's—it's uncanny, sir," said Kirby.

"Here are the marks where the intruder opened the skylight—and this looks like a smear

caused by a shuffling shoe or slipper. But how on earth did the fellow get up here?"

"The whole affair is unaccountable!" declared the schoolmaster.

He was more startled than he would admit. He and the monitor were standing on the flat roof of the school-room, next to the skylight. The lantern cast a ruddy glow over the leads. The roof was dry and quite dirty. The marks made by the Phantom Protector were so clear that they could be read without any difficulty.

But they were astounding in one respect.

The footprints and other marks were confined to the roof in the close neighbourhood of the skylight. There were no footprints leading away, either towards the main part of the school or to the edge of the roof. How, then, had the uncanny intruder come, and how had he gone?

"This is ridiculous!" snapped Mr. Creepe, peering about him searchingly. "The fellow must have climbed up somehow; and yet there are no marks. What does it mean, Kirby? What can the explanation be?"

"Well, I should imagine that he dropped from the sky!" said Kirby.

"This is no time for foolish jokes!" retorted Mr. Creepe sourly.

"I wasn't trying to joke, sir," retorted Kirby. "The intruder must have come from the sky. There's nowhere else. The marks show as clearly as possible that he alighted on the roof, came down through the skylight, and then flew up into the air again!"

"Bah!" snarled the schoolmaster.

He was irritated beyond measure. He hated a mystery. And Kirby's fantastic explanation angered him, mainly because it seemed to be the only possible solution.

There was only one way to read the marks on the roof. Without the slightest question the strange visitor had only trodden on the ledge near the skylight itself. And yet it was impossible for him to have flown, for he was undoubtedly a human being. The intruder was no ghost or supernatural apparition. Mr. Creepe was quite ready to vouch for the Protector's solidarity. And if it came to that, so were the monitors. They were still bruised and sore.

Mr. Creepe glanced up and shook his head. There were no overhanging trees. The roof stood out alone, quite separated from any of the other parts of the building.

"It's no good; we must give it up!" snapped Mr. Creepe curtly.

He hated saying it, but there was nothing else to be done. And with a vague sense of uneasiness, with a feeling that he was being watched, the schoolmaster led the way back into the building. He went straight to his study and produced his inevitable toothpick.

"Bring the other monitors to me!" he said shortly.

Kirby went, but soon returned with his five fellow-warders.

"Ah, so you have come!" said Mr. Creepe, sticking the toothpick into a corner of his mouth and glaring at the monitors. "Remember, boys, not a word of this must be breathed in the village. This matter must not go beyond the school walls."

"You can trust us, sir," said Tarkington.

"I can do nothing of the sort!" retorted Mr. Grimesby Creepe. "If I felt that I could trust you, I would not be making this order. I have always dealt leniently with you boys; I have let you have much your own way. But if I hear that you have discussed this extraordinary affair with any outsider I shall take drastic measures."

The monitors remained silent.

A slight sound came from the window, but it was only a piece of creeper moved by the breeze. Yet Mr. Creepe started, and turned a shade paler. He was on the jump. His feeling of security had gone.

The coming of the Phantom Protector, the mysterious nature of his entry and exit, and the warning he had uttered, all these things played upon Mr. Creepe's mind. His nerves were ragged. And he told himself that caution must now be the watchword.

"For the present, boys, our policy must be altered!" he exclaimed, framing his words with difficulty. "We must be careful—very, very careful. Until I probe this mystery, we must take no chances."

"You're right there, sir," agreed Kirby, nodding.

"I did not ask you to make any comment, Kirby," snapped Mr. Creepe. "Our only course is to allow this affair to die down. For a week or two, none of our boys must be ill-treated—I mean, of course," he added hastily, "we must not administer the full punishment they deserve. Under the circumstances it might be dangerous."

"And what about Watson, sir?" asked Tarkington.

Mr. Creepe frowned savagely.

"Yes, Watson," he muttered. "That infernal boy! What about him, eh? Good heavens! Am I to be prevented from inflicting punishment—" He paused, and pulled himself up short. "Well?" he demanded. "What do you want to know about Watson?"

"You—you didn't finish the job, sir," said Tarkington.

"Fool! Don't I know it?" rapped out the schoolmaster. "But I will finish the job, Tarkington—I will finish it! Not now, however. As I have said, we will allow things to go along smoothly and quietly for a week or two. So be very careful with all the boys."

He dismissed the monitors a moment later, and flung himself heavily into a chair before the fire. Even here, in the seclusion of his own study, he felt uneasy. More than once he

glanced towards the window, and at last he pulled the curtains closer.

Mr. Grimesby Creepe, to be exact, was terribly afraid that the Phantom Protector would again mysteriously appear. Without question, the unknown's work was having excellent effect already.

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT MR. PYCRAFT SAW.



MR. HORACE PYCRAFT started.

He was just coming over the bridge, on his way to St. Frank's. It was getting on for eight o'clock, and Mr. Pycraft had been down to the village to obtain some special medicine from the chemist's. The regularity with which Mr. Pycraft partook of this medicine had led to a few sinister suspicions among the Modern House boys. In fact, there were quite a few whispers that Mr. Pycraft sometimes mistook the George Tavern for the chemist's.

"What—what was that?" murmured Mr. Pycraft shakily.

The night wasn't exactly dark. There was no moon, certainly, but the stars dispelled the absolute blackness. And Mr. Pycraft had a firm conviction that he had seen something black flit across the lane in front of him.

It had apparently come from the quiet side road on the right. It was so dim and mysterious that the thing seemed intangible—just a blot of blackness more intense than the surrounding darkness.

"Undoubtedly I was mistaken," murmured Mr. Pycraft, pulling himself together. "Most disturbing! It is fortunate, indeed, that I obtained my nerve medicine."

He extracted the bottle from his overcoat pocket, took a sip, and felt better. He crossed the bridge, and felt disinclined to walk up the lane towards the school. It looked very black. And the gloomy, mysterious bulk of Bellton Wood somewhat unnerved him.

And just at that moment that mysterious black figure appeared again. Mr. Pycraft was sure of it this time. It dodged into the centre of the road, making no sound, and then suddenly vanished.

"Good heavens!" murmured Mr. Pycraft.

He was not usually nervous, although, secretly, he confessed to a certain disinclination to being abroad on country lanes on a dark night. Before coming to St. Frank's, Mr. Pycraft had been the bane of existence to some unfortunate schoolboys in London.

He felt that he had to walk on, but he couldn't bring himself to the point. He would cheerfully have entered into con-

versation with a passing farm labourer, if one had been present, notwithstanding his rooted objections to any members of the lower status.

"Disgraceful!" muttered Mr. Pycraft feebly. "The deserted nature of this lane is a perfect scandal to the district!"

A sound came to his ears from up the side road—the murmur of voices. Mr. Pycraft brightened up. Human presence was near. He moved a few steps towards Moat Hollow. Mr. Creepe's school lay just down the Edgemore Road, facing the river.

"Ahem!" coughed Mr. Pycraft loudly. "Ahem!"

That cough had far more effect than he could have imagined. For it occurred at a most inopportune moment. Edward Oswald Handforth, to be exact, was perched upon the shoulders of Church, and he was making an attempt to reach the top of the Moat Hollow wall.

"Great pip!" muttered Handforth. "Old Pieface!"

He was so agitated that he accidentally kicked Church in the left ear, and Church, objecting to this form of amusement, staggered. Handforth fell to the ground with a thud which shook the countryside.

"Sorry!" gasped Church. "Quick—we'd better scoot!"

Handforth reclined on the ground and moaned.

"I'm done!" he said, in a hollow voice. "My back's busted! My giddy spine's in about four pieces!"

"Fathead! It's old Pycraft!" hissed McClure. "I told you what would come of this business! Give it up, old man—we can't get into Moat Hollow to-night now."

Handforth leapt to his feet aggressively. Considering that his spine was in four pieces, his conduct was a masterpiece of endurance. He glared at his chums fiercely.

"We're not giving up!" he declared tensely. "Everything's quiet now, and this is our chance——"

"Good-evening—good-evening!" said Mr. Pycraft, striding up. "I thought I heard a slight altercation—— Why, dear me! Surely you are boys of St. Frank's?"

Even Handforth was compelled to admit defeat.

"Yes, sir," he growled. "We—we—— The fact is——"

Handforth paused. He was finding it somewhat difficult to explain matters satisfactorily to Mr. Pycraft, and to remain within the confines of the truth. Words failed him.

"Ah, Handforth and Church and McClure, I perceive!" said Mr. Pycraft genially. "Quite a pleasant meeting, boys! Am I to understand that you are returning to the school?"

"Yes, sir," said Church, in considerable surprise.

"Excellent!" beamed Mr. Pycraft. "You will be somewhat late for calling-over, but doubtless you have passes? In any case, there will be no trouble about getting in, since I will admit you by the private gate."

"Yes, sir!" breathed Church.

"Thank you, sir!" said McClure weakly.

Handforth didn't trust himself to speak at all. And Mr. Pycraft turned and strolled along the lane, with the three juniors surrounding him as a kind of bodyguard.

Handforth & Co. were nearly in a state of collapse. Knowing Mr. Pycraft as they did, they had expected a perfect fusillade of questions, and an endless assortment of unpleasant remarks.

But Mr. Pycraft was the soul of good nature. His geniality was startling. For once the master of the Modern Fourth was in a good humour. He had found three companions to accompany him on the homeward road. And he thought it inadvisable to ask any awkward questions.

Handforth & Co. were quite satisfied with the arrangement. It was even a slight compensation for their failure to penetrate Moat Hollow.

CHAPTER XVI.

VERY MYSTERIOUS.



ARCHIE GLEN-THORNE hovered about the gateway with some anxiety.

He had ventured out into the Triangle some time earlier, and one or two fellows had wondered what on earth could induce Archie to leave his warm fireside and his luxurious lounge.

As a matter of fact, the genial ass of the Fourth was on the look-out for Miss Marjorie Temple, of the Moor View School. There had been a tentative arrangement that she should come to a lecture—delivered by Mr. Beverley Stokes. And it was nearly time for the lecture to commence.

Lectures by Mr. Stokes were always well attended. The popular Housemaster was not one of those dry speakers who end up by sending their audiences to sleep. He was witty, light, and entertaining. And he had a habit of narrating anecdotes which had won him fame throughout both Houses at St. Frank's.

"I am afraid the dear girl has absolutely forgotten the good old date!" murmured Archie regretfully. "Frightfully annoying, and all that sort of thing, but girls will be girls, dash it! I mean, when it comes to appointments, girls are positively criminal!"

He gazed down the road through his

monocle, and brightened somewhat. Figures were approaching. They were coming from the wrong direction, certainly, but perhaps Irene & Co. had been to the village.

"Good!" murmured Archie. "The whole gang, what? Irene and Doris and all the

other dear old souls! But stay! What sound is this that hits upon the ear-plates? Not girlish tones, surely?"

He listened closely, and his hopes fell. For he distinctly recognised the unmusical tones of Edward Oswald Handforth. And



Mr. Pycraft had a firm conviction that he had seen something black flit across the lane in front of him.

when, a moment later, Mr. Pycraft's voice gashed the air, Archie's last hope fled.

"Dash it!" said Archie. "Dash it! And once again, dash it!"

When a fellow is on the look-out for a decidedly attractive girl, he naturally resents the arrival of a particularly unpleasant master and three energetic juniors. Archie's brow was sad.

"What-ho!" he said gloomily, as the new arrivals came up. "Greetings, old things! The good old constitutional, what? I suppose you haven't chanced to glimpse Marjorie down the lane?"

"What did you say, sir?" demanded Mr. Pycraft.

"Oh, nothing!" said Archie hastily. "Absolutely nothing, sir. I mean to say, not exactly nothing, but— Good gad!"

He started back, and stared across the lane.

"What are you star-gazing at?" demanded Handforth.

"I saw something—a black sort of figure," said Archie. "I mean, these things are liable to throw a chappie off his balance, dash it! A figure, don't you know—absolutely as black as anything!"

"Good gracious!" said Mr. Pycraft huskily.

He entered the Triangle with quite unseemly haste.

"Handforth!" he called back, over his shoulder. "I shall require to see you in my study within fifteen minutes! Perhaps you will then be able to give me an explanation of your presence outside the school after locking-up. I may find it necessary to report to Mr. Stokes."

He uttered the words with a kind of relish, and walked on towards the Modern House. Handforth & Co. stared after him and grunted.

"I thought there was something wrong!" growled Church. "I wondered why he was so sweet. He only wanted our company, the old beast! Afraid of the dark, poor little chap! And now he's going to be himself!"

"Blow him!" said Handforth tartly. "Who cares for old Py— My hat! What's that? Great pip!"

All the juniors stared. A figure, dim and mysterious, had just leapt across the low hedge on the other side of the lane. Even in the gloom, the juniors could see the hooded head, the short cloak, the gleaming eyes.

"Good gad!" breathed Archie faintly.

The Phantom Protector again!

"Fear not—I am a friend!" he exclaimed softly. "Do not worry over your chum at Moat Hollow. He is being watched over—he is being guarded! I am always ready to help the oppressed!"

The figure gave a soft laugh, and with a single clean bound he leapt the hedge again. He was gone in a flash. Handforth & Co. recovered from their momentary paralysis and rushed at the hedge.

"Not a sign!" panted McClure huskily.

"What was it?" muttered Church. "Oh, my goodness!"

"A dashed fearful-looking object, if you ask me," said Archie. "I mean to say, that hood business, what? It seems to me, dear old companions, that something is absolutely in the wind!"

The juniors went indoors, more startled than they could say. And before long the whole Junior School was talking. But hardly any of the fellows believed the story. Handforth & Co. however, had seen. They knew!

Who was the Phantom Protector? And when would he appear again?

THE END.

*Next Week's Story of this
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An amazing burglary has occurred in a City office, the caretaker being overpowered by some mysterious agency. Nelson Lee investigates and suspects that Professor Zingrave has been active again. By means of a ring, Lee traces the thief to a lodging-house, but the latter gets away in a motor-car. The detective goes in chase in his fast racing car. Just as he is gaining on his quarry, the racer unexpectedly overturns.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.

NELSON LEE and Nipper had no chance whatever.

The accident occurred with such appalling swiftness that they were flung out of their seats before they had an opportunity of realising their danger, and a second later they were both lying in the roadway—stunned and helpless.

For quite an appreciable time they remained exactly where they had fallen, neither of them showing the least signs of life. But gradually, as the minutes sped by, the detective recovered his wits sufficiently to partially raise himself, and to gaze round dazedly.

His head was buzzing like a steam saw, and for a few moments he could do nothing but stare stupidly into the surrounding darkness. But then he noticed that the racer was standing close beside him—an almost total wreck.

The sight of such a magnificent vehicle being reduced to this state had the effect of causing Nelson Lee acute mental agony, and he looked at the car ruefully and wonderingly. He could not understand what had happened to cause such an extra-

ordinary mishap, for the road had been perfectly free from any obstruction.

"What the deuce could have been responsible for such a thing?" he asked himself perplexedly. "The car was running splendidly a second before— By James!"

There was every cause for the detective's sudden ejaculation, for his keen eyes had observed a most amazing thing. From where he lay Nelson Lee could distinctly see the front portion of the racer, and the queer appearance of the radiator arrested his attention.

There was a huge hole in it!

Not a jagged rent such as might have been caused by the car's impact with a heavy object, but a clean-cut aperture which had every appearance of having been literally burned through the metal-work!

And this was not the only thing which the detective observed, for the front axle of the racer was also affected. Both this, and the stout steel of the chassis below the radiator, had been turned into a putty-like substance by means of some invisible force, and Nelson Lee stared at it dumbly and amazedly.

What could be the meaning of this extraordinary occurrence? How had the car been reduced to this condition in such an amazing manner? It was uncanny.

Then, in a flash, the detective realised why he and Nipper had been led to this lonely spot. The man in the leading car—the man they suspected of being Mr. Bill Stockton—had deliberately lured them on for the sole purpose of causing this disaster to Lee's racer—but how in the world had he managed to bring about such an appalling catastrophe?

There could be only one explanation, and that explanation was fairly obvious. Stockton had employed the same diabolical means as those which had been responsible for the astounding robbery at Barlow's, and had caused the vital parts of the speeding racer to succumb to the terrible power which seemed to be capable of accomplishing almost anything.

Nelson Lee had no means of knowing what weapon Stockton was making use of, but the results of its invisible force were sufficiently disastrous, in all conscience. The detective was filled with a great and tremendous rage, and he swore to himself—even at this anxious moment—that he would never knuckle under while there was life within him, no matter what forces were pitted against him.

On the contrary, he resolved to do his best to quickly triumph over his enemies, and to mete out a swift and fitting justice. If, as he suspected, Professor Cyrus Zingrave was opposed to him—well and good, for that would give Nelson Lee a further opportunity to pit his wits against those of the wily scientist who had once been the chief of the League of the Green Triangle.

But the first thing to do now was to discover what had become of Nipper. He had been flung violently from the car in the same manner as his master, and Lee looked round anxiously for some sign of the lad. So far he had given no indication that he was even in the land of the living, but the detective contented himself with the thought that only a very brief period had elapsed since the catastrophe occurred.

Nelson Lee was aching in every limb, and was by no means certain of his own ability to rise to his feet. He only knew that his body was racked with pain each time he attempted to move, but he had no sensation of having sustained any broken bones.

But, just as he was about to make an effort to scramble up, he became aware that two figures were rapidly approaching the spot—two figures which presented a somewhat startling appearance.

The foremost of them was attired in a voluminous red cloak, and possessed the red features and horned forehead which had been described by Ben Logan, the watchman at Barlow's; while his companion was a black-bearded man, wearing a thick muffler and a low-brimmed hat.

This curious pair were hurrying quickly towards the spot where Nelson Lee's racer had overturned, evidently with the intention

of ascertaining the extent of the damage and the fate of its occupants.

The detective instinctively attempted to dive his hand into his pocket for the purpose of withdrawing his revolver, but instead he uttered a little groan of agony. The swift action had told him that his arm was strained, and that in consequence he was unable to use it.

The groan he had emitted had the effect of drawing the attention of the newcomers towards him, and they were upon him in a flash. The black-bearded man looked down at the helpless criminologist with a satisfied nod, and turned to his partner.

"Here's Lee, at all events, and not much the worse for his adventure, by all appearances!" he grunted. "The best thing we can do is to rope him up now, before he gets a chance of causing trouble——"

"I don't think he'll cause us much trouble!" interrupted the other man significantly, as he pulled a bottle and pad from his cloak. "A few whiffs of this will be more effective than all the ropes in the world. Hold him down while I place the pad over his mouth and nostrils!"

The second man nodded briefly, and proceeded to carry out his companion's advice—pouncing upon Nelson Lee without loss of time, and holding him very effectually. The detective, in his present condition, was taken at a great disadvantage, and his feeble struggles were of no avail.

He felt the drugged pad of cloth being pressed tightly over his mouth and nose, and, in spite of his efforts to resist inhaling any of the stupefying fumes, he very quickly succumbed to their effects. Within two minutes he was completely insensible once more, and the two men rose to their feet with every indication of satisfaction.

"Now for the boy!" said the red-cloaked man briskly. "We'll give him a similar dose to his master, and then dispose of the pair of them together!"

Nipper was quickly discovered lying in the grass at the side of the road, in a condition of complete insensibility. He had received a somewhat severe blow upon the head—a blow which had stunned him instantaneously. But, in order to make assurance doubly sure, the drug was administered to him without compunction.

Then he and Nelson Lee—one at a time—were carried to the criminals' waiting motor-car, and placed aboard, the vehicle presently driving off, and vanishing into the blackness of the night.

Nelson Lee and Nipper, through no fault of their own, had fallen into the hands of the enemy, and were now bound for an unknown destination.

What was the meaning of all this mystery, and who were the two men who were working together against the famous criminologist and his assistant?

CHAPTER XII.

THE UNDERGROUND DUNGEON.



DARKNESS reigned supreme.

Nelson Lee raised himself slowly and painfully upon one elbow and peered into the intense blackness which surrounded him.

The detective was feeling considerably the worse for wear, and his head ached abominably.

He tried to recollect what had occurred, but since the moment when the drugged pad had been placed over his mouth and nostrils his mind was a blank. Now, upon recovering his faculties, he began wondering where on earth he could be.

He might just as well have been a blind man for anything he could see, and he seldom remembered being in such complete darkness. It was almost something solid, and the detective knew instinctively that he was in some sort of building. The air was oppressive, but curiously cold, and the great silence which prevailed was so intense that Nelson Lee's own breathing was magnified almost into a roar.

The effect of this upon the still dazed criminologist was eerie in the extreme, but after a few moments he forced himself to his feet, and stood groping about like a man would do who has lost his bearings in a dense fog.

He wondered where Nipper could be, and almost as the anxious thought crossed his mind, he gave utterance to a hail.

"Nipper!" he called loudly. "Nipper! Where are you?"

His voice echoed mockingly back to him, and the rebounding chords told the detective that he was confined within four unusually solid walls. But there was no answering call from Nipper.

With growing anxiety, Nelson Lee took a few halting steps forward, his arms stretched out in front of him blindly. And with the third step his foot encountered the inert form of his unconscious assistant.

In a trice the detective bent down and was greatly relieved to hear Nipper's own breathing. By this time Lee had almost recovered the full use of his faculties, and he commenced fumbling in his pocket for a box of matches—calling himself a lunatic for not doing so earlier.

A second later the tiny flame of the match flared up, and its feeble glimmer fell upon the inert figure of Nipper, who was lying upon the floor in an attitude of restful slumber. His appearance told Nelson Lee that he was almost upon the point of recovery, and a sigh of relief escaped the detective's lips.

Holding the match so that its light fell upon Nipper's features, Lee gently shook the lad, hoping that such treatment would have the effect of rousing him. But beyond

emitting a little groan, Nipper showed no sign of waking.

Now assured that his assistant was practically unharmed, Nelson Lee struck another match, and commenced to examine his surroundings. But such a thing would be a difficult matter without some more adequate means of illumination. As a general rule, the detective carried an electric-torch in his pocket, but to-night he had left it upon the seat of the racer.

The weak light given by the matches was scarcely sufficient to show Nelson Lee the nearest wall, but it proved to be ample to convince the detective of one curious fact.

This prison, wherever it was, had obviously been especially prepared for their reception, for upon the floor beside Nipper there were several parcels. The smallest of these was undoubtedly a packet containing about three dozen candles, and Nelson Lee pounced upon it wonderingly but thankfully.

The discovery of the candles was surprising and unexpected, but the detective lost no time in extracting a couple from the packet and in lighting them. Their illuminating powers, although feeble, greatly exceeded the light given by the matches, and Lee was now able to have a good look round the cell-like apartment in which he and Nipper were imprisoned.

The place was fairly dry, but it smelt old and musty, and had evidently been in disuse for a considerable number of years. The walls were composed of solid blocks of masonry, and the one door was made of massive oak planks, bound with iron, and secured by a tremendous lock. In addition, there were bolts upon the further side, as Nelson Lee assured himself by a quick examination of the structure.

"H'm! A dungeon!" he muttered to himself. "A medieval prison, such as are found in many of the ancient castles of England. Well, upon my soul! This is a surprising termination to our chase of the suspected Mr. Bill Stockton!"

The detective had every cause for his astonishment, for it was extraordinary to find himself in such a place as this. But the longer he examined the dungeon the more he was convinced of the correctness of his conjecture, and of the impossibility of escape from the prison.

With wrinkled brow he walked back to Nipper, and was relieved to see that the lad was now beginning to show signs of recovery. No doubt the light of the candles was having some effect upon his benumbed senses, and Lee knew that he would very soon return to consciousness.

He was right, for Nipper, assisted by his master's efforts, sat up and stared round him almost at once. It was some few seconds before he was able to speak lucidly, but he did so in a surprisingly short time.

"Guv'nor!" he exclaimed, recognising the detective instantly. "What the dickens has

happened? Oh, yes, I remember! The old bus served us a dirty trick, and turned turtle——"

"The old bus, as you call it, did nothing of the sort!" cut in Nelson Lee. "The car was deliberately wrecked, young 'un, and we ought to be very thankful that we are still in the land of the living!"

"Deliberately wrecked!" repeated Nipper wonderingly. "But the road was clear, sir—there wasn't a thing on it except the car we were following!"

"And that proved quite sufficient, in all conscience!" said the detective, with an angry glitter in his eyes. "It is amply evident, young 'un, that we have been made the victim of the same apparatus which was used to open the safe at Messrs. Barlow's establishment. It must have been aboard the car we were following, and it was used to wreck our racer. After the accident I noticed that the front of the car was literally melted into putty, and I knew at once what had caused the catastrophe. We're up against something unique and powerful, Nipper—something unheard of in the history of crime, so far as I can see."

Nipper nodded.

"It's—it's diabolical, guv'nor!" he muttered. "I can scarcely believe that our accident was caused by something which was carried by the other car. But if you're right, it means that Bill Stockton is the man who we've got to look for—the man who carried out the robbery at Barlow's."

"He's one of them, certainly," agreed Nelson Lee. "But there is at least one other man, young 'un, with whom we've got to square accounts, and he is the more dangerous of the two. I believe his is the brain behind these recent events——"

"You mean Professor Cyrus Zingrave?" cut in Nipper.

"Exactly!" said Nelson Lee. "I fancy that he was responsible for the attack upon us, and for our present predicament. We were drugged after the accident, young 'un."

And the detective told Nipper exactly what had occurred upon the roadside a few seconds after their racer had turned turtle, describing the red-cloaked man and his companion, and telling the lad how they had administered the stupefying pad to his mouth and nostrils.

"The—the awful scoundrels!" exclaimed Nipper indignantly. "That was adding insult to injury with a vengeance, sir! But I can't understand what their game is. Why were we drugged and brought here?"

"Obviously to prevent our further interference with the plans of the criminals," said the detective. "That much is clear enough!"

"But where the dickens are we, guv'nor?" asked Nipper, looking round at the black walls wonderingly.

Nelson Lee emitted a mirthless laugh.

"We are in a medieval dungeon, Nipper—a prison from which there appears to be no means of escape," he said. "We have been neatly trapped, and brought to this cell. Upon my soul, the position is intolerable, for we don't even know where we are located!"

The detective spoke the literal truth, for there was no means of telling in what part of the country the dungeon was situated.

Their predicament was, in every truth, a serious one.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NOTE.



NIPPER uttered an angry exclamation.

"The—the hounds!" he ejaculated furiously. "Do you mean to say that they intend to leave us here indefinitely, guv'nor?"

We—we shall starve to death if we can't find a means of escape!"

Nelson Lee looked at his assistant reprovingly.

"There's no need for us to anticipate anything of that nature so early in the proceedings," he said quietly. "The criminals, in order to prevent us from interfering with their plans, have adopted these means of disposing of us for the time being, but they are not quite so callous as you seem to imagine, Nipper. For instance, they had the consideration to leave us a large packet of candles, to say nothing of these other mysterious parcels!"

The detective nodded towards the other packages as he spoke, and Nipper looked at them curiously. Their presence had so far escaped his notice, and even now he was not particularly interested in them.

"Blow the parcels!" he said, scrambling to his feet. "I feel pretty groggy in the upper storey, guv'nor, and I'd like to get out of this hole just as soon as possible. Have you examined it thoroughly?"

"Yes. I have had a look round at all four walls, if that is what you mean," answered Lee.

"And you consider that escape is impossible?" went on Nipper.

"I won't go so far as that," was the reply. "At first glance, this dungeon seems to be about as strong as a fortress; but we may be able to find a loophole. We'll have a good look round before long—Well! This is certainly surprising!"

Nelson Lee had been untying one of the parcels while he was speaking, and his sudden ejaculation had been caused by the nature of the contents of the package. Nipper came over to his master's side, and stared down at the partially open parcel.

"Well I'm jiggered!" he muttered. "Grub, guv'nor!"

The detective nodded.

"You are right, young 'un," he agreed. "There is enough food here to keep two persons properly fed for several days, and its presence can only mean one thing—"

"That we're booked for a lengthy sojourn in this ghastly place, I suppose?" cut in Nipper, with a grunt. "That's all very well, sir, but we're jolly well not going to put up with that if we can avoid it. I'd admit that it's pretty decent of the crooks to supply us with a stock of food like this, but it's only their way of indicating that we're whacked. This grub shows we're expected to accept our fate without a kick; but there's nothing doing! If we can't get out of here by some means or other I shall be surprised!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Bravo, young 'un!" he exclaimed heartily. "That's the spirit I like to see! Naturally, we shall do our utmost to make our escape from our prison; but in the event of such a thing proving impossible, I dare say we shall appreciate this food to the full. At all events, it shows that our opponents are not utterly callous, and that they have no wish to bring about our untimely death. And that is something in their favour!"

Nipper nodded and looked at the contents of the parcel. Certainly there seemed to be an adequate assortment of good, wholesome food, for the package contained bread, tinned meats, cheese, fluid beef, and numerous other nourishing articles of diet. Its very presence in the dungeon, as Nelson



Sure enough, there was now a large opening in the solid masonry of the wall, and the eager prisoners hurried towards it at once.

Lee had said, showed clearly enough that the criminals who were responsible for their imprisonment did not desire them to starve.

In addition to the food, there was also a large keg of water and a couple of

glasses. No cups were provided, for these would be unnecessary, as there was no means of heating water for the purpose of tea or coffee making.

But the third parcel, as Lee and Nipper soon discovered, contained four heavy, warm blankets, and these would be amply sufficient to keep them warm in the event of their being compelled to remain in the cell for any length of time. Undoubtedly the crooks had done everything in their power to provide their captives with reasonable comforts, and the prisoners were agreeably surprised.

"Well, this is the limit!" exclaimed Nipper, as he saw the blankets. "I've never heard of such a thing being done before—even in a blessed story! It seems to show that the crooks, for their own sakes, were compelled to shove us in here, but that they're half apologising for doing it!"

"Exactly, Nipper—you have hit the nail on the head with remarkable accuracy," said Lee. "Our enemies, obviously, have no intention of harming us, but they refuse to put up with our interference. It is most unusual for criminals to be so considerate, and I cannot help thinking that at least one of them is a humane, decent individual. It is to him that we owe these comforts, for I doubt if Professor Zingrave would have shown us a moment's consideration."

"Perhaps Zingrave, after all, is not mixed up in the affair—"

"I am quite convinced that he is, Nipper," put in Lee briskly. "His methods are unmistakable and unique, and I shall be distinctly amazed if I am ultimately found to be wrong. What's that, young 'un?"

Nipper had been idly turning over the various articles of food in the parcel, and he suddenly discovered a folded sheet of paper in the centre of the pile. He picked it up quickly, and looked at his master.

"Dashed if I know, guv'nor!" he exclaimed, regarding the paper curiously. "It looks like a note— Yes, by jingo! It is a note!"

He bent down near one of the lighted candles as he spoke, and held the paper so that both he and Lee could read it at once. The message was scrawled in pencil, and was brief and to the point:

"Sorry to cause you this inconvenience, Mr. Lee; but you and your assistant are a trifle too active to suit my peace of mind," it ran. "I'm afraid you'll have to remain in your present quarters for at least a week, but at the end of that time you'll be released. No doubt you'll find the food and blankets useful."

"MEPHISTOPHELES."

Nipper gave a disgusted growl.

"A week!" he muttered. "Ye gods—a week! Fancy being cooped up here for seven whole days, guv'nor! Why, we'll be a couple of jibbering lunatics in half that time!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A CHANCE OF ESCAPE!



"STEADY, young 'un—steady!" said Nelson Lee with a smile.

"There's no need for you to exaggerate the position so grossly. Our satanic friend has been perfectly frank regarding his intentions, and it is quite evident that he considers our prison amply strong enough to hold us. If he is right, we must make the best of a bad job; but we have yet to prove that he is not mistaken."

Nipper nodded.

"He must be mistaken, guv'nor," he declared. "Surely we can find a way to get out of here? The very thought of staying a week in this place is maddening in itself, and the fact that we don't know where we are only makes matters worse. You say that this cell is a mediæval dungeon; but that doesn't get us far! There must be dozens of castles with dungeons like these dotted about the country!"

"There are, undoubtedly," agreed the detective. "You and I have frequently examined such places as this, and we should be able to tell, within a little, its probable age. This cell is one of the oldest I have ever seen, and I shouldn't be surprised if it is situated in the basement of some ancient ruin or other. There are no indications that it is frequently visited, which would probably be the case if it was the dungeon of an inhabited castle."

This simple deduction on Nelson Lee's part was probably correct, for the dungeon was obviously a neglected and isolated apartment. Dust lay thickly upon the floor, and the general odour which pervaded the atmosphere was musty and dank—showing that the outer air was seldom admitted.

The very last thing which Lee and Nipper would relish would be to spend a week in this dismal abode, and they had no intention of doing any such thing if it could be avoided.

But how was it possible for them to escape?

The detective's preliminary examination had been sufficient to assure him that it was an utterly hopeless task to attempt to batter the door down, for its strength was sufficient to withstand the onslaught of a battering-ram. And the prisoners, of course, were without a tool of any kind.

As for the walls, they were in all probability several feet thick, and any attempt to find a way through them was foredoomed to failure. So far as construction went, they were perfect, in spite of the time they had been standing, and there was no sign of a crack in any of them.

And yet it was impossible for Nelson Lee and Nipper to calmly accept their fate, and to await their release. By so doing they

would be compelled to suffer torture—for their enemies, during that time, would be actively engaged in their criminal pursuits.

No! It was imperative that the two prisoners should do everything in their power to find a way out of their inhospitable dungeon, and they set about the task with a will.

Taking a candle apiece, they commenced a systematic examination of their prison, Nelson Lee taking two of the walls, and Nipper the remaining pair. By subjecting the dungeon to this treatment, it was impossible for them to miss anything which might help them in their determination to free themselves, and for the next half-hour they were intent upon their work.

By the end of that time they had scrutinised every inch of the four walls as far as they could reach, and the result was distinctly discouraging. They were just as far off as ever of finding a solution to their problem, and they looked at one another somewhat dejectedly.

"It's N.G., guv'nor," said Nipper disgustedly. "Those crooks knew a thing or two when they shoved us in here! I don't believe a mouse could escape from this hole! I suppose the door is hopeless, isn't it?"

Nelson Lee nodded thoughtfully.

"Eh? Oh, yes, young 'un—quite hopeless!" he returned. "There is no chance whatever of us escaping by the door. But come here, Nipper—I want to stand upon your back while I examine that ventilator up there!"

He pointed as he spoke to a small aperture about six feet up the wall, and Nipper looked at it.

"What's the idea of pulling my leg, guv'nor?" he asked, with a grin. "I dare say that a couple of spiders could escape by that hole; but I'm hanged if I can see how you and I are going to!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"You never know, my lad!" he said quietly. "I was once shown a ventilator in a dungeon very similar to this, and the secret it contained was really surprising. I'm not suggesting that this one is identical, but it is needless for me to say that I can only hope for the best. Come along, young 'un—bend your back!"

Nipper did as he was requested, and his master quickly climbed upon the sturdy youngster's shoulders. From this position the detective found that he was raised high enough to be able to insert his hand and arm through the ventilator.

The aperture was a mere round hole, not more than four inches across, and was perfectly free of any bars or grating. This small inlet was obviously there for the purpose of supplying fresh air to the dungeon; but Nelson Lee did not always pay most attention to the obvious.

The detective thrust his arm through the ventilator as far as it would go, and then commenced to feel about inside. As he had

expected, the hole led into a much larger shaft, which was situated within the interior of the wall, and quite suddenly his fingers encountered a rusty metal rod.

With a little indrawn breath of satisfaction, Nelson Lee took a firm grasp of the rod, and, after assuring himself that it was securely anchored, he gave a strong, steady pull upon it.

The next second he heard a queer, rumbling noise from somewhere behind him, and at the same moment an excited cry arose from Nipper's lips.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SUBTERRANEAN TUNNEL.



"THE door, guv'nor!" he exclaimed quickly. "You've opened a secret door in the wall, sir! Oh, thank goodness!"

Nelson Lee quickly alighted from Nipper's back, and looked round. Sure enough, there was now a large opening in the solid masonry of the wall, and the eager prisoners hurried towards it at once.

The secret door was formed by a hinged portion of the thick wall, and this had now swung outwards, disclosing a dark, well-like shaft, but no passage. Both prisoners peered into the shaft eagerly, and the detective nodded to himself.

"Very queer," he exclaimed. "On one other occasion I have known a ventilator to house the operating lever of a secret door, and we are very lucky indeed to have discovered this means of escape, Nipper. Usually there is a secret passage connected with the door; but in this instance I dare say the passage is at the base of the shaft. At all events, we have found a way out of the dungeon—and that is something to be thankful for!"

Nipper nodded eagerly.

"I should say it is, guv'nor!" he exclaimed, peering down the shaft eagerly. "But how are we going to get down this well, or whatever it is?"

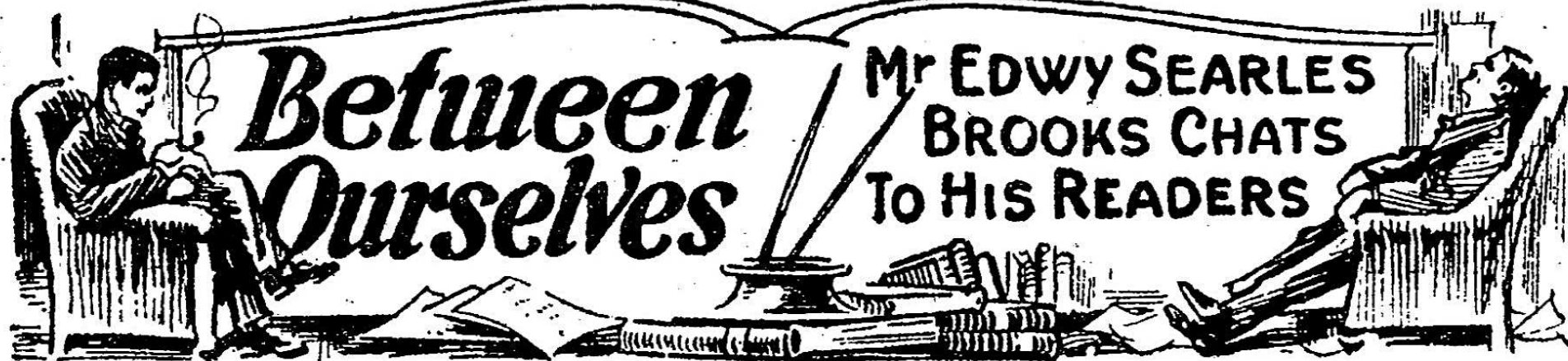
"I don't know, Nipper," said the detective. "But as a preliminary move I think it would be as well for us to lower a candle down the shaft—just to see if the air is pure. There is no sense in deliberately asking for trouble by neglecting to take precautions."

Nelson Lee was quite right in this statement, for the shaft might be filled with poisonous gases—the dreaded "fire-damp," which is frequently encountered in mines.

Quickly the string from the parcels was knotted into a continuous line, and one of the candles was tied upon one end in such a position that it would hang sufficiently level to enable it to keep alight.

The candle was then lit, and Nelson Lee,

(Continued on page iii of cover.)



MR EDWY SEARLES
BROOKS CHATS
TO HIS READERS

(NOTE.—If any readers care to write to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon any remarks that are likely to interest the majority. If you have any grumbles—make them to me. If you have any suggestions—send them along! Remember, my aim is to please as many of you as I possibly can. All letters should be addressed to me personally, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, the Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. —E.S.B.).

Letters received: E. A. Mittelholzer (New Amsterdam, British Guiana), A Nelsonleeite (Paisley), Nelson Leeite (Halifax), J. H. Wright (Boardstairs), An Irish Reader (Galway), James Cook (Poplar), A Joh'burg Reader For Ever (Johannesburg), Ernest W. Sands (Halifax), Alfred J. Prideaux (Ilfracombe), Sportsman (Belfast), A. R. Miller (Blackpool), W. Marsh (Peckham), Freestater (Dublin), E. T. Hurn (North-West Frontier, India), H. Morley (Kennington), Solly Kaminek (London, E.1.), Inquisitive (Chesterfield), Crosswords (Ealing), G. McInerny (Hove), E. G. R. (Cheshire), Alec H. (Dundee).

This week I have received another surprise—a letter from British Guiana. I must confess that I had no idea we had readers in this corner of the Empire. Thanks very much, E. A. Mittelholzer, for your interesting letter and your description of travel in British Guiana. Curiously enough, I mooted a suggestion only last week (as you will probably have seen) about taking the St. Frank's characters to British Guiana for the summer holidays. If the greater bulk of readers vote for this scheme, I know I shall have one delighted reader, at all events. But I shall have to be very careful in my writing, or I stand a chance of getting some expert criticisms from you! But nothing is settled yet, so we shall have to leave it "in the air."

It's interesting to hear that you are so keen on the "How To Do It" articles in

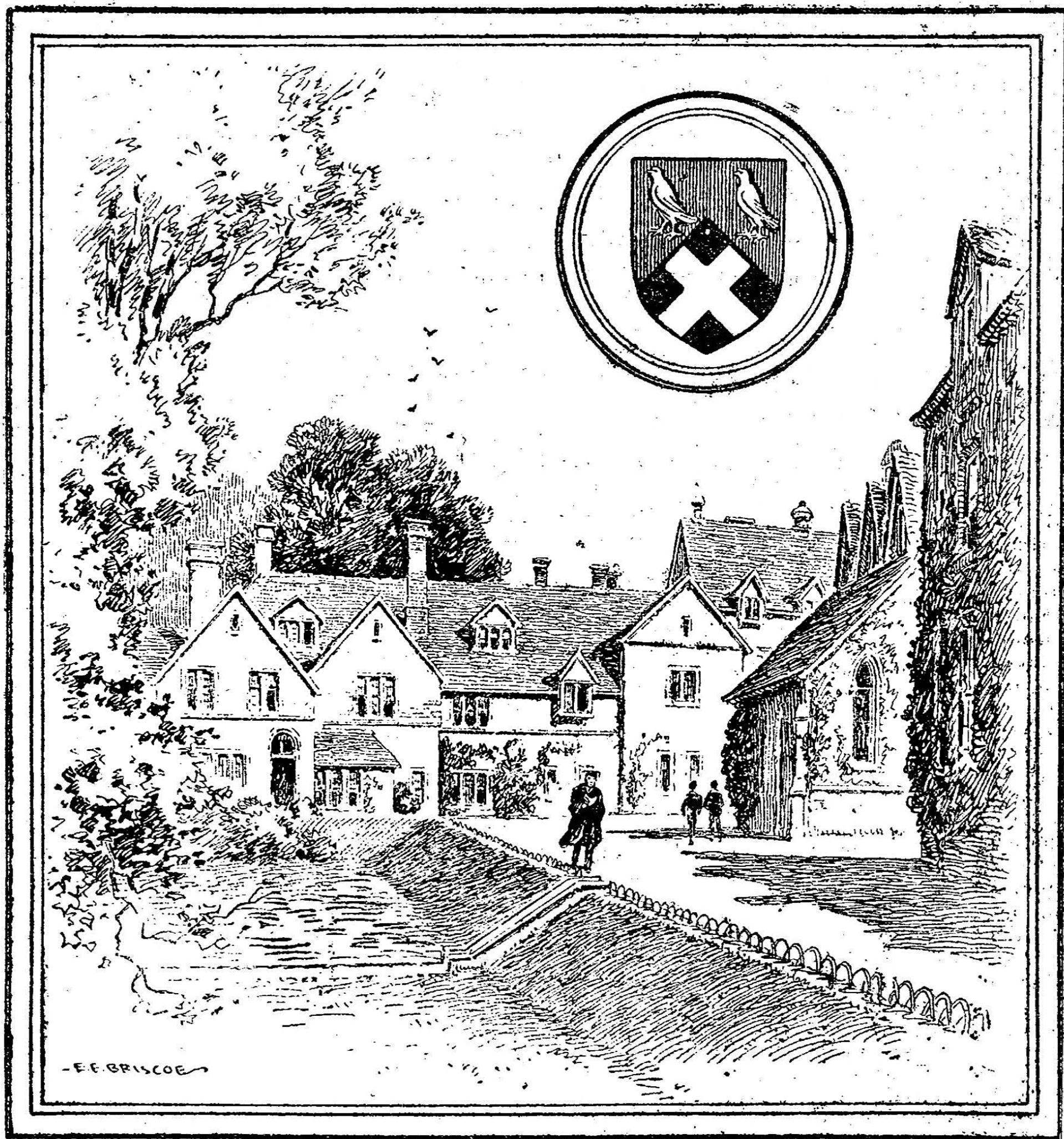
the Magazine, "Nelsonleeite." I'll bet you're not the only one who has bound some volumes "Goodwin style," as you aptly put it. I think it would be a good idea for "Goodwin" to describe how to make a model yacht. I should drop him a line if I were you. Regarding your inquiry about the map of the school and district, I am glad to hear that you are waiting patiently. You won't have to wait very many weeks longer. But the Editor and I are determined to make this new map a corker. The delay isn't occasioned by mere laziness. You wouldn't believe how painstaking we are. If the map doesn't come up to scratch when it finally appears, I give you full permission to invade the office with a chopper.

Thanks, J. H. Wright, for your very nice Christmas card. Sorry I haven't been able to acknowledge it before, but I answer all letters in rotation. It was a very nice thought which prompted your action. I have come to the conclusion that you are one of the Wright sort.

I'm not surprised to hear that you like to have the stories in series, "Irish Reader." I think ninety per cent. of you boys and girls and assorted elders like the series best, too. Occasionally, of course, I write some complete yarns entirely independent of others. For example, there'll be two of this sort when the present series has run its course—the April Fool yarn and the Easter number. I can't very well include these special yarns in the middle of a series.

There's nothing special to answer in your letter, Joh'burg Reader, but I felt that you would like me just to acknowledge it, as it has come such a long way. Thanks for your appreciation and criticism. You'll have your requirements attended to, except in the one detail of a serial school story. The St. Frank's yarn is to be greatly lengthened in the near future, and there'll be no room at all for any kind of serial. Hope you won't be very disappointed.

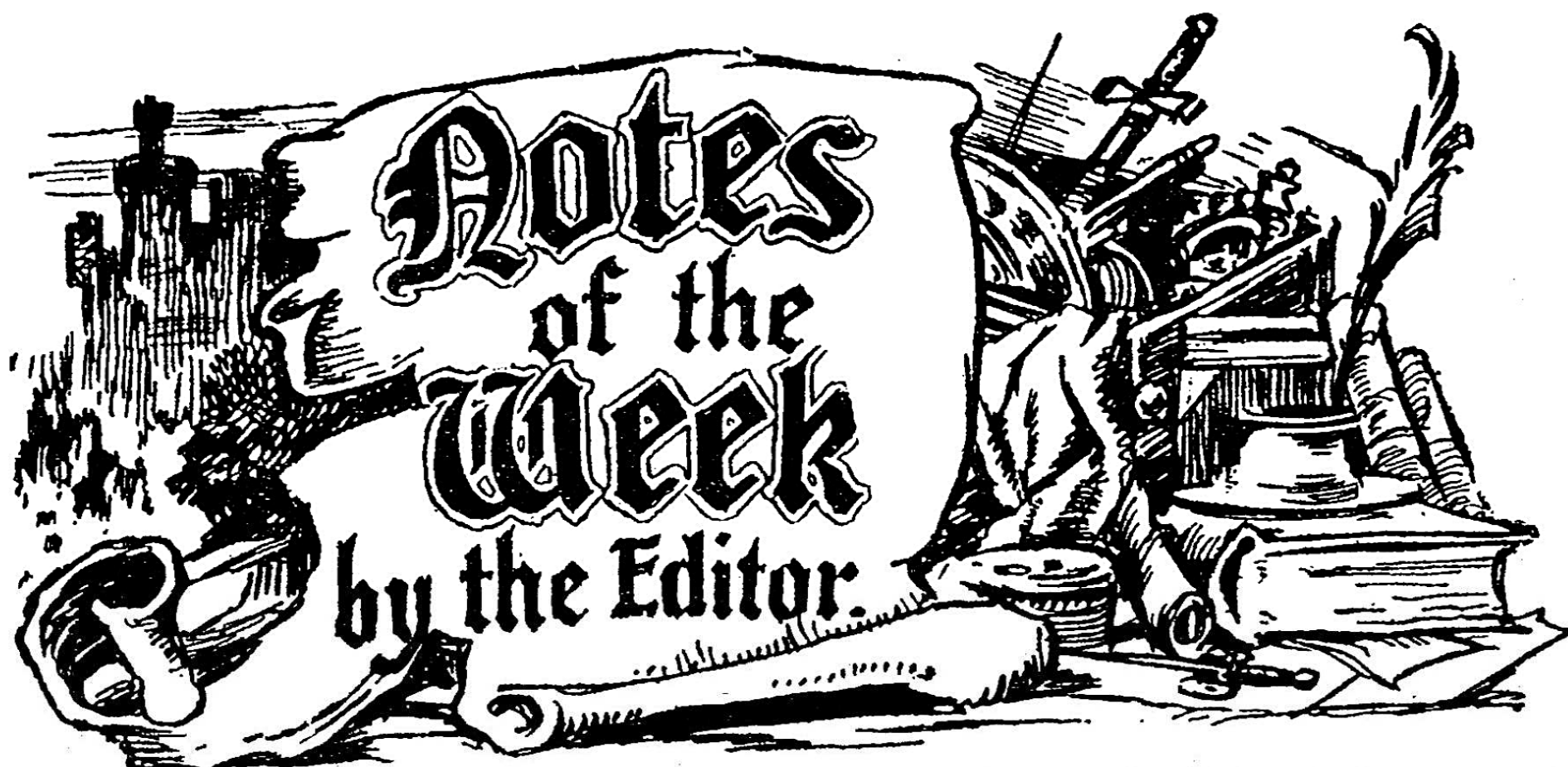
(Continued on page iii of cover)



OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS SERIES OF ART SKETCHES.

No. 64. BRADFIELD COLLEGE, BRADFIELD.

Bradfield College, also known as St. Andrew's College, Bradfield, was opened in 1850. Its founder was the late Rev. Thomas Stevens, M.A., Lord of the Manor and Rector of Bradfield. By a deed of settlement dated May 16th, 1859, the school was made a perpetual foundation, and in 1862 was incorporated by Royal Charter.



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

My dear Chums,

The glad news of the probable return of Nipper and Nelson Lee to St. Frank's within the next few weeks has spread like wildfire throughout the school. I am besieged with inquiries asking when our old skipper returns, to which I take this opportunity of stating that I do not know. The object of these inquiries, I know, is to enable my inquirers to prepare a big reception and welcome to the return of the prodigals. I believe that both Nelson Lee and Nipper anticipate this will happen, and to avoid any fuss they are not giving us an inkling of the actual day they intend to return. We shall probably find them here when we least expect it, and then disguised as somebody else. At one time I did not think Nipper would ever come back, but now that I know he will be among us again for certain very soon, I am preparing at once to include him in the Who's Who and Portrait Gallery. Look out for him in the Mag. next week!

MY IMPRESSIONS OF MR. CREEPE.

My visit last week to Moat Hollow School, disguised as a nurse, gave me an excellent chance of studying that dual personality, Mr. Grimesby Creepe, who to the world appears as a benign, kindly schoolmaster, his sole interests wrapped up in the welfare of his boys. There have been many rumours going about that Mr. Creepe is a beast of the worst possible description. Naturally, one does not like to jump to conclusions, and though I was strongly suspicious of Creepe's bona fide intentions, it was not until I had the evidence of my own eyes that I could really believe the man could be as black as he was painted. What I saw of him convinces me that for hypocrisy, meanness and cruelty, he has few equals. To think that our old school chum,

Tommy Watson, should be a victim of this vile monster's villainy, has made me more determined than ever not to rest until Grimesby Creepe's unworthy career as a schoolmaster is brought to a timely end.

A SIMPLE ELECTRIC MOTOR.

It does not seem possible to make an electric motor out of an old cocoa-tin and a few other odds-and-ends. Yet this is actually what our ingenious mechanical expert, Dick Goodwin, says you can do if you follow out his instructions in this week's "HOW TO DO IT." I have seen the model Goodwin has constructed with these simple materials, and it works splendidly.

SHOULD TUCKSHOPS BE ABOLISHED?

There is much discussion going on in the newspapers as to whether the time-honoured tuckshop should be abolished. Apparently, a distinguished headmaster, in a recent lecture, strongly denounced the tuckshop, and suggested in this age it should be done away with. The learned gentleman cited the instance of a boy who frittered away a pound on tins of milk. Fancy a boy lapping up milk in such quantities! He couldn't have been an ordinary boy—sounds more as if he belonged to the cat tribe. Even Fatty Little would have considered spending all that money on milk as an appalling waste, especially when there were such delicacies to be had as jam-tarts, doughnuts, cream-buns, etc. The desire for sweet things that cloy the taste and upset the digestions of our elders has ever been the delight of youth, and because there are a few gourmands, is it fair to abolish an institution that gives us so much joy? Far better to abolish the gourmands. I can only suggest that the gentleman who wants to abolish tuckshops must have had a bad attack of indigestion at the time, and momentarily forgot that he was once a boy with a boy's digestion.

THE EDITOR.

FACTS LET LOOSE

By EUGENE ELLMORE

MAYORAL CUSTOMS.

The first mayor in England was he of London, and he was appointed in the 12th century. But he wasn't then called Lord Mayor. His court in the City is still called "the Mayor's Court," not "the Lord Mayor's."

There are curious customs in connection with mayors, their election, and their offices. At High Wycombe, the mayor, with all the aldermen and councillors, go to the borough department of weights and measures, where they are all weighed, and the weight of each is recorded in the borough chronicles. The Mayor of Lincoln, when elected, has a ring placed on his finger. At Cheltenham the mayor is presented with a gold cane on his appointment. The Mayor of Cork is Admiral of the Port, and it used to be the custom for him and the councillors to beat the bounds of Cork Harbour, and then throw a bronze-tipped arrow into the waves.

At Bournemouth, and also Hanley, the retiring mayor has to give his successor a "loving kiss"! At Grantham, the mayor leaving office has his robe stripped off him, and the town clerk taps him on the head with a mallet. There are many other quaint customs in connection with mayoralties, and I seem to have read of one place where the mayor is knocked down in ceremonious fashion to mark his accession to office.

The Lord Mayor of Bristol is a Judge of the Admiralty Court by virtue of his office, and he has the right to sit on any bench or in any court in England. For centuries, only London, York, and Dublin boasted a lord mayor, but now Manchester, Liverpool, and other towns possess this dignity.

One of the chief qualifications of a mayor or alderman is to be a good trencherman and to have a capital digestion. The Lord Mayor's banquet in London, the goose feast at Liverpool, the sprat festival at Yarmouth, and champagne and sausages at Peterborough, all point to the fact that "good cheer" is a great matter with our municipal corporations.

RAINFALL.

An inch of rain means a gallon of water spread over a surface of nearly 2 square feet, or about 100 tons per acre.

THE FAR-OFF SUN.

An airship going at 50 miles an hour would take 210 years to reach the sun from the earth.

TRAVEL TALES.



By An Old Boy

(Lord Dorrimore's Weekly Trifle.)

No. 27.—A MAD DOG EPISODE.

FOR a thrill of real terror let a mad dog chase you. I have had one such experience, and I never want another.

It was on an Arizona ranch, the owner of which, a younger son of one of our great English families, had asked me to stay with him. One day we were in a field, unarmed, pottering about at little jobs, when I noticed that Bob, my friend's collie, was performing strange antics, such as trying to grab something in the air, running round in circles, and so on.

I called Phil's attention to his dog, and a ghastly pallor overspread his face. He looked scared to death. "He's gone mad—it's hydrophobia!" he exclaimed. "And we've no gun! What shall we do?" I volunteered to run to the house and get a gun, as I was the younger and in the better physical condition, and I started off. Bob came after me, his mouth foaming. What if he caught me? It meant a painful and horrible death!

As I neared the house, a servant came out with an axe to chop wood. I brushed him aside and seized the hatchet—just in time to deal the dog a tremendous blow on the head, which stunned him. The servant, who had fled in consternation, now reappeared with a revolver, which he handed to me. I fired shot after shot into Bob's body, and put him out of his misery.

Then I collapsed, and Phil, who had hurried after me, was just in time to catch me in his arms and carry me indoors. When I came to I was in bed, and my face was being bathed. All my friends congratulated me on my escape. But it was a near thing. Do you wonder that an involuntary shudder now passes through me every time I see a dog?



OUR PORTRAIT GALLERY. *And WHO'S WHO.*



LARRY SCOTT

No. 59. LARRY SCOTT.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Tall, well-built, and good-looking. Rather studious in expression, and takes a pride in his neat appearance. Eyes, grey. Hair, medium. Height, 5ft. 3ins. Weight, 8st. 8lb. Birthday, January, 28th.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS:

When he first arrived, was known as "The Boy Who Couldn't Tell a Lie." Under all circumstances, he speaks the literal truth—not from any moral motive, but simply because he cannot help it. A most awkward fellow to have about the place!

SPORTS AND RECREATIONS:

Prefers his studies to games, and is consequently little spoken of, and is high in the Form. Hobby: water-colour painting.



ERIC DALLAS

No. 70. ERIC DALLAS.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Small and neat—a compact little fellow, looking younger than his age. Small, good-looking features, with serious expression. Eyes, hazel. Hair, chestnut. Height, 4ft. 10ins. Weight, 7st. 5lb. Birthday, June 2nd.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS:

A genuine swotter. Is always grinding away at books of some kind, and only occasionally takes part in a House rag. Generous and open-handed.

SPORTS AND RECREATIONS:

Takes practically no interest in sports, but can run like a hare. Hobbies: Stamp-collecting and reading old classics.

THE FOURTH At ST. FRANK'S.



No. 71. ARTHUR STEELE.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Lanky and loose-jointed, with a pleasant, whimsical type of countenance. By no means good-looking, but not ugly. Eyes, brown; wears glasses. Hair, dark. Height, 5ft. 1in. Weight, 8st. 3lb. Birthday, November 23rd.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS:

Thoughtless and careless, and selfish by disposition. A mean sort of fellow, sticking tight to his pocket-money and never lending a penny. Not very popular.

SPORTS AND RECREATIONS:

Occasionally plays in a House match, but has never risen far. Could do well, but slacks at practice. No particular hobbies.



ARTHUR
STEELE

No. 72. CLEMENT TURNER.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Tall and awkward, and just as untidy as Somerton. Pleasant face and merry eyes. Eyes, brown. Hair, dark. Height 5ft. 2ins. Weight, 8st. 12lb. Birthday, August 31st.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS:

Full of high spirits, and always playing minor jokes. A decent sort all round.

SPORTS AND RECREATIONS:

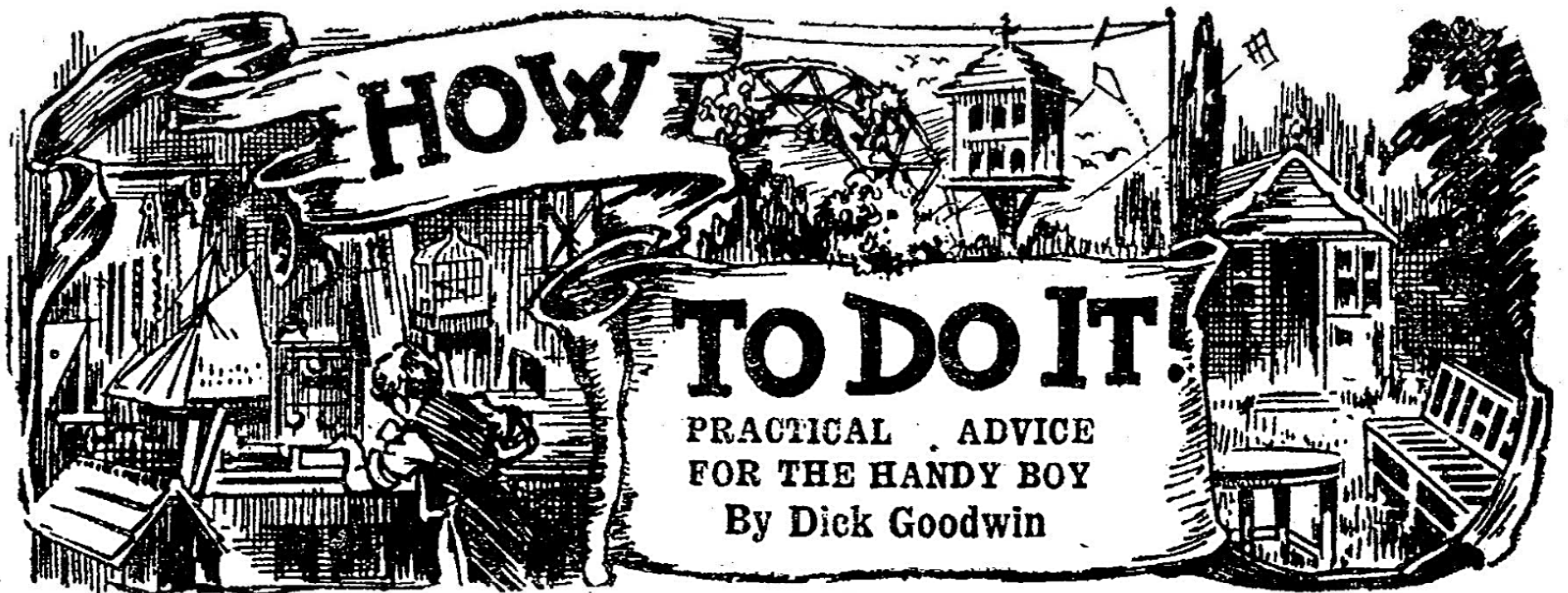
Plays regularly in the Modern House Eleven. Changes his hobby about once fortnightly.



CLEMENT
TURNER

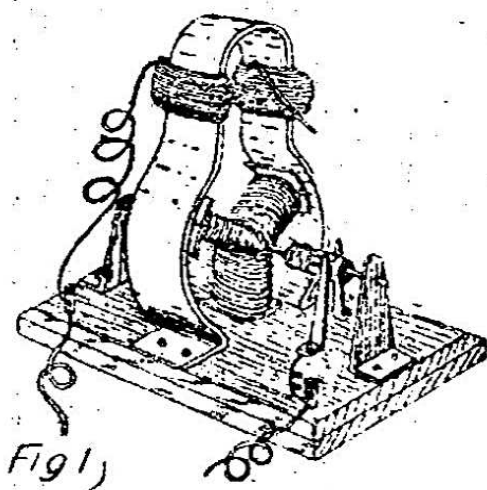
Note.—The ages of Fourth Form boys vary between fourteen and sixteen, but for obvious reasons no more definite information on this point can be given.

NEXT WEEK: RICHARD HAMILTON (NIPPER), JOSEPH PAGE, DONALD HARRON, ARTHUR KEMP.



Readers who wish to ask questions or make suggestions regarding these articles are invited to write to Dick Goodwin, c/o The Editor, The Nelson Lee Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

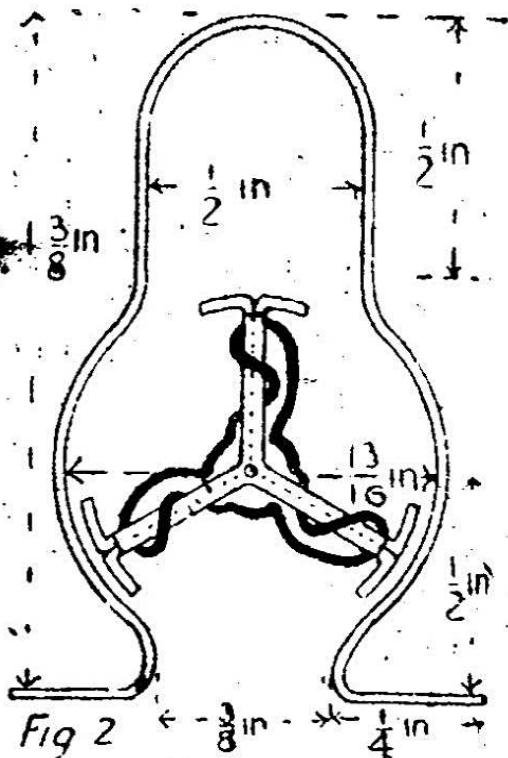
A SIMPLE ELECTRIC MOTOR



This is one of the most effective of the small simple motors I have made because, being of the tripolar type, it is self starting. It cost very little to make, as the magnet and armature was made from a stout tin canister, and the rest, with the exception of the wire, obtained from odds and ends. I think I had better explain the main parts and the main principles involved. Electric motors, as a general rule, consist of four main parts: (a) the field magnet; (b) the armature; (c) the commutator; (d) the brushes.

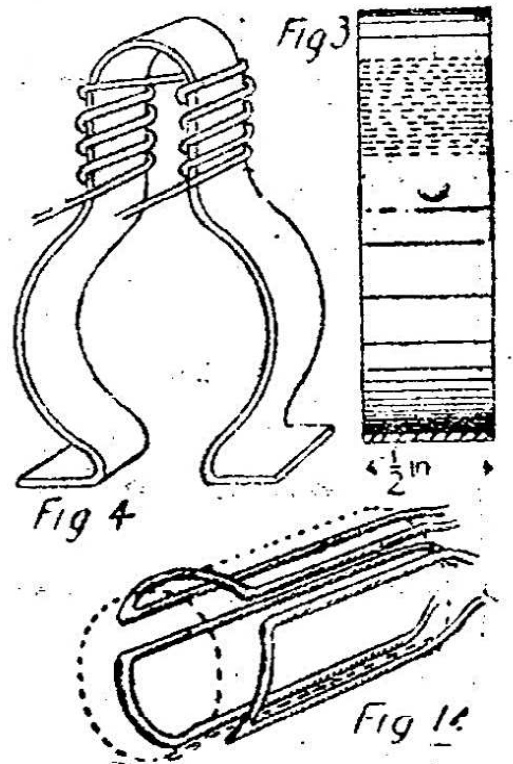
THE PARTS OF AN ELECTRIC MOTOR.

The Field Magnet sets up a strong magnetic field in which the armature can rotate freely. The magnet can be a permanent magnet, but in most cases, as in the present instance, it is an electro-magnet. The Armature or moving coil in a tripolar type consists of three coils wound on the arm of a rotating spindle. The Commutator is fixed to the revolving spindle and acts in reversing the current at the exact moment in the revolution of the armature. The Brushes rest against the sides of the commutator and serve to convey the current.

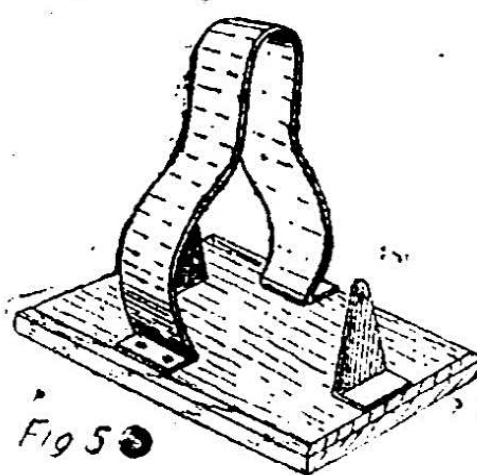


MAKING THE FIELD MAGNET

The general arrangement of the motor is illustrated at Fig. 1, and the first thing to make is the field magnet as shown at Fig. 2. The stouter the tin the better. I have used a cocoa tin, but the material from a large bully beef tin is better. The strip required is about 4 in. by 1/2 in., and is bent as carefully as possible to the shape as at Fig. 2, which is approximately full size. The curves on the sides should be as even as possible and should be bent to the shape of a wooden cylinder prepared to the required diameter, the bottom flanges are drilled or punched for screwing to the base. The next step is to cover the two sides of the upper portion as indicated by the shaded lines at Fig. 3 with paper—ordinary writing paper will do. Coat it with shellac varnish, and when tacky apply to the metal.



WINDING THE COILS

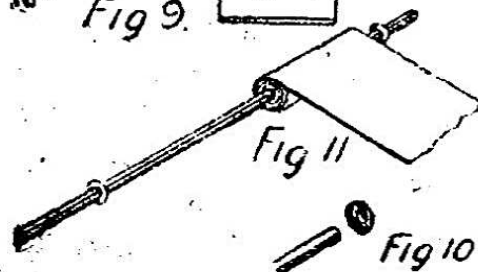
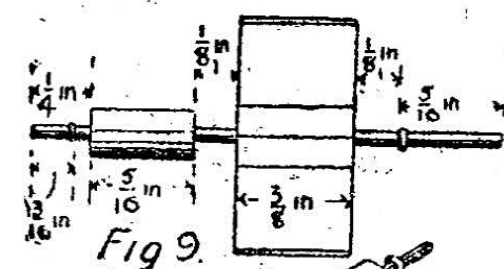
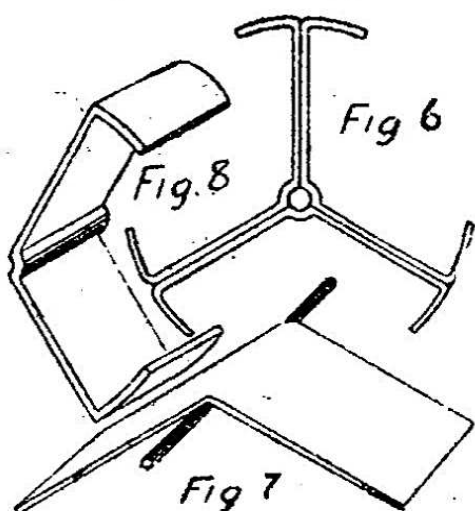


Commence winding by wrapping a short length of silk tape about 4 in. from the end of some No. 26 double silk covered wire to form a loop. Continue winding closely side by side so as to cover the tape and so hold the first strand firmly; in all 20 turns are

made, and a second complete layer is of 19 turns. The wire is carried to the opposite side as at Fig. 4, and the same procedure followed, leaving about 4 in. wire over, with the last turn secured with tape. The magnet can now be secured to the base as at Fig. 5.

MAKING THE ARMATURE

The shaft can be formed from a knitting needle, and then the armature as shown at Fig. 6 formed from three strips of tin bent in the first place as at Fig. 7, and finally as at Fig. 8. The strips should measure $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $\frac{3}{8}$ in., they are soldered together and to the spindle, the latter being cleaned with emery cloth to give a surface for soldering. The arms of the armature are covered with paper as in the sides of the field magnet and coated with shellac varnish to form effective insulation. The exact position of the armature is shown at Fig. 9, the small collars required at each end being made from wire as at Fig. 10. The method of forming the commutator is shown at Fig. 11, a 6 in. strip of paper $\frac{5}{16}$ in. wide is coated with shellac varnish on one side and wrapped round the spindle to a diameter of about $\frac{1}{4}$ in., as at Fig. 12. The commutator is



now divided into three equal parts by pencil lines—these are opposite to the poles.

WIRING THE ARMATURE AND COMMUTATOR

The end of the No. 26 silk covered wire is bared for $\frac{1}{8}$ in., folded over to oc-

cupy a little less than one of the marked spaces, with the end projecting a little beyond the paper cylinder.

The armature is now held in the left hand in the position shown at Fig. 13, and the wire wound on in the direction shown; the first layer should be 10 turns, the second 9, the third 8, and the fourth and last 7. The last turn is tied to its neighbour with silk thread and the end brought straight out.

The armature is now turned one-third back so as to bring another arm up, the wire is bared and folded over on the next section of the commutator and the two sets tied with thread to hold them in position. The winding of the second arm is the same as the first, but in this case it commences with the end of the first winding, but the order of the turns should not be altered. The third winding is now carried out in the same way, the wire being bared, formed into a loop and

rested on the commutator as before, the previous temporary binding being removed to allow of the third layer to be fastened down.

JOINING UP THE COILS

To complete, the last turn is carried out straight, cut off and then bared, and then attached to the piece left projecting at the commencement of the first winding.

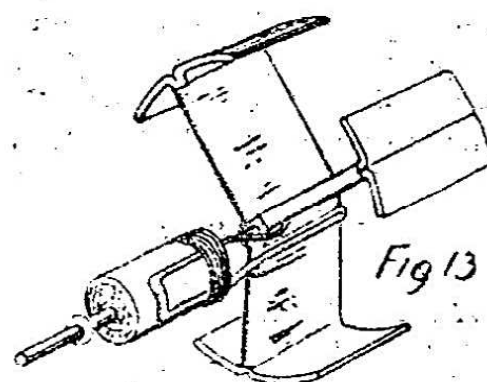
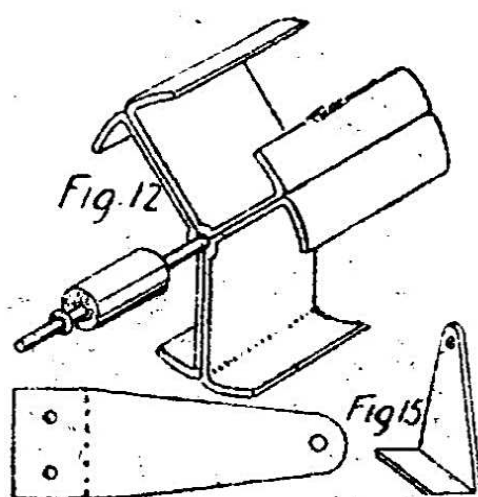
It will be seen that the whole of this part of the motor has continuous windings, beginning and finishing on the commutator, the position of the loops on the commutator being illustrated to an enlarged scale at Fig. 14. To complete, the half of the commutator nearest the armature should be neatly covered with silk thread and given a coating with shellac varnish, taking care to keep the loops of exposed wire clean. The continuous winding of the armature and commutator is shown diagrammatically at Fig. 2.

The two supports for the spindle or shaft are made from tin about $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $\frac{3}{8}$ in., bent to the shape as shown at Fig. 15. They are both drilled or punched with two holes for screws, but the height of the hole for the shaft must be the same and is $\frac{1}{16}$ in.

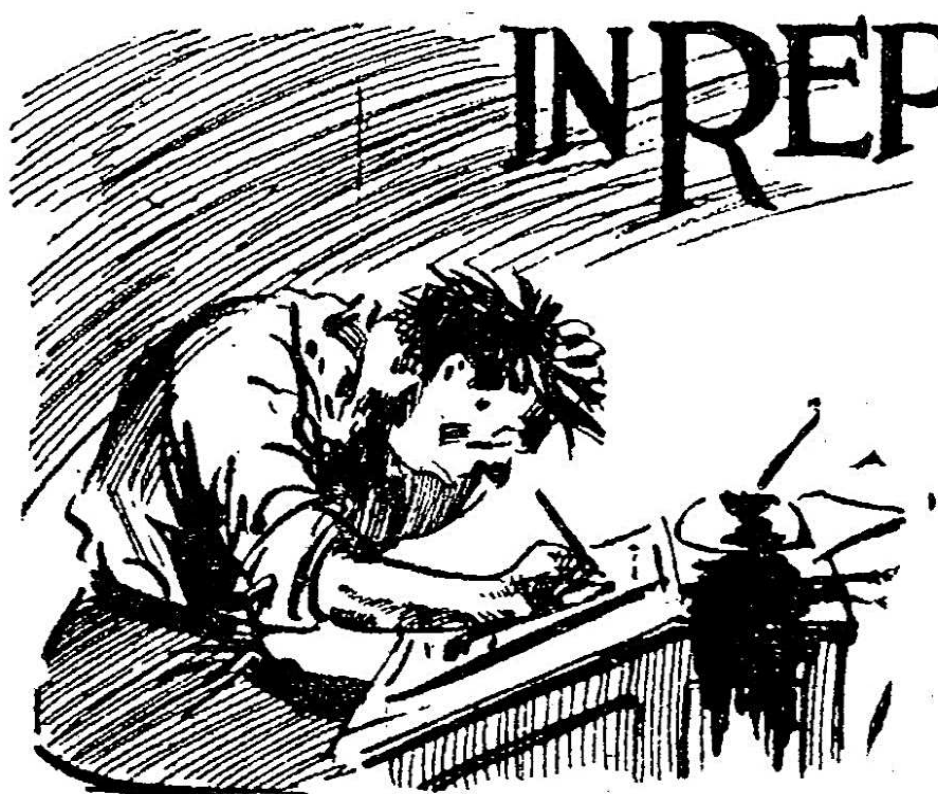
MAKING THE BRUSHES

The brushes should be of copper, and may be made by flattening some copper wire or cutting some thin sheet to a taper form and the flanged bottom screwed to the wooden base. Terminals can be made from small strips of iron or brass, but ordinary screw terminals are so cheap that they can easily be used. Connections are evident from Fig. 1, but it will be as well to cover them to ensure that all are in their proper position. One wire from the magnet is connected to the front terminal, the other wire from the magnet is connected to the far brush. From the nearest brush, a wire is carried to the other front terminal.

The motor will work from a dry cell but it will be necessary to supply a little oil to the wire of the commutator and the brushes to prevent firing. A small accumulator will last much longer than a dry cell, but an ordinary bichromatic battery can be used effectively. The main point in assembling is to see that all parts are correctly adjusted, particularly the armature and shaft, and that the brushes are so adjusted that they are in contact with the commutator wires.



IN REPLY to YOURS



Correspondence Answered by Edward Oswald Handforth

(NOTE.—Readers of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY can write to me and I will reply on this page. But don't expect an answer for several weeks, perhaps five or six. Address your letters or postcards to E. O. HANDFORTH, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. —E.O.H.)

AN OLD READER (Seaham Harbour): What a question! Of course I'm interested in steam engines, and I've been waiting for the photograph of that model of yours which you offered to send. If you don't bung it along at once, you're no pal of mine. You must be a careful old stick to keep it so long.

PETER BRIGHTWELL (Lewisham): The best way to find second-hand books about the cold regions is to haunt the shops where they sell them. You can pick 'em up for next to nothing if you go about it the right way. Thanks for your offer about the St. Frank's League, which I have passed to the right quarter.

EILEEN ROBERTS (Kensal Rise): Your remarks about my face are so uncomplimentary that I simply refuse to have anything to do with you. Peter Brightwell and a lot of others praise up my Trackett Grim stories just as much as you do, and I'm tempted to write some more, only I'm afraid Reggie wouldn't put them in.

JULIANA (Ohakune, New Zealand): Yes, Nipper does like girls with fair, curly hair and blue eyes, especially if the eyes are true as well as blue. And so do I. If you send me your photo, I might send you mine. But we should have to keep it a secret from Irene, or she might get jealous. Silly, isn't it?

HANDFORTH II. (Balham): Your fist may be as big as mine, but if it was as big as two it wouldn't frighten me, my lad. Let me tell you I only biff Church and Clurey when they absolutely ask for it. I reckon I'm jolly patient to tamely

answer all you chaps who insult me so much! But I'm getting fed up!

LOTAAD MIGHTY (Aylesbury): Church and McClure are too busy working out Cross Word Puzzles for me to find out if you're the first who's written me from Aylesbury. But as you've been a reader so long you ought to know. Don't be such a lazybones. Look back for yourself and find out! Thanks for nice note.

A. J. PARKINSON (Grimsby): If more of you chaps would buy the Old Paper instead of borrowing it from your pals, it might be run without any advertisements at all perhaps. Sufficient revenue has got to be raised somehow, you know, and if the publisher can't get it in one way he has to get it in another.

BONZO (Looe, Cornwall): Of course I could give Ernest Lawrence a tie if I wanted to. But I have enough to do to keep my own neck properly furnished without bothering about his. My Trackett Grim stories aren't laughable, you chump. They're the most serious of all our great modern detective tales.

BRUCE CHALCRAFT (Edinburgh): Be patient! I expect you, and all the other thousands who are longing for a St. Frank's Annual will have your wish gratified one of these fine days. Everything comes to those who wait, you know. I'm so pleased you like the Portrait Gallery, especially as some don't.

W. A. G. (Hull): So I look like a cross between a bulldog and a hyena, do I! And I'm a great human porpoise, am I! Well, you can jolly well go and eat coke! I can't waste any cross words on you—I want them all for my puzzles!

A STAUNCH READER (Tottenham): You sound like a bully to me—biffing your brother so much that he's afraid of the sight of you! Willy isn't afraid of me! As for him having a weekly column of "Hints for Catching Insects," do you want the Mag. to be dealt a death-blow? He's the insect to be caught—and squashed.

ENTHUSIAST (Birmingham): Look what I said to old Parkinson just now. The huge circulation of the Old Paper is

still insufficient to provide a fair return for the extraordinary value given. Why can't you and all the other borrowers be sporty enough to buy your own weekly copies? Look how handy they'd be for reference, too—bound up in the way Dick Goodwin has so thoroughly explained!

BOB BRAVE (Risca, Newport, Mon.): Of course the Portrait Gallery wouldn't be complete without good old Nipper's phiz. You'll see it there presently, never fear. It would have been there long ago, but he's been away from St. Frank's for some time, as you know. So Reggie says he's been saving the best for the last. I really ought to be Fourth captain, so I was in at the first. That notice about "Two Fine Long Stories for Boys" on the front page wouldn't offend any girl readers. They jolly well like stories about boys!

PHYCIL (Abingdon): You dotty ass! Fancy reading the Old Paper for six and a-half years and then calling me obstinate! Why, I'm as docile as a donkey. And let me tell you, my lad, that my Trackett Grim stories are not rotten. They're an eight-letter word beginning with S and ending with D. You can puzzle that out for yourself, but it means Magnificent. They're models for all writers of detective fiction to aspire to. I have no objection to your expecting a full page for your reply, you greedy beggar! But that doesn't say you'll get it, does it? No blessed fear! I meant to serve you out by giving you an extra short answer, but I've had to make it long instead so that I could tell you off properly. And it'll be a lesson to other blockheads! You can't play Old Harry with me like that and get off scot free!

A. RESTON (Liverpool): You're worse than that potty Abingdon chump I just replied to! If you think you're going to goad me on to give you a long reply, you've made a bloomer. And if you hadn't admitted that "In Quest of Gold" was a good story, and apologised in your postscript for your insults, I would have broken my record and not given you an answer at all! Still, I couldn't very well have done that without breaking my word at the same time. I've promised to reply to all letters, and I'll jolly well keep my promise. All the same, I'm not going to stand too much nonsense from any of you fat-heads. I'm a peaceable sort of chap, but it's getting a bit too thick! There's a limit to everything. So if any of you asses who are thinking of writing to me read this, just take warning and don't overstep the mark!

ARTHUR BENCE (Beeston, Notts): Now you're a chap I've taken a real fancy to! You agree with me about Willy

being a cheeky young beggar, with no respect for the best boy in the Fourth, who is also the finest goalkeeper you know of. It's a good thing worth comes out on top sometimes! But some of us majors have a lot to put up with, I can tell you! I'm speaking from bitter experience! Thanks for your recognition, good wishes, and sympathy, old fellow.

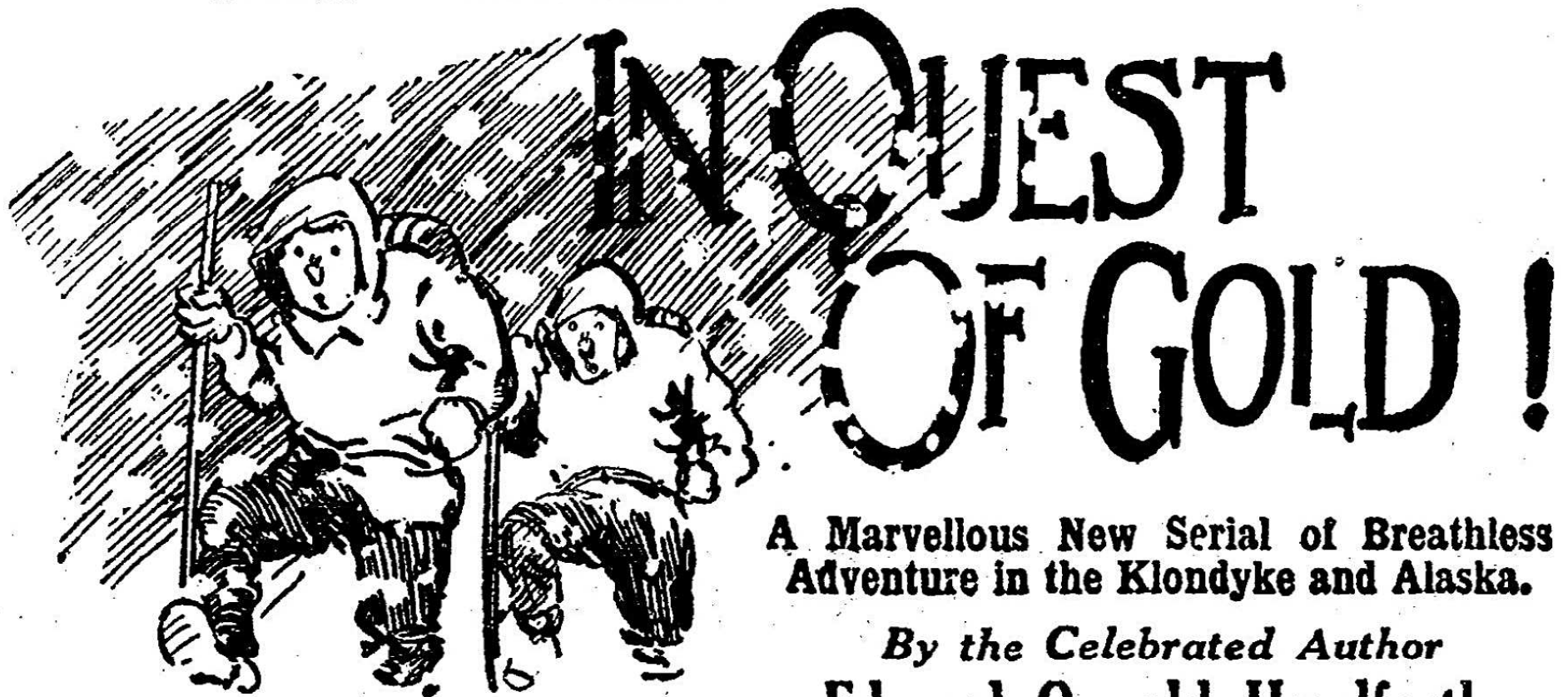
A. W. GAZE (Melbourne): I knew we had some clever chaps in Australia—and plenty of clever girls, too! It was fine of you to get that Characters Competition correct, although the time limit wouldn't permit of your competing. A seven-years' reader, too! And going to remain one for good! That's the ticket! Yours is one of the nicest Colonial letters I've had. Do write again.

E. STROUD (Granville, N.S.W.): Perhaps you'll get what you want about the Magazine section before long. Anyhow, look out for constant improvements all round. As you know, the Old Paper never stands still, but is always striving to go one better. I don't think much of that cipher of yours, especially as it contradicts the first paragraph of your letter, where you said those who laugh at my serious stories are dotty. I don't know where you could get that back number (112), but if I can get hold of a copy I'll save it for you.

JOHN MARWOOD (Malvern, Victoria, Australia): You're right, John! Of course the Old Paper's "the finest book going of the present day." Everybody says so. Also, of course, it wouldn't be much of a catch without the leader of Study D in it every week. And if the Magazine lost its leading writer it wouldn't last long. I make it a rule never to talk about myself, or I would add that it's an all-round good thing I'm still alive and kicking. Just try to imagine how flat the old school stories would be if I wasn't there to liven them up! It would be something like Australia without its Melbourne! The best way not to stutter is to speak each word clearly and distinctly without stammering. Thanks for all your praise and good wishes. Your letter is so full of both that it quite embarrasses a modest chap like me, and if I get many more like it I am afraid I shall begin to get a good opinion of myself!

COB (Manchester): You're last (unless the printers mess my copy up) but not least, although you addressed your envelope to me and the letter inside to "A Lunatic," and commenced it "Dear Idiot." You don't suppose I'm going to answer other people's letters, do you? Who's it for, and where's mine?

TED.



A Marvellous New Serial of Breathless Adventure in the Klondyke and Alaska.

By the Celebrated Author
Edward Oswald Handforth

MEMORIES REFRESHED HERE.

Our two heroes, Claude Courage and Bob Brave, have wandered away from the camp to shoot rabbits in the Rocky Mountains. They see smoke signals going up from every crag, and know that the hostile Indians are about to swoop down and attack the hardy pioneers of the prairies.

CHAPTER XX.

THE WARNING.

BOB BRAVE stared at his chum with an unknown terror in his frank eyes.

"The Redskins!" he gasped. "There must be thousands and thousands of them! Quick! We must warn the camp before it's too late."

"Shall we be in time?" breathed Claude.

With fleet steps, they fled down the mountain-side. It was one wild rush to take the warning. Never before had our courageous heroes taken such risks. The mountain was so steep that a trained monkey could not have negotiated it.

But in the extremity of the moment, Bob and Claude cared nothing for the dangers. Half-way down, Bob Brave tripped and fell headlong for seven hundred feet. He rolled over and over, crashing from crag to crag, until he finally bashed against a boulder.

But did he hesitate? Never! Picking himself up like a feather, he sped onwards, ever onwards. Gashed and bleeding, but undaunted, Bob Brave rushed towards the camp. And Claude Courage kept pace with him. Speech was impossible, for the speed was too great.

And just as they reached the outskirts of the camp, the hordes of Redskins appeared in the distance. Our heroes had arrived in the nick of time!

The word flew round like wildfire. The long line of covered wagons was swept into a circle, and the defenders got to their posts.

CHAPTER XXI.

TOUCH AND GO.

THESE defenders were rugged, grim men of the plains—hardy old-timers, every one of them. They were the survivors of many a grim battle against the bloodthirsty Redskins.

And now that the moment had come, they were ready.

The situation was made worse by the fact that three-parts of the men were raw recruits—young fellows who had just left their homes, and were having their first taste of the Great West. Many, indeed, had never seen the rolling prairie before, and many had never handled a gun.

But Bob Brave inspired everybody with his calmness. Yelling like a maniac, he dashed from wagon to wagon, encouraging the defenders. And Claude Courage did the same.

And so, when the attack came, the Indians got what for. They swept round in a great circle, howling like madmen, and urging their mustangs ever onwards. Flights of arrows swept across the camp in such numbers that the sky was darkened. But none touched the brave white men. The Redskins made a lot of noise, but they were rotten shots.

And as the fight waxed fast and furious, the night fell. It fell with a crash, for a thunderstorm happened at that minute. The lightning blazed out in lurid flashes, and the thunder rolled across the boundless prairie, and the surrounding trees were lashed in the hurricane.

The fight was nearly over, and it seemed that our heroes would soon be on their way to final victory!

(This amazing story will be concluded next week. You'll be surprised when you hear what I've got in store for you. —AUTHOR.)

(Continued from page 30)

Here are the full names you want, Ernest W. Sands—and perhaps other readers will be glad to have them in full, too: Edward Long, Thomas Watson, Thomas Burton, Jerrold Dodd, John Onions, Herbert Onions, Lawrence Scott, Richard Goodwin, Robert Christine, Roderick Yorke, Charles Talmadge, Leonard Clapson, William Nation, and Norman Grey. The latter is generally known as "Jack." How's that?

* * *

I can quite understand your desire to have some stories about Rugger, "Sportsman." I expect there are a number of others who would like me to introduce Rugby football. I know that a good many of our public schools play Rugger; but Soccer is also popular. And, as you hint in your letter, I always make the St. Frank's boys play Soccer because it has a much wider appeal. It wouldn't do for me to please just the few and displease the majority.

* * *

No, E. T. Hurn, yours was not the first letter I have had from India, but it was every bit as welcome, nevertheless. There have been some St. Frank's stories in the "Boys' Friend Fourpenny Library" but not just recently. Perhaps there'll be some more in the future. It all depends upon the "good old works," as Archie would say. I'm kept pretty hard at it, but if I can squeeze out an extra story for the "B.F.L." I'll certainly do so. You've got a good memory. Yes, what you say about Zingrave is quite correct—he did have an underground room under a fountain. But I'm hanged if I can remember the full details of it myself, after all this time. But I think the incident happened, as you suggest, in the final story of the Green Triangle series. Of course, Professor Zingrave has been active several times since then.

(Continued on page iv of cover)

THE INVISIBLE GRIP

(Continued from page 29)

gently commenced lowering it into the dark shaft. The flame burned brightly and flickeringly—showing that the air was not only pure, but draughty.

The light from the candle showed something else, too, and that was the ladder which led from the top of the shaft into the depths below.

Lower and lower the candle sank, until Nelson Lee had paid out all his line. But, although they were unable to see how much further the shaft descended, Lee and Nipper had convinced themselves regarding the purity of the air.

"The subterranean tunnel cannot be much further down!" muttered Lee, letting go of the string, and allowing the candle to drop. "Perhaps the bottom is only a foot or so beyond where the candle reached—Ah! It's gone out!"

The candle flame was extinguished almost instantly, no doubt owing to the rush of wind caused by its descent. At any rate, it went out before either Lee or Nipper caught sight of the bottom of the shaft, and the detective decided to descend at once by means of the ladder.

Without more ado, he swung himself upon the topmost rung, and commenced the descent into the black depths, with Nipper watching anxiously from the top.

The air, as Lee had surmised, was perfectly wholesome, and he experienced no difficulty whatever in breathing.

"Go easy on the ladder, gov'nor!" called Nipper, when his master was a good way down. "I heard it creak just now—Good heavens!"

Nipper's words seemed to dry up in his throat, for even as he spoke he heard the rotten ladder give way, and he knew that Nelson Lee had gone hurtling down into the unknown depths below!

(End of third instalment)

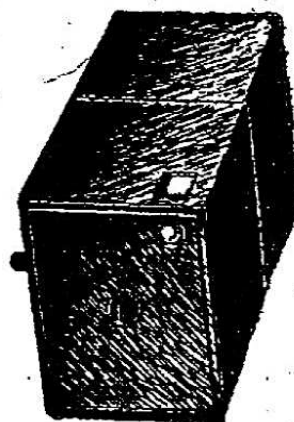
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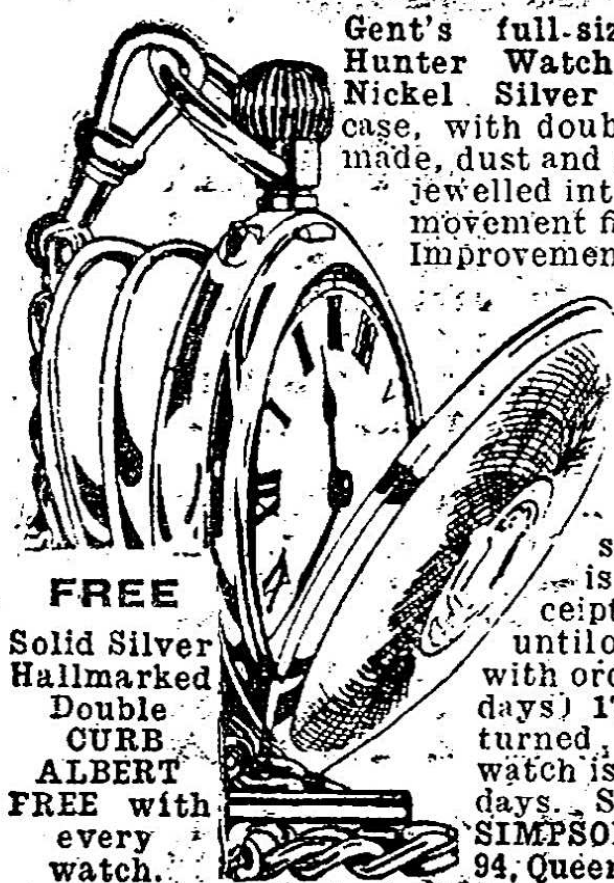
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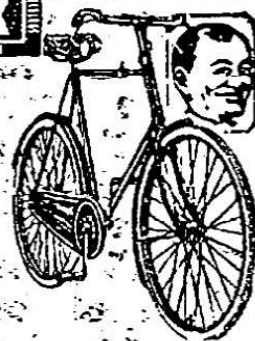


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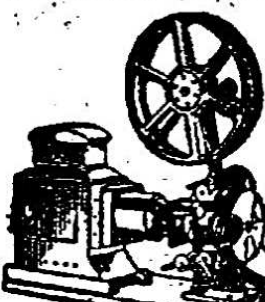
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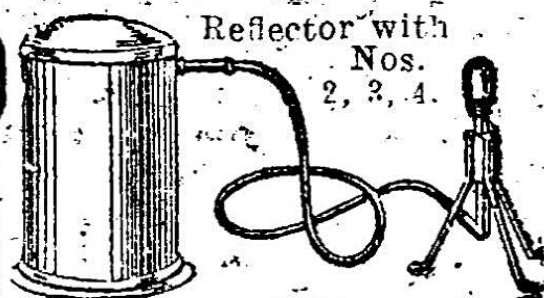


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