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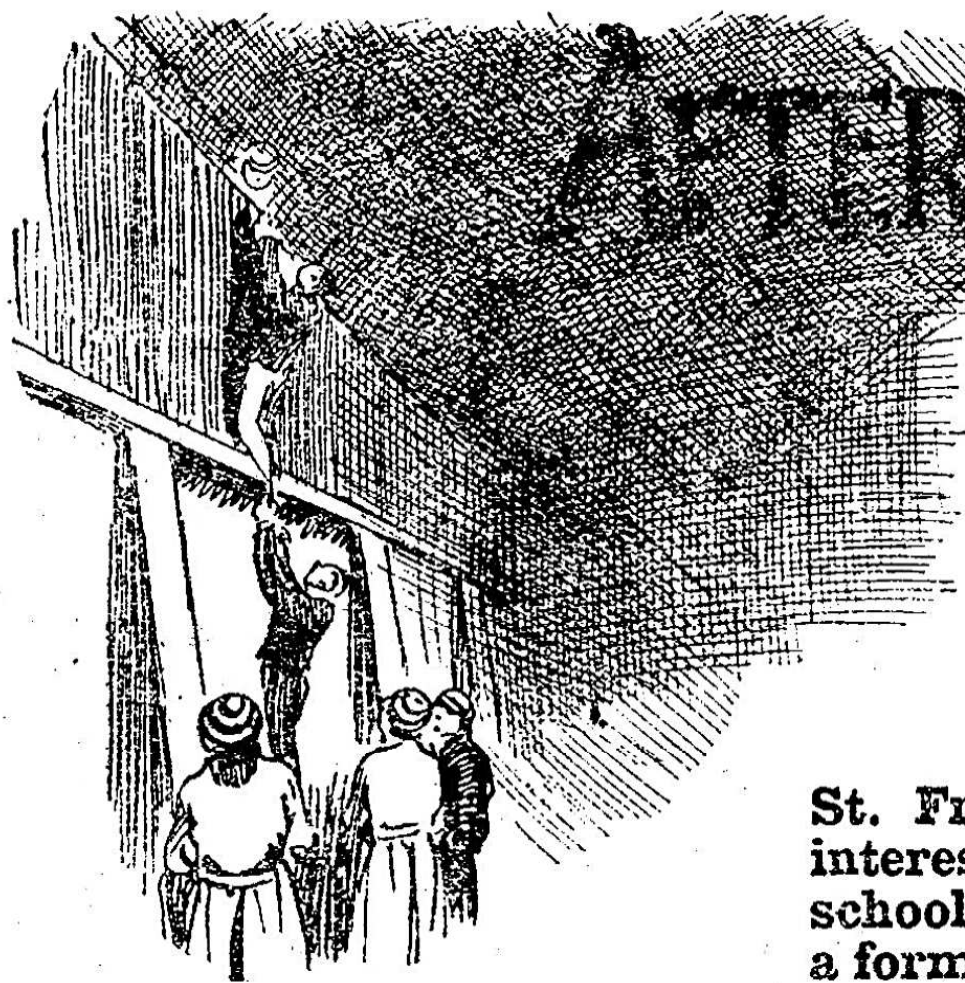


The keenest of eyes would have found difficulty in detecting the moving figures which crept along the Ancient wall.

After Lights Out



Five others followed across the moat, leaving Jack Grey on guard on the bank.



AFTERLIGHTS OUT !

*or The Martyrs of
Moat Hollow.*

Moat Hollow School, a new school in the neighbourhood of St. Frank's, has aroused a great deal of interest among the boys of the latter school, mainly because Tommy Watson, a former well-known junior at St. Frank's, is now a pupil at Moat Hollow. The establishment is run by Mr. Grimesby Creepe, who, while pretending to consider the welfare of his boys before anything else, is in reality as mean and contemptible a hypocrite as ever disgraced the name of schoolmaster. The St. Frank's juniors have not been slow to discover the truth about Moat Hollow and its scoundrelly principal, and in this week's story you will read how they plan a raid to rescue their unfortunate chum from the prison school. Once again the mysterious Phantom Protector appears. Who is he ? Can you discover his identity ?

THE EDITOR.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

SEPTIMUS TAKES EXERCISE.

MR. BEVERLEY STOKES came to a sudden halt.

The Housemaster of the Ancient House at St. Frank's was a man who took life smoothly, and as a general rule it required a good deal to astonish him. But he was astonished now.

He was in Bellton Lane, walking up from the village to the school. And he beheld a sight, on turning the bend, which caused him to stand still and stare. Then his genial face broke into a smile.

"Well, upon my word!" he murmured.

Willy Handforth was sauntering leisurely down the lane. There was nothing particularly remarkable in this. The leading light of the Third Form had as much right to saunter as anybody else.

But his methods were somewhat peculiar.

In the first place, Willy was indulging in a little light literature during his stroll. He had a story paper propped in front of his face, and his movements were somewhat erratic in consequence. Sometimes he walked sideways, and now and again he

paused for a moment or two in order to digest a particularly attractive paragraph.

But Willy was doing several things at once.

He was, for instance, indulging in a banana, and a red packet sticking out of his pocket suggested that milk chocolate was to follow as a second course.

More remarkable than anything else, however, was the fact that Willy had a companion. Trotting sedately behind him, and keeping an even pace, was nothing more nor less than an alert little squirrel. In brief, Septimus was being taken out for his daily exercise.

As it was a half-holiday, and quite fine, Willy was making his way to the village for the purpose of purchasing a supply of pea-nuts. Ostensibly, these were for Septimus, but Willy would probably share the feed.

Mr. Stokes waited, chuckling. He was always amused by Willy. The Housemaster had a real affection for most of his young charges, and Willy was one of his favourites. The fag closed his story paper with a sniff, and threw it contemptuously into the hedge.

"Piffle!" he declared, taking a mouthful of banana. "That's the worst of these giddy detective yarns—they're too jolly tame! Those crooks ought to have been left in the brass-bound chest, and chucked overboard! If I was writing a detective story I'd——"

He paused, observing Mr. Stokes for the first time.

"Hallo! Didn't see you, sir!" he said cheerfully. "How goes it? That is to say, good afternoon, sir! I'm just taking Septimus out for his afternoon stroll!"

"So I observe," said Mr. Stokes, nodding. "The little animal appears to be remarkably intelligent."

"Intelligent?" repeated Willy. "I should think he is! Why he's got more brains than you have—— Sorry, sir!" he added hastily. "What I mean to say is, he's absolutely bulging with cuteness! Just watch this!"

He turned round, and looked down at Septimus.

"Come on, Sep., old son," he said briskly. "Pocket! You know what that means! Pocket!"

The squirrel ran up Willy's trouser leg like a streak of lightning. Mr. Stokes just saw a swish of its tail, and the next moment it had dived head first into Willy's overcoat pocket. A second later the animal's tiny face peeped out perkily.

"Good gracious!" chuckled Mr. Stokes. "Remarkable!"

"Oh, that's nothing, sir," said Willy carelessly. "He'll beg, shake hands, and do all sorts of things! You wouldn't believe what I can make him do! And he knows my voice a mile off!"

Mr. Stokes nodded.

"I can easily believe it, Handforth minor," he said. "Oh, by the way, I noticed a piece of paper pasted on your study window this morning. I meant to speak to you about it——"

"Just you watch Septimus run after a stone, sir!" said Willy briskly. "Of course, he'd rather have a nut, but——"

"Never mind the stone, young man!" said Mr. Stokes. "I was talking about your study window."

"Yes, sir."

"I gather that a pane is broken?"

"Something like that, sir."

"You admit that the window is smashed?"

"Just a bit bent, sir," said Willy.

"Nothing much—only a hole as big as Chubby's head. As a matter of fact, it was his head that went through it——"

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Stokes.

"All right—we won't argue!" said Willy. "But I ought to know, sir—I pushed it through! I—I mean, he would jaw, and we got grappling, and the next minute he biffed his napper through the giddy window."

Mr. Stokes started.

"He did what——?" he asked severely.

"He projected his head through the pane of glass, sir," corrected Willy. "The fat-

head says I did it, and he made me whack out eightpence-halfpenny for sticking-plaster. I tried to make him use stamp-paper, but he wouldn't."

Mr. Stokes was rather startled.

"Are you telling me that Heath is injured?" he asked grimly.

"Injured, sir?" sniffed Handforth minor. "You couldn't injure Chubby's head with a sledge-hammer! He only got scratched a bit—a little jag about two inches long behind the ear! Of course, you won't say a word, will you? This is in strict confidence, mind you!"

"Unfortunately, Handforth minor, I cannot treat it in that way," said Mr. Stokes. "I shall make it my duty to examine Heath's head as soon as I get to the school—the very instant I arrive."

Willy grinned.

"You'll have a job, sir—Chubby's down in the village!" he said calmly. "As for his silly scratch, it'll be well before tea-time! Chubby's like a dog—he heals up in two hours!"

CHAPTER II.

THE LETTER IN THE HEDGE.



THE Housemaster shook his head.

"I'm afraid you youngsters are a bloodthirsty crowd!" he said regretfully. "However, since Heath is out and about, I

strongly suspect that your powers of exaggeration have got the better of you. I shall examine Heath's head at the first opportunity, and satisfy myself that he is unharmed."

"Oh, well, that's your look out, sir," said Willy. "Might as well be going, I suppose," he added carelessly. "I don't want to detain you, sir. So long!"

"One moment, Handforth minor," said Mr. Beverley Stokes. "You have a remarkable facility for changing the subject. It is fortunate that I am acquainted with your little habits. What about that window?"

"Window, sir?"

"The one that Heath broke with his head?"

"Oh, that!" said Willy. "You don't need to worry about a trifle of that sort, sir—although it's jolly kind of you to be so concerned. We've stopped the draught all right for the time being."

"Oh, you have?" said the Housemaster grimly.

"Still a new pane of glass would be better," said Willy reflectively. "Thanks awfully, sir, for making the offer. Shall I call in at the ironmonger's, sir, and tell him to do the job?"

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Stokes.

"No trouble at all, sir," said Willy lightly. "That's all right—don't thank

me! I'll tell old Sharpe to send you the bill, sir! It's nice of you to be so concerned for our welfare."

Willy was capable of getting away with a great deal, but he didn't get away with this. Mr. Stokes sternly seized him by the shoulder.

"Young man, I've had about enough," he said. "That pane of glass will be replaced by the school contractors—and I shall see that the cost of it is deducted from your pocket-money."

Willy gave a sigh.

"Oh, well, I tried it on, anyhow!" he said sadly. "I'm afraid you're not in one of your good humours, sir. Just my luck, of course. But don't you think Chubby ought to pay half?"

"Considering that Heath had his head pushed through the window by your violence, I think he has done his share!" said Mr. Stokes firmly. "And now move on before I decide to give you a hundred lines!"

"You bet!" said Willy promptly. "Thanks for the tip, sir. I'm fed up with lines—I haven't done that last fifty you gave me—I—I mean—Come on, Septimus, let's be trotting!"

Willy hastily departed, chiding himself for reminding Mr. Stokes of those fifty lines. And the Housemaster gazed down the lane, and grinned all over his face. For the life of him, he couldn't help being amused by this self-possessed fag. Willy's cheek was of such a brand that it was almost impossible to be offended.

"Nearly came a cropper that time, my lad!" said Willy, as he gave Septimus a pat. "But old Stokey needn't expect to get those lines—that debt's wiped off! As for the giddy window-pane, I needn't worry about that. I'll make my major pay for it."

And with this comforting reflection, Handforth minor consoled himself. By this time he had reached the corner where the lane to Edgemore branched off. The bridge lay just ahead, but Willy paused.

"Might as well have a squint at Moat Hollow!" he told himself. "Those Fourth-Form chaps are anxious about old Tommy Watson. I've a jolly good mind to do some investigating!"

Willy gazed reflectively at the twelve-foot wall which reared itself up flush with the lane. Mr. Grimesby Creepe's school was well guarded, but Willy could easily have got in had he chosen.

But Willy didn't choose. Upon reflection, he came to the conclusion that it would hardly be discreet to scale the wall in broad daylight. That sort of thing was more fitted for the darkness.

"Hallo! What's the idea?" demanded Willy. "Come back, blow you!"

Septimus, finding that his young master had halted, had leapt nimbly down, and was now making tracks for the hedge, on the other side of the road. He disappeared into the undergrowth.

"Now then—none o' that!" said Willy severely. "Looking for nuts, eh? You won't find any there, my lad—you're unlucky! Come back at once, or I'll give you a spanking!"

Septimus peeped out from the hedge, and winked.

"Of all the nerve!" snorted Willy. "Come here this instant!"

But for once Septimus was obstinate.

He turned tail, revealed a wisp of fur for a moment, and disappeared. Willy Handforth was scandalised.

"Is that what you do, after my training?" he roared. "Deliberate mutiny in front of my eyes, by jingo! Of all the nerve!"

He plunged into the hedge, and made a dive for Septimus. It was a good shot. He grabbed the little animal at the first thrust, and drew him out, squirming.

"We'll see who's master!" said Willy sternly. "I hate to correct you, old son, but these painful duties——"

He paused, his attention attracted by something which was lodged in the hedge almost on a level with his eyes. It was caught in the twigs, and Willy would never have seen it if he had not assumed this position. The thing looked to him like a sealed envelope.

"A piece of waste-paper, I suppose," he murmured.

At the same time he seized the envelope and pulled it out. The next moment he was staring at it with acute interest.

"Well I'm jiggered!" he murmured. "This is a giddy find, and no mistake!"

He scrutinised the letter eagerly. It was closely sealed, and rather crumpled. There were stains upon it, and the pencilled writing was smeared. But the superscription was plainly readable:

"TO THE FINDER OF THIS LETTER. VERY URGENT. Please deliver this at once to Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Ancient House, St. Frank's. He will pay the sum of five shillings upon receipt. PLEASE DELIVER AT ONCE."

It was hardly surprising that Willy Handforth felt his heart beating rather more rapidly than usual. He was a shrewd youngster, and he guessed, without a second's hesitation, that this letter had been flung over the high wall of Moat Hollow by Tommy Watson himself!

CHAPTER III.

FROM HIS BEST PAL.



SIR LANCELOT MONTGOMERY TREGELLIS-WEST, of the Fourth, stood idly by

the ropes on Little Side. Football practice was in progress, and Montie watched it rather mechanically.

He was thinking mainly of Tommy Watson—his best pal. He had only seen Watson once since the beginning of term. And he was feeling strangely forlorn and isolated.

The other fellows were all right in their way—Handforth and Reggie Pitt and De Valerie and Buster Boots and all the rest of the crowd. They were good chaps, one and all, but Tommy had been Montie's own study chum. The pair had always been inseparable.

Tommy hadn't been to St. Frank's at all this term. Owing to the catastrophe to his father's fortunes, Watson had been sent to Moat Hollow, for this was a cheap private boarding-school. Tommy had come there at his own wish, so that he would be near his former chums, and amid familiar surroundings. But Watson had never bargained for what he actually got. Instead of finding himself free to visit his old chums at St. Frank's as he had anticipated, he was kept a prisoner at Moat Hollow—a drudge, a slave, one of Mr. Grimesby Creep's helpless victims.

Even now, after several weeks, Tregellis-West was still in the dark. And he was particularly anxious at this period. For he had every reason to believe that Tommy Watson was passing through a bad spell.

Reggie Pitt and several other Fourth-Formers had made it their business to investigate. Pitt, indeed, had actually penetrated Moat Hollow in disguise, and had learned that Watson was booked for a flogging. But nothing had been done to save him from this ordeal. Nothing, in fact, had been possible. Even the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the Famous Fourth had failed at this stile.

Edward Oswald Handforth had certainly attempted something, but, as usual, he had blundered. Handforth was a fine fellow in a fight, a sturdy companion in a battle, but when it came to strategy and finesse, he was hopelessly at sea.

There had been much talk lately of a mysterious phantom-like figure. Handforth and Co. had seen it—and they knew. This figure, indeed, had declared that Watson was being watched over and guarded. But there was a good deal of scepticism among the juniors.

Nothing was known for certain. Moat Hollow remained a place of mystery to all outsiders. It seemed impossible to gain any definite inside information.

It was hardly surprising that Sir Montie was greatly worried. Several days had elapsed since Watson's flogging, and not a word had been heard. The suspense was getting on Montie's nerves.

"Oh, here you are!" said a crisp voice at Tregellis-West's elbow. "I've been looking for you everywhere."

Montie turned, and found Willy Handforth by his side.

"Want me, dear old boy?" he asked quietly.

"Well, I don't want you—I want five bob!" said Willy, with his usual frankness. "I've got change!" he added obligingly.

Tregellis-West frowned.

"Begad! I thought you reserved this sort of thing for your major," he said. "It's like your frightful cheek, Willy! I don't mind tippin' you if you're hard up—"

"Tipping me be blowed!" interrupted Willy. "If I want to borrow money in the ordinary way, I always go to Ted. But this is different. If you give me five bob, I'll give you a surprise."

Sir Montie leisurely extracted five shillings and handed it over.

"You can keep the surprise, old boy," he said languidly.

"Can I?" said Willy. "Look at this!"

He pulled the fateful letter from his pocket and placed it in Tregellis-West's hands. Montie gave one look at it, and he started. His cheeks flushed, and his eyes gleamed.

"Begad!" he gasped. "Tommy's handwritin'!"

Willy nodded.

"I knew it!" he said. "At least, I suspected it."

"Tommy's handwritin'!" repeated Sir Montie, his voice husky with subdued excitement. "Willy boy, where did you get this? Have you seen Tommy? Have you—"

He paused, reading the pencilled wording.

"You found it?" he went on quickly.

"Oh, so that's why you wanted the five shillings? You frightful young scamp! I never thought you were so mercenary—I didn't, really!"

"Rats!" said Willy. "Money's none too plentiful at the best of times, and I've earned this five bob. Isn't that letter worth it?"

"I'd give a quid for it!" replied Montie gladly.

"Good! You owe me fifteen bob!"

But Montie failed to hear. He was walking off, and he ran into Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey. They were regarding him curiously, for his flushed cheeks and his eager manner could not be mistaken.

"News, dear old boys—news!" exclaimed Montie breathlessly. "A letter from old Tommy! It's come at last!"

CHAPTER IV. THE LETTER.



REGINALD PITT looked at Montie keenly.

"A letter from Tommy?" he repeated. "That's fine! What does he say? It's about time he wrote—"

"But it isn't an ordinary letter," in-

interrupted Montie. "Willy brought it—I don't know where he got it from—"

"I found it in the hedge—opposite Moat Hollow," said Willy, who had followed Montie close behind. "There's no mystery about it—Watson must have written the letter in secret, and then he threw it over the school wall when nobody was looking. I expect the wind carried it into the hedge. I shouldn't have seen it at all but for Septimus."

"Phew! It might have been lying there for days!" said Jack Grey. "But, I say, things must be pretty bad at Moat Hollow if Tommy's got to resort to those methods."

Edward Oswald Handforth strode up, and Willy snorted with disgust.

"Of course, we might have expected it!" he sniffed. "You always turn up like a bad penny when you're not wanted, Ted!"

"Eh? What's that?" said Edward Oswald, glaring. "You cheeky young sweep! What's all the excitement here? Why are you chaps looking excited?"

"How else do you expect 'em to look when you arrive on the scene?" asked Willy. "You're enough to make anybody excited. Every time you come near me I feel pins and needles! I go all electrified!"

"It's all right, Handy—better come with us," said Reggie. "Don't take any notice

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"We know they're bad, or Watson would have written long ago," said Pitt. "Don't think me inquisitive, Montie, old man, but I'd love to hear what Tommy has to say. We're all anxious, don't forget."

"Oh, rather!" agreed Montie. "It's not private—I'll let you see it with pleasure. But hadn't we better get indoors? We don't want everybody buzzin' round, you know."

"Too late!" said Willy. "He's here!"

"Who's here?"

"Everybody!" said Willy. "Here he comes!"

of your minor—he can't help it. We've got a letter from Watson. Willy found it in the hedge."

"Oh, did he?" said Handforth.

"Yes, he did!" said Willy tartly. "Jealous, I suppose? Good old Trackett Grim! You couldn't find a letter in the hedge if you searched for years! But don't let's argue—we want to read that letter!"

Willy took it for granted that he was going to be taken along. And, considering that he had brought the letter, Montie made no objection. It wouldn't have made much difference if he had.

They hurried across the Triangle, and went into Study E, in the Ancient House. Pitt closed the door, and Sir Montie extracted the letter from the envelope and spread it out.

There were three sheets of paper, closely covered. They had been torn from an exercise-book, apparently, and the writing was uneven and scrawly—quite different to Watson's usual "fist." The whole letter breathed of trouble and secrecy in writing.

The juniors read it with eager interest:

"Dear Old Montie,—Goodness knows whether you'll ever get this, but there's just a chance. I've had an idea. When I've finished it, I mean to hide it away, and throw it over the school wall when nobody's looking. I want to write reams, but I can't.

"Please excuse writing—I'm in bed, and there's hardly any light. I'm writing this and pretending to be asleep. There's a monitor at the end of the room, always on the alert. This place is like a prison. But things are a bit better now.

"Old Creepe is a beast. He makes us do everything—peel potatoes, wash dishes, dig the garden, wash floors—everything! We're like slaves. He makes us send out circulars, too, and wrap up parcels, and all that sort of thing. I think he's in business under another name, and we've got to do all his work. He's the most contemptible humbug I've ever seen. He and his monitors grind us down from morning till night. I've never been so miserable in all my life.

"There are about two dozen of us, not counting the monitors. A miserable lot, on the whole. They've had all the spirit knocked out of 'em, and I don't wonder. Do you think you can do anything? I'm longing to see you, Montie—I'd give anything for an hour's talk.

"If you get this letter, for goodness' sake get Pitt and Handforth and the other chaps to help me out. I want to escape, but can't. We're watched day and night.

"Something awfully queer happened the other day. That brute—Creepe, I mean—tied me up in the school-room, stripped me to the waist, and went at me with a horsewhip. He was trying to force me to say what I'd whispered to Pitt. Did he tell you? I've often wondered how Reggie got on after he left here. Did old Creepe spot his disguise when he came here as a nursemaid? Hope not.

"But about that flogging. Creepe was just getting into his stride when a black figure swarmed down a rope from a skylight. We were all thunderstruck. Don't know who he was. He called himself the Phantom Protector—said he was watching over us. Anyhow, he grabbed the whip, and tickled up old Creepe like the dickens—after cutting me free. He gave Creepe a fearful flogging. Served him right!

"This hooded chap knocked out two of the monitors, too, and then warned old Creepe not to persecute us any more. After that he swarmed up the rope again, and vanished. Jolly rummy. Do you know anything about it? I mean, was this hooded fellow one of you chaps? I'm dying to know.

"Since then old Creepe's been tons better—hasn't gone for anybody. But he's gradually getting back into his old stride. Do something, if you possibly can—please, old son. We're having an awful time here. Can't the Fourth help?

"Daren't write any more now—no more paper, either. I'll seal this up, and hide it. Then I'll chuck it over the wall as soon as possible. If you ever get it, please do something. Life in this school is worse than penal servitude. Montie, old man, I'm relying on you.—Your old pal,

"TOMMY."

CHAPTER V.

COMING TO A DECISION.



SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS WEST took a deep breath.

"Begad! Poor old Tommy!" he exclaimed. "How frightfully rotten! He's having a shockin' time—he is, really! Thank goodness we've heard from him at last, though!"

"There's nothing startling in the letter," said Pitt thoughtfully. "We suspected most of this all along. But it's just as well to have all doubts cleared away, and to know the position for certain. Something will have to be done."

"Rather!" said Handforth promptly. "We can't do better than make a determined raid on Moat Hollow this evening—"

"My hat! There he goes again!" interrupted Willy. "He always wants to raid everything. I'm a great believer in violence myself, but there's a right and a wrong time for everything. And a raid on Moat Hollow this evening would be a fatal mistake."

"Oh, would it?" said Edward Oswald curtly.

"Of course it would," replied Willy. "I'm just giving you a bit of advice, old son—no need to thank me. I'm always willing to do you a good turn," he added patronisingly.

"You—you—"

"All right—let it go at that!" grinned Willy.

"Dry up, you two!" said Reggie Pitt. "Unless you can behave yourself, Handforth minor, you'll clear out of this study on your neck! It was like your nerve to come here in the first place."

"Why, I found the letter!" snorted Willy.

"That's why we're allowing you to remain," said Pitt. "Well, look here—we'd better call the committee together. The

sooner we can fix up a plan of action the better."

"Good!" said Handforth eagerly. "Then we're going to get busy?"

"Yes—but not in the way you think!" replied the Form captain. "Nothing drastic, Handy—nothing spectacular. Watson seems to be in a bad way, and we simply can't ignore this appeal."

"Absolutely impossible, dear old boys," said Montie. "Tommy asks for help—he says he's relyin' on us. That's the line that touches me, begad! We can't let him down, you know — we can't really! Somethin' has got to be done straight away!"

"Queer, that bit about the hooded figure," remarked Jack Grey thoughtfully. "By jingo! What a lucky escape for the poor chap! This Phantom Protector seems to have dropped in at the critical moment. And Watson hints that the mysterious chap might be one of us."

Reggie Pitt looked keen.

"There's something about this affair which could do with a little probing," he declared. "Who is this Phantom Protector? Why should he take such an interest in Watson? I suppose you don't know anything about it, Montie?"

"Begad, no!" said Tregellis-West, startled. "I haven't the faintest idea who the unknown can be. It's like one of those mysteries you read about in the story books! Frightfully puzzlin', you know!"

"Let me get on the track of him—that's all!" said Handforth grimly. "Just let me get on his track! It wouldn't take me long to find out a few things, I can tell you! Once I'm on the right track, I work at tremendous speed."



Willy paused, his attention attracted by something which was lodged in the hedge almost on a level with his eyes.

"How do you know?" asked Willy.

"Eh?"

"You've never been on the right track yet!" said the fag. "You can't judge, Ted. Speed's all very well——"

"Dry up!" roared his major. "Have I got to stand here, and put up with your giddy cheek? I've seen this Phantom Protector, don't forget! He appeared out in the lane on the very night Watson was

to have been flogged. He must have come straight from Moat Hollow to St. Frank's."

"Which seems to indicate that he may be connected with St. Frank's," said Pitt slowly. "Lots of us thought you were dreaming, Handy—and this news from Watson absolutely corroborates your story."

Handforth snorted.

"Why, you ass, Church and McClure saw the hooded figure, too—and so did Archie Glenthorne!" he exclaimed. "We were all a bit puzzled, I can tell you! I don't see how the Unknown could belong to St. Frank's. Montie's about the only fellow to suspect, and we know it wasn't him."

"Begad, no!" said Tregellis-West. "I can assure you, dear old boys, that I know absolutely nothin' about the Phantom Protector—honest Injun! He's a frightfully decent chap, all the same—I mean, the way he dashed to Tommy's assistance at the right moment."

"We shall have to unmask him," said Reggie Pitt. "I don't quite see how the job's to be done—but you never know what you can do until you try. Let's call the committee together, and decide upon our plan of action for to-night. Tommy has asked for help—and the Fourth won't turn a deaf ear!"

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER LIGHTS OUT.



ST. FRANK'S lay dark and still under the shadow of night. It was just after eleven o'clock, and practically the last light had been extinguished. The old school was

asleep.

There was no moon to-night, and the keen, frosty weather of late had changed. The temperature was milder, and a blustering breeze hinted at rain. The February night was far from peaceful.

The old Triangle was almost invisible in the prevailing gloom. The school buildings loomed up dimly and uncertainly, and the keenest of eyes would have found difficulty in detecting the moving figures which crept along by the Ancient House wall.

At the corner they branched off, and crossed the Triangle towards the outer wall. They went in a silent, mysterious fashion—eight, all told. And, one by one, the figures scaled the wall and dropped into the lane.

"Good!" murmured the leader. "We've got out all right, anyway. Couldn't have better weather for a game like this. No moon, no rain, but a decent breeze. If we happen to make any sounds, the wind will get the blame!"

"Something in that!" agreed another of the figures. "Who's got the rope? I handed the rope to somebody as we came over the wall——"

"Don't worry—I've got it!" whispered Church.

"That grappling-iron, too?" asked Jack Grey.

"McClure's got that," said Church. "We're pretty well supplied."

Reggie Pitt led his force down the lane. Handforth marched by his side—for Handforth in his own mind, had constituted himself leader of the expedition. It saved a lot of trouble and argument to let him think on.

The eight juniors were well equipped.

They were all wearing tennis-shoes—a safe form of footwear after the recent long spell of cold, dry weather. The lanes were not muddy, and light shoes were permissible.

The rescue-party, moreover, wore everything black—even the tennis-shoes had been specially prepared. Instead of collars, Pitt and his men wore mufflers. Walking silently down the lane, they were practically invisible.

They carried coils of rope, a grappling-iron, a chisel, pliers, and other mysterious implements which might be useful in their enterprise. Every member of the party was provided with a serviceable electric torch.

"Might think we were a gang of burglars!" murmured Cecil De Valerie, with a grin. "Here we are, all armed with ropes and housebreaking tools and electric torches and things—and we're going to break into Moat Hollow."

"It's a bit risky!" said McClure uneasily.

"Rats!" scoffed Handforth. "Where's the risk? And aren't we justified? We're just making a raid on another school—that's all! I never heard it called housebreaking before!"

"Well, you know what I mean——" began De Valerie.

"No, I don't!" interrupted Edward Oswald. "And you don't know what you mean, either! We're going to Moat Hollow to Rescue Tommy Watson from that beast Creepe. My only hat! What a name!"

"It fits the miserable old sinner, anyway!" said Church.

"Like a glove!" agreed Pitt. "Of all the creepy-crawly rotters, he's one of the worst I ever saw! And if only we can do old Tommy Watson a service, we're ready to risk exposure. And I don't think the Head would drop on us very heavily after hearing the whole truth!"

"He'd probably give us a whole holiday!" said Handforth.

"Against such optimism as that I remain dumb!" grinned Reggie. "But we needn't discuss the matter. I don't suppose the Head'll ever know anything about it. We want the whole affair to be as secretive as possible."

The rescue-party proceeded on its way, making their final plans. The line of action had been carefully discussed and settled

before bed-time, but Reggie Pitt believed in making assurance doubly sure. By the time Moat Hollow was reached every member of the party knew his own job.

Moat Hollow lay enshrouded in gloom, and not a light showed from any window. One by one, the raiding-party swarmed up a rope—with the sole exception of McClure. He was left outside on guard.

The rope had been easily fixed. For all along the top of the twelve-foot wall there were festoons of projecting spikes. Instead of being a hindrance, these spikes were a help. For one throw of the grappling-iron had been sufficient to make the rope secure.

A second rope led downwards into the Moat Hollow grounds. The seven figures collected together at the bottom of the wall, and no word was spoken. Once within the enemy's camp, all conversation had been strictly forbidden.

The next move was to make an entry.

And this wasn't so easy, for the school was unusually well protected. Mr. Grimesby Creepe, before entering into possession, had restored the old moat. And now a wide sheet of water separated the grounds from the house itself. The water was deep, too—and icily cold.

Pitt and his men were not handicapped by lack of information. They knew every inch of the ground—they knew exactly which window to make for, and they knew where Tommy Watson was sleeping.

Not so very long since, Moat Hollow had been known as the River House School, and the St. Frank's fellows had often visited their friendly rivals. So they knew the geography of the place by heart. The River House School was now situated in new quarters further up the stream.

Crossing the moat was an easier matter than might be supposed. Pitt had thought it all out beforehand, and went to work with a speed that would have surprised Mr. Creepe, if the latter had been watching. It would also have destroyed Mr. Creepe's sense of security. For the rascally school-master fondly imagined that his establishment was impregnable.

Round the side of the house there was a doorway with a little ornamental stone porch, ivy-covered and picturesque. There was just a stone step outside the door, and then the waters of the moat barred any further progress. The distance was too great to be jumped, and Pitt didn't even attempt such an impossibility.

His method was quite simple.

Taking one of the ropes, he deftly made a loop, and standing on the edge of the moat, he dropped the noose over a corner of the ornamental porch and drew it tight. He and the others pulled on it, and were satisfied regarding its security.

The way into Moat Hollow was open.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RAIDERS.



REGGIE PITT nodded approvingly. "Good!" he murmured. "Nothing could be nicer!"

The rope had now been fixed. One end of it was secured to the ornamental porch, and the other to a tree, some distance away from the moat. By jumping lightly up the rope could be grasped.

Pitt himself was the first raider to make the journey.

Swinging himself hand over hand, he crossed the moat with three or four feet of clearance. He reached the porch, gripped the stonework, and hauled himself up with agility.

Five others followed, leaving Jack Grey on guard beside the moat. There were now six actual raiders on the porch. And the most ticklish part of the night's work lay ahead.

Just above the porch there was a window. As Reggie Pitt knew, it was the end window of the first floor corridor. The outer shutters were securely fastened.

"Huh! We're up against something now!" grunted Handforth. "Fancy closing the shutters like this—"

"Keep him quiet, for goodness' sake!" breathed Pitt anxiously. "Don't forget our compact, Handy—no conversation!"

Handforth relapsed into silence. His fears were quite groundless, for these outer shutters were easily persuaded. It would have been far worse if the shutters had been fitted inside.

As it was, Pitt hoisted himself on to the window-sill, and then he got busy with the tools. A little coaxing with a screw-driver, a grip or two with the pliers, and the old-fashioned iron fastening was conquered. The shutters moved open with a faint creak.

"Good egg!" murmured Handforth softly.

"Begad! It's open!" breathed Tregellis-West.

The five juniors on the porch watched Pitt intently as he commenced work on the window itself. Everything was being done so silently and smoothly that there seemed no possibility of interruption. As Nicodemus Trotwood murmured to De Valerie, this was all the result of careful, thoughtful preparation.

It would have been a bad mistake to enter upon an enterprise of this kind without any preliminary plan of action. Even as it was, there were chances enough to be faced. Carefully as Pitt had prepared, a hitch was always possible.

The window-fastening gave way after two minutes gentle work. It was old-fashioned and rusty, and would have succumbed

sooner if Reggie had used force. He preferred persuasion.

Inch by inch he raised the window, and put his head and shoulders through the aperture. A draught swept in past his shoulders, and he hoped that no doors would be set banging.

The corridor was black and still. No sound came to Reggie's ears. It was as though he were entering a deserted building. He slipped lightly over the sill, and turned.

Without speaking, he motioned with his hand.

And the others, one after another, hoisted themselves up and entered Mr. Grimesby Creepe's domain. Trotwood major was the last, and then the window was gently lowered.

To speak now would have been dangerous. But speech was unnecessary, for the six juniors knew what had to be done. Pitt and Tregellis-West led the way softly down the corridor. Nicodemus Trotwood and Handforth followed. And De Valerie and Church remained near the window.

The dormitory was on this floor, and could be reached with ease. In the event of a sudden surprise the invaders would have a chance of concealment, for there were many alcoves and corners in the wide passage.

As Pitt walked he silently unrolled something bulky from about his waist. It was a travelling-rug, and it would be required almost at once. Reggie knew, from Tommy Watson's letter, that a monitor was always on duty in the dormitory. And before Tommy could be rescued this monitor would have to be subdued.

"I shouldn't be surprised if the bounder's asleep!" Pitt told himself. "If so, all the better. But everything depends upon the first move. It's a good thing for us the monitor is placed near the door."

He came to a halt and held up a warning hand. The dormitory door lay just ahead. A faint light could be seen under the crack. And as Pitt paused, a footstep sounded, accompanied by a grumpy command for somebody to stop snoring.

The juniors halted, their hearts beating rapidly. They recognised the voice of Kirby—Mr. Creepe's chief monitor. They were rather glad that Kirby was on duty, for it would give them great pleasure to "put him through it."

With a soft touch that was almost like a caress, Pitt gripped the door-handle. Without the slightest sound, he turned the knob, and he felt the door give. A fraction of an inch at a time he opened it, until a tiny crack appeared. The other juniors waited behind him, tense, and greatly worked up.

Reggie applied his eye to the crack. Then he almost smiled. Kirby, the chief monitor, was just settling himself down in an easy chair. He had apparently been up and

down the dormitory on one of his usual parades. And now he was preparing for another spell of ease.

His position was quite ideal for the purpose in hand. And that he had no hint of what was about to happen was proved by the fact that he lay back, yawned, and stretched himself.

"Confound it—another hour yet!" he muttered. "You'd better be careful, you young brats! Any more sounds from you and I'll come round with an ashplant!"

He hunched himself down into the chair, little dreaming of the shock that was about to descend upon him.

CHAPTER VIII.

GOOD WORK.



PITT opened the door inch by inch.

His companions were now able to see into the dormitory. It was a bare, miserable apartment, with stained walls, and a ceiling which was in need of repair. In many places the plaster had dropped, and the laths were plainly visible—ugly blotches which gave the whole room an air of poverty-stricken squalor.

The beds themselves were hard and uncomfortable, with an insufficiency of blankets. Sheets there were none, for Mr. Creepe had certain rooted objections to paying laundry bills. As usual, he made a virtue out of his meanness by declaring that the boys were healthier between blankets.

There was only one light, and this was given by a cheap heating stove. It stood right in front of the monitor's easy chair, and radiate a certain amount of warmth. Until recently the monitors had not even enjoyed this privilege. But they had joined forces and urged their claims.

So the heating stove was installed, and Kirby was enjoying the benefit of it. He had a blanket over his shoulders, and this, combined with the heat from the stove, tended to make him drowsy. Mr. Creepe's main objection to heat had been on this very account, for he had always feared that the night "sentry" would sleep at his post if there was any comfort.

Reggie Pitt opened the door a little further, getting his travelling-rug ready at the same moment. When the action started it would be brisk and brief.

Creak!

Without warning the door-hinge made a squeaking noise. Until halfway open, the hinges had remained silent. Pitt stood there, tense and still. Kirby half roused himself and turned.

"Oh! I'm cold—I'm shivering!"

The voice was a wail, and it came from

midway down the dormitory. Kirby forgot about the door and sat forward.

"Who's that?" he demanded sharply.

Nobody replied—all the boys appeared to be sound asleep. Kirby thought he heard a sound behind him, but before he could turn there was a swishing, rustling sound.

A black thing enveloped him. His outcry was stifled in its first breath, and before he could even rise he felt hands gripping him and forcing him into the chair. The monitor was startled and scared. This attack had come without the slightest hint or warning.

Nicodemus Trotwood had saved the situation. If Kirby had turned and had seen figures in the doorway he would have known whom to thank for his predicament.

But Nick, by throwing his voice, had stopped Kirby from looking round, and Reggie Pitt had acted at the crucial moment. The schoolboy ventriloquist had justified his inclusion in the party.

Kirby fought like mad for a few moments. After the first second or two his fear turned to bewilderment. He knew well enough that all the Moat Hollow boys were in bed and asleep. Who, then, had attacked him from behind in this way?

Not his fellow monitors, surely? Yet they were the only persons in the building except Mr. Creepe himself. And then Kirby thought of that mysterious, hooded figure—the strange Unknown who called himself the Phantom Protector.

Perhaps he— But no! Kirby could feel more than one pair of hands. He was in the grip of three or four assailants. His feet were held, his arms were grasped, and one hand was clapped over the rug near his face and acting as an effective gag.

The monitor hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels.

As a matter of fact, Pitt & Co. dealt with him swiftly. He was roped up in next to no time, and he had not uttered a sound—he had never had the chance. It was really good work.

Without disturbing anybody in the dormitory, Kirby had been rendered helpless, and he was swiftly conveyed out into the corridor, and dumped unceremoniously into a cupboard. All this had been planned in advance. Church remained on guard at the cupboard door.

"Jolly good!" whispered Handforth breathlessly.

"Begad, rather!" breathed Sir Montie. "Now for dear old Tommy! We ought to get him out within the next three minutes—"

"I say, why not release the whole crew?" asked Handforth. "Why not let the whole gang escape? We've only got to tip them the wink and they'll slip out—"

"You're always too wholesale, old man," interrupted Pitt. "We should only defeat our own ends by doing that. These kids

haven't got an ounce of spirit among the lot of them—and half of them would start yelling or squealing if they woke up. Then old Creepe and his monitors would swoop down and we might not even get Tommy away!"

"You're right!" whispered Trotwood. "We can't afford to take any risks like that. Come on—let's get Watson out on his own!"

"Oh, all right—just as you like!" growled Handforth. "Nobody ever takes any notice of me—I might as well keep my advice to myself! Go and eat coke!"

Reggie Pitt grinned, and led the way back to the silent, undisturbed dormitory. It didn't take much to get Handforth into a huff, but, fortunately, his recovery from these spells was usually rapid.

The raiders entered the dormitory and went from bed to bed, searching for Tommy Watson. It was fitting, perhaps, that Sir Montie Tregellis-West should be the one to locate the ex-St. Frank's junior.

"Tommy—Tommy boy!" breathed Sir Montie gladly.

CHAPTER IX.

DOUBTS AND UNCERTAINTIES.



TOMMY WATSON raised himself on his elbow, and gazed at Sir Montie in a dazed, bewildered kind of way. It was very dim in the dormitory, and Watson was still

heavy with sleep.

His vision was blurred, his eyelids were heavy, and it seemed to him that he was just waking up from some dream. Of course, Tregellis-West wasn't there—and he hadn't really heard the voice. Yet—

"How goes it, dear old boy?" whispered Montie.

"You're not—you can't be— It's not you, Montie!" panted Watson huskily. "I'm dreaming— Great Scott! It's you, Montie—it's you! Oh, I say, I—I—"

They gripped hands firmly, and Tommy Watson found it impossible to express his feelings. He was wide awake now, but he maintained silence. His sojourn in Mr. Creepe's school had taught him to speak never higher than a whisper.

"I—I don't understand!" muttered Watson amazedly.

Other forms had crept up; his bed, indeed, was surrounded. In the uncertain light he recognised the burly figure of Handforth. He knew that Reggie Pitt was near, and there was Nicodemus Trotwood, too.

"It's all right, old man—we've come to take you away!" whispered Pitt. "Montie got your letter this afternoon— But we can't talk here! Dress yourself and we'll get outside."

"Yes, but—"

"Dress!" insisted Reggie.

Watson slipped out of bed, and he was soon donning his rough clothes. At Moat Hollow the boys wore a kind of uniform—coarse tweed overalls. As Mr. Creepe's scholars were never allowed outside the gates, their clothing was designed for utility rather than appearance.

The raid had been conducted so silently that nobody else was awake. One or two of the boys had turned in their sleep, but nobody had sat up in bed. There had been no hint of alarm.

Watson and his rescuers stole noiselessly out of the dormitory, and the door was closed. In the corridor, a brief conference was held. Watson's feelings were mixed. He was inwardly excited at the prospect of escape—at the thought of liberty—but, at the same time, it all seemed too unreal to be true. Even now he could hardly believe that he was actually in the presence of his old chums.

"I—I don't understand!" he muttered. "How did you get in? How did you climb the wall, and cross the moat—"

"Never mind that now!" interrupted Pitt. "We'll explain everything later—when we're outside!"

"And the monitor?" asked Watson. "Where is he?"

"In the cupboard—bound and gagged!"

"My only hat!" breathed Tommy tensely.

"It's all right; we've done everything as silently as ghosts," said Handforth grimly. "You needn't worry, my son. As soon as we've got you outside we can make as much noise as we please. The main thing is to clear off—and clear off quick!"

"Hear, hear!" agreed Sir Montie.

They silently stole to the window at the end of the corridor, and Reggie gazed out. He could see nothing in the gloom. But he knew that Jack Grey was waiting just on the other side of the moat. The rope was still in position. It was only necessary to drop down on to the porch top, and then cross the rope.

"Come on—better not waste any time!" muttered Reggie Pitt.

The window was silently opened, and one after another the juniors climbed down. Reggie was the last out, and he closed the window, and placed the shutters back in position.

"Good!" he said, as he joined the others. "I'm a bit sorry for Kirby, but I don't see how we can release him. He'd rouse the whole place if we did, and we mightn't be able to escape."

"Blow him!" growled Handforth. "He'll come to no harm."

Tommy Watson nodded.

"You needn't worry about Kirby," he said. "These monitors are relieved every two hours, you know; and when Kirby's relief comes, and finds him absent, there'll be a search."

"But the other monitor may think that Kirby had gone off somewhere of his own accord," argued Trotwood. "In that case,

he'll be left in that cupboard all night—and we smothered him up pretty thoroughly, you know. We don't want to suffocate the beast."

Reggie Pitt pursed his lips.

"There's something in that," he admitted. "It would be an awful thing if Kirby—" He broke off and slowly grinned. "I'll tell you what," he added. "I'll nip back and leave a note pinned on the back of Kirby's easy-chair. When the relief monitor comes, he'll see it, and Kirby can be freed."

"Wait a minute!" said Tommy Watson quietly. "What are you going to do with me?"

"Take you to St. Frank's, of course," said Handforth.

"Yes; but after that?"

"Dear old boy, don't bother your head about such details," murmured Sir Montie. "We intend to write to your pater, an' you'll be able to tell the truth about old Creepe, an' have the frightful bounder arrested, or somethin' nice like that."

Tommy Watson looked very grave.

"My pater's on the way to Australia—you can't get in touch with him," he said. "As for Creepe— Well, I don't know. It seems to me we're acting rather meanly."

The Fourth-Formers stared.

"Meanly?" repeated Handforth.

"Yes. I— Look here, don't misunderstand me," said Tommy Watson. "It's jolly decent of you chaps to take all this trouble over me, and I appreciate it. You're bricks—real bricks! But—but— Oh, I can't quite explain—"

He broke off, and the others looked at him curiously.

"You're a queer sort of chap!" growled Handforth tartly. "We take all this trouble to rescue you, and I don't believe you want to be rescued! Look here, do you want to come with us, or stay here?"

Tommy Watson took a deep breath.

"I think I'd rather stay here," he replied quietly.

CHAPTER X.

TOMMY'S POINT OF VIEW.



REGGIE PITT & CO. were startled.

Watson's calm pronouncement had taken them quite by surprise. It amazed them to hear that he would prefer to remain at Moat Hollow. This was something they had not bargained for. They had taken it for granted that the ex-St. Frank's junior would leap at the chance of escape.

For a moment or two the knot of juniors on the stone porch remained silent. And Jack Grey, standing on the other side of the moat, wondered what on earth all the delay was about. He was getting quite jumpy.

"Buck up, you chaps!" he whispered tensely.

"All right—just coming," said Pitt. "Look here, Watson," he added, turning to Tommy, "what's the big idea? Why this thushness? What ties of love bind you to this charming establishment?"

Watson looked rather uncomfortable.

"I'm no good at explaining!" he muttered. "I don't want you to misunderstand me, but it seems a bit rotten for me to clear off like this—stealing away in the middle of the night."

"You silly ass!" snorted Handforth. "Are you so fond of old Creepe that—"

"I'm not thinking about Creepe at all," interrupted Watson gruffly. "I knew you'd get hold of it wrong. Blow Creepe! I'd like to see him boiled in oil!"

"Then why all this argument?" asked Pitt. "And where does the meanness come in?"

"Besides, what about your letter?" added Sir Montie. "Dear old chap, you're frightfully difficult to understand! You distinctly asked me to get Pitt an' the other chaps to help you out. You said you wanted to escape, but couldn't."

"Yes, I know—"

"And now we're here you don't want to come!" said Handforth aggressively. "Now we've got you outside, you want to go back! You're off your silly rocker! Didn't you say it was like penal servitude to be in this place?"

"And so it is—worse!" said Watson, his voice low and tense. "Worse than penal servitude! It isn't life at all—it's drudgery and slavery from morning till night, without the slightest ray of hope!"

"And you'd rather stay here than come with us?" said Church, staring.

Watson scratched his head.

"Look here, I'm—I'm thinking of the other chaps!" he muttered bluntly.

"The other chaps?"

"Yes—Jevons and Smithson and the rest," said Watson. "They're less able to fight against Creepe and his monitors than I am, and it seems mean for me to desert the poor bounders! That's all! Once I've gone, they'll have an awful time of it. In fact, old Creepe will vent his spite on 'em. I know him! He's a demon!"

Reggie Pitt gave a soft, slow whistle.

"Oh-ho! Now we have it!" he murmured. "Light dawns upon the subject! This accounts for the milk in the coconut! Watson, old son, I admire your loyal spirit, and I will give you all credit for it. But is it worth the candle? Couldn't you help these Moat Hollow chaps better by coming away with us?"

"No," said Tommy quietly. "Once outside, I shouldn't be able to get back again—and—"

"You're mad!" snorted Handforth impatiently. "You've got no more sense than a giddy frog! Can't you tell the police about Creepe? After spending to-night at St. Frank's, can't you go to the Head to-morrow

and tell him everything? Can't you expose Creepe in his true colours?"

Watson nodded.

"I've thought of that," he replied. "In fact, I've been thinking about it ever since I wrote that letter, two days ago. Half an hour after I'd thrown it over the wall, I began thinking—and I came to the conclusion that I'd made a mistake. I don't want to escape—I want to stay here. But you chaps can help me from outside."

"Piffle!" said Handforth tartly.

"No, it isn't piffle—it's common sense!" said Reggie Pitt. "I hadn't looked at the matter from Tommy's point of view before; but he's right. I'm always ready to be convinced."

"But why can't Watson tell the Head—"

"I can tell him—and I can tell the police, too," interrupted Watson. "I'd do it like a shot if I thought any good would come of it. But you don't know Grimesby Creepe! He's as cunning as a monkey; he's as full of tricks as a whole menagerie! He'd explain everything with ease!"

"Explain his cruelty and his methods of slavery?"

"You don't know him!" repeated Watson doggedly. "He's two-faced—he's false to the core! In the village he's got a fine name—I've heard that the vicar himself is friendly with him."

"That's true enough," said Pitt slowly. "Mr. Creepe is looked upon as a public-spirited man. He contributes to all the local charities, and nobody has got a bad word to say against him. Practically everybody in Bellton believes that Moat Hollow is an ideal private school."

"There you are—I knew it!" said Tommy Watson. "The monitors have done that—they're always going about, spreading these yarns! I tell you, Creepe's in a strong position. If I come away with you fellows, and go to the police, I shall do more harm than good."

"Yes, but—"

"I know I shall!" went on Tommy. "Even if the police took any notice of me—which is doubtful—they'd come here and be satisfied within five minutes. Old Creepe would twist them round his little finger, and send them away singing his praises."

Reggie Pitt nodded wisely.

"There's nothing more difficult to get at than the truth!" he said quietly. "We know it, but if we shouted it from the house-tops we should be set down as slanderers and rotters. It's a sad, sad world!"

CHAPTER XI.

REGGIE'S SUGGESTION.



HANDFORTH grunted. "Well, here we are, stuck here like a lot of giddy lunatics!" he said tartly. "What are we going to do? I don't believe all that tosh,

Reginald Pitt! If we tell the truth, people will believe us—"

"You're a simple sort of chap, Handy," sighed Pitt. "Tommy Watson is absolutely right in his opinion. If he comes with us, and broadcasts the truth about Creepe, he won't be believed. People will assume that he's got a grievance, and is simply telling lies. Even the Head himself wouldn't credit the story—it sounds too far-fetched."

"Begad I believe you're right, dear old boy!" said Sir Montie.

"He is, Montie," said Watson quietly. "People will always believe lies sooner than the truth. You'll notice it in a hundred different ways in everyday life. You see, I've been thinking over these things, and I've got an idea that if I bunk and tell the truth about Moat Hollow, I shall do more harm than good. And Creepe won't even be upset—in fact, it'll bring him into prominence, and he'll make capital out of it."

Even Handforth was slightly convinced.

"I'm blowed if you're not right!" he admitted grudgingly. "Look how I keep telling the truth about my detective ability! Who believes it? Nobody!"

"That's different!" said Pitt hastily. "We needn't enter into a discussion on that subject just now, old man. As for Tommy Watson, if he comes with us, he'll probably be back in Creepe's clutches within twenty-four hours."

"That's just what I've been thinking," said Watson. "I'm in a queer position. If I go to St. Frank's, the Head will discredit my yarn, and hand me back to Creepe. If I go to my Uncle Ben's, he'll be just as sceptical—and I can't live in the woods, can I? My pater and mater are away from England—"

"Look here, I'll tell you what," interrupted Pitt keenly. "There's nothing to beat a little tact. This direct action method is more after Handy's style, and we can see that it won't do. Even Handy himself is beginning to appreciate the difficulties of rush methods."

"Perhaps I am," growled Handforth. "If people only had a little sense, they'd understand the truth when they hear it! But I'm not responsible for people being dense, I suppose?"

"Of course you're not," said Pitt soothingly. "But we've got to deal with hard facts, and it's no good shoving them aside. There's only one method of helping Tommy

and all the other poor chaps under Creepe's sway."

"And what's that?" asked the others.

"Watson will have to pave the way for a revolt!" said Reggie.

"Revolt!" breathed Watson huskily.

"Revolt!" repeated Pitt.

There was a tense silence for a few moments.

"By George! That's a topping idea!" said Handforth, at last. "A rebellion, eh—a barring-out! We've had 'em at St. Frank's—why not one at Moat Hollow? After all, it's up to these chaps to fight their own battles—"

"But we can't—we can't!" broke in Watson impatiently. "You don't understand! You don't realise how we're guarded and watched! Convicts in Dartmoor Prison are better off than we are!"

"There's always a way," said Pitt gently. "My advice, old man, is this: Go back to bed, and pretend to be as meek as ever. In fact, be even meeker. Make old Creepe think that your spirit's broken. Fool him all along the line. And while you're fooling him, get in some good work among the other chaps."

"Get in some good work?" repeated Watson.

"Yes—wake them up—prepare them for the revolt," said Reggie grimly. "Don't be in a hurry—don't try to rush things. Take your time. If the revolt comes off within a fortnight, it'll be all right. We'll do our best to keep in touch with you. And when the crucial moment arrives we'll help. As soon as you're ripe for the outburst, count on us to rally round!"

"By jingo!" breathed Watson, his voice quivering.

"We'll be thinking out some schemes on our own," went on Pitt. "If you want food, we'll see that you have it—if you need weapons and ammunition, we'll supply 'em! As soon as this barring-out starts you can rely on the Fourth to back you up through thick and thin—yes, and to give active support, too! Once started, we'll be on the spot!"

"Begad! It's the best idea of all!" said Tregellis-West softly. "An' it's about the only sure way to finish old Creepe for good an' all. A barrin'-out means an exposure—an' an exposure of that kind can't be explained away. Do it, Tommy boy—do it!"

"I'll try!" replied Tommy Watson grimly. "I don't see how I can stir any life into these spiritless kids, but I'll try! We don't know what we can do until we get to a crisis, do we? And if once these poor chaps see a spark of hope, they'll probably get some backbone."

"Good man! That's the way to talk!" said Pitt approvingly. "Well, I'm satisfied. We've done some fine work to-night—because this is the beginning of the Big Push, so to speak. It's the beginning of the end for Grimesby Creepe!"

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CHAPTER XII.

THE TRIALS OF KIRBY.



TOMMY WATSON

shivered slightly.

"It's cold out here. I'll be getting back!" he muttered. "Oh, but wait a minute! What about Kirby? We've shut

him in the cupboard, and he'll tell old Creepe everything, and——"

"I've been thinking about Kirby," interrupted Pitt. "Don't worry about him. With a little careful wangling we'll fluster

mustn't know that we've been here to-night."

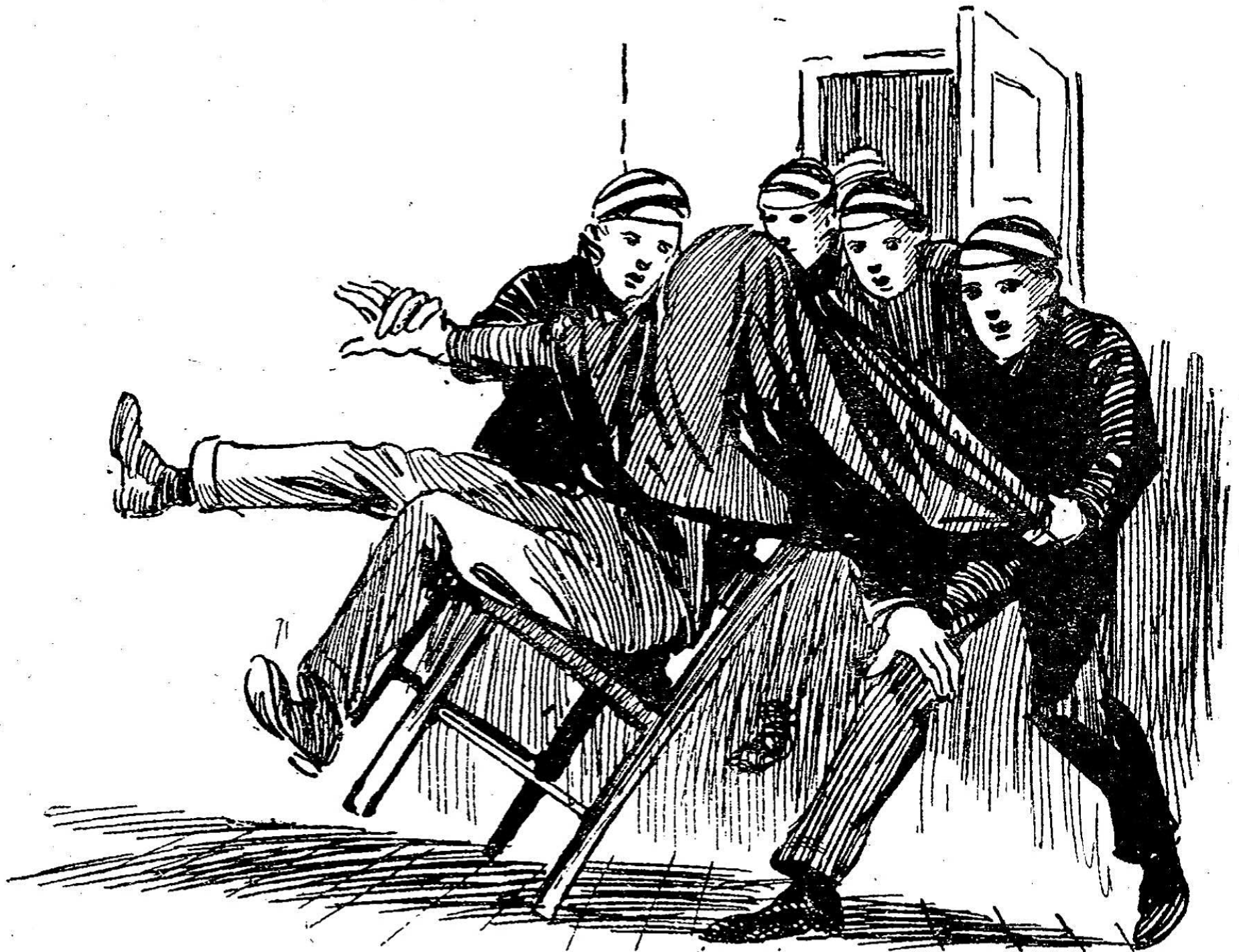
"Fathead!" snorted Handforth. "Kirby will tell him!"

"Perhaps so, but don't worry!" said Pitt.

Once inside, Tommy Watson led the way into the miserable dormitory. Within a minute he was back in bed, and nobody else in the long room was aroused.

"Good-night, you chaps—thanks awfully for coming!" whispered Watson. "I'll leave you to deal with Kirby. I hope you manage O.K."

"Leave him to us!" said Pitt cheerfully. They shook hands with Watson, and crept



A black thing enveloped him. His outcry was stifled in its first breath, and before he could even rise he felt hands gripping him and forcing him into his chair.

Master Kirby so much that he'll think he's been having a nightmare! I wouldn't mind betting my Sunday topper that Grimesby Creepe will suspect nothing."

The others couldn't quite understand, but Reggie was confident. He and Watson and Trotwood and Sir Montie climbed back through the window, leaving the others on the porch. Handforth didn't quite like it, but Pitt was firm.

"We can't take any risks now," said the skipper. "We shan't be inside more than five minutes, and we want to create as little disturbance as possible. Creepe

silently out of the dormitory. Opening the cupboard door, the unfortunate Kirby was dragged out into the corridor. He was still very much alive, for he struggled fiercely as soon as he was touched.

Ropes were tied round his ankles—festoons of them, and the knots were so profuse that Kirby would find it impossible to free himself under five or six minutes.

A brief search of his pockets revealed a stout knife, and this was removed, and left in the corridor. Not a single word was spoken throughout the proceedings, and Kirby was still smothered in the blanket—

so that he remained in complete ignorance regarding the identity of his tormentors.

The monitor was carried swiftly into the dormitory, and deposited just inside the door. And then, with one slash, the blanket binding was cut, and the thick rug swept off.

Kirby sat there, spluttering and gasping. He was rather dazed and bewildered, but he had his wits about him sufficiently to jerk himself round and stare. Except for the sleeping Moat Hollow boys, he was alone! Not the faintest sign of his recent assailants remained. They had vanished as mysteriously as they had approached. The dormitory door stood an inch or two ajar.

"All right! I'll find out the truth of this!" snarled Kirby hoarsely. "I know who you are—you can't fool me! Some of those kids from St. Frank's—you've broken in—"

He paused, and pulled himself up with a jerk. One of the boys had turned over in bed, but settled himself to sleep again. Kirby realised, with a gulp, that it was up to him to keep quiet.

If his charges awoke, and found him in this helpless condition, there might be trouble—possibly a stampede! He couldn't shout for help—he couldn't let Mr. Creepe see him in this condition. There was only one thing to be done—and Kirby did it.

Perspiring and raving, he tore at the knotted ropes.

"Go it—it'll take you ten minutes to untie that lot!" came a chuckling voice. "A bit of work for a change, eh? How are you enjoying yourself, Kirby?"

The monitor paused, and stared blankly. The voice had come from the end of the dormitory—up the far corner, where there was no window, and not even a door. Kirby went on with his untying madly. One of his assailants was trapped, anyhow!

"You're lucky to have escaped so lightly, you brute!"

It was another voice this time—deeper and more aggressive. And it seemed to float down from the top of a huge wardrobe in the nearest corner. Kirby stared up blankly.

"Wait!" he muttered. Just you wait till I'm free!"

"All right—go ahead!" said the voice from the top of the wardrobe. "You'll have to search a long while before you find me! You bully! You cowardly cad! It's about time you suffered a bit!"

Kirby tore at the ropes in sheer desperation, and, in consequence, the knots seemed to be harder than ever. His fingers ached, and his temper was at boiling point.

"Help! Let me out of here! They've locked me in!"

It was a third voice this time—a thin kind of wail, and it came from the big bottom drawer of the wardrobe. The muffled sound caused Kirby to give a start. He was becoming bewildered. Who was it in the drawer? Who had been imprisoned in there?

"All right—wait a minute!" panted the monitor.

"I can't wait! I'm suffocating—I'm dying!" came the voice, in panting desperation. "Help—oh, help! They put me in here to kill me! Please, Kirby—please be quick!"

"Good heavens!" muttered Kirby huskily.

"All right—don't concern yourself!" said a new voice from under one of the beds. "There's nobody in that wardrobe, really—only a spectral voice! In fact, we're all spectral voices!"

A low, diabolical chuckle sounded within an inch of Kirby's ear.

"Beware!" said a hollow voice.

Kirby gave a gasping cry, and he nearly fainted with fright. But the voice from the top of the wardrobe calmly advised him to keep his hair on. By this time the monitor had nearly finished untying the knots, but it was only by a strong effort of will that he remained calm.

The voices had ceased, and the dormitory was almost deadly silent as Kirby at last flung the last rope off, and staggered to his feet.

CHAPTER XIII.

NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR MR. CREEPE.



"NOW!" panted Kirby harshly.

He took two steps towards the wardrobe, and pulled open the lower drawer. As far as he knew, it contained the boys' clean linen, and, to his startled amazement, it actually did contain the linen! There was no dying boy within that drawer.

"But—but I heard him!" muttered Kirby dazedly.

He pulled an electric-torch from his pocket, and flashed the beam of light up to the top of the wardrobe. He even jumped on the chair. There was nothing to be seen but collections of dust.

Kirby went round the dormitory like a boy in a dream. Every inch of it he searched, but there was nobody within the apartment except the usual occupants.

Tommy Watson lay in bed, apparently asleep, but he was enjoying the little comedy immensely. It gave him keen pleasure to see the hated monitor in such a predicament.

"Good old Trotwood!" breathed Watson delightedly. "I knew he was a jolly good ventriloquist, but he's simply a marvel! If I hadn't known about him, I should have believed all those voices."

Kirby charged out through the doorway, his fury subsiding, and fear taking its place. He remembered that last voice! He had been informed that there were spectres

about, and that the voice in the wardrobe drawer was only a phantom sound! And he remembered that hollow chuckle near his ear. Kirby broke out into a cold perspiration.

The corridor was exactly the same as usual. The window at the end was closed and shuttered. Even the cupboard—where Kirby had been imprisoned—contained not a single clue. The whole affair was a deep and impenetrable mystery to the startled monitor.

He had already satisfied himself that all the boys were in bed and asleep. They, at all events, were blameless in this affair. Kirby glanced at his watch. The relief monitor—Fryer—would not be coming for another twenty minutes.

Kirby was all on edge—his nerves were shattered. It was impossible for him to keep this affair to himself. Hardly giving himself time to think, he rushed down the corridor, and hammered frantically upon a door. Then he walked in.

"Mr. Creepe!" he gasped. "Something's happened—"

"What—what on earth— Is that you, Kirby? What is the matter? Good heavens, boy, what in the name of wonder is the matter?"

Mr. Grimesby Creepe sat up in bed, and the springs groaned. Mr. Creepe was a heavy man, with a big, flabby face and shifty eyes, set closely together. He presented a curious figure now. A night-light was burning beside his bed, and Mr. Creepe could be plainly seen in an old-fashioned night-shirt, and with a sleeping-cap on his head.

"I want you to come, sir!" panted Kirby. "I've been attacked—I've been bound hand and foot, gagged—"

"What nonsense is this?" demanded Mr. Creepe, as he sagged heavily out of bed and felt for his slippers. "Give me my dressing-gown! Now, sir! What do you mean? Who has attacked you?"

"I don't know, sir—"

"You don't know?"

"I was grabbed from behind, sir, and a blanket was put over my head," panted Kirby. "I was locked in the corridor cupboard for nearly half an hour, and then I was taken back into the dormitory."

Mr. Creepe looked at him queerly.

"And the boys—what of the boys?" he demanded. "Are they safe?"

"They're still all asleep, sir—"

"Oh, they're still all asleep, eh?" said Mr. Creepe.

"Yes, sir. I was carried back into the dormitory, and left on the floor with my ankles all tied up," went on Kirby. "And there were people in the room—one at the corner, and one on the top of the wardrobe, and there was a boy suffocating in the wardrobe drawer!"

Mr. Grimesby Creepe stared rather blankly.

"Ridiculous!" he snapped. "Boy, you've been drinking! How could there be a dying boy in the wardrobe drawer? Don't be such a young fool!"

"But I tell you—"

"I don't care what you tell me!" rapped out Mr. Creepe. "Do you think I haven't got any sense? I'll come with you, Kirby, but it is obvious to me that you have been asleep at your duty! You have been suffering from a nightmare! Boys dying in drawers! Huh! Preposterous!"

Kirby gave a kind of gulp.

"All right, sir—I can't help it if you don't believe me," he muttered sullenly. "But I've got proof."

"Proof? What proof?"

"Why, there's all the rope that was knotted round my ankles," said the monitor. "I left it lying on the floor—"

"Rubbish!" interrupted Mr. Creepe. "You've been dreaming, I tell you!"

They went out of the room, and a minute later entered the dormitory. Everything was quiet and still. It had only taken Tommy Watson a few seconds to slip out of bed, gather up the rope, and hide it away beneath the mattress of an empty bed at the end of the dormitory. The only piece of solid evidence had now been removed.

"H'm!" muttered Mr. Creepe. "As I thought—as I thought! Well, Kirby? Well, my young friend? Where's your rope, eh?"

Kirby was passing a hand before his eyes.

"I—I don't understand, sir!" he murmured dazedly. "I left it on the floor—"

"Ridiculous nonsense!" snorted Mr. Creepe. "If you left the rope on the floor, it would be here now. I suppose you will tell me that one of the boys woke up, and, disliking to see the floor littered about, very thoughtfully got up and removed the offending rope! Be good enough to talk sense to me, Kirby!"

The monitor walked about, searching everywhere.

"I—I can't understand it, sir," he muttered. "I was captured and bound hand and foot and gagged—"

"I have heard enough of that story!" interrupted Mr. Creepe harshly. "And I am not entirely pleased with you, Kirby, for dragging me out of bed for absolutely nothing! It is perfectly obvious that you have suffered from a nightmare. These things did not happen at all—you dreamed them!"

Mr. Creepe made a brief round, examining the windows and doors, and satisfied himself that nothing had been disturbed. Then he went off back to bed in a decidedly bad temper.

Kirby resumed his duty in the dormitory, still dazed. And he was slowly but surely

coming to the conclusion that Mr. Grimesby Creepe was right.

In some extraordinary way, he had dreamed the whole affair!

CHAPTER XIV.

MORE MYSTERY.



HANDFORTH stared keenly.

"What's that?"

he breathed.

"Eh? What's what?"

"I saw something just now—a shadow moving just against those trees," said Handforth tensely. "By George! There's somebody prowling about! Old Creepe, I'll bet!"

The schoolboy invaders were on their way out of the Moat Hollow grounds. The rope across the moat had been successfully negotiated, and all trace of that temporary bridge had been removed. Pitt & Co. were quite satisfied that their escapade had been successful. They had left no clues.

They were particularly pleased with Nicodemus Trotwood, who accepted the shower of congratulations with a becoming modesty. He had certainly done well, although the idea of fooling the unfortunate Kirby had originated in Pitt's active brain.

Those ventriloquial voices had not been "thrown" for the mere sake of pulling Kirby's leg. Pitt had guessed that the monitor would rush to Mr. Creepe as soon as he got himself free. And Pitt was shrewd enough to realise that those voices would put the finishing touch to Kirby's story. Without an atom of evidence, Mr. Creepe would undoubtedly conclude that Kirby had suffered from delusions.

And Pitt's surmise had proved absolutely correct.

The juniors were now together again—the seven of them. McClure, of course, was still on duty outside in the lane. The little party had been stealing softly across the grounds towards the high wall.

"Somebody's prowling about?" repeated Pitt, as Handforth stared keenly into the bushes. "Are you having some delusions, too? I think we've fixed Kirby up all right, but——"

"I tell you I saw something!" insisted Handforth.

He charged forward, and the other juniors followed. But when they got behind the bushes they found themselves in a blind corner. The high school walls rose up in a forbidding way, barring all further progress.

"Nothing here," muttered Church. "Jolly queer, too, because I fancied I saw something——"

"It's easy enough to imagine things in this gloom," whispered Jack Grey. "We'd better get outside as soon as we can——"

"Rats!" interrupted Handforth. "I saw a figure here—I don't care what you say! It flitted behind these bushes——"

"Behold! I am here!"

The voice was soft and low, and it came from behind the little group of Fourth-Formers. Reggie Pitt twirled round, half-believing that Nicodemus was up to his tricks again.

But there, a few yards away, stood a remarkable figure. The stranger was fairly tall, and attired in close-fitting black from head to foot—with the exception of a short cloak across his shoulders. His face was completely masked, and there was a hood over his head. Two eyes could be seen gleaming out of the black mask.

"Great pip!" muttered Handforth blankly.

"The Phantom Protector!" breathed Pitt.

After the first start of surprise, Reggie was filled with curiosity. Here, before them, stood the mysterious Unknown who had saved Tommy Watson from Mr. Grimesby Creepe's brutality. Tommy himself had referred to the affair in his letter.

"Begad!" whispered Tregellis-West. "Who are you? What are you doin' here? How did you appear with such frightful suddenness?"

The Phantom Protector chuckled.

"It is my habit," he said smoothly. "Go on with your good work. Help these unfortunates. They need all our assistance."

The juniors regarded the strange figure with more calmness now. Handforth took a step forward.

"Stay!" commanded the Phantom Protector. "Do not approach! I am here only to commend you, and to urge you to greater efforts. I am always watching, but no amount of help will be too great. Farewell, my young friends. I am pleased with you!"

He took a step back, but Handforth leapt forward.

"Half a minute!" he exclaimed. "Who are you?"

The Hooded Unknown laughed softly.

"Who am I?" he repeated. "I am the Phantom Protector!"

With one bound he leapt away. Before the juniors could follow, the strange figure had vanished into the gloom. And although the juniors made a hurried search, they saw no sign of the Protector. He had vanished as mysteriously as he had appeared.

"Well, it's a mystery," said Pitt at last. "We know he's on our side, and I've got an

idea— But I won't say anything about that now," he added briskly. "Let's get back to St. Frank's."

And the raiding party left Moat Hollow, and returned to bed—thoroughly satisfied with the events of the night.

But there were other events to come yet!

CHAPTER XV.

FRYER TRIES TO FRY HIMSELF.



MOAT HOLLOW lay silent and at peace. Over an hour had elapsed, and now, in the small hours of the morning, everybody was sleeping soundly. Even Kirby had gone off to bed, and was indulging in a real dream.

In the dormitory, Fryer was in charge. He had heard nothing from Kirby regarding the earlier events—for Kirby had come to the conclusion that he had better say as little as possible. He looked foolish in Mr. Creepe's eyes already—he didn't want to be chipped by his fellow-monitors.

Fryer was enjoying the warmth of the oil-stove. It was an unaccustomed luxury, and he was sitting in his easy-chair, reading, and feeling in the best of humours. Fryer was not such a bad sort in some ways. The Moat Hollow boys preferred him to all the other monitors.

He would sometimes wink at whispered conversations, and on more than one occasion he had allowed some of the tired unfortunates to slack down. Fryer was only harsh when he was compelled to be. His position as monitor made him a bully.

Kirby and Tarkington, on the other hand, bullied for the mere sake of bullying. In other circumstances, and in a different environment, Fryer might possibly have developed into a decent fellow. But in Mr. Creepe's school he was a tyrant—he was forced to be.

Tommy Watson was still awake. He had tried to sleep time after time, but his mind was too active. He was puzzling, racking his brain for some idea that would give a start to the proposed revolt. Try as he would, Tommy couldn't see how he could possibly work up the spiritless youngsters of Moat Hollow into a ripe condition for revolt.

It was a stupendous task. But Watson had made up his mind, and he was prepared to use every nerve and sinew for the fulfilment of the plot. It had taken hold of his imagination—he was thrilled by it. A revolt! A barring-out! The very thought of such stirring terms moved him to the core.

And he swore to himself that such a barring-out would become a reality. This

matter was not one that would be allowed to fizzle tamely out! He lay in bed, thinking, thinking. Sleep refused to come.

Fryer, in the meantime, was enjoying himself.

His book had sunk down, and he was copying his predecessor's example. Certainly, the heat from this oil-stove was most comforting. With everything so quiet and still, a gentle doze seemed to be the one thing indicated.

Mr. Creepe's objection to any kind of heat in the dormitory was undoubtedly justified by the events of to-night. The schoolmaster had opposed the introduction of an oil-stove time after time. And only the insistence of his monitors, and the bitterness of the recent weather, had induced him to yield.

Fryer made himself more comfortable, and crossed his legs. At least, he intended to cross his legs. But one foot, outstretched, caught the edge of the oil-stove with a clatter.

The oil-stove crashed over Fryer's legs. He was aroused with a violent start, and at the same second a sheet of lurid flame leapt up and enveloped his lower limbs.

"Oh!" gasped Fryer frantically.

He wasn't hurt yet; but he was nearly frightened out of his wits. The oil-stove, in upsetting, had caught fire. The flames were leaping up in lurid masses. The whole dormitory was ablaze with the glare.

"Help—help!" panted Fryer desperately.

Somehow, he leapt out of his chair and rushed up the dormitory. Flames were leaping up from him—for the oil had splashed on to his clothing, and he was alight. But so far the blaze was superficial. Another twenty seconds, and Fryer would be gravely injured.

But not even two seconds were allowed to elapse.

Tommy Watson was out of bed. At the first burst of flame he had sprung up, all alert and startled. Instinctively, he had turned to the nearest water-jug. And even as Fryer staggered up the dormitory, Watson's hands were upon him.

"Look out!" he gasped.

Hissssh!

The contents of the jug whistled through the air in a great cloud. Fryer was enveloped in the well-directed water. It struck him icily, and he fell back under the impact. Steam and smoke arose from his clothing, but the flames were extinguished.

"Thank goodness!" panted Watson. "I thought you'd be killed!"

"I—I— Thanks, Watson!" muttered Fryer chokingly. "Thanks awfully! You—you acted in the nick of time—"

He broke off, for Watson was no longer with him. The junior, in fact, was hard at work, and the whole dormitory was now in a state of wild uproar. Panic had swept through the room like a hurricane. Just

near the door the floor was aflame, and the blaze was creeping nearer and nearer to the beds. To the freshly-awakened boys it seemed that the whole room was a raging furnace.

But Tommy Watson knew better. One glance told him that the fire had not taken any hold yet. And he had whipped up a blanket, and was now beating it fiercely on the blazing oil.

"Quick—lend a hand!" he panted. "Quick, Fryer!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A POSSIBLE ALLY.



FRYER leapt to the task.

Armed with another blanket, he helped to subdue the flames—the result of his own carelessness. And in less than a minute the last flicker was extinguished, leaving the dormitory filled from floor to ceiling with reeking, choking masses of smoke and fumes.

Then Mr. Creepe dashed in.

"Good heavens! What's happened here?" shouted the schoolmaster. "Answer me! What have you been doing? Open the windows! The place is on fire—"

"It's all right, sir—we've put it out!" panted Fryer.

Mr. Creepe took no notice; he dashed to the nearest window and flung it open. Watson grabbed at Fryer's arm.

"I'll say I did it!" he whispered. "You keep mum!"

"But look here—" began Fryer.

"We can't lose you—you're the only monitor we can rely on!" whispered Watson. "If you tell Creepe the truth, he'll make you one of us! I don't mind a flogging—it'll be better than the other!"

Fryer hardly knew what to say. Dimly he realised that Tommy Watson was right. Mr. Creepe would certainly remove his rank if he discovered the truth. And Fryer was only too glad to grasp at the thread.

Tommy Watson was thinking quickly—his brain was unusually alert. He had saved Fryer's life, and he was about to save him from Mr. Creepe's fury. Fryer was only human—he would be grateful. And a grateful monitor would be worth his weight in gold in the coming struggle! Watson's wits were certainly at their sharpest.

"Upon my soul, I thought the place was burned down!" shouted Mr. Creepe hoarsely. "Get back to bed, you boys—get back to bed! Who's responsible for this? That—that infernal oil-stove—"

"I knocked it over, sir," said Watson quietly.

He was telling the literal truth, for in beating out the flames he had certainly knocked the oil-stove over on its side. But Mr. Creepe detected no subterfuge.

"Oh!" he said harshly. "Indeed! So you knocked it over, Watson? You young fool! You might have burnt us all to death! How did it happen?"

"I got out of bed to get some water, sir," said Tommy Watson truthfully. "The—the stove—I—I can't explain, sir—Oh, please don't be angry! The fire's out now, sir—"

"Enough!" snarled Mr. Creepe. "I am convinced that you did this deliberately, maliciously! You shall be flogged with the utmost severity! Furthermore, you shall be confined in a cellar for a week!"

Watson was startled. He had been prepared for the flogging, but not for the solitary confinement. It would spoil things—badly. But it was too late to say anything further now.

The other boys had got back into bed. Kirby and Tarkington were present—lights had been brought. The dormitory was still choking with noxious fumes, and the air was thick.

"Hold this boy!" shouted Mr. Creepe. "I'll deal with him now!"

"Wait a minute, sir!" gasped Fryer. "You don't understand—"

"Hold your noise, sir!" thundered Mr. Creepe.

He was in a towering rage. His alarm had gone, for the danger was obviously past; and he was angry at the thought of putting his hand in his pocket to repair the damage that had been done. Mr. Creepe was a miser by nature. It tortured him to spend a shilling.

"Just a moment—everybody stand still!"

Mr. Creepe whirled round. A dim figure stood in the doorway, and the whole dormitory gasped with awe when that figure was recognised. The Phantom Protector had again mysteriously appeared!

"Good heavens!" muttered Mr. Creepe dazedly.

"Touch that boy at your peril!" said the Phantom Protector quietly. "I command you to deal with him lightly, and if he is confined in a cellar he will be released. Take warning, Mr. Grimesby Creepe! You are safe so far—but the police may learn a few things if you are not careful!"

Mr. Creepe literally collapsed. The one mention of the word "police" bereft him of all strength. For his conscience was guilty—he knew only too well what would happen if the full truth ever reached the ears of the authorities.

"He's gone, sir!" panted Kirby huskily.

Mr. Creepe sank on to the nearest bed, shivering from head to foot. The monitors rushed out into the corridor, but the Hooded Unknown had apparently vanished into thin air. And he had left no clue behind him!

The rest of the night was a disturbed time for everybody. Mr. Creepe got no sleep, and his monitors were hard at work eradicating the effects of the fire; and the boys were compelled to help, too.

There, a few yards away, stood a remarkable figure. The stranger was attired in close-fitting black from head to foot, with the exception of a short cloak across his shoulders. His face was completely masked, and there was a hood over his head.

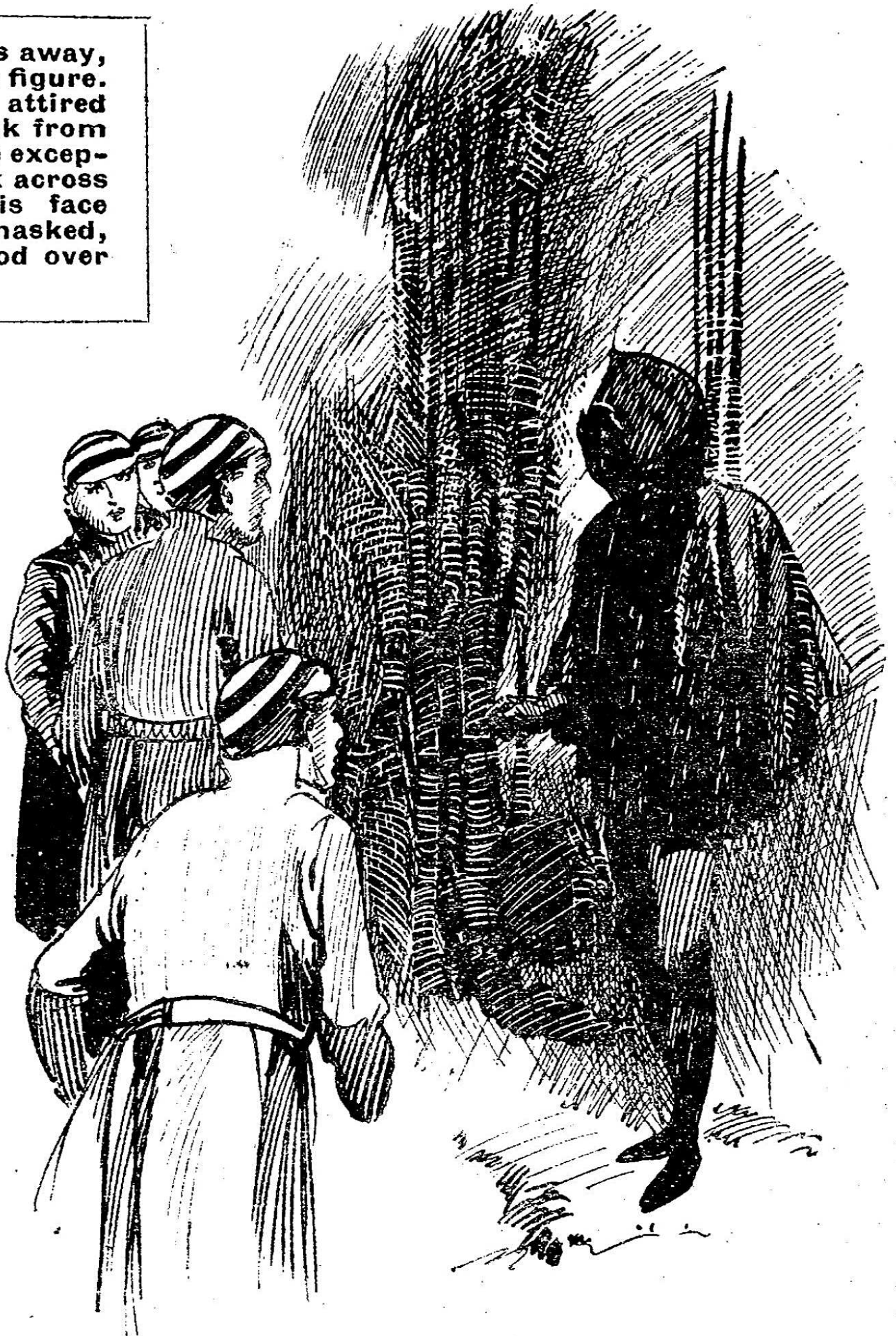
Tommy Watson was happy for the first time since his arrival at Moat Hollow. It seemed to him that the turn of the tide had come! Not only had he the support of the St. Frank's Fourth, but the Phantom Protector seemed to be always with him—and now Fryer would probably become an ally.

It was likely that future events would be crammed with excitement!

As for Mr. Creepe, he was more or less of a wreck. The timely appearances of the Hooded Unknown were beginning to unnerve him. His hands were tied—he felt afraid to inflict the slightest punishment.

And his one insistent thought was: Who was the Phantom Protector?

THE END.



Next Week!

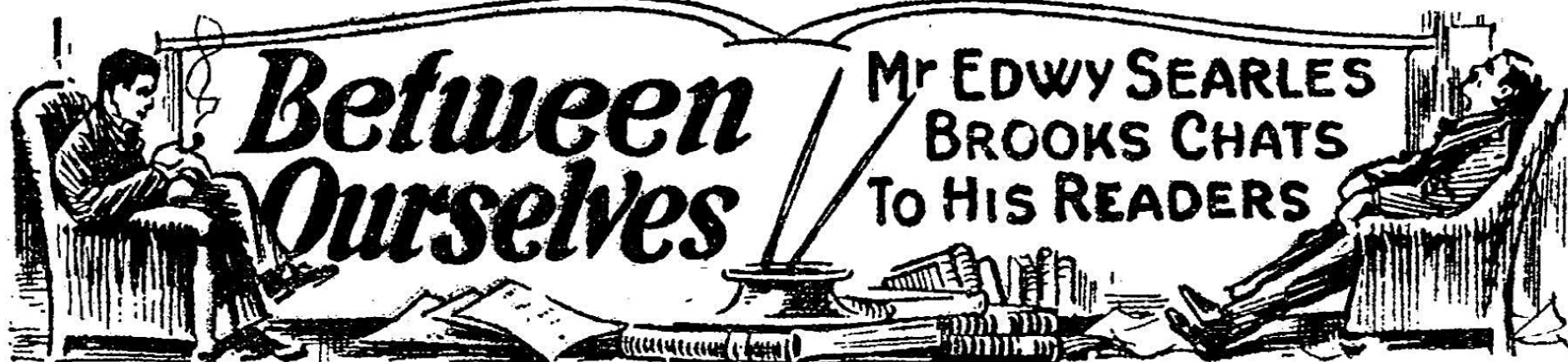
"THE HOODED UNKNOWN!"

Another grand long story of the Moat Hollow series, in which the Phantom Protector plays a prominent part.

"THE INVISIBLE GRIP!"

Long instalment of this thrilling new serial.

THE ST. FRANK'S MAGAZINE.



(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: G. T. Currie (Kilburn), R. J. D. (Herefordshire), H. S. Moss (Stock), A Bobbed-haired Tomboy (Luton), A Loyal Reader For Ever (Kidderminster), Henry Thompson (Glasgow), H. Frederick Mullett (Northay), A Reader For Ever (Southport), Patrick McSweeney (Paddington), J. L. Higson (Clitheroe), Mick (Clapham), Smith Thompson (Bradford), H. Fink (Islington), A. E. H. (High Barnet), R. C. Scorrer (Newcastle-on-Tyne), London, S.W. (Streatham), J. Saunders (Exeter), W. E. Hammond (Edgbaston), Alfred Starbuck (Canning Town), Ellie Thomson (Yalgoo, West Australia), Frank Causeway (Exeter).

Well, it won't be very long now before the long stories begin to appear—just a few more weeks. I'm beginning them already, and they'll be even longer than they used to be before we took Nelson Lee and Nipper away from St. Frank's. I think most of you will be pleased. Pleased at the length, I mean—I shall have to wait and see how you like the stories themselves.

R. J. D. wants some stories about sports, particularly sports between the rival Houses of St. Frank's. The fact is, R. J. D., I'm not sure that sports alone would be strong enough for the central theme in our stories. But I'll tell you what. It's quite on the cards that I'll write some special sports stories—just the sort you want, I hope—for another paper. Not yet, of course, but in a month or two. If I find time for this, you'll hear all about it from the Editorial chair.

Somehow, Bobbed Haired Tomboy, I don't think you're quite serious when you say that you haven't read the school stories in the Old Paper since Nelson Lee and Nipper have been away from St. Frank's. Your many references to my schoolboy characters give you away. I'm not accusing you of telling fibs, of course, but haven't you been trying to pull my leg? I see that you are opposed to Irene & Co.; you even go so far as to say you hate them. It's a funny thing, but most of the readers against Irene & Co. are girls themselves. I wonder why? Don't girls like reading about girls? And are my girl characters as untrue to life as you intimate? I hope not, anyway. I'm afraid I can't promise to drop them out, even to please you!

I'll give you the truth about the Trotwood Twins, Henry Thompson. Nicodemus Trotwood is about an hour older than Cornelius, and he's therefore known to masters as "Trotwood major." Even an hour counts, you know, when it comes to a matter of age. I think you'll find that most twins at school are known as major and minor.

I'm afraid, Higgie, that some of your criticisms are rather caustic—although your pen-and-ink sketches are very good. I certainly don't agree with you that the Old Paper is a "Penny Dreadful" because I take my characters to different parts of the world for the summer holidays. You say that the stories about the discovery of a lost colony at the South Pole were "silly," and you urge me to stick to real life. If we authors were to work on that principle, old man, I'm afraid our stories wouldn't be very interesting. While attempting to make no comparisons, what about the world-famous stories of Jules Verne? What about Conan Doyle's "Lost World"? What about the fanciful romances of Rider Haggard? You'll be telling me next that these gentlemen were the authors of "Penny Dreadfuls"—just because they allowed their imaginations to guide them! No, Higgie, it won't do! There's such a thing as Author's Licence, don't forget. And, what's more to the point, ninety-nine readers out of a hundred are rather keen on stories of discovery and exciting adventure.

(Continued on page 30.)



The INVISIBLE GRIP!

New Serial of Nelson Lee and Nipper introducing Professor Cyrus Zingrave

OUTLINE OF STORY.

Nelson Lee and Nipper investigate a robbery in a City office in which the caretaker is overpowered by a mysterious agency. Eventually they get on the trail of the thieves and while pursuing them in a motor-car, their own car is wrecked without any apparent cause. The detective and his assistant, rendered unconscious, are seized and conveyed to an underground vault, from which escape seems hopeless. Lee discovers a possible way out down a dark pit, but while examining the pit, he slips and disappears down the black cavity.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER XVI.

FREEDOM AT LAST.

NIPPER peered anxiously down the dark shaft.

The sound of Nelson Lee's crashing fall was still ringing in his ears, and for a few seconds the lad was too unnerved to trust himself to speak. He dared not contemplate what disastrous consequences would result from this terrible misfortune, and he could do nothing but stare dumbly into the dark pit which yawned below him.

But Nipper need not have worried himself greatly.

It was true that the famous detective had fallen somewhat heavily, but most of the noise which Nipper had heard had been made by the splintering timbers of the ladder.

As a matter of fact, Nelson Lee had scarcely fallen more than a couple of yards, and he was very little the worse for his adventure. He had felt the ladder giving way, and had instinctively prepared himself for the fall, with the fortunate result that he alighted without injury.

The detective was on his feet in a moment, and his first consideration was to

turn his face upwards, and to reassure Nipper regarding his safety.

"It's all right, young 'un—no bones broken!" he called cheerily. "The ladder was unable to bear my weight, and it gave way rather more suddenly than I expected!"

He heard Nipper give a sigh of relief.

"Oh! Thank goodness you're all right, guv'nor!" exclaimed the lad thankfully. "I thought you'd broken yourself into little bits by the appalling din you made! But what about me? How the dickens can I get down now that the ladder's given way?"

This was a problem which had to be solved, but the famous detective—thanks to the kind consideration of their enemies—was equal to it.

"The blankets, young 'un!" he said briskly. "I fancy they'll come in useful, after all! You'd better knot a couple of them together, and then descend the ladder to the point where it has broken. You can then secure the blanket-line to one of the rugs, and lower yourself down to me."

Nipper was enthusiastic.

"That's a great wheeze, guv'nor!" he exclaimed. "I'll do just as you suggest, and be with you in a couple of ticks!"

He left the yawning pit-mouth, and hurried across the dungeon to where the parcel

of blankets lay. Then he quickly secured two of them together by knotting their corners, slung them over his shoulder, and prepared himself for the descent.

Before he left the dungeon, however, Nipper took the precaution to stuff the majority of the candles into his pocket—guessing that they would probably come in handy before he and his master finally succeeded in reaching the open air once more.

By the time that Nipper was ready he found that Nelson Lee—at the bottom of the shaft—had relit the fallen candle, and was waiting for him with the light in his hand. The detective presented a weird appearance to Nipper, for Lee was surrounded by the fallen fragments of the broken ladder, and was himself smothered in dirt and grime.

But such things as these were the merest trifles, and could afford to be laughed at. The main thing was to escape from this mysterious and hateful prison, and to again get upon the track of the criminals who had been responsible for their incarceration.

Nipper experienced no difficulty whatever in descending the ladder to the point where it had broken, and his slight weight appeared to have no effect upon it at all. And when he had secured the blanket to a convenient rung, he slithered down the rest of the way with the greatest of ease.

"Good!" said Nelson Lee easily. "You see, young 'un, there is a passage leading out of this shaft, and I have every hope that it will enable us to find our way into the open. If it does, we shall have reason to congratulate ourselves—not only on account of our own comfort, but for a far more important reason."

"What's that?" asked Nipper, peering along the tunnel which faced them.

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Surely that is an unnecessary question?" he suggested. "Have you already forgotten what 'Mephistopheles' said in his note?"

"No—but I don't quite see——" began Nipper.

"Did he not say that we were to remain in the dungeon for at least a week?" cut in Lee crisply. "Did he not provide us with enough food and drink to last that time? He did, Nipper, and the fact that he did so is a clear indication that he intends to leave us to our own devices until such time as he can release us with impunity! In a nutshell, he is perfectly convinced that our escape is an impossibility, and if we succeed in regaining our liberty we shall be able to score a great triumph over him and his companion."

Nipper nodded eagerly.

"You mean that we can work against them—when all the time they'll think we're here in this beastly place?" he said quickly. "Why, of course, gov'nor—I can see what you mean now! But it's not going to be an easy matter to trace the crooks, you know. They'll be on their guard——"

"Not particularly, since you and I are the only individuals who have so far crossed their path," cut in Lee shrewdly. "We managed to locate Mr. Bill Stockton by means of the stolen ring, but as he now thinks we're safely imprisoned, he won't be unduly cautious. The police, remember, so far, are at fault regarding the authors of the robbery at Barlow's, and you may be quite sure that the criminals are glorying in their fancied security."

Nelson Lee's reasoning was perfectly sound, as Nipper could see at once. It was abundantly obvious that the crooks had taken very prompt measures to clear their path of the detective and his assistant—for they were the only enemies they feared. And now, in spite of everything, Lee and Nipper were well on the way to making their escape!

The situation was a curious one, but the detective hoped that it would lead to highly satisfactory results. He and Nipper were determined to make the utmost of their time if they succeeded in regaining their liberty, and it would be a great advantage to them to be able to work unsuspected and unhindered. For the criminals would be quite off their guard, and would not concern themselves about their two "prisoners."

The whole case, up to this point, had been extremely bizarre and unusual, and even now Nelson Lee knew very little indeed. He suspected that Professor Cyrus Zingrave was concerned in the robbery at Barlow's, and it was practically an established fact that the man named Bill Stockton was associated with him.

But how had this amazing pair succeeded in carrying out their plans? What extraordinary means were they employing to assist them in their crooked work?

It was evident that they were making use of some unknown and unsuspected method of dealing with safes—a method which made the use of locks and strong-rooms little more than a farce. What manner of instrument could it be which rendered toughened steel into putty, and caused a speeding motor-car to wreck itself by turning turtle?

The thing was almost beyond belief, but Nelson Lee knew it to be a fact. He had seen the result of the mysterious and invisible destructor, and he was fully determined to bring to justice the criminals who were responsible for its use.

And in order to do so it was essential that he and Nipper should leave this weird place without delay.

The pair, each armed with a lighted candle, commenced the journey along the subterranean tunnel, their spirits rising with every step they took. It was good to know that such a means of escape existed, and that they would not have to remain in their prison above.

The passage was narrow and low-built, but was comparatively dry. It had been hewn out of the chalky earth hundreds of

years before, but it was still in a state of good preservation—the floor being hard and surprisingly free from debris.

Nipper was elated at the ease with which they were progressing, and he gave a grin of delight as he thought of the turn of events.

"Freedom, guv'nor—freedom at last!" he exclaimed gleefully. "Ten minutes ago it looked as though we were booked for a long stay in that ghastly dungeon, but, thanks to your smartness, we're on the way out—"

"Don't be too certain of that, young 'un!" interrupted the detective, peering intently ahead. "I don't wish to put a damper on your hopes, but I fancy that it will not be quite so easy to leave this tunnel as we thought. Just glance ahead there, Nipper!"

Nipper did so wonderingly, and his spirits seemed to drop down to zero point upon the instant.

For, not more than two yards in front of them, the roof of the tunnel had caved in, and the resulting pile of debris completely blocked the passage!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FATE OF THE RACER.



"G O O D Heavens!" ejaculated Nipper, in consternation.

"We're trapped, guv'nor! If we are unable to get past this obstruction, we might just as well have remained in the dungeon! Oh, what ghastly luck!"

It was certainly unfortunate, but Nelson Lee did not lose hope. His keen eyes were already searching the pile of fallen earth, and his discomfited assistant looked at him in some astonishment.

"There must be an inlet somewhere—that is certain," muttered the detective, as if to himself, as he examined the bank of debris intently. "No doubt the rubbish has fallen in such a manner as to leave—"

"What's that, guv'nor?" cut in Nipper quickly. "You think there's still a chance for us?"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Why not?" he asked. "It is quite evident that this pile of earth does not completely block the passage, as we first thought, for if that was the case there would be absolutely no draught here. As it is, there is a very distinct current of air blowing along the passage, and that indicates that there is some cranny or other through which the air is passing."

"By jingo, I believe you're right, sir!" said Nipper. "You mean that it will be possible for us to force our way through this rubbish at the point where the wind is blowing through?"

"Precisely," agreed the detective. "There is no need to give way to despair yet awhile, young 'un, unless I'm greatly mistaken. Look here, see how the flame of the candle is flickering!"

Lee held the candle against the top of the pile of fallen earth, quite near to the roof of the passage, and Nipper could see that the flame was visibly affected. Even as he watched it, a sudden gust of wind caused it to almost become extinguished, and that proved beyond doubt that the detective was correct in his surmise.

"You're right again, sir—as usual!" exclaimed Nipper, his voice regaining all its former exuberance. "I can see that it won't take us long to shift enough of that earth to make a hole large enough for us to squeeze through. In fact, I can manage it myself, while you hold the candles."

He was as good as his word, and within a minute he was busily engaged in the task of burrowing a passage-way through the great mound of earth. Fortunately, the pile was not very thick, and Nipper knew that he would be able to accomplish his purpose in a comparatively short time.

He got through it much sooner than he had expected, and in five or six minutes both he and his master were standing upon the further side of the obstruction. Nipper looked more like a navvy than a detective's assistant, but that was a mere detail.

"Thank goodness we're through, guv'nor!" he exclaimed fervently. "When I first saw that heap of earth I thought our number was up! But we're not out of the wood yet, in all likelihood. Perhaps there'll be a few more mounds of earth to tunnel through."

Nipper's pessimism, however, was unnecessary. For as the pair proceeded along the passage, they came to the end of it quite abruptly, and found themselves confronted by the base of a circular stone staircase, similar to the staircases found in many old churches. The structure was falling into decay through the action of time, and it looked by no means safe to make the ascent.

"This will need very careful negotiation, young 'un," said Nelson Lee, looking at the battered and ancient staircase sceptically. "Many of the treads are completely missing, as you can see, and we must proceed with great caution. An accident here might lead to fatal consequences, for it would probably bring the whole structure tumbling about our ears!"

"You're jolly cheerful, guv'nor!" said Nipper with a grin. "But we've got to take our chance, in any case, or else go back to the dungeon and cool our heels for a week. And I can't imagine us doing that."

Nelson Lee smiled, and tried his weight upon the first stair of the flight. It seemed

to be firm enough, and he proceeded to mount higher and higher—taking care to test each stair before allowing the whole of his weight to bear upon it.

Nipper followed some distance behind him, and in this manner the pair gradually mounted to the top of the old staircase. By adopting these careful methods, they arrived at the summit without mishap, and eventually found themselves in a partially ruined tower, with great slits in the walls.

Nelson Lee walked to the nearest of these slits, and peered out into the starlit night. Then he gave vent to a little murmur of satisfaction, and turned to his assistant.

"We are quite close to the spot where our car was wrecked, young 'un," he announced cheerily. "I can recognise the surrounding countryside quite easily, and so will you, I fancy. This tower belongs to the old ruined abbey which we have frequently observed from the St. Alban's Road, and we're not more than a mile from the spot where the accident occurred.

Nipper stared out of the slit, and nodded at once.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he exclaimed. "And I thought we were miles and miles away from here. I can't understand why we were brought to this old ruin. Hallo, what's that glare over there, sir—away to the left?"

Nelson Lee looked in the direction indicated, and saw that Nipper was pointing to a dull, flickering radiance which appeared to be only a short distance away—towards London.

"It is evidently a fire of some sort, young 'un," commented the detective, watching the glow interestedly. "It appears to be situated on the roadside, and it is probably due to a bonfire— By James!"

Nelson Lee broke off suddenly as a thought struck him, and Nipper looked at him in some surprise.

"What's the matter, sir?" he asked.

The detective nodded towards the glare in the near distance with a grim expression upon his clear-cut features.

"I fancy I can guess the nature of that 'bonfire,' Nipper," he said, with an angry glint in his eyes. "No doubt our red-cloaked friend is responsible for it—"

"The crook who calls himself Mephistopheles?" interjected Nipper.

"Yes," said Lee. "After the damage he caused to our racer, he probably thought he'd finish the job for good and all!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A LIFT TO GRAY'S INN ROAD.



GREAT guns, you don't mean to say that the glare is caused by our old bus on fire?" ejaculated Nipper, with an angry snort. "That's too horrible a fate

for such an old pal, guv'nor! Why, that car was one in a thousand, and never let us down in all the thousands of miles we've travelled in her."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"It's a sad termination for so gallant a vehicle, but I can see no hope, my lad," he said. "It is obvious that the crooks deliberately set the car on fire in order to avoid undue comment. If it had been found on the roadside in the condition I described to you, there would have been a tremendous amount of publicity, especially as you and I are missing. But by firing the car, and completely destroying it, they have avoided the possibility of the vehicle being identified, and all mention of our sudden disappearance will be kept secret. It was a cute move, Nipper, and I don't think we can exactly blame the criminals for their action."

The famous criminologist undoubtedly had hit the nail upon the head in his surmise. He saw at once that it would never have done for the car to be found on the roadside with the great hole burned in the radiator, and the front of the chassis melted into putty. For such a discovery would have given rise to inquiries and investigations, and it would soon have become known that he and Nipper had vanished.

As it was, the charred remains of the car would leave little room for comment, and—even if it were eventually identified—the process would take a considerable time.

The loss of the racer did not seem to worry the detective in the least, and he said very little more about it. He was thankful that he and Nipper had managed to make their escape from the dungeon, and his one anxiety now was to get back to London, and to continue the battle with the mysterious crooks.

An investigation of the ruined tower led to the discovery that a second staircase led down to the base, and Nelson Lee and Nipper did not take long to make the descent, treading gingerly upon the ancient and crumbling stairs in order to avoid a sudden fall.

They reached the bottom in safety, and then left the ruins, making their way across a field or two towards the high road. It was their intention to visit the scene of the fire before leaving the locality, just to satisfy themselves that their suspicions were correct.

Nipper was very thoughtful as they trudged along the road towards the glare, and he suddenly turned to Lee perplexedly.

"I can't understand why you and I were drugged and then brought to the dungeon, guv'nor," he said. "I should have thought that the crooks would have taken us much further afield."

"Why, when there was such an ideal spot so close at hand?" asked the detective. "It seems quite obvious to me, young

'un, that we were taken to the handiest place for disposal—a very smart notion to get rid of us rapidly. Naturally, we were not expected to make our escape so quickly, if we managed to regain our freedom at all, and no doubt our friends would be considerably surprised if they could know the facts. But there is no fear of that, in my opinion."

"No fear at all," agreed Nipper. "The way they supplied us with grub and blankets proves that we weren't expected to leave the dungeon just yet. But I can see that you were right about the poor old car, guv'nor. That's her, sure enough."

By this time the pair were drawing near to the spot where the fire was burning, and it was evident to them that the glare had been caused by the unfortunate racer. The flames were now practically dead, but the tangled mass of wreckage still glowed dully against the dark background of the night.

When Lee and Nipper finally reached the charred wreckage, they questioned one of the staring yokels, and learned that the car was found on fire, with no apparent owner in attendance. They learned, further, that the police had been to the spot, but had found it impossible to extinguish the fire, and had finally left it to burn itself out.

There was no further information available, and there was no object in remaining upon the scene. Evidently the whole affair was regarded as a complete mystery, and Nelson Lee was quite content to allow it to remain so for the present.

The hour was now getting somewhat late, and Nelson Lee and Nipper decided to walk to the nearest station and take train to London. But, as luck would have it, a



As Harry flung open the door of the cupboard he received another shock, for he was confronted by the bound and gagged figure of Mrs. Newman—his father's housekeeper!

motorist came along just after they had left the scene of the "accident," and the detective hailed him without hesitation.

A brief conversation between Nelson Lee and the motorist resulted in a hearty offer to convey the wanderers not only to the station, as the detective requested, but direct to their home in Gray's Inn Road.

"You might just as well allow me to take you all the way, Mr. Lee," said the motorist, who introduced himself as a Mr. Basil Fullford. "I'm going direct to the City, and I shall be only too delighted

to oblige you. I can scarcely do less, in view of the misfortune which has overtaken you."

Lee and Nipper thanked him, and took their seats in his car, the detective requesting Mr. Fullford to make no mention of the identity of his passengers to a living soul.

He agreed readily enough, and lost no time in driving his powerful machine towards the great metropolis, which was reached at record speed.

Nelson Lee and Nipper were by no means daunted by their misadventures, and they were more firmly resolved than ever to get the better of their opponents and to bring them to book.

Exactly how to set about the task was something of a problem, but—although they were unaware of it—events were shaping themselves in such a manner that an opportunity to get upon the track of the criminals would present itself much sooner than they expected.

CHAPTER XIX.

A TERRIBLE HOMECOMING.



HARRY LANGFORD entered his cosily-furnished sitting-room, and flung his bag down upon a chair.

"Ah, it's good to be back again, even after a single night's absence!" he said to himself, as he lit a cigarette. "Billy and his people are the very last word in hospitality, but there's nothing like one's own quarters for real enjoyment!"

The speaker was evidently a very wise young man, and his words indicated that he was possessed of more than the usual amount of common sense. He was at present an undergraduate at Oxford, and he had just returned from a visit to a friend's house some distance away in the country.

The visit had been an enjoyable one in every respect, but Langford was one of those individuals who, despite his faultless manners and his brilliant powers as a conversationalist, could never feel really at his ease at the social functions which he occasionally attended.

He was a studious youngster with a very real ambition to succeed in life, and he had inherited these characteristics from his father—Mr. Roger Langford, the famous scientific engineer.

It was afternoon when Harry returned to his rooms, and his first act was to look round for any correspondence which might have been delivered during his absence.

A little pile of letters lay upon his desk, and the young man noticed that beside them a telegram was standing propped up

against an ash-tray, in such a position that he could not fail to see it at first glance.

With a few quick strides he walked over to the desk, and picked up the tinted envelope curiously. It was not often that he received wires, and he had a little frown upon his brow as he ripped open the flap.

A second later, however, the frown gave place to a look of excited delight, and Langford read the message upon the form a second time with every indication of satisfaction.

It was exceedingly brief, and read:

"Success. Come home at once.—FATHER."

There was nothing more, but what little there was seemed to be quite sufficient to cause Langford the keenest pleasure.

"By jingo, what terrific news!" he muttered under his breath. "The pater has been working like a Trojan on this thing, and it's great to know that he's come out on top at last! I feel as excited as a Third Form kid, and I shall have to rush up to town by the first available train!"

He glanced at the date, and the time of despatching the telegram, and he gave vent to a little exclamation of annoyance when he saw that the wire had been sent off early the previous evening.

"Confound it!" he muttered. "If I'd been here last night, as usual, instead of playing the fool at Billy's house, I could have gone to London by the night train, and been with the gov'nor before midnight. Now I suppose he'll be worrying himself like the deuce because he hasn't heard from me or seen me! It's a beastly nuisance, but the best thing to do is to buzz off at once and explain."

Langford was really annoyed at the delay which had occurred, for he hated to disappoint anybody, least of all his father. But, in the circumstances, he was not to blame in the least, and he could do nothing now but try to make amends by hurrying up to London as quickly as possible.

He found, upon consulting a time-table, that he could catch a train within fifteen minutes, and he telephoned for a taxi to pick him up at once. The vehicle arrived with great promptitude, and Langford stowed himself into it, and ordered the driver to get him to the station in time for the London train under pain of instant death.

The taximan, with a grin, accomplished the feat with a couple of minutes to spare, and the youthful traveller took his seat aboard the London train with a little sigh of relief. He felt tremendously anxious to meet his father, and to congratulate him upon his success, and he was glad that he had not missed the train.

During the journey Langford could not settle himself down to read, and he passed the time by gazing out of the windows.

And, upon arrival at the London terminus, he chartered another taxi, and told the driver to take him as quickly as possible to Cambridge Terrace, Regent's Park.

The ride did not take long, and Harry, after paying the cabman, turned into the gateway of his father's house, and looked up at the windows. They were dark and forlorn-looking, and for some reason Langford felt a sense of impending disaster.

Fortunately, he possessed a latchkey, and he quickly withdrew it from his pocket and inserted it into the lock. The next second he was inside the hall, and again that queer feeling of foreboding seemed to descend upon him.

"What the deuce is the matter with me?" muttered Harry to himself, as he threw his bag down upon the hall carpet. "Everything must be all right, of course, and yet it seems queer to come home and find the house dark and silent! I wonder where the pater is, and Mrs. Newman?"

Mrs. Newman was his father's housekeeper, and there was no sign of her whatever. Usually, she was bustling about the house with surprising energy, and her absence seemed to make the very atmosphere of the place dull and lifeless.

Harry, after switching on the light, looked round the hall keenly. It was just the same as usual to all outward appearances, and yet the newcomer seemed to feel that something was wrong. The sensation was distinctly eerie, and with a little shrug of his shoulders, Langford left the hall and made his way towards his father's laboratory.

This latter apartment was situated at the end of a long passage beyond the hall, and was the senior Langford's own special den—a sort of workshop and snuggerly combined. No unauthorised person was ever allowed within its sacred walls without special permission.

Harry reached the door, and flung it open with a cheery greeting upon his lips, fully expecting to see his father standing before him. But he was confronted by nothing but solid darkness, and he was somewhat taken aback.

"Well, I'm dashed!" he muttered below his breath, as he entered the room and groped for the electric light switch. "I've never known the gov'nor to be out at this time of the evening—Great Scott!"

He broke off with a sudden surprised exclamation as the room was flooded with light, and there was every cause for the young man's consternation.

For the beautifully equipped laboratory in which he stood presented an appalling appearance of desolation and destruction.

The whole place, in fact, seemed to have been deliberately wrecked!

CHAPTER XX.

HARRY LEARNS THE NEWS.



FOR a few moments Langford stood looking round him in absolute horror, gazing at his father's treasured possessions with dilated eyes, and a wild rage tearing

at his heart.

Who could possibly have been responsible for this act of wanton vandalism, he asked himself? What manner of man was it who had been here for the purpose of causing such terrible havoc among his father's precious objects? Above all, what had become of the elder Langford?

These questions flew through Harry's confused brain with the rapidity of lightning, but he could find no answer to any of them. He could only accept the fact that the laboratory had been wrecked, and that his father was missing.

It was evident to the young man that something very much out of the usual had occurred, and, after a silent contemplation of the scene before him, he pulled himself together and let out a lusty hail.

"Father!" he called loudly. "I say, pater—where are you?"

There was no reply, and his voice seemed to echo mockingly through the deserted house. The whole place was as silent as the grave, and Harry now began to get genuinely alarmed.

Quickly he made a search of the house, visiting every room, both upstairs and down. But all his efforts were in vain, and he could discover no trace whatever of his father.

At last he was forced to the conclusion that Mr. Langford was not in the house, and, in view of the condition of the laboratory, Harry concluded that something really disastrous must have overtaken him. The whole affair was extraordinary, and the young man decided to communicate with the police without delay.

There was a telephone installed in the hall, and within a couple of minutes the perplexed undergraduate was pouring out his story into the eager ear of the inspector in charge of the nearest police-station. The official promised to come along at once, and Harry hung up the receiver of the instrument and prepared to await the inspector's arrival.

There was nothing for the young man to do but pace up and down the hall carpet, and while he was thus engaged he became aware of a curious sound which seemed to emanate from a closed cupboard which opened into the passage leading to the laboratory.

The sound was very slight at first, but it gradually developed into an unmistakable

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Thanks for your suggestion, Mick, but I'm afraid it arrived too late. Even if I had decided to use it, I couldn't have done so, because I had completed the Moat Hollow series the same week as your letter arrived.

Hallo, Smithy! Yes, it's you I'm referring to, Smith Thompson. What's this about the Portrait Gallery? I'm delighted to have your description, but aren't you trying to have a little joke with me when you talk about "your turn" to appear in the Gallery? Great Scott! You don't seriously think that all you readers are going to appear? My dear chap, it would take about a thousand years, more or less, for the Gallery to finish! And even in these days of Thyroid Glands, I don't think we shall live until that age!

Your postscript, G. T. Currie, prompts me to give you an answer. You say: "Try and answer each reader separately." That's all very well, but some readers write to me about things which interest them personally, but which are of no general appeal. I want to do something more than just fill up the pages. This "Between Ourselves" feature is chiefly designed so that I can entertain you for a few minutes and get more cnumny. So I only write about things which I think will appeal to everybody.

I was particularly pleased to get your letter, Ellie Thomson. I don't get many from Australia—although, of course, heaps of Australian letters are regularly received by Handforth (on the quiet, I'm a bit jealous). But perhaps they'll begin to roll in presently. We live in hopes. Thanks, also, for your Christmas card, your photograph, and your good wishes. I hope your eye is all right now. It must be rather painful to come into collision with a three-inch beetle when you are quietly reading! You remind me of "Willy" when you refer to centipedes and black spiders as "regular beauties." I'm afraid I should have quite another name for them!

While I'm writing this, there's a dense fog outside, and this reminds me of America. (It's your own fault if I fill up this page with this sort of stuff. Lots of you have asked me to continue my "American Notebook," so I'm doing it this way. When you've had enough, tell me to ring off, or I'll go on like this week after week!) Now, about the fog. I don't mean to say that the fog itself reminds me of America, although while I was in New York I experienced one or two dense mists which were certainly Mr. Fog's first cousin.

No, what I mean is this. I discovered, in talking to Americans—that is, Americans who had never been to England—that nearly all of them hold the view that London is

always in a pea-soup-like condition. When I referred to a clear, sunny day in London, they were surprised. Many Americans take it quite for granted that London is merely another word for fog—that our great Metropolis is enshrouded with fog, year in and year out! And the extraordinary misconceptions of London, and England in general, fairly staggered me.

I have come to the conclusion that there is only one explanation. The Americans are a nation of boosters. Wherever they go they "tell the world" about their "wonderful country," their skyscrapers, their rugged scenery, and all the rest of it. We, on the other hand, although we have the greatest city in the world, and the finest climate on earth, say nothing about these things whatever—unless we run them down! I'm quite serious when I refer to our climate as the finest on earth. Our newspapers and our humorists are pleased to jibe at it, but perhaps they don't mean what they say. It is our climate, don't forget, which has produced such men as Drake, Nelson, Shakespeare, Milton, Dickens, and Captain Scott and Sir Ernest Shackleton, and thousands of others.

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groan—a sort of moaning groan which seemed to speak of a person in considerable pain.

For a few seconds Harry listened to the sounds with a white face, and then he hurried to the cupboard and flung open the door. As he did so he received another shock, for he was confronted by the bound and gagged figure of Mrs. Newman, his father's housekeeper!

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Harry, stepping into the cupboard and lifting the woman out. "What on earth is the meaning of this, Mrs. Newman? Who is responsible for treating you in this manner?"

As he spoke the young man untied the gag which had bound the woman's mouth, and, after she had taken a gulp of breath, she turned to him with an anxious look in her eyes.

"Thank goodness you have come, Master Harry!" she gasped. "There's been the devil's own work in this house, I can tell you! Last night your father—your father——"

She paused for breath, and Harry bent down closer to her.

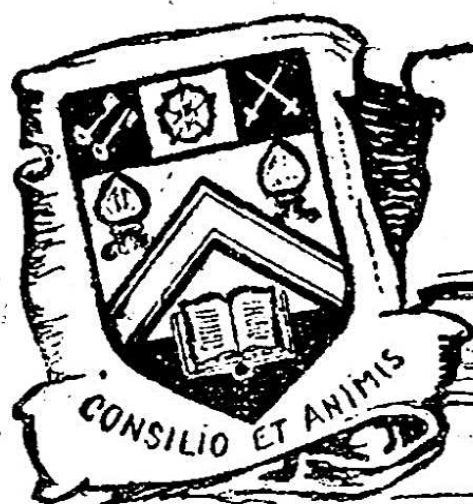
"Well, what happened to my father, Mrs. Newman?" he asked tensely.

"He—he——"

Mrs. Newman's efforts proved too much for her, and she rolled off the chair to the floor in a dead faint, leaving Harry in a state of greater anxiety than ever.

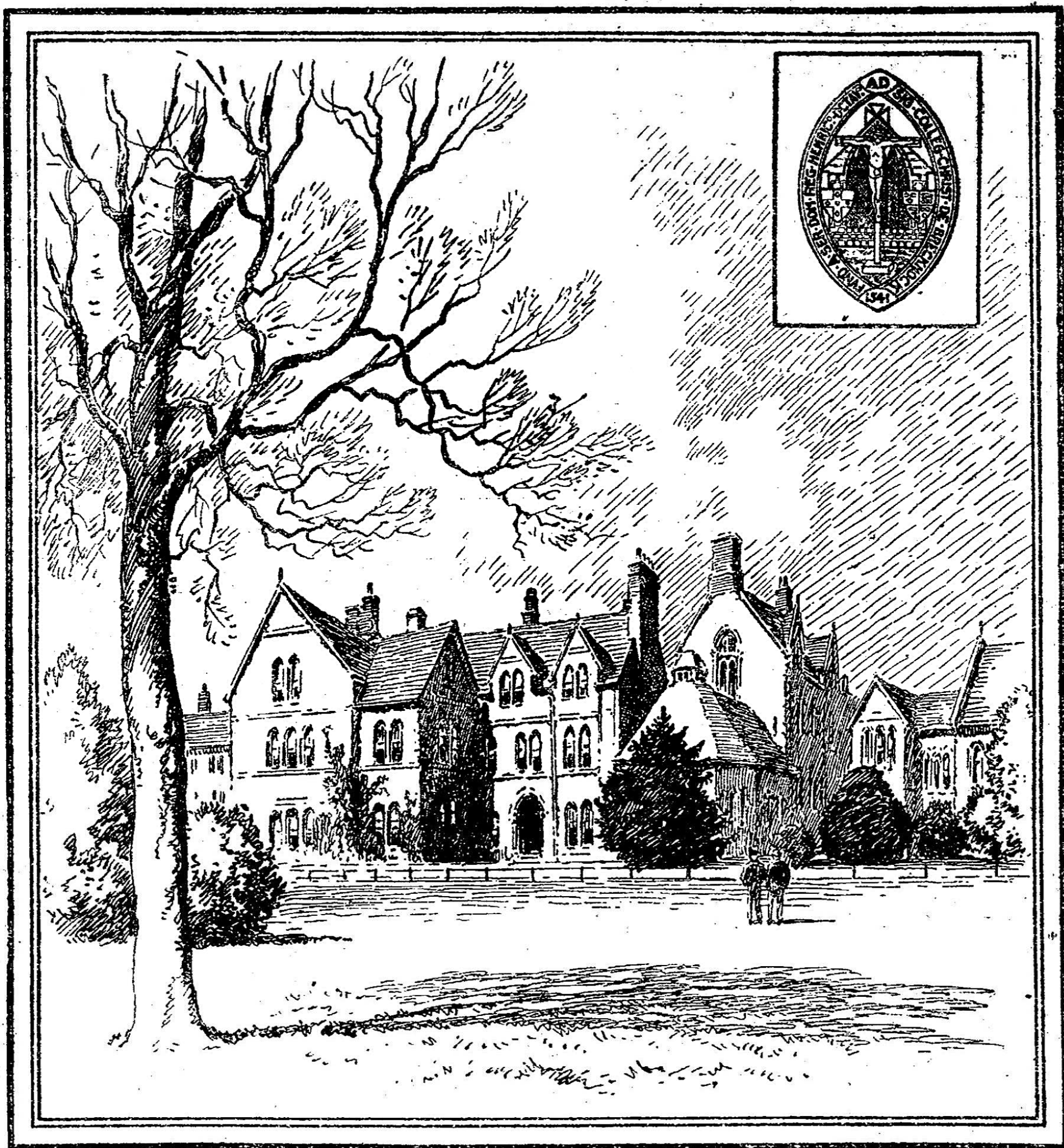
What awful thing had overtaken his father?

(End of Fourth Instalment.)



St. Frank's Magazine.

No. 64. Vol. 3. Edited by R. Pitt. February 14, 1925.

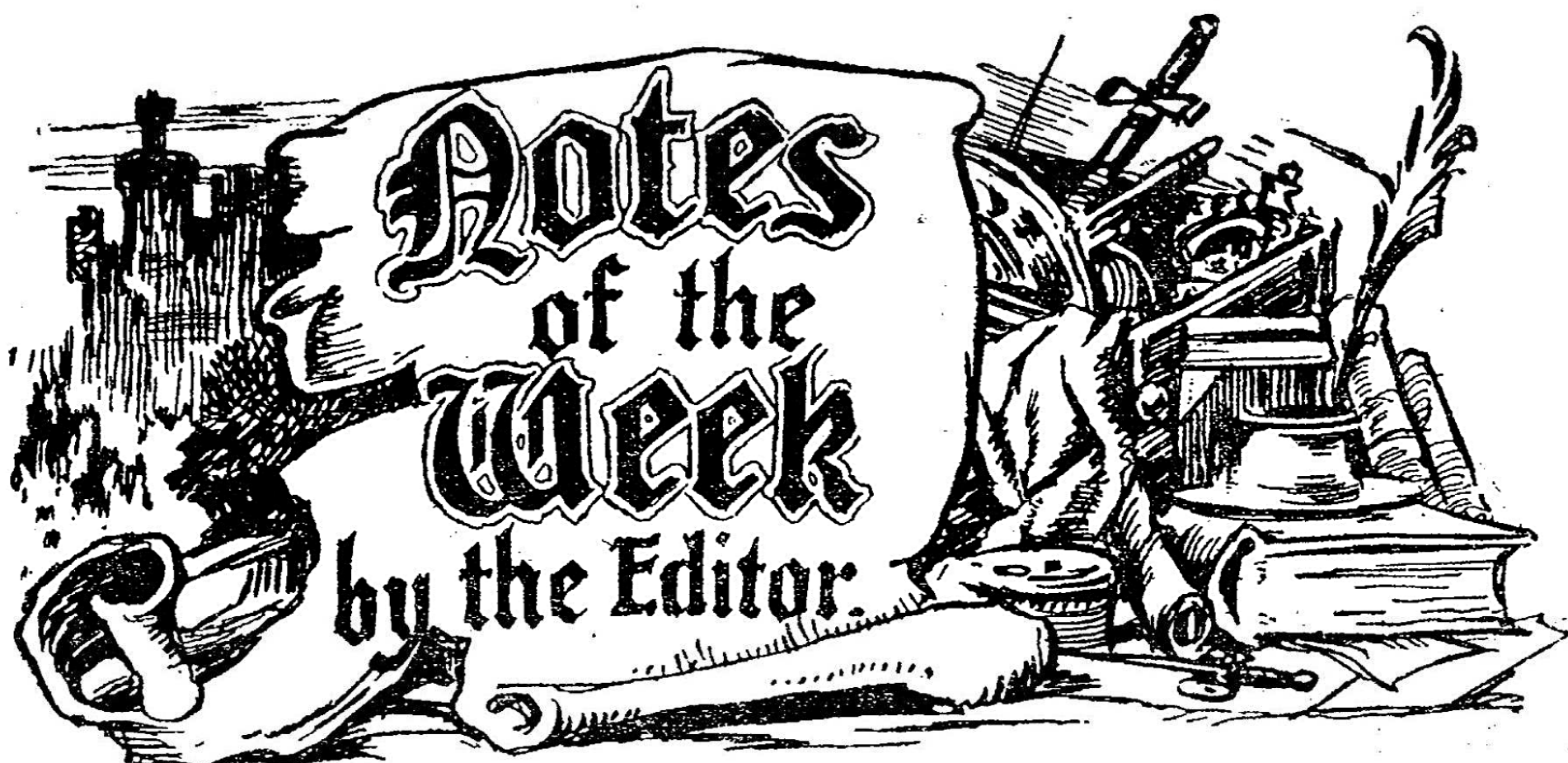


OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS SERIES OF ART SKETCHES.

No. 65. CHRIST'S COLLEGE, BRECON.

Founded by Henry VIII in 1541, and re-constituted by Act of Parliament in 1853, Christ's College, Brecon, dates back much earlier than the time of Henry VIII, records of its previous history having disappeared. Some of the existing buildings are at least as

old as the 13th century. The modern buildings were erected in 1906. Games played are Rugby football, hockey, and cricket. Brecon College ranks as one of the leading public schools in Wales.



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

My dear Chums,

Apropos my remarks last week on the question of abolishing tuckshops at public schools, there is a well-known Fourth-Former here at St. Frank's who has got the wind up pretty badly over it. Most of you know who I mean. Food is his hobby, and you will nearly always find him at Mrs. Hake's. He has written me a long letter in defence of the tuckshop, declaring that no public school could exist for long without its tuckshop, and protesting vigorously that he is not a gourmand. Says Fatty, a gourmand is he who eats more than he needs. On account of his great bulk, our fat friend says that he seldom gets enough to eat, and is therefore less deserving of being called a gourmand than the fellow who eats more than he can comfortably digest. A pretty argument this!

THE PHANTOM PROTECTOR.

There can be no doubt whatever now that the Phantom Protector is not a mere apparition emanating from the fertile imagination of a few highly-strung juniors. Whatever his identity, he is something material, and evidently means to look after Tommy Watson and the other poor chaps at Moat Hollow. Nevertheless, this mysterious figure, who appears, as it were, from nowhere just when he is wanted and then vanishes again in the same strange manner is remarkably clever in hiding his movements from the vigilant eye of old Creepe. Some of the fellows thought it was me in disguise, which, I don't mind saying, is paying me a greater compliment than I deserve.

KEEPING MR. CREEPE BUSY.

What with our raid last week and the unexpected visits of the Phantom Protector, Mr. Creepe must know he is being watched,

a circumstance that is not likely to improve his temper or his nerves. We can be sure that the wily schoolmaster has not left a stone unturned in trying to track the Phantom Protector to his lair. That he has not yet succeeded, nor is likely to succeed, says much for the astuteness of the phantom.

WATSON'S SURPRISING DECISION.

We were all a bit disappointed with Tommy Watson for staying behind at Moat Hollow after we had gone to a great deal of trouble to rescue him. Apparently, he had changed his mind at the last moment. Tommy wants understanding at times. It is quite obvious now that he did not want to desert the other boys at the school, and that he thought he would serve a more useful purpose by remaining behind. Being rather blunt of speech, he couldn't explain himself on the spur of the moment.

A SUGGESTION FOR GOODWIN.

An enthusiastic reader of the HOW TO DO IT series, who has made all the articles described, except one, has written to Goodwin saying that, owing to the floods in his part of the country, he and his pals would like to make a boat, and suggests that Goodwin would make this the next subject of his articles. Goodwin tells me that he is quite willing to oblige in a few weeks' time. At present, he is busily engaged in writing a series on how to run and print a school magazine. This will be completed in three parts, after which Goodwin will write a special aviation series, showing how to make various kinds of kites, gliders, and aeroplanes. Much can be learned of the science of aviation by experiments with kites and gliders. All readers who are interested in aeroplanes will find these articles exceedingly inspiring.

Your old chum,

REGGIE PITT.

TRAVEL TALES.



By An Old Boy

(Lord Dorrimore's Weekly Trifle.)

No. 28.—A MONKEY COMEDY WHICH WAS ALMOST A TRAGEDY.

DURING in the bungalow up in the Himalayas, where I had gone with the general and his family to avoid the sweltering heat, we were all startled by an uncanny noise in an adjoining room, in which the general's wife had left her year-old baby, of course in charge of an ayah.

She rushed to see what was the matter, and, finding that the room was empty—no baby, no ayah!—she gave a shriek, and we all ran to investigate. The sight that met our gaze was that of a female baboon, sitting up on a rafter some twenty-five feet above our heads, holding in its arms the general's baby! Of course, the mother was almost frantic, and the baby was singularly inert (the ayah had drugged it), while the monkey rocked the baby and gibbered to it.

What was to be done? Various missiles were thrown at the brute, soft ones for fear of hurting the baby, and the general threw a powder-puff, which the baboon deftly caught with one hand, smelt it and tasted it, and then threw it back, hitting the general full in the face.

Things went on like this for some time, and then the baby woke up, and began to yell and to claw and hit its weird nurse. The monkey, angry and snarly, leapt from one rafter to another, holding the baby upside down and all ways. At last she threw the baby at the general's head, and it was caught by two natives. The general rushed for his gun to shoot the animal which had so defied and humiliated him. But when he returned the baboon had vanished. The native servants had opened the door to let it escape, for they hold that monkeys are sacred. That's why they swarm.

FACTS LET LOOSE

By EUGENE ELLMORE

A FEATHERED KNIGHT.

The other day I read the following affecting little incident concerning bird heroism. A gentleman noticed in his garden a number of birds which had gathered to pick up the crumbs, etc., which he had thrown down for them. To his surprise, there appeared among them a stranger, maimed and crippled, having lost a leg. For some reason, all the sparrows set upon this hapless interloper, frustrated all its attempts to gather food, and drove it away.

But next day it appeared again, this time accompanied by an escort, who quickly proved that he was not there merely for show. He attacked the other birds in dead earnest, and kept them at bay while his weaker companion fed in ease and comfort.

Ever after that the one-legged bird was allowed to share equally with the others without interference, though it was always accompanied by the gallant little knight, ever ready to fly to its defence if necessary. But he never had to fight for her again, as she was never attacked. And he seemed to plume himself highly on his chivalrous role of escort and watcher. Among birds, as among men, courage is the kingly quality before which cruelty and cowardice shrink away abashed. It is the rarest of qualities, especially in the form of moral courage.

BIRD SUPERSTITIONS.

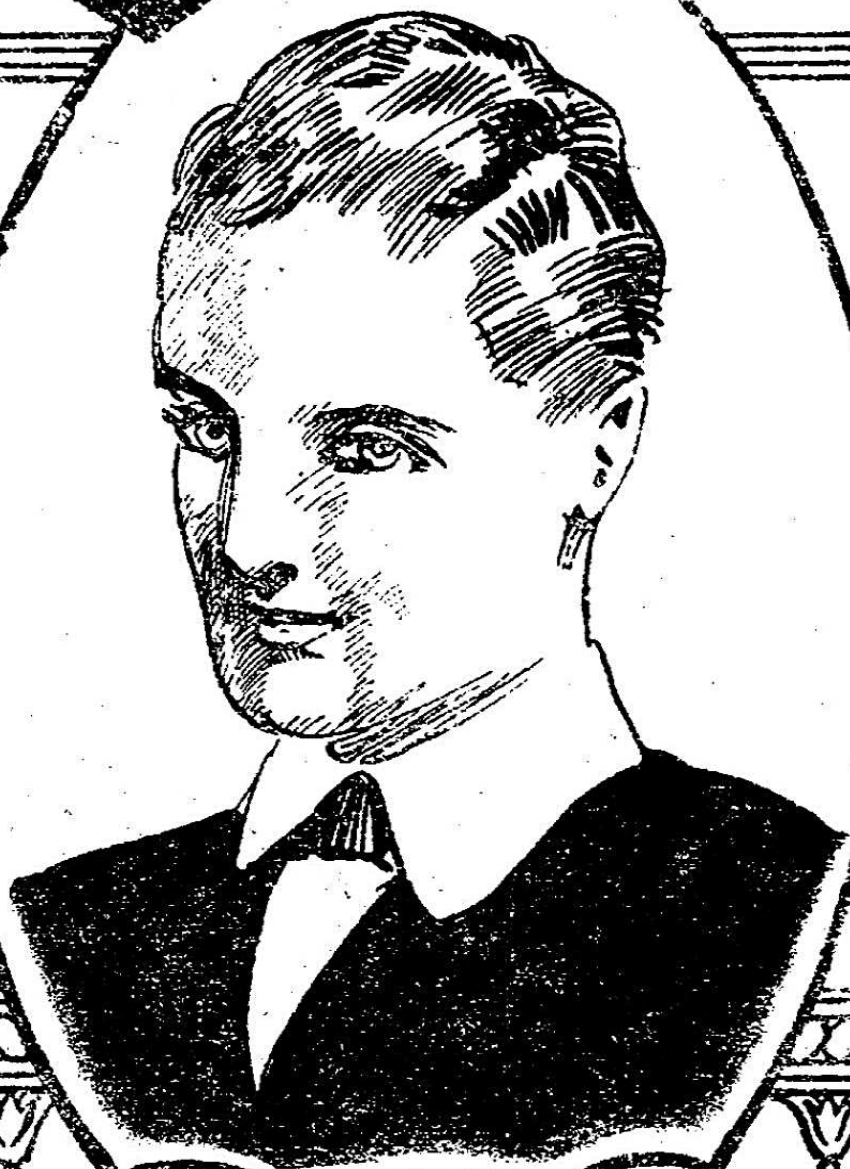
There are many of these, as old as the hills. Some people shudder when they hear the hooting and screeching of owls in the night; they think these screechings, especially if near the house, portend a death in the family. But, of course, this is nonsense. A swallow flying near the ground, and a woodpecker making extra noise, are said to foretell rainy weather, and they often do, but they are not infallible. If rooks fly home slowly and quietly it is taken as an omen of fine weather; if they are noisy and flurried and hurried, and make a great commotion in the rookery, we are to look out for storms. Perhaps more lore has gathered around the magpie than any other bird. An old rhyme has it:

"One for sorrow, two for mirth;

Three for a wedding, four for a birth."

It is said to be a good sign when a single magpie is observed to fly to the right, but a bad sign if it flies to the left.

OUR PORTRAIT GALLERY. And WHO'S WHO.



**DICK
HAMILTON**

No. 73.—DICK HAMILTON (NIPPER).

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Well-built, sturdy, with supple limbs and a finely-poised head. Well-cut, handsome, intelligent features, with an air of constant alertness in his expression. Eyes, deep grey. Hair, dark. Height, 5 ft. 4 ins. Weight, 8 st. 12 lb. Birthday, July 31st.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS:

A born leader. Capable, cool, unassuming, and utterly fearless. Possesses a fine judgment, and never acts without thinking. But once on a settled course, will pursue it relentlessly to the bitter end.

SPORTS & RECREATIONS:

A leader in football, cricket, and boxing. Keen on sports generally. Hobby: Detective work of any and every kind.

No. 74.—JOSEPH PAGE.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Squat and tubby, although not exactly stout. Short neck, and a round, cheerful face. Eyes, brown. Hair, fair. Height, 4 ft. 10 ins. Weight, 7 st. 13 lb. Birthday, October 14th.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS:

An appallingly reckless junior. Generally knocks into somebody six times a day, and is always falling downstairs and colliding with furniture. Cheerful, happy and jovial.

SPORTS & RECREATIONS:

Too rash to be much good at games. Owns a bicycle, but seldom rides, as his machine is mostly in the repair shop.



JOSEPH PAGE

THE FOURTH At ST. FRANK'S.



No. 75.—DONALD HARRON.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Medium size, with handsome features and a sleek, well-groomed appearance. Considered to be something of a dandy. Eyes, dark. Hair, dark. Height, 5 ft. 2 ins. Weight, 8 st. 7 lb. Birthday, September 14th.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS:

As acutely methodical as Page is reckless. Does everything deliberately, and is a perfect nightmare to his study-mates. Rather mean, and always knows how much money he has got to a penny.

SPORTS & RECREATIONS:

A good footballer, and plays for his House. Has won prizes for swimming, which is his summer hobby.



DONALD
HARRON

No. 76.—ARTHUR KEMP.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Slightly-built and rather weakly-looking. Quiet, studious features. Eyes, light blue. Hair, medium. Height, 4 ft. 11 ins. Weight, 7 st. 7 lb. Birthday, November 19th.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS:

Only happy when he is dipping into books, or deep in his hobby. Takes no part in "ragging" or House rows. A "quiet old stick."

SPORTS & RECREATIONS:

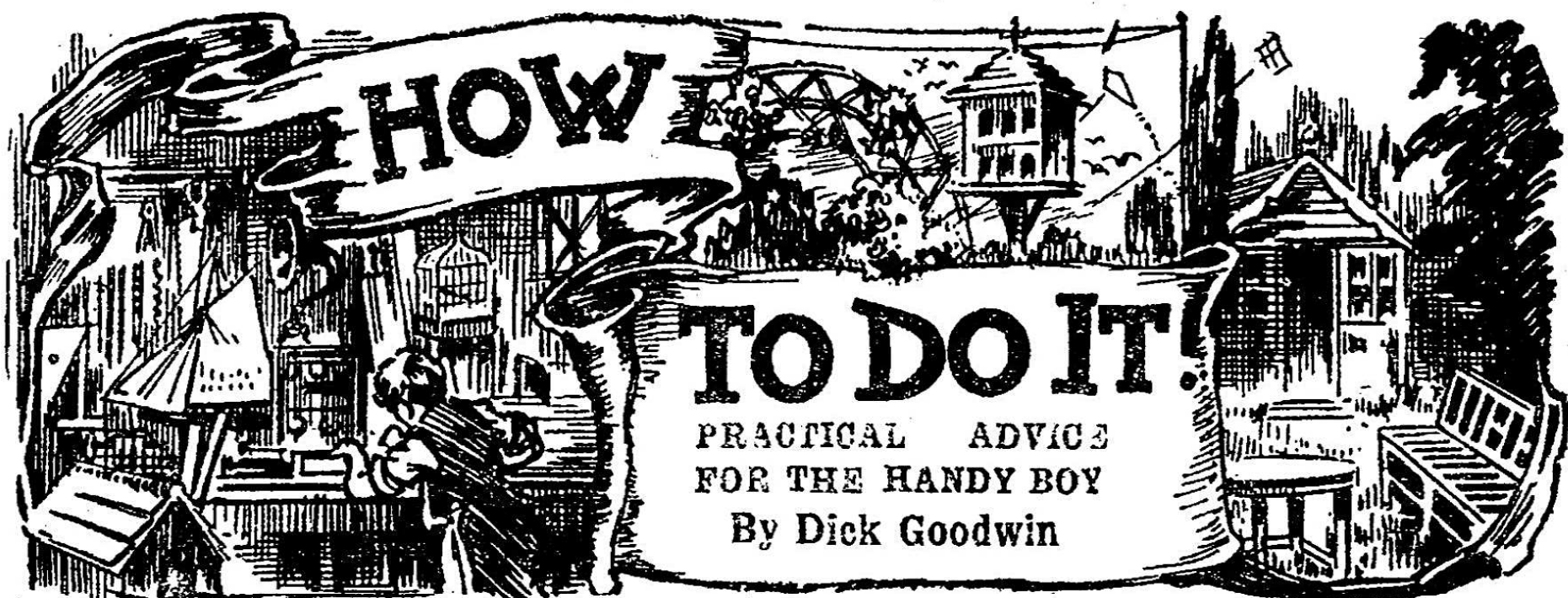
Not interested in sports, but devoted to the study of electricity, wireless, and the making of working electrical models.

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—THIRD FORM:
Willy Handforth, Tommy Hobbs, Owen Minor, Jimmy Hook.



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 LETTER BALANCE

I HAVE been asked to describe how I made the letter balance which stands on my mantelpiece; it is rather an interesting piece of work as it was made from odds and ends, and there are no separate weights, which are so liable to get lost. It will weigh up to 6 ounces. The first thing to make is the base, which is of oak. I used this wood, because it is fairly heavy and not difficult to work. A piece was sawn out to 8 in. by 3 in. by 1 in. and planed down to a width of $2\frac{3}{4}$ in. by $\frac{7}{8}$ in. with a chamfer of $\frac{1}{4}$ in. on the top edge.

CUTTING THE CHAMFER.

To work the chamfer I made a pencil line $\frac{1}{4}$ in. from the edges to show on the top and all round the sides, the wood was then placed in the vice and the two long edges planed down to the lines. The ends were cut with a chisel 1 in. wide, and specially sharpened to a keen edge, the best cut to use is a slicing action with the chisel held diagonally. The completed piece is shown at A, Fig. 2, and on it is shown, by dotted lines, the position of the brass supports, B B and C, which are shown above.

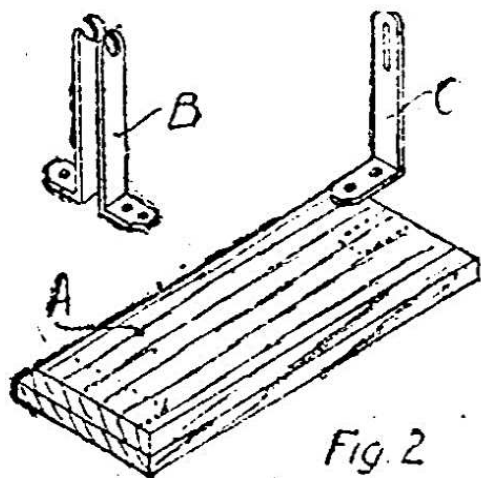


Fig 2

THE SUPPORTS

The two pieces of brass B B form the main support or standard to hold the beam, they are $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. high, 1 in. at the bottom and $\frac{3}{4}$ in.

wide. For each piece I used a length of 3 in. to allow for the bend and filing the ends to shape. At a distance of $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. above the right angle bend at the bottom drill a $\frac{1}{4}$ in. hole in each piece, but to make quite sure that both pieces are alike, they should be clamped together in the vice and drilled at the same time.

USING THE FILE.

The bottom of the holes should now be filed out to a right angle point with a small three-cornered file, but great care must be taken not to file out more than the right angle. The holes are now opened out to the front edges of the front, this should be at an angle of about 45 degrees. The piece at C is similar in size and shape to the other two, but instead of the hole, a slot $\frac{3}{4}$ in. long and a little under a $\frac{1}{4}$ in. wide is cut, the centre of the slot being $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. above the right angle bend. For the screws to hold the supports in position, drill two holes in each foot, using a drill large enough to take $\frac{1}{2}$ in. round-headed brass screws.

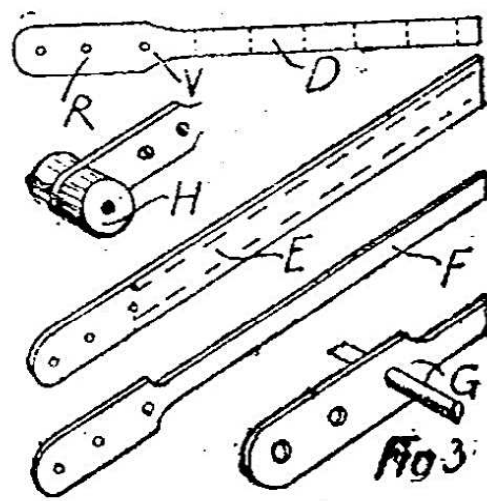


Fig 3

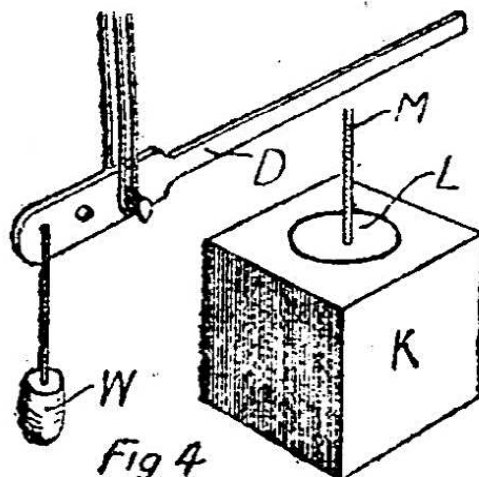


Fig 4

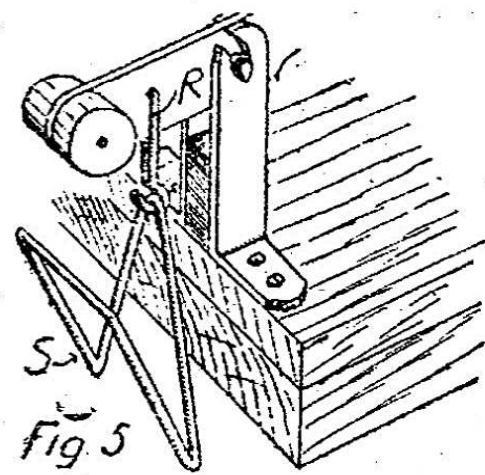
MAKING THE BEAM.

The beam consists of a strip of mild steel $8\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $\frac{1}{16}$ in., shaped as at D, Fig. 3. First draw a centre line along the strip and square a line across, $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. from the end; this will indicate the hole for the fulcrum shown at

V. Next set off a distance of 1 in. each side, that on the right will give the first division mark and that on the left the position for the hole on which the wire holder for the letters is hung. The hole at V is just above the centre line, those at R and at the end are on the centre line, all being $\frac{1}{8}$ in. diameter. The long edges are now marked $\frac{1}{8}$ in. down, as at E and then filed as at F, this will reduce the main portion of the beam to $\frac{1}{4}$ in. wide.

MAKING THE FULCRUM.

The fulcrum is made from a short length of steel a little more than $\frac{1}{8}$ in. diameter filed to a sharp edge at the bottom, as at G, it is driven through the fulcrum hole V as tightly as possible and allowed to project $\frac{1}{2}$ in. each side.



The next stage is to obtain the correct balance for the beam by adding weights to the end, as at H, Fig. 3. This is done by first

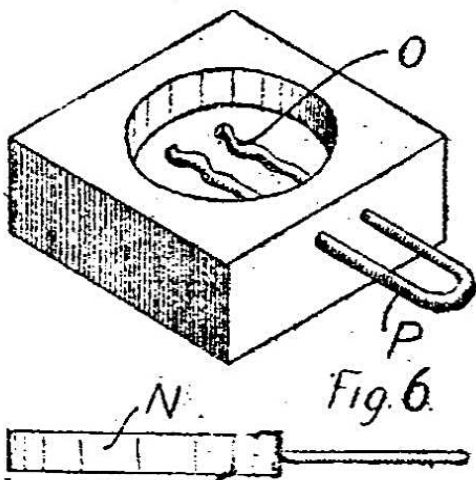
supporting the beam by a silk thread slipped round the fulcrum, as at Fig. 4, and then attaching weights, as at W until a true balance is obtained.

THE LETTER HOLDER.

Before this can be done with any accuracy, it will be necessary to make the letter holder, as at R and S, Fig. 6, this can be done with hard brass wire of $\frac{1}{16}$ in. diameter, or thereabouts. The counterpoise weights at H are made of lead, those I used were cast in a little plaster of Paris mould, as at K with a centre hole formed by a wire core pin. The two disks in my balance are $\frac{1}{4}$ in. wide, but in the first place I cast them $\frac{3}{8}$ in. thick and gradually filed them down to the correct weight.

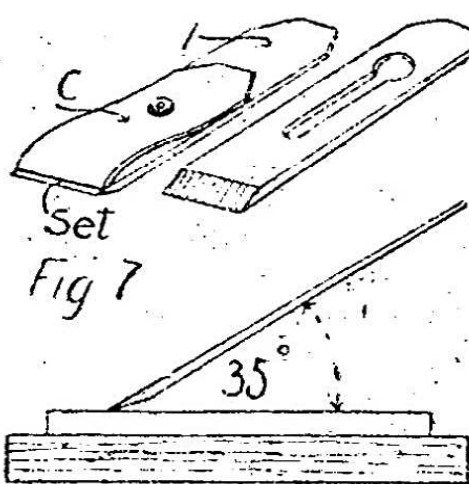
CASTING THE SLIDER.

Having obtained the correct weight and made the beam balance, I made the moving weight N by casting it to a diameter of $\frac{3}{4}$ in. in a plaster of Paris mould, as at Fig. 6. The wire loop was formed by a hairpin with the ends bent, as at O, and the loop end passing through the side of the mould, as at P. When cast I filed the weight true and brought it down to 1 ounce in weight. The next step consisted in marking off the divisions and slightly notching the top of the beam.



THE FINAL ADJUSTMENTS.

To obtain accuracy I borrowed some weights, a 1 ounce, 2 ounce, and a 4 ounce. In the first



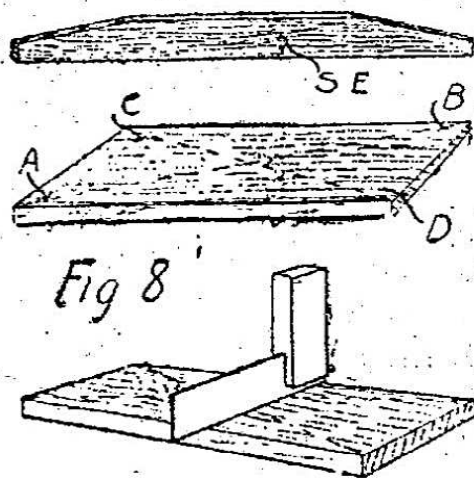
place I made a loop of fine silk and hung the ounce weight to the holder, I then adjusted the sliding weight to balance. Next, I followed with the 2 ounce weight, and so on until I had marked up to 6 ounces. The balance has been used a lot, but it does not lose its accuracy.

HINTS ON PLANING THE WOOD.

I have shown at Fig. 7, the cutting irons of a jack plane as well as the correct slope for sharpening. The cutting iron "I" is attached when in use to a cap iron "C" which is screwed down tightly, as shown with a certain amount of set or distance between the cutting edge and the cap iron edge. This distance depends on the kind of wood to be planed, with soft wood it can be $\frac{1}{16}$ in. or so, with hard wood much less.

THE ANGLE FOR SHARPENING.

The angle for sharpening should be 35 degrees, as shown, the grinding angle is 25 degrees. In planing a piece of wood, test with a straight edge, "S.E." and a try square, as at Fig. 8. The straight edge test is taken from corner to corner, as at A B and C D, but the try square is always used from side to side. The tendency in planing is to get the wood round particularly from end to end.



OBTAINING A TRUE SURFACE.

The only way to avoid it is to keep the surface of the plane close down to the wood during the course of the shaying and to aim at getting a complete shaying from one end of the wood to the other. This can only be done with a sharp and properly set plane, and by placing more pressure on the front of the plane when commencing the cut than at the back, and when at the completion of the stroke of the plane, the greater pressure should be at the rear or handle end of the plane. It is better to take thin shavings with a sharp plane than thick ones with a blunt plane, it is much easier work as well.

NEXT WEEK!

**HOW TO RUN
A MAGAZINE!**

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.)

HOE JALLOWS (Wirksworth): Look here, my lad! You've got this reply inside two months, and you ought to think yourself jolly lucky! But I suppose you're satisfied, or you'd have been over here before now to give me that good hiding you promised me if I kept you too long. Well, it's a good job for you that you didn't try it on! That's the right way to get left! Oh, you want to know what fatheads here are interested in electricity and engineering. Well, the electrical maniacs are Goodwin and Kemp, and Goodwin, Hart, Poots, and Somerton are the engineering asses. Of course, Nipper's well up in both. Mind your spelling next time, Joe Hallows! Bertie Onions drives me nearly potty with his word twisting! Cne's quite enough, so don't you start!

GEORGE COPE (Bromley, Kent): So you like to see I'm a great pal of Irene's, and you think she's the most fascinating girl at the Moor View School. That's all right, Georgie, and as long as you don't let Irene fascinate YOU, we're going to be the best of chums, especially as you like my tales so much and think the Old Paper would be very dry without me in it. Georgie, the first chance I get I'll give you those boxing lessons. You're the right sort, you are! Your wisdom makes me wonder how long you've been alive.

PHIL COLLINS (Morecambe): Of course I'm interested to know that everyone at home reads the St. Frank's stories.

But how could a paper like ours be at home WITHOUT everyone in the house reading it? I'm sick and tired of pointing out to Pitt how he messes up the magazine. It was just as bad when Nipper was in charge of it. When Reggie wants a perfect Magazine I'm here ready to give it to him. He hasn't asked me to take the editorial chair. I'm always sitting in it, but he turns me out! It's only jealousy, because everybody knows the best number we ever had was the one I edited.

TOM WILSON (Horsham): How the dickens can I answer that silly letter of yours with Church and McClure sprawling about our study floor learning how to play that new Table Football Game of Dick Goodwin's? They keep shooting the ball under my feet and disturbing me. There it is again. I'm going to give it up! . . . It's an hour later now, and a good job for you, my lad, that I'm in a jolly better temper after a go at that jolly fine game of Dick's, because I meant to tick you off properly for sending me that insulting letter. As it is, I'm only going to call you an impudent rotter for making those cheeky remarks about Irene, and I'm not going to answer you at all until you send me a respectable letter. And mind you include in it a handsome apology! If you don't, you won't call yourself Pug for nothing! They don't give away fag cards with the swanky cigarettes Fullwood smokes, so he hasn't any to sell. Is St. Frank's real? There's a potty question to ask! If you don't know, you must be a bigger ass than I took you for! This reply's real enough, isn't it?

R. TAYLOR (Enfield): Your letter looks as if a spider had saved himself from drowning in an ink-pot and crawled about over two sheets of exercise paper to get himself dry! But don't kid yourself I don't know whether you're a boy or a girl! Of course no detective could tell whether R stood for Rose or Reginald, but any fool would know your sex. If you think I don't know it, my lad, you're a donkey! You girls always give yourselves away! I don't know what you mean about contradicting myself. That's a thing I never do, sonny.

SMITH THOMPSON (Bradford): Thanks for your good wishes, Smithy. I did have a very merry Christmas, in spite of all that excitement at Glenthorne Manor and the worry over Clarence's potty pantomime, and up to now I'm quite happy in the New Year. But how about you? It was exceedingly bad news to hear that you were ill in bed, and I do hope you got quite well again long before this. But I shall be worried until I get another letter from you, Smithy. Oh, about those two questions of yours. You know very well how much I like adventures, and I'm quite an expert at driving a motor-car. Don't you remember how cleverly I manipulated the steam tractor we made out of the shipwrecked machinery on Lagoon Island? By George! Your letter's done me a world of good! There wasn't an insulting word in it from start to finish! I'm not used to that sort of thing, you know, and if I don't keep a firm hold on myself I might start getting conceited.

SHCAWB (Bildeston): I have thought again, and I still think Irene is a much better name than Stella. I know a donkey named Stella. Perhaps that's got something to do with it, especially as he's very stubborn, and not at all handsome. How the dickens do you expect me to find your name from your initials—or your girl's either? You don't call H. A. B. and S. C. W. clues, do you? And if you think I'm coming down to Suffolk to hunt you both up, you've made a bloomer! As to licking me with your little finger, you'd jolly soon alter your mind as soon as you saw me, I can tell you! I'm blessed if I know why I've wasted so much time over you, after your cheeky letter!

A to Z (Highgate): You must have a long name if it takes all those letters! No wonder you thought it best not to put your name in full! You'll never make an artist. Those ugly drawings of yours are not a bit like me. You must have been thinking of some monstrosity or other when you drew them. You stick to Cross Word Puzzles, my lad, and leave drawing alone in future! As to that riddle of yours, it's too easy, and I believe you're trying to pull my leg. If I said the man kept turkeys, you'd say—No, ducks! If you want to please me, give me something really hard to solve, and I'll do it.

MAY DORIS C. (Ealing): That idea of yours isn't much good, because everybody knows who's the most popular boy at St. Frank's and that Fullwood is the one most disliked. Of course it wouldn't become me to name the favourite, but there's no need for that, anyway. As to the next best, and so on, perhaps it might be a good wheeze to have some kind of a ballot about it if the idea

catches on at all. Let's hope some opinions come in after this appears. It was about time for you to dry up after calling me a madman. But I won't call you names, because I know you didn't mean it. I'm not so easily fooled as all that! You girls are always contrary, but it's a queer way of saying "IN QUEST OF GOLD" is the best thing in the Magazine to call it rubbish! If you were a boy, I should say you were up the giddy pole! As it is, I'll let you off by saying you're a young—well, one of those little animals on a stick! If you don't know what I mean, ask Willy. He loves 'em.

R. SEWELL (St. Ives): You're another one too tired to write your Christian name in full. All right, Richard! "Don't blame me if I call you Rosemary! Now, I must say you're a proper sport. The charming way in which you forgive me for giving you such a makeshift reply last time is very handsome, and I feel I ought to give you a whole page now to make up for it. But the best I can do is to fill up this hole in the page with as many lines as it will take. Your good nature certainly entitles you to more than the five lines you modestly ask for. If you like "IN QUEST OF GOLD" so much, you'll go potty over my next story. It's all about pirates! That's all I'm going to tell you, or you wouldn't have patience enough to carry on till you grab hold of the first instalment on Wednesday. But don't blame me, Robert, if you find it's postponed for some reason or other. You can never be sure of having everything just right with the Magazine until I take over the editorship. Then there WILL be a record scramble for the Old Paper every week!

PLANET (Longsight, Royton): I'm not going to write any more Trackett Grim yarns just yet, because they're too good for most of the readers. And I'm not going to write a lot of piffle just to please the majority! Wait till all the grumblers begin to realise the great literary treats they're missing, and then perhaps I'll write some more. But I shall want a lot more coaxing letters like yours before I do! I don't know what you mean by saying I'm funny, when I'm the most serious chap in the whole school.

HANDFORTH II (Balham): I never realised before how patient I am. I tamely answer all you chaps who insult me so much. But I'm getting fed-up.

A. J. PARKINSON (Grimsby): That grumble of yours may be reasonable, but I can't do anything to change things. Not my department, old son. Sorry!

BRUCE CHALFONT (Edinburgh): Glad you like the Portrait Gallery so much. You're not the only one. I think Reggie has struck a winner in it.

TED.



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

By the Celebrated Author
Edward Oswald Handforth

MEMORIES REFRESHED HERE.

As this is the last instalment, I'm not going to trouble about refreshing your memories this week. It isn't worth it. I'll simply say that our heroes, Bob Brave and Claude Courage, are in the thick of a terrific fight against Indians, and there's a thunderstorm as well. The battle is raging.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE GOLDFIELDS AT LAST.

THE Redskins fell in dozens. While the thunder clapped, the lightning hissed, the Indians continued their attack. But they could do nothing against the iron defence of the sturdy pioneers. Bob Brave, behind a machine-gun, was causing terrific havoc, and the enemy was mown down like a grass machine cutting the lawn.

"We're winning—we're winning!" cried Claude Courage victoriously.

And this was true enough. The remaining Redskins were so frightened that they turned pale, and weren't Redskins at all. The attack broke, and the remnants of the Indian horde fled for safety. Both of them were caught by stray bullets, and mown down.

And the prairie was strewn with the defeated savages.

Without delay all the covered waggons were harnessed, and once more the great trek across the veldt continued. Not a single member of that brave band had been hurt, and, having crossed the Rocky Mountains, the goldfields were sighted. They lay far below, clear in the morning sunlight. Bob Brave could tell that they were goldfields by the hedges which surrounded them.

"At last!" he cried, in a great voice. "Come, Claude! Let's make a dash, and stake out our claim! The first ones on the

scene will get the best choice! Here's our chance to become millionaires!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Claude excitedly.

Leaving the others far behind, they raced down the rock-strewn slopes, tearing along mile after mile with never a pause. And at last they reached the wonderful gold-fields. After an hour's search, they picked out the claim which had the most nuggets on it.

The whole place was literally gleaming with gold, and by the time the rest of the pioneers came up, Bob Brave and Claude Courage had staked their claim, and none could say them nay. But there was plenty of gold for everybody, and pluck had gained its reward.

EPILOGUE.

FIVE years have passed.

Where that barren desert once existed, there now stands a thriving city—a place full of skyscrapers, chop-suey restaurants, cafeterias, baseball parks, and pea-nut stands.

And the biggest skyscraper of all belongs to Claud Courage and Bob Brave. But they aren't known by those names any longer. Right across the skyscraper is a sign, flashing in electric lights: "THE COURAGE AND BRAVE CORPORATION." And this vast firm supplies more gold to the world than any other manufactory.

Our old friends, Bob and Claude, now glide about the city in their Rolls-Royce cars, and they are the most important men in the whole place. And so we will leave them.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK.—An amazing new serial, featuring Trackett Grim and Splinter, will commence. Be on the look-out for it.—**AUTHOR.**

All About Cross-Word Puzzles

By HUBERT JARROW

I HAVE been asked to write a few words about cross-word puzzles. They are all the rage now. They are printed everywhere. Everyone is doing them.

The question is, how do you do them? Well, that's quite simple. You see, the cross-word puzzle is a kind of problem. I mean, the idea is that you have to solve it. It is made up of words and crosses. Crosses are things that look like x's. Of course, in these problems, or puzzles as they are called, they put letters instead of crosses.

That is just to muddle you. But in theory it is all quite simple.

You see, this is the idea. You start with a kind of board marked out in squares. Well, everybody knows what a board is. You have them in any school. They are called blackboards.

And on this board you mark out squares. Some are black and some are white. So that you get a draught board.

You all know about draughts. I mean, you just open the window and they come in under the bottom of the door. They always get you in the back of the neck. That's how one gets colds.

But to make it perfectly simple I will explain how you fill in the missing letters.

You have ever so many letters. I mean, all the words that are used are composed of letters. You have big letters and small letters. The size doesn't matter a bit as long as they are all in the alphabet.

You see, the puzzles started in America. I mean, America is a sort of island bounded on the north by New York, and in the centre by the United States.

And, mind you, the puzzles are really quite simple. I nearly solved one myself a few days ago. All you have to do is to find a number of words which are all made up of letters.

The great thing about these words is that they cross and interlock. They are set in rows across the page. That is called horizontal. I mean, if they are not horizontal they are called vertical. That means they are set down. If that is not the case they must be diagonal, and that is a foul. But everyone knows what cross-words are.

Handforth knows. He is an expert. If you tell him about cross-words, he punches you under the jaw. He never uses cross-words. I mean, he has got a pair of fists, so why should he?

But with these problems, as they are called, there are a few other little matters that crop up. They must cross and interlock. And a new word always starts where you come to the end of a black square, or after you have passed a dividing line or an outside edge.

I mean to say, that is obvious. Suppose you were a black square. What would you do if you found yourself on the outside edge? Of course, you'd start a new word. It's really quite simple if you will only think it all out.

Suppose you start with a word of five letters beginning with A and meaning banana. Well, you find in the list of clues at the bottom of the page, "1. Fruit with yellow skin."

You see, what could be simpler? I mean, a banana is a fruit, and it has a yellow skin. The only thing is that in the song it says that "we have no bananas to-day."

That is the sort of thing that is bound to happen. You see, a banana has more than five letters. I know it isn't the banana's fault, but there it is. In a case like that one must try and help.

So the idea is to cast around. Every horizontal word is interlocked with a vertical word, so that words which read up and down are interlocked with words which read from side to side.

That is the idea. Thus reading down, we get a word of three letters, meaning monkey. And 't begin with "A."

Monkeys are all very well, but they live in trees. I mean, they swing about from branch to branch. Some of them live in the Zoo. They live in cages, and people feed them with nuts.

So that nut must be a word of three letters. Unfortunately, if I may point it out, this word begins with "N." Therefore, monkey cannot begin with nut. Or—But you follow me, I am sure.

Well, we must go back. We must return. And, after all, it is much easier to return than never to have turned at all. And what do we find?

I mean to say, what is left? Well, it's isn't right; it's different. So that the thing is always to find a word that interlocks beginning with an "A," and crosses with a word of three letters, meaning nuts from branch to branch.

That is all there is to it. A child could understand it. You simply look at your list of clues and follow them up like a detective. You get on the scent.

And the scent always stops when you get to a black square, unless you are on the outside edge. And even then you have to cross the—well, I mean, unless you interlock with the letters that form the words that are mentioned in the clues that are given at the bottom of the page.

But I am sure you quite understand how easy the whole thing is by now. I mean, a fruit with a yellow skin is an apple. And a monkey in three letters is an ape.

These words interlock. Because, of course, apes often eat apples. I forget about the nuts for the moment, but I think they are probably in one of the black squares.

It sounds rather hard. But then nuts are always hard. That is the kernel of it all.

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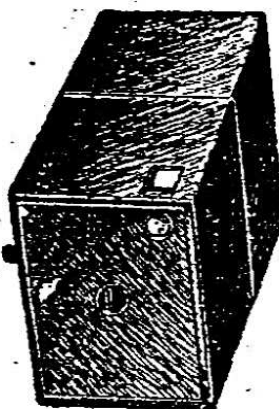
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