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*The Deluge
at St. Frank's!*

FLOODED OUT! A rousing long complete story of schoolboy adventure.

New Series No. 44.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

March 5th, 1927.



"Turn back!" shouted Handforth from the top of the bank. The great wall of the reservoir was breaking; at any moment it might collapse entirely, releasing millions of gallons of water in one appalling flood!

FIRST OF A NEW SERIES! ROUSING SCHOOLBOY ADVENTURE!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Flooded out at St. Frank's! The opening long complete story of a stunning new series of school-life yarns.

CHAPTER 1.

SLIGHTLY WET.

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST, of the Ancient House at St. Frank's, uttered a hollow moan.

"Great Scott! Are you ill, Montie?" asked Dick Hamilton, startled.

He sat up in bed, and eyed his noble chum with concern. Sir Montie, attired in brilliant pyjamas, was standing at the dormitory window. His face was a picture of doleful melancholy.

"Nipper, old boy, gaze upon it!" he said unhappily.

"I am gazing," said Nipper. "And I must say it gives me a pain. Such a good-looking face usually, too——"

"You frightful ass!" interrupted Tregellis-West. "I was not referrin' to my face!"

"Oh, sorry!" said Nipper. "My mistake!"

"I was drawin' your attention to the weather!" went on Sir Montie severely. "Dear old boy, did you ever see such a ghastly spectacle? Rain, rain, rain, an' nothin' else but rain!"

"Shocking!" agreed Nipper solemnly, as he got out of bed. "No variation at all. Not even a sign of snow, or hail, or sleet, by way of a change. We shall have to write to the papers about it."

Tregellis-West adjusted his pince-nez, and frowned.

"Dear boy, you're kiddin'!" he said coldly.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I was," agreed Dick. "It's no good grouching about the weather, Montie. If Handforth gets too high-and-mighty we can squash him—if the prefects begin any of their funny stuff we can squash them, too. But we can't squash the weather. It's just one of those things we've got to accept with as good a grace as we can. So if it rains—it rains, and all the grumbling in the world won't make it stop."

Sir Montie sniffed.

"At the same time, dear old boy, let me gently point out that to-day is Wednesday," he said frigidly. "Let me further point out that to-day, bein' Wednesday, is a half-holiday."

"Such marvellous reasoning!" murmured Nipper.

"You frightful chump!" roared Montie, exasperated. "What about our match against Bannington Grammar School? Begad! Do you realise that this is the third day of rain? Three shockin' days of drenchin' downpour, without a single stop! Little side is boggy already, an' unless this deluge stops, the whole field will be flooded!"

Nipper nodded.

"You're quite right," he said gloomily. "That football match looks a bit sick for to-day, Montie. Did you ever know such rotten luck? The first big match since we got back from the Arctic—and now it looks like being washed out."

Tommy Watson turned over in bed, and sat up.

"Can't you fatheads keep quiet?" he grumbled, blinking.

"We're talking about the weather," said Nipper.

"Blow the weather!"

"I'd blow it cheerfully, if I thought it would do any good—but I'm afraid it wouldn't," said Nipper. "Hallo! There goes the rising-bell. Might as well turn out, as we're all awake."

Tommy Watson went red with indignation.

"Do you mean to say that you idiots got up to talk about the weather before rising-bell?" he demanded. "Rats! I'm going to wait for second bell! These March mornings are beastly cold."

Nipper went to the window, and gazed out upon the dreary expanse of West Square. Rain was descending in that peculiarly insistent manner which gives one a feeling of unutterable depression. There was very little wind, and the drab sky was heavy and forbidding. There were no separate clouds, but just one pall of greyness. And the rain was coming down from that pall with a sort of vicious joy. It beat against the windows, drenched down on the flagstones, and formed dreary puddles on the gravel.

"Glorious sight!" said Nipper, with a grunt. "It started on Monday, and it's been going on ever since. The weather must have caught the latest craze—it's trying to make a world's record! Oh, well, this view only gives me the pip, so I'll look at something more cheerful."

He turned, and gazed at Sir Montie.

"Sorry, I was mistaken!" he went on, after one glance. "On second thoughts, I'd rather look out into the Square!"

"You shockin' ass!" said Sir Montie. "Are you implyin' that my face gives you the pip, too?"

"Not merely the pip, but the whole core!" replied Nipper sadly. "Think of something joyous, Montie, and get that expression changed. Take it back, and say it doesn't fit!"

But Montie's was not the only unhappy face that morning. In most of the other junior dormitories, the fellows were discussing the one important topic—the weather. It was the same in every House. The whole of St.

Frank's was fed up. Scarcely anybody had moved out of doors for days, and it was generally felt that this sort of thing was too thick.

In one particular dormitory, Church and McClure, of the Remove, were slowly dragging themselves out of bed as second bell clanged out its unwelcome summons. They both stared out of the window.

"Look at it!" said Church, disgusted. "Worse than ever!"

"Not even a break in the clouds!" agreed McClure. "I say, this is too much of a good thing," he added indignantly. "Handy! Just have a look at the weather! What do you think of it?"

Edward Oswald Handforth, the celebrated leader of Study D, was wideawake. He had a rather dreamy expression on his face, and he was staring at the ceiling, but he was certainly wideawake. His hands were clasped behind his head, and his knees, hunched up, formed a sort of mountain in the middle of his bed.

"Green!" he said absently.

"Eh?"

"Green—with pink stripes," said Handforth. "Or red stripes, perhaps. Yes, green, with red stripes."

Church and McClure gazed at him dazedly.



CHAPTER 2.

A REALLY BRIGHT IDEA.

"GREEN, with red stripes?" repeated Church, in amazement.

"Yes!" said Handforth firmly. "I thought about blue at first, but blue's too common. Green, with red stripes, and everything else cream. How would that do?"

"Everything else cream?" repeated McClure, in a whisper. "He's dotty! I thought he was talking about a footer jersey at first, but how can everything else be cream?"

"I don't want any arguments!" said Handforth, flinging the bedclothes aside. "I've made up my mind, and you fellows needn't interfere. We'll buy the stuff in Bannington this afternoon."

"The stuff?" repeated his chums.

"Oh, my hat!" said Handforth impatiently. "The wall paper!"

"Wall paper!" yelled Church and McClure.

"Yes, wall paper, my sons," replied Edward Oswald. "And we shall want three or four tins of cream cellulose."

"Cream which?"

"Haven't you heard of the new enamel stuff?" asked Handforth irritably. "It's the very thing for the study. Doesn't show stains, and it can't be scratched, and hot saucepans won't mark it—"

"The study!" shouted Church, aghast.

"Yes, you fathead, the study!" snapped

Handforth. "I'm not satisfied with our den as it is. I'm going to put new paper on it, and paint all the woodwork with cream cellulose."

"My goodness!" ejaculated McClure. "Cream cellulose! It's the first time I knew that you stuck hot saucepans on the wall!"

"You dotty chump, we put hot saucepans on the table sometimes, don't we?" demanded Handforth. "I'm going to paint everything—table, bookcase, and everything else. A sort of art effect, you know."

"There'll certainly be an effect, but I'm not so sure about the art!" said Church dubiously. "I mean, green paper, with red stripes! Won't that be a bit too dazzling, in conjunction with the cream table?"

"I believe in bright colours," said Handforth firmly.

"Well, why not go the whole hog, and paint the floor purple, with yellow spots?" asked McClure sarcastically. "And while you're about it, you might as well do the ceiling in jazz colours. We shall think there's a rainbow over us all the time!"

"How about a vermilion fire-place?" suggested Church.

"H'm! That mightn't be so bad," said Handforth, without the faintest suspicion that his leg was being pulled. "The only trouble is, the soot might spoil the effect if we light a fire."

"Light a fire!" said Church, shocked. "My dear chap, you can't light fires in an artistic room like that! Why should we want a fire, anyhow? The colours'll keep us warm enough!"

"Besides," said McClure, "we're not going to live in the study, are we? It'll be a sort of exhibition. We can put glass panels in the door, so that everybody can stare in as they go by. Then we can lay in a stock of medicine for curing colour-blindness!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Church, unable to contain himself, roared. McClure joined in, and Handforth realised that his chums were gently spoofing him. He turned red, and clenched his fists.

"You—you funny idiots!" he hooted. "If you think you can make fun of me——"

"We don't need to!" said Church. "You're funny enough, without any help from us! Oh, my hat! Green wallpaper with yellow stripes!"

"Red stripes!" roared Handforth.

"Cream celluloid!" grinned McClure breathlessly.

"Cellulose!" howled Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Church and McClure fled from the dormitory, and went to one of the bath-rooms, where they promptly spread the news of Handforth's latest. When Edward Oswald came down, he was startled to find fellows gravely asking him for his price list. How much to paint a room in madder brown? How much for twenty yards of violet wallpaper with orange crescents?

He treated all these inquiries with disdain.

"You can go and eat coke!" he said coldly. "You're jealous, that's the trouble with you! By the time I've finished Study D, you won't know the place."

He was rather surprised to find that everybody heartily agreed with him, and he was so obsessed with the new scheme, that the weather failed to trouble him. In fact, he had a sneaking hope that it might continue, as it would provide him with an excellent excuse for his indoor decorations.

After breakfast a group of fellows stood in the doorway of the Ancient House, gazing hopelessly out upon the soaked Triangle. The rain was pouring down with that same relentless force. Enormous puddles had formed all over the Triangle.

"What about to-day's match?" asked Alf Brent, as Nipper came up.

"Sad to relate, it looks like being distinctly off," replied Nipper. "Don't start growling; we can't perform miracles, and Little Side is just like a bog. At dinner-time I'll ring up the Bannington skipper, and tell him to cancel the fixture."

"Oh, crumbs!"

A groan went up from the members of the junior eleven.

"Can't be helped!" said Nipper cheerfully. "After all, the rain can't last for ever, and we shall have to squeeze the match in later on."

"Wise words, O oracle," said Reggie Pitt, who had come over from the West House. "We want to look at these things with a glad smile. They're just sent to try us. And it would be sheer madness to attempt to play on Little Side to-day."

Billy Nation of Study No. 3, in the Modern House, nodded.

"We can trust Nipper to do the sensible thing," he agreed. "A Man Of Gladness Seldom Falls Into Madness."

"Dry up with your silly proverbs, you Fourth Form fathead!" said Duncan indignantly. "It's all very well to talk about 'a man of gladness,' but who the dickens can be glad on a day like this? Nipper's just as miserable as we are, only he pretends not to be."

"He Bears Misery Best That Hides It Most," replied Nation promptly.

"Squash him somebody!" growled Tommy Watson. "This is no time for being light-hearted! Just look outside! Oh, crumbs! It's coming down in sheets now!"

"Let's all be miserable together!" suggested Pitt lightly.

"Nothing could be better," agreed Billy Nation grinning. "It Is A Little Comfort To The Miserable To Have Companions."

"Well, you fellows will have plenty of companions to-day!" said Nipper drily. "Practically the whole school is as gloomy as a graveyard! But, as I said before, there's a silver lining to every cloud."

"I didn't hear you say it before," said Pitt.

"Then I must have thought it," smiled Nipper.

"Besides, you're pinching Nation's prerogative, using up proverbs like that!" said Reggie severely. "The chap stewes over them night and day, I've heard, and he's got a selection of six different maxims for every probable or possible topic of conversation."

"Rats!" said Tommy Watson. "Let's go and look at the glass!"

But this wasn't very cheering, for the needle pointed, deliberately and sinisterly, to "Very Stormy," and a tap only caused it to reel drunkenly still further in the wrong direction.



CHAPTER 3.

SOMEBODY ELSE WITH A BRIGHT IDEA!

WHEN morning school was over, St. Frank's revelled in the fact that the rain had stopped. Nobody could believe it at first, but it was an undoubted fact. The rain had, without question, absolutely stopped.

True, the grey pall overhead was still there, but it had disintegrated somewhat, and murky clouds were scudding across the sky in a most disconcerting fashion. And although anxious fellows gazed long and intently, the most optimistic could see no sign of that silver lining.

Still, the rain had stopped.

"Let's go and inspect the field," suggested Tommy Watson hopefully.

"We can go and inspect it, but that's where we shall finish," replied Nipper. "Everybody ready? All got your sea-boots on? Somebody had better bring a life-line, too."

"Rats!" said De Valerie. "I believe the ground will be playable."

But Nipper was quite right. Little Side was not merely boggy, but the lower end of it was actually under water. The River Stowe, which usually flowed sedately past the lower end of the playing fields, was taking on a bloated and swollen appearance. Willard's Island, visible in the distance, was reduced to about half its normal size.

"Well, we've had our swim, so let's get back to dry land," remarked Nipper, as he squelched through the sodden turf. "I'll go and ring up Stanmore right away."

"Stanmore?" said Watson. "Who's Stanmore?"

"Junior skipper of the Grammar School—he's only been captain this term, I believe," replied Nipper. "I'll go and spill the bad news over the telephone."

They went despondently back into the Triangle, and all sorts of inquiries were shot at them from various juniors.

"It's no good—Little Side's only suitable for boating," replied Nipper gruffly. "The match is absolutely off."

"I grieve to hear this tale of woe; such rain as this spoils any show," remarked Clarence Fellowe, of the West House. "We try to smile our very best, but the match, I fear, has quite gone west!"

"Dry up with your silly rhyming, Clarence!"

"My rhymes are dry, I fully know," admitted the lanky Removite; "they come unasked, much to my woe. I try to curb this sorry strain, but all my efforts are in vain. If I could only speak in prose, I should never have a swollen nose."

"A swollen nose, eh?" said Tommy Watson tartly. "I don't wonder at it! Those West House chaps naturally lose their patience now and again, and biff you one!"

Clarence nodded feelingly.

"It's undeserved, upon my word; to punch at me is most absurd," he complained. "But life is full of little woes, as every fellow fully knows. We take these things just as they come, although they may seem very rum."

"It's a shame!" said Nipper. "You can't help it, Clarence, old man!"

"I'm glad to find a chap with sense," replied the poet of the Remove. "The other boys are very dense. Good gracious, me, I felt some rain! It's starting pouring down again! The weather's getting worse and worse; it's almost like a witch's curse!"

"Let's escape from this freak!" said Watson desperately.

Clarence eyed them with wild astonishment as they left him standing there. They weren't feeling any too happy, for the rain was, indeed, starting again, although only in isolated drops.

Nipper rang up Bannington Grammar School, and was soon in touch with Edgar Stanmore, the junior skipper. He seemed very concerned.

"I say, that's rotten!" he complained.

"Of course, it's rotten," said Nipper. "Don't I know it?"

"And the match is scratched?"

"It's mortally wounded!" replied Nipper sadly.

"Well, there's a fake ground to have!" snorted Stanmore, across the wire. "We wouldn't own a footer field like that!"

"Don't you be so jolly insulting!" growled Nipper. "There isn't a better set of playing fields in the south of England than ours!"

"I expect the ducks revel in them!" retorted Stanmore tartly.

"You can crow!" snapped Nipper. "Your ground is pretty well elevated—far away from the river. If it wasn't for this beastly rain——"

"I say, half a minute:" interrupted Stanmore. "Our junior field isn't being used this afternoon, and we've got a home match with you next month. How about reversing the order? You come and play on our ground to-day, and we'll come over to you in April, unless, of course, your playing fields are completely submerged!"



The little car had sunk into the mass of sticky mud. "There's only one thing to do," advised Handy. "We must push her out!" But though the juniors heaved and pulled, the car would not budge; Handy had to think again!

Nipper overlooked the slur.

"Stanmore, old man, you've got brains!" he said warmly. "I didn't know it before, and nobody would guess it to look at you, but it only shows that you can never tell. We'll come!"

"Good!" said Stanmore. "The first thing I shall do will be to dot you one, you personal ass! We'll expect you at two-thirty sharp, then?"

"We'll be there before that," promised Nipper. "Your ground is quite playable, I suppose?"

"My dear man, it's so playable that I'm thinking about taking out a book, and lolling in the grass," replied Stanmore. "Our ground was constructed for football—not for boating, like yours!"

Nipper grinned, and left the telephone-box. All the common-rooms at St. Frank's were provided with their own public telephones. The junior skipper's smiling face attracted much attention.

"Callous bounder!" said De Valerie. "He's smiling about it!"

"I've got reason to smile," replied Nipper. "The Grammar School ground is O.K., and we're going to play the match there. Tommy, come and help me to round up the eleven, so as to give them full notice."

Everybody was highly delighted, and it seemed that life, after all, was not without its compensations. The rain had practically stopped, and the match was still on. Nobody

mindful of cycling over to Bannington, a mere distance of three miles. Handforth, perhaps, received the news with mixed feelings. He was in Study D, inspecting the walls. Church and McClure were with him, giving him their close and earnest attention. At least, so they said. How they managed it was a mystery, for Church was deep in the pages of an adventure story, and McClure was wrestling painfully with a cross-word puzzle. Handforth talked on unendingly, and such subjects as distemper, painting, and wall-papering recurred again and again.

"The fact is," said Handforth, "I'm a bit undecided about the furniture. Should we have it cream colour, or should we stain it in walnut?"

"Walnut!" ejaculated McClure excitedly. "That's the very word I've been trying to think of! No, it isn't," he added, shaking his head. "It isn't quite fit—All the same, I've got it! Chestnut! That's the one!"

"Chestnut!" roared Handforth. "Who's talking about chestnuts?"

"Good egg!" said Church, looking up from his book. "Shove 'em on the top of the grate—and don't forget to split 'em first!"

"What?" hooted Handforth.

"Didn't you say you had some chestnuts?" asked Church mildly.

"No, I didn't!" retorted Handforth, becoming aware of his chums' inattention.

"By George! Haven't you chaps been listening to me?"

"We heard every word!" replied McClure promptly. "It all came in one ear, and went out of the other. But don't bother—I've only got four more words to find, and I'll have the thing complete. What is it, Handy, that opens and shuts like a concertina, and begins with a B?"

"How should I know?" hooted Handforth.

"Well, you needn't bellow——" Mac started. "That's it, of course—bellows! Thanks, old man!"

Handforth fairly goggled.

"What are you thanking me for?" he said ferociously. "Here am I, talking about cellulose finishes, and walnut varnish, and you're messing about with cross-word puzzles and rotten detective stories!"

"Why, you told me this was first-rate!" said Church warmly. "Not that I think much of your judgment—the yarn's too much like 'Trackett Grim' for my liking. It's all piffle!"

Handforth flung off his coat, and rolled up his sleeves



CHAPTER 4.

A CURE FOR ARCHIE GLENTHORNE.

NIPPER opened the door of Study D, and looked in.

"Busy?" he asked cheerfully.

"Not yet," said Handforth. "But I shall be in a minute."

Church had unostentatiously closed his story-book, and McClure had thoughtfully taken his cross-word puzzle over to the window. Both of them were eyeing their leader as a lion-trainer eyes his charges.

"Ahem!" said Nipper. "I seem to be in the way——"

"Not at all!" interrupted Handforth. "You're perfectly welcome to watch. I'm just going to smash these funny fatheads to pulp, and chuck them out into the passage. If you want to be useful, you can go to the sanny and prepare two beds!"

Nipper grinned.

"Cheese it, old man," he said gently. "I've got some good news. The match is on, after all, and you'll be needed in goal."

Handforth started.

"Is that what you call good news?" he asked sourly.

"Well, don't you?"

"What about my decorations?" roared Handforth. "I was counting on this afternoon, you ass! I was going to have the whole place finished by tea-time!"

"The ass thinks he can perform miracles," said Church bitterly. "He isn't going to do much, of course—just touch the place up a bit——"

"He's only going to paper all the walls," said McClure. "That'll take him till about

three o'clock, and then he'll fill in the odd time by painting the floor sky blue, the ceiling crimson, and the furniture walnut, with chestnut stripes."

"That's done it!" said Handforth thickly. "You—you insulting rotters, I'm going to pulverise you——"

Boom-boom!

"The welcome cry of the dinner-gong in full song!" said Nipper, grinning. "Can't do any slaughtering now, Handy, it's time for us to put on the nose-bags."

"Nose-bags?" said Handforth. "D'you think I'm a horse?"

"Other animals wear nose-bags, too," said Church pointedly.

While Handforth was wrestling with that remark, Church and McClure managed to slip out into the passage, Nipper very conveniently attracting Edward Oswald's attention at the crucial moment.

"By George!" breathed Handforth at last. "He meant a donkey!"

"More likely a mule!" said Nipper critically.

"Why, you—you—— Hallo! Where are they?" roared Handforth, staring round. "My hat! They've bunked! They've scooted!"

"Experience is a great teacher," nodded Nipper. "Don't forget the match, Handy; so be ready directly after dinner."

Nipper went out, and Handforth scratched his head.

"Experience is a great teacher," he muttered. "What the dickens did he mean by that? Fathead! Just trying to be funny, I suppose."

When he got into the dining hall he discovered, to his indignation, that Church and McClure had temporarily changed places with two other fellows, and were not only sitting on the other side of the table, but had taken the precaution to be at the very end, elbow to elbow with Mr. Crowell. So Handforth's carefully conceived plan of pouring rice pudding down their backs was scotched.

And by the time the meal was over he was feeling so comfortably well-filled, and at peace with the world, that he sought their blood no longer. Church and McClure, wise youths, had guessed this from the very start. All the same, they were very wary when they casually joined him later.

"Bannington, eh?" said Church, by way of opening the conversation. "Better go and get out our bikes——"

"Bikes be blowed!" interrupted Handforth. "We're going in my Austin Seven."

His chums accepted this announcement as a sign of renewed peace, and they made no reference to interior decorations. Handforth seemed to have resigned himself to the match. Actually, he was keen on it, being an ardent footballer.

He was not the only one, either, for many of the fellows were intensely keen on football since they had arrived back at St. Frank's

from that extraordinary adventure in the Arctic. The party had been back for more than a week, and had settled down so rapidly that the memory of that remarkable episode seemed like a half-forgotten dream.

In Study D, Handforth caused Church and McClure some uneasiness by producing a tape-measure. He made a few swift movements along the walls.

"I've decided to do the job easily," he remarked. "There's no need to rush it, after all. We'll buy the wall-paper in Bannington, and paper the study this evening. The cellulosing can wait until to-morrow."

"That'll be fine," said Church. "We can simply dawdle over the work if you give us a whole evening for repapering this study."

"Rather!" said Handforth, failing to note the sarcasm.

"Well, aren't you going to measure?" asked Mac.

"You ass, I've just done it!" replied Handforth.

"Those swift movements you made on the wall?"

"Yes!"

"Sorry—my mistake," said Mac. "I didn't know you were quite so speedy. Sure you've taken the measurements properly?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I'm not going to bother," admitted Handforth. "I shall just buy two dozen rolls of paper, and if there's any left over we can give it to some of the other chaps."

"The whole Junior passage will have repapered studies then," said Church. "A couple of rolls will be enough for a small room like this. you chump! You don't need to waste your money—"

"I believe in having plenty of material," said Handforth firmly. "Well, let's go. By the way, I want change for a fiver."

"Certainly!" said McClure, diving into his pocket. "I can give you sevenpence now, and I'll owe you the rest."

"You fathead!" frowned Handforth. "Where can I change a fiver?"

"In the wallpaper shop, I should think," said Church.

"Those shops never have change—"

"There won't be any change—if you buy twenty-four rolls!"

"Archie!" said Handforth, with a nod. "He's always rolling in quid notes, so we'll trot along to his study now. I shan't forget what happened last time I changed a fiver in Bannington," he added indignantly. "The shopkeeper seemed to think that I'd made it myself, and he made me sign my name on the back!"

They went along to Archie Glenthorne's study, and Handforth opened the door by the simple expedient of barging into it with his shoulder. The door flew open with a crash, and Handforth stalked in.

"Good gad!" moaned Archie Glenthorne from the lounge. "Odds tornadoes and earthquakes! I mean to say, laddie, with all due respects and all that, the jolly old door possesses quite a fruity sort of handle!"

The Genial Ass of the Remove was lolling languidly amid a pile of cushions, and a cheerful fire was crackling in the grate. There was a somewhat glassy expression in Archie's eye, and it was not altogether due to his monocle.

"I want change for a fiver," said Handforth.

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "All the same, old chestnut—"

"Chestnut!" said Handforth, with a start. "Don't talk to me about chestnuts! I want—by George!" he added, giving Archie a straight look. "What's the matter with you, ass?"

Archie moaned.

"The fact is, laddie, I'm dashed unwell," he complained. "The good old tissues are sadly depleted. I mean to say, sundry spasms occasionally shoot hither and thither beneath the old waistcoat. Phipps has done all that human kindness can accomplish, but the foul work still proceeds."

"You need fresh air!" said Handforth promptly. "There's nothing the matter with you, my lad—except that you're half-suffocated by this stuffy atmosphere. Come along with us, and you'll be cured."



CHAPTER 5.

BOGGED!

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE shuddered slightly.

"Thanks all the same, old cork, but there's absolutely nothing doing," he said in a firm voice. "Archie remains distinctly on the good old lounge. Why, dash it, the pin department is so dashed rocky that I couldn't walk a dashed yard."

"Just one of your little delusions, old son," said Handforth cheerfully. "What you need is fresh air—and a good football match. So you'll come with us to Bannington, and watch the game."

"Absolutely not!"

"Grab him, you chaps!" grinned Handforth. "I don't approve of this slacking! There's nothing the matter with him, and a nice ride at the back of the Austin will put him as right as ninepence!"

"You frightful fright!" gasped Archie. "I haven't the faintest desire to be as right as ninepence! I mean to say, ninepence! At the present moment, I don't even feel as right as fourpence-halfpenny! Dashed sorry, Handy, old boy, but the proposition fails to appeal. The meeting positively rejects it!"

The meeting, however, thought otherwise. Church and McClure, for once, were in entire agreement with their leader. And Archie Glenthorne, in spite of his vigorous protests, was literally carried out. He was hustled to the cloak-room, an overcoat was slung round him, a hat pushed on his head, and he was whirled outside.

"Odds tragedies and misfortunes!" moaned Archie. "Laddies, I'll go! I'll absolutely go—"

"We know that!" interrupted Handforth.

"But, dash it, kindly allow me to wear my own bally overcoat!" complained Archie.

"Isn't that yours?"

"This mouldy atrocity?" said Archie, in horror. "Good gad! The chappie who owns this should be in Borstal! I mean to say, it's an absolute crime for any right-minded bloke to own such a thing! I don't know who the foul blighter is, but he's a dashed criminal!"

Archie surveyed the overcoat with horror. Handforth had yanked it off the first hook he had seen. It was quite a good coat, really, but, to Archie's delicate eye it was a fit article for the dust-bin. The fact that it was smothered with mud and liberally spotted with oily marks, probably prejudiced him.

Church started as he noted those oily marks.

"My hat!" he grinned. "That's your coat, Handy!"

"Mine!" ejaculated Handforth, who was wearing a mackintosh.

"Looks like it," said Church. "Didn't you get that oil on the sleeve when you tucked your Austin under your arm on Monday?"

"By George, so it is!" said Handforth. "Oh, well, never mind; you can wear it, Archie. I'm not particular—" He broke off, and a light of anger came into his eyes. "My only hat!" he went on. "What's that you were saying about Borstal?"

"The fact is, old warhorse—"

"And you said that the owner of the coat was a dashed blighter, and a foul criminal!" continued Handforth fiercely.

"Absolutely not!" said Archie.

"I distinctly heard you!"

"Absolutely not, twice!" said Archie stoutly. "In fact, absolutely not with balloon tyres! I said the chappie was a foul blighter and dashed criminal!"

"Isn't that what I said?"

"You said a dashed blighter and a foul criminal," explained Archie. "Not, dash it, that it makes any difference. I stick to the statement, you human blizzard! A cove who claims ownership of a coat like this isn't fit to share a cell with a pickpocket!"

"I won't smash you!" said Handforth, controlling himself with an effort. "I won't sit you in the nearest puddle! It's too much like hitting a baby in its cradle! I'm going to take you in the back of my Austin, and—"

"Oh, come!" urged Archie. "I mean to say, at the back, dash it! Good gad! Do you think I'm a spare wheel, or some foul contrivance of that sort?"

"I don't mean absolutely at the back—but in the rear seat!"

"Odds relief and hope!" breathed Archie. "The position still remains murky, but not so mottled as I suspected. Some time ago, dear old hooligan, you mentioned a fiver.

Allow me to buy myself out, what? I mean, five of the best are yours for the asking!"

"You can't bribe me!" said Handforth tartly.

"Well, let's be going," suggested Church. "It's beginning to spit with rain again, and the other fellows went ages ago. Unless we get a hustle on, we shall be late for the match."

This was rather an exaggeration, for a considerable group of cyclists had only just pushed through the gateway. Handforth's Austin Seven was standing ready, and the engine was ticking over. Handforth always believed in getting the motor warmed up first.

"What about the hood?" asked Church. "I think we ought to raise it—"

"Fresh air," said Handforth, "is as good as medicine! We don't want to be stuffed up and suffocated. In with you!"

Church elected to take the front seat, or, to be more exact, he and McClure tossed for it, and Church lost. Archie and McClure wedged themselves into the modest space behind.

"All aboard?" asked Handforth, as he climbed in. "Good! Get your silly feet out of the way, Churchy!"

"I've got them over as far as I can!" snapped Church. "D'you want me to stick them through the body? I'm a reasonable chap. Just say the word and I'll run behind!"

Church bemoaned the fact that he had lost that toss. He could foresee trouble all the way along. There was no pleasure in motoring with Handforth. Whatever joys the ride might produce, were nullified by Edward Oswald's presence—which overshadowed everything else.

"By George! This is the stuff!" said Handy, as they romped along the lane towards Bellton. "Plenty of mud about—and that means lots of work for you chaps after tea!"

"We don't mind giving a hand," said Church.

"I can't help—I shall be too busy papering!" said Handforth firmly. "You and Mac will have to hose the car down—"

"Go easy, old son," interrupted Church. "The mud's about a foot thick in this lane, and we're skidding all over the place. Rats! It's raining again! We'd better stop and fix the hood—"

"A drop of rain won't hurt us, my lad."

"You've got a mac," said Church bitterly.

They passed through Bellton, overtaking the group of cyclists that had left just before them. And they hummed along the Bannington road. They could see the River Stowe, away to the left, across the meadows. The river was flooded already, and many of the marshes were completely under water.

Half-way to Bannington, after mounting a steep little hill, the car dipped down into the opposite valley. And at the bottom of this, stretching right across the road, was a wide patch of water. One of the neighbouring

streams had burst its banks, and the road was flooded.

"Rush it!" suggested Church. "You'll get through quickly like that."

"Rot!" retorted Handforth promptly.

He had already decided to rush it, but after such advice from Church, he couldn't possibly follow it. He deliberately slowed down, and took the ford at a crawl.

"Good!" he murmured. "We're through!"

But they weren't. In the exact middle of the flooded patch, the Austin jibbed, and slowly pulled up. The back wheels were churning helplessly, and the little car, with its four occupants, was marooned.



CHAPTER 6.

ALL FOR NOTHING!

CHURCH shook his head wisely.

"I told you to rush it!" he said. "You'd have been through in a

second if you had taken my advice. Now we're bogged! Stuck in the mud! We shall have to walk the rest of the way."

"Good gad!" moaned Archie, from the rear.

Handforth stood up in the little car, and stared round him. They were several yards from land, and the water came up to the axles. Evidently there was a lot of mud on the road, and the wheels refused to grip.

"Rats!" snapped Handforth. "I meant to rush it at the first—only you had to interfere! Now we're stuck here in the middle of this lake! There's only one thing for it," he added resignedly. "You fellows'll have to get out and give us a shove."

"Wonderful!" said Church. "Know any more?"

"Any more what?"

"Any more of those funny jokes!"

"You silly chump, I'm not joking!" snapped Handforth. "You and Mac and Archie are getting out, and you're going to push the car out of this flood!"

"You're a rotten prophet, Handy," said McClure, shaking his head. "Our idea is to sit where we are. As the driver of the car, it's your duty to get out and push."

"Hear, hear!" agreed Church.

"Absolutely, laddies," chimed in Archie.

However, the matter was fortunately decided for them. Handforth was just beginning to look dangerous, and his chums were fearing that he would pitch them out head-first. Then the crowd of cyclists arrived, and dismounted at the edge of the flood.

"Well, I always said Handy was a rummy chap, but this beats everything!" said De Valerie. "Of all the places to choose to view the scenery!"

"You silly idiot!" yelled Handforth. "We're stuck!"

"Really?" said Val, with mild surprise. "That's awkward! We'll tell Nipper about

it, and he'll play two of the reserves. Hard lines, you fellows!"

"Be a sport, Val!" urged Church. "We want you and these other chaps to push us out. It'll only take you a minute."

"Of all the nerve!" said Hubbard. "Come on! We're not going to waste time here!"

The other cyclists agreed, and as there was no way round, they mounted their machines and pedalled slowly into the water. Four of them wobbled, lost control, and were obliged to leap off in order to save themselves from falling headlong in. The rest managed to get through dry.

"Oh, well," said Handforth, "as you've got your feet wet, you might as well give us a push. Now then—all together!"

Fortunately, the cyclists were good-natured, and there was much truth in Handforth's assertion. They couldn't get any wetter by giving the Austin a push, and after two or three heaves, the sturdy little car leapt forward, and got clear.

"I shan't take any more chances," declared Handforth, with relief. "I'll come home by the Caistowe road, and be on the safe side."

"That'll be a fat lot of good," said Church, as they proceeded on their way. "There's a deeper dip along that road, and the flood will be twice as bad. You'll only need to rush this one when you come back."

But Handforth shook his head. But for the timely arrival of those cyclists, the Austin might have been stuck for an hour—unless, of course, the passengers themselves got out.

By the time Bannington was reached, Archie Glenthorne was looking much more cheerful. That overcoat pained him enormously, but he was compelled to admit that he was feeling much fitter. The fresh air, as Handforth had predicted, had done him a lot of good.

"Football, what?" he said genially. "Why, dash it, I believe I shall absolutely enjoy the good old stuff. I trust these Grammar School chappies own a respectable pavilion?"

"It's not much of a place," said Church. "But what does that matter? You can stand round the ropes, Archie, and— Oh, corks! Here it comes again! Hi, stop, Handy!"

The rain, which had only inconvenienced them slightly up till now, began to pour down in deadly earnest. Indeed, before Handforth could pull the car to a standstill, the rain was slashing down in sheets.

"This looks promising for the match!" said McClure, as he grabbed at the hood.

"Never mind the match—let's get this hood up!" gasped Handforth. "The car's getting soaked!"

"Good gad, the old rain-protector comes up like the cover of a dashed baby's pram!" remarked Archie, as the hood was fixed. "A priceless idea, but I believe in these closed cars. Saloons, what? I mean, there's no chance of getting caught in those bally things."

The four juniors were thoroughly wet, for the rain was pouring down relentlessly. It seemed to have settled itself for a twenty-

four hour downpour. The sky was leaden, and there wasn't a single break.

In Bannington, not only were the streets deserted, but many of them were half-flooded. The Grammar School lay on the other side of the town, on the high ground, and when the Austin arrived, Handforth & Co. found Nipper and a number of others sheltering inside the main entrance to the school. Stanmore, the Junior skipper, was there, and he was looking decidedly gloomy.

"Well here we are!" said Handforth, as he squeezed out of the Austin, and made a dash for the steps. "Everybody ready?"

"Everybody's ready, but the rain isn't!" growled Nipper. "Just as we were going out to have a look at the field, too! By jingo, it's coming down in sheets!"

"We're not going to be stopped by a little rain, I suppose?" asked Handforth, staring. "As long as the ground's all right, why should we worry? You're game, aren't you, Stanmore?"

The Grammarian Junior skipper made a grimace.

"Of course I am, but this is a bit too thick!" he replied.

"I like that! Didn't you invite us over?"

"Hang it! How was I to know there'd be another deluge?" asked Stanmore. "When Nipper 'phoned up, the rain had stopped, and it looked like keeping fine. But this is fearful!"

He stared out into the quadrangle. The rain was driving down slantwise, blown by a high wind which had recently arisen. A more dreary scene could not be imagined. Everything was soaking, drenching wet.

And just at that minute, as it happened, Mr. Cotton put in an appearance. Mr. Cotton was the master of the Fifth Form at the Grammar School—a rather burly individual, too.

"What are you St. Frank's boys doing here?" he asked curiously.

"We came over to play football, sir."

"Then you've got more optimism than sense!" retorted Mr. Cotton. "There'll be no game this afternoon. Stanmore, I'm surprised at you for even thinking of such a thing! I positively prohibit any match in this appalling weather."

"Oh, but look here, sir——"

"Enough!" interrupted the master. "You must be mad even to think of it. You St. Frank's boys had better remain here until the weather clears a bit." He prepared to pass on. "Understand, Stanmore, I forbid this insanity! Under no circumstances must you play football in this weather!"

"So that's that!" exclaimed Nipper ruefully as Mr. Cotton went.

"Then we've come all for nothing!" ejaculated Handforth, with a glare. "I might have guessed it! You silly Grammarians are only a lot of duffers, when all's said and done!"

"Look here, you fatheaded Saint——"

"Didn't you ask us to come over?" roared Handforth. "We've had this journey for nothing and the afternoon's completely

messed up! You needn't think that I'm going to stay here until the weather clears. I'm going back to St. Frank's now!"

"There's a certain amount of consolation in the darkest hours," said Stanmore tartly. "I was going to ask you to stay to tea, with the rest of the fellows, but you can go and eat coke instead!"

"I can't bother about tea!" snapped Handforth. "I'll use the rest of the afternoon in the study—over the decorations. It's a beastly fizzle about the match, all the same."

Handforth got back into the Austin and drove off.

"Hi! Wait a minute!" said Church. "Didn't Stanmore say something about staying to tea? Go back, Handy, you ass! We want to get out!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie.

"Then you won't get out—you're coming back with me," replied Edward Oswald. "I shall want you to help with the wall-papering."

His chums and Archie were helpless. They had remained in the car, thinking that it would be driven round to the rear, for shelter, and they had no desire to alight in that fierce downpour, Handforth having thoughtlessly stopped the car twenty or thirty feet from the doorway.

And now, it seemed, they had no option but to accompany Handforth on his travels again.



CHAPTER 7.

MORE MISADVENTURES.

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE was rather relieved, for he had visions of getting back to his comfortable lounge in Study E. He didn't

know, then, that this vision was to prove a mere mirage. He had reckoned without his host.

"We'll take the high road," said Handforth firmly.

"Good gad!" gasped Archie. "We're not going to Scotland, are we?"

"Scotland?" repeated Handforth.

"Well, dash it, you'll take the high road, and I'll take the low road, and we'll all be in Scotland together, what? Scotland's a dashed, priceless sort of place, no doubt, but——"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "I mean, we'll go along the by-lanes, up towards Pine Hill, and then drop down into Edgemore. It's a hilly sort of road, but we shall miss that giddy flood."

Church shook his head.

"Take my tip, Handy, and stick to the main road," he said. "You never know what you'll come across in those by-lanes. There might be all sorts of obstructions. Think of the mud, too! We're bound to get bogged."



Crash! The huge branch, torn away by the gale, shattered the form-room window. Then, amidst a cascade of falling glass, it hurtled in upon the juniors.

But Handforth had made up his mind, and he started off at once, taking a narrow lane which led upwards into the hills beyond the town—the hills which overlooked Bannington Moor on the one hand, and the Stowe Valley on the other. It was a district which the St. Frank's juniors knew very little about, for it was off the beaten track. Occasionally a paper-chase would veer round in that direction, but not many of the fellows knew these lanes intimately.

To argue with Handforth was useless.

However, there was one scrap of consolation. Edward Oswald, in his determination to take the "high" road, had completely overlooked the fact that he had intended buying a supply of wall-paper. Church and McClure kept as mum as oysters. It wasn't their business to remind him, anyhow.

And when they got to St. Frank's, and Handforth remembered, he would probably be so fed-up with driving through the rain that he would abandon the project. His chums held the view that Study D was perfectly satisfactory as it stood—as, indeed, it was.

The rain was certainly coming down. It was as though the Weather Clerk had caught himself napping, and had now decided to send down an extra dose to make up for the recent lull.

"Three days of it!" said Church disgustedly. "We did think it was easing up, and now it's pelting worse than ever."

"And a high wind, too!" grumbled

McClure. "At this rate, the Stowe will be a terrific flood in another day or two. It's a bit risky, Handy, going along these unknown lanes."

But Handforth refused to take any advice. He drove on, and the wind hooted round the little car, and the rain slashed viciously on the windscreen and against the side-curtains. Driving was no easy task, and Edward Oswald needed to concentrate all his attention upon his work.

The four juniors were quite startled by the force of the downpour. The drops were not particularly big, but they were extraordinary numerous. It was the kind of rain that soaks one to the skin in the first minute. And it just hissed down relentlessly and everlastingly. The grey skies gave promise of hours of the same misery.

In spite of the little Austin's all-weather equipment, the juniors were soon getting wet. No car, except a closed saloon, could have remained dry in such a rain. It penetrated everywhere. It trickled down from unexpected corners, and the beating of it on the canvas hood almost drowned the purr of the engine—a continuous, drumming roar.

And the little car plugged steadily on into the unknown recesses of these by-roads. The lanes were narrow, with rutty surfaces, and high banks on either side. Handforth only steered with difficulty, for the wheels were slithering here and there continuously.

"My hat!" he said, after twenty minutes of it. "This is a picnic!"

"Are you sure we're going right, old man?" asked Church anxiously. "We've been climbing up hills all the time, and I believe we're veering off towards Helmford. We'll get miles out of our way unless you're careful, and there's always a chance of getting stuck—"

"I know where I'm going!" growled Handforth. "I don't need signposts; my sense of direction is enough!"

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned McClure. "His sense of direction! We shall probably end up at Land's End, or somewhere like that!"

"Unless we get bogged!" said Church bitterly.

"We shan't get bogged!" snorted Handforth.

And at that very moment, curiously enough, the wheels of the Austin sank deeply into a lot of slimy mud, and the brave little car coughed, sighed, and gave it up as a bad job.



CHAPTER 8.

STUCK IN THE MUD!

"HAT'S the second time!" said Church dully.

Handforth remained silent. He had a vague kind of fear that the stop-

page was serious. The Austin had lurched down with a sinister kind of movement, and there had been a sort of gurgle. There was no flood here, but something infinitely worse—a stretch of sticky, soggy, clay soil. And the Austin had sunk into this mass up to the axles. In this lane there was no proper road surface, and the insistent rain of the last few days had converted the ground into a quagmire.

"We're waiting, old mechanic!" said Archie patiently. "As the driver, I trust you realise your dashed responsibilities? You brought us to this blighted spot, so perhaps you'll yank us out of it?"

"By George!" muttered Handforth at last. "Perhaps it would have been as well to risk that water-splash, after all. We're in a proper mess now."

He climbed out and stood there in the soaking rain. His worst suspicions were realised. The Austin Seven was half-buried in the sticky bog. She had a nasty list to port, and the near-side back wheel, indeed, had practically vanished.

"Get out, you chaps!" ordered Handforth. "There's only one thing to do—we've got to push the car out of this!"

Church and McClure got out, and Archie hovered in the doorway. Water was dripping down from the hood, and the rain was pelting viciously.

"Odds murk and misery!" protested Archie. "I don't mind the fresh air, laddie, but this shower-bath business was hardly in the contract, what?"

"It's not a shower bath, it's a mud bath,

Archie," said Church, as he sank to his ankles. "Oh, my hat! I'm soaked already! Oh, well, things can't be much worse than this, so we might as well resign ourselves."

Archie climbed out, and said nothing further. Once things had got beyond a certain stage, he was willing to stand as much discomfort as any other fellow. And as it was inevitable that they would all get wet through, there was nothing to be gained by hesitating.

"We'll never do it!" said McClure, as he inspected the car. "It'll need a dozen men to shift her. And there's no chance of people coming along this road; we're miles from anywhere."

"Well, we warned him," said Church, not without relish.

"You rotters!" roared Handforth. "It's all your fault!"

"Our fault?"

"Of course it is!" said Handforth unreasonably. "It was your weight that did this! If the car had been light, it wouldn't have got bogged!"

They gasped.

"Why, you silly fathead!" shouted Church. "We didn't ask to come! What's the good of arguing, anyhow? Let's put our shoulders to it, and see what we can do."

This was a sensible suggestion, and the four juniors, now thoroughly wet, heaved and pulled at the car. She was only a small one, but that clay had gripped her tightly, and all their efforts were in vain. But they kept it up, using every kind of device. By the end of half an hour, the car had been shifted about a yard, only to sink back into the bog again. The juniors were hot from their exertions, and they ached in every limb.

"It's no good!" panted Church at last. "We're beaten!"

"There's only one thing for it," said Handforth with a gulp. "You chaps'll have to go for help."

"Tell us where to get help, and we'll go!" growled Church.

"Oh, anywhere—to a farm—"

"You hopeless chump, there's no farm near here!" snapped McClure. "There's nothing—nothing but woods and hills. There aren't any houses for miles along these lanes. Besides, we couldn't find any men—"

"We don't need men; we need a horse!" said Handforth.

But his chums steadfastly refused to shift.

"Oh, let's have another shot!" growled Church. "I'll tell you what, Handy. If we put something under the driving wheels, or just in front of them, and you start up the engine, we might get her out. We don't want to be beaten."

"Absolutely not!" said Archie, reaching for his overcoat. "Here's something that will do to put under the wheels, laddie!"

As they were all soaked through, their overcoats had only been an encumbrance, so they had discarded them. Handforth was so

concerned about his Austin that he did not recognise his own overcoat.

"Yes," he said promptly. "That'll do!"

"Good gad!" breathed Archie.

He had only offered the coat facetiously, but Handforth's ready acceptance was good enough for him. He flung the vile thing into the mud with great relish; feeling, indeed, that he was performing a public service. The sooner that garment was utterly destroyed, the better!

Church and McClure grinned privately to themselves, but said nothing. Handforth leapt into the car and started up the engine. The rain was coming down just as pitilessly as ever.

"All ready there?" he yelled.

The drumming of the rain on top of the hood drowned almost every other sound, but he managed to hear a yell of warning.

"Steady on, you ass!" shouted Church.

"Don't put the gear in yet! We've got to spread this overcoat out."

Round at the back of the little car, Church and Archie grovelled in the mud, laying the coat flat. McClure, on the other side, was ruthlessly using the mat from the rear floor. Needless to say, he did this without Handforth's knowledge.

"Right-ho!" they roared. "Go ahead!"

Handforth engaged his low gear, and then traced the engine. Gently he let the clutch in, and the rear wheels churned round madly. The three juniors, outside, heaved with all their strength, and the Austin lurched forward, gripped the coat and the mat, and gave a kind of sideslip. With a jerk she pulled herself out of the mire.

"Jump in!" bellowed Handforth excitedly. "She's freeing herself!"

"Give us a chance!" yelled Church.

"Quick!" thundered Handforth. "Don't trouble to come round—pile in the back, all three of you! Hurrah! She's moving!"

The Austin was certainly freeing herself, and the three juniors tore open one of the doors and tried to pile in. Church, who was first, slipped, and he accidentally slammed the door with a crash.

"Right!" yelled Handforth triumphantly. "We're off!"

What with the roaring of his engine, the drumming of the rain, and his excited condition, he quite failed to note that his companions were still outside. He took that slamming door to indicate that they had entered, and with never another thought he opened the throttle wide.

The Austin slewed sideways, reeled giddily across to the other side of the lane, and then the wheels gripped in real earnest, and away she shot.

"Hi!" shouted Church desperately.

"It's all right; he's only going up to the firmer ground," panted McClure. "Well, anyway, we got her out, although it did take us an hour."

The Austin was still tearing on up the lane, and Handforth was sublimely ignorant

of the truth. He hadn't heard that warning shout, and it never occurred to him to glance round.

"The dear old sou seems to be going a frightful distance," said Archie uneasily, as he peered after the receding car. "Good gad! He isn't leaving us behind, is he? I mean to say, I can imagine sundry foul deeds, but nothing quite so ghastly as that."

Even Church and McClure were beginning to get alarmed. The lane was perfectly straight here for a long way, and the Austin was humming along it with ever-increasing speed. And at last it disappeared round a bend, and there was nothing but the rain and the mud.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Church. "He must be mad! The hopeless ass! Does he expect us to run a mile after him?"

They stood there, dismayed and furious.

CHAPTER 9.

HANDFORTH'S STARTLING DISCOVERY.



"By George! Now she's going all right!" gloated Handforth.

He was thrilled at the victory. In spite of the seemingly impossible situation, the sturdy little "bus" had been extricated from that morass. And now, on comparatively firm ground, she was humming along with all her usual agility.

The rain was pelting on the windscreen, and Handforth was crouched over the wheel, with his face pushed forward, and his whole attention on his driving.

In this latter task he was doing the right thing, for the lane was narrow, and he could not afford to take his eyes off the road for a moment. Even as it was, the visibility was almost nil. He drove on recklessly, only too happy to be really going again.

"It only shows what you can do, my lads," he said, addressing the empty air. "Where there's a will there's a way! I told you to trust me, and I'd see you through!"

He rather expected a protest here, for he had a vague idea that Church had suggested the overcoat scheme. But even when he got no reply, he did not suspect the truth. He was so certain that the others were in the car that he took their presence for granted. No doubt they were so puffed after their exertions that they could not spare any breath for conversation.

"We shall be home in twenty minutes, at the most," he went on with satisfaction. "And then for a change of clothes and a cup of tea! By George, won't a cup of tea go down well!"

He chatted on amiably, and the Austin, in the meantime, put a distance of two miles between herself and the hapless trio who had been stranded in the rear.

"After tea we can go ahead with our wall-papering," continued Handforth. "We can— Oh, my only aunt! We've forgotten to buy the wall-paper in Bannington! Church, you rotter, why didn't you remind me?"

There was a stony silence from the rear.

"Church!" roared Handforth. "Why didn't you—"

He ventured to glance round as he spoke, for the lane was a bit wider here, and he stopped short in the middle of his sentence. His startled gaze beheld—emptiness. The other three weren't in the car at all!

"What the— Great pip!" gurgled Handforth.

He nearly drove into the bank in his startled dismay. He jammed the brakes on, pulled the car up, and swung round in his seat.

"Where are they?" he asked blankly. "Well, my goodness! Of all the silly fat-heads! I thought they were here!"

He was not only amazed, but bewildered. The discovery had hit him like a blow. For a wild moment he feared that they had fallen out. But on reflection he realised that such a thing was impossible, for all the side-curtains were in position. And one cannot, after all, easily fall out of a car like an Austin Seven. It is a bit of a struggle to get out under normal circumstances.

Handforth opened his door and reached the road. The rain beat on his face like something solid, and he stared back along the lane. Naturally, there was no sign of the trio.

"They—they didn't get in the car, after all," he concluded at length. "The rotters! Just one of their tricks! By George! I expect they thought they were going to be funny!"

Yes, that was it! They had sent him off alone, just to fool him. He waxed indignant, and quite failed to appreciate the plight of the unhappy juniors. It didn't occur to him that the "joke" would have been entirely against themselves.

"All right, they can walk now!" he decided grimly. "If they think they can play these funny tricks— H'm! I don't know, though," he went on slowly. "It would be a bit of a beastly game to leave them stranded up here, on this deserted road."

On second thoughts it struck him that his original theory was probably wrong. Perhaps the silly chumps had been left behind by accident. He thought about going back for them, and glanced at the car. Then he shook his head.

"I'm not taking any chances," he muttered.

The road seemed solid enough on the crown, but the edges were thick with mud, and miniature rivers were roaring down. If he attempted to turn the car round he would probably get bogged again.

So he walked back for about a hundred yards to a bend, half hoping to catch sight of the others beyond. He didn't quite

realise the distance he had covered since leaving them.

Of course, there was no sign of them, and as he stood there his attention was subconsciously attracted by a peculiar roaring noise, away to his left. There was a big gap in the hedge just there, and beyond this rose a hill, with bracken and heather covering its slope. At the top there was a curious rock structure, with heavy sloping buttresses. Handforth looked at it without interest, his mind still on the other problem.

"Oh, I suppose I'd better wait!" he grumbled. "They can't be long, anyhow. I'm not going back."

Having decided, he gave more of his attention to the great structure which was so close at hand. He recognised it as the enormous Pine Hill Reservoir—the source of Bannington's water supply. It was placed up here in these deserted hills, and the distance, as the crow flies, was only two or three miles from the town.

"H'm!" said Handforth. "Thought I knew it!"

He remembered coming this way once, during the previous term, in a paper-chase. He had been one of the hares, and he particularly remembered the reservoir, because he had thought about laying his trail round those great granite walls.

He looked up at the massive structure, and then gave a start. He leapt into the gap, so that he could obtain a clearer view. The rain streamed off the peak of his cap, and dripped from the ends of his coat-sleeves. He wasn't merely wet, he was sodden with rain from head to foot. So he was quite careless of the downpour, which continued as steadily as ever.

"Great jumping corks!" gasped Handforth breathlessly.

That which he had seen at first now seemed to stand out and hit him. The heavy granite wall, with its buttresses, was in clear view, and on a higher level—for this lane was lower, and skirted the end of the reservoir—and there, in that granite wall there was a serried crack, stretching from the top to a spot more than half-way down. Water was spurting through in an ominous cascade.

Handforth's heart leapt into his mouth.

"My goodness!" he shouted desperately. "The reservoir's going to burst!"

Just for a second, a wild panic seized him, and he was on the point of running madly away. There was some excuse for this sudden alarm, for if the reservoir did actually burst, he would be killed in a second—crushed to pieces by the hurtling rocks.

And his mind conjured up other possibilities. He controlled himself, and got himself in hand. Edgemore was directly below! He knew his road now; he knew that if this end of the great reservoir burst asunder, all those millions of gallons of water would surge down the slopes to Edgemore, and then on to the River Stowe, with St. Frank's just beyond!

St. Frank's!

Why, if this deluge swept down, St. Frank's would be right in the path of the flood, and it would mean a terrible catastrophe.

He gazed at that ominous crack like a fellow in a dream.



CHAPTER 10.

HANDFORTH GIVES THE WARNING.

HE water cascaded down with a sinister force. Already, a river was being formed in the little hollow just below the lane. It seemed to Handforth's startled imagination that the crack in the reservoir wall grew bigger as he looked at it. He was convinced that there was grave danger, and that the buttresses might give way at any moment.

He must carry a warning!

That was the thought which throbbed through his brain now. He forgot Church and McClure, he forgot Archie Glenthorpe. His car was handy, and he could do sterling service by carrying word of this impending catastrophe to the threatened valley below!

Bannington wouldn't suffer so much. Handforth knew the geography of the place well enough to see that Edgemore and Bell-ton would receive the full brunt of the devastating deluge. And the noble pile of St. Frank's College was situated directly between those two villages!

"Oh, help!" muttered Handforth. "I shan't be able to do it!"

He was still staring at that serried crack, and his gaze was fascinated as he watched the water surging through. These unprecedented rains had strained the reservoir to such an extent that the end wall had given way and was liable to crash to fragments at any moment.

He rushed back to his car, leapt in, and sped off. Even now, he did not think of his unfortunate companions. After all, there were so many lives at stake that those three faded into insignificance. His duty was to warn the valley! His one task was to get everybody at St. Frank's to abandon the school, and seek safety.

Never before had he taken such desperate risks with his car. He tore along madly, blinded by the rain and the twisting nature of the lane. But, with his usual miraculous luck, he avoided an accident. Every moment he expected to find his car picked up by a surging mass of foaming water, and to find himself struggling for his life.

There was no fancy about it. Edward Oswald Handforth was convinced—he knew, in his own mind, that the danger was stark and real.

His hopes were beginning to rise as he drove into Edgemore. So far, he was safe, and for a moment he hesitated. What should he do?

The main street of the little hamlet was empty—utterly deserted. He stopped his car, and shouted madly. But nobody appeared. No doubt, the thundering rain prevented the cottagers from hearing.

Only for a moment did he wait. It would take him half an hour to go from door to door and arouse everybody. One would have to be sufficient, and then he would tear on to St. Frank's.

As luck would have it, a labourer came out of a footpath near by, with a sack slung across his shoulders. Handforth left his car, and rushed up to the man. He seized him by the shoulder and swung him round.

"Hi!" he roared. "The reservoir's going to burst!"

"What say, young gent?" asked the rustic. He was an elderly man, and apparently deaf.

"The reservoir!" yelled Handforth. "It's going to burst, and you've got to go round to everybody, and tell them to bolt!"

"Bolt?" repeated the man. "I don't know what 'e mean—"

"Tell everybody to leave their cottages, and to get away from this place!" shouted Handforth. "The reservoir's about to burst!"

He felt that he had done enough, and he rushed away before the rustic could explain that he hadn't grasped the purport of the information. But Handforth was satisfied that he had warned Edgemore, and he jumped into the car again, and tore off to St. Frank's.

It was getting dusk now, and the lowering skies only added to the descending gloom. When at last he drove his car through the gateway of St. Frank's, the various Houses were gleaming with warm, friendly lights. They looked very cheerful on this soaking, blustery evening.

But Handforth was not impressed in that way. He was only too thankful that he had arrived safely, and that he would be able to carry the warning to his schoolfellows.

He left the car outside the Ancient House, and he rushed into the lobby, yelling at the top of his voice. It was practically tea-time, and a number of juniors were coming from the common-room to go to their various studies.

Some of the fellows had got back from the Bannington Grammar School, too, for they had realised the hopelessness of waiting for the rain to stop and they preferred to come back in the daylight.

"Hi! Run everybody!" shouted Handforth, at the top of his voice. "The flood's coming! The deluge! The reservoir's going to burst! Run for your lives!"

When Handforth shouted at the top of his voice, he was capable of making a fairly considerable noise. His voice was loud enough ordinarily, but when he really made a big effort, the results were surprising.

They were surprising now.

Fellows in the West House and Modern House heard his roaring, and wondered what

on earth was the matter. In the Ancient House, the walls seemed to vibrate with the echo of it, and a crowd of fellows came rushing into the lobby, excited and startled.

"What's the matter?" gasped De Valerie. "Handy, you ass! What on earth are you making all this din for? You'll be lugged before the Head and swished——"

"The reservoir!" shouted Handforth.

"What?"

"The which?"

"The reservoir!" gasped Handforth. "The Pine Hill Reservoir, above Edgemore! I've just come from there—and there's a crack in the wall! The reservoir's on the point of bursting! St. Frank's is in the full path, and everybody will be wiped away!"

"Great Scott!"

"He's mad!"

All sorts of shouts went up, and Fullwood seized Handforth grimly.

"Steady yourself, old man!" he said, in his quiet, forceful way. "Handy! Don't create a panic for nothing——"

"Nothing!" shouted Handforth hoarsely. "It's true! I tell you, it's true! I've just seen it! Unless you all clear out, you'll be caught by the deluge!"

"Is this honest Injun?" demanded Fullwood sharply.

"Yes!" croaked Handforth. "Oh, you idiots—you fools! How many more times have I got to tell you? Run all over the school, you chaps! Warn everybody to clear out——"

But he was interrupted by a confusion of shouts. Wild consternation swept through the crowd. For Handforth was so deadly serious that none could doubt the sincerity of his statement. Among the weaker juniors a panic started at once, and it spread like wildfire to the other Houses.

Fellows were rushing about in the Triangle, careless of the rain, and in less than five minutes the entire school was awakening to the fact that a sensation of the first magnitude had burst upon them.

"The reservoir! Run for your lives!"

"The flood's coming!"

These and similar shouts were going up on every hand, and it was only natural that the prefects should soon dash out to discover what it all meant. Masters came, too, and for a while nothing but pandemonium reigned. It was quite amazing how the panic spread. The stronger-minded fellows remained calm, and did their best to curb the others. But, in spite of their efforts, the panic grew.

Then the prefects took a hand, rushing about restoring order. The Triangle was crowded, for, by some singular trick of the weather, the rain was held up for a brief spell, and nobody was getting wet. The picture in the Triangle was an extraordinary one—crowds of Removites, Fourth-Formers, and fags all in a state of wild excitement. Even Fifth-Formers and other seniors were there, too.

And then, in the midst of it all, the Head appeared.

Dr. Malcolm Stafford was looking startled and worried. He had no idea what this all meant, and he was grim. He had been disturbed in the middle of his tea, and he had guests, too. Such an outbreak as this, for no apparent reason, had never occurred before.

"Silence, everybody!" he thundered, as he looked round. "Good heavens! What is the meaning of this outrageous commotion?"

The Head's presence had a sobering effect on the crowd, and there was a subdued silence.

"The Pine Hill Reservoir's in danger, sir!" shouted somebody. "It's going to burst, and all the water will rush down the hills; St. Frank's is in the full path!"



CHAPTER 11.

A STORM IN A TEACUP!

R. STAFFORD started.

"What nonsense is this?" he asked sharply. "Hubbard!"

"Sir?" said Hubbard, of the Remove, trembling.

"Did you make that statement about the reservoir just now?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then what do you mean by it?" demanded the Head. "Good gracious! How dare you——"

"It wasn't Hubbard's fault, sir," said Fenton, of the Sixth. "The rumour got about the school ten minutes ago, and everybody seemed to go mad. We've had an awful job to calm these juniors down."

"What is the extent of this preposterous rumour?"

"Only that the reservoir is on the point of bursting, and that St. Frank's will be washed away, sir."

"I have never heard of such arrant nonsense!" fumed Dr. Stafford angrily. "A rumour of that kind is calculated to do immense harm."

Among the crowds Handforth was standing there, dazed. It surprised him that the flood had not yet arrived. Even now he expected the surging waters to come rushing down.

"What about your marvellous flood, Handy?" asked Armstrong, of the East House, in a sarcastic voice. "I can't see any sign of it yet."

"He must have been dreaming!" said Buster Boots.

A great many of the juniors had cooled down, and even the weaklings were looking rather sheepish. The brief cessation of the rain had done a great deal towards calming the excited crowds. The Head's presence, too, had a strong effect.

"I want to know who started this rumour," said the Head sternly. "I shall



A great foaming wave rolled through Big Arch. It swept across the Triangle, and before the fellows could get out of the way, it lifted them off their feet and carried them along on its crest.

take strong action, and punish him severely."

"It was Handforth, sir!" yelled Teddy Long.

"Handforth!" repeated Dr. Stafford, pursing his lips.

He took a deep breath. For a moment he was rather pained. He knew that Edward Oswald Handforth was a thoroughly honourable, truthful boy. But he also knew that Handforth was liable to get all sorts of outrageous ideas into his head. He was just the very fellow to start a rumour like this! And the Head was pained, because he knew that it would be necessary to punish the hot-headed junior.

"Handforth!" he said grimly. "Come here!"

Handforth strode up, and his face was dogged.

"What insanity possessed you to start this rumour, sir?" asked the Head.

"No insanity at all, sir," said Handforth.

"It's true, sir!"

"True!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Handforth! I do not want to thrash you—"

"I saw the reservoir myself—not half an hour ago!" broke in Edward Oswald,

wondering vaguely if he had indeed made a terrible blunder. "There's a crack in the wall, sir, and I was expecting it to burst at any minute!"

"I believe, at least, that you are talking in good faith," said the Head. "Tell me the full details of this—this discovery."

Handforth did so, and when he had finished the Head was rather grave.

"If this information is actually as you say, Handforth, then there is indeed cause for anxiety," he exclaimed. "I cannot allow the matter to stand in its present unsatisfactory state."

Without another word Dr. Stafford hurried away, and everybody went into their various Houses, talking excitedly. Handforth was a laughing-stock now, for it was generally felt that he had found a mare's nest. The flood hadn't arrived, and it didn't seem like arriving. The panic had completely died down.

Dr. Stafford had hurried to his own house, and his first move was to reach for the telephone in his study. As headmaster of a great Public school, responsible for the safety of hundreds of boys, he was anxious. If the Pine Hill Reservoir was indeed in danger of bursting, the situation would be serious.

And he felt that he must make immediate inquiries.

The Head went straight to the only satisfactory source—he rang up the Town Hall, in Bannington, and immediately got in touch with the chief engineer of the waterworks. This man, of all others, would be able to supply positive information.

"You are Mr. Robinson, the chief engineer?"

"Why, yes," said the voice over the wire. "St. Frank's speaking? Is anything wrong there?"

"I am Dr. Stafford, the headmaster," replied the Head. "One of my boys has reported that the reservoir is in danger of collapse—"

"Then one of your boys is either off his head, or trying to be funny, sir!" interrupted the chief engineer angrily.

"But these heavy rains, Mr. Robinson—"

"You can rely upon us, sir, to see that the reservoir is perfectly safe," said the engineer. "As a matter of fact, it was thoroughly examined yesterday, and I can assure you that there is no cause for anxiety."

"I am greatly relieved," said the Head.

"The reservoir has withstood many serious floods," continued Mr. Robinson. "It was built to stand this sort of weather, and you need have no loss of sleep to-night, sir. The walls were examined yesterday—although there was really no need for that precaution—and if this boy has said anything about a fracture, he is talking nonsense."

"Thank you, Mr. Robinson. I am sorry for having troubled you, but I felt it necessary to seek official information," said the Head.

"That's all right, sir! Only too pleased!"

Dr. Stafford hung up his receiver, and his face was expressive of mingled feelings. He was immensely relieved, and he was also angry. Just as he had suspected! The whole thing was a false rumour!

He had Edgar Fenton brought to him at once.

"Fenton," he said, as the school captain entered, "kindly bring Handforth to me without delay. I feel it necessary to inflict a sharp punishment."

"Why, was that story a fake, sir?"

"I don't think it was a fake, Fenton; the boy was obviously sincere in what he said," replied the Head, frowning. "But that doesn't make his fault any the less serious. He must be taught not to get these ridiculous fears. He probably saw a trickle of water along the wall, and jumped to some outrageous conclusion. I have been speaking to the chief engineer of the waterworks, and I am informed that the reservoir was examined yesterday, and is perfectly safe."

"The young idiot!" said Fenton warmly. "Sorry, sir, but I can't help speaking plainly. I hope you'll give him a good thrashing."

He hurried off, and was just in time to save Handforth, as it happened, from a severe ragging. A crowd of fellows in the

Ancient House lobby were about to jump on him, and "take it out of him" for alarming them so unnecessarily.

"That's about enough of this," said Fenton sternly. "The Head is going to deal with Handforth. All you fellows can set your fears at rest. We have heard officially that the reservoir is perfectly safe."

"We knew it all the time!" yelled Hubbard.

"Of course we did!"

"Handy always gets crazy ideas!"

Handforth glared at the jeering juniors.

"All right," he said bitterly. "I've given you the warning, and if you don't heed it, it's your own fault!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And everybody yelled with derisive amusement.



CHAPTER 12.

• HARD LINES!

FENTON looked round frowning.

"You'd better clear off to your studies, and be sharp about it!" he said.

"Hold on, though! Some of you had better go round and reassure the rest of the fellows. There's no danger at all, and never has been. That's official."

Handforth, who was feeling hoarse and weary, snorted.

"You poor chump!" he said witheringly. "Sorry, Fenton, but I can't help it! I saw that crack in the wall—"

"Very likely, but you'll see the Head's cane next!" interrupted Fenton calmly.

"I've got orders to take you to Dr. Stafford straight away. Come along, I don't want any fuss!"

Handforth was startled.

"My hat!" he said scornfully. "So this is all the thanks I get for warning the school! I'm going to be swished! After risking my life, and nearly—"

"Come along!" said the school captain gently.

Handforth offered no resistance, and he accompanied Fenton across Inner Court in the pouring rain—for the night had set in as wet as ever. Poor old Handforth was decidedly unlucky. He had acted in good faith, but somehow the whole thing had missed fire. In spite of his fears, St. Frank's didn't seem to be in any danger at all.

"Now, Handforth, I am going to cane you," said the Head, when the junior was facing him. "I believe you thought you were performing a real service, or I would make it a public flogging. However, I cannot allow you to rush into the school and create an unnecessary panic—"

"It wasn't unnecessary, sir," protested Handforth indignantly. "Who told you the reservoir is safe, anyhow, sir?"

"The chief engineer of the waterworks."

"He's an ass, sir—he doesn't know what he's talking about."

"Handforth!"

"Well, I mean it, sir," growled Edward Oswald warmly. "What the dickens do these silly officials know? All they do is to swank about in their offices, and grab their salaries—"

"I cannot allow you to say these outrageous things in my presence, young man!" interrupted the Head sternly. "What will you say when I tell you that the reservoir was examined yesterday, and found sound?"

"What will I say, sir?"

"Yes, Handforth."

"I'll say that yesterday isn't to-day, sir."

"You foolish boy——"

"Couldn't that crack have developed since yesterday, sir?" asked Handforth, with perfect reason. "Look at the rain we had in the night—and all day, too! I saw that crack as clearly as I can see you, sir! A great, ugly, jagged gap in the wall of the reservoir! If the chief engineer told you that the thing's safe, he's off his rocker!"

The headmaster frowned.

"Really, Handforth, I hardly know what to do with you," he said, in exasperation. "You are so obviously sincere that I really hate to cane you."

"That's all right, sir—you needn't," said Handforth obligingly. "I shan't mind!"

"At the same time, I feel that a caning is called for," continued the Head. "Hold out your hand, sir."

"That crack is really there, sir——"

"Handforth, hold out your hand!"

"Oh, all right!" said Handforth bitterly. "I've always said there's no justice in this world! Here's a fine thing, sir! I warn the school about a deadly danger, and all I get is a swishing! One of these days, sir, you'll wish you'd listened to me!"

He took his six cuts without a murmur. The Head had not laid them on particularly hard, for it was painfully clear to him that Handforth was in deadly earnest. And it was so difficult to deal with a fellow who persisted in believing that he had acted for the good of the school.

Handforth felt bitter after he had been dismissed, and he went back to the Ancient House in a reckless mood.

"I don't care if a dozen reservoirs burst now!" he said, nursing his smarting hands. "If I see the flood coming, I won't even tell anybody! By George! The rank injustice of it!"

He crossed the Triangle from Big Arch, and was just about to mount the Ancient House steps, when he beheld three weary figures dragging themselves along from the direction of the gateway. Handforth gave a start as he recognised them as Church, McClure, and Archie Glenthorne. They came into the radius of light from the open doorway.

They were a sorry picture, indeed. All three were smothered in mud from head to foot. They were tired out and unutterably fagged. Mile after mile they had walked—

prowling through boggy lanes, and fighting against the wind and rain.

"There he is!" said Church hoarsely. "Look at him! Standing there, and mocking at us!"

"Laddies, this is no time for recriminations," murmured Archie. "I desire no fight. I crave no revenge. There is one thing that every fibre of my being calls for. A bath, by gad! Absolutely the jolly old tub! And then, I mean, bed! Dash it, I shall sleep for about five weeks after this!"

"Look here, you chaps," began Handforth. "I want to explain——"

Church and McClure stared at him icily. "Who's this?" asked McClure, with deliberate chilliness. "Who's this black-looking scoundrel?"

"Oh, a callous, brutal rotter who goes about stranding people miles from anywhere," said Church. "At one time he was a decent chap, but I'm never going to have any more to do with him!"

They turned aside and stalked into the House without giving Handforth another glance.

"Look here, you fatheads——" he burst out.

But they passed indoors, and they were by no means pleased when a number of juniors yelled with laughter at their appearance. Handforth came in, and tried to resume relationships with his chums, but they simply refused to have anything to do with him.

The fact was, they were so worn out that they had no strength for any argument, and they crawled upstairs to clean themselves and to change. But they were both firmly determined, beyond any possible doubt, to finish with Edward Oswald Handforth for good and all. Never could they forgive him for this base deed.



CHAPTER 13.

GOING THE WHOLE HOG!

TEA is a wonderful beverage. After one cup of it, Church and McClure were feeling slightly inclined to forgive their leader. After

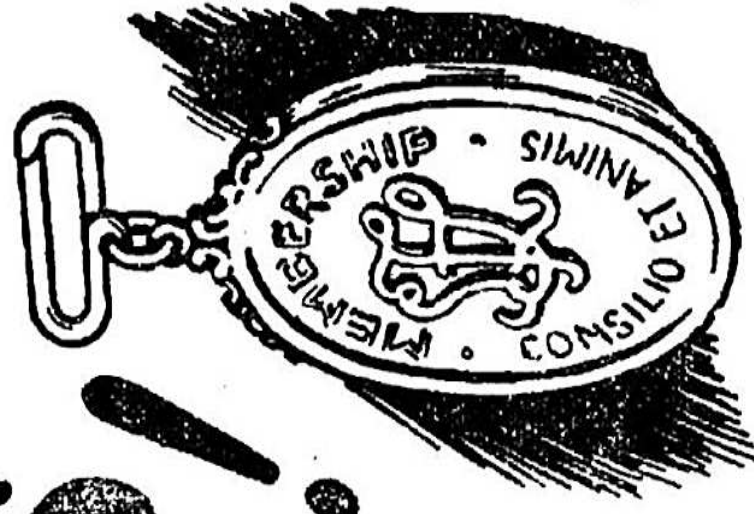
two cups, they decided that revengefulness is not as sweet as it is popularly supposed to be.

They were having tea, as a matter of fact, in Archie Glenthorne's study, having refused to go anywhere near their own den. Archie himself, resplendent once more in a complete new rig-out, was reclining languidly on the lounge, at peace with the world. There were some compensations for a long trudge through the pouring rain, when all was said and done. The fire seemed so much cheerier, and one appreciated comfort more than ever before.

"I suppose we ought to go and have a look at the fathead!" said Church, as he started on his third cup of tea. "We can't forgive him for stranding us like that, but we can forget it. Besides, somebody told me that

SILVER MEDALS! GIVEN FREE!

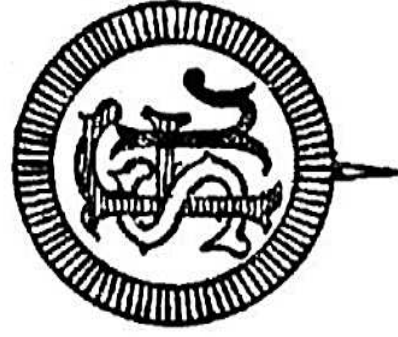
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This picture shows the League Badge. It is given FREE to all members, together with a fine illuminated Membership Certificate.



The St. Frank's League

Full particulars will be found on pages 42 and 43.

he came here and made a big song about the reservoir bursting."

"It's only fair for us to hear his story," said McClure generously.

Handforth, in the meantime, was miserable. He sat in Study D, cold and cheerless. He was like a lost sheep. The fire had gone out, the spirit-stove refused to work, and, instead of drinking hot tea, he was trying to soothe himself with cold milk. It wasn't ordinary milk either, but condensed milk with a lot of water in it.

To make matters worse, Handforth had cut his finger in opening the tin, and, being unable to find the table knives, he had cut some bread-and-butter with the aid of a ruler.

He sat there, dejected and forlorn.

He didn't know what had become of Church and McClure, and he was half afraid to go and see. His chums had always "run" the study, although Handforth didn't even realise this. But if he ever happened to be alone, he generally found things going horribly wrong. He was worried, too, about the fiasco. The Head believed that the reservoir was safe, and the rest of the school treated the whole thing as a joke. But Handforth knew better. He was very concerned.

Outside, the wind was increasing in velocity, and it was buffeting against the window, and the rain was rattling aggressively against the panes. Study D was a place of chilliness and discomfort.

Then the door opened, and Church and McClure looked in.

"My goodness!" said Church, staring.

"Oh, there you are!" said Handforth, looking round. "There's something the matter with this fatheaded fire! I've tried to light it four times, and the rotten thing won't draw! I've been nearly suffocated by clouds of smoke."

Church went to the fireplace, and jabbed with the poker.

"It's generally a good idea to open the register!" he said casually.

"Open the which?"

"This chimney flap thing!" said Church, giving it a push with the poker. "What's the matter with the tea-table, too? Why don't you use a knife, instead of a penny ruler?"

"Somebody's pinched the giddy knives," growled Handforth.

McClure opened the table drawer, and produced a couple.

"Come on, Churchy," he said. "Let's get him some tea, poor chap. I suppose we'd better forgive him for that rotten trick this afternoon."

"It wasn't a rotten trick!" protested Handforth. "I thought you were in the car all the time!"

"Thought we were in the car?"

"Yes, and I didn't find it out until I had gone a mile or two," continued Handforth. "Then I saw that crack in the reservoir wall, and I dashed down here to warn the school of its danger."

SILVER MEDALS GIVEN FREE

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He explained in detail, and Church and McClure understood. They were relieved. Handforth hadn't been a heartless rotter, after all—he had only acted, as usual, like a chump. And they could easily overlook a trifle like that.

A miracle seemed to happen in Study D, for within twenty minutes a cheery fire was blazing, a kettle was boiling, and hot tea was made ready. Handforth sat in the easy-chair, and it never occurred to him that he might have done everything just the same if only he had used his wits. But he was hopeless when it came to anything practical.

"And I got a swishing!" he said indignantly, for about the tenth time. "Six giddy cuts! And all because I did the school a wonderful service!"

"You must have been mistaken about that crack, old man," said Church gently. "After all, the engineer chap ought to know what he's talking about—"

"They never know what they're talking about," interrupted Handforth. "D'you think I place any faith in these old women of the



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Town Council? Besides, I saw the thing with my own eyes. You mark my words—that reservoir's going to burst! And this kind of weather is the very thing that's going to hasten it. I shouldn't be surprised if we're washed out of our beds during the night!"

Later on, after the school had retired, Church and McClure vaguely wondered if there was any justification for Handforth's predictions. It was certainly the kind of night to make anybody feel scared.

The wind had risen to almost hurricane force, and it was not merely whistling round the school buildings, but was shouting and roaring like a thousand giants.

Windows rattled, and the drenching rain was driven in cascades against the panes. Outside, the old chestnuts were swaying wildly and agonisingly in the fury of the tempest.

What if that reservoir broke during the night?

The same thought occurred to both of Handforth's chums, but they resolutely pushed

it aside. It seemed too fantastic. They knew Handy of old—he was always getting wild notions into his head. Certainly, he had never been quite so serious as this before, but that was because he had convinced himself of the terrible danger. But, surely, the council officials would know best?

So they went to sleep, and when the rising bell clanged out the next morning, they found St. Frank's still standing. They were rather inclined to chip Handforth on the subject, but refrained.

They were distracted by the weather conditions. These, in all conscience, were sufficient to distract anybody.

It was pouring worse than ever—had been pouring, indeed, all night. The vista from the dormitory window was startling. West Square was like a lake, for the water was unable to run away, most of the drains being clogged and overflowing.

The fourth day of rain—with scarcely a stop!

And the gale was terrific. It was shooting round the Ancient House, and when Handforth ventured to open the window, it was nearly torn out of his hand and shattered.

"This is a bit too thick!" he grumbled. "If things go on at this rate, life won't be worth living! I'm blessed if I can understand why we're still alive! That reservoir ought to have burst long ago!"

The door opened, and De Valerie looked in, with one or two other fellows.

"Hallo, Handy, what about your flood?" grinned De Valerie.

"It's coming!" said Handforth darkly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle! But I know what I'm talking about."

"Tell that to the marines!" grinned Va. "If that reservoir had been unsafe, it would have burst hours ago. Why, the very fact that it's still whole proves that you saw double. Have you seen Little Side this morning? It's just one sheet of water."

"That doesn't cheer me up!" said Handforth tartly.

"The Stowe has done the dirty on us," put in one of the other juniors. "It's burst its banks properly this time—and all the meadows are flooded, and I hear that Holt's Farm is completely surrounded."

When the chums of Study D went down, they verified the news. During the night, the Stowe had risen alarmingly, and the continuous rain was beginning to take on a menacing aspect. Fields and meadows were flooded everywhere, and the river was continuing to rise every hour. Farms were being inundated, and Bellton Village was seriously threatened.

Everybody expected the gale to die down towards mid-day, but just the opposite happened. By the time morning school was over, the wind had increased to a raging hurricane, and everybody in the school was confined to gates, by order of the Head.

Such weather as this had never been known in the whole history of St. Frank's.



CHAPTER 14.

HANDFORTH'S ANXIETY.

NIPPER was buttonholed by Handforth as he came out of Study C, just before afternoon lessons were due to begin.

"You're a sensible chap, Dick Hamilton," said Handforth.

"Thanks awfully!"

"You've got brains, and you've got a level head," pursued Handforth. "In fact, taking you all round, you're a sound, intelligent sort of fellow."

Nipper bowed gracefully.

"I can't make it more than a quid!" he said regretfully.

"A quid? Who said anything about a quid?"

"Don't you want to borrow something?" asked Nipper.

"Of course I don't, ass!"

"My mistake! After all those compliments, I thought——"

"Compliments, be blowed!" growled Handforth. "I wasn't trying to flatter you—I was just telling the simple truth. For some unearthly reason, the fellows of this House won't listen to me at all."

"Very misguided of them!" said Nipper solemnly.

"But for another unearthly reason, they seem to think that you're reliable," continued Handforth. "Now, about this reservoir. I want you to give everybody the tip to be ready at a moment's notice. It'll be a good idea to take all our valuables upstairs. And we might lay in a store of food, too——"

"Look here, Handy, are you really serious?" asked Nipper, changing his tone. "Have you honestly got an idea that that reservoir is going to burst its walls, and surge down into this valley?"

"Yes, I have," said Handforth, with unusual gravity. "I'm not joking, my lad! The fact that I got a swishing from the Head makes no difference—I still stick to my warning. After last night's rain, and what with this gale, that beastly thing might give way at any minute. I've tried to tell the chaps, but they only cackle."

Nipper was rather impressed by Edward Oswald's sincerity.

"I hope you're wrong, Handy, that's all," he said quietly. "I'd rather like to have a look at that reservoir myself—but we're all gated now, so I can't. It won't be any good my talking to the fellows, though—they'll simply think it's a joke. Anyhow, if there's any danger, we're bound to hear in plenty of time."

"You ass! That water won't take ten minutes to get down!"

"I mean, the borough engineers, or whoever they are, will make another examination to-day, for sure," said Nipper. "They probably pooh-jooed the whole idea to the Head, and told him there was no cause for anxiety. They never like to admit themselves in the wrong. All the same, they probably sent some men up to the reservoir to make a careful examination. And if there's anything rocky about it, we shall get the tip."

So Handforth had to be satisfied with that. But he was very restless. Before going in to lessons he confided to Church and McClure that he had a premonition of disaster.

"That's just your fancy, old man," said Church. "All this rain and wind are responsible. They've put these ideas into your head."

"Oh, all right," said Handforth gruffly. "Nobody believes me—not even you! The best thing I can do is to dry up!"

When they went into the class-room, Mr. Crowell was looking worried and anxious. This particular room was receiving the full brunt of the gale, and the rain was lashing noisily on the windows. All this side of the School House was bearing the terrific force of the storm.

"It's getting worse, sir," said Fullwood.

"Much worse, Fullwood, and I don't mind telling you that I am very concerned," replied the Form-master, as he looked at the windows. "The rain is getting in everywhere. All boys next to the window had better shift away. You others must make room."

"Thank you, sir."

The fellows were rather grateful for this thoughtful act. For, although the windows were closed, the rain was being hurled against them so furiously that water was trickling in in many places. Moreover, there were sundry cutting draughts.

Everybody cramped themselves up on the other side of the room. The Remove, on the whole, was feeling mildly excited. The disgust at the continuous rain had given place to a thrill. The weather was so bad now, that it had become distinctly interesting. And anything that caused a diversion during lessons, was, naturally, welcomed with open arms.

The Form-room was so full of noise, that normal work this afternoon would be quite out of the question. And the juniors found that they could talk quite safely, for the buffeting wind prevented Mr. Crowell from hearing the continuous murmurs.

The fellows speculated as to the probable outcome. Some were convinced that the Stowe would rise so high that the whole of St. Frank's would be flooded. This was quite an attractive thought to some. The prospect of rowing about the school in boats seemed very alluring. Even a week of wet weather such as this would probably have its compensations.

Curiously enough, Mr. Crowell did not

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view the matter from this same angle. He wasn't at all intrigued by the thought of getting from one House to the other in a rowing boat. And the high wind, which seemed to fill his boys with interest, only served to fill Mr. Crowell with anxiety. Lots of fellows were eagerly anticipating a few chimneys to fall, and they thought it quite likely that two or three of the big chestnut trees would crash over. They awaited these excitements with tense expectancy. Mr. Crowell awaited them with acute apprehension.

"I am afraid, boys, that ordinary work will be out of the question," he said, frowning. "This afternoon, therefore, I shall set you some special tasks, which you can accomplish at your desks, without the need for conversation. To begin with, get your geography books out."

"Do you think that tree is safe, sir?" asked Doyle, pointing.

"We are not here to look at trees, Doyle!" retorted Mr. Crowell. "And not so much talk, either! Dear me! The wind is getting higher every minute!"

In spite of his stated lack of interest in trees, Mr. Crowell went to the window, and frowned severely at one of the big chestnuts, which grew a few yards away. In the summertime it afforded grateful shade to the class-room, but just at present Mr. Crowell was decidedly prejudiced against it. He thought it a perfectly preposterous idea to have planted the tree there at all.

"Oughtn't somebody to go and have a look at that reservoir, sir?" asked Handforth.

Mr. Crowell spun round.

"No, Handforth!" he said curtly.

"But if it should burst, sir——"

"You were punished yesterday, young man, for starting these alarmist rumours, and you will be punished again to-day, unless you hold your tongue!" said the Form-master angrily. "Get on with your work!"

He turned, with a start. A perfect cataclysm of wind was hurling itself at the School House, and the chestnut tree swayed and whipped its branches in agony. The Form-room windows seemed as though they would crash in. Mr. Crowell was really alarmed.

He started back, as though afraid to stay near the window, and that action probably saved him from being injured. For scarcely had he reached his desk, than a heavy branch was torn off the chestnut tree as though a giant hand had gripped it. The wind caught it in triumph, and whirled it on.

Crash!

The branch struck the School House wall, and a portion of it shattered all the lower panes of the Form-room window. Glass fell into the room in a cascade, and the wind came hurtling in like something solid.



CHAPTER 15.

DEADLY PERIL.

"GOOD heavens!" gasped Mr. Crowell.

Glass was all about him, but, by a lucky chance, he had not been cut. And his earlier precautionary step, in shifting the boys away from the window, had been clearly justified. Nobody was injured, although the whole room was on its feet, and everybody was shouting at once.

Books and papers were flying in all directions, and the wind was bringing the rain through the broken windows in soaking flurries.

"Order—order!" thundered Mr. Crowell. "Boys; there is no need for a panic; line up on the other side of the room! Hamilton, Pitt, Handforth—a dozen of you, rush out and get help!"

The Remove considered this a ridiculous order. This wasn't a job for a mere dozen—but for everybody. Unfortunately, the Form-master threw cold water on this brainy scheme.

"The rest of you will remain here!" he ordered. "Hamilton, see if you can get some sacking—or blankets might do—anything to cover these smashed windows."

A number of fellows hurried out, and nobody noticed the sudden gleam which had sprung into Edward Oswald Handforth's eyes. Here was a chance! He would be able to slip off unnoticed, in the excitement.

In that minute he determined to get out his Austin, and ride through the storm to Pine Hill. Nothing else would satisfy him. He felt that he simply had to have another look at that reservoir! And as it was impossible to obtain permission, his only alternative was to take French leave. And here was his opportunity—for he could be right away before his absence was even noticed.

This was no mere escapade. For once in his life, Handforth was chasing a genuine peril, and not a mare's nest. And he was so restless that the thought of sitting in the Form-room all the afternoon appalled him.

While the rest were obeying Mr. Crowell's orders, Handforth shot out into the Triangle, sped to West Gate, and two minutes later he had started the engine of his Austin, and was setting out. He whirled round into the Triangle, and nearly crashed into the main gates, before he realised that they were closed.

Fortunately, Cuttle, the porter, came out.

"The gates was closed, young gent," he said heavily.

"I can see that; but I want 'em opened!" shouted Handforth.

"The 'Ead gave strict orders," said Mr. Cuttle. "An' why did 'e give strict orders? Ask me! Because——"

"It's urgent—I've got to get out!" broke in Handforth frantically.

He hadn't bargained for this obstacle, and he feared that he might be seen. He was in full sight from the main doorway of the School House, at the apex of the Triangle. Anybody coming out—

"There's been an accident in the Form-room!" yelled Handforth, with a gleam of hope. "Window busted in—rain pouring through! Quick! Open the gates! Buck up, Josh! It's urgent!"

Mr. Cuttle, thus hustled, moved. That vague reference to an accident took him off his guard, and he had opened the gates almost before he realised that Handforth had shown him no official pass. The Austin Seven shot out into the lane, and vanished.

But that little delay had made all the difference. Mr. Crowell, hurrying out of the Form-room to see if anything was being done, arrived in the big lobby just as Handforth was vanishing. The heavy door stood wide open, for some of the other juniors had neglected to close it after they had rushed out. Mr. Crowell stared.

"Upon my word!" he ejaculated. "Is the boy mad?"

He recognised that little car at once. Everybody at St. Frank's knew Handforth's Austin Seven. Other Austin Sevens came to the school occasionally, but none of them could be mistaken for Handforth's. His was a special model—a sports' type, with red coachwork. For an instant, Mr. Crowell believed that Handforth was hurrying out of

the school grounds in order to get help. But instead of turning towards the village, he shot round in the other direction.

Nipper and Reggie Pitt and Tregellis-West came tearing across from the Ancient House at that minute, bringing blankets.

"Hamilton!" shouted Mr. Crowell. "Run to the gates quickly! All of you! Handforth has just gone out in his car—"

"We can't catch him, sir!" said Pitt.

"By Jove, I'll bet he's taking a trip to that reservoir!" put in Nipper keenly. "The thing was on his mind, sir! He's got a fear that the wall is going to burst."

"Get your bicycles, and hurry after him!" said Mr. Crowell anxiously. "The young idiot may endanger himself. There are trees down, probably, and he will have an accident."

"If the road's blocked, we'll soon overtake him, sir," declared Nipper. "Come on, you chaps; there's not a minute to lose!"

About eight Removites went, including Church and McClure. Somehow, they had sensed what their leader was up to, and they did not mean to be left behind. They started out on their machines, with the wind hooting round them, and making riding precarious. More than once they were nearly blown off. But the gale was sweeping along behind them, and proved a help rather than a hindrance. Indeed, if they had been riding into the teeth of the storm, they could have made no progress.

Mr. Crowell's fear of fallen trees was

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justified, for over twenty monarchs had crashed already. Strangely enough, the road was quite open all the way, except for myriads of broken twigs and minor branches. There was nothing to seriously impede the junior's progress.

The hurricane was howling with unbelievable fury, and all the boys were soaked through already. It seemed incredible that Handforth could actually get through. Two or three miles had to be covered—the latter half, beyond Edgemore, steeply uphill.

And Handforth, as it happened, got through.

Trees were down everywhere, but not one of them had fallen so that the road was blocked. All the same, this ride was a great risk, for a tree might come hurtling upon the solitary motorist at any minute. If Mr. Crowell had thought that Handforth would find a clear road all the way, he would never have sent the other boys after him.

But Handy reached that part of the road where he had stopped on the previous day. And he jumped out of his car, and stared eagerly at the great granite wall of the reservoir.

It was a wild scene. On this hilltop, the storm was howling with a thousand furies, and the rain was beating into Handforth's face so fiercely, that he was almost blinded. The sky was so black, that a premature dusk had fallen, and the clouds seemed to be no higher than the tree-tops.

"Oh, my only hat!" gasped Handforth, his heart leaping.

That crack in the granite wall was a gap now! Water was surging through in a tremendous cascade. And all along the wall there were other cracks—and Handforth needed to be no expert to see that the structure was in danger of complete demolition.

Indeed, at that very moment, several of the topmost granite blocks seemed to heave up, and topple over. They went crashing and thundering down, striking against the buttresses, and a miniature flood roared through the gap they had vacated.

"She's going!" yelled Handforth frantically.

He didn't wait to see any more. His worst fears were realised. How he got the Austin round, he hardly knew, but a minute later he was tearing back. But almost at once he jammed his brakes on, for a group of cyclists were struggling along the muddy lane.

"Turn back!" he shouted, as he leapt out. "You idiots! What did you come here for? The reservoir's going!"

"You old ass!" panted Church. "It's only your imagination——"

"Imagination!" thundered Handforth. "Look there!"

He leapt to the bank, and scrambled up. He pointed. The cyclists dropped their machines, and joined him. From here they had a full view of the great reservoir, with its towering, buttressed wall.

"Good heavens!" muttered Nipper aghast. They all stared in utter alarm. The top of the wall was bursting asunder, and those serried cracks were widening. The wall was liable to go at any second, and then nothing in the world could prevent the deluge. Millions of gallons of water would be released in one appalling flood.

"Well?" roared Handforth, turning a face that was red with excitement.

"We're trapped!" gasped Watson. "The thing's bursting on us!"

"Quick! Jump on your bikes, all of you!" yelled Nipper. "Ride as you've never ridden before—and thank goodness it's downhill! We may have twenty minutes, or we may only have one! But ride! It's our only possible chance!"

They almost fell on their machines, and the next moment they were flying down the hill with reckless speed, Handforth leading the way in his trusty little Austin. They never expected to reach the valley alive, for they had the haunting horror of that menace in their rear!



CHAPTER 16.

ALL HANDS TO THE PUMP!

R. STAFFORD turned from his study window, his brow furrowed with anxiety.

"I am afraid that there will be a great deal of damage, Mr. Pagett," he exclaimed. "This wind is unprecedented. And the river, too. The river is worrying me enormously."

The Fifth Form-master nodded.

"I am not surprised, sir—I am not surprised," he agreed. "But I am really here for the purpose of seeking your advice about my Form-room. The water is penetrating in four or five different places——"

"Really, Mr. Pagett, I cannot help you!" said the Head irritably. "I am not a plumber! In these weather conditions, we can hardly expect anything else. You will have to get along as best you can."

"Many of my boys are getting wet——"

"Then you must shift them," interrupted the Head. "I would like to suggest some remedy, but what can we do in this dreadful rain? Perhaps I had better come with you——"

He broke off as the telephone bell rang.

"Just a moment, Mr. Pagett!" he said impatiently.

He went to his desk, and picked up the instrument.

"Well?" he asked. "St. Frank's? Yes! Who? Oh, Mr. Robinson! Yes; I am the Headmaster——" He broke off, and his face changed. "What!" he shouted hoarsely. "The reservoir is in danger!"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Pagett. "Did I hear you correctly, Mr. Robin-

son?" went on the Head sharply. "I cannot believe——"

"I am only thankful that the telephone wires are still intact!" interrupted the engineer. "Get every man you can, sir, and rush them to Pine Hill. We want every hand we can get hold of, and your school is comparatively near to the scene of danger. I can assure you, that it is entirely in your own interests, as St. Frank's is perilously within the threatened zone."

The Head could be forgiven for turning pale.

"The threatened zone!" he repeated, his tone becoming tense with rising anger. "Upon my soul, Mr. Robinson, I wonder that you have the audacity to tell me this!"

"I cannot understand your tone, sir——"

"Cannot understand it!" thundered Dr. Stafford, nearly dropping the telephone in his perturbation. "Did you not assure me, yesterday, that the reservoir was perfectly safe? You distinctly informed me that under no circumstances could the reservoir——"

"I can't help that, sir!" broke in the other harshly. "My engineers report that the south wall is crumbling, and I need every man I can get. I spoke in good faith yesterday, but I did not know——"

"Then you should have known!" stormed the Head, with justifiable rage. "One of my boys warned the school of its peril, and, owing to your feather-headed incompetence, I punished him. Good heavens! If there is any disaster, Mr. Robinson, I shall hold you responsible. I am amazed that your methods should be so lax that——"

"You needn't get abusive, Dr. Stafford!" broke in the borough engineer. "I am warning you of the danger, and the least you can do is to heed it. You surely ought to know that I am in the hands of my underlings, and I can only make statements according to their reports. I urge you to rush all the help you can to Pine Hill, at once."

"I will do so; but under strong protest!" retorted the Head curtly.

He slammed the receiver on its hook, and his face was now pale with agitation.

"Did you hear, Mr. Pagett?" he asked. "These fools! These incompetent salary grabbers; these time-serving nincompoops! The reservoir is in danger, and this whole district is threatened!"

"Then—then we must flee for safety?" gasped Mr. Pagett.

"No, sir!" snapped the Head. "We must go and help! And to think that Handforth brought the warning yesterday, only to be ridiculed and jeered at! What an injustice to the boy! If I had my way, these engineers would be thrown out of their jobs without compunction!"

"Quite so, sir; but the danger?" stammered Mr. Pagett.

"Yes, the danger," replied Dr. Stafford. "Go round and get all the masters together. I'll send messages to every House. We must

get every man. Yes; and the prefects, too. But on no account say anything to the boys; don't let them have the slightest knowledge of this."

"But ought they not to escape while they can?"

"I do not anticipate such actual catastrophe as you intimate, Mr. Pagett," replied the Head. "The engineers would scarcely ask us to help unless the reservoir was capable of being saved. This is a great emergency, and we must rise to it. We must sink our own feelings, and ignore the storm. I am glad the boys are all at work, for they will be confined to their class-rooms, and will know nothing of what is going on."

Within ten minutes, all the masters had collected together, and most of the prefects, too. The porter was there, the grooms, the gardeners, and every able-bodied man. The boys, in the meantime, had no knowledge of this sudden emergency. They were being temporarily taken by seniors.

Nelson Lee was rather dubious. As House-master of the Ancient House, he was naturally included in the gathering, and he was inclined to sound a warning note.

"If you will accept a hint from me, Dr. Stafford, I should hesitate before taking every master and prefect away like this," he said gravely. "I think we should leave a certain number——"

"Every man is required, Mr. Lee."

"I know, but think of the school," replied Nelson Lee. "At the very least, the boys should be warned of what might happen."

The Head was very agitated, and he was not inclined to listen to any advice. St. Frank's might be in danger, and he wanted to rush everybody to the reservoir without another moment's delay.

"No, Mr. Lee, we must rush off," he said agitatedly. "With our help, this danger will probably be averted, and the school need never know. Good gracious. There might be a panic if we even hinted at the actual truth. Come, we must be off!"

Lee tried again, but it was useless. And almost immediately afterwards every St. Frank's master left the premises, together with the other men, and Edgar Fenton and his fellow prefects. They were off to help in the task of saving the reservoir.

The Head's chauffeur had, in the meantime, made ready with Dr. Stafford's private car, the school bus, and a lorry. These vehicles were sufficient to accommodate them all, and they set off into the storm.

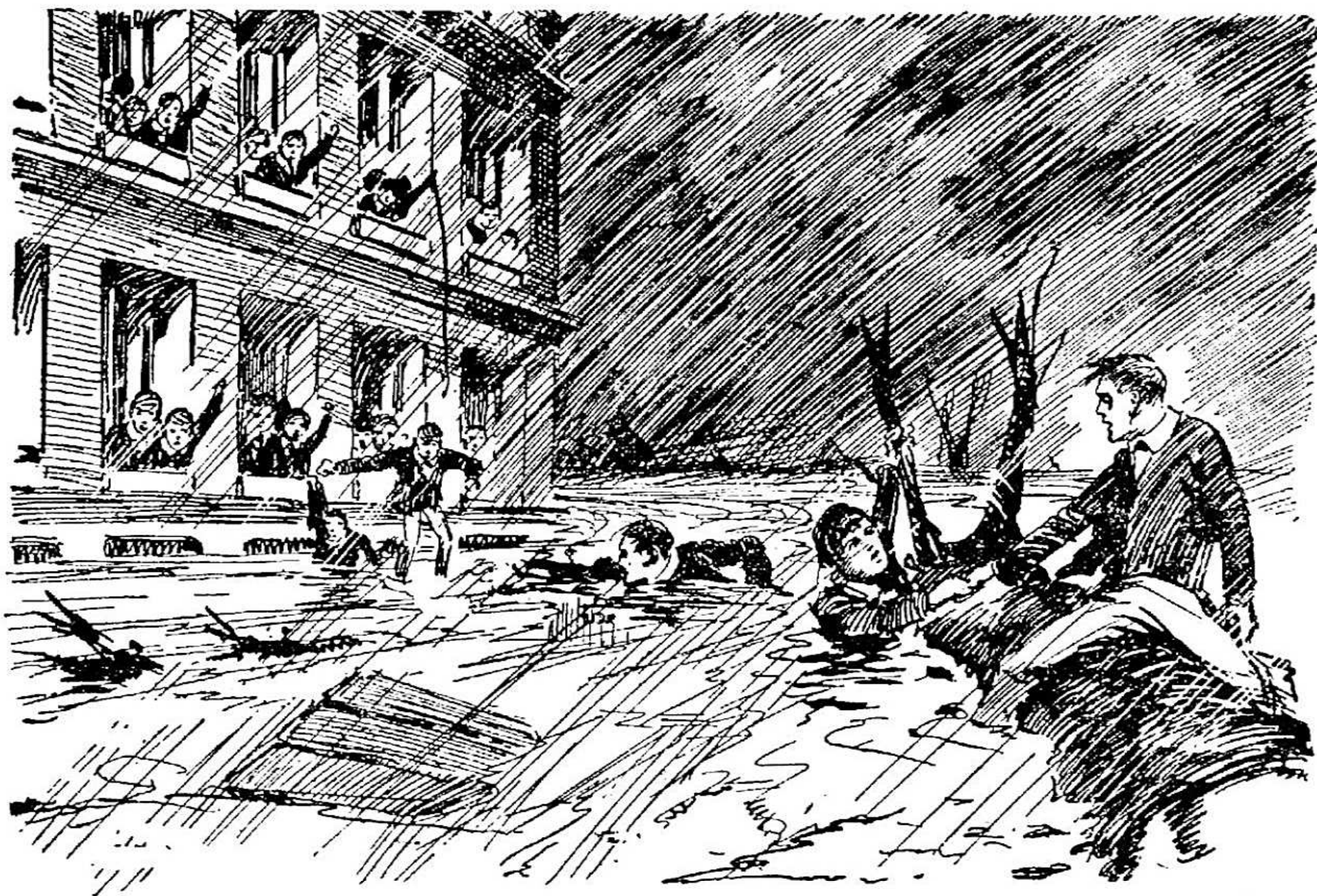


CHAPTER 17.

HANDFORTH CRIES "WOLF!"

HANDFORTH jammed his brakes on at the bottom of the little Edgemore High Street, and jumped off his machine. The other juniors

followed his example.



As the floating tree reached the Triangle, Nipper & Co. released their grip and plunged into the water. Handy jumped recklessly down to their assistance, as a roar of shouting went up from the crowded windows.

"We've got to warn everybody here!" panted Nipper, as he steadied himself against the raging gale. "Reggie, you and one or two of the others dash off to those outlying farm-houses and cottages, between here and Bellton Lane. And don't forget to give a warning to the Moor View School. Three of us will be enough to stop in Edgemore, and tell everybody to quit."

Watson stared up the hill behind him.

"It's a wonder we're not all dead!" he said apprehensively. "Why doesn't that flood come down?"

"Never mind about that now—let's be thankful that the reservoir's still holding," replied Nipper keenly. "These things always look worse at first sight. I don't suppose there's any real danger for the next half-hour—it'll take that time for the wall to crumple. But when it does crumple, by Jove, there'll be the most ghastly deluge imaginable!"

Handforth, who had pulled his Austin up further along, came running back.

"What are we going to do?" he shouted.

"Tommy and Montie and I are going to stop here and give the warning to the villagers," replied Nipper. "The rest are going round to the outlying cottages. You rush straight to St. Frank's, Handy, and tell the Head—tell everybody! Make them leave the school, and get out of the path of the flood. Even as it is, there's no time, I'm afraid—but we can do our best."

"All right—I'll go!" replied Handforth boisterously.

He was off without any delay, and the others, including Church and McClure, mounted their machines again, and took to the lanes. Not one of these juniors realised the heroic nature of their action. For they were risking their lives in order to warn the country folk. They knew the danger—they had seen that crumbling wall with their own eyes—and they knew that if they were caught in the surging waters, there would be little or no hope of escape for them. But they went on their mission without a thought of their own danger.

Their task was made all the more difficult because the country people were slow to understand. Many of the cottagers were just dazed, and could not appreciate the danger. And there were women and children here—many of them without their menfolk to help. And the boys, after all, could do no more than sound their clarion call.

They could not quite understand why they were still safe. They had expected the deluge to come long since. The reservoir wall, probably, was more sturdy than it appeared to be. But, sooner or later, the catastrophe was inevitable. The fellows fervently prayed that the fatal moment would be delayed.

A slight change had come in the weather.

The rain was so much less, that it only came down in occasional flurries. But the gale was higher than ever—a snorting, roaring hurricane, which was shrieking over the countryside, and doing tremendous damage to woods, house property, and so forth. The

sky was ugly with low, scurrying clouds. Black masses were scudding up from the murky horizon, giving promise of more torrents.

When Handforth drove into the Triangle, he found the school apparently deserted. The gates were wide open, but the porter wasn't there. He caught sight of one or two anxious-looking women at the windows of the domestic quarters. They had been told nothing, but the dramatic departure of all the men had given them a broad hint.

The school was still at lessons, and Handforth was tremendously pleased. For it meant that everybody was congregated in the School House. He would only have to dash from class-room to class-room to warn the lot.

He left his Austin Seven against the Ancient House wall, and dashed up the School House steps three at a time. And it was only natural that he should rush headlong into the Remove class-room first.

He burst in, and all the fellows started shouting. They knew there was something wrong—but Mr Crowell had not explained why a dozen had not come back after that smashed window episode. And Mr. Crowell himself had gone soon afterwards, and the Remove was in the loose charge of a Fifth-Former.

"Out of here, everybody!" yelled Handforth. "The reservoir's going to burst!"

"What!" yelled a dozen voices.

"Run for your lives!" shouted Edward Oswald. "It's a lucky thing I've got here in time, but there might be a chance——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Remove, having recovered from its surprise, burst into a yell of laughter. The whole room echoed with the sound.

"You—you cackling idiots!" gasped Handforth. "Haven't I told you——"

"Poor old Handy!" grinned De Valerie. "He thinks he can spoofer us with the same yarn twice!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nothing doing, Handy, old man!"

Handforth stared, aghast.

"Don't you believe me?" he panted desperately.

"Not likely!" shouted Singleton. "You can't dash in and cry 'Wolf' like this, and expect us to be such duffers as to fall for it."

"Try somewhere else, Handy!"

"We've heard that reservoir yarn before!"

"You—you thick-headed lunatics!" yelled Handforth, alarmed at this unexpected attitude. "I tell you it's true!"

"Rats!"

"Nipper and Pitt and the other chaps are rushing over the district, warning everybody to clear out!" went on Handforth. "This is honest Injun! I'm not trying to fool you!"

"You probably mean well, old man, but we're not taking any, thanks," said De Valerie calmly. "You can go and tell that

story to somebody who hasn't heard it before! Like your nerve to——"

"Nerve!" howled Handforth. "The reservoir's bursting!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth rushed out, and he tore into the Fourth Form class-room—only to discover, to his horror, that the Fourth-Formers treated his story with similar derision. On the previous day he had been the laughing-stock of the school, and nobody believed him now. It was a typical example of the Boy and the Wolf—and the result was liable to be grave.

It was the same with the Fifth, and the Sixth-Formers curtly told Handforth to clear out. And when Edward Oswald tried to find a master, he drew blank.

He was frantic with consternation. He was powerless to quell this jeering, laughing mob. Amid all the excitement, most of the school had gone out into the Triangle, pleased enough to find that the rain had held up for a bit. And Handforth was helpless.

"Aren't you going to move?" he demanded, as he pushed his way into a crowd of juniors. "It's fatal to stay here! I tried to tell the Head, but I can't find him!"

"Go and change your clothes, Handy," said Buster Boots. "You're wet through."

"Never mind my clothes——"

"And take a cold bath while you're at it—it'll cool you down," grinned Bob Christine.

"You silly ass! We don't believe this rot about the reservoir! Everybody knows it's perfectly safe."

"And everybody knows that Handy is dotty!" jeered Armstrong.

"Clean off his silly rocker!"

And the others shouted in the same strain—and made no attempt to prepare themselves for the coming danger. The unfortunate Handforth was so bewildered by this development that he hardly knew which way to turn. And he expected the flood to surge down at any moment.

It was an agonising situation for him—for while he knew the actual danger, the others treated the whole affair as a huge joke. And there wasn't a master in the whole school to take these thoughtless young sceptics in hand.



CHAPTER 18.

THE COMING OF THE FLOOD.

ROMAN service had already been performed by the other juniors.

Nipper and Tregellis West and Watson, rushing

from cottage to cottage in Edgemore, had succeeded in arousing the people to a full sense of the danger. The alarm had spread. And the lanes were filled with refugees, flying desperately to the safety of the hills beyond Bellton Wood. This zone would be out of the path of the rushing waters, if they could only reach it in safety.

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This is the cover to look out for next Wednesday. "THE MAROONED SCHOOL!" is just the kind of yarn you like. Order your copy to-day!

ORDER IN ADVANCE!

The two small inns of the tiny village were deserted, and the shopkeepers, dismayed and terrified, only deserted their business after they had witnessed the general exodus. There was no doubt that the chums of Study C, by their insistent urgings, saved many lives during that tense half-hour. For Edgemore was liable to be wiped completely out.

The others were rushing to the outlying cottages, to one or two farmhouses, and other bigger residences. And on such a wild afternoon as this, any disaster seemed possible.

"Dear old boy, we'd better get to St. Frank's," said Tregellis-West, at last. "The village is empty now, an' we've done our work. Begad, it makes me frightfully worried to see all the kiddies bein' hustled away."

"Some of them babies in arms!" muttered Tommy Watson. "I say, shan't we be awful idiots if the reservoir holds!"

Nipper shook his head.

"There's not much hope of that," he replied. "I'd cheerfully look an idiot if this catastrophe could be avoided. Well, come on—we'd better get to St. Frank's. I expect

we shall find the school half deserted. By Jove, what a picnic!"

They mounted their bicycles, and started off. They were convinced that the others had already reached St. Frank's, and they were getting rather anxious. Full forty minutes had elapsed since they had looked at the reservoir, and it was incredible that the crumbling wall could hold much longer. To go up and inspect it again would be suicide.

Two minutes later, this truth was impressed upon them vividly.

They had hardly got to the outskirts of the hamlet, when Nipper leapt from his machine, and stared back. The others jumped off, too.

"Didn't you hear something?" shouted Nipper.

"The wind's roaring so much——"

"A sound like an explosion!" he said. "It boomed down above the wind, and I'll swear it came from Pine Hill!"

At that very moment, drama was being enacted at the top of the hill.

There were hundreds of men there—collected at the reservoir, in the hope that something could be done. The party of men from St. Frank's had only just arrived. They had gone round by the moor, in order to avoid the narrow lanes, and had climbed the rise from the other side—which explained why the juniors had not met them.

But they were too late. Almost before they could alight from their vehicles, the air became filled with warning shouts from the workmen, and running figures scurried in every direction.

Dr. Stafford, alighting from his car, beheld a staggering spectacle. From this particular point he was looking along the south wall, and he could see water surging from dozens of gaping gaps. And then, as though some gigantic hand had pushed it, the entire mass of granite bulged outwards.

"Good heavens!" shouted Dr. Stafford.

The air was hideous with the crashing and grinding of rock, and then the water surged out—all those millions of gallons, hurtling through the broken wall in fiendish triumph. In a second, a miniature Niagara was formed. Two or three men were swept away—probably to their doom—but the others had mercifully been warned in time. They were behind the danger-point, and could watch in safety as the great reservoir emptied itself in that hurtling torrent.

Nipper and Co., in the lane a mile or two away, were staring back.

"Look!" shouted Watson shrilly. "You're right! Oh look! It's coming!"

They were transfixed by the appalling enormity of it. Far up on the hillside they could see a plunging mass of white foam—a blinding cloud of spray. Trees were being swept down like grasses, and the spectacle was too stupendous for them to realise. Nipper was the first to recover the use of his limbs.

"Quick!" he yelled. "We've got to race it! It'll be here in a minute, and if we're caught in that deluge, we shall be crushed to pulp! Thank heaven we got everybody out of Edgemore in time!"

They leapt into the saddles, and pedalled for their lives.

They rode blindly, despairingly, for they knew that it would be utterly impossible to reach St. Frank's before that deadly torrent reached them. Behind, even above the roar of the gale, they could hear the thunderous tumult of the oncoming flood. The air quivered, and the very ground shook under the stupendous force of it.

And again Nipper threw himself from his machine.

"Up this bank!" he yelled. "It's our only chance!"

He had spotted a hillock—a sharply rising piece of ground. There was a faint hope that they might be safe there. Tommy and Montie fell from their machines, rather than jumped off. They leapt after Nipper, and at that very moment, the first waters came roar-

ing down the lane like a tidal wave. There was something fascinating in the very sight of that foaming, billowing, onrushing torrent.

It swept down the lane at incredible speed, demolishing hedges, trees, and everything in its path. And the flood-waters themselves were full of flotsam, all being carried along by the irresistible force.

Nipper and Tommy Watson, racing up that hillock, believed that Montie was behind them. But the unfortunate Montie had tripped on a hidden root, and had sprawled over. And by the time he had regained his feet, the peril was upon him.

"We shall do it!" yelled Nipper. "Oh, why didn't we take notice of Handforth yesterday?"

Even now, in this dire moment of danger, it did not occur to the juniors that they had brought this upon themselves by staying behind to warn Edgemore. Thank heaven, those villagers had had time to get away! Every one would have died, had they remained.

"We're fairly safe here——"

Nipper paused, his voice drowned by the tumult. On every side the brown, foaming water was hurtling past. As far as the eye could reach, the deluge was spreading out. And Sir Montie Tregellis-West was caught on a billowing wave, and carried off.

"Montie!" screamed Watson.

The water caught Nipper and Watson, and nearly carried them off their feet. Even on this high ground, they were far from being out of danger. They stared in horror as Tregellis-West was forced under by the power of the flood—forced under until he had completely vanished amid the smother.



CHAPTER 19.

THE FLOOD AT ST. FRANK'S.

IN that dread moment, it seemed that poor Montie was doomed.

But then, as Nipper and Watson gazed, they saw their chum forced to the surface again, and in the same moment he was sent hurtling against the branches of a thick tree. The waters pulled viciously, and the tree swayed in its death-agonies, but for the moment it held. And the half-submerged junior clung to its branches, dazed, battered, and bewildered.

"Come on!" panted Nipper.

With never a thought, he and Tommy plunged into that awful, icy swirl. They were carried along, and a moment later they reached their chum. They seized him, and the tree gave way. All three were swept along, still clutching at the branches. Down with the flood, shooting over meadows and fields, with the murky foam all round them.

And on the hilltop, crowds of horrified men were watching the catastrophe from afar.

"We must get back to the school!" shouted Dr. Stafford. "Oh, somebody shall pay for this criminal blunder! Mr. Lee! Mr. Stockdale! We must get back——"

"I am afraid it will be impossible," interrupted Lee quietly.

"Impossible?"

"The school is flooded already, and we can only hope to get there by boat," replied Lee. "What boat is there here?"

"And the school is left without a single master!" ejaculated the Head, aghast. "Oh, I was foolish not to heed your warning, Mr. Lee. But these—these imbeciles shall pay!" he added furiously. "They brought us here on a fool's errand—on a hopeless mission!"

And while they desperately discussed ways and means, St. Frank's itself was encountering the first surge of the flood. Another peril had arisen, too—an unexpected one. The River Stowe, continuing its alarming rise, was sending its waters over fields and meadows, and the inundations were increasing staggeringly. With the reservoir waters, the whole situation looked like being tragic.

The Triangle at St. Frank's was still crowded with fellows—seniors and juniors alike—who refused to take any heed of Handforth's warnings. But a rather different feeling was creeping in. Everybody still cheered, but an uneasiness was taking possession of the school.

It wasn't time for lessons to end, and everybody was out in the Triangle, and yet there were no prefects. Not a single master came out and ordered the boys back. And this fact was significant, alone. Then Reggie Pitt and Church and McClure and the rest tore in. They had fulfilled their own special mission.

"Thank goodness you've come!" yelled Handforth, rushing up. "These idiots won't take any notice! All this time, and they won't listen——"

"Rats! We're not going to be spoofed twice!"

"You fools!" shouted Pitt furiously. "We've been warning the country people, and Nipper and two other fellows are risking their lives at this very minute! You ought to have gone long ago!"

"But—but we thought it was Handy's rot!" babbled Armstrong.

"It can't be true!" shouted Chambers of the Fifth. "St. Frank's is in no danger! That reservoir is safe——"

"Listen!" gasped somebody.

And from every other part of the Triangle came the same shout. As if by magic the crowds stood still, tense. From the distance came a low, ominous rumbling—a sound which could be heard above the howl of the gale. The ground was quivering, and that thunderous, rushing noise arose above all else.

"It's coming!" shouted Handforth.

"Run—run!"

"The flood's coming!"

A wild panic seized everybody, and the Triangle was filled with racing figures, running helter-skelter in every direction.

"Did you warn the Moor View School?" asked Handforth huskily.

"Yes; but Miss Bond's away!" exclaimed Pitt, turning. "They've got a temporary headmistress there, and she seemed to think we were fooling. Still, we did all we could——"

"Look!" shrieked Armstrong.

Round the further walls of the School House, a great, foaming wave was rolling up. It came through Big Arch; it came swirling round the Ancient House and the Modern House. It swept across the Triangle, lifting the running fellows off their feet, and carrying them along on its crest.

The excitement was tremendous.

Handforth grabbed at a couple of fags, and pulled them back in the nick of time. In that one moment, the whole scene was transformed. The waters were billowing round the school buildings, and hissing into the open doorways.

In the Ancient House—as, indeed, in the other Houses, too—the scenes were incredible. A couple of Sixth-Formers, coming down the senior passage to see what all the noise was about, paused. Another Sixth-Former had just come out of his study, and the cheerful blaze from his fire flickered upon the opposite side of the passage wall.

Then, round the end of the corridor came a roaring of water. The next second a giant wave came sweeping along, foaming, splashing and swirling with irresistible strength. Before those Sixth-Formers could move an inch, they were smothered, and the flood poured triumphantly into the open study, extinguished the fire in one explosive burst of steam, and splashed, with savage impotence, against the walls.

In the domestic quarters things were even worse, for the shrieking maids were in the last stages of panic. The great kitcheners were sources of deadly peril, for they were liable to burst when the icy waters struck them. It was a desperate instinct of self-preservation which caused everybody to make a blind rush for the upper floors.

St. Frank's was engulfed in a miniature sea, and there was something almost uncanny in the speed of the flood. The waters were spreading through the length and breadth of the school, and outside the scenes were incredible. In those first moments, the disaster seemed worse than it actually was.

For, truth to tell, the all-destroying force of the deluge had spent itself before it reached St. Frank's—it had spread out, too. After the first wave had swept on, the water was found to be no deeper than four feet, and the fellows were able to force their way indoors to safety.

But none could deny the gravity of this amazing situation.



CHAPTER 20.

MAROONED!

HUNDRED and one things were happening simultaneously.

Fellows, trapped in their studies, opened their doors to find themselves hurled off their feet by the flood waters. Heroic acts were so numerous that none were noted. And the rush for the upper floors continued. And in the absence of any masters or prefects, the school was left entirely to its own devices, and, not unnaturally, there was hopeless confusion.

There was nobody in authority, nobody to give orders. All the same, the fellows took matters in hand without being told. In a crisis like this, it was a case of every fellow for himself. But scores of the fellows were helping others, the weaker ones.

It was a matter for great thankfulness that no lives were lost. The school was gated, and so everybody had been near at hand. All those who had been swept away in the Triangle managed to get indoors, and the upper floors were a modern edition of Babel.

"Perhaps you blockheads will believe me now!" shouted Handforth, as, soaked to the skin, he came upstairs, dragging a couple of half-drowned fags with him. "If you hadn't been such fools—you would have heeded my first warning, yesterday!"

"We thought you were only spoofing, Handy!" panted a number of voices.

"Well, you don't think it any longer!" retorted Handforth.

There was no triumph in his voice. This wasn't a time to gloat. He had been right from the very first, but this was one of those occasions when he wished he had been wrong.

Curiously enough, nearly all the fellows had found shelter in their respective Houses. Here and there, an East House boy found himself in the Ancient House or the West House, and vice versa. But, generally, each house had its own rightful inhabitants, and every upper window was crowded with excited, eager faces.

The scene from these upper windows was amazing.

Everywhere there was water. The dusk was descending threateningly, and once again the rain was driving down. The wind howled, and the flood waters swirled murkily. That first onrush was over, and although the current was strong, it was no longer a tidal wave. Between the Houses there were wide canals, and the Triangle and the Squares were lakes. And the water, far from dropping, was rising higher every minute. Trees floated swiftly by, trees and bushes and every possible kind of flotsam, and the darkness was shutting down like a threatening pall.

In the Ancient House, Handforth was hurrying about, frantic.

"Where's Nipper?" he was demanding. "Has anybody seen Nipper? And Watson? And Tregellis-West? Those poor chaps haven't come back! They must have been swept away before they could get home!"

"We left them in Edgemore," said Church huskily. "I'll bet there must be scores of people drowned in this terrible affair! Oh, why didn't those chaps hurry back?"

"They stopped behind to warn the villagers," said Handforth grimly. "All praise to 'em, too! What a horrible thing if they're drowned! We all go up into the Arctic, and get wrecked in an airship, and join in wars and things, and then Nipper and his pals have to get killed in a local flood! It's—it's too ghastly!"

As a matter of fact, Nipper & Co. were very much alive at that moment, although their plight was desperate. They were clinging to the topmost branches of a tree, having climbed there after the first onrush had spent itself. They were surrounded by a scene of wild desolation.

The night was coming down, the floods were rising, and the gale was hooting across the sheets of water viciously. It was as much as the three exhausted juniors could do to hang on.

The water here was eight or nine feet deep, and it was swirling by with a dreadful velocity. They were in a corner of a meadow, and they could see St. Frank's in the distance, the school buildings sticking grotesquely up out of the water. And on every hand there was the same scene of hopeless bleakness.

"What can we do, Nipper?" panted Watson, his voice a mere croak. "I can't hang on much longer; my fingers are so numbed that I can't feel them. There can't be any help here, either. We shall just drop, and—and then be carried away—"

"Steady on, old man!" muttered Nipper, between his teeth. "Let's be thankful we're alive, and this tree feels fairly safe. Try and wedge yourself in—"

"I can't—I can't!" panted Watson. "My legs won't work! And the flood's rising! Can't you see it? It's getting nearer every minute! And this—this awful wind—"

"Dear old boy, it's a frightful position, but we've got to make the best of it," interrupted Sir Montie gently. "We can only hope somethin'll turn up."

They fell silent. All round them, the air was filled with the hooting of the hurricane, the lashing of the rain, and the pitiless swirl of the rising waters.

Nipper was grim. He could see little hope. If they tried to swim for it, they would never last, for their limbs were practically useless. He might be able to swim to the school, and Sir Montie would probably make half the distance, but Tommy would never do it. Twinkling lights came from St. Frank's now, and their very appearance was tantalising.

"Won't they come?" muttered Watson. "Won't they send a boat?"

"They might," said Nipper gently. "We'll see."

In his heart he knew that no such miracle could happen. For there were no boats—the St. Frank's boathouse must have been crushed to fragments when that tidal wave crashed down. In any case, the current was so strong that any boat would have had difficulty in forcing its way against it. Apart from all this, nobody knew where to look for the trio. And St. Frank's, Nipper guessed, would have its own dire troubles.

It was chance which decided things.

A bursting, hooting wind came down—a giant flurry—and that tree, which had given the chums of Study C support, succumbed. The branches whipped madly, and the trunk bent over, snapped, and tore itself free.

"Hold tight!" gasped Nipper desperately.

The next moment they were being swept along, and it was as much as they could do to keep their heads above water. But the tree was a heaven-sent blessing, for it bore their weight. They just clung to it, and let the unknown current do its will.

It wasn't chance which carried them straight down towards St. Frank's, although it seemed like it. The flow was in that direction, and they were inevitably borne nearer and nearer to the school. Nipper had one arm round Tommy Watson, and the clutching fingers of his other hand were feelingless.

"Cheer up, Tommy!" he muttered. "There's a chance for us. You'll have to make an effort. When we get to the nearest point to the school we'll swim—we'll beat this flood yet!"

"I'm game!" muttered Watson tensely.

It was all so unreal—all so fantastic. They recognised the upper part of the bicycle

shed as they whirled past it, and the next minute they were being carried past the angle of the Ancient House. A roar of shouts from the windows encouraged them. They had been seen!

"Now!" panted Nipper.

They released their grip, and the tree swept on. The three juniors swam desperately. Already the water round the school buildings was six or seven feet deep.

"Hurrah! It's Nipper & Co.!"

"Come on, you chaps, we'll grab you!"

Handforth, De' Valerie, and two or three others jumped down recklessly from the upper windows as they saw that their chums were well-nigh spent. They reached their sides, and supported them. Ropes were flung down, and all of them were dragged in amid wild cheering.

"Thank goodness!" breathed Nipper as he was hauled through a window. "My goodness, you chaps, we thought it was all up with us! How many missing?"

"None!" replied Handforth. "But there are no masters, and all the prefects seem to be gone, too. Browne of the Fifth believes that they went off during the afternoon, and they must have got stranded somewhere. Anyhow, we're safe now, and that's the main thing."

But the flood was rising all the time; night was coming down, and the gale was howling and raging with unabated violence.

The deluge at St. Frank's had done its deadly work, and the great school was marooned. Isolated—cut off from the rest of the world—and not a single master under any roof!

It was a situation which filled all with vague, uneasy dread.

THE END.

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

ORDER IN ADVANCE!

*Cut off by
the flood
—left with-
out food or
masters!*



*New thrills,
excitement
and tons of
fun in this
yarn!*

Pass this copy on to your chum—give him a chance to read this topping new series!



BETWEEN OURSELVES

Mr. Edwy Searles Brooks
chats with his readers.



*NOTE. If any reader writes to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed to EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Every letter will have my personal attention, and all will be acknowledged in these columns. Letters of very special merit will be distinguished by a star *, against the sender's name. Communications which indicate writer's age are naturally easier for me to answer.*

E. S. B.

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Well, that Northestrian series is over now, and this week the fellows are back at St. Frank's, as usual. Let's hear from some of you—all of you, if you like—pointing out what you've got to grumble at in the first of the new series. Let's have a flood—of letters.

Dick Hamilton is Nipper's correct name, Chapman Lowrie Wilson. When he first came to St. Frank's he called himself Dick Bennett, but that was only a ruse, because he and Nelson Lee were in disguise. He dropped that name as soon as the peril was over. Dick Hamilton is definitely the right name—but you can bet I'm going to stick to good old "Nipper," his nickname.

Your question is soon answered, Buck Jones. You ask where Alf Huggins got to. He didn't get anywhere. He is still at St. Frank's, and he shares Study E in the Ancient House with Archie Glenthorpe. In other words, our old pal, Alf Brent. He only used the name Huggins when he first came to the school in order to spoof everybody. If you remember, he pretended to

be the son of a bricklayer, when his respected parent was nothing of the sort.

You needn't be so plaintive, Patrick McSweeney. You say: "Is it utterly useless for me to write?" Of course it's not, but you mustn't expect to have your individual requests immediately carried out. If the general majority coincides with your viewpoint, then you'll get your wish. But if I started making alterations to please every individual reader who writes to me—well, I'll leave you to imagine the result!

* * *

I don't believe it, Douglas Crawford! Emphatically and absolutely, I don't believe it! No, sir! This is what you say: "What we want is your yarns to become serious again." Now, what does everybody else say? Would you like me to drop out old Handy altogether? Would you like me to leave Willy severely alone? Would you like me to take Browne away from the school, and to ruthlessly eliminate every scrap of humour? And what about Archie? Besides, Douglas Crawford, you're wrong when you infer that my stories *were* serious at one time. Perhaps they contained a little more drama, but I don't think you'll have much to grumble at in the series that starts this week.

* * *

By the way, don't forget my offer of last week. If any of you want my photograph (goodness knows why you should have this peculiar desire) I'll send you one, properly autographed—in return for yours! That's a bargain, of course. It's no good writing to me and asking for a photo unless you enclose one of yours in exchange. I might as well confess that the whole scheme is a selfish one. I want to fill up my album, and I want to see what some of you readers look like!

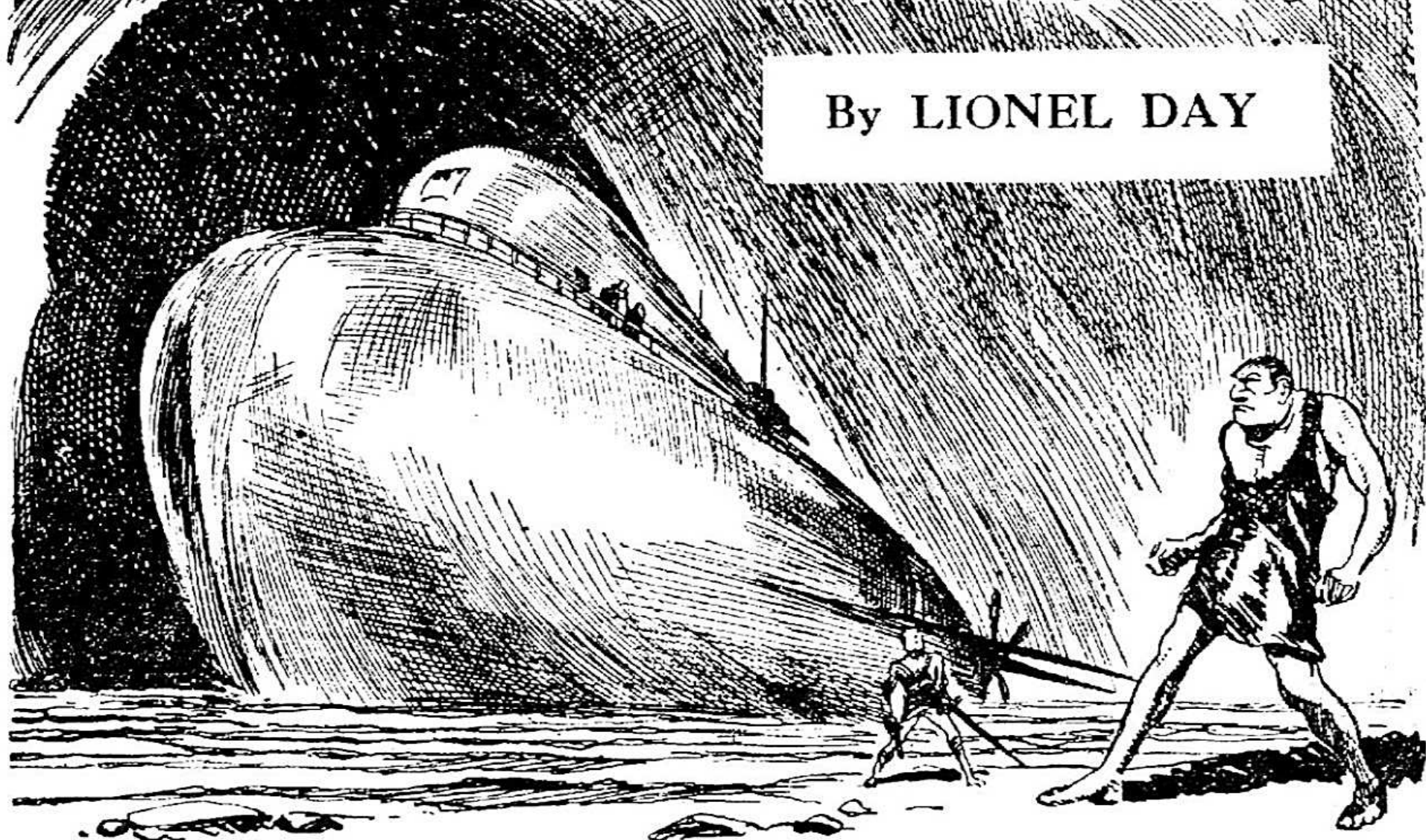
Edwy Searles Brooks

Amazing New Serial!

Packed With Surprises!

THE BURIED WORLD!

By LIONEL DAY



WHIRLED INTO SPACE!

Jim Maitland lives in a small shop in Stagmore. A mysterious man named Stanislaus Cripps owes money to the shop, and Jim decides to collect the debt. He climbs over the wall of Widgery Dene—Cripps' estate—and drops down into the grounds. Then he gets the surprise of his life! For on the ground an amazing machine of white metal, the design of which is something between an airship and a submarine. On board Jim finds Mr. Stanislaus Cripps, a big, bearded, fierce-looking man. Jim courageously asks him for the money. Mr. Cripps refuses to pay. Not only that, but he tells Jim that he is just off for a trip on the wonderful machine he

has invented, and insists on Jim going with him. Jim refuses—but in vain, for the ship is already in the air flying smoothly through space at nearly two hundred miles an hour! Mr. Cripps treats him quite well, explaining all about his wonderful invention, but Jim wants to get home. Presently he sees his chance. Mr. Cripps leaves him alone in the control cabin. Jim determines to move one of the levers an action he knows will send the machine earthwards. He touches the lever, and at once they begin to drop. At that moment Mr. Cripps comes rushing back. "What have you done?" he cries. "We are sinking to destruction!"

(Now read this week's thrill-packed instalment.)

The Flying Submarine:

WHILE Mr. Cripps was speaking he shouldered past Jim and sprang at the lever the lad had touched. For what seemed like minutes the machine continued its dash earthwards. Then, as Mr. Cripps feverishly manipulated various controls, there was a terrific lurch, and Jim was flung off his feet.

"We're saved, boy!" he heard Mr. Cripps shout. "Our fall has been arrested!"

The machine was now once again gliding smoothly on its course, and Jim picked himself up. He expected Mr. Cripps to storm at him for having caused the accident. But to his relief the eccentric man made no mention of the incident.

He appeared to think that Jim had caused the accident quite unintentionally.

After a last inspection of the controls he turned to Jim.

"I've more to show you," he said. "Follow me."

He led the way up a flight of stairs and halted at an open door. From within came the rhythmic sound of machinery. Jim caught a glimpse of enormous pistons of that wonderful metal moving backwards and forwards.

Mr. Cripps began to lecture again on the construction of his machine. But Jim scarcely listened. With every minute that passed they were leaving England farther and farther behind. Jim wanted desperately to be allowed to go home.

Several times he began to ask permission. But Mr. Cripps did not even seem to hear him, but went on talking—talking—in that loud, booming bellow. At last Jim could stand it no longer. He caught Mr. Cripps by the arm.

"Mr. Cripps, I want to be taken home," he cried.

The man's manner changed instantly. He appeared in a moment to become aware of Jim's existence as a single person and not a crowd. A grin expanded his lips.

"Home, boy? Certainly not. Do you think I want to pay your mother sixteen and fivepence halfpenny? Believe me, I should detest it. You came here unasked, and here you must stay. You shall have the inestimable privilege of sharing in my amazing investigations. Banish the thought of home, boy. You shall cook for me. You shall make yourself useful. Come, we will have supper, and then to bed."

Jim awoke the following morning with a feeling that he must have been dreaming. Surely he must be back in his little bed-room over the shop! But he wasn't there. A sensation of desolation swept over him as he glanced round the room with its shining silver ceiling, walls, and floor, and all that had happened to him swept through his mind.

He was on the Flying Submarine alone with Stanislaus Cripps. He recalled the strange supper they had had—how he had been shown into the room in which he was now lying. The blankets and mattress were brand new, evidently a portion of the loot which the man had extracted from the shopkeepers he had swindled.

Whether he liked it or not, he was embarked on this adventure, and the best thing was to go through with it, keeping a stiff upper lip and hoping for the best.

The watch under his pillow showed him that it was seven o'clock. He remembered that Stanislaus Cripps had told him that he could act as cook. He had thrown it out not as an order, but as a suggestion. Recalling the previous night's amazing interview, Jim remembered that Mr. Cripps' attitude towards him had been extraordinary. Sometimes he had been the "hireling of a greedy tradesman"; the next moment apparently someone of Mr. Cripps' own age and lastly just "boy"—a fellow creature very immature, whom he treated very much as Jim treated his terrier at home. The only thing to be done was to make the best of the situation and as idleness would be unbearable—as it would only give him more time to think of his mother and his home—he made his way to the kitchen when he had dressed.

Mr. Cripps had called it the "kitchen," though it was unlike any other kitchen he had ever seen in his life. There Jim started to prepare breakfast. There was no fire to be lit and no matches to be struck. Everything was to be done by electricity generated from the great engines of the Flying Submarine. In a quarter of an hour he had the kettle boiling and the bacon fried.

Then, finding some crockery in a cupboard, he laid the table in the dining-room—a long apartment with chairs and tables of the same mysterious metal as the ship, and so light that the draught created by opening the door moved them several feet, as if they were leaves caught by the wind. This done, he found his way to the pilot-house at the very top of the stairs. Stanislaus Cripps was there immersed in a man. At Jim's entrance he looked up with a friendly grin, as if they had been acquainted for years.

"Well, boy, and how did you sleep? She's kept her speed and her course through the night without a single variation, which means we shall strike the coast of South America by evening."

"I came to tell you that breakfast was ready, sir," he said.

"Splendid! I knew there was something I had to decide—whether I should cook the breakfast for you, or you should cook the breakfast for me, but you've settled the matter. Come along!"

A Desperate Test!

JIM, as he tucked into the bacon, listened to Mr. Cripps' bellow, as he recited his plans for the future. And such nightmare plans! As he glanced at him Jim wondered if he were sane.

"I thought of testing her this morning on the sea," he was saying; "but I came to the conclusion that it would be a waste of time. I know she'll do whatever I want of her. The great thing is to get money, boy—money. I must establish myself in the world, and without these foolish tokens of exchange it is difficult."

Jim reflected that, seeing he had lived for two years without them, and had built that amazing ship in the meantime, Cripps hadn't done so badly, but he wisely kept his thoughts to himself.

"West of Chili—between that coast and Easter Island—that's where I'm hoping to find the treasure. You will remember, boy, that a whole vast continent vanished beneath the waves in that particular area of the world. Easter Island, with its amazing evidences of a past civilisation—its wonderful statues—is a proof. We are going to explore that buried world. We will go down four or five miles to the bed of the ocean—you and I, my boy. If I mistake not we shall find gold there, which will make the treasures of the Incas of Peru seem a paltry trifle."

Jim could no longer retain his curiosity. He must satisfy himself whether this man was mad or not.

"I suppose you can get the airship under the sea, sir, but I don't see how, when you've got it there, you're going to explore the bed of the ocean."

Stanislaus Cripps pushed back his chair so violently that it flew from under him, rose in the air like a piece of paper and fluttered softly down on his head. He looked up with a puzzled expression for a moment, and then quietly removed it.

"One takes some time to remember how tight this metal of mine is," he remarked. "I ought really to have screwed the tables and chairs to the floor, but one can't think of everything. Come with me, boy, and I'll give you an answer to the question you put to me just now."

Seizing his arm he led him to the bottom floor of the great ship. Arrived there he opened a door which moved inwards. Within was a small apartment from the walls of which hung what looked to Jim like suits of armour.

"Those are our diving suits. We come in here and close the door. Those cylinders at the back are capable of providing sufficient air for an immersion of twenty-four hours. Enormous as the pressure of the water will be at the particular spot where I intend to carry out my investigations, this metal of mine is capable of resisting it. We don these suits. Then we turn this handle and admit the sea, checking its ingress as occasion requires. When the apartment is full, the pressure inside and out will be the same. We then open that door and step out on to the bed of the ocean."

He entered into a number of technical details as to how the air was expelled from the chamber. As far as Jim could understand this air was sucked away in a reservoir above until required again. To return to the ship, the outer door was closed, pumps were set in motion, and the water expelled. They would then remove their

diving suits and pass out into the body of the ship.

Jim was never to forget that morning. Stanislaus Cripps took him round the ship, and talked, and talked, and talked, explaining the immense importance of his invention and how, if he chose to give it to the world, it would revolutionise society. Presently Jim caught some of his excitement and his enthusiasm. He almost forgot his homesickness in his pride at being the sharer in this tremendous adventure. On the various floors there were rooms innumerable, all destitute of furniture.

"I hadn't the patience to make the furniture," Mr. Cripps exclaimed, "but some day when I am rich, you and I, boy, will make this ship a flying palace!"

"But how did you manage to make all this single-handed sir?" Jim enquired.

"A very intelligent question, boy! It seems to you impossible that I should have done it alone, but one of the properties of this metal I have invented is that at a certain state in the process of its development, it is as malleable as clay. You can mould it with your hands. With the most elementary machinery—a turning lathe—an ordinary potter's wheel—it was possible to fashion the various parts of the ship. For two years I worked on it, and here is the result."

There were no windows in the Flying Submarine. Save for the periscope she was blind, but on that white-topped table in the pilot-house it was possible to watch the progress they made. Jim saw the sea rolling from beneath them—a liner slip by—an island flash for a moment on that surface and then vanish. Steadily, at an unvarying speed of three hundred and fifty miles an hour, the Flying Submarine kept her southerly course throughout the day. Towards evening Mr. Cripps called Jim's attention to the fact that the sea had vanished.

"South America, boy," he boomed. "On our return journey we will explore those unknown tracts of land in the interior, but for a moment we cannot waste the time. As we do not wish to collide with any of the mountain ranges during the night, boy, we will ascend."

He moved a switch slowly, watching one of the dials as he did so.

"Look, boy, look how perfectly she answers to her controls. That needle registers her height from the surface of the sea."

Jim saw the needle pass from 10,000 to 20,000, to 30,000. He glanced at the mirrored reflection cast by the periscope. The earth that had been so vividly distinct only a moment before, had now shrunk to an indistinguishable blur.

"By to-morrow, we shall have crossed this continent and have reached the scene of our operations. You have seen how my invention has conquered the air. To-morrow you will see her victory over the depths of the sea."

On the Bed of the Ocean!

JIM was conscious of a growing sense of excitement. He had long lost any feeling of fear for his strange companion. He did not even bother himself with the question of whether he was sane or not. That marvellous invention of his was at any rate a reality. It was wonderful to be flying through the air at that enormous speed as steadily as if he were on the deck of a steamer; it would be still more wonderful to go down to the very bed of the ocean and discover its mysteries. So excited was he that he hardly slept that night. It was not until dawn had broken that he really passed into a deep slumber.

He woke with a start to find that it was already ten o'clock. Springing out of bed he

dressed himself and hurried to the pilot house to enquire if Mr. Cripps had already breakfasted. A breath of warm air met him as he stepped off the stairs on to the floor. Looking up he saw there was a round hole in the roof against which a ladder was placed. He clambered up the ladder to find himself standing on the vast shining deck of the Flying Submarine.

She was slowly descending. He joined Stanislaus Cripps, who was leaning over the rail staring downwards. Below he could see the ocean coming up to meet them. Steadily the great vessel sank. Now the first ripple of the sea touched her and she bounced like a bubble caught by the wind. Without a word Stanislaus Cripps darted below, and presently the water began to close about the vessel until she floated half submerged, swinging easily to the tide.

"We'll have breakfast on deck, boy," the great voice boomed.

It did not take Jim long to prepare tea and bacon, and seated there on the deck cross-legged, they devoured their meal. When they had finished Cripps lit his pipe. His blue eyes were shining with excitement.

"Now, boy, we will test what she can do under the sea. We are lying at this moment midway between Easter Island and the coast of Chili. It is here or hereabouts that I hope to find the submerged continent. Make haste and clear these things away and we'll begin our most important exploration."

The breakfast things removed, Jim joined his companion in the pilot house. The port-hole in the roof had been closed, and everything was in readiness for the submersion of the vessel.

"Now!" said Stanislaus Cripps, as he moved a lever.

As an experience it was somewhat disappointing, Jim found. Except that the reflections on the white topped table vanished, nothing seemed to happen. But Stanislaus Cripps appeared quite satisfied. Studying a dial he recorded the number of fathoms they had descended. Suddenly he gave an exclamation of delight.

"I have the honour to inform you, boy, that we are now subjected to a pressure which would squash the sides of a battleship as easily as you would break an eggshell. If you could step out of this vessel at this moment, you would be instantly flattened. Only my metal is capable of bearing such a pressure."

Jim felt more than a little uneasy. The disturbing thought flashed through his mind that after all Mr. Stanislaus Cripps might be wrong. He was interrupted in his gloomy thoughts by another exclamation from his companion.

"Boy, we have touched bottom. We are now fifteen hundred fathoms below the surface—three hundred fathoms more, if my memory serves me right, than any yet recorded depth! Now all we have to do is to make our way to the diving-room, don our dresses and begin our investigations."

He made his way to the head of the stairs, and was about to descend when the floor beneath them lurched violently. Jim was sent cannoning against his companion. Grasping at him wildly, they went together head over heels down the stairs. Somehow they managed to stay their progress at the first floor. Jim, who was lying uppermost, felt himself flung aside, as Stanislaus Cripps, uttering some violent exclamation, leapt over him and bounded up the stairs. Dazedly Jim crawled after him. The ship was lurching drunkenly beneath his feet, flinging him from side to side. He managed somehow to gain the pilot house. Stanislaus Cripps was standing there wedged in a corner staring at the dials.

"Can't make it out, boy. We're moving, but I don't know why we're moving. A current at this depth 's absurd."

"How do you know we're moving?" Jim gasped.

"The engines are working at their full capacity, and yet, you see, we are recording no speed. That means we must be being pulled backwards."

He clutched his shaggy red beard with both hands.

"Can it be a leak in the ocean bed, boy? Can it be that we are being sucked down into the centre of the earth?"

Jim had no answer to those questions. He could only stare at Stanislaus Cripps panic-stricken. But there was no fear in the other's face. He looked for all the world like a chess player profoundly puzzled by the unexpected move of one of his opponent's pieces.

"An interesting problem, boy. It remains to be seen whether we shall live to discover its solution. If my engines can't hold her, the strength of the current must be enormous."

"Can't we ascend, sir?" Jim asked nervously.

"I've emptied the reservoirs. She has enough buoyancy at this moment to float twenty thousand feet above the sea. And yet, we don't go up. We're like a straw caught in a mill stream."

He stared steadily at Jim.

"We must get to an end somewhere, boy. This water must have some outlet, and according to the unalterable laws, it must rise eventually to the same level as the sea. It may be a subterranean cavern, in which case, once freed from this current, with our present buoyancy, we shall rise suddenly and be dashed to pieces against the roof."

He was thinking aloud, and having arrived at these conclusions he stretched out his hand and moved the levers which replenished the empty reservoirs with air and stopped the engines.

"Boy, we are now in a position of having to wait and see," he remarked.

There was dead silence in the pilot house, broken only now and again by the slipping of their feet on the floor as the ship lurched and trembled. Five minutes went by. In spite of the ingenious machinery by which the vessel was maintained in a state of stable equilibrium, the floor every moment grew steeper, until at last they were actually standing on what before had been one of the walls. Then suddenly there was a jar. The great vessel shivered throughout its length, oscillated violently, and then assumed its normal horizontal position so unexpectedly that they were jerked off their feet like pebbles from a catapult. Stanislaus Cripps was the first to pick himself up.

"We're here, boy," he exclaimed with a grin. "wherever 'here' may be."

Even as he uttered the words he gave a little start, and his shaggy brows were puckered in a frown.

"This is strange, boy. For the last ten minutes we have been descending almost vertically. Judging by the speed we have been travelling we must have covered at least five miles. That means that we are at least six miles below the surface of the sea. According to the laws governing the action of fluids, we should be rising, and we should go on rising until we have ascended that six miles. And yet, we are stationary. What is the meaning of it?"

Jim had no suggestion to make. All he knew was that however far away the surface of the sea might be, he wished he was there.

"What is the solution, boy?" Stanislaus Cripps boomed. "As we are not rising, the leak in the bed of the ocean must somehow have become closed. But how has it become closed? That we can only know by investigation."

He advanced calmly to the spot immediately under the roof where the huge screw cap, now carefully closed, allowed communication with the deck. Jim caught his arm in alarm.

"Mr. Cripps, what are you going to do?" he cried.

"See where we are, boy, and satisfy myself as to whether the theory I have formed is correct or not."

"But we may be still under the sea, and the water will rush in and drown us."

Stanislaus Cripps grinned and shook his head.

"Impossible boy. We are floating on the surface. Those dials cannot lie. The only pressure above us is air or a gaseous vapour of some kind. We must see where we are."

He touched a button and the great cap began slowly to unscrew and rise upwards. Jim watched it fascinatedly. Stanislaus Cripps checked its ascent just at the point when it was about to slide backwards on to the deck. Looking up the aperture he sniffed several times.

"Air, boy," he boomed. "Good air! We shan't be suffocated at any rate."

He touched the button again, and the great screw cap swung clear and sunk into its position on the deck. Peering upwards, Jim found himself staring into a strange blue luminous atmosphere.

"This is interesting, boy," said Stanislaus Cripps. "We will now go on deck and take stock of our surroundings."

He sprang coolly up the ladder. After a moment's hesitation Jim followed him. A second later and he was standing by his companion's side, his hair bristling on his head, staring out on a nightmare world.

Monsters of the Deep I

ALL about them stretched a waste of black inky waters on which the great vessel floated like a cork. The atmosphere was blue, but differing from the shade of the sky on a clear sunny day as the colours of the Oxford crew differ from those of Cambridge. In that strange light the Flying Submarine had taken on a wonderful shimmering greenish hue.

So much Jim noticed of his immediate surroundings. Then he raised his eyes, with a strange shrinking feeling as if he dreaded to discover some new horror in their situation. At first he could see nothing but that blue atmosphere, and then faintly through that phosphorescent gloom he caught a faint glimmer like the shining of a star. It was curious how his heart leapt at that discovery. He turned quickly and caught his companion's arm.

"Look sir that's a star. There must be an opening."

But Stanislaus Cripps seemed strangely unmoved by his statement. He was staring across the waste of waters with that same thoughtful look in his face.

"Boy, my theory must be correct. We are six miles under the surface of the sea; we have travelled the last five in a torrent of water poured through some leak in the bed of the ocean; that leak must now be closed, otherwise this water on which we are floating would be rising, and it is obviously maintaining its existing level. But how was that leak closed? And where is the bed of the ocean?"

He leaned forward shading his eyes.

"Look, there—there is the wall of this cavern."

Following the direction of his gaze, Jim was able to make out a vast towering wall of rock that glittered faintly. It looked like some magical cave, but of a vastness which exceeded the imagination of man. Up into the gloom it stretched, seamed and torn as if it had been excavated by the hand of man, to be lost in that dark azure shadow above.

"This is very interesting, boy," Stanislaus Cripps boomed. "We are on the verge of a discovery beyond the wildest dreams of scientists. First we must satisfy ourselves on two points—

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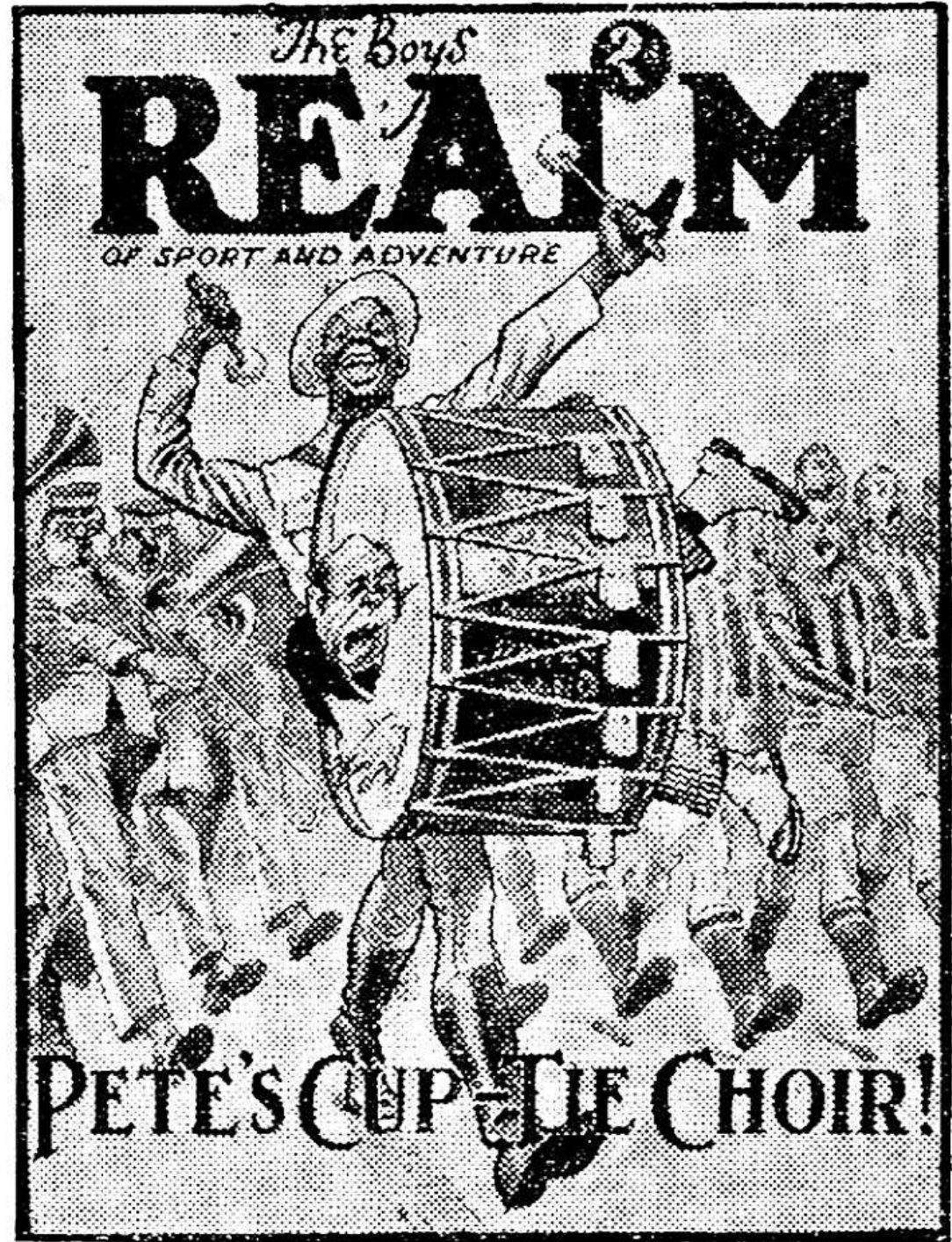
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how this flow of water has been checked, and how we come to be breathing pure air?"

He raised his arms as he spoke, studying the movement with interest.

"It would appear, boy, that there must be some opening to the outer world. I noticed a distinct difficulty in raising my hand. That means that we are subjected to the ordinary terrestrial pressure of the atmosphere plus six more miles of it. An interesting phenomenon!"

Jim now noticed that he had a certain difficulty in moving. It was as if his limbs were compressed by some thick fluid.

"Hadn't we better ascend, sir?" he said nervously. "I mean, if there's a way out, oughtn't we to find it?"

Stanislaus Cripps turned upon him with a look of amazement.

"Boy, you must be insane! Do you imagine that after coming here, I am going to leave the place until I have solved the mysteries by which it is surrounded? The only thing of value in life is experience, and here is an experience—unique!"

Something in the water seemed suddenly to attract his attention, for he leant over the rail.

"Look, boy, there are fish here—dead fish—fish flattened by the enormous pressure to which they have been subjected."

He plunged his hand into the water and drew out what looked like a fish over which a steam-roller had passed.

"Curious!" he remarked.

Suddenly his figure grew rigid. Jim looking up from his inspection of that flattened fish, followed the direction of his gaze. Instantly the blood ceased circulating in his veins and his heart seemed to stop beating. Outlined against that vast cavern wall in that strange blue haze were four enormous figures. They stood there on the brink of the water holding in their hands what looked like nets, but of a size unknown to man. They were like monstrous statues carved from pinkish-blue stone. For a moment Jim had the illusion that they were statues standing at least twenty feet high—statues perfectly proportioned to the vast scale on which they had been constructed—the figures of men exaggerated to a gigantic mould.

And then the next instant he saw them move. They had waded into the water. He could see the phosphorescent ripples about their massive limbs, and out of the azure murk eight fiery eyes stared steadily downwards at the Flying Submarine and the two human beings standing there on its deck.

(What are these amazing creatures? You will find out in next week's splendid instalment. It is full of thrills and surprises. Tell your chums about this grand Serial—and order your copy of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY in advance!)

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 66.

SECTION

A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with the Membership Number assigned to me, and Membership Badge.

SECTION

B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.) hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me..... (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION

C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."

(FULL NAME).....

(ADDRESS).....

INSTRUCTIONS.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms fill in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. The second form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together, and sent to the Chief Officer The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4. **Member Applying for Bronze Medal:** It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms, bearing the same number, are needed. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of

the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver or gold medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when the League reaches the required number of members, they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver or gold one, according to the number of introductions with which they are credited.

These Application Forms can be posted for a d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

A FEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE.

You can write to fellow members living at home or in the most distant outposts of the Empire.

You are offered free advice on choosing a trade or calling, and on emigration to the colonies and dependencies.

If you want to form a sports or social club, you can do so amongst local members of the League.

You are offered free hints on holidays, whether walking, biking or camping.

You can qualify for the various awards by promoting the growth of the League.

If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

THE CHIEF OFFICER'S CHAT

All LETTERS in reference to the League should be addressed to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Any enquiries which need an immediate answer should be accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope.

SILVER MEDALS THIS WEEK!

How to win one of the magnificent Silver Medals reproduced on page 22.

SILVER medals are now ready for issue to the members of the St. Frank's League who have qualified for the award. One of these handsome medals is well worth having, and is even more attractive than the bronze trophy which has already been given. The membership of the League has grown by leaps and bounds, and new members are being enrolled every day.

Members who already hold Bronze Medals and are eligible for the Silver award should read the notice at the foot of the page.

To qualify for the Silver Medal, you must first become a member of the St. Frank's League. This is quite simple, for you have only to introduce THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY to a chum, and follow the instructions given on the preceding page. You will then be sent an illuminated Certificate of Membership and a Membership Badge. The next step is to qualify for the Bronze Medal, and you can do this by securing six more introductions. Now you are well on the way towards the Silver Medal. Obtain another six introductions, and you can exchange your Bronze for a Silver Medal, or, if you wish to retain the Bronze Medal, you can do so by increasing your six introductions to twelve.

Is Sunderland Slack?

John Levy, 3, Hollywood Avenue, Southwick, Sunderland, sends a complaint. He is keen about a club, and, so far, there has not been a big response. No harm in a start with one or two. Others roll up. There is no O.O. as yet in Sunderland.

Surnames First.

Bobby Moore, of Stourbridge, is doubtful as to how to address correspondents. Should it be the Christian name or the surname? Well, this depends; but the surname is usual. This correspondent should join the League, and he will soon find how things work.

A Good Record.

Thos. G. Mercer, 1, Sweden Grove, Waterloo, Liverpool, has 59 introductions to his credit, and jolly good, too! He has much of interest to say to readers who care to write.

Picking Up French.

Louis Van Luyek, 49, Stryderstraat, Edegem, nr. Antwerp, would like to hear from readers who are keen on French.

Camping in Summer.

George Rudge, Stonehouse, Devon, wants hints on summer camping. Early days yet. First thing is a cheap tent. The rest follows. He has cheery things to say of Nipper. Sorry, but there is only one way of qualifying for League Membership. **FILL IN THE FORM!**

Try Again.

Joseph Mackenzie, 49, Maguire Street, Vauxhall Road, Liverpool, has been waiting to hear from

correspondents. Some readers get snowed under. Your turn will come, my chum.

Dale College Magazine.

Dale College is at King William's Town, South Africa, and its school mag. is one of the best I have seen, and best thanks to the chum who sent it along. The magazine is full of good things, not the least being a new boys' letter, who describes his journey: "At Johannesburg we changed trains. I like Johannesburg. The people walk quickly and look clever. It would be fun making money in Johannesburg. You would have a run for it."

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

Miss Ruby Bond, 40, Erith Road, Bexley Heath, Kent, wishes to correspond with girl readers anywhere.

Norman Hartley, The Hermitage, Grimsby, nr. Preston, wishes to correspond with readers who work on poultry farms overseas—Canada and U.S.A. especially. His object is to compare feeding, management of stock, etc.

Henry Cathcart, 177, Bernard Street, Bridgeton, Glasgow, wishes to correspond with readers; especially those who have bound volumes of "N.L.L." for sale.

Hugh Shillern, 2, Homewood Road, Church Road, Mitcham, wishes to hear from members in his district.

Joseph Mackenzie, 46, Maguire Street, Vauxhall Road, Liverpool, wishes to correspond with members in Scotland and Surrey to exchange hints on cycling.

L. Butcher, 12, Barrett Road, Southport, Lancashire, wishes to correspond with readers in Australia.

Albert L. Ward, "Jesmond Dene," Heneage Road, Grimsby, Lincolnshire, wishes to hear from Leagueites in his district who would help to form a football club; ages 12—14.

Miss Kitty Speller, 35, Netley Road, Newbury Park, Ilford, Essex, wishes to correspond with readers.

John Levy, 3, Hollywood Avenue, Southwick, Sunderland, wishes to correspond with readers interested in camping and walking; also with those willing to help form a club.

HOW TO GET YOUR SILVER MEDAL.

All holders of BRONZE MEDALS who have qualified for SILVER MEDALS (see instructions on Application Form opposite) and wish to exchange their medals for the higher award, should send their bronze medals, accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope, to the Chief Officer, the St. Frank's League, c/o the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4. The SILVER MEDALS will then be sent to them.

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