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WILLY DECLARES WAR!

A powerful long complete yarn of amazing schoolboy adventure,
featuring the cheery chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 166.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY,

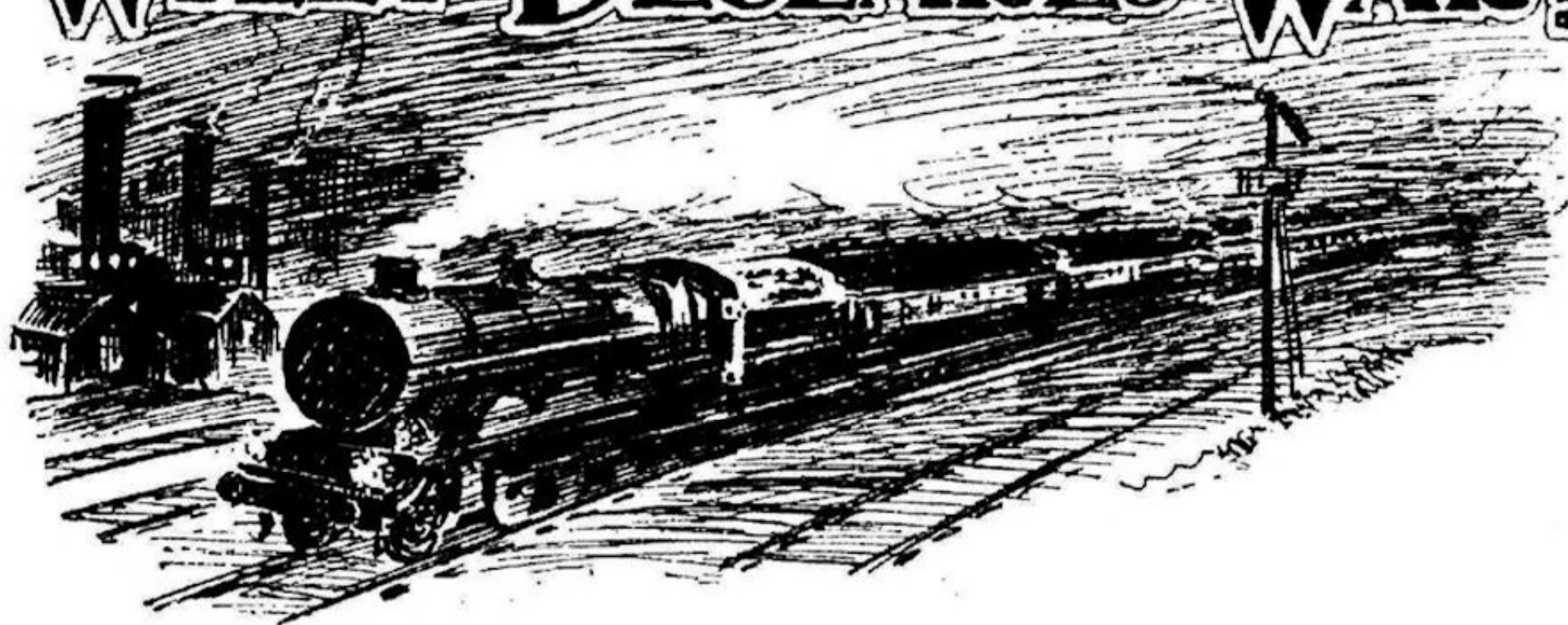
July 6th, 1923.



Sir Robert executed a really wonderful somersault. His legs shot up, he seemed to twist right round in the air, and then he crashed down and rolled into the gutter. The situation was not improved by the fact that a watering-cart had been along only just recently. "Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated Willy Handforth in dismay.

There's Hours and Hours of Enjoyment in This Fine Yarn, Chums!

WILLY DECLARES WAR!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Willy Handforth's love of animals is a byword among his school-fellows; at times it is liable to make him lose his sense of proportion. And that's what happens this week—with the result that he experiences the most amazing adventure in his already very adventurous young life!—ED.

CHAPTER I.

The Mishap in Deansgate!

"FIVE bob!" said Willy Handforth coolly.

"You silly young idiot——"

"Five bob, Ted, old son!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"What a chap you are for arguing, Ted," said Willy, with an air of patient tolerance.

"Why not get it over and done with? Come on—five bob!"

"You—you—you——"

"Pay up and smile, Handy," grinned Nipper. "You know jolly well that you can't resist your minor for long. The only way to get rid of him is to whack out the five bob."

Edward Oswald Handforth fumed. He and a number of other St. Frank's Removites were standing near the edge of the pavement in Piccadilly, Manchester. It was a half-holiday, and the School Train, standing on its siding some little distance outside Manchester, was more or less deserted. All the fellows were taking advantage of the fine, sunny weather, and were having a look round Manchester. They had heard that it was generally raining in Manchester, so they regarded this sunny afternoon as something of a phenomenon. Actually, of course, as any Manchester citizen could have told them, sunny afternoons were so commonplace in Manchester that nobody took any notice of them.

Nipper, the popular Junior skipper, was with a party of six or seven others, including Handforth & Co., Vivian Travers, and Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West. Now and again they would meet other groups of fellows.

"Buck up, Handy," said Church. "We're holding up the traffic. And we don't want these fags buzzing round us all the afternoon."

"I'm not keeping them here!" retorted Handforth, glaring at his minor and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon and Owen Minor and one or two other fags in the group.

"They can clear off as soon as they like!"

"Not until you've produced that five bob, old man," said Willy smoothly.

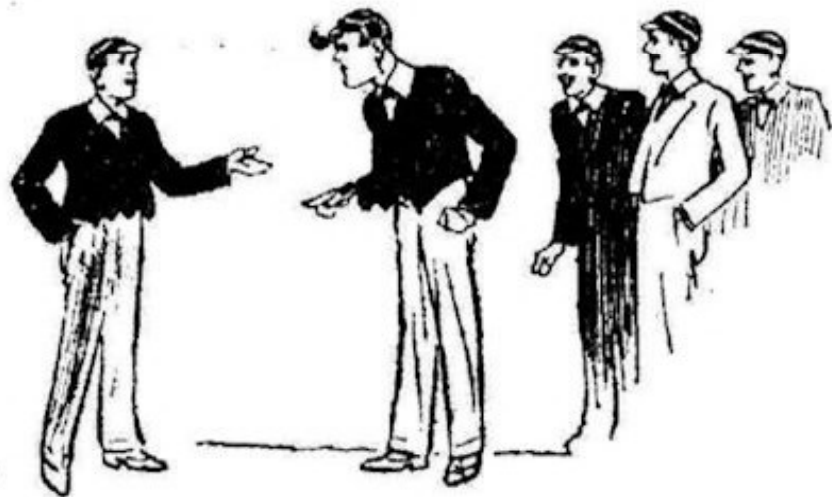
"Blow you and your five bob!" roared Handforth.

"It's not mine—yet!" said Willy. "It will be as soon as you fork it out."

"You'd better do it, Handy," said McClure. "We want to have a look at the Free Trade Hall, where the Hallé Orchestra plays, you know. Somebody told us to go down Mosley Street then into St. Peter's Square, and along Peter Street—"

"I don't want to see the place!" interrupted Handforth coldly. "I don't believe in Free Trade, anyhow. It's a silly idea. How can people do business properly if their customers don't pay?"

"You've got hold of it wrong, you ass,"



grinned Nipper. "Free Trade doesn't mean giving things away; and the Free Trade Hall hasn't got anything to do with business, anyhow."

"Then it ought to be called something else," said Handforth severely. "Oh, my only hat! Take that filthy paw away, Willy!"

"It's up to you, old man," said Willy. "As soon as you drop two half-crowns into it I'll take it away."

Handforth looked with distaste at Willy's hand, which was held out invitingly. This sort of thing was commonplace enough, for whenever Willy ran short of cash, he always came to his major and demanded "five bob." It was a sort of fixed and recognised sum.

Edward Oswald was obliged to give in at last. There was something so calm and determined about Willy—something so inexorable—that his major was compelled to give in. In fact, he had never been known to do otherwise, except when he himself happened to be broke.

"All right, then," he said thickly. "Here's your rotten five bob—and you can clear off! But remember, it's the last time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors laughed amusedly, and Willy cheerfully pocketed the cash.

"Thanks, Ted," he said, with a nod. "See you later. Mind you don't get into any trouble."

"You silly young chump—"

"You fellows had better watch him closely," continued Willy, looking at the others. "Don't forget what happened at Liverpool, when he dodged away to the docks. You've only got to take your eyes off him for a moment and he'll slip off."

"We're looking after him," said Church.

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start.

"I—I mean, we're with you, old man," said Church hastily.

Willy & Co. went off, and, having discovered an excellent ice-cream shop in Market Street, they went in and proceeded to make use of Handforth's "five bob."

"THAT'S better!" said Willy comfortably as they emerged.

"What are we going to do now?" asked Chubby Heath. "Plenty of time before we get back to the School Train, you know—another hour or two yet."

"How about the pictures?" asked Owen minor brightly.

Willy sniffed.

"Pictures?" he repeated. "On a fine afternoon like this—in Manchester—where fine afternoons are as scarce as Ted's five bobs? We can't do better than go to the Zoo."

"The which?" asked Juicy Lemon.

"The Zoo," repeated Willy. "That's short for Zoological Gardens."

"I know that, you fathead!"

"Come on, then!"

"We don't want to go to the giddy Zoo!" objected Chubby Heath. "We're not all dotty on animals like you are, Willy!"

"There'll be plenty for you chaps to see," replied Willy. "Let's get on a tram, and get out to Belle Vue."

"Belle Vue? Where's that?"

"About three miles away, and the Belle Vue Gardens are pretty wonderful," replied Willy. "There's a Zoo there which is second only to the Zoo in London."

"How the dickens do you know?" asked Juicy, staring. "You've never been there."

"Perhaps I haven't," replied Willy. "But have a look at this, my sons."

He produced a yellow-covered little booklet.

"What's that?" asked the other fags.

"This my children, is one of Heywood's Guides—price threepence," said Willy coolly. "Now, listen to this—'Visitors to Manchester should not fail to visit Belle Vue Gardens, Longsight, situated between Hyde Road and Stockport Road, about three miles from the centre of Manchester—'"

"Oh, so that's how you knew?" interrupted Chubby, with a grin.

"Don't barge in!" said Willy, frowning. "'Easily accessible by road or tram—cars run every three minutes. Each year a new and strikingly realistic monster picture is presented—'"

"There you are!" said Owen minor. "Didn't I suggest that we should go to the pictures?"

"Must be a rummy place, though," put in Juicy Lemon. "I mean, if they only have a change of picture once a year—"

"Idiot!" snorted Willy. "It's not a cinema! If you'd only listen to this, instead of interrupting, you'd understand! 'A new and strikingly realistic monster picture is presented, depicting some great or historical

battle or siege on land or sea. Many thousands of people come from all parts to see these wonderful and unrivalled productions—wonderful in that they depict the scenes represented, not only by faithful building up, but by real action. Armies marching and counter-marching, heights scaled and taken, fortresses bombarded, naval engagements, ships or buildings take fire and fall.”

“That’s the stuff for us!” said Chubby. “Where’s the tram for Belle Vue?”

“Rather!” agreed the other fags. “Come on!”

“Wait a minute!” snapped Willy. “Let me finish! ‘The crack of the rifles and the boom of cannon add to the apparent reality of the scene. Then comes the splendid firework finale, the whole forming a spectacle unequalled anywhere in the British Isles.’”

“By jingo! That sounds topping!” said Chubby enthusiastically. “I’m awfully keen on fireworks, you know. But what about paying? I expect the admission price is pretty steep, isn’t it?”

“Never mind the admission price,” said Willy. “The main thing is to get there. And once we’re there, we’ll get in. Leave it to me. But listen to this last bit: ‘The collection of wild animals, birds and reptiles is second only to that of the Zoological Gardens, London—’”

“You can go to the Zoo, and we’ll have a look at the rest of the show,” said Juicy comfortably.

They were not at all eager about the Zoo. Willy Handforth was the only one who really displayed a great interest in animals. But, as everybody knew, animals were his weakness.

It was rather curious that there should have been this conversation about animals, for almost at once an incident occurred which aroused Willy’s keenest interest—indeed, his anguish and anger and pity.

The fags were now in Deansgate, and that great Manchester thoroughfare was busy and throbbing with life. The fags were looking at the indicators on the tramcars, and they were

wondering if they could get a car here which would take them to Belle Vue.

“I think we ought to go back to Market Street,” said Chubby. “We’ve come in the wrong direction—”

“Hi! Look out, there!” shouted Willy suddenly.

His outcry was so unexpected and so abrupt that Chubby was positively startled. Willy had half jumped forward towards the road. The other fags spun round—just in time to see a rather grubby little fox terrier scampering across the road out of the way of a tramcar, and, incidentally, right in the way of an on-coming automobile.

“Oh!” gasped Willy, horrified.

There was no time for him to act. The automobile was a gleaming, glittering, superbly-appointed limousine, and, although the chauffeur

swerved, it was impossible for him to avoid the mishap.

There was a sudden wailing yelp, and the unfortunate little fox terrier, caught by the off-side front wheel, went shooting beneath the car, to slither out again almost immediately and go rolling into the gutter, where it lay still. Very obviously it had been killed on the instant.

“Oh, my hat!” said Willy, deeply hurt. The next moment his mood changed,

WHO’S WHO AT ST. FRANK’S!



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH.

Remove Form.

Study D.

Big, burly and clumsy. Very aggressive, and ever ready to punch anybody on the nose. Yet for all that one of the best, and generous to a fault. A great sportsman, if not very brilliant in other spheres.

The big limousine had pulled up practically opposite to the group of fags. People had paused in their walk, and they were looking on at the scene.

"I think the poor little chap is dead, sir," Willy heard the chauffeur saying, as he glanced back into the body of the car.

"Don't stop, Bailey—don't stop!" came the order from the man in the rear. "I can't be delayed by an infernal mongrel! Drive on, man!"

"Very well, sir," said the chauffeur.

Willy breathed hard. The little fox terrier was lying in the gutter, and yet here was this big, florid, middle-aged man in the car—telling the chauffeur to drive on without even troubling to see if the poor animal was dead or only injured!

"Here, I say, wait a minute!" shouted Willy, leaping forward. "You can't go like this, sir—"

"Stand clear, you young idiot!" said the chauffeur, as Willy prepared to leap on the running-board.

"Drive on, Bailey!" roared the man in the rear. "Confound you, what did I tell you? Boy, get away from this car! My chauffeur wasn't to blame for the accident in any way, and if the dog was yours you have only yourself to blame. You should look after your dogs better!"

Willy only heard the first sentence or two, for the car was gliding away, the big man looking anxious and angry and impatient.

A moment later the limousine was lost amongst the traffic of Deansgate. Willy shook his fist after it and then turned back to have a last look at the poor little fox terrier.

CHAPTER 2.

Willy on the Track!

"**T**HAT your dog, young 'un?"

A burly policeman asked the question as he rushed through the knot of curious people who had collected round Willy and the other fags.

"Mine?" said Handforth minor. "No. I don't know whose it is. Not that it matters much now; the poor little beggar is dead."

"Let's have a look at him," said the constable.

He took the dog in his arms, and it only needed a very cursory examination to show him that life was extinct.

"It wasn't the driver's fault," said somebody in the crowd. "He couldn't avoid hitting the dog. It ran behind a tram, and—"

"All right—all right!" interrupted the policeman, nodding. "Too many dogs running about the streets. Anybody know who this one belongs to?"

Nobody did. Apparently it was a stray dog. And, within a minute, Deansgate was looking normal. The policeman had gone off with the dog, the knot of people had dispersed, and the fags were moving on.

"Oh, well, accidents will happen, I suppose," remarked Chubby Heath, with a side

glance at Willy. "No good upsetting ourselves about it. Where's that tram for Belle Vue?"

"Never mind the tram for Belle Vue," said Willy gruffly.

"Aren't you going to the Zoo?"

"No."

"Why not?" demanded Juicy warmly. "You're not going to let that accident interfere with our plans, are you?"

"I'm not interested in the Zoo now—or Belle Vue Gardens either," said Willy grimly. "I want to find out who that man was in the limousine! The rotter! The cold-hearted, callous, pompous rotter!"

"But it wasn't his fault!" protested Chubby. "Dash it, don't be unfair, Willy! He wasn't even driving the car, and the chauffeur couldn't help the mishap, anyhow. If he had swerved any more he might have run into some people on the pavement. A dog's life is less valuable than a human being's, isn't it?"

"Don't be an ass!" said Willy, frowning. "That's not the point at all. I'm ready to admit that the chauffeur couldn't help the accident. It was the dog's fault, poor little chap!"

"Then why not forget the whole affair? Let's find one of these trams for Belle Vue, and—"

"No!" broke in Willy, breathing hard. "I don't want to go to Belle Vue now. I'm upset. I'd like to find that man in the limousine and give him a piece of my mind!"

"But why?" persisted Chubby, staring.

"Because he ought to have stopped!" replied Willy. "The fact that the chauffeur couldn't help the accident is neither here nor there. That big man is the owner of the car, and he ought to have stopped to make sure that the terrier was dead."

"The chauffeur had told him that the dog was dead," pointed out Juicy Lemon gently.

"How did the chauffeur know?"

"Well, he could see, couldn't he?"

"It wasn't certain that the dog was dead," replied Willy. "That big man ought to be scragged. I don't care who he is, or what he is—and if I meet him I'm going to tell him what I think of him!"

The other fags remained silent. Willy's feelings were so deep, so sincere, that they felt that any words of theirs would be out of place. For, frankly, they could not accept their young leader's point of view.

Dogs are run over in the streets many times a day in such big cities as Manchester. Under modern conditions, such minor disasters are almost unavoidable. Willy's companions regarded the incident as trifling—as, indeed, it actually was.

But Willy was different from most juniors. His love of animals was passionate, and it had hurt him deeply to see that poor little dog run down in that way. And it had angered him to hear the car's owner brutally—yes, brutally—telling the chauffeur to drive on.

"I expect he was afraid of the owner coming up and demanding compensation," said Willy bitterly. "I'm not idiot enough

to say that the dog didn't ask to be killed; but when a chap drives on like that he's in the wrong."

"Oh, well, of course," said Chubby uncomfortably. "But what the dickens can we do? By this time that car is probably in Oldham, or Hollinwood, or somewhere. There's not one chance in a thousand that we shall ever see it again. So what's the idea of hanging about?"

"I don't propose to hang about," replied Willy. "I'm going back to the School Train."

"And the Zoo——"

"Can't wait until another day," finished Willy. "I don't feel like the Zoo now—or any other kind of pleasure. I feel rotten."

He was, in fact, thoroughly unsettled. He kept thinking of that poor dog in the gutter—and the big, florid man in the back of the car angrily telling his chauffeur to drive on. Willy positively flushed with indignation as these thoughts chased through his mind!

RATHER disconsolately, the other fags accompanied their young leader back into Market Street. They could get a tram here which would take them to within a few hundred yards of the siding where the School Train was "parked." There would be no going to Belle Vue Zoological Gardens now. It was impossible for the fags to go without Willy, since they had no money. But they knew better than to protest any further. Willy looked rather dangerous, and he was quite capable of setting about them on the spot and punching a few noses. Far better to leave him alone, and to regard the afternoon as a wash-out.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Willy abruptly.

There was a new note in his voice—a note of incredulity and triumph mixed. He was staring across the busy street, and the other fags wondered what had come over him.

"What's the matter?" asked Owen minor.

"Look over there!" said Willy grimly.

He nodded, and the others looked. They saw a gleaming, glittering limousine standing motionless against the kerb, with the chauffeur sitting in his seat, reading a newspaper.

"My only hat!" said Chubby, aghast. "It's that car!"

He wasn't so much startled to see it as he was startled to picture the consequences. Willy, in his present mood, was capable of any sort of rashness. Chubby glanced at his companions, and they met his gaze. Instinctively they closed round Willy.

"Hold him!" muttered Juicy Lemon.

Willy stared at them.

"What's the big idea?" he asked coldly.

"For goodness' sake, Willy, be sensible!" urged Chubby, grasping his leader's arm. "You won't do any good by making a scene here, in Market Street!"

"Who's going to make a scene?"

"Eh? Well, I thought——"

"You shouldn't think," interrupted Willy. "It doesn't suit you, old man! I'm not

going to make a scene at all. I'm just going to find out who the owner of that car is, wait until he comes out, and then tell him what I think of him!"

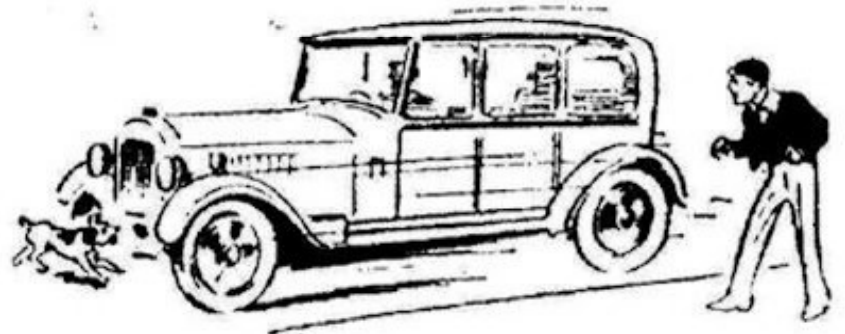
The other fags were freshly startled.

"And don't you think that will be making a scene?" asked Chubby, horrified. "You can't do a thing like that, Willy—in the very middle of Manchester!"

"Who's going to stop me?"

"But it wouldn't be right!" said Chubby. "It's not your business to tick the man off. You're only a St. Frank's junior, and he might be somebody very important."

"I don't care if he's the King of Timbuctoo!" retorted Willy. "He drove on



without waiting to see if that poor little dog was dead, and as there's nobody else to tell him off, I'm going to do it! If he likes to regard it as a piece of cheek, he can do so. I don't call it cheek at all—and, what's more, I shall rely upon you fellows to help me."

"Help you—to do what?" asked Owen minor nervously.

"It all depends," replied Willy. "If he does the decent thing and expresses his regret, there'll be nothing to do at all. But you can never tell. And you fellows must hold yourselves ready to obey my orders."

"It all depends upon what those orders are," said Juicy Lemon.

"Oh, does it?" snapped Willy. "Who's leader of the Third? When I give orders, my sons, they've got to be obeyed—on the spot, without question—or I shall want to know the reason why!"

Willy was fairly gloating now. Unexpectedly, dramatically, he had found this limousine. He had expected that he would never see it again. Yet here it was, only a few hundred yards from the scene of the mishap.

The other fags knew better than to argue with their volcanic young leader any more. Such a thing might be dangerous. It was perfectly obvious that Willy had declared war, and it was the duty of his fellow fags to back him up. They knew what would happen to them if they failed to back him up!

Willy's methods were short and sharp, but very painful.

He dodged across the road, and the others followed him. Walking round behind the limousine, Willy suddenly presented himself to the chauffeur.

"Just a minute!" he said coldly.

"Hallo! It's you again, is it?" said the man, putting down his paper.

"That little dog was dead," said Willy.

"Thought so," nodded the chauffeur. "Poor little blighter. Do you know who it belongs to?"

"No," said Willy, "and that's not the point. What do you mean by driving on without making sure?"

The chauffeur stared, startled by this peremptory tone from such a youthful interrogator.

"Steady, young 'un," he said good-naturedly. "I was only obeying the gov'nor's orders. I couldn't stop there after he had told me to drive on."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't want to lose my job—that's why not," said the man. "You don't know Sir Robert!"

"Sir Robert, eh?" said Willy.

"Sir Robert Barnes," nodded the chauffeur. "And let me advise you, kids, to clear out of it before he comes back. He's not famous for his good temper, and if you start pestering him he'll get you into trouble."

"I'm not afraid of him!" replied Willy. "It was a rotten thing to order you to drive on like that. You couldn't help the accident, but the least Sir Robert could have done was to——"

"Look out!" muttered the chauffeur. "He's coming!"

SIR ROBERT BARNES emerged from a big doorway near by. There was an expression of quiet relief on his face now—a very different expression from the one which had rendered him almost haggard only a short time earlier. The chauffeur had drawn himself smartly to attention, having nipped out of his seat and opened the rear door.

"You'd better drive from here to——" began Sir Robert.

But then he paused, noticing, for the first time, Willy Handforth and the other fags. They had drawn round him in a kind of bodyguard.

"I'd like a word with you, sir, if you don't mind," said Willy quietly.

"But I do mind," retorted Sir Robert. "I'm in a hurry."

"I shan't keep you long, sir," went on Willy. "About that dog your car ran over——"

"Oh, so it was your dog, was it?" broke in Sir Robert. "I see! You think that I should give you some sort of compensation? On principle, I refuse to do it. As a motorist, I accept no responsibility whatsoever. You should keep your dog under better control."

He spoke coldly, angrily, pompously, and it was more or less apparent that he was adopting this tone deliberately—not because it was his normal manner, but because he

felt that the situation demanded such a tone.

"It wasn't my dog, sir," said Willy.

"Then what do you mean by stopping me like this?" demanded Sir Robert, staring. "Let me pass, young man! How dare you?"

"It's not a question of daring, sir," said Willy steadily. "You ordered your chauffeur to drive on after running over that dog—without even making sure if the poor thing was dead or alive."

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Sir Robert angrily. "You impertinent young rascal! What do you mean by addressing me in this way?"

"I think you ought to express your regret, sir——"

"What!" roared Sir Robert furiously. "Of all the impudent young jackanapes! Bailey, shift these boys out of the way! Who are they? Where do they come from? I've never heard of such impertinence!"

Willy set his jaw, and glanced at the other fags.

"Ready?" he rapped out. "Come on!"

"But—but——" began Chubby.

"Grab him!" said Willy grimly. "Don't make any mistake about it, my sons! Grab him—and hold him tight!"

CHAPTER 3.

Trouble for Sir Robert!

BEFORE Sir Robert Barnes could make the slightest attempt to guard against the attack, he was seized and held. The fags, now thoroughly excited, did not fail to obey Willy's orders.

Willy himself was furious. Evidently, Sir Robert was obstinate; he was not ready to admit that he was in the wrong. Sir Robert was asking for trouble, and he was most certainly going to get trouble.

Removites or Fourth-Formers, perhaps, would never have acted in this drastic way. They would have had a greater regard for Sir Robert's dignity. But Willy remembered only that this big man was in the wrong, that he deserved a lesson; and the other fags, having received orders from their leader, obeyed mechanically—out of force of habit.

"What—what does this mean?" demanded the enraged man, in a tone of incredulous indignation. "You infernal young scamps! Release me this instant!"

"We'll release you, sir, if you promise to find the owner of that dog and compensate——"

"Good heavens!" gasped Sir Robert hoarsely.

He interrupted Willy ruthlessly; and it was obvious that he had no intention of listening to any of the fag's words. He was too startled by his own predicament.

"Bailey!" he exclaimed. "Help me! Take these boys and sling them aside!"

Sir Robert himself was struggling violently, and by this time he had forced the fags towards the rear of the car. Bailey had



“Drive on, Bailey!” roared the man in the rear of the car. “I haven’t got time to be delayed by an infernal mongrel!” And the car drove on, leaving an infuriated Willy shaking his fist after it.

not yet had an opportunity of intervening. And now something happened which was somewhat unexpected.

For Sir Robert suddenly skidded on a piece of orange peel which some passer-by had carelessly dropped. As it happened, Willy & Co. were tugging at the great man with all their strength at precisely the same second.

Sir Robert, in spite of his bulk, executed a really wonderful somersault. His legs shot up, he seemed to twist right round in mid-air, and he crashed into the road with such force that most of the breath was knocked out of his body—although, luckily, he was not much hurt otherwise. He rolled into the gutter.

Willy & Co. backed away, rather dumbfounded by this unlooked-for development. It was only natural, perhaps, that both Sir Robert and the chauffeur should believe that the fags were responsible for this act of violence. Yet, really, Willy & Co. had had no intention of performing any such outrageous move.

“Crumbs!” said Willy, startled.

The general situation was not improved by the fact that a watering-cart had been along the road only a few minutes earlier, and the gutter was running with muddy water. Sir Robert rolled right into it, and when he sat up he was no pretty picture.

“Bunk!” gasped Juicy Lemon, scared out of his wits.

“Yes, we’d better vamoose,” agreed Willy. “We didn’t mean anything like this—but he deserves it. I don’t think we’ll trouble to do anything else.”

AS it happened, Nipper and Reggie Pitt and Travers and Handforth & Co. had appeared out of a side turning a moment earlier. They had been just in time to witness the acrobatic gymnastics of Sir Robert Barnes, and they, too, took it for granted that Willy and the other fags were responsible.

“Great Scott!” ejaculated Nipper. “Look at those fags! Knocking somebody about here, in the middle of Manchester!”

“Bringing disgrace on the name of St. Frank’s!” roared Handforth. “My minor, too! Come on, you chaps—we’d better lend a hand.”

“Steady!” warned Nipper. “If we do anything at all, we’ll grab those fags and whisk them away. If we remain on the scene, we shall probably be involved in the general trouble.”

“That’s what Handy wants,” said Reggie Pitt, nodding.

But for once Edward Oswald Handforth was thinking more of his minor than of any possible scrap; he wanted to get Willy out of trouble. It only took the Removites a matter of seconds to rush up, to grab Willy & Co., and to whirl them out of sight down a side street.

It was all done so quickly, in fact, that a crowd had had no time to gather.

“Bring ’em along!” said Nipper grimly.

“Look here, you asses!” gasped Willy. “You don’t understand—”

“We understand that you were brawling!” interrupted Handforth sternly. “My only hat! It’s a lucky thing we came along! If this affair gets reported to Mr. Lee you’ll be sacked.”

In the meantime, Bailey had assisted Sir Robert to his feet; and for some moments

Sir Robert was unable to speak. He wasn't in pain, and his jaw was by no means paralysed; but he was so furious that he could form no intelligible words.

"If you'll get in, sir, I'll drive away," said Bailey anxiously. "There's a bit of a crowd collecting."

Sir Robert uttered some sort of gurgling noise, and Bailey literally bundled him into the rear of the splendid limousine. Sir Robert sank back among the luxurious cushions, soiling them considerably, although he was too furious to notice this at the moment.

Bailey leapt into the driver's seat, and the car glided away—much to the disappointment of the crowd which had now collected to know what all the excitement had been about.

"Stop, Bailey!" came Sir Robert's grating voice. "Stop, I tell you!"

The car came to a standstill some distance down a quieter street, into which Bailey had diplomatically turned. He glanced back at his employer in some trepidation.

"I thought it best to get away, sir," he said.

"Quite right, Bailey—quite right!" panted Sir Robert. "Upon my word! Never have I been so grossly assaulted! And by mere boys, too! Do you know who they are, Bailey?"

"Schoolboys of some kind, sir——"

"Don't be a fool! I know that!" broke in Sir Robert. "Of course they are school-boys! But where do they come from? Which school?"

"I haven't any idea, sir."

"Then you should have!"

"But I'm more of a stranger in Manchester than you are, Sir Robert!" protested the chauffeur. "I only know that the boys were wearing school caps, and that they must come from some pretty big school."

"Very well!" growled Sir Robert. "Perhaps it will be better to let the whole thing drop. I was going to complain to the headmaster of that school—but we can't waste our time in Manchester looking for a needle in a haystack. I dare say there are scores of big schools here."

"I expect there are, sir," said the chauffeur.

"Stop at the first big hotel you see," ordered Sir Robert. "I'm soaked! I'm in a dreadful condition. And if ever I see those boys again, I'll—I'll——"

Sir Robert Barnes did not say what he would do; but the expression on his face was eloquent enough.

"**N**OW!" said Edward Oswald grimly. The St. Frank's juniors had halted in a comparatively quiet backwater, and Handforth was looking indignant and angry.

"Keep your hair on, Ted!" said Willy. "Don't glare at me like that——"

"You young bounder!" said his major. "What do you mean by it? Who was that old boy you were bowling over?"

"Sir Robert Barnes!"

"Great Scott!"

"My only hat!"

"How do you know his name is Sir Robert Barnes?" asked Nipper.

"The chauffeur told me."

"And what was the idea of pitching him into the gutter?" demanded Nipper. "It's all very well for you fags to have a rag, but there's a limit, you know. You'll get yourselves sacked if you——"

"Cheese it!" broke in Willy. "We didn't pitch him into the gutter——"

"What do you mean—you didn't?" broke in Handforth. "We saw you!"

"You saw Sir Robert pitching into the gutter, but you didn't see us do it," replied Willy. "He trod on a piece of orange-peel, or a banana-skin, or something. I'll admit we were pulling at him, but we didn't mean to treat him like that. It was an accident."

"Well, you were pretty well mixed up in the accident," said Edward Oswald gruffly. "Still, it makes it a bit better—although it's bad enough, anyhow. What the dickens were you lugging at the man for?"

"We didn't want to do it," put in Chubby Heath. "It was Willy's idea."

"It would be!" said Handforth tartly. "I've never known such a violent young bounder! Always wanting to scrap with somebody! Why don't you take an example from me?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites could not help laughing—for if Willy had actually taken an example from his major he would have been scrapping with somebody or other, on and off, throughout the day.

"You don't understand," said Willy patiently. "What's the idea of jumping on me like this? You haven't heard anything about what happened yet."

He proceeded to explain. He told how the big car had run over the unfortunate terrier, how the chauffeur had pulled up, and how Sir Robert had curtly ordered him to drive on.

"Oh!" said Handforth at length. "Of course, this makes it different."

"Was the dog killed?" asked Nipper.

"Stone dead," replied Willy sombrely. "Poor little beggar! It didn't have a chance. Of course, the chauffeur wasn't to blame. He couldn't have avoided the accident."

"Perhaps Sir Robert was in a great hurry?" suggested Nipper. "You know what it is when a crowd collects. If a motorist kills a dog, the crowd is generally hostile—whether the motorist is guilty or innocent—and then there's a lot of delay with the police. They want to see your licence, and they take your number, and there's a tremendous fuss."

Willy stared.

"Are you trying to excuse the old rotter?" he asked coldly.

"Not exactly," replied Nipper. "But you mustn't lose your sense of proportion, Willy. You mustn't allow your love of animals to

warp your judgment. Perhaps Sir Robert was hurrying to catch a train——”

“He wasn't,” interrupted Willy. “How could he have been? He only drove two or three hundred yards, and then went into the big building. We saw his car waiting outside.”

“I'd forgotten that,” said Nipper. “Still, it doesn't make much difference. He may have been in a great hurry to get to the place for some reason. And if the dog was dead, I can't quite see why you got so excited.”

“How was Sir Robert to know that the dog was dead?” demanded Willy gruffly. “My point is that Sir Robert ought to have got out and made sure.”

“There's something in that,” admitted Handforth.

“Instead of that, he just told the chauffeur to drive on—said he couldn't be delayed by a mongrel!” said Willy heatedly. “That stamps him as a callous, cold-hearted old blighter! And I don't care who hears me saying it!”

“I suppose you saw his car, and then laid in wait for him?” asked Nipper.

“Yes.”

“You ought to have had more sense,” said the junior skipper, frowning. “Thank goodness none of the masters or prefects happened to spot you. You'd have been in hot water, Willy, if anything like that had happened. You can't take the law into your own hands and throw people into the gutter——”

“I didn't throw him into the gutter,” protested Willy. “Haven't I told you that that was an accident?”

“I'll bet Sir Robert doesn't look upon it as an accident,” said Nipper.

“Well, anyway, the whole thing's over,” grunted Willy. “I'll try to forget it. We didn't mean to treat the old boy so roughly, but as he crashed over, and as his suit was pretty well ruined, we'll call it square.”

“Thank goodness!” said Chubby Heath.

The fags parted company from the Removites and went their own way. But they did not go to Manchester's famous Zoological Gardens. Willy was in no mood for pleasure.

In fact, he was irritable and moody. Perhaps he felt that Nipper's reproach was justified; perhaps he realised that he had been in the wrong for once.

Still, there was no sense in worrying now. There wasn't much chance that any of the St. Frank's fellows would ever see Sir Robert again. The incident was closed.

But was it?

Fate has a curious way, sometimes, of providing sequels!

CHAPTER 4.

All Aboard for Birmingham!

“HEARD the latest?” asked John Busterfield Boots, of the Fourth, as he strolled into the Junior Common-room that evening.

The Junior Common-room, it must be understood, was really the class-room coach on the School Train. By day it was used for lessons, but during the off-periods the juniors were permitted to convert it into a Common-room. Lavish as the accommodation was on the train, there was nevertheless a certain amount of cramping.

“The latest?” said Nipper, looking up. “What about? We know that we're moving on to Birmingham to-night——”

“That's stale news,” interrupted Buster Boots. “I mean something else.”

“Out with it, then,” said Handforth.

“After we get to Birmingham we're going to be shown over the works of the famous Three Spires Cycle Company Limited.”

“I've got a Three Spires,” remarked Oldfield, of the Fourth. “Jolly good bikes, too!”

“But aren't the Three Spires bicycles made in Coventry?” asked Nipper.

“Yes,” said Boots. “We shall go over to Coventry for the occasion, of course. Biggleswade, of the Sixth, was just telling me all about it. It's official.”

Handforth grunted.

“Nothing very exciting in that,” he said.

“I'd rather go and see a cricket match.”

“You can see a cricket match anywhere, old man, but you don't often get the opportunity of being shown round a great cycle works,” said Nipper. “Personally, I think it'll be a ripping experience. I'll bet Mr. Lee fixed it up for us.”

“That's what Biggy says,” nodded Boots.

Biggleswade himself happened to look in

later in the evening, and he was at once questioned.

“That's right,” he said, nodding. “To-morrow afternoon.”

“But it's not a half-holiday,” said Pitt.

“That doesn't matter—you're going, all the same,” replied Biggleswade. “I expect Mr. Lee considers that the trip will be of greater educational value than stewing in the class-room at lessons.”

“Good for Mr. Lee!” said Handforth heartily. “I'm all in favour of going to the Three Spires cycle works.”

“You were against it not long ago,” grinned Church.

“I didn't know then that we were to go to-morrow afternoon,” replied Handforth



coolly. "Anything will be better than swotting at lessons in this weather."

"There's something else I can tell you," said Biggleswade cheerfully. "The Three Spires company is going to present half a dozen jiggers—the very best ones they turn out—to you kids. Lucky young beggars! I don't suppose the seniors will come in for anything like that."

"Who's going to get them?" asked a dozen eager voices.

"It all depends," replied the prefect. "I understand that there's to be a kind of competition afterwards. You'll have to write a composition on your trip. And the six fellows who get the best marks for describing the trip round the works will get the bikes."

"Good egg!" said Harry Gresham. "I always get pretty good marks for composition."

At first there was a little scepticism regarding this tale, but later it was officially made public in a notice. The entire Junior School—Removites, Fourth-Formers and Third-Formers—was to ride from Birmingham to Coventry on the following afternoon in a couple of special motor coaches. Later on in the week there would be a sort of exam for composition, and the six prize-winners would be the lucky owners of the six bicycles.

"Jolly generous of the Three Spires Cycle Company to give six of its jiggers away like this," remarked Nipper, at bedtime. "Of course, it'll be a good advert, no doubt. They'll advertise in all the papers that they're giving six of their machines to the St. Frank's fellows."

"I don't suppose those bikes will cost them anything in the long run," said Reggie Pitt. "The advert will be so good that they'll get all the money back."

Handforth was looking thoughtful as he commenced undressing. The long Junior sleeping coach was gleaming with electric lights, for although it was still twilight outside all the blinds were drawn. Handforth was leaning against his bunk, looking thoughtfully into nothing.

"Penny for them, old man," said McClure, the Scottish member of Study D.

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start. "I don't want your silly penny! Keep it. I was just wondering what I should do with my new bike."

"Which new bike?"

"The one I'm going to win this week."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth's confidence was sublime, and the other juniors yelled with laughter.

"Don't you count your chickens before they're hatched, Handy, old man," warned Nipper. "I don't suppose you'll get one of those bikes. Your composition was always a bit rocky."

"He got forty marks out of a possible hundred last week," grinned Church.

Handforth coloured.

"Oh, rot!" he said. "I wasn't trying then."

"Yes, I dare say it'll make a bit of difference," chuckled Nipper. "When there's a bicycle at stake everybody will be on their mettle."

"It's a jolly cute dodge, say what you like," remarked Travers. "If it wasn't for those prizes we should probably go through the works in a languid sort of way. As it is, we'll keep our eyes open all the time, and pay close attention to everything we see. By Samson! These Three Spires people are smart!"

THAT night, while the School Train slept, Manchester was left behind. It was the usual custom for the train to travel from place to place in the darkness of the night, when the main lines were slack. Being a special train, it could not run in the daytime without considerable disorganisation of the normal traffic, and that would have meant enormous expense.

By travelling at night, however, the ordinary running of the railways was in no way altered. Sometimes the School Train would be shunted into a siding for an hour or so, just to await the coming of a goods train. But nobody cared, nobody minded. In the morning the School Train was always at its next location.

To-night, for example, the School Train found itself running through Burslem and Stoke, through the heart of the potteries district. Some of the fellows, arousing themselves in the small hours, felt at times that they were travelling through a kind of inferno. In the blackness of the night they could see the lurid glare from the blast furnaces, lighting up the summer sky and creating flickering, ruddy reflections.

Yet when the rising bell went they found the train at rest in a new siding some distance outside Birmingham, in a comparatively countrified spot where there was plenty of green, plenty of woodland, and an abundance of pure fresh air. It was hardly ever possible for the School Train to "park" near the centre of a great city.

All the juniors were on their best behaviour during the morning, for if any of them were detained for inattention or for any other offences they would be deprived of the visit to the Three Spires Cycle Company Limited in the afternoon.

So Mr. Pycraft and Mr. Suncliffe had a comparatively easy time that morning.

"**O**FF we go!" said Reggie Pitt cheerfully.

Luncheon was over, and all the juniors were now seated in the two splendidly-equipped open motor-coaches—which were drawn up quite near to the School Train. It was a splendid sunny day; and very hot. The juniors solidly voted that this way of spending the afternoon was far better than sizzling in the Form-rooms.

They were soon off, and there was much to interest them on the way. Almost at once they entered Birmingham. It was a regular sight-seeing trip, and they were much impressed by the glories of New Street—which, really, is the oldest street of modern Birmingham—and by the busy character of Corporation Street.

They saw many of the splendid public buildings: the town hall, the council house, and the law courts. And then, after that, they continued onwards through Birmingham—straight along the main road to Coventry.

It was a comparatively short run along that splendid main road. The St. Frank's fellows were much interested in the Warwickshire scenery, and many of them, too, were astonished.

They had imagined that Birmingham and Coventry, and other midland cities of the same type, were surrounded by nothing but smoke and grime and industrial districts, where belching factory chimneys ruined the countryside.

In reality, of course, some of the most delightful country in the British Isles is to be found in this neighbourhood.

There are wide-open spaces, and there is much to be seen of the glorious typically Warwickshire country, richly studded, as it is, with old country mansions, ancient fortresses, stately churches, and romantic castle ruins.

And within easy distance, too, there is the lovely Shakespeare country.

(Continued on next page.)

A Screamingly Funny Article by Fatty Little—Discussing His Favourite Topic!



*Being a true and faithful statement
from the hungriest fellow at St. Frank's.*

HOW do I keep fit?

One word explains it. Grub—and the more you eat the healthier you'll be!

You've only got to look at me to realise the truth of that statement. Here I am, a big, strapping chap, finely built, as strong as a horse (before it becomes beef in that rotten restaurant down in Bannington), with muscles everywhere that look like the biggest turkey eggs. (Trust Fatty to get similes with grub. And who told you you were big and strapping and finely built, Fatty? You're big in circumference, all right, and therefore you're just the reverse of "finely" built.—Ed.)

And what's the cause of my physical fitness? I repeat: grub—grub, grub.

Mind you, there's a limit to this grub question. I don't believe in eating continuously all day long. That would be rank gluttony, and that's one thing I do detest. A snack every half hour of the day is quite sufficient.

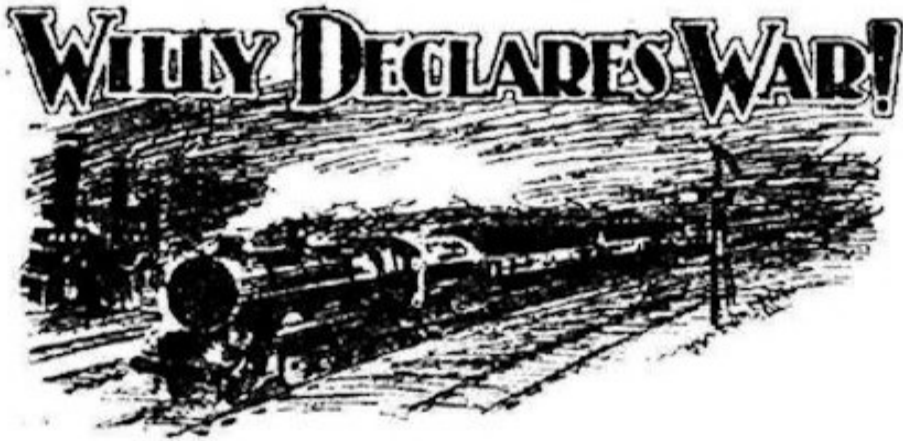
Another reason why I'm so fit is because I get plenty of exercise. Some fellows who, like me, eat rather heartily, will persist in falling asleep at every opportunity. It's all wrong. If I feel that I want to sleep I im-

mediately go to the cupboard and eat a meat pie or something like that.

But, as I was saying, I believe in plenty of exercise. Every morning when I get up I make a point of trotting briskly down to my study. (That's because he's after his first snack of the day.—Ed.) In fact, in case you don't know it, I'm a jolly good runner. I often have races with Nipper and the other chaps to the tuckshop, and I always beat 'em!

And has this thought occurred to you? Eating well gives you a strong constitution. Eat as I do and you'll have a cast-iron one. Don't you remember Julius Cæsar, or somebody or other making that famous saying, "An army marches on its stomach." Well, what he meant was you can't expect soldiers to win battles unless they are well fed. Right then, no Form-master has a right to expect a chap inwardly to digest Latin and other awful tripe unless he allows him to digest necessary articles of diet just how and when he fancies them.

So if you want to keep fit take my advice and eat all you can. Make these your mottoes: "Twenty doughnuts a day keep the doctor away," and "Eat not to live, but live to eat!"



(Continued from previous page.)

As for Coventry, this city has a wealth of mediæval associations, and old timbered houses dating back for centuries. Coventry, indeed, is a wonderful old-world haunt for tourists. Great as the city's progress has been in the industrial and commercial aspects, it still remains a delightful old English spot.

"Coventry is tremendously old," remarked Reggie Pitt, as they came near the outskirts. "I believe there was a convent founded here towards the end of the seventh century."

"It can't be standing now, though," said Jack Grey.

"No," replied Pitt. "It was destroyed in 1016 by an invasion under Canute and Edric, the Traitor."

"Canute, eh?" put in Handforth. "Wasn't he the chap who burnt the cakes?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fathead!" said Church. "That was King Alfred. King Canute ordered the sea back, and it refused to go."

"Oh, well, what's the difference?" asked Handforth airily. "By George! Look at the river over there!"

"That must be the River Sherbourne," nodded Nipper, as they looked over the fields and meadows. "We're coming into Coventry now."

They entered by the Holyhead Road, and they could soon see the three famous spires which have always been associated with Coventry—Holy Trinity Church, the Cathedral, and Christ Church.

They went along Smithford Street and Gosford Street, and so right into Coventry. There was no delay; for the great works of the Three Spires Cycle Company, Limited, were situated on the other side of the city—somewhere out on the Binley Road, towards Rugby. Past Stoke Green, and then on for a little distance round various roads, until at length the two coaches pulled up outside the works.

These works stretched back for quite a distance, and there were extensive grounds, too. Immediately in front were the general offices, with an imposing entrance, and there, ready to receive the schoolboy visitors, was a number of the company's officials.

Nelson Lee himself, of course, was in charge of this party—and there were the Form-masters, too. It was felt that the juniors would need a little looking after, so Mr. Pycraft and Mr. Suncliffe had come along.

Everybody was eager to get inside—to see the wonders of bicycle manufacture. The Three Spires Company was one of the most

famous in the land—a firm that produced only the highest class machines—a firm whose name stood for everything that was solid and dependable.

And then came the shock—for Willy Handforth, at least.

The juniors were all lined up, in readiness to be marched in. Nelson Lee was shaking hands with the officials in the entrance.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" murmured Willy suddenly. "My sons, this is going to be interesting!"

Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, who were next to Willy, stared in wonder. Then they uttered startled ejaculations.

For the gentleman who was now shaking hands with Nelson Lee was Sir Robert Barnes himself!

CHAPTER 5.

An Unexpected Meeting!

"W E'D—we'd better bolt!" murmured Chubby Heath nervously.

"Bolt?" repeated Willy. "We'll do no such thing! I'll admit the situation is a bit delicate, but I'm jiggered if I'm going to show the white feather!"

Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, however, were thoroughly nervous. To find that Sir Robert Barnes was here had hit them like a blow. They had confidently believed that they had seen the last of the pompous Sir Robert in Manchester. Yet here he was, in Coventry—and actually at the works of the Three Spires Cycle Company! The very fact that he was shaking hands with Nelson Lee indicated, in fact, that he was connected with the firm.

"Who is that gentleman, sir?" asked Willy, turning to Mr. Suncliffe, who was near. "The one talking to Mr. Lee?"

"I really don't know," said the Third Form-master. "However, I daresay——"

He turned to one of the numerous officials near by, and spoke to him. Then he looked at Willy again.

"The gentleman is Sir Robert Barnes—the managing director of this company," he said. "Indeed, Sir Robert is the—er—boss. A very fine man, Handforth minor."

"Yes, sir," said Willy, compressing his lips.

"A man who has done much for Warwickshire cricket," continued Mr. Suncliffe enthusiastically. "Indeed, I believed he played for the county in past years. A great sportsman—a great business man—and a great gentleman."

"Yes, sir," repeated Willy ominously.

He noted that Mr. Suncliffe had suddenly ceased to be bored. Until a minute ago, the Third Form-master had seemed half asleep; the prospect of being shown through the Three Spires works did not seem to thrill him in the least. He was prepared to be bored stiff.

But the discovery that the managing director of the concern was no less a person than Sir Robert Barnes seemed to make a great

deal of difference. Mr. Suncliffe was keenly interested in county cricket, and Sir Robert, the ex-cricketer, was a man of far greater interest than Sir Robert, the bicycle maker.

For his own part, Mr. Suncliffe would have preferred to spend the afternoon in witnessing a cricket match. Any kind of cricket match would have been better than this.

"Look here, Willy, we've got to bunk!" whispered Chubby, plucking at Willy's sleeve.

"Rats!"

"We mustn't let Sir Robert see us!"

"Why not?" asked Willy. "You're not afraid, are you?"

"Yes, I am!"

"You—you funk!"

"I'm not!" snorted Chubby. "What do you say, Juicy?"

"I'm with you!" said Juicy-Lemon nervously. "The only thing for us to do is to clear off."

"There you are!" said Chubby. "Be sensible, Willy! If Sir Robert spots us, he'll see red. Don't forget what happened in Manchester! He thinks we deliberately chucked him into that muddy gutter—"

"Well, he deserved to be chucked into the muddy gutter," interrupted Willy. "We didn't do it on purpose, I know, but Sir Robert got what he asked for."

"If he sees us here, he'll know that we're St. Frank's chaps," groaned Chubby Heath. "The very fact that there's been no inquiry proves he couldn't find out who we were. But now he'll know! And what do you think is going to happen after he has reported us to Mr. Lee? There'll be an inquiry, and even if we don't get sacked we shall be flogged!"

Willy considered.

"I'll take the blame," he said, at length. "You chaps needn't worry. If there's any trouble—"

"If!" echoed Chubby. "There's bound to be trouble, you ass! And Juicy and I won't let you take all the blame. We were in it with you, weren't we? Why not quietly slip away? I don't suppose anybody will notice our absence."

Willy hated the idea of such a retreat, but for the sake of his chums he felt that it was a time for him to sink his own feelings.

It was almost certain that Sir Robert would make things most unpleasant for them when he recognised them. And as the other fags refused to allow Willy to take all the blame, Willy was more or less compelled to give in to them.

"Oh, all right!" he said reluctantly. "If it's going to save you chaps from the chopper, I'll agree."

THEY happened to be near the end of the Third Form ranks, and it seemed to be an easy matter for them to drop out unostentatiously and stroll away casually in the direction of the empty coaches. Willy's idea was to get behind one of these vehicles and then make a quick dash down a little side street.

Owen minor had joined them, and he and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were intensely relieved. In their opinions, this strategic retreat was the only possible thing to be done.

"Handforth minor!" came a sharp voice. "Heath! Lemon! Owen minor! Halt!"

Their hearts sank. Mr. Suncliffe's voice was curt.

"What are you doing over there?" continued the Third Form master. "Come back at once! Did I not expressly forbid you to leave the column?"

"Bolt!" gasped Chubby.

"Too late!" muttered Willy. "Can't defy old Sunny like that. It would mean as much trouble as the other thing. Come on—we've got to go through with it now."

There was no help for it. The fags, thoroughly scared, went back to the Third Form ranks and took their places. Mr. Suncliffe's eye was upon them, and there was no possibility of escape now.

"There must be none of this nonsense," said Mr. Suncliffe sternly. "After we are within the works you will perhaps be able to move about freely. We shall probably be broken up into small parties. But for the moment we must keep together, otherwise there will be confusion."

"Yes, sir," said Willy resignedly.

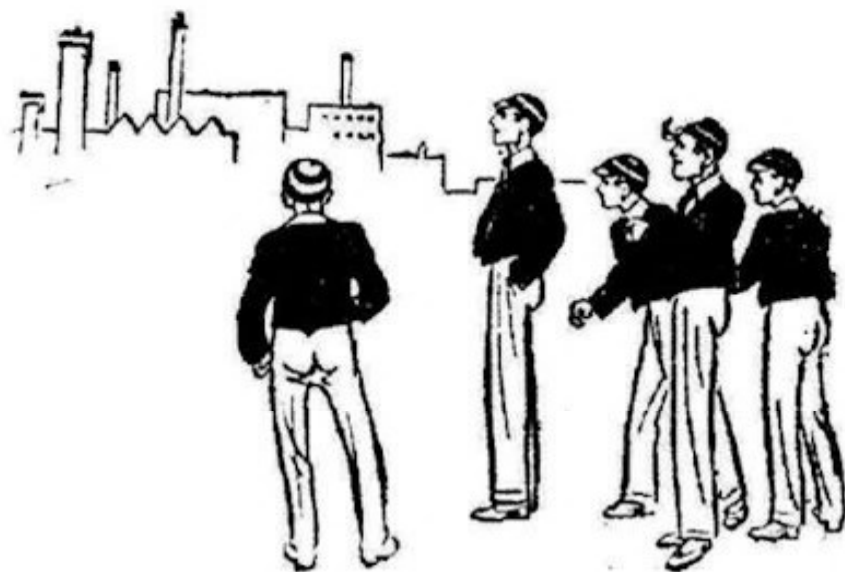
The Removites and Fourth-Formers were entering the building, and Sir Robert, mercifully, had vanished.

"Perhaps we shan't come across him at all," murmured Willy, as he and the other fags moved forward. "He'll probably keep with Mr. Lee all the time. Anyhow, if he comes our way we can easily dodge him."

"We'll do our best to," said Chubby.

Much to their relief, they found that Sir Robert had vanished completely by the time they got into the works. He was with Nelson Lee, far in advance of the Removites.

The juniors themselves were broken up into comparatively small parties, each one in charge of an official of some kind. They all went round the works in a free and easy, friendly way. Sir Robert, it need hardly be said, had not the faintest idea that these St. Frank's boys were unusually interested in him; he did not suspect that those school-boys who had "attacked" him in Manchester belonged to St. Frank's.



Nipper and Handforth and the other Removites had been a bit startled when they had heard Sir Robert's name; they knew who he was at once. And they were hoping for the best; they were trusting that luck would be on the side of the fags.

And luck was—to begin with. Willy & Co. caught a glimpse of Sir Robert now and again, but he was always some distance away from them, and there was very little chance that he would be able to recognise them.

"It'll be easy," said Willy, with all his old confidence. "As long as we keep our eyes open, my sons, we shall be safe. If Sir Robert comes anywhere near us we can turn our backs and be interested in some of the machinery."

"There's not much chance for us to win one of those giddy bikes!" said Chubby bitterly. "We're too busy keeping our eyes open for Sir Robert that we can't pay any attention to the works. So how can we hope to write a decent composition?"

"Don't worry, you wouldn't have got one of the bikes, anyway," said Willy. "You know jolly well that your spelling is too awful for words."

THEY had become quite confident about ten minutes later. Never once had Sir Robert come anywhere near them, and it now seemed certain that they would be able to dodge him without any trouble. Their first fears were not being realised.

It was a good policy to keep out of Sir Robert's way. As Willy had said in Manchester, the affair was now over and done with; no good purpose would be served by reopening it now. And there wasn't the slightest doubt that Sir Robert would reopen it if he recognised these fags; and he would reopen it in such a way that Nelson Lee would be informed of the facts, and then there'd be a whole heap of trouble for Willy & Co.

Everything was proceeding well. The juniors were vastly interested in the assembling shops, where they beheld bicycle wheels being made with uncanny skill and accuracy by the workmen. They saw the machines in all stages of manufacture—the making of the frames out of cold drawn steel tube, and dozens of other processes, all fascinating and absorbing to witness.

Willy & Co. and a number of other fags were passing through one of the shops when they were startled to behold Sir Robert Barnes walking briskly towards them. This was decidedly unfair. Without any warning, Sir Robert had left Nelson Lee and was barging in amongst the fags. It was a great shock for Willy & Co., who had taken it for granted that Sir Robert was now no longer a danger.

"Quick, this way!" said Willy briskly.

There was an open doorway just near, and without their official guide noticing them

they slipped through. They found themselves in a big yard, where the sun was beating down with considerable heat. Other workshops were dotted about here and there, and the whirr of machinery droned on the air.

"Not this way, boys!" said a voice behind them. "This door should not have been left open."

They spun round—and beheld Sir Robert! They had not known that Sir Robert himself had been making for that door. Instead of getting out of his way, they had got directly into it!

"Crumbs!" ejaculated Chubby blankly.

There was a smile on Sir Robert's face; but now his expression changed in a moment. At first he looked rather bewildered, then his eyebrows contracted, his eyes blazed, and his whole face became suffused with colour.

Seldom had Willy seen a man get into a rage so quickly.

"The Manchester boys!" ejaculated Sir Robert hoarsely. "You unmitigated young rascals! What are you doing here?"

"We're St. Frank's chaps, sir," said Willy steadily.

"What!" thundered Sir Robert. "Do you mean to tell me— St. Frank's boys! But you were in Manchester—"

"The School Train was in Manchester yesterday, sir," said Willy. "We moved to Birmingham during the night."

"Then you three boys belong to St. Frank's—and I have been entertaining you in my works!" shouted Sir Robert fiercely. "Good heavens! If I had known this, I would have locked my gates to all St. Frank's boys!"

"That's not fair, sir," said Willy quickly. "The other fellows aren't to blame for what we did. Besides, it was an accident. We didn't try to knock you over into the gutter; you slipped on a bit of orange peel, or something."

"How dare you!" roared Sir Robert. "You are only making things worse by this ridiculous denial of your grossly hooliganly conduct!"

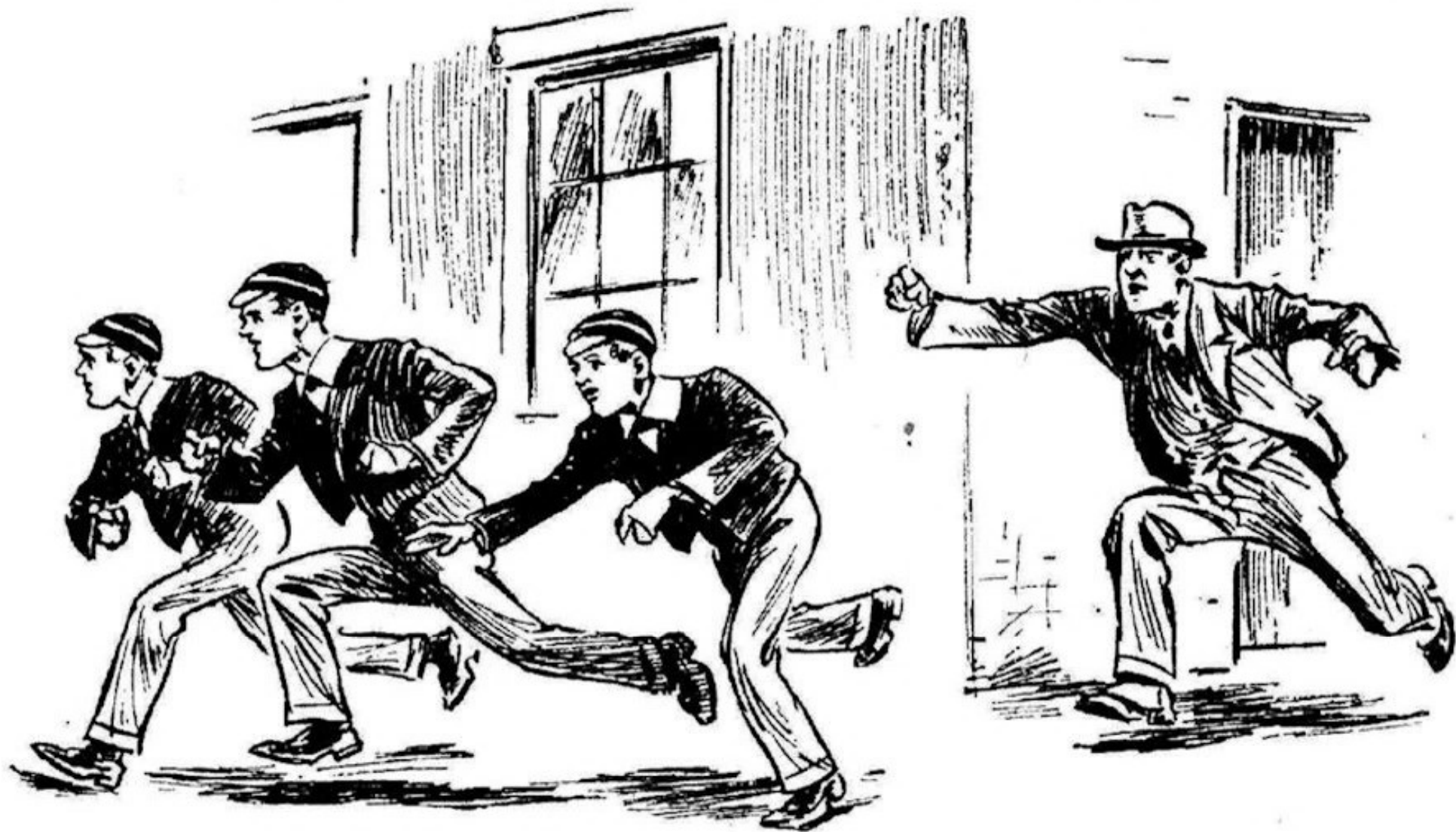
It was noticeable that Sir Robert looked only at Willy Handforth; he seemed to recognise that the other fags were not worthy of attention. Willy was the leader—Willy was the culprit. And it was upon Willy that Sir Robert vented his spleen.

"It was all because of that dog, sir," said Willy grimly. "You know as well as I do that it was your humane duty to stop and see if the poor animal—"

"Enough!" shouted Sir Robert. "I am going to throw you boys off these premises. The others, perhaps, must remain until the inspection is over. But you shall go now. And as for you—you—I'll throw you off with my own hands!"

He made a lunge for Willy, fairly beside himself with rage. Evidently, Sir Robert was a man of quick and violent temper.

Willy had no desire to be flung unceremoniously out of the Three Spires works,



“I’ll throw you out with my own hands!” bellowed Sir Robert. He made a lunge at Willy who, deciding that for once discretion was the better part of valour, dodged like lightning. “Run for it!” he gasped to his chums, and next moment they set off like hares—with Sir Robert in full pursuit!

and for once he decided that discretion was the better part of valour. He dodged like lightning and shot a glance at Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon.

“Run for it!” he said breathlessly.

They set off like hares, and Sir Robert Barnes, with a bellow of anger, gave chase.

Here was another unexpected turn. Never had Willy believed that the managing director of this vast works would so far forget his dignity as to chase three mere junior schoolboys!

CHAPTER 6.

Thanks to Willy!

“HE’S coming after us!” gasped Chubby, as he cast a glance over his shoulder.

“It’s all right—we’ll shake him off in no time!” panted Willy. “What rot, you know! Having to bunk like this! Makes a fellow feel so small!”

“That’s better than feeling sore for a fortnight!” said Juicy Lemon. “If he’d got hold of you, Willy, he’d have half-slaughtered you. Then he’d have reported you to Mr. Lee, and you’d have had another dose!”

“I expect I shall have that second dose, anyhow,” grunted Willy.

They were running all out now—running at random. They were glad that they were out in the open, for there was a good chance of getting clear away. They could see an open doorway in a big wall, two or three hundred yards farther on, and as they ran

they became aware of a noisy clanking and puffing.

A tiny locomotive engine was puffing along a narrow-gauge track at right-angles to them, pulling a number of queer little trucks behind it. It was one of those works trains, looking hardly any bigger than a toy.

“Straight ahead!” panted Willy. “Plenty of time for us to get across!”

He was right. They shot over the track, which was not guarded in any way, while the little train was twenty or thirty yards away, although it was coming at a good speed. And immediately behind them Sir Robert was still in full pursuit.

All would have been well if Sir Robert had not tripped just before crossing the miniature railway track. As it was, his foot seemed to catch on some projection or other. He stumbled, staggered forward, and fell with considerable force.

There was an ugly thud as the side of his head struck one of the metal rails, and he rolled over and lay perfectly still. Willy happened to spot this, for he had glanced over his shoulder to see how much lead he and his chums had gained.

“Whoa!” ejaculated Willy. “Quick, you chaps! He’s had an accident!”

WILLY was famed for his quick action. And now he was lightning-like in his movements.

The driver of the tiny locomotive had seen the incident, and the brakes were screaming as he applied them. But Willy could see, in one horrified flash, that the man could never pull up the train in time. Those

little trucks were loaded with metal, and the weight of the whole train, in spite of its diminutive size, must have been enormous. It was bearing down upon the prostrate Sir Robert, and was even now no more than fifteen yards away!

Willy sped back on his tracks faster than he had ever run before. He knew what had happened. Sir Robert had stumbled, had caught his head on the rail, and was unconscious. And there he was—right in the track of that train! Not another soul was near—although, from a distance, shouts were sounding. Work-people had seen the chase, and had paused to watch it from afar—and now they had seen this fresh sensation.

Fortunately, Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon had raced after their leader, and they arrived at the track only a bare second after him. Willy was grasping Sir Robert under the arms. The little train, now greatly slowed down, was bearing on them. It was clear that the driver would not be able to pull up in time.

"Quick!" yelled Willy. "Come on—one pull!"

Chubby seized hold of Sir Robert, and Juicy grabbed, too. They gave one tremendous heave, and as the steaming, hissing, clanking locomotive rattled by, they pulled Sir Robert clear. Only by a bare eighteen inches had they succeeded.

"My hat!" said Willy. "That was pretty warm!"

The train was at a standstill now, and the driver came running up.

"Gosh, kids, that was smart work!" he ejaculated approvingly. "Well done! You saved his life. I tell you, I was nearly sick with fright!"

"It's all right," said Willy. "A miss is as good as a mile, you know."

A dozen other men came running up now; they seemed to materialise from every direction at once. The newcomers did not know what the schoolboys had done, and Willy & Co. were elbowed aside. Men were bending over Sir Robert, and presently he was lifted up and carried away. Willy and Chubby and Juicy were left there.

"Hope he isn't hurt much," said Willy anxiously. "I've got a feeling that it was our fault, you know. If he hadn't been chasing us, he wouldn't have met with that accident. He caught his head a terrible crack on that rail."

"They can't blame us for it, though," protested Chubby. "We didn't ask him to chase us, did we? Don't you think we'd better clear out while we've got the chance?"

"I suppose it'll be the best thing," admitted Willy reluctantly.

HARDLY anybody knew how the three fags had figured in that little affair. Certainly, Nelson Lee knew nothing, and Nipper and Handforth and the other juniors, when they came running out to meet the crowd, did not guess that Willy & Co. had saved Sir Robert's life.

"What has happened?" asked Nelson Lee, as he strode up. "I'm not a medical man, but I know something of medicine. Let me have a look at Sir Robert."

"Fell over the track, sir," said one of the men. "Seems to have caught his head a nasty bang, by the look of it."

There was an ugly mark on Sir Robert's head—although it was not noticeable until the hair was brushed aside. While Nelson Lee was examining the wound Sir Robert opened his eyes.

"What is it?" he muttered, trying to sit up. "Hallo! What the— What does all this mean? Has there been an accident?"

"I think you fell, Sir Robert," said Nelson Lee. "I shouldn't exert yourself too much—"

"By gad, yes! I remember!" said Sir Robert, recovering with remarkable speed. "Those infernal boys!"

"I don't think I understand," said Nelson Lee.

"Three of your boys!" panted Sir Robert. "I was chasing them. I stumbled—I fell across the railway track, and I think my head—"

He broke off incoherently. But when Nelson Lee and some of the others tried to persuade him to lie down he refused. He shook his head vigorously, pressed his brow, and flung his shoulders back.

"I'm all right," he declared gruffly. "I'm not the kind of man to be knocked out by such a trifle. It's nothing—nothing at all! For Heaven's sake don't fuss over me!"

Nobody told him that he owed his life to Willy. Nobody there knew anything about it, in fact. There had been so much confusion, so much excitement, that the real facts were not known. It was generally assumed that Sir Robert had merely had a fall, and that the train had pulled up in time to avoid him.

Nelson Lee, with rare diplomacy, got Sir Robert into his own office. The latter had wanted to continue with his task of conducting the schoolboys round the works, saying that his head hardly troubled him at all. But Nelson Lee was not so sure; he did not like the look of that ugly bump. So, by gentle methods, he at length got Sir Robert into his own sanctum.

"I dare say you were right, Mr. Lee," he muttered after a while. "I am an excitable man—and a man of quick temper, too."

"So I gathered," said Lee dryly.

"It isn't often, however, that I go off the deep end so thoroughly," continued Sir Robert, frowning. "but, by gad, those boys fairly made my blood boil! I simply couldn't help myself. I was a fool to chase them, of course—I ought to have known better!"

"But what had the boys done?" asked Nelson Lee interestedly. "I hope you will tell me, Sir Robert—because they came here under my care. If any of them are deserving of punishment, I shall have to administer—"

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"It was nothing they did here," broke in Sir Robert. "The affair happened in Manchester."

"Oh! In Manchester?"

"I don't know the names of the boys, or I would tell you them," said Sir Robert. "They are quite young boys—"

"Handforth minor and Heath and Lemon, I think," said Lee, nodding. "I was told that they were running away from you."

"Is Handforth minor the boy with the intolerable insolence?"

"I should hardly call it that, Sir Robert," said Lee. "Handforth minor is a cool young customer, I will admit, but I do not think he means to be deliberately insolent. He has sufficient nerve for a whole school of boys, and sometimes it is necessary to curb him. As a general rule, however, I must confess that he is very level-headed, very reliable, and thoroughly trustworthy."

"The boy has deceived you!" snapped Sir Robert. "I found him to be impertinent, audacious, and positively dangerous!"

"I wish you would tell me what happened in Manchester."

"I will," said the other grimly. "I was on my way to a business conference. It was a most urgent matter—a vital matter. No need to go into any details, Mr. Lee, but I can tell you that it was a question of an option. It was necessary for me to be in that office by three o'clock, or the option would have expired—and that would have meant a loss to my firm of a very great sum. I am telling you this so that you will understand how absolutely imperative it was for me to be there on time. I had been delayed, and I was afraid, even then, that I should be too late."

"I see," nodded Lee.

"In one of Manchester's busy streets my chauffeur happened to run over a dog," continued Sir Robert. "It was no fault of Bailey's—he simply couldn't help it. Well, you know what happens when a car stops in a crowd after such an accident. People press round, and there is an intolerable

delay. Nothing could be done, and I thought it better to drive straight on."

"You were, of course, justified—in the circumstances."

"Man alive, it would have meant the loss of several contracts," said Sir Robert. "And this boy—this insufferable young rascal—had the audacity to follow my car, and to ambush me as I came out after the conference."

"To ambush you?" asked Lee.

"Literally that!" said the other. "No sooner did I appear than he and his companions surrounded me. This boy—this Handforth minor—practically called me a brute for not stopping after the dog had been run over."

"You must remember, Sir Robert, that he did not know the urgency of the case," said Lee gently. "He had no idea that you were fighting the clock like that. And it so happens that Handforth minor is passionately fond of animals. When he saw your car run over that dog, he doubtless felt grieved—"

"That was no excuse for his conduct," growled Sir Robert. "Do you know, sir, that he and his companions threw me into the gutter—a gutter, moreover, that was full of muddy water?"

"I am sorry to hear this, Sir Robert," said Lee gravely. "I had no idea that the offence was so serious."

"In fairness to the boys, I must admit that I trod on a piece of orange peel," grunted Sir Robert. "I did not know it at the time, but Bailey, my chauffeur, told me that the young rascals were not really responsible for my fall. But I maintain that they *were* responsible, for I should not have trodden upon the orange peel if they had not pestered me."

"I wish you had told me of this before," said Lee.

"How could I?" asked Sir Robert. "I did not know who the boys were—or to what school they belonged. I only discovered it this afternoon—when I suddenly came upon young Handforth and his companions. I recognised them at once, of course."

"And immediately lost your temper?"

"I'm afraid I did," admitted Sir Robert. "It was ridiculous of me—and doubly ridiculous for me to chase them in that way. But I am like that. Ask any of my employees. I have many failings, Mr. Lee, and one of them is my quick temper."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I am thankful that your injury is not serious," he said. "As for that boy, Sir Robert, let me urge you to reconsider your decision. He is by no means the young scamp you imagine him to be. It was only his love of animals that caused him to be—as you assume—insolent. I am convinced that he intended no insolence."

And Nelson Lee, in his own private mind, decided that he would drop the whole matter. No good purpose would be served by questioning Willy, and having the whole

matter reopened. Far better to let it drop. Sir Robert himself had admitted that his fall in Manchester had been more or less accidental.

So Willy & Co. had an anxious time for nothing after they got back to the School Train. They had not waited for the coaches, but had gone home by motor-bus. And there, in their own little study, they had awaited the summons.

"It can't be delayed much longer," said Willy, at about six o'clock. "Tea's over, and Mr. Lee's been back a long time. Why the dickens doesn't he send for us, and get it over?"

"Perhaps he's not going to do anything, after all," said Chubby hopefully.

"Don't you kid yourself, my son," said Willy. "Sir Robert must have told him everything—that Manchester business included. We're going to get it in the neck before long, or I'm a Dutchman!"

Evidently Willy was a Dutchman, for they didn't "get it in the neck."

CHAPTER 7.

The Wallet!

"FUNNY!" said Willy, frowning.

It was seven o'clock now, and still nothing had happened. At least, nothing unpleasant. Nelson Lee had seen them, had nodded to them, and had remarked upon the fineness of the evening. But he had not ordered them into his study. It really did seem that the summons was not coming.

At last Willy decided to end the suspense. He went along the School Train, knocked on the door of Nelson Lee's study, and entered.

"Can you spare a minute, sir?" he asked.

Lee was at the open window, reading a newspaper. He was taking a little leisure after the tiring experience of the afternoon.

"Well, Handforth minor?" he said.

"I just want to know if you're going to swish me, sir," said Willy steadily.

"Oh! Do you think, then, that you deserve swishing?"

"I don't deserve it, sir, but I thought that you might think so," replied Willy. "I expect Sir Robert Barnes told you all about that little affair in Manchester, didn't he?"

"As a matter of fact, he did."

"And aren't you going to take any action, sir?"

"I had decided, Handforth minor, to say nothing whatever," said Lee quietly. "I assumed that Sir Robert had mistaken your anxiety for that poor dog for impertinence. Do you assure me that you had no intention of being impertinent?"

"I thought that Sir Robert acted rottenly, sir," said Willy bluntly. "He told his chauffeur to drive on without even making sure that the poor creature was dead. It was cruel and callous, sir."

"Not quite so cruel and callous as you imagine, Handforth minor," said Lee. "Sir Robert was in a great hurry—a vital hurry. Any delay might have meant a serious loss to his firm."

"Oh, I didn't know that, sir," said Willy, startled.

"Well, it is a fact," said Lee. "Sir Robert explained to me what happened, and I really do not think that it is necessary for us to go over it again. As far as I am concerned, the matter is entirely closed."

"Thanks awfully, sir," said Willy gratefully. "I suppose Sir Robert felt a bit more kindly disposed towards me after he heard of our saving him. I was awfully glad to learn that he wasn't badly hurt, sir."

Lee looked at Willy curiously.

"How do you mean—saving him?" he asked.

"Why, dragging him from in front of that train— But didn't you know, sir?"

"I certainly did not," said Lee. "Are you telling me, Handforth minor, that you saved Sir Robert's life?"

Willy felt uncomfortable.

"I wish I hadn't said anything, sir," he muttered. "It doesn't matter at all, sir."

"Tell me what happened, young 'un."

"I'd rather not, sir—"

"Tell me!" insisted Lee.

"Well, when Sir Robert fell he was a bit stunned," said Willy gruffly. "I could see that the little train couldn't pull up in time, and that Sir Robert would be killed. So Chubby and Juicy and I rushed back, grabbed Sir Robert, and pulled him clear in the nick of time. I thought you knew all about it, or I wouldn't have said anything."

Nelson Lee pursed his lips.

"I am glad you have told me this, Handforth minor," he said quietly. "It definitely convinces me that I was wise in deciding to make no inquiries into this affair. The fact that you saved Sir Robert's life undoubtedly puts everything right. It was very plucky of you, my boy."

"Oh, cheese it, sir—I wasn't in any danger."

"Well, if it wasn't plucky it was a remarkable exhibition of quick presence of mind," smiled Lee. "An instant's delay on your part and the unfortunate man would have been killed. You acted splendidly, and I am very glad to hear of this."

"Well, I'm glad it's all over, sir, and I'm glad that you're such a sport," said Willy. "Thanks again, sir."

He went out, and when he returned to his little study he was grinning cheerfully.

"It's all right, my sons," he said. "There's going to be no chopper. I'm a Dutchman, after all. Hallo! What's that you've got, Chubby? And what are you looking so startled about?"

Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were staring at a brown leather wallet which was in the former's hands.

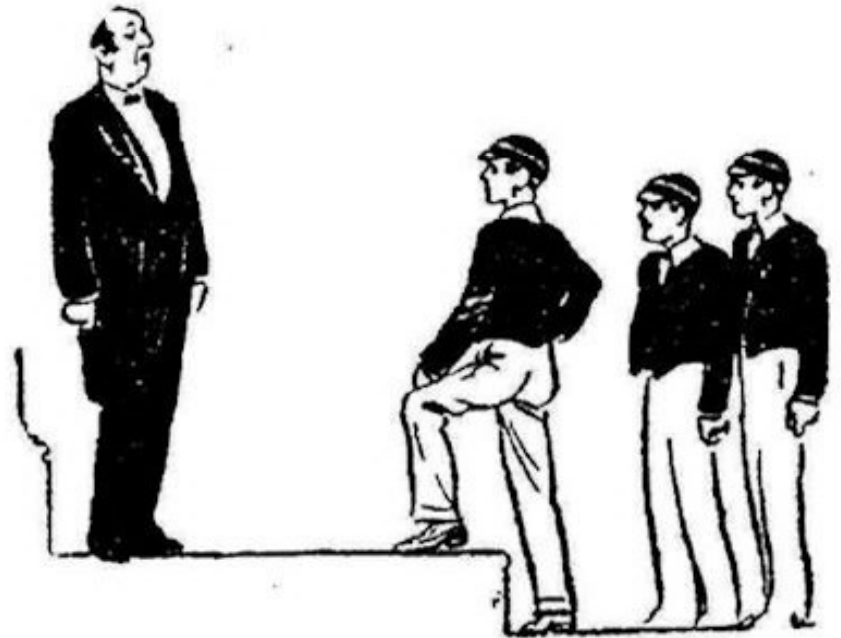
"I've just remembered," said Chubby breathlessly. "This is Sir Robert's!"

"Then how the dickens did you get hold of it?"

"I found it on the ground."

"What the——"

"You remember when we dragged Sir Robert clear of the little railway track?" asked Chubby. "Well, I noticed this wallet on the ground, and I picked it up and stuffed it into my pocket. There was such a crowd coming, and with Sir Robert unconscious, I didn't know what else to do. I meant to give it to you at first, and then I decided to wait until Sir Robert was better. And after that I forgot it."



"It must have fallen out of his pocket when he fell over," said Willy, taking the wallet. "I'd better have a look inside, just to see if there's any money in it. Can't be too careful with wallets, you know."

He opened it, and whistled.

"Great Scott! Banknotes by the score!" he ejaculated. "Look at these—twenty quid—ten quid—and one here for fifty quid! There must be two or three hundred pounds in this wallet!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Chubby, startled. "He'll think that we've pinched it!"

"Rot!" said Willy. "We'll return it at once. I think I'd better hand it over to Mr. Lee, and tell him— Hallo! No, I suppose I'd better not read—"

He had half opened a telegraph form—one of those with strips of green paper from a tape machine pasted on to it. He did not mean to read the message, but he caught sight of two or three words which compelled him to read the rest.

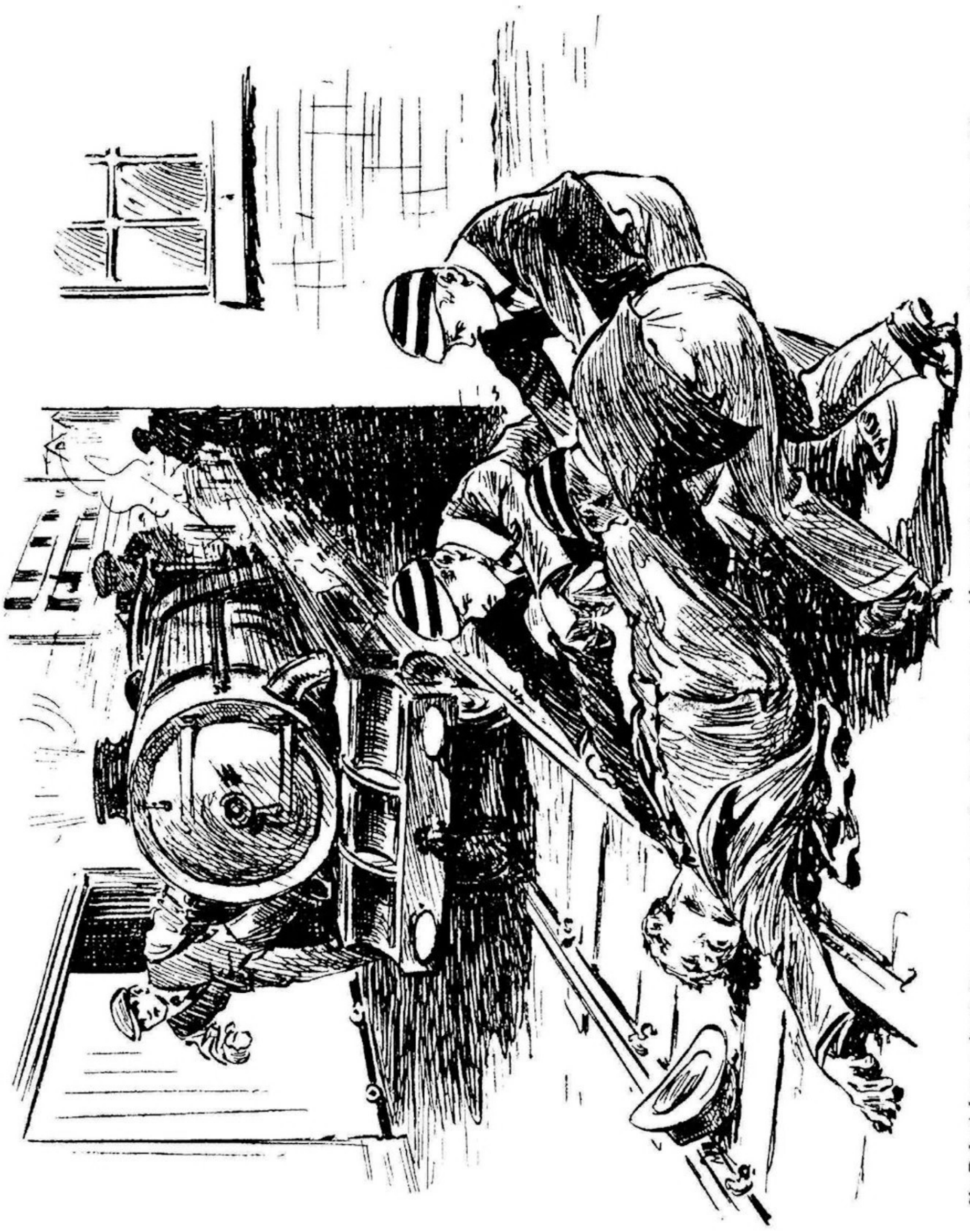
"Vitaly necessary for you to be here by three p.m. to-day if option is to be taken up.—Walton."

That was the message—and Willy knew that Mr. Walton was Sir Robert's general manager. He had been much in evidence that afternoon.

"Phew!" whistled Willy blankly.

"It's like your nerve, reading that wire!" protested Chubby. "I didn't think you were so nosey, Willy."

"I'm not nosey," said Willy slowly. "I didn't mean to read the wire at first. But look here! Mr. Lee told me just now that Sir Robert was in the very dickens of a hurry when his car ran over that dog—and



Sir Robert lay an inert figure across the rails. Bearing down upon him was the clanking locomotive. It was obvious that it would be unable to pull up in time. "Quick!" yelled Willy to his chums. "Come on—pull!" The three fags pulled. Would they be in time to avert the catastrophe?

this wire shows why he was in a hurry. He had to get somewhere by three o'clock in order to take up an option."

"What does that mean?" asked Juicy, staring.

"It means that if he hadn't been there by three o'clock, he might have lost a big business deal," said Willy. "Don't you see? It was nearly three when that dog was run over."

"If he had allowed his car to wait a crowd would have collected, and then the police would have come up," continued Willy. "Don't you remember? A bobby came along only a minute after the car had gone—and you know what bobbies are like."

"We do," agreed Juicy Lemon. "They're about as obstinate and as awkward as Form-masters!"

"That's just it," said Willy. "This bobby would probably have asked a whole rigmarole of questions, and that delay might have meant a very serious thing for Sir Robert. It's a pity he didn't explain it at the time!"

"You couldn't expect him to explain his business matters to us, you ass!" said Chubby Heath, grinning. "So he wasn't such a cold, callous-hearted rotter, after all?" he added, with a trace of sarcasm.

"He wasn't callous at all," grunted Willy. "I misjudged him—and I'm dashed sorry about it. I feel that I ought to go to Sir Robert and apologise to him."

"You can't go now—it's nearly time for calling-over," said Chubby.

He and Juicy were surprised at Willy's changed attitude. They only vaguely understood what the option meant. But Willy was pretty keen, and he thoroughly appreciated Sir Robert's anxiety at the smallest possibility of any delay. It had been nearly three o'clock when the accident happened, and Sir Robert had been afraid that he would arrive too late for the conference.

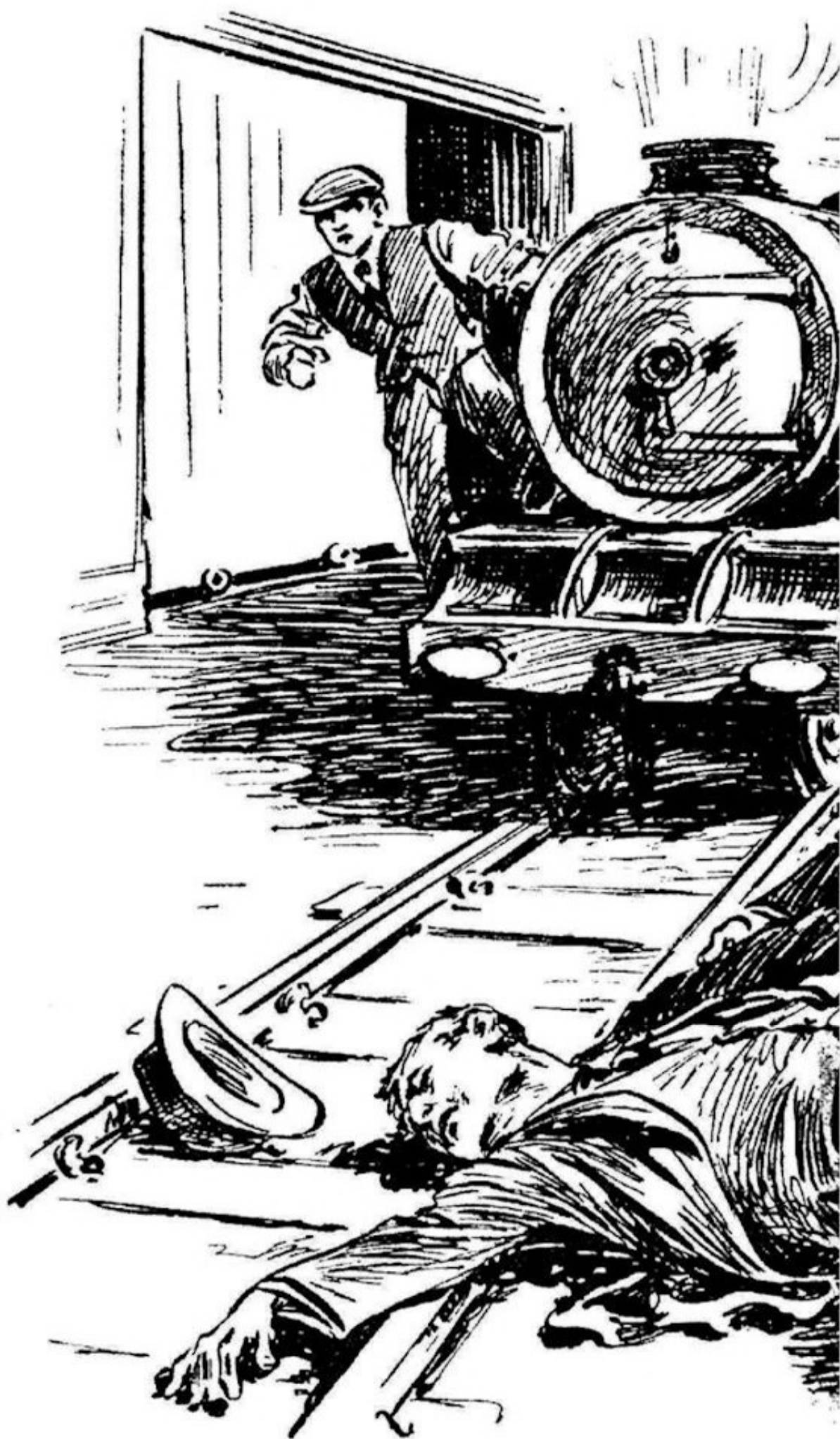
"Yes, I ought to apologise," said Willy uncomfortably. "There's a good chance here, too. I can return this wallet to him, and apologise at the same time. I shan't feel satisfied until I've done that—until I've explained to Sir Robert that I made a bloomer."

"Far better let it drop," said Juicy Lemon. "It's over and done with now, and you don't want to get in Sir Robert's way deliberately. If he catches you, he might tickle you up with a walking cane, or something!"

"Somehow, I don't think he will," said Willy. "Anyway, we'll see. Wait here until I come back."

NELSON LEE turned the leather wallet over in his hands, and glanced at Willy Handforth.

"Yes, I quite understand," he said. "In the excitement, Heath put this wallet in his pocket and forgot to return it. You did quite right in bringing it to me."



Sir Robert lay an inert figure across the rails. Bearing down would be unable to pull up in time. "Quick!" yelled the engine-driver. "Would they be in time?"

"If you don't mind, sir, I'd like to take it to Sir Robert Barnes myself," said Willy. "I was wondering if you would give me permission to go now—with Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, too. We're the chaps who were most concerned, and I think we ought to apologise to Sir Robert. If we take that wallet back, it'll be a good opportunity."

"Why do you think you should apologise, my boy?"

"Because I happened to spot a telegram in that wallet, sir," replied Willy. "I wasn't prying, or anything—I was only looking through the wallet to see if there were any valuables in it. And now I understand that



the clanking locomotive. It was obvious that it was. "Come on—pull!" The three fags pulled. "Strophe?"

Sir Robert was rushing across Manchester to take up an option by three o'clock."

"Very true—Sir Robert told me so himself."

"I didn't know that at the time, sir," said Willy. "If I had known it, I wouldn't have cheeked Sir Robert as I did. I thought he was just one of these rotters who drive on

after running a dog over. There are plenty of 'em about, you know, sir."

"Unfortunately, there are," agreed Nelson Lee. "And there are some, I fear, who drive on after running down human beings. But I am quite certain that Sir Robert would have stopped had he been on a normal drive. It was careless of him, Handforth minor, not to acquaint you with the facts—but I am afraid that these big business men are not in the habit of confiding their business affairs to junior schoolboys," he added dryly.

"It was all a misunderstanding, sir," replied Willy. "I hope you'll let me take that wallet back at once, sir. Sir Robert lives comparatively near, doesn't he? Somebody told me that his house is in Edgbaston, and that's a part of Birmingham, sir."

"If this necessitated your taking a journey to Coventry I should refuse," smiled Lee, "but as Sir Robert does live at Edgbaston, as you say, I'll give you a special permit for this evening. And you may take Heath and Lemon with you."

"Thanks awfully, sir," said Willy eagerly. "I shall feel a lot more comfortable after this is over."

"**J**OLLY decent of Mr. Lee to let us go," said Chubby contentedly.

"Rather!" said Juicy.

Willy was silent. They were all on a 'bus, journeying towards the suburb of Edgbaston. Willy felt that a few private words with Sir Robert would put things right.

After all, Sir Robert was evidently a sportsman, or he wouldn't have invited the boys to go over his works, and he wouldn't have made them a present of six machines. His quick temper was a fault, but the best of us have faults, if it comes to that.

Arriving at Edgbaston, Willy & Co. found that Sir Robert Barnes lived in a magnificent mansion situated on the top of a little rise and surrounded by superb gardens.

Sir Robert had interests in Coventry and in Hanstall, a Staffordshire town—though his home was situated midway, as it were, between his business interests.

Willy presented himself at the great front door with plenty of confidence. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were not quite so sure; they were by no means certain as to the reception they would receive.

"The only trouble is, he might be in bed," said Willy, as they waited. "I've thought of that all along—but we'll hope for the best. After that whack he had on the head, he'll probably be subdued, anyhow."

The door opened, and a rather magnificent butler presented himself. He looked down upon the fags with mild surprise.

"We'd like to see Sir Robert, please," said Willy briskly. "Just give the name of Handforth minor, and I think he'll—"

"I regret, young gentlemen, that you cannot see Sir Robert," interrupted the butler, with dignity.

"Tell him we're St. Frank's boys," said Willy. "We've got a special permit to come and see him, and——"

"Sir Robert is not at home," said the butler, with an air of finality.

"I don't suppose he is—to people he doesn't want to see," said Willy. "But he'll want to see us as soon as you give him my name. And tell him that we've got a wallet of his—the one that he lost at his works this afternoon."

"I must repeat, young gentlemen, that Sir Robert is not at home," said the butler, with some asperity. "Sir Robert has been called to his iron-smelting works at Hanstall. He left an hour ago, and intimated that he would not be back until quite late this evening."

Willy's expression changed.

"Oh!" he said. "You actually mean it, then? He really isn't at home at all?"

"I have already told you that Sir Robert has gone to Hanstall," said the butler tartly. "If you wish to leave a message——"

"No, thanks, it doesn't matter," said Willy. "But you're not spoofing, are you? You aren't telling us he's gone to Hanstall just to get rid of us?"

The butler assured them, with even greater dignity than before, that he was not in the habit of spoofing anybody. It was an absolute fact that Sir Robert Barnes had gone to Hanstall.

"Well, that's done it!" said Chubby, after the door had closed, and he and the other fags were walking down the drive.

"The only thing we can do is to get back to the train," said Juicy, with relief. "I'm not particularly disappointed. I didn't want to see the old boy. His temper is a bit too uncertain for me."

"It's early yet," said Willy, as he glanced at the evening sky. "My sons, I'm not going to be diddled like this. We're not going back to the School Train yet. We're going to Hanstall!"

CHAPTER 8.

Chasing Sir Robert!

"GOING to Hanstall?" said Chubby Heath, staring.

"Yes."

"But Hanstall is in Staffordshire!"

"I believe it is," nodded Willy.

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"And we're in Warwickshire, aren't we?" "My dear asses, what's that got to do with it?" asked Willy. "In some places you've only got to go across the road and you're in another county. The main fact is that Hanstall is only about fifteen miles away. There are bound to be plenty of trains, and we can be there in about half an hour, with luck."

"I'm glad you said 'with luck'!" grunted Chubby.

"Well, anyway, we've got a permit to see Sir Robert," said Willy. "What does it matter if we don't get back until ten o'clock, or after? We're safe. I'll admit that Mr. Lee didn't expect us to go chasing Sir Robert into Hanstall, but life's full of these little troubles."

Willy's chums did not quite approve of it—not that this made the slightest difference to Willy's decision. He had made up his mind to see Sir Robert this evening, and it wasn't likely that Sir Robert would have left Hanstall by the time the fags arrived. Anyhow, here was a jolly good excuse to be out late for once, and, incidentally, to see something of the district at the same time. Willy wasn't the kind of fellow to accept defeat. He had come out to see Sir Robert, and he was jolly well going to see him!

THEY got a train all right, and it was just their luck that, when the train stopped at the first station, there should be another train on the opposite platform. And as Willy stood at the window, looking up and down, who should he stare at but his major.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Edward Oswald. "What the dickens are you doing in that train, you young ass?"

"Just going off on a jaunt," replied Willy.

Other heads appeared—those of Church and McClure and Jerry Dodd and Travers and two or three more. They were all in the other train—bound for Birmingham. As a matter of fact, a little party of them had been out sightseeing. They were expecting to get back rather too late for calling-over—but were fully prepared to face the music.

"You can't go for jaunts at this time of the evening!" said Handforth indignantly. "You're going away from Birmingham—not towards it!"

"Go hon!"

"Where are you going?"

"Hanstall, if you must know," said Willy.

"Have you had permission to go to Hanstall?"

"Well, no, not exactly——"

"I knew it!" said Handforth sternly. "You reckless young ass! What do you mean by dodging off like this? You'll get yourself into hot water— Hi! Stop that train, somebody!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Willy's train was moving out of the station, and Willy waved his hand affectionately.



Handforth undertakes to answer, in his own unique fashion, any question "N.L." readers care to submit to him. But, although of a certainty the results will be amusing and entertaining, the Editor takes no responsibility for their veracity. Write to Handforth, c/o the NELSON LEE LIBRARY to-day.

I THINK it's a swindle. I make a jolly fine suggestion to the Editor, and now he gives me a mouldy half-page. (There's gratitude for you.—ED.) He ought to have given me half the paper to myself. The Editor's all right in his way, but he wants waking up. He wants a real live genius on the job. That's me. (There's one thing I like about Handy, and that's his modesty.—ED.) I've got millions of wonderful wheezes and now they'll be wasted. Such is life. Anyway, I want ALL you chaps—and girls—to write to me. If you don't I'll—I'll—I'll come round and punch every one of you on the nose.—E. O. HANDFORTH.

R. E. F. (Kensington) writes to tell me that he is going abroad for his summer holidays. He hates getting sunburnt, and wants to know if I can tell him how to prevent it. "Obvious, sir, obvious!" as Splinter would say to Trackett Grim. Take your summer holidays in England.

"Reader" (Birmingham).—Is Yung Ching the Chinese junior of St. Frank's? Well, he's certainly not French, you duffer!

P. R. (Bath).—Yes, the School Train is going to visit Bath. And what do you mean when you ask: "Are Handy & Co. going to the famous Roman Bath?" Of course not!

Why the dickens should I go to Bath for a bath? And anyway, I certainly shouldn't have a Roman one; I'm patriotic.

"Sportsman" (Liverpool).—Glad to hear you're very keen on sport. You must be a jolly fine fellow; one of the very best. I'm very keen on sport, too, you know. And who's the best "all-rounder" at St. Frank's? Why, Fatty Little. What a silly question to ask.

"Nelson Leeite" (Chester).—Many thanks for the photograph showing you standing beside a donkey. I'm sure you're right when you say: ". . . it's a remarkable likeness of me." Haw! Haw!

"Dirty Dick" (Clapton).—So you're interested in amateur theatricals, are you? Yes, I should like to have a part in your next play. I'm just the chap for the handsome hero or a bold pirate. In fact, I'll write the play for you if you'll make me stage manager, appoint me producer, give me the leading part, put me in charge of the "props," let me be chief scene-shifter, chief electrician, "effects" man and—well, everything else I haven't thought of. By the way, you shouldn't be disappointed because the theatre was half empty at your last performance. After all, it was half full, wasn't it?

EDWARD OSWALD.

"So long, Ted!" he said sweetly, as their compartments came opposite. "See you later!"

He playfully "tapped" Edward Oswald on the nose as they passed, and Edward Oswald roared at the top of his voice.

"Hi! Come back!" he bellowed. "I forbid you to go to Hanstall!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Afraid it's too late to do any forbidding now, Handy, old man," said Harry Gresham, grinning. "They've gone!"

"Well, I'm going, too!" said Handforth grimly. "Where's the door? Let me get out! I'm not going to have my minor running about the countryside like this, breaking bounds, and getting himself into trouble!"

"Rats! We can't do any good," said Church.

"Willy's gone off without a permit," said Handforth anxiously. "I'm going to get out of this train, and I'll catch the next one to Hanstall from the opposite platform. I'm going to fetch Willy back by the scruff of his giddy neck!"

"Look here, you silly chump——"

"Stand aside, blow you!" bellowed Handforth.

He fairly barged his way out of the compartment, and Church and McClure went out after him as though they were tied to strings. Where Handforth went, they went. They wouldn't dream of letting him go off on this journey alone. He would only get himself lost, or something equally alarming.

"Oh, well, if you three chaps are going we might as well all go!" grinned Travers coolly. "How about it, dear old fellows? We shall be late for calling-over, anyhow, so we might as well be hung for sheep as lambs."

"I'm game!" said Harry Gresham. "Might as well make a full evening of it."

"Well, well!" chuckled Travers, as they all stood on the platform. "What naughty habits you do lead us into, Handforth, dear old fellow!"

"I didn't ask you fellows to come," said Handforth coldly. "It'll be a lot better without you, in fact. I can deal with my minor, thanks."

"Perhaps you can—but who's going to deal with you?" asked Travers blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hanstall isn't far, anyhow," continued Travers. "There's bound to be a train within a few minutes, and we'll soon grab those fags

and bring them back. Must uphold the discipline of the school, you know!"

"**H**ERE we are!" said Willy crisply. He tumbled out upon the platform at Hanstall, and he was not particularly impressed. It was a grubby, dirty station, and perhaps it looked grubbier than ever in the fading light. Dusk had fallen now, and the whole countryside was looking gloomy and overcast.

Yet this was really a false impression, since the evening was fine. But here, in this district, there were great belching chimneys, and a kind of pall seemed to hang in the still summer atmosphere.

"Well, now that we're here, what are we going to do?" asked Chubby politely. "We don't know where Sir Robert is, or where his works are, or anything."

"We've got tongues in our heads, haven't we?" retorted Willy. "We're not dumb! At least, I'm not, even if you are!"

Outside the station a few inquiries were quite profitable.

"Bob Barnes' place?" said a man to whom they spoke.

"I suppose so," said Willy.

"That'll be over in the valley, beyond the railway," said the man, pointing vaguely.

"You can't go wrong if you keep to this

(Continued on next page.)

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road. And you can't miss 'em—not them blast furnaces, anyway. Just over a mile, I should think, and you keep straight on. Better ask somebody else when you get pretty near."

"Thanks!" said Willy.

"Well, that was easy enough," remarked Juicy. "But how are we going to find Sir Robert once we get to the blast furnaces?"

"There's no sense in making difficulties," replied Willy. "Let's get to the place, and then we'll soon locate him."

"I thought he had a kind of factory here," said Chubby Heath. "Blast furnaces, eh? That's where they make iron, isn't it?"

"Of course," replied Willy. "I suppose the Three Spires Company makes its own raw material."

They walked along the somewhat drab road, and it seemed to them that over the valley into which they were now gradually dropping was a kind of haze. It seemed to be half mist and half dust, and altogether depressing.

Not far away was the railway, and in the gloom of the approaching night they could see trains being shunted—puffs of smoke and steam coming from the engines as they bustled here and there, rumbling and snorting. The clang of the trucks, as they jarred against one another, came to the juniors like series of pistol-shots in the still air.

"Rummy sort of place," remarked Chubby soberly.

"Oh, I dare say it looks commonplace enough in full daylight!" replied Willy. "Just now, though, with the night nearly upon us, it looks rather mysterious."

Twinkling lights were showing here and there—no doubt the lights from street lamps—and into the distance arose multitudes of great chimneys, the majority of them belching forth masses of reeking smoke. And now and again the fags saw a spidery kind of wheel sticking up against the outline of the sky, marking some colliery, perhaps.

But the most impressive sight of all was nearer at hand—the black, vast hill on the other side of the valley, where the enormous cylinders of the Three Spires company's blast furnaces were belching forth their smoke and fitful flames. There was the great mass of the ironworks, which was a part and parcel of the same concern.

"By jingo!" said Willy, impressed.

They stood looking down into the valley; they could hear the thudding of the great steam hammers, and they could see the masses of white-hot sparks darting out as though from nowhere. It was a place of seething molten metal and lurid flame.

A man came walking past, carrying a small basket, evidently a workman on his way home.

"Are these the Three Spires company's works?" asked Willy.

The man paused.

"That's them," he said, pointing with his pipe. "About time some o' them furnaces was scrapped, too!"

"Why, are they dangerous?" asked Willy.

"No, not dangerous," replied the man heavily, "but they're blamed old-fashioned. Some of 'em have been out o' date for years, but they're still carrying on. Sir Robert's a man who don't like to make changes, even when it's for the good of his business. Look at that over there."

He pointed again, and the fags saw a truckload of fuel being shot into one of the giant cylinders. Masses of red flame shot up into the evening sky, to be followed by a smother of black dust and smoke.

"It—it looks awful!" whispered Chubby Heath. "Those flames, I mean, and the glare. Reminds me of some nightmare. In a way, it's impressive, too."

"Oh, impressive enough, young gents!" said the man. "But it's time them furnaces was scrapped. There ain't many where they tip the fuel in nowadays by the truckload like that. Most of 'em have got automatic hoists—and so they ought!"

He passed on with a nod.

"Old-fashioned or not, they seem to be going ahead pretty busily," remarked Willy. "Well, we're on the right track, my lads. Come on. Shan't be long now."

They penetrated deeper into the valley, and nearing the bottom of the slope they went across an exposed railway line. Now the ironworks of the blast furnaces were right in front of them.

There were great slag heaps—gigantic mounds of clinker. All around came the sounds of the work that was being done, the puffing of engines in the distance, the clatter of trucks, the thudding of the steam hammers, the rattle of the rolling mills, and the ever-present roar from the blast furnaces. It made a great, awe-inspiring spectacle in the gloom of the approaching summer's night.

"Better go this way, I suppose," said Willy, peering cautiously ahead of him. "There doesn't seem to be much of a path, but it's the way to the furnaces."

They picked their way round great heaps of coal and slag and ore, and as they drew nearer the tumult of the rolling mills became more blatant and aggressive.

There was some water over towards the left—a pond perhaps, and it reflected the fiery red of the furnaces. Steam seemed to be coming up from some of the water.

And now that they were getting nearer to the blast furnaces they could hear the insistent roar of sound from them. It was becoming more and more awesome.

"I don't think we ought to have come," muttered Juicy, in a scared sort of voice.

"Fathead!" said Willy. "There's nothing to be afraid of in an ironworks. What about all those men there—working right next to the molten metal? It looks pretty fearful, but there's no danger if you're careful."

They were so near to the rolling mills now that they could see the men at work, moving round like puny midgets. White-hot metal seemed to be everywhere—under the great hammer and between the wheels of the rolling mill.

They were close to one of the great blast furnaces, and they watched fascinatedly as they saw a truck of ore and fuel and lime being raised on the lift to the top of the great cylinder. It was an old-fashioned method, as the workman had said.

"Hallo! What are you boys doing here?" asked a sharp voice.

They turned, and found a man near them, a young fellow dressed in blue serge.

"We're looking for Sir Robert," said Willy. "We've come from Birmingham, having heard that he was here. Do you know anything about him?"

"Well, I'm one of his under-managers," said the other. "Yes. Sir Robert's about somewhere. I was talking to him only five minutes ago. Having a look at one of the furnaces, I think."

"Good egg!" said Willy. "We've run him to earth, my sons!"

CHAPTER 9.

A Dramatic Turn!

THE young man looked at the fags curiously.

"Schoolboys, aren't you?" he asked.

"Yes—St. Frank's chaps," said Willy.

"Did anybody give you permission to come here?"

"No; but we're looking for Sir Robert, so we thought it would be all right."

"Well, I'm not so sure about it," said the young man dubiously. "This is no place for kids to be at large. You'll only get yourselves into some sort of mess, especially at this time of night. You must want to see Sir Robert pretty urgently."

"We do," replied Willy.

It seemed that this young man knew nothing of the St. Frank's fellows' visit to the Three Spires bicycle works that afternoon, otherwise he would have mentioned it. He would have recognised them as St. Frank's boys. Apparently Sir Robert had made no mention of the afternoon's events.

"Perhaps you'd better wait here," said the young man. "I'll try to find Sir Robert. I'm warning you, though, that he's not in the best of tempers. Rather queer to-night, in fact."

"How queer?" asked Willy.

"Don't quite know," said the other, frowning. "Sort of thoughtful and silent and moody. In fact, nobody quite knows why he came out this evening; he wasn't expected until next week, and ever since he came he's just been roaming about all over the place, having a general look round. I don't quite like it."

He went off, and Willy glanced at the other two fags.

"I don't like it much, either," he said in a low voice.

"What do you mean?" asked Chubby, startled.

"That whack on the head, I expect," said Willy sagely. "Must have affected him a bit."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Well, it's rummy, isn't it, that he should have come out here on the spur of the moment?" asked Willy. "I'm jolly glad I came, my sons. After I've apologised to him, and after he's got his wallet back, he'll probably feel better. It looks as if he hasn't told anybody about that mishap this afternoon."

"He ought to be in bed," said Juicy. "How about persuading him to come home with us?"

"That's what I'm going to do," replied Willy, nodding.

Presently the young man came back.

"Sir Robert's up on that platform at the top of the big blast furnace," he said, pointing. "I don't like it at all. I asked him to come down, but he wouldn't."

"What's he doing up there?" asked Willy.

"Nothing, except having a look round," said the other, frowning. "Confound it! I wish he wouldn't fool about like this! I've never known him behave like it before. Can't very well say anything, though; he's in a touchy mood."

"Did you tell him we were here?" asked Willy.

"Yes; I said that three schoolboys wanted to see him," said the young man. "He told me to take you along."

"Good enough!" said Willy briskly. "Let's go, then."

They went over the rough ground, away from the rolling mills, and getting nearer to that vast blast furnace which was but one of many. When they got to the base of it, near the lift which hoisted the trucks, they looked up and could see a figure far above—seventy or eighty feet up, on the top of the platform—which, of course, was higher than the furnace.

"Here they are, sir!" called the young man.

"All right, Walsh; send them up," came Sir Robert's voice. "I dare say they'd like to have a look at the view from here. Very wonderful—very impressive. No, you needn't come. Send them up alone."

"Funny!" muttered Mr. Walsh.

But he obeyed orders, and a few minutes later Willy and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were high above, where they could feel the appalling heat from the blast furnace beating against them. There was only a narrow rail to protect them from the sheer abyss.

A loaded truck was standing there waiting to be dumped into the waiting mouth of the furnace. Sir Robert was standing near it, leaning against it, in fact. The air was full of the sulphurous reek of the furnace. The fags had a bitter taste in their mouths, and they felt rather chokey at the back of the throat.

The noise was tremendous, too—the incessant, tumultuous roar which came to them

with awe-inspiring force. It seemed that they could even hear the boiling of the iron, and there was the tremendous noise of the blast.

Sir Robert stood looking at the fags strangely—fixedly. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were already scared. They were sorry that they had come up—and yet they tried to remain calm. Willy was as cool as ever, and he was earnestly anxious to have this little talk with Sir Robert Barnes. Not that he had ever expected to have the talk in such a curious spot as this.

“Wonderful, isn’t it?” shouted Sir Robert suddenly. “Whenever I come up here I realise what tiny weaklings we humans are.”

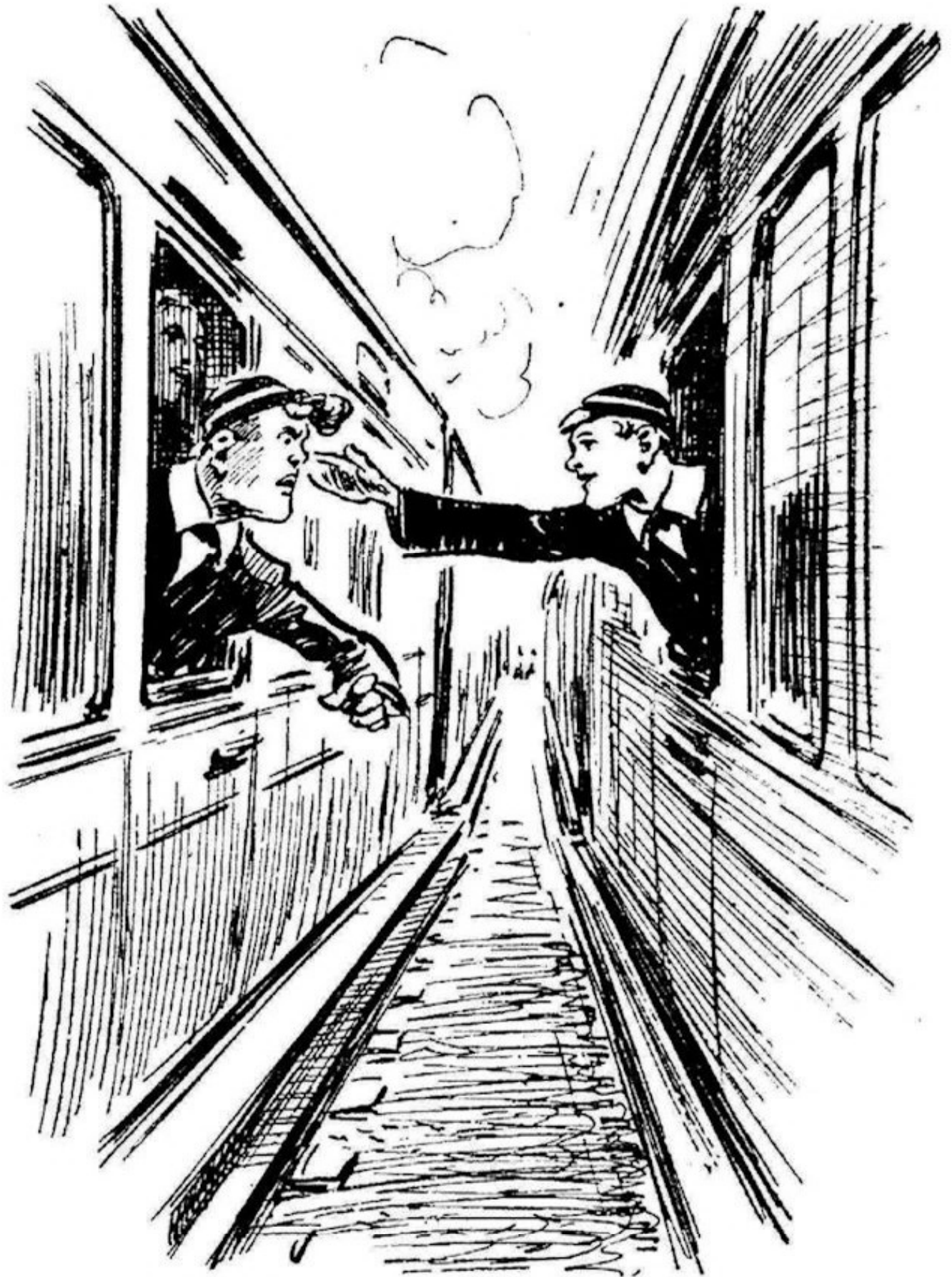
“Yet it’s we humans, sir, who make these monsters,” replied Willy, indicating the furnace.

“True,” said Sir Robert. “And sometimes the monsters get the better of us, eh? They’re all right while they’re watched and looked after and controlled, but once let them get the upper hand and they turn on us, boy. Yes, they turn on us.”

Sir Robert seemed pre-occupied; he had made no attempt to look closely at the schoolboys. He did not seem to be interested in their identity. He stood there, stretching out one of his arms and indicating the long valley.

“It’s nothing to look at by day—but now there’s something grand about it, eh?” he went on, an exultant note in his voice. “It awakens some chord within me—some dormant spirit, perhaps. There goes the glare from one of the other furnaces. Old-fashioned, are they? Well, I admit it. But they’ve done good service, and they’re faithful old friends. There goes one of them again, opening his giant mouth and sending forth his fiery breath. Look at him!”

Willy took a grip on himself. There was something about Sir Robert that he did not like at all. He was a changed man from the afternoon. There was no temper now—no violence whatever. Yet he was a thousandfold more terrifying than when he was in a rage. There was something frightful about his attitude—about his burning eyes and his set, tense expression.



“So long, Ted,” said Willy sweetly. “See you later.” He playfully tapped his major on the nose as the train passed by, whereat Edward Oswald snorted in rage. “Hi! Come back! Stop that train, somebody!”

“We’ve got your wallet, sir,” said Willy. “Chubby Heath picked it up—”

“Never mind my wallet!” broke in Sir Robert impatiently. “What does it matter? This is no time to talk of wallets, boy! Look down here—look at this monster! A veritable Titan. Seventy feet of molten metal and fire!”

The juniors stared down at the blast furnace—at a kind of cone which was held in place by a great chain. The heat was tremendous, coming up in great waves of suffocating intensity. Already the fags were perspiring. Even Willy, strong-nerved though he was, was beginning to regret coming here. But how was he to have known that Sir Robert was in such a strange mood?

“Jolly hot, sir,” shouted Chubby, feeling that he was called upon to say something.

“Hot!” returned Sir Robert. “You’re right! Perhaps you don’t know that the

temperature in the middle of that giant is something like a thousand degrees!"

"My only sainted aunt!" said Willy, impressed. "A thousand degrees! Why, it's awful. If a man were to fall into it he wouldn't last long."

"Long!" screamed Sir Robert, with terrible intensity. "He wouldn't last a second! Just a flash—a puff—and he'd be gone. Do you understand? Gone! And nothing would be left—not a trace!"

The fags backed away, horrified by the other's tone.

"Steady, sir!" urged Willy. "I think this heat is a bit too much for you. Hadn't we better be getting down?"

"Yes, it's hot up here, right enough," said Sir Robert, ignoring Willy's words. "Even the top of that cone is something like three hundred degrees centigrade."

"Hadn't we better get back, sir?" panted Juicy. "If that furnace opens, one of those big flames might come out—"

"There'll be no flame yet—not until a truck-load of fuel and ore is tilted down upon the cone," shouted Sir Robert. "Then you'll see a flame. Oh, yes—a seething mass of flame and smoke and dust, wreathing and writhing upwards into the night air. You see, that cone doesn't shift until a truck-load of stuff is dropped upon it, and then it sinks, allowing the fuel to enter the furnace. Old-fashioned, perhaps—but effective. I'm an old-fashioned man, and I don't take kindly to the new methods."

He seemed to be talking generally—not so much to Willy & Co. as to the very atmosphere itself. He was in a wild, dangerous mood; and Willy was convinced that the blow on the head was in some way responsible.

Perhaps his brain was slightly affected. That was why he had come to Hanstall like this, without warning, without preparation. The furnaces had lured him—since he was in the mood for something demoniac. The lurid glare and the intense heat had done nothing to cool him. Indeed, he had grown rapidly worse since these fags had come up here. The great blast furnace was having its deadly effect.

"I think we'd better go down, sir," said Willy steadily.

"Down?" raved Sir Robert. "Not yet, boy—not yet! Didn't you come here to see all round the works? Yes, and there's six bicycles for you boys if you—"

"But we're not at the works now, sir," interrupted Willy. "I came here to apologise to you, sir. For that affair in Manchester, I mean. I've been trying to tell you—"

"Manchester—Manchester!" broke in Sir Robert sharply. "Oh, yes, Manchester! Of course! I'd forgotten for the moment."

He suddenly spun round, seized Willy by the shoulders, and peered closely into his face.

And for the first time in his life Willy felt sick with fright. There was something

in Sir Robert's eyes which was terrifying. The man's face changed; it became contorted with a wild, appalling fury.

"You—you!" he screamed. "And I didn't know! It's you, you young hound!"

"Oh!" sobbed Chubby, nearly fainting with terror.

Willy tried to get away, but those fingers gripped him so that he could not move. He turned his head, and tried to speak coolly.

"You fellows get down!" he said, breathing hard. "Shout for somebody to work

COMING NEXT WEEK!



the lift for you. Only get down—and you'll know what to do then."

Willy's words were eloquent. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, terrified though they were, realised what they were to do. Go down—and bring help! That was what Willy meant! For they could tell, even as he could tell, that he was in deadly peril. Sir Robert had gone out of his mind! Only temporarily, perhaps—as a result of that blow on the head—but without question he was a demented man.

"We can't go!" gasped Chubby. "We can't leave you, Willy. Oh, let him go—let him go!"

With one accord, Chubby and Juicy threw themselves at Sir Robert. They were frantic with terror, yet their pluck did not desert them. With one sweep of his hand Sir Robert knocked them aside, and it was only

by a miracle that Chubby Heath did not topple headlong over the low rail into the black abyss.

"Get down—get down!" shouted Willy hoarsely.

And then Sir Robert swung him off his feet, and held him in his arms without any apparent effort.

"Yes, they can get down—but you shall stay here!" he shouted in a terrible voice. "You shall stay here, boy! It's you I want—you I am going to deal with! At last I've got you, you young wretch! Now you

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shall suffer for your impertinence and your hooliganism!"

"You're wrong, Sir Robert!" said Willy thickly. "It was a misunderstanding, and I want to apologise for—"

"It's too late!" screamed Sir Robert. "It's too late!"

And there was a world of hideous meaning in his crazed voice!

CHAPTER 10.

Touch and Go!

"GREAT Scott! What's happening?" asked Edward Oswald Handforth in amazement.

"Goodness knows!" said Church. "But something funny seems to be going on up there."

"I knew my minor would get himself into trouble!" said Handforth anxiously.

He and the other Removites had come running round one of the great slag heaps. They had found their way to the Three Spires Company's ironworks, and they had arrived at a critical moment.

They were near the glowing blast furnace, and they could see a number of men gathered round. The lift was descending, and there were two figures on it—both of them shouting and sobbing with excitement and terror.

"It's Heath and Lemon!" yelled Harry Gresham. "But Willy isn't there!"

"No, Willy's at the top!" roared Handforth. "Can't you see him? By George! He seems to be struggling with that man—"

"It's Sir Robert!" put in McClure dazedly.

"Help—help!" came Chubby Heath's voice, through the tumult. "Sir Robert's gone mad! He's going to kill Willy!"

There was such a world of urgency in his voice that none of those who heard could doubt the truth of the statement. It was no mere wild exaggeration, uttered in the terror of the moment.

"Willy!" panted Handforth hoarsely.

"Ropes—ropes!" came a shout from Mr. Walsh. "I knew there was something queer about the boss! Good heavens! If he hurts that boy—"

At that moment the lift reached the bottom, and before Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon could get out, the other St. Frank's fellows tumbled on to it.

"Leave him to us!" called Handforth. "It's my brother up there—my young brother! Leave him to us, you men! We're enough to deal with him, and there isn't a second to be lost. Don't waste time!"

Mr. Walsh was a young man of intelligence and quick decision. In a flash, he gave the order for the lift to ascend—and jumped on it himself. These boys were right. If they wasted time in fetching ropes and ladders the tragedy would have happened. Even now the rescuers might be too late!

SIR ROBERT BARNES held Willy in his arms easily, and Willy, for his part, made not the slightest attempt at resistance. In this he displayed his astonishing coolness and level-headed wit.

For if he had struggled Sir Robert might have ended the whole thing then and there. And Willy nearly fainted, in spite of his pluck, when he thought of the fate that was in store for him.

To be dropped down upon that cone—that great metal lid—which, when it felt his weight, would sink and allow him to slither into the unbelievable horror of the great blast furnace!

The one and only consoling thought for Willy was that his death would be almost instantaneous; ghastly though this death would be, he would have no time to feel pain.

Willy did not hide from himself the awful truth that he was as good as doomed. Yet while there was life there was hope; and he

knew that the other St. Frank's fellows were below, including Edward Oswald. Sir Robert did not seem to know it; he was oblivious of everything except the one fact that he had Willy in his grip.

"You are the boy who has tormented me!" he said thickly. "Morning, noon, and night I am pestered and tortured by you! And now, boy, you shall pay the penalty!"

His voice was awful, and it was clear enough that the trifling offence that Willy had committed had become exaggerated out of all proportion in Sir Robert's fevered brain. He imagined that Willy was not merely guilty of a jape, but guilty of something which affected and ruled his whole life.

Of what use to point out the truth to him? What purpose could be served? He would not listen to any word—to any argument. At the slightest provocation he would hurl Willy down—and perhaps hurl himself, too.

But Willy was not knuckling under yet.

"Your butler told me that you were out here, sir," he said, trying to speak in his normal voice. "And I met Mr. Walsh on the ground. I think if we saw Mr. Walsh now he might be able to straighten things out a bit."

His tone had something of the desired effect. Sir Robert relaxed his fierce grip a little, and the ferocity died out of his expression.

"Walsh!" he muttered, as though to himself. "What does Walsh want? Tell the infernal young idiot to mind his own business!"

A wave of suffocating sulphur fumes came up and enveloped the pair, drifting on the wind.

"Phew!" yelped Willy. "It's getting pretty bad up here, sir. I really think we ought to get down."

It was an amazing exhibition of coolness in the face of such deadly danger, and it spoke volumes for Willy's courage.

"Not yet," said Sir Robert dully. "Not yet, boy. I haven't finished with you—"

He broke off abruptly as the lift reached the top, and as a number of figures appeared. Then he took a step forward—nearer to the edge of that terrible inferno. At the same moment he raised Willy high above his head.

"Oh!" muttered Willy faintly.

"Fools—fools!" screamed Sir Robert. "Do you think you can foil me like this? Stand back! Move a step, and this boy goes hurtling down into the furnace—to his death!"

"For heaven's sake, pull yourself together, sir!" shouted Mr. Walsh feverishly. "You're mistaken, sir! That boy has done you no harm—"

"Back, I say!" thundered Sir Robert. "Do you hear me? Now, you young hound, down you go—down into the furnace!"

It seemed to be the end. Handforth stood there, white to the lips. His one desire was to dash forward to the salvation of his minor, but he instinctively knew that if he moved he would bring disaster. The anguish he

suffered in those seconds was more than he could even realise.

Sir Robert turned, his arms became taut, and he drew himself back.

A sob came from Willy. It was the only sound he made. What escape was there for him now? For even if the rescuers rushed forward they would be too late. Within a split second he would be hurtling down—

Something hissed through the air—a thin coil of rope. Cunningly, magically, it settled round Willy's shoulders, drew tight, and gripped him.

There came a scream from Sir Robert, a twanging as the rope lost its slack.

And as Willy was about to be plunged downwards to his doom, the thing happened. Suddenly he was jerked back out of Sir Robert's arms—jerked clear of the abyss, to fall with a crash upon the ramshackle platform.

"Done it!" came a sudden yell. "On him, you fellows!"

But at the same second Sir Robert Barnes uttered a choking cry, his knees sagged, and he collapsed. Indeed, he would have toppled over the rail had not Handforth and Travers and Mr. Walsh rushed up and pulled him back in the nick of time.

Willy, bruised and grazed, was staggering to his feet, unwinding the rope from around his shoulders. Mercifully, the fall had not broken any bones, in spite of its violence. By a miracle he had been saved. He had been plucked back from certain death, even as he had been dropping to it.

"THANKS, Jerry," said Willy quietly.

Jerry Dodd, the Australian junior, breathed hard.

"It was the only thing to be done," he said. "I didn't think for a minute that it would succeed; I didn't think that I could get the rope over properly. But it was a close range, and I hit the bullseye. Thank Heaven I did!"

Some minutes had passed. Sir Robert, unconscious, was being carried to the lift by Mr. Walsh and some of the juniors. Handforth and Willy and Jerry Dodd stood apart.

It was Jerry who had saved the situation. With that coolness and presence of mind which were characteristically his, he had grasped the situation in a flash. Any attempt to rush Sir Robert would have been fatal; but there was the one slim chance that Willy could be lassoed.

And in a moment Jerry had whisked out the length of thin line that he always carried. A single throw and he had succeeded. Sir Robert had helped him, for he had held Willy in just the right position for Jerry to get a good aim.

Later, when the ground had been reached, and when the first flush of the shock was over, Jerry was thumped on the back by all the juniors in turn.

"One of the smartest things I've ever seen, dear old fellow," said Vivian Travers

admiringly. "For the love of Samson. You needed a steady hand for that job!"

"Not so much a steady hand as a steady eye," said Jerry. "I never expected to succeed, you know. But I wish you fellows would drop the subject. It's over and done with now, and Willy, thank goodness, is safe and sound."

Handforth's face was glowing.

"Didn't I tell you that he would get himself into trouble?" he asked. "Wasn't I right in coming along?"

"You were, old man," said Church. "Must have been some sort of instinct, I suppose. Anyhow, if we hadn't come along Willy would never have been saved, because Jerry was the only fellow who could do that trick."

Sir Robert had been carried into one of the offices in the ironworks, and it was here that the doctor, hastily summoned, examined him.

"A brainstorm, I imagine," said the medical man, afterwards. "I don't think he's insane. He's had a very severe blow on the head, and something must have temporarily affected his reason. Now there's a collapse, and it might result in brain-fever."

"He didn't know what he was doing," said Mr. Walsh. "I knew he was queer as soon as he appeared, but I never thought it would end in anything like that."

Fortunately, Nelson Lee turned up soon afterwards, having been telephoned for immediately after the excitement, and with him he brought a special ambulance.

All the boys were taken back to Birmingham in this ambulance, together with Sir Robert. When the latter's mansion in Edgbaston was reached there was another surprise. This time it was a welcome one.

Sir Robert regained consciousness, and to his own medical man's relief he was now normal. That wave of insanity had passed.

He believed that he had had a nightmare, and nobody told him of the dreadful truth. Time for that later, when he had grown stronger.

"Before long, Willy, Sir Robert will be told that you saved his life, and then, no doubt, he will realise how unjustly he treated you," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Not, of course, that he understood what he was doing at the time. It was that blow on the head which caused him to act so strangely."

"I'm glad he's all right now, sir," said Willy.

"Not all right, young 'un, but out of danger," said Nelson Lee. "He will have to be in bed for some weeks, and then a long spell in the South of France may restore him to complete health. I understand that he has been overworking for many months, and this is partly the outcome. That blow on the head merely accelerated the collapse."

(Concluded on page 41.)



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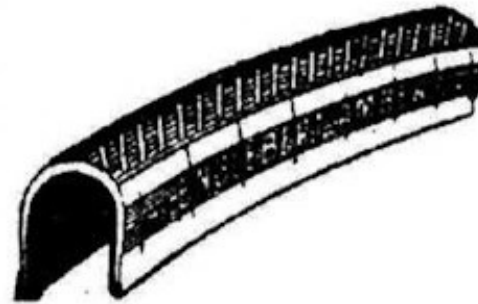
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Here's a Top-Hole New Feature which will Interest All Readers of the Old Paper!

GOSSIP ABOUT ST. FRANK'S



Things Heard and Seen by EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

IF some of you are wondering what's happened to "Between Ourselves," here's the answer in this new feature. The Editor and I had a jaw, and we felt that there wasn't enough scope in the old page, and that something a bit more general was indicated. In this new feature I can just ramble on as I feel inclined, always knowing that you readers will be able to turn to another page as soon as you get fed up. Of course, I shall still welcome letters in just the same way as of old, and readers will be mentioned in the same way as of old, too, and their queries will be answered if they are queries which concern St. Frank's and its denizens. Naturally, this includes Caistowe and Bannington and Holt's Farm and the pond at the bottom of the little dip just round by the hill at the back of Bellton Wood. In fact, you can write to me about any old place round St. Frank's and district, and anybody who lives there. I know this part of the country pretty well.

When I was down at St. Frank's a few days ago, I had quite a long chat with Dr. Morrison Nicholls. He seems to be pretty well established at the old school now; and, personally, I'm rather glad of it, because he's a very capable man, and I honestly think that he's the best Head that St. Frank's has ever had. Which reminds me that Fred Ramsbottom, of Pitsea, has asked me in a letter if Dr. Stafford is ever coming back to resume his old position. Well, I'm not so sure. When I saw Dr. Stafford last he was rather inclined to think that he had better retire. His health hasn't been any too good of late, and, after all, controlling a big school

like St. Frank's is a pretty hefty job. I think I am safe in saying that Dr. Nicholls will continue to hold the reins. And if anybody feels sorry for Dr. Stafford he can be quite comfortable, as I know for a fact that Dr. Stafford is perfectly happy, and is satisfied that St. Frank's is now in better hands than his own.

* * *

Rather a rummy thing happened when I chanced to look into the East House, after I had left the Head. I was looking for Mr. Goole when I came across Jimmy Hook and Conroy minimus, of the Third, in one of the corridors eating chunks of raw cauliflower. I asked them if they mistook themselves for rabbits, or if they'd missed their dinner, or something. They both looked pretty sick about it, and said it was a new rule of Mr. Goole's. He's a bit of a food crank, on the quiet, and believes in all these vegetarian dishes. It seems that eating raw vegetables is his latest craze. I don't mind admitting that I dodged out of the East House pretty quickly. I had had some idea of lunching with Mr. Goole, but I couldn't quite fancy myself sitting down to his table, and nibbling a raw potato, or having a slice of uncooked turnip placed in front of me, with garnishings of cabbage-leaves.

* * *

While I was on the School Train at Liverpool, the subject of Handforth's previous school cropped up. Before he arrived at St. Frank's he was at Monkhurst, and it was here that he met Church and McClure for the first time. R. Fyfe, of Greenock, makes the suggestion that a serial dealing with Handforth & Co.'s earlier adventures might

OUR READERS' PORTRAIT GALLERY



George F. Hodgson.

be welcomed. And George F. Hodgson, who lives in Scarborough (and whose photograph you see this week), has told me that he would like a serial about a trip to the moon, or the planets. Well, it's up to the Editor, of course, to decide the serials, but if enough readers expressed a desire for a serial on this or that subject, I dare say he would lean to their wishes. Handforth had quite a lively time at Monkhurst, particularly as he was on terms of bitterest enmity towards Church and McClure before they became inseparable pals. They hated him like poison to begin with at Monkhurst, and they laughed uproariously when they were telling me all about it. It's always easy to laugh about these sort of things afterwards—but at the time one is not apt to see the humour. Monkhurst was only a comparatively small school, and Handforth, I understand, was soon boss of the whole show—with Church and McClure enthusiastically leading the opposition party. One day, perhaps, I may write an account of these early adventures of the Study D chums. But this will largely depend upon the attitude of you readers—not to mention the attitude of Mr. Editor.

* * *

Running down to the old school is a pretty perilous undertaking for me these days. No sooner do I show myself than I'm surrounded by mobs of Removites and Fourth-Formers who indignantly reproach me for leaving them out in the cold. Why don't I chronicle the events at St. Frank's while half the fellows are on the School Train? Why do I confine my pen to relating the School Train adventures? They tell me quite plainly that it's a bit thick. Well, from their point of view, I suppose it is. But, dash it, the Old Paper is only a certain size, and my capacity for writing is only a certain size, and it's a question of writing the adventures which will be most acceptable to you readers. And I'm quite sure that you're more interested in the fellows on the School Train than you are in those who have been left at St. Frank's. Besides, as I pointed out to Doyle of the Remove, who was very heated about it, absolutely nothing of real interest has happened at St. Frank's since Nipper and Handforth and Archie and Browne and the rest have been away.

* * *

Here's a point that might be of interest. "Old Reader," of Sittingbourne, says that he's twenty-four years old, and he has assumed from my replies to readers that those of you of his age are few and far between. Of course, he's quite wrong. The Editor and I rather pride ourselves on the fact that our readers are of all ages, and of both sexes. But this isn't the point I was going to raise, and unless I'm careful I shall drift on to something else. So we'll start another paragraph.

"Old Reader" thinks that there ought to be a Correspondence League for readers of twenty-one and upwards. He is of the opinion that if a fellow of twenty-four writes to a reader of twelve, he's likely to get a reply that won't interest him. I quite agree with him. The reader of twenty-four would possibly write about his work, and his prospects of getting on, and the reader of twelve would think this just about as interesting as a wet summer's afternoon. So there really is something in the wheeze. But wait a minute. Another reader—"Tennis," of Birmingham—has made quite an excellent suggestion, which I herewith pass on, free gratis, to the Chief Officer of the St. Frank's League. "Tennis" very brainily proposes that all League members, when asking for correspondents on the League page, should state their ages. This is a very simple way out of the difficulty, and completely does away with the complication of running a Senior Correspondence League.

* * *

Talking about correspondents, reminds me that Scout R. Potter, of Bury St. Edmunds, has told me in a recent letter that he already has twenty pen friends in Great Britain alone—all through the Old Paper. He's had invitations to spend Easter with one of them, and all sorts of other nice things. He says he's going to Birkenhead in August to attend the Scouts' 21st Birthday Jamboree, which is to be held in Arrowse Park. He's meeting half a dozen of his pen friends there—from South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. You can imagine what a thrill he'll get when he hunts these chaps up, and sees them for the first time. He wonders how many readers of the Old Paper will be there; and I wonder, too. There'll be something like fifty thousand scouts from all parts of the world in camp. What a chance for R. Potter and similar enthusiastic readers to introduce the Old Paper to scouts who are not yet acquainted with it!

* * *

Howard John Panter, who lives in Ballham, S.W.12 (and who, incidentally, is a holder of both Bronze and Silver League Medals), and who has read the Old Paper for five years without missing a single week, wants to know why we don't put the portraits of the St. Frank's chaps in our pages. Well, we've done it more than once, and, judging by what Nipper and Archie and Handforth and a few others have told me, they weren't very pleased with them. But who ever is pleased with his own portrait? There always seems to be something wrong, doesn't there? Anyhow, I expect my London chum is feeling quite satisfied now. A new portrait gallery is beginning this week. The Editor tells me that these latest portraits are really good ones—and he is quite certain that the St. Frank's fellows themselves will be just as pleased with them as all you readers.

This Week's Exciting Instalment Teems With Thrills—Start Reading It Now!

RIVALS of the RAMPANT!



By STANTON HOPE

Bad News!

BUSKY wriggled uneasily.

"Because, sir," he explained, "I didn't at first intend having it known at all. Only at the last moment, after I'd put the money in, I thought that they would think it queer getting so much in a street box, and be sort of suspicious."

"Humph! Curious reasoning! Petty-officer Teak, have this boy report to me in fifteen minutes' time," ordered the captain.

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Too utterly flabbergasted by Busky's attitude, Jack went away with the squad for vaccination.

On every side he heard the most fulsome murmurs of admiration for Busky Smith, except from Ginger Jones, who, in his cute Cockney way, seemed to understand that there was a deal more behind the affair than appeared on the surface.

What transpired between the captain, police, and Busky was never fully known, for Busky's version was too far-fetched to be believed. The fact remained, however, that his "generosity" seemed to have outweighed most of his misdeeds, for he was let off with a remarkably light sentence of a week's stoppage of leave and a reprimand.

In the circumstances, Jack kept his own council. He was by no means proud of having butted that policeman, and if Busky liked to take the "credit," he could jolly well do so!

The only unfortunate thing was that his mates of the New Entries squad who knew he had been adrift that night were rather inclined to look down on him. Some consolation he found in a letter that arrived from Barny Morland by the second post—the second in two days. In it Barny, to Jack's surprise, expressed considerable doubt as to Busky's "heroism" on the ferry, in spite of what the newspapers had said. Also, Barny expressed his intention of coming down to see the two boys at the Rampant schools.

Meantime, Busky was cook-a-hoop. He cared nothing about that week's stoppage of

leave in his enhanced reputation as a hero—until he was vaccinated! His heroism then, as on his visit to the naval dentists, was conspicuous by its absence.

He emerged from the surgery moaning and holding his arm, and annoyed Petty-officer Teak by saying

that "he believed he was getting a touch of fever, and might have to go to his hammock."

"Go to your hammock!" hooted Teak. "What, with four little scratches on the arm! Tar me, what's the Navy a-comin' to?"

He might have said a deal more, but at that moment a Marine messenger arrived in the small building where the P.O. was giving the newly-vaccinated squad a talk on naval tradition, bearing a buff telegram in his hand.

Jack Gilbert is having the time of his life at H.M.S. Rampant. Busky Smith may be a source of trouble, but Jack's getting used to that now. And then comes the shock—a shock which leaves Jack dismayed and full of fears!

"For you, Smith," he said.

Busky stepped back and opened it.

"My uncle!" exclaimed Busky. "I'll have to get leave, petty-officer, to go up to London."

Jack felt his heart suddenly miss a beat, and he glanced at the telegram form as Busky stepped forward again. On it was printed: "Regret Morland, your uncle, died suddenly from heart failure this morning.—GREAVES & GREAVES, Solicitors."

The whole world seemed to slip away under Jack's feet, leaving him in a vortex of pain and bewilderment.

A Torpedo Astray!

"CRUMBS! This is a bit of all right!" The eyes of young Ginger Jones gleamed with pleasurable excitement.

"You bet it is!" Jack agreed. "This is the sort of thing I've been living for!"

Three weeks had passed, and the boys of the awkward squad had got out of the new entry stage and were now called preliminaries. Their vaccinated arms were better, and they had been attending classes in general education, and were starting swimming, gym, and footer.

To-day, as a very special treat arranged by Captain Hedworth Orr, they were being given a trip out to sea in H.M.S. Firedart, a destroyer attached to the torpedo schools at Porthaven, to watch the practice.

They stood on the after-deck of the destroyer, near the triple torpedo tubes, and watched a number of bluejackets, wearing greasy overalls, load a great 21-inch Whitehead torpedo.

The "fish," as a torpedo is called in the Navy, had a blunt, red-coloured dummy head fitted to it, and inside, among its other complicated mechanism, it had a kind of scientific barometer for registering its length of run, depth, attained speed, and so forth.

"This fish," remarked Petty-officer Teak, who was standing by the squad, "is worth about a thousand quids."

"Crums!"

"But the latest kind," went on the P.O., "the sort which would be used by the Royal Navy if war broke out against a foreign power to-morrow, is worth a deal more than that, me lads. The best of 'em carry over four hundred pounds-weight of explosive, and can slip along at a speed of fifty miles an hour."

"My aunt!"

"And each time we fire one of 'em," concluded Petty-officer Teak, "it's like chucking eight thousand quids into the sea."

"Whooh!"

The destroyer was cutting along at about thirty knots in Deadman's Bay, facing direct on the English Channel, and some miles from Porthaven. On the horizon, among the wreathes of sea-mist, could be seen in the far distance the black smoke clouds of a portion of the Atlantic Fleet engaged on special evolutions.

As Jack's eyes roamed to those grim smoke-clouds, they dimmed as he thought of poor old Barny.

He, with Busky, had got leave to attend the funeral, and later they had heard the will which embodied the same conditions that Barny had made to them when they went to the schools. That his money should be inherited by the boy who passed out of his training in the Rampant with the most credit.

His death was a stunning blow to Jack, so much indeed that the boy had even lost his fear of his own uncle, Lew Bonner, whom he now knew to be alive, but had not seen since the ferry accident.

"Stand farther aft, me lads!" grunted Petty-officer Teak.

The boys did as they were bidden, Busky Smith moving with alacrity away from the loaded torpedo tube.

Up on the bridge with the captain and navigating officer was the gunner, his finger on the trigger of a pistol. The tube was at the ready, and the fact was recorded by a little dial in front of him.

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

JACK GILBERT, a cheery youngster of some fifteen years, has just joined H.M.S. Rampant, a naval training school at Porthaven. His only living relative is his scoundrelly uncle,

LEW BONNER, and the less he sees of him the better Jack will be pleased. The boy joins the Navy along with

CLEM SMITH, or Busky, as he becomes known at the Rampant. Smith is of the bullying type, and is very jealous of Jack's friendship with his—Busky's—uncle,

EARNY MORLAND. It was Barny who got the two boys to join the Navy, and he has promised to leave a sum of £2,000 to the boy who acquits himself best in the Service. On the way to the Rampant Jack saves the ferry boat from grounding, but everybody thinks Smith is responsible, and a collection is made for him. Arriving at the Rampant, Busky is looked upon as a hero. One night he breaks bounds, taking with him the collection money. Jack follows, and makes his rival put the money in a convent poor box, together with a note saying that the money came from the boy who saved the ferry boat. Jack is captured by a policeman, and accused of robbing the poor box, but he manages to escape. Next day an inquiry is held at the Rampant. By now the note has been found, and so everybody thinks that Busky is the one who has put the money in the poor box. The captain of the Rampant asks him why he should have "broken ship" to do this.

(Now read on.)

Now the destroyer was speeding strongly on a course parallel with the coast, with the torpedo tube pointing direct out to sea. For there might be danger to small fishing boats and other craft if the "fish" were fired direct to the shore, although it was not fitted with a war-head or explosive.

Then the captain gave the order.

"Fire!"

There was a dull *poof!* and the great steel "fish" leaped out of the tube in a cloud of smoke, and dived porpoise-like into the sea.

Eagerly Jack and his mates from the Rampant watched the thin streak of bubbles which marked its track, and then in the far distance, as the destroyer swung round, they saw a burst of calcium smoke as it rose at the end of its run.

The Firedart hove-to. The gunner approached the bluejackets and boys aft.

"Perhaps, Petty-officer Teak," he said, "you'd like to go away in the Evinrude motor-boat and bring back the fish? You can take two or three of those lads with you."

Immediately Jack and Ginger stepped forward.

"Smart lads!" commended Teak. "You shall go."

The rest of the juniors clamoured to be allowed to go as well, and Teak then gave permission for one more to go into the little motor-boat—Busky Smith, who, as "hero" of the schools, was often "wangling" privileges for himself.

One after another Petty-officer Teak and the three boys dropped into the small motor-boat which was fitted with an Evinrude engine at its stern, and the boat was then lowered into the water. Jack shoved off from the bow, and Teak, taking his seat aft, got the engine going and steered the boat away from the destroyer for the rising calcium smoke of the torpedo, which was bobbing in the water like a red-topped buoy and with the power of its machinery expended.

The sea was running into Deadman's Bay in long smooth swells, and the drifting wreathes of sea-mist occasionally hid the small fishing craft and other boats to shoreward.

The distance was not much more than a quarter of a mile, but a thicker bank of mist swept up, completely obscuring the torpedo for a space from those on the lean grey destroyer and the petty-officer and boys in the speeding motor-boat.

"This'll be good practice for you, me lads," remarked Teak. "Stand by with those ropes to take the fish in tow."

"Getting a bit thick in the Channel, isn't it, petty-officer?" remarked Busky Smith, who was always trying to ingratiate himself with his superiors. "Blessed if I can hardly see the Firedart now."

The leather-skinned P.O. sniffed the cold, damp air.

"Aye, I don't like the look of it!" he growled. "We'll just let the crew of the

Firedart see how smart we can be in getting the job done."

The drifting sea-mist blanked out the destroyer, and still Teak kept on the course where the torpedo had last been sighted.

"Sufferin' skates!" he exploded suddenly. "Surely I can't have over-shot it?"

And then he and the three boys saw a large motor-boat not far ahead of them just moving off with the derelict torpedo in tow!

"Ahoy there!" bawled Jack from the bow. "Bring that fish back, old sports!"

Teak also roared at those in the boat ahead, and raced full speed toward them.

Instead of heeding, the two or three men in the large motor-boat moved faster away, the torpedo snugly lashed to the port side of their craft.

Now the mist thickened as the two boats raced on a course almost parallel with the coast.

"Thunderin' gales!" bellowed Teak. "The swabs have got the heels of us!"

The men who had bagged the torpedo looked to be of the fishermen type, and it was obvious that their boat was fitted with powerful engines, for they began to draw away swiftly through the mist from the Evinrude.

For one brief second one of them glanced backward, a triumphant grin on a face that bore the indelible stamp of evil living.

And Jack Gilbert, in the bow of the Evinrude, uttered a choking cry.

Again, for a brief moment or so, he had looked upon a man whom he hoped had gone out of his life for ever—his uncle, Lew Bonner!

Within half a minute the boat with the torpedo was swallowed up in the mist, and, realising the folly of further pursuit, Petty-officer Teak swung the Evinrude round in a wide semi-circle.

"Those swabs will get more'n they've bargained for!" he raved. "Did any of you lads recognise them?"

"No chance," Ginger said. "They kept their faces turned away."

Only Jack had seen the one man turn round, and he kept mum about it. He knew that the men would hand over the torpedo to the authorities, and if he "squealed" about his uncle the latter would doubtless make trouble for him. It was by no means likely that Bonner had recognised him, and he was not at all anxious for the crook to find out that he was now serving in the Royal Navy.

"Well, what the thump did they want to pinch that fish for, petty-officer?" inquired Ginger Jones.

"Tar me, they've not pinched it!" growled Teak. "The sharks were lying in wait to get the chance of snaffling it merely to take it back to the Porthaven torpedo schools as a derelict, for which they reckon they'll get a fiver, but I'll spike their guns when I report how they took no heed of a naval salvage boat!"

A light gun was fired from the Firedart to give the Evinrude the direction back, for the

treacherous mist, which so often shrouded the Channel, now showed no sort of break.

But suddenly the small engine began to give trouble, and then conked out.

Teak fumbled in a locker under the after thwart, and muttered savagely.

"Is there another tin of petrol for'ard?" he demanded.

"Don't see any, petty-officer," returned Jack.

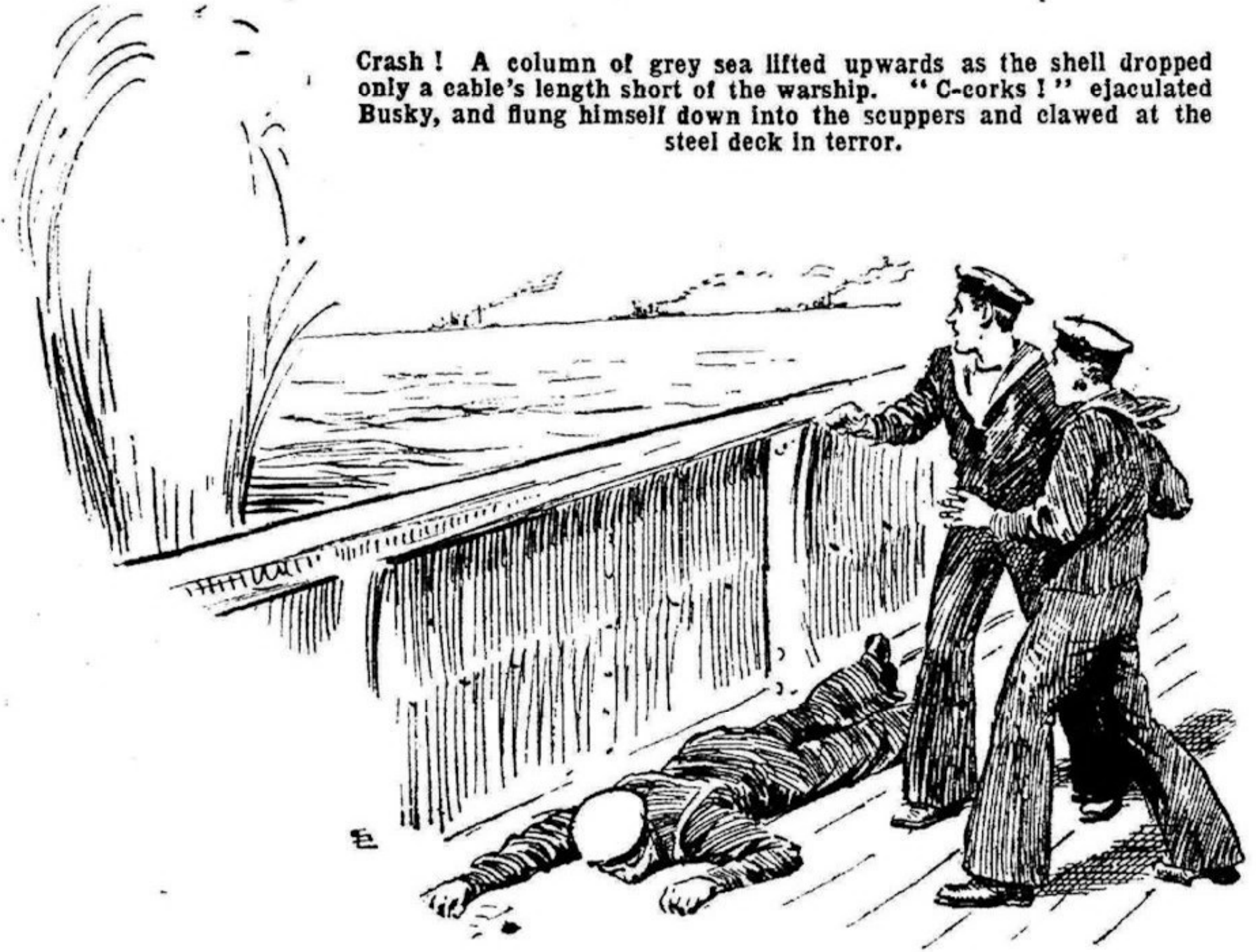
During the following five or ten minutes, P.O. Teak "let off steam" in no uncertain way. Though sound signals could be heard it was impossible for the motor-boat which

to the waves. By curling up in the bottom of the boat they got snatches of sleep, though P.O. Teak himself remained steadfastly on watch the whole night through.

Dawn broke, and with it came a strong wind from the south-west which raked them to their bones. The mist opened out in curious lanes, and through one of these clear avenues they glimpsed a flotilla of destroyers at manœuvres, with the unmistakable shape of Britain's most powerful warship looming like some grim, grey sea-monster beyond.

Then suddenly through another opening in the mist they saw a battle-cruiser.

Crash! A column of grey sea lifted upwards as the shell dropped only a cable's length short of the warship. "C-corks!" ejaculated Busky, and flung himself down into the scuppers and clawed at the steel deck in terror.



had run out of petrol to reach the destroyer, and meantime the swift tide off-shore was taking the Evinrude farther out to sea.

All aboard the motor-boat shouted in turn, but to no purpose.

Once the mist let up in a seaward direction, and they glimpsed the smoke of the Fleet, but the ugly grey curtain rolled over again, and dusk helped to veil the Channel.

There were no oars in the boat, and Teak ordered the boys to smash one of the thwarts in the hope of paddling toward any craft that they might see, but these home-made paddles proved to be quite useless for making headway against the tide.

Darkness fell, and the occupants of the Evinrude shivered in the damp, cold air of the Channel night as their boat rose and fell

"Spike me!" ejaculated Teak. "It looks like the old Thunderous! But it can't be. She has been lying at Portland waiting to be scrapped."

The big warship, which seemed to have been hove-to, was steaming at about five knots, but her speed increased as she approached through the choppy sea.

The boys, at Teak's order, raised lusty yells.

"Hooray!" piped Busky, shivering with the cold. "They've seen us and she's altering course a bit this way."

With the vagary of weather in the Channel, a great clear space opened out, while in the opposite direction the mist was rolling in white clouds across the water.

There was not a sign of land, but those in the motor-boat could see the superstructures and funnels of distant warships which were hull-down on the horizon. To their amazement, the battle-cruiser turned away, and, after manœuvring over a couple of miles of sea, hove-to not far from them.

"We're all right now, mates," grinned Ginger. "They're going to lower a boat."

Jack noticed Teak's face, and saw a puzzled expression on it.

"This is rummy!" gurgled Busky. "They don't seem to be getting any giddy move-on. Talk about Navy smartness--why, they're slower than blessed post-office messengers!"

"Hanged if I can see anyone on deck at all!" remarked Jack.

P.O. Teak sprang to his feet.

"Here, give me one of those paddles!" he roared. "And you take one, Gilbert. You get into the sternsheets, Smith!"

Busky clumsily tried to push by as Teak made a dive for a piece of the broken thwart, and, overbalancing, the petty-officer crashed full-length, the side of his head striking on the gunwale of the boat.

"You clumsy lubber!" hooted Jack.

He and Ginger rolled Teak over in the bottom of the boat as the little craft plunged alarmingly, and saw with dismay that Teak had been knocked out as clean as if he had just met Gene Tunney in the ring.

Quickly the boys bathed the petty-officer's head, then taking up the paddles they rowed towards the warship which bore the name Thunderous.

"Ahoy, there! Ahoy!" they bellowed.

But not a soul answered them. The old battle-cruiser was like a ship of the dead.

"Gr-rrrgh!" shivered Busky, who was already badly scared by their night in the open and the accident to Teak. "I—I don't like the look of this."

"Well, I've heard tell of ghostly wind-jammers," mumbled Ginger, "but never afore of a spook battle-cruiser!"

A rope hung down by the sea-gangway, and the boys tied the painter of the motor-boat to it.

"Stay here by Teak," Jack said to Busky. "I'm going aboard to see what's up with this giddy craft."

"I'm coming, too," Ginger said.

The two "raggies" went up the sea-gangway one after the other, and tumbled over on to the deck of the warship.

Everything aboard was very ship-shape, but there was none of the polished brass fittings or painted anchor-chains which they had seen on such ships as Hood, Repulse and Renown.

There was not a sign of life, and yet the boys felt the throb of engines under their feet.

The derelict warship was moving again!

"Hi! Hi!" bawled Busky from the boat.

"Oh, my giddy aunt! Let me come aboard!"

Leaving Petty-officer Teak, he climbed hand over hand up the steep sea-gangway.

"My hat!" exclaimed Jack. "We can't leave Teak there alone! The motor-boat will be getting swamped!"

He looked around him, and from the higher altitude of the warship's deck saw the goliaths of the Fleet in battle formation. Even as he looked there was a great puff of smoke from one of them, pierced by a spear-head of orange flame.

Boom!

The dull roar of a gun reached their ears a few seconds later, and then there came the sound of an aerial express train, and—

CRASH!

A shell struck the sea a cable's length beyond the Thunderous and sent up a mighty fountain of foam fifty feet into the air.

"Ye gods!" gasped Jack, as Busky dropped face foremost on the deck. "Don't you savvy? This giddy ship we're on is a target for the guns of the Fleet!"

Guns of the Fleet!

"G-good-night!" gasped Ginger Jones at Jack's elbow. "Once upon a time I didn't mind playin' the part of Wild Man o' Borneo on Bank Holidays at me uncle's cock-shy on Hampstead Heath! But I'm hanged if I'm stoppin' to be an Aunt Sally for the shells o' the British battlefleet!"

"Aye, the sooner we beat it," panted Jack, "the less chance of having our nobbs knocked off! Here, you!" he bellowed, sharply stirring the prostrate Busky with his toe. "Skin down into the motor-boat; we've decided that the sea air will be healthier a couple of miles away from this old hookpot!"

Busky Smith lifted himself on to all fours and looked nervously about him. His slow trembling movements and the position he assumed were an incitement to violence, and Ginger, eager to be gone, applied the toe of his regulation boot astern of him in an effort to liven him.

"Come on, you burbling chump!" spluttered Ginger. "Jump to it!"

Emitting a yelp, Busky got to his feet and clutched the warship's rail. Another flame stabbed the horizon; there followed the deep-throated boom of the gun and the shriek in crescendo of an approaching shell.

CRASH!

A column of grey sea lifted upward a cable's length short of the Thunderous, reminding Jack of the pictures he had seen of boiling geysers of the Rotorua district of New Zealand.

"C-corks!" ejaculated Busky, and flung himself downward again into the scuppers and clawed the steel deck in agonising fear of swift, tearing death!

"That's the flagship Terror, firing," said Jack grimly. "They've straddled the target, Ginger, and it's long odds that the next one

is coming aboard us! Quick! Help get this big shivering jellyfish over the side!"

The two young bluejackets gripped the coward and attempted to drag him to his feet. Now, however, Busky was convinced that his one hope of safety lay in the shelter of the steel bulwark, and he grimly clung to a small grating in the scuppers to prevent himself from returning to an open boat which he believed would either be swamped or blown sky-high.

"Leave the fool!" hooted Ginger furiously.

By a mighty wrench Jack got one of Busky's hands away from its hold, but just when it looked that the chums would succeed in forcing the cad over the side, the third shell arrived with a roar like an Underground express train. It was a six-inch shell of the high-explosive variety, and, zipping down over the deck, struck the rail on the starboard side, where it detonated.

This time Busky was down with a celerity which would have earned him the commendation of the most critical naval martinet in other circumstances. Nor were Jack and Ginger slow in following him, and their promptness probably saved their lives.

To a blinding flash of flame, a burst of smoke and an ear-shattering explosion, the shell ripped away several yards of steel bulwark at some distance from them as though it had been cardboard. Metal splinters hammered back into the target-ship's superstructure and outward across the sea, and the Thunderous reeled to the shock like a boxer caught in the stomach by a short-arm jab.

"Whooh!" breathed Jack, rising unsteadily through the drifting smoke. "You fellows all right?"

"R-right as rain!" came the cheery if somewhat shaky response from Ginger.

"Oh! Oh!" rose the mumbling voice of Busky. "Oh, why did I do it—why did I do it?"

Hurriedly Ginger ascertained that the coward had suffered no hurt.

"Do what, you big lobster?" he demanded impatiently.

"Join the Navy!" moaned Busky hoarsely. "I knew the Navy was no blessed good for me!"

"You mean," retorted Ginger in disgust, "that you're no blessed good for the Navy!"

A cry from Jack, who had taken an anxious look over the side at Petty Officer Teak, took his attention from the fear-stricken lad on the deck.

"Great snakes!" yelled Jack. "A chunk of shell has holed the motor-boat!"

(What's going to happen now? The one way of escape from the target ship was by the motor-boat, and now that that has been damaged—well, escape is impossible! Make sure you read next week's instalment, chums—it's a real thriller!)

WILLY DECLARES WAR!

(Continued from page 33.)

NEXT day the School Train was throbbing with the whole story, and Willy was about as usual. He was looking rather pale, rather haggard, but he scoffed at the idea of staying in bed, as Nelson Lee had suggested.

"It's no good pretending that I can forget the affair, but we'll stop talking about it," he said to Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon. "My only hat! I never want to see another blast furnace as long as I live!"

And all those other fellows who had been on the spot at that dreadful time were of the same opinion.

In fact, much as they were impressed by Birmingham and its surroundings, they were glad enough to get away from this locality, from this district of belching furnaces and clanging ironworks. None of them was ever likely to forget that dreadful night when Willy had been on the verge of death.

It was Jerry Dodd who was the hero of the hour, although Jerry himself hated the very idea of it. He was more pleased than anybody else when the School Train moved on—this time into Wales. In the Land of the Leek perhaps other adventures would happen, and this affair would become shorn of its horror.

And so the School Train moved on in the night, past more of those blast furnaces, one of which had provided the fellows with such a thrill.

THE END.

(Next Wednesday the chums of St. Frank's are booked for many more amazing adventures—this time in Wales. Look out for this grand yarn, entitled: "The Mystery of the Cave!")

IF YOU'RE AT THE SEASIDE—

make sure you prominently display your copy of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY. Representatives of the Old Paper will be strolling along the beaches of all the principal seaside resorts this week, and if they see you are a reader of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY you will receive a

HANDSOME FREE GIFT!

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 106.

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 leave 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, 5, Carmelite Street, 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, providing that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver 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 they have secured the requisite number of readers they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver one.

These Application Forms can be posted for *id.*, 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.

NOTICE!

The St. Frank's League has now attained such proportions that we are compelled to discontinue the offer of gold medals in connection therewith. The silver and bronze medals will still be available, however, as heretofore, to those who qualify for them in accordance with the rules.

The ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE CORNER!



*The Chief Officer Chats
with his Chums.*

*Here's his address if you want to
write to him: The Chief Officer, The
Nelson Lee Library, Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.*

HALLO, chums!

Once more we meet—and this time we're comfortably ensconced, so to speak, in our own little corner of the Old Paper.

Our own little corner! Sounds good, doesn't it?

Yet, after all, this is just as it should be. The St. Frank's League has expanded considerably; is now a big organisation; and consequently it is only right that its thousands of members should have their own corner wherein League topics can be discussed.

And that is the object of this feature. Here I shall be pleased to acknowledge and discuss letters from members; here I shall ladle out what I hope is helpful advice; here I shall chat about anything that I think is likely to interest League-ites.

Yet, to do this really successfully, I want co-operation — co-operation with YOU. And how better can you do this than by writing to me?

Besides helping me to make this feature more interesting, it might also result in your winning a pocket wallet or penknife—see the announcement in centre of page.

So how about it, chums? If you've got any interesting news, just drop me a line about it. If you've got a ticklish problem you want solving—apply to me!

The Winning Letter!

This week's winning letter is extremely interesting because it has a bearing upon

one of the recent St. Frank's yarns. Do you remember a story entitled: "Kidnapped by Bushrangers?" which appeared during the Australian series? If you do, you will also remember how Edward Oswald Handforth was surprised—and disappointed—to learn that the notorious bushranger, Ned Kelly, was no longer alive. I have received a letter from a chum in New South Wales, Australia, who has something to say about this same Ned Kelly. Here is Master Henry Williams' letter:

"To the Chief Officer,

"The Nelson Lee Library,

"Dear Sir,

"Re a little incident appearing in your weekly paper, I thought the following information dealing with Ned Kelly, who Handforth reckoned was still alive, might be of interest to you and your readers. I have taken these facts from an Australian newspaper.

"The skeleton of Ned Kelly, Australia's most notorious bushranger, was unearthed recently from the flagged yard of Melbourne Gaol, where it had rested for nearly half a century.

"The discovery was not unexpected. Only a short time beforehand a stone marked 'E.K.' and bearing the imprint of a broad arrow, was removed from above the spot by a workman excavating in the old gaol yard for the foundations of the engineering school of the Working Men's College.

"The bones were exposed when the lip

PRIZES FOR LETTERS!

This prize-winning scheme is open to all readers who are members of the St. Frank's League. They are invited to write to the Chief Officer about anything interesting they've heard of or done, or experienced in connection with the League. The best and most interesting letters will be published week by week on this page, and the senders will receive handsome Pocket Wallets or Penknives. Letters, which must not be more than 250 words in length, should be sent to:

The Chief Officer,
The Nelson Lee Library,
Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street,
London, E.C.4.

Readers must state their St. Frank's League membership number at foot of letter.

Readers who are not already members of the League and thus cannot participate in this prize-winning offer, should join NOW by filling in the form opposite, after which they will be quite eligible to compete.

The St. Frank's League Corner!

(Continued from previous page.)

of a strong sheet tore the lid from the rough wooden coffin in which Kelly's body had been buried. The coffin was about five or six feet below the original level of the great wall.

"Immediately the discovery was made there was a rush to the gate. The bones, which were remarkably well preserved, were taken by workmen to be kept as mementoes.

Yours faithfully,

(Signed) "HENRY WILLIAMS."

For this letter Henry Williams will receive a handsome pocket wallet.

Going to have a crack at winning a prize, you chaps? Good! Cheer up till next week, chum!

THE CHIEF OFFICER,

(Editor.)

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

Sow Peng Chuan, 91 F, Kampong Java Road, Singapore, Straits Settlements, wants correspondents.

S. Crocker, 33, Pennsylvania Road, Ellacombe, Torquay, wants back numbers of the N.L.L.

Wilfred Ponsford, 34, Arch Road, Catford, London, S.E.6, offers N.L.L. Nos. 1-30.

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Wilkinson Rigg, 19, Edith Street, Nelson, Lancs., wants members for his correspondence club.

Ernest M. Loebe, c/o P. L. Loebe (Chemist), Swellendam, Cape Province, South Africa, wishes to hear from readers interested in Rugby.

C. Charles, c/o 59, Albert Street, Durban, Natal, South Africa, wishes to hear from readers in England.

Miss Griselda Mande, 94, Charles Street, Bloemfontein, Orange Free State, South Africa, wants to correspond with girl readers, ages 17-18; interested in music.

Miss Alma Hart Ephgrave, 7, Oliver Road, Sutton, Surrey, wishes to correspond with girl readers.

Harry McMahon, 50, Long Street, Broken Hill, N.S.W., Australia, wants to hear from Darlinghurst (Sydney) readers; also from readers in Sydney.

Miss Joan Couchman, 121 Mergers Road, Tufnell Park, London, N.19, wishes to correspond with girl readers.

Earl Russell, William Street, Prospect, South Australia, wishes to correspond with stamp collectors; preferably those aged about 15.

P. Raghavendra Bhat, c/o Mr. P. S. Bhat, Postal Inspector, Koolavasan, Calicut, Madalar, India, wishes to correspond with readers.

Miss Winifred Hayes, 17, Sandringham Road, Sandringham N.S., Victoria, Australia, wishes to hear from girl readers anywhere, excluding Victoria. All letters answered.

Miss Eileen Coopes, 16, Blenheim Road, Darlington, Durham, wishes to correspond with girl readers anywhere, especially Ireland; interested in dogs and horses.

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