

HOW TO ENJOY A CARAVAN HOLIDAY!

READ THIS WEEK'S
GREAT STORY!

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THIS WEEK'S ATTRACTIONS.

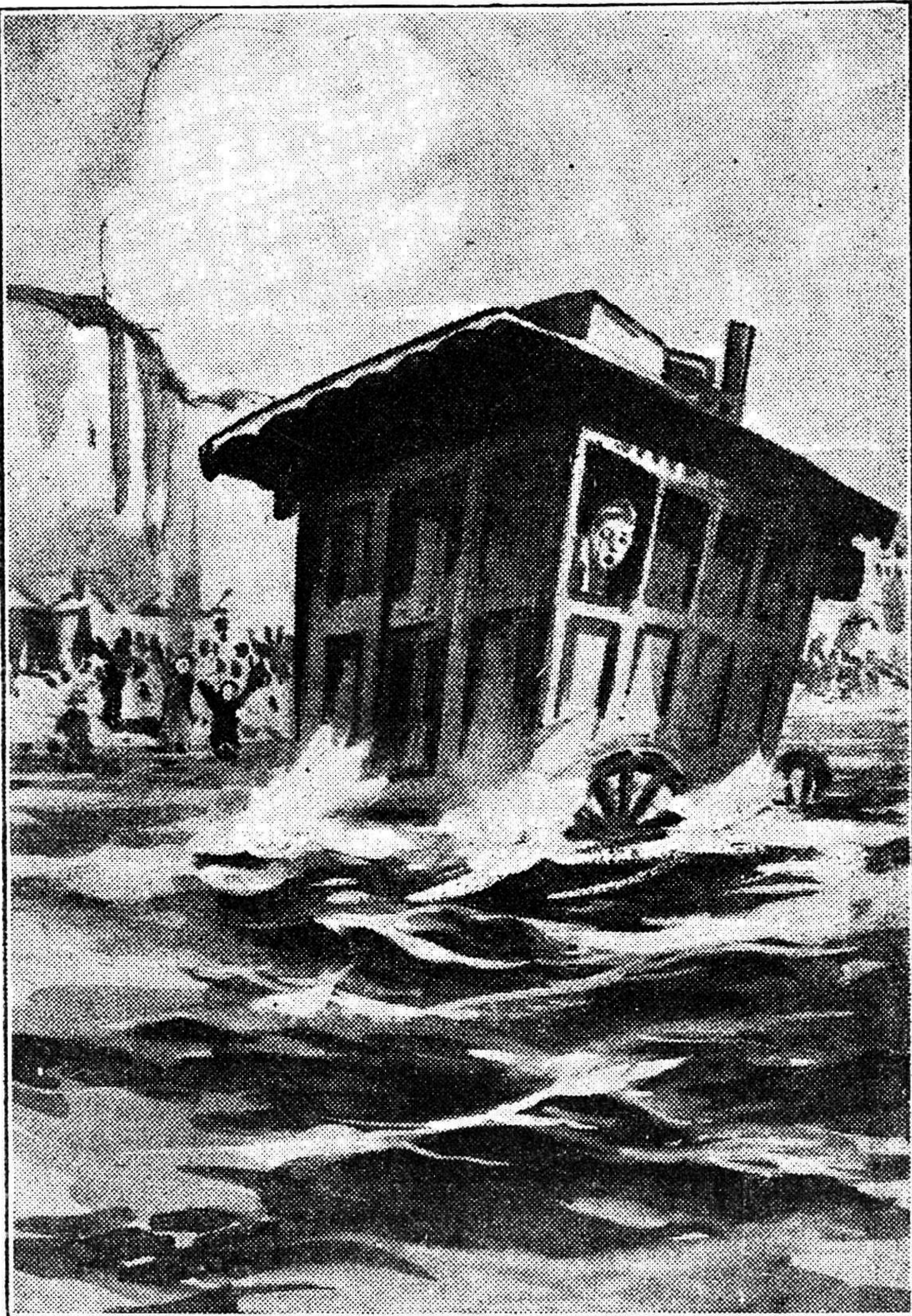
Laughable long complete
story of the Boys of ST.
FRANK'S and their
caravan holiday adventures in

THE SCHOOLBOY MINSTRELS!

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**THE LEAGUE OF THE
IRON HAND!**

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GORDON FOX!



Archie glanced out of one of the windows.
"Gadzooks!" he murmured dreamily. "I mean to say, water—water everywhere! It appears that I'm dashed well on the ocean! This is not only frightful, but positively bally!"

The Schoolboy Minstrels



If you would know how to enjoy a holiday on wheels with your best chums, read this second capital story of the caravan series, introducing the famous juniors of St. Frank's—including a new character who rejoices under the name of Clarence Fellowe, but is dubbed "Longfellow" by the Juniors on account of his lanky stature and natural propensity for talking in rhyme. In this entertaining description of the Juniors' caravan adventures you will read how they start a minstrel troupe, and how the inimitable Handforth attempts to recite a new version of "The Village Blacksmith" on the beach at Brightside-on-Sea to an appreciative audience of Bank Holiday trippers. There is not a dull moment throughout the whole story.—

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

ROUND THE CAMP FIRE!

CRACKLE—SIZZ—CRACKLE!

The camp fire flickered cheerily, the flames curling up intermingled with blue, pungent smoke. The new wood, filled with sap, made a drowsy, hissing noise as it slowly burned.

"Not so bad—eh?" said Handforth.

He stirred the fire with a long piece of stick, and the flames leaped with renewed energy.

"Careful!" warned McClure. "You'll bury all those giddy chestnuts!"

"I know what I'm doing," said Handforth, as four chestnuts disappeared into the heart of the fire. "Don't try to teach me, you fathead! Stirring a camp fire is an art. I know all about these things."

"So it appears," grinned Reginald Pitt. "Somebody's going to be four chestnuts short pretty soon. Not that it matters—plenty more in the bag. I say, it's pretty good out here, you know."

"Absolutely," drawled Archie Glenthorne. "That is to say, the night is filled with large lumps of peace. The evening breeze

sighs through the jolly old tree-tops, and the moon riseth o'er the hills!"

"Good!" chuckled Cecil De Valerie. "Is that the first verse?"

"Well, I mean to say, a chappie feels dashed well on the verge of poetry on a night like this," said Archie. "Everything is so frightfully priceless that the old bean begins to think in rhyme, what? The froggies croak and the crickets crick! The grasshopper hops, and—and——"

"The mushroom mushes?" suggested Pitt.

Archie adjusted his monocle.

"Dash it all!" he protested. "That, I mean, is somewhat poisonous!"

"You're thinking of toadstools," said Reggie, shaking his head.

"Toadstools?"

"Toadstools are poisonous—not mushrooms."

"Gadzooks!" said Archie. "It appears, laddie, that you misunderstood me! What I meant was, as it were— The mushroom mushes! Well, I mean to say, there it is! In all its ghastly ghastliness, don't you know!"

Handforth grunted

"If you fatheads are going to start rotten

poetry, I'll biff you!" he declared warmly. "I never heard such piffle! I'll show you how to make poetry, if you like! I'm a bit of a dabster at making rhymes!"

The circle round the camp fire chuckled.

"Good old Handy!" murmured Bob Christie. "Always ready!"

"Do you say I can't make up poetry?" demanded Handforth, glaring.

"For Heaven's sake, don't goad him!" gasped Jack Grey. "You'll start him off! Archie's had enough, but Handy! Hellup!"

"I mean to say!" protested Archie feebly.

The circle again chuckled. We were taking things very easily. It was just after nine o'clock, and the May evening was a glorious one. The stars glimmered and twinkled up in the sky, and a gentle breeze softly whispered through the tops of the old elm trees.

We had camped in a little secluded corner by the roadside, and our four caravans were drawn up in a line, like four little gaily-painted bungalows. Our horses were peacefully grazing in an adjoining meadow.

We had obtained a permit to put the geese there. No more entering meadows without asking permission! Our recent experience with Mr. Crabb, the farmer, had made us cautious.

There were sixteen of us in the party—all members of the Remove Form at St. Frank's, with the exception of Willy Handforth. He was a Third Former, but his inclusion in the party was welcomed by all. Willy was the right sort.

The idea had been Archie's, in the first place.

He had got his pater to buy the caravans from a broken-down circus, and Archie had had them repainted and refitted in the most luxurious manner. They were good enough for a king's entourage.

We had started out from St. Frank's at the beginning of the Whitsun holidays, and it was our intention to potter along the highways, just as the fancy took us, enjoying the rural delights. We also intended visiting seaside resorts, and were within eight miles of the coast now.

It would be Bank Holiday on the morrow, and we were looking forward to a good time. The weather promised to be glorious. There was no sign of rain, and the clear sky promised a day of warmth and sunshine. Anyhow, we were hoping for the best.

Up till now we had not had the best of luck.

Our first day, in fact, had been a wash-out—in more senses than one. We had started from the old school under heavy skies, rain had poured before evening, and we had got ourselves wet through by the night.

Not only this, but we had bogged the caravans, and had had great difficulty in freeing them. However, now that it was all over, we could smile at our recent misfortunes.

We had been joggling along the roads during the past two or three days, enjoying ourselves tremendously. For the weather had

cleared, and now seemed to be set fair. And it was Whit-Monday on the morrow.

Having partaken of a hearty, well-cooked supper—provided ably and plentifully by the chef-in-chief—Fatty Little—we were now squatting round the blazing camp fire for half an hour before turning in.

It was wonderfully peaceful out there, under the whispering trees.

"Poetry," said Handforth, "it's easy."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Tommy Watson. "He's going to start!"

"If he does, we'll slaughter him!" I declared warmly. "Look here, Handy—have mercy on us, there's a good chap!"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "I'll show you whether I can make up verse! Just listen to this! The night was peaceful and calm, and the birds sang down by the farm!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't you call that a rhyme?" roared Handforth.

"Well, in a way," admitted Pitt. "But I didn't know that birds sang at night-time. Of course, there's the nightingale——"

"I meant nightingales," interrupted Handforth. "Besides, poets are allowed a good bit of licence."

"We shan't allow you much—about another minute!" said Somerton.

"Down by the rippling brook, there was a little nock," exclaimed Handforth dreamily. "And there I sat a-dozing, while—while——"

"A bull he came a-nosing!" hinted Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you hopeless duffer!" snorted Handforth. "You've messed it up now—a beautiful poem like that! I shall have to start all over again."

"Oh, help!"

"Under a spreading tavern sign the village bobby stands,

The cop, a mighty man is he, with a tankard in his hands!

He cares not for the drops that drip upon his tunic blue,

As he puts the tankard to his lips he shuts out all the view!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

We roared at this masterly effort of Pitt's. But Handforth only gave the humorist a withering glare of scorn.

"Any ass can make a rotten parody like that," he declared. "Listen to this one! The unemployed! Onward, onward, marched the gallant six hundred! Banners to the right of them, banners to the left of them! Into the valley of gloom marched the gallant six hundred. What cared they for——"

"Work?" suggested De Valerie.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What cared they for gibes and jeers?" roared Handforth, glaring at Archie.

"Dash it all!" gasped Archie. "I mean, I don't know, old can of tomatoes! I didn't jeer at the dear chappies!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What cared they for gibes and jeers," proceeded Handforth. "The crowd then gave them three good cheers! Banners to the right of them, banners to the left of them——"

"Down the Old Kent Road marched the six hundred!" said Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—your funny asses!" snapped Handforth. "How can I think of rhymes when you keep interrupting? But the best kind of poetry is the straight stuff—no parodies. Listen to this one—'Ode to an Acorn!' Up, little acorn, sitting in the oak tree! Up, little acorn, your face I want to see——"

"Oh, drown me, somebody!" moaned Jack Grey. "Anything's better than this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll give you one!" said Fatty Little brightly. "There was a little puff, who had no jam inside; along came Mrs. Muff——"

"And that's enough!" I broke in. "You'd better chuck this stuff!"

Somebody else wanted to extemporise, but I put my foot down. The party was getting rather weak already. Archie, indeed, was dozing. Pitt declared that the Genial Ass had fainted.

"We haven't got much time," I went on, before any of the others could start. "Tomorrow's Bank Holiday, and we want to make an early start. We reckon to be in Brightside-on-Sea by ten o'clock, and we're going to give a minstrel show in aid of the hospitals, aren't we?"

"You bet!" said the others.

"Make tons of money!" declared Tommy Watson.

"Either that, or we shall collect a few over-ripe vegetables for Bank Holiday dinner," I grinned. "Well, there isn't much time, so I think we'd better have a final rehearsal."

"Costumes and all?" asked Willy eagerly.

"Yes, we might as well—a full dress rehearsal, in fact," I said. "This is our last chance. The evening's lovely, and we're as quiet as possible here. Let's get busy."

Handforth looked grim.

"Is my minor in this?" he demanded.

"As a minstrel?" I asked. "Why, yes."

"Then I'm out of it!" said Handforth, with the air of one who delivers a stunning blow.

"Then the minstrels might be a success, after all!" said Pitt thoughtfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You babbling lunatic!" hooted Handforth. "If I'm not in the show, it won't be worth looking at! If I don't sing, there'll be nothing to listen to!"

"Such," sighed Reggie, "is true modesty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Handy, what's your objection to your minor?" I grinned.

"Objection?" repeated Handforth. "He's not a Remove chap, is he?"

"Well, no."

"Then he's an outsider!" declared Hand-

forth. "He's no right to be included in these minstrels. That's what I say!"

I nodded slowly—and winked heavily at Willy.

"Oh, all right, you can have your way," I said patiently. "We'll bar Little Willy. He's only a fag, and he's your brother. Considering that he's your minor, we'll bar him. Willy, my son, you're not wanted. You're scorned and rejected. You can crawl away and weep with the willows!"

Willy sobbed and rubbed his eyes.

"Oh!" said Handforth, slowly pushing up his sleeves. "So that's the game, is it? You're going to shut my minor out from these rotten minstrels? He's not good enough, I suppose? Just because he's my young brother, you want to insult him! Look here, you rotters! If Willy isn't allowed——"

"All right—all right!" I said hastily. "He can join the troupe!"

The matter was settled—and, amazingly enough, Handforth didn't seem to realise that his leg had been pulled with much force. In some ways Handy was a hopeless duffer. Yet he could be as sharp as a needle when he liked. He was a queer mixture—as Church and McClure were always ready to admit. Only, of course, they had to do their admitting in soft and zephyr-like whispers.

Within ten minutes we were changed beings.

We had entered the caravans and had changed. The idea of the minstrel show had originated weeks earlier—when Archie had invited us to a garden party to be given at his father's London house. That garden party was now off, as far as we were concerned, for we were on this caravan holiday.

But we had planned, at first, to give a minstrel entertainment at the garden party. Having done much rehearsing, we didn't see the fun of wasting all our good stuff. So we intended giving the show on the sandy shore by the sad sea waves. Anyhow, Pitt declared the waves would soon be sad after Handforth started his wonderful baritone solo.

Our costumes were rather dinky and attractive.

They were of a rich royal blue, with red buttons of enormous size. They were of soft, voluminous silk, all sheeny and full of ruffles and ornamentations. On our heads we wore close-fitting caps of red silk.

When we appeared in public we should have blackened faces—but we did not see the necessity of going to that trouble now. The main thing was to get the programme mapped out perfectly, so that there would be no hitch at the actual performance.

"All ready?" I asked briskly. "Good! We'll squat down here, where the firelight can play on us, and start right away. When I say the word we'll begin the opening chorus."

We were all provided with folding stools—dinky, little, white enamel things. Half of them were high stools, and the other half were low. Consequently, when we sat

round in a half-circle, the back row of minstrels was on a higher level than the rest.

This gave us a true "troupe" effect. Pitt sat on one extreme corner, and I sat on the other. In the actual show our faces would be blackened in a comic way, with great lips, and other humorous details.

And it would be our duty to rattle of all sorts of jokes. We had quite a few in readiness, and we had trained our voices so that we spoke in the real nigger manner. All the other fellows would simply sing solos, or harmonise in the chorus.

"Now then—altogether!" I said. "Start the music!"

The music commenced, somewhat wobbly at first, but after a few moments it settled down into a catchy, attractive tune. The musicians sat in the back row, and were armed with a violin, a cornet, a banjo, a Swanee whistle, and a trap drum.

The fellows had practised a good deal, and were really capable.

"Good!" I shouted. "We're off—altogether!"

The chorus started—a jazzy nigger song in which all our voices were supposed to harmonise. It was called "Down on de old plantation." After the first two or three bars I was aware of the fact that something was wrong. There seemed to be a discordant note somewhere.

"Not a cent, not a cent, an' my clothes is only lent, all the same I'm feelin' just fine!" roared Handforth, in the full volume of his marvellous baritone voice. "How I've dreamed, how I've schemed——"

"Stop!" I yelled.

The opening chorus came to an abrupt end.

"Ass!" snorted Handforth. "What's the idea? I was just going fine!"

"You—you hopeless duffer!" I said wrathfully. "You were singing 'Coal Black Mammy!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I thought there was something wrong!" remarked Pitt, grinning.

Handforth looked at me in astonishment.

"My hat, so I was!" he ejaculated.

"Don't we start with 'Coal Black Mammy'?"

"My dear ass, you're supposed to inflict 'Coal Black Mammy' on the public as a solo," I pointed out. "It's a good thing we're having this rehearsal. If you start like that to-morrow, you'll mess the whole thing up!"

We started again, and this time Handforth managed to come in all right with the correct melody. But Bob Christine forgot the words, and improvised with some of his own, which didn't quite fit in. So there was another stoppage.

However, after several attempts, we got it right, and the opening chorus finished with a regular burst of vocal harmony.

"Good!" I declared. "That's the stuff. Now we go on to the patter for a bit. How am you'se a-gettin' on, Brudder Pete?"

"Eh?" said Handforth.

"I'm talking to Pitt, you josser! He's Brudder Pete!" I snapped.

"But—but his name's Reggie, not Pete!" said Handforth argumentatively.

I breathed hard.

"Did you ever hear of a darkie named Reggie?" I demanded. "In this show Pitt's supposed to be Brudder Pete, and I'm Brudder Sambo. For goodness' sake don't keep interrupting!"

Reggie and I managed to get through the opening jokes. Then De Valerie—who sat in the centre, and was supposed to be master of the ceremonies—called upon Tommy Watson to give a solo. It was a humorous song entitled "After The Moon Goes Down." Tommy stood up, the music began, and played the introduction about four times.

"Buck up, you duffer!" I said. "Aren't you going to start?"

Tommy Watson was very red.

"I'm blessed if I can think of the first line!" he confessed.

"My goodness!" I exclaimed. "That's a good start! It's your song, and yet you don't remember the lines! 'You've heard a lot about Mr. Moon——'"

"Oh, yes!" interrupted Tommy. "That's it. Thanks!"

He burst into song, and went all right until he got half-way through the chorus, and then dried up. But, after one or two further trials, he had it all right. And he delivered it fairly decently.

"Now we have some more patter——" began Pitt.

"Wait a minute!" put in Handforth.

"Where do I come in? Don't I sing?"

"Yes—later on," I said patiently.

"You've got 'Aunt Susie's Picnic,' but I'll bet you've forgotten half the words!"

"I think he'd better recite," said Pitt thoughtfully. "How about 'The Village Blacksmith'? He knows that by heart, and I think it would be rather decent for him to recite a fine poem like that."

"Of course, I don't mind," said Handforth. "I'll recite the poem as well. 'The Village Blacksmith' is jolly good, and I know every word of it."

In order to prove this, he proceeded to start on the spot. And rather to everybody's surprise, he made no mistakes. It seemed that Handforth had learned the poem earlier, as a child. His fond parents had dinned it into him so thoroughly that he had never forgotten it. But I was very doubtful about its inclusion in the minstrel performance—until Pitt had a few words with me in private later on. Then I agreed. 'The Village Blacksmith,' as rendered by Handforth on the sea beach, was likely to be humorous.

That rehearsal took us until nearly ten o'clock, and so we decided to finish up, and go to bed, because we wanted to be off by seven o'clock in the morning, at the very latest.

So we turned in, pleasantly tired.

But the occupants of one caravan, at least, were not destined to sleep just yet.

CHAPTER II.

JOYS OF THE SIMPLE LIFE!



HANDFORTH commenced undressing absentmindedly.

He and Church and McClure and Willy occupied Caravan No. 2, which rejoiced in the name of Emma. The other three juniors were still chatting just outside—having a few words with Fatty Little and Dick Goodwin.

"Yes," murmured Handforth. "It's a pretty good wheeze!"

He was thinking about the "Village Blacksmith," and was rather gratified by the knowledge that he was to deliver the poem before the public. He had no suspicion of Reggie Pitt's sinister intentions.

"Of course," muttered Handforth, "it'll improve the show a whole lot. What the—Great pip! My only hat!"

He suddenly let out a yell. Something was crawling up his leg. It was not unusual for things to crawl up the legs of the juniors during these days—for tiny insects of all sorts found their way upon the fellows' persons. But this crawly thing felt like something enormously big.

Handforth bent down, hastily pulled up his trouser leg, and gasped afresh. A gigantic centipede, about an inch long, was making its way up towards his knee. Handforth gazed at it fascinatedly.

"My goodness!" he said, in a faint voice.

In the nick of time, he swished it on to the floor, and stamped on it. Then he sat back, and tried to recover himself. He had an idea that centipedes were capable of biting.

"I say, you chaps!" roared Handforth. "I've just had a narrow escape!"

"Eh? What's that?" asked McClure, looking in at the door.

"I've been nearly bitten by a rotten scorpion thing!" shouted Handforth.

"Nearly?" said Church.

"Yes!"

"By the row you're making, I should judge you'd been bitten in about twenty places!" grinned Willy. "Fancy making all that fuss! Scorpions ain't harmful if you handle 'em right!"

Handforth snorted.

"There's no accounting for taste!" he snapped. "If you like to make pets of 'em, you can! I don't care if you chain the blessed things up, and call 'em by their Christian names! But when I see a scorpion I kill it!"

Willy entered the caravan, and examined the remains on the floor.

"Why, it's a centipede!" he said scornfully.

"What's the difference, you little fat-head?"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth minor. "You don't know the difference between a scorpion and a centipede? Now, a scorpion is a kind of beetle, with a back that rears up over the top of its napper. In this tail there's a kind of sting——"

"Gag him, somebody!" roared Handforth. "I don't want to hear—— Yar-ooooh! What the—— Great stars! Look—look here!"

He stared dazedly at the beautifully enamelled wall of the caravan. There, on a level with his face, were three enormous caterpillars—great hairy things that crawled along purposefully.

"Who—who put them there?" demanded Handforth fiercely.

"I say, be reasonable!" protested Church. "The giddy things crawled there, I suppose. You know what caterpillars are—they're always worming about somewhere or other."

Church proceeded to pick the grubby things off the wall, in order to throw them out of the window. But Willy stopped him. The Third-Former took the caterpillars fondly, and vanished outside.

"If he brings them back, I'll slaughter him!" said Handforth darkly.

He proceeded with his undressing, making various uncomplimentary remarks on the subject of insects in general. He didn't mind a few gnats, and he wasn't particularly averse to butterflies and moths, but when it came to centipedes and scorpions, he put his foot down.

"Well, it's no good making a fuss," remarked Church, sitting down on one of the lockers, as he unlaced his boots. "We must expect to find a few insects when we're camping out——"

Church broke off abruptly.

He sat quite still, and a rather startled expression came into his eyes. Church, it may as well be added, was practically disrobed. It was most distressing that he should leave his boots until the last, but many boys are addicted to the same lamentable habit.

It will be understood, therefore, that Church was sitting on the locker in person—there was nothing between his bare skin and the actual cushions of the locker. And he was aware of a curious, prickly sensation on his skin—just where he was sitting down.

"My only hat!" he gasped.

As though suddenly imbued with life, he sprang up, shook himself violently, and gazed round. But he needn't have been very alarmed. There, on the locker cushion, were about half a dozen ladybirds, intermixed with a few small beetles of the common earth type. They were crawling about leisurely. These cheerful little creatures had thought it worth while investigating Church's anatomy.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "We're swarming with insects!"

Handforth and McClure stared in a fascinated kind of way.

"I—I can't understand it!" said McClure. "We've never had insects like this in the caravan before! We must have camped in a particularly crawly place. Quick! Grab those giddy things before they slip between the cracks! We don't want them walking all over us during the night."

The ladybirds and the beetles were forthwith ejected. Church continually wriggled convulsively, declaring that at least four beetles were crawling up his back. Investigation, on the part of McClure, however, was fruitless. Church's imagination was evidently a vivid one.

"Oh, well, it's no good being afraid of a few beetles!" said McClure. "Now, spiders are different. I hate spiders. If I see a spider——"

McClure broke off abruptly, having seen two. It was rather curious that he should spot these just as he was discussing the subject. But there they were—two fine specimens that seemed to have been especially selected. They were snugly esconced in one of the corners, just over the washbasin. They were spiders of a particularly big type—enormous, brown, hairy things that fairly gave McClure the creeps.

"Look out!" he roared.

"What!" gasped Handforth.

He was, at the moment, preparing to indulge in a wash, and was quite unconscious of the fact that the two spiders were only an inch or two from his face. He put his hand on the wall as he turned round.

"Oh!" panted McClure, in horror.

Edward Oswald had placed his hand about half an inch from the nearest spider. And the latter gentleman, evidently getting the wind up, proceeded to find other quarters. It took a short cut across the back of Handforth's fist.

"What the dickens——"

Handforth nearly choked as he saw that hairy monster on the back of his hand. He gave a fiendish yell, shook his hand violently, and the spider gracefully alighted on the top of McClure's head.

"Yow—wow!" howled McClure wildly. "Take it off—take it off!"

But it was not necessary to do anything of the kind. The spider had taken itself off with supreme alacrity. He vanished like lightning down McClure's neck, and for one ghastly second Handforth and Church thought it was going to vanish down their chum's collar.

But, at the last minute, the spider crawled on to McClure's jacket, and then dropped to the floor with a nasty, unpleasant plop. It whizzed away into a corner.

McClure sat back, pale and trembling.

"I—I'm not a nervous sort of a chap, but spiders fairly bowl me over!" he said weakly. "We've got to catch it—we can't go to sleep with that rotten thing in the caravan. There's the other one, too!"

After about five minutes' hard work, the two spiders were rounded up and forcibly expelled. In the course of this search, numerous other insects came to light—for

example, four caterpillars were found nestled together in one of Handforth's tennis shoes. A few earwigs were leisurely investigating the inside of Church's straw hat. And quite a number of other beetles were found roaming about at random.

"Well, my only hat!" ejaculated Handforth, at last. "This is a bit thick, you know. I've never known anything like it! A giddy plague of insects!"

"Oh, well, I think we've got rid of them now," said Church. "Better turn in; it's getting late."

Handforth grunted, and threw back the bedclothes. Each caravan was provided with four comfortable cots—arranged in something after the same style as the bunks in a ship's cabin. But they could be folded out of the way during the daytime, and were arranged so neatly that there was plenty of room.

"After all," said Handforth, "insects can't do any harm. And we're a lot better off than people who have to live in the African jungle! They get all sorts of horrible things there, you know. They get——"

"Look!" panted Church suddenly.

He pointed with a quivering finger. And Handforth, who was sitting on the bed, turned and gazed at his pillow—which he had just uncovered. A particularly huge stag beetle was crawling over the white linen with quite an outrageous amount of assurance. It was one of those stag beetles of formidable aspect—the kind that look far more dangerous than they really are.

"It—it's a cockroach!" gasped Handforth faintly.

"You—you mean a cockchafer!" said McClure.

"Fathead, it's a stag beetle!" said Church. "Grab it! My hat! Look at those great, long antlers! Mind! If you let that thing touch you, it'll nip your finger in half!"

This, of course, was a sheer exaggeration, but Handforth was very cautious. In desperation he seized the pillow, and flung it clean through the window, stag beetle and all. He looked round him, and shivered.

"I'm clearing out of here!" he declared. "I'm blessed if I'm going to sleep with a whole crowd of stag beetles and earwigs and grubs! I—I'd rather walk about all night!"

"Same here!" said McClure hurriedly.

They made a hasty exit in various stages of dress and undress. Indeed, it was just as well that the spot was very private and secluded, for Handforth and Co. were hardly respectable.

The other three caravans were closed, and their occupants were apparently in a state of peace and quietness. Voices could be heard, but there were certainly no signs of any trouble.

"I say, you chaps!" roared Handforth.

Two caravan doors opened, and a few heads looked out.

"What's the trouble out there?" asked Reggie Pitt.

"Trouble!" hooted Handforth. "We've been driven out!"

"Driven out?" repeated Pitt.

"Our caravan's swarming with live things!" said Handforth fiercely.

"But, really! How absolutely absolute!" exclaimed Archie Glen-thorne, in a shocked voice. "I mean to say, how frightfully foul! Live things, don't you know! Are you implying, laddie, that insects are abroad?"

"I wouldn't mind if they were abroad!" retorted Handforth tartly. "But I'm blessed if I'm going to put up with three or four thousand of the things in my bed!"

"Three or four thousands!" I repeated mildly.

"Well one, anyhow

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, yes, you can laugh—you'll jolly well find yourselves in the same fix soon!" snorted

Handforth. "Look here, we'd better find the horses, and shift to another camping ground! This place is simply overrun with beetles and earwigs and caterpillars and centipedes and scorpions!"

"You seem to have been having a happy time!" observed Pitt. "That's queer, too. There's no sign of insects in this caravan."

"Nor in ours," I put in.

"They must like Handy's flavour!" said Tommy Watson.

"Rats! Don't make such a fuss over nothing!" said Willy Handforth, coming down the steps of the last caravan. "I've just been having a chat with Fatty Little—trying to get the greedy bounder to make me a sandwich!"

"Mind your own business!" said his elder brother.

"Oh, all right!" exclaimed Willy. "But there's no need for you to worry about those insects. I don't suppose they'll come back. I thought perhaps you would have cleared them out by this time—that's why I kept out. You see, I didn't want to be in the way."

A dark and awful thought suddenly came to Church.

"Great Scott!" he breathed. "I—I believe I know how all those insects got in



Handy was game for anything—he didn't know the meaning of fear—and he would have waded out to the rescue, even if he couldn't swim a stroke.

there. There's an explanation! You—you young rotter!" he added, turning to Willy. "It's your fault!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Willy indignantly.

"What!" exclaimed Handforth, instinctively preparing to roll up his sleeves—and forgetting that he had no sleeves on to roll up. "Why, you—you young bounder! Do you mean to say you put all those insects in our caravan?"

Willy grinned.

"Well, yes——"

"What!"

"Oh, don't start!" growled Willy. "How could I help it? I didn't know the blessed things would escape!"

"Escape!" said Handforth faintly.

"You see, I collected a few specimens this afternoon, as we were coming along," explained Willy, with serene calmness. "You know I'm interested in insects. I'm a naturalist. I had a whole box full of 'em, and I put them under your locker, Ted."

"Under my locker!" said Handforth, in a mechanical kind of voice.

"Yes, I wanted them for my collection."

"Your collection!" said Handforth dully.

"Great guns!" snapped Willy. "Have you turned into a parrot, or what? Don't keep repeating everything I say! I put all those

specimens in a box, but I suppose the jolting of the caravan jerked the lid off. You won't be so unreasonable as to blame me, will you?"

Handforth tried to speak, but somehow or other, his voice failed to arrive. The truth was, he wanted to say about fifty things at once, and his throat—large though it was—was not sufficiently capable. The words jammed, with the result that only a gurgle came.

But if Handforth couldn't speak, he could act.

"I mean to say, unreasonable, what?" murmured Archie. "Personally, laddie, I rather fancy that the dear chap has a case, don't you know! I mean, when a fellow's younger brother collects about four hundred and fifty-three different insects, and lets them loose in the old homestead—well, as it were, it's bally well time to do something! I mean to say, castigation, and what not!"

"Willy's booked!" said Pitt sadly. "I don't know what for—but he's booked all right! And the young ass was too slow!"

Willy, indeed, had attempted to flee, and could easily have evaded his elder brother. He had never thought that Church and McClure would join in the hunt. But it so happened that they were as highly incensed as Handforth himself. They fell upon Willy from behind, and held him.

"Oh, you—you mean rotters!" panted Willy. "Lemme go!"

"Not likely!" retorted Church. "We're going to take you into that caravan, and we're going to shove insects down the back of your neck until you howl for mercy! We'll teach you something!"

Unfortunately, this scheme was rather impracticable—as Willy discovered, to his relief. But there seemed another method of dealing with him. Handforth and Co. proceeded to tear the clothing from the Third Former.

Out there, in the open, they yanked off his jacket and his waistcoat and his trousers—and, in fact, everything. Finally, Willy was clothed in the scanty garb of nature. During this process, of course, he had been handled with such roughness that there was practically no breath left in his body. He was jerked one way, and then another, turned upside down, laid on his back, and into every other conceivable position.

"Finished?" he gasped at last. "Thanks! You've saved me the trouble of undressing! Hi! Mind what you're doing, Church! You're treading all over my bags! There's a watch in that waistcoat pocket——"

"Now!" said Handforth, with terrible purpose in his voice.

Willy, showing up pinkish in the gloom of night, was marched away from the vicinity of the caravan. The other fellows had been watching the entertainment with a great deal of interest.

"Good thing this place isn't public!" remarked Pitt. "Willy isn't fit to be seen, certainly—and the other chaps ought to be ashamed of themselves! Look at Handy—

wearing nothing but a giddy cricket shirt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Willy was curious by this time. He had an idea that a terrible fate was about to overwhelm him. It was no good struggling against it. In the hands of the three wrathful juniors he could do nothing.

They arrived upon the banks of a pond—a deep pond with a surface that seemed to be composed of greenish slime. The juniors had not tested this pond—one look had been quite sufficient.

"In with him!" said Handforth breathlessly. "I expect he'll find plenty of insects in there! Let him make a night of it! He can revel in creepy crawly things for hours!"

Splash!

Willy was swung backwards and forwards, and then suddenly released. He described a graceful arc through the air, and descended into the very centre of the pond. He vanished beneath the greenish surface.

There was a wild disturbance of the water for a few moments, and then Willy reappeared. At least, something reappeared. As Church afterwards remarked, it looked like the old man of the sea. In the moonlight there appeared a head and shoulders of some grim and terrible object—an object that had green weeds falling down in festoons from its head. And it was making curious gurgling noises.

"My only hat!" gasped Church. "Is—that Willy?"

"I don't know—and I don't care!" replied Handforth callously. "My goodness! It's getting chilly! I—I say! We're not dressed decently! If somebody comes along we shall be in a terrible fix!"

Until this moment they had not realised their scandalous appearance. They made a rush for the caravan, caring nothing whatever for Willy's fate. About five minutes later a feeble knock sounded upon the door.

"Go away!" said Handforth brutally.

"I—I say!" came Willy's voice, faint and weak. "I—I'm all entangled! Don't be so rottenly mean! My left eye is bunged up, and I've swallowed about half a hundred-weight of weeds!"

Church opened the door, in strict disobedience of Handforth's command. Then he started back, aghast. Willy had been entirely unclothed when he entered the pond. But now he was fully dressed.

His attire, certainly, was of the most undesirable description, but there was undoubtedly very little of Willy to be seen. He had come from the pond, trailing behind him a long, dank, tangled mass of waterlily plants, and various other types of vegetation.

"Good heavens!" breathed Church. "He's turned green!"

McClure and Handforth came to the door and looked at Willy with cold, unsympathetic eyes. They were somewhat startled, but did not allow this fact to reveal itself. From out of the weeds a pair of eyes gleamed in the

light from the caravan, and a hand appeared from somewhere.

"Don't be mean!" came a feeble voice. "Help me out of this rotten forest, you chaps! I'm—I'm all mixed up! There are about five tadpoles crawling up my back, and my ears are filled with tiddlers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The occupants of the other caravans, who were all watching and listening, burst into a roar of unsympathetic laughter. Somebody suggested that Willy ought to have the hose turned on him. Certainly, nobody went near him. He looked far too awful to approach.

In the end he was obliged to crawl away to a running stream, a hundred yards distant. Sounds of wallowing and splashing proceeded from this direction for about fifteen minutes. Then, at length, Willy reappeared—startlingly clean. As Church remarked, he hadn't been so clean for weeks. McClure added that the stream was now quite muddy.

Willy was allowed to crawl into the caravan. After a good towelling, he collapsed into his bed and slept the sleep of exhaustion. But he had learned his lesson. He was not likely to collect any more specimens for quite a time!

CHAPTER III.

ON THE SILVERY SANDS!



"MORNING, what?" Archie Glen thorne looked about him with an approving eye.

"I mean to say, up with the lark and all that sort of stuff!" he went on. "Brilliant sunshine, balmy breezes, and so forth. In fact, dear old lads of the village, the morning is dashed near priceless!"

"Rather!" agreed Reggie Pitt. "Bank Holiday, too! My sons, we're going to have a fine day by the sea!"

It was not quite seven o'clock, and the morning was indeed perfect. The sun shone in a cloudless sky, and the whole countryside was looking wonderful in that flood of golden light.

Just near our camp a stream wandered idly through the valley—the stream where, in the darkness of the night, Willy Handforth had cleansed himself. On the other side of the valley the ground rose in sloping, wooded hills. And the green of everything was glorious. There is nothing more beautiful in the world than the English countryside on a fine summer's morning.

But the juniors were not famed for their appreciation of Nature's beauty. Their chief thoughts, at the moment, were concerned with breakfast. Fatty Little, with many willing helpers, was bustling about with frying pans and eggs and bacon and loaves of bread. Breakfast was a most important matter.

Four powerful spirit stoves were on the go, with kettles of water heating, coffee pots ready, and numerous other details connected with feeding. On a particularly green patch of smooth grass a huge white cloth had been laid, and Jack Grey and Dick Goodwin were busily laying out the knives and forks and crockery.

"What ho! What ho!" observed Archie, strolling up and surveying the scene approvingly through his monocle. "Large supplies of the succulent egg and the prime old streaky, what? That, I mean to say, is the stuff to give them. Absolutely!"

"The very nilf makes me feel peckish!" remarked Church, as he hungrily sniffed the air. "Good! It's nearly ready! Hallo, Willy, my lad! Feeling fit this morning? You're looking unusually clean for once!"

Willy Handforth, who was passing, gave Church a cold look.

"Callous beast!" he said witheringly. "You'd have let me die in that pond!"

"My dear kid, we did humanity a good service," replied Church. "We compelled you to take a bath, and we caused a particularly fungussy pond to be cleared out. Let's hope you benefit by the lesson."

"Rats!" said Willy, walking on.

"Rats, as it were, in swarms," said Archie amiably. "In fact, Church, old thing, the young laddie scorns you with considerable vim. I mean to say, his voice contained several large chunks of priceless contempt."

"Oh, I'll get over it, I dare say," grinned Church.

Handforth appeared shortly afterwards, and he walked about the camp, gazing this way and that, apparently in search of some definite object. Archie regarded him for some minutes with mild interest. And as Handforth was passing by, Archie gently but firmly dug Handforth in the ribs.

"Possibly," he said, "I can assist."

"Eh?"

"You appear to be searching for something, fruity one," observed Archie. "If there is anything that I can do, do it! I should say, I will do it! The old brow appears to be somewhat tripelike—that is, wrinkled!"

"I didn't ask you to interfere!" said Handforth curtly. "Go away and hide yourself under a bush! You're spoiling the landscape! That horrible waistcoat of yours doesn't blend with the colour scheme. If you want to know, I'm looking for Willy!"

As it happened, Archie was in a position to explain precisely where Willy was; but after Handforth's remarks concerning the waistcoat, Archie became very closely allied to a stone statue. He froze up solid, and gave Handforth a glare through his monocle that really ought to have shrivelled the leader of Study D up on the spot.

Handforth walked on, however, totally unconscious of the power of that glare—since it had been directed at his rear. And soon afterwards he suddenly came upon Willy as the latter was investigating a ham sandwich.

"Glutton!" said Handforth. "Having a snack before breakfast, I suppose? Where did you find that sandwich?"

"Oh, round the corner!" said Willy vaguely.

"Any more there?" asked Handforth.

"No—this is the last one," grinned Willy. "It seems to me somebody else is inclined to be a glutton. Sorry, old man. There's nothing doing. As a matter of fact, I'd made up my mind not to speak to you for a fortnight—but I'm not the sort to keep up a row!"

Handforth granted, and pulled out a ten-shilling note.

"What's that for?" asked Willy, eyeing it with interest.

taken a particularly keen and fiendish delight in seeing his minor suffer.

Afterwards, however, he had realised that it had been a bit too bad to chuck Willy into the pond. He had said nothing during the night—chiefly because he was sound asleep at this period. And when he had awakened he found that Willy was absent. Willy had deemed it safer to be dressed in good time.

And Handforth considered that ten shillings would put things square. Not for the world would he give any reason why he suddenly thrust such riches upon his younger brother. But having made this measure of compensation, he considered the matter settled.

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Handforth thrust it into his minor's fist and turned away.

"I say!" called Willy. "What's the idea? Going dotty, or what? Or is this note a dud?"

"A dud!" roared Handforth, turning. "It's a genuine one—as good as I am!"

"Then I'll never change it!" said Willy sadly.

But he made this remark under his breath, and Handforth walked away feeling that conscience was satisfied. He had, as a matter of fact, passed a somewhat uneasy night. At heart, Handforth was as soft as butter. At the time of the outrage on Willy, Edward Oswald had thoroughly enjoyed it. He had

Breakfast was a jolly, enjoyable meal. The very weather conditions made depression absolutely impossible. A soft, cooling breeze was springing up, and there was that clearness in the air that makes a fellow feel brisk and active.

While Fatty and his staff were clearing away the breakfast things, the rest of us set about collecting up the horses—which, of course, had been fed and tended long before we fed ourselves.

The only fellow who was excused all duty was Archie Glenthorne. He was always insisting that he ought to do his share, but we insisted just as firmly that he should be an onlooker. If Archie started to help,

the whole machinery of the camp would become clogged. Archie, in fact, would act very much in the same manner as an obstruction in the cogwheels. Politeness forbade us to point it out, however. Archie was not even included in the minstrels. He was merely the chap who had provided the caravans, and made the whole holiday possible.

We got started less than half an hour after breakfast had been disposed of. And our journey was not such a long one, for we were only a matter of nine or ten miles from Brightside-on-Sea.

It was just after ten-thirty when we entered the town, after a perfectly uneventful journey along the quiet, country lanes. We had taken particular care not to travel by any of the main roads.

"Strictly speaking, this is a diversion," I pointed out. "This caravan holiday was supposed to include nothing but the simple life. But as it's Whit Monday, we'll stretch a point, and have a jolly good time."

"And make some money, too!" said Handforth. "This minstrel show's bound to be a success, and we ought to clear about sixty or seventy quid!"

"How much?" gasped Church, clutching at his collar.

"Oh, eighty quid!" said Handforth.

"That's all right; I heard you first time!" said Church. "You—you blind, hopeless, optimistic duffer! I—I mean—Steady, Handy! Keep your blessed fists away—"

"Don't worry!" interrupted Handforth. "I wouldn't hit you in this caravan; but wait until we get on solid ground! We shall clear eighty quid or more—four performances, at twenty quid a time—"

"My dear, deluded ass!" said Reggie Pitt, who was walking alongside. "If we give this minstrel show, and collect a couple of quid, we shall be lucky. Every little helps though, and we might as well turn an honest penny!"

Archie, of course, was absolutely horrified at the very idea. He didn't mind the minstrel show, but he considered that it ought to be provided free. To accept money was too awful for words. But, then, Archie had peculiar ideas. He didn't seem to realise that a shilling thus earned by the fellows would be sweeter than a pound out of their ordinary funds.

Brightside-on-Sea proved to be a lively holiday place.

It is one of the biggest and most rapidly growing seaside resorts on the South Coast, and being within comparatively short distance of London, it is the mecca of tens of thousands of day trippers on a Bank Holiday—particularly if that day happens to be fine.

Excursion trains were rolling in, two or three to the hour, each one discharging a full freight of cheery merry-makers. And all the main roads were thick and congested with charabanes.

We decided to go right through the town

along the water-front. I knew Brightside pretty well, and I was aware that on the further edge of the town there was a quiet, bare stretch of sand dunes. Here we could make our camp, without causing any trouble whatever. And a walk along the beach would bring us to the centre of activity.

It was close upon twelve o'clock by the time we were at our camping ground—having caused quite a stir as we passed through the town and along the esplanade. Our caravans were gaily enamelled and decorated. And our horses were harnessed to perfection, with masses of glittering nickel-work. We had put special decorations of bunting all over the caravans, too. So that our procession had quite a gay and festive appearance.

The very instant we had chosen our camp, I went off to find quarters for the horses, and Reggie Pitt and De Valerie went along the beach on quite a different mission.

I found excellent stabling quite near at hand, and arrangements were soon made. The caravans themselves were all placed in a row along the sands, like so many bathing machines. In fact, we had placed them purposely in this position, just above high water mark, so that we could use them for bathing purposes.

The sands here were firm and hard, and sloped rather steeply. It was necessary, therefore, to place blocks under the wheels. But everything was done speedily and in the most satisfactory manner.

By this time Pitt and De Valerie reappeared.

"Yes, you've had the best of it!" growled Tommy Watson, as they came up. "Phew! I'm going for a dip soon! I'm sweltering!"

Most of the fellows were perspiring freely after their energetic work, for caravanning calls for quite a good deal of exercise. It is not all honey. But this is really what makes it so attractive—there's something to do all the time.

"Well?" I asked, looking at Pitt.

"My dear chap, everything's all serene!" replied Reggie. "I've bought a roll of Government tickets—sixpenny ones, of course—and we've got our pitch on the sands."

"A good one?"

"Right in the heart of things," replied Pitt. "Of course, it isn't allowed, strictly speaking, but we can't go by rules and regulations. I've hired about a hundred canvas chairs for the day, and they're all stacked in a heap, ready. All we've got to do is to march up, and give the show!"

"Good!"

Pitt and De Valerie had done their work well. There wasn't much chance of gathering any crowd now, for it was close upon luncheon time, and the sands would soon be half deserted. So we decided to wait until the afternoon before giving our entertainment.

We filled in the time profitably.

We all indulged in a bathe, and we enjoyed it immensely. The sea was deliciously

cool, and the sun gratefully warm. Archie startled the natives by appearing in a bathing costume which consisted of red and blue squares, with a gold bordering round the neck and arms.

And, naturally, as soon as the bathing was over, we all discovered that a most extraordinary hunger had overtaken us. But Fatty Little knew well enough what to expect, and he had prepared a luncheon of surpassing excellence and quantity. By the time this was over we had to be thinking about the show. For, as Pitt pointed out, if we waited too long, we should get another appetite for tea, and the show would get missed out altogether.

So, forthwith, we changed into our silken minstrel costumes. Beforehand, however, we carefully blackened our faces and necks by means of a special preparation we had laid in for this purpose. Reggie Pitt and I had comic make-up on, but the others were all just blackened.

By the time we were all ready, nobody would have recognised us as juniors from St. Frank's College. We were completely disguised. And Archie, who was not in this act at all, regarded us with distinct approval.

"Well, of course, that makes a dashed big difference," he observed. "I mean to say, nobody will know whether you're St. Frank's chappies, or whether you're the sons of a few sundry coalminers! You grasp what I mean? I must remark, however, that Comrade Handforth has a somewhat frightfully piebald appearance!"

"What?" said Handforth, staring.

"The neck, laddie," Archie pointed out. "I mean to say, do these nigger chappies really have pink patches under the ear, and pink patches beneath the chin? Of course, I don't want to be critical, but it seems to me that a few well assorted improvements might be made."

Handforth grunted, but when several fellows also pointed out the defects of his make-up, he condescended to allow Pitt to touch him up. After that we were all ready.

"Now, don't forget!" I said. "The opening chorus is 'Down on de old plantation.' As soon as the orchestra's started, and I drop my hand, all start singing at once. For goodness' sake don't mess the show up before it gets fairly started!"

All the juniors promised that they would do their best.

And we sallied along the sands, gathering supporters, as it were, upon the way. Before we had half covered the distance, crowds of people were following us, evi-

dently curious to see what we were about to do.

I might as well admit that these people were aged, on the average, from about five to seven. There might have been one or two a year or so older, but not many. To be quite frank, we didn't exactly welcome this attention—but it was something we could hardly control.

By the time we arrived at our pitch, the crowd, as the newspapers say, had grown to enormous proportions. Our pitch, I will add, was not ours at all, strictly speaking. We had simply appropriated a chunk of the beach—as Archie delicately put it.

Whether we should get into trouble afterwards, remained to be seen. We had an idea that people had to pay heavily for pitches on the sands; but as ours was to be a kind of flying trip, and really in the nature of a bank holiday jape, we didn't think much harm could be done.

It took us about four minutes to arrange the chairs that Pitt had hired. We set them up in rows, in a kind of semi-circle. And Reggie had proved himself to be a bit of a genius in this respect. He had chosen a spot just against a cliff, where there was a big flat section of rock, about eight feet wide, and two feet above the level of the sands.

And this made a perfect natural stage. We planted ourselves on this rock platform, sat down on our stools, and allowed the crowd to admire us. Of course, the show didn't start yet.

But we were ready.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MINSTREL SHOW.



"LADIES and gentlemen!" I shouted invitingly.

"Dry up!" interrupted De Valerie. "I'm the master of the ceremonies—that's my job! You keep quiet until the show starts!"

De Valerie was standing up for his rights, and I didn't interfere. He proceeded to do his work well.

"Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to present the genuine Wandering Minstrels—the only troupe of its kind in the whole world!" exclaimed De Valerie proudly. "We are now about to give our modest performance—which can be witnessed and heard for the preposterous sum of sixpence! Chairs are available for all who care to whack out the necessary amount—tax paid, and everything! Walk up, and occupy the chairs! Comfort and pleasure for sixpence! All those who care to stand, can see the show for nothing, but we give fair warning that we shall pass the hat round! Our friend on the right in the red blazer will oblige in that respect!"

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"Gadzooks!" gasped Archie, startled. "Absolutely not!"

Do Valerie's little speech was repeated several times. About six people ventured to spend sixpence each and occupy chairs. But there appeared to be no mad rush. The band, therefore, started up a bit of a jazz, in order to prove to the public that we were capable of doing something.

It was rather unfortunate that the band started playing two different tunes at the same time. When this was adjusted, however, the effect was pretty good.

Crowds of people were looking on by now—people of all descriptions. Prosperous City men, with wives and things, looked on condescendingly. Day trippers regarded us in an expectant manner, and with some show of impatience. And the children were simply dying for us to begin.

"Buck up, mates!" shouted one of the trippers. "Ain't yer goin' to do somethink? D'you think we want to stand here all the bloomin' day?"

"Better begin!" muttered Handforth. "I'll recite—"

"That would put the lid on things!" said Pitt. "The whole beach would be as empty as the Sahara in about two minutes! No, we'll start with the opening chorus, and the show will go on according to schedule."

This was decided upon, and Tommy Watson remained in the crowd for the purpose of selling tickets—if any more seats were required. And the opening chorus began.

By a piece of wonderful good luck, there was no hitch. In fact, "Down on de old Plantation" was delivered with a swing and a harmony that even surprised the minstrels themselves. But they had been put on their mettle by the fact that they were singing in public, and not a single mistake was made. Even Handforth managed to keep his voice in control, so that it didn't drown everybody else's.

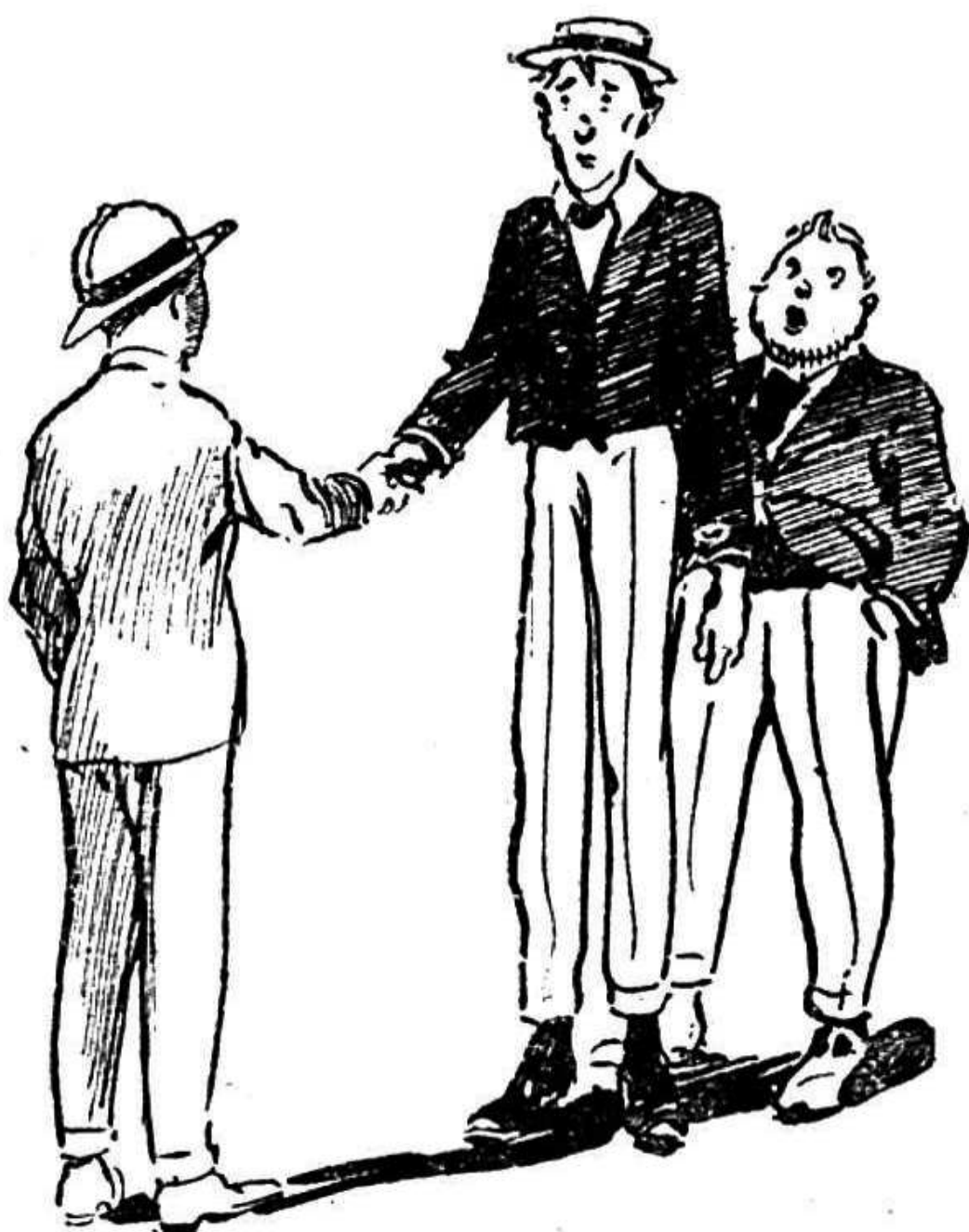
The effect was immediate.

We had plenty of applause, and fully thirty people crowded into the chairs, paying their money willingly. And Reggie Pitt and I, as corner men, indulged in a few quips and cranks.

"Did yo' hear 'bout dat man who went to de bar in one ob de swell London hotels, Brudder Pete?" I asked. "A smart niggah he was, sure."

"No, I nebber heard nothin', Brudder Sambo," said Pitt. "What did de swell niggah do at de bar ob a big London hotel?"

"Say, dat niggah called for a mighty big whisky, Brudder Pete," I replied. "He says to the bar-tender: 'Gib me a big whisky befo' dis unholy row starts.' De bar-tender gabe him de whisky, and dat whisky vanished so slick yo' couldn't see it go down. Den de niggah says to de bar-tender: 'Gib me anodder big whisky befo' dis unholy row starts!' So he got anodder whisky, an' dat went quicker dan de fust. Den de niggah says to de bar-tender: 'Gib me anodder big



For he was attired in an Eton suit and a straw hat. His trousers were extremely narrow, and his jacket appeared to be extremely short.

whisky befo' dis unholy row starts.' He got dat whisky, too, Brudder Pete!"

"Dat niggah had some t'irst, Brudder Sambo!" said Pitt.

"He sure did," I agreed. "An' de bar-tender says to dis niggah: 'What's dis row dat's gonna start, anyways, an' where's it gonna be?' De niggah makes dat t'ird whisky vanish quicker'n de fust two, an' he looks at de bar-tender an' grins. Den he says: 'Dat unholy row's gonna be right here, an' it's gonna start right now—'cos I ain't go no cash!'"

Here, of course, "Brudder Pete" roared with laughter at the point of the joke. And it was very gratifying to us that the crowd roared with laughter, too. We had made quite a good beginning, and that was half the battle. Tommy Watson was hastily called up from the crowd in order to sing "After The Moon Goes Down." Except for the fact that he dried up twice, and had to be hoarsely prompted, he got through successfully.

He would have given an encore—the chorus over again—for it was warmly applauded, but Handforth didn't see the reason for this. Without waiting for the music to begin, Handforth calmly started singing "Auntie Susie's Picnic."

This naturally upset the programme a trifle. But the crowd seemed to imagine that it was a bit of funny business, and it passed off all right. Handforth's totally un-

rehearsed stage whispers were looked upon as part of the show. They went so well that none of us minded.

And it was rather a scream when Handy really got started on the song. Unfortunately, he got the first verse and the second verse mixed up, and several lines of the chorus were sung in the wrong place. However, he managed to get to the finish. He concluded with a perfect burst of vocal effort—and apparently believed that he had delivered a supremely creditable performance.

The crowd was on the verge of hysterics. The song in itself was fairly humorous, but, as rendered by Handforth, it was ludicrously funny. As a comedian, Edward Oswald was worth his weight in gold. And it was all the funnier, because he wasn't really trying to be humorous. Pitt solemnly declared that several times during the song Handforth wandered into the tune of "Coal Black Mammy," and even touched upon the melody of "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay" upon two occasions.

After that, when the audience was able to compose itself, Pitt and I indulged in a few more jokes. Pitt got a great laugh by telling the story of the man who fancied himself tremendously as a motor-cyclist. This man was taking a friend out for a ride on the carrier one night, and they were speeding at fifty miles an hour. The driver was boasting about his dexterity in shaving passing traffic. And just then two bright lights appeared ahead, round a bend. Turning to the man on the carrier, the motor-cyclist said: "Now just watch me, Jim! I'm going to drive straight between those two lights!" That, of course, was the end of the story—and the audience was left to imagine what happened to the unfortunate pair who tried to pass between the headlights of an oncoming motor-car.

At this point of the programme there was another concerted number—an old-time nigger melody sung by the whole company. It was delivered with complete satisfaction. We, ourselves, were now feeling happy—for every seat had become occupied, and the people standing were dropping money liberally into the hat.

After the concerted number, it was Bob Christine's turn to give a solo. There was a big argument, however, with Handforth—who declared that this was the finest opportunity for him to deliver "The Village Blacksmith." He made out that a serious effort was now required—more comic stuff could come later. And since we couldn't very well indulge in a fierce battle of words in public, Handforth had his way. And Reggie Pitt winked at me, and then turned and winked at the audience.

Handforth stood up and gave a preliminary cough.

"The Village Blacksmith," he announced. "The Village Blacksmith," by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The audience yelled—and so did the minstrels.

"You mean, Henry Putney Longfellow, I suppose?" grinned Pitt, in a stage whisper. "You duffer, it's Wadsworth, not Wadsworth!"

Handforth turned very red—but nobody saw it, fortunately.

"Ahem! 'The Village Blacksmith,' by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow," he said firmly. "Under a spreading chestnut tree, the village smithy stands; the smith, a mighty man is he, with large and sinewy hands; and the muscles of his brawny arms are strong as iron bands! His hair is crisp, and black and long—"

"Say, Brudder Sambo!" said Reggie Pitt, interrupting the poem in a loud, hoarse whisper. "Did yo' hear dat story about de fellah down in Tennessee? Dat fellah was a real dirty dog."

"Eh, Brudder Pete?" I said. "A dirty dog?"

Handforth had paused, and he waved one hand wildly behind him.

"Quiet, you fatheads!" he hissed. "You're messing it up!"

He said this in such a loud voice that everybody in the audience heard him—and, naturally, assumed that it was part of the show. Pitt and I had discussed this beforehand, and we knew exactly what would happen. We could always rely on our Handforth to do as we wanted. We had heard this very same stunt worked in a theatre in London, and were trying it ourselves. But there it had been all prearranged, and this was only prearranged between Pitt and I.

"The Village Blacksmith!" shouted Handforth defiantly, starting all over again.

"A regular dirty dog!" said Pitt, in a reminiscent way.

"The Dirty Blacksmith!" roared Handforth. "I—I mean—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The Village Blacksmith!" hooted Handforth wildly. "Under a spreading chestnut tree, the village smithy stands; the smith, a dirty dog is he—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The audience nearly collapsed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How the dickens can I recite when you chaps keep talking about dirty dogs?" howled Handforth fiercely. "You're mixing me all up! I'll biff you if you don't stop! 'The Village Blacksmith!' he ended up, in a perfect thunder.

Nearly all the minstrels by this time were shedding tears of sheer joy.

"Under a spreading chestnut tree the village smithy stands!" roared Handforth deliberately. "The smith, a mighty man is he, with large and sinewy hands—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"With large and sinewy hands!" hooted Handforth. "And the muscles of his brawny arms are strong as iron bands! His hair is

(Continued on page 15.)

POWERFUL NEW NELSON LEE SERIAL NOW RUNNING!



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No. 25.

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May 26, 1923.



THE LEAGUE

OF THE IRON HAND



A Thrilling Detective Story of Nelson Lee's Greatest Exploits against a criminal confederation organised by the mysterious "Number One."

FOR NEW READERS.

PAUL HERMAN, millionaire and well-known figure in West End society, is the head of the League of the Iron Hand, a dangerous criminal confederation, which

NELSON LEE, the famous Gray's Inn Road detective, has set out to crush with

DERRICK O'BRIEN, the young Irish detective, and

COLIN MACKENZIE, the leading Scots detective, hailing from Edinburgh.

The League steals a marvellous new airship, and kidnaps the inventor, Donald Stuart. As the latter refuses to disclose secrets of the airship's mechanism, Herman decoys Stuart's younger brother Jack, and his chum Nipper, from St. Frank's College to act as hostages. Nipper escapes, is followed, and evades capture by jumping into a river. After this incident Herman disappears to the Continent, but, as nothing more is heard of Nipper, the former returns to his old haunts.

(Now read on.)

THE RETURN OF NUMBER ONE.

SO the San Miguel steamed into Plymouth Harbour, and on Friday night, nine days after the kidnapping of Nipper and Jack Stuart, Paul Herman walked into his house in Curzon Street as calmly and unconcernedly as if he had only been absent half an hour.

Early next morning, immediately after breakfast, in fact, he drove in his electric brougham to the Centurion Club, in Piccadilly.

"Can you tell me where I shall find Mr. Fairfax?" he asked of a waiter whom he met in the entrance-hall.

"He's just gone out, sorr," said the waiter, with more than a suspicion of a brogue in his voice.

A look of annoyance crossed Paul Herman's clean-shaven face.

"Do you know where he has gone?" he asked.

"I do not, sorr," said the waiter. "But he said if anybody called to see him I was to say he would be back in a few minutes."

"You are a new waiter here, aren't you?"

"I am, sorr."

"Well, my name is Herman. I have a suite of rooms upstairs—Number 10. When

Mr. Fairfax returns, kindly tell him I shall be glad if he will come up to my private room."

In about ten minutes' time Willoughby Fairfax arrived at the club, and on getting the waiter's message, went upstairs to Herman.

After preliminary greetings, Herman at once entered on an explanation of his long absence from town. He told of the kidnapping of the two boys from St. Frank's, and of how, just after the pursuit of Nipper, Wilkinson had returned from London in the car.

"He brought a letter with him," proceeded Herman. "The letter stated that my presence was urgently required at Walworth Road in connection with a case which Fifty-seven had in hand; so I jumped into the car then and there, and was back in town by half-past three.

"After I had settled the matter for which I had been summoned to Walworth Road, I went over to Hartop Manor, intending only to spend the night there. In the middle of the night, however, I was seized with an attack of gout, which kept me in bed until yesterday afternoon. I returned to London this morning, and came on here to tell you all that had happened."

"Then you haven't been to Rycroft since the night when Nipper was shot?"

"No."

"Stuart and his brother are still there, I suppose?"

"Of course."

"And the airship has not been repaired yet?"

"No; but it will be before very long. After I leave here I'm going back to Curzon Street to disguise myself, and then I'm going to Rycroft. When I arrive I shall show young Stuart to his brother, and I shall tell the latter that unless he consents to repair the airship at once I'll cut the lad to pieces before his very eyes."

"May I come with you?" asked Fairfax. "I'm tired of being cooped up here."

"But are you sure that nobody is shadowing you?" asked Herman.

"Quite sure," said Fairfax. "For the last week I've spent several hours each day at one of the upper windows of the club, keeping watch on the road outside. And I'm absolutely certain that nobody is watching the club—which means, of course, that nobody is watching me. Let me come with you."

"All right," said Herman. "You can come with me to Curzon Street now, and when I've disguised myself we'll go to Rycroft together. Come along!"

As the two men rose to their feet, a man who had been kneeling outside the door, with his ear to the keyhole, also rose and softly glided away.

It was the waiter whom Herman had met in the entrance-hall. He was known at the club as Michael Ryan, but truth compels us to add that this was not his real name.

For this simple-looking waiter, as a matter of fact, was Derriek O'Brien, the Irish detective!

MR. CROWELL VISITS NELSON LEE.

IN order to explain how O'Brien became a waiter at the Centurion Club, it is necessary to go back to the day when Donald Stuart was acquitted of the charge of stealing the Marquis of Hummersea's jewels.

As the reader may remember, Mac and Donald Stuart had gone on to Wimbledon, whilst O'Brien had returned to Nelson Lee's rooms in Gray's Inn Road.

This was on Monday evening, and Nelson Lee was then engaged in keeping watch on the Centurion Club. He returned to his rooms about midnight, and after O'Brien had told him the result of the trial the two detectives retired to rest, having first arranged that O'Brien should take his turn at watching the Centurion next day.

In pursuance of this arrangement, O'Brien rose early on Tuesday morning, and was just about to set out for the club, when old Cornforth—Donald's man-of-all-work—arrived with the startling news that Mac had been fatally shot and that Donald had been abducted.

Needless to say, O'Brien lost no time in rousing Nelson Lee, and the two detectives returned with old Cornforth to Wimbledon, where they spent the rest of the day in trying to discover some clue to the identity of the men who had murdered Mac and kidnapped Donald.

On Tuesday night they returned to Gray's Inn Road, no wiser than when they had left. On Wednesday morning Nelson Lee went down to Wimbledon again, to make arrangements for Mac's funeral, whilst O'Brien repaired to the Centurion Club to keep watch on Fairfax. And at six o'clock in the evening, whilst the two detectives were both away from Gray's Inn Road, a telegram arrived from Mr. Crowell, addressed to Nelson Lee, and informing him that Nipper and Jack Stuart had been kidnapped and carried off by a couple of unknown men in a motor-car.

It was midnight when Nelson Lee returned from Wimbledon, and his feelings when he read Mr. Crowell's telegram may be better imagined than described. In fact, when O'Brien returned from the Centurion, at one o'clock, he found his colleague pacing the room like one demented.

"It is the league's doing, without a doubt," said Lee, when O'Brien had read the wire. "They know how dearly I love the boy, and they have kidnapped him in order to compel me to leave them alone by threatening to kill him."

"Sure, that's just what I thought myself!" said O'Brien. "But why do you suppose they've kidnapped young Stuart?"

"I don't know," said Nelson Lee, shaking his head. "The whole affair is a puzzle to me."

"Will you go down to St. Frank's?"

"Of course! I can't go to-night, for there isn't a train; but I shall go by the first train in the morning."

"Would you like me to come with you?"

"No, thank you? You can do no good, and your time will be better employed in shadowing Fairfax."

At five o'clock on Thursday morning, accordingly, Nelson Lee departed for Bell-ton, whilst O'Brien once more made his way to the Centurion to resume his watch on Fairfax.

Three hours after Lee's departure, Paul Herman's letter was delivered by the post-man at Gray's Inn Road. In accordance with her instructions, Mrs. Jones readdressed the letter to Bellton, and thus it came about that Nelson Lee did not receive Paul Her-man's ultimatum until Friday morning.

He was seated at breakfast with Mr. Crowell when the letters arrived. Alarmed by the groan of despair which burst from the detective's lips when he had read the letter, Mr. Crowell sprang to his feet.

"You have received bad news?" he said quickly.

"Bad news—yes—but only what I expected!" answered Lee in hollow tones. "I told you I was sure the two lads had been kidnapped by the League of the Iron Hand, didn't I? Well, here is a letter from Number One which proves that I was right. Listen! 'Nipper is our prisoner. So long as you leave us alone no harm shall come to him; but if you take any further steps against the League of the Iron Hand I will inflict such torture on the boy as you have never dreamed of. I enclose a letter from you to him, which I found in one of his pockets, and which will convince you that I am not bluffing, and that the boy is really in my power.—NUMBER ONE.'"

For a moment or two Mr. Crowell regarded the detective in sympathetic silence.

"What will you do?" he asked at length.

"I can do nothing but obey!" said Lee bitterly. "They hold the trump card, and they know it!"

"Then you will leave the League alone for the future?"

Lee nodded sadly.

"There is nothing else for it," he said. "To defy these miscreants just now would be tantamount to signing Nipper's death warrant!"

"So you will return to London, I suppose?"

"Yes, it is useless my remaining here. I shall go to London by the next train."

A few hours later Nelson Lee was back at Gray's Inn Road.

Late in the evening O'Brien came in; whereupon Lee showed him Herman's ultimatum and announced his intention of re-tiring from the campaign—for the present, at any rate.

"You'll think me an awful coward, I expect," concluded Lee, "but I simply daren't

do anything that would endanger Nipper's life."

"I quite understand that, old man," re-turned the warm-hearted Irishman, laying a sympathetic hand on the other's shoulder. "'Tis myself that would do the same if I were in your place. But I needn't retire from the fight, need I?"

"Of course not," said Nelson Lee. "There's no earthly reason why you should."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, because I've taken a rather important step to-day."

"What's that?"

"Well," explained O'Brien, "I've been watching the outside of the Centurion Club for weeks now, and haven't discovered the smallest scrap of evidence against Fairfax. So it struck me that I might have better luck if I did my watching inside the club."

"The same thought had occurred to me," remarked Lee. "But how can it be managed?"

"It can be managed all right," replied O'Brien. "You see, I happened to hear that there was a vacancy for a waiter at the Cen-turion. I applied for the job this afternoon in the name of Michael Ryan, and got it. I'm to start my duties on Monday morning. How's that, old man?"

"Splendid!" was Nelson Lee's enthusiastic comment.

So O'Brien had duly commenced his work as waiter at the club on the following Mon-day morning, and for five days had kept a strict watch on Willoughby Fairfax without discovering anything of importance.

The Irishman—who still continued to live with Nelson Lee—left Gray's Inn Road at eight o'clock every morning, and returned every night at about half-past nine.

It was on the Saturday night that O'Brien, returning two hours earlier than usual, burst in on Nelson Lee somewhat excitedly.

"Hallo!" greeted Lee. "What's up? Found out something at last?"

"I have!" replied O'Brien. "Unless I'm greatly mistaken, I've made a discovery to-day that—"

Ere he could say more a footstep was heard outside the door, and Nelson Lee sprang to his feet.

"That's Nipper!" he gasped. "I know his step!"

"Right you are, guv'nor!" said a voice out-side the door. "It's me, sure enough!"

And before the two detectives had re-covered from their stupefaction the door swung open, and Nipper walked in!

NIPPER'S ASTONISHING STORY.

THE next instant Nelson Lee was doing his best to wring one of the young-ster's arms out of its socket, whilst O'Brien was doing his best to dislo-cate the other.

"Where's Jack?" was Nelson Lee's first question.

"At the same place as Donald," said Nipper.

"And where is Donald?"

"At the same place as the airship," answered Nipper, with a provoking grin.

"And where is that?" asked Nelson Lee.

"At Rycroft Hall," said Nipper.

"Rycroft Hall!"

"Rycroft Hall!"

The two detectives uttered the words at the same moment, and exchanged significant glances.

"Rycroft Hall?" said Nelson Lee. "Wilmington, Fairfax's country house, near Chelmsford?"

"Yes," said Nipper.

"That is where you and Jack were taken when you were kidnapped?"

"Yes."

"And Donald Stuart is imprisoned there?"

"Yes; and the stolen airship is there, too, in a wooden shed in the grounds."

His face aglow with triumph and excitement, Nelson Lee pushed Nipper into a chair, seated himself, and signed to O'Brien to follow his example.

"Now begin at the beginning," he said to Nipper, "and tell us in the fewest possible words everything that has happened since you and Jack were kidnapped."

There is no need to repeat Nipper's story, with which the reader is already familiar. Suffice to say that he began by describing how he and Jack had been carried off by two men, whom they afterwards discovered were Number One and the escaped convict, Cundle; how they had been taken to a big house in the country; how Number One had handed them over to a man named Barker; and how Barker had conducted them to a barely furnished room upstairs.

"By-and-by, one of the fellows who had kidnapped us, came up to see us," he continued. "He admitted at once that he was Number One, the head of the League of the Iron Hand. He also admitted that it was he and his pals who had stolen the airship, and who afterwards kidnapped Donald Stuart. He said that something had gone wrong with the machinery of the airship, and, as nobody in the league could put it right, they had kidnapped Donald in order to make him repair the damage."

"Well, Number One told us that Donald had absolutely refused to mend the airship, so they had kidnapped Jack in order to make Donald do as they wished by threatening to torture Jack."

"The inhuman fiends. But I might have guessed. Did he tell you why he kidnapped you?"

"Yes. Same idea—to make you leave them alone by threatening to torture me."

Nipper then described how he and Jack had escaped from the room by climbing up the chimney; and how, whilst they were on the roof, a flash of lightning had illumined the surrounding country, and had shown them Rycroft Church.

"And then, of course, I knew in a minute where we were," he said. "Dick and I, you will remember, were at Rycroft last holidays. We went over the church, in company with

the vicar, and he showed us Rycroft Hall and told us it belonged to Mr. Fairfax. As soon as I recognised the church, therefore, I knew we were at Rycroft Hall, and that Number One, in all probability, was Mr. Fairfax."

O'Brien shook his head.

"You're wrong about Number One being Fairfax," he said. "On the day that you and Jack were kidnapped, I was watching the Centurion. Fairfax was there, and I know of my own knowledge that he never left the club all day. If, therefore, it was Number One who kidnapped you and took you to Rycroft, Number One can't be Fairfax."

"Then who is he?"

"I only wish we knew!" said Nelson Lee. "But go on with your story."

Nipper then recounted how Number One had recaptured Jack; how he, himself, had escaped; how he had been pursued; how he had given his pursuers the slip by jumping into the river; how he had been stunned by a drifting tree; how he had recovered consciousness, to find that he had lost his memory; how he had fallen in with a travelling hawk named Higgins; how for nine days he had tramped the country acting as the hawk's assistant; and how his memory had returned as suddenly as it had departed, and he had at once journeyed to London.

"So now you know everything," he said in conclusion. "What has happened at Rycroft Hall since I escaped, ten days ago, I cannot tell you. All I can tell you is that ten days ago Number One was at Rycroft Hall, and so were Donald Stuart, Jack, Cundle, and the airship. Since then, of course, Donald may have repaired the airship."

"Possibly," said Nelson Lee. "However, we shall soon know."

"You are going to Rycroft Hall?"

"Of course. I shall first take you to Scotland Yard, in order that you may repeat your story to the Chief Commissioner. Then, if the latter approves of my plan, we will go to Chelmsford and interview the Chief Constable. With as many police as he can muster, we will then raid Rycroft Hall and arrest every man in the place, except Donald and Jack, of course."

"And where do I come in?" asked O'Brien.

"Oh, you'd better come with us to Scotland Yard," said Nelson Lee. "If, when Nipper has told his story, the Chief agrees that there is sufficient evidence against Fairfax to warrant his arrest, you can go with a constable to the Centurion—"

"But Fairfax isn't at the Centurion now," said O'Brien, interrupting him. "He left this morning."

"The dickens he did!" said Nelson Lee. "Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"Because I hadn't time," said O'Brien. "Don't you remember that when I came in I told you I had made a rather important discovery at the club to-day; and I was just going to tell you what it was when Nipper arrived and interrupted me?"

"Yes; I remember now," said Nelson Lee.

OUR DETECTIVE STORY SECTION

"In the excitement of Nipper's return, I'd forgotten. What was the discovery you made?"

"About half-past nine this morning," said O'Brien, "the Curzon Street millionaire arrived at the club."

"Paul Herman?"

"Yes. He's a member of the Centurion, you know."

"I know. When I was taking my turn at watching the club, I saw him arrive and depart on several occasions."

"Well, I happened to be in the entrance-hall when he arrived," said O'Brien, "and he asked me if I could tell him where Mr. Fairfax was. I replied, which was perfectly

man were evidently friends. When Fairfax returned, however, the look of relief which crossed his face when I delivered Herman's message excited my curiosity. As soon as I could manage it, therefore, I followed him upstairs and listened outside the door of Herman's room, in the hope of hearing what they were talking about.

"I was not very successful, for their voices seldom rose above a whisper. Nevertheless, I distinctly heard Herman mention Donald Stuart's name, and also Cundle's. Twice I caught the word 'airship,' and once I heard Herman say he was going to Rycroft Hall."

"Is that all?" asked Nelson Lee as O'Brien paused.



Without a word, the three men strode up to Donald and threw him down on the bed. Before he had recovered from his astonishment, Barker snapped the handcuffs on his wrists. Then Armstrong and Wilkinson seized his legs and lashed them together with the rope.

—true, that Fairfax had just gone out, but had told me, if anybody called to see him, I was to tell them he would be back in a few minutes.

"You are a new waiter here, aren't you?" said Herman.

"I am, sorr!" said I.

"Well," said he, "my name is Herman. I have a private suite upstairs—Number Ten. When Mr. Fairfax returns, will you kindly tell him I would like to see him in my room?"

"I didn't attach much importance to this," continued O'Brien, "though, of course, I made a mental note that Fairfax and Her-

"Yes," said O'Brien. "It isn't much, I admit, but it seems to me to be very suggestive. Don't you think so?"

"I do, indeed!" said Nelson Lee. "When Fairfax, who is undoubtedly a member of the league, talks to Herman about the airship, which was stolen by the league—and about Cundle, who was rescued from Dartmoor by the league, and about Donald Stuart, who was kidnapped by the league—well, there is only one deduction to be made—Paul Herman, incredible as it sounds, must be a member of the league!"

"And not an ordinary member, either," said O'Brien, in a meaning voice. "A man

of his outstanding ability and force of character would never be content to play second fiddle to anybody else."

Nelson Lee started, and uttered a low, long-drawn whistle.

"You think——" he began.

O'Brien nodded.

"I do!" he said.

"That Paul Herman is Number One!"

Again O'Brien nodded.

"By Jove!" said Nelson Lee; and again, "By Jove! It takes one's breath away! Paul Herman, the cultured millionaire, the friend of peers and statesmen—Paul Herman, the leader of an organised gang of thieves and murderers! If you're right, old man—and I'm inclined to think you are—we're in for the biggest sensation of modern times.

"However," he continued, "we can discuss that theory later. For the present our first duty must be to rescue Donald and Jack, and recover the stolen airship. For that purpose we must go to Rycroft. By the way, you said that Fairfax left the Centurion this morning. Do you know where he went?"

"No," said O'Brien. "I only know that he left the club in company with Herman, and the two of them drove off in Herman's electric brougham. If Herman went to Rycroft Hall it's more than likely that Fairfax went with him."

"Then it's quite possible that Herman and Fairfax are both at Rycroft Hall now?"

"Quite possible. Probable, in fact."

"Then the sooner we reach the Hall the better," said Nelson Lee.

He turned to Nipper.

"Cut upstairs to your room, and put on some decent togs," he said. "While you're changing I'll telephone for a taxi."

A quarter of an hour later the two detectives and Nipper were on their way to Scotland Yard.

"I've been considering the matter," said Nelson Lee as they drove up Holborn, "and I think we'd better not say anything to the police about Paul Herman. If he's at Rycroft when we arrive, he'll be arrested along with the rest, and the proof of his connection with the league will be complete. If he isn't there, we'll shadow him for a day or two and keep watch on his house, and in the meantime we'll keep our suspicions to ourselves."

Accordingly, they said nothing to the Chief Commissioner about their suspicions regarding Herman. Nipper merely repeated the story he had already told Nelson Lee and O'Brien; and after Nelson Lee had outlined his plan for raiding Rycroft Hall, and after the Chief had approved of the plan, the two detectives, Nipper, and the Chief embarked in the last-named's car and motored to Chelmsford.

It was eleven o'clock when they reached the county town, where half an hour was spent in interviewing the Chief Constable and explaining the situation. The Chief Con-

stable at once expressed his willingness to fall in with Nelson Lee's plans, and shortly before midnight a party of police, over twenty in number, headed by the Chief Constable and the Chief Commissioner, and accompanied by Nelson Lee, O'Brien, and Nipper, set out for Rycroft Hall.

FOR HIS BROTHER'S SAKE.

WHEN Herman and Fairfax left the Centurion together on Saturday morning they drove to Herman's house in Curzon Street, and after Herman had disguised himself they walked to Liverpool Street Station, took train to Rycroft, and arrived at the Hall a minute or two before noon.

Barker, the butler, opened the door for them; and, in reply to Herman's question, assured them that Donald and Jack were in the best of health.

"We have followed your instructions to the letter, sir," he said. "You told us to keep them apart and to treat them well, and we have done so."

"Mr. Stuart, of course, has not been told that his young brother is here?"

"No, sir. But the youngster knows that Mr. Stuart is here."

"Yes; I told him myself," said Herman. "The airship, I suppose, is still in the same state as when I was here ten days ago?"

"Just the same, sir."

"Has Mr. Stuart shown any signs of yielding? I mean, has he expressed any willingness to repair the vessel?"

"No, sir. On the contrary, whenever the subject is mentioned to him, he says that nothing in the world will ever induce him to repair it."

A grim smile flitted across Paul Herman's face.

"He'll sing a different tune by-and-by!" he said. "Now send Armstrong and Wilkinson to me. I wish to give them—and you—certain instructions."

Whilst Herman was giving the three men their instructions, Donald was sitting on the edge of his bed, in the attic already described. He was reading, or pretending to read, a book; but his thoughts were far away. He was thinking of Vera Langford, of the theft of his airship, of the wreck which had been made of all his hopes and plans—of anything, in fact, except the contents of the books on which his eyes were fixed. Spencer and Youle were seated at the table, playing cards.

Presently somebody knocked at the door, which was locked on the inside. Spencer opened the door, and Barker, Armstrong, and Wilkinson walked in. Barker had a pair of handcuffs in his hand, and Armstrong a coil of rope.

Without a word the three men strode up to Donald and threw him down on the bed. Before he had recovered from his astonishment Barker snapped the handcuffs over his wrists; then Armstrong and Wilkinson seized

his legs and lashed them together with the rope.

"Why have you done this?" gasped Donald, as they dragged him to his feet, and Armstrong and Wilkinson took their stand on each side of him.

"You'll know in a minute why we've done it," said Barker.

He strode to the door and flung it wide open.

"We're ready sir," he called out.

Footsteps were heard in the corridor outside, and a moment later Herman, Fairfax, and Jack Stuart entered the room.

The boy's hands were tied behind his back, and a rope, with a running noose at the end, encircled his neck, hung down his back, and trailed on the ground behind him.

At the sight of Jack, a great cry of anguish and despair burst from Donald's lips.

"Jack—you here!" he cried, in an agonised voice. "What—why—how long have you been here?"

"I've been here ten days," said Jack, making a brave effort to keep back his tears. "This scoundrel"—he glanced at Herman—"kidnapped me a week ago last Wednesday, and brought me here in a motor-car."

"Why?" demanded Donald, glaring at Herman. "What harm has the boy ever done to you that you should seek to injure him?"

"We don't seek to injure him," said Herman, in his silkkest tones. "At least, if we are compelled to injure him, it will be entirely your fault."

"What do you mean?"

"The last time I was here," said Herman. "I asked you to repair the damage which Nelson Lee's bullet inflicted on the machinery of the airship. You refused. We tortured you, but still you refused. Then, as you may remember, I told you that when next I came you would grovel at my feet and beg me to let you repair the vessel as quickly as possible."

"Well?" said Donald, as Herman paused.

"I am now about to prove that I was a true prophet," said Herman coolly. "You are now going to accept my terms."

"Never!" said Donald fiercely.

"As you may also remember," continued Herman, ignoring the interruption, "my terms were these: If you consent to repair the airship, and do so, you will be blindfolded, taken away from here at dead of night in a motor-car, and set at liberty in the grounds of your house at Wimbledon."

"I offered you these terms eleven days ago," he concluded. "Since then, as you see, we have captured your brother, too. I now include him in my terms, and I pledge my word that, as soon as you have repaired the airship, both you and your brother will be set at liberty. What is your answer?"

"The same as before!" said Donald. "You may keep both Jack and me here for the rest of our lives, if you wish; but never will I consent to repair the airship, and so assist you and your confederates to resume your dastardly work."

Herman shrugged his shoulders and turned to Barker.

"Over with the rope?" he said.

Barker seized the end of the rope that was hanging down Jack's back, climbed on the table, and hitched the end of the rope over one of the beams in the ceiling. Then he stepped down from the table and stood with the end of the rope in his hand, awaiting further orders.

Donald bit his lip until the blood ran. From head to foot he shook with mental anguish. If it had been only his own life that had been at stake, he would cheerfully have suffered all the torment of Hades rather than have yielded to these inhuman fiends. But how could he condemn his young brother—his only relative—the being he loved best in all the world, to a horrible death!

"I can't do it!" he groaned. "Heaven help me, I can't do it!"

"You accept my terms, then?" said Herman.

"Don't!" cried Jack. "Don't give in to the scoundrels—don't! Never mind me; it will be all over in a few minutes. Don't give in to them!"

"I am waiting for your answer," said Herman. "Will you repair the airship?"

Donald clenched and unclenched his manacled hands, but made no reply. Herman glanced at Barker.

"Up with him!" he said.

Barker hauled away at the rope, and the next instant Jack was swinging in mid-air, his legs convulsively jerking, his eyes protruding from his head, and his face, as the noose grew tighter, growing more and more livid every second.

Whilst a man might count six, Donald stared at the gruesome spectacle with horror-dilated eyes. Then, with an inarticulate cry, he broke away from his guard, stumbled forward, and fell prone at Herman's feet.

"I surrender!" he moaned. "You have conquered. Take him down—quickly! I will repair the airship as soon as you like."

"I knew you would," said Herman calmly.

He signed to Barker, who instantly slackened the rope and lowered Jack to the ground. Five minutes later Jack was back in the room which had been his prison cell for the past ten days, and Donald, under escort, was on his way to the shed in which the airship was housed.

"This is more serious than I expected," said Donald, when he had examined the damaged machinery. "It will take ten or twelve hours to repair, and I shall want two men to help me."

"Take your choice," said Herman, waving his hand towards the half-dozen men, including Cundle, who had accompanied them.

After questioning the man as to their knowledge of mechanics, Donald selected Cundle and Spencer. Then, having taken off his

(Continued on page xii.)



The Case of the District Messenger Boy!

The Adventures of GORDON FOX, DETECTIVE.

CHAPTER I.

THE MISSING FRENCHMAN—THE CHAMBERMAID'S DISCOVERY—GORDON FOX HAS A THEORY.

M GASTON CHOCEMARD, the modern Vidocq of the French detective force, had, on the previous evening, left his card at Gordon Fox's rooms. He had also written a few lines, in which he stated that he had crossed the Channel in order to recover a number of jewels that had been stolen from the Marquis de Noyes; that he had succeeded in his object; and that he meant to return home on the following night.

"Call at Lambert's Hotel any time after five, and we'll have a chat," the letter concluded. "Inquire for me in the name of Ballantine. I have taken precautions, for reasons which you know, to keep my visit to London a secret. If there is any man whom I fear, it is the Rat."

The Frenchman was to Paris what the Britisher was to London. The two had been acquainted for some years, and had often worked together, so the prospect of meeting his old friend—whom he had not seen for many months—was pleasing to Gordon Fox.

Late the next afternoon—it was a bleak, autumn day—he took a cab to Lambert's Hotel, in Fleet Street, and sought the manager's office.

"Can you tell me where to find Mr. Ballantine?" he asked.

The man looked at him queerly.

"Mr. Ballantine is no longer here," he replied. "He went off in a hurry, between eleven and twelve o'clock."

"And he left no message or letter for me—for a Mr. Fox?"

"Nothing. He was in a forgetful mood, I imagine, for at two o'clock he wired from Dover saying he had left a small parcel hidden in the fireplace in his room, and asking that it should be sent to him, in care of a District Messenger-boy, by one of the evening trains. He was particular that nobody should know anything about it. But will you tell me if you are Mr. Gordon Fox, the detective?"

"Yes, I am."

"Then I have something to show you, sir," declared the manager. "I'd have sent for the police if you hadn't come in." He care-

fully placed on the counter a bowl of water, in which was immersed a small wooden box, about six inches long. "What do you make of this?" he added. "The chambermaid found it, just as it is, in Mr. Ballantine's room after he had gone."

"It has been soaking for hours, then?"

"Yes, sir."

The detective took the box from the water, opened it with a knife, and examined the contents.

"It is an infernal machine," he said, "and a very clever and dangerous one. It does not go by clockwork, but it can be set to any time by means of a fuse, through which an acid eats its way until it reaches the explosive matter."

"Ah, I thought it was something of that sort!"

The truth suddenly dawned on Gordon Fox. He was convinced that the infernal machine had been made by Boni Larouge, who was noted for his skill in that line. The man Larouge, better known as the Rat, had belonged to a gang of Parisian anarchists who were trapped a year ago by Gaston Cochemard, and sent to New Caledonia. The Rat had managed to escape to London, and had sworn, sooner or later, to have the French detective's life. What had happened, therefore, seemed reasonably clear. Last night Larouge must have hid the machine in the room occupied by Cochemard, who had fortunately discovered it and put it in water; and, in the morning, fearful of giving his enemy another chance, he had hurried away in alarm to Dover.

"It looks as if this Mr. Ballantine was an anarchist," said the manager. "If you want to catch him—"

"My dear sir," interrupted Gordon Fox, "my friend Ballantine is no more of an anarchist than I am; but he has nearly fallen a victim to one. I am interested in this affair, and I want to ask you a few questions. Has a lean, middle-aged man, with sharp features, been stopping at this hotel lately, or paying visits here?"

"That description isn't enough."

"He would have a blue scar, burnt by acid, over his left temple."

"Ah, now I've spotted him! Such a person, with a black beard, has been taking several meals a day in our grill-room for

the past week. I believe his name is Barwell. I noticed the scar on one occasion when he was running his fingers through his hair."

"That's the man," declared the detective. "By-the-bye, I don't suppose he was in earshot when that telegram from Mr. Ballantine was read?"

"As it happens, sir, he was," replied the manager. "I had been out for a time, and when I returned my clerk, Russell, had brought the parcel down and put it on my desk. He read the telegram to me, and when he had finished, I looked up and saw Mr. Barwell standing at the counter. He asked for change for a sovereign."

"Was he perfectly cool?"

"He looked rather excited, come to think of it."

"He heard every word of the message?"

"Not a doubt of it, sir."

"And he saw the parcel?"

"He could hardly have helped seeing it," said the manager.

"What became of him?"

"He walked out to the street at once."

"At what time did this incident occur?"

"About half-past three."

One of Gordon Fox's subtle inspirations flashed to his mind.

"Was the parcel similar in shape to this infernal machine?" he asked.

"It was about the same size and shape," was the reply, "and it was wrapped in brown paper tied with heavy cord."

"Thank you. And now I want to know where the messenger-boy was to deliver the parcel at Dover."

"I can't tell you that, Mr. Fox. I've forgotten the place, and my clerk stuck the telegram into his pocket."

"Where is he?"

"You can't see Russell until late to-night, for he is off for the rest of the day. When he left he went over to the post-office with the parcel to arrange that one of the boys should take it down to Dover by the six o'clock train. If you come back here at twelve o'clock——"

"There is no time for that," interrupted the detective, as he glanced at his watch. "It is now half-past six, and I must catch the seven o'clock train."

A moment later Gordon Fox was out in Fleet Street. He had evolved a most startling theory, and he had difficulties to contend with. Boni Larouge was doubtless aware of the purpose that had brought Cochemard to London. He had heard the telegram read, he had seen the parcel that he knew to contain the jewels, and he had probably observed that it was similar in shape to his infernal machine. No doubt he had more of the deadly instruments at his unknown lodging in Soho. What, then, would this cunning and desperate man do? Was it not likely that he would get another machine, set it a few hours ahead, and make it up to resemble the parcel of jewels; that he would travel by the same train with the

District Messenger-boy, drug him if he could, open his wallet with a skeleton key, and exchange the parcels? The result would be that Gaston Cochemard would be blown to pieces, while the Rat would have both his revenge and the jewels.

"I may be wrong," the detective told himself, "but I won't take any chances. I'll have to trust to my wits to find Cochemard. They won't give me his address at the post-office yonder, at least not without a lot of time and trouble."

He walked rapidly to Charing Cross, and caught the seven o'clock train.

CHAPTER II.

OFF TO DOVER—RAGGLES TELLS HIS STORY—THE FLIGHT OF THE RAT.

THE journey was a long and anxious one to Gordon Fox, and during the ride he balanced the perplexing points of his theory. All was doubtful except the fact that the Channel boat by which Gaston Cochemard meant to cross would not leave until nearly midnight. On the one hand, Larouge and the lad might not have had a compartment to themselves; if otherwise, and the boy had been drugged, he would possibly suspect what had happened when he recovered, and taken steps to frustrate the Rat; and the machine had probably been set for a couple of hours ahead. On the other hand, the lad might have been alone with Larouge; he might have fallen asleep, and proceeded an easy and unconscious victim; and the infernal machine had possibly been arranged to explode shortly after Cochemard received it.

"I am one hour behind," the detective reflected, "and that may make all the difference between life and death."

There might be nothing in his theory, but he did not believe that. He left the train when it stopped at the Dover town station, and almost the first person he saw was a District Messenger-boy, whom he accosted at once.

"Are you the lad who was sent down with a parcel for a Mr. Ballantine?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you meet him?"

"At the Castle Hotel."

"What is your name?"

"Raggles, sir."

"Well, Raggles, I am a detective, and I am here to protect Mr. Ballantine from an enemy. You had better come back to the hotel with me; you can return to London later." The two hurried away from the station, and Gordon Fox continued: "I want to know my boy, if an attempt was made to rob you in the train."

"There was, sir," was the startling reply, "but it didn't work. I was too sharp for that."

"Tell me about it—quick!"

"It was like this, sir," replied Raggles. "I got a compartment to myself at Charing Cross, but a man with a black beard jumped into it just as the train started. He began to read a paper, and I didn't pay any attention to him. I had been on duty for many hours so it wasn't long till I fell asleep. I had a queer dream, as if a handkerchief was being pressed to my face, and the next thing I knew I was half awake, with a splitting headache. Somebody was touching me, and I felt sure that I had been drugged. I didn't move or open my eyes, but I peeped through the corner of one, and saw the black-bearded man beside me. He had opened my wallet, and had my parcel in his hand. He took another parcel from his pocket, exactly like mine, and just then, as the train passed slowly through a lighted station, he put the two parcels down on the seat, a little apart, and turned his back to look out of the window. As quick as a wink I reached out, and changed the position of the parcels, and the next minute, when the station was behind, the man put my parcel back into the wallet, locked it with a key, and slipped his own parcel into his pocket again. After that I pretended to be asleep. I was going to have the man arrested, but just before the train reached Dover he suddenly opened the door, and jumped out. I knew it would be no use to look for him, so I went straight to the hotel, and delivered the parcel to Mr. Ballantine."

"You told him what had happened?"

"No, sir; I meant to wait and report to the superintendent."

"You are a clever boy," said the detective, "but you are absolutely certain that you knew which was which when you changed the parcels?"

"I saw how the man put them down," replied Raggles, "and I could almost swear that it was mine he put into the wallet. Come to think of it, though, I might have made a mistake."

"In which case you have given the wrong parcel to Mr. Ballantine!" exclaimed Gordon Fox, with a look of dismay.

"I'm sure I didn't, sir!"

"I hope not. But come, there is not an instant to lose."

The two hastened on, and when they were within a few yards of the Castle Hotel they came face to face with M. Gaston Cochemard himself.

"My dear Fox," he cried, "what brings you down here?"

"Can't explain now," the detective said eagerly. "That parcel you sent for—where is it?"

"In my pocket."

"Then get rid of it at once. I am afraid it is an infernal machine! Take it to the hotel, and plunge it into water. Be quick; don't wait!"

Gaston Cochemard was off like a shot, his coat-tails flying behind him.

"If he has the jewels, a soaking won't

hurt them," said Gordon Fox. "But I don't believe he has. The Rat would be too shrewd to—"

"Look, sir," interrupted Raggles. "Here comes my man!"

A lean, black-bearded man was approaching the two. It was Boni Larouge. He paused, recognised the detective and the messenger-boy, then turned and took to his heels.

"Stop him! Stop him!" shouted Gordon Fox, as he and the lad gave chase.

A hue-and-cry was raised, but already the Rat had leapt into a small motor-car that was standing unattended near the hotel. There was a spluttering, thumping noise, a whirr of wheels, and the fugitive anarchist was off at full speed.

"Lost him!" exclaimed Raggles.

Across the street another and larger motor-car had just stopped, and a gentleman had alighted from it. The detective immediately observed this, and dashed to the spot.

"Will you lend me your car, sir?" he asked hurriedly. "I am Gordon Fox, the detective. You saw that man steal the other motor? He is a criminal, and I want to arrest him."

"Take the car, by all means," replied the gentleman. "Bring it back here. I would go with you, but I have an important engagement."

Raggles and the detective sprang to the seat, and the latter gripped the wheel, and the chase began.

CHAPTER III.

THE MOTOR CHASE—THE FATE OF LAROUGE—GASTON COCHEMARD'S GRATITUDE.

"**T**HINK we'll catch him, sir?" asked Raggles.

"I can hardly doubt it," replied Gordon Fox. "This is a twelve-horse-power car, while the other can't be more than eight or ten. But if the man don't turn off into some by-way!"

The fugitive had but a brief start, Gordon Fox was an adept at handling a motor, and he drove it rapidly through the quiet streets of Dover and into the open country. A little later—it was a moonlight night—a glimpse of the other car was had, some distance ahead.

"I thought so," said the detective. "He is on the London Road, and he will stick to it. He don't know yet that we are after him."

From that time on the quarry was kept in sight. Gordon Fox put on full speed, and the big motor whizzed along at the rate of a mile a minute. Slowly and surely the pursuers gained. Larouge was now aware of his danger, and was trying his hardest to escape, but it was evident that he was handling his car with little skill. The miles

fell behind, and gradually the intervening space lessened, until the fugitive was no more than sixty yards ahead. Then the detective slackened speed, running at an even pace.

"Why do you do that?" asked Raggles. "Make a spurt, and you'll soon overtake him."

"I know that," replied Gordon Fox; "but I want to keep him in sight, follow wherever he goes. It would be too risky to run him down. What has he got in his pocket—the jewels or the infernal machine?"

"The jewels, sir."

"Probably so, for he would most likely

For a short time, separated by more than a hundred yards, the two motors thundered on. Then the one in front slowed up, and swerved towards the hedge.

"He is going to jump out!" cried Raggles, "and cut across the fields."

The words had hardly left his lips when there was a tremendous explosion, a lurid glare. The echoes died into silence, the smoke rolled away, and all that could be seen ahead were a few dark patches. A moment later the pursuers were on the spot. They pulled up and sprang to the ground, where a ghastly scene met their eyes. The frightfully mangled body of Boni Larouge, rent limb from limb, lay in



"While the black-bearded man turned his back to look out of the window, as quick as a wink I reached out and changed the position of the parcels."

have opened the parcel when he jumped off the train. But we can't be sure of anything, and I am not going to imperil your life, my boy. I have no fear for myself, however, and if I put you down—"

"I'll stick with you, sir," vowed Raggles. "Fire ahead! I'm not afraid."

Just then Larouge turned round, and with a cry of rage, fired a pistol, the bullet humming close to the pursuers.

"This won't do!" exclaimed the detective. "We'll have to drop back a little, out of range."

the road amid the minute and splintered fragments of the stolen motor-car. A hole had been torn in the earth, and a section of the hedge had been levelled.

"Isn't it awful, sir?" gasped Raggles.

"But for you, my boy," Gordon Fox replied solemnly, "my friend, Cochemard, would have perished in this dreadful manner and at the same instant. You made no mistake. It was the right parcel that was put back into your wallet, and it was the wrong one that Larouge took with him, which accounts for his terrible death. He

deserved his fate, and the world is well rid of him. Come, we'll go back and inform the police."

They reached Dover between eleven and twelve o'clock, and found Gaston Cochemard at the Castle Hotel. Gordon Fox told him the whole story, and he then explained his hasty flight from London, which exactly fitted in with the detective's theory.

"My brave friends, how can I thank

you?" cried the grateful Frenchman. "I owe you much, indeed! Here, my boy, is a banknote of 500 francs. For you, Monsieur Fox, there shall shortly be sent from Paris a beautiful ring. And also I will recompense the man who has lost his motor-car. The night boat has gone, and I will cross to-morrow. But often I will return to London, knowing that I can never be harmed by that scoundrel Larouge, who has so kindly blown himself up. So let it be with all anarchists!"

THE END.

THE LEAGUE OF THE IRON HAND!

(Continued from page vii.)

coat, and having obtained a supply of tools, he and the two men set to work.

After watching them for half an hour or so, Herman and Fairfax returned to the house for lunch, leaving two armed sentries, in addition to Cundle and Spencer, to keep watch on Donald. They came back to the shed at four o'clock, and again at six, and again at eight, by which time the shed had been brilliantly lit up with a row of lanterns.

"Nearly finished?" asked Herman.

"No!" said Donald curtly.

"Much more to do?"

"Four hours' work, at least."

"Then hadn't you better knock off for to-night?" suggested Fairfax.

"No!" said Donald fiercely. "I've no wish to remain here a moment longer than is absolutely necessary. Now I've begun I don't intend to leave off till I've finished."

For four hours longer the shed resounded with the clang of hammers and the rasp of files; then, as the clock in the stable-yard struck midnight, Donald threw down his hammer, picked up his coat, and announced that the work was finished.

"And now I claim the fulfilment of your promise," he said to Herman. "You said that as soon as I had repaired the airship my brother and I would be taken away from here and set at liberty. I have fulfilled my

share of the bargain. I now call on you to fulfil yours."

"Presently," said Herman, as he tossed away his half-smoked cigarette. "Up to now we have only your word for it that the airship is all right. Before we set you at liberty we must have proof of the truth of your assertion. In other words, you must take us for a short flight round these grounds, and prove to us that the airship will rise and descend as perfectly as she did before. Off with the tarpaulin, you men!"

The shed was roofed with an enormous sheet of tarpaulin, which could be removed at will, in order to let the vessel enter and leave.

In obedience to Herman's orders, Armstrong and Wilkinson removed the tarpaulin sheet, whilst Cundle and Spencer cast off the ropes to which the vessel was held down. Herman, Fairfax, and Cundle then climbed aboard, and Donald was about to follow their example, when a shot was heard in the grounds, followed by a chorus of excited shouts.

And even as Herman turned to Cundle, with the intention of ordering him to go and see what the uproar was about, the door of the shed was suddenly flung open and Barker staggered in, with blood streaming down his face from a wound in his forehead.

"Nelson Lee and the police are here!" he cried, in a choking voice.

Then he stumbled forward, threw up his arms, and fell senseless to the ground.

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(Continued from page 14.)

crisp, and black and long, his face is like a
dog's——"

At this point it was quite impossible for
him to proceed. The audience was laughing
so much that it couldn't listen. And Hand-
forth, thoroughly disgusted, went to his place
and sat down with a thud. He was so angry,
in fact, that he sat down too heavily, and
the stool crashed to atoms beneath him.
This, too, was regarded as part of the per-
formance. The audience took it all as a par-
ticularly clever piece of burlesque work.

And Handforth got tremendous applause,
with repeated shouts of "encore." Funnily
enough, he was so indignant at first, that he
didn't realise what was going on. Then Pitt,
in a stage whisper, pointed out the position.

Handy grasped it at once, and then took full
credit to himself. It wasn't until the show
was all over and finished that he was in-
formed that we had tried the thing as a
stunt—just to see if he would get really con-
fused by our inopportune reference to a
dirty dog. The actual result was far better
than we had ever anticipated.

The show went on afterwards, with several
more songs, and, finally, a closing chorus.
I think I can safely say that the whole min-
strel performance was an unqualified success.

We were clapped again and again—and
when De Valerie announced that we should
give another performance that evening, there

was more clapping still. We could easily see
that we should have a record crowd to deal
with at night.

And after we had left the seat of our
triumph, we counted up the takings, and
found that we had the exact sum of three
pounds seventeen shillings and tenpence—to
say nothing of two bent farthings, and a
sixpence with a hole in it.

"Jolly good!" declared Pitt. "Nearly four
quid! Why we shall coin money at this rate,
if we keep it up."

And we hustled back to the camp, cheery
and light-hearted, with thoughts of tea. The
afternoon had been happy, indeed.

CHAPTER V.

LONGFELLOW, THE POET!



THE DUKE OF SOMER-
TON sighed.

"Awfully rotten, of
course, but there you
are," he said ruefully. "I've
simply got to go. That's the
worst of being a blessed

duke! Always being bothered with all sorts
of confounded duties and formalities! I wish
I was just a plain chap, like the others!
Lucky beggars!"

Archie coughed.

"Well, I mean to say, it's all a matter of
opinion, what?" he suggested. "It seems to

me, old lad, that a good many fellows would be only too bally glad to be a duke, with vast and well-assorted slabs of the good old cash, to say nothing of ducal castles and feudal estates, and all this and all that. I mean, it appears to be, on the surface, a somewhat fruity posish!"

Somerton grinned.

"Well, yes, in a way," he agreed. "But it's a frightful bore, you know. I've had this wire, and I've got to buzz off to Somerton Castle straight away—must be there to-morrow. It seems that I'm required to act as the youthful host at a big house-party. Rotten! I'd much rather stay with you chaps."

"Absolutely," said Archie. "We shall be bleak and dreary without you. I mean to say, icy blasts will whizz through the old party, and faces will be sad and mournful. Kindly remain, Sommy, old thing. In other words, shove the half-nelson on this going-away scheme."

"Yes, stay with us," urged Reggie Pitt. "Don't spoil the party, old man."

The schoolboy duke looked distressed.

"I'd love to keep on tour with you," he declared. "You know that as well as I do. But I can't get out of this—I really can't. You don't know how cut up I am."

Somerton was honestly upset. The telegram had arrived while we were giving the minstrel show—it had been left at the post office. One of the fellows had popped there to see if there were any letters, and had brought the wire back with him. For, of course, all the juniors' people knew that we should be in Brightside for Bank Holiday, and we had asked that any letters should be sent there, addressed to the post office, to be called for.

Of course, Somerton's departure from the party would not make much difference to us. We should carry on just the same, and his absence would hardly be noticed after the first hour or so. With fifteen of us left, there were plenty to keep things alive.

The afternoon was still warm, and as tea was not ready, a good many juniors decided to indulge in another bathe. And in a short time nine or ten fellows, including Handforth and Co. were disporting themselves in the water.

Other people were bathing, too—but most of them were a little further along the beach, where there were a number of bathing tents. The St. Frank's crowd kept mainly to itself. Nearly all these other people who were in the water were quite youthful—in fact, children. The older persons considered that the latter part of the afternoon was hardly the time for bathing.

Quite a pleasant breeze had sprung up, and although the day was warm, this breeze had strengthened so much that the sea was choppy and quite alive. The tide was coming in, and the waves had a forceful vigour.

"Come on in, you chaps!" called out Handforth. "The water's ripping!"

I was just about to enter with Sir Montie Tregellis-West. And it was at this moment that we became aware of a slight commotion further along the beach.

"What's all that, dear old boy?" asked Sir Montie mildly.

"I thought I heard a cry for help——"

I broke off and stood staring, shading my eyes with one hand as I gazed along the beach. Two or three women were running towards the water. Looking out into the sea, I saw a little red thing bobbing up and down fifteen or twenty yards out. Then a hand came out of the water.

"There's somebody in danger, I think!" I said quickly.

"A girl, begad!" said Tregellis-West.

Other people were running up to the spot, but nobody seemed to take any action. Most of the holiday-makers were excitedly calling out to a boatman who was so far off that he could not possibly render any assistance.

As a matter of fact, the luckless one was a child—a little girl of nine or ten who had been bathing in shallow water. She had been some little distance from the sloping beach, out on one of those raised banks which are by no means uncommon at the seaside.

Thus, when the tide continued to come in, the child found herself cut off. And all she could do now was to struggle madly in the water and scream for help. The other St. Frank's fellows had seen the affair by now.

"Come on, you fellows!" roared Handforth. "This is where we come in!"

"Rather!"

"St. Frank's to the rescue!"

The fellows commenced running along the beach—in the wake of Sir Montie and I, who had started off first. In the meantime, another rescuer was dashing off to save the unfortunate little girl.

We had not seen him at first—but it would hardly have been possible to have missed him now. He was much nearer to the spot than we were—in fact, exactly opposite.

He had just emerged from a bathing-tent, intent upon a dip. In a second, apparently, he knew what the trouble was, and he did not waste any time. The person in question was about the most extraordinary youth I have ever set eyes on.

At the time, owing to the general excitement, I did not give him very close attention. But I might just as well explain his appearance straight away. He was an enormously tall youth of about fifteen—although at a distance he looked very much older. He was six feet high if he was an inch—and so extraordinarily thin that he bore a somewhat close resemblance to a lamp-post. His legs and arms were like long sticks, his body was a mere wisp of a thing. And upon his

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shoulders rested a bony head, with a long, lean face that appeared to wear a set expression of mournful resignation. The top of his head was surmounted by a huge, waving mop of curly, brown hair.

Added to all this, he was wearing a very tight-fitting bathing costume—so that as he hopped down the beach, he looked very much like a human hairpin. He seemed to be running leisurely—but his legs were so long that he fairly flew over the sands.

Long before we were on the spot, this newcomer was in the water, striking out with powerful strokes towards the hapless child. Most of the St. Frank's juniors came to a halt and looked on. They didn't want to rob this rescuer of any credit. He had gone out to fetch the child—and he should have the task to himself.

But it soon became apparent that the current at this spot was extremely tricky. Owing to that sandbank—which was completely invisible, owing to the incoming tide—the water had a kind of undertow which had the effect of dragging a swimmer down. And although the tide was coming in, it was the most difficult matter to fight against the current—which had a tendency to sweep a person out to sea. And the lanky youth had essayed more than he could do.

He reached the girl, seized her firmly, and found that she was nearly exhausted—although a long way from being unconscious.

"All right—all right!" he said breathlessly. "Just hold tight!"

"Oh!" gasped the child. "Save me—please save me!"

"That's what I'm doing!" said the lanky one. "If you struggle it'll be our ruin!"

He held her tightly and tried to strike out for the shore. Rather to his dismay he found that the sands were now a good long way distant. Either it was his imagination or a fact; but it seemed to him that he was being swept outwards. And this was curious, seeing that the tide was incoming.

The lanky one did not know about the current—that treacherous flow which lurked round the hidden sandbanks. He used all his efforts, swimming hard. At the best, he was not a first-class swimmer, and he was now hampered by the dead weight of the child.

Under these circumstances, his prompt attempt at rescue was all the more praiseworthy—it stamped him as a fellow of superb courage. And it really seemed as though there was a possibility of a double tragedy.

On the sands, I watched intently.

And it did not take me long to come to the conclusion that unless help was sent, neither of the pair would come ashore alive. Although the tall youth was swimming with vigour, he got no nearer. Indeed, I was quite convinced that he was being edged further and further away from the beach.

"There must be a trick current out there!" I exclaimed suddenly. "Look! The poor chap's in a bad way—he'll soon be in difficulties himself. Come on! Let's dash out to him!"

"Hurrah!"

With one accord, we plunged into the water and struck out. Even as we did so, the lanky boy realised that his strength was rapidly ebbing away. He didn't actually cry for help, but he waved a lean, bony arm—possibly as a sign that he was beaten.

Reggie Pitt and I were swimming in advance with the others—racing one another in fact. Handforth had believed that he could arrive on the spot first, but he was quite a good distance behind. Handy was game for anything—he didn't know the meaning of fear—and he would have waded out to the rescue, even if he couldn't swim a stroke.

"All right—we've got you!" I exclaimed pantingly, as Pitt and I "trod water," one on either side of the tall youth. "I'll take the child. Reggie, lend this fellow a hand—I think he's pretty well done up."

"Grab hold!" said Pitt invitingly.

At the same time I relieved the stranger of his burden. His face was pale and drawn, and his movements were feeble. He was, indeed, practically spent. And he was only too glad to avail himself of the assistance.

But the fact that he was unable to complete the rescue on his own account did not diminish the value of his own praiseworthy efforts. He had gone to the rescue of the child at the risk of his own life—and nobody could do more than that.

I could feel the treacherous undercurrent tugging at me. Pitt had noticed the same thing. But we were all good swimmers, unhampered, and we were in not the slightest danger. By this time four or five other members of the caravan party were bobbing around.

"Thanks!" murmured the tall youth. "I was just going! In another minute, I believe I should have sunk—there's no knowing!"

"That's all right—just hold on, and say nothing," urged Pitt.

And, together, we struck out for the shore. A huge crowd was awaiting our arrival—excited, cheering, and making an altogether unnecessary fuss. At least, it was unnecessary so far as we were concerned.

The child was snatched from my arms as I got into shallow water. Its mother was there, and its sister, and its aunt, and its father—and, by all appearances, a dozen other relatives as well. They simply fell on the little girl like a pack of kindly wolves.

Surprisingly enough she came to no harm. I was half expecting that she would be killed on the spot, instead of being brought back to life. It transpired that she was far more frightened and exhausted than actually harmed.

And Reggie Pitt and Handforth and I were giving our attention to the lean and lanky youth who had acted with such signal bravery. A crowd of other holiday-makers gathered round, offering all sorts of unnecessary advice and uttering words of high praise. In fact, they were far more of a nuisance than a help.

"Look here—we can't stay here, in all this crowd!" exclaimed Pitt briskly. "Let's carry him along to our caravans. We can put him round there, and take him back to his own bathing tent afterwards."

"Good idea!" I said promptly.

And, in spite of feeble protests, the long youth was seized by a dozen hands, and literally carried along the sands at a run. We didn't allow him to walk. He vainly protested that he was better, and that he wanted to dress. But he only made these remarks in a few disjointed sentences.

By the time we arrived at the caravans he was getting just a bit of colour into his cheeks. Tommy Watson had run on in advance, and had some towels and blankets ready.

The rescued one was bundled into the first caravan, and we set about drying him and wrapping him up well. We wouldn't allow him to speak until he was leaning back on one of the lockers, well blanketed. The rest of us were quite all right in our bathing costumes—the afternoon was warm, and we should come to no harm.

"Jolly good!" I declared, at length. "That attempt of yours, my son, was one of the pluckiest things I've seen."

"Oh, really!" protested the stranger. "Don't talk so queerly!"

"What's your name?" demanded Handforth.

"Clarence," said the other. "To be exact, Clarence Fellowe. But, really, there's no need to bellow!"

"Clarence Fellowe!" retorted Handforth in the same loud voice. "The surname ain't so bad—but Clarence. Your people ought to be slaughtered for giving you a name like that!"

"Don't be so giddy personal!" put in Pitt. "Well, Fellowe, we all think you're a good plucked 'un: It was ripping, the way you dived in to rescue that child. By the way, shall I open the door? Or do you think there's enough room for your legs with the door closed?"

Clarence Fellowe looked perfectly solemn.

"I cannot be held responsible for my length!" he replied, with a touch of reproach in his voice. "You see, I've length instead of strength. Since early days I have run to seed, but for me to speak this way there is no need!"

We looked at this queer specimen of humanity with real curiosity.

"Feeling better now?" I asked.

"I'm fine!" said Clarence Fellowe. "Comfort is mine!"

"What?"

"And I should like to thank you with all my heart—for pulling me out of the water so smart," said Fellowe. "I was, in fact, on the point of sinking. By this time I should have been dead, I'm thinking."

"My only hat!" said Handforth, staring.

"Is—is it human?" murmured De Valerie.

"I'm much better now, my dear old chaps," said Fellowe. "I'm thinking you'll let me go, perhaps! My tent's along the beach—

and it I badly want to reach! My clothes are there, I must explain, and I want to don them once again!"

"I may be wrong, of course," observed Archie. "I may, I repeat, be wrong. But, somehow, it distinctly sounds to me as if the chappie is talking in rhyme. I mean to say, he's absolutely reeling forth yard after yard of poetry! Along the beach—I badly want to reach! You get the idea? Dashed queer! Gadzooks! I've caught the bally fever," added Archie, somewhat startled.

"I expect it's only coincidence!" I put in. "I say, Fellowe, do you always speak in that way?"

The lanky boy looked at me gravely.

"To speak in rhyme is just my habit," he replied. "And now I'd better bolt like a rabbit. To don my clothes, I must away, so kindly do not say me nay! I thank you much for all you've done, my high esteem you've surely won!"

"He sounds like a character in a pantomime!" grinned Pitt. "That's just how they talk in 'Cinderella,' or 'The Babes in the Wood'!"

We all grinned. Reggie was quite right. Clarence Fellowe was not precisely poetic—but, in some extraordinary way, he caused everything he said to rhyme. Apparently, this was an unconscious effect. He simply couldn't help himself.

He was fully recovered now from the effects of his swim. He had taken practically no water aboard, and it had been a simple case of exhaustion. The rest had enabled him to restore his tissues—as Archie put it.

Fellowe pushed the blankets aside, and slowly proceeded to rear himself into the air. By the time he was standing upright, his head was touching the roof—and even then he was compelled to bend somewhat.

"Pity we haven't got a lift handy!" said Reggie. "If somebody will oblige with a stool, I'll carry on a conversation with the walking Eiffel Tower! I say, Fellowe, don't you find it a bit awkward? Doesn't it feel queer to be walking about like a factory chimney?"

Fellowe looked at him without changing his expression.

"At times it is most trying, and that fact I'm not denying. But let me go at once, I crave—I beg of you to behave!"

"All right—come back when you've got dressed," I grinned. "Tea will be ready in a minute or two, and we'd like you to join us. You see, we're from St. Frank's College—a party of us on a caravan tour."

Clarence nodded.

"A fact that interests me much," he said. "To tea I'll come, my dear old dutch! I'll speed back here with rapid strides, and bring an appetite, besides!"

And, with that, he dived out of the caravan, and stalked away like some fellow who was using stilts. We stood there, looking after him, and grinning. Then we looked at one another.

"Well, I've met a few queer specimens in my time, but he fairly takes the bun!"

chuckled Pitt. "He didn't smile once—he couldn't speak without rhyming—and he's the most peculiar chap to look at I ever set eyes on."

"I wonder if he'll come back?" I said thoughtfully. "I've got an idea he will. Did you notice how he started when I mentioned that we are St. Frank's chaps?"

"No."

"Well, he did—and looked at us keenly, too," I said. "Either he knows something about St. Frank's, or I'm a nigger! But, in spite of his queer ways, he's made of the right kind of stuff."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "Not much of it—but absolutely! I mean to say, the material appears to have become somewhat stretched! I should certainly hazard a guess that the dear old thing has, at some period of his young life, passed beneath a steam-roller!"

We all got dressed, for tea was waiting. Many of the fellows were already getting busy with the food. In just the same fashion as before, a big cloth was spread upon the sands, and the meal was being partaken of picnic-fashion. Fatty Little had made hosts and hosts of sandwiches.

By the time the rest of us were dressed several of these hosts had vanished, never to reappear. But there were further armies in reserve, so to speak. Of the little girl who had been rescued, there was no sign. She had obviously been carried off home by her anxious regiment of relatives.

And tea was just in full swing when a long shadow fell across the tablecloth. Looking up, I saw Clarence Fellowe striding towards us. His appearance was even more remarkable than it had been.

For he was attired in an Eton suit and a straw hat. His trousers were extremely narrow, and his jacket appeared to be extremely short. The effect was quite ludicrous. And we could now judge his age far more easily. The very fact that he was in Etons proved that he was a boy. He was obviously no older than fifteen.

"I don't know about Fellowe!" remarked Pitt, with a chuckle. "Considering that he's such a master of rhyme, and considering his length, it wouldn't be a bad idea to call him Longfellow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's a good nickname for him!" I smiled. "Longfellow! It fits him absolutely to perfection—I've never known anything so appropriate. He's a poet, and he's a long fellow! And his name happens to be Fellowe, too!"

The rest grinned with delight. Pitt's suggestion was something of a brainwave. And our new acquaintance became "Longfellow" from that moment onwards.

He strolled up, and stood gazing down at us, as we lounged round the festive cloth. Gazing up, Clarence's face appeared to be an enormous distance away.

"Come down a few flights!" invited Pitt. "From this position you look like a human skyscraper! Squat down here, and start eat-



"I say, old darling!"
Handforth looked up at the interruption, and found a face gazing at him from one of the caravan windows.

ing. Here's a cup of tea doing nothing—and you might as well find it a good home! It'll have to go a long way before it gets home, but that can't be helped!"

Our new friend sat down, and his feet stretched out towards the sea like a couple of breakwaters.

"This is great," he declared. "Our meeting was ordained by Fate."

"Seems like it!" grinned Pitt.

Longfellow helped himself to a sandwich, and proceeded to devour it with much relish. He seemed incapable of smiling. His face was long and mournful, and his eyes contained a far-away, dreamy expression.

"For this feed I extend my thanks," he observed. "And you are from St. Frank's?"

"All of us," I replied. "We're Remove fellows—belonging to the Ancient House, mostly. Just on a Whitsun holiday, you know. Caravanning. We're having a peach of a time."

"Your information is particularly interesting," said Clarence. "These sandwiches are

great—they well deserve a testing. To you it may seem queer, but I'd like some ginger-beer. Tea does not agree, particularly with me."

We grinned in spite of ourselves. Clarence was extremely quaint.

"Ginger-beer?" said Fatty Little. "Just as you like, Lamp-post. Here you are. Coming over! Catch!"

A bottle of ginger-beer sailed over the festive board, and Clarence deftly caught it.

"Well, this is rippin'," he observed. "Many thanks, old pippin!"

"He can't help it," grinned Handforth. "Of course, the chap's a dotty lunatic, but that's not his fault. If we had a freak like that at St. Frank's we'd soon knock him into shape, I can tell you."

"Don't be insulting, Handy," I said severely.

Longfellow, having partaken of ginger-beer, looked round gravely.

"It so happens, my dear old chums," he said, "that when the new term comes, I shall pack my grip, and off for school I'll slip. In fact, to be exact—in case the news you've lacked—I shall go straight away, and at St. Frank's I'll stay."

"At St. Frank's!" I repeated quickly.

"Precisely," said Clarence. "That's the case concisely."

We all stared hard at the elongated youth.

"You're—you're booked for St. Frank's next term?" gasped Handforth faintly.

"The Ancient House, I think," nodded Clarence. "But pray, why do you blink? Is it very strange for a new boy to arrange—"

"Look here, you giddy doggerel-manufacturer!" interrupted Handforth. "What the thump do you mean? Coming to St. Frank's—in the Ancient House? What Form will you be shoved in?"

"Well, as far as I can say, in the Upper Fourth I'll stay."

"The Upper Fourth? You mean the Remove, don't you?"

"Ah, yes, I expect you're right," said Clarence. "The Remove it would be—quite!"

"Are you trying to spoof us—or is this absolutely true?" asked Pitt.

"Absolutely true!" said Longfellow gravely. "The facts I'm telling you!"

We were quite interested. We had been entertained by this very queer specimen of humanity from the first moment that we had seen him. But to know that he was coming to St. Frank's at the beginning of next term—and, what was more, to discover that he was booked for the Remove—was rather startling.

"I suppose you're down in Brightside on a holiday?" I inquired.

"The truth you've hit," replied Clarence. "That is exactly it."

"Are you here with your people?"

"I regret to say I'm not—they're far distant, where it's hot."

"Hot?" said Handforth, staring.

"In India, I must explain," said Clarence. "Do I make myself plain?"

"So your people are in India—eh?" said

Handy. "In that case, I expect you're with some friends. I don't want to pry into your affairs, goodness knows, but as you're coming to St. Frank's—"

"Oh, don't apologise, I pray," interrupted Clarence. "I'll tell you more if I may. I'm down here quite alone, at a hotel on my own. I'm filling in the spell, until at the school I dwell."

"In other words, you're quite by yourself, staying in a hotel, and you've got nothing to do until the new term starts at St. Frank's?" I asked.

"Yes," said Clarence. "You've made a perfect guess."

"Not much guesswork about it, after all your verses on the subject," I grinned. "But do you really mean to say that there's nobody with you at all? Haven't you got a guardian of any sort?"

Clarence nodded.

"Well, in a way I have a man, who's made a little plan," he said. "He's a lawyer from town, and just at present he's down—that is to say he's here with me—though only for the day, you see."

"I understand," I replied. "Your parents left you in charge of this lawyer, and he's acting as a kind of guardian to you? I'd like to know the lawyer's name, if you don't object, and where I can find him."

"I don't mind at all," said Longfellow. "His name is James McCall. You'll find him at the Hotel Grand, though his office is in the Strand."

I grinned.

"It's wonderful, the way you fill everything in—and so easily, too!" I remarked. "You see, Fellowe, I'd like to have a word with Mr. McCall. If you've got nothing to do between now and the new term, you might just as well join our crowd. How would you like it? You're going to be a new chap at the school—so we can practically look upon you as one of us already. How would you like the idea of coming on this caravan tour?"

A sparkle came into Longfellow's dreamy eyes, although he didn't move a muscle.

"The scheme is fine!" he declared promptly. "And delight is mine."

"Then you'd like to come?"

"I would, indeed! Follow me—the way I'll lead!"

He got up, and looked at me intently.

"Where are you off to?" I asked.

"The Hotel Grand—we'll get this planned."

Clarence was obviously a fellow of action. I liked him all the better for it. After the way he had rescued that little girl from the sea, I knew that he was true blue, and his remarkable method of speech made him quite attractive.

While the other fellows were clearing away the tea things and clearing up, I accompanied Clarence to the Hotel Grand, and found that his words were perfectly

true. Mr. McCall was there—a stout, genial Scotchman. He heard all that I had to say, and laughed heartily.

"So you have taken a bit of a fancy to Clarence, eh?" he said. "Well, I don't wonder. The lad's a bit of a unique specimen, if ever there was one—but as genuine as they make them! I'm sure I can leave him safely in your hands. Naturally, I shall have to communicate with Dr. Stafford, and attend to one or two other little details, but there's no reason why Clarence shouldn't go with you straight away, if you'd like it."

"Good enough," I said. "He might as well come, Mr. McCall. You see, one of our chaps—the Duke of Somerton, to be exact, has to leave the party. So we've got room for Clarence, without inconveniencing anybody. He'll take Somerton's place in Caravan No. 3."

We only had a few more words, and Mr. McCall promised that he would bring Clarence down personally to our camp, later on in the evening—after the lanky junior had packed up his necessary things.

Clarence himself was filled with excitement at the prospect. He didn't say much, and his expression remained as serious as ever. But he couldn't keep that eager gleam out of his eyes. He went off into several verses of eloquent expressions of thanks. And by the time I had escaped, I was chuckling hugely.

Our new comrade was a bit of a novelty.

CHAPTER VI.

ARCHIE ALL AT SEA!



"THIS," observed Archie Glenthorne languidly. "is somewhat topping, and all that!"

He was lounging at ease, and in quiet solitude, in Caravan No. 1. Archie had fed well, and he felt that forty winks would be highly beneficial. So he had placed his bunk in position, and was now lolling upon it gracefully.

He was the sole occupant of the caravan, for none of the others wanted to be under cover in such glorious sunshine. But Archie was somewhat addicted to this practice of stealing a little nap at odd intervals.

"I mean to say, forty of the best and brightest assist a chappie in restoring the old form to its usual condish. of brisk vigour!" he murmured. "I shall now proceed to waft away into the land of dreams. It appears that several earthquakes are taking place near by, but these little things can't be helped. I suppose they're dashed well sent to try us!"

He closed his eyes, and composed himself for sleep.

It must be admitted that this was somewhat difficult, for the window was open, and just outside, on the sands, Handforth

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and Co. were engaged in an argument. It was merely one of their usual chats—but Handforth always insisted upon speaking as though his two chums had been born deaf. As Church frequently remarked, they certainly would be deaf before long.

"If you fellows like to oppose me—all right, you can do it!" said Handforth bitterly. "But I want to know if we're going to stand it! Who told Nipper to invite this telegraph pole? He's not wanted—he'll only get in the way all the time."

"Oh, he's not a bad sort," put in McClure. "And don't forget the way he nearly gave his own life to save that little kid! One of the pluckiest things I've ever seen."

Handforth nodded.

"Well, I admit it," he said. "There's nothing wrong with Clarence when it comes to pluck. But he's a born freak. He looks like the reflection of a chap in one of those distorting mirrors! And as for him being in the Remove—well, it's about time we put a stop to it!"

"Put a stop to what?"

"Why, allowing St. Frank's to be turned into a kind of Barnum and Bailey show!" declared Handforth firmly. "We've got a few freaks there already—Timothy Tucker and Fatty Little and the two Trotwoods and Archie and Larry Scott! But if Longfellow is included in the bunch, we might just as well shove up a pay-box and charge admission!"

"Why argue?" asked Church. "We can't control the school, I suppose? If this chap's people like to send him to the school—if they can afford to pay the fees—it's their business. I don't see why we should kick up a fuss. Besides, he can't help being as tall as a lamp post and as thin as a rake. Personally, I rather like the chap. He's amusing."

"Better than a film comedian!" agreed McClure.

Handforth glared.

"If you two rotters are going to oppose me, I'll jolly well chuck you into the sea!" he roared. "I'm not going to stand this rot any longer! Just say one more word, and——"

"I say, old darling!"

Handforth looked up at the interruption, and found a face gazing at him from one of the caravan windows.

"What's the matter with you, fathead?" demanded Handforth.

"Well, dash it all!" said Archie plaintively. "I mean, dashed terse, what! Don't you think it would be a rather priceless idea to fade out of the old landscape? What I mean is, there are some frightfully ripping

cliffs further along the beach. How about exploring, old dears?"

"Exploring!" retorted Handforth. "Who wants to explore cliffs now?"

"Oh, don't you understand?" grinned Church. "I expect Archie's trying to get a nap, and your voice is a bit monotonous to him."

"Absolutely!" said Archie, nodding.

"My voice!" bellowed Handforth. "My voice! Why, you rotters, what's the matter with my voice?"

"I don't absolutely know," replied Archie. "You mean, what's the matter with it? I should judge, taking all the effects into consideration, that at some early period you must have swallowed a bally gramophone horn! I mean, no ordinary human chappie could possibly develop a voice like that by sheer nature!"

Handforth breathed hard.

"I don't want to start a row on Bank Holiday—but it seems to me there's only one way to deal with this matter," he exclaimed grimly. "I'm going into that caravan, and I'm going to reduce Archie to a pulp!"

"A somewhat poisonous scheme!" remarked Archie, in alarm. "I mean to say, a dashed messy business! From my own point of view, it's absolutely out of the ques! I mean to say, no reasonable chappie will allow himself to be reduced to a pulp. Absolutely not!"

The face vanished from the window, and a moment later came the sound of a key being turned in the lock. Handforth started, dashed round to the rear of the caravan, and grabbed at the door handle.

"Open this door!" he hooted.

"Certainly, old bean, certainly!" said Archie, through the glass. "I shall open it after the vials of your wrath have bubbled down somewhat. I mean, your vile wrath — That is——"

"Open this door!" howled Handforth, shaking the handle violently.

"Sorry, old cabbage, imposs.!"

Archie disappeared from the glass top of the door, and proceeded to gaze out of the side window once more. Church and McClure were still chatting together. From the end of the caravan came numerous thumps and roars of anger.

"Kindly oblige, laddies, by removing the dashed disturbance!" said Archie. "I mean, how can a chappie obtain forty of the good old winks with all this commosh. going on?"

"Things are looking bad!" said Church. "You've insulted Handy in the most vital spot, and he'll dog you until he gets his revenge. You needn't think for a minute that you'll get any sleep."

"No?" said Archie, pained. "But, I mean to say, that's dashed foul!"

Handforth came tearing round the back of the caravan.

"Oh, there you are!" he shouted breathlessly.

"Well, what-ho!" said Archie. "I

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couldn't very well be anywhere else, what? If I have said anything that I'm sorry for, old lad, I'm frightfully glad of it!"

"What?"

"I should say, that if I've insulted you, I meant it!" proceeded Archie. "That is, I merely meant to point out——"

"You—you lobster!" said Handforth thickly.

"Oh, come!" protested Archie. "I should say, go! That's a bit steep, if you know what I mean! A lobster is one of those dashed crawly things that do a considerable amount of nipping, and so forth! A lobster is one of those blighters with about five hundred and forty claws! I don't mind being called a silly ass, or even a fathead—but when it comes to lobster——"

"Are you coming out here, or not?" howled Handforth.

"Well, under the eaves, not!" replied Archie.

"All right—I'll jolly well come and hoof you out!" said Handforth. "You needn't think that that locked door is going to stop me! I'll get in the window! Then you're jolly well going through it!"

"The window?" asked Archie mildly.

"Yes—after I've done with you!"

"But pray consider!" urged Archie earnestly. "I mean, this is my caravan. You, in a way of speaking, are a guest. It doesn't appear to be absolutely the correct thing for a guest to shove his host through windows! Hardly proper, what? Kindly think of all these little details, old winkle!"

"Winkle!" retorted Handforth. "You call me a winkle? That's done it!"

"Sorrow!" said Archie hastily. "I didn't mean winkle—absolutely not! I should have said shrimp!"

"Shrimp!" bellowed Handforth. "Great pip!"

He made one wild leap at the window, but it was rather high, and he had difficulty in reaching it. By this time, too, Archie had closed the window. Handforth looked round wildly.

"Gimme something to stand on!" he shouted.

"Oh, don't be an ass——"

"Ah! That'll do!" breathed Handforth.

"I'll show him!"

He dived down, and proceeded to pull a big block of wood from under the caravan. It was resting just against the rear wheel.

"Hi! Look out!" said Church, in alarm.

"The giddy thing will run away if you take that block out of position! Leave it alone, you ass!"

"Rats!"

"But—but——"

"Go and eat coke!"

Handforth proceeded to tug at the block of wood. He was too excited to realise what the consequences might be. In point of fact, he didn't care a penny what the consequences were.

But they were likely to be alarming.

As I have already mentioned, the caravans

had been set in a row on the hard sands, out of reach of high-water mark. And the beach was rather sloping, necessitating the fixing of blocks under the caravan wheels. The tide was now practically in, and the waves were breaking only ten or twelve feet away from the caravans.

Angelina—to give Caravan No. 1 her proper name—gave a kind of shiver of fright as Handforth succeeded in getting that block of wood free. Then, without warning, she swerved round, and literally jumped the block that was holding the opposite wheel.

"Whoa!" gasped Handforth. "What the——"

"Hold her!" yelled Church. "Oh, you ass! You've done it now!"

Handforth came to himself with a jerk—as usual, too late. He always realised these things a second or so after the damage was done.

"I—I didn't know the giddy thing would shift!" he panted. "Don't stand there staring, you fathead! Hold her back!"

These words, of course, were quite idle, for even as Handforth was talking Angelina was careering bumpily and triumphantly towards the sea, as though she was in sheer necessity of a bathe.

The caravan took a diagonal kind of course, and entered the sea almost sideways. Archie was inside, of course. Archie was locked in. And in his desire to keep Handforth out he had even gone so far as to take the key out of the door.

He felt the caravan moving, and a vague sense of alarm came within him. He had lain down on the bed again, but now he sat up, the big vehicle bumping and careering beneath him. Crockery rattled in its rack, and everything within the van shook and trembled.

"Dash it all!" gasped Archie, leaping out. "What—what——"

Swish—splash!

Archie dived neatly into a corner. The caravan had come to such an abrupt stop that the unfortunate junior was pitched head first over. He picked himself up, dazed and bewildered.

Then he glanced out of one of the windows.

"Gadzooks!" he murmured dreamily. "I mean to say, water, water everywhere! It appears that I'm dashed well on the ocean! This is not only frightful, but positively bally!"

It occurred to him that his only course was to escape—and to do it quickly. There was no telling what would happen to the caravan—now that it was fairly on the bosom of the tide.

For Angelina was floating. She had not merely taken a short dip, and then waited to be hauled out. A couple of big waves in succession had lifted the caravan up, and had set her fairly afloat.

And almost before the startled onlookers could realise it, Angelina was twenty feet from the shore—floating placidly like a miniature Noah's ark, and showing no signs of

capsizing. She was proving herself to be seaworthy!

Archie dashed to the door, and tore at the handle.

"Locked!" he breathed. "The posish is becoming fouler and fouler every second! Locked! I mean, I'm dashed well doomed to die like a bally rat in a trap! This is where Archie passes out of human existence! A frightful death, but there may be worse ones!"

He searched wildly for the key. He remembered placing it on one of the little shelves. But it was no longer there. The jerking and tossing had caused the key to vanish into some mysterious corner or other.

So Archie turned his attention to the windows.

"Frightfully undig., but these things can't be helped!" he murmured. "I suppose I shall have to whizz down from the old lattice—there may be hope yet, by gad! The good old fighting blood of the Glenthornes is up! Do I perish without a strug.? Absolutely not!"

Strictly speaking, there was no danger for Archie whatever. If he had been wise, he would have laid down on the bed again, and waited for something to happen. But the alarming thought that the caravan would sink caused Archie to act with unprecedented speed.

It struck him that if the caravan sank to the bottom he would be drowned before he could escape—and this was undoubtedly true. But there was only about one chance in a million of the caravan sinking. At the worst, it could only capsize, and continue to float.

But Archie wanted to be on the safe side.

He opened the window and proceeded to climb through—head first. This window was the one nearest the shore, and the beach was now twenty or thirty feet away. The sea was carrying Angelina further and further out with every second that passed. And she still retained an upright position.

By this time the beach was alive with running figures. All sorts of people were greatly interested and came hurrying along to watch the fun. Handforth was still standing at the water's edge, looking rather dazed.

"How—how was I to know that the blessed thing would run away like that?" he demanded indignantly.

"Oh, come off it!" protested Church. "Didn't we warn you? Fancy taking that block away! You might have expected trouble! Our best caravan! It'll be ruined before we get back!"

"I'm expecting to see it capsize every second!" said McClure.

All the other juniors were at the water's edge, including myself. I had just got back from the Hotel Grand. In fact, I had arrived in the nick of time to see the caravan lumbering in the water.

"Who did that?" I panted, rushing into the crowd.

"I don't know!" said Pitt. "I think Handy knows something about it."

"Well, we can't let it stay there!" I said sharply. "Come on—we'll bring it back at once! If we can only manage the trip quickly, there'll be no harm done. But if Angelina capsizes, she'll wreck herself!"

We all hurried down until our feet were in the water. But by this time the caravan was being carried far out and quite beyond our reach. For, the beach being steep, the sea at high tide was very deep only a few yards from the shore. By swimming we could reach the caravan, but we should never be able to drag it back.

Then we saw Archie climbing through the window.

"Hi!" I roared. "Stop there, you ass!"

"All right, Archie—we'll pull you back!" shouted Pitt.

"Absolutely not!" came Archie's voice. "I mean, I can't dashed well risk it! Life is singularly sweet to a fresh young chappie in the bloom of his youth! Prudence tells me to leap into the good old briny!"

And he proceeded to fall headlong into the sea. It was an undignified proceeding, and a lamentable one, for Archie was dazzlingly attired in a suit of snowy-white flannel. Only for a moment had he hesitated. There was no time to bother about flannels. Life was sweeter than a suit of clothes.

Archie arrived in the water, and swam with brisk strokes to the shore. He came out like a drowned white rat. And Angelina, in the meantime, was left derelict—forsaken, and deserted upon the bosom of the ocean.

Archie gazed at Handforth coldly and wetly.

"As for you, laddie!" he said, his voice quivering. "I shall deal with you later. Absolutely! I regard you as a particularly frightful kind of a blighter! I mean to say, you're dashed well poisonous!"

And Archie strode up the beach with dignity. At least, he attempted to be dignified—but this was somewhat difficult, considering his appearance. He entered one of the other caravans and hastily undressed.

Having rubbed himself down with a towel, he sat down on a locker and stared glassily before him. He had just remembered that all his spare clothing was in the unfortunate caravan and quite beyond his reach. His entire stock of holiday goods was contained within the lockers of Angelina.

And Archie sat there, dazed and stunned by the shock.

In the meantime we were getting to work. Something had to be done—and that quickly. And I soon came to a decision. As far as I could see, there was only one way in which to save Angelina from becoming a total loss. Left to herself and the mercy of the sea she would soon begin to take large supplies of the English Channel on board.

It was only owing to the caravan's sturdy build that she had so far come to no damage. But it was a certainty that as the minutes passed she would sink lower and lower, until

the ocean began to invade her interior. And then, of course, widespread damage to the furniture and fittings would be caused.

I stared up the beach, a gleam in my eye.

"Come on, you chaps!" I called quickly.

"Wait a minute!" said Christine. "What's the idea?"

"We've got to get this van back again," I replied. "And we shan't do much if we continue to stare at it! Come on—we'll hire one of those motor-boats. We'll have Angelina back again in a few minutes."

"Good wheeze!"

"Rather!"

Everybody agreed that my idea was a good one. Just along the beach there were several of those lumbering motor-boats which cater for the holiday maker. They take about a dozen passengers on board, at a shilling a

"Good enough!" said the fellow briskly. "Start her up, Jim!"

Several of us piled into the motor-boat, and the engine was started. Then she chugged away, backed round, and was soon speeding across towards the caravan. The latter was now a full hundred yards out and was perceptibly lower in the water.

Ropes were fixed to the front shafts—a fairly easy proceeding, for the motor-boat was able to go up close. Then came the task of hauling the caravan to the shore.

It was considered to be the best way to make a dash at full speed. This was done, the Majestic swerving round at the last moment and casting the rope loose. The momentum was sufficient to bring Angelina wallowing on to the beach like some freshly-landed whale.

Many fellows dashed into the surf and



Even as Handforth was talking, Angelina was careering bumpily and triumphantly towards the sea as though she was in sheer necessity of a bathe.

time, and then proceed to chug round the pier. Having performed this move, they come back again and take on another load. One of these boats was quite near by, and so far there were no passengers on board.

Two lusty-voiced sons of the sea were standing near by inviting people to take a ride in the magnificent motor-boat Majestic. She was about to start, and unless the public hurried up they would lose their chance.

We arrived on the scene, and I immediately faced the proprietor—at least, the elder of the two men in charge.

"See that caravan?" I asked, pointing.

"We've got to get her back to shore—and we want this motor-boat to do it with! We'll give you ten shillings to do the trick."

"Let's see the ten bob, young gent," said the boatman promptly.

I thrust a note into his hand.

steadied the caravan as it grounded. Then, with one accord, they hauled her high up out of the waves. They could not have accomplished this alone. There were scores of willing helpers. Boatmen, holiday makers, children—even women—trying to lend a hand.

Anyhow, the caravan was pushed straight up the beach and placed in position once more—and the blocks firmly jammed against her wheels. A crowd stood looking on while we investigated—for by this time we had landed out of the motor-boat.

I entered by means of the door in the front—which Archie, in his alarm, had entirely overlooked. Even Handforth had forgotten it, too—or else he had assumed that Archie had locked both doors.

Two or three other fellows came in after me. The carpet on the floor was soaked through and sea water was swirling about. But this was about the only damage done.

The caravan had come out of her ordeal almost unscathed.

And Archie entirely recovered his spirits when he was enabled to change into a fresh suit of white flannels. He even forgot to be angry with Handforth. The latter passed the whole affair off in his usual lordly way.

In fact, he seemed to imagine that the whole thing had been caused by Archie. But in future we decided to keep a strict watch on Handy.

CHAPTER VII.

"A LITTLE HELP IS WORTH——"



"EVERYBODY ready?" I asked that question briskly as I put my head out of Caravan No. 1, and looked up and down at her companions. I was dressed in my minstrel costume and my face was already blackened.

It was evening, mild and gloriously fine, and just the very kind of weather for a record crowd to foregather on the beach. Later on, of course, these crowds would shift into the town itself—to the picture theatres and the pier pavilion, and the numerous pierrot shows which were held on the front.

But at present holiday makers still clung to the beach.

"Buck up, you chaps!" I added loudly.

"All right—keep your hair on!" said Handforth, putting his head out of the next caravan. "Shan't be a minute."

"Get back—you're unfit to be seen!" I said severely.

The face retired, for Handforth himself realised he was in no fitting condition to appear before the public gaze. He was in the middle of blacking his face, and it was black only on one side.

"This blessed stuff is no good!" he declared, as he proceeded to smear some more of it on. "Nothing to beat the old-fashioned burnt cork. I never did believe in these patent inventions!"

"We had no trouble with it," said Church, who was all ready. "It's not the stuff that's wrong, Handy—it's the way you put it on. Fancy using a toothbrush! No wonder you miss a lot of places!"

Handforth grunted, and went on with his black toilet. In the meantime, I was hustling the other fellows up. For we had announced that the evening show would be given at six-thirty, and it was six-fifteen already.

Pitt and De Valerie went along in advance to get the chairs in order and to invite the crowd to buy them. And Archie, resplendent once more, went along, too. He completely disapproved of taking any money at all, regarding it as a mundane degradation. But Archie had more money than he knew what to do with—whilst many of the juniors would be only too glad of some extra pocket-money.

"Now then, Fatty—put those sandwiches

down and hustle!" I commanded, looking in at the door of Caravan No. 4.

"All right—I'm doing it!" mumbled Fatty, with his mouth full.

"Doing what?"

"Putting these sandwiches down!" replied Fatty calmly.

"You—you glutton!" I declared severely. "We had tea only half an hour ago, and you ate enough for about six then! Where can you find room for any more? It's a mystery to me!"

"I'm only just having a snack—a little peck before we go!" said Fatty.

"A peck, begad!" remarked Sir Montie, strolling up. "I suppose you mean a bushel, dear old boy?"

Fatty looked indignant.

"I didn't mean that kind of peck at all!" he snorted.

"H'm! Well, Montie's about right!" I grinned. "Ready now? We shall have to hustle, or we shall be late for the opening chorus."

Half the juniors didn't seem to know what the time was, and they didn't think it at all necessary to keep faith with the public. Handforth, for example, stoutly declared that it would be far better to wait until half-past seven. He even added that this was an excellent idea.

"To be an hour late?" I asked tartly.

"Of course!" said Handforth. "Why not? It'll give the public time to buy the chairs. At half-past seven every seat will be sold——"

"At half-past seven there'll have been about four riots—unless we give the show at the right time," I interrupted. "Pitt and De Valerie are taking money now, and we've only got about ten minutes. Come on, for goodness sake!"

At last I managed to round up the orchestra, and then we all started off along the beach—again escorted by a certain percentage of the Brightside infant population.

Since our afternoon performance we had become almost famous—but I'm afraid this fame was not entirely due to our musical and vocal efforts. We were talked about because it had leaked out that we were schoolboys from St. Frank's. We had taken no particular precautions against this, and so we could hardly expect anything else. Furthermore, we had earned notoriety by our part in getting the little girl ashore and by the incident of Archie and the caravan.

Consequently, when we approached our "stand" against the cliff, we found that every seat was sold, and that two or three hundred people were standing round. We were in for a record time. And I was only sorry we hadn't got more seats; because we could have sold three or four hundred.

We took our places on our little stools, and were greeted by an encouraging round of clapping. It was nearly time for the show to begin, and the orchestra was already tuning up.

Archie, during this time, was standing some distance away.

And there was a dreamy, puzzled kind of look on Archie's countenance. He gazed at the throng which surrounded the St. Frank's minstrels. Then he turned, and peered through his monocle further along the beach.

His attention was attracted by a tumble-down kind of wooden structure which stood on the sands—a sort of stage, with one or two tiny dressing-rooms in the rear. Everybody who has visited the seaside will know what I mean. It was a pierrot stand, and in front of it were four or five hundred chairs in an enclosure.

At the two gates of this enclosure stood two forlorn-looking pierrots. More pierrots were on the stage itself, indulging in an opening number. Their show, in fact, had just commenced.

"I mean to say!" murmured Archie. "How absolutely foul!"

He was gazing at the enclosure which was starkly empty. There were, certainly, about a dozen children at the rear, but business was frightful. Nobody appeared to be patronising the pierrots at all.

Probably they didn't deserve patronage. Judging by the sounds which were proceeding from the little stage, Archie was quite convinced that the general public was well advised to make a wide detour round this section of the beach.

At the same time he couldn't help feeling queer inside.

"What I mean is, it appears on the surface as though we are dashed well queering the bally old pitch!" he murmured. "I mean, the populace is gathering at the mountain—or, to be more exact, the cliff!"

Anybody with half an eye could see that the St. Frank's minstrels had monopolised this section of the beach. And the unfortunate pierrots had very little prospect of making ends meet.

"This," observed Archie, "is where a little chat is necessary."

He pulled himself together and strolled elegantly towards one of the gates of the enclosure. At the same time, the St. Frank's minstrels were just striking up the opening chorus.

Archie approached the gate.

"Sixpence admission, sir!" said the pierrot at the gate, invitingly.

"Absolutely!" replied Archie. "But it so happens, laddie, that I have no inclination to attend this frightful—I should say, this priceless performance. It appears that times are somewhat lean?"

The pierrot looked at Archie in a straight fashion.

"You're one of those St. Frank's boys, aren't you?" he asked.

"A perfectly good guess, old thing."

"Your chums have properly put the lid on us!" said the pierrot mournfully. "Why, under ordinary circumstances we should have been over half full by now. We haven't taken five shillings!"

Archie started.

"Not five shillings!" he choked. "But, I mean, that's little short of ghastly!"

The pierrot nodded.

"Ghastly isn't the word, young 'un!" he said. "We didn't do so well this afternoon—only thirty bob—and that won't pay our rent! We were relying on Bank Holiday, too, to give us a bit for the week. Just our rotten luck! I expect we shall starve for the rest of the week!"

Archie looked genuinely alarmed.

"Starve!" he repeated blankly. "Oh, imposs. I mean to say, dashed imposs. Not to be thought of, old tomato! What you want, as far as I can see, is an audience. Am I right?"

The pierrot didn't answer this unnecessary question.

"Yes, what you want is an audience," repeated Archie. "Well, there you are. I mean to say, there it is."

"Eh?"

"The audience," said Archie, waving his hand.

It seemed as though he indicated the great crowd which was surging round the school-boy minstrels—and that was rather like waving a red flag to a bull. The pierrot's face became thunderous.

"Do you mean that crowd round your pals?" he asked.

"Absolutely," said Archie. "That, I mean, is what a chappie might reasonably call a dashed good audience!"

"Look here, young man," said the pierrot grimly. "I don't want to get cross, but you needn't think I feel very friendly towards those schoolboys. They've robbed us of our bread and butter, and—"

"Wait!" interrupted Archie hurriedly. "Wait! I mean to say, bread and butter? Dear old boy, I'll show you a way where you can have jam as well!"

Archie suddenly realised that this little matter required a certain amount of diplomacy. He had approached it from the wrong end. And now he decided to go about the thing more carefully.

"You see, old lad, it's like this," he exclaimed mildly. "You want the best seats—we have them—I mean to say, you want an audience—we have it. How does that go? I will trickle over the golden sands and whisper a few sweet words into the ears of my pals. They will proceed to trickle back with me, and give their show here—"

"Give their show here?" repeated the pierrot, staring.

"Absolutely."

"You're off your head, young man—"

"Not at all, laddie—not at all," interrupted Archie. "You don't appear to grasp the scheme. You see, when these minstrel chappies proceed to flow in this direction, the bally audience will flow also. And it seems that there are large assortments of spare seats lying about here."

The man stared for a moment or two.

"Are you suggesting that we should stand down and let your amateur minstrels give their show instead?" he asked, after a spell.

"That," replied Archie, "is the wheeze."

"Oh, a great stunt," sneered the pierrot. "A brain wave! Look here, my clever little fellow! You'd better go away while you're safe. You want to come here and steal our pitch, so that you can collect all the cash—"

"Wait!" said Archie firmly. "Dash it all, wait! I mean to say, what a perfectly foul idea! I am wounded. Archie is stricken down. I feel sundry packages of sickness descending on me."

"Don't talk like a young idiot—"

"It appears," went on Archie sadly, "that you have misjudged me. I am suggesting that we should give the show—but that you and your pals should collect the takings. You grasp the scheme? You have no audience, and you're not likely to get one to-night. So we'll bring ours, and you can pre-empt over the bally box-office receipts."

The man stared and seized Archie's arm.

"You mean that?" he asked huskily.

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "The Glen-thorne's never spoof!"

"You'll give your show—just to help us out of this hole?" asked the pierrot. "You'll let our crowd keep the takings for the evening?"

"Once again, absolutely," said Archie. "In fact, absolutely with knobs on!"

"Wait a minute!"

The man turned and hurried to the stage. He engaged in conversation with his colleagues, and a moment later two other pierrots came down. They talked with Archie for a few moments.

"Right-ho, old scream—right-ho!" said Archie. "It shall be done."

He hurried away, and arrived at the minstrel "stand" just as the opening chorus had come to an end. Tommy Watson was about to commence a solo. Archie hesitated a moment, and then mounted to the "platform" and faced the crowd.

"Ladies, as it were, and gentlemen!" he began gracefully. "I—er—have risen to this—"

"Clear off, you blithering ass!" hissed Handforth tensely.

Archie gazed at Handy reproachfully. As a matter of fact, he had acted upon impulse. He had started to make his speech because he felt that it would be better off his chest.

To call me aside and explain matters, and then come to an arrangement, would have taken time—and the show was going on. There was no time to waste. Action now wouldn't matter. The performance had hardly started.

"Kindly refrain from interrupting, old sprout!" said Archie severely. "As I was about to remark, ladies and gentlemen! That is, of course, ladies and gentlemen and sundry children, if you have no vast objections, I should greatly appreciate the honour of whispering a few sweet words into your weatherside ears! That is to say, in

nautical terms, your starboard ears! What I mean to remark is that some very dear chappies are at present passing through a period of leanness. Succour is necessary—in fact, large chunks of succour!"

"He's mad!" said Handforth fiercely.

"Let him go on!" I whispered. "The crowd's amused!"

As a matter of fact, the audience was enjoying the speech immensely.

"Precisely!" went on Archie, feeling that he was on more solid ground. "These chappies are in a distinctly fearful posish. Well, anyway, what I want you to do is to move into the offing—or, to be more exact, I want you to move to yonder enclosure. Those who have paid will be admitted free. But there will be seats in plenty for vast throngs of others. If you will cast your optical members to the north-west, you will understand perfectly."

Archie pointed, and everybody saw the deserted pierrot stand.

"Dear old boy—a word!" breathed Archie, coming over to me. "Kindly assist me out of this most frightful predic. When it comes to a speech, I'm done. I want you to shift your dashed quarters!"

In a surprisingly few words—for Archie—he explained what the idea was, and I jumped to it at once.

"I mean, it's absolutely ness!" concluded Archie. "Noblesse oblige, and what not! You grasp what I mean? These poor blighters are in danger of dropping by the wayside, and all that sort of rot! Chunks of starvation and so forth! It's simply got to be done. The old assisting fist, you understand!"

"Of course, I understand, Archie," I said gently. "It's just like you. They're probably spoofing, but that doesn't make any difference to your good-heartedness. All right—we'll do it."

It only took me a few minutes to make the announcement to the audience. I explained that we had come to an arrangement with the pierrots, and would give our show immediately. Those who had paid would be provided with front seats, but there would be ample room for plenty of others.

The audience stood it very good naturedly.

Those in the chairs were each given a slip of paper, and were thus identified when they presented themselves at the gates of the pierrot enclosure. And in less than ten minutes every other seat in that enclosure was sold, too. The pierrot troupe collected something like eight or nine pounds—which was a solid, substantial amount.

The fellows didn't mind in the least—they were rather pleased, in fact. For here, on this proper stage, they felt it was easier to let themselves go. And the performance was a big success in every way.

There were so many encores that we exhausted our entire supply of songs and anecdotes—and in the end we had to finish up simply because we didn't know any more.

We had taken two hours and a half to give

the show—which was a very creditable performance, taking everything into consideration.

And when it was all over, and the audience had departed, the pierrot troupe came up and thanked us warmly.

And when we arrived in camp, we found two yards of thin humanity seated on the steps of Caravan No. 1. With him were two or three suit cases. He rose to his feet, and appeared to stretch out like one of those comic cartoons one sees at the cinema.

"Hallo!" I said. "Here's Longfellow!"

"Have you come to stay?" inquired Pitt. "All fixed?"

"I am pleased to say that everything is well," replied Clarence Fellowe. "In fact, I'm quite delighted, as you can tell."

I grinned.

"Good enough!" I said. "As soon as we've changed, we'll escort Somerton up to the train, have a look round the town, and then come back to camp. Sorry you've got to go, Sommy, but you've got the consolation of knowing that your bed will be kept well aired!"

And soon afterwards we all walked through the town and saw the schoolboy duke off. Our party still numbered the original sixteen, for Clarence was now a fully-fledged member of the caravan trippers.

And bright and early on the morrow, long before the town was awake, we were up and moving. To our satisfaction, Clarence proved that he was no mere dreamer. He did his part of the work willingly and thoroughly. He helped with the horses, with the breakfast, and with the many other odd jobs connected with camp life.

And while the sun was still low in the heavens we started off along the highway—while the dew was still on the grass and Brightside was just beginning to stretch itself for the day's pleasure and the day's work.

We were off once again along the rural lanes of the English countryside—in search of further adventures.

THE END.

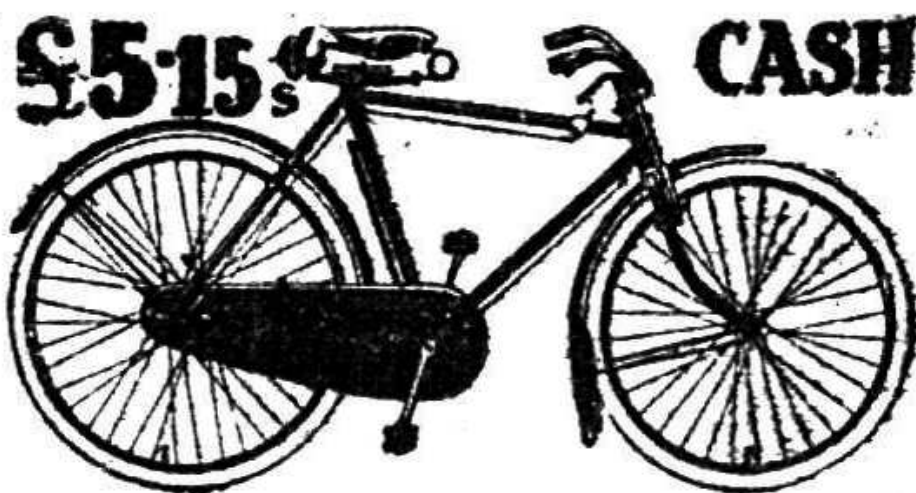
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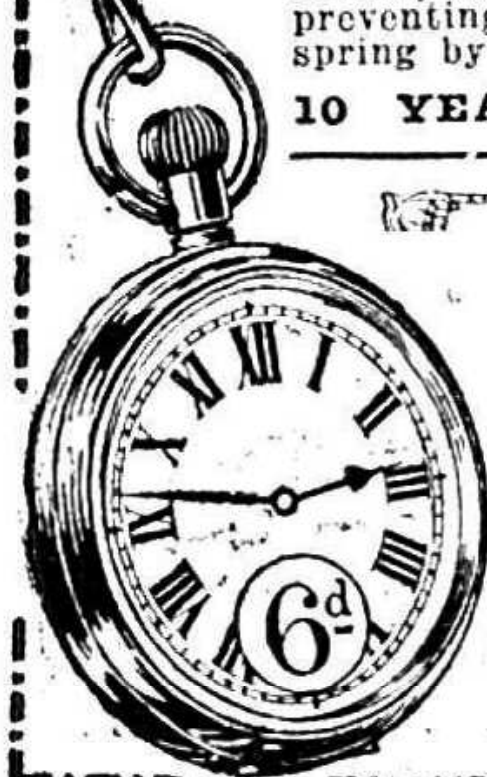
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