

GRAND SCHOOLBOY CIRCUS SERIES STARTS IN THIS NUMBER!

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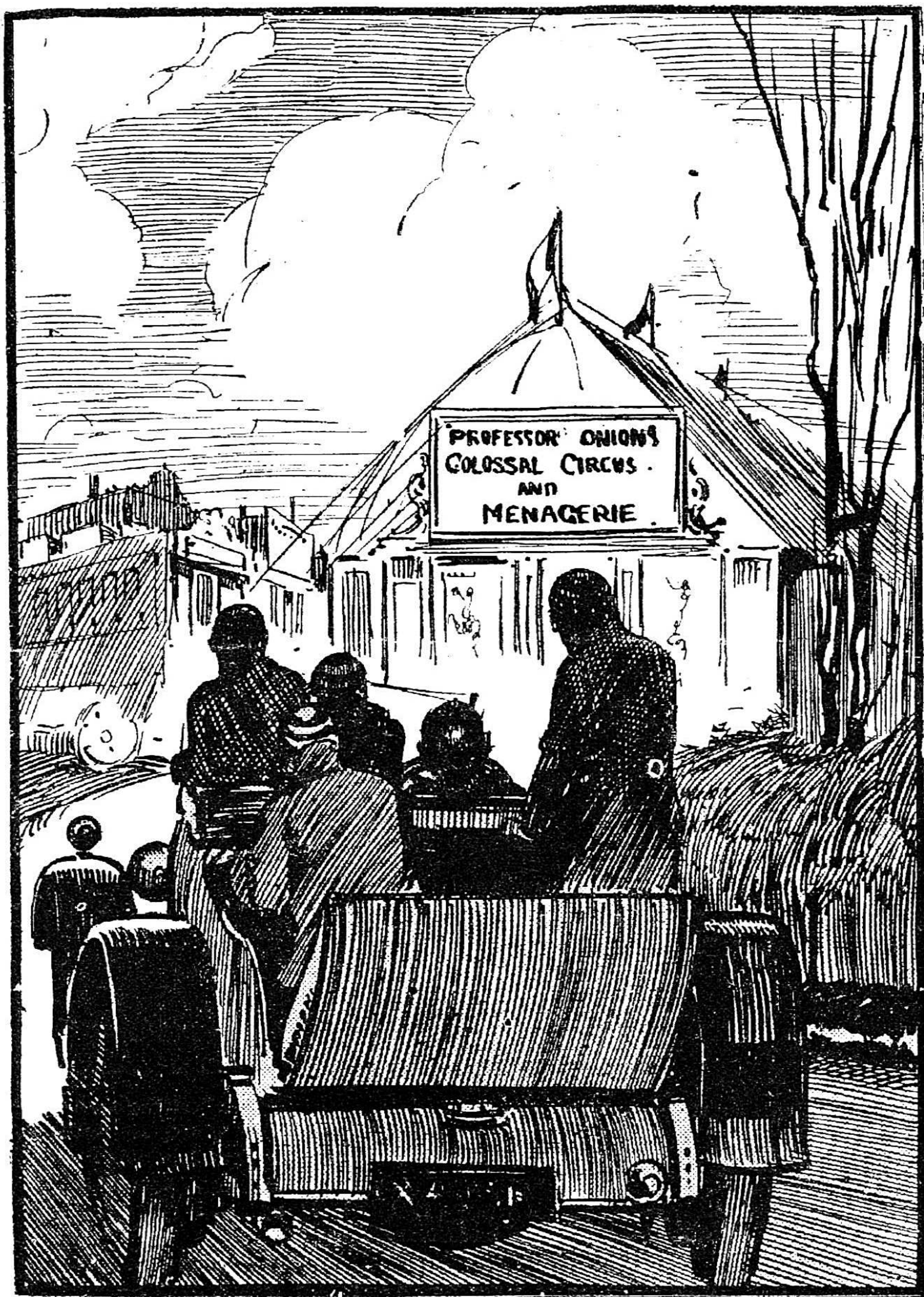
And St. Frank's Magazine

2d



The flaming caravan dropped into the water with a mighty, surging splash!

Splendid New St. Frank's Series Begins with This Week's Story:—
THE SCHOOLBOY CIRCUS OWNERS!



And there we were, standing in the stationary car, staring at the great ornamental frontage to the big tent.

THE SCHOOLBOY CIRCUS OWNERS!

THE OPENING STORY OF A GRAND NEW SERIES OF THE BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S AND HOW THEY COME TO RUN A CIRCUS.

You may have read circus stories before and found them very entertaining, but as far as St. Frank's is concerned the Author has hit on something quite original. Considering the amount of talent available at St. Frank's, it is a wonder that we have not attempted a circus series until now. What with Handy and Co., the Onions Brothers, Fatty Little, Pitt, Archie, and a few others, they will only need a few elephants, a tame lion, and ring horses, and



the whole of Bannington will flock to see it. But they are going to do it properly. They are going to buy up a real circus, lock, stock, and barrel. For sheer humour and thrills, this series will take a lot of beating. Just read this story and see for yourself.

THE EDITOR.

The Narrative Related by Nipper and Set Down by E. Searles Brooks

CHAPTER I.

ARCHIE'S FAIR CALLER!

"PUNG!" said Handforth triumphantly. "Here, hold on——"
"Rats! I want that Green Dragon!" said Handforth. "I've just punged it, and it's mine! I know what I'm up to!"

"But, dear old gooseberry, you absolutely can't do it!" put in Archie Glenthorne mildly. "I'll admit that you're entitled to chow, but when it comes to punging, absolutely not!"

"Do you think I'm dotty?" demanded Handforth. "I've got three East Winds here, and four Bamboos, and now you're trying to do me out of that Green Dragon! What am I going to do with these Bamboos, anyhow?"

"Looks as if you're going to be bamboozled!" said Reggie Pitt blandly.

Handforth jumped up, and the table rocked.

"Mah Jongg!" he said contemptuously. "Call it a game? Nothing but a lot of tosh! All this silly business about punging and chowing! Whoever heard of such piffle?"

I grinned.

"I thought it was coming," I said, with a

chuckle. "The game of Mah Jongg is only suitable for people with patience. I knew it was no good trying to teach Handy. I suppose we'd better be thinking about bed, eh?"

"The scheme," observed Archie, yawning, "is fruity!"

There were four of us at the little table, and the hour was not far from midnight. This, alone, is quite sufficient evidence to show that we were not at St. Frank's.

As a matter of fact, the scene was the cosy little morning-room in Sir Edward Handforth's London house. And the Easter holidays were approaching their end. Before many days had elapsed we should all be returning to St. Frank's for the new term.

We had heard that the old school was practically itself again, after the recent stirring adventures and battles with Mr. William K. Smith and his ruffians. The big encampment known as Cyclone City, in fact, was rapidly becoming a thing of the past.

Handforth had asked a few of us to spend an evening at his pater's place, and we had gladly agreed to the proposal. Church and McClure, Handforth minor, Tregellis-West, and a few others had gone out to a theatre, and would return to their respective homes, only Willy returning. Archie and Pitt and

"I were staying the night at Handforth's place—being too lazy to go home.

Handforth glanced at the clock, and grunted.

"Where's that young bounder, Willy?" he demanded, glaring at Archie. "What's he mean by staying out till this time of night?"

"Dash it all! Don't blame me, old lad!" protested Archie. "I mean, there's no necessity to give me the frozen optic. I'm dashed glad that I'm not responsible for Willy's actions."

"I'll bet he's gorging somewhere!" said Handforth sourly. "I suppose they went into a giddy restaurant after the theatre, or somewhere, and the greedy young beggar will come home fairly glistening with that over-fed appearance! Never knew such a glutton——"

"There goes the bell!" put in Reggie Pitt languidly.

Handforth stalked out into the spacious hall, and just forestalled the butler, who was on the point of opening the main door. Handforth flung it wide, and glared.

"Now, you young rotter!" he snorted. "What have you got to say for yourself? I'm going to flatten your giddy nose—I—I mean——"

Handforth turned furiously hot, and he had a curious desire to emulate the example of a magician he had seen recently, and vanish through the mat. For instead of his younger brother being on the step, he beheld a singularly attractive young lady.

"I—I beg your pardon, miss!" he gasped. "I—I thought it was my young brother. awfully sorry! I—I didn't mean——"

"Oh, it's all right, sir," said the girl, smiling. "Can you tell me if Master Glenthorne is here?"

"Archie? Yes, of course," said Handforth hastily. "Please come in! I'll go and fetch him! Take a chair, miss—sit down, you know! Shan't be two ticks!"

Still horribly confused, Handforth backed away, knocked over a couple of vases, and finally fled into the morning-room. The red appearance of his face at once attracted our attention.

"Hallo!" said Reggie. "What's happened?"

"I—I thought it was Willy, you know!" gasped Handforth. "And instead of Willy it was a jolly pretty girl! And I told her I was going to flatten her nose! It's—it's Archie's best girl!"

Archie Glenthorne went rather pale.

"Oh, come!" he protested feebly. "I mean to say, come! Dash it all, old gargoyle, this is somewhat steep, if you grasp what I mean! As a matter of fact, I haven't got a best girl! And, in any case, it's a frightfully late hour for young ladies to be hovering about, as it were."

"Well, anyhow, she asked for you!" said Handforth. "She's waiting in the hall—you'd better go and speak to her, Archie! I expect it's some secret out of your black past!"

Archie pulled himself together, and gave us an appealing look.

"Nipper, old companion!" he pleaded. "Perhaps you——"

"Nothing doing!" I said firmly. "You're not going to mix me up in any of your entanglements, Archie! I'm surprised at you! I never suspected you had this trait in your character!"

Archie gave a kind of hollow moan, managed to pull himself fairly upright, and he strode out like a martyr going to the lions. But he had only taken two steps in the hall when all his confusion vanished. He came to a halt, and an expression of relief replaced the glassy look in his eyes.

"What-ho!" he chirruped. "Norah! Absolutely! I must confess, Norah, old girl, that you absolutely shoved the wind up me in vast hurricanes! What, to be precise, is the idea behind all this?"

"Mr. Dingle sent me, sir," said the girl respectfully. "The telegram came about half an hour ago, and as it's Button's evening out, Mr. Dingle sent me at once—he thought it might be important."

"Ah, dear old Dingle," said Archie reminiscently. "A priceless lad, when you come to consider it. The dear, portly old bird who buttles so rippingly for the pater. In his way, Dingle is absolutely as brainy as old Phipps. But you made some passing remark concerning a telegram, what?"

It must be confessed that Handforth and Pitt and I were waiting just inside the morning-room, listening. After all, there was nothing private about it, and we were keen to know who Archie's fair visitor might be. We grinned at one another now.

"Only a giddy maid-servant!" whispered Handforth gruffly. "And I thought she was a real girl! Blessed if you can tell maid-servants from ladies now-a-days! She's all dressed up nice, and looks jolly pretty, too!"

Handforth felt somewhat aggrieved. If he had known from the start that Norah was merely one of the maids in Colonel Glenthorne's London house, he might not have been so confused.

Outside in the hall, Archie took a telegram from the girl, and gazed at it wonderingly. It was addressed to "Archibald Glenthorne," and was obviously intended for his own hands.

"From the pater, I expect," he murmured. "Dash it! What a bore! It's a bit thick when the old boy starts sending telegrams at this bally hour! Stand by, Norah, old girl, and the young master will peruse the jolly old wire!"

CHAPTER II.

THE RACE THROUGH THE NIGHT!



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE lost his impatient look almost at once. He gazed at the telegraph form anxiously and in alarm. His expression had become keen

and alert.

"Oh, I say!" he exclaimed. "This is absolutely frightful!"

"Bad news, Master Archie?" asked Norah, with concern.

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Oddslife! The poor old pater appears to have been under a bally 'bus, or something! This is positively ghastly! I've got to fly—fly to the dear old lad's side!"

Norah, with much anxiety, took the telegram that Archie handed to her. And there was every reason for his perturbation. For the telegram ran as follows:

"Your father knocked down by omnibus. Fear seriously injured. Unconscious. Come at once.—WHITCOMBE."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed the girl. "Oh, Master Archie!"

Handforth blundered out of the morning-room into the hall, and we followed. The expressions on the faces of Archie and the girl were so grave that we were all very concerned.

"Bad news, old man?" I asked quickly. "You weren't serious when you said that Colonel Glenthorne had been knocked down, were you?"

"Laddie, the old bean refuses to function," said Archie huskily. "I don't know what to do! This—this poisonous blow has whizzed out of the offing like one of Handy's upper-cuts, and it's absolutely bowled me over!"

I took the telegram, and read it swiftly, Handforth and Reggie Pitt leaning over while I did so. I looked up.

"When did this come?" I asked, turning to Norah.

"About half an hour ago, sir," replied the girl.

I thought rapidly. The telegram had been sent by Dr. Whitcombe, of Bannington. The message, although exceedingly brief, was nevertheless eloquent.

Archie's father had been knocked down by a motor omnibus—presumably in the High Street—and had been taken into Dr. Whitcombe's surgery.

And the medical man, knowing Archie to be away from Glenthorne Manor, had instantly wired to the colonel's London address. For Archie's pater was a very rich man, and kept two establishments going constantly—his country seat, and his town residence.

It was undoubtedly smart of Dingle, the butler, to send the telegram so promptly,

but I was rather at a loss. I could easily understand why Archie himself was so flabbergasted. I glanced at my watch.

"Ten minutes to twelve!" I murmured. "The last train's gone hours ago. I'm afraid you'll have to leave it till the morning, Archie—"

"Imposs., laddie—absolutely imposs.!" broke in Archie, his voice hoarse and strained. "I've got to rush to the dear old pater's side. I mean, dash it, he may be frightfully smashed about. After all, when a chap gets under a 'bus, you know, it's a pretty foul proposition. And to think that the pater was knocked down—"

He broke off, his voice tragic.

"I know!" said Handforth excitedly. "A special train!"

Archie's eyes gleamed.

"By gad, yes!" he exclaimed. "That, I mean, is a dashed brain-wave! But—but how do we arrange about these things? Do we just whizz to Victoria, and order one, like a taxi?"

"That won't do," I broke in. "It'll cost hundreds of pounds—"

"Expense, dear old soul, is nothing!"

"Yes, but apart from that, there'd be all sorts of delays," I went on. "Over an hour would be wasted before the train could be ready. And by that time the car will be half-way to Bannington."

"The car?" said Archie, repeating the only word he had heard.

"The gov'nor's racer," I explained. "I've got it outside, in the garage."

"Bravo!" said Reggie Pitt. "That's the smartest wheeze yet! If we start at once, Nipper, how long will it take to get to Glenthorne Manor?"

"Three hours, at the most," I replied. "By breaking a few speed records, we'll do it in two and a half!"

"Quicker than the train," said Handforth. Archie looked at me with excitement and anxiety.

"It's frightfully decent of you, old lad," he said gratefully. "But you know how serious it is, don't you? I am dashed if I like bothering you—"

"Don't be an ass!" I interrupted crisply. "Get your things on—and make haste. Reggie, have my coat and cap ready, please. I'll have the car round here in less than two minutes!"

The next second I had gone, and it only took me a few moments to reach the garage, where I made sure that the big racing car was well filled with petrol and oil, and ready for the road.

Nelson Lee was away in the Midlands, and so I had been able to use the car just as I liked. And I realised how handy it would now be. By three o'clock, at the latest, we would be at Glenthorne Manor.

I brought the car round to the front drive, and found three figures waiting—in overcoats and mufflers and caps. For although Spring had practically come, the night was clear and inclined to be frosty.

"What's this?" I said. "All coming?"
 "Dear old boy, I insisted," said Archie. "I shall be frightfully worried all the way down, and I want you fellows to rally round, as it were. I mean, this is a time when a chappie requires his pals flowing round him."

"You've got room; haven't you?" asked Reggie.

"Room for six, at a pinch," I replied crisply. "Jump in!"

The guv'nor's powerful racer was fitted with a rakish looking body which was far more commodious than appearances led one to believe. There was ample room for three in the front seat, and there was a kind of dickey in the rear which provided easy accommodation for two.

"I'll go behind," said Pitt promptly. "And don't waste—"

"Hallo! What's all this?" came a new voice. "Well, I'm jiggered! What do you chaps think you're doing?"

Willy Handforth loomed up from the gateway, having just emerged from a taxicab with all the assurance of an elderly clubman. He had, in fact, had a heated argument with the taxi-driver over a disputed sixpence.

"Go indoors, Willy, and get to bed!" said Handforth, glaring.

"Not likely!" snorted Willy. "If you're off for a spree—"

"There's no spree about it," I interrupted, taking him by the shoulder. "Archie's pater has been badly injured, and we're taking Archie down to Glenthorne Manor to the Colonel's bedside. Don't delay us, there's a good chap!"

Willy was serious in a moment.

"I say, can I come?" he asked eagerly.

"He might as well," said Pitt. "He can keep me company behind here."

I didn't argue—and, for a wonder, neither did Handforth. Perhaps he realised full well that the situation was too tense for any unnecessary delays. My only regret was that any of the fellows were coming at all—for the bigger the load, the less the speed. However, it was hardly a matter of life and death, although serious enough. And I should be able to get enough speed, even fully loaded up.

We started at once, for Willy was already overcoated and muffled, and he climbed into the dickey seat with Pitt. We roared out of the short drive, and just had a last glimpse of Norah discussing the situation with Sir Edward's butler.

At this hour London was practically empty, and we were soon roaring through the South-Western suburbs on the main Guildford and Portsmouth road—going by way of Putney, Kingston, Esher and out into the open country beyond.

We passed through Guildford fairly sedately, but had been roaring along at well over fifty miles an hour at times. The car was enormously powerful, and purred over the smooth road superbly.

Once past Guildford, we rushed on again through the dark, starlit night. It was clear and fine, and except for the grave nature of our mission, we should have enjoyed the trip immensely.

"Helmford next," remarked Handforth, after we had passed a number of small villages, and had left the Portsmouth road. "We'll be there in just over an hour, I'll bet—at Glenthorne Manor, I mean."

"Under an hour," I said shortly.

In due course we came within sight of the twinkling lights of Helmford—the last big town before reaching Bannington. We had just passed over a high ridge of the Downs, and Helmford lay below, spread out in front of us, with myriads of points of light.

"Hallo! What's that?" said Willy Handforth, pointing.

"Looks like a fire," said Pitt. "I don't suppose it's much."

Over to the right of the road, and far away in the valley, a kind of ruddy glow was flickering amid the surrounding darkness. A few moments later, it was hidden by an intervening patch of woodland.

And we saw nothing of it again until several miles had been covered, and we came out from a wooded stretch of sloping road into the Helmford valley. We were now within a mile or two of the town itself.

And as we turned a bend of the main road we saw a blaze of lurid fire, and, instinctively, I slowed down somewhat. A fire meant traffic on the road possibly, and as we were doing nearly sixty, I thought it advisable to go easy.

I throttled down until we were gliding along at just over thirty, and then we came right upon the scene of the fire itself. Strangely enough, the road was still empty and desolate, and this seemed to indicate that the fire was a mere trifle—an old bonfire, perhaps, fanned into a blaze by the strengthening breeze.

But this wasn't the case.

As we sped by a large, open meadow, we saw a number of tents within—one tent in particular being of enormous size. Round about there were numerous caravans, just visible in the gloom of the night.

But these we hardly noticed. Our attention was concentrated upon one caravan in particular—a bigger, roomier van which stood in splendid isolation from the rest. And the rear end of it was blazing like a torch!

CHAPTER III.

THE INGRATITUDE OF MR. SIMON SNAYLE!



W HOA! Better stop, hadn't we?" said Handforth excitedly.

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "A minute or two won't matter, and there might be some poor blighter in peril here. Gadzooks!"

The dashed caravan is absolutely doomed, as it were! This is where we get busy, laddies!"

I had already stopped the car, and we were standing up, and staring over the short hedge. As far as we could see, the fire was quite undiscovered, for not a soul moved about in that encampment.

"A circus!" said Willy, with interest. "I say, the whole place might blaze up! See how the sparks are flying towards the tents?"

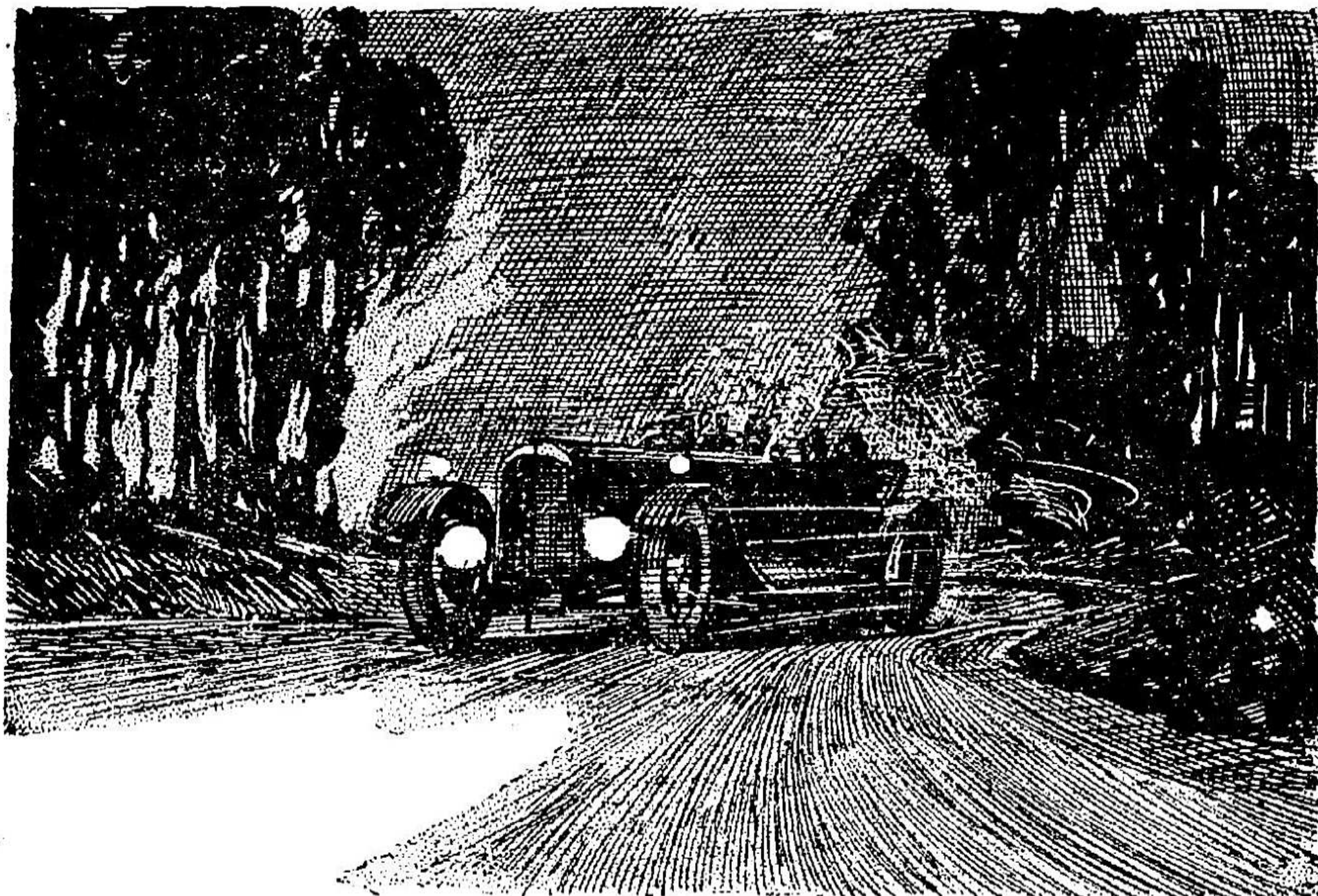
We were all puzzled. It seemed extraordinary that nobody had discovered this blaze. The big caravan was well alight,

"We'd better yell!" said Handforth.

"No good," I replied crisply. "If that caravan is to be saved, we've got to get busy. We can put it out in two minutes. See that pond? Come on! It's the only way!"

I didn't give the other fellows a chance to ask what I meant. Leading the way, I leapt out of the car, and over the low hedge, and they all came trailing after me. We arrived at the caravan, and found that it was in a bad way.

The heat near the rear of it was fierce. About an eighth of the van—the entire end section—was alight from top to



Over to the right of the road, a kind of ruddy glow was flickering amid the surrounding darkness. A few moments later it was hidden by an intervening patch of woodland.

and positively doomed unless action was taken on the instant.

Yet there were plenty of indications that the camp was inhabited, for we could hear the kicking of horses, the movements of other animals, and in two of the distant caravans there were faint lights gleaming.

Yet the fire had attracted no attention. We had the road to ourselves. Further along there were some cottages, but they were all dark. And, after all, upon due consideration, I realised that the affair was not so strange. It was after two o'clock in the morning, and the whole countryside was asleep. And this fire had probably only started blazing ten or fifteen minutes earlier.

bottom. Fortunately, the wind was blowing away from the main body. Had it been otherwise, the caravan would undoubtedly have been a complete torch by this time.

The front section, where the shafts were lying idly in the grass, was quite untouched. And as there were no hosepipes handy, there seemed only one way to deal with this conflagration.

"Grab hold!" I said sharply. "And push!"

The others had gathered the idea by this time, and they pushed with a will. A short distance from the spot there was a muddy locking pond, occupying a corner of

the meadow. And the ground sloped slightly down in that direction.

"As she dips in, stand back!" I yelled.

A glance had shown me that the pond had a fairly steep bank, and nothing could have been more suitable. The heavy caravan, gathering speed as it lumbered over the grass, went over the edge of the pond with a beautiful sweep. Flames and sparks roared out with a tremendous gush.

And then—splash! Hiss!

The caravan dropped into the water with a mighty, surging splash, to be followed instantly by an almost explosive cloud of steam. And there the clumsy vehicle stuck, sagging downwards at the rear, the

voice of a man, in accents of rage, terror, and confusion.

The next moment there was a splintering of glass and a small window at the front end of the caravan—which was now looking skywards—burst open. The head and shoulders of a man came pushing through.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Reggie.

His surprise was shared by all of us. In our determination to extinguish the fire we had overlooked the fact that the caravan might contain a living person. And this man was certainly living.

"Help!" gasped the man, his voice thick and terrified. "I'm blind! I'm choked!"

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lower part of the fire extinguished, but the upper part still blazing.

"Over with her!" yelled Pitt.

Standing on the bank, we heaved at the front wheels, using all our strength. And by a tremendous effort we succeeded in tipping the caravan completely on its end. There was another tremendous cloud of steam, and the fire was out—that section of the caravan being completely immersed.

"Quick work, by George!" said Handforth breathlessly.

He stared at the caravan, for from within there came the sounds of bumping and knocking, accompanied by the growling

Help me out of this! Hang you, ain't you got any sense? Can't you see I'm done?"

Handforth and I leapt on to the caravan from the bank of the pond, and assisted the man out of the smashed window. At close quarters, we could see that he was fully dressed, and was well-nigh unrecognisable as a human being. His face was grimy, his clothing was blackened by soot—and we did not fail to detect the strong odour of whisky.

"Anybody else in there?" I asked sharply.

"No—hang you, no!" grated the fellow. "You young fools! What in thunder did you want to tip the van up for? I'll have

the law on you for this, burn you! Boys, eh? You young pigs——"

"Here, steady!" I put in grimly. "You force me to remind you that we've just saved your life! And the least you can do is to thank us for saving the caravan."

The man struggled out of the window, jumped to the grass, and stood swaying slightly as he looked round. Everything was now quite peaceful. There had still been no alarm, and we had this part of the field to ourselves.

"What about it?" asked Archie anxiously. "Time to scud off, what?"

"Yes," I replied. "We've saved this man's life, and we can't do much more. Better give him a drink of water—he seems a bit dazed, even now. I don't wonder at it, with all that smoke. Funny thing he wasn't suffocated."

Pitt had already filled his cap with pond water, which was the best available. He held it out to the man, who dashed it to the ground.

"Take that blamed stuff away!" he snarled. "Water? I ain't mad yet! And don't you kids go—I want to have a word with ye!"

He pulled a flask from his hip pocket, and took two or three skilful gulps, proving himself to be an expert at this form of lubrication. I looked at the man with sudden suspicion.

And I came to the conclusion that he was still suffering from the effects of heavy drinking. Apparently he had been lying fully dressed on his bunk—where he had flung himself upon lurching into the caravan. And he had been sprawling there, stupefied by liquor, unable to realise his peril. It had not been the smoke and the fumes that had bemused him, but the drink.

And the sudden upending of the caravan, and the clouds of steam, had presumably awakened him out of his drunken stupor. As far as we could see, he wasn't hurt at all. He looked a burly, hulking brute of a man, with rugged features and prominent teeth.

"I am sorry, but we haven't got time to stay now," I said grimly. "We were passing by, and we saw your caravan on fire. So we took the only possible means to extinguish it. If we hadn't come along, you would have been suffocated, and burnt alive!"

The man laughed harshly.

"Boy, you're mad!" he said hoarsely. "I'd 'a' got out all right, without no interference from you! This 'ere caravan's a wreck now—thanks to your blamed foolery burn the whole crowd of ye!"

"Look here, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Snayle's my name!" broke in the man—"Mr. Simon Snayle!"

"It fits you down to the ground!" remarked Reggie Pitt pointedly.

CHAPTER IV.

AT COLONEL GLENTHORNE'S BEDSIDE!



MR. SIMON SNAYLE failed to catch the point.

"You don't seem to know what you've done!" he went on, wriggling slightly as he stood. "Ruined that caravan—that's what you've done! And I'm the manager—see? I'm the manager of this circus, and I'm the boss! That's me—the boss! And if you give me any lip, I'll swipe you!"

Archie Glenthorne jammed his monocle into his eye.

"Allow me to remark, you pestiferous blighter, that I regard you with absolute contempt," he exclaimed stiffly. "These chappies have saved your life, and all you can do is to use this frightful language! You're nothing but a bally cad!"

"Let's go!" added Reggie Pitt.

"Go, will you?" roared Mr. Snayle. "Not until you've pulled this caravan out of the pond! Come on, blame you! Get to it, or I'll make you smart! That's what I'll do! Look lively, blister you!"

We didn't even demean ourselves by answering him. In spite of his threats and ravings, we hurried across the meadow and reached the road. Here we climbed into the car, and were soon speeding away.

"The rotter!" said Handforth gruffly. "Another minute, and I'd have biffed him one! After we'd saved his life too! I'll bet that circus isn't much good, with a boss like that!"

"He's several kinds of a beast, but we can't exactly judge him," I said. "The man was obviously half drunk, and I don't suppose he knew what he was saying. His mind was too fuddled to realise that we had saved him from a horrible death. He saw his caravan overturned, and naturally accused us. Later on he'll probably realise how much he is in our debt."

We put the affair from our minds, for now that it was over it seemed trivial. And we were thinking, too, of our mission—our journey to Glenthorne Manor. Archie was far more anxious than he allowed us to see.

In spite of the brief delay, we shot into the park gates of the Manor shortly after two-thirty, and saw that several lights were gleaming in the windows of the picturesque old mansion. But even now we were not certain that Colonel Glenthorne was here. Perhaps he had been kept in Bannington by Dr. Whitcombe.

As I pulled the car to a standstill on the terrace, Archie Glenthorne leapt out, raced up the steps, and hammered loudly upon the door—for it had failed to open in response to his efforts.

And by the time we mounted the steps, too, the great door opened, revealing a tired and sleepy looking butler.

"Master Archibald!" he exclaimed gladly. "Absolutely!" said Archie. "But tell me, Ferris, what about the pater? Don't trouble to break it gently, laddie! Pour it forth absolutely steaming, for the young master is on edge!"

Ferris, who was an impressive looking individual, smiled soothingly.

"It's all right, Master Archibald—quite all right!" he said. "I am afraid Dr. Whitcombe was hasty in sending you the telegram. The master is not badly hurt, and is now, I believe, sleeping—"

"That's dashed good!" said Archie, grasping Ferris, and nearly kissing him. "Dash it, Ferris, you've made the old heart throb once more! During the last hour or so it has absolutely ceased to push the life fluid through the old veins! I mean, I have been absolutely unstable. But now a fresh burst of life surges through the old tissues!"

"I am jolly glad to hear this, Archie," I said thankfully.

"Rather!" said the others.

It was indeed a relief to know that Colonel Glenthorne was not fatally hurt. We all went inside, and found a cheerful fire glowing in the lounge hall. And Archie was insisting upon going upstairs to see his father when we heard a rustle, and Mrs. Glenthorne appeared.

"What ho, mater!" said Archie. "Kindly allow me to dash into your arms and condole! These are the dear chappies!" he added, indicating us. "The good old lads of the village who whisked me down here. Between you and me and the old balustrade, they're a fine bunch of sportsmen!"

Archie kissed his mother, who was attired in a long dressing gown, and who looked by no means worried or anxious. She greeted us with much warmth, and proved to be a kindly, amiable lady. And it could hardly be said that we were meeting her under ideal conditions. This was the first time we had been introduced to Archie's mater, by the way.

"It was very foolish of Dr. Whitcombe to send the telegram," she told Archie. "Your father was certainly knocked down, but it was only a mere bruise. Perhaps it looked more serious at first than everybody thought."

"Was the dear old boy absolutely knocked silly?" asked Archie.

"You must not refer to your father in that manner, Archie," said Mrs. Glenthorne, frowning.

"Well, dash it, the dear old pater," amended Archie obligingly. "I gather, from the narrative that he was somewhat slightly biffed, and no more? Dashed rotten of old Whitcombe to shove the wind up me like that!"

"You see, your father was unconscious for nearly half an hour, and it might have been quite serious," said Mrs. Glenthorne.

"I must thank your friends for bringing you down so speedily."

We denied that we had done anything worthy of thanks, and soon afterwards Archie went upstairs to see his father. He came down alone, and his face was beaming.

"The report, dear old lads, is entirely satisfac.!" he observed. "The old boy is positively sitting up and taking notice. A bit knocked about, and some of the paint-work scratched, as you might say, with a dint or two in the armour, but otherwise the old toff is chirping. So kindly raise your voices, and cheer with much lustiness."

"We'd do anything to oblige a pal, Archie, but I am afraid Mrs. Glenthorne would have a few objections," said Pitt. "We'll reserve the cheering until tomorrow. And now I suppose we'd better be getting back."

Archie stared.

"Pray don't be such a priceless chump!" he observed. "The Ferris bird is now dashing about like anything, preparing sundry beds, and what not! Which reminds me, old sparking splugs, that refreshments of a somewhat lavish order are awaiting us in the feeding apartment."

This was a piece of glad news, for after our long ride we were peckish, and we were soon sitting down to hot coffee, sandwiches, and other light refreshments. And Archie told us all about the Colonel's accident at length.

It had been quite a simple affair. The Colonel had slipped while crossing the Bannington High Street, a motor bus had bumped into him and sent him flying, and his head had caught a portion of the mud-guard, inflicting a fearsome looking scalp wound which bled profusely.

When Colonel Glenthorne had been carried into Dr. Whitcombe's surgery, he had looked as good as dead—a rather fearful sight. And the doctor had very thoughtfully sent a telegram to call Archie to his father's bedside. But it soon proved that the wound was only skin deep. A few stitches, a bandage, and the Colonel revived. And in all probability he would be walking about in a couple of days, as hale and hearty as ever.

So we were mightily pleased with everything in general, and went to bed tired and sleepy. We certainly had no idea of the somewhat surprising events which were to occur as a direct result of this unexpected trip to Bannington.

CHAPTER V.

THE SCHOOLBOY CIRCUS OWNERS!



"WELL I'm jiggered!" said Handforth blankly.

"And we didn't know!" remarked Reggie Pitt.

"This is, without exception, a dashed startling revelation!"

said Archie Glenthorne, staring fixedly through his monocle.

It was morning, between nine and ten o'clock, and the racing car was halted beside the road, and we were all staring across a low hedge into the adjoining meadow—where the tents of the circus were pitched.

At my suggestion, we had started bright and early, for I felt that we were rather in the way at Glenthorne Manor. And we wanted to get back to London, too, for there were only one or two days left of the holidays.

And it was somewhat natural, perhaps, that we should slow down while passing the scene of the night's adventure. We were curious about that circus, and wanted to see what it looked like in the light of day.

The weather conditions could not have been better, for the April sunshine was warm and brilliant, and the whole countryside was looking fresh and green and unusually delightful.

And there we were, standing in the stationery car, staring. And the reason for our astonishment was this; on every caravan, and on the great ornamental frontage to the big tent, we read the words, "Professor Onions' Colossal Circus and Menagerie."

"So this is it!" I exclaimed wonderingly. "Well, I can't congratulate Professor Onions on his beautiful manager. And the next time I see those River House chaps, I'll tell 'em so!"

"You won't need to wait long," said Reggie Pitt. "They're on the spot!"

He pointed to the big tent, and we all saw two youthful figures just emerging. Two figures whom we recognised as Johnny Onions and Bertie Onions, the rather quaint pair who had recently become pupils at the River House School.

We had known all along that they were the sons of a circus proprietor, and they had given more than proof of this—for Johnny was a remarkably clever acrobat, whilst Bertie, the unsmiling one, had given every indication that he had the makings of a clown in him.

But it came as a bit of a surprise to discover that this circus was the one that their father owned. And it was even more surprising to discover that the two brothers were here themselves.

They saw us at about the same time as we saw them. They paused, spoke together for a few moments, and then came striding briskly over towards the hedge.

We noticed that the caravan had now been pulled out of the pond, and was standing near by. A couple of men were working on it, and although there was no sign of Mr. Simon Snayle, we felt, somehow that he was hovering round somewhere.

"Cheerio Johnny, old son!" shouted Pitt, as the two River House boys came closer. "How goes it? We didn't expect to find

you fellows here. How's Mr. Slug this morning?"

The Onions brothers broke into a run, and came up, rather breathless. They halted, looking at us from the other side of the hedge.

"Well I'm blessed!" said Johnny. "About the last fellows I expected to see! What the dickens are you doing down here—before the holidays are over, too!"

"Just on our way to London," I replied. "We called here last night, you know—or, to be exact, about two o'clock this morning."

The two brothers stared at us.

"Why, were you the chaps who tipped Mr. Snayle's caravan into the pond?" asked Johnny.

"We're the chaps who saved Mr. Snayle's life!" retorted Handforth grimly.

"What do you think of that, Bertie?" said Johnny. "I'll bet that bouncer has been lying to us! Why, we thought some of the town urchins had been larking about by what he said."

"Mr. Snayle is an unpleasant man," said Bertie gloomily. "He's always telling lies. I think it must be because he's such a lank river."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "But, personally, I think he knows more about ponds than rivers."

"Oh, sorry!" said Bertie dejectedly. "Did I say lank river? Just a slip! I meant to remark that he's a rank liver. He's always getting drunk, and last night he was sadly boaked. I should say, badly soaked."

"You'd better dry up, Bertie, and let me do the talking," said Johnny. "You're such a chap for getting mixed up."

"Never knew anybody like him!" growled Handforth. "He can't say a dozen words without getting mixed up. And he looks as if he's lost a pound-note, and picked up a German mark."

"I can't help it," said Bertie, in a melancholy voice. "Sometimes I wish I was as light as you brads—"

"Eh?"

"Sorry! I mean as bright as you lads," said Bertie. "What we ought to do with Mr. Snayle is to get him low."

"I agree," said Handforth grimly. "Why don't you?"

"He won't," said Bertie glumly.

"Won't what?"

"Go."

"Who's talking about going?" roared Handforth. "You said you were going to get him low—"

"Oh, did I?" said Bertie. "Sorry! Just a slip! I meant that we ought to let him go. But he won't go! That's the worst of it!"

"Blessed if I can understand what you're driving at!" growled Handforth.

"He's talking about Mr. Snayle," said Johnny. "He's the manager of the circus, and he's about the most unspeakable beast under the sun. A good manager, I dare say,

although we've seen no sign of it yet—but unquestionably a beast."

"We thought about putting him in a cage," said Bertie sadly. "But, somehow, I don't think he'd be a draw. He told some awful chibs about you faps, and said you kied to trill him."

"Said we what?" asked Reggie.

"Oh, sorry! I mean tried to kill him," said Bertie.

"Why, the horrible liar!" roared Handforth. "I—I mean the horrible liar! We came here and found the caravan burning and saved the lotter's rife! I—I mean, the rotter's life! Blow this chap! He keeps mixing me up!"

It didn't take us long to gather that Mr. Simon Snayle had given a falsified account of the night's excitement. But the Onions brothers believed us implicitly when we told them the actual truth.

"I'm not surprised, though," said Johnny. "The man's a miserable cad, and I'm going to ask my pater if we can't get rid of him. As far as I can see, he'll do a lot of harm to the show."

"You speak as though the giddy circus is yours!" said Handforth.

"So it is—mine and Bertie's."

"What?" exclaimed the five of us, staring.

"Fact!" said Johnny calmly. "We're the owners."

"But—but what about the River House?" I asked. "The new term starts in a couple of days, and I understand that Dr. Hogge is going to take possession of the old school again until the new place is built. What's the idea?"

Johnny looked almost as serious as his brother.

"Well, we know you chaps, so we won't make any mystery of it," he said quietly. "I think you know that our pater came into a lot of money, and sent us to a first-class school on the strength of it?"

"Yes, everybody knows that," I replied.

"Well, dad got a bit reckless or something," said Johnny. "The money went to his head, I expect, and he thought he could double it by risky speculation. Anyhow, he took advice from some rotten sharks, and lumped all his money into some companies that were duds."

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed Archie. "How frightfully mouldy!"

"Yes, it was a bit rotten," agreed Johnny. "To cut a long story short, the pater can't afford to keep us at school any more, and we hadn't even completed one term! And the dear old chap had a stroke, too!"

"It never rains but it roars," said Bertie dolefully. "I—er—mean it never rains but it pours. Just a slip! Sorry!"

"Well, they're both about right, as it happens," I said. "But how do you mean? A stroke? Is Professor Onions very ill?"

"This news came all of a sudden, you see," said Johnny. "Just when the pater was expecting to hear wonderful news, and now he's lying helpless. The doctors say

he'll recover, with care, but it's a rotten position. By a bit of luck, he hadn't sold the old circus, but had it packed away in winter quarters. So he's put it on the road again, and Bertie and I are equal owners of the show."

"Good luck!" I said heartily. "I hope you'll make good with it."

"It'll be a struggle," said Johnny, shaking his head. "This is our first pitch, you know, and we're here for three days. Yesterday we didn't take enough money to pay exes, and I expect it'll be the same to-day. But we're hoping for the best. Like to have a look round?"

CHAPTER VI.

LOOKING ROUND.



WE expressed our desire to walk round the circus, and have a look at it at close quarters. And so the gov'nor's racer was left on the grass beside the roadside, and

we entered the meadow, escorted by the two youthful circus owners.

We couldn't help feeling sorry for Johnny and Bertie Onions. Johnny had put the thing very prosaically, but we felt that both he and his brothers were more deeply hurt than they cared to tell of. Just when they had thought to leave the circus behind for good, and to launch out upon life with a fair start in a good school, they were called back to the old order of things.

Owing to the reckless speculation of Professor Onions, these two boys were compelled to live in a caravan once again, and to go round with the circus from pitch to pitch. From a distance there may be a certain glamour about the life, but at close quarters it tends to become rather sordid and miserable, as the brothers knew well enough.

Their only consolation in the present situation was that the show was their own. Their father had legally made over the entire circus property to his sons, and everything was formally signed and settled. Johnny told us this before we had even reached the big tent.

"But it's not much to boast of," he added. "A few years ago, Professor Onions' circus was the biggest on the road, and was always packed at every performance. In fact, only last autumn it was as ripping as ever. But this time the old circus is shabby and poverty-stricken. You see, the pater couldn't afford to spend a penny on re-fitting, and we came out all weather-stained and dirty and faded, just as we finished last season. It's a terrible handicap!"

"I don't see that a bit of paint makes much difference," said Handforth. "The caravans are a bit faded, and the tents are patched but that's nothing. It's the show that counts."

Johnny nodded,

"Yes, it's the show that counts," he agreed. "And I don't mind telling you fellows in confidence that the show is pretty awful. You see, all our best performers went at the end of last season, and we couldn't afford 'em now. Just the same with the animals. The pick of the pater's menagerie had to be sold, and we've taken the road with only a few old crocks—some ancient elephants, a lion, a few monkeys, and precious little else. Just enough to make a bit of a show, and that's all."

"And how about your turns?" I asked.

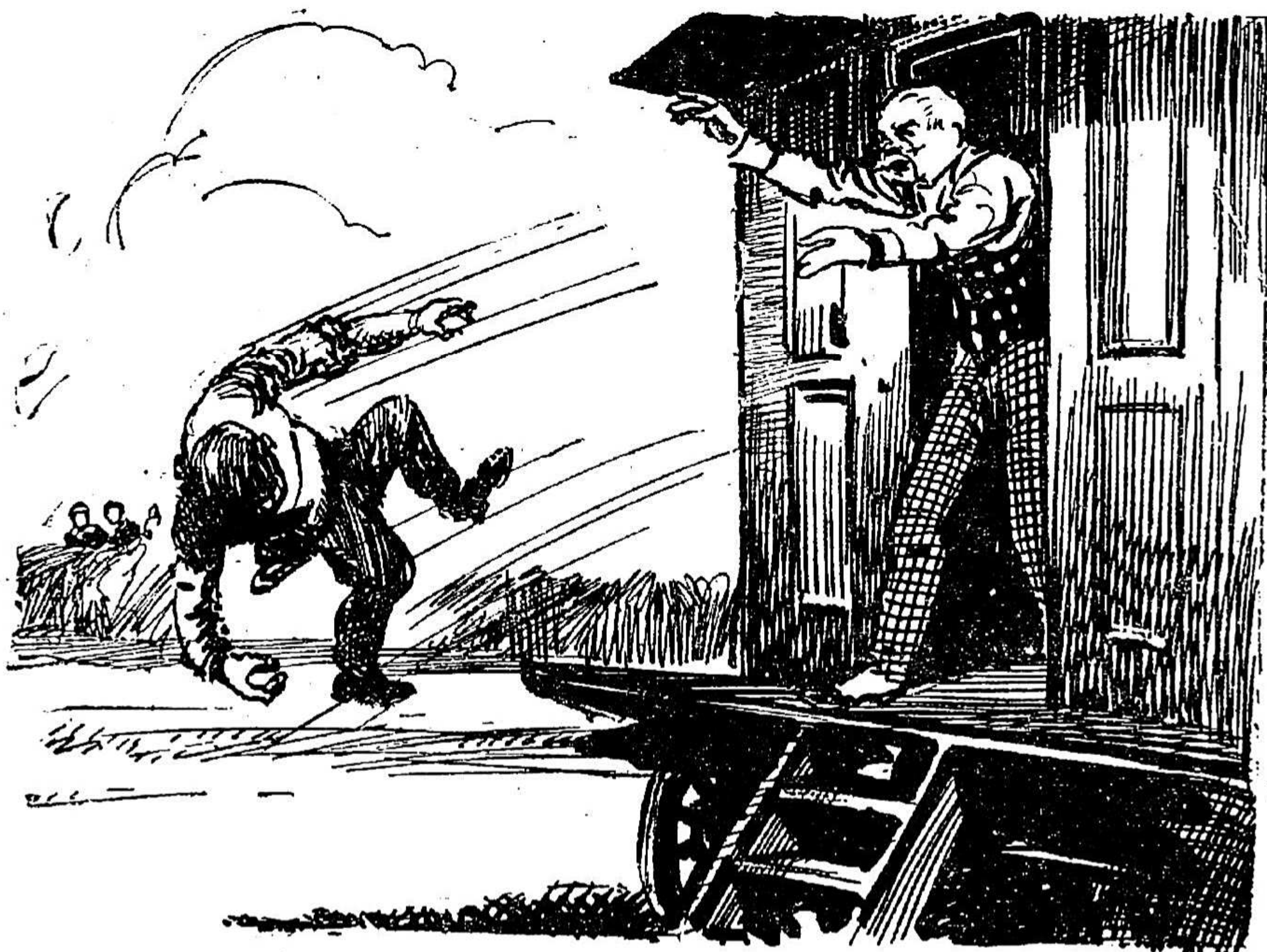
"The company isn't exactly a brilliant one," admitted Johnny. "We've got one or

We came to a halt, and Johnny Onions turned red.

"Look here, Mr. Snayle! There's no need to talk like that to my friends!" he said angrily.

"Your friends!" stormed the manager. "These—these young hooligans your friends? Perhaps you don't know that they tried to kill me last night!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth. "You—you unspeakable toad! You've got the nerve to stand there and say that we tried to kill you! Why, we saved your life! If it hadn't been for us, you'd have been



With one mighty swing of his powerful shoulders, Mr. Snayle sent the unfortunate dwarf hurtling out of the caravan like a piece of rubbish.

two rough riders, a conjuror, two bare-back lady riders, a trapeze act, but none of them are startling. I do a bit of acrobatic work myself, and Bertie fools about as a clown."

By all that we could gather, the circus was a very third-rate affair, and we felt more sorry than ever for the schoolboy owners. We were just about to enter the big tent when we heard a hail, and observed that a burly figure was approaching us. It was Mr. Simon Snayle, the manager.

"Oh! So you infernal boys have had the nerve to come back, eh?" he shouted as he strode up. "Clear off this field! Clear off, or I'll have you chucked out! Understand?"

burnt to death in that blazing caravan! You were too drunk to know anything!"

Mr. Snayle swore with violence.

"Drunk!" he roared. "Ye say I was drunk?"

"Absolutely!" declared Archie. "Why, dash it, you smelt like a bally old distillery! It's a dashed wonder the gas didn't ignite, and explode you! As for your personal habits, Mr. Snayle, the one thing that puzzles me is that you don't leave a bally trail behind you! Other snails do, by gad."

"Good!" said Reggie. "Well spoken, old son!"

"There you are!" stormed Mr. Snayle.

"You hear what kind of whelps they are! Can't speak without insulting me!"

"You asked for it, Mr. Snayle, so you can't grumble," interrupted Johnny Onions curtly. "These young gentlemen are my guests, and you'll please treat them as such."

"I'll do nothing of the sort!" thundered Mr. Snayle. "I'm the manager of this show, and I'll be obeyed!"

"And Bertie and I are the owners, and if you don't behave yourself, Mr. Snayle, there'll be trouble!" snapped Johnny furiously. "You'd better understand, once and for all, that you can't boss it over me!"

The manager seemed to choke for a moment.

"All right, my lad—all right!" he said thickly. "Have your own way! But I'll see that your father knows about this, blister me! I'm not going to be flouted, I can tell ye!"

He turned on his heel and stalked away, swearing.

"A perfectly noisesome chunk of fungus!" observed Archie pointedly.

"An absolute beast!" agreed Willy Handforth. "I'm blessed if I can understand why you fellows stand him! If you're the owners, why the dickens don't you kick that blackguard out? I know I would!"

Johnny Onions looked rather distressed.

"It's a bit of a mystery," he said. "About Snayle, I mean. You see, there was a certain clause in the legal papers, or something. I don't know much about these things, but Snayle's a fixture."

"What do you mean—a clause?" asked Handforth.

"When the circus was made over to us by the pater, he signed documents to name Mr. Snayle as the permanent manager," explained Johnny. "Anyhow, it's all legally fixed, and we can't do a thing. Bertie and I are the owners, but Mr. Snayle is nominally in charge. We've simply got to stand him!"

"There's something rummy about that," I remarked. "Looks to me as if the man has got a hold on your dad."

"That's what we think, but it seems pretty awful," said Johnny. "What hold could such a rotter have over our pater? Why, the pater's one of the most harmless chaps you could ever meet—the most loved man in the whole circus game. Personally, I think he misjudged Mr. Snayle, and gave him the job."

"That's possible," I agreed. "Snayle may have been quite a good manager—with your father's eye constantly on him. But now that he's on his own, he's taking advantage of the fact."

"Besides, there's another reason why we can't get rid of him," said Johnny slowly. "Somebody else would suffer. But we don't want to talk about this any longer," he added. "Let's go round."

We went into the big tent, and were not very impressed. It was only a small ring,

and everything was rather old-fashioned. The menagerie, adjoining, was not much of a show—a few elephants, a lion, some monkeys, an alleged zebra, and a few other uninteresting exhibits. Everything looked dead and dismal, and we couldn't possibly see how this material could come to life under the influence of an audience.

Having been round, Johnny invited us into the caravan which he and Bertie shared, and we talked of making a move towards London.

"Oh, no! Don't say that!" exclaimed Johnny, with concern. "We want you to stay to lunch, and then see the afternoon show. Do stay!"

We looked at one another, sighed, and agreed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BULLY.



ABSOLUTELY foul, of course; but, dash it, we've got to be polite!" murmured

Archie, as he and Reggie Pitt hung behind. "I mean to say, it's a bit decayed to be doomed to this frightful show!"

"Out of sheer pity, we have to remain!" grinned Reggie. "It would be an awful blow to these chaps if we waltzed off without seeing the afternoon show. I expect it'll nearly kill us, but the demands of friendship are hard."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie hopelessly. "And this Snayle blighter. I mean, he absolutely makes me feel that the old spine is turning into a chunk of jelly. He now stands in the middle distance, gazing at us like the dashed villain in a Lyceum melodrama gazing at the hero."

They passed into the caravan, leaving Mr. Snayle still standing in the middle distance, probably gnashing his teeth. But Mr. Snayle was soon forgotten, for the caravan proved interesting.

There was certainly very little room for seven healthy juniors to disport themselves in; but the caravan, after all, was only designed for two, and was an ideal travelling home.

Professor Onions, at least, had seen to the comfort of his two sons in this respect. The caravan was one that had been designed for his own use, and had hardly ever been used. It was beautifully fitted, with every modern appliance, with two cosy bunks; folding tables, lockers, and even electric lights, and the Onions brothers were justly proud of their home.

"Of course, we don't do any of the cleaning or washing," explained Johnny. "Dippy does most of the domestic work."

"Dippy?" I repeated.

"Didn't you see him over by old Snayle's caravan just now?" asked Johnny. "A little,

dwarf chap. I don't think he's got any other name—at least, I've never heard of it. Snayle treats him like a dog, and one of these days there'll be trouble. If you'll excuse me a minute, I'll nip off and find him, and get him to hustle with the lunch."

We soon began to enjoy ourselves, for the lunch proved to be a most excellent meal in every way. And by this time, too, the circus was beginning to wake up. That totally dead aspect was wearing off, and some of the artists were putting in an appearance, and were even rehearsing.

But nothing could alter the poverty-stricken, frowsy appearance of the whole show. And we couldn't possibly see how such a circus could be successful. On every hand there was full indication of bad management.

The brothers couldn't be blamed, for they were absolutely new to this life—so far as management was concerned. Our early opinion of Mr. Snayle was rapidly becoming more pronounced. We could only regard him as a bullying tyrant, with little or no business ability. Under his guidance, the circus would soon die a perfectly natural death.

There was not much wrong with the display bills, it is true. These were great, gaudy affairs, setting forth the various attractions of the circus in startling language. Apparently the circus was about the most extraordinary collection of human talent that could be found in the whole wide world. But the display bills could not be regarded with absolute veracity.

After our splendid lunch, feeling strongly fortified for the coming ordeal, we wandered into the big tent again, to have a look at some rehearsing. The star troupe of acrobats were practising a new trick. The troupe, to be exact, consisted of two worn-out music-hall artists. Their speciality was a trapeze act, and they were really too old to do it convincingly. At one time they had been high up in their profession, but now they were only too glad to accept work in a circus.

They were using the nets for safety, and were just going through the final practise of a new trick. Mr. Snayle stood by, watching, and the expression on the manager's face was not exactly encouraging.

"You'll need to do better than that, Johnson," he said sourly. "Why, this trick ain't worth looking at! Can't you manage to put some speed into your work? You'll have to quit unless you come to life."

"Give us a chance, guv'nor," said one of the men. "This is only the third time we've tried the trick. We're going to put it in the programme next week if we can get in enough practice. Without the nets, too!"

"Next week!" snapped Mr. Snayle. "You'll put it in to-morrow, or you'll get the sack! Don't talk so much—get on with the job! I want to see what this blamed stunt is like. No good, I'll bet!"

It could hardly be said that Mr. Snayle was encouraging to his performers. The

men, however, were doing their best, and the feat they now performed was quite a risky one—or would be when the nets were removed. Whilst one man hung head downwards from a trapeze, the other swung himself from a higher trapeze, turned a double somersault, and was caught by his partner. But there was a kind of sideways twist attached to the trick which made it doubly effective. And it was this twist which the "Johnson Brothers," as they called themselves, were now perfecting. Mr. Snayle's comments were unpleasant.

Johnny and Bertie Onions stood looking on, and the rest of us watched, too. The Johnsons made one or two preliminary trials, and their work struck me as being quite good—although ordinary. There was nothing at all startling in the trapeze business they performed.

Even this new trick was mild and commonplace, but none the less interesting for that. And what else could be expected from such lowly-paid artists? They performed the trick once with complete success, although it was obvious that the nets were necessary.

"Bally good!" said Archie clapping. "Bravo, laddies! Distinctly the stuff to give 'em! Not absolutely startling, but I gather that the rustic minds will absorb it somewhat voraciously."

"Splendid!" I agreed, clapping also.

"Bah! I saw tricks like that twenty years ago!" snapped Mr. Snayle. "Look here, you two, unless you can get something new into your act, you're salary is going to be lowered! I'm sick of this old stuff!"

The unfortunate gymnasts went on with their rehearsal without making any comment. I could well imagine that this engagement was the first one they had enjoyed after a long period of "resting," and they were compelled to swallow their pride, and accept these jeers with what grace they could muster.

Again they practised the trick, and this time they didn't quite get the hand grip, and one of the men broke loose, twirled over sideways, and came hurtling earthwards.

"Oh!" gasped the onlookers.

But they needn't have been startled. The net caught the falling man, and he bounced up and down once or twice, and then fell out of the net practically at Mr. Snayle's feet—flustered, confused, and rather dazed. He picked himself up unsteadily.

"You make me sick!" said the manager icily.

He gave the gymnast a push which sent him reeling, and both Handforth and I instinctively started forward. Snayle was twice the size of this elderly acrobat, whose active days were strictly over.

"Steady, sir!" said Johnson thickly. "No need to shove me about like that! Jim and I are doing our best——"

"You're no good!" snapped Mr. Snayle. "And I don't want any lip, either!"

"Lip!" retorted the man, hotly. "I can speak, I suppose?"

"Shut your mouth!" shouted Mr. Snayle, twirling on the man in a fury. "Why, burn you, I'll shut it for you!"

He brought his fist round with a mighty swing, and floored the unfortunate gymnast with one swipe. The man sagged to the ground with hardly a sound, although a shout of rage went up from his partner, aloft.

"By George!" breathed Handforth fiercely.

Before I could move an inch, and before we could divine Edward Oswald's intention, he took four rapid paces forward, and literally yanked Mr. Snayle round with one pull. The manager gazed at him in surprise.

"Why, what the mischief——" he began.

"You rotten bully!" bellowed Handforth. "Take that!"

Crash!

Handforth put the full force of his shoulders behind a terrific upper-cut, and Mr. Simon Snayle turned such a beautiful somersault that one might have believed he had been trained as an acrobat himself.

CHAPTER VIII.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT.



MR. SNAYLE sat up, and looked round with bleary eyes.

"And the next time I see you acting the brute, I'll do it again!" said Handforth fiercely. "You confounded bully! Hitting a man half your size and double your age! It's a pity we didn't leave you to burn!"

"Good for you, Ted!" said Willy. "As it happens, you just forestalled me. I was thinking about knocking the cad down! Whoa! Look out, there! He's getting frisky!"

Mr. Snayle, in fact, had leapt to his feet with a perfect roar of rage. He stood swaying on his feet, preparing to knock Handforth completely out of the tent. But Handforth stood his ground, and laughed.

"Come on!" he invited. "I'm ready! Huh! Think I'm afraid of you? I'll jolly well——"

"Steady, old man!" I put in, grasping his arm. "We don't want to let this affair go any further. Cool down, old son."

Handforth stared at me.

"Don't you agree with what I did?" he hooted.

"Yes—but you needn't deafen me!" I re-

plied. "Of course I agree. But it's over now——"

"Oh, is it?" shouted Mr. Snayle, his face purple with passion. "Over, eh? I'm going to smash this kid until he can't see, and until he ain't got a whole bone left in his infernal body!"

The Onions brothers grabbed Mr. Snayle, and pulled him back, and everybody else in the tent stood looking on with great interest. Mr. Snayle glared at the two boys dangerously.

"Stop this, Mr. Snayle!" said Johnny curtly. "It's gone far enough, and I'm not having any more violence. You asked for that swipe, and you got it. All right, Johnson—get on with your rehearsal."

"Thanks, Johnny," said the man, moving away.

"By thunder!" snarled the manager. "Who's boss here?"

"I am!" said Johnny Onions.

"You!" roared Snayle. "What am I—a stable hand? I'm the manager, and if you kids think you're going to run the show, you've made a blamed mistake! That kid knocked me down, and I'm going to pay him!"

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Mr. Snayle," interrupted Johnny, who was keeping his temper well. "And let me tell you something. As long as you manage this show properly, you'll get no interference from either Bertie or I. We won't butt in on your authority. But as soon as you start acting the bully, we'll uphold anybody who knocks you down."

"Hear, hear!" said Archie. "A dashed sound speech, by gad!"

Mr. Snayle went almost pale, but by this time he had managed to control his violent temper. And he knew, instinctively, that he had made a blunder. He was in the wrong, and this knowledge did nothing to improve his rage. But it helped him to control it.

"I'll let your father know about this!" he snarled.

"All right—go ahead!" said Johnny quietly. "When my father knows the truth about the whole incident, I fancy he'll have something pretty severe to say to you, Mr. Snayle. You know as well as I do that my dad always insists that his employees shall be treated humanely. I'm willing to forget the whole affair—and I advise you to do the same."

Mr. Snayle wrenched himself away from the schoolboy owners, and took a deep breath. He probably realised that he had his limitations—he was, after all, only the manager. And he had acted in gross contravention of all Professor Onions' orders.

Without a word he swung round, and strode out of the tent. Bertie and Johnnie breathed sighs of relief, and Handforth looked indignant.

"The rotter!" he said wrathfully. "I was just going to knock him down again!"

"Thanks all the same, Handforth, but it isn't good for discipline to have these kind

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of scenes," said Johnny quietly. "It was decent of you to butt in like that, but Bertie and I are the owners, you know."

Handforth had nothing to say. He felt, vaguely, that he had been mildly ticked off. And, when all was said and done, it had hardly been his place to take matters into his own hands. He should, at least, have waited to see what Johnny would have done.

But "nobody" could blame him for his action, and five minutes later the whole affair was tacitly forgotten. Handforth only refrained from referring to it again because I had taken him quietly aside, and had advised him to let it rest. I pointed out that an incident of that kind was better banished.

"All the same, the man's a beast!" said Handforth gruffly.

"Quite right—he's a beast!" I agreed, with diplomacy. "But if he knocks any of the artists about again, Handy, leave it to Bertie and Johnny. If they fail to put things right, it'll be quite time to interfere."

"Oh, all right!" said Handforth grudgingly. "Never knew such a fuss. I can't knock a blessed bully down now without being told off! What's the good of having a decent punch?"

"Forget it," I said patiently.

"Don't keep talking to him like that," said Willy, coming up. "My hat! Don't you know Ted by this time? The more you tell him to forget it, the more he'll keep harping on it! He's the biggest rag-chewer under the sun. Talk about fish wives. He'd win the championship!"

"Who told you to shove your nose in?" demanded Handforth hotly.

"I did!" said Willy. "My hat! Look at that! Not bad, eh?"

He pointed up at the trapeze, and Handforth gazed up at the gymnasts with interest. Not that there was anything thrilling to watch. Willy had only pointed on the spur of the moment, just to bring the argument to an end.

"I can't see anything," said Handforth sourly.

"Poor chap!" sighed Willy. "He's blind now!"

He strolled off just in time to avoid a swipe which Handforth aimed at him. But Willy was so practised in dodging these blows from his major that he did it almost unconsciously. It was the most difficult thing in the world for Handforth to get anywhere near his younger brother with a good biff. Somehow, Willy was never there at the exact second.

But the fag's intervention had the effect of bringing the discussion to a finish. And for the next half-hour we watched the rehearsals. And we came to the inevitable conclusion that there was ample room for improvement.

If we had just seen a sample of the actual

show—and there was no question that we had—the afternoon's entertainment was not destined to be exactly brilliant.

CHAPTER IX.

DIPPY, THE DWARF.



CURSING under his breath, and tenderly feeling his chin, Mr. Simon Snayle made his way to one of the caravans which stood a little apart from the other vans and waggons of the show.

Mr. Snayle was in an evil temper.

Once or twice he paused to rap out some harsh remarks at the various circus workers, some of whom were making preparations for the afternoon show. The crowd would be coming along in about half an hour—that is, if any crowd came at all. Already a few small boys were hovering about in the road, waiting for the gates to open.

The men connected with the circus were not a very brisk-looking crowd. Many of them were little better than tramps—fellows who were only too glad to hang on to a circus, in order to do odd jobs, earn their food, and perhaps a few shillings besides. They slept anywhere—in the empty trucks, in the tents, and sometimes when the show was on the move. There was never any difficulty in getting these relics of humanity to join a circus.

Mr. Snayle entered his caravan noisily. It was one that he had taken possession of that morning, for his own was in no fit condition at the moment—after being half-burnt and then tipped into the pond.

Mr. Snayle's new home was a shabby-looking caravan, and rather smaller than his old one, and this did not improve his temper. He was a man who always looked after his own comfort.

Inside the van he paused, and stood staring. The interior was looking very untidy, although a short, stumpy little man was on his hands and knees, scrubbing the floor industriously, and to such good purpose that the perspiration was pouring from his ugly, grotesque face.

"What the blazes does this mean?" rapped out Mr. Snayle harshly. "Ain't you finished yet, you lazy skunk? All the morning, and can't do better than this! Burn you for an idle dog!"

The short, little man cringed back, fear written on all his features. The imprecation which Mr. Snayle had hurled at him seemed justified, for there was something startlingly dog-like in this mis-shapen creature's attitude. He cringed to the floor, and held his head aside, as though in expectation of a sudden kick. No doubt the unfortunate dwarf had every reason for the precaution.

"Dippy doing his best!" he exclaimed, in a husky, throaty voice. "Dippy work hard,

boss! Soon be finished. Dippy had lot to do this mornin', an' this caravan all untidy. Dippy nearly done."

"Shut your infernal whining!" said Mr. Snayle brutally. "I'll give you ten minutes to finish, or you'll live to regret it! You ugly, distorted hog! Another word, and I'll kick you in the ribs!"

Dippy looked up in fear and apprehension. "Dippy soon finish, boss!" he pleaded.

He went on with his work with a kind of frantic haste, and Mr. Snayle flung himself upon a locker, and watched the dwarf at work. For some moments the manager continued to tenderly rub his chin, and then he filled a pipe. He smoked in silence for some minutes, and the strong tobacco seemed to soothe him somewhat.

"Durned if I know why you weren't drowned when you was a kid, Dippy," said Mr. Snayle reflectively. "You ain't much better than an animal, when all's said and done. A lazy whelp, too!"

"Dippy try to work hard!" said the dwarf fearfully. "Dippy always work hard for boss. Boss kind to me, and give me food, and sometimes money. Dippy very grateful!"

Mr. Snayle nodded.

"Ay, and so ye should be!" he declared. "Tisn't every man would employ a blamed g'rilla like you. As long as you work for your grub, I'll keep ye, but the first time you get lazy, out ye go in the gutter!"

Mr. Snayle took a cruel pleasure in uttering all the insults he could at this unfortunate creature. The dwarf was undoubtedly repulsive to look upon, but this was hardly his own fault. He was a human being, the same as Mr. Snayle himself, but for years he had been ground down by hard work and semi-starvation.

For over two years, now, he had been employed by Snayle, and had become the man's slave. Somehow or other, Mr. Snayle exerted a strange power over the dwarf, and kept him in constant subjection.

In many ways, in spite of Dippy's ugliness, he was a pitiful little figure. But since falling into Snayle's power, he had been well fed, and his broad shoulders and great chest spoke of much strength. He worked like a horse, and did the work of three ordinary men. He more than earned the food he got, and the miserable coppers that Mr. Snayle sometimes flung at him.

In the circus Dippy was generally supposed to be half-witted. Snayle believed so, too, and took advantage of it. The dwarf had no other name—at least, nobody had ever heard it. He was just Dippy—and this nickname in itself was a kind of insult, signifying, as it did, that he was "loony."

"These kids are a durned nuisance, butting in where they ain't wanted!" went on Mr. Snayle savagely. "Seems like they'll

stay for the afternoon show, too. Young fools! I hope they'll enjoy it!"

He laughed to himself, and Dippy made no comment.

"Not like the old show, is it, you twisted chunk of ratflesh?" went on Mr. Snayle, giving the dwarf a contemptuous shove with his heavy boot. "Eh? Not like the old show, is it? Answer, burn ye!"

The dwarf looked round with apprehension.

"Show bad now," he said sadly. "Show all gone wrong since Big Boss stayed in winter quarters. Dippy very unhappy—"

"Ye blamed fool!" interrupted Mr. Snayle. "What the thunder have you got to be unhappy about? Ye ain't got the sense to know what's good and what's bad. Blister me, I've seen apes with more brains than you've got, ye dirty savage!"

Dippy went on with his work as though he had not heard. His face was averted from Mr. Snayle, and the dwarf allowed an expression of keenly intelligent hatred to enter his eyes. Mr. Snayle would have been startled could he have seen it. There was nothing of the half-witted about that face now.

Once or twice Dippy had given the slightest trace of a wince as the insults had been hurled at him, but always he had concealed these tiny indications from his master.

Yet, in all truth, Mr. Snayle's blackguardly taunts bit deeply into the dwarf's thick skin. He suffered these taunts daily, and one would have thought that they would become commonplace. But this was not the case. Dippy knew only too well that he was an unfortunate, mis-shapen travesty of a human being. And, surprisingly enough, he was sensitive on the point. For years he had been treated as a piece of filth, and through it all he kept his inner feelings locked away within his shapeless body.

"Ain't ye never going to finish?" demanded Mr. Snayle, rising to his feet and looking round critically. "What have ye done, anyway? Wasted the whole morning—curse you for a good-for-nothing hog! Ye'll be thankful I don't kick the life out o' your hairy hide!"

Dippy had finished the floor by this time, and was scrubbing vigorously at the little folding table near the window. As a matter of fact, he had worked like a galley-slave all the morning, and Mr. Snayle knew it well enough. This caravan had been filled with rubbish—a kind of store-room for odds and ends. Single-handed, Dippy had cleared it out, and had made it into a thoroughly presentable habitation.

"Don't stand looking at me!" snarled Mr. Snayle harshly. "Get on with your work, blame you! One of these days, Dippy, I'll take ye by the throat and choke the life out o' ye! It wouldn't be murder, either! What are ye but a dirty animal?"

Dippy looked up, his eyes gleaming strangely.

"Dippy not dirty!" he protested. "Dippy clean! Dippy always work hard for boss—"

"By thunder!" roared Mr. Snayle. "Ye'd answer me back, would ye?"

He flew into a violent rage, and picked the dwarf up with one fierce swing. It was one of his favourite tricks to goad Dippy into a meek protest, and then turn upon him like a tiger.

"Outside, you scum!" he panted brutally. With one mighty swing of his powerful shoulders, Mr. Snayle sent the unfortunate dwarf hurtling out of the caravan like a piece of rubbish.

CHAPTER X.

THE AFTERNOON SHOW!



"O D D S L I F E!" said Archie Glenthorne mildly.

He stood quite still, and gazed across the sunlit meadow in the direction of Mr. Snayle's caravan.

Handforth and Reggie Pitt were with him. And all three had seen the little incident.

A curious, dwarfish little figure had come hurtling through the doorway of the caravan, to fall in a tangled heap on the grass. The figure picked itself up with amazing alacrity, and scuttled off to one of the dressing tents with a strange, ungainly run. And his speed was startling.

"Come back, ye lazy skunk!" shouted Mr. Snayle, appearing at the door of the caravan, and dusting his hands as though they were contaminated. "When I get hold of ye, I'll break every bone in your tyke's body!"

"By George!" said Handforth thickly. "He's at it again!"

"Steady, old son!" said Pitt. "It's nearly time for the show, and we don't want to cause any fresh commotion. I'll admit that Mr. Snayle deserves to be neatly carved into slices, but it's not our job."

Archie adjusted his monocle with a firm hand.

"Between you and me and the bally old landscape, laddies, this foul person is a dashed blister!" he observed. "I mean to say, he's absolutely a chunk of poisonous vegetation! Strictly speaking, he ought to be dropped down the nearest drain!"

"It's no good talking to the Onions' about it," said Reggie, shaking his head. "You can see the poor chaps are worried stiff, and they don't like Snayle any more than we do. Better go easy, and be blind to all these little incidents."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "It's decidedly ragged at the edge, but I agree, laddie."

"Look here, I don't!" snorted Handforth. "Snayle ought to be boiled—"



And the next moment Tessa had fallen heavily to the sawdust.

"Personally, I should imagine that boiled snails are positively abhorrent!" observed Archie. "Pray listen to reason, old gargoyle—"

"Are you calling me a gargoyle?" demanded Handforth grimly.

"Absolutely not!" said Archie with haste. "A mere form of address, old flick! Dash it, you're such a chappie to get wild, you know. One bally word, and I'm dashed if you don't buzz off the deep end like a cross-Channel swimmer! You make a chappie go all hot and bothered!"

Handforth cooled down.

"I don't like to see bullying," he said gruffly.

And he stalked off with his hands thrust into his trousers-pockets.

"Ye gods!" murmured Reggie. "The chap who doesn't like to see bullying! If Church and McClure had been with us to-day they would have been sharing about three black eyes and two fat ears by this time! Queer how some fellows fail to see themselves as they really are!"

Handforth stalked off behind the tents, having no objective in view. He had only walked away to mark his disapproval, and he was by no means delighted when he came face to face with his younger brother.

"Talk about a nightmare!" he growled. "I can't turn north, east, south, or west without coming across your ugly mug! Who the dickens told you to prowl round here?"

"Oh, that chap!" said Willy vaguely.

"Which chap?"

"The chap who told you," said Willy calmly. "Satisfied? What's the idea of looking so purple in the face? Did somebody

make a few remarks about your manly beauty?"

"I'm not in the mood to listen to any of your cheek!" retorted Handforth, breathing hard. "I'm fed up! Understand? Fed up! If this show doesn't start soon, I'll jolly well——"

He broke off, for at that moment Dippy, the dwarf, appeared round a corner of the tent. He paused uncertainly as he caught sight of the two juniors, and stood looking at them with frank curiosity.

"Hallo!" said Willy cheerfully. "How goes it?"

Dippy stood there, without replying.

"You have my sympathy," went on Willy, determined to make himself agreeable. "I saw the way the Snayle reptile treated you just now, and it wouldn't be too severe to hang him! I suppose you're a part of the circus, eh?"

"Mc Dippy," said the dwarf cautiously. "Dippy my name."

"Oh, glad to meet you!" said Willy, extending his hand. "Put it there!"

Dippy was rather suspicious, for he had never shaken hands with anybody in all his life, so far as he could remember. He had never even had a hand offered to him. He took Willy's tentatively, and Willy proceeded to pump his arm up and down with vigour.

"Glad to know you, Dippy," he said genially. "This object is my brother. No compliment to me, but we all have our little misfortunes, don't we? Do you appear in the show, or are you just one of the staff?"

Dippy's face broke into a smile of happiness. For years he had been treated like dirt, and it was a wonderful change to be addressed as an equal. And, repulsive though his face was, it changed completely under the influence of his smile, and became pleasantly human.

"Dippy play clown now," he said, with a kind of pride. "Dippy try to make people laugh. You see me in show soon."

"Look here, Dippy, what about Mr. Snayle?" put in Handforth. "He's your boss, isn't he? Does he treat you roughly and knock you about?"

"Dippy got to go now," said the dwarf, his smile vanishing. "Dippy got work to do. Nearly time for show."

He went off round the tent like a rabbit, the very mention of Mr. Snayle's name apparently freezing him up. Willy turned to his brother and eyed him with disfavour.

"Proud beast!" he said frankly. "Why didn't you shake hands with the chap?"

"You cheeky young ass, he didn't give me a chance!" retorted Handforth. "I was going to ask him about Snayle, and he bolted! Looks to me as if he's in mortal dread of that brute!"

"That's about the size of it," agreed

Willy. "Oh, well, it's no good running after him. Now, lemme see. We shall have to go in the half-crown seats, I suppose. Must do the thing properly. Come on, old son!"

"What do you mean—come on?"

"Three bob!" said Willy, holding out a hand.

"Why, you—you——"

"Oh, don't mess about!" said Willy impatiently. "Half a crown for a seat, and sixpence for chocolates! You can't expect me to go through the whole afternoon without any chocolate, you mean rotter! Hand it over, and don't make a fuss!"

Handforth nearly exploded, and then grew icily calm.

"Oh, what's the good?" he said disgustedly.

"No good at all!" said Willy. "You'll save time by giving in at once!"

Handforth wearily took out some silver, and handed his brother the required three shillings—he was always as soft as putty when it came to cash. He put an extra florin into Willy's palm.

"Five bob!" said Willy. "But I only wanted——"

"Say a word to me, and I'll biff you!" roared Handforth. "Clear off! I've never known such a—— Eh? What the—— Well, I'm jiggered!"

Willy had mysteriously disappeared, and Handforth, gazing round, could see no sign of him. But he found him a few minutes later, busily sampling some fearful-looking stickjaw he had just purchased.

The "crowd" was now beginning to roll up. It consisted of children, for the most part, and by the time the circus was due to commence its performance, the great tent was not more than an eighth full. The attendance, indeed, was pitiable, and was probably the result of poor publicity.

Reggie Pitt and I and the other fellows were the only occupants of the best seats, and we felt so conspicuous there that we soon cleared out and joined the other members of the audience.

And the show itself nearly drove us to distraction.

Mr. Snayle was now transformed, and in his ringmaster's uniform he looked quite imposing and important. And there was now no sign of his brutal arrogance. Before the public eye Mr. Snayle was a perfect gentleman.

The performance went on draggily, and we became more and more depressed. The clowns were awful, with the exception of Bertie Onions, who performed some really comic stunts, and did his best to liven up the show. Dippy was in the ring, too, fooling about in an aimless fashion, the butt of the other clowns—who were mostly ostlers and odd men, who almost made us weep.

We were just getting bored absolutely stiff when Tessa appeared. And Tessa made us sit up, rub our eyes, and take notice!

CHAPTER XI.

TESSA, THE LITTLE BARE-BACK RIDER.



"WHAT-HO!" observed Archie, feeling hastily for his eyeglass. "What-ho! I mean, is it so, or am I dreaming?"

Instinctively, we had all sat forward in our seats, and were gazing at the new "act" with open admiration and surprise. So far, we had been driven nearly into a state of coma. One or two horses had appeared, ridden by alleged equestrians and equestriennes—the Marvellous Melrose Family, as they called themselves. They were only marvellous in the fact that they knew scarcely anything about their business, and must have possessed extraordinary nerve to appear at all.

Johnny Onions had done some pretty good work on the trapeze, but one good turn doesn't make a show. And after Johnny had retired, a terrible conjuror had appeared—a man dressed like a shabby edition of an Egyptian priest, who performed the most obvious tricks with a clumsiness that didn't even deceive the children. It must be recorded, with regret, that Mustapha, the Magician, got "the bird," and was finally howled out of the ring.

The audience, therefore, was in just the right mood to give the next turn a hostile reception. But the next turn was Tessa, and a change came over the audience.

According to the programme, Tessa was "The Little Bare-back Rider," and I heard Handforth give a groan as the number came up. Archie had sagged back in his seat, with a glassy expression in his eye. For we all expected a matronly person of about forty-five to appear, and do similar stunts to those perpetrated by the Melrose Family. Somehow, we distrusted the very name of Tessa—until Tessa appeared.

And, as I have remarked, we rubbed our eyes and took notice.

For Tessa was singularly different. She came riding gaily into the ring, standing on the saddle of her bay horse, and at the very first glimpse we could see that she was not a year older than sixteen or seventeen. And this girl was wonderfully graceful, slim, and attractive.

Unlike the other performers, she was by no means shabby, but dressed in a fluffy silken costume that suited her wonderfully.

"What-ho!" murmured Archie again. "Dear old boys, we live again!"

Tessa was careering round the ring, displaying cleverness in every motion of her supple body and shapely limbs. And it was not only her figure that was so attractive, but her face, too. There was practically no sign of paint or powder, and her dark brown curls were obviously her own. Her eyes were bright and merry, and for sheer prettiness Tessa would have been hard to beat.

"Jolly good!" said Handforth, clapping vigorously. "Encore!"

"Shut up, ass!" said Willy. "She hasn't started yet!"

Handforth continued clapping, and it was fairly obvious that he was clapping Tessa's appearance more than her performance. Willy gazed at him with rather a pitiful smile.

"Poor chap! He's smitten again!" said Willy.

"Eh?" said Handforth, turning red. "Why, you—you—"

"Don't forget Irene!" said Willy, holding up a warning finger. "What's Irene going to say if she finds that you've fallen in love with a circus girl? You can leave this one to me, Ted!"

It was just as well that I sat next to Handforth, for I prevented him from committing assault and battery on the spot. And Tessa's performance was a lucky diversion, too. She was more than pretty and graceful—her act was absolutely brilliant and talented.

"Who the dickens is she?" murmured Reggie Pitt. "Funny thing we didn't hear anything about her before the show started. Oh! I say, Johnny—just a word!"

Johnny Onions, having changed, had slipped near us to ask how we were enjoying the show. He had certainly chosen an opportune moment.

"Who's the sweet damsel?" asked Reggie. "Tell us, O chief, who this fair wench may be. I would fain know more of her."

"Tessa?" asked Johnny. "She's about the only decent turn in the show."

"Barring yourself," I pointed out, with a smile. "And Bertie."

"Oh, we don't count," said Johnny. "But Tessa's pretty good. Lucky we've got her. Her name's Tessa Love."

"But isn't she with somebody?" I asked. "I mean—"

"She's Mr. Snayle's niece," replied Johnny quietly.

"What!" shouted Handforth, leaping up, and sitting down so abruptly that the plank gave a sinister creak. "My hat! I thought I'd gone! Snayle's niece!" he added blankly. "You're mad!"

"Now you'll understand, perhaps, why Bertie and I don't want Mr. Snayle to go," said Johnny. "But we can't talk here—wait till tea-time. Ripping, isn't she? Only fifteen, too!"

Johnny spoke with warmth, and we all regarded Tessa with complete admiration. She continued her performance with increasing success, the audience working itself up to its first enthusiasm.

But even now Mr. Snayle wasn't satisfied.

More than once he had cracked his whip with unnecessary violence to Tessa's horse—probably because he enjoyed any form of cruelty. And as we turned to look at the girl again, Mr. Snayle subjected the horse to a stinging flick with the whip that was quite unjustified.

The animal reared at a most awkward moment, for Tessa was in an upright position, and balancing herself on one foot. That sudden rearing of the horse caused her to slip, and the next moment she fell heavily to the sawdust.

"Oh!"

One or two of us half jumped out of our seats, ready to dash to the girl's assistance. But she was up in a moment, and had remounted her horse almost before the audience had had time to take its breath.

Mr. Snayle, scowling fiercely for a moment, muttered something to the girl, and the act went on. But I could see by the drawn look on Tessa's face that she was in pain. Such a fall as that could hardly have failed to hurt her.

But she finished with a brilliant flourish, and made her exit. She was compelled to come out twice to take an encore, and after that the show continued rather dully. After Tessa's appearance there was nothing much to attract the audience.

The show soon finished, to the accompaniment of a jangling discord from the alleged band. This latter consisted of four miscreants who had armed themselves with cornets and trombones, and who did their utmost to create the greatest possible individual din.

We were thankful when the National Anthem was played. By some extraordinary feat, the band managed to make the tune just distinguishable—probably through long practice.

And the audience passed out of the tent, and went back into Helmford town to spread the news that the circus was a "dud." Reggie Pitt and Archie and Handforth, Willy, and I, made our way into one of the adjoining tents, looking for Johnny Onions, who had invited us to tea.

We were just in time to see Mr. Simon Snayle raving violently at his niece. We came in unexpectedly, and they knew nothing of our presence during those first few seconds.

Tessa had now changed, and was neatly attired in a tweed costume, and we could easily see that she was no older than fifteen, and even prettier in ordinary attire than when dressed for the ring.

"But it was your fault, uncle!" she was saying defensively. "You cracked your whip—"

"Don't argue with me, girl!" shouted Snayle. "You were careless! This is what comes of neglecting your practice! What do you mean by falling like that—in front of the audience, too?"

"But I tell you—"

"Don't argue!" repeated her uncle. "I won't be browbeaten by a mere child! You're getting worse and worse! Just because you're fifteen, you think you're no longer a child, and these high-flown notions won't do! Get to your caravan at once, and don't dare answer me!"

"Oh, uncle!" said Tessa indignantly. "It isn't fair! You know as well as I do that poor Bess is touchy, and that whip—"

"Confound you, Tessa, your impudence is unbearable!" stormed her uncle, bringing his hand round and catching the girl a brutal blow on the side of the head.

She reeled and almost fell.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STRIKE!



TESSA recovered herself in a second, and turned upon her uncle.

"Oh, you brute!" she exclaimed passionately. "How dare you hit me like that! You've got so used to bullying your poor men that you've even started with me! I'll go right away if you dare to do it again!"

Mr. Snayle started back, dumbfounded.

Handforth and I and the others had moved a step forward, quite prepared to take the manager and pitch him into the pond. But Tessa's prompt action held us back.

"You young hussy—" began Mr. Snayle.

At that second he caught sight of us, and he pulled up short. Tessa saw us, too, and she went pale for a second, and then flushed. With a toss of her head, she turned her back on Mr. Snayle and walked away.

Fortunately, Johnny came in at that moment, and Mr. Snayle strode out, muttering. As far as he could remember, he had never had such a provoking day in his life. Everything was conspiring to increase his violent temper to fever pitch.

It was the first time he had ever struck Tessa—at least, since she had developed from the childish stage. He regretted it now, in his own way, for Tessa was valuable to him, and he didn't want to quarrel with her.

Johnny spoke to the girl for a few moments, and then brought her over to us, and the girl was introduced.

But she was obviously embarrassed—realising that we had seen that humiliating blow. So she soon went off to her own caravan, which was looked after by a stout old lady known in the circus as Mrs. Simkins. She was an old performer, a kindly old soul, who travelled with the circus, and generally looked after Tessa.

Johnny Onions took us off to his caravan, and there was a kind of constrained feeling. There was quite an excellent tea prepared—for the brothers lived in a way that was fitting to their position. There was just room enough for us all in the caravan—but only just.

"Look here," burst out Handforth, breaking the rather awkward silence; "I'm not thinking about tea now. Blow tea! What are we going to do about that bullying cad, Snayle?"

"Go easy, old man—" began Pitt.

"I won't go easy!" retorted Handforth. "I'm going to speak my mind!"

Johnny and Bertie looked distressed.

"Anything fresh?" asked Johnny, with concern.

"Fresh!" snorted Handforth. "Isn't it enough for that brute to nearly knock Tessa down? Didn't you see him put his filthy paws on the girl, and give her a biff that nearly knocked her over?"

"My hat!" said Johnny, with a start. "So that's why Tessa looked so pale? I didn't know it, Handforth—I didn't see Mr. Snayle hit her!"

"Well, you know it now!" said Handy. "What are you going to do?"

"It's pretty awkward," said Johnny slowly. "I don't know what I can do. After all, Tessa is Mr. Snayle's niece, and he's her legal guardian—both her parents are dead. I don't see that we can do anything."

"It's a rotten shame that such a ripping girl should have such a beast of an uncle!" said Reggie Pitt warmly. "But Johnny's right, Handforth. We can't do anything in the matter. It'll only make things worse if we say anything about it to Snayle—and it'll distress Tessa, too."

"Absolutely!" said Archie, nodding. "It occurs to me, old cups of tea, that the best thing we can do is to stand by and say nothing. I mean, it would be dashed poisonous if we caused the dear girl any worry. She's got enough already, what?"

It was some minutes before Handforth cooled down; but he did so finally under the influence of watercress and thin bread-and-butter. And by the time tea was nearly over, his indignation had gone.

"I'll tell you one thing," he said abruptly. "We're going to stay here to see the evening show! Best circus I've seen for years!"

"Wha-a-at?" gasped Johnny, nearly swallowing a doughnut.

"Fact!" said Handforth. "Some of the turns are a bit squiffy, I'll admit, but Tessa—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth turned red at that burst of laughter.

"I knew it!" said Willy disgustedly. "He's just as bad as ever he was! Always falling in love! Goodness knows what he'll be like when he's twenty! I'll bet he'll break hearts just the same as a chap breaks monkey-nuts!"

"You wait till I get you alone!" said Handforth helplessly.

Willy grinned, knowing that he was safe. He was wedged at one end of the caravan, and Handforth at the other. So fistic exercise was out of the question.

"I'm not so sure about staying for the evening show," I said thoughtfully. "We ought to get back to London. Everybody will be wondering what's happened to us."

"Oh, blow that!" said Handy. "We'll send some wires—"

He broke off, for we could hear the sounds of quarrelling from outside. But they died down, and Johnny Onion's hastened to pour out some more tea.

"Don't take any notice," he said. "Snayle's in a rotten humour to-day—quarrelling with everybody. He got a bit drunk last night, and the burning of his caravan upset him a bit. I'm rather worried about the evening show, you know. We had an awful crowd this afternoon, didn't we? Unless we do better to-night we shall have to stop paying salaries, or something!"

"What you need is a few more decent turns, and some publicity," I said. "It's a bit rough on you chaps, trying to make this circus a success with such poor material. If we can help—"

The sounds of quarrelling outside became so pronounced that they obtruded themselves upon our conversation. Handforth glanced out of the nearest window, and his face became red.

"Old Snayle raving at the giddy Melrose Family!" he said warmly. "My hat! He's just biffed one of the chaps in the eye!"

We struggled out of the caravan, and found that Handforth's statement was correct. The leader of the Melrose Family—which was really a troupe of totally unrelated circus performers—was shouting at Mr. Snayle with no particular choice of words.

"We're fed up!" he exclaimed hotly. "Understand that, Mr. Snayle? And, what's more, we finish! You can go to blazes, for all we care—you, and the show, too! We're not performing to-night—or any other time! And we'll get one of the Unions to take action over this business—see if we don't!"

"Hear, hear, Herb.!" said one of the ladies shrilly. "A nice state of affairs, I must say—in these' ere days, too! We ain't dirt, to be trod on! We'll walk out and leave the show flat!"

And the Melrose Family glared defiance at Mr. Snayle—who probably realised that he had gone a little too far. To make matters worse, all the other performers had been attracted by the altercation, and they instantly threw in their lot with the Melrose troupe.

"Come on, all the lot of you!" shouted one of the Johnson Brothers. "We're sick of this! Let's clear out, and go up to London! There's plenty of other work to do—and I'd rather starve than be in this rotten circus!"

Johnny and Bertie stood there, more startled than they could express. They saw the entire circus company walk out, and leave the show without even an hour's warning. And as they went, Mr. Snayle twisted his lip into a malicious smile.

Somehow, I couldn't help thinking that he had goaded the performers deliberately—that he wanted the show to be stranded. There was something behind this that I hadn't quite fathomed!

CHAPTER XIII.

MAKING THE BEST OF IT!



JOHNNY ONIONS ran up to Mr. Snayle in alarm. "You can't let them go!" he shouted. "Call them back, Mr. Snayle—offer them extra money! We've got to give the performance to-night! It's billed! We've got to keep faith with the public!"

Mr. Snayle shrugged his shoulders.

"I've done the best I can," he replied sourly.

"Yes—the best you can to ruin everything!" declared Johnny, with anger and bitterness. "Oh! I'll let my father know about this—he'll have something to say, you traitor! What are we going to do about to-night? You're the manager—you've got to think of something!"

Mr. Snayle sneered.

"It's easy enough to talk!" he replied. "But we can't get fresh artists down in time for this evening, and there's an end of it! As for these fools who have left us in the lurch, they weren't worth a cent, anyhow!"

"But they could give a show, at least!" shouted Johnny.

He turned away, distracted. The next second he made up his mind, and raced out of the meadow, and down the road. He overtook the indignant performers, and they looked at him coldly.

"I say, let's patch it up!" said Johnny. "Mr. Snayle's hardly himself to-day. You're not going to leave the show stranded like this? Give us until to-morrow evening, at least! We've got to keep faith with the public!"

"Sorry, Master Johnny, but it can't be done," growled one of the Melrose troupe. "We've been insulted long enough by that blackguard. We ain't particular, goodness knows, but things have got too thick!"

The others agreed, and showed no signs of relenting. As a matter of fact, they had received their salaries that very morning—delayed, owing to Mr. Snayle's mismanagement. Perhaps this was one reason why they had walked out in a body. With wages owing to them, and no cash in hand, they might have waited for a day or two, and given notice in the usual way.

"Never mind Mr. Snayle," said Johnny. "Think of the old show! This concerns Bertie and I—we're the owners! For goodness sake, be reasonable!"

"Well, I'll tell you what, young gents," said the spokesman, "give old Snayle the chuck, and we'll all come back. How's that?" he added, turning to his companions.

"Yes, we'll stick to the show if Snayle goes," they agreed.

Johnny Onions knew that he was done.

"I can't kick Snayle out—I'd like to, but I can't!" he replied desperately. "He fixed it all up with my father—legally. And

there's Tessa, too. If Mr. Snayle goes, he'll take her."

"Well, we ain't coming back, if Snayle stays—that's final!"

And all Johnny's efforts at persuasion failed. He returned to the circus field, despondent and intensely worried. Being the elder of the two brothers, he felt the responsibility more than Bertie. And Bertie, after all, was a quaint fellow, with little or no business ability.

"No luck, old man?" asked Bertie gloomily.

"None at all—they've cleared out for good!" said Johnny.

"I expected it!" said Bertie, with intense melancholy. "The only thing we can do is to take the fleas of the cat and go home."

"Why, you disgusting rotter!" said Reggie. "What on earth do you want the fleas of the cat for? Fleas are beastly things to have in any home!"

Bertie started slightly.

"Oh, sorry!" he said hastily. "That was a bad one, wasn't it? Just a slip, you know. What I meant was, we'll take the keys of the flat, and go home!"

Reggie grinned.

"Oh! The keys of the flat!" he exclaimed. "By jingo, some of these slips of yours sound a bit awful at times!"

"Oh, don't be funny now!" said Johnny impatiently. "What are we going to do? We're stranded—we can't give the evening show! There's only Tessa and Bertie and I! We can't run a circus without any performers!"

Mr. Snayle came up, still sneering.

"Well?" he said gruffly. "A lot of good, wasn't it? Those fools don't know when they're well off! You can't say that I sent them away—they took their own choice —"

"You've ruined everything, Mr. Snayle!" shouted Johnny. "The best thing you can do is to leave the management to me. If I can't do it better than you, I'm not worth a grain of salt!"

Mr. Snayle scowled, and then gave a jeering laugh.

"All right, young Barnum!" he sneered. "Get on with it!"

He walked away, leaving Johnny and Bertie gazing at one another. The rest of us stood round, rather embarrassed. It seemed that the schoolboy circus owners were having a big struggle. And unless things altered very rapidly, their tour would come to an end almost before it had started.

"I don't want to butt in," I said slowly. "Perhaps I'd better keep quiet——"

"No—go ahead!" said Johnny. "I'm at a loose end! Can't think of a thing, and if you've got any suggestions——"

"Well, it's not much of a suggestion," I interrupted. "There's no sense in getting into a panic, and worrying over a position that's inevitable. You can't give any show to-night—that's certain. So don't rack your brains needlessly."

"But—but what can we do?" asked Johnny helplessly.

"Wait till the crowd comes up—and let's hope, for once, that it won't be a big crowd—and then make a short speech to them," I said. "Explain the position, and say that the circus will give a better show to-morrow night than ever before. Then get busy with your pater, and see that to-morrow's show is a huge success. If you can't guarantee that, don't promise anything. Because if you fool the public, you'll be lost!"

"I'll get some performers for to-morrow all right," said Johnny grimly. "I don't know how—but I will! All right—we'll make the best of it, and I hope the crowd's only a small one, as you say."

"On second thoughts, it'll be all the better if the crowd's big," I remarked. "It'll mean more publicity—and it'll make the people of Helmsford curious. Better go along to your caravan now, and prepare the speech."

The two brothers went off, and after a short consultation, we decided to stay until opening-time, and see the thing through.

Quite unexpectedly, the people began to roll up in considerable numbers—which seemed to indicate that the poor nature of the show hadn't got round yet. It takes the public a long time to know whether a show's good or bad even if it stays in town for a week.

There were a few hundred people waiting in a crowd before the big tent—believing that the pay-box would soon open. And then Johnny Onions, rather nervous, took his stand on the top of an adjacent caravan, and made his speech.

He was quite diplomatic. He explained that there had been a disagreement among the artists, and that no show was possible until the morrow. The crowd listened in surprise at first, and then a certain amount of hostility began to manifest itself—particularly among the rougher element. A large number of the town louts had come along, and they soon made themselves heard.

"It's a swindle!" shouted one young rustic. "Made us walk all this 'ere way, an' there ain't no show! Yah! It's a swindle! Let's chuck this young ijit in the pond!"

"'Ere, 'ere!"

The crowd became noisier and noisier. One or two of the young roughs started throwing stones, and the situation appeared to be rather dangerous.

CHAPTER XIV.

JOHNNY MAKES A PROMISE.



"YAH!" — "Boo! Rotten swindler. — There never was no bloomin' circus!"

All sorts of shouts were hurled at Johnny—the majority of them quite unjustified. If these people had paid their money over, it would



Tessa recovered herself in a second, and turned upon her uncle. "Oh, you brute!" she exclaimed passionately. "How dare you hit me like that!"

have been another matter. The majority were satisfied, and were streaming away. But the roughs remained, only too glad of an opportunity to start some horseplay. Many, indeed, had come to the circus for no other purpose, and were delighted to find that they had such an excellent excuse.

"There's no swindle about it!" shouted Johnny Onions angrily. "The show will be given to-morrow, and I'll guarantee that it'll be improved. We can't do impossibilities, and with most of our performers on strike, we're helpless!"

"Yah! Git down, you young liar!"

Some more stones were hurled, and one glanced off the side of the caravan, and struck Mr. Snayle in the face. The manager was standing by, smiling in that malicious way of his. But his smile soon vanished. He gave a bellow of rage as the stone hit him, and it was fortunately a smooth one, inflicting only a bruise. But the effect was instantaneous. Mr. Snayle rushed round the caravan, bellowing like a bull.

"Clear out of this meadow!" he shouted wildly. "There'll be no show—and the next hooligan who throws a stone will be arrested!"

"Please, Mr. Snayle!" said Johnny grimly.

"Go to blazes!" snarled Mr. Snayle. "I'm the manager of this circus, and I'm going to have order! These young fools——"

"'Ere! This bloke's callin' us fools!" yelled one of the roughs.

"Pelt him!"

"Let's pull the bloomin' tents down!"

"Love us! That's what we'll do!"

A number of the roughs made a rush at

one of the smaller tents, and I stood looking on with real apprehension. From recent experience, I knew only too well how quickly a mob can get out of hand.

There was only a small proportion of roughs here—but quite enough to cause terrible destruction. If one of these young fools struck a match and set fire to one of the smaller tents, the whole show would soon be obliterated.

"Come on, you chaps!" I said grimly. "This is where we begin!"

"Good!" roared Handforth, pushing up his sleeves.

"Hold on!" I snapped. "No fighting, old man!"

"No fighting?" gasped Handforth blankly.

"No! That'll only make things ten times as bad—and we're hopelessly outnumbered, anyhow. Handy, you and Pitt and Willy grab hold of Snayle, and get him out of sight! A bit more of his bullying, and we'll be unable to do a thing!"

Handforth might have argued, but Reggie and Willy allowed him no opportunity. They hustled him off, and a few moments later Mr. Simon Snayle found himself seized violently from behind, and whirled behind one of the tents, in spite of all his shouts and curses. Big as he was, he was no match for the three sturdy juniors.

In the meantime, of course, other people were coming up in a continuous procession, and the crowd had now become quite large. The meadow in front of the great tent was full, the noise tremendous, and the louts were becoming rougher every minute.

And then Archie and I climbed on to the caravan beside Johnny, and helped him with his speech.

"Just a moment, dear old lads of the village!" shouted Archie, thrusting his monocle into his eye, and gazing round. "Kindly allow me to bleat a few words. Possibly you have heard of Colonel Glenthorne?"

"Yes—he owns half the Helmsford High Street!" shouted somebody.

"Absolutely!" said Archie, nodding. "Well, I am Colonel Glenthorne's son, and if I can do anything to calm the old populace, I am dashed well going to do it! About this circus. Something pretty ghastly has happened—strikes, and what not! If you'll lend me the old ear department, I'll rapidly get busy and fill it!"

Archie looked so genial, and his appearance was so comic, that most members of the crowd began to smile. Even the roughs calmed down a bit. Johnny and I didn't say a word. Archie was doing well.

"Good!" said Archie. "Absolutely priceless! Here we are, all gathered together, as it were, and I must be allowed to remark that the weather is somewhat fruity. Spring and all that, what? It's a dashed shame about this circus. The artists—the chappies who dash hither and thither in the ring, performing all sorts of marvellous stunts—well, dash it, they've buzzed off into

the far distance, as it were, leaving the show somewhat deflated."

"We've heard that before shouted somebody.

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie heartily. "Do I deny it? Of course you've heard it before. I'm just here to drive the old point home, as it were. And kindly allow me to observe that I've always regarded the people of Helmsford as a collection of ripping sportsmen! It appears to me that this is one of those jolly old occasions when the populace ought to rally round, and do a vast amount of sympathising! The show can't be given, and there you are! But I would like to introduce Mr. Johnny Onions—the son of that famous laddie, Professor Onions, the bally Circus King!"

Archie bowed to Johnny, who was rather unprepared.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "I hope you'll forgive us for not giving any show to-night. I have already told you about the trouble we are experiencing, but in the name of my father, Professor Onions, I guarantee that there will be no disappointment to-morrow."

"Good for you, young 'un!"

"You can't say no more than that!"

A number of encouraging shouts went up.

"Unfortunately, a few thoughtless people seem inclined to cut up rusty," went on Johnny, growing easier. "It's not our fault that we can't give the show, and it's hardly fair to start any violence. May I ask you to return home, and do us the great honour of returning to-morrow? I give my faithful promise that you won't be disappointed!"

But still there were a large number of people who growled, and who insisted that the show ought to be given. And we became rather anxious, for the disturbance seemed to be on the increase again.

And then Johnny got a brain-wave.

On the spur of the moment he invited the crowd to enter the tent and take their seats—free of charge.

"We can't give the ordinary show, but there will be a parade of the animals, and one or two acts will appear," he announced. "We want you to accept this invitation at our expense; and in return we hope that you will come to-morrow and pay for admission in the ordinary way."

This announcement made a startling change. Even the roughs calmed down, and before another five minutes had elapsed the big tent was over half full. And everybody who came along afterwards was admitted without payment, the whole thing now being an advertisement.

And it proved to be a splendid one, too.

For it happened that there were only two turns left—Tessa, and Johnny Onions himself. Bertie fooled about as a clown, but the other two performed their ordinary business. And as they were the best acts in the whole show, they gave a sample which was, in fact, rather misleading, as compared with the complete show of the afternoon.

For the performers on strike were a crowd of "duds," to say the least.

And so everybody went away satisfied, delighted, in fact.

In the tent, Johnny had seized the opportunity to make another speech from the ring, and he had promised that new performers would be obtained on the morrow, and that the show would be given in its full and complete form.

The audience applauded heartily, and there was little doubt that the big tent would be nicely filled with real money on the morrow. There was only one fly in the ointment.

For the life of him, Johnny couldn't possibly imagine where on earth he was going to conjure up a new set of performers.

CHAPTER XV.

REGGIE PITT'S BRAIN-WAVE.



MR. SNAYLE gave a harsh laugh.

"Well, you've made a fine mess of it, haven't you?" he said sourly.

"You may have stopped a riot to-night; but there'll be a blamed tornado to-morrow! Where the mischief do ye suppose you'll get your new artists?"

Johnny Onions glared.

"There's one thing certain, Mr. Snayle—I shan't ask any advice from you!" he retorted. "Bertie and I are the owners of this show, and you can call yourself the manager if you like; but from this minute onwards we'll do without you! We'll get over this difficulty all right!"

Mr. Snayle snapped his teeth together.

"Oh! So you think you can chuck me, eh?" he snarled. "Bah! I'm a fool to take any notice of ye!" he added, with a sudden laugh. "Young fools! A pair of upstarts, that's what ye are! Think you can run the show without me, eh? All right! I won't do a blamed thing—no, not for a whole week! Then see how ye get on!"

He swung off, thinking that he had put consternation into the hearts of the two brothers. He would not have been complimented if he had seen the expression of relief on Johnny's face.

"A week!" he said. "A week without Snayle! That'll give us a chance to show what we can do!"

He and Bertie were standing just outside the big tent, and everything was peaceful and quiet. The crowd had gone, and the dusk was deepening into night. I was chatting to the other fellows—in fact, suggesting a prompt move, for it was high time that we were off.

"We've seen the chaps through as far as we can," I said. "If we remain, we shall only be in the way."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "I don't like to tear myself away, dash it—leaving the

poor old champions in a mess. But what, as it were, can we do? Absolutely nothing!"

"Yes, there's three, at least," said Reggie Pitt dreamily. "Perhaps four—and even five. By Jove, I believe it could be worked. A bit of a nerve, of course——"

"Talking to me?" asked Handforth bluntly.

"Eh?" said Pitt, with a start. "Oh! No, it's all right. I was thinking."

"Then don't think like a gramophone," said Handforth. "Jabbering away there to yourself like a twelve-inch record! What d'you mean—four, and perhaps five? You're dotty!"

"Perhaps," said Reggie absently. "Who knows?"

"Then you admit you're dotty?" snapped Handforth.

"No, I don't!" retorted Pitt. "I was thinking again."

He walked slowly across to the Onions brothers, and we followed him. I seemed to have an idea that Pitt was about to suggest something. It was quite certain that his brain had been active. I could tell by the gleam in his eye that he was inwardly excited.

"I suppose you fellows are going now?" asked Johnny, with a kind of hopeless resignation. "Oh, well, we can't expect you to stay for good, can we? I dare say we'll get through the trouble somehow."

"Look here, what are your plans?" asked Reggie bluntly. "Don't think I'm inquisitive; I've got a reason for asking."

"Plans?" repeated Johnny.

"Yes. You promised the public half an hour ago that you'll give a full circus show to-morrow," said Pitt briskly. "I don't suppose it's necessary for me to point it out, but if you fail to carry out that promise, you might as well shut the show for good now."

"Yes, I suppose we might," said Johnny miserably.

"You can't play fast and loose with the multitude," went on Reggie. "If there's no show to-morrow, take my advice and have a hundred policemen on guard. And when you go on your next pitch, you'll have a hostile public in front of you. Because bad news travels fast, and everybody will know what's happened. This thing is absolutely serious, and it's no good blinking at it. If we can lend a hand, we'll be only too jolly pleased."

"Count on us," I agreed readily.

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "All hands to the old pump, what?"

"It's—it's jolly ripping of you fellows to be so concerned," said Johnny Onions huskily. "But—but—Oh, what's the good? How can you fellows help me now? I've got to get a new set of performers."

Reggie Pitt nodded.

"That's what you promised the public," he said. "And that promise, by hook or by crook, has got to be kept. Now look here. When you gave your word like that did

you have any idea in your mind about getting some new acts?"

Johnny looked at us rather feebly.

"Well, no," he admitted. "The—the fact is, I was desperate, and had to say something. I'll be frank with you fellows. I haven't the faintest idea of how we shall be able to give to-morrow's show, and that's the truth!"

"Good!" said Reggie gleefully.

"Good?" echoed Johnny. "Oh, rather! Screamingly good, in fact! Even if I wire to the pater, I doubt if he'll be able to do anything. He's ill, remember, and—hard up, too. Oh, we're in a mess! I don't know which way to turn!" he added distractedly. "I'll do my best; I'll try frantically. But even now I'm not sure about to-morrow's show. If we had a little cash it would be better."

"A mere detail, old lad," said Archie. "Kindly allow me to whack out a trifling loan—"

But neither Johnny nor Bertie would hear of it, and they made it quite plain to the embarrassed Archie that they couldn't possibly borrow his money.

"No, we're in a hole, and we've got to get out of it ourselves. It wouldn't be fair to you, Archie, to take your cash, knowing well enough that we might not be able to return it. No bank or loan society would advance us a penny—the show's too rocky for that. And if we accepted your offer, we should only be taking an unfair advantage."

"Then, the blunt truth is, you haven't got any hope of finding new artists for to-morrow?" asked Reggie.

"Yes, but we'll do our best," replied Onions major.

"In other words, you'll do nothing," said Pitt. "Oh, I know it! Without experience, and without capital, you'll never be able to engage a circus crowd for to-morrow, even if you knew where to put your hands on such people. Don't forget that the other circuses are on the road now, and it's hard enough for them to find talent. The only circus performers out of work are the duds."

"You're right," said Johnny, with feeling. "We know it!"

"Therefore how in the name of all that's mysterious are you going to conjure up a full crowd of decent artists in the time?" asked Pitt. "It would be far better to play amateurs than a lot of ancient, incompetent, underpaid make-shift professionals."

"It's all very well to talk like that," burst out Johnny. "We can't afford to have anything better than makeshifts—anything better than duds. There aren't such people as amateur circus performers."

"No?" said Reggie calmly. "That, my son, is where you make a little mistake. It so happens that I've got a whole bunch ready for immediate work—so tame that they'll eat out of my fingers!"

"What on earth do you mean, Reggie?" I asked, staring.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE REMOVE RALLIES ROUND.



REGINALD PITT looked round at us and smiled.

"Come into the caravan," he said crisply.

"This needs thoroughly going into, and we don't want to stay out here. The wind's getting chilly. I believe I've got a solution to the problem."

And there was no time lost in getting into the Onion brothers' caravan. With the electric light turned on, and the door closed, we were somewhat cramped, but very snug. Reggie Pitt sat on a locker, and seemed to enjoy the mystery he had created.

"Out with it!" said Handforth hastily. "What's the wheeze?"

"This circus," said Reggie, "is stranded. We've got an interest in it because it's owned by two River House chaps. Johnny has promised a show for to-morrow, and that show must be given—"

"My hat! We know all this!" said Handforth.

"Must be given!" went on Reggie, with perfect calmness. "Now, cash is scarce, and the show can't afford anything better than the poorest of poor talent. Why not get a whole crowd of performers for nothing?"

"Nothing?" gasped Johnny.

"Why pay wages at all?" asked Pitt calmly.

"You're mad!" shouted Handforth. "Who'll work for nothing?"

"The Remove!" replied Reggie. "How's that?"

"The Remove!" I yelled.

"The Remove!" repeated Reggie serenely.

"But—but you must be off your rocker, old man," I gasped. "How on earth can the Remove give a circus show? I thought you had a good idea—not a crack-brained suggestion like this."

"I'm going to punch him in the eye!" said Handforth aggressively.

"Don't be silly, Ted!" put in Willy. "The idea's a ripper!"

"A ripper?"

"Of course it is," said Handforth minor promptly.

"Oh, thanks muchly!" grinned Reggie. "Words of wisdom flow from your lips, O youth of tender years! These other chaps can't see the thing, but you can."

"By Jove!" I said slowly. "Of course, it's possible—"

"It's not only possible—but it's going to be done!" interrupted Reggie crisply. "Look here! Think of the Remove as a whole, and you'll think of a crowd of St. Frank's juniors. But just pick 'em out! Before you know where you are, you'll find a whole mass of circus talent! We can even run some side shows, with Fatty Little as the Fat Boy, and Clarence Fellowe as the Living Skeleton!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Johnny Onions looked at Pitt in a strange way.

"But—but what about the circus acts?" he asked huskily.

"Plenty of 'em!" replied Pitt. "Jerry Dodd—the Australian Buck Jumper and Trick Rider! He's an absolute marvel with his little pony, Bud, and that pony is as full of circus tricks as two of Barnum & Bailey's best!"

"My hat! You're right!" said Handforth blankly.

"Then there's Farman," went on Pitt. "He may be a bit out of practice, but when he was on his father's ranch in California he was an expert broncho buster. He can do some marvellous stunts."

"So he can!" I murmured, becoming excited.

"Nipper can be the Ringmaster, and Handforth the Strong Man," went on Reggie.

"Strong man!" gasped Handforth.

"Why not?" asked Pitt. "A chap like you—a fellow with such a fine, magnificent physique, handsome features, and curly hair! Hercules to the life! You'd create a sensation!"

"By George!" said Handforth, soaking it all in. "As a matter of fact, I was going to suggest something like that, but you got it out first!"

"A good thing I did—for the sake of your modesty!" said Reggie. "There's Johnny, here—a ripping acrobat. There's Tessa to do the bare-back riding, and Bertie as a clown. And we can have some of the other chaps as clowns too. You've got plenty of costumes, haven't you?"

"Yes—tons!" gasped Johnny excitedly.

"Then what's to prevent the show?" demanded Reggie Pitt. "It's not late yet—we can get out dozens of telegrams, and shove them off within half an hour. Practically all the fellows are in London—all who matter anyhow. Just over an hour's run in the train—it's easy!"

"We could even put the time of a certain train in the wires," I said. "The first train in the morning—they'd all come by that, and get here at breakfast time."

"Exactly," said Pitt. "That leaves all the morning for rehearsals. And if we can't give a show to beat that ghastly fiasco we saw this afternoon— Ahem! Sorry, Johnny!"

"Oh, it's true—I know it!" said Johnny. "The show was too awful for words. And—and after what you've said I can see that the Remove will do ten times as well as those horrible has-beens! What do you think of it, Bertie?"

Bertie was red in the face.

"Fine!" he exclaimed, with intense excitement. "Do you know, I thought Pitt had something up his sleeve when I saw him give Willy a wealthy stink."

"A wealthy stink?" said Reggie, horrified.

"Oh, sorry! A stealthy wink!" said Bertie hurriedly. "I'm so full of this

idea I don't know so I'm waying! It's a great idea!"

"Yes, but what about you, Pitt?" asked Johnny. "Won't you do a turn?"

"A bit of conjuring, perhaps," said Reggie. "Anyhow, we'll fake up something and map out a full programme. Is it a go?"

"It is a go?" echoed Johnny, falling into Pitt's arms. "Master, I'm your slave! A chap with a brain like yours ought to be in a glass cage! It's a wonder to me your head doesn't bulge in places!"

"Dry up!" grinned Reggie. "Then it's settled? Good! The Remove to the rescue! Now we'll get out a sheaf of telegrams. We can stay at a hotel for the night—"

"Rats! There are two or three caravans you can use," put in Johnny.

"Fine!" I exclaimed. "Now, the wires!"

We were all equally enthusiastic, and in less than a quarter of an hour Reggie Pitt and Willy dashed off into the town to dispatch the telegrams, catching a bus that was passing. And those wires were so worded that they would not fail to bring the whole Remove down.

"It's all right!" said Bertie, coming back into the caravan. "They've bought the cuss!"

"Bought what cuss?" asked Johnny, staring.

"Oh, sorry! I meant to say they've caught the bus!" said Bertie, sadly. "I say, Johnny, isn't it topping?"

"Topping isn't the word!" replied his brother. "It's a miracle!"

He and I got together at once making arrangements, while Handforth lay back on a locker with a dreamy look in his eye—probably picturing himself as a Strong Man. We were glad to let him dream.

Pitt and Willy came back, and reported the successful dispatch of the wires. And then we fell to making plans.

"But was it necessary to have the whole crowd down?" asked Handforth.

"Advertising!" said Pitt. "Those fellows who aren't rehearsing will be swamping Helmford with publicity. Boots will see to the advertising department—just his line. We'll have this big tent absolutely bulging with humanity!"

There were hundreds of other things to talk about—mapping out the full programme—getting the copy to the printer—having some special bills prepared. By acting at once we could get it done.

It certainly seemed that the immediate future would be full of interest for the St. Frank's Remove—and also for The Schoolboy Circus Owners!

THE END.

COMING NEXT WEEK!
"THE ST. FRANK'S CIRCUS!"

or, It Pays to Advertise."

A Story of School and The Ring, full of frolic and thrills.



MY AMERICAN NOTE-BOOK

By the Author of our St. Frank's Stories.



No. 20. The Highest Skyscraper in the World.

IN one of my stories I have referred to the Woolworth Building, but I feel that it deserves a little article quite to itself. As a general rule, I disliked the American sky-scrapers, but the Woolworth Building is such an exception that I have nothing but wonder for it.

My chief objection to the ordinary sky-scraper is that it is extremely ugly and unsightly—a bare, plain mass of brickwork which rises to a tremendous height from the street, and makes no pretension whatever to beauty.

The Woolworth Building stands in “down town,” New York, within a stone’s-throw of the City Hall and Brooklyn Bridge. For a commercial building, it commands about the finest location in the whole of the United States—in the very heart of America’s great metropolis.

The building is the highest in the world, and it would be interesting to name a few statistics concerning this wonderful edifice. From a distance, it is less impressive than I should have imagined, but at close quarters one begins to see the marvel of it.

This sky-scraper, in fact, is a masterpiece of art and architecture, the entire structure built in true Gothic lines. It rises 792 feet from the roadway, and it is by no means uncommon for the summit to be hidden in the clouds. The tower, which surmounts the noble building, is in itself the work of an artist.

There are fifty-eight stories in the Woolworth Building, the last one of all being the observation gallery, and upon stepping on to this for the first time one feels almost dizzy, for New York is stretched out below one, and the view is one that the sightseer is never likely to forget. It has, indeed, been described as the most wonderful view in all the world.

There are no less than 80,000 electric lights in the building, and when the great edifice was opened on April 24th, 1913, the late President Wilson pressed a tiny button, which flashed the whole of these 80,000 brilliant lights on at the same moment.

The great mass of the building is divided up into hundreds of different offices, and suites of offices, and daily this one building, erected upon a comparatively small site, houses enough people to populate an entire city—to be exact, 14,000.

Try and imagine 14,000 people working, day in and day out, under one roof! The first thought that would strike one is that every floor would be overcrowded to suffocation. On the contrary, one can travel up to any floor, at any time of the day, and find the corridors and passages almost deserted. And business goes on continuously from all the hundreds of offices.

I believe there is a widespread impression that the Woolworth Building, of New York, is the headquarters of the famous Woolworth 3d. and 6d. stores—or, as they are called in America, the five and ten cent stores.

But this impression is quite wrong. Mr. Frank W. Woolworth (who, by the way, descended from Richard Woolworth, an Englishman who settled in America in 1650) built this great edifice as a monument to his own name, and the place has nothing whatever to do with the popular 3d. and 6d. stores.

But for the fact that Manhattan Island is more or less composed of solid rock, a towering structure of this kind could not have been built; but, with such solid foundations, the enormous project was an engineering success.

I find it quite impossible to give all the interesting details in this article, so I shall continue the subject next week.

NEXT WEEK!

Our Author will give some more interesting facts about the
WONDER OF NEW YORK!

GRAND EASTER HOLIDAY NUMBER OF THE MAG!

No. 22. Vol. 1.

Edited by Nipper.

April 26, 1924.



St. Frank's Magazine



FAMILIAR PHRASES FROM FICTION *As Seen By Our Artist*

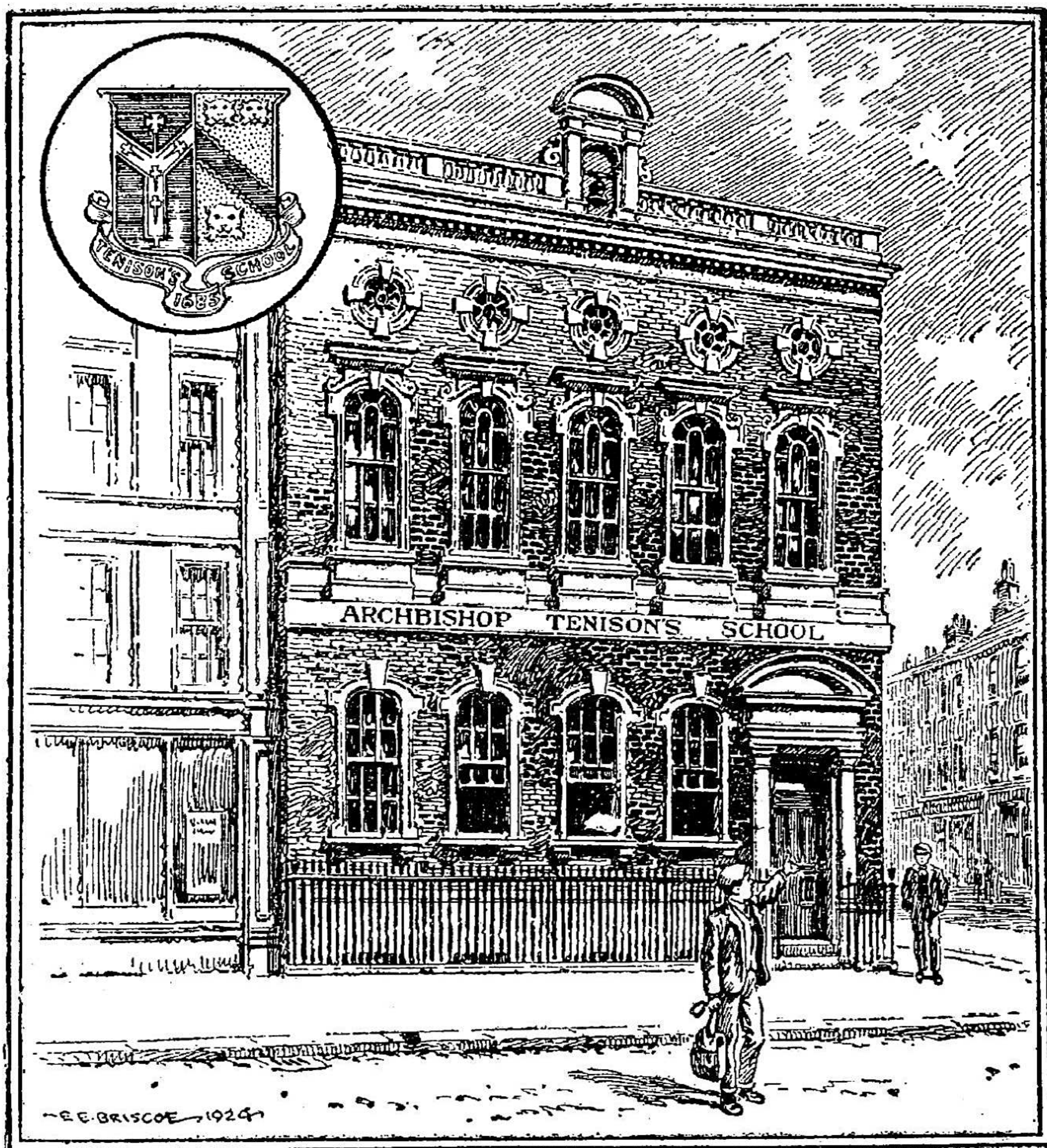


"HE WAS TIED IN A KNOT!"

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

SPECIAL SERIES OF ART SKETCHES BY MR. E. E. BRISCOE.

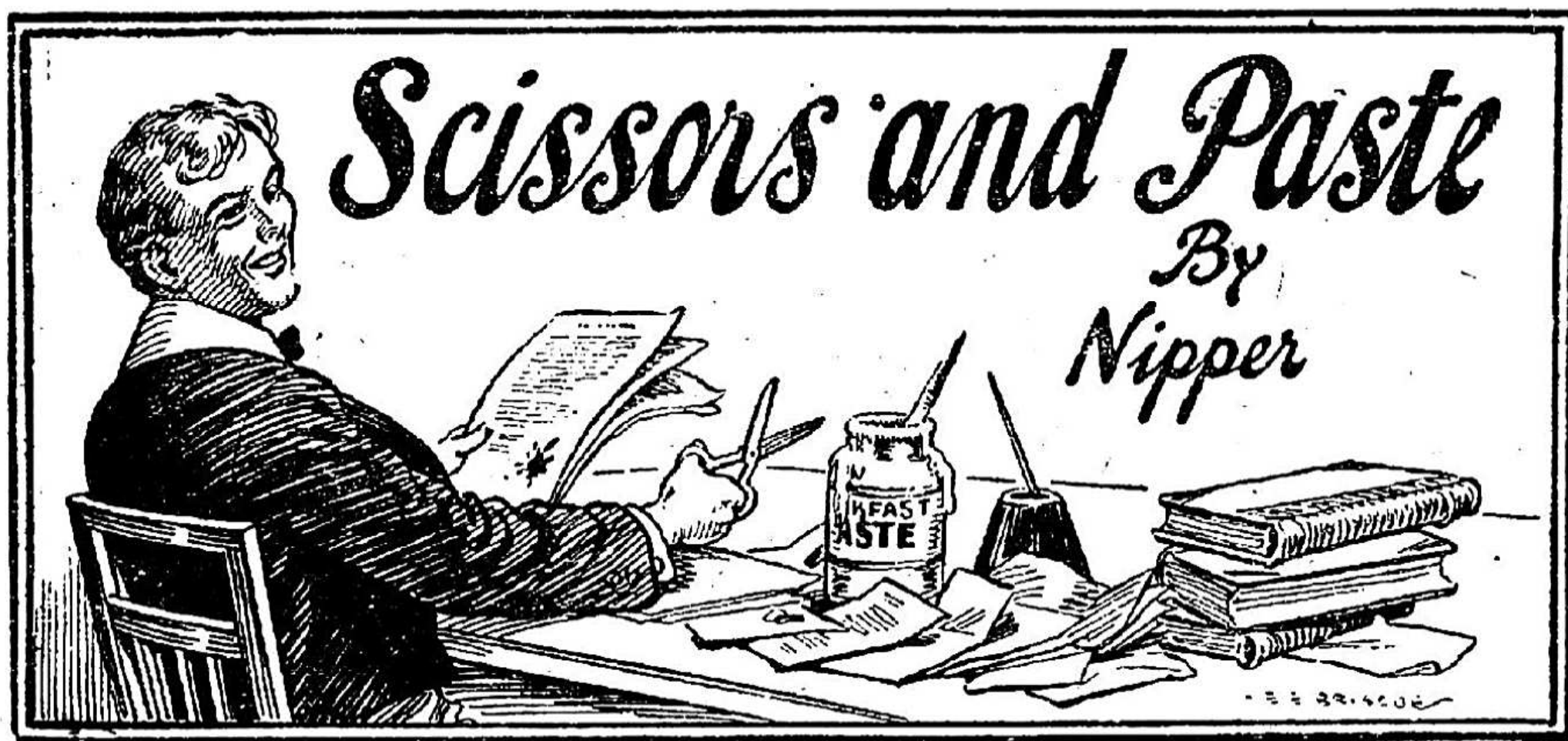
No. 24. Archbishop Tenison's Grammar School.



Archbishop Tenison's Grammar School was founded in 1685 by Thomas Tenison, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury. After consulting Evelyn, he erected in Castle St., Leicester Square, a library designed by Wren. This was the first public library in London. Under its roof was endowed a school which developed into the present one. The library fell into decay and was sold in 1861, and the proceeds were added to the school funds. An interesting fact concerning the school is

its association with William Hogarth, the painter, who at one time occupied the building as a residence.

The above particulars have been given me by a reader, to whom I am sending Mr. Briscoe's original sketch. Should any other reader care to send along photo, badge and particulars of his school, provided it has not already appeared in this series, I shall be pleased to publish a drawing of it and present him with the original sketch, signed by the artist.



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

My dear Chums,

What a long time Easter has been in coming this year! Something really ought to be done about it. Schoolboys have been particularly hard hit, for they have to use their brains so much more than most people, and naturally feel the strain of an exceptionally long term. At St. Frank's we have passed through a pretty strenuous time, beginning with the sinister adventures of Dr. Karnak and ending with the overthrow, only last week, of the powerful and influential financier who had nearly brought about the ruin and destruction of our famous old school. We feel now that we have earned our holiday, and are going all out to enjoy ourselves.

EASTER WEEK.

As I promised last week, this number of the Mag. is mainly on the subject of Easter. E. Sopp, Clarence Fellowe, and the author of Trackett Grim have each infused the Easter spirit in their various contributions. You will notice that Handy has drawn his own sketches for the Trackett Grim story this week. The reason for this is necessity rather than choice. Handy forgot about my request for an Easter story, and turned in something else, which I promptly declined. When at last he had complied with my wishes, the usual artist was nowhere to be found, and, as there was no time to lose, Handy solved the difficulty by offering to do the illustrations himself. There was nothing for it but to agree, and if the drawings are not exactly works of art, they are at least in harmony with the story.

HANDFORTH'S MOTOR-CYCLE TRIP.

Handy's Easter adventures with his chums

on a motor-cycle were to have been a special feature of this number. McClure, who wrote the account, rather carelessly left the copy lying about in Study D, and Handy spotted it and read it. For some reason Handy was not very elated with McClure's version. According to Church, Clurey received such a pasting that he has not the inclination to proceed with the article—not for a week or two, at any rate. But I think we can rely on its turning up eventually.

CHARACTER NAMES COMPETITION.

My chums are always asking me why I don't run more competitions. The fact that they cost money, take up space and much time, must be considered and weighed as against their probable popularity. In the CHARACTER NAMES COMPETITION I am putting it to the test, and if the number of entries indicates the general desire of my chums for more competitions, I will endeavour to oblige. The subject of the present competition is quite unique, and presents no great difficulty to the regular reader. The prize is not a fancy one, but it is worth winning for the expenditure of a little thought and the writing out of twenty-four names.

THE ARCHIE NUMBER.

When I asked Archie what about it, the other day (his coming number of the Mag.), he confessed that the bally old bean absolutely refused to get busy. In other words, he was not feeling in the mood. So I am afraid we shall have to wait a little while longer, and this will give the Genial Ass time to think of something really good. Besides, I would much rather see the competition through first.

Your old pal,

NIPPER



Correspondence Answered by Uncle Edward

RALPH LESLIE.—You ask if Trackett Grim is a real man, and express amazement that the author of these famous stories should get such marvellous ideas. I didn't know you had so much sense, and any further letters of praise you may care to send in will be carefully preserved and ultimately framed.

INQUIRER.—You are obviously a fool. To compare Trackett Grim with Sexton Blake is mere impudence, as everybody knows that Trackett Grim is the most modern detective in the world of fiction.

HEATH, OF THE THIRD.—Can I tell you the best way to get to Wembley? No, I can't! And even if I could, I wouldn't, because it's ten to one that there'll be another tram and 'bus strike during the Easter holidays. And if there isn't, the Underground will probably be out of gear. So what's the good of me looking up information for nothing?

HUMORIST.—This page is not run for the purpose of sending me riddles. If I knew who you were, I'd biff you. In any case, the riddle is so silly that I won't repeat it. Where do you find the jam when Mrs. Flake has made a new batch of puffs? What rot! In the puffs, of course! And you, like a fathead, say that the jam is to be found in the doorway!

HARD-UP.—I am sorry you can't afford to have your watch repaired. It's not a bad idea to soak the watch in a bowl of petrol, and if it won't go after this treatment, wiggle the escapement with a pin. I've done this with my watch several times, and although I haven't been successful in making the works go, I know for a fact that it's the correct treatment. If a pin won't do, use a match, only be careful that splinters don't fall into the works, as these are very delicate.

A PERFECT.—Glad you like the Mag. so much. Of course, we like to get letters

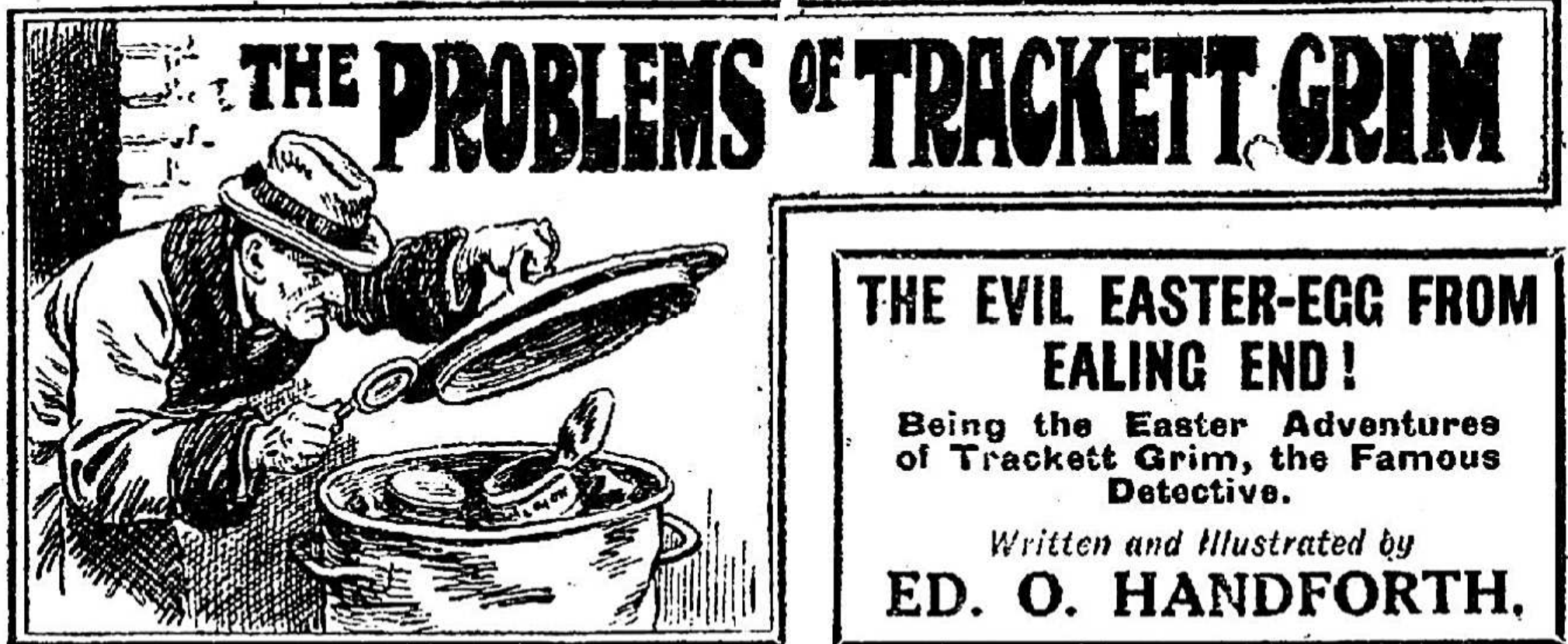
from seniors, and we appreciate them. But you'd better not write in the same strain again, or I won't answer you. I don't like the way you refer to the Trackett Grim stories as being "the richest thing in the Mag., as they're so funny." Everybody knows that these celebrated stories are tense, gripping, and deadly serious.

OWEN MINOR.—Your letter is a disgrace. It's so full of blots and scratches that I haven't been able to read a single word, not even your signature. So I can't be expected to answer the question you ask about cricket for Easter week. If you write to me again, make your letter more readable.

CECIL DE VALERIE.—Letters are always welcomed, and you can rely upon me to give prompt and helpful replies. Yes, of course I'm glad that you're well again. It isn't true that I ever said you had come back to St. Frank's like a lunatic. I only mentioned to somebody that you were just as much off your rocker as ever. So don't be touchy. You always were mad, anyway.

COMPETITION FIEND.—As I told you last week, there's a Competition being prepared, but I can't say a word about it, because it's a secret. Nipper is preparing everything, and it's pretty certain that the whole Competition will be a fizzle. If he had left the choice to me, there would have been a very different story to tell. I can't say any more at the moment.

HANDFORTH MINOR.—How many more times have I got to tell you not to keep bothering me with silly letters? In any case, your question is ridiculous. Why doesn't Easter Monday come on the same date every year? You young ass! Everybody knows that Easter Monday is fixed by the weather authorities so that there's certain to be icy winds and pouring rain,
UNCLE EDWARD.



THE EVIL EASTER-EGG FROM EALING END!

Being the Easter Adventures of Trackett Grim, the Famous Detective.

Written and Illustrated by

ED. O. HANDFORTH.

THE HORRIBLE HORROR BY POST!

MR. GORGON ZOLA, the celebrated provision merchant, with branches throughout the United Kingdom, sat at his whacking great breakfast-table on Easter Monday. The table groaned with a choice selection of his own provisions, and his chair groaned under Mr. Gorgon Zola's twenty stone of solidity. At the other end of the table, another chair positively trembled beneath the frightful bulk of Mrs. Gorgon Zola.

"Ha!" cried Mr. Gorgon Zola. "What have we here? A present, Matilda, unless I am mistaken. Yes, by George, an Easter egg!"

And Mr. Gorgon Zola ripped off the wrappings from an oval parcel, and revealed a large-sized Easter egg, made of coloured cardboard. It seemed fairly heavy, and the famous provision merchant examined it with interest. The egg was made to come

apart in the middle, and suddenly it separated into two pieces.

"Ah, what—Gug-gug-gr-rh!"

Mr. Gorgon Zola uttered a loud, gurgling cry and collapsed in his seat, for from the egg had come a filmy cloud of vapour. It caught Mr. Zola full in the face, and the deadly fumes entered his lungs, with frightful effect. He crashed to the floor without a sound, the gas still enveloping his head.

"Help!" screamed Mrs. Gorgon Zola wildly. "Help! My husband has been gassed by poison gas! Some dastardly miscreant has attempted his life! Send for the police!"

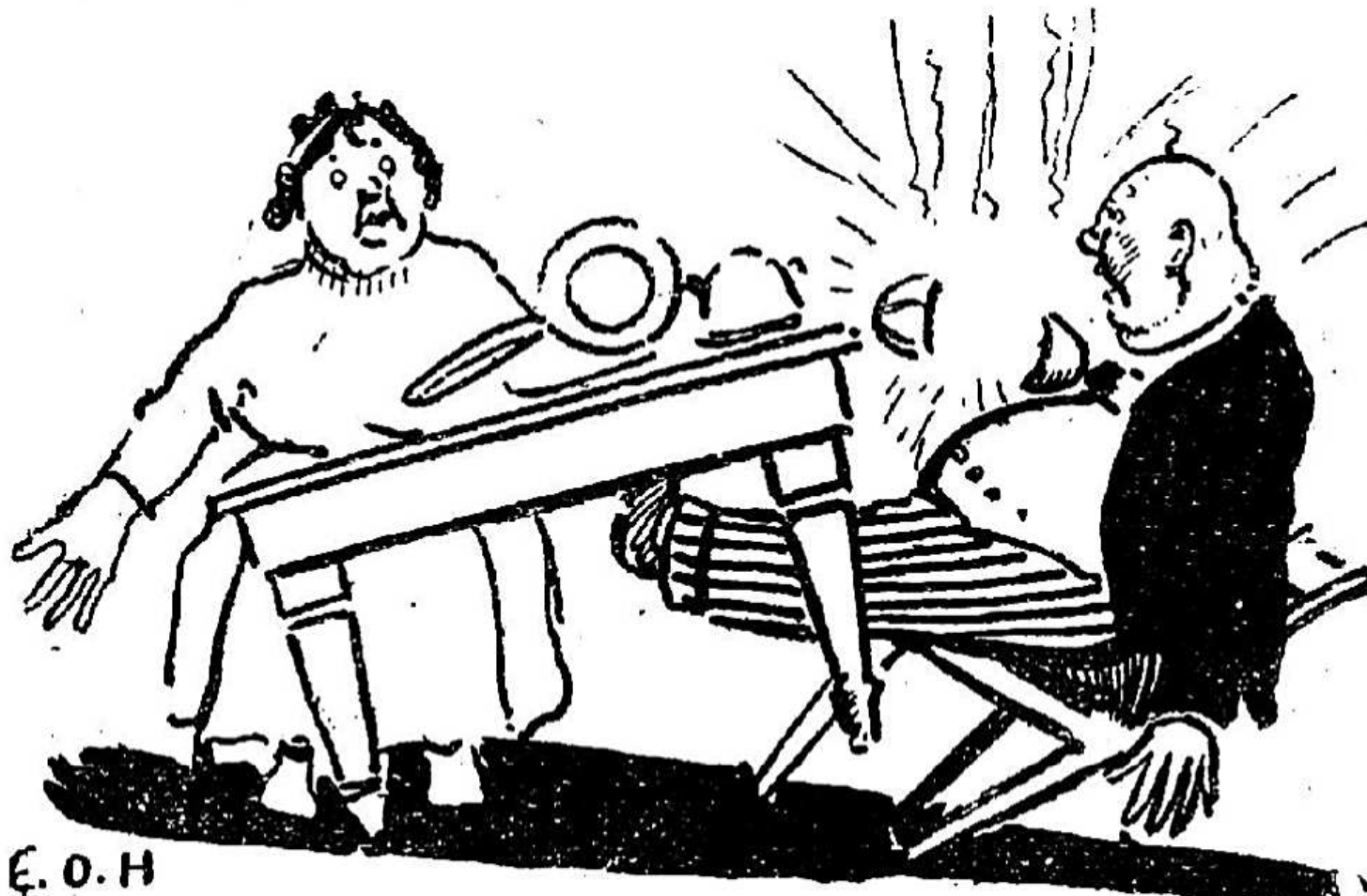
But old Stilton, the faithful family butler, shook his head.

"This is no case for the police, ma'am," he croaked, as he bent over his master and swamped tears upon Mr. Gorgon Zola's face. "Poor master! He's dead! We must send for Mr. Trackett Grim to unravel this terrible mystery!"

A light of wild hope came into Mrs. Zola's eyes.

"Ah, yes!" she cried. "Trackett Grim! He is the man! The most wonderful detective on the face of the earth!"

And Stilton rushed off to telephone to the celebrated mystery merchant, and Mrs. Zola staggered to the window for fresh air, for the whole room was now reeking with those deadly fumes.



Mr. Gorgon Zola uttered a loud, gurgling cry, and collapsed in his seat. For, from the egg had come a filmy cloud of vapour.

THE CLUE OF THE POST-MARK!
Trackett Grim and

Splinter raced through London in their powerful motor-car. Only five minutes earlier they had received the urgent call from Stilton, and they were now whizzing off to hunt down the dastardly murderer of Mr. Gorgon Zola. In two minutes they reached the house and shot inside.

"Ah! We are here before the police," said Trackett Grim, sending his eyes roving all round the room. "Good! We have a clear field! Yes, the man's dead—obviously struck down by poison gas!"

The famous detective only gave one glance at Mr. Gorgon Zola. The man was dead, so there was no use in wasting time on him. Trackett Grim was here to hunt down the murderer.

His keen, flashing eyes swept the floor, and he suddenly pounced upon a paper wrapper. He gave one glance at it, uttered a yell of triumph, and yanked out a huge magnifying-lens.

"Is it something important, sir?" cried Splinter breathlessly.

"Oh, Mr. Grim, tell us!" pleaded Mrs. Gorgon Zola.

Trackett Grim shoved her aside without compunction.

"When I am engaged upon a case, I cannot be bothered!" he snapped. "I have found a valuable clue, and under no circumstances can I reveal it. Such a thing is opposed to all my methods. Look here! On this piece of paper there is a post-mark—also the handwriting of the murderer!"

"Good heavens!" said Mrs. Zola fearfully.

"The post-mark, as you see, is 'Ealing End,' therefore I must dash to Ealing End without delay, and pick up the trail there. Splinter, come!"

And Trackett Grim marched outside, leaving Mrs. Gorgon Zola utterly staggered by this display of brisk, energetic detective work. In less than two ticks, Trackett Grim had picked up the trail!

THE MAN WITH THE TWISTED MOUTH!

Ealing End proved to be that part of Ealing which was at the end. It was a bare,

desolate region, more like a desert waste than a new garden suburb. Yet for weeks it had been advertised as London's new paradise, and it was even possible to buy a house for fifty quid down, and to pay the rest of the money at seven bob a week over a period of eighty-four years. The only trouble was there weren't any houses to buy. So far, they were all in the air.

As far as the eyes could see, on every side, there was nothing but waste land. Not a house, not a cottage, not even a road. And Trackett Grim and Splinter looked round intently.

It only took the famous detective a moment to decide. He marched straight into the post-office, and his inquiries were so clever that he soon learned that a man with a twisted mouth had posted an oval parcel, addressed to Mr. Gorgon Zola, the previous evening.

"The scent is hot, Splinter!" said Trackett Grim tensely.

There, in the mud, were still the tracks of the man who had gone to the post-office to post his parcel, and the celebrated detective raced along like a bloodhound on the track, with Splinter behind him, just like a chip of the old block.

They penetrated into the heart of that barren, deserted waste land, where there were no houses. And at length they came to a modern villa, which was still in a fine state of preservation, although it had been standing for over two months. And there, at one of the windows, stood a man with a twisted mouth!

RUN TO EARTH!

"There is our man!" shouted Trackett Grim dramatically.

He rushed at the garden gate so vigorously that he knocked over one of the garden posts, but didn't care. Up the path he sped, and flung himself through one of the open windows. And there, before him, stood

the man with the twisted mouth, looking like a caged tiger.

"Stand back!" he cried hoarsely.

"Never!" roared Trackett Grim. "I've got you at last!"

But he broke off with a cry of rage, for the miscreant had suddenly flung himself at the wall. The bricks and mortar parted with ease—the house being one of the modern type—and the criminal broke through into the open.



And the celebrated detective raced along like a blood hound on the track, with Splinter behind him, just like a chip of the old block.

But Trackett Grim was after him, and in a trice the man was down, with his two pursuers on the top of him.

"I want you for the murder of Mr. Gorgon Zola!" rapped out Trackett Grim. "You are the man who sent Mr. Zola an Easter egg filled with poison gas, and if you try to deny it I'll biff you on the nose!"

The man's eyes goggled out of his head, and they fell beneath Trackett Grim's gaze.

"What?" he shouted. "You silly ass! My name's Mr. Ingle Nook, and I'm a regular customer at the Ealing branch of Gorgon Zola's stores. For weeks their cheese has been getting worse and worse, and the piece I bought on Saturday was so terrific that it twisted my mouth, and I can't get it straight again!"

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Trackett Grim blankly.

"And if Mr. Gorgon Zola is gassed, it serves him right!" said Mr. Ingle Nook viciously. "I sent him that Easter egg as a present, and what you say about poison gas is all rot! There was nothing in it but half a pound of his own biffy cheese! No wonder he collapsed! The whiff had become concentrated, and he must have got the full force of it as he opened the egg!"

And Trackett Grim and Splinter wended their way homewards, satisfied. They didn't even trouble to inquire if Mr. Gorgon Zola was improving. But it was many weeks before the great cheese merchant fully recovered!



The Duties of the Insides

NEXT week is "Wembley Week"—otherwise, the week in which the great Cup Final will be played, and your Editor, Nipper, because he thinks that it will be of more interest to you, has asked me to write an extra special article on the Cup Final in place of my usual hints to footballers.

The week after next will see the dethronement of King Football and the ascension of King Cricket, and so, as you will probably be deserting the winter game for the more topical game of willow and leather, I intend to plunge into cricket in two weeks' time. This will mean, of course, that our present football series will be suspended for a time, but do not worry. One has to move with the times, and when I've said what I want to say about cricket and other summer sports, we shall come back to good old footer and carry on from the point at which we leave off this week.

What About It?

That is, of course, only if you wish it. I have told you before that these pow-wows are written solely for your benefit, and I

want you to take advantage of them. If you feel that you would like me to continue with the footer articles or go on to some other subject besides cricket, you have only to say so, and I shall be pleased to fall in with your desires.

By the way, I'm not receiving half as many letters as I would like to receive, and nobody, up to the time of writing, has suggested another sport they would like me to discuss. Am I to take this as a sign that you don't appreciate these pow-wows, and would like the space devoted to them filled with something else, or is it merely that you can't suggest subjects or improvements?

As I said before, I am entirely in your hands, even to the extent of relinquishing this corner, and what you say is my law. So now, you fellows, pull up your socks and write to me.

Remember Your Wingers!

Now to get back to the inside forwards,

(Continued on page 9, column 2)



E. Sopp's Fables

By
Edgar Sopp of the Fifth

No. 21. The Fable of the Easter Holiday Excursionist.

NOW, it came to pass that a Great Holiday descended upon the land, and this holiday was known far and wide as Easter Monday. To a Select Few it was a Religious Festival, but to the Vast Majority this day merely represented an occasion for having a Good Old Spree. And it chanced that Two Stalwarts, known as Owen minor and Owen major, were under their Parental Roof, the vacation being in Full Swing. And as Easter Monday dawned brightly, Owen major was

TEMPTED, AND HE FELL.

And he went to his Younger Brother, and spoke unto him, saying that he had made up his mind to indulge in a day at the seaside. Both he and his minor had Plenty of Cash, and were at liberty to do as they pleased. And Owen major declared that a day at the seaside would be bracing and Healthy, and was just what he needed to Buck him Up. Whereupon Owen minor shook his head, and spake many words of contempt regarding his Elder Brother, even declaring that going to the seaside on an Excursion was

A MUG'S GAME.

And he added that he intended spending a Quiet Day indoors, reading a ripping Adventure Book before the fire. And Owen major Scoffed Loudly, and thereupon took himself off and sallied forth upon his Ozone-seeking Mission. And, behold, he reached the station to find that Vast Multitudes had been struck by the Same Idea as himself, and the throngs were mighty. But by dint of Much Elbowing, Owen Major obtained his ticket, and Squashed his Way into the Excursion Train, only to find that

THE COMPARTMENT WAS JAMMED.

And his discomfort was great, since the train was a Slow One, and as there were twenty other people in the compartment, the Fresh Air was limited. And, to make matters worse, rain commenced to Pour

Down just before the coast was reached. Thus, the weather had enticed the multitude out, and had then, with its usual cunning,

DONE THE DIRTY.

And Owen major felt that he needed some bracing, indeed, when he left the station and Wended his Way towards the beach on foot, which was a distance of a mile. For it was in keepin' with the rest of Owen major's luck that the Local 'Busmen had gone on strike. And the Seaside Resort was thronged with wet holiday-makers who looked the Reverse of Happy. But, lo, the sun broke through the clouds, and

SPIRITS BEGAN TO RISE.

And it might be added that spirits began to descend, also—for the Doors had Just been Opened. Now, Owen major had been feeling Rather Sorry for himself, but under the influence of the sunshine, and the keen Sea Air, he developed an appetite that was really Large enough for a horse. He had, in fact, lost his own appetite, and

FOUND A DONKEY'S.

And this was Greatly to his Liking, for similar to all of his species, he enjoyed nothing better than a Good Feed. But, behold, he went hither and thither, from restaurant to restaurant, and although he dallied at these luscious-smelling places, he found that he could not Obtain a Seat. And he was thus compelled to Go Hungry for another hour, and to feed frugally upon the Left Overs after the multitude had finished. And when he emerged,

THE SKIES WERE AGAIN DULL.

And he failed to feel the Bracing Effect he had so desired. On the contrary, he was already becoming Fed Up and Frightfully Tired. So he thereupon decided to Hark Himself to the Esplanade, there to sit in one of the shelters with a magazine, so that he

might Drink In the ozone. But, to his disgust, he found that the Esplanade was Thronged to Suffocation with various Hilarious People who persisted in playing mouth-organs and singing, and making the atmosphere Generally Murky. Not only this, but the shelters were filled, and as the beach was damp, Owen major was compelled to

SEEK REST ELSEWHERE.

And the Bright Scheme of attending a Picture Theatre occurred to him. He went to the biggest, having already had experience of standing. And, lo, as soon as he Got Inside, he found that the place was full, an attendant requesting him to wait for just a Few Moments. Now, these Few Moments were of wondrous duration, for it was not until an Hour Later that Owen major found a seat. And by this time he was So Tired that he fell straight off to sleep, and

COMPLETELY MISSED THE SHOW.

And he awoke to find the audience leaving, and he was compelled to leave also. For, to His Disgust, the show was Not Continuous, but only for the afternoon. And out in the street, the rain was Pouring Down, and Owen minor turned his thoughts Towards Home—home, a book, and the fire-side. So he Went Forth to the station, and discovered that Other People were also in a hurry. Thus, he was compelled to stand Once Again, arriving in London

FOOTSORE AND WEARY.

And he crawled to his Place of Abode, haggard, wan, and looking more like a Washed-out Rag than a human being. And his Younger Brother greeted him with sarcasm, and asked him how he enjoyed the Ozone. And Owen major sank into a chair, and bleated for a Really Good Feed, which was forthwith supplied. And it transpired that Owen minor had enjoyed his day enormously, and was still so fresh and so full of beans that he went to a ball with his pater and mater. But Owen major, having spent a day at the Bracing Seaside, felt no interest in the ball, and Crawled Away to bed, more or less of a wreck.

MORAL: IF YOU WANT TO ENJOY A PUBLIC HOLIDAY, STAY AT HOME!

We are glad to report that Singleton is not such a spendthrift as he used to be. Only this week the Hon. Douglas resisted the temptation of squandering five pounds for a new rug for his study. He chose one a bit smaller for four pounds fifteen! There's nothing like self-denial!

POW-WOW (continued from page 7)

with whom I dealt last week. I want to talk to you principally upon the inside man's duty to his wingers—a duty, I regret to say, which is all too often neglected. For some unaccountable reason, inside forwards are sometimes forgetful of the fact that they have outside men, and persist in keeping the ball in the centre of the line. This is a great and grave mistake, although I admit it is an easy one to make. Remember always that your wingers are not likely to be marked half as much as your insides; therefore, always give them plenty of work to do.

One of the most important functions of a good inside is an accurate knowledge of passing—and this knowledge, of course, must be backed up with the power to put it into effect during his games. He must be able to use both the inside and the outside of his feet for this purpose, he must be able to judge when is exactly the right time to pass; above all, he must know where to pass so as to make the most of opportunity and give his side the advantage of the play.

Usually, you will find that the best method of passing is slightly ahead of the man to whom you wish to transfer the ball, for you must remember that the line must be on the move all the time if it is to make headway, and passing to a man in a dead straight line means that the man has either to stop and wait for the ball, or else to run to meet it.

Watch Your Man!

This is not gaining ground as ground should be gained. The man who stops to wait for the ball may very well find his pass intercepted; the man who runs to meet it may not be so unfortunate, but neither he nor you are assisting your side to get nearer the goal. You may regard this as splitting a hair, and may be inclined to argue that such a movement could not cost the loss of more than three seconds at the most, but in football three seconds may make all the difference. Just consider how marvellously quickly the game sometimes passes from one half into the other.

So always pass forward. But keep a wary eye, in doing so, on possible offside traps. When passing to a winger whose chief claim to his position lies in his speed, you should remember to pass slightly more in advance than you would pass to an inside man, or the centre-forward.

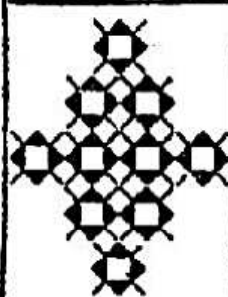
This concludes my footer chat, as far as instruction goes. If any of you have questions to ask or theories to propound, I shall heartily welcome them.

And—you will write to me, won't you?



PAINFUL PARODIES

PERPETRATED
By
Clarence Fellowe



WHEN IT'S NIGHT
TIME IN ITALY
IT'S EASTER OVER
HERE!

(WITH APOLOGIES TO THE POPULAR SONG)

Some naughty, sporty poet chaps com-
posed a fox-trot song,
With ripping, catchy music, but with
words that sound all wrong.
And now I'll go on right ahead and
beat them at their game;
So when you read these choruses,
don't give me all the blame:

When it's night-time in Italy, it's Easter
over here,
When the chaps are on holiday, they
feed on Easter eggs—I don't think.
Why does an Egg? When does it hum?
I've had a few that were by no means
mum.
If it's raining on Easter morn, why was
Good Friday clear?
When it's night-time in Italy, it's
Easter over here.

When it's night-time in Easter week,
there's Wembley over here;
When we go to the exhibish, we'll find
it more than half completed.
There'll be a rush, Cup Final crush,
And with some luck, they'll squash us
to a mush.
We shall have such a ripping time, of
that there is no fear;
When it's night-time in Easter week,
and Wembley's open here.

When it's spree time on holiday, with
heaps of fun and cheer,
Then the chaps spend their ready
cash, they go to dad and call him
"dear."
Just cupboard love—they want more
tin,
For on the razz, you blue your cash
all in.

If you go for a motor ride, be careful
how you steer,
When it's spree time on holiday, you
never shed a tear.

When it's train time for school again,
you're feeling out of gear,
When the vac.'s done and back you
go, you feel so cold and miserable.
Oh, rats and blow! Class-rooms in
store!
Such rotten luck, you never had
before.
When you sit in your corner seat you
feel a mutineer,
When it's train time for school again,
and work is looming near.

When it's term time at school again,
with lessons dull and drear,
When the Sixth Form is studying,
you always hear them snoring
loudly;
They work so hard—who called me
liar?
This verse is bad, in fact, it's rather
dire.
If you talk to a senior, he makes you
feel small beer,
When it's term time at school again,
they're slacking over here.

When it's fight time in Study D, there's
more than one thick ear,
And the air's blue and sulphurous,
and Handforth makes his chums
unsightly;
They know no peace—always at war.
Handy's a chap who always asks for
more.
As you stroll down the passages, loud
thuds and bumps you hear,
When it's fight time in Study D, then
someone's feeling queer!

Great New Competition Serial

£1 : 1 : 0 FOR TWENTY-FOUR NAMES !

This week the ST. FRANK'S MAGAZINE embarks upon its first great competition, and I wish to state that it is open to all readers of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, and the more entrants there are the better we shall like it. It is our desire to reach the outside public as well as the St. Frank's readers. So roll up, my lads and lasses, and have a shot at this competition—the easiest, simplest competition that any paper has ever introduced.

Below we publish the first instalment of a new serial. As I have written it myself, I won't say much about the quality. But I'll tell you that twenty-four of the characters in this story are members of a new St. Frank's Secret Society, and instead of being referred to by name they all have numbers. There will be four instalments of this serial, and six of these numbered characters will appear in each instalment. Now, regular readers, it's up to you! All

you have to do is to read this serial and do your best to judge who the characters are by their style of conversation and their actions.

For the present, all you have to do is to read the first instalment and make a list of the six numbered characters on the form that you will find on cover-page iii of this issue. Then hang on to it until you get further instructions from me. Don't send anything in until the whole serial is completed, and full directions will be given as to this when the last instalment is published.

A prize of One Guinea will be awarded the reader who sends a correct list of the names of the twenty-four characters. In the case of two or more readers sending in correct solutions, the prize will be divided accordingly.

NIPPER.

Editor, St. Frank's Magazine.

THE COMRADES OF THE CRIMSON CROSS !

:: A Mystery Serial by the Editor ::

CHAPTER 1.

THE ST. FRANK'S SECRET SOCIETY.

THE Comrades of the Crimson Cross were in full meeting.

The Council Chamber was packed, all the members of the Order being indistinguishable from one another. They wore black hoods, through which nothing could be seen but the eyes.

The Chief was speaking, standing upon a raised platform at the end of the Council Chamber. His voice was quietly impressive, and the other twenty-three listened to him earnestly.

"Comrades, the time has come for us to get down to the actual work of the League," said the Chief. "As you all know, I am Comrade 1, and you've all got to remember that no names are to be mentioned. If

you have occasion to speak to one another, use your numbers, and nothing else."

"All right, fathead!" said Comrade 2. "Don't chew the rag like this—get on with the business. As a matter of fact, I ought to have been Chief. I never knew such a fellow for jawing!"

The Chief turned sternly.

"You'd better remember, Comrade 2, that there are to be no interruptions," he said. "This League of ours is not a joke, but a serious business. I think you can all trust me to see that everything is planned out carefully, and that our various coups will be conducted on a proper basis."

"Of course we can!" said Comrade 3. "But buck up with the scheme, and let's be off. I'm absolutely starving. You can't expect me to go out on an expedition unless I have a good feed first!"

"There will be no time for feeding, Comrade 3," said the Chief sternly. "Now, the objects of our Society are these. We have banded ourselves together for the purpose of putting down all forms of petty violence and brutality. There are many culprits on our list, including such notable examples as Kenmore of the Sixth, Lumpy Bill, of Bellton, and Farmer Holt. We have clear cases of tyranny and brutality against these three."

"What about Wellborne, of the River House School?" demanded Comrade 2. "If you're going to leave him out of the list, I'll clear out of the League altogether—and then the whole thing will go to pieces."

The Chief's eyes twinkled.

"We are quite prepared to take that risk, Comrade 2," he said lightly. "But you can be quite certain that Wellborne is on the list. For this evening, I propose that we deal with Lumpy Bill."

"Couldn't do better!" declared Comrade 3. "That'll take us down to the village, and the tuck-shop's bound to be open—"

"I shall require five assistants for this piece of work," went on Comrade 1, ignoring the interruption. "And, in order to save all possible argument, I shall take those five of you whose numbers immediately follow my own."

"Numbers 1 to 6, you mean?" said Comrade 2. "All right—I'm game! I shall be in the party, so we can be absolutely sure that Lumpy Bill will get it in the neck. I'm going to biff him until he can't stand!"

"You will kindly leave all instructions for me," said the Chief. "Comrades 2 to 6, stand forward!"

Five of the cloaked figures left the ranks and stood at attention.

"You are all agreeable to this?" asked the Chief.

"Of course we are!" said Comrade 2.

"It would be better if we had a feed first," said Comrade 3.

"'Souse me, we've got no time for eating!" declared Comrade 4. "We've got to do as the skipper says, and set sail for Lumpy Bill's craft."

"I kinder think we're going to make that rotter be sorry for himself," said Comrade 5. "By jinks! He'll be a bit surprised when we swoop down on him and put him through the mill!"

"Absolutely!" said Comrade 6 languidly.

The Chief looked round and nodded.

"The rest of you will go on other expeditions," he said. "Listen carefully, and I will outline exactly what you have to do."

And for some little time the meeting went on with tense inward excitement. And then

the first expedition left the Council Chamber and departed on its errand of vengeance.

"A dashed good scheme!" said Comrade 6 approvingly. "Of course, between you and me, dear old lads, it's going to be a frightful bore; but all in the interests of justice, what?"

"Better not talk too much, Comrade 6, or you'll give yourself away," grinned Comrade 5. "I'm safe, by jinks! Nobody would be able to tell who I am, with my voice disguised like this."

"Swill my scuppers!" said Comrade 4. "Have we got to disguise our voices, mess-mates?"

"Don't be a blithering idiot! Of course we have!" growled Comrade 2. "What's the good of us wearing these hoods if we jaw in our natural way? Anybody can tell who you are with all that fatheaded nautical talk! But don't forget I've got the detective instinct, and when I'm on a job of this sort, I enter into it heart and soul. If you say you know who I am, I'll jolly well give you a black eye! When I'm disguised, I disguise everything!"

The other members of the expedition chuckled, and a few moments later they emerged into the old Triangle, and now removed their hoods. But they kept them handy for use later.

And in the gloom of the gathering evening the six members of the Comrades of the Crimson Cross went off in search of their first victim.

(To be continued.)

(Next week six more numbered characters will be introduced, but you needn't worry about them now. Don't forget that all you have to do is to fill in the various names opposite the numbers on the special form, which will be found on page iii of this issue. Then keep the list by you, and the next two as well, until the final instalment is published.—ED., St. Frank's Mag.)

There is no truth in the rumour that Archie Glenthorne and Alfred Brent have fallen out. As a matter of fact, they got jammed in the doorway of Archie's study, and fell in! Although Archie put his boot into Alf's ear, Alf manfully refrained from lapsing into his famous Cockney flow. All the flowing was done by Archie's nose!

SOME OF NEXT WEEK'S ATTRACTIONS!

"NEVER COUNT YOUR CHICKENS"

BY ARNOLD McCLURE

SPECIAL CUP-TIE ARTICLE,

BY MR. CLIFFORD

PAINFUL PARODY, E. SOPP'S FABLES, ETC

CHARACTER NAMES COMPETITION.

In the spaces provided below write against the numbers the names of the St. Frank's characters represented by corresponding numbers in this week's instalment of "THE COMRADES OF THE CRIMSON CROSS." Particulars of this competition are given on page 11 of the ST. FRANK'S MAGAZINE

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

(Write clearly and in ink. Keep this coupon until the fourth instalment appears, when closing date and further instructions will be given.)

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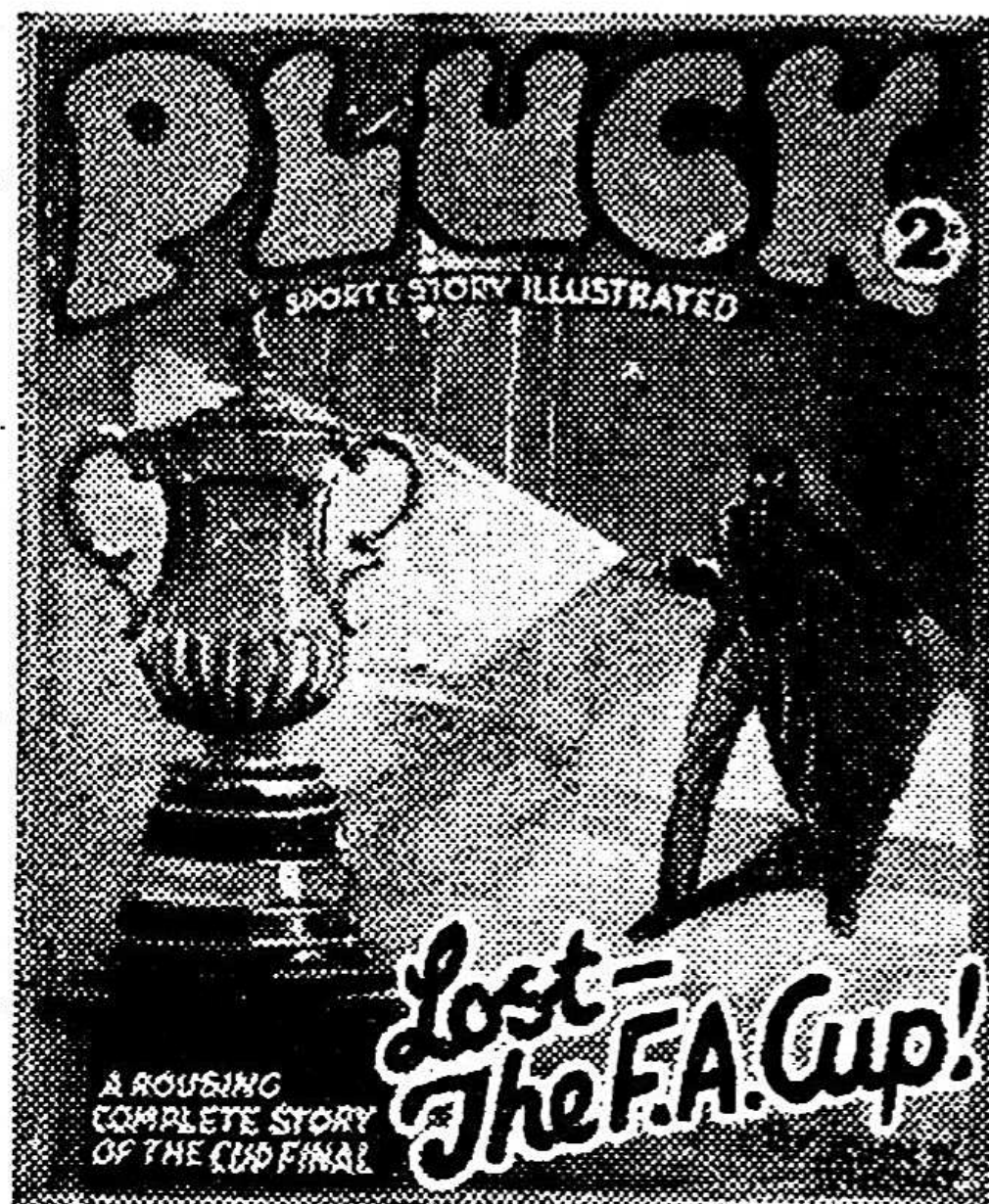
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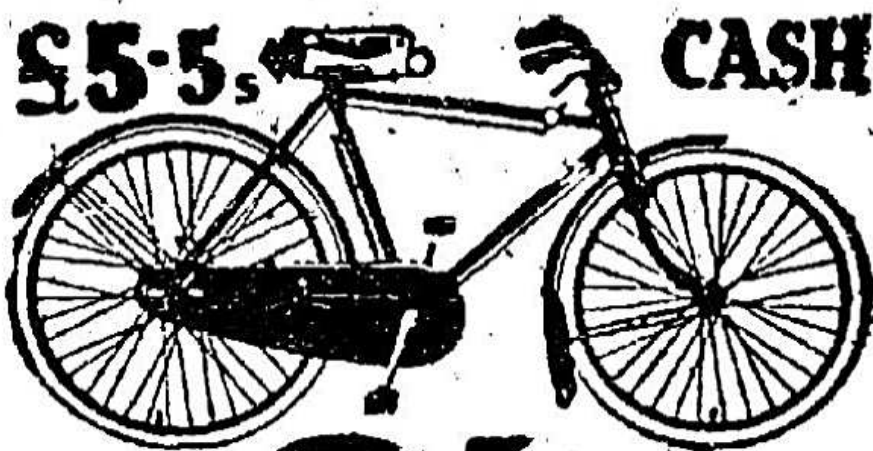
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