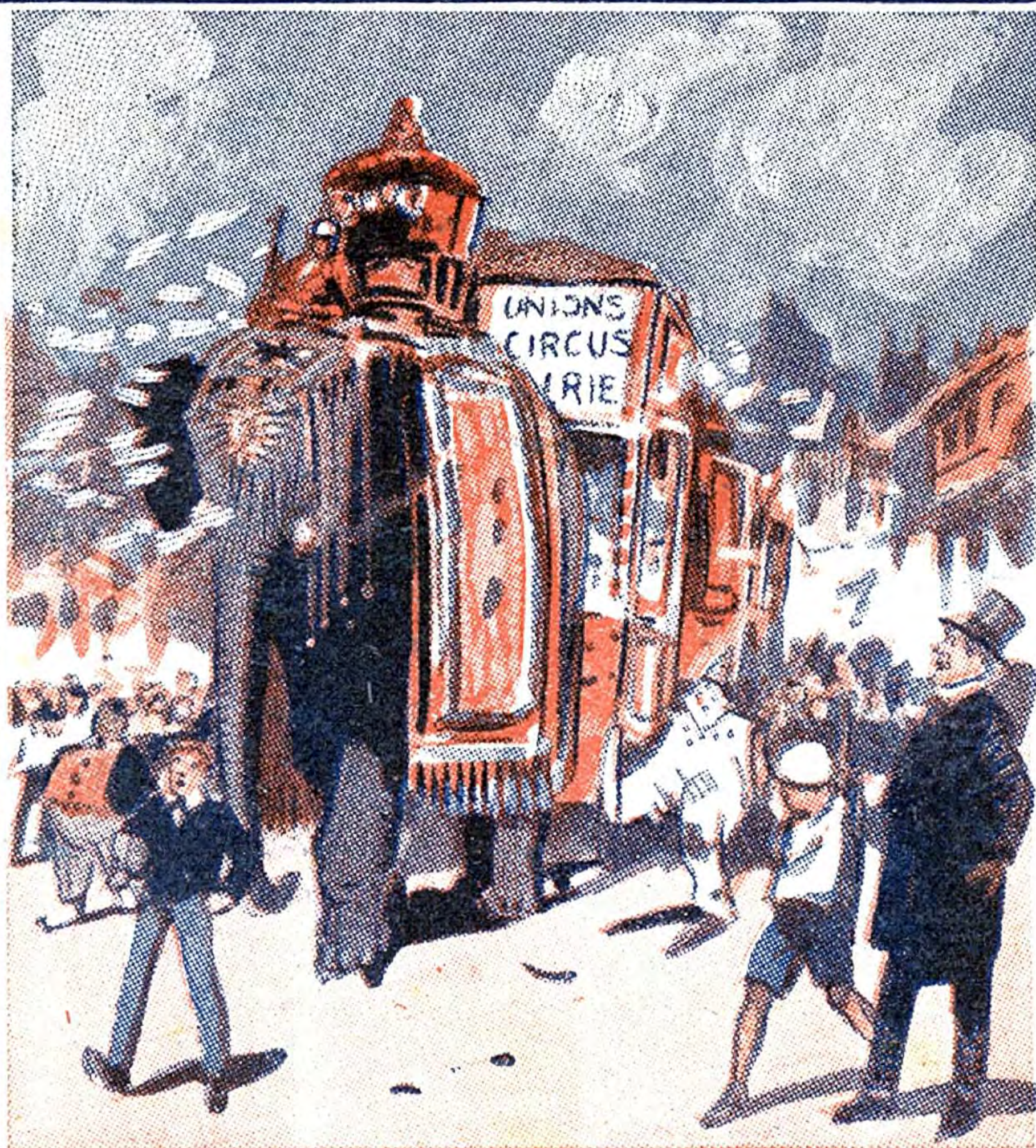


GRAND SCHOOLBOY CIRCUS SERIES JUST STARTED !

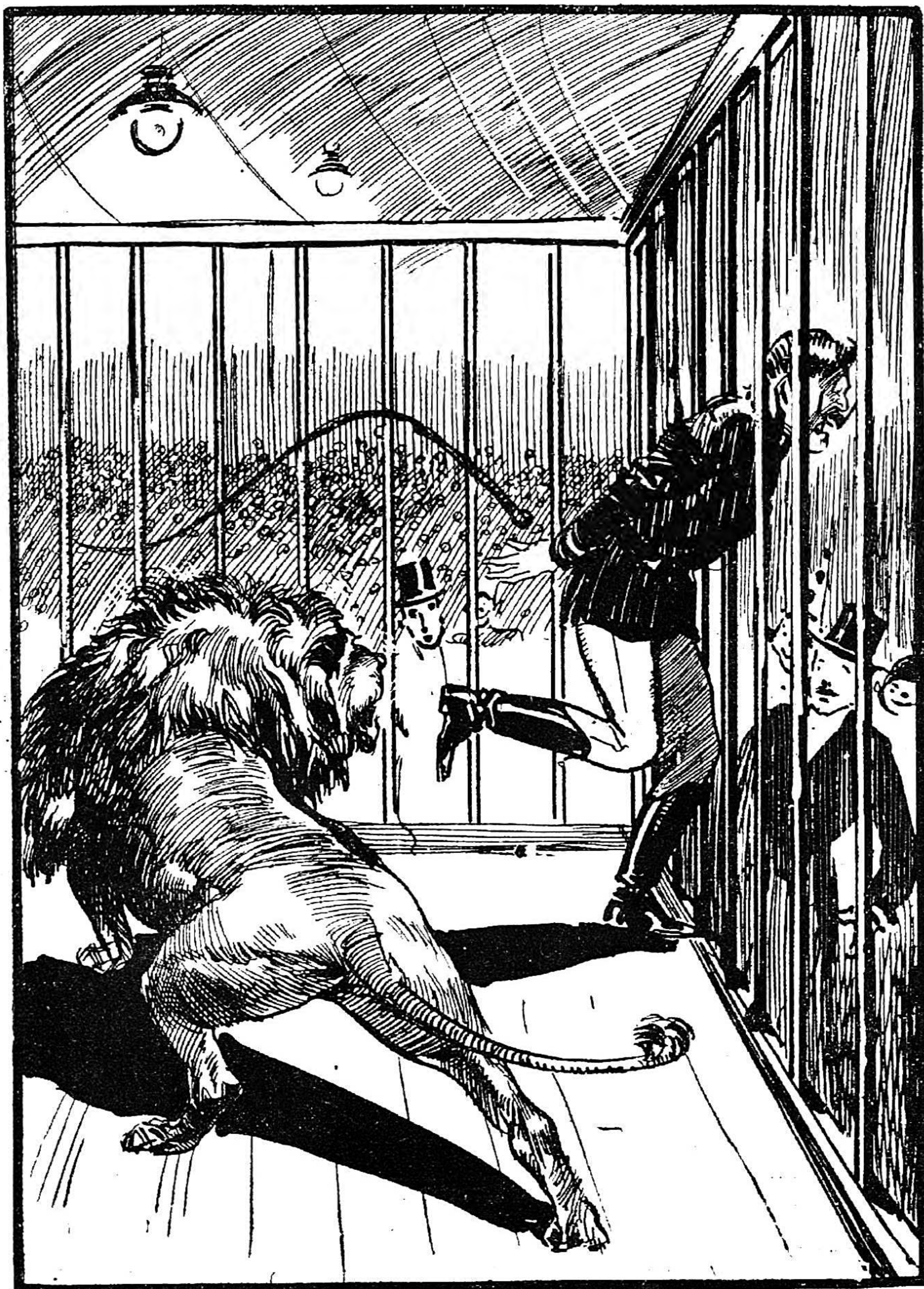
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BUSTER ADVERTISES THE SHOW !

The Story of the Week :—

THE ST. FRANK'S CIRCUS; OR, IT PAYS TO ADVERTISE!

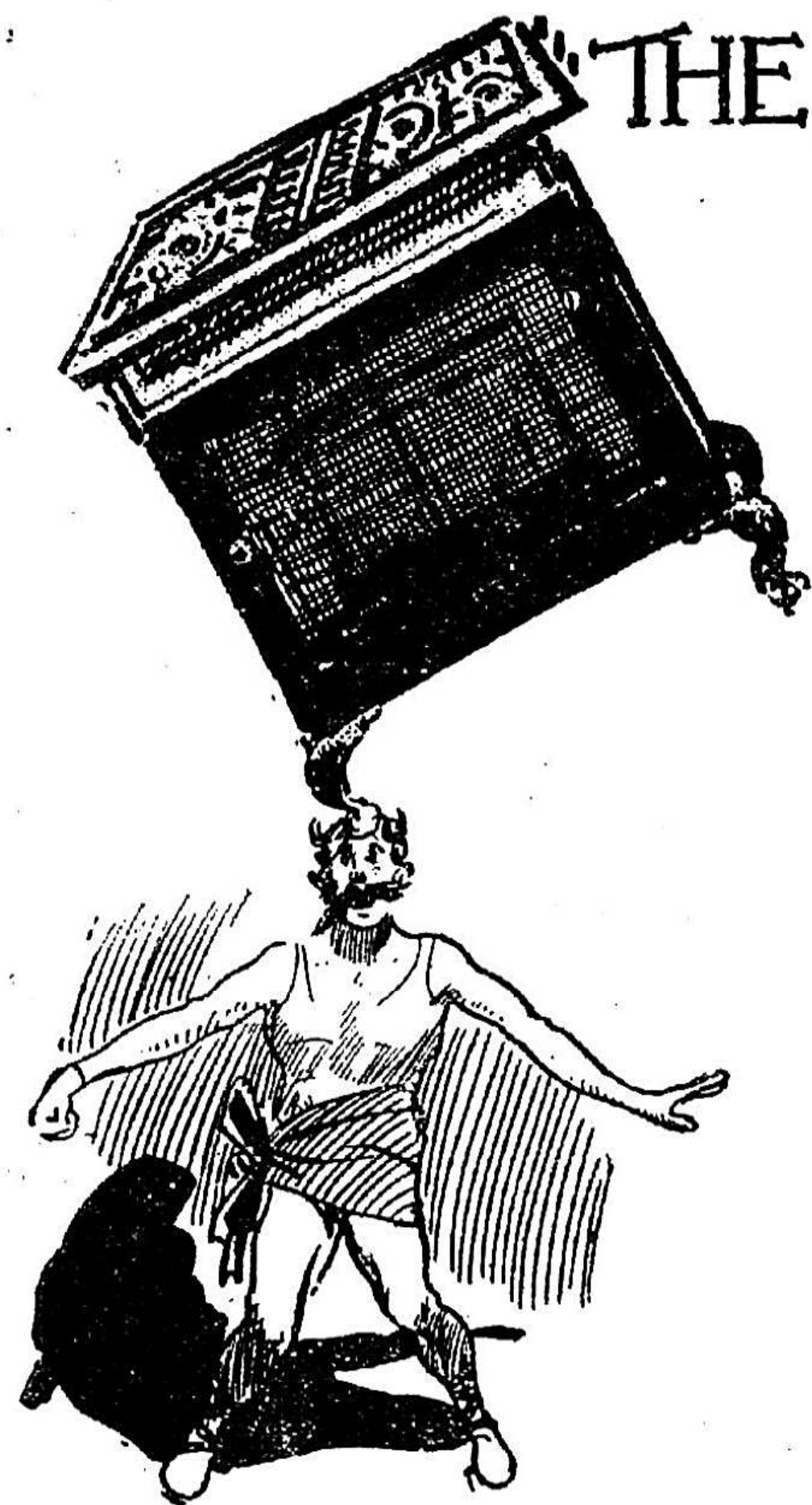


Taken by surprise and the power of the blow, Handforth was sent flying to the other side of the cage.

THE ST FRANK'S CIRCUS!

BEING THE THRILLING AND AMUSING ADVENTURES OF THE BOY'S OF ST. FRANK'S IN THE RING.

The Onions brothers, sons of Professor Onions of circus fame, were introduced to St. Frank's last term. They came as new boys to the River House School, then housed at St. Frank's, and becoming very popular with the Remove fellows, a great deal of interest was naturally taken in the appearance last week of their father's circus in the vicinity of St. Frank's—especially as the Onions brothers were to perform. The manager of the circus is, however, a tyrant and appears to have some hold over the professor. The artistes are treated so badly that they have all gone on strike. This will mean great loss to the proprietor. So the Remove decide to lend their support in running the circus. They not only advertise the



show, but supply several new turns. These include the Handforths, the Onions brothers, of course, Reggie Pitt, Jerry Dodd, Fatty Little, etc. Now read how the Juniors delight the whole of Helmford as circus performers.

THE EDITOR.

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

CHAPTER I.

CANVAS AND CARAVAN.

GENTLEMEN—
“Hear, hear!”
“I have a few important words to say—”

“Hurrah!”

“But I can't say 'em if I'm continually interrupted!” said Reginald Pitt genially. “I may remark that I wanted Nipper to make this speech, but the beggar's backed out of it.”

“The whole thing was your idea, Reggie, so you've got to do the explaining,” I said

sweetly. “Everybody's here now, so there's no excuse for further delay. And time's short, anyway. Show some speed!”

“You said it!” declared Adams. “Atta-boy!”

Reggie Pitt cleared his throat, and once again faced the Remove. And the celebrated Remove Form of St. Frank's, let me add, was in a most unusual environment—being, in fact, in the half-crown enclosure of the big tent of Professor Onions' Colossal Circus and Menagerie.

Sun peeped in through chinks of the canvas, and the blithe Spring breeze caused the

great folds of the tent to bulge lazily, and sway to the creak of the great supports.

Outside the tent, the meadow was green and fresh, and the various caravans and waggons of the circus, although rather shabby, nevertheless looked attractive. And this was a very fateful morning for the circus.

"As you all know," continued Pitt, "the Easter holidays are nearly over, and the day after to-morrow we have to return to St. Frank's for the new term—"

"Shut up! Don't remind us!"

A groan arose from half the Remove.

"The facts have got to be faced!" said Pitt sternly. "Holidays can't last for ever, and the awful grind of work commences once again on Thursday. In the meantime, there's work of another kind to be done."

"Work!" said John Busterfield Boots. "Good gracious! Have you brought us down here to work? Speak! Get me out of this anxiety!"

"Yes, let's hear the worst!" shouted Armstrong.

The Remove was becoming rather anxious. The majority of the fellows had arrived only half an hour earlier, and the entire Remove was present, except for a handful of fellows who had not been in London the previous evening. The others had rallied to the general call.

They had been surprised to get urgent telegrams, late the previous evening, summoning them to Helmford by the early morning train. And there had not been a single defaulter. All had turned up at Victoria, and the very fact that they knew nothing of the reason for the urgent summons added to their curiosity.

Helmford Station had swarmed with Remove juniors just when the town was sitting down to breakfast, and Helmford knew well enough that the Remove had arrived. For the Remove always made itself heard.

Reggie Pitt and I had gone to the station to meet them, and we had arrived at the circus only ten minutes ago. We had come in for a good deal of attention from the townspeople, for our fame had spread far and wide.

Helmford was not so very far from Bannington, and nobody had forgotten how the St. Frank's Remove had fought a desperate war against Mr. William K. Smith, the German-American millionaire—and how that warfare had ended up in a riot which almost finished St. Frank's for good.

Not only Helmford, and Sussex in general, but the whole country knew about the exploits of the Remove, and the juniors felt justly proud of themselves. But it was exasperating for the fellows to be down here without knowing the reason. Reggie Pitt was now supplying the deficiency.

"Now that I've reminded you about the new term, I'll get on to the immediate business," he said. "You know, of course, that this Circus belongs to Johnny and Bertie Onions—the sons of the famous King

of the Ring. They are running the show on their own."

"Rats! They belong to the River House School!" yelled somebody.

"Not exactly," corrected Pitt. "They certainly belonged to the River House School, but they don't now. Their pater has had some rough luck, and finances went wrong. Professor Onions is ill in bed, and his sons are running the show off their own bat."

"Good luck to 'em!" said Church heartily.

"Of course, Johnny gave me permission to tell you this, or I wouldn't be doing it!" went on Pitt. "Yesterday we happened to be passing—that is, Nipper and Archie and the two Handforths and I. We stopped to see the show, and it wasn't exactly sensational. And to cut the story short, practically all the performers went on strike last night, and cleared off. They left the show flat."

"Hard lines!"

"It was mainly the fault of Mr. Simon Snayle—"

"Mr. Who?" put in Christine.

"Mr. Snayle."

"He sounds a bit of a crawly creature!" said Christine.

"He not only sounds it, but he is," said Pitt. "He's the manager—or, to be exact, he's the fellow who pretends to manage. It was his fault that the performers went on strike, and left the show stranded."

"But what's it got to do with us?" asked McClure.

"Everything!" replied Reggie. "You've all been brought down here to rally round. We regard Johnny and Bertie Onions as members of the flock, and it's up to us to help them in their times of trial."

"But, hang it all, we can't perform in a circus!" said Armstrong.

"Some of us can," replied Pitt serenely.

"What!"

"It's all planned out," continued Reggie. "We've got the whole programme fixed—and by this time the bills are being printed, and they'll be delivered in about an hour. The majority of you chaps are then going out in battalions, all over the town, on a big publicity push."

The Remove gazed at Pitt speechlessly.

"I have here," went on Reggie, "the names of certain artists who will appear in the ring this afternoon. The proper show will be given to-night—the matinee being a kind of dress rehearsal. First of all we have Tricky Trix, the Australian Marvel, and his Human Pony, Bud—"

"Bud!" shouted Jerry Dodd, sitting forward, with a start.

"Mr. Tricky Trix will perform some extraordinary feats with the rope, and give exhibitions of trick riding on his pony," went on Pitt, ignoring the interruption. "Then we have Strongolio, the World's Greatest Weight-Lifter; Mustang Mike, the Peppy Cowboy; Marco and his Marvellous Lion;

Badd and Wurse, the World's Wickedest Wizards——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This," said Reggie, "is no time for laughter. Allow me to repeat the names of the performers I have just mentioned—Jerry Dodd, Handforth major and Handforth minor, Justin B. Farman, Jack Grey, and my humble self. Oh, and there will be Mr. Nipperino, the Champion Ring Master—in other words, Nipper. Do I make myself clear?"

The Remove burst forth into a babble of excited shouts.

"Is this spoof, or do you mean it?" demanded Buster Boots.

"Oh, Buster, how can you?" asked Reggie. "Did you doubt me? Of course it's true—and you, by the way, are down on the list as Managing Director of the Publicity Department."

"I say, that's great!" shouted Boots warmly. "Good man!"

"To put it all into a nutshell," said Pitt, "the Remove is here for the sole and only purpose of pepping up this show, stuffing it with ginger, and, in fact, running the whole giddy performance!"

CHAPTER II.

THE WHERZE OF THE YEAR.



IT would be putting it very mildly to say that the Remove was enthusiastic.

Everybody fell into the scheme with a gusto that was almost embarrassing to Johnny and Bertie Onions. In fact, it struck the Remove as being the one really great idea of the century.

Of course, those fellows who were booked to perform in the ring were more excited than the others, but it was quickly realised by the rank and file that they couldn't all turn themselves into artists.

"We've got everything mapped out to the last detail, so there can't be any confusion," I exclaimed, taking Reggie's place in the ring. "We took it for granted that you'd all agree—knowing what sportsmen you are——"

"Hear, hear!"

"And we sat up half the night going into details," I said. "In a few minutes I shall begin to reel out some instructions, and I want all of you to enter into the spirit of the affair, and work in unison."

"Wait a minute!" put in Jerry Dodd. "I'm as keen as mustard on doing my bit, but you've forgotten something! Have you got my name printed on the bills, including my little pony, Bud?"

"You're billed as Tricky Trix and Bud," I replied.

"But Bud's in the stable at St. Frank's!" said Jerry, indignantly.

"A perfectly natural mistake," I remarked. "Bud, as it happens, is quietly browsing at the bottom of this meadow——"

"By jings!" yelled Jerry. "You mean it?"

"We realised, of course, that Bud was a necessary part of the performance, and so Handforth went over to St. Frank's early this morning—in fact, by the first train—accompanied by two of the circus ostlers," I explained. "They arrived back shortly before you turned up, and Bud——"

But Jerry didn't wait for more. He dashed out of the big tent to go in search of his beloved pony—probably believing that Bud had been half slaughtered, or something.

It wasn't long before something like order was restored, and then we set about putting our plans into execution. Buster Boots was quick to take up his own duties, and he waved his hand airily as I began to outline a scheme for letting the public know that the circus was to be something pretty marvellous.

"It's all right—you needn't say another word!" declared Buster. "I'm the fellow with the big ideas. When it comes to advertising, I'm there with a Punch. Leave this in my hands, and by dinner-time there won't be a man, woman or child in the whole of Helmford who doesn't know this afternoon's programme by heart!"

"Good man!" I said heartily. "But remember—not a word about the show being given by St. Frank's chaps. The town's got to believe that we're merely pushing it along, and that some artists of the first quality have been secured at enormous expense."

"Sounds good!" grinned Johnny Onions.

"You needn't tell me what to say!" put in Buster Boots tartly. "Do you think I don't know my own game? What about my articles in the Mag. about Getting on Top? Just give me the handbills, and any other information that you want passed across to the population, and leave the rest to me."

"How many fellows will you want?" I asked.

"As many as I can get," replied Buster promptly. "The more the merrier."

He went off, bustling about with a kind of volcanic energy. There was something infectious in his manner, and it wasn't long before he imbued half the Remove with his own spirit.

In the meantime, those fellows who were to appear in the ring hurried into a dressing-tent to hold a consultation. There wasn't a moment to be lost, for there was a good deal of rehearsing to be done.

"It's a good idea for Handforth to appear as Strongolio," said Pitt. "and I think he ought to make a sensation. Any strong man who can lift two fifty-six pound weights with his little finger ought to go strong."

"Two fifty-six pound weights!" said Handforth blankly.

"Oh, you needn't worry," grinned Johnny.

"Two or three of the men are at work on the weights now—boring out the innards! By the time they are finished, they'll look the real thing—but they'll only be about seven pounds each!"

"But that's a swindle!" he said warmly.

"Oh, all right—if you want to make a mess of it, use the proper standard weights!" said Pitt. "There's no need to be so scrupulous. We don't give any guarantee of genuine weights, or offer any reward if Strongolio is bowled out. It's a perfectly legitimate stunt."

"Oh, well, I suppose I'd better agree," said Handforth reluctantly. "Of course, I'd rather use the full weights, but I dare say it'll be more impressive if I throw a few overgrown dumb-bells in the air, and catch 'em as though they weighed about an ounce."

"Take my advice, and don't throw anything in the air!" I said. "They'll be pretty heavy, even after they're faked. And you'd better begin rehearsing in about ten minutes, my son."

"What about the lion performance?" asked Handforth.

I sighed. The menagerie boasted one solitary lion, but it wasn't exactly a performing animal—it was merely kept to impress the public. And Handforth had insisted upon appearing twice in the programme—once as Strongolio, and a second time as Marco, the Lion Tamer. Just for the sake of peace, I had agreed, and the bills were even now being printed.

"I wish we hadn't decided on that lion idea," I said gruffly.

"Why not?" demanded Handforth.

"Because it'll be a fizzle," I replied. "The brute can't do any tricks, and the audience might get ratty. The cage will simply be wheeled into the ring on a waggon, you'll make an ass of yourself in a glorious uniform, and then you'll both clear off again! Not much excitement in that, is there?"

"Anything's better than nothing," replied Handforth. "The very fact of the lion being wheeled in will cause a stir. And you can trust me to make the most of my opportunities!"

"It would be better," said Pitt, "if you entered the cage!"

"If I did what?" repeated Handforth, turning pale.

"All genuine lion tamers go in the cage," said Reggie. "If you don't, my lad, you'll get the bird! Why not risk it? All for the sake of art, you know!"

Handforth glared.

"What do you care?" he said bitterly. "You stand there, and talk about me going into the cage as though it were a trifle! You'd send me to my death without a qualm!"

Pitt shrugged his shoulders.

"What we want is realism," he said. "But still, perhaps you'd better not—"

"By jove!" I interrupted abruptly. "I've

just thought of something! It's a stunning wheeze! Absolutely the very thing—and we'll give the public a performing lion act that will absolutely stagger them!"

"Am I in this?" asked Handforth suspiciously.

"You're not only in the act, but you're in the cage!" I replied. "The fact is, we're going to get another lion—there's a good big empty cage that'll just do. We'll make the Helmford public sit up!"

"You're making Handforth sit up already!" remarked Pitt.

"Another lion?" snapped Handforth, glaring.

"Yes!"

"Is it savage?"

"A perfect terror," I replied. "In fact, about the cheekiest living article in creation! This lion will perform the most astounding tricks, and it'll be your duty, Handy, to go into the cage and put the beggar through its paces! One of your chief tricks will be to lie down and let the lion crawl all over you, and seize you by the throat!"

"Good!" said Willy heartily. "Fine!"

"Would you like to see me killed?" howled Handforth.

"Not exactly killed!" said his minor.

"But where's the danger?"

"Danger?" hooted Edward Oswald.

"D'you think I'm going to let this blessed lion grab me by the throat?"

"Yes—because it'll be a lion of a particularly harmless variety," I interrupted. "Listen, you fellows! Remember Dr. Karnak? Remember that stuffed lion that Lord Dorrimore presented to the school museum?"

"Of course we do," said Pitt. "But what on earth—"

"Remember that some fellow tried to murder old Karnak by getting into the school enclosed in a marvellous lion's skin?" I went on tensely. "Just think what that skin was like! So lifelike that you expected to see it breathe! It can be operated inside so realistically that even when you know it's a fake, you begin to have doubts—"

"It's too much!" interrupted Pitt faintly.

"An idea like that is beyond all admiration! Nipper, old son, you've done it! You've thought of the best idea under the sun!"

CHAPTER III.

GETTING SOME CUSTOMERS!



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH drew a deep breath.

"You—you mean —" he began faintly.

"Exactly!" I interrupted.

"We can get that lion's skin without any trouble. Mr. Clifford's at St. Frank's, and he'll be only too jolly glad to help. It isn't as though the skin were an exhibit—it's tucked away in some cellar, or other."

"It's the most marvellous thing I ever saw!" said Handforth. "That giddy skin, I mean! I know, because I saw it with a man inside, and I could have sworn that it was alive. It sprang at me with every appearance of actual life——"

"We know it!" I interrupted. "You came and told a crowd of chaps all about it, and we thought you'd gone dotty. But that lion's skin, with a clever chap inside, will easily fool the public. Nobody will ever know that it isn't a real lion. But we shall need somebody small for the job—small and active."

"Of course, I'd do it," said Handforth slowly, "but I can't be the trainer and the lion as well, can I?"

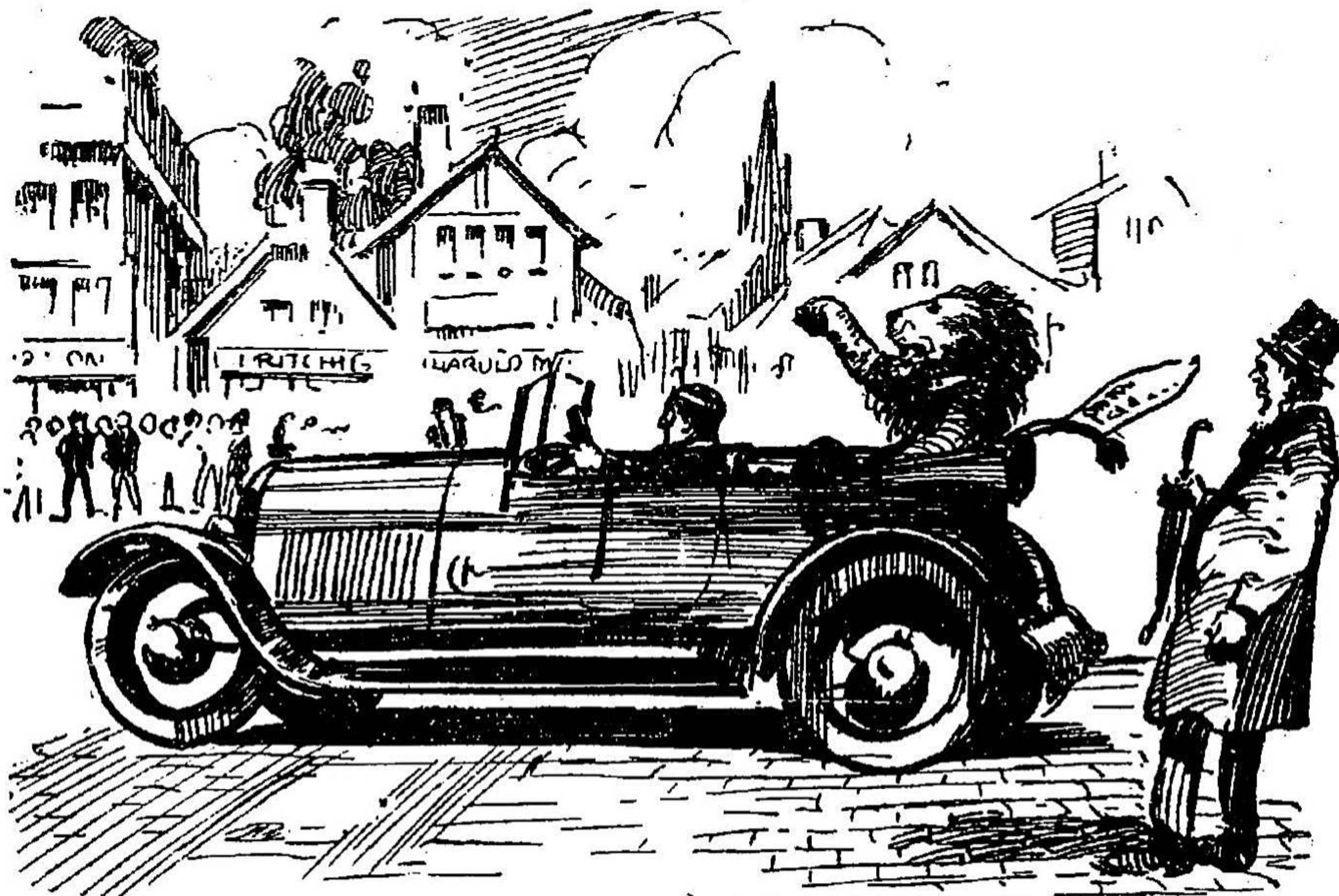
"Just as you like," I said carelessly. "Fortunately, your name isn't on the bill, so anybody can be Marco. What about you, Armstrong? Do you mind dressing up as the lion tamer?"

"Not a bit!" said Armstrong promptly.

"Of course, it might be a good idea to have Willy inside," said Handforth, with exaggerated carelessness. "On second thoughts, it's a great wheeze! All right! I'll be the lion tamer, and Willy can be the lion!"

I grinned.

"Good! Then that's settled!" I said. "Sorry, Armstrong, but you've lost the chance of becoming famous. Where's Archie?"



An extremely cheerful-looking lion was calmly sitting on its haunches in the rear of the car, opening and shutting its mouth, and waving to the passers-by!

"My dear ass, you want to do everything!" I said. "And if you tried to get into that skin, you'd bust it to atoms. There's one chap only for the job—your minor."

"Good!" said Willy. "I was expecting it!"

"My—my minor!" said Handforth, turning red. "Not likely! I'm blessed if I'll go into the ring with that young monkey!"

"I'm not a monkey," said Willy, "I'm a lion!"

"Rats! I won't agree!" snorted Handforth. "Why, for two pins the young bouncer would fly at me, and upset the whole show! I won't agree!"

Asleep somewhere, I'll bet! Somebody dash round and find Archie."

"Absolutely unnecessary, old gargoy!" interrupted Archie Glenthorne, lounging up. "I trust that I am not required for any work? I mean, the sun, you know—dashed hot? Still, in the cause of friendship——"

"I want you to take the car, and pop over to St. Frank's," I said briskly. "Take Willy with you, and bring that lion's skin back. And the sooner you can return, the better. For once in your life, Archie, you've got to hustle!"

"My dear old carrot, I'm your man!" said Archie readily. "I mean to say, it'll be the

car that does the hustling, what? Work of that kind is an absolute pleasure, old yell!"

It only took me a few minutes to give him full instructions, and off he went, taking Handforth minor. Archie, of course, was thoroughly skilled in driving, and he could handle the powerful racer without difficulty.

The pair went off, leaving a great bustle of activity, and were soon roaring along the main road from Helmford to Bannington. The distance to St. Frank's was, roughly, twenty miles—a mere jump in a good car.

In a little over half an hour, Bellton was reached—for Archie had taken me at my word, and had driven at about thirty-five

"Oh, my hat!" he said. "This'll mean an hour's delay! I say, Archie, can't you leave your love-making until a slack time? We can't stop to talk to these flappers now!"

Archie gazed at Willy with a cold, steely look.

"Dash it!" he protested. "You frightful young blighter! I mean, referring to these priceless young ladies as flappers, and accusing me of love-making! I am wounded!"

"Got a heartstab?" asked Willy. "Look here, Archie, don't be a prize ass! We've got to hurry! Marjorie's a jolly pretty girl, but, after all, what are girls, anyhow? Jolly

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miles an hour, quite regardless of speed limits.

"I expect we'll find a few changes," remarked Willy, as they romped over the bridge across the Stowe, and started up Bellton Lane. "Hallo! Not much sign of Cyclone City left!"

"A frightfully good thing, too," said Archie. "The place was a dashed excrecence on the landscape—a kind of ink spot on the tablecloth, so to speak. What-ho! What-ho! But here, laddie, we have an absolute vision of beauty!"

They had turned the bend, and Archie instantly slowed down, and finally brought the car to a standstill. Three cyclists were coming along, and Willy Handforth grinned.

expensive luxuries! Silly gigglers who think of nothing else but new hats and bottles of scent! I don't believe girls have got any brains at all! I know my sister hasn't!"

"Apparently the condition runs in your family," said Archie icily. "Another word, dash you, and I'll bally well slap you!"

At this moment the girls arrived, and Archie politely rose, and raised his cap. The three young ladies were Irene Manners, Marjorie Temple, and Doris Berkeley, the prettiest girls in the Moor View School, and inseparable chums.

"Why, this is unexpected, Archie!" exclaimed Marjorie, looking at the two juniors with a slight flush on her cheeks. "We didn't expect you back until Thursday!"

"Well, as a matter of fact, dear girl, we're not back," said Archie. "That is, we're here, but not at school, if you gather the trend. Just a flying visit, as it were, to grab the old lion."

"The lion?" repeated Irene, wonderingly.

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "You see, we're running a circus——"

"Really, Archie, there's no reason why you should try to be funny!" said Irene.

"He can't help it, poor chap!" said Willy.

"It's his nature. It'll only take two minutes to explain the whole situation, and I had better add that we're in a hurry. If I don't pep him up, I shall be here for an hour!"

"Really, you young bounder——" began Archie.

But Willy, quite serene, interrupted him and informed the girls of the full state of affairs. They listened with great interest—and, indeed, became just a little excited.

"Oh, how gorgeous!" exclaimed Doris. "A real circus! And you're going to run it yourselves! I say, Renie, we'll have to buzz over and see the show. I wouldn't miss it for worlds!"

"A sound scheme!" said Archie, with enthusiasm. "It would be absolutely topping if you young ladies appeared in the old tent. I mean, it would give the chappies so much encouragement that they couldn't fail!"

"Really?" said Marjorie, with a smile.

"Absolutely—with door handles!" said Archie. "Kindly allow me to book three of the best seats for you, and I'll dashed well come over in the old car——"

"No, Archie," interrupted Irene. "Thanks awfully for booking the seats, but we can't bother you to come over. We'll catch the afternoon train. It's not so very far to Helmford, and as this is the first day of term, we can do practically as we like. Oh, it'll be perfectly ripping to see a circus like that!"

"Come on!" said Willy impatiently. "Let's be moving!"

"Oh, rather," said Archie. "I mean, absolutely not! Don't keep bothering, you young bounder! I want to hear all about the holidays, and so forth, and I've got heaps to tell——"

"Let it wait!" said Willy. "Don't you realise that we've got to get that lion's skin, and that I've got to do a lot of rehearsing? Are you going to hang the whole show up just for the sake of talking sweet nothings?"

Archie gazed at Willy with an icy stare.

"It would be unseemly for me to express my thoughts aloud," he said frigidly. "In fact, dash it, I could absolutely be arrested for what I'm thinking now! Kindly dry up, and remain dried up!"

"You're an optimist!" said Willy briefly.

"After all, Archie, I think he's right," said Marjorie gently. "The morning's getting on, and that lion's skin is important."

Oh, I know! Don't tell any of the others that we're coming, and then they'll be surprised to see us in the enclosure."

"Absolutely priceless!" agreed Archie. "Eh? My dear young blighter—— Good gad! You're absolutely ruining my jacket!"

Willy continued tugging at Archie's sleeve.

"See that accelerator?" he asked, pointing to the floor.

"Eh? Oh, rather!"

"Good! Then step on it!" said Willy. "Ta-ta, girls!"

Archie was absolutely flustered into bidding Irene and Co. good-bye, and before he knew where he was, the car was speeding up the lane, and Willy was serenely throwing kisses over the rear—which, unfortunately, Irene and Co. did not observe.

CHAPTER IV.

IT PAYS TO ADVERTISE.



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE turned very red. "Odds life! You frightful young ragamuffin!" he said severely. "Stop it, dash you! How dare you be so frightfully familiar?"

"Rats! They didn't see!" said Willy, turning back. "My only hat! When it comes to hustle, you're about as energetic as a dead crocodile. Still, it's not your fault and I forgive you."

"You forgive me?" said Archie dazedly.

"I mean—— What ho! This appears to me to be the absolute occasion for a swift and painful chastisement. In other words, dash you, I'm going to tick you off! Absolutely!"

"Instead of ticking me off, you'd better remember the minutes are being ticked off!" said Handforth minor impatiently. "Oh, help! Can you ever realise that time goes, and can't be recovered? If we don't get back with that lion's skin, Johnny and Bertie will lose hundreds of quids!"

"Oh, come! In other words—come, come!" protested Archie.

"What's the good of them giving the show without the lion?" demanded Willy. "They might as well shut the tent, and turn the money away! If I don't appear as the performing lion, the show will be rotten! Of course, Ted will mess the whole thing up—that's certain. But we'll live in hopes."

By this time, they had reached St. Frank's, and Archie turned the car into the Triangle, and brought it to a halt. Both he and Willy sat there, looking at the old school with interest.

The famous pile seemed particularly attractive on this brilliant, sunny morning—

although the intense silence was strange and unusual. Willy appeared to be rather disgusted.

"Why, everything looks the same as usual!" he said. "I was hoping there'd be workmen all over the place, and that we should have the holiday increased for a week! Never any luck these days!"

"You awful young blighter!" said Archie. "I'm dashed glad to see the old show looking Spring-cleaned, as it were. I say, those workmen chappies must have put in a frightful amount of overtime."

There was some reason for the pair's surprise. When they had left St. Frank's at the beginning of the holidays, the old school had been in a terrible condition, as the result of that dreadful riot which had brought William K. Smith's activities to a dramatic termination. The Ancient House door had been blown to fragments, almost every window in the school had been smashed, and the interior wreckage had been considerable.

But now St. Frank's was looking itself again.

The windows were replaced, the Ancient House door was as usual—the new door being an exact replica of the old one. Even the brickwork had been so cunningly renewed that there were no unsightly scars.

Gazing over the playing fields, the juniors could see the meadows leading down to the River Stowe and Willard's Island. Smith's great encampment, known as Cyclone City, had nearly gone, and a few workmen moving about in the sunshine proved that the last remnant of the camp would soon vanish. Willard's Island was looking as peaceful and as picturesque as ever.

Once inside the school, the juniors were freshly astonished—and even delighted. For here the damage had not only been repaired, but extremely attractive improvements had been effected.

The entire junior quarters—which had suffered most in the riot—were completely repainted and redecorated, and the Remove was booked for a pleasant surprise when it returned. The studies smelt a bit painty, but this would soon wear off. The walls were now attractively papered—instead of being distempered as hitherto. The Junior Common-room was now quite a luxurious lounge, with well-filled bookshelves, leather-covered settees, and almost unheard-of luxury. St. Frank's was moving with the times—and possibly the Governors felt that the juniors deserved some compensation for their recent trials.

Mr. Clifford, the Sports master, readily consented to let the juniors take the lion's skin away with them, and he discreetly refrained from asking any awkward questions. If the juniors had wanted the magnificent stuffed lion out of the Museum, it would have been a different matter. This was Lord Dorrimore's gift, and was sacred.

The juniors merely wanted the substitute stuffed lion which had been used by Dr. Karnak's enemies for the purpose of smuggling a man into the school. And this was not a stuffed lion at all, but a cunningly constructed mechanical fake. It was hollow, and "all made to work."

And soon afterwards Archie and Willy departed with their spoils, the massive lion being concealed under a rug in the rear part of the car, with Willy beside it, to see that the rug remained in place. Archie drove, and all speed was made on the way back to Helmford.

There were no stops on the way, and by the time the outskirts of the town were reached, Archie had dropped into a kind of languid reverie at the wheel—thinking, in fact, of Marjorie and the other girls, and wondering how they would enjoy the show. He was anxious to get them the best seats in the whole tent.

But he had reason to notice the peculiar behaviour of various passers-by, as the car glided sedately through the outlying streets. The circus was pitched on the other side of the town, and it was therefore necessary to go right through Helmford to reach it.

Archie awoke completely when he observed a number of children screaming with delight on the pavement, clapping their hands, and generally behaving in a state of wild excitement. They even commenced running at full speed, and keeping pace with the car.

"Dash it!" murmured Archie. "This is somewhat frightful! What, I mean to say, is the scheme? I trust the old tie is straight, and so forth!"

Archie couldn't possibly understand why everybody stared at the car as though it contained some extraordinary freak. It was not only the children, but everybody; and as they progressed, the main road became more populated, for they were now getting towards the heart of the town. People stood in open mouthed groups. And Archie became more and more ill at ease.

He hardly felt complimented when several women screamed aloud and ran for their lives. He slowed down somewhat, carefully felt his necktie, and then inspected his reflection in a small mirror.

"Dashed extraord!" he murmured. "There seems to be absolutely nothing wrong with the old appearance. Good gad! I wonder—Willy, you young doorknocker, are you making faces—"

Archie paused abruptly. His blood seemed to freeze, and he nearly ran into a lamp-post. That one glance round explained everything. There was no sign of Willy in the back of the car; there was no bulging rug concealing the cargo.

Instead, an extremely cheerful-looking lion was calmly sitting on his haunches in the rear of the car, opening and shutting his mouth, and waving to the passers-by!

CHAPTER V.

WAKING 'EM UP!



"GADZOOKS and good heavens!" said Archie faintly. The car wobbled dangerously.

"Look out!" said the lion huskily. "Mind where you're

going, ass!"

"Dash it all!" gasped Archie. "This—this is too much. Oh, by gad! Is that you, Willy?"

"Don't talk, fathead—you'll give it away!" hissed Willy's voice, appearing mysteriously from the lion's mouth. "Advertising!"

"Eh?" said Archie feebly.

"Think of the sensation we're causing!" issued Willy's voice. "Drive on, you duffer! Pretend that everything's all serene—and smile! I saw a play during the hols. called 'It Pays To Advertise.'"

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "I saw it, too."

"A ripping comedy about some chap who sells soap!" went on Willy. "You know—Ralph Lynn at the Aldwych. The whole show proves that advertising is the finest way to make tin! So I've taken the tip, and this is where we advertise the old circus like one o'clock!"

Archie, feeling very faint and thoroughly confused, continued driving. And the lion sat there in perfect serenity. The public as a whole were not alarmed, because the great beast looked so harmless. Moreover, there was a huge collar round its neck, and two chains were fixed to either side of the car. Willy had thought this out before leaving St. Frank's, and had brought the necessary materials. Archie was now dimly realising why Willy had vanished for twenty mysterious minutes.

The car purred along smoothly, and it happened that the lion's tail was projecting jauntily over the rear. And from this tail stretched a gaudily coloured streamer, with the words "Professor Onions' Colossal Circus" in glaring letters on either side. Willy had tucked this streamer into his pocket before leaving on the expedition.

And thus they went through the heart of Helmford, causing consternation, amazement, and widespread publicity throughout the journey. The populace was undoubtedly impressed, and as an advertisement the scheme was an unqualified success.

The sensation was no less at the circus itself when the car turned into the meadow—which was now fairly a-bustle with life and activity. All sorts of shouts went up, and Johnny Onions and Reggie Pitt and I stared blankly at the approaching car.

"Brains!" said Reggie Pitt admiringly. "Nothing else but brains! If they came through Helmford like that, the public will roll up in their millions for the afternoon show!"

"I—I can't believe it's a fake!" gasped Johnny, staring. "Why, it's real—it's alive!"

"Yes—with Willy!" I said grimly. "I'm not sure that this isn't a bloomer. It's more calculated to scare the public than to—Oh, he's chained in, I see! That makes a difference!"

The car came on over the grass, and Archie was about to stop.

"Drive on, you chump!" said the lion tersely.

"Eh? I mean—"

"Can't stop here—too public!" continued the lion. "Go into that nearest tent—drive straight through. I'm absolutely streaming with perspiration. But it was worth it!"

Archie drove into the tent as directed—a square tent with a wide opening. A crowd of fellows rushed in after the car, and the canvas flaps were quickly pulled across.

Mr. Snayle, standing near his own caravan, scowled ferociously.

"Young fools!" he muttered.

He was savage, for he knew well enough that these boys were advertising the show in a manner that was calculated to thoroughly awaken the public. They were doing far better than he had ever done, and the knowledge did not please him.

The fact was, Mr. Snayle felt rather helpless. He was the manager of the show. But upon hearing that the two young owners were determined to run the circus with amateur talent, he viciously declared that he wouldn't have anything to do with the management for a week. Mr. Snayle fondly believed that the brothers would make a hopeless mess of things. And they appeared to be doing just the opposite.

So he had to stand by idle, or else interfere and make himself look foolish. So far, Mr. Snayle had preferred to save his face by remaining inactive. But he was rapidly losing his temper and his patience.

In the tent we surrounded Archie and Willy, who by this time had crawled out of the lion's skin and was grinning cheerfully.

"How's that?" he asked, looking round.

"First class!" I said heartily. "You came through Helmford like that?"

"Absolutely!" put in Archie. "I didn't know anything about it until we were practically in the middle of the dashed town. The young bounder absolutely put the wind up me in severe gusts."

"Sorry, Archie; but I didn't say anything because you might have objected," grinned Willy. "But advertising is good, and if the people of Helmford don't know about our wonderful performing lion, they ought to!"

"I think we're getting plenty of advertisement," remarked Pitt genially. "Buster's parade is just nicely on the go by this time, I should think. You'd better get back in that skin, and start your rehearsals with your major."

"I'm ready when he is," replied Willy promptly.

In the meantime, Helmford was being impressed.

John Busterfield Boots, with boundless energy, had planned a rather startling parade. It wasn't the ordinary circus type, but something quite novel and absolutely new.

The two elephants of the show led the way, driven by two of the circus men—both picturesquely attired as Hindoos, with gorgeously coloured clothing and turbans.

And on the back of each elephant were two St. Frank's fellows, throwing leaflets to the passers-by as the procession went on its way. It was quite easy for the juniors to keep their balance, and they thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

Behind them came every wagon that the circus could spare, containing a few other animals, and apparently endless juniors.

And Buster's idea seemed to be to make as much noise as possible. For the juniors were shouting at the top of their voices, informing everybody that the circus was due to open at two o'clock.

The bills themselves were well printed, in spite of the haste that had been necessary, and were a tremendous advance on the old-fashioned bills that Mr. Snayle had produced.

The manager, in fact, had been content to run the circus on the same, obsolete lines that had obtained for over fifty years, and Johnny and Bertie were too much concerned with the performance itself to bother themselves about publicity. And they knew very little about publicity, in any case. They believed that Mr. Snayle would attend to all that.

And this circus was not the only one to run on the old, time-worn methods. Many of the others on the road at the same period were carrying-on as their forefathers had carried on.

But Buster Boots was a great believer in sensational stunts. He was in his element. He boosted the circus with boundless energy, and instilled the same energy into his assistants.

As a result, Helmsford received a decided jolt.

Quite half the population had been absolutely unaware that a circus was pitched on the outskirts of the town, and the other half cared little or nothing about it. And yet the circus had been on that ground for two days already!

By dinner-time of that day there wasn't a soul in the whole of Helmsford who didn't know every fact—big and little—about Professor Onions' Colossal Circus and Menagerie. They couldn't help knowing it. Willy's special stunt, alone, had got everybody talking; and Buster's parade kept the interest alive.

There were plenty of people in the town to fill that tent a dozen times over, and Buster Boots saw no reason why they shouldn't be awakened. He was going to make them come to the circus, whether they wanted to or not!

CHAPTER VI.

MR. SNAYLE VENTS HIS SPITE!



TESSA LOVE clapped her hands delightedly.

"It's too wonderful for words!" she exclaimed. "Why, I'd never believe that it wasn't real! I've never seen anything so

splendid!"

"Rather good, eh?" said Handforth, with pride. "Of course, he's only following my instructions, you know. Without me to touch him up and order him about he wouldn't be worth looking at!"

They were both watching the alleged lion, who was slowly marching up and down in the tent, whisking his tail, and shaking his great mane. There was something quite ferocious about the great beast's aspect.

But the lion suddenly stood on his hind legs and opened his mouth wide.

"Well, I like that!" he said breathlessly and indignantly. "Calmly taking the credit to yourself—and all you do is to strut there and fool yourself that you look impressive!"

Handforth turned rather red.

"Get on with your tricks!" he roared. "Now then, try that one where you pretend to get fierce."

But the lion, instead of obeying, proceeded to disgorge its inner self; and Willy emerged, looking very hot.

"Splendid!" said Tessa. "You do it beautifully."

"Thanks!" said Willy. "Glad somebody gives me a bit of credit! My hat, it's warm work, though—jolly hard, too! It's no joke to be cramped up in that blessed skin, walking on all fours."

Tessa was Simon Snayle's niece—nobody knew why—and she was looking quite fresh and charming in a short pleated skirt and a white jersey. She had, in fact, just finished some rehearsals of her own—for she was the celebrated little bare-back rider of the show.

She soon went off, and passed into the big tent where other rehearsals were in progress. Handforth and his minor were left to continue their own practising, for time was getting short, and before long it would be necessary for all the "artists" to make themselves scarce. Once the public was admitted into the meadow there would be no more rehearsals. For, of course, not the slightest inkling was being allowed to escape that the new performers were St. Frank's boys under assumed names.

Johnny Onions was busily performing on a slack wire, and doing it very well, too. Jerry Dodd had been putting Bud through his paces, and going through all his old tricks and generally removing signs of rust.

Handforth had already rehearsed his "strong man" act, and there was no reason why he shouldn't be a success at it, because it was quite a simple business after all. At the same time, I was a bit dubious.

Handy had such a habit of forgetting essential details at the crucial moment.

Pitt and Grey were hard at work in another part of the tent, preparing something of their own. Even Fatty Little was busy; and, in fact, everybody was doing something. On this eventful morning there was no time for idleness. The show was being prepared in a rush, and even now it was a big gamble.

We had an idea that a decent crowd would arrive—a better audience than on the previous afternoon, at all events—but whether they would swallow the amateur turns remained to be seen. Even the most optimistic fellows were inclined to be uncertain in their hearts.

Professor Onions; and, secondly, because if he went it would also mean the departure of Tessa. And the show couldn't afford to be without Tessa, who was the only feminine member of the "cast." If she went, all would be up. Without any girls at all, no circus can hope to succeed.

Mr. Snayle was still glaring at the opposite wall when the door of his caravan opened and a stumpy, misshapen man entered—a dwarf, with a repulsive face, and distorted limbs.

"Get out of here!" snarled Mr. Snayle harshly.

"Dippy come to prepare boss's dinner," said the dwarf in the doorway.

"Oh, all right; get on with it, and don't



Handforth got up dazedly, turned round, and saw the lion sitting back on his haunches, and shaking his sides as though with laughter.

Mr. Snayle apparently had more confidence in the juniors than the juniors had in themselves. At all events, he was savagely morose—a certain indication that he feared success.

He went to his caravan in a sullen mood, and flung himself upon one of the lockers, and glared at the opposite wall. For some reason he was anxious for the circus to be a failure. He was the manager, but both Johnny and Bertie were convinced that he was a traitor to his trust. And they couldn't get rid of him for two reasons—firstly, because he held a binding agreement made by

come near me—I'm particular!" growled Mr. Snayle. "I don't like being touched by animals! And look sharp about it!"

"Dippy work hard for boss," mumbled the dwarf.

"And you'd better, you ugly toad, or I'll wring your neck!" said the manager sourly. "You lazy tyke! I'm not in the mood for any nonsense, so you'd best look out! Your face is like a gorilla, so keep it turned away—I'm sick of the sight of you!"

Dippy went on with his work as though he hadn't heard. In that confined space it was almost impossible to avoid close contact with

Mr. Snayle, and whenever he came near, the dwarf cringed, as though expecting a sudden kick. He had reason to be careful, for Mr. Snayle treated him as a slave, and ill-used him worse than any mongrel.

It was Mr. Snayle's general habit to hurl every insult he could at the dwarf's head, and this unfortunate creature was in the manager's power—body and soul. Snayle had but to command, and Dippy obeyed. But now and again the dwarf would allow a curious gleam to enter his close-set eyes—a gleam that would have warned Mr. Snayle not to go too far, could he have seen it.

"These infernal boys are running the show, curse 'em!" went on Mr. Snayle, who rather enjoyed talking to Dippy. "Hear me? The young hounds! Ain't they, Dippy—young hounds, eh?"

"Dippy not see much of 'em——"

"Disagree with me, would ye?" shouted Mr. Snayle, lashing out with his boot and catching the dwarf a brutal kick on the side of his leg. "You twisted chunk of refuse! You sewer rat! I'll learn ye!"

Dippy backed away with a gasp of pain, and cowered.

"Sorry, boss! Dippy didn't mean to disagree," he muttered. "These boys are young hounds, yes. Interfering! Everything go wrong this week. Dippy not know what to think!"

"Thought I'd make ye change your tone!" growled Mr. Snayle. "Don't stand there, you idle skunk! Get that dinner!"

Dippy escaped, and Mr. Snayle lay back with a harsh laugh. He felt rather better. It always amused him to vent his spleen upon the helpless dwarf. It soothed his nerves.

At just the same time, Handforth, in one of the small tents, was giving orders to Willy.

"I'm going to get changed now," he said briskly. "I'm going to get dressed up in the lion-tamer's uniform, and you'd better look out. I shan't be more than ten minutes, and then we'll have a dress rehearsal."

"All right," said Willy. "Go ahead! It'll give me a rest. It strikes me I'm doing all the work in this act. I'm nearly melted to a giddy grease spot. You'd better buzz, or we shan't have time."

"You've got to be in that cage when I get back," said Handforth, pointing across the tent. "I shall come in just as if you were in the ring, and enter the cage and go through the whole act. First of all, I'll put you through some tricks in the cage, and then you'll follow me outside——"

"Oh, all right! I know it all!" said Willy. "Don't jaw, old son! Never knew such a chap for chewing the rag!"

"Do you want a black eye?" snorted Handforth aggressively.

"Well, I prefer it pink, if it's all the same to you," replied his minor. "Oh, my goodness! Can't you leave squabbling alone for a bit?"

Handforth went off with a snort; and after waiting for some time, Willy got back into the lion's skin, prancing about once or twice in a most realistic fashion, and then walked sedately into the big cage.

In the meantime, Handforth had changed. He emerged in all his glory, wearing a startling uniform of red, blue, and gold, that fairly staggered the eyesight. Handforth fancied himself, too. He strutted across to the tents and marched into one of them with a fine swagger.

"My hat! Who's this?" exclaimed Reggie Pitt, turning and gazing at Handforth and shading his eyes with one hand. "Oh, my eyesight! I believe it's Handy!"

"Don't rot!" said Handforth curtly. "And if you want to stay here and watch, don't interrupt. I'm going to put Willy through his paces!"

He marched across the tent to the big cage at the other end, watched with staring eyes by Pitt and Grey and Church and McClure. Handforth reached the cage, and wrenched open the door.

"Stop!" gasped Church frantically.

"Don't bother!" snorted Handforth. "Time's short!"

He flung open the door wide, slipped into the cage, and swung the door to with a metallic clang. The catch dropped into position, and Handforth fancied that he was doing the thing rather well.

"Come out!" shouted Church, horrified. "You're in the wrong cage, you ass! That's—that's not Willy! It's the real lion!"

CHAPTER VII.

HANDFORTH IN THE LION'S DEN.



HANDFORTH smiled in a superior kind of way as he gazed through the bars at Church and the others.

"Ass!" he said pityingly. "Think you can fool me?"

If he had been less confident, he might have been uneasy by the expressions of absolute fear and alarm which were manifest on the faces of all four juniors. They had, in fact, turned deathly pale with fear.

For there was no foolery about this—Handforth was actually in the wrong cage! Instead of shutting himself up with Willy, he was enclosed in the cage of the real living lion—a great African monster that was the pride of the menagerie.

It was rather a terrible situation, and all the more terrible because Handforth was not yet aware of his perilous position.

Considering that Edward Oswald was the one who had made the blunder, it was understandable. He was an extraordinary fellow for taking things for granted. And in this instance there was some slight excuse for his error.

Bunched near the great circus tent were

a number of smaller tents, used for temporary dressing-rooms, for sheltering the animals, and for preparing the various acts before they went into the ring.

These smaller tents were very much alike, and Handforth, marching into one of them, saw a big cage with a lion in it. Without pausing to think, he took it for granted that this was Willy, calmly waiting for him to begin. He had momentarily forgotten all about the real lion, being completely engrossed with his own importance.

"Come out of that—quick!" shouted Reggie Pitt. "You'll be mauled to death if you don't escape! Can't you see it's a real lion? Oh, you hopeless ass! Move—move!"

"Handy, you'll be killed!" wailed McClure.

"Don't rot!" said Handforth shortly. "I'm not such a duffer as that!"

He grinned, and turned back to the lion, and stood regarding it thoughtfully. He started slightly. Somehow, it seemed to be bigger than it had been, and there was almost a look of real life about the eyes.

But Handforth wasn't going to be laughed at by these asses. They were doing it pretty well, but they couldn't spoof him. He took a step forward, and the watching juniors were held motionless with apprehension. They hardly knew what to do.

They dare not shout, being afraid that the outcry would startle the lion and electrify him into activity. They could only stand there and wait for the terrible end.

"Now then, my lad, don't sit there mooning," said Handforth briskly. "Buck up and start your tricks!"

The lion cocked his head slightly on one side and regarded Handforth reflectively. It almost seemed as though he were wondering whether this mortal would be tough or tender.

"Buck up!" said Handforth impatiently.

The lion rose languidly to his feet, stood staring at Handforth with swishing tail for a few moments, and then he backed away a little, lowering his head, and shaking his great mane.

Church put his hands over his eyes.

"He's—he's going to spring!" he shrieked.

"Don't—don't!" muttered Grey huskily.

Handforth stared out through the bars.

"Can't you fatheads stop that piffle?" he demanded. "My hat! Keeping up this foolery all this time. You must think I'm off my rocker." He turned back to the lion. "Now then, start the first trick!" he ordered curtly.

To the watching juniors this was torture of the most exquisite kind. It was an agony of suspense. There was Handforth, inside the cage, sublimely ignorant of his danger, and deliberately ignoring all their warnings. The situation was absolutely awful.

"Hurry up!" roared Handforth, losing all patience.

The lion was a bit startled by this abrupt shout, and he lifted one paw menacingly,

and backed further away. At the same moment he opened his mouth wide and gave a low, ominous growl.

Handforth stared.

"That's rather good!" he said approvingly. "When did you learn to do that? Not a bit like the real thing, of course, but it might pass in the ring. A real lion growls—"

He paused, another doubt assailing him. Distinctly he saw one or two drips of saliva drop from the lion's mouth, and he even believed that he saw a glimpse of a tongue. Imagination, of course. Still, it was a bit startling. And there was a peculiar odour in the air, too, which Handforth hadn't observed earlier, a kind of strong animal smell.

"I—I say," he said, keeping control of himself with an effort. "It's—it's all rot, you know. Willy, why can't you speak? Don't—don't stare at me like that, blow you! Those—those eyes—"

"Oh, Handy!" wailed McClure. "There—there may be still time—"

He was interrupted by an appalling sound from the lion. The great animal, having examined Handforth fully, rather disapproved of this intruder. He didn't take any drastic measures, but gave a kind of warning to begin with. He opened his great mouth and let out a tremendous roar that nearly deafened Handforth. He stood there, rooted to the spot, the lion's breath wafting over him in a manner that told him the full truth in one ghastly flash.

Handforth gave a kind of hollow gasp.

He couldn't move; he simply couldn't lift a finger. A strange, uncanny sensation went all over him, and his flesh seemed to shrivel and his skin contract. Dimly he had an idea that his uniform cap was being projected upwards by his hair.

The lion swung round indignantly, annoyed considerably. He felt probably that he had been insulted. This intruder had taken no notice of his roar, which had always proved effective hitherto. He backed his hindquarters into Handforth and sent the junior flying.

"Yaroooh!" howled Handforth. "Help!"

He came to life all in a flash, the spell being broken.

Outside in the tent the juniors were looking on, now hopeless with dread. And at this moment Johnny Onions came in, and paused. He stared at the dramatic scene before him.

"Help!" hooted Handforth wildly. "Where's the door?"

Hardly daring to look at the lion, and expecting every moment to be clawed to shreds, he fumbled helplessly for the door. But he couldn't find any door. In some extraordinary way it had vanished.

"I'm locked in!" he gasped. "Are—are you chaps going to stand there and see me eaten by a lion? Quick! In another minute he'll have me!"

Church and McClure started forward, and then halted in their tracks. For the great lion made a sudden bound, and swept Handforth off his feet like a ninepin. The junior fell face upwards, and in a flash the lion was astride his body, his tail lashing viciously.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SHOW OPENS.



JOHNNY ONIONS grinned. "I say, come out of it!" he said calmly. "Why the dickens are you messing about with Lucifer? Can't you be satisfied with your own giddy

lion, without spoiling Lucifer's morning nap?"

The watching juniors heard the voice as though in a dream. Vaguely they were staggered that Johnny could be so calm at such a dreadful moment. For Handforth was lying on the floor of the cage, with the king of the forest on top of him.

"Help!" he whispered feebly. "I—I say, good-bye, you chaps! He—he's just going for my throat! You can have my wireless set, Church, and don't forget to give Irene a bottle of scent."

"Oh, Handy!" said Church fearfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Johnny Onions hilariously.

That yell of mirth brought Reggie Pitt round like a shot.

"Don't you understand?" he panted. "It's the real lion!"

Johnny nodded.

"Of course," he agreed. "Don't look scared—he's harmless!"

"Harmless!"

"Old Lucifer is just about as dangerous as a white mouse," grinned Johnny. "In fact, less dangerous, because white mice can bite. Lucifer can't!"

"Can't bite?" asked Church, with a gulp.

Lucifer turned his head, gazed at Johnny, and calmly sat down on Handforth's chest. Edward Oswald had heard the conversation, but he was by no means reassured. After all, he was the only one in the lion's cage.

"Now then, old man, don't take liberties," said Johnny. "Come off it, Lucifer. Where are your manners? Back, old boy—back! That's the idea!"

The lion obediently rose from Handforth's chest, stepped to the rear of the cage, and flopped himself down as though weary of the whole business. With a laugh, Johnny

ran to the cage, flung open the door, and put his head inside.

"Come on!" he said. "Time's getting short."

Handforth gave one wild leap, flew out through the door, and landed in a heap on the turf, nearly knocking Johnny flying en route.

"Saved!" he gasped. "Am—I am I fatally injured?"

He staggered to his feet, shaking all over.

"Oh, Handy! We—we warned you, you know!" said Church. "It was your own fault, you ass!"

"What's all the fuss about?" asked Johnny. "Don't you know Lucifer? He's as old as Methuselah, and hasn't got a tooth in his head or a claw in his feet. He's too old for tricks, and wouldn't hurt a fly."

"But—but he might have killed me!" said Handforth, breathing hard.

"My dear chap, he hasn't got the strength of a child!" said Johnny. "It's as much as he can do to lug himself from one side of the cage to the other—the laziest beggar in the whole show. He's only here for exhibition, and my pater's had him since he was a cub. He's never hurt anybody. I've seen children in the cage with him. But it doesn't do to let the public know these things!"

"Then—then I was safe all the time?" asked Handforth.

"Safe? As safe as you are now!"

"Then it's a swindle!" roared Handforth indignantly. "I've been fooled!"

He seemed to think that he had a grievance because the lion hadn't tried to eat him.

"Sorry!" grinned Johnny. "The next time I'll try and get you a lion straight out of the jungle. You seem to be a bit particular—now that you're safe. Didn't I tell you fellows that Lucifer was like an angel?"

"No, you didn't!" snorted Handforth. "Blow you! And blow your rotten old lion!"

Lucifer's brother appeared in the doorway of the tent, and lounged inside.

"Going to keep me waiting all day?" he asked throatily.

Willy, in fact, had become impatient at the delay, and had come in from the adjoining tent to see what all the noise was about. As soon as he gathered what had happened the juniors were enlivened by the spectacle of a staid-looking lion giving a wild howl of laughter and then subsiding on the floor and kicking his legs in the air.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared with laughter and relief.

"Funny, isn't it?" sneered Handforth heavily. "Rats! I'm fed-up!"

And he stalked out, and his famous lion picked itself up and marched out after him. And Lucifer looked on with blinking eyes,

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and appeared to be wondering what all the noise was about.

Soon afterwards, Handforth and his minor were busily engaged in their final rehearsal, Edward Oswald none the worse for his scare. And outside, in the meadow, the public had begun to arrive.

People were coming up in a steady stream, and there were large numbers of children. And to my satisfaction I observed that the majority of the people were of a much better class than those who had patronised the show the previous afternoon.

"Buster's publicity seems to be successful," I remarked to Johnny. "This looks healthy, old son. Nearly three-quarters of an hour before starting time, and they're rolling up. I suppose you're admitting 'em?"

"Rather!" replied Johnny. "The money-taker's in his box, and there oughtn't to be any delay. Bertie's there, too, because old Snayle won't have anything to do with the show."

"What about the side-shows?"

"Open!" said Johnny briefly. "Doing well, too."

Near the big tent there were a number of canvas huts, and the admission to most of these was the princely sum of twopence. Within were the freaks of the circus—and we had been rather hard up for freaks.

However, we didn't do so badly on the whole. In the first tent, Fatty Little was enjoying himself immensely—dressed in flesh-coloured tights and other curious garments—designed for the especial purpose of showing off his plump figure with a little padding here and there, to assist his natural blubber. Fatty looked quite impressive.

And he had made it a stipulation, before appearing, that he should be disguised. So he was wearing a curly wig, and he had been made up a beautiful chocolate brown, and had been advertised as the Fat Boy from Fiji. And the stout junior was partaking of food without cessation—much to the admiration of various small children who passed in to see him.

In the next tent was the Wild man from Borneo—a strange-eyed, hairy, freakish-looking individual with bony legs, and as black as night. He did nothing but sit on a stool and wave his arms about in a mysterious manner. Even the St. Frank's chaps had some difficulty in recognising their old friend, Timothy Tucker.

Clarence Fellowe, the tall, lanky poet of the Remove, did excellent service as the Living Skeleton; for he was as thin as a hair-pin, and in skin tights he looked frail enough to pass through a keyhole.

In the next tent Dippy was in his usual place—he was always a side-show, and always had been. He was billed as the Shortest Man in the World, and he added to his own appearance by performing a few simple tricks.

On the whole, the side-shows were a great success, and the money was rolling in

steadily. At the same time, the big tent was being filled—gradually, but none the less certainly.

Johnny and Bertie, although calm enough outwardly, were inwardly filled with intense excitement—and apprehension. The crowd had come—a bigger crowd than they had ever dared to hope for.

But would this experiment be a success? Would the performance pass muster? After all, the majority of the artists were mere schoolboys, and there was not the slightest doubt that the enterprise was—risky.

CHAPTER IX.

TRICKY TRIX, THE AUSTRALIAN MARVEL.



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE peeped through the folds of the entrance curtains and beamed serenely.

"What ho!" he murmured.

"The good old population has gathered for the meeting! I mean to say, the assemblage is somewhat vast, by gad! Why, dash it, the whole bally town is here!"

"Isn't it just fine, Archie?" asked a soft voice, in thrilled tones.

Archie turned, and found himself looking at Tessa, her pretty face alight with enthusiasm and joy. The girl was dressed ready for the ring, with a light cloak over shoulders.

"Oh, rather!" said Archie hastily. "I mean, what? The fact is, old thing, I'm somewhat dazed, and all that. The tent is absolutely bulging with the lads of the village—to say nothing of the lasses and the younger generation! I must admit that I feel braced."

And these were not the only two who had that feeling. Everybody concerned with the show was bubbling with excitement. The great tent was full! Even the most expensive enclosure was crowded, and the more popular parts of the auditorium were absolutely packed. A crowd such as this would have charmed the heart of Professor Onions in his palmiest days.

And this record audience had been drawn to the circus by the high-speed publicity methods of the St. Frank's Remove! To Johnny and Bertie Onions it seemed something like a miracle.

"Hallo, hallo!" murmured Archie. "It appears that some of the dear children are crying—absolutely squalling, in fact! That noise, you know—"

"It's the band!" said Tessa, laughing.

"Good gad!" breathed Archie. "Really? I'm frightfully sorry!"

Perhaps he had some excuse for the error, for the sounds that were issuing from the bandstand were rather extraordinary—and decidedly unmusical. The band, it must be added, was a makeshift one.

It consisted of six members—three of the circus men who had professed to musical abilities, and three Removites. These latter were Armstrong, who played the cornet, Bob Christine, who strummed on a banjo, and Percy Bray, who was rather skilled with the jazz drum.

The band suffered from lack of practice—and the audience suffered from the band. Two members of the original orchestra had gone off with the strikers, and so the Remove had come to the rescue.

Armstrong had made a lamentable mistake in declaring that he could play the cornet. He certainly made a noise with it, but it amounted to nothing else. And he was no worse than the circus men, anyhow. Christine and Bray were pretty good, but a banjo and a drum don't make an orchestra.

However, after a few shaky opening bars, the ghastly noise transformed itself into something like a tune. And the audience wasn't allowed to dwell too much on the supposed music, for the show was commencing.

With a rush, the clowns entered—six of them. Bertie was the chief comedian—in fact, the only comedian. The others were more than painful, although, somehow, the small children enjoyed their antics enormously. After all, there is scarcely ever more than one good clown in any circus.

Two or three of them were Remove fellows—but unrecognisable in their gay costumes, and with their faces whitened and painted. They tumbled about recklessly, and if they weren't particularly funny, they were certainly energetic.

And then came the first act—Johnny Onions on the trapeze. He did some very clever things, and finished up by a tight-rope performance that brought forth a storm of applause. The audience was now getting comfortably settled down, and the show was going with a swing.

Again the clowns, and then one of the big turns—Tricky Trix, the Australian Marvel, assisted by his wonderful pony, Bud. This, needless to say, was Jerry Dodd.

He entered the ring like a whirlwind, and gave the audience no opportunity to catch its breath. Jerry was no mean horseman, and when it came to daring tricks, he was as expert as most circus performers, and fully lived up to his assumed name.

After an exhibition of rapid trick riding, he put Bud through a number of feats that were extremely popular with the audience. The pony was, indeed, a sagacious little animal, and caused intense delight.

The ringmaster was looking very smart—all dressed in red and black silk, with knee breeches and stockings. Me, of course. I had offered to perform this task, and I was rather enjoying it. As Ringmaster I was the M.C. in general, and did all the announcing.

Jerry Dodd finished up his turn with some hurricane riding, and whisked out amid fine applause. In his loose, open shirt and wide-

brimmed hat, he looked a typical son of Australia, and scarcely anybody would have guessed that he was a St. Frank's schoolboy.

"Encore! Encore!"

Highly delighted, Jerry came and took his bow, and the applause was increased. From the other side of the tent, through a chink in the canvas, Mr. Simon Snayle peeped through, and gnashed his teeth.

"These infernal young cubs!" he snarled to himself. "A crowd like this, too! It's fooling the public—that's what it is! I'll spoil their game, darn them! The young upstarts!"

The audience did not appear to be fooled, as Mr. Snayle had suggested, and were, indeed, enjoying themselves hugely.

Somehow, there was something about the circus that made it pulsate with life. So many circuses are dull and dreary, and amusing to children only. But in some strange way the show this afternoon was imbued with ginger.

There wasn't a dull moment.

Immediately after Jerry Dodd came the commencement of the great lion act. And here the St. Frank's juniors began to feel dubious—and Johnny and Bertie Onions were rather scared. Would this act "get across"?

Marco and his Marvellous Lion—in other words, Handforth major and Handforth minor—made their appearance. The huge lion's cage was wheeled into the ring by a host of attendants, and the audience was impressed. The lion was roaming savagely up and down his cage, lashing his tail viciously.

"Ladies and gentlemen," I announced, waving my hand majestically towards Handforth and the cage, "I now have pleasure to introduce Marco and his amazing lion—the only lion of its kind in existence! Let me add that this is Marco's first appearance in England, in any ring, and I venture to prophecy that his feats of daring with this king of the forest will stagger you."

Applause.

Handforth bowed, and there was more applause. He bowed again, and the lion frisked up and down impatiently, looking far more lifelike than anyone could have believed. The audience was certainly impressed, and there was not a single member of that great throng who suspected the truth.

"Marco will now enter the lion's cage absolutely unarmed," I went on impressively. "But you need have no fear, for this lion is trained so perfectly that Marco has full and absolute control."

In the best enclosure three young ladies were sitting, and watching with very great interest. Fortunately, Handforth had not yet spotted them—or his assurance might not have been quite so complete. But the young ladies were Irene and Co., of the Moor View School.

"Is it really Handforth?" whispered Irene

doubtfully. "But it doesn't look like him a bit! It simply can't be Ted!"

"Don't be silly! Of course it is!" murmured Marjorie. "Doesn't he look ridiculous in that absurd moustache?"

Handforth, indeed, was made up in a most elaborate manner. In addition to his gaudy uniform, he wore a curly wig, a long, black, waxed moustache, and his whole face had been subjected to complete treatment with grease-paints. He looked triple his real age, and there was nobody in the audience who guessed that he was a mere boy.

Of course, it could be seen that he was wearing make-up. But this was nothing. The public would merely assume that it was Marco's policy to appear with additions to his normal beauty. And Handforth had been warned not to speak.

He carried a short whip, and he cracked it impressively. Then, with an air of superb indifference, he flung back the catch of the door, opened it wide, and stepped into the lion's cage.

The whole audience watched with bated breath.

CHAPTER X.

MARCO AND HIS MARVELLOUS LION.



MARCO stood within the lion's cage, two spot-lights directed upon him. The men who were operating these lights, however, had received strict injunctions to avoid playing the spot too closely on the lion.

The great beast of the forest crouched back in his corner with lowered head, gazing at Handforth in a menacing way. The very fact that the spotlight was full on Handforth left the lion in corresponding gloom. There was very little fear of the deception being found out.

"Come on, fathead!" whispered Handforth tensely. "You've got to go round in circles, and try to catch your giddy tail!"

The lion got up, walked round the cage once or twice, and brushed past Handforth with considerable energy.

"I knew you'd mess it up!" muttered the lion tartly. "That's the second trick!"

"Eh?"

"Don't keep everybody waiting!" went on the lion. "Can't you tell me to go into the corner and beg like a dog? That's the first wheeze!"

"My hat! So it is!" said Handforth, with unnecessary loudness.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" I shouted hurriedly. "A little patience, and Marco will reveal his wonderful control over this monster of the jungle. It sometimes happens that Caesar is a little awkward—but under perfect control. Marco's authority is absolute."

I made this announcement in order to give Handforth a chance to begin. And, in-



"Great pip!" muttered Strongo-llo blankly. He felt horribly weak all of a sudden, and the two "fifty-six" pound weights sagged down, and dropped with a couple of thuds to the sawdust.

wardly, I had a vague fear that everything would go wrong. Handforth generally managed to mess anything up that he undertook. Perhaps it had been a mistake to give him this task, in the first place.

But Handforth was commencing at last.

He shouted some orders to the lion—not in English, but making queer, guttural sounds that had no meaning at all. And the lion, displaying extraordinary intelligence, obeyed on the spot.

He pranced over to the end of the cage, tossing his mane vigorously. Then he slowly rose on his hind feet, and sat perfectly still with his front paws in the air—looking extremely comical. Certainly, no audience had ever seen a lion acting in that way before.

The audience broke out into loud applause, and at the sound of it the lion resumed his normal position, and walked across to Marco. He cocked his head on one side, and looked up.

"We're going great!" said the king of the forest. "Now, then, you dummy, get busy on the next trick, quick! My goodness! If you ain't more peppy, I'll go through the act without any orders!"

Handforth turned and bowed, and it was rather unfortunate that Willy should turn

at the same moment, for the lion's hind-quarters bumped against Handforth as he was in the act of bending double, and the Great Marco blundered head first across the cage, and got his head stuck between two of the bars.

"Help!" gasped Handy. "You—you young —?"

He pulled himself up with a gasp, and battled vigorously to drag himself back. In a dim kind of way he was aware that the audience was roaring with laughter, and clapping with delight. This was regarded as part of the act.

"Cæsar is becoming playful!" I exclaimed loudly. "Kindly watch the next trick closely, ladies and gentlemen. Marco will now proceed to make the lion turn round and round in circles, and finally catch his own tail."

This trick was performed with much success, Handforth having extricated himself just in time to prevent a fiasco. And then came other tricks—all of them simple and easy for Willy—but absolutely astounding to the audience. For they thought it was a real lion that was acting in such a startlingly intelligent fashion.

Finally, Handforth laid himself full length on the floor of the cage, and allowed the lion to walk all over him, to grip him by the throat, and to do similar things that held the audience in the grip of tense excitement and vague anxiety.

But Handforth got to his feet unharmed, and bowed. The applause was deafening, and Johnny Onions, in the entrance, felt greatly relieved. He could hardly credit that the show was going so successfully.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this concludes the first portion of Marco's programme," I announced. "He will now bring the lion out of the cage, and the most astounding tricks will be performed. Let me urge you to keep your seats, and to refrain from any excitement. You are all quite safe, and there is no possibility of the lion breaking away."

During the past ten minutes, while Marco and the lion had been performing, a crowd of attendants had been busily fixing up a complete circle of protective rails—some old "props" which had once been used in an obsolete animal act, and which now came in handy.

There was now a complete inner ring, and so well guarded that the audience felt perfectly secure. Again the cage door was flung open, and Handforth emerged. The lion walked up and down for a moment or two, and then came to the door of the cage, and looked out.

"Oh!"

A long sigh of tense excitement went up. "Gubba-lubba-goof!" shouted Handforth gruffly.

With one bound, the lion landed in the protecting ring, and then commenced rush-

ing round and round, lashing his tail furiously. Handforth cracked the whip, and allowed the end of the thong to come in contact with the lion's rear.

"None of that!" hissed Cæsar. "Stop it, you ass!"

Some more orders from Marco, and the lion sat down on his haunches, and gazed over at the audience with a comical twist to his head that aroused an instant laugh. Trestles were handed over the barrier to Handforth, and these were placed in rows.

Again the whip cracked, and Cæsar bounded over the trestles with well-timed leaps, performing his tricks with a sagacity that was almost human. Considering that he was human, this wasn't very surprising.

But Marco wasn't satisfied. He rather fancied that whip, and he kept cracking it, much to the alarm of Cæsar. The latter not only got one or two more cuts, but he was in constant dread of others. Handforth was such a careless beggar. He didn't realise the strength he was putting into his work. But Willy did. Even through that thick skin, he smarted.

"Another cut, you jossler, and I'll knock you flat!" whispered the lion as he brushed past his trainer.

"Cheeky young ass!" said Marco curtly.

Fortunately, these private asides were too low for the audience to overhear.

Moreover, the people were far too engrossed in the performance to take any notice of a few inaudible murmurs.

The actions of the lion were absolutely life-like, and I inwardly congratulated Willy for his splendid impersonation. Without question, this was his act, Handforth being a mere accessory. It was a triumph for Cæsar.

"I don't believe it! It's too real," whispered Irene Manners as she watched. "It can't really be Willy, Doris. I'm sure that lion is genuine! Why, I've never seen anything so wonderful!"

"Which proves that it isn't a real lion," whispered Doris. "And to think that these boys are doing everything——"

Crack!

She paused, for Handforth had again tickled up his pet with another cut of the whip. He had intended it to be a mere touch, but once again his judgment was at fault. Willy was stung.

The lion gave a bound sideways, paused, and then rose up majestically on his hind legs.

"Take that!" hissed Cæsar defiantly.

Smack!

One of the lion's front paws came round and caught Handforth a heavy swipe on the side of the head. Taken by surprise and the power of the blow, Handforth was sent flying to the other side of the cage!

CHAPTER XI.

STRONGOLIO, THE WORLD'S GREATEST WEIGHT-LIFTER.



JOHNNY ONIONS, behind the entrance curtains, held his breath.

"Oh, my hat!" he breathed. "That's done it! It's all up now!"

The lion's action had been so absolutely human that it seemed impossible that the audience should be deceived any longer. As a matter of fact, Willy had forgotten, in his exasperation, that he had to conform to certain rules. He had hit out quite naturally, his only object being to take revenge.

And the audience simply ate it!

Being convinced that they were watching a real lion, the people took this to be another genuine trick, and for a moment there were many gasps of consternation. One or two shrieks sounded from the ladies. It was feared that Cæsar had got out of control.

Handforth got up dazedly, turned round, and saw the lion sitting back on his haunches and shaking his sides, as though with laughter. Cæsar's mouth was open, and his two front paws were on his ribs.

The sight was so comical that the audience burst into a yell of laughter, and Johnny Onions gasped with relief. The turn was going better than ever! All the same, everybody in the know was very relieved when the lion act came to an end, and Marco and Cæsar made their exit.

Johnny Onions now appeared once more, this time in the guise of an Arab. He performed a clever series of tricks on the horizontal bar, and in the meantime the lion was taking a breather.

When Willy crawled out of the skin, he was looking like a wet rag, streaming with perspiration, red-faced, and indignant. He glared at Handforth, and Handforth glared at him.

"A fine mess you made of it!" said Willy bitterly. "If it hadn't been for me, the whole turn would have been a frost! Heaven help you when you go on alone—as the giddy strong man! You'll absolutely get the bird!"

Handforth turned red.

"You young duffer!" he roared. "What the dickens do you mean by sloshing me in the face like that?"

"Well, you shouldn't lash me with that giddy whip!"

"It's all in the show," said Handforth curtly. "Besides, I didn't whip you! I just touched up the lion's skin——"

"Yes, and it got through to my skin too!" interrupted Willy, rubbing himself tenderly. "Next time I won't go in the giddy ring until that whip's burnt! I'm not going to be stung like that for nothing!"

Further argument was impossible, for

Tessa arrived, to say nothing of Pitt and Gray and a few others. They showered congratulations upon the heads of the late performers, and Handforth and his minor basked in the sunshine of popularity.

"But you can't stop here talking, old man," said Pitt, glancing at his watch. "You're due in the ring again in ten minutes."

"Ten minutes!" said Handforth, with a start. "That's a bit thick, you know! I don't mind anything reasonable——"

"All right. Do a bit of grumbling at yourself," said Reggie. "It was your own idea, and you insisted on it. If you're not dressed in time, the whole show will be disorganized. So get a hustle on!"

Handforth dashed off, and in the meantime Willy changed into his ordinary attire, his work for the evening being done. He went and had a look at the show, and was much interested in Johnny's acrobatics.

The audience appeared to be in an excellent humour, and there was no doubt that the show was going with a continued swing. Willy was rather astonished to find that Strongolio stalked into the ring at the appointed moment. For once, Handforth had come up to the scratch.

"Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to announce Strongolio, the world's greatest weight-lifter," I shouted, with importance. "You may be surprised by the fact that Strongolio does not appear extremely large, but you will be even more greatly surprised by his extraordinary feats of strength and endurance. Ladies and gentlemen—Strongolio!"

Handforth stood in the middle of the ring, bowing. There was nothing he liked better than publicity and applause. He thrived on it. It suited his complexion, and his complexion, at the moment, was extremely rich.

Handforth had changed his attire, and now appeared in skin tights of a startling pink hue that was supposed to be flesh colour. Round his middle he wore a great red sash, and his arms were perfectly bare. He struck an attitude, something after the style of certain Greek statues he had seen, and he looked impressive. In fact, he looked comic, and the audience roared.

"The fathead!" I muttered. "This is a serious turn—he'll mess it all up!"

Handforth had also changed his wig, and there was no resemblance between Strongolio and Marco.

He commenced his performance by rippling his muscles, and turning round in circles, so that the whole audience should see the fine character of his physique. He was surrounded by weights of every description, and the audience, of course, was not to know that all these weights were less than a quarter of what they looked.

Handforth picked up two of them—enormous fifty-six pound weights, with rings fitted to them. Slowly, impressively, he raised the two weights until they were

above his head. Actually, they were about seven pounds each, and Handforth had no difficulty whatever in raising them.

Clapping broke out as he got the weights to the level of his shoulders, with his arms stretched straight out. And Handforth, slowly turning, suddenly found himself gazing straight into the eyes of Irene.

He hadn't noticed the Moor View girls before; he hadn't the faintest suspicion that they were present. And it came as a tremendous shock to him to find Irene there, not only watching the show with interest, but applauding with vigour.

"Great pip!" muttered Strongolio blankly.

He felt horribly weak all of a sudden, and the two "fifty-six" pound weights sagged down, and dropped with a couple of thuds to the sawdust. And Handforth had given such a start that his moustache bade farewell to his face, and dropped glidingly to the ground.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The audience liked it, and a yell went up, particularly from the children. Handforth made one dive, recovered his moustache, and clapped it to his upper lip. He believed that he had done this so quickly that nobody had observed, and he rose from his bending position and faced the crowd once more.

"Oh!" gasped Irene.

She went off into a fit of laughter, and the crowd joined. For Handforth's appearance was so ludicrous that to keep a straight face was impossible. That moustache of his was one that had been designed to make his appearance important. It was big and gushy, with fiercely upturned ends.

But Handforth stuck it on upside down, the ends now being drooping, and the change in his expression was so startling that he looked very much like a walrus. And no strong man can look dignified in a drooping moustache.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth was confused. He didn't know what the laughter was about, and for a second he had a wild idea of dashing helter-skelter out of the ring. All he wanted was to escape, to get out of the pitiless glare of the spot lights, and to avoid the gaze of these hundreds of eyes. And Irene's eyes were watching him too, which was really the cause of his confusion.

He felt self-conscious to a terrible degree. One glance at his naked arms almost made him shudder. He didn't feel quite decent, and he wondered how he had ever come to appear in public in such a get-up.

"Get a move on, Handy!" I muttered urgently.

Handforth gave a start, coming out of his trance with a jump. He knew that if he pushed out he would bring ridicule down on his head, and for his own sake he would have to retrieve this position. But in his confusion he did the one thing to irrevocably ruin the act.

Grabbing hastily with one hand, he seized both the fifty-six pound weights, and tossed them lightly aside. Sandow himself couldn't have done it, and the big audience fairly rocked and roared.

CHAPTER XII.

THE REVOLT OF TESSA.



STRONGOLIO stood in the centre of the ring, dumbfounded.

Too late, he had realised his blunder, and he was now gripping a huge iron bar, plainly marked "200 pounds," by one hand, and holding it so casually that there was obviously some discrepancy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The audience accepted the joke, and was greatly amused.

Handforth thought that everything was up, and he was just on the point of fleeing when I walked past him.

"Keep it up!" I hissed. "You're going great guns!"

"But—but—"

"Make it funny now! Be a comedian!" I said. "Chuck these weights about as though they were toys, but do it impressively. I'll help you!"

I turned away, and smilingly faced the crowd.

"Ladies and gentlemen, Strongolio will now lift a complete kitchen range, and balance it on his head. I wish to impress upon you the astounding endurance necessary for this startling feat."

The kitchen range was to have been the culminating feat of the act, calculated to bring the house down. While Handforth cleared away the fake weights, half a dozen attendants staggered into the ring with the kitchen range. Acting on previous instructions, the attendants appeared to have as much as they could do to drag the cumbersome thing along.

It was one of those cottage ranges, quite complete, with four ornamental legs, and even a short length of chimney. Three men had been working half through the previous night in a near-by carpenter's shop on that range.

Naturally, it was lightly made of wood, but patterned on an actual range, and after completion it had been blacklead and polished in every part. It was so well done that even I could detect no difference.

It had been Reggie Pitt's idea, and Johnny Onions had jumped at it. The circus bills had invited everybody to come to see the great Strongolio lift a complete kitchen range and balance it on his head. It was one of the features of the show.

The carpenters had done their work wonderfully well, and even a close inspection would hardly have revealed the deception. The blacklead finish gave the highly-polished

wood the absolute appearance of cast iron. And the weight of the thing looked enormous.

The audience began to cease laughing, and were rather impressed when the range was set down by the six attendants, and Handforth got ready. Slowly bending down, he seized the range by two of its ornamental legs, and slowly and deliberately he raised it high.

The audience began to doubt, to wonder if Strongolio was a fake or not. A minute earlier they had taken it for granted that he was a joke, but this latest feat had them all guessing.

"Do it properly!" I murmured, noticing the change. "They'll still think you're the mighty man of iron! There's nothing better than sending them away in a state of indecision. They'll talk!"

Handforth showed no sign of having heard, but he obeyed.

Raising the range until it was above his head, he slowly lowered it until the centre of it rested upon his wig. It was perfectly balanced, and he had no difficulty in leaving the range there while he removed his hands.

Hardly a sound could be heard in that great tent as Handforth turned a complete circle, apparently exerting every ounce of his strength. Even Irene held her breath. The deception was so perfect that she was almost brought herself to believe that the kitchen range was a real one.

Handforth made a sudden sound, and instantly the six attendants dashed forward and lifted the range from his head. And Strongolio stood there, bowing, while the range was laboriously carried out of the ring.

He retired amid deafening applause. At first the audience had believed him genuine, then they thought him to be a joker, and now, finally, they came to the conclusion that he was genuine again. The turn, in fact, had been an unqualified success.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Handforth, in the entrance tent. "I—I thought it was all up!"

"My dear fellow, it was a roaring success!" declared Pitt enthusiastically. "Keep it up like that! Do it the same again—exactly, even to the giddy moustache! It's just the stuff they want."

In the meantime, the ring had been taken by Tessa, whose dainty performance captivated the crowd. She was an extremely clever bareback rider, and we had admired her performance the previous day. It had been good then, but now it was positively sparkling.

I knew the reason, of course. Previously, Tessa had performed before almost empty benches, when everything seemed flat and lifeless. Under the influence of the enthusiastic audience, she entered into her work with a zest that had been previously unknown.

And she obtained the most thunderous applause of the evening when she finally

galloped out of the ring. The audience would not be satisfied until she had returned and given an extra act.

She was very excited when she came out of the ring.

Congratulations were heaped upon her by all, and Johnny Onions was particularly delighted.

"Thanks awfully, Tessa!" he said enthusiastically. "I say, it wouldn't be a bad idea if you appeared again—a bit later on. You act so well that they're bound to like you again. You can do the hoop-jumping act."

"I don't mind. I'll be glad to," said Tessa readily.

"Fine! Then be ready just after the comic conjurors," said Johnny. "Only a short act, you know—about five minutes—but they'll like it. How about coming out in that other dress of yours—the red one, with the golden sash?"

Tessa was eager enough to comply. The show was going so wonderfully that everybody was on tiptoe to urge it along. For a huge success at this first performance would mean continued success later.

Tessa ran swiftly over to her own caravan, wearing a long cloak over her ring dress, and she was just about to enter the van when a bulky form appeared. It was that of Mr. Simon Snayle, her uncle.

"Oh, you gave me quite a fright uncle!" said Tessa, coming to a halt and recognising him.

"In a bit of a hurry, ain't you?" demanded Mr. Snayle, his voice short and curt. "Finished your act?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Then what's the idea of this rush and tear?"

"I'm going to do another act a little later on," replied Tessa, her eyes shining. "Everything is going so well that Johnny wants me to appear again. Oh, uncle! Isn't it simply gorgeous? You ought to have heard the applause that Handforth got—Listen! They're cheering Farman now. He's the American boy, you know, appearing as Mustang Mike."

The shouts and storms of clapping from the big tent made Mr. Snayle's flesh creep. He glared at Tessa ferociously.

"These infernal boys seem to be running the whole darn show!" he snarled. "And you're not going to appear again, my girl! Understand? And you won't do your act this evening, either!"

Tessa set her lips, and looked at her uncle grimly.

"Oh, you're horrid!" she exclaimed angrily. "You're angry just because these schoolboys are making a bigger success of the circus than you did! It isn't fair! And I won't agree to it!"

"By thunder! You mean that you defy me?" he snapped dangerously.

"Yes, I do!" retorted Tessa, her eyes blazing. "Johnny is the manager now, and he wants me to appear. Please stand

away from that door, uncle! I want to go in and change my dress."

She walked forward as though he didn't exist, and brushed past him, her chin in the air. It was fortunate that a few youngsters were idling about, basking in the afternoon sunshine—shabby looking fellows who had probably failed to scrape up the admission money. Mr. Snayle could hardly lay hands upon his niece under the circumstances. She went into the caravan, and slammed and locked the door.

"Bah!" he muttered savagely. "I'll ruin their game sooner or later!"

Tessa's taunt had stung him—for it was true enough that Johnny was now the manager. Mr. Snayle had placed Johnny in that position himself, having declared that he wouldn't interfere with the show for a whole week.

Only a single day of that week had elapsed, and Mr. Snayle could hardly take control again without humiliating himself. He had maliciously believed that the show would fall to pieces without his guiding hand. And it amazed his cunning, dull-witted nature that the circus had improved out of all recognition.

It inspired the deepest kind of hatred within him, and there was not the slightest doubt that Mr. Simon Snayle was a dangerous enemy!

CHAPTER XIII.

MUSTANG MIKE, THE PEPPY COWBOY.



MEANWHILE, the circus was going strong.

As Tessa had said, Justin B. Farman had taken the ring, and he was surprising the natives with a vengeance. Dressed

in the picturesque costume of the great Wild West, the American schoolboy looked the part of Mustang Mike to the life. And his performance was not merely a matter of looks.

He had been provided with a wild young horse—one that had not previously been used in the ring, owing to its boisterous nature. But under Farman's hand, the young animal was obedient, for the boy from California knew more about horses than all the circus hands put together.

He had been brought up on a ranch, had driven and played with horses since he was able to walk, and his command over them was magical. The audience could see, within a very few moments, that this youthful looking cowboy was not only peppy, as the bills described, but undoubtedly accomplished.

Ulysses Spencer Adams, the boy from New York, was wild with enthusiasm. He was sitting among the audience, and he watched his fellow American with patriotism surging within him—indeed, surging out of him, for he overflowed.

"Attaboy!" he shouted wildly. "Good old stars and stripes!"

Farman, in the ring, grinned to himself, for he easily recognised the voice of Ulysses. And Farman was enjoying himself hugely. Perhaps that was why these amateur performers did so well—for they knew their business, and entered into it with all their heart and soul. There was nothing mechanical or forced about their efforts.

The Remove fellows watched with pride. Even they had not suspected that so much talent lay dormant in the Remove. Without question, Jerry Dodd and Farman were the most skilful of the Removites—knowing their work so well. Handforth was a comedian. He didn't know it, but he was.

And two other juniors soon proved that they were no mean artists, either. These two were Reginald Pitt and Jack Grey. Reggie was the real comic, and he gave a performance that marked him as a fun-maker of the first quality. Jack Grey proved himself to be an excellent foil.

Mustang Mike concluded his act amid thunderous clapping and cheering, and after a little fooling by Bertie Onions and the other clowns, Johnny appeared once more—this time blacked up like a nigger, and doing another trapeze act. The crowd would have been rather surprised if they had known how they were being so harmlessly deceived. The audience had the impression that there were endless numbers of artists—never dreaming that some of them appeared in the ring under several different names, doing different acts.

But Johnny was the most versatile of all—trapeze, horizontal bar, and tight-rope walking all coming easily to him. As a nigger, he gave a comic turn. He was dressed like a tramp, with enormously baggy trousers, and his face was inky black, with white eyes, and a great red mouth that stretched half across his face. And his speciality this time was to make a hopeless mess of every trick he attempted.

If the audience had only known it, this blundering was even more difficult to do than the straight act. The nets were spread, of course, and the way Johnny kept missing the trapeze, and falling into the net, and tumbling about, created great diversion.

At last his turn was over, and then Reggie Pitt convulsed the crowd afresh. If once an audience is got into a thorough good humour by much laughter, it is a comparatively easy matter to keep it interested. And no acts are more popular than humorous acts—especially in a circus.

Two extraordinary looking individuals took the ring. They entered impressively with slow gait, and much pomp. They were announced by the blaring of trumpets, and to the accompaniment of a crash from the band.

But the audience didn't take them

seriously—knowing from the start, that the extremely yellow chinamen in flowing robes were on the programme as Badd & Wurse, the World's Wickedest Wizards.

Reggie Pitt did all the talking—pattering to the audience in a continuous chatter of pidgin English. . . . He had made very little preparation, and most of his humour was spontaneous. But this was not remarkable, for Reggie was celebrated in the Remove for his never failing fund of dry humour.

The two alleged conjurors were surrounded by all manner of ridiculous props—an old chest of drawers, some chairs, an ancient trunk, and similar rubbish.

Talking perfectly seriously, in the manner of well-known stage illusionists, Reggie proceeded to perform his wonderful tricks of magic. And in every case something went wrong, and the audience was enabled to see exactly how the imaginary illusions were performed.

It was a skit, and after the first minute or two, the crowd appreciated it, and liked it. Grey was sealed down in the old trunk, bound with ropes, and then mysteriously appeared within the chest of drawers. But in the process of this trick, it was found out that the trunk was provided with a flap, and the drawers were a mere fake, the whole piece of furniture being empty. Grey's efforts to get from one receptacle to the other, while Pitt pattered to the audience, as though he knew nothing about it, were extremely comical.

They did several other bits of foolery of a similar kind, and when they finally made their exit from the ring, they earned a big round of applause.

And then, to the delight of the packed tent, Tessa appeared once more, performing some fresh feats of graceful charm on her impressive looking steed. She was followed at once by the performing elephants—one of the few acts which remained over from the old programme.

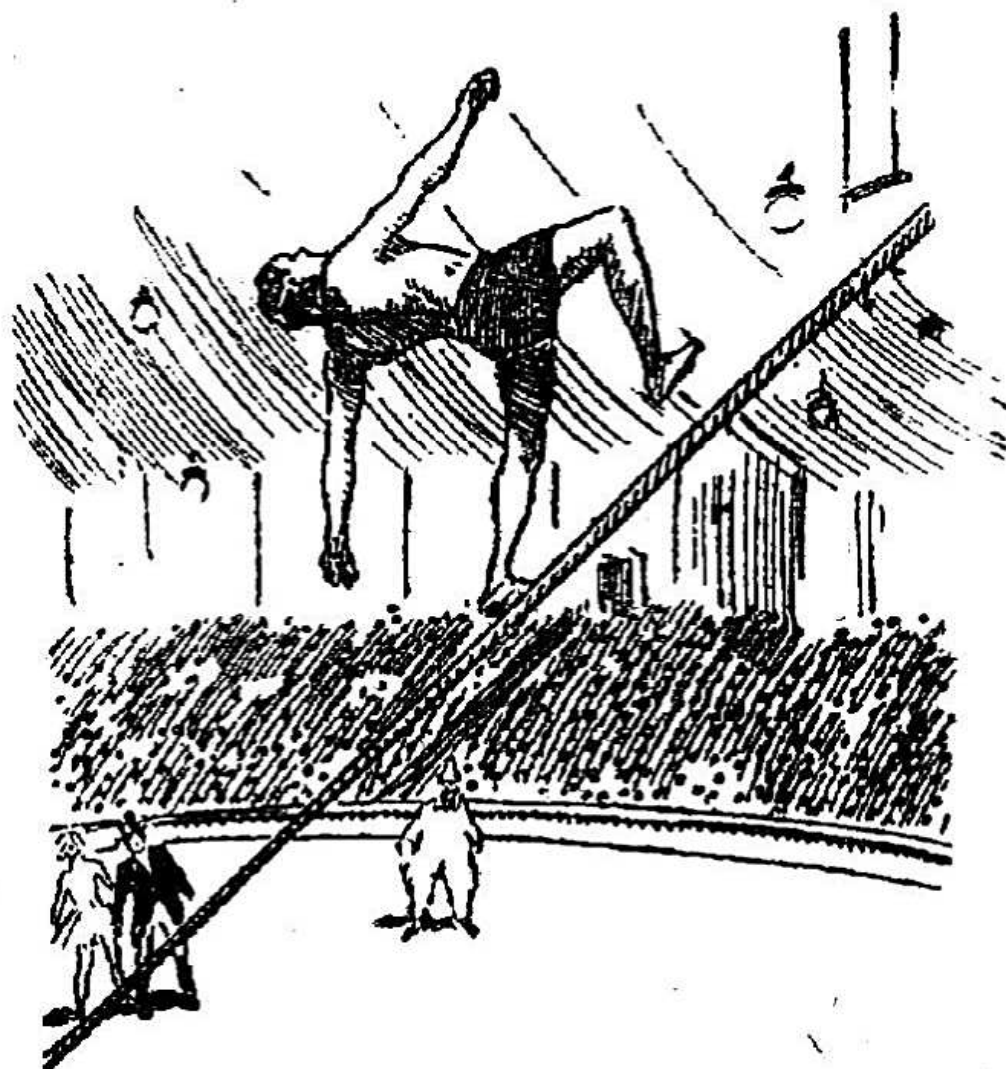
These were popular, of course, for a circus without its performing elephants is hardly a circus at all.

Tessa, flushed and excited, stood watching from behind the curtains for a few minutes, and then turned to go. There were only one or two attendants in the entrance tent, for there was a slack fifteen minutes during the elephant act. And as Tessa drew her cloak round her to emerge into the open, Johnny Onions appeared.

And once again he had made a transformation, for he was now attired as a Japanese, and his get-up was rather effective. Tessa started as she looked at him, and a troubled look came into her eyes. She ran across to Johnny, and placed a hand on his arm.

"Oh, Johnny! You're not going to do the Slide for Life?" she asked anxiously. He laughed.

"Must!" he said briefly.



Johnny made one futile attempt to recover his balance. As he slid backwards, he felt himself falling sideways.

"But—but you haven't practised enough

"Oh, I'll be all right, Tessa," he broke in confidently. "We've got such a fine audience here that we can't afford to miss the opportunity. We want to send them away thoroughly satisfied. And we must have a bit of a punch for the last act!"

"But you'll have the nets, of course?" asked Tessa quickly.

"The nets?" said Johnny. "Well—no

"No?" she broke in, with a gasp. "You mustn't do it, Johnny—you mustn't! Oh, it's foolish—it's madness! You might fall, you know—you might— And without the nets—"

"I'll admit I haven't practised the stunt very much, but I've got plenty of confidence," interrupted Johnny. "And just think, Tessa! The thing wouldn't be worth looking at with the nets. The audience would know that I was safe all the time. And it's absolutely impossible to give a big punch or a big thrill unless there's a genuine element of danger. You know that."

Tessa was rather pale.

"And—and you're going to risk your life just to give the audience a thrill?" she asked.

"There's no question of risking my life," said Johnny gruffly. "Look here, Tessa, you buzz along and change. By the time you're dressed, my turn will be over, and so will the show."

Tessa turned away, her lips set. Then she fled to her caravan, and commenced changing at lightning speed. She wanted

to be watching while Johnny Onions was providing this record audience with its big thrill—and risking his life in the process!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SLIDE FOR LIFE!



“LADIES and gentlemen!”

I spoke the words impressively, and the spotlights were full upon Johnny Onions, who stood in the ring near by. The tent, of course, was well filled with daylight, but those brilliant arcs, concentrated upon the one figure, were very effective, in spite of the light which filled the great canvas dome.

“Ladies and gentleman, I will now introduce Yezo, the famous Japanese slack wire exponent,” I shouted. “Yezo’s performance is not merely an ordinary example of slack-wire art, but something far greater and more impressive. He will conclude his act by his celebrated Slide for Life.”

A murmur ran through the audience.

“This Slide for Life is one of the most dangerous feats performed by any circus artist,” I continued gravely. “The slightest miscalculation, the slightest error of judgment, and Yezo will crash to the ground from the full height of the tent. I ask you all to be as silent as possible during this wonderful Slide for Life, for any disturbance may distract Yezo’s attention.”

Yezo bowed, and I retired. The next moment Johnny leapt nimbly on to the slack wire, and proceeded to give the preliminary part of his act—which, of course, was of a quite ordinary nature, although entertaining enough. But there was no danger attached to it.

A clever tightrope walker, Johnny was even more adept when the wire was slack. The manner in which he kept his balance on that unstable perch was quite remarkable.

In the meantime, several attendants were preparing for the final thrill. They were fixing up a stout cable of hemp from the topmost pinnacle of the big tent to the far side of the ring. It came down in a long slant, and was drawn excessively taut by means of a miniature hand winch.

The thing looked like a ship’s cable, with a roughened surface, which would do nothing to impede the downward slide, but which would considerably help Johnny in his climb. By the time the great rope was stretched out, Yezo had finished his slack wire tricks.

He leapt nimbly down amid applause, and the slack wire and its supports were quickly unfastened and removed.

“Yezo will now commence his marvellous

Slide for Life!” I announced, indicating the rope with a wave of my hand. “Again let me impress upon you the urgency for complete silence!”

Watched by all eyes, Johnny commenced the ascent of that long, slanting rope. He was wearing special shoes, and although the walk up that steep slant was difficult, there was no question of his ability to reach the top in safety.

I was concerned on quite another score.

I stood in the ring, apparently unconcerned. Yet, actually, I was filled with anxiety. I noticed that Bertie Onions was standing near the entrance, watching tensely; oblivious of everything except his brother. And I saw that Tessa was there, too—anxious and rather pale.

She knew as well as I did, that Johnny had not practised this particular feat with sufficient care. He had been successful on two occasions—but always with the nets underneath, to catch him in case he fell. Every other time that he had attempted the slide, he had fallen off the rope.

It didn’t matter then, because the nets were there in position. But now there was nothing, and the slightest overbalancing would mean that he would crash down to certain injury, and probable death.

As Johnny himself had said, the trick would be utterly worthless as a thrill if the nets were spread. The public would know at once that there was no danger—and the public takes rather a morbid kind of interest in watching a fellow human being risking his life.

So Johnny, at the last moment, had decided to put this “big punch” into the programme. He was confident that he would succeed.

One of the most difficult features of the slide was that he carried no balancing pole, for such a pole would be most awkward to deal with when Johnny reached the bottom.

He was half way up the rope by now—mounting steadily, and with every indication that he was complete master of himself. And as he rose higher and higher, to the accompaniment of soft music from the band, all the members of the audience craned their necks to watch the solitary figure.

So far, Johnny had quite enjoyed the thrill of the act. There was no danger at all. He was such an accomplished tight-rope walker that the only difficulty of this climb was the physical effort—for it was no easy matter to mount such a steeply inclined rope. Of danger there was none.

But that was in store.

Having reached the top, Johnny would hover for a moment, balanced, and then slide swiftly and dramatically down the rope backwards—to be caught by a number of attendants at the bottom.

At the very moment of the slide the thrill would be tremendous. And it was here that the danger lay. For Johnny to

move forward was easy—and safe. But he had had but little practise of backward balancing. And if he lost his equilibrium during that downward rush, there was a certainty of falling sheer to the ground.

"Oh, Bertie! I don't like it!" murmured Tessa huskily.

Bertie Onions didn't take his eyes from his brother's figure.

"Neither do I!" he said, his voice strained.

Tessa said no more, but her heart was thumping rapidly, and she had a queer premonition of disaster. Her face was deathly pale as she stood there, looking up at Johnny.

He had just reached the top, and the great canvas roof was only a foot or so above his head. It was hot up there, for the sunshine beat down upon the dome of the tent, and Johnny could feel the air quivering with the heat. And now, at the last moment, at the vital moment, he felt that the absence of the nets would unnerve him.

But he steeled himself, and he heard the band suddenly cease playing. And there he stood, on the rope, perfectly still, balancing himself without difficulty.

In that tense silence a pin might have been heard to drop.

"Go!" I shouted loudly.

At the same second the drums commenced a crescendo tattoo, and Johnny slowly moved downwards, allowing his feet to slide over the thick rope. After the first yard or two his pace increased, and then grew speedier and speedier.

He had covered about a sixth part of the distance, and a sudden choking cry left his throat as he realised that his balance was gone. The watching crowd held its breath, unconscious of the coming disaster.

Johnny made one futile attempt to recover his balance. As he slid backwards, he felt himself falling sideways. Recovery was out of the question. His mind was in a whirl, and he had a swift, ghastly picture of what would happen when he struck the ground.

The next second a shout of horror arose.

For Johnny fell headlong from the rope, twisted round in his fall, and dropped like a stone towards the ring!

CHAPTER XV.

A HUGE SUCCESS.



"OH!"

Tessa gave a short, strangled scream and covered her eyes with her hands. And Bertie, close beside her, never moved a muscle. It

was impossible to tell his emotions beneath the mask of his clown's make-up.

My heart was in my mouth.

In that one flash I acted. Watching Johnny closely, I had seen that he had

lost his balance. I knew this even before he fell from the rope. I don't know what made me do it, but even as Johnny came headlong down I rushed at the long trapeze which swung idly near by.

And with one mighty heave I sent the trapeze whizzing across the arena, so that it swung beneath the falling boy. Perhaps I had some vague idea that it might help to break his fall. Anyhow, my action was more instinctive than deliberate.

There had been no time for more than that one cry of horror. Johnny was falling like a stone, and if he had still had his back to the ring nothing on earth could have saved him.

But that twist enabled him to catch a fleeting glimpse of the trapeze as it came rushing towards him.

There was something miraculous in what followed.

The flying trapeze reached the end of its arc at exactly the same second as Johnny hurtled to the same point. The unfortunate junior had given himself up for lost; but he suddenly saw the crossbar of the trapeze before him. He clutched with both hands, his fingers gripped the bar, and the next second he was swinging away across the great tent with hardly a jar.

If the whole thing had been rehearsed for months it could not have been performed more neatly.

And in a flash Johnny's nerve recovered, and he took advantage of the situation. Inwardly he was faint and sick, and his head felt as though it would burst. Dizziness seized him, but he fought it off.

And as the trapeze swung across again, he hauled himself up and sat there, looking unconcerned and smiling. To the audience it seemed that the whole thing had been planned that way.

And in the sudden rush of relief, a storm of tumultuous applause broke out.

Tessa, her hands still covering her eyes, heard the roar as though from afar. Everything had happened in the space of three seconds, and she had dreaded to see Johnny's figure as it lay crushed and crumpled in the ring.

She looked up, startled and frightened.

"Oh!" she gasped unbelievably.

For she saw Johnny swinging easily on the trapeze, and she saw the audience swaying with the energy of its applause. Many people were now laughing in a strained kind of way, feeling foolish because they had allowed this trick to scare them.

There was no doubt about the big punch.

If the audience had known how near tragedy had been they might not have felt so enthusiastic. But it was taken for granted by all that the act had finished according to prearranged plan.

"He's—he's safe!" whispered Tessa huskily.

"Yes," said Bertie, with a gulp.

At the moment he could utter no other word. He had expected to see Johnny

lying mangled by this time, and even now he couldn't understand how it was that his brother was safe. And Johnny himself was in the same predicament. Even as he swung on that trapeze he had no knowledge whatever as to the cause of his deliverance.

Johnny lightly swung himself to the ground, bowed to the cheering audience, and ran out of the ring. At the same moment the band stood up and commenced playing the National Anthem. It was the end of the show.

The clapping continued, and Johnny was compelled to go back again and again and make bow after bow. But he was glad to escape at last. And when he came out into the entrance tent he found Bertie there with Tessa. Pitt had come up, too, with Grey, and Handforth, and myself.

"Thank goodness you're safe, old man!" I said fervently.

"I don't understand it," said Johnny. "What happened?"

"Oh, it was dreadful—dreadful!" said Tessa, nearly crying.

"Buck up, old girl—don't go on like that," laughed Johnny. "I was a silly ass to overbalance in that way. And to-night's crowd will be expecting the same stunt, by jingo!"

"Then they won't get it!" I said grimly. "Miracles of that sort don't happen twice. There won't be any slide for Life, either—unless you have the nets in position."

"Can't cut it out of the programme," said Johnny dubiously. "Perhaps we'd better have the nets. I don't like the idea, but what else can we do? Perhaps I'll get in some practice to-morrow, and—"

"I won't let you attempt that trick without the nets again!" put in Tessa quickly. "It's too dangerous, Johnny. Even now I don't understand how you caught that trapeze like that."

"Neither do I," said Johnny. "I'm in the dark."

"Then I'll tell you!" said Handforth. "Nipper saved your life!"

"Nipper?" Johnny turned and looked at me.

"You needn't start thanking me for anything," I said. "The action I took was absolutely mechanical. I hadn't time to think; I acted on the spur of the moment."

"But what did you do?"

"When I saw you falling off that rope I just grabbed the trapeze and swung it across the tent," I replied. "That's all. By a piece of luck that couldn't possibly happen again, you met the trapeze at the end of its swing. That's all!"

Johnny took a deep breath.

"All!" he said quietly. "Well, it's enough. Thanks, old man. I can't say what I'd like to say—"

"Then let it rest at that," I broke in. "Well, what do you think of things in general?" I went on, changing the subject.

"Somehow, I believe we pleased the populace, don't you?"

"Pleased 'em?" said Johnny. "My dear chap, we've got 'em eating out of our hands! They'll go away and spread the news, and there's no better publicity than that."

Bertie nodded.

"We've taken enough money to fill a bank," he said gloomily.

"I don't feel quite comfortable about it, you know," said Johnny. "You fellows ought to take something for all you've done, at least three parts of the receipts, to be absolutely fair—"

"If you want to offend us, you'd better talk like that again," I said grimly. "We haven't helped the show from a mercenary point of view. We've done it because we're pals of yours, Johnny."

"Thanks!" he said simply. "Sorry!"

By this time the big tent was nearly clear, and the audience was streaming away, thoroughly delighted with the afternoon's entertainment. That the circus had been a big success was obvious, and that this success was mainly due to the St. Frank's Remove was equally obvious.

And we all felt that we had had a good time. There was probably only one individual who was savage with rage at the result. Mr. Simon Snayle walked up and down in his caravan like a caged tiger.

He was anxious for this circus to be a dismal failure. Although the nominal manager, his one object in life was to contrive things so that the circus should be a financial disaster.

And here were these infernal schoolboys butting in, and changing the show from a dismal failure to a glorious success.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE REMOVE STANDS BY.



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE beamed.

"Bally good!" he declared approvingly.

"I mean, dash it, you lads have absolutely performed the good old seven wonders of the world! It appears that Helmford will stagger up en masse for the evening show, and the old tent will positively bulge its dashed sides."

"Looks like it," said Buster Boots. "Of course, it was mainly due to my publicity; you can't get away from it. It doesn't matter how good a show is, it'll attract no attention unless the people know it's here."

A group of Removites were standing near the big tent, discussing the afternoon's success.

At the same time, Mr. Snayle was talking with the Onions brothers. They had changed, and were now in their ordinary attire; and both were looking serious, and just a little concerned.

"Understand?" Mr. Snayle was saying. "I'm the manager of this show, and I won't have these cursed boys interfering! They don't appear in the ring again—not a darned one of them!"

"You relinquished the management for a week, Mr. Snayle," said Johnny grimly. "So you can't very well back out of it now—"

"Have I any authority or not?" roared Mr. Snayle. "I'm not going to be treated like a stable hand! And these kids don't perform again! They're ruining the show—ruining your father's reputation!"

Johnny Onions' eyes blazed. "Look here, Mr. Snayle, I didn't want to do any plain speaking, but you force me to!" he said curtly. "Up till yesterday evening, under your management, the show was a rotten failure. We didn't take enough money to pay half the expenses—hardly enough to feed the animals!"

"And was that my fault?" snarled Mr. Snayle.

"Not so much your fault as your indifference," replied Johnny.

"Indifference?" "That's the word I used, and that's the word I meant!" said Johnny grimly. "You didn't care a hang about the advertising, you didn't make any effort to improve the show, and half the people of Helmsford didn't even know there was a circus here. But these St. Frank's chaps have come along and changed the whole business!"

"They've made it a laughing stock!" sneered Snayle.

"That's false, and you know it!" retorted Johnny hotly. "They not only advertised the circus for us, but changed it from a dud show into a sparkling success. Look here, Mr. Snayle, it seems to me that you'd like to see the whole circus go bust. What's your game?"

"Game?" repeated Mr. Snayle thickly.

"Yes. I've got an idea that you want us to fail, so that we're in a hopeless muddle, and then offer to buy the whole caboodle," said Johnny. "You'll probably get it cheap like that, and that's what you're working for!"

Mr. Snayle's very expression proved that the shot had gone true.

"Nothing of the sort!" he blustered.

"Instead of managing the show, you've been mismanaging it!" went on Johnny. "And you needn't think that I can't see through you. And I've written to my father, too, and by this time he knows the whole truth. You'd better be careful, Mr. Snayle, or your job won't be worth a stale bun! As for that agreement, you've got to keep it; we'll manage the show on our own for a week!"

Mr. Snayle nearly choked.

"Those boys shan't perform any more!" he grated harshly.

"You needn't worry on that score," said Johnny. "St. Frank's opens on Thursday for the new term, and these fellows have

got to go back. They won't even be able to appear again to-night—"

"Who's this telling fibs about us?" I asked genially. "What rot! Of course we'll appear again to-night!"

Johnny turned, his eyes gleaming with renewed hope.

"You—you mean it?" he asked eagerly. I had come up with Reggie Pitt and Handforth and the others. We had just been holding a little confab., and had come to certain decisions.

"Mean it?" I repeated. "Of course! Now, let me see. I think you move on the day after to-morrow—Thursday?"

"Yes—to Bannington," said Johnny.

"For a three-day stand?" I said pleasantly. "Good! Well, Bannington, as you know, is under three miles from St. Frank's. With a little wangling, we can easily—"

"You—you don't mean—" Johnny broke off, staring.

"We've just fixed it up!" put in Handforth. "You're billed to appear in Bannington for three days; but if you take our tip, you'll extend it to a week. You'll do the business all right."

"But—but—"

"We'll guarantee to see you through to-night's performance, and both shows to-morrow," I said. "And we'll continue our programme all the time the circus is in Bannington, and at Caistowe, too. In other words, my sons, you can count on the Remove to stand by for as long as you're in the neighbourhood of St. Frank's. And don't talk any rot about thanking us, either. Don't forget that we look upon it as a pleasure."

Johnny and Bertie Onions were too startled to say much.

"It's—it's amazing of you!" stuttered Johnny. "But—but how can you do it?"

I grinned.

"I'm blessed if I know!" I said frankly. "But it's got to be wangled—and it will be wangled! Here's my fist on it!"

We shook hands, and I thereby pledged the Remove to the scheme. And Mr. Simon Snayle swore furiously under his breath and stalked away. He felt that protest was useless just now. There would be a better way of spoiling this plan—a more cunning way.

Mr. Snayle, in fact, looked dangerous. And as I gazed after him, I had an idea that the schoolboy circus performers would not have everything their own way.

And, as events turned out, I was right!

THE END.

Further Adventures of the Schoolboy Circus Owners

NEXT WEEK

In another Fine Story—

"UNDER THE CANVAS DOME!"



MY AMERICAN NOTE-BOOK

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



No. 21. New York's Greatest Wonder.

LAST week, I dealt with the Woolworth Building, in New York, but I found it quite impossible to exhaust the subject. As this great structure is the highest skyscraper in the world, I am convinced that the majority of readers will welcome a few additional facts about it. They are facts that are not generally known in England—and it really needs a personal visit to the Woolworth Building to glean them.

To begin with, I will give a few more statistics, and perhaps the reader will be able to gain a slight impression of this vast building. From the observation gallery, nearly eight hundred feet above the street level, one can see—on a clear day—for twenty-five miles in every direction.

Immediately below lies New York, with its population of over nine millions. You can see far up the Hudson River and the mountains beyond. To the east lies Long Island and the great Atlantic Ocean. To the south is the mighty harbour of New York, and to the west one gazes over the State of New Jersey.

Looking straight downwards from the observation gallery—and I am now speaking from my own personal experience—the street cars, taxis, and other vehicles look tiny, insignificant, and toy-like. And the crowds of people, walking up and down Broadway, resemble so many ants—insignificant, pigmy people of the most incredible smallness. It is as though one is hovering in an aeroplane.

Every year there are more than three hundred thousand visitors from all parts of the world, who go to the top of the Woolworth Building. So far, I have only described the exterior, but the interior is even more impressive, and one can only wonder at the marvel of it.

The Grand Arcade, for example, with its graceful curves and arches, is of warm, golden marble—this marble having been quarried on the Isle of Skyros, off the coast of Greece. It is carved in pure Gothic design, and the dome ceiling is a real masterpiece of glass mosaic.

In the basement there is a complete power plant, which generates electricity to operate the elevators, and to furnish light and ventilation for the entire building. There are four mighty engines and dynamos, which operate day and night.

The elevators—or lifts—in the Woolworth Building are the speediest I have ever been in. They travel so smoothly and noiselessly that their movements are scarcely noticed, and they rise at the remarkable speed of seven hundred feet in one minute. They are, indeed, the fastest travelling elevators in the world.

Upwards of thirty-five thousand people travel daily upon the Woolworth Building elevators, and they are equipped with electrical safety devices, which make them as secure as human ingenuity can evolve.

Fire, of course, is one of the worst perils in any skyscraper, but in this building not a single atom of inflammable material was used in the construction. A fire could not spread beyond the office in which it breaks out, for the walls are of stone or steel, and even the doors are absolutely fireproof. Every stairway is an enclosed fire-tower, and the building is equipped with fire-fighting apparatus that is capable of delivering five hundred gallons of water a minute—even as far up as the fifty-eighth story.

There are nearly three thousand telephones in service throughout the building—and this alone is enough to stagger the mind. And to give London readers some idea of the colossal height of the Woolworth Building, let me conclude by stating that this skyscraper is nearly five and a half times as high as our celebrated Nelson Column, in Trafalgar Square!

A splendid studio portrait of our popular author has just been received and will be published in this journal very shortly!

No. 23. Vol. 1.

Edited by Nipper.

May 3, 1924

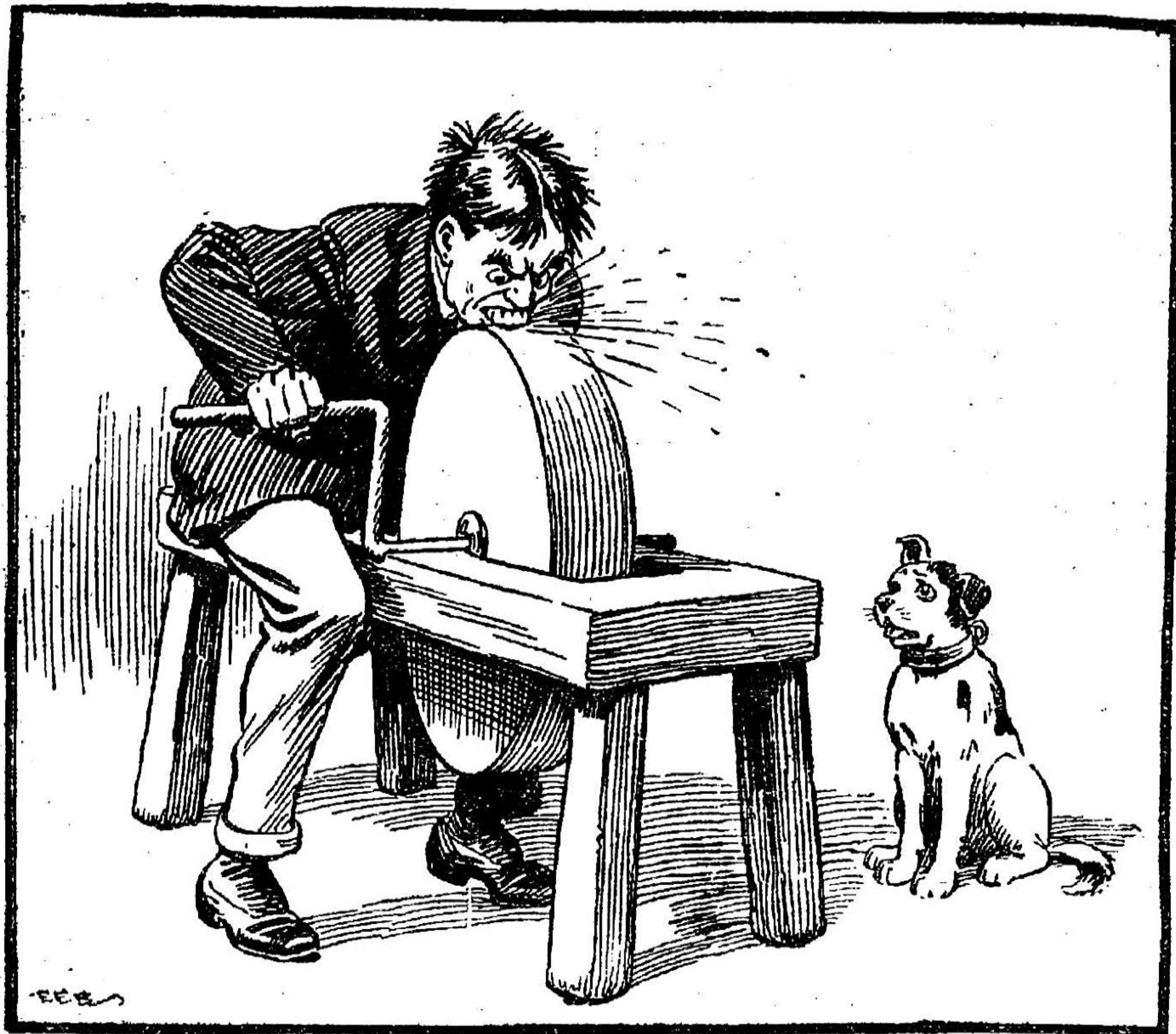


St. Frank's Magazine



FAMILIAR PHRASES FROM FICTION

As Seen By Our Artist

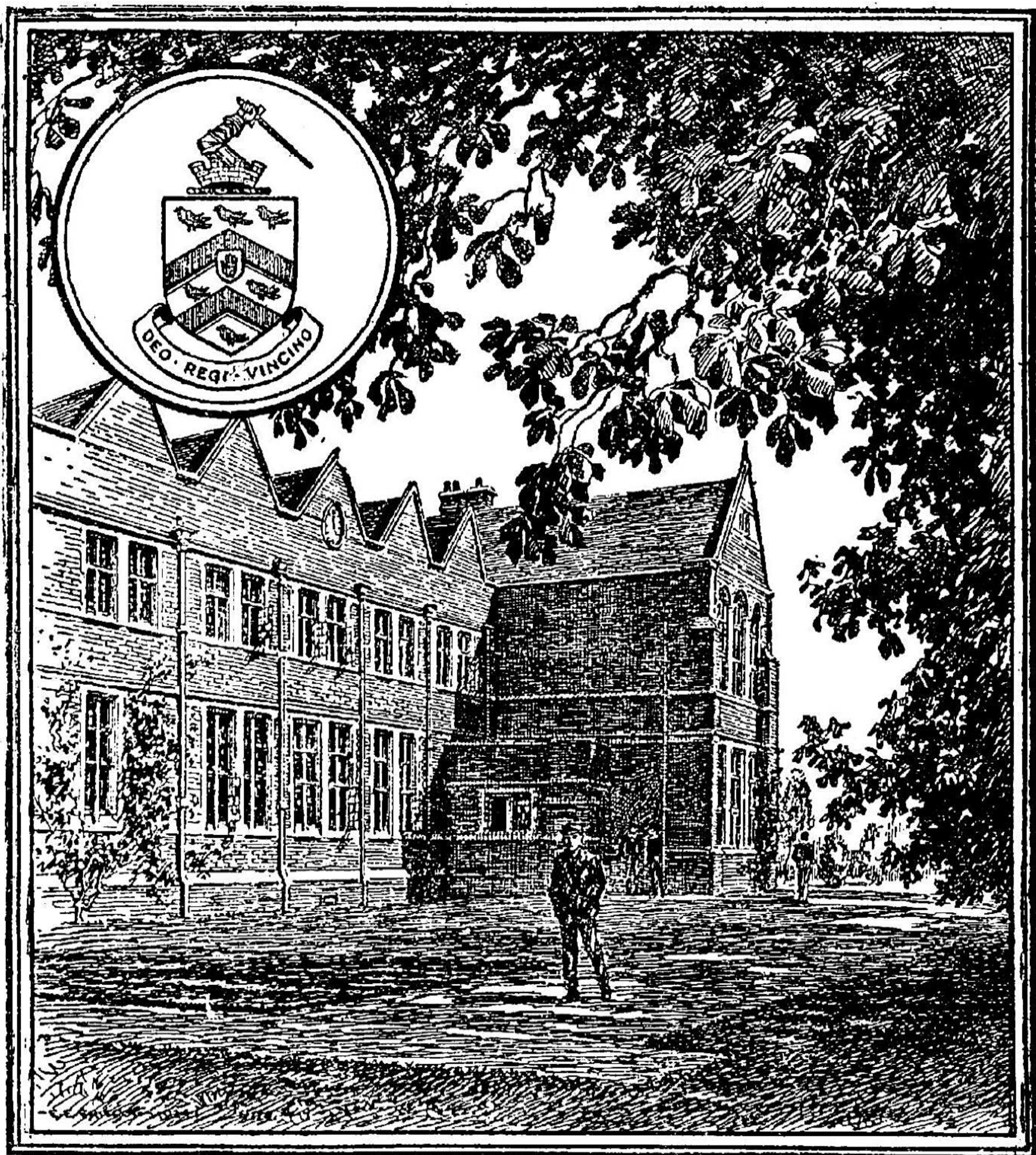


"HE GROUND HIS TEETH!"

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

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

No. 25. Bromsgrove School, Worcestershire.



The foundation of Bromsgrove School, Worcestershire, is unknown, but it was reorganised by Edward VI in 1553, and was refounded by Sir Edward Cooke in 1693.

The school is almost entirely a boarding-school, consisting of about 300 boys, divided into three sides, Classical, Modern, and Army. There are six houses: the School House, which is sub-divided into the Lyttleton and Millington, Gordon House, Elmshurst, Wendron, Oakley and Lupton. Every boy has a share in a study.

The school has an O.T.C., which furnishes

an infantry unit of 200 cadets or thereabouts.

There are four societies belonging to the school: the Debating Society, Natural History, Photographic, and Dramatic Reading societies.

I am indebted to a reader for the above facts, and I have accordingly presented him with the original drawing reproduced above. If your school has not appeared in this series, send along photo, badge, and particulars of its history, and the original sketch will be yours.



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

My Dear Chums,

This week I am publishing the second instalment of my Competition serial, "The Comrades of the Crimson Cross," with six more names for you to discover. To the regular reader of the St. Frank's adventures recorded in "The Nelson Lee Library," the competition should present little difficulty. Even the new reader will find all the characters mentioned in the accounts of our circus exploits. I have tried, however, to make some of the characters a little more difficult to recognise than others, for it would not do to make the contest too easy. Even so, there are distinct clues to each character, as you will discover when the results are published.

OUR SPORTING FEATURE.

Mr. Clifford has asked me to draw attention to his new cricketing chats beginning next week. The great summer game is now in full swing, and a good many of you are looking forward, no doubt, to knocking up a few decent scores this season and achieving success in other departments of the game. We fellows at the school, of course, can always get some useful tips from Cliffy. But it is chiefly for the benefit of my numerous friends outside the school that our Sports Master is writing these articles.

THE VALUE OF A COACH.

Every big public school has a coach to train its youthful cricketers to play the game in the correct style. Faults as to stance at the wicket or the making of a stroke are often impossible for the player to detect himself. But an expert, if he knows your faults, can easily put you wise and trace these faults to their source. That is why the schools which are out to

win matches employ a capable instructor to train their budding young cricketers.

MR. CLIFFORD'S OFFER.

St. Frank's owe their high position in school cricket to the valuable coaching of Mr. Clifford, who possesses the happy knack of being able to spot intuitively what's wrong with a player who is temporarily off his game. Mr. Clifford has kindly consented to act as coach, through the "Mag.," to any reader who cares to write to him explaining his difficulties. "Tell them a post-card will do," he says. I hope that every reader who loves the game will respond to Mr. Clifford's generous offer.

THE ST. FRANK'S CIRCUS.

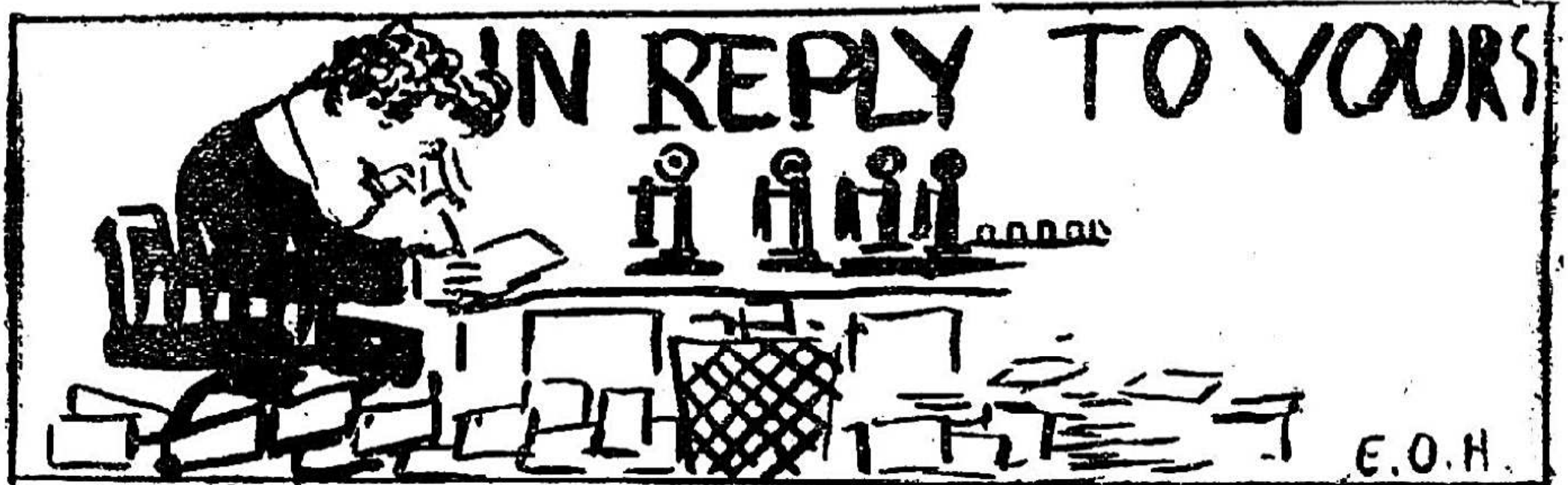
I hope you all had a jolly Easter Holiday and feel ready for the long summer days of the new term. Last year, you remember, we went caravanning all over England. It was a great stunt and a topping way of learning geog. We would like to do it again this year, but Dr. Stafford says we have other things to think about besides geography. And that is perfectly true. There is this circus, for instance. It's going to be great fun, and I have a feeling that, with all the wonderful talent available in the Remove, we are sure to make a huge success of it.

ARCHIE'S DETECTIVE STORY.

Instead of the usual Trackett Grim story, I am giving you next week a special detective yarn by Archie. This is the first time the Genial Ass has attempted this kind of story. The result is decidedly funny, though quite different in its humour to Handy's. The story is entitled, "DESPERATE DICK!" and is described as "A Priceless Yarn of the Secret Service and London's Underworld, Absolutely Invented and Put Down by Archie Glen-thorne."

Your faithful chum,

NIPPER.



Correspondence Answered by Uncle Edward

REGULAR READER: No, I'm afraid I shan't edit the Magazine again. That one week was quite enough for me, and I've absolutely refused, in spite of great pressure, to take the editorial chair again. But it is possible that Archie Glenthorne may become Editor for a week in the near future. But don't say a word about this to the other fellows, because it hasn't been decided yet, and not a single breath of information must come out.

SOLOMON LEVI: I don't like to say it publicly like this, but I feel compelled to call you a mean beast. You ask my advice about collecting five bob you lent to a fellow in the College House. You are willing to sacrifice the agreed-upon interest, and will accept the bare amount. You ought to be ashamed of yourself! When I lend five bob to Church or McClure, I forget all about it—and so do they.

COMPETITION FIEND: Well, at last the great Competition is in full swing. It was Nipper's idea, although, of course, I suggested it. At least, the same idea came to me two minutes after Nipper had spoken about his. And I must admit he's done it pretty well. Anyhow, you'll have to be pretty smart to find out whether I'm in the Secret Society or not!

CLAPSON: I don't believe it. It isn't possible for any frog to jump over the Triangle wall. You thought it was a frog, but it was probably a toad.

J.J.B.: Your request for advertising space in the Magazine is unreasonable. I agree that Onions' Circus deserves to be advertised, but when you talk about cutting out the Trackett Grim story so that two pages of the Mag. can be devoted to adverts, I have nothing else but contempt for you.

FATTY LITTLE: No wonder you are troubled with indigestion in the morning. Considering that you gorge your-

self five minutes before going to bed, and sometimes in the dormitory, it's a wonder you're still alive. Feeding in bed is one of the most disgusting habits I've ever heard of.

C. FELLOW: I can understand your anxiety about your figure. The fact is, you're much too thin, and what you need is more grub. One of the best methods of increasing weight is to have a tremendous feed in bed, just before going to sleep. I have often tried this myself, and can recommend it as being a really enjoyable and effective treatment.

TIMOTHY TUCKER: Your long letter has reached me. Thank you for nothing. By this time your letter has reached the dust heap.

WOULD-BE CRICKETER: Your interest in the game is welcome. Cricket is really a summer game, although in England it is frequently played under winter conditions. There are always eleven players on each side, but there is only one ball. The object of the game is to hit this ball all over the field, so that the other players can't get it. Any more hints you require on this subject I will gladly supply, but I am surprised at your ignorance.

FENTON, OF THE SIXTH: Your letter, addressed to the Editor, has reached my hands. You ask numerous questions, and I will gladly answer them, only I haven't got time. I am so occupied with the Circus just now that you're jolly lucky to get even mentioned!

HUBERT JARROW: Your article for the Mag. is unfit for publication, being only a lot of silly rot. I haven't read it, but it may interest you to know that your MS. has been burnt. I opened the letter without the Editor knowing, and I didn't think it worth while to bother him.

UNCLE EDWARD.

"NEVER COUNT YOUR CHICKENS—"

By **ARNOLD McCLURE**

STUDY D, in the Remove passage, was extraordinarily quiet.

As a general rule, this state of affairs only reigned when Handforth and Church and I were absent from it—for it was impossible for anything approaching peace and quietness to exist there when Handy was anywhere about.

But on this particular evening the silence had remained undisturbed for at least five minutes—which pretty nearly constituted a record.

Church and I looked at one another several times, and we could see that Handy was vastly preoccupied with something; he was like a fellow with something weighty on his mind. Now and again he is taken with fits of this sort, but they are generally the result of one or other of his marvellous "detective" spasms.

We knew, however, that nothing of this nature was troubling him, and the mystery was beginning to get on our nerves. When Handforth is quiet it means that there's some tremendously strong reason for it, and we couldn't get at the bottom of the thing.

"I—I believe Handy's ill," said Church, in an anxious tone, looking at me with a sidelong glance. "He hasn't been like this since he had that attack of 'flu! What shall we do about it?"

"Nothing!" I replied. "He'll be O.K. in a tick! I expect he's thinking of his best girl, or something——"

"Yes, rather!" said Handforth, looking at us with an absent, far-away look in his eyes. "When the jigger comes we'll have some thundering fine jaunts! We'll buzz off to Helmford, and Bannington, and Caistowe——"

"What the dickens are you babbling about, you ass?" asked Church bluntly. "What's all this about a jigger, and jaunts,

and all the rest of it? Have you gone off your rocker, or what?"

Handforth came to himself with a jerk.

"What's that?" he bawled, glaring at Church. "Are you saying that I'm off my rocker? If you did, Walter Church, I'll just about splifficate you in two ticks!"

He commenced rolling up his sleeves as he spoke, and Church backed away hastily.

"Don't be a silly fathead, Handy!" he said. "I only asked you if you were off your rocker! You were acting like a lunatic—jawing about a jigger, and rides to Caistowe! What's the idea, anyhow?"

Handforth paused, and then pulled his sleeves down again.

"Was I?" he asked, in surprise. "Well, I didn't mean to—and it's just like your cheek to listen to me when I was unconsciously speaking my thoughts aloud! But since I mentioned it, I may as well tell you that I've got a terrific motor-bike and side-car coming along to-morrow! Absolutely a spanker, one of the best makes in the world, and the sensation of the Motor-cycle Show which has just finished in London!"

Church and I looked at him excitedly.

"Are you serious, Handy?" gasped Church. "Do you really mean that this bike is coming to you—actually on the way?"

Handforth nodded.

"Of course it is!" he replied confidently. "It's an eight-horse twin, with a tremendously roomy side-car—big enough for two to sit in comfortably! None of your three-and-a-half-trouble-all-the-way jiggers, remember, but a machine which will take the three of us anywhere, and absolutely laugh at hills! It's just the sort of combination I've been longing for, and when it comes you'll see me showing 'em how to drive! By George! I can just imagine the other chap's faces when they see it!"

I looked at Handy reproachfully.

"What the dickens have you been so secret about it for?" I demanded. "If you knew this outfit was coming to-morrow, how is it we didn't hear about it sooner?"

He grinned.

"Well, you see, I wanted to surprise you," he said. "I'm not a chap to brag and boast, as you know jolly well, and I thought I'd leave it till the last moment! But I don't mind you two chaps knowing now! All the school will know to-morrow, when they see us careering down the High Street on the new Harley-Davidson——"

"Oh, it's a Harley, is it?" said Church eagerly.

"They're American machines, but they're absolutely IT when it comes to speed! You'd better go easy, Handy, for a bit, in case the motor-bike runs away with you! I'm surprised at your pater buying one of those——"

"He didn't buy it, you fathead!" said Handforth, with a sniff. "I asked him for one month ago, but he said I must wait until I'm a bit older! Huh! As if I couldn't manage a fatheaded motor-bike! Why, I'd guarantee to drive any make of jigger at sight!"

I grinned.

"But who the dickens is buying this combination if your pater isn't?" I asked curiously. "A Harley is a dashed expensive thing——"

"That's right," agreed Handy. "This outfit is worth well over two hundred quid, I know! But wait till it comes, then you'll see what a beauty it is!"

We could get no more out of him that night, and the next morning we noticed that his bed was empty when the rising-bell rang. Church and I dressed hurriedly, and ran down to ascertain the cause of Handy's unusual burst of energy.

When we reached the Triangle we found him just coming in at the gates. In his hand he was carrying a copy of the "Daily Wireless," and his face was wearing a look of deep dejection.

"What's the matter Handy?" asked Church quickly. "Where the dickens have you been——"

"They've made a terrible bloomer!" said



"Are you saying that I'm off my rocker? If you did, Walter Church——" Handy commenced rolling up his sleeves as he spoke.

Handy, with a snort. "They've sent that motor-bike to Scotland in mistake!"

I snatched the paper out of his hand, and glanced at it quickly—then I understood. There was a brief announcement to the effect that the winner of the first prize in the "circulation-estimating" competition was a resident of Glasgow!

We found out after that Handforth had entered the competition "on the quiet," and, with his usual cock-sureness, had fondly imagined that he would be the winner. Incidentally, he was only a matter of about twenty-five thousand short in his estimate of the circulation of the "Daily Wireless"!

Handy will always "count his chickens before they're hatched," and I doubt if this little incident will have any effect upon him—in spite of the chipping he received from all quarters.

The great F. O. H. is unalterable.

DON'T MISS

"DESPERATE DICK!"

By Archie Glenthorne.

COMING NEXT WEEK!

THE COMRADES OF THE CRIMSON CROSS!

:: *A Competition Serial—By the Editor* ::

£1:1:0 FOR TWENTY-FOUR NAMES.

Below I am publishing the second instalment of my grand new Competition Serial. Readers of "The Nelson Lee Library" are cordially invited to test their skill in solving the identity of the numbered characters. Last week I gave six names to find, and with this week's instalment I have added six more. There will be another two instalments, containing six new characters in each instalment.

All these characters are members of a new St. Frank's Secret Society, and accordingly their names are only referred to by numbers. To the regular reader of our adventures in "The Nelson Lee Library," our well-known juniors may be recognised by their conversation, their actions, and many other clues which I have supplied.

Now what you have to do is to read this instalment with a little more care than usual, looking out for any hint suggesting who the numbered characters represent. When you have decided upon their identity, turn to page III of the cover to this book, where you will find a coupon. Write the names clearly in ink in the spaces provided on this coupon, and keep it by you until further instructions are given.

To the reader who sends in the correct list of the twenty-four characters, a Prize of One Guinea will be presented. In the event of two or more readers tying, the prize will be divided.

NIPPER.

Editor, St. Frank's Magazine.

CHAPTER II.

THE EXPEDITION AGAINST FARMER HOLT.

BELLTON LANE was dark and apparently deserted.

But appearances are not always what they seem, for a closer inspection would have revealed the fact that a number of dim figures lurked in the shadows of the hedges.

There were quite a collection of them, all being members of The Comrades of the Crimson Cross—the new Junior Secret Society which had just been organised at St. Frank's. Six of the members went off without a word, their duty being to deal with Lumpy Bill, the bully of the village.

Six others broke through a gap in the hedge, and went off across the meadows. They were Comrades 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 of the Secret League, and they were all keen upon executing the commission which Comrade 1, the Chief, had entrusted them with.

"It's about time Farmer Holt got his deserts," said Comrade 7, with a shake of his dark head. "He should bully people just as he likes! We're going to make him pull up with a jerk."

Comrade 8 nodded.

"Well, of course, my dear sir, that is a matter of opinion," he said mildly. "When

I joined this Society I was unaware of its violent nature. I am quite opposed to all warfare, deeming such methods to be brutal and barbaric. Yes, quite so! It would be far better to get hold of Mr. Holt, and deal with him peacefully. My idea is to read him one of my lectures on the Domestic Policy of the Ancient Aztecs——"

"I'm blessed if I know why we brought you!" put in Comrade 9. "Still, it's too late to send you back now, my son. But if you're not prepared to do your whack, there'll be trouble from the Chief."

"My dear sir——" began Comrade 8.

"Oh, dry up!" interrupted Comrade 10. "We don't want to hear your piffle now, old man. We have quite enough of it in the study."

"Wise words, O speaker of sooth," said Comrade 9. "Even as thou sayest, Comrade 8 is quite enough trouble in the study, without starting his frightful lectures out here. Comrade 8, you will kindly dry up, or I shall be reluctantly compelled to smite you on the mazzard!"

"Dear, dear, dear!" said Comrade 8, shocked. "That would be most distressing, my dear sir! The mazzard, I understand, is that portion of my anatomy which is commonly described as the skull——"

"Begad! Can't you keep that chap quiet?"

asked Comrade 11, in a tone of mild annoyance. "He's nothin' more nor less than a nuisance—he is, really. We are out on a serious expedition."

"Hear, hear!" said Comrade 12. "And that applies both ways, because we are here."

Comrade 12 pointed, and Holt's farm could be seen just over one of the neighbouring hedges. The building was rather old and dismal, and there was only one light shining from the lower windows.

"You are getting smart in your old age, Comrade 12," said Comrade 9. "It isn't usual for you to make puns, or jokes of any sort. But when it comes to action, you're the fellow for work."

"Don't be an ass!" said Comrade 12 bluntly.

They broke through the hedge and cautiously approached the farmhouse. By a piece of luck, the back door of the building opened at that moment, and the burly figure of Farmer Holt made its appearance. At the same time, one of the farmer's labourers came round the angle of the building and paused at the side of his employer.

"Oh, so there you are!" shouted Holt grimly. "Come here, durn ye!"

The man was elderly and undersized, and he approached with fear.

"I bin down the village, master," he said, raising his arm as though to ward off a blow. "The vicar stopped me, he did, an' kep' me talkin'. I got back soon as I could——"

"Yes, and kept me waiting!" snarled Farmer Holt. "I'll teach ye! Be thankful I don't give ye the sack!"

He brought his hand round, and gave the unfortunate labourer a violent clout which sent him reeling over. He stumbled on the rough cobbles and fell. Farmer Holt kicked him brutally.

"Oh, the cad!" said Comrade 12 hotly. "Come on! Now's our chance! Let's chuck the rotter into his own pond!"

"Well spoken, Comrade 12," said Comrade 9. "It is done!"

"By my life!" said Comrade 7. "The old lozer!"

The six members of the Comrades of the Crimson Cross charged forward—but not until they had adjusted the black cowls over their heads and shoulders. Farmer Holt was startled and amazed to find himself surrounded by six mysterious, sinister-looking figures.

"Take that!" shouted Comrade 12, delivering a lunge.

Comrade 12 was not much of a fellow for conversation, and it was said that he was rather slow in wits. But when it came to action, he was always ready, and could be relied upon to the last ditch. And his conversation at all times was blunt and to the

point. The Chief had never known Comrade 12 to fail in a tight corner.

The six cloaked figures had Farmer Holt down in a moment, and it didn't take them long to convey him to his own muddy pond and hurl him into it with tremendous force. The farmer wallowed about in the thick mass of mud, shouting and raving.

"This is your first warning!" said Comrade 9, in a deep voice. "Beware! Unless you mend your ways from this day onwards, other and more violent methods will be adopted against you. Comrades, away!"

And the Comrades melted into the gloom.

"That was swift and sudden!" grinned Comrade 10. "If old Holt doesn't improve after this, he ought to."

"Possibly—possibly!" said Comrade 8. "But I must remark, my dear sir, that these violent methods pain me."

"Something else will pain you as soon as we get you into the study," said Comrade 10 grimly. "As a matter of fact, Comrade 9 and I are getting just about fed-up with you, my lad!"

And Comrade 8 said no more. A short time later, the six members of the Secret League emerged into the lane, and ran into six other figures who were passing.

"Halt! Who goes there?" said Comrade 9 sharply.

"The cross is crimson!" came the instant reply.

"Good!" said Comrade 9. "The Chief, eh?"

"Yes, we've just got back from Lumpy Bill's place," said Comrade 1. "We caught the beggar, frogs-marched him, stripped all his clothes off, and painted him with axle-grease! Seen anything of the others?"

"I call it a lot of rot!" put in Comrade 2 sourly. "Axle-grease! My idea was to dip the rotter in a tub of tar, but these fat-heads wouldn't hear of it! Anyhow, it was my idea about the axle-grease!"

"Did you get on all right, old son?" asked Comrade 1, clapping Comrade 12 on the back.

"Rather!" said Comrade 12. "We ducked old Holt in the pond."

And the twelve members of the Comrades of the Crimson Cross wended their way up the lane towards St. Frank's, wondering what had happened to the other two parties, who had also gone out upon avenging expeditions.

(To be Continued.)

(Well, have you been able to name the six new comrades mentioned in the above instalment? I have an idea that the task has been fairly easy. Next week we shall relate the adventures of the third half-dozen Comrades.—ED., "St. Frank's Mag.")



E. Sopp's Fables

By
Edgar Sopp of the Fifth

No. 22. The Fable of the Youth Who Wouldn't Be Consoled.

ONE Sunday it happened that a Certain Youth named Handforth arose from his bed at an Earlier Hour than was absolutely necessary. And great was the surprise of all when it was observed that Handforth was missing from the dormitory. Now, this event was So Unusual that Handforth's chums, known as Church and McClure, hastened into their clothes and Went Forth upon a search for their Missing Leader. And behold, they found him in Study D,

LOOKING PRETTY GHASTLY.

And Handforth waved them aside, and curtly bade them Push Off. It was Sunday, and he wanted to be at Peace and Rest. And Church and McClure were not only suspicious, but convinced. For, lo, on the table lay the Discarded Envelope of a letter that bore the Local Postmark, and the date of the previous evening—thus proving that it had Been Delivered but an hour since. In fact, the letter Had Arrived

BY THE SUNDAY MORNING POST.

And both Church and McClure exchanged glances. The handwriting upon that envelope was well-known to them, being, forsooth, the Dainty Flit of a sweet young lady named Irene, who graced the Moor View School with her presence—and for whom, as everybody knew, Handforth had not only a Soft Spot, but several soft spots rolled into one. It was obvious that he had expected the letter, and had arisen early so that he should Receive It

FROM THE POSTMAN'S HAND.

And thus his present gloom and Inconsolable Depression were explained. It seemed, indeed, very much as though Irene had Given him the Bird. It was clear that Her Letter had contained certain passages which had thrust Handforth down into the Deepest Pit of despair. And, with much tact, Church

and McClure tried to Question Him on the subject. But Handforth answered them not, but only feebly expressed a desire

TO BE LEFT ALONE.

And it came to pass that Handforth failed to Turn Up at breakfast. It is true that he Crawled In to prayers, and, later, he attended Morning Service—but only because These Duties were compulsory. And as the day progressed, he grew More Haggard and wan, and into his eyes there came a look of Hopeless Misery that caused Church and McClure to make a Firm Resolve. At all costs, they would brace their leader up, until, indeed, he displayed Evident Indications, of

THAT KRUSCHEN FEELING.

And they again set to work, only to find their Efforts Useless. For Handforth would not Be Consoled. Indeed, forsooth, any mention of Irene's letter brought such Dire Threats to his lips that Church and McClure trembled. And their leader became More Depressed than ever, and it seemed that he was about to Pine Away and droop to a Mere Shadow. Even dinner did not Tempt Him, but he remained hunched up in the easy chair before the Study Fire, shivering, haggard, and with an expression of the Utmost Gloom on his face. And not one word of explanation regarding these love-sick Symptoms could Church and McClure extract. And so they decided to

PROBE THIS MATTER TO ITS SOURCE.

And behold, they Sallied Forth upon a mission which took them to the Moor View School, where they had No Difficulty in catching sight of a sweet damsel with Fair Hair and Blue Eyes who turned out to be Irene. And she greeted him warmly, and expressed Great Surprise that Handforth was not with them. She would not have

Been Astonished to see Handforth without Church and McClure, but to be visited by Church and McClure without Handforth was

A STARTLING NOVELTY.

And the two Miserable Juniors thereupon spake unto Irene, telling her of Handforth's misery, and begging her to retract the Hard Things that she had apparently said in that early-morning letter. And Irene was Mightily Surprised, declaring that her letter was in No Way calculated to upset the recipient. However, she declined to reveal its contents, and Church and McClure were compelled to wend their way back to St. Frank's in a More Puzzled condition than ever. And it came to them that Handforth must have misunderstood

HIS FAIR CORRESPONDENT.

And they went to Study D once more, and Were Gratified to discover that Handforth was sleeping in the chair—noisily, but undoubtedly At Peace. The Haggard Expression was somewhat softened, and the Greenish Tint had vanished from beneath his eyes. And behold, Irene's letter was projecting invitingly

OUT OF HIS WAISTCOAT POCKET.

And Church deemed that the Circumstances Warranted a little spying. So he and McClure extracted the letter, and Read It with much curiosity and surprise. For it proved to be but a friendly Little Note, acknowledging the receipt of a certain volume on Indian Travel which Handforth had presumably obtained for Irene. And at This Moment Handforth awoke, and glared at His Chums with something of

HIS FORMER ARROGANCE.

And they begged of him beseechingly, urging that he should explain This Mystery. And Handforth thereupon Snorted Loudly, and declared that the letter had had Nothing Whatever to do with his Groggy Condition. And it transpired that he had partaken of some Fish Sandwiches for supper the previous night, and these had apparently been Somewhat Squiffy, resulting in a frightful Bilious Attack which had occasioned Handforth pains in the Night and pains in the Tummy, and had caused him to arise in the Early Morn. And behold, the symptoms were now passing, and he was feeling almost himself again.

MORAL: DON'T JUDGE BY APPEARANCES—THEY ARE OFTEN DECEPTIVE.



PAINFUL PARODIES

PERPETRATED
By
Clarence Fellowe

WHISPER AND I SHALL HEAR

If in my study private,
You murmur of secrets dark,
Outside the keyhole I wait,
List'ning there for a lark..
Just breathe some news to each other,
Sigh what gossip you may;
I know I shall hear your voices, clear,
Borne to me straightaway.

O, tales that float round the House,
Lying ones, like as not,
I get them all you know,
Most of them quite red-hot.
O, tales that float round the House
Drop in my list'ning ear,
I have got room for them all,
Whisper and I shall hear!

If in the dormy, silent,
And after the lights are out,
When there is nothing vi'lent,
I am still on the scout.
Just murmur a word of scandal,
Leaning out of your bed,
I know I shall hear it clearly there,
Every word you have said.

O, yarns that go round the dorm.,
Gossip about the chaps,
Whispers of secrets grim,
Libellous ones, perhaps—
O, yarns that go round the dorm.,
I don't miss them, no fear!
My name is Ted, my ears are Long,
Whisper and I shall hear!



All About the Cup

EVERYBODY is talking about the great Football Association Cup Final which took place last Saturday at the new Stadium at Wembley Park. Football and snals are in the air at the moment, and many of you would like to know something about the great snals that have passed.

We who attend these pow-wows like to be in the fashion, and so I propose this week, instead of carrying on with football instruction as usual, that we devote our chat to this great football match, and get to know more about it so that we may follow the arguments and the gossip of other people we hear talking about it with greater interest.

Well, then, in the first place, what is the Cup? The Cup, as we generally use the term, is the biggest knock-out competition in the world in which all our first-class league clubs compete, but which, at the same time, is also open to smaller clubs—such as your local senior team, for instance. As many as 600 clubs enter for the trophy every year, but of these, of course, only two reach the final.

We usually get to know that the Cup is in the air about the second week in January, when the first round is played. At least, that is when it is most prominently brought before our notice. Actually, however, the competition starts in September, and by the time that January is here it is half way through.

The Cup Competition, for purposes of convenience, is split up into two parts. The first part is made up of what is called qualifying rounds and the second portion of the competition proper. In the competition proper only sixty-four clubs compete, but in the qualifying rounds all the other clubs that have entered for the cup compete. The smaller clubs who are successful enough to win through the qualifying rounds then become entitled to compete in the competition proper.

That, roughly, is how the Cup is worked. Now let us consider the Cup itself and its romance. The Football Association Chal-

lenge Cup—to give the trophy its full name—is a solid silver vase, standing about two feet high, and is worth, perhaps, at to-day's price, something between £40 and £50. But the cup is not the original one with which the competition was started. That, as no doubt you have heard, was stolen in Birmingham while it was on exhibition in a Birmingham shop window twenty-nine years ago, and has never been recovered.

The idea of the Cup was put forward while Association football was still in its infancy—in 1871, to be precise—and in its first season only fifteen clubs entered, three of which withdrew before the competition actually started. Most of these clubs belonged to London and the district surrounding London. Only two clubs that entered for the Cup belonged to districts outside London, and these were Donnington School, of Spalding, a northern club, and the famous Queen's Park, of Glasgow, a Scottish Club.

In those days the Cup rules were very simple, and Queen's Park, because they dwelt such a long distance away, were not called upon to play in the competition until the semi-final. To travel from Scotland to London was expensive in those days, and as Queen's Park finances were inadequate to meet the expenses of such a journey, a subscription fund was organised in Glasgow, and the money raised that way. Thus the Queen's came to London to play in their tie with a club called the Wanderers. The match took place at the Kennington Oval, and after a very hard game resulted in a draw. As Queen's Park could not afford to stop in London for the replay, and as they could not afford, either, to travel down from Scotland a second time, they withdrew from the competition that season and so allowed the Wanderers to go into the final. In this match, which was the first Cup Final of all time, the Wanderers won by defeating their opponents, the Royal Engineers, by one goal to nil.

Below I am giving you a list of Cup results for the last thirty years. It is interesting to record that since 1882 Totten-

ham Hotspur are the only Southern Club to have won the Cup. It seems strange to reflect, in view of this, that for the first eleven years of the competition the Cup was guarded by clubs of the South.

But this was mainly because, in the first few seasons of the competition the Northern clubs did not evince the interest in the Cup that they have since shown, and that no great notice was taken of the trophy until five finals had been won and lost. During that time there had been a gradual increase in the Northern Aspirants to Cup fame, but it was not until 1878-79 that their ambition received the fillip that was required. This was given them through Nottingham Forest, who succeeded in getting into the semi-final, only to be beaten by the Royal Engineers, who became the ultimate winners of the trophy.

In 1882 the North came fully into its own, however, and for the first time a Northern English club appeared in the Final. This was Blackburn Rovers, who, after defeating Sheffield Wednesday by five goals to one in the semi-final, came to London, confident in their ability to beat the Old Etonians, who were to be their opponents in the final. The confidence of Blackburn received a nasty check, however, when the match was played, for the Southerners demonstrated their superiority by winning 1-0.

But the following year—that of 1884—saw the North obtain their revenge for the Rovers' defeat, for another club from Blackburn—the Olympic of that town—trounced the victorious Old Etonians by two goals to one, after a very hard game in which an extra half-hour was played for the first time in the history of the competition. That was a disastrous year for southern England, for when the Olympic took the Cup away, the South saw the last of it for eighteen years.

It came back for a brief spell to the Metropolis in 1901, when Tottenham Hotspur, who were then only a Southern League club, defeated Sheffield United at Bolton,

but the following year it departed northwards again when Sheffield United beat Southampton. The Cup did not return until 1921, when again the 'Spurs beat Wolverhampton Wanderers in a very wet and dismal match at Chelsea by the only goal, scored, you may remember, by Jimmy Dimmock. And for this season, at least, the hopes of the South are blighted, for it is two northern clubs which appeared last Saturday.

Rapidly following on the triumph of the North, the Midlands took a hand, and in 1886 West Bromwich represented the Midlands in a final tie by appearing against Blackburn Rovers, who had already won the Cup the preceeding two years. West Bromwich, however, after playing the Rovers to a draw in London, were beaten by two clear goals in the replay at Derby. Thus, for the third year in succession Blackburn Rovers carried off the Cup, and to commemorate the event the Football Association presented the club with a special trophy.

But where West Bromwich failed to uphold the supremacy of the Midlands, Aston Villa—ever a name in Cup football to conjure with—succeeded. Curiously enough, the Albion and the Villa were paired the following year in the final and the Villa won easily by two clear goals.

The Villa are easily England's best Cup fighting team, for they hold the record by having appeared in seven finals, and having won the Cup on six occasions. It seems rather in the nature of a coincidence that on the one occasion that they were beaten—in 1892—West Bromwich Albion should have been their conquerors.

But I find my space running out. I could talk about the Cup until I had filled several issues of the "St. Frank's Magazine," for there is more to be said on this competition than any other in the world. But here I must ring off, leaving you to fill in the blanks of this pow-wow by the table of winners appended below. This table I have made as informative and interesting as possible.

CUP WINNERS FOR THE PAST THIRTY YEARS

Season.	Winners.	Goals.	Runners-Up.	Goals.
1893-94 ..	Notts County (At Everton)	4	Bolton Wanderers ..	1
1894-95 ..	Aston Villa (At Crystal Palace)	1	West Bromwich Albion	0
1895-96 ..	Sheffield Wednesday .. (At Crystal Palace)	2	Wolverhampton Wanderers	1
1896-97 ..	Aston Villa (At Crystal Palace)	3	Everton	2
1897-98 ..	Nottingham Forest .. (At Crystal Palace)	3	Derby County ..	1
1898-99 ..	Sheffield United (At Crystal Palace)	4	Derby County ..	1
1899-1900..	Bury (At Crystal Palace)	4	Southampton	0
1900-01 ..	Tottenham Hotspur .. (At Bolton, after a draw at Crystal Palace)	3	Sheffield United ..	1

(Continued on cover iii.)

(CUP WINNERS FOR THE PAST THIRTY YEARS—continued)

Season.	Winners.	Goals.	Runners-Up.	Goals.
1901-02 ..	Sheffield United (At Crystal Palace, after a draw)	2	Southampton	1
1902-03 ..	Bury (At Crystal Palace)	6	Derby County	0
1903-04 ..	Manchester City (At Crystal Palace)	1	Bolton Wanderers	0
1904-05 ..	Aston Villa (At Crystal Palace)	2	Newcastle United	0
1905-06 ..	Everton (At Crystal Palace)	1	Newcastle United	0
1906-07 ..	Sheffield Wednesday (At Crystal Palace)	2	Everton	1
1907-08 ..	Wolverhampton Wanderers (At Crystal Palace)	3	Newcastle United	1
1908-09 ..	Manchester United (At Crystal Palace)	1	Bristol City	0
1909-10 ..	Newcastle United (At Liverpool, Goodison Park, after a draw)	2	Barnsley	0
1910-11 ..	Bradford City (At Manchester, Old Trafford, after a draw)	1	Newcastle United	0
1911-12 ..	Barnsley (At Sheffield, Bramall Lane, after a draw)	1	West Bromwich Albion	0
1912-13 ..	Aston Villa (At Crystal Palace)	1	Sunderland	0
1913-14 ..	Burnley (At Crystal Palace)	1	Liverpool	0
1914-15 ..	Sheffield United	3	Chelsea	0
1919-20 ..	Aston Villa	1	Huddersfield Town	0
1920-21 ..	Tottenham Hotspur (At Stamford Bridge)	1	Wolverhampton Wan- derers	0
1921-22 ..	Huddersfield Town (At Stamford Bridge)	1	Preston North End	0
1922-23 ..	Bolton Wanderers (At Wembley Stadium)	2	West Ham United	0

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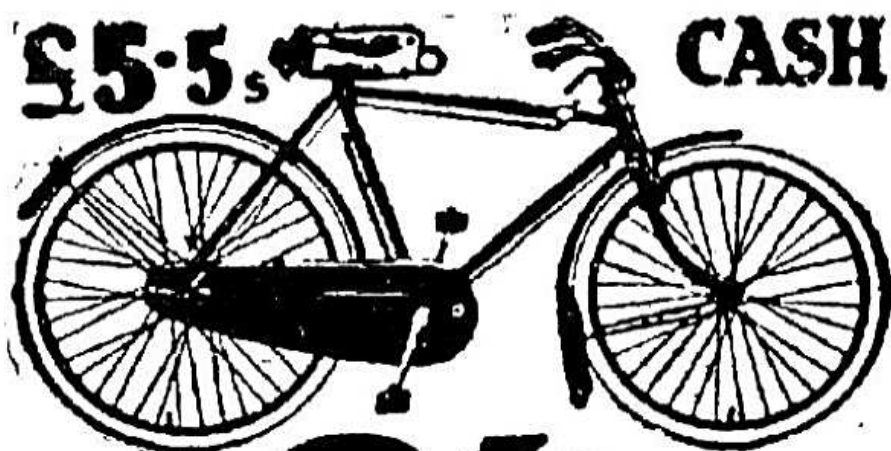
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