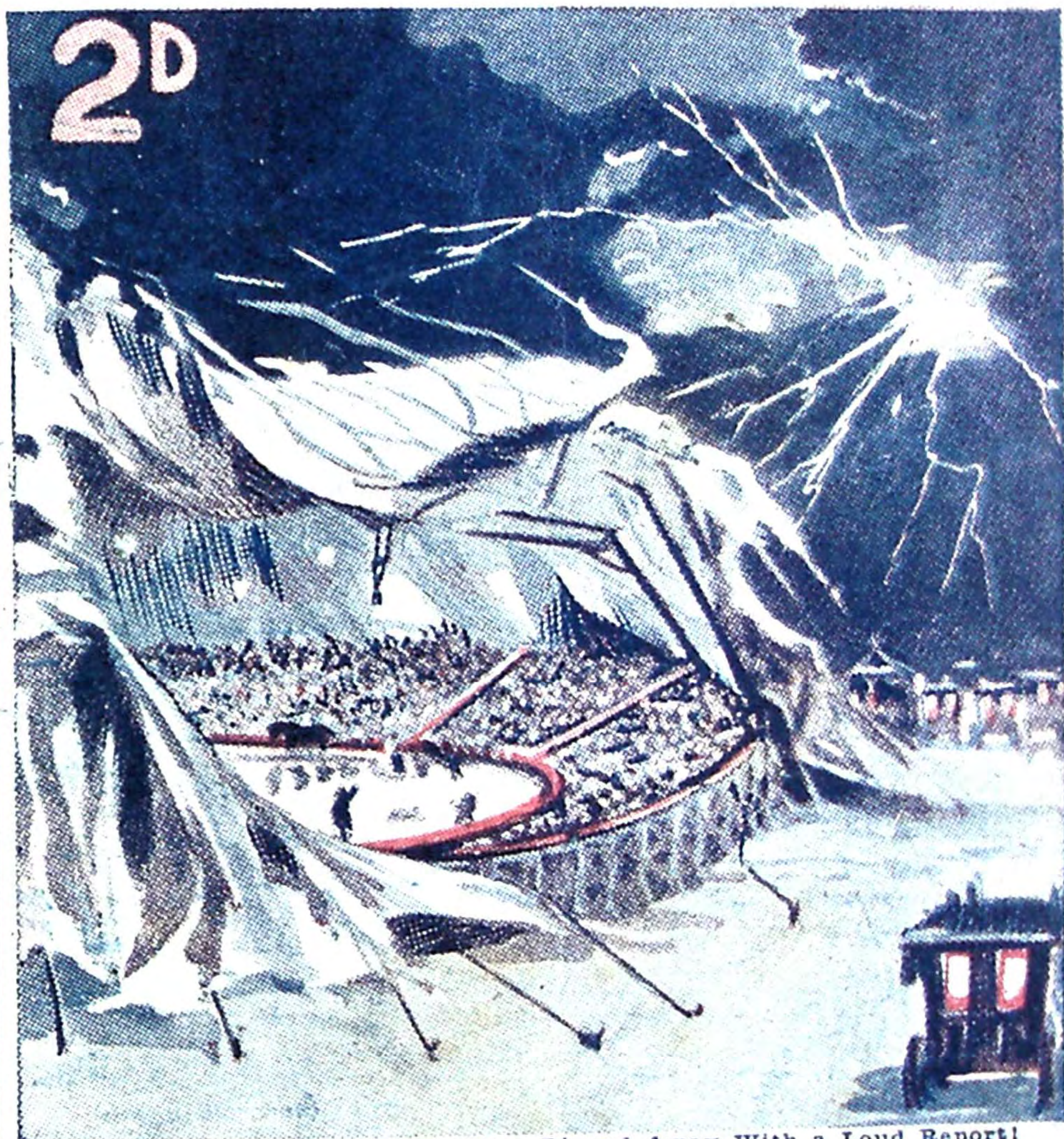


THE ST. FRANK'S CIRCUS CATASTROPHE!

Amazing Account
Within!

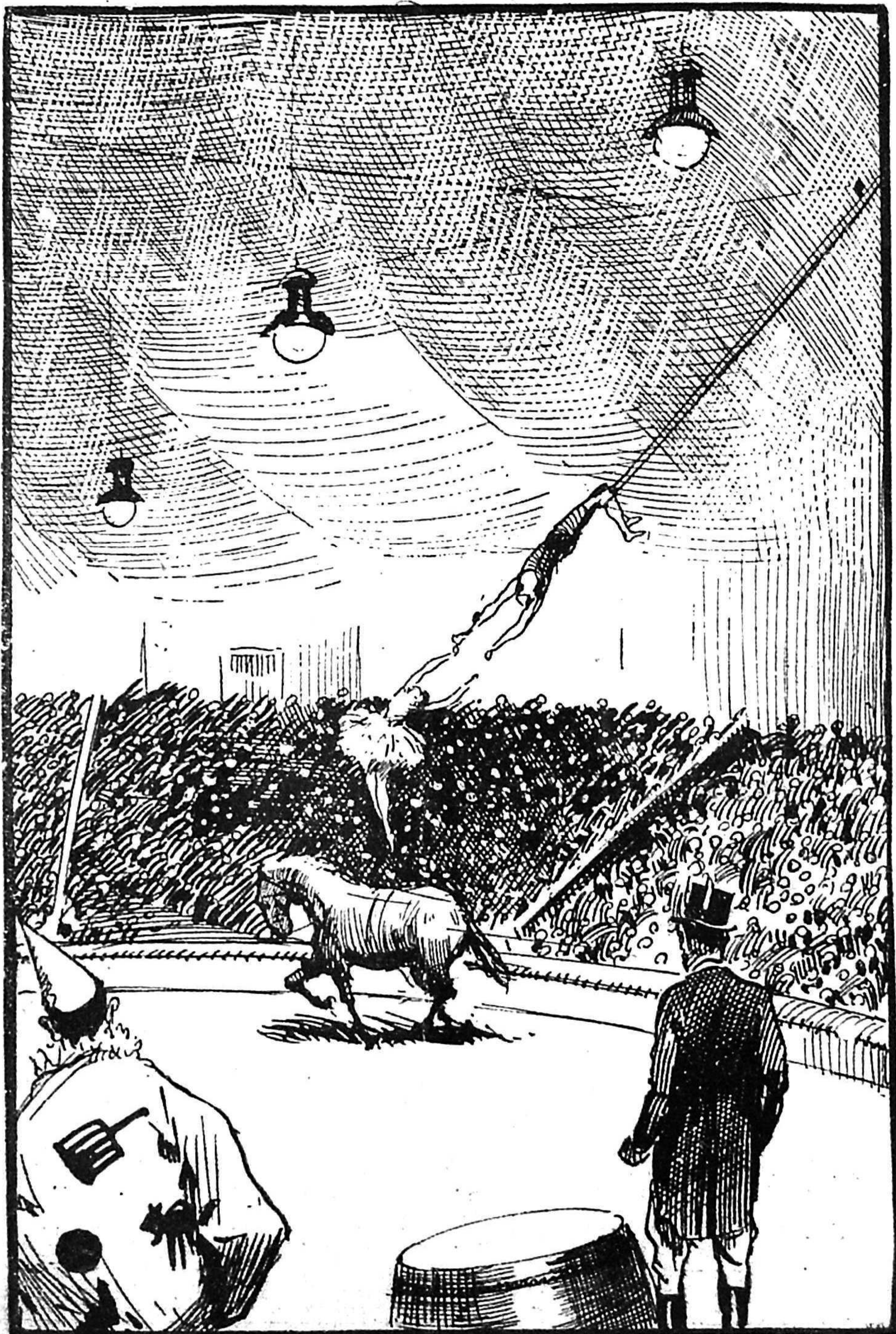
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Grand School and Circus Story:—

QUEEN OF THE RING!



Tessa came out of the somersault and landed with amazing precision on the back of the galloping mare.



A ROLICKING SCHOOL AND CIRCUS STORY.

As you may have read in the previous stories of this enthralling series, the famous Juniors of St. Frank's have put new life into the Onions' Circus, and have made a financial success of a show that would otherwise have been ruined by its rascally manager, Simon Snayle. On account of a signed contract Snayle cannot be

dismissed, and although he has little to do with the actual management of the circus, he makes full use of his position to obstruct the Juniors in making a success of the show. In this week's story you will read of the triumph of Tessa, the clever girl trick rider, and how Snayle tries to wreck the big canvas tent, and of the great storm that sweeps down upon the circus and completes the vile work begun by the villainous manager. **THE EDITOR.**

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

CHAPTER I.

TRYING IT ON THE DOG!

"GURRRRH!"
A low, throaty growl proceeded from Edward Oswald Handforth, and Church and McClure looked up, rather startled. The famous trio were in Study D, in the Ancient House at St. Frank's.

"What was that?" asked Church, staring.

"Sounded like a dog!" said McClure, gazing at Handforth suspiciously.

"A dog?" said Handforth, speaking with a careless air that instantaneously gave his chums a clue. "Oh, rather! It did sound a bit like a dog, didn't it? Perhaps somebody's got a terrier, or something."

Church and McClure looked at him hard. They knew perfectly well that the growl came from Handforth, and they failed to see any reason why he should attempt to conceal the fact. But it was never wise to be rash with Handy. Tact was always necessary.

Breakfast hadn't long been over, and the juniors had come into their study for a quiet ten minutes before morning lessons. Under ordinary circumstances they would have been outside in the Triangle, or in the playing fields. But the May weather had been very sultry of late, and this morning a gentle rain had commenced falling—much to the disgust of the juniors, and much to the joy of farmers and various allotment holders.

Church yawned.

"Getting up at half-past five is all very well, but it rather takes it out of a chap," he said. "Still, we've already done two hours work this morning, and it's rather ripping to know that we're free for the afternoon."

"Looks like being a pretty beastly day for the show," growled McClure, glancing out of the window. "In my opinion, this weather's going to get worse. Shouldn't be a bit surprised if we have a giddy thunderstorm."

They were thinking of the circus in Bannington-Onions' Colossal Circus and Menagerie—which the Remove had so ably assisted of late. It was on account of the circus, in fact, that almost a third of the Remove had got into the habit of rising at the unearthly hour of five-thirty.

This new order of things had been schemed out so that the afternoon's work could be done before breakfast. It was rather like putting the cart before the horse, but it made no real difference to the work. The juniors got in their full daily hours. And the plan had the advantage that by mid-day all work was at an end for these particular fellows. They were free to help the circus without feeling that their studies were suffering.

"Well, let's go down to the Common-room," suggested Church. "There's not long before lessons, and—"

"Gurrrrh-gag-gurrrrh!"

This time a much longer growl sounded, with a kind of break in the middle of it, and Church and McClure gazed at Handforth with real alarm. Edward Oswald was looking queer. His face was strained, the muscles of his neck stood rigid, and he appeared to be in imminent peril of going into some kind of fit.

"My hat!" gasped Church blankly.

"That was a dog all right!" said Handforth, suddenly relapsing into his usual condition. "The sound came from behind that big chair. Didn't you hear it? There must be a dog up in the corner!"

For a moment, Church and McClure thought that their leader was trying to be funny. But he wasn't. He was deadly serious. They knew perfectly well that Handforth himself had made the sound—and he must have known it, too. Yet he appeared to actually believe that the growl had come from behind the easy chair.

"Feeling fit, old man?" asked Church anxiously.

"Who, me?" snapped Handforth.

"Yes."

"Of course I'm feeling fit, fathead!"

"Perhaps you're feeling like having a fit?" suggested McClure. "There's all the difference between feeling fit, and feeling that a fit is coming on. We ought to have more fresh air."

Handforth apparently failed to detect the sarcasm and rlying his chum's remarks. And he suddenly went into that queer strained attitude again.

"Morning, Handy! How's things?"

This time Church and McClure were positively alarmed. There was Handforth, actually standing in the middle of the study, asking himself questions! And before Church and McClure could say a word, Handforth replied.

"Things are all right," he said. "But what the dickens are you doing under the table, Buster Boots?"

"Boots!" breathed Church. "Under the table?"

Handforth nodded.

"Didn't you hear him speak to me just now?" he demanded.

Church and McClure swayed a little as they stood.

"Speak to you?" said McClure, with a gulp.

"They think I'm not here, the asses! But you know it, don't you, Handforth? I've been hiding under here for the last ten minutes!"

Considering that Handforth spoke these words himself, but in a strained, throaty voice, and with obvious difficulty, it was hardly surprising that Church and McClure began to suspect him of incipient insanity.

"Oh, of course!" said Church, deciding to humour the patient.

"Eh?" asked Handforth.

"Fancy Boots being under the table!" said Church, with a strained laugh. "I'd never have thought it!"

"You fathead!" said McClure. "Boots isn't—"

He paused abruptly as Church shot a warning glance at him.

"Oh, yes!" he added, hurriedly. "Under the table, eh? Ha, ha! Good old Boots! Always up to something funny!"

Handforth burst into a triumphant roar.

"Look under the table, my sons," he grinned. "And be prepared for a bit of a shock."

Church and McClure had had one shock already, so they were feeling braced. And it was no shock at all when they saw at a single glance that the space beneath the table was quite empty. They had known it all along.

"Boots isn't there!" gasped Church, keeping it up manfully.

"Of course he isn't there!" jeered Handforth. "And I'll tell you why! He never was there!"

"No?" asked McClure, with exaggerated incredulity.

"No!" said Handforth. "And he wasn't there because it was me speaking all the while!"

"You!" yelled Church.

"Of course it was me," laughed Handforth.

He gazed at his chums with complete triumph, and Church and McClure were so blank with astonishment that they gave the impression of being startled. They couldn't quite make Handforth out, and their leader was deceived.

"No need to keep it a mystery," he said carelessly. "As a matter of fact, I was just practising a bit of ventriloquism."

A blaze of light burst upon his two chums.

"Ventriloquism!" said Church, feebly clutching at the table.

"Exactly! I was just throwing my voice a bit."

"Throwing your voice!" whispered McClure faintly. "Oh, yes! Rather! Jolly good! So that's the way it's done, eh?"

Church and McClure were relieved. They remembered, now, that Handforth had decided to take up ventriloquism a few days earlier—his scheme being to introduce a new act into the circus.

And he had just been trying his new art upon his chums! The almost tragic feature about the business was that Handforth firmly believed that he had been actually throwing his voice. And his chums, out of sheer kindheartedness, refrained from breaking the sad truth to him. Besides, it would have been rather risky to put it so bluntly.

Upon the whole, it would be more diplomatic to leave it to somebody else to give Handforth the evil tidings. And when it came to diplomacy, Church and McClure were past masters in the art.

CHAPTER II.

NOT QUITE SUCCESSFUL.



HANDFORTH was delighted.

"To tell the truth, I didn't quite expect such wonderful success myself!" he admitted. "But it's proved now! You chaps

absolutely thought that Boots was under the table."

"Oh, rather!" agreed Church. "In fact, there are some boots there now—your footer boots—"

"Don't try to be funny!" snapped Handforth. "And puns are the lowest form of humour! I'm ashamed of you! You ought to be punished for making such rotten jokes."

"Well, let's clear out!" suggested McClure.

"Nothing of the sort!" put in Handforth. "I'm just going to make a final test, and if I don't fool you again, you can jolly well shove my head in the coal-scuttle!"

"You're going to throw your voice again?" asked Church.

"It's all right—let him do it! I think he's perfectly marvellous at this ventriloquism."

It was Handforth speaking, in that throaty voice of his. But he looked at McClure, and nodded.

"Thanks, old man," said Handforth, in his natural voice.

"Eh?"

"Thanks for what you said."

"I didn't say a word!" snorted McClure. "I heard you mumble something, but I didn't quite catch it."

Handforth turned rather red.

"Fathead!" he sneered. "Don't you understand? I just spoke in your voice, and threw it over to you so that anybody would think you had been speaking!"

"My hat!" said McClure blankly. "Is my voice like that?"

He glanced at Church, and the latter winked. And from that moment a perfect understanding existed between them. If Handforth tried it on again, they would fall in with his scheme, and pretend that this ventriloquism was a complete success. It saved such a lot of trouble.

"Well, Handy, let's be going," said Handforth.

He looked at Church, and nodded.

"Right you are, old man," he went on. "We'll go!"

"Might as well," said McClure. "You need a throat tablet, old man. Your voice sounds a bit hoarse."

"It wasn't me speaking!" said Church, keeping it up.

"Wasn't you?" repeated McClure blankly. "Well, my hat! This is simply marvellous! I never heard anything like it!"

"Neither have I!" said Church truthfully.

Handforth roared with appreciation.

"It only just shows how I can fool everybody with this marvellous new accomplishment of mine," he said modestly. "You wouldn't believe what astounding things a ventriloquist can do! Of course, strictly speaking, it's a gift."

"Oh, rather!" said Church promptly.

"And no ordinary fellow could possibly learn it so quickly," went on Handforth. "But as you chaps know, I'm not ordinary."

"Rather not," said McClure. "You're extraordinary! And as for that ventriloquism of yours, it strikes me as being unearthly!"

Handforth gave him a suspicious glance.

"Hardly unearthly," he demurred. "As a matter of fact, it's just the result of careful training and painstaking practice. The most difficult part is to imitate somebody else's voice while throwing it."

"But doesn't it ever hurt?" asked McClure anxiously. "I mean, it's a bit risky to go throwing your voice about like that. It might dash up against something and get bruised!"

"Listen to this!" said Handforth. "I'm not going to tell you where this voice is coming from, but you'll know in a tick. It'll be a first-class demonstration of my startling power."

Church and McClure stood by, and Handforth cleared his throat.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, in a strained, rumbling voice. "Hallo, there! Better look out, because I'm coming down! And look out for soot! I'm coming down now—nearer and nearer!"

Handforth increased the loudness of his voice, and the effect was rather uncanny. It came from his own mouth all the time, and how in the name of all that was wonderful he could believe otherwise was a mystery that Church and McClure did not even attempt to fathom.

"Marvellous!" gasped Church, at length.

"Where did the voice come from?" demanded Handforth.

"Your mouth——"

"Eh?"

"I—I mean it must have come from your mouth, really!" panted Church hurriedly.

"But I'm blessed if it didn't seem to come from up the chimney! Marvellous, wasn't it, Clurey?"

"Marvellous isn't the word!" said McClure. "In fact, I'm not sure there isn't somebody up the chimney now!"

Handforth was overjoyed.

"There you are!" he said. "If that's not proof, what is? I didn't tell you where I was going to throw my voice, I didn't even mention the chimney, and yet you knew! It only shows you how easy it is to fool you!"

Church and McClure nodded, feeling that speech was somewhat too difficult under the circumstances. And they couldn't help thinking that Handforth found it much easier to fool himself than to fool them. He had apparently forgotten that he had given a valuable clue by mentioning soot.

The bell for morning lessons started ringing, and to Church and McClure it was like sweet music, for it signified their happy release. As a rule, they hated the sound of that bell with a wholesome loathing, but this morning the clang of it caused their faces to break into happy smiles.

"Lessons!" said Church dreamily. "Come on!"

He and McClure made a dash for the door, and escaped—even now dreading that Handforth would call them back, and put them through another test. But Handforth was so satisfied, that he had conceived a great idea.

If he could fool Church and McClure, why couldn't he fool the whole Remove? He would! The idea possessed him, and he nursed it lovingly. After all, where was the fun in just trying it on the dog, as it were? How much better to deceive the whole Form, including Mr. Crowell!

And Handforth made his decision lightly, little realising the dangerous path upon which he had elected to tread. In a measure, it was the fault of his chums, for they had left him undeceived.

The Remove was not in the happiest of moods that morning.

Rain always seemed to make the fellows a bit gloomy, and there were many glares cast up at the sky, through the long windows, as the juniors took their places.

Some were thinking of the circus that afternoon. Rain, after all, is a very necessary factor, but it is not to the liking of circus proprietors. But it was no good grumbling. There's one thing that grumbling never alters—and that's the weather. And yet, curiously enough, people grumble at the weather more than anything else in the world.

"Good-morning, boys!" said Mr. Crowell briskly, as he entered the Form-room.

"We've seen you before, sir," said Pitt.

"Quite so—quite so!" replied Mr. Crowell.

"You are apparently very sharp this morning, Pitt. A rainy day, but all the better for work, eh? I rather like rain, because it settles the class for steady labour."

The class was inclined to disagree, but held its tongue.

Church and McClure were filled with keen anxiety. They observed, with horror, that Handforth's face was becoming red, and his neck muscles were standing out. He was about to throw his voice!

"My only hat!" breathed Church. "Oh, this is where the band plays!"

Handforth gave a preliminary grunt.

"Well, boys," he said thickly, "I think we'll take the geography lesson first. Get out your books at once!"

The class, to a man, stared at Handforth in blank surprise. Mr. Crowell nearly dropped his pince-nez, and his jaw sagged.

"What did you say, Handforth?" he demanded curtly.

"Who—me?" gasped Handforth, startled. "Nun-nothing, sir!"

"Nothing!"

"I—I mean——" Handforth paused, horrified, and dimly suspecting that something had gone wrong. "Did it sound as if I spoke, sir?"

"To be exact, Handforth, it sounded as if you were choking!" snapped Mr. Crowell.

"Is anything the matter with you, my boy? Your throat appears to be hoarse. And what was that you were saying about geography?"

"Nun-nothing, sir!" said Handforth feebly.

"Then let me hear no more of this nonsense!" said the Form-master. "Boys, get to work. The first lesson is history."

Handforth sank back in his chair, feeling faint and trembling. He had meant to startle the class by putting words into Mr. Crowell's mouth. But, for some remarkable and inexplicable reason, his voice had refused to throw itself.

Church and McClure understood perfectly, because they knew that Handforth's voice could no more be thrown than St. Paul's Cathedral could be lifted with one hand. But Handforth was mystified.

And the class, after several more stares at Edward Oswald, got to work.

CHAPTER III.

GIVING HANDY A HELPING HAND.



RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD shuffled his feet uncomfortably.

"Come, come, Fullwood!" said Mr. Crowell. "Sharply, my boy—sharply! Answer the question at once!"

"Do—do you mind repeating it, sir?" said Fullwood desperately.

"I want you to tell the class the exact date upon which James Scott, the Duke of Monmouth, landed in England to conduct his insurrection, and at which port," said Mr. Crowell. "You should have the answers on the tip of your tongue."

"Yes, sir," said Fullwood sheepishly.

He stood there, helpless and supremely self-conscious. Fullwood was usually most self-possessed, but if there was one thing he hated more than another, it was to be singled out in the class and requested to answer a question to which he had no reply.

"Stand up at once!" commanded the Form-master. "How dare you interrupt in that manner while I am questioning Fullwood?"

"I—I didn't speak, sir!" gasped Handforth desperately. "It was Fullwood, you know! Didn't you hear his voice?"

"Boy, are you deliberately attempting to play a joke upon me?" demanded Mr. Crowell. "I cannot possibly overlook this offence—a most flagrant example of insolence. You will take five hundred lines!"

"Oh, great pip!" said Handforth hoarsely.

"Do not make those ridiculous ejaculations!" snapped Mr. Crowell. "You may sit



By some impish trick Handforth landed in the centre of the pigs' feeding-trough, in which was a quantity of bran, potato peelings, and other choice vegetable odds and ends.

Handforth suddenly looked tense.

Here was another chance for him—and a chance to reveal his powers to the full! He knew the answer to that question—or thought he did—and Fullwood was still silent. A glorious opportunity to put words in his mouth!

"Got it, sir!" said Handforth, throatily and loudly. "The Duke of Monmouth landed at Southampton, and the date was February 31st, 1762."

The class gave one roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Handforth!" thundered Mr. Crowell.

"Yes, sir?" said Handforth, startled.

down— No, just one moment! Did you give me what you assumed to be a correct answer to the question I asked Fullwood?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Repeat it!"

"It was about the Duke of Monmouth, sir," said Handforth, with a gulp. "He—he landed at Southampton on February 31st—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you so ignorant that you do not know that February never has more than twenty-nine days?" stormed Mr. Crowell.

"Oh, my goodness! I'd forgotten that, sir!" breathed Handforth.

"Your answer is wrong in every detail, and your lack of knowledge is appalling!" said Mr. Crowell. "You will take another five hundred lines for such a display of ignorance. You will write 'Monmouth landed at Lyme Regis on June 11th, 1685,' and I shall require those lines, carefully and neatly written, before you will be allowed to leave the school premises."

"But—but the circus, sir!" gasped Handforth, horrified.

"The circus is no concern of mine!" stormed Mr. Crowell. "I will make you understand that I am not to be trifled with! Sit down! You may sit down, too, Fullwood!"

"I thought what it would come to!" muttered Church. "The fathead's properly put himself in a mess now! Let's hope he'll chuck up this ventriloquism for good!"

But Church and McClure were unduly optimistic if they assumed this. However, Handforth made no further attempts during morning lessons, but went through his work in a bemused kind of condition.

As soon as lessons were over, he passed out of the Form-room, and was by no means overjoyed to come face to face with his minor. Willy was looking particularly cheerful.

"I've been waiting for you, slowcoach,"

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Mr. Crowell, thoroughly exasperated, dropped his glasses, stooped to pick them up, bumped his head on the corner of the desk, and nearly knocked his chair flying. The Remove looked on with keen enjoyment.

But Handforth was an exception. He sat in his place, dazed.

"You oughtn't to have done it, old man," whispered Church. "That ventriloquism of yours isn't perfect enough yet."

It was an unwise thing to say, but for once Handforth took it listlessly. He sat back in his place, dazed and bewildered. A thousand lines! And they had to be written before he left the school premises! So much for his marvellous ventriloquism!

he said briskly. "Look here, I've got a new stunt for this afternoon——"

"There'll be no afternoon!" said Handforth, in a hollow voice.

"No afternoon?" repeated Willy. "Well, we live and learn! Is the world coming to an end at dinner-time, or what?"

"Don't try to be funny—there's tragedy in the air!" said his major, in a voice that quivered. "I've got to do a thousand lines for old Crowell. The beast dropped on me——"

"Phew!" whistled Willy. "A thousand lines! Well, the best way is to divide 'em up, and do a hundred a day——"

"They've all got to be turned in before

"I can leave the school," interrupted Handforth tragically. "The whole lot! I've worked it all out, and it'll take me all the afternoon, and right up until bed-time. We can't do our show to-day at all—and that means that the circus'll have to close down!"

"Hardly as bad as that, old man," said Willy. "At a pinch, I dare say they could get along without us. Of course, you're a pie-can for letting yourself in for an impo like that—but, after all, we expect it. The surprising thing is you haven't fallen in the cart before."

"Go away!" said Handforth dully. "I haven't got the strength to biff you now! Clear off! You worry me! I'm a physical and mental wreck!"

"You're a mental wreck all right," agreed Willy promptly. "Always have been, if it comes to that. Although, when you come to think of it, a chap can't very well wreck something he hasn't got. But where's your stamina? You—the most important chap in the Remove—where's your pep? Ted, I'm surprised at you—I'm disappointed! I thought better things of you!"

And Willy turned his head away, and gave one or two choking sobs.

"Better not goad him now!" whispered Church, who was standing by. "He's not such a physical wreck as he makes out—"

"To think that Ted should knuckle under like this!" said Willy brokenly. "My major—the chap I've always looked upon as a tower of strength! He calmly throws up the sponge, and decides to leave the circus in the lurch! This is the saddest blow of my life!"

"What else could I do, idiot?" hooted Handforth, exasperated.

"What else?" repeated Willy. "You ask that! You! A chap with a brain like a thousand horse-power dynamo! What you've got to do, Ted, is to write those lines and deliver them before two-thirty this afternoon."

"A thousand lines—in less than two hours?" sneered Handforth.

"Nothing easier!" said Willy calmly. "What's more, you'll be able to squash dinner in, too. And if you don't know how it's going to be done, I'll tell you. This, in fact, is where Little Willy walks right into the centre of the stage and grabs all the limelight!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE LINE MACHINE.



HANDFORTH stared aggressively.

"You cheeky young f a t h e a d!" he

snapped. "You think you're jolly clever, don't you?"

"Yes!" said Willy

promptly. "And so will you, when you've seen something. I'm a modest chap, as a

rule, but just at the moment I've got every reason to regard myself as one of the world's master-minds. Come along to Study D, and we'll proceed with the doings."

Handforth was feeling too miserable to object. The imposition of a thousand lines had knocked him all of a heap, and he hadn't recovered from the shock. It had occurred to him that he might ignore the impo and sneak to the circus. But, after all, this would only be aggravating the offence. And, sooner or later, it would mean a visit to the Head's study, with, perhaps, a gating for a week. And such a thought was stupefying. The only way was to get the lines done, and be more careful in future.

Study D was reached, and Willy was looking grave.

"Now, I don't want you chaps to think that I'm fooling," he said briskly. "Just stay here for five minutes, and I'll be back. And I guarantee that all those lines will be finished on time."

He hurried off, and Handforth and Co. looked at one another without any particular enthusiasm. The position appeared to be quite hopeless, and it was no good relying on the promises of a mere fag.

"I expect the young ass has got one of those silly duplicators," growled McClure. "But they're no good. Old Crowell's got an eye like a hawk, and he'd see through the wheeze in a jiff. He always wants his lines written in ink, and you can't fool him!"

Handforth nodded despondently.

"I've tried it, goodness knows," he said. "But Crowell's a proper beast when it comes to lines. Sometimes you chaps have helped me by doing some, but Crowell's always detected the difference—and in the end I've had the impo doubled."

"You ought to be more careful—" began Church.

"If you start grumbling, I'll chuck you out of the study!" snorted Handforth. "I'm not feeling very agreeable. I've got to write a thousand lines, and they'll take me—"

"Here we are!" interrupted Willy, slipping in through the doorway. "Don't mind if I turn the key, do you? This thing's got to be kept private. And, what's more, you fellows must pledge yourself to secrecy."

Willy placed a bulky parcel on the table, and proceeded to remove the wrappings. And a moment later he revealed an extraordinary-looking apparatus—an ingeniously constructed affair of finely balanced wires and wooden stays, and the whole thing was mounted upon a wooden base that looked suspiciously like a pastry-board.

"What's all this?" demanded Handforth suspiciously.

"My patent line machine!" said Willy proudly.

"Your which?" shouted Handforth and Co. in unison.

They stared at the thing with greater interest. It gradually became apparent to them that there were no less than ten penholders fitted to the contrivance, and there were ten tiny inkpots sunk into the base—one opposite each pen. Willy proceeded to fill these inkpots from a big bottle which he pulled from his pocket.

"But—but what is it?" gasped Handforth, impressed.

"The average exercise paper has exactly twenty lines," said Willy, assuming the air of a lecturer. "In fact, all the exercise paper we use is of that size. These pens are fitted into the machine at precisely equal distances—one line from another. Thus, with one operation, ten lines are written, and by merely writing two lines a whole page is instantly filled."

"Great pip!" said Handforth blankly.

"A bit wonderful, eh?" grinned Willy.

"It would be wonderful if it worked!" said Church dubiously. "But you can't kid me, my lad! The thing's impossible—it's too complicated—"

"You chump! I've been using it for a week!" interrupted Willy. "Old Suncliffe has been puzzled out of his wits for days past! This machine is the greatest invention of the age!"

"And it really does—work?" asked Handforth breathlessly.

"Try it!" said Willy, with a wave of his hand. "But be careful, because it's delicate. Used with care, it operates perfectly. Instead of writing a thousand lines, you'll only have to do a hundred. And if you get a hustle on, you'll have a third of 'em done before dinner."

Handforth was suddenly revived. Church and McClure were excited, too. A sheet of exercise paper was placed in position upon the board—which was carefully marked, so that there could be no mistake. And Handforth lifted the master-handle, which acted as a pen-holder for the ten nibs, and prepared to write.

But Willy took it out of his hands and gave a demonstration. He wrote "An example of what the line machine can do," and, to the amazement of the others, the words appeared ten times on the paper, all exactly the same, and in unison. The demonstration was startling.

"Why, it's—it's the most marvellous thing I've ever seen!" panted Handforth excitedly. "Where did you get it from, you young bounder?"

"Made it!" said Willy briefly.

"You—you made it? Who gave you the idea?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I borrowed the idea," replied Willy, with perfect frankness. "I happened to go into a pawnshop in Bannington. I was short of cash, and I popped my watch for two bob. The mean rotters—a solid silver watch, too—"

"A silver watch!" interrupted Handforth, with a start. "That's my watch! Do you

mean to tell me you've pawned my giddy ticker?"

"Oh, don't make a fuss over nothing!" said Willy impatiently. "I had to have some money, hadn't I? I can't walk about broke, I suppose? Anyhow, the watch wouldn't go—"

"I gave it to you to take to the watch-maker!" howled Handforth. "And instead of taking it there you pawn the giddy thing! I've never heard of such nerve in all my life!"

"We won't argue about it," said Willy calmly. "Here's the ticket; all you've got to do is to go and redeem your ticker for two-and-a-penny. All this fuss over a penny! I believe it's only a halfpenny, really. Well, when the chap made out the ticket I was impressed. He used a funny kind of pen with three nibs in it, and three inkpots."

"My hat!" said Handforth.

"So I thought it would be a good wheeze to make a pen like that with ten nibs," went on Willy. "It took me over a week, and I had one or two failures, but it works beautifully now. And I pledge you chaps to silence, because if this leaks out, there'll be a rush for it."

Willy had good cause to feel proud of himself, for that apparatus was an exceedingly ingenious device, and all the more commendable because it was manufactured from odds and ends.

"But look here, about my watch—" began Handforth.

"Never mind your watch—you gave it to me a fortnight ago, and you would have forgotten all about it if I hadn't mentioned the pawnbroker's," said Willy. "You've got another watch, so what are you grumbling at? And you're wasting time! Get busy on those lines!"

And Handforth, without another word, obeyed.

CHAPTER V.

THE LITTLE QUEEN OF THE RING.



MR. CROWELL adjusted his glasses rather agitatedly.

"Good gracious!" he murmured. "This—this is incredible!"

In his hand he held a great sheaf of exercise paper—fifty pages, to be exact. They were all filled with Handforth's handwriting—neat, tidy, and surprisingly well executed. Indeed, Mr. Crowell had never before seen lines written with such uniform precision.

"A thousand, sir," said Handforth nervously. "Just finished, sir. Can I hurry off now, sir? The other chaps have gone, and they've arranged to have my circus act delayed a bit. The show's started

already, and I shall only just get there in time—"

"Wait, Handforth—wait!" said Mr. Crowell curtly.

They were in the Remove Form-room, and afternoon lessons were already in progress. The majority of the Removites were at work, and although they looked at Handforth and Mr. Crowell curiously, they couldn't hear what was going on.

A limited number of the juniors—those who were connected with the circus—were allowed the privilege of putting in two hours' work before breakfast, so that they should have their afternoons free. As it was only a temporary arrangement, the Head had not objected.

"This—this is extraordinary," said Mr. Crowell. "It is, in fact, impossible! You could not have written these lines in the time, Handforth. I had made up my mind to reduce your imposition by half, feeling that it was rather too severe—but I was not going to tell you of my decision until tea-time. But the full thousand lines are here! It is beyond my comprehension!"

"They're all right, sir, aren't they?" asked Handforth.

Mr. Crowell made no reply, but continued to closely examine the pages of exercise paper. The lines were not merely all right, but exceptionally good, and it was impossible for Mr. Crowell to grumble at them. But he certainly wanted an explanation of this seemingly impossible feat.

"Tell me, Handforth, how did you write these lines in such a short space of time?" asked the Form-master. "My own common-sense assures me that you could not have performed the task alone. It is absolutely impossible. How did you write them?"

"With my own hand, sir," said Edward Oswald truthfully.

"You are not attempting to deceive me?" demanded Mr. Crowell. "You have not employed a duplicator—"

"Oh, come off it, sir!" protested Handforth indignantly. "Can't you see that these lines are genuine? I wrote them all in ink—every one! And I wrote them all with a pen."

"Without assistance?" asked Mr. Crowell, sharply.

"Positively, sir! They're all in my own handwriting—honour bright!" said Handforth earnestly.

"Upon my soul!" murmured Mr. Crowell, startled.

He knew Handforth to be an absolutely truthful boy, and his statements were perfectly definite. Mr. Crowell was more mystified than he would care to admit, and he felt quite helpless. And it was impossible to detain Handforth longer, for the whole imposition was done. But somehow Mr. Crowell could not help feeling that it was a kind of double imposition.

"Er—ahem! You may go, Handforth," said the Form-master mildly.

Handforth went—like a streak. He had been on tenterhooks all the time, fearing that Mr. Crowell would jump to the truth, or that he would ask some awkward questions which could not be evaded.

In the corridor Handforth ran into his minor.

"All serene?" asked Willy crisply.

"Yes; but the old beggar doesn't know whether he's on his head or his heels," grinned Handforth. "Properly floored him, by George! He just stared at those lines, and his old gimlet eyes nearly goggled out!"

"What did I tell you?" chuckled Willy. "That machine of mine is worth a bit, eh? But you'll keep it mum, won't you?"

"Rather!" said Handforth. "Come on, let's shoot off—"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Willy. "Ten bob, my lad!"

"Eh?"

"It ought to be a quid—but I'll let you off lightly with ten bob."

"Why, you—you—" Handforth paused, glaring at his minor. But the indignation died out of his gaze, and he drove a hand into his pocket.

"Well, by George, you deserve it!" he said heartily. "There's your quid—and I only make one stipulation. Take this giddy pawnticket, and get that watch out. I wouldn't be seen dead inside a pawnshop!"

"Snob!" said Willy. "What's the matter with the pawnshop? It's a place of business, just like any other establishment. I've no patience with people who sneer at pawabrokers."

"We won't argue about it," growled Handforth, as they moved down the passage. "By the way, what have you done with that machine of mine?"

"Yours?"

"Yes; that line machine—"

"I've stowed it away where it can't be found," interrupted Willy.

"That's good; we've got to be careful with it," said Handforth. "For two pins, some of the other fellows would come along and claim the credit for it. It's one of the smartest things I've ever thought of. In fact, I've a good mind to have it patented."

Willy swayed slightly.

"That you thought of?" he repeated in a weak voice.

"My hat! You're not going to claim the credit for it, I suppose?" asked Handforth impatiently. "I'll admit you made the thing, but that's nothing. It's the idea that counts. And I thought the whole thing out weeks ago. Only it was sort of subconscious, and didn't take shape until—"

"Until you saw mine, already made?" grinned Willy. "All right, we'll let it pass. No good arguing."

"In any case, it's mine," said Handforth. "I've bought it—"

"Bought it?" gasped Willy.

"Didn't I give you a quid for it two minutes ago?"

"Here—take the quid!" snorted Willy, dragging it out of his pocket. "I thought this was just for the use of it! I don't mind selling it to you, but I shall want ten bob a week, regularly, for the rest of the term, in addition to this quid!"

"Why, you—you young Shylock!" said Handforth indignantly.

They passed out of the Ancient House, still squabbling, mounted their bicycles, still squabbling, and the argument was still in full blast when they arrived in Bannington, at the circus meadow.

Here everything was quiet and peaceful, except for the occasional roars of laughter, or bursts of applause, which sounded from the big tent. A full audience was watching the performance, and at the moment Tessa was in the ring.

Handforth and Willy were due to appear next, in their special lion act, and Johnny Onions came hurrying out to hustle the pair up.

"Thank goodness you've come!" said Johnny briskly. "You've only got ten minutes to change. I'm just going in to finish up Tessa's act with a new sensational stunt. This is the first time we've tried it, and it ought to go down well."

"Not dangerous for Tessa, is it?" asked Willy bluntly.

"No; but it looks like it," replied Johnny.

He hurried off, and Handforth and Willy went to their own dressing tent.

The Remove fellows—over a dozen, including myself—were helping the Onions brothers enthusiastically in making this circus a success. We had first appeared in the ring at Helmford, and were continuing our services.

Johnny and Bertie Onions had been at the River House School during the previous term, but their father had met with bad fortune, and his terrible losses on the Stock Exchange had caused him to have a stroke, and he now lay helpless in bed, partially paralysed.

And Johnny and Bertie, coming up to the scratch with a will, were running the circus on their own. Mr. Simon Snayle, the manager, was more of a hindrance than a help, and he had already inspired the enmity of St. Frank's fellows.

But he was endured mainly for the sake of Tessa Love—his pretty, fifteen-year-old niece. Being the only girl in the whole show, she was naturally the queen of the ring, and just at the moment she was proving her full claim to the title.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ACT SENSATIONAL.



TESSA, looking more like a fairy than a human being, was careering round the ring on Bess, her beautiful bay mare. Both horse and rider worked in perfect unison, and gained the admiration of all.

Tessa was attired in some flimsy muslin material which made her look even more dainty and sweet than she actually was. She was riding bareback, Bess having no saddle or harness of any kind. And Tessa was performing some very clever evolutions while changing from one foot to the other at full speed.

The ringmaster had practically nothing to do, except to look impressive, which was his job. I happened to be the ringmaster, and I was watching Tessa with as much admiration as anybody else, and with just a little anxiety for the girl's safety.

She was quite all right at present, but on this particular afternoon she intended introducing a new finale—one that had never before been performed in public, or without the customary safeguards which were always used at practice.

Johnny Onions appeared now, and he unobtrusively climbed a rope, and seated himself upon a trapeze which hung ready. It was fairly low, and Johnny proceeded to swing himself backwards and forwards, until at length he was swaying across the tent with considerable speed.

A few moments later he lowered himself head downwards, allowing his feet to grip the ropes of the trapeze. It was a perfectly safe position for a trained gymnast, but it always looks risky.

This was my cue, and I immediately cracked my whip, and moved to the centre of the ring.

"Ladies and gentlemen, Tessa will now perform one of the most difficult feats ever attempted in the ring," I announced.

The audience prepared itself for something startling, and watched with greater interest than ever. Bess was galloping round the ring at an increased speed, with Tessa standing on her unstable perch, gazing upwards at the swinging figure of Johnny.

The precise moment arrived.

Tessa came galloping round the ring at exactly the same second as Johnny swooped down on his long swing, and Tessa held her arms outstretched as high as she could. It was timed to perfection.

Johnny's fingers gripped Tessa's slim wrists, and the girl was lifted clear from the mare's back and swung away with Johnny across to the other side of the tent. The audience was already applauding.

But the climax had not yet been reached. Bess galloped on at the same speed round the ring, and as she neared the completion

of the circle the trapeze swung down on its return journey. And Johnny Onions thrilled with pleasure.

His judgment was perfect, and he knew that everything was going well.

"Now!" he said softly.

With a quick twist, he released Tessa, and the very nature of Johnny's swing caused the slim girl to perform a slow, graceful somersault in mid-air. The audience gave a combined gasp of consternation and wonder.

Tessa came out of the somersault and landed with amazing precision on the back of the galloping mare. For one second she swayed, recovered her balance, and then rode through the ring to the accompaniment of storms of applause.

"Splendid!" I said enthusiastically, as Tessa leapt nimbly to the ground and bowed.

"Congratulations, Miss Tessa!"

"Thanks!" she said, flashing a smile at me.

A moment later she had lightly leapt to the back of her horse again and trotted serenely out of the ring.

The audience clapped and shouted for her return.

The sensational act had met with a greater success than even Johnny had anticipated. But only Johnny and Tessa knew of the painstaking work that had been necessary to perfect that stunt, which, from first to last, occupied less than a bare minute.

Its safety and success depended solely upon keen judgment and strong nerve. And both Tessa and Johnny, having been practically brought up to circus life, possessed abundant stores of these qualities.

A glance had told Johnny that nothing could go wrong, and Tessa's somersault had been more or less easy. But the precise synchronisation of trapeze artists, girl, and horse were exceedingly impressive to the onlooker. It was this that created the success.

"It's too jolly risky!" declared Handforth indignantly, as Tessa came into the entrance tent, looking flushed and happy. "Look here, Miss Tessa, you mustn't do that trick again."

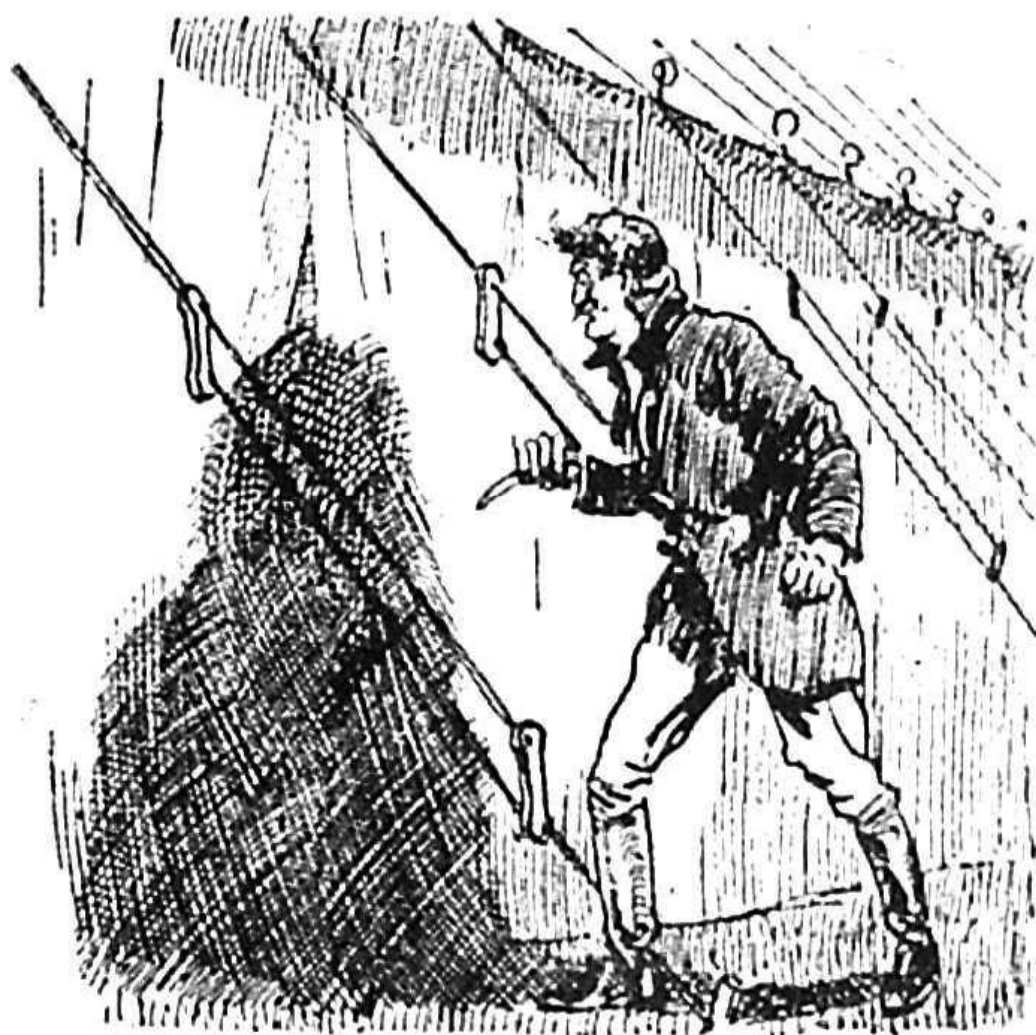
"Don't be silly," laughed Tessa. "It's perfectly safe. I can always trust to Johnny's judgment. If Bess isn't in the exact position we shall simply wait until he makes another circuit of the ring, that's all. But it looks ever so much better to do it straight off."

"But supposing you missed the gliddy horse altogether?" asked Handforth.

Tessa laughed.

"Well, supposing I did?" she asked. "It wouldn't hurt me, you goose! I should only land in the sawdust, and that wouldn't be fatal, would it? It would only half spoil the trick."

Handforth only grunted, and Tessa was unable to wait longer, for the audience was clamouring for her to return. Handforth



With a high-pitched cackle, Mr. Snayle brought the edge of the knife down upon the nearest stay rope.

was feeling somewhat indignant inwardly. For one thing, it was the first time he had ever been called a goose, and it had rather bowled him over. He thought Tessa was a pretty nice girl, as girls go; but Handforth had a kind of scorn for all young ladies, with the solitary exception of Irene Manners, of the Moor View School. She was in a class apart. Tessa was just a girl, and nothing more.

Again she came tripping out of the ring, having taken another bow. And Handforth decided that this sort of thing had better stop. It was a bit of a nerve, anyhow. A mere girl gaining all this applause! And here was he—Handforth—waiting to go into the ring!

So Edward Oswald marched in, with all the pompous dignity that characterised his performance. He was dressed in the lion-tamer's uniform—a startling creation of red cloth and gold braid. Handforth thought he was impressive, but in reality he was funny. The fact that he didn't know this made him all the funnier.

He stood in the ring, bowing, and was intensely gratified by the storm of applause that greeted him. The audience was clapping, shouting, and making a tremendous uproar. Handforth bowed again and again, flushing with pleasure.

"I'm pretty popular, anyway," he said, glancing at me.

"Get out of here, you ass!" I muttered.

"They're yelling for Tessa!"

"Eh?" said Handforth blankly.

His vanity had received a rude shock, and it was hardly pleasing to discover that the uproar was not for him at all. In fact, he

wouldn't believe it until a number of patrons yelled for Tessa by name.

"We don't want this lion-tamer! We want Tessa!" roared somebody.

"Tessa! Tessa!"

Handforth, much to his mortification, was compelled to retire, and Tessa was forced to give an encore. This afternoon, more than ever before, she was undoubtedly the Queen of the Ring.

And Handforth stood just behind the curtains, boiling and bubbling with heat.

"Never knew such a giddy cheek!" he muttered fiercely. "Turned out of the ring! Turned out by a blessed girl! I don't know what things are coming to these days!"

Handforth considered that he was humiliated. It was nothing more nor less than a disgrace that he should be eclipsed by a girl! There was only one thing for it, and that was to improve his own act.

After all, wasn't he the biggest star in the show?

He wasn't, but he still had an idea that he was. And he made up his mind, then and there, to invent some new stunts that would make his position firm and secure. In other words, Edward Oswald Handforth was apparently on the look-out for trouble.

CHAPTER VII.

HANDFORTH TAKES A RIDE.



"**B**ETTER and better!" said Johnny Onions happily. "It's wonderful, considering that we are practically at the end of our stay here.

We shall soon be off for Caistowe, and yet we're getting crowded tents at every performance."

"Just the result of organisation," said Buster Boots. "It's the advertising that does it. This is what comes of having a good publicity man on the job."

I grinned.

"I'll admit that publicity has a great deal to do with it, Buster, but the show's the thing," I said. "We couldn't expect to have good audiences without a good show, no matter what publicity you engineered. In just the same way, a good show's no good if the public doesn't know about it. I think it's a case of honours divided."

"Well, perhaps you're right," admitted John Busterfield Boots. "I must say the show's getting better and better. That new act of Tessa's is a stunner. If only Handforth would put a little more pep into his work—"

"What's that?" said Handforth, coming up. "Why, you rotter—"

"There's nothing wrong with Handy, so don't you complain," interrupted Johnny. "That lion act of his gets the crowd every time."

"His!" interrupted Jerry Dodd. "It strikes me that Willy is the lion act! Willy plays the lion, and he does all the work. Handforth's only a kind of figure-head, by jings!"

"Oh, am I?" said Handforth darkly. "What about my strong man act? And it won't be long before I'm doing something bigger, too! I've got all sorts of ideas in my head—"

"Better keep them there, old man," suggested Reggie Pitt. "Ideas in your head are a lot better than ideas out of your head. They're liable to create ructions if they're allowed to roam about loose!"

"Of course, you're jealous!" said Handforth bitterly. "I'm not surprised. You fellows have got no inventive genius, and so you jeer at me because I'm so bristling with new stunts."

And he walked off in a huff, with his nose in the air. The others grinned appreciatively.

"Good old Handy! He means well," chuckled Pitt. "But if we let him have full rein, there's no telling what he'll get up to."

It was usual for the juniors to get on their bicycles and ride straight back to St. Frank's for tea. But this afternoon they were in no hurry, particularly as Jerry Dodd wanted to do some practising with his pony in the ring. Pitt and Grey and Archie and I went with him to look on.

"I don't want to be pessimistic, dear old lads, but the weather conditions strike me as being somewhat mouldy," observed Archie Glenthorne. "I mean to say, the air is dashed sultry, and there's a kind of bally heaviness that bodes ill. Rather good, what? I mean, bodes ill! A snappy term, as it were."

"In a nutshell, Archie, there's a thunderstorm about," I said.

"Absolutely!"

"We've been expecting thunderstorms for over a week now," said Church. "But they always seem to steer clear at the last minute. I don't suppose there'll be any violent change in the weather."

And the subject was dismissed, although it had not been brought up without reason. The sun was still shining, but there was a curious, heavy haze in the air that could not be mistaken. Not a breath of wind stirred, and the air was full of hovering midges and gnats. The heat was close and oppressive, and the whole countryside seemed to be brooding under some threat.

Within the big tent, however, we forgot the weather conditions, and watched Jerry Dodd with interest. His little pony, Bud, was an exceedingly clever animal, and the manner in which he picked up new tricks was surprising. Jerry Dodd was a patient teacher, and by dint of much perseverance, he had already improved his performance immensely. The little pony seemed almost human in its understanding of his master.

Bud, in fact, was becoming one of the most popular acts of the circus.

Handforth had been mooching about the ring when we entered, and he stopped to watch the proceedings, and after a bit he was inclined to be sarcastic.

"I'm blessed if I can see why you make such a fuss of that giddy pony," he said bluntly. "He's a nice little beggar, but he's not half so tricky as you make out, Dodd. Anybody could ride him, and put him through those tricks."

"Don't be an ass, old man," said Church. "Bud only takes notice of his master. If anybody else ordered him about, he wouldn't give any sign of obeying. He knows Jerry's voice, and he'll even take notice of Jerry's nod. But he ignores everybody else."

"He won't ignore me!" said Handforth tartly.

"Like to try him?" asked Jerry Dodd obligingly.

Handforth accepted the invitation, and was rather glad of the opportunity to prove that he was just as capable of controlling the pony as Jerry himself. And Handforth rather fancied himself in the saddle.

He mounted the pony and sat astride stiffly.

"Now then, my lad, go round the ring and do that counting business with your feet," said Handforth, patting Bud on the neck. "Go on! Get a move on, blow you! Gee-up!"

He slapped Bud on the flank, but Bud remained as immovable as a stone horse. He showed absolutely no sign of life—except for the fact that his ears and eyes were on the alert in Jerry Dodd's direction.

"Fine!" said Pitt, clapping. "Look at Handy giving an imitation of Wellington on his charger! You'd think they were made of stone."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth turned rather red.

"Hi! Get a move on!" he roared, jogging up and down. "Bud, you rotter, start walking—and keep on walking!"

"He thinks he's Felix!" said Pitt, grinning.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth felt very foolish, for, after his boasting words, his performance was somewhat inadequate. He couldn't very well put Bud through his paces if the pony wouldn't even move!

And Bud remained perfectly still, his four legs splayed out, and he stood there, obstinate and fixed. Jerry Dodd had always taught him to adopt this attitude when a strange rider got on his back. And Bud knew his master by the very touch.

Jerry Dodd gave a brisk nod.

And Bud, with a snort of understanding, put his head down, and started racing round the ring so abruptly that Handforth was nearly somersaulted over backwards. He managed to recover himself, however, and clung to the saddle for dear life.

"Stop, you rotter—stop!" he gasped frantically.

"There's no pleasing this chap," said Boots. "First of all he wants the pony to go, and now he wants it to stop! Go on, Handy! Let's see how you can make Bud do his tricks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth was in no condition to give Bud any orders. It was only by whole-hearted concentration that he kept himself in the saddle. It would be a final humiliation if he allowed himself to be thrown.

"All right, Bud! Let it go!" said Jerry cheerfully.

The pony altered his tactics on the instant. Instead of continuing round the ring, he swerved abruptly, made a bee-line for the exit, and went racing outside at a gallop, with Handforth clinging to him like glue!

CHAPTER VIII.

FOOD FOR THE PIGS.



TESSA paused on the steps of her little caravan, and smiled as Bud went careering across the meadow, with Handforth on his supple back. And Edward Oswald saw that smile, and it made him go all weak.

If there was one thing he disliked more than another, it was to look ridiculous in the eyes of the fair sex, and, confirmed optimist though he was, he couldn't help realising that at the present moment he cut a very ludicrous figure.

The worst of it was he had no reins, and all he could do was to cling to the stirrups with his feet, to Bud's ribs with his knees, and to the front of the saddle with his hands.

It would be nothing short of tragic if he were to be thrown, in full public gaze, and with Tessa looking on, too! Handforth wished with a large amount of fervour that he had left Bud very severely alone.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

We came crowding out of the tent, and looked on with real enjoyment as the pony went galloping round the big meadow, with apparently no intention of stopping. If Handforth thought the incident distressing, the spectators did not share his opinion.

"It'll do him good," said Church, with relish. "Handy's always better after somebody has taken him down a peg or two. He needs an experience like this once in a while to bring him down to the proper level."

"That pony won't hurt him, I suppose?" asked McClure.

"Hurt him? No. He'll probably end up by pitching Handy into the River Stowe, or something like that, but that's only a detail."

In the meantime, Handforth was working

frantically to get Bud under control, and he was finding the task quite beyond his powers. He shouted, he threatened, he cajoled, all to no purpose. Bud, like the celebrated Felix, kept on going—only, instead of walking, he galloped.

As Bud came tearing round the meadow again, Handforth descended to a plain appeal, although it hurt his pride sadly to do so.

"I say, Jerry, can't you stop the beast?" he roared as Bud thundered by.

"All right—soon!" shouted Jerry. "But we must let Bud take his exercise first. There's nothing he likes better than a gallop."

The pony swung past the gateway, and here, indeed, Handforth was the nearest he had been to falling off. For, to his horror, he beheld three dainty young ladies in the act of dismounting from their bicycles. They were all dressed in white, and looked quite charming.

"Irene!" moaned Handforth unhappily.

His cup of bitterness was full. The girls were Irene Manners and Marjorie Temple and Doris Berkeley, of the Moor View School. Of course, it was just fate that had brought them along to the circus at this unfortunate moment. And it was a worse fate that sent Willy to their side.

"Just in time!" said Willy, as he raised his cap.

"Just in time for what?" asked Irene.

"To see Ted putting Dodd's pony through his paces," grinned Willy. "At least, that's what Ted said. He doesn't seem to be very successful yet. I think he must be carried away by the importance of the occasion."

"He's carried away all right!" grinned Pitt as he hurried up. "Evening, girls! How do you like Handforth's riding?"

Handforth came swooping across the meadow at this moment, Bud keeping up the pace without any apparent effort. And Handforth had now given up all hope of stopping him, and was simply clinging to the saddle in a hopeless, resigned kind of way. His one determination, now was to stick there. To be thrown in Irene's presence would be a tragedy from which he would never recover.

"It's too bad!" said Irene, laughing. "Your brother doesn't seem to be able to stop the pony at all, Willy."

Willy shook his head.

"It's a sad case about Ted," he said gravely. "Somehow he's always starting things that he can't finish! I'll bet he's turning green and purple and all sorts of colours now that he's seen you. You're the

last person in the world he wanted to see, Miss Irene."

"Oh, indeed!" said Irene stiffly.

"Under these circumstances, I mean," explained Willy. "He hates to look silly in your eyes, you know. Of course, he can't help looking silly, because that's his natural expression. But when you come along, he always wants to be absolutely at his best. He's got a soft spot—"

"Don't be so silly!" interrupted Irene, blushing.

"Oh, all right! But I know," said Willy, with a nod. "In fact, he dreams about you! I even believe he writes poetry in secret."

And Willy, feeling that he had done his major a good turn, strolled away, and continued to watch Handforth's progress with keen appreciation. Bud was now showing signs of slackening down at last. And Handforth, hot, flustered, and entirely dishevelled, prayed that the ordeal was coming to an end.

It was, but hardly the end that Handforth would have chosen.

"Bud," shouted Jerry Dodd sharply, "you can stop now, old man."

The pony paused in his gallop at the sound of his master's voice, and then, instead of completing the circuit of the meadow, he started off in a bee-line for the farther hedge.

Handforth was startled at this change of tactics, and he became quite alarmed when he saw that the pony was racing for the hedge at full speed, as though he meant to go clean through it.

"Hi, stop, you beggar! Stop!" he gasped.

But Bud didn't stop. He kept straight on until, indeed, even the other spectators believed that he meant to crash through the hedge. But at the last moment he came to a sudden, abrupt standstill—obviously a premeditated move.

And Handforth shot out of the saddle like a stone from a catapult. He rose in the air, and went clean over the hedge, with his arms and legs flying. A yell of laughter went up as Handforth disappeared from sight, for there was little fear of the junior being hurt. A tumble on to the turf beyond the hedge was nothing to be afraid of.

Unfortunately, Handforth didn't land on the turf.

There was a kind of paddock adjoining the circus meadow—part of the grounds of a neighbouring farm. And this particular corner was devoted to a large number of pigs.

The sty was situated near at hand, but just against the hedge stood a long feeding trough. It was evening, and the pigs had just received their supper—a large, ample supply of bran mush.

And by some impish trick, Handforth flew over the hedge at this exact spot, turned two somersaults, and landed with really beautiful precision in the exact centre of the trough!

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The pigs scattered, scared and squealing. And Edward Oswald Handforth, having descended to the bottom of the trough to fully investigate the contents, rose in a sitting posture, smothered with bran, potato peelings, and other choice vegetable odds and ends!

CHAPTER IX.

DIPPY, THE DWARF.



STRANGELY enough, Handforth wasn't even hurt.

The trough of pig food had broken his fall perfectly. It was thick, puddingy stuff, and it had accepted him gently. But Handforth was a fearful sight as he struggled to his feet.

"Gug-gug-groooh!" he gurgled incoherently.

The pigs, having found that nothing had hurt them, were now turning back, thinking of their interrupted meal. But they didn't venture too close. They stood eyeing the intruder with many grunts and squeals.

Somehow or other, Handforth managed to get his eyes clear, and almost the first thing he saw was a long hedge, with a large number of heads above it, and looking over into the farmyard.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A yell of merriment went up from a dozen throats.

"Oh, my hat! Is that Handy?" shouted Church.

"Well, this only proved my contention," declared Reggie Pitt. "Last week Fullwood said that Handforth wasn't fit to live with pigs. And I said he was. This proves that I was right."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth shook his fist at the grinning faces, and a shower of mush went dripping down.

"You wait!" shouted Handforth, in a thick, bran-like voice. "Wait till I get hold of Jerry Dodd! I'm going to smash him! Can't you fatheads come over here and help me? I'm nearly dead! It's a wonder I'm not unconscious!"

Handforth nearly did go unconscious a moment later, for he caught sight of Irene and Co. looking at him from a gate, a little lower down. The very sight of them was enough to send him reeling.

He leapt out of the trough, and a few of the more venturesome pigs scuttled away, screaming frantically. And at the same moment a burly individual in gaiters and breeches, but with no coat, came striding up from the direction of the farm.

He was a gentleman with mutton-chop whiskers and a very red face—and he was known to all the circus crowd as the farmer himself. The circus bought all their dairy supplies at the farm, so the owner—Mr. Rawson—was well known to them.

"What's all this?" demanded Mr. Rawson angrily.

"It's no good asking me!" hooted Handforth.

"Then what be you a-doin' in that condition, young man?" asked the farmer. "You've bin in my pig trough—that's where you've bin! An' I'd like to know what ye mean by it!"

"Do you think I jumped in for a bath?" asked Handforth thickly. "It's a good thing for you I wasn't killed! If I had been, you would have had to pay me some heavy damages."

"Tain't no sort of use arguin', my lad," said Mr. Rawson. "You'll come along o' me—that's what you'll do! I'm going to take ye to Mr. Snayle, an' tell him I won't have this kind o' monkeyin'."

Handforth's humiliation was complete, for the farmer, careless of getting splashed, seized the junior by the coat collar, and hauled him along. And in this way they arrived at the adjoining gate just as Mr. Simon Snayle came marching up. To Handforth's relief, Irene and Co. had retired, but the juniors were still looking on.

"See here, Mr. Snayle, I've no quarrel with ye, but I'd like ye to keep your young boys out o' my pigs' trough!" said Mr. Rawson grimly. "And if ye'll take my advice——"

"I want no advice from you, Mr. Rawson!" snapped Snayle curtly. "This affair was nothing to do with me."

"Ain't you the manager of this show?"

"Well, yes——"

"Then you're the man I've got to speak to," said Mr. Rawson. "I ain't caused you no trouble since you've bin here, an' I don't want you to cause me none. That's all I've got to say."

"I tell you it's not my affair!" shouted Mr. Snayle.

"An' I tell ye it is!" roared the farmer. "It don't matter to me whether you knew what was goin' on or not, you're the manager, an' you're responsible. So I'll ask ye to be more careful in future. Look after these boys better, or mebbe there'll be some trouble——"

"Mind your own confounded business!" snarled Mr. Snayle.

The farmer started back at the other's tone.

"See here, Mr. Snayle, I ain't used to bein' talked to like that!" said Mr. Rawson angrily. "Ye'd best curb your tongue. I'm the injured party, an' by rights ye ought to apologise——"

"The injured party!" howled Handforth. "What about me?"

"Clear out of this meadow!" snapped Mr. Snayle, pointing to the gate. "You, I'm talking to!" he added roughly to the farmer. "If you think you can come here bullying, you've made a mistake!"

Mr. Rawson gasped.

"Why, dang my skin, it's me own meader!" he shouted indignantly.

"You're a liar!" roared Mr. Snayle. "We've hired it—and you've had the money! So get out while you're safe!"

The farmer went nearly purple.

"I don't allow no man to stand in front o' my face an' call me a liar!" he said furiously. "By gosh! You'll take that back, or I'll fight ye on the spot!"

"I'll take nothing back!" snarled Mr. Snayle.

Johnny Onions pushed forward, and his eyes were blazing.

"You'd better get back to your caravan, Mr. Snayle!" he said grimly. "You've been drinking—that's what's the matter with you! We're not going to have a quarrel here over nothing!"

He turned quickly to Mr. Rawson.

"Please don't take any notice," he added. "My brother and I are the owners of this circus, and we accept full responsibility for the mishap. We're sorry, Mr. Rawson, and if we've caused you any inconvenience, we apologise."

"Well spoken, young gent—well spoken!" said the farmer. "I'm a reasonable man, and it ain't my way to quarrel with anybody. But as for this man here, I won't be called a liar——"

"He's been drinking!" whispered Johnny. "Don't let us have a row, Mr. Rawson. Please take no notice."

The farmer, who wasn't at all a bad sort, nodded, and went back into his own paddock. And Mr. Snayle, with a glare of hatred at Johnny, stalked across the meadow to his own caravan.

"Thank goodness!" I said. "For a moment, I thought we were going to have ructions. Hallo! Where's Handy got to?"

But Handforth was marching away to get himself cleaned, and Jerry Dodd intercepted him. Just at that moment, Handforth was feeling quite ready to take hold of the Australian boy by the neck, and he could cheerfully have strangled him. But Jerry was concerned.

"I say, old man, awfully sorry!" he said, earnestly. "I'd no idea that Bud would pitch you over the hedge like that. I thought he would merely unseat you. Don't be wild about it, Handy!"

Handforth seemed to swallow something.

"You—you rotter!" he said thickly. "Are you apologising?"

"Well, yes, I reckon so."

"You rotter!" repeated Handforth. "I was going to smash you, and now I can't do it! You've dished me out of the pleasure of giving you two black eyes! All right! I'm not the chap to keep up a quarrel."

He gave a grunt, and walked off, and he vanished into one of the dressing-tents to give himself a thorough clean down. And it wasn't long before Bertie Onions appeared with a suit of his own flannels, and all the necessary articles of attire to make Handforth presentable again.

In the meantime, Mr. Snayle entered his caravan, fuming and cursing. Johnny had

been right. The manager had been drinking, and he didn't like to be reminded of it. He found the caravan occupied by Dippy, the dwarf—the repulsive looking handy man who prepared meals for the Onions brothers and their manager. Dippy was just tidying up.

"Get out of here, you ugly toad!" said Mr. Snayle harshly.

"Dippy just going, boss," said the dwarf. "Dippy been making things ship-shape."

"Get out, hang you!" thundered the other.

He aimed a kick at Dippy, and delivered a vicious back that caught the dwarf on the shins. The unfortunate fellow went reeling out through the open door, fell down the steps, and thudded to the ground.

"I'll learn you!" muttered Mr. Snayle, with an oath.

He snatched down a dog whip from a bracket, reeled outside, and brought the lash of the whip down with vicious force.

Slash! Slash! Slash!

The whip hissed through the air, and Dippy lay on the ground, writhing under that brutal, uncalled-for punishment!

CHAPTER X.

THE MYSTERIOUS OLD TRAMP.



"MY goodness!" said Buster Boots, staring.

Reggie Pitt and Johnny Onions and I were with him. We had just turned a corner of one of

the smaller tents, and the scene before us made our blood boil.

Lash! Lash! Lash!

Mr. Snayle was using the dog whip with cruel, devastating effect. Dippy squirmed on the ground like some helpless animal. The dwarf dared not move, in fact. He was using all his efforts to protect his hands and face. To get up and run would be to expose his head to these lashing cuts, and one of those swings of the whip might easily blind him.

"This," said Reggie Pitt, "is where we do a little butting-in."

With one accord, we dashed forward, and jumped upon Mr. Snayle from behind before he realised that we were near him. In a moment, he was pulled back, and the whip was snatched from him.

"You cowardly brute!" I shouted hotly.

"Hang you!" grated Mr. Snayle, panting heavily. "Do you dare——"

"You cur!" shouted Johnny Onions. "I'll see that this gets to the ears of my father, Mr. Snayle! You're not fit to clean Dippy's boots! You miserable hound!"

"Hold him, you chaps!" said Buster. "I've got the whip—let's give him some of his own medicine—and see how he likes it!"

"Hear, hear!" I said heartily.

I agreed with the suggestion, because I knew that a brute like Snayle would understand nothing better than the lash. It was his own favourite form of punishment, and to have the dog whip turned on himself would be a fitting reprisal.

And before Snayle could say anything further, he was thrown to the ground by three of us, and Boots got busy with the whip.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

"Yow! Yaroooh!" howled Mr. Snayle wildly. "You young demons! You infernal young brats—"

He reeled out a string of blasphemy, and

Then he dragged a whisky bottle towards him, and gulped down a large quantity of spirit.

Outside, we left the scene, feeling rather satisfied. We took the dog whip with us. And Dippy, nursing his hurts, had crawled into his own ramshackle caravan. He didn't notice a curious looking old tramp who had been lurking near the neighbouring hedge during the past few minutes.

Yet the old chap had been on the point of intervening just as Dippy was rescued from Mr. Snayle. But he remained in hiding when he saw that the task was being done better than he could do it.

The tramp was a curious looking specimen



Mr. Snayle was swept up by the kite-like monster and carried onwards at express speed.

Buster Boots wielded the whip with increased energy. The lash fell with stinging, burning force, and Simon Snayle howled and screamed for mercy.

"That's enough—let him go!" I said curtly.

Buster Boots stood back, and we released our hold. And Snayle, with a look that meant mischief, turned his face to us for a second. It was flushed and bloated, until its normal coarseness was trebly intensified.

Then he slunk into his caravan, slammed the door, and locked it. The first thing he did was to sink down upon a locker. He cursed wildly for a few moments, his skin burning with agony.

—unshaven, unkempt, and generally disreputable. But it was difficult to distinguish his features under his wide-brimmed slouch hat.

It was not the first time that the stranger had appeared at the circus. On one other celebrated occasion he had saved several of the juniors from falling victims to Simon Snayle's plotting.

And now he left the shelter of the hedge, slouched up to Dippy's caravan, and went inside. For some little time, he remained in the caravan, talking with the dwarf—who now forgot his pain, and whose eyes burned with sudden excitement. Soon after-

wards, the tramp took his departure and vanished.

Mr. Snayle drank heavily.

He couldn't trust himself to go out again, and he lay over his table, drinking drinking glass after glass of raw whisky, and becoming gradually but certainly drunk. And it took a good deal to get Mr. Snayle into an intoxicated condition. He was a heavy drinker always, and it was only on rare occasions—generally when he was in a vile temper—that he drank so much that he became unsteady.

The agony of his whipping was not so acute now, and the strong drink served to soothe his body while it inflamed his mind. Mr. Snayle sat there, nursing his grievance, and gathering up his hatred against Johnny Onions and all the St. Frank's juniors.

And in the midst of this, before he became absolutely incapable, an object fell with a clatter on his table, rebounding against a glass, and cracking it.

It was a stone, that had come through the open window.

"The young whelps!" muttered Snayle thickly.

For the moment, he believed that some of the boys had deliberately flung that stone through the window. And he was about to get up when something else came through.

And this time it was a rudely constructed arrow—just a blunt piece of wood with a split at the end. And in this cleft a small piece of paper was wedged, acting as a kind of rudder. It fell on the table, and Mr. Snayle stared at it rather blearily.

It came to his dulled wits that the stone had been merely a preliminary—to draw his attention to the second missile. He picked up the piece of wood, and disengaged the scrap of paper. There were some words upon it, and a fierce oath broke from the man's coarse lips.

His flushed, drink-sodden face paled under the influence of a sudden emotion—an emotion which was very akin to fear.

For that scrap of paper bore these words:

"You have been warned once. Take care!"

Mr. Snayle looked at the paper fixedly, and he had no difficulty in remembering the first occasion on which he had been warned. He had been about to half-murder Dippy for some imagined wrong, but his hand had been stayed by a mysterious communication very similar to this one.

Mr. Snayle crumpled the paper up in his hand, cursed loudly, and seized the whisky bottle again. It was empty, and he flung it down with a snarl of fear and rage.

Then he opened a small cupboard, brought out a fresh bottle, and opened it by the simple expedient of snapping the neck clean off—by striking it against the edge of the table.

He poured himself out nearly half a tumblerful of raw spirit, and sat there

drinking the stuff, and leering at the opposite wall. By all appearances, Mr. Simon Snayle was determined to drink himself into a state of insensibility. But so far his wits remained with him.

His back still smarted, and his befuddled brain could think of nothing else but the St. Frank's juniors, and the revenge that Mr. Snayle intended taking. He was becoming more murderous every minute, and his condition was—dangerous.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SUDDEN HURRICANE.



"LOOKS threatening," said Reggie Pitt, shaking his head.

"Yes, we're going to have it," agreed Jack Grey. "And I shouldn't be surprised if we get it within the next hour. Just look at those clouds rolling up in the west."

It was nearly time for the evening show to commence, and the weather conditions were threatening in the extreme. People were pouring steadily into the big tent, but they did not come in such masses as hitherto.

Undoubtedly, the weather was to blame.

A kind of premature darkness had begun to settle. The air was thick and absolutely still—uncannily heavy and oppressive. There was something threatening in the very appearance of the sky.

Overhead everything was clear—that is to say, there were no clouds, although the sky itself looked a dull, leaden colour. It was unnatural in its lowering aspect.

Away to the west, as Jack Grey had indicated, a dense cloudbank was making its appearance—slowly, insidiously. The clouds were so thick and impenetrable that they looked rather like an even range of inky black mountains. And they rose so slowly that they seemed to have no movement whatever. But, actually, they were gradually but surely rising, and developing along the entire horizon.

"We're going to get something big to-night," I remarked, joining the others. "Not an ordinary storm, if I'm any judge. There's something almost tropical about the appearance of this sky."

"It's a result of the heat these last two or three days," said Pitt. "It isn't right to have such hot weather in May, anyhow, and so we've got to pay for it. See that?"

A kind of flash had spurted out from the intensely black cloudbank, but it was so rapidly over that nobody else saw it. And now and again we felt, rather than heard, a kind of far-distant rumble.

It was so vague that nobody could actually say that there was any sound. But the air seemed to quiver, and the dead stillness of the atmosphere was so apparent

that the smoke from two of the caravans arose in perfectly straight columns and was lost in the haze above.

The result of these threatening conditions surprised nobody.

The townspeople preferred to remain indoors, and at opening time the big tent was only just over half-filled, and there was no prospect of a larger audience rolling up. And we had all anticipated a record crowd for to-night.

"It can't be helped," said Johnny Onions philosophically. "We must take the lean with the fat. We know the show's not to blame, anyhow, so we can be comfortable."

"Lot of cowards!" said Handforth contemptuously. "Afraid to come out, just because there might be a giddy storm! If I make up my mind to go anywhere, I go!"

"But it's different with these townspeople, old man," I said. "The majority bring children, and parents don't like to think of their youngsters getting soaked in a sudden thunderstorm. And there's one coming—without any question. If you ask me, the wise people are the ones who have stopped at home."

Johnny Onions grinned.

"Well, let's be thankful that some of them were unwise," he said.

And soon afterwards the performance commenced. In the tent, it was brilliant and lively. The glaring arc-lamps, the sustained interest of the show, and the blare of the band, all combined to make the people forget that a storm was brewing.

Indeed, it was not until a low, rumbling burst of thunder sounded during a lull in the orchestra that the audience remembered. But even then the thunder seemed far distant and isolated.

Outside a big change had taken place.

It was now nearly pitch dark—although, ordinarily, there would still have been plenty of twilight left. The massive cloudbank, creeping up so gradually, had spread over the sky until it had already passed the zenith.

And it had apparently remained the same, without thinning in the slightest degree. The clouds were black, inky, and dreadfully ominous. And the deadly calm remained oppressively over the countryside.

But there came a kind of lazy, listless movement in the air—just a heavy thrust of the atmosphere that caused the canvas of the tent to flap idly to and fro. And then the calm returned.

At intervals there would be dazzling flashes of lightning in the clouds—brilliant, startling displays of electricity that scared many of the good people who had been drawn out into their gardens to watch.

But in the tent, where the circus was merrily progressing, there seemed no danger at all. It was hot in there—oppressive and clammy—but the audience had absolutely no conception of the true conditions.

The occasional rumbles of thunder were by no means alarming. They only alarmed

the people who could see as well as hear. The show was about half over, and Tessa was in the ring, commencing her performance.

Handforth was standing in the entrance tent, dressed all ready for his lion-taming act—he was due in the ring after Tessa had finished. Willy came up and touched his brother on the arm.

"Look out for squalls," he said briefly.

"Eh?" said Handforth. "Look here, my lad, you'd better go and get ready for the show—"

"Plenty of time yet," said Willy. "Just come and squint outside, Ted. It's as black as ink, and, in my opinion, the storm's going to break pretty soon. I expect it'll come suddenly—just like one of those tropical cyclones."

"Rot!" said Handforth.

But he accompanied his minor to the exit, and they stood looking out across the dim, shadowy meadow. The darkness seemed weird and uncanny, and in the far distance there appeared to be a strange moaning sound.

"My hat!" said Handforth. "I didn't think it was so bad— Oh!"

He broke off with a startled exclamation, for at that second a blinding, appalling flash of lightning split the whole sky from zenith to horizon. It was one dazzling, flickering burst of purple flame.

Crash!

The clap of thunder which instantly followed shook Handforth and his minor as they stood. It deafened their ears, and left them tingling. The sound was like a devastating explosion, and the following rumble was startling in its roar.

"My goodness!" gasped Willy.

Within the tent the audience had received a shock. That deafening crash had seemed to shake the very ground—and the preceding flash of lightning had penetrated the tent, and even dimmed the glaring arc-lights. The audience was restless in a moment.

If the storm had developed gradually, nothing would have been thought of it—for people are not generally scared by a mere thunderstorm. But everybody within the tent had completely forgotten the weather conditions for the time being, and that fearful crack of thunder had reminded them.

Tessa's horse reared and swerved, nearly throwing her rider. It was only by sheer skill that Tessa saved herself from falling.

Bess was nervous, agitated, and difficult to manage. But Tessa continued her act with even greater perseverance than before. For she realised that it was up to her to keep the audience amused.

Several people left their places and made for the exit, but the majority kept their seats, although uneasy.

And then a second clap of thunder crashed out, and with it came the wind. Abruptly, unexpectedly, without any preliminary warning, the wind struck the big tent like something solid and tangible.

One moment all had been calm, and the next moment the gale was shrieking and whistling round the canvas walls like a million demons. The canvas sagged in and out, booming and slatting.

The great canvas dome of the tent even seemed in danger of being lifted bodily away, but all the stay-ropes held, and the tent remained intact.

It was a trying time for Tessa. Uneasy inwardly, she preserved an appearance of perfect tranquillity, continuing her act as though nothing unusual was happening outside.

And the storm grew worse.

The wind was not steady, but patchy, uneven, swooping down in violent gusts and miniature whirlwinds. No rain had fallen yet, but the thunder and lightning were now almost continuous. All round the meadow the trees were lashing and swaying in the wind.

One of the smaller tents was lifted completely from its moorings, and went flapping away with a scream of triumph. But the big tent stood there solid and intact—shivering and straining, but safe.

And the hurricane grew worse and worse.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FRENZY OF SIMON SNAYLE.



THE darkness was absolutely solid.

Only when the flashes of lightning split the heavens was it possible to see a dozen yards ahead. Although it was still

comparatively early in the evening, this terrific thunderstorm had blackened the sky until some of the scared country folk believed that the end of all things had come.

The absence of rain made things worse. Once the clouds released their super-charged burden, the intensity of the storm would diminish. But at present it was a fearsome, electrical phenomenon that caused general consternation and fear.

In one caravan, however, a man sat leering before him in a stupid, bemused kind of way. Simon Snayle had drunk himself into a condition of sodden intoxication.

Under ordinary conditions, Mr. Snayle would probably have sprawled in his caravan until the effects of his drunken bout wore off. But the deafening crashes of thunder aroused him. For a time he sat in the caravan in perfect darkness, his brain too befuddled to realise what was going on.

But he still had his wits about him, although they were now inflamed and frenzied until they were hardly his own. He pulled himself to his feet, wrenched open the door of the caravan, and stepped out.

But in his fuddled state, he forgot there

were steps, and he went crashing and sprawling down.

He fell on his hands and knees, and his face buried itself in the grass, his nose being scratched on a thistle. The sudden sharp pain, and the force of the fall itself, had the effect of arousing Mr. Snayle as nothing else would have done. The stupor dropped from him.

He struggled to his feet, and stood there unsteadily, a sudden whirling gust of wind nearly pitching him over again. In the dazzling flashes of lightning, which were now lighting up the sky in a continuous succession, he saw the great circus tent writhing and straining at its hundreds of stay-ropes.

And the sight brought Mr. Snayle to earth with a jerk.

"I'll make them brats pay!" he muttered thickly.

The dull, sore feeling in his back made him remember that lashing he had received. Even when sober, the recollection would have made him flush with anger. But in his present condition, the thought caused him to break into a wild, maddened frenzy.

He reeled off towards the tent, intending to force his way inside and to ruin the show. What did he care, anyway? Hang the show! He was reckless with the rage that surged within him.

Again Mr. Snayle was nearly swept away, for a devastating rush of wind came sweeping over the meadow, carrying with it clouds of dust, leaves, broken branches, and odds and ends of paper and rubbish. At the same moment another small tent near by burst from its mooring with a noise that resembled an explosion.

It collapsed in a tangled, billowing mass of canvas, and there followed a stampede of frightened horses. Mr. Snayle stood there, fighting for breath, nearly choked with the dust.

He recovered his balance, and cursed violently.

One or two people came out from the main entrance, and hurried away towards the gates, anxious to get home before the storm developed even further. But the majority remained inside.

The lightning flashes revealed a few of the circus men standing about, some of them near the labouring traction-engine which supplied the show with electricity. They took no notice of Mr. Snayle, for he was merely one of the vague figures who moved about in the meadow.

Mr. Snayle reached the big tent, but instead of passing inside he paused, clutching at two of the quivering stay-ropes. He could feel the strain upon them as he held.

The ropes were taut and stretched, and now and again, when a lull came, they slackened, only to tighten again with an abrupt jerk that threatened to snap them asunder.

The whole vast expanse of the enormous tent was straining madly at the stay-

ropes, and it seemed that a very small amount of extra strain would cause the great mountain of canvas to collapse.

The wind sang and hooted through the ropes, and the flapping of the canvas was deafening in itself. Faintly, now and again, Mr. Snayle could hear the strains of the band, for the musicians were playing their hardest to drown the deafening commotion outside.

"Good gosh!" muttered Snayle thickly.

An idea had come to him—a sudden, swift scheme for taking revenge. It was an evil idea, and, scoundrel though Mr. Snayle undoubtedly was, such a scheme would never have occurred to him in soberer moments. But his whisky-fevered brain was ready for any villainy just now.

It was revenge he wanted—revenge!

That whipping he had received—the humiliation of it—the knowledge that these boys were in the way of his plans. Everything combined to stir Simon Snayle into action. The very weather conditions, in their wild abandon, fitted in with Mr. Snayle's present mood.

More than anything else, he wanted to wreck this circus—he wanted to ruin it utterly. And here was a chance—a chance provided by Nature itself! And Mr. Snayle would be safe, since nobody could prove a thing against him.

Another great booming rush of wind swept down, and the ropes were nearly torn from his grasp. They tightened, quivering, and he could hear the straining and groaning of all the ropes in unison.

Mr. Snayle made up his mind—an easy task, for this evil scheme had commended itself to him, and he did not pause to think of the frightful, murderous nature of his decision. Indeed, with his wits inflamed by drink as they were, he was incapable of reasoning.

His action was the result of frenzy.

He dragged from his pocket a big, heavy clasp-knife, and in a moment the blade was opened. It was sharp—as keen as a razor—for he had sharpened it only that morning.

With a high-pitched cackle, Mr. Snayle brought the edge of the knife down upon the nearest stay-rope. The rope parted with a twang like a pistol-shot, and Mr. Snayle laughed again.

And then he went from rope to rope—staggering through the thick, coarse grass, which was scarcely ever disturbed in this quiet part of the meadow—at the rear of the big tent.

Mr. Snayle performed his work at lightning speed.

Curiously enough, a brief lull had come. The wind was still gusty and boisterous, but not so wild as hitherto. And Mr. Snayle slashed through twenty of the ropes in quick succession—leaving that part of the tent absolutely unsupported.

Already the masses of canvas were beginning to sag.

Another blinding flash of lightning came, and a short, squat form came to a halt some distance away. It was the figure of Dippy; but Mr. Snayle saw nothing of the dwarf.

Dippy, however, had one clear glimpse of the manager. He saw Mr. Snayle slashing through another rope, he saw the cut ropes all down the side of the tent. And Dippy uttered a cry of horror.

And at that very moment, with a whistling shriek of triumph, a solid burst of wind came sweeping and booming over the meadow. The full force of the hurricane bit the big tent with devastating violence.

And the tent staggered reelingly, sagged inwards like a pricked bladder, and began to collapse!

CHAPTER XIII.

BURIED IN THE DEBRIS.



JOHNNY ONIONS was just preparing to ascend the trapeze.

Tessa's act was drawing to an end, and she wanted to repeat her success of the afternoon by performing the mid-air somersault with Johnny as assistant. The show, in fact, was going along just as though no storm raged.

And the very smoothness of the performance, and the cool, calm indifference of the artists, gave the audience confidence. Under all the circumstances, it would have been better if the big tent had been cleared of humanity at the very beginning of the storm.

But nobody was to suspect that human agency would add to the difficulties of the evening. Johnny and Bertie Onions, and everybody else connected with the circus, felt sure that, whatever happened to the smaller tents, the main tent would stand the onslaught.

And it undoubtedly would have done so. It was Simon Snayle's villainy that brought about the disaster.

Johnny had been working hard to keep the audience thoroughly amused. Tessa had done her share, but before commencing the finale of her act, a brief minute of preparation was necessary.

And even this minute was filled in, so that the audience couldn't become alarmed—for Johnny was most anxious to avoid a panic. With so many children in the crowd, a panic would probably prove far more dangerous than the storm itself.

So Jerry Dodd and Bud came into the ring, and Bertie Onions, dressed as a clown, caused roars of laughter with some of his comic business. Bud was very clever in his humorous tricks.

And it was at this moment that the catastrophe happened.

I was in the middle of the ring joining in the general fun, for it was one of the ring-

master's duties to act as a kind of comedian on occasion. Bertie Onions and I had practised quite a deal of cross-talk, and our jokes generally raised a good many laughs.

With a preliminary shriek, the wind came buffeting against the canvas walls of the tent after a brief spell of comparative calm. This fresh onslaught was accompanied by a shattering crash of thunder.

Tessa was in the act of mounting her horse, but she paused, for the animal pranced away and got out of her reach. And then the whole great body of the tent seemed to sway sideways in a drunken fashion.

"Oh!" cried Tessa, startled.

We heard her exclamation, and looked up.

But I hardly saw the girl at all. The thing that claimed my full attention was the tent wall beyond. It was sagging inwards, and a great gap appeared in the canvas.

And through this gap the wind came shooting in with the force of a tropical cyclone. The arc lights were set swinging dizzily, and the air was filled with the roar of the wind, and the canvas slatted and boomed like the sails of a ship.

All this took only a few moments, and I stood perfectly still, staring.

And before I could recover from my momentary daze, the thing had happened.

With a terrific, ear-splitting roar, the whole dome of the tent vanished. It went upwards to the accompaniment of the scream of the wind, and at the same second all the electric lights went out, plunging the whole tent into inky darkness.

The supply cable had been wrecked by the sudden collapse.

And this was only just the beginning of the disaster. Screams came from the audience—the screams of frightened woman, and the shrieks of children. Men shouted, and there was a wild scramble for safety. But in that pitchy darkness the exits were invisible.

Perhaps this was as well, for a stampede would undoubtedly have led to more than one death. I remember feeling thankful that the tent was only half filled, for, with a full audience, heavy casualties would have been unavoidable.

Immediately following the ripping away of the canvas roof the walls of the tent collapsed inwards, burying everybody under the heavy, deadening folds. Only a few escaped.

I was one, for being in the centre of the ring, there was nothing to fall on me, the dome having gone. But the wooden supports came crashing down with thuds and loud splintering noises. It was only by a miracle that nobody was caught by those heavy supports and killed outright.

Tessa was under the canvas, forced down into the grass, and held there by the sheer weight of the collapsed tent. Fortunately

she was unhurt, and could have crawled to safety in no time.

But just then one of those falling supports struck the ground and then rolled over. One end of the beam caught Tessa's head, only the canvas protecting her. It was sufficient to save her from a bad wound, but the blow momentarily stunned her.

From every side came the screams of the imprisoned audience.

And near Tessa a bulge in the canvas moved frantically. It was Bud, Jerry Dodd's pony. He was buried like the rest, although Jerry himself had been swept aside and was lying several yards distant, fighting for his life against the suffocating canvas folds.

The pony was frightened. But he had sense enough to realise that there must be some way out of this trap. Bud wasn't hurt, and, as it happened, his very bulk caused a big bulge in the canvas, with an exit just beyond. And Bud was lacking his way out, snorting with fright.

He swerved round, his nose to the ground; and suddenly the pony stood quite still, quivering. For at his feet lay the unconscious form of Tessa, and the sagacious little animal knew her at once, for Tessa was one of his best friends.

Bud acted in a way that was almost human.

With one snap of his powerful teeth, he seized the strong sash which was bound round Tessa's waist, and then, moving backwards, he dragged the girl with him.

But this was not quite so wonderful as it seemed. Bud had been trained, in one of his best tricks, to pick up the seemingly unconscious form of his master, and drag him out of some supposed danger. It was second nature for the pony to do it.

And so, finding Tessa lying on the ground, Bud instinctively seized her—acting as though he were performing the life-saving trick. It is doubtful if the pony would have seized any other person, however, except, of course, his master.

He had only to drag Tessa a short distance, for the exit was near, and just as he was backing out, a blinding flash of lightning revealed him. Handforth and Reggie Pitt and I were near by—having fought our way clear of the debris.

"Look! There's Bud!" shouted Pitt.

"Good thing he's saved, but we can't bother about Bud now," I said sharply. "Tessa's somewhere in these ruins—to say nothing of hundreds of other people. We've got to organise a rescue-party at once!"

But all was confusion at the moment—for, indeed, the disaster had only occurred a minute or two earlier. Members of the audience were crawling out of the wreckage on every side of us, and walking about dazed and utterly bewildered.

We hurried up to Bud, and tried to calm him—for I feared that he would stampede, and perhaps knock down some of the chil-

dren who were being hauled out into safety.

"Why, there's something—" began Handforth, startled.

"Tessa!" shouted Pitt. "Quick! Lend a hand, you chaps! Good old Bud! He's dragged Tessa out with him!"

In a moment we had the girl on her feet, and, to our intense relief, she was just recovering, although still dazed. Bud, the pony, had covered himself with glory!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NOBLENES OF DIPPY.



SIMON SNAYLE laughed drunkenly.

It was a moment after he had cut the ropes, and, fearing to be caught in the general collapse, he had rushed away

into a clear portion of the meadow. And now he stood watching—and gloating.

"I'll show 'em!" he said thickly. "Ah! There she goes!"

A sizzling flash of lightning from the disturbed heavens cut through the darkness, and revealed the tent as it sagged inwards. And just for a flash Mr. Snayle had a glimpse of a figure standing comparatively near by. But he didn't recognise who or what the figure was.

As a matter of fact, Dippy was rooted to the ground with horror. He had seen what Mr. Snayle's game was, but he had been too late to stop it. And now he was too late to even give a warning.

For the tent was crumpling like a house of cards.

Mr. Snayle ran backwards at random, for the moment a madman. Afterwards, he would probably have no recollection of his terrible act, for he was so full of whisky that his present mind was not his own.

But retribution was to fall upon him.

It was at this second that the full force of the wind caught the tent and tore the dome completely away from the rest of the structure. The billowing mass of canvas rose into the air like a balloon, and then swooped down to the ground, held in the wind.

It struck the ground with a thunderous, roaring noise, but instead of lying there, the wind carried it along sweepingly over the grass. It was as though a dozen giant hands held the canvas in their grip.

And Mr. Snayle stood directly in the path of this wind-driven juggernaut.

He saw his peril, and turned, panting with fear. He took a few steps, stumbled, and nearly fell. He might as well have attempted to stem the wind itself.

There was no time for him to get clear. The whole thing happened in a moment. He was swept up by the kite-like monster and carried onwards at express speed.

And the force of the impact stunned him.



And, as Dippy was turning away, he caught a glimpse of Simon Snayle. For the second time the doomed man had come to the surface.

For even canvas, when driven at such a velocity, can be as solid as a board. All the wind was knocked out of Mr. Snayle, and his sense left him.

The gust of wind exhausted itself after a few brief moments, and the manager was carried right into the River Stowe, where he fell like a stone into the water. And the tent top itself crumpled up into a dismal heap on the opposite bank, billowing wildly in the wind.

And Simon Snayle went down into the cold water, and even this plunge did not restore him to his senses.

There was only one witness of this dramatic affair.

Dippy, the dwarf, saw it all. Everybody else connected with the circus concentrated their attention upon the debris of the big tent itself. The shouts and screams from the wreckage were sufficiently alarming.

Dippy raced up to the river bank, and stood there, fascinated. He saw Mr. Snayle's unconscious form rise to the surface. The constant flashes of lightning revealed the truth.

And Dippy gloated.

Openly, he laughed aloud with joy. At last! The tyrant was doomed! This man, who had made Dippy's life a mere slavery, had gone to his own death! And the dwarf allowed himself a moment of real pleasure.

In that brief space of time, all his hatred against Mr. Snayle came to the surface. He remembered countless occasions upon which the bullying manager had ill-treated him. Sometimes Snayle had committed acts which would have earned him long terms of im-

prisonment if Dippy had dared to go to the police.

And now it was Snayle's turn—Snayle was in the water, unconscious, and not another soul knew about it.

Dippy was not such a fool as he was reputed to be.

He could see that this affair would be put down as an accident—as, indeed, it was. Everybody would realise that Mr. Snayle had been picked up by that stretch of canvas, and blown into the river. And he would be well rid of for all time!

Again Dippy laughed gloatingly and turned away.

He was still sore and agonised from that terrible whipping that Mr. Snayle had inflicted. Every movement during the evening had been a burning pain to him. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that Dippy now looked upon Snayle's fate with such composure.

A long, hissing flash of lightning broke the sky—a great, jagged fork, which ended in a perfect blaze of electrical glory. And every object in the meadow was lit up with dazzling brilliance.

And, as Dippy was turning away, he caught a glimpse of Simon Snayle. For the second time the doomed man had come to the surface. Only his face was visible—and in that lightning flash, it floated upon the water, white, pitiful and ghastly.

Dippy hesitated, and clenched his great, gnarled fists.

"No, no! Dippy not save him!" he muttered fiercely. "Dippy hate him! Beast-bully—brute! Dippy not pull him out of river! He die—die—and Dippy pleased!"

But, even as he muttered the words, the dwarf's gloating triumph faded. In some strange way, the full realisation of this tragedy was borne to him. He was standing there, unharmed and active, and he was allowing a fellow human being to drown miserably without lifting a finger to save him.

True, this fellow human being was the man who had always treated him worse than a dog—the man whom he feared more than any. But, in spite of all this, Simon Snayle was a fellow human, and he was in the greatest distress that any living being could be in.

Dippy choked back something in his throat, and he knew that there was only one course open to him. Common humanity demanded that he should rescue this man who was on the point of going down for the third time—who was unconscious, and unable to lift a finger to save himself.

The dwarf didn't stop to think longer.

He gave one nimble run, and leapt into the river in a clean dive. Several powerful strokes brought him to Simon Snayle's side—just as the manager was about to sink for the third and last time.

Dippy didn't realise it, but in this action he proved the nobleness of his character. A mis-shapen dwarf—an ugly, repulsive cari-

cature of a human being—a thing to be laughed at and kicked. That's what he was, and that's what he always had been.

But hidden beneath Dippy's coarse exterior was a nature that few suspected. Lifted out of his slavery, he would have proved himself to be made of good, honest material. But Dippy had never had a chance.

Hundreds of men in his position, and suffering from the brutality that he had suffered at Snayle's hands, would have left the manager to perish. But Dippy couldn't do it. At first he had told himself that he could—had believed that he would enjoy the tragedy—but he was wrong.

And now, in rescuing his greatest enemy, Dippy experienced a thrill of satisfaction. He was doing the right thing. And, somehow, Dippy felt very glad.

He reached the river bank, and hauled Simon Snayle out. And then, with one heave, he pulled the unconscious figure across his sturdy shoulders, and marched off across the wind-swept meadow.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HEIGHT OF THE STORM.



CONFUSION reigned.

And the storm, having done so much damage, proceeded to make things worse. For the elements had not yet expended their energy. Indeed,

the hurricane was only just reaching its height.

The wind now came down in volleying bursts, and became a veritable cyclone of violence. The thunder crashed overhead, the lightning blazed, and the whole scene was one of terrifying aspect.

And still no rain fell.

But it was near—there was no question that before very long there would be a deluge. And when it did come, it would probably arrive in a tremendous, sweeping torrent.

More than ever, this storm reminded me of a tropical disturbance. The lightning was so vivid and incessant, and the thunder so booming.

Rescue parties were quickly formed.

So far, a roll call had been impossible—that is, a roll call of the St. Frank's fellows and the circus company. But it seemed that most of the juniors were unharmed.

And the first thing was to get the unfortunate women and children from under the imprisoning folds of the wrecked tent. But it was difficult work, for the fierce wind made continuous trouble. The canvas flapped and broke away every time it was touched, and there was always the danger of the whole wreckage being lifted up and carried bodily off.

We had no time to think of the disastrous nature of the wreck. The tent, of course,

was ruined beyond repair, and could never be used again. And exactly how the circus could open at Caistowe on the following afternoon remained a mystery.

Tessa had been taken away to her own caravan, where she was taken charge of by Mrs. Simkins, the buxom lady who looked after Tessa like a mother. We had no further anxiety regarding the girl.

Other helpers were coming up in large numbers.

The news that the circus tent had collapsed spread rapidly, and not only the police, but immense crowds of townspeople arrived, all eager to lend a hand. So the rescue work went on apace.

It was found necessary to rip the canvas into sections, for it was quite impossible to lift the entire mass, and thus release the imprisoned audience.

And the most surprising feature of the whole affair was that nobody seemed to be badly hurt.

We had expected that some people would be killed, including children. But as the rescue work proceeded, and the injured were brought out, and attended to, it was found that nearly all the hurts were of a superficial character—bruises, grazes, slight cuts, and similar abrasions.

There were one or two grave cases, but happily they were few and far between. One woman, for example, had a broken leg. An elderly man had his ribs smashed, and two others were suffering from broken arms.

But there were no injuries that promised to be fatal.

All the more serious cases were carried off into neighbouring houses until better arrangements could be made. The slight injuries were neglected for the time being, for everything was still in chaos.

None of the children seemed to be hurt much, and all the St. Frank's fellows escaped very lightly. They had their share of bruises and knocks, but made light of them.

It seemed that a real tragedy would occur when smoke and flames were seen to be issuing from a portion of the wrecked tent. Screams came from that direction, too, and we gazed at the spot with concern.

"Fire!" gasped Handforth.

"Quick—buckets!" I shouted. "If that fire spreads there'll be no hope! All the rest of these people will be burned alive!"

"You're right!" said Johnny tensely. "With this wind, the flames will be fanned into an absolute roar in two minutes, and the canvas is like tinder, after all this dry weather."

"Oh, my goodness!" said Watson blankly. "But—but how could the fire have been caused? I don't understand—"

"A fused electric cable, I expect," snapped Johnny. "They haven't got the supply going again yet—Hullo! Rain!"

I looked up at the sky, which was still inky and impenetrable. And as a blaze of lightning dazzled me, a tremendous drop

of rain splashed on my face. At the same moment similar drops fell on every side, making curious "Plops" as they struck the ground.

"My hat!" said Handforth. "It's coming down by the cupful!"

The drops were, indeed, enormous. But we took little notice of them, and rushed to the spot where the fire had originated—and to our horror we saw that the flames were now breaking out with intense fury.

Shouts went up from all sides, and there was a rush.

And at the same moment the rain came—not merely a thunder shower, but an absolute deluge. It arrived suddenly, unheralded except by those few preliminary drops, and in less than twenty seconds we were drenched to the skin.

Any kind of movement was practically impossible. It was a cloudburst, and the rain swooped down in one blinding, devastating sheet. So great was the force of the downpour that the spray hissed up, and formed a mist two feet high. And all we could do was to stand there and gasp for breath.

And there was one merciful result.

The fire was quenched in just the same way as a candle is snuffed out. The flames flickered, died away, and in less than half a minute there was no fire left, and no possibility of one.

And the rain had the effect of deadening the wind, too. For there were such tremendous quantities of it falling to the square mile that the gale was beaten to a standstill.

"First we have a fire, and now we're having a flood!" gasped Handforth, as he clutched at my arm. "If this keeps on for long, we shall have to swim for it, by George!"

"I'm glad it's come," I said thankfully.

"Glad?"

"Rather! It'll soon be over now," I exclaimed. "This is the last lap, so to speak—the storm's dying gasp."

"Then all I can say is it's a pretty energetic gasp," growled Handforth. "My hat! I never knew such rain."

It was still pouring down in sheets, and the circus meadow was resembling a lake. But the work of rescue was resumed at once—and with a much greater chance of success.

For, with the wind abating, the canvas could be more easily moved—although, water-sodden, it required much greater effort. However, there were plenty of helpers, so this was only a detail.

For a full twenty minutes the rain came down with unrelenting violence, and everybody was so soaked that they didn't care. In fact, most of us were quite content. After the sultry heat of the day, and the oppressive closeness of the evening, we were all clammy and uncomfortable. The rain served as a cooler that was most welcome. But at length the deluge abated.

The meadow was now a mass of deep, muddy puddles, miniature lakes, and the Stowe was already a raging torrent. Instead of its former placid clarity, it had become a surging, muddy flood.

And the moon broke through the slowly drifting cloudbanks. The thunder was dying away, and the lightning had practically ceased. The moon, coming out clear at last, shed a weak light down upon a scene of wreckage, chaos, and hopeless destruction.

CHAPTER XVI.

STILL SMILING.



SIMON SNAYLE was pale and haggard.

He lay in bed, in his caravan—where Dippy had placed him. The dwarf, in fact, had compelled the manager to get out of his

clothes and to get between blankets.

For Mr. Snayle had partially recovered upon reaching his caravan, and, with Dippy's assistance, had been able to undress. And Mr. Snayle was sober now—his narrow escape from death had driven the final fumes away from his inflamed brain.

And Mr. Snayle lay alone—quite forgotten in the general commotion.

He was thinking of what had taken place. He could remember very little. Consciousness had returned to him for a brief spell while Dippy was hauling him out of the water, and he knew that the dwarf had rescued him from death. And Mr. Snayle marvelled at the wonder of it.

Dippy—that unfortunate wretch he had always treated with contempt—had saved his life! Mr. Snayle felt no actual gratitude—it is doubtful if he was capable of such an emotion—but he was certainly astonished.

He knew that there had been a storm, and that the tent was down. And it seemed to him that he—Snayle—had had something to do with it. As though in a nightmare, he could picture himself cutting through the stay-ropes.

Had it really happened—or was it merely imagination? Mr. Snayle didn't know, but he had a terrible suspicion that it was no dream. And in the middle of his anguish Dippy entered the caravan.

"Dippy brought some hot soup, boss," he said briefly.

"Look here, Dippy—you pulled me out of the river, didn't you?" asked Mr. Snayle hoarsely. "You saved my life, eh?"

The dwarf looked uncomfortable.

"Dippy not see boss die," he growled. "Boss not always good to Dippy, but—"

"See here—about that tent!" muttered Snayle. "I've got a kind of notion that I was drunk, eh? Was I dreaming, or did I really cut some of them stay-ropes? Mebbe it's only imagination—"

"Boss cut the ropes," interrupted Dippy grimly. "Dippy see."

Mr. Snayle sank back, aghast.

"By glory!" he muttered. "Then—then it was my doing?"

"Boss mad drunk—cut through stay-ropes, and tent fall," said the dwarf. "Dippy see everything. Boss caught by canvas and thrown in river. Dippy pull boss out."

Mr. Snayle sat up again, feverish with fear.

"Is—is anybody dead?" he asked hoarsely. "Were there any people killed, Dippy? Answer me, you rat, or I'll—"

"Nobody killed, boss—plenty hurt, and some gone to hospital," replied Dippy. "But nobody killed. Tent all smashed up."

"Hospital!" muttered Mr. Snayle dully.

It came to him, with a flood of terrible fear, that his next resting-place would probably be a cell. If the truth of this got out, he would be instantly arrested for causing such destruction. It was hardly surprising that his anxiety was acute.

"Do—do they know, Dippy?" he asked fearfully, dreading to hear the reply. "Do those infernal kids know that I cut the ropes?"

"Dippy know—but nobody but Dippy," replied the dwarf, looking at Mr. Snayle with a calm confidence that he had never before possessed. "Boss safe while Dippy keep quiet. But Dippy see everything."

"You—you'll keep it secret, won't you, Dippy?" asked Mr. Snayle huskily.

"Dippy not speak—if boss want it," replied the dwarf.

There was nothing else said, but Mr. Snayle understood. As long as he treated Dippy right, the dwarf would keep his mouth shut. And Mr. Snayle was thankful, indeed, that his villainy would not be made public.

In the meantime, the St. Frank's juniors were still at work—and they did not rest until the last atom of wreckage had been turned over, and the last imprisoned person rescued. And even now it was comparatively early, for the hour was only just ten o'clock.

"My goodness! I thought it was about midnight!" said Pitt, when he heard the time. "Well, thank Heaven we've finished at last! What a storm! And just fancy the tent collapsing like that!"

I frowned.

"I can't understand it," I said. "There's something queer about that collapse. With all those stay-ropes, I should have thought the tent fully capable of withstanding any hurricane that blew. There's more in this affair than we know of."

Johnny Onions looked at me queerly.

"You're not suggesting—foul play?" he asked huskily.

"I don't know, but I'd very much like to know how Mr. Snayle got injured," I replied. "He wasn't near the tent—or ought not to have been—and yet he's now in his

caravan, in bed, and looking like a ghost. I questioned Dippy, too, and Dippy was mum."

"It looks fishy, I'll agree," said Johnny slowly. "But we'd better not say anything. It can't do any good now, and there'd only be a police inquiry, and all sorts of trouble. Besides, it wouldn't be fair to say anything without proof."

"And what about the show?" asked Handforth. "How do you suppose we're going to open at Caistowe to-morrow afternoon, according to the announcements?"

"We'll open all right," said Johnny confidently.

"Without a tent, I suppose?"

"No—with one."

"But—you silly idiot, the tent's a wreck!" protested Handforth. "It can't be repaired—it's in a thousand shreds."

Johnny Onions nodded.

"I'll admit the tent is a pretty hopeless proposition," he agreed. "But I haven't told you that I've just got back from the telephone."

"The telephone? What the dickens—"

"Yes, I put a trunk call through to London," went on Johnny. "I rang up a big firm that supplies all these kind of things—my dad has dealt with them for years. By a piece of luck, I got hold of the manager, and told him what had occurred. He's sending down a new tent at once."

"Good man!" said Reggie Pitt heartily. "What's the good of Mr. Snayle, when you can manage things so perfectly yourself? And the tent will be here in time?"

"It's going straight to Caistowe," replied Johnny. "I was pretty worried about this catastrophe, but I had to think of to-morrow, too. This firm is sending down the new tent to-night. It'll take them a few hours to get it ready and loaded up, and they expect to start between one and two—so they'll arrive at Caistowe in the early morning. By that time we shall be on the spot, because the men are starting to pack at once."

Johnny, in fact, was proving himself to be an excellent manager, and he had handled the present difficult situation with perfect business acumen. Owing to his promptness, the circus would open to-morrow as usual—as though nothing had happened.

And at length, tired out and weary, the St. Frank's fellows returned to the old school, grateful that the evening had not ended more disastrously. Of course, we were all excused when the truth got to the Head's ears, and at last we went to bed, still smiling.

In Bannington, the circus was already on the move, preparing to start away for the new pitch at Caistowe.

Johnny Onions went in to Mr. Snayle towards midnight, and told him of the new arrangements. And after the manager was left alone, he lay in his bed, thinking, and turning over the fact in his mind. And

gradually a light of intense excitement crept into his eyes.

It seemed, indeed, that Mr. Simon Snayle had learned nothing by his lesson, but was even now planning further mischief against the schoolboy circus owners.

And this, in fact, was the exact truth!

THE END.

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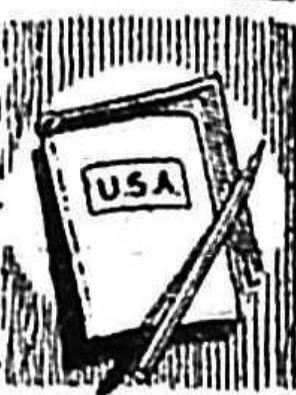
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MY AMERICAN NOTE-BOOK

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



NO. 24. NEW YORK'S BOWERY AND CHINATOWN

ROMANCE and reality are two different things, and the truth of this is never more emphasised than when one visits a place one has read a great deal about in sensational stories—a place which one has clothed in a glamour of romance and mystery, until it actually seems to exist. That is, it seems to exist as one has imagined it.

It is in a case of this sort that a visit to the actual place is frequently an eye-opener.

Since a mere child, I had read many thrilling stories about that celebrated district of New York known as "The Bowery"—the centre of the Underworld, where dope-dens abounded, and where desperate "yegg-men" rubbed shoulders with Chinks and professional crooks of all types.

One night I took it into my head to go down to the Bowery, and have a look at the place with my own eyes, just to see how it compared with my pre-conceived mental picture of the spot. I need hardly say, that I was considerably disappointed.

It was just after midnight when I got on a Subway train at Times Square station, and I was soon being whirled down town towards the quiet and deserted business section of the city, and away from all the bright lights. I emerged from the Subway at Canal Street, and then walked along this drab thoroughfare towards the East Side.

The journey by underground is only a brief one—occupying a few minutes—but the difference is amazing. At Times Square the lights are dazzling, and the vicinity of Broadway teems with gay life. But down here, at Canal Street, Broadway is dark and dismal, with very little traffic, and Canal Street itself is even more uninviting.

But I walked briskly, assuring myself that when I reached the Bowery and Chinatown I should find plenty of romance and mystery, and I even began to wonder if I should have an adventure. Nothing is impossible in New York.

I arrived at a particularly sordid thoroughfare, where a few garish restaurants were

open, displaying flashing electric signs. Street cars passed to and fro, and the Elevated roared overhead at intervals. And with a bit of a shock, I discovered that I was actually in the Bowery.

It was a very different proposition to what I had pictured in my mind. There were no desperate characters lurking about, as far as I could see, and there were no indications that this district was dangerous for a decent citizen to wander through.

Indeed, to be blunt, the Bowery struck me as being nothing but a particularly dirty, shabby, squalid neighbourhood. And the further I investigated it, the less attractive it seemed to get. Now and again I would pass a Chinaman, or there would be one of these gentry lurking in a dark doorway. In the daytime, I may add, the Bowery is even more drab and uninteresting.

Disappointed, I turned my steps in the direction of Chinatown, this section being, in fact, part and parcel of the same district. But I found nothing remarkable in these narrow, twisting streets, except the extraordinary dirtiness of them. And as for an adventure, I never had a ghost of one, and finally got into a Subway train, and went up town, rather fed-up.

I had taken a look at the exterior of the Bowery and Chinatown, and I have just set down my impressions. There is no doubt that if I had penetrated into the inner heart of the district I should have come away with a different story.

But it is not only a difficult matter to get into these Underworld-resorts, but a ticklish and dangerous matter, too. The regular denizens of the Bowery district can move about as they like—but for a stranger, it is well-nigh impossible. And quite apart from all this, I was rather keen upon seeing the light of another day.

And if I had dared to venture into the secret haunts of this "tough" district (even if I could have gained admittance) I should have taken my life in my hands—and probably left it in somebody else's!

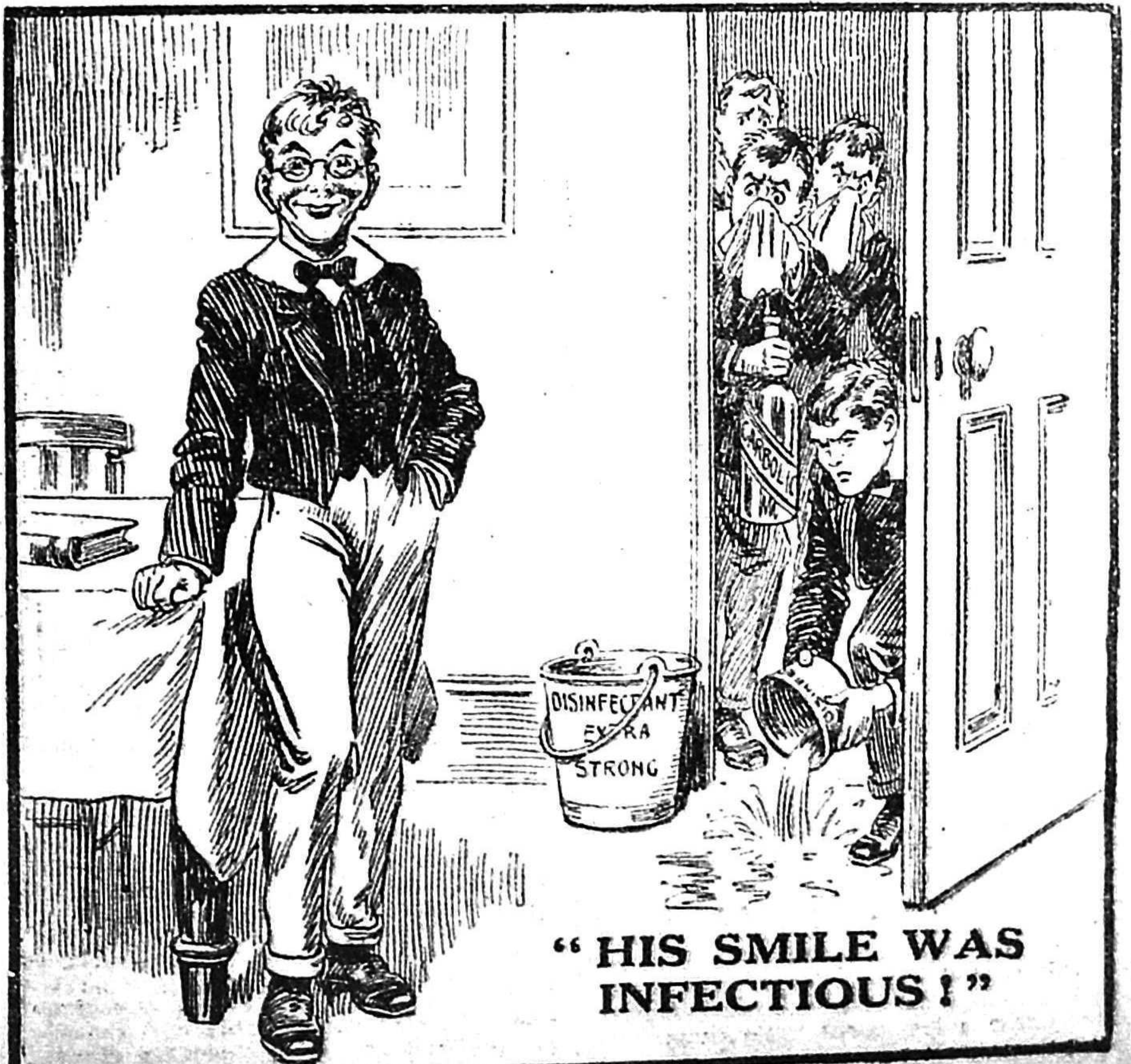


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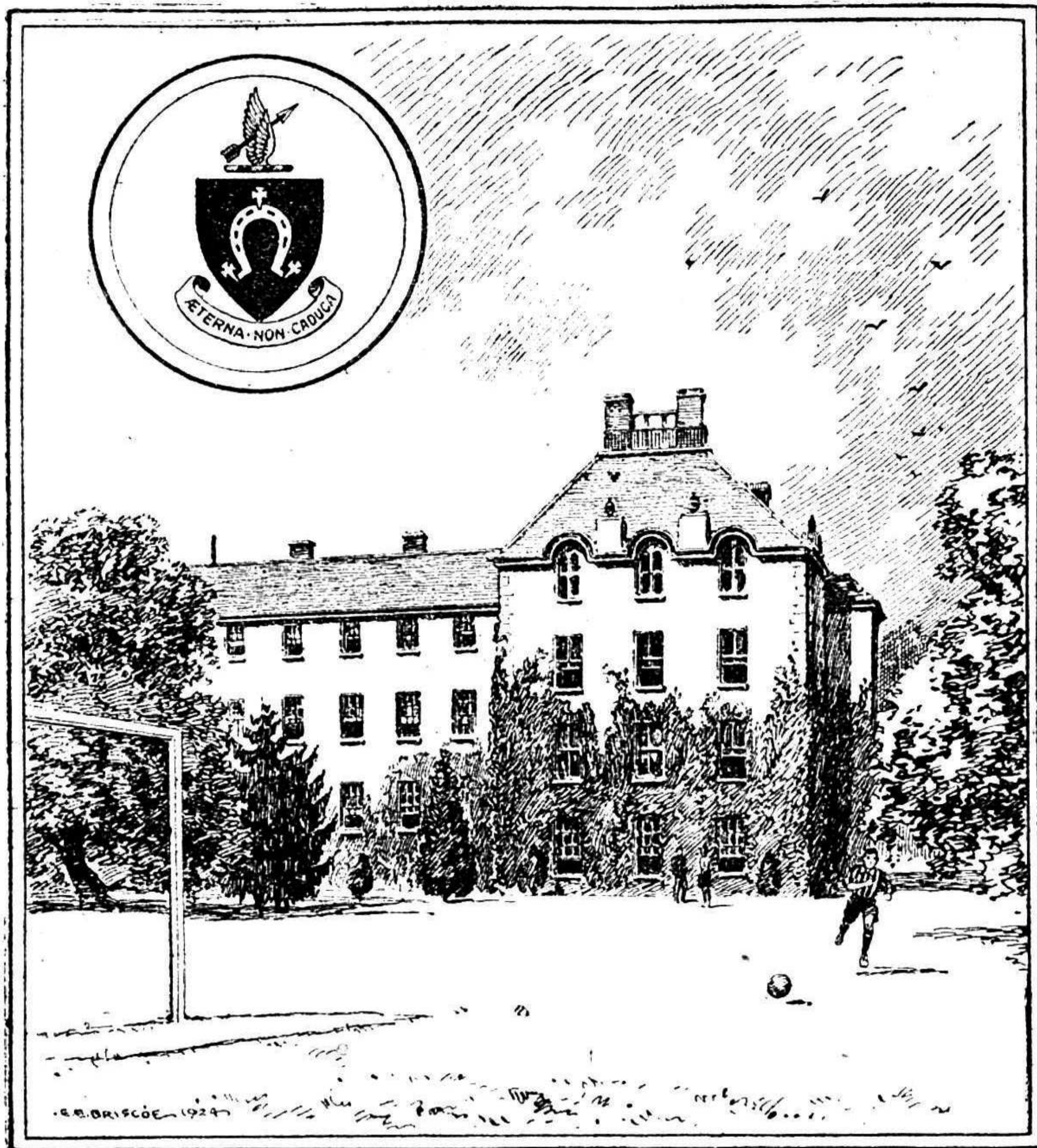


**"HIS SMILE WAS
INFECTIOUS!"**

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

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

No. 28. BEAUMONT COLLEGE.



Beaumont College, Old Windsor, considered to be the senior English Catholic school, was founded in 1861 by the Jesuit Order for the education of Catholic boys. The college stands in 200 acres of undulating grounds, between Windsor and Staines, and is 100 feet above the level of the Thames. The junior school, accommodating 70 boys, was built in 1888. Other buildings include science laboratories, libraries, gymnasium, and swimming bath, etc.

The discipline at the school is very similar to that of other English public schools, privileges being given to boys as they attain higher forms. The school magazine, known as "The Beaumont Review," offers scope for contributions by the boys.

The school games played are Rugby football, cricket, tennis, and hockey. Other sports include bicycling, boating, swimming, and boxing. Horse riding and the care of horses are taught, and there is a strong contingent of the Officers Training Corps.



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

My dear old Beans,

Here we are in the bally inquisitorial chair, as it were, flourishing the blue pencil, or rather, to be more exact, chewing it. The jolly old thinking machine is somewhat on the wane.

I mean the gear-box wants oiling badly. Editing, and all that kind of rot, makes a fellow feel dashed used up. Beads of perspirash begin to trickle down the top-not, or whatever you like to call it, until one feels like taking a good old forty of the best with an iceberg for a pillow.

IT BEHOVED ARCHIE TO GET BUSY!

Nipper, the priceless johnny with the bulging brain, and all that, was absolutely insistent that I should run the jolly old rag this week. I told him it was dashed ridic. to expect a chappie like me to take on such a respons.

Then the dear boy said a few choice remarks, and the pride of the Glenthornes asserted itself. In other words, dear old tins of fruit, Archie began to see glimmerings of daylight, if you understand what I mean.

The jolly old volcano became active, and all that sort of thing. Large chunks of disappointment appeared in the offing, and it behoved Archie to get busy.

All the lads of the village, the Remove johnnies, and so forth, would have shed a large assortment of tears if Archie failed them. It would have been dashed awk., and all that.

SOMETHING DREADFULLY DRASTIC WAS ESSENTIAL!

It was a ghastly posish. to be in. The bally old ball had to be set in motion;

something dreadfully drastic was essential. "Archie, my lad," says I, "we must call in the reserves."

In other words, an urgent S.O.S. for Phipps. There's no one like the good old oracle when the Young Master is in a difficult situash.

That did the trick, if you follow me. Phipps, the brainy lad, weighed in with a splendid allowance of advice, and what not. He suggested I should say a word or two about the contents of the present number.

A jolly good wheeze, if I may put it so. Absolutely! I mean to say, tell the readers what there is for them to read, and all that kind of rot. That's the best of Phipps. He always hits the nail on the crumpet, if you follow me.

A FINE ASSORTMENT OF FICTION.

So here we are then, old pineapples. Now for a word as to the assortment of priceless fiction displayed for you, as one might observe.

In addition to several topping sorts of articles, as they say, there is a Trackett Grim yarn absolutely continued by myself. And in addition, if I may repeat myself, to this yarn there are several topping articles.

That's pretty good and straight, what? I mean, that's cleared up the jolly old atmosphere, and so forth. In addition to what I have said, there are many other attractions, and what not. So that altogether this number is full of rather powerful stuff.

If there is any old thing I've forgotten to mention, I hope, old nutmegs, that you'll let me know. Drop me a line, as it were. Drop me two lines. In fact, any number of lines that you happen to have about you!

Yours absolutely,

ARCHIE.



Correspondence Answered by Uncle Edward

SECTION 1.—REPLIES TO SCHOOL READERS.

INQUIRER: No, I am not the composer of that well-known song, "Two Lovely Black Eyes." Of course, I could write songs if I liked, but I regard this vocation as being somewhat soppy. I prefer something more vigorous, and in later life I shall probably become a Big Game Hunter and Explorer.

WALTER CHURCH: I am sorry to hear that you suffer from a tender nose, and that it is liable to bleed at the slightest provocation. It seems to me that somebody must have been punching you, and I would like you to give me his name, so that I can deal with him as he deserves.

C. OWEN: Your suggestion that St. Frank's should be provided with a private picture theatre is absurd, and I shall certainly not place the matter before the Housemaster, as you suggest. If you can't write more sense in your letters, you had better not write at all.

RODERICK YORKE: Sorry to hear your boots are squeaky. The best cure is to thoroughly soak the boots in paraffin oil for two days, and then leave in the sun to dry. If they squeak after this, it shows that the boots are rottenly made, and you'd better throw them away.

J.B.B.: I agree with your complaint about the shows they put on at the Bannington Cinema. Most of the programmes are awful, and as far as I can see, the only way out of the difficulty will be for us to demand a private picture theatre in St. Frank's. The idea is entirely my own, and I intend to place it before the Housemaster for serious consideration.

SECTION 2.—REPLIES TO GENERAL READERS.

(NOTE.—All readers of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY are invited to write to me, stating their likes and dislikes, and their opinion of the Magazine and the Old Paper in general. I will reply to

these letters in this Section of my page. So let me hear from you, boys and girls, and address your letters or postcards to "UNCLE EDWARD, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E. C. 4. UNCLE EDWARD.)

MARJORIE D., GRAVESEND: Ladies first, of course, so you come at the top, Miss Marjorie. I'm not sure you belong to Gravesend, because you didn't put any address on your letter, but I noticed the postmark was "Gravesend" so I have made a shrewd deduction. This is what comes of writing Trackett Grim stories. Thanks awfully for your nice letter, and here goes to answer it. Nipper's full name is Richard Hamilton; he has no brothers or sisters, and no parents. Nelson Lee is Nipper's legal guardian. Reggie Pitt has a sister, and she's a ripping girl, too. I'm surprised that you should like Pitt better than anybody else at St. Frank's, because I should have thought that— Oh, well, I don't want to sound conceited. I think it is fine of you to be so interested in Irene Manners. She's a lovely girl, and her chums aren't bad, either. If you write anything about the Moor View School girls, let me have a look at it, and I'll give you my opinion. What do you mean by saying that the issue of the Magazine I edited was "the limit"? And in printed letters, too! Still, you say the number was fine, and I heartily agree. I don't mind you calling me Ted a bit, you know, and I'm sure Irene wouldn't mind. I don't believe a word you say about wearing a mask, and I'm sure you must be jolly pretty, because your letter is such a nice one. How do you like the Trackett Grim stories?

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE II, TORRINGTON: Sorry, old man. No room to reply to letter here, but I'll give you heaps of space in next week's number.

UNCLE EDWARD.

CUNNING CARL, THE COWBOY CROOK!

By Archibald Winston Derek Glenthorne

EDITOR'S NOTICE.

Kindly observe, dear old reader chappies, that this priceless yarn is really one of Handforth's. What I mean is, the first spasm of the jolly old story appeared last week, and it was all about Trackett Grim, and cowboys, and prairies, and what not. But when I asked our dashed contributor about finishing the masterpiece, he absolutely gave me one of his five-hundred-and-twenty-horse-power glares, and told me to finish the bally thing myself. Absolutely.

It seems that he's a bit peeved or something like that, and in his fearful fury he wants to let the Old Paper down with a somewhat ghastly wallop, if you grasp the old trend. Well, anyhow, it seems to me that this is positively one of those occasions when a lad is required to rally round with much energy, and shove his shoulder, as it were, to the grindstone. So I have taken Handforth at his bally word, and I've finished the yarn.

Not being practised in these Trackett Grim affairs, I have a suspish that the result is somewhat fruitily poisonous.

In the first part of the story, a poor blighter named Six-Shooter Sam is murdered by Cunning Carl, the cowboy crook, a perfect horrid cove who roves the old prairie, shoving lead into the citizens.

Trackett Grim and Splinter whizz to Arizona and have a look at the body, and Trackett Grim finds some finger-prints on the deceased chappie's collar, and makes some priceless remark about this being the first clue.

Detective-Inspector Gink, of the Arizona Police, and a couple of policemen are absolutely staggered. Now, this is where we proceed—and, between you and me, it's just about time, what?

I mean, unless we do something soon, there won't be any space left for the dashed story! So just read on, as it were.

Yours chattily,
THE JOLLY OLD EDITOR.

THE CLUE OF THE RUMMY HORSESHOE.

TRACKETT GRIM looked round for his old gee-gee.

"Come on, Splinter, old fruit, we've got to make a dash into the hills," he warbled briskly. "Pull up the old socks, and get a move on, dash it!"

"Absolutely, sir!" said Splinter, dashing hither and thither.

"What are you going into the hills for?" demanded Detective-Inspector Gink, shoving a chunk of tobacco into his mouth, and chewing like the dickens. "I mean to say, what's the priceless idea, old companion? Kindly explain the posish."

Trackett Grim waved a hand with pretty fearful impatience.

"Was there something queer about Cunning Carl's horse?" he asked, his eyes gleaming with eagerness. "I mean to say, did the old lad—"

"Absolutely!" cried the inspector bird. "What-ho! You mean that horseshoe that was shoved on the wrong way about, what? I say, Mr. Grim, you're a frightfully clever chappie—"

"Well, rather!" interrupted Trackett Grim. "Everybody knows that, you bally fathead! I mean to say, I'm famous all over the world, as it were. And this, in fact, is where I add a few bunches to my laurels. If I don't come back with Cunning Carl, dead or alive, you can call me a dashed fearful duffer! Come on, Splinter, old tea-cup, we've got to whizz into the offing, and catch the good old miscreant!"

And in next to no time the famous pair were whizzing.

They dashed like anything over the old prairie, following the trail of the crook. And they soon arrived in the hills, and started climbing towards the bally clouds. There weren't any tracks, or anything like that, but Trackett Grim knew jolly well that he was on the right trail. It was his what-do-you-call-it that guided him—you know what I mean, his thingummy—his good old instinct. That's the word—absolutely! His priceless instinct.

As far as I can understand from reading several of these poisonous perpetrations, Trackett Grim possessed an absolutely marvellous instinct, and he could positively track criminals by a kind of sixth sense. Jolly clever, if you know what I mean.

Well, anyhow, he braced himself up pretty stoutly, and surged upwards into the mountains, with Splinter bringing up the old rear. And the higher they went, the more robust they felt. What I mean is, the mountain air shoved tons and tons of energy into their good old carcasses. This is the effect mountain air has on a chappie.

"What-ho!" quoth Trackett Grim, at last. "Here we are, Splinter, old cheese, and the enemy appears to be dodging us somewhat nippily. I mean to say, it's a bit thick when the dashed enemy does that, what? His job is to whizz out and grapple with us, and all that sort of rot."

Hardly had the word flowed gracefully from Trackett Grim's priceless old tonsils when a pretty frightful looking arsenal hove

into sight round one of the mountains. In other words, two terrific revolvers materialised out of the middle distance, and Cunning Carl was behind them.

"Hands up, you blighters!" he chirruped, with an assortment of dashed horrid oaths. "I guess I've got you covered, you doggone yaller dorgs! So kindly raise the digits, and all that! Sorry, old things, but this is where I proceed to shove an assortment of lead into your interiors!"

The words were pretty ghastly, don't you know, and Trackett Grim positively wilted. But only for a second. Being a man of steel, and all that sort of piffle, he braced himself up like anything, and literally dashed into battle.

I mean, it was jolly plucky of him, when you come to think of it. The cowboy crook blazed away for all he was worth, and the bullets sang past Trackett Grim's ears. It seemed to the poor old lad that these frightful bullets were singing "Good-Bye for Ever," or some such mouldy tune, but he didn't flinch. I mean Trackett Grim didn't know how to flinch. He never had been a flincher.

"Oddslife, you foul rotter! I arrest you for the murder of One-Eyed Sam, or whatever the poor chappie's name was!" yelled the great detective, dodging the bullets with a huge amount of skill. "And also let me add that anything you say will be taken down, and all that, and used in evidence against you. So desist, dash you!"

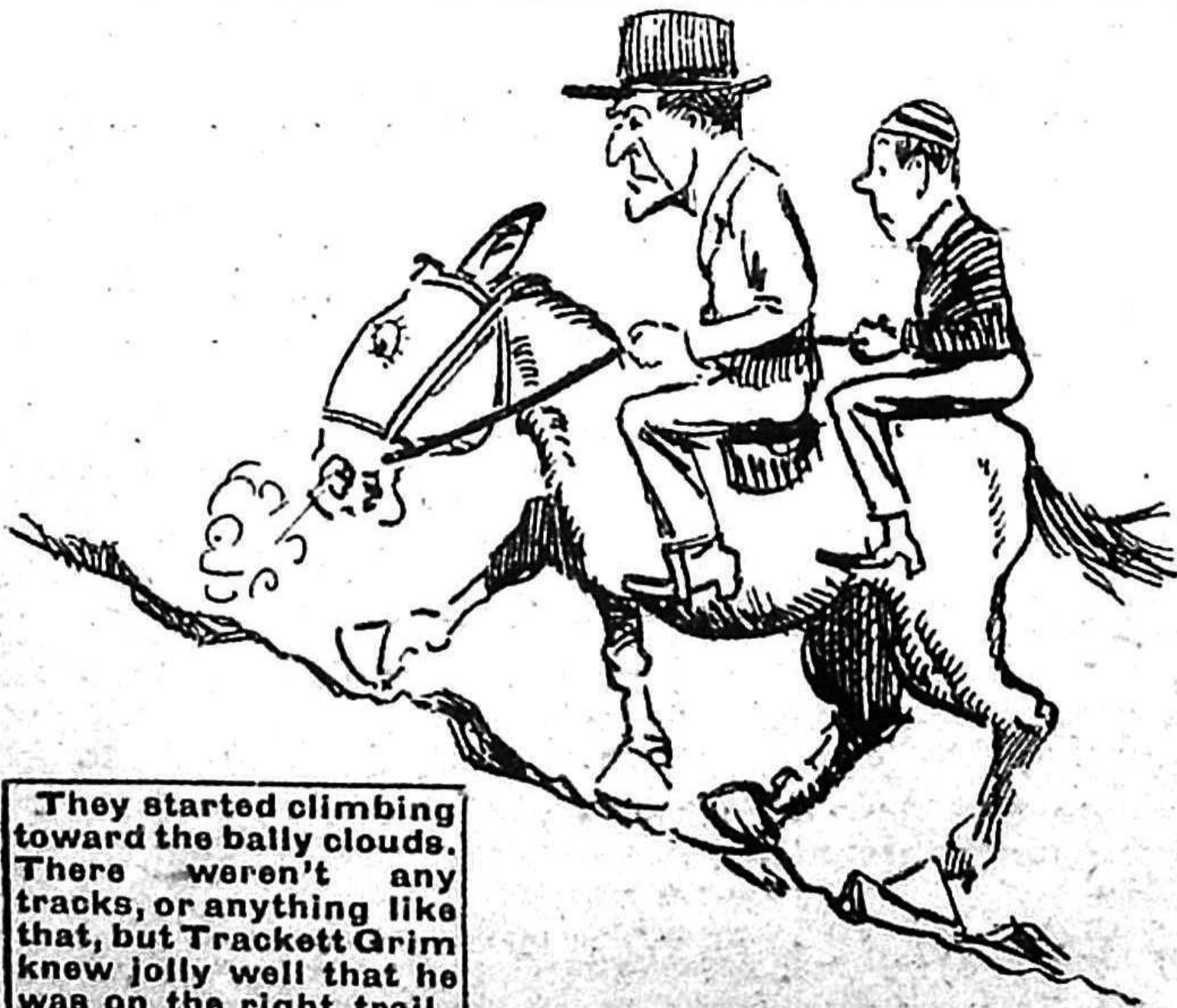
Cunning Carl absolutely quivered.

"Move another step and you're as dead as salt beef!" he howled.

But did Trackett Grim halt? Absolutely not! I mean to say, he wasn't the kind of bird to halt. Once he started, a bally traction engine couldn't have stopped him.

He grabbed Cunning Carl round the old equator, and the pair of them simply struggled for the mastery. It was dashed thrilling, if you follow me. There they were, at the top of that mountain, on the edge of a frightful precipice.

A drop of about five-hundred-and-four thousand feet yawned against their ankles, and Splinter hung back, feeling somewhat dithery. In fact, the poor old sparrow had gone all white about the gills, and he uncoiled countless yards of lasso rope,



They started climbing toward the bally clouds. There weren't any tracks, or anything like that, but Trackett Grim knew jolly well that he was on the right trail.

just to be prepared. He proved that he was jolly well wide awake, what?

Well, anyhow, Cunning Carl suddenly gave a most fearful warble of fear, and he went whizzing down to his jolly old doom. At the bottom of the precipice there were a frightful amount of rocky spikes, and any fellow dropping on them was due for a somewhat painful packet.

Unfortunately, the blighter gave Trackett Grim a tug at the same time, and the detective chap sagged at the knees and kept on walking still, as it were. In other words, he tipped over the chasm and followed Cunning Carl into the valley of the shadow.

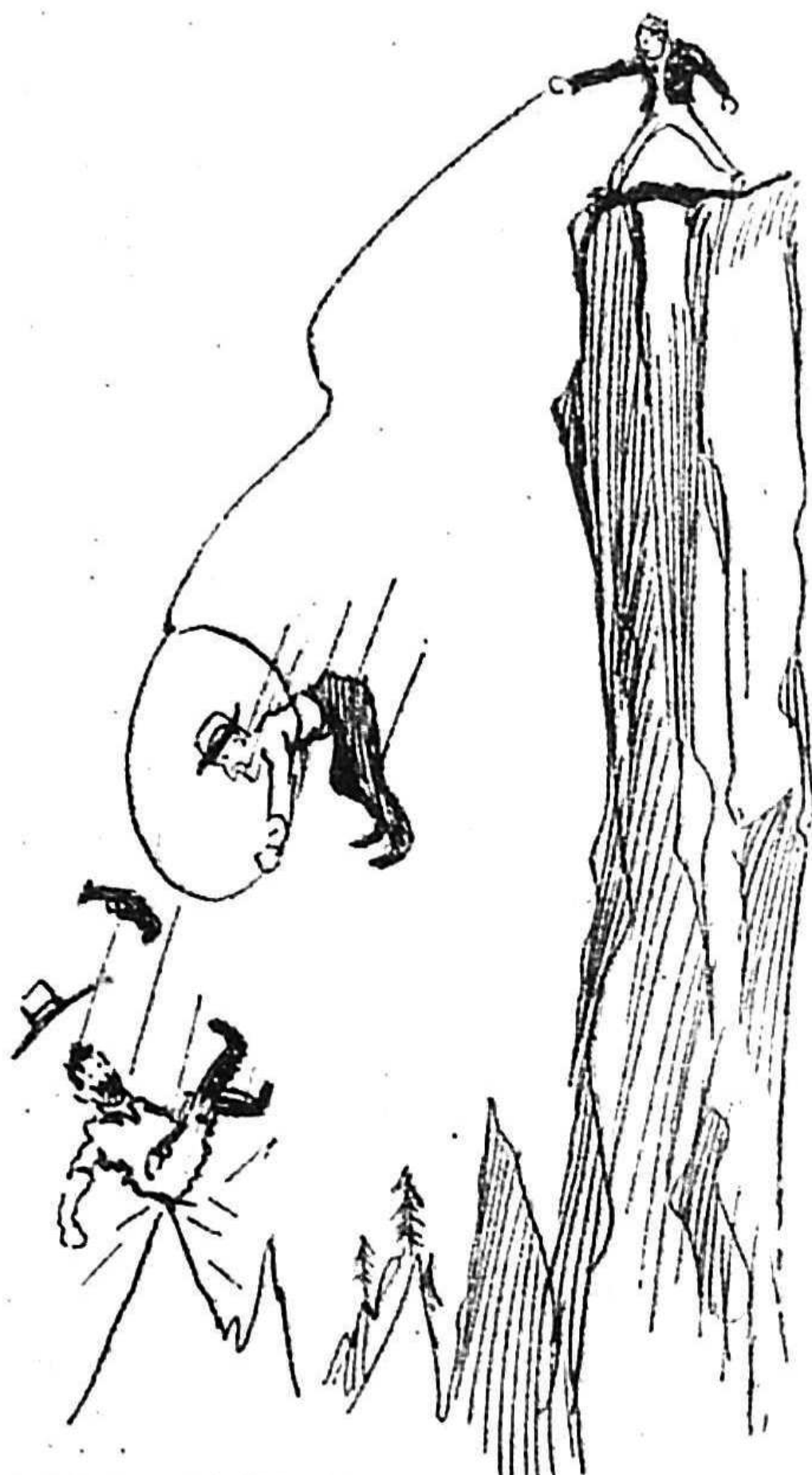
This was where Splinter came out strong. Absolutely. The good old bird yanked the lasso round his head, and sent it shooting down like anything. He was only just in time, too. Trackett Grim had fallen about seventy-five thousand feet when the rope coiled itself round his shoulders.

The jerk was so frightful that Trackett Grim was nearly winded, and it's a wonder the rope didn't snap. Splinter was nearly shot off the edge of the precipice. And between you and me, just on the quiet, he would have been in real life. But this is only a story, so it doesn't matter, what?

Trackett Grim hung there, with his life on a thread—or, to be more exact, on a piece of rope. And Cunning Carl continued downwards for the rest of the joy ride, and smote the spiky rocks with considerable vim.

The fearful miscreant splashed himself over an area of about a hundred square feet. He simply ceased to exist, and all that remained of him were a few stains on the rocks. This was pretty awkward, because Trackett Grim couldn't gather up the remains.

Anyhow, the old job was done. Trackett Grim was hauled up by the faithful Splinter, and the good old pair proceeded to leg it back to camp. Here they were met by Mr. Cyrus P. Squirt, the rancher, who shoved a few bags of gold-dust into Trackett Grim's hands.



Trackett Grim had fallen about seventy-five thousand feet when the rope coiled itself around his shoulders.

And in next to no time our heroes were back in London, ready to rush off on another case.

And that, if I may say so, is that.

THE NEW YORK MYSTERY; or, NIPPER & CO. AMONG THE SKYSCRAPERS

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FASHION HINTS

By The Editor

HERE we are, in the good old summer-time if you know what I mean, and a few hints on the latest fashions wouldn't be absolutely out of place, what? It positively makes me wince when I see some of the lads of the village venturing into the public gaze wearing badly cut bags, or waistcoats with several buttons missing, and all that sort of thing.

I mean to say, it really isn't done.

And I regard it as a duty, particularly as I'm the Editor of this bally rag, to make a few well-chosen remarks on the subject of dress. In my opinion it ought to be a criminal offence, punishable only by penal servitude, for any chappie to stagger forth in a blue shirt with a green necktie. This kind of thing will ruin the eyesight of the nation, and bring about the downfall of the good old British Empire.

Of course, a fellow is somewhat restricted when he's obliged to wear Etons, but, even so, there are limits. Absolutely. There is positively no excuse for the blighter who appears in an Eton suit and white shoes. Nothing but black footwear should be allowed with Etons, and I absolutely bar these champagne socks. They're frightfully priceless with a lounge suit and brown shoes, but with Etons—no!

I have recently noticed a tendency among some chaps to whiz into public gaze wearing white trousers and brown or black shoes. Dash it, this is simply foul. When a chappie is in white he ought to do the bally thing properly. Nothing looks worse than flouting all the jolly old rules and regulations of Fashion.

Now, when it comes to headgear—What-ho! Here I am, at the end of the old column, and there's no more dashed room! And I haven't really started yet!

It was Singleton's birthday last Monday, and he held a little party in Study N, and had quite a good time. Handforth skidded on some orange peel in the Triangle and skinned his knees; then he got lines in the class-room for jawing; and was swished in the evening because he biffed a football into Mr. Pagett's face. Apparently, it was Handforth's birthday, too.

HEALTH GOSSIP AND SO FORTH

By A. W. D. G.

COLD IN THE HEAD.—In spite of the good old fine weather, and all that rot, heaps of the customers, as it were, suffer from colds. And there's nothing worse than a bally cold. I mean to say, it's absolutely foul when a chappie trots about somewhat feebly with watery eyes, feverish brow, and all that sort of thing. The one golden rule is to get to bed. Absolutely. Skid into the old sheets, and simply do absolutely nothing. And sleep—sleep all the dashed time. There's nothing like the good old forty winks.

SPRAINED ANKLE.—What with the cricket and running and cycling, and all that, some of the dear old souls are spraining their ankles and things. Any cove with a sprained ankle cannot do better than take to his jolly old bed. Sleep is what he wants—sleep, as a matter of fact, in chunks.

TOOTHACHE.—If there is anything more absolutely poisonous than a toothache, I'd like to know what it is, by gad! According to old Phipps, toothache is caused by a dashed feeble condish of the old nerve centres, and so forth. All the patient has to do is to stagger to his good old couch and sink upon it forthwith and lapse into slumber.

MENTAL STRAIN.—Lessons are a frightful pull on the old constitution, you know. Even I have frequently felt somewhat wilty at the knee-joints after a session in the dashed class-room. And mental strain is a pretty foul complaint, and needs a strong cure. The best remedy is to wallow into bed, and allow life and all its troubles to pass into oblivion. Forty of the best and brightest will work wonders.

BLACK EYES, THICK EARS, ETC.—It sometimes happens that a fellow will acquire a ripe and juicy black eye, or a full-blooded thick ear. These outbreaks generally follow the exertion and strain of study warfare. The one and only cure is to whiz lightning-like into the old blankets, and sleep.

THAT TIRED FEELING.—Most chappies suffer from this complaint at times. Personally, I get it nearly every bally day. And I always find that a fruity nap on the old sofa absolutely does the trick.



E. Sopp's Fables

By
Edgar Sopp of the Fifth

No. 25. The Fable of the Helpless Youth and the Desert Island.

THE Helpless Youth was so incapable of doing anything for himself that he hired a Man to look after him. And this Man, who was an invaluable Servant, tended to his Young Master hand and foot. And, forsooth, it came to pass that the Helpless Youth got to that Condition when he could do Absolutely Nothing without the assistance of Phipps, his Man. (Dash it! I believe this Helpless Youth chappie is meant to be me, by gad!—ED.) And it chanced one day that the genial Archie (he absolutely is, dash it!—ED.) wandered forth

IN SEARCH OF ADVENTURE.

And he went upon the sea-shore with Phipps, and there they embarked upon a small boat, the Scheme being to go for a little cruise upon the good old Ocean Wave. Now, Archie was utterly and positively Hopeless when it came to anything that smacked of Work (Here, I say, that's a bit thick, you know!—ED.), and Phipps was obliged to do all the rowing. The general idea was to reach a little island a mile from the shore, and there indulge in a Picnic. And for this purpose had been brought

A FINE ASSORTMENT OF EDIBLES.

And Archie looked forward with languid interest to the forthcoming Feed, for the sea air had already made him Peckish. However, the food had to be cooked, and the menu consisted of chicken, potatoes, cabbage, with custard and rhubarb to finish with. (Dash it all, people don't go whizzing out on picnics with uncooked provender of that type, you know! However, this is only a Fable, so I gather that these liberties are allowed.—ED.) A spirit-stove and other cooking apparatus had been brought along, so there was every prospect of a Feed worthy to be

SET BEFORE A KING.

And, behold, the island was reached, and Archie got ashore. And Phipps landed the foodstuffs and the Cooking Utensils, and then went back for a Tablecloth, for this Helpless Youth was so Fastidious that he Insisted upon such Fal-de-lals. (I'm afraid this dashed affair is becoming dashed personal, dash it!—ED.) And, lo, a sudden current seized the boat and whirled it away from the shore! Now, unfortunately, the oars had been thoughtlessly Unshipped and left on the beach. So it came to pass that Phipps

DRIFTED HELPLESSLY UPON THE TIDE.

And Archie was left alone on the island, being, in fact, Marooned. All Phipps' efforts to reach his Young Master were in vain, and he was carried far out to Sea, until he became a Mere Speck. And Archie was then Utterly Alone, and cut off from Civilisation. Moreover, he was compelled to Fend for himself; and, being such a Frightful Duffer, he was in a fairly ghastly Pickle. (If there are any more of these bally Insults I shall be compelled to bring the old blue pencil into play pretty lavishly, dash it!—ED.) At first, all Archie could do was to wander up and down the shore

BLEATING FEEBLY FOR ASSISTANCE.

And he was getting Hungrier and Hungrier, and at length it turned his attention to the food. And this, forsooth, was uncooked, and therefore uneatable. And Archie, knowing not how to lift a finger to help himself, could only stare at the stuff in a Glassy Way. But Nature asserted itself more strongly still, the gnawings of hunger making Archie long for the gnawing of a chicken-bone. (Kindly observe, dear old readers, that I absolutely bar gnawing chicken-bones at any time. This contribu-

tion is becoming fouler and fouler as we proceed with the poisonous thing.—ED.) And then Archie got

A BRAIN WAVE.

And his helplessness dropped from him like a cloak. He suddenly realised that the only Possible Solution to the problem was to Get Busy with his own milk-white, carefully manicured Fingers. Since Phipps had drifted away, the Young Master was obliged to Fend for himself. And, behold, this Helpless Ass, this tailor's Dummy, this—(I have felt compelled to slice out four complete bally lines of this dashed manuscript, the insults being too frightful for publication.—ED.)—discovered that his Hands were Made for Use, and not for Ornament. Furthermore, Archie found out that his Brain was in his head for the Purpose of being Exercised. And it came to pass that he very soon

GOT THE SPIRIT-STOVE GOING.

And after that the rest became Comparatively Easy. Once he had made a Beginning, he found that Work, after all, was not a thing to be regarded with Horror. (Ridic! If I had anything else to fill these priceless columns with, I'd shove this dashed rot into the bally fire!—ED.) Instead of being a Helpless Idiot (Oddslife! What next?—ED.) this Dandified Duffer prepared himself a Royal Spread, and actually did cook the chicken to a Turn. The potatoes were possibly Sloppy, and the Custard was a Terrible Failure, but these are Details. It is enough that Archie

PULLED HIMSELF OUT OF HIS RUT.

And it happened that evening fell, and the air did become chilly and Damp. And Archie wondered what would be his Fate. Never in all his life had he been required to look after himself, and he Believed that the task was Impossible. Yet it must be recorded that Archie found himself a Snug Retreat among some rocks. Furthermore, he forthwith got Busy, and gathered much Moss and Bracken, making for himself a warm and cosy Bed. And he lay himself down thereupon and slept with perfect Peace. And thus he was found by the Faithful Phipps, who eventually returned with other Searchers. And behold, they were Much Astonished to find that Archie, in spite of all his Helpless Manner, was really and truly a Youth of Great Prowess, and even Genius. (Oh, well, that's not so bad, what?—ED.)

MORAL: YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT YOU CAN DO UNTIL YOU ARE FORCED!

FORTY WINKS OF THE GOOD OLD DREAMLESS!

By Archie Glenthorne

I MEAN to say it's all very well. I don't mind criticism and all that sort of stuff. I can take my gruel, so to speak, with the best of them. Every time and likewise absolutely. But hang it all, my jolly old hide isn't as thick as a rhino. A rhinoceros, I should say. And chaps are writing to the Mag. about my being lazy. They accuse me of being too fond of the jolly old dreamless. They say I indulge in an excess of slumber, as it might be.

Now, that's all absolute rot. I mean to say, it's a putrid libel, and what not. It's a stupid mistake to think that just because a fellow enjoys a bit of repose now and then he is lazy.

As a matter of fact, we don't get enough sleep. What with games, and meals, and lessons, and what not, there is very little time left for a snooze. I mean to say, sleep is most necessary.

Would Napoleon have won the Battle of Waterloo if he couldn't sleep? Absolutely not!

Would Cæsar have won the Battle of Trafalgar, and conquered England, if he couldn't have slept at nights? Absolutely not!

And why was Horatius able to cross the jolly old bridge? Because he always slept well!

History shows us that all great men got plenty of the good old dreamless. Even jolly old Rome was not built in a day, so that shows the men who built it must have gone to bed at nights.

The fact is that the body needs rest, and so forth. The tissues have to recover and what not. The red corpuscles of the blood simply pine if they don't get a bit of quiet.

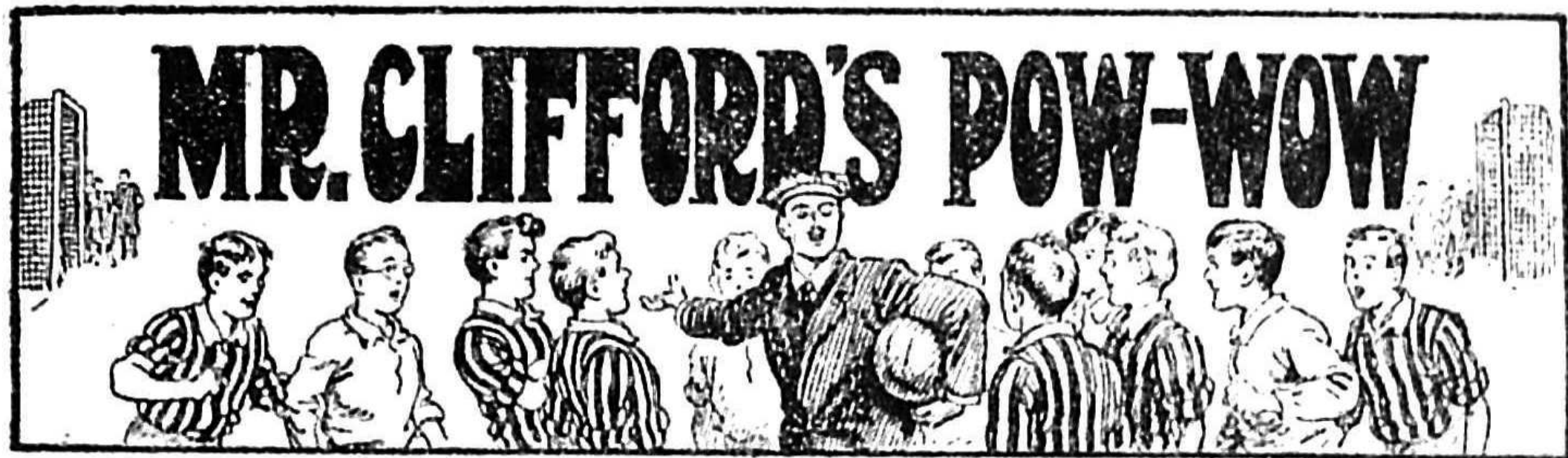
The muscles and the arteries simply stagger about like mad if you don't let them have their snooze.

And that means that the brain cells and all that won't function properly.

Sleep is utterly necessary—bagfuls of it. I like it in great chunks, as you might say.

And that's why I'm not going to run this Mag. every week. I have had to sit up half the jolly old night to think out these contribs.

So, if you'll excuse me, in a manner of speaking, I'll just slither away for a small slice of the good old dreamless, as you might call it!



CRICKET HINTS.

Further Remarks on "Stone-Walling."

BEFORE I continue my remarks on the subject of defensive batsmanship, I would like you to understand clearly what I mean when I refer to a "straight bat."

A straight bat is not a perfectly upright bat, as the embryo cricketer may be led to imagine. In playing to a straight ball, the bat should be held with just the slightest incline towards the bowler, the handle slightly in advance of the bottom of the bat.

That is, briefly, what is meant by holding a "straight" bat, and you should learn to use the willow in this fashion before attempting hitting out or playing back.

Batting's Two Departments.

Briefly, batting is made up of two departments—back play and forward play—and you cannot make up your mind which to use until you have been treated to the first ball of the opposing bowler. In most cases back play is the safer to adopt, but when the bowler is a very fast merchant, the better course is to play forward.

One of the big secrets of success in sport is confidence; in cricket it counts for more, probably, than in any other field game. If you have confidence in yourself, and have the courage to stand up to the most dangerous-looking balls, then your path to cricket fame is already opening out before you.

Confidence is required in forward play. Watch the ball, and do not be afraid of it. Notice where it pitches particularly, and in making the forward stroke throw out the left foot towards the leather, and

at the same time present the ball with a straight bat. If you have judged rightly—and judgment is an art which you cannot learn by any amount of article reading—you should make your stroke comfortably, and be back with both feet in the crease before the ball is ten yards on its way.

The Back Stroke.

The back stroke is, if anything, simpler than the forward stroke, but here again you must use your own judgment. This is the method that should be adopted when the ball pitches well away from the wicket, and you will find that it is a fairly easy method to learn. Face the bowler squarely, keep your feet near together, and jerk up the bat as the ball pitches, making no attempt to strike out when it connects with your bat. These are the principal strokes in defensive batsmanship. Practise them quietly in privacy before a practice or match, and you will be astonished at the ease with which they will come to you.

Only by learning purely defensive batsmanship can you hope to cultivate a style, and train on into a batsman of the highest order. After all, your club comes first, and it is your duty to keep your end for your club when you are at the wicket. The lad who selfishly—and often foolishly—goes out for individual glory at the wicket is a player that no captain cares to have in the side.

As in football and every other game, the "club" spirit is the spirit to cultivate, for only by working collectively and towards one end can you hope for your team to do well in its games. And if you succeed in

helping that team to finish the season at the top of the league, or to win one or more of the trophies for which it is entered, what better personal glory can you wish for?

How to Hit Hard.

And now for the lad who has mastered the simple principles of "stonewalling," and is anxious to get on to scientific batsmanship, we will turn our attention to the opposite aspect of cricket—hard hitting and run getting.

Don't misunderstand me. By hard hitting I do not mean slogging, for a slogger is not a scientific batsman, and against a bowler who knows his job thoroughly, and is expert in carrying it out, he is likely to meet with short shrift. You can be a hard hitter without being a slogger, and if you play carefully, your batting average will always be miles above that of the slogger.

I have already taught you the elementary strokes of defensive play, and on these strokes the whole art of batsmanship is based.

If the ball is an easy one and looks safe, you may temporarily discard scientific ambitions, jump out at it, and hit with all your might. If it pitches so that you can reach it on the rebound by striding out with your left foot, then play the forward stroke, striking the ball as it passes the foot.

Watch The Ball!

But don't be in too much of a hurry to hit. An early clout at the ball means sky-ing it into the air, and probably into the hands of some alert fieldsman. Leave the actual stroke till the very last moment, meeting the ball as the bat swoops down towards the ground. In this way you will find that balls thus treated will travel swiftly along the ground and will not rise, as balls that are hit too early often do.

Of course, to get good results you must put all your beef behind the stroke; but if you find that your first efforts meet with success, don't get excited and lash out at all and sundry, as I have seen some youngsters do. Even a hard hitter may face a bowler whom he can only play by defensive strokes, and until you get the measure of the man at the other end, treat him carefully.

Practice makes perfect, they say, and, as you know, I am a great believer in practice. Do nothing in a match until you have rehearsed it in private—until you feel yourself perfect on the practice pitch. Above all, keep your head, and acquire that most important factor of the successful cricketer—sound judgment!

Next week, if you are agreeable, we will go on to the subject of bowling.

IN THE LION'S SKIN

By WILLY HANDFORTH

“WHAT does it feel like to be a performing lion?” lots of people have been asking me after they had seen me at the circus last week. They didn't dream it was me when they watched me gambolling about in that cage, while my big, brave brother pretended that he was risking his life making me jump through lighted hoops—I would have like to have seen him doing it without burning himself. But you would have roared if you had seen Ted when he got into the wrong cage in mistake, and found himself facing a real lion instead of me—the lion roared, anyhow.

It's not a pleasant feeling being a lion with a silly chump like Ted as trainer. No tame lion living would put up with the lashing he gave me. If I had been a real lion, I would have torn him to pieces. As it was, I had to show him that he couldn't flick me with that whip just as he liked. Of course, I know that Ted didn't mean to hurt me. I suppose he was trying to show off before Irene.

Ted wanted at first to be the lion. A fine mess he would have made of it, too. It would have been a case of the ass in the lion's skin! Walking and jumping about on four feet is not so easy as it looks. Besides, this unnatural position is beastly tiring. I would much rather be a Felix any day, because then you can walk on two legs.

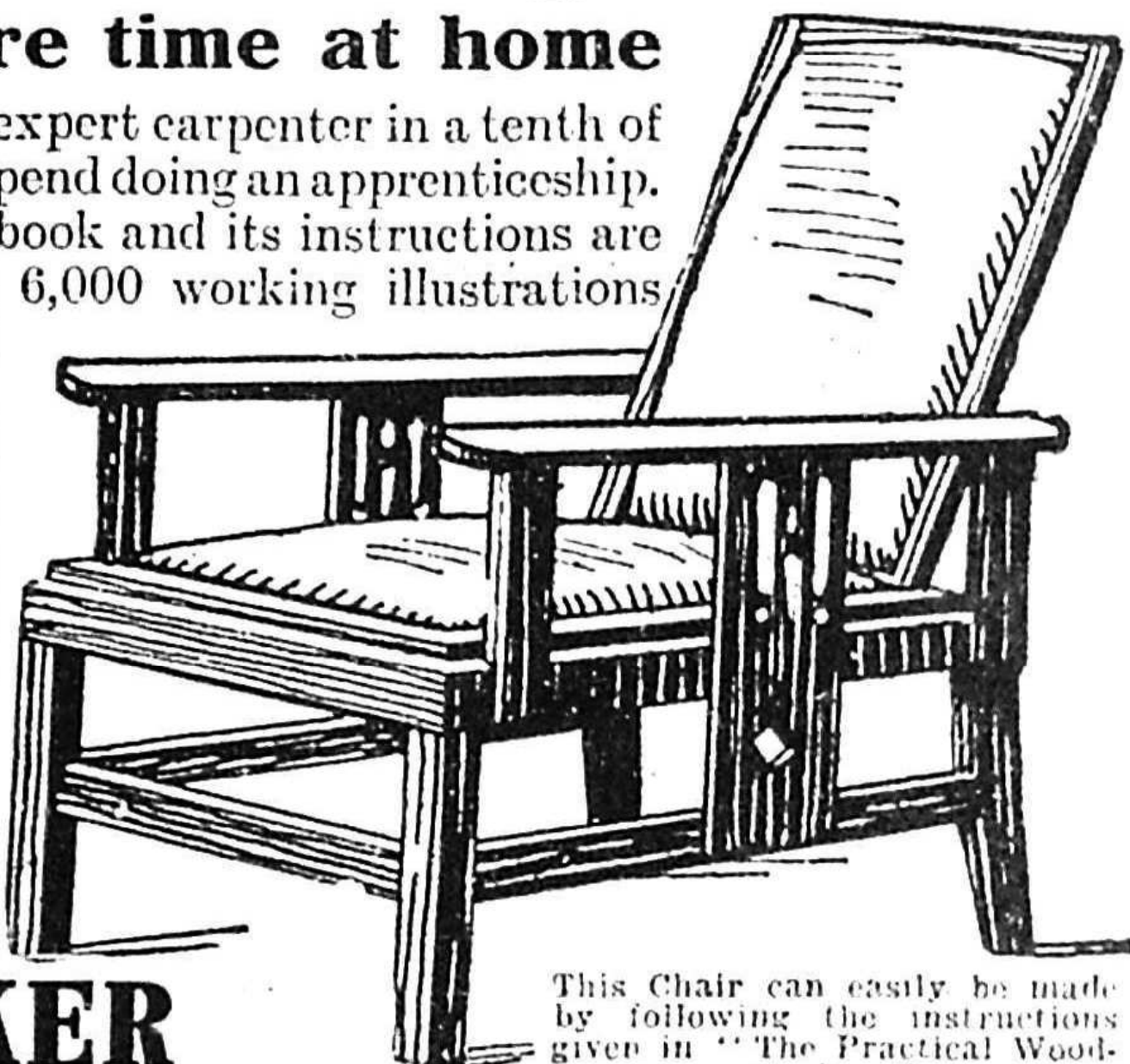
To see an ordinary lion walking up and down a cage may be all right at the Zoo, but it would be much too tame for a circus show. To be any good he must be able to do tricks without hurting his master. That is where I scored over the real lion. I could do lots of tricks which the best trained lion in any circus could never have done. What lion, for instance, would have sat on his haunches and rocked with laughter after he had pushed his trainer over? Lions haven't, as a rule, any sense of humour. It is only by fear that they are made to do anything. In my case, it was brotherly love.

The way Ted takes all the applause, which was really due to my acting, is not quite fair. After all, as everyone knows, I am doing the lion's share!

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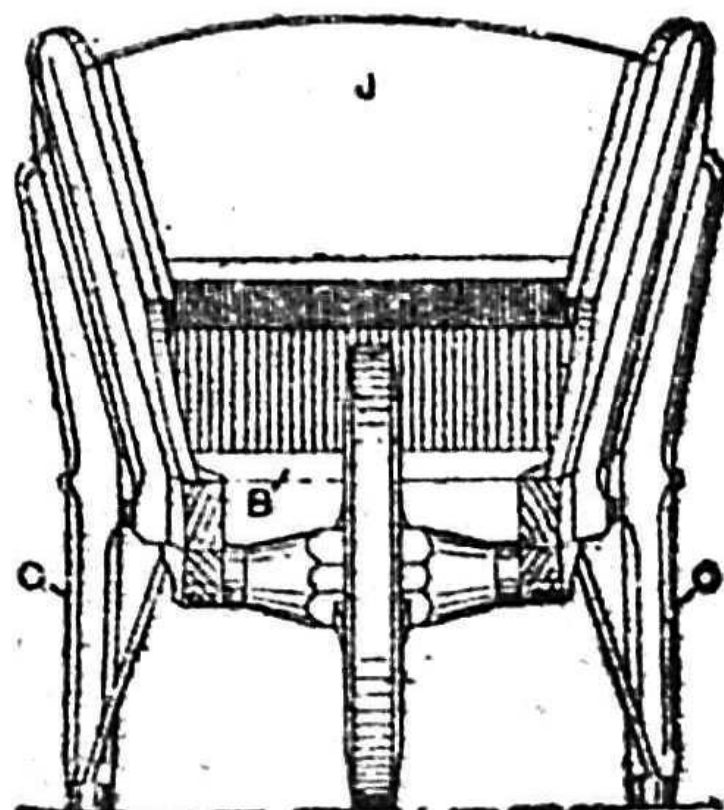
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