

A LIVELY STORY OF SCHOOL AND THE RING!

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Willy was dropping straight into the yawning black chasm of the chimney.

CIRCUS AGAINST CIRCUS!

A Tale of the Rival Circuses and the Boys of St. Frank's.

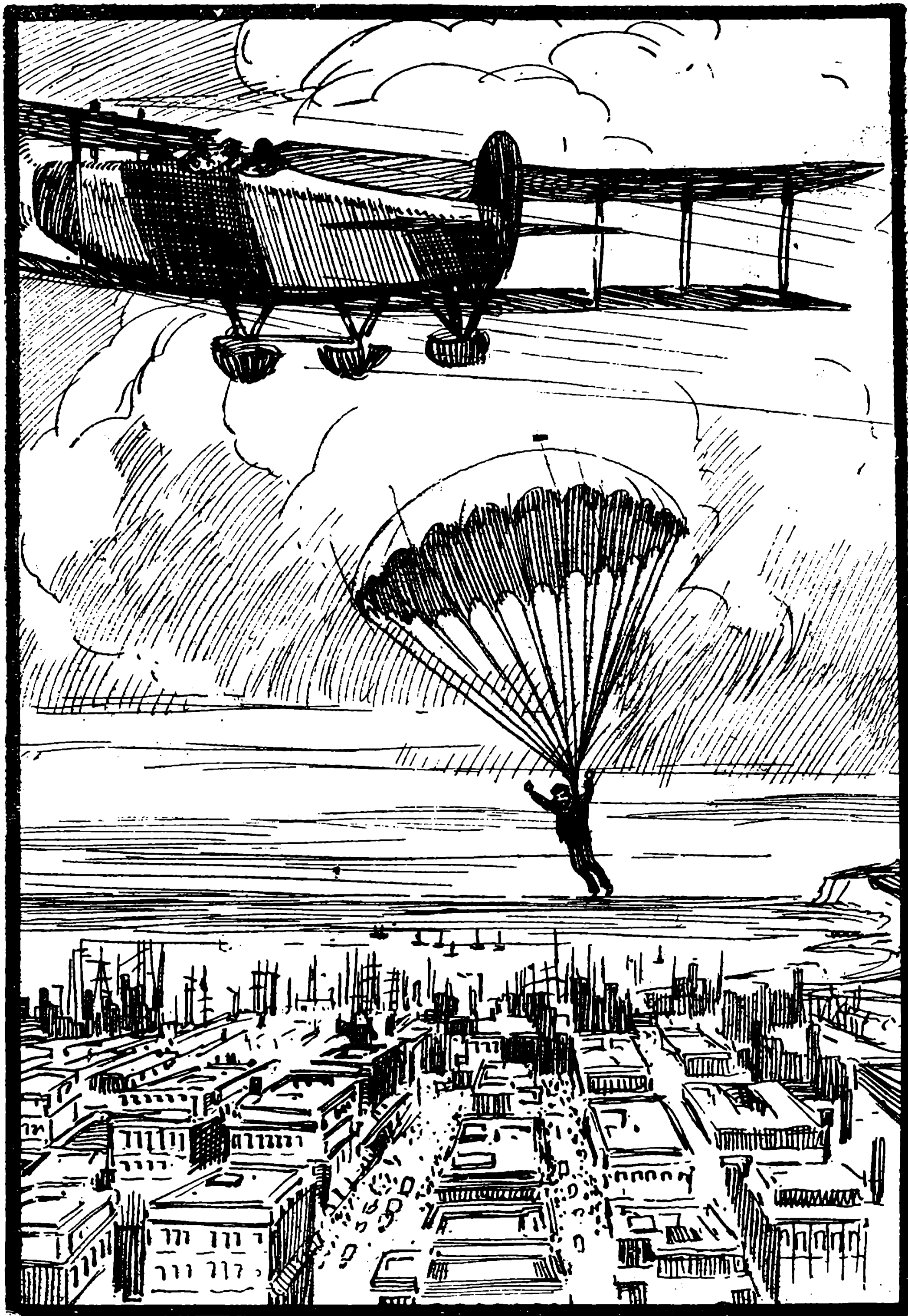
No. 469.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

May 31, 1924.

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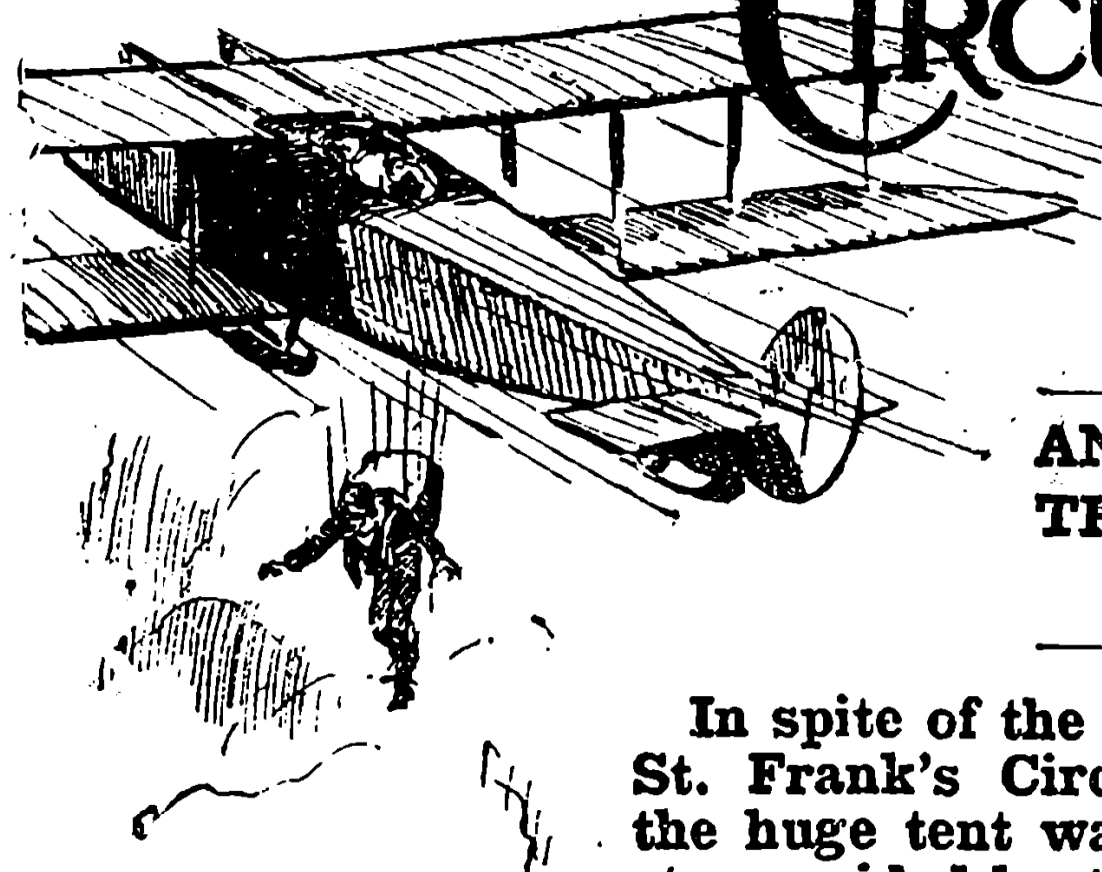
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Willy floated gently and comfortably in the atmosphere. Far below the streets and houses looked tiny and toylike, and the people were midgets.

CIRCUS AGAINST CIRCUS!

AN EXHILARATING STORY OF
THE ST. FRANK'S CIRCUS AND A
RIVAL SHOW.



In spite of the terrible disaster that wrecked the St. Frank's Circus last week at Bannington, when the huge tent was destroyed by the fury of a raging storm aided by the villainy of Simon Snayle, the unscrupulous manager, the Juniors are determined to give their performance at Caistowe as advertised. Fortunately, there was no loss of life, although a number of people had suffered from injuries and shock. Without delay a new tent had been ordered and preparations for the forthcoming show were hustled forward with great zest. But there is a rival circus on the road known as Casselli's Circus, owned by Bill Cassell. Snayle sees an opportunity to thwart the Juniors by helping the rival showman to queer the pitch of the St. Frank's Circus. Buster Boots, the St. Frank's advertising genius, gets busy, and something startling happens which you will read about in the absorbing story below.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

CASSELLI'S INTERNATIONAL CIRCUS!

THE headlights of the small two-seater revealed the long line of circus waggons, trucks, and caravans. It was just after midnight, and the main road to Bournemouth was wet and gritty, after a devastating thunderstorm, which had swept over the county in the late evening.

But now the moon was shining from an almost cloudless sky, and the night was summer-like and tranquil in its calm peacefulness. The countryside was quite undisturbed except for the grinding of wheels, the stamping of horses' hoofs, and the noisy puffing of the traction engine which led the circus procession.

The man in the two-seater had pulled his car to one side of the road, so that the circus would have full room. And he regarded the long string of vehicles with eminent satisfaction.

They were painted in all sorts of colours, most of them glaringly bright and gaudy, the paint being new. And most of the vans bore the legend, "Casselli's International Circus."

"Good!" murmured the new-comer. "I didn't expect to come across this bunch for another half-hour." He caught sight of one of the drivers regarding him critically, and he raised his voice. "Is Mr. Cassell with the show?" he called. "I'd like to see him."

"You'll find the boss in the last caravan," replied the man. "Mebbe he ain't gone to sleep yet, but like as not he has. And Big Bill don't like being disturbed, mister."

The stranger merely nodded, and allowed the procession to pass him. He soon picked out the last caravan, and he left his seat in the car, and lightly mounted the rear steps of the caravan. The procession was only travelling at about three miles an hour, so the move was easy.

The door proved to be locked, and the visitor hammered loudly.

"Who's that?" came a rough, throaty voice.

"It's all right, Bill. It's me—Snayle," said the other.

There came a movement within, and the door was flung open, revealing a hulking man, with coarse red features and an enormous moustache that lent him an air of importance. His fat chin disappeared into

the folds of his neck, and altogether he looked a most greasy, unprepossessing specimen of humanity in his present attire, for he was without coat or waistcoat, and collarless.

"Why, blame me if it ain't Simon!" he said heartily. "Come in, old man! The last feller I expected to see—particularly at this time o' night. You ain't lookin' so well——"

"No, an' I don't feel well," interrupted Mr. Simon Snayle. "I wouldn't have come, only the matter's important. I've got a small car here, Bill, and I can't leave it in the road. Best call a halt while we have a little talk."

"What, the whole bunch?" said Mr. William Cassell. "You've got a nerve, Simon! Think I'm going to stop all these vans——"

"Well, if you don't stop them now, you'll have to call a halt a bit higher up the road, so it won't make much difference," interrupted Mr. Snayle. "I tell you it's important, Bill, and I shan't keep you longer than ten minutes."

The big man agreed, and he jumped to the road, and yelled out some orders in a roaring voice, which were repeated right down the line of vehicles. And in a few minutes the entire procession had pulled to the extreme side of the road, and had come to a halt. In the meantime, Mr. Snayle had taken his little two-seater to the end of the line, leaving it there.

"Now, Simon, what's the game?" inquired Mr. Cassell, as the pair sat down on opposite lockers in the caravan. "It ain't every man I'd stop for like this. And what are you doin' on this road, anyway? I thought you was in Bannington, with the Onions outfit!"

Mr. Cassell poured out two generous tots of whisky, and pushed one glass over towards his visitor. In the ring, Mr. Cassell was rather more imposing than at the present moment. When before the public, he was resplendent in red cloth and gold braid, and his name became Signor Casselli. And his circus—which he owned lock, stock, and barrel—was one of the finest on the road.

"Thanks, Bill," said Mr. Snayle as he took the whisky. "Well, here's luck to our next venture! And if you'll come in with me, and see the affair in the right light, there's no reason why we shouldn't bust up the Onions show, once and for all!"

Mr. Cassell looked interested.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Simon," he said. "I'm opening at Bourne-mouth to-morrow afternoon, an' I ain't got time to waste on the Onions show. I've left that in your hands, an' so far you've made a pretty mess of it!"

Mr. Snayle frowned.

"You don't know the facts——" he began.

"I know that you're the manager of the outfit, and that old Professor Onions is a-bed with paralysis, an' can't move a finger," interrupted Mr. Cassell. "What's more, the

show's bein' run by the professor's two sons—a couple o' mere school kids. An', by what I can 'ear, the show's doin' record business. Doesn't say much for you, Simon."

"It's all very well to talk, but things have been against me," said Simon Snayle as he tossed down the last of his whisky. "Ever since we came to our arrangement, I've done the best I could."

Big Bill sneered.

"The best!" he echoed. "By thunder! An' ever since this tour started, the Onions circus has played to record crowds! An' our arrangement was that you should make the show a dead failure!"

"Haven't I told you that those boys butted in?" demanded Mr. Snayle hotly. "Didn't I speak to you on the telephone last week? Didn't I write to you? You don't understand, Bill! Those cursed St. Frank's boys have got more pep than a hundred ordinary performers. Why, they changed the show out of all recognition!"

Bill Cassell grunted and lit a cigar.

"Well, Simon, you ain't the man I thought you was," he said unpleasantly. "If you was any sort of a manager, you'd see that them boys didn't play you up in that way. I'm surprised! A man of your experience—a circus man all your life—allowin' a parcel of blamed school kids to beat you! Why, dang my skin, you ain't got the pluck of a rabbit!"

Mr. Snayle rose to his feet.

"Look here, Bill! I didn't come here to have that kind of talk chucked at me!" he snarled. "We came to an agreement, you and me, and I've done the best I could to keep to it——"

"Your best ain't so very much to boast of!" said the fat man.

"If you knew what them boys were, you wouldn't talk like that," snapped Simon Snayle. "Young terrors—that's what they are! Especially Nipper and Handforth and Dodd, that Australian kid. What's more, Bill, they know the business. Know it? I'm telling you, Bill, some of those kids can do better stunts than the highest paid performers in the game!"

Big Bill Cassell looked dubious.

"You allus were a man to make yourself in the right, Simon," he said. "Mebbe you've had some trouble with them boys, but I don't agree that you couldn't 'ave done better than what you 'ave. No, Simon. An' you can't fool me, neither. We went into an agreement together that you was to mess up the Onions show, an' make it worthless——"

"I might as well talk to a blank wall!" interrupted Mr. Snayle harshly. "Don't I keep telling you that things haven't turned out as we expected? But it's not too late, Bill. We'll get the show yet, and if you'll only agree to what I suggest, the thing will be done in no time."

From the conversation of these two men, it was clearly apparent that they had entered upon a villainous conspiracy to ruin

Professor Onions' Colossal Circus and Menagerie.

The object of the plot was clear enough.

The Onions Circus was the only rival that Casselli's International Show feared. The two circuses never covered the same districts, but generally gave one another a wide berth. And pure professional jealousy was at the root of Bill Cassell's plotting.

Simon Snayle was purely out for gain, however, and his interest was greater than his confederate's. But he could do nothing without Cassell's money, and was therefore in the rascally circus proprietor's hands.

The plot was a simple one.

Mr. Snayle had been left in charge of the Onions show because Professor Onions himself was lying helpless in bed, a permanent invalid. His unfortunate condition, it appeared, was the result of a stroke, brought on by unexpected financial loss on the Stock Exchange.

The professor's two sons, Johnny and Bertie, were really pupils of the River House School, but they had taken over the ownership of the circus at the commencement of this tour, with Simon Snayle as manager.

And Snayle, in accordance with his agreement with Big Bill Cassell, had planned, from the very first, to make the tour a dismal failure, so that the whole circus, including the stock-in-trade, would be a losing proposition, and in the market at a ridiculously low price.

As soon as this stage was reached, Mr. Cassell was to have come on the scene, and he and Snayle would then have bought the outfit for themselves, holding half-shares. And Mr. Snayle was to have cleared the Onions brothers out, changed the name of the circus, and to have made it a financial success.

A pretty pair of rogues, indeed!

CHAPTER II.

SIMON SNAYLE'S SCHEME.



APPARENTLY the plan had not worked to perfection.

And the reason for this was not far to seek. The circus had been in the town of Helmford when Mr. Snayle's scheme had come to a head, when he had successfully bullied the performers until they left the show in the lurch. It really seemed that the plot had succeeded.

But by an unlucky chance for the conspirators—and a very lucky chance for Johnny and Bertie Onions—a crowd of St. Frank's juniors had arrived on the scene. As Johnny and Bertie were old friends of the St. Frank's Remove, the latter had nobly come to the rescue.

The result had even surprised the Remov-
ites.

For the show, instead of being a failure, was turned into an instantaneous success, and had gone from triumph to triumph ever since, in spite of all Simon Snayle's petty interference and plotting.

But now, on this particular night, a fresh opportunity had arisen.

"It's this way, Bill," said Mr. Snayle, leaning over the little table and speaking tensely, "the Onions show opens up at Caistowe to-morrow afternoon; at least, that's the plan. I dare say you were in that thunderstorm earlier this evening?"

"In it?" repeated Mr. Cassell. "We was nearly washed away! About the worst storm I can remember. But they tell me it was a lot worse down near the coast."

"In Bannington, we had it something terrible," said Mr. Snayle. "I don't want to keep you too long, Bill, so I'll cut it short. Our big tent was blown down and stripped to ribbons—absolutely wrecked. The tent's no more use than a heap of old sacks now."

Mr. Snayle conveniently neglected to mention that the tent had been wrecked through his own villainy. Big Bill was fairly unscrupulous, but he would certainly not have agreed to endangering human life. In a drunken frenzy Snayle had cut the stay ropes of the big tent at the height of the storm, and the result had been disastrous.

The affair had been a sensation at Bannington. Scores of people had been injured, and a good few were now in hospital, suffering from broken limbs and other wounds. Happily, there had been no fatal injuries.

"If the big tent was ripped to ribbons, how in thunder is the show going to open to-morrow?" demanded Mr. Cassell.

"Those Onions kids are darned smart," acknowledged Simon Snayle grudgingly. "They got on the 'phone at once, and got hold of Ashford & Martin's, the big tent manufacturers——"

"Think I don't know 'em?" interrupted the other tartly.

"Yes, I suppose you do," agreed Mr. Snayle. "I know 'em, too—old Onions has had his stuff from Ashford & Martin's for years, and I know the manager and most of the men. Well, to cut it short, they're putting a brand new tent on the road at once, and they've guaranteed to deliver the whole shoot at Caistowe at nine o'clock."

"Quick work!" said Big Bill approvingly.

"You bet it's quick work," agreed Snayle. "But I doubt if they'd have done it if they hadn't had a promise of cash on the nail. The Onions show ain't been doing so well lately, as we know, and these big firms are a bit careful nowadays. But, owing to them school kids, the money has been rolling in like a full tide during these last couple of weeks. And the big tent's going to be delivered by nine o'clock——"

"You said that afore," interrupted Mr. Cassell impatiently. "Durned if I can see what you're driving at, Simon."

"I'll tell you!" said Snayle, lowering his voice. "If that tent don't arrive, the show

goes bust—see? It's all advertised, and the Caistowe folks are ready to flock to it in crowds. Besides that, the place is a seaside resort, and it's full of visitors. Good enough for a four-day stand, Bill! And packed tents at every performance!"

"Well, what about it?" asked the fat man. "What do you mean—if the tent don't arrive?"

"Well, my game is to go along in my little car, and meet those lorries containing the tent," said Snayle. "It's bound to come along this road, and it's due to pass in the early morning, just about dawn. My plan is to stop those lorries, and send them on to Bournemouth."

"Bournemouth!" echoed Big Bill. "Why, what the——"

"Wait! Hear the rest of it before you start butting in," exclaimed Snayle. "The men on those lorries know me. They know I'm the manager of the Onions show, and they'll take my word for gospel. I shan't have no trouble there. I'll simply say the circus is opening at Bournemouth instead of Caistowe, and they'll push off on the other road."

"Maybe," said Big Bill. "But what in the name of thunder are you suggesting, Simon? You can get the tent sent to Bournemouth, I've no doubt, but what the Peter is the good of it? I don't want the blamed tent!"

"Of course you don't. But your advance agent is in Bournemouth, and he can deal with the tent when it arrives," said Snayle. "You won't take your show to Bournemouth at all, but go on straight to Caistowe."

"Me—go to Caistowe?" gasped Signor Casselli, aghast. "You blamed fool! What monkey business——"

"I tell you it's the best chance we've ever had," urged Snayle earnestly. "All you've got to do is to get in touch with your advance agent, and get him to post up some fresh notices that the show is postponed for four days. You'll get your Bournemouth pitch just the same, and you'll get Caistowe as well. It's only a matter of simple arrangement. And the big point is this—by working this dodge we'll smash the Onions show in one swoop!"

Big Bill Cassell pursed his fat, coarse lips, and slowly stroked his middle chin.

"I never knew you were such a cunning snake, Simon," he said slowly. "It's an idea—I'm admittin' it! It's a good idea, too! But it needs a bit o' thinkin' over before we fully decide."

"Well, you can't think too long, because time's going, and if we don't act at once, the chance will be left behind," said Snayle. "Man alive! The thing don't need any thinking of! Listen! All you've got to do is to go to Caistowe, and it would be a good idea to pitch in the next blamed meadow to the Onions outfit."

Mr. Cassell's eyes gleamed—the idea appealed to him.

"The next meadow, eh?" he muttered. "That's a darned good idea, Simon! Make

them Onions kids squirm, eh? But how do you know we can get the next meadow? Mebbe there ain't a next meadow at all——"

"Well, there is, because I happen to know the place, and the pitch as well," interrupted Simon Snayle. "Don't you see, Bill? You'll get all the benefit of the Onions' advertising, and the crowds will flock into your show. Most of them won't know the difference—a circus is a circus, and the public ain't nothing more than fools, at the best! You'll have everything your own way, because the Onions' outfit can't open. Without their big tent, they'll be helpless. And the big tent will be in Bournemouth. What's more, your advance agent can fix things so that the tent gets absolutely lost."

"Yes, but Ashford Martin can send another!" said Big Bill.

"Not likely! Not without the cash!" argued Snayle. "In any case, it'll be too late, because it's the first day that counts, and if the Onions' show can't open to-morrow, it's done! You'll be the first in the field, and you'll make that other outfit look darned silly!"

Big Bill Cassell thumped the table heavily.

"It's a go, Simon!" he said grimly. "We'll do it!"

CHAPTER III.

THE SCHOOLBOY CIRCUS PERFORMERS.



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH yawned.

"Jolly glad to get to bed, anyway," he said sleepily, as he slipped between the sheets. "Nearly midnight! Thank goodness

we haven't got to get up early in the morning!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We can sleep until the rising bell!"

"Good egg!"

"Don't talk about eggs—it makes me feel hungry!" grumbled Fatty Little. "I tried to get some grub downstairs, but every giddy cupboard was empty! And when I suggested some sandwiches to Mr. Lee, he calmly told me that grub's bad for the health late at night! He doesn't know what he's talking about!"

"Well, I dare say you'll survive," grinned Reggie Pitt.

The Remove dormitory in the Ancient House at St. Frank's was not in its usual state of tranquil peace—for at such an hour as this it was customary for the long room to be silent, except for the deep breathing of the majority of juniors, and the unmusical snores of Handforth and one or two other similar miscreants.

But to-night was a special occasion.

We had all got back from the circus in Bannington shortly after eleven o'clock,

but in view of the very exceptional circumstances, we had been excused.

We were only late because we had stayed behind to engage in rescue work, and we had received nothing but commendation. If we had arrived back at school at the correct hour, admitting that we had come away in the midst of the disaster, we should not have received much praise.

As it was, the Head himself had expressed his admiration in warm terms, and we had gone off to bed feeling tired, achy, but perfectly content. We had every reason to congratulate ourselves.

"Well, there's nothing to worry over," I remarked, as I donned my pyjamas. "The

duffer. I don't go about with my eyes closed!"

"It's rather a late hour to receive news, but news is always welcome," remarked Pitt, amiably. "Glad to hear you're broadcast, Handy, old man. And what does the great brain suggest?"

"Foul play!" said Handforth grimly.

"Just now you said the thing was fishy," said Pitt. "And now you're talking about fowls! Might as well stick to one class of food."

"My hat!" said Handforth contemptuously. "And this chap goes into the ring, and tries to be funny! And people laugh at

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circus is moving on to Caistowe to-night, and Johnny made certain that the new tent will be on hand at nine o'clock. So everything'll go along in just the same way as usual."

"Considering the wreckage of that tent, it's pretty marvellous to realise that the show will start at the usual hour to-morrow afternoon," said Church. "But I can't make out why the old tent collapsed. It seemed strong enough to me."

"There was something fishy about it," declared Handforth.

"Oh, come off it——"

"Something fishy!" repeated Handforth darkly. "You can't fool me! I'm not a

him, too! It only shows that it takes an idiot to make the public laugh!"

"That's quite right," said Pitt. "The public yells at you."

"Oh, go to sleep, and don't jaw so much!" grumbled De Valerie. "Don't you chaps realise it's after midnight?"

"I don't care if it's four o'clock in the morning!" retorted Handforth. "There was something fishy about that tent collapsing, and I'm not afraid to say so! I shouldn't be a bit surprised if Snayle himself was at the bottom of the whole rotten business!"

"I suppose Snayle waved a kind of wand,

and caused the thunderstorm?" asked Church sarcastically.

"I don't want any rot from you, Walter Church!" interrupted Handforth, with a glare. "Snayle didn't cause the thunderstorm—but he assisted it! I don't believe the storm, alone, would have busted the tent up! I'm pretty sure that old Snayle played some dirty work."

"Well, we won't argue about it," I put in. "But I'm inclined to agree with you, Handy. I had my suspicions about Snayle, from the first. But I don't think he did the thing deliberately."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you know as well as I do that Snayle was as drunk as a lord when the show started," I replied. "In fact, he was so swilled that he was practically helpless. And if he did anything to the tent at all, he must have done it in an intoxicated frenzy. That's my opinion, anyway. Not that it's any good making these theories, because we shall never be able to prove how the tent collapsed."

"Then let's get to sleep," said McClure drowsily. "It's a half holiday to-morrow, so we needn't be up before the rising bell goes—and that's something to be thankful for."

To any outsider, this would have sounded rather a remarkable statement. But while the Remove fellows were engaged in helping the circus, they were obliged to put in two hours extra work in the early morning, in order to have their afternoons free—this necessitating a very early start. Five-thirty was the rising hour.

But on half-holidays there were no afternoon lessons, of course, and so the juniors were enabled to remain languidly in bed until the usual getting-up time.

"It seems a pity to spoil the sequence," I said thoughtfully. "I shall be awake at half-past five, and if you fellows like, I'll haul you out."

"But what on earth for?" asked Jack Grey.

"For one thing, after being up early every morning, it seems a pity to slack in bed to-morrow," I said.

"Slack!" snorted Handforth. "Even if we don't get up till rising bell, we shall only have seven hours sleep. And if we get up at half-past five, we shall only have five hours!"

"Did you do that in your head?" asked Pitt sleepily.

"I'm admitting that we shall only have five hours," I said, "but five hours' sleep is quite enough for once in a while—"

"Well, I'm going to have seven!" said Handforth flatly.

"Hear, hear!" said two or three of the others.

"And yet all people with big brains can do with four or five hours sleep," I said thoughtfully. "Edison, for example, never has more than four hours sleep. I'm sur-

prised at you, Handy. With a brain like yours, you ought to be able to do with a mere nap!"

"As a matter of fact, I'd made up my mind to be up at five-thirty, in any case," said Handforth promptly. "And you needn't call me, either! I shall be awake to the tick!"

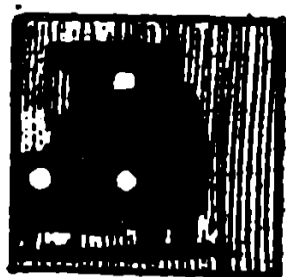
I grinned.

"Well, I think I'll give you a jab, just for old time's sake," I said. "My idea is to get out our bikes, slip to Caistowe, and have a look at the new pitch before breakfast."

Most of the others agreed that it was a good suggestion—but, somehow, I had an idea that they would hold different opinions at the chill, cheerless hour of five-thirty a.m.!

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE WEE SMALL HOURS.



MR. SIMON SNAYLE applied the brakes of his two-seater, and the car came to a halt.

It was in the small hours, and the moon was still shining peacefully. The main road was quiet, except for the rumble of three heavy motor lorries that were approaching.

Mr. Snayle was not yet certain that he had reached his quarry, but these big vehicles looked like them. He watched them closely as they drew abreast and proceeded to pass.

"Want any help there?" hailed the driver of the first van, apparently thinking that the two-seater was disabled.

"No, thanks—but hold on a minute!" shouted Mr. Snayle. "I've been waiting for you fellows. You've got the big tent there, for Onions' Circus, haven't you?"

One glance at the lorries had satisfied Mr. Snayle.

The three heavy motor trucks came to a halt, and a number of men got down, and walked across to meet Mr. Snayle. One of them was apparently the foreman, and Snayle recognised him at once—with a thrill of satisfaction. He held out his hand.

"I'm glad you've come, Taylor," said Snayle heartily. "I was half afraid you'd all be strangers."

"Mr. Snayle, isn't it?" asked Taylor. "Didn't expect to see you on this part of the road, sir. We've got orders to go straight down to Caistowe, and we must be there by nine. We're trying to arrive at eight—"

"As it happens, Taylor, the plan has been altered," interrupted Snayle. "I take it that you are in charge of this job?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you know me, of course—I'm the manager of Onions' Circus, and I've been

at considerable pains to get in touch with you," said Snayle. "In fact, the only way was to come personally, and meet you on the road."

"Well, it was a pretty certain way, at least, sir," grinned Taylor.

"At the last minute we decided to open up at Bournemouth, instead of Caistowe," said Mr. Snayle easily. "We had some trouble about the pitch, and Bournemouth is a better proposition, anyway. So I want you to go straight through to Bournemouth. It'll hardly make any difference, because the distance is practically the same."

Taylor nodded.

"As a matter of fact, sir, I'd rather go

to Caistowe—and that would have meant a big delay."

The men never thought of questioning Mr. Snayle's authority. They knew him to be the manager of the circus, and they took his instructions without the slightest suspicion of a conspiracy.

It was quite true that a man would meet the lorries just outside Bournemouth—but this man would not be the agent of Professor Onions' Colossal Circus, but the representative of Casselli's International Circus. But Mr. Snayle did not think it necessary to mention the detail.

Once the big tent was in Bournemouth, it would be dealt with promptly. And the



"We had some trouble about the pitch," said Mr. Snayle easily, "so I want you to take the tent straight through to Bournemouth."

to Bournemouth, because I know the road," he said. "I reckon we shall do it by eight o'clock easily. Whereabouts is the pitch, sir?"

Mr. Snayle was quite ready for the question.

"I haven't seen it, so I can't tell you exactly," he replied. "But our agent will be waiting on a bicycle just outside the town—on the main road. You can't miss him, because he'll be there as early as six o'clock. He'll direct you straight to the ground."

"Well, that's clear enough, sir," said Taylor. "It's a good thing you hit on us like this, or we should have gone straight

possibility of Onions' Circus giving a show in Caistowe that day would dwindle into a myth.

The whole thing was quite simple—so simple, in fact, that any kind of hitch was quite impossible. And Mr. Snayle bade good-morning to Taylor and his men, and watched the three lorries start up and go off.

Mr. Snayle did not accompany them very far, as it was necessary for him, as he declared, to run back to Caistowe in order to settle up a few final matters.

Two miles from the spot where Snayle had met the lorries, the main road branched off into two sections—a distinct fork where

the highway divided itself. One road led to Winchester and Bournemouth, and the other to Helmsford, Bannington and Caistowe.

Simon Snayle took the latter road, and he made no particular haste. He was feeling well content and satisfied. Everything was going splendidly, and it would now be out of the question for Johnny and Bertie Onions to give any show.

Dawn was already coming before Mr. Snayle reached Bannington, and the daylight had fully arrived by the time he located the new pitch of Casselli's Circus in Caistowe.

Work was progressing rapidly.

The ground was well chosen, for it stood on the main highway, with Caistowe right at hand, within easy walking distance. The meadow was large and perfectly flat, with the turf in excellent condition.

Bill Cassell's caravans were grouped about, and every available man was hard at work on the task of erecting the big tent. The scene was one of bustle and pulsating life.

And yet there was scarcely any commotion. Everything was being done so quietly and systematically that even in the next meadow, nobody knew what was going on.

And yet there, in that adjoining field—which was just as level, and just as well turfed, as its neighbour—Professor Onions' Circus was encamped. But it was silent and still, except for the occasional snorting of a horse, or a movement in the menagerie vans.

To be exact the Onions' circus slept.

A most unusual state of affairs, it is true, but perfectly natural under the circumstances. Johnny himself had informed the men that they need not turn out until seven o'clock—and the men were taking full advantage of this unaccustomed luxury.

For nothing could really be done until the tent arrived, except to prepare the ground. And as the tent wasn't expected before nine, the men, by rising at seven, would do all that was necessary.

Ordinarily, these burly, open-air fellows would have scorned to lie asleep until seven o'clock. But everybody connected with the Onions' circus had had a hard, strenuous, gruelling night.

There had been that terrible storm in Bannington, the wreckage of the tent, and the hours of continuous rescue work, without a moment's pause. And then, although the men were nearly dropping with fatigue, they had merely paused to consume a hasty supper, and had started forthwith on the task of dismantling the show.

Just before four a.m., the Caistowe pitch had been reached, and the men only stopped to see after the animals before they went to their quarters, to drop off into sound slumber—the deep sleep of exhaustion. So it was hardly surprising that the noises from the

adjoining meadow awoke nobody in the Onions' camp.

The situation was rather interesting.

There were these two circuses, side by side, within easy stone's throw of one another, and all the advantages were with the newcomer—the usurper.

Mr. Snayle grinned to himself as he saw the sleeping camp in the next meadow, for nothing pleased him better. He got out of his car, and approached Big Bill Cassell, who was superintending the operations.

"Well, Simon, I'm here—though I ain't so sure that I did the right thing," said Mr. Cassell, as they met. "Strikes me as being a bit too risky. Still, it's too late now!"

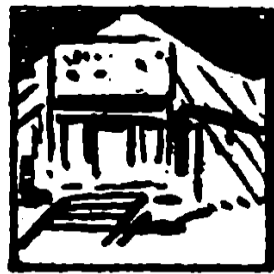
"There's nothing to worry about, Bill—I've fixed up the business just as we planned," said Mr. Snayle. "By this time, the tent is well on its way to Bournemouth, and we shall never even get a smell of it round this quarter."

"Good! Let's go into my van and have a drink on the strength of it," said Big Bill.

"Just the very thing I need!" declared Mr. Snayle heartily.

CHAPTER V.

SOMETHING LIKE A SURPRISE.



THE school clock at St. Frank's was chiming the half-hour when I opened my eyes, and sat up in bed, wide awake. Sunlight was streaming in through the big dormitory

windows, and the morning was filled with the twittering and singing of birds.

I glanced at my watch—five-thirty to the minute. I felt quite satisfied with myself, for after the previous strenuous evening, and the late hour of going to bed, this voluntary awakening had been well tested.

I had cultivated the habit through Nelson Lee's tuition, and it was a very handy accomplishment. I could generally awaken at whatever hour I pleased, and there was nothing particularly remarkable about it—just a question of will power.

I slipped out of bed at once, and commenced awakening the other fellows. They didn't like turning out, but I was insistent. And well before six we were outside in the Triangle—more than a dozen of us—making our way towards the bicycle shed.

Rather to our surprise, John Busterfield Boots and two or three other College House juniors turned up. We had not expected them to appear at all—but they had two or three alarm clocks between them, and had the strength of will to obey their summons.

"Well, we couldn't have a nicer morning, anyhow," said Handforth. "I'll take your bike, Church—my front tyre's punctured —"

"What about me?" snorted Church indignantly.

"I can't help your troubles!" snapped Handforth. "Pinch somebody else's machine—or perhaps you'd better stay behind! Anyhow, I've got your bike, and I'm going to stick to it!"

Handforth always acted in this high-handed fashion with his chums, and Church gave in without further protest. But he would certainly not have done so if there had been any chance of his being left behind. As it was, there were plenty of machines in the shed for him to choose from.

"I'll take Archie's," he said. "The lazy bounder hasn't got up—"

"What ho!" said Archie Glenthorne, putting his head in the doorway. "Cheerio, lads, and all that sort of rot!"

"Talk of angels, and they appear!" growled Church. "I'll have to take another machine now. Singleton's will do—there's no fear of him needing it before breakfast."

"So here we are, what?" observed Archie Glenthorne genially. "All bright and gay, with sunshine flowing over the old scene! The fact is, dear old souls, I heard you dashing about in the bath-room, so I thought I'd turn out."

"And do you really think you can kid us with that yarn?" asked Pitt. "My dear ass, I distinctly saw Phipps floating down the corridor with a tray."

"Oh, rather!" agreed Archie. "The good old cup of morning tea, you know! I mean, I gave the password to Phipps last night, and up rolled the blighter at five-thirty. I mean, it may be somewhat bracing to plunge out into the daylight at this hour, but it requires a frightful amount of stimulants before the old bed can be forsaken!"

We all started out across the Triangle, having sorted out our machines to the general satisfaction. At least, Handforth was the only one who appeared disgruntled.

"Look here, Church, you can have your rotten bike back!" he said abruptly. "The front brake won't go on, the saddle's all loose, and I wouldn't ride it if you gave it to me! I'll have Singleton's!"

Church had been rather afraid of this. The Hon. Douglas' machine was a spanker, and it was only by chance that Handforth had overlooked it at first. But Church couldn't grumble, because his own machine was returned to him.

"Some chaps can never make up their minds," he said tartly, as he regained possession of his own bicycle. "Well, I feel sorry for Singleton. I don't like to see a good jigger wrecked!"

"I haven't wrecked it, you fathead!" roared Handforth.

"No—but I expect you will!" said Church. "You've only had hold of my bike for two minutes, and you haven't even ridden it, but the lamp bracket's twisted, the brakes are all loose, and the saddle's got a horrible list to starboard."

"Better take care that dandy doesn't look at the bike too closely," said Reggie Pitt. "I believe that if he turned his full glare upon it, the jigger would simply fall to pieces."

We got off at last, after Josh Cuttle the porter, had opened the gates in response to our summons. And the ride to Caistowe in the clear air of the May morning drove the last vestige of sleep from our eyes. We arrived at the outskirts of the snug little port as fresh as daisies.

I was the first to notice something peculiar.

We knew where the new circus pitch was situated, but some little time before we reached it, I noticed the great bulk of a huge tent rising up from beyond the hedges.

"Hallo! They've got the new tent here already!" I exclaimed, in surprise. "And it's only about half-past six! They didn't reckon to be down with it before nine!"

"But it seems to be in the wrong meadow," said Pitt, staring. "I thought Johnny said that— Why, what the— Those caravans aren't the same, I'll swear!"

We had now come within clearer view of the first meadow, and there certainly seemed to be something unfamiliar about the circus rolling stock. We all put on speed, being curious.

"They're different, certainly," I agreed. "The Onions caravans are a bit shabby, and they're painted cream and green. But these caravans are chocolate and yellow! Look at the traction, too! It's altogether bigger— Great Scott!"

"What's the matter, ass?" asked Handforth.

"It's another circus!" I yelled.

"Impossible!" said Pitt, looking startled. "No other circus would be idiotic enough to come and open in Caistowe— By Jove, you're right, though! See that sign? Casselli's International Circus! Well, this is the limit! You could knock me down with a sledge-hammer!"

We all stared at the strange caravans with growing interest—indeed, with amazement. Such a discovery as this had never entered our heads—it was about the last thing we expected to see.

By the time we rode past the gates of the meadow, there was no room for the slightest doubt, for groups of strange men were hustling about at their work as though they were being paid double wages. And Casselli's Circus was taking definite shape.

The big tent—of the same type as the one that had been destroyed in the Onions' circus the previous night—was more than half up, and men were swarming over it like ants.

We didn't pause, but pressed onwards to the next meadow—where we could now see the familiar cream and green caravans dotted about on the turf. But this meadow was a scene of desolation compared to the other.

There was no sign of activity, except for

the lazy movements of one or two horses in the distance. The caravans were deserted looking. Not a human figure could be seen—not a single spiral of smoke arose from any of the caravan chimneys.

"There's something funny about this!" I said grimly. "Everybody's asleep here!"

"Johnny said he'd let the men take it easy until seven o'clock," put in Buster Boots. "There's nearly half-an-hour before seven. But what on earth is Casselli's Circus doing so near by?"

"That's what we've got to find out," I said firmly. "Casselli's is the only other circus that Professor Onions steered clear of. The two shows are rivals, and by all that Johnny has told me of Mr. William Cassell, he's not exactly a saint. There's something crooked about this, I'll bet!"

CHAPTER VI.

ANXIOUS HOURS.



JOHNNY ONIONS yawned and stretched himself.

"What on earth are you chaps doing here?" he asked sleepily. "It isn't seven o'clock yet, is it?"

"Twenty minutes to," I replied. "We started out early to come and inspect the new pitch. But there's something I want you to look at, Johnny. No, don't dress—come here!"

Johnny Onions got out of his little bed, and regarded us curiously. Bertie, in the other bed, made no attempt to rise. There were only one or two of us in the caravan, the rest of the fellows having stayed outside.

"What's the matter with you fellows?" asked Johnny, staring. "You're looking as grave as a set of owls! Has something happened?"

"That's what we want to know," I replied. "Come here, my son, and see if you can explain this."

I took him to the door, and pointed across to the adjoining meadow. The hedge was quite low—in fact, in some places it degenerated into a mere bank—and the Casselli caravans and the big tent could be seen with ease.

Johnny Onions looked, rubbed his eyes, looked again, and then he went rather pale. He turned a startled countenance towards me, and clutched at my arm.

"It's—it's Bill Cassell's outfit!" he gasped. "I know the colours!"

"Is this the first time you've seen it here?"

"Yes, of course!"

"Didn't you know Casselli's Circus was coming?" I asked keenly.

"It's—it's absolutely mad!" exclaimed Johnny, utterly bewildered. "I must be dreaming, or something! Cassell's a fool to

come and pitch right in the next meadow to us! There must be a mistake——"

"That's impossible," I interrupted. "Cassell knows you're here—he couldn't fail to know it. Caistowe is plastered with your publicity, and your display bills are stuck on every gate and hoarding along the country roads."

"But there are no announcements of Casselli's Circus," said Johnny. "I heard that he was a lot further West—towards Dorsetshire. I say, there's something rummy about this, you know!"

"It's more than rummy!" agreed Buster Boots. "This rival of yours isn't such a fool as you think. He's going to take advantage of all your advertising! Tons of people will walk into his circus without knowing the difference——"

"I can believe that, but Bill Cassell is one of the most experienced showmen in the country," interrupted Johnny. "He knows well enough there's not room for two circuses in a small place like Caistowe. And with all the advertising in favour of us, he's simply riding for a fall."

"And yet he's a shrewd showman?" I said slowly.

"That's why I can't understand it," replied Johnny. "Look here—I'll tell you what. Just wait five minutes, and I'll get dressed and go along and have a word with Big Bill. I'll ask him what the dickens he means by poaching on our preserves."

"Of course, he's got a perfect right here——" began Boots.

"Legally, yes," agreed Johnny. "But it's a ghastly breach of professional etiquette. There's an unwritten law among showmen that they shouldn't interfere with one another's districts."

Johnny was soon dressed, and he had got over his surprise by this time, and was looking highly indignant. Indeed, his eyes were glittering with real anger as he set out across the meadow toward one of the many gaps in that patchy hedge.

"We don't want to all go," I said to the others. "Most of you chaps had better stay behind. It'll look bad if we all crowd into the place."

So there were only four of us—Johnny, Pitt, Boots and myself. Johnny recognised Big Bill Cassell at once, as the latter stood near the big tent, superintending the stretching of the great canvas. The fat man looked round at us as we approached.

He was not a handsome sight, for he wore an old pair of baggy trousers, a decidedly unclean shirt, and practically nothing else. His shirt was open at the neck, displaying his grubby, unshaven chin. And when he smiled there was something mocking about it.

"Hallo, kid!" he said to Johnny. "Awake at last, eh? I thought you was going to sleep until mid-day! That ain't the way to run a show, my lad!"

"What are you doing here, Mr. Cassell?" asked Johnny bluntly.

"It seems to me that question ain't necessary," retorted Mr. Cassell. "I'm here, because I'm here to give two shows to-day. Like as not I'll be on this pitch for the rest of the week."

"But you can't!" said Johnny Onions hotly.

"Can't? Oh! And why not?"

"Because Caistowe is our town!" replied Johnny angrily. "You've no right to come here at all, Mr. Cassell! It isn't fair—it isn't playing the game! Besides, you haven't advertised your show—"

"That's got nothing to do with you, young shaver!" interrupted Mr. Cassell roughly. "My advertising is my business, and not yours! I've paid the rent of this medder, an' I'm goin' to stay here! An' if you can't be civil, you'd best remember that you're trespassin'!"

Johnny bit his lip.

"Then you mean to stay here, and do your best to ruin our show?" he asked grimly. "You've come here as a rival?"

"You can call it what you like—but let me tell you that if there's any business in this town, I'll get it!" said Big Bill calmly. "As for your imitation circus, it don't stand a chance! When Casselli's show is pitched, there's no room for another outfit!"

"But we were here first!" shouted Buster Boots angrily.

"You was?" sneered Mr. Cassell. "A blamed school kid, eh? I thought as much! I reckon it's a good thing I come—to save these Caistowe folks from bein' swindled by your fake show."

"Why, you—you—" began Johnny thickly.

But I took his arm, and drew him back.

"It's no good!" I whispered. "If you start abusing him, he'll have you thrown off the meadow. Let's get back and talk things over. There's nothing to worry about."

Johnny calmed down, and we turned our backs on Signor Casselli and walked over to our own caravans. We were at once surrounded by the rest of the juniors, who demanded to hear what was in the wind. We told them.

"The rotter! The fat, dirty scoundrel!" panted Johnny Onions. "Coming here like this, and pinching—"

"He's pinched nothing, and isn't likely to pinch anything," I broke in. "My dear chap, what on earth have you got to fear? You know that your show is better than Casselli's, and this meadow is nearer the town than the other."

"So it is!" said Buster Boots slowly, looking at that low hedge. "It wouldn't be a bad idea if we— Yes, it could be done easily. Some of that old canvas—I'll think about this!"

"Think about what?" demanded Handforth.

"Oh, nothing!" replied Boots blandly.

"Don't forget that the Caistowe public

has only got our publicity in the district," I went on. "Casselli's Circus hasn't been advertised at all. The only thing we've got to fear is trickery that isn't yet apparent."

"That's what I'm afraid of," said Johnny. "There must be something behind this that we don't know about. If there isn't, Cassell's a fool. Everybody in Caistowe is talking about our show—especially after that storm last night—and they'll crowd into our tent and leave Cassell flat!"

"Look at old Snayle!" interrupted Handforth. "There's something about that smile of his I don't like."

We all turned and regarded Mr. Simon Snayle, who had just come out of his caravan. He was showing signs of dissipation, and sleeplessness, but his expression was a gloating one. It was hardly the look that one would expect to see on the face of a circus-manager in such circumstances. Mr. Snayle was a good schemer, but a bad actor.

"Do you know anything about this, Mr. Snayle?" asked Johnny, striding up to him, and waving a hand towards the rival circus.

"Not a darned thing!" replied Mr. Snayle promptly.

And the very way he said it proved that he was lying. And the fact that he strolled into the rival camp was equally significant. But we could prove nothing by these slight indications. We could only console ourselves by the thought that we certainly had the best of the situation.

But had we?

There was an anxious period of waiting till nine o'clock—the time when the tent was due to arrive. There was no sign of it coming. And nine o'clock was the full extent of the time-limit—Ashford and Martins had guaranteed delivery by that hour, and had intimated that the tent would arrive sooner.

Johnny and Bertie were serious and silent. They hung about the gates, watching the road. And when nine-thirty arrived, and there was still no sign, we were all worried intensely.

We could not help feeling that something had gone radically wrong.

CHAPTER VII.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER.



BIG BILL CASSELL did not give Mr. Snayle a very warm welcome.

"A fool thing to come here like this—openly," he said, with a glare. "You ought to have

had more sense, Simon. Those kids will begin to suspect."

"Let 'em suspect!" said Snayle. "What do I care? They can't prove anything. How do they know I haven't come to you to ask why you've pitched in the next meadow?"

The fact of my coming here doesn't prove anything."

The big man frowned.

"Well, I don't like it," he said. "And if you want to speak to me, Snayle, the best thing you can do is to go up the road to the inn, at the corner. Sit in the back parlour, and I'll come and meet you there in five minutes."

And Mr. Snayle had to be content with this arrangement.

He left the meadow, walked along the road, and was rather annoyed because Johnny and Bertie Onions, and two or three of the St. Frank's fellows, were hanging about the gates. I walked up to Mr. Snayle and stopped him.

"Have you made any arrangement with the owner of this other circus?" I asked bluntly.

"Arrangement? What are you getting at?"

"I mean, have you told Cassell to abandon this idiotic idea, and clear off our preserves?"

"See here, my lad, the best thing you can do is to mind your own infernal business!" retorted Mr. Snayle curtly. "You haven't got a thing to do with this circus, and the sooner you realise that the better! Think I'm going to answer your blamed questions?"

"If you won't answer Nipper's perhaps you'll answer mine!" put in Johnny quietly, as he stepped nearer. "I'd like to remind you, Mr. Snayle, that this show belongs to my brother and me, and you're manager. So it's your business to see that Cassell's Circus clears away from this neighbourhood—"

"It's all very well to talk like that, but what in thunder can I do?" interrupted Mr. Snayle impatiently. "You know Big Bill as well as I do—he's a man of sudden ideas, and not the kind to be talked over, either. But what are you afraid of, anyway?"

"Why did Cassell's Circus come here?" demanded Johnny.

"How should I know?"

"I can't help thinking, Mr. Snayle, that you know a lot more than you admit," said Johnny grimly. "During the last week or so you've proved pretty clearly that you'd like to see our show petering out. But if you think we're going to give in—well, you'd better think again!"

Simon Snayle laughed.

"You don't know what you're talking about," he said gruffly.

And, without giving us an opportunity to question him further, he passed on. We watched him rather grimly as he walked down the road towards the inn at the corner.

"It looks blacker than ever!" said Handforth. "That beast fixed this up, I'll bet! And I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he's done something to prevent that tent getting here!"

"Oh, but that's impossible!" said Johnny, aghast.

"Well, you mark my words—I'll bet I'm right!" said Handforth.

"Be silent, O pessimist!" put in Pitt. "The position's pretty bad already, and all you can do is to butt in with a choice prophecy like that! Personally, I've got an idea that we shall beat these clumsy plotters at their own game!"

And we continued to wait anxiously for the first sign of the new tent. The fact that it didn't come made our anxiety all the keener, and we forgot all else—even breakfast—in our worry.

In the meantime, Mr. Snayle reached the inn, and went into the quiet back parlour. It wasn't long before he was joined by Big Bill Cassell. They learned that drinks were not allowable yet. But the landlord managed to produce a bottle from somewhere, and left his customers alone. He had an eye to business, and had no wish to drive two such likely-looking frequenters away on the first morning of their arrival.

"Well, Simon, it looks pretty good," declared Mr. Cassell, as he leaned back in his chair, and caused that article of furniture to groan. "We've got those kids fixed up so they can't do a thing. It don't matter what they do this morning, they'll never get that tent—nor any other tent, either."

Simon Snayle grinned.

"Yes, we've got 'em in a corner at last," he agreed. "This is going to be the finish of those young cubs! Yes, and old Onions, too! When you come to think of it, Bill, it's been pretty easy."

"As far as I can see, we've got 'em tied up in a knot," said Big Bill, as he poured himself out another drink. "Between you and me, Simon, the public's only a blamed lot of jits, after all. They know a circus has been advertised, an' they'll come down the road an' find my big tent waitin' for 'em. They won't know the difference! They'll all flock in, an' we'll do record business."

"That's what I told ye from the first," said Mr. Snayle. "You'll get all the benefit of the Onions advertising. And the kids'll never be able to recover from this blow."

"It'll smash 'em up!" declared Mr. Cassell, with relish.

"They'll go dead broke," said Snayle. "And that's where we'll step in, Bill, and buy the whole shoot for a song."

And the two rascals continued to celebrate their victory so enthusiastically that they finished the whole bottle between them before they rose to take their departure. But they were both hard drinkers, and even this large amount of liquor left them both perfectly steady. But they were feeling very light-hearted and cheerful.

They quite neglected to go back to the circus independently. Instead, they strode side by side, chatting in the most amiable manner.

And then, just as they came within sight of the first circus meadow, they noticed a certain change. In place of the lethargic listlessness of the Onions camp, there was now a brisk, energetic bustle of activity.

Both Mr. Snayle and Mr. Cassell halted, staring.

"By the good gosh!" gasped Big Bill. "What the——"

He broke off, words failing him. His eyesight was quite keen, in spite of the whisky, and he could see three heavy lorries standing just inside the Onions meadow.

And, what was more to the point, the spreading folds of a dazzlingly new tent was being unfurled on the grass!

Something had gone wrong—the big tent had arrived, after all!

CHAPTER VIII.

A SHOCK FOR MR. SNAYLE!



BILL CASSELL turned on Snayle like an enraged bull, his face purple with alarm and fury.

"What's this mean?" he snarled thickly. "The tent's here! Do you see? It's here—they've brought the blamed thing, after all! It means ruin to me——"

"I can't understand it!" panted Snayle. "I met those lorries, and sent them on to Bournemouth——"

"What's the good of lying to me?" shouted the other. "You've made a mess of it—that's what you've done! This is what comes of leaving an important thing in your hands! This is what comes of taking any notice of your insane talk!"

Mr. Snayle turned almost as purple as his companion.

"You'd best take care, Bill!" he said fiercely. "I tell you I did the thing properly! I saw those lorries take the Bournemouth road with my own eyes! What more could I do?"

"Mebbe these boys got wind of the game——"

"That's impossible!" interrupted Snayle. "They couldn't get wind of it—they didn't know a thing. And didn't you see how anxious they were half an hour ago? By thunder! I'm going to find that rep'le, Taylor, and I'll wring his infernal neck!"

"That won't help me!" raved Big Bill. "That tent's here, so what's the good of getting out of it? It's here, an' we can't shift it away now, without showin' that we're playing dirty. I dessay these kids know it already! Oh, you fool—you muddlin' brainless idiot!"

Mr. Snayle almost choked.

"Wait till you find out the truth before you start cursing me like that!" he snarled. "I shouldn't be surprised if your

own agent did this—got suspicious, or something, and sent somebody along to meet the tent. Anyhow, I did everything that was humanly possible."

"And what's goin' to happen now?" panted the other. "Don't you understand, blame you, that I don't stand a dog's chance as soon as this other tent's up? The public won't look at my show—they'll all crowd into this first medder! The Onions Circus had all the advertising in this district, and I don't suppose I'll get a dozen people in the enclosure! I was a madman to listen to you in the first place!"

Snayle was too angry to make any reply, and he abruptly strode forward, and left Big Bill standing there. Mr. Snayle had caught sight of Taylor, the foreman of the gang from London. And the very sight of the man filled Simon Snayle with renewed rage.

Nobody in the meadow had taken any notice of the pair on the road—for everybody was too busy. The men were hard at work, preparing for the immediate erection of the tent. And the St. Frank's fellows stood around, eager to help, and excited with interest.

By all appearances, this new tent was a much better article than the old one. Not only in its newness, but in many other respects. In the first place, it was larger, and there would apparently be a most imposing entrance. And there were all sorts of ornamentations and gay decorations that had been quite lacking in the old tent.

"My word! It looks a spanker!" I declared. "Everything's all right now, because they reckon to have the tent completely up by twelve o'clock, and then it won't be such a long job to fix the trapezes and the other interior fittings."

"Mr. Snayle doesn't look quite so happy as he did," remarked Buster Boots, gazing at the manager as he came striding up. "He looks as if he's just received a bit of a shock."

There was no doubt that Buster Boots was right. Simon Snayle was almost beside himself with fear and alarm and anger. In fact, he was so furious that he was inclined to be reckless. He strode straight through the busy knots of men, and made his way towards Taylor—the man he had given instructions to in the wee, small hours.

Taylor saw Mr. Snayle coming, and paused, struck by the dangerous expression on the man's face.

"Didn't expect to see you again quite so soon, Mr. Snayle," said Taylor. "That Bournemouth stunt didn't quite come off. Sorry, but——"

"I want to talk to you, Taylor!" said Snayle thickly. "Let's get out of this—behind one of these caravans!"

"I'm wanted here, Mr. Snayle——"

"You'll come with me, or I'll smash your face in!" muttered Snayle threateningly.

Taylor was not very big, and hardly a

fighting man. He hesitated. If it came to a fight, he would have plenty of assistance, but before that assistance could arrive, even though it only took a bare five seconds, Mr. Snayle could knock him silly.

"All right!" he growled. "But get it over quick."

He accompanied Snayle to the rear of one of the nearest caravans, and not only Johnny Onions, but several of the other fellows, watched them go with considerable interest. Snayle's appearance, and his behaviour, were very significant.

"Now, you infernal fool, what have you to say?" asked Snayle dangerously. "What do you mean by coming on here? Didn't I give you strict orders to go straight ahead to Bournemouth?"

"You did," said Taylor, nodding.

"Then what are you doing here?"

"Chief's orders," explained the foreman. "Your chief's orders, I mean."

"My Chief!" shouted Snayle. "You dog! I'm the manager of this show, and you'd better——"

"You may be the manager, Mr. Snayle! But you're not the boss!" broke in Taylor tartly. "I'm talking about Professor Onions himself."

"The Professor!"

"Yes."

"You're mad!" yelled Snayle, growing excited as well as angry. "The Professor's lying helpless in London—a paralysed old man with one foot in the grave! He couldn't send you orders—he didn't know anything about this business."

Taylor laughed.

"Didn't know anything about it?" he echoed. "It seems to me, Mr. Snayle, that you don't know much, considering that you're the manager! Perhaps you'd like to hear what happened on the road after you left me?"

Mr. Snayle started.

"What did happen?" he asked, with sudden fear.

"We hadn't gone more than about four miles before another car met us, and Professor Onions himself got out," said Taylor. "He asked why we were taking the Bournemouth road, and I told him. So he said you must have made a mistake, and told me to get some speed up, and come straight through to Caistowe. That's why we're here. That's all."

Mr. Snayle was nearly dancing with fury.

"You—you blundering lunatic!" he raved. "You've been fooled—you've been deceived! It wasn't Professor Onions at all——"

"Sorry, but if there was any mistake,

you're the one who made it!" interrupted Taylor. "I've known the Professor for over ten years—one of the best men breathing—and if you say I don't know him——"

"But it couldn't have been the Professor, you mad fool!" broke in Snayle desperately. "Don't I tell you that Professor Onions is paralysed and helpless in bed?"

"Then it's the first time I've seen a paralysed man walking about as briskly as the Professor," said Taylor grimly. "Seems to me, Mr. Snayle, that you're not quite so well informed as you ought to be."

And the foreman walked off before Snayle could detain him. The fact was, Simon Snayle was dumb and helpless with a sudden fear.

A cold chill seemed to descend over him.

Was it possible that Professor Onions had recovered? Such a thing seemed out of the question—and yet Taylor's story rang true. And if the Professor turned up, the fat would indeed be in the fire.

Simon Snayle had a most uncomfortable feeling that the ground was quaking beneath his feet. He lurched away to his own caravan, went inside, and locked the door.

There was a mystery here quite beyond his powers to unravel.

CHAPTER IX.

BUSTER BOOTS GETS BUSY.



"WHY not?" said John Busterfield Boots absentmindedly.

"Eh? Why not what?" asked Handforth.

Boots started, and seemed to come to himself.

"Oh, nothing!" he said carelessly.

"That's the second time you've said that to me this morning, my lad, and I'm not satisfied!" snorted Handforth. "What's the idea of muttering to yourself and looking like a dead goldfish, and then saying that there's nothing the matter?"

"Well, if you must know the truth, I've got an idea," said Boots.

Handforth gulped.

"All this fuss over an idea?" he sneered. "Why, you duffer, I get twenty ideas every hour, and think nothing of 'em!"

"Neither does anybody else!" nodded Boots.

"You—you——"

"Now, keep calm—keep calm!" said Buster. "There's no need to get excited. With all due respect to your ideas, Handy, I'd like to mention that this one of mine is worth a gross of yours! Because mine's a brain-wave. And before a chap can get a brain-wave, he's got to have a brain!"

"Are you suggesting that I haven't got one?" roared Handforth.

"I never make suggestions," replied Buster calmly. "But don't be silly—just listen to me for a minute. There's no

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reason why we shouldn't submerge Casselli and his rival circus altogether."

"Do you think we're on the Atlantic?" sneered Handforth.

"A mere figure of speech," explained Buster. "Just take a look at the geography of this meadow. I say, Nipper—and you, Pitt! Johnny as well! Just a minute!"

We gathered round curiously.

"He's going to give a lesson on geography!" said Handforth sourly. "I think the fathead's going off his rocker! He's been talking a bit wild the last five minutes."

"Observe," said Buster, "the formation of these meadows, and the road. A little attention here will be well worth while. As publicity expert, I wish to draw your attention to a most important fact."

"He talks like a guide-book!" snorted Handforth.

"Dry up, Ted!" put in Handforth minor. "This is going to be interesting. Buster's the chap for ideas. It's a pity you can't dry up, and let somebody talk!"

"Wasn't I talking?" howled Handforth.

"You were using some English words, but I don't know that we can exactly call it talking," replied Willy. "Before words become talk, they've got to have some sense!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth made a wild grab at his minor, but Willy instantly placed his hand upon a stump which stood near by.

"Touch wood!" he said calmly. "Pax! If you biff me now, Handy, you'll be breaking a sacred law!"

Handforth pulled himself up and breathed hard.

"If you two can't keep quiet, you'd better go and play somewhere else!" said Buster Boots insultingly.

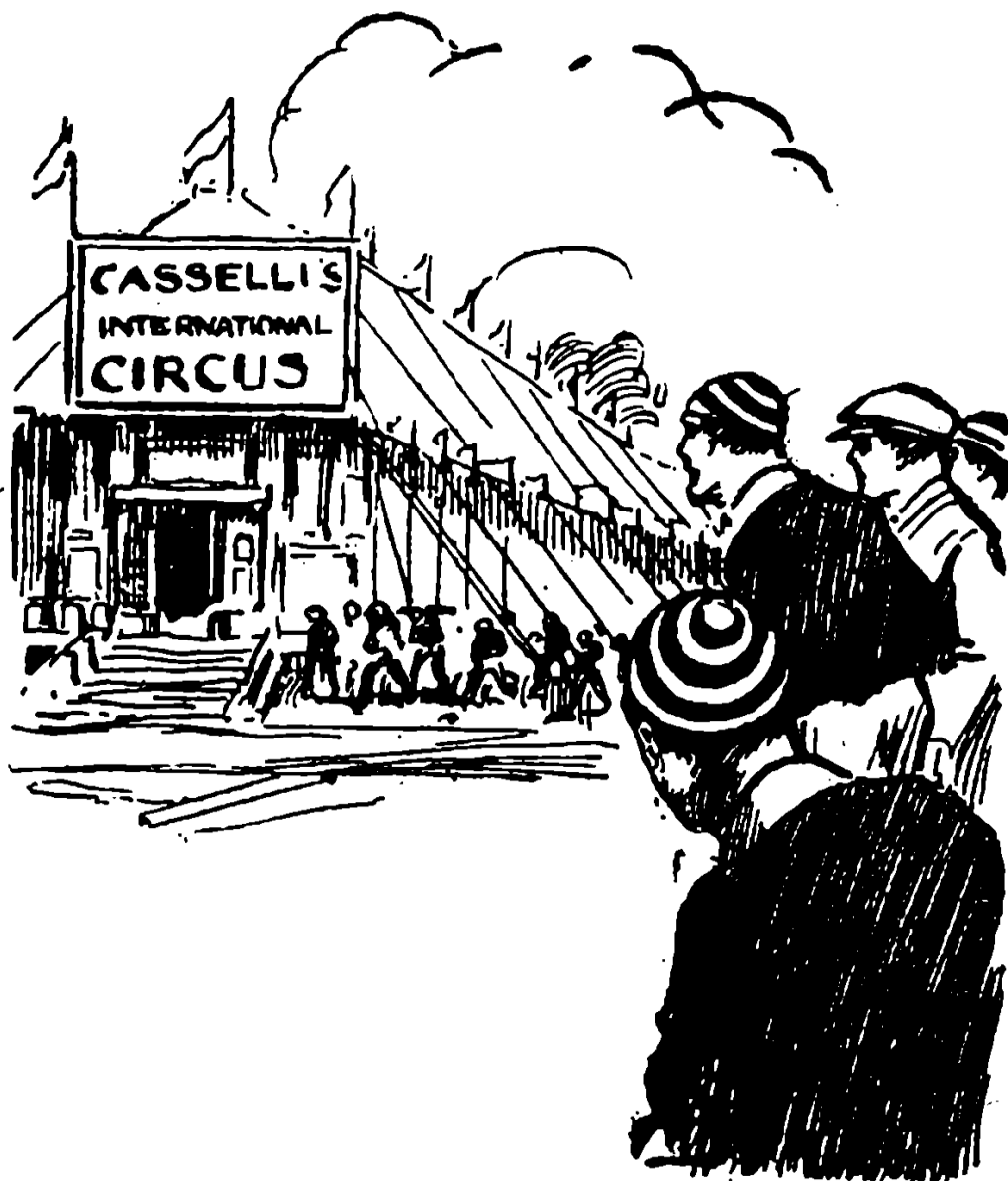
"Play!" hooted Handforth. "Do you take us for a couple of infants? What I want to know is how this young bounder got here! I thought he was still at St. Frank's until he suddenly bobbed up a minute ago!"

"I got out of bed at six o'clock," said Willy. "I couldn't sleep any longer, because the vibration had ceased. The unaccustomed silence woke me up!"

"What vibration?" asked Reggie Pitt.

"I'm not quite sure, but I believe it's caused by Ted's snoring," said Willy solemnly. "As soon as he goes to sleep, the whole Ancient House begins to quiver, and it keeps on until he wakes up. Anyhow, I got dressed, found that you chaps had scooted, and I easily guessed where you'd come to. So I followed. A mere matter of deduction—but quite elementary, my dear Watson."

"Am I going to stand here listening to you fatheads all the morning, or am I not?" shouted Buster Boots, thoroughly exasperated. "If you say another word, Handy, I'll biff you!"



There was no room for the slightest doubt, for strange men were bustling about at their work as though they were being paid double wages. And Casselli's Circus was taking definite shape.

"By George! Try it!" said Handforth aggressively.

"Oh, help!" groaned Buster. "He wants to fight now!"

Willy was gently but firmly pushed out of the crowd, and dispatched elsewhere. It was rather hard on Willy, but whenever he was near Handforth, peace and quietness fled. And as it was too much trouble to remove Handforth, we removed his minor.

"Now," said Pitt, "proceed! We're all ears."

"Yes, I've noticed it," said Buster. "Just take a look at the road. Observe it closely."

"Wonderful!" said Reggie. "I can even see a few ruts!"

"You'll notice that the Caistowe population, in coming to the circus, will arrive at this field first," went on Boots. "Therefore, they'll see our tent before anything else, and they'll naturally come into this meadow and patronise our show."

"What a brain!" sneered Handforth sarcastically.

"At the same time, a good many of the people might get confused with Casselli's Circus, and go along to the next gate," continued Buster. "But if they were prevented from seeing Casselli's Circus, they wouldn't know anything about it, and so all possible confusion would be avoided. In other words, we've got to blot out the other show from the public gaze."

"That sounds pretty easy," said Pitt. "I should suggest setting up a smokescreen, or asking the Clerk of the Weather to oblige with a nice fog."

"Are you going to take me seriously, or must you make these dotty remarks?" demanded Boots fiercely. "I've got a first-class idea, and all you can do is to make silly jokes!"

Reggie Pitt bowed his head.

"I stand corrected!" he murmured. "Proceed, O Chief!"

"It ought to be comparatively simple," said Buster. "The idea is to put a barrier up between these two meadows. And why shouldn't we use the remains of the old tent?"

"It's a good scheme," I said heartily. "You mean that we should use the wooden supports as stakes, and rig up a canvas wall alongside the hedge? Is that the wheeze?"

"Exactly!" said Buster. "If a dozen fellows get busy on the job, it ought to be completed within two hours. We've got plenty of material at hand. And think how we shall do these rivals in the eye!"

The plan was an excellent one.

As Boots had said, ninety-nine per cent of the public would come from the direction of Caistowe, and if that canvas barrier was rigged up, it would absolutely hide Casselli's Circus from the road. And it would thus prevent any stragglers going into the wrong circus by mistake.

Johnny Onions was enthusiastic about it, and the work was forthwith put in hand. And before another ten minutes had elapsed, nearly all the St. Frank's fellows were at work on the job.

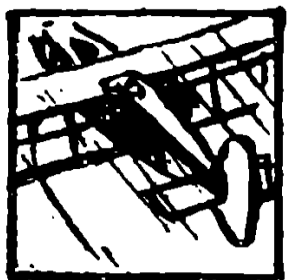
Buster declared that he would also have two juniors standing a good distance down the road—on the other side of Casselli's meadow—bearing a banner. This banner would contain instructions to all and sundry to continue straight for the famous Onions' Circus.

Boots, in fact, was absolutely bubbling over with advertising schemes, and he was certainly proving that he was well capable of handling his own particular speciality.

For Buster hadn't done yet—by any means!

CHAPTER X.

THE PARACHUTE DESCENT.



CECIL DE VALERIE stopped working, turned slightly pale, and grabbed out his watch.

"Ten to eleven!" he gasped blankly.

"What about it?" asked Pitt.

"We—we've forgotten lessons!" shouted De Valerie, aghast.

All the other fellows engaged upon the

canvas barrier heard his shout, and realisation flooded upon them. They had been so engrossed by the activity at the circus that they had completely overlooked the insignificant fact that this was Wednesday, and that morning lessons were a recognised part of the day's duty.

"Oh, my goodness!" ejaculated Grey. "Lessons! I say, we shall get into terrific hot water for this! Why on earth didn't somebody think of it before? We'd better shoot back——"

"Too late now," I interrupted. "I was wondering when somebody would come back to earth. I thought of lessons half an hour ago, but I didn't want to worry you, so I said nothing."

"What the dickens shall we do?" asked Church, looking scared.

"Carry on with this work and face the consequences later," I replied promptly. "It's not a bit of good going back this morning, and it would be risky, too. In all probability we should be detained all the afternoon—and that would make the circus go a bit dizzy."

"Nipper's right," said Reggie Pitt. "We can't afford to take the risk. By the way, where's Buster? I thought he was super-intending this job?"

"So he was," said Handforth, "but the ass suddenly got interested in that seaplane that's been flying about over the bay for the last hour. He went off with another of those dreamy looks of his. A fresh stunt, I suppose. Like his cheek to leave us here to do the work!"

"Never mind!" I said, with a chuckle. "We've got to admit that Buster's doing pretty well. And don't worry about lessons, because it's no good crying over spilt milk."

Handforth's surmise regarding John Busterfield Boots was very near the mark. The advertising chief had had his eye on the seaplane for some time, and when he saw the craft alight in Caistowe Bay, he at once made off.

To his delight, he found that the seaplane was moored quite close to the landing jetty, and he was further delighted by the fact that the aircraft was a privately-owned one. Indeed, the pilot was no less a person than the well-known Caistowe sportsman, Mr. Fielding.

This gentleman was the owner of several racing motor-boats, and he was on very friendly and intimate terms with the St. Frank's juniors. So he was very cordial to Buster when the latter buttonholed him on the jetty.

"I didn't know you were an air pilot, Mr. Fielding," said Boots.

"Neither did I until a few weeks ago," smiled Mr. Fielding. "I haven't forsaken my motor-boats, but flying interests me enormously. I shall be going up again soon, and if you'd like to come for a ride——"

"Thanks awfully, Mr. Fielding," said Buster eagerly. "That's just what I wanted to talk to you about. You see, I'm the

publicity manager of the Onions Circus—"The deuce you are!" said Mr. Fielding in surprise.

Buster briefly and graphically described the position. He explained how Snayle had conspired with Signor Casselli to ruin the two schoolboy circus-owners, and how the St. Frank's crowd was working might and main to make the Onions show a huge success.

"And all we need now, Mr. Fielding, is a little quick-fire publicity," went on Boots. "We've got plenty of small handbills, and if we could have these distributed from the air, it would be a ripping advertisement. If you take me up, and let me throw these handbills over the town, it would help tremendously."

Mr. Fielding laughed good-naturedly.

"Well, under the circumstances, I have no objection," he said. "It won't do me any harm, and if it'll help you youngsters, I'm game!"

"That's jolly decent of you, sir!" said Boots enthusiastically. "By the way, do you carry a parachute in your seaplane?"

"Two, as a matter of fact."

"Good!" said Buster. "Then perhaps you wouldn't object to another of us coming up at the same time and making a parachute descent? Anything to catch the public eye, you know."

Mr. Fielding looked dubious.

"H'm! You're asking rather a lot this time," he said, stroking his chin. "There might be some risk—Although, of course, my parachutes are absolutely guaranteed, and they're safe as human ingenuity can make them," he went on musingly.

"And it's a glorious morning, Mr. Fielding, with hardly a breath of air," said Boots eagerly. "There'd be no danger at all in a parachute descent. Handforth minor is just the chap for the job—he's small and light, and he absolutely loves anything exciting."

Mr. Fielding needed a good deal of persuading, but Buster had a smooth tongue, and in the end he won. Mr. Fielding promised to be ready at noon, and Buster hurried off with his heart beating rapidly. He had never really believed that he would succeed.

"When it comes to advertising, I'm the chap with the goods!" he told himself delightedly. "This'll make the other chaps stare."

It did.

Nobody would believe Buster at first, but he convinced them at last.

"Well, of all the cool, calculated cheek!" said Pitt, with a laugh. "I don't know how you had the nerve to go to old Fielding like that! They say there's nothing like cheek—and this proves it."

"Rubbish!" said Buster. "It's not a question of cheek at all. All you need in the advertising business is confidence—more confidence, and still more confidence!"

"You've got it all," grinned Reggie Pitt,

"Well, we don't want to argue," went on Boots briskly. "Where's Willy Handforth? Has anybody seen—"

"Here I am, if you want me," interrupted Willy, pushing forward. "But I'd better warn you that I'm busy. I can't spare any of my valuable time unless you've got something brainy to suggest."

Buster Boots drew Willy aside.

"Are you game for something special?" he asked keenly. "I'm going up in Mr. Fielding's seaplane at noon, and I'm going to drop handbills over the town. How would you like to make a parachute descent?"

Willy's eyes sparkled.

"Great!" he said. "But will they allow it? I'm game enough, but Mr. Fielding might—"

"You needn't worry about that—I've fixed it."

Willy was considerably surprised, but he tried not to show it. And he was pleased, too, for any adventure with a spice of danger in it appealed to him. Accordingly, at eleven fifty-five, to the minute, Buster and Willy presented themselves at the jetty.

But a disappointment awaited them.

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNREHEARSED EFFECT.



MR. FIELDING met the two juniors just against the steps.

"All ready!" he announced cheerfully. "But I've been thinking about that parachute descent, my boys, and I've made an alteration."

"You're not going to cut it out, sir?" asked Buster anxiously.

"Not at all," said Mr. Fielding. "But after due consideration, I must alter my procedure. It would never do to allow one of you schoolboys to make the actual descent."

"Oh, what rot!" exclaimed Willy. "Sorry, sir! I—I mean, I'm as keen as mustard to make the descent—"

"No doubt—no doubt," interrupted the other. "But your keenness must be curbed, young man. After thinking the matter over, I have come to the conclusion that I should not be justified in allowing you to take the risk."

"Risk!" echoed Willy, with scorn. "What risk, sir?"

"I will admit that risks are extremely remote, but you are only a schoolboy, and it is not within my power to permit such an undertaking," said Mr. Fielding gently. "If I had the permission of your parents, and the permission of your headmaster—well, that would be different."

"Oh, but look here, sir—" began Buster protestingly.

"At the same time, you shall have your parachute descent," smiled Mr. Fielding. "And since the scheme is a mere advertising dodge, the actual performer makes no difference, eh? I have arranged with a young friend of mine to make the drop."

Willy was absolutely disgusted.

"Well, it's a bit thick!" he said flatly. "I'm not the kind of chap to grumble, but it's dashed rotten! Anybody might think I was made of china, or that I was a paralytic! And it's your fault, Boots. You brought me into this thing, and——"

"Clear off back to the circus!" ordered Boots curtly. "You're not wanted now! And none of your cheek, or I'll push you off the giddy jetty. Buzz off, you young bounder!"

Willy gave a kind of gasp. This was altogether too much. After being invited to make the parachute descent, and after consenting to the task, it was decidedly galling to be ordered off in this fashion. It was, indeed, humiliating.

"Look here, Boots, you're too big for your name!" he said darkly. "I'm not going to be messed about by a fatheaded Remove jackass like you! I've come here to go up in that seaplane, and——"

"Boys—boys!" protested Mr. Fielding, laughing. "This won't do. We don't want any quarrelling. Certainly you will come up, young 'un," he added, patting Willy on the back. "I wouldn't deprive you of that little pleasure. You can assist your friend in throwing out the handbills. But you will not make the parachute descent. That is all."

Willy grunted.

"Thanks very much, sir," he growled. "I came here to do a thrilling aerial stunt, and I'm allowed to chuck away a few handbills. Oh, it's all right—it's no good grumbling now. All the same, I think it's a lot of tommy-rot!" he added, beneath his breath.

Willy, in fact, was thoroughly disappointed. He could see no earthly reason why Mr. Fielding should have made such a change. And yet the seaplane owner was quite correct. The parachute descent, no matter how innocuous, would be a mistake if Willy undertook it. Indeed, Mr. Fielding had absolutely no authority for permitting the enterprise.

He had realised this soon after Buster Boots had removed his volcanic presence. But Mr. Fielding, being a one hundred per cent sportsman, made prompt arrangements to keep his promise.

And so, when the two juniors took their places in the roomy cockpit of the seaplane, they found a slim, wiry-looking young fellow already in possession. He nodded genially to the juniors.

"Are you the chap who's going to use the parachute?" asked Willy bluntly.

"Yes," said the stranger. "My name's Moody—from the big garage in the High Street, you know," he added confidentially.

"I've dropped in parachutes scores of times—served three years in the R.A.F."

So Mr. Fielding had found the right man for the job. It turned out that Moody was a motor mechanic, and had been in France during the war, attached to a captive balloon section. A parachute was familiar to him.

The seaplane was soon up, gliding over the water, and rising in a graceful sweep. Mr. Fielding sat in the pilot's seat, in the very bows, with his three passengers behind him. The parachute—a big one, and of a particularly safe pattern—was got ready by the cheerful Mr. Moody.

And as soon as the seaplane began to soar over Caistowe, Buster Boots and Willy threw out handbills by the score. They fluttered down like immense snowflakes, and were eagerly picked up by the townspeople, who crowded out into the streets to see what the excitement was about.

As an advertising move, the thing was a huge success.

Mr. Fielding was getting higher and higher, for he wished to reach two thousand feet before Moody made his jump. At this height the risk would be practically nil.

The bills were soon gone, and then there was nothing else to do but wait until the necessary height had been attained. Down below, almost the entire population of Caistowe was looking up, waiting for the parachute descent.

Buster had instructed several fellows to cycle through the town shouting out the announcement, and they had performed this task with complete success. For the news had spread quickly, until scarcely a soul in the town was in ignorance of the coming thrill.

Willy Handforth sat in the cockpit, looking very thoughtful. He still felt that he had been tricked. Indeed, he looked upon it as an insult, not only to himself, but to the entire Third Form. This was distinctly a case where brains were required.

For even now Willy hadn't given up hope.

He considered that Mr. Fielding's objection was sheer rubbish. More than anything else in the world, he wanted to be the actual stunt artist. Willy thought it an absolute cheek for this Moody fellow to be in the seaplane at all.

"How does it fix on?" he roared, above the din of the exhaust.

He took up the lower end of the parachute, which was fitted with straps. The silken fabric of the apparatus was all neatly folded, and attached to the side of the machine. It was thus quite safe. The parachutist had merely to strap himself up and leap overboard, when the apparatus would unfold itself automatically.

Willy saw that the straps were quite easy to fix. There was a big leather band which went completely round the shoulders, and underneath the armpits. Once this was fixed the rest was easy.

And suddenly Willy made up his mind. He was essentially a fellow of action, and, like his brother, he was utterly reckless and daring. This was a question of honour, and he had to do something. By this time the seaplane had reached a height of fully eighteen hundred feet.

"Look!" yelled Willy suddenly. "Is that a fire over there?"

He pointed excitedly over in the direction of Bannington. The whole countryside for twenty miles was in clear view, and Buster Boots and Moody turned and stared out in the given direction.

Instantly Willy grabbed the apparatus, wormed himself into it, and strapped the belt under his arms, drawing the buckle tight and secure. He had just finished when Moody glanced round.

"I can't see anything—Hallo! What the——" He broke off, alarm in his eyes. "Take that off, you young ass!" he roared.

"Good-bye-ee!" said Willy sweetly.

With one clean leap, he went over the side, and both Buster Boots and Moody gave a yell of consternation. The silken folds of the parachute were jerked away with a rush and Willy dropped like a stone.

But only for a moment. The parachute opened with a booming explosive sound, and Willy floated gently and comfortably in the atmosphere. The big seaplane was already far away.

And Willy could hear a confused noise of shouting from far below. Looking down, he grinned. The streets and houses looked tiny and toylike. And the people were mere midgets.

"They can't diddle me!" said Willy.

CHAPTER XII.

WILLY'S BLACK LOOK.



JOHN BUSTERFIELD BOOTS stared aghast at Moody.

"The young rotter!" he panted. "Why didn't you stop him?"

"I didn't have time—he was over before I knew it!" replied the mechanic. "Still, it doesn't matter; he's safe enough. The parachute opened beautifully, and he'll drop like a feather."

"I hope he doesn't alight in the giddy bay!" said Boots anxiously.

"Impossible—the wind's in the other direction, what little there is of it," said Moody. "He'll probably come down in a ploughed field, on the outskirts of the town."

Mr. Fielding knew what was wrong by this time, although, owing to the incessant roar of the engine, he had not been able to converse with his passengers. Even Buster and Moody had been obliged to yell at the top of their voices.

Mr. Fielding smiled to himself as he shut off the engine and commenced a long glide down towards the bay. He could see the parachute below, gracefully getting lower and lower. And Mr. Fielding could not help feeling a certain admiration for the daring Third-Former. Willy had revealed a spirit that Mr. Fielding liked.

Willy himself was thoroughly enjoying the adventure.

It was very novel to be floating down in such an easy way, with that vast silken mass above him. He could control it, for there was a string leading up to a vent which enabled him to change the speed of the apparatus. Willy was so light that at times he appeared to float and almost hover.

"It's a bit tame," he told himself, after a while. "I always thought that these parachute descents were thrilling. Well, you never know until you try. A giddy cripple, ninety years old, could do this stunt, and never notice the effects."

But Willy's opinion was not shared by the spectators, who were vastly interested. And the advertisement was of enormous value, for by this time the whole of Caistowe was talking about Willy, the handbills, and the circus. It would be very surprising if a record crowd did not turn up for the show.

But there was something in Mr. Fielding's safeguards, after all. Ninety-nine parachute descents out of a hundred may be safe and tame—and the hundredth precisely the opposite. This one of Willy's, as it happened, chanced to be the odd one in the hundred.

So far, it looked perfectly simple and easy. But the one drawback about a parachute descent is that the performer is entirely at the mercy of the wind—and sometimes the very absence of wind is a drawback. For he has no choice as to his landing spot.

It was so in Willy's case.

He noticed, in a casual kind of way, that he was gradually drifting towards the outskirts of the town, and he figured that he would land in a meadow just beyond the Caistowe Steam Laundry. This was entirely satisfactory. But Willy didn't drift as much as he thought he would, and as he descended lower and lower he noticed that the big factory chimney attached to the laundry was getting uncommonly close.

It was, in fact, almost beneath him, and there was a bare possibility that he would foul it.

"This won't do!" muttered Willy. "I don't want to be roasted."

He opened the vent by pulling the string, causing the parachute to descend more quickly. But, to Willy's dismay, he only made the position worse. The yawning black chasm of the chimney was now immediately below him—in fact, within ten feet.

"My only hat!" muttered Willy desperately.

A second before he had regarded the

peril as insignificant. But now, in a flash, it became a deadly menace. He relaxed the cord, and the vent automatically closed. The parachute descended more leisurely. But there seemed to be utterly no breath of wind, and Willy dropped vertically towards the chimney.

The position was acute. As far as the junior could see, he wouldn't even have a chance of landing on the coping. The chimney was not very high, and not unusually large—the opening at the top being about five feet across.

But Willy was in the dead centre of it, and dropping into the actual cavity. Even in this moment of peril he could hear the shouts and cries of consternation from the spectators.

The circus was not far distant, and most of the St. Frank's fellows, and hundreds of the more youthful townsfolk had come running along to congratulate the parachutist upon landing. And now a huge crowd stood gazing up at the factory chimney.

Willy made a desperate effort to save himself before it was too late. He swung himself sideways, and attempted to grasp the blackened stonework. But his reach was short, and the next moment he dropped straight down—down into the very bowels of that soot-begrimed shaft!

"Oh!"

A gasping shout of horror arose from the spectators. They watched, numbed and fascinated. The huge mass of the silken parachute seemed to envelop the top of the chimney for a moment or two, like a cap, and then the billowing mass slowly and lazily crumpled up.

The parachute vanished—dragged down into the chimney by the weight of its human freight—crumpled up and no longer buoyant. Willy had gone—there was no longer a trace of him.

Edward Oswald Handforth and Reggie Pitt and I came running up, having witnessed the disaster from a little distance. Handforth was perspiring freely, but his face was white.

"My minor!" he muttered hoarsely. "He's killed himself!"

"Steady, old man——" I began.

"He dropped into that chimney—he'll be roasted alive!" choked Handforth.

The rest of us said nothing. For the same ghastly thought had come into our own minds. For Willy would slide right down the shaft—into the furnace itself. Indeed, no power on earth could save him from this fate.

To stand there was impossible; we had to act; we had to do something. And we ran like mad for the engine-room. We burst into the yard, tore across it, and dashed at the low brick building—from whence the shaft arose to the sky.

Once inside, we had no difficulty in spotting the furnace. The great iron door of the thing was closed, but even as we hurried towards it with faltering steps, the door

jerked open, and a vast volume of soot came hurtling out in a cloud.

"My only hat!" gasped Pitt, staggering back.

Something rolled out of the furnace on to the floor—an inky black object which stood in the midst of the cloud like a figure in a dense fog. It proceeded to unfold itself.

"Well, I'm safe, anyway!" said Willy's voice, out of the black pall.

"He's alive!" roared Handforth gladly.

"Willy!" yelled the rest of us.

"Oh, don't make a fuss!" spluttered Willy.

"I can't see a thing; I've eaten a ton of soot, and I'm nearly dead! Help me to get rid of this giddy parachute, for goodness' sake! I'll bet you couldn't have landed so neatly as I did!"

The situation, which had seemed so fraught with horror, suddenly struck us as being comic. Willy's very tone proved that he was unharmed. And I realised, with a flood of remembrance, that the Caistowe Steam Laundry was a failure, and had been closed up for some weeks, pending the transfer to new owners.

So the factory shaft had been quite cold, and the parachute had naturally acted as a drag as Willy descended into the disused furnace. Some of the fellows started yelling with laughter.

"Very funny, isn't it?" asked Willy, with a black look.

"Jolly lucky for you that the furnaces were out," said Church.

"Rats!" said Willy. "If there had been a fire in this furnace, the hot air would have lifted the parachute like a balloon, and I should have dropped in the meadow, as safe as anything."

"By Jove, he's right!" grinned Pitt. "I hadn't thought of that!"

In the excitement, this was not surprising. But it was undoubtedly a fact that, with the furnace going, Willy would have come to no harm. So, in a way, it was unfortunate for the reckless fag that the fires had been out.

A great crowd came surging round, anxious and eager. And Willy, still as black as a nigger, but freed from the parachute, forced his way through the throng impatiently.

"Never knew such a fuss!" he said indignantly. "Blessed if I can see why everybody's getting so jolly excited!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DECENCY OF FENTON.



EDGAR FENTON, of the Sixth, jumped off his bicycle and stood looking in at the circus meadow with a grim expression on his face. But after a moment or two it softened, and his eyes twinkled.

The captain of St. Frank's made no move for a moment or two.

He stood there, greatly interested in the intense activity that was apparent. Men were hard at work on the big tent, putting the finishing touches to the great erection.

But Fenton did not pay much attention to these perspiring individuals. He was gazing at Buster Boots, Handforth & Co., and all the other St. Frank's fellows—who were working swiftly and methodically against the hedge. A vast barrier of canvas and wood was being erected, and it was nearly completed. The juniors were working like Trojans.

grimly. "I require an explanation from you youngsters; but my requirements are insignificant compared to the Head's!"

"You—you see, we forgot!" said Boots.

"Lessons clean slipped our memories," put in Handforth. "The fact is, Fenton—"

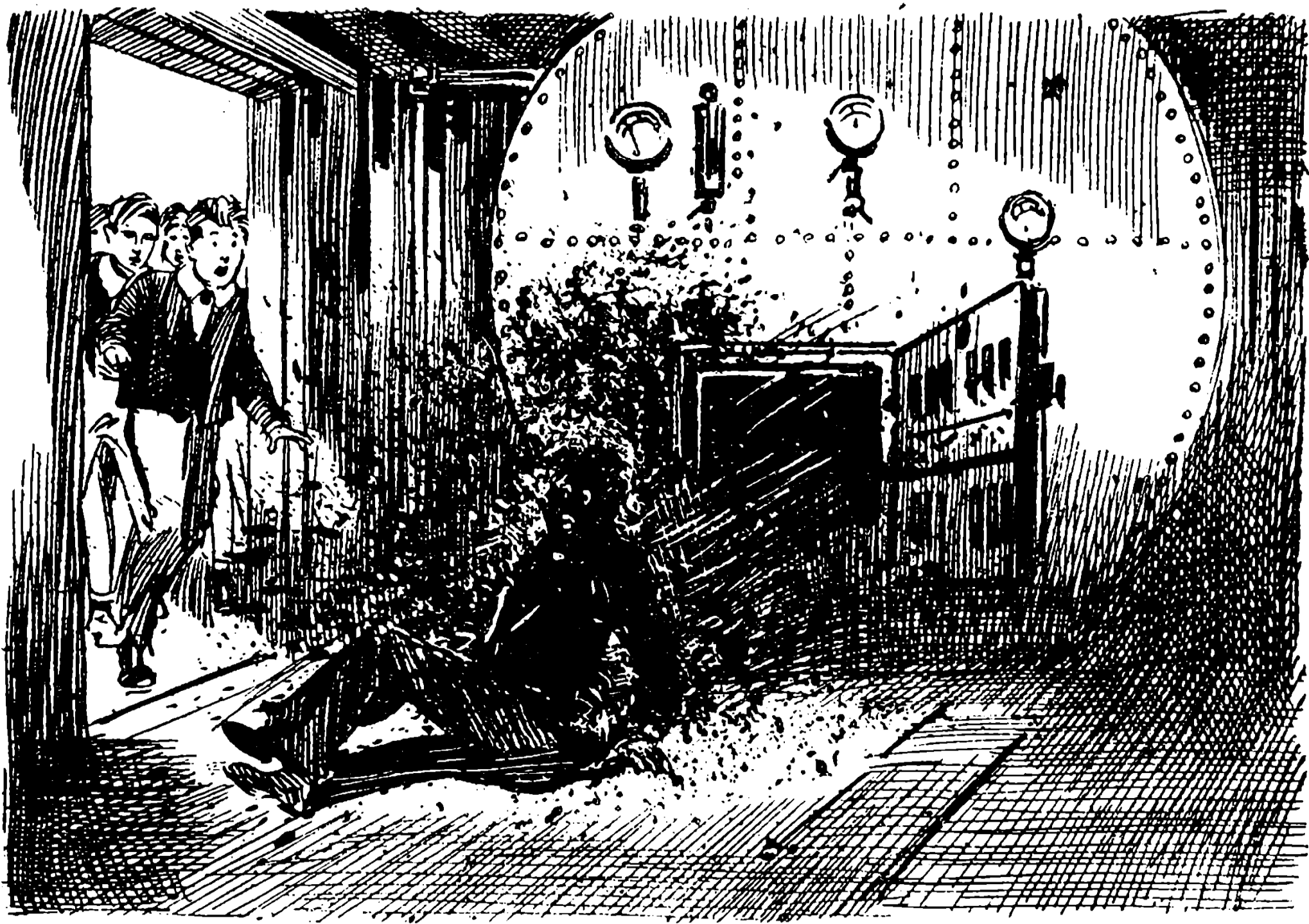
"That's just what I want—facts!" interjected Fenton. "So please bear that in mind, and don't try any excuses. Who's responsible for the whole crowd of you?"

"I am!" I said promptly.

"Rats!" snapped Handforth. "We're all in this together."

"Hear, hear!"

Fenton looked at us sternly.



Something rolled out of the furnace on to the floor—an inky black object which stood in the midst of the cloud like a figure in a dense fog.

"So this is the game, eh?" murmured Fenton grimly.

Wheeling his machine, he entered the meadow, and was among the juniors before they knew anything about his arrival.

"Well, what's the idea?" asked Fenton abruptly.

The juniors turned and gazed at him in sudden surprise. Church, indeed, fell off a short ladder in his consternation, and landed on the top of Handforth. Reggie Pitt and I looked at Fenton blankly.

"Hallo, Fenton!" I said, looking sheepish.

"Ripping morning, eh?" said Reggie Pitt.

"Nice and sunny—"

"We don't want to hear anything about the weather, thanks," interrupted Fenton

"So you all accept the same blame?" he asked.

"Yes!"

"I don't agree to that!" I exclaimed. "It was my suggestion that we should get up early, and come over here before breakfast. So if anybody has got to answer for missing morning lessons, I'll stand on the carpet. Better haul me along, Fenton. But don't use handcuffs, because they look bad."

Fenton grunted.

"This is no time for joking, young man!" he said severely. "And if you think I'm going to haul you back to St. Frank's alone, you've made a little mistake. You're all coming—every mother's son of you. And I might casually mention that you'll be de-

tained all the afternoon, and probably all the evening. As an additional punishment, the Head is now exercising his arm in preparation for a general swishing."

"Oh, my goodness!"

"But—but we've only missed morning lessons!" roared Handforth indignantly. "That's not a crime! We've been so busy that we forgot all about the school!"

"Ye gods!" exclaimed the prefect. "You'd better make that excuse to the Head—and observe the effect! Now, look here, kids, I'm not going to rag you. I can understand your enthusiasm, and in a way I sympathise," went on Fenton. "But you've got to realise that you've committed an inexcusable crime."

"Oh, cheese it, Fenny!"

"If anything, my term is a mild one," went on the captain of St. Frank's, looking us over with a grim eye. "It isn't as though there were just two or three of you—that wouldn't have been so bad. But sixteen! Or is it twenty? Anyhow, practically a third of the Remove failed to turn up for breakfast, and didn't even put in an appearance when the bell rang for morning lessons. Upon my word, Mr. Crowell was nearly off his head."

"And I suppose he went straight to Dr. Stafford?" growled Boots.

"Not straight; he waited until after eleven," replied Fenton. "And as you didn't show up by noon, I was sent for, and I came straight along here. Get your coats on, and—"

"Wait a minute, Fenton," I interrupted. "I haven't explained."

"You needn't," said Fenton. "It's the Head who wants your explanations, not me! Get a hustle on, and move!"

"Before I move an inch, I'm going to tell you why we stayed here, instead of returning to school for breakfast," I said grimly. "And if your heart is made of the ordinary stuff, and not of granite, you'll think of some other way out of the position."

"None of that!" said Fenton sharply. "You can't get round me—"

"Listen," I said, "and don't interrupt!" Fenton was considerably surprised, and not a little angry at my calm determination. But he listened. At first his expression was impatient and irritable. But he gradually altered.

I explained the full details, and Johnny Onions came along and helped me. Fenton was not allowed to have the slightest misapprehension regarding the situation.

We told him of our suspicions regarding Mr. Simon Snayle; we went into full details about Signor Casselli, and that rascal's attempt to ruin the Onions brothers' show; we told him of our plans for defeating the efforts of the conspirators; and concluded by making it quite clear that in the anxiety and excitement, we had really and truly forgotten lessons—and even breakfast.

"It's not fair to blame these chaps," said Johnny Onions stoutly. "I kept them here,

Fenton. In fact, if it hadn't been for their help, I doubt if the circus would have given a show this afternoon. As it is, there's every prospect of a record crowd, and those plotting rotters will be beaten. I wish I could kick Snayle out—but I can't!"

"Um!" said Fenton slowly. "Um! Well, of course, this makes a difference. I didn't know things were quite like this."

He walked up and down for a moment or two, very thoughtful and with his brow puckered. Finally, he came to a halt in front of us, his face cleared, and he laughed.

"All right, kids—carry on!" he said briskly. "I'll go back to the Head, and explain things—and I'll take the responsibility for not bringing you along with me. I should hate to be a spoil-sport!"

We all took a deep breath.

"You—you mean it's—it's O.K.?" gasped Buster joyfully.

"Yes—goodness knows, I don't want to mess everything up, just when you're on the last lap!" said the prefect. "In my opinion, you were justified in missing lessons. I'll try and make the Head believe the same. So long!"

He waved his hand, and walked briskly away. And the crowd of us broke into a ringing cheer of excitement and enthusiasm. Fenton looked back and grinned, and a moment later he had gone.

"By jingo!" said Johnny Onions. "What a sportsman!"

CHAPTER XIV.

EXIT MR. SNAYLE.



MR. SIMON SNAYLE paced up and down the tiny confines of his caravan like a caged animal.

He had been engaged in this occupation at different intervals for the last hour or so, occasionally flinging himself into a chair by way of a change.

But ever since he had locked himself in the caravan, he had remained there—his mind a mass of confused doubts and haunting fears. Every now then he had gazed outside, at the growing tent and the busy juniors. He had not even emerged during the excitement of the parachute descent.

For one thing, Mr. Snayle was feeling nervous. He dared not face Bill Cassell now. He could picture Big Bill raving and cursing on his own pitch, for the safe arrival of the new tent made all the difference between success and failure to Casselli's Circus.

Again, Mr. Snayle was tortured by what Taylor had said. According to the foreman, Professor Onions himself had given orders for the big tent to be delivered in Caistowe, after all. But the Professor was helpless in bed!

So far as Mr. Snayle could see, there was only one explanation. Somebody had impersonated the Professor—and had done it so well that Taylor had been deceived. But who—who? Not any of the boys, for Professor Onions was a biggish man.

And there was another thing that kept Mr. Snayle locked in his caravan. He knew quite well that the plot was exposed. Everybody in the circus knew it by this time. He had met the Ashford and Martin lorries, and had used his authority as manager of Onions' Circus to order them on to Bournemouth. And they had come to Caistowe instead—to find that the Onions brothers were anxiously awaiting them, and that Caistowe was their true destination. This proved beyond dispute that Snayle had attempted a despicable trick—and the manager was as near to feeling shame as ever he had been. He dared not go out, for fear of meeting Taylor again—for fear of meeting Big Bill Cassell—for fear of being called upon by Johnny Onions to explain.

His position was an impossible one, as he slowly began to realise. In the plainest possible manner, he had proved his treachery to his employers. Owing to the terms of his agreement with the Professor, neither Johnny nor Bertie could dismiss him. But once their father learned the facts, Snayle would receive his marching orders without a moment's delay.

Tap! Tap!

In the midst of Mr. Snayle's fevered thoughts, a soft knocking sounded on the door. He halted, and felt himself go hot all over. Big Bill Cassell! The rival circus proprietor had come to thrash this matter out! Or perhaps it was only Dippy—Dippy, the dwarf. Yes, it was getting near to dinner-time—

Tap! Tap!

Mr. Snayle muttered a curse, and strode to the door. He unlocked it, and flung it wide open. On the steps of the caravan stood the ragged figure of a tramp—an unshaven individual who looked in the final stages of destitution.

"Go away, confound you!" snarled Mr. Snayle. "It's no good begging here—I've got nothing for you!"

"I'd like a word with you, Mr. Simon Snayle," said the tramp, his voice calm and grim. "And you'd better hear me—without making a scene."

Something in the tramp's tone caused Mr. Snayle to go shaky. He fell back, and the tramp entered. Mr. Snayle watched in a fascinated kind of way as the visitor closed the door and locked it.

"Now, my friend, we can talk quietly and privately," said the tramp, removing his battered hat, and a tangled wig at the same moment. "I think it is time that we came to an understanding, Mr. Snayle."

The manager sat down with a thud on a locker.

"The Professor!" he whispered thickly.

The tramp nodded.

"Your eyesight is keen—or my disguise is not as perfect as I thought it was," he said. "The mere removal of my wig enables you to recognise me. Yes, Snayle, I am Professor Onions!"

It seemed to the wretched plotter that the crack of doom had sounded. He was bewildered—amazed—frightened. But, at the same time, he obtained a measure of relief. For his doubts regarding Professor Onions were at an end. But he was still bewildered.

"You—you don't understand, Professor!" he gasped, trying to gather his wits together, and making a desperate effort to explain the unexplainable. "I—I've been doing my best—"

"Exactly!" interrupted the other coldly. "I can quite believe it, Snayle. You have been doing your best to bring ruin upon my unsuspecting sons! I have been keeping my eyes upon you for weeks, and I have followed every one of your treacherous, cowardly moves. And at last I am thoroughly convinced of your dishonesty and villainy. To-day you will leave my employment for good."

"But—but, Professor!" panted Snayle desperately. "I—I thought you were in bed, helpless—paralysed! I thought—"

"You thought that you could take advantage of my helplessness, and ruin my sons—whilst pretending to be faithful to me," interrupted Professor Onions dangerously. "You infernal rogue! You may count yourself lucky, indeed, if I do not hand you over to the police! It is only the unwelcome publicity which prompts me to act otherwise. So have no misapprehensions regarding my mercy."

Snayle seemed to shrivel up under the other's scornful gaze.

"I was not paralysed—I have not suffered a penny of financial loss," went on the Professor. "That was a mere deception—entered into with a definite object. I was anxious to test my boys—to see how they would shape if they thought they were thrown upon the world to fend for themselves. That is why I sent the show on the road in a financial condition which almost amounted to bankruptcy. I never expected my boys to pull through—the test was a severe one."

"It wasn't your boys—it was these St. Frank's kids—"

"Left to themselves, I am convinced that they would have succeeded," interrupted Professor Onions coldly. "But from the first, Snayle, you attempted to bring ruin upon the show—for your own villainous ends. But the very fact that my sons were business-like enough to get their schoolboy friends to help the show is sufficient to convince me of their calibre. It needed pluck and daring to make such an experiment. And you—you cur—did everything you possibly could to ruin the enterprise. My experiment has ended satisfactorily, for I have learned the truth."

"It wasn't me, chief—it was Cassell!" wailed Mr. Snayle, in a whining voice. "Cassell put me on to the scheme——"

"That is of no interest to me!" snapped the professor. "I have proved my boys to be true blue, and I have proved you to be a treacherous hound! The time has come for you to go, Snayle!"

"But, I want to explain——"

"Within a minute I shall leave this caravan," continued the Professor. "You will send for my son, John, and hand him your resignation. After that you will leave this circus within the hour. And remember—not one word of what has passed between us must you breathe."

"I don't understand!" said Snayle sullenly.

"I do not want my sons to know the truth about me just yet," explained Professor Onions. "That is why, instead of kicking you out with my own boot, I am giving you the privilege of resigning. If you breathe a word about my presence here, or give the slightest hint that I am well and about, the police will learn of your activities at once."

Mr. Snayle gave a gulp.

"All right, Professor—I'll quit!" he said hoarsely.

CHAPTER XV.

A FREE HAND.



FIVE minutes later the tramp had gone, and Simon Snayle was alone.

"Curse him!" he muttered savagely. "The old demon! Pretending to be ill, and spying on us all the time!"

But at the same time, Mr. Snayle fully realised that his position was untenable. Bluff or bluster was useless. There was only one thing to do—and that was to quit. Professor Onions had been quite correct in saying that the police would be interested in Mr. Snayle's recent activities. The wretched man remembered the incident at Bannington—when he had deliberately cut the stay ropes of the big tent in a drunken fit, thereby endangering hundreds of lives. If the police knew about that, it would not be merely a matter of proceedings by the Professor. The Public Prosecutor would have something to say, for it was an offence against the general community.

Simon Snayle was beaten, and he knew it. And he also knew that he was lucky to retain his freedom. His schemes had come to naught—his plans had crashed about his ears. But it was something to be able to walk out of the circus with the semblance of dignity. Instead of being kicked out in disgrace, or taken away in handcuffs, he would resign.

Professor Onions, indeed, had been extremely merciful—and it was not altogether

the fear of publicity that had prompted him to adopt this course. For the famous circus owner was a kindly, forgiving man.

Mr. Snayle pulled himself together and went to the door.

"Hi, Dippy!" he shouted, waving a hand. "Come here!"

The dwarf was pottering about his own caravan, and he at once obeyed the summons. For years he had been held in subjection by Simon Snayle, and so little realised that his release from bondage was at hand.

"Boss want Dippy?" he asked, as he ran up.

"Yes. Go and find Master Johnny, and bring him here," ordered Snayle. "And tell him it's important—vital! If you come back without him, I'll break every bone in your distorted body!"

Dippy went off at once, and found Johnny Onions admiring the result of Buster Boots' work. The big canvas barrier had been completed, and it was an unqualified success.

Johnny frowned as he heard Dippy's message.

"Tell Mr. Snayle that I don't want to see him, and won't see him!" he said curtly.

"That's all, Dippy."

The dwarf hesitated.

"Boss says vital!" he exclaimed. "Dippy got to bring you back, or boss smash Dippy. Boss says very urgent!"

"Oh, he threatened to smash you, did he?" said Johnny grimly. "All right, Dippy, I'll come."

He went off with the dwarf, and was looking very angry when he entered Mr. Snayle's caravan. The man was apparently making preparations for departure, for he was turning out lockers and cupboards.

"Have you been threatening Dippy, Mr. Snayle?" asked Johnny hotly.

"That's nothing—I didn't mean it!" replied Snayle. "I wanted to make certain that you'd come. I am quitting this show, Johnny. Here's my resignation," he added, handing Johnny a paper.

The boy took it in surprise and slight bewilderment. He glanced at the resignation, which was in perfect order.

"You mean this, Mr. Snayle?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes, I have had enough of this show," said Mr. Snayle. "Of course, Tessa'll come with me—she's my niece, and——"

"We can't get on without Tessa!" interrupted Johnny in alarm. "You rotter! You're doing this on purpose—just to deprive us of Tessa's act! She's not going——"

"We'll see about that!" interrupted Snayle grimly. "I've said all I mean to say. With regard to wages, I had a fortnight's money in advance, so that's about square."

Johnny left the caravan, feeling elated and concerned at the same time. The knowledge that Simon Snayle was leaving filled

him with delight. But the thought of losing Tessa—the show's only lady performer—was startling. Johnny realised that something would have to be done.

He told Bertie and all the other juniors, and there was quite a lot of elation. None of us could quite understand Mr. Snayle's sudden decision. Rather naturally, we assumed that Casselli's Circus had something to do with it, although, of course, this was not the case.

In the meantime, Mr. Snayle had made his way to Tessa's caravan. This was a neat, exquisite little van which had been designed for her by Professor Onions himself. And the girl matched her surroundings, for she was dainty and pretty and altogether charming. The greatest puzzle in the circus was how she came to be Simon Snayle's niece.

"Get your things together—and look sharp about it!" said Mr. Snayle curtly, as he entered. "I've resigned my position as manager, and we're leaving at once!"

Tessa started up, turning slightly pale.

"Leaving!" she exclaimed. "Oh, but, uncle, you don't mean it! Only yesterday you told me——"

"It doesn't matter what I told you yesterday," broke in Snayle. "I have changed my plans since then. And if I go—you go!"

"Indeed, I won't go!" said Tessa, standing squarely before him. "I won't uncle! It's unfair—it's shameful! Just when Johnny is so anxious about a specially good show."

"Do you think you make the show?" sneered her uncle.

Tessa flushed.

"No, but I help!" she replied hotly. "And I'm not going to desert the show at a moment's notice! I won't—I won't! And you can't force me, either! I'm all right here, with Mrs. Simkins to look after me. I won't budge—I won't!"

"Do you dare to defy me?" thundered Snayle.

"Yes, I do—and you daren't try to force me, either!" replied Tessa, her eyes flashing. "You may be my uncle, but I won't obey you! I won't play such a shameful trick on Johnny——"

"In love with him, eh?" jeered her uncle.

"Oh!" cried Tessa, turning scarlet.

Slap!

She delivered a resounding slap on Mr. Snayle's cheek that sent him recoiling back, in absolute consternation. He gave one glance at Tessa, as she stood there glaring at him, and fled.

He had sense enough to realise that he had made a mistake in attempting to force Tessa to accompany him. He made his way across the circus meadow, that slap having calmed him considerably. He was beginning



"Now, my friend, we can talk quietly and privately," said the tramp, removing his battered hat and a tangled wig at the same moment. "I think it is time we came to an understanding, Mr. Snayle."

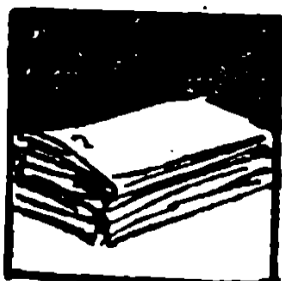
to realise that he had far better go without the girl at all.

For now that he had been turned out of the circus, he was rather at a loose end, and Tessa would only be a responsibility. Far better for her to stay where she was. As regards her welfare and safety, Snayle didn't care two pins.

And as he left the circus, he made a grim, deadly resolve. By fair means or foul, he would smash the Onions Circus, and bring ruin upon the owner and his sons!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FRUITS OF SUCCESS.



"GREAT!" said Johnny Onions enthusiastically.

"Not so bad," agreed Buster Boots with modesty. "Anyhow, Casselli's rotten circus is pretty well

eclipsed!"

"Obliterated, in fact," said De Valerie.

There was no doubt that Casselli's International Circus was very conspicuous by its invisibility. A number of the juniors had gone along the lane towards Caistowe in order to note the effect.

Turning, they approached the circus,

imagining themselves to be would-be patrons. The circus meadow lay on the right, with the low hedge enabling them to see the great new tent, the gay bunting, and the hustle and bustle of busy life.

Casselli's Circus was nowhere to be seen.

This was because of that canvas barrier which had been built along the lower hedge, at right-angles to the road—thus completely screening everything in the adjoining meadow. Even Casselli's big tent was invisible.

The public, streaming down the road from the town, would not even think of a second circus. The Onions show was the only one that had been advertised in the district, and even if Big Bill's outfit was seen, it would be assumed by most people that it was a part and parcel of the other show. And this, in a way, was helpful—since it would give the impression that the Onions Circus was much bigger than it actually was.

It was getting on towards opening time now, and the juniors were comparatively free—for a full hour, at least. And they did not omit to partake of a hearty meal which Johnny had thoughtfully provided.

The crowds were beginning to roll up in earnest.

And the sight was a gratifying one. The afternoon was fine, and the interest of the public had been thoroughly aroused. It began to look as though the audience would break all records. For it was just at the beginning of the holiday season, and Caistowe was a growing resort. The town was full of seaside visitors.

"There's nothing to worry about," said Handforth, as he stood watching the queue of people in front of the ticket office. "They're simply pouring in! What about that new stunt of yours, Johnny?"

"You mean the cannon idea?"

"Yes."

"I don't think I shall be ready to introduce that until to-morrow," said Johnny, shaking his head. "I've got everything ready for the trick, but the top trapeze needs fixing in a certain position. I'm afraid there won't be time to-day."

And while the crowd was pouring into the seats, Big Bill Cassell stood at the gate of the adjoining meadow, cursing and growling to himself. He did this because there was nobody else to curse at.

His circus was ready for the afternoon show—everything was waiting. The ticket offices were open, the money-takers in their places, and the attendants were at their positions in the tent.

Unfortunately, the public came not.

To Mr. Cassell's intense chagrin, not a single soul arrived. A few stragglers passed by along the road, but they were all bound for the Onions Circus.

Even these stragglers, coming from the opposite direction to the town—and there-

fore seeing Casselli's Circus first—had been thoroughly informed. For some distance down the road several juniors paraded with a great banner, instructing the public that there was only one Onions Circus, and that this was further on, beyond the twin elm-trees which formed a landmark at this point.

Big Bill Cassell was almost speechless with rage.

His whole scheme had gone wrong—or, to be more exact, it was Simon Snayle's scheme that had miscarried. And Snayle had conveniently vanished. Seeing that he had let Signor Casselli down so heavily, Snayle thought it an act of wisdom to keep out of the way.

And Big Bill was left to rail at his own folly.

And his humiliation was complete when opening time came. It had nearly caused him to burst a bloodvessel when he saw the great throngs of people surging into the next meadow—when he heard the happy laughter—and when the blare of the Onions band floated unmusically over that canvas barrier.

"By thunder!" snarled Mr. Cassell. "It's no good grumbling—it's my own blamed fault! This is what I get for listening to fools! And at Bournemouth I could have taken a record gate!"

He stamped up and down nervously and angrily. And when, soon afterwards, he learned that the rival show was overcrowded, he became almost inarticulate. His rivals were packed—jammed!

And he had come to Caistowe especially to ruin the business of these infernal boys! Boys! Big Bill felt like choking. The whole show was being run by school kids! And they'd beaten him—they'd made him the laughing-stock of the entire circus profession! It certainly did not add to his peace of mind when the overflow arrived!

It was the bitterest pill of all.

Professor Onions' circus was so packed that at last admission had been refused, and the final stragglers found that they were too late to get in. It was only natural, therefore, that they should turn to Casselli's Circus as a kind of final resort.

Thus, the fat, beefy Mr. Cassell was edified by the spectacle of two or three dozen late-comers hurrying in to attend his performance. It was altogether too much for Big Bill.

He swore a round, lurid oath.

"By ginger! Not me!" he said thickly. "I'm durned if I'll acknowledge my show to be a makeshift! Bill Cassell plays second fiddle to nobody; Hi, close these gates!"

In his excited rage, he bellowed like a bull.

"There'll be no show this afternoon!" he roared. "And get busy with taking the whole outfit down! We leave this pitch to-night!"

The sudden decision was a relief to him. Anything was better than waiting—knowing full well that he was a beaten man. His defeat burned into him, as bitter as gall, but it would make things no better to fool himself.

And so he gave fierce, angry orders for all hands to turn out and pull the show down. The few stragglers who had come in to see the performance were turned away, and the gates closed.

With feverish haste the work of dismantling commenced—Big Bill Cassell rushing hither and thither, and keeping his men on the run. And so, while the performance progressed with roars of applause and laughter in the next meadow, Mr. Cassell was getting ready for flight. For this sudden departure of his was nothing less.

And Simon Snayle proved himself to be a wise man.

He kept out of Cassell's way. If he had approached his fellow-conspirator at such a time as this, it is almost certain that bloodshed would have been committed—and only one kind of blood would have been spilt.

Never before had Johnny and Bertie been

so lighthearted and supremely happy. Somehow, the performance went with a rattling swing, from start to finish. Every act was fully appreciated by the delighted audience, and not the least pleased among that vast throng was a ragged old tramp who sat in the cheapest section.

Needless to say, this shabby old fellow was no less a person than Professor Onions himself. Truth to tell, he was amazed at the success of these schoolboys, and filled with admiration at their glorious courage and enterprise.

And he smiled to himself as he realised that the time would soon arrive for him to disclose himself. For this stay at Caistowe was to be brief—and when the circus departed it would go so far afield that the St. Frank's juniors would not be able to follow its fortunes.

It was a subject which Johnny and Bertie Onions were rather afraid to consider, but they were getting resigned to it. They didn't know that some very exciting events were looming up before St. Frank's severed its connection with circus life!

The climax, in short, was at hand!

THE END.

Editorial Announcement

My dear Readers,

There is yet one more story to come before this splendid school and circus series comes to an end, and not one of you, my readers, having read the preceding stories, must on any account miss it. Entitled "TRAPPED ON THE TRAPEZE!" it presents the most thrilling episodes that have so far appeared in these stories.

SNAYLE'S REVENGE.

Simon Snayle, the ex-manager of Onions' Circus, who has been ruined by his own folly and villainy, is not the type of man to take his punishment quietly. He blames those who stood in his way to accomplishing his vile deeds, and against them he means to exact vengeance. In so doing, he seals his own doom and pays the penalty in an unexpected way. The dramatic exit of Snayle is a masterly piece of writing. One is spellbound by the impending disaster that seems inevitable, and does come—only by the hand of Justice.

AN AFRICAN EXPEDITION.

Jack Grey and his chum, Reggie Pitt, will be regarded next week as two of the luckiest

Juniors in the Remove. For Jack's father, Sir Crawford Grey, a keen naturalist, calls on the Head to ask if his son can accompany him on an expedition to a remote part of Africa. The Head gives his consent, and, of course, Jack arranges for Pitt to go too. They are to leave England in a few days.

AN INVITATION FOR THE HEAD.

Later, Sir Crawford persuades Dr. Stafford himself to join the expedition. This means a New Head. But I have said more than I should, and must ask you to be patient until next week, when you will learn more about the interesting events that are soon to set all St. Frank's talking.

THE ST. FRANK'S MAGAZINE.

The Old Paper will be sparkling with new life next week, when a host of brilliant new features, all freshly illustrated make their appearance.

THE AUTHOR'S PORTRAIT.

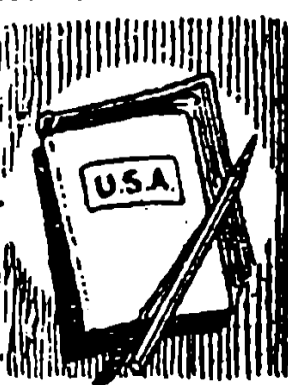
I hope to publish Mr. Brook's photo with an appreciative article in a fortnight from now.—Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.



MY AMERICAN NOTE-BOOK

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



No. 25. WESTWARD HO!

COMMENCING with this week, I intend to describe, as entertainingly as possible, my journey from New York to the Far West—just a little jump of nearly three thousand miles, from one side of the continent of America to the other. It is a journey to be rather awed at, especially to an Englishman, who is not usually accustomed to such enormous distances.

My plan was to go direct from New York to Los Angeles, and some idea of the distance covered may be judged by the fact that the continuous journey, without any "stop overs," occupies five days. Thus, if one starts from New York at midday on Monday, one is due in Los Angeles or San Francisco on the Friday afternoon.

And this, remember, continuous travelling! As can well be imagined, there are all sorts of preparations to be made in advance. One does not simply go to the booking-office, take a ticket, and enter the train. It is necessary to make arrangements quite a long time in advance—two or three days, if possible.

For my own ticket, I went to the railroad agents, and not to the station. I took my ticket on the Pennsylvania Railroad as far as Chicago, and thence on the Santa Fé to Los Angeles. Imagine a journey of nearly three thousand miles, taking five days, and only one change!

To those who know, the best way from New York to Chicago is on the New York Central Railroad, and the finest train of all is the Twentieth Century Limited, which does the thousand mile trip in twenty hours.

But I was in no way desirous of excessive speed. My object was to see as much of the country as possible going out and coming back. My prearranged plan, therefore, was to go Westward on the Pennsylvania and the Santa Fé, and to return on the Union Pacific and the New York Central. In this way I should do both journeys by the direct route—for they both take exactly the same time, being approximately the same distance—but would see different scenery the whole time.

Well, as I have said, I got my ticket—about a yard of it. These long-distance railroad tickets are rather fearsome-looking affairs, perforated into different sections. And as you go from section to section on your journey, one piece after another is torn off, until, finally, you have no ticket at all.

It is also necessary to book a sleeping-berth, and this is why it is advisable to apply a day or two in advance. For, by doing so, you have your pick, and can choose a good lower berth. Later, I shall describe the American Pullman cars, and go into the mysteries of these upper and lower berths. But I can say at once that a lower berth is far better in every way than the upper—and ought to be, considering that the price is much higher.

Having got my ticket, the next thing was to obtain my baggage checks. These are necessary in order to ensure all luggage being collected and dispatched in advance. For when travelling by train in America, one does not fuss about at the guard's van, wondering whether the trunk or the Gladstone bag or the hat-box has been left behind by the porter.

In America, your luggage is called for by the carriers' vans—or Express, as they call it over there—and your trunks, etc. vanish from your gaze a day before you depart. After that, you forget them, until you arrive at your destination. And there, lo and behold, on presentation of your baggage checks, it is a hundred chances to one that all your personal belongings are calmly waiting for delivery. There is no trouble, no bother, and you are not inconvenienced by having the stuff with you en route.

Well, I soon found out the ropes, and my baggage was duly dispatched the day previous to my departure. I was told to forget it, but I didn't. Somehow I felt that I should never see my luggage again. But this feeling soon passes after one has had experience of American railroad travelling.

Next week : "New York to Chicago."

SOME BRAIN-WAVES FOR NEXT WEEK!

**SEE
INSIDE!**

No. 27. Vol. 2.

Edited by Nipper.

May 31, 1924.

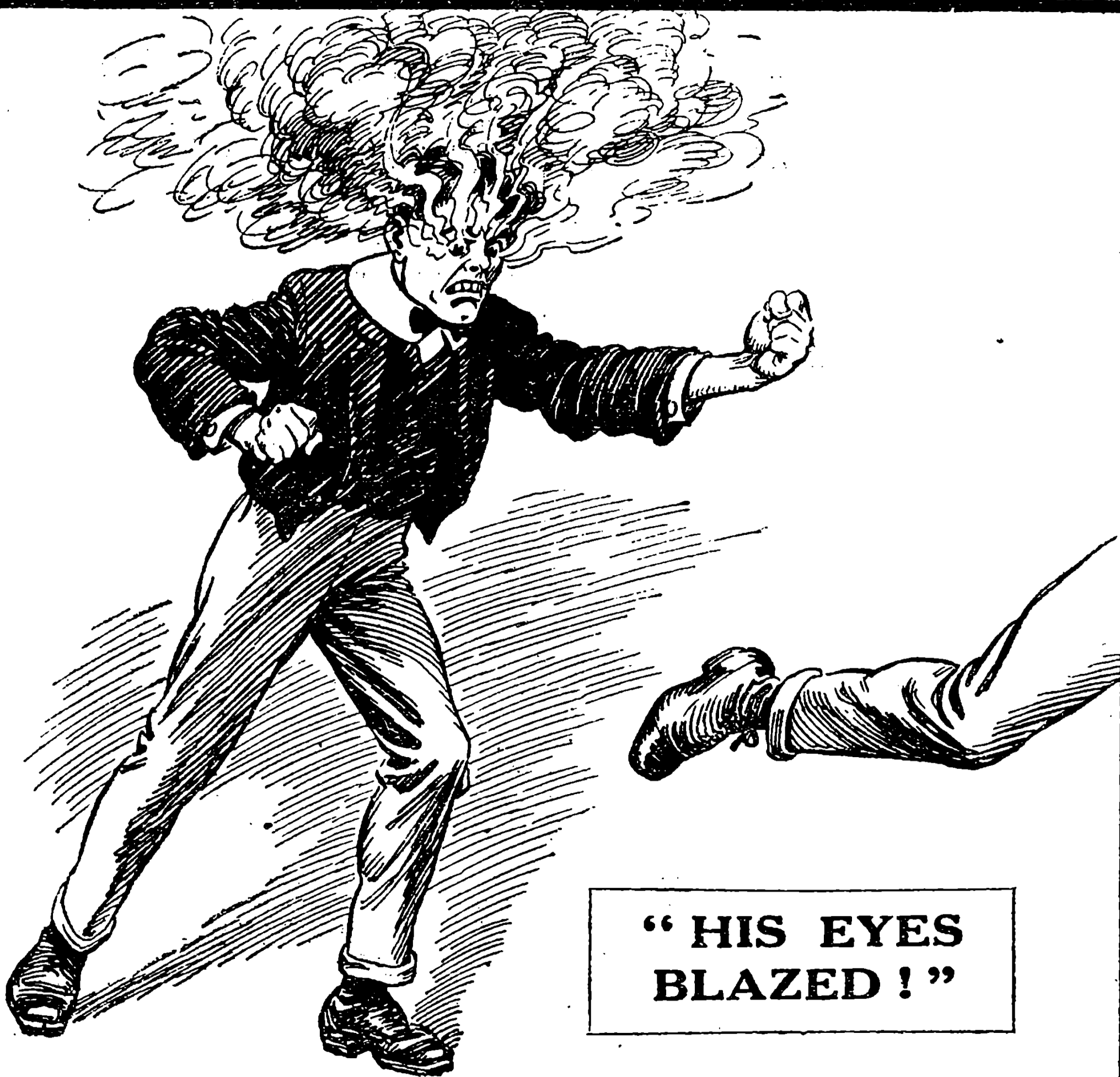


St. Frank's Magazine



FAMILIAR PHRASES FROM FICTION

As Seen By Our Artist

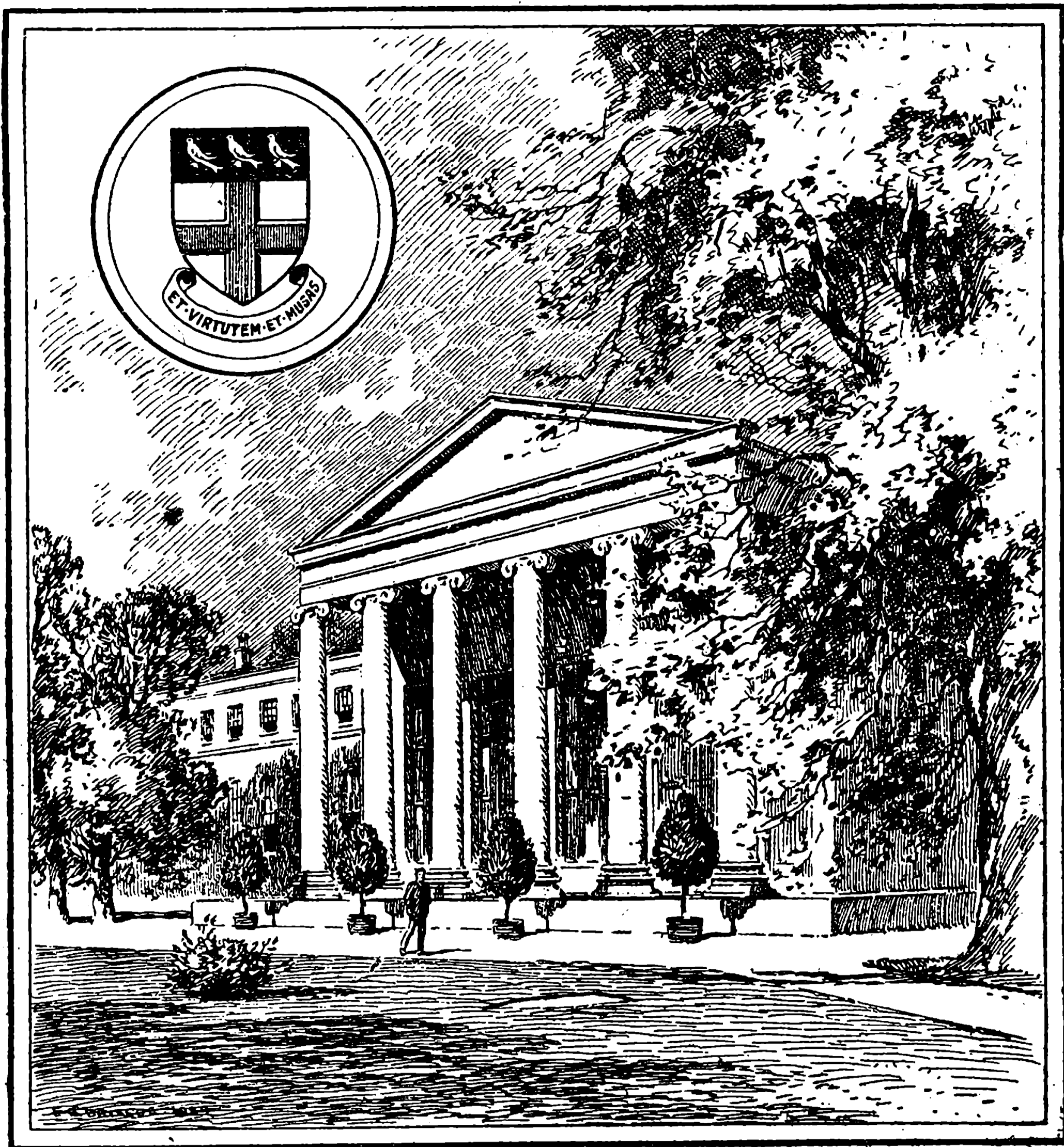


**"HIS EYES
BLAZED!"**

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

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

No. 29. MILL HILL SCHOOL.



This famous public school was founded in 1807 for the sons of Nonconformists at a time when the older universities were not open to them. In 1869 its constitution was remodelled on broader lines. The school stands on high ground in 70 acres of estate at Mill Hill, London, N.W. Its fine buildings include five houses, science laboratories, gymnasium, swimming-bath, workshops, etc.

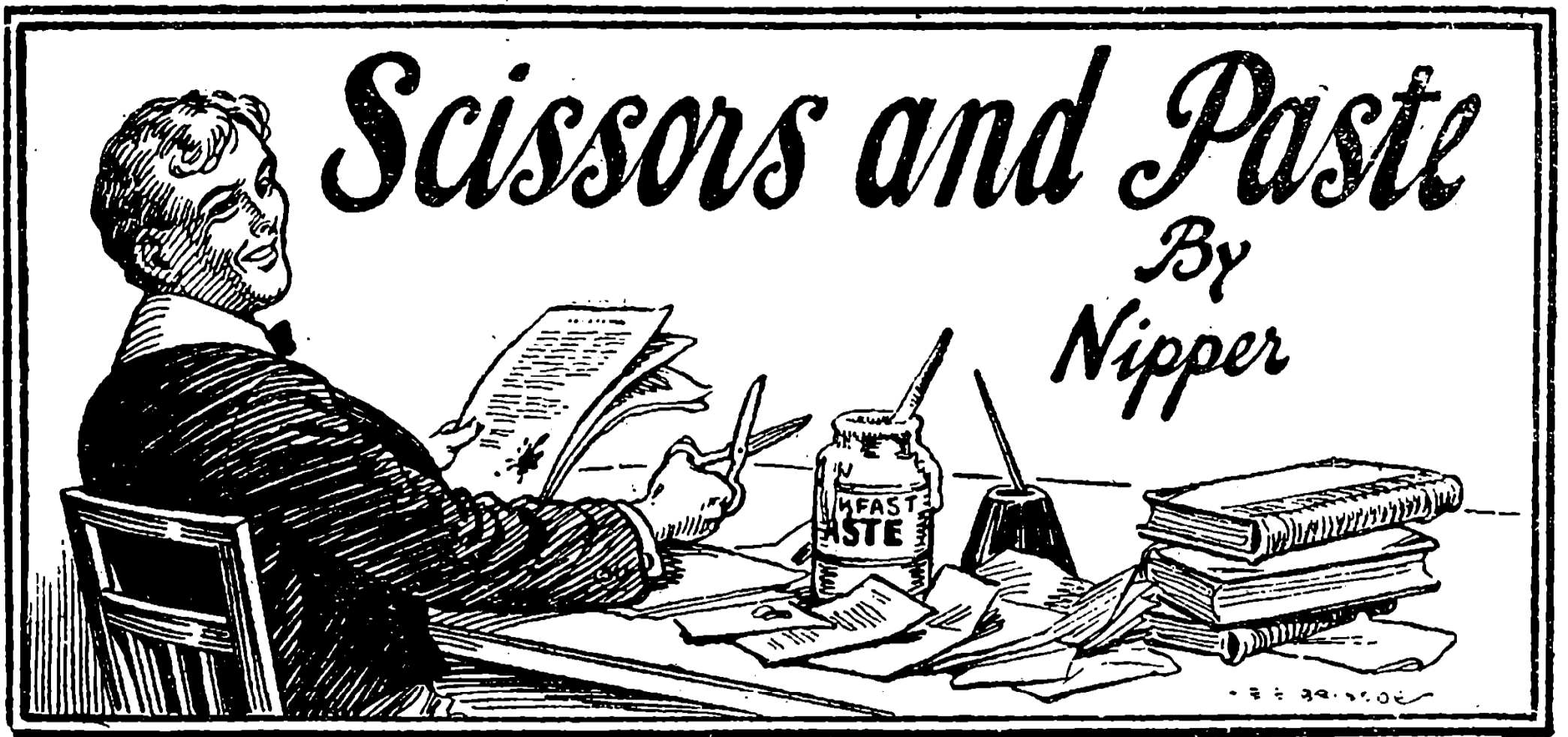
The senior school numbers about 300 boys, and there are about 75 boys accommodated in the junior school.

The school is divided into Upper, Middle,

and Lower, the Upper and Middle being divided into Classical and Modern sides.

The classics are given special prominence in the course of studies, except on the Modern side, where Latin is omitted, and chemistry, bookkeeping, and shorthand are substituted. Although the school is supported by Nonconformists, its religious instruction is unsectarian. There are scholarships to the universities, and to the school itself.

In the Great War 200 Old Boys gave up their lives, and they are commemorated by a Gate of Honour.



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

My dear Chums,

I hope you were quite satisfied with the way Archie edited the Mag. last week. The poor chappie was quite worn out by the time the last page was put to bed. In fact, he was not long in taking refuge in the good old dreamless himself, and, according to Phipps, he slept the full round of the clock, and a bit more, before he could be roused to wakefulness again. On the whole, it was not such a bad number, considering that this was Archie's first attempt at editing.

THE EFFECT ON THE MAG.

Archie, of course, is full of apologies for some of the stuff bearing his name. But then the Genial Ass is such a ridiculously modest chap, and there is really no need for apologies. His Archvian humour is just what the fellows wanted. Furthermore, his services to the Mag. in relieving me of the task of looking after it last week, has resulted in my being able to give all my time and attention to working out some first-class new features.

SOME BRILLIANT NEW IDEAS.

For some weeks past I have felt the desirability of procuring more new talent for the Mag.; to open my columns to several new contributors, and to retain only the most popular of existing features. It is not because any of my chums have complained that I am making these changes. Indeed, every letter I receive from readers is full of praise for the Mag. My object, as it has always been, is to try to do better still. I doubt whether perfection can be reached in anything; there is always

room for improvement. Anyhow, the Old Mag. is to be enriched next week by some capital ideas, some of which I will tell you about further on.

A ST. FRANK'S DIARY.

One of the new contributors sent me a story, which, although exceedingly well written, was not the type of story for us. It satisfied me as to his ability as a writer, but what really attracted my attention was his name. It was Pepys! I had heard of him before, of course, but not as an author. The name suggested an idea. I thought, why not a diary of events at St. Frank's by Pepys, in the style of his illustrious namesake? Pepys was most enthusiastic about it, and brought me in some copy on the following day. I could not have wished for anything better, and I know you will like it when you read it in the Mag. next week.

JOSH CUTTLE AGAIN.

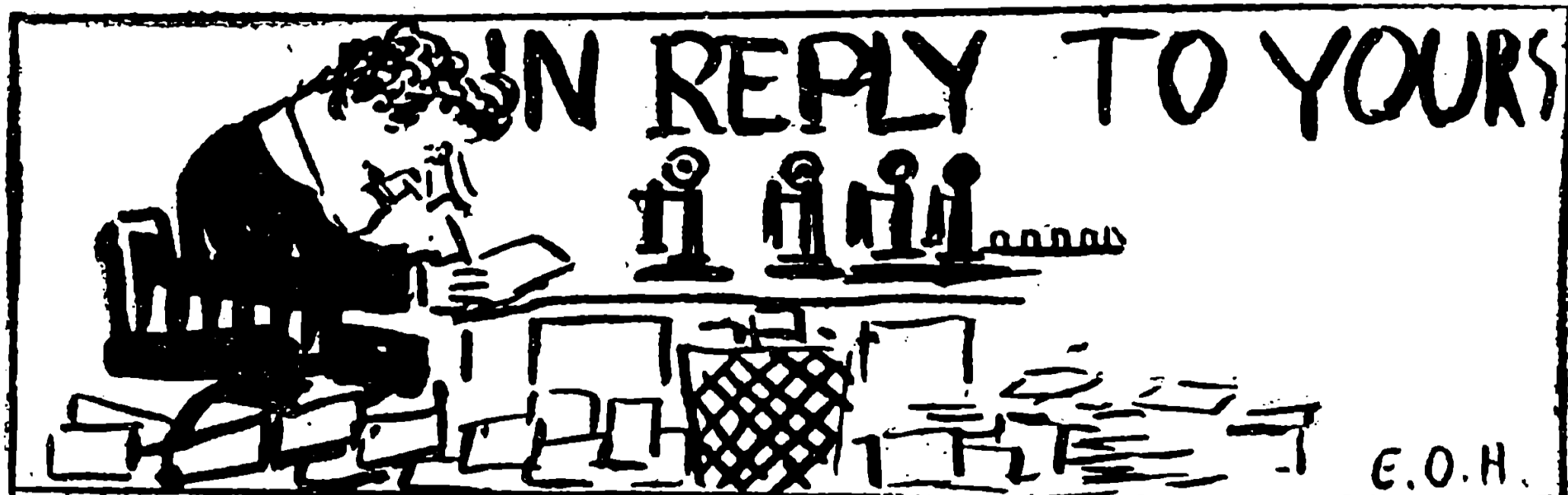
It is a long time since we published anything by the School Pessimist. The Dismal Doorkeeper of St. Frank's is always amusing. Look out for his "POTTED PESSIMISM" next week!

OTHER FEATURES.

In cheery contrast to the above, Boots is contributing a tonic talk, Lord Dorrimore writes on Big Game Hunting; Historicus—his name is purposely withheld—on "ADDLED ANCESTRY," and even Tubbs, our popular messenger-boy, is doing his whack. The whole number will be profusely illustrated with brand-new sketches drawn in the most killingly humorous fashion.

Always yours,

NIPPER.



Correspondence Answered by Uncle Edward

SECTION 1.—REPLIES TO SCHOOL READERS.

BRAINWAVE (College House).—Your suggestion that Handforth should go in for sword swallowing in order to provide a new thrill for the circus, is interesting. I told Handforth about it, but he is very much afraid that his time is fully occupied by more important matters. Besides, I don't think I should like to swallow swords, anyhow.

WOULD-BE AUTHOR.—Is it difficult to write humorous stories? I am sorry I can't give you an answer to this question, as I have had no experience. All my stories are serious and thrilling, and I wouldn't waste time on writing a lot of rubbishy comic stuff.

A. GLENTHORNE.—I don't agree with your suggestion that armchairs should be provided in the Form-room. When at lessons, everybody should confine himself to hard work. I consider the Form-room seats are too comfortable as it is.

J. LEMON.—It's a pity you can't ask sensible questions, you young idiot. Everybody knows that kippers and bloaters are two totally different fish. I should think you could tell that by the flavour!

ACHES AND PAINS.—You are quite right. In a fine, well-appointed class like St. Frank's, it is high time that some reform was made in the class-rooms, and more comfort provided for the fellows. I will do everything I can to push this matter on.

SECTION 2.—REPLIES TO GENERAL READERS.

(Note. Readers of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY can write to me, and I will reply

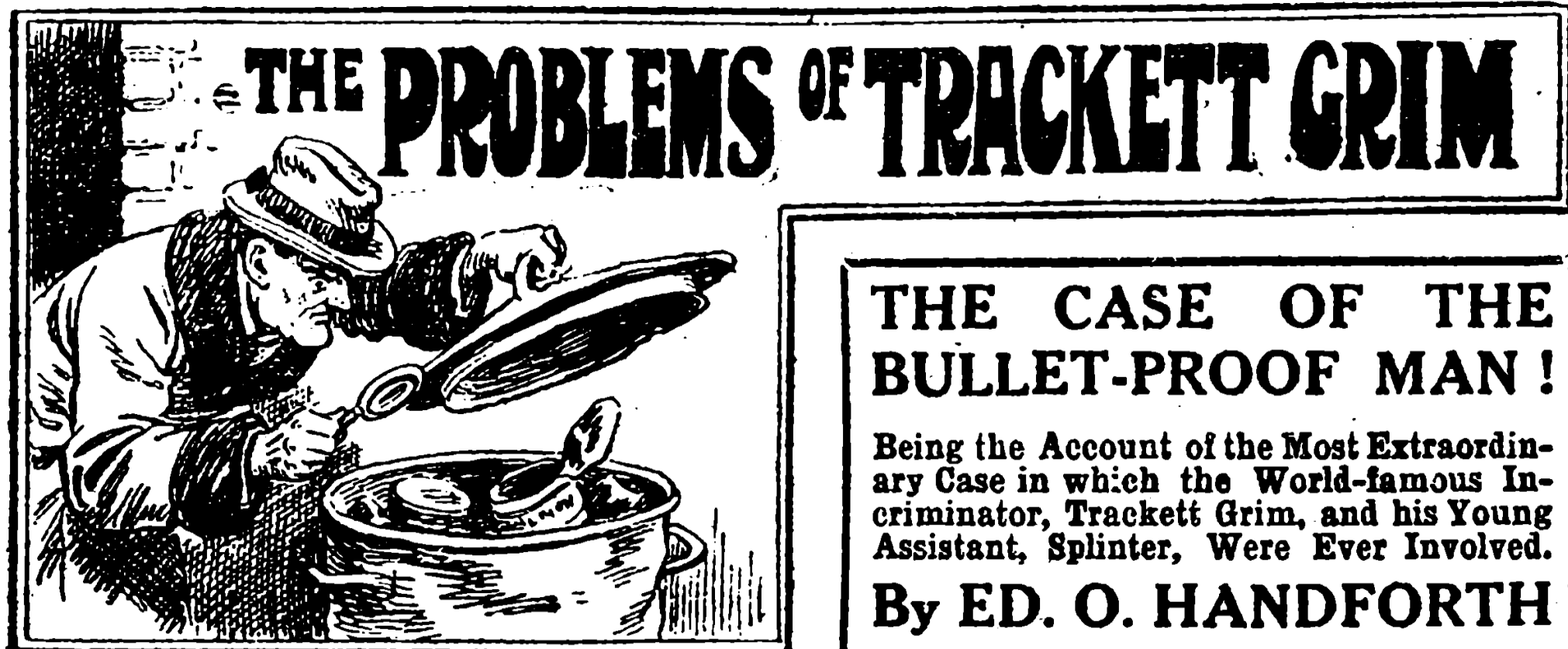
in this section. Address your letters or postcards to **UNCLE EDWARD**, c/o The Editor, The NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.—**UNCLE EDWARD**.)

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE II, TORRINGTON.

—Sorry to have kept you waiting since last week, but now I'll make up for it by giving you a nice long answer. I only assume that you belong to Torrington, because of the postmark on your letter, but that's a detail. It's like your blessed nerve to call yourself by Archie's name. He's pretty wild about it, I can tell you, and he even went so far as to say that you've got a bally priceless nerve. But you mustn't take any notice of that, old son. Secretly, I believe he's rather honoured. And now about your letter. Very pleased to hear that you like the long stories of our general adventures, and I have passed on your congratulations to the right quarter. With regard to the map you talk about, I will see what can be done. I ought to have mentioned that Nipper gave me your letter to reply to, so I'm answering it for him. I think it's quite possible that we'll have another map of St. Frank's and district before long—but don't be impatient if it's delayed a bit. These things want a bit of getting out. I offered to draw the whole map, and to put in all the new landmarks, but for some reason Nipper choked me off. If you can understand it, I can't.

INQUISITIVE.—Your question is so beastly personal that I won't give it the slightest publicity by answering it. And I'd like to tell you straight out that I positively never blush when I meet Miss Irene—and I only punch Church and McClure when they deserve it.

UNCLE EDWARD.



THE CASE OF THE BULLET-PROOF MAN!

Being the Account of the Most Extraordinary Case in which the World-famous Incriminator, Trackett Grim, and his Young Assistant, Splinter, Were Ever Involved.

By ED. O. HANDFORTH

CHAPTER I.

SHOTS IN THE STREET.

"IT'S no good, Splinter," sighed the world-famous incriminator, Trackett Grim, as he paced up and down his private sanctum. "It's no good at all!"

"What's no good, guv'nor?" asked his bright young assistant, Splinter.

"Everything's no good!" snapped Grim authoritatively. "There are no longer any cases left in the world which are worth my attention. As the greatest living incriminator, it is natural that I can only afford to take up cases of the utmost difficulty and danger. There are no more left, Splinter."

Grim lit a huge pipe and clasped his hands behind him as he paced to and fro across the sanctum. Then he began to pace to and fro in the opposite direction.

Splinter had never seen his wonderful master so despondent. It really seemed as though there were no more celebrated cases to investigate, and the young lad gave vent to a deep, hollow howl, as though in sympathy with Grim.

"You may well say that," the detective grunted, filling another pipe and restlessly strewing the room with tobacco as he kept up his pacing to and fro. The fact is," he added, striking match after match, "that there is no more crime left in the world. I ma—"

Yoooooooooooooooooooooop!

Woooooooooooooooooooooop!

Yeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeep!

These extraordinary sounds suddenly smote upon the atmosphere of Grim's sanctum. Grim strode recklessly to the window and thrust out his head.

His young assistant sprang from the chair in which he had been sitting, and joined him. An amazing spectacle met their eyes as they craned out.

"My hat!" gasped Splinter breathlessly.

"Nonsense!" corrected Grim. "Your hat's hanging up in the hall."

Grim was quite right. It was. But what was happening in the street below?

All sorts of amazing things! There were three men in overcoats being pursued by a giant!

He was a terrific man, who stood over seven feet high, and he had a black beard, over two feet long, which completely hid his face. This huge man was chasing the others and letting out terrific blows from his fists as he ran.

Nor was that all!

For hurrying down the road came three policemen, one of whom was armed with a rifle.

At the moment Grim and his assistant looked out of the window the giant suddenly caught hold of one of the men he was pursuing. With one hand he gripped him by the collar, while with the other he dealt him a tremendous blow on the jaw.

The man fell without a sound. At once from a doorway sprang a small man who wore a red moustache. He leapt upon the giant's victim and hurriedly took something from the poor chap's pocket.

It was a small packet, and the man with the red moustache put it away inside his coat. Then he produced a police-whistle, which he blew sharply. At once there came the sound of wheels, and a huge pantechnicon came dashing along the street.

"Great heavens!" muttered Grim, his pipe falling from his lips with a clatter. "It's a removal! They're going to abduct him!"

But for once in his life the great incriminator was wrong. For the man with the red moustache suddenly caught hold of the giant in his arms and picked him up as though he had been a baby!

The pantechnicon pulled up by the kerb, and the little man lifted the giant inside!

By this time the three policemen had

arrived, and there was a sudden spurt of flame.

Bang!

The man with the rifle had fired. The bullet sped through the air and hit the giant on the shoulder!

Ping!

After striking the villain, the bullet bounced off and rolled into the gutter at the side of the street. Quick as lightning the armed policeman fired six more shots. Each one hit the giant—and they all bounced off into the middle of the road without doing any damage!

"Great pip!" cried Grim. "The man must be bullet-proof!"

Before another shot could be fired the van started to move, and the two crooks inside it were disappearing down the street!

CHAPTER II.

THE BRIGAND OF BERMONDSEY.

WITHOUT waiting to go downstairs, Grim jumped through the window of his sanctum and alighted in the street. He immediately bent over the still form of the giant's victim. The man lay on the pavement, breathing deeply. As Grim bent over him he opened his eyes and sat up.

"Where am I?" he gasped.

"Not in the least!" Grim replied reassuringly. "But tell me how it happened."

"Not here—not here," responded the other, suddenly standing up.

"Then come inside," invited Grim. "I am a great detective, and I can see there is something wrong!"

"Wonderful!" gasped the man. "I have been vilely attacked!"

The three policemen now approached. But at a sign from Grim they touched their helmets and silently strolled away. They knew who he was, and were content to leave the baffling mystery in his hands.

"Now, sir," said Grim, when the two were seated in his sanctum and Splinter had been sent to find a strong glass of lemonade. "I know that you were attacked by a man, who, from his size, I should deduce was a giant. After having been laid out by this fellow, you were robbed of something. In other words, the giant's confederate stole something from your pocket. Am I right?"

"It's amazing, sir!" the victim roared, the colour flowing back into his pale cheeks. "The giant, as you call him, is Black Bolski, the Brigand of Bermondsey. The other man is his confederate, Red Rube. They are the most desperate thieves on the Continent—and in Europe also," he added thoughtfully.

"Aha, aha!" said Grim. "And I can further deduce that you were robbed of something very valuable."

"Right again!" howled the other. "I have been robbed of my most valuable papers. What can be done?"

"Only one thing," Grim replied shortly; "I must get them back!"

Waving aside the man's gratitude as though it had been so much paper, the incriminator, with Splinter at his heels, once more rushed into the street, not even giving himself time to put on his hat.

Once in the road, he produced from his hip-pocket a large magnifying-glass. Then he bent down and appeared to study the ground intently.

"Good!" he remarked, suddenly straightening up.

"Have you found the criminal?" asked the clever lad.



"It's no good, Splinter," sighed the world-famous incriminator, Trackett Grim, as he paced up and down his private sanctum. "It's no good at all!"

"Not yet," returned Grim; "but I have found his tracks. Get out the automobile. We will follow the tracks of the pantech-nicon."

Splinter ran off, and a few seconds later reappeared at the wheel of Grim's huge touring-car. Grim stepped in and took the wheel out of the lad's hand.

Then, with one eye scanning the road through his glass and the other fixed straight ahead, Grim set off on the desperate chase.

"You see, Splinter," he explained, as they went along, "this is the most difficult case I have ever been on. Not only do these two rogues rob the poor fellow in broad daylight; but" — he paused significantly —

"but even when one of them is shot he takes no notice. That is most extraordinary. In my long experience, even the greatest villains have always given way when they have been hit by bullets."

There was no further time for conversation. By this time the car had whizzed into the purlieus of the East End. Grim had followed the tracks of the pantech-nicon and now drew up before a great warehouse.

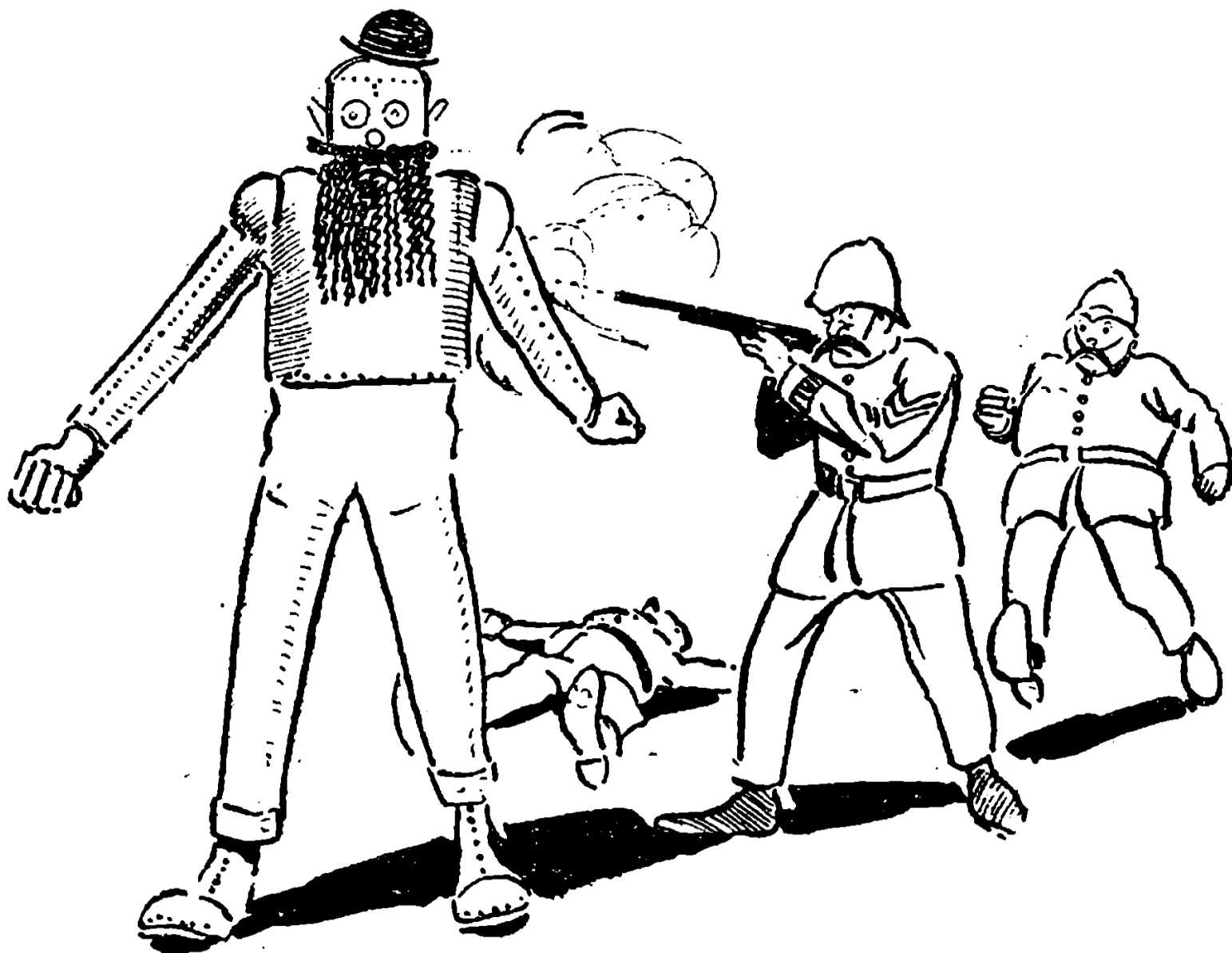
"Look after the car till I get back," commanded Grim, hopping out.

It was almost dark at this deserted time of the night, and the incriminator had to flash his torch hither and thither. At last the beams fell on a broken window, through which Grim was able to crawl.

Very warily he stepped into an empty room and along a passage. Then, coming to a half-open door, he heard a curious sound. He peeped through the door, and the sight that met his eyes almost caused him to ejaculate.

For sitting on a chair was the man with the red moustache, and at his side was the Brigand of Bermondsey! But that was not all, for Red Rube was actually hammering a nail into the big shoulder of Black Bolski!

He was hitting it hard in with his hammer, and the Brigand never uttered a sound. Grim was so surprised, he nearly dropped his torch. But his training never deserted him. Suddenly he entered the room and drew a revolver out!



Bang! The man with the rifle had fired. The bullet sped through the air and hit the giant on the shoulder. Ping! After striking the villain, the bullet bounced off and rolled into the gutter.

"Hands up!" he said quietly.

With a shriek, Red Rube turned towards Grim and flung up his hands, throwing the hammer out of the window! Grim quickly bound the villain with some string that was in his pocket. Then he turned his attention to Black Bolski.

The man had never moved. Three times Grim commanded him to throw up his hands, but the scoundrel never obeyed. Then, losing his temper, Grim hit him on the head with his electric torch.

With a clang, the villain toppled over and hit the floor. At once Grim understood the extraordinary truth. The man was not a man at all! He was an automatic figure, and was made of steel!

The great incriminator felt him all over and found his surmise was quite correct. Black Bolski, the Brigand of Bermondsey, was only a wonderful machine!

In a secret cupboard in the automaton's head Grim found the missing papers. Then, with his captures, he and Splinter drove off to Scotland Yard, where the prisoners were duly handed over. Needless to say, Grim was well paid for his services, and the country ridded for ever from a most dangerous rogue!

NEXT WEEK:

"THE CASE OF THE MISSING MILLIONAIRE!"

Another Amazing Story of Trackett Grim.



E. Sopp's Fables

By
Edgar Sopp of the Fifth

No. 26. The Fable of the Tyrant and the Rebels.

NOW, behold, it chanced that there were three students at the celebrated College of St. Frank's. There were more than three students, of course, but we are dealing with Handforth, and Church, and McClure. And the three were Great Chums. Now, they were in all respects equals, except that Handforth had more Physical Strength and more Brute Force in his character. And upon this he did presume to make himself leader, thereby making the same mistake that many a seeming sensible man hath made, namely, of supposing that Bullying is

A MARK OF LEADERSHIP.

And this same Handforth, in addition to a tendency to lay Violent Hands upon his chums, had also a Quick Temper, so that Church and McClure had to exercise Constant Vigilance, and were hard put to it to know how to order Their Conduct. And do what they would they could not avoid Strife of Tongue, and Bouts of Fisticuffs, since their most Innocent Words and acts were so misconstrued by their leader as to appear the Exact Contrary of what they intended. Thus, acting on his own Perverted View, he generally

PROCEEDED TO BIFF THEM.

And the Whole School marvelled that these two chums should take the insults and blows so patiently. But the proverb saith that a Worm will Turn. And, behold, there came a day when the two Down-trodden Chums did reach that Famous Condition which is known throughout the length and breadth of the land as being Fed Up. And they did Take Counsel with each other, and did enter into a Mutual Compact. And they bound themselves to take Common Action against their leader the very next time he should accuse either of them unjustly, or Slosh them

WITHOUT GOOD CAUSE.

And, lo, it came to pass that on the very day that they entered into this Bond, their leader had one of his Fits of Violence, and did most unreasonably assault McClure, even going to the length of shoving his head Up the Chimney. And all this, for-

sooth, because Handforth Made Announcement during the partaking of tea that he had decided upon a walk to Bellton by way of the Moor View School. Whereupon McClure, speaking for both, did ask Handforth where they Came In. To which the reply was that they

CAME IN NOWHERE.

And this did so rile the Two Chums that McClure did make Sarcastic Remarks, with the drastic result aforementioned. And, behold, later, after certain cleansing operations had been performed, the Indignant Pair demanded of Handforth who elected him leader, and McClure did tell him that he could jolly well go for a walk by himself, and that for their part they jolly well intended to stay in and do their prep. Thereupon, the redoubtable Handforth, taking off his jacket and rolling up his sleeves, prepared for

DIRTY WORK AT THE CROSS ROADS.

But, acting upon their Bond, Church and McClure did Arise. And they sprang upon their tormentor, and did Present Him with that Order which is known as The Push. And after smiting him mightily, they did deposit him, in no Gentle Way, outside the study door, in the passage. And, behold, they Locked the Door and barred it, and did proceed with their prep. And to all Handforth's appeals and threats they turned not one Deaf Ear, but four Deaf Ears. And to his amazement, he found himself

BARRED OUT.

And, lo and behold, towards bed-time the once Arrogant Leader did humbly beseech entrance by the Window, asking for forgiveness, and vowing that in future he would seek to lead only by Reason and Persuasion. Whereupon the Victors did give him entrance, and they shook hands all round, and the former Good Relations were restored, to their Great Joy and Content.

MORAL: 'TIS EXCELLENT TO HAVE A GIANT'S STRENGTH, BUT TYRANNOUS TO USE IT LIKE A GIANT.

THE VILLAINS OF BELLTON WOOD!

Complete Story :: By TOMMY WATSON

I.

"LUMPY BILL'S" NEWS!

THE spring sunshine was glorious. It was Wednesday afternoon, and Bob Christine and his two chums, Yorke and Talmadge, of the College House, had decided to go down to the village on a little shopping expedition—owing to the fact that Christine had just received a somewhat generous "tip" from an uncle in London.

All three juniors were in the best of spirits as they turned out of the Triangle into Bellton Lane, and there was a smile of satisfaction on Yorke's face.

"Our luck's in, my hearties!" he exclaimed, with a chuckle. "The contribution from that uncle of yours, Bob, has come in the nick of time! Instead of returning to an empty board at tea-time, we shall be able to sit down to a slap-up, gilt-edged repast!"

"Oh, rather!" agreed Christine. "It's a funny thing, but I've always noticed that just when things look blackest something always turns up to save the situation! Ten minutes ago the three of us couldn't raise more than fourpence-ha'penny! But now—Hullo! Look what's coming!"

He nodded up the road as he spoke, and the three Removites saw a swiftly running figure a short distance ahead. It was that of a roughly-clad youth, and he was hurrying towards them as fast as he could pelt.

"Why, it's Lumpy Bill!" said Christine, with a grin. "Judging by his speed, I should say that he's received a pretty hefty scare!"

"Evidently!" agreed Yorke, with a sniff. "It doesn't take very much to put the wind up that bounder!"

Talmadge looked at the flying figure of the blacksmith's son keenly.

"He seems to be more than usually frightened this time!" he said critically. "By Jingo! His face is as white as chalk!"

It was now apparent to the three juniors that Lumpy Bill was in a great state of agitation, and as he drew nearer they could see that his features were working convulsively. A moment later he almost flung

himself into their arms, and stood gasping for breath.

"What's the matter with you, eh?" demanded Christine sharply. "Seen a ghost?"

The village youth gulped.

"No—no! It's—it's worse'n that!" he panted frantically. "There's murder goin' on in Bellton Wood—"

"Murder!" repeated Yorke, looking at the other curiously. "What are you talking about, you madman?"

"It's true, I tell 'ee!" persisted Lumpy Bill quickly. "I—I see a terrible feller threatenin' a woman with a revolver! She—she 'ad a baby wrapped in a shawl, an' she was yellin' with fright! I've been expectin' to 'ear the shot all the time!"

The College House trio stared at the working features of the blacksmith's son with startled glances, but they soon decided that he was speaking the truth. There could be no doubt whatever that Lumpy Bill's fright was the genuine thing, and Christine snapped his fingers.

"We'd better look into this, you chaps!" he said, turning to his chums quickly. "This merchant can't be spoofing, and it's quite evident that he's seen something in the wood—something which has almost turned his head with fear!"

Yorke and Talmadge nodded, and set off with Christine at once—bent upon rescuing the unfortunate woman with the baby.

II.

THE VILLAINS IN THE WOOD!

THIS way!" gasped Lumpy Bill, as the quartette reached the stile leading to the footpath. "The bloke I saw is in the clearin'—'bout three 'undred yards from 'ere!"

The four juniors vaulted over the stile and pelted for the clearing as fast as they could go, and came within sight of it in a very few seconds. As they neared the spot Christine halted abruptly and pointed.

"Bill was right, you chaps!" he said tensely. "Look! There's the woman—"

"Yes—and there's the black-bearded chap

with the revolver!" put in Yorke quickly. "Great Scott! What shall we do?"

Christine looked grim.

"Do?" he queried. "Why, there's only one thing we can do, you fathead! We must creep up behind that rotter and collar him! Come on! We're three to one, anyhow, and that ought to be enough! He's threatening her again—Buck up!"

Christine's words were true, as the juniors could plainly see. Just through the trees the tense little drama was being enacted—the frightened woman clutching her baby frantically, and the black-bearded man scowling at her vindictively, holding his revolver within a few inches of her head!

The situation looked desperate, but Christine and his chums did not hesitate for one moment. With one accord they dashed to the rescue—Lumpy Bill remaining in the background, too scared to do anything but stare.

The Removites covered the ground swiftly and noiselessly, speeding towards the rear of the man with the revolver. It was evident that he had no idea of their proximity, for he took a threatening step towards the shivering woman, and growled out a few hoarse words.

"Give me that child, woman!" he grated vindictively. "If you don't hand it over at the count of three, I shall pull the trigger! Do you hear?"

The mother cowered, and hugged the baby more tightly than ever.



"What's the matter?" demanded Christine sharply. "Seen a ghost?"

The village youth gulped.

"No—no! It's worse than that!" he panted frantically. "There's murder goin' on in Bell-ton Wood——"

"You—you cowardly blackguard!" she screamed. "I will never allow you to take my baby from me! You shall kill me first!"

The bearded man uttered a fierce growl and thrust the revolver forward.

"All right!" he grunted. "Your death will be upon your own head! But I am in earnest, mind! At the count of three I shall fire! One—two—th—"

Before the scoundrel could utter another syllable Christine and Co. were upon him. The three juniors simply hurled themselves upon the ruffian simultaneously, and bore him to the ground before he had a chance to even turn. His revolver went flying into the grass, and the bearded man crumpled up with scarcely a moan.

"Got him!" said Talmadge excitedly. "Collared him beautifully!"

"Yes; we've got him all right!" gasped Christine. "But we must take care to keep him down! Thank goodness his revolver's gone!"

"Jolly neat capture, if you ask me anything!" said Yorke, sitting down on the prisoner's legs heavily. "It's no good struggling, you rotter—you're fairly cornered!" he added, addressing his remarks to the captive. "By jingo! We'll teach you to murder a defenceless woman——"

Lumpy Bill, from the edge of the clearing, suddenly let out a yell of fear.

"Look out!" he bawled, in a gasping voice. "There's a lot more o' the crooks comin'—pals o' the other bloke, I reckon!"

Christine and his chums turned quickly; but they were too late.

At least eight desperate-looking ruffians appeared as if from nowhere, and flung themselves at the dauntless trio in a trice. The Removites were roughly pulled from the black-bearded man's prostrate form and quickly roped together. The gang of villains scarcely uttered a word, but carried out their task with silent, grim determination.

Within two minutes Christine, Yorke and Talmadge were securely trussed up, and carried to a grassy bank near by, where they were unceremoniously flung in a heap. Fortunately they were not blindfolded, and they were able to watch the remainder of the strange proceedings.

The black-bearded man, having straightened his clothing, recovered his revolver. Then, with the same vindictive scowl on his forbidding features, he advanced upon the frightened woman again, obviously intent upon carrying out his murderous intentions as if no interruption had occurred.

"Now, then, hand over that baby!" he grated, in a voice of thunder. "Do you hear me? This is your last chance! One—two—three!"

Bang!

The weapon went off with a tremendous report, and Christine and Co. shuddered as they saw the unfortunate woman fling up her hands and fall to the ground—the baby thudding to the grass with a sickening

crash. It was all over in a moment, and the black-bearded man ran forward and picked up the child. He bestowed one venomous glance at the dead woman, and then hurried away.

Christine looked at his two chums dumbly, too dazed to speak. In spite of their efforts the murder had taken place—before their very eyes! It was too ghastly!

Then suddenly a youthful voice broke through the woods.

"Oh, great!" said the voice. "Couldn't be better, old man!"

Christine and Co. blinked in amazement—for they had recognised the voice instantly. It was unmistakably that of the leader of the "Commoners" of the River House School.

Two minutes later the gang of villains was crowding round the three trussed-up Removites, and all of them were chuckling gleefully.

"Sorry to treat you so roughly!" said one of them cheerily. "But it was your own fault, you know!"

Christine gulped.

"Brewster!" he exclaimed. "Well, I'm jiggered! You—you spoofing blighter! What's the idea of all this rot, eh?"

"Oh, just a little enterprise of our own, old man!" said Hal Brewster lightly. "You and your pals jolly nearly kyboshed the whole stunt—but by collaring you as we did we just managed to save the situation!"

"The which?" asked Christine. "What are you talking about, you fathead?"

Brewster and his fellow "villains" chuckled.

"Well, you see, we've just been 'shooting' a particularly dramatic incident in our super-film!" he explained. "We thought it would be a good idea to produce a film of our own, and we've got a camera and all the rest of it among the trees, in full working order! The photo-play is going to be a terrific success, and we couldn't have you chaps butt in and ruin everything, could we?"

Christine and Co. smiled three sickly smiles.

"We had an idea that Lumpy Bill might stir up trouble," went on Brewster, "for we knew that he had seen our 'murder' being enacted. So we prepared to receive intruders, and we bound you up until the scene was taken! The light's getting weaker every minute now, and we simply had to



The three juniors simply hurled themselves upon the ruffian simultaneously, and bore him to the ground before he had a chance to turn.

finish this afternoon! Hope you won't feel particularly nettled about it! After all, it was your own silly doing—you shouldn't have butted in!"

Christine nodded.

"Oh, don't mention it!" he said, with a weak grin. "But I must say your make-ups are terrific! You look like a set of East End hooligans!"

"Of course!" said Brewster. "When you're working with a camera you've got to be thundering particular. I can tell you! We've got our machine concealed in the bushes; but I'll bet it's taken every detail perfectly. You wait until you see the film, that's all!"

A few moments later Christine and Co. were unbound and taking leave of their River House rivals. There was no ill-feeling whatever on either side—but the trio of Study Q in the College House could see no trace of Lumpy Bill.

He had completely vanished—which, perhaps, was just as well.

THE END.

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CRICKET HINTS.—Bowling

BOWLING is an art that cannot be taught, but which must be acquired. In cricket you are either a bowler, or you are not a bowler.

There is no middle course. The boy without any aptitude for bowling will never be a bowler, try as he may. He may learn, in the fullness of time, to pitch a straight ball, but that is not bowling, as bowling is recognised. Bowling is a science in itself—perhaps the most difficult of all cricket sciences.

Yet even a “born” bowler cannot grip the leather for the first time and hope to send the wickets skitting. He requires tuition in the same way as the “born” musician must master the elementary principles of music before going on to play. And he can only do this by great perseverance and constant practice.

Therefore it is to the cricketer with a natural aptitude for bowling that I am addressing this article.

In the first place, let me give you a warning. Don't overdo practice, for this is as ruinous to cultivating a good style in bowling as anything can be. Take your bowling steadily at first, sending down a few balls, and having a rest or change before taking up the leather again. The elasticity of the muscles should at all costs be preserved, and you can only do this by giving them work which is not likely to tire, and therefore afterwards stiffen them.

The style of bowling you adopt will be perfected with practice. That is a matter which you, and you alone, must discover for yourself. Cultivate a good length, and don't run away—as many youngsters do—with the idea that sheer physical force will bring you success, because it won't. Balls with “brawn” behind them are balls a good batsman laughs at and wallops—if they don't go over his head or knock his knee or elbow out of joint.

I don't want you to imagine that by writing in this strain I am trying to deride fast bowlers. I am not. A fast bowler—a real, scientific fast merchant, that is—will tell you that is it not the force with which

he delivers the ball that gives it speed, but rather the knack of twisting it in the hand as it leaves it.

In your practice, first aim for direction: try slow balls, medium, and fast, and when you have discovered which of these suit you best, then cultivate length, for on a good length the success of bowling mainly depends.

I do not suggest that in matches you should always stick to one length, for a good batsman, once he has got your measure, will be able to play you easily. In cases of this sort you must vary your length, of course, and make your balls break at different angles and in different places. I suggest cultivating one certain length, just as a basis on which to build up your style.

To be a good bowler, you must be capable of altering your length, your style, and everything. If you are a “fast” man, and the batsman has you “weighed up,” and has become accustomed to hitting your fast deliveries, a slow, trundling ball, or even a medium-paced ball, will probably take him by surprise. There is nothing so disturbing as the unexpected, and it is by this ability to change pace and style at will that so many of our best bowlers depend for success.

Don't be discouraged if at first you find your bowling hit. You can't expect to jump into the front rank of bowlers right away, and every bowler of note on earth has had the mortification of seeing his balls clouted all over the place at his first attempt.

If it is only at practice that you are hit—and it is unlikely that your captain will put you on until you have developed a bit—then grin and bear it, for, after all, it is one of the best things in the world for you. Until you find your feet—or arm—don't indulge in fancy stuff, as this is likely to crab your delivery at the outset.

Don't hold the ball too long before letting it go; on the other hand, don't release it too soon. You will usually find that the right moment to let the leather go is when your arm has made its sweep, and is slightly

in advance of the head. This, too, is another lesson that can only come with experience.

I hope this article will help you. I have given you no hard-and-fast rules to follow, because, frankly, I do not believe that any hard-and-fast rules on bowling can be made, in spite of everything that has been written and said to the contrary.

Frequently I deride the saying that footballers and cricketers are born—not made—for I hold that any boy possessing a liking for either game, the physique and the brain, will make a good player. Bowling is the only science in which I do not adhere to this view, for from personal experience I know that bowlers are "born."

So if you discover that you are not cut out for a bowler, drop it, and concentrate on some other department of the game.

This temporarily concludes my cricket chats. A number of readers have lately written for advice on boxing, and, therefore, another week I hope to commence a new series, dealing with the noble art and science of self-defence. When you want more cricket articles, write and tell me. You shall have 'em, I promise you!

And, by the way, what about that letter? Don't forget I am here to help you, and that I want to hear from you.

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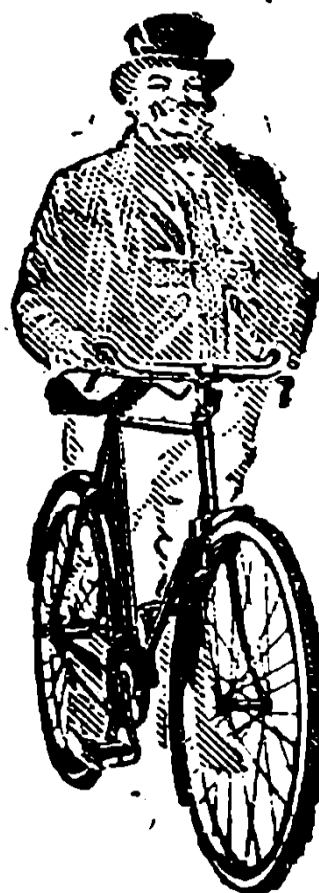
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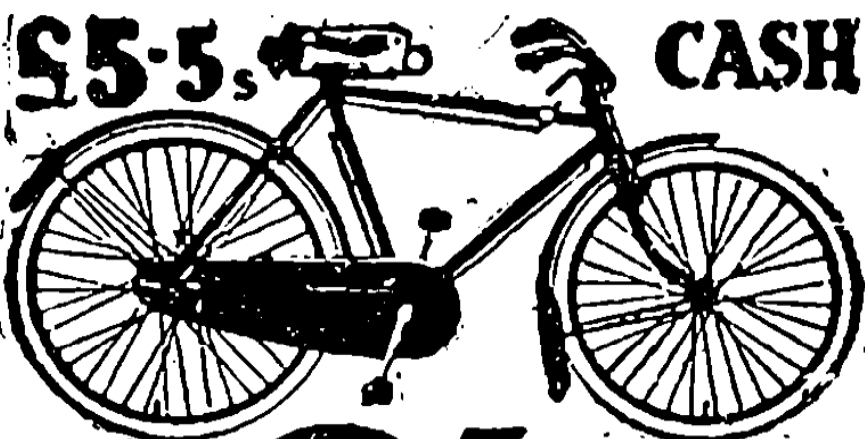
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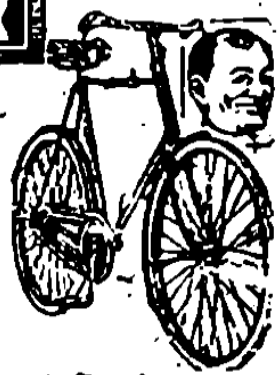
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D/R

May 31, 1924