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Library and St. Frank's Magazine



THE TWINS' TERRIBLE TANGLE

or, **THE SCHOOLBOY
DETECTIVES!**

A Laughable Long Complete
Story of the well-known Boys
of St. Frank's.



The dinghy ploughed across the bay towards the Southern Prince. The three juniors were as helpless as babies. Bound hand and foot, they couldn't move, and their mufflers had now been bound over their mouths.



AN AMUSING LONG COMPLETE STORY OF SCHOOL AND ADVENTURE AT ST. FRANK'S COLLEGE.

Regular readers must often have heard of the Trotwood Twins from time to time, although within the last year or two we have had little opportunity of giving them a leading role such as they occupy in this week's story. Besides being exceptionally funny, the adventures of the twins, recorded below, lead to some exciting situations, in which Captain Starkey, that blustering ruffian of the high seas, reappears on the scene once more.

THE EDITOR.

By E. SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

SOMEWHAT POISONOUS!

NICODEMUS TROTWOOD, of the Fourth Form at St. Frank's, strolled out of the Ancient House and cast a critical eye at the weather.

"It's going to be fine," he announced confidently. "Come on, Corny. We'll be first out. Don't want to wait till the crowd comes."

Cornelius Trotwood, looking amazingly like his twin brother, was just in the rear, and he passed out into the Triangle. The two thin, long-legged juniors made for the bicycle shed.

Afternoon lessons were just over, and the short, wintry day was showing signs of closing in. Just lately there had been a lot of rain, and most of the juniors were rather tired of it. It was a welcome change, therefore, to find the sky clear and the ground drying up pleasantly.

"We've got all sorts of things to buy in Bannington," said Nicodemus, as he and his brother entered the bicycle shed. "I

particularly want to get a couple of history books by Jonathan Plaistow."

"Excellent!" said Cornelius, nodding. "We are going to Caistowe?"

"Caistowe!" grinned Nick. "I didn't say—"

"I am afraid the seaside will be somewhat chilly at this time of the year, but the ocean breeze will doubtless be of benefit," said Cornelius. "This is my bicycle, I think."

They took their machines out, and Nicodemus didn't think it necessary to explain to his deaf brother that they were really going to Bannington—Cornelius would find it out for himself later. That trivial omission on the part of Nicodemus was destined, however, to have astonishing consequences.

"Wait a minute!" growled Nick. "My back tyre's slack."

Cornelius looked surprised.

"But, my dear brother, why do we need a sack?" he asked mildly.

"I'm not talking about sacks!" roared Nick. "My tyre's flat! I've got to put

some wind in it. I'm talking about the tyre, you ass!"

"Possibly," said Cornelius, "although such a short ride ought not to tire us much."

"Oh, you're getting worse every day!" said Nick impatiently.

"You can't hear a word I say?" asked Cornelius. "Dear me! I trust you are not getting deaf, my dear brother? That would indeed be a calamity. I am slightly deaf myself, as you know——"

"Slightly!" scoffed Nick. "You fathead, you're as deaf as a post!"

"Ridiculous!" protested Cornelius. "How can I look as pale as a ghost while I am in perfect health?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"Of course, if it's a joke, that makes a difference," said Cornelius, beaming. "Hallo! You going out, too, my dear Glenthorne? Splendid! Perhaps we can all go to Caistowe together?"

Archie Glenthorne lounged up to the bicycle shed looking particularly elegant in a brand-new Norfolk suit. The swell of the Ancient House was feeling very comfortable. Phipps, his valet, had just assured him that he had never cut a better figure.

"Yards of sorrow, old darling, but the fact is I'm just about to push into Bannington," he replied. "I really wouldn't bother, only some rather priceless neckties are on public view, and Phipps absolutely refuses to gaze upon them. So the young master must needs go in person."

"Indeed?" said Cornelius politely. "I didn't know that you were acquainted with Mr. Billy Merson. I think you remarked that you are off to meet the gentleman?"

"Good gad!" said Archie blankly. "I have not the slightest doubt that Mr. Billy Merson is a frightfully fruity old soul to know. But I don't happen to be honoured with his priceless friendship."

"You are going out on a ship?" asked Cornelius, in surprise.

"Don't take any notice of him!" said Nick, pausing in his pumping operations. "He can't help it, you know. Poor chap, he's getting deafer every day. I shall have to buy him some ear-trumpets, or something."

Archie nodded.

"Absolutely!" he gasped. "In point of fact, absolutely with sundry knobs attached. I mean to say, you can't even address the lad without starting all sorts of bally misunderstandings. Dashed embarrassing, if you know what I mean."

Further conversation was rather difficult, owing to the arrival of Handforth and Co. It was very much like a hurricane blowing up. As soon as Edward Oswald Handforth appeared anywhere the normal conditions of life were cast to the winds.

The leader of Study D strode into the bicycle shed briskly, so briskly, in fact, that he fell headlong over Cornelius, who

was in the act of emerging. Church and McClure watched with interest and enjoyment while Handforth and Cornelius sorted themselves out.

"You fathead!" roared Handforth, jumping up and glaring. "What's the idea of shoving into me like that?"

"Kindly refrain from shouting," said Cornelius tartly. "Anybody might think I was deaf. Besides, I didn't shove into you at all. As far as I know, you shoved into me. A most clumsy proceeding!"

"I'm not going to argue with you—you're too deaf!" snorted Handforth. "We're in a hurry. Where's my bike?" he added, looking round. "Who's pinched my bike? Hi, Church! My jigger's gone!"

"Don't look at me like that!" said Church. "I haven't swallowed it!"

"My jigger's gone!" repeated Handforth fiercely. "If either of you idiots have borrowed it——"

"And you call yourself a detective!" put in McClure sourly. "Didn't you ask me to take your bike to the blacksmith's this morning? You knew jolly well that you smashed the front forks yesterday!"

"My hat! So I did!" said Handforth blankly. "I'd forgotten all about it! But it doesn't matter much; I'll take somebody else's jigger!"

Handforth's way out of the difficulty was simple. He cast his eye over the collection of bicycles and took the best one in sight. It was, of course, Archie Glenthorne's. The machine was a glittering monarch amongst bicycles.

"Come on! Let's be off!" said Handforth briskly.

He wheeled the machine out of the shed under Archie's very nose, and Church and McClure grinned. It was quite characteristic of Handforth to behave in this high-handed fashion. Edward Oswald would never perform a mean action behind a fellow's back.

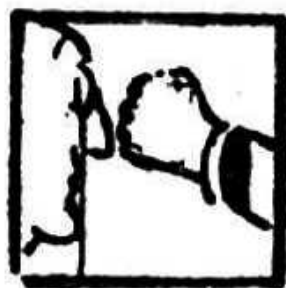
"It appears," said Archie, adjusting his monocle, "that a slight mistake is hovering about. I mean to say, if this isn't positively poisonous, what is?"

"Talking to me?" said Handforth, pausing.

"Absolutely!" said Archie stiffly. "Be good enough to deliver up the good old velocipede. I may be a good-tempered sort of cove, but I'm not absolutely here to be used as a bally doormat!"

CHAPTER II.

A SLIGHT ARGUMENT.



HANDFORTH looked indignant.

"You're not going to make a fuss, I suppose?" he demanded.

"Well, I sincerely trust not, old saucepan lid; but I feel somewhat inclined to issue a large and

robust protest," replied Archie. "I mean to say, here am I waiting to whizz forth on the old jigger, and here are you whizzing forth on it yourself. A bit thick, eh? In fact, a bit pea-soupy!"

"Your jigger?" repeated Handforth, in a tone of surprise that wouldn't have deceived an infant. "Well, what about it? You're not going to be selfish and take it away, are you?"

"Well, I mean to say——"

"What am I going to do?" demanded Handforth warmly. "If I can't use this bike, how the dickens can I go to Bannington? Be reasonable, for goodness' sake!"

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie helplessly. "Reasonable, what? It seems to me, dear old hurricane, that our ideas of reason don't absolutely tally. Kindly unhand the good old steed!"

Handforth grunted, and relinquished the bicycle.

"All right—take it!" he said tartly. "If you like to be selfish, that's your affair! I wouldn't ride the rotten bike for a ransom! I'll take somebody else's now—just to make you wild!"

"I can assure you, laddie, that I regard the prospect with complete sangfroid," replied Archie cheerfully. "Well, what about it? Do we trickle forth? We all go the same way home, what?"

"Going to Bannington, Archie?" asked Nicodemus.

"That, in a way, was the scheme."

"All right—just a minute and we'll come with you," said Nick. "Ready, Corny? Good! Let's be moving!"

They wheeled their machines out, and Johnny and Bertie Onions watched them with casual interest. The Onions Brothers were waiting for the crowd to disperse—Johnny having decided to make a few repairs. He knew very well that he couldn't hope to accomplish them with Handforth in the vicinity.

"I think it'll be fine," said Johnny, glancing at the sky. "Thank goodness we've got some decent weather at last. It's enough to make a chap feel bright and cheerful."

His brother looked intensely sad. Bertie, in fact, had never been known to smile. On the most cheery occasions he always wore an expression of deep gloom and melancholy.

"Yes, we're all pleased," he replied, in a hollow voice. "This is the first dutiful bay we've had for a week."

"The first what?" asked Handforth, staring.

"Dutiful bay! That is, of course, beautiful day!" said Bertie, correcting himself. "I believe there's something wrong with the school clock," he went on. "It doesn't seem to be giving the tight rhyme, according to my watch."

"The tight rhyme!" gasped Edward

Oswald. "Oh, you mean the right time? I've never known such a chap for twisting your giddy words about. If I stay here much longer I shall catch the habit. You're as bad as a carrot in a page!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "By George! I meant to say parrot in a cage! But this idiot's always mixing me up."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "I must confess that the dear old soul's conversation is somewhat bewildering. But I have so far escaped the frightful taint. I don't wish to trump my own blow it——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd howled, and Archie gave a violent start.

"Oddslife!" he gasped. "How perfectly foul! I can't even discuss the old sub. without falling into the bally trap! I meant to say I don't want to blow my own trumpet; but I shan't say it now. This sort of thing absolutely makes the old dean busy."

"Makes the old dean busy?" repeated Handforth, staring. "Who's talking about a dean?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Church. "He means that it makes the old bean dizzy!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "That's what I said!"

"You didn't!" retorted Handforth. "But I don't blame you; you can't help going wrong, after listening to this chotty dump!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think it must be the weather," said Bertie sadly. "It's so mild this afternoon that I shouldn't be a bit surprised to see a few butterflies, or even the bite of a flea!"

"The which?" asked Nicodemus, staring.

"Everybody to his taste, of course," said Archie. "Personally, dash it, I have a few well defined and rooted objections to the bite of a good old flea!"

"Bertie wasn't talking about fleas at all," grinned Johnny Onions. "He meant to say 'the flight of a bee,' but he got mixed. I think you fellows had better go before you all catch the complaint!"

"I think we had!" snorted Handforth.

And the leader of Study D grabbed McClure's bicycle and mounted. And McClure, after a brief delay, succeeded in borrowing Jack Grey's machine—so the cycling party was intact when it wheeled out of the gate.

CHAPTER III.

STRANGE ACTIVITY AT THE OLD RIVER HOUSE.



"HALLO! What's this?"

Handforth applied his brakes as the six cyclists were coasting past the opening of Edgemore Lane. The River

Stowe lay just ahead, with the stone bridge

spanning it. The little lane to Edgemore branched off to the left, at right-angles.

"Hold on! Pull up, you chaps!" said Handforth, as he turned round on his machine. "Let's have a look at the old River House. Somebody's up to something!"

Church and McClure glanced down the narrow lane, and saw that Handforth's statement was not far wrong. The old house was almost completely hidden among the trees during the summer months, but now the leafless branches failed to conceal the building.

"Half a minute, Corny!" yelled Nicodemus, as he applied his brakes with the rest. "Stop, you ass! Oh, he can't hear!"

"Let him go on; we'll overtake him before long," said Church. "Either that or he'll come back."

Cornelius Trotwood had been slightly in advance of the others, and he quite missed the fact that they had all stopped. He pedalled on serenely, fondly believing that the others were still behind.

They were still behind, but not in quite the same way as Cornelius imagined. They dismounted in front of the grim-looking old River House, which, until a few months earlier, had been known as Dr. Hogge's Academy.

But the River House School had moved. Dr. Hogge had built a fine new edifice further along the river, about mid-way between Bellton and Edgemore. Hal Brewster and Co., the cheerful leaders of the River House juniors, saw very little of their St. Frank's friends nowadays, excepting when the two schools met at football or other sporting contests.

Dr. Hogge's new academy was still known as the River House School, and this old building, now derelict, had been shut up ever since the notorious William K. Smith had decamped from the district. The property had been sold for next to nothing by Smith's agents, but nobody knew who the new owner was, or what he intended doing with the place.

Indeed, for many weeks the old structure had remained empty and deserted and with many windows boarded up, exactly as Smith had left it. The St. Frank's fellows had begun to conclude that the place would never be again occupied.

Nowadays it was being referred to by the villagers as "Moat Hollow," a name the house had borne a great many years earlier, before being converted into a school. At that time, indeed, it had been a private lunatic asylum, and the name had suited it well.

Within the memory of the St. Frank's fellows there had never been any real moat, but if one looked closely among the bushes and evergreens round the house, traces of the moat were still visible.

"There's something doing at last," said Church, with interest, as the five juniors stood looking through the closed gates. "I don't wonder they call it Moat Hollow; it looks grim and mysterious."

"Ever since Smith had the old show it's been different," said Handforth. "When the River House chaps were here it was a bit lively, in spite of its gloomy appearance. But what the dickens are they doing? There seems to be a lot of digging going on."

They pressed closer to the gate and peered through. There was no work in progress at the moment, and nobody was to be seen. But in front of the house, and round one side as far as the juniors could see, great piles of loose earth were lying about. The grounds, in fact, were in a state of disorder and upheaval.

"I didn't know anything was being done until now," remarked Nicodemus. "The new owner must have started operations this week. By jingo! I'll bet I know what they're doing!"

"Well, what?" asked Handforth.

"Excavating that old moat again!" said Nick, with conviction.

"My only hat! I believe he's right!" ejaculated McClure. "Look! Can't you see the piles of earth they've dug up? But why the dickens do they want a moat?"

"My dear old boy, it's no good looking at me," said Archie, shaking his head. "I regard the whole proposition as mouldy in the extreme. In my opinion the scheme is a foul one. I mean to say, we want bright and cheery places nowadays, not sinister old spots like this."

There were piles of timber in evidence—a further indication of coming activity. And over on the far side of the grounds work had been commenced on adding to the height of the existing wall. The juniors could just see through the ragged bushes.

"Well, it's no concern of ours, anyhow," said Church, at length. "And, after all, we're not interested since the River House chaps have gone. Let's be going; the daylight won't last very long."

Handforth shook his head.

"I've a good mind to investigate," he said grimly. "You chaps wait here while I climb over the gate—"

"And trespass?" interrupt Trotwood. "You can't do that, old man. Quite apart from getting yourself into trouble with the Head, there's no excuse for it. Inquisitiveness is a bad weakness."

"Are you calling me inquisitive?" demanded Handforth wrathfully.

"The shops close pretty early," put in Church, in a casual way.

"By George! I've got to buy a couple of new collars, too!" said Handforth, with a start. "What's the idea of sticking here? Just like you fatheads to waste time over nothing!"

And Handforth, to the relief of the others, leapt on his bicycle, and the investigation was abandoned.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ADVENTURES OF CORNELIUS.



CORNELIUS TROTWOOD cycled on sedately.

He had got to the other end of the village, and he was still unconscious of the fact that he rode alone.

It never occurred to him to look back.

came, and he could be imposed upon with impunity.

When he got to the end of the village he rode straight along the Caistowe road without hesitation. He had got it firmly fixed in his simple mind that they were going to Caistowe, and he didn't even think of looking round to make sure.

In this way it came about that Cornelius took the wrong turning, and thus got completely separated from the rest of the party. Under ordinary circumstances he would probably have discovered his mistake ere long, and would have cycled back to make inquiries.

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Being deaf, he rarely took part in the conversation while a wheel, and never tried to hear what any companions might be saying.

So his present ignorance was easy enough to understand. He took it for granted that the others were with him, and he pedalled on serenely. Corny was a very simple youth, quite different to his brother.

Although the twins looked startlingly alike—so much alike, indeed, that their own form fellows couldn't tell them apart until they spoke—their characters were very distinctive.

For while Cornelius was a harmless, in-offensive duffer, Nicodemus was keen-witted, active, and alert. Cornelius took life as it

came, and he could be imposed upon with ordinary.

For Cornelius dropped right into a curious adventure. The Caistowe road was muddy, so he kept well to the centre, where the surface was comparatively firm. And he didn't even hear the urgent hoot of motor horn behind him.

A motor-van was bearing down upon the deaf cyclist. It was coming at considerable speed, and as there was a dip at this particular spot the driver was displaying less caution than he might have done.

Hoot! Hoot!

Again the horn blared out its warning. And this time the junior's danger was

quite considerable. For the van was close behind him, the driver having taken it for granted that the boy would swerve to the near side.

Cornelius didn't, and that was the trouble.

Too late, the driver realised that the boy was either a fool or deaf. He applied his brakes with all his strength, this being indeed his only chance of pulling up in time to avoid running the junior down.

Zurrrrh!

With a slurring, slithering sound the van skidded dizzily, the driving wheels completely locked. The whole thing was over in a flash, and it was only at this moment that Cornelius became aware of his narrow escape.

The front wing of the van touched him as it skidded by. It was only a light blow, but it sent him reeling over sideways, to collapse, unharmed, in the damp grass on the other side of the road.

The van itself met with dire misfortune.

Unable to correct the skid, the driver was helpless. And the lumbering vehicle lurched across the strip of grass, swinging round broadside, and the offside wheel sank sluggishly into the muddy ditch.

The van heeled over and came to a sickening halt, undamaged, but hopelessly bogged. It would require a team of horses or a small traction-engine to extricate it from this predicament.

"Hang you for a blamed young fool!" shouted the driver thickly, as he literally fell out of the driving-seat. "Didn't you hear my horn? Why the thunder couldn't you get out of the way?"

The man was incensed, and rightly so. For, without question, the mishap had been caused entirely by Corny's sticking to the centre of the road instead of hugging the left, as he should have done.

The junior was just getting to his feet.

He was startled to see the van, for he hadn't had the faintest inkling that any such vehicle was near him. He was more than surprised, too, to find that his school-fellows were nowhere in sight.

"Dear me!" he said mildly. "There seems to have been an accident!"

"Accident!" roared the driver furiously. "You can thank your lucky stars you ain't dead! And look at my van—buried! You—you—" He went off into a string of foul abuse, which Cornelius fortunately failed to appreciate. "I've a good mind to thrash you!" shouted the driver. "Haven't you got no sense, or what?"

"Really, I don't quite understand!" said Cornelius, bewildered. "But I fear I must have unconsciously caused this disaster. I was in the middle of the road, was I not? But why didn't you sound the horn?"

The man nearly burst a blood-vessel.

"You young fool!" he snarled. "I gave you plenty of warning!"

"You saw me this morning?" asked

Corny, in surprise. "You couldn't have done; I was in school—"

"Boy, you're either a lunatic or next door to one!" interrupted the driver harshly. "Why didn't you move out of the way?"

"Pay? Did you say I've got to pay?" asked Cornelius in alarm. "Oh, but I can't! I didn't know there was any damage—"

He paused, for the man looked so ferocious that he backed away. The enraged driver, in fact, was so exasperated that he swore wildly at the empty air. He was a rough-looking man, with a seafaring air about him, and this indication of his profession probably accounted for his fluent profanity.

By this time he was beginning to appreciate the fact that Cornelius was very deaf. Even so, there seemed no adequate excuse for the fellow's violent rage. As a car driver, he should have known that such mishaps are always liable to happen; and upon the whole, he was lucky to have saved the van from any actual damage.

The mere fact that it was stuck in the ditch seemed a trifle, and no sufficient cause for the man's violence. It seemed, indeed, that he was not only enraged, but positively alarmed.

After the first few moments he glanced anxiously up and down the road. Then he went to the back of the van—which was an enclosed one—and satisfied himself that the doors were secure.

After this he walked round the van, and convinced himself that nothing could be done to pull it out of the ditch. Without powerful assistance, he was helpless.

"Is—is there anything I can do?"

Cornelius made the suggestion tentatively—feeling, in a way, that it was up to him to say something. The van-driver turned and glared at him with ferocious hostility.

Then a sudden light of eagerness came into the fellow's eyes, and he grasped Cornelius by the shoulder.

"Yes," he said grimly. "There is something you can do!"

CHAPTER V.

CAPTAIN JONAS STARKEY.



CORNELIUS winced slightly as the man gripped him.

"Really, is this necessary?" he asked. "I have already expressed my regret, and—"

"You caused this accident, kid, and the least you can do is to help me out of the difficulty," said the man. "I want you to take a note into Caistowe, and deliver it into the hands of a certain gentleman. It's important, and you won't have to waste no time."

"A waste of time?" said Corny. "Yes, I suppose it is. I'm afraid you'll have to stop here until you can get some help. I don't mind taking a message to somebody, if you like."

"That's just what I'm telling you!" snapped the man.

"Compelling me?" said the deaf junior. "Oh, but I don't see——"

"Great stars! This boy will drive me mad!" panted the man. "He's more deaf than an old cove of ninety! Here, wait a minute!"

He turned aside, Cornelius having a vague idea that he had referred to the speed limit,

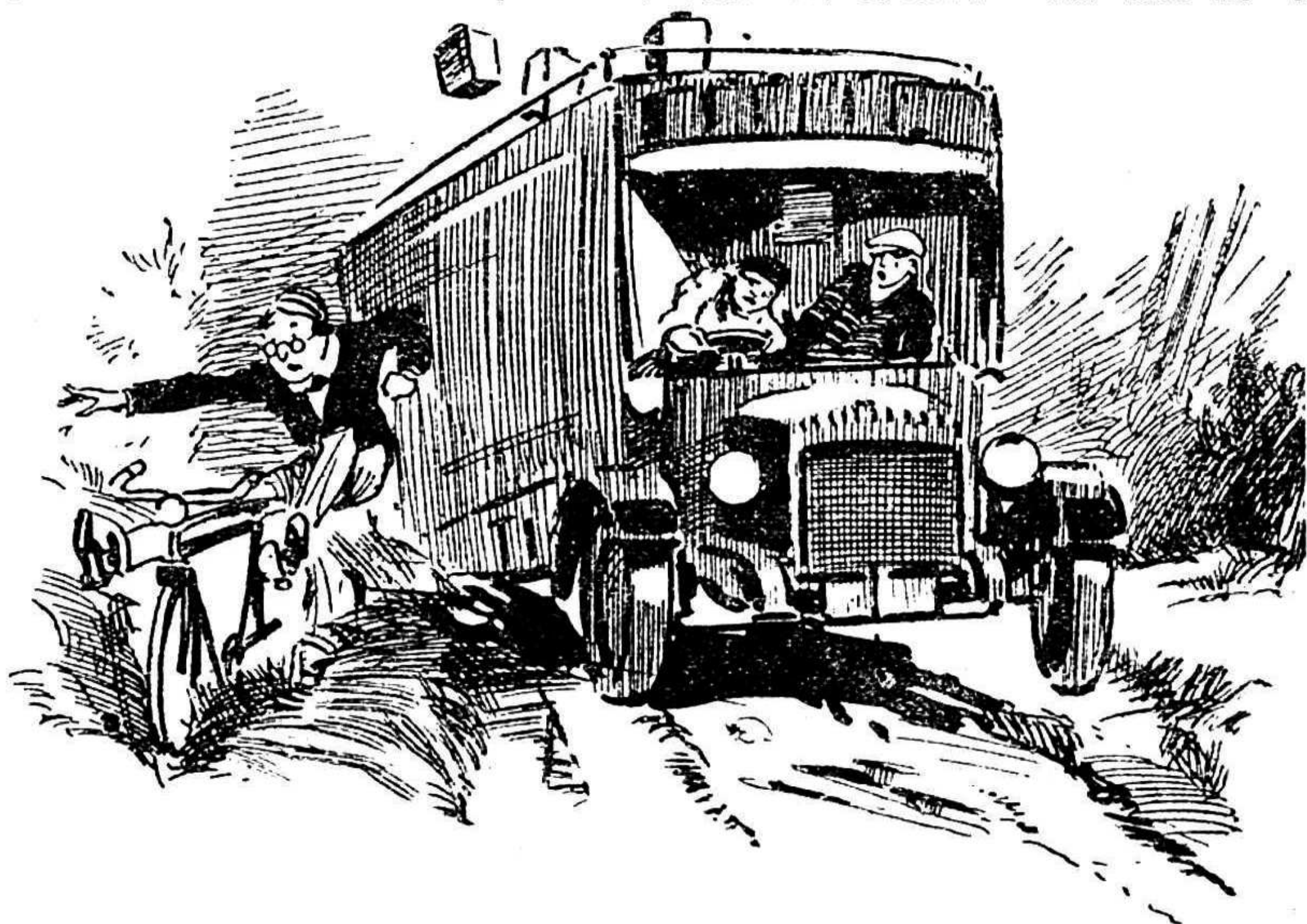
driver. "Take this to the Blue Peter Inn, just past the pier!"

"Oh, the pier!" said Cornelius brightly. "Exactly! I quite understand. I'm to look for a two-seater, just past the pier——"

"Two-seater!" gasped the man. "Who said anything about—— Oh, the Blue Peter! By thunder! You're as deaf as a post! The Blue Peter! Here—look at this!"

He held the envelope in front of Corny's eyes, and jabbed an oily forefinger at the address.

"Ah, to be sure!" said Cornelius, nodding. "Captain Jonas Starkey, the Blue Peter Inn, Caistowe. You want me to



It was only a slight blow, but it sent Cornelius reeling over sideways.

and pulled out a note-book. With a stub of pencil, he stood for a moment licking the point. Then he commenced to write with haste.

A few minutes later he was done, and he tore the pages out of the note-book, and enclosed them in a soiled envelope which he extracted from a wallet. He stuck it up, and addressed it.

"Here you are—take this to the Blue Peter, in Caistowe," said the man. "It's a little inn, just near the water front—not far past the pier."

"You want me to go to an inn and get some beer?" asked Cornelius in surprise.

"No, I don't!" roared the exasperated

driver. "Certainly! It will be quite a pleasure. I can assure you."

"Then clear off before I wring your neck!" said the man thickly. "Two minutes more of you, and I'll go mad!"

"Yes, it is bad, certainly——"

"Get off!" roared the other. "Half a mo! Give that note to Captain Starkey, and put it right in his hands! Understand?"

"You needn't shout!" said Cornelius mildly. "You want me to put this right in Captain Starkey's hand?"

"Yes! If he ain't at the inn, go down to the docks, and find him!" shouted the driver. "But he's bound to be at the Blue

Peter—I'll stake my life on it! Deliver that note as soon as you can, sonny."

"Money!" said the junior. "Certainly not! I don't want anything—"

The driver pointed a shaky hand down the road, and Cornelius understood this perfectly. He stuffed the letter in his pocket, mounted his bicycle, and rode away. The man stood beside his delivery van, cursing violently into the atmosphere.

Cornelius reached Caistowe soon afterwards—for the distance was by no means considerable. It was getting quite dusky now, and lights were beginning to twinkle in the houses, and from the shipping in the harbour.

Cornelius had quite enough sense to find his way about with ease. And he located the Blue Peter Inn at once. It proved to be a dingy-looking little water-front tavern, and there were one or two rough seafaring characters rolling out of it when the junior dismounted from his bicycle.

He didn't like his task at all, but he had given his word, and meant to keep it. Entering the bar, he felt rather like a lost sheep. He was glad to find that the bar was empty at the moment. A man in an apron regarded him suspiciously from the other side of the bar.

"What the blazes do you want?" he asked bluntly.

"Is Captain Starkey here?" inquired Cornelius.

"Cap'n Starkey? Yes—he's in the parlour, at the back," replied the barman. "What'll you be wantin' with that old rogue? Like as not he's half drunk."

As he spoke, the barman pointed to a door at the rear, and Cornelius took this to indicate that he was to pass through. He did so, and found himself in a dim passage. There were only two doors in sight, and Cornelius chose the first.

He found himself in a little room where a big fire glowed, and where two men were sitting at the table, talking earnestly. The air was thick with rank tobacco fumes, and the stale smell of liquor. Both the men stared at Cornelius Trotwood in astonishment.

"Captain Starkey, please?" asked the junior nervously.

"Bust my eyes! What's this 'ere?" growled the elder of the two men, in a husky voice. "Who's this kid? Comin' here, as bold as you please, askin' for me! What d'you want, young shaver?"

"I don't think so," said Cornelius.

"Eh? Don't think what?"

"I'm not really doing you a favour," said the deaf junior. "I've brought this message from a man along the road. His motor-van is upset in the ditch, and—"

Crash!

Captain Starkey leapt to his feet so abruptly that his chair went hurtling to the floor. Corny's words had apparently filled him with alarm, for his coarse, weather-

beaten face changed colour, and his eyes took on a half-scared expression.

"What's that ye said?" he rapped out harshly. "The van's upset? Did ye say the van's upset?"

Captain Starkey looked so villainous that Cornelius backed away. He was by no means lacking in pluck, but his meek, simple nature revolted against such surroundings and companions as these. He was rather confused.

The two men were decidedly unprepossessing in appearance. Captain Starkey was a tough-looking old rascal, with grizzled hair, and a short, stumpy figure. He seemed to be a sea-dog of the old school—a man, no doubt, who had sailed the seven seas, and who knew as much about the tropics as he knew about the temperate zones.

The other was younger—a thin, wiry little fellow, with sharp features. He was clearly a seafaring man, too, and the fact that he had a livid scar on his right temple did not improve his appearance.

Cornelius Trotwood was in strange company, indeed.

CHAPTER VI.

SUSPICIOUS DOINGS ON THE CAISTOWE ROAD.



CAPTAIN JONAS STARKEY grabbed the letter which Cornelius had brought, and after one glance at the superscription, he tore it violently open.

"Great hurricanes!" he ejaculated tensely. "Just cast your eye on this, Mr. Trapp! That fool of a Hurst has got the van bogged in a ditch! Can't move a blamed inch!"

"That's orkard—durn me if it ain't!" said Mr. Trapp, with an alarmed expression in his eyes. "Very orkard! Bogged in the ditch, hey? What's got to be done now?"

"There's only one thing for it—we've got to get another van, and transfer the stuff as quick as we know how," said Captain Starkey grimly. "Here, boy, what do you know about this affair? Let's 'ave the yarn!"

"No, it wasn't near the barn," said Cornelius. "It happened at the bottom of the dip, and I'm afraid that I was partly to blame—owing to the fact that I failed to hear any warning sound from the van."

"And is she all broke up?" demanded Mr. Trapp quickly.

"But I wasn't asleep!" said Cornelius, in mild surprise.

"Who said you was?" roared the man.

"Didn't you ask if I woke up? I'm afraid I can't hear you very well," said Cornelius.

"You are speaking too softly—"

"Bust my eyes, this kid's as deaf as a bilge rat!" snapped Captain Starkey. "We can't waste our time with him. Seems like

he was on the spot at the time, and Hurst sent him along with this message. The man ain't such a fool as you might think. Leastways, he did the best thing he could."

Cornelius was wondering why these two men should look so utterly startled and concerned. They were filled with consternation, indeed. And as far as Cornelius could see, the circumstances didn't warrant any such agitation. It was most puzzling.

"All right, boy, you can lift your anchor!" growled the skipper.

"You want me to go to your banker?" asked Corny.

"Blow my topsail!" roared Captain Starkey. "I didn't say anything about my banker! You can clear off, young 'un! We don't want you no more! Get off back to your nursery!"

"I beg your pardon?" asked the junior meekly.

"Go home!" snorted the captain. "You've done your job!"

"Certainly not!" said Cornelius stiffly.

"Eh?"

"I could not think of accepting a bob——"

"Great cyclones!" shouted Captain Starkey. "This kid's makin' me go white! Pitch him out, Mr. Trapp! Take him by the ear, and chuck him down the gangway! He's no more use on this craft!"

"I think you are most rude to call me daft!" said Cornelius indignantly.

Mr. Trapp, who was obviously a great friend of the captain's, took Cornelius by the arm, and roughly led him out into the passage, and thence through the bar to the exit.

"You can clear!" he said briefly.

"I don't mind a lemonade," said Cornelius.

"What?" gasped Mr. Trapp.

"But I really couldn't touch beer!" went on the junior. "Such a thing is not only against all the school rules, but I am personally opposed to intoxicating liquors."

"Go home, blame you!" said Mr. Trapp thickly.

"If I don't go home, you'll lame me?" asked Cornelius. "Oh, really, that's very uncalled for! However, I'll go at once—and I think you are most ungentlemanly to threaten me in such a way."

He walked to his bicycle, mounted it, and rode off in a very dignified way—making for the Bannington road. For Cornelius had been thinking, and he realised that the other fellows must have gone to Bannington. He would probably meet them there. It wasn't necessary to go back through Bellton to get to the market town.

In the meantime, Mr. Trapp returned to the bar parlour, and he and Captain Starkey talked earnestly for fully five minutes. They were greatly exercised in mind over the mishap to Mr. Hurst and the delivery van.

Having decided upon a course of action, they marched out of the tavern, and made their way into the centre of the little sea-

side town. Here they entered into negotiations for the hire of a motor-van. At first the garage proprietor was reluctant to let the vehicle go without one of his own drivers in charge.

But Captain Starkey declared that Mr. Trapp could drive perfectly—and Mr. Trapp soon proved that he could. Consequently, the skipper and his mate were allowed to take an ancient van out, and they lost no time in making for the spot where the mishap to Mr. Hurst had occurred.

A few of the worthy Caistowe inhabitants, who happened to be in the streets, vaguely thought it was rather strange that the captain and first officer of the tramp steamer, Southern Prince, should be driving about in a van.

But Captain Starkey was obviously so agitated that he didn't give any attention to such a trifle as this. His main object, it seemed, was to transfer the load from the derelict automobile into the temporary van. Possibly there was something significant about this load. At all events, Captain Starkey was in a rare old stew about it.

He was enormously relieved to find Mr. Hurst alone. And Mr. Hurst was no less relieved when the skipper and his mate drove up with the relief vehicle. The dusk was deep now, and the three men had the lane entirely to themselves.

CHAPTER VII.

A PERFECTLY NATURAL MISTAKE.



CAPTAIN STARKEY breathed a sigh as he observed that the bogged motor-van was quite intact and undamaged.

"We couldn't get nothing out of that infernal kid!" said the skipper. "As deaf as a post, and as daft as a lunatic!"

"Still, he brought the note all right, didn't he?" exclaimed Hurst. "That was the main thing, Starkey. The young rat! If it hadn't been for him there would have been no trouble."

The skipper grunted.

"I was pretty sure you'd blame the kid!" he retorted. "But it looks to me as if you was driving badly. How the thunder did you come to get the old craft in the ditch? Rotten steering, Hurst—that's what it was! You was off your course, blame you!"

"I tell you it was that boy!" said Hurst hotly. "Stuck in the middle of the road, and didn't hear my hooter! The old bus skidded—slid tight into the ditch before I could pull her up! Lucky, too. It's a good thing we weren't wrecked!"

"Better not waste no time," suggested Mr. Trapp pointedly. "If other people come along, it might look a bit queer. Not that

the fools round these parts are suspicious. We're safe enough—as long as we get the stuff shifted quick. But you an' me don't want to be seen, capt'n."

The skipper swore fluently.

"Didn't we arrange it so as we shouldn't be seen?" he snapped. "Hurst was going to take the stuff straight down to the hut, and unload it himself. This is what comes of a accident! All our plans gone wrong! But it ain't too late to make things right, even now."

And the three men lost no time in setting to work. The derelict van was opened, and the load was revealed. There was nothing particularly startling about it.

There were numbers of long wooden cases, each one just about as big as a strong man could carry. There were smaller cases, too—square little boxes that appeared to be remarkably heavy for their size.

Mr. Trapp and Hurst did most of the work, Captain Starkey looking on and helping now and again. Fortunately they were undisturbed, for there was very little traffic on this road.

And while this interesting scene was taking place, Nicodemus Trotwood was somewhat concerned about his brother. Nicodemus was fully aware of Corny's shortcomings.

After leaving the old River House, the five juniors had cycled on through the village. Handforth and Co. and Archie had forgotten all about Cornelius. But Nick hadn't.

"Just like the ass to lose himself!" growled Trotwood major. "Not a sign of him! I thought we should find him somewhere here in the village—but he must have done straight on."

"Oh, we'll overtake him soon," said Handforth absently. "I've a good mind to investigate the old River House later on this evening. There's something fishy going on there—"

"Blow the place!" interrupted Nicodemus. "Just a minute, you fellows! I'll ask this old chap if he's seen anything of Corny. He looks as if he's been a fixture for the last half hour."

Nicodemus referred to an ancient gentleman who was seated upon one of the rustic benches outside the George Tavern. He was, in fact, locally known as the oldest inhabitant, and he spent most of his time wandering about the village, generally interesting himself in the mild gossip of the place.

"Did you happen to see my brother go by this way?" asked Nicodemus.

The old fellow gazed at Nick with a searching eye.

"You young gents allus was up to your little jokes!" he said wheezily. "I dunno about your brother, master, but I see you go by some little time since. You can't play them tricks on me, ye know!"

Nicodemus grinned.

"So you saw me, eh?" he said, thinking it unnecessary to explain matters fully. "And which way did I go?"

"Well, well! If that ain't a queer question to ask!" said the oldest inhabitant. "Didn't ye take the road to Caistowe, young master? I saw ye ride up the lane with me own eyes, so I did! But it's rare queer that you should be back here agin! I never saw ye come!"

"Thanks!" said Nicodemus briefly.

He returned to the other juniors, who were waiting.

"The hopeless ass has gone to Caistowe!" he said disgustedly. "It's my fault, really—I didn't make him fully understand before we started. He's probably wandering about Caistowe by this time."

"That's dashed awkward!" said Archie. "I mean to say, the dear old laddie will be absolutely looking out for us, what? It seems to me that something ought to be done about it."

"Well, we're not going to Caistowe—I can tell you that much!" said Handforth promptly. "We're late as it is, and—"

"Keep your hair on!" interrupted Nick. "You fellows go along to Bannington, and I'll look for Corny. If there's still time after I've found him, I'll look out for you later. So long!"

So they parted. Handforth and Co. and Archie went on to Bannington, as originally planned, and Nicodemus took the road to Caistowe. He pedalled as hard as he could go, putting his back into the work. Cornelius would have gone sedately, and he would be sure to be wandering about somewhere.

Nicodemus particularly wanted to be rapid, and, under the circumstances, it was perfectly natural that his chain should fall off after riding less than half a mile.

This necessitated a fairly long halt. For not only was the chain buried in the mud, but the connecting link was quite missing. And Nicodemus, fretting and fuming with impatience, wasted a solid fifteen minutes before remembering that he had a spare link in the tool-bag.

Of course, the spare link wouldn't fit properly. Things always happen like this. By the time Nicodemus had managed to get the chain into fully working order, half an hour had slipped by, and night was creeping on.

At last, with grimy hands and a somewhat ragged temper, Nicodemus leapt into the saddle and continued his journey. A mile further on he almost decided upon turning back—deeming it a waste of time to go to Caistowe at all.

But down at the bottom of the dip he could see a motor-van of some kind, and he decided to cycle on in the hope that he would learn something. As he approached, he saw there were two vans—one almost on its side in the ditch, and the other drawn as close as possible.

Three men were engaged in the task of transferring the broken-down van's load. They all saw Nicodemus at the same

moment, and they exchanged glances. Captain Starkey uttered a grunt as he recognised the junior's features in the gloom.

"That blamed kid again!" he exclaimed sourly.

The skipper's mistake, considering everything, was perfectly natural.

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK TAKES A HAND.



NICODEMUS TROTWOOD dismounted, and was rather surprised to find the three men staring with open hostility. Considering that they were perfect strangers to him, this reception seemed uncalled for.

"You can clear off, young shaver!" exclaimed Captain Starkey, in a loud voice. "You wasn't told to come back here. Bust my eyes! Ain't we had enough of this kid already?" he added fiercely.

"More than enough!" agreed Hurst. "Look here, boy, we don't want none of your nonsense! Get on that bike, and clear off! We've had as much of you as we can stick!"

"But I don't understand——" began Nicodemus mildly.

"I don't s'pose you do!" interrupted the skipper. "Bein' as deaf as a post, you wouldn't! You can go to blazes!"

Nick was a shrewd youngster, and it took him about five seconds to elucidate this little mystery. These men, of course, had mistaken him for Cornelius. And it was equally evident that Cornelius had not made a hit with the trio. Something must have happened—and the derelict motor-van seemed to supply an explanation.

For an instant Nick wondered if his simple brother had been involved in an accident, and was hurt. But the manner in which these men addressed him proved that Cornelius had been quite whole when they saw him last.

And while these thoughts were passing through Trotwood major's mind, he stood there, looking very soft. For Nicodemus wore just that same expression of simple innocence as his minor—his minor by about fifty minutes. But whilst Cornelius was really simple, Nicodemus wasn't.

He was about to explain the little error, and make inquiries after Cornelius, but didn't. Something that Mr. Trapp said made him pause. Mr. Trapp automatically lowered his voice, but Nick's ears were as keen as his brother's were dull.

"Better clear the kid off, capt'n," muttered Mr. Trapp. "I don't s'pose he knows a thing about guns, but we don't want him to see any more of these boxes than we can help. The young swab might talk!"

"So he might, by hurricanes!" growled the skipper.

While the other two men continued working, Captain Starkey approached Nicodemus with a threatening kind of air. And during those few seconds Nick made a resolve. It was the mention of the word "guns" that decided him. These three men were a villainous, suspicious-looking trio, and they were obviously engaged in some task that wouldn't bear the full light of day. And since they had mistaken him for Cornelius, he wouldn't trouble to enlighten them.

"We don't want you hanging about here, young man!" said Captain Starkey harshly. "Get on that craft of yours, and steer your course away from this latitude!"

Nicodemus blinked innocently.

"Gratitude?" he said, as though he hadn't caught the last word properly. "But I don't see why I should be grateful——"

"Suffering sharks!" swore the skipper. "Clear off! Get away from this spot—understand? We don't want you hanging about!"

"I know very well I'm not stout!" said Nicodemus indignantly. "In fact, I'm thin! But that's no reason why you should make fun of me——"

"This kid's going to send me crazy!" panted Captain Starkey.

"Yes, I think it is getting a bit hazy!" said Nicodemus, looking round with simple interest, and copying his brother's manner to the life. "Indeed, a fog seems to be coming down."

"Let's hope the kid's right!" put in Mr. Trapp, as he carried one of the smaller boxes. "Fog's just what we need to-night. There couldn't be nothing better for our job."

"Not so loud, blame you!" snapped the captain.

"Afraid of the kid?" sneered Mr. Trapp. "He's as deaf as a dead haddock! And if we was to tell him we was doing a bit of gun-running he wouldn't know what we was talking about. The boy's a blinking idiot!"

The words were spoken so softly that even Nicodemus only just caught them. So Captain Starkey was in no way alarmed. Believing the junior to be very deaf, he merely grinned.

"A idiot?" he repeated. "You're right, Mr. Trapp! An' if he don't clear off within two minutes I'll knock his fool head off! Of all the——"

Captain Starkey went off into a string of blasphemy that rather shocked Nicodemus—although he took care to show no sign of it. There were two words that startled him. Gun-running!

Nicodemus was a junior schoolboy, but he was sufficiently sophisticated to know that gun-running was a distinctly unlawful proceeding. He wasn't surprised to hear the subject referred to so openly, because he was supposed to be deaf. But it was with difficulty that he maintained his simple air of serene innocence.

"I don't think you really want me here," he said meekly.

"Great whales!" said the captain. "He's showing some sense at last!"

"I couldn't do it!" said Nick, shaking his head.

"Eh? Couldn't do what?"

"Go to sea before the mast," replied the junior.

Captain Starkey became so fierce in appearance that Nicodemus backed hastily away, with every sign of panic. He mounted his machine hurriedly, and wobbled off down the lane into the gloom.

CHAPTER IX.

DEC'DEDLY SUSPICIOUS.



JUST round the first bend, Nicodemus dismounted.

As quick as a flash, he whisked his machine through a friendly gap in the hedge, and crouched there. The men would assume that

he had cycled away and if one of them came to the bend to make sure, he would take it for granted that the junior had completely gone.

But Nicodemus had no intention of going.

All his suspicions were aroused. The very appearance of the men themselves had been enough to make him feel vaguely uneasy. But the derelict van, the mysterious cargo, and the talk about guns and gun-running, caused the Fourth-Former to thrill with inward excitement.

Nicodemus was an adventurous sort of junior at heart. Occasionally he had proved himself to be both shrewd and enterprising. He was as keen-witted as Cornelius was simple. The twins were opposite in everything except their appearance.

While Nick crouched there his thoughts were busy.

He tried to reconstruct what had happened to his brother. Obviously, Cornelius had met these men before. Perhaps he had been partially responsible for the mishap. In any case, it was clear enough that Cornelius had ridden off in perfect safety—so there was nothing to worry about.

At the moment, Nick would give his attention to these men.

He was determined, in fact, to find out more about them before continuing on his way. Open questioning was useless, and he had already proved that his presence on the spot was undesirable.

There was only one course to adopt.

And that was to hang about until the van took its departure. Nicodemus could then follow it, and learn the destination of those curiously-shaped boxes which he had glimpsed.

It was not a masterpiece of deduction for him to guess that the boxes contained fire-

arms of some kind. There could be no two ways of taking the term "gun-running." And the fact that two of these men, at least, were sailors, placed the matter beyond all doubt.

There was some crooked work afoot.

Single-handed, Nicodemus could do nothing. And it would be equally impossible for him to give information to the authorities unless he could state something of a definite nature. He realised that in order to expose the plot thoroughly he must make more certain of his ground.

It was cold and miserable behind that hedge. A raw breeze was blowing in from the sea, bringing with it a dank haze that caused the lanky junior to shiver repeatedly.

But at length he was gratified to hear the humming of a motor, and a minute or two afterwards the ramshackle old van passed by down the lane. Nick was already on the alert.

It relieved him to see that the vehicle was proceeding at no more than twelve miles an hour—a pace easily possible to the poorest of cyclists. The greasy nature of the lane was responsible for the slow speed.

Nicodemus had his bicycle through the hedge in less than no time, and after mounting he pedalled briskly away in pursuit of the van. He could distinctly see the rear light shining hazily through the murk.

He found the speed as much as he could comfortably accomplish—for the greasy surface was more difficult for him than it was for the car. However, the pace was not maintained.

For after a brief half-mile the rattling vehicle turned off at right-angles, proceeding down an exceedingly narrow track which necessitated a walking-pace. Nicodemus followed in some surprise. As he had not lighted his own lamp, he was quite invisible in the darkness.

This ratty lane down which he was now progressing led, as he knew, to the cliffs. There was a way down to the shallow bay, just beyond the Caistowe headland.

And since the lane led nowhere else, it was obvious that the van was making for the beach. There was a brief delay while the automobile stopped. The lights were extinguished, and the subsequent progress was slower than ever.

"Yes, there's something fishy about this!" Nick told himself grimly.

At last the beach was reached—after the van had cautiously descended the steep-sided gully which cut through the cliffs. Just at the bottom of the gully the van came to a halt.

Nicodemus silently got off his bicycle and pushed it to one side. Then he proceeded on foot—an invisible shadow. Creeping nearer and nearer, he could distinguish two dim forms.

They were Captain Starkey and Mr. Trapp. Hurst had apparently remained behind with

the other van, the obvious victim of a perfectly natural sideslip. The danger, as far as the load was concerned, was over.

But why had it been brought down here—to this bleak, deserted stretch of beach?

Nicodemus soon learned. His eyes, grown accustomed to the gloom, distinguished a kind of bathing-hut, or boathouse, set close to the cliff-face, far beyond highwater-mark and the most violent spring tide.

The van was comparatively close to this hut—as close as it could conveniently get, at all events, for the intervening space was covered with loose sand, and no vehicle could traverse it.

As Nicodemus watched, he saw the boxes being transferred from the van to the stoutly built hut. Captain Starkey and Mr. Trapp worked hard. It is quite likely that they had not worked so hard for years.

And they were so intent upon their labours that Nicodemus ventured to creep a little closer. He crouched in a sand hollow within three or four yards of the hut itself.

"We'll be done in ten minutes, thank goodness!" panted Mr. Trapp, as he and the skipper struggled across the loose sand with one of the heavy boxes. "Good thing it's dark and misty, cap'n. Not much chance of us being spotted."

Captain Starkey grunted.

"All the same, I'll be durn glad when the stuff's safely locked up," he exclaimed gruffly. "The coastguards might get nosey if they got wind of this. And where should we be if they came along and discovered all these blamed rifles and boxes of ammunition?"

Nick caught his breath in. He had heard as much as he wanted to. His first suspicions were verified—these men were unlawfully attempting to smuggle firearms out of the country. They were, in fact, gun-runners.

Seizing a chance while both the men were in the hut, Nicodemus crawled silently away, and was soon speeding off back to St. Frank's. He had resolved to fetch help. This affair wasn't over yet!

CHAPTER X.

THE SCHOOLBOY DETECTIVES.



THREE cyclists pedalled down the High Street of Bellton, and the leading rider was making curious grunting sounds as he went along. It was fairly obvious that his temper was ruffled.

"The fatheaded idiots!" he snorted. "Like their nerve!"

Handforth was exasperated. The other two cyclists were not Church and McClure, as might be supposed, but Reginald Pitt and Jack Grey. Riding home from Bannington, they had overtaken Handforth en route. And

Handy had been pedalling along in solitary state.

"Speaking to me?" asked Reginald Pitt politely.

"They're not bad chaps, on the whole," said Handforth. "But I'm blessed if I'll stand any of their giddy rot in public! After to-day I'll never go out with them again!"

"What fearful crime did they commit?" asked Reggie.

Handforth had not yet explained the reason for his short temper, or for his separation from Church and McClure. But Pitt and Grey knew that it would come in good time. It was only necessary to leave Handforth alone and he would soon talk.

"Crime?" he repeated fiercely. "By George, that's just the right word! I'll tell you what happened, and leave you to judge! We were just coming out of the Japanese Café, and we were having a bit of an argument——"

"You surprise me!" said Pitt, shocked.

"It was all McClure's fault," continued Handforth. "The fathead started criticising my Trackett Grim stories while we were having tea, and I threw a jam-tart at him. Well, after that we had to clear out."

"I don't wonder!" said Reggie severely. "I expect you were turned out, as a matter of fact, but we won't inquire too closely. What happened outside? What caused this sad and lamentable break-up of the old firm?"

Handforth was so angry that he nearly ran into the pavement.

"I'll tell you!" he said huskily. "As soon as we got outside, McClure squared up to me, and before I could lift a finger he punched me in the eye!"

"Bravo, McClure!" grinned Jack Grey.

"Eh?"

"He punched you in the eye?" repeated Pitt. "And do you mean to say you allowed a little thing like that to come between your friendship? After all, he was only paying back——"

"I went flying!" roared Handforth. "Imagine me being knocked over in Bannington High Street! Think of it!"

"I am!" said Reggie happily.

"In front of crowds of people!" thundered Handforth. "And, to make it worse, Church joined forces with McClure against me, and they threatened to chuck me into the horse-trough!"

Pitt sighed.

"Church and McClure seem to be kicking over the traces a bit," he observed. "I can't say I'm altogether surprised. If it comes to that, I'm rather pleased, too. I like to see plenty of spirit in a chap."

"I walked away without giving them a chance to speak to me again!" said Handforth hotly. "In fact, I took mercy on them! Instead of smashing them to pieces

on the spot, I left them flat! Just my rotten luck, of course!" he added sourly. "I was going to slaughter them, when I caught sight of old Pagett up the road."

At this point another cyclist overtook the trio from behind. He peered keenly into the faces of the other juniors as he was passing. Then he applied his brakes, and slowed down.

"Just a minute, you fellows," he panted.

It was Nicodemus Trotwood. And Nick was more than pleased to come upon these three Fourth-Formers so unexpectedly.

"Just the chaps I want!" he said breathlessly. "I've dropped into a rummy adventure, and I want you to help me. By the way, did you see anything of Corny in Bannington?"

"Your brother?" said Jack. "No, we didn't see him."

"What's this about an adventure?" demanded Handforth. "If you want any detective work done, I'm quite agreeable—"

"That's just what it is—detective work!" interrupted Nicodemus keenly. "No, I'm not spoofing. Honest Injun! I think four of us ought to be enough for the job—and the sooner we get to work the better."

Reggie Pitt and his companions regarded Nick with curiosity. It wasn't usual for Trotwood major to act in this way. His very excitement proved that there was something special in the wind.

And, without any delay, Nick explained the circumstances. He related everything that had happened, and his listeners caught some of his own subdued excitement. Handforth, indeed, was fired with a tremendous enthusiasm to capture the gun-runners single-handed.

"All we've got to do is to grab old Starkey, and take him to the police-station!" he exclaimed. "We can go to that inn and collar him—"

"Hold on, old man!" interrupted Pitt. "What about the evidence?"

"Can't we tell the police about those guns in the hut?"

"Of course we can, but evidence of that kind won't prove any case against Captain Starkey," said Reggie. "Starkey's only got to disclaim all knowledge of the stuff and he'll be released. Before the police make an arrest they've got to have some pretty strong proof of guilt. Besides, this isn't a job for the police at all."

"You mean we'll do it ourselves?" asked Edward Oswald quickly.

"No, my dear chap, I don't," said Pitt. "I may be wrong, of course, but it strikes

me that the coastguards ought to deal with the matter. It seems to be more in their line."

Pitt was undoubtedly correct, and, after another brief discussion, the four juniors wheeled their machines about and set off along the Caistowe Road.

CHAPTER XI.

NOTHING DOING.



REGGIE PITT was a keen, level-headed youngster, and as he cycled along he was thinking rapidly.

In the first place, he was convinced that Nicodemus was in real earnest. He wasn't the kind of fellow to exaggerate, or allow his imagination to get the better of his judgment. Nick, in fact, was a sound, reliable junior in every way.

And Pitt took his story at its face value. It was a remarkable story, and Pitt realised that something drastic ought to be done. Captain Starkey was obviously a crook, and it was quite possible that his ship would be leaving Caistowe on the evening tide. It was necessary to move quickly if this plot was to be exposed.

And Reggie was striving to find the most direct way. He said little, but he was fully alive to the situation. Handforth, on the other hand, talked grimly about rounding up the crooks, binding them, gagging them, and similar improbabilities. Edward Oswald always became melodramatic at the slightest provocation.

Approaching the gully near the cliffs the juniors became very cautious.

All conversation ceased, and even Handforth realised that he would have to keep his tongue still. They silently crept out upon the bleak, windswept beach.

All was black and deserted. The motor-van had gone, and the little hut stood there, just faintly visible in the gloom. Pitt went on in advance, much to Handforth's disgust, but soon returned.

"All clear!" he murmured. "There's not a soul about."

"Good!" growled Handy. "We'll examine this hut thoroughly. Better leave it to me, you chaps. I'll search for footprints and other clues. I'm particularly keen on getting finger-prints."

"This is a serious business, my son," said Pitt severely. "We don't want any of your Trackett Grim stunts to-night!"

The examination of the hut afforded no excitement. It proved to be a sturdily-built structure with a solid door and no window. It was so strong that a battering-ram would have been required to break it open. The door was secured by means of

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a heavy, ordinary lock, and two padlocks on a chain in order to make doubly sure.

"Well, there's a swindle!" said Handforth indignantly. "We can't get in!"

"We didn't expect to," said Nicodemus. "I only wanted you to come here to prove that I'm not exaggerating. If you look at the sand, you'll see the marks of that van——"

"Good! Let's have a search!" said Handforth.

"Don't trouble—I've seen 'em!" interrupted Pitt calmly. "I believe everything you've told us, Nick, and we've got to get busy. I've got a bit of an idea already."

"What is it?" asked Jack eagerly.

this hut, and the whole thing will fall to the ground."

"Then what are we going to do?" demanded Handforth.

"My idea is for one of us to buzz along to the coastguard-station," replied Reggie. "I'll go myself—to save argument. You three stay here and keep watch. Now, let me see. It'll take me ten minutes to get to the coastguard-station—ten minutes there and ten minutes back. That's half an hour. After I've been gone twenty minutes I want you chaps to light a fire."

"Light a fire?" said Nick, staring.

"Rot!" growled Handforth. "We shan't be cold! Besides, a fire will attract notice—we can see the harbour from here——"



"What's that ye said?" Starkey rapped out sharply. "The van's upset? Did ye say the van's upset?"

"Well, we've got to go pretty carefully," said Pitt. "If we bring the coastguards here they can't break into this hut without a warrant, because it's private property. And they can't get a warrant without reliable information. And they may not take much notice of our word. We've got to be prepared for these little difficulties."

"Can't we have Starkey and Trapp arrested?" asked Nick.

"On what charge?" retorted Pitt. "The authorities, don't forget, won't take any action until they've got plenty of evidence. And while they're messing about investigating, the stuff will be taken out of

"Exactly," interrupted Pitt coolly. "That's just the wheeze. If you chaps light a fire it's a ten to one chance that Captain Starkey or Mr. Trapp will see it. They'll jump to the conclusion that their hut's on fire, and they'll come shooting out here at full speed."

"By jingo!" said Jack Grey softly.

"They'll rush to the hut, and we shall be watching—with the coastguards," went on Pitt. "See the idea? These men will be caught red-handed, and the evidence will be cast iron. If they're caught in the hut itself, they won't have a leg to stand on."

There was a chorus of approval. Even

Handforth had to admit that the scheme was thoroughly sound. And Pitt, without any further discussion, hurried off up the gully, seized his bicycle, and sped off to the coastguard-station.

But he met with a sad disappointment.

The coastguard officer listened to his story, smiled indulgently, and observed that he had a better use for his time than to waste it on such a wild-goose chase as this apparently was.

"Don't you believe it?" demanded Pitt hotly.

"Gun-runners?" said the officer. "A wicked sea captain and his mate smuggling rifles and ammunition out of the country? My dear lad, your story is rather too fantastic for my liking. I am sorry I can't take any action in the matter—at least, not until I have investigated the matter personally. I might feel inclined to do so to-morrow."

Reggie Pitt compressed his lips.

"You may think the story is fantastic, sir, but it happens to be true," he said grimly. "And if you don't come along at once with some men, Captain Starkey may get wind of trouble, and——"

"Rubbish!" interrupted the officer impatiently. "You'd better get back to St. Frank's, my lad! I can't be bothered with schoolboys who imagine all sorts of preposterous stories. On your own showing, you are relying solely upon the word of this youngster, Trotwood. I am sorry, but it won't do. Go back to school and forget all about it."

Pitt opened his mouth to protest, but closed it again. He realised that the coastguard officer was not altogether unjustified. The story certainly did sound fantastic, and coming from such a source was naturally viewed with open scepticism. To press the matter would do no good.

"All right, sir," said Reggie quietly. "As you won't take any notice, I'd better clear out. Good-evening!"

Pitt left the coastguard-station with set lips and gleaming eyes. The officer could go to the dickens! The Fourth Form would deal with this matter off their own bat!

CHAPTER XII.

THE BAIT IS TAKEN.



CAPTAIN STARKEY leaned forward in his chair and refilled his glass.

"Well, Mr. Trapp, here's the best!" he said pleasantly.

"Thank the stars we've got that darned bit of business over! Everything's quiet now, and there's no harm done, after all."

"We're lucky," said Mr. Trapp grimly.

The pair were sitting in the captain's cabin on board the *Southern Prince*. The

old tramp steamer didn't look very princely. She was a rusty old tub, squat and clumsily built. Her usual trading waters were a good deal south of the equator, but occasionally her owner-captain brought her to England for special cargoes. At present his holds were full of general merchandise, and the steamer was due to leave Caistowe within a couple of days.

Her crew were absent—in fact, they hadn't yet been signed on. And the *Southern Prince* was practically deserted except for the pair in the captain's cabin and one or two watchmen—these latter being old hands who had sailed with Starkey for years.

"Looks like being a bit thick to-night, Mr. Trapp," went on the skipper. "Couldn't be better. Around two o'clock we can slip off in the dinghy and bring a load of guns aboard. Three trips ought to be enough to fetch the lot. By morning they'll be stowed safely away where nobody can't see 'em—and we'll pull up our hook and be off without nobody being the wiser."

"It's a bit risky," commented the mate.

"Bust my eyes! You ain't getting nervous, Mr. Trapp, are you?" scoffed Captain Starkey. "Man alive, there ain't a ha'porth of risk—not the way we've done it! And it's a paying game."

"Ay, it's paying all right," agreed Mr. Trapp.

"Them guns will fetch a fine price among the islands," said the skipper reflectively. "Pearls, Mr. Trapp—nigh as many as we like to ask. Copra! For a dozen cases of rifles we can fill our blamed holds with copra! There's nothing to beat it, Mr. Trapp—it's next door to money for nothing!"

The mate nodded.

"Mebbe, but we'd best watch our step," he said slowly. "If our game's suspected, it'll mean big trouble. There's been a lot of killing among the kanakas in some of the islands, and the gunboats are keeping a sharp look-out for runners."

"Let 'em look!" said the skipper contemptuously. "I'm an old hand at the game, Mr. Trapp, and they'll need to be durned slick to catch me at it!"

"There's the whites, too," went on Mr. Trapp. "I ain't squeamish, capt'n, but it gives me a bit of a turn now and agin. The last time we landed a dose of rifles them blacks went mad, and massacred the whole station! Forty whites murdered that time. And our guns, don't forget. I don't wonder them Navy fellows are getting peppy."

Captain Starkey swore with violence.

"You and me are going to quarrel, Mr. Trapp, if you get talkin' on this course!" he snapped. "Supposin' there was massacres? Supposin' there's more after we've landed this fresh bunch of rifles? We can't alter the nature of these kanakas,

can we? An' if we don't take guns, somebody else will—so we needn't worry ourselves!"

The skipper generally stilled what little conscience he possessed by an argument of this sort when the subject was broached. But Mr. Trapp was too old a hand to take much notice of it. Gun-running was profitable, but even the mate shuddered a little when he contemplated the horrible consequences. Taking rifles and ammunition to the uncivilised blacks in some of the South Sea islands was a crime of the worst possible description.

But Mr. Trapp soon laughed away his scruples—particularly as the skipper promised him a bigger share than usual of the spoils. Mr. Trapp's conscience was not above being bought.

They went on deck after a while to cast their eye at the weather. And Captain Starkey had hardly set foot on the grimy deck plates before he uttered a startled exclamation and stared across the bay.

The tramp steamer was lying anchored some little distance from the docks with no other vessel in near proximity. The lights of Caistowe twinkled dimly through the haze. And across the bay the cliffs rose in a rugged line, almost invisible against the murky sky.

"Roaring hurricanes!" muttered the skipper. "What's that, Mr. Trapp? What's that blaze over there?"

He pointed with a quivering forefinger, and Mr. Trapp caught his breath in. Over on the other side of the bay a flickering light was visible—a light that would have been a lurid glare but for the mist. And both Captain Starkey and Mr. Trapp were only too well acquainted with the location of that blaze. It was on the beach, at exactly the same spot as the old bathing hut.

"She's afire!" gasped Mr. Trapp. "Them guns—and the ammunition! By thunder, cap'n, the hut's afire!"

Captain Starkey swore violently.

"Didn't I tell ye not to light that blamed pipe o' yours in there?" he snarled. "Quick! We'll jump in the boat and row across! Mebbe we'll be in time to save the stuff!"

Three minutes later the precious pair were rowing madly across the bay in the darkness, having bitten the bait in no uncertain manner.

CHAPTER XIII. THE SURPRISE.



HANDFORTH pointed excitedly.

"There's a boat coming!" he muttered. "See it? Look! Over there! By George! They haven't lost much time!"

"They'll be here too soon!" said Jack

Grey anxiously. "I didn't expect any action for another ten minutes! Why the dickens doesn't Reggie come back?"

"He'll come," said Nicodemus confidently.

The three juniors were watching keenly from the beach. They were some little distance from the hut, twenty yards in front of which a great fire of wood and rubbish was blazing fiercely. From the sea, even at close quarters, it seemed as though the hut itself was blazing.

The juniors had hardly expected events to move so rapidly. They were waiting with eager anxiety for the arrival of Reggie Pitt and the coastguards. They didn't know that Reggie had taken more time than he had anticipated, and that his argument with the coastguard officer had ended so fruitlessly. The programme, in fact, was not going at all well.

The juniors were startled at the rapid approach of the boat. And they crouched low when they saw the dinghy grind its nose into the sand. Two men leapt out, and Nicodemus easily recognised them as Captain Starkey and Mr. Trapp.

"Are they the chaps?" whispered Handforth.

"Yes," breathed Nick. "But where's Pitt?"

There was no sign of Reggie; and small wonder, for he had only just left the coastguard station. The gun-runners had arrived on the scene much earlier than the juniors had expected.

"By sharks!" said the skipper hoarsely. "It ain't our hut at all, Mr. Trapp! It's a bonfire—a blamed mystery, too! Who the thunder lit this fire in a place like this?"

Mr. Trapp was relieved, but suspicious.

"It don't look good to me," he said slowly. "We'd best take a look at the hut, cap'n. Seems to me there's been some monkey play of some kind. There's nobody here—not a soul!"

The two men approached the hut, gazing about them anxiously and suspiciously. But they saw no sign of any living thing. The juniors took care to crouch low behind a sandbank, well in the darkness.

They were momentarily expecting the arrival of Reggie Pitt and the coastguards. And no time could be better than this. For the conspirators were actually in the act of entering their storehouse. Caught there, red-handed, the evidence would be overwhelming.

Captain Starkey and Mr. Trapp opened the hut door and entered. And as they vanished Handforth uttered a growl.

"Look here, we've got to do something!" he said grimly. "Pitt hasn't come back, and doesn't seem to be coming, either!"

"And those rotters won't stay in there more than a minute!" said Grey anxiously. "I say, how rotten! The scheme's failed!"

"Looks like it!" said Nicodemus regretfully.

"Failed, has it?" snorted Handforth. "Do you think we're going to let these bounders escape? Not likely! We'll capture them ourselves!"

"How?"

"By slamming that giddy door and locking it!" replied Handforth promptly. "There's no window, and once they're bottled up inside we can keep them there until the coastguards come!"

Nicodemus caught his breath in.

"That's a fine idea!" he said breathlessly.

"Rather!" agreed Jack Grey.

For once Handforth had made a really brainy suggestion. His idea was not only feasible, but seemed to provide a solution to the problem. Pitt and the coastguards must surely come soon, and the only thing necessary was to keep the plotters on the spot until they arrived.

Before they could have time to alter their decision the juniors moved. They crept noiselessly across the loose sand and ran up to the hut door in a bunch. Within, Captain Starkey and Mr. Trapp were looking round with the aid of an electric-torch.

Crash!

The door slammed to with a thud that shook the whole building.

"Got 'em!" roared Handforth triumphantly.

"Quick, grab that chain somebody!"

While Handforth spoke he turned the key in the lock. From within came yells of fury and alarm, to say nothing of a string of foul language. Heavy blows rained upon the inside of the door. But to escape was impossible. The key was not only turned, but the padlocks were soon chained in position.

"Jolly good thing you had me with you!" panted Handforth. "I don't want to boast, but if I hadn't thought of this idea these rotters would have escaped!"

"Why the dickens doesn't Pitt come?" muttered Grey anxiously.

"It doesn't matter now if he takes half an hour," said Edward Oswald. "But it's not like him to be late; he's generally full of ginger!"

The commotion within the hut continued for a while. The imprisoned men were so alarmed and enraged that for a time they gave themselves up to shouted threats and blasphemy.

But this soon subsided, and silence followed.

"I thought they'd give it up before long," said Handforth calmly. "They know they're trapped, and——"

"Look out!" yelled Nicodemus in acute alarm.

As he spoke a horny fist struck him on the side of the head, and he reeled over, partially stunned. Handforth, amazed and startled, found himself grappling with Mr.

Trapp. And Jack Grey was already held like a vice by Captain Jonas Starkey.

CHAPTER XIV.

PRISONERS.



THE surprise had been complete.

Handforth tried to put up a fight, but it was impossible. Before he could attempt to deliver one of his famous "rights," Mr.

Trapp had knocked him nearly senseless with a brutal, cowardly blow on the back of the head. And Jack Grey was held down by the skipper.

"Boys—that's what they are!" snarled Starkey. "Most of them durned school-boys! Pals of that deaf kid, I'll lay my life! This is serious, Mr. Trapp—darn my skin if it ain't!"

The skipper fully realised the danger. If these boys knew the truth about the hut it was possible that others knew, too. Although the fact that the juniors had taken matters into their own hands served to ease the skipper's alarm. Perhaps they hadn't told anybody else. And one of them was the deaf youngster, as Captain Starkey had seen.

But the skipper was mistaken. Knowing nothing about the Trotwood twins, it never occurred to him that there were two identical editions of this unusual looking schoolboy.

The juniors themselves were alarmed. Their consternation was increased by the fact that their hands and feet were being bound. Indeed, within a minute they were all rendered helpless. And they were mystified by the whole affair.

"How—how did you get out?" demanded Handforth curiously.

And it was this question which was worrying Nicodemus and Jack Grey. The men had been locked in this hut, which had only one door and no windows. Unfortunately the Fourth-Formers had completely overlooked the fact that the hut possessed a small skylight in the rear.

It was quite low down, and even the burly Captain Starkey had experienced no difficulty in climbing through and jumping silently to the soft sand outside. By this means the trappers had themselves been trapped.

And still there was no sign of Reggie Pitt and the coastguards.

"Best shove 'em in the boat and row 'em back to the ship," suggested Mr. Trapp savagely. "We can't let 'em go, cap'n, they know too much! After what's just happened, we'd be mad to let 'em go!"

"It would mean jail for the pair of us!" snarled the skipper. "Great blizzards! It's the first time as I've been pestered by a parcel of infernal school kids! Yes, we'll

take 'em aboard, Mr. Trapp. And if necessary, we'll keep 'em aboard until we sail!"

Truth to tell, Captain Starkey was at his wit's end. His secret was out—in the possession of these schoolboys. It was hardly surprising that the villainous skipper was alarmed.

And it seemed to him that it would be sheer madness to remain on this spot a minute longer than was necessary. The only other place to go to was the ship.

So the dinghy was rapidly filled, and then it ploughed across the bay towards the Southern Prince. The three juniors were as helpless as babies. Bound hand and foot, they couldn't move, and their mufflers had now been bound over their mouths.

The ship was reached, and one by one the captives were carried on board. It was hard to realise that the evening was still comparatively young. The cold, misty night and the dead appearance of Caistowe made it appear that the hour was a great deal later.

Within ten minutes the unfortunate amateur detectives were stowed below in the empty store-room, with an iron door between them and liberty. There was no escape.

And Captain Starkey and Mr. Trapp went ashore.

"The kids'll be all right on board!" growled the skipper. "We've got to make inquiries, and find out what's doing. If anybody else knows about that hut we'll soon find it out!"

The pair decided to visit the Blue Peter Tavern, their favourite haunt. There was a bare possibility that they might pick up a word or two of gossip. Caistowe was a small place, and any excitement or event of an unusual nature was bound to be discussed by the local worthies.

But the gun-runners learned nothing in the tavern.

They spent ten minutes there and listened to the gossip in the bar, but there seemed to be nothing out of the common in the air. They emerged, and bent their steps towards the centre of the town.

"Blamed if I can see the idea of this!" said the mate impatiently.

"You fool! We've got to find out what's been happening!" growled Starkey. "We can't ask openly, so we've just got to—By thunder! Look there, Mr. Trapp—look there! May I be sunk in ten thousand fathoms! It's one o' them blamed boys! They've got out!"

"Impossible!" gasped Mr. Trapp in alarm.

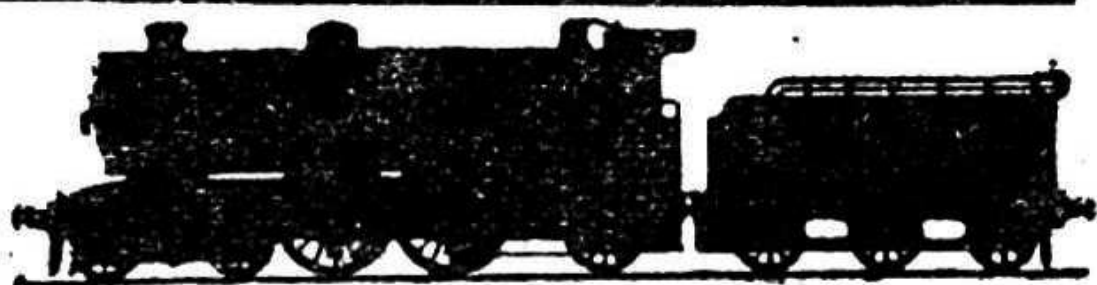
But his tanned face went blotchy as he caught sight of a never-to-be-forgotten

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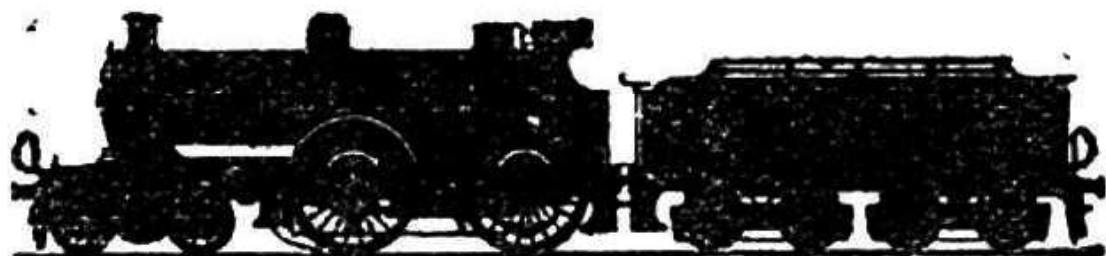
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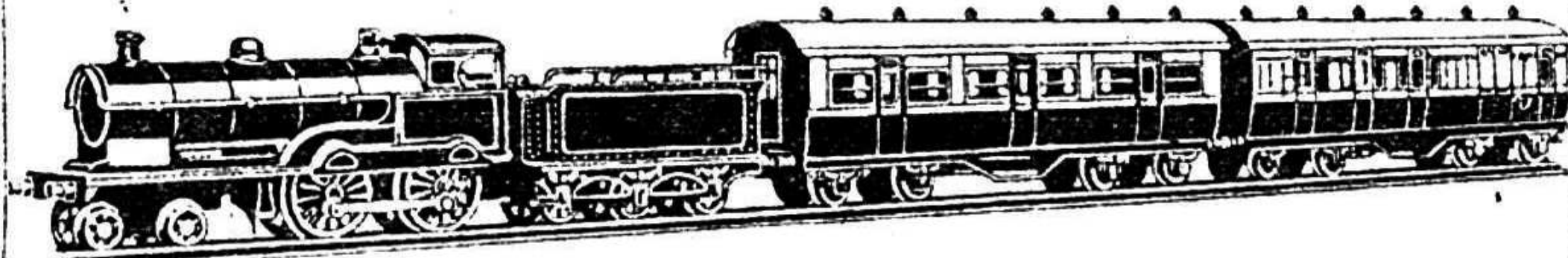


figure. Cornelius Trotwood, in fact, was cycling along the road. And Cornelius was in sublime ignorance of the consternation he had caused.

He had just come from Bannington, having searched fruitlessly in that town for his brother. He had had a few words with Archie, and the latter had informed him that Nicodemus had gone on to Caistowe. So Cornelius had returned home via the seaside town.

But his appearance in Caistowe was staggering to Captain Starkey.

For the skipper instantly concluded that this boy was one of the trio who had been imprisoned below decks on the Southern Prince. Starkey's assumption was a natural one. How could he possibly guess that there were two schoolboys alike?

The twins were undoubtedly getting into a terrible tangle! Or, to be more exact, they were getting Captain Starkey into one!

At all events, the skipper acted promptly.

He strode out into the road, and literally grabbed Cornelius as he was about to pass. The unfortunate junior wondered what on earth was happening. He was torn from his bicycle, and hustled off by the skipper, in spite of his protests.

Starkey was off his head with confusion and alarm, and the only thing he could do at the moment was to capture this boy and take him on board. He was hoping against hope that the others were still on the ship.

The situation was becoming acute.

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT REGGIE SAW.



REGGIE PITT paused in breathless dismay. He had just arrived on the beach, and he could dimly see some figures at the water's edge. There were two men, and these two

were roughly bundling other figures into a waiting boat.

The whole thing was obvious.

The gun-runners had come in response to the bait, but instead of being captured, they had turned the tables on their trappers! Pitt saw this at a glance, and he refrained from showing himself.

Single-handed, he could do nothing—and he promptly abused the coastguard officer for having failed him so badly. If only the coastguards had come with him! What a fine climax this affair would have had!

As it was, the boat pushed off at once, and Reggie Pitt had the mortification of seeing his schoolfellows carried off as prisoners. For a few moments even the resourceful Reggie was nonplussed.

But a minute's steady thought calmed him.

"There's only one thing to be done!" he muttered.

He turned, and made his way up the gully. Seizing his bicycle, he mounted, and sped off. His object was to reach the docks as quickly as possible. Here he would tell his story, and get up a rescue-party, to go to the Southern Prince, and save the three juniors from the clutches of Captain Starkey.

But it was impossible for Pitt to get to Caistowe in advance. While the boat had merely to cross the bay, Pitt was obliged to take a wider detour by land, traversing narrow, muddy lanes where speed was out of the question. To make matters worse, Reggie's front tyre had developed a puncture. Fate generally plays a mean trick of this sort. But it was a slow puncture, and the tyre did not completely deflate. Pitt could feel the rim continuously, and he muttered all sorts of uncomplimentary things about inner tubes, outer covers, and flint-strewn by-lanes. That slack tyre made his progress even slower, and by the time he reached Caistowe he was decidedly fagged, and in a state of heavy perspiration.

But he didn't give himself any rest.

He turned his bicycle in the direction of the docks. And it wasn't exactly a coincidence for him to witness a surprising little scene from afar. As he came down the road he saw two men drag a youthful figure from a bicycle. And even at that distance Pitt recognised the thin, bony figure as Cornelius Trotwood.

"My hat!" muttered Reggie. "I wonder if those chaps are Captain Starkey and the mate. They must be! Great Scott! These rotters are collaring our chaps wholesale!"

Pitt put on some speed, careless of the flat tyre, and he nearly ran into a party of men who came marching out of a side-turning at that moment. Reggie nearly fell off his bicycle when he recognised them as coastguards.

And, what was more to the point the officer in charge of them was the gentleman who had treated Pitt so brusquely a short time earlier. The junior leaped from his machine at once.

"I say, look here——" he began.

"Oh, it's you!" said the officer. "I've been thinking over what you told me, young man, and I've decided to act. On second thoughts, there may be something in that yarn, after all."

"May be something in it!" echoed Pitt breathlessly. "It's about time you woke up! Captain Starkey has kidnapped four of our chaps! He's just collared the fourth down the road—I saw him with my own eyes!"

The officer looked sceptical.

"Come, come!" he protested. "You mustn't let your imagination——"

"Look here, sir, I'm getting a bit tired of this scoffing!" interrupted Pitt quietly. "You don't seem to realise that this is an urgent matter! If you can't act on my information at once, I'm going straight to the police! I haven't got much faith in them, but they can't be any worse than you!"

The coastguard officer frowned.

"My lad, you're impudent!" he said stiffly.

"Impudent!" shouted Pitt, in exasperation. "What do you expect me to be when you treat me like a fool? Captain Starkey has just dragged one of our fellows away—and I believe he's got three others on board his ship!"

And Pitt rapidly explained what he had seen. And at last the coastguard officer came to the conclusion that the story was true. Hare-brained it seemed, but Pitt's very vehemence gave it conviction.

And so, after so much unnecessary delay, the representatives of the Crown got to work. The officer gave some brisk orders, and the party of blue-jackets went forward at the double.

The docks were reached without much excitement being caused—for the streets of Caistowe on a raw, cold night like this were practically deserted. The docks were literally abandoned to the darkness. Caistowe was only a small port, and after nightfall there was no work in progress.

Boats were secured, and the coastguards rowed out towards the dim, squat shape which represented the Southern Prince. Pitt had taken care to find a place in the leading boat, and he was feeling anxious and worried. He badly wanted to know what had happened to his companions.

The coastguard officer was now determined upon his course. He would board the tramp steamer, interview Captain Starkey, and judge from the skipper's manner whether Pitt's story was true or not.

CHAPTER XVI.

ALL THROUGH CORNY.



"A HOY, there!"

A gruff hail came from the deck of the Southern Prince as the first coastguards' boat grated against the rusty plates. Captain Starkey, in fact, was leaning over the rail.

The skipper was inwardly mad with anxiety. It was only with the greatest effort that he maintained a calm exterior. Mr. Trapp had just gone below, hustling the unfortunate Cornelius before him.

And Captain Starkey's heart nearly



"Captain Starkey?" asked the officer curtly, as he mounted the ladder.

"That's me!" said the skipper truculently. "Bust my mast! What's the idea of this? Take these darned men off my ship!"

stopped beating when he recognised his visitors as coastguards. Trouble was coming! The only possible hope was to affect complete ignorance, and to deny all knowledge of the bathing hut and its contents.

"Captain Starkey?" asked the officer curtly, as he mounted the ladder.

"That's me!" said the skipper truculently. "Bust my mast! What's the idea of this? Take these darned men off my ship!"

The officer ignored the skipper's words, and gave his men a few brief instructions. Within a minute they had stationed themselves in various part of the deck. The Southern Prince, in fact, was now in the hands of his Majesty's representatives.

"You've got an infernal nerve, ain't you?" demanded Starkey, affecting to be indignantly angry.

"Sorry to inconvenience you, Captain, but I've got to do my duty," said the officer grimly. "I understand that you've brought two or three schoolboys on board your ship——"

"Schoolboys!" roared the skipper. "What the blazes should I want with schoolboys? By thunder! You'll be tellin' me next that I'm turnin' my craft into a nursin' home!"

"It'll be much better if you keep calm, Captain Starkey," said the officer. "Do I understand that you deny the presence of these boys on board?"

"You blamed fool, there's nobody on board but my first officer and a couple of hands!" retorted the skipper furiously. "Schoolboys, indeed! What in the name of perdition should I want with schoolboys?"

Starkey's agitation was obvious—so obvious that the officer was instantly suspicious. The skipper, indeed, could only repeat his former question, his mind being too confused to vary it.

"I am sorry, Captain, but I shall have to ask your permission to search the ship," said the officer.

"My permission!" snarled Starkey, pale with alarm. "By sharks! If you don't get off this craft, I'll pitch you overside! Where's your warrant? Where's your authority?"

Whether the coastguard officer had any authority, or whether he was acting entirely on his own judgment, was never revealed to the skipper. For just then a distinct yell sounded from a near by ventilator. Without any question, it was a boyish voice that uttered that cry.

"That's Handforth!" exclaimed Pitt quickly. "Did you hear it, sir? They're here! They're on board!"

"I heard!" rapped out the officer curtly. "Seize this man!"

The order was given to some of his bluejackets, and the next moment Captain Starkey was arrested. Another party of coastguards hurried below to make a close investigation.

That yell of Handforth's had made suspicion into certainty. And Edward Oswald had been allowed to make the shout because Mr. Trapp momentarily lost his head.

The mate, forcing the confused Cornelius before him, was under the impression that the three prisoners had escaped. Therefore, when he got to the store-room, he flung the door open recklessly. He flashed his torch inside, and uttered a gasp of amazement. For the three prisoners were

still there! And Handforth let this be known at once by giving voice to a lusty bellow of rage.

Mr. Trapp was confused. The fact that there were two juniors exactly alike explained much to him. But before he could quite recover the coastguards had arrived.

And then Mr. Trapp knew that the game was up.

The events of the next half-hour were quite interesting. The juniors being released, they poured out their story to the astonished coastguards. And while Captain Starkey and his mate were detained, the officer paid a visit to the bathing-hut and examined the contents.

He was startled to find that Pitt's original story was true. The cases contained rifles and ammunition—the whole consignment destined for some obscure South Sea island.

The juniors felt highly pleased with themselves when, at last, they wended their way back to St. Frank's. For them the evening had been one long thrill of excitement, and they considered themselves fortunate for having come through practically scatheless.

They arrived long after calling-over—indeed, after bed-time. But when Mr. Stokes heard the explanation he readily excused them. And after that the entire Fourth were regaled with the story. Edward Oswald Handforth saw to that.

"And it was all through Corny!" grinned Nicodemus, as he tumbled into bed. "He and I got tangled up a bit, and those gun-runners are under arrest in consequence! Funny how these things happen!"

But it was still funnier from the Fourth's point of view when Cornelius Trotwood mildly asked what all the excitement was about. For the simple Corney was still in complete ignorance as to the true position.

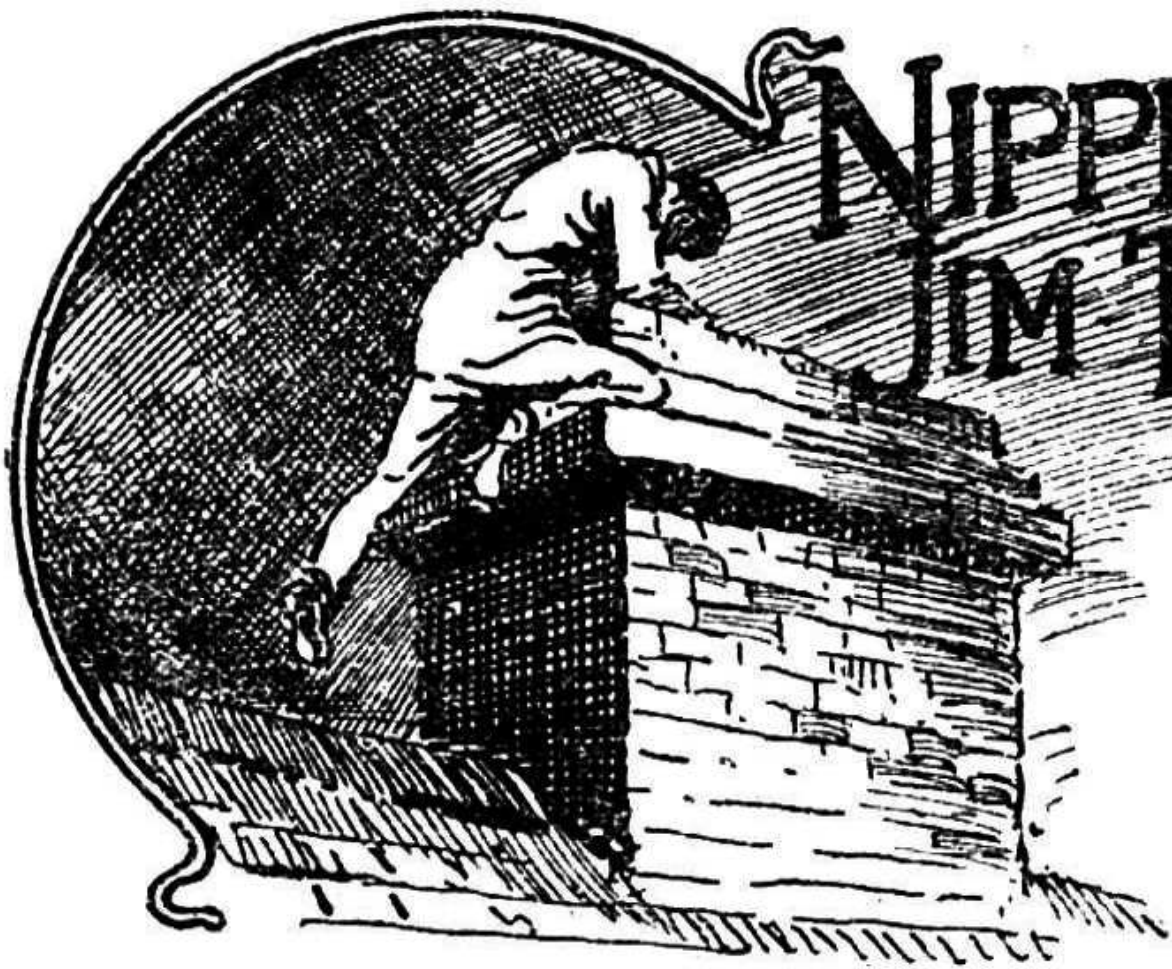
The whole adventure had started through him, Captain Starkey and Mr. Trapp were under arrest through him—and he didn't know a word about it!

But, as Nicodemus pointed out, what did it matter?

THE END.

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in which Nipper, Nelson
Lee's Brilliant Young Assist-
ant, makes a Bold Attempt
to Capture the Notorious
Forger, Jim the Penman.**

CHAPTER I.

THE LONELY HOUSE.

DOUGLAS JAMES SUTCLIFFE—better known as the notorious forger, Jim the Penman—gripped the steering-wheel of the powerful car he was driving, and smiled to himself with a satisfied air.

"Well, Thornton, what do you think of it?" he asked, turning to his companion genially. "Did you ever see a neater little job than the one we've just pulled off?"

Sutcliffe's confederate shook his head, and grinned.

"Never, Jim!" he declared emphatically. "It was rich—too rich for words! The way you kidnapped the Governor of Portmoor Prison was a masterpiece! With Nelson Lee and that Scotland Yard man right beside you it was decidedly risky; but you managed to do it, all the same. I can just imagine what they feel like, now that they've discovered the truth!"

Jim the Penman grunted.

"What Nelson Lee and that policeman feel like is no concern of mine," he returned. "I've shown them clearly enough that I'm capable of beating them at close quarters, and I'm satisfied. I've got the two prisoners I set out to get—and Colonel Millbank and Chief Warder Hulton will soon learn what sort of a life I've planned for them! By gosh, I've been waiting for this moment for more than five years, and now that it's come I mean to take the fullest advantage of it! They say that revenge is sweet, and I can fully appreciate the words now that I'm in a position to take it! It was worth risking something to get those two into my clutches; and now that I've got 'em I'll see that they're made to pay!"

Sutcliffe's voice was now harsh and discordant, but he was only uttering the literal truth. He was, indeed, in a position to do everything he boasted, and he had brought

about that position by his own amazing cleverness.

With almost unheard of audacity and daring, Jim the Penman had succeeded in kidnapping the Governor of Portmoor Prison, and Chief Warder Hulton—and he had both his prisoners in an unconscious condition in the tonneau of the car he was driving.

For more than half an hour the vehicle had been hurtling through the night, getting farther and farther away from the grim old walls of the great convict prison with every minute that passed. And the fact that no pursuers had appeared in their rear had caused Sutcliffe to regard himself as safe.

Jim the Penman, after his release from Portmoor by members of the now disbanded League of the Green Triangle, had set himself the task of taking his revenge upon all those who had contributed to his incarceration in the great penal settlement, and he had only met with very limited success owing to Nelson Lee's activities. Almost at every turn he had found himself thwarted by the great detective, and Jim the Penman had determined, as a last resort, to bring off a tremendous coup right under the noses of Nelson Lee and Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard—and he had succeeded.

Previously, his efforts at vengeance had been frustrated just at the moment he had anticipated triumph; but this time it looked as if he was to have everything his own way.

With consummate skill and daring, Jim had so arranged matters that Nelson Lee had been under the impression that he would visit Portmoor Prison in the personality of Sir James Parkinson, the Home Secretary. Whereas, in reality, Jim had employed an out-of-work actor from Brixton to fill the role.

Meanwhile, Sutcliffe—disguised as Chief Warder Hulton and wearing his uniform—had actually been within a few feet of the governor's office, ostensibly on guard; and he had, at the correct moment, sandbagged

Colonel Millbank and lowered him out of the window of an ante-room to his waiting confederate.

All this he had accomplished with his usual audacity—in spite of the fact that Nelson Lee and Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard were on the spot. And Sutcliffe had left a note pinned to the window-frame, explaining his action, and defying the detective to outwit him!

Now he was making his escape, with his task successfully accomplished.

He had set himself to capture the two men against whom he intended to take his revenge, and those two men were now huddled in the back of the car, helpless and unconscious.

Jim the Penman grinned into the darkness as he thought of the manner in which he would "get his own back" upon Colonel Millbank and Chief Warder Hulton. Both these men, he considered—quite unfairly—had contributed to his misery while he had been a prisoner in Portmoor; and Sutcliffe, viewing the situation with a warped perspective, had determined to exact vengeance.

The master forger, no doubt, had been brooding upon his sufferings while a convict in the great prison, quite overlooking the fact that he richly deserved all the punishment he had received. He was acting now in a manner which proved beyond all doubt that he was possessed of some sort of "brain kink," for no moral being would go to such lengths as he was going solely for the purpose of quenching his thirst for revenge upon men who had done nothing but their simple duty.

If Jim the Penman had received "special treatment" at the hands of the governor and the chief warder while in prison he had merited it, as he knew well enough; but Sutcliffe was so constituted that he felt bound to carry out any oath which he had taken. And he had sworn many times to "get even" with Colonel Millbank and Hulton.

By this time the swiftly-speeding motor-car had passed beyond the confines of Devonshire, and was now well into Somersetshire. For another ten miles or so Jim drove—until he was well past the town of Bridgewater, and traversing a particularly lonely stretch of country. He seemed to know the district exceedingly well, and he at last turned the car into a narrow side-track, and continued along this until he reached an isolated, rambling old house.

Outside the picturesque, ivy-clad building Sutcliffe brought the car to a standstill, and climbed from his seat, followed at once by Thornton, his confederate. The latter cast a quick glance at the old pile, and turned to his chief inquiringly.

"What's this, Jim—a new discovery of yours?" he asked. "Looks all right, at all events—right off the beaten track, and as lonely as blazes! Do you intend to hang out here for good?"

"That depends," replied Sutcliffe. "But we could easily go further and fare worse, in my opinion. This place is absolutely an ideal retreat, as you'll agree when you've seen it. But this is no time for talking, Thornton. Let's get these prisoners safely inside."

This was accomplished without much difficulty, Jim and Thornton carrying the unconscious men into the building one at a time. Lamps were then lit, shutters were placed in position, and Sutcliffe applied himself to the task of reviving his two captives.

Repeated doses of neat brandy soon had the effect of bringing the dazed men back to their senses, but it was some little time before they were conscious enough to grasp the situation in its full significance.

But when they did finally recover their scattered wits, Jim the Penman speedily took steps to make them realise that they were completely in his power, and quite beyond hope of rescue.

Sutcliffe's long looked-for hour had come, and he meant to make the most of it!

CHAPTER II.

THE FATE OF THE PRISONERS!



NIPPER crouched in the thick hedge, and stifled a groan.

"Great Scott!" he muttered, with a wry face. "I'm as full of aches as a sieve is full of holes—and I don't wonder at it! Still, strictly speaking, I'm dashed lucky to be alive at all, after riding all this way on that rotten luggage-grid! My Stars, it's a marvel that I managed to stick it!"

Nelson's Lee's astute young assistant, with all his usual prodigality, was exaggerating the extent of his sufferings beyond all reason; but in this instance there was a certain amount of excuse for him.

He was standing in the garden of the old house to which Jim the Penman had brought his prisoners, and he had been a very interested spectator to the transfer of the captives from the motor-car to the house.

Nipper's presence at this secret retreat of Sutcliffe's was due entirely to his own quick-wittedness and pluck, and the lad felt particularly pleased with himself.

At Portmoor—while Nelson Lee and Lennard had been awaiting Jim's arrival in the governor's office—Nipper had been instructed to prowl about outside, and to keep his eyes open; tasks which he was particularly fitted for, as events had proved.

Nipper had witnessed the arrival of the out-of-work actor in the disguise of the Home Secretary, and he had seen Thornton take up his position outside the window of the ante-room. A little later he had seen "Chief Warder Hulton"—who was, of course,

Jim the Penman—pass the unconscious body of Colonel Millbank through the window to Thornton, and he had, finally, seen Sutcliffe take his place at the wheel of the car in readiness for instant departure with his prisoners.

And Nipper had done some quick thinking.

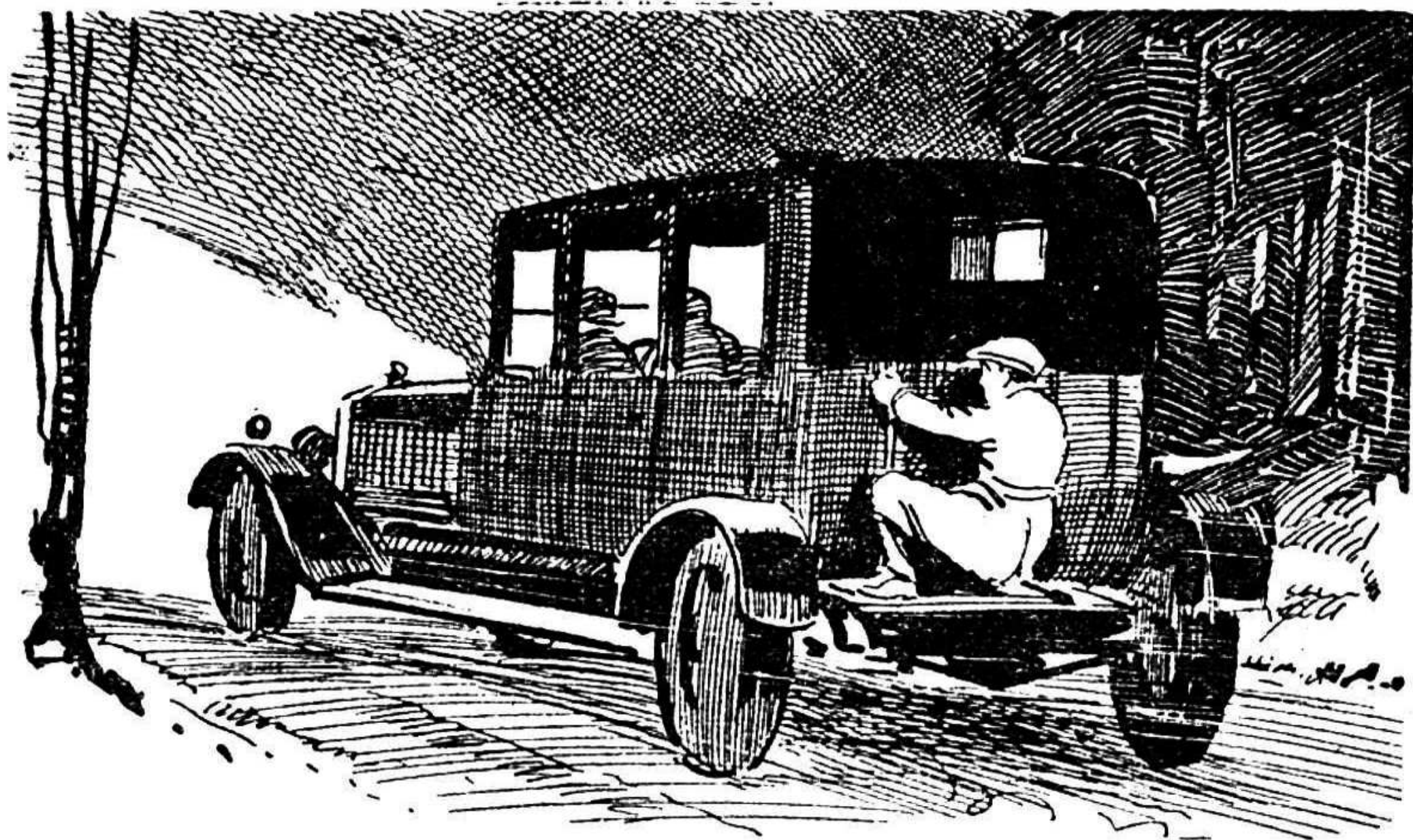
He was quite aware that it was impossible to go in chase of Jim, owing to the lack of a second automobile; and he knew that once Sutcliffe succeeded in getting away he would probably be lost for good.

And so Nipper, without the slightest hesitation, had decided upon the one course of action which he knew would be the most effective, and he had perched himself upon the luggage-grid of the car, determined to discover its destination.

luggage-grid a good few yards before the car had come to a standstill, and by the time its passengers had alighted, Nipper was completely invisible in a near-by hedge.

Nipper looked at the old house critically in the bright starlight. The place was like a fortress almost, and every window in the building seemed to be closely shuttered—that had been Jim's first consideration.

"It's up to me now with a vengeance!" thought Nipper to himself. "I'm the only living being who knows where Jim has taken his captives, and I've got to get the better of Sutcliffe and effect a rescue! It's no good trying to get in any of these blessed windows, so I shall have to have a shot at the chimneys! They look nice and wide,



And so Nipper had decided upon the one course of action which he knew would be the most effective, and he had perched himself upon the luggage grid of the car—determined to discover its destination.

During his uncomfortable journey he had been considerably worried and puzzled regarding Jim's undoubted success, and Nipper continually asked himself how Sutcliffe had managed to outwit Nelson Lee with such apparent ease. There had been no time for the lad to ascertain if his beloved gov'nor had been hurt or injured, and he could do nothing but fervently hope that such was not the case.

And now he was here, in the wilds of Somerset, outside the house to which Jim had brought his prisoners. Nipper chuckled to himself as he thought of the situation, for he knew quite well that his presence was totally unsuspected by either Sutcliffe or Thornton. He had dropped from the

at all events, and that's something to be thankful for!"

Nipper was undaunted by the problem which faced him, difficult as it seemed. His long experience with Nelson Lee had taught him to eliminate the word "impossible" from his vocabulary, and he always tried to act up to Lee's teachings to the best of his ability.

Without hesitation Nipper crept towards the ivy-clad wall of the old house, and was soon climbing easily up the tangled limbs of the giant creeper towards the moss-covered tiles of the roof. He had chosen a spot for his ascent, which looked easy of accomplishment, a spot where a strong, iron pipe projected above the tiles near the ledge.

By means of this pipe Nipper would be able to swing himself directly to the roof from the ivy, and he soon found that he had not made a miscalculation.

Nipper was as agile as a monkey, despite his aches and pains, and he found very little difficulty in gaining the tiles. Once upon them, it was an easy matter for him to mount upwards towards the great square chimneys and to grasp them in a firm grip.

There were six chimneys, he saw, built in a solid block and having no circular pots upon them. And almost as soon as he pulled himself into the upright position, Nipper heard Jim the Penman's voice floating upwards from one of the rooms beneath.

"—going to make you pay—and pay dearly for the treatment you meted out to me at Portmoor!" Nipper heard Jim saying. "Do you hear, Millbank, and you, Hulton? I'm going to make this house my headquarters, and I'm going to keep you here as my prisoners. But you're not going to be kept in idleness—oh, dear no! You're going to be made to work, just as you made me work in that cursed prison of yours! You're going to keep the same hours, eat the same food, and live the same sort of life—"

"Rot!" came Hulton's voice to Nipper's ears. "You must be mad, Sutcliffe, if you think you can carry out a threat of that sort! This is England, remember, and you'll be found out in a very short time!"

Jim the Penman laughed harshly.

"You think so, Hulton?" he queried. "Very well, you're quite at liberty to think what you like! But I know what I'm talking about. This house is as isolated as the North Pole almost, and you'll never be found here if a thousand detectives are on your track. Don't make any mistake, either of you! You're here until it pleases me to release you, and while I'm in charge of this house you'll be made to live the life of convicts—the life of convicts in every particular. You're going to have a taste of what I went through in Portmoor for five ghastly years, and we'll see how you like it!"

Sutcliffe's voice was harsh and bitter, and there was a vindictive note in it which made his prisoners' blood boil.

"You're a lunatic, Sutcliffe—a hare-brained imbecile!" stormed Colonel Millbank angrily. "Do you think you can frighten Hulton and I with your confounded threats. You're talking childish drivel when you say you're going to treat us as convicts—"

"You'll soon see whether it's drivel or not!" cut in Jim the Penman, with a chuckle. "I fancy you'll sing a different song, my dear colonel, when you have seen the preparations which I have made for your reception down below in the cellars!"

Nipper, at the top of the wide chimney, could hear every syllable, and he knew

that Sutcliffe meant every word he uttered. It was characteristic of him to plan a revenge of this kind for the two men who had been in authority over him while he had been in Portmoor—the sort of revenge he would take a delight in administering.

"My hat!" muttered Nipper to himself. "Those two poor chaps are getting it in the neck this time, and no mistake! They haven't got a dog's chance of hitting back, either! I can't stick this sort of thing much longer, and I shall have to do something drastic!"

Nipper listened again at the chimney, and he heard Sutcliffe roughly order his prisoners to march to the cellars—at the point of the revolver. The colonel made a spirited protest, but his voice soon died away. In a few moments complete silence reigned, and Nipper knew that all the occupants of the room had departed for the cellars.

And Nelson Lee's keen young assistant strove frantically to think of a way out of the difficulties which beset him.

CHAPTER III.

A DARING MOVE.



"WHAT the dickens can I do?" thought Nipper, racking his brains

for inspiration. "This place is miles from anywhere, and it would take me hours and hours to get help! And if I got help, we shouldn't be any better off. There's nothing but my bare word that this house is inhabited by Jim the Penman, and I should have a deuce of a job to get a search-warrant!"

He shook his head in the darkness, and came to a courageous decision. He knew well enough that he would have a hard task to enlist the aid of the authorities in such an outlandish spot as this, and he came to the conclusion that his only plan would be to turn the tables upon Jim the Penman himself.

After what he had heard, Nipper felt compelled to do his utmost to rescue Jim's two luckless prisoners; but how was he to set about such a momentous task?

There was only one way, and that way was not without its dangers. But Nipper did not give a thought to the peril of his undertaking; he was filled with a determination to outwit Sutcliffe and to release Colonel Millbank and Chief Warder Hulton.

And if he was to act at all he must do so at once, while the room was unoccupied.

And Nipper, having made up his mind, lost no time in putting his scheme into operation. His previous survey of the exterior of the house had convinced him

that it was hopeless to attempt to get in by any of the windows or doors, and there remained only one possible entrance—the chimney!

Such a daring scheme would not have occurred to many lads, but to Nipper it was the obvious method of overcoming his difficulty. He was by no means a stranger to the interior of the old-fashioned chimneys, and within the next few seconds he was gingerly feeling his way down the sooty shaft. By carefully feeling for the crevices of the brickwork with his feet Nipper managed to make the descent with surprising ease and quickness, and he reached the ancient fireplace of the lower room smothered in soot and grime—but safe.

A lamp burning upon the table cast a brilliant light round the room, and a glance was sufficient to tell Nipper that the apartment was unoccupied. Hastily brushing the worst of the clinging soot from his clothing, he squeezed through the opening at the top of the fireplace and emerged into the room. His first consideration, after listening intently for a few seconds, was to remove his cap and use it as a brush to sweep the dislodged soot from the hearth into the fireplace, in order to remove as completely as possible all traces of his entrance.

This done, he softly stole towards the door and looked out into the wide hall. This, too, was illuminated by means of an oil-lamp hanging from the ceiling in the centre, and before Nipper had had more than a moment to look round, he heard the sound of footsteps approaching from the lower regions.

Quick as a flash, Nipper darted to a curtained alcove and concealed himself behind the hanging draperies, just vanishing from sight as Jim the Penman and Thornton reappeared in the hall. If Nipper had been two seconds later he would have been seen; but as events turned out he was perfectly safe. Sutcliffe considered himself to be absolutely secure here, and he was quite unsuspecting.

Both the men went into the room which Nipper had just left, and the door was closed upon them. After a few moments their droning voices became just audible in conversation, and Nipper breathed a sigh of relief. Evidently they had attended to the prisoners, and were now settling down for a talk.

"Good!" thought Nipper with satisfaction. "They've left the coast clear for me to buzz down below and release the prisoners! If they'll only keep where they are for another five minutes I'll have the colonel and Hulton as allies! And three of us ought to be more than a match for Sutcliffe and Thornton!"

Nipper stole cautiously forward as these thoughts crossed his mind, and a few

moments later he was softly descending the stairway which led to the cellars. In the lower corridor a small light was burning, and Nipper recalled Jim's words about the prisoners being treated the same as those in a regular prison. There, of course, it is usual to have night-lights burning in the passages outside the cells, in a similar fashion to the arrangements which Jim had provided here.

But another shock was in store for Nipper in a moment or two.

He produced his electric torch from his pocket, and flashed its light about. The brilliant ray soon showed him that two of the many cellars had doors which were fitted with massive bolts, and which were—curiously enough—provided also with iron grilles in their upper half! It was just as if Nipper was gazing upon two cell doors at Portmoor!

Quickly tip-toeing towards the nearest of the grilles, Nipper raised his torch, and directed the ray into the interior of the cell. As he did so he had the greatest difficulty in stifling the involuntary cry which rose in his throat—for he found himself gazing into an exact replica of a real prison cell!

More curious still, the cell was tenanted by a real convict—dressed in the hideous uniform bearing the broad-arrow marks! For a moment Nipper stared blankly at the figure of the man who sat dejectedly upon the edge of the low bench at the far side of the cubicle, and then he gave vent to a low whisper of amazement.

"Great guns!" he ejaculated, as he recognised the "convict." "It's Colonel Millbank!"

The Governor of Portmoor jumped to his feet with a glad cry in his throat, and bounded towards the grille.

"Nipper!" he breathed. "By heaven—Nipper!"

"Sssssssh!" warned Nipper quickly. "Not a sound!"

Hastily, but silently, he drew back the massive bolt which secured the door, and the colonel emerged, looking anything but imposing in his "prison" garb. Within the next few minutes Chief Warder Hulton was also a free man, and his gratitude almost overflowed then and there.

Nipper rebolted the cell doors, and then left the corridor with his two companions. They had been forced to don the broad-arrow clothing in place of their own under pain of instant death—and these drastic measures showed clearly enough that Jim the Penman meant to carry out his threats to the letter.

But with the coming of Nipper all their hopes returned; they were free once more, and nothing remained but for them to get out of the house as speedily as possible.

Nipper, however, was not ready to depart yet awhile. He quickly told his companions that he had a scheme in mind to capture the two criminals upstairs, and he intended to carry it out without delay!

CHAPTER IV. TURNING THE TABLES.



"THIS house is the very place I've been looking for for years!" declared Jim the Penman, in a tone of satisfaction. "I happened to run across it recently, Thornton, and I grabbed it at once. It's so far off the beaten track that we shall be safe from observation at all times, and it will be an ideal spot for our headquarters. Here we can make bank-notes and Treasury-notes to our hearts' content—to say nothing of running a few more forgery schemes which I have in mind! I've got big plans arranged for the future, but I shan't feel safe until Nelson Lee has been effectively dealt with! I haven't done with him yet by a long way—"

"Oh! Why not leave him alone?" suggested Thornton. "He's too dangerous a customer, Jim, to play the fool with!"

Sutcliffe grunted.

"He's got to be captured, and brought here, to keep Millbank and Hulton company!" he grated. "Do you think I shall be content to start big operations with Lee at large, Thornton? No, I'm not such a fool! He has been responsible for smashing up practically all my carefully made plans in the past, and I'm going to see that he has no opportunity of repeating his tactics in the future. Before I do another job of any sort, that detective has got to be safely imprisoned in one of those cells down below! And when we've got him, I'm going to make Lee writhe with agony and self-pity! I'm going to torture him until he begs for mercy—"

The door of the room at this moment was flung violently open, and three masked and cloaked figures strode into the apartment. Each member of the trio carried a revolver in his right hand, and the weapons were pointed unwaveringly at Jim the Penman and his confederate. They stared at the newcomers with flabbergasted glances, and their surprise was complete.

"Hands up—both of you!" commanded the leader of the masked men roughly. "No nonsense, now! You're fairly cornered this time, Sutcliffe, and any attempt at escape will meet with abject failure! Also, it will be an extremely painful proceeding—because I will shoot!"

Jim the Penman looked at the speaker keenly, and he could tell that this was not bluff. Just at the moment when he had thought himself secure from all possible harm, this bombshell had been sprung upon him. After all his carefully made plans, and his elaborate precautions against discovery, his secret retreat had been discovered, and that within the first hour of his own arrival!

It was galling in the extreme, and Sutcliffe's wrath almost broke its bonds. Only by the exercise of his strong will-power did

he manage to control himself—but he glared with vindictive hatred at the leader of the invaders.

"Who the thunder are you?" he demanded, in chagrined tones. "Who are you, eh?"

"You'll know—all in good time!" was the answer. "My first anxiety is to relieve you and Thornton of any weapons which you happen to possess! Keep your hands up—both of you—while your guns are collected!"

A second of the masked men now stepped forward, and rapidly relieved the two discomfited criminals of their revolvers. When that had been done, they were quickly and securely bound—their ankles being tied together with strong cords, and their wrists firmly bound behind their backs. Thus treated, they were rendered helpless and harmless, and the leader of the masked men placed his revolver in his pocket with a little sigh of relief.

Then he laughed—a boyish, rippling laugh, which sounded suspiciously like Nipper's. Jim the Penman heard it, and he looked up with a quick glance of surprise.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Nipper gleefully, as he peeled the mask from his face and allowed his cloak to fall to the floor. "We got them beautifully, colonel! No trouble whatever—not even a shot!"

Colonel Millbank and Chief Warder Hulton now followed Nipper's example, and reappeared from beneath their cloaks and masks. Sutcliffe and Thornton watched them with expressions which can scarcely be described, but which can easily be imagined.

"So it's you who I've got to thank for this, eh, Nipper?" said Jim the Penman, with a baleful look in his eyes. "By Jingo! I might have known that Lee would keep a few trumps up his sleeve!"

Nipper nodded.

"Yes; that's quite a little habit with the gov'nor!" he replied. "He knows you of old, Jim, and he was considerably suspicious of your hanky-panky tricks regarding that 'Home Secretary' business. He suspected that there was more in it than appeared on the surface, and so he placed me on guard outside the prison!"

Jim snorted disgustedly.

"And you, of course, travelled here at the back of my motor-car?" he suggested.

"Naturally!" agreed Nipper. "I also heard your neat little scheme to turn this house into a miniature Portmoor, and when I got inside I made a bee-line for the lower regions!"

There was no doubt that both Sutcliffe and Thornton had received a very rude shock owing to Nipper's intervention, and they said very little. Jim the Penman, in spite of everything, had failed, and he knew that this time he would not be able to make his escape.

The governor and Hulton lost no time in exchanging their horrible prison garb for their own garments, and when they had

done so, the two prisoners were carried out to the motor-car and placed within.

Then, with Nipper at the wheel, they commenced the return journey to Portmoor. Nelson Lee's astute assistant had scored a great personal triumph, and had won his battle against Jim the Penman.

CHAPTER V.

THE RETURN—AND AFTER.



NELSON LEE paced up and down Colonel Millbank's office with a worried frown on his brow.

For hours both he and Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard had been doing their utmost to pick up some of Sutcliffe's movements, but without success. Since Jim had disappeared in his motor-car with the two kidnapped prison officials he seemed to have vanished from the face of the earth, so far as traces were concerned.

The great convict prison was situated in a lonely corner of Devonshire, and it was not surprising that Sutcliffe's car had not been seen by any of the local residents. Even if it had been seen, there was nothing about it to cause suspicion, and it had been quite a simple matter for Jim to get clean away.

Now it was nearly midnight, and no news whatever had been heard of the missing criminals.

The chief inspector was nearly frantic with consternation and rage. He had fondly imagined himself returning to London in triumph with the master forger in his charge—and all he had got was this bitter disappointment.

But Nelson Lee did not lose hope.

"Nipper will bring us news of Jim, Lennard," he declared confidently. "I would back that youngster against a thousand. Why is he absent for so long a time—unless he is trailing Sutcliffe very closely? It is obvious that Nipper must have—Upon my soul! Do you hear that, Lennard? A car outside!"

With one accord Nelson Lee and the chief inspector dashed out into the front of the governor's house, and they were just in time to see Nipper stopping Jim's car at the gate. The lad saw his master, and let out a cheery hail.

"Hallo, guv'nor!" he called. "Everything's O.K! We've got Sutcliffe and Thornton trussed up in the car—"

"What!" yelled Lennard, with a note of joy in his voice. "You've got Jim the Penman, Nipper? Great guns! You deserve the V.C. for this, to say nothing of the D.S.O.! How on earth did you manage it?"

Nipper merely grinned, and stood modestly on one side while the two prisoners were hauled out of the car. Their ankle bonds were untied, and then they were escorted into the governor's office.

Colonel Millbank, beaming with delight, explained the enormously important part which Nipper had played, and the lad was showered with congratulations. Nelson Lee was particularly lavish in his praise, and Nipper flushed with genuine pleasure. He always felt proud if the famous detective acted in this manner.

"Yes, Nipper has done wonders," agreed the chief inspector. "Thanks to him, Sutcliffe, you will soon be occupying your old cell in this prison—for you needn't hope to make your escape this time! You're fairly cornered, and I'll take good care that you don't slip away again!"

Jim the Penman grinned, and then, with a sudden, swift movement, he made a dart at Colonel Millbank's pocket. In a trice he had secured the revolver which he had seen the governor place there, and he whipped it out and levelled it.

"Don't be too sure of that, Lennard!" he said coolly. "As you see, I am again master of the situation—within three seconds of your boast! Hands up, all of you! And I'll trouble you, Lennard, to remove this rope from my wrists! It's deucedly uncomfortable!"

Nelson Lee pursed his lips. This sort of thing was getting unbearable, and the detective determined to end it at once. With a spring a trifle quicker than Jim's had been, Lee hurled himself across the room, and the next second he had snatched the revolver from Sutcliffe's grasp. So the forger's triumph was short-lived, after all.

Very shortly afterwards Jim the Penman and his confederate were taken off to London—this time with Nelson Lee, Nipper, and the chief inspector guarding them. They would see that he did not make another attempt to escape.

And so Sutcliffe's brief career of revenge came to an end. In spite of his efforts, he had achieved very little since his escape from Portmoor; and there was no doubt that he would very shortly return to the convict prison, as Lennard had foretold.

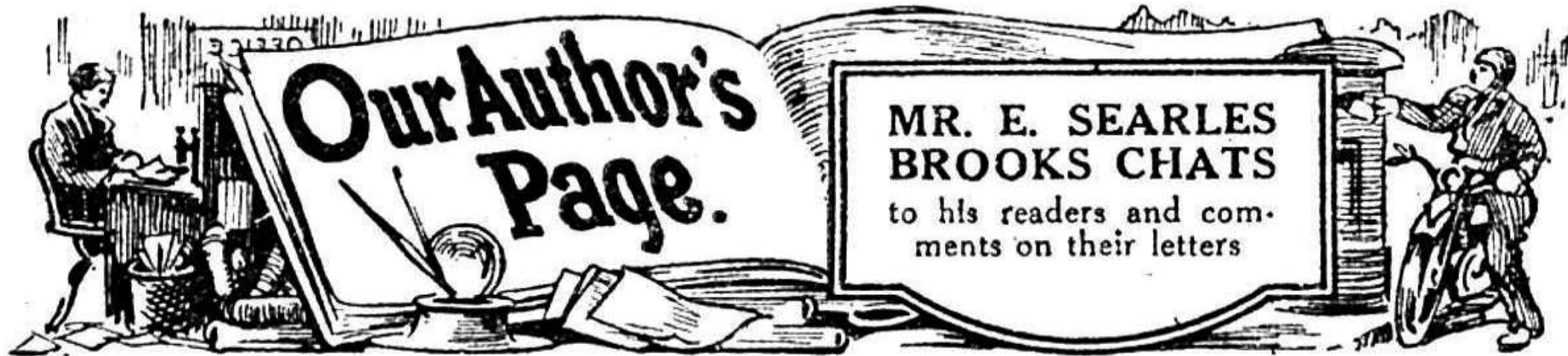
When his sentence was completed he would undoubtedly become a dangerous menace to Nelson Lee and Nipper—but he would find them prepared.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!

"The Hollowdene Manor Mystery!"

A Brilliant Complete
Detective Story of
**NELSON LEE and
NIPPER.**



(NOTE.—If any readers care to write to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon any remarks that are likely to interest the majority. If you have any grumbles—make them to me. If you have any suggestions—send them along! Remember, my aim is to please as many of you as I possibly can. All letters should be addressed to me personally, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, the Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. —E.S.B.).

The following readers have sent me some very nice letters: S. G. Lovesey (Leicester), Charles Price (Leeds), A Yankee Admirer (Broadstairs), A. D. C. (Sutton Coldfield), Stanley Lowe (Cheltenham), An Interested Reader (Southwark), S. Ward (Bluntisham), Cissie (E.C.1), John Rodgers Junr. (Oldham), A. A. Jacob (Winchester), L. Burgess (Titchfield), Frederick Mears (Great Wyrley), Free Stater (Limerick), Robert Carey (Swanley), Arthur Chambers (Swanley), David Lewis (Llanelli), An Olhamer (Oldham), Ben (Plymouth), R. Clifford (Willenhall), A Girl Friend (Harrow), Interested (Poplar), Wilfred A. Ratcliffe (West Hendon), Devoted Reader (London, N.W.), J. Robert Coulter (Leeds), A. Thomas (Walworth), Wm. W. Marshall (Willesden), A Loyal Reader (St. Ives), G. C. Boxall (Chatham).

Phew! That's a nice little list, isn't it? If I attempted to reply to you individually I should require half the entire issue! And I've got some more letters on my desk, too! But I daren't open these just yet—I must leave them for attention next week.

Well, anyhow, there's not much to deal with in this week's page. I've already gathered that most of you would like the school stories longer—but, as I mentioned last week, we can't make any changes just yet. As for the St. Frank's League, I seem to have put my finger on an electric button. There hasn't been a single note of dissent. If I'm to judge by your letters, a League would be an instantaneous success.

Unfortunately, it can't be started just yet. Let's wait till after Christmas, at least. There's a tremendous lot of work entailed in getting such a Club started

But I'll tell you what. If this League becomes a reality—and there's no real reason why it shouldn't—we shall naturally want a small army of old and loyal readers to help—as a kind of labour of love, if you understand what I mean. I'll make it a bit plainer. Once this League is fairly going, we shall probably want a kind of Chief Officer for each district—one of you fellows who don't mind a bit of work, and who can write well. Girls, of course, will be just as eligible.

If any of you are willing to accept the appointment of Chief Organising Officer in your district, it wouldn't do any harm if you sent along your name and address. Then I could give it to the Editor, and he could file it away for possible use when the time comes. This would save heaps of delay later on. But I don't want any of you to offer your services unless you are really enthusiastic, and perfectly willing to throw yourselves heart and soul into the League movement.

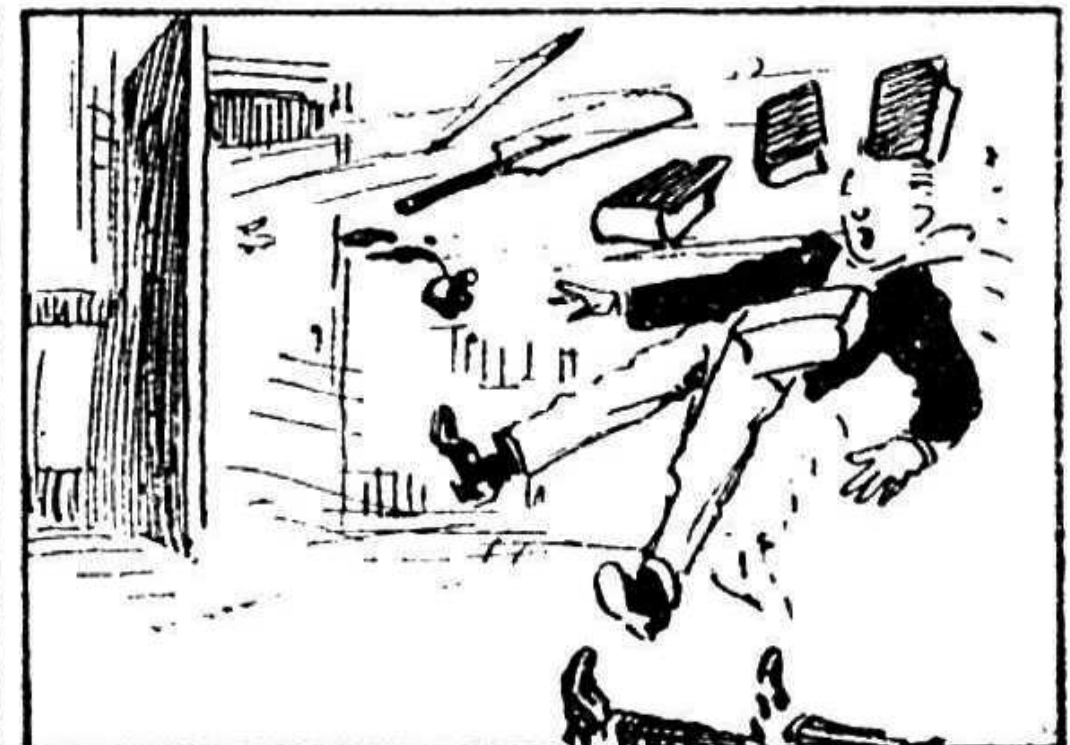
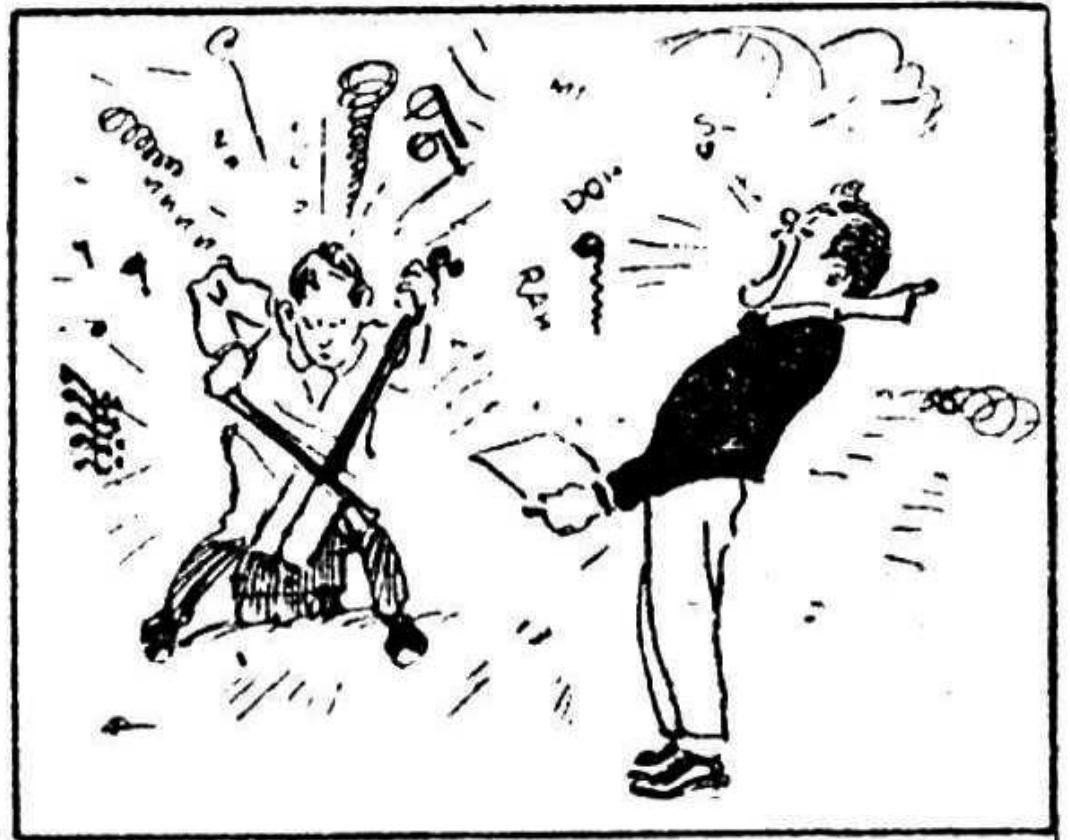
Naturally, there'll be an extra special Badge issued for such Officers, and I dare say a few other advantages, too. So if any old readers care to send their names and addresses, I shall be awfully delighted. Mind you, I don't promise anything. The League may become a reality, and it may not—but there's no harm in being prepared. The deciding factor might even be the number of readers who offer their services.

Of course, there's nothing to be really afraid of. There'll be no hard work required from anybody—in fact, I've got an idea that you'll look upon the task as a pleasure. But the more volunteers we get, the better. Think it over, and see what you can do.

One of the main objects of the League is to enable readers to get into closer touch with each other and with myself, the Editor, and the staff of Your Paper. It is only fair that you should have some voice in the running of your favourite weekly, and to help to make it one of the greatest successes in boys' papers of this generation. To do this, chums, we must all pull together and make the League a reality, so that we can interchange ideas more quickly and less expensively than at present.

ADVENTURES OF THE HANDFORTH BROTHERS

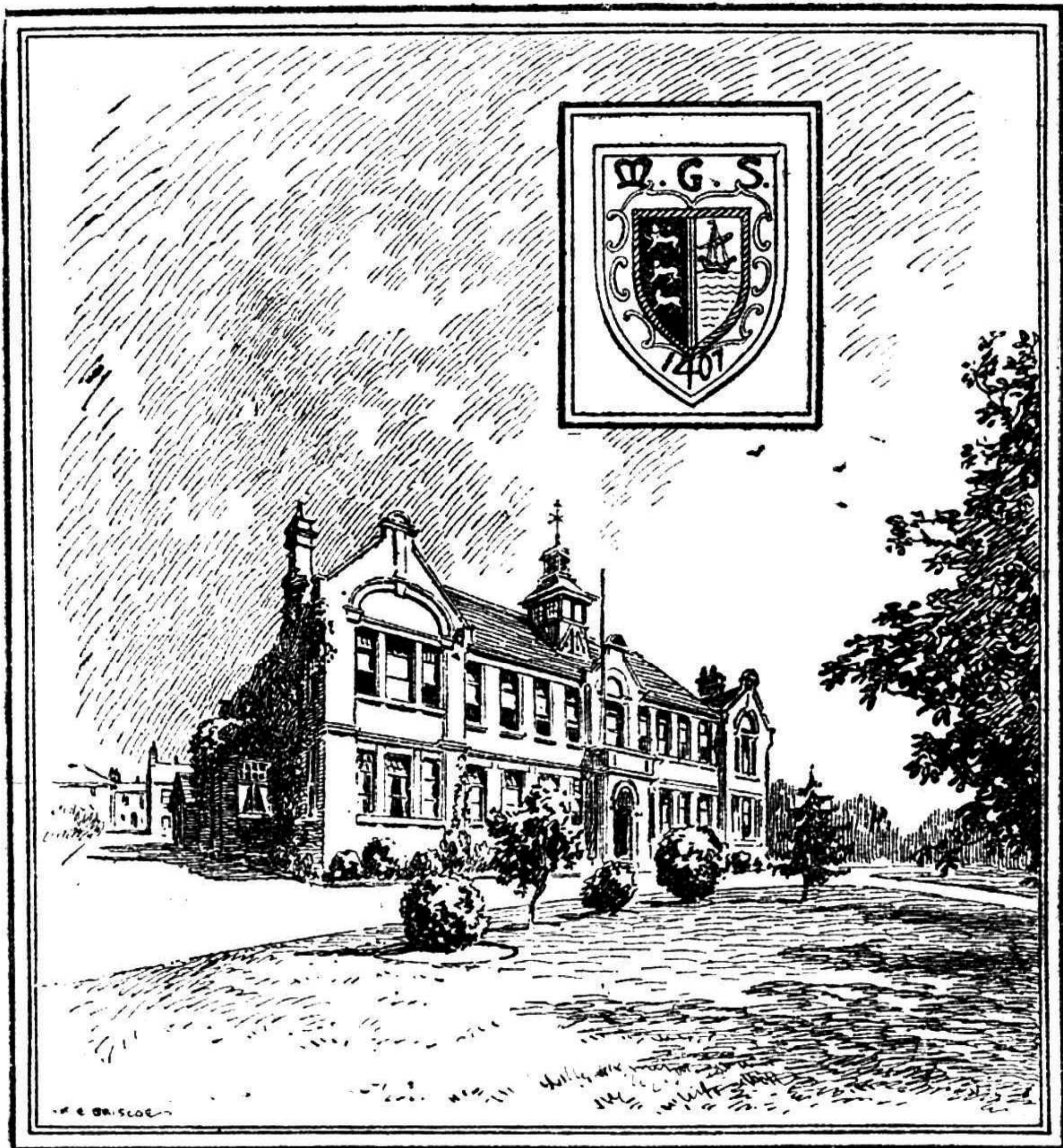
HANDY AS A WARBLER!



OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

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

No. 56.—MALDON GRAMMAR SCHOOL.



Maldon Grammar School was founded in 1407. In 1608 Ralph Breder gave £300 towards the upkeep of the school, and Dr. Plume gave the rents of two houses in the High Street for the same purpose.

There are at present about 260 scholars at the school, and these are composed of boys and girls. The school is divided into three houses—Breder, Plume, and Wentworth.

The present building was erected in 1907, and includes science laboratories, workshop, library, and gymnasium.

Among the boys, soccer, cricket, tennis, cross-country running, and jumping are the

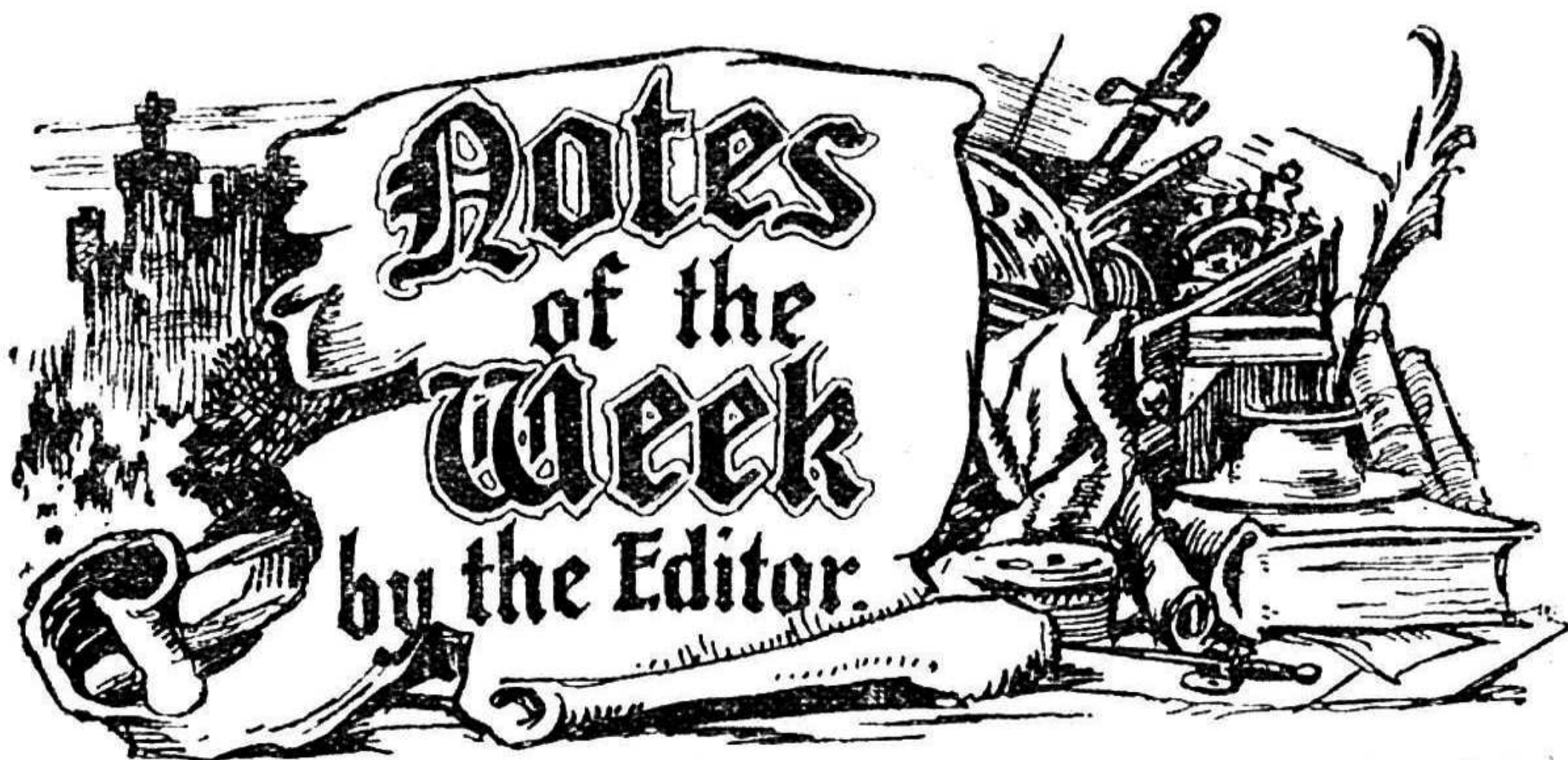
chief sports followed, while the girls indulge in tennis, hockey, running, and jumping.

Published at the end of each term is "The Maldonian," an excellently produced school magazine, and a credit to all concerned.

The house colours are Breder: Yellow; Plume: Royal Blue; Wentworth: Scarlet.

The school colours are Navy Blue and Orange-yellow.

I am indebted to a reader for the above, and I am accordingly sending him the original drawing of his school after it has been reproduced.



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

My dear Chums,

So that old villain, Captain Starkey, has been active again in the neighbourhood of Caistowe. Who would have thought that the Trotwood Twins could have brought this hardened rascal to justice? Gun-running, too! Cornelius is not quite such a fool as he would appear. His deafness on this occasion came in useful. But it is to Nicodemus we must give the credit for fooling Captain Starkey. He quickly grasped the situation, and his impersonation of his deaf brother was a clever piece of acting.

IN QUEST OF GOLD!

This brilliant new serial, the opening instalment of which appears this week, should appeal strongly to that great mass of struggling humanity to whom this yellow precious metal means so much. The author, Edward Oswald Handforth, has had stuff published in this paper before. A lot of rot, most of it, I will admit, but amusing withal. Notice in Chapter I how our gifted contributor in a few words draws us a wonderful picture of the snow-covered wastes of Canada, over which his heroes trudge in search of their fortunes. At this time of the year one likes to read about snow. Like gold, we see so little of it that it awakens in us a spirit of romance. That is what novelists call getting atmosphere into their stories. Handy seems to be exceptionally good at getting atmosphere into his yarns. In fact, I should really warn my chums to wear smoked glasses while reading this first instalment, or they may run imminent risk of getting snow-blindness. Undoubtedly, Claude Courage and Bob Brave are heroes after the author's own heart. Perils, hardships, and adventures are to them as food and

drink are to ordinary mortals. But if these first chapters throb with excitement, they are nothing to be compared with what is to follow.

PICTURE FRAMES AND HOW TO MAKE THEM.

Dick Goodwin would be glad to hear from any readers who have succeeded in making some of the articles described in his series of HOW TO DO IT. He says that he is also willing to explain anything which is not quite clear to the reader. Letters should be addressed c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Next week, Goodwin will show you how to make a few simple and attractive picture frames. Most of you, my chums, have pictures that you would like to frame, and would willingly do so, but for the cost. Goodwin will tell you how it can be done quite cheaply. In addition to showing how you can inexpensively ornament the walls of your study with neatly framed pictures, Goodwin has another reason for choosing this subject for his article next week. It is because the work provides excellent practice in the use of the hand-saw and nailing. Hints on the correct way of sawing wood and of hammering in nails will be contained in this article. Later on, Goodwin will let you into the secret of planing, which is the next thing to learn in carpentry.

NEXT SATURDAY'S BIG FOOTER MATCH.

I hear that the River House team, whom we are to meet on Saturday, are putting into the field an exceptionally strong eleven. They seem to be fairly confident of giving us a licking, too. We are not going to allow that, of course, but, all the same, I fancy it will mean an exciting tussle.

Your sincere chum,
REGGIE PITT.

OUR PORTRAIT GALLERY. And WHO'S WHO.

No. 41.—JERRY DODD.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Loose-limbed, free-and-easy figure. Wiry and strong. Not exactly handsome, but decidedly attractive. Twinkling eyes, and cheerful, sun-burnt countenance. A typical Colonial. Eyes, blue. Hair, dark brown. Height, 5 ft. 2 ins. Weight, 8 st. Birthday, May 25th.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS:

Good-natured and breezy, with a cheerful smile and a happy word for everybody. Devoted to his pet pony, Bud, and passionately fond of all animals. Brilliantly clever at trick-riding. Generous and lovable—a true sportsman in every sense.

SPORTS & RECREATIONS:

A genius at cricket, being equally clever at batting and bowling. The most prominent member of the junior eleven. Only mildly interested in football. Hobbies: His pony, Bud, rope-throwing and all types of outdoor recreation.

JERRY DODD

No. 42.—EDWIN MUNROE.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Thin, tall and bony. Inclined to be somewhat knock-kneed and slouchy. Possesses a long face, with outstanding ears, which he can wriggle at will. Pointed nose and wide mouth. Eyes, hazel. Hair, chestnut. Height, 5 ft. 3 ins. Weight, 7 st. 12 lb. Birthday, April 11th.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS:

A decent sort of chap generally, but is inclined to flare up quickly, and remain sulky for a protracted period. Careless with his pocket-money, and a notorious slacker in class. Is renowned in the Modern Fourth for blotting his work.

SPORTS & RECREATIONS:

A keen enthusiast at sports, but never seems to get anywhere. Has taken several prizes, however, for the high jump, and has few equals at that sport. Hobbies: Amateur bookbinding, stamp-collecting and carpentry.

EDWIN MUNROE

THE FOURTH At ST. FRANK'S.



No. 43.—AUGUSTUS HART.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Well set-up, strong and sturdy. Handsome features and smart in appearance. Eyes, grey. Hair, fair. Height, 5 ft. Weight, 8 st. 8 lb. Birthday, June 29th.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS:

Cheerful, jocular and witty. Always ready with a quick retort, and full of confidence. A good-natured junior, and one to be relied upon for staunch support in an emergency.

SPORTS & RECREATIONS:

An excellent footballer, and one of the champion swimmers of the Ancient House. Hobbies: Specimen hunting, experimenting in chemicals, and amateur engineering.



A. HART

No. 44.—PETER COBB.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Small and squat, with a cheeky, sunny countenance. Wears spectacles, which give him an owlish appearance when serious. Eyes, brown. Hair, auburn. Height, 4 ft. 10 ins. Weight, 7 st. 13 lb. Birthday, October 4th.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS:

Rather careless, and always thinking out practical jokes to play on his study-mates. Happy-go-lucky and generous. Habitually slacks in class, and is always writing impots.

SPORTS & RECREATIONS:

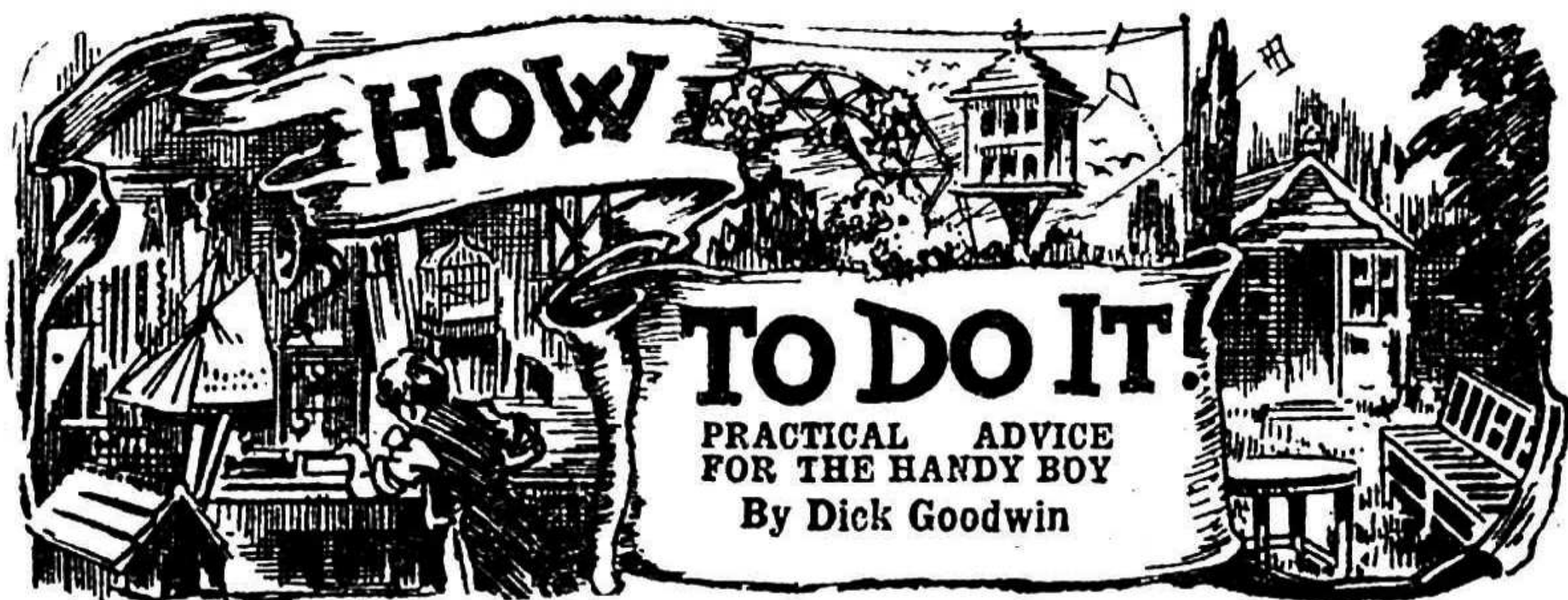
Cares little or nothing for sports. A bookworm, and clever at drawing rough sketches and caricatures.

NOTE.—The ages of Fourth Form boys vary between fourteen and sixteen, but for obvious reasons no more definite information on this point can be given.

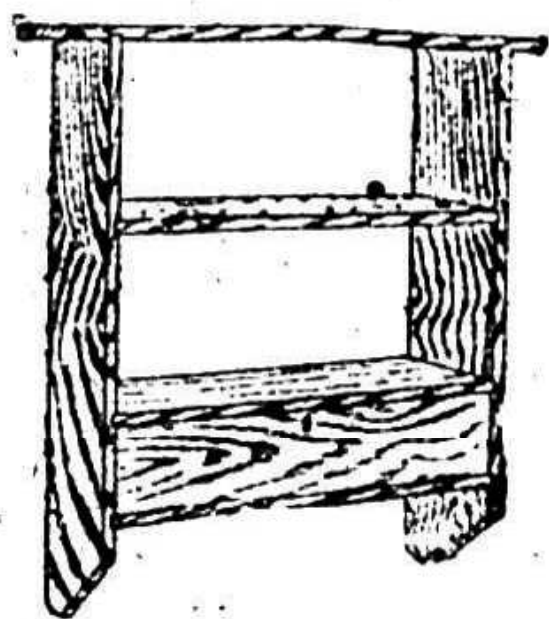
NEXT WEEK: Ulysses Spencer Adams, Julian Clifton, Duke of Somerton, Robert Simmons.



PETER COBB



AN EASILY MADE BOOKSHELF



length of 6 in. by $\frac{1}{2}$ in. floor-board; this is already planed quite smooth, and, although only yellow deal, it takes stain well and looks nice when finished. I have made drawings of the various parts in Fig 2, and have lettered them so that they are easily followed.

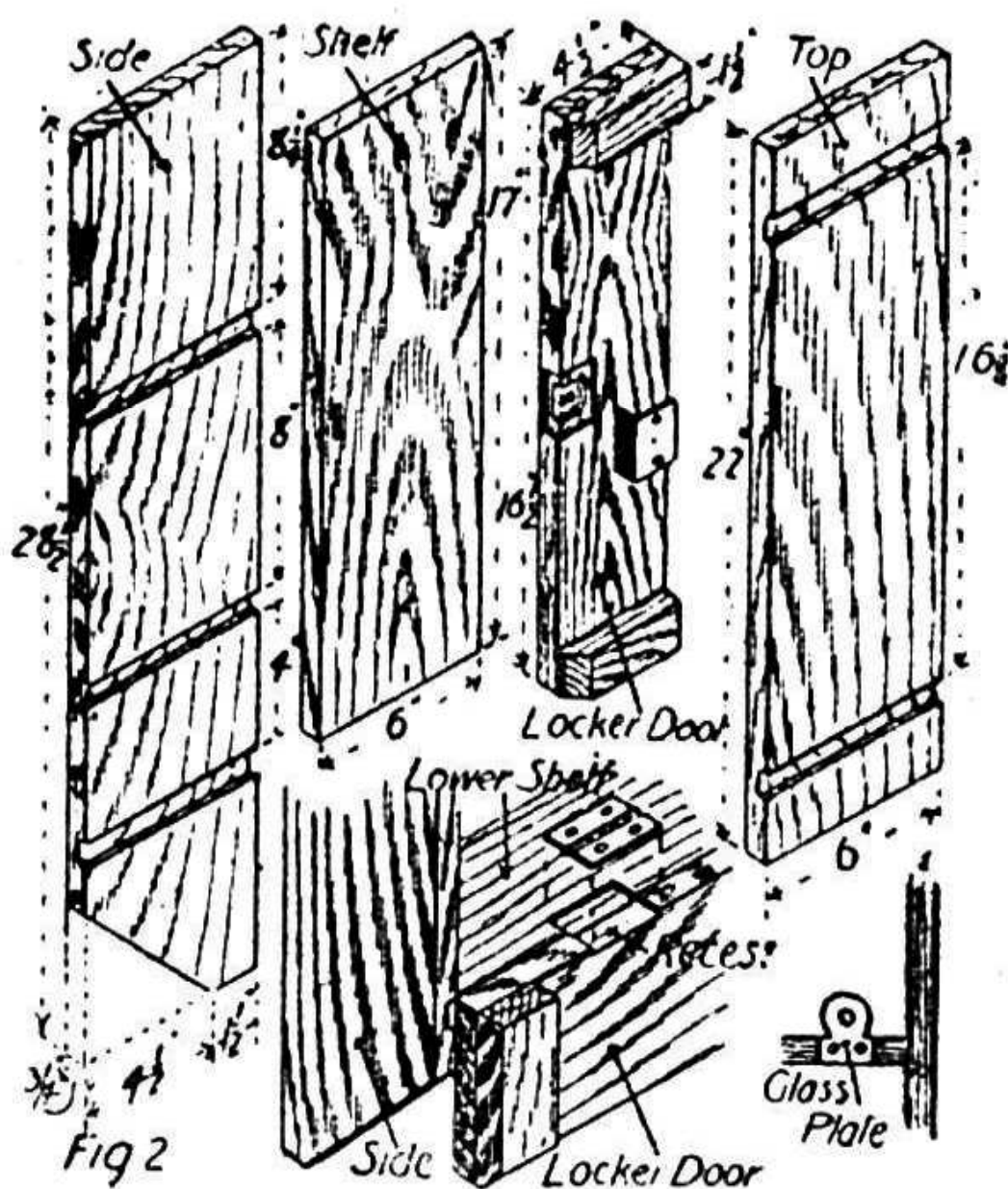
MAKING THE SIDE.

The two sides are cut to 28 $\frac{1}{2}$ ins. The best way to get them accurate is to use the try-square and a sharp knocket-knife blade for the lines, and then saw the wood on the waste side of the line, using the sawing board to rest the wood on. The next thing is to cut the three grooves in each piece, and to get the markings correct they should be placed edge to edge. The first groove is 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ ins. down from the top; this allows for the amount required to fit into the top. The width of the groove must be the same as the thickness of the shelves. A space of 8 ins. is marked below, then another groove, then 4 ins., and another groove, and this will leave about 6 ins. All the marks should be cut in deeply with the knife, and the depth of each groove marker with a gauge to $\frac{1}{4}$ in.

CUTTING THE GROOVES.

The grooves are now sawn down on the

waste side of the line with a tenon saw, and the waste cut out with a $\frac{1}{2}$ -in.-wide chisel; the best way is to make sloping cuts from each side until the gauge line is reached, and then to level it afterwards. The surface can be tested by the blade of the try-square. The bottom front corner of the sides is sawn off, and then cleaned with a wide chisel or smoothing plane. Mark off three shelves to 17 ins., and fit them in. Next cut the top to 22 ins., and mark out the two grooves with pencil, place the top against the sides to make sure the grooves are correctly spaced, and then cut the lines, saw and chisel out. The ends of the top piece are smoothed, and the whole of the pieces cleaned up with fine glass-paper.



THE LOCKER.

The locker door is sawn to about $4\frac{1}{2}$ ins. wide, and cut to the exact length of the opening, and planed on the edge to fit. The ends are stiffened with two 4 in. by $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $\frac{3}{4}$ in. pieces glued on, and the top corners cut off with a chisel. An ordinary cupboard lock is fitted—the keyhole can be made with a gimlet—and the position of the space for the lock marked; this is done when the door is in place, by inking the top

of the bolt, and pressing it against the shelf by turning the key. The hole can be made with a $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. chisel. The work is now glued up, using very hot and thin glue. The $1\frac{1}{2}$ -in. brass butt hinges are fitted as shown, and then four brass glass plates with screws obtained. These are screwed on, two on the first shelf from the top, and two on the bottom shelf. A good stain is made by adding a little Brunswick black to some turps and applying with a brush.

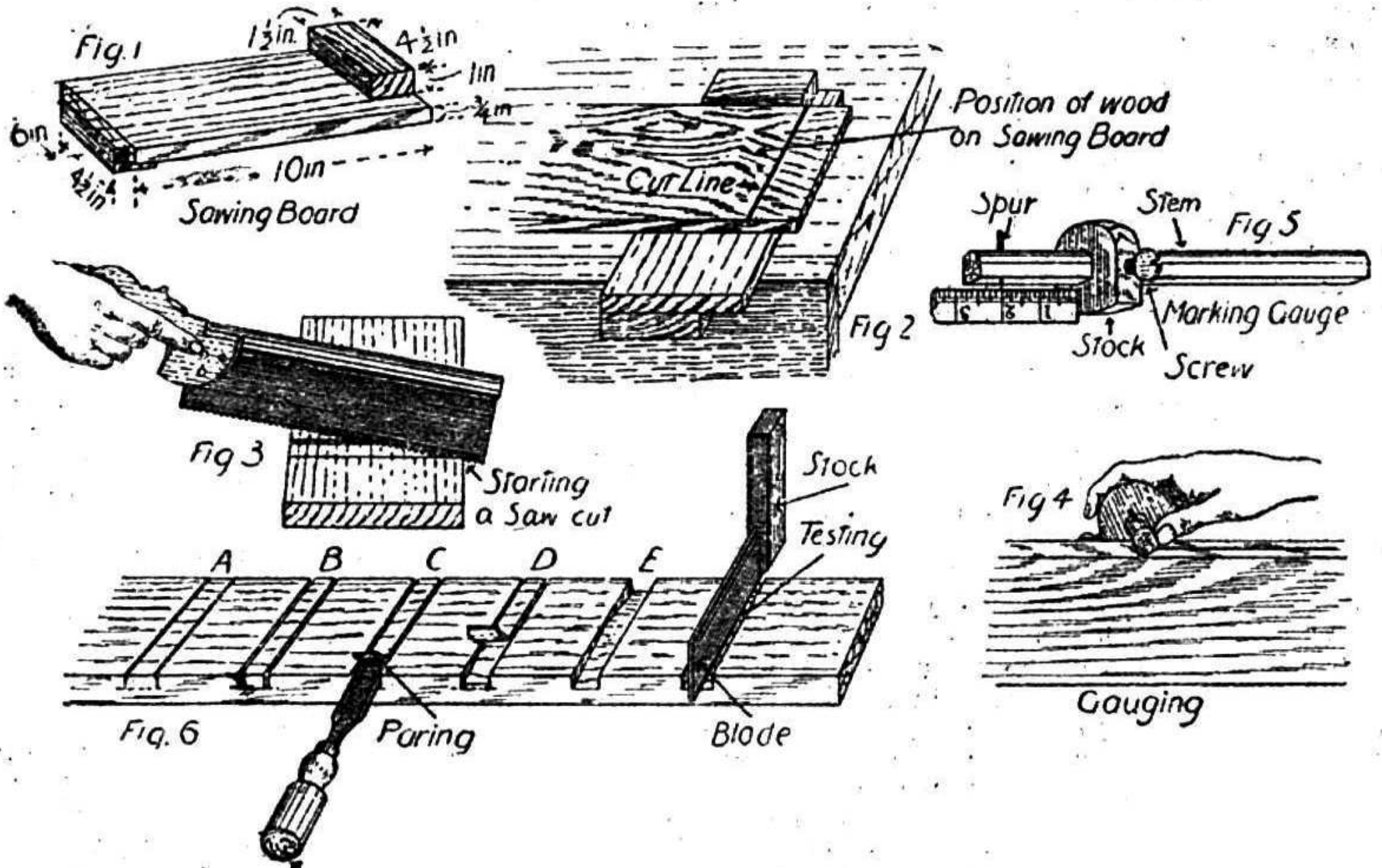
HOW TO USE THE TENON SAW, GAUGE AND CHISEL

One of the uses of the tenon saw is to cut through thin boards and strips of wood on the bench top, and to prevent damage and also to hold the wood firm, a sawing board or bench-hook is required. This is easily made, as I have shown at Fig. 1,

a short distance from the end of the top projection.

HOLDING THE TENON SAW.

The tenon saw should be held in the right hand with the first finger placed straight



from one piece of deal 10 in. by 6 in. by $\frac{3}{4}$ in., with two $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. by 2 in. by 1 in. pieces glued on opposite sides flush with the ends and the left-hand edge. The sawing board is placed on the bench as at Fig. 2, so that the left hand resting on the wood provides sufficient pressure to keep it firm while sawing. In use, the wood to be sawn is placed

along the handle, the other fingers clasped round the handle, and the thumb resting on the edge as shown at Fig. 3. This method of grasping the handle helps in making a straight cut with the blade. As a general rule, a saw should be allowed to do its work by its own weight, that is, it should not be forced, and, if it should be necessary

to use force, either the sharpness or the set of the teeth is at fault. In all saws the teeth are turned outwards alternately one side and the other; this is called the set, and the amount of the set depends on the particular kind of saw. The teeth are sharpened with a fine file, and the angle varies with the kind of saw, neither the setting nor the sharpening should be attempted without a considerable amount of experience. The best way is to take the saw to a cutler or ironmonger, and have it sharpened by an experienced man.

COMMENCING THE SAW CUT.

The commencement of a saw cut is often found difficult by beginners, but if the thumbnail is placed by the far side of the line to act as a guide, and the saw is tilted upwards, as at Fig. 3, and drawn backwards, a sufficiently deep cut will have been made in the corner of the wood to allow a forward cut to be made. When the cut has been started, the weight of the back will be sufficient to carry the saw through the wood; all that is necessary is to keep the cut on the side of the line and the blade upright. This will not be difficult if the eyes are directly over the saw.

USING THE GAUGE.

Cutting grooves requires careful gauging, sawing and paring with a suitable chisel. The method of holding the gauge is shown at Fig. 4, and, providing no attempt is made to dig the spur into the wood, and that the stock is pressed against the side of the wood, the work is simple. The best way to set the gauge is shown at Fig. 5. Six stages in cutting a groove is shown at Fig. 6. A represents the deeply cut knife line, B shows the two saw cuts made on the waste side of the lines, and C shows the first cut with the chisel.

USING THE CHISEL.

The wood can be placed in the bench vice or placed on the sawing board, and then the chisel placed about 1-16th in. down, and a long, wedge-shaped shaving removed. This is continued as at D, gradually working downwards, and not more than half-way across the wood. When the gauge line is reached, the wood should be turned round, and the operation repeated as at E. The final cutting is done with the chisel held horizontally, thin shavings being taken across until the gauge lines are reached. The method of testing by means of the blade of the try-square is shown in the next groove.

NEXT WEEK:
How to Make Picture-Frames.

TRAVEL TALES

By An Old Boy
Lord Dorrimore's
Weekly Trifle

No. 24.—AN EXCITING ADVENTURE WITH A BOA CONSTRICTOR.

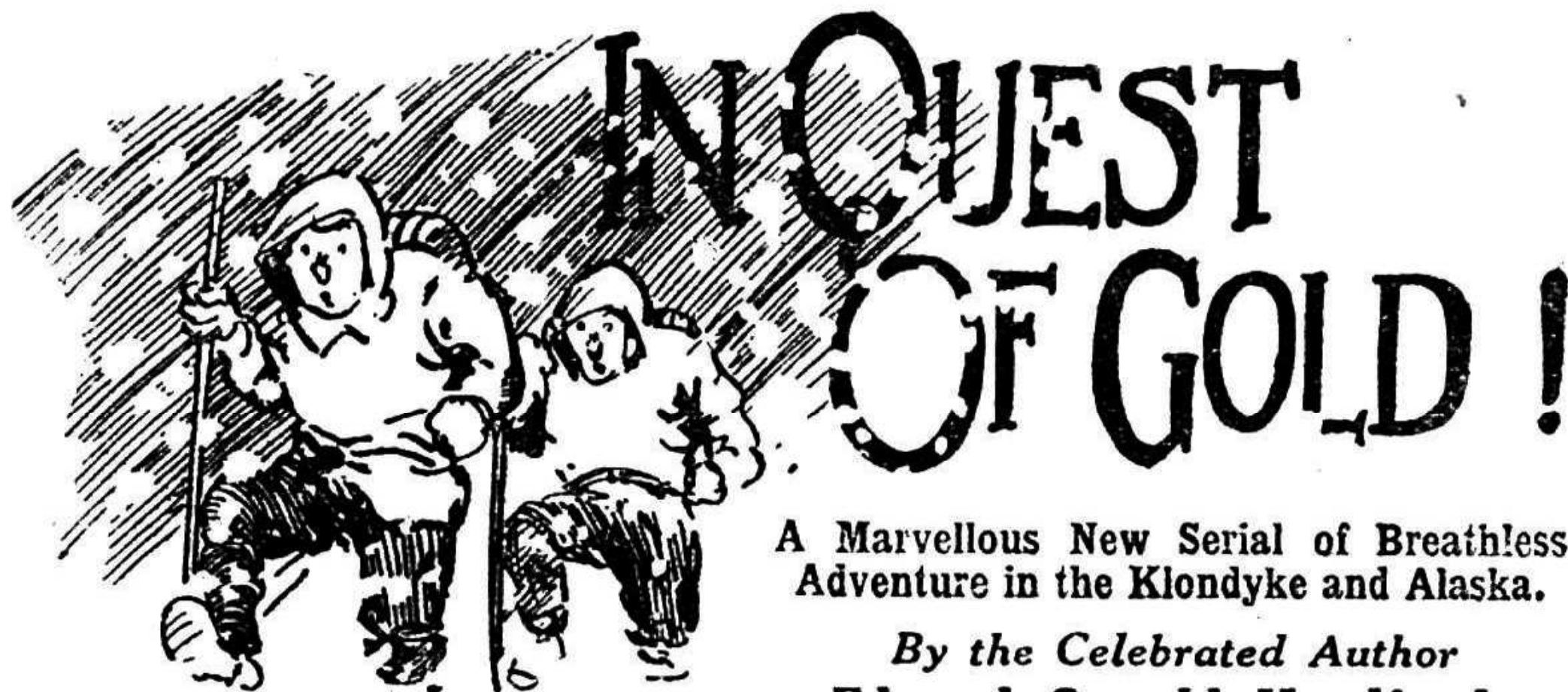
ALTHOUGH I am keen on hunting wild animals, I am not fond of keeping them as pets. Snakes I detest. Yet at Dakar, in French Senegal, I found myself the possessor, almost against my will, of a young boa constrictor, nine feet three inches long, and fifteen inches round one part of his body. I didn't care for the thing at all. But I thought the Zoo people would be glad to have it, and in the end I bought it. This would be about my twentieth gift to the Zoo.

I put the snake into an old tin box, and wired it up very securely, as I thought. Then I went to a party, and returned to my hotel at about one o'clock. I had a look into the boa's box before turning in, and to my horror he was not there. How he had squeezed his fifteen inches through the little hole that I found I could never understand. I hunted all round the hotel, but in vain.

Nothing occurred until the next night. Then, as I was dozing on the balcony after dinner, I was awakened by a piercing shriek—a woman's. Trying to locate the sound, I paused before an open window further along the balcony. I peered into the room, which was in darkness, and asked in French if anything was wrong. The answer was another blood-curdling shriek, and cries of "Help me! Help me!"

Rushing into the room, I stumbled against the bed. Feeling about, I touched a woman's head and arm, and then something cold and clammy. My boa! My cries soon brought help and lights. Then what a scene was revealed to us. The boa had wound his tail round the bed-rail—for unless they can lay hold of something pretty solid with their tails they can't constrict much—and then he had wound himself two or three times around the girl's arm, and finally got his head round her neck in a strangle-hold.

I tried to unfasten the tail and then to tear the coils from the arm, the angry snake hissing all the time like a steam engine. But I couldn't move them. Not until a French officer came to my aid could we overcome the brute and release the girl, who was unconscious. A doctor was fetched, but strange to say she took no serious harm, and soon recovered. I carried the angry boa back to his box, squirming and fighting, and I discovered how strong he was. A few weeks later he was deposited in the Zoo, with a black viper, a civet cat, a lynx, and a few other things which I had collected.



IN QUEST OF GOLD!

A Marvellous New Serial of Breathless Adventure in the Klondyke and Alaska.

By the Celebrated Author
Edward Oswald Handforth

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCING OUR HEROES.

THE snow came down in myriads of flakes.

Bob Brave and Claude Courage, two sturdy British lads, trudged onwards through the snow, knee-deep, with their packs bearing heavily upon their shoulders.

They were on the march through the endless snows to the gold-fields of the Klondike. For weeks they had been walking across Canada, and now they were within a week of their wonderful dreams. Alaska lay just ahead, and the goldfields were only a bit farther on.

Bob Brave was a fine, courageous youngster, and Claude Courage was a splendid, brave lad. In fact, a couple of better heroes couldn't be found anywhere. They were simply full of grit from head to foot.

The trail was difficult. Snow lay everywhere, and tons more of it was coming down in whacking great flakes that absolutely weighed the weary travellers over with the force of it.

The gold fields

couldn't be seen yet—they lay beyond the mountains, and they were all covered with whiteness. Claude Courage and Bob Brave were passing through a deep ravine, where the rocky crags frowned down with sinister aspect. It was one of the wild places of the earth, where grizzly bears roamed, and where wolves were liable to spring out at a chap without a minute's warning.

And the snow came down in myriads of flakes.



"Gee whizz!" snarled a coarse voice. "Say, kid—does hand over those gosh-darned grub stakes, or we'll riddle you with lead!"

Then, suddenly, as the snow was still falling, two burly forms loomed up out of the icy smother. Our heroes uttered gasps of dismay, and stood back to back, or, to be exact, pack to pack.

"Gee whiz!" snarled a coarse voice. "Say, kiddies, hand over those gosh-darned grub stakes, or we'll riddle you with lead!"

The two fearless youngsters were absolutely scared. Nothing on earth could frighten them, but these crooks put the wind up them properly. For they were Six-Chamber Sid and Cross-Eyed Carl, the two worst gunmen of the Far North.

CHAPTER II.

THE CLAIM AT ROARING CREEK.

IN a trice our brave heroes were grabbed and robbed. Then they were sent hurtling down the ravine to what seemed certain death. Six-Chamber Sid and Cross-Eyed Carl gave vent to horrible laughs of mirth as they made off with the spoils.

And the snow came down in myriads of flakes.

Sliding, skidding, slithering, Bob Brave and Claude Courage reached the bottom of the snow-filled pass. And by dint of bulldog grit, they fought their way out of the impassable snowdrift.

"Never fear!" cried Bob Brave valiantly. "We've got no food left, Claude, but we'll win through to Dawson City!"

"Ay, onward!" quoth Claude Courage, his voice ringing on the crisp, frosty air, and echoing from crag to crag. "We'll trudge on until we get to the Klondike. And one day, Bob, we'll make those rotters pay for their dirty work! One day we'll give them a licking!"

And with their hearts full of pluck, but with their tummies empty, the two sturdy boys trudged on through the snow. They faced perils too awful to mention. In fact, these perils were so stark and dreadful that no human beings could possibly live through them.

But Claude Courage and Bob Brave were no ordinary youngsters. By sheer grit they lived out the next ten days. Without a morsel of food, and without a drop of anything to drink, they kept on the march. Never once did they stop. For ten days and nights they went on, and they didn't even trouble about getting any sleep.

And at last they marched into Dawson City, triumphant.

"At last!" cried Bob Brave, his fine young voice sounding like a clarion on the frosty air. "Here we are, in the land of gold! All we have to do now is to stake our claim!"

But two lurking figures came out from behind a shack. They were Six-Chamber Sid and Cross-Eyed Carl. Once again our heroes were face to face with their deadly enemies!

CHAPTER III.

THE CLAIM JUMPERS.

CROSS-EYED CARL leered ferociously. "Curse the brats!" he snarled.

"They've got here in spite of us! But all the better—we'll wait until they stake out a claim, and then we'll jump the darned thing! How's that, bo'?"

"Gee, it's sure slick!" said Six-Chamber Sid. "Not 'arf!"

They lurched into a saloon and drank two bottles of rye whisky at a gulp. And Bob Brave and Claude Courage knew nothing whatever of the peril which loomed over them so menacingly.

Our heroes left Dawson City, refreshed and ready for further great deeds. They staked out a claim on the banks of Roaring Creek. And in next to no time they built a little wooden shack.

"Now for the gold!" exclaimed Bob Brave, with shining eyes.

They soon commenced digging, and on the second day Claude Courage gave a yell of triumph and held up a great nugget as big as a brick. The gold glittered and shone in the rays of the northern sun, and Bob Brave staggered back in stupefied amazement.

"Great pip!" he gasped. "Our fortunes are made!"

"The whole hillside is nothing else but gold!" cried Claude, in a great voice. "We have succeeded beyond our wildest dreams, Bob!"

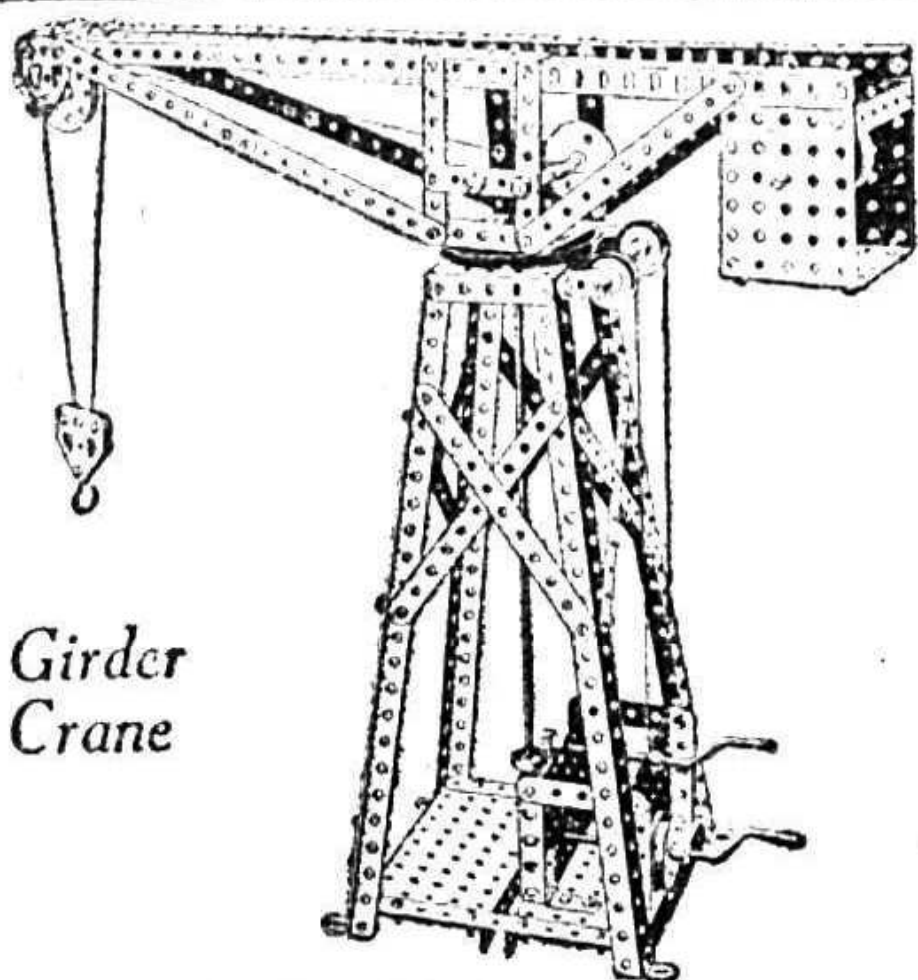
All that day they worked as hard as the dickens, digging out the gold in heaps. The ground round the shack shone yellow with it. And little did our heroes realise that their adventures were only just beginning!

For now, just at their hour of triumph, two villainous forms appeared round a boulder on the barren hillside. They came out from the mighty fir-trees—grim and sinister.

Six-Chamber Sid and Cross-Eyed Carl had come to jump the claim!

(Well, what do you think of that? I've re-written this yarn entirely, and next week the second instalment will positively appear. You were spoofed last time, but this serial is positively booked for lengthy publication now! Don't fail to read next week's heart-throbbing instalment.—AUTHOR.)

**GRAND SPECIAL
CHRISTMAS NUMBER
OF THE MAG.
COMING SHORTLY!**



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Crane

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MECCANO

ENGINEERING FOR BOYS



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26 Weekly

buys a No. 300A Mead Gramophone with giant horn, loud sound-box, massive oak case and 40 tunes. Carriage paid. 10 Days' Trial. 300 model 37/6 cash to record buyers. Table Grands and Cabinet models at **WHOLE SALE** Prices. Write for Lists.

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110 DIFF. STAMPS FREE, inc. Set Brazil, Cuba, Good Brit. Cols., etc. Ask for Blue Label Appros. No 4 & send post.—
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FREE FUN! Ventriloquists' Instruments given Free to all sending 7d. (P.O.) for Sample Trick and List of Tricks, Novelties, etc.—P. FEARING, Travancore, Seaford Rd., Colwyn Bay.

Stop Stammering! Cure yourself as I did. Particulars **FREE**.—**FRANK B. HUGHES**, 7, Southampton Row, London, W.C.1.

"Gentleman Jim"

Here's a new pal for you—a jockey who rides "over-the-sticks." You'll like Jim Linton. He's a cheery sort with any amount of "go" in him.

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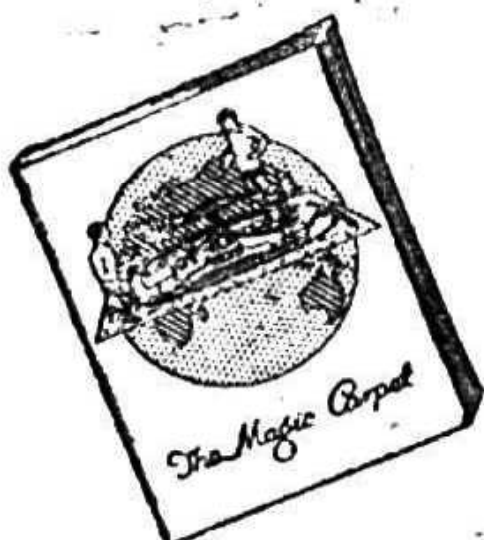
Boys' Realm

(Starts in this Wednesday's issue)

HORNBY CLOCK WORK TRAINS

THE TRAIN WITH THE GUARANTEE.

Modelled on the latest type British locomotive and carriages, and beautifully enamelled in colours, the Hornby train is the finest clockwork train made. A most valuable feature of the Hornby loco. is that all the parts are standardised, and any lost or damaged part may be replaced with a new one. A Hornby Train lasts for ever!



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This is a splendid new book that tells all about Hornby Trains and all the other Meccano Products. A copy will be sent post free to those boys who show this advertisement to three chums. Send us their names and addresses with your own. Address your letter to Dept. S.

Hornby Train Week.

11-18 December.

We have arranged for special displays of complete Miniature Railway systems to be made throughout the country during this eventful week. Ask to see the Hornby Train Display at your shop.

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This handsome, full-sized Gent.'s Lever Watch sent upon receipt of 6d. After approval send 1/- more, the balance is then payable by 6 monthly instalments of 2/- each. Guaranteed 5 years. Chain offered Free with every Watch. Wrist Watches, etc., on same terms. Cash returned if dissatisfied. Send 1/- now to **Simpson's, Ltd.**, (Dept. 122), 94, Queen's Road, Brighton, Sussex.

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MY XMAS BOX TO YOU. An UNIQUE OUTFIT, containing the following useful accessories will be sent ABSOLUTELY FREE:—Pocket Folder for Duplicates, Perforation Gauge, Stamp Mounts, Transparent Envelopes, Giant Packet of 50 Stamps and the Smallest Stamp in the World. Send a postcard asking to see my Special Xmas Bargain Approvals.—Victor Bancroft, Matlock, Eng.

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