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THE EDITOR.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER 1.

THE AWAKENING.

CLANG-CLANG!

Tommy Watson moved drowsily in his sleep, and for some unaccountable reason his usually comfortable bed seemed to be hard and lumpy. When he moved, his limbs were stiff and aching.

And the rising-bell had a different kind of note. Tommy Watson vaguely wondered why. He thought about rousing himself a bit, and having a word with Sir Montie Tregellis-West, who occupied the next bed.

Then he had an idea that he was imagining things. He opened his eyes, and everything was pitchy-dark. Why was the rising-bell going at such an unearthly hour? And why was its note different?

As far as Tommy Watson could make out, the Fourth Form dormitory in the Ancient House at St. Frank's was a different shape to the usual. There was a window in the wrong place. Instead of being exactly opposite to Tommy's bed, it was over to his left. He could distinctly see a greyish

patch, which distinguished the window from the deeper blackness.

"Oh, it's queer how rummy things seem when a chap's still half-asleep!" he mumbled, turning over. "And why does that bell— Ooooooh! What the dickens—"

A sharp, agonising pain shot through his left shoulder as he turned on to it. It was as though he had bruised it very badly. And the bed seemed simply horrible.

He drowsily decided that he would have a word with Mrs Poulter, the House matron. And he was puzzled, too, about the sheets. They seemed so rough and uncomfortable—

"Now, then—up you get! No slacking!"

The voice cut through the gloom, clear and distinct, and Watson roused himself more thoroughly. That voice struck a familiar chord somewhere. He had heard it before, but he couldn't remember where.

It wasn't Morrow, or Fenton, or—

Swish! The bedclothes were whisked away from his reclining form, and a chill, icy draught struck him. He sat up, aching in every limb, and only just beginning to gather his wits about him.

"Come on—six o'clock!" said that unpleasant voice. "Rouse up!"

"Six o'clock!" muttered Watson. "What's the idea? There's an hour and a half before rising-bell! I say, Montie—"

"You're still half-asleep, you young rat!" interrupted the voice. "I'll give you just ten seconds to start dressing."

Watson opened his eyes fully, the sleep finally driven out of them. And he received a tremendous shock. He was sitting on the edge of a rough hard bed. A big, burly youth of about sixteen was standing over him—a youth who was attired in blue overalls.

A light had been brought now—a stable-lantern, by the look of it. And Watson could see all sorts of figures dressing in the shivering air. They weren't Fourth-Formers at all! They were queer, undersized-looking boys of all types.

Some were knock-kneed, others had misshapen features or crooked limbs. A few were well-proportioned, decent-looking juniors. But all dressed feverishly, and without a word.

And the room wasn't the Fourth Form dormitory at all!

It was a long, barren apartment with bare boards and rough, stained walls. The ceiling was black, and in many places the plaster had fallen. The apartment had not been repaired or re-decorated for ages.

"Well, I'm blessed!" muttered Watson dully.

Remembrance came to him now—not gradually, or by slow degrees—but in a flood. And a sudden fierce apprehension took possession of him. Full of ordinary pluck and dogged determination, Tommy Watson nevertheless shrank back as he realised his true position.

He wasn't at St. Frank's at all!

He was at Moat Hollow—the strange, forbidding old house at the corner of Edgemoor Lane, just on the outskirts of Bellton! It was the old place which had formerly been known as the River House School—and which had remained empty and desolate for months and months on end.

Everything came back to Watson now. His father's voluntary financial ruin—for Sir Vivian Watson had handed over his entire fortune to meet the liabilities of a bogus company he had unwittingly put his name to.

Watson remembered staying at home while all of his chums had returned to St. Frank's. His father had been unable to afford the high fees at St. Frank's. So Watson had come to this new cheap school in the district so that he could be near his former friends.

It had been his own choice. Sir Vivian had brought Tommy down personally, and, together, they had been favourably impressed by Mr. Grimesby Creepe and his school—which, according to his own statement, was more like a quiet country mansion, where

the boys were treated as members of the family.

And after Sir Vivian's departure the shock had come!

Watson had difficulty in remembering everything. But he knew that both he and his father had been criminally deceived. A surge of indignation began to well up within him as the thoughts took shape.

"Going to sit there all day?" demanded a harsh voice.

Watson looked up, and saw the burly youth. He recognised him now. He was Kirby, one of the school monitors. And Watson instinctively clenched his fists and his eyes gleamed. One of his last recollections was of knocking Kirby down.

He could see the mark on the fellow's chin even now, and a certain satisfaction went through him.

"All right—I'll dress," he said grimly.

He had resolved to obey his harsh jailers—for they were little better. Hitherto he had defied them, with sorry results. He would try the waiting game, and see what would result.

CHAPTER II.

BEGINNING THE DAY.



MR. GRIMESBY CREEPE entered the dormitory with a sharp step.

"Now then, Kirby—now then, Tarkington—now then, Fryer!" he said briskly.

"Get these young brats about their business! You're late! What's the good of me giving orders, I'd like to know?"

"They're just ready, sir," said Kirby hastily.

"And about time, too!" snapped Mr. Creepe. "Ha! That's one of the new boys, is it? The young demon we had such trouble with last night? Give him some extra hard work to do, Tarkington! It's the only way to deal with these stubborn puppies!"

For a schoolmaster, Mr. Grimesby Creepe was a novelty.

As Tommy Watson looked at the man, he could hardly credit his own eyes. On the previous day he had been scrupulously attired, and although nothing could disguise his bodily shape, and his facial ugliness, he had nevertheless looked a gentleman.

But now he stood revealed as he was—a slave-driver.

His short, squat figure was attired in breeches and leggings, with a rough brown sweater above. He wore no collar, but had a thick woollen muffler wrapped round his neck. On his head sat a battered old soft felt hat.

Mr. Creepe had just finished a meal, by all appearances. He was using a huge quill, and picking his teeth as he spoke—and this fact alone indicated that he lacked the breeding of a gentleman. His heavy-jowled,

flabby face was in need of a shave, and the bags under his eyes hinted that he was not unacquainted with the bottle.

Altogether, Mr. Grimesby Creepe was an unprepossessing-looking specimen of humanity as he stood there glaring out from beneath his bushy eyebrows and using his toothpick to the accompaniment of unpleasant sounds.

"Shall I be allowed to go out this morning, sir?" asked Watson, as he commenced to dress.

"Go out?" repeated Mr. Creepe. "No, boy, you won't! You'll never be allowed to go out! Once a boy comes into my school, he gets to like it so much that he doesn't want to leave it! Eh, Kirby? What do you say to that?"

"You will have your little joke, sir," said Kirby gruffly.

"But I must go out!" insisted Tommy Watson. "I mean to send a telegram to my father!"

Mr. Creepe nodded.

"Of course you do," he said. "I'm not surprised in the least. I don't blame you, Watson. I'd want to do the same. But you won't send it! You won't leave this property!"

"I will! You can't keep me here!" shouted Tommy, all his usual stolidity thrown aside. "Are we prisoners? Is this place a convict settlement, or what?"

"Keep that boy quiet, and take him below at once!" said Mr. Creepe curtly. "He'll work in the scullery till breakfast-time. You know what that means, Kirby?"

"Yes, sir!" grinned Kirby, with obvious pleasure.

Tommy Watson was a bit calmer again. Being thus ignored, he had time to recover himself—and he again realised that it would be better to wait. He felt for his clothes, and was surprised to find that there was nothing for him to wear except a coarse combination garment like a workman's overall, only made of cheap, dark-coloured tweed. He picked it up wonderingly.

"I can't wear this thing!" he protested. "What's become of my Etons?"

"You won't need any Etons while you're here, my lad!" growled Kirby. "Put those things on, and make haste. These clogs, too! Mr. Creepe is very careful about shoe-leather in this school!"

By the time Watson was dressed he felt like a convict. The rough, uncouth clothing was most uncomfortable, and the footgear was pinching him dreadfully. But he was hustled downstairs, and led through the dark, chilly passages until he reached the scullery. Here fresh surprises awaited him. He had at least expected to see several domestics at work, preparing breakfast, and doing other jobs.

Instead, the kitchen was in possession of a monitor and four boys—all of whom were working hard—making the fire, cutting bread, and preparing other articles for breakfast.

Watson was led straight into the scullery, and he found himself forced down upon a low stool. He and Kirby were the only occupants of the scullery. Kirby lounged against the door, and lit a cigarette.

"Go on—get busy!" he ordered curtly.

And then Watson saw what he was supposed to do. Immediately in front of him stood an enormous tin bath filled with potatoes. He had been set the task of peeling them! His blood rose. His father had sent him to this school to be educated—not to act as a servant!

"I'm not going to peel these potatoes!" he said fiercely. "You must be mad! What do you think I am—a drudge, to do all the dirty work?"

"It doesn't matter to me what you are; but you've got to peel those potatoes!" retorted the monitor. "And let me tell you this, my rebellious young spark! You won't get a bite of breakfast until you've finished the whole pile!"

Watson caught his breath in.

He was aware that a dreadfully empty sensation assailed him. He had eaten no supper the night before. There had been a pretence of giving him some, but he had lost the opportunity. Scarcely anything had passed his lips during the last eighteen or twenty hours, and the junior was faint from want of food.

In addition, he ached in almost every limb, for on the previous night he had been kicked and brutally treated. He felt wretched, indeed. And before he could have a bite to eat he must peel all these potatoes.

"Look here, I can't do it!" he said tensely. "I tell you I can't do it! I've never peeled potatoes before——"

"Don't worry about that—you'll soon learn in this place," interrupted Kirby. "Anyhow, the Head's given his orders. You've got to peel those potatoes before you have your breakfast—so you'd better get busy!"

CHAPTER III:

THE EARLY BIRD.



SIR LANCELOT MONTGOMERY TREGELLIS-WEST sat up in bed and stretched himself.

"Begad! Ten-past seven!" he murmured, glancing at his gold ticker. "Good! I'm only ten minutes late. And the risin'-bell won't ring for another twenty minutes!"

He hopped nimbly out of bed, crossed the dormitory, and looked out of the window. The morning was still grey, but there was every indication of the fine weather continuing—with plenty of frost.

"Rather good, by gad!" murmured Sir Montie. "Just the mornin' for a healthy

run! I'll go down to Moat Hollow, an' see if there's any sign of old Tommy."

Tregellis-West commenced dressing leisurely. He was thinking of Tommy Watson while doing so. For Tommy was his own particular chum, and he was immensely pleased to know that Watson was still comparatively near St. Frank's. Indeed, as far as Sir Montie could see, the old position was very little altered by this change.

Tommy would be able to come to tea in Study C, he could join in the football on Little Side—although, of course, he would not be eligible to play for St. Frank's. In a hundred and one other ways the late St. Frank's junior would be able to continue the old mode of life.

At least, this is what Sir Montie thought. He was picturing Moat Hollow in the colours that Tommy Watson had painted them in the previous evening. And he assumed that his chum was having a fine time.

Late dinner, cosy fires, a bed-room to himself—these, and other luxuries galore, were supposed to be Tommy Watson's lot. Even Sir Vivian Watson himself believed that his son was enjoying the new life.

How was anybody to know that Mr. Grimesby Creepe was an arrant humbug—a sanctimonious swindler who posed as a kindly man before parents, but who was really an arch-tyrant behind their backs?

Tommy Watson had received the shock of his life after his father had gone. For then he had seen his new school as it really was, and the surprise had well-nigh stunned him.

Sir Montie went downstairs light-heartedly, and he felt distinctly proud of himself as he sallied out into the frosty Triangle. There was something rather good in the feeling that he was the first out.

"Absolutely the first chap in the school to take the air, begad!" he murmured urbanely. "There's nothin' like risin' early in the mornin'. An' I can pat myself on the back—"

He broke off, staring. For there, near the fountain, he had just caught sight of no less a person than Willy Handforth, of the Third. And Willy was not only fully dressed, but as bright as a lark. He was bending over the fountain industriously.

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "An' I was just pridin' myself on the fact that I was the first out—I was, really! Cheeky young sweep!"

He walked up to the fountain and stood there.

"It's all right—no charge to look on!" remarked Willy, turning his head upwards from his bending position. "Hallo, Montie! What's wrong this morning? Bilious, or something?"

"I'm feelin' fine, begad!" replied Montie.

"Then what's all this energy about?" asked Willy. "My hat! Fully dressed, too! Who's the young lady? I'll bet

you're off to meet a girl! Nothing else would get you out so early!"

"I refuse to answer such ridiculous questions, dear old boy!" said Sir Montie. "As a matter of fact, I'm just about to dash down to Moat Hollow to have a look at Tommy Watson."

Willy sniffed.

"Watson isn't so bad, but I'm blessed if I'd get up early to have a squint at him!" he said. "I'm just trying an experiment. I've got some goldfish here, putting 'em to the test."

"The test?"

"Yes, I want to see if they'll die in icy cold water," replied Willy. "Somebody told me they liked cold water better than warm, and I want to make sure. If they keep alive, I shan't worry any more. And if they die, there'll be fourpence gone west. These giddy things cost twopence each, you know."

Sir Montie passed on, wondering at the rare enthusiasm which could fetch a Third-Former out of bed on a frosty morning to test the cold-defying capabilities of goldfish.

Tregellis-West reached the end of the lane, and then turned the bend towards Moat Hollow. He expected to march straight into the main gates of the new school. But to his surprise the main gates were closed and securely locked.

No sounds came from within. Sir Montie stood there, blank. He hardly knew what to do. He searched for a bell, but there wasn't one. And he hardly liked to hammer on the door.

"This is queer!" murmured the elegant junior. "Surely they must be rousin' themselves—it's past seven-thirty by this time. Begad, the lazy beggars! They have a better time than we do!"

If Montie could have seen his chum at that moment, he would not have entertained such ideas. For Tommy Watson was valiantly struggling with the enormous pile of potatoes, and had only succeeded in peeling a mere handful. The work was utterly new to him, and his hands were nearly frozen with the cold.

Outside, Montie pondered on the extraordinary nature of the new order of things at Moat Hollow. The enormously high additional fences puzzled him—they rose to a height of ten or twelve feet, just like the walls of a prison. And at the top there were many cruel spikes—set in such profusion that no human being could possibly climb over them.

He took a stroll round the tiny grounds, and, as he observed the complete precaution against intruders, he could not help feeling just a little uneasy. This prison-like wall seemed so unnecessary. Why on earth had Mr. Grimesby Creepe enclosed his school behind such a barrier?

By the time Montie had made his circuit,

he was more exercised in mind than ever—and even suspicious. The gates were still closed, and 'he decided that nothing could be done.

He returned to St. Frank's vaguely worried.

CHAPTER IV.

SOMETHING WRONG WITH ARCHIE!



PHIPPS tapped lightly upon the door of Archie Glenthorne's bedroom, and silently entered.

It was eight o'clock to the minute—Archie's usual time for being called. And it was his valet's

Archie opened his eyes heavily and blinked.

"Eight o'clock, sir!" said Phipps.

"Eh? What? Oh, good!" murmured Archie. "That is, of course, bad! Dashed bad, Phipps! I was hoping that you wouldn't trickle in for another two hours, dash you! The fact is, old tea merchant, I'm feeling absolutely dithery!"

"I trust there is nothing amiss, sir?" asked Phipps.

"Oh, look here, Phipps!" protested Archie feebly. "I mean to say, what's become of the good old gear-box? I tell you, I'm all dithery, and you calmly ask if there's anything amiss! If a few dozen things weren't

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duty to come along with a cup of hot tea—in order to assist the awakening process.

Archie was a privileged sort of person. He was allowed to have his own bed-room. He was permitted to use Phipps, and in many other ways he had advantages over the other juniors. But nobody cared, for it was generally recognised that Archie was a helpless sort of duffer.

Phipps set the tray down on the little table, and went through the usual routine of pulling up the blind. Then he turned to the bed, and gave a discreet cough.

all going wrong at the same time, why should this dashed dithery feeling be so frightfully pronounced?"

"The tea, sir, may be beneficial." said Phipps calmly.

"The tea, what? Good gad! I'd forgotten it!" said Archie, sitting up in bed. "Kindly pass the good old brew to the young master, Phipps! I wish to take a few gentle sips of the fatal beverage! Tea, Phipps, is what I might term the mainstay of life! Without this good old juice, life wouldn't be worth living! I'm not so

dashed sure it's worth living, anyhow," he added wearily.

He took one sip and shuddered.

"Gadzooks!" he murmured. "In fact, oddslife!"

Phipps, who was thoroughly accustomed to the fads and fancies of his young master, looked on imperturbably. At the same time, he was slightly perturbed at this plain expression of disapproval.

"I trust the tea is palatable, sir?" he asked.

"Laddie, I wouldn't have believed it!" said Archie sadly. "Instead of tea, you absolutely bring me a cup of arsenic! I mean to say, this dashed stuff is poison! I've never tasted such a frightful brew in all the old existence!"

He took another sip, shuddered again, and sank back. And Phipps now noticed that Archie was looking pale and unwell. The valet was full of concern, for he had a great admiration for Archie. Phipps knew well enough that Archie was by no means the helpless duffer he pretended to be.

"You are looking rather pale and shaken, sir," said Phipps. "The tea is perfectly good—just the same as usual, sir. I am afraid you have a slight touch of biliousness."

Archie moaned.

"Biliousness?" he said in a hollow voice. "Pray refrain from playing with words! This is no bilious spasm, Phipps—the young master is dying! The end has come at last! Be good enough to dash about, and whiz all over the shop, and gather up the old family!"

"I hardly think matters are as grave as that, sir."

"I say, Phipps! I mean, who's doing this dashed dying business?" murmured Archie feebly. "I ought to know, by gad! So be good enough to rope the family in, and drag them to the bedside before it's too late. Phipps, laddie, I shall leave you my gold fountain-pen. Absolutely! As it happens, the nib's gone frightfully off colour, so I shan't miss it in the slightest degree. I'm going, Phipps—I can feel the priceless old death-rattle gathering up for the final onslaught!"

Archie sat up in bed and attempted to clear his throat.

"Good gad! I'm nearly through the old portal already," he murmured. "Death's door, what? It absolutely yawns before the young master, beckoning him to skate through!"

Phipps, by this time, was rather alarmed.

Without question, Archie was slightly delirious. As a matter of fact, he had a touch of fever—as Phipps could tell when he felt his brow. There was nothing much the matter—a bilious attack, accompanied by nausea. It was the result, in all probability, of lack of exercise and incautious eating.

Phipps hurried off and consulted Mr. Beverley Stokes, the Housemaster. And not only Dr. Brett was 'phoned for, but Colonel Glenthorne was informed of his son's indisposition.

There was quite a commotion.

Archie was confined to his bed, and Dr. Brett soon came along and dosed him up, and generally made him easier. But the swell of the Fourth was not himself.

"He won't be right for a day or two, I'm afraid," announced Dr. Brett, later. "Nothing to worry about, of course. But the boy had better stay in bed, and take things very quietly."

For Archie, this was a supremely easy thing to do. In fact, to use one of his own expressions in a literal sense, it was just what the doctor ordered.

CHAPTER V.

LEARNING BY DEGREES.



MR. GRIMESBY CREEPE rapped his desk sharply.

"Now, my dear boys, lessons!" he exclaimed. "Once more we begin work. School starts in earnest to-day, and you must all do your best to please your parents by striving hard for the best results."

He paused, and looked round. He caught sight of Tommy Watson at the end of the top row, and for a moment he hesitated. Watson was looking at him with frank gaze and open hostility.

Breakfast was over, and the pupils of Moat Hollow had been collected together in the schoolroom for the morning's work.

The scene was a curious one.

In some respects the school bore a resemblance to the real article. The bare room was cold and cheerless, and the unfortunate scholars were compelled to huddle themselves up in order to keep warm. There were long rows of desks, with hard, narrow forms.

Mr. Creepe occupied a desk of his own—quite a comfortable affair, with a swing-back chair. And as he was wearing thick attire, the cold failed to penetrate. The schoolmaster looked after himself thoroughly, even if he didn't pay much heed to the requirements of his scholars.

He was still wearing the thick sweater, but now that lessons were afoot, he had donned an additional garment—an aged and rusty smock and mortar-board. He had the grotesque appearance of a schoolmaster in caricature.

"You may observe, Watson, that I am looking at you," went on Mr. Creepe. "You may notice that I have given you some slight attention during these last few moments."

Watson made no reply.

"Ah, I regret that you should fail to answer me, Watson," said the schoolmaster.

"I like my boys to be polite. This virtue will come in time. Let me give you an example of what I mean, Watson. I am always ready to teach—for that is my profession."

He turned to one of the boys in the front row, and pointed to him.

"Smithson, stand up!" he commanded.

A thin, weakly looking boy rose shivering to his feet. The expression of apprehension and fear on his face was pitiful to behold.

"Smithson, your neck is dirty!" said Mr. Creepe.

"Yes, sir," faltered Smithson, with a catch in his voice.

"Your face is ugly, and your figure is distorted!" went on Mr. Creepe pleasantly.

"In fact, Smithson, you are a most repulsive boy in every way. Don't you think you should have been smothered years ago, Smithson?"

"Yes, sir," said Smithson feebly.

Mr. Creepe smiled.

"You see, Watson?" he asked. "That is what I call politeness. One of these days you will do the same."

Watson still maintained silence.

"Well, boy, have you no tongue?" demanded the schoolmaster.

"Yes, I've got a tongue," replied Watson, at last. "But there wasn't any need to use it, sir. I was taken into this school under false pretences, and I shall let my father know, and——"

"Tut-tut! This won't do—this won't do!" interrupted Mr. Creepe, shocked. "Good gracious! You certainly have a tongue, Watson! Unless you're very careful, young man, it will get you into serious trouble. Another such tirade, and you will go without your mid-day meal!"

"I shouldn't miss much, sir!" retorted Watson bitterly.

"No? Then we will see what can be done to oblige you!" said Mr. Creepe. "Kirby, take care that Watson has no dinner to-day. Starvation is the one cure—the one certain remedy for insubordination in general."

Watson could well believe it. He was learning things. And he was able to appreciate that Mr. Creepe's pupils were more or less habitually starved.

Thus, at the slightest sign of insubordination Mr. Creepe had only to threaten a boy with losing a meal, and the unfortunate victim would knuckle under in complete subjection.

Breakfast had been a sorry affair.

After peeling potatoes until he was sick and weary, Tommy Watson had been let off. And he had filed in to breakfast with the rest of the school. The meal had consisted of weak, watery tea, with scarcely a taste of milk or sugar in it, and thick rounds of stale bread sparingly spread with some greasy substance which did duty for butter.



But now he stood revealed as he was—a slave driver.

But Watson had been so hungry that even this meagre fare seemed almost good to him. And he had eaten ravenously. And even now he was still filled with a kind of vague unbelief. He had the impression that he would soon wake up, to find that he had been passing through a particularly bad dream.

This school was an impossible one. Tommy Watson hadn't believed that any such establishment could exist under present day conditions. With the existing regulations and inspections by Government officials, it seemed to Watson that Mr. Grimesby Creepe was running a grave risk of landing himself into penal servitude.

But Mr. Creepe evidently knew better.

Mr. Creepe had a way of evading inspection, no doubt—or if he didn't actually evade it, he knew how to succeed in throwing dust into the eyes of the educational inspectors. Watson had already had a glaring example of how Mr. Creepe could delude his victims. Sir Vivian Watson had returned to London, fully satisfied that his son was in safe, kindly hands!

And if Mr. Grimesby Creepe could satisfy Tommy Watson's father, it was obvious that he knew a method of hoodwinking any Government inspectors who happened to come round.

As far as Watson could understand, there were no servants kept in the establishment. The boys were compelled to do all the domestic labour themselves. This, of course, was an easy method of reducing the running costs of the school.

Mr. Creepe was a rank hypocrite—a parsimonious humbug who only revealed himself when the coast was clear. And it was obvious to Watson that no boy was ever allowed to venture out alone.

The monitors could go into the village freely, for they could be trusted. They led an idle, easy existence, and for their own sakes they would not breathe a word against Mr. Creepe's methods.

By degrees, Tommy Watson was learning. But he was scarcely receiving the kind of education he was expecting!

CHAPTER VI.

THE NATURAL HISTORY CLASS.



BEFORE commencing work for the day, there are one or two remarks I should like to offer," said Mr. Grimesby Creepe. "Two letters have come to hand this morning—one for Russell, and the other for Lloyd."

Mr. Creepe produced his inevitable quill, stuck it between two of his teeth, and worked it about with his tongue—a particularly unpleasant habit of his.

The two letters lay on his desk, and he picked them up.

"Both new boys, eh?" he said pleasantly. "It appears that one or two little items were overlooked at the last moment—hence the letters. For example, your mother, Lloyd, quite forgot the little matter of five shillings which she had evidently promised you. Is that so?"

One of the weakly looking boys stood up.

"Yes, sir," he said eagerly. "But it's not my mother—she's my aunt. My mother's dead, sir."

"Ah, distressing—most distressing!" said Mr. Creepe. "You have my deepest sympathy, Lloyd. I will do everything in my power to make your life happy and joyful. So your aunt promised you five shillings, eh? That was most kind of her, Lloyd."

"She had to hurry off for the train, sir, and forgot it, I suppose," said Lloyd, eager and anxious. "Can I have the letter please, sir?"

Mr. Creepe laughed with much amusement.

"Did you hear that, Kirby?" he chuckled, his flabby cheeks shaking up and down in folds. "Can he have the letter! Upon my soul! Some of these boys are real humorists, eh?"

"Especially the new ones, sir," grinned Kirby, who seemed to be Mr. Creepe's chief monitor.

"As you say, Kirby—especially the new ones!" said the schoolmaster. "But to return to the matter of the letter. No, Lloyd, you may not have it. I make a point of opening every letter that is delivered to the school—so that I may know precisely what is going on."

There was something brutally frank about this statement—but it was uttered in a tone which implied that Mr. Creepe was doing his pupils a favour. Watson listened in amazement.

So every letter was opened! Even letters from parents! If Tommy's father wrote to him—if Sir Montie wrote to him—if his sister wrote to him—all these sacred communications would be ruthlessly opened by this low-down brute of a master, and discussed before the whole school! There was something revolting in the thought. Tommy Watson's blood boiled within him.

"Now, let me see—let me see!" proceeded Mr. Creepe, producing a pair of pince-nez, and pushing them on to his great nose. "Ah, yes! Here we are, Lloyd—here we are! Your aunt encloses a postal order for five shillings, and she trusts that you will not overlook the fact that your shoes are new, and therefore need careful treatment—"

"My shoes have been taken away, sir," said Lloyd.

"Yes, to be sure!" said Mr. Creepe. "They will be kept for you, Lloyd—carefully preserved. Your aunt further remarks that you must always have your eggs soft-boiled. Wonderful, Lloyd! I shall take great care over that point! Whenever we have eggs, yours will be soft-boiled! Eh, Kirby? Eh, Tarkington?"

All the monitors roared with merriment.

Watson boiled afresh. He knew well enough that the unfortunate Lloyd would never see an egg, cooked or uncooked, while he was in this outrageous establishment. And for the principal to goad his monitors into making deliberate fun of the letter was little short of indecent.

"As for the five shillings, Lloyd, I shall retain it," said Mr. Creepe calmly.

"Re—retain it, sir?" said the boy, his voice trailing.

"Good gracious! Do you imagine that I could allow you five shillings?"

"But—but it's from my aunt, sir——"

"Under the circumstances, I must appropriate this money," said Mr. Creepe severely. "Since you must have eggs, Lloyd, I have no alternative. Eggs cost money, and this postal order will help towards your breakfast delicacies for the term. Sit down, Lloyd."

Lloyd sat down, overcome. Tears were pouring down his cheeks, and although he strove hard to control himself, he sobbed convulsively. Tommy Watson only held himself in check with difficulty. Never in his life before had he wanted to strike out as forcibly as now. He wanted to dash down, and knock Mr. Grimesby Creepe flying. If the man had been frankly and harshly brutal, his attitude would have been more bearable.

It was his arrant hypocrisy which made Watson's ire rise. The cur pretended to be kindly and fatherly, and adopted this manner in order to disguise his brutality and meanness.

The other letter was discussed openly in front of the school in just the same way. Evidently no boy had any privacy. Not only Mr. Creepe knew the contents of his letters, but the whole school as well. And all money was appropriated by the Head. Watson could easily see that Mr. Creepe was a thief as well as a brute.

And, gradually, he was appreciating how this school could be run. Only the monitors were allowed out—and so no word of scandal was allowed to get abroad.

If any talk arose concerning the high nature of the school walls, Mr. Creepe would have a ready answer. And on Sundays, perhaps, he and the monitors would take the school for a walk in public—with perfect decorum and safety. Any Tartars would be naturally left behind on such occasions as these.

Watson could see that this blight was capable of continuing indefinitely. As long as Mr. Creepe maintained the necessary precautions, he was safe. Once a boy entered his power, there was no escape. And even Tommy Watson was beginning to feel uneasy.

"Well, my lads, we will start the day with a special natural history lesson," said Mr. Grimesby Creepe pleasantly. "The day is fine, and there is no reason why we shouldn't take advantage of it. Indoor lessons can wait for rainy weather."

Watson wondered what was coming.

"All monitors will collect their charges, and march them out into the grounds," continued Mr. Creepe, rubbing his hands softly together. "My method of teaching is simple, but effective. Theory is all very

well—but the practical side is far, far better."

And a minute later the school was being marshalled for the first lesson of the day.

CHAPTER VII.

PRACTICAL AND PROFITABLE.



TOMMY WATSON was marched out with the rest of the school.

It was now nine-thirty, and the winter's day was breaking out fine and clear. Watson felt glad to be out in the open air. Indeed, he had some vague hope that he might be able to make a break for liberty.

Only just over that fence—and there lay Bellton! There lay St. Frank's, and all the familiar surroundings. Sir Montie—Reggie Pitt—good old Handforth!

Somehow, however, these scenes and faces seemed remote and far distant when Watson found himself in the school grounds. That high fence, with the cruel spikes on the top, shut out the world beyond in an unmistakable manner. The barrier was impassable.

And Tommy's hopes died as soon as they were born. Even if the fence had been comparatively low, there would have been no escape. For the boys were treated like convicts. They were marched out in gangs—one monitor being in charge of four pupils.

Watson was already beginning to appreciate that these monitors were nothing more nor less than warders. At the slightest attempt to break out of the ranks any culprit would be seized and held.

"Attention!" commanded Mr. Creepe, at length. "Just a few instructions, and then we will commence the lesson in earnest."

They had reached a particularly barren part of the school grounds—at the back, as far from the lane as possible. And the double row of boys had been collected up, and were now standing at attention. Mr. Creepe strode up and down, like a general inspecting his troops.

"This lesson will prove to be of great interest," he said pleasantly. "It is necessary that all boys should learn the wonders of Mother Earth. For does not everything spring from the common clay? I want you all to enjoy the marvels of this lesson."

Mr. Creepe waved his hand.

"The spades, Kirby—and hurry!" he commanded.

"Wouldn't forks be better, sir?" asked the monitor. "The ground's a bit hard with the frost——"

"The forks—the forks! Don't quibble, boy!" interrupted Mr. Creepe. "What difference does it make? By all means, the forks!"

Each monitor took his own little "gang," and they were marched in

sections to a shed at the angle of the building. And every boy was provided with a stout garden fork. Watson took his with a growing certainty as to the true meaning of this so-called lesson.

Within five minutes the entire school was actually commencing the task of digging up the garden! Under the pretence of teaching them "the wonders of Mother Earth," Mr. Grimesby Creepe was forcing his pupils to do his gardening!

It was a staggering piece of audacity.

And it was rendered even more audacious by the fact that Mr. Creepe adopted a pretence. It was this side of the school-master's character that Watson was beginning to loathe and detest. Everything he did he made a virtue of! Even when he stole the boys' money, he calmly made out that he was taking it for their own good!

Watson used his fork with the rest—he had no alternative. To refuse the work would have entailed a battle with the monitors—and as Tommy had already proved, the odds were overwhelmingly against him. For the slightest act of insubordination, too, he would probably be deprived of his dinner.

Mr. Creepe was ready to seize upon the flimsiest excuse for withholding food. For by so doing he saved expenses. The man was like a miser. His whole school was run on starvation rules.

For the first time, Tommy was able to get into conversation with one of his fellow victims—a boy named Jevons, who seemed a little sturdier than the rest. He and Watson were digging side by side.

"Better go easy," murmured Jevons, under his breath.

For a moment, Watson wondered who had spoken. Jevons had made no sign—he had not even glanced up. And Kirby, who was smoking a cigarette some little distance away, knew nothing of the whisper.

"If you speak, don't let Kirby see!" went on Jevons. "We've got to act like convicts—and speak without moving our lips! We're used to it, too—and so will you be soon."

Tommy Watson took the tip, and kept on digging.

"How long have you been in this place?" he murmured.

"About a year—but that was in Kent," said Jevons. "We only came here this week, you know. This is better than the Kent place—that's why most of us don't grumble much."

"Better!" breathed Watson. "Impossible!"

"You don't know," whispered the other. "And wait till you see old Creepe really roused! He's a demon!"

"Haven't you ever tried to escape?"

"I tried once, but that was enough!" muttered Jevons feelingly. "They dragged me back, I was shoved down a cellar, kept alone for two weeks on bread-and-water. I nearly went mad. Never again! It's no

good, Watson—there's no escape from this place. We're drudges—slaves of this inhuman beast!"

"But there must be some way of——"

"Now, then, who's talking there?" exclaimed Kirby sharply.

Jevons took no notice, and Watson did not even look up. He realised that caution was necessary in this extraordinary school.

But he had plenty of food for thought!

CHAPTER VIII.

A CHANCE FOR WILLY.



MR. SUNCLIFFE passed a hand wearily over his brow.

Lessons were proceeding sedately in the Third Form-room at St. Frank's. It was only just ten o'clock, and the Third had barely settled down. And the Form-master was looking far from well.

The fags, however, noticed nothing. They had something better to do than worry about Mr. Suncliffe's physical condition. In fact, they would probably regard their Form-master's indisposition with frank approval. The Third was not noted for its kindness.

"Anything wrong, sir?" asked Willy Handforth keenly.

He was about the only fellow who had been watching Mr. Suncliffe's signals of distress. The Form-master sat up, and pretended to be alert.

"There is nothing wrong, Handforth minor," replied Mr. Suncliffe wearily. "At least, nothing that matters. A headache—that is all. I am feeling decidedly off colour this morning."

"I am sorry, sir," said Willy. "Anything I can do?"

"I am afraid not——"

"They say it's a good idea to stand on cold bricks, sir," suggested Willy. "Why not take your boots and stockings off, and go for a walk in the Triangle? The paths are all icy, and——"

"I appreciate your suggestion, Handforth minor, but we will not discuss the subject further," interrupted Mr. Suncliffe tartly. "If you wish to please me, you will get on with your lesson in silence."

Willy looked rather aggrieved.

"How about cold water round the forehead, sir?" he asked. "It won't take me a tick to whizz to the tap, and soak one of the dusters. It's a fine thing for a heated brain——"

"You young rascal!" interrupted Mr. Suncliffe. "My brain is not heated!"

"I thought you said your head was squiffy, sir——"

"I said nothing of the sort!" exclaimed the Form-master. "And I disapprove of such absurd expressions, Handforth minor. You are only making my headache worse by this needless altercation."

"How about massage, sir?" put in Chubby Heath.

"Or a couple of aspirin tablets, sir?" added Willy. "That's the idea, sir. Old Pagett's got plenty—I—I mean, Mr. Pagett always keep a stock of aspirin tablets in his study—I seen 'em on the mantelpiece. They're marvellous, sir."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Suncliffe coldly.

"Wonderful, sir," went on Willy. "Only last week Septimus was looking groggy, and I gave him one, and he bucked up no end."

"Septimus?" repeated Mr. Suncliffe.

"My squirrel, sir—"

"Bother your squirrel, Handforth minor! How dare you bring up such subjects in the middle of lessons?" demanded the exasperated Form-master. "As for aspirin tablets, I disapprove of them. They do far more harm than good."

"I'll pass that on to Mr. Pagett, sir," said Willy. "I mean, it's something he ought to know. But I'll tell you what, sir," he added. "I'll dash over to the Modern House, and see Mr. Pycraft. He's got some special stuff that he sniffs up his nose out of a bottle. He's a bit of a beast, but I dare say he'll lend it to me when he knows that I've come on an errand of mercy—"

"Will you be silent, Handforth minor?" shouted Mr. Suncliffe angrily. "You will also refrain from referring to Mr. Pycraft in such disrespectful terms."

"Oh, come off it, sir!" growled Willy. "You know as well as I do that he's a regular oner! Buster & Co. hate him like poison—as much as you hate those aspirin tablets."

Mr. Suncliffe sighed, and held his head as a sudden spasm assailed him.

"I generally use a mixture from the village chemist's," he muttered. "Unfortunately, my supply is exhausted. I think, perhaps, the room is too warm—I wish you would open the window, Lemon—"

"Let me buzz down to the chemist's, sir!" interrupted Willy quickly. "I'll rush down like the wind, sir. It's rotten to see you suffering like this! Be a sport, sir. I'll soon be back!"

"You must do your work, Handforth minor!"

"Oh, that doesn't matter, sir—I mean, I'll make it up by staying in late," said Willy generously. "That is, of course, if you insist on it. And what's half an hour, sir, compared to your headache? Good! I'll rush down straight away, sir!"

Willy left his place, and dashed to the door.

"One moment, Handforth minor!" said Mr. Suncliffe sharply. "I did not give you per—"

"You didn't give me the money, sir?" said Willy briskly. "That's all right—I'll tell the chemist to chalk it up. If he can't trust you for a miserable bottle of physic, he ought to be boiled!"



Sir Montie expected to march straight through the main gates of the new school. But to his surprise the main gates were closed and securely locked.

And before Mr. Suncliffe could stop him, Willy vanished.

He sped down the passage, reached the cloak-room, and seized his overcoat and cap. Then he sallied out into the Triangle, donning his overcoat as he ran.

"That's the way to do it!" he murmured coolly. "There's nothing like striking while the iron's hot. Another two jiffs, and old Sunny would have squashed the whole game."

Willy was by no means averse to a trot to the village. This was Thursday morning, and Mr. Binks always made a point of baking doughnuts on Mondays and Thursdays. Willy would be able to obtain a supply still hot from the oven.

In fact, in his attraction for the tuck-shop, he came perilously near to forgetting Mr. Suncliffe's medicine—the real object of his visit. It was only the sight of Dr. Brett, speeding by in his car, which gave Willy the necessary reminder.

So he obtained the medicine, and then started off back to St. Frank's. He had crossed the bridge—after pausing for several needless minutes on the crown of it, in order to contemplate the semi-frozen river—when he caught sight of the high fencing round Moat Hollow.

"Might as well!" murmured Willy, after a moment's hesitation. "I'd like to have a word with Tommy Watson. I might be able to take a message to old Montie."

And with this kindly thought in mind, the hero of the Third made a detour up Edgemoor Lane, and arrived opposite the barred and bolted gates of Mr. Grimesby Creepe's mysterious establishment.

CHAPTER IX.

EXTRAORDINARY!



WILLY snorted as he viewed the boarded-up gates.

"It's closed up like a giddy fortress!" he muttered. "Getting on for eleven o'clock, too! Don't

they ever wake up in this blessed place?"

He tried the little wicket-gate, and found it immovable. There was no sign of a bell, and no sounds came over the high fencing. It seemed as though Moat Hollow was deserted and forlorn.

"Jolly queer!" said Willy, frowning.

He hammered on the wicket-gate with his fists, and as this did not satisfy him, he picked up a big stone and used it as a kind of knocker—regardless of the fact that considerable dents were appearing in the woodwork.

He heard a latch being pulled back, and the next moment the wicket-gate opened. A burly, awkward youth stood there, glaring. He was Tarkington, one of Mr. Creepe's monitors.

"Oh, so you've come, have you?" asked Willy sarcastically. "What's the idea of locking the place up in this way?"

"What do you want?" demanded Tarkington grimly.

"I've just popped round to have a word with Watson—"

"Watson?" interrupted the monitor sharply.

"Yes—Tommy Watson—he's a new chap here," said Willy.

Tarkington frowned.

"What do you know about Watson?" he demanded.

"Oh, come off it!" growled Willy. "Watson used to be one of our chaps up at St. Frank's. I thought I'd like a word with him—"

"Then you'd better think again," snapped the other. "Mr. Creepe won't allow any visits during school hours. If it comes to that, he won't allow visitors any time. This place is exclusive. You'd better go, and I should advise you not to come back!"

He slammed the door in Willy's face, and bolted it. Handforth minor caught his breath in and whistled. He was rather incensed, too. There had been no justification for such discourteous treatment.

"Of all the giddy rotters!" he muttered. "I don't like this place at all! There's something rummy about it. If this fence wasn't so high, I'd climb up and—"

He paused, stood back, and contemplated the wall. It had always been rather high, but additional woodwork had raised it until the spiked top was nearly twelve feet from the ground.

The outside was smooth and plain, without any handgrip or foothold, and the few bushes that had grown near by had been deliberately cut down. There seemed no way of climbing that fence.

But Willy was a bit of an inventor. Moreover, he had a strong will, and could be obstinate when he desired. In this respect he resembled his celebrated major.

Something occurred to him, and he retraced his steps down the lane until he came within sight of the Bellton road. On his right lay the corner of the Moat Hollow grounds, the wall being just as high and inaccessible here as elsewhere.

But on the other side of the road lay a long, crooked pole. It was half buried in the grass, and had been there for ages—a relic of some repairs which had been effected to the fence guarding the river.

Willy grasped the pole with all his strength, and managed to hoist it up. He dragged it across the lane, and after a good deal of strenuous effort he succeeded in propping it against the top of the Moat Hollow fence, where it lay at a fairly acute angle.

"Now we're all right!" muttered Willy breathlessly.

He used the pole as a kind of make-shift ladder, swarming nimbly up it after the

fashion of a monkey. Once at the top, he gripped the strong iron spikes by the base, and hauled himself up.

He could see directly over into the Moat Hollow grounds, and for a moment or two he stared rather blankly. He had not expected to see anything really worth looking at. Indeed, he had only tried the experiment for the sake of curiosity.

But his reward was startling.

Some little distance from him, on the far side of the dilapidated garden, a number of youthful figures were hard at work. They were all attired in rough, coarse-looking overalls, and all were engaged in the task of digging up the ground! Near by stood Tarkington and one of the other monitors. These two were well wrapped up, and idling about with cigarettes between their lips.

Willy Handforth was so amazed that he nearly lost his grip. A moment or two earlier he had felt a qualm, for he hated to think that he was spying. Now, however, he considered that his action was justified.

"Great pip!" he murmured. "Digging! Ploughing up the giddy garden! My hat! And there's Watson, too—using a fork with the rest of 'em! This place isn't a school at all—it's a farm!"

At this moment Mr. Grimesby Creepe strode round the angle of the building, and Willy had a fresh surprise. For the schoolmaster looked a strangely unscholarly figure in his thick boots, leggings and sweater. He carried a cane with him, and proceeded to swish it suggestively.

"Now then—no lazing!" Willy heard him say. "Kirby! Why can't you attend to your duty? Keep these boys hard at it! Do you want me to look after you all the time?"

Willy saw one of the monitors jerk the ash from his cigarette, and hurry among the digging juniors. Kirby proceeded to punch and cuff the unhappy boys indiscriminately—whether they deserved punishing or not. And Mr. Creepe stood looking on with satisfaction.

Without doubt, Moat Hollow School was something entirely new!

CHAPTER X.

NO LOOPHOLE!



TOMMY WATSON applied his garden fork with sullen vigour.

For over an hour he had been working without rest, and his arms and shoulders were aching with the unusual strain. It seemed that this "lesson" was to continue throughout the morning.

And Watson was slowly recovering from his amazement.

At first it had been a kind of stupor. He had found it impossible to believe that such

things could really happen in a modern, up-to-date boarding-school.

But it was becoming clearer to his startled mind that Mr. Grimesby Creepe was a schoolmaster of a novel order. His plan, obviously, was to run his establishment "on the cheap." Once the term had actually begun, and he had his pupils at his mercy, he compelled them to work as servants. Instead of scholars, they were drudges.

But Mr. Creepe was cunning enough to disguise his actions. He pretended that he was teaching his boys practical gardening. This digging labour was dignified by the name of "lesson." If criticised, Mr. Creepe would probably retort that such teaching was most beneficial.

According to what Watson had already seen, he was not likely to grow fat at Moat Hollow. The food was poor and scanty, and was merely another proof of Mr. Creepe's mania for saving expense.

"Stick it, old man!" came a whisper from Watson's left. "Only about ten minutes more, and then we shall go indoors for the second lesson. Ordinary school stuff, I expect."

Watson glanced sideways without pausing in his work. The boy next to him was Jevons, and he was digging laboriously, with machine-like movements.

"Do we always have to do this sort of thing?" breathed Watson.

"Generally—except it rains," replied Jevons. "On wet days we have to scrub floors, or mend socks, or do the washing. Pretty rotten, isn't it? But this school's different to others."

"Different!" muttered Watson, aghast. "It's outrageous—it's a scandal that ought to be exposed——"

"Steady—steady!" whispered Jevons. "You'll have old Kirby down on us—and that'll mean a black eye each! You'll get used to the place in time. They all do."

"Never!" vowed Watson fiercely. "I'm going to write to my pater to-night! I'll tell him everything, and ask him to take me away. I won't stay here another three days!"

Jevons nearly betrayed himself by pausing and staring.

"You are raw, and no mistake!" he whispered, in wonder. "My dear chap, you won't be allowed to write a word—and even if you did write it, the letter would never get posted. Old Creepe's a beast, you know—he doesn't even allow us to go out into the village. We're like prisoners."

"He can't prevent me writing——"

"If he does anything at all, he'll force you to write to his dictation," interrupted the other grimly. "He's done it before. Of course, it isn't necessary in most cases—because nearly all of us are here for good."

"For good?"

"Yes," said Jevons bitterly. "We're not ordinary schoolboys, you know—and this isn't an ordinary school. We never go home during the holidays—we haven't got any homes. Our people don't want us. That's why we're sent here—to be out of the way!"

Watson was rather staggered.

"What do you mean, your people don't want you?" he asked.

"Just what I say," replied Jevons. "My pater's a widower—I haven't seen him for years! He's a bookmaker, I believe, and moves about all over the country. He doesn't care about me any more than a dog. Some of the other chaps haven't got any parents at all—their fees are paid by their uncles, or people like that."

"Well, I'm blessed!" muttered Watson blankly.

"Haven't you seen the fellows with knock-knees and squints and deformities?" went on Jevons, still in the same bitter tone. "Most of us are the same—we're unwanted children! That's why we're here! It's cheap, and nobody ever asks any questions. This place isn't a real school at all—it's a kind of home for unwanted kids! That's why old Creepe does without any servants, and can use us as he likes. As long as he squares the inspectors, he's safe."

"Well, he can't square my pater!" said Tommy Watson fiercely. "If I can't write, I'll escape—and if I can't escape, I'll expose everything when I go home at the end of term—"

"Optimist!" whispered Jevons. "You won't go home at the end of term! You'll stay here, with the rest of us. Your pater may be one of the exceptions—if so, old Creepe's fooled him. Anyhow, you're here for good, my son. And by the end of the term you'll be resigned to it. They all are. I kicked as bad as anybody at first—and it took me five or six weeks to realise that the game isn't worth the candle."

Watson said nothing. He was thinking. These revelations had thrown a new light on the whole situation. He was beginning to understand why the boys were kept prisoners. He realised the meaning of the high walls. Jevons had been painfully blunt.

But Tommy Watson found it impossible to believe that his father had known the true character of the school when he offered to place his son there. In some way, Mr. Creepe had successfully thrown dust into Sir Vivian's eyes.

And for the first time Watson felt vaguely apprehensive.

CHAPTER XI.

TOO THICK TO BE BELIEVED.



REGINALD PITT came briskly out of the Ancient House with Jack Grey and Cecil De Valerie. There was a football under Reggie's arm, and he and his companions were bound for Little Side.

"Heard the latest?" asked Willy Handforth who was leaning against the stone-work at the bottom of the steps.

"No—haven't got time!" replied Reggie promptly.

"You're a fine pal!" snorted Willy. "All you think about is football! Have you forgotten Tommy Watson? Isn't it about time you went down to Moat Hollow and looked him up?"

"My dear young ass, Watson was here last night, and according to what he said, Moat Hollow is a kind of glorified hotel," said Reggie. "I don't think he'll be feeling lonely yet. Plenty of time to look him up later on—"

"Hotel!" echoed Willy. "My hat! Did he say that? I suppose he didn't mention that he'd be digging up the garden this morning?"

"Digging up the garden?" repeated Jack Grey curiously.

By this time a number of other Fourth-Formers had appeared—including Handforth & Co. and Sir Montie Tregellis West. The latter regarded Willy rather sceptically.

"Dear old boy, I fail to understand," he remarked. "Tommy has a frightful objection to gardenin'—always had. I was just goin' down the lane to have a little chat with the dear fellow."

"Don't waste your steps, Montie—it's no good!"

"Begad! What absolute rot!" said Sir Montie. "I went to Moat Hollow this mornin', but the frightful slackers hadn't even opened the gates—"

"Yes, and the frightful slackers have kept them closed all the time!" interrupted Willy. "I went down there during the morning—at about half-past ten—"

"Don't tell fibs!" said his major severely. "How could you be down at Moat Hollow at half-past ten? You were in class then!"

"That's all you know!" retorted Willy disdainfully. "Old Suncliffe was a bit rocky this morning, and I buzzed down to the chemist's for some of his patent brain-reviver! On the way back I stopped at Moat Hollow—only you needn't mention anything about it. Old Sunny might rag me if he got to know."

"Well, and what did you see at Moat Hollow?" demanded Edward Oswald.

"The place was all locked and bolted, so I climbed to the top of the wall, and looked over," replied Willy. "And what do you think? A whole crowd of chaps were digging up the garden!"

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fourth-Formers laughed boisterously.

"Oh, Willy—Willy!" said Pitt reprovingly. "That's not up to your usual form! We expect something better from you! Can't you invent a more attractive joke—"

"Joke!" snorted Willy. "It's the truth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The truth;" roared Willy defiantly. "There were those Moat Hollow chaps, all dressed in beastly-looking overalls, digging up the garden in the middle of morning lessons!"

"And I suppose Tommy Watson was digging as well?" grinned Jack Grey.

"Yes—just the same as the others."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling fat-heads!" yelled Willy. "This isn't a joke—I'm telling you the truth! There were two or three seniors looking on—and they were smoking—"

"Draw it mild!" grinned Church.

"And old Creepe himself came along, dressed like a farmer," said the fag. "Leggings, breeches, and everything complete! There's something rummy about that school—"

"There's something rummy about your imagination, you mean!" interrupted Pitt. "My dear young ass, you can't fool us with that pretty story. Digging the garden," he added, with a chuckle. "Come on, you chaps—we've heard enough fairy tales for once."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fourth-Formers dispersed, and Willy looked on with a glare.

"That's right—cackle away!" he snorted. "Who cares? The next time I see anything I'll keep it to myself!"

He stalked off, highly incensed. Sir Montie Tregellis-West thoughtfully wiped his pince-nez, and carefully adjusted them.



Tommy Watson was valiantly struggling with the enormous pile of potatoes, and had only succeeded in peeling a mere handful.

"A bit too bad, begad!" he declared. "I fail to see the reason for Willy's joke—I do, really! Of course, the whole story is absolutely preposterous!"

Nobody would give Willy's tale the slightest attention. It sounded so impossible that it was simply regarded as one of Hand-forth minor's little jokes.

"The silly young ass!" said his major severely. "I don't believe he went to Moat Hollow at all! In any case, the place isn't a giddy gardening institute! I believe there's something going on there," he added

significantly. "That's what I believe! There's something going on there!"

"We heard you the first time," said Church. "Let's get over to Little Side, and do some practice. We've got to go and see Archie, too—I hear he's worse! According to Brent, he's liable to peg out any minute between now and dinner-time!"

"Blow Archie—and blow footer practice!" said Handforth. "Archie's as well as I am—it's only his giddy imagination. We're going down to Moat Hollow to make a few investigations. I've got my suspicions," he added darkly. "That place isn't what it seems to be."

Church and McClure exchanged hopeless glances.

"Look here, Handy," said McClure, in a last effort. "We don't want to do anything discreditable. We shall be spying if we peep over that fence, and it'll only lead to trouble—"

"It's no good—I've made up my mind!" said Handforth firmly. "You don't know the difference between an investigation and spying! Detectives always have to peep over walls and squint through windows! It's part of their job! But you needn't worry—I'm not going to spy. My plan is to get completely over the fence and walk boldly into the house! They can't keep me out, I can tell you!"

And Edward Oswald Handforth meant what he said.

CHAPTER XII.

OVER THE GARDEN WALL.



"LOCKED!"

The leader of Study D made this announcement in an impressive tone as he tried the big double gates of Moat Hollow. Church and McClure

stood by, tully impressed.

"Locked!" repeated Handforth. "What's the meaning of it? Nearly dinner-time, and the beastly place is still closed up like Wormwood Scrubs! I'm going to climb over the wall!"

"Good!" said Church eagerly. "We knew we could rely on you to do the best thing, Handy! Buck up! We'll give you a leg up! There's no stopping you once you start, old man!"

"No fear!" agreed McClure. "That's the best of you, Handy! You're like a volcano—you seem to be full of fire and energy!"

Handforth beamed upon his chums.

"Oh, well, we've got to wake up when there's something important on the go," he said modestly. "You can trust me to probe this investigation to the bottom! You can rely on me to elucidate the mystery!"

It wasn't often that Church and McClure encouraged their leader so whole-heartedly, and Handforth swelled under the influence.

He wasn't aware that his chums had made a secret pact of their own.

In short, they intended to see him safely over the wall, and they would then conveniently vanish. For one thing, they didn't feel inclined to accompany him on this rash expedition; and for another thing, they considered that it would be a lesson to him. Church and McClure were always ready to do their leader a good turn.

"One of you chaps must stand against the wall, and I climb on your shoulders," said Handforth briskly. "It won't take me long to climb over. Those spikes won't worry me a bit. Any decent detective can cope with trifling obstacles like these."

Church was chosen for the work, as he was slightly taller than McClure, and a little bit heavier. He needed to be heavier to sustain the bulky form of his clumsy chief.

It was a perilous undertaking. No less than three times Church completely collapsed, and Handforth rolled to the ground. But at the fourth attempt, aided by McClure, Church managed to gain an upright position.

"Good!" panted Edward Oswald. "Keep like that—I can just reach! As soon as I'm fairly up, I'll reach down and lend you chaps a hand!"

He was still suffering from the delusion that his chums were to accompany him on this expedition. He stood on Church's shoulders and Church was pressing himself flat against the wall, with McClure propping him up. Handforth could just manage to grasp the top of the fence.

He obtained a firm grip, and hauled himself upwards.

"Thank goodness!" breathed Church fervently.

He staggered away, and both he and McClure stood watching, highly interested and entertained by Handforth's gymnastic operations.

Edward Oswald was hanging from the top of the fence and going through all sorts of contortions in his efforts to pull himself up. His chums confidently expected to see him tumble down; but for once he surprised them. With a supreme effort, he raised himself higher and higher until he managed to throw one leg over the top of the fence. He clung there, holding on to the stout iron spikes.

"Good!" said Church approvingly. "So long, Handy!"

"Eh? Look here, you fathead—"

"Sorry—can't stop!" said McClure. "We promised to go and see Archie—and it's nearly dinner-time already! Good luck, old man! Hope you carry out the investigation successfully!"

"Why, you—you—"

Handforth broke off as his chums walked away, chuckling. And just then his attention was attracted by a movement on the other side of the wall. A quick step sounded on the paved courtyard.

"You infernal young rascal!" rapped out an angry voice. "What are you doing up there? Get down at once!"

Handforth shifted his position and gasped. He had failed to take the necessary care in moving, and one of the iron spikes jabbed him forcibly in the rear.

"Ow!" he roared. "Great pip! What the——"

"I'll complain to your headmaster about this!" shouted Mr. Creepe, hurrying up, and standing beneath the wall. "If you don't get down at once, I'll call my monitors and have you horsewhipped!"

Mr. Creepe was absolutely furious. He stood there beneath the wall, gazing up at Handforth with blazing eyes, and with his face purple with rage. One might have thought that he was alarmed. He had certainly never bargained for such a situation as this.

Handforth deliberately swung his other leg over the rail, and sat there. Mr. Creepe's rage had a curious effect upon him. Incensed at first, he now became deadly calm. He gazed down at the schoolmaster with a cold disdain. Unfortunately, Handforth had failed to notice that the offending spike had actually penetrated the rear of his trousers, although it wasn't touching any part of his actual person.

"Do you hear me, sir?" raved Mr. Creepe. "Get down at once!"

"That's just what I'm doing now!" retorted Handforth. "But I'm coming down on this side—and I want to see Tommy Watson!"

Handforth released his grip and jumped. At least, he meant to jump. There was a rending, tearing noise from the rear, and Edward Oswald hung there. The spike had gone clean through his clothing, and he was suspended on the spike like a monkey on a string.

"Hi, help!" he gasped. "What the dickens——"

With utter dismay, he realised what had happened. But although he wriggled and twisted, he found it impossible to free himself. He hung there, helpless—a ludicrous spectacle.

Somehow, his investigation was panning out badly.

CHAPTER XIII.

POOR OLD HANDY!



MR. GRIMESBY CREEPE shook his fist menacingly.

"You young ruffian!" he shouted. "Who told you to climb over that fence? What do you mean by trespassing on my property? I'll call my monitors and have you dealt with as you deserve!"

"Here, wait a minute!" panted Hand-

forth. "I'm caught! One of those rotten spikes——"

"You are quite right, young man—you are certainly caught!" interrupted Mr. Creepe harshly. "And I do not intend to let you go unpunished! This spying and trespassing is intolerable!"

He turned round and strode into the house almost at a run. Handforth was relieved. He felt his position acutely. And it was all the more exasperating because he was so helpless. No matter how he twisted about, he couldn't unhook himself.

He was thankful that none of the boys were out in the courtyard, and he fervently hoped that none would appear. For Tommy Watson to see him like this would be tragic. He had come here to do some daring detective work—and this was the result.

He was still vainly struggling when Kirby and Tarkington hurried out. The two monitors were looking grim, but they paused in their tracks, and their expressions relaxed when they saw Handforth's predicament.

"Another of those rotten St. Frank's kids!" said Tarkington maliciously. "We've got him just where we want him, too! Better pull him down—eh? Then we'll tan the young idiot, and——"

"Hold on!" interrupted Kirby. "The Head ordered us to teach the kid a lesson, but he didn't say how. I've got an idea. Wait just a minute, and see that he doesn't escape."

He ran off and entered the tool-shed, some distance away. When he returned, he was carrying a tarnished garden syringe in one hand and a pail in the other. He set the pail down, and Tarkington chuckled as he glanced into it. It was three-parts full of black, murky liquid.

"You—you rotter!" gasped Handforth, staring. "What are you going to do with that black stuff? If you chuck it at me I'll——"

"I'm going to teach you to keep away from this place!" interrupted Kirby grimly. "We don't want any spying, and you're lucky to get off so lightly. We've had enough of you St. Frank's kids!"

Kirby filled the syringe with deadly purpose. Then he aimed it at the helpless Edward Oswald and pushed the handle. A deadly stream of black, sticky liquid issued forth.

Splash!

The aim was good, and Handforth's face was completely enveloped in the awful deluge. He spluttered and gasped and yelled. He struggled so violently that a series of ominous rends sounded from behind. But still he hung on—at the mercy of these tormentors.

Again and again the syringe was brought into play, until Handforth was drenched from head to foot, and unrecognisable beneath the covering of liquid mud. Fortune favoured the monitors. For the pail was

nearly emptied before Handforth's wild struggles had effect.

With a final tear, he came free, and tumbled headlong to the muddy ground. Kirby and Tarkington backed away, not because they were afraid of the junior, but because of his condition.

"Had enough?" jeered Kirby. "You can clear off now. Follow me, and I'll open the gate for you. And if you come back again you'll get something about ten times as bad!"

Handforth was rather dazed, but by no means subdued. He made a wild rush at Kirby. The latter, however, displayed not only strategy, but considerable cunning.

He took to his heels at once, and ran wildly for the main gates. Wrenching open the wicket, he tore through, leaving the gate wide. Handforth blundered out in full pursuit.

He took three steps forward before he heard a movement in his rear. Then he caught a glimpse of Kirby vanishing backwards through the wicket. The door slammed, and the latch clicked.

"You wait!" howled Handforth wildly. "By George! Just you wait until I catch you——"

"Go away, you young idiot!" came a voice over the high gate. "And be thankful that you weren't treated as you deserved!"

Handforth was too wet and uncomfortable to have much fight left in him. And he was helpless, too. With that great closed gate in front of him, he couldn't very well give way to his warlike feelings.

He remembered, with a breath of relief, that he had removed his overcoat before climbing the wall. It was still lying beneath a little bush near by. With a thankful gasp he donned the garment, and pulled it tightly round him. There was a keen nip in the air, for the temperature was below freezing-point.

Handforth ran up the lane, boiling with rage. There was only one thing to be done. An affair of this sort was too big to be left to the Fourth! The headmaster himself must deal with it!

It wasn't often that Handforth complained to the Head, but on this occasion he felt that such a course was necessary. St. Frank's had been insulted!

He arrived in the Triangle, and took no notice of the juniors who paused in their tracks and stared at him. He rushed straight across to the Head's house and grabbed the door handle. He found the latch unfastened, and he burst in with all his usual impulsive haste.

Down the passage he went, and right into the Head's study. But he only took a couple of steps before he fell back, staring hard. Mr. Grimesby Creepe was there before him!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LETTER.



DR. MALCOLM STAFFORD rose to his feet.

"Good gracious! What is the meaning of this outrageous interruption?" he asked angrily. "Who are you? Why, is it possible that—— Boy, are you Handforth?"

"Yes, sir, I am!" gasped Handforth. "I've come here to complain against Mr. Creepe's seniors——"

"Silence!" commanded the Head. "Control yourself, young man! By what right do you come bursting into my study in this unseemly fashion? Leave my presence at once!"

Mr. Creepe rubbed his hands gently together.

"It appears to be Handforth's favourite pastime—this bursting in upon his superiors!" he exclaimed, his voice soft and silky. "I trust, Dr. Stafford, that you fully realise the justification of my complaint?"

The Head compressed his lips.

"One moment, Handforth—I have one question to ask you before you go," he said grimly. "Did you deliberately climb the wall at Moat Hollow with the intention of spying upon Mr. Creepe's household?"

Handforth was rather taken aback.

"I wasn't spying, sir!" he protested. "I was just making a little investigation——"

"Then you admit that you climbed the wall?"

"Yes, sir," faltered Handforth. "I——"

"I should advise you to say nothing further, Handforth," interrupted the Head. "You know perfectly well I disapprove of such ungentlemanly conduct. I assume that you acted without a full realisation of your offence. Mr. Creepe's complaint is a serious one, and fully justified by the circumstances. In future, Moat Hollow will be strictly out of bounds for all junior boys!"

"Oh, I say!" protested Handforth. "Look here, sir——"

"Any juniors found breaking these bounds will be punished by a flogging at my own hands!" said Dr. Stafford angrily. "There is nothing I deplore more than my boys making themselves objectionable to our neighbours. You will report to me after you have changed, Handforth."

The leader of Study D passed out of the Head's study in a kind of daze. He hadn't yet got over the shock of seeing Mr. Creepe. In some way the principal of Moat Hollow had forestalled him, and Handforth felt swindled.

Mr. Creepe did not remain long after Handforth had departed. He deprecated the fact that he had felt compelled to com-

plain, and urged the Head to be lenient with the culprit. As he explained, his was no ordinary school—owing to the fact that many of his pupils were more or less patients—and privacy was absolutely essential. It was annoying in the extreme that the Fourth-Formers should pester him to such an extent.

Mr. Creepe was very courteous and smooth-tongued. The Head, indeed, considered him to be a well-mannered gentleman, although, perhaps, a trifle uncouth in his appearance.

Mr. Creepe departed, highly pleased with the result of his interview. He had created a good impression, and that was what he had desired. Furthermore, he had learned one or two facts which caused a grim glitter to appear in his eye.

As soon as he reached Moat Hollow he strode to his study and struck the bell. Kirby soon appeared, and the monitor commenced narrating the misadventures of Handforth.

"Yes, yes—quite so!" interrupted Mr. Creepe. "I know all about it, Kirby—you needn't waste your breath. Find Watson, and bring him to me at once."

Kirby raised his eyebrows, but knew better than to delay. Within three minutes he returned with Tommy Watson. The junior was looking sullen and defiant.

"Ah, Watson, just a few words, my dear boy!" said Mr. Creepe, sitting back in his chair and smiling benignly. "I think it is about time you wrote a few words to your father. Being a new arrival, you are naturally strange to your surroundings, and I am sure Sir Vivian will be anxiously awaiting a letter."

Watson brightened up instantly.

"Can I write home, sir?" he asked eagerly.

"To be sure, you can," replied Mr. Creepe, his heavy cheeks shaking as he shifted his position. "Good gracious! Did you suppose that my boys were not allowed to write home? What an idea! You will find pen and paper on the other side of the desk. Draw up a chair, Watson, and write your letter."

Watson readily obeyed, too excited to realise that there was a catch of some kind in this affair. Mr. Creepe watched him as he wrote the address and the date. But at this point the schoolmaster intervened.

"I think you had better write to my dictation, Watson," he said softly. "Tell your father that you are very happy here, that you are comfortable and well cared for, and that you regard Moat Hollow as a home second only to your own—"

"Tell—tell my father—that?" broke in Watson bluntly.

"Exactly! It is my desire—"

"I won't! It isn't true! I'm going to complain—"

"Tut-tut!" interrupted Mr. Creepe. "This

won't do—this won't do! Remember, Watson, that I am commanding you, and I am accustomed to being obeyed!"

Tommy took a deep breath.

"Oh, it's shameful!" he burst out. "I won't write such a string of lies to my father! I hate this place. It's a prison. You can't keep me here against my will. I won't write any letter—"

"One moment, Watson, interrupted Mr. Creepe gently. "I don't wish to be harsh with you. But any more of this nonsense, and you'll be flogged. And then—if you still refuse—I shall have no alternative but to sentence you to solitary confinement. In other words, you will be placed in a cellar, without light or warmth, and kept there day and night until you consent to my demand. Well, my boy?"

Tommy Watson flushed up crimson with passion.

"I won't write the letter!" he shouted furiously. "You brute! You old, cowardly beast! I won't—"

Mr. Creepe rose to his feet.

"I am afraid that we must use a little persuasion, Kirby," he said calmly. "Strap the boy in the usual place, and fetch me my birch. I have no doubt that Watson's letter will be ready for the evening post."

It was.

Human suffering has a limit. And although Tommy Watson was as courageous as most juniors, he was compelled to submit. He received the most terrible thrashing of his life. And then, threatened by a second birching, he succumbed. With his usual determination sapped away by his suffering, he gave up the fight.

And the letter was posted that evening. Mr. Grimesby Creepe always had his own way.

CHAPTER XV.

BY REQUEST OF ARCHIE.



SIR MONTIE TREGEL-
LIS-WEST tip-toed
into the bed-room
cautiously.

"What-ho!" murmured a feeble voice. "Enter, laddie! Trickle to the old bedside, and grab the old flipper! The fact is, I'm sinking—absolutely! I shall soon be coming up for the third time!"

Archie lay in bed, pale and ill.

There was no doubt about his condition. It was evening now, and Phipps was on duty in the bed-room, calm and collected. Phipps made an ideal nurse. Mrs. Stokes had spent all the afternoon with Archie, and he was feeling rather bucked in consequence.

"Feelin' a bit rocky, dear old boy?" asked Sir Montie.

"Oh, well, dash it!" breathed Archie. "Rocky, what? I mean to say that's hardly the word, dear old stalwart! The

good old frame is absolutely shrinking, and the vital tissues are wilting away. Behold! Observe Archie shrivel as you gaze!"

"Begad! Not so bad as that," smiled Tregellis-West.

But Archie shook his head mournfully. He was convinced that his illness was fatal. As a matter of fact, he was in the throes of a severe bilious attack, and nothing worse.

He lay looking at Sir Montie dreamily.

"Fate," he murmured, "has sent you. I mean, that's the sort of dashed sporty thing that Fate does now and again. Here you are, absolutely at the old bedside just when you're needed!"

"I really came up to see if you were better, dear fellow," said Sir Montie. "An' I was goin' to tell you about Watson, too. He's down at Moat Hollow, you know——"

"Absolutely!" breathed Archie. "Good gad! This is dashed extraord.! I mean to say, dear old Tommy is precisely the chappie I wish to warble about. I gather that Study C is a somewhat forlorn and dismal chamber, what?"

"Yes, rather!" growled Montie. "I'm on my own, you know."

"How positively poisonous!" said Archie sympathetically. "A thousand sorrows, old scout! It so happens that good old Alf is lonely, too. So what about it? What price an amalgamation, as it were?"

"I'm afraid I don't quite follow," smiled Tregellis-West.

"Dash it all, the brain cells appear to be somewhat weak!" whispered Archie. "There you are, in Study C, absolutely tiring of your own dashed company, and there's Alf Brent in Study P, pining away for my companionship. Waifs in the wilderness, what? I mean to say, why not carry the good old goods and chattels along, and park in my study?"

"Oh, you mean that I should join Brent in Study P?" asked Sir Montie. "Thanks, dear old boy—jolly decent of you. But I'm afraid I should be in the way when you came down—I should, really!"

Archie flapped a feeble hand.

"Laddie, it's all over!" he murmured. "Archie will never come down again! This, I mean to say, is dashed near the end! So kindly be a good old sportsman, and join up with Alf. The poor old horse is absolutely pining away."

Sir Montie promised—not without an inward chuckle—and then he solemnly shook Archie by the hand, and wished him a long farewell.

Very soon after that two distinguished visitors arrived—Colonel Glenthorne and a white-haired old gentleman who turned out to be a celebrated London physician—the Glenthorne family doctor, in fact.

He looked Archie over, lectured him severely, and allowed him to remain in bed. But the genial ass of the Fourth didn't stay there for long.

That one visit seemed to have worked wonders.

Within two days he was up and about—restored fully to health, but still convinced that he was an invalid. And when he entered his study he received a bit of a shock.

For Sir Montie Tregellis-West had taken full advantage of his offer.

Sir Montie was not only there in person, but he had brought all his books, his odds and ends, and his personal belongings. Sir Montie was firmly installed—and Study C, for about the first time in history, was empty.

Archie accepted the situation bravely.

He insisted upon Sir Montie remaining, and Tregellis-West didn't require much persuasion. He was a fellow who loved luxuries, and Archie's study was replete with them.

But although Archie was quite amiable about the new arrangement, he mentally resolved that when he was dying on the next occasion he would be a little more cautious.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West's removal into Archie's study seemed a mere trifle to the rest of the Fourth—but, as a matter of fact, it wasn't a trifle at all.

CHAPTER XVI.

A LETTER FROM HOME.



"S PLENDID—splendid!"

Mr. Grimesby Creepe chuckled with much satisfaction as he gazed at the letter in his hand. It had arrived by the morning post, and was clearly and plainly addressed to "Master Thomas Watson." But Mr. Creepe had no compunction in ruthlessly tearing it open. Watson didn't even know of its arrival.

Mr. Creepe toyed with his quill thoughtfully.

"Splendid!" he repeated. "That letter had precisely the right effect—as I was convinced it would have! Sir Vivian assured me at our first interview that I should be certain of the boy for a year. But this is better—much better!"

He glanced at the neatly written letter again.

"Naturally, I shall not show it to the boy yet," he told himself. "I may not even show it to him at all. It all depends!"

Mr. Grimesby Creepe was particularly pleased. Although his fees were ridiculously low when compared to those of St. Frank's, he was charging Sir Vivian Watson a higher rate than usual for the care of his son. And he naturally felt satisfied—for the schoolmaster was one of those peculiar individuals who gloat joyously over the saving of a single penny.

The letter was fairly long, and quite instructive:

16, Mountcroft Gardens,
Regent's Park, N.W.

My Dear Boy,—Your letter gave your mother and I the utmost pleasure. We are indeed delighted to learn that you are happy and comfortable in your new surroundings.

I had expected a good report from you, but I must confess that your letter surprised me. My first impression of Moat Hollow was good, and your corroboration has quite gratified me. I can rest content that you are in good hands, and amid surroundings that you like.

As you are happy in your new home—for I am convinced it is a home—I will now reveal something which I have hitherto kept back. I did not wish to tell you of this until you were comfortably settled. My confidence in Mr. Creepe is complete, and I may as well tell you that he already knows of this little secret.

Well, Tom, your mother and I intend to sail for Australia almost at once—that is to say, within two or three weeks. You know most of the facts concerning the financial crash, and although no iota of blame attaches itself to me for the catastrophe, certain ill-disposed people are talking—and newspapers and periodicals are dragging our honoured name through the mire.

All this is particularly distressing to your mother, and I wish to take her completely away until the affair has died down. I did not like to tell you of this before you left home—I did not have the heart. Perhaps, indeed, I lacked the courage.

But the fact remains that we must set off for Australia. I have a few mining interests there, and it is my fervent hope that I can realise on these, and so save us from complete financial ruin. But it is essential that I should go out personally.

Your sister Violet is being cared for by your Uncle Benjamin, and no doubt she will come down to see you occasionally. Your mother and I expect to be absent for a year, but it is quite likely that the period will extend to eighteen or twenty months.

As you are so happy and content at Moat Hollow, I am quite comfortable regarding your welfare, and I shall leave you in Mr. Creepe's hands with complete confidence.

I need say no more now—for, of course, I shall write you again before we sail.

With the utmost love and affection from us both,—Your affectionate father,

VIVIAN WATSON.

Mr. Creepe chuckled heavily.

"Very nice—very nice indeed!" he murmured. "If I am any judge at all, my



Edward Oswald was hanging from the top of the fence, and going through all sorts of contortions in his efforts to pull himself up.

friends will be absent for nearly two years. So the boy will be no trouble to me. With his parents away, and with myself in complete control of him, there will be no difficulties."

Mr. Creepe was relieved. Tommy Watson was an unusual scholar. The principal of Moat Hollow made a speciality of taking unwanted children--and Watson did not come exactly within that category. But for the fact that his father and mother were going abroad for a protracted trip, Mr. Creepe would never have accepted him as a pupil.

"The boy will remain here during the holidays," murmured the schoolmaster. "Under no circumstances must I let him go. And it will be easy to find excuses if his uncle or sister should come bothering. The money is worth the little extra trouble--well worth it! And his presence in my

school is valuable. It will sound well to prospective clients to state that I have the son of a baronet in my care."

It was obvious that Mr. Grimesby Creepe had an eye to business. And although Tommy Watson was an awkward pupil at present, his presence at Moat Hollow would benefit Mr. Creepe in more ways than one.

As for the future, the schoolmaster dismissed all worries. If Watson talked when he finally emerged from his imprisonment--well, he could talk. The word of a school-boy would be as nothing compared to the irrefutable evidence of honesty and integrity which Mr. Grimesby Creepe could produce if necessary.

Tommy Watson's life at Moat Hollow had just commenced, and little did Mr. Creepe realise what the immediate future had in store!

THE END.

By Your



Editor.

The author and I are now busily engaged in planning several new schemes for the improvement of the Old Paper. The formation of a St. Frank's League is taking up a great deal of our attention just now. I do not know whether to call it a League or a Fellowship. The main idea, of course, is to bring readers into closer touch with each other and to establish branches in various centres where they have already volunteered their services as officers in the League, and I am keeping their names and addresses for future reference should I avail myself of their kind assistance.

NEXT WEEK'S STORIES!

The amazing adventures of Tommy Watson at the Moat Hollow School will rank as one of those exceptionally fine series that have made THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY yarns so popular. "THE PHANTOM PROTECTOR!" is next week's story of this engrossing series. The first instalment of a new, thrilling detective serial, entitled, "THE INVISIBLE GRIP!" begins next week. It is a story of Nelson Lee and Nipper, introducing that extraordinary personality, Professor Cyrus Zingrave.

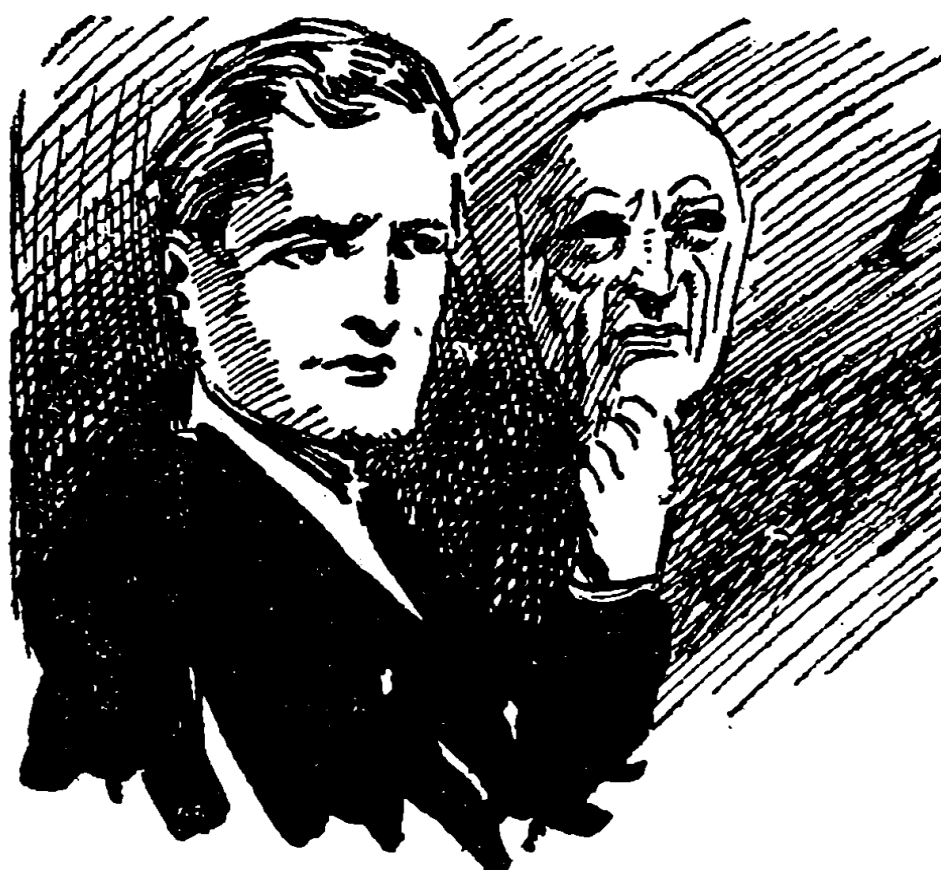
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**A CLEVER DETECTIVE STORY
DESCRIBING HOW EILEEN DARE,
THE PLUCKY GIRL DETECTIVE,
ASSISTED BY NELSON LEE AND
NIPPER, SOLVES THE MYSTERY
OF HOLLOWDENE MANOR.**

CHAPTER I.

THE MOTOR-CAR CHASE.

EILEEN DARE, Nelson Lee's lady assistant, was in a very strange predicament.

Attired in a loose-fitting, dead-black pierrot costume, and wearing a hideous yellow mask, she was being hurried through the gloomy grounds of Hollowdene Manor in the fierce grip of two Chinamen.

The lady detective had, in fact, just been kidnapped from one of the rooms of the old house, and she found herself helpless against the two slant-eyed yellow men who were responsible for the outrage.

Moreover, Eileen Dare had not the remotest notion why she was being taken away by them, nor had she any idea what her destination was to be. Her abduction was a complete mystery to her.

She struggled frantically to free herself from their grasp, but she would not lower herself to beg for mercy from such heathens. And, finding that escape was impossible, the plucky girl set her lips firmly, and resolved to await a more favourable opportunity of outwitting her captors.

In a dark by-lane bordering the Manor grounds a motor-car stood waiting, and it was towards this vehicle that the girl was taken. One of the Chinamen, upon reaching the car, produced a coil of rope, and with this the girl was rapidly bound—her hands being tied behind her back, and her arms securely roped to her body.

Then she was placed upon a seat at the back of the car, with one of the Chinamen guarding her. The other took his place at the driving-wheel, and started the engine, letting in the clutch instantly, and driving off into the main London road.

The whole operation of kidnapping Eileen had occupied only a few minutes, and the girl racked her brains for an explanation of the Chinamen's reasons for taking her away.

On Nelson Lee's instructions she had taken a position as maidservant with Dr. Jeremy Nicholson, at Hollowdene Manor, near Watford, a man who was surrounded in mystery, and in whom the detective was greatly interested.

A few nights earlier, during a severe storm, one of the maids at Hollowdene Manor had met with an untimely death, and Nelson Lee suspected that she had been killed by sheer fright.

Dr. Nicholson denied this; but the detective was determined to verify his suspicions. In order to do so, he had installed Eileen Dare within the house under the name of "Mary Aldridge," and since she had been in residence she had seen several mysterious and inexplicable happenings.

Lee and Nipper, working from the outside of the house, had also made a few discoveries. They knew, for instance, that Dr. Nicholson was being menaced by the two Chinamen for some reason, and they had also discovered that two London burglars—Bill Jenkins and Walter Hayes—had been bent upon blackmailing the doctor.

By a clever ruse, Nelson Lee and Nipper had succeeded in capturing these two rascals, and they were now lying, bound and helpless, in the interior of a dilapidated shack upon the common.

It was while the famous pair had been thus engaged that Eileen Dare had been kidnapped—and this occurrence was an eventuality for which the detective had made no allowance.

Nelson Lee, in point of fact, had expected that an attempt would be made to abduct Dr. Nicholson, and the news of Eileen's kidnapping came as a great surprise to him.

He learned of the Chinamen's capture of "Mary Aldridge" from Mason, the butler, and the detective shrewdly suspected that the girl had been mistaken for another individual entirely.

For some little time he and Nipper—and Eileen Dare also—had guessed that Dr.

Nicholson was concealing a mysterious person within a secret chamber which opened from his private room—a person who seemed to habitually wear a hideous yellow mask, and whom Eileen had actually seen upon one occasion.

No doubt the lady detective had been making an investigation of the doctor's room this evening, and had discovered the yellow mask, which she had unsuspectingly tried on.

At the same moment, she had been seized by the two alert Chinamen and hurried away—the Chinks being under the impression that they had got Dr. Nicholson's mysterious captive.

This, at all events, was how Nelson Lee read the riddle; but he did not delude himself that Eileen Dare would be safe when her real identity was discovered by her captors. The detective had had a long and varied experience of Chinamen, and he knew that they would not hesitate at any villainy if it would serve their ends or safeguard their liberty.

The girl's danger, therefore, was a very real one, and Nelson Lee intended to leave no stone unturned in order to rescue her from the clutches of the Chinamen.

The position, as events turned out, was not nearly so bad as at first appeared—for as Nelson Lee and Nipper emerged from the hall-door of Hollowdene Manor, after learning of Eileen's abduction, their ears were assailed by the unmistakable throbbing of a motor-car engine, which could not be more than a few hundred yards away.

And the great detective instantly divined the truth.

"The Chinamen have taken Eileen to a motor-car, young 'un, and they are just starting off!" he said tensely to his assistant. "Thank goodness we've got our racer at the edge of the common! In that we can pursue them, and unless they've got a thoroughbred under them, we can overtake them this side of Watford!"

Nipper nodded excitedly.

"Our old 'bus will overtake anything on the road, guv'nor!" he declared proudly. "We'll have Miss Dare out of the Chinks' hands before they realise we're after 'em!"

It was indeed fortunate that the detective had foreseen some such possibility as this, and that he had brought his powerful racing car from the King George Inn, at Little Barling, to a spot quite close to the Manor.

With quick strides, he and Nipper sprinted through the grounds towards the common, and they reached Lee's racer in a very few minutes. The great machine was in absolute readiness for instant departure, and the engine roared into life at the first touch of the self-starter. With a bound, the car started forward as Lee set in the clutch, and a second later the powerful monster was careering down the road in the wake of the Chinamen's vehicle.

With headlights gleaming, the racer tore

along the road at an amazing speed, superbly piloted by the steady hands of the famous detective. The first mile was covered inside of two-and-a-half minutes, and half-way through the second Lee and Nipper had the satisfaction of seeing the tail-light of the Chinks' car away in the distance.

The rapidity with which they were overtaking the winking ruby light was convincing evidence that Lee's car was by far the swifter, and the detective knew that he need have no further anxiety concerning Eileen Dare. Within a comparatively few seconds she would be rescued, and the Chinamen would be at the mercy of himself and Nipper.

Nelson's Lee's estimate was soon proved to be correct, for the racer overtook the fleeing car almost as the thoughts passed through his mind. And, once he had gained the lead, the detective took very active steps to prevent the further progress of the Chinamen's car.

For Lee turned his racer broadside towards the oncoming vehicle, and thus forced it to come to a standstill. And, once it had done so, he and Nipper covered the Chinamen with their revolvers, and demanded their surrender. The two Orientals were flabbergasted at the rapidity of their capture, and they complied with the detective's orders without hesitation.

"What do you mean by kidnapping my lady assistant?" demanded Nelson Lee, in a stern tone.

One of the Chinamen murmured "No savee," but his companion answered the criminologist in perfect English.

"You are mistaken, my dear sir!" he said, with a bow. "We have kidnapped no lady, I assure you! The man we have taken is rightfully ours—"

"Do you call this young lady a man?" cut in Nipper, as he pulled the yellow mask from Eileen's head. "By jingo, if you had done any harm to Miss Dare, the guv'nor would have just about killed the pair of you!"

A silvery laugh broke from Eileen's lips—a laugh of sheer delight and relief.

"Oh! Thank goodness you have come, Mr. Lee!" she exclaimed fervently. "I—I was tremendously frightened—"

"What is this?" interrupted the Chinaman blankly, as he stared at the girl's features. "A lady! And we thought that we had got the Captain!"

"Just as I imagined!" said Nelson Lee, with a nod. "I think the time has now come for a full explanation of your conduct, and it will be better for you to return to the Manor with us at once."

The Chinaman nodded.

"Very well, Mr. Lee—for I know your identity, you see—we will do so," he agreed readily. "I must apologise for abducting this young lady, and I hope you will accept my assurance that she was kidnapped entirely by mistake. We do not want her at

all, for our business is connected with an entirely different person."

"The Captain?" suggested Nelson Lee.

"Exactly—the Captain!" agreed the Chinaman blandly.

CHAPTER II.

BILL JENKINS EXPLAINS.



THE return journey to the Manor was accomplished without loss of time—the two Chinamen travelling in their own car, and preceding Lee's racer.

Eileen Dare, now freed from her bonds, was seated between Lee and Nipper in the

to comply with the request, in view of the present situation.

Lee himself had come to a few conclusions which he had no doubt were pretty near to the truth—but he wished the matter to be settled once for all, and the mystery dispersed.

Upon arrival at the old house, the two Chinamen showed no desire to make their escape, but accompanied Lee and the others into Dr. Nicholson's library. Here they found the two dejected blackmailers—who had been brought from the hut upon the common by Mason, who had acted upon the detective's instructions.

Dr. Nicholson was also there, and he gave a very perceptible start as he beheld the two

"Do you call this young lady a man?" cut in Nipper, as he pulled the yellow mask from Eileen's head.



racer, and she gave them an account of how she had been mistaken for the man the Chinamen were really after.

Events had transpired exactly as the detective had surmised, and Eileen had simply been pounced upon owing to her wearing the mask. But for that she would never have been molested.

Both she and Nipper were curious to know the real meaning of all the queer happenings which had been taking place at the Manor; but Nelson Lee advised them to wait until the Manor had been reached. Dr. Nicholson would then be called upon for an explanation, and he could scarcely refuse

Chinamen. But he made no remarks, and contented himself with listening to what Nelson Lee had to say.

"This little gathering, Dr. Nicholson, has been brought about by a most astonishing series of events," said the detective. "But I hope that it will serve to clear up, once for all, the mystery which seems to have enveloped both you and your residence——"

"It is impossible!" muttered the doctor. "The mystery, as you call it, must for ever remain a mystery——"

"I fancy you are mistaken," said Nelson Lee quietly. "This man Jenkins, I know, has been attempting to blackmail you on

account of something which he saw in this house upon the night of the storm——"

"Quite right, guv'nor!" said Jenkins, pulling a wry face. "But you came along and upset my apple-cart properly! And now that me and Walter have been copped, we might as well make a clean breast of the whole business!"

"Precisely!" said Lee, with a nod. "You and Hayes, I take it, were here for purposes of burglary on the night in question?"

"Yes," said Jenkins. "We got into the passage outside Dr. Nicholson's room, and then we saw a ghastly figure come tottering out of the doorway—an awful-looking thing it was, with a yellow face and staring eyes! At the same moment it was seen by one of the maidservants, and she flew screaming out into the storm, frightened out of her wits! She dropped dead out on the drive from sheer fright—and I don't wonder at it!"

Nelson Lee nodded grimly, and glanced at Nipper.

"Just as I surmised," he murmured. "I was perfectly sure that poor Ellen Bennett was scared to death by some unspeakably horrible sight she had witnessed within the Manor, and that her death was not merely due to the storm. This man's story confirms my theory—but it is not quite clear why Dr. Nicholson persisted in attributing the girl's death to the thunderstorm."

The doctor gave a little despairing gesture, but remained silent.

"He did that because he daren't let anybody know that he's keeping some bloke a prisoner in here!" volunteered Jenkins generously. "But me an' Walter saw him, as I just said, and it was our idea to make the doctor give us some money to keep the secret——"

"It is true, Mr. Lee—every word of it!" cut in Dr. Nicholson, holding his head down dejectedly. "By all appearances, it is impossible for me to keep my secret any longer, and as that is the case I may as well tell you everything. Ellen Bennett, poor girl, was frightened in precisely the way this man has stated; but it was purely owing to an accidental meeting. I did everything possible to prevent such an occurrence—but it happened, in spite of my efforts."

Nipper looked at the doctor shrewdly.

"But if Miss Bennett's death was due to an accident, why did you say that the storm had caused her collapse?" he asked.

"Because it was impossible for me, at that time, to give an explanation of the 'apparition' which frightened her," said Dr. Nicholson, glancing at the two Chinamen fearfully. "Now, by all accounts, further concealment is useless, since my secret is known to the very men from whom I most desired it to be kept."

One of the Chinamen smiled.

"If you are referring to myself and my companion, Dr. Nicholson," he said, "I may tell you that we have known your secret for

several days past. It was our intention to take away the captain much sooner than this; but, owing to the servant-girl's death, and the disturbance which followed that event, we held our hand. Since then we have been awaiting a favourable opportunity to strike; but these two criminals complicated matters very considerably. In addition, Mr. Lee and his assistant were continually threatening our safety, and it was not until to-night that we were able to make a move. And then, as we now know, we made the mistake which has led to the present situation. Instead of getting the captain, we merely got Miss Eileen Dare!"

Dr. Nicholson looked puzzled.

"Miss Eileen Dare?" he repeated, glancing at the girl curiously. "You are not 'Mary Aldridge,' then, but the famous lady detective?"

Eileen nodded, and blushed.

"I came here in the character of the maidservant in order to assist Mr. Lee to discover the cause of Ellen Bennett's death," she said simply. "But I am afraid that I have done very little beyond making a muddle of things! To-night I found the yellow mask in your room, Dr. Nicholson, and I slipped it over my head—merely out of curiosity. And the next instant I found myself being carried off in the arms of the two Chinamen——"

"They, no doubt, mistook you for the man they had planned to capture," said the doctor. "Dear, dear! What an extraordinary series of events, to be sure! It is quite evident that I have been living in a fool's paradise! For, while I thought that my secret was safe, it was apparently known to you all!"

The knowledge seemed to stun him for a moment, and he relapsed into silence.

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE STORY.



THE assembled company in the library—surely as queer an audience as ever a man had—watched the old doctor curiously, and waited for him to resume.

Nelson Lee and Nipper were standing close to Eileen Dare, and the two Chinamen were a little distance apart—both of them looking on with expressionless faces.

Near by, still guarded by Mason, the butler, Bill Jenkins and Walter Hayes were seated, their wrists securely tied in order to prevent them from escaping.

And over by the fireplace stood Dr. Nicholson, the mystery man of Hollowdene Manor. His lined features now indicated that he was greatly troubled, and there was no doubt that he was considerably shocked to find that all these people were in possession

of his secret—which, of course, was a secret no longer.

"It is quite useless for me to attempt to hide the facts any longer," said Dr. Nicholson at last. "You all know that I have been concealing a masked man in this house; but I doubt if you are aware of that man's identity, or of my reasons for keeping him in hiding. The Chinamen, of course, know his identity, for otherwise they wouldn't be here! It was on account of them and their countrymen that I have been forced to act as I have done, and I pray that I shall never have to undergo another such ordeal!"

Nelson Lee looked at the doctor sympathetically, and spoke in a low tone.

"You are referring to your son, and to his sufferings?" he murmured.

"Yes, Mr. Lee—you are quite right," agreed the doctor. "For the past six months Captain Nicholson, my son, has been in this house undergoing treatment at my hands—treatment such as I have never had to apply to another human being during the whole course of my medical career! My task has been one of the most terrible which any father has been called upon to undertake, and I marvel at the strength and determination which alone have enabled me to carry on."

He paused, and glanced round before resuming.

"I must explain that my son," he continued, "was captured in the interior of China some time prior to his return to this country, and that while there he was shockingly tortured by a little band of fanatics. He was so atrociously handled that the natives left him for dead—being quite convinced that the injuries they had inflicted were sufficient to prevent my son's recovery."

The doctor paused again, and looked at the Chinamen—who still remained silent and inscrutable.

"But Captain Nicholson, by a miracle, did regain consciousness," went on the old man, in a ringing voice, "and he managed, Heaven alone knows how, to crawl to a place of safety. Later he succeeded in reaching the coast, and boarding a homeward-bound steamer as a stowaway. In this vessel he travelled to London, and from there he made his way here on foot—arriving in the dead of night, and attracting my attention by throwing stones at the window of my bedroom. I shall never forget the terrible shock I received when I came face to face with my son—for he was scarcely recognisable as a human being!"

Eileen Dare gave vent to a little exclamation of sympathetic concern as Dr. Nicholson's face expressed the horror he felt.

"Oh! How awful!" she murmured. "How truly appalling! You must have suffered

agonies, Dr. Nicholson, to find your son in such a condition!"

The old man nodded.

"You are right, Miss Dare," he agreed. "It is quite impossible for me to describe my feelings, but you can, perhaps, imagine something of them when I tell you that I found my son's features almost entirely missing! They had been literally hacked away by his Chinese torturers, and I marvelled that the boy had survived the ordeal at all. He was the most ghastly object that I have ever beheld, and I felt at that moment very much like cursing the whole of the Chinese race."

"I don't wonder at it," declared Nipper warmly. "I have never heard of such a diabolical outrage, Dr. Nicholson. But what about your son now? Is he still in the same terrible condition?"

The doctor shook his head, and smiled.

"By the mercy of Providence—no," he replied. "For the past six months—ever since my son's arrival, in fact—I have been conducting a series of experiments upon him. Operation after operation has been performed within the secret chamber which opens from my bedroom, and at last I have succeeded in restoring my son's features to something like their normal appearance. The task has been a formidable one, but it was worth every atom of trouble and care which I have lavished upon my patient—"

"And do you mean to say that you have carried out all these intricate operations single-handed?" asked Nipper incredulously.

Dr. Nicholson nodded.

"Yes," he said. "Secrecy was imperative, and I was obliged to do everything necessary with my own hands. But I did not mind that so long as my son showed progress. Happily, he proved to be a wonderfully healthy patient, and he came through the series of operations in the most remarkable manner. If you will excuse me for a moment, I will bring Captain Nicholson to you, and allow you to judge for yourselves."

The doctor addressed the latter part of his remarks to the occupants of the library in general, and then hurried away to fetch his son.

His extraordinary statements had practically cleared up the mystery which had formerly surrounded both himself and the Manor, but there were still a few minor details to be explained.

It was not clear, for instance, why Dr. Nicholson had been forced to conduct his operations with such close secrecy, nor why the captain had been subjected to torture in China.

If Nelson Lee knew the answers to these questions he kept his own counsel, and waited with the others for Dr. Nicholson's return. No doubt a complete explanation would be forthcoming sooner or later.

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW ARRIVAL.



DR. JEREMY NICHOLSON opened the library door, and entered, piloting a grotesquely masked figure before him. It was the figure of a slim young man, who walked with halting steps, and whose eyes gleamed strangely from the eye-holes in the hideous yellow mask.

"Allow me to introduce Captain Nicholson," said the doctor proudly. "My son has entered with the mask in position, so that you can all see him as he appeared to poor Ellen Bennett, on the night of her death. The mask is a ghastly-looking affair, I know—but it was vitally necessary for the captain to wear it for several reasons. Now, however, it can be dispensed with."

Dr. Nicholson removed the mask as he spoke, and the features of his son were revealed to the curious gaze of the onlookers. But if they had expected to be shocked by the sight of a badly disfigured face, they were very pleasantly surprised, for Captain Nicholson presented the appearance of an exceedingly good-looking man of slightly under thirty years of age.

At first sight there did not appear to be a blemish upon his features, and it was only by a very close scrutiny that a spectator could tell that he was not in every way normal. Even then the defects were by no means marked, and merely consisted of one or two slight scars.

He bowed politely to the assembled company; but Lee noticed that an angry glitter appeared in his eyes as he beheld the two Chinamen. But it disappeared in an instant.

"Good-evening!" he exclaimed, glancing round the room interestedly. "My father has given me a slight idea of what has taken place this evening, and I can assure you that I am delighted to stand here before you—a living monument to Dr. Nicholson's amazing skill! My father has literally performed a miracle upon me, and I shall never cease to be grateful to him, nor to wonder how he has achieved his results. My face has been restored to its normal condition after being almost completely obliterated—"

"It's amazing!" murmured Eileen Dare incredulously.

"It is, indeed," agreed the captain, with a nod. "Just how amazing you can never know, because you did not see me before the operations commenced."

Captain Nicholson then gave his hearers an account of his father's wonderful work, and told them how painstaking the doctor had been. He concluded by holding up the mask, and referring to it.

"This was an absolute necessity to me," he said, "partly to assist in the healing of

my features after the various operations, and partly to act as a disguise. It was essential that my presence at the Manor should be kept an absolute secret—"

"Why?" asked Nipper curiously.

One of the Chinamen took upon himself to answer.

"I think I can explain why the captain was in hiding," he said calmly. "My name is Lung Foo, and I am in a position to know all the facts, since I was sent over to this country with orders to trace Captain Nicholson. He is accused of the theft of a god from the Temple of Shin-tia—"

"But the accusation is a false one!" interrupted the captain hotly.

"I do not think so," said Lung Foo. "You and your companion, Lieutenant Summers, were both concerned in the theft; but, unfortunately, Summers escaped. You were suspected as the one who actually had the god in his possession, and you were, therefore, subjected to the torture by the enraged priests of the Temple. You protested your innocence, it is true; but a little later Summers was found, and he swore that you had the god—"

"The lying scoundrel!" ejaculated the captain. "I never even saw the thing—let alone stole it!"

"The priests of Shin-tia evidently think otherwise!" said Lung Foo. "For, after learning of Summers' accusation, they instituted a minute search for you. Eventually it was found that you had fled to England, and myself and my servant were instructed to locate you, and to bring you back at any cost—"

"But you will never do so!" said the captain hotly. "After the diabolical treatment I received at the hands of your people, I will never again set foot in your accursed country! I am entirely innocent of the atrocious charge which you bring against me, and I swear that I know nothing whatever about the god you have mentioned. I never touched it, or saw it, that I can remember, and as for stealing it—why, the idea is preposterous!"

Captain Nicholson spoke in a most convincing tone, and there was not a single person in the library who disbelieved him—apart from the two Chinamen. They, of course, were prejudiced against him, having been sent over especially to effect his recapture.

It was at this moment that Nelson Lee looked at his watch a little anxiously, and then glanced towards the French window. Then he raised his hand and beckoned.

Instantly the French window was pushed open, and a third Chinaman entered the room—a gentlemanly-looking man, who walked towards the detective with hand outstretched.

"Ah, Mr. Lee—delighted to see you again!" he murmured. "In answer to your telegram, I hurried down here with all possible speed, and I arrived just in time to hear

everything which has recently taken place in this room. Fortunately, I have been able to do everything you required—"

"Thank you—thank you!" said Nelson Lee, in a tone of relief, as he shook the newcomer's hand warmly. "I am tremendously glad that you have come now, because you will be able to convince your countrymen of their mistake. Events have turned out much more satisfactorily than I had anticipated, and we shall be able to settle everything quite amicably."

The detective turned to the assembled company, and indicated the new arrival.

"Allow me to introduce Mr. Loh Yang, the Chinese Ambassador," he said quietly. "I fancy that he has some very important information to impart—information which will please all of us, but which will appeal very forcibly to Dr. Nicholson and his son."

The Chinese Ambassador smiled and nodded, and then proceeded to startle the occupants of the library with the information which Lee had promised.

CHAPTER V.

PEACE COMES TO HOLLOWDENE.



MR. LOH YANG beamed.

"I am happy to be able to confirm Mr. Nelson Lee's statement," he began amiably. "I have, indeed, brought some important information, and I will commence by telling you that Captain Nicholson's protestations of innocence are perfectly true—"

"What?" almost shouted the doctor. "You mean that my son's honour is vindicated—that his innocence is established?"

"Exactly!" agreed Mr. Loh Yang. "We have received the news that the missing god of the Temple of Shin-tia has been found—in the possession of Lieutenant Summers! Summers, it appears, tried to sell it recently, and I fear that a very swift and terrible retribution overtook him—"

"Serve him right!" ejaculated Nipper, in a tone of disgust. "Summers, according to Mr. Lung Foo here, swore that Captain Nicholson had stolen the god—and there's no punishment too severe for a man who swears a false information against a pal!"

Mr. Loh Yang nodded.

"I agree with you entirely," he said, "and I am delighted that Mr. Lee wired for me to come down here in order to prevent any further molestation of Captain Nicholson. I regret very much that he has been made to suffer at the hands of some of my misguided countrymen, but you have my assurance that he will in future be left severely alone."

As he spoke, Mr. Loh Yang made a signal to Lung Foo and the other Chinaman, and they both left the room at once. A few

minutes later the Chinese Ambassador took his leave of the assembled company, and followed them. Mr. Loh Yang was an old acquaintance of Nelson Lee's—which accounted for his readiness to make his appearance in answer to the detective's telegram.

When the Chinamen had gone, Dr. Nicholson turned to Lee almost with tears in his eyes, and seized his hand gratefully.

"Thank you, Mr. Lee—thank you a thousand times," he said brokenly.

"Nonsense, doctor!" said the detective, with a smile. "I am only too happy to think that I have been able to assist you a trifle—"

"A trifle, Mr. Lee!" repeated Dr. Nicholson. "You call it a trifle! You can hardly realise the extent of my obligation to you! But for the assistance which has been rendered by yourself and Nipper and Miss Dare, I should not only have been kidnapped and blackmailed, but I should have had the pain of seeing my son's operation endangered in its last stages! I owe you a debt which I can never repay—and so does my son!"

Captain Nicholson nodded, and stepped forward impulsively.

"Dad's right, Mr. Lee," he agreed. "But for you and your clever assistants, there's no telling what might have happened to my face! During the latter part of the time my father has been paying it a tremendous amount of attention, and if he had been forcibly detained by those blackmailers, there's no saying what might have occurred. You see, that hideous mask was so fixed that I could not remove it without assistance, and it was owing to my helplessness in this respect that I came face to face with the unfortunate servant-girl. I had an accident that night, and spilled some acid—which, fortunately, did no harm beyond scarring me, and causing me to make a search for my father."

The gratitude of the father and son was genuine and enthusiastic, and Lee and his assistants were slightly embarrassed. But they were glad that the case had ended so satisfactorily for all concerned. Eileen Dare had materially assisted in the unravelling of the mystery, and she was glad that peace had once more come to Hollowdene Manor and its occupants.

Bill Jenkins and Walter Hayes were handed over to the police without delay, and a little later Nelson Lee, Nipper, and Eileen Dare left the old house in the racer, en route for Gray's Inn Road. The trio were pleased that their eerie experiences had terminated in such a happy manner.

A few days later Lee received a handsome cheque from Dr. Jeremy Nicholson, and Eileen Dare, by the same post, was the recipient of a magnificent gold wrist-watch, suitably inscribed—both of them tokens of the doctor's gratitude which spoke for themselves.

THE END.

BETWEEN OURSELVES

MR. EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Chats with his Readers and Comments on their Letters

(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.).

Letters received: J. Gullin (Jersey), William Salter (Bristol), Smith Thompson (Bradford), Basil Titchbourne (Pimlico), R. H. W. (Abingdon), E. A. Quin (N. Kensington), "An Enthusiastic Reader" (Walthamstow), John Willes (Folkestone), "Ebo" (Sheffield), W. B. (Winchester), "Life-Long Reader" (Leicester), H. F. Mullett (Northay), J. Parr (Platt Bridge), T. Dixon (Liverpool), Tapping Brothers (Tring), "Roderick Dhu" (Newcastle), W. G. White (Nuneaton), Albert Barrow (Islington), C. Southon (Tonbridge), "Old 'Un" (Millwall), G. Watling (Wandsworth), W. L. Hayward (Southampton), Fred Allison (York), Allan J. Parkinson (Grimsby), Joseph Taylor (Walthamstow), Critic (Harrow), Tom Lord (Wisbech), Charles R. Colwell (Birmingham), Elmor Martin (Limerick), "Redskin Ern" (Hale), Fred A. Mayerl (Shepherd's Bush), J. H. Wright (Broadstairs), Ben Brooke (Stockport), Derek Wilson (Clavering), John Cobbleton (Birmingham).

Well, I've got such a lot to say this week that I'm afraid my remarks will overflow on to another page. If so, you have my sympathy. But I'm not taking any blame, because I get so many letters that I simply MUST have the space. So that's that.

Now for a few general remarks. All right, you fellows—I'll deal with a few individual replies later on. But first of all I want to get some weighty thoughts off my mind. By the way, how do you like the new heading—"Between Ourselves"? I think it,

makes us just a little bit closer together, eh?

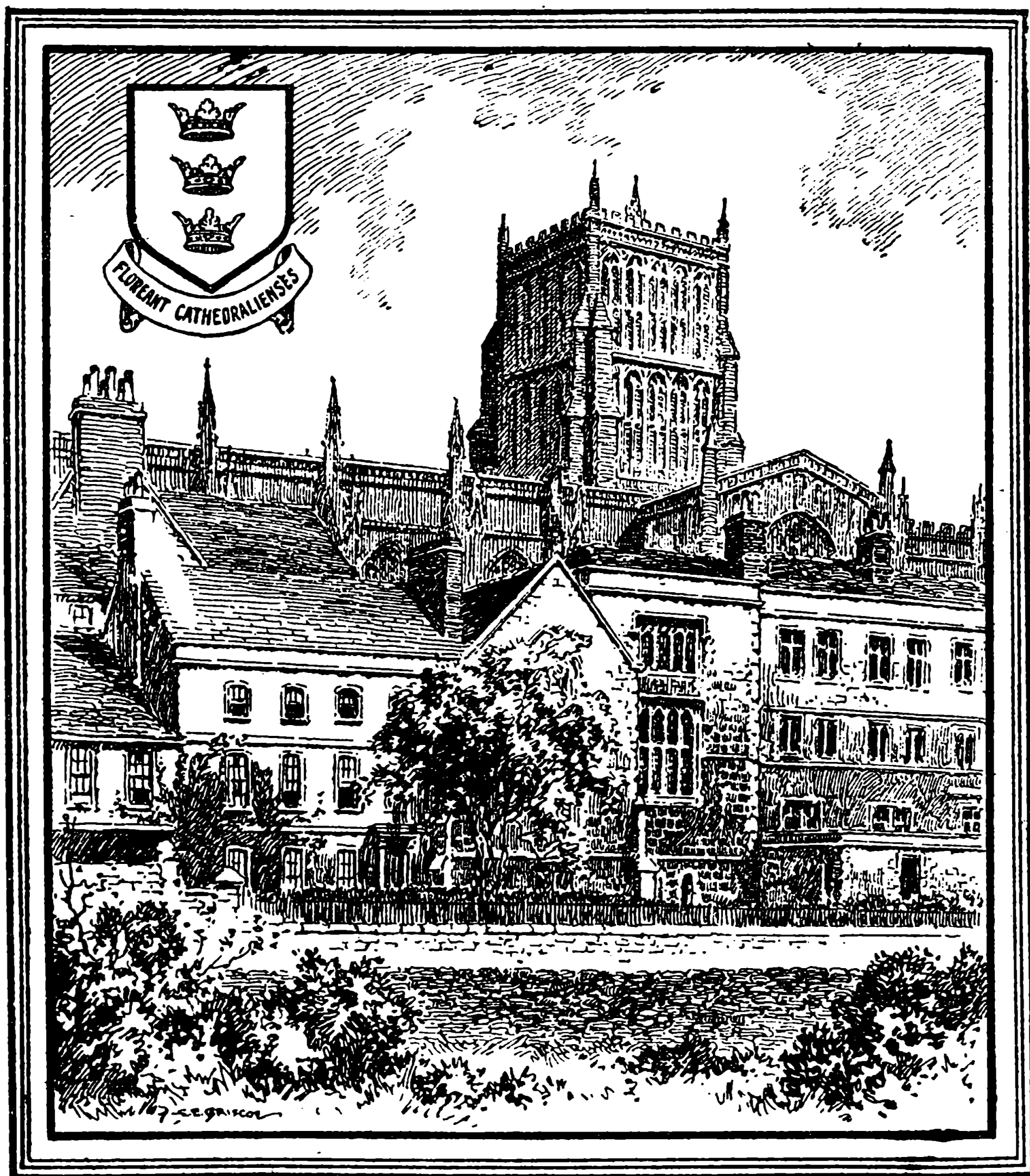
About the League. This is still very much "in the air." That is to say, the Editor and I have talked about it, but nothing definite has yet been settled. All the same, I'd like to thank all you hosts of good fellow who have eagerly expressed your willingness to become District Organising Officers for your own towns (here's a chance for you to pat yourselves on the back, too—you hold the field to yourselves. Not a single girl reader has so far offered her services! I say, young ladies, what's the matter?). Your names and addresses have been placed on a list, and the Editor is holding it ready for future reference. It is quite likely that you will soon be called upon to be "up and at 'em." This League scheme may develop very shortly now—but I can't say anything more at the moment.

A great many of you have been writing to me about that hint I gave some weeks ago of dividing the Old Paper into two publications. There appears to be an overwhelming majority in favour of keeping it intact—but with one important change. You all seem to want a longer school story. The separate story about Nelson Lee and Nipper seems to be about as popular as fog at a football match! You want the detective element, but you want it intermixed with the school yarn. In other words, you're not keen on a double-course meal—you'd rather have it on one plate!

All right. You shall have it. As I have already promised, Nelson Lee and Nipper will come back to St. Frank's, and take up their old positions, as soon as the present series has run its course. And, what's more, I'm going to work extra hard, and give you longer school stories than ever before. So don't write to me and say that I'm not reasonable!

Although most of you like the Portrait Gallery, the Editor and I have received a few grumbles. Well, we expected them, so

(Continued on cover page iii.)



OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS SERIES OF ART SKETCHES.
No. 61. THE BRISTOL CATHEDRAL SCHOOL.

Founded in 1542, the Bristol Cathedral School is known to have flourished fifty years before this date. Queen Elizabeth visited the school in 1592. To-day there are about 150 scholars. In the sketch above can be seen the school building and the Head's house, with the Cathedral in the background.



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

My dear Chums,

We are all getting anxious about the welfare of Tommy Watson at the Moat Hollow School. He has only called here once, and that was soon after his arrival at Moat Hollow. If you remember, Tommy gave us a glowing account of the place, and some of us began to envy his good fortune. It is not like Tommy to drop his old pals, and I cannot help thinking it is very strange we do not hear anything of him nowadays. There is something fishy going on at Moat Hollow, and I should not be surprised if old Grimesby Creepe is keeping the whole school gated for some reason other than as a punishment. Why, for instance, does he erect high wooden barriers on the walls and gates so that no one can see within? For what reason are the gates kept perpetually locked, and what is the meaning of a moat around the school buildings?

CONCERTED ACTION NECESSARY.

During the week, Handy succeeded in climbing over the wall of Moat Hollow, but the reception he received makes it quite clear that Grimesby Creepe is determined at all costs to keep out intruders from his establishment. Those who know Handy can rest assured that this intrepid youth will not be prevented from penetrating Creepe's stronghold before many moons. Nevertheless, I fear that Handy will not be able to do very much on his own account, and that unless his chums, Church and McClure, can prevent him, he will only succeed in getting into more trouble. To do any good, concerted action, according to a carefully worked out plan, is necessary. And that is what I am now preparing.

OUR REDSKIN ARTICLES.

Some real facts concerning North American Indians are always interesting, especially when they come from such a trustworthy source as Eugene Ellmore. The articles published last week and in the present issue are intended to correct a few inaccuracies contained in Handy's serial, "In Quest of Gold!" which introduces redskins in the most reckless way.

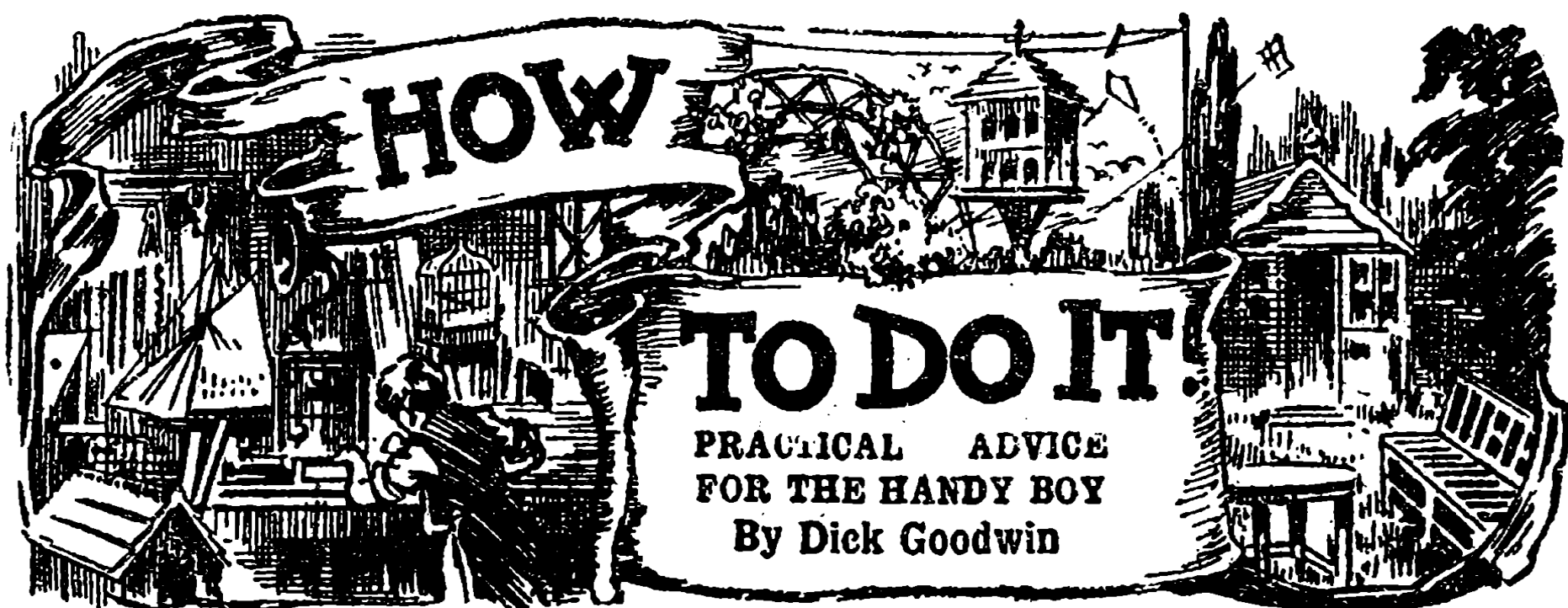
A REALISTIC TABLE FOOTER GAME.

The St. Frank's Table Football Game, a description of how to make and play it being a special feature of this week's Mag., will, I hope, shortly be available for those readers who wish to buy the game already made. It should be clearly understood that the game inventor has applied for a patent for this game, and that the game may only be made by readers for their own private use. The game has caught on no end here at St. Frank's. Some of the fellows are getting quite expert. To-morrow night the Ancient and Modern Houses met in mortal combat in the Common-room to try their skill at the new table game. Later on, I hope to arrange Table Football League matches among my readers.

OUR CROSSWORD PUZZLE.

Crosswords are the latest craze. They are not called crosswords because they make you angry, though they do try one's temper a bit. I am giving you a very simple one in the Mag. next week. As most of the words in the puzzle are to do with St. Frank's, I am sure that many of you will get it correct. Though I am not offering prizes for the correct solution, I shall be interested to hear from those chums who succeed in solving our crossword puzzle next week.

Your sincere friend,
REGGIE PITT.

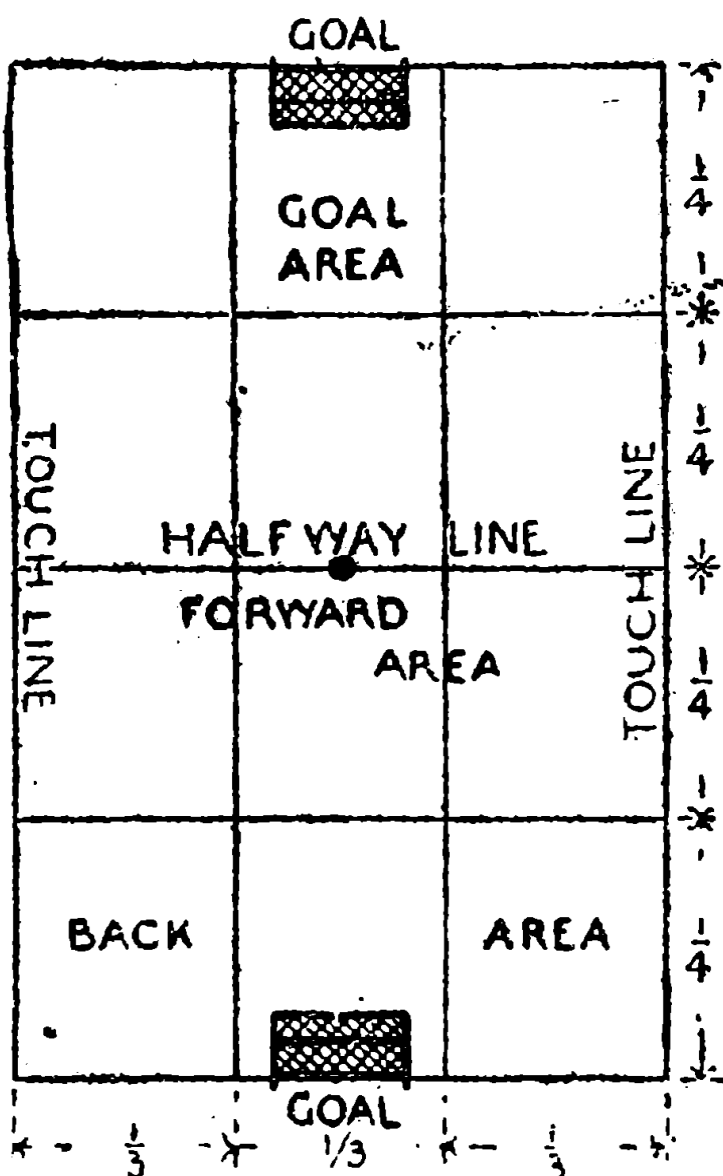


THE ST. FRANK'S TABLE FOOTBALL GAME WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO PLAY IT

THE table football game as played at St. Frank's is the nearest approach to the field game that has been devised; but it has the advantage that it can be played by two or more even number of players arranged on opposite sides, on any rectangular table, preferably covered with cloth, on which the field can be marked. The method of playing the game can be followed by reading the rules.

THE RULES OF THE GAME.

1. The game can be played with 2, 4, 6, or more players, divided into opposing teams of equal numbers.
2. The table should be rectangular and divided into twelve spaces, these being formed by dividing the end of the table into three parts, the sides into four equal parts, and joining the points (see Diagram) by means of chalk or paint.
3. Goals are fixed at each end. The rectangle immediately in front of the goal is called the goal area, those adjoining at the sides are called the back areas, and those adjoining the halfway line are called forward areas. The edges of the table form touch lines.
4. The ball may be of rubber or celluloid, preferably $\frac{1}{4}$ in. diameter, but should not exceed 1 in. diameter.



5. The game is to prevent the opponent or opponents from getting the ball into the net.
6. The players are provided with miniature feet which fit on the first and second fingers of one hand.
7. The players must always have one foot on the table, the feet moving alternately as in walking or running.
8. In a game with four players, one of each of the opposing teams acts as back and goalkeeper, and must remain within the goal and back areas, the forwards have the run of their own forward areas and the opponents' field. With 6 players, the forwards may be two players on each side, or 2 players can remain as backs, one also acting as goalkeeper. With 10 players, the teams of 5 are arranged as goalkeeper, 2 backs and 2 forwards.

9. No player is allowed to push another player with his hands.
10. No player must remain in the opponents' area after the ball has left it, but must follow it into his own area.
11. When a goal has been scored, the side at whose expense it has been made, kicks off anew from the centre of the halfway line, which is also the commencing point of the game. All players being in their correct areas.

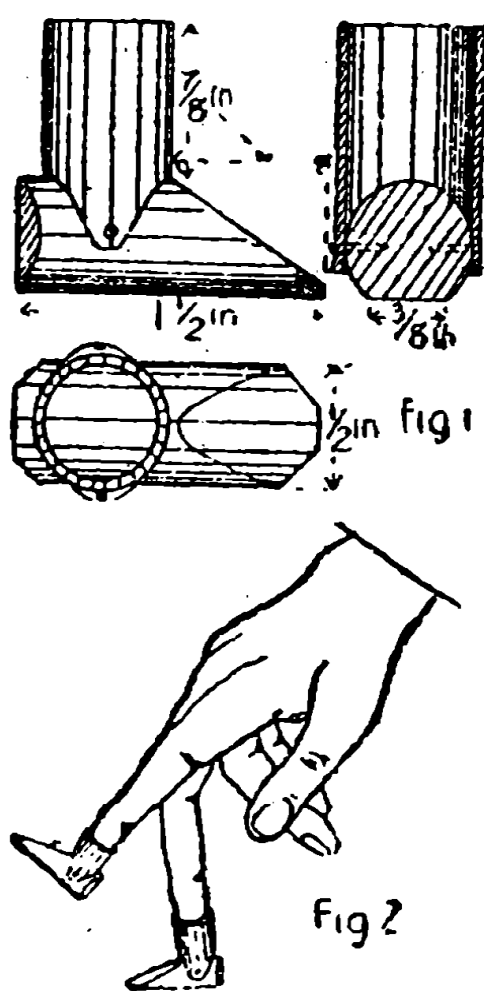
12. The ball is out of play when it is allowed to fall off the table or behind the net.
13. When the ball is out of play by going over the touch line, the opponent is allowed a free kick at a point 2 in. from the edge where the ball crossed the line.
14. When a ball is out of play through going behind the net from an opponent's foot, a behind kick is allowed to the other side. This is taken 1 in. from the goal mouth.
15. When the ball is out of play for the same reason from the defenders' foot, a penalty is awarded to the opponents. This takes place from one of the outer corners of the goal area.
16. If a player transgresses any of the rules outside the goal area, a free kick is allowed to the other side from the place where the rule was broken. This is called a foul.

If the foul takes place inside the goal area, the penalty takes the form of a free kick to the other side from the centre of the outside goal area line with only the goalkeeper defending.

17. Time of play. The game may be carried on for any stated period, but the players must change ends at half time.
18. After half time, the ball is kicked off by the team who scored the last goal in the previous half, failing a score by the team who did not kick off in the first half.
19. The game must be supervised by a referee.
20. Play must stop at the sound of the referee's whistle and be resumed under his direction. The decision of the referee must be regarded as final in all disputes.

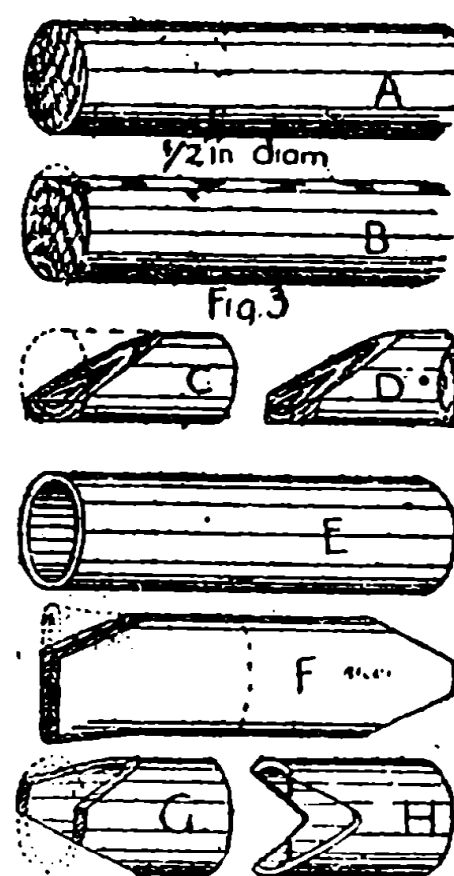
HOW TO MAKE THE GAME

THE feet can be made with $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. lengths of $\frac{1}{2}$ in. diameter dowel rod, to which fix $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. lengths of ordinary rubber tubing, as at Fig. 1. The rubber tubing should be of a suitable diameter to fit on the finger-tips in the position shown at Fig. 2. The method of preparing the parts is shown at Fig. 3.

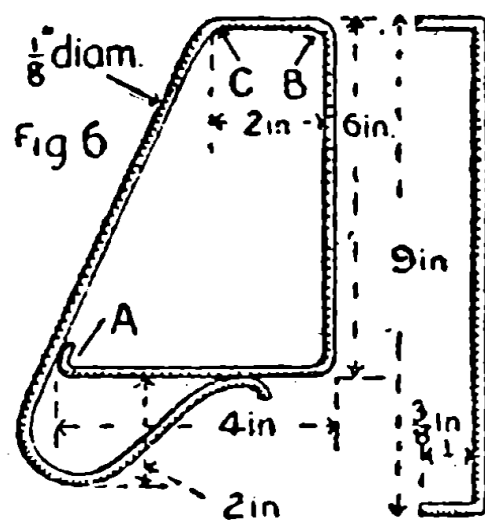
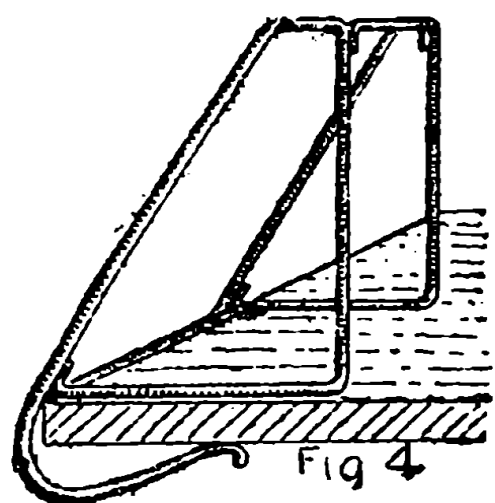


A represents a length of dowelling which can be obtained at a timber merchant's or cabinet maker's, the wood is generally birch. A portion of the round should be planed off to give a flat surface $\frac{3}{8}$ in. wide, as at B, and then the length cut up into $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. pieces. The pieces are now shaped with a sharp chisel as at C and D. The rubber tubing, as at E, is pressed together, as at F, and

the corners cut off with a pair of scissors as shown, giving a shape when opened out as at G. Two small wire gimp pins are pushed through, as at H, and then the rubber is attached to the wood, the nails fitting in fine holes previously made in the wood with a bradawl.



The nets are made with a wire foundation, as at Fig. 4, and covered with netting or coarse muslin, as at Fig. 5. The measurements of the parts are given at Fig. 6, all joints at A, B, and C being soldered. The necessary spring to the clip underneath can be imparted by hammering the wire on the sides, after it has been bent. A flat iron makes a suitable anvil for this operation. The netting can be attached by sewing or with glue.



IN REPLY to YOURS



Correspondence Answered by Edward Oswald Handforth

(NOTE.—Readers of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY can write to me and I will reply on this page. But don't expect an answer for several weeks, perhaps five or six. Address your letters or postcards to E. O. HANDFORTH, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. —E.O.H.)

S. SIRRAH (Nottingham): My hat! Some of you chaps are more curious than girls! The two St. Frank's fellows whose homes are in Notts are Stevens of the Flith, and Hobbs of the Third. Sorry—no more space.

"ANCIENT" BRITTON (Orpington): We thought about having a scout troop at St. Frank's—at least, I did. But when I suggested calling ourselves the "Squirrels," the other chaps said "Rats!" Perhaps we'll have a troop one day.

NORMAN FREER (Leicester): It seems to me that you're freer with your remarks than you ought to be, my lad! (There's a pun there!). In your P.S. you say you're sorry that I'm an ass. Well, you're a fath ad, and I'm NOT sorry.

SIMPLE SYMON (Belfast): First you call me a Teddy Bear, then you wish me a rotten Christmas and an unlucky New Year, and end up by asking for a nice reply. What do you think I am—a doormat? You know your right name, anyhow!

BEN PEAVOY (Mount Mellick): It's likely I'm going to publish your silly description! Who wants to know that you've got a turned-up nose and a double chin and podgy cheeks? It's like your cheek to say you can beat me!

MABEL KNIGHT (East Croydon): Here, I say! Go easy! You mustn't be so jolly affectionate! Have we got a wireless set at St. Frank's? What a question! You might as well ask if we've got glass in the windows!

PETER PAN (Southport): So you're Naughty Neil's friend, are you? I'm not a bit surprised! Thanks for your offer to come and be my secretary. But I've got two already. They obey all orders without jibbing.

LORD THOMAS (Wisbech): Haven't had time to read your letter—the pencil was too faint. Write it again in ink, and I'll answer it! You're the first Peer of the Realm I've known to write in that slovenly fashion!

LEN G. WATERMAN (South Chingford): Will I excuse your typewriting? My dear, heavenly chap! There's nothing I love better than typewriting! I read every word of your letter with joy, but your sketch gave me the pip.

GODFREY (Southampton): As I am, in your opinion, the biggest idiot that was ever born, I can't find words to answer your letter. So all I can do is to let it go at that. This is what you get for being cheeky!

DUMKINS (Brackley): Don't blame me about putting Brackley instead of Brackley. I sent in my copy O.K., but the fatheaded printers messed up my reply to LUFFEY. I knew you came from Brackley all the time!

B. C. (Brackley): Well, this is a bit thick! You draw a picture of a chap with a donkey's head, and say it's my portrait! Who did you take for a model when you drew it? Your pal, Luffey, I'll bet!

FRIEND OF B. C. (Brackley): There's swarms of you! I expect B. C. either drew that donkey from you or Luffey, or—most likely—he had a good look at himself in the mirror before he started drawing. You can't diddle me!

LUFFEY (Brackley): Great pip! I've got to give you a reply, too, have I? I'm overwhelmed with gratitude for that drawing. At least you credit me with having a human head! You Brackley chaps are the dizzy limit!

SINGER (W.2.): The only tips I can give you about punching are these—only punch when you really must, and then punch jolly hard. Get yours in first.

TED.

OUR PORTRAIT GALLERY. And WHO'S WHO.



**CLARENCE
FELLOWE.**

No. 57—CLARENCE FELLOWE.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

An extraordinarily tall boy, and so thin that he resembles a lamp-post. His arms and legs are like long sticks. Has a bony head, with a long, lean face, wearing a set expression of mournful resignation. Eyes, brown. Hair, brown and curly—a huge, waving mop. Height 6 ft. 1 in. Weight, 8 st. 7 lb. Birthday, February 19th.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS:

Calm and imperturbable, but quick in an emergency, with plenty of pluck. Cannot say a dozen words without rhyming them. An unconscious poet. Has an aptitude for concocting doggerel parodies.

SPORTS & RECREATIONS:

Spends most of his spare time reading or writing letters home. Is a demon correspondent, and can generally be found writing to somebody. Contributes occasionally to the "Magazine."



ALBERT CROOKS.

No. 58.—ALBERT CROOKS.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

A slim, pleasant-looking boy. Wears glasses. Eyes, brown. Hair, chestnut. Height, 5 ft. Weight, 8 st. 3 lb. Birthday, January 31st.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS:

Bright, sunny and happy when he is broke to the wide, and when things are generally in a bad way. Makes the best of everything. A cheerful, happy-go-lucky optimist, who never worries himself over the slightest thing.

SPORTS & RECREATIONS:

A good long-distance runner, with plenty of staying power. Hobby: Cheering other fellows up when they look miserable.

THE FOURTH At ST. FRANK'S.



No. 59.—ALFRED BRENT.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Broad-shouldered, clumsy, and big-limbed. A wonderfully sunny boy, with many freckles, and an infectious smile. Eyes, soft brown. Hair, fair. Height, 5 ft. 1 in. Weight, 8 st. 13 lb. Birthday, June 26th.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS:

Although good-tempered, he has a dogged determination and strong will. Obstinate to a degree—and very hard to convince. Modest and unassuming generally. A hard worker and an energetic sportsman.

SPORTS & RECREATIONS:

Plays well at back in football, and nearly good enough for regular junior eleven. Hobbies: Cycling, reading, amateur carpentry.



ALFRED
BRENT.

No. 60.—GEORGE HOLLAND.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

A smallish boy, with a serious countenance. Always dapper in appearance. Eyes, blue-grey. Hair, auburn. Height, 4 ft. 10 ins. Weight, 7 st. 13 lb. Birthday, September 28th.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS:

Has a peculiar outlook on life. Worries over everything. When all is well generally, is fearful of coming disasters. Takes a gloomy pleasure in every misfortune. A pessimist.

SPORTS & RECREATIONS:

Dislikes sports, and prefers to spend fine afternoons wandering down country lanes for specimens. Is a naturalist, and has a fine collection.

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: Timothy Armstrong, Ernest Lawrence, Louis Griffith, William Freeman.



GEORGE
HOLLAND.

FACTS LET LOOSE

Our Allsorts Page
By EUGENE ELLMORE

FOGS.

What is a fog? Nothing more or less than a cloud out of place; it has settled down on the earth instead of keeping up in the air. This fog-cloud may be dry or wet. In London it is dry, because the particles of soot or dust upon which the moisture is deposited are numerous and large and close together, so that there is more carbonised matter and less vapour. In the country and at the seaside, where the air is freer from these solid particles, the fogs are mainly water.

Either form is bad enough, and the driest of fogs is a veritable wet blanket; and persons who suffer from chest and lung diseases have a trying time in the fog season—which, by the way, is at its height in December, our foggiest month. A day or two of fog in London will double the deaths from asthma, bronchitis, pneumonia, etc. A single bad fog, it has been stated by a high authority, may cost more lives than a big battle.

These are the direct effects. The indirect nobody can estimate. How much the human vitality is depressed, and human energy neutralised, by the contact of the chill moisture with the skin and by the deprivation of sunlight, it is impossible to tell. But both body and mind suffer—the mind most of all.

Fog is the traveller's deadliest enemy. The mariner dreads it, and the motorist scarcely less so. It turns the streets of London and our big cities into death-traps. Can it be cured or prevented? This is a debatable question. It is another form of the struggle of Science v. Nature. And Nature usually wins.

PTARMIGAN.

The ptarmigan has been called the aristocrat of game birds. It is, and has been for centuries, a favourite of kings and aristocrats and epicures. But it has not been seen much in England of late, mainly because in Iceland, which is the chief source of supply, it has been illegal to shoot ptarmigan since 1921. An extra severe winter that year came near to extinguishing the bird entirely, and so to preserve it the law was passed. Travellers in Iceland tell us that now the birds may be seen there in tens and hundreds of thousands, and that hunting and shooting them is again allowed. So ptarmigan have once again been seen on the tables of English epicures.

TRAVEL TALES.



By An Old Boy

(Lord Dorrimore's Weekly Trifle)

No. 25.—BLINDING A LION.

IT was in Kenya Colony. And in that country it is almost as common an occurrence to meet a lion in the path as to meet a man, in many parts even commoner, once you are outside the towns and settlements.

I was staying with an acquaintance, and we started out one morning on a big game hunt. We didn't intend to go far, so we sent on our native servants with our rifles and provisions, and decided to walk, so that we might have greater freedom. We were plodding along, chatting, when we were startled by a piercing cry, enough almost to curdle the blood, coming from the forest scrub.

Hurrying on, we soon came to a turning, a sort of track, too narrow for vehicles, down which we turned. In a minute or so we came upon a fearsome spectacle. A lion, a big, tawny monster, his mane bristling and his eyes flaming, was just about to spring on an Indian woman, while a man and a child, also Indian, stood by, paralysed with fear.

Running my swiftest, I ran nearly close up to the group, and fired my revolver, aiming straight at the lion's left eye. The shot went home, and the lion stopped mauling the woman, looked at me with his other eye, and then came for me. I dodged behind a tree, and the lion prepared for a spring at me, evidently intending to take the tree in his jump. But while he hesitated an instant I fired at his other eye, and providentially hit the mark. The brute now became frantic, and seemed to charge all ways at once. Then he abruptly stopped, turned, and fled into the forest with a roar.

We got the poor woman to the main road, and, a doctor's car coming up opportunely, she was taken to hospital, and ultimately recovered.



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

By the Celebrated Author
Edward Oswald Handforth

MEMORIES REFRESHED HERE.

After a stirring adventure with Indians, Bob Brave and Claude Courage have been rescued by General McTavish and his troops. They are on their way back to Fort Adventure, when they see, across the prairie, a great train of covered wagons.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SCHOONERS OF THE PRAIRIE.

"LOOK!" cried Bob Brave. His eyes leapt over the prairie, and swept the distant horizon. Creeping across the undulating country was the great wagon train—hundreds of them, all bound for the goldfields.

"We will join the wagon train!" shouted Claude Courage happily. "They are going to the goldfields, and we will go, too! We will seek our fortunes again!"

"Good egg!" roared Bob Brave.

And less than ten minutes later they bade good-bye to the troops, and joined the hardy pioneers who were off into the goldfields. It was a great moment. Our two heroes were delighted by everything they saw.

There were hundreds of covered wagons, and each one was full up with men or women or children or stores. And the leader of the expedition proved to be a huge man named Prairie Bill.

"Waal, if this ain't the cat's whiskers!" exclaimed Prairie Bill, as he welcomed our two wanderers. "Say, pards, you're sure welcome! I guess we can do with two blokes like you! I guess we can! You're the right sort, I guess! Sure thing!"

"Then—then we can join the expedition?" chorused our heroes.

"Yep, sure!" said Prairie Bill. "Shake on it, pards!"

CHAPTER XV.

OUR HEROES MAKE AN ENEMY.

A WEEK has passed. Bob Brave and Claude Courage were now full-blown members of the great expedition. They were enjoying themselves immensely. There was nothing like the life on the prairies! And day succeeded day, and everything went on fine. The goldfields grew nearer and nearer.

Then, one afternoon, a startling thing happened.

Bob Brave was frying some bacon outside his wagon. The whole expedition was camping, and the air was filled with the smell of frying sausages and hot tea and buttered toast.

Bob Brave suddenly started back, and the bacon dropped out of the pan, and fell on the fire. For Bob had just seen the Bully of the Camp kicking a little boy in the ribs! It was a foul deed. The bully was a hulking great rotter named Roaring Jake, and he kicked the kid about ten yards. It fell with a sickening thud, and howled like the dickens.

"You bully!" cried Bob Brave, rushing up.

Roaring Jake towered over him like a mountain. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and his hairy arms were like tree-trunks, all over knots. His face was coarse and red, and covered with a kind of shrubbery.

"Jumping grizzlies!" thundered Roaring Jake. "What's this 'ere?"

"Take that!" panted Bob grimly.

And the next moment the great fight had started!

(Read how Bob thrashes the bully in next week's stirring instalment.—AUTHOR.)

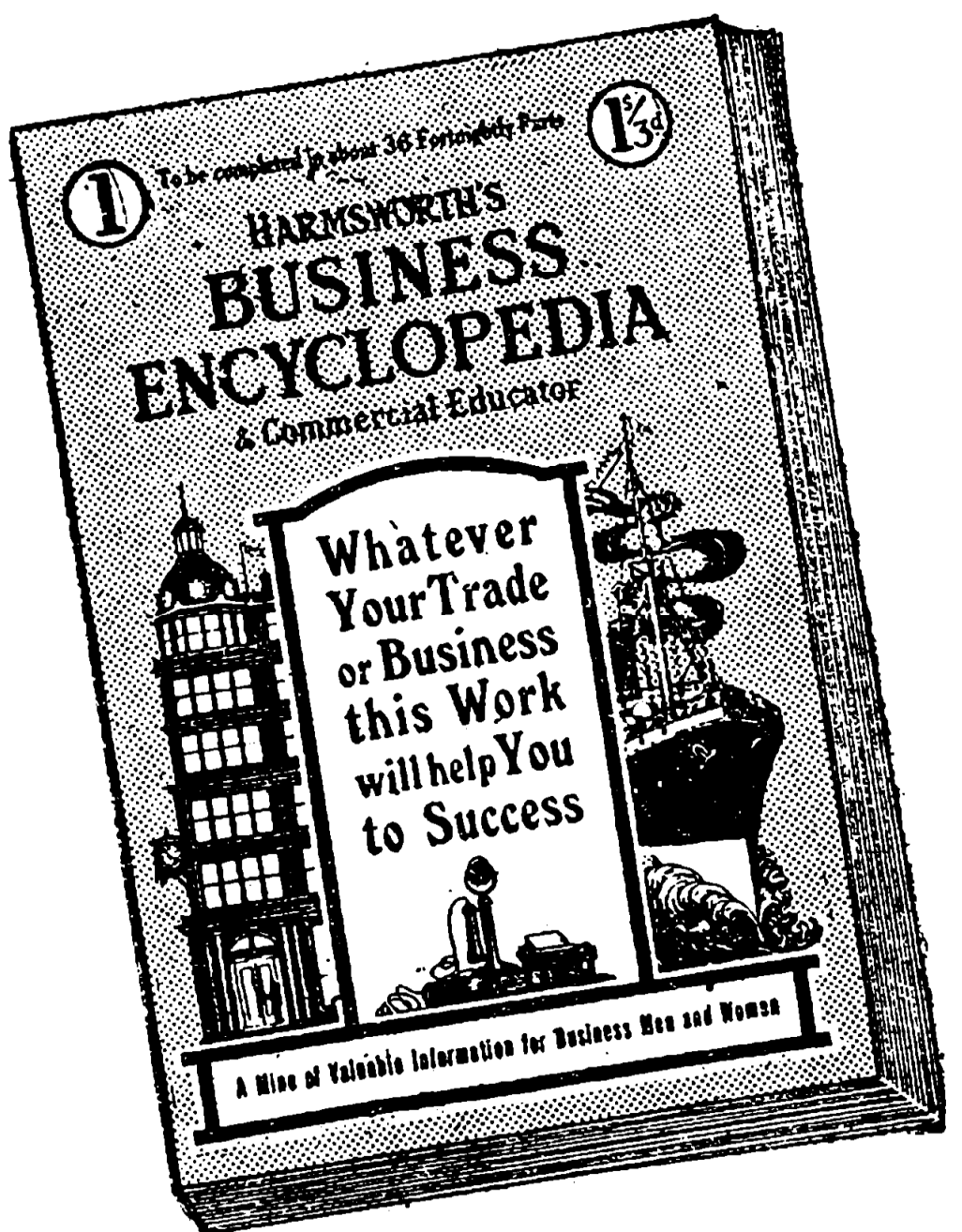
WIN SUCCESS IN BUSINESS

This NEW WORK will help you to

**Tackle a Bigger Job. Earn More Money.
Carve Out a Big Future for Yourself.**

Knowledge is the secret of success. When you start in business—any business—it's the little bit of extra knowledge which makes the difference between the boy who stays on junior pay and the boy who climbs from job to job to a big position at the top. This new work will give you much more than a little extra knowledge—it will tell you *all you want to know*, whatever business you take up. It will tell you: How to become an Accountant, a Shop-keeper, an Architect, or any profession you can think of. Once you have decided, or if you have already entered upon a career, it will give you the fullest possible information about every subject connected with it.

Cabinet Ministers, Treasury Experts, Directors of big Banks and great Business Men have combined to write the BUSINESS ENCYCLOPEDIA. It will be fully illustrated and the contents will be alphabetically arranged. It is to be issued in fortnightly parts at 1/3 per fortnight. The ONE PENNY PER DAY it will cost you now may mean hundreds a year to you later on.



Fortnightly **1^s/3^d**
Parts
PER PART

HARMSWORTH'S

BUSINESS ENCYCLOPEDIA

PART 1. On Sale THURSDAY, JANUARY 15th

Of All Newsagents and Bookstalls.

Order a Copy TO-DAY!

(Continued from page 30.)

we're not absolutely bowed down with grief. It's only natural that many of you should have formed your own opinions regarding the looks of different boys. And if the portrait doesn't exactly coincide with your preconceived idea, you calmly sit back and say that the portrait is rotten! Even the best of chaps are sometimes ugly, don't forget. We can't all be handsome, dashing Valentinos like the Editor and his dazzling staff. Why, it's a positive relief when I walk into the office—the contrast is so great. (Most of you have seen my photograph, so it's hopeless for me to pretend that I'm in the Valentino class—the Editor gave me away when he published that awful likeness.) But to become serious again. I'm sorry if some of you feel like using the Portrait-Gallery to light the fire with, but we must learn to bear these blows with fortitude. ~~Li~~ these little worries.

A good many of you want me to feature all sorts of minor characters in my stories. One would like a story about Yung Ching, another is bursting to hear about Hussit Ranjit Lal Khan, somebody else wants a story written round Ulysses Spencer Adams, and still another is keen upon Larry Scott, or the Onions brothers. Sometimes I sit back in my chair, scratch my head, and wonder how the dickens I can please you all. As far as I can see, my only chance is to bring in these minor characters at intervals—for it is obviously impossible for me to feature everybody in every story.

Thanks for your two little drawings, Smith Thompson. They're quite good. One of these days you'll be earning lots of money with your artistic skill. I've kept every one of your little sketches.

You ask for one line from me, Basil Titchbourne, so here it is. I'll be extra generous, and give you two or three. No, I don't mind your criticism at all—I like it—and I hope the new series is pleasing you as much as you apparently anticipated. Let's know, will you?

W.B., of Winchester, wants to know if the Old Paper can be obtained in India. I think it can, W. B.—at all events, you will have no difficulty in getting your copy if you subscribe direct. After all, when you're abroad like that, I think it would be better to have it sent by post.

Very well, Alan J. Parkinson, I'll tell you why I've replied to a good many girl readers. The answer is quite simple. I've replied to them because they have written to me on subjects which are of general interest. And that, as you know, is the main object of these columns.

Glad to hear, Frank Nichols (I acknowledged your letter last week, you'll remember) that since your father has read some copies of the Old Paper he no longer regards my yarns as "Penny Dreadfuls." I should hate anybody to characterise my work as such! I wish a few thousand other fathers would follow your dad's example! I wonder why so many people take things for granted? I wonder why so many people condemn without any knowledge? It's a sad, sad world!

You're another chap I mentioned last week, A. H. Searle. And I'm afraid your complaint about the Moor View girls is now almost entirely unsupported. Our cheerful friend, T. E. Pattinson, has very handsomely retracted his first remarks—so you are now the one who is "alone in the wilderness." At least, you'll only have "An East Ham Reader" to keep you company.

As for you, John Franklin, take my tip, and write to the Editor. I acknowledged your letter last week, but had no space to write anything further. The Editor is the man to help you about that correspondence idea. If I took it on my shoulders to promise anything, I might get into fearful hot water. And I only deliberately get into hot water when I take my annual bath!

John Cobbleton, of Birmingham, apparently has a morbid mind. He wants to know if crime is greater in America than it is in England. I shouldn't deal with this subject here under ordinary circumstances, but in view of my recent "American Note-Book" articles, and the overwhelming number of requests I have received for a continuation of them, I think you will all be interested.

Well, John Cobbleton, crime in England is a mere infant in arms compared to crime in the United States. Do you realise that, roughly, 8,500 murders are committed annually over there? And can you grasp the fact that there are no less than 135,000 murderers at large in America?

I cannot do better than quote the exact words of Judge Kavanagh, of the Superior Court in Chicago. "There is no civilised country in the world where life and property are as insecure, and where the laws, though made by the people for themselves, are less feared or so little respected. In this regard we stand humiliated before the nations of the earth, and this generation of Americans will be written, belittled and disgraced through all history." And such words, coming from such an authority, cannot be ignored. Yes, John Cobbleton, crime in America is a veritable monster. We in peaceful, law-abiding Britain sometimes fail to realise how fortunate we are!

SIX STORIES FOR TWOPENCE!

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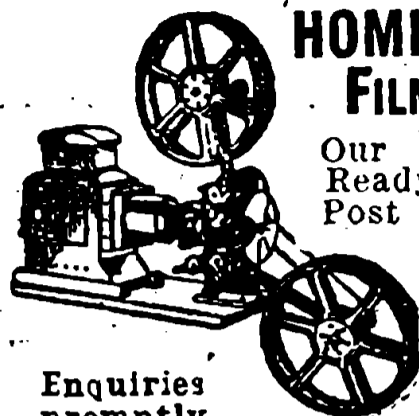
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