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“THE HOODED UNKNOWN”

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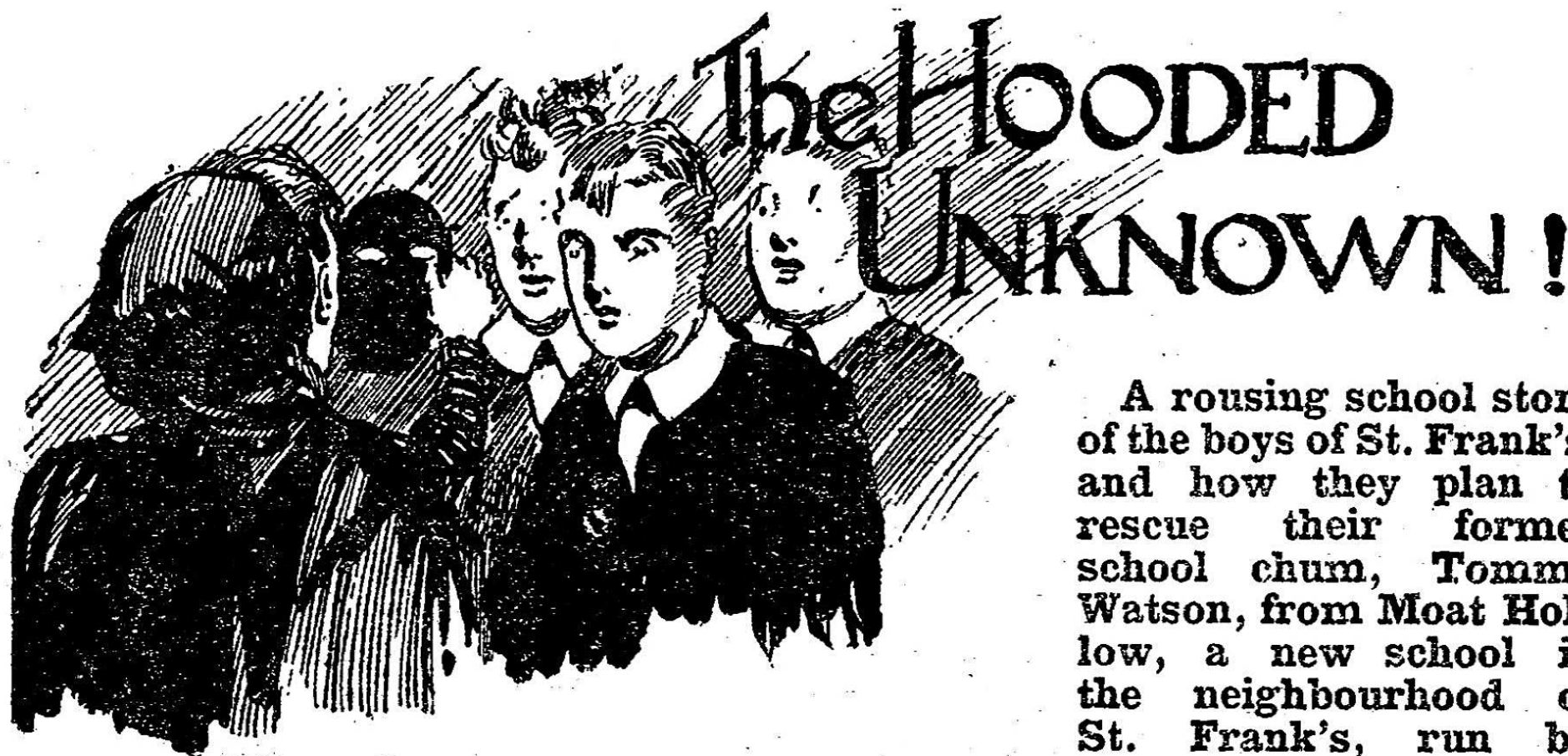
No. 507.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

February 21, 1925.



Then she caught sight of something between the bars of the grating. It was a human face.



A rousing school story of the boys of St. Frank's, and how they plan to rescue their former school chum, Tommy Watson, from Moat Hollow, a new school in the neighbourhood of St. Frank's, run by Mr. Grimesby Creepe,

who, while pretending to take a paternal interest in his boys, treats them harshly, half starves them and makes them work like slaves, wherewith to line his own pockets. These wretched boys are ruthlessly punished if they rebel against his tyranny or attempt to escape from their prison school, which is surrounded by high walls and a deep moat. They have an unknown friend, who from time to time appears on the scene in a mysterious manner, and is attired from head to foot in a black, close-fitting costume. This strange figure, known as the Phantom Protector, plays a leading part in the story below, in the course of which his identity is for the first time made known.

THE EDITOR.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

A BRUSH WITH THE ENEMY.

"WHEW! Hold tight!" gasped Church.

A gust of wind came whistling down Bellton High Street, and Handforth & Co., of the Ancient House at St. Frank's, were nearly swept off their feet. The full force of the gale hit them head on.

"My hat! It's like a giddy cyclone!" said Handforth breathlessly. "We shall have a few roofs singing past us in a minute!"

The three juniors struggled on a few yards further, and took refuge in Mr. Binks' little tuck-shop. They had been bound for this destination in any case. Once inside, they forced the little door to, the old-fashioned bell jangling noisily. The chums of Study D took deep breaths.

"We're getting March before the time," said McClure. "Here we are, still in February, and there's a regular March wind!"

"More like an October gale!" said Handforth. "There's a haystack blown over

the road up at Judkins' Corner, I've heard. It's a wonder the whole village isn't swept away!"

He turned, attracted by a savoury odour of fresh doughnuts. Then he observed, for the first time, that there were other customers in the tuck-shop. He stared at them with all his famous aggressiveness.

"Oh, so you're here!" he said grimly.

"Well, what about it?" asked one of the two boys who stood against the counter. "Did we have to ask your permission first? Awfully sorry if we offend you!"

Handforth turned red.

"Are you trying to be funny?" he demanded. "Look here, you Moat Hollow rotters, for two pins, I'll chuck this dish of jam-tarts at you!"

Mr. Binks, behind the counter, started as though he had been stung.

"Please, Master Handforth!" he urged. "Please control yourself, young gentlemen! If you wish to purchase the tarts——"

"Blow the tarts!" roared Handforth. "Who's talking about purchasing them? I'm going to shy 'em at these cads!"

"Steady on, old man!" muttered Church. "You can't throw Mr. Binks' stuff about like that! Besides, it's better to leave these Moat Hollow chaps alone. We don't want to start a squabble."

"Ignore 'em!" advised McClure softly.

But Edward Oswald Handforth never would take such well-meant advice as this. He glared ferociously at Kirby and Tarkington, the bullies of Moat Hollow School.

"I'm not going to make myself cheap!" he said, with deliberate indifference. "You can jolly well go and eat coke! I wouldn't demean myself by talking to you! I regard you with contempt!"

Kirby and Tarkington flushed up angrily. They were big fellows—quite as big as any of the St. Frank's Fifth-Formers. They were, in fact, Mr. Grimesby Creepe's chief monitors, and they usually led the Moat Hollow boys a miserable life.

"We've as much right to be here as you have, you young fool!" said Kirby harshly. "You'd better mind what you're saying, too! I hate having a row in public, but you'd better be careful!"

"It won't take us a minute to chuck you outside!" added Tarkington.

"A minute, eh?" roared Handforth. "Try it! By George, you may be overgrown fags, but I could knock you sideways with one fist! Why, if you came to St. Frank's, you wouldn't know enough to be put in the Second! You're only old Creepe's paid bullies!"

The Moat Hollow monitors flushed more than ever. That shot had struck home. For there was a great deal of truth in what Handforth said. When it came to a matter of scholastic knowledge, both Kirby and Tarkington were far less advanced than the St. Frank's Fourth. They were, indeed, allowed a very easy time in school in consideration of their pugilistic usefulness.

Kirby swallowed hard.

"Look here, Mr. Binks, do you allow this sort of thing in your shop?" he demanded furiously. "These infernal St. Frank's cads can do as they like, it seems! They're nothing but stuck-up snobs! I wouldn't belong to a rotten school like St. Frank's if they paid me!"

"No fear!" said Tarkington. "St. Frank's is only a rotten zoo!"

Handforth was almost past speech. Even Church and McClure instinctively pushed back their coat-sleeves. Any insult against St. Frank's was an insult against themselves. And Kirby and Tarkington had undoubtedly gone much too far.

"By George!" breathed Handforth. "Up with your hands, you cads!"

Crash!

He delivered a punch which took Kirby in the chest and sent him flying backwards. The Moat Hollow bully lost his balance, and sat down with a wild yell into a box of mixed biscuits. Mr. Binks stood behind the counter, waving his arms about like mill-sails.

"Young gentlemen—young gentlemen!" he shouted desperately. "Please be careful! I shall be ruined! You'll wreck the whole place! Oh, dear! This is dreadful!"

"Come on—outside!" bellowed Handforth.

McClure obligingly opened the door, and Church gave Tarkington a heave which sent him reeling outside. Handforth's chums realised that vast damage would be done within the tuck-shop if Handforth once sailed in. And as Handy would pay up meekly for the damage after he had calmed down, Church and McClure were anxious to avoid such a disaster. Funds were by no means excessive at the moment.

Mr. Binks gasped with relief as the last of the combatants passed out into the road. In order to be on the safe side, the harassed shopkeeper dashed round and bolted the door. But it wouldn't have surprised him in the least to see his shop-front suddenly driven in.

"Now, then—I'll show you!" roared Handforth.

They were out in the road, and Edward Oswald charged forward like an enraged elephant. He was taking Kirby to himself, leaving Tarkington to the tender mercies of Church and McClure.

But Kirby and Tarkington held other views.

"Come on—we mustn't risk it!" muttered Kirby hoarsely.

And before Handforth could get fairly started, the two monitors took to their heels and bolted. It was an undignified exit—but there was no help for it. Kirby and Tarkington knew what the consequences would be if Mr. Grimesby Creepe learned that they had been fighting in public.

Quite apart from this, they were only too glad to bolt. For something about Handforth's eagle eye told them instinctively that real safety lay elsewhere.

CHAPTER II.

LOST, A HAT.



IRENE MANNERS jumped breathlessly from her bicycle.

"Oh, Doris, it's too much—we really can't keep on!" she exclaimed. "Why, it's—it's really dangerous! I was nearly blown into the ditch that time!"

"Yes, it's a bit thick!" agreed Doris Berkeley. "Don't be surprised if a tree falls on the top of us, or something nice like that! But never mind—I expect it's a lot worse at sea!"

There were three girls altogether—Irene and her two chums from the Moor View School. As the half-holiday had seemed so fine, they had decided to cycle down to the village.

But now that they had reached the bridge at the end of the lane, the gale practically stopped them. Indeed, cycling had been almost impossible. Emerging from the

shelter of Bellton Wood, the full force of the powerful wind swept across the river. The fair cyclists had almost met with disaster.

"My word, I hardly remember a gale as bad as this!" said Marjorie Temple breathlessly. "What shall we do? Walk on, or ride back?"

"Walk on, of course!" said Doris promptly. "Are we to be beaten by a puff of wind? Not likely! I've got to go and see about my new jumper this afternoon, don't forget."

The three girls were looking very charming as they steadied themselves against the wind. It wasn't cold, and they were wearing neat tweed costumes. The wind had brought red spots to their cheeks, and their hair was blowing about their pretty faces.

"I say, don't let's give in!" said Doris. "Supposing we meet any of the St. Frank's chaps! They'll grin like anything if they see us walking. Let's bike on until we fall off, anyway!"

"Oh, it's easy enough to talk——" began Irene.

"Whoa! Look out—— Oh, rats!" cried Doris.

Her neat little hat, lifted by a sudden gust of wind, sailed into the air, and was carried high. Doris looked round, and watched it as it mounted higher and higher in the wind.

"And it was only new last week!" she exclaimed with aggravation. "Fourteen and eleven gone west! Oh, I say, look at it! The silly thing thinks it's a balloon!"

"But, Doris, you can't lose it!" said Irene quickly.

"It's losing itself, by the look of it!" retorted Doris. "Hallo! Down she comes! Look out for the crash!"

The hat, having travelled a surprising distance, fell into a calm spot, and dropped quickly. It vanished beyond the high wall of Moat Hollow, and the three girls looked at one another queerly.

"It's fallen into that horrid school!" said Irene. "Whatever will you do, Doris? You can't go in there—the place is locked up! And I don't think Mr. Creepe is nice!"

"He's about as nice as a scorpion!" put in Marjorie.

"What am I going to do?" repeated Doris grimly. "Watch me! Do you think I'm going to lose a sixteen and eleven hat?"

"It was fourteen and eleven a minute ago——"

"Well, it's worth two bob more now!" said Doris calmly. "Hats always vary in price. Only last week I was looking in a shop at Bannington, and I saw a lovely little hat for thirty shillings. Quite above my price, of course—it naturally would be! And I'm blessed if the same hat wasn't shoved in another window two days later at two quid!"

Irene stamped her foot.

"Why will you waste time like this, Doris?" she demanded. "Your hat is

probably blowing about and ruining itself! And don't forget the moat——"

"Oh, corks!" gasped Doris. "The moat won't do it any good, will it?"

She leapt recklessly on her machine, and dashed off down Edgemore Lane to the entrance of Moat Hollow. Irene and Marjorie followed at a more sedate speed.

To the surprise of Doris, the great gates of Moat Hollow stood wide open. She had expected to find them closed and locked, and this discovery was a welcome one. She rode straight in.

"What-ho!" she murmured. "There's only one thing they've forgotten—they haven't put 'Welcome!' on the mat! Now, where's that giddy piece of headgear? If it's in the moat, I'll say all sorts of things!"

She dismounted, and propped her machine against a bush. Then she ran round the gloomy old house, looking keenly about her. But there was no sign of her missing hat. Marjorie and Irene were now close behind.

They were not quite so venturesome as their impetuous chum, and they came to a halt on the front drive, holding their machines. Doris had vanished round the angle of the building.

She was, in fact, at the back of the school, where strangers were strictly forbidden. Not that Doris cared anything about such restrictions as these. She had lost her hat, and she was going to find it.

The school grounds seemed deserted. Doris couldn't hear any sounds such as usually emanate from a school. It was a half-holiday, of course, but the girl was well aware that the Moat Hollow boys never enjoyed these.

"Ah! So there you are!" she exclaimed suddenly.

Almost on the point of giving up hope, she caught sight of her hat a short distance away. It was caught on the twigs of an evergreen—and, the hat being itself green, she had failed to observe it at first.

She ran forward, but at the same moment a whirwind flurry swept down across the grounds, and the hat was flicked off the bush as though by an invisible hand.

"Oh, if that's not the limit!" cried Doris, with vexation.

The hat swept along, and vanished into a cellar grating near the school wall. And the girl's peace of mind was restored. The hat was trapped now, anyhow!

But little did Doris realise what that sudden gust of wind was to actually lead to!

CHAPTER III.

A SURPRISE FOR DORIS.



DORIS BERKELEY looked rather rueful as she stood on the edge of the cellar grating and gazed down. Her hat had lodged below, but it was such a wreck that she doubted the advisability of recovering it.

The opening was of the usual type—a kind of pit, three or four feet deep, with the iron bars of the cellar flush with the wall, but below the ground surface.

"Oh, well, I suppose I may as well get it," murmured Doris. "The girls will only laugh at me if I don't. I expect they'll laugh at me if I do—so it doesn't make much difference."

She lowered herself on to the edge of the pit, sat there for a moment, and then dropped lightly down. Her dainty feet sank into a sodden collection of dead leaves, and she made a grimace.

"Oh, how horrid!" she exclaimed.

"That's what I am—practically," said Tommy Watson.

"Don't be silly!" said Doris, frowning. "Isn't it enough for you to frighten me like this without making things worse? I say, though, you do look a bit pale and washed out!" she added critically. "Is there anything wrong, old son?"

"Don't I tell you I'm a prisoner?" said Watson bluntly. "How on earth did you know I was here, Doris?"

"I didn't know—I jumped down to get my hat."

"Yes, but how were you in Moat Hollow grounds?"

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She made a grab at the hat, determined to get out of this unpleasant place without a second's delay. Then she caught sight of something between the bars of the grating. It was a human face.

"Oh!" gasped Doris, startled.

"Great Scott, Miss Doris!" ejaculated a familiar voice. "I—I say! Sorry I scared you—I'd no idea—"

"It's Tommy Watson!" said Doris blankly, as she crouched down in a doubled position. "You frightened the life out of me, you awful thing! What are you doing down in this cellar? You look just like a prisoner in jail."

"My hat blew over the wall, and I came in after it—although I don't see any reason why you should ask these potty questions," said Doris severely. "I say, Tommy, you're not really a prisoner, are you? You're just down here getting your trunk, or something."

"No such luck!" said Watson, with a bitter note in his voice. "That brute, Creepe, has kept his word—he's put me down in this cellar for a week's solitary confinement. I've been here nearly twenty-four hours already—and I've only had two meals of bread and water."

The girl looked through the bars with a scared expression.

"You're not—not serious?" she asked breathlessly.

"Yes, I am," said Watson. "I wouldn't tell you a lie. I'm a prisoner here—honest Injun! Didn't you know that Grimesby Creepe is the biggest humbug under the sun?"

Doris was absolutely bewildered.

"Oh, but it's—dreadful!" she cried. "It's outrageous—it's wicked! You might as well be living in the Middle Ages! It's—it's like the Spanish Inquisition!"

Tommy Watson permitted himself a faint grin.

"A bit like that—but not so bad," he said. "Look here, Doris—don't make a song about it, you know. I don't want to worry people with my troubles. Don't go and make a fuss among the St. Frank's chaps."

Doris was still breathless.

"But what did you do?" she demanded suddenly. "What did you do to earn a punishment like this?"

"Nothing!"

"Nothing?"

"Absolutely nothing!" insisted Watson. "There was a scene in the dormitory—a monitor upset an oil stove, and the whole place nearly caught fire. I got the blame for it—and this is the result."

"But it's not fair—it's outrageous——"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Watson. "I asked for it, in a way—I thought I could get Fryer—he's the monitor—over on our side. I believe I've done it, too, but he hasn't had an opportunity to help yet. I don't think I shall be kept down here for long. So please keep it mum."

"I don't see why I should!" replied the girl indignantly. "Why, it's perfectly disgraceful—even if you were only locked down here for an hour! I shall go straight to Mr. Creepe——"

"For goodness sake don't do that!" interrupted Tommy Watson quickly. "You'll only get into trouble—and I shall find myself in hotter water than ever! I was relying on the Phantom Protector to get me out of this, but he hasn't turned up yet."

"The phantom what?"

"Protector," said Watson. "He's a mysterious chap in black, who miraculously happens to appear when any of us are in trouble. I can tell you, Doris, this is a queer school."

"My only hat!" said Doris. "It seems like it!"

CHAPTER IV.

AN AWKWARD POSITION.



TOMMY WATSON looked through the bars earnestly.

"Be a sport, Doris—don't say anything to anybody!" he urged. "I don't want the chaps to know that

I'm locked in a cellar like this. Don't worry about me—I'll be all right."

Doris slowly shook her head.

"I can't understand it," she said. "I've heard a few rumours about this Phantom Protector, now you come to mention it—but I thought it was all spoofo. Do you mean to say there's really somebody who appears like that—like—like—The Scarlet Pimpernel?"

"Yes, something after that style," said Tommy Watson. "Only different, of course. I'm still hoping that he'll turn up. And I think Fryer will help me this evening, anyhow. So you needn't worry. Please promise that you'll keep it dark."

"All right," said Doris reluctantly. "But I shall feel sort of guilty until I know that you're all right. I don't suppose I shall sleep a wink to-night," she added frankly.

"Oh, I say—you needn't worry about me like that," said Watson uncomfortably. "It's jolly nice of you, and I think you're a brick——"

"I should worry about anybody—not particularly you—if they were in the same predicament," interrupted Doris, with some haste. "Oh, well, it's no good staying here—I suppose I'd better clear out while I'm safe."

"Yes—it's a wonder to me you haven't been spotted already," said Watson anxiously. "Good-bye—and thanks awfully for being so concerned. I think it's ripping of you."

She bade him good-bye, and raised herself lightly out of the grating pit. Then, pushing her hat on to her head tightly, she glanced round. Nobody was in sight—she still had the school grounds to herself.

"Good-bye!" she said softly.

Glancing down, she could just see Watson's face looking up at her from the cellar bars. She walked quickly away. There was something depressing and uncomfortable about the whole affair. The girl was quite changed as she walked round the whole house. Her usual high spirits had flown. She was frowning and thoughtful.

As she walked along beside the moat she suddenly started. She paused, looked at the moat, and then turned, frowning more deeply than before. She was puzzled—she couldn't understand how it was that she had approached the school wall without crossing the moat. She had always thought that the moat completely surrounded the building.

But one glance back explained the mystery.

Watson's prison was not in the school building at all—the cellar being beneath a gaunt-looking additional structure. It was, in fact, the school gymnasium, and stood fifteen or twenty yards away from the main building.

Doris walked on, wondering. Why had Mr. Creepe imprisoned Watson under the gym? There could be only one reason—so that he would be completely isolated from everybody

else in the school. The schoolmaster, of course, had never reckoned upon any outsider wandering to the back of the school in this way. Indeed, it had only been by the purest chance that Doris had even noticed the cellar grating.

She followed the moat round, and then came face to face with Irene and Marjorie.

"We thought you were never coming back!" said Irene. "Wherever have you been all this time?"

"I've been finding my hat," replied Doris. "Just look at it! Nothing but a wreck! Let's get out of here as quick as we can!"

But before they reached the gateway, Kirby and Tarkington came striding in. The two monitors halted, and gazed at the schoolgirls in surprise. They barred Irene & Co.'s exit.

"Hallo! Paying a friendly call?" asked Kirby sarcastically.

"We're not likely to pay a friendly call here!" retorted Doris. "You can't help being inquisitive, I suppose, so I'll tell you. My hat blew over the wall, and I came in to fetch it. Anything to say?"

Kirby grinned.

"Yes—use hat-pins!" he replied blandly.

Irene & Co. swept past the monitors without another word—they had met these two before, and knew them for the bullies and cads they were. And Kirby and Tarkington, gazing after the girls, had not the faintest idea of the true position. They went indoors, and thought no more of the incident.

But Irene and Marjorie soon noted a decided change in Doris' manner. She wasn't like the same girl. As the three chums walked down the lane, fighting against the wind, Doris was silent.

"Whatever's the matter, Doris?" asked Irene curiously. "You look awfully serious. And even now I can't understand why you were away so long. I believe you're keeping something back!"

Doris remembered what she had told Watson.

"I think we can ride now, don't you?" she asked pausing, and preparing to mount her bicycle. "The wind won't be so bad going back——"

"Why didn't you answer Irene's question?" put in Marjorie.

"Oh, don't be silly!" said Doris. "I tell you I was looking for my hat—it caught on a bush, and then rolled against the school wall."

"In the moat, I suppose?" asked Irene quickly.

"Well, not against the school wall—against that outbuilding," said Doris, correcting herself. "What's the idea of cross-examining me like this?"

"Doris, there's no need to get touchy!" protested Irene. "We're not trying to cross-examine you. If you don't want to speak to us, we'll say no more."

"Good!" said Doris, with relief.

"I think you're really nasty," said Mar-

jorie bluntly. "I've never known you to be like this before, Doris. Why don't you tell us what happened?"

"Because I can't."

"You mean because you won't!"

"All right! If you like to think that, I'll go off alone!" flashed back Doris, with spirit. "You can both go and eat coke!"

She jumped on her machine and pedalled off rapidly, leaving Irene Manners and Marjorie Temple gazing after her in blank astonishment.

CHAPTER V.

LETTING THE CAT OUT OF THE BAG.



DORIS was feeling rather wretched as she cycled up the lane.

In the heat of the moment she had parted from her chums, feeling that she had got the better of the argument, but now that she had calmed down she realised that she had acted badly.

"I was horrid! I was just beastly!" she told herself, a worried look entering her pretty eyes. "But what was I to do? I told Watson I wouldn't say anything, and they kept questioning me! It wasn't fair of him to bind me like that!"

She felt distinctly aggrieved, and her temper was by no means improved as she caught sight of two figures in the lane just ahead. She recognised them at once as belonging to Archie Glenthorne and Sir Montie Tregellis-West, of the Fourth.

Of late these two elegant juniors had chummed together a good deal, mainly because Sir Montie was at present sharing Archie's study. They were apparently out for an afternoon stroll.

Doris wasn't particularly anxious to meet them, but she couldn't escape now. They had already seen her, and Archie, in fact, had gallantly raised his cap.

The girl jumped off her bicycle as she drew level.

"What-ho!" observed Archie gracefully. "Greetings, fair damsel! I mean to say, how goes it, and so forth? Don't you find the afternoon somewhat robust?"

"It's a bit boisterous, Archie," replied Doris. "You won't keep me, will you? I'm rather in a hurry."

"Oh, I say, don't dash our hopes like that!" protested Archie.

"We haven't seen one another for days, dear old girl," put in Tregellis-West. "Begad, that was a frightfully keen gust! I don't think you ought to be cyclin' this afternoon—I don't, really."

"I'm not afraid of a breeze," said Doris tartly. "You're not looking quite yourself, Montie. You're worried. You've got lots of lines on your forehead."

"Good gad! That's absolutely nothing to what he was yesterday," said Archie Glen-

thorne. "The dear old laddie was absolutely wilting at the knees and shaky at the good old ankles. I mean to say all this dashed worry about Tommy Watson has had due effect."

"Tommy Watson?" repeated Doris keenly.

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "The poor old cove is a prisoner down at Moat Hollow—absolutely a bally prisoner. I mean that sort of thing is a bit near the dashed edge, between all of us and the good old gatepost."

"You needn't tell Doris all this, Archie," began Sir Montie.

But Doris was looking startled—and relieved.

"Oh," she exclaimed slowly, "then—then you know!"

"Know what?"

"All about Tommy Watson being a prisoner."

"Know it?" said Archie. "Oddslife, of course we know it, old chestnut! I—I mean—Pardon, and all that sort of rot! Of course we know it, Doris, old thing! Tommy is absolutely a dashed prisoner in the dungeons, so to speak."

Doris Berkeley was not to be blamed for assuming that the two Fourth-Formers were fully acquainted with Tommy Watson's precise predicament. She didn't know that Archie was merely referring to Watson's general mode of life at Moat Hollow. His reference to dungeons, although significant to Doris, was merely one of Archie's habitual expressions.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" said Doris, with relief. "I'm awfully pleased!"

The two juniors regarded her blankly.

"Begad! You're pleased?" repeated Sir Montie.

"I say, you know," protested Archie—"I say! That's a bit frightfully steep, what? You can't actually be pleased—"

"Duffer!" interrupted Doris. "I mean I'm pleased because you know all about it; there's no need for me to be secretive. I hate keeping secrets—I loathe it! In fact, I can't keep 'em!" she added frankly.

Archie adjusted his monocle.



"I intend to unmask that confounded spy! I'll have him yet, Fryer—I'll have him yet!"

"I'm aware that the old grey matter swills about somewhat scantily in the dome, but reason is not entirely lacking," he observed. "And I absolutely fail to follow the old trend."

"I'm afraid I'm the same, Doris," said Sir Montie. "I can't understand you, begad! Who has asked you to keep any secret?"

"Tommy Watson. I was speaking to him twenty minutes ago."

"Great Scott! You were speaking to Tommy?" repeated Archie.

Doris quickly explained the incident of the lost hat, and the two juniors listened to her with open astonishment.

"You see, I promised Tommy that I wouldn't tell anybody, and I should have kept the promise," concluded the girl. "But as you know all about it, I'm not telling you anything, am I?"

Sir Montie caught Archie's eye.

"Begad, no!" he said awkwardly.

"Absolutely nothing!" declared Archie. "I mean to say about old Tommy being a prisoner, what? Stale news, and all that

sort of stuff. Leave it to us, old bean! Leave it absolutely to us!"

The girl was immensely relieved. She bade the two juniors good-bye, and mounted her bicycle again, intending to go back to Marjorie and Irene and make things right. She serenely informed herself that there was no longer any need to keep silent. The cat was out of the bag.

But as soon as she had gone Archie looked straight into Sir Montie's eye.

"What-ho!" he murmured. "Foul and dirty work at the good old cross-roads, laddie! I mean to say, what about it? Doesn't it seem to be indicated that something ought to be done?"

Tregellis-West nodded.

"Somethin's goin' to be done, begad!" he replied grimly.

CHAPTER VI.

GETTING READY TO ACT.



THE situation was rather curious.

Doris had gone off quite satisfied that she had told Archie and Sir Montie nothing more than they knew already. As a matter of fact, she had told them a very great deal more.

They had been aware that Tommy Watson was virtually a prisoner in Moat Hollow—as, indeed, were all the other pupils in Mr. Grimesby Creepe's infamous establishment—but they had certainly not known that Tommy was locked in a cellar, sentenced to solitary confinement.

"It was the best way, old boy. It was, really," said Montie. "There was no need for us to tell Doris that she was giving the secret away. We know now, begad, an' we can act."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "Act, what? Do a few things, and all that? Laddie, this is where we've got to rally round and dash hither and thither, and gather up all the lads of the village."

"Yes, I think we'd better see Reggie Pitt at once," said Tregellis-West, nodding. "It's terrible! It's shockin'! Poor old Tommy! How are we goin' to help him?"

"Dash it! Can't we get him out of that dashed cellar?"

"I don't know. According to what Doris says, he doesn't want any help," said Montie thoughtfully. "I think we'd better leave it for the committee to decide. Tommy's a frightfully queer chap. He told us himself that he doesn't want to escape."

Montie was thinking of the affair that had happened a night or two earlier, when Reggie Pitt & Co., in force, had raided Moat Hollow. They had, indeed, actually succeeded in getting Watson out of the school, but at the last moment he had unexpectedly expressed a desire to remain.

Tommy Watson was not thinking of him-

self; his motive was entirely unselfish. He desired liberty more than anything else, but his generous heart went out to the helpless unfortunates in Mr. Grimesby Creepe's care.

As Watson had pointed out, if he left Moat Hollow at this stage, the spiritless victims of Mr. Creepe would never gain their freedom. Months and years they had been crushed and beaten, until, indeed, they were nothing but slaves and drudges, without a punch between the lot of them.

So Watson had elected to remain, so that he could awaken the dormant spirit of these boys, and stir them up into a state of revolt. The ultimate aim was a barring-out. There was something thrilling, something inspiring, about the very term. Barring-out! It was the only way to defeat the despicable Creepe, and expose him in his true colours.

Watson could have escaped; he could have told his story to all and sundry, but Mr. Creepe was so cunning and clever that he would have dealt easily with such a situation. Throughout the district he had the reputation of being a kindly, generous man. Yet Mr. Creepe was exactly the opposite to what people supposed him to be. Beyond the bounds of Moat Hollow he always wore a mask—a mask of kindness.

Only his unfortunate pupils knew the man as he really was. He was safe; his foundations were solid. No outsider would pay the slightest heed to such stories as Tommy Watson could tell. It would be assumed that the boy was either demented or maliciously traducing the character of an honourable man.

Watson had realised this, and so he had chosen to remain a prisoner. The raiding Fourth-Formers had left him with the understanding that he would stir up a revolt, and they, for their part, would wait for the word to be given, and then render all help possible.

And now came the news that Tommy was confined in a cellar!

It was a blow, for it told with cruel bluntness that Watson's plans had gone wrong, for it was certainly impossible for him to stir up a rebellion if he was condemned to solitary confinement.

Tregellis-West and Archie Glenthorne hurried to St. Frank's, deeply engrossed in their own thoughts. Sir Montie was determined to call a meeting of the Fourth-Form "heads" at once, but Archie had apparently forgotten all about this momentous decision.

He crossed the Triangle with a far-away expression in his eyes. Montie spoke to him twice, but got no reply. For the time being, Archie seemed to be copying the example of the celebrated Professor Tucker, the absent-minded science master. He entered the Ancient House abstractedly.

"Begad, you're frightfully thoughtful, old boy," said Montie curiously.

Archie walked straight on, and it was

perfectly clear that he had not even heard the words. He wandered off and found himself in the prefects' room. Then he paid a visit to the housemaster's study, Mr. Beverley Stokes fortunately being absent.

Finally, Archie entered his own sanctum, and sank down into an easy chair, with a look in his eyes which can only be described as glassy. Never before had the genial ass looked so worried.

"Phipps!" he murmured pleadingly. "Phipps, laddie, kindly rally round and allow a few words of wisdom to flow. The young master is absolutely distraught."

It didn't seem to occur to him that Phipps was out of earshot. He waited, racking his brain until he felt dizzy. Something had apparently happened to affect him deeply. But what? It seemed that there was something more on his mind than Tommy Watson's predicament.

And then, suddenly, his eyes took on a gleam.

"What-ho! The good old gearbox begins to revolve!" he murmured. "The cogs are dashed creaky, and all that, but light dawns! Absolutely! Archie, laddie, the good old brain isn't dead, after all."

He sprang up with surprising alacrity, performed one or two exercises, and disported himself in a manner that would have astonished the Fourth-Formers. His agility, indeed, was startling.

"And now," he murmured, "for it!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE FAMOUS FOURTH DECIDES.



REGINALD PITT looked thoughtful.

"Yes, something's got to be done," he said firmly. "There's no doubt about it, my sons—we must move. Tommy

Watson can't be left to languish in durance vile. Our job is to get him out of that cellar."

"When?" demanded Handforth aggressively.

"My dear chap, you needn't bark——"

"I've got reason to bark!" interrupted Handforth. "I know you—you always prefer to think for days and weeks before you act! I suppose you'll lead a raiding-party to rescue Watson from that cellar at the end of next week?"

Pitt patted Handforth gently on the arm.

"I forgive you—you can't help it!" he said kindly.

"Eh? What the——"

"If it'll put you out of your misery, I'll explain that the good work will take place this evening—as soon as ever it's dark," went on Reggie. "No, I'm not being rash—I'm not copying your methods. But this is a case where speed is absolutely essential."

"Hear, hear?"

"That's the stuff, Reggie!"

"Good man!"

"Rather!"

Study E echoed with the comments of approval. The famous apartment was well filled. Not only Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey were there, but Handforth & Co, Tregellis-West, Nicodemus Trotwood, De Valerie, and others.

"This evening?" repeated Handforth eagerly. "You mean it?"

"My heavens! He doubts me!" said Pitt, horrified.

"Look here, you ass—don't rot!" growled Handforth. "We don't want to hear any of that melodramatic rot——"

"I was merely quoting a sentence from one of your stories, old man," said Reggie blandly. "But we don't want to enter into a discussion on such heavy literature. About this raid. I shall require five volunteers—— Hi! Steady! I said five—not a dozen!"

Everybody was clamouring to be recognised.

"I regret it, old sons, but it can't be did!" said Pitt regretfully. "Four of us would be nearer the mark—but I'll stretch a point and make it six. Supposing I say Tregellis-West, Trotwood, Grey, Church, and McClure? How's that?"

"Fine!" declared the selected five.

Handforth looked dazed.

"You haven't mentioned me!" he gasped blankly.

"That's clear proof of my thoughtfulness and consideration," said Pitt. "You're right in the middle of a new serial, and I wouldn't dream of taking you away from literary labours——"

He didn't get any further, because Handforth started bellowing.

"Look here, I'm not going to be left out!" He roared. "If I don't go, I'll jolly well raid the place single-handed——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're a bit of a marvel, old man, but I don't see how you can raid the place if you don't go," grinned Church. "But don't get excited—Pitt's only pulling your leg. He knows well enough that the raid couldn't be successful without you!"

Handforth became calmer.

"Am I coming?" he demanded, glaring at Pitt.

"If Nero speaks, Nero must have his way!" replied Reggie resignedly. "All right, Handy—you're with us. Now, take my advice, and quickly disperse. Have tea in comfort, and collect here again at six o'clock. Watson won't perish in the meantime."

"I thought we were going now?" snorted Handforth.

"You can go, if you like—but I shouldn't advise it," said Pitt. "Perhaps you'll kindly explain how we could raid Moat Hollow like shadows of the night in broad daylight? You may be able to do these

things, but I can't! I have my limitations."

Edward Oswald glanced at the window.

"I'd forgotten it wasn't dark," he growled.

"That's all right—you always forget the things that really matter," grinned Pitt.

"By six o'clock it'll be beautifully thick and murky. There's no moon, and plenty of clouds. And with a wind like that to drown any sounds, we shall have an easy time of it."

And the meeting dispersed, with everybody satisfied.

It had been decided that Watson should not be actually rescued. The main idea of the raid was to have a chat with him, find out the actual position, and supply him with a few luxuries in the way of food. Nothing definite could be decided until Watson had been questioned.

In the meantime, Archie Glenthorne was making certain preparations. He had been upstairs, and now he haunted the lobby. Occasionally he would glance at his watch. And at last he donned his overcoat and cap and prepared for a journey. He hurried out of the Ancient House, crossed the Triangle, and studiously ignored a couple of juniors who asked him where he was off to.

It was still only dusk, and the wind was a little less boisterous.

Archie hurried out into the lane, and vanished into the gloom.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TIGER IN HIS DEN.



MR. GRIMESBY CREEPE lolled back in his chair comfortably.

He had finished his tea, and his sitting-room at Moat Hollow was cosy and warm. Mr. Creepe, flabby and clumsy, completely filled the big chair with his bulk.

As usual, he was plying his big quill toothpick, and his small, closely set eyes were rather more placid than usual. His boys had worked well that day, and Mr. Creepe was feeling almost content.

The school was a mere blind. Most of the pupils were unwanted children—boys who had no parents, or whose guardians cared little or nothing about them. They were a poor lot at the best, and constant drudgery under Mr. Creepe's rule had completely knocked the little spirit out of them.

This extraordinary schoolmaster carried on, secretly, a kind of mail order business. He had offices in Bannington, and through the medium of the post he disposed of all sorts of cheap-jack jewellery and novelties at prices out of all proportion to the value of the goods. And he made his scholars at Moat Hollow perform all the work.

As a money-making scheme the plan was ideal. Mr. Creepe paid no wages, his workers laboured at all hours, and the whole game was about ninety per cent. profit.

And this man, actually a brute and a humbug, was not only regarded as a desirable resident in the district, but even the vicar himself believed Mr. Creepe to be a man of generosity and honour. For Mr. Creepe attended church regularly, he subscribed largely to local charities, and every Sunday he took his school to church with him.

Outwardly, Mr. Grimesby Creepe was a good man. And his monitors never lost an opportunity of telling the simple villagers of Mr. Creepe's kindness, of the luxuries at Moat Hollow, of the gentlemanly life the boys led.

From first to last Mr. Creepe and his monitors fooled the entire district. The only ones with wide-open eyes were the schoolmaster's victims. And they were helpless—for they were prisoners.

Mr. Creepe touched a bell-push on his desk, and waited. A moment later the door open, and Fryer appeared.

"Ah, Fryer, so you are on duty, eh?" said Mr. Creepe.

"Yes, sir," said the monitor.

"I think it is about time our young friend had his evening meal, eh?" said the schoolmaster pleasantly. "A pity he should be so obstinate, Fryer—a thousand pities! It grieves me to see a boy so self-willed. He must be taught, Fryer—he must learn his lesson!"

Fryer looked rather uncomfortable.

"It wasn't really Watson's fault about that stove catching fire, sir," he said shuffling his feet. "It was more or less an accident, and—and— Well, sir, don't you think it's about time he came out of that cellar?"

Mr. Creepe frowned.

"Weakness, Fryer—weakness!" he said, elevating his bushy eyebrows. "What's this? I didn't know you had a soft spot, young man! It won't do—it won't do at all! I am surprised that you should make excuses for Watson, and I cannot listen to any more."

"I'm not making excuses for him, sir," growled Fryer. "I'm only thinking that it may be a mistake to keep him locked up—"

"Enough, Fryer," interrupted Mr. Creepe. "Not another word!"

"Well, what about that mysterious character, sir?" demanded Fryer doggedly. "What about that Hooded Unknown?"

Mr. Creepe's expression became ugly.

"The infernal busybody!" he snarled, stung by the reminder. "Don't imagine that I am afraid of him, Fryer! And don't imagine, either, that I've given up all hope of discovering his identity! I intend to unmask that confounded spy! I'll have him yet, Fryer—I'll have him yet!"

"I hope so, too, sir," said the monitor. "Do you remember what he said the last time he appeared? He warned you not to flog Watson, or to give him this solitary confinement."

"How dare you attempt to criticise me, Fryer?" demanded Mr. Creepe harshly. "I suffer enough insolence from you monitors as it is! I make my own decisions, Fryer—I want no criticisms from you! I have placed this Watson in solitary confinement because he is safer there. I am convinced that this—this Hooded Unknown, as you call him, will find it extremely difficult to rescue the boy from that barred cellar. I don't make mistakes, Fryer; my decisions are always the right decisions."

Fryer could have made some comment on this bombastic statement, but he refrained.

"As for you, my boy, go at once to Watson, and give him his evening meal," continued Mr. Creepe. "One slice of stale bread and one glass of water—not a crumb or a drop more!"

Fryer took his departure at once. He was trembling slightly, for he had gone further with Mr. Creepe than he had ever gone before. And he had quickly learned that his word carried no weight. He went down the passage, and entered a snug little room at the end. It was untidy, and littered with magazines and papers and all sorts of rubbish, but it looked comfortable and warm.

It was, in fact, the monitors' room, where Kirby, Tarkington & Co. foregathered in their spare time. It was impossible for the monitors to be all present together. But after school hours two or three of them were generally lounging about.

"What's the matter with you, ugly face?" demanded Kirby, as Fryer walked in. "Has old Creepe been giving you a wiggling? You've had the miseries all day, for some reason——"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Fryer. "I've got to go and feed Watson."

"Twist his ears for me, will you?" said Kirby. "I'm glad to see that kid's getting his deserts at last! I'll take his grub if you like—I shall enjoy pulling his nose!"

"Thanks—I'll do it myself!" said Fryer curtly.

He walked out, went to the kitchen, and obtained a single slice of bread and a glass of water. Under all the circumstances, it was surprising that Fryer should have stuck so rigidly to Mr. Creepe's orders—particularly as he could have added a slab of cheese without anybody being the wiser.

He went out by the back door, after pushing a narrow bridge across the moat—a swing affair of Mr. Creepe's own design. The grounds were now dark and forbidding, for the high wall gave the place the aspect of a prison yard.

Fryer crossed to the gymnasium building, unlocked the heavy door, and walked in. The light of his electric torch served to show him the way. He passed to the back of the

building, and halted before another heavy door. He thrust back the bolts, turned the key in the lock, and swung the door open.

The light from his torch revealed a black void inside the doorway.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WEAKNESS OF FRYER.



TOMMY WATSON rose from his blankets as he heard the sound of footsteps on the floor above. He was cold and miserable—although, since the afternoon, he had been feeling a little better. That little talk with Doris had stiffened his backbone. He wasn't particularly fond of girls, but Doris' sympathy and indignation had rather affected him.

"Supper, I suppose!" he muttered, as the door opened.

The dazzling light from an electric torch shone down. There were no steps—just a deep drop from the doorway into the pit of the cellar. Behind the light stood a hazy figure.

"I've brought your supper," said Fryer.

"Oh, it's you!" exclaimed Watson. "I say, Fryer, I've been waiting to get a word with you! Can't you come down for a minute? I want to talk to you!"

The monitor hesitated.

"I daren't stop!" he replied. "And I can't come down, in any case. If Creepe found me talking to you in this cellar he'd drop on me like a ton of bricks!"

"It's all right—he won't come out here now——"

"Won't he!" growled Fryer. "You don't know him!"

He lowered the food on a kind of wooden tray, attached to a rope. In some ways, this cellar wasn't even as good as a prison cell. A few days' solitary confinement in this place usually reduced a stubborn pupil to a mere wreck—ready to obey any orders.

"There you are—take it!" said Fryer. "I daren't stop!"

Watson took the bread and the water, and the tray was drawn up again. For some reason, Fryer seemed very anxious to get away as soon as possible. Tommy Watson was frankly surprised—indeed, he was hurt.

For he had every reason to expect consideration from Fryer.

He was, indeed, suffering this solitary confinement for a "crime" of which he was entirely innocent. Fryer himself was the real culprit. The monitor had dozed at his duty during the night watch in the dormitory, and he had upset the oil-stove, nearly causing a fire.

But for Tommy Watson's swift action, Fryer would have been ablaze from head to foot. In a word, Tommy had saved his life—and on the top of this he had taken the blame for the mishap. For Watson had

cherished the hope that Fryer would secretly help him and the other unfortunates of Moat Hollow. He could do scarcely less, under the circumstances.

His present indecent haste to get away was therefore puzzling.

"Half a minute!" said Tommy, looking up into the bright glare from the electric torch. "Aren't you coming down, Fryer?"

"I tell you, I can't stop—"

"I've been waiting all this time to have a private chat," interrupted Watson grimly. "What about that night? I don't want to remind you of it, but I'm suffering this punishment—"

"I know!" broke in Fryer bitterly. "I ought to be down there instead of you. Honestly, Watson, I'd like to help you—I'd like to help all the poor beggars indoors. I'm not like Kirby and Markington—I hate this sort of business. But I've got to do it—"

"Got to?"

"If I don't, old Creepe will degrade me," said Fryer. "As a monitor, I can help you fellows a bit—"

"As a monitor, you've got a soft time of it," interrupted Tommy bluntly. "That's the truth, Fryer! When it comes to helping us, you back out! After all that's happened, it's a wonder to me you can stand up there and talk such rot! I want you to help me."

"It's too risky!" muttered Fryer weakly.

"I've planned it all out—I've got it all cut and dried!" went on Watson, his voice becoming tense. "As soon as I'm back in the school, I mean to stir the chaps up to a rebellion—"

"Rebellion!" echoed the monitor, horrified.

"Yes—with your help it'll be easy!" went on Tommy. "Don't you understand? There's only one time for it—in the night! You're always on duty for a two-hour spell, aren't you? Well, every night for a full week I want you to let me wake the chaps up, and talk to 'em."

"But—but—"

"Let me finish!" said Watson grimly. "These kids are a pitiful lot, but if once they get some spirit back they might take a firm stand. It only needs some persuasion—and then the final decision. Once we revolt against Creepe and the other monitors we shall have the upper hand."

Fryer actually trembled, and he had gone white.

"You're mad!" he muttered huskily. "We daren't do it!"

"Daren't?" said Watson contemptuously. "Speak for yourself! I dare—and I will! But I can't do anything alone. Without your assistance in the night, I shall be helpless. You needn't take part in these discussions—leave it all to me. And later on, when the revolt comes, you can join us."

"I can't—I can't!" said Fryer, his weakness of spirit pitifully apparent. "It's a good idea, Watson—I'd love to join in. But you don't know Creepe—he's a demon! I

daren't do it—I wouldn't think of it! Forget all about—"

"You—you miserable rotter!" shouted Watson, suddenly flaring up. "You funk—you coward! I was relying on you—and I might as well have relied on a wooden dummy! I tell you, it'll be easy—"

"No—no!" interrupted Fryer fiercely. "I can't risk it! When I'm on duty at night I must keep order, and if any of the chaps start talking, I've got to call Mr. Creepe! I must do it, Watson—I daren't go against Creepe's orders! I—I'm sorry—"

"Get out of my sight!" said Tommy Watson thickly.

He thought he heard a slight sound from the grating, but took no notice. In his present mood he was careless of such trifles. He was boiling with rage and disappointment. After all his high hopes, Fryer was proving himself too weak to be of any use!

The monitor took his departure, leaving Tommy Watson in solitude once again. And after his temper had died down, despondency enveloped him like a cloak. His one and only hope had gone. All his dreams of a revolt and a barring-out were shattered.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNWELCOME VISITANT.



DEAR me! Six o'clock already!" murmured Mr. Creepe, replacing his watch.

"Time I went round on my tour of inspection. I have some important work for the

boys—very important work!"

He chuckled, and rose from his chair. By this time, the pupils of Moat Hollow would have finished their evening meal, and would be back in the prison-like class-room. There were some important circulars to send out, and Mr. Creepe believed in driving his helpless drudges with scarcely a pause. It saved them from thinking too much.

He touched the bell, and heard the faint tinkle of it in the monitors' room, further down the corridor. Kirby, who was sitting in front of the fire with a newspaper, uttered an unchoice exclamation and got up.

"Hang the old fool!" he muttered. "What does he want now?"

Strictly speaking, it was one of Kirby's "off" spells. But it was always a grievance among the monitors that Mr. Creepe should keep them on the run even when they were off duty.

Kirby lumbered out of the monitors' room, his clumsy, ungainly figure brushing against the doorpost as he emerged. In the dim passage he came to a sudden halt. For a hand, with a strong grip, seized his shoulder behind. The sensation was rather startling.

"Just a minute, my friend!" said a soft, even voice.

"What the——"

Kirby twirled round, and then gave a shout of pure fright. Immediately behind him stood the black, cloaked, hooded figure of the Phantom Protector! He had appeared as though from nowhere.

"Oh! What—what——"

"It's all right, Kirby—don't get alarmed!" murmured the Phantom Protector. "Go back into your room. I will answer Mr. Creepe's bell."

The black figure walked on without another word, and Kirby stood there, breathing heavily. His mind was still in a whirl. He wanted to shout and warn Mr. Creepe, but he felt afraid to do so.

The door of Mr. Creepe's study opened, and the schoolmaster heard the familiar creak of the hinge. He didn't look round.

"Ah, Kirby, just a little task for you," he purred. "I think this is your hour of liberty, eh? Splendid! Just put your overcoat on, and run into the village——"

Mr. Creepe broke off as though his words had been snapped. While speaking, he had half-turned, his flabby face wreathed in smiles. But instead of Kirby standing in the doorway, the motionless figure of the Phantom Protector was there.

Mr. Creepe stood absolutely rigid, his body bent, his head half-turned. He seemed to be petrified, and for fifteen tense seconds not a sound broke the stillness of the room except the cracking of the embers in the grate.

"Just a little friendly call, Mr. Creepe," said the Unknown smoothly.

His voice broke the spell.

"Good heavens!" muttered Mr. Creepe, falling back into his chair with a floundering thud. "How—how did you get in? You—you infernal spy! You busybody! I'll have you thrown out—— Kirby! Tarkington! Roberts!" he bellowed. "Quick! Come here, you fools!"

"A mere waste of breath, Mr. Creepe," said the Phantom Protector. "Your henchmen will not throw me out. I fear them not. You will be wise if you accept this situation calmly."

"How did you get in?" panted Mr. Creepe feebly.

He could think of nothing else to say. All his strength had suddenly sapped away. This mysterious visitant was getting on his nerves. Moats and locked doors and barred windows seemed to have no effect. The Phantom Protector entered as he pleased. And although Mr. Creepe blustered, within his heart he was terrified.

"How did I get in?" repeated the Unknown. "I have any ways—although we need not enter into them now. I am here because you have ignored my orders. My warning has gone unheeded."

"Your orders!" said Mr. Creepe thickly. "Your warning——"

"You have imprisoned Watson in the gymnasium cellar, in spite of my warning," said the Phantom Protector sternly. "Now, in

my presence, you will release this boy, and restore him to his companions."

Mr. Creepe nearly choked.

"You—you dare to give me orders?" he snarled.

"I am giving them!" said the other curtly.

"You—you infernal madman——"

"I shall wait until those orders are carried out!" went on The Protector. "And if Watson suffers any further punishment, the consequences for you will be as swift and disastrous as the sweep of an avalanche."

"Threats!" snapped the schoolmaster. "I will take no notice of your threats! You are an intruder—you have no business here! I refuse to be intimidated——"

"And that is final?" asked The Protector grimly.

"Yes!"

The black figure bowed, and moved towards the door. Mr. Creepe was startled. His guilty conscience warned him that he was in no position to be defiant. And, like a flash, an idea suddenly came into his head. His eyes became cunning.

"Wait!" he said, his voice taking on its purring note. "Wait! You have me beaten! I will release the boy as you desire!"

CHAPTER XI.

MR. CREEPE'S TRIUMPH.



THE Phantom Protector bowed again.

"You are more wise than I believed," he said smoothly.

"Waste no time, Mr. Creepe—and attempt no tricks. I am on the alert—I am prepared for any treachery. The latter, I believe, is your speciality."

Mr. Grimesby Creepe writhed at the words—but, with an effort, he managed to keep his temper. He came round the table, and took care to avert his face. For in his eyes there gleamed a light of sheer cunning.

"Come!" he said softly. "We will go to Watson without delay. He shall be released and restored to his fellow scholars."

"To his fellow slaves would be a more accurate description," said The Phantom Protector quietly.

Mr. Creepe left the taunt unanswered, and he led the way out of the passage, and then into the dimly illuminated hall. Kirby stood watching from a distance—startled and puzzled. He half expected to receive a summons from his chief, but none came. Either Mr. Creepe was carrying out some ruse, or he was defeated. In any case, Kirby did not feel like butting in.

The bridge was in position across the moat—for it was regularly drawn in at six-thirty every evening. They passed across it, and

found themselves in the dark, wind-swept grounds.

The Phantom Protector kept a pace or two behind Mr. Creepe. He made scarcely any sound as he walked, and it was as much as Mr. Creepe could do to control himself. He had an uncanny feeling that this masked and hooded figure was a kind of apparition. He was weird—he was unnatural.

They reached the gymnasium, and Mr. Creepe unlocked the door, his companion standing close by, still and silent. Unless absolutely essential, The Phantom Protector never spoke.

"Follow me!" growled Mr. Creepe sullenly.

He had adopted an air of defeated resignation. But his eyes told a different story. He kept these averted from his companion, and they both entered the gymnasium.

It was dark inside, and a sudden dazzling flash of light blazed out. The Unknown had switched on a powerful electric torch. He played it fully upon the schoolmaster.

"I am prepared!" he said shortly.

"Fool!" snapped Mr. Grimesby Creepe. "Do you think I would attempt any trickery? I am alone—and my intentions are honest. I am here to release Watson, in accordance with your orders."

"Proceed!" said The Protector.

They went to the end of the gymnasium, and Mr. Creepe shot back the bolts of the cellar door, and turned the key in the lock. He was trembling slightly as he did so.

"Watson is down here," he said huskily. "Stairs lead straight down into the cellar. I will go in advance."

"Good! Do so!"

Mr. Creepe swung the door open, and at the same instant The Phantom Protector flashed his light down into the cellar. The first glance revealed the fact that there were no stairs.

"So you lied to me——" began The Unknown.

"Yes, confound you, I did!" roared Mr. Creepe furiously. "And now, you spy, I've got you!"

With one heave of his powerful frame, Mr. Creepe charged the other. He knew better than to fight. His movement was a sheer charge, and the full force of his powerful bulk had effect.

The Phantom Protector was taken by surprise. For once he had miscalculated. Before he could save himself, he was literally flung over the cellar threshold.

He dropped sheer, and the torch went out.

Crash!

The Unknown struck the floor with a thud,

and at the same second Mr. Creepe slammed the door with such force that the whole building shook. The schoolmaster put his shoulder to it, and stood there panting. With trembling hands, he shot the bolts home.

"I've got you!" he shouted thickly. "You fool—you idiot! Did you think you could get the better of me? At last I've got you! And there you'll stay—a prisoner in my power!"

He laughed rather hysterically—for the tension had been great, and now that the crisis was over, Mr. Creepe was feeling the reaction. He saw two shadowy figures at the other end of the gymnasium, and a prickly sensation attacked his spine.

"Who's—who's that?" he panted.

"Only me, sir——" began Kirby's voice.

"Oh!" muttered Mr. Creepe, with relief. "Confound you, Kirby! Confound you for a young fool! What do you mean by startling me like that? Who's that with you? You young——"

"It's Tarkington, sir," interrupted Kirby. "We thought you might need some help, so we followed you out. I say, sir, that was wonderful of you! You've trapped him—you've got that masked chap down the cellar!"

"It was glorious, sir!" said Tarkington.

Mr. Creepe was mollified—his temper vanished.

"They can't get the better of me, Kirby!" he exclaimed. "They can't trick me, Tarkington! I've got this fellow now, and I'll keep him!"

"Hadn't we better unmask him, sir?" asked Kirby eagerly.

"All in good time—all in good time!" said Mr. Creepe. "The fellow will never escape from that cellar—it is like a castle dungeon! He may be troublesome at present, and we don't want any bother. A little course of starvation, my boys—twenty-four hours, at least! A spell of starvation, and he will be easier to manage!"

Mr. Creepe rubbed his hands together with satisfaction, and he and his monitors moved out of the gymnasium.

CHAPTER XII

SURPRISING EVENTS.



TOMMY WATSON was in a state of dizzy bewilderment.

He had been dozing when The Phantom Protector came hurtling down, and even now he was only partially awake. He could hear Mr. Creepe yelling with triumph from the other side of the cellar door. And near the prisoner something was moving.

"What—what's happened?" muttered Watson. "Who's here?"

ANSWERS
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The electric torch flashed out.
 "I'm here to help you—
 I'm The Phantom Protector!"
 came a soft voice. "It's all
 right, Watson——"

"The Phantom Protector!"
 gasped Watson blankly.

He could see the familiar
 shape behind the light. He
 could see the hooded head,
 and the gleaming eyes from
 behind the black mask. It
 was like a dream. And
 Watson suddenly jumped.

"They've collared you!"
 he muttered, in alarm.

"No, no—they only think
 so!" whispered The Protec-
 tor. "Poor Mr. Creepe! He's
 no actor! I guessed his
 intentions from the first, and
 fell into the trap very
 obligingly!"

"But—but——"

"We must work speedily—
 there is no time!" interrupted
 The Protector. "It pleases
 me to give our mutual friend
 a little surprise. Listen! He
 is talking with his monitors!
 There will be a delay—and
 that, too, I anticipated.
 Splendid!"

The Unknown padded across
 to the grating. One swift
 examination was sufficient.
 He laughed softly to himself.
 Then, working with astonish-



He lowered the food on a kind
 of wooden tray, attached to a
 rope.

ing rapidly, he took out a number of tools from hidden pockets. Tommy Watson held the light—trembling with excitement at the same time.

The Phantom Protector got to work on the first bar.

"And Mr. Creepe fools himself that I am a prisoner!" he murmured. "We must disillusion him, Watson! I came here to get you out of this cellar, and I mean to do it. I could have released you without Mr. Creepe's knowledge, but I preferred to go to him first."

While speaking, The Unknown was working rapidly. One look at the cellar grating would have convinced most people that escape was absolutely impossible. Mr. Grimesby Creepe was one of these simple souls. The grating was of heavy iron, set solidly into the stonework.

The Phantom Protector made short work of the problem.

The tool he was using was a kind of hack-saw—long, delicate, but extraordinarily effective. The bite of the teeth could be heard musically as the saw worked up and down in The Protector's strong grip.

The iron was cut through almost with the ease of lead. The first bar was severed in under a minute. And then, without a pause, The Unknown started on the second.

If these bars had been steel, the task could not have been accomplished. But, being of wrought-iron, they succumbed without even a struggle. Mr. Creepe, in imagining the cellar to be impregnable, had not considered these finer points.

"Splendid!" murmured The Phantom Protector, as the second bar was conquered. "Quick—they are still talking above us! We shall do it, Watson—and we'll give Mr. Creepe the surprise of his life!"

He seized the first of the bars, and bent it out with ease—for, being severed at the base, the bar itself acted as a powerful lever. When the second one had been bent upwards, there was plenty of space for a human being to squeeze through.

Watson was told to go first, and he did so. He was bewildered and startled. The ease with which his rescuer had escaped was rather startling. As they hurried across the school grounds, there came the sound of a slamming door. Mr. Creepe and his monitors were leaving the gymnasium.

The bridge across the moat was still in position, and as Watson and The Phantom Protector passed through the hall, they saw nobody. They went straight to Mr. Creepe's study and entered.

"Just in time!" breathed The Unknown. "What a surprise for Mr. Creepe! Your troubles are nearing an end, Watson! The rebellion you desire will soon be a reality!"

Tommy Watson took a deep breath.

"How—how did you know about a rebellion?" he asked quickly.

"I heard your talk with Fryer," replied the other. "And I knew it before that, too. But Fryer's attitude tells me that you need other help—strong, powerful help. I shall do my best to supply it. My utility in my present disguise is at an end!"

Watson looked at the masked figure wonderingly.

"Who are you?" he whispered.

The Phantom Protector slipped to the door, opened it, and then turned.

"Can you control yourself?" he whispered tensely.

"Yes, yes—I promise!" panted Tommy Watson.

The Unknown pulled back his hood, and then peeled off the long, black, close-fitting mask. For an instant he stood revealed as himself, and Tommy Watson started back with a cry of amazement. His eyes shone, and his cheeks flushed.

"You!" he gasped, with a note of joy.

"Hush! Not a word!" said the Phantom Protector lightly.

With two swift movements he replaced the coverings, and at that moment footsteps sounded in the corridor. The Phantom Protector dropped into a seat and adopted an easy attitude.

"You!" repeated Watson in a stupefied voice. "But—but it's impossible! I mean, you're not here. I must be dreaming. Oh, my head's nearly bursting with excitement!"

"Remember your promise!" whispered the hooded unknown.

It was fortunate, perhaps, that the door should open at that moment. Mr. Grimesby Creepe was just coming in. He was in the best of humours. But he wouldn't be in a moment.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAST WARNING.



MR. CREEPE'S heavy face was wreathed in smiles.

They were rather malicious smiles, and Kirby and Tarkington knew better than to mistake the school-master's good-humour for the genuine article. He was in reality in one of his most dangerous moods.

"We've got him, my boys! We've got him tight!" said Mr. Creepe, as he laid a hand on his study door. "And I think we'll change our plans. Why wait twenty-four hours?"

"Just what I thought, sir," said Kirby.

"We'll return to the cellar at once," declared Mr. Creepe. "But we must be prepared. That is the reason I have come indoors. We need ropes—a horsewhip—weapons of other kinds. Oh, yes, we shall make no mistake on this occasion!"

He opened the door and walked into his study.

"Ah, Mr. Creepe, we meet again!" said the Phantom Protector, rising and bowing. "I simply couldn't tear myself away!"

The schoolmaster stopped in his tracks as though suddenly shot. His face went the colour of putty and his eyes fairly goggled. The shock was in all truth a staggering one, and the Protector had intended it to be.

Only a few minutes earlier, it seemed, Mr. Creepe had left this elusive being a prisoner in the cellar with Watson. And here he was, as calm as ever, in Mr. Creepe's own study! And Watson was here, too!

Mr. Creepe simply stood there and gibbered.

"Rather a shock, eh?" said the hooded voice. "Perhaps so, Mr. Creepe—and I hope you will profit by it. I hope you will realise that I am not the fool you took me for."

"How—how did you escape from—from —"

Mr. Creepe found it difficult to articulate his words. Recovery was slow. He was still blankly amazed. And Kirby and Tarkington, in the doorway, stood looking on in a daze. Only the Phantom Protector and Tommy Watson were thoroughly enjoying the situation, and Watson's enjoyment was confused by the excited tumult within his breast.

"Need we go into the matter of how I escaped?" asked the Phantom Protector quietly. "I am here—that is enough! And my presence is significant. I am here to give you a final warning!"

Mr. Creepe held on to the wall for support.

"Are you human?" he panted hoarsely.

"At least you realise that I am determined," said the unknown, ignoring the question. "You have persecuted this boy unkindly, and it must cease. Harm a hair of his head or inflict any punishment, and my methods will become drastic."

"What—what do you mean?"

"There are several ways of being drastic," said the Phantom Protector. "For example, Mr. Creepe, it would amuse me to horsewhip you round the room, although I fear the experience would not be very comic from your point of view. On the other hand, I could go to the police and tell them of your treatment of Watson. I could, indeed, lay proofs of your conduct before them. An inspection of the cellar would not be improbable."

Mr. Creepe tottered to a chair and sank into it.

"You—you demon!" he panted. "How did you get here? How did you escape? And what do you want of me?"

"Merely an undertaking that neither Watson nor any other boy in this school will be tortured by solitary confinement or brutal flogging," said the mysterious one sternly. "If any boy is insubordinate, he must be punished fittingly, and not brutally. Give me this undertaking, Mr. Creepe, and I will depart—and perchance I shall not return."

The schoolmaster felt slightly better.

"You will not inform the police?" he panted.

"Not unless you drive me to it," said the Protector. "But this is my last warning! One more inhuman act on your part, and you shall receive no mercy. Remember, I am watching! I am watching—always!"

"I—I promise!" stuttered Mr. Creepe, with an effort. "Watson shall return to his schoolfellows, and I undertake to punish my boys only when they deserve punishment. Am I to promise to let them run wild?" he added savagely.

"No, you may control them with justice," replied the other, the stern note creeping back into his voice. "I accept your promise, Mr. Creepe, but my faith in you is so slight that I shall continue to watch. Instruct your monitors to let me pass unmolested."

Mr. Creepe rose to his feet.

"Kirby! Tarkington! Go to your room!" he demanded harshly. "Who told you to stand there, listening? Go to your room, confound you! What infernal impudence is this? Go—both of you!"

The two monitors vanished rapidly; they had no desire to receive the full vials of Mr. Creepe's wrath. He was quite capable of relieving himself at their expense.

"As for the police, go to them if you please!" snapped Mr. Creepe, turning back to the Phantom Protector with a show of defiance. "I care nothing for the police! My position here is firm and well established."

The unknown gave a soft chuckle.

"Your courage has returned, Mr. Creepe, now that you feel yourself to be fairly safe," he said dryly. "You are a wonderful humbug! But you cannot keep up your pretence too long. Sooner or later you will meet with disaster. But so long as you obey my orders you will be safe from me. Good-evening!"

He bowed and passed out of the room, but not before waving a cheery hand to Tommy Watson, who gazed after him with shining, joyous eyes.

Tommy Watson knew the identity of the unknown, and it seemed that this knowledge had imbued him with untold courage.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE REVELATION.



H ANDFORTH looked up at the high wall of Moat Hollow and turned impatiently to the other dim figures near him.

"Buck up! Let's have those ropes!" he exclaimed. "It's long after six, and we can't stop here all the evening! If I was in charge of this rescue party you'd see a difference!"

"Anybody might think you were in charge of it already," growled Church. "Why can't you leave things to Pitt?"

"He's too slow!" retorted Handforth.

"Is he?" put in Jack Grey, with a touch of indignation. "While you're standing there gassing, Reggie's getting busy. He doesn't talk much, but he acts!"

Handforth accepted the rebuke quite mildly.

"He's acting?" he repeated. "By George, so he is! He's fixed that rope up already! Oh, well, that makes a difference. But let's get a hustle on, for goodness' sake!"

There were six juniors in the party, as Pitt had arranged. Handforth, of course, had insisted upon coming. According to what he said, without him the rescue party had been foredoomed to failure.

One by one the juniors swarmed up the rope and reached the top of the high wall. Then they lowered themselves on the other side and dropped into the Moat Hollow grounds.

The conditions were ideal.

The February evening was as black as ink; thick clouds were scudding across the sky, and the gale was powerful. The roar of it filled the air. Trees were rustling and creaking, and every angle of the old house moaned and shrieked with the powerful wind.

Any sounds that the invaders might make were drowned at birth, and there was little or no danger of being seen or heard. And it was quite early. The raid could be accomplished and the juniors back at St. Frank's before calling-over.

Acting upon Doris Berkeley's information, the juniors crept over towards the gymnasium. It stood there, dark and indistinct. The school itself, surrounded by the moat, was almost as dark. Only one or two dim lights could be seen.

"Not much fear of being spotted in this gloom," murmured Pitt as they crept out of the gymnasium. "And we could easily slip off at the first sign of danger."

"Slip off?" repeated Handforth. "Not likely! I'm longing to meet those two rotten monitors—Kirby and Tarkington! I haven't forgotten the way the cads sauced me in the tuckshop this afternoon! But the funks buzzed off!"

"We don't want to settle your little differences here, old man," said Pitt gently.

"Reserve your quarrel with Kirby and Tarkington until you meet 'em in the road. We're here to help old Tommy—not to start a riot!"

Handforth grunted and subsided. By this time the juniors had located the grating-pit which Doris had described. Tregellis-West was one of the first to drop down into it. He could dimly see the bars set in the opening.

"Tommy!" he murmured. "I say, Tommy, boy—Begad!"

Sir Montie broke off with a startled exclamation. Reggie Pitt had just jumped down beside him.

"What's up?" whispered Reggie.

"Dear old boy, the bars are missin'!" breathed Sir Montie in a tense voice. "Two of them, begad! I believe somethin' has happened! Tommy! Tommy!"

"He's escaped, by the look of it!" said Pitt keenly.

He ventured to flash on an electric torch, but he took care to shade the light carefully under his coat. No rays were allowed to spread outwards. The light went between the bars into the cellar.

"Empty!" said Pitt. "The bird's flown! And look at these bars—sawn clean through and bent back! This is a bit of a surprise, eh? We didn't expect anything like this!"

He and Sir Montie hoisted themselves out of the pit.

"Well, that's done it!" said Handforth bluntly. "Of all the silly asses! Fancy escaping when we came here to rescue him! I always thought that Watson was dotty!"

"You can't blame him for getting out while he had the chance," said Church.

"Do be sensible, old man!"

"Look here, Walter Church——"

Handforth broke off, for from the rear a low chuckle had sounded. All the juniors heard it. They stared. Standing there was a dim figure, indistinguishable amid the gloom.

"Too late! I was on the spot first," said the figure calmly. "Good for you, all the same. It shows that you're alive to the situation. Watson is now safely indoors, and Mr. Creepe is suffering from the blues."

"Who—who's that?" demanded Reggie Pitt sharply.

"Am I so inconspicuous?" asked the figure in an injured tone. "I am he of the hood. I am the Phantom Protector!"

The six juniors were rather startled. They had heard a great deal about this elusive, mysterious character and his doings, but they had never met him face to face. Once he had appeared near the school gates, but only for a brief moment.

He was a kind of spectral figure, so far as the juniors were concerned—a will-o'-the-wisp. But his exploits had thrilled them. It was he who had horsewhipped Mr. Creepe in his own class-room.

"Look here!" whispered Handforth tensely. "Let's charge him! Let's pounce

on him and tear his mask off. There's been enough mystery already—I want to know who he is!"

The Phantom Protector laughed.

"Your whispers are as loud as ever, Handy," he chuckled. "In any case, your plan is unnecessary. I mean to reveal myself at once, because the time has come for different tactics."

"You're going to tell us who you are?" asked Pitt curiously.

"Yes. But let us get out of here," replied the Hooded Unknown.

He led the way off into the darkness, and swarmed up the rope which the juniors had left against the wall. The Fourth-Formers followed, half fearing that the mysterious figure would have vanished.

But he was standing in the lane. Reggie Pitt started as he saw that the hood and the mask were now missing. The Protector was still dressed in his close-fitting black, but his face and head were bared.

"Come on—where's the torch?" he said amusedly.

Pitt flashed it on, a thrill of intense curiosity assailing him. The light fell full on the face and head of the Unknown. For the first time his features were revealed.

And the six juniors uttered the same gasping shout in one voice:

"Nipper!"

CHAPTER XV.

CLEARING UP A FEW POINTS.



"NIPPER!"

It was a shout of sheer bewildered amazement. The six juniors crowded round the Phantom Protector in wild excitement. Staggering as it

seemed—impossible, indeed, as the revelation appeared to be—the unmasked Unknown was none other than Nipper, the ex-Captain of the Fourth!

"Sorry if I've given you a bit of a shock," he said cheerfully. "My hat! I'm glad! I'm glad to throw off that disguise. It was all right while it lasted, but I've been itching to grab you fellows by the hand for the last ten days. How are you, old chaps?"

"Nipper boy!" muttered Sir Montie huskily. "Begad! I—I—"

He clasped the hand of his old chum with so fierce a grip that even Nipper winced slightly. Sir Montie's greeting clearly indicated the warmth of his feeling.

"Nipper! I say, this is too marvellous for words!" exclaimed Reggie Pitt, elbowing Sir Montie aside, and grabbing at Nipper's hand. "Good old Nipper! By Jove! We've missed you, old man! How the dickens are you?"

"Fine, thanks!" grinned Nipper. "It's awfully decent of you—"

"Here, out of it!" roared Handforth excitedly. "Nipper, old man, let's have your giddy fist. Welcome back, old son!"

He grabbed Nipper's hand and delivered a thump on his back which nearly sent the ex-skipper flat on his face.

"Ho, steady!" he gasped. "When you've done!"

"And do you mean to say that you've been this Phantom Protector all the time?" demanded Handforth. "You awful spoofer! Leaving us in the dark for days and weeks—"

"I couldn't help it," interrupted Nipper. "I couldn't explain before; but if you'll listen—"

"Of course. I knew it all the time!" said Handforth genially. "I guessed this weeks ago—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weeks ago!" repeated Handforth. "The Phantom Protector couldn't be anybody else but you—and I knew it! I didn't mention anything to my chums because they talk too much—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, we don't want to argue about it here, do we?" chuckled Nipper. "Suppose we go along the towing-path to the old barn? It'll be sheltered there, and we can have a good old pow-wow. Fort Resolute, eh? Remember how we barred out those giddy mistresses? Miss Trumble and the rest?"

"My hat! Do we remember?" said Pitt softly. "You were captain of the Fourth then, old man—and we're longing for those days to return! I'm all in a muddle; I can't understand a thing!"

"Well, come along to the barn and I'll tell you," said Nipper briskly.

Now that the first excitement of the revelation was over the juniors were filled with an intense, burning curiosity. They hadn't even thought of Nipper as a possible ally. They had believed him to be far away, working with his celebrated guv'nor, Nelson Lee. That he should be secretly in the district was a staggering surprise.

They were still excited at the thought of it, of course. But they held themselves in check, waiting for Nipper to give his explanations. And all the juniors felt a comforting sense of security and protection. It was curious how Nipper's personality should affect them. It was as though a celebrated general had taken command of a battle.

The Fourth-Formers hardly remembered going along the towing-path. They had forgotten Moat Hollow and Tommy Watson and Mr. Creepe. They only wanted to hear Nipper's story. And Sir Montie Tregellis-West was perhaps the most delighted fellow of all.

"Tell me, Nipper, old boy," he whispered, as they approached the barn. "Does Tommy know? Have you told him?"

"Yes," said Nipper, "only a few minutes before I met you chaps."

"Good!" said Sir Montie gladly. "I say, that's rippin'! The dear fellow will be frightfully relieved—he will, really!"

They all entered the barn, and the door was closed. They didn't need any light. They surrounded Nipper in a circle and clamoured for him to start.

"Well, strictly speaking, Archie Glen-thorne was the cause of my coming," said Nipper. "And it was owing to Archie, too, that I adopted the role of the Phantom Protector. He put the idea into my head."

"Good old Archie!" said Pitt.

"Yes, he's a dark horse," said Nipper. "He may pretend to be a slacker, but he isn't. In fact, it was Archie who started this Hooded Unknown business—I'm merely his deputy!"

"Well I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Handforth blankly.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BEST NEWS OF ALL.



ARCHIE was the Hooded Unknown?" repeated Pitt, frankly astonished.

"In a way, yes," replied Nipper. "I'll be as brief as I can; but here's the yarn.

Do you happen to remember that Archie was ill a few weeks ago? His pater came, and a specialist from London—"

"Yes, that's right," said Jack Grey.

"Well, that specialist told Archie quite frankly that there was nothing wrong with him except sheer laziness," said Nipper. "Archie told me this himself, so it's true enough. The specialist warned him that if he didn't tak, at least two hours strenuous exercise daily he would crumple up. Of course, he was staggered by that piece of news—or, to use his own term, he felt dithery all down the jolly old spine."

"But he's been slacker than ever since then!" protested Handforth.

"That's all you know," grinned Nipper. "The poor old chap thought it all out, and he didn't like to do exercises in the daytime; he was afraid of being chipped and laughed at. So he kept it dark. And, assisted by Phipps, he made a practice of getting up at about midnight and going for a two hours' cross-country run every night."

"Well I'm blessed!"

"Having a bed-room to himself made it possible, of course," said Nipper. "He told me that he scared Fullwood and Snipe one night, and he met with other adventures

on that same occasion. In fact, the events of that night led to my taking on the job."

"How?" asked Pitt curiously.

"Well, it seems that Archie was passing Moat Hollow on his way home, and Tommy Watson had managed to escape—at least, he'd got on to the roof. He had an idea that Montie was waiting for him outside."

"Begad! That must have been the night when old Creepe lashed out at me with a horsewhip!" said Tregellis-West breathlessly.

"Yes," said Nipper. "Watson was fooled, I believe. It was after one o'clock, and he thought it was only eleven. Well, anyhow, he shouted out the awful nature of his predicament at Moat Hollow, and Archie heard every word. For the first time the truth about Moat Hollow was known to an outsider. Creepe and his monitors went for Watson, and he fell off the edge of the roof—into the moat!"

"Poor beggar!" said Handforth feelingly.

"Well, Archie acted like a good 'un," said Nipper with warmth. "He climbed the wall somehow and pulled Watson out of the moat—without letting out who he was; he didn't want any cheap glory. Later on he told Phipps all about it, and said that he was going to keep his eye on Moat Hollow every night. But he feared that he wasn't up to it, and he wrote to me."

"But why?" asked Pitt. "Why didn't he tell us?"

"Because he was afraid that you'd go and get yourself into a lot of trouble. You remember, Moat Hollow was put out of bounds just before that," replied Nipper. "In his letter to me, Archie said that an outsider could do the thing fifty times better than anybody else."

"But you're not an outsider, begad!" protested Sir Montie.

"Well, I'm not connected with St. Frank's now, anyhow. And yet I know all about St. Frank's, and I know the district, and I know Moat Hollow inside and out, and Tommy Watson, don't forget, is one of my own particular pals."

"Yes, you were certainly the right chap for the job," admitted Pitt.

"By a piece of luck, Archie's letter came just as the gov'nor was setting off for Vienna," said Nipper. "It wasn't necessary for me to go, so I decided to come down here on the quiet. As it happens, Mr. Lee is still in Vienna, and he may not be back for a week or two."

"Then you're still going to stop here?" asked Montie eagerly.

"There's no reason why I shouldn't, and a hundred reasons why I should," replied Nipper keenly. "I came down here and met Archie, and we talked it over—at one o'clock in the morning, if you please. Then I got the idea of appearing as a kind of phantom figure—appearing just when I was most wanted."

"But how on earth did you wangle it?" asked Handforth excitedly.

"I got into Moat Hollow by means of a rope—slung to the top-most branch of a high tree," replied Nipper with a grin. "By swinging on the rope like a pendulum I landed on the roof with ease, and I got off the roof in just the same way. It must have looked fearfully mysterious to old Creepe. These simple devices are always the best, you know."

"You dropped down a skylight once, didn't you?"

"Yes—after Archie had given me the tip," replied Nipper. "You see, I had an arrangement with Archie; I am staying in Bannington, and he rang me up every time he heard that Tommy Watson needed help. He tried to ring me up to-day, but the telephone was out of order."

"Oh! That's why he was looking so worried at teatime!" said Grey.

"I expect so! Anyhow, he came over to me by train," replied Nipper. "He told me everything he had heard from Doris, so I put my disguise into a bag and hurried over. I've got a little hut in Bellton Wood where I usually change," he explained. "All very simple, isn't it?"

"It's wonderful!" explained Pitt breathlessly. "But what's the next move, Nipper? What are you going to do now?"

Nipper bent forward slightly.

"I'm going to help Watson to stir up that rebellion in Moat Hollow!" he replied in a grim voice. "It's the only way to wipe out Creepe once and for all. And I want you chaps to keep everything dark—for the time being, anyhow!"



The Phantom Protector was taken by surprise. For once he had miscalculated. Before he could save himself, he was literally thrown over the cellar threshold.

These promises, of course, were given on the instant. For Pitt & Co. realised to the full that the most stirring times of all lay ahead. Nipper had returned. What else mattered?

THE END.

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(Now read on.)

CHAPTER XXI.

AN APPEAL TO NELSON LEE.

A TERRIBLE fear gripped at Harry Langford's heart.

Mrs. Newman's swooning fit, following so closely upon the other dramatic events which had greeted the young man's home-coming, indicated that some dreadful catastrophe had overtaken his father.

Harry bent down beside the unconscious housekeeper in a fever of anxiety and consternation, and wondered what on earth he could do to revive her. She was looking chalky white, and it was evident that her confinement in the cupboard had told upon her sorely.

"Wake up, Mrs. Newman, for goodness sake!" exclaimed Harry, taking one of the woman's hands and chafing it vigorously. "I—I want you to tell me what has happened— Oh, great Cæsar! What the dickens can I do?"

He broke off helplessly as he saw Mrs. Newman's death-like appearance, and he rose to his feet and hurried into the kitchen—realising that the best method of reviving the unfortunate woman would be to procure some water.

He drew a tumbler-ful from the tap, and rushed back to the hall with it, instantly sprinkling a little of the liquid upon Mrs. Newman's face, and then gently rubbing her temples with his moistened finger. This treatment, after a few moments, seemed to be having some effect, for the housekeeper gave a fluttering sigh, and commenced twitching her fingers.

Harry now placed his arm under her head, and raised it sufficiently to enable him to hold the glass to her lips. At first Mrs. Newman's tightly clenched teeth prevented the water from entering her mouth, but by degrees Harry managed to overcome this difficulty, and to pour a little of the water down her throat.

A few seconds afterwards Mrs. Newman opened her eyes, and the colour began to return to her pale cheeks. She looked at Harry dazedly, and then sat up and stared round perplexedly.

"Oh, Master Harry!" she muttered. "Whatever is the matter— Oh! I—I must have fainted—"

"You did, Mrs. Newman," cut in the young man, helping the housekeeper to her feet. "You fainted just when you were going to tell me about my father! You said that some devilish work was afoot

last night, and I can quite believe it! For heaven's sake, tell me what occurred and where my father is——"

"I don't know, Master Harry!" interrupted the housekeeper, wringing her hands in consternation. "He was set upon in the laboratory last night by two terrible scoundrels, who knocked him down and took him away! The poor master was treated brutally, and—and kidnapped!"

Harry's face blanched.

"Great Scott!" he muttered, looking at the woman fixedly. "The poor old man assaulted and abducted! Are you sure—I—I can scarcely believe such a thing——"

"It's true, sir—I saw him knocked down with my own eyes!" said Mrs. Newman tearfully. "I even went to his help with the poker, but those two wicked men turned on me, and bound me with a rope! Then they bundled me into the cupboard, and left me there while they finished their work! I heard 'em talking, and I know that they took the master away as their prisoner! Oh, dear! I shall remember last night until the day I die!"

The housekeeper produced a handkerchief and commenced crying into it softly. The reaction was now telling upon her, and she was bordering upon a state of exhaustion. Harry observed her nervous condition, and patted her hand soothingly.

"There, there, Mrs. Newman—don't give way, again," he urged anxiously. "I can't understand why all this has happened, or who is responsible——"

"The devil is responsible, Master Harry!" cut in the woman, with a shudder. "One of the men who came here was the devil himself—dressed in red, and with horns on his head! The other man was a black-bearded ruffian who looked like a cut-throat from the slums!"

Mrs. Newman described, at some length, the appearance of the kidnappers, and Harry realised that the criminals had evidently attired themselves in very effective disguises.

"The whole thing's a mystery," he muttered. "What on earth was my father kidnapped for——"

"For the sake of that machine he's been working on so hard!" declared the housekeeper. "Those murderous robbers have taken that, as well as the master! I heard 'em taking it out of the laboratory——"

"The gov'nor's machine stolen!" repeated Harry, with a snort of anger. "Good heavens, Mrs. Newman, this is more serious than I thought! My father has been working for years and years to perfect his apparatus, and he only finished it recently. He wired me yesterday of his success, but I didn't get the message until this morning! And now, when I arrive home, I find all this! It's a ghastly state of affairs, and it's a great pity that the police could not have been informed earlier!"

The housekeeper nodded.

"Yes, Master Harry, it is," she agreed.

"I should have got the police long ago if I could have got out of that dratted cupboard, I can tell you! But I couldn't free myself, and so I've had to stop here ever since last night!"

Harry nodded, and crossed to the telephone. He was furious and alarmed, but he realised that it was his duty to give the police all the information in his power. He had already communicated with the local headquarters, but he deemed it wise to inform them of his latest discoveries.

His father, he knew, had been working upon the stolen apparatus with the utmost secrecy, and had taken the most minute precautions to prevent any knowledge of his machine becoming public. But, in view of what had occurred, it was imperative that the police machinery should be set in motion, and Mr. Langford and his apparatus found.

Harry was soon connected with the police-station again, and he gave the inspector an account of the facts he had learned from Mrs. Newman, and urged the official to send his most competent men. The inspector said that two men were already on the way, but he promised to come along himself within a few minutes.

He was as good as his word, and he arrived very shortly after the first two constables had put in an appearance. He surveyed the wrecked laboratory, questioned Mrs. Newman closely, and made very copious notes in his book.

"H'm!" he commented, looking at Harry thoughtfully. "A queer business, Mr. Langford—a very queer business, indeed! It looks as if your father put up a pretty stiff fight before he was finally captured, at all events!"

He nodded towards the wrecked laboratory as he spoke, and Harry glanced at him impatiently. The inspector seemed to be reverse of energetic—and Harry was impatient to see something accomplished without delay.

"My father is not the sort of man to submit to abduction calmly," he said proudly. "The state of this room shows that clearly enough, as you say. It also proves that my father made strenuous efforts to prevent his machine from being stolen, and I cannot impress upon you too strongly, inspector, the necessity of recovering it. It will be a national calamity if Mr. Langford and his apparatus are not found soon!"

The policeman nodded.

"We'll do our best, sir—never fear," he replied. "But I must say that there ain't much to go on! The kidnappers, according to the housekeeper, were wearing fantastic disguises, so we haven't got any descriptions of what they're really like."

Harry turned away impatiently. The inspector's lethargic manner got on his nerves, and he felt that he must find other and swifter methods of getting upon the track of his kidnapped father. But such a thing

was not so easy; there was nothing to indicate who had been responsible for the outrage.

The whole thing was a deep mystery, and it would take a clever brain to solve it—a cool, calculating, detective brain—

"Good heavens, why didn't I think of it before!" muttered Harry to himself, as these thoughts crossed his mind. "Nelson Lee, the famous detective, is the very man to handle this business. I'll ring him up at once, and ask him to find my father!"

He hurried towards the telephone as he arrived at his decision, firmly resolved to make an appeal to the celebrated criminologist of Gray's Inn Road.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE KEY TO THE MYSTERY.



NIPPER flopped himself down upon a chair in the consulting-room, and gave a sigh of satisfaction.

"Well, guv'nor it's good to be home again, after all our exciting adventures!" he declared. "I had an idea it was past midnight, but I see it's only a little after ten! It's queer how you can lose track of time, isn't it?"

The pair had just got home after their adventure in the old ruined Abbey in Hertfordshire, and they were looking forward to spending a few hours of rest and quiet.

But these hopes were doomed to failure—as they were soon to learn.

Five minutes after entering the consulting-room the telephone-bell rang shrilly, and Nipper, with a significant look at his master, rose to ascertain the identity of the caller.

After a few moments' talk, Nipper turned to Nelson Lee.

"It's a chap named Langford, of Cambridge Terrace, Regent's Park," he announced, placing his hand over the transmitter of the instrument. Says his father has been kidnapped, and wants your help. He seems to be in the dickens of a stew, guv'nor—"

"Tell him that I'm very sorry, but it is impossible for me to accept any further commissions at the moment," cut in the detective. "The case I am now engaged upon is occupying my whole attention."

Nipper delivered the message, and was greeted with a gasp of consternation from Harry Langford.

"You—You can't be serious!" he exclaimed, scarcely able to believe Nipper's words. "Please tell Mr. Lee that the matter is vital! It's not only my father who has disappeared, but a marvellous machine of his which has just been completed! The police have got the matter in hand, but I'd much rather Mr. Lee handled it—"

"The guv'nor's too busy, really!" cut in Nipper apologetically. "I'm afraid it's no

use asking him again, Mr. Langford. The police will be able to do everything necessary, I'm sure. Good-bye, sorry the guv'nor can't help you!"

Nipper replaced the receiver, and looked at his master.

"I believe your refusal to take up the case has given that chap a bit of a shock," he announced thoughtfully. "He seemed to be genuinely cut-up."

The detective frowned.

"That's all very well," he said, "but it is impossible for me to shoulder all the commissions which are thrust upon me. I dare say Mr. Langford will get over his difficulties without our help, Nipper!"

But Mr. Harry Langford had no intention of doing any such thing.

Nipper's message came as something of a shock to him, and for some moments he stood at the telephone, with the receiver still in his hand. The possibility of Nelson Lee refusing to undertake an investigation had not occurred to him; but Nipper's words had been clear enough.

"This is a calamity!" he muttered to himself. "Something's got to be done to get on the pater's track quickly! Mr. Lee's the ideal man for the job, and he's simply got to listen to me!"

Harry was not the sort of youngster to be deterred from his purpose lightly, and he grabbed his hat, and left the house—fully determined to seek an interview with the famous detective, and to do his utmost to induce Lee to reverse his decision.

Gray's Inn Road was only a short walk from Cambridge Terrace, and Harry covered the ground at a brisk pace. Within eight minutes of his telephone conversation with Nipper he was ringing the door-bell of Nelson Lee's house, his eyes bright with determination.

The door was soon opened by Mrs. Jones, the detective's housekeeper, and she looked at the visitor questioningly.

"I've just called to see Mr. Lee on important business," said Harry briskly. "He's in, isn't he?"

"Yes—but you can't see 'im without an appointment, sir," said Mrs. Jones, planting herself firmly in the doorway. "What name, please?"

Harry's brain worked quickly. He guessed that it would be useless sending in his card after what he had heard on the telephone, and so he adopted a little subterfuge.

"Oh! Mr. Lee knows my name!" he said truthfully. "I was talking to his assistant a few minutes ago. The consulting-room's on the first floor, I believe?"

Mrs. Jones nodded.

"Yes, sir—just up the stairs," she replied, stepping aside, and allowing Harry to pass. "I suppose it's all right, seein' as you've spoken to Master Nipper!"

Harry did not prolong the conversation, but bounded up the stairs three at a time. Outside the door of the consulting-room he paused for a moment, and then knocked.

He heard someone say "Come in," and he accepted the invitation with alacrity. He noticed that both Nelson Lee and Nipper looked somewhat surprised as they saw him, but Harry gave them no chance to question him.

"I'm glad that you invited me to come in, Mr. Lee—for that was just what I wanted," he said, a trifle breathlessly. "I'm Harry Langford, the chap who was on the telephone a little while ago, and I've come to see you in person."

Nelson Lee looked at the clean-cut features of the newcomer for a moment, and then smiled.

"That appears to be fairly obvious," he commented drily. "Upon my soul! You seem to be a remarkably persistent young man, Mr. Langford. My assistant distinctly told you that I am too busy at the moment to undertake any—"

"Yes, I know!" cut in Harry quickly. "But you'll change your mind when you've heard what I've got to say, Mr. Lee—at least, I hope you will! A most appalling thing has happened to my father and his apparatus, and if they're not found at once the consequences will probably be disastrous—"

"For whom?" queried the detective.

"For everybody—the community at large!" said Harry earnestly. "This machine of my father's is a terribly powerful instrument, and in the hands of criminals it could be used as a deadly engine of destruction. It is capable of the most amazing achievements, and it has been stolen by a man in the disguise of Mephistopheles—"

"What!" almost yelled Nipper in surprise. "Mephistopheles! Great guns! Do you hear that, guv'nor?"

Nelson Lee nodded, his eyes gleaming strangely. Harry Langford's words, in all conscience, were startling enough, and the detective hoped that the young man's information would provide him with a key to the mysterious affair he was already investigating.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NELSON LEE IS KEEN.



HARRY LANGFORD looked from Lee to Nipper in surprise.

It was obvious to him that his words had caused them more amazement than seemed to be called for, but he was thankful that he had interested them at all.

"You seem to know something about this Mephistopheles already," he suggested, after a momentary pause. "If that is the case, I'm jolly glad, for perhaps it will induce you to alter your decision to turn me down, Mr. Lee. I'm sure you'll be interested—"

"I am!" cut in Lee crisply. "Much more interested than you can possibly imagine, Mr. Langford. As it happens, both Nipper and I particularly wish to come to grips with the man you have mentioned, and anything you can tell us concerning him will be warmly welcomed!"

Harry smiled with pleasure. He had expected to have quite a battle with the famous detective, and here was Lee eager to hear everything he had to tell. The situation was decidedly queer, to say the least, and the youngster was considerably puzzled.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you much about him, Mr. Lee," he said, shaking his head. "All I know is that he and another man are responsible for kidnapping my father, and stealing his machine. I only discovered what had occurred a short time ago, and I learned the details from my father's housekeeper, whom I found bound and gagged in a cupboard!"

"Tell us all you possibly can, Mr. Langford," said the detective keenly.

Harry did so, beginning with his discovery of the telegram at his rooms in Oxford, and explaining the state of affairs he had discovered at his father's house. He told Lee and Nipper how he had found the laboratory, how he had telephoned to the police, and how he had subsequently found Mrs. Newman in the cupboard.

"She said that one of the kidnappers was attired like the devil, Mr. Lee, and that the other was a black-bearded ruffian," he concluded. "Whether she's right or not, I cannot say, but—"

"I fancy she is pretty near the mark," cut in Lee grimly. "These two men are obviously the same pair as Nipper and I have had dealings with, and who were responsible for the robbery at Messrs. Barlow's. That crime was committed with the aid of some extraordinary machine—"

"Great Scott! You mean that my father's apparatus has already been used for purposes of robbery?" asked Harry, aghast.

"Evidently!" said the detective. "The safe was found with the door turned to a putty-like substance, and the watchman of the premises was discovered in a paralysed condition. If those effects can be brought about by this machine you refer to, there is little doubt that your father's apparatus is responsible."

Harry nodded dully.

"You must be right, Mr. Lee," he declared. "The machine is an electrical affair, and it is capable of doing all you say, and a great deal more besides. What on earth my father designed it for I cannot say, but his motives were of the highest possible nature. The apparatus he has completed is only an experimental model, so Heaven knows what a full-sized machine would be capable of doing!"

Nipper snorted.

"This one is quite powerful enough for my liking!" he muttered. "The way it busted up our racer was a caution!"

Harry looked mystified, and he was promptly given an account of all that had taken place since his father's apparatus had been stolen. Lee and Nipper told him about the robbery at Barlow's, and also about the fate of their racer.

for there can be no doubt that those two men are also the kidnappers."

"No doubt whatever," agreed the detective. "I am convinced, Mr. Langford, that an old opponent of mine—Professor Cyrus Zingrave—is at the bottom of this affair, and for that reason alone I am determined to probe it to the very core. How he became acquainted with your father, and how



"Look! Look!" he screamed excitedly. "Don't you see, Mr. Lee? Good Heavens!"

The young man was greatly impressed.

"I'm thundering glad that I came to you, Mr. Lee," he said earnestly. "I didn't know it, of course, but it seems that you're already hard at work on my father's case. Perhaps you'll be able to find him while you're hunting for the criminals you're after,

he got to know of this apparatus, is at present obscure. Perhaps an investigation of the wrecked laboratory will throw a little light on the mystery."

Harry beamed.

"You're coming to investigate on the spot, Mr. Lee?" he exclaimed. "Oh, good!

"That's better than I hoped for. I know that if any man in London is capable of discovering my father's whereabouts, that man is you. But what can I do to help? This inactivity is getting on my nerves, you know, and I feel that I want to do something!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"That is quite natural, Mr. Langford," he agreed. "I feel the same; but there is very little we can do until we know something more definite. All we know at present is that your father and his machine have been kidnapped, and that the criminals are using the apparatus for their own purposes. They probably abducted him in order to force him to demonstrate the working of his instrument, or to prevent him from giving an alarm. At all events, it is evident that they don't intend to harm him, or they would have done so in the first place."

This piece of reasoning seemed to be particularly sound, and Harry was greatly cheered. But he was greatly shocked at the knowledge that his father's apparatus was being used by criminals for such atrocious purposes.

It was no use worrying, however. Nelson Lee would do everything which was humanly possible to outwit the crooks, and to deprive them of their stolen machine.

Lee and Nipper and Harry left Gray's Inn Road almost at once, and were soon on their way to Cambridge Terrace, where the famous detective hoped to obtain a few clues which would materially assist him in his campaign against Mephistopheles and his companion.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DR. GREGORY MORTON LOOKS IN.



NELSON LEE looked at Mr. Roger Langford's wrecked laboratory and nodded his head grimly.

"An eloquent testimony to your father's indomitable courage and bravery," he commented, glancing at Harry as he spoke. "His kidnappers evidently did not have everything their own way here last night, by any means. I have seldom witnessed a more terrible scene of destruction!"

"It's appalling, gov'nor," said Nipper, looking round with rising anger. "There must be hundreds of pounds' worth of damage done here. Look at all the delicate instruments and scientific implements—ruined beyond repair!"

The sight was indeed sufficient to make one weep. In addition to the articles which Nipper had mentioned, the floor was strewn with broken bottles and spilled liquids and powders, which now lay upon the linoleum in little pools and heaps. Mixed with them

were the scattered remnants of costly glass retorts and tubes and broken fragments of valuable scientific apparatus of all kinds.

Nelson Lee had already had a few words with the inspector who was in charge of the case, and that official had given the detective free permission to do as he pleased. He had recognised Lee at once, and seemed to be in no way resentful at his presence, as some of the official force were. On the contrary, he appeared to welcome the detective's interest, but mentioned that Lee would find himself up against a tough proposition.

Nelson Lee had come straight to the laboratory, which was obviously the starting-point for his investigations, and was now surveying the untidy apartment from just inside the doorway.

His first move, after keenly scanning the room in general, was to make a thorough examination of the floor, and he was struck by the absence of any footprints, a fact which convinced the detective that the kidnappers had provided themselves with felt slippers or overshoes. This in itself was an indication of their astuteness, and pointed to them being professional and experienced criminals—men who left nothing to chance, and who took care to leave no clues behind them.

Lee next examined the benches and desk for fingerprints, but of these, too, there was a very marked absence. On every hand there was evidence of very careful planning, and after ten minutes' searching, Nelson Lee was very little the wiser than when he had started.

There was nothing whatever to show who Mr. Langford's kidnappers were.

The inspector, noting Lee's expression, smiled in a superior manner, and waved his hand vaguely across the room.

"Nothing much to be picked up here, Mr. Lee, is there?" he asked, with a grin. "The crooks are pretty expert hands, if you ask me anything!"

"Very expert indeed!" agreed the detective. "They have shown remarkable cleverness in their methods, inspector, I must admit. It is, however, quite obvious that they were quite familiar with Mr. Langford's habits and customs, and that they chose their time for abducting him with extraordinary accuracy. They have evidently been watching very closely indeed, and they pounced upon their victim the very instant he had completed his electrical apparatus—proving that their main objective was the machine."

Harry looked at Lee admiringly.

"By Jove! You've hit it, Mr. Lee!" he exclaimed. "My dad has been working on this thing for years, and nothing of this sort has happened before. He thought he had guarded his secret well, but evidently he was mistaken. These crooks must have been up to every move, otherwise they

couldn't have known that the machine was finished."

"Exactly!" agreed Lee. "I think I'll have a few words with Mrs. Newman, and hear what she's got to say."

The housekeeper was sent for, and she came in a few moments, looking very much better than when Harry had first found her in the cupboard. She was quite willing—and eager—to tell everything she knew, and she did so with astonishing verbosity.

Nelson Lee allowed her to tell her story in her own way, and he gathered very little more than he already knew. Mrs. Newman simply repeated all she had told to Harry, but with much more detail.

"Was your master alone in the laboratory last night?" asked the detective.

"Yes, sir; he was mostly alone," replied the housekeeper. "He was expecting Master Harry to arrive at any moment, and he was a little puzzled because he didn't come."

Harry nodded gloomily.

"I should have come like a shot if I'd received the wire in time!" he exclaimed. "Perhaps if I'd been here things would have turned out a little differently."

"It was very unfortunate," murmured Nelson Lee. "Now, Mrs. Newman, I want you to tell me one thing," he went on, looking at the woman fixedly. "Was Mr. Langford's machine fixed up in readiness to operate?"

"Yes, sir. I saw it," said the housekeeper, with a nod. "A queer-looking contrivance on a tripod! The master said it was all ready to show to Master Harry when he came. But then two scoundrels came before Master Harry, and attacked the master in the most brutal fashion! After they had knocked him down, I tried to brain them with the poker, but the wicked wretches roped me up and put me in the cupboard."

Mrs. Newman spoke with just indignation, and after a few more words the detective dismissed her. The most significant part of her testimony was in relation to the stolen machine, which had been set up in readiness to demonstrate to Harry.

It was very curious that the crooks had pounced upon Mr. Langford at the precise moment when his apparatus was in perfect working order, and their action in doing so proved that they were possessed of very accurate inside information concerning Mr. Langford's affairs.

Nelson Lee was thoughtfully turning over some of the papers on the desk when a visitor was announced. He was bustling in as soon as Mrs. Newman had opened the door for him, and he walked straight to Harry, with extended hand.

"Ah, Harry," he exclaimed, "I'm delighted to see you! But what's this the housekeeper tells me about your father? She says that something dreadful has occurred!"

"She's right, Dr. Morton," cut in Harry,

shaking the newcomer's hand. "Dad has been kidnapped, and Mr. Nelson Lee is here making an investigation. Let me introduce you."

The detective cast a keen look at the visitor and then walked forward, with a pleased expression upon his face.

CHAPTER XXV.

A STARTLING INTERRUPTION.



"THIS is Dr. Gregory Morton, a friend of my father's," said Harry, as he made the introduction. "I fancy they have many interests in common, for I know that the pater used to make a regular confidant of the doctor."

"He did indeed!" agreed the doctor heartily as he shook hands with Lee, and afterwards with Nipper. "Mr. Langford and I have been almost inseparable for a very long time. I just looked in to-night to have a few words with him, and I am shocked beyond measure to hear of this catastrophe. I cannot understand why a man like him should be singled out for abduction unless it was on account of his wonderful machine."

"Oh, you know all about that, then?" said Harry.

"Know about it!" repeated Dr. Morton. "My dear boy, I've known about it all along! But you don't mean to tell me that anything has happened to your father's apparatus?"

"It's been stolen!" said Harry. "Just at the moment it was completed it was carried off by two unknown crooks. The same men who kidnapped my father. It's terrible, Dr. Morton—"

"Terrible is a mild word to use, Harry," cut in Morton concernedly. "Why, the loss of that machine is nothing less than a national calamity! Your father spent months, years, in perfecting it, and he had great hopes that it would revolutionise several industries, in addition to proving a great asset to this country in other ways. It is imperative that it should be recovered without delay, for in the hands of criminals it can do incalculable harm!"

Nelson Lee listened to the benevolent-looking Dr. Morton as he continued his search among Mr. Langford's papers. There were several letters upon the pile, and one of them, lying open, attracted the detective's attention.

It was from an international financier named Mr. Max Kerner, and it was nothing less than an offer of two hundred thousand pounds, in return for which Mr. Langford was to surrender all rights and patents in his electrical apparatus.

Lee looked at the letter with great interest, and he was struck by the tremendous amount of money involved in the offer. It was little short of stupendous; but Mr.

Langford appeared to have ignored it, and treated it with disdain.

Had this letter, which was dated about a week previous, anything to do with the events which had followed? Had Mr. Max Kerner had any hand in the kidnapping of Mr. Langford, and in the theft of his machine?

Nelson Lee knitted his brows thoughtfully as he considered this aspect of the matter, and he wondered. Certainly it was somewhat significant to discover a letter of this sort in view of what had taken place.

The detective again became aware of Morton's voice, talking with Harry.

"It's a terrible calamity, my boy—nobody can say just how terrible!" he was saying. "I frequently warned your father to be more careful, but he wouldn't listen to me at all. He was notoriously incautious, as you know, and even when I pointed out some suspicious characters who were hanging about here, he wouldn't listen to reason."

"What sort of suspicious characters?" interjected Nelson Lee, swinging round sharply. "Foreigners, Dr. Morton?"

"Well, one or two of them looked like foreigners, now you come to mention it," said Morton, with a start. "Bless my life, I remember one man distinctly—a swarthy-skinned, repulsive-looking fellow, with a scar on his cheek. But what are you hinting at, Mr. Lee? Do you think—"

"I am hinting at nothing!" cut in the detective. "I am merely endeavouring to get to the bottom of this very singular business, Dr. Morton. It is just possible that foreigners are mixed up in the matter. That's all."

Dr. Morton nodded.

"You—you surely don't mean Mr. Max Kerner, Mr. Lee, the man who made Langford an offer the other day?" he asked in a low voice. "I can scarcely credit such a thing."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I did not mention any names, Dr. Morton," he said quietly. "Such a proceeding—Upon my soul—"

The detective broke off as Dr. Gregory Morton suddenly pointed to the window, gesticulating wildly.

"Look! Look!" he screamed excitedly. "Don't you see, Mr. Lee— Good heavens!"

Dr. Morton uttered the ejaculation in a tone of startled consternation, and stood staring at the window with white face and a fixed expression.

What awful sight had caused him to display such emotion?

CHAPTER XXVI.

MR. MAX KERNER—FINANCIER.

NIPPER twirled round like lightning.

"What is it, Dr. Morton?" he asked quickly.

"A—a face!" gasped the doctor, with a tremor in his voice. "The scarred

face of the foreigner I mentioned a little while ago! Did you not see it?"

Nipper shook his head.

"No, I'm dashed if I did!" he declared.

"Neither did I!" said Harry Langford, looking from the window to his father's friend curiously. "Are you sure you weren't mistaken, doctor?"

"Positive!" was the reply. "I—I saw the man as plainly as I see you, Harry! He was one of the suspicious characters I told Mr. Lee about—one of the men I warned your father against!"

Nelson Lee, with a peculiar expression on his face, darted to the window, and flung up the sash. There was no blind to the window in the ordinary sense of the word, but just a flimsy curtain, for the casement overlooked the lawn at the rear of the premises.

Everything was dark and silent as the detective peered out, and there was no sound whatever of any intruder or prowler. Lee produced his torch from his coat-pocket, and flashed the light upon the ground beneath the window.

There were no footprints that he could see—which proved that the man with the scarred face, if he had been there at all, must have been wearing felt-soled shoes.

Lee closed the window, and turned back into the room.

"Remarkable!" he exclaimed. "Your foreigner is an exceedingly slippery customer, doctor! There was no sign of him when I flung the window up, and I heard nothing of him whatever. Tell me, have you seen this same man here on several occasions?"

Dr. Morton nodded.

"Not at this window, Mr. Lee," he said. "But I've seen him hanging about in the roadway in front of the house. I never liked the look of the fellow, and his actions struck me as being suspicious. But Langford merely laughed when I warned him, and said that my fears were groundless. After what has now occurred, I wish to Heaven that I'd forced him to take more notice of me!"

"So do I, doctor," said Harry. "But dad was always the same—he never would believe ill of anybody. You said something just now about Mr. Max Kerner, didn't you?"

Dr. Morton nodded.

"Yes; he's a wealthy financier in the City, Harry," he said. "Your father told me that he had received an offer from Kerner of two hundred thousand pounds for his apparatus: but he wouldn't even consider it! Quite right, too! The thing's worth millions, my boy—literally millions! It's a queer thing that your father should be kidnapped just after refusing this offer! It looks highly suspicious to me!"

Harry stared.

"You mean that this man Kerner is responsible?" he ejaculated. "Why, he daren't do such a thing, Dr. Morton—after writing to my father and making an offer! He would condemn himself at once!"

Dr. Morton shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps you're right," he admitted. "I hadn't looked at the matter in that light before. But Kerner, by the sound of his name, is a foreigner—and I'm highly suspicious of all such people, especially in a matter of this sort! Your father was patriotic enough to ignore Kerner's offer, and it would be a pity to see the machine go out of the country as stolen property."

The police-inspector, who had been out of the room, returned in time to hear Dr. Morton's words, and he at once went up to him with the intention of extracting further information.

Nipper, meanwhile, strolled over to his master.

"Do you think there's anything in Dr. Morton's suspicions, guv'nor?" he asked. "That face-at-the-window business was a bit queer, you know—"

"Very queer," agreed the detective. "Morton was right concerning Kerner's offer—for the letter relating to it is here on Langford's desk. I think it might be as well to interview Mr. Max Kerner, young 'un—just as a matter of routine. We're pretty well up against a blank wall at the moment, and it's just possible that some good results might come out of it. It's a bit late for seeking interviews, but I dare say we can find Kerner at his private house!"

Nelson Lee spoke in a manner which clearly indicated to Nipper that he was greatly elated over something or other; but what it could be Nipper could not for the life of him guess. But he knew the signs too well to mistake them, and he wondered what had caused his master's satisfaction.

The detective soon ascertained, by looking in the telephone directory, that Mr. Max Kerner's private residence was situated in Wigmore Street, and he and Nipper—after taking leave of Harry and Dr. Morton—left the house and hurried towards Euston Road.

Here they succeeded in picking up a taxi, which quickly conveyed them to their destination. The run was so short that Lee and Nipper had practically no time to discuss the curious case they were investigating—even if there had been much to discuss. So far, the whole affair was wrapped in impenetrable mystery, and Nipper, at all events, could see no glimmer of light in the darkness.

If Nelson Lee had any inkling regarding the lie of the land, he kept his own counsel. The detective seemed to be in the best of moods, although there could be no doubt that he was considerably puzzled.

Lee dismissed the taxi outside Kerner's house, and he and Nipper presented themselves at the front door. After a few moments, their knock was answered by a servant in livery, and he seemed surprised at the detective's request for an interview at so late an hour. But he ushered the pair into the hall, and indicated that he would take Lee's card to his master.

He did so, and returned within a few seconds—requesting the visitors to follow him

into the library. Mr. Max Kerner rose from a big armchair as they entered, and bowed politely to the two newcomers. He was a somewhat elderly man of decidedly Teutonic appearance, and he smiled pleasantly as he resumed his seat—waving his visitors into chairs as he did so.

"An unexpected honour, I am sure, Mr. Lee," he murmured softly, looking at the detective from beneath partially lowered eyelids. "I gather that your business is of an important nature, considering the unusual hour?"

"Exactly," agreed Nelson Lee. "It has come to my knowledge that you made an offer recently to purchase Mr. Roger Langford's electrical machine—"

"He ignored it completely!" cut in Mr. Kerner. "I offered two hundred thousand, Mr. Lee—and he ignored it! Why, I cannot imagine. Surely he doesn't expect to obtain more than that?"

"As to that, I can say very little," said Nelson Lee, looking at Kerner searchingly. "I have come to tell you that Mr. Langford has been kidnapped, and that his machine has been stolen."

Mr. Kerner gripped the edge of his desk, and returned the detective's gaze unflinchingly.

"Your news is very surprising, Mr. Lee," he said. "But I hope you do not think that I had any hand in this affair? I assure you that I know nothing whatever about it."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I am not accusing you in any way; but I thought it only right to let you know the position," he said. "Since you are an interested party, that is only the just thing to do."

"Thank you, Mr. Lee; it is very kind of you to take so much trouble," said the financier. "But I tell you frankly that I cannot sympathise with Langford in the least! If he had accepted my offer, this would not have happened—for the machine would have been in my possession days ago, and I should have taken adequate means for safeguarding it. As it is, I suppose I've lost all hope of ever purchasing it."

Mr. Kerner shrugged his shoulders and rose to his feet, indicating that the interview was at an end. Lee and Nipper bade him good-night, and left the house at once.

Nipper snorted as they walked down Wigmore Street.

"A blessed waste of time, guv'nor!" he commented. "Kerner's a chap who knows—"

"A great deal more than he would have us believe, Nipper!" cut in Lee crisply. "I am perfectly convinced that Kerner is playing a very deep game, young 'un, and I would no more accept his word than I would jump off Westminster Bridge!"

"Good heavens! You think he's a crook, sir—one of the crooks concerned in this affair?" asked Nipper.

(Continued on page iii of cover.)



Between Ourselves

Mr EDWY SEARLES
BROOKS CHATS
TO HIS READERS

(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: An Owdhamite (Oldham), Albert Nott (Poplar), J. Parr (Platt Bridge), Jack Ricketts (Hayle), W. Thompson (Manchester), A. Greenway (Stretford), A. E. Blackmore (Bognor), S. Harris (Nottingham), A. J. George (Wellingborough), C. Stone (Shoreditch), W. R. Darling (Westbourne Grove), N.L.R.'s (Folkestone), John D'Testro (Melbourne), Jack Roy (Melbourne), E. A. Mittelholzer (New Amsterdam, British Guiana), Michel M. Ulrich (Nice), W. L. Hannell (St. Albans), Helene Sudbury (Saone et Loire, France), Mimi Verdier (North Finchley), Harry Hindley (Blackpool), E. Wigley (Battersea), L. Stevenson (Tooting).

That's rather a good idea of yours, Owdhamite, but I am wondering if there are enough enthusiastic readers to warrant the scheme being adopted. You want book covers issued for each series, with the name of the series printed on each cover? That's it, isn't it? So that readers can bind their own series, eh? Well, Owdhamite, I'd help you if I could, but this is really a matter that ought to be placed before the Editor. If I were you I'd drop him a line. If any other readers are interested in this suggestion, you can't do better than write to the Editor direct.

I've had several good offers of back numbers from readers, in response to my request some weeks ago. Some of you are mentioned above, and by this time I expect you will have heard from me through the post. Thanks again. Some of you have written, requiring back numbers, and I've got all your letters specially marked. As

soon as I can I will do my best to send you the particular copies you want. But please don't be impatient. The back numbers offered to me are not always the ones that other readers ask for. So if anybody else wants to sell, don't forget to let me know.

You're a bit too impatient, C. Stone. I'll admit that "Dick Goodwin's" first articles were about woodwork, but what about the Table Football Game, and the Leather Wallet, and the Electric Motor—only to mention one or two non-woodwork items? If you particularly want him to describe how to make a steam engine, drop him a line.

Thanks for your second letter, E. A. Mittelholzer—and for your offer regarding the St. Frank's League (which has still to be born). It's fine to know that we can have a Chief Organising Officer in British Guiana if we want one! Have you any idea how many readers of the Old Paper there are in your town? I'd be awfully interested to know.

Don't blame me if I've got your name wrong, Michel M. Ulrich. Your signature wasn't quite as clear as print. As for excusing you because you are a foreigner, there's really nothing to excuse. Your letter was practically perfect in grammar and handwriting. I say, you get your copy early, don't you? You refer to something in the January 17th issue, and your letter was written on the 11th. As they say in America, "how come?" I'll pass on your information at once. It was very nice of you to send it. W. B., of Winchester, ought to be grateful to you.

Attention, W. B., of Winchester! Michel informs me that you can obtain the Old Paper in Colombo, Calcutta, Bombay, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. He tells me he's lived in the East for six years, and he knows all the above towns. So I fancy you will have no difficulty. I can't guarantee this information personally, of course, but I'm willing to take Michel's word.

I'm not going to disappoint you, Mimi Verdier, so I'm giving you a few lines, as you request. I'll try my hardest, for your sake, not to make my girl characters too "goody-goody"! Yes, I've written all the St. Frank's stories that ever appeared in the Old Paper.

I'm glad your parents no longer regard the Old Paper as a "Penny Dreadful," E. Wigley. If any other readers are forbidden to read my yarns, it might be a good idea to get their parents or guardians to glance over these pages of mine. Both the Editor and myself are doing our hardest to fight down the prejudice which still exists in some quarters. And I hope, before long, that it will have completely disappeared. It's unfair to us both for parents to condemn the Old Paper unread.

It's very nice of you L. Stevenson, to suggest a companion paper, and to ask me to write stories about Helmsford College and Bannington Grammar School, etc. But there's a drawback. How am I going to find time to write all this? I'm kept pretty busy as it is—particularly as I'm trying to squeeze out some time to do a "Boys' Friend" 4d. book occasionally. On the top of this, the usual St. Frank's stories are going to be longer, too. After all, I'm only human, and I can't do the impossible. Do have mercy on me! You wouldn't like me to go prematurely grey, would you?

If ever I get a chance to introduce a French boy, Helene Sudbury, I'll do so. But if I did do so, he would have to speak broken English—or our hosts of readers wouldn't consider him a French boy at all. And broken English, just between ourselves, isn't very easy to write!

And now to add a word or two about America. I generally fill up this page with something of this sort, don't I? If you're not interested, you've got a very simple remedy. Just skip the rest of my remarks,

and have a go at the Magazine, or the main story (although I expect you've read them long ago). Well, I'd like to tell you about the Polite Conductor.

I think I have mentioned, in my previous Notes, that the tramcar and 'bus conductors in New York are brusque gentlemen, who waste no words on politeness and who generally use a kind of bark, instead of an ordinary voice. In New York there's no time for "thank you's" and "pleases." They may be something like this in Chicago, but I'm not quite so sure. Anyhow, one little experience of mine seems to prove the opposite.

On my home across America I stayed in Chicago for a time, and one of the first things I did was to jump on to a motor-'bus to have a look round. It was a fine, warm morning, and I couldn't resist the temptation to go sight-seeing. And there's no better place than a 'bus top for this sort of thing. Well, I jumped on the first one that came along—at random. I passed through some wonderful boulevards, one of which, I remember, was called West End Avenue. But I can't go into any descriptions here. The point is this: I went to the terminus, and came back to the centre of the City on the same 'bus. When the conductor came up to collect my second fare, I mentioned that I was taking a look round, and his concern for me was really wonderful.

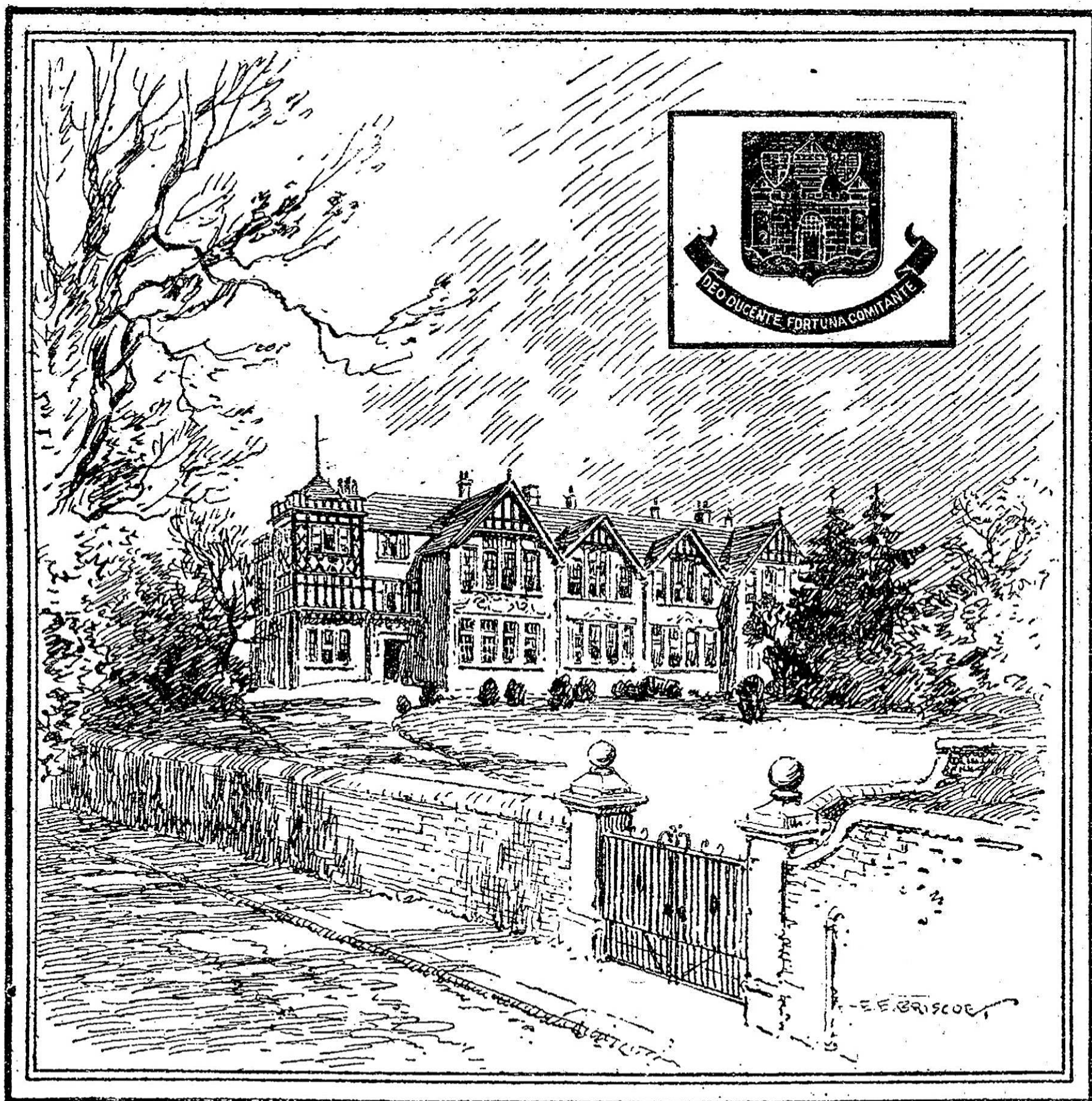
He could see at once that I was English, and that I was a "stranger in Town," and he took great pains to tell me which routes to go on to see everything to the best advantage. A more smiling, a more polite 'bus conductor I never encountered. Not content with just telling me these things, he ran upstairs at every opportunity during the run to tell me of some fresh point of interest that had occurred to him. And when I left the 'bus at last, he waved cheerily to me until his vehicle had disappeared. I shall always remember that Chicago 'bus conductor! One of the Right Sort!

NEXT WEEK'S STORY

Will be Entitled

NIPPER TAKES THE REINS

The Mystery Surrounding Moat Hollow School and its rascally Head is on the point of being cleared up. Don't miss this Great Yarn. Out on Wednesday. Price Twopence.

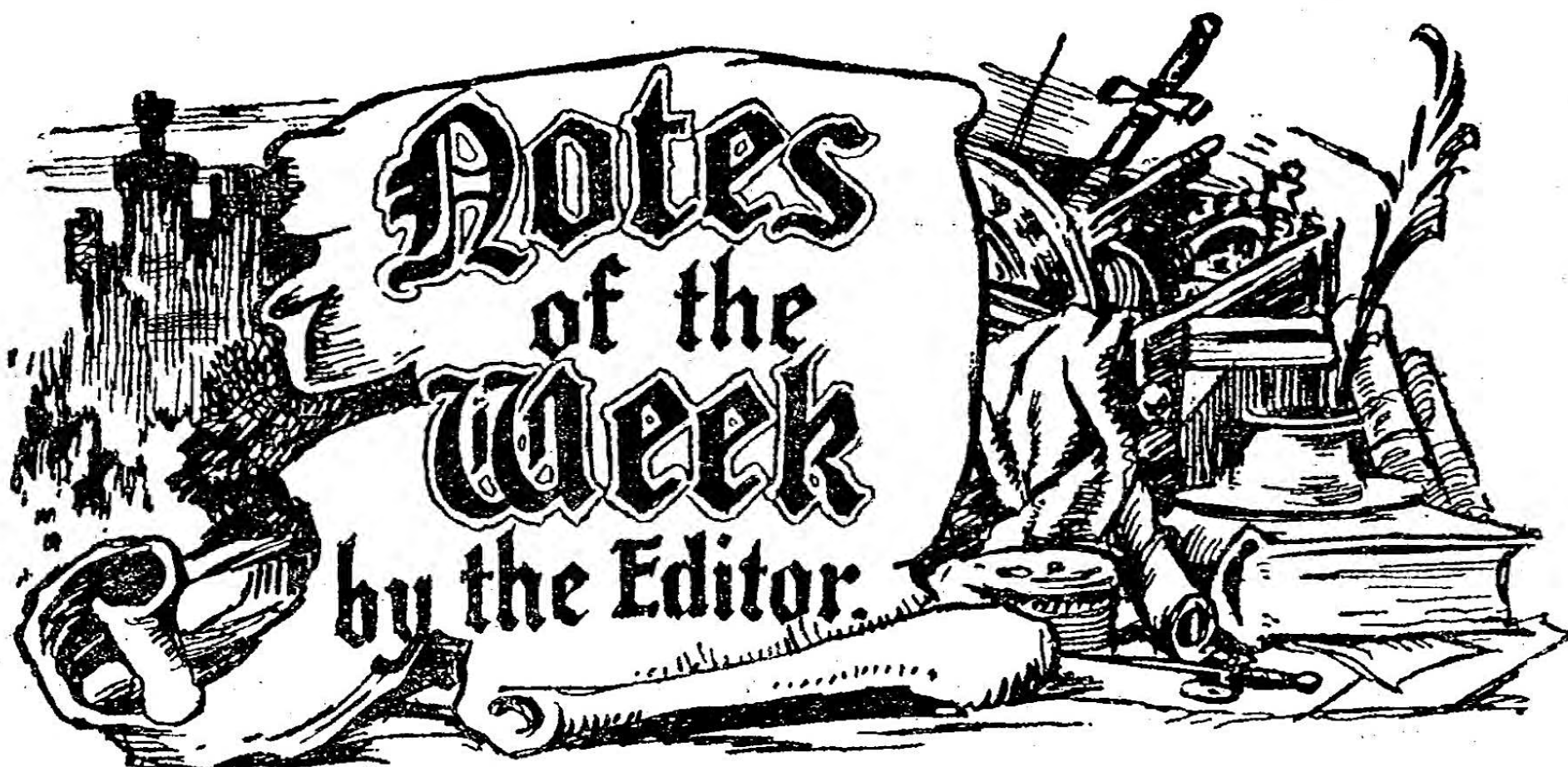


OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS SERIES OF ART SKETCHES.

No. 66.—BRIDGNORTH GRAMMAR SCHOOL.

This fine school is magnificently situated on the summit of the High Town, overlooking the Severn. Its foundation dates back to the 14th or 15th century. In the 17th century it was endowed by Sir Rowland

Hayward. Cricket and football are compulsory unless specially excused by the headmaster, and there are splendid opportunities for swimming and rowing.



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

My Dear Chums,

Things are certainly moving a bit in this neighbourhood!

The Moat Hollow mystery becomes more and more mysterious as the days go by. It was a piece of luck Sir Montie and Archie running into Doris Berkeley. Though quite unwittingly, it was she who put them on to the fact that things were worse at Moat Hollow than they had previously thought.

Tommy Watson was a prisoner in a dungeon!

Such a thing is almost inconceivable in these modern days. Poor old Tommy is certainly going through it. But there is always the Phantom Protector! I expect it came as a bit of a surprise to most of you when his identity was revealed.

AN INTERVIEW WITH HANDY.

Everybody seems to know that Handy is busy on a new serial for the Mag. From an unknown—but not unsuspected—source I have received the following peculiar account, which I publish in full. It is unsigned, and runs as follows:

Chancing to look into Study D the other day, I found Handy seated at the table. The cloth was littered with paper.

It suddenly struck me that here was a good chance to interview the celebrated author for the Mag. So I fired a few questions at him in the usual manner of the professional interviewer.

AWKWARD QUESTIONS.

"Our readers would like to know how you compose your masterpieces," I began, standing near the door.

"With a pen, fathead!" replied our famous contributor.

"Thanks! Do you write them sitting or standing?"

"I'm not going to stand your rot!" yelled Handy, getting to his feet.

"Quite so. And who, may I ask, are your favourite authors?"

"Mind your own business and clear out!"

"Never heard of them. Then, tell me, which form of recreation do you like best? Are you fond of any sports?"

"You—you——"

THE COMPLETE SPORTSMAN.

"You like a little knitting before lunch, shall I say?"

"If you say anything more——"

"Certainly I will. You follow up with a nice game of marbles. And shall we add, a quarter of an hour's needlework in the evening.

"You—you utter chump! I'll soon show you——"

"Some other time, Handy. I've got enough information now. But at any time you like to give me a bright idea——"

"I'll give you a black eye and a thick ear!" howled Handy.

And as I quite believed him I ducked politely and hurriedly left.

HOW TO DO IT.

The series of three articles, the first of which appears this week, on running a magazine, should be of great interest. Nearly every chap thinks he would like to be an editor.

I used to think it myself. I thought it was a top-hole whole job to be the editor of a real live magazine. Well, I've had my wish. But it's not nearly such an easy job as I thought.

The most difficult part about it is the contributors. It is they who turn an editor's hair grey. Not because you can't get enough of them. But because they are always late with their "copy." When Press Day arrives the editor is the most worried man in the world.

Your old pal,
REGGIE PITT.

TRAVEL TALES.



By An Old Boy
(Lord Dorrimore's Weekly Trifle.)

No. 29.—A PYTHON'S EMBRACE.

OUT hunting in South Africa, thinking only of the big game I was after, I found myself all in a moment in the grip of an immense python—twenty-three feet in length, as I afterwards found. If the thing had dropped out of the heavens, I couldn't have been more surprised.

What a plight! Taken unawares, coil after coil being wrapped around me, pressing and crushing; the python's ugly head near my face, and its foul breath nearly overcoming me; its wicked eyes gazing into mine, as if trying to hypnotise me. Worst of all, its tongue was darting and flicking about, and if it commenced to lick me my doom would be sealed, even if I got free, as the saliva is deadly poison. At the best I should be covered with sores.

What was I to do? The coils were tightening. One had to think and act quickly. Now, a python in constricting slackens and contracts its body. Taking advantage of this, I was able to get my right arm free. But the coils prevented me reaching my knife! I tried to choke the snake by seizing its throat, but I could make no impression on its hard steely muscles. Then I tried to prise off one of the coils, and in the struggle the snake pitched me to the ground. Rising, in a mad rage, I seized the python's head with both hands, and banged it with all my strength against a stone. It at once uncoiled, as a steel spring does when loosed, and made off. But I got in a fatal shot just as the creature was escaping over a wall. Then I fell back insensible.

My body was black and blue for weeks. But I got the python's skin, and had shoes and leggings made from it.

FACTS LET LOOSE

By EUGENE ELLMORE

THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA.

This wall has been called the most stupendous structure ever reared by human hands, but this is, perhaps, an exaggeration in view of the Pyramids. It dates from the third century B.C., and was built by the Emperor Chin, who styled himself Shih Huang-ti, or First Emperor, and was designed as a defence against the invasions of the Tartars of Central Asia. Beginning in Shanbaikwan, it ends near Kiayukwan, in the province of Kansu, 1,200 miles from Shanbaikwan. It rises from the sea, passes over mountain ranges and gorges, no slope being too steep, no peak too inaccessible.

Other smaller walls branch out from this parent one, and they never take the shortest course from point to point, but wind about to embrace the most dangerous and difficult places, and make them impregnable. It was a fortification pure and simple.

The Great Wall, with its branches, is 2,500 miles long. At certain points it is twenty-five feet wide at the base, and fifteen feet at the top, where there is a brick-paved footway, protected by parapets, loopholed and embrasured, designed for the passage of troops. At intervals gigantic watch-towers are placed, loopholed for cannon.

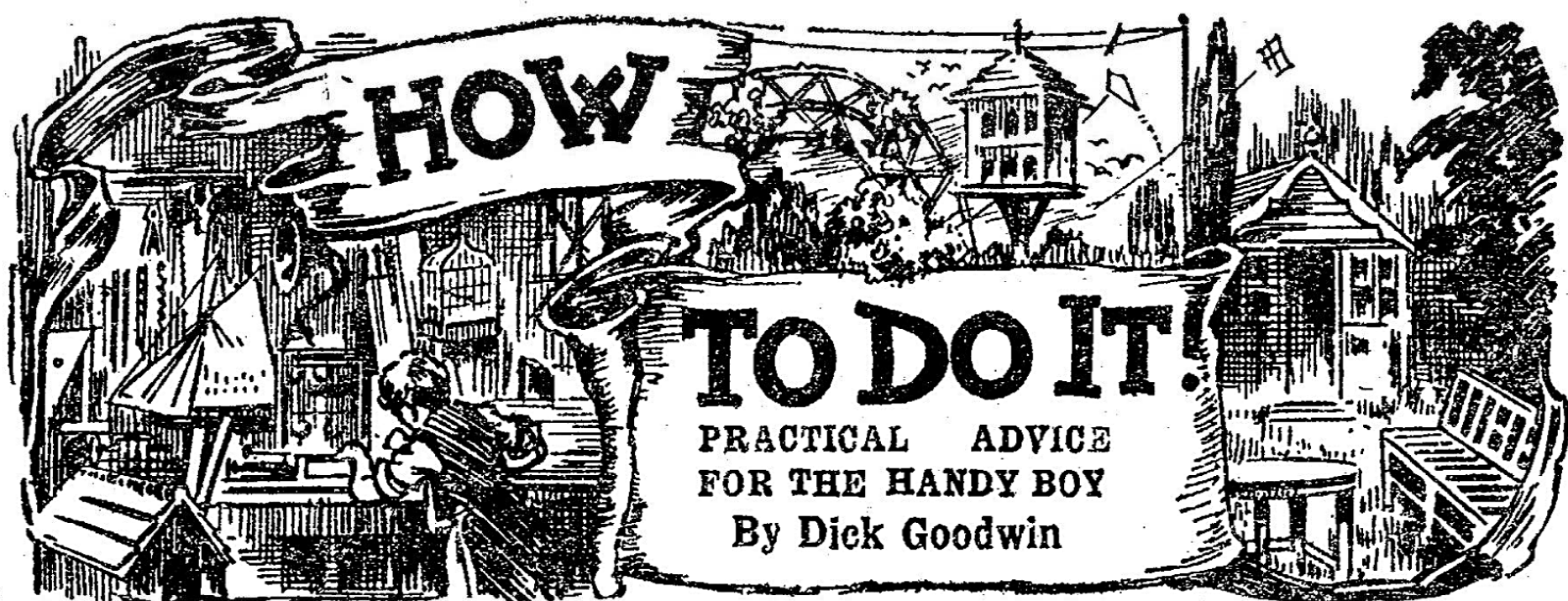
The whole of the work of building this 2,500 miles of wall is said to have been done in ten years, 300,000 men being employed. Of course, the Great Wall is now little more than a curiosity of antiquity, being obsolete and useless under conditions of modern warfare. But for over 2,000 years it was an effective defence for China. It was restored in the fourteenth century by the Ming dynasty, but has since been neglected and suffered to decay.

LAND AREA AND POPULATION.

Our globe has a land area of 55,500,000 square miles, and a population of 1,850,000,000.

OUR LONGEST TUNNEL.

This distinction is possessed by the Severn Tunnel, its length being 4 miles 636 yards.



Readers who wish to ask questions or make suggestions regarding these articles are invited to write to Dick Goodwin, c/o The Editor, The Nelson Lee Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HOW TO RUN A SCHOOL MAGAZINE

THE production of a school magazine is dependent on several essential necessities, but its success depends on the energy and resource of the controlling editor. First of all, the editor must be convinced of the possibilities of running the magazine, and unless he is prepared to undertake the whole of the expense himself, must be assured of a sufficient number of subscribers to cover the cost of production.

He should have a staff of contributors and helpers; the latter will be required for printing and binding the magazine. It will also be necessary to consider the possible number of subscribers, so that the best method of duplicating can be followed. It will be seen that, at the outset, there are several points to be settled before an actual start can be made.

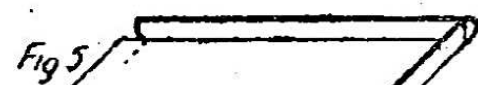
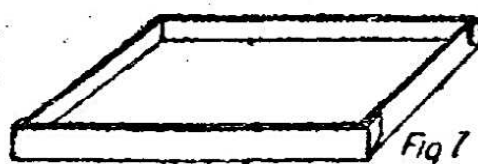
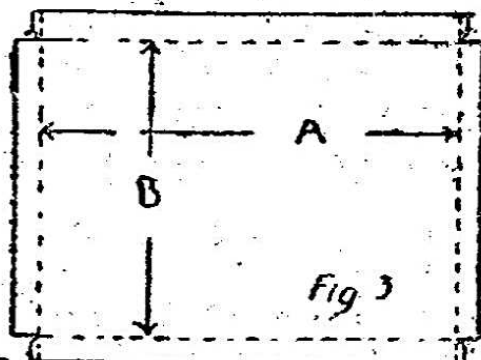
AN EIGHT-PAGE MAGAZINE.

We will suppose that the editor has in view a possible circulation of fifty copies, and that he proposes to issue a magazine of eight pages—that is, four leaves—together with a cover, and that it shall be printed on a hectograph from foolscap and fold to a finished size of 8 in. by 6½ in. There are two ways of printing the pages; one is to use the single foolscap sheets, which measure approxi-

mately 13½ in. by 8 in. This will mean four separate printings from one foolscap-size hectograph or the use of four hectographs. The other way is to use double foolscap sheets and two larger hectographs. In the one method the pages are arranged as at Fig. 1, and in the other as at Fig. 2. With either the cover should be printed separately.

MAKING THE HECTOGRAPH.

Before proceeding further with the arrangement of the pages and the supply of suitable matter, the hectographs should be made. This form of duplicating has the advantage of cheapness, as the composition is mainly composed of glue with some glycerine. First of all provide the container, which is generally made of tinned sheet; but zinc is much better, because it does not rust. The sheet of metal should be marked



Ply-wood can be used instead of metal, and glued and bradded to ½ in. square strips, as at Fig. 8; but the whole of the wood should

be coated with shellac varnish and left to get quite hard before being used.

MIXING THE COMPOSITION.

There are several methods of making the composition. One is made by dissolving half a pound of best Scotch glue, adding sixteen ounces of glycerine and a few drops of oil of cloves. Place the glue in a piedish, or large basin, and cover it with water; leave it for about forty-eight hours, until the glue has absorbed as much water as it can and forms jelly. Drain off the surplus water and place the jelly in a large jam-jar with the glycerine. Do not use best glycerine; the commercial variety is quite good enough, and is cheaper. Place the jar in a saucepan of water over a gas-ring and bring the water to the boil. Stir the contents of the jar, and, when thoroughly mixed, the few drops of oil of cloves should be added.

AVOIDING AIR BUBBLES.

The stirring should be most carefully done to avoid forming air bubbles, which are difficult to get rid of, and corresponding care should be taken in pouring the solution into the receptacle for the same reason. Another composition can be made in the same way, using two ounces of gelatine instead of glue to six ounces of glycerine. A third method of making a hectograph uses one pound of powdered and sifted

whiting, mixed with four ounces of glycerine. Half the quantity of whiting is mixed with the glycerine first, and then the remainder added and allowed to stand for about twelve hours. It is spread in the tin and worked smooth with a wooden roller, as at Fig. 9 and shown in parts at Fig. 10. All the above duplicating surfaces are cleaned by wiping the ink off with a wet sponge, and when the surface becomes uneven the glue and gelatine graphs can be melted up again.

Suitable inks for hectographs can be purchased in several colours, but can be prepared by dissolving one part of an aniline colour—blue-violet gives the best results—in a mixture of seven parts of water and one part of alcohol.

PREPARING THE COPY.

The preparation of the copy can now be taken in hand, and it is presumed that a

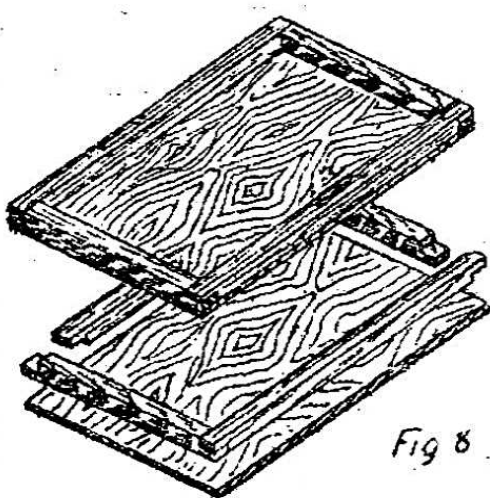


Fig 8

suitable title has been chosen and sufficient material is available. It is suggested that the cover should have a decorative design, executed in several colours; this can be made quite effective with a few lines, and can incorporate the title of the magazine. A suggestion for a remove magazine is illustrated at Fig. 11. The outer border lines should, for the particular size suggested above, be 6 in. by 4 in. As far as possible, use Roman letters, rather than fancy types, and aim at obtaining well-proportioned spaces. The title should be repeated at the top of the first page, but it should be on a smaller scale and occupy an inch or so, as at Fig. 12. The pages can

be written right across; this will generally be found the easiest method, but if the pages are divided in the centre, the broken line will be found quite effective.

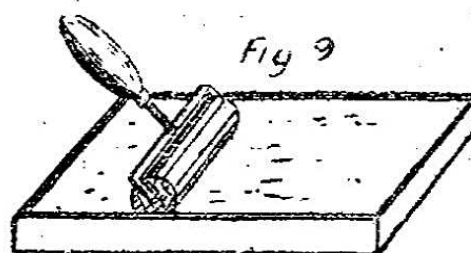


Fig 9

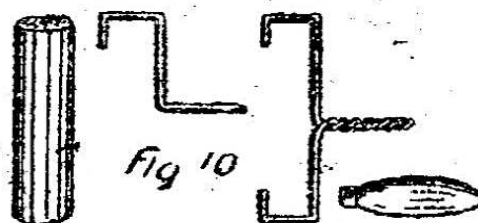


Fig 10

THE TITLE.

Titles should be printed, and for this purpose there is nothing to beat a thin upright line capital letter, giving each letter its full width and space between, and circular letters, and those based on the circle, make really circular and not narrow ellipses. The original should be written on non-absorbent paper; ordinary glazed foolscap is quite suitable. The ink must be thoroughly dry before the paper is placed on the graph.

PRINTING THE PAGES.

When everything is ready, the written paper is placed face downwards on the graph and rubbed over very lightly with the fingers to exclude air bubbles, and to make sure that every portion of the writing is in contact with the gelatine. Leave the paper on for a few minutes, and then lift up one corner and peel the sheet off. The copies can be taken off with ordinary plain foolscap, or some absorbent paper can be used. Paper that has undergone surface treatment to obtain a high gloss is not so suitable as an ordinary cheap quality plain foolscap.

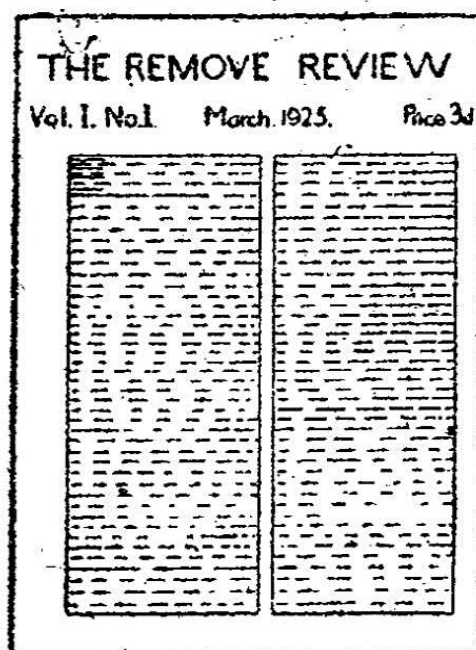


Fig 12

NEXT WEEK!

The Second of this Useful Series of Articles will appear.

HANDY ON THE JOB

All About Next Week's Trackett Grim Serial

By WALTER CHURCH

ACCORDING to all reports, Handy's new Trackett Grim serial ought to have started in this week's issue. At least, he promised to have it ready, and our Editor thought he meant it. Not that Reggie Pitt takes too much notice of Handy. Still, on the whole, Handy's a pretty regular chap when it comes to the Mag.

Reggie has asked me to describe the great serial writer at work. It's a bit of a job, but I'll tackle it. E. O. H. was cross last week because "In Quest of Gold" had come to an end. He had an idea that it was going on for a year, but as everybody was getting fed up with it, the Editor gave Handy the plain tip that "The End" were the best words he could finish up last week's instalment with.

So, after a lot of humming and ha'ing, Handy agreed on a new serial. Pirates, he said. In fact, he's got all his plot ready, and his characters and everything. Anyhow, that's what he tells us. Study D was in an awful state yesterday. Handy was supposed to be a pirate captain, and Study D was the cabin of a Spanish galleon, or something. Anyhow, McClure and I had an awful time, what with Handy lunging at us with a cricket-stump (although he said it was a sword) and listening to alleged old English.

But Pitt came in and kiboshed the whole scheme. He didn't want a pirate serial. Wouldn't have one at any price. Said the readers were asking for Trackett Grim. So it had to be Trackett Grim or nothing.

Poor old Handy sat down in a chair—after roaring for about five minutes—and wanted to know if his new plot was to be wasted. So Reggie calmed him down by promising to use the pirate serial later on—after everybody had got sick and tired of Trackett Grim again.

All this evening McClure and I have been on the jump. It's a wonder we've lived through it. We've had to do our prep. over in the corner, while Handy's been striding up and down the room, muttering to him-

self, tearing his hair, and glaring like the dickens if we even made a pen scratch.

He's been thinking out his new detective plot. At first we thought it was about a mad-house, and that he was imitating one of his characters. But when I suggested that he chucked a dictionary at me. Then McClure asked if we could give him any suggestions—he thought we might get our prep. done better if Handy was settled off first.

But the celebrated author wouldn't hear of it. Said if he couldn't get his own plots he'd boil himself. I asked him why he couldn't settle on a subject and stick to it.

"Limehouse!" I declared firmly. "That's the place for Trackett Grim to go to! Why not have an opium-den, and smugglers, and Chinamen, and all that sort of stuff? I've read some ripping stories——"

But he simply told me to go and eat coke, and that my ideas were not only dotty, but more like the ravings of an imbecile. Then he paced up and down for another half an hour, until McClure and I thought we were really in Colney Hatch. I can tell you, it was a bit steep.

Then, just as we were preparing to spring on him, and chuck him out, he suddenly sat down. (Yes, we do get fed up now and again, and when that happens, Handy knows all about it!) He sat there, staring in front of him, with his eyes gleaming like anything.

"Got it!" he exclaimed, in a low, tense voice. "I say, you chaps! Listen to this! I'm going to call my new serial 'The Yellow Terror,' and I'm going to make it all about an opium den in Limehouse, with Trackett Grim on the trail of smugglers, and a Chinese gang! How's that?"

I started saying something, but pulled myself up with a jerk. What was the use? I don't believe in peace at any price, but I wasn't feeling in the mood for a scrap just then.

Anyhow, that's how Handy gets his ideas!



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.).

THOMAS CAGE (Epsom): Where did they teach you to write like that? What's the idea of writing each letter separately, as if you were a giddy typewriter? It wouldn't be so bad if you made a good job of it, but you're going to get a fat lot of credit from me for such a disgraceful exhibition of careless penmanship! Hold on, though! I will give you credit for something! You've made a good job of spoiling a nice sheet of paper! As for what you've written, well, I shouldn't have answered it at all if you hadn't said how delighted you are with my Trackett Grim stories. So you see what you get for being truthful? Always stick to the truth, my lad, and you'll have plenty of blessings to count! But don't go and get a swelled head over this.

C. SUTTON (O'ham): You're worse than the Epsom fellow! Tommy DID have enough courtesy to write in ink, but you haven't got the decency to use a good black pencil. I can't even make out where you live—there are two letters after the "O" which I'm sure even you couldn't make out if you weren't living in the silly place. So I've put an inverted comma instead. But I don't call it clever to baffle an experienced detective in such a paltry way. And what do you mean by addressing me as "Dear Old Crab"? Blow you! I'm not going to answer your letter until you send me a handsome apology!

LONELY LILLIAN (Kent): At last! I've been looking out for another letter from you for such a long time, Lonely Lillian.

and now it has come it isn't half long enough, although you managed to fill four pages! Yes: I still get heaps of letters from all the dear boys and girls—you ought to hear old Mudford grousing about the bags of rubbish he has to lug up to St. Frank's for me! But I don't care! In fact, the more letters I get the better I like it. Filing them up and getting them ready for me to answer keep Church and McClure out of mischief, I can tell you! But I will say that out of all the nice letters I get none are nicer or more welcome than yours. So don't run away with that silly idea again! You couldn't bore me if you tried! I always long for more when I get to the end of one of your letters. Make the next one twelve times as long, and see if I grumble! I expect you're back in Birmingham long before this, and I hope you've secured all the back numbers of the Old Paper you missed while you were in Kent. If not, you must root about among the old book shops in Birmingham until you get them all. Anyhow, you really mustn't miss a single number which appeared while you were away, because the Portrait Gallery was running all that time. I hope you and your friend enjoyed the fancy-dress ball you were going to. You won't be quite so lonely now that you've got her, will you? Of course I know Kent, and what a lovely place it is. But I must dry up now, or the others will be grumbling because I've given you too long a reply. But if they do they've got no right to, because anyone who writes me as nicely as you do will get just as long a reply if I've got half a chance to give it to 'em, whatever their age or sex.

ARTHUR LITLEDAL (Newbury): Why do you thank me for my nice letter, ask why I should ask if Church and McClure are in hospital, and then cross it all out? The rest of your letter's all over the place. I believe you're potty. To make matters worse, you've written in pencil, and the pencil wasn't a good one. Or perhaps it was a good pencil in a bad list? Just because you start "Dear Old Goalie," that doesn't square me, you know! You'll have to pull up your

socks, my lad, and do a lot better than this if you want to get respectable reply out of me! Willy isn't nearly as good-looking as that rotten sketch of yours, and you can't kid me you know French just because you've written two words of it at the end of your letter. Write the whole of your letter in French next time, and then perhaps I'll believe you—and answer you in a language it'll puzzle you or anyone else to understand. But no more of that lazy pencil business!

P. H. ROWE (Thames, New Zealand): You needn't crow about the "All Blacks" licking our teams over here. We have to let you get these victories now and again to stouten your hearts! All the same, they're a jolly fine sportsman-like lot, and all credit to them. But just wait till we come over there—that's all, my lad, WAIT! New Zealand's a chip of the old block, all right, but the old block's still as solid and reliable as ever! What do you mean about a "foreign" competition? Call that patriotism? If you mean overseas readers, that's another thing, and if there are enough of you wanting one, I've no doubt you'll get it—and others to follow. I'm glad you like my Trackett Grim stories, but they're not laughable, you fathead! So I don't know what you mean about laughing for a week after you've read one! Is that supposed to be funny? You've been a reader for five years, and think the Old Paper the best boys book on the market. So I suppose I must forgive you. But you'll have to show some new zeal over your sketching if you want to become a New Zealand artist. That little drawing of Irene isn't so bad, but the others, and your monogram, are disgracefully poor. Try and be a credit to the Colony, for goodness sake! Spend a little more time over them next time, and do them properly! If that mate of yours is the cause of all the trouble, just dot him one! He seems to be another perfect terror, like Willy! Hard lines!

LAWRENCE FORWARD and COLIN FINLAYSON (Newlambton, New South Wales): It's jolly awkward for me, you know. Here have I been giving long replies to nearly everybody this week, and I shall have to dry up soon with a long list of letters still waiting to be answered. If I give you as long an answer as I've just given that New Zealand chap, I shan't have much room left for anybody else. And if I don't, you'll say I'm giving New Zealand preference over Australia! But that's all tommy rot. Nothing of the kind! Don't run away with any silly ideas like that, or I'll stop this column altogether! Then you would all be properly done, wouldn't you? Of course, I'm talking to

the lot of you now—I'll answer your letter presently, boys. I'm only putting this in your answer to make it look longer, and to prevent anybody from getting jealous if they think they haven't got their fair whack. So just get it firmly fixed in your noddles, all of you, that I'm going to chuck up this job if I catch any of your grumbling! And if that happens there won't be anything left to buy the Old Paper for! Next week I expect everybody will have to be content with one line, or I shall get snowed up with unanswered letters. But, mind, no grumbles! Now, Larry and Colin, thanks for that nicely typewritten letter of yours. So you also think the Old Paper the best boys' book on the market, after reading it for four years, and I agree with you about the marvelous genius of the chap who writes those hair-raising tales of Trackett Grim. You must be two clever chaps to spot the best thing in the Old Paper at once like that! I've told Jerry Dodd what you suggested about his writing something for the Mag. about Australian Bush Life, and I never saw anybody so pleased. I expect it's because you're Australians! Anyhow, he says he'll have a shot at it, so if you look out you may find something from his pen presently if Reggie can find the room for it. Jerry hails from Bathurst, New South Wales. I gave him your good wishes, which he heartily returns.

YOUNG NEW ZEALANDER (Auckland): Reggie's just looked in and grumbled at me like the dickens for making my Replies too long. He says they're dry and uninteresting, and if I don't make 'em short and snappy he won't print 'em. So your luck's out. Nipper's right name is Dick Hamilton, there are nearly eighty boys in the Fourth, and I won't give your love to Irene.

G. GRIERSON (Melbourne): You hope I'll like your writing, but it's all the same if I don't, and anything will do for me! Oh, will it! Well, this'll do for you! If they all had your manners my work would soon get done!

EDNA L. (Melbourne): About your Eleven beating ours, look what I've said to old Rowe. Don't be silly! I love being called Ted. You're all wrong about Willy being a dear, and I'm not offended because you think my Trackett Grim stories interesting. But I didn't know you spelt it a-m-u-s-i-n-g in Australia!

ALLAN TAYLOR (West Brunswick, Melbourne): Why didn't you leave your letter to me until you came out of church, and then send a longer one? Just to teach you a lesson, my lad, that's all the reply you're going to get!

TED.

The Invisible Grip.

(Continued from page 30.)

"Indirectly concerned—yes!" said the detective. "I don't think he had anything to do with the kidnapping; but I'll stake my life that's he's actively engaged in an endeavour to obtain Langford's machine! I fancy this is a case of wheels within wheels, Nipper, and I mean to get to the bottom of it, if it's the last thing I do! I believe both Kerner and Professor Zingrave are pitted against us—but that remains to be proved."

Nelson Lee spoke earnestly, and Nipper knew that he meant every word he said.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A JOB FOR NIPPER.

"**H**OW are we going to prove all this, guv'nor—that's what I want to know?" said Nipper. "If Professor Zingrave is mixed up in this business, he's keeping very much in the background—"

"An old habit of his," commented Lee. "Nevertheless, Nipper, I feel convinced that he is actively engaged in the present mystery. His brain was the directing force behind the Barlow robbery, and we have to thank him for the destruction of our racer. But it is with Kerner that we are immediately concerned, and I think you had better remain behind and keep your eye upon him—"

"Now, guv'nor?" asked Nipper in surprise.

"Yes—now!" said Nelson Lee. "Our recent visit will probably precipitate his plans, and by shadowing him from this moment onwards you will probably learn a good deal which will materially assist us. I know I can trust you, Nipper—"

"Rather, sir!" cut in the youngster quickly. "You can rely upon me all right! I'll go back to Kerner's house at once, and keep my eyes skinned! I suppose I can get hold of you at home in case of necessity?"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"In all probability—yes!" he returned. "I know of nothing to take me away, Nipper—but it is never wise to be too certain. In any case, I'll leave a message for you if I am called away."

The pair took leave of one another at once—Nipper stealing back towards the financier's house, and Lee going on to Gray's Inn Road. The detective was in a very thoughtful frame of mind, trying to piece together the various filmy threads with which he had to deal. So far the evidence—if it could be called such—was so skimpy that it amounted to practically nil, and in the circumstances it was somewhat difficult for Lee to form any definite conclusions.

But the famous detective was by no means discouraged by the present dark outlook; on the contrary, he was feeling dis-

tingently "bucked"—as Nipper would probably have termed it. His keenest interest were strongly aroused, as they always were when he found himself confronted with a more than usually intricate problem—as this problem undoubtably was.

When Nelson Lee arrived at his house in Gray's Inn Road, he was a trifle surprised to discover Harry Langford awaiting him in the consulting-room. The young man was obviously excited, and he jumped from his chair as the detective entered.

"News, Mr. Lee!" he exclaimed, waving a letter in Lee's face. "Good news, too! I've got a note from the pater!"

He thrust the letter into the detective's hand as he spoke, and Lee glanced at the envelope keenly.

"H'm! This is somewhat unexpected, I must say!" he commented, scrutinising the post-mark closely. "Posted in the City during the afternoon, I see. You received it by the last delivery, I suppose?"

Harry nodded.

"Yes, Mr. Lee—Mrs. Newman put it in the hall," he explained. "I didn't find it until after you'd gone, and then I rushed along here to show it to you. The message only contains a few words, but it's a great relief to know that my father is safe and sound."

"Naturally," said the detective, extracting the enclosure from the envelope, and unfolding the paper. "You are quite right regarding the brevity of the message, Langford!"

The note merely contained the following words, written in Mr. Roger Langford's own hand:

"Dear Harry,—I am absolutely O.K. Please don't worry.—Your affectionate FATHER."

Nelson Lee after reading the note handed it back to Harry.

"Very satisfactory, my dear fellow," he commented. "I am very glad that you have received the message, and I hope that you will act upon your father's excellent advice. I suppose there is no doubt that this is his handwriting?"

"None at all, Mr. Lee—it's his right enough," said the young man. "But it's ridiculous to suppose that I can stop worrying! Hang it all, I'm not a callous rotter of that sort, you know! I'm as anxious as the deuce, and I can't understand why my father wrote in this manner—"

"He probably had no choice in the matter," interrupted Lee. "The very fact that he was allowed to write at all is a very significant sign, in my opinion, for it proves that his kidnappers are not entirely without feeling. It also indicates that your father will be allowed his freedom within a short time—otherwise there would have been no object in sending the message to you."

(To be continued)

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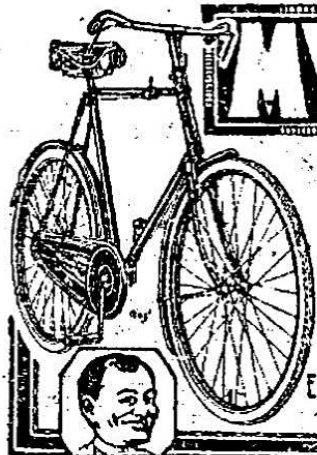
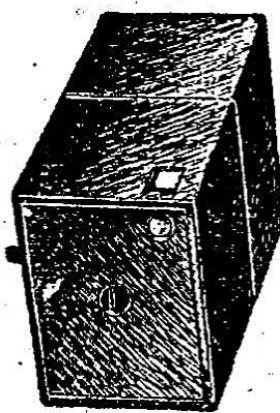
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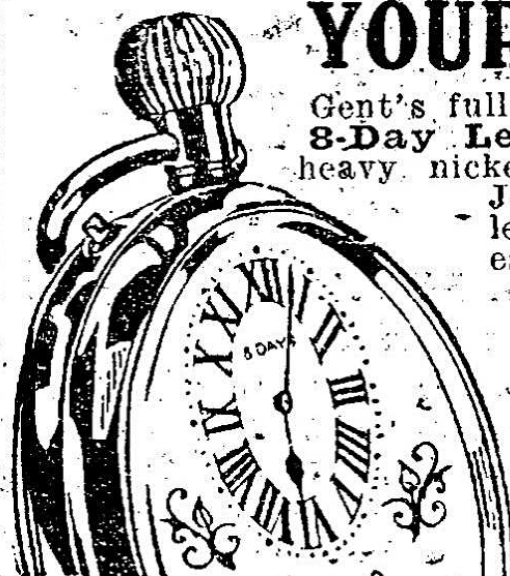
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