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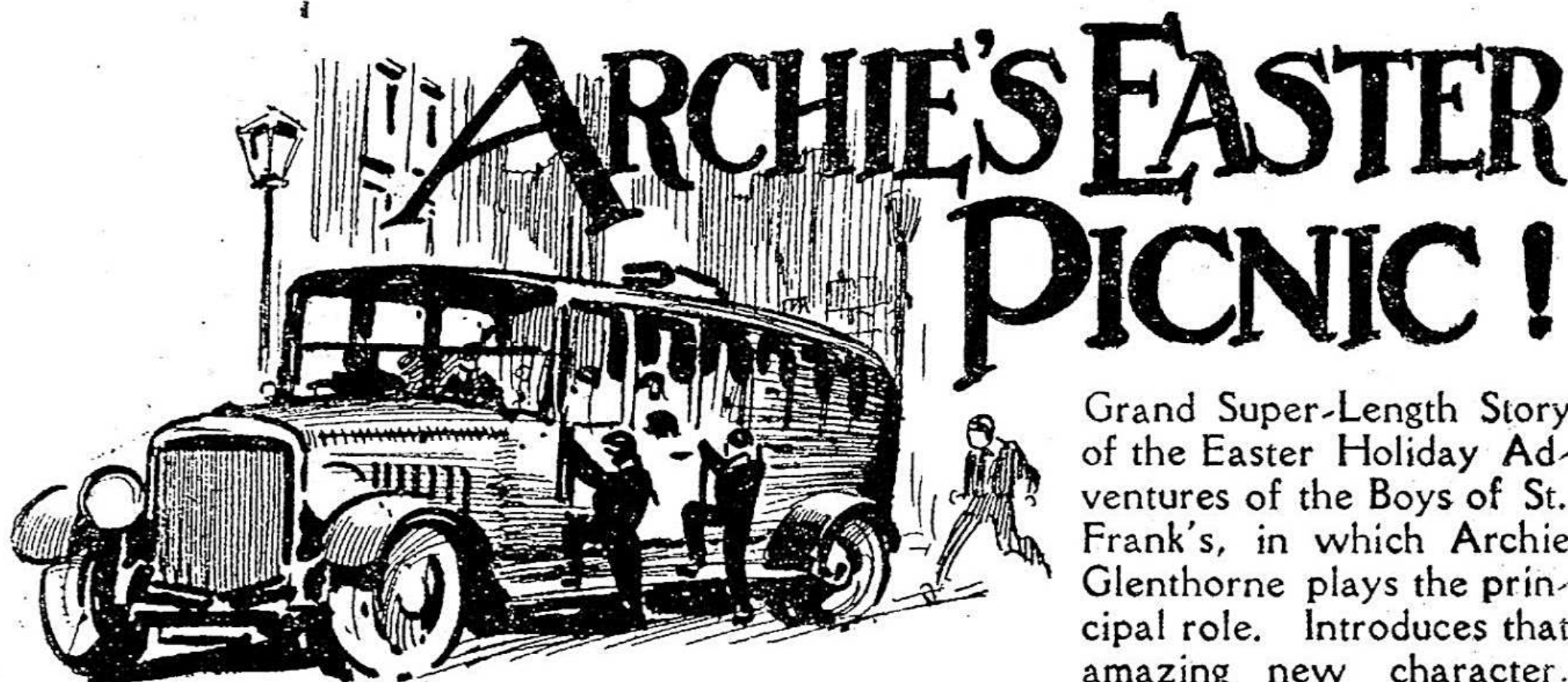


"ARCHIE'S EASTER PICNIC"

A rollicking Easter Holiday story of the Boys of St. Frank's, introducing Archie Glenthorne, Napoleon Browne, Nipper and other popular characters.



In less than five minutes the juniors were all squatting round the festive "board," enjoying the picnic with healthy appetites.



Grand Super-Length Story of the Easter Holiday Adventures of the Boys of St. Frank's, in which Archie Glenthorne plays the principal role. Introduces that amazing new character, William Napoleon Browne

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

A QUIET SUNDAY EVENING.

RAT-TAT! Rat-tat-tat!
"Somebody at the door again, sir," said Phipps gently.

"Kindly rally round, laddie, and stand by the young master in this hour of need!" pleaded Archie Glenthorne. "I mean to say, for a Sunday evening, life is somewhat strenuous. We no sooner get rid of one dashed gang before another floats out of the good old offing!"

Rat-tat! Rat-tat-tat!

"Judging by the sound, our current visitors are frightfully impatient, to say nothing of being boisterous," went on Archie. "I say, Phipps, don't you know! Dash it! Kindly flow to the good old portal — What-ho! The laddie has apparently oozed forth!"

Phipps had silently left the cosy apartment, and Archie could now hear him opening the outer door. A moment later Archie sank back weakly into the recesses of his armchair.

"Good gad!" he moaned. "Handforth!"

He could hear the loud voice of the celebrated Edward Oswald out in the passage, and he didn't seem to relish the forthcoming interview. Archie, in fact, was feeling used up after a rather tiring day, and he was in no mood for entertaining visitors of the Handforth type.

The swell of the St. Frank's Fourth Form was in strange surroundings. The distant hum and bustle of traffic sounded from the windows, for Piccadilly Circus was not much more than a stone's throw from the flat.

To put it briefly, Archie Glenthorne was at present occupying his eldest brother's snug chambers in Jermyn Street. Captain

Bertram Harold Glenthorne, D.S.O., was at present in Egypt, and Archie had thought it rather a bright scheme to make the flat his headquarters during the Easter holidays.

The family was in residence at Glenthorne Manor, near Bannington, but Archie had no relish to stay at home. For one thing, it was too near to St. Frank's, and for another thing he considered that London was the one and only place for the holidays. Most of the Fourth were up in Town, and Archie was a cheery soul. There was nothing he liked better than to have visitors popping in every now and again. But at the present moment the popping in of Handforth was too much for Archie's depleted tissues.

Colonel Glenthorne had only consented to his youngest son's occupation of the flat on condition that Phipps remained with Archie throughout the stay. Nothing pleased Archie better than this arrangement. Without Phipps, his faithful valet, he was undone.

He had enjoyed himself immensely during the past few days. Good Friday had been wet, and Archie had spent a glorious day indoors in front of the fire. But Saturday had turned out warm and sunny, and Alf Brent, his study mate of the Fourth, had dragged him out on a long round of London outdoor amusements.

On the top of this he had spent the Sunday at the Zoo, his pater being a Fellow of the Society. Archie thus being a privileged person—the ordinary public not being admitted to the Zoo on Sundays—a number of other St. Frank's juniors had accompanied him on the free list.

It was getting on for nine o'clock now, and Archie was tired out. He had dined

comfortably, and his chief desire was to roll between the sheets. Only fifteen minutes ago he had got rid of Reginald Pitt and Jack Grey and John Busterfield Boots. And now Handforth had turned up!

"Hallo! So you've been to the Zoo to-day?" asked Handforth, as he strode bios-terously into the room. "Like your nerve! Why the dickens didn't you ring me up, and take me along?"

"Greetings, laddie!" said Archie, beam- ing hospitably upon his visitor. "The fact is— Gadzooks! What's all this? A dashed invasion, by Jove! Walk in, old haricots! Make yourselves absolutely at home!"

Church and McClure had just entered, but there were no others. The famous chums of Study D had merely dropped in on their way home from a Sunday evening visit.

"We're not going to stop," said Hand- forth crisply.

"Thanks awfully, old lad!"

"Eh?"

"I mean, of course, how frightfully frightful!" said Archie hastily. "Surely, you aren't going to tear yourselves away at the very beginning of the rally? Kindly sit down, laddies."

"We only came to make sure about to- morrow," said Church. "I told Handy not to bother you, but he insisted."

Handforth sat down on a corner of the table, and a glass vase crashed over and splintered to fragments.

"Hallo! Who did that?" said Handforth, starting. "Well, of all the careless fat- heads! Fancy putting a silly vase like that on the table! You'd better tick your valet off, Archie."

"He'd better tick you off, you mean," growled McClure. "The first thing you do when you come in is to start smashing up the happy home!"

"I didn't break that vase!" roared Hand- forth.

"Yes you did!"

"Why, you—you—"

"Good ga!" gasped Archie. "Is all this bother absolutely necessary? I mean, wouldn't it be a somewhat ripe scheme to leave this sort of stuff until you dash out into the open spaces?"

Handforth grunted.

"Well, I'm not going to be accused of smashing a vase when it wasn't my fault at all!" he snorted. "The thing shouldn't have been on the table."

"Absolutely not," said Archie pacifically. "I should have realised, old cockatoo, that you might be blowing up. And I am well aware of your dashed partiality for tables, dash it! Just at the moment I'm feeling fearfully fagged, and forty of the best seem to be indicated."

"Is that a hint for us to go?" demanded Handforth.

"Well, I mean— That is—"

"All right, Archie—we'll go!" grinned Church. "We're due home in about five minutes, anyhow. We just wanted to ask you about to-morrow's picnic."

CHAPTER II.

THE FATEFUL TELEGRAM.



ARCHIE adjusted his monocle, and beamed.

"The good old picnic, what?" he repeated. "Oh, rather! The dash into the forest glade, and all that sort of stuff? Absolutely! Phipps has the whole thing nailed to the mast, as it were."

Handforth and company turned to Phipps. "Might as well get the facts out of you, Phipps," said Handforth gruffly. "We can't stay here all night, listening to Archie's long-winded gabble! I never knew such a chap for jawing! He's all right, but he never knows when to stop. He goes on and on—"

"Yes, sir," said Phipps smoothly.

"On and on!" continued Handforth, with a glare. "What about this picnic? Is everything fixed up?"

"Everything, Master Handforth."

"All the grub ready, and that?"

"All packed and prepared, sir."

"Is the motor-coach ordered?"

"It is, sir."

"Anybody might think Handy was giving the picnic, by the way he's cross-examining old Phipps," murmured McClure. "Like his nerve to come here with this third-degree business!"

"What's that?" demanded Handforth, turning round. "Did you speak, Arnold McClure?"

"I was talking to Church," said McClure tartly.

"The next time you talk to Church, talk properly—and don't mumble!" said Edward Oswald, in a severe tone. "I bet you were saying something insulting about me! Goodness knows how many libels you utter as soon as my back's turned."

"About this picnic, old machine-gun," put in Archie gently. "We start away at ten o'clock to the minute. All the lads have promised to rally round at nine-thirty, so that's that. The barometer is dashing upwards with considerable vim, and Old Moore positively declares that Easter Mon- day will be blessed with sundry spasms of sunshine. So everything, as it were, is ripe and juicy."

Archie wondered why on earth Handforth had come at all. It wasn't as if Handforth knew nothing about the picnic. He had been invited days ago, together with many other Fourth Form celebrities.

It had been Archie's own idea, and he was not a little proud of it. He had

chartered one of the latest motor-coaches—a luxurious Pullman affair with great pneumatic tyres, limousine body, and padded chairs. It was a kind of exaggerated private saloon. An ordinary char-a-banc was a dust-cart compared to it.

In this super-vehicle Archie and his party would set out through London, and penetrate into the wilds of Surrey. No fixed camping place had been settled. Archie thought it rather a good idea to amble along, and choose a good spot when it hove in sight.

As for the picnic itself, this was on a lavish scale.

Blessed with endless pocket-money, Archie always did things handsomely. And this picnic was to be a truly gorgeous affair—with rich viands of the most delectable type, ginger-ale, and kindred drinks galore, and fruit enough to stock a complete shop.

It was like Handforth's cheek, therefore, to calmly barge in and question Phipps as though he, himself, was the host. But as Handforth didn't mean anything by this display, Archie was not offended.

"Be here at half-past nine, eh?" said Edward Oswald. "All right—we'll arrive to the minute. By the way, how many of us in the party?"

"Fifteen—including Nipper and Tommy Watson and good old Phipps," replied Archie, with a yawn. "Phipps is going to stand by with the serviettes, and do the handing round, and so forth. A dashed handy sort of cove, when it comes to this sort of stuff. What?"

Handforth and company felt that further questioning would be an intrusion upon Archie's hospitality—especially as Archie had closed his eyes, and was three-parts asleep. So they bade him a cheery good-night, and went their way—but not until Handforth had nearly knocked over the hall-stand, and upset a fern pedestal on his way out.

Archie gave a contented sigh as he heard the front door close to. A moment later Phipps glided in and gave a discreet cough.

"Your bed is quite ready, sir," he suggested soothingly.

"Bed? Oh, rather!" said Archie, with a start. "What-ho! A dive into the good old whiteness, what? Between you and me, Phipps, that is distinctly the stuff to give them! What the doctor orders, so to speak. Be good enough to lead the way to the old sleep department."

"If you will precede me, sir——"

Rat-tat! Rat-tat!

It was a loud, imperative double knock. Archie looked at Phipps in a sickly kind of way, and Phipps unbent so far as to utter a short sigh of resignation.

"Another bevy, by gad!" bleated Archie. "I say, Phipps, this sort of thing is absolutely wearing the young master to a shadow! It's absolutely taking years off a promising young life!"

Phipps vanished, and Archie sat in his chair listening with furrowed lines on his brow. He heard no cheery youthful shouts, however, and he began to hope slightly. Then Phipps materialised with a buff envelope in his hands.

"It's a telegram, sir," he announced.

"Sundry quantities of gratitude, laddie!" breathed Archie. "I mean, anything is better than another frightful disturbance. Kindly open the old missive, Phipps, and read it aloud——"

"The telegram, sir, is addressed to me," said Phipps.

"Good gad!" gasped Archie. "For you, old comrade? I trust nothing is seriously amiss? I'm all dithery, dash it! Kindly peruse the effusion, and let me know the worst!"

Phipps read the telegram, and his usually grave face became acutely troubled.

CHAPTER III.

SOMEWHAT POISONOUS.



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE dropped his eyeglass listlessly.

"Laddie, brace up and speak!" he exclaimed. "I mean to say, this frightful suspense——"

"The telegram is from Manchester, sir," said Phipps steadily. "My Uncle George has had a sudden seizure, and it is feared that he is on his deathbed. He is calling for me, sir."

"Oddslife!" breathed Archie, staggering to his feet. "How absolutely foul! You don't know how sorry I am, Phipps! It seems to me you'll have to fly with somewhat fleet feet!"

"I'm afraid so, sir."

"I mean, when a chap's uncle starts signalling the good old S.O.S., briskness is the order of the day," said Archie. "But I must observe, Phipps, that your uncle chooses a dashed awkward time—— No, no! Possibly the poor old buffer had no alternative!"

"He has been ailing for some little time, sir," said Phipps, glancing at his watch. "I wrote a few days ago—upon our arrival in London, in fact—and that accounts for the telegram being sent here. If you could possibly give me a few days' leave, sir——"

"Absolutely!" interrupted Archie stoutly. "I understand that you have a few gilt-edged prospects from Uncle George? Quite apart from the human element, the old boy might cut you off with a tin tack, or something, if you fail to rally round?"

"I am certainly one of my uncle's favourite nephews, sir," admitted Phipps.

"I don't wonder at it, laddie," said Archie. "Without wishing to make you vain, I must

confess that you are a somewhat useful citizen. Without you, Phipps, I shall be desolated."

"I will return at the earliest possible moment, sir."

"But what of the picnic to-morrow?" moaned Archie. "Gadzooks! I can see the whole frightful affair sideslipping! But it can't be helped, Phipps—you've got to dash off."

"I think there is a midnight train, sir—or even earlier," said Phipps. "If you'll permit me to consult the Bradshaw——"

"Leap to it, old **PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.**

Second Series—Third Form.

Phipps consulted the Bradshaw, and found that an excellent train left King's Cross within the hour. By dashing a few things into a bag, and rushing off, he would just be able to catch it. Phipps was really concerned, and Archie was touched. It was the first time he had really seen any sign of emotion on his valet's face.

In less than ten minutes Phipps had gone, hastening to the bedside of his stricken uncle. And Archie, alone in the flat, sprawled in the big armchair, too agitated to even think of bed.

He wasn't nervous—he didn't mind being alone in the place. But the loss of Phipps was a staggering blow. He had been relying on Phipps for the morrow. In fact, Archie relied on Phipps so much that when the valet was absent he was aware of a sense of utter loneliness.

Archie sat there in a kind of daze. He wasn't aware of the passage of time. He was trying to adjust his focus to this new situation. And the task was too much for him. He was dumbly miserable.

There was no reason for this condition, of course. The absence of Phipps would by no means mar the success of the morrow's picnic. The other juniors would probably receive the news without even wincing. But to Archie the affair seemed all important.

Rat-tat!

Archie gave a jump in his chair. He sat up, turned round, and gazed at the door. Another visitor was announcing himself! This sort of thing was getting monotonous.

"I say, Phipps!" shouted Archie. "I mean, why don't you remove that dashed knocker—— Oddslife!"

Archie suddenly remembered that Phipps had gone, and he was faced with the dreadful ordeal of opening the door himself. He hadn't done such a thing for years. But he braced himself to the task, and dashed out into the hall. And he was feeling slightly relieved.

He would welcome some of the St. Frank's fellows now, for they would dispel the sense of loneliness which oppressed him. He would be able to pour forth his miserable story into their sympathetic ears.

He seized the door and flung it open.

A tall, immaculately attired young gentleman stood on the mat. He was carrying a suit-case, and looked as though he had come to stay. Both he and Archie started slightly as they gazed at one another.

"Good gad!" said Archie.

"I agree entirely!" said the other. "Out of all the words in the English language, you took those two out of my very mouth! What strange trick of Fate is this? I may possibly be wrong, but have we not met before, brother?"

"Why, dash it, you're Browne!" ejaculated Archie.

"The result of loitering in the sun!" admitted the other apologetically. "I trust the weather-beaten appearance is not too pronounced? No? I breathe again!"

"But, look here—I mean——"

"Were I to disregard such a cordial invitation, I should indeed be boorish!" said Browne graciously. "Thank you, brother! Yes, I will certainly enter, and explain the nature of my visit in detail."

In a daze, Archie escorted his late caller into the flat.



No. 17.—Tommy Hobbs.

One of the most studious-looking fags in the Third—quiet, reserved, and inclined to be shy. Has a mania for making things, and is never content unless he is busy on a new "invention."

CHAPTER IV.
A TOUCHING STORY.



WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE sank comfortably into the easiest chair in the room, and beamed at Archie Glenthorne benevolently.

"I feel that an apology is due from me," he observed. "Although we have met before, I must confess that your name has entirely escaped me. Can it by any chance begin with a 'G'?"

"My name is Glenthorne—Archibald Winston Derek Glenthorne," said Archie with dignity. "You saw me at St. Frank's, dash it! You're the frightful cove who absolutely fooled the whole school on the First of April."

"I rather pride myself on that hot piece of work," continued Browne, nodding. "And so, Brother Glenthorne, we meet again. Another proof of the smallness of this terrestrial globe. But am I right in assuming that there are other Glenthornes in this particular locality?"

"I'm alone," said Archie. "That is to say, alone in the old flat."

"You'll pardon a slight interruption, but do I count for nothing?" asked Browne gently. "Am I a mere cipher, that I should not even be recognised? A trivial matter, of course——"

"The fact is, my man Phipps was obliged to dash off to the bedside of Uncle George," explained Archie. "The whole situation is poisonous, but there you are. I mean——"

"Don't mention it," interrupted Browne. "Did I hear you asking me to partake of a snack? Thank you, Brother Glenthorne! Your hospitality is indeed overwhelming. Nothing, at the moment, would suit me better than to insert my teeth into one of yonder sandwiches."

He hoisted himself out of the chair, lounged to the sideboard, and selected a couple of sandwiches from under a glass cover. Munching these, he took up his position on the hearthrug, and regarded Archie with kindly interest.

"And now," he said, between bites, "for a little elucidation work. I came here, I must confess, on a mission of some gravity. A few questions, no doubt, will clear the air."

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie feebly.

"These sumptuous chambers, I take it, are your own?"

"No, they're my brother's," replied Archie. "I'm only staying here just for the Easter holidays, as it were. It's a frightful pity that Phipps has oozed away——"

"Leaving Phipps out of the discussion, would it be at all possible to meet your brother to-night?" went on Browne.

"Dash it, he's in Egypt!"

"In that event, the great dramatic scene in act two has apparently developed a misfire," said Browne sadly. "The affair has

sprung a leak. Alas, such things are only sent to try us!"

"What do you mean, you frightful ass?"

"I'm astonished, Brother Glenthorne, that such terms of reproach should pass your lips," said Browne, visiting the glass dish again. "Ah, ginger ale, I perceive! My favourite intoxicant!"

"Help yourself, old cheese!" said Archie, with slight sarcasm.

"Too late!" sighed Browne. "I have already done so—not that your invitation is not cordially appreciated. As I observed in the pre-ginger ale epoch, I ventured hither on a mission of some gravity. To get down to brass tacks, I brought this!"

He pointed to the suit-case, which now lay on the settee.

"That?" said Archie, staring.

"I fancy," said Browne, "it fits into a niche in the Glenthorne establishment."

"But, I say, look here—— I mean——"

"Of course, errors are always liable to occur," went on Browne. "But when I observe the initials 'B.H.G.', and this aristocratic address on the bag, my deductions are not entirely outside the penalty area."

"Oddslife!" ejaculated Archie.

He was electrified into action, and he picked up the suit-case and examined it. A very brief scrutiny satisfied him that it actually was the property of his brother Bertram.

"I say, how—that is, where——"

"I missed it by a hair's-breadth," explained Browne.

"Missed it?"

"Only by swerving my car severely to the off-side, and thus risking the life of the country's most promising personality, did I avoid it," said Browne. "The suit-case, Brother Glenthorne, was in the road."

"Good gad!"

"Possessing a high sense of honesty, I forthwith journeyed hither, and naturally expected to find the owner," continued Browne. "I can only conclude that there is some slight entanglement."

"A dashed big entanglement, dash it," said Archie. "My brother didn't drop that bag in the road, or anywhere else. He's been in Egypt for weeks, and I'm absolutely floundering. I mean, all this sort of thing is getting me down to the danger-point!"

CHAPTER V.

MAINLY ABOUT PORK.



ARCHIE was exaggerating slightly, but he was certainly bewildered.

Browne generally caused this effect. His was a dominant personality, and his cool cheek was of such a quality that

ordinary human beings were unable to cope with it, unless prepared in advance.

He had made a great stir at St. Frank's, nearly a fortnight earlier—when he had hoodwinked the school, from the Head downwards. His "rag" had been all the more audacious, considering that he was booked to join St. Frank's as a Fifth Form pupil at the beginning of the new term.

William Napoleon Browne was the son of Mr. Justice Browne, the eminent judge. And it seemed certain that he had inherited some of his father's celebrated eloquence. Nothing ever perturbed him. His coolness in a tight corner was something to marvel at.

"Let me be brief," he said, as he settled himself once more in the easy chair. "Enticed by the tranquility of the evening, I summoned my attendants, and my Rolls-Royce was harnessed and saddled—"

"Rolls-Royce?" asked Archie, awed.

Browne waved his hand.

"A mere figure of speech," he said carelessly. "To be exact, my car happens to be a Morris-Oxford, but why quibble? As I say, we ventured out upon a blithesome trip in the evening balm."

"A dashed good scheme," said Archie. "A party of you, what?"

"No; we went quite alone," replied Browne. "There is nothing we enjoy better than the solitude of the great wilds. It is there, amid Nature, that we chew over the great thoughts of life. But to resume. Pottering homewards, at peace with the world, what happened?"

"Eh? I mean—"

"You may not believe my statement, but a considerable quantity of pork wandered into the road some two or three hundred yards ahead—"

"Pork?"

"At the moment it was merely pig, but became pork soon afterwards," went on Browne. "I will proceed to throw a shaft of light into your cranial cavity. Upon catching sight of this pig—who was more or less sprightly, not knowing that he was being driven to an untimely death at the hand of the slaughterer—I naturally drew in the rein with vigour."

"Absolutely!" said Archie, who only dimly understood.

"At this very moment," proceeded Browne, leaning forward, "a crimson object shot past me like a shrapnel shell going into action. This object, you will understand, overtook me, and bounded ahead with all the vim of a six-months' Kruschen addict."

"I mean to say, all this—"

"The crimson object was a car," declared Browne. "Not exactly a respectable car, but one of those sporty abominations which are at present beginning to burst into activity on our highways and by-ways. I have seldom encountered such a ghastly noise-manufacturer."

"But, dash it all, I don't quite see—"

"Hush! I will explain all!" said Browne. "The unfortunate pig, in attempting to nibble a stray bunch of asparagus by the wayside, failed to observe the approach of the Crimson Destroyer. Alack, Brother Porker accidentally stepped on the reverse, and we much regret to add that he was decapitated in one fell blow."

"I say!" ejaculated Archie, with concern.

"I can well understand your natural horror," admitted Browne. "Happily, the death sentence was carried out instantaneously, and Brother Porker knew absolutely nothing. He became converted into choice streaky without any knowledge of the fact. And I beg to inform you that the executioner in the up-to-date sports model sped on into the gloom, taking no notice of the death-squeal which must have rang in his ears, even above the din of his engine."

"The chappie ought to have been arrested!" declared Archie hotly. "I mean, whizzing on like that, after killing a pig. A pig, dash it, is only a pig, but this fellow was obviously a foul blighter to ride on without stopping."

"A blistered specimen of the most pronounced type," agreed Browne. "Without wishing to offend you in any way, I must acknowledge that I took him to be your brother."

"My brother!" ejaculated Archie, jumping a foot.

"The suit-case leapt out of the crimson car at the moment of the impact," said Browne. "Being just in the rear, I saw it all. Furthermore, I dismounted, took charge of the spoils, and soon found myself engaged in conversation with an exceedingly angry and exceedingly whiskered gentleman in gaiters. He wore other things, but no matter."

"The owner of the pig, I take it?"

"Your perceptive powers are beginning to sit up and take nourishment," said the visitor. "You have struck the nail exactly on the spot. The farmer was not only enraged, but positively jibbering with mortification. What was to have been perfectly good pork had swiftly become unsaleable pork. And the farmer rightly considers that he has a grudge against the unknown merchant who carved up the joint with his non-skids."

"Well, look here, I don't know anything about it," exclaimed Archie. "It's frightfully rummy, and all that sort of thing, but the chappie hasn't been here."

"You cannot suggest any possible explanation?"

"Absolutely not."

"A friend, perchance—"

"My dear old tulip, it's a fearful mystery to me!" said Archie. "What I mean is, I can't possibly understand how this suit-case could be in the possession of a bounder of that sort."

Browne rose to his feet.

"Then we must make our excuses, and retire with that gracefulness for which we are celebrated," he said benevolently. "Should I awaken when the milkman deposits his daily quart, I will arise, and wander round for a further chat—for I must confess I find your hospitality both charming and delightful."

"Oh, rather," said Archie. "Trickle round any old time you like, laddie! I mean, you're practically a St. Frank's fellow anyhow, what? When you're passing, pass—that is——"

"Say no more!" pleaded Browne. "Being modesty itself, I find these pressing invitations somewhat embarrassing. But as you insist with such gusto, I shall make a point of honouring your hearth with my person at the earliest opportunity."

Archie escorted his visitor out, said good-night all over again on the doorstep, and then returned to the sitting-room. He stared at the mysterious suit-case, and sighed for Phipps.

CHAPTER VI.

STILL THEY COME!



RELIEVED of Browne's powerful personality, Archie was able to think better. The quietness of the room soothed him. He munched a couple of sandwiches, and considered the problem.

Without question, it was rummy, he decided. How on earth could his brother's suit-case have got into the possession of an utter outsider, who ran over pigs and didn't stop to make inquiries?

As far as Archie knew, Bertram was one of the best fellows going, and not the sort of man to be friendly with such unprincipled rotters. There was no question about the suit-case being Bertram's. Archie had seen it before—and, in fact, he had one like it himself.

"If only Phipps were here, he'd dashed well ferret out the truth in about two ticks," declared Archie. "Of all the frightful situations! It would have been different any other time—but here I am, alone——"

Tap-tap-tap!

Archie started. From somewhere out in the hall came a soft, mysterious tapping. Archie, with a bitten sandwich in his hand, remained motionless. He felt a curious tingling in his scalp.

Tap-tap-tap!

It came again, and the swell of the Fourth braced himself. Now that he was entirely on his own, he felt stronger. All thoughts of sleep had been driven away. Put to the test, Archie was as resourceful and as keen as the next fellow. His help-

lessness was more of a pose than anything else.

He tiptoed to the door, opened it, and glanced out into the hall. The electric light gleamed, but there was no sign of anything amiss. Faintly, in the distance, sounded the hum of the traffic.

Tap-tap-tap!

This time Archie located the sound without difficulty. Somebody was tapping lightly on the panel of the front door—with his finger-nail, judging by the faint sound. The flat was quite self-contained, and on the second floor. A carpeted public stairway led down to the main entrance.

"Dashed funny!" murmured Archie.

He went to the front door and threw it open.

"Thank goodness!" gasped a frantic voice. "I say, Bertie——"

The speaker paused, and stared at Archie in blank surprise. Archie, on the other hand, was even more startled.

He beheld a frightened-looking young man, who was attired in a golfing-suit of pronounced originality, complete with plus fours. Archie gave one look and shuddered. The visitor's stockings were positively yelling at him, and his neckwear was too atrocious for words.

"Good gad!" said Archie feebly.

"I—I must have come to the wrong flat!" gabbled the other, with a hasty glance over his shoulder. "Awfully sorry! I thought this was where Bertie Glenthorne lived——"

"So it is," interrupted Archie.

"Eh? But——"

"I'm Bertie's brother," explained Archie. "He's away just now—in Egypt. I say, dash it, don't keep jiffing about like that!"

The young man in plus-fours was certainly acting in a strange manner. He was like a cat on hot bricks—jumpy, nervous and agitated. Every now and again he turned his head, and gazed anxiously down the stairs.

"Hanged if I know what to do!" he said feverishly. "I didn't know old Glenny was away in Egypt. I'm a pal of his, you know. I didn't guess he wouldn't be at home. I'm in a frightful mess."

"Absolutely," said Archie, nodding. "So I gathered."

"Well, what's to be done?" asked the other tensely.

"Done?" repeated Archie. "Well, dash it, I'm not renowned for brain-waves, and all that sort of thing, but it seems to me that there's only one course indicated. In other words, laddie, it's absolutely up to you to stagger off into the night."

"No, no!" gasped the stranger, clutching at Archie's jacket. "I can't go away—Look here! You're Bertie's brother—I'd like to explain things to you. We'll go in, eh? Can't talk out here! So beastly public—anybody might come up."

And Archie was hustled into the flat, and the door closed.

CHAPTER VII.

FELIX THE RABBIT.



APPARENTLY, this was one of Archie's unlucky evenings.

Not only had he lost Phipps, but all possibility of slumber seemed out of the question. This latest visitor was worse than any of the others. Archie would have welcomed the loquacious Browne, in preference to the agitated young man in plus-fours.

"Thanks awfully!" breathed the stranger, as he entered the sitting-room. "I say, what about a revive? I can just do with some Scotch——"

"Sorry, old scream, but the intoxicants are absolutely off the menu," interrupted Archie frigidly. "And look here! I mean, what about it? I don't even know your dashed name! I'm not absolutely sure that I ought to have let you come in——"

"But I'm one of Bertie's best pals!" insisted the other. "Haven't you ever heard him talk about old Felix?"

"Felix?" said Archie. "Why, dash it, I've seen Felix on the screen! That frightfully funny cat-chappie, you mean?"

"No, I'm Felix," said the other. "Lieutenant Felix Spottiswood—I was in the same regiment with your brother, don't you know. Greatest pals on earth. He always calls me Spotty. No idea he was away."

The visitor sank into a chair, and stared before him in a glassy kind of way. He had been speaking jerkily, as though with an effort, and there was a shivery look about him that told of intense inward agitation. His weak-looking face was pale and haggard.

"Spotty, what?" said Archie musingly.

"Yes, that's what he always calls me," said the other. "Greatest pals in the world, in a way of speaking."

Archie nodded. He was recalling a certain conversation which had taken place during the Christmas holidays. His brother Bertram and Col. Glenthorne had been talking, and Archie had languidly listened. He remembered, now, that this self-same Felix Spottiswood had been the subject of that chat.

And Archie somehow felt that Felix was misrepresenting his relationship with Captain Glenthorne. For Bertram had complained bitterly to his father of the sponging tactics of Felix. He had referred to the young man as a toad, a rabbit, and had used even stronger similes.

As far as Archie could remember, Bertram had been positively pestered by the young man—who insisted upon thrusting himself upon Bertram at every opportunity. Bertram, in fact, loathed the fellow, but, being a peaceful man, had never actually kicked him as he deserved.

As a matter of fact, Felix Spottiswood was the son of an excellent Devonshire

family, and his career in the Army had been brief. He was, Archie believed, known in his own locality as the "Spottiswood Problem." His people were only too pleased that he spent most of his time—and more than his allowance—in Town.

"What-ho!" said Archie, with a start. "I mean, so you're Felix? Spotty, as it were? Oh, rather! I've heard heaps about you, old door-knob. But what's the precise scheme? This haggard look, and so forth? You haven't been committing a burglary, or something?"

"Oh!" said Felix, with a long, low moan.

"Good gad! Not worse?" asked Archie, startled. "You don't mean to say you've killed somebody?"

"Yes!" babbled Felix incoherently.

Archie drew slightly away, and glanced at one of his brother's swords, which hung on the wall. He had heard that murderers were generally desperate, and it was just as well to be prepared. Not that this fearful specimen of humanity looked very menacing.

"I say, what rot!" said Archie. "You can't fool me, you know! What I mean to say is, you're rotting! Absolutely!"

"I'm not—I'm not—I'm not!" insisted Felix, his voice rising crescendo. "I've killed somebody—a little girl, I believe."

"Oddslife! You BELIEVE!"

"Yes! I—I——"

"But, look here, don't you KNOW?" gasped Archie. "Dash it all, if a chappie kills somebody, he generally knows——"

"But I ran over her—in my car!" panted Felix miserably. "I can tell you, I can hear her scream ringing in my ears now! It was awful! It was horrible! Clean over the poor kid, don't you know—must have killed her on the spot! One frightful bump, and it was all over!"

Archie felt horrified, but his repulsion had gone. This prize idiot had recklessly run over a child, and these ravings were brought about by his remorse.

"I suppose you came round here to tell Bertie all about it, what?" he asked. "Of course, you would! Where did this tragedy happen? I can understand your addled state of mind——"

"It—it was on the Portsmouth road, between Haslemere and Godalming," muttered Felix brokenly. "I was coming home, you know, after a run down into Sussex. Nearly dark—and my lights are all squiffy, owing to the battery being run down. I didn't see the kid until she ran into the road. I just heard a crash, and a scream, and——"

He shuddered, and covered his face with his hands.

"How absolutely ghastly!" murmured Archie. "And was the poor little thing killed on the instant? I mean to say——"

"I don't know—I don't know!" groaned Spottiswood.

"You don't know?"

"No, I drove on in a kind of panic—" "You drove on?" ejaculated Archie, with a jump. "Good gad! You don't mean to say you ran over this little girl, and—and—" "Yes! I just trod on the accelerator, and shot off!" said Felix, in a shaky whisper. "I was afraid to stop—scared out of my wits! The police, you know—I expect they're after me even now!"

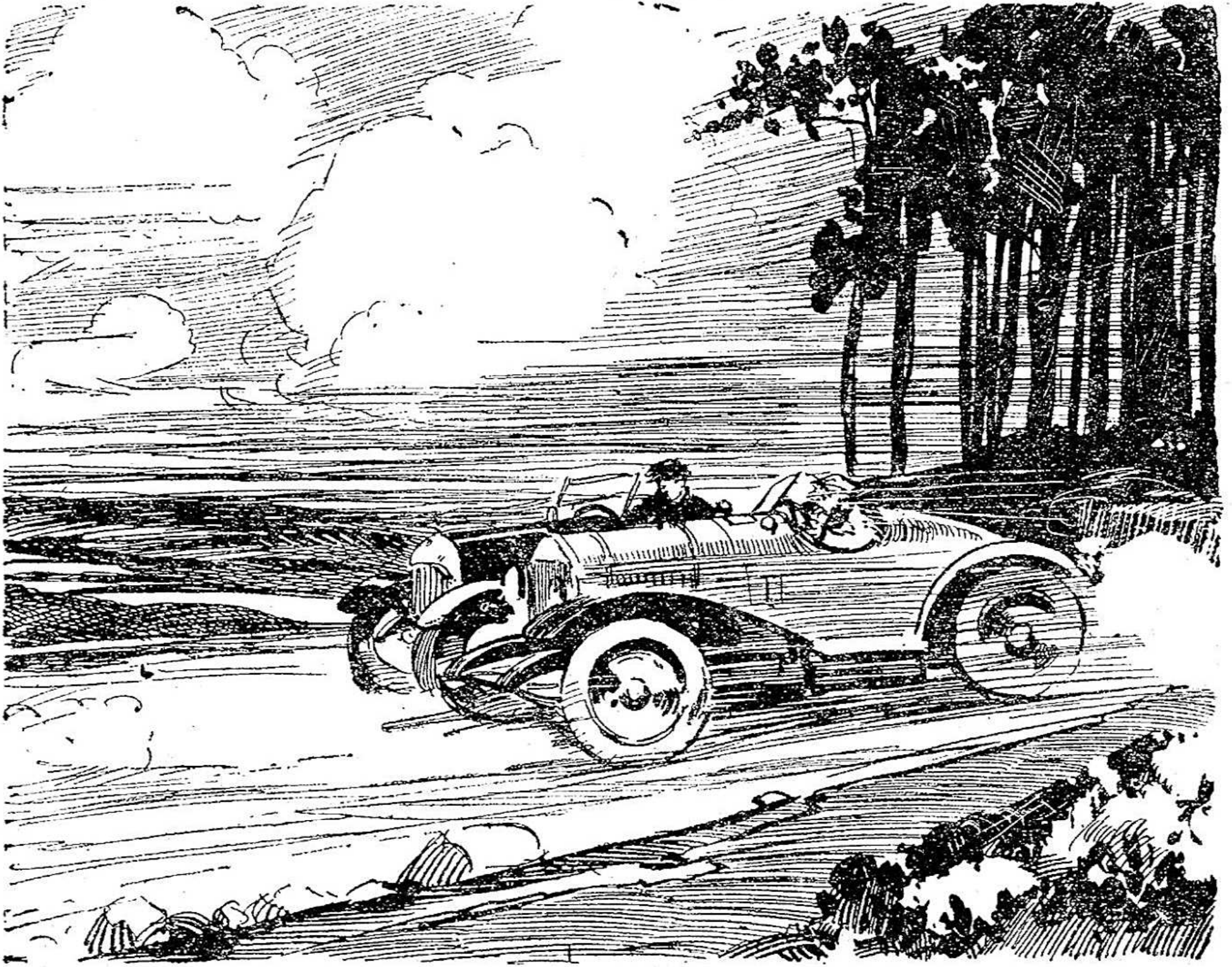
Archie backed away, and regarded his visitor with utter contempt, anger and loathing.

ping. And Archie regarded such motorists as fiends in human form. And now that he had one of these individuals in front of him, he hardly knew what to say.

"But, dash it—I mean—You foul blighter—"

"I tell you I lost my head!" moaned Felix frantically.

"But, look here!" exclaimed Archie, recovering himself. "Look here! If you didn't stop, how did you know that the little girl was killed? You fearful reptile,



"And at this very moment," proceeded Browne, "a crimson object shot past me like a shrapnel shell going into action."

CHAPTER VIII.

ARCHIE SEES DAYLIGHT.



"DON'T look at me like that!" panted Felix, as he glanced up at his host. "I couldn't help it! I just lost my head, and simply tore off like the

wind! It's a wonder I didn't break my neck! I must have gone round corners at fifty miles an hour!"

Archie couldn't speak for a moment. He had often read about motorists who knock people down, and then ride on without stop-

ping. And Archie regarded such motorists as fiends in human form. And now that he had one of these individuals in front of him, he hardly knew what to say.

"There—there was a man with her," groaned Felix. "That's why I escaped. They were both on the footpath, and the kid ran out into the road. Oh, it was fearful! If I'd stopped, this man would have collared me, and by this time I should have been in chokey!"

"That's where you ought to be, dash it!"

"It was an accident—"

"Perhaps it was—even a first-class cad of your sort wouldn't murder people deliberately," said Archie, with burning indignation. "You haven't got the dashed pluck, you frightful worm!"

"Oh, I say——"

"I've never heard of a more poisonous cove in all my days!" went on Archie hotly. "I mean to say, running over a child, and then buzzing off! You ought to be kicked all the way round London, and then chucked in the Thames! Not that the Thames deserves such pollution, dash you!"

Archie felt strongly, and he spoke strongly. The fact that Felix Spottiswood was ten years his senior made no difference. The chap was obviously a creature of no worth whatsoever. Archie had far more respect for a common-or-garden spider.

"I don't know what to do," moaned Felix hoarsely. "I know the kid was killed—it must have been! I was going at about forty miles an hour, and both my wheels went over her—— Besides, there was—— there was blood!"

"Blood!" repeated Archie, turning pale.

"Yes, on the car—on the off-side wing!" gabbled Felix, becoming almost hysterical. "I stopped about a mile further on, don't you know. The steering was upset a bit, and I was afraid of smashing myself up——"

"Nothing to be afraid of there," said Archie contemptuously.

"I got out, and looked at the car, and there was blood——" Felix shuddered. "Oh, I can't tell you any more! I pushed the car into a little wood, and left it there. I don't seem to remember much after that—except that I stumbled across some fields, and found a small railway station——"

He covered his face with his hands again, and rocked to and fro.

"There's only one thing to do," said Archie sternly. "I'm going to ring up the police."

Spottiswood leapt into the air.

"You—you don't mean that?" he gasped.

"I do, dash you!" said Archie. "You don't think I'm going to harbour a frightful murderer in my place, do you? You're worse than a murderer, you foul chunk of fungus!"

"Don't—don't!" blithered Felix miserably. "I'll—I'll do anything for you, if you'll only hide me somewhere! They don't know me—it was too dark for that man to see who I was! My people, you know—— The disgrace—— I've got to think of them——"

"You're only thinking about your own bally skin!"

"I'm not—I'm not!" persisted Felix. "But I expect the police will get me, anyhow. I'm not safe, even here—they'll probably come to this flat first! That's why I came—to make sure."

"Come to this flat first!" repeated Archie, staring.

"Yes," said Felix, his eyes gleaming feverishly. "You see, I had a suit-case with me—one that your brother lent me a year ago. I—I was going to let him have it back this week——"

"A suit-case?" repeated Archie, something flashing within him.

"Yes, one of those leather things, you know," went on Spottiswood, rocking up and down. "It was slung on the back, and when I stopped it wasn't there! I think it must have jerked off when I—when I hit the little kid! And it's got your brother's initials and address on that bag."

"Good gad!" said Archie.

"I thought perhaps the police would come here," said Felix. "I was frightfully worried about it. As they haven't been, it proves that I must have dropped the suit-case somewhere else. I remember going over a bump on the other side of Haslemere, and I suppose it jerked off then. Thank goodness! They won't connect it with the accident! So I'm safe!"

Archie stared at his visitor rather dazedly. For a moment he had half suspected Spottiswood of containing a grain of decency. He had thought that the man had come here to warn Captain Glenthorne about the suit-case. But it was quite obvious that Felix had been thinking entirely of himself in the matter.

And something else was stirring in Archie's brain, too.

He remembered the story which William Napoleon Browne had told him—a story, curiously enough, which bore an extraordinarily close resemblance to Spottiswood's. The one great difference was that Browne had spoken of a dead pig.

Even Archie, with his alleged limited brain power, saw daylight in a flash. The two stories were one and the same—and Felix Spottiswood was labouring under a complete delusion.

There hadn't been any child killed at all!

CHAPTER IX.

THE GRIM DETAILS.



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE sat down rather abruptly.

He gazed across at Felix Spottiswood, his mind working with great speed. Felix was rocking himself up and down on the couch, and moaning slightly. He was in no condition to observe the gladsome relief which shone out of Archie's eyes.

The swell of the St. Frank's Fourth was a tender-hearted youth, and it had pained him beyond measure to think of a little girl being torn and mangled beneath the wheels of this unutterable cad's car. He was not quite so concerned about the fate of the pig.

It was a pretty beastly business, even then, but Archie consoled himself with the thought that the pig had been on its way to the slaughter-house. According to Browne's story, it had been dispatched

painlessly, and probably with less cruelty than it would have suffered at the slaughterer's hands.

The suit-case clenched the affair beyond any manner of doubt.

With a start, Archie remembered that it was in this very room—actually beside the couch on which Spottiswood sat. If Felix caught sight of it, he would know at once that somebody had been.

But until the suit-case had been mentioned, Archie had never dreamed of connecting Felix's story with Browne's. Felix now believed that the case had dropped off his car at some earlier period of his ride.

There could be no question that Browne's account of the accident was the true one. Spottiswood had driven straight on without stopping, and in the dusk he had not been able to see anything clearly.

Browne, on the other hand, had stopped, had viewed the remains of the unfortunate porker, and had even had a brief conversation with the farmer. Browne had obtained concrete evidence. Spottiswood only possessed a delusion.

He had been going at such a speed that he had seen nothing except a dim form running out from the footpath. He had hit it, and had run over it, and had heard an agonised squeal, which he mistook for a childish scream. This was not at all to be wondered at—for a pig can utter a very humanlike cry at times. And Felix had been too panic-stricken to think clearly.

Archie breathed more freely. But, at the same time, his eyes took on an expression of deep loathing. He had considered it pretty contemptible for a motorist to ride on after killing a pig. But here was this Felix, pleading for help, firmly convinced that he had killed a little girl! The man was a cad of the first water.

Archie's first impulse was to tell him the truth at once, and put him out of his agony. But then he hesitated. Why should he? The fellow didn't deserve any sympathy of any kind.

And during those tense minutes Archie came to a decision.

"I'll teach this frightful bounder a lesson!" he told himself. "Absolutely! Dash it, I'll lead him such a dance that he'll remember this day's work for centuries and æons! For about twenty-four hours I'll make his frightful life a dashed nightmare!"

Archie's scheme was an excellent one. He would tell no lies, but he would allow Felix Spottiswood to labour under the misapprehension. Archie would say nothing to enlighten the cad.

But he would say a great deal to strengthen Felix's present belief—and thus make the man suffer further agonies. He deserved it. The fact that he had only killed a pig made no difference—for he didn't know this. His conduct was cowardly and despicable.

Archie rose to his feet, crossed over to

the couch, and with one swift movement pushed the suit-case out of sight underneath. Felix looked up with misery in his eyes.

"What are we going to do?" he moaned, in anguish.

"Do?" repeated Archie. "I'm dashed if I know for the moment—but we'll probably think of something."

"You're—you're not going to tell the police?"

"No."

"Oh, thanks frightfully!" muttered Felix. "I say, you're a brick! And you'll let me stay here to-night?"

"Absolutely!"

"That's ripping!" said Spottiswood. "It's not as if I'd done the thing deliberately, you know. It was a pure accident. In fact, it was the kid's own fault for dashing into the road. These kids are always a fearful nuisance. Worse than dogs!"

Archie gripped himself hard.

"Where did you leave the car?" he asked grimly.

"In a wood, some distance on the other side of Godalming, replied Felix, his tone now stronger and bolder. "You see, it's a red car, one of those rakish sporting models. I thought it was safer to leave it in the wood. So conspicuous on the road, don't you know—the police would have traced me in no time."

"But don't you think they'll find the car in the wood?"

"Never," said Felix, with confidence. "I shoved it right deep in the trees, and I needn't go for it until the whole thing has blown over. There'll be a hue and cry, but I'm safe now, thank goodness!"

"Don't you believe it, laddie," said Archie grimly. "Unless I help you pretty strenuously you'll soon be in gaol!"

CHAPTER X.

A QUESTION OF DISGUISE.



FELIX SPOTTISWOOD gave a kind of yelp. "Gaol!" he repeated shakily. "I say—Look here—"

"Gaol!" said Archie relentlessly. "Why, dash it, you were seen! By this time your description is probably circulated."

"But—but it was nearly dark—"

"These country people can see like the dickens!" said Archie. "Besides, that red car of yours must be conspicuous. The fact that you've hidden it is a mere trifle. By this time the police may be round at your own address, searching for you in the coal-cellar, or among the evergreens at the bottom of the garden. I mean, these police chappies are frightfully keen."

"Save me!" moaned Felix feebly.

"You're not even secure here," went on Archie. "I'm not going to tell any dashed lies about you, you fearful insect! If the police come I shall dashed well give you up on the instant! And you can't set foot outside the place without risking——"

"Can't I stay here for about a week?"

"No, you can't, you fearful bounder!" said Archie. "It's Bank Holiday to-morrow, and a whole crowd of fellows are coming round at breakfast-time. We're going on a picnic, you know. At about nine-thirty this flat will be swarming like a dashed rabbit-warren."

Felix Spottiswood trembled all over.

"Isn't— isn't there a cupboard?" he bleated.

"It doesn't matter whether there's a cupboard or not—I'm not going to leave you in my brother's flat on your own!" said Archie firmly. "Not dashed likely. Bertie is jolly particular! He doesn't allow murderers to ooze in and out——"

"I tell you it was an accident——"

"Let me think!" interrupted Archie. "Let me think, dash you!"

He paced up and down, apparently in deep concentration. As a matter of fact, he had already schemed out a workable plan—but he didn't want to let Felix know this too soon.

"I'll tell you what!" he exclaimed suddenly. "My valet, you know—good old Phipps—he's buzzed off to Manchester. That's where we can step in, so to speak. You've got to be my valet!"

"Your valet?" repeated Spottiswood.

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "And I shall have to take somebody else into our confidence—a frightfully keen chappie who's a masterpiece at disguising people. You needn't worry—he'll keep mum. But it's the only thing to do. You don't deserve all this fearful trouble——"

"But—but I can't act as your confounded batman!" protested Spottiswood, with some show of spirit. "Why, it's—it's menial! I've got my position to consider."

Archie gazed at him coldly.

"You frightful fright!" he ejaculated scornfully. "If you don't want to agree to my scheme, you can dashed well get out of this flat! I won't harbour you for another minute——"

"Oh, I say!" gasped Felix. "I—I'll do it!"

"You'll be my valet?"

"Yes."

"You'll have to come with us to-morrow on that picnic," said Archie, with relish.

"It'll be safer, you know. Who'll suspect you with whiskers on? And being with us you'll be absolutely O.K. What's the time? Midnight, dash it!"

Archie had determined to bring Nipper into this affair. Nipper was the one fellow who could disguise Spottiswood adequately. Instead of a tragedy, the whole affair would become a rather priceless Easter joke, and Felix Spottiswood would benefit by having a good lesson.

Archie looked up Nelson Lee's telephone number, and seized the instrument. He got through in less than a minute.

"Hallo, who's that?" came a cheery voice from the other end.

"What? 2 LO calling—I mean to say, it's me, you know," said Archie. "I thought I'd got dashed earphones on for a minute! Is that you, Nipper, old sportsman?"

"You ought to be in bed, Archie," said

Nipper.

"Bed? Good gad! I've forgotten what a bed's like!" replied Archie sadly. "What with all this buzzing in and out, and all this excitement, and chappies coming to me for assistance——"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Oh, rather!" said Archie brightly. "The fact is, laddie, I want you do me a somewhat ripe and juicy favour."

"You've got something with a ripe and juicy flavour?"

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

Second Series—Third Form.



No. 18.—Roderick Foote.

A silly young ass, old enough to be in the Fourth. He always affects a superior air, and talks of philosophy, and such like—but knows practically nothing.

"Dash it, no! A favour, you know—those things that Boy Scouts do every day," explained Archie. "A good deed, so to speak." "Oh!" came Nipper's chuckle. "Say on, Archie."

"Instead of getting here at nine-thirty, I want you to trickle round at eight o'clock," said Archie. "And I want you to bring some of your priceless disguise material with you. I can't explain over the 'phone—too frightfully public—but you know what I mean."

"A little joke, eh?"

"Absolutely," said Archie, nodding at the instrument. "That, as it were, is the brief idea. How about it? Will you trickle?"

"How can I refuse a request from our one and only Archie?" came Nipper's voice. "All right, old son—I'll be there to the minute. Mind you're up in good time to let me in."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "Absolutely! Thanks awfully, old cherub. Yards of gratitude, and all that sort of stuff!"

A minute later he rang off, and looked at Felix.

"And now we'd better get to bed," he said coldly. "Follow me, you frightful maggot, and I'll escort you to the jolly old spare bed-room."

Spottiswood winced, but he could hardly feel justified in protesting. In his present peculiar circumstances he had to submit to being called a maggot, and say nothing.

CHAPTER XI.

EARLY BIRDS.



NIPPER awoke with a little start.

"Seven o'clock, young 'un," said Nelson Lee cheerfully. "You'll have to put some speed on if you mean to get to Jermyn Street by eight. I suppose you'll want a snack before you start?"

It was the next morning, and Nipper, sitting up in bed, was rather surprised to see that Nelson Lee was fully dressed—although he was wearing his old dressing-gown in lieu of a jacket.

"You don't mean to say you got up early just to wake me, sir?" asked Nipper.

"You flatter yourself, my boy!" smiled the great detective. "No, I have been up since five-thirty. There were one or two experiments to be made in the laboratory—and I might as well confess that it was only by chance that I glanced at the clock just now. Come along—out of it!"

Nipper climbed out of bed, and glanced out of the window.

"Never!" he ejaculated, in amazement. "Am I still dreaming, or is the sun really shining? Is it possible to have a fine Easter Monday, guv'nor? I thought they'd gone out of fashion!"

"You mustn't judge by the sky," smiled

Nelson Lee. "There's no telling, with our wonderful weather, Nipper. By midday it may be pouring in torrents."

"That's right—cheer me up!" said Nipper.

"People have a habit of sneering at our weather," went on Lee. "And, curiously enough, the most bitter sneers of all are uttered by ourselves. Yet the English weather is the best in the world. Its charm lies in its very uncertainty. There is nothing more monotonous than continuous sunshine, day after day, without a break."

"Well, I hope there'll be continuous sunshine to-day, anyhow," said Nipper, as he dashed into his trousers. "All right, guv'nor—I'll be out in about four shakes. You might pass the word to Mrs. Jones that a couple of eggs wouldn't look bad on a round of toast!"

Nelson Lee chuckled and went out. And when Nipper appeared, ten minutes later, the poached eggs on toast were all ready for him, coyly hidden beneath a burnished dish-cover.

Nelson Lee was not interested in breakfast yet. He was looking rather thoughtful, and he didn't seem to be quite his old self. During the past few months he had taken an active part in many mysterious cases, and a great deal of colour had left his cheeks, and he was a trifle thinner.

"You're going off on this picnic to-day, aren't you?" he asked presently.

"Yes, sir," said Nipper, as he attacked the second egg.

"You'll meet a few of your St. Frank's friends?"

"Over a dozen of 'em."

"Well, Nipper, you can tell them that I've definitely made up my mind to return to the old school," said Lee. "I have heard from—"

"You mean it, guv'nor?" interrupted Nipper, jumping up eagerly.

"Yes."

"But you didn't tell me anything before—"

"It was only this morning that I finally decided," replied Nelson Lee. "I am feeling in need of a rest—and, although I expect to continue my detective work while at St. Frank's, the country air will be of much benefit. I have heard from Sir John Brent, the Chairman of the St. Frank's Board of Governors, and the new term will find me installed as a full resident."

"That's the best piece of news I've heard for months, sir," said Nipper enthusiastically. "The chaps will go dotty with delight, too. You don't realise how popular you are, guv'nor!"

"I'm afraid I don't deserve all this flattery," said Nelson Lee drily. "Mr. Beverley Stokes, of course, will retain his position in the Ancient House. I shall fill a less tying position as lecturer on chemistry and the scientific aspect of detection. I shall, in fact, be in full charge of the new laboratory."

"I can see we're going to have a good time, sir," said Nipper happily. "The summer term's the best term of all at school—with cricket and other kinds of sport. I'm longing to be back."

"Between ourselves, Nipper, so am I," admitted Nelson Lee.

Nipper went off soon afterwards, as pleased as Punch. In fact, he felt so exuberant that he indulged in the luxury of a taxi, and thus arrived at Captain Glenthorne's flat in Jermyn Street nearly ten minutes before eight o'clock.

He had dismissed his taxi, and was just about to enter the main hall of the building when another taxi drew up. Nipper glanced back, and saw the tall figure of William Napoleon Browne emerge from the vehicle.

Nipper paused, and nodded with recognition.

"Hallo, Prince Augustine!" he said, grinning.

"Hail, brother, well met!" said Browne graciously. "I perceive that your memory is fitted with a full double spring action. I may be wrong, of course, but are you about to charm one, Archibald Glenthorne, with your sunny personality?"

"Why, yes," said Nipper.

"Then let us invade the flat together," went on Browne. "And then, without doubt, Brother Glenthorne's cup of happiness will be filled to the uttermost brim."

CHAPTER XII.

THE CONSPIRACY.



"**O**DDSLIFE! I mean to say, whoa! Tally-ho, and all that sort of stuff"

Archie Glenthorne awoke suddenly with a feverish hand clutching at his shoulder. He struggled up on one elbow, and gazed at the apparition standing beside his bed.

"There's somebody at the door!" panted the apparition.

"The door?"

"Yes, banging like the dickens——"

"Oh, the door!" said Archie dazedly. "Laddie, be good enough to dash out of the limelight. I mean, those pyjamas! Somewhat dazzling to the eyesight, if you grasp the old trend."

"They're your pyjamas, anyhow," said Felix Spottiswood.

"Good gad! Really?" murmured Archie. "Old Phipps always gazed at that particular set with a kind of jaundiced eye. And now,

dash it, I can understand! I shall burn the poisonous things forthwith!"

"But the door——"

Rat-tat! Bang-bang-bang!

"There you are!" gasped Felix. "I believe it's the police!"

Archie hopped out of bed with alacrity.

"Nobody could call you an optimist, old boulder!" he observed. "But why doesn't Phipps rush to the rescue—— Oh, of course, the priceless cove is hobnobbing with Uncle George. He's gone to the place where there's always plenty of rain, what?"

Archie dashed into his dressing-gown, and flew to the mirror, and hastily brushed his hair. Then, wearing odd slippers, he hastened out into the hall, and threw open the front door.

"Is this what you call being up?" grinned Nipper. "We've been hammering for ages——"

"Yards of sorrow, old sparrow, but I've had a most frightful time," explained Archie. "Oddslife! Browne again, what? I mean——"

"Say no more!" interrupted Browne kindly.

"I can well understand your untold joy at my unexpected arrival—so do not trouble to give expression to your delight. Brother Browne is on the spot, and what more need be said?"

They went into the flat, and Archie closed the door.

"Browne, old tulip, be good enough to relate the diverting tale of the pig to Nipper," said Archie. "There are a few frightfully good reasons why he should know all about it."

"The pig?" asked Nipper, in surprise.

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Browne will rally round with the old yarn. In the meantime, I shall have an opportunity of throwing a few wrappings around the old carcase!"

"Leave it to me," said Browne gracefully. "You have hit upon my pet hobby. If there is one thing I like in the early morning, it is to tell touching stories on the subject of pigs to attentive listeners. So let us be merry, Brother Nipper."

They went into the sitting-room, and Archie hurried back to his bed-room. He found Felix Spottiswood clutching at the bed-rail with anxiety. He looked at Archie with a kind of haunting fear.

"Well?" he asked hoarsely.

"Only a couple of lads from the village," said Archie. "That is to say, Nipper and that fearful spouter, Browne."

"Who's Browne?"

"A frightfully decent sort, I believe, but a perfect beggar for talking," replied Archie, without realising that he ran Browne a close second. "Nipper is the laddie who will presently get busy on your dashed face. There's one cheerful outlook—he can't make it any worse!"

"Any worse?" repeated Felix. "My face?"

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"Nature," replied Archie, "did the job thoroughly."

Spottiswood frowned.

"You're a bit cheeky——" he began.

"Be good enough to flow away and dress," interrupted Archie frigidly. "Kindly remember that you are a frightful cad! The less conversation I have with you, dash you, the better! Clothe the old body, and await the young master's summons. From this minute you are my valet."

Felix vanished into his own bed-room, and Archie got dressed.

In the meantime, Browne related the story of the pig to Nipper, going into full

tain flash in his eye which betokens a massive thought. Be good enough, Brother Archie, to share this electrical shaft with us."

"Well, the fact is," said Archie. "This poisonous chappie who killed the pig is absolutely on the premises."

"On the premises?" repeated Nipper.

"Getting dressed!" said Archie. "I want you to disguise him."

Browne slowly rubbed his hands together.

"I may be at fault, but it seems to me that we have the elements of a stirring drama surrounding us," he observed.

"Lose no time in enlarging, Brother Archie, or I am pulling at my leash."



"I—I must have come to the wrong flat!" gabbled the visitor, with a hasty glance over his shoulder. "Awfully sorry! I thought this was where Bertie Glenthorne lived . . ."

details, and thus causing Nipper much amusement. There was a certain whimsicality about the tall Fifth Former which was quite attractive. He certainly had a "way" with him.

Archie appeared at last.

"About time, too," said Nipper. "I've heard the story of the pig, and I agree with you that the fellow in the car was an outsider of the worst type. But I'm all at sea. Why did you want me to hear it? And why did you ask me to bring these disguise materials along?"

"Brother Archie has a good reason, no doubt," said Browne. "I perceive a cer-

CHAPTER XIII.

PUTTING IT ACROSS OLD SPOTTY.



NIPPER shook his head.

"I'm not usually dense, but I'm hanged if I can fathom this business," he remarked.

"Do you mean to say you want me to disguise this chap? He's an absolute rotter——"

"Dash it, he's far worse than that," interrupted Archie. "He's named Felix Spottiswood—used to be a lieutenant, or some-

like that—and he's the Curse of the Spottiswood family, as it were."

"I can believe it!" said Nipper, grinning.

"He came to me last night, after Browne had gone," continued Archie. "I hated the cove at first sight. Took one look, and felt absolutely dithery down the spine. I fancy he used to know old Bertie—although Bertie tried to choke the sponging rotter off time after time."

"Without having seen the man, I can, of course, form no exact judgment," said Browne. "But from hearsay alone, I should set him down as being a decidedly blistered specimen. Leave this affair entirely in my hands, Brother Glenthorne. Tell me all, and our wonderful resources of brain and muscle will be at your disposal."

"The fact is, this chappie thinks he killed a little girl," said Archie.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Nipper.

"Twice!" observed Browne briefly.

"A little girl, mind you," went on Archie, with burning indignation. "And then he had the absolute nerve to stagger into this flat asking me to hide him under the what-not!"

"A most unreasonable proposal," said Browne, nodding. "I entirely agree with you, Brother Glenthorne, in refusing this —"

"Kindly allow me to continue the old narrative," interrupted Archie stiffly. "I mean to say, once you get going, laddie, you're like a dashed burst in the main! Briefly, this is the present posish."

Archie explained Felix's story in detail, and Nipper could see that there was no possibility of there being any mistake. For Browne verified the exact spot between Haslemere and Godalming, and the evidence of the suit-case was in itself conclusive.

"You see, this out-and-out cad thinks he killed the child, and came here for help," concluded Archie. "Well, dash it, it struck me that it would be too frightfully merciful to tell him the truth straight off. I mean, a bally toadstool of that kind ought to be taught a lesson!"

"I see it all!" said Browne, rising. "You intend to let him labour under this simple delusion for the rest of the day? Brother Glenthorne, we beg to extend you our hearty congratulations. Gazing at you squarely in the face, we cannot understand how you do it. But no matter. Let us pass on to more important questions. The scheme—admittedly a hot scheme—is to keep this reckless speedster on a certain amount of tenterhooks until it pleases us to toss him to the lions?"

"Absolutely," said Archie.

"It's a good idea," said Nipper slowly. "The man deserves it. He thinks he killed the child, so it stands to reason that he would have acted exactly the same if he had actually killed one. A few hours of torment will do him good, and have a lasting effect."

"I thought about making him come with us on the picnic," said Archie. "As my valet, what? Phipps, you know, has buzzed off to Manchester to perch himself on the bedside of a departing relative. So the whole thing can be done with ease."

"You haven't hinted to him that his victim was only a pig?"

"Good gad, no!" said Archie. "The awful cove believes the worst!"

"Then," said Browne, "we can move without delay. Have you, by any chance, a copy of last Thursday's 'Daily Illustrated' swishing about in the ocean of ancient and bygone journals?"

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," said Archie. "Phipps is a careful old stick, you know, and generally hoards up these bally newspapers."

"Then stir your stumps, Brother Glenthorne, and make a search," exclaimed Browne. "Brother Felix is already splashing about in the oxtail, but nothing will delight me better than to see him foundering."

Archie hurried out, and returned within three minutes, triumphantly carrying the required newspaper.

"Excellent—excellent!" beamed Browne. "Brother Archie, you have our permission to go up two places. While I am searching this honourable sheet, you may amuse yourselves with the latest cross-word puzzle, or any other form of light frivolity which occurs to you. But let there be peace while I make my investigation."

He soon found the paragraph he wanted, and gave a little sigh.

"Now you can lead the victim in to his fate," he remarked. "It will not be necessary for you to broadcast the fact that this newspaper is five days old. My amazing memory—absolutely unassisted by Pelmanism—remembered the fact that a certain apt paragraph appeared on Thursday last."

Archie went into the bed-room, and returned almost at once with Felix Spottiswood—who was now dressed, and who looked very much like a lamb going to the slaughter.

CHAPTER XIV.

BROWNE TAKES CHARGE.



"HAVE no fear," said William Napoleon Browne. "It may be difficult, but do your best to look less like a garden slug. There are times when we must all make these manly efforts, and this, Brother Spottiswood, is one of them."

Felix looked at Browne and Nipper apprehensively.

"They know everything," said Archie. "I told them the whole dashed story."

"Oh, I say——"

"You ought to think yourself lucky to get any help at all," said Nipper curtly.

"In a very short time, Brother Nipper, our dear friend will grovel at our knees," said Browne calmly. "Place yourself in a firmly supported position, Brother Spottiswood, and get ready to clutch at something. I am about to read bad news."

"What bad news?" bleated Felix, with sudden alarm.

"Wait! This impatience is unseemly!" reproved Browne. "You must remember that you are in exactly the same position as a mouse with its tail caught deftly beneath the trap spring. I mention this in passing—in case you should forget. I am not sure whether you possess a tail, but as your name is Felix, I should imagine you do."

"Look here——"

"I half expect," went on Browne, "to observe notes of interrogation shooting upwards from your cranial cavity. I am led to believe that Felix himself indulges in these childish pastimes. But to proceed with the stern business of the day. You are firmly supported? There is no danger of your swift and sudden collapse? Good! Then open up your listening apparatus, and hearken unto the voice of fate!"

Browne picked up the newspaper, and gazed at it.

"I will entertain you with a little paragraph," he said benevolently. "It has an attractive heading which says: 'A Surrey Motoring Fiend.' Do you not agree with me, Brother Spottiswood, that——"

"Good heavens!" moaned Felix, sagging at the knees.

"The paragraph itself runs thus: 'An unknown motorist ran over and killed a child on the main London to Portsmouth road last night,'" said Browne gravely. "Listen carefully, Brother Spottiswood, for this is all important. 'This cowardly scoundrel neither stopped nor reported the accident to the police, but vanished into the night. It is one of the most appalling cases of criminal road-hogging which we have reported for many weeks. Needless to say, the police are actively hunting for the culprit, and an arrest is expected at any moment.' Brother Glenthorne, be good enough to bring a few props. I may be wrong, but it seems to me that Brother Spottiswood is noticeably in need of them."

Felix had collapsed on to the couch.

"I knew it—I knew it!" he moaned. "They're after me already!"

"You see?" asked Browne. "He knew it all the time! It is just as well, for it is possible that he will now fall in with our plans without the slightest jibbing. Not," he added, "that it would matter much if he did jib. It would take but a few moments for me to bring my celebrated anti-jibbing device into play."

Browne paused, not because he had nothing further to say, but because he wanted that paragraph to sink fully into Felix's head. Felix didn't know it, but it referred to another motorist altogether—and to a section of the Portsmouth road fifty miles distant from the pig incident. But Browne thought it just as well to omit these details.

The effect was quite good.

"I—I'll do anything!" groaned Spottiswood. "If only you'll hide me from the police—or do something to keep them away! I don't care what it is—I'll—I'll even scrub the floors if you want me to!"

"Housework done free of charge," observed Browne. "But not, I fear, free of blemishes. Upon the whole, Brother Spottiswood, I think we can excuse you this particular duty. But we must be firm about the whiskers."

"Whiskers? What whiskers?"

"Ah, here we see the result of two minds being out of tune," said Browne sadly. "Were you to concentrate more, Brother Spottiswood, you would do better. But perhaps I expect too much. How, after all, can one concentrate without the necessary machinery?"

"I don't understand," said Felix apprehensively.

"Whether you understand or whether you do not understand, is entirely immaterial," said Browne. "All we have to do, Brother Spottiswood, is to relax, and allow Brother Nipper to operate upon your frontispiece. I have no doubt that he will make considerable architectural improvements. I have seldom gazed upon such an unimposing facade."

The newspaper paragraph—so brilliantly remembered by Browne—had certainly done the trick. Firmly convinced that the police were after him, Felix Spottiswood was ready for anything.

And Nipper busied himself without delay.

Browne drew Archie aside, and took him into the hall.

"Leave this interesting little problem in my able hands, Brother Glenthorne," he said easily. "Throw yourself heartily into the enjoyment of the day, and worry no more. For I am on the spot, and I may safely add that Brother Spottiswood is in for a hectic round of jollity."

"But he's coming with us on the picnic, you know," said Archie. "I mean to say, you won't be there——"

"A slight misapprehension which I must at once dissolve," interrupted Browne gently. "Hitherto I have had no opportunity of thanking you for your cordial invitation, but I now do so with all the grace and charm for which we are justly celebrated."

"Oh, but I say——"

"Enough! Do not embarrass me with these touching expressions of gratitude," said Browne. "I am built like that. I do these gracious acts spontaneously, distributing sunshine wherever I go. I have had grave doubts as to whether your picnic

would have been a success—but now that I have decided to come, its complete triumph is assured."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie feebly.

"And now, just one more word," said Browne. "Although you are undoubtedly the host, Brother Glenthorne, I shall be the sole Director of Operations. The party will go whither I take it. I might say that I have a peppery scheme up my capacious sleeve, and I can assure you that Brother Spottiswood is not only going through the mill, but he will find it necessary to negotiate a considerable number of hoops. Indeed, I venture to suggest that the next few hours will be recorded in history as the Turning Point in an Idle Life."

CHAPTER XV.

THE GATHERING OF THE CLANS.



"**W**E'RE late!" said Church regretfully.

"Yes, by George, it's nearly twenty minutes to ten!" exclaimed Handforth.

"What did I tell you? This is what comes of hanging about for you asses! I've got to suffer the stigma of unpunctuality because of your giddy laziness! Blow these cross-word puzzles!"

"Cross-word puzzles!" said McClure warmly.

"You can't kid me!" snorted Handforth. "Instead of going to bed last night, you sat up trying to find out that blessed word! Ten letters, with two 'g's' in the middle——"

"It was all your silly fault for being up late!" interrupted Church indignantly. "We called for you twenty minutes before time, and you hadn't even got up! Didn't Willy tell us?"

"If you mention Willy to me again I'll biff you!" roared Handforth.

They were mounting the stairs to Captain Glenthorne's flat. Handforth frowned darkly, as though at some unpleasant recollection. He knew well enough that he was to blame for this lateness, but it pleased him to put the onus on his chums' shoulders.

There had been a painful scene in the Handforth mansion that morning. Willy, rising much earlier than the household, had commenced operations by letting off a couple of jumping crackers under his major's bed.

Being effectually awakened, Handforth had found the room filled with gunpowder-smoke and Willy's cackles. A chase had resulted throughout the house, in which Willy was the easy winner. Having given it up, Handforth went back to bed—although he knew well enough that he had no excuse for such an action.

On the top of all this, Willy had industriously sewn his major's clothing up over night. Thus, when Handforth finally decided to dress, he found his shirt hermetically sealed, his trousers minus an opening, and

even his waistcoat and jacket were closed up like jumpers.

Under the circumstances, it was rather surprising that Handforth & Co. had turned up for the picnic only ten minutes late. The very mention of Willy's name was calculated to bring fire to Handy's eyes.

Still thinking of Willy, Edward Oswald used the knocker on Archie's door so violently that he nearly cracked one of the panels. And the whole building seemed to shiver and shake.

"Go easy, old man!" said Church.

"Mind your own business!" snapped Handforth. "I expect we're the first to arrive, anyhow. Everybody's bound to be late. When there's no rising-bell, these lazy beggars stick in bed for hours!"

The door opened, and Handforth stared.

"Hallo! I—I thought——"

He paused, and half-suspected that he had hammered on the wrong door. Instead of the placid Phipps, a total stranger confronted him. He was no ordinary kind of manservant. He was thin, weedy, and his chin lost itself before actually beginning. Short, neatly-trimmed side-whiskers adorned his cheeks, and he clung heavily to the door, and his mouth sagged.

"Kuk-kindly step inside, pup-please!" he muttered hoarsely.

Handforth & Co. stared blankly.

"The chap's ill!" said Handforth. "Look at his legs—they're wobbling like jelly! I say, is this Archie Glenthorne's place?"

The unfortunate Felix Spottiswood—having believed that the police had come, owing to Handforth's thunderous knock—took some moments to recover. And while he was in the middle of this process, Archie himself appeared.

"What-ho! Trickle in, laddies—trickle in!" he said cordially.

"What's this thing?" demanded Handforth.

He indicated Spottiswood with a light touch on the shoulder—at least, Handforth thought it was a light touch. Felix lost his clutch on the door, reeled back, and having reached the passage wall, sank slowly to the floor. His legs were apparently insecure.

"Good gad!" said Archie, dropping his monocle.

"You'd better get a doctor!" said Handforth. "The man's dying!"

"What priceless rot!" said Archie hastily. "He's my new man, you know——"

"I thought he was your new jellyfish!"

"Spotty, to be exact," went on Archie. "The fact is, he's a bit new to his job. Doesn't know the ropes, and so forth. Only temporary, of course—Phipps will be back by to-morrow."

Felix rose painfully from the floor, and tried to compose himself. And Handforth & Co., wondering, passed into the sitting-room. Edward Oswald took one step into the apartment, and then paused.

William Napoleon Browne was deep in conversation with Willy. At least, Browne

was talking, and Willy was listening. The fag had an intense, rapt expression on his face.

"And that," said Browne, "is the story of my early boyhood. Let me pass you on a word of warning——"

"Eh?" said Willy. "Were you talking? I was just trying to think of an Italian river that begins with an O and ends with a Z. Blessed if I know why these Italians give their rivers such dotty names!"

"Alas!" sighed Browne. "Two thousand five hundred words wasted! All my early history brushed aside for the sake of these cross-words—— But what is this? I was aware of a draught, but I did not know that it had wafted something into our midst."

He gazed at Handforth, and bowed gracefully.

CHAPTER XVI.

ALL ABOARD!



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH grunted.

"So you're here, are you?" he asked. "You're the chap who spoofed St. Frank's the other week. I didn't know you were one of Archie's pals."

"None of us are perfect," said Browne. "Even I, with all my amazing qualifications, cannot claim to be jewelled in every joint. When, ultimately, I become Prime Minister——"

"And what the dickens are you doing here?" interrupted Handforth, glaring at Willy. "It's like your nerve to push your way into this flat! I'm going to kick you out——"

"Fathead, I'm one of the guests!" said Willy.

"By George, I'll—I'll——"

"Let there be no vulgar brawling," interrupted Browne pacifically. "Much as I am in favour of warfare when the occasion demands, I must pass an unqualified veto on this unhappy scene. Remember, Brother Handforth, that you are under the roof of our mutual host. And try, with all your strength, to recollect the few manners that were indicated to you in childhood."

Handforth pulled himself up, and breathed hard.

"All right—I'll reserve it," he growled. "I'd forgotten I was in Archie's place."

"A decidedly handsome withdrawal," said Browne approvingly. "Such self command does you great credit, Brother Handforth. In case you are unaware of the fact, be good enough to realise that I am the master of the ceremonies. The picnic is entirely in my hands."

Exactly what Handforth would have said in reply to this remark remains unknown, for Nipper entered at this moment, escorting Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West. And after that all the other guests seemed to arrive in a clump.

Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey were closely

followed by Alf Brent and John Basterfield Boots and Bob Christine. Then Fatty Little arrived, puffing and blowing after a super-breakfast. As he explained, he had laid in a good stock, in order to start the day well.

Cecil de Valerie was the last one to turn up—and by this time the flat was fairly swarming. There were fifteen Fourth-Formers all told, and Browne was quite content to be in such company.

There was no false dignity about Browne. He was older than most Fifth-Formers, but he was just as unruffled in the company of fags as he was in the company of prefects. His great policy in life was to take things easily, whatever the circumstances.

Nobody took much notice of Spottiswood. Some of the juniors were rather surprised that Archie should engage such a hopeless specimen, but they realised that he was only a temporary man.

As for Felix himself, he was gradually recovering some of his strength. Nobody seemed to guess that he was disguised, and it was forced upon him that among all these noisy juniors he would be perfectly safe. In the capacity of a manservant he would never be suspected.

The motor-coach arrived prompt on time, and it was indeed a luxurious affair. Low built, with pneumatic tyres, and looking like an overgrown limousine, there was comfort galore. The interior was handsomely decorated, with plush-covered lounge seats. And at the rear there were some enormous built-in lockers. Fatty eyed these latter with concern.

"Where's the grub?" he asked anxiously. "Not in those giddy lockers?"

"Absolutely," said Archie.

"Great pancakes!" gasped Fatty. "There won't be enough for a snack!"

"Have no fear," interrupted Browne. "I have already inspected the menu, and I can safely assure you that we shall be lucky to crawl, at the end of the picnic. Our mutual host has been lavish. Cold chickens galore, sundry hams, sandwiches in mountains, and cakes and pastries too numerous to mention are included on the list. Be at peace, Brother Little, for all is well. Do not judge by outer appearances. It is always a fatal mistake."

Browne was speaking with knowledge. He had indeed inspected the menu, and he wondered how on earth a mere eighteen human beings—including Felix and the driver—could hope to get rid of the enormous amount of food which had been ordered.

However, after gazing thoughtfully at Fatty Little for a moment, Browne concluded that there was still hope of a clean board at the finish.

There was a good deal of bustle as the party took their seats, a good deal of argument because Handforth wanted a front seat, and couldn't get one, and a good deal of chaff and laughter.

But everybody was aboard at last, and the great motor-coach glided off.

CHAPTER XVII.

BROWNE SELECTS THE SPOT.



ONE reason why Handforth hadn't been able to get a front seat was because Browne got there first. Beside him sat Felix Spottiswood, and this was the main reason for Handforth's bitterness.

He couldn't see why a confounded manservant should share the frontal position with a beastly Fifth-Former. But, as Archie knew, there were excellent reasons. And Archie did his best to soothe Handforth with honeyed words.

He pointed out, with much grace, that everybody else in the coach would be miserable without Handforth's sunny face in their midst. Decidedly pacified, Handforth accepted the situation.

Browne had two reasons for being in front.

Firstly, he wanted to keep his eye on the road, and to issue instructions to the driver, and, secondly, he wanted to keep a firm grip on Felix. Browne had a sort of idea that Felix would partially collapse when the chosen picnicking spot was reached. He was half afraid, in fact, that Felix would suffer from acute heart failure.

The luxurious coach glided along Fulham Road, over the Thames at Putney Bridge, and thence across the Heath, and so on along the main Portsmouth road. In the meantime, the Fourth-Formers made merry.

Various songs were sung, including, "It ain't goin' to rain no mo'"—which, as Browne solemnly pointed out, was tempting Providence rather severely. He further indicated that it was decidedly stale.

Spottiswood was growing more and more restless as the journey progressed. He shifted about in his seat, and he gazed at the roadside with almost bloodshot eyes.

"Pardon me if I am at fault, Brother Spettiswood, but do I detect a certain un-

easiness?" asked Browne politely. "Your seat, perhaps, has a recalcitrant spring? You are suffering from a refractory shoe? I will acknowledge that corns are extremely painful. I have a perfect remedy——"

"We're passing through Cobham!" muttered Felix, in a hollow voice.

"Ah, you know the country?" beamed Browne. "Splendid! Your knowledge of geography is praiseworthy——"

"Are—are we going through Ripley and then Guildford?"

"I trust so," replied Browne. "Either

that, or we shall plunge into the nearest ditch. I have detected a certain recklessness in the driver's demeanour which occasionally unnerves me. However, he is the man on the job, and it were carping for us to complain."

"Guildford!" muttered Felix. "And then Godalming?"

"A charming place," said Browne. "Indeed, the scenery in these wild parts of Surrey is not only superb but——"

"Can't—can't we go some other way?" asked Spottiswood desperately, "Round by Dorking, for example, or—or Leatherhead——"

"Much as I admire Dorking and Leatherhead, I fear that the proposal must meet with our unqualified veto," said Browne. "Be at peace, Brother Spottiswood. Place your trust in me, and all will be well."

Felix relapsed into a moody silence.

This was the last place in the world he wanted to go to—the

one road of all roads he wanted to avoid. As he sat hunched in his seat, his mind dwelt continuously upon the tragedy of last night. It happened on this very road! Perhaps they would pass the actual spot!

Felix shivered, and prayed that the picnickers would branch off on to some other highway further on. He had suffered torture enough. He didn't want to revisit the scene of his crime. He might even come face to face with the child's father! The thought nearly made him faint.

Browne, observing these subtle changes,

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

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No. 19.—Leonard Simms
(Simms Minor).

A surly youngster. For some reason, he generally prefers to be on bad terms with everybody, is habitually disagreeable, and is generally ready to indulge in any mischief.

felt distinctly pleased. Spottiswood was certainly going through the mill. The various hoops would come later. As far as the juniors were concerned, one spot was just as good as another—the feed, after all, was the thing.

After Guildford had been passed, and Godalming hove in sight, Spottiswood became more and more agitated. Even Handforth noticed it. And when Handforth noticed anything he gave a public display of his utter lack of tact.

“What’s the matter with your manservant, Archie?” he demanded.

“Eh? What? My manservant?” asked Archie. “Oh, rather!”

“He’s ill again!” said Handforth.

“I expect he’s getting hungry,” said Fatty Little sympathetically. “I’m feeling a bit rocky myself. There’s nothing like a motor ride to give you a terrific appetite. I suppose we couldn’t stop here?”

“Dry up, glutton!” said Handforth. “I believe that manservant’s ill. Look at the way he’s sagging! And when he looked round just now his face was as pale as a piece of paper!”

Browne glanced round, and smiled.

“Have no fear, Brother Handforth,” he observed. “We are looking after Brother Spotty with care and solicitude. Should he become faint, we have an ample supply of meat tabloids to give him sustenance.”

“I don’t think he ought to have come!” said Handforth firmly.

“Brother Spotty, you heard?” asked Browne. “Be good enough to raise the vocal chords and give voice. I think I am not mistaken in asserting that you are supremely overjoyed to be with us?”

“Yes, tha-thank you,” mumbled Felix miserably.

“You are feeling quite robust and sound?”

“Yes, I’m fuf-line,” gurgled Spottiswood.

“You see?” said Browne smoothly.

“Brother Spotty is at peace with the world, and these slight indications of fading-



Edward Oswald paused, and half suspected that he had hammered on the wrong door. Instead of the placid Phipps, a total stranger confronted him.

out are a mere habit. Set your minds quite at rest, for Brother Spotty is full of beans.”

And Felix, much to his relief, was forgotten. And although he felt weaker and weaker as the miles were covered, he fought hard to contain his growing anxiety.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PICNIC.



“GORGEOUS!” said Fatty Little ecstatically.

— “Dash it all, I’m inclined to agree with you, laddie!” said Archie, screwing his monocle into his eye.

and surveying the scenery. “Of all the priceless spots, I must admit this is the most priceless! The good old forest glade, what? The fairy dell, so to speak—”

“Fairy dell?” repeated Fatty. “You ass, I’m talking about the grub!”

"Oddslife!" gasped Archie.

He came back to earth, and observed that Fatty was gazing with glowing eyes at the sumptuous spread. Archie, on the other hand, had been drinking in the beauties of the scenery. Handforth and a few others were drinking in a goodly quantity of ginger-beer.

The picnic was about to commence.

Nobody could possibly complain of Browne's judgment. He had selected a truly idyllic spot for the spread. Just off the main road, and in the recesses of a stately forest.

The foodstuff had been carried into a kind of glade—the coach-driver and Felix performing most of this strenuous labour. The forest towered on either side, but at one end of the glade a clear vista was visible for miles—a superb view of rolling hills and wooded slopes. In the fresh flush of spring, the whole landscape was glorious. For there is no finer scenery on earth than that of the English countryside in spring.

The weather was still kindly. One or two clouds had occasionally come up, threatening a shower, but they had always obligingly changed their minds. And now that the picnic was about to start, the sun was shining with an almost June-like warmth.

The picnic looked fit for a king.

Gleaming white tablecloths were spread on the grass, and almost every inch was covered with various dishes. Cold chicken, sliced ham, ribs of beef, glaze tongue, and other foodstuffs too numerous to mention were displayed to the eye. There were hundreds of rolls, piles of sandwiches, and cakes and pastries galore.

Just at the edge of the glade the driver was busy with a spirit-stove and an enormous urn. And there were several cases of assorted mineral waters to be going at in the meantime.

"By Jove, I must say you've done the thing properly, old man," remarked Pitt, slapping Archie on the back. "This is about the finest picnic I've ever seen!"

"Don't mensh., old sportsman," smiled Archie. "Kindly pile in, and get the old molars going."

"Rather!" said Reggie. "Fatty's busy already."

In less than five minutes the juniors were all squatting round the festive "board," enjoying the picnic with healthy appetites. Browne had appointed himself chief carver and acting host. And he took care to keep Felix Spottiswood on the run all the time.

Felix, in fact, had no rest. When he wasn't carrying plates round, he was clearing plates away, and he hardly had a moment for thinking of his own troubles. Yet these were grave enough.

As Browne had foreseen, the luckless Felix had nearly collapsed when this particular glade had been chosen. For it was within a couple of hundred yards of the

spot where his own red motor-car was concealed. It was small wonder that Spottiswood carried out his duties in a kind of daze.

It never occurred to him that the place had been chosen deliberately. He thought it was a pure accident—a mere coincidence. But then, of course, he had no inkling that William Napoleon Browne knew a great deal more about that "accident" than he did himself.

The picnic proceeded merrily.

At the end of half-an-hour the provisions were looking a bit weak. The chickens had become mere skeletons, and even the big ham was somewhat bony. While most of the juniors were merely toying with the sweets, Fatty Little was still going ahead like a true trencherman.

"You will pardon me, I am sure, Brother Little," said Browne gently. "But is it not time that you applied the hydraulic brake? Nothing pains me more than to observe a fellow human exploding like a Christmas cracker. And something seems to indicate that the danger-point is nearly reached."

"Gug-gugh!" said Fatty.

"I entirely disagree with that observation," said Browne. "Will someone kindly remove all food from within Brother Little's reach? I hate to see this——"

"You silly ass!" roared Fatty. "I've only just started!"

"Brother—brother! What strange words are these?" asked Browne, shocked. "Alas, I fear that Brother Little is a Lost Cause. But there is always a bright ray in the darkest hour. Grave-digging, I am told, is most healthy exercise. We must commence work almost at once."

Fatty looked startled.

"Don't take any notice of the chump!" said Nipper, grinning. "Not that he isn't partially right. Unless you ease up soon, Fatty, you'll burst something. Enough's as good as a feast!"

"When I've had enough, I'll stop," growled Fatty.

And he munched on with a newly acquired edge to his appetite. Even a brief pause was sufficient to give Fatty an added zest.

CHAPTER XIX.

BROWNE'S NEW FRIEND.



PEACE reigned.

Half an hour had elapsed, and the picnic was over. Seven or eight juniors sprawled about in the grass, sleeping. There is nothing like a heavy meal to induce slumber. Fatty was flat on his back, looking like a miniature hillock, and contented snores were arising.

Some of the other fellows had wandered off into the woods to explore, and the driver of the motor-coach, having packed up the remains, had sallied down the road.

Even Browne had disappeared, although nobody knew exactly where he'd gone to. Felix Spottiswood sat hunched on a tree-stump, more miserable and jumpy than ever. The fact that some juniors had penetrated into the wood kept him on feverish tenter-hooks. At any moment he expected somebody to come rushing back with the news that a motor-car had been found.

If Felix had possessed a real brain, instead of a substitute, he would have known that there was no real cause for alarm. Even if the car was found, it wouldn't be connected with him. It was only his guilty conscience which caused him such acute anxiety.

It had been decided that no move would be made for at least an hour. There was something pleasant in this lazy stay in the woods. Far better than the noise and excitement of a Bank Holiday in London.

Browne had outlined a good programme for the afternoon. A leisurely run through Surrey and then back to London by a different route. And Browne had insisted upon the party being his guests for the evening. The old Uxtonian had taken quite a fancy to the Fourth-Formers, and, being generosity itself by nature, he felt that this was a good opportunity to make himself solid with the Fourth. Browne never lost a chance. There was never any telling what might happen at St. Frank's—and the support of the Fourth was valuable.

Browne was feeling highly satisfied with everything so far. But he felt that this affair of Felix Spottiswood needed rounding off. It would be altogether too tame to tell Felix of his error, and let it go at that. The time had arrived for a master-stroke. And Browne went about the business with all his boasted energy.

Having reached the road, he marched along it with brisk strides. It was nearly two miles to the spot where the pig had been killed, but he was prepared to walk even further, if necessary.

But luck was with him.

He had not travelled more than half-a-mile before he paused, shaded his eyes, and gazed over a hedge into the adjoining meadow. A few isolated farm-buildings were clumped together in the corner, looking very picturesque and fresh in the bright April sunlight. A burly man was preparing to enter a high dog-cart.

"Our superb eyesight is not at fault," murmured Browne. "Surely, those whiskers are familiar? Unless we are vastly mistaken, yonder cave-man is none other than our pigless friend of last night."

Browne had guessed that the farmer had resided somewhere near, and he had kept his eyes open alertly. But this early success delighted him. He leapt over the

low hedge, and loped across the meadow with long strides. The farmer saw him coming, and waited—instead of driving off along a rutty farm-track.

"We realise that this haste is unseemly, but why worry?" exclaimed Browne, as he arrived at the dog-cart. "Good-afternoon, brother! I fancy you have had the honour of meeting me before?"

The farmer, a bearded, red-faced man, looked at Browne without a great display of enthusiasm.

"Good-afternoon, young gent," he replied gruffly. "Wasn't you the one who come up just after my pig was run over last night?"

"I perceive that your memory is as gilt-edged as ever," said Browne. "Pray accept my apologies for having overlooked your name—"

"I never told you my name," interrupted the farmer. "It's Biggles—David Biggles—"

"A great and honourable name, Brother Biggles," said Browne approvingly. "I may be at fault, but was there not a celebrated Biggles at the Battle of Sedgemoor? This great warrior not only slew a few dozen of the enemy, but was, himself, graciously beheaded at the express command of Judge Jeffreys, in token of his good service. Doubtless an ancestor of yours, Brother Biggles?"

"I don't know nothin' about my ancestors, young gent," growled the farmer. "I s'pose you ain't heard no more about that young fool in the red car? By thunder! I'd like to get my hands on him!"

"And so you shall, Brother Biggles—so you shall," replied Browne. "Strictly between ourselves, I am on a mustard-like track. Come with me, and you will never regret it."

The farmer picked up his reins.

"I've got no time to waste this afternoon, young man," he said impatiently. "I've got to go over to Little Badsley—"

"I have no doubt that Little Badsley is awaiting your arrival with a full brass band, but Little Badsley will have to wait," interrupted Browne. "Your presence is far more essential in the forest glade."

Mr. Biggles didn't quite know how to take Browne. In fact, he didn't fully understand him. And he jerked his reins again.

"I'll bid ye good-afternoon," he said, clucking to his horse.

"Then you don't want to meet the miscreant who slew your pig?" asked Browne.

"Meet him?" said the farmer. "He ain't here, is he?"

"I rather fancy I can lead you to him unerringly," said Browne. "However, go on your way. We wouldn't dream of delaying you."

But the farmer had heard enough to arouse his curiosity.

CHAPTER XX.

THE TRIALS OF FELIX.



"HALLO!" said Reggie Pitt. "Who's Browne got hold of?"

Pitt had been chatting with Nipper and Tommy Watson at the scene of the recent picnic. But now he paused, and looked towards the edge of the clearing. William Napoleon Browne had appeared with a bearded stranger.

A few juniors were still sleeping, but others were idling about, enjoying the

My dear Brother Biggles, why cast such slurs upon the brain capacity of rabbits? Otherwise, you have described the slayer of your poor Hettie with singular accuracy."

"He ain't here!" repeated the farmer.

"We can never tell," said Browne softly.

"Although not visible at this precise moment, who can say but what he might not fade into the picture at any moment? In the meantime, I am convinced that my friends will highly appreciate a repetition of your pitiful story."

"Has anything happened?" asked De Valerie.

"Has anything happened?" repeated Browne. "Alack-a-day! Too much—too

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afternoon warmth. Felix Spottiswood sat on his tree-stump, lost in the depths of his own misery.

"Here," said Browne, "we have Brother Biggles. Allow me to introduce a gentleman who has suffered a great bereavement. He has told me his sad story, and it is only with the greatest difficulty that I can fight back the tears. Alas, there are many scoundrels on our public highways."

Mr. Biggles looked round keenly.

"The young fool ain't here!" he growled. "I'd know him at first sight, I would! A thin, skinny, soppy-looking young idjit, with no more sense than a rabbit!"

"Far less!" said Browne. "Far, far less!

much—too much! Last night, almost within a mile of this sylvan glen, Brother Biggles' dear little Hettie was basely run over by a monster of the turnpike, and instantaneously killed!"

The juniors looked grave—all except Archie and Nipper—and Felix Spottiswood seemed to shrink visibly. He cast one hunted look round him, and then sat perfectly still. He was in full view, and any sudden movement on his part would be fatal.

But he felt horribly alarmed. This man—this Farmer Biggles—was undoubtedly the father of the child he had killed! There was no question of it! And Browne had deliberately brought him here so that he,

Felix, should be tortured. In that moment Spottiswood bitterly regretted that Browne had not been his victim.

"It was like this," said Mr. Biggles. "I was goin' home, taking Hettie back to her sty—"

"One moment—one moment!" interrupted Browne, smothering the last word just in time. "You must permit me to relate this touching episode. As a weaver of fairy-tales I have a reputation second to none."

"I can believe it!" grinned Nipper.

"What-ho!" said Archie. "Absolutely!"

"I trust I am wrong, but do I not detect a certain cynical strain in these remarks?" asked Browne sadly. "However, we will not pursue the subject, but will pass lightly on to the troubles of Brother Biggles. As he was saying, while escorting his dear little Hettie home a rude ruffian in a red run-about thundered out of the dusk and delivered the death-blow."

"I say, how awful!" said Jack Grey.

"In one fell moment the thing was done," went on Browne. "Poor little Hettie, unversed in the ways of our main roads, pattered lightly out on to the macadam. And the next second she lay on the road—mangled, torn, and lifeless! Nay, do not disregard this story, brothers! It is all too true—too true!"

"It's true enough," said the farmer angrily. "And let me lay hands on the young fool who was in that red car! Just let me lay hands on him—that's all!"

Mr. Biggles' attitude was so appalling that Felix Spottiswood quivered from stem to stern. And it so happened that the farmer turned the full power of his glare on Felix at that second.

The unfortunate young man gave a pitiful squeal, and toppled over backwards off the tree-stump. He picked himself up, swayed drunkenly, and clutched at the air.

"Take no notice," said Browne smoothly. "Brother Spotty is subject to these slight attacks. Any painful story affects him deeply. His heart, I am told, is so excessively soft that it can only compare to his brain. It is merciful to ignore his present distress."

"But what about this feller?" demanded Mr. Biggles. "That's what I want to know! You told me I should find him here, young man! I ain't got no time to waste on any fooling, neither! I want the man who killed my poor Hettie."

"Patience—patience!" said Browne gently. "Always remember, Brother Biggles, that patience is a great virtue. We will assume that the slayer of Hettie appeared at this moment. In these diverting circumstances, what would you do?"

The farmer uttered a sound like an atmospheric.

"What would I do?" he roared. "I'd take the young fool, shake the life out of him, and hand him over to the police!"

Felix Spottiswood gave a low moan, and fell to the ground.

CHAPTER XXI.

A GRIM DISCOVERY.



BROWNE shook his head.

"Alas, Brother Spotty has fallen into one of his daily trances," he said in distress. "Be good enough, Brothers Pitt and Grey, to render first-aid forthwith. Convey Brother Spotty to yonder brook, and sprinkle water on his feverish brow. But be cautious—always be cautious. His whiskers, I understand, are singularly susceptible to water."

But Spottiswood was in no need of such assistance. He rose to his feet, staggered back to his tree-stump, and sat down with a limpness which made him resemble a wet sock.

"While endorsing your proposed treatment of the motoring miscreant, I must make one slight protest," went on Browne. "I strongly urge you not to shake his life completely out. Somehow, I have a feeling that the police would not have much use for him in that state. Moderation, Brother Biggles, is the order of the day—moderation is the cry!"

But at this moment came another cry, and of quite a different nature. Handforth & Co., in fact, came tearing out of the wood as though they had encountered a few gnomes, or hobgoblins.

As a matter of fact, they had been searching for Willy. The hero of the Third had cheeked Handforth somewhat strongly soon after the feast, and had then escaped. Since then Handforth had been searching for his minor—totally unaware that Willy was enjoying the proceedings from a tree-top. And Church and McClure had been obliged to assist in the hunt.

And it was while investigating a clump of dense bushes that Church had come across a motor-car. He stared at it blankly at first. It was a good car, and it couldn't have been in the wood for long. The nickel work was bright, the tyres were hard, and it seemed to be perfectly whole.

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Church.

He yelled for his chums, and they came. Handforth, of course, took charge of the investigation at once. He gave one look at the car, and jumped to a dramatic conclusion.

"There's been a murder!" he said. "Some rotter must have lured his victim into this wood, and shot him! We'd better search for the body! Take the number of the car, and—"

"Don't be an ass!" interrupted McClure. "If anybody had done that, he'd have driven off again."

"Not a bit of it!" said Handforth promptly. "I'll bet they had a duel. That's it! They shot at one another, and now they're both dead! We've got to look for two dead Frenchmen!"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Church.

Handforth was a bit too speedy for him, and he walked round to the front of the car and had a look at the make. But his attention was diverted from the name on the radiator to something else. One of the wings was buckled, and on the number-plate there were splashes of blood!

"I say," muttered Church, rather scared, "I believe there's been an accident, after all! Look at this!"

Handforth and McClure looked.

"Yes, it seems pretty bad," said McClure. "The owner of this car must have run over somebody, and he hid it in here in a panic. I suppose we'd better inform the police——"

"That's it—there's been an accident!" interrupted Handforth. "By George, I've got it! You can't keep me off the track for long! The chap who was in this car killed somebody, and got scared, and hid it in here."

"That's what I just said!" snorted McClure.

"Eh?" said Handforth. "Don't start any of your rot—— Hi, where are you going? Come back, you fatheads——"

But Church and McClure had already rushed off to tell the news to the others, and Handforth could do nothing but follow. They burst into the clearing at great speed, and rushed up to the group.

"Quick!" yelled Church. "We've found something in the wood!"

They came to a halt, breathless, and Browne allowed a tiny gleam to enter his eye. He had hoped for something of this sort, but nothing could have been more nicely timed than this.

"A discovery?" he said kindly. "Continue your childish prattle, and let us hear of this great wonder. A tree with two trunks, perchance? A hedgehog with one spike over the allotted number? Out with your story, Brother Church, for we are consumed with impatience."

"It's a motor-car!" roared Handforth. "A sporting-looking car, all red—and there's blood on it!"

"Blood!" shouted the listeners, in general.

Felix Spottiswood rapidly turned green. The terrible thing had happened! His car had been found!

"Blood!" said Mr. Biggles, in a queer voice. "A red car! Why, darn my hide, that's the car that run over my Hettie last night!"

"So you see your doubts were not only ill-timed, but a decided slur upon my veracity," said Browne coolly. "Unless we are vastly mistaken, the owner of the car himself is within our wave-length—— But what ails Brother Spotty? He appears to be in sore straits."

Brother Spotty, suddenly realising that he was in dire peril, had staggered to his feet, and was now dashing off across the glade, with short, jerky strides, and staggering as he ran. Unfortunately, he forgot all about

the brook, and he took it fairly in his stride.

With one despairing yell he dived head downwards into the water, and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXII.

UNMASKED.



FELIX had not only acted unwisely, but with unseemly haste.

Had he paused to consider, he would have known that the safer course would have been to act with complete indifference. In this way no attention would have been drawn to him.

But Browne, knowing Spottiswood's weak mental condition, had fully relied upon his present activity. Everything was working out as though the various actors had rehearsed their parts.

Spottiswood disappeared into the brook, and a number of shouts went up.

"Have no fear," exclaimed Browne briskly. "Calmness is the watchword! I am on the spot, and what possible danger can there be? Moreover, I fancy the brook is of the traditional tricky variety, and therefore shallow. Let us make investigations."

The stream was, indeed, only a couple of feet deep, and when Felix Spottiswood sat up, his waist was only just awash. There was a hopeless, fixed look in his eyes, one side-whisker had vanished, and the opposite eyebrow was loose at one corner.

"What the dickens——"

"He's coming to pieces!"

"He's disguised!"

"Those whiskers are false!"

The juniors, crowding round, shouted out these things in unison, and Felix made a wild clutch at his face. He had hit the water unexpectedly, but it had had one unforeseen result. His brain was cooled, and he felt altogether calmer.

At the first clutch, he knew that one whisker had gone; and the second clutch resulted in the other whisker loosening its ends and coming away in his hand. At the same moment his second eyebrow dropped. His bronzed, full-toned complexion was also running.

"Come, Brother Spotty, this behaviour is most unwise," said Browne reprovably. "I have always been against sitting in rivers—the effect is generally fatal. If you must do these cross-word puzzles, try and think them out in more fitting surroundings."

Felix rose to his feet, and floundered about on the river bed. He brushed his hair back, and Browne obligingly tossed him a table napkin. With this substitute towel, Felix thoroughly wiped his face—and the effect was exactly as Browne had desired. He wiped off the last traces of his disguise.

"I don't believe he's a manservant at all!" said Handforth brilliantly.

"What-ho!" murmured Archie. "This,

dash it, has just about put the lid on old Felix! Absolutely!"

Browne wagged an accusing finger.

"You see, Brother Biggles," he observed, "as Brother Handforth has just remarked, the manservant is no manservant at all. Do I detect a gleam of recognition in your starry eyes?"

Farmer Biggles had not recognised Felix at all, as a matter of fact, but Browne's cunning remark had the right effect. Mr. Biggles at once suspected the truth. He had only seen a fleeting glimpse of the pig-killer as he sped by, and any definite recognition was impossible.

"By thunder! You—you mean——"

"Precisely," said Browne. "Your wits, I am glad to observe, are running with the smoothness of butter in a hot frying-pan. Take my advice, Brother Biggles, and——"

"It's him!" roared the farmer. "Yes, I can see it now! That's why he bolted, too!"

"We grow keener and keener!" murmured Browne.

"Come out o' that!" bellowed Mr. Biggles. "Come on, ye reckless young idjit! I'll learn ye to run over my Hettie and kill her! Off you go to the police——"

Felix Spottiswood realised that the game was completely up. He gave a wild squeal of terror, turned round, and fled.

"Tally-ho!" sang out Browne. "We shall now observe the Marathon runner in full glory. Brother Biggles, this, I believe, is where you do your Big Act. And hesitation is fatal."

The farmer needed no urging. He plunged into the brook without a qualm, scrambled through, and set off in chase. The juniors, not to be outdone, followed him. Archie was the only one to remain behind; he couldn't possibly bring himself to ruin his wonderful appearance.

Browne, always original, leapt upon Handforth's back just as Edward Oswald plunged in. This resulted in Browne shooting on to the other bank quite dry, but Handforth plunged headlong into the water.

"Thank you, Brother Handforth!" said Browne courteously. "Thank you, indeed! I have always known that it is one of your great characteristics to render these stately services to your fellow-beings. One day they will reap their own reward."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LITTLE MISUNDERSTANDING,



FELIX SPOTTISWOOD was not exactly a champion. He could sprint creditably for a hundred yards, but after this his store of energy began to run short. At the beginning of the chase he



Felix Spottiswood gave a low moan, and fell to the ground.

seemed to be a certain winner, for Farmer Biggles was slow and lumbering, and the juniors accommodated their pace to his.

But Felix was no stayer.

At the end of three hundred yards his pace became slow and erratic. And fifty feet further on he tripped in a tuft of grass, fell headlong, and lay there.

Mr. Biggles thundered up, grabbed Felix by the seat of his trousers, and yanked him upright. The unfortunate Spottiswood was too breathless to speak, but his eyes were terrified.

"Now then!" shouted the farmer aggressively.

"Wait!" advised Browne, as Mr. Biggles raised his hand. "I pray you, Brother Biggles, have a care! The man is undoubtedly a worm, but allow him to gulp in a few breaths before commencing the chastisement."

Reggie Pitt and Nipper dragged Felix away, and supported him while he recovered. In the meantime, Mr. Biggles lost some of his anger. Browne had no desire to see Felix slaughtered on the spot. The fellow had had his lesson, and Browne had no intention of seeing him knocked about.

"It—it was an accident!" moaned Felix brokenly.

"Mebbe it was!" retorted the farmer. "I ain't denyin' it might have been an accident! But that's no excuse, ye dangerous young hound! It's a wonder to me they grant licences to road-hogs of your type!"

"I—I didn't see your—your Hettie——"

"I'm not saying you run over her a-purpose!" growled the farmer. "But run over her ye did, and killed her outright, too. And then rode on, without stopping, ye callous young——"

"Rode on without stopping?" repeated Handforth blankly.

"Ay!" roared the farmer. "That he did!"

Handforth forgot all his animosity against Browne in his new astonishment. He forgot that he was soaked to the skin, and that he had made up his mind to give Browne the hiding of his life.

"I—I was panic-stricken!" moaned Felix. "I—I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Biggles. I'll swear it was an accident! If there's anything I can do now, I'll do it! I won't talk about compensation——"

"Compensation?" repeated Mr. Biggles.

The word acted upon him like magic—much to the astonishment of the greater portion of the audience. The farmer lost his furious look, and even smiled.

"Ah, the sun, we observe, is shining!" said Browne gently. "Strange, strange, indeed, that one little word can mean so much! But it seems that we have placed our finger on the thorax of this problem. Compensation, Brother Biggles! That is the one glad cry!"

"I—I'll pay anything!" bleated Felix, seeing a ray of hope. "But please don't drag me into the police-court, or make me go to the inquest!"

"Inquest?" repeated Mr. Biggles, with a start.

"My family, you know!" gabbled Felix. "It would be an awful disgrace to my people, and my pater would stop my allowance, and—and——"

"And throw a spanner into the works generally?" suggested Browne. "Whenever in need of words, Brother Spottiswood, appeal to me. I am always at your disposal. Families catered for daily."

"Inquest?" repeated Mr. Biggles, for the second time.

"I—I'd like to settle the thing privately, don't you know," pleaded Spottiswood, now much stronger. "I haven't got much cash at the moment, but I could raise a pony by the end of the week."

"A pony?" repeated Mr. Biggles, staring.

"The sum of twenty-five pounds," explained Browne generously. "Apparently Brother Spotty is a racing enthusiast."

"And I'll tell my pater all about it in private; and I shouldn't be surprised if he sprang a monkey!" went on Felix eagerly. "That is to say, five hundred quid. Anything to compensate you for your frightful loss, Mr. Biggles."

The farmer reeled.

"Five hundred pounds!" he repeated. "Five hundred pounds for a pig!"

"Ah!" sighed Browne interestedly.

"A pig!" shouted the juniors, in one voice.

"A PIG!" shrieked Felix, leaping like a broncho.

"What else did ye think my Hettie was?" growled the farmer. "Just takin' her to the butchers, I was, and I've had to lose all the money——"

"A pig!" whispered Spottiswood. "Oh,

my only aunt!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A LESSON WELL LEARNT.



PROFOUND relief was the one emotion which surged through Felix Spottiswood. In a flash, limited though his brain-power may have been, he saw that his dire anguish had been for

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nothing. Instead of killing a little girl, he had only killed a pig!

"But—but I say!" he panted. "I—I thought— A pig, you know! Then—then if I pay you the price of it, you'll be satisfied?"

"I will that!" said the farmer briskly. "If you're agreeable to settling the matter, young gent—"

"Agreeable!" said Felix hysterically. "Agreeable! I'll pay you any old price you like! Oh, my goodness! And I thought I'd killed a little kid! How much? I believe I've got enough on me—"

The farmer named a price—a price which seemed absurdly low to the relieved Spottiswood, but which was really excessive. Without any hesitation, Felix pulled out a sodden note-case and paid up.

"They're a bit wet, but I can't help it."

"That's all right, sir—that's all right," said the farmer genially. "I'm sorry I was a bit rough, but I didn't know. We'll say no more about it, though I do think as you were going a bit too fast, ye know."

"Have no fear, Brother Biggles—have no fear!" said Browne. "Brother Spotty will never go fast again. Unless my calculating system has worn out its brake lining, I imagine that Brother Spotty will henceforth proceed at the merest crawl."

The farmer went off in high good humour. And Felix Spottiswood, so relieved that he felt faint, was able to turn his thoughts in other directions. The sight of Browne's calm visage confronted him. He frowned with sudden annoyance.

"You knew all the time!" he exclaimed tensely.

"My dear Brother Spottiswood—"

"That paragraph you read out of the paper," went on Felix. "I don't believe it was in there at all—"

"It has sometimes been hinted that we exaggerate, but never before has a direct accusation of mendacity been levelled against us," said Browne, in distress. "This is indeed sad! I will admit the paragraph was five days old, but is it not idle to quibble over such trivial details?"

"You knew I'd killed a pig!" went on Spottiswood furiously. "You young fool! You've tricked me—that's what you've done!"

"One moment, you dashed insect!" interrupted Archie, who had found a log bridge further along the stream, and had come up five minutes earlier. "One moment, dash you! It was my juicy scheme to hoodwink you like this. Absolutely! Browne only thought out the details."

"A considerable task, nevertheless," murmured Browne.

"You came to me last night, howling for help!" went on Archie indignantly. "Why,

you foul blotch? You mottled chunk of rubbish! You absolutely thought you'd killed a little child, and you rode on without making any inquiries. And now you've got the frightful nerve to show your poisonous temper!"

"Well said, Brother Glenthorne—well said!" approved Browne. "Naturally, I could have put it better, but you have made a fairly respectable effort. Proceed!"

Felix calmed down considerably, and looked sullen.

"I only killed a pig—" he began.

"That makes no difference," retorted Archie. "You would have ridden on just the same if you had really killed a child. Kindly remove your loathsome carcass out of the landscape. It absolutely offends me, by gad! I've only stood you all this time in order to give you a lesson."

"We have been acting solely for your own good, Brother Spottiswood," added Browne. "Having your well-being at heart, we thought it not only necessary, but essential that you should pass through hoop after hoop. The process may have been painful, but we trust the effect will be permanent."

Felix Spottiswood showed the first spark of decency.

"I'm sorry!" he muttered. "Perhaps I was a blackguard. I won't do any more of that road-hogging, though. I've a good mind to give up motoring altogether."

He went off in very much the same fashion as a whipped dog, and soon afterwards the juniors saw him manœuvring his car out of the wood. Within five minutes he had reached the highway, and had gone.

"Upon the whole," said Browne. "I think we may claim to have performed our daily good deed with flying colours. Brother Spottiswood is now a far, far better man. Let us away to our waiting state carriage, and then to view the beauty spots of Surrey. Time presses, and I have a vague suspicion that Brother Little is again pining for food. I will confess that a cup of tea would not come amiss."

"The good old brew, what?" beamed Archie. "Absolutely!"

And the picnic party, highly satisfied with the afternoon's work, went off in much merriment on further holiday revels.

THE END.

*Do not miss next week's grand
long St. Frank's story:—*

**"THE RETURN OF NELSON LEE
AND NIPPER!"**

IN REPLY to YOURS



(NOTE.—Readers of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY can write to me, and I will reply on this page. But don't expect a reply for three weeks or a month. 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.)

Correspondence Answered by Edward Oswald Handforth.

W. A. H. (Winchester): The only way to be sure of not missing any details is to make sure that you never miss an issue of the Old Paper.

"REGULAR READER" (Worcestershire): Everybody knows that I ought to be captain of the Fourth. But "everything comes to him who waits."

S. L. FARQUHAR (Weybridge): There's no danger of me getting swelled head. I'm altogether too modest a chap for that. Haven't you noticed it?

STANLEY T. BACON (Nuneaton): It's like your cheek calling me an old sock and a lump of dough! Easy now! Don't get any rasher, Bacon.

"HANDY II." (Finsbury Park): You'll get your wish next year, because the first "St. Frank's Annual" will certainly appear in 1926.

LESLIE WILKINSON (Scotswood-on-Tyne): I've kicked Fullwood for you. Thanks for the offer of back numbers, and you'll be hearing further.

H. E. GILFILLAN (Vauxhall): If you will let me know what back numbers of the Old Paper you want, perhaps we can fix you up.

A. H. COLEMAN (Walthamstow): I thought everybody knew that my young rascal of a brother was captain of the Third Form. Such is fame!

FRANK H. STEVENS (Sutton): If I didn't keep Church and McClure well supplied with biffs they'd lose all respect for me. It's our way of being chummy.

AGNES MARSHALL (Stratford): Very nice of you to want me to take you out, but

it won't work. Still, I'll try to get you that back number.

A. C. CLEEVE SCULTHORPE (Vancouver Island): "N.L.L." 23—"The League of the Green Triangle"—was the first Zingrave tale. Now say I don't answer you properly!

DORIS & FREDA (Cricklewood): Thanks for your nice letters. But when you both write in pencil you put me off giving you decent answers.

FREDERICK COLEMAN (Stoke): As you think I'm a blundering ass and a clumsy fathead, you won't expect a reply—and you won't get one!

ADA, GLADYS, & ROSALIND (London, E.): I told Willy you think he's the best darling in the world, but he only said "Rats!" He's got no soul above his animal pets!

W. CUSHING (Mildmay Park): I've asked Reggie about that map of St. Frank's. He says you've got to wait till autumn, because it takes time to do it properly.

BRUCE CHALCRAFT (Edinburgh): Your front cover sketch for our "Annual" is great, but I'm afraid you won't be lucky enough to have the whole book written by me.

JACK CAPLAN (Manchester): How can I answer you freely when I'm so cramped for room? Be thankful you get an answer at all!

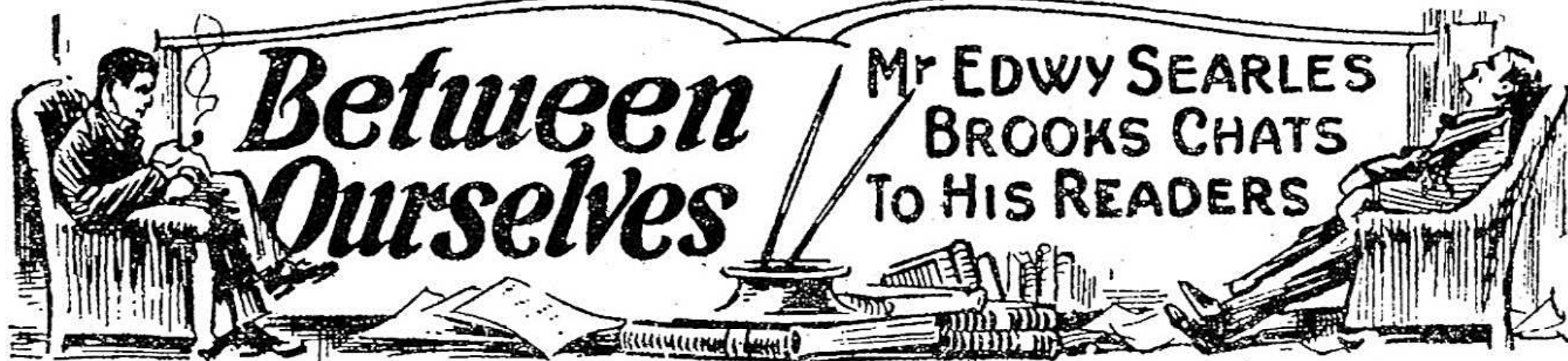
"KCAJ REKSA" (Norwich): What a whopper! You didn't come to Bellton at all! Church didn't tell you I was "soft in the attic"! With all his faults, he's truthful!

LIONEL MOXOM (Rochdale): You couldn't strew Study D with my bones, you fathead, because I haven't got any! Make what you can of that!

S. SIRRAH (Nottingham): That drivell of yours wasn't worth spending the postage on! So I'm not even going to acknowledge its receipt.

TED & WILL (Commercial Road, E.1.): You can send me as many letters as you like if they are just as appreciative as this one. You must belong to a jolly sensible family! You're a clever couple. And tell cousin Helen and sister Doris I think just the same about them.

TED.



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: Ursula M. Archer (Margate), Sidney V. Sargent (Battersea), William Frazer (Edinburgh), "Enthusiastic Reader" (Rye, New York), Clifford Sparks (Wigan), E. Miles (Forest Gate), H. H. Maycock (Kettering), P. E. Haynes Southend, John L. Foote (Wallsend), S. J. Ward (Bluntisham), Eric Holden (Hove), E. Rogers (Fleetwood), S. R. Finn (Gosforth), Mrs. Hills (Huddersfield), Leslie W. Adams (Handsworth), Oliver A. Hughes (Sawtry), Bernard Lee (Westcliff), "An Anxious Reader" (Langley), Jack Asker (Norwich), G. W. Linford (Worstead), S. Battle (Ramsey), Jean Bain (Edinburgh), Tommy (West Hampstead), B. Barden (Tunbridge Wells), "X.Y.Z." (St. Ives), Alfred Young (Hythe), H. H. (Harlesden), Kitty Browne (Highbury), E. H. R. (Penge), R. Spellerberg (Ashburton, N.Z.), Eldred Mountfort (Maritzburg, S.A.), F. Robinson (Liverpool), B. Booth (Brierley Hill), "Nipperite" (Edinburgh), A. Redgate (Nottingham), D. M. (Clonmel), E. Bate (Warrington), R. W. G. (Catford), Renee Turk (Canning Town), F. A. Bottomley (Tottenham), H. W. Muskett (Romford), "Welshman" (Glam.), Gerraccio Merzioriez (Liverpool), L. W. Penny (Southampton), A. Anderson (Bellingham), Claude Leverton (Plymouth), Sydney C.C. (Kilburn), Orlando Crowther (Sheffield), "Ada" (Glasgow), "A Regular Reader" (Worcestershire), "Printer's Devil" (Birmingham), R. Griffin (Reading), J. Parr (Platt Bridge), H. Wigglesworth (Leeds), "Ted" (S.E.16), Francis E. Fielder (Huddersfield).

So many letters have been coming in recently, and so many of them need commenting upon, that I'm afraid I shall have to make most of my remarks quite brief.

But don't let this deter you from writing. As I have said before, the more letters I get, the better I like it. And you can be quite sure that if your letters are interesting, I shall find space to comment upon them.

I can't help thinking, Ursula M. Archer, that your inquiry is humorous. You ask me if Sir Montie Tregellis-West has been knighted! (Now I come to think of it, one or two other readers have been similarly puzzled). But surely you know that Sir Montie is a baronet? All hereditary titles descend from father to son automatically. If the father dies when his boy is only a baby of six months, that baby assumes the title. Thus, it is quite possible for the tiniest child to be a baronet or an earl or a duke. And when they grow a bit older, they naturally go to school, don't they? Knights are only created for their lifetime—the title does not continue after their death.

There are just three lines in your letter, Sidney V. Sargent, which I should like to quote, and I hope you don't mind: "One of our masters at school once read THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, and could find no fault with it." If anybody has been forbidden by their schoolmasters or schoolmistresses to read the Old Paper, you might show them this little paragraph.

Talking about quotations, I should like to print at least half your letter, William Frazer. But there's one little bit that I must repeat: "I say here and now—and you can have it printed in your paper for all your readers and their parents to read, if they like—that the readers' parents' objection and prejudication to their children reading THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY is the result of sheer ignorance." I entirely agree with you, William.

But I hope any parents who read these lines will understand that William Frazer is not accusing them of being generally ignorant. His meaning is quite clear. They are ignorant ONLY of my stories. That is a state that can soon be remedied, and I hope all prejudiced ones will be fair enough to read before condemning.

I was glad to hear from you again, "Enthusiastic Reader." Thanks for replying to my questions. I am rather pleased that all your friends who read our paper are 100 per cent Americans. It is indeed welcome news to know that my stories of English school life are appreciated by native-born Americans, where school life, as I know from personal experience, is so very different.

* * *

With reference to your inquiry, E. Rogers, the Second Form—to say nothing of the First—are not mentioned because they don't really count. I consider that it would be rather a waste of time to record their doings. Surely Willy and company are young enough? To go lower down the scale would be to introduce many new characters. And I find it difficult enough to handle all those who are well known. Even as it is, I am constantly grieving somebody or other by failing to feature this boy or that boy. Do have mercy on me!

* * *

Your letter wasn't very long, S. Battle, but it was very welcome. I particularly liked your statement to the effect that you lend your copy of the Old Paper every week to a poor chum. Your heart's evidently in the right place.

* * *

"I suppose it is only natural, Jean Bain, that you should want a Scottish junior to appear in my stories. Being a Scottish girl, it is only to be expected. I am sorry that you have misgivings that I, as an Englishman, will think your idea daft. Not at all. When the right opportunity arises, I shall certainly introduce a REAL Scottish boy, accent and all. (To avoid a lot of indignant letters, I'd better say that I'm thinking about an Irish boy and a Welsh boy, too). How would it be to bring them to St. Frank's all at once—three chums from another school?

* * *

So you're interested in model yachts, Alfred Young? And the season for that sort of sport is just coming on, too. I'll see what I can do about getting a special article in Dick Goodwin's "How To Do It" series. I think lots of readers would like to know how to make a model yacht.

* * *

The tone of your letter, H. H., is rather bitter. You and your chums seem very upset because Nipper is no longer captain of the Fourth. I think you ought to read next week's story before you write to me again. And your statement that Reggie Pitt as captain is "a miserable wash-out" is grossly unfair. I think the majority of readers will agree with me that Pitt has

handled the reins worthily, and that far from being a "wash-out," he has proved himself to be a success. You express a hope that I shall not be offended by your letter. Well, I'm not. But I certainly think that you and your friends are bad judges. And I don't think you mean me to take that threat of yours—to drop the Old Paper—in a serious way. You needn't worry. In the forthcoming series, and in all future stories, Nipper will be prominently featured.

* * *

"You ARE an enthusiast, Eldred Mountfort, and no mistake! After doing some canvassing, you have secured eight new readers, three of them being girls! Good for you, Eldred! And in South Africa, too! Home readers will find it difficult to equal your record! Thanks!

* * *

Thanks for that sketch of myself, Renee Turk. There's not much guesswork about your name, is there? You are a girl, of course. If you were a boy, there would be an "e" less in Renee.

* * *

Commenting upon your interesting letter, F. A. Bottomley, I don't guarantee that my stories are a description of Public school life EXACTLY as it is. Naturally, my schoolboys do things somewhat out of the ordinary now and again. But you are quite wrong in thinking that Public schools are dismal places, more like prisons than schools.

* * *

I am sorry you didn't get an individual reply last time, "Ada." The fact is, although your letter was interesting to me, there was nothing in it that I could comment upon as a general topic. This time you have mentioned the Annual. There has been some discussion on this matter already. If at all possible, an Annual will be published next Christmas—but I am afraid it is rather doubtful. But there will be no doubt about a St. Frank's Annual the year after. I shall, of course, refer to this matter again later on. In the meantime, I shall do my utmost to fill in my spare time (and that's a fat lot!) by writing St. Frank's stories for "The Boys' Friend" 4d. Library.

* * *

I was greatly interested in your letter, "Printer's Devil." It gratifies me to learn that your father, two brothers, two friends, and yourself regarded my "American Note Book" series as "the most interesting facts about America ever published," and that you have read them again and again. I am sure they don't deserve such praise, but as you are not the only one who has asked for more, I will try my best to continue this series in the near future.



or, THE SECRET OF THE GHATS.

A Wonderful Romance of the Adventures of Two British Boys in India.

By WILLIAM MURRAY

FOR NEW READERS.

The story opens at Mysore with the arrival of the Bedfordshire Regiment, commanded by Colonel Teversham, the British Resident, and introduces Captain Chesney, secretary to the Resident and father of Myles Chesney, about whom, with Paltu, a native stable-lad, and Jack Wynyard, these adventures are written. The Resident and his secretary are summoned to Madras, leaving Pershad Jung, the rajah's Prime Minister, as Deputy-Resident. Shortly after, Pink Triscott, a private of the Bedfordshire's, disappears. Young Wynyard and his chum suspect foul play. A fire breaks out at the rajah's palace, and the two boys come upon and rescue the missing private, who had been kidnapped by the rajah, and was to be put to death next morning.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER III.

UNWELCOME VISITORS.

THE fugitives realised at once that they had entered a part of the rajah's menagerie. The cell was really the den of some wild beast. Again the angry snarl was heard, blended with a queer, clanking noise.

"We must get out of this," exclaimed Myles in trembling tones. "You're in the way, Jack. Move aside—quick!"

"Stop, lad!" Pink sternly whispered. "Don't open the door, the creature is chained. Our lives depend on silence."

Myles obeyed, and a few seconds of fearful suspense slipped by. The dungeon was twelve feet long, and far up in the rear wall was a grating that probably opened on the back garden of the palace. Through the bars filtered a dusky beam of light, show-

ing the uncouth form of the beast squatted in the middle of the floor. Its eyes were two balls of fire.

Nearer and nearer came the noisy tread of the rajah's soldiers. The animal snarled incessantly, as though bent on betraying the intruders.

"If this keeps up we are lost," muttered Jack.

"I'll fix 'im," replied Pink. "There's time enough."

He stepped forward, and the beast sprang to the end of its chain to meet him. Then, by the dim light, Pink drove the spear deep into the tawny breast, and the animal rolled over in the throes of death. Before it could utter more than a wail or two Jack's tulwar nearly severed its head from its body.

"Well struck, lad!" whispered Pink. "Ah, 'ere they come! Not a sound, for your lives!"

The danger had been averted just in time. Already the gleam of torches was flashing under the cell door. With boisterous speech and tread the guards went by.

"Now is our chance," whispered Myles. "No time to lose."

"Wait a bit," said Pink, stepping toward the rear of the cell. "No, we can't get out by the grating," he added. "It's too narrow. Say, this is the biggest leopard I ever saw."

"It's a good thing it was chained," replied Jack. "Come on—quick!"

An instant later the fugitives were in the corridor, and moving through the darkness toward the staircase. For fear of missing the way they presently ventured to relight the lamp.

"There's only a minute or so to spare," warned Pink. "It won't take those 'cather rascals long to crawl over the rubbish into my cell, and find it empty. Then won't they kick up a rumpus!"

"Hark, they're pulling the stones down!" whispered Jack.

"Here's the stairway just ahead," cheerfully replied Myles. "If we can't find the spring we'll kick the panel to splinters and dash through the——"

His voice ended in a gasp of fright, for just then the burly figure of Motee Mal stalked out of a cross-corridor. The Hindu instantly recognised the party, and the horror depicted on his face was something awful.

Pink lifted his spear for a deadly thrust, but Paltu caught the weapon just in time.

"Spare my father, sahib!" he implored.

"Your father?" gasped Pink, seeing a gleam of hope in the discovery.

"On my head be misfortune!" wailed Motee Mal, tossing up his arms in despair. "Sahibs, you are all lost. Alas, that my first-born should perish by the tulwar!"

"Plead with 'im, lad," Pink whispered to Myles. "There's some chance if 'e don't know of this private affair of the rajah's; otherwise, there won't be any hope for us. Quick, or I'll 'ave to use the spear!"

"The tall sahib is the prisoner of his Highness," resumed the Hindu. "Him I seize, but the others I will aid if there be power——"

"Never!" exclaimed Jack fiercely. "Save all or none. We won't escape without Pink."

"Help us, Motee Mal, for Paltu's sake," implored Myles. "Have you no fear of the Resident? Be quick, or the guards will come."

Paltu threw himself beseechingly at his father's feet, and just then a burst of angry voices was heard in the distance.

Motee Mal tore his hair in a frenzy of remorse.

"Brahma, forgive me!" he cried. "I am accursed among men. Yet surely I must be faithful to my vow of gratitude, even at the risk of my head."

He glanced at Myles and Paltu, indicating that the latter's rescue from the tank was in his mind.

"Swear by the holy Ganges, sahibs," he added quickly, "that you let no word of what I am about to do come to the rajah's ears."

Without hesitation the fugitives took the required oath. Motee Mal scanned each face, and was apparently satisfied of their sincerity.

"This way," he muttered, snatching the lamp from Pink and dashing into the side corridor from which he had come.

He ran at such a pace, and turned so many angles that it was difficult to stick at his heels. Far to the rear the clamour of the soldiery rose and fell and died away to silence.

But Motee Mal did not lessen his speed. He pushed on through a maze of narrow corridors, where the walls were damp and

slimy, and the air was tainted with evil smells.

His knowledge of the labyrinth was unerring, and finally he paused before a rusted iron door. He pressed a knob and the door opened slowly on creaking hinges. From the black darkness beyond a hoarse tumult was borne in on a wave of fresh air.

"Yonder lies the garden," whispered Motee Mal. "I can aid you no further. If you are quick you may slip through the fortress gates before the alarm is given. Remember your oaths, sahibs, and may Brahma guide you."

The door grated shut, and the fugitives were on the outer side amid a dense coppice of shrubbery. Crawling through this they stood erect, and found themselves near the lower end of the tank.

The fire was under control, but two streams were still playing on the smouldering ruins of the explosion. A noisy crowd looked curiously on.

"There goes an engine," said Pink. "We may slip out behind it. Come on, I must stand the chances of being recognised. In another minute it may be too late."

They hurried across the garden, and overtook the engine just as it was rolling through the main gate. The sentries paid no attention, and a moment later the fugitives were out in the street.

"Where now?" asked Pink. "Before we're five minutes older the rajah will 'ave 'is spies 'unting the town for me."

"This will let us into the rear garden of the residency," replied Myles, holding up the key.

"Just the place," exclaimed Pink. "Move faster, lads, and don't run against any one if you can 'elp it."

The latter precaution was difficult, since many people were astir. However, the fugitives gained the English church without attracting attention, and a little later they entered the residency grounds.

Pink made his companions sit down in a nook alongside the wall, screened by thick shrubbery. He began by questioning Myles about the affairs at the residency, and quickly learned that Pershad Jung was in charge during the absence of Colonel Tever-sham and his secretary.

"That makes this 'ere mission of mine a little easier," he declared. "The night's young yet, so I'll 'ave time to spin the yarn if I make it short. What would you say if I told you a revolution was ready to burst on Mysore?"

Myles and Jack fairly gasped for breath, and Paltu opened eyes and mouth wide.

"Impossible!" cried Myles. "I can't believe it. You must be——"

"Crazy, eh?" interrupted Pink. "But I'm not, lad. This 'ere statement is gospel truth, and I'll prove it. In the first place, you'll believe me when I say that a couple of the rajah's ugly soldiers kidnapped me

from the cantonment gate the other night. You've 'ad evidence of that."

The boys nodded. Already they were becoming credulous.

"Well," resumed Pink, "the rascals drugged me, and the next thing I knew I was in a magnificent room in the palace, and there was the rajah and a lot of Hindu traitors, mostly officers of the Mysore Regiment. The rajah talked to me in good English. First 'e begged my pardon for carrying me off. Then 'e said I was a brave fellow, and 'e'd taken a shine to me because I saved 'is life. 'E asked me would I like to command 'is army and 'ave lots of money and jewels. Well, I sort of let on I was willing, because I wanted to discover what 'e was driving at. So pretty soon I 'ooked 'im, and the whole plot come out. I tell you I was scared. I 'ad 'ard work to keep cool—"

"And what was the plot?" interrupted Myles.

"As near as I can remember, it was like this," replied Pink. "It starts a couple of 'undred years back. In those days the Hindu rulers of Mysore—the ancestors of this 'ere rajah—'ad a big family jewel. They called it the magic opal, and as long as the rajah wore it on 'is turban no enemy could overthrow 'im. In 1760 a Moham-medan named Hyder Ali got hold of the opal somehow or other, and became the ruler of Mysore. 'Is son, Tippoo Sahib, came after 'im, and as the opal was no good for Mohammedans, Tippoo was knocked out by the English in 1799."

"That was the battle of Seringapatam," said Jack.

"Exactly," assented Pink, "and before the battle Tippoo Sahib 'id the opal and a lot of treasure in some secret place. Tippoo was killed, and the old Hindu family went back to the throne under a British protectorate. Ever since the people of Mysore 'ave been looking for that opal, and 'oping it would come back to put an end to the British rule. Mind you, the English know nothing about it, and never did. But the tradition 'as been 'anded down among the natives to this day, and every man jack of them is ready for revolt as soon as they know the opal is in the rajah's turban. The rajah would never 'ave told me the secret if I 'an't fooled 'im into it. 'E said that Mysore would 'ave mutinied in 1857 like the other natives if the opal 'ad been found then—"

"And you don't mean to say it's been found now?" cried Myles, excited.

"As good as found," declared Pink. "A day or two ago the rajah discovered an old document under the palace. It was written by Tippoo Sahib, and tells the 'iding-place of the treasure and the opal stone. It's miles off, though, and they 'aven't gone after it yet. But the rajah's

spies are spreading the news among the people, and telling them to be ready."

The boys were by this time thoroughly convinced that Pink's story was true, and their horror and amazement can be better imagined than described.

Even Paltu seemed impressed by the wonderful news.

"Do you know where the stone is hidden?" asked Jack, after a pause.

"Wait a bit till I finish my story," replied Pink. "You see, there was a clause to this letter of Tippoo Sahib's, saying that the opal must be dug up by an Englishman, or its power would be gone. To cut matters short, that's what the rajah wanted with me. I ought to 'ave parleyed with 'im, but instead of that, I was fool enough to say no outright. Just then Pershad Jung came into the room—at least, that's what they called 'im—and 'e flew into a terrible rage. 'E pitched into the rajah for blowing the plot, and the rajah got mad and pitched into 'im. Pershad Jung said I couldn't be trusted, and I'd 'ave to lose my 'ead. They talked in Hindustani, and I took good care not to let them know I 'ad picked up the lingo when I was stationed at Calcutta. By and by they got cooled down, and let out where the opal was 'id, and 'ow to get it. I always 'ad a good memory, and you bet I made use of it. Then the guards ran me down to the dungeon and told me my 'ead was to be cut off at the second sunrise, meaning to-morrow morning, and it's only owing to you chaps that I'm out of that scrape."

Pink drew a long breath, and wiped the perspiration from his face.

"Something must be done at once," exclaimed Myles excitedly. "We can telegraph to the Resident, and alarm the cantonments—"

"Not a bit of it, lad," interrupted Pink. "If our soldiers try to arrest the rajah and his minister now there'll likely be a bloody massacre. The Resident's absence is a downright streak of luck. You don't see it, eh? Well, 'ere's the situation in a nutshell. Pershad Jung 'as the upper 'and, being in charge of British interests, and 'e and the rajah will trust to that to engineer their plot through in spite of my escape. No doubt they'll keep shady until their spies report that I'm not to be found, and that no alarm 'as been given at the cantonments. Then they'll gobble up some Englishman in my place, and send 'im with a party to get the magic opal. But I'm going to get it myself."

"You?" exclaimed Jack and Myles incredulously.

"Exactly," asserted Pink. "That's the only sure way to knock the plot on the 'ead. It's about midnight now, and I'll start in an hour or two. The rajah's party will 'ardly leave before morning. As like as not the guards are still 'unting for us in the dungeons, since no one saw us come out except Motee Mal, and 'e'll be mum as an oyster."

The boys drew a long breath. Pink's

logic seemed flawless to them, and they realised that his perilous mission would probably avert the threatened bloodshed and revolt. Older and wiser heads might have reached the same conclusion, for the situation was indeed full of critical complications.

"How far away is the opal?" asked Myles.

"Eighty or ninety miles to the north-west," answered Pink, "in the heart of the Ghauts. I can get to the spot easy enough, but I'll not deny that it's a stiff task at the end. You see, old Tippoo Sahib chose the toughest place 'e could find, and——"

"Then you need help," broke in Myles. "I'll go with you."

"So will I," added Jack; and Paltu chimed in with a shrill: "Me, too, sahibs."

"I've been sort of counting on that," admitted Pink, tugging reflectively at his moustache. "What we went through to-night showed that you chaps are made of stern stuff, and can stand peril and hardships. You're better away from 'ere, anyhow. It'll worry your friends, though, for you won't dare leave any messages."

"My father and Captain Dundas are both in the Neilgherry hills, and won't leave for a week," replied Myles.

"That's good," said Pink; "we'll be back long before they will, and as for Pershad Jung—why, the old rascal can think what 'e pleases. And now about an outfit, lads. We need fast horses, arms, and ammunition, blankets, provisions, a long rope, and a couple of spades."

"I can furnish them," eagerly volunteered Myles; "that is, if we take proper precautions. I know where the key is to Colonel Teversham's arsenal-room, as he calls it."

"Good for you!" approved Pink; "that makes plain sailing. And now, my lad, I would suggest that you get what stuff you want from the house right away. Pershad Jung is likely at the palace, but 'e'll soon be back."

"All right," Myles assented. "I'll take Paltu along to help carry. He can creep about like a cat."

Just as the two lads rose to their feet, an angry growl was heard not far away.

"Lassa! Lassa!" called Myles in a loud whisper, and instantly a huge Tibetan mastiff bounded to the spot. The intelligent animal seemed to understand his young master's command to be silent. After a sniff or two at Pink, who was the only strange member of the party, he crouched contentedly down in the shrubbery.

"I forgot about the dog being loose," said Myles. "He won't give us any trouble, though. Hold him by the collar, Jack, or he'll follow me. You, then, Paltu——"

"Stop!" interrupted Pink, in a sharp whisper. "I 'ear voices beyond the wall. I'm afraid we've been tracked."

"And I forgot to lock the gate," exclaimed Myles. "The key is outside."

"Too late, lad," whispered Pink. "Keep down for your lives. Ah, 'ere they come!"

Myles dropped flat, and took a double grip on the mastiff by his collar and long nose.

"Be quiet, old fellow," he breathed softly. "We're in danger."

Lassa bristled like an angry porcupine, but made no sound.

Creak! Creak!

The wicket gate slowly opened, and two dusky figures crept through into the garden. They advanced six feet, and halted in a broad streak of silvery moonlight that clearly revealed their faces to the anxious watchers.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH THE EXPEDITION STARTS UNDER THRILLING CIRCUMSTANCES.

MYLES at once recognised both men, and his heart beat rapidly with fear. The taller of the two was Mogul Mir, a one-time native officer of a Sepoy regiment, but now a soubadar major of the rajah's bodyguard. From force of custom, he still wore a scarlet shell-jacket and braided trousers. His twisted black moustache dropped over his mouth like a pair of buffalo horns. He had lost his nose by a sabre stroke from a Ghazi fanatic in the Punjab, and his mutilation lent him a truly satanic aspect. He was noted for cold-blooded cruelty and reckless courage.

His companion was one of the sentries from the fortress gate, and Myles well remembered brushing against him on the way out.

For a moment this precious pair of rascals stood in silence as they peered keenly about them.

"I can scarce credit your tale, Baboo Sing," muttered the soubadar. "It were past belief had we not found the gate open."

"By Brahma, I speak true!" answered the other. "I knew the fellow for the rajah's prisoner when he slipped by me with the young sahibs. I would have seized him but for the risk. So I crept behind the party, and saw them enter the garden. Then I returned in haste."

"Perdition on the Feringhee dog!" growled the soubadar. "Had the escape been known a little sooner he would never have left the fortress. Perchance he is concealed in the Residency, and, if so, we shall have him. It is certain that he has given no alarm as yet at the barracks."

"Should he venture near there our spies will surely slay him," replied the soubadar's companion.

Mogul Mir knit his brows in perplexity for an instant.

"Remain here, Baboo Sing, while I hasten to the palace," he said. "Pershad Jung and his Highness are in consultation, and I must report to them at once."

With this the soubadar slipped out of the

gate, and he had scarcely vanished when the mastiff uttered a muffled growl.

Baboo Sing started, and then strode rapidly forward. It was a critical moment, for Triscott and Jack had thrown their weapons away when they parted from Motee Mal.

But Lassa settled the matter by tearing loose from Myles, and springing upon the enemy with a ferocious snarl. Baboo Sing fell backward, struggling and kicking. He could make no loud outcry, for his wind-pipe was half-closed by the pressure of the dog's teeth.

Pink was on his feet like a flash.

"Attend to that fellow," he cried. "Save

stunned senses could revive, Pink bound and gagged him with his own equipments, and dragged him into a clump of shrubbery.

Meanwhile, the three boys had shown themselves equal to the emergency by separating the mastiff and his victim, and overpowering the latter. Baboo Sing's throat was lacerated, but not seriously. Luckily for the fellow, Lassa had been trained to capture without killing.

"If you make a sound I'll put the dog on you again," said Myles, in a stern whisper.

This warning was needless, for the prisoner was half-suffocated, and found it hard work to breathe. Lassa stood silently watching him.



He stepped forward, and the beast sprang to the end of its chain to meet him. Then, by the dim light, Pink drove the spear deep into the tawny beast.

'is life if you can! I've got other work cut out for me.'

Close by stood a row of potted plants. Foreseeing what would happen, Pink grabbed one of the pots, shook it empty, and quickly ensconced himself against the wall at one side of the gate.

All this occurred in less time than it takes to tell, and the next instant Mogul Mir, having heard the dog's outcry, reappeared at the gate, drawn sword in hand. He was scarcely inside, when Pink brought the earthen pot down on his head with terrific force.

The soubadar fell like a log, amidst a shower of broken crockery, and before his

Just then Pink arrived, full of praise for the clever work of his companions. Nor had the capture of Mogul Mir been unnoticed by the lads.

In a trice Baboo Sing was bound and gagged and hauled alongside the unconscious soubadar. His captors mercifully put a bandage on his bleeding throat, and made sure that the gag was loose enough for free breathing.

"There's two dirty traitors out of our way," muttered Pink, "and 'ere they'll lie till morning. You' eard what they said, lads? Pershad Jung is still at the palace, so right now is our chance."

"I'll have all the supplies here in ten minutes," replied Myles, as he drew his companions out of earshot of the prisoners, "and then for the horses, which won't be so easy. Jhansi and three other Hindus always sleep at the stables."

"Do you suppose they went to the fire?" asked Jack.

"No," assured Myles, "they wouldn't dare leave the grounds."

"We'll find a way to manage," said Pink. "Go on, lad, and be quick. Jack and I will attend to the dog!"

Myles and Paltu at once departed on their errand. It was a fortunate circumstance that Myles should have come out by a rear door when he went in after the key to the wicket gate early in the evening.

The door was still open, and the boys entered without discovery. In their shoeless feet they mounted the back staircase.

By this time the fire and its excitement were over, and most of the household servants were asleep. Myles knew every nook and corner of the big residency, and in three trips he and Paltu brought out a heap of stuff that made Pink's eyes glisten.

The assortment comprised four light-weight repeating rifles, four revolvers, four cartridge belts stuffed with shells for both weapons, two coils of hemp rope, two pairs of blankets, and solar topees—sun helmets—and riding boots for all of the party.

"The spades are at the stables," said Myles. "I can't get anything to eat, though. The kitmutgar is awake, and he has the store-room keys."

"You've got quite enough," replied Pink. "I couldn't 'ave asked for a better outfit. We'll forage for provisions on the way. And now load up, comrades."

The articles were distributed, and the little party were soon equipped for the journey. Paltu stubbornly refused to wear either helmet or boots, and hid them in the shrubbery with the cast-off shoes and caps of his companions.

He probably knew best, for the soles of his feet were hard as stone, and he was proof against the fierce rays of the sun.

Now came the most delicate part of the enterprise, and everything depended upon its success. Myles softly led the way to the stables, which, it will be remembered, lay on one side of the grounds. They were never guarded at night, since Lassa's presence in the garden was considered a sufficient protection.

A careful survey revealed the fact that Jhansi and the three other attendants were asleep in their quarters at the end of the buildings nearest the big gates. All was silent, and a couple of lanterns shed a light on the scene.

Bidding his companions wait, Myles entered a room under the sleeping apartments, and came out a moment later with a bunch of keys in his hand.

"All right!" he whispered. "The worst is over. We must lead the horses out by the wicket gate. The big gates creak too loudly. This way now."

Taking a lantern down from the wall, he hurried along the narrow court. He stopped within twenty feet of the far end of the stables and listened keenly for an instant. Then, with the bunch of keys, he opened two adjoining doors.

"Here we are," he whispered. "You won't find these animals much on looks, but they've all made a record for speed and distance."

On Pink fell the choice. From the six horses that occupied the two compartments he quickly chose four—a big grey mare for himself, two black chargers for Myles and Jack, and for Paltu a rusty little Afghan pony, which Myles declared was equal to the others in speed and endurance.

The steeds passively submitted to saddling and bridling, and were led quietly into the court. Rope, blankets, and rations of feed were stuffed into the saddle-bags.

Then Myles closed the doors and slipped away in the gloom. He was back a moment later with a pair of spades.

"No one is awake," he reported. "I put the keys and the lantern in their places."

"Good!" commented Pink. "We're in luck, sure! The next stop is easier. Softly, my beauties!" he added, as he led a pair of the horses forward.

Myles and Jack followed with the other two, and their hearts seemed to leap into their throats at every crunch of the hoofs on the gravelled walk. When the spongy turf was reached all stopped to listen. Hearing no alarm, they pushed silently on.

At a distance of thirty yards from the wicket gate another halt was called by Pink.

"I don't want those rascals to see us leave," he whispered. "Wait 'ere till I go and drag them deeper into the shrubbery."

He lingered a moment to stuff the spades partly into the grey mare's saddle-bags. Then he turned his two horses over to Myles, and swiftly vanished.

Several minutes passed in profound silence. The steeds gently pawed the grass, as though impatient to be off at a gallop. Lassa pranced around them, wagging his tail.

Another minute, and then Pink stalked suddenly out of the darkness. The boys felt instinctively that his quick return meant bad news.

"What's wrong?" asked Jack. "The prisoner's haven't escaped?"

"But they 'ave," replied Pink hoarsely; "and there ain't a trace to tell 'ow long they've been gone! Baboo Sing must 'ave slipped 'is bonds, and untied the soubadar!"

"Can they be hiding in the grounds?" said Myles.

"Not a bit of it, lad, I'll bet they cut straight for the palace. And as like as not they've 'ad time to get back 'ere with a band of cut-throats. But we'll risk it, lads. Quick! Don't lose a second!"

The boys showed no fear in the face of such a deadly peril. At reckless speed the horses were led to the wicket gate, and out into the narrow thoroughfare between grounds and church.

"Go back, Lassa!" Myles whispered sternly, and the dog instantly obeyed.

"No alarm yet," said Pink, leaping upon the grey mare. "We'll make it."

His companions mounted as quickly, and all four turned their steeds toward the broad avenue on the right. They tacitly chose this way in preference to the thickly-populated street to the left. Side by side they rode slowly on, looking and listening for danger.

When the avenue was nearly reached, Pink spurred his horse a yard or two in advance of the others, and turning partly around in the saddle, he held up a warning hand.

"Be ready for a dash!" he whispered. "I think I 'ear footsteps coming down the street."

Pink's ears had not deceived him. At that very instant a dark, bulky figure sprang from out the clustered shadows at the corner of the English church; and as he confronted the party they identified the sleek, fat features of Pershad Jung.

The recognition was mutual, though the villainous Prime Minister had the advantage of being prepared for it. Up went his left hand, clutching the bridle of the grey mare, and forcing the animal back on its haunches. With his other hand he lifted a gleaming tulwar, and aimed a fearful blow at the rider.

Pink swung himself to the opposite side with the agility of a Commanche Indian. Indeed, he very nearly went headfirst out of the saddle.

But the act saved his life. Luckily for the grey mare's ribs the tulwar was intercepted by the handle of one of the spades that protruded from the saddle-bags. The blade cut deeply into the hard wood and stuck fast.

Pershad Jung wasted a precious moment by trying to extricate the weapon. This was Pink's opportunity, and he was quick to seize it. He straightened up in the saddle, whipped a revolver from his belt, and shot out his right arm.

With a dull crash Pershad Jung's forehead and the stock of the pistol met together, and the next instant the Prime Minister was a limp and groaning heap on the ground.

All this occurred in a few brief seconds, and before the startled boys could realise that the danger was over, they saw the grey

mare dash forward, and heard Pink's shrill command to "dig spurs."

There was a clatter and whirl of hoofs, and the mettlesome steeds tore by the prostrate body of the would-be assassin. Just in time, too, for half a score of the rajah's bodyguard, armed to the teeth with steel, now arrived tardily on the spot. Of the number was Mogul Mir, with a blood-stained bandage about his head.

But the ruffians could only stare in baffled rage at the receding horsemen. Pursuit was useless, and they dared not rouse the town by a discharge of firearms.

The soubadar-major clapped his hand on his rifle, and swore an awful oath of vengeance.

"We shall meet again, accursed Feringhee dogs!" he hissed. "And Brahma himself shall not save you then!"

Meantime, the fugitives were galloping down the broad, deserted avenue, past compounds and gardens and detached bungalows where English wives and children were sleeping peacefully, ignorant of the treachery that was rife in the court of Mysore.

The horses, having been stabled overlong, were almost beyond constraint. They paid little heed to bit or bridle. Paltu's wiry Afghan pony kept well abreast of the others.

All of the party were good riders, but Pink was more at home in the saddle than on his feet, having formerly belonged to a cavalry regiment.

"I'll keep this 'ere little memento!" he exclaimed, as he tore Pershad Jung's tulwar loose from the saddle-handle, and thrust it into one of the saddle-bags. "I may 'ave a chance to give it back to its owner with interest!"

The boys shuddered. The true and stern meaning of the night's adventures was beginning to dawn upon them. They wondered vaguely what the end of this thrilling exploit would be.

"Will they pursue us?" asked Myles, glancing behind.

"Undoubtedly, lad!" Pink replied. "It's 'ard luck that we should 'ave been discovered, because the rajah will see through the whole affair, and 'e'll 'ave 'is fleetest 'orsemen after us double quick. We've got to beat them, that's all. It's a long race, but we'll come in ahead if we don't miss the way. Once we reach old Tippoo Sahib's barrier we can snap our fingers at a thousand of the ugly 'eathens."

"What do you mean?" queried Jack.

"You'll know if you live long enough," responded Pink mysteriously. "Ah! 'Ere's the end of the town. Now, which is the straightest road to the north-west?"

Myles was fortunately able to give the information, and the fugitives were soon riding swiftly along a narrow and a level highway.

Behind them the lights of Mysore twinkled fainter and fainter. To right and left the pale moon shone on patches of dense jungle and fields of wheat, sugarcane, and maize.

Now and then a village was passed through, seemingly deserted except by the pariah dogs that ran out to snap at the horsemen.

"Every nigger between 'ere and the Ghauts would be watching for us with matchlocks and spears if they knew what we were coming after," said Pink; "but we're all right as long as we keep ahead of the rajah's messengers."

"Ninety miles is a stiff stretch for the horses," remarked Jack dubiously.

"They're good for it," declared Myles.

"No doubt, lad," admitted Pink; "but we're not going to overtax them or ourselves. At the pace we're making now we can afford to snatch an hour or so of sleep about daylight and forage around for a breakfast. I know that we're all hungry, and—'Allo, that moon's in the wrong quarter, surely? 'Ave we blundered?'"

Myles frantically pulled up his horse.

"We're travelling due west!" he cried. "In that dark bit of jungle this side of the last village the road forked, and we took the wrong turning. It was all my fault. I should have known better."

"The spot was a gloomy one," replied Pink. "No one is more to blame than another. We can't cut across country, so 'ere goes for the only remedy!"

He wheeled his horse round, applied the spur, and led his companions back along the road at a furious gallop. They had blundered at least two miles out of the proper course, and as every minute thus lost was of inestimable value, the possibly fatal result of the mistake was easily forseen.

Not a word was spoken during that mad ride. Pink's grave and rigid face was inscrutable to his companions, and frightened them more than the thought of the danger.

The gallant horses were given full rein, and after a space of time that seemed hours instead of minutes, they galloped into the welcome and familiar belt of jungle. With great difficulty they were checked at the dimly visible fork of the road.

As the dust-covered riders wiped the reeking perspiration from their faces with tremulous hands, that which they had dreaded became a reality. In the direction of the village a horde of barking curs woke the echoes. The shrill clamour died away, and was succeeded by a more ominous sound that steadily grew on the night air—the dull clump, clump, of horses' hoofs!

(Another Grand Long Instalment Next Week.)

By Your



Editor.

My Dear Readers,—

Now that the popular St. Frank's story has been lengthened so considerably, I hope that everyone is pleased—I won't say satisfied, because I am perfectly aware that all of Mr. Brook's admirers suffer from an insatiable appetite for his stories. But enough is as good as a feast, and I think it is asking as much as we dare from the author to expect him to do more than his present output every week. Besides, if we want that map and the "St. Frank's Annual," we must give him a little spare time.

"THE LOST OPAL."

I have purposely given you two extra instalments of this fine new adventure serial dealing with the exploits of two British lads in India. This has meant post-

poning the "How to do It" article and "Public School" sketch until next week, but I am sure you will agree that Mr. Murray's story is worth it.

"THE RETURN OF NELSON LEE AND NIPPER."

This is the title of next week's extra long St. Frank's story, and there is not a "N.L.L." enthusiast who will not welcome with the keenest delight the reappearance of these popular heroes in our St. Frank's stories. You have all wanted them back again at the old school, and no one is more pleased than myself that I am able to gratify that wish in our forthcoming story.

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

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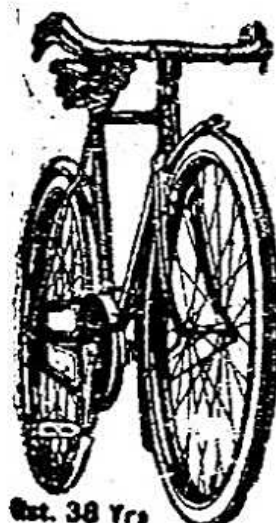
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