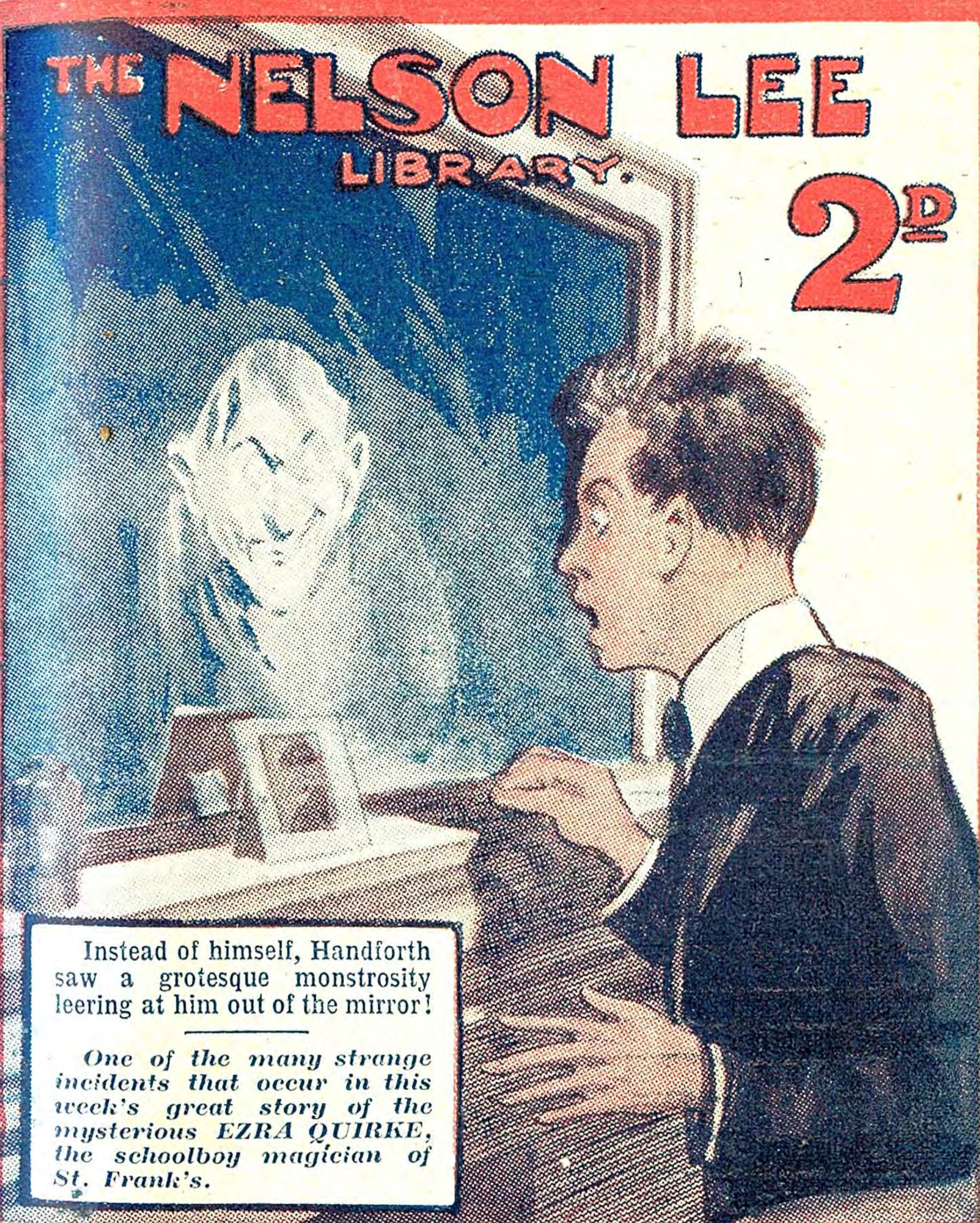


**MORE ABOUT "THE COMPACT OF TEN"**

# THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY.

**2<sup>D</sup>**

A black and white illustration of a young boy with dark hair, wearing a dark suit and tie, sitting at a desk. He is looking into a mirror. In the reflection, instead of his own face, there is a grotesque, pale, and distorted face with a wide, menacing grin. The boy's expression is one of shock and fear. The background is dark and indistinct.

Instead of himself, Handforth  
saw a grotesque monstrosity  
leering at him out of the mirror!

*One of the many strange  
incidents that occur in this  
week's great story of the  
mysterious EZRA QUIRKE,  
the schoolboy magician of  
St. Frank's.*

## THE CELLAR OF SECRETS

This Week's Gripping Story of the Boys of ST. FRANK'S, describing how the COMPACT OF TEN set to work to investigate the strange mysteries of EZRA QUIRKE.





In this inverted position Quirke was violently shaken. Money, keys, a pocket knife, and other personal belongings, rained to the ground.



# THE CELLAR OF SECRETS!



By a series of strange and inexplicable manifestations, Ezra Quirke, the mysterious new boy at St. Frank's, has induced a large section of the school to believe in superstitious nonsense and in his possession of occult powers. Nipper, Pitt, Napoleon Browne, and a few others have formed themselves into a Compact of Ten with the avowed object of exposing Quirke as an impostor and a trickster. In Browne, Quirke has a serious rival as a magician, only Browne admits that he obtains his illusions by material means. In this story, the Compact of Ten investigate the Cellar of Mystery.

THE EDITOR.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

## CHAPTER I.

### WIPING UP HELMFORD.

"GOAL!"

"Well kicked, Fullwood!"

"Good man!"

"Rats! It was Pitt's goal!"

said Edward Oswald Handforth excitedly. "I've never seen a neater centre. That shot might have even beaten me!"

There was a good deal of enthusiasm round Big Side. It was a Wednesday, and the St. Frank's First Eleven was engaged in the pleasant task of giving Helmford College a good hiding.

The second half was well on the way, and there was no question of the home team's superiority. From the very kick-off the Saints had played with a vim and a dash which had carried all before them. Already Fenton and his forwards had found the net four times, and Helmford had only replied once. They were far too busy defending their citadel to think about attacking.

And the Saints were pressing harder than ever, as though determined to register the season's record win. Fenton had scored two of the goals, but the others had come from Nipper and Ralph Leslie Fullwood.

The three junior members of the First Eleven were again proving their sterling worth. Reggie Pitt, indeed, on the right wing, was an absolute thorn in Helmford's side. The opposing back could do nothing with him, and Pitt's runs down the touch-line were becoming irksome—to the visitors. The watching crowd, however, cheered to the echo every time Reggie got going. They knew exactly what to expect, and every one of Pitt's centres was a thing of joy to behold.

"We're winning hands down!" declared Tommy Watson enthusiastically. "By jingo, look at old Napoleon Browne! He's doing the work of two men at centre-half. There he goes again. I say, what a lovely pass to the left wing. Go it, Rees!"

Rees, the lithe little Sixth-Former, was streaking down the field at his best speed. Across went the leather, but Fenton just failed to trap it, and one of the Helmford backs scrambled the ball into midfield again. It was like that all the time—one long succession of vigorous attacks.

"Huh! Talk about Quirke!" said Handforth sourly. "Where's his giddy influence now? I'd like to see the evil spirit that's going to turn this game into a loss. I'll



bet we'll be six up before the finish. Blow Quirke and his rotten omens!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie Glenthorne with conviction. "Odds kicks and passes! The good old game is dashing along at a frightful speed. The lads must be somewhat exhausted."

"Rats! They're as fresh as paint!" retorted Handforth.

"Oh, rather!" agreed Archie. "At the same time, when a chappie dashes hither and thither like a bally mustang for a whole dashed afternoon he probably feels slightly dithery. I mean, dash it, this sort of thing would absolutely finish me for all time. The good old tissues would wilt and wither like leaves in the autumn blast!"

"Rubbish!" grinned Brent, Archie's study chum. "You're only too sorry you can't be in the game yourself, old man. When it comes to the pinch you're just as energetic as the rest of us."

Archie Glenthorne beamed.

"Oh, well, of course, the Glenthorne's have always been a dashed vigorous crowd," he admitted. "Soldiers and all that sort of thing. When duty calls, what? Absolutely. Odds fouls and charges. That was a somewhat dirty piece of work at the cross-roads, by gad!"

Browne had been charged over violently by one of the Helmford backs. A certain amount of ill-feeling was creeping into the game. The Helmford players were exasperated by the one-sided fight, and a few tempers were getting short. Not that the teams were ill-matched. On the contrary, they were very even—only the Saints were playing with the will to win. And determination, in football, as in everything else, is one of the chief factors.

Following the foul a free-kick was awarded, and it was rather a case of poetic justice when William Napoleon Browne dashed through on his own and scored. It was a surprise shot—a long, dropping kick which utterly confused the goalie.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Browne!"

"Who says we're unlucky now?" demanded Handforth, turning round and appealing to the crowd about him. "Where's Quirke? Let him come and put the giddy 'fluence on. He's a fake!"

"That's all rot!" said Tommy Watson frowning. "Quirke's genuine enough, but the run of bad luck——"

"Genuine?" snorted Handforth. "Why, you poor, pitiful chump. He's a trickster—a faker. We've proved it!"

"You've proved it?" repeated Watson mechanically. "Hallo! That Helmford chap looks like getting through. By jove, he's—— It's all right. Wilson's on his track. Oh, well cleared, Wilson!"

Handforth glared at Church fiercely. For some moments both Church and McClure had jostled against him, and Church had even clumped on his foot.

"You clumsy ass!" roared Handforth. "What's the idea——"

"Shut up, you idiot!" hissed Church.

"Eh?"

"Don't you realise that——"

Church paused, confused. A few of the other juniors were looking at him with frank curiosity, and he dried up. He made a swift grimace, intending this contortion of his features to be a warning.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Handforth, staring.

"Nothing."

"Then what's the idea of twisting your dial up——"

"I wasn't!" hissed Church, turning red. "Oh, you hopeless ass! Can't you dry up? No need to talk about Quirke here!"

"I'll talk about Quirke as much as I like!" retorted Handforth grimly. "The chap's a fraud. What about the Compact of Ten?"

"The which?" asked Hubbard.

"Oh, he's raving!" said McClure hastily. "You mustn't take any notice of Handy. He doesn't know what he's talking about."

Handforth was looking across the field in a dreamy kind of way.

"The Compact of Ten!" he repeated softly. "By George! We're going to show Quirke up before long. It only needs a little evidence——"

"Hurrah!" yelled Church violently.

"Go it, you chaps!" roared McClure.

There wasn't anything to cheer at, but they felt it highly necessary to create an interruption. Handforth, with his usual thoughtlessness, was rambling on, and giving the whole show away. And his voice wasn't exactly a whisper, either. Hubbard and Snipe and Skelton and a few more of Ezra Quirke's special set were all within earshot.

What was more to the point, they were listening to Handforth, and were distinctly curious. Church and McClure were positively worried. They were members of the Compact of Ten, too, and there was a strict injunction that complete secrecy should be maintained. And here was Handforth talking about it in front of a crowd.

Browne and Stevens, of the Fifth, were members of the Compact of Ten, too, and it would be a serious affair if a lot of gossip got going. Ezra Quirke had been left severely alone for some days, and he and his superstitions were losing some of their original novelty. The majority of the juniors believed in him—were convinced of his psychic powers. That ten of the fellows were banded together for the purpose of exposing him was a complete secret.



"Yes, the Compact of Ten!" said Handforth, absent-mindedly. "Once we get our investigations going we'll show Quirke up in his true colours. Under my leadership—"

"Look out, there's another goal coming!" interrupted Church briskly. "They need you between the sticks, Handy. My hat! If Helmford had you as their goalie we shouldn't have scored once to-day."

Handforth started, and came back to earth.

"Eh? Rather not!" he agreed. "I don't want to boast, but I should have saved every one of those shots. They were all pretty stiff, but a good goalie wouldn't have much trouble— Look at that! Absolutely messed it up. By George! What luck!"

This was hardly fair, for the Helmford custodian had made a desperate save. Handforth was fully interested in the game again, and made no further reference to Ezra Quirke or the Compact of Ten—much to the relief of Church and McClure.

And soon afterwards the final whistle blew, and St. Frank's left the field having trounced Helmford to the tune of five goals to one. There was much happiness throughout the various Houses of St. Frank's. For the first time that season the First Eleven had gained an overwhelming victory.

"It's the turn of the tide all right," said Boots, of the Modern House. "Things'll go all right after this. And perhaps there won't be so much talk about that ass, Quirke—"

"Yes, talking about Quirke—" began Handforth.

But Church and McClure pulled him forcibly away, and rushed him across the Triangle and through the West Arch. Once in the quiet square beyond they halted, and jammed him against the wall.

"You hopeless fathead!" panted Church fiercely.

"You jabbering jackass!" gasped McClure.

"By George!" snorted Handforth. "If you talk to me—"

"Don't you realise that the Compact of Ten is a secret organisation?" demanded Church. "What's the idea of telling that crowd round the ropes all about it? If Nipper gets to hear of this he'll be as wild as the dickens!"

Handforth started.

"I forgot we had to keep mum!" he admitted, looking blank. "Well I'm jiggered! Not that it matters; nobody heard me—"

"Nobody heard you!" howled McClure. "Why, they all heard—Hubbard, Snipe, and Armstrong—all of 'em. Thank goodness they don't take any notice of what you say!"

"We shall have to be more careful," said Handforth, frowning. "I shall have to

see that you chaps don't go giving the game away—"

"Oh, my goodness!" moaned Church.

He fainted into McClure's arms. But as McClure fainted into Church's at the same moment there was an unfortunate misunderstanding, and they both crashed to the ground.

"What the dickens are you chaps playing at?" asked Handforth tartly. "If you haven't got any more sense— Hallo, by George! Four o'clock!" he added, as the chimes sounded. "Four o'clock, and we've got to prepare the study! Come on, for goodness' sake. We shall never get done!"

Apparently there was something special on the agenda for that afternoon, for Church and McClure picked themselves up, and hurried indoors with Handforth.

## CHAPTER II.

### WHAT THE CRYSTAL REVEALED.



**E**NOCH SNIPE, of the Fourth, halted before the door of Study No. 20 in the East House, and tapped upon the panels.

There was no response, and Snipe hesitated. He was an unpleasant-looking junior, thin and slightly hunch-backed, with a long neck and a projecting head. His expression was foxy, and his red-rimmed eyes were shifty and watery. Even in the East House, which was considered of no account at St. Frank's, he was regarded with contempt.

He tapped again, and waited.

"Come in, confound you!" came an impatient voice.

Snipe entered, and then paused. He found the Hon. Douglas Singleton glaring at him impatiently, and on the other side of the centre table sat Ezra Quirke, the schoolboy magician. Before him stood his famous crystal, and Quirke seemed oblivious of his surroundings.

"Please, Singleton—" began Snipe.

"Get out of here!" snapped the Hon. Douglas curtly.

"But, please, Singleton, I want to speak to Quirke—"

"You can't speak to Quirke!" interrupted the Removite. "You can come back in ten minutes if you like, but not before. Skid, my lad! Your face gives me a horrid pain!"

Snipe backed out of the study, and the Hon. Douglas closed the door and locked it. He thought he had locked it before, but made no mistake about it this time.

"Sorry, Quirke," he said. "It's a pity if we can't be left alone for five minutes—"

"I see strange things!" murmured Ezra Quirke mysteriously.



Singleton became attentive. If Handforth or any of the other sceptics had been present, they would have been amused at this performance. But the Hon. Douglas was a confirmed believer in Quirke's magic. He couldn't be blamed for his credulity. Quirke had produced some very wonderful effects in Singleton's presence, and he had been particularly marvellous with the crystal.

The latter, now before him, seemed to be alight with inner fire. There was something almost uncanny about it. It was full of life, and yet a mere crystal globe. Singleton could see nothing definite within its depths, but Quirke was apparently gifted with occult vision of some kind. He could even see things which were destined to take place in the future.

According to Dick Hamilton and the other members of the Compact of Ten, such a thing was sheer nonsense. Nevertheless, Quirke had looked into the future on several occasions with uncommonly surprising results. Exactly as he had foretold, the events had happened. And in no instance was it possible to connect him with the occurrences. It seemed out of the question to suggest that there was a conspiracy between Quirke and those who figured in the foretold events.

"I see strange things!" repeated Quirke. "There is an elderly gentleman here. You are with him, my friend. On your face there is an expression of surprise and amazement. There is a gashed hand—and yet, contradictorily enough, the hand is healed. It is all very vague. I cannot understand what it means."

"Well, I'm hanged!" muttered Singleton tensely.

He stared at Quirke rather blankly. Quirke wasn't aware of his sitter's gaze, for he was looking intently into the crystal. His whole being seemed to be concentrated on the task.

What he had just said increased Singleton's faith in him tremendously. For the Hon. Douglas had recently had close association with an elderly gentleman—with a gashed hand—with a hand which had been instantly healed.

But there wasn't a soul in the whole of St. Frank's who knew of that affair except Singleton himself and his elderly companion—who was none other than Professor Sylvester Tucker.

To assume that Professor Tucker was in league with Ezra Quirke was not only absurd, but verging on the farcical. The genial old science master was the soul of honour, and except for his absent-minded eccentricities, was a normal enough man. Under no circumstances was it possible to credit that he had given Quirke his secret.

For it was a secret of staggering possi-

bilities. Singleton only knew of it by chance—by the unforeseen circumstance caused by the professor's absent-mindedness.

Yet Quirke could see all this in his crystal! Even if Singleton had been a sceptic, he would have marvelled at this revelation, for it seemed beyond all logical explanation. He, himself, had not breathed a word to a soul—not even to Hussi Kahn, his study-mate, for whom he had a fond and affectionate regard. Latterly, he and the Indian junior had drifted somewhat apart, for Hussi Kahn smiled good-humouredly at Singleton's stories of Quirke's marvels. Kahn was no believer in the occult.

"All right—go on," said Singleton slowly. "What else can you see, Quirke? Are you looking into the future now?"

"That I cannot tell you," replied the schoolboy seer. "Sometimes it is the past, sometimes the present, sometimes the future. Once before I saw blood in connection with you, Singleton. That time it was a cut finger. Now it is a gashed hand. And, again, I can see a withered arm. What can it mean? I see two or three men this time, and most of them are anxious. One is full of doubt. But, no! His expression has changed to joy. It is useless, Singleton—I can make nothing of it."

"A man with a withered arm!" muttered Singleton. "Other men, too! Are you sure you can't see anything more, Quirke?"

"There is nothing."

"Look again—"

"It is quite useless—everything has faded away," interrupted Quirke impressively. "Your case is one of the strangest I have ever encountered. Generally, I can see clearly—can describe things in detail. But there is some negative influence at work which prevents the full realisation of my wishes. Are you doubtful of me, Singleton?"

"Not a bit," said the Hon. Douglas promptly. "I think you're a marvel! How on earth you can see these things in that infernal crystal is a fair corker! But you do see them—there's not a doubt on that point. I'll bet that withered arm will fit in somewhere before long."

Quirke smiled.

"Such a thing is as certain as the coming of another dawn," he said quietly. "But when this will be, I cannot say. I am unhappy. I dislike being baulked in this fashion. You are a most difficult subject."

He took the crystal away, and placed it in his cupboard. Quirke was a strange-looking junior—almost ghostly with his pale face and deep, sunken eyes. It was his appearance, indeed, which had created such an impression throughout the Junior School. His very personality was mysterious.



"I might as well go, I suppose?" said Singleton, rising. "Thanks awfully, Quirke. I didn't mean to bother you at tea-time like this, but I was curious."

"You are always welcome," said Quirke. "What powers I possess are at the service of those who help my movement. Happily, there are only a few unbelievers now, and they will soon realise the folly of their obstinacy."

"Yes, you've pretty well converted everybody by this time," admitted Singleton. "Not only in this House, but in the others, too. Let's hope nothing bad comes of that Form-room affair."

Quirke frowned.

A few days previously the headmaster himself had surprised a kind of seance in the Fourth Form class-room, and many anxious juniors were awaiting the result of the Head's deliberations. So far, Dr. Stafford had taken no action.

Singleton took his departure, and Quirke sat down in his big easy-chair and stared into the fire. For once he allowed a smile to appear on his face. But it was an inscrutable kind of smile.

Tap!

"Come in!" said Quirke, looking up.

Enoch Snipe entered, and a shadow passed over Quirke's face. Snipe was one of his supporters, but he detested the fellow.

"I do not wish to be disturbed—" he began.

"Oh, chuck it, Quirke!" protested Snipe. "I've been waiting for ten minutes to see you. I've got some important news. Some of the fellows are getting up a determined opposition—"

"They can do me no harm," interrupted Quirke.

"Don't you believe it!" declared Snipe. "This isn't like that Thirteen Club, you know. They say you're a fake—a trickster—and they're boasting that they're going to bowl you out. I know who's the ring-leader, too."

"Who is he?" demanded Quirke quickly.

Snipe hesitated.

"I suppose you'll pay me something for this information?" he asked cringingly. "It's worth a bit to you, Quirke—"

"I will pay you nothing!" interrupted Quirke hotly. "Get out of this study, Snipe! And breathe one word of this to another soul, and your punishment will be drastic! I have the power at my command to—"

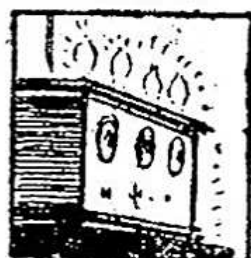
"Oh, all right!" interrupted Snipe hastily. "I'll tell you! But I think you ought to give me something for the tip, Quirke. Handforth's at the bottom of this plot."

Quirke shrugged his shoulders.

"Handforth?" he repeated sneeringly. "I care nothing for Handforth! He can do his worst!"

### CHAPTER III.

#### STRANGE ACTIVITY IN STUDY D.



SNIPPE shook his head. "I shouldn't be too confident, if I were you, Quirke," he said warningly. "There's something different this time. Handforth's the head of a

new set, and they call themselves the Compact of Ten. They say they've got you taped, and they only need a little evidence to expose you as a fraud. You mustn't be too sure, you know!"

"They can do me no harm, I tell you," insisted Quirke. "If my tricks were faked, I should be worried. But they are not faked. No man on this earth can collect evidence to unmask me as a fraud. Your information is of no value, Snipe. You will leave this study."

"Oh, but, please, Quirke—"

"You will leave this study."

"But I wanted to—"

"You will leave this study!"

There was something in Quirke's deliberate insistence which Snipe could not fight against. He turned to the door and went out. And after he had gone, Ezra Quirke turned the key in the lock, and stood near the window. He stared unseeingly out into the dusk of the East Square.

"Handforth!" he muttered. "They only need to collect evidence! I must do something! I shall need to be careful—very careful. One false step, and these fools will turn the others against me."

Even as early as this, Handforth's incautious remarks had borne fruit. Quirke knew of the Compact of Ten, and was preparing to combat its influence. Forewarned is forearmed, and Handforth's recklessness was exceedingly unfortunate.

Snipe, of course, had told only a part of the truth. There was certainly a Compact of Ten, but Handforth was not the leader. Dick Hamilton was the chief mover in the affair, although the great William Napoleon Browne modestly claimed that he was the managing-director.

All the confirmed sceptics were in this little company, and they consisted of Browne, Stevens, Nipper, Pitt, Fullwood, Nick Trotwood, Buster Boots, and Handforth & Co. A few days earlier, through Browne's ingenuity, Quirke had been trapped into holding an occult meeting in the Fourth Form class-room. Very mysterious things had occurred, and Quirke had proclaimed them to be the work of his spirit allies. Yet the Compact of Ten knew that they were all tricks!

Quirke suspected trickery, too, but he had never dared to tell his supporters this. He led them to believe that he had invoked the ghosts, and they did not doubt him. But



Quirke knew well enough that secret agents were at work against him.

And now, it seemed, Handforth was the chief mover! Ezra Quirke made up his mind, then and there, to adopt drastic methods.

By this time Handforth had forgotten all about his indiscretion. Even Church and McClure had overlooked it, too, and they were standing in the doorway of Study D, in the Ancient House, surveying the room with satisfaction.

"Topping!" declared Handforth enthusiastically.

"Not so bad, is it?" said Church. "That window curtain's a bit twisted, but it doesn't matter—"

"Oh, doesn't it?" interrupted Handforth. "By George! We can't leave it like that!"

He hurried across the study, and set the curtain right. Four-thirty was just striking. And Church had scarcely closed the door before it opened again, and three cheerful faces appeared in the doorway. Handforth gave them one look, and frowned darkly.

"Outside!" he said magisterially.

"That's good!" said one of the visitors calmly. "Puzzle—how can we get outside when we're not even in?"

"We give it up!" said the other two visitors.

"Clear off!" roared Handforth, turning red. "We don't want any of you fags butting in—"

"And that," said Willy sadly, "is all we get for performing good deeds! We're not even wearing our Boy Scout's uniforms, and we're doing good deeds for the sheer love of it! And we're ordered off!"

"What good deeds?" grinned Church.

"We've brought your wireless back," said Willy Handforth. "It's all fixed up and repaired, and I'll bet it'll work better than ever. Can we come in with it, or shall we take it away again?"

Handforth started.

"Oh, well, of course, that's different," he admitted. "How long will it take to fix up?"

"We've only got to connect the wires," said Willy.

"Good!" said his major. "You can come in, then."

Willy turned to his faithful henchmen—Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, of the Third. He gave them a very severe look.

"Boots clean?" he asked critically. "Perhaps you'd better take 'em off, and come inside in your stockings. Remember—don't touch anything. Don't look at anything. Don't even breathe! It's all sacred!"

Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon looked duly impressed.

"Good!" they said. "Go ahead!"

The fags entered the celebrated apartment, and then came to a sudden halt. Willy, who was carrying the wireless set, staggered slightly.

"Jumping corks!" he gasped. "What's happened?"

"Curtains!" breathed Chubby. "Tapestry, or chintz, or whatever they call it!"

"You young ass, it's damask!" roared Handforth.

"It isn't," said Church. "It's cretonne!"

As a matter of fact, the curtains were made of quite another material, but this was only a detail. And certainly Study D was looking vastly improved.

"Flowers!" burst out Juicy Lemon, shying from the table like a frightened horse. "Look at 'em—carnations!"

"Fathead!" howled Handforth. "They're roses!"

"Anyway, they're flowers," said Willy practically. "And they must have cost a good bit, too, at this time of the year. I'll bet they're artificial!"

"You babbling young chump!" snorted Handforth. "I paid five bob for those roses!"

"But what is it?" asked Chubby, open-eyed. "A birthday-party? I can't see any birthday-cake—although those pastries look jolly good. My hat! Chocolate biscuits and cream scones! I say, is this a spread for us—because we're repairing your giddy wireless?"

"You poor, deluded simpleton," said Willy. "Do you think my major would prepare a feed like this for us? The whole thing's obvious. This is a feminine party! That's why we've got to clear off quick. Some of those giddy Moor View girls are coming to tea!"

"Irene Manners, Doris Berkeley, and Winnie Pitt," said Church, nodding. "Marjorie Temple was coming, too—but she's got a cold, and that old dragon of a Miss Bond has kept her indoors."

The fags looked thoroughly disgusted.

"All this fuss over three of those silly girls?" asked Willy tartly. "Well, I'm blessed! I could understand it if somebody's uncle was coming. Or even an aunt. There's always a chance of a fat tip—"

"Are you going to fix that wireless set up, or not?" demanded Handforth grimly. "It happens to be Irene's birthday, and we've invited her to tea. Later on we're going to a party at the Moor View School. Something special, you know. So you can get this job done, and clear out!"

Willy busied himself with the instrument for a minute or two, connecting the wires, and making a few preliminary tests with the headphones. It was an excellent set. It had been mysteriously wrecked a week or so earlier during a thunderstorm.

Anyhow, Willy had viewed the remains, and had declared that he could fix it up again. And now the set seemed whole. It contained one or two patches, and there were many obvious signs of repair. But it was undoubtedly one united instrument.



"I knew it," said Handforth. "It won't work—it can't work after you've been tinkering about with it—"

Willy pressed over a switch.

"... now be going over to the Capitol Theatre for half an hour's music," declared the loud speaker firmly. "This transmission . . ."

"How's that?" asked Willy, rudely interrupting.

"I'm hanged if it isn't better than it was originally!" ejaculated Church. "It's louder—clearer—the reception's a lot better! And do you mean to say that you kids repaired this yourselves?"

"Jolly good!" he declared. "Thanks, Willy! Of course, you'll have to go now. The girls will arrive at any minute— Hi! Leave those cakes alone, Juicy, you young burglar!"

"I've only had two!" said Juicy Lemon indignantly.

"Two!" howled Handforth. "Why, you young—"

"Go easy, Ted!" interrupted Willy. "We'll all clear out as soon as you've paid the account."

"The which?"

"You don't expect us to work for nothing, I suppose?" asked Willy warmly. "I've



Snipe entered, and then paused. He found the Hon. Douglas Singleton glaring at him impatiently, and at the other side of the table sat Ezra Quirke.

Willy looked modest. "Just little me!" he replied. "These chaps only looked on!"

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE MYSTERY OF THE LOUD SPEAKER.



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH handsomely acknowledged that the repair was a complete success. He was frankly astonished. He had never believed it possible

that Willy could get the set into working order again.

spent two or three nights on that wireless, and Chubby and Juicy have wasted their time looking on." He held out his hand. "Fifteen bob!"

"Fifteen bob!" hooted Handforth. "You can go and eat coke—"

"And jolly cheap at the price," added Willy calmly.

"But look here—"

"You're not going to raise any objections, I suppose?" said Willy, with a snort.

"Here's a nice business! We only charge fifteen bob for practically rebuilding your wireless set—and you jib at it! Why, it would have cost three or four quid in a shop—"



"He's right, Handy," interrupted Church. "In fact, I don't believe a shop would have taken on the job at all. And you've got to admit the reception is topping. Just listen to that!"

The strains of music, relayed from the Capitol Theatre, were surging into Study D melodiously. Handforth dived his hand into his pocket, and produced some money.

"I haven't got fifteen bob!" he growled.

"One of those quid notes will do," said Chubby Heath brightly. "We can give you the change in about two minutes——"

"Who wants any change?" roared Handforth. "Here you are, you young sharpers! Take this quid and buzz off! I've never heard of such cheek in my life! You're just taking advantage of my good nature!"

Willy & Co. grinned happily. Considering that they had only asked for fifteen shillings, Handforth's accusation was scarcely valid. But it was quite characteristic of him to raise heated objections, and to add twenty-five per cent. to the amount of the bill.

"Good!" said Willy, as he pocketed the currency note. "Come on, you chaps—we'll have a glorious spread to-night—— Oh, hallo, Irene! How goes it, Winnie? I must say you're looking chirpy, Doris!"

As Willy opened the door, he came face to face with the three visitors, and it had to be acknowledged they were looking their very best. Irene Manners, Doris Berkeley, and Winnie Pitt tripped in, and for the next few minutes greetings were the order of the day.

Willy & Co. discreetly withdrew. After all, they had got their cash, and the tuck-shop was more interesting from their point of view than any amount of girls. In their opinion, girls were far more trouble than they were worth. What did they amount to, anyway? Even giving them credit for beauty, a dish of Mrs. Hake's pastry was far more beautiful.

"I say, how ripping!" said Irene, as she glanced at the festive board. "And is all this in my honour?"

"Oh, it's nothing," said Handforth carelessly. "When it's somebody's birthday, we've got to provide a special spread, you know. I say, Church, cut that din off, for goodness' sake!"

"Yes, it's interrupting," said Winnie Pitt, glancing at the radio.

But Irene Manners protested.

"Oh, it's a shame to switch off!" she said. "They're playing a lovely waltz—I've heard it lots of times."

"Rather!" said Handforth enthusiastically. "By George, what ripping music! If you switch that off, Church, I'll jolly well biff you! I—I mean—— That is——"

Church wisely veered away from the wireless set, and the meal commenced. It was just a preliminary to the evening's real programme. The girls were holding quite a

big party at the Moor View School, and Handforth & Co., and several other Remove fellows, were invited. Irene had accepted Handforth's invitation to tea, and, consequently, Edward Oswald had been crowing somewhat joyously for the past day or two.

There was a tap on the door, and Reggie Pitt looked in.

"Hallo, Win!" he said carelessly. "Just popped along to see if you've had your hair shingled yet! Many happy returns of the day, Irene!"

Pitt was quite effusive over his sister, and over Irene! But it was significant that he greeted Doris with pronounced reserve. Church and McClure winked a private wink to one another, and smiled. In less than a minute, Reggie was sitting next to Doris, and oblivious of everybody else in the study.

Somehow, Church and McClure felt rather out of it. They were well aware that Handforth had a soft spot for Irene—in fact, they often described it as a soppy spot. They found themselves obliged to chat politely to Reggie's sister.

A tap sounded on the door, and Ralph Leslie Fullwood looked in.

"Any chance of borrowing a teaspoon—— Oh, sorry!" he said hastily. "I'd forgotten—— Hallo, girls!"

Fullwood did it very badly. Everybody guessed that he rehearsed this entry three or four times before bursting into the study. And it was a rather curious fact that when he said "Hallo, girls!" he looked at nobody else but Winnie. In fact, he came perilously near to omitting the all-important duty of wishing Irene many happy returns of the day.

And Winnie had responded promptly, half rising, and colouring with pleasure. There was a strong friendship between her and the reformed cad of Study A.

"Let 'em all come!" said Handforth. "The more the merrier! For goodness' sake, turn that awful din off—— Oh, sorry! I—I——"

"I think we'd better have it switched off," said Irene. "We can't talk, and it's a dreadful insult to those hard-working musicians."

Church and McClure were now absolutely isolated. As far as they were concerned, they might have been utterly alone. For Fullwood had claimed Winnie's full conversation.

"It can't last long, anyhow," murmured Church confidentially. "These girls are stunning, and as pretty as you like, but I'm blessed if I can see the necessity for all this——"

"My hat!" ejaculated McClure. "What was that?"

Everybody in the study was startled. A curious groan had sounded from somewhere—a long, drawn-out, mournful sound, which



throbbed through the study above the rise and fall of conversation.

"Chuck it, you chaps!" said Doris severely. "You can scare us with——"

"One of you made a sound like a dying duck!" declared Irene. "It isn't very funny to groan——"

"But we didn't do it!" interrupted McClure, starting to his feet. "It seemed to come——"

"Listen!" said Winnie tensely.

Everybody remained still. Handforth had a cake poised between his plate and his mouth. Fullwood was holding his tea-cup. Reggie Pitt felt uncomfortably noticeable with a bulge of bun in his cheek.

And in that silence came an extraordinary sound of whispering. Nobody in the room was making the slightest sound. And the very air was filled with the mysterious whispers. No actual words could be detected, but the whispers were nevertheless pronounced.

"What can it be?" asked Winnie, in a startled voice.

"Some idiots trying to be funny, I expect!" growled Handforth. "Chipping us just because we've got you girls to tea. Like their blessed nerve!"

He strode to the door and flung it open. But the passage was quite deserted, and no human being could have reached the corner in that brief space of time. Apart from this, the whispers hadn't come from the door at all.

Pitt examined the cupboard with no result. There wasn't any other line of investigation, for the window was closed, and there was no chance of any trickster being under the table.

"Funny!" said Fullwood, frowning. "It seemed to me——"

"There it is again!" cried Doris.

Even while the door was still open the whispers floated through the atmosphere of the study. The effect was positively uncanny. All the former cheeriness had gone. Hosts and visitors looked at one another with strange expressions of uncertainty.

"The wireless!" exclaimed Irene suddenly. "It's coming from the loud speaker. Listen. Can't you hear it?"

## CHAPTER V.

### MOST MYSTERIOUS.



"BY George!" said Handforth tensely.

He dashed to the loud speaker and applied his ear to it. This Study D radio was one of the best instruments in the Ancient House. Before the accident it had been a real work of art, and even now it

was handsome, except for the indications of repair.

The loud speaker was a concealed one, being built into the wireless cabinet itself. There was an ornamental grill over the front, and nobody would have known it was a loud speaker at all, unless they had been told.

"There's nothing here," said Handforth, shaking his head.

He turned the switch, and the Capitol Orchestra obligingly provided some more music.

"It couldn't have been the radio," said Handforth, puzzled. "She's working just the same as ever. It's impossible for any sounds to come through when the valves are turned off. It's absolutely dead!"

He switched off again, and the instrument relapsed into a solid silence.

"Well, it seemed to me as though——" began Irene. "There! Didn't you hear it again?"

This time a short burst of whispering was followed by the eerie sound of mocking laughter. Irene and Doris thought it came from the loud speaker, but Church and Fullwood were equally convinced that it did not. There was profound uncertainty.

"It couldn't have been the wireless, Doris," protested Pitt. "Nothing can come through when the valves are off. Besides, there's never any whispering from 2 L O or any other station. Even if there was it wouldn't be heard unless we were receiving the broadcast. I say, it's pretty queer."

"The room's haunted!" said Church, in a startled voice.

"Haunted!" gasped Handforth. "Then it's Quirke—— Oh, rot!" he added, with a growl. "I don't believe in hauntings, anyhow."

"Quirke?" said Irene curiously. "Do you mean that strange boy in the East House? We've heard something about him——"

"Don't take any notice, girls," said Fullwood briskly. "Quirke's only a clever conjurer. He's rather keen on producing all sorts of mysterious effects. Heaps of fellows believe he's a kind of sorcerer, but that's all tommy-rot. Let's talk of something better than Quirke, for goodness' sake."

But the mysterious whisperings in the study had completely upset the harmony of the tea-party. Even when nothing else took place, and the meal was resumed, everybody's ears were on the stretch. There is always something unnerving in the Unknown. And the very riddle of this "haunting" affected the nerves of all.

"Oh, well, we'll be off soon!" said Handforth, frowning. "Just fancy this thing happening to-day of all days. There's never been anything squiffy about the study before. Who can it be, anyhow?"



"Those whom you have chosen to ridicule!"

"Eh?" gasped Handforth.

Everybody stared at one another blankly.

"Who—who said that?" asked Handforth, with a gulp.

They all denied having breathed a word. The voice, intangible and detached, had sounded in the very air of the study. The little party was freshly startled.

"We didn't say a word!" exclaimed Winnie, her eyes alight with vague fear. "I—I don't like this——"

"Who spoke just now?" demanded Handforth hoarsely. "I say, chuck it! None of these larks, you rotters. It isn't fair with these girls in the room. No silly rot!"

But all the other fellows hotly protested their innocence. Indeed, they gave their word of honour that they were in total ignorance.

"Nick Trotwood's capable of throwing his voice, but he's gone off to Bannington—so it can't be him," said Fullwood. "Besides, he wouldn't play any tricks on us."

"Foolish youths!" came the voice of mystery. "Interfere not with things which are beyond your comprehension. Be warned!"

"Great corks!" ejaculated Handforth blankly.

"It came from the loud speaker!" cried Doris. "I know it did. I heard it. I distinctly——"

"Didn't I say so at first?" asked Irene.

Pitt jumped to the loud speaker and listened. No sound came from it. He switched on, and although there was no broadcasting at the moment, the radio immediately became alive. Slight indications of atmospherics sounded in the study. A turn of the switch and the instrument was dead again.

"It COULDN'T have been the loud speaker!" protested Reggie. "Hang it all, the thing's opposed to all the laws of science. Not a sound can come out of this until the valves are on. It seemed to me as if the voice sounded in mid-air."

The truth was, nobody could say with any certainty where the voice had emanated from. One said the loud speaker, another the cupboard, and so on. A second investigation was held. The study was searched in every corner. The corridor was explored. Even Study C and Study E—the rooms on either side—were penetrated, much to the bewilderment of Dick Hamilton & Co, and Archie Glenthorne and Alf Brent. They all stoutly denied any complicity in the affair, and were indeed inclined to doubt the story.

"Whispering voices," said Dick Hamilton slowly. "Mocking laughter. You must have been imagining things."

"We all heard it distinctly," declared Pitt.

"Somebody playing a trick——"

"It's all very well to say that, Nipper, but there isn't any somebody," interrupted Church. "We've looked everywhere. I'm feeling a bit queer, I can tell you. The study's haunted."

Having met with complete failure, the investigators tried to resume the merry tea-party. But it was more or less of a farce. Neither the girls nor their hosts could settle themselves down to enjoying the interrupted meal.

All were greatly relieved when a move was made for the Moor View School. Handforth & Co. had originally decided to do their prep. immediately after tea, and to go to the birthday party afterwards. But considering what had happened, the girls were uneasy and alarmed. It was very dark outside, and Handforth insisted upon escorting them home.

Dick Hamilton and Fullwood and one or two other invited guests followed later on. The chums of Study C were just on their way across the Triangle when they encountered a West House junior.

"Just off?" asked the Hon. Douglas Singleton. "You can wait for me if you like; I shan't be more than two minutes."

"All right—but don't be longer," said Nipper.

Singleton dashed into the West House and nearly collided with Professor Sylvester Tucker, the genial, absent-minded science master.

"Good gracious!" ejaculated the professor. "What is all this? Don't bustle me about——"

"Sorry, sir," said the Hon. Douglas. "I didn't notice——"

"Ah, Singleton!" said the professor, fixing the Removite with a steady gaze. "Splendid! Just the boy I wished to see. You won't forget to-morrow, will you, Singleton?"

"Rather not, sir," said Singleton. "Those two specialists——"

"Tut-tut! Not so loud—not so loud!" warned Professor Tucker, peering round. "Upon my word, Singleton, you mustn't forget yourself like that!"

"There's nobody here, sir."

"Walls have ears, Singleton, and those ears are particularly sharp when least expected," murmured the professor, frowning. "Upon my word, we shall have the whole school talking about it if you're not careful!"

The professor pattered on his way, and Singleton hurried upstairs for one or two things he required. And during the walk to the Moor View School, in company with the other juniors, he was unusually silent.

The professor's words had had a singular significance. The morrow was to be a day



of exceptional importance. Indeed, so far as Professor Tucker was concerned, it might prove to be a day of amazing triumph.

Singleton remembered the secret which he alone shared with T. T.'s distinguished uncle. And every time Singleton pondered over the matter the more unreal it appeared to be.

Yet he knew quite well that the events had actually happened. The professor's marvellous scientific discovery was a reality. The magical box that could cure any disease was an absolute fact.

Singleton had seen it at work. He had seen Professor Tucker deliberately gash his hand, and he had seen the bleeding wound, and furthermore, he had seen the hand after a brief treatment from the uncanny apparatus. And the hand had been completely healed, without a trace of a scar.

It had really been an accident that Singleton had discovered the professor's secret, brought about by the old scientist's absent-mindedness. And rather than have the boy spreading strange rumours over the school Professor Tucker had sworn Singleton to secrecy, and had told him all. It had been better to take the junior into his complete confidence and thus seal his lips.

And on the morrow two of the world's most famous specialists were coming to St. Frank's, ostensibly as casual visitors to the science master. But they were really coming to witness a demonstration of the great scientific invention.

And everything would depend upon that test. The Hon. Douglas was so wrapped up in the affairs of Professor Tucker that he almost shared the scientist's anxiety and suspense.

## CHAPTER VI.

### FANTASTIC EVENTS IN STUDY D.



"PREP?" said Handforth, with a start. "By George! I'd forgotten all about it. We shall have to look alive, and——"

"You silly ass, there's only two minutes before bedtime," interrupted Church tartly. "Didn't we keep urging you to come away from the party? I know we had official passes to be out until bedtime——"

"Rats!" growled Handforth. "Like your nerve to suggest leaving the party for the sake of doing rotten prep. We shall have to make an excuse to old Crowell tomorrow, and hope for the best."

The chums of Study D were just entering the Ancient House, and they were expecting the bell to ring at any moment.

It was practically bedtime, and they had only just scraped in by the skin of their teeth. Most of the other fellows had left earlier.

"No harm in hoping," grunted McClure. "Not that it'll be much good. Crowell won't take any excuses. We'd better get up early and do our prep before breakfast. Or why not sit up to-night in the dormitory?"

But Handforth and Church were solidly against the suggestion. It if had been a feed or a House rag they would have agreed heartily. But the very idea of work was abhorrent.

"Anyhow, we'll take our books up," suggested McClure. "We may feel like it after we've got undressed. Half an hour's work will do the trick, and that'll be better than facing old Crowell's wrath."

They went along to Study D with a feeling of depression. They had enjoyed themselves immensely at Irene's party. It had been an overwhelming success. But it was a bit too thick to find work awaiting them when they arrived home. The very thought of their neglected prep. weighed heavily upon them. But duty was duty, and even Handforth and Church came to the conclusion that there was something to be said for McClure's suggestion.

"We've just got time to grab our books," grunted Handforth. "Huh! Can't go to a party now without having to pay for it! Why can't they drop prep on occasions like this? These masters haven't got any souls!"

"But they've got canes!" said McClure pointedly.

"I say, I've just remembered!" said Handforth, looking round. "This study, you know. I wonder what the dickens was wrong at tea-time? That whispering voice, and the warning——"

"I've just remembered it, too," admitted Church. "It hadn't crossed my mind again until you started speaking——"

"Look!" yelled Handforth, with a gasp.

His tone was so charged with consternation that his chums stood stock still, their hearts thumping madly. The recent experiences in the study had come back to them like a flood, and they were feeling curiously nervous. Handforth's yell nearly made their hair rise.

"What—what——" began Church breathlessly.

Edward Oswald was staring dazedly into the mirror. It was quite an ordinary looking-glass, fitted on the mantelpiece. But Handforth experienced a staggering shock. Instead of his normal reflection, he saw something else! It was impossible—it was outrageously insane—but it was a fact! Instead of his own well-known features, he saw a grotesque monstrosity leering at him out of the mirror!



But even as he stared at it with fascinated, horrified gaze, it changed. He couldn't move an inch. He was held there as though in some vice. The horror of the thing gripped him. Church and McClure rushed to his side.

"What's wrong?" gasped Church, his face pale and drawn.

"Look!" breathed Handforth.

He managed to point to the mirror. Both Church and McClure stared. They saw their own reflections, and they saw Handforth's. Everything was quite normal. There was nothing to account for Edward Oswald's shock.

"Look where?" asked McClure quickly. "I can't see—"

"It's gone!" croaked Handforth, lurching to the mirror and staring into it closely. "It's gone!"

He felt the surface of the glass, and even swung the mirror back and looked at the wall behind. The mirror itself was untouched, and the wall was as solid as ever it had been.

"What's gone?" asked Church, grabbing at Handforth's arm. "What's gone? Handy, what did you see just now?"

"I—I don't know!" muttered Handforth, passing a hand over his eyes. "There's something horrible about this study! I looked at myself in the mirror just now, and it wasn't me at all!"

"Wasn't you?"

"No!"

"But—but—"

"It wasn't me, I tell you!" insisted Handforth feverishly. "It was an awful-looking monster—a warped, distorted creature with horrible eyes and great hunched shoulders. I nearly had a fit!"

They looked at him anxiously.

"You must be wrong, old man," muttered McClure huskily. "You couldn't have seen anything else but your own reflection. It's opposed to all the laws of nature. A looking-glass is a looking-glass. It can only reflect the actual thing in front of it—"

"It was horrible!" muttered Handforth, breathing hard. "I don't like to think about it. It wasn't me, I tell you! It was some—"

"Look over there!" burst out Church, pointing.

Handforth and McClure leapt a clean foot into the air. They were in such a jumpy state that they fairly shivered. But there was nothing horrible to witness this time, although what they saw was fantastic enough, in all conscience!

On the other side of the room a big expanse of blank wall was shivering with great red words. They hadn't been there a moment ago. By some mysterious, hidden agency they had sprung into being without the juniors knowing how or when they had been produced.

Handforth & Co. stared with bulging eyes.

"FOOLS! FOOLS! NO PEACE WILL BE YOURS UNTIL YOU CEASE YOUR INSANE OPPOSITION TO OUR EARTHLY AGENT. YOU SEE THESE WORDS, BUT THEY HAVE NO REAL EXISTENCE! WATCH!"

All the words appeared to be daubed on the wall in great red letters, and in some extraordinary way they had the aspect of life. They glimmered and quivered on the wall eerily.

"How—how—" began Handforth.

Then he abruptly stopped and blinked. Before his very eyes the words faded. They flickered and vanished. He ran forward, and felt the wall feverishly. There was nothing there but the blankness. Not a trace of paint or pigment. And the juniors had the study utterly to themselves.

"What—what was it?" gasped Church.

"A warning!" said McClure huskily. "Insane opposition to an earth agent! That must mean Quirke. We saw something written there by the spirits— But it's all rot! It couldn't be!"

"I know—a magic-lantern!" shouted Handforth. "Somebody's ragging us!"

But even as he uttered the words he knew how idle they were. Any magic-lantern, in order to throw that message upon the wall, must have been set within the study—on the wall where the fireplace was situated. There was no possibility of a human being concealing himself within the room. The study was prosaic and commonplace.

Clang, clang!

All three juniors jumped, but it was only the bell which signified bed-time. They had forgotten all about their prep, and had made no attempt to collect their books. Instinctively, they made a move for the door, glad enough to have an excuse to leave this apartment.

"Come on—we'd better clear out!" muttered Church. "Goodness knows, I'm not a nervous chap, but— Oh, my hat! Look up there!" he screamed. "Look up there!"

"Eh?" gurgled Handforth, clutching at McClure.

Church was pointing over the door. And there, apparently hovering over the framework, was a fearsome-looking head. The face was too grotesque to be human, and yet it had the appearance of impish life. It was on the wall, and yet it seemed to be projected—as though the fearsome thing had pushed its head through the solid plaster.

The three juniors backed away, staring. In a darkened room these extraordinary phenomena would have been terrifying enough. But Study D was blazing with



electric light, and every corner of the cosy room was flooded with the normal illumination.

And yet that head hung there—as though defying them to pass through the doorway into the safety of the corridor. For one instant, Handforth thought of dashing madly to the window. He even took a step in that direction, and Church and McClure divined his intention.

"Let's get out!" breathed Church.

"No!" muttered Handforth. "I'm not going to be scared by—Great leaping kangaroos!" he panted. "It's gone! It's gone!"

They stared up over the door, and there wasn't a thing there. Just the plain wall and the ceiling above. It was as though they had seen nothing—as though the creature had been a monstrosity of disordered minds.

They didn't wait. Dashing to the door, they flung it open and tore out. They scarcely remembered getting upstairs to their dormitory. Subdued and shaky, they sat on their beds, and made no attempt to undress. For once the mighty Edward Oswald was actually scared.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE COMPACT OF TEN INVESTIGATES.



**D**ICK HAMILTON looked in a minute later.

"Who's the culprit?" he asked severely.

"Eh?" said Handforth with a start.

"One of you careless asses forgot to switch the light off in your study," went on Nipper. "It's a good thing I spotted it, or—Hullo, anything wrong?" he went on curiously. "By Jove! You're looking a bit white about the gills, aren't you?"

"It's Quirke—I know it's Quirke!" muttered Church. "I shan't scoff at him any more. He's in league with demons, or something! I believe he's only a ghost himself!"

Nipper looked at the chums of Study D grimly.

"Hullo—hallo!" he said. "What's all this? Out with it, my sons! This sort of thing won't do, you know! When I found your study light on, I never dreamed—"

"The room's haunted!" declared McClure. "What about those whisperings, and that mocking laugh? And now these other things! I tell you the room's haunted! I think somebody ought to tell the Head."

"Far better tell me!" said Dick Hamilton crisply. "Wait a minute, though! This seems to be important. We'll all go along to old Browne's study. The Compact of Ten must look into this officially."

Handforth stared up into Nipper's face.

"Yes, by George!" he said. "That's it—the Compact of Ten! We'll all meet together, and I'll tell you about it. First of all, there was that awful thing in the mirror—"

"No need to tell it twice, Handy—wait until we're in council," interrupted Dick. "I'll go along, and give the other chaps the tip before they start undressing."

"Why not go now?" asked Church.

"My dear chap, what about the prefect?" said Nipper. "As soon as he's made his rounds, and all lights are out, we'll join forces. The best thing will be to collect in Browne's bed-room—it's bigger than ours."

And in various Remove dormitories certain juniors waited impatiently for lights out. The Compact of Ten was quite a newly-formed organisation—really, a reorganised Thirteen Club. But the latter had died after several of its members had been converted to Ezra Quirke's mysticism. The Compact of Ten had arisen out of the wreckage.

First and foremost, the members had pledged themselves to oppose Quirke and his doings on every possible occasion. But, unlike the Thirteen Club, which had made a public display of its activities, the Compact of Ten worked in secret. The primary object was to secure evidence against Quirke, and finally unmask him as a trickster.

It was unfortunate that Handforth should have made such indiscreet remarks on the football field, for by those few thoughtless words Quirke had gained the impression that Handforth was the leader of the new opposition.

And now, if one took it for granted that Quirke was in league with the Black Arts, the latter had already commenced their grim business on Study D. It was evidently a movement to frighten the Compact of Ten into extinction.

If there was any leader at all, it was William Napoleon Browne, the cool, lanky, imperturbable captain of the Fifth Form. Browne, aided by Stevens, had already made a decided move against Quirke, and only a few days earlier there had been a sensation regarding the Fourth Form class-room. Only the Compact of Ten knew that the strange manifestations had been produced by the genial Browne.

Dick Hamilton was actively engaged in the campaign against Quirke, too, and he was particularly interested in Handforth & Co.'s recent experience. It was undoubtedly an occasion for a meeting of the Ten.

And soon after lights out the redoubtable Die-hards collected together in Browne's bed-room. In addition to Handforth & Co., there were Dick Hamilton, Reggie Pitt, Fullwood, Nicodemus Trotwood and Buster Boots. Several of them had had to sneak



across from their respective Houses. Nipper himself had taken the word round. But an occasion such as this was worth a little risk.

"We are all here, brothers?" asked Browne at length. "Splendid! I will not comment upon the lamentable lateness of one or two members, but will pass lightly on to more important topics. We have on the agenda a most diverting monologue from Brother Handforth. Kindly sit down, and allow your ears to stand firmly at attention. Brother Handforth, we hang upon your words."

"Blessed if I know how to begin," said Handforth. "In fact, it all seems so jolly unreal now. You'll only laugh at me—"

"Heaven forbid such a catastrophe!" said Browne, horrified. "Let me urge you, fellow members, to hear Brother Handforth out minus any vulgar display of hilarious scepticism. I do not, of course, expect you to understand all these long words, but you will possibly grasp the trend. I understand, moreover, that Brother Church and Brother McClure were equally involved?"

"We all saw the things," said Church. "Go on, Handy—no need to be afraid to speak. We didn't imagine anything—any chap with common sense will know that we couldn't all see the same illusions at the same second."

"Bravely spoken, Brother Church," said Browne gravely. "And now, perhaps, we shall have the delightful experience of listening to Brother Handforth's celebrated vocal prowess."

"All right—I'll tell you everything," said Handforth, pacing up and down. "But I'm dashed if I'd say a word if Church and McClure hadn't seen the things as well! Thank goodness they were there; that's all!"

"So you've seen something now?" asked Boots. "Somebody told me there were queer whispers in the study at tea-time, but I didn't take much notice—"

"That was rummy enough, but this is ten times more extraordinary," interrupted Handforth. "We went to that party to-night, you know, at the Moor View School. Rather a ripping affair, too. All the girls were looking fine, and as for Irene, she—"

"While acknowledging the charms of these delightful young ladies, it is, nevertheless, irrelevant to bring them in at this precise juncture," interposed Browne gently. "I am aware it will be a great effort, Brother Handforth, but kindly forget Irene for the moment, and confine yourself to the point."

"We went to that party, and didn't get

back until nearly bed-time," said Handforth gruffly. "We went to the study, and I hadn't been in the room two minutes before I looked into the mirror."

"Ah!" murmured Browne. "It is sad to observe these early signs of vanity. And what, Brother Handforth, did you see?"

"A perfectly ghastly monstrosity!"

"I am quite prepared to believe that," observed Browne smoothly. "We are not, however, discussing your unfortunate physiognomy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The rest of the meeting smiled somewhat broadly.

"I wasn't talking about my face!" roared Handforth, glaring.

"No?" asked Browne. "In that case, allow me to offer you one thousand apologies. But when you tell us that you gazed into the mirror, and beheld a ghastly monstrosity, we are apt to conclude that you have at last realised the dreadful truth. Not that I wish to enter upon any discourse concerning this lamentable subject—"

"But I didn't see myself at all!" hooted Handforth, turning red. "Instead of my own reflection, I saw a horrid apparition."

Browne shook his head.

"Alas, it appears that one can come to only one conclusion," he said, with a sigh. "I earnestly trust, Brother Handforth, that you indulged in nothing stronger than ginger-wine at this party? Possibly a little elderberry might result in these illusions. I have even known primrose wine, on occasion, to produce the most startling effects. One must be careful—"

"We didn't have any wine at all, you lanky fathead!" interrupted Handforth. "I wasn't thinking of anything when I looked into that mirror. And there, staring at me, was the most awful sight I've ever seen!"

"We, of course, must perforce gaze upon this sight daily," said Browne, with regret. "Pardon my scepticism, Brother Handforth, but this portion of the evidence appears to be somewhat thin. In fact, it would not be too drastic to describe it as almost invisible. I trust Brothers Church and McClure will give you some measure of support?"

"When we looked in the mirror, we could only see Handy," said Church.

"You must have been mistaken, old man," declared Nipper. "How on earth could you have seen anything in the mirror but your own reflection?"

"I don't know," replied Handforth obstinately. "But it was there. It wasn't me, but a giddy nightmare! And none of your grins, either! Do you think I can't tell my own face from a gargoyle?"

"A somewhat difficult task, but it's just possible that the difference might be detected," said Browne benevolently. "It is sometimes conceivable that one pea may be

# ANSWERS

Every Saturday. Price 2d



distinguished from another. However, we will not stress this unpleasant subject. Let us carry on."

"You Fifth-Form rotter!" roared Handforth. "If you mean to imply——"

"Let us carry on with the evidence," interrupted Browne soothingly. "You evidently misinterpreted my expression, Brother Handforth—you are carrying on in quite another way. What was the next item of mystery?"

Church and McClure took up the tale now, and described the shimmering red lettering and the awful head which had appeared over the doorway. The other members of the Compact of Ten listened with expressions which revealed their thoughts only too plainly.

To be exact, they discredited the whole yarn.

"Forgive us, you chaps, but we can't quite swallow it," said Stevens dubiously. "Hang it all, there's a limit! I can understand somebody working up a trick—but these things you speak of couldn't be worked by trickery. You must have imagined everything."

"We didn't!" said Handforth stubbornly. "Those red letters——"

"Peace, Brother Handforth—peace," interrupted Browne gently. "At all costs, let us have peace. One course appears to be indicated. Under my renowned leadership, we will now visit this haunted chamber, and make a few close investigations. Leave this entirely in my hands. Seldom have I been baffled—never have I been absolutely bogged."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE GHOST.



**S**TUDY D was looking quite normal when the Compact of Ten crowded in.

The investigators took the precaution to pull the curtains, so that no gleam of light should escape across the Square. Indeed, extreme caution was necessary, for there were several masters still wakeful.

Handforth went to the mirror, and gazed into it. William Napoleon Browne gave a start as he regarded Handforth's reflection.

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated. "Brother Handforth was right in his assertion. Gaze, brothers, at this——"

"You silly ass!" howled Handforth. "That's me!"

"Indeed?" asked Browne, in pained surprise. "Much as I regret the fact, I am afraid you are right. A perfectly symmetrical face is identical both in and out of the mirror. But a lop-sided, knobby face is apt to appear different when viewed without warning. Hence my natural error."

"Can't you leave my face alone?" de-



"There's nothing here!" said Handforth, shaking his head. He turned the switch, and the Capitol Orchestra obligingly provided some more music.

manded Handforth thickly. "Honestly, you chaps, there was something awful in that mirror. I'm not the kind of chap to imagine things—I saw it as clearly as I can see my own reflection now."

"You didn't see yourself as well?" asked Pitt keenly.

"No—only that awful thing."

"Then it seems only too painfully obvious——"

"Chuck it, Browne," said Stevens. "It couldn't have been imagination on Handforth's part. He's one of the most matter-of-fact chaps in the Remove. Besides, Church and McClure saw those other effects, too."

Nipper was closely examining the mirror, but the result was negative.

"It's a mystery to me!" he declared.

"The glass is just the same as usual. The frame hasn't been touched, and the wall is intact. Nobody's tinkered with this mirror, I'll swear."

"And the walls seem just ordinary, too," said Fullwood.

They continued the keen scrutiny, but all their efforts came to nothing. From floor to ceiling, and in every nook and cranny, Study D was just the same as it had always been. There wasn't the faintest suggestion of anything being faked.

"Listen!" ejaculated Pitt suddenly.



He held up his hand, and everybody became silent. Outside, it was intensely quiet. The school was settled for the night, and there were none of the hundred and one sounds that had been present during the tea-hour. There wasn't even any wind. At the holding up of Pitt's hand, the silence in Study D was like something tangible.

And in the midst of it there came the sound of whispering. Strange, mysterious, eerie whisperings. They filled the very air. They seemed to be everywhere at once, and yet nowhere in particular.

"Just like it was at tea-time!" breathed Church, startled.

"Hush!" murmured Browne. "I may be wrong, but my unerring instinct warns me that we are in the presence of dirty work at the cross-roads. Let us range ourselves about the room, and open our ear-pieces to the widest."

And the ten investigators took advantage of the excellent tip. They each occupied a different spot, until the entire study was covered. And then dead silence reigned again.

Dick Hamilton happened to be near the radio, and he suddenly gave a start. A whispering voice sounded in his very ear. He stared at the loud speaker with a grim look in his eyes.

"It's here!" he breathed, holding a finger to his mouth. "Shsssssh! Don't let's give them any warning."

"Irene said it was the loud speaker at tea-time!" whispered Handforth triumphantly. "I knew she was right all the time!"

Nipper was closely examining the instrument. Then, ruthlessly, he tore off the ornamental grill, and dived a hand into the aperture.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated. "Ghostly whispering, eh? Spectral moans! There's fakery here, or I'll eat my boots!"

"How?" asked half-a-dozen voices.

"Wait a minute!" said Nipper grimly.

He pulled out an electric torch, and flashed the light deep into the wooden horn of the loud speaker. Then he gave an ejaculation of satisfaction.

"Here we are!" he said calmly. "Two little telephone gadgets—a receiver and a transmitter! It's just a short line. I should imagine, and anything spoken at the other end is naturally loud here—especially after being amplified by the horn."

"But—but the thing works fine when the valves are on," began Church.

"Of course, it does," interrupted Dick. "That's the cunning part of it. This telephone dodge is absolutely independent. We shall probably find the wires leading down through the cupboard—By Jove, we can trace the thing to the other end if we follow those wires."

"Anyhow, we've got Quirke now!" said Boots triumphantly. "Here's a direct proof of trickery—"

"Don't bring old Quirke into it," came a chuckling voice from the loud speaker. "I can hear everything you chaps say, you know! My hat! I didn't think you'd bowl me out so soon!"

Handforth staggered back with a choking cry.

"My minor!" he gurgled helplessly.

"Alas, these minors!" sighed Browne. "I distinctly remember one unfortunate fellow at Uxton who had no less than four minors in the school. The torments of this unhappy fellow-creature would be impossible to describe—"

"My minor!" roared Handforth, recovering himself with difficulty. "Lemme get at him! I'll jolly well smash him—"

"Steady, old man!" grinned Dick Hamilton. "You've got to admit it was a pretty clever dodge. But how did he get hold of that radio without you knowing it?"

"Without me knowing it!" howled Handforth. "Why he kept it for two-days, and repaired it—and charged me fifteen bob for the job!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And he only wanted it to fake up that telephone stunt!" snorted Handforth. "When I get hold of him—"

The door opened, and Willy strolled in, grinning.

"How's that for a good ghost?" he asked calmly.

"You—you—you—"

"Oh, come off it, Ted!" protested Willy. "I only did it for a lark. The wires go right through to my study, and I've been sitting there listening to you chaps, and doing all the effects. You don't know the trouble I went to to fit those gadgets in—"

"Trouble!" breathed Handforth. "You charged me fifteen bob!"

"Well, of course, that was necessary," said Willy. "If I hadn't charged you anything, you would have been suspicious. When I had that set in my workshop, I couldn't resist the temptation. It suddenly occurred to me—"

"Lemme get at him!" panted Handforth desperately.

"Rats! It was a good joke!" grinned Nipper. "How did you manage the other things, Willy?"

"What other things?"

"The writing on the wall, and the face, and the thing your major saw in the mirror—"

"You're dreaming," said Willy blankly.

"Don't you know how they were done?"

"I never knew anything about it until this minute," replied Willy earnestly. "Honest injun, you know. I'll admit the moans and the whispering, but nothing more. Do you mean to say there's been something else?"

Willy was in deadly earnest when he made this denial. And it was soon proved beyond question that his part in the



mystery was confined to the loud speaker alone. The really inexplicable happenings were as great a riddle to him as to the others.

"I heard you all sneaking down, so I naturally concluded you'd come to look for the ghostly voice," he said. "I thought I'd come along and improve things a bit. But as for the writing on the wall, and—Oh, chuck it, you know. All that stuff's a bit too thick!"

"I'm beginning to think so myself now," said Church doubtfully. "It seems so unreal. Perhaps we were a bit unnerved, or something."

Even Handforth and McClure were wondering, too. The total absence of any explanation was startling. The whispering voices had been the least of the unaccountable mysteries. Willy was the culprit in that case, and he was unmasked.

But what about the other uncanny manifestations?

"Well, it's no good staying here," said Nipper at last. "We might as well get to bed and talk it over to-morrow. And if there's anything else, Handy, you'd better call some of us in on the very instant."

"A wise and sound decision, Brother Hamilton," agreed Browne. "Let us therefore hasten to our beauty sleep. There are some among us—names would be painful—who can do with it."

Nipper opened the door and switched the light off. They all started creeping out into the passage. But there came a sudden gasp from Fullwood.

"What—what's that?" he asked breathlessly.

The others turned and were held transfixed. In Study D a strange, spectral figure was hovering. In spite of the utter darkness it was visible—not luminous in the ordinary way, but a definite presence.

## CHAPTER IX.

### ANOTHER MOVE IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.



"LIGHTS—lights!" shouted somebody frantically.

Those fellows who were left in the study were positively scared. The Thing seemed to be actually upon them. It was hanging there, ready to pounce—an elusive, vague shape.

With a click the light was switched on.

Not one of those juniors had taken their fascinated gaze from the apparition. The sudden burst of light came, and the result was uncanny in the extreme. Study D was as devoid of any spectral presence as ever. There was simply nothing there, although

the switching on of the light had been instantaneous.

"Where is it?" breathed Church.

"Gone!"

The electric light had an encouraging effect upon the juniors. They wondered if their imaginations had run riot. The thing was so inexplicable. There wasn't any indication of an unusual presence in the study now. Certainly there was no trick "ghost" such as Pitt had once employed. There wasn't even a scrap of muslin or a string of a wire. No room in the school could have been more prosaic than this one.

"Switch the light off again, Brother Hamilton," suggested Browne. "It is too much to hope for a second materialisation, but in this world one never knows."

Nipper switched off the light, and Study D was again plunged into darkness. But as Browne had feared there was absolutely nothing to be seen, although Fullwood declared that he caught a glimpse of the shape for a mere second or two.

This, however, was put down to imagination.

Once again the room was examined, and once again the investigators drew blank.

"I wonder if there's anything in old Quirke and his Black Magic after all?" said Church dubiously. "I'm half inclined to believe—"

"Sleep on it, Brother Church," interrupted Browne. "Are we to lose one of our diehards at this early stage? The Compact of Ten stands firm. Rest assured that we have witnessed a phenomena which has a natural explanation. The mere fact that we cannot fathom it is a mere trifle. To-morrow we will be nearer to our goal. And Brother Quirke will be nearer to the morass which is awaiting to envelop him. Have no fear. Trust in my marvellous powers of leadership, and there can be but one result."

They went to bed, several of the juniors in a very unsettled state of mind. But in the morning they felt better. The full daylight made the events of the previous evening seem unreal and grotesque.

Emerging from the Ancient House, William Napoleon Browne and Horace Stevens paused for a moment. It was a fine morning, and the Triangle was sunny. There was a nip of frost in the air.

"I think," observed Browne, "that a somewhat diverting interlude is now about to unfold itself before our gaze. Watch closely, Brother Horace, for this will be well worth your attention."

Ezra Quirke was just emerging from the East House. He was alone, and walked with his usual silent tread. Nearby two or three groups of juniors were idly chatting. But it was rather significant



that they all belonged to the Compact of Ten.

Dick Hamilton gave a short, sharp whistle. And the groups of fellows became galvanised into instant life. With one accord they swept upon Quirke, and behaved in a somewhat extraordinary manner.

Quirke was seized, bowled over, and then held upside-down. In this inverted position he was shaken violently. Money, keys, a pocket-knife, and other personal belongings rained to the ground.

"A masterly piece of work," observed Browne contentedly. "Seldom have I seen such decisive methods. A triumph, Brother Horace."

For a moment Quirke was hidden amid the confusion of figures. But it was all over in a moment. The Removites faded away. Quirke was left sitting in the Triangle, ruffled, dishevelled, and dazed.

Armstrong, Griffith, Skelton and a few others came running up and collected round the unfortunate schoolboy magician. He was muddy and untidy, and all round him were the contents of his pockets. They were literally strewn on the gravel.

"Little do they realise the sinister truth," observed Browne, with a shake of his head. "Let us wend our way to the haunts of our youthful fellow-conspirators, and doubtless we shall receive news of a cheering order. Judging by appearances, Brother Horace, my genius has once again been victorious."

Quirke was assisted to his feet, and dusted down.

"What happened?" asked Armstrong. "Why on earth did those Remove chaps pounce on you like that? The rotters. If they call that funny——"

"We must accept these insults and exhibitions of petty violence with the contempt they deserve," said Quirke, with cold anger. "It is idle to protest. Indeed, such a step would merely aggravate further action."

"But hang it all, there was no need to pounce on you like a pack of wolves!" said Griffith hotly. "Come on, you chaps, help me to pick these things up."

All Quirke's belongings were restored to him, and he was slightly relieved. For it had occurred to him that there had been an ulterior motive in this early morning rag. He even feared that the Removites had attempted to purloin his keys. But no. They were still intact.

So Ezra Quirke came to the conclusion that he had merely been the victim of a foolish jape—a burst of innocent exuberance. He was particularly anxious about his keys. One of them fitted the door of the inner cellar—the Chamber of Horrors, as the sceptics disparagingly termed it.

But it would have been a crude piece of work at the best, if the key had been

taken. For Quirke would have missed it, and would have taken the necessary steps to prevent any tampering with his mystery cellar. He was relieved to realise that the rag had been motiveless.

In the Ancient House, Browne and Stevens were in Study C. They had the apartment to themselves for a few minutes, and then Dick Hamilton arrived, accompanied by Fullwood and Pitt.

"I take it that all is well, Brother Hamilton?" asked Browne.

"Rather!" grinned Nipper. "A complete success."

"Splendid!" beamed the Fifth-Former. "I could not have placed the commission in better hands——"

"Why, you lanky ass, it was Nipper's idea!" said Fullwood.

"Indeed! In this one instance perhaps we will grant that my own genius was equalled by Brother Nipper," said Browne. "May we be permitted to gaze upon the prize?"

Nipper produced something from his pocket—an uneven slab of substance which looked like wax. Everybody gazed at it intently.

"A triumph—a masterpiece!" declared Browne. "Seldom have I seen such a perfect impression. I trust, Brother Hamilton, that you will never seriously take up the hobby of cracksmanship. With such ability as this you would doubtless become a danger to the State."

Nipper grinned. The wax contained a faultless impression of a Yale key. The depth of the conspiracy was now revealed. There had been some deep motive in that attack upon Quirke, after all. The all-important key had not been purloined, but during the confusion Nipper had managed to obtain a splendid wax impression of it. Thus Quirke suspected nothing, but a duplicate of the key was merely a question of time.

"We're out for evidence," said Nipper grimly. "We've always been suspicious of Quirke's Chamber of Mystery, but we've never had the opportunity of visiting it without his knowledge. This time we'll bowl him out."

"When shall we be able to explore?" asked Pitt keenly.

"Not before this evening," replied Dick. "Quirke's got a meeting on to-night—a very special one, too. He wants to impress his supporters with his own infallible powers. And he's losing grip a bit. He sees the necessity of doing something particularly spectacular."

"Yes, lots of fellows are talking about that meeting, although it's supposed to be a dead secret," remarked Fullwood. "It's a rummy thing; they simply can't keep it to themselves. But if this meeting is to be held at seven-thirty, what chance shall



we have of exploring the cellar beforehand?"

"We can get busy soon after tea," replied Nipper. "And we shall do something in addition to exploring, my son. Browne's plan is to set a few traps for Master Quirke. Not knowing anything about them he'll walk right in and give himself away. It only needs one exposure to convince all his dupes that he's a fraud."

"Masterly words, Brother Hamilton," agreed Browne. "To-night I think we shall witness the edifying spectacle of Brother Quirke sliding steeply into the abyss of oblivion. To-morrow he will be but a memory. At least, I trust so. But in this world of snags and jolts one can never be too sure. Fate is generally lurking round the corner with a sandbag."

"Oh, we shall get him to-night!" said Fullwood, with conviction. "Let's have a look at those blank keys, Nipper."

The conspirators had already provided themselves with a number of Yale key blanks—that is to say, keys which had never been cut to any pattern. They had easily been bought from an ironmonger's in Bannington."

And one of them proved to be suitable. The grooves were identical with Quirke's key, so it would merely be a matter of filing to obtain an exact duplicate of the pattern. And with the wax impression as a guide failure was impossible.

To all appearance this was to be a very special day in Ezra Quirke's brief history.

## CHAPTER X.

### PROFESSOR TUCKER'S VISITORS.



**P**ROFESSOR SYLVESTER TUCKER frowned.

"Don't bother," he said irritably. "Go away! How dare you disturb me now? I won't have it!"

He was seated at his desk in his cosy study, and it seemed that he didn't really know what had disturbed him. He was only aware of the fact that some distracting influence had interrupted his train of thought. As a matter of fact, he was quite alone in his study.

"Tap! Tap!"

"This is too bad!" said the professor angrily. "I positively won't have this disturbance— Good gracious! I really had no idea— Come in—come in!" he added loudly. "Come in!"

The Hon. Douglas Singleton appeared.

"Sorry if I'm butting in, sir—" he began.

"Undoubtedly you are butting in, Singleton," interrupted the professor, frowning. "What is more to the point, I won't have this butting in! Go away at once! Shut the door, and sit down! Confound you, boy, there's an infernal draught!"

Having been ordered to do contradictory things, Singleton chose the latter, and sat down just inside the door. It was nearly tea-time, and the Hon. Douglas had been unable to keep away from the professor's quarters. After his recent interview with Quirke—and the strange hints that Quirke had given after gazing into the crystal—Singleton could not rest. He knew that the professor's distinguished visitors were due to arrive at about this time.

"Have you heard anything, sir?" he ventured. "A telegram, or a 'phone call, sir?"

"Eh?" said Professor Tucker abstractedly. "The telephone? Answer it at once! It may be—"

"No, sir. I was only asking if you'd had a call said Singleton. "Aren't you expecting those big pots from London?"

"To be sure!" agreed the professor. "It is high time these big pots were on the scene— Pots?" he added with a start. "What pots? I know nothing of any pots, Singleton! What nonsense—"

"The specialists, sir."

The professor jumped to his feet.

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated with a startled expression in his eyes. "The specialists! Of course—of course! What time is it? Why didn't you come before? Here am I, wasting my time on mere trifles, and I have not even prepared— This is a calamity!"

He rushed into his laboratory, switched on the lights, and bustled about from one bench to another, evidently making an effort to tidy the place up. The laboratory was in its usual condition of disorder, for the professor would allow none of the school cleaners to come into that sacred chamber.

"Can I give a hand, sir?" asked Singleton briskly.

"What is the time?" panted the professor, pulling out his watch and staring at it. "Upon my soul! Nine-thirty! We are too late, Singleton! The gentlemen must have come, and I didn't even know— This is terrible—this is a most frightful blow—"

"Your watch must have stopped, sir," interrupted the Hon. Douglas. "It's only just half-past four. You told me the specialists were due here at about this time—"

"Half-past four!" repeated the professor. "Thank Heaven! Do you know, Singleton, I never have the correct time—never! First it is my watch, and then my clock! They are atrociously out of order. For some unaccountable reason, they are always stopping, and always making me lose



count of the hours. I live in a state of constant confusion."

The professor wound his watch up with a vicious force—proving that the reason for its failure was not so unaccountable, after all. He was so absent-minded that incidents of this type were part of his daily life.

"Everything depends upon this visit," he declared, as he dropped the watch into the waste-paper basket and pocketed an old cork. "Come along, Singleton—come along! Help me with this litter. We shall never get straight if you stand there looking on!"

The Hon. Douglas took the hint and cleared up a mass of rubbish from the floor, shifting it into one of the corners—where a pile of odds and ends had already accumulated.

"Singleton!" barked the professor suddenly. "Stop! Stop this instant! How dare you interfere with those things? Upon my word! This is altogether too bad!"

"But you told me——"

"Nonsense, sir!" stormed the old scientist. "I allow you to come into my laboratory—Heaven knows why!—and all you can do is to interfere! I have never been so upset in all my life! If you cannot behave yourself, Singleton, you will have to go! Why are you here at all? Am I to have no peace?"

The Hon. Douglas gave it up as a bad job, and stood looking on—fully expecting the professor to rail at him for remaining idle. But the science master had apparently forgotten that there was anything to be cleared up. He was lovingly fingering a curious-looking instrument on one of the benches—an object with one or two dials on it, and with wires leading out of it.

"Everything is prepared!" he murmured. "To-day will prove the crucial test. I have already tested the apparatus to my own satisfaction——"

"And mine, sir," said Singleton.

"Eh? Your what?"

"My satisfaction, sir."

"What has your satisfaction to do with me?" demanded the professor tartly. "These interruptions. Ah, yes, to be sure!" he added with a start. "You have witnessed one or two performances, have you not, Singleton? Splendid! If only these famous doctors will see eye to eye—— Good gracious! Isn't it time they arrived?"

He pulled out the old cork, and gazed at it searchingly.

"What is this?" he asked in a startled voice. "My watch appears to have changed its character. Good heavens! A cork! What on earth——"

"I think you must have thrown your watch into the waste-paper basket, sir," grinned Singleton. "I'll look——"

Tap, tap!

"They are here!" breathed the professor tensely.

He scuttled out of the laboratory like an ancient rabbit and threw the outer door open. The professor occupied a self-contained suite in the Ancient House, with an outer door leading on to the upper corridor. He beheld Tubbs, the page-boy.

"Confound you, sir!" stormed the professor. "How dare you come bothering me——"

"Three gents to see you, sir," said Tubbs brightly.

"Three gents?" ejaculated the professor. "Splendid! Show the gents up at once! Er—I should say, the gentlemen! How dare you trap me into using your ridiculous abbreviations? Show them to my rooms at once, Tubbs! Don't stand there grinning like an imbecile!"

"No, sir!" gasped Tubbs. "Yes, sir!"

In the meantime, the Hon. Douglas Singleton was gazing out of the laboratory window, hoping to catch a glimpse of the Triangle. But this was impossible, since the window overlooked the West Square. If Singleton had been able to see into the Triangle, however, he would have observed a superbly appointed limousine at the Ancient House steps. Evidently the visitors were wealthy, in addition to being distinguished.

A few minutes later they appeared.

Two of them were grave, elderly men, scrupulously groomed. Singleton caught a glimpse of them through the open door of the laboratory. He set them down at once as Harley Street experts. The third was of a totally different type—a commonplace man, weakly-looking and slight. He was gazing about him with a bewildered, half-scared expression.

"It is quite all right, Johnson," said one of the specialists to him. "You have absolutely nothing to fear. Professor Tucker will give you his assurance that this operation will be painless and devoid of all danger."

"I'm game, sir," said the man with a quick smile. "I ain't the kind of chap to kick if there's any chance of being put right. But I don't believe it, sir. There ain't no human power what can do anything to my arm!"

"A week ago I would have been ready to agree with you, Johnson, but I have heard amazing reports of Professor Tucker's apparatus," replied the specialist kindly. "Mind you, we can give you no definite hope, but there is just a chance—a slim possibility——"

"Rubbish, sir—rubbish!" interrupted Professor Tucker, frowning. "There is not merely a slim possibility, but a decided probability that the man's arm will be restored. Let me see it! I shall then be able to judge."

"It's been paralysed for nigh on twenty years, sir," said Johnson. "An accident on the railway it was, down near Surbiton——"



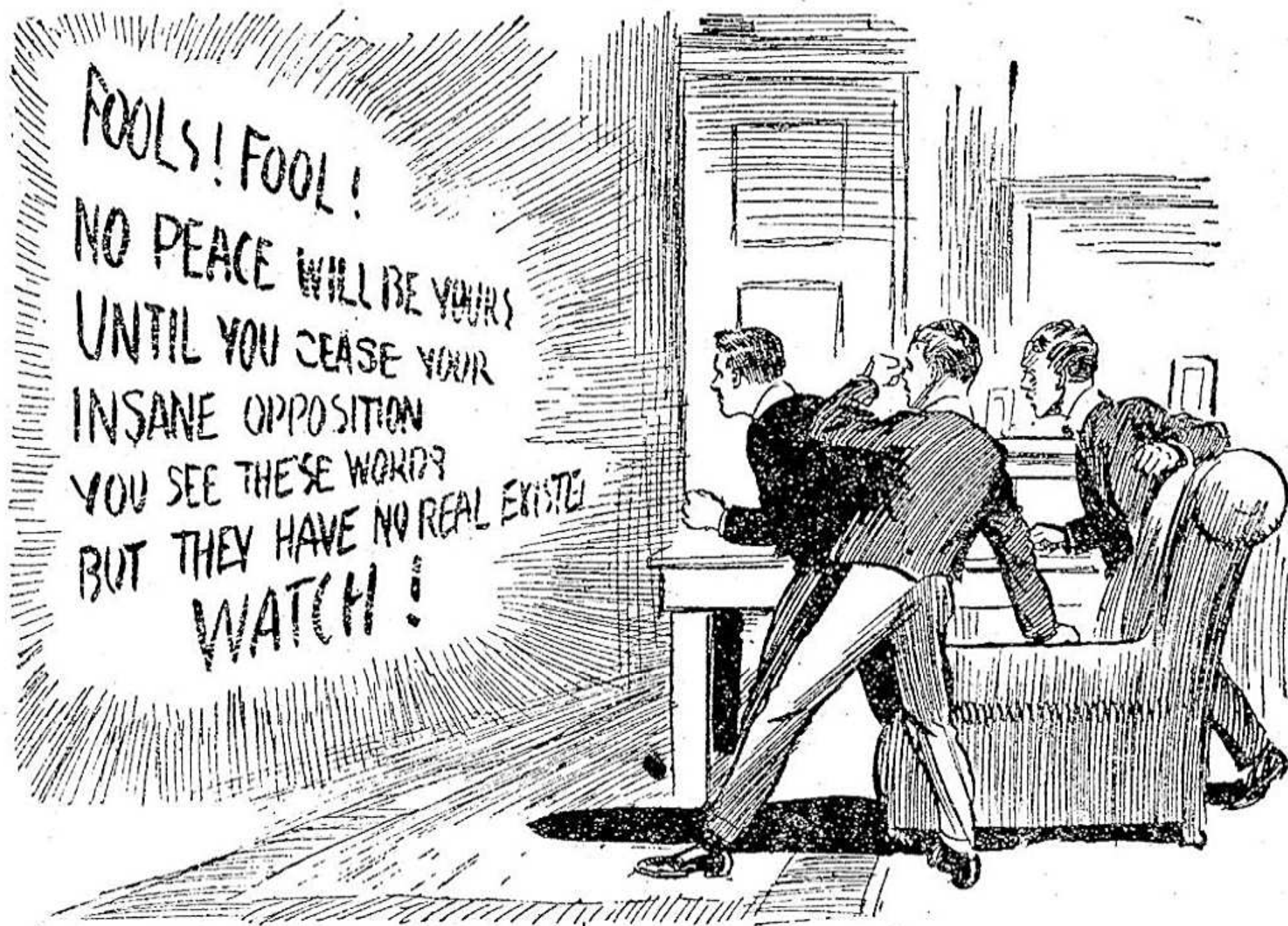
"We are not interested in the cause of this accident, Johnson," said Professor Tucker impatiently. "Let me see—H'm! Dear, dear, dear! Terrible—terrible! You have certainly brought me a most difficult subject, Sir Howard!"

"I took you at your own word, professor," replied the other quietly. "Both I and Dr. Metcalfe selected this case from a hundred others. If your apparatus can improve the condition of Johnson's arm, it will prove itself to be a modern miracle. I tell you quite frankly that no surgical

withered arm! Quirke had seen it in his crystal! How? By what means had Quirke obtained the advance information? Was he really able to see the future in his crystal?"

It seemed only too true. That Quirke could be in Professor Tucker's confidence was too ridiculous for a moment's consideration. Singleton knew that he, alone, shared the scientist's great secret. The way in which Quirke knew things was positively uncanny.

"It is not my intention to make a big



All the words seemed to be daubed on the wall in great red letters, and in some extraordinary way they had the aspect of life. They glimmered and quivered on the wall eerily.

powers within human knowledge can restore the withered tissues."

Professor Tucker was looking anxious and concerned. And the Hon. Douglas Singleton was alarmed, too. Through the open doorway he could see Johnson's arm. The specialists had removed the man's coat, and the arm was lying loosely in Professor Tucker's hand—obviously as useless as the dead limb of an otherwise healthy tree.

The arm was shrivelled and shrunken, being but half the normal size. It had been obviously paralysed for many years, and was, of course, utterly feelingless. Singleton felt a curious throb as he remembered Ezra Quirke's prophecy. A

fuss over this case, gentlemen," said Professor Tucker quietly. "Come, we will apply the test at once. Have no fear, Johnson—you will need no anæsthetic, and the experiment will be quite painless."

"I'm game, sir," said the man promptly.

They all entered the laboratory, and the two specialists gave Singleton a searching glance—rather a severe glance, the junior thought.

"Who is this—er—young man?" asked one of them.

"Oh, this boy?" said the professor. "Singleton—a young friend of mine. He shares my secret—he is fully trustworthy, Sir Howard. Singleton, these gentlemen are



Sir Howard Gibbs and Dr. Julius Metcalfe, the celebrated Harley Street nerve specialists."

"Pleased to meet you, sir," mumbled Singleton awkwardly.

"Preposterous!" muttered Dr. Metcalfe. "The boy has no right to be here. Yet we cannot very well order him away—"

"You will be good enough to stand aside and remain silent, young man!" said Sir Howard severely. "I am astonished that Professor Tucker should allow you to remain here. Stand well aside, please!"

The Hon. Douglas Singleton obeyed—only too glad to remain. He had fully expected to be dismissed. And, knowing what Professor Tucker's apparatus was capable of, he was inwardly thrilled.

What marvel of science was he about to witness?

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE MODERN MIRACLE.



**T**HE specialists were frankly sceptical.

They revealed this in every look—in every glance at one another. There was certainly nothing very convincing in the out-

ward appearance of Professor Sylvester Tucker's "magical box." It was a plain, crude-looking affair, and was the result of the professor's own industry. He had built it entirely in his laboratory, and the contents were his own secret.

For many years he had laboured on his invention—secretly, unceasingly. He had told Singleton all. While following his vocation as science master, he had gradually developed his life work, and at last his dream was a reality. The apparatus was complete.

Indeed, he had spent every farthing of his private fortune on this simple-looking device. It was inconceivable to imagine that it had cost much money. But one had to remember that the professor had built countless earlier models, only to see them fail—only to see his money go pouring out for no purpose.

Success now, however, would mean the recovery of all his lost capital, and a vast fortune in addition. But Sir Howard Gibbs and Dr. Julius Metcalfe were obviously dubious.

"What is it—an electric shock, sir?" asked Johnson curiously.

"Dear me, no!" said the professor. "Electricity, I will admit, has amazing possibilities—undreamed-of possibilities. But this is something totally different—an element which I, alone, have succeeded in harnessing. Even the X ray is commonplace compared to this new power."

The specialists glanced at one another significantly. Singleton felt that he could knock them down. Their scepticism was so painfully obvious. The junior felt that he could read their thoughts—that they were coming to the conclusion that Professor Tucker was a crank, and that his invention was nothing more than a delusion.

"I will confess, gentlemen, that you have brought me a singularly difficult test case," said the old scientist gravely. "This man's arm is beyond all hope of recovery by normal methods. I think you will be prepared to state that you have no actual hope of success?"

"We have warned Johnson to expect none," replied Sir Howard quietly.

"That's all right, sir; I'm ready for it," said the patient, with a wry smile. "Ain't I had enough experiments? They've never done me no good, though, so I shan't be cut up if this one fails. Sometimes I wish they'd slice the bloomin' thing off, and done with it!"

The professor frowned.

"Tut-tut! You mustn't talk like that!" he said. "I have plenty of hope, Johnson—plenty! H'm! The arm is withered to an appalling extent. Life seems to have entirely ceased in the member. If only I can restore— But I mustn't be too sanguine. H'm! Difficult—most difficult!"

Singleton could see that the professor was anxious in the extreme. And this anxiety communicated itself to the Removite. Professor Tucker was like a part of St. Frank's, and if he failed Singleton felt that it would be a blow to the school's prestige. On the other hand, if he succeeded, St. Frank's would share some of the reflected glory when the world knew.

But in spite of what Singleton had seen a week earlier, he was filled with dread. The conviction was growing upon him that these specialists had brought a case which would prove the professor's undoing. Johnson's arm was in a pitiable state—withered to such an extent that it almost looked mummified. Shrunken and shrivelled, it was so thin that there seemed no hope of restoring it.

After all, the specialists could be forgiven for their impatience. It seemed humanly impossible for any apparatus to effect a cure. Any doctor in the world would have declared that Johnson was a cripple for life.

Singleton felt hot with anger. He considered it a dirty trick that these wealthy Harley Street doctors should bring down such an impossible case. Why couldn't they have chosen an easier subject as an initial experiment? It struck Singleton as being singularly mean and contemptible. They had brought Johnson on purpose to encompass the professor's undoing, and to thus humiliate him. A petty exhibition of professional jealousy!

The very glances which the specialists gave



one another were significant enough. They were nearly ready to gloat already—they were preparing to treat the professor with kindly toleration.

And while Singleton watched these changing expressions, Professor Tucker was busy. He was applying a long bandage to that poor, pitiful arm, wrapping it round loosely, and with scientific skill. He uttered no word until the limb was entirely swathed.

"We shan't be long now," he said briskly.

"Don't mind me, sir," said Johnson. "What's going to happen when you shove the 'fluence on? Shall I feel anything?"

"Possibly—quite possible," replied the professor. "But no pain."

"Come, professor!" protested Dr. Metcalfe. "Why tell the man that? It is humanly impossible for him to feel any life in that limb. It is paralysed and shrivelled beyond recall!"

"Upon my soul, sir!" burst out Professor Tucker, turning hotly. "I have suffered your glances in silence, but this is really too bad! You will be good enough to wait until the experiment has failed before expressing such views again!"

"Really, I—"

"Enough, sir!" barked the professor. "You may taunt me to your heart's content after I am proved a fraud. But until then be good enough to remain silent! Impudence—positive impudence!"

Singleton could have jumped for joy. He was delighted at the professor's sudden show of spirit, and at Dr. Metcalfe's discomfiture.

With flushed cheeks and gleaming eyes, the professor selected a long, black glove—a great gauntlet affair which reached to the very shoulder. He drew it gently over the bandaged arm, and secured it at the top by means of a spring button.

Then he took the loose terminals from the apparatus, and attached them to the gauntlet.

"Gentlemen, we are ready," he said quietly. "Johnson, you will please sit quietly in that chair, and close your eyes. Have no fear whatever. I give you my assurance that you will suffer no pain."

With a touch, Professor Tucker pressed down a switch.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE RESULT.



**B** URRRRH!

The apparatus on the bench gave forth a curious, low, musical purr. There was something soothing about it—something mysterious and impressive. Professor Tucker stood by, his very expression eloquent of his acute

anxiety. In vain he tried to compose himself.

But after a moment or two he threw all pretence to the winds, and paced up and down the laboratory clasping and unclasping his hands. Now and again he would pause, and listen. The note of the apparatus seemed to reassure him. Biting his underlip, and feverishly stroking his hair, he was the very picture of mental suspense.

Singleton felt that he was a trespasser. He had a desire to escape—to get away, where he could not witness the professor's distress. And later, perhaps, after the experiment failed—But Singleton obtained a conviction that it wouldn't fail. He didn't exactly know why, but a wild hope filled him. In spite of the utter impossibility of the thing, he believed that Johnson's arm would be different after the bandages were removed. Not restored, but certainly different. Hadn't Singleton seen this apparatus before? Hadn't he seen the professor slash his own hand, and heal it within three minutes?

The specialists were conversing together in low tones, dividing their attention between the apparatus, the patient, and Professor Tucker. There was no sign of any operation in this curious experiment. Just the low hum of the instrument.

"Do you feel any effects, Johnson?" asked Sir Howard at length.

"Not yet, sir," said the patient.

"I was afraid—"

"Not even a faint tingle?" demanded the professor, coming to a halt in front of Johnson's chair, and staring at him intently.

"Not even a faint tingle, my friend?"

"Nothink at all, sir."

"H'm! Curious—very curious!" muttered Professor Tucker, resuming his feverish pacing.

The specialists gave one another a significant look, and evidently didn't think it curious at all.

"The poor old fellow is demented, I am afraid," murmured Dr. Metcalfe. "Johnson will never feel any sensation in that arm. We were foolish to come, Sir Howard. We have merely made ourselves the victims of a hoax. I regret exceedingly that I should have advised you—"

"It is a pity, but it is too late to talk now," muttered Sir Howard.

Singleton, who heard these words, glared quite openly. He was just a little unreasonable in this hostility of his. These famous specialists were evidently at the top of their profession, and any operation of this nature was beyond their ken. Professor Tucker's apparatus was far beyond the bounds of any human conception. Scepticism on the part of the doctors was only to be anticipated.

The minutes ticked by—five, ten. And Professor Tucker's anxiety increased. He



couldn't keep still for a second. Almost continually he mopped his brow, and his mental condition was pitiful. And every minute he strode to the apparatus, and listened. It was though he were expecting some catastrophe.

"How long?" he asked tensely. "How long has it been?"

"Twelve minutes," said Sir Howard, watch in hand.

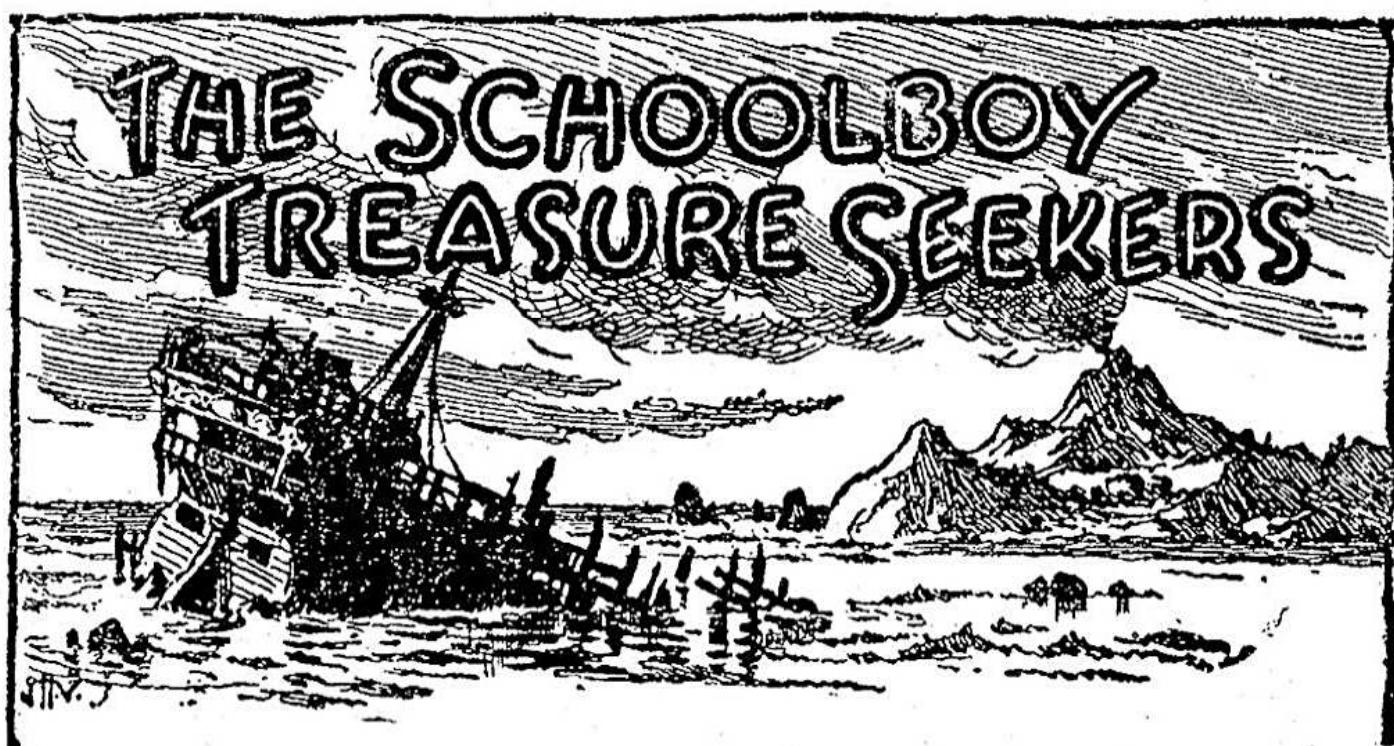
"Twelve!" echoed the professor hoarsely. "Only twelve? Good heavens, I wonder—Gentlemen, gentlemen, this test was too drastic, I fear! The reserve of energy is only limited. But there is still some left," he added, as he listened to the soft purr. "Perhaps—perhaps—"

you expect that arm to be restored in less time? But the energy is running out rapidly—too rapidly."

"This is terrible!" muttered Sir Howard.

Even Singleton was acutely worried. He had a fear that Professor Tucker would go out of his mind. The old scientist was looking wild, and the light in his eyes was feverish. Only he knew what this experiment meant. The dream of years—the labour of years—all were concentrated into this one brief period. His apparatus was being tested by specialists—and they had taken good care to bring an almost impossible subject!

The hum within the apparatus was growing perceptibly weaker. But it still con-



A Splendid Novel-length Story of the Boys  
of St. Frank's College on a Trip to the  
:: :: South Sea Islands :: ::

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Something  
New in  
Books for  
Boys!

Large, Clear  
Type!

Magnificent  
Three-colour  
Cover!

**"THE MONSTER LIBRARY"**

No. I. NOW ON SALE. Price One Shilling.

He paced up and down again, clenching his fists until his knuckles were white. Indeed, his condition was so acute that Dr. Metcalfe interposed.

"I think we had better examine the patient now, professor," he said quietly. "This—this operation has gone on long enough. Sir Howard and I insist upon the bandages being removed!"

"Indeed!" shouted Professor Tucker fiercely. "Then I insist upon them remaining! Touch one finger on my apparatus, and I will not be responsible for my actions! The man must have twenty minutes—twenty minutes at least! Good heavens! Can

tinued, and Professor Tucker occasionally allowed a gleam of hope to appear in his eyes.

"Do you feel nothing—nothing?" he asked.

Johnson took a deep breath.

"It's a rummy thing, sir, but I can feel something now—" he began.

"You can?" shouted Sir Howard, aghast.

"A kind of twitching, and it seems as though I can move my fingers a bit," replied Johnson, in a scared voice. "It all feels heavy, too. I can't quite explain, gents. But I believe there's somethin' doin' all right!"



"Splendid—splendid!" muttered Professor Tucker.

"Imagination—sheer imagination!" said Dr. Metcalfe, frowning. "I was afraid of this. The man will be appallingly disappointed—"

"How long?" demanded the professor.

"Eighteen minutes—"

"Eighteen! Only two more—twenty is the utmost limit of the energy," went on the professor. "I am gaining hope, gentlemen. I believe this experiment will be a success. There can be only one explanation of Johnson's sensations."

For the life of him, Singleton couldn't help pressing nearer. By a great effort of will he had effaced himself as much as possible until now, but the crisis was at hand, and he crept nearer. The humming within the apparatus was now so weak that it was almost imperceptible.

"Twenty minutes!" said Sir Howard curtly.

"Now!" shouted Professor Tucker.

With a click, he switched off the instrument, and disconnected the terminals. Very gently, he withdrew the gauntlet. The two specialists crowded near, and at last they were looking flushed and intent. Singleton was so anxious that he pressed against Sir Howard's shoulder.

"Go away, boy—go away!" snapped the specialist.

The Hon. Douglas withdrew, and it galled him to the quick when he was unable to see the immediate results. He dared not move round, for he was in constant fear of being ordered out of the laboratory altogether.

"Crikey!" he heard Johnson exclaim. "Look at that bandage, gents! It's all tight now!"

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Dr. Metcalfe huskily.

"Wait—wait!" came the professor's injunction.

With deft fingers—deft, in spite of their trembling—he unrolled the bandage, and a moment later it was off. Singleton could have cried aloud. For the momentary silence which followed was full of poignant possibility. Everybody in the laboratory seemed to be stunned. What was the result?

"This—this is positively staggering!" muttered Sir Howard dazedly.

"Look!" shouted Johnson. "Look! My arm's like it used to be!"

Singleton could not restrain himself any longer. He fairly pushed past Sir Howard, and the latter took no notice. And the Hon. Douglas found himself staring at an astounding scene.

Johnson was sitting in the chair, and his bare arm was outstretched in front of him. Professor Tucker was gaping at it with a light of triumph in his eyes. The two specialists were looking utterly stunned.

For the arm was of normal size—the flesh was full and healthy—and the skin itself had resumed the ordinary tint of healthy tissue. Johnson was moving his fingers about—cautiously, as though awed.

"It works, gents—it works!" he muttered hoarsely. "I'm all right again—I'm cured! And it's this gent I've got to thank," he added, turning to Professor Tucker. "I don't know 'ow you did it, sir, but—"

"Tut-tut!" interrupted the professor, with a wave of his hand. "Forgive me, Johnson, but I look upon you as a mere subject—not as a personality. You have nothing to thank me for. It is I who must thank you—for submitting yourself to this test."

Johnson had no words. He seemed to be on the point of collapsing—not because the operation had been a strain, but because he was overwhelmed with amazement and joy. And the two specialists were several minutes before they could frame any words to express their feelings.

"Professor Tucker, I owe you a profound apology," said Sir Howard quietly. "I will confess that I was utterly sceptical. My dear sir, this is a triumph—a veritable miracle! I am stunned—I cannot conceive how it was possible for your instrument to accomplish this amazing feat."

Professor Tucker smiled—completely composed now.

"It is unnecessary to apologise, Sir Howard," he said. "Indeed, I expected nothing but doubts from you. How could it have been otherwise? This new element is something unheard of in medical science. It is capable of restoring human tissue to an extent hitherto undreamed of. My only fear was that the store of energy would exhaust itself before success was achieved. The subject was a most difficult one."

"But can you perform no further operations?" asked Dr. Metcalfe.

"Thousands—millions!" replied the professor. "But the energy must be stored and controlled before it can be transferred into the human system. My apparatus is at present drained. But that is a mere trifle. What has been accomplished once can be accomplished again. Is it not sufficient that we have met with unqualified success? Obtaining a fresh store of this elusive energy is simply a matter of expense and time."

"We shall, of course, make a complete report," said Sir Howard. "The whole medical profession throughout the world will ring with this news. Naturally, we shall keep our own counsel for the time being—"

"I beg of you to remember that, gentlemen," interrupted the professor earnestly. "If one word of this leaks out, there is no telling what might happen!"

"And yet you allow this boy to witness everything?" said Sir Howard, frowning.

"Eh?" ejaculated the professor. "Single-



ton! Good gracious! Have you been here all the time?"

"Yes, sir. You told me to stay——"

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Professor Tucker angrily. "How dare you? Go away at once! Have no fear, gentlemen—the boy will respect my confidence. I know I can trust him implicitly. Leave the laboratory this instant, Singleton! I had no idea you were here!"

The Hon. Douglas Singleton went—by no means offended by the professor's curt tone. After all, he had seen everything there was to be seen, and he had no desire to listen to the experts' discourse.

He took his departure in a condition of complete bewilderment. He had seen something which his common sense told him was impossible. Yet it had happened before his very eyes, proving that it was not only possible, but an absolute fact.

He had witnessed the triumph of science over human limitations. That which seemed too impossible for words had been accomplished. And Singleton swore to himself that he would respect this staggering secret.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE CONSPIRATORS.



**E**ZRA QUIRKE came out of the shadows so silently that Singleton nearly jumped.

"Hang it all, Quirke!" he protested. "What's the idea of jumping out like an infernal jack-in-the-box! You gave me a turn!"

"I am sorry, I had no intention——"

"You're always giving chaps turns!" said Singleton, with a frown. "I believe you do it on purpose—just to make yourself more mysterious. You've impressed everybody with your magic quite enough, without resorting to those dodges!"

"This is most unjust!" protested Quirke. "I merely came out for a stroll in the evening gloom. Why should you assume that I make a habit of springing out upon people?"

They were in the Triangle, and the Hon. Douglas had been walking through the West Arch. He hadn't even seen Quirke amidst the dense shadows of the archway. They now walked across towards the fountain.

"You seem very nervous," continued Quirke, peering at Singleton with a curious glance. "Has anything happened, Singleton? You are quite pale!"

"I'm all right."

"You have not forgotten the meeting for this evening?"

"Meeting?" repeated the Hon. Douglas. "Oh, yes! I had forgotten it for the minute, but I'm not sure whether I shall turn up. I don't feel much inclined——"

"Something has disturbed you," interrupted Quirke. "Am I mistaken in venturing that you have just come from Professor Tucker's rooms?"

Singleton started.

"How did you know?" he asked sharply.

"I know these things," replied Quirke, shrugging his shoulders. "But why look so worried? Is it a guilty action on your part to visit our worthy old science master? Doubtless you have been discussing astronomy."

"No. That is to say—— I mean——" Singleton paused, and frowned. "Something like that," he added gruffly. "Look here, Quirke, how on earth did you know that I'd just come from Professor Tucker's rooms?"

Ezra Quirke gave a soft laugh.

"There is no magic in connection with my knowledge," he replied. "I saw you as you passed along the upper passage—I caught a glimpse of you at one of the windows. You were coming from the professor's quarters. Is there anything so very surprising in my assumption?"

"You're such a mysterious beggar that we associate you with all sorts of rummy things," growled the Hon. Douglas. "Well, I'll be getting indoors——"

"Possibly you saw the professor's visitors?" asked Quirke carelessly.

"Visitors?" said Singleton, with a start. "How did you know——"

"One cannot help noticing a big limousine, and Tubbs is not renowned for his discretion," said Quirke drily. "You seem to have had an interesting time, Singleton. May I ask——"

"Sorry, I've got to get indoors," interrupted the Hon. Douglas curtly.

He walked away before Quirke could ask any more questions. A sudden idea had come to him—rather an alarming idea. Was Quirke a genuine mystic, after all? Or was he an elaborate trickster? Up till now, Singleton had been convinced. But a tiny seed of suspicion had taken root in his mind.

Were those hints of Quirke's—his vague references to a withered arm, and so forth—genuine? Or had he caught Professor Tucker napping in the same way as Singleton had? It was quite possible that the professor had absentmindedly revealed something to the queer Fourth-Former. And Quirke had been playing upon Singleton's credulity to further his own reputation.

Even more than that. Perhaps Quirke was trying to get hold of Professor Tucker's secret—for some ulterior purpose of his own. This thought was indeed staggering. And the more Singleton thought about it, the more uneasy he became.

He analysed the recent meeting with Quirke. Without doubt, the East House fellow had tried to pump him. He was curious to know who Professor Tucker's visitors were, and what had happened in the laboratory. More than ever before, Single-



ton resolved to keep the great secret locked in his own breast.

For one wild moment he conceived the idea that Ezra Quirke had purposely come to St. Frank's to steal the professor's secret.

Perhaps he was in league with somebody else! Perhaps his mysticism was a mere pose, in order to fool— But Singleton pulled himself up. These thoughts were fantastic. Quirke wasn't a fellow of that sort.

But, somehow, Singleton found that he had lost a great deal of enthusiasm for the schoolboy magician's activities. He had no desire to attend the meeting that evening. He was even beginning to turn round again—to suspect Quirke of being a trickster.

And while Singleton went to his study, and gave himself over to thought, certain activities were towards in the Ancient House. Study C, in the Remove passage, was well filled.

"Browne considers it best that he shouldn't appear in this business," Dick Hamilton was saying. "If he and Stevens were spotted over in the East House, there might be some comment. So we'll do the trick on our own."

"Isn't Browne coming to the meeting?" asked Boots.

"Yes—but that's different," replied Nipper. "In this preliminary affair we've got to be jolly cautious. Those East House chaps mustn't suspect a thing. The sooner we can get over there the better."

"Why?" demanded Handforth.

"Because they haven't finished tea yet, and they'll be in their studies," replied Nipper. "If everything goes well, we shall trip Quirke up this evening. And once that happens, he'll be discredited for good. We've got to acknowledge that Browne's a brainy chap. It was his idea about the threads and the tin pans."

"Let's get busy on the job," said Fullwood impatiently.

There were six members of the Compact of Ten altogether—Dick Hamilton, Fullwood, Pitt, Handforth, Church and Buster Boots.

They made their way out of doors, and entered the East House. But they didn't enter after the fashion of rational human beings. They made their way to the back of the East Square, and nipped through the window of a rear passage. Strictly speaking, this was out of bounds to the juniors, but a trifle like that wasn't worth considering.

They only needed to turn one angle of the passage and they arrived at the door which led down to the cellars. Quirke's meeting was not due for another hour, and so there were no indications of the dabblers in the occult.

"Sharp's the word!" breathed Dick Hamilton.

A key was inserted in the lock, and the door was opened. They slipped through like

shadows, and the door was relocked from the other side. There was nothing much in conquering this particular door. It was fitted with a commonplace lock, and nine keys out of a dozen would fit it. The juniors had actually brought the key of one of their own cellars, and it proved entirely satisfactory.

It was the further door which had occasioned such conspiracy.

Down the concrete steps the plotters went, and found themselves facing a great blank wall. There was a door in it—fitted with exactly the same kind of lock as the one above. But it was also supplied with a Yale lock—which Ezra Quirke himself had added.

This was his Cellar of Mystery, and he took good care that none should enter without his knowledge or consent. A Yale lock is no easy object to defeat, and Quirke always kept the key in his own pocket. But by means of the wax, an impression had been obtained—and a key subsequently made.

All the conspirators were provided with electric torches, and they advanced upon the door in a purposeful manner.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### SETTING THE TRAP.



"OPEN sesame!" murmured Reggie Pitt dramatically.

Nipper turned the key in the Yale lock, and the door swung open with beautiful ease. There were several exclamations of satisfaction.

"Good egg!" said Handforth. "Old Browne's a pretty clever chap, you know! How the dickens did he make that key so perfectly?"

"I don't want to boast, but I made it!" grinned Nipper. "With my little file I did the trick! Considering I had the exact measurements, though, I don't claim to be a magician. Now, be as careful as mice! We mustn't leave the slightest trace—at least, not that anybody can see."

He was highly satisfied with that home-made key. As he had said, it had not been a difficult task, but Yale keys have a habit of refusing to function unless they are filed to within a hair's-breadth. It was gratifying to see the lock yield so effortlessly.

"We'd better leave somebody just against the door, listening," said Nipper thoughtfully. "Quirke might come down to make a few preliminary arrangements, for all we know. Who'll volunteer?"

Nobody offered, and at last Church was selected as the unfortunate doorkeeper. He protested, but it was quite useless.



"And if there's any sign of a surprise the only thing we can do is to dodge behind the black draperies," said Nipper. "Of course, Quirke may find us, and then we shall have to admit the thing."

"Pessimist!" said Pitt. "We shan't be here more than fifteen minutes, and there's no need to be windy. We'll easily get done."

First of all the Remove fellows went entirely round the cellar, examining every nook and cranny. The baffling feature about the place was that it was made entirely of concrete—floor, walls, and even ceiling. There wasn't any window, either—merely a grating, with heavy iron bars embedded in the concrete. In any case, this ventilator wasn't large enough to admit a fox terrier.

The cellar was roomy, and the whole of it was occupied except a narrow space round the walls. There were black draperies hanging on all sides, and there was a narrow space left between the draperies and the wall in some places. In others the draperies practically touched the wall itself. It was all according to the way they were hung.

Apparently Quirke used the draperies for effect. It seemed much better to give a magical show with black hangings on every hand. The concrete walls were barren and chill-looking.

The Compact of Ten believed, however, that the hangings were used for the purpose of concealing trick apparatus. It was the only possible method by which the weird effects could be produced. For Quirke had certainly done some extraordinary things in his Chamber of Mystery.

"Well, it beats me!" admitted Pitt, scratching his head. "There's nothing here, not even an inch of picture wire. Nothing but the bare concrete and these draperies. Where the dickens does he store his apparatus?"

"We needn't worry about that," said Nipper crisply. "There's no apparatus here now, and we'll make jolly certain that none is brought down before this meeting. After we go out we'll keep a watch on the outer cellar door."

"Yes, that'll flummox him," grinned Boots.

They examined the various articles in the body of the cellar. There were plenty of chairs for the audience, and a special chair at the end where Quirke was accustomed to sit in charge of the proceedings. An Oriental stool, a bamboo table, and one or two other pieces of furniture formed the rest of the stuff.

"It's a rummy thing about this table," said Handforth, frowning. "Do you remember the last time we were here? Quirke produced a whacking great casket out of it. And yet the table's a common or

garden thing that you can buy in any shop for fifteen bob!"

It was indeed an ordinary enough article of furniture. The juniors examined it carefully, going over every inch. But the very idea of it being a trick table was out of the question. It was the same with everything else. Just as Quirke had always maintained, there wasn't a single article of mystery in the whole affair. All the effects—according to Quirke—were produced by his co-operation with the Black Arts.

"Well, we've proved there's nothing fishy in the place now," declared Nipper. "Now for the traps. By jove, if Quirke produces magical things this evening he'll be a real conjurer!"

The juniors proceeded to put some very cunning ideas into practice. Going behind the draperies they attached lengths of cotton at various intervals from the hangings to the wall. They went entirely round the cellar, and these short lengths of black cotton were invisible even in a strong light.

Yet the effect of a confederate walking behind the curtains would be drastic. He would feel nothing, he would know nothing, but he would break every one of those invisible traps.

"If Quirke's got a human ally he'll give himself away this evening," chuckled Pitt. "Only a real ghost can creep behind these draperies and get past these tricky little barriers."

"Where's the bag?" asked Nipper.

A big cricket bag had been brought down, and from it were produced a number of small tin pans. At intervals these were placed upon the floor, close against the wall. Leaning against the wall, in fact, so that the slightest touch would overbalance them, and cause an appalling clatter upon the hard concrete.

And they were so placed that no living thing could creep behind the hangings without coming into contact with those precariously placed pans. The cellar was encircled by the invisible traps.

Thus when the audience came in, and Quirke took his seat, the plotters knew that he could employ no confederates. At least, if he did employ them they would give themselves away within a few seconds of commencing their operations. It would be rather good fun, sitting in the audience waiting for the first clatter. Quirke's face would be worth watching.

Dick Hamilton had no compunction in adopting this subterfuge. Quirke's supporters would have called it an underhand trick. In reality it was nothing of the sort. The Compact of Ten was determined to unmask this harmful junior as a fraud, and to rid the school of his unhealthy influence. Open methods were useless. So the Compact of Ten were matching





cunning with cunning, and only by this procedure could results be expected.

After all, if Quirke was genuine he would have nothing to grumble about. Such trifles as cotton and tin pans would not hinder spooks. But they would certainly make a nasty mess of his arrangements if the spooks proved to be of the solid variety.

"Good!" murmured Dick Hamilton at last. "We've finished now, so we'd better clear out. We're lucky, too; we haven't been disturbed once. Is everything exactly the same as when we came in?"

"Look here, why shouldn't some of us stay here?" asked Handforth brilliantly. "Why not hide behind these hangings, and—"

"My dear chap, that would be fatal," interrupted Nipper.

"Why would it be?"

"Because we should give ourselves away, especially if you were included in the party, and then Quirke would know everything," replied Nipper. "We don't want to show our hand like that. So far he hasn't got the faintest idea that we're on his track."

"But we could spot his confederates," declared Handforth.

"Plenty of time for that later on," said Pitt. "One thing at a time, my son. If we can prove that Quirke uses confederates that's quite enough for this evening. We'll deal with the next step later on. I'm not so sure that he is unsuspicious, either. What about those rummy happenings in Study D?"

"I'm worrying about them, too," growled Nipper. "I can hardly believe that Quirke's responsible, and yet there must have been trickery somewhere. Well, come on!"

The door was silently opened and they all filed out. The door closed with a click, and there was no indication that it had ever been opened. With extreme caution the plotters mounted the steps and emerged into the rear passage.

And three minutes later the juniors dropped into the Square via the passage window. One fellow, however—Buster Boots—remained at the window. From this point of vantage he could see the door of the outer cellar. Thus nobody could enter without the Compact of Ten knowing.

## CHAPTER XV.

### BEYOND ALL UNDERSTANDING.



THE scene was very impressive.

Ezra Quirke's Cellar of Mystery was packed. In addition to the usual members of the Occult Society—as Quirke's supporters styled themselves—there were a



And there, apparently hovering over the framework, was a fearsome looking head. The face was too grotesque to be human, and yet it had the appearance of impish life.

number of unbelievers. Nipper and Pitt and Fullwood and Handforth were there in strong force. And even William Napoleon Browne and Horace Stevens, of the Fifth, had graced the meeting with their presence. In fact, the entire Compact of Ten was on hand.

Quirke had protested at first, but some of his supporters had pointed out that these negative influences had been present on other occasions, and had caused no trouble. It was just possible, they argued, that some of them would be converted to the Cause.

And now the meeting was just about to settle down.

Browne had been delighted to hear the result of the secret preparations. Not for a single instant had the door of that cellar been left unobserved. Buster Boots had done his duty thoroughly.

And when Quirke led the meeting down into the cellar Nipper took good care to be in the forefront. He satisfied himself, in fact, that neither Quirke nor anybody else penetrated the cellar since the traps had been set.



In this way the conspirators were convinced of one thing. They had been the last to leave the cellar, and they were the first to go back into it. It therefore followed that no human agency could have been at work there in the meantime.

Upon this occasion at least Quirke was "taped."

If he produced any remarkable phenomena in the cellar after all the Compact of Ten's precautions he would be an extraordinarily clever fellow.

One of the chief anxieties was now over. Nipper had feared that some careless ass would knock against the draperies during the preliminary stages, and upset one of those tin pans. This, of course, would have resulted in an examination. Once or twice the plotters had felt their hearts jump into their mouths as the hangings had been knocked against or displaced by the members of the audience. But by great good fortune no disaster had occurred.

"You must forgive me if our meeting is brief this evening," said Quirke quietly. "We have a number of negative spirits with us, and my task is always more difficult under such circumstances. I will, however, endeavour to show you what can be done."

"He's preparing a way out!" murmured Handforth. "He knows he can't produce anything——"

"Hush!"

"Dry up over there!"

Without a sound something appeared from the draperies and fluttered on to Ezra Quirke's shoulder. It was his famous owl. And the members of the Compact of Ten stared. This was certainly a bit of a shock.

That owl had not been present when they had explored the cellar, and Quirke hadn't brought the strange creature with him. Yet it appeared. How had it got in?

"My object is to amuse you," said Quirke impressively. "Let us have no serious research to-night. You all know that I employ no apparatus, that I have no tricks or confederates. I claim to be in association with the mysteries of Black Magic, and by that means alone can I produce these astonishing effects. I can horrify you, I can amaze you, I can amuse you. To-night I will amuse you."

"I'll bet you will!" said Handforth loudly.

"You, of course, assume that I am boasting," said Quirke, looking at Handforth with a steady gaze. "But I will prove how wrong you are. As a preliminary I will take this sheet of thin silk."

From his pocket he produced a small object which was clearly an ordinary silk handkerchief. He displayed it to the audience, rolled it up in his palms, and then shook it out again. This time it was a dozen times as large—a veritable silken sheet.

"Just the ordinary conjuring stuff," breathed Nipper into Pitt's ear. "By jove, is he going to dish us, after all? He's a clever beggar, and he can do all sorts of magical things without any big apparatus."

"I shouldn't be surprised!" growled Pitt, with a grimace.

The owl was left perched on the back of the chair, and Quirke proceeded to waft the silken sheet up and down in a mass of fascinating billows. The shaded electric light overhead cast a dim radiance over the scene, and it was just sufficient to reveal the schoolboy conjurer's actions. There was no dazzling light in any portion of the cellar.

"This, of course, is merely one form of necromancy," observed Quirke, as he suddenly whisked the silken sheet into the air. "You have no idea where this bowl came from, and neither have I. All operators in the Black Arts must have a great deal of faith."

The audience stared. Standing on the carpet was a huge goldfish bowl—a great thing standing two feet in height. And in it were numerous live goldfish, swimming lazily about in the crystal water, which reached to the very brim.

"Well, I'm hanged!" murmured Nipper.

He and the others had examined that carpet, and had found it normal. Underneath it there was nothing but a solid concrete floor. Every member of the Compact of Ten was prepared to swear that the floor contained no trapdoor. No ingenuity can manufacture a trapdoor in concrete without leaving a trace. The very material itself would allow of no such deception.

And yet Quirke had produced this brimming bowl of goldfish from apparently nowhere! It was noticed by the conspirators, however, that Quirke was steering clear of the draperies. Was it by accident or by design? Did he know of those traps which were set?

"You will see that I am merely setting out to amuse you," exclaimed Quirke, in his level voice. "We will next try a little experiment with the table. As you all know, it is merely a bamboo table of the most ordinary type."

The Compact of Ten watched very intently now. Six of them, at least, knew that that table was indeed as innocent of trickery as any table in the school. They had had it in their own hands less than an hour earlier.

Quirke deliberately drove his hand through the top—a crashing, splintering blow. But, staggeringly enough, his hand did not appear in view after passing through! Yet the table was quite open, and was even covered by a cloth.

"I say, this is a bit weird, isn't it?" breathed Fullwood.

"Can't make head or tail of it!" admitted Nipper, frowning.



Quirke raised his hand, and produced before the startled audience a massive, glittering brass cage. It came out—nearly as big as the table itself. He stood it on the floor with a metallic clang.

"You will notice that it is quite real," he observed, drily. "I never attempt to deceive you over these matters. You may examine it for yourselves."

He came forward, and several members of the audience touched the cage, and satisfied themselves that it was no mere illusion.

"A singular achievement, Brother Quirke," observed Browne. "But let us not inquire too closely into the precise manufacture of this cage. I venture to predict that I could produce an even better one from an ordinary straw hat!"

Quirke frowned.

"It is a pity you should suspect me," he said.

He went back to the centre of the carpet, and placed the cage on the floor beside the goldfish bowl. At a word, the owl entered through the open door, and Quirke clipped it to. Then, again, he covered both the objects from view by means of the silken sheet.

"Just a little change of abode, as you will see," he remarked.

He flicked the silk away, and the result was quite startling. The owl was calmly standing at the bottom of the bowl, and it seemed that the water was still filling the bowl to the brim. What was even more surprising, the goldfish were placidly swimming about in the air, within the cage!

"But enough of this!" said Quirke briskly.

He clapped his hands together, and there was a blinding flash from between the two objects on the floor. The audience blinked, and stared. The carpet was barren. The whole mysterious paraphernalia had vanished! There was not the slightest trace of the bowl or the cage.

And the table, when Quirke tested it, was perfectly whole. Everybody had seen him crash his hand through the top, but now it was solid again, having apparently repaired itself by some magical means.

"It's all old stuff—as old as the hills!" muttered Nipper. "But how does he do it? Illusions—illusions! But how in the name of all that's queer does he make them vanish through this solid concrete?"

"He'd better not try anything behind the draperies!" breathed Reggie Pitt.

Even as he spoke, the owl came clean through one of the hangings as though they were made of air. It perched itself calmly on the back of Quirke's chair, and stared unwinkingly before it.

And then something else moved behind the black curtains—something in the rear of Quirke's chair. A hand came through the hangings—a human hand with a clenched fist. It was withdrawn, and the curtains

moved all along the wall, proving that somebody was walking behind.

But no clatter came—no sound of disturbed tin pans!

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A RIDDLE WITHOUT A SOLUTION!



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH felt a grip on his arm.

"Who's that?" he gasped. "What the—"

"It's only me!" breathed Church hastily.

"Great pip! I thought—"

"What does it mean?" asked Church. "There's somebody behind those curtains, Handy! Didn't you see that fist—"

"Great Scott! Look there!" muttered Handforth.

A figure had suddenly appeared from behind the draperies—a figure in a brown gown with a cape to it—an old monk, by his appearance. He held up a hand, and pointed an accusing finger.

"Enough!" he exclaimed, in a deep, impressive voice. "Why have you come to disturb my peace of the centuries? Away! Who is responsible for these—"



### FREE.

Ask at any toy shop for free Bing Booklets. No. 1.—Steam, clockwork and electric trains. No. 2.—Stationary engines, magic lanterns and cinemas. No. 3.—Miniature table railway sets.



## Bing are Best

You can buy complete systems with finest Clockwork, Electric or Steam-driven Locos, rolling stock, tracks, stations, tunnels, buffers, signals, etc., or build up from separate parts. Ask at any toy shop to see Bing Models, including stationary Steam Engines, Magic Lanterns, Cinemas, etc., etc. All Bing Toys are accurate, scale-built models selling at surprisingly low prices. See them to-day.



**BING**  
Model Toys

"Keep Boys Busy."

Bing Toys are distinctively boxed in yellow boxes with black edges.



"I fear I am the culprit," said Quirke quietly. "It was not my wish to disturb your rest. I will clear this cellar, and leave you in peace if you so wish it."

"It is well!" exclaimed the monk. "Go hence!"

With a swing of his hand, he pushed the curtains aside, and strode behind. And it was noted by the Compact of Ten that the figure disappeared in exactly the spot where several of the traps had been set. The draperies had been flung about wildly, and it stood to reason that every cotton would be snapped.

There was nothing supernatural about that figure. The monk had been solid—actual flesh and blood, by all appearances. And yet how had he got into the cellar? And how would he escape?

Nipper ran his eye quickly over the audience. He counted them—as he had counted them upon entering. There were exactly the same number, so the possibility of Quirke having a confederate in the audience was ruled out.

For a moment or two the curtains shook, as though the mysterious monk were walking alongside the wall. Then he reappeared through the hangings at another spot. Slowly, he advanced towards the audience, pausing near Ezra Quirke. He pointed dramatically towards the door.

"Go!" he commanded.

"We will go!" said Quirke quietly.

He gripped the monk's cowl, and suddenly pulled it sharply. With one movement he rolled the cowl and the gown into a ball. And there was no trace of the monk himself—just his outer apparel!

Quirke took the bundle, and flung it into the air. It struck the black draperies overhead, and vanished. And when the juniors gazed up, the curtains seemed as whole and as intact as ever.

"It seems that we have disturbed one of the many sleepers who lie beneath these modern buildings," exclaimed Quirke quietly. "In the remote past, as you all know, a monastery stood upon this site. We can do nothing but respect the wishes of our late visitant. We must go."

He led the way to the door, and threw it open. The audience quietly left—for even the Compact of Ten was too surprised to make any comment on what had occurred. Nothing had happened as they had expected it to happen. They had planned this coup with considerable cunning—with the deliberate purpose of unmasking Ezra Quirke as a fraud. But nothing had transpired to upset the schoolboy magician's power.

"Something of a frost, brothers, but we must not despair," remarked Browne, when he and the other members of the Compact of Ten collected in the Triangle. "It appears that Brother Quirke is an elusive customer. Alas! we have under-estimated his genius."

"But how was it done—how?" demanded Dick Hamilton. "Hang it all, I'm not usually flummoxed over these conjuring tricks! I could understand it if Quirke had a prepared room, with trapdoors and all the rest of the gadgets. But there was nothing in that cellar—I'll swear it!"

"A rash proceeding, Brother Hamilton," said Browne. "Reason indicates to us that the cellar contains no apparatus. But cold fact states in unmistakable terms that the apparatus was nevertheless there."

"What about our traps?" demanded Handforth.

"It will be an interesting experiment to examine them at the earliest possible moment," went on Browne. "According to all the laws of gravity, every tin pan should be upset, and every cotton severed. But in dealing with this Quirke, we are up against a stiff proposition. I fear that he is not hovering on the edge of the abyss just yet. There is apparently a flaw in the crankshaft, and the machinery fails to work."

"We'd better go and look at that cellar straight away!" said Pitt keenly. "We don't want to give Quirke any chance to do anything behind our backs. He hasn't had time so far, but we'd better buck up."

"An observation which bristled with wisdom, Brother Pitt," observed Browne. "On this occasion I will risk the consequences, and personally conduct this investigation. Thus we shall be assured of success."

"You'll have to climb in through the rear window, you know," said Nipper.

"A feat I am easily capable of," said Browne benevolently. "Indeed, I may safely say, without fear of contradiction, I hold the world's championship for climbing through windows without leaving a trace. It is a perfect mania with me. Were there no windows to climb through, I should languish and fade."

They went cautiously round to the rear of the East House, and succeeded in getting through the passage windows. This part of the House was now completely deserted. All the members of the party had dispersed, and were either in their studies or in the common-room.

In less than twenty seconds the Compact of Ten were safely in the outer cellar. The Yale key was brought into use again, and the door of the inner cellar was flung open.

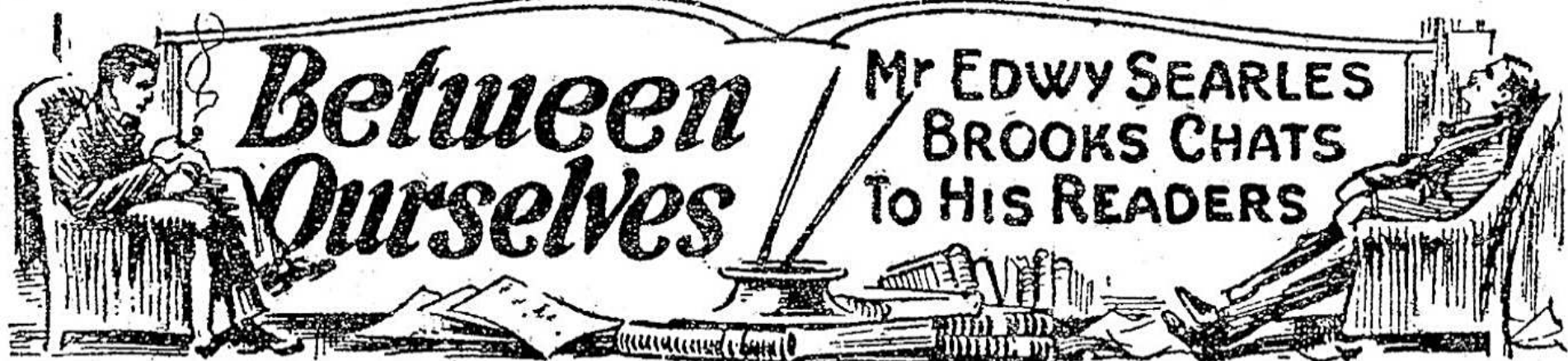
The Compact of Ten marched grimly in.

The cellar was in precisely the same state as the meeting had left it. On another occasion the juniors had examined this cellar after a meeting, and had found nothing to account for the mysterious happenings. But this time it was felt that some discoveries would be made.

Cautiously, Nipper went between the wall and the curtains, with his torch flashed on. Every strand of cotton was in place—every

(Continued on page 40.)





Mr EDWY SEARLES  
BROOKS CHATS  
To HIS READERS

NOTE.—If any reader writes to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed to EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Every letter acknowledged below has been personally read by me, and I thank each reader most heartily. But, although all letters afford me an equal amount of pleasure, I am reluctantly compelled to confine my individual replies to those of general interest.—E.S.B.

This week I am going to start boldly and fearlessly by acknowledging a generous slab of letters. You mustn't expect an individual reply, mind. If you get one, so much the better—but if you don't get one, bear it with fortitude. Lots of fellows expect to see me devote about three-parts of my Chat to their one list of inquiries, but it simply can't be done. If I answered EVERY letter, and gave a full reply to EVERY question, I should require not merely the whole book every week, but a special double number now and again to catch up the arrears. So if some of you DO get a special reply, don't growl because it's short, but chirrup because you've got one at all.

George F. Read (Sidcup), Artist Admirer (Birmingham), Hubert Kelk (Worksop), E. T. Matthias (North Wales), Clifford George Leary (Brisbane), F. C. Manners (West Tytherley), Harry (Toronto), Douglas Axe (Doncaster), Lionel Moxom (Rochdale), Charles H. Coutman (West Tamworth, Australia), M. Williams (W.I.), Donald Ellis Mackenzie (Durban, Natal), A regular Reader (Walthamstow), A. B. Butcher (Birkdale), G. Dejardin (Fernan-Vaz, Gabon, Equatorial Africa), H. Rawlings (Toronto), F. M. 372 (Liverpool), Annie Waye (Hoxton), Cheeky Nineteen (Hammersmith), Sam Whitton (Glasgow), Leonard J. Mockler (Cologne), F. H. (Manchester), Bob Currie (Featherston, N.Z.), Frank Atkin (York), Kia Ora (New Zealand), M. Garrett (Geelong, Australia), W. Dane (Bow, E.), W. Holmes (Glasgow), J. H. (Glasgow), Football Enthusiast (Birmingham).

Don't blame me for talking about that MONSTER LIBRARY OF COMPLETE STORIES. At this early stage of my chat,

it's a bit thick, but it's a matter of necessity. Here's George F. Read asking me if the St. Frank's Annual is out yet. Awfully sorry, George, but the Annual hasn't been born yet. But this MONSTER LIBRARY is now on sale everywhere, and it goes one better than the Annual, too. It's coming out every month. So DO buck up, all you chaps, and get that first number. With Christmas coming on, they won't last long, you know!

Words fail me, Artist Admirer. That sketch of yours, depicting Archie and Marjorie, is absolutely splendid. Hearty congrats., old man. I don't pretend to be an expert in black-and-white drawing, but even my unprofessional eye can see that the technique is perfect. I am preserving the sketch (of course, I've got that other one of yours), and I hope that both of them will be reproduced in Our Paper as soon as the opportunity presents itself.

I don't like to say it, E. T. Matthias, but you're a lazy bounder! Not the only one, either, for several other fellows have written me in exactly the same strain. You want to know how long THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY has been going. If that isn't a sample of sheer indolence, what is? My dear chap, you've only got to turn to this week's number, reckon fifty-two issues to a year, and you'll have the precise date of No. 1 in no time. As a matter of fact, it appeared on June 12th, 1915. You surely don't expect me to go to the trouble of looking it up? Not likely!

Thanks for your cheery letter, Clifford George Leary. It was a real dinkum letter, and I regard you as one of my cobbers. If you're feeling very energetic, I'd like you to send me a list of all the Australian slang you know. I have never had the extreme pleasure of visiting your wonderful country, so any details like that will be welcome. Other cobbers of mine, please note!

I would like to give you a definite date, Douglas Axe, regarding the reappearance of the Portrait Gallery, but I am afraid I cannot do so. But I can safely say that the New Series of Portraits will appear quite early in the New Year. Your delightful letter gave me any amount of pleasure, old man.



After a struggle, I managed to get through your pencilled note, Lionel Moxom. But you're wrong. I did NOT say "Help" when you mentioned that you would write again shortly. My dear old chap, you can write as often as you please, and I shall always welcome your letters. And these remarks apply to everybody else, too. For goodness' sake, don't think you're bothering me.

Yes, I'm afraid you'll have a lot of trouble if you try to get those early issues you want, Charles H. Coutman. But you really needn't bother. In THE MONSTER LIBRARY you'll find all the earlier Series of yarns, so if you subscribe to the new monthly, your wishes will be granted. I shouldn't think there'll be any difficulty in getting these shilling books in Australia.

I'm always in a state of fear and trembling when I open letters from Australia or South Africa, or other of our Dominions. I can't be in every part of the world at once, and I'm awfully afraid of being bowled out in minor details. You pick me up on one of these points, Douglas Ellis Mackenzie. You assure me that Umlosi is quite in order when he uses such forms of address as "N'Kose" and "Umtagati." Being so near the Zulus, you certainly OUGHT to know. But you can't understand why Umlosi refers to Nipper as "Manzie," because "Manzie" means water. I know it does. You haven't tripped me up at all, my lad! Let me quote a line or two from "The Ivory Seekers"—the first yarn in which I introduced Umlosi, published in June, 1917: "And as for thou," went on Umlosi, turning to Nipper, "I shall call thee Manzie, since thine eye is of water—" "Don't you call my eyes watery!" said Nipper indignantly. "Thou mistake me," went on Umlosi gravely. "Thine eye is as the liquid water; it is deep and pure, and thou hast a mighty courage." So, you see, it was just one of Umlosi's whimsicalities to give Nipper the nickname of "Manzie." With regard to your medal coupons, you needn't keep them until you have the necessary amount of introductions—you can send them in at different times, just as you please.

Yes, Regular Reader, Guy Pepys is still at St. Frank's. He shares Study M, in the West House, with the Onions brothers. But as he is a quiet, studious chap, he is very seldom mentioned. The First and Second Forms are never featured in the yarns because I really don't think that we number infants among our readers. The doings of such youthful characters would not interest the great bulk of Our Paper's supporters.

It is always interesting to get letters from odd corners of the world, and your letter from French Equatorial Africa, G. Dejardin,

was particularly welcome. I can't understand why you didn't hear from me earlier, in response to your previous letter, and I'll look the matter up. I quite appreciate your desire for me to "tick off" the Leeds reader you mention because he is afraid to let his parents know that he reads Our Paper. But it wouldn't be quite fair to publish his name, would it? I don't want to get the poor chap into trouble. And now I'll take the liberty of quoting the concluding lines of your own letter: "I proclaim far and wide that THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY is the only paper to which I am really attached. I follow the adventures of Nipper & Co. as if they really lived." Thanks heartily.

That problem of yours isn't a problem at all, H. Rawlings. In fact, I believe you're trying to pull my leg. You ask me how a Toronto reader can have the paper sent to his house. Is it possible? !!!!! Ye gods! Why don't you turn to the back page of the cover? At the foot of it, you'll find that the Old Paper will be sent to any address in the world—delivered right at the door—on payment of 11s. per annum, or the equivalent in Canadian, foreign, or any other old kind of currency.

I hope your brother knows your Membership number, F. M. 372. And I hope he chips you, too! You didn't want me to print your real name because you were afraid of being chipped! My dear old chap, what on earth is there to be afraid of? If you are certain that what you are doing is right—and this applies to everything in life—you can smile serenely, and let everybody chip you to their heart's content.

It's rather rummy that you should express a wish for "a longer book, printed, say, about every two or three months," Sam Whitton. The MONSTER LIBRARY will more than satisfy you, I should imagine.

All right, W. Holmes, send that effort of yours along as soon as you like. I'm quite satisfied that it won't be the work of a mere tyro. After winning all those prizes for compositions and essays, I'm sure you'll turn out something really decent.

If you're looking for an attractive indoor winter game, Football Enthusiast, I think I can put you on to one. This is "The St. Frank's Table Football Game." You see, it is named after our good old school, and should be particularly interesting to readers. You can get the game at all the big stores—such as Hamley's, Harrods, Barker's, Gamage's, etc. It is really top-hole, and quite different from anything else in the same line—a table game where real football skill can be exercised. You're bound to like it.

E.S.B.





# THE CITY OF MASKS;

## or, THE CASE OF THE BOY KING!

*A Gripping New Tale of Detective Adventure, introducing SEXTON BLAKE and TINKER.*

### FOR NEW READERS.

The story takes place in the wild and mountainous country of Carlovina, infested by bandits and outlaws. Here life is held very cheaply, and it is with grave personal risk that Sexton Blake and Tinker find themselves the guests of the youthful King Peter, the new ruler of Carlovina. The great detective, in the guise of Mr. Brown, English tutor to the King, has been employed by the Foreign Office on an important mission, and Tinker is on a visit to King Peter as an old school chum. Blake does not trust the King's ministers, who are plotting to overthrow the King. Following investigations by the great detective, the identity of Blake and Tinker are suspected, and Tinker narrowly escapes being trapped on a false errand.

(Now read on.)

**T**HERE was another gala performance at the opera that night. King Peter came back late from his fishing, but as the sport had been good, he was in a very good humour. Tinker was in the royal dressing-room, and two valets were helping the king into his magnificent uniform when the lieutenant announced that Mr. Secretary Brentschi begged to be permitted to speak to his Majesty for a few seconds.

"Let him come in," said King Peter.

The soft-footed, soft-voiced, shifty-eyed secretary bowed low. His message was that his Excellency, the Prime Minister, wished to be excused for not attending his Majesty at the Opera House, for he had important affairs of state to attend to.

"Oh, all serene!" said Peter. "If he's in the palace, I shall expect him at supper afterwards."

"His Excellency is at his house, sir, and has sent for me to join him there," said Brentschi, his forehead almost on the carpet.

"Then he'll miss some jolly good trout," said the king. "We'll have another go at those chaps to-morrow, Billy," he added to Tinker, "and I'll bet I catch more than you do. Oh, my hat! I wish I hadn't to wear all these beastly medals, jewels, and things."

"You do certainly look a bit like a walking pawnshop," said Tinker, "and I'd jolly well like the job of pawning you if I could keep the money. As I expect you're taking me, I suppose I'd better toddle along and put on my humble dress-suit. May I dodge it?"

"You may not, old thing," said Peter, "for I'm not going to suffer alone. Try to dodge it, my lad, and off goes your napper."

"You miserable old tyrant!" grinned Tinker. "What-ho the sword with the jewelled hilt! Don't get it between your legs and tumble over it. I'll be ready in about two shakes, though. I'd sooner play ping-pong or shove-halfpenny than go to the opera."

Tinker hurried off to the private rooms to scramble into a dress-suit.

"I've got to toddle off to the opera again, guv'nor," he said to Sexton Blake. "I don't think they'll try another dud letter on me asking me to go out and be shot. Sarjo won't be there. He sent the secretary to Peter saying he had a lot of work to do."

"In the palace, young 'un?" asked the private detective quickly.

"At his house, guv'nor. Brentschi is going to help with the dirty work. What a slinky beast that chap is with those pig's eyes that look everywhere but at you! A cleyer beggar, too. That guy has lots of brains."

"I think he wrote the forged note, though it may have been Prince Darro, the pretended poet fellow, but I don't think they'll try the same trick again. We're both being watched, Tinker, inside the palace and out. Not, I think, that you are suspected, but perhaps it was a mistake for us to share these apartments."

As we came with the king, and are both Britishers, I don't see anything in that to arouse suspicion, guv'nor."

"That's true in a way," answered Sexton Blake, "but they're suspicious of me. Sarjo's agents have been making inquiries about us in England—at Calcroft School."

"Gee! That's dangerous, guv'nor."

"I'd foreseen that move and arranged for it," said Blake, smiling. "They got



their answers. About that little affair of mine with Veilburg at the cathedral, I think they're all puzzled."

"They must be," said Tinker. "I wonder if they imagine we've told the king."

"I don't think they do, but they may think we've told Princess Celia, for they can't possibly take us to be such complete idiots as to swallow Veilburg's yarn on top of that forgery. This isn't a safe or easy job, young 'un. We're up against a cunning gang, and the king may play right into their hands. What's wanted here is a sudden revolution, but not the kind of revolution our Foreign Office was afraid of when they sent me here. If it isn't done, we shall go under."

"I'd like to chin with you, but I must hop it, gov'nor. Peter has booked me for the opera, so I must run. So-long!"

From the window, in the glare of the electric lamps, Blake watched the royal motor-car leave the palace with Blimp and an escort of guards. The king's tutor yawned and went into the corridor. Presently he met the lieutenant, one of the few people in Kamfak Blake knew he could trust.

"Off duty, lieutenant?"

"For a few hours. I've only just left the gate. I have to be at the Opera House before the performance ends."

"Then perhaps you can tell me if Brentschi has gone."

"Yes, I spoke to him," said the lieutenant. "The Prime Minister's car came for him and he went off in it."

"Thanks, that's all I wanted to know—or nearly all. Is our smiling friend Veilburg in evidence to-night?"

"Not to my knowledge," replied the lieutenant, after a cautious glance up and down the corridor. "When I saw him last he was talking with Bizer. The colonel has not gone to the opera, either, so it seems there is some business on at the Prime Minister's house."

"Thanks," said Sexton Blake again.

The private detective smoked a couple of cigarettes in the solitude of the sitting-room, and then walked to the door of the council chamber. He passed the door and came back again to make sure that he was not being watched, and then slipped a key into the lock. Closing the massive mahogany door behind him he relocked it and stood in semi-darkness.

Behind the chair of state in which the boy king sat when business was being discussed was the Prime Minister's room. The secretary had locked it, but the private detective, with the aid of a skeleton key, quickly made his way in. There were iron shutters over the windows, and these the cautious secretary had also fastened and locked, and it was very dark.

Switching on his flash-lamp, Sexton Blake lifted a curtain and tried the door of

Brentschi's room, and a few minutes later he was standing before a large safe that was embedded in the solid masonry of the wall. It looked a formidable obstacle, and Blake examined it with caution and respect till he had assured himself that there was no electric contrivance attached to it to alarm the guard or summon the police. Then Sexton Blake took off his coat.

It was an old safe, made by a famous London firm, but for more than half an hour it defied him and all the keys he had brought. He could not use force, for the safe had to be left as he had found it. Just as he was thinking of abandoning the task as hopeless there was a sharp click, and as he pulled at the brass handle the heavy door swung outwards.

Placing a chair against the door to keep it open, Blake stepped into the safe. It was lined with closed drawers, and little steel cupboards, each bearing a ticket with a number and a neatly written list of the documents it contained. To have read them all would have taken hours, and Blake did not think the document he was looking for had been docketed.

Brentschi was a tidy person, and there were no loose papers, but many leather-bound books with an old velvet coat lying on top of them. Blake searched the pockets of the old coat and found a pipe and tobacco-pouch. In the breast-pocket was a thick envelope. He had the envelope in his hand when he heard a sound. Someone had entered the council chamber.

Quick as thought, Sexton Blake sprang out of the safe, closed the door, and put the chair back into its old position. In the darkness he pressed himself close to the wall beside the curtained door. When it opened he was behind it. A hand pressed down the electric switch and flooded the room with light. Through the crack of the door he saw Brentschi, the secretary, and it was a tense moment, for if the secretary had shut the door all Sexton Blake's hopes of altering the condition of affairs in Carlovía would have been swept to the winds.

As it was, there was very little hope of evading discovery. The secretary crossed to the safe. Though the lock had probably fastened, Blake had not had time to replace the combination as he had found it, and in a moment the secretary would see that the safe had been tampered with. And just as Brentschi took a key from his pocket, the telephone on his desk started to ring.

Still there was no escape for Sexton Blake, for when Brentschi went to the instrument and lifted the receiver he was facing the door, and his shifty eyes seemed to watch it suspiciously as he listened.

"Ah, yes, I am here!" he said. "I am at the commands of your Highness. If

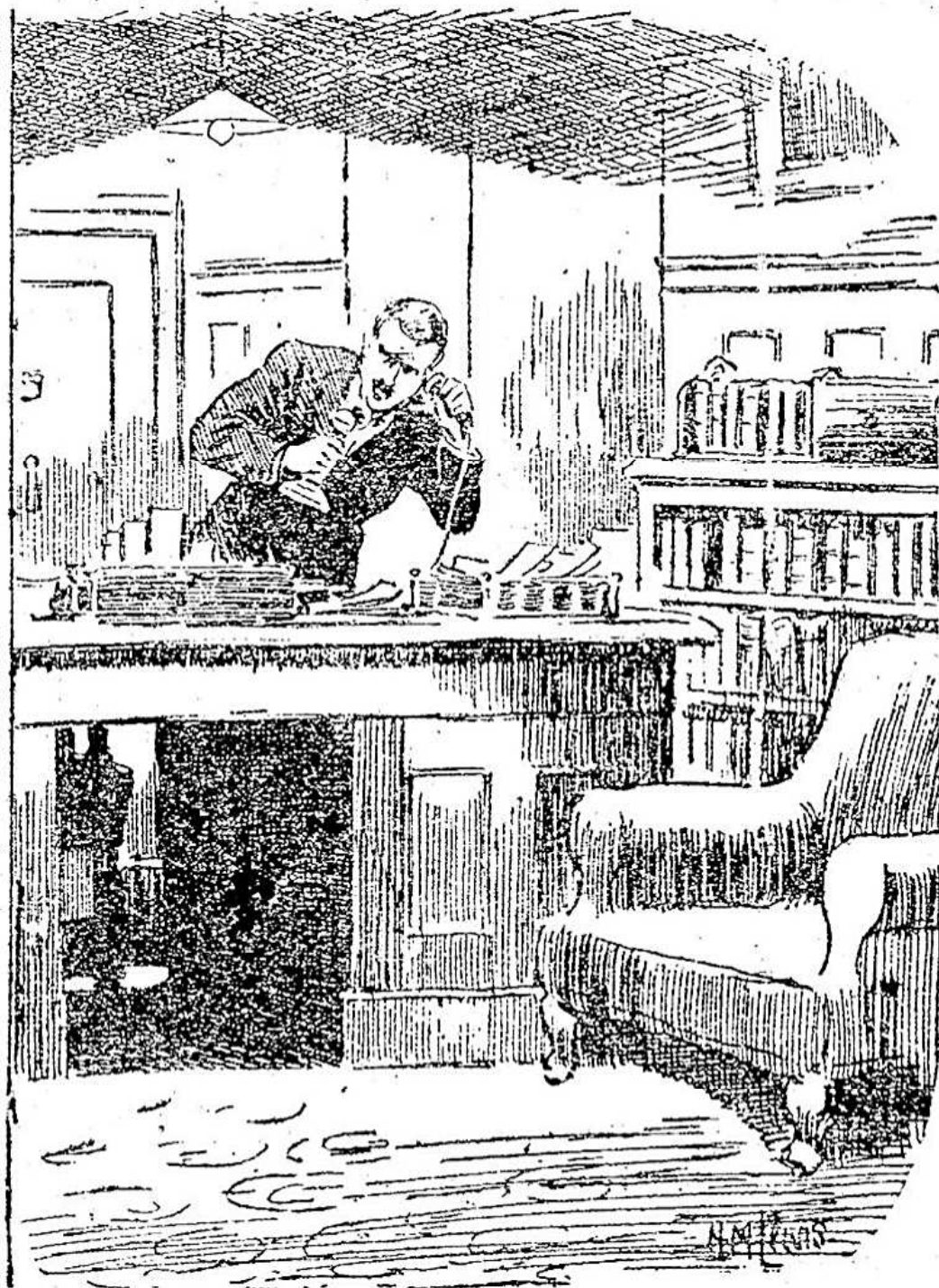


your Highness will spare me five minutes—  
At once? At once then."

Brentschi took a brush and a little mirror out of a drawer, brushed his sandy hair, arranged his tie, and hurried out. It could not be Prince Darro who had spoken, for the prince had gone with King Peter to the opera. The only other Highness in the palace was Princess Celia, and her apartments were a good distance away. Sexton Blake came from behind the door and examined the contents of the envelope he had taken from the pocket of the old velvet coat. He replaced the document, put the

a stranger to open a safe in the royal palace and pry into State secrets isn't exactly a trifling offence, and I couldn't very well have strangled Brentschi or have knocked him on the head to keep him quiet. That telephone bell was prettier music than any Tinker is likely to hear at the opera to-night."

Celia's French maid knocked at the door. Princess Celia wished to speak to Mistaire Brown, she announced, and Sexton Blake followed her. Celia put down the book she had been reading and told the maid to leave them.



Still there was no escape for Sexton Blake, for when Brentschi went to the instrument and lifted the receiver he was facing the door, and his shifty eyes seemed to watch it suspiciously as he listened.

combination of the safe right, and returned to his room.

"A slice of good luck," he thought. "Celia intervened at the fatal moment and saved the situation."

He paced up and down deep in thought. It had been a narrow escape, for it was something that could not have been explained away, and if he had been discovered he would have been deported at once, for even the king could not have saved him.

"Sarjo would have got me hanged for it, I suppose," he reflected with a smile. "For

"Were you there when Brentschi came—in the council chamber?" she asked quickly.

"Worse than that, I was in his very room, hiding behind the door. How did you know?"

"Because I saw you go in."

"You did, and I thought I had been so careful to let nobody see me," said Sexton Blake.

"I'm thankful I did see you," said Celia. "I knew you must be trying to do something to help us. I was thinking of going to bed, and rang for my maid. I had told her to pay some bills, and I asked her if



she had done so. She said she had not enough money, but that if I would write her a cheque she would ask Brentschi to cash it for her, as she had just met him. That terrified me, for I was sure you would not have ventured to go into the council chamber unless you were sure the secretary was away, and I thought you might be still there, so I rang the telephone."

"Splendid!" said Sexton Blake. "You are a most amazing young lady, princess, though I may have made the same statement before. It was a very clever and very timely thing to do, for just then I was in a most difficult corner. And did he cash the cheque?"

"Oh, yes, he's useful that way!" said Celia, smiling. "But don't take such dreadful risks. What could you have said in excuse if he had found you there?"

"My dear princess, I don't know. It was slightly worse than being there, for I had opened the safe."

"Good gracious!" Celia's eyes were startled and astonished. "Sarjo would want your life for that. You left nothing behind to betray you?"

"I think not, princess, for your brilliant idea gave me time to cover my tracks. I'm heartily thankful I wasn't caught, for that would have put a sudden end to things. Not that I think Sarjo would have had my life for it, but it would have been rather humiliating to have had to explain my position and then be bundled out of Carlovian neck and crop. My employers at home would think me a nice sort of person to send out on an important secret mission. Yes, you are an amazing young lady."

"Please don't keep saying that. Did you do any good by taking such desperate risks?"

"I hope so. Brentschi came back for something he had forgotten, and I think I know what it was," said Sexton Blake. "They are putting their heads together at Sarjo's house to-night over some black business, but I cannot tell you anything now. All the same, cheer up. If you can keep on acting as brilliantly as you did when you rang the telephone-bell we shall smash the Sarjo gang at the finish."

"In spite of Peter?"

"In spite of anybody, princess. Now I'll take a late stroll and see what's happening in the streets of the City of Masks."

#### A BAG OF FOUR.

**A**BOUT eleven o'clock, Sexton Blake knocked at the door of the tinsmith's shop which he had gone a mile out of his way to reach. At the fifth knock the door was opened and a masked man came out.

"Here I am, Rivastoff," said Sexton Blake. "I've been followed, as usual, so

I'll just slip in and change my clothes. Please do a little patrol work for a few minutes. There were two of them, and I think I shook them off, but look about and make sure."

"They are persistent curs, these dogs of Veilburg," said the bandit. "I am tempted to put a knife into some of them, for a knife makes no noise. That, of course, is forbidden, but it is a great pity. A few dead police spies would be a good lesson to the others, Excellency."

"Possibly, but since we joined forces, you have promised to cut out that sort of business," said Sexton Blake. "We are for the king, but sticking knives into a few of Sarjo's secret police will do the king no good. If you see anything suspicious just give a cat-call, and I'll slip out by the back and meet you behind the cathedral."

"As you will, Excellency. I hope there is work to do to-night, for I am tired of spying and plotting."

"We shall see," said Sexton Blake.

As the private detective changed his clothes in a little room at the rear of the shop, it struck him that only in Carlovian could an honest man make friends with a brigand, or, rather with an ex-brigand, for Rivastoff had agreed to abandon that exciting career. In Carlovian a bandit was generally a popular person, except with the authorities and those who were unfortunate enough to fall into his clutches. And Blake found Rivastoff useful, for he hated Sarjo, and was well in touch with the leaders of the anti-Sarjo party.

The alleys of Kamfak swarmed with cats. One of them uttered a shrill meiau, and judging it to be a two-legged one, Sexton Blake left the premises of the tinsmith by climbing a wall at the back into another alley even darker and dirtier than the first one.

Blake boarded the last tram to the cathedral, and found Rivastoff waiting for him, wearing a mask.

"One of Veilburg's curs was nosing about, so I gave the cat-call, Excellency," said the ex-bandit. "What's the work in hand?"

"The leader of the pack if we can get him," said Sexton Blake. "I think he'll be carrying some papers I want to look at."

"Veilburg keeps himself well guarded, Excellency, so it may not be easy. You know where he is to-night, then?"

"At Sarjo's house in the Great Square," said Blake. "I'm not expecting it to be easy, my friend, but any fool can do what is easy."

"True, Excellency; but Veilburg's gunmen are quick at shooting. Not that I care, for I am used to being shot at. I still have a twinge from the last bullet your young henchman fired at me. Am I to kill Veilburg, then?"

"Not at all," said Blake, with a laugh.

(Continued on page 40.)





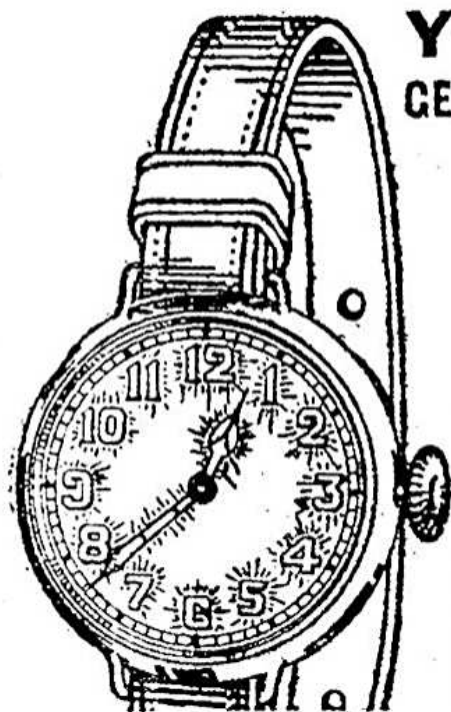
# 16 Weekly

buys a big Hornless Gramophone or 2/6 Weekly a 300A Mead with giant horn, loud sound-box, massive oak case and 40 tunes. Carriage paid. 10 Days Trial. No. 300 model 37/6 cash to record buyers. Big Jacobean Cabinets and Table-Grands at WHOLESALE prices. Write to-day for Catalogue, beautifully illustrated in colours.

**Mead** Co. (Dept. G2) Birmingham.



**ACCESSORIES FOR STAMP COLLECTORS FREE!** Also 62 diff. stamps and tweezers. Request appros.—Lisburn & Townsend, London Road, Liverpool.



## YOURS for 6d GENT'S LEVER WRIST-LET WATCH.

deposit Handsome, Gent's size Lever Wristlet Watch, complete with leather strap. Best quality polished Nickel Silver-finished Case. Luminous Hands and Dial to see time in the dark. Carefully adjusted Lever Movement. Jewelled Balance, warranted for 5 years. Sent upon receipt of 6d. only. After receipt you send 1/6 more, and balance by instalments of 2/- per month until only 16/- is paid. Price, full cash

with order, or balance within 7 days of receipt, 15/- only. Reduced from 25/-. Cash returned if dissatisfied and Watch is returned within 7 days. Send P.O. or stamps at once to **SIMPSON'S (BRIGHTON), LTD. (Dept. 1693).** Queen's Road, Brighton, Sussex.

**£2,000** worth cheap Photo Material. Samples catalogue free; 12 by 10 Enlargement, any photo, 8d.—**Hackett's Works,** July Road, Liverpool.

**TRICKS** Send at once for one of our wonderful boxes of conjuring tricks. Prices, 1/-, 2/6, 5/-, 10/-, £1. Post 3d.—**P. TAYLOR,** 134, Fleet Street, London, E.C.4.

**FREE!** —Set of 25 Swiss Stamps FREE to those sending postage (abroad 6d.) and asking to see Approval Sheets.—**N. FLORICK,** 179, Asylum Road, Peckham, London, S.E.15.

All applications for Advertisement Spaces in this publication should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, **THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY,** The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

# MECCANO

## ENGINEERING FOR BOYS

Don't let your Meccano get out of date. Scores of new parts have been added to the system during the last year or two and new parts mean hundreds of bigger and better models.

Meccano was always the "real thing," but Meccano to-day, with all these new parts, is better fun than ever. Keep your Outfit up-to-date. Your Meccano dealer has all the new parts in stock. Ask him to show them to you—he will be pleased to do so.



*Meccano*  
**Outfits from**  
**3/6 to 370/-**

*free to boys!*

"The Magic Carpet" is the name of a fine book we will send you free. Send us the names and addresses of three of your friends — and include your own last—on a postcard. You'll get the book by return of post. Write to-night and address your postcard to Dept. 12, Meccano Ltd., Binns Road, Liverpool.

**Meccano**  
**Limited,**  
**Binns Rd.,**  
**Liverpool.**





(Continued from page 38.)

"I never struck such a bloodthirsty place. Do you want to kill him?"

Rivastoff shrugged his shoulders.

"It would be a praiseworthy deed, Excellency, and many people in Kamfak would rejoice, and there would be much dancing and much wine drunk to-morrow in the café's," he answered. "But it would be unwise, for as yet these accursed police are too strong for us, and houses would be searched, and many innocent people arrested and sacrificed who are our good friends and staunch to the king. Even if they took me red-handed the searches and arrests would still go on. No; to shoot Veilburg just now would be to play Sarjo's game."

"Exactly, so our game is not to shoot him. Keep your eyes very wide open, my friend. Are we being followed?"

"I think not, but we had better part. At the bottom of the Great Square, then, in twenty minutes. Good-night, my friend."

"Good-night!"

They made a great show of shaking hands in front of the cathedral steps, in case they were being watched from the shadow of the pillars, and separated. Rivastoff, who knew all the short cuts, emerged from the gloom of some ornamental trees when Blake reached the square where the prime minister's mansion stood.

"It is useless," he said, in a low voice. "There are two men at the gate, Excellency. I am willing enough, but this is pure folly."

"Is there a car?"

"There are three cars, and the police car is in front. Veilburg's driver and a gunman are sitting inside playing cards."

"Get into cover and wait," said Sexton Blake.

The iron gates were open, and the three motor-cars were drawn up inside. The drivers of two of them had evidently gone into the house. There was nothing to distinguish the police car from the others, but as he peered cautiously through the bars of the gate, Blake saw that one of the card-players wore a peaked cap decorated with a red band and a silver star. The other card-player, who was masked, was in civilian clothes, and a mackintosh spread across their knees served as a card-table.

Sexton Blake tiptoed away, and once more Rivastoff glided out of the shadows to meet him.

"Can you drive a motor-car, my friend?"

"That, Excellency, is beyond my poor abilities," answered the ex-brigand. "Horses, yes, but not these evil-smelling things on rubber wheels."

"Then that will be my affair if it happens, though if you could drive you would make a more suitable chauffeur," said the private detective. "Please hold these for me one moment."

Sexton Blake removed his overcoat and coat, and proceeded to uncoil several yards of strong, pliable cotton rope which he carried wrapped round his waist, and then proceeded to cut the rope into four equal lengths.

(To be continued next week.)

## "THE CELLAR OF SECRETS"

(Continued from page 32.)

pan was leaning against the wall exactly as the plotters had left them!

It was the same in every corner of the cellar.

Not one of their traps had been disturbed—not one trace of evidence remained to account for Quirke's magical effects. The carpet was pulled up, and found intact. The floor beneath was as solid as the flagstones in the Triangle.

The bamboo table was devoid of any trick apparatus. In short, from one end of the cellar to the other, there was absolutely nothing that the investigators could seize upon as an evidence of trickery. They had laid their trap, and it had failed.

"Hang it all, this is getting positively weird!" growled Dick Hamilton, scratching his head. "I don't like being baffled like this. What does it mean? How in the name of wonder does Quirke do it?"

"I believe he's in league with the spirits, after all!" muttered Church.

William Napoleon Browne slowly shook his head.

"Brother Quirke is undoubtedly a foxy

young gentleman, but we have nothing to fear," he exclaimed. "With my great brain power, I have already evolved a solution to this problem. Indeed, there can be but one, and you can rest assured that Brother Quirke is no worker of genuine magic. Within a week he will be knee deep in the consommé!"

Browne seemed very confident, and Nipper was looking very thoughtful—indeed, a gleam of understanding had crept into his eyes. But the other members of the Compact of Ten were sorely puzzled.

The next step was likely to prove the most dramatic of all!

THE END.

**MORE ABOUT "THE COMPACT OF TEN" AND PROFESSOR TUCKER'S GREAT DISCOVERY IN NEXT WEEK'S STORY:—**

**"THE SCHOOLBOY CONSPIRATORS!"**



# AS SIMPLE AS A B C.

**INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership.** Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms fill in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C by running the pen diagonally across both Sections. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. The second form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

**Member Applying for Bronze Medal:** It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms are needed, and these must be taken from copies of the latest issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the time when the forms are sent in. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A

and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided the forms are taken from the latest issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the time when the forms are sent in.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver or gold medal can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B, which has been revised for this purpose. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when the League reaches the required number of members, they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver or gold one, according to the number of introductions with which they are credited.

These Application Forms can be posted for  $\frac{1}{2}$ d., provided the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

**IMPORTANT.**—Complete and post off this form before the next issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY is on sale. Otherwise the form becomes out of date and useless.

## ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 23. Nov. 28, 1925

### SECTION

# A

### READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

Being a regular reader of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY," I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare myself to be a staunch supporter of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and that I have introduced Our Paper to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with Membership Number assigned to me.

### SECTION

# B

### MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.) hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me..... (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

### SECTION

# C

### NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) ..... to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY," which I will read with a view to becoming a regular reader of this paper.

(FULL NAME) .....

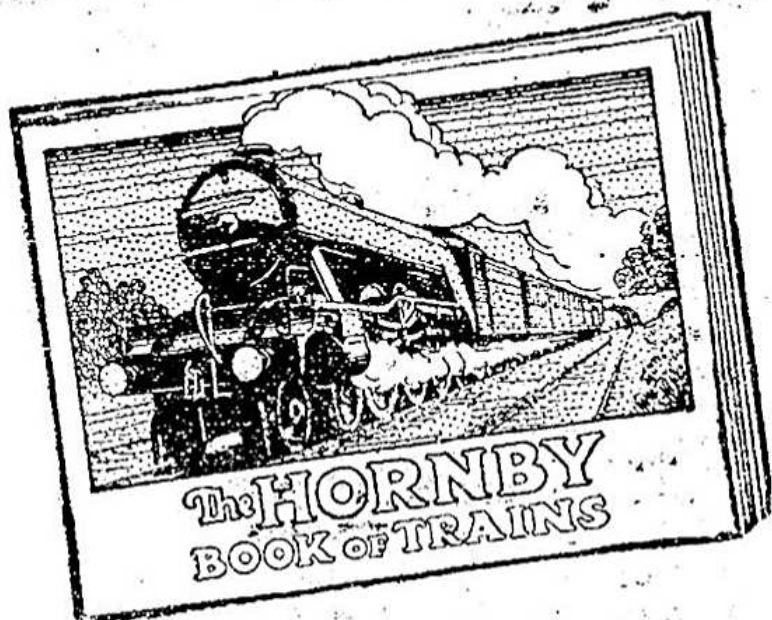
(ADDRESS) .....



# HORNBY TRAINS

## BRITISH AND GUARANTEED

Only when you've got a *real* train like the Hornby, can you enjoy the fun of running your own railway system. It's the finest fun in the whole world, and you will find that even your father will want to help you when you've fixed up a Hornby Railway! Ask him to buy you one for Christmas.



*Hornby Train Prices  
from 17/6 to 110/-.*

MECCANO LTD. :: BINNS ROAD :: LIVERPOOL.

## SEND FOR THIS HORNBY BOOK OF TRAINS

This year the centenary of the railway is being celebrated. The Hornby Book of Trains tells of many things interesting to railway enthusiasts. It also contains splendid illustrations, in colour, of the Hornby Trains, etc. The price of the book is 3d, and it will be sent to you post free on receipt of stamps for this amount. Address your letter to Dept.S, Meccano Ltd., Binns Rd., Liverpool.

## GREAT FREE OFFER

of specimen copies of the Guide Book,

## "INDOOR RECREATIONS"

comprising 32 illustrated pages of articles on Light Woodwork, Fretwork, Toy Making, Stencilling, Strip Woodwork, Leatherette Work, Making Tie Presses, Coloured Calenders, etc. Two splendid fretwork designs given free. Send a postcard for your copy to-night as there will be an enormous demand. — **HANDICRAFTS, Ltd.**, G. Dept, Weedington Rd., London, N.W.5.

## 14CT. GOLD NIB BRITISH MADE



LEVER SELF-FILLING SAFETY SCREW CAP  
Over 200,000 in use the World over.

## The Famous FLEET PEN

The World's Best Value in Fountain Pens

**CUT THIS OUT.....**

**NELSON LEE LIBRARY PEN COUPON VALUE 6d.**

Five of these Coupons will be accepted in part payment for one of the above handsome FLEET FOUNTAIN PENS, usual value 12/6, Fleet price 7/-, or, with 5 coupons, only 4/6 net cash. Ask for Fine, Medium, or Broad Nib. Send direct to **FLEET PEN CO., 119, Fleet St., London, E.C.4.**

## SELF PROTECTION

NO LICENCE  
REQUIRED.

## SAFETY REVOLVER 9/6

(Accidents impossible.)

Exact replica of real revolver converted to fire blank cartridges only. Safe and harmless. Useful for theatricals, race starting, etc. Can easily be carried in pocket.

6-Chamber, NICKEL or BLUE ... 9/6 post free.

8- " " Cowboy Pat. Length 10ins. 12/- " "

10 " " Cowboy Pat. Length 10ins. 17/6 " "

Special Loud Cartridges for above, 1/6 per 100.

Carriage on Cartridges, 9d. any quantity.

Single Chamber Pistol, 2/6 post free.

Illustrated Catalogue, Cinemas, Cameras, Cycles, etc., post free.—**JAMES MANSFIELD & CO., Ltd.**

71, High Holborn, London, W.C.1.

**MAGIC TRICKS**, etc.—Parcels 2/6, 5/6 Ventriloquist's Instrument. Invisible. Imitate Birds. Price 6d. each, 4 for 1/-.—**T. W. HARRISON**, 239, Pentonville Road, London, N.1.

**FREE**—Choice 100 stamps from large pkt., pkt. best linings, pocket folder, to applicants for approx No. 102. Stamp.—**B. L. Coryn**, St. Vincent, Lr Isl. Wall, Whitstable.

**BE SURE TO MENTION "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" WHEN COMMUNICATING WITH ADVERTISERS.**