

SCREAMINGLY-FUNNY NEW SERIES OF SCHOOL YARNS STARTS TO-DAY

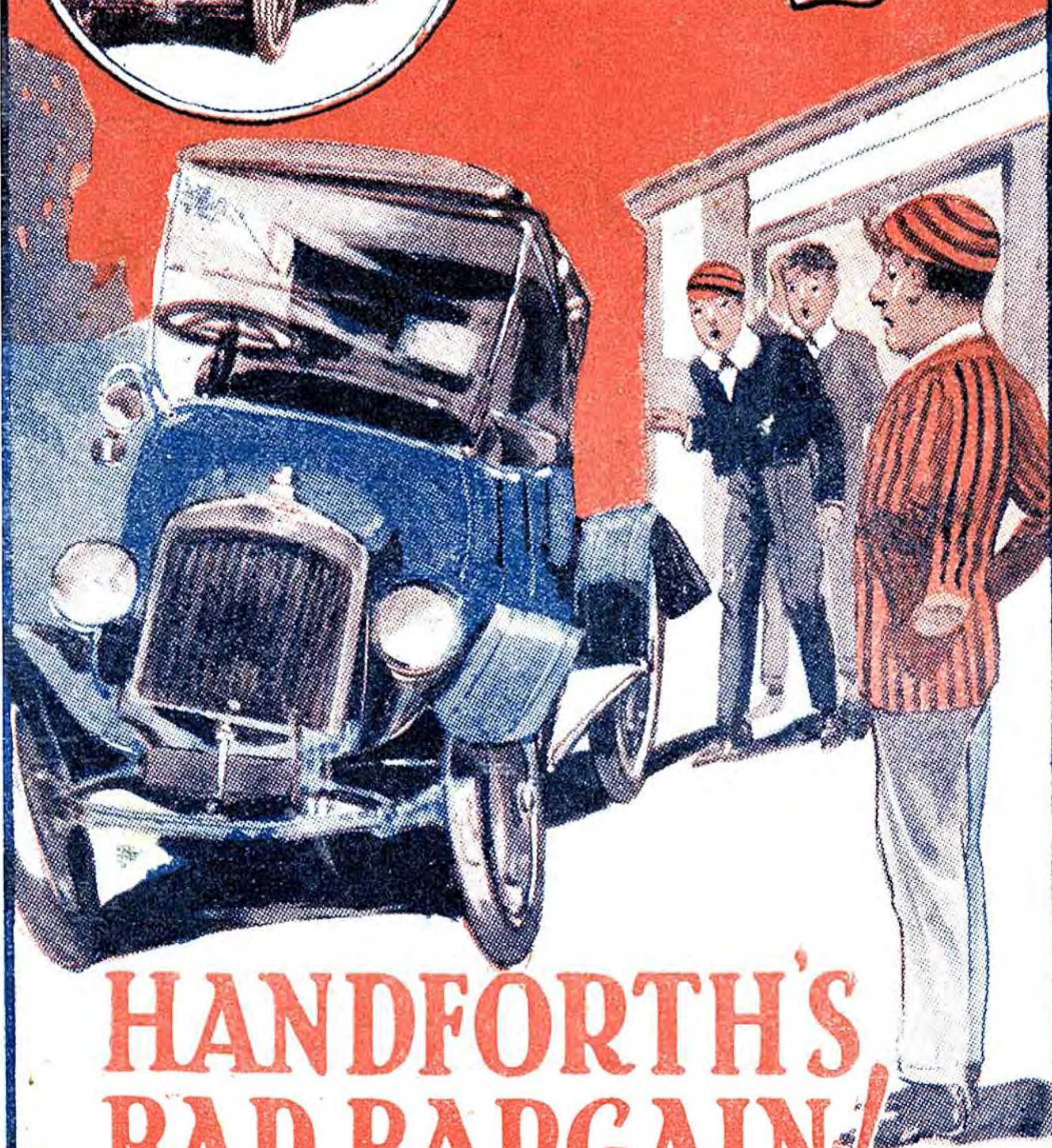


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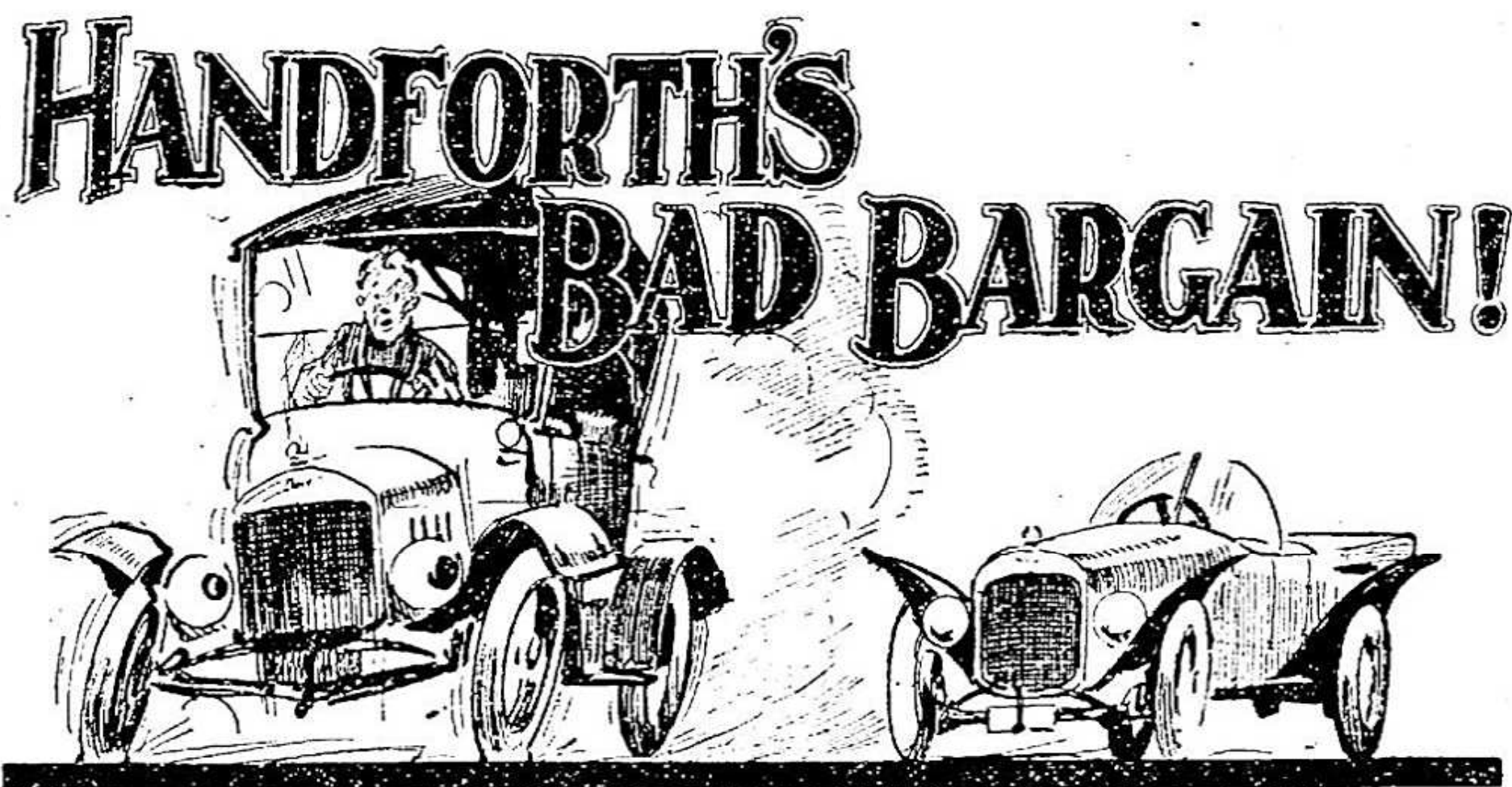


HANDFORTH'S BAD BARGAIN!

A LIVELY LONG COMPLETE STORY
OF THE BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S.



As the car hit the bump, there came a series of cracks. The wheels flew off in all directions, the body hit the road and slithered forward in a cloud of dust, pitching the juniors in a heap! There wasn't going to be much left of the car by the time Handforth had done with it!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

The opening yarn of a screamingly-funny series of long complete stories of the Boys of St. Frank's.

CHAPTER 1.

THE FIRST DAY OF TERM.

Z IZZ-ZIZZZH!

Edward Oswald Handforth sat up in bed and blinked. He stared at the window, and blinked again. The continuous hissing of rain on the panes was positively alarming. The water was streaming down in blinding sheets, obliterating the view.

"My only hat!" said Handforth disgustedly.

He hopped out of bed, fully awake, and gazed disconsolately at the window. It was just eight o'clock, and the September morning was apparently doing its utmost to prove that summer had gone. This was the first day of the new term at St. Frank's, and Handforth had decided to go down by road, in his Austin Seven.

"Of all the beastly, rotten luck!" he grunted, glaring.

The famous leader of Study D was at home, in his own bed-room. He remembered how he had ridiculed his young brother Willy when the latter had predicted rain. Indeed, the previous evening they had had quite a tussle, until Sir Edward Handforth had come along and separated them.

"I'll tick the pater off for this," said Handforth grimly. "What's the good of him

having a liar down in the hall instead of a barometer? The thing distinctly said 'set fair' last night! And look at this!"

It was rather characteristic of Handforth to blame his father for the vagaries of the weather. And such weather! Even Handforth had never known the rain to beat so fiercely and so continuously against his bedroom window. It was more like a deluge.

It was eight o'clock, too, and Handforth had arranged with his bosom chums, Church and McClure, to be round promptly at half-past eight, so that they could make an early start in the little Austin. Why go down to Sussex by train when they could enjoy themselves in the car, and save the fares?

"Rats!" said Handforth crossly. "Blow! Rot!"

He flung open the window with a grunt, and then staggered back, soaked to the skin. He stood there, spluttering and gasping, and rather dumbfounded. It was the first time in all his experience that he had known the rain to come upwards instead of downwards!

But it was an absolute fact. The rain was hissing upwards from the ground, and, instead of beating against the windows, was now entering the bed-room in a cascade. Handforth stood there, his wet pyjamas clinging to his muscular form like an ill-fitting bathing suit.

"Great pip!" he said breathlessly.

The rain stopped. It didn't stop gradually, like any self-respecting rain should do, but with absolute abruptness.

"Lazybones!" came a cheery voice from outside.

Handforth started violently, leaned out of the window, and beheld his minor on the garden path below, holding the nozzle of a hose. The sun was shining gaily, and dispersing the early morning mists.

"Thought it would do the trick!" said Willy, grinning. "But it was like your silly rot, Ted, to get yourself soaked. Your pals will be here in about twenty minutes, you know. I thought I'd give you a reminder."

Edward Oswald positively gulped.

"Then—then it's not raining?" he roared.

"Not now!" said Willy brightly.

"You—you swindling young ass!"

"All right, I'm always willing to oblige," said Willy promptly. "If you want some more rain, you can have it."

He deftly turned a tap, and the hose sent forth another devastating spray of water. It fell upon Handforth with blinding force, and he staggered back into the bed-room, uttering weird and extraordinary cries.

The "rain" stopped again, and Handforth slammed down the window. His feelings were mixed. He was pleased to find that the morning was fine, but he was enraged at Willy's trick. By George! He'd make the young fathead pay for this as soon as he got down!

He proceeded to dress at lightning speed, totally unaware of the fact that he was playing Willy's own game. For the captain of the Third had made a little wager with his sister, Ena, that he would get Edward Oswald downstairs, fully dressed, within seven minutes from the time of awakening him.

Willy strolled into the dining-room, and found Ena glancing at the fashion advertisement of the morning paper. She belonged to the Moor View School, and this was the first day of term at that establishment, too.

"Master Clever!" she said coldly. "Only two minutes left, and then you'll have to whack out that pocket-knife of yours. It's just the thing I need for my study, so it'll come in handy."

Willy grinned.

"Awfully sorry, sis, but I need that pocket-knife myself—and I can do with your scissors," he said coolly. "I always have to borrow some when I want to cut something out of my scrap-book."

"You're an optimist!" said Ena briefly.

"I didn't even go to Ted's bed-room, either," said Willy. "I just spoke to him from the garden—"

"Then you're more dotty than I thought," interrupted Ena tartly. "Six minutes gone!" she added, glancing at the clock. "You'd better trot out that pocket-knife—"

She paused, and started. There was a sound outside in the hall, as though somebody had just tipped a ton of coal down the staircase. But this was quite an ordinary sound in the

Handforth household during the holidays. It merely meant that Edward Oswald was coming downstairs.

"Those scissors, please," said Willy blandly.

Ena looked at him, and compressed her lips.

"You—you giddy little magician!" she said. "How on earth did you do it?"

Handforth blundered into the room, and glared round.

"Where is he?" he asked thickly. "Oh, there! You—you young rotter! I'll teach you to swill me with water from the garden hose, and try to make me believe that it's raining!"

Ena slowly broke into a happy smile.

Edward Oswald took no notice of his sister. He made a bee-line for Willy, intent upon administering a swift castigation. But Willy dodged round the table, and became very meek.

"You seem pretty active this morning, Ted," he said calmly. "Must be the weather. Looks like being fine for our trip in the car."

"Our trip?" repeated Handforth. "Who said you're coming?"

"I did!"

"Then you're wrong!" roared Handforth. "I wouldn't take you to St. Frank's in my car for a thousand quid!"

"You won't have to," replied Willy. "You'll take me for nothing!"

"You—you silly young idiot!" roared his major. "If you think—"

"That's no way to talk to your brother, Edward!" said a stern voice.

Handforth turned round, and found his father in the doorway, and he suddenly realised the reason for Willy's assumed meekness. Of course, Willy had seen his pater long since.

"Just talking about our motor-car trip, dad," said Willy cheerily.

"So I understand," said Sir Edward Handforth, nodding. "Do I take it, Edward, that you are unwilling to include Willy in this journey?"

"There won't be room for him," protested Handforth.

"How many of you are proposing to go by car, then?"

"Well, there'll be Church and McClure and me," replied Edward Oswald.

"Three!" said his father. "And the car is a four-seater. It will be a sheer waste of money for Willy to pay his railway fare when there will be ample room for him in the car. Naturally, he will have his money, but he will find more use for it than handing it over to the railway company."

"But—but—"

"That is enough," said Sir Edward. "The matter is settled."

Handforth breathed hard, gave his minor a look that should have shrivelled him up, and stalked out.

"Since Edward is the owner of a motor-car—a most preposterous fact—he must use it reasonably," said Sir Edward, with a judicial air. "I cannot understand why his aunt made him such a present—but then, of course,

Constance was always eccentric. I only hope the young rascal will keep himself out of accidents."

"Oh, you can trust Ted all right, dad," said Willy. "He's one of those chaps who were born lucky. He can take the most frightful risks, and he always comes out safely. Just think of the adventures he had in China! Strictly speaking, he ought to have been dead about ten times."

Sir Edward frowned.

"Your mother and I are thankful, indeed, that you are all back safely," he said gruffly. "I'm not sure that we shall ever allow you to go on these wild expeditions again. For weeks we heard nothing—we thought you were all at the bottom of the sea. Thank heaven, you will be safe enough at St. Frank's."

Sir Edward was referring to the recent holiday trip, when the genial Lord Dorrimore had taken a big party of St. Frank's fellows and Moor View School girls to China in the *Wanderer*. The newspapers had made a big stir over the affair, for at one time it had been believed that the whole ship's company had gone to the bottom. But that adventure was now over, and school was the great item on the programme.

Handforth bustled off to see about his beloved little Austin, and Walter Church and Arnold McClure put in an appearance at the same time.

"We came a bit early, in case you needed some help with the baggage," said Church.

"Good men!" declared Handforth. "Had breakfast?"

"Well, no."

"You silly asses——"

"Didn't you tell us we should start before breakfast?" asked McClure. "Didn't you promise to have a lot of sandwiches packed up, so that we could feed on the way down?"

"By George! I forgot all about 'em!" said Handforth, with a start. "Not that it matters—we can easily do without any grub until we get to St. Frank's. The main thing is to get off quickly. Come and give me a hand with the car."

fine," he added, glancing approvingly at the neat little 'bus. "Glittering all over, by Jove."

Undoubtedly the Austin Seven was a picture. Handforth took a great pride in his car—an unexpected present from his eccentric Aunt Constance. It was a kind of semi-sports model, enamelled brilliant red, with rakish-looking black wings, and a tiny, semi-circular wind-screen. The radiator and lamps were gleamingly nickel-plated, and the hood was tucked away in a black casing. It was an occasional four-seater—that is to say, while the front seats were ample, the rear seats were somewhat cramped.

"We ought to get down there by noon, if we start at nine o'clock," remarked Church. "That'll give us time to put the study in order before lunch. But I think we ought to have a snack before we start."

"We can stop somewhere and buy some sandwiches," said Handforth briskly. "What's that you said? Noon? You fat-head, we'll be there by eleven o'clock!"

"Impossible!" said McClure. "It's over fifty miles."

Handforth looked at him pityingly.

"When it comes to a matter of simple calculation, you're worse than a kindergarten infant," he said tartly. "Fifty miles! And how fast can this car go?"

"Well, you've driven her at forty, haven't you?"

"Good!" said Edward Oswald. "We'll say thirty as a comfortable touring speed. That means under two hours for the journey. You chump, we'll get there before eleven."

"It's all very well to talk about touring speeds and calculations," growled Church. "What you've got to do is to work out the average. But a simple little thing like that never seems to occur to you, Handy!"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, it'll take us nearly an hour to get through London—out beyond Putney and Kingston," said Church. "We can't expect to do any thirty miles an hour until we're on the open road. If we get to St. Frank's by twelve o'clock, we shall do well. But we don't need to argue."

"Any luggage?" McClure cut in diplomatically.

"Nothing to speak of," replied Handforth.

"Good!" said Mac. "We know your Austin isn't exactly a pantechicon, so we've sent our trunks and bags on by train. Sent 'em yesterday, in fact—they'll be there by now."

"I don't trust the trains," said Handforth curtly. "I'm taking mine in the car."

"But you just said you had nothing to speak of!"

"Well, only a flat travelling trunk, four suit-cases, a couple of handbags, and two odd parcels," said Handforth casually. "You chaps will be able to manage a few trifles like that behind."

"Oh, will we?" snapped Church. "I thought you told us we were going to enjoy this motor ride to St. Frank's? Why the



CHAPTER 2.

OFF TO ST. FRANK'S.

ROUND in the garage, Handforth's Austin Seven looked a mere toy compared to Sir Edward's powerful limousine. The chums of Study D wheeled out the handy little car, and Handforth examined the controls with an air of importance.

"It's always best to take a look round before starting on a long trip," he said firmly. "The pater's chauffeur has cleaned her up, and filled her with juice, but I never trust anybody but myself."

"Surely you can trust your pater's chauffeur?" asked Church. "She's looking

dickens couldn't you send your traps on in advance? I never knew such a forgetful fat-head!"

"And what about the front seat?" asked McClure. "You'd better have your suit-cases and things beside you, where you can keep your eye on 'em."

Handforth frowned.

"Willy's going to sit there," he said warmly. "The young bounder has palmed himself off on me, and I can't get out of it. And I won't let him sit behind, because he might start some of his funny tricks. I can trust you chaps to act like sensible human beings, but I can't trust him!"

Church and McClure glanced at one another, but they made no comment. After all, what was the use? There would be plenty of time to raise objections when the actual start came.

Breakfast materialised, after all, for Lady Handforth scoffed at the idea of them starting without any food, and Church and McClure had the satisfaction of sitting down to a square meal. Handforth fumed, but it was noticed that he ate as heartily as the others. It was nearly half-past nine before a definite move was made, and by this time Sir Edward had gone off to business, taking Ena with him, so that he could see her off by train first. Ena was meeting a number of her school chums, and pooh-poohed the idea of going down by road.

"The best thing will be for you chaps to get in the car, and Willy and I will put the baggage in afterwards," said Handforth crisply. "There won't be room enough for you to get in if we do anything else."

"Look here, Handy——"

"We don't want to start any fuss, do we?" asked Handforth aggressively.

"Oh, well——"

Church and McClure gave it up. They waited again, fully prepared to protest at the crucial moment. After all, it was only fair to see exactly what Handforth's intentions were.

The car was brought round to the door, and Church and McClure got in. They were just comfortable now, without any luggage at all. It struck them as being a dotty idea to spoil the whole trip by overloading the car with bags and things.

But they soon found that it was too late to protest.

Handforth appeared with armfuls of suit-cases and bags. He proceeded to pile these on the knees of his chums—until, indeed, they had almost vanished from sight, only their heads projecting.

"Good!" said Handforth. "Didn't I say there'd be room? Just nice and comfy, my lads!"

"Oh, rather!" said Church. "You haven't got a couple of grand pianos ready, by any chance? Plenty of room for 'em here, if you have!"

"You will have your joke!" said Handforth, grinning.

"Joke!" howled Church, whose sarcasm had been completely wasted. "You silly ass! We can't travel like this! We shall be half-dead by the time we get to St. Frank's! Take these silly things off, and give us some breathing space."

"We only allowed you to do this just to show you how dotty it is!" said McClure, in alarm. "Great Scott! I'm wedged! I can't push these things off—I can't even move!"

"Corks!" breathed Church. "I'm wedged, too!"

"Good!" said Handforth coldly. "You're there, my sons, and there you'll stick! Of all the giddy nerve! I'm taking you down to St. Frank's in my car, and you can't even take my bags without grumbling! Hop in, Willy! We've wasted enough time already!"

"Well, there's no hurry," said Willy. "If we get there by tea-time we shall do pretty well."

"Tea-time be blowed!" retorted his major. "We'll be there before lunch, and I mean to spend the afternoon on Little Side. Footer practice, by George! Doesn't that make you feel good?"

Willy took pity on his major's chums, and relieved them of two bags and a suit-case. These he managed to wedge in front, although Handforth grumbled loudly, and protested that he wouldn't have room to drive. At last, however, the party was ready to make a start.

"I knew it!" muttered Church dismally. "Rain!"

A few drops were falling. The sunshine of an hour earlier had gone, and thick clouds had been rolling up on the chill autumn wind. Rain was already developing into a steady shower.

"H'm! Better shove the hood up," said Handforth. "I shall get my baggage wet if I don't!"

"Baggage!" roared Church. "What about us?"

"If you can't stand a few drops of rain, it's a pity!" retorted Handforth tartly. "But these suit-cases are good ones, and I don't want 'em ruined. Lend a hand, Willy, you young ass! Do something for your living!"

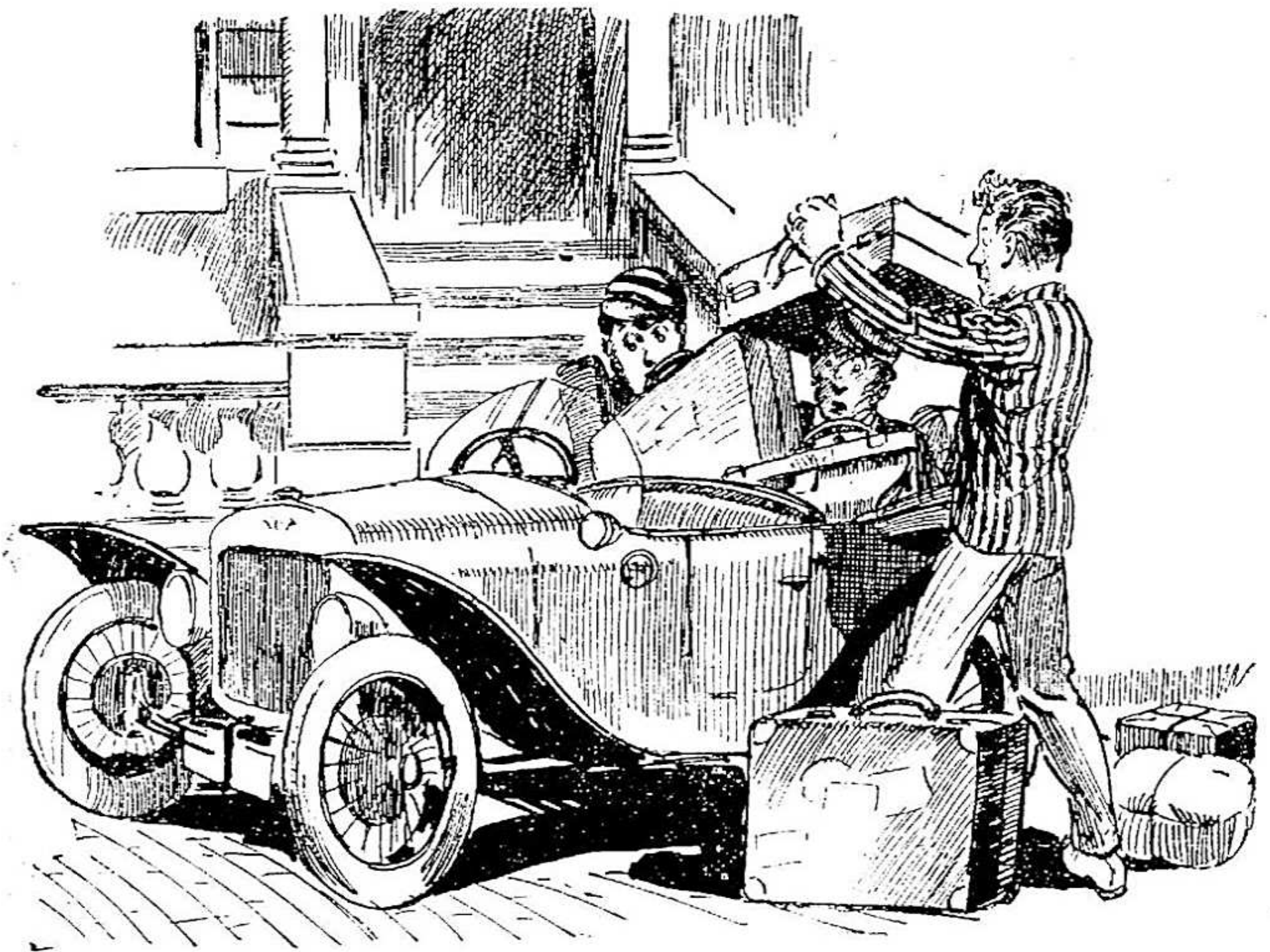
With the hood and side curtains in position, the Austin was converted into a comfortable little saloon. But there was even less room than ever now, for the passengers were unable to project their arms over the edges. And, what with the piled-up baggage, the interior was inclined to get stuffy. But even this was better than being soaked to the skin.

"Now, lemme see," said Handforth, as he pressed the electric starter. "Our best way is to go straight to Piccadilly, then down the Haymarket, and along the Strand—— Hallo! The engine won't start!"

Very concerned, he pressed the electric starter again, and frowned.

"That's rummy!" he said, worried.

"It may be a fad, of course, but I always thought it was a good idea to switch on the ignition before you try to start her up," sug-



Handforth piled suitcases and bags on top of Church and McClure, until only their heads projected. "Good!" exclaimed Handforth. "Didn't I say there'd be plenty of room? It'll be just nice and comfy for you!" The two gasped, they were wedged tight—they could hardly breathe. And yet Handy said they would have a nice, comfortable journey!

gested Willy. "At least, I've generally understood—"

"Take your fingers off that switch!" roared Handforth, who always considered that a loud voice would hide any amount of confusion. "You young chump! What's the idea of switching off! No wonder she wouldn't start!"

"My hat!" said Willy blankly.

This time, of course, the engine purred on the instant.

"I shouldn't go down the Strand, if I were you," remarked Willy, as they glided forward. "That's the opposite direction to the one we need. We've got to go through Knightsbridge, Fulham Road, and then on to Putney."

"What the dickens do we want to go to Putney for?" demanded Handforth, staring.

"Don't look at me—look at that 'bus ahead!" advised Willy. "We have to go to Putney because it's the best way out of London. Then we touch Kingston and go out through Esher, Ripley, and Guildford. My hat! Isn't it about time you knew the road? I thought you were a motorist!"

Handforth laughed carelessly.

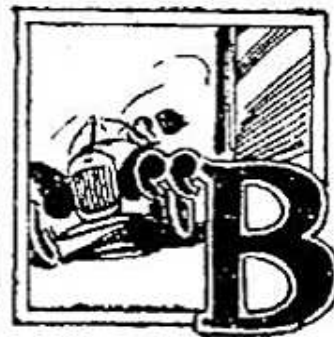
"I was only trying to spoof you," he said. "Of course we go through Putney. Do you

think I didn't know it? Let's put some speed on!"

He depressed the accelerator, and the Austin Seven purred forward.

CHAPTER 3.

HANDFORTH, THE STUNT ARTIST!



BETTER go easy along here," suggested Willy, as the car approached Hyde Park Corner in the driving rain.

"They've got the new system at work, and you've got to go round with the traffic—no cutting straight across."

"Oh, that gyroscopic business," said Handforth. "A lot of silly rot, in my opinion. I'm not going to take any notice of it."

"And quite right, too—if it is gyroscopic," said Willy drily. "We don't want to spin round like a top—at least, I'm quite content with riding in the ordinary way. But I suppose you mean gyratory?"

"What's the difference?" asked Handforth. "Don't quibble!"

"No, the bobby on point duty will do that," grinned Willy.

He felt that it would be wise on his part to dry up. It was only necessary to urge Handforth to a certain course, and he would do exactly the opposite. In this particular case, he had firmly made up his mind that the gyratory system of traffic was unnecessary. Why, therefore, should he pander to it by obeying the ridiculous "one-way" signs?

The little Austin sped along Piccadilly, shot past Park Lane, and then proceeded straight onwards towards Knightsbridge, right across the open space, instead of going round with all the rest of the traffic. The road was clear, it was a much shorter route, and there was everything in its favour. Nobody but a fathead would go all that way round with the thick traffic!

"They can't spoof me with their silly rules!" said Handforth tartly.

A second later he put his brakes on hard, and the Austin gently skidded to a standstill. A large policeman had put his hand up, and he seemed to tower far above the little car.

"What's the idea, young man?" he demanded, looking at Handforth very severely. "H'm! You're a youngster to be driving a car, aren't you? Don't you know you shouldn't come across here? Let's have a look at your licence?"

"My licence?" said Handforth, with a start.

"Yes!"

"I—I left it in my other pocket!" said Edward Oswald indignantly. "You're not going to make a fuss over nothing, I suppose? We're in a hurry, too. So let's get on, and don't be funny!"

The policeman stared.

"This'll mean a fine, if you're not careful," he said aggressively. "No licence, eh? An' you think you can break the traffic laws and get away with it? Let's have your name and address, young gent!"

Handforth was fairly startled.

"Rot!" he retorted. "I've done nothing—"

"It's all right, officer—I can give you his licence, if you like," interrupted Willy cheerfully. "He's a good driver, but he's pig-headed. Did you ever have anything to do with mules? They're just like rabbits compared to my major! He can't help it, you know—he's harmless, but—"

Willy touched his own head significantly, and the officer nodded.

"Just what I thought!" he remarked, thawing considerably.

Willy snapped open a suit-case that reposed on his knees, and pulled out his major's Norfolk jacket. A moment later the licence was handed across.

"Good man!" said Handforth, with relief. "I'm blessed if I knew where the thing was!"

"You wouldn't," agreed Willy kindly. "It shows how necessary it was for me to come along and look after you. That licence is O.K., isn't it, officer? As for cutting across the traffic, why not be a sportsman? Let him off with a caution."

There was something in Willy's manner which appealed to the big policeman. Indeed, Willy had never been known to fail in an affair of this sort. The officer returned the licence, winked at Willy, and then turned a severe eye upon Handforth.

"I'm not sure that I oughtn't to arrest you!" he said grimly. "I suppose you think it's nothing, defying the traffic laws? Well, just you get that idea out of your head, young man. I wouldn't like to see a smart youngster like you doing fourteen days' hard labour!"

Handforth started.

"You—you mean they could shove me in chokey?" he gasped.

"You don't know what you're escaping!" said the policeman vaguely. "All right—carry on! But don't try any more of these tricks, or the next policeman might not be so soft-hearted!"

He moved off, and Handforth breathed a sigh of relief. A moment or two later they were in the ordinary traffic again, proceeding down Brompton Road. Willy had saved the situation. Not that Handforth realised this in the slightest degree.

"After all, it's always better to treat these bobbies politely," said Edward Oswald. "You can always get round 'em if you know how to go to work. They're decent chaps, on the whole."

"Oh, rather," said Willy, grinning.

"A good thing I remembered where that licence was, too," went on his major. "That's the best of having a keen memory. Let this be an object lesson to you, Willy," he added in a fatherly manner.

"You bet," agreed Willy. "It is!"

Fulham Road proved to be very congested, and any kind of speed was out of the question. But neither Church nor McClure thought of reminding Handforth of his thirty-miles-an-hour average. It was one of his habits to reckon one hour for a journey that would take at least two.

"Oh, rats!" he said at last. "I'm fed-up with this crawl! That fatheaded lorry in front won't move— Good! Watch me nip through! We can't stick behind this thing all day!"

"Look out!" warned Willy. "Don't forget the grease—"

He broke off, breathless. With his usual recklessness, Handforth had dashed for a tiny opening in the traffic. It was just large enough to admit the Austin Seven, although no other make of car on the road would have risked such a hazard.

"My goodness!" gasped Handforth abruptly.

A taxicab, coming in the opposite direction, was cutting round a 'bus, and a head-on collision seemed inevitable. The Austin Seven, with the brakes hard on, swung round, slewed sideways, and practically vanished beneath the rear of the huge lorry. There was a soft thud, and the Austin stopped.

"How's that?" asked Handforth triumphantly.

"We're out of the rain, anyhow," said Willy.

Much to Handforth's surprise, a crowd was collecting. He hadn't the faintest idea that he had done anything alarming. But there were many people who thought that he and his fellow travellers had escaped death by inches.

The Austin Seven was in a most startling position.

The stationary lorry was an enormous thing, with a high body, projecting rearwards far over the back wheels. And the Austin was completely underneath it, wedged there, the hood jammed against the underside of the lorry. The Austin's front wheels were actually touching the lorry's rear axle.

"L u m m y!" observed a burly, red-faced gentleman who forced open the Austin's door. "That was a pretty near touch, wasn't it?"

"Which?" asked Handforth.

"Strike me!" said the lorry driver. "I just saw you comin' as I looked round, an' I thought you was right under me!"

"So we are!" said Willy.

"One o' the smartest bits o' drivin' I ever seed!" declared the red-faced gentleman. "Why, you ain't hardly touched. The top of your 'ood may be torn a bit, but that's nothin'—"

"N o t h i n g!" hooted Handforth. "Torn? Where? My hat! If that hood's torn, I'll have you arrested for blocking the way! You ought to feel jolly lucky I didn't smash into you," he added darkly.

"Why, you young ijit, this 'ere perambulator o' yours wouldn't 'a' scratched my paint even!" said the indignant lorryman. "I could run over your toy, an' not know it! I wouldn't even feel a jolt!"

A policeman came along, and while several willing onlookers held the Austin Seven, the lorry pulled away, and Handforth anxiously examined the top of the hood. It was grazed a bit, but otherwise unhurt.

"You'd better go a bit easier, young gent," said the policeman coldly. "One of the luckiest escapes I ever saw! Perhaps you won't be so fortunate next time. Take my

advice, and go gentle. An' let's have a look at your licence."

"What, again?" said Handforth indignantly.

"No, not again—I haven't seen it once yet."

"But I showed it to another bobby at Hyde Park Corner."

"Well, this is Fulham Road!" said the policeman impassively. "You look a bit young to me. I'm not sure that you're fit to hold a licence."

But he was convinced when the licence was produced. It was quite a special one, obtained by influence of some sort, through one of Handforth's relatives. Anyhow, it was strictly in order, and the policeman had nothing further to say. The journey continued.

"With luck," said Willy, "we might arrive in time for calling-over!"

CHAPTER 4.

ON THE ROAD.

KINGSTON was reached without further adventure, and there were now signs that the rain would clear up. Handforth, of course, would have carcered serenely along the Hampton Court Road unless he had been pulled up by Willy, who knew that they had to turn off to the left and take the Portsmouth Road.

"Steady!" he said, when he saw his major's move. "Round to the left!"

"Left?" said Edward Oswald

briskly.

The road was greasy, and he was too far across to attempt any safe turn. But he calmly pushed his brake on, and the unfortunate Austin spun round like a top, skidding in the most hair-raising fashion. It wasn't the car's fault at all—it was entirely on account of Handforth's ram-headed methods.

But, as usual, he came up smiling.

In the most uncanny fashion, the skid came to an end with the little car pointing directly into the Portsmouth Road. Handforth calmly dropped into second gear, and purred past an exceedingly astonished point-duty policeman, who had no time to pull up this madman, and take his name and address.

"You—you reckless chump!" ejaculated Willy. "Look at my hair! Isn't it sticking



up like wire? I'll come down by train next time, and make certain of arriving without a few tufts of grey hair!"

"Eh? What's the matter now?" asked Handforth.

"All this skidding business," said Willy severely.

"What skidding business?"

"My goodness!" said Willy. "What's the use?"

He thought it just as well to drop the matter, since Handforth was not even aware that he had done anything out of the ordinary. And, in any case, most of the traffic was now left behind. And the rain was stopping, too. Here and there a gleam of blue could be seen in the sky.

"By the way," said Willy, after a while, "I wonder if Church and McClure are still there? I haven't heard anything of 'em for ages. Perhaps they're suffocated?"

He glanced round, and saw that Handforth's chums were just visible. They were wearing expressions of tense, strained discomfort.

"We're all right!" murmured Church. "I can't feel my left leg, and my right arm is dead as mutton. But we're not grumbling."

"I think I shall have a cricked neck for the whole term," said McClure miserably. "The worst of it is, we can't shift our positions, with all this luggage—and Church has been treading on one of my feet for the last five miles!"

"First time I knew it!" said Church. "My left leg's done in!"

However, they obtained a measure of relief soon afterwards, for Handforth halted to pull down the hood. The rain had completely stopped, and there was no reason why the travellers should be deprived of fresh air. Willy kindly took out the baggage, and Church and McClure hobbled about like cripples for two or three minutes. Handforth gazed at them in wonder.

"What's this—a new game?" he asked tartly.

"Yes—pins and needles!" said Church, in agony. "Thank goodness you stopped! It would have killed us if we'd gone on another ten miles. Oh, what an ass you were not to send your giddy traps on by train."

"You don't deserve to be treated with kindness!" said Handforth tartly.

"Kindness!" gasped Church. "Help! Gimme water!"

That rest, however, made them feel new again, particularly as the hood was now down, and they could get plenty of fresh air. And by the time they had got beyond Esher, and were sailing through Ripley, the roads were dry.

"Now we can make up a bit of lost time," said Handforth.

He certainly "stepped on the gas," and the obedient Austin sang along with never-failing

energy. Guildford was left behind, and the Portsmouth Road abandoned. They were now well on their way to Helmford, with Bannington and St. Frank's growing ever nearer.

"Nearly twelve o'clock," said Willy, as he glanced at his watch. "Five miles to Helmford, and twenty miles from Helmford to St. Frank's. I suppose we shall just get in by about two o'clock."

"Two o'clock!" echoed Handforth. "Rats! You must be mad to suggest two hours to do twenty-five miles! Why, we're going thirty now."

"But I was reckoning broadly," said Willy. "We shall probably have some more hold-ups in Helmford, and one or two in Bannington. The bobbies will want to examine your licence again."

"Oh, will they?"

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Willy. "You're bound to defy the traffic rules in Helmford, or push a 'bus over, or mangle two or three innocent pedestrians. The bobbies always look at your licence when you do things of that sort."

"Are you trying to make out I can't drive?" asked Handforth grimly.

"That's not the point," said Willy. "You can drive—in fact, you can drive too much. Instead of a brake being on the car, it ought to be on you! You never seem to know when you're near the edge."

"The edge of what?"

"It would take too long to explain," replied Willy tactfully. "But it all comes of insufficient road-sense. When you get complete road-sense, you'll be one of the best drivers unhung."

Handforth deliberately took out his clutch, put the gear into neutral, and applied his brake. The Austin Seven came to a standstill beside the road.

"Hallo!" said Church. "What are we stopping for?"

"I'm going to thrash this young fathead, then we'll carry on," said Handforth grimly. "He's just told me that I haven't got any sense, and if he thinks I'll stand that, he'd better think again!"

"I didn't say you hadn't got any sense!" retorted Willy. "I was talking about road-sense."

"Well, what's the difference?"

"Not much!" admitted Willy candidly. "If it comes to that, Ted, you're in sore need of both! And as for insulting you, you ought to be jolly pleased that I condescend to ride in your car!"

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

"I'm only doing it as a favour to Church and McClure," went on Willy.

"A favour!" gurgled Handforth. "To—to Church and McClure?"

"Exactly!"

"But—but——"

"It seems such a shame that they should end their young lives while they're still in the Remove," remarked Willy. "So I came along in order to keep a watch on you. Strictly speaking, you ought to whack out five bob for services rendered."

"My—my only aunt!" breathed Handforth thickly.

"Five bob!" said Willy. "I might as well take it now——"

"You—you young lunatic!" hooted Handforth, leaping out of the car, and making a grab for his minor. "That's done it! You'll walk the rest of the way to St. Frank's! Twenty-five miles, my son! How will you like that?"

"It's only twenty-two," said Willy. "We've come three miles since we discussed the distance——"

"Do you think I care whether it's twenty-two or twenty-five?" howled Handforth, exasperated by his minor's coolness. "You're not going to ride another yard in this car. Understand? Come out of it!"

Willy hopped out nimbly.

"Oh, Ted!" he sobbed. "Please don't be so hard——"

"Not another yard!" repeated Handforth. "We've had nothing but trouble ever since we started, and it's all your fault! Now you can walk! I hope it'll be a lesson to you."

"Twenty-two miles is too far for one lesson," objected Willy. "You can tip me out of the car when we get to Bellton if you like——"

"You're out now—and you'll stay out!" said his major curtly. "I'm fed up! I haven't got any sense, eh?"

Willy glanced up the road, and nodded.

"Not a scrap!" he replied.

"Eh?"

"I've seen ants with more sense than you've got, Ted," said Willy. "And when it comes to driving a car, you're like a baby! I wouldn't travel the rest of the distance to St. Frank's in your Austin for ten quid! I'm rather particular about my drivers!"

"Your — your drivers!" breathed Handforth. "Do you realise that you've absolutely killed your last chance?"

"Drive on, and don't waste so much gas!" retorted Willy coldly.

"By George, I will!" roared Handforth. "I'll show you!"

He leapt into the car, put the gear into mesh, and sped off. Willy was left standing forlornly in the middle of the road—twenty-two miles from his destination. But he was looking quite calm. In fact, he

didn't even give his major's Austin a glance.

His attention was fully concentrated upon a Morris-Oxford saloon which was looming up along the straight, clear road. Willy had spotted this car earlier—before informing Handforth that the latter had no sense whatever.

He waved his hand, and the Morris-Oxford slowed down.

"Good egg!" said Willy approvingly. "What price a lift?"

Behind the wheel of the saloon sat William Napoleon Browne, the captain of the Fifth Form at St. Frank's. He beamed upon Willy benevolently.

"There is no price for a lift, Brother Willy," he said smoothly. "You are entirely welcome to the luggage-grid. I strongly advise that you should strap yourself on, as you are liable to jolt——"

"Cheese it, Browne!" said Willy. "I told Ted he hadn't got any road-sense, and he pushed me out of his Austin. I've got to get to St. Frank's somehow, haven't I? Isn't there room for me inside?"

Browne turned his head.

"Move down the car, please!" he said authoritatively.



CHAPTER 5.

HANDY KNOWS!

WILLY HANDFORTH saw that the saloon was already filled. Ralph Leslie Fullwood, Archie Glenthorne, Reggie Pitt and Tommy Watson occupied the rear section, and Horace Stevens, of the Fifth, was sitting next to Browne—with Sir Montie Tregellis-West on his lap.

"It's not fair to overload the car like this," said Willy critically.

"A telling point, Brother Willy," agreed Browne. "My best thanks for reminding me of this unkind treatment of a noble steed. Under the circumstances, the luggage-grid is no longer available."

Willy grinned.

"Oh, I shan't make much difference now that you've taken advantage of the poor thing," he said promptly. "Move up, Archie. Let's have a bit of room!"

"What-ho! I mean to say, absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne. "Sardines, what? If somebody will kindly produce a can-opener, we'll try to shove you into the good old box!"

Browne sighed.

"A base description of my beautiful car!" he said sadly.

**THIS BADGE
FREE.**



**TO ALL MEMBERS OF
THE ST. FRANK'S
LEAGUE.**

(See pages 42 and 43.)

Archie started, and looked pained.

"Oh, I say!" he ejaculated. "I mean—Yards of sorrow, laddie! Furlongs of apology! I didn't absolutely mean to imply— Good gad, no! Kindly accept an assortment of juicy regrets."

"It is all forgotten!" he said kindly.

Willy managed to squeeze himself in—as he had fully intended squeezing himself in from the very start. He had recognised Browne's car in the distance—by the distinctive mascot on the radiator.

Browne, of course, was en route for St. Frank's himself, and he had good-naturedly allowed these Remove fellows to fill his car. Browne had a peculiar liking for juniors, and always got on with them better than with fellows of his own age. Horace Stevens was the one exception.

In the meantime, Handforth was sitting grimly at the wheel of his Austin Seven, glaring balefully at the hedges, and at every pedestrian he happened to pass—much to the wonderment of the latter.

Not a word was spoken until a full mile had been covered.

"A bit thick, isn't it, Handy?" asked Church, at length.

Handforth jammed his brakes on, and stopped.

"What's thick?" he demanded fiercely.

His very manner betrayed the workings of his conscience.

"Why, leaving your minor stuck helpless on the road," said Church. "Hang it, he didn't mean to be saucy. It's only his way. He can't help cheeking you. And he saved you from being summoned, too!"

Handforth felt another pang.

"I'm going back!" he muttered, brightening up. "After all, I needn't take any notice of the cheeky young ass. Perhaps he's had his lesson by this time. I don't want to be too hard on him!"

The loud note of a warning siren sounded, and Handforth glanced round. A Morris-Oxford was sweeping up, and Handforth's eyes goggled. Willy was leaning out of the window, waving his handkerchief!

"See you at supper-time—when you arrive!" he sang out.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Handforth.

Church and McClure grinned happily—although Handforth failed to observe this facial display. He was watching the Morris-Oxford, which had drawn in, and which was pulling up a little farther along. It seemed to Handforth as though the saloon was a temporary charabanc—judging by the number of fellows who continuously piled out. They retraced their steps, and gathered round the Austin Seven in an inquiring group.

"Trouble?" asked Browne earnestly. "Let me offer you my sterling advice—"

"Yes—heaps of trouble!" snorted Handforth. "Trouble with that cheeky minor of mine! You've got him—and you can keep him! I hope you enjoy his company! But

mark my words," he added darkly, "he'll cause ructions!"

"I venture to suggest that Brother William has far more common sense than to precipitate ructions in the midst of this valiant host," said Browne calmly. "At all events, I am prepared to take the risk."

"So that's that!" said Willy gently.

"You young wriggler!" growled Handforth. "You're always making yourself safe in some tricky way or other. I suppose you're kidding yourself that you'll be at St. Frank's first, eh? My Austin can beat this Morris any day of the week!"

"But not on a Wednesday," said Browne firmly. "We must always except the Wednesdays."

"To-day's Wednesday!" said Handforth, in surprise.

"Exactly!" smiled Browne. "Thus, your ideal is beyond achievement."

"You funny ass!" said the leader of Study D. "What's the idea of standing round, and looking at me as though I were a curio? Clear out of the way—I want to start off!"

"But I was under the impression that you were suffering from what is officially termed an involuntary stop," said Browne. "Lack of petrol, perhaps? That, I am aware, is one of your favourite complaints. Or perhaps the plugs are behaving badly? Let me offer you my assistance—"

"There's nothing wrong with this car!" interrupted Handforth coldly. "Can't I stop now without you thinking I'm in trouble? If anything goes wrong with my bus, I can put it right. Understand? I know this engine inside-out! Every motorist ought to be a mechanic."

"I will grant the truth of that wise observation," agreed Browne. "A motorist, indeed, is not a motorist unless he is also a mechanic. And I must confess that I have never regarded you, Brother Handforth, as a mechanic."

"Which means, in blunt language, that you're not even a motorist," grinned Willy. "I must say that old Browne knows what he's talking about."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

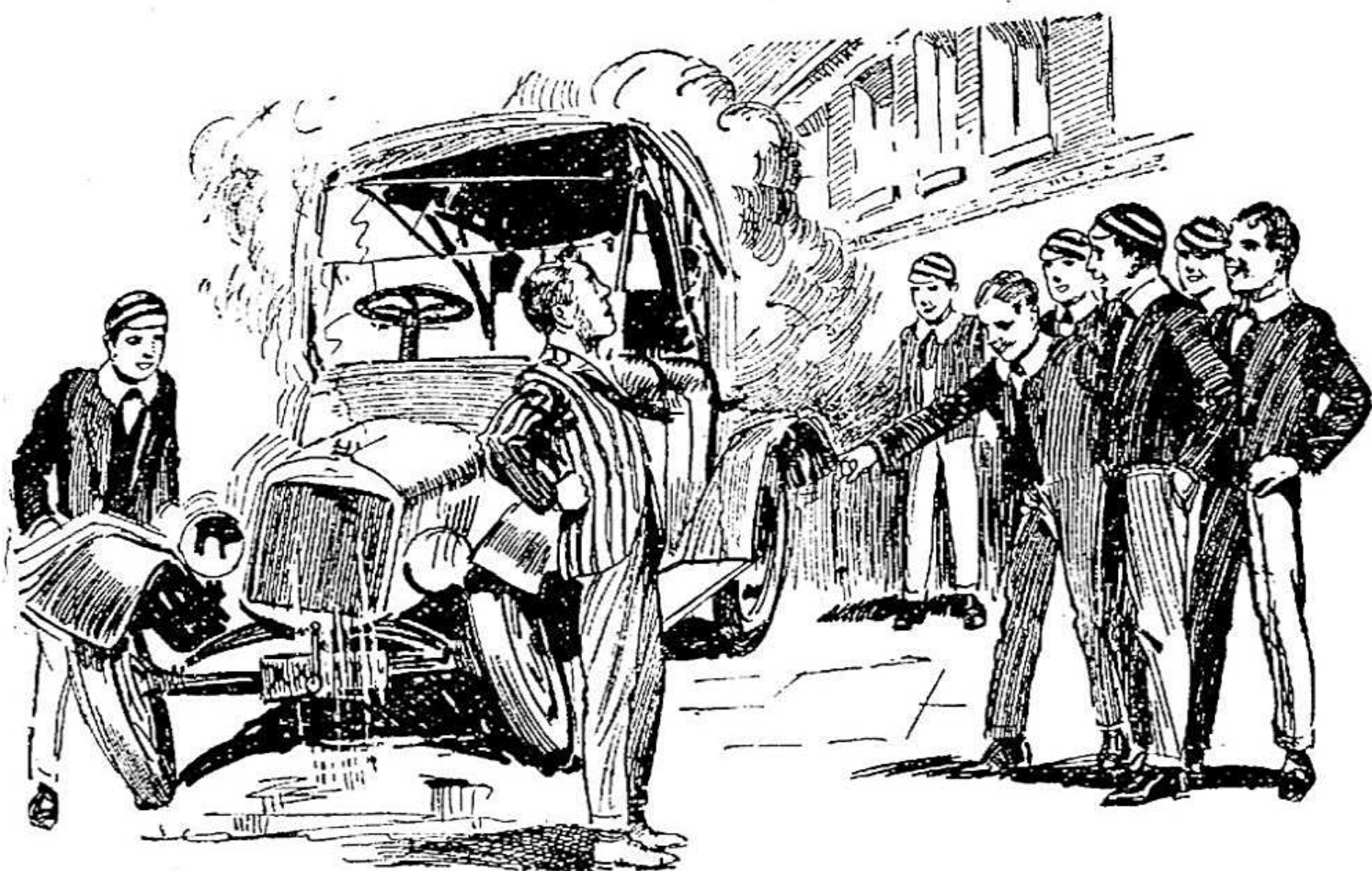
"I don't care what goes wrong with this car—I can put it right!" roared Handforth aggressively. "One of these days I'll prove it, too! I'll show you whether I can do my own repairs or not! I'm not boasting, but when it comes to my Austin, I'm on safe ground!"

Browne looked thoughtful.

"In that case, Brother Ted, perhaps you will be good enough to give me the benefit of your supreme knowledge?" he asked. "There is a faint metallic sound in my own engine, and I should gladly welcome your opinion as to the cause. I am ever willing to accept the counsel of an expert."

"Oh, well—of course—" said Handforth, thawing.

He went along the road to Browne's Morris-



"This is my car!" said Handforth defiantly, waving a hand at the dilapidated-looking wreck. "I've changed my Austin Seven for it. I can do what I like with my own property, can't I?" The startled juniors grinned.

Oxford, and Browne solemnly raised the bonnet and started the engine. She ticked over smoothly, and Handforth listened with a critical ear.

"She's missing on one cylinder!" he said promptly.

He was so occupied that he failed to notice that Browne had gone. The Remove fellows, however, were crowding round closely.

"Wonderful!" said Fullwood. "He's found the trouble at once!"

"It just shows you!" observed Pitt, shaking his head.

Browne, in the meantime, had the Austin Seven to himself—for Church and McClure had seized this chance to stretch their legs, and were gathered round the saloon with the others. Deftly and coolly Browne disconnected one wire from the ignition switch so that it ran direct to earth from the magneto—no current could now reach the sparking-plugs. A non-mechanical eye would never know that anything was out of place. It was merely the work of a second or two, and Browne hurried back.

"What's the idea?" asked Stevens, meeting him.

"A trifling test, Brother Horace," murmured Browne. "I have made a slight disconnection, and if Brother Handforth is the expert he claims to be, he will swiftly locate the cause of the trouble."

"Trouble?" asked Stevens.

"When he attempts to start, he will merely attempt!" explained Browne.

"I say, isn't that a bit thick?" asked the other Fifth-Former dubiously.

"I will grant that it is somewhat murky, but I would impress upon you that I have caused no damage," said Browne. "A mere wire out of place—the work of a moment to reconnect it. We will proceed leisurely, and if Brother Handforth overtakes us, I will grant him full marks as a mechanic. But if, on the other hand, he fails to locate the mischief, surely he will deserve all he gets for his bombastic braggadocio!"

"That's a good word!" said Stevens admiringly.

"I use none but the best!" agreed Browne.

They strolled back to the others—Stevens fully appreciating the subtlety of Browne's little test. Upon the whole, there was nothing "thick" about it, after all. Handforth claimed to be a mechanic. Well, here was a chance for him to prove it. For a mechanic of the most elementary type would be able to diagnose the trouble after a brief inspection.

"Well, Brother Handforth, what news?" asked Browne.

"Your engine's all right," said Handforth suspiciously. "I thought she was missing at first, but I was wrong."

"I never travel with a missing engine," said Browne. "Indeed, we have a riddle here. If the engine is missing, how can the car travel at all? For a missing engine means an absent engine—"

"You spoofing chump!" growled Hand-

forth. "I believe you've been pulling my leg!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The roar of laughter which went up proved the point beyond all question. And Handforth stalked back to his own car, looking very red. He hadn't the faintest idea that anybody had touched his engine, or that anybody had been near it. And Church and McClure were similarly ignorant.

The Morris-Oxford proceeded on its way, and all its occupants were soon in possession of the little secret. Browne proceeded at a leisurely pace, and a look-out was kept for the Austin. But it was in vain.

Helmford was passed, and Bannington grew nearer—but there was no Austin Seven.

CHAPTER 6.

MR. MIGGS SEES HANDFORTH COMING!



HANDFORTH grunted with exasperation as he prepared to start his engine.

"I'll get even with Browne for trying to spoof me!" he said gruffly. "And thank goodness we've got rid of Willy. We shall have a bit of peace on the road now!"

"Hear, hear!" said Church. "We can shove all these suit-cases in the spare front seat—or, better still, I'll sit there, and give Mac plenty of room behind."

"Good idea!" said McClure approvingly.

A rearrangement was made, and by the time Handforth was ready to start up two or three minutes had elapsed.

"All fixed now?" he asked. "Take your time! Don't mind me!"

"Go ahead!" said Church. "Phew! That's better!"

Handforth switched on, and pressed the electric starter. But the faithful little engine refused to respond with its usual promptitude.

"That's rummy!" said Handforth, frowning. "I've switched on, too!"

"No petrol, perhaps," said Church.

"Yes, there is—the tap's turned fully on." Zurrurrh!

Again the electric starter buzzed—again and again until, indeed, Handforth began to get worried about his battery. But there was no sign of an explosion in the cylinders. He had never known anything like it before.

"Well, this beats me!" he said, scratching his head. "Perhaps the carburettor is choked or something. She was running all right before we stopped, though. I'll soon see—no engine can get the better of me!"

"So you told Browne," said Church carelessly.

"Yes—and I meant it, too!" snapped his leader.

He got out, and raised the bonnet. A touch on the float needle proved that there

was nothing wrong with the petrol supply. There was an immediate flood of spirit.

"Well, of all the funny things!" said Handforth blankly. "Why the dickens doesn't she start? She's switched on—she's got plenty of juice—she's thoroughly warmed up—and yet she won't buzz!"

He looked in the radiator, and assured himself that there was a plentiful water supply. He even examined the magneto—but quite failed to detect the disconnected wire. As a mechanic, indeed, he fizzled out.

"Oh, rot!" he said. "She must start! There's no earthly reason why she shouldn't! I'll give her a swing this time, though."

He again looked at the switch; he advanced the throttle lever slightly, and retarded the spark control. Then he went to the front of the car, and grasped the handle. He swung the engine until he stopped, exhausted. Not a trace of an explosion had occurred.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he said breathlessly.

"Shall I have a shot?" asked Church.

He had two or three shots—and McClure followed on. But the engine remained utterly and absolutely dead. Under the circumstances, this was not surprising, for the best engine in the world will jib when there is no spark to explode the gases in the cylinder-head.

"This is lively!" said Church at last. "What do you think we'd better do, Handy? After all, you said you could locate any trouble—"

"If you're going to start jeering—"

"Rats!" interrupted Church. "I'm not jeering. But we can't stick here all day, I suppose? It seems to me that there's something badly wrong. Perhaps the engine's busted up inside, or something. How about the oil? My hat! Supposing she's seized up!"

"Seized up!" said Handforth, with horror.

"Well, engines do seize sometimes, you know," said McClure. "If they can't get enough oil in the bearings—"

"Oh, goodness!" muttered Handforth. "We—we'd better shove her into Helmford. It's only about a mile, and there's bound to be a garage on the outskirts. Come on—lend a hand!"

Edward Oswald was so intensely worried that his chums did not have the heart again to remind him of his statement regarding mechanical stoppages. It wasn't so much a boast as an expression of supreme confidence. Handforth's confidence in himself was always tremendous—until he came upon a snag.

And the present snag was a hasty one. He had all sorts of uneasy fears. He was very proud of his car, and the possibility that anything was radically wrong appalled him. Never before had she refused to start.

And so the chums of Study D trudged along the high-road, Handforth with one hand on the wheel, and his chums pushing behind. Fortunately, there was only one gradual rise

to negotiate, and just over the brow of the hill there was a welcome sign—"Garage."

The place wasn't particularly prepossessing—a corrugated iron structure, with petrol advertisements on the walls. A big, stout man in blue overalls stood at the door, watching the three youthful motorists as they approached.

He was a man with a ruddy complexion and a straggling moustache, and by all appearances he was on intimate terms with the landlord of the neighbouring hostelry. There was a kind of gleam in his eye as he watched the three schoolboys come up—an expression of speculative anticipation.

"Trouble, young gents?" he asked genially.

"It's nothing much—she won't start, that's all," said Handforth. "The petrol's all right, the radiator's full, and everything. I would have put her right myself, only it was too much fag," he added carelessly. "Besides, I don't want to get myself messed up."

"That's all right, sir—let's have her inside," said the stout man.

Handforth glanced at the board over the front of the garage.

"You're Mr. Miggs, I suppose?" he asked.

"That's me, young gent," agreed Mr. Miggs. "I'll soon have you goin'."

The Austin was wheeled into the garage, and Handforth was rather relieved to find that nobody else was present. Mr. Miggs evidently ran his garage single-handed.

"She won't start, eh?" he said breezily. "I shouldn't be surprised if it's somethin' serious. You never know with these engines. Too small. No power in 'em. Liable to seize up."

Handforth listened in dismay to this outrageous libel on a proved engine of sterling merit.

Mr. Miggs unfastened the bonnet, examined the engine, and then pursed his lips. It only took him about twenty seconds to locate that shifted wire, and he needed no further evidence. The cause of the trouble was here. But it was clear to him that these schoolboys were "mugs." He looked very grave, and shook his head.

"Bad!" he said solemnly. "I'm sorry, young gents. Which of you is the owner?"

"I am!" said Handforth breathlessly. "What—what's wrong?"

"You wouldn't understand, even if I told you," said Mr. Miggs, as he seized the starting-handle and gingerly turned the engine over. "Yes, I thought so. Big-ends gone! Bearin's done in! Over-heatin'—that's what it is. She's melted her bearin's like candle-grease! Scrap-iron—that's all she is now!"

"Scrap-iron!" gurgled Handforth, aghast.

"Of course, the body's all right," said Mr. Miggs, inspecting it critically. "But the body's not much, when all's said an' done. Wait a minute."

He went down on his knees at the rear of the car, leaned forward, and felt the shaft.

"Thought so!" he said puffingly. "Differential's gone!"

"Gone!" breathed Handforth, staring back along the road. "We—we might have dropped it—"

"Well, it ain't exactly gone—not what you might call lost!" interrupted Mr. Miggs, his first appraisal of his customers verified. "When I say the diff's gone, I mean she's worn out."

"Worn out!" echoed Handforth, parrot-like in his dismay.

"Practically nothin' left of her!" declared Mr. Miggs, shaking his head sadly. "If you'd like to leave the car here, I'll see what I can do with her. She'll need a rare lot o' new parts, though. Of course, you can rely upon me to put her right," he added generously.

Whether he was deliberately having a game, or whether this was an attempt to purposely victimise the schoolboys, remained obscure. Perhaps Mr. Miggs was merely extending a kind of feeler—to see where it would lead him. It would always be possible to laugh the thing off if he was bowled out. For, of course, he knew very well that the Austin was in tip-top condition.

"You'll put her right, eh?" said Handforth, with relief. "Thank goodness for that! How much do you think it'll cost?"

"Well, that's difficult to say," replied Mr. Miggs. "What with new big ends, and new pistons and cylinders—somewhere about eighty pounds might cover—"

"Eighty pounds!" yelled Handforth.

"Mind you, it may be a bit more—"

"But—but the car only cost a hundred and fifty new!" said Handy.

"It's the engine that costs the most money," replied Mr. Miggs. "I can see you've been using this poor little bus badly. As I told you, she's all done in. A big young chap like you needs a man's car. These Austin's are first-rate for ladies—but a young fellow o' your stamp— Well, it don't look quite manly. You need somethin' bigger."

Handforth's feelings were mixed. Eighty pounds! Perhaps more! Such a sum was utterly and absolutely beyond his wildest possibilities. And he daren't write to his Aunt Constance, and tell her that he had ruined the car already! And Mr. Miggs' mention of a bigger car appealed to him. After all, the Austin was certainly more suitable for ladies, he reflected.

Church and McClure were not quite so easily bluffed. It was always extremely simple to pull Handforth's leg—and it struck his chums that Mr. Miggs was pulling it now, and in a way that Church and McClure didn't like.

"Look here, Mr. Miggs, you needn't talk to Handforth about a bigger car," said Church gruffly. "His Austin Seven is one of the finest little runabouts on the road, and I don't believe she's worn out, as you say."

Mr. Miggs looked pained.

"You'll be tellin' me I don't know my own business next!" he said.

"Well, don't try to bluff Handforth!" growled Church. "It's easy enough to spoof

a chap who believes everything that's said to him."

Handforth turned, and stared.

"Are you talking about me?" he asked grimly.

"Well, yes——"

"You howling fathead!" roared Handforth. "Do you mean to say I'm incapable of looking after myself? Huh! I'd like to see the man who'd fool me! If THAT'S what you think of me, you can dry up!"

"Yes, but look here, Handy——"

"I don't want anything from you, either, Arnold McClure," interrupted Handforth curtly.

"But, hang it, old man——"

"This is my car, and I'm doing all the business with Mr. Miggs!" went on Handforth, in a cold, deliberate voice. "If you chaps want to interfere, I'll lay you flat in two ticks! I'm doing all the talking—so you can jolly well dry up!"



CHAPTER 7.

TROUBLE!

CHURCH glanced at McClure, and McClure glanced at Church. Then they both glared ferociously at Handforth.

"All right!" said Church crossly. "Go your own way!"

"And don't blame us if you're swindled!" added McClure, with heat. "You can raise your eyebrows all you like, Mr. Miggs! There's nothing much wrong with this Austin car, and you know it. So don't try any dodges——"

"Are you going to dry up?" hooted Handforth, pushing back his coatsleeves. "My hat! Insulting Mr. Miggs in front of his face!"

"I believe in saying what I think!" roared McClure.

"Come on!" said Church furiously. "Leave him to himself!"

They walked off in high anger, and stood outside in the road, discussing Edward Oswald Handforth's amazing blindness. It was beyond their comprehension that he should believe everything that Mr. Miggs had been saying. The one and only Handforth was as trusting as an innocent child.

"A pair of hot-tempered young gents, them friends o' yours," said Mr. Miggs sympathetically. "Mind you, sir, I ain't bearin' them no ill-will for what they said. Maybe it does seem a bit queer from their point of view. But I know engines—inside an' outside—I've been in the motor trade for twenty-five years, an' nobody knows better than I do."

"That's all right, Mr. Miggs!" said Handforth gruffly. "Blow 'em! Don't take any notice. What's that you were saying about a bigger car? Of course, I can't have one—and I'm dashed if I know what I'm going to

do about the Austin. I'm sort of bowled over. I mean—eighty quid!"

Mr. Miggs nodded.

"Yes, it do seem a tidy sum," he admitted. "But, there, when you start payin' out on motor-cars, money simply goes like water. Especially if the engine an' transmission gets done in. That's what's happened 'ere. Have you driven this car all the time?"

"Yes—and I've been jolly careful, too."

"First car you've had?" asked Mr. Miggs.

"Well, yes."

"Ah!" said Mr. Miggs, nodding significantly.

"What do you mean—'Ah!'?" asked Handforth, staring.

"I've met your sort before," said Mr. Miggs confidentially. "This is what comes of inexperience. 'Tain't a nice thing to admit, but the fact is, you've run this engine off her feet, so to speak. Over-eatin'—over-eatin', that's what done it!"

Handforth started.

"Over-eating?" he asked blankly.

"There ain't no question of it, young gent," said Mr. Miggs.

"But—but how can the car be affected if I over-eat myself?" asked Edward Oswald, in amazement. "I'm blessed if I see—— Oh! You mean over-heating? Why the dickens can't you speak proper English? The engine?"

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Miggs sadly.

"Then you're off-side," said Handforth coldly. "I've been away in China for months, and this car has been in the pater's garage all the time. She's hardly had any use at all——"

"Lor' bless your life!" said Mr. Miggs. "That don't count for a thing, sir! An engine like this 'ere can be turned into scrap-iron in a twenty-mile run! Did you see if there was any oil in the sump before you started out this morning?"

"Oil?"

"Yes."

"In the—the sump?"

"Yes."

"Well, I didn't look," confessed Handforth.

"Ah!" said Mr. Miggs.

Handforth stared at him blankly.

"I don't like these giddy 'ahs' of yours!" he growled. "Why the dickens can't you speak out plainly, instead of saying 'ah,' like a blessed parrot?"

"I don't like to hurt you, sir," said Mr. Miggs, scratching his head. "You see, the fault's all yours—just a question of neglect. No wonder the engine's all to pieces—no wonder the shaft and the back axle is wore out. You might as well expect a railway engine to run without water, as one o' these motors to run without oil!"

Handforth was rather horrified.

"And what about the differential?" he asked.

"Well, that's the same thing as the back axle, sir, in a manner o' speakin'—all one unit," said Mr. Miggs. "It's a rare pity you

can't finish your journey—unless, of course—
But maybe you wouldn't consider the idea."

"What idea?"

"Well, I was sayin' that these 'ere Austin Sevens was a bit small for a big, manly handsome young gent like yourself," said Mr. Miggs. "If you'll pardon my sayin' it, Mr. Handforth, an Austin don't quite suit you. Sittin' behind that wheel, you look more like a overgrown baby in a perambulator!"

"Oh, do I?" said Handforth grimly.

"No offence, sir—lor' bless you, no!" said Mr. Miggs, with haste. "I was just tryin' to show you what I mean. What you need is a big car—somethin' more in keepin' with your fine, stalwart appearance."

Handforth unconsciously drew himself up.

"Oh, well, of course, there's that!" he said.

"But it's no good talking to me about big cars. I haven't got any money to buy big cars. If it comes to that, I haven't any money to repair this little car!"

"Ah!" said Mr. Miggs.

"Look here——"

"Maybe we can do a deal," said the fat man, bending down, and speaking confidentially into Handforth's ear. "The fact is, sir, I've took a likin' to you. I'm feelin' a bit sorry for you. I don't mind droppin' a bit if it's goin' to do you a good turn."

"Droppin' a bit of what?" asked Handforth, staring.

"We was just talkin' about big cars," replied Mr. Miggs. "Well, it so happens I've got one here. What would you say to an exchange? I'll take your little bus just as she stands—an' stand the cost of repairs on me own, an' risk gettin' a buyer? What do you say?"

Handforth's brain was buzzing.

"A big car?" he asked breathlessly. "Where?"

"There she stands!" said Mr. Miggs, pointing. "As fine a piece of engineerin' as ever I see. Take a good look at 'er, sir, an' perhaps you'll realise that I'm in danger of doin' myself a bad turn."

They both looked at a car on the other side of the garage, and Handforth's heart leapt.

curiously designed, with a handsome mascot on the cap.

"She's a Ford," said Mr. Miggs, after a pause.

"A Ford!" echoed Handforth. "Oh, look here——"

"Maybe you're one o' them young gents who think Fords are no good?" interrupted Mr. Miggs quickly. "Let me tell you that this one is a real wonder! And look at her size! Think how important you'll be behind the wheel of a fine-lookin' bus like that! Plenty o' room for your friends, too!"

Handforth gazed at his smart Austin Seven, and then turned his eyes on the other car. One, of course, was a sound, modern production of skilled engineering, and the other was a faked-up crock. But that mention of an eighty-pound repair bill had given Handforth a turn.

"I don't know!" he said at length. "What's this car worth?"

"Well, anythin' between ninety an' a hundred pounds," said Mr. Miggs mendaciously. "Of course, no ordinary Ford could fetch that price second-hand, but this one's a special."

"But look here," said Handforth. "That isn't business! If you've got to pay eighty pounds to repair this Austin, and this Ford is worth a hundred, how the dickens can you make any profit?"

Mr. Miggs winked.

"Ah!" he said knowingly.

"That's all very well——"

"You see, I can get spare parts at wholesale price," interrupted the garage proprietor. "I can put my own time into the work, too—an' all that will reduce the costs. I wouldn't suggest an exchange like this, young gent, unless it was fair to both of us. An' don't think I'm pressin' you. Just do as you like. There's the car—a big, 'andsome, sturdy turn-out, just suitable for a young gentleman of your stamp. Take 'er or leave 'er. In fact, I'll be all the better pleased if you refuse," he added cunningly. "Fact is, I opened my mouth a bit too wide, but I'm not a man to go back on my word."

Handforth was torn. He hated the thought of sacrificing his beloved Austin Seven. And yet, eighty pounds—— Besides, she had always been a bit too small for him, now that he came to think of it. Perhaps it would be just as well——

"Are you sure it'll cost all that money to repair the Austin?" he asked.

"You can take it from me that there won't be much change out of a 'undred pounds," said Mr. Miggs, nodding. "You haven't the faintest idea what these engines an' transmission units cost. Anyhow, the car's finished. She'll 'ave to be stripped, an' everything put on the dust 'eap. I can 'ave her ready for you within a month, though."

"A month!" echoed Handforth, in dismay.

"Well, three weeks, if I can rush the spare parts down."

Handforth was in a further quandary. It never occurred to him for a moment that Mr.

CHAPTER 8.

HANDFORTH'S "BARGAIN" I



It seemed to the leader of of Study D that he was dealing with a lunatic. Surely no business man in his right senses would

accept a crocked car in exchange for a big one like this?

"What make is she?" asked Handforth cautiously.

The car was an open tourer, blue in colour, and any experienced eye could have detected that she had just been cheaply renovated. The radiator was of polished brass, and

Miggs might be romancing. He was a garage proprietor, and he ought to know his own business. And here was a chance of driving straight to St. Frank's in a really big motor-car!

There wouldn't be any waiting, and he would avoid applying to his father or his Aunt Constance for that horrifying sum to cover the repair bill. Handforth was always a fellow to plunge into a thing without giving it full consideration.

"All right!" he said. "It's a go!"

Mr. Miggs started.

"You'll—you'll take the Ford?" he asked wonderingly.

"Well, yes, if she runs all right," replied Handforth. "It'll save a lot of trouble and delay—"

"Come into the office, sir!" said Mr. Miggs briskly.

He had the air of a very surprised man, but he strove to conceal it. And for a moment he hesitated. Perhaps he was wondering if this deal wasn't a bit too crooked. It was almost like taking the money out of a blind man's cap! Handforth hadn't even examined the crock he was prepared to take in exchange for the Austin Seven!

"We'll make it proper," said Mr. Miggs.

He wrote a few words on a sheet of paper—words to the effect that the "undersigned was fully satisfied with the exchange," and so forth. Handforth signed it with his usual recklessness.

"Well, that's done," he said gruffly. "You'd better come and start up the Ford, and I'll transfer my luggage. You're sure this is a fair deal from your point of view, Mr. Miggs?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I ain't," said Mr. Miggs. "As like as not, I shall lose heavily on the deal—but I'm a man that likes to take a chance. You've got the best o' the bargain, you can take it from me!"

Church and McClure, out in the road, were growing more and more uneasy.

"That chap's a twister!" Church was saying. "He's got a bluff, genial sort of way about him—but I don't like his boozy face and his cunning eyes. He's trying to swindle old Handy!"

"We needn't worry," said McClure. "The car's registered in Handy's name, and the man wouldn't be fool enough to pinch it. I vote we go in and push her straight out, and take her to the next garage—and get a second opinion."

"But Handy might start a few ructions—"

"Let him!" said McClure grimly. "We can whack him in an emergency like this. He'll thank us afterwards. Come on—Hullo! What the dickens—Look there!"

They stared into the garage. Handforth was in the act of putting two of his suit-cases into the back of a blue car which looked suspiciously like an old Ford. Church and McClure exchanged alarmed glances, and ran in. Mr. Miggs was tinkering with the Ford's engine.

"What—what's the idea?" asked Church breathlessly. "Are you borrowing this Lizzie just to get home in?"

"This which?" asked Handforth coldly.

"This—this painted chunk of tin!"

"You fathead, she's my car!" said Handforth, enjoying the sensation he was creating. "I've exchanged her for my Austin!"

His chums nearly fainted away.

"Handy!" roared McClure. "You're spoofing!"

"Look here—"

"Is—is this honest injun?" asked Church hoarsely.

"Of course it is!"

"Then you're mad!" shouted Church desperately. "You're dotty! You're off your rocker! You're being swindled! Why, this—this old crock ought to be given away with a tin of petrol!"

Handforth flushed at this imputation.

"That's enough!" he snapped. "I'm making this deal—not you!"

Unconsciously, Church and McClure had done great harm. A minute before Handforth had been on the point of regretting his hasty bargain. But now that his chums spoke so baldly on his business sagacity, he became as hard as nails. He even convinced himself that he was extremely lucky to have brought off the deal.

"Handy, you can't mean it!" panted McClure. "This—this Ford is one of the oldest crocks that ever came out of the factory. I don't believe it did come out of the factory! It's a relic of the Flood! Noah must have had it on the Ark!"

"It's not worth putting in a penny raffle!" urged Church.

"When you young gents have done callin' me a swindler, maybe you'll clear out o' my garage," said Mr. Miggs angrily. "I've done a deal with Mr. Handforth, an' he's satisfied. I don't have to get no permission from you!"

"Hear, hear!" said Handforth warmly. "Buzz off, blow you!"

"But it's not fair!" burst out Church. "Look here, Mr. Miggs, you're taking advantage of a baby!"

"A what?" howled Handforth.

"You're getting the better of a born lunatic!" went on Church, in sheer desperation. "He's no right to be out in public! He ought to be chained up, or else kept in the padded cell! You can't do a deal with a raving maniac!"

Crash!

Handforth's right shot out, and Church sat down abruptly in a pool of oil. McClure helped him up, and they both backed away.

"It's all right, Handy—I forgive you!" gasped Church. "But listen to reason! Listen to what we're saying—"

"In another two ticks I'll refuse to take you home in my new Ford!" said Handforth threateningly.

"New Ford!" yelled McClure. "It's growing whiskers!"

But they both realised the utter futility of

continuing this discussion. There was an expression on Handforth's face which proved that he was in one of his most mule-like moods. Nothing short of an earthquake would have shifted him.

So Church and McClure, alarmed and dismayed, went outside, and waited.

"St. Frank's is a fine place, but it's not suitable for Handy!" said Church, dabbing his nose. "I know a much better establishment——"

"Colney Hatch!" interrupted McClure sadly.

CHAPTER 9.

SOMETHING LIKE A CAR—BUT
NOT MUCH!

UZZZRRRH!



The Ford was going—at least, the engine was. True, the body was shaking after the fashion of a jelly, and the whole car had a kind of hula-hula movement, but the engine was certainly going.

"H'm!" said Handforth. "She's not very quiet!"

"Ah, but she can go!" said Mr. Miggs. "Besides, the engine's racin' a bit. I always do that, just to get her warmed up. She's ready for the road, young gent—full up with petrol an' oil, an' everythin's in trim. You can leave the transferin' of the licence to me."

"Is there a spare wheel and tyre?" asked Handforth.

"Lor' bless you, yes!" said Mr. Miggs. "I wouldn't do anythin' to deceive you, Mr. Handforth! Not exactly a spare wheel, but a spare rim."

"What's the good of a rim without a wheel?" asked Edward Oswald.

"Well, these American cars generally 'ave spare rims," explained Mr. Miggs. "In my opinion, it's a better idea than carryin' the whole wheel about with you. I'll drive 'er outside, shall I? All your baggage in? Right! Now all you 'ave to do is push this pedal down. Simple as A B C."

Handforth stepped in. The Ford glided forward, and the instant she was in motion the vibration ceased. There was very little real noise, either. Handforth felt quite relieved.

As a matter of fact, the Ford was in fair running order, and there was no question that her appearance was attractive. She was a car that had been disguised by many different owners, and there were all sorts of additions that no ordinary Ford could boast of. To an inexperienced eye, she looked a rather handsome turn-out, and thus it was that Handforth had fallen.

Church and McClure were by no means expert, and their description of the Ford had been greatly exaggerated. But they instinctively felt that the whole thing was a swindle. And, after all—a Ford!

Perhaps the car was worth forty or fifty pounds, but as an exchange for a practically brand-new Austin Seven, she was an utter and absolute fraud. And there was no telling how long she would hold together. Mr. Miggs was the kind of man who would tie up a vital part with string, just in order to effect a sale.

"Oh, my hat!" said Church, staring.

"He—he means it!" murmured McClure.

"Oh, the dithering cuckoo!"

Mr. Miggs got down from the driving-seat, and Handforth took his place.

"Jump in!" he said gruffly.

"Listen to us, Handy——" began McClure.

"If you're going to start any arguments——"

"Oh, all right, have your own way!" said McClure. "We've done our best, and you won't take any notice. But you'll regret this before the day's out, when it's too late."

"Give this thing back to Mr. Miggs, and let's push the Austin all the way home!" urged Church. "We don't mind! We'll help you, Handy! It's only twenty miles—we'll push her every inch of the way, if necessary."

"Are you going to jump in, or are you going to stay here?" interrupted Handforth coldly. "The bargain's sealed, and I've signed a receipt."

"That's done it, then!" breathed Church hopelessly. "You'll hear more about this!" he added, turning to Mr. Miggs with a fierce glare. "You needn't think you can get away with this awful swindle!"

Mr. Miggs frowned.

"Any more o' that, young man, an' I'll have you summoned for slander!" he said unpleasantly. "A deal's a deal, an' a bargain's a bargain."

Church and McClure gave it up. They felt utterly helpless in face of this combined opposition. With Edward Oswald Handforth a willing party to the exchange, there was absolutely nothing to be done. He had gone into the deal with his eyes open, and he could blame nobody but himself if he was "stung."

His chums climbed into the back of the Ford, and sat there with fierce, set expressions. In the meantime, Mr. Miggs gave Handforth a few instructions regarding the controls.

Church suddenly relaxed, and looked relieved.

"What a couple of asses we are," he murmured. "There's no need for us to worry. Brown and Hamilton and Pitt and the other fellows won't let this stand, neither will Willy. We needn't get the wind-up."

"By Jove, no!" whispered McClure, also relieved. "And there's Mr. Lee, too. We've only got to explain the affair, and Mr. Lee will have this beggar arrested as a crook! So let's enjoy this giddy ride home, and please old Handy by pretending to agree with him."

And so, feeling considerably better, Church and McClure waited. Their excitement had gone down now, and cool reflection convinced

them of the needless nature of their former apprehension.

The Ford gave a sudden lurch forward. Church heeled over backwards, and nearly went clean through the rear. McClure saved himself by clutching at the front seat. With a series of wild lurches, the Ford went off down the road towards Helmford, her engine roaring appallingly.

And then, with a still more violent lurch, Handforth managed to get into top gear. The noise and the vibration ceased, and they went sailing along with a fair amount of comfort. Edward Oswald glanced round triumphantly.

"There you are!" he shouted. "How's that?"

"Fine!" said Church.

"Wonderful!" grinned McClure.

"Glad you realise it!" snapped Handforth. "You don't know how lucky I am! Where the dickens do you think I can get eighty pounds from? I was pretty fond of the little Austin, but a big car, after all, is a lot better—"

"Look where you're driving, you ass!" shouted Church.

Handforth wasn't quite used to the steering. The car went down into the gutter, scraped the kerb, and nearly collided with a lamp-post. But, with a dizzy swing, Handforth succeeded in getting it back to safety. They were now getting well into the town.

"I'm going easy here," said Handforth. "By George! This car is heaps better than I thought! She can hum like the dickens!"

The throttle was hand-controlled, and for the moment Handforth had overlooked this point. He felt everywhere for the foot-throttle, and when he couldn't find it, he looked rather dazed.

"Great pip!" he gasped. "I can't ease her down!"

There was traffic ahead, and Church and McClure felt anxious.

"Shove your brake on!" yelled Church.

But Handforth was already doing this—or trying to. But, instead of applying the brake, he somehow got into low gear again, and the sudden jolt had such an effect upon the springs that the body tried to part company with the chassis. Church shot up into the air, thudded down again, and skidded off the seat, landing on his back.

He struggled there, amid the suit-cases and bags.

"Hold tight!" gurgled McClure.

In some miraculous way, Handforth managed to shoot round an oncoming motor-bus. One of the front wheels went on the pavement, came off again, and off they went on a fresh tack. A policeman on point duty was some little distance ahead, watching the Ford with grim ferocity.

He held his hand up for Handforth to stop.

"Oh, corks!" gasped Edward Oswald.

Without knowing it, he was in top gear again, and he just managed to miss the policeman by an inch or two. The Ford shot

past, scraped the end of a farmer's trap, and whizzed down the Bannington Road.

"This'll mean prison!" said McClure breathlessly. "He's got your number, and you'll be summoned—"

"I can't stop the thing!" howled Handforth desperately.

"We'd better jump out!" said Church, looking round wildly. "How the dickens we managed to escape death just now is more than I can understand. How many dead and dying are strewn over the road?"

"What's that lever under the steering-wheel?" asked McClure, leaning forward.

"My hat! The throttle!" panted Handforth, clutching at it.

He pulled it back, and the engine immediately reduced its vibrant throbbing. The Ford continued her journey at a crawl.

"Stop her, for goodness' sake!" said Church. "Stop her, and get the hang of those controls a bit better. If you don't, you'll wreck us!"

Handforth breathed a sigh of relief.

"I'm all right now," he said, glancing back anxiously. "We'd better get on as quickly as we can, and trust that that bobby didn't take our number! How could he expect me to stop when I couldn't find the throttle?"

Within two or three minutes they were out in the open country again, and Handforth pushed the lever on the steering column. The Ford answered promptly, and surged forward with increasing speed. The road was a bit rough here, and they bounced about all over the place.

There was a sudden devastating rattle, a fearful crash, and silence—at least, comparative silence. The Ford still went on, and the engine was still pulling.

"Whoa!" roared Church. "We've dropped something!"

"It's all right," said McClure. "Only the off-side rear wing!"

Handforth closed the throttle, and this time he applied the brake correctly. The Ford pulled up, and they got out. The off-side rear mudguard was missing, and the running-board was hanging forlornly—twisted scrap-iron. It was shivering about violently with the motion of the running engine.

"By jingo! Something like a car," said Church, with feeling.

"Something!" agreed McClure. "But not much!"



CHAPTER 10.

A SHOCK FOR ST. FRANK'S!

HANDFORTH was certainly shocked. He had had no suspicion that the car would start falling to pieces before he got it home. And he was just beginning to realise that he had made a terrible blunder. But he wouldn't admit it for worlds.

"Better fetch that mudguard, and shove it in the back," he said gruffly. "It's nothing—"

only a tiny mishap. A thing like that might happen to any car. And if you chaps start crowing——"

"We're not crowing," said McClure, in surprise. "This is the first time I've been in a Ford, and I'm interested."

"She's certainly a big, man-sized car!" said Church, nodding.

"Not so neat as my Austin!" growled Handforth disconsolately. "Still, what was the good of her, with a busted engine and a done-in back axle? Even a Ford's better than a car that won't go at all!"

"Something in that," admitted Church.

The lost wing was recovered—a piece of torn and twisted metal. But Handforth didn't like to abandon it, so it went into the back of the car. The running-board was tied up with string.

And again the Ford started in another series of giddy jolts. All went well while a moderate speed was maintained. But at the first sign of a burst of anything over thirty miles an hour, the whole contraption seemed to be on the point of shaking itself to bits.

Crash!

"What was that?" gasped Handforth, as something metallic hit the ground, and bounded away. "My only hat! Has the back axle fallen off, or something? Whoa! We shall have to go easier!"

He stopped again, and they inspected the car.

"One of the headlamps missing," said Church. "That's what it was."

They searched for the headlamp, and found it in the grass. Not that it was much good, since one of the back wheels had run over it. Handforth was now beginning to look more and more concerned.

"What's the good of a car with only one headlamp?" he asked grumblingly. "I'm beginning to think that old Miggs swindled me——"

"Glad you're realising it!" said Church.

"Eh?" said Handforth, starting. "Rats! I'm jolly glad I made the exchange! Let's get going again! What's the time?"

"Two o'clock!" growled McClure. "We shall miss lunch, and we shall be lucky if we get there in time for tea. The chances are, we'll land up in the Bannington General Hospital!"

Again they started, and although Handforth drove at a moderate speed, another wing fell off; the tied-up running-board shook itself loose, and mangled itself to debris before it could be rescued. The Ford was losing some of its smart appearance. There were several indications that it was an animated wreck.

"Don't talk to me about Miggs!" said Handforth thickly, as he saw that his chums were preparing to speak. "I made a bargain with him, and I'm going to stick to it, so there's an end of the affair. It won't take me long to fix this Ford up, once we get to St. Frank's."

"Yes—once!" said Church tartly.

At the bottom of a little decline there was an arched bridge—a common enough object

on the English country roads. The Ford gathered speed as she went down, and there was a sudden jolt as she took the hump of the bridge. Church and McClure bounced upwards, two suit-cases fell out; the hood tore free from its moorings, and dropped overside in the dust.

"Pull up!" said Church. "We've dropped something else! Hallo! What's happened? We're all sagging sideways! There's a list to starboard!"

Handforth took a deep breath, and pulled up. He was getting sick of this. The back of the car was certainly leaning steeply to the off-side, as though the springs had broken. This was probably the case, although it was just as possible that something had come unhitched. But Handforth was in no temper to make an examination.

"Fetch that hood!" he said hoarsely.

"At this rate, we shall soon need another car to carry the bits!" said Church sarcastically. "Don't be surprised if the body drops off, with Mac and I in it. You'll look round in about a mile, and find us gone!"

"My only hat!" said McClure. "This is something like a car!"

For a moment Handforth clenched his fists, but Church and McClure, unconscious of their narrow escape, had gone off to collect the hood and the suit-cases. The hood had come unfolded, and was a heap of stained, dirty-looking canvas. Church lifted it up, and revealed a number of patches and gaps.

"The hood!" he said briefly. "Looks more like something that the moths have been at!"

"Moths!" grunted McClure. "More like a herd of goats!"

They carried the hood back in three sections, for most of it fell to pieces when they tried to collect it. Everything was dumped in the back of the car, and Handforth watched with a set expression of misery. He was looking pale now, and there were haggard lines appearing on his rugged face.

"Go on—laugh!" he said bitterly.

"I'm wondering where we're going to sit," said McClure. "There doesn't seem to be much room left. Wouldn't it be a good idea to tip the whole affair into the ditch, and wait for the next 'bus?"

Handforth did not condescend to reply.

With set lips, he climbed back into the driving-seat, and fiercely started off. The engine gave four or five fearful explosions, and then settled down into a harsh roar. With a terrific jolt, top gear was again attained.

Handforth was wondering if it wouldn't be better to leave the car at a garage in Bannington. He had an uneasy fear that the St. Frank's fellows would laugh as soon as they saw this Ford—and there was no doubt that this fear was justified. The rest of the chaps were not likely to be as sympathetic as Church and McClure.

Secretly, Handforth was shocked. He had at least expected to get to St. Frank's with the car still in one whole piece. But it was simply falling to bits. He had a fearful appre-



Handforth couldn't stop. He swerved madly round a 'bus, shot past the grim-looking policeman's upraised hand—just missing him by a couple of inches—then whizzed on down the road. "This—this'll mean prison!" groaned McClure. "He's got your number and you'll—"; "I can't stop the thing!" Handy howled desperately.

hension that a wheel would drop off next, and it even occurred to him that the engine might fall out. And there was certainly a continuous rattle, and the whole shaky contrivance gave one the impression that it was liable to disintegrate completely.

However, he was still wondering what he should do when Bannington was reached, and Handforth was so occupied in getting through the traffic that he forgot all about stopping at a garage. Besides, the Ford was going now, and while it was going, it was wise not to interfere. There was just a forlorn chance that they might reach St. Frank's without another stop.

As a matter of fact, they did.

It chanced that Reggie Pitt and Fullwood and Cecil de Valerie and a few others were collected round the steps of the Ancient House, discussing an affair of great importance. They were all looking serious.

"Yes, it's pretty bad," Pitt was saying. "Is this absolutely certain?"

"I heard it from the Head himself," replied Fullwood. "Mr. Stokes ought to know, too—he's promised to take charge of the Ancient House this term—or until Mr. Lee turns up."

"I shall have to speak to Mr. Stokes," said Pitt. "He's the Housemaster of the West House, and I'm junior skipper of the West House—and I haven't been told a thing; in fact, I can't believe it's really true!"

"What's the discussion about?" asked Armstrong, the junior skipper of the East House, as he joined the group.

"It's about Mr. Lee," growled Fullwood.

"What about him?"

"He hasn't turned up this term."

"That's not a tragedy," said Armstrong. "I dare say you Ancient House chaps will manage to survive."

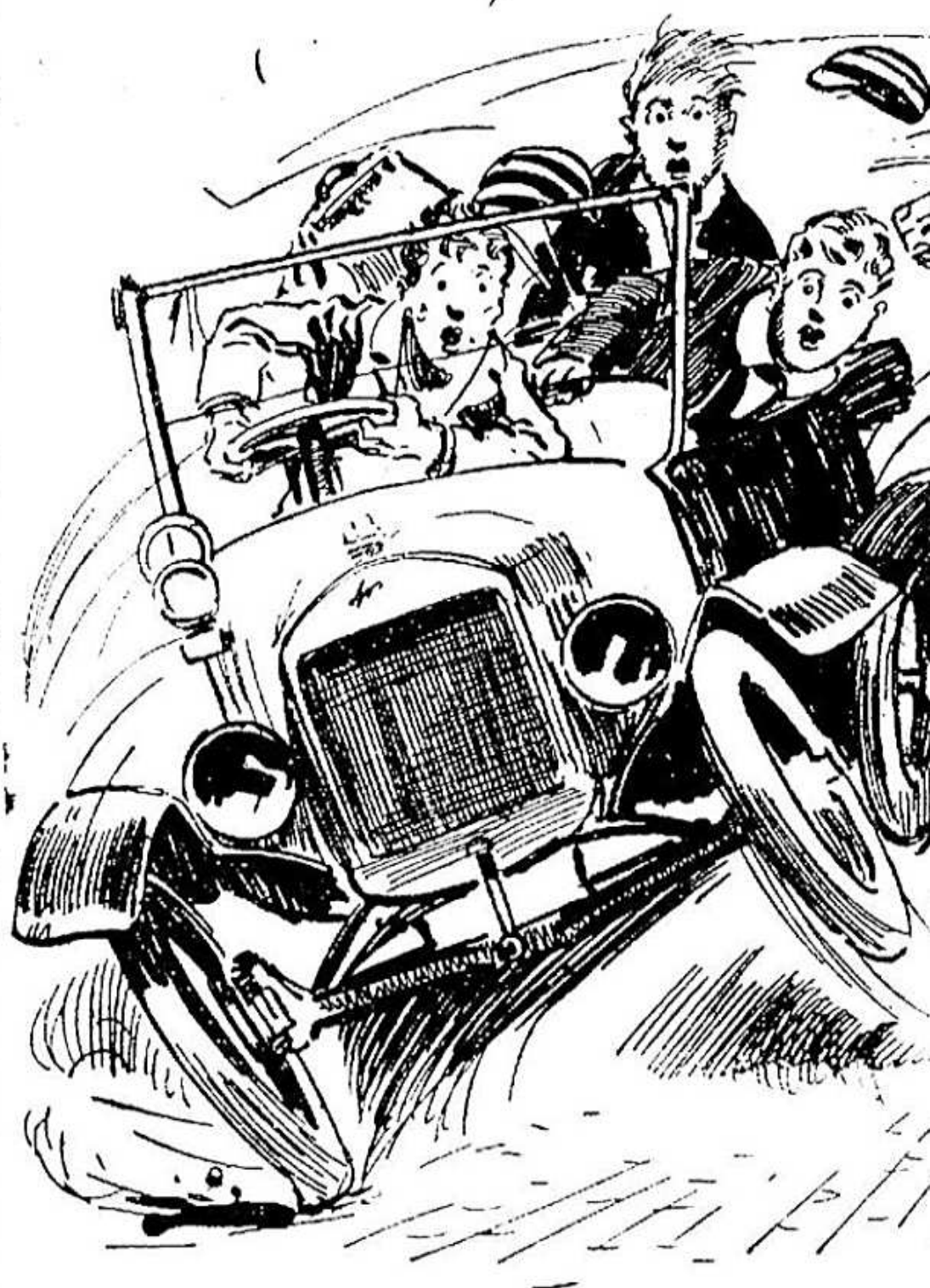
"Don't be an ass," growled Fullwood. "Mr. Stokes has promised to look after the Ancient House while Mr. Lee's away. But what are we going to do about a junior captain? We haven't got either a Housemaster or a junior skipper! Dick Hamilton's away, too."

"Poor old Ancient House!" grinned Armstrong.

"Mr. Lee has been commissioned to undertake a pretty difficult case, by what I can understand," said Fullwood. "They may have to go abroad—and Dick Hamilton is booked, too. So we shall have to muddle along as best we can until they both turn up."

"I take it, Brother Fullwood, that you are referring to Brother Handforth?" asked William Napoleon Browne, as he came out. "Surely our worthy brethren of Study D have arrived?"

"Blow Study D!" said Fullwood. "We're worried about Dick Hamilton. We can't be bothered with Handforth now. It's not merely a question of a junior skipper of the Ancient House—it's a question of a Remove captain. Dick's the right man, and he's away. How about football? Of course, you're pretty keen, Reggie, and—"



Handforth couldn't stop. He swerved madly round hand—just missing him by a couple of inches—then groaned McClure. "He's got your number and you deserve it!"

"Unless I am vastly mistaken, there are sounds of approaching hosts," interrupted Browne. "Surely a convoy of tanks are proceeding up the lane? You will observe the characteristic metallic clanging—"

"By jingo!" interrupted Pitt, staring towards the gates. "It's a car of sorts, and it's coming in here!"

"A car?" repeated Browne. "Pardon the correction, Brother Pitt, but is this not a Ford? A difference, I can assure you. By no stretch of the imagination can the Ford be classed as an actual car. You will detect the full-throated cry of the Ford on the war-path."

For the moment, the problem of Dick Hamilton was forgotten, for it was observed that Edward Oswald was at the wheel of the "tin Lizzie." It proceeded into the centre of the Triangle, pulled up with a violent jerk, and stood there, actually shimmying.

"Well, we've got here!" said Handforth grimly. "They can't spoof me!"



is, shot past the grim-looking policeman's upraised
d on down the road. "This—this'll mean prison!"
—"I can't stop the thing!" Handy howled
ly.



CHAPTER 11.

BROWNE TAKES CHARGE.

THE juniors crowded round the rattling, quivering car. "What the dickens is the idea of this?" asked Pitt, in astonishment.

"Why didn't you come on in the Austin? And where did you dig up this thing? If you don't shut off the engine, it'll fall to pieces where it stands!"

"Go and eat coke!" said Handforth gruffly. "Thank goodness, we're here, anyhow. We—we had a bit of a mess-up on the road," he added casually. "If any of you chaps start rotting, I'll smash you!"

"Well, there's no need to be so touchy!" said Fullwood. "We're naturally curious to hear——"

"Well, you can be curious!" interrupted Handforth. "I'm not saying anything to anybody. This is my car, and——"

"Your car!" roared a dozen voices.

"My car!" repeated Handforth curtly.

"But—but what about your Austin Seven?"

"I've made a deal with it—changed it for this one!" retorted Handforth aggressively. "Anybody got anything to say about it? It was my car, and I can do as I like with my own property!"

"A deal!" gasped Pitt.

"You've changed your Austin for this mass of wreckage?" asked Fullwood, aghast.

"Your lovely little Austin?" yelled De Valerie.

A perfect chorus of amazed inquiries went up. Handforth looked round, and compressed his lips. He had been expecting something of this sort all along.

"Mind your own business!" he said gruffly.

"I say, Church, is this true?" demanded Reggie Pitt sharply. "Has Handy been crazy enough to exchange his Austin Seven for this—this awful thing?"

"He thinks he's made a good bargain," replied Church. "The Austin went wrong, and we pushed it to a garage outside Helmford, and the man persuaded Handy to take this Ford in exchange."

"We tried our utmost to prevent it, but he wouldn't listen," said McClure. "And ever since we left Helmford we've been falling to bits! You can see the remains in the back."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't laugh, you idiots!" roared Pitt. "This is serious! Poor old Handy's been absolutely stung! This car isn't worth four-pence-a'penny! And he's—he's changed it——" Pitt paused, and took a deep breath. "He's given his Austin Seven in exchange for an ancient Ford!"

"He's mad!"

"Rats! I don't believe it!"

The crowd grew larger, and the shouts grew louder.

"It's not a jape!" shouted Church. "He's seriously done it, and Mac and I nearly wept. But what's the use? You know what an obstinate mule he is. We might as well talk to a gatepost!"

"One moment, brothers—one moment," said Browne, gently pushing forward. "Let me take charge of this little discussion. Tell me, Brother Handforth, is this comic effect positively official?"

"What do you mean—comic effect?"

"Am I to understand that this exchange is genuine?"

"You can understand what you like!" said Handforth coldly. "My Austin went wrong, and I gave it to Mr. Miggs in exchange for this Ford. And it's *my* business! It's a pity you chaps can't look after your own affairs!"

Browne sighed.

"I fear this shortness of temper is occasioned by a pang of remorse, Brother Handforth," he said smoothly. "You are realising that you have been unwise, but you are reluctant to acknowledge it. Come, let us hear all the details. Remember, you are among friends. I, personally, will take full command."

"It's all very well for you to talk out of the back of your neck, but the deal is finished, and there's an end of it," growled Handforth. "It was a bargain, and I'm willing to stand by the consequences."

His very words revealed the fact that he was filled with regrets. Indeed, the Ford was in such an appalling condition that one glance at it was enough to make Handforth shiver. And he had had sufficient time, too, to fully realise the incredible nature of his folly. But he was determined not to admit it.

"You're dotty, Handy!" said Pitt. "There was nothing wrong with your Austin. Just wait until your minor hears——"

"Blow my minor!" growled Handforth. "And as for my Austin—it was ruined!"

"Ruined?"

"Yes!"

"Great Scott! Did you have a smash?"

"No, we didn't have a smash!" snapped Handforth. "But when I tried to start the engine, it wouldn't budge!"

"So I imagine, Brother Handforth," said Browne gently. "But I fail to see why you jumped to the fatal conclusion that your nippy little Austin was ruined. I must confess that I'm filled with curiosity——"

"Mr. Miggs, the garage man, examined the car and said she was done in," growled Handforth. "I couldn't get her to start, so we pushed her for about a mile. And when Mr. Miggs examined her, he found that she was a wreck."

"What do you mean—a wreck?" asked Pitt, staring.

"Why, the engine was all seized up, and the back axle was stripped, and all sorts of other things happened," said Handforth miserably. "He wanted eighty quid to repair her, and offered me this car in exchange——"

"But—but your Austin wasn't hurt at all!" yelled Fullwood. "Browne played a jape on you, that's all!"

Handforth gave a violent start.

"A jape?" he asked hoarsely.

"Merely a harmless little test, Brother Handforth," said Browne, smiling. "Pray remain calm. Let us discuss this affair with level voices. As I accept a certain modicum of responsibility, I am willing to step into the breach."

"But—but do you mean to say that my Austin——"

"Browne simply disconnected one of the ignition wires!" exclaimed Reggie Pitt. "The car wasn't harmed in the slightest degree. You said that you could detect any mechanical fault in a flash, so Browne simply put you to the test!"

Handforth went pale.

"Then—then the engine wasn't busted up at all?" he asked breathlessly.

"I can assure you, with perfect confidence, that your Austin is as sound at this moment as it was when you first took possession of her," declared Browne. "There can be no question that Mr. Miggs is a gentleman of considerable imaginative ability. In bald language, Brother Handforth, he has put it across you to some purpose."

Handforth looked round him, dazed and furious.

"You—you rotter!" he panted. "It was you who led me into this——"

"And it is I who will lead you out of it," interposed Browne calmly. "I shall welcome the opportunity of meeting the World's Greatest Liar. After tea we will journey to Helmford, and have a few forceful words with Brother Miggs."

"You hopeless chump!" said Pitt. "Do you mean to say that you believed everything this garage man told you? Eighty quid to repair your car! My dear chap, it won't cost a cent! You've only got to shift a wire, and the car will go as sweetly as ever!"

"Browne only did it as a joke!" said Fullwood. "We thought you would overtake us any minute, but as you didn't come, we had an idea that you had stopped behind in Bannington for something. We never dreamed of this!"

"I'm going back now!" said Handforth tensely. "I can't wait until after tea! Church! Mac! Jump in! I'm going straight to Miggs, and I mean to smash him to pulp. The—the awful swindler!"

"It's a pity you didn't realise it before you signed that receipt!" growled Church. "Goodness knows, we tried to convince you——"

"Receipt!" breathed Handforth, with a start. "Oh, my only aunt! I—I can't get the Austin back now! I've signed a deed of exchange!"

Browne waved his hand.

"A trifle, Brother Handforth," he said. "A scrap of paper."

"But I signed it, I tell you——"

"And Brother Miggs will know quite well that you are a minor, and therefore unbound by any legal restrictions," replied Browne smoothly. "I beg of you to leave this matter safely within my grasp."

"But I'm not a minor!" shouted Handforth, in alarm. "Willy's a minor, but I'm a major!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Legally, you are both minors," explained Browne. "Do not be flurried or alarmed. We will have tea in peace, and then journey forth on this animated mass of junk. It will be a perilous voyage—an expedition fraught with stark and unknown dangers. But have we not braved perils in China? Surely we can steel our hearts, brace our sinews, and face the horrors of a Ford?"

Handforth gripped his fists tensely.

"Blow tea!" he snapped. "I'm going now!"

"Then you can go alone!" growled Church. "We've been standing your rot all day,

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Handy, but this is where we jib! I'm not chancing that Ford again until I've had some tea to revive me! We all need a wash, too. My hat! What a day!"



CHAPTER 12.

WANTED—A REMOVE CAPTAIN!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH wisely listened to Browne's counsel, and decided to wait until after tea before going back to Helmford to claim his Austin Seven. He had a fear that Mr. Miggs might dispose of it in the meantime, but Browne dispelled this supposition.

"Brother Miggs is well aware that he is sailing distinctly near the edge," declared the Fifth Former. "Were he to dispose of your Austin now, he would lay himself open to immediate arrest. Thus, he will wait, half-expecting the inevitable. But he has a faint hope that the deal might go through, and so he will leave the Austin untouched, and await the course of events. Brother Miggs is already ankle-deep in the soup—ere long he will be submerged!"

There was sound sense in Browne's argument. The wily Mr. Miggs would undoubtedly stick to the Austin for at least two or three days. He would be prepared to take his Ford back in case of trouble, and would probably declare that he had only been joking.

Still, there was always the chance that this theory was wrong. The sooner the Austin Seven could be recovered, the better. And tea promised to be a very hurried meal.

"Heard the latest?" asked Church, as he came into Study D, after indulging in a wash and a brush-up. "Dick Hamilton isn't here."

"Don't bother me with the latest news," said Handforth, as he tipped some tea into the pot. "I want to get off to Helmford. I believe that swindling rotter is going to pinch my car. Great Scott! He may not be the garage proprietor at all! Perhaps he's in London by this time—perhaps he's sold my Austin to somebody else! Perhaps I shall never see it again!"

"Perhaps you've put enough tea in that pot!" said McClure. "Is it usual to use a quarter of a pound packet for three cups of tea?"

"Bother the tea!" growled Handforth. "I'm worried!"

"You deserve to be!" said Church tartly. "Didn't we try to drive sense into you in that beastly garage? Why, Mac and I were horrified when you told us about that crazy old Ford. A new Ford isn't so bad—they're jolly good cars! But this thing was built in the Year One!"

"Of course it was," agreed McClure. "Fords aren't so bad; in fact, they've proved themselves to be jolly reliable cars. But nobody can expect an old creak to be any

good. That thing Miggs palmed off on you, Handy, is just a painted-up collection of rusty tin!"

Handforth had the grace to admit it.

"Yes, I know!" he said sadly. "What a blithering idiot I was not to take any notice of you chaps! Why didn't you shove me against the wall, and smash my face until I saw sense?"

"You might have smashed our faces first," explained Church.

"Well, if ever I act like a lunatic again, rope me up, and gag me!" said Handforth. "I give you full permission!"

This was such a handsome admission of folly that Church and McClure were instantly touched. It was impossible to utter any more recriminations.

"That's all right, old son," growled McClure. "We understand. And you can trust Browne to deal with Miggs. Let's have some tea now, and forget the Ford until we've finished."

"All right—let's have some of that cake," said Handforth soberly.

So tea in Study D resolved itself into an unusually peaceful meal. Handforth was so subdued that Church and McClure felt quite uncomfortable. Edward Oswald was much more natural in his usual aggressive mood. It wasn't like him to be so humble and meek.

"There's some talk of an election," remarked Church, in order to give the conversation a turn.

"Why bother about elections?" asked Handforth. "We're not interested in politics. If that chap interferes with any of my tools, or scratches any of the paint——"

"Never mind your Austin now," interrupted McClure. "We're not talking about a political election, you ass. Dick Hamilton isn't back this term—and he's Remove skipper. He's gone off somewhere with Mr. Lee. An unexpected case of big importance. The Remove's without a captain."

"He might mess up the gears," said Handforth worriedly.

"Eh? You—you ass!" snapped McClure. "We're talking about a Remove skipper!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Handforth. "What about him?"

"There's got to be an election."

"Has there?"

"Yes, there has!" roared McClure.

"What for?" asked Handforth, in surprise.

Church and McClure felt that the conversation was getting beyond them.

"Can't you listen, you idiot?" demanded Church. "Do you want us to take you at your word, and bind and gag you? Listen! Dick Hamilton isn't coming back for some weeks, and the Remove needs a temporary skipper!"

Handforth started.

"By George!" he ejaculated. "A temporary skipper! Good egg!"

"Oh, you understand, do you?"

"Of course I understand!" said Handforth. "But what's all that rot about an

election? Why should there be an election, anyhow?"

"To decide on a temporary skipper, of course!"

"My dear asses, that's decided already—I shall be skipper!" said Handforth, firmly. "You don't suppose there's anybody else in the running?"

"Well, Reggie Pitt might consider himself as a possible candidate," said Church tartly.

"He's a West House chap."

"And junior skipper of the West House," said Church. "He's got more claim than anybody else to be temporary Form captain. We'd like an Ancient House man for the job, of course, but it'll be a question of voting. There's some talk of Fullwood being elected—"

"It's all rot!" interrupted Handforth. "I'm the only chap for the job, and there's no need for any election at all. Just wait until I've settled this Austin business. I've always wanted to be captain of the Remove, and this is my chance. I shall be able to prove my worth. Under my leadership the Remove simply won't be able to recognise itself."

"I can believe it!" agreed McClure, grinning.

"As soon as I'm captain, I'll bring in all sorts of new rules," continued Handforth eagerly. "In fact, I'll bring them in to-night, as soon as we get back from Helmsford. By George! I'll show the chaps something!"

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to get elected first?" chuckled McClure.

"Oh, that's a foregone conclusion," said Handforth, with perfect confidence. "Well, if you've finished guzzling tea, we'll get ready. I'm anxious to be off. Buck up!"

"Browne won't be ready yet—"

"If Browne isn't ready, we'll go without him," said Handforth firmly. "I'm sorry Dick isn't coming back this term, but in another way I'm glad. It'll give me a chance to put my theories into practice. And when Dick Hamilton turns up again, I shall be so firmly established that he'll let me remain in control. By George! I'm feeling heaps better!"

Handforth's cool assumption that he would be elected as Remove captain tickled his chums immensely. They realised that there was about one chance in a million of Handforth obtaining a majority. If he was ass enough to put up for election, he could be certain of only two votes, and it was most unlikely that he would get any more! His chums would stand by him from sheer force of habit.

Outside in the Triangle, they found a group of juniors collected round the Ford. All the baggage had been removed, and the loose parts of the decrepit vehicle were piled in at the back.

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House, as Handforth came up. "They can't spoof you, Handy!"

"Are you looking for a thick ear?" asked Handforth aggressively.

"This Chinese Rolls-Royce of yours deserves to be put in a museum," went on Boots, grinning. "It's a pity to leave it standing here like this. The poor thing might collapse."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The Ford is a jolly good car, but this one has seen its best days," said Clapson, of the Fourth. "A crock like this is dear at any price!"

"*Ill Ware Is Never Cheap,*" remarked Billy Nation, nodding. "*What Costs Little Is But Little Esteemed.*"

"My goodness!" said Clapson, glaring. "Can't you do anything but trot out proverbs, Billy, you ass!"

"Sorry!" chuckled Billy Nation.

"Since he's arrived to-day, he's done nothing but shoot proverbs at us!" said Clapson, addressing the others. "We've never heard so many in all our lives! He wasn't like it when he went home for the holidays!"

"I've been reading 'em up!" said the Fourth-Former, with a chuckle. "Proverbs are fine things—they express what you want to say a lot easier. There's nothing to beat a good old proverb or maxim."

"Let's hear one about Handy being swindled," grinned Boots.

"*He That Cheateth In Small Things Is A Fool, But In Great Things Is A Rogue,*" retorted Billy Nation promptly.

"He's got them on the tip of his tongue for every mortal subject!" said Clapson, in astonishment. "It fairly beats me!"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "I'll soon bowl him over! Let's hear a proverb on pigs, my lad! That's done you!"

"*What Can You Expect Of A Pig But A Grunt?*" said Billy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Handforth, staring. "You'd better take this chap back to the Modern House and lock him up somewhere. If I chose, I could trot out proverbs, too."

"*He That Is Full Of Himself Is Very Empty!*" grinned Billy Nation.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's one for you, Handy!" said Buster Boots.

"I've something more important to attend to than proverbs!" said Handforth sourly. "Where's Browne? We've got to start off for Helmford. We've got to take this cranky old Ford back, and recover my Austin."

Browne appeared at that very moment, and came up.

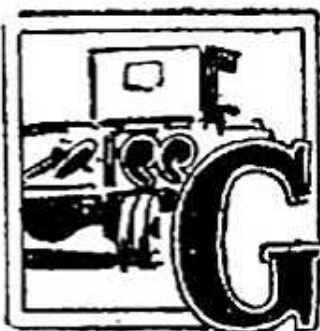
"Splendid!" he said. "We are all ready to start? You are sure that our steed has four wheels attached? Let us venture upon this murky mission!"

"We'll come along, too, to see the fun," said Reggie Pitt.

"Hear, hear!"

"Pile in!"

Eight or nine juniors swarmed into the Ford, and packed themselves away like sardines. The unfortunate vehicle sagged perilously, and William Napoleon Browne shook his head with dubious uncertainty.



CHAPTER 13.

THE PERILOUS ADVENTURE.

REATLY as I welcome an army of supporters, I fear that nothing but disaster can come of this enthusiasm," said Browne.

"It will be much better if we set forth upon this journey alone, Brother Handforth. You must remember that we are relying upon an unknown quantity. Can we afford to take these risks?"

"Rats! We all want to come!" said Fullwood.

"Hear, hear!"

"Fords will stand anything, Browne."

"We must remember that we shall return upon the Austin Seven," continued Browne. "I rather fancy that Brother Handforth will protest——"

"I should think Brother Handforth will!" snorted Edward Oswald. "Do you think I'm going to allow eight or nine chaps to pile into my Austin? You can all get out of this rattle-trap, my lads!"

"When you first came, you said it was a good car!" grinned Pitt.

"Never mind what I said when I first came——"

"You needn't worry about your Austin, either," added Fullwood. "We'll come back by train. It's worth paying the fare, to see all the fun!"

"In that case, you're welcome!" said Handforth promptly. "The more weight on this Ford the better—it'll hold it down. The giddy thing's got a habit of bumping all over the road!"

"If you are satisfied, Brother Handforth, I will say no more," declared Browne. "But with regard to the driving, I feel that we should be safer in the hands of an expert."

"That's right," said Handforth. "So I'm going to drive!"

"I was about to suggest that I should take the wheel——"

"No fear!" interrupted Handforth. "This is my affair, and I'm going to see it through. And when I get my hands on old Miggs, I'll pulverise him!"

"With such hands, I can readily believe it!" murmured Browne.

He made no more comment, but climbed into the seat in front. The Ford was sagging worse than ever—and small wonder! The rear part was simply packed with grinning juniors, all eager for a bit of sport. After all, it was the first day of term, and everything was more or less lax.

The story of Handforth and his Ford had spread throughout the school by this time, and every House was chuckling over the joke. It seemed incredible that Handforth could have sacrificed his smart little Austin Seven for an ancient Ford. But then, only a few of the fellows knew the actual details.

Browne felt a great measure of responsibility because he had precipitated the whole unfortunate business in the first place. Browne had never imagined that the victim of his little jest would do anything so startling.

So Browne was determined to smooth things over. He instinctively felt that Handforth would be too ramheaded in his treatment of Mr. Miggs, so Browne would do all the talking. And Browne was determined to make Mr. Miggs squirm. Obviously, the man had attempted to pull off a criminal fraud. He had grossly taken advantage of Edward Oswald's innocent and trusting nature.

Somebody cranked the engine, and after the second pull it fired. There were one or two preliminary explosions in the exhaust pipe, and then the engine settled down to a steady, rattling roar.

Handforth put in the low gear; the Ford gave a lurch, and started off. Crowds of juniors scooted out of the way, shouting encouragement.

"Look out, there!"

"Make way for the animated salmon-tin!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mind it doesn't fall to pieces before you get outside!"

Handforth gritted his teeth, and precariously steered the car round towards the gates, executing a series of dizzy lurches. He knew that most of these shouts of laughter were directed at him, rather than at the Ford. And it made him all the more exasperated because he knew that he deserved them. Well, anyway, he would take it out of Mr. Miggs!

"Hurrah!"

"We're outside! Now for some speed!"

Somehow, Handforth had manoeuvred the Ford out into the lane, and he was only just in time—for Dr. Stafford himself had emerged from his private domain to find out what all the noise was about. And he might have asked some awkward questions. The fellows much preferred to settle this little affair on their own.

"Whoa! Steady! Take it easy, Handy!"

Handforth had just got the Ford into top gear, and she went thundering down the lane with ever-increasing speed. There was not so much rattle now, but a thudding, solid sort of noise. She was carrying a heavy load. Now and again the rims could be felt, as they went over an inequality of the road.

"We're sinking a bit on this side!" sang out Fullwood. "By the feel of it, there aren't any springs left, but I expect we shall have to chance it. My hat! That was a nasty jar!"

They careered through Bellton, and Browne was seriously wondering how they would ever reach Helmford. He had a sort of intuition that no power on earth could make this antiquated car complete the journey.

It was becoming more and more evident that the Ford had been faked—patched up temporarily, in order to effect a sale. For the slightest strain caused all sorts of unexpected disintegrations.

There was a sharp hill to be climbed, soon after getting through Bellton, and half-way up it the old Ford staggered, and wheezed in agonies of grief. Even the low gear failed to relieve it much. Gradually, her pace became slower and slower, until she was lurching along in a series of grunting jerks.

"Come on—let's get out and push!" shouted Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All hands to the pumps!"

"Heave-ho!"

"Mind you don't push the body off the chassis!"

Most of the juniors tumbled out of the car and ran behind, and at the sides, pushing. Not that she needed much assistance now that the majority of the weight was removed. She succeeded in getting to the top in triumph.

"There's a puncture!" ejaculated De Valerie. "I say, whoa! This off-side back tyre is as flat as the dickens!"

"Let it be flat!" snapped Handforth. "We can't stop for flat tyres!"

"But the wheel's all wonky, too!" yelled Fullwood. "It's wobbling sideways, and it'll come off in another minute!"

Handforth glanced round.

"If you're coming, hop in!" he roared. "I'm not stopping for anything! She's going now, and I'm taking no chances!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They all managed to scramble on board again, jammed in like sardines. And the Ford, with a long, gradual descent in front of her, surged forward, accompanied by a rattling, devastating commotion. With a painful sound of grinding metal, the top gear went in.

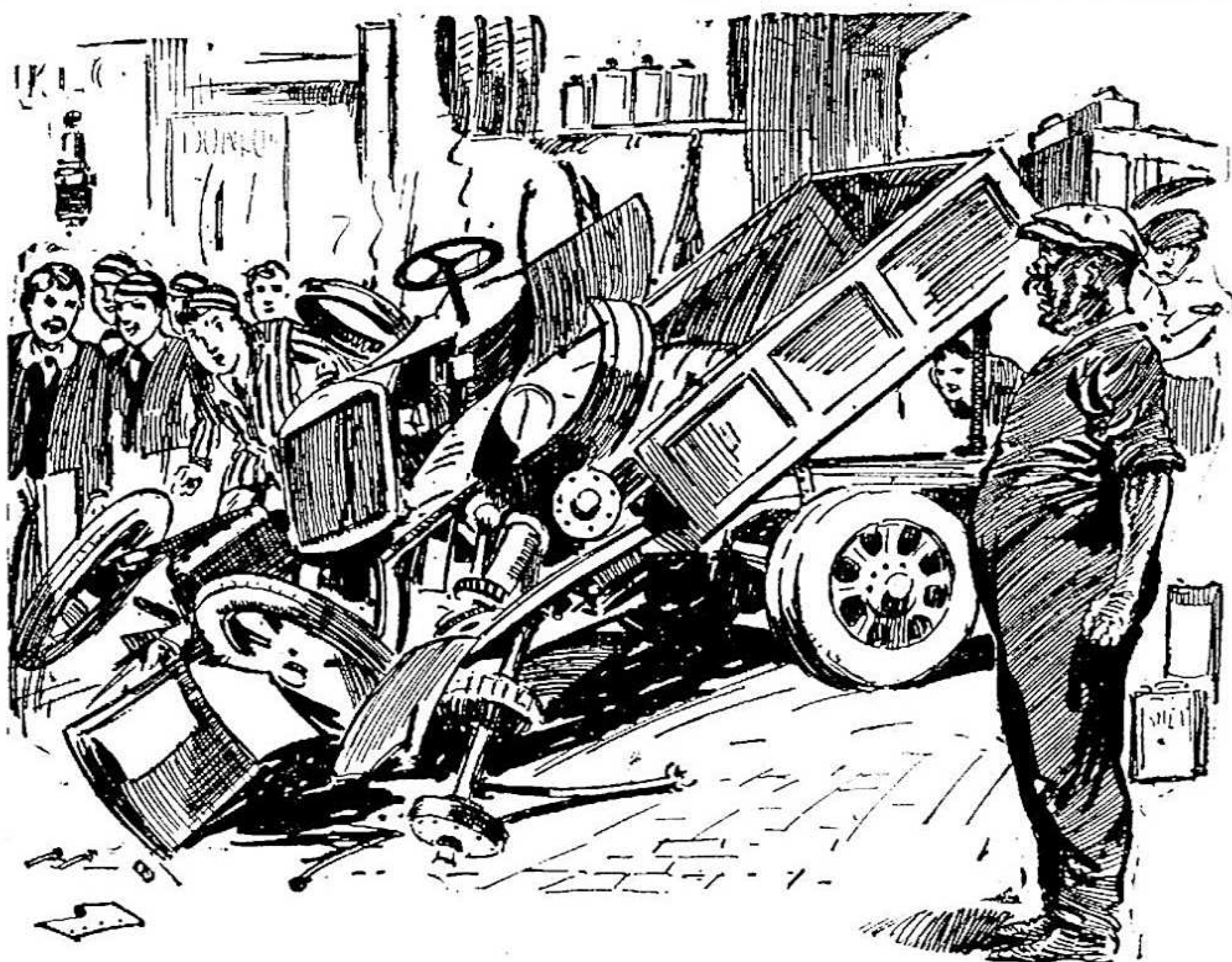
"We are now," said Browne, "in the lap of the gods!"

"If we hold tight, we'll be all right!" said Handforth, clutching the wheel desperately. "We've got to get to Helmford—and we can't waste any time. I believe that crook is monkeying with my Austin!"

This thought was such an obsession with Handforth that he cared nothing for flat tyres or oscillating wheels. Helmford! The only thing was to get to Helmford! Too much time had been wasted already.

With ever-gathering speed, the old car sped down the long hill. There came a lurch, a terrific report, and the vibration at the back was like nothing on earth.

"Another tyre's gone!" gasped Fullwood. "Steady on, Handy!"



The body of the lorry tipped up, and the amazed Mr. Miggs saw the Ford—every last scrap of it!—shoot to the garage floor with a clattering, tinny rattle. "Do you recognise the remains?" asked Handforth, grimly.

"My hat! We've dropped the back number-plate!" shouted somebody. "We can't go on without a number-plate, Handy! We'll be pinched!"

"Look out! One of these doors has fallen off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Ford, in fact, was falling to pieces, and leaving scattered fragments of metal all the way down the hill. But Handforth couldn't stop the car now, even if he had wanted to. The speed was increasing, and the engine was thundering with such force that the vibration became terrific.

"Caution, brother—caution!" advised Browne mildly.

"Caution be blowed!" gasped Handforth. "I can't hold the thing!"

"Let me suggest the brake——"

"It's no good—it won't work!"

"Then we are indeed lost!" murmured William Napoleon. "It might be a good idea to steer into this ditch——"

He was interrupted by a noise that sounded like half a dozen explosions in one. The Ford simply shivered from stem to stern, the bonnet burst open, bent and twisted, and the radiator caved back. There was a terrific and unearthly jolt. But still the Ford roared onwards.



CHAPTER 14.

RUBBISH SHOT HERE!

"TOP!" shouted Fullwood. "We've dropped the engine!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a fact!" gasped

Fullwood. "Look there!"

And his statement, although so far-fetched, was the actual truth! Rolling down the road, amid the dust in the rear of the car, was the Ford's engine—smoking and knocking itself to atoms. The terrific vibration had forced it completely out of its seating, and the smashing of some vital part had freed it completely.

So the engine had dropped out on the road, had fouled the back axle—the cause of that tremendous bump—and now it was left behind.

The radiator followed. It gave one or two sagging jolts, boiling water spurting out amid clouds of steam, and then it rolled sideways, and disappeared. But yet the car still shot down the hill, and the speed was increasing with every yard.

The reason, of course, was clear.

There wasn't even an engine to act as a brake now, and with the brakes themselves

useless, the car was simply a free chassis with four wheels on it. The marvellous thing was that the steering-gear remained intact. If this went—as it was liable to—there would be a nasty smash.

"Trust me!" panted Handforth. "I'll get you through safely!"

In spite of the danger, the whole affair was ludicrously funny. The Ford was literally leaving itself in batches all down the hill. The vital parts had already vanished.

"We are now upon the rocks!" said Browne tensely.

He was staring at a steep hump in the road just ahead—another of those little bridges. But this one was a particularly sharp hump, and the Ford was tearing down upon it like some noisy Juggernaut.

The next few seconds were startling.

The car hit the hump, and simply rose into the air. For a brief fraction there was a sensation of flying, and then the Ford hit the ground, slewing round at the same moment. To remain whole any longer was simply out of the question. The strain upon the wheels was tremendous.

There were a series of cracks like gunshots, the wheels flew off in all directions, and the body struck the road with a thudding crash, and slithered along amid the dust.

But nobody was thrown out. They all clung there, jumbled together, but perfectly safe. Legs and arms appeared, and gradually the juniors climbed out of the wreckage.

"All safe?" asked Handforth, wiping his brow. "My only hat! And old Miggs told me this car was a corker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Look up the road!"

There was nothing but the body left, and even this was twisted and misshapen. Two wheels were in the hedge, one more lay ten yards up the road, and the fourth one had mysteriously vanished. Just behind the car lay the back axle.

There wasn't a scrap of the Ford left in its original setting. Higher up the hill lay the engine and various other portions of that metal anatomy.

"Well, we may safely say that this particular Ford has met its Waterloo," remarked Browne, as he dusted himself down. "My hearty congratulations, Brother Handforth, upon a piece of masterly driving. We owe you our lives."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "I couldn't do anything else. Didn't you know that the steering was locked during the last half of the hill?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I simply had to go where the giddy thing took us!" panted Handforth. "But look here. What about my Austin? I can't give this bus to old Miggs in this condition!"

"Brother Miggs will probably protest, but the lesson will be all the sharper," said Browne. "We are, however, confronted with the problem of delivering the fragments. If

Helmford was nearer, we could each grasp a section, and carry it there. But I do not relish an eighteen-mile walk."

"We've got to do something, anyhow," said Pitt, as he rubbed a bruised knee. "Great Scott! I've never seen anything so rich in my life! Look at all this debris! The old tin can simply fell to bits by the chunk!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all very well for you fatheads to laugh, but what are we going to do?" demanded Handforth, looking worried. "We've got to get this lot to Helmford, and I don't see—"

"It has been truly said that luck favours the brave!" interrupted Browne calmly. "Observe, brothers! Our problem is solved!"

The Fifth-Former was watching the approach of a small lorry. It was one of the open type, and was empty. The driver didn't wait to be pulled up. He applied his brakes of his own accord.

"You've had a pretty nasty spill, haven't you?" he asked, looking at the bits. "Anybody hurt?"

"It's only a Ford," said Handforth. "It came into fragments as we were coming down the hill."

"Looks like a bomb had hit it!" said the man, chuckling.

"Better and better!" declared Browne. "You will observe, brothers, that this vehicle is of the tipping variety. All rubbish shot here! I gather that you will have no objection to earning a crisp, crackling, five-pound note, brother?" he added, addressing the driver.

"What's the little game, sir?" asked the man cautiously.

"You have already seen the fragmentary remains," said Browne. "Place them upon your lorry, convey them to Helmford, and the aforementioned crisp, crackling fiver will be your very own."

The man hesitated for about a millionth of of a second.

"Done!" he said promptly. "But is this square, sir?"

"You shall have the fiver in advance, as an earnest of our sincerity," replied Browne, handing over the crisp, crackling note.

"Lummy!" said the driver, looking at it in awe.

"I say, Browne, you'll have to let me pay this, you know," said Handforth. "It's my funeral—"

"Happily, there will be no funerals," interrupted Browne. "I must confess that I suspected an orgy of them at one time. But we are evidently too young and innocent to die yet. As for the trifling matter of the crisp, crackling fiver, pray let us forget this mundane subject. I am well content to pay for my pleasures, and we must remember that it was I who started this cheery little pantomime."

"All the same, it's my car—"

But Browne refused to listen. He superintended the loading of the remains. All the

NEXT WEEK!**"VOTE FOR HANDFORTH!"**

The Remove needs a captain!
Handforth thinks he's the only possible fellow for the job.

Anybody who doesn't promise to vote for him in the junior election gets five seconds in which to put up his fists!

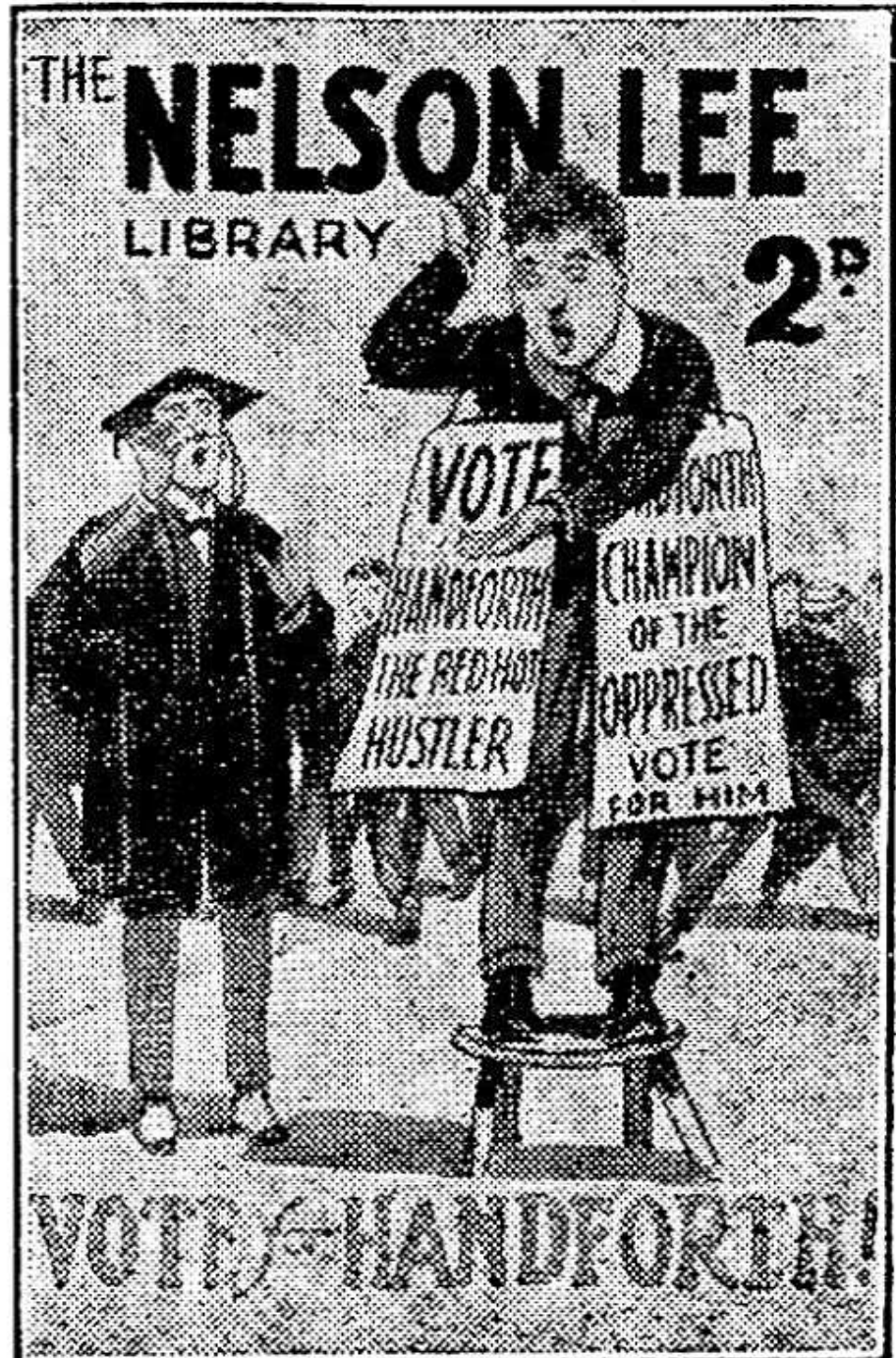
That's Handy's idea of canvassing for votes!

Next Wednesday's long complete yarn is one big laugh. You know what Handforth's like when he gets an idea into his head. He gets an idea with a vengeance in next week's story—and everybody is surprised at the way in which it all works out! If you miss the next issue of the Nelson Lee Library, you will be missing one of the finest full-of-fun yarns ever published.

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juniors helped, and at the end of ten minutes the disintegrated Ford was lying in a heap inside the lorry. The juniors all climbed in, and Browne and Handforth took their seats beside the driver.

"Helmford, Jeames!" said Browne smoothly.

"Well, this is easy money, and no error!" said the man, chuckling. "I've got the fiver—"

"The crisp, crackling fiver," said Browne.

"I've got the fiver, so I don't care," grinned the driver. "I'm goin' to Helmford, anyhow—so this job won't be takin' me out of my way, not by a hundred yards."

"Then we are all pleased," smiled Browne benevolently. "It now remains to be seen whether Brother Miggs will be pleased. I have a faint suspicion that his pleasure will assume a peculiar form."

The journey to Helmford was much more comfortable now, and the Remove fellows took quite an interest in this novel form of transport. They did not seem to appreciate the fact that they had all had a very narrow

escape. The affair of Handforth's Ford was becoming funnier every minute, and Reggie Pitt predicted that the school would howl when it heard the full details of that comic ride.

Mr. Miggs' garage was reached in due course, and Handforth didn't wait for the lorry to stop. He hopped down, and raced breathlessly into the corrugated iron building. He surprised Mr. Miggs in the act of pressing the electric starter of the Austin Seven. The faithful little engine purred sweetly at the very first touch.

"By George!" roared Handforth.

Mr. Miggs' jerked round, and his jaw dropped. But he had the presence of mind to switch off the engine at the same second.

"Just been havin' a look at 'er, young gent," he said feebly.

"Big ends gone, are they?" yelled Handforth.

"The fact is—"

"The bearings are all seized up, eh?"

"Now, look here, sir—"

"The back axle's chewed to bits, is it?" said

Handforth fiercely. "You—you swindling rogue! That car's mine, and I'm going to have it!"

Mr. Miggs compressed his lips, and his cunning eyes narrowed.

"Oh, you're goin' to 'ave it, are you?" he said nastily. "We'll see about that, young shaver! A bargain's a bargain! First of all, where's my Ford?"

"Here, Brother Miggs—every scrap of it!" said William Napoleon Browne, with a bland wave of his hand.

The lorry was deftly backing into the garage. And the amazed Mr. Miggs saw the body tip up, and the Ford—every scrap of it—shot to the garage floor with a clattering, tinny rattle.



CHAPTER 15.

BROWNE DOES THE TRICK!

MR. MIGGS stood there, and fairly gaped.

"What's all this 'ere?" he asked blankly.

"Can't you see?" demanded Handforth. "Don't you recognise the remains?"

"My—my Ford!" gasped Mr. Miggs, stunned.

"Yes, and that's how it served me!" said Handforth indignantly. "The giddy thing simply fell to bits, and you can have it back. And I'm going to take that Austin Seven away—"

"Oh, are you?" shouted Mr. Miggs, recovering himself rapidly. "Like your nerve, ain't it? You take that car away in spinkin' fine condition, after a square deal, an' bring it back after it's been run over by a traction engine! Nothin' doin', my lad! This Austin's mine!"

"Why, you—you—"

"An' you can take that junk away!" added Mr. Miggs.

"You hopeless idiot!" snapped Handforth. "You swindling rotter! That Ford wasn't touched by anything. What do you mean—run over by a traction engine? This is what happened to it while it was being driven! She came into a hundred portions as we drove down a hill. You can't kid me! The whole car was only held together by bits of thread!"

"That Ford was as good as new—"

"Allow me to conduct this little interview, Brother Handforth," interposed Browne gently. "Coolness is the essential quality now required. I understand, Brother Miggs, that you hold a receipt from our mutual friend, Brother Handforth?"

"Yes, an' I'm goin' to stick to it!" retorted the man.

"That, of course, is a mere matter of personal choice," said Browne. "You may stick to it, or not, as you wish. I am assuming that you fully realise the valueless nature of that paper?"

"It's a signed receipt—"

"From a mere schoolboy?" asked Browne coldly. "Brother Miggs, you are not quite such a fool as to imagine that that receipt would help you in a court of justice. It is not our intention to waste any time in this establishment. I may mention that the atmosphere of it offends us. You have two alternatives, and two only."

Mr. Miggs looked at the schoolboys, and set his teeth. After all, these youngsters were only on a par with Handforth himself. Browne was a bit older, but he was a schoolboy, just the same.

"By thunder!" growled Mr. Miggs. "If you think you can come into my garage, an' threaten me, you've made a mistake! Git off my premises, before I throw you off!"

"Gently, brother—gently!" said Browne. "We have not yet discussed these alternatives. You may either deliver up the Austin car without further fuss, or—"

"Or what?" demanded Mr. Miggs, glaring.

"Or it will be our painful duty to pay a brief visit to the police-station," said Browne smoothly. "In the latter event, it will, of course, be necessary to explain the full facts—"

"You can't bluff me with this nonsense!" interrupted Mr. Miggs. "Go to the police-station! You'll git a fat lot of satisfaction! This car is mine, an' you can't prove—"

"Come on! Let's take her!" broke in Handforth hotly. "Are you going to stand aside, Mr. Miggs, or shall I biff you over?"

Mr. Miggs uttered a string of oaths.

"You young fool!" he ended up. "Stand back, there!"

"I warned you!" shouted Handforth fiercely. "Take that!"

Biff!

Mr. Miggs was apparently composed entirely of blubber. He was a big man, and a heavy man, but that terrific drive from Handforth's right had a devastating effect. Mr. Miggs sagged backwards, and collapsed to the floor like a pricked bladder. Only he didn't grow any smaller. The very ground shook beneath his thudding weight.

"Come on!" roared Handforth.

With a yell of triumph, he leapt into the driving-seat of the Austin, and joyously pressed the electric starter. The little engine sang on the instant, and Handforth slipped in bottom gear, and shot round towards the exit. He was an uncertain quantity at the wheel of a Ford, but he knew what he was doing now! His judgment with the Austin was uncanny.

"I'll 'ave you arrested for theft!" stormed Mr. Miggs, struggling madly to his feet. "Do you think I'm goin' to accept this heap of scrap-iron? This was in good order when you took 'er away—"

"And the car is in almost the same order now," interrupted Browne. "She may have looked whole, but that was a mere illusion, Brother Miggs. Let this be a lesson to you to act honestly. I have no wish to point out the folly of publicity, but it might be as well to remind you of certain facts. We have

taken the Austin, and we have returned your Ford. If you wish to prosecute, you are at perfect liberty to do so."

"I'll 'ave you put in prison!" hooted Mr. Miggs.

"Brother Handforth can always be found at St. Frank's College—and I can be discovered there, too," continued Browne. "You know exactly what to do, Brother Miggs, if you desire to pursue the course of folly. I would mention that my father happens to be Sir Rufus Browne."

Mr. Miggs gave a violent start.

"Sir Rufus Browne—the judge?" he asked blankly.

"Ah, it delights me to know that the fame of the Browne family has even reached the backwoods of Helmford!" smiled Browne. "Correct me if I am wrong, but is not my father due to officiate at the coming Assizes here? Alas! I am afraid you will be in for a murky time, Brother Miggs, if you take this sharp lesson in the wrong spirit."

The man was absolutely dumbfounded.

"Oughtn't we to soak him in some of his gear-oil, or something?" asked Fullwood. "Wouldn't it be a good idea to carry him to the nearest pond and duck him?"

"The idea is sound, Brother Fullwood, but the prospect of carrying Brother Miggs appals me," replied Browne. "He has had his punishment, so we will let it rest at that. I should like to predict that he will remain very discreetly silent on this whole painful subject."

They went out, leaving Mr. Miggs dumb with chagrin. And there was no question that Browne had made a true prophecy. Mr. Miggs would be a very foolish man if he allowed this affair to develop into a legal action.



CHAPTER 16.

THE SHADOW OF COMING EVENTS.

"BROWNE," said Handforth, "you're a brick!"

"In that case, it is rather a pity that I did not heave myself at

Brother Miggs," said Browne calmly. "I trust you will freely acknowledge that your capacity as a mechanic is limited?"

They were in the Austin Seven, speeding homewards, and Church and McClure were in the rear. The rest of the juniors had gone off to the station to catch a train—well satisfied with their adventure.

"What are you getting at?" asked Handforth, staring.

"You may remember that I removed a wire—"

"You bounder, that's what started all the trouble!" growled Handforth. "Naturally, I didn't look at the mag.! I tried everything else—"

"But it proves, nevertheless, that my contention was right," interrupted Browne gently. "Brother Miggs, you will note, detected the loose connection in a moment—and he then proceeded to hand you the dope. Alas! That a stalwart of your brain power should soak it in with the eagerness of a thirsty sponge!"

"Oh, it's no good—I was a silly chump, and I've got to admit it," said Handforth handsomely.

"Then let us dismiss the subject entirely," beamed Browne. "Such an admission from you, Brother Handforth, is overwhelming in its candour. We return to St. Frank's happily and contentedly."

Not that Handforth escaped the unmerciful chipping of St. Frank's. As soon as the school was reached, he was surrounded by a shouting crowd, and he was the brunt of endless laughter.

The school fairly howled when it heard about the collapsing of the Ford between Bellton and Bannington. That story, told with many variations, was screamingly funny.

But before the evening was over, Handforth found relief. After all, there were more important matters to be discussed.

It was an established fact that Dick Hamilton would be absent temporarily; and as Mr. Nelson Lee would be absent, too, Mr. Beverley Stokes, of the West House, had undertaken to look after the Ancient House, in addition to his own duties.

"The arrangement may be only very brief," said Barry Stokes, when a number of juniors appealed to him for information. "That is why a temporary Housemaster is not being appointed. Mr. Lee has undertaken a difficult task—a question of diplomatic importance, I gather. He may be away for five or six weeks, or he may be back within ten days."

"And what about Hamilton, sir?" asked Pitt.

"Hamilton will naturally return at the same time—perhaps sooner," replied the Housemaster. "I suggest, therefore, that there should be no drastic alteration in any of the present arrangements. Just go on in the same way as ever. That's what I advise."

Later, there was an animated discussion in the Remove common-room of the Ancient House. There were many visitors from the West House, where half the Remove boys boarded.

"The question is, will it be worth while appointing a temporary skipper?" asked Do Valerie. "Wouldn't it be just as well to give the job to Pitt? He can look after the Remove affairs—"

"Rot!" interrupted Handforth. "I've got nothing against Pitt. In fact, he's one of my best pals—a sportsman to his finger-tips."

"How much do you want to borrow?" asked Pitt, grinning.

"Don't be an ass," frowned Handforth. "As I was saying, I've got nothing against

you, Pitt, old man, but we can't afford to be lax on a question of the captaincy. Hamilton isn't here, so we've got to appoint another Form skipper. It may be six or seven weeks before Hamilton shows up."

"Yes, it's possible," agreed Fullwood. "We certainly ought to fix on something."

"Then it's as good as settled," said Handforth. "Why go to all the fuss and bother of an election? The result's a foregone conclusion, anyhow. I'll take the reins from this minute——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm afraid the fellows will need more time to consider your claim," chuckled Fullwood. "As far as I can see, we shall have to hold an election campaign—say, three days of it," continued Fullwood. "Think of the fun! Different speeches by the different candidates—all sorts of promises by the would-be skippers. Why not decide on an election now, nominate the candidates on Friday, and fix next Monday as polling day? How's that for a programme?"

The Remove approved heartily, and an election was always a welcome addition to the ordinary run of school life. Even if the result was a forgone conclusion, there would be plenty of fun.

"All right; have it your own way," said Handforth calmly. "I'm nominated as a candidate to start with——"

"You can't nominate yourself, you ass!" grinned Reggie Pitt.

"Then Church and McClure will nominate me," retorted Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The very idea of Handforth standing for the election was extremely comic. The whole Remove knew that there were only two possible men for the captaincy—in the absence of Dick Hamilton. Ralph Leslie Fullwood, of the Ancient House, or Reginald Pitt, of the West House. In fact, the fight would probably resolve itself into a battle between the two Houses, in order to select their own man. It would be the duty of the rival speech-makers to induce Remove fellows belonging to the other House to vote opposite. Pitt, for example, would win if he and his supporters could only persuade a number of Ancient House Removites to plump for him. And Fullwood would naturally adopt the same tactics.

Handforth, of course, would only be a mere comic relief.

In Study D, that night, he outlined his campaign.

"This is just the thing we need!" he said briskly. "After all our adventures in China, we want something bright and cheery to liven things up. You two chaps are my lieutenants from this minute onwards."

"Haven't we always been your lieutenants?" asked Church.

"Never mind about that—you've got to work now," said Handforth. "We're not going to let any grass grow under our feet, my sons! We've got to get out placards by the score—'Vote for Handforth,' 'Vote

For The Live-Wire Candidate,' 'Make Handforth Your Skipper, And Watch The Remove Boom!' That's the sort of stuff we've got to get out!"

"Yes, but what will the other chaps get out?" asked McClure dubiously. "They're bound to make a platform gag out of your temporary Ford! They'll ask why a chap like you should be made skipper."

"I shall have plenty of answers to those gags," retorted Handforth. "I'm standing for the captaincy, and I'm going to win! I've got to win! And you chaps must help me."

"Oh, rather," said Church. "We'll do our best."

"Of course, it's a dead cert from the very start," said Handforth. "The election will only be a sort of formality, but we've got to hold it, or some of the chaps will kick up a fuss——"

"Don't you believe in that dead cert stuff," interrupted McClure.

"Eh?"

"Of course, they don't understand you," said McClure quickly. "They don't realise your sterling qualities. And Pitt will be a hot favourite with the West House chaps. If you're going to win this election, you'll have to fight every inch of the way, and it's no good fooling yourself."

Handforth looked rather thoughtful.

He hurried out, bent upon a few preliminary preparations, and Church and McClure glanced at one another rather helplessly.

"Talk about cyclones!" said Church. "What do you think of the chap? All this excitement over his giddy Austin to-day—then that Ford—and now he's dotty on winning the captaincy!"

"Poor old scout!" said McClure, shaking his head. "It's no good trying to tell him anything—he'll never listen. Of course, our two votes are the only ones he'll get! It's a shame to deceive him!"

But Church and McClure were booked for one of the greatest shocks of their lives in the very near future!

THE END.

("VOTE FOR HANDFORTH!" is the title of next Wednesday's rollicking yarn—and it's one of the best we've ever had! Order your copy IN ADVANCE!)

..... NEXT WEDNESDAY!

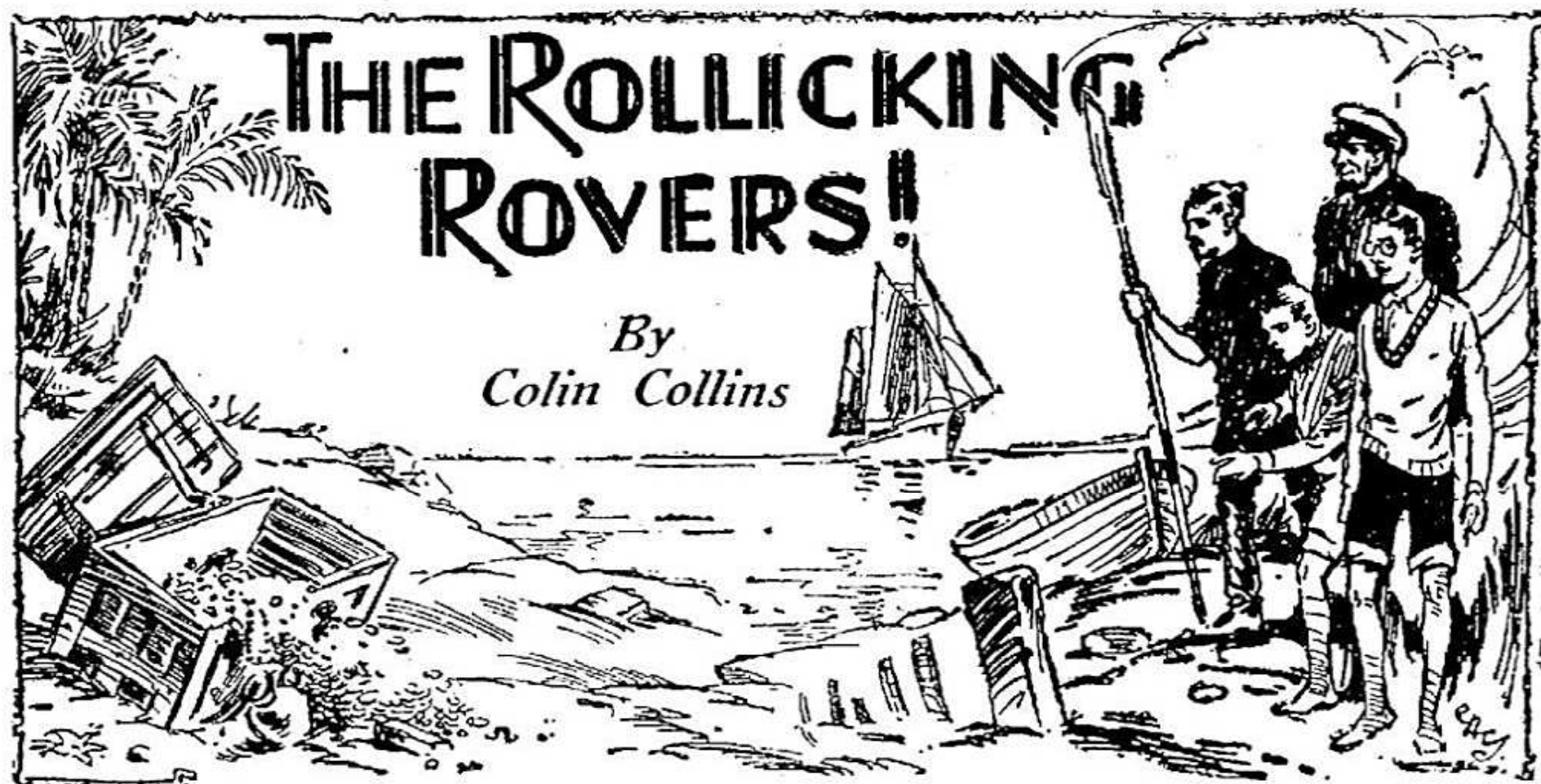
VOTE FOR HANDFORTH!



.....

Stirring Adventure!

In Quest of Treasure!



WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

BOB DIGBY, HAROLD DWYER, and FATTY VOSS are left a large fortune, to be divided equally between them. The fortune is left them by their uncle, Silas Digby, and the wealth is hidden in a chest which he has buried somewhere during his travels round the world. They have no clue to the whereabouts of this fortune, but enlist the aid of BEN TOPPET, the skipper of the Saucy Ann, who tells them of a chest concealed beneath a tree in their uncle's garden. They dig up the chest and find that it contains documents, a mummified head and hands! The papers are examined, and it is decided to accompany Ben on the Saucy Ann in a world quest

for the lost treasure. But they are shadowed by FOXEY JOHNSON, a crafty rascal, who conceals himself on board. The Saucy Ann proceeds to Teredos, where a box of valuables had been left by Old Digby. The treasure turns out to be only a box of books. They now turn their attention to Monteblanco, a cannibal-infested country in the Congo, where, according to Old Digby's diary, they will find the treasure. Foxey, concealed on board, means to get that treasure. As to what happened to Foxey and where our adventurers eventually find the treasure, will be told in this grand concluding instalment.

The Arrival at Monteblanco.

"THERE is Monteblanco—that's the old mountain!"

Ben handed the glasses to the lads, who had been counting the hours these last few days.

Down below, or, rather, just below, the hatchway of the hold, Foxey, with his ear and his eye to a crack, was listening and hearing all their plans.

They had sailed down the mighty Congo river, and the snow-capped peak of the mountain was their landmark for turning.

"Changes—changes!" muttered Ben as they approached the shore. "That hut is new—and that looks like a church. My word, them missionaries makes headway once they gets busy. Why, that's the Union Jack!"

The boys were sorely disappointed to see these signs of civilisation in a place they had visioned as the haunt of elephants, lions and tigers and hippos and cannibal niggers. Round the mission station were grouped a number of native huts, showing that the missionary was on the best of terms with his neighbours.

"It's some years since I was here," Ben explained. "Once these parson chaps gets

going with the niggers, there ain't no stoppin' 'em."

"They're not cannibals any more, then!" observed Fatty regretfully.

"No, old son, you're safe—you can show yourself!" chaffed Bob; for which nonsense he got a punch in the ribs.

"A very lonely place for a missionary. It's the first sign of civilisation we've seen," observed Goggles, taking the glasses in his turn and peering hard. "I see natives and—they're wearing clothes of sorts."

"You may call it civilisation if you like," chuckled Ben, "but it's only skin deep, as you may say. Them sky pilots is wonderful soft in believing they can alter the ways of a continent by just tidyin' up a bit o' the river bank. I'll bet you as, ten miles inland, there's blacks as have never seen a white man—but they've heard what they taste like!"

"Better stay on board, Fatty!" chaffed Bob.

"I can see the missionary; he has a white beard, and he's as broad as he's long—worse than Fatty," observed Goggles.

"Let's have a look!" cried Ben. And in a minute he cried out: "Why—that's old Olive Oil!"

"Old whom?"

"Olive Oil. His real's name's Oliver. He's a missionary, and a trader, and he deals in palm oil. He's known up and down the river for a thousand miles. Ho, ho, so he's got a station now! Things is looking up. He was a great pal o' your uncle's. He'll know the Saucy Ann."

By the time the ship was half a mile from land the shore was thronged with natives, and the missionary was at the water's edge. He seemed to be the only white; but there were a few blacks in white suits, who seemed to be his associates. Soon a large canoe set out, with Mr. Oliver in it, to board the Saucy Ann.

"He'll want to know why we've come," said Bob, rather disturbed.

"Well, we needn't tell him. We've come for that cargo o' mother-o'-pearl—it's ours!" growled Ben.

"If it's still there," suggested Bob.

"It's bound to be. Lend me them glasses. There you are, up there on the slope! See all them mounds; no missionary would dare touch 'em. You've got to respect a black man's feelings, even if you are a bloomin' missionary. Touch one of them mounds, and let a nigger see you, and it'd go round like wildfire, right across the countryside, and there'd be a riot as no missionary would dare stop."

Foxy lifted the hatch in his greedy eagerness, and peered in the direction indicated. The others had their backs to him. He grew bolder, and his trained sailor eye was able to do without glasses. He counted the mounds on the mountain side, and knew that they were all there.

The one at the end, on the right, was his. His fingers itched and his eyes bulged, and, in imagination, he saw inside the mound, saw himself digging into it deeper and deeper, and coming upon the chest of hidden Spanish gold. Long thinking and hankering had made doubt into certainty, hope into reality.

He must get there first.

The coming of the missionary gave him joy. He knew the etiquette of these lost stations in No Man's Land—a visit of a ship meant the offer of hospitality; news from the outside world; fresh water and food for weary crews; a bed ashore; a gathering of the clans; a service in the church; and a native welcome.

Other canoes were setting out:

"Keep them black devils off the ship!" Ben roared out as the fleet, headed by Mr. Oliver, came near.

The warning was needless; Oliver's word was law, and he alone came close under.

"Hallo, Mr. Oliver!" shouted Ben.

A long stare, and then the white man waved his hat.

"It's the Saucy Ann!" he cried. "But what have you done to her, Ben?"

"Re-fitted and fresh rigged, sir."

"And where's the captain?"

"Dead, Mr. Oliver."

"Dear, dear me, that's sad! Who's aboard?"

"The old gent's nevvies—pleasure cruise," Ben explained. "Come aboard, sir!"

The missionary came on deck, and the lads were presented to him. They explained that Ben had told them of a cargo of mother-o'-pearl belonging to their uncle, and they had come to fetch it.

"One o' the captain's dumps," Ben added.

"Where?" asked Oliver.

"That's what we've got to find out—it's written down somewhere. We're all anxious to land, and mighty glad to see your buildings, Mr. Oliver. I see your church, but I don't see no Hotel Metropole."

The missionary laughed, and explained that his hut was large, but had not entertained white men for many months. He was waiting for a ship to take off a cargo of his own. Had they any room in their hold?

Foxy began to quake, and slid down again to his nest of boxes. Ben showed the hold, but pretended that the mother-o'-pearl would be enough to fill it.

"Well, well, no matter," sighed the missionary, "we must wait—a ship is due in a day or two."

That was glorious hearing for Foxy. It would solve his problem of how to get the treasure chest to sea. He could hide with it until the ship arrived, and get a passage home—after the Saucy Ann was gone away with its cheated and disappointed crew.

You see, he was certain, absolutely certain, there was a treasure, and quite sure he must get to it first.

The Saucy Ann was anchored in a little bay, a clearing in a jungle swamp, where Oliver had got his converts to build a wharf of rough timber, and the adventurers landed. Dummy was left to guard the ship.

"I have taught my little congregation here to work and earn money," said the missionary, "and with the stuff we have sold we have raised enough to build our church. But it is hard going. The river-bank men are manageable; but inland——"

It ended in a sigh. Ben winked at the lads, and Goggles murmured "Cannibals?"

"Yes," Oliver replied sadly. "Our head-man disappeared last week, and we are half-expecting a raid. But we are ready. It is uphill work. They still regard the mountain as sacred to their devil gods."

"I see the mounds are still there," observed Ben, shading his eyes and looking up the slope.

"Yes, we should like to clear them away, but we daren't. We should like to show them that our God is above their gods, and that nothing would happen if we cast down their idols—but we daren't—yet."

"Could we help you, sir?" asked Bob, with a sly look at Ben. "We're not afraid. We have weapons."

"Good heavens, no! Once start bloodshed here, and what would become of all our good work?"

"We would like to go up and look at them," suggested Goggles.

"No—no!" cried the missionary in alarm. "No white man may trespass—they are very suspicious."

"What would they do to us?" asked Bob.

The missionary coughed awkwardly, as though he would rather not answer that question, and turned to Ben.

"You and I, Ben, are old stagers in these parts. We know."

"Ay, ay!" replied Ben, grinning and making a pretence of stirring an imaginary pot.

"It is hot here. Come to the hut and be made welcome," said Mr. Oliver, pretending not to see Ben's action.

Things were not going to be as easy as they seemed. The lads looked wistfully up the mountain, and then at Ben, who put a warning finger on his lip as he followed in the wake of the missionary.

The Missionary's Warning.

FOXEY was waiting until dark. And Dummy, as usual, finding nothing to do, and no intrusions from the docile natives, went to sleep.

In the leaf-thatched hut Mr. Oliver entertained his visitors; and very civilised-looking black fellows in white suits waited at table.

The sun went down, lamps were lighted, and the punka fans waved to and fro. Fireflies flitted outside, and strange insects hummed. Night fell with great swiftness, and the talk turned to Captain Digby, about whom Mr. Oliver had much to say, and many interesting yarns.

"So the old man died rich!" said Oliver, raising his glass to the light and blinking at its pleasant colour.

"Middlin'," replied Ben.

"Only middling! Why, his books must have been worth a little fortune. A tireless collector. He showed me one or two."

"Them collected things is never worth much!" growled Ben.

"That depends on the collector—Captain Digby had specimens that would command almost any price," corrected Mr. Oliver. "He showed me one, a Spanish version of an old Bible that was most precious, but he would never tell me where he got it."

Ben winked at the lads, and they remembered the story of a Bible with a chain that Uncle Digby sailed off with.

"He used to say," continued Mr. Oliver, "that he would be able to leave you lads very well off indeed, and promised he would bring you to these parts to see me, and very likely he would be coming under steam, in his own yacht."

"We've got a motor aboard the Saucy Ann," said Ben proudly. "I suppose the gov'nor didn't by any chance talk of having any money set by—secret like?"

"He was rather mysterious in his manner when he was last here, and behaved—oddly."

Ben gave a swift look at the boys, and continued:

"Behaved oddly, sir! In what way?"

"He shunned everybody—went inland alone. There was no mission station here in those days. I used to come and go in my river-boat. I well remember his borrowing several shovels, and I was puzzled to know what use he could possibly make of them. But if, as you say, he dumped a cargo hereabouts, that explains it."

"Did he land any—er—boxes, sir?"

"Let me think—I don't remember."

They all sighed, and looked wistfully out into the blue night in the direction of the mountain. Far away, Bob saw a light flash out—a torch—and then it disappeared. From another quarter a second flare, and that disappeared, too.

"Natives reside on the mountain-side, sir," observed Bob.

"No, no," answered Mr. Oliver; "it is sacred to the remains of dead sacrifice."

"I saw lights moving," said Bob.

"Don't say that! Don't tell me that! It's a bad sign."

"Why?"

"Moving lights are signals in these parts. The rascals are always up to mischief of some sort when lights begin to move. They tell me they are restless spirits—not lights—but I know better."

Mr. Oliver walked out on to the veranda and grunted some more when he, too, saw the lights moving. He ran round the hut and came back angry.

"As I suspected, some of my boys have taken French leave and are missing. I hope none of your crew have ventured ashore—where they shouldn't go."

"They're all here, 'cept Dummy, and he's asleep," replied Ben.

"That's well. It must be some inland tribesmen on the mountain, trespassing, just to provoke my lads to show fight."

"Sort o' trailin' the tails o' their coats!" chuckled Ben.

"The other way round. I can't think what they're up to—unless—unless someone is being buried."

"Buried!" cried the boys with sharp interest.

"A death," explained the missionary, with a sigh. "They ought to report it to me, but—well—deaths occur suddenly, and I'm not told."

"Why suddenly, sir?"

"It is their old religion, and I can't preach it out of them. On certain days the mountain demands a sacrifice, but, for the life of me, I can never find out the dates. I have my suspicion that on days when the sun sets in a certain quarter and tips the white tip with red it is interpreted as a demand for blood—that is their devilish creed. For preference the blood of one of my converts!"

"Don't your people make a fight for it, sir?" asked Bob indignantly.

"It is done by stealth. But the god of the mountain loves best a white man for sacrifice; but up till now they've left me alone. I work magic in my hospital, you see. I have chloroform, and can kill men and cut off a maimed limb, and restore to life again! If I can do that to others, what might I not do to myself? I bear a charmed life."

"Me and the lads is going to the mountain to-morrow, sir," said Ben. "I may as well own up, sir, that the last mound out there is—a stumer."

"A what?"

"A dud, sir. It's not bones, but just mother-o'-pearl, and we've come to open it. And we're looking to you for the loan of a spade or two and some baskets!"

"Heavens, no! You would be slaughtered and eaten."

"We'd like to see 'em do it!" chuckled Fatty. "We've come prepared for that; we can put up a fight all right."

"Nothing of the sort!" cried the missionary excitedly. "An army couldn't do it."

"Not at night?" suggested Goggles.

"At night there are eyes on the mountain. At night things happen."

As he spoke a faint, wailing cry came out of the dark; then another; then another.

"Are those hyenas?" asked Fatty innocently.

Mr. Oliver rushed to the wall, and took down a gun, and went out on to the veranda. Lights could now be seen dancing afar off, but all coming to a central point, converging. And now the faint beat of distant tom-toms.

"What is it, sir?" asked Ben, looking wistfully and anxiously at the other guns hanging on the wall.

"Sacrifice!" groaned the missionary, coming back and setting down his gun as he dropped into a chair in despair. "I thought it was an attack. Just sacrifice, confound them, and under my very eyes! Must my life's work be always in vain? Will I never conquer?"

"Who is being sacrificed, sir?" asked Bob.

"Don't ask. Lower the reed curtains! Don't look, I am powerless—powerless after years of heart-breaking work!"

The unhappy missionary looked very near to tears. The curtains were lowered; but not before the boys had looked out. And they saw more torches and a roaring fire on the slope of mountain.

Foxy's Fate.

FOXEY had waited on board until the stars came out.

He saw lights in the mission station, and could detect, through its open sides, the forms of visitors, seated. They were all enjoying themselves, and too much

occupied at that moment to be thinking about treasure hunting.

What fools!

Dummy was now snoring. Foxy crept out, and over the ship's side, and took cover on the wharf. From there he made his way, creeping, until he was in the mission enclosure.

He began to crawl around. His object was to secure a spade, or some implement with which to attack the mound, and burrow inside—to the treasure.

He found what he wanted in a tool-shed, and took his bearings in the dark. Every yard was covered at a crawl, sometimes on hands and knees.

But others can crawl and not be seen. Black skins are invisible in the dark. A half-clad native, lying on guard outside the gate, was almost stepped on and not seen. Once outside the enclosure, Foxy went more boldly on his way, until he had to climb the high fence of the stockade.

The nigger climbed, too, and trailed him, as silent as a panther, until Foxy got so far that the fellow began to quake for his own safety—the white sailor was going where even Mr. Oliver dared not go. He was making for sacred ground.

A faint wail went up, and Foxy started.

"Jackals," muttered Foxy. "I've got my knife and my axe and my spade—they won't touch me!"

The cry was echoed—and echoed—and travelled.

"All over the place!" muttered Foxy nervously.

Lights had no meaning for him, and they were far away. But the howlings faded out when the lights started.

Further and further inland, till he struck a path between rocks and came upon a mound with a stake in it, and a skull on the top. Foxy struck a light and looked for the cross cut in the stake. Not this one. He moved further to the right until he found what he sought. The whitened skull on the top of the stake stared down at him with sightless eyes and made him shudder. But this was no time for fear.

He attacked the mound. The lightest covering of earth gave way, and the spade went clattering in the heap of shells. Fiercer and wilder his shovelling. The gleaming discs rattled and slithered and slipped aside, and he went deeper and deeper in.

After a pause he again attacked, and reckoned he was somewhere near the middle. He gave a deeper lunge, and the spade struck something hard and solid.

In his excitement he almost shrieked his glee.

"At last!"

His shovelling made so much noise that he heard nothing else, and never suspected others might be near. He lunged to the right, and

..... **ON SALE TO-DAY!**

Have you seen this week's issue of the BOYS' REALM?

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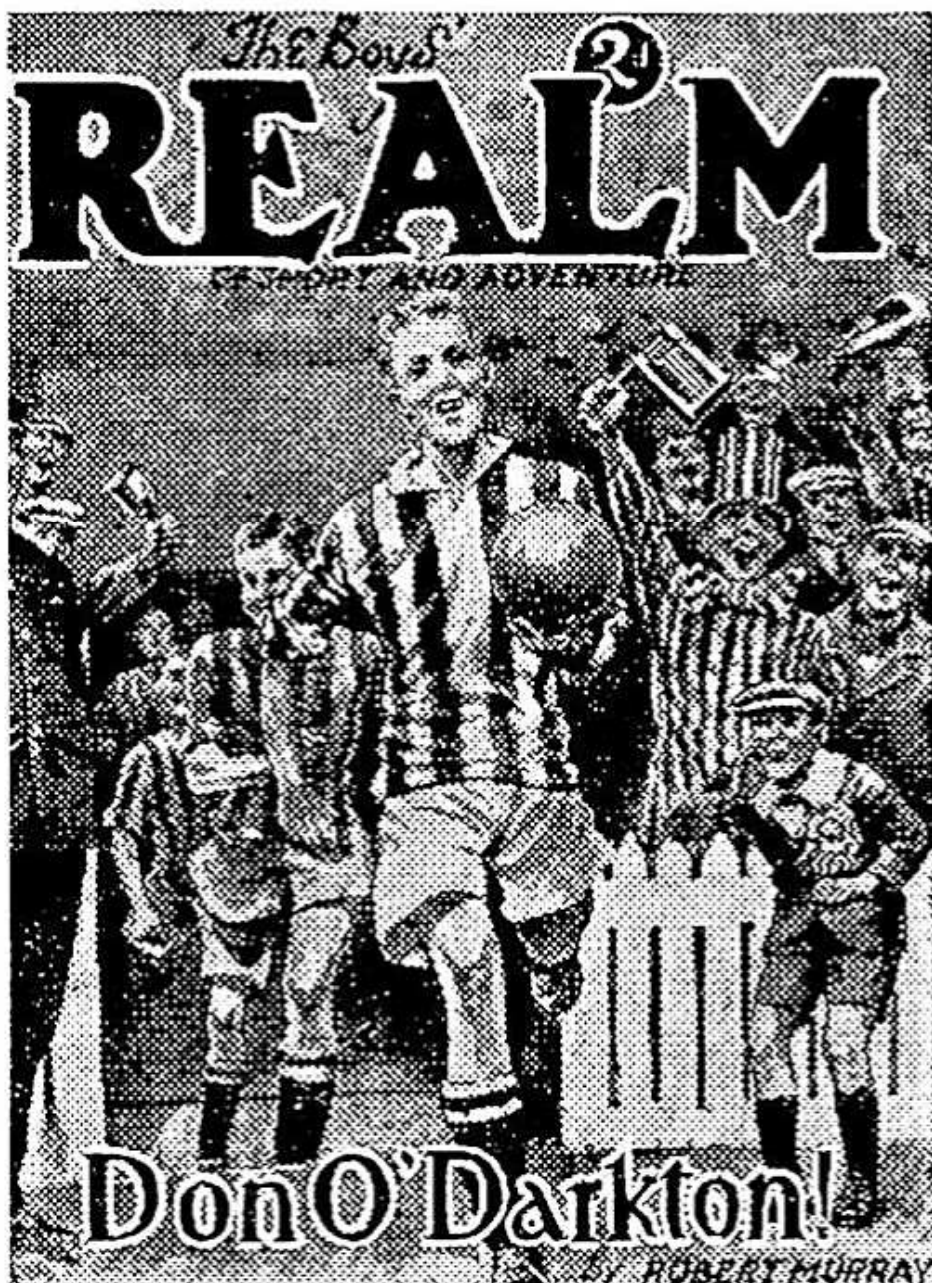
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..... **EVERY WEDNESDAY—PRICE TWOPENCE**

all was soft and movable. He lunged to the left, and nothing there. In the centre once again—and—a thud.

Wood!

He fondly imagined he had struck and located the Spanish chest—but it was only the bottom of the long stake around which the shells had been heaped. When that was apparent he cursed, and struck a light to make sure.

Something leaped upon him—and he yelled. The light had lasted long enough to reveal a dozen faces rising from the ground all round his feet—hands and arms and glistening eyes and spears!

The spears were raised to the accompaniment of a yell of hate. He fell, pierced by a dozen shafts.

Death was swift.

The torches were coming nearer, with tom-toms beating, and savages were dancing in the gloom. More and more torches. Stealthy backsliders from civilisation were creeping out from the Mission Village. The white medicine man was feasting with his friends—why should not black men feast as well?

When they found the desecrated bones in the cairn turned to shells they scented magic, and wished they had tortured their victim.

But it was too late; Foxey was dead.

The Treasure Found!

AFTER a peaceful night in the Mission Station the adventurers held a council of war to decide upon the next, and—what they knew to be—the most dangerous step.

But Mr. Oliver was abroad; and slinking, repentant savages were crawling back one by one, pretending that all was as usual. He selected one, the most pious of his converts, and called him to his feet. The wretch squirmed and crawled when he saw a long knife in the hands of the fat white medicine man.

"Tell me, or I will kill you, and cut off your hands, and bring you to life again!"

"Oh, massa—it was not me!"

"Whom did they kill?"

"Wicked man—white man—magic man. He turn bones to shells."

"White man! What white man?"

The nigger pointed to the Saucy Ann.

"Good heavens!" shouted the missionary, running indoors with the news.

"Dummy!" they all cried at once when they heard, and made a race to the ship.

But when they got there they found Dummy climbing out of the open hatchway of the hold, making angry signs and pointing down,

and dancing about in rage. He flourished a cap, Foxey's cap, and a coat.

They saw it all in a flash—it was Foxey who had outwitted them once more—and perished.

A return to the Mission Station was made after a talk, and a clean confession and explanation given to Mr. Oliver.

"Why didn't you tell me the truth at first?" he cried. "I could have told our headman, and if the mound only contained shells they would have demolished it for you!"

"Let's have the headman in, sir!" cried Ben. "The chest is there, and Foxey knew, and found it."

"Perhaps," added Bob.

"Well, let's see."

There was much palaver now, and a tribal chieftain was fetched in after some delay. He came in full war paint and feathers, defiant and shameless. Justice had been done, and no white medicine man could complain.

When told of the dump of shells he was convinced of the absence of magic. It was a pity; but what was, was, and the mischief could not be undone.

Mr. Oliver and his guests accepted an invitation to inspect the mound. And there they saw, to their discomfort and dismay, nothing but shells.

Sorrow for the hapless Foxey was eclipsed by their abject disappointment. This quest was foolish. It led nowhere, and produced nothing but despair.

"We'd better go home," Goggles announced, with a sigh of sad resignation.

"We had that," Ben agreed.

"Yes, let's get a move on; we're only wasting time and money," added Bob.

"If you ask me," said Mr. Oliver, "your uncle's mind was probably unhinged; and there wasn't any treasure at all. He was certainly very odd in his manner the last time I saw him, and ridiculously cock-a-whoop and satisfied with himself. But what seemed to occupy his mind most was his books. He was sane enough when it came to his book collection."

"Books!" sneered Ben. "He never troubled to read a book them last few months."

"Ah, but his interest in them was extraordinary. The last time we had a talk about his collection he showed me one in Latin," said Mr. Oliver, "and it had an inscription in it 'From Regina to Louis Philippe.' He had an idea that it was the signature of a queen, and the book three hundred years old."

"Bah!" growled Ben, and he spat his contempt. "I've heard that sort o' talk. He'd buy a Bradshaw if it was only an old one, and kid himself as it was the first one ever printed."

"Did the lawyer sell his library when he died?" asked Mr. Oliver. "If he didn't I should like that book—if it has no value—as a memento of my old friend. It was in my line—a Bible."

"You shall have it, sir, if we can find it at home. Nothing has been sold," said Bob.

"You have been very kind, and helped us back to common sense."

"I'll see that you have it, sir," added Fatty.

"If it has no value," said Goggles cautiously, "I should like to see that book, and get an expert opinion on it."

After much more talk and some differences of opinion, it was decided to give up the quest. It was bitter to be fooled this way; but better to accept defeat than continue a wild-goose chase. There was the future to think of; and the expense; and Mr. Endersleigh's orders that the boys were not to spend more than a certain amount of time and money in their quest, but think about earning a livelihood instead of spending what little capital that remained.

At last farewells were said. The Saucy Ann turned for home.

It was a long journey, for they touched at many ports on the way, including Teredos, where they visited Madame Rima again, and told her the truth about the captain's death—about everything, for there was no need for concealment now.

She was full of sympathy, and, at the mention of the box of books in the hold, grew sentimental.

"Oh, the good capitaine, I would like a book to remember him by!"

"There are plenty in the box we got from you, madame," said Bob politely. "We will bring you one—or several for you to choose from."

The boys once more opened the hated box on their return to the boat, and clawed out three volumes, and dropped the lid again.

"Let her have 'em all; they're no use to us," said Bob as he flung the volumes up to Fatty on deck.

As Fatty caught at the last one he only got it by the cover, and the inside fell out on the deck.

"This one is rotten and falling to pieces!" Fatty cried, as he picked up the bits. "And it's in Latin—and here's a letter in uncle's handwriting."

The others came round to read the missive, which proved to be only the beginning of a letter. Anything in uncle's writing still had a vital interest for them. Goggles read it aloud.

"Dear Mr. Somersby,—This is the fellow of the book I showed you, and will do for a beginning. It is intact, though faded and a little rotten. The sea-water got at it, but all the others—fifty of them—are perfect. I expected Spanish gold and found only books; but books worth more than their weight in gold, as you well know. This and most of the others are from Caxton's press, and will make such a stir in the world that, if they were sold in one day, they would create a record."

"As you advise, I shall set a bed-rock reserve of five thousand pounds on each

book, knowing very well each is worth more, and some double that. I am following your advice. I shall produce them one at a time, when I feel a little better in health. My heart and head are very bad, and—I forget what I write——”

Here the letter broke off.

“Five thousand pounds for a book!” cried Fatty.

“Five thousand pounds, and fifty of ’em!” cried Bob.

“Five thousand pounds for fifty——” Goggles began, and broke off to rush to the hold, crying: “Let’s have a look at ’em. This was his Spanish treasure, and we’ve had it on board all the time! Books, not gold! Books! Let’s go down!”

Ben looked on with mild surprise to see the lads playing follow-my-leader, and actually leaping down into the hold like madmen, risking their necks and dropping with ugly thuds.

“Ere, d’ye want to knock the bottom out of the ship?” he yelled down.

From above he saw the lads emptying the box of its precious load of books—printed three hundred or more years ago—and saved from loss and decay by being sealed up and buried at the bottom of the sea. This chest of books had been sent by Queen Mary to Louis Philippe of Spain as a precious gift—precious even in those days, but absolutely priceless now.

The letter to the famous auctioneer and dealer in valuable books had been written—and never finished—at the time the captain’s health gave way. Ill health and excitement had unhinged his mind. He left his books at Madame Rima’s and brought one home to show to the London dealer. On learning that he had rescued a fortune from the sea, the excitement had resulted in an attack that left him minus his memory.

When the lads climbed up to tell Ben, and dance round him, and shriek with glee and shout “hooray,” and inform him that the quest was ended, and a fortune for all of them lay at the bottom of the hold, the old seaman shook his head sadly.

“Books!” he sighed. “I allus told you there was a curse on this ship. First your uncle went dotty on books, and now it’s got you lads as well. There weren’t no books ever printed as was worth more than ’arf-a-crown, though I admit there’s some silly folks as’ll pay more.”

“Rare books, Ben—old books!”

“Why should old books be worth more’n new ones?” he demanded.

“They’re rare, priceless. America sometimes pays fifty thousand pounds for a rare book—a Bible.”

“A Bible!” cried Ben scornfully. “And they gives ’em away to the niggers in these parts, they’re that cheap.”

“But these are hundreds of years old!” Goggles insisted.

“And more’n ’arf rotten!” growled Ben. “Well, all I can say is, your poor old uncle weren’t the only man in the world whose brain was turned soft by books. Seems there’s plenty of others.”

“Anyway, America will go mad about them!” cried Goggles. “We’ve got to hurry home with our precious cargo.”

“What’s your hurry?” growled Ben. “Books ain’t like bananas, they don’t go mouldy on a journey.”

“We can’t wait for the Saucy Ann to make the voyage,” said Bob. “We daren’t trust her.” And the others agreed.

“You mean as the old ship ain’t good enough for you!” cried Ben aggrieved.

“Not fast enough, Ben. A steamer, a liner; we’re off home by the next big ship!”

“And what about me?” asked Ben.

“You must get together a good crew and come after—at your leisure.”

“Ah, you don’t want me any more!” muttered Ben, with an odd choke in his voice.

“That’s where you’re wrong, Ben!” cried Bob, slapping him on the back. “You’re ours for ever!”

“You’ve no need for me now,” sighed Ben, drawing a sleeve across one eye. “I don’t know nothing ’bout books!”

“Buck up, Ben!” cried Fatty, giving him another slap. “The Saucy Ann will still be wanted at home by us millionaires! Of course, we shall buy a steam yacht presently and you can be skipper. But the Saucy Ann will never be sold in our time.”

“Unless we give it to Ben as a birthday present,” suggested Goggles. “What about that?”

“Hooray, splendid!” the others cried. “Great idea!”

“Ain’t you countin’ your chickens afore they’re hatched?” asked Ben nervously.

“No, we’ve counted our books, and we’re rich for ever, and our fortune’s made.”

“Well I hope so. We’ll look up the steamer sailin’s. I reckon you’ll have to wait a week or two yet.”

“We can bear that, Ben. You shall take us in YOUR SHIP, the Saucy Ann, part of the way.”

“My ship—the Saucy Ann! Mine?” cried Ben a little dazed.

“Yours and Martha’s.”

“Well—I—never!” gasped Ben, unable to realise it all at once, and too overcome to say thank you.

“Walk about and have a look at it, Ben,” said Bob, with a wink at the others; “we’ve got to go below and have a better look at our bananas, and see that they are snugly packed and don’t go mouldy on the trip.”

Ben walked away, dazed at his good fortune, and the lads returned to an examination of their treasure in the hold, to gloat over it and gingerly handle the wonderful old books.

Afterwards they cleared out Foxey’s rat-hole, and came upon those gruesome relics,

(Continued on page 44.)

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION

FORM No. 49.
SECTION
A
READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

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 that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE 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 the Membership Number assigned to me, and **Membership Badge**.

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."

(FULL NAME)

(ADDRESS)

INSTRUCTIONS.

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. 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, bearing the same number, are needed. 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 that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver or gold medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B. 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 1d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

A FEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE.

You can write to fellow members living at home or in the most distant outposts of the Empire.

You are offered free advice on choosing a trade or calling, and on emigration to the colonies and dependencies.

If you want to form a sports or social club, you can do so amongst local members of the League.

You are offered free hints on holidays, whether walking, biking, or camping.

You can qualify for the various awards by promoting the growth of the League.

If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

THE CHIEF OFFICER'S CHAT

All **LETTERS** in reference to the League should be addressed to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4. Any enquiries which need an immediate answer should be accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope.

Popularity of the Badge.

Perhaps you can imagine the sense of relief I feel—and gratification—that we have got everything in train at last. I cannot help thinking of the numberless suggestions which reached me concerning the real need of a Badge for everybody connected with the League.

Since May last, when we started our grand new series of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, I have had more letters than ever couched in urgent terms. I am bound to admit the writers had hit the target. They saw what was needed. I hope to hear that the design of the Badge and the general turn-out meet with universal approval.

Hooray For Australia!

Stan H. Wheatley, Livestock Offices, South Australian Railways, Adelaide, sends me a nailing fine letter about the land where the kangaroo hops. I think he has the wrong granter by the ear, though, in his supposition that over here we have scant knowledge of what Australia is.

Real cricketers understand that it is not all jam with a hard wicket at the Antipodes. He also thinks that Australia should be associated in everybody's mind with its grand football game. Quite so! This correspondent is a League member who will do much.

An Up-to-Date Club.

An interesting letter reaches me from Percy Young, 122a, Wavertree Road, Edge Hill,

Liverpool. This Organising Officer has been able to establish a splendid St. Frank's League Club, with a half-size billiard-table, card-tables, chairs and other equipment for a social club. A magazine is being started with a story of St. Frank's in prehistoric times.

My correspondent says:

"It is to be hoped that other clubs will follow suit, and put all troubles and drawbacks to one side as we have done, and do their utmost for the St. Frank's League. 'If at first you don't succeed try again,' as the good old adage has it. It all comes right in the long run. What is the good of anything if you don't have a bit of a fight to get it?"

I can let these sentiments go without further comment. They hit the target with a bang.

A Canadian Chum.

The other day a right welcome visitor blew into my office. He was H. P. Williamson, 20, Vendome Avenue, Montreal, and he just came to tell me that he was a heart and soul believer in the St. Frank's League, and the NELSON LEE LIBRARY. He had worked his passage over to England. He had only one day in London, so I took it as a particular compliment that he called on me. He spent a week in Antwerp. My special job was to run him up a short itinerary so that he should see as much as possible of London in the few hours he had to spare. I was glad enough to do it, too.

Correspondents Wanted!

Allen Neilson, Hassall Street, Harris Park, New South Wales, Australia, asks readers and League members in the Parramatta and Harris Park districts to communicate with him.

Miss Kitty M. Brownbill, 8, Chapman Street, New Mile End, South Australia, wants to find a correspondent who understands German.

William T. Murphy, 356, Heidelberg Road, Ivanhoe, Victoria, Australia, wishes to hear from readers in England, France, and Africa who are interested in soccer and cricket.

Hee. McFarlane, Wullumulla Street, Glen Innes, N.S.W., Australia, wishes to hear from members.

Miss J. L. Lane, 13, Gladstone Road, Walton, Liverpool, wishes to hear from a stamp collector in Montreal; interested in photography and exploring.

Maurice A. Noakes (1015), 196, 18th Avenue, Lachine, Quebec, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers in India, Australia, and South Africa.

H. C. Wileman, 4, Grove Park West, Colwyn Bay, North Wales, wishes to correspond with readers in Australia interested in cricket and football.

J. J. Lawrence, 419a, Fox Street, Fairview, Johannesburg, Transvaal, wishes to correspond with readers in New Zealand and Rhodesia.

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See reproduction on page 11.

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A stamped addressed envelope should be enclosed, and applicants should mark their letters "BADGES" in the top left-hand corner.



(Continued from page 41.)

the mummified head and hands of the Spanish traitor, which they threw overboard.

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