

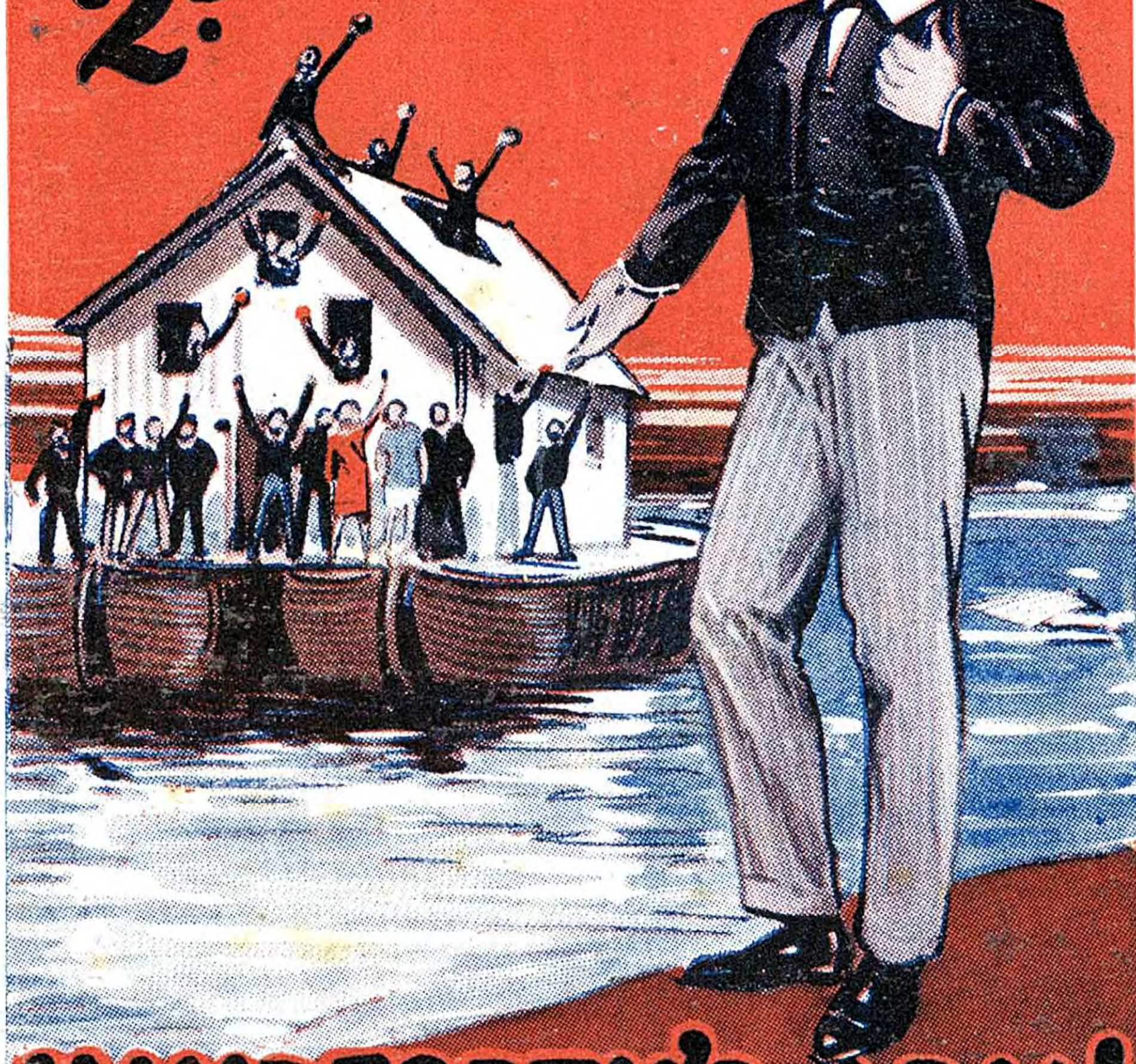
SCHOOLBOY
ADVENTURE!

THRILLS AT FLOODED ST. FRANK'S!

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HANDFORTH'S ARK!

CHEATING THE FLOODS! THE LATEST STARTLING EXPLOIT OF
THE FAMOUS BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S!



As Willy Handforth and his chums, in their home-made paddle-boat, came towards the seaplane, the pilot stepped out of the cockpit. A shout went up as the juniors recognised him. Nelson Lee had returned to the flooded school.

Cut Off by Floods!The Schoolboy Refugees

HANDFORTH'S ARK!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

*A stirring, long complete yarn of fun and
adventure at flood-bound St. Frank's.*

CHAPTER 1.

THE STRANDED SCHOOLBOYS!

"WHAT," asked Archie Glenthorne, "is this?"

"Oatmeal fritter—my special recipe!" said Fatty Little proudly.

"Good gad! Kindly remove it!"

"You ass! It's my triumph!" roared Fatty.

The genial ass of the St. Frank's Remove jammed his monocle firmly into his eye, surveyed the abomination more closely, and shuddered.

"It reminds me of the family ghost!" he said distastefully. "It has the same pasty, mottled complexion. Take it away, laddie, and lay it! All self-respecting ghosts must be laid!"

"You funny chump!" snorted Fatty Little. "Is this all the thanks I get for frying you

one of my specials? I'll jolly well eat it myself unless you make up your mind!"

Archie averted his eyes.

"The old mind is already riveted!" he declared. "In fact, dash it, it's so securely fixed that I might say that it's bolted and padlocked! The odour of this foul atrocity offends me!"

The fat junior was offended, too. He had taken a particular pride in that fritter, and it hurt him to hear these disparaging remarks. In his eyes, it was a thing of beauty.

"That's done it!" he said indignantly. "After this, you can prepare your own grub, or starve! I fried that fritter in oil—real oil!"

"I believe you, old fright—absolutely," said Archie feebly.

"I'll admit it wasn't proper frying oil, but we can't be too particular at a time like this," went on Fatty, with warmth. "Handforth found it—a brand-new can of bicycle

oil, stuffed away in his bed-room cupboard! The only trouble is, it's burning oil—and I usually find lubricating oil better for frying purposes. Still——"

He paused. Archie was making pitiful signals of distress. The elegant junior, in fact, rose from his bed, draped a blanket round him, and staggered off to the nearest bathroom.

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Fatty, staring. "The poor chap must be ill! I take the trouble to bring him his breakfast in bed, knowing what a lazy-bones he is, and he scorns my prize fritter!"

And Fatty, thoroughly incensed, proceeded to demolish the delicacy himself.

St. Frank's was just shaking itself up for the day. And St. Frank's, to be exact, was not quite its usual self. Instead of being surrounded by picturesque grounds, playing-fields, and grassy meadows, it was entirely surrounded by water.

The flood had got the old school in its grip, and the inhabitants were hopelessly stranded. Nobody quite remembered when the deluge had taken place; the date seemed remote. Nobody even troubled about the day of the week. Food, perhaps, was the weightiest problem which exercised most minds, with the thought of escaping from the flood area a good second.

Considering the nature of the general breakfast which had just been demolished, the boys were justified, perhaps, in their anxiety. For that breakfast had consisted of plain flour-and-water dough, baked or boiled over bed-room fires, without salt or leaven of any kind. As an alternative, there was oatmeal gruel, or whole-wheat porridge.

The boys consumed this diet eagerly and ravenously, for, after all, nobody could deny the unquestionable fact that it was wholesome food, if somewhat indigestible. The only trouble about it was that it lacked variety. And after one or two dumplings or stodgy pancakes, the stuff seemed to lose its original appeal.

"All the same, it's grub," declared Dick Hamilton, the popular captain of the Remove. "It may be plain——"

"It is plain!" put in Tommy Watson.

"It may be unpalatable, but we're at least saved from the shadow of starvation," continued Dick smoothly. "And as the stuff is only a sort of stopgap, we can face the future with calm stoicism. To-day, my sons, we're going to make things hum."

Reggie Pitt, of the West House, sniffed the air.

"If you ask me, things are humming pretty badly already," he remarked. "What's this niff of cart-grease, mingled with hair-oil, paraffin, and colza? Who's perpetrating this dastardly offence?"

Fullwood grinned.

"It's only Fatty, making some of his special messes," he chuckled. "There's no end to the ingenuity of that chap! What a cook!"

"Exactly," agreed Reggie, "with the accent on the 'what'!"

"He can't help it—it comes natural to him," continued Fullwood. "He uses anything, too—he's not a bit particular. Personally, I'd rather stick to the plain oatmeal porridge, or the stodgy dumplings."

"Breakfast's over now, and Fatty's indulging in some of his fancy work," remarked Reggie. "He made a special fritter for Archie, but I hear that Archie turned it down."

"That's just as well," said Fullwood. "I only just rescued my tooth-paste in the nick of time. That fat horror wanted to use it for peppermint flavouring!"

"That's nothing!" said Watson. "I caught him running off with my pot of vaseline. Said it would do fine for frying! And Dick Goodwin only just rescued his tin of soldering flux by a hair's-breadth. Fatty wanted it for shortening his pastry."

"There's no end to his activities!" put in De Valerie. "Remember those pancakes he gave us, with an almond flavouring? He'd used my pot of brown boot cream, if you please!"

"If we're not all poisoned, it'll be a wonder!" grinned Reggie. "After this, I'm going to stick to the plainest of plain diet. Somehow, I've got a flavour of zam-buk hanging round my mouth. It wouldn't be a bad idea to change our cook!"

Fatty, of course, had appointed himself sole chief of the commissariat for the Remove. The task fell to him naturally, as his reputation as a chef was well established. But he needed to be watched. When he was short of the recognised ingredients, he had no compunction about utilising the most fantastic substitutes.

But, anyhow, breakfast had been successfully negotiated in the Ancient House. Stomachs were feeling slightly weighty, perhaps, but appetites were appeased, and the fellows were ready for the rigours of another day.



CHAPTER 2.

ARCHIE SEES DOUBLE!

THE flood had engulfed St. Frank's with dramatic completeness.

After a solid week of pelting rain, the great Pine Hill reservoir had burst its south wall, and the Stowe valley had been converted into a wilderness of water and debris. St. Frank's, full in the path of the flood, had become half submerged.

The flood waters were swirling and eddying only a few feet below the level of the dormitory windows. The old Triangle was a lake—the squares and Inner Court were smaller lakes. And the entire district round about the school was like an inland sea.

There had been plenty of excitement since the disaster had burst upon the school.

In the first place, there were no masters. Not a single House of St. Frank's had a man within its walls, and even the prefects

were missing. All had been called away during afternoon lessons on the day of the catastrophe—in a futile attempt to stave off the danger. And thus St. Frank's had been caught napping, as it were. The school was marooned utterly, and none of the masters had been able to get near since.

Even Phipps, Archie's faithful valet, had become separated from his young master. And the elegant junior was, in consequence, just drifting through life in a dazed condition of helplessness and misery. Without his trusty Phipps, he was like a dog without a tail.

The first twenty-four hours had been the worst, for during those anxious hours the flood had been rising, a fearful hurricane had raged throughout the night, and the school had found itself without a morsel of food. The girls of the Moor View School, too, had been in the utmost peril, and the Remove had valiantly undertaken the task of rescuing them. The girls, with two mistresses, were now in full occupation of the West House. And the normal West House inhabitants were crowding upon their Ancient House colleagues.

Finding that no help came from the outer world, the boys had faced the situation pluckily. Dick Hamilton, perhaps, was the fellow who had done most to keep everybody calm and collected. In this emergency, the school had conducted itself in a way that upheld all the fine old traditions of St. Frank's.

For all the sight of other humanity they saw, they might as well have been on a lonely Pacific island. They were deserted—cut off—marooned in the midst of this watery waste, with the strong, swirling currents of the swollen river forming a barrier between them and outer civilisation.

A great raft had been built, and many sacks of flour and oatmeal had been rescued from the flooded mill on the outskirts of Bellton. Thus the school was saved from starvation. But none could deny that the position was still bad. They couldn't continue on that frugal diet for long, and the main thought was to get away, out of the flood zone altogether.

Fortunately, there were plenty of fires going. The debris that came drifting down the current was useful. Much of it was serviceable as fuel—hen-coops, sheds, planks, and a hundred-and-one other wooden scraps of flotsam and jetsam. The majority of these articles drifted irresistibly into West Square. There was some hidden eddy which caused the stuff to swirl round and entrap itself in the square.

Certain juniors were told off to rescue all this fuel, to carry it indoors, and dry it in front of the existing fires. And so there was a constant supply. The fellows took it in turns to do these duties, and the other Houses were allotted their equal share.

It was now eight o'clock in the morning, and fellows were thinking about the big raft, and the possibilities of getting away. The flood was still at its high level, although

many prophets were declaring that it would soon begin to drop. Rain was no longer falling. The March morning, in fact, was sunny and pleasant. But for the ever-present desolation of the flood, everything would have been very cheery this morning.

"Well, Nipper, what's the programme?" asked Pitt. "You're the commander-in-chief, and—"

"Rats!" said Dick Hamilton, frowning. "We're all in the same boat, and we're all pulling together. We'd better bring the Majestic out of dock, and get her ready for her trans-Atlantic trip. The idea is to take a load of girls to Bannington, isn't it?"

"And a jolly good idea, too," said Pitt stoutly. "Who would imagine a nicer cargo?"

"Don't rot, old son," said Nipper. "We talk very glibly about using the raft to rescue the school, but it won't be so easy. There are three or four hundred of us, and if we can only take twenty at a time, and the return trip occupies four hours, where are we? Just figure it out!"

Reggie scratched his chin.

"H'm! We shall be getting somewhere near to Christmas!" he said.

"Somewhere into next week, anyhow!" growled Nipper. "I think we had better confine ourselves to the girls alone, and see them safely on to dry land. The rest of us ought to stick to St. Frank's to the bitter end."

"Personally, I was hoping that the end would be sweet," said Pitt. "I don't quite like that 'bitter end' stuff. It sounds pessimistic. You're not anticipating a general collapse, are you? The flood isn't undermining the foundations, I hope?"

But Nipper was thinking. He took no notice of Reggie's characteristic jocularities. Such pleasantries were hardly in tune with the situation.

In the meantime, Archie Glen thorpe was taking his morning air. This was a rite which Phipps had never allowed him to miss. Ten minutes' stroll in the Triangle had been, as Archie expressed it, just what the doctor ordered. But although Archie was quite keen on that morning stroll, he saw no reason why he should take to swimming as a substitute. There was certainly no other method of perambulating the Triangle at the present time.

So Archie took the only alternative, and went out on the roof.

At this place it was flat, and made an excellent exercising ground. Archie took several turns round, and then considered that it was time for a brief rest. He leaned against the stone parapet, gazing pensively at the flood. A waft of oily odour came up from a lower window, and he started as though he had been stung by a hornet.

"Good gad!" he gasped, reeling away.

He recognised that odour, and a momentary vision of Fatty Little's "special fritter" came before his mind's eye. Archie felt that his spine had turned into jelly, and the

middle section of his person was revolving round and round.

He went to the other side of the roof, and breathed in several mouthfuls of the fresh morning breeze. Then he started. His eyeglass dropped out of his eye, and he stared glassily across the flood.

"Odds tragedies and horrors!" he murmured, aghast. "I feared as much! That frightful stuff has impaired the good old health. The pride of the Glenthornes is absolutely seeing things!"

He was gazing across the paddock, his attention being riveted upon the big barn which stood just beyond the corner of the playing-fields. That barn was a well-known landmark, and it had been three-parts submerged by the ever-rising floods.

But it seemed to Archie that the barn had taken on a drunken list to starboard. And even as he watched it, it seemed to heel over still more. Archie shook his head, groped for his monocle, and jammed it in, and stared again.

It made no difference—the barn was still behaving in a fashion that no self-respecting barn should. Unless Archie was mistaken, the thing was absolutely inclined to be tipsy.



CHAPTER 3.

TROUBLE WITH MISS BROOME!

ARCHIE gave himself a vigorous shake.

"No, it's just the same!" he said despairingly. "The dashed old

barn appears to be reeling somewhat. Of course, it isn't. I mean to say, barns don't dash about in floods, executing the good old Charleston! Absolutely not! It's me, dash it! Good gad, it's absolutely me!"

For a tragic moment, Archie believed that the recent flood had impaired his balance. It was so obvious. There was the barn, a solid wooden structure, with a thatched roof, reeling over until it was many degrees out of the perpendicular.

And then Archie started again—more violently still.

"Odds mysteries and puzzles!" he ejaculated hoarsely. "The old eyesight is doing the dirty on me! Absolutely and unquestionably, the dirty! It's a bit thick when a chappie's optical department turns on him, as it were, and positively bites him!"

The barn was perfectly level now—as staid and sedate as ever. Archie gulped, polished his eyeglass, put it in his eye again, and wondered what he would see now. He wouldn't have been very surprised if the barn had assumed an upside-down position.

But there it was—quite normal.

"Of course, it's the eyes," said Archie, looking desperately across the flood in the direction of Bannington. "Phipps, old life-saver, where are you? I mean to say, how can the young master proceed without your choice and juicy advice? And, dash it,

there isn't a doctor in the place!" he added, coming down to practical affairs. "The next thing will be, so to speak, blindness. If a chappie's eyes shove the half-nelson on him without the slightest warning, they're liable to— What-ho! I knew it!" he added hopelessly. "They're dashed well at it again!"

The barn was still there—still in full sight—but it wasn't where it ought to have been. The startled Archie could easily see this. He knew for an absolute fact that the barn had never been within a mere six feet of the sports pavilion!

Reggie Pitt came up, and rubbed his hands cheerily.

"Ripping morning!" he observed. "You've got good judgment, Archie—"

"One moment, laddie!" interrupted Archie Glenthorne. "Kindly flow to this side of the good old battlements. Be good enough to pour yourself in this direction, laddie!"

Reggie obligingly poured himself.

"Fine!" he said. "There's better air here—"

"You frightful ass!" interrupted Archie. "Be good enough to corroborate a ghastly fear of mine. Is the dashed barn where it ought to be, or is the dashed barn not? That, I mean, is the question."

Reginald Pitt looked, started, and grinned.

"As a matter of fact, the dashed barn isn't," he replied.

"Isn't!"

"The dashed barn is wandering into the playing-fields," continued Reggie. "Got tired of the flood, I expect, and pulled up its foundations in disgust. I don't blame it—I'd do the same myself, if I could."

"Then it's all right?" asked Archie, in great relief. "The good old eyes haven't been playing draughts with me? I mean to say, I'm not buffed?"

"Nothing to worry about at all, old man," grinned Pitt. "I'm seeing the same as you're seeing, so you can dismiss all those hard, cruel, sinister suspicions about poor old Fatty!"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I was beginning to fear that Fatty's culinary atrocities had impaired the mental balance," confessed Archie. "I don't mind admitting, old top that I'm somewhat ripely relieved. Absolutely! I can ooze below in comfort now, and seek the good old couch."

Archie wandered off, much happier in mind. Reggie was still watching the barn when Nipper and Handforth came up. The famous leader of Study D was arguing, as usual. And Nipper was ignoring him—also as usual.

"What's happening to the barn?" asked Nipper, staring.

"Left it's foundations, and going off for a little swim," replied Reggie. "We can't waste time on such trifles, though. What about the raft? When do you propose to get things going?"

They watched the barn for some moments. The wooden building was drifting lazily, and one of those back currents which are peculiar

"I'VE BEEN UP ALL NIGHT!"



"Gosh, I am tired! Mind you, it's my own fault. You know that bit they stick in the papers about tellin' the newsagent to deliver your copy every week—saves you gettin' wet feet going round for it, and all that sort of thing. Well, I did it! I said to our newsagent: 'You might stick the 'BOYS' REALM' through the letter-box on Wednesday mornings!' My idea was that I'd get it a bit earlier and have a look at it over breakfast. I went to bed Tuesday night, an' blow me if I didn't lay awake all night listening for the old 'REALM' to plop on the mat when the bloke delivered it! You see, they've got Jack, Sam and Pete running in it now—and Pete's a proper scream! I wouldn't miss it for anything, and it's only tuppence. My club's just joined the 'Rea'm' Football League, and we're right after one o' those Championship Cups they give away. But no more laying awake for me. I'm goin' round to collect the old paper on Wednesdays; the newsagent's going to put it by."

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to all floods was causing it to veer round in the direction of Inner Court. Strictly speaking, the barn ought to have drifted in the other direction, down with the river. But it had been picked up by one of those side eddies.

"I'm thinking about Miss Broome," explained Nipper. "She's been making things unpleasant ever since we rescued Irene & Co. From the first minute she made herself a nuisance."

"And she isn't even the headmistress!" snorted Handforth. "Miss Bond was away, and this—this old fright tries to pull off the bossy stunt with St. Frank's! She's only the senior mistress—the senior under-mistress! Why take any notice of her?"

"Because it's impossible not to," replied Nipper. "She's grumbling at everything, and we're all sick of her outbursts and tirades. But you can't alter the fact that she's in full charge of the girls."

"And that's where we come against the snag, eh?" asked Reggie.

"Rot!" said Edward Oswald Handforth. "There's no snag! We'll just ignore the silly old frump! We'll take a raftful of girls, and——"

"That's just it, Handy," interrupted Nipper, frowning.

"Just what?"

"The snag," replied Nipper. "Of course, we could do as you say, and fill the raft with girls, but I'm dubious. I don't mind ignoring her, and defying her, because her authority over us is only self-assumed, and

doesn't count for a straw. We're not obliged to obey her. But the girls are."

"Eh?"

"She's their senior mistress, and if we persuade the girls to come with us in defiance of her orders, we shall simply aid and abet a mutiny in the Moor View ranks," explained Nipper shrewdly. "That's what I'm thinking about. We don't want Irene & Co. to get into a peck of trouble later on, do we?"

"Oh, that's all rot," said Handforth.

"It may be rot, and it may not," declared Nipper. "You know me, Handy. I'm a cautious chap——"

"Go hon!" said Handforth sarcastically.

"And we've got to remember that four of those girls came within an inch of drowning yesterday—including your sister, Reggie," concluded Nipper quietly. "If we take the girls, and land them safely beyond the flood zone, all well and good."

"Isn't that what we're planning to do?" demanded Handforth.

"Sometimes a theory doesn't always pan out in practice," Nipper pointed out. "And if we take the girls, and something happens to the raft, we shall be responsible. I'm not anticipating a tragedy, of course, but what fools we should look if we got stranded in a part of the flood where there's no shelter. The girls would catch it hot from Miss Bond when Miss Broome reported, and the ring-leaders might even be expelled."

"But the girls are as keen as mustard on the thing," protested Handforth.

"We all are," said Nipper, "with the ex-

ception of Miss Broome. I don't propose to persuade the girls to venture on this trip against their mistress' orders. So I'm going to Miss Broome, and I'll try to make her see reason."

"I wish you luck!" said Handforth witheringly.



CHAPTER 4.

MISS BROOME SAYS "NO!"

AFTER all, Nipper was perfectly right, and it was just as well that he and Reggie Pitt, and one or two others kept their heads clear. At such a time as this, the fellows were liable to lose their sense of proportion.

There wasn't a master in the place, and discipline and routine were naturally swept by the board. It was largely owing to Nipper's calm, forceful personality that the Remove had maintained its equilibrium.

During the building of the raft, there had even been a minor barring-out, and that sort of thing was calculated to get into the blood—at least, into the blood of a schoolboy. Being a young animal who naturally rebels at authority, the schoolboy welcomes a barring-out with open arms.

Even Nipper had joined in that little affair—in fact, he had mooted it. For he had no intention of being hindered in his work, and he had told Miss Broome plainly that he refused to recognise her authority. It was, in all truth, a piece of sheer effrontery on the lady's part to assume any authority at all at St. Frank's. Her domain was solely confined to the girls.

And that was where Nipper decided that he must step warily.

There was nothing to prevent him taking the raft off with a load of fellows. Miss Broome could forbid it all she pleased, but the boys could get into no trouble for defying her, and they knew it.

But neither Nipper nor Pitt nor Handforth wanted to take the raft off with a load of boys. That sort of thing went against the grain. They believed in the axiom of "ladies first." They simply couldn't rescue themselves, and leave Irene & Co. stranded here. St. Frank's was a safe shelter, no doubt, but it was not an ideal refuge for the occupants of a high-class boarding school for young ladies. The conditions were bad enough for the boys, but they were much worse for the girls.

They had been brought to St. Frank's practically destitute. It had been a question of saving lives, and none of the girls had been able to bring a stitch of clothing except that which they stood in. The West House was comfortable enough, but it had not been built for the accommodation of girls. And there was the food question, too. Nipper didn't like to think of Irene

& Co. subsisting on the stodgy, half-cooked dough that was the school's only diet.

The sooner the girls could be removed to dry land, the better. For then they would be able to get to their various homes, and be safely out of all this confusion and discomfort and turmoil.

But Miss Broome thought differently!

She was in full command where the girls were concerned, and Nipper did not like to take the serious step of counselling his girl chums to flout their mistress' authority. By doing so he would be gravely in the wrong. If the girls defied Miss Broome of their own free will—well, that was quite a different matter.

Nipper went over into the West House without delay.

At the beginning of the flood, there had only been a line, stretching across the square. But now there was a proper bridge. A number of Fifth-Formers, under Browne, feeling that a little exercise would do them good (or perhaps Browne had felt that the exercise would do them good) had got busy with ropes and planks.

A sort of pontoon bridge had been constructed. Many barrels had drifted on the flood, and these had been requisitioned for the bridge—before the fuel merchants could gather them in for the fires.

A series of barrels, with planks nailed to them, stretched across the flooded square, and there was a rope support, too, to serve as a kind of handrail.

Miss Broome, naturally, had been against this bridge from the very start. Why, she wanted to know, did the boys want a bridge that led only into the girls' quarters? She failed to appreciate that Irene & Co. were keen on joining the boys in their building operations, and that the boys were equally keen on establishing free and easy communications with their enforced guests.

As a matter of fact, the girls hadn't crossed that bridge once, for Miss Broome had forbidden it. In vain Nipper pointed out to her that the bridge was essential. It was used constantly, for fuel was regularly taken into the West House, and food supplies were carried over, too. There were a hundred ways in which the bridge was essential.

It incensed the girls enormously when they realised that Miss Broome regarded them as a species of hot-house flower, to be shut up within a glass case. Actually, they were healthy, modern girls, and they wanted to have as much fun as they could out of this exciting situation.

Nipper crossed the bridge, and found his way barred when he got to the opposite window. Miss Broome regarded him coldly. She was an austere lady, thin, angular, with a hooked nose and a stern chin.

"Just the one I wanted to see, Miss Broome," said Nipper cheerily.

"You surprise me!" retorted the mistress.

"On business, of course," added Nipper. "We're getting the raft ready for immediate



The barges swung into the Triangle. On the foremost, Handy had grasped a sweep and was trying to guide the craft. But the weight was too much, and brickwork flew in all directions as the clumsy vessel crashed into the wall of the West House.

sailing, and I want your permission to take half your girls with us. We'll deliver them safely out of the flood zone, and then come back for the rest."

"Indeed!" said Miss Broome acidly. "You seem to have planned it out very neatly, young man!"

"Our idea is to go straight to Bannington," went on Nipper. "There may be trains running from there; but even if there aren't it'll be a big improvement on St. Frank's. The girls will be able to get the accommodation they need, and fresh clothing, and proper food——"

"All this is very interesting, no doubt, to you," said Miss Broome. "I will tell you, however, that it does not appeal to me in the least. I refuse to allow any of these girls to embark on such a mad, preposterous enterprise."

"But look here——"

"Owing to the plucky and commendable activities of you boys, Miss Bond's pupils are providentially safe," continued Miss Broome. "I have never attempted to belittle the wonderful help you gave us, but I am, nevertheless, determined to show my stern disapproval of your present activities. The whole thing is insane!"

"What do you propose, then?" asked Nipper grimly.

"We shall remain here until the masters of this school recover from their lethargy, and think fit to send an expedition," said Miss

Broome curtly. "The manner in which St. Frank's has been ignored and deserted is little short of scandalous. From the headmaster downwards, the men of this school are deserving of the sternest censure!"

Nipper kept himself under control with difficulty.

"Doesn't it strike you, Miss Broome, that a statement like that cuts both ways?" he asked. "You might just as well say that Miss Bond is even now censuring you for not bringing the girls out of the flood. How can the masters get here? There aren't boats by the hundred knocking about, ready for anybody to use——"

"I have no wish to argue with an impertinent schoolboy!" interrupted Miss Broome angrily. "I have told you my decision, and I shall not shift from it. None of my girls shall go away on that raft of yours. Dr. Stafford is guilty of callous and criminal neglect——"

"That's not fair!" broke out Nipper heatedly. "That sort of talk, Miss Broome, only does more harm than good. Why can't you wait until you hear the real facts? The Head may have been killed during that deluge, for all we know."

Miss Broome compressed her lips.

"There were many masters, all told," she replied. "While I do not admit for a moment the possibility of your pessimistic suggestion, I do maintain that the masters

of this school have failed. And until they send relief, I shall remain."

"You're welcome to, of course, but I was talking about the girls——"

"The girls will remain, too!" snapped Miss Broome. "I should be guilty of a gross betrayal of my trust if I permitted any of the girls to risk their lives on that crazy contraption of yours. That is all! Once and for all, I desire this subject to be closed."

She turned on her heel and strode off down the passage. And Nipper sat on the window-sill, glaring after her with an expression that really ought to have caused a burning sensation up and down her back.



CHAPTER 5.

WELCOME VISITORS.

"OUR old Dick!"

Nipper looked up and found Mary Summers and Irene Manners next to him. Doris Berkeley was

also tiptoeing up.

"She's gone!" she whispered. "Oh, the old tigress!"

"That's no way to speak of your beloved mistress!" said Nipper severely. "I wouldn't dream of calling her a tigress."

"What would you call her, then?" demanded Doris.

"Oh, something much worse than a tigress; a female ogre, for example," replied Nipper.

"Anyhow, she's an outsider!" declared Irene. "Think of it!" she added in an indignant voice. "You fellows get that raft all ready for us, and she won't let us go!"

"One of life's little tragedies," sighed Doris.

The girls found Nipper eyeing them with frank astonishment.

"Well, it's amazing!" he said at last.

"You needn't be personal!" complained Mary. "We know we look pretty awful——"

"I was just thinking how ripping you looked!" interrupted Nipper. "It beats me hollow! How the dickens do you manage it? We fellows are going about like tramps—with dirty collars and torn jackets and goodness knows how many other defects. We've got changes of things, too!"

"That's a serious admission," said Doris sternly. "It leaves you without the slightest excuse——"

"And you girls, who were brought here with only the clothes you wore, are looking as neat and clean and tidy as if you were at home," went on Nipper in open admiration. "One of those mysteries that the masculine mind can't grasp, I suppose."

There was some excuse for his enthusiasm. At first the girls had worn any clothing they could get hold of—borrowed, of course, from the West House fellows' wardrobes. But now they were attired in their own frocks again, these having been dried in the mean-

time. Considering the difficulties under which they were living, the result was astonishing. Irene & Co. were looking almost their own charming selves.

"Well, never mind about our appearance," said Mary firmly. "What are we going to do about this little problem? Shall we hold ourselves ready, and jump down to the raft when you give the signal? We're game to defy the Broome bird, you know."

Nipper shook his head.

"I'm not going to advise you on that point," he said promptly. "Miss Broome is your mistress—you're welcome to her—and you have my sympathy. But as she's so hard-and-fast——"

"Hey, Nipper!"

Dick turned, looked out of the window, and saw Reggie Pitt up on the roof of the Ancient House. He waved.

"When you've done flirting down there, perhaps you'll tear yourself away and have a look at the latest?" sang out Reggie.

"Ass!" shouted Nipper briefly.

"Any luck?" asked Reggie. "Or has Miss Broome swept you up?"

Nipper turned to the girls.

"I had better go," he said. "There seems to be something doing over there. Have a shot at Miss Broome yourselves. Go to her room, and carry on the good work. She may relent."

"It's too much to expect," said Doris firmly.

"What, that she'll relent?"

"No, that we'll go to her room!"

"Yes, I suppose it is," admitted Nipper. "Something like sending a party of lambs into a lion's cage! Oh, well, it's pretty rotten, but I dare say there are worse troubles at sea! Don't forget to trot across the suspension bridge when you feel inclined."

He departed, and they looked after him indignantly, for he knew well enough they were forbidden to set foot on that bridge.

When Nipper got on to the roof, he found a number of fellows gazing intently down at the flood. Browne, of the Fifth, was amongst them.

"If there is one feature about floods that I appreciate, brothers, it is their constant variety," William Napoleon Browne was saying. "It is not too much to say that one can be constantly entertained by merely standing here and watching. An hour ago we welcomed the remains of a rustic bridge, and shortly afterwards we were treated to the sight of two dejected chickens floating by on the ramshackle remains of their erstwhile home. And now, behold, a fleet of stately vessels appears on the bleak horizon."

"If, by horizon, you mean Inner Court, I agree with you," said Nipper.

"A mere figure of speech, Brother Dick," said Browne kindly.

"Barges!" ejaculated Nipper. "Whacking big ones, too, and absolutely undamaged. Anybody aboard, do you think?"

"We have hailed in vain," replied Browne. "We therefore conclude that their skippers are consoling themselves in some up-river hostelry, and——"

"They're taking the same course as all the other litter," interrupted Reggie. "See how they're gently swinging round, and coming towards West Square? I shouldn't be surprised if they barge right in!"

"Which merely proves their good sense," said Browne. "For here they will reach a safe harbour. The end of their long pilgrimage is in sight, and, like horses eager to leap at the manger, they are seeking their nest."

"One looks as if it'll find a nest on the bottom!" remarked Handforth.

Browne nodded.

"I will grant that the rearmost argosy has a somewhat depressed look," he agreed. "But, in spite of all drawbacks, she's clinging nobly to her haughty companions. They have doubtless attempted to shake her off, but all in vain."

The three barges were undoubtedly drifting towards West Square. There was something rather magnetic in the attraction of that backwater, it seemed. Two of the barges were proudly braving the flood, but the third was waterlogged.

"They must have drifted for miles," said Handforth. "We don't want the blessed things here! They'll only be in the way of our raft——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anything funny in that?" demanded Handforth, glaring at Nipper and Pitt.

"My dear chap, you're a scream!" grinned Nipper. "You're so concerned about the ramshackle old raft that you don't seem to appreciate the possibilities of these barges! Why, one of them alone is worth three of our rafts."

"By George!" gasped Handforth. "You—you mean——"

"I mean that Miss Broome'll probably waive her objections now, and let us carry on with the good work," replied Nipper briskly. "A good, solid barge is a different proposition to a home-made raft. And even Miss Broome can't object to a transport of this nature."

"You're right!" ejaculated Handforth excitedly. "Quick! Let's dash down, and make sure that the giddy things don't drift off! This is a prize worth grabbing!"



CHAPTER 6.

THE TREASURE ARGOSY.

BUT Handforth need not have worried.

The drift of the flood was so inexorable that the barges were heading straight for the cul-de-sac formed by the three sides of West Square. Once they had

nosed their way into that trap, there was no getting out.

Nipper's suggestion was the only obvious one.

Two of these barges were practically new, and it was astonishing that they could be adrift like this, without any crews. The only explanation was that they had been moored somewhere, and that they had got adrift while the crews were away.

Not that this aspect of the matter worried the boys. These barges were rich prizes, and worth seizing. It was just the irony of fate that they should drift in after the boys had expended so much energy on the manufacture of the raft. Fate has a habit of playing such capers.

"They're all complete, too," said Handforth eagerly. "They've got their big sweeps on deck, and everything! Miss Broome can't object to us taking the girls away on these giddy boats!"

"There's another aspect of the matter, brothers," put in Browne gently. "Without wishing to raise any unwarranted hopes, I would like to remind you that barges, as a general rule, are constructed for the purpose of carrying cargo. They cannot be described as true pleasure craft."

"What's that got to do with it?" demanded Handforth. "There'll still be plenty of room for a lot of passengers."

"Granted, freely and without prejudice," said Browne, nodding. "But you may recall that I was speaking of cargo. And what, I ask, do barges carry as cargo? A mere suggestion, of course——"

"Food!" gasped Handforth, with a yell.

"I thought of the same thing, but we don't want to take anything for granted," put in Nipper quickly. "Barges carry coal, too—and gravel—and cement. We can hope for the best, of course, but we don't want to excite the whole school by visions of glorious provisions which only turn out to be bricks! Let's go easy, Handy! Let's keep calm."

"Wise counsel," declared Browne. "At the same time, we must always remember that there is an odds-on chance of clicking. Let us steel ourselves to be duly resigned if we cast off the hatches and gaze down upon nothing more edible than roof tiles!"

But the juniors would hear none of it. Barges and food were terms that went well together, and they all considered that it was high time that Luck did something for them, and not against them. These barges contained food. They had to contain food. There was simply nothing else for it.

It was ridiculous to suppose that such smart, clean-looking craft could be soiled with gravel or bricks. Even when somebody suggested the highly probable theory that the cargo consisted of flour, the optimism still ran as high as ever.

Just at the moment, St. Frank's had no interest in flour. The school was even beginning to regard oatmeal with a prejudiced eye. No, these barges must be chockful of sides

of bacon, and barrels of butter, and great cases of biscuits. The thing stood to reason. Any fellow who thought differently was a chump.

An excited crowd poured down into the bed-room corridors, and gathered at the windows. Nipper found so many juniors on the pontoon bridge that the whole affair was sagging ominously.

"I say, chuck it!" protested Nipper. "There's no hurry—those barges won't arrive for another ten minutes——"

"Won't they?" yelled Handforth. "Who's coming on the raft with me? We don't want to take any chances! Let's man the raft and steer the barges safely in."

"Hear, hear!"

"Too much risk to let them drift!"

"Well, what is this fresh excitement?" asked Miss Broome tartly, as she appeared at one of the West House windows. "Ah, the raft! I am quite determined to adhere to my——"

"I am glad to have a word with you, Miss Broome," said Nipper, going to the window. "Two serviceable-looking barges have drifted down on the flood—derelicts. There's a third one, but we needn't count it."

"Barges?" repeated Miss Broome. "What of them?"

"You'll see them soon," replied Nipper. "We're hoping that you'll alter your mind——"

"I am not in the habit of altering my mind!"

"There's an exception to every rule," said Nipper cheerfully. "You see, Miss Broome, a strong, sturdy barge is a different proposition to a home-made raft. I'll even grant that the raft isn't everything it should be. But a good barge——"

"I quite fail to understand what you are driving at!" interrupted Miss Broome impatiently. "Why should I be interested in these derelict craft which come drifting down on the flood?"

"I'll tell you why," replied Nipper. "You can trust the girls to a barge with perfect confidence. There's even a cabin, and a fireplace, in case it's needed. We can carry at least twenty——"

"Ridiculous!" said Miss Broome curtly.

The junior skipper looked at her with sudden surprise.

"But—but don't you approve of this?" he asked. "Great Scott, Miss Broome, you needn't be afraid——"

He broke off, her look chilling him. Nipper had taken it for granted that the mistress would change her prejudices entirely. The barges would make all the difference. But, apparently, she was as obstinate as ever.

"I have already told you that the subject is dismissed," she was saying.

"But—but—— You don't mean it, Miss

Broome!" protested Nipper. "What possible objection can you make?"

"I will admit that I am not versed in the ways of river boats," retorted Miss Broome acidly, "but I do know that barges are clumsy, difficult vessels to manage. It is work for men—not boys. I refuse to trust any of the girls in my care——"

"But on a boat like that——"

"Enough!" she snapped. "I distinctly refuse."

Nipper went away, staggered. It seemed that nothing on earth would shift this obstinate woman. She had evidently set herself to be unpleasant, and she regarded every suggestion with hostility. Her repeated refusals were doubtless due to ignorance and fear.

She could not believe it possible that these schoolboys could safely control a barge. And in that, perhaps, there was just a glimmering of reason on her part. Even Nipper was no bargee, and the flood current, after all, was a treacherous thing to monkey with.

But Nipper took the view that in an emergency like this, one was perfectly justified in taking a chance. If one waited for absolute certainties, one might go on waiting.

Miss Broome, however, was one of those women who refuse to risk anything. She and the girls were safely at St. Frank's, and there they would remain until rescuers came—men of responsibility. She regarded all the boys as hot-headed, impetuous irresponsibles. Quite apart from that, she viewed with a jaundiced eye all boy-and-girl friendship, and her one desire was to keep her charges as far from the boys as possible. Miss Broome was behind the times.

But Nipper knew when he was up against a rock, so he dismissed the subject, and watched the arrival of the barges. There was no question about them arriving. Handforth needn't have troubled. Indeed, the raft's activities probably hindered rather than helped.

At close quarters, the river vessels looked extraordinarily large as they swung round into the West Square. The flood was nine or ten feet deep there, so there was no fear of the vessels grounding.

They were bunched together, as though huddling up for companionship. Yet each barge was independent. They were not lashed together in any way. Handforth and a number of others had already leapt upon the deck of the leading one, and they were using the sweeps to help them along—just when they didn't need any help.

"Look out!" yelled Nipper. "You'll do some damage!"

The others hardly realised the weight of those clumsy vessels. They came sluggishly into the West Square and drove straight on. And the leader butted into the wall of the West House with a dull, sickening crash.



CHAPTER 7.

CORN IN EGYPT.

Y hat!"

"It's rammed a hole right through the wall!"

"My goodness!"

The air was full of shouts, and the juniors were dropping down from the nearest windows and leaping on the barges, which filled half the square. The pontoon bridge, indeed, had been swept completely away and wrecked. But nobody took any notice of that amid the excitement.

The derelict barge—the one that was waterlogged—was an old, ramshackle vessel, and received no attention. But the other two were practically brand new, and displayed to the world at large that they would answer to the names of Araminta and Penelope. They were in trim condition, with closed hatches, and with tarpaulins snugly fixed.

Handforth, of course, had already been down the little companion-way of the first barge, and he ran up, reporting that the cabin was in good trim. The remains of a meal were on the table, and he had found a cupboard stocked with groceries.

"I'm afraid they won't go far when it comes to feeding the school," said Reggie Pitt. "I shan't be satisfied until I've looked into these holds. By Jove, it's like a sea story I once read, where some people found a derelict ship in the Pacific, with everything all in order, and the remains of a meal in the saloon."

"Well, isn't this the same thing?" asked Handforth. "I'll bet these barges were moored to a wharf, farther up the river, and the crews were ashore when the reservoir burst. Of course, the chaps never had a chance of getting back."

This surmise was probably correct, and explained why two such worthy vessels should be drifting helplessly, and without any men in charge. It seemed that half the school was engaged on the task of ripping off the tarpaulins.

Both the barges were swarming with juniors, and they were so eager that they hindered one another. However, the Araminta was at last reluctantly compelled to yield up her secret. The hatches were wrenched off, and the juniors stared down into the spacious holds. Nipper was among the fellows who looked down into the forward cargo space. He felt a little pang of disappointment.

"Oh, my goodness!" ejaculated Tommy Watson. "Gravel!"

"Ballast!" nodded Nipper. "Not very palatable."

"Why, it's a swindle!" yelled Handforth from the after hold. "There's nothing in this rotten barge but a lot of gravel. Oh, corks! What a giddy frost!"

The wild enthusiasm was dampened as though a hose had been turned on the crowd.

The excited expressions faded, and there were many full and disgusted comments. The juniors thought it decidedly thick that Fate should have played such a trick on them.

"Well, Browne warned you," said Nipper. "You can't judge a cigar by the picture on the box! These barges look nice and clean on the outside, but it's not much comfort to find gravel——"

"Hi!" yelled somebody from the deck of the Penelope. "Boxes and things! Come on, you chaps!"

"Who's got a chisel?"

"This isn't gravel, it's something good!" sang out De Valerie. "Either my nose is playing me false, or I can smell coffee!"

"Coffee!" roared a dozen voices.

"Yes, and cheese!" said Val.

"Cheese!"

"Great Scott!"

There was such a wild rush for the other barge that several of the juniors were nearly hurled overboard. A minute earlier they had all given up hope, for the sight of that ballast had disheartened them. They took it for granted that both barges were similarly loaded.

So this fresh news came as a shock.

Nipper, elbowing his way through the crowd, found that the after hold of the Penelope had been removed. Fatty Little was already down in the hold, with De Valerie, Nick Trotwood, and one or two others. There were great packing cases in view—piles and piles of them. The hold, in fact, was full of them.

"By Jove, this looks encouraging," said Nipper eagerly. "But even now we can't be sure. Let's get one of these lids off——"

"Hi, make way!" yelled Handforth. "I've got a marlinspike here, or whatever they call 'em. Anyhow, it'll do fine as a crowbar. Let's get up one of these lids!"

He wrenched and hacked at the lid of the first case, and the crowds jostled one another all round the hatchway. Other fellows were wrenching off the forward hatch, bent upon examining that hold, too. The Penelope was promising to stand revealed as a treasure argosy instead of a prosaic river barge.

Crash!

The lid of the case came up, and Handforth and Nipper wrenched it free.

"Tins!" gasped Handforth. "Oh, what rot! All this trouble——"

He broke off as a wild paean of triumph shrieked out from Fatty Little's lips. Fatty was brandishing one of the tins aloft.

"Salmon!" he was yelling.

"Salmon!"

"Prime British Columbia cut!" said Reggie Pitt, grasping one of the tins. "Oh, give me an opener! My kingdom for a tin-opener!"

"Give the tin to Fatty—he'll bite through it!" said Nipper. "By Jove, though, this is a prize, and no mistake! We'll have salmon for lunch to-day!"

"Hurrah!"

At any ordinary time the school would have felt itself aggrieved at the very suggestion of tinned salmon for its midday meal. In fact, the fellows would have held indignation meetings at the very suggestion of it. But it now appeared that tinned salmon was the only food in the world that really mattered.

The first excitement soon passed. Fellows were grabbing tins of salmon, and some were even being tossed up to the Moor View girls, who were crowding the West House windows. Quite a few of the tins dropped into the flood and sank.

"Stop that, you idiots!" shouted Nipper angrily. "Cool down, everybody! We've got to organise this thing properly. It isn't lunch-time yet, and——"

"That doesn't matter!" yelled Hubbard. "We want some salmon now!"

"Hear, hear!"

It took Nipper and Pitt and the other level-headed fellows some little time to calm the rank and file. And then came the problem of unloading some of the spoils.

"Of course, we're jolly lucky," said Handforth. "But I wish it had been something else, instead of salmon. We shall get pretty sick of it——"

"You hopeless ass, these other cases may be full of something else," said Church, who was tearing off another lid. "Hallo! What's this? What have we got—— Sugar!"

"My only hat!"

"Hi, you chaps—condensed milk!" roared De Valerie.

"There's about ten cases of corned beef in the other hold!" gasped somebody on deck. "They've found a lot of baked beans, too, and a couple of chests of tea——"

"Hurrah!"

"This is corn in Egypt!" declared Nipper gratefully. "A barge full of groceries and provisions. By Jove, who says we never get any luck?"



CHAPTER 8.

ANOTHER UNEXPECTED TURN.

EVERYBODY was so full of the great discovery that time was forgotten, and all thoughts of leaving the school, for this morning, at all events, were abandoned. In fact, why leave the school at all?

With such a food supply as this, the necessity for getting away had vanished. There were enough stocks here to last two or three days, and a wave of serene happiness was passing over St. Frank's and spreading from House to House.

Buster Boots, Bob Christine, and some more Fourth-Formers had arrived on a raft from the Modern House. Armstrong and his East House gang appeared soon afterwards. The news spread like lightning.

And the Penelope, the prize of prizes, was steered out of the West Square by many willing hands, and manœuvred round into the Triangle. There she was moored rigidly to the Ancient House, about six ropes being utilised, so that there could be no possibility of her escaping.

It was better for the barge to be secured in the Triangle, because it was a handy base. The Modern House and East House fellows could get at the stocks more easily. The big raft was used for the purpose of taking sundry cases to the various hungry parties.

Even butter had been found—tubs of it. There were no biscuits, but the school already had plenty of flour, so there would be no shortage of bread. It didn't matter much about the quality of the bread now, since there were plenty of other good things to disguise it.

Even the seniors so far forgot their dignity that they entered into the spirit of the thing, and helped with the great preparations for a grand banquet. Tins were opened by means of hammers and chisels, or with pincers, or by the simple process of ramming a chisel through the lid.

Fatty Little was already gathering a host of helpers round him, and half the fellows were commencing operations by sampling the supplies before they were really prepared. Even Nipper found it impossible to check these depredations. Fatty, indeed, had sampled so many tins that he was already beginning to look shiny and bloated.

The ballast barge had been left just where she had drifted—at the back of the West Square, broadside on to the wall. The waterlogged barge was pottering about near the submerged chapel, neglected after she had been pulled out of the fairway to make room for the triumphant passage of the Penelope to the Triangle.

And now somebody noticed that another piece of flotsam was drifting into the West Square trap. Rather a big piece this time. In point of fact, the barn.

Unnoticed, the barn had come closer and closer, until she was now butting against the end of the West House, irresistibly drawn in by the back current. The building looked grotesque at such close quarters.

"I say, we ought to do something about it!" exclaimed Church, as he took the news to Handforth. "The beastly thing will come right into the square, and block it up."

"That's all right," said Handforth, who was interested in a tin of sardines. "We can haul it out again."

"Not if it gets jammed."

"Let it jam!" said Handforth.

But Church was so insistent that his leader accompanied him to one of the windows, where McClure was standing, and they stood watching. Handforth forgot all about his sardines.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he ejaculated blankly.



Willy's craft was moored under the window. "If you're going off in that crazy cockleshell," roared Handy "I wash my hands of you!" "Good!" retorted Willy. "Your hands look as if they need it!"

West Square seemed to be almost filled by the bulk of the drifting barn. Its roof was scraping against the grey walls, and the whole derelict building had an acute list. In fact, this list was so pronounced that Church's alarm was justified.

"By George, it's going to collapse!" shouted Handforth. "If it falls over here there'll be a terrific crash, and it might smash through these windows and cause a lot of damage."

Reggie Pitt had joined them.

"But we can't do anything," he said practically. "The thing will be at the end of the square in a minute, wedged against that barge. We ought to have seen it earlier, and sent it off into the main flood. It's too late now."

"Afraid it is," grunted Handforth. "What rot!"

They watched, unable to do anything. From that Ancient House window the barn looked huge and menacing as it slowly drifted by. The building had entered the square broadside, and was still broadside, with the list so pronounced that one wall of the barn was quite out of the water. It was this wall which was moving onwards towards the barge at the end.

And then, with a jarring and splintering, the barn reached the end of its first voyage. It was rather curious how the thing happened. The entire wall of the barn—the

broadside wall which was clear of the water—scraped over the edge of the barge, and then jammed itself inextricably on the top of the *Araminta*. It was so tightly locked that the juniors knew, after the first glance, that they would never be able to free it. And after that first grinding and splitting of wood, there was silence. The barn was wedged on to the *Araminta* as though it had chosen the unfortunate barge as a new foundation.

But it was only a foundation for one side, for the opposite wall of the barn was well under water, the whole building heeling over towards the exit of the square.

"She's fixed there now," said Pitt. "We can't do anything. By Jove, what a job it'll be to clear all this away after the flood's gone down!"

"Do you think it'll capsize?" asked Church.

"Not much chance of it," replied Pitt. "It's jammed so firmly, and, besides, that submerged part must be nearly touching the ground as it is. If we could only haul her up level, she'd almost float on the barge."

"What about getting to some of the other windows, and climbing down?" asked McClure. "We shall be able to reach the door of the loft with ease. You remember the loft? We often used to go up there."

"We used it as a kind of headquarters once, when we barred-out against Miss Trumble, and those dotty mistresses," said Handforth. "There's a rummy thing! Miss

Broome tried to start petticoat rule with us, but we weren't having any!"

The old barn was a favourite haunt of the juniors. They knew every inch of the place, and the loft was old, familiar ground. But it certainly seemed strange to have the barn here, right in West Square.

More out of curiosity than anything else, Handforth and some others went round to the main part of the building, and found that they could reach the loft doorway with ease from one of the windows. From here, the barn wall sloped away from them, the list being away from the building.

Handforth jumped, and was in. The loft door was wide open, and Edward Oswald went slithering down the sloping floor to the other side. He was brought up against a pile of hay bales.

"Well, there's no effect without a cause," said Pitt, as he entered. "It's this hay. It must have shifted after the barn got adrift from its foundations, and she couldn't do anything else but sag over."

They explored interestedly, and came to the conclusion that the building was as strong and sturdy as ever, in spite of her journey. The roof was showing no signs of weakness, and all the wooden walls were sound, without a single crack.

"Don't you fellows want something to eat?" sang out De Valerie from one of the windows. "Never mind that old ruin now. The banquet's just beginning."

And Handforth and his fellow explorers suddenly lost all their interest in the old barn.



CHAPTER 9.

HANDFORTH'S GREAT IDEA.

"FINISHED?" asked Church curiously.

"Eh?" said Handforth with a start. "No, you ass, I've only just started."

"Well, you weren't eating——"

"I was thinking," said Handforth. "An idea came into my head a minute ago—a kind of fleeting idea. I tried to grab it, but the giddy thing escaped me. Ideas do that sometimes, you know. You think you've got it, but you haven't."

Church had no particular regard for his leader's ideas.

"Well, try these baked beans," he suggested. "And drink that tea up! Mac and I are going to share the goblet after you've finished with it. D'you think we're going to wait all day?"

"Goblet?" repeated Handforth.

"It's only a salmon-tin, but we can't be too particular," said Church. "What does it matter if the tea tastes a bit fishy? It's real tea—hot, with plenty of condensed milk in it. What greater joy could life give?"

Handforth took a sip of the tea, forgetting, in his absent-mindedness, the nature of the

vessel. He took it from his mouth with a yelp.

"I'm cut!" he gasped. "Who the dickens gave me this rotten tin? It's all jagged and——"

"Sorry!" said McClure. "We shall have to complain to the management. They'll give you one of the silver drinking cups, instead of a diamond-studded gold one!"

Handforth wasn't listening.

He had once more relapsed into deep thought, and his forehead was wrinkled. It was so wrinkled, in fact, that Church remarked upon it.

"That's just how old Boz goes when he's worried about his fodder!" he said. "Something, Mac, is stirring. The great mind is beginning to function. He's so jolly keen on it that he's forgotten his lunch."

Handforth was certainly preoccupied. In spite of the wonderful foodstuffs, he was only eating mechanically, and McClure was rather shocked.

"What's the good of finding all this glorious food?" he asked. "If we gave him turnips, he'd be on eating just the same. Hi, Handy, what's the matter with you?"

Handforth started, and glared.

"You fathead!" he snapped. "You've driven it away again!"

"Driven what away?"

"That great idea of mine!"

"What is the idea?" asked Church.

"I don't know; I can't quite get it."

"Then how do you know it's great?"

"It is!" roared Handforth. "I know it! It flashed across my mind just before we left that barn. I seemed to see a—a—— No, I can't get hold of it again. But you needn't worry, I shall think of it!"

"We're not worrying a bit," said Church frankly. "We shall only be worried after you've thought of it!"

"Oh, leave him alone!" said McClure. "He's gone off into another trance. Hallo, Archie, what's the matter?" he added, turning to his next-door neighbour. "What are you looking so worried about?"

It must not be imagined that the juniors were seated at table. As a matter of fact, they were on the upper landing, and a trunk was serving as a table. The juniors themselves were kneeling on the floor, and their eating utensils consisted of soap-dishes, tin lids, and similar articles. They couldn't afford to be too particular.

Archie Glenthorne was distressed. He was quite willing to rough it with anybody, and he hadn't been heard to grumble once. But his delicate nature was somewhat revolted now. Somebody—he didn't know whom—had passed him a slab of corned beef, garnished with baked beans, this rich feast being contained on a coal shovel. And Archie didn't know what to do with the handle.

He was perfectly prepared to eat out of a soap-dish—providing it had been thoroughly washed for him—and he would have raised

no objection if a clean tin lid had been used. But he rather drew the line at coal shovels.

"Anything wrong?" asked Church.

"Well; laddie, yes," admitted Archie. "I mean to say, the good old appetite has somewhat oozed away. I rather thought I was going to charge into this attack with some vim, but the tissues are wilting."

"Grub is just what you need for wilting tissues," said McClure.

"Absolutely," agreed Archie. "But, dash it, kindly observe the good old vessel! I'm not a frightfully particular chappie——"

"Oh, the coal shovel?" asked Mac, grinning. "That's nothing! Hubbard and Owen major, over there, are eating out of a scuttle!"

Archie shuddered.

"I have no rooted objections to the actual shovel, old onions, but, dash it, the blighter who whacked out the fodder might at least have cleared off the ashes!"

"Oh, that's nothing," said McClure. "A little grit will do you good. I don't mean to be personal, but I'm talking about real grit—ashes, for example. They act as a good digestive——"

He broke off as Archie gave a glad yelp. Some kindly individual had passed him up a large corned-beef tin, and it was full of steaming hot tea. Archie might object to eating his food off a shovel, but he would have drunk tea out of a paraffin can. He grasped the tin fervently, and took several glorious gulps.

"What-ho!" he gurgled at last. "The good old brew! I mean to say, I've been waiting for this moment for years! The old corpuscles are of the correct vivid colour again. All is right with the world, laddies! Kindly commune with yourselves, for Archie is engaged!"

He took another dose, and paused. Somehow, the second taste wasn't quite so good. And after he had half-emptied the can, he gazed inquisitively into its interior.

"I may be wrong, of course," he said, "but this was dashed funny corned beef! I detect a frightful flavour of fishiness—— Good gad! The dashed old brew is alive!"

Now that he gave the tea his closer inspection, he observed a sardine floating on the surface. Church and McClure grinned.

"After all, what does it matter?" asked Church. "We eat sardines and drink tea at the same time, so why not out of the same can? Let's be thankful that we've got the stuff."

"Oh, absolutely," said Archie feebly. "Old scouts, I'm so frightfully pleased with the tea, that the corned beef fails to appeal. I rather think forty of the best are indicated. I mean to say, after a shock like this, the good old system——"

"Got it!" roared Handforth abruptly.

The unfortunate Archie was so startled by that yell that he swamped himself. The can jerked in his hand, and a rest of the tea

went over him in a cascade, leaving the sardine as a decoration for his hair.

"Odds earthquakes and eruptions!" he gurgled. "I mean to say——"

"Got it!" repeated Handforth triumphantly. "I knew it was a great idea, and so it is! It's brilliant! It's dazzling! It's the most stupendous idea of the century!"

Church looked at him admiringly.

"If there's one quality about you I like more than another, Handy," he said, "it's your marvellous modesty!"



CHAPTER 10.

THE REMOVE THINKS NOT!

HANDFORTH didn't hear. His face was flushed, his eyes were gleaming, and in his excitement he was waving his tea about so violently that he splashed it liberally on everybody within three yards range.

"Hold him, you chaps!" gasped Reggie Pitt.

"Cheese it, Handy, you ass!"

"By George, what an idea!" said Handforth, his voice trembling with triumph. "I knew I should get it if I only concentrated. An ark!"

"A what?"

"Ark!" said Handforth.

"All right—go ahead!" nodded Pitt.

"Eh?"

"We're 'arking, old man," said Pitt. "It may not be correct grammar, but we'll excuse you——"

"You funny lunatic!" roared Handforth. "I said ark. My idea is to build an ark, and provide enough room for all of us to get away!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody within earshot howled.

"Isn't it wonderful how he gets them?" asked Pitt, with frank astonishment. "Good old Noah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle all you like!" panted Handforth. "This is the greatest idea I've ever thought of!"

"That's not saying much," remarked Fullwood.

"It's the greatest idea that's ever been thought of!" declared Handforth. "We all want to get away from St. Frank's, don't we? We all want to escape from the flood! Well, here's a way to do it! We'll make a sort of modern Noah's Ark, and sail away!"

"Any more for the Skylark?" asked Pitt, looking round.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You hopeless ass, Handy!" said Church, turning red. "Why don't you sit down and eat your dinner?"

He felt personally affected by this exhibition, and so did McClure. They were Handforth's chums, and they were loyal to him.

When he made himself an ass, they felt uncomfortable all over. There was a bond of sympathy between them—a sort of invisible chain which held them all together.

"Yes, chuck it, Handy!" urged McClure. "How the dickens can we build an ark? We had enough trouble with the raft. And now that we've got these barges——"

"That's just it!" interrupted Handforth, his eyes gleaming more excitedly than ever. "The barges! They'll form the foundations for my ark. In fact, the ark will float on them, and——"

"The poor chap's gone doity!" interrupted somebody. "It must be this food. It's affected his brain——"

"Listen to me!" thundered Handforth, aware that he was being laughed to scorn. "You think I'm crazy, don't you?"

"Yes, rather!"

"You think I'm talking out of my hat, eh?"

"Not exactly," said Pitt. "You're not wearing a hat. Personally, I think you're talking out of the back of your neck!"

"Har, har, har!" laughed Handforth, with elaborate emphasis. "Very funny! But I'll soon show you whether I'm talking out of the back of my neck or not! This idea of mine is based on solid, sound, sensible reasoning. I got the first glimpse of it when I was in the barn."

"You shouldn't strain yourself, Handy——"

"And just now it came to me in a rush," continued Handforth grimly. "There's that barn, with one wall jammed on the barge. My scheme is to heave the barn up on an even keel, and then push the second barge alongside the first. Don't you understand?" he went on tensely. "There'll be a barge under each wall of the barn—and it'll be as solid as a rock!"

There wasn't quite so much laughter this time. The fellows were amazed at Edward Oswald's optimism.

"Poor old Handy!" said De Valerie. "So that's the great idea, is it? Shove the barn on the two barges, so that it floats?"

"Yes—that's it!" said Handforth.

"Wonderful!" said De Valerie.

"Didn't I tell you——"

"Only there seems to be a flaw in it," continued Val.

"A which?"

"A flaw."

"You ass, of course there's a floor!" said Handforth, staring. "There's the floor of the loft. But that's all to the good, because the loft'll be a sort of upper deck. It doesn't matter about a bottom floor, because the barges will provide——"

"Hi, hold on!" gasped De Valerie. "I didn't say a floor!"

"Eh? What the dickens——"

"I said there's a flaw in your idea, and I'll point it out," said Val. "We'll grant that the ark might be a good stunt if it could be floated. There's no doubt that the barn would provide plenty of accommodation. But

how do you propose to get that other barge under?"

"Heave it under, of course," said Handforth. "We'll bring it round from the Triangle, and then wedge it——"

"Yes, but wait a minute," put in Reggie Pitt. "Didn't you say something about raising the barn first? We can't slide that second barge into position unless the barn is tilted up, and brought on an even keel."

Handforth nodded calmly.

"That's just the idea," he said. "We've got to get the barn on to an even keel."

"Exactly, but how?"

"Eh?"

"How?"

"How!" said Handforth, staring. "What's the idea of putting all sorts of quibbling questions——"

"My dear old chap, it's a practical question," insisted Pitt. "This ark scheme is first-class, and I'll give you full credit for it—after you've told me how you're going to lift two or three tons of solid barn."

Handforth started.

"Two or three tons?" he repeated blankly.

"That's a modest estimate," said Pitt. "It'll be more like six or seven. Shall we all take a swim, and lift the barn up that way? About five thousand of us might have enough strength——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth scratched his head.

"I hadn't thought about that," he admitted reluctantly. "You mean, how are we going to get the thing on an even keel?"

"Yes—how?" said De Valerie. "If the whole barn was floating, it might be easy, but one wall of it is resting on the Araminta. Just imagine the impossibility of heaving the whole building straight, so that the second barge could be pushed under. No, Handy, the idea may be good, but it simply couldn't be done. We should need a whacking great steam crane—and I don't think there'll be one floating down on the flood."

Handforth sat down, his enthusiasm dampened.

"All the same, it's a thundering good idea," he growled. "Think of it—a modern ark! That barn, fixed securely to the two barges, would hold hundreds of us. We could get across the flood, and reach dry land as easy as winking. That's the beauty of the whole scheme. Instead of making heaps of journeys, taking a handful at a time, we could all——"

"But why talk about a dream?" asked Church gently. "It's no good, old son; it couldn't be worked. Finish up this grub of yours, and give the ark a rest!"

Handforth spurned the food.

"I've got no appetite now," he retorted. "How the dickens are we going to tilt that barn up and get it straight? That's the problem. That's the thing we've got to think out!"

Church and McClure exchanged hopeless glances. Handforth, it seemed, was actually

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Full particulars on pages 42 and 43.

setting himself the task of thinking out this wild-cat proposition.

But, as it happened, St. Frank's was to receive a diversion of a very welcome kind almost at once—a diversion which relegated Handforth and his ark into the limbo of forgotten things.



CHAPTER 11.

ON THE SICK LIST.

R. MALCOLM STAFFORD looked at Nelson Lee with feverish eyes.

"You must get to the school, Mr. Lee," he exclaimed, his voice a mere hoarse whisper. "Unhappily, I am in no condition to accompany you. Need I tell you of my terrible anxiety? Need I—"

"You must try to put all these thoughts out of your mind," interrupted Nelson Lee gently. "The doctor has warned me against exciting you, or allowing you to speak too much. Really, Dr. Stafford, I must insist upon you calming your fears. There is no cause for acute alarm."

But the Head would have none of it.

"You cannot deceive me by such methods, Mr. Lee," he said wanly. "Your own alarm is almost as acute as mine. Luck has been against us. All our efforts to reach the school have failed. For Heaven's sake, do not fail to-day! I am ill. I feel that I cannot stand this strain much longer."

"I want you to rest, to let your mind be as easy as possible," replied Nelson Lee quietly. "I am going now, doctor, and you can rely on me to do the utmost in my power. If there is any possible means of getting to St. Frank's this morning, I shall get there."

"When may I expect you back?" asked the Head.

"Not until this afternoon, I am afraid—"

"Afternoon!" muttered Dr. Stafford. "It will seem like a week, Mr. Lee! I cannot tell you of the fear that is within me. Those poor boys! The entire school cut off by the flood—starving, no doubt. We've heard nothing—not a sound—not the slightest word—"

He broke off, breathing heavily.

For the moment the Head was exhausted. He was lying in bed, propped up with cushions, and his haggard face was unhealthily flushed. Indeed, there was a fever on him, and Nelson Lee was more concerned than he would admit over his condition.

On the previous day Dr. Stafford had caught a chill, and this present illness was the effect. The Head was not a young man, and his ordeal had dealt him a heavy blow. In desperation he had set out with Mr. Nelson Lee and Mr. Beverley Stokes—the housemasters of the Ancient House and the West House respectively—in a small boat from Bannington. In an endeavour to get to the school, to learn the actual truth of the conditions there, the headmaster and his two colleagues had been trapped by the flood.

It had been a sheer mischance. For one of the rowlocks of the decrepit boat had broken, and Mr. Stokes had lost his oar. After that, nothing could be done, and the ramshackle craft had capsized after striking some submerged debris of the flood.

That plunge into the icy water had reduced the unfortunate Dr. Stafford to a physical wreck. After hours of sleeplessness, hours during which he had taken no food, the drenching had acted with the utmost severity. His companions had taken him safely to a cottage, and afterwards he had been brought to Caistowe.

And here he was now, in Caistowe's best hotel, surrounded by every luxury. But he was feverish, and, indeed, the physician was gravely afraid that this chill might develop into pneumonia.

Dr. Stafford's condition was very serious.

To make matters worse, Mr. Stokes was confined to his bed this morning, too, almost as feverish as the Head. He had insisted upon getting up, but Nelson Lee had insisted even more strongly that he should not do so. Lee himself would continue his efforts to reach St. Frank's. For Lee was unaffected by his experience of yesterday.

He was exasperated beyond measure. It seemed so ridiculous that they should have been balked. Here, in Caistowe, there was no sign of the flood at all, except for the smashed bridge which crossed the torrential Stowe. The river was tearing through the town like a raging torrent on its way to the sea. But the stream passed through Caistowe in a kind of causeway, and there were no floods in the town.

Nelson Lee took his leave of the Head and went out. He had no fixed idea in mind. There were boats in Caistowe, but of what use were they? Not even a powerful motor-boat could force its way against that tremendous current. And even if it could have done, such a trip would have been madness.

For the flood waters were filled with heavy debris—tree-trunks, massive logs and planks which would stave in the side of any boat that attempted to force its way up.

No, Lee decided, his only method was to walk out of the town, cross the little ridge of hills, and get across the flood from there. St. Frank's was only three miles away, after all. But that was rather a big "only." Over two miles of flood had to be crossed, and there was no boat of any kind. The difficulties were exasperating. A boat wouldn't have been much good, in any case, for, from Caistowe, one would have to go up against the raging current, and in the present state of the flood this would be a herculean task.

Lee, to tell the truth, did not know what to do. He was completely at a loss—a most unusual state of affairs for him. Only two or three miles to cover, and no possible method of getting there!

All the other St. Frank's masters had gone home. Dr. Stafford had insisted upon this, although the good gentlemen had protested that they were deserting their charges. But, as Dr. Stafford had pointed out, what good could they do? As soon as the school was reached, and the boys brought safely away, they would all go home. So it was quite objectless for the undermasters to remain.

And now the Head and Mr. Stokes were out of the running, and Nelson Lee was the only one left. It was indeed a curious set of circumstances. And Lee, with all his resource, felt baffled.

The absence of news from the school was

disturbing. The Head, indeed, was so greatly affected that his physical condition was made doubly worse by reason of his mental stress. He could obtain no peace of mind, and there could be little relief for him until this suspense was allayed.

Lee, as he walked out of the town, cudgelling his brains for a plan, was thoughtful and worried. He subconsciously watched an aeroplane as it glided down from the upper air and prepared to land near the water front. He was wondering what the conditions were like at St. Frank's—and he was wondering, also, how he would be able to relieve the acute distress which the school was almost certainly enduring. Lee knew there could be no food there—no heat—no light. It was an appalling position.

"Why on earth——"

He broke off his muttered exasperated ejaculation and stared at the plane. It was almost on the point of alighting. And Nelson Lee could now see that it was a small, single-seater seaplane. He caught a glimpse of the floats as the craft banked round preparatory to alighting.

"By Jove!" he murmured, suddenly alert.

A seaplane! And here it was, alighting at Caistowe, within half a mile of him, in the harbour!

Nelson Lee was not the kind of man to hesitate. He turned and hurried towards the harbour as fast as his legs could carry him.



CHAPTER 12.

AN UNFORESEEN OPPORTUNITY.

NELSON LEE'S plan was obvious. If he could only get hold of that seaplane pilot, and persuade him to fly to St. Frank's, the problem would be solved. There would be no need to trouble about boats, or such like matters.

It was a golden opportunity, and one that Lee was disinclined to miss. Within three minutes of taking off, he would be over St. Frank's and then he would be able to learn the true state of affairs.

An aeroplane would be useless, since it could not alight. But this machine was a seaplane, with floats—and it would have no difficulty in dropping on to the flood over Little Side, or even in the Triangle itself. And it would be just as easy to get off again.

Caistowe was much frequented by aircraft of this type, for the harbour was always calm and protected. It was an ideal landing spot for such aircraft.

By the time Nelson Lee arrived at the harbour, the plane was moored to a buoy a few dozen yards from the quayside. There was nobody in it, but a small boat had just arrived at some steps farther along. A man in a heavy leather overcoat was striding off towards the town.

"That's the fellow!" muttered Lee.

He hurried after him and caught at his arm. The airman turned, and a light of recognition sprang into his eyes.

"Why, Mr. Lee, surely?" he asked.

"This is well met, Major Hammond!" replied the schoolmaster-detective gladly.

The recognition had been mutual. Nelson Lee had met Major Hammond a year previously at Croydon, when the major had piloted one of the big cross-Channel aeroplanes to Paris. He was, indeed, one of the most trustworthy pilots in the Service.

"Taking a busman's holiday," smiled the major. "You saw my little butterfly in the harbour, didn't you? I say, these floods in this district are pretty serious, aren't they?"

"That is the subject I wish to discuss with you," replied Nelson Lee. "St. Frank's is isolated, and there happens to be no master there. I'd like to tell you the whole story, but it's rather a long one. But here's the crux of the matter. Can I borrow your machine for an hour or two?"

Major Hammond smiled.

"Why, certainly, Mr. Lee," he replied promptly. "I wouldn't lend it to anybody, but your certificate is about as clean as the best in the Service. But I'd no idea the position was as acute as all that."

"I'm awfully obliged," replied Lee gladly. "She's a single-seater, isn't she?"

"Yes," replied the other. "If not, I'd fly you over myself—or go as a passenger. But why this acute hurry? Things aren't so bad as all that, are they?"

They were near an hotel, and in the coffee-room, Nelson Lee quickly explained the main facts. He felt that it was only right that the major should know them.

"Phew! That is serious!" said the airman, when he had heard. "I just came along at the right moment, didn't I? You can have the machine, and welcome, Mr. Lee. I shall be infernally interested to hear how the school has been getting on. I wish the old bus had room enough for a case or two of grub, but I'm afraid that's out of the question."

And so it was arranged. Nelson Lee felt that the luck was turning, and when he went down to the water-front with the good-natured officer, he knew that nothing could prevent his arrival now.

And while he was preparing to take off, another machine was about to undergo its trials at St. Frank's. Well, it wasn't exactly a machine, but a sort of boat. And Willy Handforth was the inventor.

Luncheon was over, and the leader of the Third had repaired to the rear portion of the Ancient House. His faithful chums, Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, were with him.

"I suppose we shall be safe, Willy?" asked Chubby dubiously. "We don't want to get caught in the flood, you know, and get

carried away—the same as those Remove chaps yesterday."

Willy looked at him coldly.

"This is my invention, and you needn't talk rot," he said. "The boat is going to be a huge success. And if you chaps don't like to act as the engines, I'll get a couple of others."

Juicy Lemon was rather bitter.

"That's all we are to you—engines!" he complained. "It was just the same when we worked at the pedals in your Silent Two. Chubby and I were the engine, and——"

"Are you complaining?" asked Willy ominously. "I don't want to be unpleasant, young Juicy, but I'm an obliging chap, and if you want a black eye, I'll deliver one c.o.d. in two ticks!"

"Oh, all right," said Lemon gruffly. "Why make a fuss?"

They went to the rear window, and Willy opened it. Just outside, moored by a rope, was a weird-looking contrivance. Actually, it was a big clothes-chest, with the doors removed. A false bow had been added, too, and there was a big rudder at the back, operated by means of a steering-wheel. Willy & Co. had spent quite a lot of time on this contraption, and the Third Form leader was full of optimism. The craft hadn't yet been tried, but it certainly looked business-like.

The mechanism was not entirely new. It had been borrowed, to tell the truth, from Willy's "motor"-car—his celebrated Silent Two, which he had constructed in opposition to his major's Austin Seven. The Silent Two had been driven by bicycle pedals and chains and other gadgets, the two parts of the engine—in other words, Chubby and Juicy—being housed beneath an enormous bonnet.

All that stuff was dispensed with here. The pedalling apparatus was in full sight, and the chest itself looked none too stable. The whole contrivance was weird and wonderful.

Handforth came along and glanced out of the window.

"I heard you'd been up to something, my lad," he said severely. "What's this box of tricks?"

"It's my sewing machine," said Willy sarcastically.

"Your sewing machine?" gasped his major. "Why, you young ass, you couldn't sew—You're pulling my leg!"

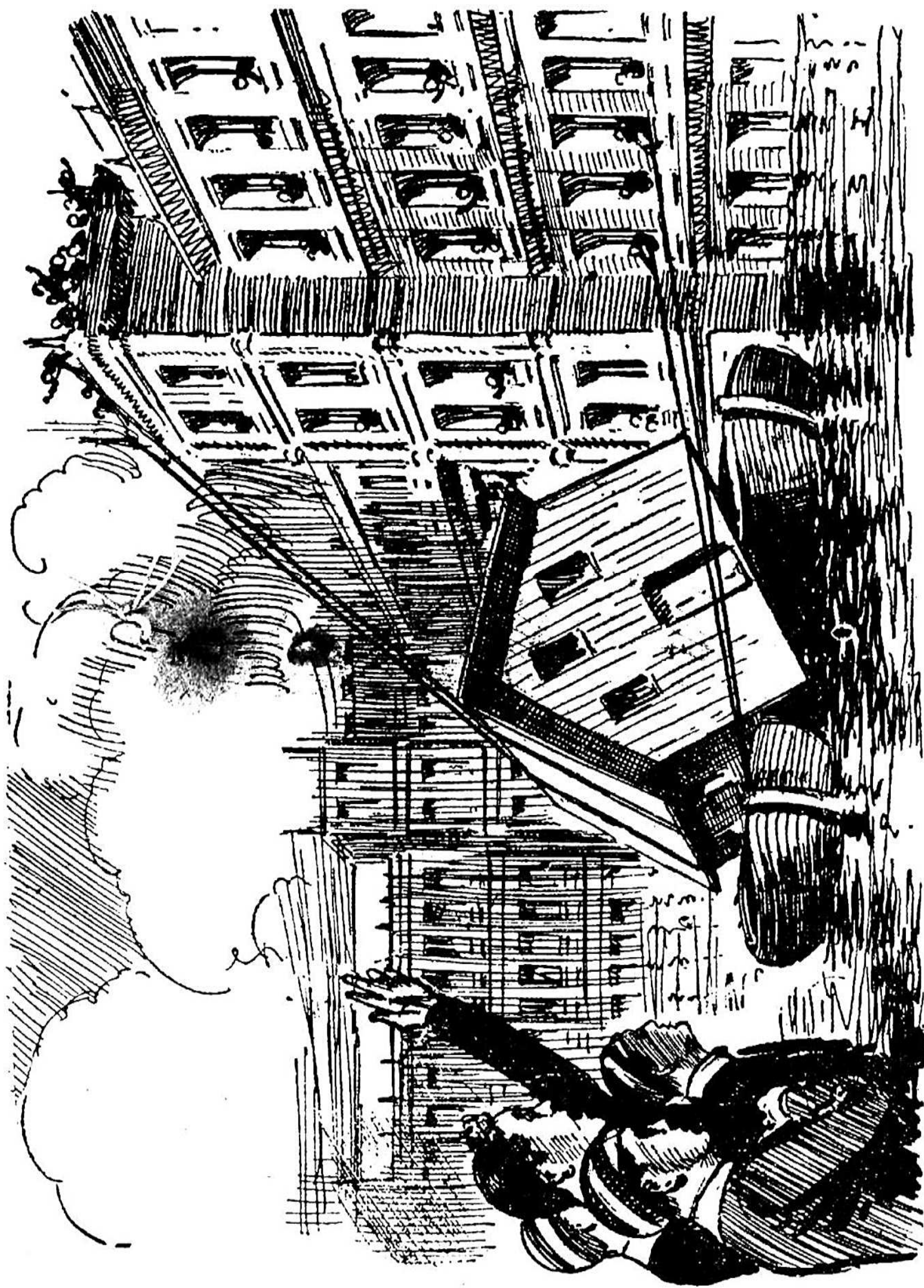
"Go hon!"

"You'd better smash the thing up for firewood, and be done with it!" continued Handforth sternly. "Anyhow, I'm not going to let you risk your life on that giddy cockleshell. Why, in two minutes you'd be swept away, and there'd be no chance——"

"Anyhow, it's a sounder proposition than your Noah's ark!" interrupted Willy, in a voice of scorn.

"You leave my ark alone——"

"The ark wouldn't be so bad if you could get it afloat—I can recognise a good stunt when I see one—but you haven't got the



The Juniors on the tower and at the windows hauled on the ropes, and gradually the barn was lifted. "Good—she's going up!" roared Handforth. "One more pull will do it!"

practical mind, 'Ted,' said Willy. "You think of things, and picture them as completed, and you never give a thought to ways and means."

His major frowned.

"I didn't come here to listen to your chatter," he said coldly. "I haven't given up the idea of that ark yet, I might tell you. Before long I shall evolve a sound, practical scheme."

"You always were a humorist!" agreed Willy.

"What?" glared Handforth. "Look here, you young ass! Not another word! I refuse to discuss my ark with you, and I won't allow any more discussion. I'm here to prevent you committing suicide in that idiotic contrivance outside the window."

"In other words, you forbid me to go?" asked Willy.

"Yes, I do!"

"Hard lines, you chaps!" said Willy, turning to his grinning chums. "Ted forbids us to go! That settles it, doesn't it?"

"Rather!" said Chubby and Juicy, in one voice.

"I'm glad you've got enough sense——" began Handforth.

"It settles it finally," said Willy calmly. "We're going!"



CHAPTER 13.

AT LAST!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH turned very red.

"By George!" he said thickly. "So you're daring to defy me, are you?"

"I've given you my orders, and——"

"Reggie, old man, you've come just in time!" interrupted Willy, as Reggie Pitt strolled up with Jack Grey and Singleton. "I want you to do me a favour."

"Say on, child!" said Reggie. "What is your pleasure?"

"In fact, I might describe it as a public service!" went on Willy thoughtfully. "A bold, determined act in the general cause of humanity. That's what it'll be. Just take Ted away, and bind him, gag him, and shove him in a rubbish-bin, and rivet the lid down!"

Reggie Pitt grinned.

"I'm always willing to oblige, but——" he began.

"Hold on!" broke in Handforth. "If you think I'm going to stand here and listen to that sort of rot, you're wrong! This dangerous young minor of mine is talking about going off on that cockle-shell of his, and taking these other fags with him! It's not only suicide, but next door to murder! I absolutely forbid——"

"Cheese it, old scout!" interrupted Reggie. "Let 'em go!"

"What! You—you uphold them?" gasped Handforth.

"Of course," nodded Reggie. "They'll be



The Juniors on the tower and at the window—she's going up!" roared

safe enough." He looked out of the window, and eyed the triumph of shipbuilding. "It looks a bit shaky, but you needn't worry. Willy wasn't born to be drowned. He's one of those human cyclones who are destined to go through life to a ripe old age. When he's about ninety, he'll probably be playing tricks on his grandchildren, and pestering the life out of them!"

Handforth drew a deep breath.

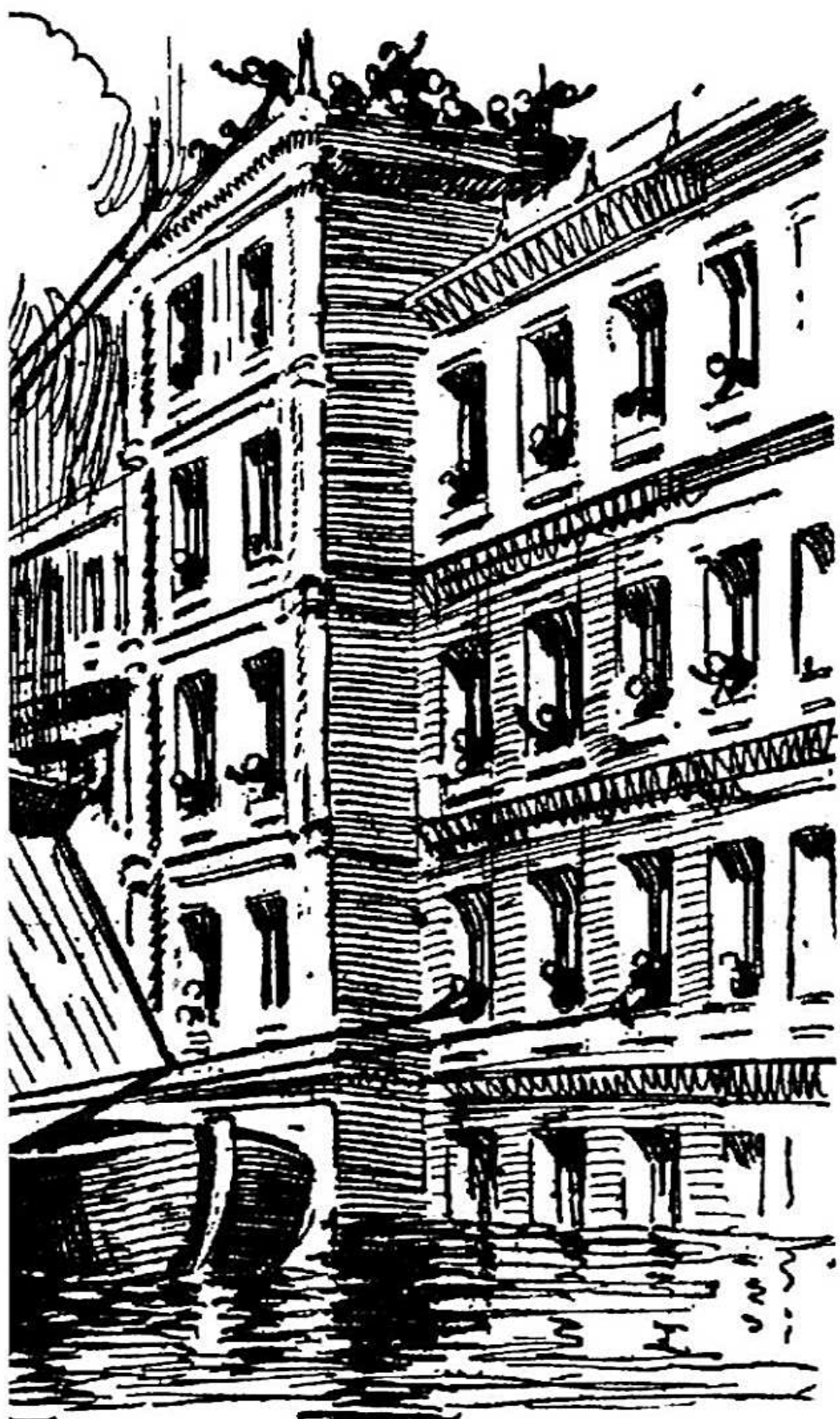
"Well, I've done my best," he said bitterly. "If you fellows side against me, I'm finished. I wash my hands of the whole business!"

"Good!" said Willy, with relief.

"Understand, I'm going to wash my hands!" repeated Handforth sternly.

"That's why I said 'good'—they look as if they need it!" retorted his minor. "I'm not a very particular chap myself, but there's no need to go about with hands that look like flower-beds!"

He climbed out of the window, and Handforth was so indignant that he could find no words. It was always the same. If it came to an argument with Willy, Edward Oswald was left at the post.



and gradually the barn was lifted. "Good
no more pull will do it!"

"Let 'em go!" said Pitt, as Chubby and Juicy followed their leader. "A little exercise'll do them good. After that lunch they consumed, they need a cruise of about four hundred miles to work off the effects. With my own eyes I saw Willy eating baked beans, salmon, tinned pears, corned beef, and condensed milk out of the same washing bowl!"

Handforth was so upset at the mental vision that he reeled away. And Willy & Co., relieved of his presence, started their trial trip. Chubby and Juicy seated themselves for'ard of the amidships line, where two saddles were provided, the pedalling apparatus beneath being of the ordinary bicycle type.

Willy took his place in the stern, and the balance was just about equal. He gave the wheel a turn, and the rudder answered at once.

"All right—go ahead!" he ordered. "I oughtn't to give you verbal orders like this, really, but it'll do for now. Later on I'll rig up an engine-room telegraph."

The boat sheered off from the wall of the Ancient House, and Reggie Pitt and his

companions were not the only watchers. Lots of fellows were interested in this experiment. Many, indeed, were ready to go to the rescue after the Third Formers had plunged into the flood, amid the wreckage.

Curiously enough, the human motor-boat met with no such catastrophe. It veered round with a surging of ripples and a great splashing of water. And it sailed serenely into the West Square, and spun round with extraordinary obedience to the helm.

The motive power was supplied by Willy's chums, their pedals operating two paddle-wheels. These plunged round, sending up the spray in cascades. But there was no doubt about the success of the trial. The craft was a triumph.

It could do its ten knots with ease, and the way in which it answered the helm was a revelation. Willy performed circles, figure eights, and all sorts of fantastic evolutions. Then he ordered a stoppage.

"She's all right—better than I expected," he announced. "We can go to Bannington, if we like—"

"We don't like!" said his chums, in one voice.

They were puffed. Pedalling was all very well for a bit, but it was inclined to be tiring work. In fact, it was much more strenuous than ordinary cycling, and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were glad of the rest.

But it wasn't a long one.

The craft was lying just between the ends of the Ancient House and the West House, and Willy was turning over an idea in his mind. He would do a bit of exploring. They would take a course round the Head's house, swing round Inner Court, and make a circuit of the school. And then a voice interrupted Willy's thoughts.

"Bring that absurd thing to the nearest window at once!" said the voice. "Good gracious! Are you trying to drown yourselves?"

"Corks!" muttered Chubby. "The old eagle!"

Willy glanced round, and saw Miss Broome at a West House window.

"Speaking to me, madam?" he asked with sweet politeness.

"Yes, I am speaking to you!" retorted Miss Broome. "Bring that wretched contrivance to your House this instant!"

"Oh, well, if you insist—" began Willy.

"I certainly do insist!" shouted the mistress. "What is more, I shall give orders for the abomination to be dismantled and smashed up at once!"

Willy nodded.

"That's different, of course," he said. "I'm glad you told me, Miss Broome. Full speed ahead!"

The paddles churned, and a yell of laughter went up from the windows as Willy & Co. sheered off and passed out of sight beyond the Ancient House wall. Miss Broome turned pale, compressed her lips, and her eyes flashed.

"The impertinent young puppy!" she muttered. "Even these—these fags defy me to my face! Fags! Pah! A ridiculous, disgusting word to use in reference to young schoolboys!"

Willy, lounging at the wheel as the craft plunged over the flood, solemnly shook his head.

"The only thing to do, of course," he remarked. "There are some things that call for strong, stern action. It's likely we're going to let Miss Broome chop up our masterpiece, isn't it?"

"What's that noise?" asked Chubby suddenly.

He and his fellow pedaller had eased down, and Willy was cocking his ear, too. He looked up, and then his eyes gleamed.

"By jingo, an aeroplane!" he ejaculated. "She looks as if she's coming down!"

The fags stared up. The machine was only a small one, and the purr from its engine was subdued and restrained. Then the sound ceased altogether, and the butterfly-like machine came round in a gliding curve, dropping towards the wide expanse of flood which covered Little Side.

"Look!" yelled Chubby. "It's a sea-plane—it's got floats! It's going to land here!"

"Elementary, my dear Watson!" said Willy. "Any chump could have seen that. Civilisation has arrived, my sons! We are about to receive news from the outer spaces of the world!"

The roofs of every House at St. Frank's were packed with excited fellows by this time, for the seaplane's descent had been noted by all. And it was also noted that Willy & Co., in their little craft, were pedalling swiftly. And as the 'plane touched the water and gently surged forward, the little paddle-craft went to meet it with serene coolness.

"By George!" ejaculated Handforth indignantly. "Look at that! I'm jiggered if my minor hasn't stolen a march on the whole giddy school!"

"Willy is simply maintaining his unsullied reputation, brother," said Browne soothingly. "A truly remarkable infant!"



CHAPTER 14.

NELSON LEE TAKES COMMAND!

It was certainly exasperating to the school that a trio of mere fags should be calmly welcoming the visitor, while the school itself was helpless. Some of the juniors

talked about getting out the raft, but Nipper vetoed the idea.

"No good!" he declared. "Willy will have that airman over to us before the raft could be even turned round."

Nipper was watching anxiously—and with just a little suspicion of eager hope in his mind. He was convinced that the 'plane had come deliberately—that it was not a forced landing by a stranger. The masters were responsible, without a doubt.

As for Nelson Lee's feelings, they were mixed.

He had flown over from Caistowe in a very few minutes—indeed, it seemed to him that he had only just started. For the distance, as the crow flies, and at sixty miles an hour, was a mere hop.

He had only climbed to two or three hundred feet over Caistowe harbour, and had flown straight off at that low altitude, the machine proving to be a little beauty.

Lee had wasted no time after arriving over St. Frank's. His first sight of the school had confirmed his fears, for St. Frank's looked grotesquely dumpy. The buildings were barely half their true height, owing to the depth of the all-conquering flood. Lee could see at once that the lower floors were fully submerged.

But his keen eyes did not fail to note the crowds of figures on the flat roofs, the eager faces at almost every window. And he was enormously comforted after alighting. The sight of Willy & Co. ploughing up in their paddle-boat was reassuring. Lee, of course, was not a bit surprised to see that crazy-looking craft—and he guessed that the pilot was Willy, even before he recognised him.

Lee had climbed down from the cockpit, and was standing on the starboard float when the fags came alongside. From the watchers went up a shout as they recognised him. He was dressed in normal garb—a tweed overcoat and a soft hat. He looked as though he had just stepped out of a motor-car.

"Good egg!" shouted Willy, his face alight with pleasure. "Jolly glad to see you, Mr. Lee! My hat! It's like welcoming a long-lost uncle!"

"I should like to acknowledge the compliment as it deserves, Willy, but it can wait," replied Nelson Lee swiftly. "What of the school? Tell me! Were any of the boys drowned when the reservoir burst?"

"Not likely, sir!" replied Willy, shocked. "Just because there weren't any masters here, d'you think we were like a lot of sheep? The school's all right—sitting up and taking nourishment as well as ever!"

Nelson Lee's relief was profound.

"Nobody injured?" he asked.

"Not one, sir," replied Willy.

"Splendid!" said Lee, his whole manner becoming more cheery. "I was hoping for the best, but I must confess that I am enormously relieved. I'll warrant you boys are ravenous, though!"

"Ravenous, sir?" asked Willy. "Why? We've just had lunch!"

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Nelson Lee looked at him hard.

"Lunch?" he repeated. "And what, may I ask, was on the menu?"

"Oh, any old thing we liked, sir. Personally, I plumped for the salmon, but I got corned beef, sardines, condensed milk, and all sorts of other things, too. We're a bit short of crocks; but that doesn't matter much. The bread might be a bit better——"

"Bread!" ejaculated Lee. "Look here, my lad, what nonsense is this? Where have you obtained all this food?"

Willy grinned, and briefly explained, helped by Chubby and Juicy. And the school, in the meantime, fumed with impatience, watching from the distance. The Remove, at least, decided by a unanimous vote to have every drop of Willy's blood when he returned.

"Well I'm hanged!" exclaimed Nelson Lee, at last. "And your poor headmaster is nearly out of his mind with worry, thinking that half of you are drowned, and the other half thin from starvation!"

"Then the Head ought to know better, sir," said Willy firmly.

"I had similar fears myself——"

"Then you ought to know better, too, sir," interrupted Willy, with a severe look. "Haven't you learned that St. Frank's can be trusted in a crisis? I don't mind telling you that Nipper has done more than anybody else to keep the flag flying."

"That hardly surprises me," said Nelson Lee gently.

"There's only one blot on the landscape," continued Willy, a note of indignation creeping into his voice. "Well, it's more than a blot, sir—it's more like a witch's curse. Miss Broome, sir!"

"Miss Broome! The senior Moor View mistress?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you calling her a blot?"

"No, sir—a witch's curse!"

"You impertinent young rascal——"

"All right, sir—we won't argue," said Willy smoothly. "I wouldn't dare to argue, anyhow, with you—I might get my ear clipped. But just you wait until you see this feminine dragon! You'll take one look, and then you'll come to me and apologise for calling me impertinent."

"That's enough, young man!" frowned Nelson Lee. "How am I going to get to the school? There doesn't seem to be any way of crossing. I can't take the 'plane closer——"

"That's all right, sir," said Willy. "Make her secure to one of these trees, so that she doesn't drift away, and we'll paddle you across."

Lee eyed the craft dubiously.

"I am grateful for the suggestion, Willy, but I don't think I'll swim to-day," he replied. "Haven't the boys started out on their raft? I'll wait until——"

"Until doomsday, sir, if you expect that raft to come," said Willy. "I'll guarantee a safe passage on this boat of mine. Take a chance, sir, and you'll never regret it."

But if I were you, I wouldn't go near the school at all!" he added warningly. "You've heard the news, and you can't do anything, anyhow. And Miss Broome will probably jump down your throat——"

But Nelson Lee did not let him continue. He settled all arguments by taking the chance. And that little paddle-craft performed its work nobly, and delivered Nelson Lee through one of the Ancient House windows without even wetting his feet.

Pandemonium was reigning everywhere.

Nelson Lee had been recognised, and the school was cheering itself hoarse. And when Lee got into the general-room, literally heaved there by the excited press, he had no lingering doubts regarding the general health and spirit of St. Frank's.



CHAPTER 15.

ORDERED TO CARRY ON!

O that's the entire yarn, sir," said Nipper simply.

Twenty minutes had passed, and Nelson Lee, standing before the fire

in the general-room, had received a full account of the recent events from Dick Hamilton—with occasional interruptions from William Napoleon Browne, Handforth, and others. The room was crowded to suffocation, and the passages were packed, too. Everybody was eager to hear what Nelson Lee would propose. His arrival at the school had made everybody feel that the adventure was practically at an end. Rescue would now be only a matter of hours—and then for home, until the floods had gone down and St. Frank's was habitable again! That was the general theory.

But Nelson Lee killed it.

"I can only congratulate the school on its fortitude and ingenuity," he declared, addressing the deputation. "When I carry this news to Dr. Stafford, he will be wonderfully heartened."

All the lesser fellows had been excluded from this conference. The party consisted of such stalwarts as Browne, Chambers, Nipper, Pitt—the leaders, in fact, of all the principal Forms.

"We just did our best, sir—nothing more," said Browne gracefully. "While admitting that we have had our moments of worry, it is only truthful to add that we have also had our moments of rapture. You can well imagine the cries of joy when the food barge delivered up its secret."

"Yes, I can well appreciate the school's satisfaction," replied Nelson Lee. "Of course, those supplies must be used just as you need them. The school authorities will be only too glad to reimburse the owners of the cargo. I understand, too, that you have used many doors, have torn up flooring for fuel, and so forth."

"We couldn't do anything else, sir," said Nipper. "I accept the responsibility——"

"My dear boy, I'm not censuring you," smiled Nelson Lee. "Under the circumstances, you could do nothing else. The flood, in all conscience, has caused enough damage. The school governors will be only too thankful to hear that every life is safe, and that the school, in general, has suffered no grievous harm. They are not likely to quibble over such trifling items as torn-up floorings. For my part, I congratulate you heartily on your resource and courage. The episode of the Moor View School is particularly creditable."

"Oh, rats, sir!"

"We only did what any other fellows would do," said Nipper. "But that reminds me. As I told you, the girls have got the West House to themselves, and Miss Broome's in charge. I think you ought to see her, sir."

"I intend to interview the lady at once," replied Lee. "I am rather surprised that she has not sought me out. She must surely know that I have arrived?"

"Alas, you are suggesting a bold, courageous course," said Browne. "I would advise a swift, back-door exit. Unless you are anxious to be torn limb from limb, do not interview this energetic lass."

As a matter of fact, Miss Broome was raging helplessly in the West House. She knew that Nelson Lee had arrived, and it was impossible for her to greet him. The pontoon bridge had been destroyed by the drifting barges, and there was no means of

bridging the flood now. It was retribution, for Miss Broome had ordered the destruction of that bridge several times. And now that she wanted it, it was gone!

Her shouts were futile. She had made herself hoarse, calling to the Ancient House, but nobody had taken any notice of her. And her temper, as she fumed at one of the West House windows, was comparable to that of a savage tigress which has been persistently jabbed with red-hot irons.

"Miss Broome is in the West House, sir, I expect," said Nipper. "Don't you think that she and the girls ought to be got away as quickly as possible? There's no actual distress here, but we fellows can rub along much more easily than the girls."

"That is true enough, young man, but——"

"We thought that once the girls were gone, the West House fellows could go back to their own quarters, and then we could all hang on until the flood went down," continued Nipper. "Somehow, we don't like deserting the old school in its hour of trial."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"A very creditable desire, but I am afraid it is a trifle too quixotic," he smiled. "No, Nipper. At the earliest possible moment the girls will be freed from this flood-prison, and so will all the rest of you. I want to get you all away as soon as I can. I shall return to Caistowe, and shall do everything in my power to effect that result."

"You think we'd all better go, then, sir?" asked a Sixth-Former.

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"I do, indeed," replied Nelson Lee. "Unfortunately, there is no immediate prospect of getting you away. The headmaster is ill, and Mr. Stokes is seriously indisposed. The other masters have gone home, since they could do nothing to help. For when you get away, you will simply go straight to your homes. The problem's a serious one. But one fact is outstanding: the sooner you can leave, the better."

"Are you going to get things moving, sir?" asked Nipper. "I don't see that you can do anything by taking charge here——"

"I have no intention of remaining," interrupted Lee. "In fact, it would be something like a slight on the school, since the school has proved itself capable of looking after itself so admirably. Quite apart from that, I am needed elsewhere. St. Frank's must carry on by itself for just a little longer. And I shall go with a feeling of perfect confidence."

"And you'll make plans for a general rescue, sir?"

"That is my intention," said the Housemaster-detective. "But you must not expect immediate results. There is much distress in the district—far more than we even know of, perhaps—and it will be a very difficult task to get you all away. But the matter is urgent, and I will move heaven and earth."

"But why is it so urgent, sir?" asked Pitt curiously. "As we've got over the worst, and the weather seems to be clearing, we might as well stay until the flood goes down."

"No, that is impossible," replied Lee gravely. "The school must get away from here as soon as means can be found to effect it. You are all right so far, and I do not anticipate any unhappy development within the next day or two. But you must remember that the entire draining system is out of commission. And when the flood goes down there will be mud, slime and debris. In a big school like this, any one boy is liable to develop fever—and I am telling you this quite frankly so that it may serve as a warning. A fever, once started, would spread with appalling rapidity, since you are all hemmed in together so closely. You will appreciate my anxiety for the school to get away."

"H'm!" said Nipper. "I hadn't thought of that, sir."

"But it is an important point," declared Lee. "Therefore, if any boy shows the slightest sign of illness—any feverish temperature—it will be your duty to either place him in quarantine, or get him away. Far better to risk a journey on your raft, and carry the patient completely out of the school. I don't want to alarm you, and it is quite possible that no such happening will occur. But it is always better to be warned and prepared."

"That's quite true, sir," agreed a chorus.

"Circumstances make it impossible for St.

Frank's to be rescued to-day, or even to-morrow, I am afraid," pursued Lee. "This flood is the most serious that the district has ever experienced. There is acute distress everywhere. The school must carry on without outside help for another day or two."

"And the girls must stay, too, sir?" asked Nipper.

"I fail to see how they can be removed," replied Lee, frowning. "You must all have patience. You must trust me to expedite your release. If I am rather longer than you expect, don't lose heart. You may be sure that I shall be straining every nerve."

"Hurrah!"

"We know you'll do your best, Mr. Lee!"

"Rather!"

"And you can trust St. Frank's to carry on."

"Hear, hear!"

The shouts went up in a loud chorus, and Nelson Lee smiled contentedly as he heard them. His first impression regarding the bulldog spirit of St. Frank's was thoroughly verified.



CHAPTER 16.

TROUBLE WITH MISS BROOME.

MISS BROOME faced Nelson Lee with glittering eyes. She was breathing rather hard, and there was no mistaking the warlike set of her square jaw.

She had just come across from the West House, having been fetched, by Nelson Lee's orders, on the raft. At first, Lee had thought about going over to the West House, but he had finally decided to interview the lady in the presence of the boys. For he had heard rumours regarding her activities, and he felt that it was only right that she should justify herself in the presence of her hosts. Lee did not forget that she was a refugee.

"Well, sir!" said Miss Broome, opening the engagement with a couple of high explosive shells.

"Let me sympathise with you, Miss Broome, in this general upheaval," said Nelson Lee diplomatically. "I am glad that the boys of St. Frank's have been able to be of such service to your own pupils and to yourself. The whole distressing situation will be terminated at the earliest possible moment. Circumstances have been exceedingly trying——"

"One moment, sir—one moment!" interrupted Miss Broome, her words coming out like hand-grenade explosions. "You are Mr. Lee, I believe? You are, in fact, the responsible Housemaster of this House?"

"That is true——"

"Then, Mr. Lee, perhaps you will kindly explain the reason for your gross neglect?" barked Miss Broome. "Perhaps you will tell

me why these—these irresponsible young firebrands have been allowed to run loose, just as they pleased?"

"While sympathising with your very natural distress, I must add that I fail to understand your anger," said Nelson Lee coldly. "But for the fact that these young firebrands ran loose, I am afraid that you and your girls would have suffered very cruelly at the hands of the flood."

Miss Broome started.

"The boys rescued us, certainly," she admitted, rather taken aback. "I am not attempting to belittle their heroic work. But why should it have been left to them to act thus? This school—this great college—has been left without a scrap of authority, and I, in consequence, have suffered indignity after indignity!"

"I regret to hear that, Miss Broome," said Nelson Lee quietly. "As I was saying, circumstances practically forced the situation upon us. You may be quite sure that the masters were not absent through any incompetence on the part of Dr. Stafford—"

"I disagree with you, sir!" shouted Miss Broome. "In my opinion, Dr. Stafford should have been here when the danger threatened!"

"The headmaster was away, with all the rest of us—called urgently to the reservoir in a vain effort to avert the disaster," said Lee patiently. "There has been incompetence, I will grant you—gross, criminal incompetence. But that is a matter for the Barmington Town Council to take up with its engineers."

"Are you denying that Dr. Stafford is guilty of neglect?"

"Most certainly. The whole position——"

Nelson Lee paused, again interrupted. He began to realise that it was quite impossible to reason with this obstinate lady. She had made up her mind that the school authorities were to blame, and nothing short of dynamite, it seemed, would shift that delusion.

"We will drop the subject, if I have your permission," said Lee smoothly. "Unfortunately, it is necessary to face facts. I am afraid there is little prospect of rescue, Miss Broome, immediately."

"I am not surprised," snapped Miss Broome. "I am helpless—I can do nothing here. It occasions me no astonishment to learn that I am to be left at the mercy of these impudent boys!"

"I regret their impudence——"

"The word is inadequate—utterly inadequate!" shrilled Miss Broome. "I give orders, and they are scorned with contempt."

"If you adopt a different tone, Miss Broome, I have no doubt the boys would be only too willing to grant your slightest wish," said Lee, with a trace of grimace in his voice. "It is quite possible they resent any attempt on your part to exercise authority."

"Resent!" cried Miss Broome. "Why should they resent authority?"

"Let me remind you that you are a refugee——"

"Nonsense!" stormed Miss Broome. "I come here and find the school without a master—without a trace of discipline or authority. It is my plain duty to grasp the reins——"

"Not likely!"

"No petticoat rule for us!"

"We're not standing it!"

A chorus of excited voices arose.

"There!" barked Miss Broome. "You hear? Before your very eyes, Mr. Lee, they insult me! Are you going to permit this insolence?"

"My dear lady, there is no insolence intended," replied Lee. "This is a boys' school, and if you will confine your authority to the girls under your care, there will be no further trouble. I have instructed the school to carry on, but I am afraid I cannot compel the boys to accept your orders. They have no intention of insulting you, and I regret that you should invite their hostility. Really, Miss Broome, you will have no further trouble if you rub them the right way. We must all pull together in this difficulty, and, I hope, a happy outcome will soon——"

"Naturally, I am helpless if you support the boys in this disgraceful fashion!" broke in Miss Broome bitterly. "I demand that you shall take me away at once—to-day! All my girls must be removed from this place forthwith. I insist! You are a responsible master, and I positively refuse to remain in this pandemonium!"

Nelson Lee felt rather helpless.

"The boys have a couple of barges, and it is just possible that they could convey you to dry land if you insist," he replied after a moment. "I would not advise the move, because there is no need for such a measure. Moreover, the boys are not skilled bargemen."

"Good heavens!" gasped Miss Broome. "Are you suggesting, then, that such a possibility is tenable? The boys themselves suggested this plan, and I refused to listen to it."

"In that you were wise, and I only proposed it as a possible means of escape for you and the girls," said Nelson Lee. "The only alternative is for you to remain here until I can get things moving from the other end. I can assure you I shall waste no time."

Miss Broome was looking at him with amazement.

"Would you countenance these boys manning a barge, and placing themselves at the mercy of the flood?" she asked. "Am I to understand, Mr. Lee, that you actually uphold such madness?"

Lee breathed hard.

"If the boys were to use these barges for the purpose of escaping, I should not attempt

to check them," he replied pointedly. "I do not advise the move, because I do not think it is necessary. But it may become necessary before I can return with help. A barge is not a skiff, and even the full force of the flood current would not endanger the lives of the occupants. As I have told you, I am trusting the school to use its own discretion. I fancy I have good reason to adopt this attitude, as you ought to know, too. The whole situation is bristling with difficulties, and we can only hope for the best."

Miss Broome said no more, but her expression was hard and contemptuous. She was beaten—she had failed to convince this obstinate master that she should take control. There were other expressions just at that time, too—but not of contempt. Edward Oswald Handforth, for example, was looking inwardly excited. He was pondering over Nelson Lee's recent words, and he was thinking of that great idea of his in conjunction with them!



CHAPTER 17.

HANDY GETS GOING AGAIN.

NELSON LEE walked with a springy step as he covered the distance from Caistowe Harbour to Dr. Stafford's hotel.

He had made the return trip without incident, and had suitably expressed his appreciation to Major Hammond for the latter's courtesy. And now he was bent upon carrying his good news to the Head.



Handy and the others waited below the window to catch the girls as they came one by one down the chute. They arrived on the deck of the barge rather ruffled, but thoroughly enjoying the fun. The great escape had commenced.

For it was good news—wonderful news.

Nelson Lee had expected to find conditions at the school far, far worse. There was still every need for urgent action, but St. Frank's was at least safe and sound, and in no fear of starvation. As for Miss Broome, Lee had already dismissed her from his thoughts. She counted for nothing. Perhaps there had been insolence on the part of some of the boys, but, if so, it had undoubtedly been provoked. Lee's talk with Miss Broome had left him with no doubts on the subject. She was not worthy of entering into his calculations. She and her girls must be rescued first, and the sooner the better. Already Lee's mind was full of schemes for effecting a general rescue.

When he entered Dr. Stafford's bed-room, Mr. Beverley Stokes held up a warning finger. The Housemaster of the West House was looking a little feverish, but he had insisted upon dressing, even if the doctor would not let him go abroad.

"He's asleep!" muttered Mr. Stokes. "I'm terribly worried about him, Lee. But your news? Have you succeeded in getting hold of any information?"

The Head opened his eyes and started up. His appearance was indeed alarming. His haggard face was flushed and lined, and there was an expression of wildness in his eyes.

"Mr. Lee!" he panted. "You're back! What have you heard? What have you discovered? I did not expect you for hours! You told me——"

"The school is safe," interrupted Lee quietly.

"Safe!" breathed the Head.

"I have been there, and I have learned the real truth," continued Lee. "Not a single boy has come to any harm, the school itself is only superficially damaged, and the spirit of the boys is admirable. They are all carrying on famously."

"Thank Heaven!" muttered the Head dazedly.

"By Jove, you've relieved me, too," said Barry Stokes. "All well, eh? Carrying on famously? It sounds too good to be true!"

"It isn't true!" said Dr. Stafford suddenly. "Mr. Lee, you are deceiving me! You are telling me this out of a sense of false——"

"No, no—I assure you!" insisted Lee.

And he told the whole story. The effect was remarkable. The Head, of course, did not doubt the authenticity of Lee's word after he had assured him that it was the plain truth. And when the Head knew all, the unhealthy flush had left his cheeks, a great peace had come into his eyes, and he rested back among the pillows with grateful relaxation.

"This is indeed wonderful," he murmured. "Truly wonderful, Mr. Lee. Splendid boys! Upon my word, I am proud of them!"

"And now, doctor, you can just go to sleep and forget everything," smiled Nelson Lee. "You, too, Stokes—you had no right to be

out of bed. I'll do what I can to get things on the move."

Soon afterwards the doctor arrived, and his amazement at the improvement in the Head's condition was positively startling. Later, he had a private word with Nelson Lee.

"Honestly, Mr. Lee, I don't think I am exaggerating when I say that his life has been saved," he declared. "The chill had got him in its grip, and all my physicks were no better than plain water. It was his mind that retarded any possibility of improvement. I can safely say that the crisis is now over, and I have very little fear of unhappy complications. I guarantee that he will improve rapidly, and will be thoroughly well inside of a fortnight. That medicine of yours was far more potent than any of mine. We doctors, after all, are helpless sort of people when a patient is against us."

And then Nelson Lee went out and set about the task of organising. Exactly how he was going to act he hardly knew, but he had no delusions regarding the problem. He doubted if the boys would be able to be fetched from the school on the morrow. The transport difficulty was well-nigh insuperable, owing to the raging torrent which was the Stowe at Caistowe. No boat of any kind could go up the river from there. And this was the only place where there were any boats.

But, at least, Lee now had an almost care-free mind. He had been to St. Frank's, he had learned the true position, and he had confidence that the boys would continue to keep the flag flying.

At St. Frank's, activities were quiet.

Nelson Lee's visit had had a calming effect, and the fact that a large food supply was on hand made a big difference. The majority of the boys were perfectly content to let things go on as they were. There was a good deal of fun to be obtained, anyhow, and everybody took the view that the flood had its sterling compensations. Lessons were quite forgotten.

Handforth had been looking dreamy and thoughtful ever since Nelson Lee had departed. About half an hour after Lee's seaplane had disappeared into the distance, Handforth strode to one of the windows, and looked out into West Square. His gaze was resting upon the tilting barn.

"It's got to be done!" he said firmly.

"What's got to be done?" asked Church.

"I've been thinking," said Handforth. "And I've come to the conclusion that Mr. Lee's right. I agree with him entirely."

"Marvellous!" murmured McClure. "Did you hear that, Churchy? For once in his life Handy agrees with somebody!"

Handforth frowned, and regarded McClure with an eagle eye.

"Yes," he said. "Just as I feared. You're looking bad!"

"Bad?"

"Feverish," said Handforth.

"Mc?" said Mac, staring. "Feverish?"

"Positively awful!" declared Handforth.

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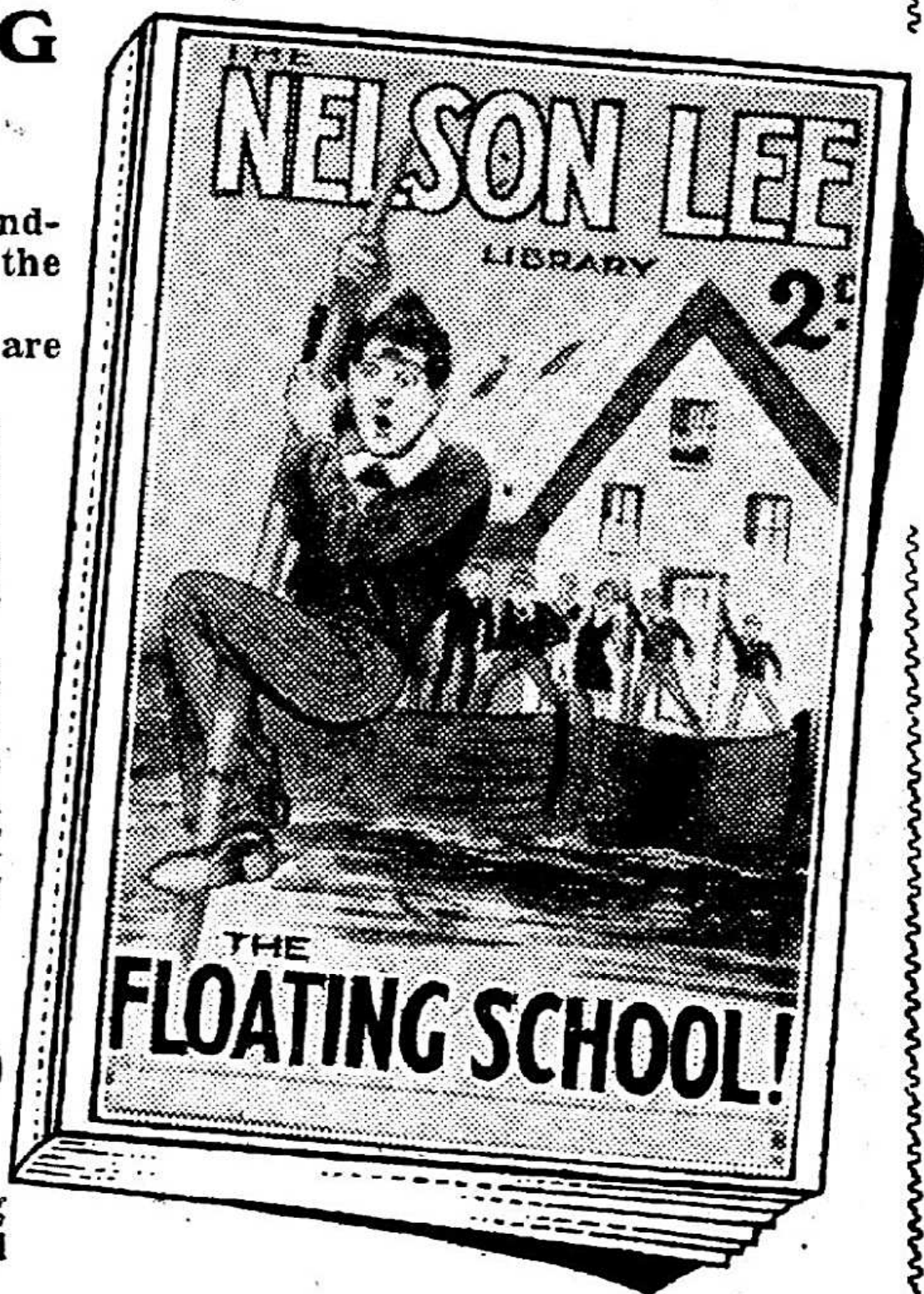
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"I've noticed lots of the other fellows, too. There's only one solution. We've got to get away from St. Frank's as quickly as we can!"

"If anybody's feverish, you ass, it's you!" grunted McClure. "I wondered what the dickens you were getting at!"

"Mr. Lee said that there might be fever

"Rats!" said Church. "That was only just a word of warning to prepare us, in case of a genuine illness. You'd better not go about telling people that they're looking squiffy, or there'll be trouble."

"Never mind about that—it's all wrapped up in the same subject," declared Handforth firmly. "Some of the chaps might contract fever, and prevention is better than cure any day."

"That's true enough," admitted McClure.

"And the best way to prevent a fever breaking out and spreading is for us to clear off!" said Handforth triumphantly. "It's a perfectly sound argument—you can't get round it!"

"If you'll explain how the dickens we're

to clear off, we'll be obliged," said Church sarcastically. "It's all very well to talk——"

"How?" interrupted Handforth. "In my ark, of course."

"Oh, help!" moaned Church and McClure, in one voice.

**CHAPTER 18.****THE MIRACLE!**

HANDFORTH looked at them coldly.

"Yes, my ark!" he repeated. "Why, the loft alone—or, rather, the

upper deck—will provide accommodation for a hundred of us. Then there are the holds of the barges, and the cabins and bunks. Just think how the congestion will be relieved if a hundred of us clear off!"

"You—you silly dreamer!" said Church, exasperated. "That ark idea of yours is impracticable."

"Mr. Lee said that he left us to our own discretion," argued Handforth. "We can do as we like, and if we leave St. Frank's, it's

all square. I mean, we shan't be disobeying orders, or doing anything wrong. So why shouldn't we leave? Why not forestall Mr. Lee by getting the ark afloat, and then escaping by our own efforts?"

"My hat, he's at it again!" said De Valerie, joining them.

"Can't you do something to stop this, Nipper?" asked Reggie Pitt, as he and Dick halted at the window. "Handy's a good sort in his way, but he'll drive himself dotty with these ideas of his!"

"That's impossible!" said Church tartly.

"You—you helpless rotters!" roared Handforth, turning on them. "Here am I, suggesting a first-class idea, and all you can do is to laugh at it! Won't it be a feather in our cap if we can escape from the flood zone before Mr. Lee comes to fetch us?"

"Yes—if we can escape," replied De Valerie. "But that's a terrific 'if,' my son."

"Didn't Mr. Lee give us permission to use our own judgment?" asked Handforth sternly. "Didn't he leave everything to us?"

"Handy's right," said Nipper, nodding. "And if we can get away from the school, there's no question about the wisdom of the move. The gov'nor saw it, but he didn't like to say too much, because there was no prospect of us escaping."

"Then what's all the talk about?" asked Hubbard.

"Handy has got the right idea—in theory," continued Nipper thoughtfully. "If we can only get that precious ark of his afloat, we can take a hundred chaps away, and that would put an end to this congestion in the Ancient House, and make things a lot easier all round."

"Wouldn't it be better to take the girls, so that the West House chaps could go back to their own quarters?" asked Handforth, as though the scheme was already a practical certainty.

"It would be better, of course, but Miss Broome wouldn't hear of it," replied Nipper.

"Blow Miss Broome!"

"I agree—but blowing her won't change her character," said Nipper. "She's mistress of the Moor View girls, and we can't kidnap the sweet young things, can we? No, Miss Broome's here, and we've got to realise it. So I'm afraid we shall have to leave the girls out of our considerations. And, after all, there's no congestion at all there, so it doesn't matter. The West House is three-parts empty with only thirty-five girls in it. But over here we're like sardines. Yes, the ark's a good idea."

"A good idea?" repeated Reggie Pitt, staring.

"Yes, and Mr. Lee gave us permission to do as we thought fit."

Handforth looked at Nipper with glowing eyes.

"Well, I never thought it!" he said admiringly. "I never thought you'd show such sound, sterling common sense. You're not

pulling my leg by any chance?" he added with sudden suspicion.

"Not a bit," smiled Nipper. "As I said before, the ark is a great idea—in theory."

"You make me tired!" said De Valerie. "What's the idea of hanging about here, theorising? That barn is tilting over at a terrific angle, and only one wall of it is in position. Are you trying to tell us that the giddy thing might be lifted?"

"Exactly!" said Nipper.

"What!"

"There's just a chance that there might be a practical method of putting Handy's theory into effect," replied Nipper keenly. "It seems a fantastic idea, I know, but I've been thinking about it."

"And the massive brain has functioned?" asked Reggie.

"Well, there might be a chance——"

"Enough!" interrupted Pitt. "Once again, children, the great magician has evolved a masterly——"

"You'll get a masterly black eye unless you're careful!" muttered Nipper, turning red. "Don't be an ass, Reggie! My idea's as simple as A B C."

"All ideas of genius are simple," agreed Pitt, unabashed.

"By George!" said Handforth. "You really mean that we can lift the old barn up, and get the other barge underneath?"

"No, we can't lift it," said Nipper. "But perhaps we can utilise that old water-logged barge and let the flood current do the work for us. This is one of those cases where we can apply natural power to serve us. But, mind you, the whole thing may go phut when we try it."

"What whole thing?" asked De Valerie.

Nipper looked out of the window and eyed the problem.

"The barn is sound enough," he said. "And she's jammed on to that barge as firm as a rock. There's no doubt that the ark will be stable enough if we can get her really afloat. The two barges will be side by side, and naturally we shall lash them together and make them as one. We might even be able to fix up a sort of lower deck——"

"But, you ass, how are you going to raise the barn?" demanded Church.

"Well, look here, it's this way," said Nipper. "But wait a tick—come with me."

The mystified juniors followed him, and finally found themselves at the top of West Tower. It was very high up there, and, gazing directly downwards into the square, they could see the tilting barn immediately below. For it had drifted right to the end of the square, where the Araminta was broadside on to the school building.

"Well?" asked Reggie interestedly. "Proceed, professor! Carry on with the miracle!"

"Miracle be dashed!" said Nipper. "Look here, the problem is to get that barn upright, isn't it? Now, supposing we fix some heavy rope cables on to the tilting wall—the one furthest from us?"

"Well?"

"And supposing we carry those ropes up here and over into the Triangle?" proceeded Nipper keenly. "At the other end of the ropes we fix the water-logged barge, and then edge her out beyond the West House, so that she catches the strong current. What will that barge do?"

"Why, drift down until the ropes come taut," said Handforth, with a start.

"And then?"

"Well, then— Great pip!" gasped Handforth. "You—you mean that the pull will be directly upwards, and the barn will heave herself into the perpendicular?"

"Yes, if the cable is strong enough, and if that barge is heavy enough to do the trick—and if the current is of sufficient strength," replied Nipper. "You see, everything will depend upon those circumstances."

"It'll work!" declared Handforth excitedly. "By George, Dick Hamilton, it's a marvellous scheme! I thought of the ark, but, blow it, you're the chap who's made it possible!"

"Do you really think it might work?" asked Pitt. "Supposing the pull is really sufficient? What's to prevent the barn heaving right up and spoiling everything? We shan't be able to stop the barge, once it gets into the flood current."

"That's just a matter of arrangement," replied Nipper. "A crowd of us will be on the Penelope, ready to edge her into place at the right moment. Some other chaps will be on the tower here, with knives. And the instant we get the barge under the lifting wall, the ropes will be cut. Then the thing will be done."

"Masterly!" said Pitt, nodding.

"Rats! It may all go wrong when we try it," grinned Nipper. "But it's certainly worth trying. I'm with Handy all along the line—the sooner a big crowd of us can get away, the better for everybody else."

"The whole school will want to come," said Pitt dubiously. "We shall have to draw lots, or something."

"I don't believe it," replied Nipper. "Most of the fellows will prefer to wait. In the end, we may have to force the chaps on board! But let's leave that until the necessity arises. It's quite likely that the whole plan will peter out when we put it into practice."

But Handforth wouldn't hear of it. He had set his heart on this ark, and he meant it to be a certainty!



CHAPTER 19.

THE ARK BECOMES A REALITY!

EVERYTHING was ready.

It was late afternoon now, and several hours had elapsed. Handforth, of course, with his characteristic optimism and his impracticable

mind, had assumed that everything would be ready for the experiment in about half an hour. But Nipper knew differently. When it came down to brass tacks, the preparations ran away with the time in a surprising way.

First of all, the barn had to be thoroughly examined and surveyed. This was a satisfactory inspection, for there were several heavy beams projecting out through the wooden wall, half-way up. Nipper decided to fix his ropes to these. They were plenty strong enough to stand the strain.

Then the ropes themselves had to be got ready. The juniors already possessed the long length of heavy cable which they had utilised as a life-line to rescue the Moor View girls. The barges provided plenty of other rope, too, for several long lengths of cable were found on them.

Then the ropes had to be fixed to the barn, carried up to the tower, and carried over into the Triangle. After that, the water-logged barge was taken round into the Triangle, and manoeuvred into position—this alone proving to be an hour's task.

And there was the Penelope, too. She was brought round into the West Square, and poled up until she was all ready for the experiment. Nipper was getting rather anxious. He did not want this affair to end in tragedy. If anything went wrong, and the edge of the barn fell on some of the helpers, it would be a case of swift and horrible death.

So Nipper took precautionary measures.

Nobody was to man the second barge. She was placed broadside on, ready, and ropes were carried up to the windows at either end. Each rope had its crew, and the idea was to haul on the ropes, pressing the barge against the side of the barn. If the latter lifted, the barge would then automatically slide under, and nobody could be in any danger, even if the building utterly collapsed.

And now everybody was at his post.

Nipper was at the top of the tower, directing the operations—for from here he could shout to the fellows on both sides. Knives were ready to slash the rope if the "miracle" really happened. A crowd of fellows were waiting in the Triangle to push the half-sunken barge into the current. The fact that she was water-logged was all the better, since she was heavier. And in the West Square, the Penelope, with her rope crews pulling, waited patiently.

Would the thing be a fizzle?

Nipper was anxious about it, for it would be altogether too bad if the experiment failed after so much labour and preparation. However, he had repeatedly warned everybody that the ark might never materialise.

The seniors were watching with a sort of detached interest. They didn't believe in encouraging these juniors by taking part in their escapades. That was what they told one another—but many of them looked rather envious.

"Right-ho!" shouted Nipper, from the tower. "You can let her go!"

"And let's hope," said Pitt, "that the old barge doesn't pull the tower down."

Those in the Triangle were now getting the barge into the current, using the big raft for this purpose. Nipper watched the ropes anxiously. The barge sluggishly caught the flow, and then gathered speed. The ropes drew taut, scraping over the stonework at the top of the tower. There was practically no danger of any damage being done.

The ropes sang noisily, and shrieked as they grew as tight as stretched wires. One of them snapped with a twang, but the others held. And from the windows below came a loud chorus of yells.

"Good—she's going up!" roared Handforth. "One more pull will do it."

The current was proving strong enough! As the waters tugged at the barge, she pulled at her leash, straining tremendously. And, inch by inch, the barn moved, and the heavy list was being corrected. The submerged side, in fact, was being drawn out of the water.

Nipper, watching, was gratified to see the Penelope grate under the now exposed wooden wall. More yells came from the rope crews. The second barge was in position—jammed hard alongside her companion.

"Right!" roared Nipper.

The knives flashed, and every rope was hacked at once. It was only necessary to half part them, however, the tremendous pull doing the rest. They parted with a terrific twanging noise, accompanied by crashing and splintering of woodwork as the barn settled back.

"By Jove!" muttered Nipper. "I wonder!"

He tore down from the tower, and reached the dormitory window level. From here he could look right out upon the ark, and, indeed, he swung himself out and dropped on to the narrow rim of deck that was still exposed. Handforth was with him.

"We've done it!" said Nipper, with satisfaction. "Look! The barge is hardly scratched—and the whole thing is as solid as a house. Floating buoyantly, too—a real ark!"

"By George, you're right!" said Handforth breathlessly. "It's marvellous! And now we can sail off, eh? Let's get a big crowd in, and push off at once!"

Nipper chuckled.

"Easy, old man—easy!" he said. "What's to-day? I'm blessed if I haven't forgotten!"

"What does it matter, anyhow?" asked Handforth, staring.

"Well, we shall be pretty lucky if we leave St. Frank's on this ark by the day after to-morrow!" replied Nipper.

"The day after to-morrow!" yelled Handforth.

"My poor, deluded chump!" said Nipper. "It's nearly dark now, and a crowd of fellows are assisting Fatty with the evening

meal. We need food. We need sleep."

"Oh, rats!"

"There's a day's work on the ark, too," continued Nipper. "It's no good doing a thing at all, Handy, unless we do it thoroughly. We've got to patch up all these broken holes, and lash the barges together, and make a number of windows. If fifty of us work all day to-morrow, we shall only just manage it. And as it would be clean dotty to start off in the dusk, it'll mean waiting until the next morning before we can sail."

Handforth gasped, struck by the wisdom of those words.

"Then—then it's all for nothing?" he ejaculated. "By that time, Mr. Lee will be here with help—"

"Don't you believe it," said Nipper, shaking his head. "It may be three or four days before anything really big can be done. This flood is a terrible affair, don't forget, and the whole district is devastated. Mr. Lee knows that we're O.K., so he won't worry."

"Any room for us on board?" called down Irene, from a window.

"Do you want to come?" asked Nipper.

"We'd love it!" replied Irene.

And those incautious words cost them their liberty!



CHAPTER 20.

THE GREAT ADVENTURE!

MISS BROOME had heard. And she came to the conclusion that Irene Manners and her immediate circle were better locked up out of harm's way.

The next day, therefore, Irene & Co. were conspicuous by their absence. Not that many of the fellows noticed this, for they were so busily engaged. Miss Broome was determined to squash any attempt on the girls' part to escape from the school in this preposterous ark. She hadn't much fear about the others, but she was very suspicious of Irene & Co.

And the six girls were locked in an attic, and kept there. They fumed and waxed indignant, and even cried a little; but Miss Broome frankly told them that they would not be released until the ark had gone.

Nipper's time-table proved to be correct.

That night—the night after the preliminaries had been completed—everybody slept soundly. True, conditions were bad in the Ancient House, for the congestion was heavy. Every bed contained two sleepers, and the question of feeding, too, was difficult. No real organisation was possible. And Nipper was more than ever anxious to ease the position by taking a hundred fellows or so away.

The juniors were up soon after dawn, although the seniors steadfastly refused to take part in this escapade. Nipper was the guiding genius, and after a solid breakfast

a small army of fellows set to work on the ark, Handforth alone doing the labours of three.

Everybody was full of the keenest enthusiasm. This ark idea had excited their imaginations. Crowds of Fourth Formers rafted across, and insisted upon helping—as they would probably insist upon going when the ark commenced her voyage.

And all day the work went on. Floors were being fixed up, windows made, and the two barges were lashed together so securely that there could be no possibility of them drifting apart. The weight of the barn was almost sufficient to ensure this stability, but Nipper believed in making doubly sure.

By the time everything was ready, the afternoon was growing late, and a persistent rain had commenced to fall. But even this was insufficient to dampen the enthusiasm. The flood had dropped by about nine inches, but if this rain continued the waters would probably rise again.

Even Handforth agreed that it would be unwise to set sail in the dusk, especially as the evening looked like being rough. No word had come from Nelson Lee, and none had been expected. Monday, at the earliest, would see a general rescue.

So Handforth was satisfied. His ark load would escape a clear day ahead of the others—and perhaps several days ahead. The two barges, in their original condition, might have carried thirty or forty passengers; but the ark could easily accommodate treble this number. And that was a very important point.

Nipper had unloaded most of that food cargo, so that the school would be well supplied. Only a few cases were left on board—enough to feed the voyagers for a couple of days.

And when the school went to bed that night it was tired—at least, the junior section of it was. Everybody knew that the ark was to venture out upon the flood at dawn the following morning. Miss Broome knew it—and Miss Broome spent the night outside the locked door of that attic where Irene & Co. were imprisoned. She had no intention of letting them go!

She didn't know to what lengths ingenuity could go. For the girls had whiled away their night, not in sleep, but in sewing their sheets and blankets into a long funnel—similar to a canvas fire-escape chute. For that attic window overlooked the West Square, with the ark below. And when the ark was manœuvred out, it would pass beneath that window.

Another dawn found the Remove and a good proportion of the Fourth awake and active. Mattresses and bedding were carried into the ark—for, although the adventurers expected to reach dry land within a few hours, there was nothing like being well prepared!

Most of the Third decided not to chance it, but Willy & Co., needless to say, were three of the first fellows on board. Incidentally, Willy smuggled his pets down into

one of the barge cabins before anybody else in the school was awake. Willy and his pets were inseparable.

When the dawn light strengthened, the ark was being edged out of her position. Fellows with poles were heaving, others were pulling at ropes, and slowly the twin barges moved out of the cul-de-sac.

The barn sat so snugly on her foundations that the whole thing seemed one solid construction—a single unit. There was still a small portion of the deck available, practically all the way round the barn—that section where the two bows gaped being bridged over by a false section of deck. And here and there were doors.

Out of the grey light came a curious object, tumbling down from the upper air. It struck Handforth as he went round the narrow deck.

"Hi!" he protested. "Who's chucking bedding about?"

"Hist, Ted!" came a soft voice from above. "Hang on! We're coming down!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Handforth, looking up. "Is that you, Irene?"

"Yes—and five others!" came Irene's voice. "We've made up our mind to come with you, and Miss Broome has made up her mind that we shan't!"

"I think we're going to win!" came a chuckle in Doris' voice.

"Good egg!" shouted Handforth. Nipper came along, and glanced up.

"We're not persuading you, mind!" he said. "But you're perfectly welcome!"

"That's good enough for us!" said Irene.

The next minute a large bulge appeared in the home-made chute. Half a dozen fellows were waiting at the base, and Irene Manners was eased up as she reached the bottom, and helped out. She was all ruffled and dishevelled, but enthusiastic.

"Phew!" she gasped. "I thought I should never get here!"

One by one they came down in the half-light, shooting out at the base, gasping, laughing, and thoroughly enjoying the fun.

"That the lot?" asked Nipper, at last.

"Yes—the other poor things don't know anything about it," replied Irene. "I don't think they'd be keen on coming, anyhow. I say—what sport!"

"Well, there'll be a different kind of sport if Miss Broome spots you," said Nipper. "Take my tip, and dodge down into one of the cabins. Why didn't you let us know you were coming? We haven't made any provision for fair visitors."

"As we're not fair, it doesn't matter," replied Irene promptly.

But they took Nipper's advice, and hurried below. And the ark stole out into the growing daylight, watched only by a comparative few. The enthusiasm was only at fever height among those who were embarking on the trip. The rest preferred to remain comfortably in bed.

Perhaps Miss Broome grew suddenly suspicious.
(Continued on page 41.)



BETWEEN OURSELVES

Mr. Edwy Searles Brooks
chats with his readers.



*NOTE.—If any reader writes to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed to EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Every letter will have my personal attention, and all will be acknowledged in these columns. Letters of very special merit will be distinguished by a star, thus *, against the sender's name. Communications which indicate writer's age are naturally easier for me to answer.—E. S. B.*

GLADYS HOWARD (Beckenham), Peggie* (North Shields), Appreciative* (Brixton), Herbert A. Payne (Tottenham), E. & E. Callis* (Morecambe), Cynic (Wolverhampton), Anna J. Dahl (Sunderland), J. E. C. (Lowestoft), A Nipper Supporter (Gateshead), G. A. E. Turnock (Bosham), Geoffrey Rabbitt (Edwin-stowe), H. L. Ridgeley** (High Wycombe), Maurice Stodel (Shoreditch), M. H. C. (Glasgow), Mercia Yoxall-Bubbers (Ilford), A. Thomas Ryland (Stourbridge), Herbert Ball (Cambridge), Percy Bowles (Sydney).

Certainly, Peggie. You may write as often as you wish, and I shall always be pleased to hear from you. Perhaps you are not the only lonely reader. In fact, there might be many others like you—in lodgings, and away from home—who feel they would like to write to somebody. Don't forget that I am here, and that I am always ready to read your letters, and to reply to them, too, if they raise any items of general interest. In any case, you can always be sure that they will be acknowledged.

Sorry you don't like this page, Herbert A. Payne. In your opinion, the Old Paper is spoilt by "Between Ourselves," eh? I talk a lot of rot, do I, that leads nowhere? And after crying down this Chat so scathingly, you calmly ask me to put a note in it, including your name and address, to the effect that you have some periodicals to dispose of! What's the idea, my son? If you are a member of the League, your paragraph will be inserted by the Chief Officer, but it's not going in *these* columns, considering how much you dislike them. You might regard it as a lot of rot!

You needn't worry about the old series, Geoffrey Rabbitt. Why trouble to search about for back numbers? Isn't it better to spend a shilling a month on the "Monster Library"? All the series you want are there, and quite a number of the earlier issues are still obtainable from the Publishers. This is much cheaper than buying back num-

bers, and certainly more compact. Any of you new readers who want to get hold of the earlier St. Frank's yarns can't do better than go straight to the newsagent and order the "Monster." It seems such a waste of time to hunt round for back numbers—and to find, even then, that very issue you wanted most of all is missing from a series.

I didn't acknowledge your previous letter, H. L. Ridgeley, because I didn't receive it. Are you sure you posted it? I always acknowledge *every* letter that I receive, but I can't acknowledge those letters which get forgotten in overcoat pockets, or which get tucked into a drawer, pending the affixing of a stamp. I often get letters which are dated weeks earlier than the actual postmark. I strongly suspect that the writers have either got bad memories or that the stamp money went on something more important.

No, I haven't forgotten Ulysses Spencer Adams, Clarence Fellowe, Timothy Tucker, or, indeed, any of the characters who have previously appeared, J. J. Hoser-Cook. I may sometimes shelve them, but I never forget them. And they'll bob up again when least expected.

As far as I know, Maurice Stodel—and I ought to know—Ernest Lawrence is as keen on boxing as ever. One of these days he will probably be featured in another boxing story.

Some readers complain that they have been unable to obtain their usual copy of the Old Paper. Sold out, of course! But what can they expect if they do not order their copies in advance?

Edwy Searles Brooks

*Fighting the Giants!**Prisoners under the Ocean!*

THE BURIED WORLD!

By LIONEL DAY



**GET GOING ON THESE THRILL-PACKED CHAPTERS OF
OUR AMAZING NEW ADVENTURE SERIAL!**

INTRODUCTION.

Jim Maitland lives in a small shop in Stagmore. A mysterious man named Stanislaus Cripps owes money to the shop, and Jim determines to collect it. He climbs over the wall of Widgery Dene—Cripps' estate—and drops into the grounds. There he finds an amazing machine which is something between a submarine and an airship. Mr. Cripps is on board and Jim asks him for the money. The man refuses to pay, and before Jim realises it he finds the machine in the air! It travels half over the world, then dives into the ocean. It reaches the bottom, and then, instead of resting on the bed continues going downwards! It is then floating on the surface of an underground river, and Mr. Cripps explains that there must be a sort of leak in the ocean bed and they are being sucked down to the centre of the earth. They stop the machine and come on deck. But

as they appear they are captured by several amazing giants who fall on them from the shore. Jim escapes and later saves the life of a little man called Masra. In return Masra and his daughter Tinta let him live with them. Jim finds himself among a colony of dwarf men, who are called the Kru people. They live in a vast cavern and are at enmity with the Giants—a race that is dying out. One day Jim sees a light flashing. It is Mr. Cripps signalling in Morse with his torch. He is still a prisoner, and is going to be put to death in four days. Jim determines to find the submarine and rescue him. Masra and Tinta decide to accompany him. To do this Masra has to desert from the Kru people. This he does by a strange ceremony. He hurls his spear at a rock, at the same time chanting words in the Kru tongue, which Jim can now understand.

(Now read on.)

Searching for the Submarine.

"No more do I belong to the Kru," chanted Masra. "I am an outcast from the Inner Cavern. I go with him who gave me my life."

A musical laugh sounded in Jim's ears. Tinta had crept to his side, and was smiling at him.

"Where you lead, Masra and I follow," she exclaimed. "There's no going back now, Krim.

Look, I have the food and the machine for the liquid fire."

She showed him a big bag she carried, and that strange bellows arrangement by which the Kru people were able to eject a jet of liquid flame. For a moment Jim's heart was too full for words. This loyalty and this friendship, which made Tinta and her father exile themselves for ever from their homes and go out into a world peopled by their terrible enemies, was some-

thing so wonderful that it almost took his breath away.

"I shall never be able to forgive myself if anything happens to you," Jim said. "You and your father shouldn't have done this for me."

"You go out to save your friend, and are not we your friends? Masra and Tinta would never lift up their heads again if they deserted you."

Jim made no reply in words. Instead he caught Tinta's hand and pressed it warmly. The next moment they had both slipped down the rock and had set their feet on the rocky floor of the Outer Cavern.

Half an hour later when they had put about two miles between themselves and the entrance to the Inner Cavern—it was a precaution suggested by Masra in case their flight had been discovered—they halted behind a big boulder, and there Jim outlined the very hazy plans he had formed. They had to search for the Flying Submarine. That was the strange vessel he had drawn for them on the slate that first day of his coming to the Inner Cavern. Tinta nodded her head.

"I know, Krim. It goes up there. It floats like the dead fish on the water—it goes under the water."

She made a little dramatic movement with her hands to suggest the Flying Submarine coming head first down the drain from the bed of the ocean.

"And it comes down here like that."

"That's right, Tinta. We've got to find the Flying Submarine. If we can find it, we shall have no need to fear the Falta any longer. We shall be masters of the Outer Cavern."

"And where do we look?" Masra interrupted. "The land of the Falta is wide."

"Not so big as it seems," Jim retorted. "My friend is good at calculations. If we cover a certain distance between each growing and renewing of the food, we can make the circuit of the whole Outer Cavern in the time."

He took his watch from his pocket and described how many times the hands must move round for the period of a day.

And we have four of those days," he added, "before the coming of the Great Light. It is not as if it is a small thing for which we are looking. Thirty of the Faltas, lying stretched on the ground, head to feet, would hardly reach its whole length. So you see if we can get near it, we shall see it. We must try and cover the whole distance in the four days."

Masra rose gravely to his feet.

"Then let us be going, Krim. It is a great distance that we have to cover."

Between the edge of the Central Lake and the walls of the cavern that disappeared into the darkness above them, there was a distance of nearly six miles. Assuming that the great bulk of the Flying Submarine would be visible at a distance of at least two miles, Jim deployed his little party so that they advanced across the ground separated from one another by intervals of a mile.

To keep in touch with one another, they arranged a system of signals. Owing to the pressure of the air in the Cavern Jim had discovered that sound carried much further than in the outer world. The dropping of a stone could be heard miles away. It was possible therefore to communicate by cries.

It was arranged that in the event of Masra and Tinta being in any danger, they should warn Jim, who marched in the centre of the line, so that he might flash the news by the aid of his electric torch. When they had covered their allotted distance for the day they were to close in and take cover for the night.

Jim's course took him through the heart of

that Falta settlement, where he had seen the great houses built of clumsy boulders, and had glimpsed one of the giants engaged in cooking food in a titanic cauldron over a fire. When last he had been there, such had been his terror that he had crawled for nearly half a mile on his hands and knees. But the months spent among the Kru had hardened his body and toughened his nerves. Like the Little People he had developed a profound contempt for the intelligence of the Falta.

He approached the group of enormous stone huts with hardly more than that delicious thrill of terror with which a child enters a dark room. Flitting from boulder to boulder, he gained at last the rear of one of them. The huge stones of which they were made were innocent of any mortar, and through the gaps between them, he was able to peer into the interior. It was empty; and passing on to the next hut, he discovered that that was in a similar condition. For some reason or other the Falta had left that settlement.

Behind the Idol!

KEEPING careful note of the time by his watch, and reckoning their rate of progress at three miles an hour, he pushed on. When over eight hours had elapsed, he made the agreed signal with his lamp and squatting down on the ground, waited until he was joined by Tinta and Masra. Like himself they had nothing to report. They had not seen any of the giants nor the Flying Submarine.

"The Falta have gathered together for the Feast of the Great Light," Masra exclaimed. "It is their custom. They will be waiting at the feet of their god. When we set out again after our period of sleep, we shall have to pass among them. It is then that we shall have to be careful."

Crawling under the boulders, they slept. When they awoke Tinta lit a fire and prepared the food. While this was being done, Tim got into communication with Stanislaus Cripps with the aid of his torchlight and reported the progress they had made.

"Boy," came back the answer, "you must not fail me. It would be an irreparable loss to science if anything were to happen to me. The Falta, who number eighty, are collected here in honour of some approaching religious rite, of which, I understand, I am to be the central figure."

Jim could only flash back that he would do his best—that if it were possible to find the Flying Submarine, he would find it.

That day, after he had eaten, they proceeded with more caution. They had covered some eighteen miles when Jim halted abruptly with a sudden feeling of indescribable horror. Looking up by chance, he had seen a great expressionless face, staring down at him from the azure murk.

For some moments he thought he must be in the presence of a super-giant, but as his startled nerves grew more steady, he realised that what he was looking at was the upper portion of that huge idol, which he had seen depicted on the walls of the Inner Cavern.

It was the most terrible face he had ever seen. It was the face of a demon carved out of stone. The great eyes seemed to look down at him with a fiendish greed, and the enormous lips were suggestive of some being ravenously hungry and waiting for the kill.

So high was the statue, that, seen in the shadows, the great head had the appearance of being suspended in the air. It was only on looking closer that he could make out the outlines of

THERE'S A BIG LAUGH IN:—

"JIMMY'S CANADIAN COUSIN!"

By OWEN CONQUEST.

A Topping Long Story of
Jimmy Silver and Co., the
Chums of ROOKWOOD SCHOOL:—

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the figure. It stood erect, its feet set firmly on a great slab of stone—the stone which he knew from the mural paintings was the place of sacrifice.

And all round this stone the Falta squatted—some apparently asleep, some kneeling as if engaged in devotions. They were about two miles away, he estimated, and yet he could hear the sound of their breathing.

Here was a situation in which he must obviously take counsel with his companions. Making the signal, he was presently joined by Masra and Tinta. It was agreed among them that they must pass to the rear of the statue; to attempt to make the passage in front would inevitably result in their being seen by the giants.

Having eaten some food they pressed on, Jim being determined that they should get clear of the neighbourhood of the idol before they rested. They kept closer together now, Jim, for the moment more anxious, if the truth be told, to avoid the Falta than to find the Flying Submarine.

An hour later and they had crept within the shadow of the statue. So vast was it, that all behind it was in darkness—a fact for which Jim at least was grateful. Now they could see the giants close at hand, their vast limbs—their huge heads and their foolish faces.

One seated by the side of the idol was feeding enormous handfuls of food into his mouth, devouring, while they watched him, what must have been at least a hundredweight of some kind of sustenance.

Jim shuddered as he saw those long yellow fangs behind the big blubbery lips. The very grossness of the giant was so unnatural as to be shocking.

Behind the statue they paused, not daring to speak. Jim looking about him, saw at the side of the statue's base what looked like a huge cage made of some yellow metal. Even as he watched he saw one of the giants thrust his great hand through the bars and catch something.

The next moment, with his face pressed against the bars, he was examining his catch. Suddenly, Jim was startled by the sound of a familiar voice. It came booming through the still air.

"Fool—gross fool! To think that Fate should allow a hypertrophied moron—an exaggerated idiot—the Colossus of brutal ignorance—to treat a great man like this! Fool! Fool! if ever my chance comes, I will bind you in chains of slavery, even as Jupiter is said to have bound the Titans!"

It was Stanislaus Cripps. Undoubtedly it was Stanislaus Cripps. Quite apart from the booming voice, the exaggerated way in which he spoke would have betrayed him. Evidently he was talking more for his own self-esteem than in any hope that his insults would be understood by the giant. It was Stanislaus Cripps' gesture of protest against the cruel fate that had befallen him.

Jim saw the giant poke a finger of his disengaged hand between the bars. His action was followed instantly by a squeal of pain and indignation. Then, as if his curiosity were satisfied, the giant released his victim and stood back licking his lips.

Jim touched Masra on the arm, and motioning to Tinta, they crept onwards. For two hours by Jim's watch they trekked forward, and having more than completed their allotted distance for the day, laid themselves down to rest in a little cave formed by two boulders. In spite of his terrifying experiences, Jim no sooner lay down than he fell asleep.

He was awakened by a hard, warm little hand placed across his lips. He sat up to find Tinta kneeling by his side. In that unearthly light her face looked curiously rigid. Following the direction of her eyes, Jim saw Masra crouched at the further end of the little cave with his spear ready in his hand. He was obviously on the alert against some danger that threatened; but what that danger was, Jim was at first unable to discover. And then he saw.

At Grips with a Giant!

THROUGH the opening between the two boulders something was being thrust—something that looked like the tentacles of an enormous octopus. They were five in number and they sawed at the air as if groping for something. Then Jim realised that those tentacles were attached to what looked like a pinkish blue pillar in that strange light. With a shock of terror he understood all.

One of the Falta had tracked them down, either by chance or by some hunting instinct which these giants possessed. He was lying there outside their cave, thrusting his great arm in as a boy thrusts his careless hand into a bird's nest.

"The liquid fire, Tinta," Jim whispered.

Tinta shook her head and pointed helplessly to that curious bellows-like machine which they had left with their bag of food near the entrance of the cave. They could not get to it without being caught. And now the hand was drawing nearer to Masra, Jim felt Tinta cling to him as if for support. One of those fingers had touched Masra's foot, and then paused suspended, as if trying to decide whether it had at last touched what it sought, or not. The next instant that vast arm was thrust further into the cave and the giant's hand closed about Masra's legs.

Instantly the Kru struck with his spear. Jim saw a spout of blood spring like a fountain from that pinkish blue flesh. There was a squeal of pain. Before Masra could strike again he was jerked from his feet and the giant's arm was drawn back, gripping its victim.

Jim heard Tinta crying, and the sound braced him to an act of courage from which in cold blood he would have shrunk. Putting the girl aside, he rushed at Masra, and caught him under the arms. Flinging himself backwards and bracing his feet against the two sides of the cave, he managed to stay his progress.

That sudden opposition must have puzzled the giant, for with the simple curiosity of a child, he thrust his huge face into the opening of the cave as if to discover the cause of the obstruction. Jim found himself looking into those saucer-like eyes.

Once when he was younger he had found a baby owl and brought it up. He remembered how its eyes had been dilated, just like the giant's, and how helpless and blind it had been in the sunlight. Jim was quite helpless—he could no more have withstood the slightest pull exercised by the giant, than he could have stayed the onrush of an avalanche. He had no weapon. But there was his flash lamp in his pocket, and that recollection of his pet owl and its behaviour when he took it into the sunlight gave him his great idea.

Taking a hand from under Masra's arm, he produced the torch, and, pressing the catch, leaned forward so that the rays of the electric light shone with their full glare on those distended eyes. He saw the giant blink—try to turn away his head—give vent to a little cry, and then releasing Masra draw back quickly into the darkness beyond.

Even as he did so Tinta leapt to the liquid fire machine. Holding it in her hand she made for the exit to the cave. Springing to his feet, Jim rushed after her, calling to her frantically to come back.

"Tinta—Tinta—come back," he shouted.

But the girl seemed deaf to his appeals. Now she had passed the entrance to the little cave. Following quickly in her tracks, Jim saw the giant standing some twenty feet away, rubbing his eyes with his hands, as if he was still blinded by the glare of the electric torch.

"Tinta—Tinta—come back!"

He made a grab at the girl's arm. Even as he did so, from out of the spout of the apparatus there was projected a jet of flame. It struck the giant on his left side in the region of his heart. Jim heard a dreadful sizzling noise, followed by the horrible stench of burnt flesh. It seemed to him, as he watched, that a hole was eaten away in the giant's side, even as the flame of the deadly oxy-acetylene blow-pipe eats its way through steel.

He saw the giant reel on his feet, put his hands with a pathetic clumsiness to his side, as if to guard himself from that cruel pain, and then fall back with a thud that awoke the echoes of the Buried World.

Before Jim could recover from his astonishment and horror at the deadly effects of this Kru weapon, he felt Masra touch his arm.

"Let's make speed, Krim, while yet there is time. The Falta will have heard and will follow us."

Keeping his head even in that emergency, Masra seized the bag of food and bounded out of the cave. Without a second's delay Jim and Tinta followed him hot foot.

Behind them they could hear the thunderous thud of the Falta's footsteps in pursuit. The ground shook beneath their onrush. Glancing over his shoulder, Jim could see them, a serried mass of Titanic figures, advancing through the gloom. It seemed to him that they could never hope to avoid capture. At each stride they covered four or five yards to their miserable thirty-three inches.

That meant that, given a four miles start, the giants were capable of overtaking them before they had covered a mile! And now less than a thousand yards separated them. He saw that Tinta was lagging behind, and, turning, he took her hand. At any rate, he would die with this girl, who had given up everything for his sake.

The front rank of the giants was now only a hundred yards away. Sixty more paces and they would have caught them. He was running at the top of his speed, dragging Tinta after him. And then the unexpected happened.

The Falta had reached the spot where their dead comrade lay. At the sight of him, they halted, and set up a wail which rang like the cry of sea-gulls through the vast cavern. Masra, who was leaping among the boulders ahead of them, looked back, waving to them excitedly. With a last effort of his strength, Jim dragged Tinta forward, and gained the man's side. Masra pointed to a hole in the mass of boulders.

"See, there is a rock there," he gasped. "If we can cove the hole with that, the Falta are so foolish that they will never find us. Help me, Krim."

Having made Tinta descend the hole, Jim turned to assist Masra in moving the small rock that was to conceal their hiding place. Balancing it on the edge of the hole, and, still holding it with their hands, they let themselves down through the aperture. Then they lowered the stone, so that it half hid their place of concealment.

They had hardly done this, than the rocky surface above them resounded with the pounding of the Falta's feet. They could hear their high pitched, whining voices and the slobbering of their lips. They cowered there in the darkness and listened.

Prisoners of the Cave!

FOR nearly two hours the giants searched and searched for their prey. But as Masra had rightly assumed, their intelligence was so negligible, that they never dreamed of lifting any of the rocks to see if those they sought were hidden there.

One fact only seemed to have dawned upon them—one deduction their gross minds were alone capable of making from the set of circumstances—and that was, that the Kru must be hiding somewhere, and that if they waited long enough, they would come out and be caught.

Presently a curious silence fell, save for the massed breathing of the giants. Jim, peering through a crevice could see them seated around their hiding place, waiting and watching stolidly.

"How am I going to find the Flying Submarine?" he asked Masra. "My friend is relying on me to help him."

Masra shrugged his shoulders.

"We have done what we could. We can do no more."

Jim sunk down on a rock and buried his face on his hands. He felt very near to tears, as he thought of the terrible fate that must now inevitably await Stanislaus Cripps. The man had trusted him—yet here he was virtually a prisoner in the cave. In his despair, he heard Tinta's voice soft and pleading and musical.

"Do not be sorrowful, Krim. The Falta must leave some time before the coming of the Great Light, and maybe we shall yet find what you seek in time."

But her words failed to comfort the boy. For sixty hours now they had been searching for the Flying Submarine and had not discovered it. How could they expect to find it in the brief time between the raising of their siege and the moment when Stanislaus Cripps would be sacrificed to that demon god?

"It's no use, Tinta," he gasped. "I've cut you off from your people—I have condemned you to this wretched life—and all to no purpose."

"Who can read the pictures of Fate, Krim?" Tinta answered gravely.

It was then, Jim saw, by glancing at his watch, half-way through the third day. They had but thirty-six hours left. Stanislaus Cripps was doomed, he told himself. It seemed to him that it would be better to risk capture by the Falta, than to lie skulking there in that hole doing nothing. But both Tinta and Masra counselled patience, and Jim had perforce to wait.

Slowly the time went by. Another twelve hours passed. In twenty-four more the feast of the Coming of the Great Light would begin. But

still the Falta kept watch and guard on their hiding place. They could hear them from time to time whispering among themselves in those strange high pitched voices. Jim sat with his watch in his hand. An eternity seemed to elapse. Tinta prepared food and they ate, but the boy was unconscious of doing so. Only twelve hours more. Now eleven. Now ten.

"They will go soon," Masra exclaimed confidently.

But they did not go till there was but two hours left; then they heard the thundering of their footsteps as they rose and disappeared into the distance. Jim was the first up the little shaft, and with a violent shove of his shoulder had pushed the rock aside. The next instant he was clambering over the boulders. Almost mad with despair he rushed blindly on, hardly seeing where he was going. He could hear his companions behind him, but he took no heed of them. He was like one demented. He had failed Stanislaus Cripps!

Suddenly a cry made him halt. He turned round dazedly. There was Tinta, her figure very erect, standing on a boulder pointing into the distance.

"Krim!" she cried. "Krim—look!"

Hardly knowing what he was doing, his limbs seeming to act automatically under the urgency of her summons, Jim scrambled wearily to her side. Then, abruptly, the blood rushed to his head and raced tumultuously in his veins. There, not a mile away, lying like a great green bubble on a level stretch of the rocky floor, was the Flying Submarine. Wonderfully—miraculously—they had found it at last!

He glanced at his watch. There was still a little time before the hour fixed for the sacrifice to the demon god. Could they reach the Flying Submarine, set her floating in the air, and drive her to the scene of the Falta's demon rites, in time to save Stanislaus Cripps?

(Jim and his companions are certainly in for a desperate race against time. They've less than a couple of hours left now to rescue Stanislaus Cripps! Look out for great thrills in next week's thrilling instalment of our splendid Serial, and don't forget to order your copy of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY in advance!)

HANDFORTH'S ARK!

(Continued from page 35.)

picious—or perhaps she was reassured when she noted that the ark had passed out beyond the square. Anyway, she opened the door of the attic prison, and beheld stripped beds, a wide-open window, and no Irene & Co.

Miss Broome nearly fainted on the spot.

"Good gracious!" she panted. "The wretches! The good-for-nothing young hus-sies! They have dared to escape, in spite of my strict orders! They shall suffer for this!"

She staggered to the window and stared out. One glance at the chute was enough for her. The thing became plain. And there, slowly turning round the angle of the Ancient House, the ark was floating serenely out upon the flood.

"Come back!" screamed Miss Broome. "I insist—"

She broke off, gulping. Crowds of fellows were waving their hands to her—and there, in the midst of all those boys, were Irene & Co.! Miss Broome clutched at the window-ledge feebly.

And the ark drifted away from St. Frank's. She was an impressive sight, and she contained all the bold spirits of the Junior School. Incidentally, she also contained the bold spirits of the Moor View School!

They believed that an easy voyage lay ahead of them, with dry land at the end of it. And then the train—and home. It seemed quite nice—and so easy.

They didn't realise what they had let themselves in for!

THE END.

(Look out for some exciting times in next week's long complete story, "THE FLOATING SCHOOL!" Avoid disappointment by ordering your copy in advance.)

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 69.

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 f.d., 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.

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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.

All Right Ahead.

WE are swinging along in good style, and those Silver Medals are going like hot cakes. Thirteen introductions in all bring this fine award along. I am getting plenty of praise for the Silver Medal, and no wonder. It is a real beauty.

A Queue For The N.L.

There are queues for the NELSON LEE in Boksburg East, South Africa. So says my chum, Leslie W. Parkes, of Claim Street. More copies wanted there, and no mistake! This correspondent wants to see England, as there is always something happening here. In Boksburg there is nothing but heat. Well, if he comes over next winter I hope he will bring some of the temperature with him. London could do with it to mix with our north-east blizzards.

Advice on Emigration.

A Berks pal asks for advice as above. The query is far too vague. He would get information about conditions overseas from the Oversea Settlement Office, Caxton House, Westminster, London, S.W.; but, of course, before serviceable hints can be served out one must know what the applicant has in mind. Does he mean to go on a farm? Town jobs are hard to get.

Just Nothing.

A Midland chum is down in the dumps because he has been severely snubbed by a girl. "What am I to do about it?" he asks. The answer is at the top of this paragraph. Snubs don't really do much harm, my chum; they may do a power of good! Any old how, they have to be lived down.

Touring.

I advise the correspondent at Stoke who wants to know about inns and route details to get the book issued by the C.T.C., 280, Euston Road, London, N.W.1.

Colour Films.

J. R. Wilkinson writes from Alberta to ask about the coloured films. Are these hand-painted by Chinese, or is there a process for doing it? He can wash out the Chinks or any other hand painters; there is a special method for taking these coloured pictures, and this differs considerably from the system of ordinary colour photography. It was splendidly exemplified in "The Black Pirate," the great Douglas Fairbank's film.

S.F.L. Clubs.

To my mind, many correspondents who write in about forming St. Frank's clubs make a mistake of wanting to start on a large scale. I am always ready to insert

notices, and these help, but a good little club which will be of much service in the way of sport and hobbies can be got going by a few chums who are keen.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

F. E. Spreadbury, 6, Whitmore Gardens, Kensal Rise, London, N.W.10, wishes to hear from members in his district who would like to help form a St. Frank's League Sports and Social Club.

A. J. Southway, Beaulieu, 106, Queen's Road, South Farnborough, Hampshire, wishes to correspond with readers.

Norman Shirley, 242, Swan Lane, Coventry, wishes to hear from Stanley Whitehouse, late of Coventry.

Arthur R. Thomas, 13, Oakland Road, Mumbles, Swansea, desires to obtain Nos. 365-380 inclusive of the N.L.L., also Nos. 529-536 inclusive.

Member No. 5117, Mons Parade, Noble Park, Victoria, Australia, wishes to hear from members who are interested in stamp collecting, sport, etc.

Leslie Drury, 6, Beech Street, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, has back numbers he will sell.

P. J. Roche, 14, Mary Street, Coburg, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers in Ireland who are keen on swimming, jumping, tennis and other sports; also readers in England.

William Sullins, 1, Keogh Road, Stratford, London, E.15, wishes to hear from West Ham readers who are interested in the formation of an S.F.L. club and cricket team.

J. R. Wilkinson, 10219, 99th Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, wishes to hear from readers who wish to buy some mechanical equipment which includes many electrical supplies.

W. Raab, 94, Westbourne Grove, Bayswater, London, W., wishes to correspond with readers in China who are interested in photography.

J. T. Wren, No. 2 Flat, 46, Renfrew Road, Lambeth, London, S.E.11, wishes to correspond with readers interested in photography and model sailing ships.

Fred C. Camfield, 59, Salisbury Road, Wood Green, London, wishes to correspond with readers in the United States on any subject except stamps, postcards and natural history. All letters answered.

Fred Chapman, 12, Cavendish Road, Urmston, Manchester, wants to join a football or cricket club attached to the S.F.L., and would like to hear from readers who can help him to this.

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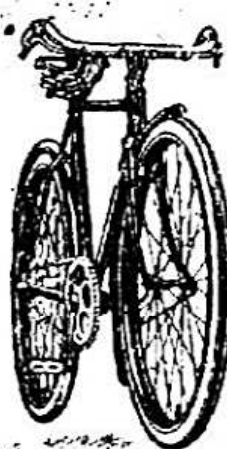
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