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S^T FRANK'S in CAMP!

An exciting long mystery and adventure story, featuring the Fresh Air Fiends.

New Series No. 56.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

May 28th, 1927.



Fighting his dizziness, Nipper staggered on through the gas-filled tunnel, followed by the choking Handforth. Then, just when all hope seemed gone, the beam of Nipper's torch picked out the exhausted figure of Sir Lucian. Were they in time to save him?

*The Mystery of Sir Lucian!**Handy on the Trail!*

ST. FRANK'S IN CAMP!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

*The Boys of St. Frank's in another rollicking
mystery and adventure yarn of the Fresh Air
Fiends.*

CHAPTER 1.

LAYING DOWN THE LAW.

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE, of the St. Frank's Remove, put his head out of the tent, and took a look at the morning.

"Good gad! There's a frightfully bracing chunk of ozone hovering about in the good old atmosphere," he observed. "Kindly shift-oh, Alf, old lad, and allow me to obtain a lungful!"

Alf Breno grinned.

"That's not ozone, Archie," he said. "Somebody's frying bacon!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie, nodding. "Now you come to mention it, old chappie, I recognise the perfume. Odds appetites and relishes! I'm dashed if some merchant isn't brewing some of the priceless old India and Ceylon! I mean, dash it, it's enough to make the head reel!"

"You'd better buck up, and prepare your own brekker," said Alf. "There's no Phipps

for you this morning, Archie—no early cup of tea on a tray! If you want your tea, you'll have to make it."

The Genial Ass of the Remove braced himself.

"When the worst comes to the worst, we must manfully face the ordeal," he said stoutly. "Is Archie going without his cup that soothes? Absolutely not, old rasher!"

And before long the usually helpless Archie was bustling about with kettle, tea-pot, and frying pan. When it came to the pinch, the Pride of the Glenthornes could do his share with the best of them.

The Open Air Camp was awakening for the day.

It was only just after seven o'clock, and the summer's morning was wonderfully fine. The sun was shining out of a blue, cloudless sky, and the Sussex countryside was green and delightful. Twenty yards from camp, the River Stowe flowed placidly along its course.

Scores of tents were placed here, and in front of each tent figures were busy—curiously clad figures. But they all belonged to St. Frank's. Removites. Fourth Formers, and Third Formers. One and all, they were wearing sandals on their bare feet. Their clothing mainly consisted of shorts and Arcadian-like tunics, with open necks and quaint girdles. But over the quaint costume, the bulk of the fellows were wearing their cricketering blazers and the familiar St. Frank's caps were everywhere.

Outside one tent, Edward Oswald Handforth was busily frying bacon, and laying down the law at the same time.

"This camp had got to do the thing properly, or not at all," he was saying. "We came here to lead the Simple Life, didn't we?"

"That was the general idea!" admitted Church.

"Well, the whole thing's a farce if we feed on bacon, and tea, and kippers, and steak, and mutton chops!" said Handforth firmly. "The only correct way to do this is to hunt for our meals!"

"Yes, I noticed the way you stalked those two rashers of bacon this morning," remarked McClure, nodding. "It was wonderful how you ran them to earth, and shot them both with the same barrel!"

Handforth frowned.

"I don't want any of your rot!" he said severely. "I'm talking about the future—from this meal onwards, in fact. Nobody's had time to hunt for food so far, but there's no reason why we shouldn't start this morning."

"You can start, if you like," said Church. "We shan't stop you."

"Lady Honoria has got the right idea, but it doesn't go far enough," continued Edward Oswald. "So it's up to me to set the example. I believe in doing a thing properly, or not at all."

"Generally not at all!" murmured McClure.

"What?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"Unless you can speak audibly, don't speak at all!" said Handforth, glaring. "We're here in this camp, and we've pledged ourselves to lead the Simple Life strictly and rigorously. We want to show the Head that his sister was justified in taking us under her banner."

Church and McClure did not pay much attention. They were busily preparing their own breakfasts, and they had no time to listen to their leader's chatter. In one way, he had ceased to be their leader now. For in this camp it was every fellow for himself.

The Open Air Society was an organisation which had been founded by Lady Honoria Dexter, and the good lady herself was in full charge of this recently opened branch. She was still organising—still recruiting new members.

Lady Honoria happened to be the sister of Dr. Malcolm Stafford, the learned head-

master of St. Frank's. She was also the wife of Sir Lucian Dexter, one of the School Governors.

Lady Honoria had descended upon St. Frank's like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky.

If the boys had been surprised by her coming, the Head himself had been literally staggered. This sister of his had always been a sort of skeleton in his cupboard.

Lady Honoria was a stormy petrel.

She was middle aged now, and her varied experiences covered such fads as joining the Suffragette movement in the old days, exploring odd corners of the world, and generally making herself a nuisance to everybody with whom she came in contact.

In short, the headmaster's sister was a crank of the very first order. If anything bizarre was going on, she was bound to be mixed up with it. In her favour, it can be said that she was as honest as the day, and that her motives, however misguided, were of the best. She was one of those women who can never rest content. She always had to be "up and doing." And as she had plenty of money, she was generally up, and she was always doing.

This Open Air Society was one of her mildest exploits. She was now devoting her activities to fads in connection with hygiene, and she had succeeded, with singular ease, in dragging St. Frank's into her snare.



CHAPTER 2.

TROUBLE IN TENT D.

Of course, Dr. Stafford had put his foot down hard when Lady Honoria had suggested a special branch of her Open Air Society for

the schoolboys.

But the Head had soon discovered that putting his foot down, however effective it might be with masters and boys, was utterly futile where his sister was concerned.

She simply took no notice of it, and went ahead as though Dr. Stafford had not opened a protesting mouth. For once, the Head's voice was no more authoritative than the voice of his smallest fag.

Lady Honoria's personality was powerful. She had a will like iron, and if anybody was foolish enough to stand in her path, she swept him away. The Head had been brushed aside without compunction, for he, of all men—being merely her own brother—was of utterly no account.

Thus her invitation to the school to join her camp had been allowed to stand, and a large proportion of the Remove, Fourth, and Third were already under canvas, enjoying the novelty of the situation.

It was a fine bit of sport.

No lessons, no school regulations to bother about, and any amount of enjoyment in the open air. True, belonging to this society

meant a minimum walk of five miles daily, and it entailed every fellow preparing his own meals, doing his own work, and relying on nobody but himself.

But who cared?

The weather was perfect, the river was near at hand, and the novelty of the whole adventure was attractive. Added to all this, a little mystery had crept in—a mystery which was keenly exercising the minds of Nipper, Pitt, Handforth, and a few others. Mysterious strangers were prowling in the neighbourhood of the school at night-time, and still more mysterious holes were being excavated on the sacred turf of Little Side. And Sir Lucian Dexter was another mystery in himself. Nobody had been able to make head or tail of him.

He never came near the camp, he hardly ever saw his wife, and it was whispered that he spent very little of his time under the Head's roof, where he was supposed to be a guest. Sir Lucian was a bony, gaunt sort of man, sinister in aspect, and strange in manner.

Altogether, these times were worth living.

When breakfast was over, Handforth was still full of his latest idea. When Edward Oswald embraced a scheme, he fairly hugged it, and took it to his bosom. And he generally went to extremes. This Simple Life notion had fascinated him completely.

"Yes, we've got to do the thing properly," he was saying, as he pushed his plate aside. "We don't eat another mouthful unless we capture it with our own hands, and by our own wits. That's the only way to lead a truly primitive existence."

Church and McClure grinned as Nipper, Pitt, Russell, and one or two others paused to hear the great man's edict.

"Is this the latest?" asked Nipper politely.

"Yes, it is," said Handforth. "I hope you'll support me, Nipper."

"You'll need supporting by the time the day's out," nodded Nipper. "If you're going to feed yourself on your own catches, Handy, you'll starve! We shall find you eating grass in the end!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "You wait until dinner-time! I'll have a better dinner than any of you—and I shall have the pleasure of knowing that I've obtained it by my own efforts. To start with, I'm going fishing. There's nothing to beat a good fish dinner."

"Why trouble to catch fish?" asked Church. "We've got three or four good bloaters in the tent."

"You idiot!" snorted Handforth. "Don't I keep telling you that the only way to lead the Simple Life is to fend for yourself in everything? It's only half doing it if you go to the grocer's and buy eggs. If you want eggs—find your own eggs! If you want vegetables, go into the woods and dig up some edible roots!"

"If you want bacon, choose a nice pig and cure him!" agreed Pitt.

"It's all very well to be funny, but I'm

serious!" growled Handforth. "And it's up to you chaps to back me up. Let's do this thing as it ought to be done."

Nipper shook his head.

"I can see your point of view, old man, but it's too idealistic," he said. "In this life it's always safer to be practical. On a tropical island we could carry out your scheme with great success. But here, in Sussex, it's a bit too difficult."

"Oh, rot!"

"The only edible roots about here are Farmer Holt's new potatoes, or somebody else's field turnips," said Nipper. "The only eatable eggs are to be found in a private chicken-house. I'll admit you've got the river, but you can't expect us to live on fish, and nothing else. No, Handy, the idea's all right, but the location is wrong. You could put it into practice if we were marooned on a South Sea island!"

The juniors moved off, and Handforth glared.

"Well, I hope you're satisfied," said Church. "If you ask me, Nipper put the thing jolly neatly. You can't get away from it, Handy—the only way to lead the Simple Life here is to buy your food from the shops."

"Rats!" said Handforth stubbornly. "Those other weaklings can do as they like. But we're going to handle the job properly."

"Are we?" said McClure.

"Yes, we are!"

"Not so much of the 'we'!" growled Church. "You can't drag us into this potty nonsense, Handy! In this camp we're all individuals. Every chap for himself! So you can hunt your own dinner with pleasure. Mac and I are going to the village to buy a nice chunk of steak."

And Handforth's chums entered the tent as an indication that the subject was closed. There was a big "D" on the tent flap, but Handforth & Co. were unaware of the identity of the humorist who had placed it there. Still, it served. The inseparable trio occupied Study D in the Ancient House, so it was only fitting that they should have Tent D in camp.

Church and McClure had hardly got inside before their leader barged in. His face was red, and his eyes were gleaming.

"Just a minute!" he said ominously. "I want a word with you rotters!"

His chums eyed him warily.

"Cheese it, old man," said Church, noting with dismay that the exit was covered. "You're not going to be silly, I suppose? Mac and I can do as we like—"

"Oh, can you?" interrupted Handforth. "Not while I'm able to breathe! This 'every fellow for himself' business is all very well, but I don't recognise it. We three have always stuck together, and we'll stick together now!"

"We're willing to carry on as usual—if you'll only be sensible," said McClure. "But it's a crazy idea to hunt for our own food. Why don't you think, Handy? We might catch a fish or two, but what about meat?"

"Aren't there plenty of rabbits?" demanded

Handforth. "And what's better than a rabbit pie?"

"A pie's a fat lot of good without a crust!" snapped Church, in exasperation. "How do you suppose you'll get a crust? Perhaps you'll grow the wheat—after finding the seeds wild in the forest? Then perhaps you'll thresh the wheat, and grind it into flour? You're a pretty marvellous chap, so we'll accept your word——"

"Rot!" interrupted Handforth gruffly. "Can't we have stewed rabbit? Why quibble about a crust?"

"Well, what about vegetables?" demanded McClure. "Vegetables don't grow wild. And you're not proposing that we should pilfer out of somebody's allotment, are you? You've got to look at the thing from a practical point of view, Handy. It's the only possible way."

But Handforth was thoroughly exasperated.

"I'm fed up with this argument," he said grimly. "Are you going to back me up, or are you not? I want a straightforward answer!"

"We're not!" said his chums, in one voice.

"All right—don't blame me for this!" roared Handforth.

He flung himself into battle, and the next second Tent D was rocking and swaying ominously on its flimsy foundations.



CHAPTER 3.

ONLY A TIDDLER FOR HANDY!

"GREAT Scott!" said Alf Brent. "What's happening in there?"

— He and Archie Glen-

thorne were just passing Tent D, and they stared at the canvas edifice in astonishment. A bulge would appear on one side, and then sway across to the other. Now and again the whole tent would reel drunkenly.

"It seems to me that there's trouble in the family, laddie!" said Archie, with concern. "A bit of a bother, what? Shall we pile in, and see what can be done? Or not?"

"Or not, I think," grinned Brent.

"Correct-oh," nodded Archie. "This, dash it, is the abode of Handforth, now I come to inspect it through the good old monocle. And strife is the natural order— Whoa! Odds crashes and disturbances! There she goes!"

With a billowing movement, the entire tent sagged over and collapsed on its side. Muffled yells came from the folds, and after a moment Walter Church crawled out. His left eye was puffy, and a thin trickle of red was adorning a corner of his mouth. He came out into the sunlight, and sat there, looking dazed.

"That's the first survivor!" remarked Reggie Pitt, coming by, and pausing.

Arnold McClure came next. One ear was swollen, his nose was considerably enlarged, and there was an expression of dreamy contentment on his battered face—although why he should look contented was a mystery.

"Survivor No. 2," said Pitt. "I must say that you're badly knocked about, my sons."

McClure smiled with happiness.

"Are we?" he murmured. "Wait until you see Handy!"

They did not have to wait long. The canvas heaved, and Edward Oswald Handforth crawled into the sunlight. And now the explanation of McClure's contentment was patent. Handforth was a wreck. He had a dazed, bleary look in his face, his under-lip was swollen, and his nose was puffy. Both eyes were the worse for wear.

"Well, it was a good scrap, anyway," he said thickly. "Who won?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Perhaps he won't try to foist any more of his rot on us!" said Church. "We're not going to make fools of ourselves, just because he gives his silly orders. Not likely! If he wants to go and hunt for his dinner, let him hunt."

And Church and McClure rose to their feet, and vanished among the other tents. Handforth picked himself up slowly and painfully.

"I'll get even with them for this," he muttered. "By George! They won't be so jolly cocksure when I turn up at dinner-time with my catch!"

"You'd better accept the situation, old man, and give up this hunting idea," remarked Pitt. "You'll only make trouble for yourself——"

"When I want your comments, I'll ask for them!" interrupted Handforth aggressively. "I'm ashamed of the whole lot of you! Instead of doing a thing properly, you're only playing at it. Well, I'll set you an example."

The others walked off, chuckling. And twenty minutes' later, Handforth set out on his mission.

His appearance was greatly improved. He had removed most of the traces of the fight, and his jaw was set in a determined way.

He strode up the towing-path to the boat-house, and when he ventured upon the river he took with him an expensive fishing-rod and all the necessary outfit. He hadn't had this tackle long, and so far he had caught nothing. But this morning he was determined to catch enough fish for his own dinner, and he had visions of giving some away, too. By George, that would show them!

He took no notice of the various polite comments which were sent to him from the bank. Members of the Open Air Society were actively engaged on all hands—for there was plenty to do in the camp. Everything was quite free and easy here, however. There were no restrictions, and no regulations. As long as the fellows honoured the simple laws, nothing more was asked of them.

Handy anchored his little craft in mid-stream, and then commenced fishing. Judging by the nature of his outfit, he should have met with great success, for he wanted for nothing. But, somehow, his float remained placidly on the surface of the water.

You Ought To Get This!

You're keen on cricket, aren't you? It's a great game, and even if you don't play much you probably watch county matches on hot summer afternoons.

It would be fine if you could name all the positions of the fielders, and if you knew just why they stand where they do. How much more interest you would have in the game if you understood how the bowler is trying to trap the batsman—and how the batsman is doing his best *not* to be trapped.

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The Boys' **REALM** *OF SPORT & ADVENTURE*

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An hour passed, and not a bite had he had.

"There must be something wrong with the giddy river," he said fiercely. "Just my luck, of course! I'll bet these fatheads have scared all the fish away, what with their shouting and bathing!"

He glared down the river to a spot where a number of juniors were disporting themselves gaily in the water. How on earth could a fellow fish amid all this confusion?

Then a punt came drifting gently down the stream. Handforth's temper was by no means improved when he recognised the occupants. He was an impatient fellow, and the reluctance of the fish to bite exasperated him.

"My minor!" he muttered, as he stared at the punt. "By George! I'm jiggered if the young rotter isn't fishing, too! Like his nerve!"

Willy Handforth was reclining in the front, and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon brought the craft to a standstill in mid-stream.

"Clear off!" roared Handforth fiercely. "What the dickens do you think you're doing, Willy?"

"I'm fishing."

"Don't be an ass," retorted his major. "How the dickens can you fish with a home-made rod like that, and a piece of thread for a line? I suppose you've got a bent pin on the end of it? You'll never catch anything!"

"Oh, I don't know!" replied Willy cheerfully. "I haven't had much luck yet, I'll admit. I've only caught a couple of roach —"

"What!"

"One of them's pretty big—look!" continued the fag blandly.

He held up a splendid example, and Handforth gazed at it dazedly.

"You can't spoof me!" he snapped. "You didn't catch that with your silly line. Why, my only hat! I'm blessed if you haven't got a bottle-cork for a float!"

"What's the matter with it?" asked Willy. "It floats, doesn't it?"

"Not now!" said Chubby Heath excitedly. "Whoa! Look out, Willy! Down she goes! You've got another bite, old man!"

Willy hauled in another beauty, and calmly popped it into his basket. His major watched fascinatedly.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he breathed.

"Of course, I can't expect to equal your catch, Ted, old man," said Willy. "With that expensive rod of yours, you've probably caught half a dozen whacking great pike. Still, I'm not grumbling. We shall have some nice fresh fish for dinner."

Handforth was so startled that he hardly noticed that his own float was gently bobbing about. It was Willy, indeed, who called his attention to the fact. He stared at the thing with sudden joy.

"By George, if this is a pike, I'll be able

to hold my head up, after all!" he muttered fiercely. "I'm not going to let my minor have the laugh over me!"

He gingerly wound in his line, and a united cackle went up from the three fags. A tiny, insignificant fish was wriggling forlornly at the end of Handforth's line.

"Who said that Ted isn't an angler?" grinned Willy. "He's caught a tiddler, anyway!"



CHAPTER 4.

THE SIMPLE LIFE.

HANDFORTH allowed the unhappy fish to escape.

He didn't actually mean to, but he gave such a start that he jerked the little creature off his hook. But one glimpse of it had been sufficient. A tiddler! He wasn't actually sure that it had been that type of fish, but Willy probably knew.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go on! Laugh!" hooted Handforth. "But I'll prove my case before dinner-time!"

"Then you'd better buck up!" suggested Willy. "Some of the chaps are getting ready for cooking even now. You've only got about another hour, at the most. I'm going ashore, so if you want to borrow my rod——"

"Go and eat coke!" roared his major. "How the dickens can I fish while you keep interrupting?"

In desperation, he pulled up the river, and did not anchor again until he was well clear of the camp. Here everything was still and peaceful. The water was deep, and the conditions were ideal for angling.

But that was as far as Handforth got.

He changed his bait two or three times, he did everything possible—but not one bite did he get. And his alarm was increasing. Catching his own dinner wasn't so easy!

He had set out so full of confidence, too. He always did. Experience was the only teacher which Handforth recognised. But he never seemed to learn by his experiences.

And at last, to his dismay, dinner-time arrived.

And still he was without a bite. Inside, he was aware of a dull, gnawing pain. He had eaten rather sparingly at breakfast-time purposely—so that he would develop a first-class appetite for the ripping meal that he had planned to prepare.

He had developed the first-class appetite, but the ripping meal seemed remote.

And at last, exasperated beyond all words, he hauled up his anchor, and decided that angling was a ridiculously over-rated sport. He went back to camp mechanically. If he had been wise, he would have steered well clear of it, for the very atmosphere of the place was enough to make him dizzy.

Cooking operations were in full blast. Here sausages were frying, with chip potatoes

browning merrily in the same pan. And there a juicy steak was sizzling. No matter where Handforth looked, appetising food was either being cooked or eaten.

Church and McClure were just turning out their own dinner, and Handforth's mouth watered as he eyed it.

True to the rules of the Society, Church and McClure had each prepared his own food. But it consisted of the same ingredients—fried steak, garnished with well-browned onions. And floury roast potatoes to go with them.

"Oh, here you are, Handy!" said Church brightly. "We wondered what had become of you. We've finished with the fire, so you can go ahead with your own cooking."

Handforth gulped slightly.

"I—I've decided to do without any dinner," he said carelessly. "We're leading the Simple Life, and I don't believe in all this gorging. It isn't healthy."

His chums looked at him in amazement.

"There's nothing in the Simple Life to make a fellow starve himself," said Church. "What about the fish you were going to catch? Where's the bag? How many did you get hold of?"

"Eh?"

"What about all your fish?"

"I—I didn't bother!" said Handforth, with exaggerated indifference. "At least, the rotten fish wouldn't bite, and there's my silly young minor catching whacking great beauties with only a giddy bottle-cork, a piece of carpet thread, and a bent pin!"

Handforth's exasperation had betrayed him.

"And you caught nothing?" grinned Church. "Hard lines, old man. Well, never mind. There's a chunk of steak left, and heaps of onions. Get busy with the frying-pan."

Handforth hesitated. The odour which came to his nostrils was enough to make his senses reel, but his natural stubbornness arose within him.

"No fear!" he said grimly. "I meant what I said this morning. I'm going to catch my own food, or eat nothing!"

"But you can't go on like that!" protested McClure, with concern. "Don't be such a chump, Handy. You'll starve to death. I thought you'd give the whole thing up——"

"Well, I'm not giving it up, and you needn't try to tempt me with this bought grub," interrupted Handforth. "It's against my principles to eat it. This afternoon I'll catch some rabbits."

"How?" asked Church.

"Eh?"

"How?"

"How?" said Handforth. "Well, I—I shall catch them, of course."

"It's easy enough to say it, but you need a gun," said McClure. "Or you might be able to snare them. But that means waiting. You can't snare rabbits to order."

"I've got a catapult," said Handforth obstinately.

His minor sauntered up.

"Brought you one of my fish, Ted, old son," he said generously. "The biggest one of the lot. Your appetite's pretty hefty, isn't it? Take it with my blessing."

He held out the prize of his catch.

For a moment Handforth hesitated, then he steeled himself.

"Jolly decent of you, Willy, but I'd rather not take it—thanks all the same," he said awkwardly.

"Why not?" asked Willy. "Perhaps you'll have better luck than me one day, and then you can return the compliment."

"That's not the point," said his major. "My policy is to catch my own grub—to prepare it single-handed. I don't believe in doing things by half-measures, and bought food is barred."

"But this isn't bought food," said Willy. "I caught it!"

"I know you did—but I didn't!"

"What's the difference?"

"There's a lot of difference," growled Handforth. "I'm not going to eat anything unless I've captured it with my own hands. I don't care whether it's a fish, rabbit or a wild duck, or even a giddy sparrow! Every fellow for himself! And the one who fails to satisfy his own appetite is not worthy to live the Simple Life. That's my argument, so you can keep your fish with my compliments."

Willy shook his head.

"Poor old Ted!" he said sadly. "You mean well, but you're misguided. You'll have to knuckle under in the long run, so why not take the plunge now?"

"You'll see whether I shall knuckle under!" snapped Edward Oswald. "Determination can do anything—and I'm determined to show the whole lot of you that I can win through!"



CHAPTER 5.

MORE RECRUITS!

R. CROWELL, the master of the Remove, frowned as he observed a few of his boys moving purposefully towards the playing-fields. There was some reason for Mr. Crowell's frown, for the bell for afternoon lessons was clanging.

"Just a moment, boys!" he called out.

The juniors halted.

"Anything we can do, sir?" asked Singleton politely.

"Yes, Singleton, you can accompany me to the Form Room," said Mr. Crowell. "Surely you are aware that the school bell is ringing?"

"Yes, sir, but we're not coming in for afternoon lessons," explained Singleton. "We've decided to join the Open Air Society at once, and—"

"Nonsense!" interrupted the Form-master. "I was hoping that a few sensible boys

would remain, but you are all catching this ridiculous fever, apparently. Be advised by me—"

"Thanks all the same, sir, but we had enough of the Form-room this morning," said one of the other juniors. "It was like an oven—and it'll be twice as hot this afternoon."

They raised their caps, and were preparing to move on, when Mr. Crowell stopped them.

"This is very foolish," he said testily. "I cannot appeal to the other boys, since they have already joined this absurd society. But perhaps I can prevail upon you to think carefully before taking the step. No doubt it seems all very nice to live in the open air during this hot weather. But what about when this heat wave goes?"

"It looks like lasting, sir."

"That is all the more reason to assume that it will suddenly collapse," urged Mr. Crowell. "And when we have rain and cold winds, you will regret this impulsiveness. There is not much pleasure in camp life during wet weather. So think carefully."

"Thanks all the same, sir, but we've thought," said Singleton.

The juniors raised their caps again, and passed on, and Mr. Crowell, with a worried frown, continued on his way to the School House. He received a shock when he entered the Remove Form-room, for only a bare half-dozen juniors had turned up.

The thing was becoming a farce.

And it was just the same in the other Form-rooms, too. Recruits for the Open Air Society were pouring into camp that afternoon. The weather was so hot that the fellows were succumbing to the lure. Those who had hesitated at first, now made up their minds.

St. Frank's was greatly depleted, and there was every prospect that the Senior Forms would soon follow the example of the Lower School. The campers were enjoying themselves so much, and the open air life was so alluring, that there was liable to be a general exodus before long.

Dr. Stafford was very worried.

True, it was getting near to the Whitsun holidays; that was one consolation, since the school would naturally break up, in any event, and by the time the new term started perhaps Lady Honoria would have taken her fads elsewhere.

All the same, Dr. Stafford felt that the old school was being made a laughing-stock, and he, as headmaster, was naturally coming in for a lot of unfavourable comment.

Whispers were already going round that he was mortally afraid of his sister, and that she could twist him round her little finger. This was not the kind of thing that conduced to respect.

And it was rough on the Head, too. For if he had only had his forceful sister to deal with, he might possibly have over-ruled her. But her husband was an influential member of the governing board, and although the

Head had full authority at St. Frank's, Sir Lucian's wishes were, nevertheless, tantamount to commands.

Dr. Stafford chanced to encounter his brother-in-law walking across Inner Court, and he detained him.

"I am very concerned, Lucian," he said anxiously. "I hear that many other boys are swarming down to Honoria's camp."

"That is no reason for concern, surely?" said Sir Lucian coldly. "My wife's mission is a worthy one, and I must say that your attitude is inexplicable, Malcolm. What earthly reason can you have for these objections? If I, a governor, countenance them, why should you disapprove?"

"I am afraid we shall never understand one another, Lucian," replied the Head stiffly. "You, as a governor, have no responsibility. You have no position to lose. But my own position is very delicate. I am seriously afraid that I am losing prestige. The boys are saying that I am afraid of Honoria, and that she is—ahem!—ruling the roost!"

Sir Lucian smiled a rather sour smile.

"That is very near the truth, isn't it?" he asked drily.

"It is not!" snapped the Head. "But for your support, Honoria would have dropped this madness long ago. I can be master of my own school without succumbing to the influence of a woman. The fact that she is my own sister makes no difference. It is your attitude which distresses me. If you will talk to Honoria——"

"My dear Malcolm, what on earth is the use?" growled Sir Lucian. "Heaven knows. I have talked to her until I am hoarse! I very much regret to say that your sister is a wilful, stubborn, determined woman. But she is my wife and in this particular fad of hers I am prepared to support her. There is nothing so beneficial as the open air, and this camp will do your boys an enormous amount of good, so don't be absurd."

The Head compressed his lips.

"Before long the whole school will desert me!" he said curtly.

"Well, what does it matter?"

"It matters a great deal! It matters——"

"I am sorry that I cannot see eye to eye with you, Malcolm," interrupted Sir Lucian. "My wife has made up her mind, and I am not rash enough to oppose her. You, of course, may do as you wish, but you will have a thankless task."

And Sir Lucian walked on, leaving Dr. Stafford biting his lip.

More recruits were leaving St. Frank's every hour, and Dr. Stafford felt that the position was becoming impossible. Yet what could he do? His sister would undoubtedly create scene after scene if he went to the camp and ordered all the boys back. And his brother-in-law would be highly incensed. Not that the Head feared Sir Lucian.

It must be confessed that he was mortally afraid of Lady Honoria. In one hour she would be able to destroy his prestige for ever. Yes, it was far better to have let

things run on as they were going. The boys seemed satisfied, at all events, and the majority of them were ready to cheer him for his generosity in allowing them to go.

"Good gracious!" murmured the Head bleakly. "Generosity, indeed! That is what they credit me with! And in reality I am forced by circumstances. Honoria I could deal with, but while Lucian is ready to support her I am helpless. I really can't understand why he does it!"

And the Head went indoors, a much-worried man.



CHAPTER 6.

HANDY THE HUNTER!

"ABBITS," said Handforth hungrily.

He was standing in front of Tent D, and Handforth, Church, and McClure were just finishing their clearing-up work. The midday meal was over, and most of the campers were feeling well satisfied. Preparing their own food and cooking it was much to their liking.

But Edward Oswald Handforth had gone hungry.

"Rabbits!" he repeated dreamily.

"Why not have a piece of steak, and done with it?" suggested Church. "It's still here, old man. You needn't be afraid."

"This afternoon we're going hunting," said Handforth curtly.

"Are we?"

"Yes."

"Hunting for rabbits?"

"Rabbits first, but I'm not very particular," replied Handforth, licking his lips. "I dare say a squirrel might cook nicely. Anyhow, as soon as you chaps are ready, we'll go into Bellton Wood."

Church and McClure were sorry for their leader, although they were exasperated with him for being so obstinate. Their quarrel of the early morning was forgotten. Scraps of that nature were every-day affairs.

"Oh, we'll come with you if you like," said Church. "But I'm afraid you won't catch much in the woods. If it was later on in the year, you might find some blackberries, and satisfy your appetite with them. Or even wood-nuts!"

"Don't be a blithering idiot!" said Handforth desperately. "This isn't the time of the year for fruit. Nothing's ripe yet; at least, nothing wild. I've got to kill a rabbit or catch a wood pigeon. I'm not particular. And you chaps can come along to help."

"But we're not allowed to help," pointed out McClure.

"Why not?"

"Because you said so."

"I—I didn't exactly mean it," said Handforth hastily. "At least, you can come along to watch, I suppose? You can help me to spot the prey, can't you?"

His attention strayed, and Church and



Both Church and McClure showed obvious signs of combat, but Handforth was in an even worse condition as he crawled from the wrecked tent. He had a dazed look on his face, his under-lip was swollen, his nose was puffy, and both eyes were black. For once in a way Handy had come off second best at the hands of his chums!

McClure found that he was looking at a cheery little dog which had appeared from a neighbouring tent. He was Boz, Nipper's pet. The dog gave Handforth a friendly wag as he spotted Edward Oswald's glance.

Reggie Pitt, who was passing, suddenly looked alarmed.

"Hey, Nipper!" he sang out.

Nipper put his head out of the adjoining tent.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Better take your dog in," said Reggie.

"Why, what's he up to?"

"Nothing. But Handy's looking at him!" said Pitt.

"Well, why shouldn't Handy look at him?" asked Nipper.

"It's dangerous," said Pitt solemnly. "I shouldn't like to think of poor old Boz appearing on a plate as camouflaged Irish stew! Handy's desperate, and the look he gave just now was purposeful."

Nipper grinned.

"I don't think he's so bad as that," he replied, with a chuckle.

"You—you comic clown!" snorted Handforth, glaring at the blandly grinning Pitt. "If you think I'm reduced to eating a dog, you've made a bloomer. When tea-time comes, I'll make your mouth water! Just you wait!"

He stalked off, and Church and McClure followed him.

Nothing was said until the camp had been left far behind. They plunged into Bellton Wood, and were grateful for the cool relief. It was blazing hot in the sunshine, and the afternoon had settled over the countryside more oppressive than ever.

Yet there was no sign of any break in the weather. The glass remained high, and the skies were cloudless. It was a regular heat wave, and nobody could tell how long it would last.

Handforth pulled out a powerful catapult and examined it.

"If only I can get a direct hit, I'll soon pot a rabbit," he said. "If either of you fellows see one, don't forget to give me the tip. If we can nab one within ten minutes, I shall be as pleased as Punch. I'll go straight back and cook the giddy thing."

His chums hated to throw cold water upon his high hopes, so they said nothing. But they were very doubtful of success. Handforth the hunter would probably fare no better than Handforth the angler. The leader of Study D had taken on a Herculean job.

But there were undoubtedly rabbits in the wood.

The three juniors received evidence of this within the first hundred yards, for something scuttled away through the ferns and the

undergrowth, and they had a momentary vision of a fat, healthy-looking rabbit. But it had gone even before Handforth could get his catapult ready.

"My hat!" he said eagerly. "Did you see that? A rabbit as big as a giddy calf! A couple like that, and I shall have enough food for two or three days! I can smoke some of the flesh, and——"

"Better wait till you've caught the rabbit before you start talking about smoking the flesh," interrupted Church. "We may not spot another one for an hour!"

They proceeded cautiously, and they suddenly met with another stroke of luck. Handforth was leading when a brown object shot out from behind a clump of undergrowth and whizzed along a clearing in the wood.

It was another rabbit!

Handforth gave a yell and flew after it.

"Shoot!" roared Church. "It's no good chasing the thing! Where's your catapult, you ass?"

Handforth felt desperately for his catapult as he ran, but he couldn't find it, and the rabbit by this time had vanished into the distance. But Handforth still plunged on.

In fact, he plunged in a manner that he had not bargained for.

Unexpectedly, as he forced his way through some undergrowth, he beheld a yawning hole right in front of him. He tried to check himself, but it was too late.

Crash!

Edward Oswald plunged down head-first, and fell to the bottom of that deep cavity with a heavy thud. He rolled over, smothered in gravel and dirt.

He lay there, still.

Church and McClure, hurrying up behind, wondered where he had vanished to. One second they had seen him, and the next second he had gone. They ran up, vaguely apprehensive.

"Handy!" yelled Church.

"Oh!" came a groan from somewhere in the depths.

"Where the dickens are you?" gasped McClure, pushing forward. "Where—— By Jupiter! Look here, Churchy!"

They both stared down into that deep hole.

Handforth was just sitting up, and he was dazed and hurt. He was half buried in gravel, and he was smothered.

"I—I fell in before I could stop myself," he muttered. "Oh, my goodness. I've hurt my giddy leg! I believe I've broken it! My ribs feel smashed up!"

His chums lowered themselves to his side.

"Come on, Handy!" said Church gently. "Don't try to move. We'll lift you. Get hold, Mac. Now then, easy does it!"

"Cheese it!" said Handforth gruffly. "Don't be a couple of asses! I can get up without your help, can't I?"

"But your leg's broken, old man."

"I—I don't think it is," said Handforth.

"And your ribs are smashed in."

"Don't be funny!" frowned Handforth, picking himself up and rubbing himself

down. "I'm only a bit bruised. But I can't make it out," he added, looking round. "We've been through this part of the woods scores of times, and I never noticed this blessed hole before. That's why I fell into it! I wasn't ready!"

"It hasn't been like this for long," said Church, giving his attention to the cavity. "Why, look here! If I'm any judge, this—— Yes, by jingo!" he added excitedly. "Look at this!"

He made a grab at something, and pulled it from behind a pile of stones and gravel. It was a pickaxe.

"Great Scott!" gasped Handforth. "Then this hole's only just been dug! Another mystery!"



CHAPTER 7.

A MYSTERY.

THE chums of Study D looked at one another with startled expressions.

They remembered those other excavations—those unaccountable holes which had been dug in Little Side. They remembered their adventure with the three mysterious men who had escaped in the night. There had been no explanation of that seemingly pointless affair.

And now they had discovered another excavation!

But this one was right on the other side of the school, and remote from Little Side. What could it mean? Were the same men responsible?

"This beats me hollow!" said Church, at last. "No wonder you nearly broke your neck, Handy! You thought it was solid ground here."

"Of course I did," said Handforth. "How was I to know that some idiots had been messing about with picks and shovels? This hole must have been dug out last night!"

"Why last night?" put in McClure keenly. "It was probably being dug when we came into the wood, a quarter of an hour ago! Otherwise, why should this pick have been left here? The people responsible evidently left in a tremendous hurry."

Church suddenly started, and sniffed the air.

"What's the matter?" asked Handforth.

"It may be only my fancy, but I thought I could smell tobacco smoke just now—a kind of waft of it," said Church. "That seems to show that we disturbed the beggars at their very work."

"They may be watching us!" whispered McClure.

They stared round, suddenly tense.

This was a very lonely part of the wood, well out of the way of the known footpaths. The three juniors were standing at the bottom of the excavated portion. And on every side the dense ferns and the undergrowth crowded round.

Thickly growing trees surrounded the whole little spot. So thick were the trees, indeed,

that the upper foliage completely concealed the sky. Down here the light was subdued, and the air was close, without a breath of wind. Only in one or two spots did the afternoon sunlight penetrate through.

"I don't think there's anybody here," murmured Handforth. "If we disturbed them, they must have bunked. They're a mile away by now. By George! I'm going to examine this spot carefully! We may find a solution to the puzzle."

"Do you think this has been done by the same men who messed up the playing fields?" asked McClure.

"Of course it has!"

"But we can't be sure——"

"It's a certainty," interrupted Handforth. "You don't suppose that two sets of people would go about the countryside, digging mysterious holes? We've got to find out what it means!"

He moved, and winced slightly.

"Are you hurt much, old man?" asked Church, with concern.

"No, it's nothing," said Edward Oswald. "I don't care if I am hurt, either. I'm too interested in this mystery to take any notice of it. Now, why the dickens have these people been doing all this?"

They examined the ground minutely, but there was nothing to see.

Nothing, that is, except loose gravel, stones, and earth. There wasn't any explanation of the problem. They had found the one pickaxe, but no other clue.

"It all seems so silly!" said Handforth, in exasperation. "They must be escaped lunatics!"

"I don't believe it," said Church. "There's something funny behind this. There's something pretty bad, too! It would be a good idea if we explained everything to Mr. Lee, and got him to investigate."

"Not likely!" said Handforth quickly. "Mr. Lee would discover the thing in no time, and then we should be dished out of the fun! I say! An idea! There might have been a murder, and they're trying to find a place to bury the body!"

"That's very likely!" said McClure tartly. "Who'd bury a body in the middle of a cricket field?"

"H'm! It seems a bit unlikely," admitted Handforth. "Well, anyhow, there must be some reason for——"

"Look!" gasped Church.

He grabbed Handforth's arm, and pointed. For a fraction of a second, Handforth and McClure saw something move. They had an idea that a face had been there. Church was certain of it.

"A face!" he shouted. "Somebody was watching us!"

They heard a movement beyond the ferns, the crackling of twigs. And the next minute they were scrambling up the sides of that pit, bent on giving chase. They blundered through the undergrowth, running blindly, and at last they were compelled to give up the hunt as futile.

"He's gone!" panted Handforth. "If we hadn't been down in that beastly hole, we might have overtaken—— Hallo! What the dickens is the matter with you, Churchy?" he added curiously. "What are you looking so scared about?"

"I'm not scared!"

"Well, then, why are you looking startled?"

"That face!" said Church breathlessly. "I recognised it! I saw him distinctly—for a clear second before you chaps looked up. He was Sir Lucian Dexter!"

"What!" yelled Handforth.

"Eh?" shouted McClure.

"He was Sir Lucian Dexter."

"Rot!" said Edward Oswald. "Don't be so dotty! Sir Lucian Dexter is Lady Honoria's husband, and——"

"I can't help that!" interrupted Church. "I tell you I recognised him. It's not a face you could easily mistake."

"But you're mad!" ejaculated McClure. "Sir Lucian Dexter is one of the governors of the school. He's a man with pots of money! He wouldn't be fooling about with this crooked sort of business!"

Church set his jaw.

"I don't care who he is, or what he is!" he said stubbornly. "I saw his face just now, and I tell you he was Sir Lucian Dexter."

"The Head's brother-in-law!" breathed Handforth. "Oh, it's too thick! I think we'd better get back to camp, and have a word with Nipper. He was in that other affair, so he ought to know about this. We can't do any more here, anyhow."

McClure was looking thoughtful.

"Now we come to remember it, Sir Lucian might be mixed up in something mysterious," he said. "What about when we saw him measuring the ground, and tapping with his stick? If you ask me, he's dotty!"

Handforth shook his head.

"That doesn't explain much," he replied. "There were three men on the job, don't forget—three men digging up Little Side! Well, we can't reckon that there are three lunatics, can we? And this excavation in the wood wasn't done by one chap, either."

"If there was any possible object, we could understand the business," said Church. "But why make holes in a cricket field? Why dig up a wood? It all seems so ridiculous!"

And the chums of Study D remained mystified.



CHAPTER 8.

BY WHOSE HAND?

THEY made their way out of the wood in thoughtful silence, and it wasn't until they were crossing the meadows towards the camp that Church remembered something.

"What about your rabbit?" he asked, halting.

"Rabbit?" repeated Handforth.

"Weren't you going to catch——"

"Never mind that now," growled Edward

Oswald. "I'm jolly hungry, and I'm still determined to stick to my policy. But this other business needs investigating."

So they continued on their way.

Handforth was ravenous, but his appetite for detective work was greater than his appetite for food. He would have carried on the investigation single-handed if such a thing had been possible. But it would require a few dozen thoroughly to search Bellton Wood.

And this was Handforth's plan. He was going to get every available fellow, and institute a complete hunt. He had concluded that the woods held the key to the puzzle, and he wanted to waste no time.

As it happened, they ran into Nipper & Co. outside the camp. The chums of Study C had been having a bathe, and they were looking fresh and cool. Boz was with them, leaping friskily about and getting himself thoroughly over-heated.

"Hallo!" said Nipper, as Handforth & Co. approached. "Why these grave looks? What's the matter, Handy? You've just come out of the wood, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Have you found a rabbit there?"

"No; but we've found a hole!" said Handforth tensely. "A giddy excavation, my lad! As a matter of fact, I was just looking for you. There's something in the wood that needs our attention!"

He explained the circumstances, and Nipper listened with considerable interest.

"It seems pretty obvious that the same men have been at work again," he remarked at length. "We don't know who they are, or what their game is, but——"

"We do know who they are!" interrupted Church. "Handy hasn't told you yet, but I recognised the man who looked at me through the ferns. He was Sir Lucian Dexter!"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie Tregellis-West blankly.

"Oh, cheese it!" protested Tommy Watson.

"Look here, Church, are you sure of this?" asked Nipper keenly. "Are you absolutely positive that you recognised Sir Lucian? It's important that you should avoid guesswork!"

"He was Sir Lucian," said Church briefly.

"Hold on," said Handforth. "Why is it so important?"

"Because Church's evidence corroborates mine," replied Nipper. "I didn't tell any of you fellows, but I've had an idea that Sir Lucian was mixed up in this mystery. When we nearly captured those men on Little Side, I fancied I recognised Sir Lucian. But as I wasn't sure, I said nothing."

"Well, this proves it," said Handforth eagerly. "I was a bit sceptical myself when Church told me, but this removes all doubt, doesn't it?"

"Not all," replied Nipper. "I didn't see him clearly, and it was only a suspicion on my part, and Church had one fleeting glimpse. It seems good enough to clinch

the matter, but we mustn't look on it as a certainty."

"By the way," said Church. "What about that old piece of parchment you found, Nipper? One of those chaps dropped it during the scrap, and——"

"I've got it," said Nipper. "But we needn't think about that now. I shall probably show it to the gov'nor, and get him to decipher it. We'd better keep this fresh development to ourselves. We don't want everybody to be saying rummy things about Sir Lucian. He's Lady Honoria's husband—and he's related to the Head. We've got to be cautious."

"Begad, yes!" nodded Sir Montie gravely. "It would be frightfully awful if the Head's name were dragged into some shady business. I hope you'll be discreet, Handy, dear old boy?"

"That's a slur," said Handforth coldly. "Surely you can trust me to use tact?"

"That's just the trouble—we can't," said Nipper, with a chuckle. "But this is very important, Handy, so we hope you'll rise to the occasion. Think of the harm we should do if we spread unfavourable reports about the Head's brother-in-law. And there's no proof that Sir Lucian is even remotely connected with these people who are crazy on digging."

"No proof?" repeated Handforth, staring. "What about the face Church saw? What about your own evidence?"

"My evidence amounts to nothing more than a vague suspicion," replied Nipper. "And Church's story is too thin to amount to proof. How do we know that there isn't somebody prowling about here who looks just like Sir Lucian? It's not likely, of course, but I'm just trying to show you that we can't be sure. We don't know for certain that Sir Lucian himself is the man."

Nipper's methods did not suit Handforth.

"Rats!" he said gruffly. "I'm satisfied, anyhow, and I want to get all the chaps together, so that we can make a search of the woods. Everybody must join in—Fourth-Formers, and fags, and——"

"Just a minute," said Nipper. "What are you going to search for?"

"Eh?"

"What are you going to tell these chaps, when you suggest an organised hunt in the woods?"

"Can't we explain that we suspect Sir Lucian, and that——" began Handforth.

"That's just it!" interrupted Nipper.

"So far, this little mystery has been kept confined to our own little circle. But if you organise a big search party, there'll be endless talk. Besides, a hunt of that sort would be worse than useless. There's nothing to look for, Handy. The best thing we can do is to lie low, and keep our eyes open, and, above all, let's keep our mouths shut."

"Then you don't approve of a search?"

"Sorry, but I don't think it would be any good."

"H'm! Perhaps you're right," admitted Handforth grudgingly. "Now I come to

think of it, the rest of the chaps would be pretty inquisitive, wouldn't they? All right. We'll keep it to ourselves."

"Good man!" said Nipper. "It's the only safe way. Mind you, I believe Church is right—I believe he did see Sir Lucian. But we've got to avoid jumping to conclusions. And before we can press any inquiries about Lady Honoria's husband, we've got to be sure that we're on solid ground."

Church nodded.

"Yes, there's nothing like being certain," he agreed. "I'm satisfied that I saw Sir Lucian's face, but if I was asked to swear to it, I wouldn't. I hadn't thought of it like that before."

And they parted, fully agreed that discretion was the policy to go upon for the moment.

Handforth & Co. went to their tent. Church and McClure led the way, and Handforth naturally followed. Whenever the great Edward Oswald was in a thoughtful mood, he would go anywhere his chums liked to take him. At such times he was inclined to be absent-minded.

Church and McClure had a little scheme. They meant to show their leader some food, and they had an idea that he would be tempted. The sooner he dropped his impossible pose, the better. There would be no peace at all unless he adopted the general system of the camp.

But the little plot came to nothing, for, as soon as Church and McClure entered the tent, they halted in astonishment. Everything within those canvas walls lay in complete confusion. The tent was so disordered that it seemed as though a bullock had run amok inside it.

"Who the dickens has done this?" asked Church indignantly. "Great Scott! The whole place has been ransacked!"

"Absolutely turned upside down!" gasped McClure. "Look at this, Handy! I say, what a dirty trick!"

Handforth came in, and surveyed the disorder.

"By George!" he said grimly. "Somebody's raided the tent! But what for? It isn't a study, and there aren't any House rows in camp! What's the meaning of it?"

"Goodness knows!" said Church, scratching his head. "Anybody might think there was something valuable here, and that thieves had been in. But who the dickens would burgle a giddy tent?"

"Another mystery!" said McClure, with a grin.



CHAPTER 9.

HANDY'S THEORY!

HANDFORTH, of course, would not rest until he had made exhaustive inquiries.

The camp was fairly deserted, only a few of the fellows being in or about their tents. The majority were out

walking or swimming or rowing on the river. They were taking full advantage of their unexpected liberty.

Those who remained could give no satisfaction.

An examination of Tent D proved that nothing had been taken. Handforth & Co. had brought many of their personal belongings to the camp, but nothing of any value was touched.

"Well, it wasn't thieves, anyhow," said Church, at length. "All our money is intact, and burglars could easily have pinched it. There's no damage, either. Somebody's been in here searching for something. That's the only possible explanation."

"But what have they been searching for?" demanded Handforth.

"Goodness knows!"

"Oh well, we'll soon find out," declared Handforth gruffly. "Somebody's idea of a joke, I expect."

But their inquiries were not very successful. Reggie Pitt declared that none of the fellows had been anywhere near Handforth's tent that afternoon. Several other juniors corroborated this statement, and it seemed that the inquiry would fall to the ground.

"As far as I know, Lady Honoria is about the only one who's been anywhere near the tents," said Fullwood. "She went round inspecting things, and I believe she went into your tent, Handy."

"Stayed there rather a while," grinned Russell. "I expect she found everything in a mess——"

"Then you expect wrong!" interrupted Church. "Our tent was in apple-pie order, and a single glance would have been enough. If she's going to nose about, she won't be so popular."

Handforth drew his chums aside.

"I've just thought of something!" he said tensely. "That parchment!"

"Eh!"

"Supposing that parchment is valuable?" went on Handforth. "Even Nipper doesn't know what it really is, and the chap who dropped it was Sir Lucian Dexter!"

"We haven't any proof——"

"Perhaps not, but we know enough to satisfy ourselves, don't we?" went on Handforth. "Supposing that that parchment belongs to Sir Lucian? He couldn't very well come and ask for it, could he?"

"By jingo, no," said McClure. "Asking for it would be as good as confessing that he's the man who's been digging up the playing fields."

"Exactly," said Handforth. "And even Sir Lucian couldn't tell which of us had grabbed it. Naturally, our tent was searched first, as we're the most important chaps in the Remove."

"Ahem!" coughed Church. "Quite so!"

"And Lady Honoria did the searching!" went on Handforth triumphantly.

"Oh, draw it mild," said Church.

"Rats! We've got proof, haven't we?" said Handforth. "Nobody's been near this

tent except Lady Honoria—and she's Sir Lucian's wife! He lost that parchment, and believes that I was the chap who grabbed it. So he put his wife on the searching for it!"

It sounded plausible enough. In fact, Church and McClure were so astonished at such a sensible theory from their leader that they hardly knew what to make of it.

"Oh, it's too dotty!" protested McClure, at last. "First of all, we suspect Sir Lucian of being crooked, and now we are dragging Lady Honoria into the beastly business! And she's the Head's sister! You're not going to tell me that she'd do anything dishonourable or dishonest. I won't believe it."

"Neither will I," said Church.

"It may not be dishonest," argued Handforth. "In all probability, she doesn't know what a crook her husband is. She's so interested in her own schemes that she doesn't know he's a criminal!"

"We don't know it, either," said Church drily.

"Well, we've had enough evidence to indicate something of the kind," persisted Handforth. "I expect he spun Lady Honoria a yarn, and she fell into the trap without realising it. Then he came along, and met his confederates in the wood——"

"Whoa!" gasped Church. "Why not stick to facts, Handy? You masn't let your imagination run loose, and take all sorts of fantastic things for granted! That's the way to get mixed up!"

"Well, let's go out," said McClure. "It's stuffy in here."

"I'm going to investigate everything in this tent!" declared Handforth. "I shall stay here for an hour, at least—and you chaps will help me! We're going over each article, looking for finger prints or other marks."

"But——"

"You ought to be jolly pleased to figure as my assistants," continued Handforth, grandiloquently. "Come on! None of your backing out! Don't grumble about the heat, and——"

"Isn't that Irene's voice outside?" asked Church casually.

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "By George!"

He ran out of the tent, and Church and McClure grinned. The arrival of the Moor View girls could not have been more opportune. They were just in time to save Church and McClure from a great deal of unnecessary exercise.

There were six of them and they were talking and laughing with Nipper, Tregellis-West, Reggie Pitt, and a few others.

Handforth's eyes sparkled as he looked at the schoolgirls. They were well worth looking at. All were dressed in river frocks, and it was surprising how cool they looked. The hot sunshine and the close air seemed to have no effect on them.

"Come on, Handy, you're just in time," said Reggie Pitt, as the chums of Study D strolled up. "We need the eloquence of

your wondrous tongue. So unloosen some of your best persuasive shafts."

"Hallo, girls!" said Handforth cheerily. "How do you like our sandals and things? What do you think of the camp? Aren't you all jealous?"

"It must be ripping, Ted," said Irene Manners.

"But it's no good asking us to join the Open Air Society," said Doris Berkeley firmly. "These chaps have been trying to persuade us, but there's nothing doing."

"Oh, so that's what you meant about my eloquence?" said Handforth, glancing at Pitt.

"You heard me, then," said Reggie. "I thought you were so stunned by this vista of prettiness that you had no ears for any words of mine."

"There's not much I miss!" replied Handforth confidently. "So you've been trying to get the girls to join the camp, eh? Well, why not? Lady Honoria's planning a special ladies' camp, and——"

"Thanks all the same, Ted, but we're not joining," interrupted Irene resolutely.

"We wouldn't join for anything!" said Winnie Pitt.

"Never!" echoed the other girls.

They were so stubborn that the juniors were rather astonished. As a general rule, Irene & Co. were only too eager to join in the general fun.

"I can't understand why you're so—well, obstinate," remarked Nipper. "I was going to say 'firm,' but why not call a spade a spade? You're just obstinate. The Open Air Society is available to all, and there's a special ladies' camp, and——"

"It's no good, Dick, we're just as obstinate as ever," put in Mary Summers, smiling. "This sort of thing may be all right for you boys, but we're not having any."

"Don't you like the open air?" asked Handforth in surprise.

"The open air's lovely."

"Well, then, don't you like camp life?"

"Nothing better," smiled Irene.

"Aren't you in favour of sleeping in a tent, and preparing your own meals, then?"

"That seems to be the best part of the programme," said Doris, with sparkling eyes.

"Then what the dickens is the matter?" demanded Handforth. "You like the camp, you like the open air life, and you're keen on cooking your own meals, and living in tents. What's the trouble?"

The girls glanced at one another, and there was an awkward silence.

"I suppose you think that your headmistress would object?" suggested Nipper.

"Well, of course, she might. Lady Honoria has no influence with Miss Bond, whereas she has plenty with the Head."

Irene & Co. still looked uncomfortable.

"That isn't it," said Mary. "It's—it's—— Well, if you must know the truth, you persistent bounders, we're not prepared to dress hideously, and make ourselves look ridiculous."



Handy, Church and McClure surveyed the disordered tent in amazement. "Somebody's raided us!" exclaimed Edward Oswald indignantly. "What's the meaning of it?" There was a short pause, then: "Another mystery!" said McClure briefly. Another mystery it certainly was!

"That's it!" said the other girls, with relief.

"Hideous?" repeated Handforth, in astonishment. "You don't call these sensible clothes hideous, do you?"

"They're fine," agreed Irene nodding. "But what about us? We should look glorious in breeches and jerseys, shouldn't we? I understand that Lady Honoria wants everybody to dress in her own style, and it's not good enough for us!"

The next moment the girls were startled, for the St. Frank's fellows burst into a loud roar of laughter.

"She wore them when she first came to St. Frank's, but that's only her travelling attire," chuckled Nipper. "Haven't you seen her lately?"

"No."

"Then you'll probably change your mind," said Reggie Pitt. "If you join this camp, you'll have to wear a sort of Arcadian costume. That's one of the orders of the Lodge! Rational dress! Loose tunics and sandals, and all that sort of thing."

Irene & Co were greatly interested. They had been under a misapprehension until now, and their objections could be understood. For when Lady Honoria had first arrived at St. Frank's she had created general merriment by her grotesque appearance. That is to say, merriment in the school. Among the surrounding residents her appearance had been the subject of scandalised gossip for days.

By great good fortune, Lady Honoria herself arrived just then, and Irene & Co. had an opportunity of inspecting the "Arcadian" dress for themselves.

The President of the Open Air Society looked terrible.

It wasn't the fault of the dress, but of the wearer. Lady Honoria, unfortunately, was quite unfitted for the donning of such garb. She was fairly short, and she was certainly not slender. And when a lady of

CHAPTER 10.

BETTER THAN THEY
THOUGHT.



FINISHED yet?" asked Irene coldly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The shouts of laughter continued.

"Sorry!" grinned Nipper at last. "But I think you've got hold of it wrong. My hat! No wonder you refused to join the Open Air Society! Did you actually think that you would all have to wear breeches and pullovers?"

"Lady Honoria wears them," said Violet Watson.

that type gets into short skirts and loose tunics and sandals, she merely converts herself into a freak.

To make matters worse, Lady Honoria was wearing a kind of Arcadian wreath on her head. It was the finishing touch! The Head's sister thought that flower-wreath a fitting addition to her open-air costume—a sort of emblem denoting the tenets of the Open Air Society. But Lady Honoria had no sense of the ridiculous. She thought she looked quite rational, whereas her appearance was purely comic.

It was only with difficulty that the St. Frank's fellows kept their faces straight.

Irene & Co., being girls, were tremendously interested. And after a short inspection, they were inclined to change their minds about joining the camp. This style of dress had more appeal for them.

Lady Honoria looked out of place in short skirts and sandals, but the slimmer figures of Irene & Co. would make all the difference. And the girls, mentally picturing themselves in those rational costumes, felt that they would be able to look their best.

"I am delighted to see you here," the Head's sister was saying. "Oh, yes, I've heard all about you young ladies! You are from the Moor View School, aren't you? Quite close neighbours, eh? Why don't you come and join our special little camp, and lead the Open Air life?"

"Would you really like us to?" asked Irene.

"You would be quite welcome," replied Lady Honoria. "I dare say you know all the rules of our Society by now. Naturally, you would not be permitted to wear those frocks. All members of the Society must dress rationally. Ladies must adopt the costumes you now see me in."

"It's lovely!" said Doris gravely.

"But we can't join yet—even if we did want to," put in Mary Summers. "You see, Miss Bond wouldn't excuse us from school. But we might be able to come as soon as we break up for the Whitsun holidays."

"Yes, rather!" said Marjorie Temple.

"I shall have to see Miss Bond, and arrange something," said Lady Honoria. "I agree that lessons are essential to the young mind, but the open air is much more important. A week or two in camp would do you all a world of good. It is the most wonderful life in the world. I cannot understand why every school is not equipped with its own camps for the hot weather."

Lady Honoria spoke rather indignantly. She had, of course, no authority at the Moor View School. She had no brother there, whom she could browbeat and terrorise.

"I'm afraid Miss Bond won't agree," said Irene, shaking her head. "She's just a bit old-fashioned, and she might be difficult to persuade."

"Leave her to me," said Lady Honoria confidently. "There is nobody on earth who can withstand my arguments for the Open

Air life. I will see your headmistress, and compel her to see the sensible viewpoint."

And the Head's sister, with a grim set of her jaw, took her departure.

"I believe she's going to see Miss Bond now!" chuckled Irene. "I say, what a lark! Old Bondie will have a fit if Lady Honoria walks into her study with that wreath on her head!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, about Whitsun!" ejaculated Handforth excitedly. "I've just had an idea. What's that you said about joining the camp as soon as you break up for Whitsun, Mary? Do you mean that you'll come along and join us then?"

"Yes, of course," said Mary Summers.

Handforth beamed.

"Then this idea of mine is an absolute stunner!" he declared triumphantly.



CHAPTER 11.

PLANS FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

EGGIE PITT clapped Handforth on the back.

"There's nothing like it, old son!" he said heartily. "It's the one quality in you that I've always admired."

"Eh?" said Handforth. "Which quality?"

"Your wonderful modesty!" said Pitt solemnly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rats!" growled Handforth. "You'll say this idea is a stunner when you hear it. The girls are going to join the camp for the Whitsun holidays, aren't they? And at about the same time we're supposed to go off home for the vac. Well, why go? Why shouldn't we all spend Whitsun in camp?"

There was a moment's silence.

"Is that what you call a stunning idea?" asked Nipper at last.

"Yes!"

"You silly ass, Handy!"

"What the dickens—"

"It's like your nerve to trot that out as an idea!" growled Nipper. "If the girls joined the Fresh Air Camp for Whitsun, do you think we *should* go home?"

"Eh?"

"My dear old ass, the majority of us had already decided to stay here over the holidays," said Reggie Pitt gently. "Of course, if Irene & Co. are attaching themselves to the movement, the very idea of going home is idiotic."

"That's very nice of you, Reggie," said Doris.

"Rats!" replied Reggie. "Excuse my bluntness, but rats! My idea is to have an open-air holiday. Better than being roasted in London."

"You fellows seem to have started your holiday well in advance!" chuckled Irene. "Well, let's hope that Miss Bond reveals an

atom of sense for once. As a rule, she's down on anything modern. And as for our joining forces with a boys' camp, the very idea will give her a pain."

"But this is different," said Winnie quickly. "Lady Honoria is in charge, and even Miss Bond can't raise any objections when we've got an official chaperone."

"Yes, that's the point," agreed Nipper. "Although I don't see what the dickens Miss Bond has to do with it. Surely you can spend your Whitsun holidays as you like, without asking her? Your people won't object, will they?"

Doris smiled.

"We were thinking about coming straight to the camp, you see," she replied. "But Miss Bond may make us go home first. Her responsibility doesn't end until we're safely delivered into our loving parents' arms. Don't worry, you chaps, we'll join the gang pretty soon, and after that you can look out for ructions."

The girls accepted several invitations to tea, and were soon distributed about the camp. Much to Handforth's relief, Irene was captured by somebody else, and Tent D had no visitors to entertain. On any other occasion, Handforth would have slaughtered any possible rival. But not to-day. The food problem was on his mind.

The girls wanted to help with the tea preparations, but all offers were firmly declined. It was an unwritten law of the camp that every fellow should prepare his own meals. But there was nothing to prevent them from entertaining guests.

"It's a jolly good thing that Irene is having tea with Winnie Pitt in Fullwood's tent," said Church, with a grin. "I'm afraid you couldn't have provided much, Handy."

Handforth frowned.

"Tea?" he repeated. "By George! I suppose I shall miss tea, you know. There's nothing much to take its place, is there?"

"Well, you can't go out and pick tea wild, if that's what you mean," said McClure. "Of course, you might dry a few dandelion leaves, and have dandelion tea. Dried daisies might make a good beverage. You never know. Still, that's your trouble. If you will have these potty ideas, it's up to you to suffer the consequences."

"I don't want any nerve!" said Handforth darkly. "I've made up my mind to eat nothing except that which the countryside provides! No bought stuff! That's my policy, and I'll stick to it."

"And starve in the meantime?" asked Church.

"I shan't starve," replied Handforth. "Fasting is jolly good for you, and I shan't come to any harm, even if I eat nothing until the morning."

"And what will you eat in the morning?" asked McClure interestedly.

"The rabbits I snare to-night!" replied Handforth.

"The rabbits you snare?"

"Yes."

"To-night?"

"To-night!" repeated Handforth firmly. "That's given you a surprise, eh?"

"It's nothing to the surprise we shall have if you eat snared rabbit for breakfast," said Church. "My dear old ass, you don't know the first thing about snaring rabbits. Still, if you won't listen to reason——"

"By George!" interrupted Handforth tensely. "Look there!"

He was staring in a fierce way across the camp.

"What is it—a rabbit?" asked McClure politely.

"Three rabbits!" said Handforth, setting his jaw. "Or, to be more exact, three worms!"

"There's something wrong with you if you can't tell the difference between a rabbit and a worm," grinned Church, turning and looking. "But I'm blessed if I can see them! I thought you were going to have some tea, after all, but——"

"There!" growled Handforth, pointing. "Those beastly worms of Study A! Forrest and Gulliver and Bell!"

His chums inspected the cads of the Remove critically.

"No, you can't eat them for tea," said Church. "I'm afraid they'd be a bit too tough."

"Besides, their parents might object," added McClure. "I don't know why the parents of Forrest and Gulliver and Bell should jib at such a thing, but they might. Quite apart from all that, Handy, you ought to draw the line at cannibalism."

"It isn't done nowadays," said Church. "At least, not in polite society."

Handforth ignored their pleasantries.

"I want to know what those three bounders are doing in this camp!" he said fiercely.

"Why not go and ask them?" suggested Church.

Handforth was already off. It irritated him to see Bernard Forrest and his two rascally cronies in this clean encampment. The arrival of Forrest & Co. had robbed it of its original freshness.

"What are you chaps doing here?" demanded Handforth, planting himself in front of the cads of Study A.

"Can't we come if we like?" asked Forrest dangerously.

"No, you can't!" roared Handforth. "We don't want outsiders! Understand? No cads allowed! I'll give you just twenty seconds to get outside the camp!"

"You'd better cool down, Handy, and talk sense," said Forrest calmly. "We've as much right here as you have."

"As much right——"

"The fact is, we've joined the Open Air Society," said Forrest blandly.



CHAPTER 12.

HANDY ON THE SCENT!

JOINED the Open Air Society!"

Handforth echoed Bernard Forrest's words as though they were fraught

with horror.

"Anything to say about it?" asked Gulliver sourly.

Handforth had so much to say that he could say nothing. He just stood there, vainly attempting to pronounce his words.

"Lady Honoria has invited everybody to join," said Forrest. "We have decided to come to the camp. So we're here. We're here for good. And we don't want any interference from you, Handforth!"

"You may not want it, but you'll get it!" roared Handforth, finding his tongue. "By George, this camp is for decent chaps—not for smoky blackguards like you! We won't let you join up!"

Forrest scowled.

"Fortunately," he said, "we don't have to ask you!"

They stalked off, and Handforth was pulled up by his chums just as he was about to give chase. Nipper happened to be passing at that moment, too.

"Lemme go, your asses!" shouted Handforth.

"What's the matter?" asked Nipper.

"Why, didn't you see those three cads?" demanded Handforth. "Forrest says that he's joining the Open Air Society! Gulliver and Bell, too! We're not going to stand that!"

"I don't see how we can prevent it," said Nipper.

"What, aren't you going to do anything?"

"My dear chap, we can't bar them," replied the Remove skipper. "This is Lady Honoria's camp—not ours. Besides, the open-air life will probably do those fellows a lot of good. It's just what they need—open air. It'll take some of the smokiness out of them."

"H'm! There's that, of course," admitted Handforth.

"We can easily keep an eye on them," continued Nipper, in his level way. "If they start any of their funny tricks, we'll kick them out of the camp, and Lady Honoria will support us. But we can't kick anybody out before he has broken the society's laws."

So Forrest & Co. were allowed to join without any protests. But Handforth was not the only one who voiced objections. The cads of Study A were not the type of fellows to enjoy the clean, healthy life under canvas. They were too fond of smoking and card-playing and slacking. Life in camp entailed a certain amount of hard work.

But, strangely enough, Forrest & Co. seemed to thoroughly enjoy themselves that evening. They prepared their own suppers, and entered into the spirit of a rough-and-ready concert which was got up round the

camp fires. They behaved themselves well.

Handforth was about the only camper with a heavy heart. And this heavy heart was mainly caused by a light stomach. He had eaten nothing since breakfast, and he steadfastly refused to accept two luscious kippers which his chums had offered him.

No; he had set some snares for rabbits, and he would wait until the morning. Handy had bought a couple of small nets, and had contrived some rabbit-traps of his own design. Whether the timid animals would be tempted to enter them remained open to doubt.

As soon as darkness had descended, the camp was quiet.

Most of the fellows had retired early, for it was the general order nowadays to be up and about in the early hours. By ten o'clock there was scarcely a sound among all those tents. Everybody was asleep.

At least, everybody with the exception of Handforth.

For some reason which he couldn't explain, slumber would not come to him. He was tired, and, according to all precedent, he should have dropped off to sleep within the first five minutes.

But he didn't.

The truth was, he was literally starving. That aching void in the region of his middle would not allow him to rest. Furthermore, he was thinking of those snares of his. He kept wondering if any rabbits had been tempted.

"I'll bet I've caught a couple of beauties by this time," he told himself. "I set those traps three hours ago, and rabbits generally come out in the dusk. Then they bunk into their holes again as soon as it's dark."

He lay in bed, thinking.

He had set those snares at the end of an adjoining meadow, in a little-secluded hollow, where there were many burrows.

It suddenly occurred to him that his nets might not be strong enough, and the thought alarmed him.

"My goodness!" he breathed. "Supposing I've caught some rabbits and they've escaped? That'll be a nice thing! By the morning they might have wormed their way out, and then I shan't have any breakfast."

The thought alarmed him to such an extent that sleep now became sheerly impossible. He couldn't even rest. He was obliged to get up, slip some things on, and go out. He managed to leave the tent without awakening his chums.

And once outside he made up his mind to settle all doubt by going to the little hollow and examining his nets. That would settle the thing once and for all.

Another thought came to him.

"By George! If I've caught a rabbit, there's no reason why I shouldn't cook it straight away," he murmured. "I can get the camp fire going again, and it won't take me ten minutes to fry a few rabbit steaks! My hat—food!"

The thought cheered him up wonderfully,

and he set off through the sleeping camp to examine his snares.

But he didn't go far.

He had scarcely passed round half-a-dozen of the tents before he came to a halt. The moon was up now, and he could see fairly well. And over near the edge of the camp, creeping with furtive secrecy, were three dim figures!

Handforth came to a halt and caught his breath.

Three figures!

He remembered the adventure on Little Side, when three mysterious men had made still more mysterious excavations.

And here were three intruders now—creeping into the very camp!

There could be no question of their unauthorised presence. These three made no sound. They crept like shadows, and their movements were taken with excessive caution. They were creeping like cats.

Handforth forgot his hunger, he forgot his snares, and the excitement of the hunt gripped him. By sheer chance he had spotted the mysterious men who had caused so much puzzlement. What mischief were they up to now?

Handforth watched breathlessly.

He crept round a tent, keeping his quarry in sight. Then, to his surprise, he beheld another figure in the gloom. The four met, and talked together in the faintest whispers.

Then they all vanished into one of the tents!



CHAPTER 13.

CAPTURING THE VILLAINS!

HANDFORTH took a deep breath.

"That parchment!" he muttered excitedly. "That's it! They've come here to

search for that giddy parchment! Goodness knows what they'll do! They've gone into that tent, and they'll probably bind our chaps up, and gag them, too!"

For a moment, Handforth thought about dashing to the attack.

But he hesitated. There were four of them. He was a valiant fighter, but he had enough sense to realise that he could never conquer these four men singlehanded.

"Anyhow, the credit will be mine," he told himself grimly. "After we've collared the rotters, I shall be able to claim the honour!"

He rushed back to his own tent—after memorising the exact position of the tent where the figures had vanished. In fact, he had noted that that particular tent had a flag at the top of it, and the flag was heeling over. Many of the other tents had flags, but they were straight.

"Get up!" hissed Handforth.

He grabbed his chums, and shook them.

"What the—— Hi! Chuck it, you ass!" gasped Church sleepily. "Are you dotty, Handy? What the dickens——"

"Get up!" said Handforth tensely. "We're on the track!"

"On the track of what?" demanded McClure. "You rotter! Have you woke us up so that we can go and look at your silly snares?"

"Blow the snares!" said Handforth fiercely. "I've just seen those three men. They're here!"

"Here?"

"Yes, here in the camp!"

"But——"

"I was on the prowl, and I spotted them!" went on Handforth. "They vanished into one of the tents, and they're probably attacking some of our chaps!"

"My only hat!"

"Skip some things on as quickly as you can, and I'll fetch Nipper and Pitt and Fullwood, and one or two others," continued Handforth. "If we're quick, we can catch the rotters red-handed, and if Sir Lucian's one of them we can expose him as a crook!"

He went off, excited and eager. Church and McClure, although they didn't believe a word of their leader's story, turned out.

"I suppose we'd better humour him," growled Church. "I expect he's been dreaming, but we shan't get any rest until we've been out. Might as well get it over and done with."

In the meantime, Handforth was talking excitedly to Nipper & Co. They seemed to be as sceptical as Church and McClure had been.

"But why should these men come right into the camp?" argued Nipper. "You've probably got hold of the wrong end of the stick, Handy. You must have seen three of our chaps——"

"They weren't our chaps!" insisted Handforth.

"How do you know?"

"Because I'm not a juggins!" snapped Edward Oswald. "Do you think I couldn't tell the difference? These three were wearing dark clothes, and they crept up like burglars. If they were our chaps, they would have walked ordinarily."

"Begad! There's somethin' in it," said Sir Montie. "I believe Handy's right, dear old boys. It's distinctly up to us to look into this."

"Yes, rather!" agreed Watson.

Nipper made no objection, and they were soon out.

By this time, Church and McClure had arrived, and Fullwood and Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey had been aroused. The search party was a considerable one.

"Now, where's this tent?" asked Nipper briskly. "Are you sure you can find it again, Handy? They all look alike, you know."

"I can find it—you can trust me to be thorough," growled Handforth. "The tent they crept into has got a drunken flag at the top. But by this time the beggars may be gone. You've been so jolly slow!"

They set off in silence, Nipper and Handforth leading the way. His story was certainly significant, particularly in the light of



First Bell, Forrest and Gulliver were thrown protestingly into the river by the indignant juniors. Then came the turn of the three River House cads. "Ready, you fellows?" sang out Handy. "Good egg! In with 'em!" And in they went! They wouldn't feel like smoking and card-playing again that night!

what had happened on other occasions. It would be foolish to ignore the whole thing.

And it seemed that the leader of Study D had struck a winner for once.

That particular tent was illuminated!

"There's a shielded light inside," murmured Nipper, as they paused to take a good look. "Can't you see? It's a candle, I believe, with some sort of hood to it, so that the light won't show."

"They're digging in there!" murmured Handforth.

"Rats! They wouldn't come into the camp to dig," protested Church.

"Then they must have met Lady Honoria in secret, and they're planning something fishy," said Handforth, not to be denied. "We shall catch Sir Lucian absolutely red-handed, and then we'll find out what his game is. Why not make a big attack now?"

"You're sure that's the tent?" asked Pitt dubiously.

"Certain."

"You saw those three men creep in?"

"Yes!"

"Shall we chance it, Nipper?" asked Pitt.

"I rather think we'd better," replied Nipper, with a curiously grim note in his voice. "Yes, we'll make a combined attack."

Handforth looked at him sharply.

"That's a pretty firm tone of yours!" he murmured. "Do you think we shall really find something shady?"

"Yes, I do," replied Nipper. "I don't mind confessing I was sceptical at first, Handy—but I'm convinced now."

The others hesitated no longer. If Nipper was convinced, it was good enough for them. And without any further waste of time they ran for the tent.

Nipper flung the flap open, and Handforth & Co. tore back the canvas sides of the tent itself.

"Thought so!" said Nipper angrily. "Yes, by Jove, there's something shady here, Handy!"

"Hold them!" gasped Handforth. "We'd better fetch the police—Eh? What the——"

He broke off in blank amazement.

Instead of staring into a meeting of villains, he found himself looking at Bernard Forrest—at Gulliver—at Bell—and at the Hon. Aubrey de Vere Wellbourne, of the River House School—to say nothing of the Hon. Bertram Carstairs and the Hon. Cyril Coates!

It was a shock for the amateur sleuth—but it was no shock for Nipper.

For Nipper had remembered noticing that Forrest & Co. had deliberately monkeyed with the flag on the top of their tent. Nipper had thought it curious at the time, but now he knew the reason. The little flagpole had been tampered with so that the late visitors should have something to guide them.

"What—what the——Forrest!" ejaculated Handforth. "Wellbourne! Well, I'm jiggered!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fullwood and some of the others chuckled loudly.



First Bell, Forrest and Gulliver were thrown the turn of the three River House cads. "em!" And in they went! They were

"I'll admit they're villains, Handy, but hardly the type you expected to find," grinned Reggie Pitt.

"Handy has done good work," said Nipper. "But I think we'll do some better!"

CHAPTER 14.

THE MYSTERIOUS PARCHMENT!



BERNARD FORREST was just recovering his composure.

"What's the idea of this late call?" he asked, controlling himself with difficulty, and speaking in a calm, sneering voice. "It's a pity if we can't have a little privacy in our own tent."

"I'll trouble you to come out, Forrest," said Nipper. "Yes, and the rest of you, too."

"Go and hang yourself!" sneered Wellbourne. "I'm not taking orders from any St. Frank's cad."



river by the indignant juniors. Then came "sang out Handy. "Good egg! In with ing and card-playing again that night!

"Me, neither," said Carstairs.

"Go to the deuce!" added Coates. "We just came here to see our pals in their new quarters."

"An' I suppose Handforth was nosin' about, an' mistook us for somebody else?" asked Forrest curtly. "Well, he's made a mistake. The sooner you clear off, the better."

But Nipper was not to be denied.

"Are you coming out willingly, or shall we pull you out?" he asked. "We don't want to disturb the camp, but we're quite prepared to do it if there's any nonsense!"

Handforth was sniffing the air just inside the tent.

"By George! The place reeks of cigarette smoke!" he said fiercely. "This is an Open Air Camp, and these rotters come here and pollute it with their rotten cigarettes!"

"That's not the worst," growled Nipper. "Look here!"

He flashed on an electric torch, and the cads were done. They had extinguished

the candle at the first hint of alarm, and they had been hoping that the "investigators" would go away after a brief inspection. But there was no chance of that now.

Nipper's light revealed the evidence.

Playing-cards were strewn all over the floor of the tent. There was money there, too—currency notes and silver. A box of cigarettes came within that beam.

It was only too clear that the six young rascals had been squatting in a circle, playing banker, or some such game. As a matter of fact, the half-dozen young idiots had been indulging in the doubtful pleasures of pontoon.

"Great Scott!"

"Cards and money!"

"Begad! This is a bit rotten!" protested Tregellis-West. "These three rotters only joined the camp so that they could meet their frightful friends and play cards."

"Of course," agreed Nipper. "They thought they'd be safe here. No fear of a prefect or a master butting in. I thought they weren't very sincere about honouring the laws."

"Why can't you mind your own business?" snarled Forrest, in alarm. "It's a pity if we can't entertain some guests without bein' interrupted an' interfered with. Get back to your own tents, an' leave us alone!"

"Yes, confound you!" said Wellbourne. "We're here at the invitation of our friends, an'—"

"And you're going at an order from us!" interrupted Nipper. "Let me see. The River House School is beyond the river, isn't it? We won't make you trouble to go round to the bridge, or take a boat. A little swim will do you good."

"Hear, hear!"

"That's a good idea, Nipper!"

"Let's chuck them into the river!"

"Don't you dare to touch us!" roared Coates, in alarm. "We told you what it would be, Forrest, you idiot! We told you it wasn't safe!"

"I say, lots of the other chaps are coming up!" said Church, from the rear. "Singleton, Goodwin, Russell and Duncan. We're rousing the whole giddy camp!"

"All the better!" roared Handforth. "There'll be no chance of these rotters escaping! Buck up, Remove! Come on, the Fourth! Pile in!"

Wellbourne and his two chums had no chance whatever. Neither had Forrest & Co. They were all seized and held. Their struggles were in vain, and their threats were worse than useless.

Nipper had guessed their game.

Forrest and his chums had joined the camp to indulge their caddish fancies, and the River House trio were well known as rank outsiders. They had thought it a very brainy scheme, no doubt, to organise this little plot.

The cads of Study A had joined the camp, and had arranged with their shady pals to arrive after everyone was asleep. And then

for a quiet, enjoyable hour or two at smoking and card-playing.

A very pretty arrangement, but it hadn't worked.

"Hadn't we better chuck Forrest in the river, too?" asked Reggie Pitt.

"Yes, it's a good idea," said Nipper, nodding. "We'll lend them some towels afterwards, and they've got plenty of blankets in their tent, so they can't accuse us of being heartless!"

"Their tent?" repeated Handforth. "What do you mean? They haven't got a tent! They're not members of this camp any longer! I vote we chuck them out, and keep them out!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Expel them from the Open Air Society!"

"Good gad! Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne stoutly. "I mean to say, things are somewhat ripe when a cove is aroused in the middle of the good old night, and dished out of his dose of dreamless!"

Nipper shook his head.

"There's no question about these bounders being expelled from the society," he said. "They've broken the rules on their very first night, but we can't very well hurl them out now. We'll wait until the morning."

"Why can't we hurl them out now?" demanded Handforth.

"Because the school's locked up, and they can't get in," said Nipper. "We'll give them a bath, and let them ponder over their sins after they come out."

"You rotters!" gasped Forrest as a move was made. "Lemme go! If you dare to chuck me in the river——"

"This way!" said Nipper briskly.

"Look here, confound you——"

"No charge for a bathe, Forrest!"

"I tell you I won't——"

Forrest's protests were drowned in more senses than one. They had reached the river bank, and willing hands heaved the young rascal into the shallows, where water-lilies were growing side by side with rushes.

Splash!

Forrest went in, fully dressed as he was, and he vanished under the surface with a tremendous commotion.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gulliver and Bell followed, and then it was the turn of Wellbourne, Carstairs and Coates. The River House fellows begged, almost on their knees, to be spared.

"Don't be so mean, you fellows," protested Wellbourne frantically. "We've got to get home, remember, an' then we've got to steal indoors. If we're all soakin' wet, we might leave traces——"

"We can't help your troubles!" interrupted Handforth curtly. "We're going to

show you that it's a dangerous business to come near this camp with your smoking and your card-playing."

"Yes, but I say! Look here——"

"Ready, you fellows?" sang out Handforth. "Good egg! In with him!"

Splash! Splash! Splash!

The River House trio, thoroughly frightened, were hurled into the river with much force. But they didn't attempt to swim across to the opposite bank. They waded out lower down stream, and ran like mad down the towing-path. Forrest & Co. had already crawled back to their own tent.

"Well, I think that's settled them," said Nipper contentedly. "They won't play any more tricks of that sort. We'd better get back to our beds now, you fellows!"

"Begad, rather!" agreed Sir Montie. "We're losin' a frightful amount of beauty sleep."

"I don't think Handy's ever had any!" grinned Pitt.

"This isn't a time to make feeble jokes!" said Handforth tartly. "Anyhow, I bowled those rotters out, didn't I? If it hadn't been for me, you wouldn't have known anything about it!"

"Quite right, Handy; this is your triumph entirely," said Nipper. "By the way, how did you spot Wellbourne & Co. in the first place? What were you doing out of your tent?"

"I—I—— Well, I was just having a look round the camp," said Handforth carelessly.

"Rats!" said Church. "I'll bet you were off to have a look at your giddy rabbit traps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't wonder at it, either," went on Church. "He's had nothing to eat all day, and——"

"And I'm not going to eat anything until I've caught it by my own efforts," said Handforth doggedly. "You can cackle all you like, but I'm determined! And when I'm determined, I'm—I'm——"

"Pig-headed?" suggested Pitt politely. "It's the same thing with you!"

Handforth snorted, and went back to his tent, and all the others followed his example. The traitors had been dealt with, and there was now no reason for remaining awake.

Nipper and his two chums returned to their own tent, chuckling over Handforth's original theory.

"Just like the old ass to jump to conclusions," smiled Nipper. "Those mysterious men aren't likely to come into this camp. It's a bit too lively for them—even when we're asleep!"

"How about that queer parchment you found?" asked Watson.

"It's in the tent—packed away in my dressing-case," replied Nipper. "To-morrow, I'll pay a visit to the school library, and see if I can't get a clue to those hieroglyphics. You never know, we ought to be able to decipher the thing ourselves."

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"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "Who's in our tent, dear old boys?"

"What!" whispered Nipper sharply.

They had approached quietly, and were nearly up to their tent. A shadow appeared for a moment, outlined against the canvas. Then, before either of them could make any further comment, a wild howl of anguish arose on the air, accompanied by a furious barking.



CHAPTER 15.

ON THE TRAIL.

NIPPER leapt forward.

"Boz!" he shouted.

"Great Scott! There was something in what you said, after all, Tommy.

That parchment! They've been after it, as sure as a gun!"

Just as they reached the tent, a figure burst out.

Crash!

A fist struck the unfortunate Tregellis-West on the nose, and he reeled back, half-dazed, and crashed violently into Nipper. The back of Montie's head caught Nipper in the mouth.

They both rolled over, and Tommy Watson had a fleeting glance of a man rushing away into the darkness. Boz was prancing round wildly.

"Go after him!" roared Watson. "Good dog! After him, Boz!"

But the faithful spaniel, madly excited, was still tearing round in circles. By this time, Nipper was on his feet.

"Which way did he go?" he gasped.

"I don't know—towards the meadows, I believe," said Watson. "I only caught a glimpse of him as he bolted. My hat! That was a bit sudden wasn't it?"

"Too sudden for my liking," growled Nipper, as he felt his lower jaw. "By Jove, Montie, your head's hard at the back!"

Sir Montie sat up dazedly.

"Begad, I'm frightfully hurt, Nipper, boy!" he mumbled. "That rotter tried to push my nose through the back of my face! Awfully sorry, but—"

"He's escaped anyhow!" interrupted Watson. "And we didn't even see who he was. Sir Lucian Dexter, I'll bet."

"I don't think so," said Nipper. "He was too big. Come on, Montie—get up! We'll see if the fellow has been after that parchment. It won't take us long to prove it."

"I say, look at Boz!" broke in Watson. "What's the matter with him?"

The little spaniel was still prancing round, and he seemed to be more excited than ever. He was leaping up to Nipper, and the latter suddenly noticed one peculiar fact. Boz was not barking as usual. But he kept up a continuous whine of eagerness.

"He's got something in his mouth!" said Nipper. "All right, old man—all right!

Steady! Not so much of it! Well, I'm blessed! Look at this, you fellows! Good old Bozkins!"

Nipper was on his knees, and Boz became docile at last. Firmly held in his mouth was something stiff. The parchment! There it was, gripped tenaciously between the spaniel's teeth.

"My old aunt!" said Tommy Watson.

Boz relaxed his grip at Nipper's order, and a swift examination showed that the parchment was not even torn.

"Good dog!" said Nipper heartily. "By Jove, you've done well!"

"But—but how the dickens—"

"Why, it's easy enough to see what happened," interrupted Nipper. "Boz came out with the rest of us—he was at the river bank when we threw those rotters into the water. And he came with us when we started off for our tent. But he must have gone on in advance, and he found someone ransacking our things."

"Yes, that's about it," agreed Watson.

"And Boz, being a person of resource, went straight into action, and took a chunk out of the intruder—as per yell we heard," continued Nipper. "Then he must have spotted the rotter with the parchment, so he pinched it from him. Good old burglar-catcher!"

Boz was jumping round joyfully.

"I say, dear old fellows, this is getting somewhat thick, isn't it?" asked Tregellis-West, as he gently dabbed his nose. "These bounders are actually coming into our quarters now."

"That man only came because we left the tent deserted," replied Nipper keenly. "He saw his chance and took it. But it proves beyond question that the parchment is valuable. The question arises—what does it stand for? What secret does this parchment hold? And who are the men who want it?"

"Sir Lucian Dexter, for one," replied Watson.

"It seems like it, but we can't be sure," said Nipper thoughtfully. "Rather a pity we didn't follow that chap up, and see where he went to. Let's go into the tent, and have a look round."

They passed inside.

A single glance revealed the disorder. The unknown marauder had worked quickly, and he had strewn everything about in great confusion. But Nipper found his attention attracted by Boz.

The spaniel was sniffing eagerly at a spot on the floor. Then he went to another spot, and finally looked up at Nipper, his eyes aflame with eagerness and excitement. There was something so eloquent in that look that the little dog almost spoke.

"By jingo—blood!" said Nipper, concentrating his light on those ominous spots. "Good old Boz! I was right about that bite, then? You must have given the fellow a lovely taste of your eye-teeth!"

Boz wagged his tail, as though to assure Nipper that this was a mere portion of the truth.

"Hallo! Look at this!" said Watson suddenly.

He picked up something from the floor near the exit, and they could all see that it was a cloth cap. It had been worn a good deal, but was by no means shabby. Without question, it had been brushed from the intruder's head as he had dashed out of the tent.

Nipper looked at the cap, and then he looked at Boz.

"This is where we do the bloodhound stunt," he said calmly.



CHAPTER 16.

THE MYSTERY OF THE VAULT.

TOMMY WATSON looked excited.

"You—you mean we'll track the man down?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes," said Nipper. "Why not? It ought to be easy. There are these spots of blood to start with, and there's this cap. Boz ought to be able to follow the trail with ease. It's absolutely fresh, too."

"But he isn't a bloodhound!"

"Don't you believe it!" replied Nipper. "Old Boz doesn't look the part, but that's

an advantage, when you come to think of it. He isn't conspicuous."

Sir Montie nodded.

"Yes, and Boz is capable of trailin' down the thief, too," he said. "He's done it before, Tommy, boy. Don't you remember?"

"My goodness," said Watson. "Let's put him on the trail!"

"That's what I'm going to do," replied Nipper grimly.

Handforth looked into the tent.

"Before you fellows go to sleep, I'd like to suggest something," he said. "I think we ought to investigate—Hallo! What's up here?" he added as he noted Watson's excited expression. "What's happened? You chaps been having a fight?"

"You needn't look at my nose in that suspicious way," protested Montie. "Some frightful intruder gave me this!"

Nipper quickly explained—in order to save time.

"So there you have it in a nutshell, Handy," he concluded. "We're just off on the trail, and I think old Boz'll pick it up. Of course, you would butt in!"

Handforth was agog with excitement.

"I like that!" he snorted. "If it hadn't been for me—"

"Yes, yes, I know all about it!" interrupted Nipper hastily. "Come on, then. We don't want to waste any more time. How many fellows are there out there?"

"Only Church and McClure."

"Well, that's a good thing," said Nipper.

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"We don't want half the camp with us. First of all, we'll get a leash for Charles Dickens."

"Who?" ejaculated Handforth, staring.

"You shouldn't say 'Who,' you should say 'Whom'!"

"You silly ass——"

"We've got to keep you up to your grammar, old man," said Nipper, grinning. "Where's Boz's leash?"

"But you have said something about Charles Dickens!"

"Any fathead knows that Boz is merely another name for Charles Dickens," said Nipper patiently. "It's a bit of an insult to the immortal Charlie, but I regret to say that Boz answers to the name of Charles Dickens with alacrity."

Handforth grunted, and pulled a length of cord out of his pocket.

"Never mind about his lead—and never mind about Charles Dickens, either," he said. "This piece of cord will do. Come on, Boz! Hold still, you young ass! Let me tie this cord to your collar."

"By the way, who's conducting this tracking business?" asked Nipper politely. "Don't think I'm inquisitive, Handy, but it's just as well to know where we are. Who's in charge here?"

"I am!" said Handforth promptly.

"Oh, are you?"

"Well, you asked, and I've told you," continued Handforth. "I was the first chap to start this business to-night, and you can't deny it. If it hadn't been for me——"

"My goodness!" groaned Watson. "There he goes again!"

"If it hadn't been for me——"

"All right!" gasped Nipper. "You're the sleuth, Handy—you can put Boz on the trail! Don't let's argue about it, or there won't be any trail left!"

Handforth was triumphant.

But Nipper winked to the others. They would let Handforth hold the leash, but none of them would be far behind. And if Handy liked to think that he was the leader, it was just as well to humour him. It didn't harm anybody.

This sort of thing suited Edward Oswald down to the ground. His hunger was forgotten, his rabbit snares were a matter of no importance whatever. Here he was, on the trail of something big. Bloodstains—the cap of a mysterious stranger who had attempted to steal the parchment! Handforth's veins were throbbing.

It was his one dream to be a detective, and he never seemed to realise that he was about the last fellow in the world to make a success of criminal investigation. His clumsiness was a by-word, and he was as impulsive as a young bull.

"Come on, Boz—on the trail, my lad!" he said tensely. "Pick it up, old chap!"

He fairly hauled the unfortunate spaniel out of the tent, and tried to urge him onwards. It was just as well for the success of the investigation that Nipper was there.

"It might be a good idea to let Boz have a sniff at this cap, Handy," he suggested.

"Don't think I'm trying to teach you anything, but it's generally done, you know, even with bloodhounds."

Handforth turned red.

"I'd forgotten about that!" he admitted gruffly.

It was Nipper who placed the cap in front of Boz's nose, and urged him to sniff. Boz did so with such eagerness that it was obvious he keenly understood what was expected of him.

The next moment he was sniffing round with such eagerness that the hair all along his back was bristling. He gave vent to a series of excited whines, and he pulled so hard at the cord that he half-choked himself before Handforth understood.

"Go ahead, Handy!" urged Nipper. "He's got it! Good old Charles Dickens is on the trail!"

And there was no doubt about it.

Boz was pulling hard at the leash all the time, and Handforth tried to imagine that he looked like a great detective as he followed behind, allowing the clever little dog to have his head. Handforth adopted a crouching attitude, with his head thrust forward.

"We've got the scent," he said intently. "Good old Boz! Look! He's going ahead without a falter!"

Nobody said so, but they were all thinking of Sir Lucian Dexter. Was it possible that he was mixed up in this shady business? For there seemed no doubt now regarding its shadiness. Honest people do not ransack the tents of others.

But Nipper, at least, was convinced that the man was not Sir Lucian. He had been too big—too powerful.

But it was significant that Boz was leading the way to St. Frank's! And Sir Lucian Dexter was staying at St. Frank's, as Dr. Stafford's guest!

"I thought so!" murmured Handforth, as they approached the gate which led into the Triangle. "I'll bet Sir Lucian is—— Hallo! Chuck it, Boz! That's not the way! Hi! Stop it, you young fathead!"

Just before the gate was reached, Boz had veered off alongside the stone wall. And Handforth was trying to pull him up!

"Let him have his head!" urged Nipper.

"But Sir Lucian lives at St. Frank's," said Handforth. "Old Boz has got off the trail, for some reason——"

"Oh, my goodness!" groaned Nipper. "You're a fine detective, aren't you? You make up your mind over a theory so solidly that you won't admit you're wrong, even when it bites you! You idiot, Handy! It's your theory that's at sea—Boz is still on the right scent!"

Handforth only just saw it. The trail didn't lead into the Triangle at all, but skirted near by in the adjoining paddock. The trail was as strong as ever, for Boz never once hesitated.

"The old ruins!" breathed Church, at length.

"I thought that was where he was making for," said Nipper, nodding. "We'd better

go carefully now, you chaps. No talking. If these men are about anywhere, they may spring on us."

The ruins of the old monastery loomed up, and the juniors hesitated a moment when they found that Boz was whining at the top of the ancient stone stairway which led far down into the vaults.

The trail led straight down those sinister old stairs!

"Shall—shall we go down?" asked Watson tentatively.

"Of course!" said Handforth. "And be ready for a scrap, my sons! We're bound to meet the enemy down here, and it'll be a hard fight."

The other juniors were looking at Nipper for guidance.

"Yes, we'll see it through," said the Remove skipper. "We've trailed the man all this way, so we won't give up."

And they went down into the old vault.

They were all on edge. They hardly knew what to expect, but at any moment something dramatic might happen. For an absolute certainty, the man had passed down these crumbling old stairs not half-an-hour ago.

There was only Nipper's electric torch to light the way, and none of the juniors had a weapon.

As they reached the last of the stairs, they beheld the black vault yawning in front of them. No sound came up. There was no indication of human presence.

What was the mystery of this old place?



CHAPTER 17.

THE RIVAL CAMP.

WITH their hearts beating rapidly, the six Removites rushed into the vault.

They took this action almost automatically, and

by mutual consent—without any pre-arrangement. If there was any danger here, they wanted to meet it quickly.

Nipper whirled his light round.

Dark shadows danced and wavered. The vault seemed utterly empty of human presence, save for themselves. It was cold down here—with a coldness which was chilling.

"There's nobody here!" said Handforth, his voice harsh with excitement, and the harsher by reason of the echoes which came from the stone walls and domed arches.

"My hat! I thought we were going to be in the middle of a scrap by this time," said Tommy Watson breathlessly. "Where's your light, Nipper? What about this corner over here?"

Nipper brought his light down, while Handforth urged Boz on. But the little spaniel was at a loss now. He could do nothing but go round in circles, and it seemed that the trail was at an end. But if the man had come down here, where was he?

There was a tunnel which led right underground to the disused quarries on Bannington Moor, but a section of this was blocked, and Boz made no attempt to go near the entrance—proving that the stranger had not gone that way. In all probability he had escaped by means of a secret passage of some kind. These old ruins were honeycombed with such ancient tunnels.

"This looks interesting," said Nipper. "Very interesting! Here we have the tool-house of the excavators!"

In the far corner of the vault some surprising discoveries were made. Leaning against the wall were picks and shovels and spades. There were two or three lanterns and some coils of rope.

One of the stone walls was half demolished. The great blocks of stone had been forced completely out, showing the solid earth behind. In another place the floor itself had been tampered with.

Nipper scratched his head.

"Well, I've been mixed up in a few mysteries in my time, but this affair beats me," he confessed frankly. "It's so—so rummy! There seems to be no rhyme or reason in all this."

"That's just what I'm thinking," growled Handforth. "First they dig up Little Side, then they make excavations in the wood, and they seem to have been making a mess of the old vault, too! And where does that parchment come in? And who was that man we saw? And what about Sir Lucian Dexter?"

Nipper grinned.

"We can't find everything out at once, Handy," he replied. "Let's be satisfied for one night. We've found the headquarters of the gang, but we don't know how many there are in the gang, or who they are."

"We don't know what their game is, either," said Church, looking round into the darkness. "I think we'd better get back to the camp, you chaps."

"What rot!" said Handforth. "We've done nothing!"

But the others felt they had done quite sufficient; in spite of Handforth's protests, they left the vault, and went up the broken old circular staircase and out into the moonlight.

St. Frank's was asleep, and the whole countryside was still and peaceful. The juniors had met nobody, and it seemed incongruous that there could be any danger amid all this summer peacefulness.

They returned to camp, and even Handforth was soon asleep. Perhaps there was an excellent reason for this. He had, as a matter of fact, decided to abandon his stubborn policy. On the way back he had discovered that his snares were untouched, and so the prospect of any breakfast seemed remote.

When he and his chums awoke it was late—getting on for nine o'clock. They had badly over-slept themselves, and the first thing they saw when they turned out was a considerable little camp of tents on the other side of the river, just above Willard's Island. Figures



"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "Who's in our tent, dear boys?" Nipper and Watson turned sharply, then gasped. Outlined against the canvas was the shadow of a man being attacked by a dog; there came a wild howl of anguish, accompanied by a furious barking. Who was the midnight intruder?

were moving about, and some of them were getting into a boat.

"They're girls!" said Church blankly.

"Irene & Co.!" ejaculated Handforth, in astonishment. "By George! They can't be in camp already!"

But Irene & Co. were.

It had been quick work. At seven o'clock a full dozen of the Moor View girls had presented themselves to Lady Honoria, who, as usual, was up and about at an unearthly early hour.

And Irene & Co. were busy in their own camp well before nine o'clock. Two or three of the girls came over the river, and Handforth went to meet them, with many of the other juniors.

"Well, we're here, you see," smiled Irene.

"How the dickens did you manage it?" asked Handforth.

"Well, it's only two days to breaking up, and Miss Bond has released us," said Irene. "But I think Lady Honoria is mainly responsible. She had an awful long talk with old Bondie last night."

"So we're camping on the other side of the river," said Doris. "What's more, we've made up our minds to beat you fellows at your own game. We'll show you just how a camp *should* be run."

"We're going to have some jolly times," said Tessa Love, her eyes sparkling. "I believe Irene's cousin, Dora, is coming down

for the Whitsun holidays, too. We'll have lots of fun!"

"Better than going home!" said Handforth enthusiastically. "But, I say, you girls look ripping! Where did you get those clothes from? Neatest things I've seen for months!"

"Our Arcadian costumes!" chuckled Doris. "All supplied with the camp. I must say that Lady Honoria does the thing properly."

The girls were looking very charming indeed.

Although they wore almost the identical costume that Lady Honoria herself affected, the difference was astonishing. It was a question of age and figure, to say nothing of features.

Whereas Lady Honoria was quite ridiculous in such idyllic dress, the Moor View girls were very fittingly attired. It certainly seemed that the immediate future would be jolly for all concerned.



CHAPTER 18.

NIPPER SETS A TRAP.

THE St. Frank's camp was very cheery that morning.

A number of the juniors had decided to go home for the holidays, mainly be-

cause their people had written refusing them

permission to let them stay in camp. But all the more prominent fellows were due to stay. And the Whitsun holidays were likely to be full of incident.

Naturally enough, Edward Oswald Handforth partook of breakfast like a hungry wolf. The way he consumed rasher after rasher of bacon and egg after egg was a spectacle.

Church and McClure, being wise and discreet youths, made no mention of their leader's oft-repeated vows. Rabbits were forgotten. Fishing was a taboo subject. Handforth had come to his senses, and Church and McClure were too decent to rub it in. They were only too glad the old chump had knuckled under.

"Well, that's that!" said Handforth at last as he sat back and stretched himself. "By George, I feel a new chap now! I'm ready to go ahead with the investigation."

"What investigation?" asked Church. "Oh, you mean that rummy business about the old parchment and the vault?"

"What else?" said Edward Oswald. "I'm rather keen on this detective stuff; it suits me down to the ground. And I've decided to pursue my inquiries, and obtain some more data."

Church grinned.

"Well, here's Nipper," he said. "You'd better hear what he's got to say."

Nipper came up briskly.

"About that affair last night, you fellows," he said. "You haven't said anything to anybody else, I hope?"

"Not a word," replied Handforth. "What do you take us for?"

"Well, we can't be too careful," replied Nipper. "I want you to forget all about that mystery for the moment. Don't do any prowling about, Handy, or think that you can get on the track. I want you to give it a rest."

"You can rely on me," said Church promptly.

"Same here," agreed McClure.

"To which I say—rats!" put in Handforth. "Of all the nerve! You silly ass, Nipper! I'm just planning to make a complete inquiry. I'm going to start down in that vault by looking for footprints. And if I find some that look like Sir Lucian's, I shall prove—"

"Seriously, old man, this affair is too tricky for us to make any slips," said Nipper earnestly. "Sir Lucian is the Headmaster's guest—and the husband of Lady Honoria. If we're on the wrong tack, and we make a bloomer, we're liable to get the sack. So before we go any further, I mean to test Sir Lucian himself. And everything else has got to hang fire in the meantime."

"What do you mean—test Sir Lucian?" asked Handforth, staring.

"I'm going to set a trap for him."

"A trap?"

"Yes."

"But he might hurt himself!" protested Handforth.

"Poor old Handy!" sighed Nipper. "As soon as we talk about traps he conjures up visions of iron jaws, with spikes."

"Look here——"

"I don't mean a trap of that sort," grinned Nipper. "My idea is to find out if he really is interested in the old vault, and the tunnels. I've got an idea in the back of my mind that this mystery is connected with something underground. That's not a very brilliant deduction, considering that these people have been making excavations, but they may be wanting to locate one of the old tunnels."

"By George!" breathed Handforth. "That's an idea!"

"So I'm going to put Sir Lucian to the test," exclaimed Nipper. "And please don't butt in, Handy. You can leave this to me, and I'll report later. In the meantime, I rely upon you to do nothing."

And the captain of the Remove nodded, then went off. He did not allow Handforth any time to make objections. But he knew that he could rely on Handy to respect his wishes.

Nipper's plan was a simple one, and he was not allowed any opportunity of putting it into operation until nearly midday, when he happened to meet Sir Lucian Dexter near Big Side.

Lady Honoria's husband was walking along in an abstracted way, his gaunt, bony figure bent, and his rather sinister face set in a puzzled frown. Nipper was alone, having been awaiting his chance to get Sir Lucian to himself. He paused, and raised his cap.

"Lovely morning, sir," he remarked politely.

"Eh? What is that?" said Sir Lucian with a start. "What is that? Were you addressing me, young man?"

"I said it's a lovely morning, sir."

"Is it?" snapped Sir Lucian. "Yes, so it seems!" he added, glancing at the sky as though he hadn't seen it before. "I am sorry to disappoint you, but I have no interest in the conditions of the weather."

"That's all right, sir—we all have our likes and dislikes," said Nipper cheerily. "I hope you find plenty of interesting features in the school? It's a wonderful old place, really."

"As you say—wonderful," agreed Sir Lucian.

He was evidently anxious to get rid of this talkative schoolboy, and his voice was curt and uninviting. But Nipper, who had a purpose, was not to be easily rebuffed.

"St. Frank's is full of quaint old relics, sir," he continued. "They say that there have been buildings here ever since the Roman occupation of Britain."

Sir Lucian gave a violent start.

"What?" he shouted. "What?"

Nipper duly noted that sudden excitement.

"Fact, sir," he went on coolly. "Bits of the old Roman walls have been found within a mile—there are some in Edgemore, even now. And I believe that the old monastery

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ORDER IN ADVANCE!

was built on the site of a Roman bath. There used to be an arena, too——"

"Really? Really?" exclaimed Sir Lucian, looking at Nipper with gleaming eyes. "I must confess that I am interested. I—er—am always attracted by anything antiquated. I have heard, indeed, that St. Frank's is steeped in ancient traditions. The old monastery itself is a building of great antiquity and interest——"

"That's nothing compared to the old tunnels, sir," said Nipper.

"The old tunnels?" asked Sir Lucian thickly.

"Why, yes, sir. There are plenty of them underneath this ground," said Nipper, as though he noticed nothing different in his companion's manner. "There's even one running under these playing-fields."

"H'm! Really?" said Sir Lucian, controlling himself with an effort and speaking casually. "An old tunnel under these fields? Quite interesting! And how do you know of this, young man? Just rumour, I presume?"

"Oh, no, sir!" said Nipper. "I've been in the tunnels. Why, there's an exit behind the

pavilion—a sort of trapdoor, with turf on the top of it. There was a secret exit there once, and I expect it's still the same. But the tunnel is all blocked and disused, I believe."

"Behind the pavilion?" said the other, glancing round. "You wouldn't know the spot, of course? Not that it matters. I merely thought—— One is rather apt to be attracted by these stories, of course, but I place very little credence in them."

"Well, come and have a look, sir," said Nipper. "I think I can show you the exact spot."

They went, Sir Lucian a-quiver with ill-concealed excitement.



CHAPTER 19.

WAITING FOR SIR LUCIAN.

BEHIND the pavilion, Nipper searched in the grass and trod down the profusely-growing weeds and nettles. During the last month the weeds had half-choked that secluded spot.

"Yes, here we are," said Nipper at length. "There's nothing much to see, sir, but this is the exact place where the door is."

Sir Lucian Dexter eagerly adjusted his glasses and peered down.

"I see nothing," he said sharply. "I see nothing here! I trust you are not attempting to play a joke upon me, young man?"

"Of course not, sir," grinned Nipper. "This is a fact. You can ask anybody about it. They'll all tell you of the tunnel exit behind the pavilion. There's no secret about it at St. Frank's—although I think the majority of the fellows have forgotten all about it. If you look closely, you can see the difference in the turf."

Nipper, of course, was telling the simple truth. There actually was an exit to the tunnel here, although the tunnel itself was blocked farther along, and there was no way of penetrating it.

Much to Nipper's delight, Dr. Stafford appeared at that moment. This was a stroke of luck that Nipper had not bargained for.

"Upon my soul, Lucian, what a earth are you doing?" asked the Head, as he picked his way through the weeds. "Have you forgotten that luncheon is quite ready, and waiting?"

"Luncheon?" repeated Sir Lucian, looking up and frowning. "Nonsense! Why bother me about luncheon?" He suddenly recollected himself. "Yes, yes, of course!" he added hastily. "Luncheon! How remiss of me! I will come at once, Malcolm."

"I was just showing Sir Lucian the place where that old tunnel came out, sir," said Nipper. "We were talking about the old ruins, and the subject sort of cropped up."

"Very interesting—very intriguing," said the Head, smiling at his brother-in-law. "I understand now, of course. I do not wonder that you were attracted, Lucian."

"This tunnel is a reality, then?" asked Sir Lucian.

"Why, yes."

"Then the exit is really here?"

"I am sure I could not tell you," smiled the Head. "But if Hamilton says so, you can take his word for it. He knows much more about these things than I do. But let me again remind you that luncheon——"

"Yes, yes!" interrupted Sir Lucian impatiently. "I will come at once, my dear fellow. Thank you, my boy—thank you for your interesting information."

"Don't mention it, sir," said Nipper, raising his cap and moving off.

He watched the two men go off, and he did not leave the spot until he had satisfied himself that they had both retired into the Head's house. Then he sped off across the meadows towards the camp. He met his chums and Reggie Pitt long before he got there, and Handforth & Co. came running up at the same time.

"Well, I've got him on the line!" said Nipper, with satisfaction. "He took the bait, and swallowed it whole."

And Nipper briefly explained what had happened.

"It proves that Sir Lucian is connected with the mystery," went on Nipper. "He pretended to be only casually interested in what I was saying, but he was as keen as mustard."

"But how does this prove——"

"Wait a minute, Handy," said Nipper. "I had a stroke of luck just after I'd shown Sir Lucian the spot. The Head must have spotted us going behind the pavilion, and he came up and carted Sir Lucian off to lunch."

"How do you call that a stroke of luck?" asked Pitt.

"My dear chap, it gives us time to prepare," explained Nipper. "If my theory is right, Sir Lucian will be tremendously eager to have a look at that tunnel. If he's only casually interested—as I think he pretends—he won't come back. But if he's connected with this excavating business, he'll dodge behind the pavilion at the first opportunity, and do his best to open that secret door."

"By jingo, that's right," said Watson.

"I reckon we've got about an hour," said Nipper. "He can't rush off in a hurry, and the Head will easily keep him an hour over luncheon. So I vote we have our own grub at once, then go to the pavilion, and take up our positions in the trees."

"In the trees!" echoed Handforth.

"Yes. I've examined the spot, and if we get up in the trees we can watch that narrow strip behind the pavilion, and Sir Lucian won't know that any eyes can see him. It'll be rather interesting to watch what he does."

"It's a go!" said Handforth excitedly. "But why bother about grub? Why not take up our positions at once?"

"Yes, it's easy enough for you to say that!" growled Pitt. "You didn't have your breakfast until late, and you demolished enough for a dozen! We're hungry. If we're back in half an hour it'll be all right."

Handforth was overruled, and the school-boy investigators returned to camp.

But within the half-hour they were on their way to the pavilion, and when they arrived there was no sign of Sir Lucian Dexter. Near the pavilion were a number of tall, leafy trees, and after the juniors had climbed into their positions, there was no trace of any human presence.

Yet several pairs of eyes had a clear view of that strip below. Anybody walking behind the pavilion would never dream that his every movement could be watched and noted.

Would Sir Lucian come?

That was the question. If he was really mixed up in this strange affair of the excavations, he would undoubtedly put in an appearance sooner or later. Nipper rather believed that it would be sooner than later.

And, sure enough, the expected happened.

The watchers had not been waiting for more than half an hour before a cautious

figure edged round the end of the pavilion, and stood there. The figure produced a handkerchief, and mopped his brow. Sir Lucian Dexter had come.

He stood for some moments at the end of the pavilion, and once or twice he peeped round. Clearly, he feared that his move had been seen, and he was waiting. For people would wonder for his sanity if they had seen him creeping behind the building like that. But after a while he seemed reassured, and he turned, then approached that spot which Nipper had pointed out. Several times he looked up and round about him, and more than once he stood in a tensely-listening attitude.

Then, at last, he dropped on his hands and knees, and dug fiercely among the turf and weeds. He had produced a little trowel or a cutter of some kind. At all events, he sliced the rubbish away, and potted about, endeavouring to locate that strange old trap-door.

Five minutes passed—ten minutes.

Sir Lucian, grubby and perspiring, paused in his efforts. He was a strange figure, and the watching juniors felt rather guilty. It seemed to them that they were spying. Sir Lucian was so utterly unconscious of their scrutiny!

He continued his efforts, and then, suddenly, he uttered a little cry of triumph.

"It's here—it's here!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "Good heavens! The boy was right!"

He worked feverishly now, as though his very life depended upon the discovery of the old tunnel. And it was all the more remarkable because everybody in the school had known of that tunnel. There was nothing mysterious about it at all!

With a heave, Sir Lucian pulled up the almost-forgotten door—a cunningly-contrived thing, with the turf actually growing upon it. It seemed that he heaved up a slab of the very ground itself.

A yawning cavity was revealed.

Sir Lucian did not waste a moment. He dropped into the hole, and allowed the "trap-door" to drop into place behind him. He vanished completely, and Nipper drew his breath in with a sharp gasp.

The next second he was slithering down his own particular tree like a squirrel. He barked his knees, he grazed his hands, but he didn't care. For Nipper was wildly alarmed at the result of his own ruse.



CHAPTER 20.

A CLOSE CALL!

"WICK, you fellows!" he shouted desperately.

The others had been prepared to stop in their trees, waiting for Sir

Lucian to come up again. But seeing that Nipper had descended, they lost no time in following his example. They ran up as

Nipper was tugging hard at the earth-covered trap.

"Well, we've got the proof!" said Handforth triumphantly.

"Never mind the proof!" snapped Nipper. "Help me!"

"What on earth—"

"Don't waste time!" shouted Nipper. "Lend a hand here!"

The others regarded him in astonishment.

"But you're not going to let Sir Lucian know that we've seen all this, are you?" asked Watson blankly. "He might cut up rusty—"

"He must be mad!" snapped Nipper. "And you fellows seem to be just as mad as he is! Can't you realise that this disused old tunnel might be full of evil gases?"

"What!"

"And Sir Lucian has gone down there—and he's even closed the door after him," went on Nipper. "If anything has happened to him, it'll be my fault for putting him up to this dodge. The chances are that he's all right—but we can't risk it."

"You—you mean he's in danger?" asked Handforth.

"Of course!" put in Reggie Pitt. "Nipper's quite right; there might be terrible danger! There's no ventilation down there, and if once he is overcome, he'll never be able to get out. Shouting for help will be useless, and he'll die miserably."

They wrenched open the door, and a dank, earthy noisome smell arose from the disused tunnel. They recoiled. There was something horrible in that smell.

"I'm going alone!" said Nipper grimly. "You chaps stay here—one of you just inside. If you hear me yell, come and help."

"I'm going with you!" declared Handforth stoutly.

"Look here, Handy, don't be an ass—"

"I tell you I'm going with you!"

"But it's ridiculous—"

"If there's any danger, I'm going to share it!" vowed Handforth. "I was nearly killed in this rotten tunnel once, and I know every corner of it. If you're going to argue, Nipper—"

"All right—come on!"

Nipper was wildly apprehensive, and he saw no reason why Sir Lucian should die while they argued the point at the exit. He pulled out his handy electric torch, and flashed it on. It was a powerful light, but it seemed utterly feeble after the brilliant sunshine outside.

There were some rough steps to go down. Some of them were broken, but the descent was not difficult. Reggie Pitt followed them down, meaning to take up his position at the bottom, in case he was needed. Church and McClure followed, too.

Down in the tunnel, Nipper paused for a moment, and flashed his light to and fro. There were footprints on the damp earth of the tunnel floor, and they told their own story. There was no need to hesitate as to which direction to take, for at this point the tunnel branched two ways.

"Sir Lucian!" shouted Nipper desperately.

"It's no good——"

"Quiet, Handy!" muttered Nipper.

They listened. There was no answering hail. The silence was only broken by the sounds of the other juniors on the steps.

"Come on!" muttered Nipper.

They went forward, and they had scarcely proceeded ten yards before Nipper felt himself swaying. His head was beginning to reel, and a thousand strange lights were dancing before his eyes. His breathing became difficult.

"Can you—can you feel anything?" asked Handforth hoarsely.

Nipper clutched at him.

"I feared as much!" he panted. "It's gas! Sir Lucian—Sir Lucian!"

The shout was almost a croak, and there was no reply.

"You get back, Handy!" went on Nipper.

"He's done, of course! He must have collapsed. Get back and warn the others!"

Fighting his dizziness, Nipper staggered on, knowing only too well that he was courting death. And Handforth came behind—for Handforth was not the kind of fellow to desert a companion in danger.

And then, just when it seemed that all hope had gone, Nipper's swaying vision thought it detected a still figure sprawled across the path. He tried to steady himself, and he gave a panting cry of relief.

"He's here!" he muttered. "We're in time!"

"Good egg!" choked Handforth. "Come on, we can do it!"

How they dragged Sir Lucian out they hardly knew.

They were both dazed, and half-unconscious. Their senses seemed to be on the point of deserting them, and they felt choking. At the risk of their very lives, they hauled Lady Honoria's husband into safety.

Indeed, but for the presence of Pitt and the others at the bottom of the stairs, all three of them might have perished.

Neither Nipper nor Handforth had any recollection of getting out into the open. But they had managed to half-drag themselves up, with the help of the others.

And the fresh air soon performed its wondrous work.

Within five minutes, Nipper and Handforth were almost themselves again. Their heads were splitting, and they felt generally groggy, but they had regained full possession of their senses.

"That was a close call," said Pitt, looking at Nipper in a scared sort of way. "You boulder! You gave us the fright of our lives! Handy, too! We thought you were both gone!"

"Rats!" growled Handforth. "We went down there to fetch Sir Lucian, and we fetched him. Why make a fuss about it?"

Sir Lucian Dexter, smothered in dirt and grime, pale and wan, was just coming to himself. After a while he sat up in dazed bewilderment, and recollection returned.

"Good gracious!" he muttered. "What is all this?"

"We happened to see you go into that tunnel, sir," said Nipper.

Sir Lucian started.

"Yes, I remember," he muttered, holding his head. "How foolish of me to venture in! I don't seem to recall what—— No, I stumbled. I fought for breath, and——"

"These two fellows risked their lives to save you, sir," said Pitt quietly. "In another five minutes you would have been gone, and they nearly got killed in dragging you out!"

"Oh rot!" said Nipper, giving Pitt a glare.

"It is the truth," said Sir Lucian. "Yes, I quite realise that. I shall be everlastingly grateful, my boys. You have undoubtedly saved my life, and it seems that no words of mine can adequately——"

"Please give it a rest, sir!" said Handforth, in distress.

Sir Lucian rose unsteadily to his feet.

"It was my curiosity," he muttered. "If you will save me from unwelcome comment, please keep this little affair to yourselves. I ask you this as another favour."

"Rely on us, sir—we'll say nothing," promised Nipper.

And Sir Lucian Dexter went off. Not a word of explanation, not a hint of his real object. The juniors felt that the mystery was deeper than ever!

THE END.

.....NEXT.....

WEDNESDAY!

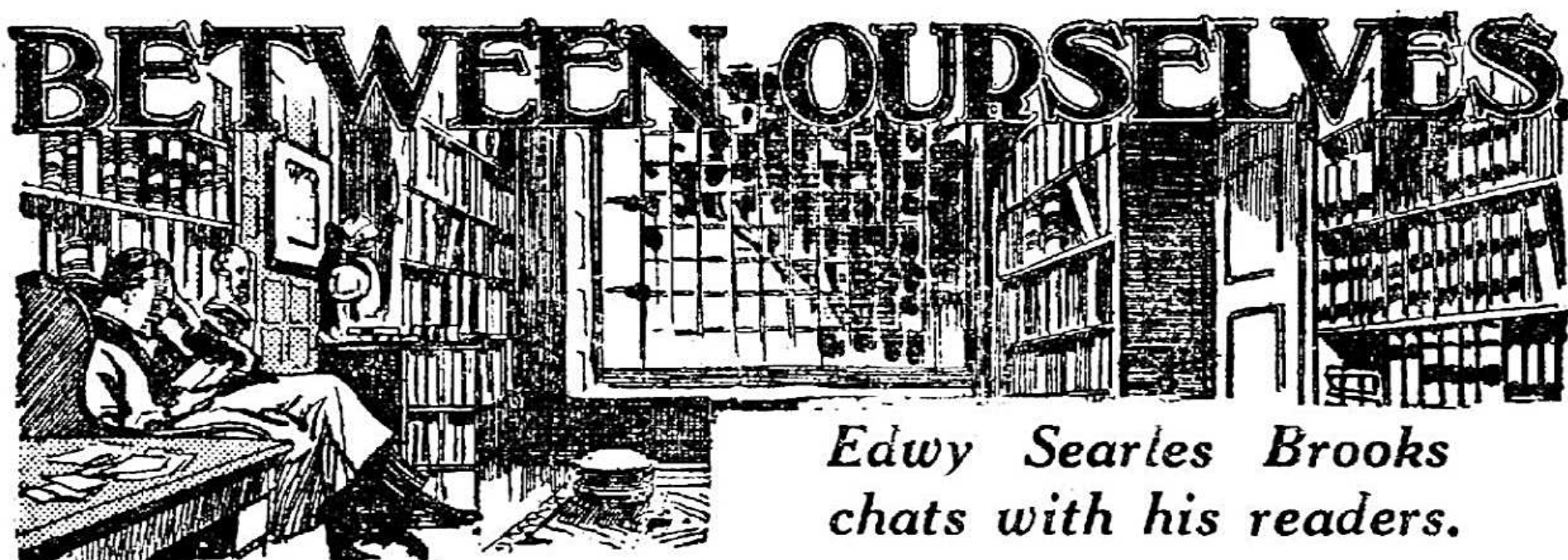
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fun!

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ADVANCE!



*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.

Cecil A. Westrope* (Surbiton), William Wall (Fairford), J. Fisher (Highbury), Charles Daniel (Worcester), John Seymour Pearce (Wood Green), Eileen Mingay (Balham), I. L. Harley (Bridgnorth), D. Fellmore* (South Ealing), George Farrington (Bristol), Geo. W. Hulbert (Birmingham), "Lon Chaney" (Newcastle-on-Tyne), Reginald Rushworth* (Gateshead), "Frightfully Interested" (Pontypridd), Arthur Lloyd (Ramsey, I. o. M.), Geoff Johnson (Market Harboro'), Ronald Mabbett (Fairford), Gladys Howard (Beckenham), Terence Sullivan* (Brighton), "Irene the Second"* (Southport), "Bud" (Liverpool), "Patience"* (Birkenhead), J. Fairman* (Horley), Harry Cox (Leeds), Bernard Sollis (Banbury), James A. Evans* (Liverpool), Susie Winsion* (Durban), Herbert Walter (East Ham), "Syd" (Grimsby), C. D. Gubbins (Charlton), Frank J. Bamber (Charlton), J. R. Cook (Bolton), William Fletcher (Stanwick), Miss E. Mead (Dover), Israel Herr (Johannesburg).

Before commenting on any of this week's letters, I want to say a word to my many coppers in Australia. They probably noticed a mistake on Page 16 of No. 52 of the Old Paper—in the story called "SHUNNED BY ST. FRANK'S." Owing to a printer's error, the word "dinkum" came out as "dunkum." I thought I'd better mention this in case all you Aussie coppers of mine got writing to me, pointing out that I didn't know the true Australian vernacular. I spotted the mistake as I was glancing through the yarn, after getting my copy. Just a printer's error, you know—not ignorance on my part.

Sorry, "Irene the Second," but the St. Frank's fellows will go abroad for the Summer Holidays, as usual. I rather think the majority of readers prefer this. Still, the present Fresh Air Series is very much like a holiday adventure in England, isn't it? So perhaps you'll be satisfied. In fact, everybody ought to be satisfied—because there'll be something for all.

Awfully sorry, if I upset you, "Bud," by that incident in "Spring Cleaning at St. Frank's." You tell me that you are a plasterer, and that I have insulted all plasterers by making my own particular character use a form of speech that

is very different to a real live plasterer's. My apologies to all plasterers! But, really, the man who figured in my story *did* speak like that, and you must remember that there are plasterers and plasterers. I really think that you are just a little bit too touchy, old man. If I make one of my characters—a bargee, for example—speak in a very coarse manner, this doesn't mean to say that all bargees speak the same. I know, for a fact, that some bargees are very educated people. But they don't write up to me and complain!

Please do not think that you have wasted my time by writing to me, "Patience." You tell me that you have been in bed for two years, an invalid, unable to do anything, or to reach anything for yourself. If it will give you any comfort to write to me, I shall be delighted to have letters from you regularly, and I will do my best to answer them, and to comment upon them on this page. I never regard it as a waste of time to read every letter, from the first word to the last. I enjoy reading them, and look upon this pleasant task as one of my most delightful recreations.

Of course you can write to me, Harry Cox. It doesn't matter whether you are a member of the St. Frank's League or not—I like getting letters from everybody. Not that it wouldn't be a good idea if you joined the League. Because everybody who joins the League proves his (or her) loyalty to the Old Paper. And—incidentally—to me. So hurry up, old son. With regard to the best route for cycling from Leeds to London, I don't think you'll have any trouble. It's a main road, you know, and any cycling map will give it to you. But I shouldn't advise you to light fires on the wayside in the summertime. It's rather a risky business, especially after a long spell of dry weather. The best advice I can give you is to join the League, and then write to the Chief Officer. He'll give you all the information you want.

I'm sorry I cannot accept your challenge to insert your letter in the Old Paper, Israel Herr.

(Continued on next page.)

BETWEEN OURSELVES

(Continued from page 35.)

Quite a number of fellows have written to me, challenging me to reproduce their epistles. If I did so, the whole paper would be filled, and there wouldn't be any story. I note that you entirely agree with Messrs Marlow, Tibby, and Co., and I must leave it at that. You say you want me to write complete stories? That is to say, each week a different little plot—with no interest running from story to story. I wonder how many other readers are with you in this desire? Personally, I rather think the series are much more popular than the complete stories.

Paddy Roche (Melbourne), "H. W. K." (Islington) "Eileen Dare" (Brighton), Edmund Francis Armitage (Auckland, N.Z.), "P. Smaker" (N.1), R. Christian (Johannesburg), Reginald Osborne* (Leicester), Miss Winnie Stevens (Leytonstone), Peter Charnley* (Rochdale), Colin Fensham (Victoria, B.C.), Felix Dennis (S. Chingford), Miss B. Tipper (Chelsea), Maisie Abrams* (Clapham Common), "R. P." (Dover), "W. G. M." (Islington), Frank E. Ball (Birmingham) "D. Fellmore" (S. Ealing), Jack Stanley Francis (Canvey Island), W. Harry Bazeley (Birmingham), Arthur Rivlin (Radyr) E. Lewis* (Northampton), Alec Walker (Balham), Miss A. Skull (Southall), N. Atherton* (Warwick), Eric Dence (Derby), Jean Gaylord (Wolverhampton), A. Franks (N.16), W. Eric Bryar (Bradford), Douglas Emery (Hull), Marie Pigott* (Hammersmith), Frank Taberer-Moore* (Nuneaton), G. A. Boucher (Wood Green).

Yes, I wrote the story, "In Trackless Space," Edmund Francis Armitage. It was published in the Old Paper as a serial, and later in No. 504 of "The Boys' Friend Library"—Old Series. But it had a *nom de plume* of mine on it—"Robert W. Comrade." I claimed to have written this story in a reply on this page some months ago, and one or two readers wrote to me, and practically told me that I was a fibber. So perhaps this little word of explanation will show them that they were wrong.

There is already a South African junior at St. Franks, R. Christian. His name is Herbert Vandyke, and he shares Study No. 8, in the Modern House, with Terence O'Grady, the Irish junior. I shall have to bring both of them a little more to the front. So look out for them.

If you want your name and address put in the Old Paper, Winnie Stevens, you'll have to join the League, and apply to the Chief Officer. It is perfectly easy, you know.

I say, Felix Dennis, what's the difference between "piffle" and "tosh"? You tell me that you disagree with the "fatheads who call my yarns tosh." And then you say, "In my opinion, it is a jolly fine paper, although the stories are mostly piffle." That's rather a dubious kind of compliment, old man. What exactly do you mean?

Sorry I can't help you to get those back numbers you want, Frank E. Ball. I can only suggest that you should join the League, and then have an advert. put in the Old Paper—which is free to Leagueites. Perhaps there are some old readers who will be willing to supply you with the back numbers you require.

S. Williams* (East Ham), K. A. Gudgeon (Wimbledon), K. W. Norris (St. Anne's), Frederick W. Boyce* (Bristol), V. G. B. Hill (Hendon), G. W. Parkes (Chesterfield), Wm. S. Sutton* (Liverpool), Mrs. R. E. Prince-Bishop* (Hammersmith), Reginald A. J. Haynes* (Stratford), Derek Cockayne* (Ilford), Edward Tomlinson (Settle), F. H. Stephen (Willesden), Jack Gillick* (Belfast), Renee Turk* (Canning Town), C. Voight (Carlisle), W. Knight (Shoreditch), "A Well-Wisher" (Barrow-in-Furness), B. Benham* (Coatbridge), Stanley F. Bainbridge (Chelmsford), David Stairs (Glasgow), R. A. Whaite* (King's Park, S. Aus.), "Waddy" (Ilkley), Mrs. Iles* (Wandsworth), "Harry Gresham"* (Hollinwood), Harry Matthews (Ashton-under-Lyne), William Watkins, Elric D. Berry and Harold Lane* (Marple), "A Broken Hillite" (Broken Hill, N.S.W.), John Rayburne (Stalybridge), Sidney Jones (Manchester), Laurie Godden (Kilton) John Howard Panter (Balham), Wm. J. Aldous* (Norwich), "Ivy Stella Grey"* (Barraport, Vic., Aus.), Wm. G. Marsh* (Islington).

If you go to New York, David Stairs, you can easily get the Old Paper there—by paying a subscription to the London office. It will be posted regularly every week, without fail. In any case, I think you can buy nearly all the British papers at the Times Square Subway Station, along Broadway. At least, they had them all on sale when I was in New York, and I believe that this particular establishment is now greatly enlarged—but I wouldn't be absolutely sure.

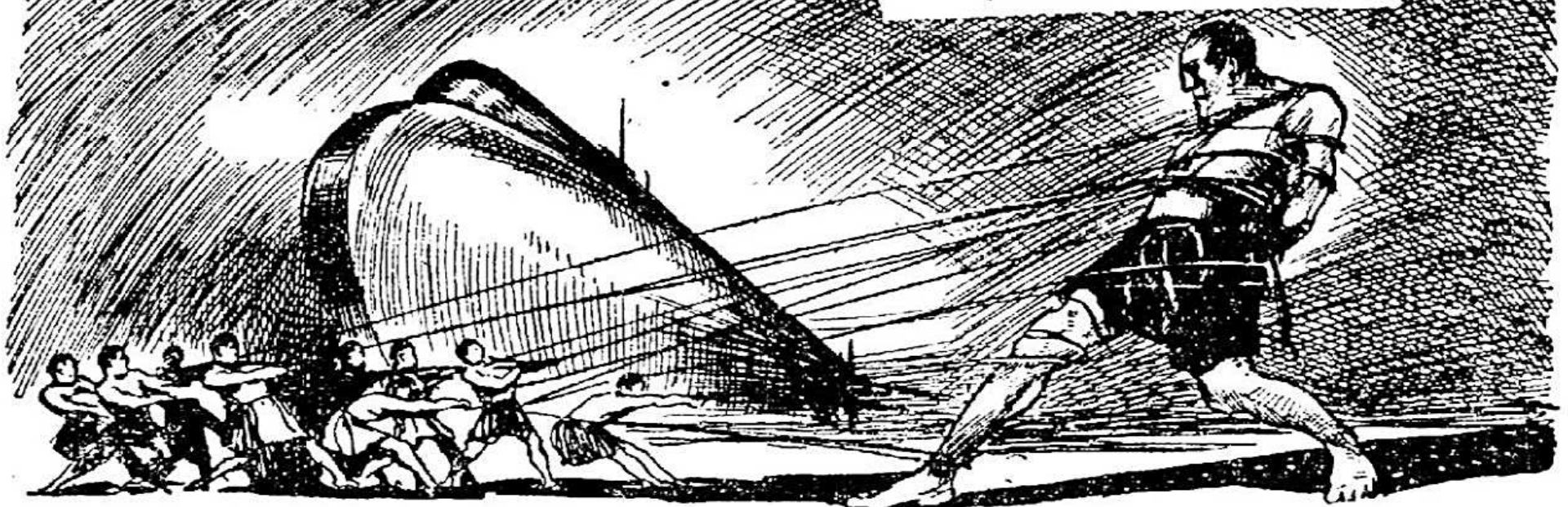
Now and again it happens that I write more for this page than the poor old printers—they're only human, after all—can possibly squeeze in. For the age of miracles isn't still with us, you know. So, if any of you, at any time, have dealt with a matter of general interest which I haven't commented upon, you'll jolly well know that I have answered your letter, but that my reply to you has been ruthlessly cut out by those printer chappies—just because *something* had to go. You can bet your boots on it! When this misfortune happens, keep smiling, and—write me again. Better luck next time—or, at any rate, the time after that. Third time's lucky, you know. But, as these columns are the least attractive of all in the Old Paper, if anything has to be cut, the blue pencil travels like a magnet to this unimportant chatter of mine.



*The Traitor !**Thrills Galore !*

The BURIED WORLD!

By LIONEL DAY



WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED :

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 are at enmity with the Giants. Jim, accompanied by Masra and Tinta, rescue Mr. Cripps. To do this, Masra has to desert from the Kru people. Tinta and Masra are called traitors and urged on by a scoundrel named Ka-Ra, are captured by the Kru. Jim and Mr. Cripps are attempting to rescue them when news comes that the Kru are to be
by their great enemies, the Falta. Instantly there is pandemonium, and everybody is terror stricken. Then Mr. Cripps springs up in their midst, and tells them he will drive back the Falta providing the Kru agree to let Tinta and Masra go free.

(Now read on.)

Cripps to the Rescue.

THERE was a moment of uncertainty after Stanislaus Cripps had delivered his ultimatum. The scales of Fate hung evenly balanced, with the habit of submission to *He-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken* weighing against the force of character and the will-power of Stanislaus Cripps. And, during that pause, an amazing thing happened.

Suddenly the curtain over the doorway was torn aside, and through the opening there appeared the great head of one of the Falta. His squat nose, his slobbering lips, his huge distended eyes, set in that rocky frame, presented a picture of indescribable horror. There was a scream from the massed crowd, and instantly those in the neighbourhood of the door began to fight to get away. Pandemonium was let loose.

Jim saw the giant open his cavernous mouth, and his great yellow fangs glittered for a moment in the light. Then slowly he crept through the doorway. One of his huge groping hands, as they felt their way forward, closed unconsciously upon one of the Kru, crushing him like an egg-shell.

Foot by foot his enormous form continued to

thrust its way forward into the Hall of the People. Now he drew up his legs, cast his gaze for a moment in the direction of the roof as if to gauge whether he had standing room, and then rose to his feet.

The effect of that giant's presence amidst so many thousands of human beings of ordinary stature was extraordinary. Jim was reminded of a picture in "Gulliver's Travels," in which the hero is shown among the people of Lilliput. Twenty feet high, the Falta dwarfed the Kru so that they looked for all the world like insects swarming at his feet.

Like all the Falta, his face was expressionless, but there was something in his slobbering lips which suggested an ecstasy of cruel satisfaction. For the first time one of the Falta had the Kru at his mercy. There were no liquid flames in the hall with which the unfortunate dwarfs could protect themselves. He was like some savage beast of the jungle let loose among people who however much greater their intelligence were unarmed.

The Kru were now all pressed in a struggling, inextricable mass on the upper tiers of seats. Only the women and children, as if terror had robbed them of the power of motion, still

crowded round the stone on which Stanislaus Cripps was standing.

The Falta looked round, turning his great head slowly. Then he reached out an arm and plucked a handful of the Kru from the lower tier of seats.

He held them in his palm for a moment, studying them like an entomologist might inspect some insect. Then he did a thing, the horror of which was to remain in Jim's mind for ever.

Like a cruel boy plucks the wings from a fly, so the giant set himself to tear the limbs from his victims. Jim could hear the tortured screams of the unfortunate Kru. The scene was sickening in its dreadful bestiality.

There was a clatter of metal-clad feet striking the stone floor. Stanislaus Cripps had leapt from the stone, and, thrusting aside the terrified women and children, was striding towards the giant. By comparison with the Falta, he was no larger than a rabbit.

"You dog—you beast!" he shouted in English. "Murderer, loathsome excrescence—there's only one way of dealing with you!"

The Falta must have understood, partly by the sound and partly by the fact that that shining figure was moving towards him, that he was being addressed. He looked down, and then stretching out his disengaged hand, made as if to scoop Stanislaus Cripps off the floor.

The next instant there was an ear-splitting report. That huge figure seemed to disintegrate. The Falta had vanished! All that was left of his recent loathsome presence was a crimson circle on which the wounded Kru were lying moaning!

"King of the Kru!"

"I HATE this butcher's business, boy!" Stanislaus Cripps exclaimed, his usually cool, self-confident voice oddly tremulous as he spoke. "But there was nothing else for it. I wonder if there's anyone here with any glimmerings of medical science, because these unfortunate people ought to be looked after. Tinta, my dear, can you do anything to help these wounded?"

He uttered the last words in the Kru tongue. Tinta instantly stepped off the rock, and pushing her way through the crowd—not one of those who, but a moment before, had been clamouring for her life, attempting to stay her—reached Stanislaus Cripps' side.

"To the women of Kru, O Halry One, belongs the duty to tend the sick and helpless. They will be borne to the Cave set apart for them."

She made a movement as if to summon some of the women to assist her, and at that moment the spell of wonder and relief that held the assembled Kru in silence broke down. A shout went up to the vaulted roof.

"Great is the Shining One! He is our Lord and Master! The Falta was here and he is not! The magic of the Shining One has destroyed him. From now onwards shall he be known among us as He-Whose-Word-Must-Be-Obedied!"

As if to test that statement, Stanislaus Cripps raised his arm to command silence. Instantly all noise ceased in the cave.

"You have taken a long time to come to your senses, but you have come to them at last, O Kru. Now listen to me. There are men among you who have betrayed the trust imposed in them. The food grows foul in the Cave of the Mushrooms, for there has been no one to gather it; the cattle moan for they have not been milked. Let those who have deserted their posts come forward!"

There was a movement among the crowd, and some hundred men, looking very frightened, ranged themselves round Cripps.

The scientist selected one of them at random and motioned him to come forward.

"You shall speak for the others. Why did you abandon your duties?"

The man bowed his head submissively.

"Four times was the food gathered and renewed, and yet He-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken had not told us what his will was. Has he not always directed our doings? Without his order, O Shining One, why should we gather the food and tend the cattle?"

"I'll tell you. Because you'd all starve if the job wasn't done. It was a necessary piece of work that your intelligence should have told you must be done in the interests of the people, whether you received an order or not."

He turned to the spectators.

"These men deserve punishment. In the space between the gathering and renewing of the food, nothing shall pass their mouths except water. And they shall labour in the Caves of the Cattle and the Mushrooms four times beyond their allotted span. You will see to this, O Kru. Afterwards those whose duty it is to do this necessary work, will perform it in rotation without any further orders."

As he finished speaking, a strange twittering sound came from the open doorway. Looking round, Stanislaus Cripps saw the loathsome face of another Falta peering into the hall. Evidently he was seeking his companion, who had gone on ahead of him for he hesitated, staring about him without attempting to enter the hall.

"Boy," Stanislaus Cripps shouted, "go and dose that brute with the sleeping gas. I can't have any more of this butchery. It would give these Kru a taste for cruelty. Quick, boy, before he gets into the hall!"

On hands and knees, that giant figure was now beginning to move forward. Jim dashed forward to meet him the cylinder of sleeping gas in his hand. Halting just out of the reach of those ten foot arms, he discharged a cloud of vapour into the giant's face. He saw the milky cloud spread into the air. For a moment the giant's head was hidden in that veil of mist. When it cleared he was lying prone on the ground unconscious.

"That's blocked the passage for the rest of them, anyway," Stanislaus Cripps exclaimed. "Now we've got to get busy. Tinta, my dear, get some of these ladies to help you with the wounded. And you, Kru, back to the tasks that you did before! The time for talking is over."

Some of the men rushed forward, weapons upraised in their hands, with the obvious intention of plunging them into the unconscious figure of the Falta. Stanislaus Cripps stopped them with an imperious gesture.

"Stay! We will have no more bloodshed. We will make the Falta submit. They shall be your slaves, O Kru. At any rate, the feud between you shall cease."

He hurled an explanatory aside at Jim.

"Got to get rid of this fear business. It's the only way to civilise these people."

He stood there, while the huge audience slowly dispersed. On account of the unconscious giant lying in the doorway, their exit was considerably hampered, but gradually, little by little, they dispersed. Tinta and a party of women carrying away the wounded.

At last only Jim, Masra and Stanislaus Cripps remained. Stanislaus Cripps put up his hands, gave his metal helmet a twist, and then lifted it off. His great head, with its mass of red hair, appeared with an almost jack-in-the-box effect from above his shining armour.

"Boy, that was swift work," he exclaimed, drawing in deep breath. "I think they're going to eat out of my hand after this. Now let us go and see what these hypertrophied idiots are up to!"

The Warning!

JIM was about to follow Stanislaus Cripps towards the door when his attention was called to the figure of Ka-Ra, lying there where he had fallen under the influence of the sleeping gas. The man was just beginning to move.

"He's coming round, sir," Jim exclaimed.

Stanislaus Cripps halted, the glittering head-piece of his armour still in his hand.

"Pick him up, boy, and let's have a look at him. He's a would-be Napoleon who didn't click!"

Jim put his hands under Ka-Ra's arms, then raised him to his feet. The man stood there blinking at them. He was evidently still dazed.

"Well, Ananias, what have you got to say for yourself?" Stanislaus Cripps exclaimed in English.

Ka-Ra's face twitched, and into his dark eyes there flashed an expression of unutterable hate.

"Lord and Master," he exclaimed in a whining tone, "I am but one of your meanest slaves!"

Stanislaus Cripps pulled at his red beard with a gesture of exasperation.

"Listen to him, boy!" he boomed. "What a cringing cur he is! And yet, he must have had the makings of a man out of the ordinary. He had ambitions, which none of the other Kru people seem to have. His was a case of initiative without intelligence, boy."

He turned with a frown to Ka-Ra.

"You'll understand, Ka-Ra, that I am the master of the Kru people, that my word henceforth is law. Don't invent any more communications from He-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken, and don't try to make yourself a big noise, either. You can go now, and let what has happened here be a lesson to you."

Ka-Ra ran a few paces across the floor, then halted in horror at the sight of the huge form of the Falta almost filling the exit.

"You need have no fear, Ka-Ra," called Cripps. "He sleeps even as you slept, and you can walk over him with safety."

Ka-Ra stepped gingerly past that recumbent giant and disappeared in the corridors beyond. Only when he was gone did Masra speak.

"O Hairy One, you have done wrong to let that man escape. Ka-Ra hates you in his heart, and he means you mischief. I saw it even in his eyes."

Stanislaus Cripps laughed robustly.

"He can't make any trouble for me, Masra. Let's not bother our thoughts with him any further. We have more important matters in hand."

He turned and frowned at the figure of the sleeping giant.

"We must get that mountain of flesh out of this somehow, otherwise he'll wake up soon and make trouble. He's worse than a stranded whale. Masra, go and get fifty of the strongest men, and send them along here to cart this Falta into the Outer Cavern. We are going to see what has happened."

"Eat More Fruit!"

LEAVING the Hall of the People with Jim at his heels, Cripps strode down the network of corridors to the entrance to the Inner Cavern. An exclamation of astonishment escaped from his lips.

Where that entrance tunnel had been, previously so low that not even Jim could stand upright in it, there was now a great fissure some fifty feet high and some thirty feet broad. The whole

face of the cliff had been torn away, and beyond they could see, brooding in its strange blue atmosphere the world of the Outer Cavern.

"What the dickens can be the meaning of this, boy!" Stanislaus Cripps exclaimed. "It must have been caused by an explosion, and as the only explosives in the place belong to me, they must have got at our store somehow. But how did they learn how to use them?"

"Perhaps it was just chance, sir," put in Jim. "The tin containing the power with which you destroyed the idol was in the tractor."

Stanislaus Cripps stepped gingerly through the gap, then stood for a moment on the threshold of the Outer Cavern, looking about him. Suddenly he pointed to the ground below.

"Yes, I think you've hit it, boy. A Falta must have found the tin, and, opening it, spilt the powder on the ground. That would be more than sufficient to detonate it. The giant who did it is now amongst the missing!"

He stepped off the rock on to the floor below. Of the Falta not one was in sight. Apparently the two who had made their way into the Inner Cavern were the only ones in the neighbourhood at the time of the explosion, or perhaps their companions had fled terrified.

A quarter of a mile away a glittering object was visible on the ground. Stanislaus Cripps gave a snort of satisfaction.

"There's the tractor, boy. These big clumsy brutes haven't been able to break that up, anyway!"

In a few minutes they had gained the spot where the tractor stood. It had been rifled of most of its stores, which the Falta, not understanding the use of them, had left scattered about the ground.

The barrels of fruit were intact, and Stanislaus Cripps, seizing an apple, began to devour it greedily. The machine itself had been turned upside down, but so weightless was it that Jim was able to right it with one hand.

"Help yourself to some of that fruit, boy. It's the best medicine in the world, and I'm not sure that the diet we've been having is quite what the doctors would recommend. I'm going to take the tractor back into the Inner Cavern and use it to transport that Falta hulk out to his own quarters. You'd best stay here, boy, and keep an eye on the stores till I return."

He stepped into the machine, examined its shining levers and switches with the satisfaction of the man who had invented it, and then pressed a button. Instantly there was a faint humming sound as the engines sprang to life.

"Nothing wrong, here, boy. I'll be getting along. See you later when I've got the Falta out of the way!"

A Traitor!

Left alone, Jim eagerly adopted Stanislaus Cripps' prescription and helped himself liberally to the oranges and apples. He was just in the act of beginning on his third orange when, directly across his line of vision, there appeared for a moment, about a mile away, a small figure clambering among the boulders.

Jim stared at it in amazement. It must be one of the Kru, and yet what was one of the Kru doing alone in that world of the giants, where death threatened him at every turn?

He rose to his feet to get a better view, and as he did so, his foot touched something on the ground. Looking down he saw that it was a pair of binoculars. Picking them up, he took them

out of their case and focussed them on that figure.

The man had halted on the summit of a high boulder, beyond which appeared the domed roofs of one of the Falta settlements. Jim saw him look round nervously, and, as he did so, the boy caught a glimpse of his features. It was Ka-Ra!

Somehow that discovery filled Jim with a vague uneasiness. What was this man, who had sought to seize power by deliberate fraud, and had lost the daring game he had played by the intervention of Stanislaus Cripps, doing alone on the fringe of that Falta settlement? Settling himself comfortably behind the boulder on which he had been seated, Jim watched his movements through the glasses.

Now apparently Ka-Ra's movements of uncertainty had come to an end. Jim saw him turn his face towards those huge stone huts, his figure rigid. Then across the vaulted cavern came the sound of his voice, though his words were indistinguishable. He was calling to somebody!

A few minutes went by, then, above the boulders, there reared themselves the heads and shoulders of a number of the Falta. Jim half expected Ka-Ra, who was unarmed, he saw, to turn and flee at the sight of those terrible apparitions; but still he stood his ground.

Then he started speaking to the giants, and owing to that vast enclosed space, his voice was audible to Jim. Once the boy saw him point upwards. Once, too, he turned with a dramatic gesture to the entrance to the Inner Cavern.

An immense curiosity filled Jim's mind. There was something wrong here, he reflected. For a Kru to meet the Falta and not be instantly destroyed was, he knew, contrary to all precedent.

How came it, then, that Ka-Ra had not been swept off that rock like a fly snatched from a wall and crushed to death? Could it be that Ka-Ra was engaged on some treacherous mission to their enemies? It was a matter, he decided, that he ought to inquire into.

Acting on that resolve, Jim began to make his way across the boulder-strewn ground in the direction of the spot, cleverly taking cover so that he should not be observed. Long before he gained the outskirts of the Falta settlement, Ka-Ra had disappeared.

Now at last Jim had reached the outer fringe of that clearing on which those giant huts stood. As he peered cautiously through a crevice between two huge rocks, he saw an astonishing sight.

Twenty of the Falta were seated on the ground in a circle, their huge limbs drawn up under them, their distended eyes fixed in an expressionless state on the little figure that stood in the middle of the circle. It was Ka-Ra, and he was addressing them in violent, passionate tones.

"Listen to me, O Falta! I have finished with the Kru. I come to you as a friend and an ally. Between each Coming of the Light you grow fewer and fewer. Soon there will be none of you left, for the Kru will kill you one by one. I alone am able to save you. I will show you a way by which these Shining Ones and their magic can be placed in your power, and you can become masters of the Outer and the Inner Cavern, and make the Kru your slaves!"

The Falta nodded their huge heads, and from their lips came that strange, bird-like twittering sound by which they expressed their emotions.

"Swear to me, O Falta, that we are brothers—that you will stand by me through life and death, that my enemies shall be your enemies—and I will show you the way to victory!"

Each Falta glanced at his neighbour, and then once more they nodded their heads.

"We are your brothers," they exclaimed in chorus. "Your enemies are our enemies. Tell us, then, what we must do!"

Captured by the Falta!

JIM saw an expression of satisfaction light up Ka-Ra's face. The man had risked his life on a gamble and had won. He, a representative of the Falta's hated foes, had been accepted as a friend and an ally!

"Where is the Flying Thing that the Shining Ones brought?" Ka-Ra inquired.

One of the giants pointed into the dim distance.

"It is over there, O Kru. We have ridden on it. Many times we have brought it to the ground, twenty of us holding it. Then it has risen, bearing us away."

Jim hardly knew what his feelings were on hearing that the Falta had been using Stanislaus Cripps' wonderful invention for joy rides.

"That is well," Ka-Ra exclaimed in a tone of satisfaction. "You must take me to it, O Falta. There on that Flying Thing is all the magic of the Shining Ones. There is the magic that makes one sleep. There is the fire that strikes and destroys. Once we are armed with those, who can stand against us? The Kru would be like the cattle in the cave of the meadows to do nought but your will! Bring me to this Flying Thing, O Falta! We must not delay."

At that moment all the giants, as if moved by some common impulse, raised their heads and looked upwards. In order to see what they were staring at, Jim had to slip out of his hiding place between the two boulders. A little gasp of astonishment escaped from his lips.

There, floating some twenty feet above his head, was the huge hulk of the Flying Submarine! Seated across it, like children riding on a horse, were five of the Falta. Evidently their enormous weight had overcome the buoyancy of the vessel, and caused it to sink towards the ground. The anchor, Jim saw, was still dangling over the side and trailing along the ground.

"Put me up there, O Falta," Ka-Ra exclaimed excitedly. "I shall know where to find the magic of the Shining Ones!"

All the giants rose, and one of them, reaching out an arm, caught the trailing anchor rope. Clearly, during their absence in the Inner Cavern, the Falta had discovered how the Flying Submarine could be brought to the ground.

Now six of them, bearing on the rope with all their weight, caused the vast vessel to settle like a bubble in the open space about the huts.

Then one of the giants who was riding on the Flying Submarine at the moment, suddenly called out something in his high falsetto voice. Jim could not understand the words, but the gesture of his hands made it perfectly clear what he was saying. The Falta was pointing to the spot where he himself stood.

Too late Jim realised that he had been discovered. He turned to flee, diving instinctively for the cover of the rocks that strewed the ground, but he had not gone more than a few yards when a huge hand closed about him and he was lifted from his feet. The next moment he found himself staring into the vast, expressionless face of one of the Falta!

(This looks serious for Jim, doesn't it? What will the Falta do with him, and will Stanislaus Cripps find out and try to rescue him? Next week's exciting instalment will tell you. Don't miss it!)

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ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 73.

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 Membership 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 4d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

A FEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE.

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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 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 St., London, E.C.4. Enquiries which need an immediate answer should be accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope.

A Boom Budget.

BEST thanks to the legion readers all over the world who have written in to say what they think of the League and the Silver Medal. "Prime," is the verdict! Week in, week out, the League is spreading and proving its uses as a link between chums with hobbies, and others who are getting up clubs.

The Morse Code.

Here's a letter from Cork, and the writer wants to know about the Morse Code. He will find this in all the scout diaries and signal books. It is quite simple. I am sending my Cork chum a copy of the alphabet, and hope he will soon become an expert.

A Uniform.

A progressive O.O. suggests a uniform and a belt. He has figured it all out: Belt 2/-; knife 1/-; whistle 6d.; hat 2/-. The uniform consists of white shirt, grey trousers. A good notion when camping out. I put the idea before members.

Congratulations!

A chum writes from Stratford to tell me he can play any tune on the piano from ear. Congratulations go to him. Music is topping, and the ability to knock off a few gay tunes makes a fellow wanted and popular.

6 ft. 1 in.—And He Stoops!

A complaint from Long Eaton suggests that the writer has followed "Long Eaton's" lead. He is too long, and he bends a bit. What is the cure? Standing straight—nothing to beat that! Tall fellows drop into the drooping lily habit, but physical exercises correct the fault. "Long Eaton" will find himself envied by the short 'uns before the world gets much older.

A Teaser.

A Dalston inquirer asks me to supply him with "a few notes on the chief parts of North America." Great snakes! I'll have to push this reader on to an encyclopædia. There he can read of the old days of the Marquis de Montcalm, and the Indian Wars, and of the steady sweep of civilisation across the prairies.

The Cheery Camper.

S. S. asks about camping, because he is starting when the summer comes. What about a tent? He can get one at a moderate price from the Lightweight Tent Co., 70, High Holborn, W.C.1.

Camera Work.

I advise J. B., of Edmonton, to consult "Photography Simplified" (Cassell's "Work Series," 1/6) for the points which puzzle him over developing.

A Peckham Club.

Good work is being done at Peckham. I have a letter from George Wilson, 27, Nutt Street, Peckham, S.E.15, in which he says his Amberton Social and Sports Club is going ahead full steam.

This club is run in the interests of football, cricket, cycling, swimming, running, jumping, etc. Members are rallying in good style.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

A. Simpson, Greycot, Scotforth, **Lancaster**, wishes to correspond with a reader who will write in French.

Edward J. Cleary, 36, Victoria Dwells., Clerkenwell, **London, E.C.1**, wishes to hear from readers interested in cycling.

T. Litchfield, 5, Surrey Place, Albany Road, Camberwell, **London, S.E.5**, wants to hear from readers in his district with a view to forming a club.

A. R. Lodge, 162, Wadham Road, Bootle, nr. **Liverpool**, has for sale Nos. 455—568 of the "N.L.L."

John R. Wenham, 72, Covert Road, Tooting, **London, S.W.17**, wishes to correspond with those interested in Soccer.

S. H. Yeo, 13, Buchanan Road, **Wallasey**, Cheshire, wishes to hear from readers in his district who would help form a club.

J. Annells, 4, Wickham Road, Shirley, nr. **Croydon**, Surrey, wishes to hear from readers living in Alberta, Canada.

Chris Holloway, 7, Jackson Avenue, Marton, **Blackpool**, wishes to hear from readers, preferably in his district.

George Barsby, 13, Frederick Road, **Leicester**, wishes to hear from readers in Leicester who are running a club, either sports or social.

G. R. Jones, 43, Tennyson Street, Battersea, **London, S.W.11**, wants to hear from readers in his district who are keen on cricket.

Edward Cope, 42, Talma Road, Brixton, **London, S.W.2**, wishes to hear from readers in his district interested in swimming and cricket, and would like to hear from the O.O. nearest to him.

George Farrington, 18, Parnall Road, Fishponds, **Bristol**, wishes to hear from readers in his district, also from the O.O. in the northern part of Bristol.

Edmund Armitage, Jellico Avenue, Tuakau, **Auckland, New Zealand**, is keen to get the complete book, "In Trackless Space," or the "St. Frank's Boys' Trip to the Moon."

Ivor Blake, 2, South View, Queen Street, North Cliff, **Withernsea**, E. Yorks, wishes to hear from readers.

HOW TO GET YOUR SILVER MEDAL.

All holders of **BRONZE MEDALS** who have qualified for **SILVER MEDALS** (see instructions on Application Form opposite) and wish to exchange their medals for the higher award should send their bronze medals, accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope, to the Chief Officer, the St. Frank's League, c/o the **NELSON LEE LIBRARY**, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4. The **SILVER MEDALS** will then be sent to them.

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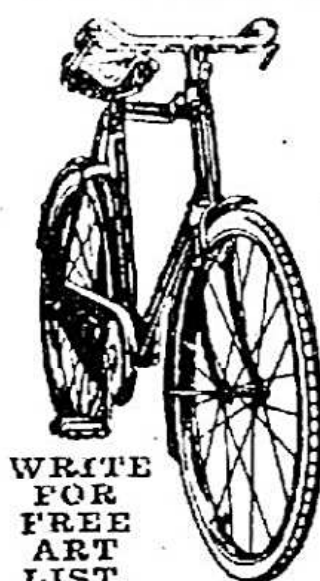
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