

Treasure-Hunt Thrills and— **FUN WITH THE FRESH AIR FIENDS!** Complete Story —Inside!

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ROMAN GOLD!

The Boys of St. Frank's in an exciting long complete story of mystery and school-life adventure.



Led by Nipper, the indignant juniors charged to the rescue of Irene & Co. Handforth sent one rough reeling, while Nipper and the others accounted for the remaining hooligans. The girls slipped away from the melee, and they stood enthusiastically cheering the juniors on.

The Treasure Tomb!School-life Thrills!

ROMAN GOLD!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

The Boys of St. Frank's in a rollicking long complete story of fun and treasure-hunt adventure, featuring the Fresh Air Fiends.

CHAPTER 1.

THE DESERTERS!

"**T**RAITOR!" said Handforth indignantly.

"Look here——"

"Deserter!" roared Handforth.

"You silly ass——"

"And I might as well tell you now, Cecil de Valerie, that I don't want to speak to you again!" added the angry leader of Study D. "I've finished with you!"

"That's a relief, anyway," said De Valerie tartly. "What's the idea of picking on me, anyway? What about Hubbard and Duncan, Singleton and Doyle, Fatty Little, Levi, and a lot of others?"

"Their turn's coming!" replied Handforth grimly. "They're all traitors—they're all deserters! I'm ashamed of the lot! Just because St. Frank's is breaking up to-day

for the Whitsun vac., you all clear off and forget your word of allegiance!"

"Rats!" said De Valerie. "We didn't join the Open Air Society under any fixed obligations, and we're not breaking any oaths. Besides, you fathead, the majority of us can't help ourselves."

"Why can't you?"

"Because our people have written and told us to go home," replied De Valerie warmly. "They've made plans for Whitsun, and we've got to go whether we like it or not."

The great Edward Oswald made a snorting sound.

"Parents!" he said fiercely. "They're more unreasonable than Form-masters! There ought to be a law passed to suppress them! They're always butting in and messing everything up!"

Handforth spoke with feeling. It was a

glorious summer's morning, and the camp of the Open Air Society was a picture of white canvas and green grass. The sun shone down from a sky of cloudless blue, and the figures of the schoolboy campers fitted the picture. They all belonged to the Remove, or the Fourth, or the Third, and they were attired in loose tunics, shorts, and sandals—the garb of the Fresh Air Fiends. But most of them sported their school blazers and House caps.

Between twenty and thirty of the fellows were making active preparations to leave the camp. Some, indeed, were already hurrying across the sunlit meadows to the school, where they proposed to change into conventional Etons and catch the mid-morning train for London. For St. Frank's was breaking up, and this was, indeed, the first day of the holidays.

"It's disgusting!" continued Handforth indignantly. "Lots of us have planned to stop here over Whitsun, so that we can enjoy the full benefits of the open air. Where's the sense of going to London in this scorching weather?"

"Don't I tell you that my pater told me to go home?" roared De Valerie. "It's all very well to scoff at parents——"

"In a case like this you ought to assert yourself," interrupted Handforth sternly. "That's what I did. My mater wanted Willy and me to go home for some beastly garden-party or other. Yes, and Ena, too! Of course, we all refused. We're staying here in camp. This vac. is only a short one, anyhow, and it's not worth going home!"

De Valerie failed to see any purpose in continuing the argument, and he walked off. As he had intimated, he was not the only "deserter." Fully half the juniors in the camp were being drawn away by the lure of the Whitsun holidays. Some were ordered home by their parents, others took themselves off on their own initiative.

Lady Honoria Dexter, the headmaster's volcanic sister, was the ringleader in this Open Air business, and she was disappointed to find so many of her protégés running away. But she accepted the situation philosophically and put no obstacles in their way.

Such fellows as Handforth, Church, and McClure, and Nipper, Watson, Reggie Pitt, and Fullwood were staying behind. Boots and Christine, of the Fourth, and Willy Handforth & Co., of the Third, were equally staunch. In fact, the majority of the junior leaders had decided to spend the holiday in camp.

There was an added attraction just now, too. Ireno Manners & Co., of the Moor View School, had started a camp of their own on the other side of the river, and there promised to be plenty of fun between the schoolboy camp and the schoolgirl camp. The very idea of going home was ridiculous.

Nipper, the cheery Junior captain, grinned as he came upon Handforth arguing loudly with his chums of Study D.

"It's no good, Handy, old man," said

Nipper. "You needn't get indignant. These fellows are free agents. They can please themselves, and——"

"They're traitors!" interrupted Handforth darkly. "This camp was formed in good faith by Lady Honoria, and she expected all the members to remain loyal. It's a dirty trick to run off now, just because the holidays have started.

"But they can't help it, you chump!" said Nipper gently.

"Rot! Where there's a will there's a way!" retorted Handforth. "The rotters were glad enough to join the camp when it meant missing lessons, weren't they? I call it jolly mean, if you ask me."

Edward Oswald would not be appeased. And even when the genial Browne came along, he failed to recover his normal good-humour. And William Napoleon Browne was well-known as a tonic. The lean and lanky skipper of the Fifth beamed benevolently upon the juniors as he joined the group. He turned to Stevens, his bosom chum, who accompanied him.

"Here, Brother Horace, we have the ubiquitous fresh air fiend in his native haunt," he said pleasantly. "You will observe the peculiarly characteristic tan. You will take note of the brown and robust knees, to say nothing of heads that have long ceased to be on friendly terms with the brush and comb. A wild and menacing-looking lot, but comparatively harmless. Be not afraid."

Handforth glared.

"If you're trying to be funny, Browne——" he began.

"Assuredly not, Brother Handy," interrupted the Fifth-Former. "To be quite honest, we have wandered this way in order to honour you with our welcome presence prior to departing for the wilds of Britain. In other words, we have come to say good-bye."

"That's very kind of you," chuckled Reggie Pitt.

"Very kind indeed," agreed Browne. "We felt that your holiday would be completely spoiled if we neglected this graceful act. Brother Horace and myself take great interest in your playful antics."

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to join the society, instead of gassing?" asked Handforth tartly. "Why don't you set an example to the rest of the seniors, and join up?"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Stevens, smiling. "This camp is only for juniors."

"No fear!" said Nipper promptly. "Lady Honoria has invited everybody—including the Fifth and Sixth. But I expect you seniors are too high and mighty to mix with a junior crowd."

"Harsh words," said Browne, shaking his head. "In fact, undeserved censure."

"Why don't you join, then?" asked Handforth.

"I must confess that the idea did not occur to me," said Browne. "And yet, undoubtedly it is a scheme of much brilliance

Alas! Our multitudinous engagements utterly preclude any possibility of our accepting this invitation. Much as we should like to join this joyous throng, we must decline."

"That's a fine excuse!" growled Handforth. "Can't you cancel your silly engagements? Think of the delights of the open air! Think of the ripping pleasure of camp life!"

Browne reddened.

"We have considered every point, and we have come to the conclusion that the Open Road possesses the stronger voice. We hear the clarion call even now."

"What do you mean—the Open Road?" asked Tommy Watson.

"Brother Horace and myself have planned a complete motor tour for the holidays," explained Browne. "All is ready, and by to-night, providing the M.O. behaves herself, we shall be filling numerous Devonians with excitement owing to our unexpected advent. Devon little knows its luck."

"Then you won't join our camp?" asked Handforth curtly.

"As I have said, the call of the Open Road——"

"Blow the Open Road!" interrupted Edward Oswald, frowning. "Camping is the only thing in this kind of weather. And what the dickens do you mean by 'M.O.'?"

"Is it possible, Brother Horace?" said Browne mildly. "Is it conceivable that these infants are unaware of the fact that M.O. stands for Morris-Oxford? Such ignorance——"

"Oh, so you're going for a tour in your Morris-Oxford, are you?" said Handforth. "If it comes to that, I could go for a tour in my Austin Seven. But I'm not going. Camp life beats touring any day."

"Handy's right," said Pitt. "Why don't you chuck this tour up, Browne, and join us?"

"Not likely!" said Stevens. "Browne and I have spent a fortnight planning our tour, and it's all fixed. We go through Devonshire, and then to Wales, and up into Yorkshire, and down South again through East Anglia."

"Exactly," agreed Browne. "Much as we would like to bring joy to your hearts by staying, we must tear ourselves away, leaving you without the stimulation of our presence."



CHAPTER 2.

THE GIDDY GOAT!

HANDFORTH was not particularly impressed.

"We're so stimulated that we'll duck you in the river unless you clear off,"

he said darkly. "If you won't join the Open Air Society, you're not wanted here, and the sooner you go, the better."

"Look here, you cheeky Remove idiot——" began Stevens.

"Be patient, brother," urged Browne. "I fear that Brother Handforth is not quite himself this morning. He appears peeved. Observe the furrowed lines upon his massive brow. Note the steely glint in those hawk-like eyes. Undoubtedly, Brother Ted is mentally disturbed."

"Rats!" grinned Stevens. "How can he be mentally disturbed? How can there be a disturbance in nothing?"

"A point, Brother Horace—a distinct point, I will admit."

"Chuck it!" grinned Nipper. "Handy's wild because lots of the chaps are clearing off for the holidays. He thinks they ought to stay in camp. They joined up with the rest of us, and he looks upon them as deserters."

"And so," said Browne firmly, "they are!"

"If you're so jolly certain about it, why don't you come into camp with us?" demanded Handforth. "Chuck up this silly tour——"

But the two Fifth-Formers firmly and politely declined to be influenced. They said good-bye all round, and went their way. It was characteristic of Browne to come especially to the camp to have a last cheery word.

But as for abandoning the tour—certainly not!

Browne and Stevens had been discussing this tour for weeks—they had saved up their money for it. The Morris-Oxford saloon was already packed, and a carefully thought out itinerary had been prepared. The two Fifth-Formers were bent upon enjoying this motor holiday.

It would be an open-air vacation, and it was much more attractive than camping in one given spot. It was hardly surprising that Browne and Stevens had refused to join the Open Air Society.

"No, I fancy our own programme is much more attractive," said Browne as they reached the old Triangle of St. Frank's, and crossed over to the spot where the faithful Morris-Oxford was standing. "We are well on time, Brother Horace. We are due to leave in exactly ten minutes."

Stevens glanced up at the school clock.

"Well, why not go now, and have ten minutes' leeway," he suggested. "We've said good-bye to everybody. There's no need to stay any longer."

"A suggestion that is not entirely without merit," said Browne cheerfully. "Yes, let us set forth upon our search for the wide open spaces."

They climbed aboard the car, and were soon off. The Morris-Oxford was completely filled in the rear compartment—filled with luggage of all kinds, including a collapsible tent, cooking stoves, and a hundred and one other requisites for a motor tour.

At one time the inseparable chums of the Fifth had thought about hiring a trailer cara-

van, but had concluded that this would be an unnecessary luxury. Besides, there would be more fun without it.

"Like their cheek," said Stevens, as the car glided along Bellton Lane. "Fancy expectin' us to join their kids' camp!"

"Ridiculous, of course," agreed Browne. "Quite apart from the fact that we are otherwise booked, I can't quite picture the thing, can you, brother? I was never a great stickler for dignity, but there are moments when even I must put my foot down."

"Yes, it was an idiotic suggestion," agreed Stevens. "These juniors are all right in their own element, but—what are you shoving the brake on for?"

"I believe," said Browne, "that an interesting event is to take place at once, and I desire to be an eye-witness."

He brought the car to a stop, and looked over the low hedge with a twinkle in his eyes.

The shady bulk of Bellton Wood bordered one side of the lane, but on the other side lay one of the meadows of Holt's Farm. It was empty, save for a solitary figure near the end hedge.

"What do you mean—an interesting event?" asked Stevens.

"Observe!" said Browne, waving his hand.

"There's nobody there, except a man pottering about with a stick," said Stevens, observing. "I seem to recognise—Yes, he's Sir Lucian Dexter, the Head's brother-in-law. There's a goat there, too."

"Precisely," murmured Browne. "And Sir Lucian, without doubt, has omitted to observe the goat. Alas, there is no time for us to give a warning! This is well worth watching. Brother Horace."



CHAPTER 3.

THE MYSTERIOUS CHART.

SIR LUCIAN DEXTER was certainly unconscious of any peril.

He was giving himself up wholeheartedly to this morning ramble in Farmer Holt's meadow. The fact that he was trespassing did not seem to occur to him, for he was inclined to be somewhat absent-minded.

And as for the presence of a goat, Sir Lucian was far too occupied to take note of the animal's proximity. Lady Honoria's husband was engaged in a curious pursuit—that of taking measured paces, and then pausing and examining the ground. Occasionally, he would stoop down, and remain in this attitude for some moments at a time.

The goat, which had strolled into view from behind the hedge, watched these proceedings for some little time with wholehearted interest. He had even relinquished his search for succulent vegetation, and he was so far engrossed in Sir Lucian that he even forgot to champ.

Browne and Stevens arrived at just about the crucial moment—at the point where the goat had come to the conclusion that some sort of action was indicated. He resented the intrusion of this stranger, who kept bending down in the most tempting attitude.

And Sir Lucian Dexter fairly doubled himself at that particular moment, offering such a target that no self-respecting goat could possibly resist it. The animal lowered his head and charged.

"As I feared, brother!" murmured Browne sadly.

"Hi!" roared Stevens involuntarily. "Look out, there!"

But even if his voice had carried, the warning would have been too late. The goat struck Sir Lucian with devastating force.

Biff!

The unfortunate gentleman went head first into the hedge. And there he stuck, his legs just visible, kicking wildly amongst the undergrowth. The goat, with a triumphant toss of its head, strolled off, and partook of a few tufts of grass.

"I rather think," said Browne, "that we must now utilise that spare ten minutes, Brother Horace. Let us go to the rescue of this unhappy man."

They left their car standing where it was, and ran across the meadow. The goat, disliking their purposeful aspect, bolted precipitately. He did not seem enthusiastic for any further butting. Probably he already had a headache.

"Allow me, sir!" said Browne benevolently. "Brother Horace, be good enough to seize one of these moving parts, and treat it gently. Now, a long pull and a strong pull."

The unhappy Sir Lucian was firmly wedged into the hedge. But Browne and Stevens soon pulled him free. Lady Honoria's husband was not a pleasant man at the best of times. He was thin and bony, with a sinister cast of countenance. At the moment, he was looking dazed and pained.

"Good heavens!" he gasped. "What—what happened? I am injured! I am seriously hurt!"

"A slight mishap, I assure you," said Browne. "Pray sit down on this grassy hillock."

"I must decline!" interrupted Sir Lucian firmly.

"A thousand pardons!" said Browne. "How thoughtless of me to suggest such a thing! Sitting down is, at the moment, scarcely one of your favourite pastimes, I gather."

Sir Lucian glared at the two Fifth-Formers.

"How dare you assault me?" he stormed, partially recovering himself. "What do you mean by——"

"Steady on, sir!" interrupted Stevens gruffly. "It was that goat which assaulted you. We came to your rescue."

"Goat?" snapped Sir Lucian. "Which goat?"

He looked round, and then started. The guilty animal was sauntering in the distance, with a wary eye on the trio.

"So that is the creature which hurled me into the hedge!" said Sir Lucian. "Extraordinary! I have no recollection of even seeing the animal before. I must apologise, my boys, for my rough words of a moment ago. But I am in pain, considerable pain. I may say excessive pain. I must rest."

He started moving off, but Browne checked him.

"Pray allow us to escort—" he began.

"No, no, certainly not!" interrupted Sir Lucian. "Certainly not! Thank you for helping me out of that infernal hedge. I trust you will not spread this—this—er—painful but ludicrous story."

He went off, walking stiffly and unnaturally. He took to the footpath close by and vanished.

"Not exactly a cordial old stick," said Stevens.

"And if you had just been butted into a hedge, Brother Horace, I doubt if you would be cordial," replied Browne. "We have done all within our power, so let us return to the chariot, and proceed—but, one moment! One moment, brother! It may be two moments!"

He bent down among the tall grass near the hedge, and picked up a stiff sheet of notepaper. Browne needed no telling that Sir Lucian Dexter had dropped it, for the notepaper was the Head's own brand, and Browne had seen something white in Sir Lucian's grip.

"What's that?" asked Stevens.

Browne scrutinised it.

"I fear we are transgressing the limits of good manners, but a brief up-and-down is necessary," he said. "Ah! Sir Lucian appears to be an amateur mapping enthusiast. Here, unless I am mistaken, we have a rough chart of St. Frank's and surrounding district. It is, by the way, a thing which many have cried for, but which none have received. Not, Brother Horace, that any would be satisfied with this. For not only is St. Frank's decidedly drunken in aspect, but the surrounding district appears to consist of sundry dots and atrociously drawn lines."

Stevens grinned as he looked at the chart.

"It's only a hastily scrawled affair, anyhow," he said. "I suppose we ought to let Sir Lucian have it. It's of no value to us, but it might be something he needs."

But when they looked for Sir Lucian, there was no sign of him.

"I decline to chase through the meadows and byways for the mere purpose of restoring this atrocity," said Browne firmly. "If Brother Lucian desires a map of St. Frank's, let him draw another one. We can only hope that his second attempt may be more successful."

They returned to the Morris-Oxford, and

were just in time to meet Handforth & Co., who were striding briskly down the lane.

"Ah, Brother Handforth, the very man!" said Browne.

"Can't stop!" said Handforth gruffly. "We're gong to fetch some of those beastly deserters back! And you're not much better, Browne! If you had any sense—"

"Dry up, Handy!" interrupted Church. "Don't start all over again!"

Browne produced the chart.

"Sir Lucian Dexter has lost this valuable document," he said. "It is unnecessary to go into details, but if you happen to observe the gentleman, be good enough to hand it to him with our compliments."

"What is it?" said Handforth, staring at the chart. "You fatheads! Are you trying to spoof us? This must have been scrawled by an infant!"

"It looks like it," grinned Stevens, "but Sir Lucian dropped it—honest Injun! He was butted through the hedge by a goat, and he was a bit dazed after that. I think he dropped that chart accidentally."

Handforth's eyes suddenly glittered.

"All right!" he said in a peculiar voice. "Hand it over!"

He seized the sheet of notepaper, then hurried off, Church and McClure with him. But they dived into the wood, instead of continuing their original trip to the village.



CHAPTER 4.

TROUBLE!

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE glanced at Stevens.

"Strange and unaccountable behaviour of Brother Handforth," he observed.

"Yes, he did act a bit rummily," said Stevens, staring into the wood. "He seemed to be impressed by that chart, somehow. I wonder why?"

"Cease to wonder," said Browne. "I have long since forsaken the pastime of wondering where Brother Handforth is concerned. His actions are beyond the mere brain capacity of such simpletons as ourselves."

"Why drag me in?" asked Stevens. "And what about our start? I suppose you know we've lost that ten minutes, and another ten, too?"

"Happily our itinerary is broadly planned, and we have ample time," replied Browne. "However, I think we may safely dismiss Brother Handforth, and proceed on our way."

But the two Fifth-Formers were evidently fated to encounter further delays that morning. Once through Bellton, they took the road to Caistowe, and they had scarcely travelled a mile along this quiet road before they beheld a distressing spectacle. At least, it was distressing to Browne.

A girl was approaching, and she was evidently in difficulties. She was trundling a

bicycle by the hind wheel only, the front part of the machine being out of action. She drew aside in order to allow the car plenty of room to pass.

But Browne took his foot off the accelerator.

"I rather think we must have another slight delay, Brother Horace," he murmured. "Surely this is an obvious case of beauty in distress? The beauty is unquestionable, and the distress is no less apparent."

"Yes, but look here——"

Browne took no notice. He stopped the car and sprang out.

"If we can be of any assistance, fair lady, please command," he said gracefully.

The girl was rather taken aback.

She was more than a little flustered, and Browne was pained to see that she was breathing heavily, owing to her exertions with the crippled machine on that hot morning. She was slim and graceful, and dressed in a check black-and-white frock, which Browne decided at once was the most charming frock he had ever seen.

And the wearer was even more charming. She had delightful brown eyes, and the most entrancing chestnut hair, with fluffy little wisps peeping out on either side of her hat. And her pretty face was vaguely familiar, somehow, although Browne could not place her. He knew he had never seen her before, but she seemed to be like somebody whom he knew—only a lot prettier.

In fact, both Browne and Stevens were looking at her so earnestly that her flush deepened, and she shyly lowered her eyes.

"Thanks awfully, but it's really nothing," she said hesitatingly. "I think my front brake must have broken loose, and I was thrown off."

"Were you hurt?" asked Stevens with concern.

"Oh, no—it wasn't a smash at all, really," replied the girl. "But when I tried to get on again I found the front brake jammed. And now I can't move it."

"Allow me," said Browne gracefully.

He took the machine, and gave it a cursory examination.

"Hopeless!" he declared.

"Oh, I don't know," said Stevens. "We might be able to free that brake——"

"Kindly permit me to know best, Brother Horace," said Browne firmly. "Under no circumstances can we attempt to attack this formidable task. The only alternative is obvious. Fair lady, you must allow us to convey you to your destination in my car."

The girl shook her head, and Stevens gave Browne a quick glance of understanding.

"Thank you ever so much, but I couldn't dream of bothering you," she said. "I am going to St. Frank's, and——"

"Enough!" interrupted Browne. "We are bound for St. Frank's, also."

She opened her eyes wider.

"But you were travelling in the opposite direction," she pointed out.

"A mere detail," said Browne, with a wave of his hand. "True, we are bound for St. Frank's via Wales, Yorkshire, and East Anglia, but it will be a simple matter to forsake that part of our journey. Allow me to introduce Horace Stevens, of the Fifth Form at St. Frank's. In me you behold William Napoleon Browne, also of the Fifth."

The girl was still looking very timid.

"It's very nice of you, but you really mustn't bother," she said. "It isn't far now, and I can easily walk it. I'm only going to the Open Air Camp to join my cousin and her friends."

"Your cousin?" echoed Stevens.

"Irene Manners," said the girl.

"Kindly punch me, Brother Horace, for being so dense," said Browne. "Of course! So now we know where the fair Irene obtains her beauty. The entire family is obviously hand-picked. Am I correct in addressing you as Miss Manners, fair lady?"

The girl was now rather confused.

"Yes, I'm Dora Manners," she replied. "Irene asked me to spend the Whitsun holidays in camp with her, and I was cycling over. You see, my mother and father are staying at Caistowe for the holidays."

Browne and Stevens were delighted. They felt as though they were old friends. For Irene Manners, of the Moor View School, was very popular at St. Frank's—and so were all her girl chums. But Dora seemed to be rather more retiring than her schoolgirl cousin.

Perhaps Dora was taken aback by Browne's elaborate form of address—but that was only one of his little ways.

"You'll have to let us take you to the camp, Miss Manners," said Stevens pleasantly. "We can't let you walk there, with your bike in this condition. And it's quite impossible to repair it on the road."

"Quite!" agreed Browne firmly.

"Out of the question!" added Stevens.

Considering that they had scarcely given the machine a glance, these decisions were inclined to be hasty. And Browne, in order to avoid any further examination, relentlessly took the machine from the girl's grasp, and proceeded to lash it to the off-side running-board.

"Under no circumstances can we proceed on our way, Miss Dora, until we have escorted you safely to your destination," he said calmly. "Therefore, if you have any objections to make, be good enough to forget them. You will find the front seat most comfortable. The rear accommodation is, I fear, largely occupied with various impedimenta."

Dora was looking into the car with concern.

"But what about your friend?" she asked quickly.

"My friend?" repeated Browne. "Ah, you doubtless mean Brother Horace? Have no fear for Brother Horace. Strangely enough, it is one of his peculiar delights to prefer a perch on the rear carrier."



Sir Lucian Dexter fairly doubled himself up, and the goat, unable to resist such a target, lowered its head and charged. "I think," said Browne to Stevens, "we had better go to the rescue."

Stevens looked blank.

"What on earth——" he began.

"Much as I dislike to reveal this fact, Brother Horace, I feel that it is necessary to do so," continued Browne firmly. "We all have our little idiosyncracies, and this propensity of yours for adding yourself to the rear luggage is, fortunately, timely."

"But, you idiot, I don't like riding on the carrier!" said Stevens, with an indignant flush. "If you think you can fool Miss Manners with that nonsense, you're wrong!"

Dora was greatly distressed.

"There isn't room for me!" she retorted. "Oh, please don't bother——"

"Brother Horace is naturally upset at my disclosure of his strange weakness," said Browne gracefully, as he trod forcibly on Stevens' toe. "Rest quite content. You shall occupy the seat next to me, and Brother Horace will take his own simple pleasure on the rear grid!"



CHAPTER 5.

THE TWO CAVALIERS.

STEVENS was furious, but helpless.

A moment's consideration convinced him that the grid was, indeed, the

only place for him. His foot still tingled from Browne's silent message.

If he refused to accept Browne's ludicrous assertion, Dora would undoubtedly insist

upon walking. There was no room for three in the front seat—at least, not where a girl like Dora was concerned. She would never consent to being tightly sandwiched between two strange youths, or placed upon the lap of one. Her shy disposition was obvious. And it was this very timidity of hers which attracted Browne and Stevens more than anything else. She was so refreshingly different.

As for travelling in the rear part of the car, this was equally out of the question, as it was filled up with the materials for the tour.

Stevens found that Dora was looking at him curiously.

"Do you really like riding on the carrier?" she asked, in a doubtful voice.

"Er—yes!" stammered Stevens. "Oh, rather! I—I mean, not exactly on the carrier. That's only Browne's rot. But it's rather fun to ride on the running board, sitting on one of the front wings," he added, with a defiant glare at Browne.

Browne beamed

"You see?" he said, turning to the girl. "Brother Horace admits it. Monkey-like, he prefers to perch himself in the most precarious position possible. Do not be surprised if he performs various evolutions en route. We may find, upon arrival, that he has settled himself on the roof."

Stevens promised his chum a warm five minutes when he got him alone. But to speak his mind in front of Dora was impossible. Five minutes later, Browne had

reversed the car, and they were gliding back towards St. Frank's. Stevens was maintaining a fair equilibrium on the near-side running-board, in close proximity to the door.

He wasn't half so indignant now. In actual practice, the scheme was splendid. For while Browne was compelled to confine his attention to the driving, Stevens had the open door-window at his side, with Dora delightfully near.

"You mustn't take too much notice of Browne," said Stevens, his good temper fully recovered. "He's a long-winded sort of chump. I don't mind riding here, of course!"

"I'm afraid you're terribly uncomfortable out there," smiled the girl. "It's really too bad of me to——"

"Nothing of the sort," interrupted Stevens earnestly. "I love it! On a warm day like this, you get all the breeze."

"To say nothing of the dust," said Dora drily.

She wasn't nearly so shy now. In fact, she was beginning to like those fellows. They were so nice to her. For Dora fully understood that they were going completely back on their tracks to accommodate her. And she appreciated the kindness.

Dora Manners was older than her cousin by nearly two years, and she had left school. She was, indeed, almost the same age as Browne and Stevens. She had only been to St. Frank's once before, and she was not likely to forget that visit. For Handforth had mistaken her for one of the fellows dressed up as a girl, and had given her the fright of her life. Ever since then, the unfortunate Handy had winced at the very mention of her name.

Rather to Stevens' surprise, Browne stopped the car in Bellton Lane, opposite the stile which led into the wood.

"But this isn't St. Frank's!" said Dora, looking round.

"But I surely understood you to say that you wished to reach the Open Air Camp?" asked Browne.

"Well, yes!"

"You must be somewhat hazy in your knowledge of local geography?" asked Browne casually.

"I don't know it very well," admitted the girl.

"Splendid!" said Browne. "If we leave the car here and take the path through the wood, we shall strike the camp on the other side. Is that not correct, Brother Horace?"

"Yes, rather!" said Stevens promptly.

He thought it quite unnecessary to point out that it would be a lot nearer if they proceeded further in the car, so that only a meadow or two would have to be crossed on foot.

But the privilege of walking with Dora through the shady woods was too good to be missed. And the girl herself had no idea

that she was deliberately being walked twice as far as she need have been.

"You mustn't come with me," she insisted. "I have taken up too much of your time already. If you tell me the way, I can easily reach the camp alone."

"Impossible," said Browne, shaking his head. "The woods are full of unknown paths, and we cannot let you take the risk of losing yourself. No, Miss Dora, you must allow us to escort you right into the camp. In point of fact, we insist."

"Wouldn't hear of anything else," said Stevens.

"But I'm taking up so much of your time," she protested.

"Our time," said Browne, "has never been so well spent. If you will honour us by this great privilege, we shall both be your grateful slaves."

"You are very good!" murmured Dora softly.

"As for your bicycle, permit us to take charge of it for the time being, and to place it in the hands of the village repairer," continued Browne. "We will attend to this later." He paused for a moment. "On second thoughts, it might be an excellent idea for Brother Horace to take the bicycle to the repairer now, while I escort you to the camp."

"If that's what you call an excellent idea, you'd better have a third thought!" said Stevens, with a glare.

"A mere suggestion, brother," said Browne mildly.

"It's a good one—providing you take the bike!" said Stevens.

Browne considered.

"On the whole, I am inclined to agree that it is somewhat scaly," he said. "You are quite right, Brother Horace. The bicycle must remain where it is."

And so they went into the woods, and neither Browne nor Stevens gave a single thought to their wrecked itinerary. Indeed, the whole tour itself had slipped their minds. Or, if they thought of it at all, it had lost a great deal of its former attraction.

Dora may have been retiring in disposition, but there was no question regarding her sharpness. And it wasn't long before she perceived that her companions were deliberately dallying. Once, indeed, they took a branch path which only brought them back in a circle, the net result being ten minutes wasted. Browne and Stevens considered that it was ten minutes gained.

"Isn't this rather a long short cut?" asked Dora demurely, at length.

"But think of the delights of the woods!" said Browne, with enthusiasm. "Think of all this wondrous beauty!"

"Never seen anything so topping!" said Stevens.

But, curiously enough, they were both looking at Dora.

"I think we ought to be hurrying on," she said, blushing.



CHAPTER 6.

BROWNE CHANGES HIS MIND!

TIME Dora was here," said Irene, glancing at her wrist-watch.

"She's late already," remarked Winnie Pitt.

"Didn't she arrange to be over by twelve o'clock, Renie? That's what she said in her letter, anyhow."

"Oh, she'll turn up soon," said Irene, gazing across the sparkling river. "I hope she doesn't walk into the boys' camp by mistake. You know how shy she is with boys."

"Then it's time she learned better," said Doris Berkeley. "I'm jolly glad she's coming to spend the holiday with us, Renie. It'll give us a chance to knock some of the timidity out of her. Anyhow, she'll see enough of the St. Frank's fellows during the next few days, and we shan't allow her to be shy. I'm jolly glad that her people chose Caistowe as a seaside holiday resort."

Irene & Co. were standing in a little group near the bank of the River Stowe. The stream flowed past them, and on the opposite bank stood the neat tents of the main Fresh Air camp—occupied by the St. Frank's juniors.

All the girls were dressed in the simple, rational dress of the Open Air Society—sensible short skirts, becoming tunics with girdles, and they all wore sandals. The dress only served to add to their natural attractions. All of them were hatless.

"There's somebody coming now," said Marjorie Temple, shading her eyes, and gazing down the towing path. "A girl, anyway, with two fellows to escort her."

"That can't be Dora!" said Irene promptly.

"But it is Dora!" smiled Winnie, a minute later. "And isn't that Browne with her? There can't be another fellow with a lanky figure like that!"

Irene looked puzzled.

"This beats me," she said. "Dora planned to come over on her bicycle, and I told her how to find the towing path, and everything. And now she's on the friendliest possible terms with those two St. Frank's seniors. Girls, there's something doing!"

Dora Manners was looking rather relieved when she joined her cousin and all the other schoolgirls. They swarmed round, greeting her, and Browne and Stevens stood by, looking on. Browne was benevolent and cheery.

"We must take it, Brother Horace, that our duty is now done," he said, with a touch of regret. "There is, indeed, no further excuse for dalliance. A great pity, but one must face the facts. It cannot be denied that the riverside is singularly attractive on such a glorious morning."

"Very attractive," said Stevens absently. "Jove, she's pretty!"

"I beg your pardon, brother?"

"Eh? I—I—"

"I was referring to the river," said Browne gently.

"Oh, rather!" agreed Stevens, turning red.

It only took them a few moments to explain the circumstances to Irene—for the girls had already heard the story from Dora, and they refused to let Browne ramble on in his customary long-winded fashion.

"It was jolly good of you to bring Dora into camp," said Irene appreciatively. "Thanks awfully, you fellows. She's going to stay with us over the Whitsun holidays, you know."

"I hope you'll have a good time," said Stevens. "We're just off, you know—on a tour in Browne's car."

"Lucky bounders!" said Doris.

"Oh, I don't know," said Stevens, without enthusiasm.

Dora smiled at them, and held out her hand.

"I hope I shall see you again before the holidays are over," she said. "Thanks for helping me. Good-bye!"

Browne took her hand.

"We shall unquestionably be back before the holidays are over," he said firmly. "Who knows? We may be back sooner than that. So there can be no question of saying good-bye. Let us be quite informal. In other words, cheerio!"

They walked back along the towing path in a thoughtful mood. Both of them were curiously listless in their movements. They seemed to be in no hurry to get back to the waiting car. The lure of the open road had apparently lost its urge.

"Wales!" said Stevens gruffly. "By this time to-morrow we shall be making for Wales, shan't we? Who the dickens wants to go to Wales, anyhow?"

"I will admit it seems absurd," agreed Browne. "And what, after all, is there to attract us in the Yorkshire moors? What beauties are there in the wilds of Norfolk to drag us there? I am beginning to fear, brother, that our enthusiasm for the motor tour was somewhat misplaced."

"By Jove! I was just thinking the same thing," said Stevens eagerly. "In fact, why go on this tour at all?"

"Why?" asked Browne dreamily.

They had paused, and were looking at the sparkling river, and at the neat camps, one on either side, nestling in the grassland beyond the willows. It was a scene of peace and contentment.

"Motor tours are too much fag," said Stevens. "You get smothered in dust, and there's a lot of unnecessary work, and there's always a chance of having punctures. More like hard labour than a holiday! Look at this peaceful scene!"

"It is singularly alluring," agreed Browne. "Yes, brother, I am inclined to confess that the beauty of this landscape has taken possession of me."

"Me, too," said Stevens.

In the distance, they could see Dora Manners, and it was rather significant that they were both looking in her direction.

"We have been invited to join the Open Air Society," continued Browne enthusiastically. "Why turn down such a sound and sensible suggestion? Why not join this happy band?"

Stevens looked at his companion eagerly.

"That's funny," he said eagerly, "I was just thinking the same thing."

"Then it is a sound thought," declared Browne. "Think of the attractions of this camp, Brother Horace. No dusty roads—no gruelling miles of travel—no bother with meals. Nothing but peace! Gentle cruises on the river, drowsy afternoons in the shade of the willows. Shall we deliberately cast all this aside?"

"No fear!" said Stevens. "Now I come to think of it, Browne, that tour of ours would have been a mistake."

"A cardinal blunder," said Browne brightly. "Let us seek out Lady Honoria, and join this wonderful band."

Stevens nodded.

"Of course we shall be on the other side of the river," he said thoughtfully.

"But there are boats!" Browne pointed out. "Imagine the pleasure of gliding down stream in a canoe. Just you and I——"

"Eh?"

"Or just I and you," said Browne calmly. "Or, if it comes to that, just any two of us. What does it matter? It is the delights of the river that we long for."

"Yes, by Jove—the river!" said Stevens hastily.

And so they persuaded some of the juniors to take them across in a boat, and they forthwith joined the St. Frank's camp. Strangely enough, since parting from Dora they had not even mentioned her name. Her advent apparently had no connection with their sudden change of plan. But it was a rather singular coincidence!



CHAPTER 7.

HANDY TAKES THE CREDIT.

NIPPER and Reggie Pitt looked surprised.

"But I thought you wouldn't even hear of joining us, Browne?" asked Nipper. "I thought you were as keen as mustard on that tour of yours?"

William Napoleon Browne waved a kindly hand.

"Brother Stevens and myself felt that it would be an act of grace on our part to succumb to your pressing invitation," he said smoothly. "Therefore, Brother Nipper, we have cast our own inclinations aside, and our reward is ample. It is gratifying to perceive the obvious pleasure which our joining up has occasioned."

Reggie Pitt grinned.

"There's something fishy about this," he said with a chuckle. "I wonder why you fellows have changed your minds so suddenly. Didn't we see you with Irene's pretty cousin a little while ago?"

Browne raised his eyebrows.

"Indeed?" he said mildly. "One is apt to forget these trifles. Now that you remind me, I believe we did meet the young lady?"

"She's not bad," said Stevens carelessly.

They strolled off, and Pitt looked at Nipper, then winked.

"Two cases!" he said drily. "Did you notice the off-hand manner in which they referred to Dora?"

"Very significant," agreed Nipper, nodding.

Further discussion was interrupted by the arrival of Handforth & Co.. And the leader of Study D was looking flushed and excited.

"What was Browne saying to you just now?" he asked quickly.

"He's joined the camp, that's all."

"But I thought he and Stevens were going on tour?" put in Church.

"That's what we all thought, but they've suddenly changed their minds," said Reggie Pitt. "I rather fancy that Irene's cousin has worked the oracle. Dora's just about the same age as Browne and Stevens, and they seem to have been smitten at one fell blow. I don't wonder at it, of course, because Dora's a corker."

"Didn't Browne say anything about that chart?" asked Handforth sharply.

"Which chart?"

"The chart Sir Lucian lost."

"It's the first I've heard of Sir Lucian losing a chart," said Nipper.

Handforth looked impatient.

"Sir Lucian lost it when he was butted through the hedge by a goat," he explained.

"It's the first we've heard of Sir Lucian being butted through the hedge by a goat, too," remarked Pitt. "When did this interesting event take place? Sadly enough, Handy, we saw nothing of it."

"We didn't see it, either," replied Handforth, with a mysterious air. "But Browne and Stevens did, and Sir Lucian dropped a chart. Browne gave it to me to return to Sir Lucian, but I've stuck to it. Sir Lucian won't know. And it might be valuable."

Nipper and Pitt were interested.

"Let's have a look at this precious chart," said Nipper. "If it's valuable, Handy, you can't keep it. And what's the mystery about?"

Handforth produced the rough map, and glanced round cautiously.

"Don't let any of the other chaps spot us," he said. "Just have a look at this. Doesn't it prove that our suspicions about Sir Lucian were justified?"

Nipper and Reggie looked at the chart curiously.

"There's nothing valuable about this," said Pitt. "Just like you, Handy, making a fuss over nothing. I never knew such a chap for letting his imagination run riot. What on

earth is there to excite you in a scrawled scrap of paper like this?"

Handforth lowered his voice.

"Haven't we every reason to suspect Sir Lucian of rummy things?" he asked tensely. "What about the excavations on Little Side? What about that strange affair in Bellton Wood? Some unknown men are digging holes everywhere, making raids at night, and generally behaving mysteriously. And we know that Sir Lucian Dexter is mixed up in it all!"

Nipper nodded.

"That's true enough," he admitted. "We tested Sir Lucian the other day, when he nearly got gassed in the old tunnel behind the pavilion. And there's no question that he's pottering about the district on some sort of secret quest. What's the latest, Handy? Are you suggesting that this chart is a clue?"

"It's more than a clue," declared Handforth. "Look at it! We know that Sir Lucian has been busy on this job, and here's a rough chart, with two or three crosses against certain spots."

"By Jove! That's true!" said Nipper keenly. "And there's a date against one of the crosses——"

"To-day's date," interrupted Reggie Pitt.

"Yes, and '11 p.m.' is written after the date," said Nipper. "What the dickens does it mean? This particular spot is on the other side of Bellton Lane, down in that little hollow beyond Farmer Holt's meadow."

"We can't make head or tail of it," said Church.

"And yet it's pretty clear," said Nipper. "Eleven p.m. to-night—in that hollow! And here it is, marked on Sir Lucian's chart. Doesn't it mean that they're going to start their mysterious digging in that particular spot to-night?"

Handforth started.

"By George!" he gasped. "I—I was just going to suggest—— You fathead! What the dickens do you mean by taking the words out of my mouth? Those men are going to excavate to-night, and we ought to do something!"

"Don't get excited," grinned Nipper. "It's only a conjecture at the best. We may be all wrong. There's no sense in jumping to conclusions, Handy. Let's remain calm."

"I am calm!" roared Handforth.

"Then I hope I don't meet you in one of your excited moments," retorted Nipper.

"You silly ass——"

"I want to hear more about this piece of paper," continued Nipper. "You say that Browne gave it to you? Facts, please! Let's have a few details."

Nipper soon heard the full story from Church and McClure. Then he went to Browne, and the skipper of the Fifth corroborated the statements.

"At the time of handing the document to Brother Handforth I imagined myself to be setting forth on a motoring tour," explained Browne. "Since then wisdom has come to

me. I have tested the delights of these rural surroundings. I have looked into the limpid stream, I have looked——"

"Into Dora's brown eyes?" suggested Nipper politely.

Browne appeared astonished.

"Really?" he said. "Dora? Ah, yes, to be sure! One of the young ladies in the opposite camp, no doubt? And her eyes are blue?"

"Brown, you ass!"

"It is a great thing to be observant," said Browne, nodding. "We cannot all achieve such perfection. But to revert to Sir Lucian, I trust that Brother Handforth has restored the document?"

"I don't think it matters," said Nipper.

The skipper of the Remove was very thoughtful for a time, and, later on in the day, he had a little chat with Handforth, Pitt, Fullwood, and a few other selected juniors.

"I think we ought to take some sort of action to-night," he said. "I vote we take up our positions in that hollow. Something might happen, or the whole thing may be a frost. But I think it'll be worth trying."

"I had decided on that long ago," said Handforth coldly. "What's more, I'm going to attack these night marauders, whoever they are. As soon as they come I'm going up to them, and——"

"If it's all the same to you, Handy, I'll be in charge of the expedition," said Nipper gently. "I'm the leader, and I shall expect my followers to obey instructions to the letter."

"Rot!" said Handforth. "I'm leader!"

"We'll soon settle that," said Nipper. "Hands up all those who accept me as leader for to-night's expedition."

Every hand went up.

"You silly fatheads!" roared Handforth. "What about me?"

"You're just one of the followers," said Church happily. "If you don't like it, Handy, you can lump it!"

"And that," said Reggie Pitt, "is that!"



CHAPTER 8.

THE NIGHT WATCH!

"HERE goes half-past!" murmured Church.

"Rats!" growled Handforth disgustedly. "The thing's a swindle. I knew it all the time. This is what comes of adopting Nipper's fatheaded ideas!"

"I thought you said it was your idea?" whispered McClure.

"We're here at Nipper's suggestion, and you jolly well know it!" said Handforth tartly. "And what's the result? It's half-past eleven, and there's no sign of those men at all!"

"And there won't be if you keep talking, you ass!"

"Rats! I'm only whispering!"

"Yes, but your whisper is like any other fellow's yell," said Church. "There's not a breath of wind to-night, and your voice carries tremendously, Handy. For goodness' sake, dry up!"

The chums of Study D were crouching at the bottom of a dense hedge which bordered the hollow on Farmer Holt's property. Further along Nipper and Tregellis West and Watson were ensconced. In another spot Fullwood and Russell had concealed themselves. And Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey were somewhere about, too.

So far their vigil had been in vain.

They had all taken up their positions at ten-thirty, before the last glow of dusk had gone. And Nipper was half afraid that they had been seen, and that the proposed work had been postponed.

There was no actual certainty that any digging had been planned for to-night. It was only a conjecture on Nipper's part, based on the assumption that the rough chart could be trusted.

The juniors had every reason to be suspicious.

Ever since Sir Lucian Dexter had arrived at St. Frank's, a series of mysterious events had taken place. Sir Lucian was Lady Honoria's husband, and therefore the Head's brother-in-law. Furthermore, he was one of the Governors of the school.

Surely a man of proved and sterling integrity!

And yet his actions had unquestionably been strange. He had been seen pottering about the meadows and playing-fields, taking measurements, and tapping the ground with his stick. Great holes had been dug in the most unexpected spots, and it was difficult to believe that Sir Lucian was associated with this apparently aimless despoiling of the landscape.

At first the fellows had believed that Sir Lucian was a bit wrong in the head. There seemed to be no other explanation for his queer and erratic conduct.

But Nipper was beginning to believe that there was something behind it all—some definite objective. Nipper had even spoken to his gov'nor about it—to Mr. Nelson Lee—but the famous schoolmaster-detective had laughingly advised Nipper to take no notice.

This might have discouraged any other fellow, but Nipper was keener than ever. He had more than a suspicion that Nelson Lee himself was taking a quiet and unobtrusive interest in the little mystery.

"There's Handy at it again!" murmured Tommy Watson, as some soft growling sounds came from a neighbouring hedge. "Why the dickens can't he keep quiet? Even when he whispers he shouts."

"That's one of his little failings," said Nipper, frowning. "I wanted to leave him behind—but that would have been worse still. Handy's one of those chaps who won't be kept down. It's a fine quality—but a bit embarrassing at a time like this."

"Begad!" breathed Tregellis-West. "There's somethin' movin' over by the far gate, dear old boys."

"Let's hope that Handy keeps quiet!" whispered Nipper.

Fortunately, Handforth did.

For Church and McClure had seen those moving figures, too, and they had given their leader a timely warning. The moon was shining, and the June night was about as perfect and peaceful as it could be.

Three figures came down into the secluded hollow, and as they approached, the hidden juniors had no difficulty in recognising Sir Lucian Dexter as the leader of the trio.

Positive proof at last!

Until now they had only assumed that Sir Lucian was concerned; but his presence to-night settled all doubt. The two men with him were unknown to the boys. They had certainly never appeared at St. Frank's and were complete strangers.

With hardly a word being spoken, Sir Lucian's companions set to work with heavy pickaxes. A wide hole was commenced, and the work proceeded deliberately. These men were not behaving in any random fashion. They were excavating at a spot which had been carefully measured off by Sir Lucian.

What could it mean?

Here was one of the most influential and richest of the school governors, accompanied by two strange men, digging a deep hole in Farmer Holt's property! It was an extraordinary situation. Sir Lucian was actually trespassing now. He was mutilating property over which he had no control. And this, in itself, seemed to prove that his mission was both illegal and sinister.

It had been Handforth's idea to make a sudden dash, to surround the men and to capture them red-handed. This was quite characteristic of the ram-headed Edward Oswald.

But Nipper was more cautious.

He could see that nothing would be gained by such action. In fact, much ground would be lost—since Sir Lucian would know that the schoolboy campers were interesting themselves in his affairs.

It was far better to remain in concealment, and to watch what went on. By doing this it was quite possible that the boys would obtain a clue as to Sir Lucian's motive.

But their luck was out to-night.

For the intruders had not been working for more than ten minutes before an angry voice sounded—a harsh, coarse voice from the other side of the hollow.

A burly man had come into view in the moonlight, and even at this distance his heavy stick could be seen as he brandished it.

"Hey!" came a roaring voice. "What the thunder are you doing on my property?"

Sir Lucian spun round.

"Good heavens!" he muttered. "Quick, men! Run! It's Holt—it's the farmer! Confound him! What made him come here

to-night? Run—run! On no account let him see you at close quarters!"

The boys heard the words distinctly. The next second Sir Lucian and his two men were running off in full flight, putting as much ground as possible between themselves and Farmer Holt. And, as it happened, the three men ran straight for the spot where Handforth & Co. were crouching.

"That's right—run!" came Farmer Holt's angry voice. "I'll wager ye're some of them confounded boys from the camp! It ought to be put down! Young varminths!"

The farmer was evidently unaware of the real truth. And he made no attempt to give chase. He thought it quite sufficient, evidently, if he scared these trespassers away.

"By George!" breathed Handforth excitedly. "Sir Lucian and his men are coming straight for us. Get ready, you chaps! We'll pounce on 'em as they come up!"

"No, we won't," said Church. "Remember what Nipper said."

"Blow Nipper!"

"But he's leader!" argued McClure.

"Oh, is he?" snorted Handforth. "We'll see about that! This is where I assert my authority, my sons!"

"Is it?" growled Church exasperated. "Well, Mac and I are going to assert some force!"

McClure was quite willing. With one accord they fell upon their impulsive chum, and rolled him face downwards into the thick grass. Church sat on his legs, and McClure took a seat on the back of his head.

And almost at the same time—even while Handforth was struggling desperately—Sir Lucian and his two companions ran by within a mere yard or two. They crashed through the hedge, and disappeared into the depths of a neighbouring spinney.

Farmer Holt watched wonderingly, for he was still under the impression that the trespassers had been schoolboys—and he failed to understand what they had been doing.

"All right, Handy—you can get up now!" whispered Church, as he and McClure released their leader. "But don't make too much noise. Old Holt's still messing about near by."

Handforth gurgled and grunted.

"You—you rotters!" he gasped. "Just wait! I'll smash you for this! I'm hurt! I'm stung all over!"

"Stung?"

"You idiots, you shoved my face into a bed of stinging-nettles!" hissed Handforth. "I'm all over blisters!"

"For goodness' sake keep quiet——"

"No fear!" roared Handforth, his exasperation greater than his caution. "I'll slaughter the pair of you!"

"Oh, help!" groaned McClure. "That's done it!"

They bolted precipitately, and heard scrambling sounds in other directions—indicating that the rest of the watchers had taken to

their heels. Ten minutes later they all collected in camp.

"You hopeless fathead!" said Nipper, glaring at Handforth. "You might have spoilt everything; but as it happens, you've done a bit of good. Old Holt is perfectly satisfied that he was only dealing with boys, so he won't make any inquiries."

"If you had followed my advice, we should have discovered Sir Lucian's game by this time," said Handforth tartly. "As it is, we know just about as much as we knew before."

"It's mysterious," said Nipper thoughtfully. "The great question is, what does Sir Lucian expect to find by digging all these holes?"

And they went to bed, more puzzled than ever.



CHAPTER 9.

WILLY'S WANGLE.

WILLY HANDFORTH looked thoughtfully across the sunlit river. He was sprawling in the grass under the shade of a willow, and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were taking their ease near by.

It was Whit-Monday, and the long spell of fine weather continued, with no sign of breaking. The Open Air camp was enjoying itself thoroughly—and the girls' camp, across the river, was no less successful. Lady Honoria Dexter was doing everything to make her protégées comfortable.

"It's a Bank Holiday, and it's a fine morning," said Willy slowly. "Just the kind of morning for a chap to take a girl down the river in a canoe."

"What?" gasped Chubby Heath, sitting up and blinking.

"A girl?" said Juicy Lemon faintly. "In a canoe?"

"Yes," said Willy.

"Oh, my goodness!" ejaculated Chubby in alarm. "You don't mean to say you're going to start any of that silly rot, Willy? It's bad enough having the girls just across the river, without you making an ass of yourself. We're constantly being bothered by 'em. Why couldn't they have made their camp a couple of miles away?"

"Idiot!" said Willy, frowning. "I'm not thinking about myself. Girls are all right in their place—but they don't appeal to me. I'm thinking about old Browne."

"Browne of the Fifth?"

"Exactly," said Willy. "Look at him! I'm not blind, even if you are. During the last few days, he and Stevens have been hanging round Dora Manners like wasps round a honey-pot. They both want to take Dora up the river this morning, and they can't get rid of one another."

"Why should you worry?" asked the amazed Chubby.

"I'm not worrying," replied Willy. "It's something to do—that's all. I'm just wondering which one I shall favour."

"You mean which one Dora will favour?"

"No, I don't," said Willy. "Upon the whole, I think it's old Browne's turn. Stevens took Dora for a walk on Saturday while Browne was playing cricket. I think I can wangle it all right."

Browne and Stevens, of the Fifth, might not have been entirely delighted if they had heard this candid discussion. At the moment the two seniors were lounging outside their tent. Breakfast had been cleared away, and there was nothing much to do for the moment.

During the last few days a certain reserve had sprung up between these staunch chums of the Fifth. Hitherto, they had been inseparable. A quarrel or an estrangement had been unthinkable between the genial Browne and the easy-going, good-natured Stevens.

But since they had joined the Open Air Camp they had got into the habit of rambling off alone, one without the other. And their rambles generally took them somewhere in the vicinity of Dora Manners.

"Lovely morning," said Stevens casually.

"By no means unenjoyable, Brother Horace," admitted Browne.

"Well, I'm going for a stroll," said Stevens, trying to speak carelessly. "Didn't you mention something about going into the village?"

"I had some fleeting notion of doing so."

"Sorry I can't come with you," said Stevens. "Well, I'll be off."

This sort of conversation was quite unusual between them. It had a stilted sort of touch, and Horace Stevens felt much better after he had wandered along the river bank. He had a vague idea of walking up as far as the rustic bridge, crossing the stream, and then strolling down quite casually into the girls' camp. It would look too obvious if he rode straight across in a boat. Never would he admit to himself that he had the slightest interest in Dora Manners.

He hadn't gone far before he was aware that Willy Handforth had joined him. He hadn't seen the Third-Former come up, and he frowned when he noted that Willy was keeping pace with him.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked gruffly.

"Just out for a stroll," said Willy. "Same with you, I suppose? How do you like camp life?"

"It's not so bad," said Stevens.

"Those girls don't improve it, though," remarked Willy.

"No, it's a pity they're here," said Stevens, with much too much readiness. "I can't understand why Lady Honoria formed that girls' camp at all. Well, you needn't trouble to come with me, young 'un."

"No trouble at all," said Willy. "I'm going the same way, so we might as well stroll together. Got anything planned for to-day? It's Bank Holiday, you know."

"Bank Holiday doesn't make any difference," said Stevens. "One day is very much like another in camp."

"I'm glad you agree with me about the girls," said Willy. "By the way, if you want to avoid them, don't go near the school. I saw Irene's cousin walking to the school, and——"

"By Jove!" ejaculated Stevens. "You did?"

"Yes, so don't go there," said Willy. "Dora's older than the others, of course, but I expect she's just as silly and fluffy-headed. All these girls are the same—they're all——"

"You'd better not say anything against Dora, you cheeky young idiot!" snapped Stevens warmly. "She's the pick—— I—I mean, I suppose you're right!" he added hastily. "Clear off! You worry me!"

Willy cleared off, and grinned as he noted Stevens' brisk strides as he hurried off towards St. Frank's.



CHAPTER 10.

UNWELCOME VISITORS.

FIVE minutes later Willy stepped ashore on the other side of the river, and left his canoe among the reeds. Irene and several of the other girls were just getting ready to go for a long ramble.

"Where's your cousin, Irene?" asked Willy briskly.

"I think she's in one of the tents."

"Good! You might give her old Browne's compliments, and say that he'd like to take her for a cruise down the river," said Willy coolly.

"My hat! So it's come to invitations on the river, has it?" chuckled Doris. "But it's not like Browne to send a deputy."

"As a matter of fact, Browne doesn't know anything about it yet," said Willy, with a wink. "Don't let on, of course. But I can't bear to see him mooning about with that dreamy look in his eyes. I thought I'd push things on a bit."

"You little wretch!" said Irene indignantly. "If you think we'll let Dora go with you——"

"Why not?" urged Willy. "Dora's pretty reserved, you know, and she'll think nothing of going with me—and then I can hand her over to old Browne, and the thing's done. Nothing easier."

"It's a pretty sound idea!" said Doris approvingly.

As it happened, Dora herself came along at that moment, and Willy lost no time. He ran up to her, raising his cap as he did so.

"I've just brought a canoe over for you," he said briskly. "You know old Browne? He wants to take you for a paddle down the river, so if you'll step aboard——"

"I'm sorry, but I'm going for a ramble with the other girls," interrupted Dora.

"Rats! The canoe's waiting."

"Really, I don't think I can——"



Handy and the other juniors watched the runaway charabanc in horror—horror that changed to amazement. For, without warning, the vehicle suddenly dropped downwards as though the earth was swallowing it up! There came a crash—and then silence. “I knew it!” gasped Handy. “They’ve overturned!”

“Of course you can,” interrupted Willy. “Canoeing is a lot better than walking on a hot morning like this. Come on. Browne’s waiting. He’s particularly keen on the trip.”

“Yes, chance it, Dora!” chuckled two or three of the other girls.

And almost before Dora could realise it she was in the canoe, and Willy was paddling her across the river. William Napoleon Browne received something of a shock when he beheld a mere fag escorting this girl of all girls. In fact, he became indignant—until Willy hailed him.

“Here she is, Browne!” sang out Willy. “Everything’s all fixed, and you’ve only got to get aboard, and you have her to yourself. I’ve spoofed Stevens into going off on his own.”

“Oh!” murmured Dora, looking very confused.

For it was as obvious as daylight that Willy had deliberately planned this double manoeuvre. Even Browne was taken aback. The capable, forceful Browne hardly had a word to say.

“Please don’t trouble,” said Dora, rapidly recovering herself. “It’s only a trick, and I ought not to have come. Let me get ashore at once, Willy!”

“Not likely—after I’ve taken all this trouble,” said Willy. “Buck up, Browne, you giddy slowcoach!”

He pushed the end of the canoe into the reeds, then leaped ashore. And Browne, marvelling at the genius of this fag, gave Willy a warm and grateful glance, and within ten seconds he was in the canoe and pushing off.

“Please put me ashore!” said Dora coldly.

“I am sure you don’t mean it,” murmured Browne, with a return of his old confidence. “Willy, as you will probably realise, acted on instructions from me. I trust you will accept my invitation to a leisurely cruise down the stream?”

“He acted on instructions from you?”

“Mental instructions,” said Browne coolly. “He read my thoughts.”

And Willy, on the bank, chuckled to himself as he observed that Browne was slowly but surely conquering. He turned, and found his major looking at him with suspicious eyes.

“What the dickens have you been up to?” demanded Handforth.

“Nothing—just amusing myself,” replied Willy. “I’m glad you’ve blown up, Ted. I wanted you. Or, to be more exact, I want the five bob that you’re going to whack out.”

Handforth gave a loud snort.

“You cheeky young ass——” he began.

“Now, don’t argue, Ted,” said Willy patiently. “It’s Bank Holiday—it’s a blazing hot day, and the village tuckshop has laid in an extra supply of ice-cream, and I’m broke. I’m not sure that five bob’ll be enough!”

“I’m not your banker!” roared Handforth. “Go and eat coke! I’m sick of you and your demands for five bob! Clear off!”

But he knew it was a losing fight. When Willy departed, two minutes later, Edward Oswald was five shillings lighter, and Willy grinned cheerily as he met Stevens on the outskirts of the camp.

"Here, I've been looking for you!" said Stevens ominously.

"Well, here I am," said Willy. "Feast your eyes on me!"

"Didn't you tell me that you saw Dora going to St. Frank's?"

"Yes."

"You told me a fib, you young bounder!"

"I didn't!"

"But she hasn't been near the school since yesterday!"

"That's right," nodded Willy. "It was yesterday I saw her."

"What!"

"Now, don't get ratty," said Willy soothingly. "I might as well own up, and tell you the truth. I wanted to get you out of the way."

"Oh, did you?" said Stevens thickly. "What for?"

"So that old Browne would have a chance of taking Dora out in a canoe," said Willy with perfect candour. "I've been watching you chaps, and I came to the conclusion that it was his turn. You don't mind, do you?"

"Don't mind?" roared Stevens. "Why, you—you—"

For a moment he saw red. He had been tricked into going to the school for nothing, and Browne had pinched Dora while his back was turned! And here was this young reprobate asking him if he minded!

Horace Stevens didn't say anything. He couldn't. Words failed him. He hurled himself at Willy like a battering-ram. At least, he hurled himself at the spot which Willy had just vacated. The leader of the Third eluded him with ease, and vanished beyond the willows like a streak. Stevens' pursuit was futile from the start.

He gave it up at last, and went to the river, bathed in perspiration, and fuming inwardly like a furnace. A bathe seemed to be indicated, for he needed cooling off badly.

"Anything wrong?" asked Nipper, as he was passing.

"Oh, no!" panted Stevens hoarsely. "Nothing's wrong! Not at all!"

"You look hot!" remarked Tommy Watson.

"That's your imagination," snapped Stevens, walking on.

Nipper & Co. looked after him and grinned.

"I don't think we'd better inquire too closely," chuckled Nipper. "There are times when it's wiser to be blind!"

Handforth came up, looking indignant.

"What's all that beastly noise?" he asked bluntly.

"You needn't look at me so accusingly," said Nipper. "I've heard the noise, too. Singing and shouting, by the sound of it. Seems to be coming from Holt's meadow, on the other side of the lane."

"I think we ought to go and see," said Handforth firmly. "It's a bit thick to have our Arcadian peace disturbed by these fearful sounds. I believe somebody's playing a mouth-organ or a concertina."

They listened. There was certainly an

atrocious din proceeding from somewhere in the distance—as though a crowd of rowdies had been let loose. It was a most unusual sound in this peaceful spot. It was more reminiscent of Hampstead Heath than of this sylvan stretch of the quiet river.

Several other juniors joined Nipper, Handforth & Co. as they went across the meadows to investigate. The mystery was soon solved. A motor coach was standing in Bellton Lane, and it was full of rough-looking men and youths. They were singing comic songs, fooling about, and generally making themselves a nuisance.

"We can't interfere," said Nipper, frowning. "Trippers, by the look of them—probably bound for Caistowe beach. We can't help this sort of thing on Bank Holiday, I suppose. Let's hope they soon get a move on."

"We'll jolly soon tell them to, if they don't," said Handforth grimly.

"Better not!" advised Reggie Pitt.

"Eh? Why not?"

"Because we don't want to start any unpleasantness," replied Reggie. "After all, these men are on the highway, and we can't give them any orders. It'll only lead to a bust-up if we interfere."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "We're not going to stand this row!"

"Reggie's right," said Nipper. "We can't do anything, Handy. It's Bank Holiday, you know, and the roads are full of trippers. Let's hope they soon get a move on."

But there seemed to be no immediate prospect of this happy event. The motor-coach was not one of the biggest—a sixteen-seater, by the look of it—and its occupants were all unsavoury specimens.

They were common-looking customers, and their one aim in life seemed to be to make as much noise as possible. The juniors stood behind the hedge, looking on.

"Buck up with that old engine of yours," shouted one of the trippers, as he leaned over the wind-screen. "You ain't going to keep us here all day, are you?"

The driver turned a perspiring face from the engine.

"Can't you let a man work in peace?" he demanded hotly.

"Well, don't be too blinkin' long!" said the man. "If you ain't careful, we shan't get to Bannington in time for the first race!"

Nipper looked at the other juniors and nodded.

"So that's it!" he murmured. "I thought they looked too rough for seaside trippers. The sooner they're out of the district the better!"



CHAPTER 11.

NOT NICE FOR IRENE & CO.

UT the unwelcome visitors were in no hurry to depart.

After about five minutes the driver succeeded in getting the engine to fire, and a loud chorus

of exaggerated cheers arose from the rough racegoers. But the driver looked at them impatiently.

"It's no good, we can't go yet," he growled. "The carburettor's bunged up. I knew what the trouble was from the start. I've got to take it down."

"Well, get on with it, mate," said a burly-looking man in a loud check suit. "We didn't come out to spend a day in the country!"

"That's right, Bill Dawson—give 'im the length of your tongue!" said one of the others. "Let 'im 'ave it!"

"You shut your 'ead, Ginger!" said Bill Dawson.

"Garn! I ain't takin' no orders from you!" retorted Ginger, a small, insignificant little man, with a foxy face and a mop of red hair. "I'll shut my 'ead when I likes, an' not when you tells me!"

"That's the talk, Ginger Welch!" grinned one of the others. "Bill ain't so important as 'e thinks 'e is!"

"We don't want to start no blinkin' trouble," said Bill Dawson darkly. "I'm fed up with stickin' 'ere, in this blessed lane. What's the matter with that engine, driver?"

"Nothin'!" said the driver crossly. "It's the carburettor what's wrong. Bunged up!"

"The carburettor's bunged up?" asked Bill Dawson.

"Yes, bunged up," said the driver, with relish. "An' afore we can shift from this 'ere place I've got to take it down. See? The whole blinkin' works! It'll take about an hour!"

A chorus of dismay went up.

"A hour!" yelled Ginger. "We shan't be in time for the fust race!"

"I can't 'elp your troubles!" snapped the driver. "I'm worried—that's what I am. This old bus is fillin' up the whole road, an' there'll be trouble if anythin' else comes along. Can't you fellers lend a 'and, an' 'elp me to shove 'er into this meadow?"

"Crikey, you ain't goin' to keep us 'ere for over a hour, are you?" asked Ginger, in alarm. "We won't stay! 'Tain't likely! We 'ired this old rattletrap to take us to the Banninton races, an' we ain't goin' to be swindled!"

"All right—you can walk!" said the driver sourly. "She won't go till I've 'ad the carburettor down. I tell you it's bunged up. Didn't I say so five or six miles back, when she started splutterin'?"

The men were indignant and angry, but they were helpless. They either had to wait for the carburettor to be "unbunged," or walk. And as none of them felt inclined to walk on such a hot morning, they waited. The charabanc was pushed into the neighbouring meadow, and was finally brought to rest in the shade of some neighbouring trees.

The driver, greatly to his relief, was allowed to go on with his work, while the men—nearly a score of them—prepared to picnic near by. As Bill Dawson remarked, they might as well have their lunch while they

waited. They had all come provided with packets of sandwiches, to say nothing of an incredible number of beer bottles.

And as the bottles became emptied, so the picnic party became more rowdy. The men were apparently indifferent as to the race-meeting now, and they whiled away the time by singing popular songs and dancing.

The St. Frank's fellows had returned to their own camp, realising full well that they would only precipitate trouble if they requested these rough customers to make less noise. Handforth, of course, wanted to give them a piece of his mind, but Nipper wisely restrained him. As he truthfully pointed out, it was no business of theirs to make these men keep the peace.

And while this was going on, Irene & Co. were enjoying their ramble through the woods. They took a roundabout course, and emerged, at length, on the opposite side of that peaceful meadow. They knew they were on Farmer Holt's property, but there was a public footpath there, and so they were not trespassing.

But as they started to cross the meadow, they suddenly became aware of that unexpected party on the other side. Until the girls were well out into the open, they had not realised the presence of these rough-looking men. And it was disconcerting to find that the footpath led within a few yards of that impromptu camp.

"It's like their nerve, picnicking in this meadow," said Mary Summers indignantly. "What a rough-looking crowd!"

"Hadn't we better turn back?" suggested Winnie.

"No fear!" said Irene promptly. "We can't show the white feather!"

"Of course not!" agreed Doris. "This is a public footpath, and those men would only jeer if we turned back. They're looking at us now, and it'll seem awfully silly if we run away. Let's walk past as though we don't even see them!"

There were six girls in the party, and they tried to appear unconcerned and indifferent as they approached. Even Winnie regretted her momentary weakness. Why should they be afraid of these strangers, anyhow? There might be a few rude cat-calls, but the men would never dare to accost them.

In this assumption the girls were sadly at fault.

For the men, having finished their lunch, and having learned that there was no prospect of an immediate departure, were just in the mood for a bit of fun. At least, it would be fun from their point of view.

The unexpected advent of six fresh-looking schoolgirls was too good an opportunity to let slip. They weren't ordinary school-girls, either, as the men could easily see. They were all dressed in the attractive white costume of the Open Air Society, they were hatless, and all of them were unusually pretty.

"Lummy!" said Ginger Welch. "Look what's blown up!"

"They couldn't 'ave come at a better moment," grinned Bill Dawson, heaving himself to his feet. "We could do with a bit of sport, couldn't we, mates?"

"Anythink to pass the time," grinned one of the others.

"That's right, Sid!" chuckled Ginger. "Betcha a tanner I gets the fust kiss!"

"Yus, I can see you tryin' it!" jeered Sid.

"None o' that!" put in Bill Dawson sharply. "We've got to do the perlite thing, mates. We'll ask the gals to lunch, sec? That's what they calls it, don't they? We'll invite 'em to luncheon, what?"

A chorus of approval went up.

Irene & Co. were in no way deceived as they approached. They could tell that this rough party of men was preparing to accost them. But they did not turn aside, or falter. This was a public footpath, and they had a perfect right to use it in order to reach the lane. They weren't going to show the white feather.

And then, almost before they realised it, they were surrounded. These rough-looking men swarmed round, raising their caps with exaggerated politeness. It was impossible to ignore them—and it would have been unwise to adopt a frigid coldness.

"Now, don't be silly," said Doris briskly. "What's the idea? We're in a hurry, and —"

"No, you ain't!" interrupted Bill Dawson. "Not too much of a 'urry to refuse a hinvite to lunch, anyway. We've got some sandwiches left, an' young 'Erb ain't finished all that ginger-beer yet!"

And before Irene & Co. could protest, they were hustled into the very heart of the uncouth throng.



CHAPTER 12.

ST. FRANK'S TO THE RESCUE.

WILLY HANDFORTH frowned.

"Nerve!" he said warmly. "Those beastly rotters ought to be

stopped! Pretty rotten for Irene & Co., anyway."

Willy had a bird's-eye view of the entire proceeding. He was perched in a tree-top, on the other side of Bellton Lane, and he could see the Moor View girls protesting angrily but fruitlessly with their tormentors. The men had formed a complete circle round them, and were enjoying the helplessness of their victims.

Willy decided that something ought to be done. And yet his position was by no means enviable. He was, to be painfully frank, treed. Horace Stevens was grimly waiting below, swinging a wicked-looking ash-stick in his hand. He had run Willy to earth, so

to speak, and was now playing a game of patience. He meant to be revenged for the trick which Willy had played upon him.

"Oh, well," sighed the fag. "Can't leave the girls in this pickle!"

He skimmed down the tree with the agility of a squirrel, whereat Stevens gave his stick a swish, and prepared for the slaughter. He had hardly expected his victim to walk into his hands like this.

"Just a minute!" said Willy.

He had dropped to the ground, and was now facing the Fifth-Former coolly and carelessly. The very fact that he made no attempt to escape—the fact that he stood within striking distance of that stick—rather robbed Stevens of his strength.

"Look here, you young monkey!" said the senior grimly. "If you think you can bluff me, you're mistaken! I'm going to tan your hide!"

"You can't!" said Willy briskly.

"Why can't I?"

"I've got my fingers crossed!" retorted Willy.

"You—you——"

"Besides, you wouldn't act like a bully, I'm sure," continued the fag coolly. "I'm absolutely at your mercy, Stevens. I'm not attempting to bolt, and if you like you can swish me. But you won't."

"Oh, won't I?"

"Of course you won't!"

"Why not?"

"Because Irene & Co. are over in Holt's meadow, being tormented by those beastly roughs," said Willy. "I've just seen 'em. They were coming along the footpath, and those beasts swarmed round, and forced them into a circle. The girls can't get away now—they're being kept there."

Stevens dropped his warlike attitude.

"Is that true?" he asked sharply.

"Honour bright!" declared Willy. "It's serious. We're not going to let the girls be insulted by those blackguards, are we? Of course not! Then let's dash into camp, get a crowd of the other chaps, and turn the tables."

Stevens nodded.

"Good!" he agreed. "We'll do it!"

He knew that Willy was speaking the truth. There was a very serious expression in the fag's eyes, and Stevens forgot his enmity. Together they ran for camp, and spread the news of Irene & Co.'s plight!

"What!" said Nipper, when he heard. "This is different! I advised no interference with those beggars, but this puts a different complexion on the affair. Come on, you fellows! St. Frank's to the rescue!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Come on, the Remove!"

Handforth came running up, hot and excited.

"What did I tell you?" he roared. "I knew those men were a gang of rascals, and we ought to have turned them out of the neighbourhood before——"

"We couldn't do it, Handy," interrupted Nipper. "Until these men interfered with this camp, or any members of the Open Air Society, we couldn't go for them. But we can now. They're tormenting Irene & Co., and they'll have to pay for it!"

"Begad, rather!"

"Come on, St. Frank's!"

"Hurrah!"

There were no laggards. All the fellows were filled with indignation, and they were only too ready to dash to the rescue of Irene & Co. Any men who took advantage of a party of schoolgirls were only deserving of drastic punishment.

Handforth was among the first to catch a clear sight of the scene, and his indignation burst into a flood of anger.

Irene & Co. were still helpless.

They were hopelessly outnumbered, and to fight these men was impossible, for two reasons. Fighting would only incite further indignities, and to make a struggle for freedom would be too absurd for words.

So the girls were compelled to submit. They were in the midst of a rowdy circle, but so far the men had not attempted to handle any of their victims. They were just having a bit of sport, as they called it. They enjoyed keeping the girls here against their will.

And this alone was enough to anger the St. Frank's juniors to the highest pitch. They swept across the lane in a flood, leapt over the low hedge, and rushed into Holt's meadow!



CHAPTER 13.

MORE TROUBLE BREWING!

NIPPER caught Handforth's arm, and pulled him back.

"Hold on!" he said.

"Don't start any scrap-
ping yet."

"You ass!" roared Handforth. "I'm going to smash them!"

"We'd better not ask for trouble," said Nipper. "We'll give these rotters a chance to let the girls go and to apologise. That's only fair. If they refuse—then we can pile in."

"Hear, hear!" said Reggie Pitt. "That's the best plan."

"Nipper's right, Handy!" shouted Fullwood.

Church and McClure thought so, too, and they clung to their leader and held him back. And Nipper, by mutual consent, acted as spokesman.

"Stop this!" he shouted angrily. "Leave those girls alone!"

For a moment there was a silence as the crowd of toughs stared at the angry schoolboys in blank astonishment. An interruption of this kind had not been anticipated, and the men were taken by surprise. Bill Dawson moved out from the crowd and glared at Nipper.

"What's that?" he demanded.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!" snapped Nipper. "Haven't you any more decency than to worry a party of schoolgirls? We'll give you one minute to let them go!"

"And to apologise!" roared Handforth, from the rear.

"Yes," said Nipper, "and to apologise."

Bill Dawson burst into a roar of laughter, and some of the other men, who were beginning to look dangerous, glanced at Bill for guidance.

"Don't lose your tempers, mates," said the burly Bill. "Lummy, this is funny, ain't it? A parcel of blinkin' schoolboys orderin' us about! Why, you young idjits, unless you get out o' this medder pretty quick we'll bust your faces in!"

"We'll bust 'em in, anyhow!" said Ginger Welch fiercely.

Nipper looked grim.

"That means you want to fight, eh?" he snapped.

"It means you'd best mind your own business," retorted Bill Dawson. "We'll let these gals go when we think we will. See? An' just for this 'ere interference, my lads, we'll kiss 'em all!"

That was quite enough. Nipper glanced round.

"All right, you chaps!" he sang out. "Carry on!"

"Hurrah!"

"Down with these blackguards!"

The fellows needed no encouragement. Bill Dawson's attitude had enraged them to fever heat, and Bill appeared to be the leader. The rest of the men were ready to follow his example, and Irene & Co.'s position was becoming more uncomfortable than ever.

Crash! Biff! Crash!

The fight developed like lightning. Nipper himself led the attack, and he selected Bill Dawson as his opponent, much to Handforth's disgust. For Edward Oswald had already singled out that burly brute as his own particular game.

"Lummy!" yelled Ginger. "The kids mean it!"

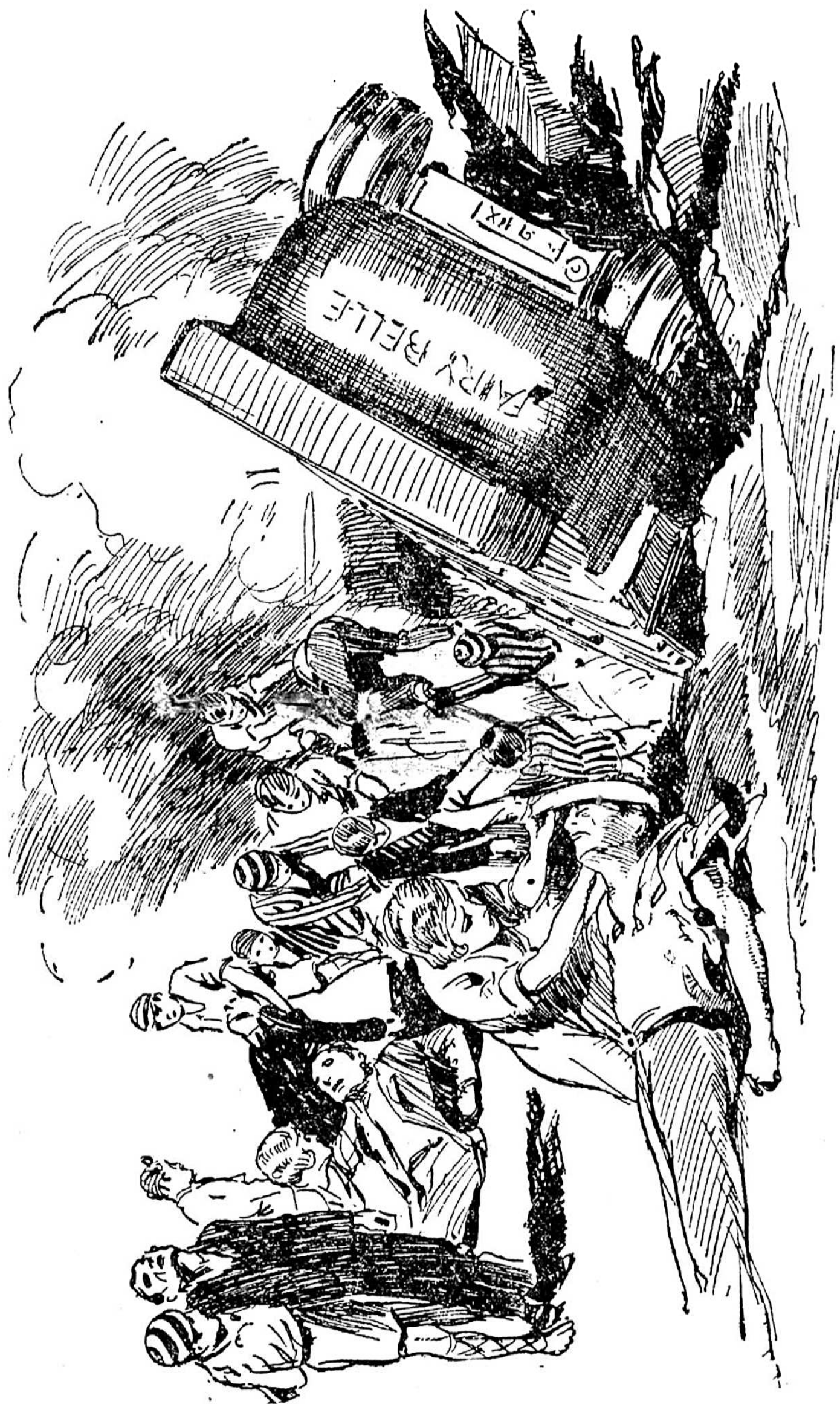
"You never spoke a truer word, my son!" said Reggie Pitt. "And this'll show you that we're really in earnest!"

Slam!

Before Ginger could dodge, Reggie's fist caught him on the chin, and the foxy-faced rascal was nearly lifted off his feet. He went over with a fearful crash, and Reggie swung round just in time to deal with a vicious attack from the flank.

The fight was developing into a regular riot. It had resolved itself into a series of combats. The contestants were mostly in pairs, but here and there a sort of free fight between small parties was taking place, and so far the odds were even.

Handforth was busily engaged with Sid White and 'Erb Carey, two of the ring-leaders. He was thoroughly enjoying himself. Sid White and 'Erb Carey had started with the idea of enjoying themselves, too. Somehow they had failed to do so.



The St. Frank's juniors and Moor View girls rendered valuable first-aid to the roughs as the injured men were extricated from the overturned charabanc. The boys were willing to forget that, only a little while before, these men had made a dastardly attack upon them with sticks and stones.

The leader of Study D was a much larger handful than they had bargained for.

"All right, girls! Skip off while you've got the chance!" sang out Handforth. "Take that, you rotter!" Biff! "We'll deal with these blackguards, Irene!" Crash!

"By George, that was a bullseye, wasn't it?" Sid White was rolling on his back, howling, and the other youth, finding himself without supporters, lost his nerve and bolted.

"Yah!" jeered Handforth. "Funks! All right, Churchy! I'm there! Hold him for another tick!"

Church was fighting a losing battle against a rascal twice his size, and Handforth sped to the attack in the nick of time. Nipper, Reggie Pitt, Fullwood, Stevens, and the others were still hard at it.

But the fight was practically over.

Irene & Co. had sensibly taken Handforth's advice, and had slipped away. They were now on the other side of Bellton Lane, excitedly watching the progress of the scrap. Indeed, judging by the enthusiastic expressions and encouraging cheers, they were enjoying themselves.

The charabanc trippers, having been taken unawares in the first instance, were beaten. The driver of the coach had dropped his work, and was looking on with keen interest. His sympathies were purely with the school-boys, for he was a decent fellow, and quite fed up with his passengers.

"That'll do!" roared Nipper. "We only came here to get the girls away, and they've gone now. Back away, you chaps!"

"Not likely!" roared Handforth. "We haven't smashed them yet!"

But Nipper's advice was sound, and the others adopted it.

Even Handforth saw the wisdom of the move, and he joined the others on the opposite side of the lane. They all moved off towards camp, with Irene & Co. triumphantly in their midst.

"Thanks awfully, you chaps," said Irene gratefully. "It was glorious the way you came and smashed into those brutes!"

"Rather!" said Winnie. "They deserved a thrashing!"

"Oh, don't mention it!" grinned Nipper. "As a matter of fact, we enjoyed ourselves. I hope these rotters didn't try any rough stuff with you?"

"No, you just came in time," said Doris. "I believe that big man was going to kiss Irene, though, and that would have been awful. It's a shame that such creatures should be loose on the roads!"

"It's Bank Holiday, you know," said Nipper. "Most trippers are well-behaved, thank goodness, and these charabanc parties are generally composed of sportsmen. We seem to have run into an exceptional crowd of roughs. I believe they're a sort of race-gang."

"That's what I thought, too," said Reggie Pitt, nodding. "They're not ordinary men, just going to the races, but regular toughs. Just our luck that the coach should break down in Bellton Lane."



The St. Frank's juniors and Moor View girls extricated from the overturned charabanc. these men had made a dash

"Let's hope they soon move on," said Marjorie.

Half an hour later the unsavoury incident was almost forgotten.

It was time for the mid-day meal, and both the Fresh Air camps were going merrily. The summer's air was filled with the odour of cooking, and the campers were thoroughly enjoying themselves.

And then Juicy Lemon, of the Third, came running at top speed into camp. He was flushed and excited.

"Look out, you chaps!" he gasped breathlessly. "They're coming!"

"Eh?"

"Who are coming?"

"Those beastly roughs!" panted Juicy. "I've just spotted them! The whole crowd, armed with sticks and things!"

CHAPTER 14.

THE AMAZON!



NIPPER and Handforth and a few of the others gathered round Juicy Lemon, and looked at him keenly. The rest of the

camp was becoming alive to the fact that something unusual was afoot.



st-aid to the roughs as the injured men were
ng to forget that, only a little while before,
em with sticks and stones.

"Let's have this clear, young Lemon," said Nipper. "You say you saw those men getting ready to make an attack? It seems a bit thick, doesn't it? Those rotters wouldn't be mad enough to—"

"I tell you I saw them!" roared Juicy. "They've got sticks, and things, as big as tree branches! And they're all half-drunk!"

"Well, there's no sign of them!" said Handforth, as he looked across the meadows. "You young rotter! You're just spoofing us! By George, I wish they would come!"

"We're not all so fire-eating as you, Handy," said Nipper. "It'll be a pretty bad thing if those men attack the camp."

"We can drive them out, can't we?" demanded Handforth.

"You can bet we'll defend ourselves—and the camp, too," replied Nipper, frowning. "But it won't be easy. If those men are armed with sticks, as Lemon says, there'll be trouble with a capital T! We can't encourage that sort of thing by using the same weapons—or there'll be a few broken heads to account for."

"Good gad!" said Archie Glenthorne, "but we can't absolutely let these blighters smash up the happy home, can we? I mean, hadn't we better dash about, and run here and there, and prepare some defence?"

"No time for it, Archie," said Nipper. "They're coming!"

"What!"

"By George, so they are!"

"I say, this looks lively," muttered Reggie Pitt.

The more level-headed fellows were really alarmed. A fistic encounter was one thing, but a battle with heavy sticks was another. Indeed, no such conflict could be entered upon.

Bill Dawson and his gang had evidently been drinking. They had taken their defeat badly, and were bent upon revenge. It was the height of misfortune that the charabanc should still be disabled—for these men were idle, and they were just in the mood for mischief.

Ruffians though they were, they might have hesitated before acting in this way had they been sober. As it was, they were quite reckless, intent only upon "getting their own back."

The crowd which swept down towards the camp was a wild, dangerous one.

As Juicy Lemon had said, all the men were armed with heavy sticks, and many of them had been collecting pocketfuls of stones. They swept down in a disorderly body, shouting defiantly.

Nipper turned to the others.

"Hang it all, we can't stand by and see the camp wrecked!" he shouted. "Come on—let's make a fight of it, anyhow, but we can't use sticks."

Whizz! Hiss! Whizz!

"Look out!" yelled Fullwood. "They're throwing stones!"

"The curs!" panted Nipper. "Can't they fight fairly?"

Truth to tell, the juniors hardly knew what to do.

They were game enough to fight until they dropped, but it would have been sheer madness to face this blackguardly assault. If they lost their heads and threw stones in return, the affair would degenerate into a riot, with blame on both sides.

Handforth yelled encouragement to those round him.

"Come on!" he thundered. "We can dodge these stones! Let's get to close quarters, and tear those sticks out of their hands! Then we can fight 'em on even terms!"

"Hurrah!"

"It's no good, Handy—you'll never do it!" shouted Nipper. "Half of us will get brained before we can tear those sticks away. The best thing is to fetch the police, but there's only old Sparrow in the neighbourhood, and he's probably miles away."

"Then what's the good of suggesting it?" asked Handforth fiercely.

He rushed forward, tired of Nipper's hesitation, and then learned that his own impulsiveness was too costly. A stone whizzed through the air, and caught him on the side of the head.

He reeled, then crashed over, dazed and helpless.

"Handy!" shouted Church, rushing up. "Great Scott! They have got him! Oh, the brutes!"

Handforth sat up, his forehead bleeding freely.

"By George!" he muttered dizzily. "Nipper was right! It's no good trying to fight these hounds! We shall all get done in!"

The situation was desperate. On the other side of the camp, the men were already beginning their work of destruction. With their heavy sticks they were smashing down the tents, and wrecking everything they could lay their hands on.

And then Lady Honoria Dexter took a hand.

The president of the Open Air Society arrived on the scene from the rear, and nobody knew of her presence until she went into battle. Lady Honoria had just come from St. Frank's, and she arrived at the crucial moment—just when the men were commencing their operations.

Lady Honoria took one look, and then acted.

She didn't go into hysterics, she didn't shout for help. She caught sight of a broom leaning against the nearest tent, and she took possession of it.

Then, without the slightest hesitation, she went into action.

And Lady Honoria was worth watching.

In the first place, she was a large woman. Impolite people would have called her fat. She was attired in the picturesque costume of the Open Air Society, but, unfortunately, Lady Honoria's bulk changed its picturesqueness into a sort of ludicrous caricature.

But there was no doubt of her courage.

She sailed in like a battleship under full steam, and swung her broom round with devastating effect, discharging broadsides, as it were.

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, Lady Honoria!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In a moment, the intensely dramatic situation was changed into comedy. There was something funny in the sight of this large lady going for all these men single-handed. Handforth was about the only fellow who didn't see the humour of it. And Handforth naturally wouldn't

"Come on, you chaps!" he roared, pushing his anxious chums aside. "Clear out of it, Church! My head's all right!"

"Yes, but——"

"Lemme go!" yelled Handforth. "Are we going to allow Lady Honoria to fight these rotters single-handed?"

"She's capable of it, old man!" chuckled Nipper.

"But it's all wrong," snorted Handforth. "It's a disgrace to us chaps!"

"Rats!" said Nipper practically. "If we go for these men they'll smash us over the head with those sticks. They may be ruffians, but they wouldn't attack a woman—and that's where Lady Honoria has got the advantage. We'll wait until she puts them to rout and then we'll finish the job!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Nipper was undoubtedly right. The unexpected arrival of Lady Honoria had sobered the men considerably, and they were sobered still more after they had received one or two hard knocks from that whirling broom. Not one of them dared to hit back.

In fact, they retreated, and were soon fleeing in all directions.

"Good for Lady Honoria!"

"Begad, rather!"

"Now, then, St. Frank's, all together!"

"Hurrah!"

And the fellows rushed off in pursuit, carrying on the good work of chasing the intruders out of the camp.

It was a triumph for Lady Honoria, but she made little of it. Her only emotion was one of indignation, and when a crowd of fellows gathered round her, she accepted their praise with coldness.

"There's no need to make a fuss, boys," she said with a frown. "I'll teach these rascals to interfere! Let them come again—that's all!"

"We thought about sending for the police, but you handled them better than a battalion of infantry, Lady Honoria!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "Thank goodness you came up. Another five minutes and they would have wrecked the camp."

"We shall have to be careful," said Lady Honoria firmly. "Who are these men, anyway? How dare they interfere like this?"

"I don't think we need worry any more," said Nipper. "They're not likely to bother our camp again, but I shouldn't be surprised if they got into trouble with Farmer Holt, though. A whole crowd of them went off into his turnip-field, and they're not doing it much good."

Lady Honoria frowned.

"It's a pity that such men are allowed to invade these peaceful country spots."

"It's all because their beastly charabanc went wrong," said Handforth. "I vote we go along and push the thing into the road, and——"

But Edward Oswald was shouted down. There would be no sense in inciting the roughs into further activity, and if they were left alone, they would probably get out of the neighbourhood of their own accord.

But Bill Dawson and his gang weren't finished with yet!

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CHAPTER 15.

FARMER HOLT ASKS FOR TROUBLE!

R. JEREMIAH HOLT came to an abrupt stop, and glared.

"Darn my hide!" he ejaculated thickly.

His tone was one of mingled indignation and fury, and it must be confessed that the farmer had a good and sufficient reason for his outburst.

He was a sour, ill-tempered man at the best of times, and he was probably one of the most unpopular individuals in the whole Bellton neighbourhood. But just now his anger was excusable.

He was strolling round on a tour of inspection. Bank Holiday made no difference to Farmer Holt, nor to any of his employees. They carried on just as though the day were an ordinary one.

And Mr. Holt had crossed over a stile, and had come into full sight of his pet turnip-field—the one which adjoined the meadow. There were several turnip-fields on Holt's farm, but this particular one was the best of them all, and the crop looked very promising.

Taking Holt's Farm on the whole, it was a poorly-managed affair—mainly owing to the fact that the farmer was too niggardly and too short-sighted to employ sufficient labour.

"Darn my hide!" said Mr. Holt again.

This turnip-field was the apple of his eye, for it was the one crop which happened to be free from weeds, and which was in perfect condition. And there, straggling over the farther end of it, were over a dozen men and youths—all strangers to the neighbourhood.

And these vandals were not only trampling over the young roots, but were actually pulling a number of them up—ruthlessly and maliciously.

Mr. Jeremiah Holt went purple with rage. Then he caught sight of something else—a big vehicle standing in his meadow. He had not given anybody permission to make a camp on that grass, and his anger grew even more pronounced.

"Confound the impudent hounds!" raved the farmer. "I'll soon put them about their business!"

For a moment he was on the point of dashing headlong across his own turnip-field, but he checked himself. Instead, he burst through a gap in the hedge and ran across the meadow to the spot where the charabanc was standing—with the driver still perspiring at his task of reassembling the carburettor.

"Hey!" shouted Farmer Holt as he ran up. "Hey, you!"

The driver looked up from his work.

"Speakin' to me?" he asked, mopping his brow.

"Yes, you infernal rascal, I am!" shouted the farmer. "What are you doing with that charabanc on my property?"

"Repairin' the carburettor," said the driver briefly.

He was a peaceful man, and although he resented the farmer's tone, he tried not to show it. After all, he wasn't doing any harm. The meadow was empty of cattle, the grass was short, and no damage had been done. None of Bill Dawson's gang were in sight.

"You'll get on that thing and drive it off my meadow!" roared the farmer angrily.

"Look here, mister, there's no call to be nasty," said the driver. "I ain't doin' any harm. I've had a breakdown. I'll get out of the meadow as soon as I can—an' glad to. You needn't think I like standin' here in the sun!"

Mr. Holt proved unreasonable.

"You'll get out now, and I'll prosecute your company for damaging my property!" he retorted promptly. "What's your name?"

"My name's Simpson—not that that matters one way nor the other," said the driver. "I had a breakdown, an' I couldn't stay in that lane—it was too narrow. I've done no harm——"

"Your confounded passengers are pulling up my turnips!"

"They would!" said the driver bitterly. "But you ain't blamin' me for that. I suppose? I ain't responsible for what they do, am I? They're a low, common lot, an' I'm sick of 'em. The sooner I gets on my way again, the better! Maybe they'll stop their mischief."

"You're responsible for your passengers——"

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, but I'm not!" interrupted Simpson patiently. "I'm responsible for this 'bus, an' I promise you I'll take 'er out of your meadow as soon as I can get the engine goin'. If you don't like the way my passengers are behavin', you'd best go an' tell 'em so. You can't blame me for their games!"

Holt grunted. He quite understood that the driver was on his side, and he couldn't very well quarrel with him. The unfortunate man was sick of his own passengers, and he had promised to leave the meadow.

"All right!" grunted the farmer. "You get that engine going as soon as you can. I'll deal with these men!"

He strode off towards the turnip-field and forced his way through the hedge just as the bulk of the men were approaching. They were in an ugly mood, having been foiled of their purpose in the Open Air camp.

"Come out of that, before I fetch my dog!" roared Farmer Holt fiercely. "You're trespassing, and——"

"Ho! Look what's come up out of one of the rabbit 'oles!" jeered Bill Dawson. "Blowed if it ain't the farmer!"

"Pelt 'im with 'is own turnips!" suggested Ginger.

"Lummy!" said Bill. "That's a blamed good idea!"

And before Farmer Holt could retreat, the bombardment began!



CHAPTER 16.

AN UNEXPECTED DELAY.

WHIZ! Whiz! Whiz!

Farmer Holt's choicest young turnips came hurtling past him in a veritable fusillade. Many of the shots were true, and the unhappy farmer was hit mercilessly.

"You rogues!" he roared. "I'll have the police on you for this! I'll have damages——"

"We'll give you all the damages!" jeered Bill Dawson. "Come on, mates! Let 'im 'ave another taste!"

Whiz! Whiz!

A perfect avalanche of turnips struck the enraged farmer, and rendered him helpless. Indeed, he was considerably hurt, and went down under that attack. The ruffians roared with laughter, and proceeded to do as much damage as possible.

"We'll show yer!" shouted Ginger Welch. "Comin' 'ere with your big talk! Let's grab the old fool, mates—let's chuck 'im in this 'ere bed of stingin'-nettles!"

"You're full of good ideas!" grinned Bill Dawson. "Now, then, you fellers—all 'ands to the pumps!"

Exactly what would have happened to Farmer Holt remains in doubt, for at that moment Sid White, who was looking the other way, gave a yell.

"Crikey! The charabanc's on the move!" he shouted. "Let's get aboard, an' take the old bus over this field. That won't do the turnips no good, will it?"

There was a chorus of approval.

"Yus, that's what we'll do!" shouted Dawson vindictively. "And if this old fool gets in the way, we'll run over 'im!"

More jeering shouts went up, and Farmer Holt watched in dazed amazement as the men streamed across the meadow towards the charabanc.

Simpson had got the engine going at last, and spluttering explosions were disturbing the peaceful afternoon air.

Holt picked himself up and shook his fists helplessly. He could do nothing against that mob, and he was too angry to be relieved at their sudden departure. He wanted to have them all arrested, and to prosecute them with the utmost rigour of the law. But he knew that he would never be able to achieve this end. The men would get in their motor-coach, and escape altogether—and this fact alone only served to infuriate the farmer still more.

Simpson, the driver, was alarmed when he found his passengers swarming on board like a crowd of wild Hottentots.

"I'll take the wheel!" yelled Dawson. "You fellers can hang on behind!"

"'Ere, steady!" shouted the driver.

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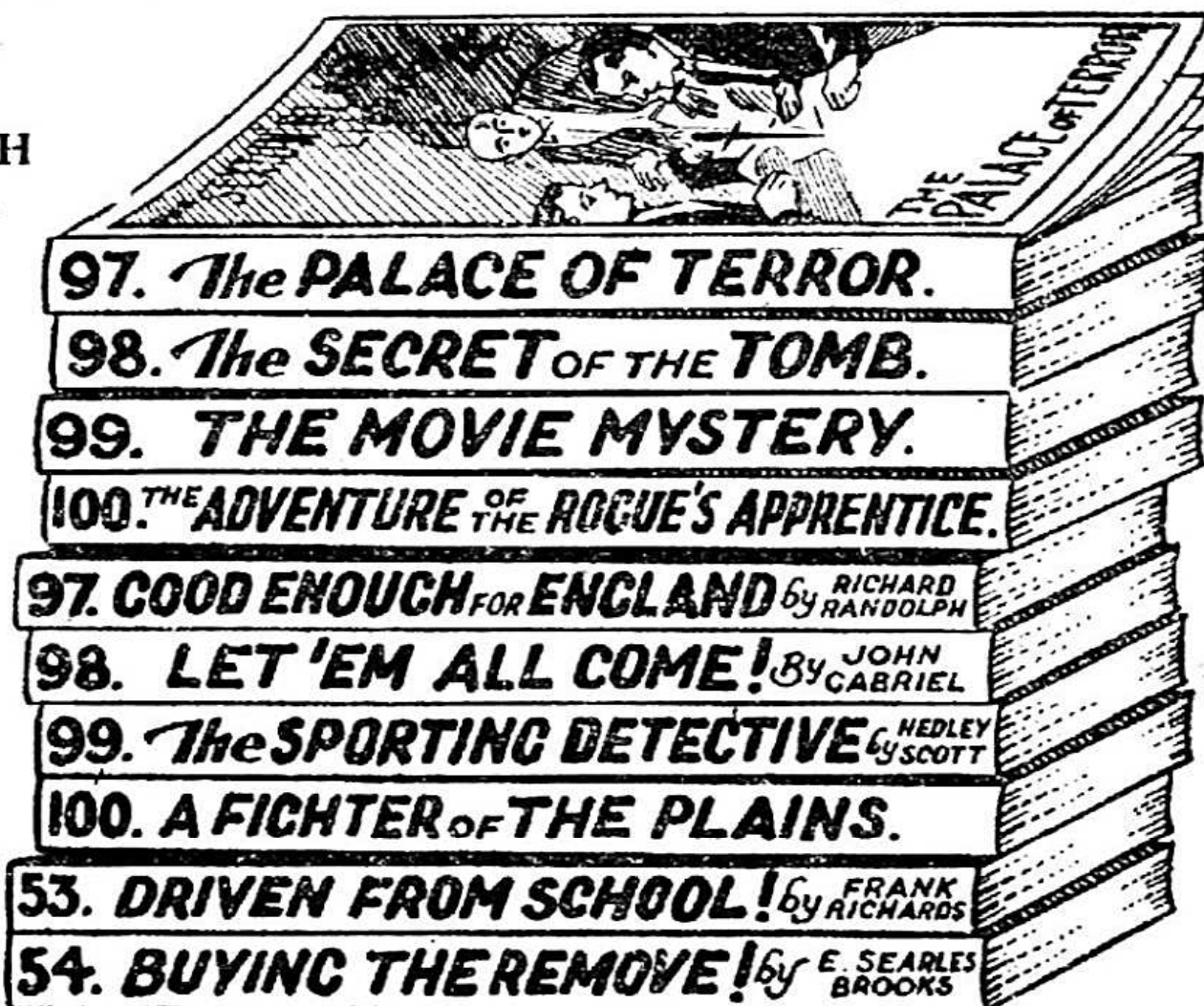
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"What's the idea? I'm in charge of this coach, an' I don't want none of your silly rot! Nobody don't drive this bus but me——"

"Chuck 'im off!" yelled Ginger.

And before Simpson could protest any further, he was roughly seized and flung to the ground.

"You fools!" he gasped. "You'll go and kill yourselves. I'm in charge of this——"

"Garn!" shouted Ginger. "Go an' fry yourself!"

Bill Dawson was at the wheel, and he evidently knew something about driving, for he raced the engine, and engaged the gears with the facility of an expert. The rest of the men were hanging on the vehicle, shouting excitedly. They were in a more dangerous mood than ever.

"Straight across the turnip field, Bill!" advised two of the others. "Let 'er go, mate!"

"That's me!" grinned Bill.

And without the slightest regard for Farmer Holt's turnips, or for the safety of the charabanc, he pulled the wheel round, and sent the cumbersome vehicle heading for the hedge which screened the turnip field. It was a perfectly mad thing to do, for there was a shallow ditch there, to say nothing of a bank.

"Good heavens!" gasped Farmer Holt, as he saw the heavy charabanc lumbering straight towards him.

He was not the only witness, for several members of the Fresh Air camp had been attracted by the loud shouts. Handforth & Co., and two or three others, were watching from a rising knoll on the other side of Bellton Lane.

"They're mad!" said Handforth blankly. Crash!

With a lurching thud, the heavy charabanc went down into the ditch, but it had not attained sufficient speed to cause a wreck. One of the front springs snapped, and the whole vehicle took a list to starboard. But it still lurched on, and rose at the sloping bank like a charging animal. Truth to tell, Bill Dawson had got his foot jammed, and found it impossible to release the accelerator.

The next few moments were tense.

"That's done it!" muttered Simpson hoarsely.

Rearing up, the coach vanished over the other side of the hedge, and Simpson expected to hear a splintering, grinding crash as it overturned. But nothing of the sort happened. The charabanc, running riot, was careering across the turnip field, taking a zig-zag course. The men on it were now clinging for dear life, for although Dawson had only engaged second gear, the throttle was wide open, and the coach was gathering speed with every second.

Straight through the opposite hedge it went, and then into a smaller meadow, right in the heart of Farmer Holt's property. The ground was uneven here, full of hollows

and mounds. At any moment it seemed that the runaway vehicle would overturn.

And then an extraordinary thing happened.

Plunging into a shallow depression, the charabanc took a kind of dive. Without the least warning, the earth gave way beneath it, and the entire front of the coach plunged straight down.

With a thudding crash, the whole thing was over.

One moment the charabanc had been there, and the next moment it had gone—clean downwards, as though the earth had swallowed it up.

Handforth and the other juniors had watched the charabanc as it had ploughed its way across the turnip field. They had seen it plunge through the hedge on the far side.

Then, with one accord, the juniors had followed the example of Farmer Holt and Simpson, who were running in the wake of the charabanc. They could all hear the racing engine.

And then came that crash—and silence.

A terrible silence—eloquent in its meaning.

"I knew it!" muttered Handforth. "They've overturned!"

"My goodness!" breathed Church.

And then they ran harder than ever.



CHAPTER 17.

GOOD FOR EVIL!

FARMER HOLT stared in utter amazement.

"Why, where in the name of thunder has the blamed thing got to?" he

asked blankly.

"What's that hole?" gasped Simpson, pointing.

They had crossed the turnip field, and, plunging through the hedge, had expected to find the charabanc a wreck just beyond. But there was no signs of it, and on the other side of that little meadow there was a fence, and the fence was intact.

"Hole?" said Farmer Holt, staring. "Why, it couldn't—— Darn my hide, but the infernal thing must have buried itself!"

"I shall get the sack for this!" said the driver miserably.

They ran on, and at the same moment a dozen St. Frank's fellows, headed by Handforth, raced up from the flank. More figures were appearing in the distance, including two or three girls.

And now, at close quarters, the juniors became aware of moans. They seemed to be muffled and buried, but they were alarming in their significance. As Farmer Holt reached the spot from one angle, Handforth and the other Remove fellows raced up from another.

"Oh, my only hat!" said Handforth breathlessly.

They could see the rear of the charabanc now. A large portion of the vehicle was below the surface of the turf, in the centre of an enormous cavity. The sides had caved in, and men were struggling desperately amidst the debris. Here and there arms and legs were showing.

Tragedy was in the air.

"But—but I don't understand!" panted Simpson. "There wasn't any pit here, was there?"

"Never has been!" said Holt. "This meadow was all grass——"

"Somebody must have been excavating!" broke in Handforth.

"Then they was pretty quick about it!" retorted the farmer. "I came over this meadow ten minutes ago, and there were no excavations then. I suppose we'd best do what we can to help," he added grudgingly. "Can't leave the poor devils like this!"

Handforth & Co. were already commencing the rescue work. Leaping down into the cavity, they were helping the dazed and frightened men out. More members of the St. Frank's party were coming up, for everybody seemed to know that disaster had occurred.

What had happened was fairly obvious.

The careering charabanc had struck, quite by chance, a patch of ground that was hollow underneath. Even Holt himself had never suspected this condition, and but for that wild drive, the discovery might never have been made. Cattle, or ordinary farm wagons, could have passed over the spot with impunity, but the ground had proved too weak to support the heavy charabanc.

There was apparently a hollow beneath the meadow, although how it came there, or why it existed, were problems which could not be dealt with at the moment. This was a time for first-aid work.

And everybody forgot their quarrel with these ruffians, and they returned good for evil.

Irene Manners and her cousin were among the first of the girls to run up, and it wasn't long before more members of the girls' camp were on hand. Browne and Stevens, of the Fifth, had arrived, too, and Nipper had come up with Tregellis-West, Watson, Pitt, and several more.

And the rescue work went on swiftly.

There was every need for haste.

Most of those men had been partially buried amidst the earth and turf which had caved in, and they were able to scramble out, more or less unharmed. But five or six of the charabanc party had fared much worse.

"There's five of 'em down there yet!" said one of the men, in mortal fear. "I'll bet they're killed by now—buried alive! It was Bill's fault—the big fool!"

"Never mind whose fault it was," said Nipper. "Where's Simpson? Where's the driver? How many passengers were there?"

"There are five more to come," said

Simpson hoarsely. "I've counted 'em up—an' there's five still missin'!"

"That's right!" said the other man. "Old Bill, Dawson, Ginger Welch, 'Erb Carey, Sid White, an' a bloke named Perks. They're gorn! Shouldn't be surprised if they're dead by now!"

"Well, we know where we stand," said Nipper grimly. "Five more to come, eh? I'm afraid it's a forlorn hope——"

"Here's one!" yelled Handforth.

He was down in the cavity, clutching to the bodywork of the charabanc, and pulling at a leg. There was plenty of help forthcoming, and a minute later Perks was hauled out. Extraordinarily enough, he was only dazed and bruised.

Reggie Pitt, Jack Grey and Archie Glen-thorne had succeeded in finding Sid White; the injured man was gently hoisted up, and first-aid rendered. He was unconscious, badly gashed and bruised, and his right arm was broken.

Dora Manners insisted upon helping, although Browne had attempted to lead her away from this tragic scene.

"No, I must stop!" she said firmly. "Don't you know that I'm a nurse? This is my work. If some of you will make some improvised splints, I'll try to set the poor man's arm. But a doctor ought to be fetched at once——"

"Young Willy has dashed off already," interrupted Stevens. "Dr. Brett is at the school, and he'll come in no time as soon as he hears. I expect the Head will put in an appearance, too."

"They've found another man!" said somebody excitedly.

Carey had been brought up—and only in the nick of time. He had been half-suffocated, and had been literally dug out at the last moment by Handforth & Co. He, too, was unconscious, and badly battered.

There were only two missing now—Bill Dawson and Ginger Welch. Almost all the St. Frank's fellows were working with feverish energy. And it was dangerous work, too. At any moment the ground might collapse further, and that would mean danger. But the juniors paid no heed. There were two lives to be saved, and they fought on grimly, regardless of the sweltering heat and the risky nature of the work.

"Can't make it out!" panted Nipper, as he took a brief rest. "There's a kind of hollow space right underneath—and the charabanc itself prevents any further fall of earth. There are stones down there, too—square stones, hand-hewn. There seems to have been an old tunnel under the earth."

"That explains the thing, of course," muttered Pitt. "One of those old tunnels must have run under here, and that's why the charabanc fell through. Come on—let's have another shot!"

They joined the others, and were rewarded a minute later by the discovery of Bill Dawson and Ginger Welch together. The two



Disturbed by Farmer Holt, Sir Lucian and his two companions dashed straight towards where Handy & Co. were hidden. "By George, we'll pounce on 'em as they pass!" breathed Handy. But his two chums thought differently. With one accord they fell upon their impulsive leader, Church sitting on his legs, while McClure took a seat on the back of his head.

men were pulled out senseless and in a shocking condition. The bullying Dawson was cut pitifully about the face and head, and the sight of him was so appalling that the juniors warned the girls to get back. More than one of those Removites felt sick and faint.

Ginger Welch was nearly as badly injured. Both men were suffering mainly from cuts—horrible gashes inflicted by the smashed wind-screen. But both were alive, and both had escaped fatal injury.

Dora behaved wonderfully throughout.

Cool, resourceful and steady, she bathed those dreadful wounds and applied temporary bandages. And now that the rescue work was over, Dr. Stafford himself came hurrying towards the scene. He was accompanied by Dr. Brett, Mr. Beverley Stokes, and Sir Lucian Dexter.



CHAPTER 18.

STRANGE BEHAVIOUR OF SIR LUCIAN.

R. MALCOLM STAFFORD was looking agitated and alarmed.

He had heard rumours of the disaster from two or three different sources—after learning of that ruffianly attack on the boys' camp. This

latter information had upset him, but that had been a triviality compared to this.

"It's all right, sir—we've got them out!" panted Nipper, as he ran up to meet the little group. "Two or three of them are badly hurt, but they're all accounted for."

"Thank Heaven for that!" said the Head, with relief. "What an extraordinary occurrence! Did you see this disaster, Hamilton?"

"No, sir," said Nipper. "I think the charabanc broke through the roof of an old tunnel, though, and went clean down into the earth, burying half the occupants."

"Tunnel?" said Sir Lucian Dexter sharply. "Tunnel?"

"Yes, sir. That's what we——"

"Where?" interrupted Sir Lucian. "Where is this tunnel?"

"Really, my dear Lucian, this is no time for pottering about with your absurd archæology," said Dr. Stafford impatiently. "There has been a disaster, and many men are injured. It will be as well if you forget your hobby for the time being."

The Head spoke quite brusquely to his brother-in-law. The fact that Sir Lucian was one of the school governors made no difference. The Head had no sympathy.

"It's all right, sir. Sir Lucian can have a look at the spot if he likes," said Nipper. "I mean, all the injured men have been

taken out, and the next thing is to get them to the hospital. Is Sir Lucian interested in these old tunnels?"

"Exceedingly," replied the Head gruffly. "Sir Lucian is an ardent archæologist, and his fascination for these musty old relics is quite beyond the comprehension of all normal people. Dear, dear! This is terrible—terrible! Good gracious, Stokes, what an appalling sight!"

They were looking at the string of injured. The unfortunate rascals were lying on the grass in a row, two or three of them still unconscious. They were all roughly bandaged, and Dora Manners and several of the Moor View girls and St. Frank's juniors were still busy with first aid. The other members of the charabanc party were standing in a group—sobered, frightened, and thoroughly subdued.

Dr. Brett came up, after one glance at the injured.

"I cannot examine these cases here, Dr. Stafford," he said urgently. "Two or three of the men, I believe, require stitches in their wounds, and any unnecessary delay may be serious. I suggest we convey the more urgent cases to the school sanatorium."

"By all means," replied the Head. "An excellent idea, Brett."

"I was about to suggest the same thing," said Sir Lucian. "Indeed, where else can they go? There is a hospital at the school, and the school is near. The thing is obvious. Take them at once."

"We'll help, sir!" said half a dozen juniors.

The Head looked at them warmly.

"You have already acted splendidly, boys, and I am very pleased with you," he said with appreciation. "It is not too much to say that your prompt and commendable activity has saved the lives of these men. They may be uncouth ruffians, but this is a time to forget such trifles."

And the work of mercy went on.

Many of the men offered to help, and they were allowed to do so. As gently as possible the injured were conveyed to the school. And after they had been taken into the sanatorium, the work of the juniors was done. It was now Dr. Brett's turn.

"Well, we've done our share, I suppose," said Nipper at length, as he and a group of others emerged into the old Triangle. "My hat, Handy! You're in a pickle!"

"We're all in a pickle," replied Handforth contentedly. "But who cares? Those men are a crowd of rotters, but they'll think twice before they try any of those games again! I suppose we'd better go and have a wash and brush up?"

"Trust Handy to think of something really novel," said Pitt, with a chuckle.

The fellows needed a wash badly. Practically all of them were tremendously begrimed, and their smart white camp costumes were ruined beyond hope. But a detail or

two of this sort had no effect upon their spirits.

By the time they had cleaned themselves up and were once more presentable, Irene & Co. were also changed. And it was learned that the majority of the charabanc party had gone off to catch a train from Bellton Station. There were six men left in the school sanatorium—four booked for quite a long spell in bed, and the other two would probably be able to leave within a day or two.

Upon the whole, the men had escaped rather marvellously. As the headmaster had said, several would undoubtedly have died but for the prompt rescue work of the St. Frank's fellows.

"Well, we can't say we haven't had an exciting Bank Holiday," remarked Handforth, as they strolled across the playing-fields. "Thank goodness those men have gone—the air seems sweeter. By George, they asked for trouble, and they got it!"

"I vote we go straight to camp and have some tea," suggested Fullwood.

"Good!" said Handforth.

But he frowned when he observed that Nipper, Tregellis-West, and Watson were veering off towards the lane. The chums of Study C were obviously bent on revisiting the scene of the accident.

"Just a minute," said Handforth.

He ran after Nipper & Co. and looked at them suspiciously.

"What are you going back for?" he asked.

"I'm curious about Sir Lucian," replied Nipper. "Didn't you notice how excited he got when I mentioned something about a tunnel? I learned to-day, for the first time, that he's an archæologist."

Handforth sniffed.

"That's only one of his hobbies," he replied. "What does it matter what he is? I thought he had more sense than to waste his time on chemistry and all that sort of rot."

"Chemistry?" repeated Nipper. "You fathead! Archæology is the science of antiquities. Sir Lucian is interested in old things—and that accounts for his interest in these tunnels, the monastery ruins, and the old crypt."

"Then—then we know why he's been making secret excavations," said Handforth, in disgust. "He only wants to find these silly old tunnels! There's nothing mysterious about him, then?"

"I wouldn't say that," replied Nipper thoughtfully. "Sir Lucian's interest in this district is a bit too striking to be normal. There must be some special reason for all his activities, and I want to find what it is."

"Do you think there's anything rummy about that spot where the charabanc vanished?" asked Handforth.

"Well, it's queer, isn't it?" said Nipper. "Nobody knew of any tunnel under that particular meadow, and I'm curious to find

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

"THE SCHOOLBOY FIRE-FIGHTERS!"

A blazing barn—with maddened horses trapped in the flames!

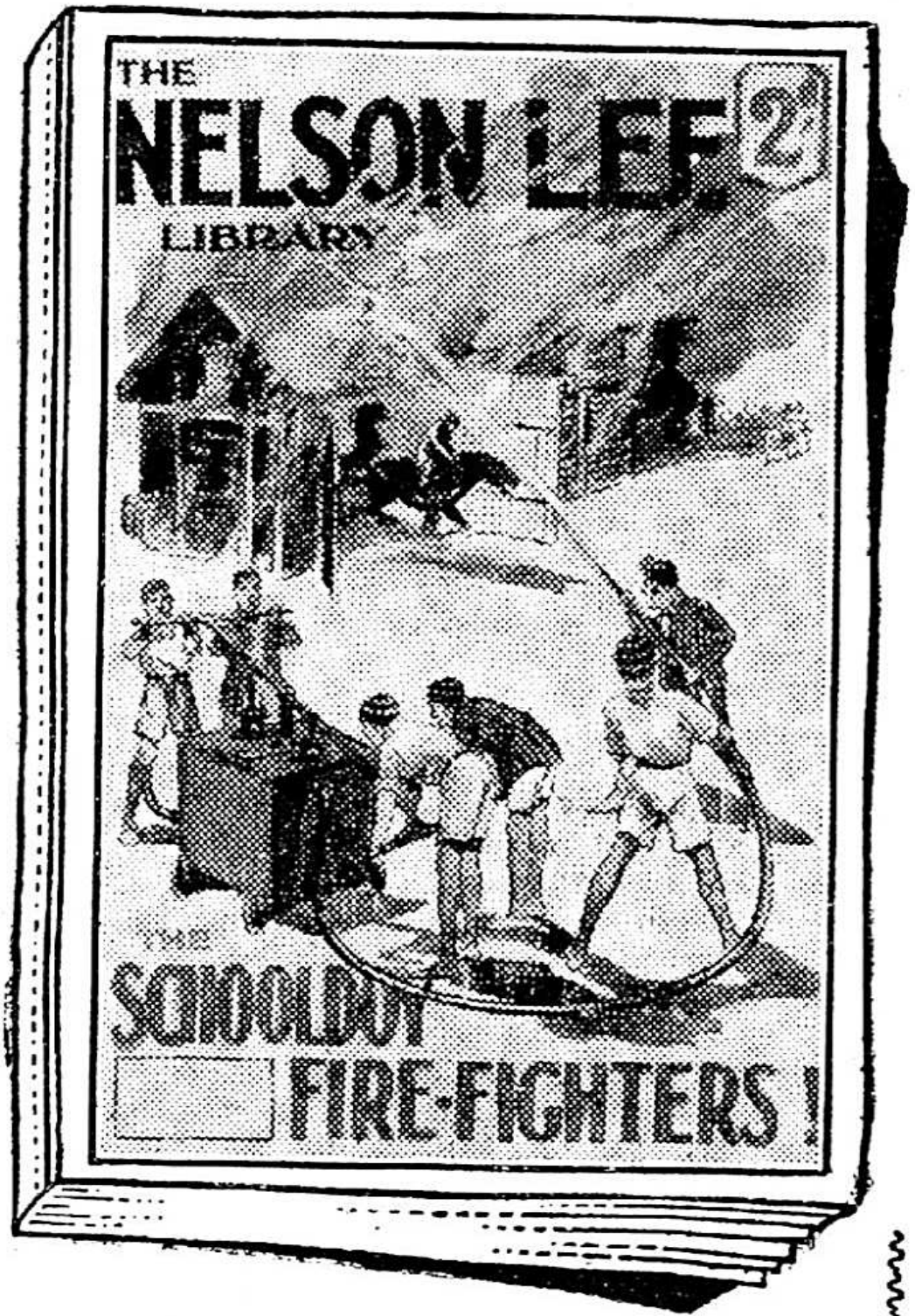
Plucky little Willy Handforth risking his life to get them out.

The rest of the fellows fighting the fire—and old Handy telling his brother off for being such a mad young ass!

The Fresh Air Fiends get all the thrills they want in next week's rattling story. What with a fire and a terrific storm, the mysterious Sir Lucian prowling about, and Roman treasure hidden near, they have a rousing time.

Another slashing instalment of
"THE BURIED WORLD!"

Keep up with the astounding developments in this exciting yarn.



ORDER IN ADVANCE!

out more about it. We thought we knew all the tunnels—and this is a new one."

"I thought you said it was old?"

"You chump! A new one to us, I mean!" said Nipper. "We're just going along to have a look at it on the quiet. Everybody has gone now, and I expect the meadow is deserted!"

"I'm coming with you!" said Handforth triumphantly, as though he expected to be rebuffed.

"You're as welcome as the flowers in May," said Nipper cheerfully.

When they arrived at the meadow, there were no human beings in sight. Even the forlorn Simpson had deserted his wrecked vehicle—and had, in fact, gone home by train to report to his employers. Farmer Holt wasn't in evidence, either.

But as the juniors approached the caved-in spot, an earthy, bedraggled figure arose from the depths. The juniors stared. The figure pulled itself free, and became recognisable as that of Sir Lucian Dexter. And his behaviour was somewhat remarkable.

For Sir Lucian, without knowing that the schoolboys were near by, acted like a demented creature. He capered up and down, uttering strange sort of chortling sounds. And in his hands he held two or three earthy stones.

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

"Off his rocker!" murmured Tommy Watson, awed.

"It seems like it, dear old boy, but I wouldn't be so sure," said Tregellis-West softly. "Sir Lucian is a queer specimen—he is, really!"

Lady Honoria's husband continued to caper about. He seemed to be in a transport of sheer joy, but as he danced round, he suddenly caught sight of the juniors, and sobered down rapidly.

"Ahem! Er—er—a little exercise, boys!" he said hastily. "Young puppies! I thought they had all gone!" he added, in an audible undertone. "What are you doing here?"

"We came to have a look at the charabanc, sir——" began Nipper.

"Tush! There's nothing to see!" interrupted Sir Lucian. "The vehicle is quite

wrecked. A good thing, too! Those confounded men were a nuisance, and yet I mustn't be hard—no, I mustn't be hard! After all, it was their folly which led to this amazing discovery!"

"Which discovery, sir?" asked Handforth, staring.

"Eh?" said Sir Lucian, with a start. "Oh, nothing! Nothing at all! Discovery? Of course not!"

Somewhat confused, Sir Lucian turned aside, and set the bricks and stones on the ground—handling them as though they were made of solid gold. Then he went scrambling down into that ugly gash in the meadow, and disappeared round the body-work of the wrecked motor-coach.

The juniors glanced at one another in wonder.



CHAPTER 19.

A CURIOUS DISCOVERY!

SIR LUCIAN'S actions had been sufficient to arouse a high pitch of curiosity in Nipper and his companions.

Even admitting that the Head's brother-in-law was an enthusiastic archaeologist, his present excitement needed some other explanation. It was almost as though he had discovered something which he had been definitely searching for—and something, moreover, which was of great value.

"Rummy!" murmured Handforth. "What are we going to do?"

"We'd better scramble down, and bring the old crank up!" replied Nipper. "It's dangerous down there—what with all this loose earth, and those old stones. He might disturb something, and bury himself alive!"

"Begad! Then let's do somethin'!" urged Sir Montie.

Nipper had not exaggerated. The danger was a real one, especially to a man in Sir Lucian's reckless frame of mind. He apparently had no idea of the danger, and was indifferent to it, anyway.

The juniors were standing on the edge of the great pit. Earlier in the afternoon, this piece of ground had been green turf, with scarcely a crack or a crevice. But now a piece of the meadow had entirely vanished. A complete section, roughly twenty feet across, had caved in, leaving jagged edges.

These, however, were not sheer, for the loose earth sloped down, half-burying the motor-coach, which was standing nose downwards, just as it had plunged in.

Most of the victims had been dug out of the loose earth in this pit. In one or two places it was possible to descend deeply—for down below there were many spaces which had not been filled up by the collapsing ground.

Sir Lucian had vanished through one of these holes, and he was taking a big risk.

There was no guarantee that the earth would not settle down, and suddenly bury him. And, judging by those stones he had already brought up, he was probably pottering about, pulling the debris over in search of further trophies.

"Come on!" said Nipper briskly. "And go easy. In fact, two of you had better stay up here, in case we're buried. This'll be the second time we've pulled Sir Lucian out of this sort of danger. He doesn't seem to have any idea of risks at all."

They cautiously lowered themselves, and wormed their way down past the side of the motor-coach, where a sort of abyss led straight down into the bowels of the earth.

Nipper and Handforth were the pair who slithered down, and they were both alarmed and curious. They were alarmed because Sir Lucian had vanished, and their curiosity was natural. Previously, they had been too busy rescuing the injured to give much attention to the natural peculiarities of this pit.

"Sir Lucian!" called Nipper sharply.

"Go away!" came a voice from somewhere. "How dare you follow me down here? Go away at once!"

Nipper pulled out his electric torch, and scrambled on. He soon found himself in a sort of half-ruined, crypt-like chamber. The old stone roof was in a precarious condition, with stones bulging out, and with dribbles of earth continuously trickling down. Sir Lucian Dexter was looking about him with intently eager eyes. He, too, had a torch.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir, but it isn't safe to be here," said Nipper firmly. "This roof might collapse at any minute!"

"Nonsense," said Sir Lucian angrily. "Leave me at once! I won't be interfered with like this."

"But there's nothing to stay here for, sir," growled Handforth. "It's only a part of a rotten old tunnel—"

"Nonsense!" interjected Sir Lucian. "This is no tunnel. Unless I am greatly mistaken, it is part of a tomb, dating back — H'm! Not that you would understand." he went on hurriedly. "I wish you wouldn't bother me!"

He pulled at a portion of the brickwork, and Nipper gave a yell.

"Look out, sir!" he shouted. "You mustn't do that!"

Nipper was amazed at Sir Lucian's utter disregard of the most elementary precautions. He was so intent upon his investigation that the idea of a collapse did not seem to occur to him.

But Nipper's warning was undoubtedly justified, for a large section of the roof crashed down with a devastating rumble. For an instant, the two juniors were horrified. They thought they were going to be buried alive. They were choked and blinded by the clouds of dust. And Sir

Lucian, staggering back, nearly bowled them over.

Happily, the exit was still free, and they managed to scramble up that slope again, fighting every inch of the way in the loose earth and stones.

"You might have been killed, sir!" said Nipper angrily.

"Upon my soul, so I might!" panted Sir Lucian, conscious of the peril at last. "What a ridiculous thing! You boys have more sense than I gave you credit for. I promise I won't go down again—at least, not until that roof has been propped up, and made secure!"

And without any further talk, Sir Lucian wandered off. But before going, he picked up those stones from the turf, and hugged them to his chest as he went.

"Dotty!" said Handforth indignantly. "I thought there was something worth looking into, but the whole thing's a fraud."

"What did you find down there?" asked Watson.

"Nothing," growled Handforth. "Nothing but the ruins of an old crypt, or something. I'm going back to camp!"

Nipper was looking very thoughtful as he strolled along with the others. He said nothing, but he was puzzled. He felt that there was something deeper behind Sir Lucian's behaviour.

As they were entering the camp they passed William Napoleon Browne and Horace Stevens, of the Fifth. Browne was limping with exaggerated painfulness, and Stevens had his arm in a sling.

"Hallo!" said Nipper. "I didn't know you chaps were injured."

"Gravely, Brother Nipper," said Browne. "I fear that Brother Horace is malingering, but with regard to my own injury, a visit to the school sanatorium is positively essential."

"Rot!" said Stevens. "There's nothing wrong with your silly leg. Now, my arm—"

"That's enough!" grinned Nipper. "I'm surprised at the pair of you!"

Browne elevated his eyebrows.

"Why this pained tone, brother?" he asked politely.

"Oh, nothing!" chuckled Nipper. "I hope you find Dora still helping with the good work. If not, I expect those injuries of yours will heal themselves in no time."

"A base and scurrilous suggestion," said Browne sadly. "Alas, Brother Horace, that we should be accused of such duplicity. One might almost suppose that we take an interest in this young lady."

They passed on, and the juniors yelled.

"Well, it's something new for old Browne to be smitten!" grinned Handforth. "I admire his taste, though. Dora is Irene's cousin, and that's a guarantee of quality."

And they went into camp chuckling.



CHAPTER 20.

THE ROMAN TOMB!

HANDFORTH looked out of his tent and started. "I knew it!" he muttered. "Those Study C chaps are up to something. I am going to find out."

"Oh, chuck it, Handy," said Church sleepily. "Let's go to bed."

"Rats!" said Handforth.

It was late evening, and the camp was very peaceful. The day's excitements were over, and most of the campers were in bed. It was getting on towards ten o'clock, and even now there was still some lingering daylight in the western sky.

Handforth had heard voices, and now he beheld Nipper and Watson and Tregellis-West moving quietly away past the tents. It was very evident that they were off on some secret expedition.

"Hi!" called Handforth. "What's the idea?"

Nipper & Co. halted, and then hastily ran up.

"Don't shout like that, you hopeless duffer!" said Nipper. "Do you want to rouse all the others?"

"Where are you off to?" demanded Handforth.

Nipper looked at his chums hopelessly.

"I suppose we shall have to tell him," he grunted. "We're going back to the meadow, Handy. I want to have a closer look at that old crypt place. I've got a theory about it, and I want to prove it."

"What's the theory?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"Never mind now, I'll tell you if I'm right," replied Nipper. "You go to sleep, and dream—"

"Fathead! I'm coming with you!"

"I thought you were!" sighed Nipper. "But I don't know what we've done to deserve it."

So when they went out of the bounds of the camp there were six of them, for Church and McClure had naturally insisted upon accompanying their leader. They felt that it was their duty to look after him, although they did not mention this fact.

"Blessed if I can see the sense of going down that hole to-night," growled Handforth, as they approached their destination. "Why couldn't you have left it until to-morrow?"

"Nobody asked you to come," said Watson bluntly.

"H'm! No!" admitted Handforth. "Oh, well, I suppose we might as well go through with it now. But it's all rot."

Nipper half expected to find Sir Lucian prowling about the spot, but the place was completely deserted. During the evening Farmer Holt's men had put hurdles all round the pit, probably in readiness for cattle in the

morning. The danger zone was now protected.

"I don't think we ought to all go down," said Nipper, after they had climbed the hurdles. "My idea was to pop down alone. I only want to make a brief inspection. But you'll want to come, Handy."

"Of course I will," said Handforth promptly.

"The question is, will it be best to let you come, or shall these other chaps sit on your head until I've finished?" asked Nipper. "I expect it'll save a lot of trouble if we let you come."

Handforth disdained to make any reply. Instead he led the way into the depths. Within a couple of minutes they were both standing in their semi-demolished tomb. At least, Sir Lucian Dexter had called it a tomb, and he, being learned in such matters, should have known.

"By Jove, I thought so!" said Nipper keenly, as he examined those ancient bricks. "I just wanted to be sure. We can go back now, Handy. I'm satisfied."

"Satisfied about what?"

"This wall is ages old," said Nipper. "In fact, you'd better take that puzzled expression off your face and look duly awed. Handy, we're in a Roman tomb!"

"A which?"

"These old walls were built by the Romans," said Nipper. "So you can just imagine how old the place is. I asked Lady Honoria about Sir Lucian this evening, and although she didn't like to speak much, she admitted that her husband's pet craze is to explore for Roman relics. What Sir Lucian doesn't know about the Roman occupation of Britain could be written on the back of a postage stamp. He's the author of three volumes on the subject, and this part of Sussex is known to be rich in Roman remains."

Handforth wasn't impressed.

"And do you mean to say we've been fooled and spoofed all this time?" he asked tartly. "Why, I thought Sir Lucian was on the track of some mystery, and now we find that he's only looking for fusty old Roman walls!"

"I'm not so sure about that," said Nipper. "There's more in it than that, Handy. There's a good deal more——"

"Whoa!" gasped Handforth wildly.

He had shifted his position, and one foot went clean through the floor. He pulled himself out unhurt except for a barked shin, and Nipper flashed his torchlight into this new cavity.

"We're none too safe," he said. "Even the floor seems to be hollow."

"What's that down there?" asked Handforth sharply.

He forgot his shin, and went down on his hands and knees. Then he groped in the cavity, and pulled out some quaint old coins. They were heavy and discoloured.

"Let's have a look!" said Nipper quickly. "Great Scott, Handy, proof!"

"Eh? Proof of what?"

"Can't you see those coins? They're Roman!"

"Well, I found 'em, anyhow!" said Handforth triumphantly. "Roman gold, eh? By George, treasure!"

"Don't be an aes!" said Nipper. "I don't know whether they're gold or not, but they're probably worth a lot of money. They must be over seventeen hundred years old, and they're still in good condition. No wonder Sir Lucian danced a hornpipe when he discovered this place!"

Handforth had a dreamy look in his eyes.

"Treasure!" he murmured. "That's the long and short of it, my son! Sir Lucian must have got a chart—— By George! Don't you remember that old parchment we found? There's a treasure!"

And Nipper began to wonder.

No further investigations were made that night, for Nipper had satisfied himself that his theory was correct. That recklessly driven charabanc had accidentally located this Roman tomb. What hidden secrets were there in that quaint old place?

The St. Frank's fellows were determined to find out!

THE END.

.....NEXT.....

WEDNESDAY!

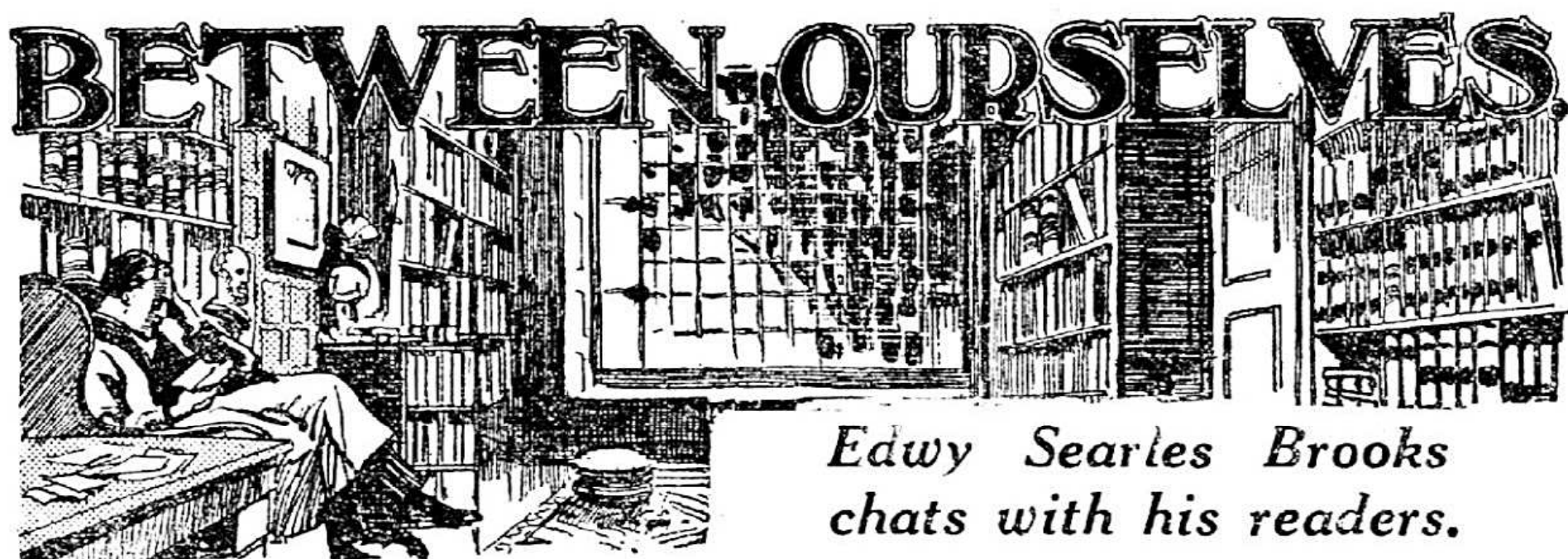
Thrills for the
Fresh Air
Fiends!



Another rous-
ing mystery
and adventure
yarn!

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*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.

For several weeks past I have been offering to send my photograph—properly autographed—to any reader who sends me his, or hers. But I thought I made it quite clear that the first move in this little exchange is to come from the reader. So, Lily Plummer, I shall have much pleasure in letting you have my autographed photo after you have sent me yours. You indicate that it will soon be finished, so I expect I shall have it in my Album long before this reply appears in the Old Paper.

Oh, while I think of it. Some of you readers have been writing to me in pencil. There were several letters in this week's batch like that, and I'm going to give you a ticking-off. It is a very bad habit to write letters in pencil, and it is a sheer sin to address the *envelope* in pencil. I might add that one or two readers have lost stars owing to this careless habit. I'm not trying to preach, you know—I wouldn't dream of it—but, really, there's no excuse for anybody when you can buy pen nibs at four a penny.

Harry Dobie (Eastbourne), "W.G.M."* (Islington), Sydney Smith (Grimsby), A. Brenchley (Perth, W. Australia), Lily Plummer (Battersea), "Ed. U. Cation" (Paddington), John L. Higson* (Clitheroe), James W. Hoser-Cook* (Poplar), "Ethel B." (Birmingham), Eleanor A. Radford* (Stratford), W. Holmes (Glasgow), "H.C." and "W.C." (No Address), "The Brainy Brace" (Christchurch), Norma & Aline Wignall (Preston), Eric Jackson (Seaforth), A. Broughton (Doncaster), Oswald Walsh, Billie Thorpe, Clifford Ormerod, Edgar Beaumont, Donald Hodge, Rodger Swift & John Stephens (Morecambe), Ernest G. Hughes* (Manchester), F. R. Mears (Walsall), J. Cutting (Southsea), R. Remington (Margate), Rhoda Barrett* (Colchester), Thomas Jones (Wolverhampton), Alfred Kemp (Staines), "T.C."* (Liverpool), "Halicarnassus" (Leyton),

Arthur C. Foster (Sydenham, N.Z.), A. David Blackhall (Wednesbury), Daniel S. Edge (Bedale), Ivy Swailes* (Heckmondwike), Elsie M. Quinn (W. 10).

* * *

You seem to have got the idea all wrong, James W. Hoser-Cook. I'm awfully sorry, but you can't buy my photograph. It isn't for sale. My main idea in offering to send my dial to my readers is to obtain photos for my own Albums. It is my readers' likenesses that I value—not their money. So you'll have to wait until you can send me a snap-shot of yourself, Cooky. As regards my private address, you can't kid me that this is a matter of general interest. Yes, of course, all names of League members are kept in weighty reference books. The records are all complete, from the very first member down to the latest recruit.

* * *

The title you want, "Ethel B.," is No. 499—"The Secret of the Panel."

* * *

What would be the good of having my photograph printed in the Old Paper, Eleanor A. Radford? If I did that, there wouldn't be any inducement to all you readers to send me your own photos and snapshots. So how about my Albums? By the way, I don't judge a reader's character by good looks or prettiness. Some of my most treasured photographs are positively ugly. Always remember that ugly faces very often go together with beautiful natures.

Oh, my hat! Another inquiry about my giddy photograph! Yes, W. Holmes, a four-year-old snapshot will do splendidly. Of course, if you were taken standing behind a tree, I might kick a bit—but as long as it's a photograph of *you*, it'll be good enough.

I am sorry, Norma and Aline Wignall, that your names have not been put in the "Correspondence Wanted" List. But, really, this isn't my province. If you are members

of the St. Frank's League, the Chief Officer will do what you require. But if you don't belong to the League—well, you'd better join up as quickly as possible, or your names will never be put in the Old Paper.

Oh, no, Oswald Walsh & Co. You can't force me to publish your letter by challenging me. I've had scores of letters like yours during the past two or three weeks, but I'm not biting the bait.

It doesn't matter if you already belong to a dozen Leagues, Thomas Jones. You are still eligible for the St. Frank's League. Why not join up, and enjoy the benefits?

I'm not quite sure whether you want the title of No. 2 of the Old Series, Alfred Kemp, or whether you want the title of No. 2 of the New Series. Anyhow, I'll give them both, so one of them is bound to be right. No. 2 of the Old Series was called "The Case of the Secret Room." And No. 2 of the New Series was entitled "Handforth's Bad Day."

So you want the "St. Frank's Magazine" back in the Old Paper, "T.C."? You're not

the only one, old man. In fact, dozens and dozens of readers have written suggesting that the Mag. should be re-started. I wonder what the general opinion is on this point? Another serial, or the St. Frank's Mag. back again? Let's hear from you all.

Handforth & Co. were introduced in the very first St. Frank's story, "Halicarnassus" (you've given me a twisting with that pen-name of yours!) and the first story of St. Frank's came out in No. 112, Old Series of the N.L.L.

So you want a Portrait Gallery, A. David Blackhall? I'd like to remind you that a Portrait Gallery has already appeared in the Old Paper. Still, I dare say there are many thousands of readers who never saw it. If we *did* re-start the Mag. there might be another Portrait Gallery. You never know!

Edmund B. Smith

ON SALE TO-DAY!

"PETE'S DERBY WINNER!"

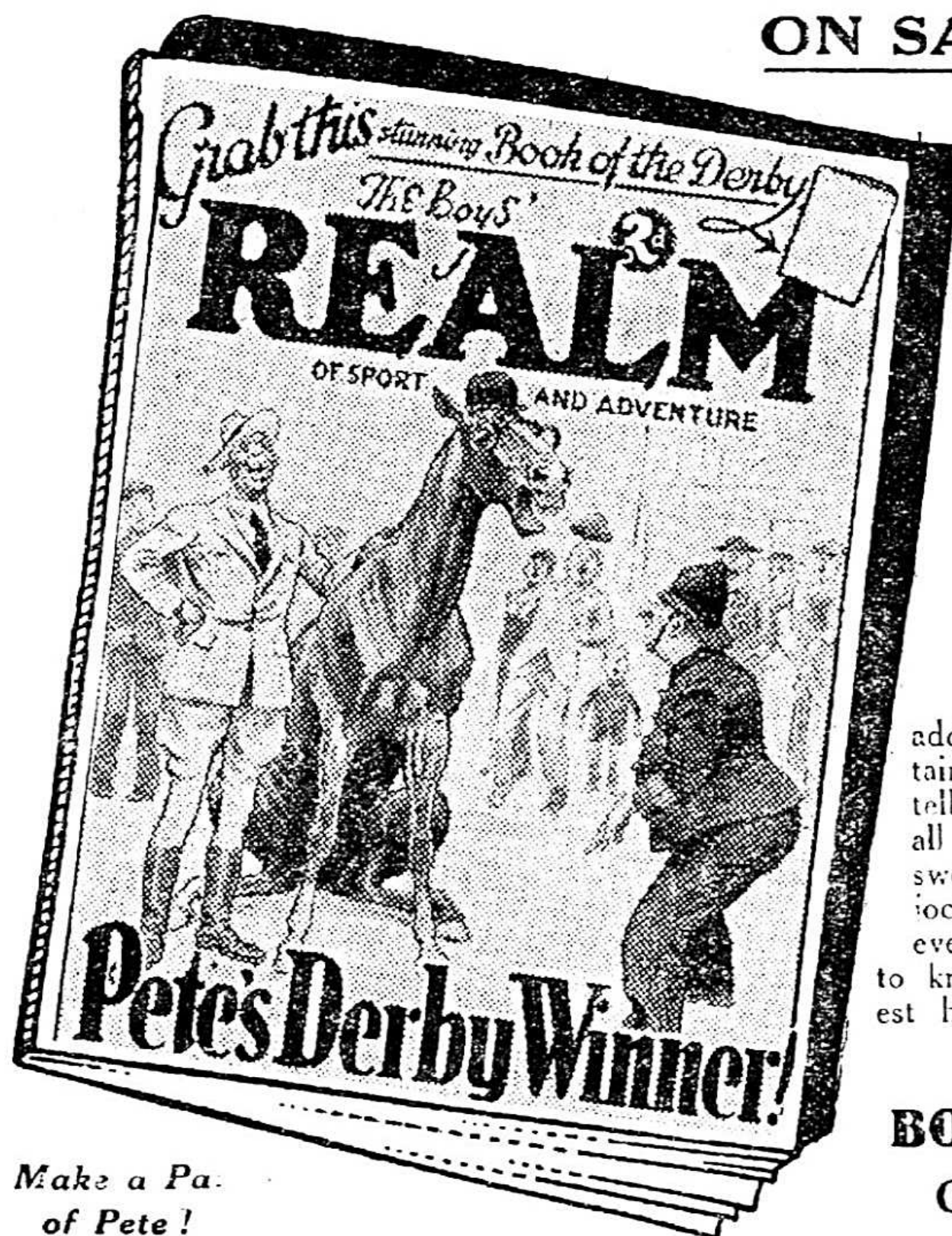
Where's the lad who doesn't love a laugh? Not you, is it? You're one of the cheery fellows who like to keep smiling—and there's a yarn going this week that was just made for you. You'll see the title above. The story features those famous laughter-makers — JACK, SAM, and PETE.

The good old REALM is always full of fine yarns. In addition, this week's issue contains a stunning booklet which tells you all about the Derby, all about the course, Derby sweeps sensational Derbies, jockeys who have won—in fact, everything you can possibly want to know about the world's greatest horse-race. It's all in

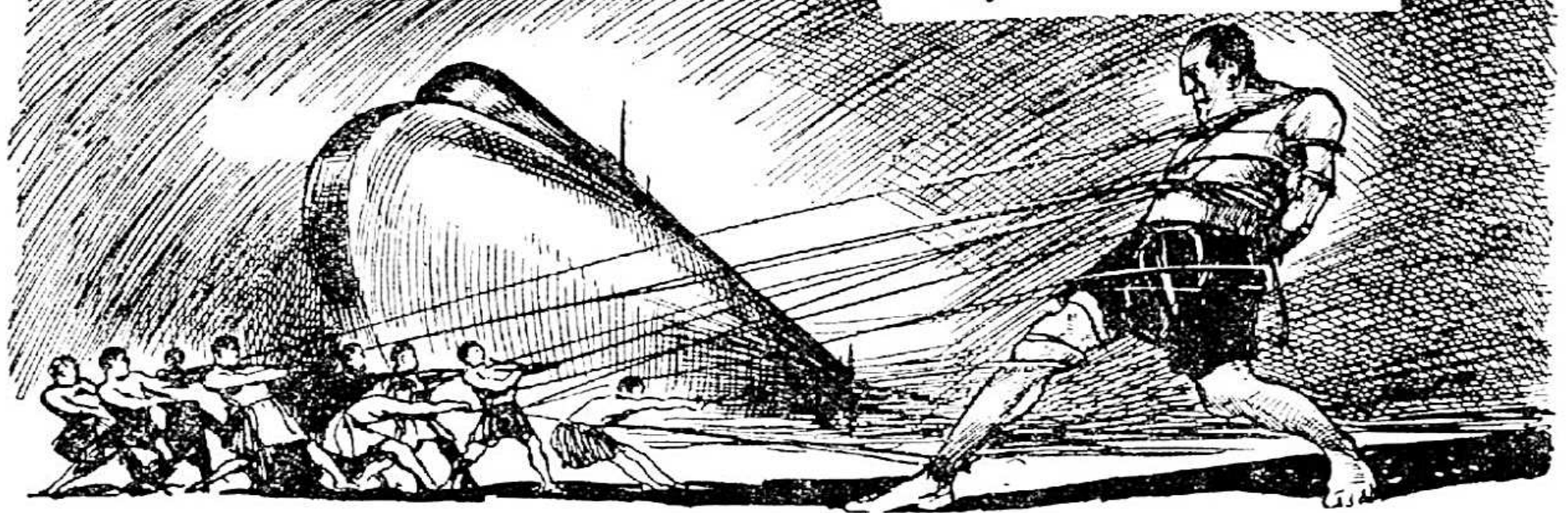
The Boys' Realm

BOOK OF THE DERBY

Get a Copy NOW!



Make a Pa.
of Pete!

*Thrills Under the Ocean!**Exciting Adventure!***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, who 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 rescue them, thereby incurring the hatred of Ka-Ra, who himself turns traitor by going to the Kru's enemies, the Falta, and telling them that if they capture Jim and Cripps they will be able to beat the Kru. Jim overhears this, but is inadvertently captured by the Falta!

(Now read on.)

A Hopeless Position

JIM was glad that Stanislaus Cripps had insisted upon his wearing his diving-dress, and that before setting out to stalk Ka-Ra, he had readjusted the headpiece which he had removed in order to enjoy the apples and oranges, for the giant Falta instantly attempted to tear him to pieces.

He jerked his arms and legs, pressed him between his hands, and even attempted to break him, as if he were a stick, over his knee. But the wonderful metal that could withstand the tremendous pressure of the lowest depths of the ocean was proof against even his strength. Jim came through the ordeal a little shaken, perhaps, but otherwise unhurt.

He thought the worst was over, but he was mistaken. The giant, finding that such methods were unavailing, seized him by one foot, and made as if to swing him round with

the object of breaking his prisoner's head against a neighbouring rock. Ka-Ra instantly intervened.

"Stay, O Falta!" he cried. "Stay!"

The giant abandoned his murderous intentions and, holding Jim dangling by his ankles as if he were a dead rabbit, he glanced down at the little figure of the Kru.

"What would you have me do, O Kru?" he exclaimed in his birdlike voice.

"This is one of the Shining Ones. He has the secret of the magic!" Ka-Ra exclaimed with a cunning smile. "We can make him give us this magic. Set him down here, O Falta."

The giant sank down on his haunches, with Jim lying over his drawn-up knees. The boy suddenly remembered the weapons he had in his belt. He raised his hand with the intention of drawing out the cylinder containing the sleeping-gas, but even as he did so Ka-Ra sprang on him. The next instant everything

that his belt contained was removed. He heard Ka-Ra give a shout of exultation.

"Look, O Falta!" he exclaimed, dangling the cylinder. "This is the magic instrument that makes all who stand up against it fall asleep; and this"—he indicated the revolver—"is that which contains the fire that strikes and destroys!"

Jim shut his eyes at this period of the demonstration, feeling that his end had come, for Ka-Ra was holding the revolver upside down with his fingers on the trigger. Every moment he expected to hear that earsplitting report which he knew meant instant death.

"Already, O Falta, we have the Kru in our power!" exclaimed Ka-Ra. "Who can stand up against this mighty magic? There but remains the Flying Thing. Let the Shining One be bound, and we will give him no food or drink until he shows to me the secret of its magic!"

Jim's Strategy !

THE Falta possessing nothing that could be used for binding the prisoner, Ka-Ra himself supplied it, taking the sash from about his waist and tying Jim's arms behind his back. Then, as he lay there on the ground, Ka-Ra addressed the boy, his face glowing with exulting cruelty.

"Now, O Shining One—now, where is your magic with which you rescued Tinta from the sacrificial stone, and faced even He-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken? You are in my power! You are Ka-Ra's slave. If you refuse to do my bidding you shall die!"

Jim looked up into those triumphant eyes unflinchingly.

"You are a traitor, Ka-Ra, and in the end you will pay for your treachery. For the moment I may be at your mercy, but a greater one than I is not in your power. Remember there is the Hairy One, before even He-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken fell, and the Hairy One is my friend and sworn brother. Woe to you, Ka-Ra, when he knows what you have done!"

Jim saw the man blanch for a moment, and then quickly recover himself.

"He cannot touch me now. I have his magic. I fear nothing, O Shining One. Think not of me, but rather of yourself."

He pointed to the great bulk of the Flying Submarine.

"I would know how this Flying Thing is made to do your bidding. You will tell me, and, until you tell me, no food or drink shall pass your lips!"

"And when I have told you?" Jim inquired.

"Then perhaps I will allow you to be my slave!" Ka-Ra retorted with a slow smile.

"If I knew anything I'd never tell you!" Jim gasped. "You can kill me, but how much wiser would you be then? And you've still to reckon with the Hairy One."

Ka-Ra shrugged his shoulders.

"I have seen men who, just like you, have boasted that nothing would make them speak.

But when the Shadow of the Dark Wing has only so much as touched them, then they have found their tongues."

He regarded his prisoner with a sneer.

"Even so will it be with you, O Shining One. I can wait. Now I take you to the Flying Thing. There shall you remain—without food and water—until you unfold to me all the hidden magic!"

He spoke some words to the Falta, some of whom were climbing on one another's backs, like schoolboys, in a vain attempt to reach the deck of the Flying Submarine. Others had been hauled on board by their comrades, and were seated astride the great shining hulk.

Now, acting on Ka-Ra's instructions, Jim was tied to the mooring rope and, without any regard for his personal comfort, hauled, hand over hand with jerks that lifted him twelve feet at a time, on to the deck.

Immediately afterwards Ka-Ra followed, and stood peering round, evidently more than a little frightened at the unfamiliarity of his surroundings. Presently his eye fell on the opening that led to the pilot-house.

"What lies down there, O Shining One?" he exclaimed.

Jim did some swift thinking. Once Ka-Ra was let loose in the pilot-house, there was no knowing the mischief he might do. He might touch the lever that controlled the air-reservoirs, and send the vessel hurtling up into the upper reaches of the air, never to descend again. Or he might move the lever that would make the enormously powerful engines spring into life and drive the vessel at an incredible speed into the face of the rock. At all costs he must be prevented from entering the pilot-house.

"There is nothing down there, Ka-Ra," Jim answered. "You can see steps. You have but to descend. All will be well with you."

As he intended should be the case, the Kru did not believe one word he said. This was but a plot of the Shining One to lure him into the power of those mighty and mysterious forces that lurked within the interior of the vessel.

In his anger he kicked Jim with his bare foot, hurting himself, Jim reflected, with a certain satisfaction, far more than he inconvenienced him.

"You lie!" he exclaimed furiously. "That is where the Hairy One keeps the mighty spirit under his control."

"Not a bad estimate of the situation," Jim reflected, in spite of the other's unscientific language.

"You shall come with me. First I will see what happens to you" Ka-Ra went on.

He rolled Jim to the mouth of the companion-way, and then, propping him up till his feet were dangling over the edge, let him fall. Fortunately the diving-suit had such a power of shock resistance that Jim, though he fell with a crash against the wall, was only slightly dazed.

He lay there looking up, watching Ka-Ra cautiously descending the ladder. Now the

man was by his side, staring round with an appearance of calm which his frightened eyes belied.

Apparently he was disappointed by what he saw—or perhaps he felt he needed more time to steady his nerves—for after a few seconds he bolted back up the companion-way. Jim could hear him speaking to the Falta. Then his voice faded away into the distance.

For half an hour Jim lay there, a prey to every known form of anxiety. What was going to happen to himself? What was going to happen to Stanislaus Cripps? Armed with those weapons, the use of which he did not understand, Ka-Ra was like a madman with a loaded revolver in his hand. Quite unprepared—never suspecting what had happened—Stanislaus Cripps might be caught and killed.

As these gloomy thoughts were passing through his mind, Jim began to struggle in an attempt to release himself from his bonds. Then, when the futility of his efforts was dawning upon him, a shadow passed across the mouth of the conning tower. Looking up, he saw a great face peering down at him. One of the Falta was there. Then he heard a voice—a low, twittering whisper.

"Fear not, O Shining One, I am come to release you. It is Gra who speaks!"

Help at Hand!

JIM could have shouted with joy as he heard that friendly, twittering voice and recognised Gra's features.

"I waited a long time, O Shining One! The Hairy One bade me catch the Flying Thing, but when I had caught it, and would have brought it to him, he had vanished. I began to think that I should never look upon his face again."

Having voluntarily proffered his loyal devotion to Stanislaus Cripps, Gra had apparently remained faithful to his vow. Here was an ally whom Jim needed badly.

"Where is the Kru Ka-Ra?" he inquired.

"He is just below, O Shining One, talking to the Falta. He has many words, and they make my comrades mad."

"What is he talking about, Gra?"

"He says that he will capture the Hairy One—that presently he will make the Falta masters of the Kru. He is telling them that the Kru shall work for the Falta, and that they shall be lords of the Inner Cavern as they are of the Outer Cavern."

"You don't believe him, do you, Gra?"

Something that bore a faint resemblance to a smile twisted the corners of the Falta's cavernous mouth.

"I have seen the might of the Hairy One. Did he not breathe on our god, and lo! he was no more? Has he not the Powers of Sleep and Death in his hands? Who can stand against him?"

"No one, O Gra!" Jim retorted stoutly.

"In the end Ka-Ra will pay for his treachery. Sooner or later the Hairy One will come with destruction in his hand, and woe to

the foolish Falta who have listened to this man's words."

"I know it, O Shining One," Gra answered. "I have said it even to my comrades. But they will not listen to me. They are mad with the Kru's words. So angry were they with me that they would have fallen on me, so I held my peace."

Jim recognised the wisdom of this cautious behaviour, for if anything were to happen to Gra he would be left without one single friend in his desperate predicament.

"That is well, Gra. The Hairy One will do you great honour for your wisdom. Let neither Ka-Ra nor the other Falta know what you think. Listen to what they say, and keep it in your mind."

"It shall be even as the Shining One wishes."

There was just one other matter which Jim felt ought to be dealt with before he considered his own personal convenience. Somehow, Ka-Ra must be deprived of the revolver which, in his inexperienced hand, might be the cause of terrible slaughter.

"Listen carefully to what I have to say, Gra. This Ka-Ra has stolen one of the shining instruments that I wore in my belt. It contains great magic which only the Hairy One and myself understand. The magic may get loose and destroy you and your comrades. You must secure it for me, Gra."

Jim gave a detailed description of the revolver, particularly impressing upon Gra not to hold it, except by either end, for fear that his clumsy fingers might touch the trigger. Gra thrust both his arms down the companion-way, almost completely filling the circular aperture. His fingers groped in the pilot-house like the tentacles of an enormous octopus.

"Shall I not catch him and kill him, O Shining One? I have but to squeeze him between my hands like that, and he will be no more!"

Those huge hands came together with a squeezing motion. Jim had an unpleasant picture of Ka-Ra being pressed to death.

"No, Gra. The Hairy One does not want bloodshed. He hates to kill. Get me just this instrument for which I ask. You can pluck it from his belt when no one is looking. Now loosen this thing that binds my hands."

He turned himself over as he spoke, and the next moment he felt those fumbling fingers fasten on the sash with which his hands were bound. There was a wrench, a rending sound, and he was free. Gra had not troubled to undo the knots; he had merely torn the tough material apart as if it were made of paper!

Jim sprung to his feet with a sigh of relief. As he did so, Gra disappeared abruptly from the aperture above. Somewhat puzzled by his sudden disappearance, Jim cautiously climbed the ladder. His head was just on a level with the deck, when he saw Ka-Ra approaching the opening.

Jim ducked quickly, but it was too late. The Kru had seen him, and realising instinctively the dangers that threatened all his

plans if one who understood the mysteries of the Flying Submarine were to escape, he acted with commendable promptitude.

Risking a broken neck, Ka-Ra sprang into the opening, and, striking Jim on the shoulders with his feet, came down on to the floor of the pilot-house with his arms gripping the boy tightly. Half dazed as he was by the fall, Jim struggled valiantly.

It was a strange contest that took place in that confined space. Owing to the diving-dress it was quite impossible for Ka-Ra to do Jim any real damage. On the other hand, the boy was not strong enough to stand up to a powerful man like the Kru.

The struggle resolved itself into an attempt on Ka-Ra's part to hold the boy's arms to his side and prevent the other's lusty kicks by lying on his legs.

Twice he obviously thought he had mastered Jim, for he rose to his feet, only to find that the shining figure on the ground was still very much alive. The combat might have ended in the exhaustion of Ka-Ra had not something utterly unexpected happened.

As Jim rose to his feet for the third time, and made a lunge at Ka-Ra's head with his gauntleted right, the Kru snatched the revolver from the belt about his waist. The fact that he held it the wrong way round did not give Jim any confidence.

In a flash the boy realised what would be the effect of the explosion of one of those powerful oxygen cartridges in such confined surroundings. The pilot-house might be wrecked and the delicate controls of the Flying Submarine's machinery irretrievably ruined. Even the certainty of Ka-Ra's destruction would hardly be compensation for such a disaster.

Jim acted swiftly. As luck would have it, he was standing just on the threshold of the spiral stairs. As Ka-Ra, with one finger dangerously near the trigger, presented the butt of the weapon at him with a glow of vicious triumph in his dark eyes, Jim flung up his arms and, acting to perfection the part of one who had been struck by the magic of that weapon, hurled himself backwards down the stairs.

His body struck the bend, cannoned off the railing, and continued its bumping course downwards. In vain he tried to catch the rail to stay his fall. His head, in its loose-fitting headpiece, rattled like a dried pea in a pod. Stars danced before his eyes. He cried out despairingly at the top of his voice. Then there was a final crash, and darkness settled down upon his brain!

The Submarine Concealed.

FROM the head of the staircase, Ka-Ra peered down into the darkness. The electric light had been switched off. Nothing was visible. His enemy had been sent hurtling down that abyss by the magic of the Hairy One. He had tested the efficiency of the magic.

Had not the Shining One withstood all his efforts to render him helpless until he had pointed that wonderful instrument at him? Then, of a sudden, he had grown powerless and, with a shriek, had vanished into the bowels of the Flying Thing—into that pit of darkness—where Ka-Ra—who, like all the Kru, was intensely superstitious—had no intention of following him. It was enough that he had proved the value of the great power of which he was now the possessor.

But there was one fly in the ointment of his content. The Shining One, from whom he had hoped to extract the secret of the Flying Thing by the simple process of depriving him of food and drink until he gave the desired information, had vanished, never, he was convinced, to return again. How, then, was he to obtain this secret?

It was a difficult problem, and its solution was not without a grave personal risk to himself, he realised. Ka-Ra had made many promises to the Falta; they were to have the secret of the Flying Thing, and to become masters of the Inner Cavern. If he couldn't deliver the goods, there would certainly be trouble for himself.

The Falta were like children, easily influenced by someone of greater intelligence and stronger character; but, also like children, they were susceptible to gusts of passion if they were crossed or disappointed. They would think nothing of taking him and plucking him limb from limb if he should in any way fail them.

Leaning against the wall of the pilot-house, Ka-Ra debated with himself the dark problems of his future. How to get the secret of the Flying Thing's magic.

There was only one other who knew it, and that was the Hairy One. Obviously, therefore, he must somehow get the Hairy One into his power. But the Hairy One was armed with the same magic weapons as himself, and, being more expert in their management, might use them first, in which case, Ka-Ra realised, he would come to a quick and sticky end.

It was a situation that demanded strategy. He must keep the Falta in ignorance of the annihilation of the lesser Shining One, and devise some plan for getting hold of the Hairy One.

He had seen the Hairy One with his head-piece off, and he was intelligent enough to realise that in that situation the man could be attacked like any other man—that without his armour he was vulnerable.

For the better part of an hour Ka-Ra stood there, communing with himself, and then, with a rather nervous glance at that black hole in the floor down which Jim had disappeared, he climbed the ladder on to the deck.

Some twenty of the Falta were seated cross-legged on the great shining curves of the Flying Submarine, their combined weight keeping the great vessel on the ground. Ka-Ra turned and addressed them.

"Know, O Falta, that I have overcome the Shining One. I have imprisoned him where

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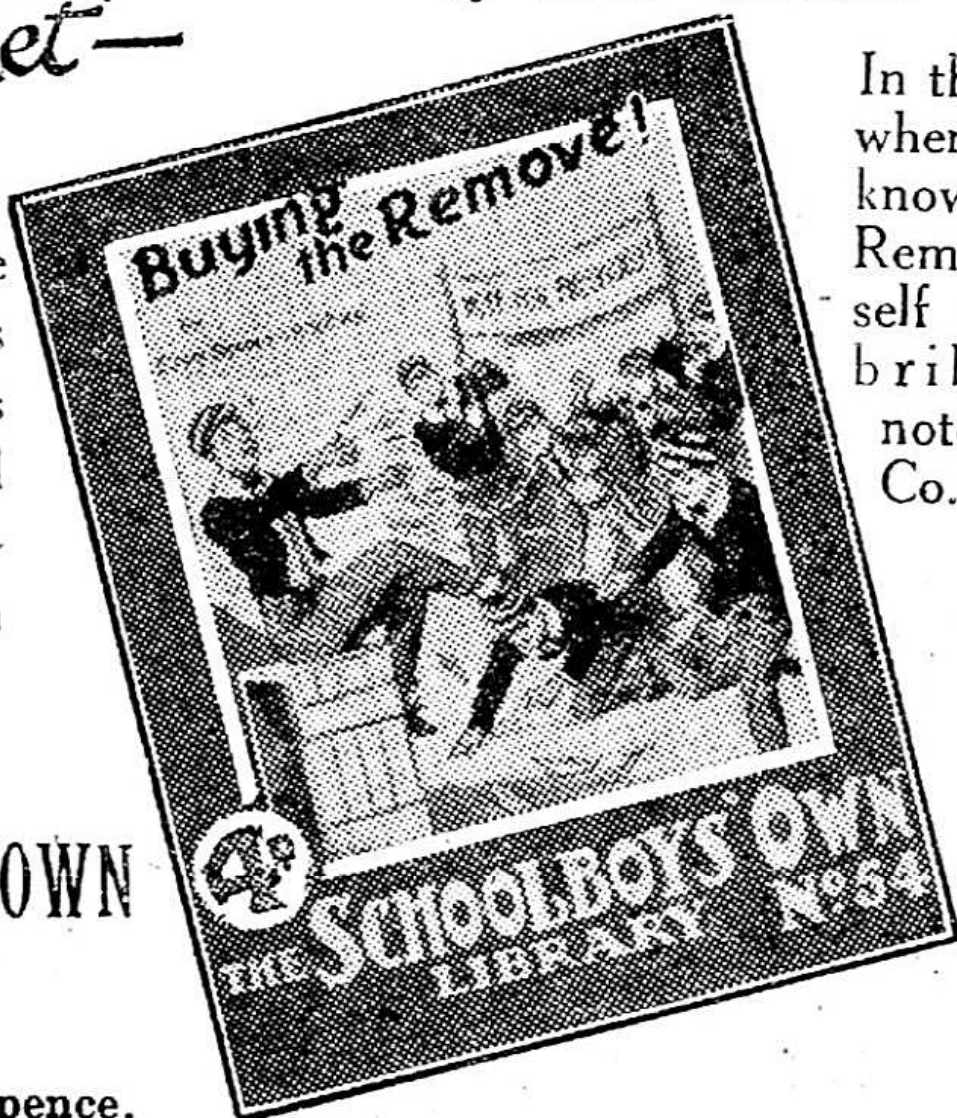
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he will remain until he tells the secret of this Flying Thing. Meanwhile, O Falta, we must be up and doing. There is yet the Hairy One that we must take captive."

He had cunningly reflected that if Stanislaus Cripps came out into the Outer Cavern, and the Flying Submarine were to be allowed to float at her moorings, he would see her, and exert himself to get possession of her. It was also possible that he might catch sight of her lying on the ground.

The obvious thing to do was to conceal the Flying Submarine, and this could be done effectively by utilising some of the huge boulders with which the floor of the cavern was strewn.

He issued his orders in that imperious tone to which he had been quick to discover these childlike giants readily submitted. While their comrades kept the Flying Submarine in position, others began to pile together some of the great boulders that lay about. As each Falta was capable of lifting unaided a mass of rock weighing four or five tons the work proceeded apace.

Very soon a kind of vast, elongated cairn began to rise up above the shining sides of the Flying Submarine. Under Ka-Ra's directions they built this pile with two sloping sides, making the base sufficiently wide to enable them to clamber up with their burdens when the rising tide of rock had got beyond their reach.

Soon those seated astride on the deck of the submarine were able to assist in the work. At the end of an hour a pyramid of stone, over three hundred feet high, had been erected about the Flying Submarine. Ka-Ra viewed the result with satisfaction. The Flying Thing was completely hidden, and also it was no longer able to float up into the air.

"That is well, O Falta!" he exclaimed. "Rest now and eat, for before long the work to which we have set our hands must be accomplished!"

Ka-Ra's Plan!

THE Falta brought out their cooking-pots, lit the fires, and prepared their mess of boiled fish, shovelling great handfuls of the food into their cavernous mouths, and expressing their amusement at Ka-Ra's comparatively small performance by little twittering sounds. When they had finished, Ka-Ra, climbing half-way up the pile that hid the Flying Submarine, once more addressed them.

"There is only one enemy left that you need fear, O Falta, and that is the Hairy One. He has, even as I have, the two magic weapons of Sleep and Death. We must secure them. We must take him captive."

The Falta nodded their great heads as if approving of this suggestion. Only one of them ventured to voice an objection.

"But if he uses the weapons of Sleep and Death, it will go ill with us, O Kru!"

"True. But I have thought of that, O Falta. Not one of you shall suffer from the magic. I will show you a way by which all can be accomplished without any risk."

He folded his arms across his chest.

"The Hairy One is a great boaster. With my own ears I heard him say that he would make the Falta the slaves of the Kru. You were to work for the Kru, O Falta—toiling and sweating, while they, your masters, lived in idleness."

A cry like the screaming of myriad seagulls arose from the giants seated on their haunches on the ground below him. Ka-Ra realised that the temperature of the meeting was rising, and that was exactly what he desired. He must feed their passions to white heat so that they could get rid of their fears.

"And what answer have you to this boaster? Are you to slave for the Kru? Are you, who are masters of the Outer Cavern, to toil and sweat for those whom you could crush with one hand? This Hairy One seeks your destruction. But I will show you a way by which all his boasting shall be brought to nought."

"Tell us what we must do, O Kru!" one of his audience exclaimed.

"It is a very cunning plan that I have formed," explained Ka-Ra. "This is what you must do. You will go, all of you, to within one hundred paces of the entrance to the Inner Cavern. There you will be safe from the liquid fire should any of the Kru attempt to attack you.

"When you have arrived at this spot, you may throw yourselves on your knees on the ground and abase yourselves. Be sure there will be some who will go to the Hairy One and tell him what the Falta are doing. He will think that you are humbled—that you are prepared to become his slaves. And he is so boastful—so sure of the might of his magic—that he will come out to you and speak to you."

Again that twittering cry rose in the air.

"You will let him draw near, O Falta. You will utter humble words. You will call him Master. You will tell him that his enemies are your enemies—that hereafter you will be content to let his foot rest upon your necks."

A look of diabolical amusement crept into Ka-Ra's face.

"Then, when he is sure that you are his slaves, and he has approached near enough, you will seize him swiftly, and remove from the belt about his waist the magic weapons that he carries there. Then you will bring him to me, and I will deal with him!"

The Falta showed their approval of his proposed strategy by beating the ground with the flats of their hands.

"It shall be done, Ka-Ra!" one of the Falta exclaimed. "Little is your body, but great is your wisdom!"

"Then go, Falta, and do as I have bid you. I will stay here, and you will bring me the Hairy One, when you have seized him!"

He made as if to descend from the pile of boulders. Instantly one of the giants rose and stepped forward.

"Why should the Kru, who has given us so freely of his wisdom, trouble to climb down when I can lift him?"

It was Gra who spoke. Ka-Ra, gratified by this illustration of the personal authority he had imposed upon the giants, instantly stood still. Gra reached out one enormous hand and, clasping Ka-Ra about the waist, gently raised him from the boulder on which he stood. The Falta then set him on the ground. At the same time, unnoticed by Ka-Ra himself, or any of the other assembled giants, Gra's disengaged hand closed about the revolver the Kru carried at his waist. The next moment he had taken the weapon and hidden it in the folds of the cloth that he wore about his massive loins!

(Will the Falta succeed in capturing Stanislaus Cripps? And what has happened to Jim? You'll thoroughly enjoy next week's exciting instalment—don't miss it, whatever you do!)



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The S. F. L.

Everything is going very smoothly with the League. It is advancing wonderfully. Congratulations to all the loyal chums who are putting their backs into the work!

Joining the Police.

C. B. (South Wales) wants to join the police. What do I think? I doubt if he could do better. My correspondent is right for age and weight. He should apply at the nearest headquarters.

Training a Dog.

H. F. (East Cowes) has a dog three months old, and asks how he shall train it to be a companion. The answer is, make it a companion; the dog will readily respond. H. F. must keep the dog with him, feed it himself, and be very chary of punishment, even when it makes mistakes.

A League Cap.

Allan Neilson, Hassall Street, Harris Park, N.S.W., Australia, has thought of a topping idea for a League cap, and sends me a sketch of this. He is convinced such a cap would be a success. It is simple in style—blue ground, red circle, and red lettering on a white panel. Like some others, this supporter has found it beyond him to answer all correspondents. By the way, a correspondence club has been started in his area, and is doing well.

A Question of Friendship.

A South African chum writes me a rather bitter letter about some of his disappointments. Friends have not played up as he wanted. He has been let down here and there; promises have been broken like piecrust and so on. But that is the way of the world—or a section of it, at least. I hope he will make a few more allowances, steel himself to worry, and see the best in things.

How a Tumbler Flies.

In reply to a Todmorden chum who keeps tumbler pigeons, a tumbler can fly (with a favourable wind) 150 miles in the hour.

A Gallery.

Tom Jones (Bradford) wants a portrait and a biographical feature each week about Mr. Brooks' famous group of characters, their tastes and hobbies, etc., with details of their homes. Interesting, but no space at the moment.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

John D. Cope, 30, Main Street, Stapenhill, Secretary of the Burton-on-Trent and District St. Frank's League Club, wishes to correspond with other secretaries of clubs within a fifteen-mile radius, and other readers. All letters answered.

R. Russell, 150b, Union Street, Waterloo, London, S.E.1, has back numbers of "N. L. L." for sale.

J. Turner, 14, East Street, Bridport, Dorset, wishes to hear from readers in his district.

A. R. Jones, 43, Tennyson Street, Battersea, London, S.W.8, wants to hear from cricket clubs in his area to arrange fixtures.

V. Denton, 43, Middle Street, The Avenue, Southampton, wishes to hear from readers in his district.

M. Bladon, 88, Ruston Street, Ladywood, Birmingham, wishes to correspond with readers overseas, age about fifteen, who are keen on stamps and picture postcards; would like to correspond with French readers interested in cigarette cards.

Vaughan Starsmeave, 20, Finchley Road, Walworth, London, S.E.17, wishes to hear from readers in Sheerness and Walworth.

(Continued on next page.)

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(Continued from previous page.)

Lewis Sidney Davies, 11, Railway Terrace, Shiarburn Hill, Co. Durham, wishes to hear from readers interested in music.

Allen Neilson, Hassall Street, Harris Park, N.S.W., Australia, wishes to hear from readers within a radius of twenty miles of Sydney for the purpose of forming a sports club.

Cyril D. Rawlings, 71, Abinger Road, Deptford, London, S.E.8, wishes to hear from a club or from readers in his area.

Charles Daniel, The Guildhall, High Street, Worcester, wishes to hear from readers interested in the South Sea Islands, also in story writing.

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