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THE SCHOOLBOY FIRE-FIGHTERS!

The Boys of St. Frank's
in a quick-action, long
complete story of
school-life adventure.

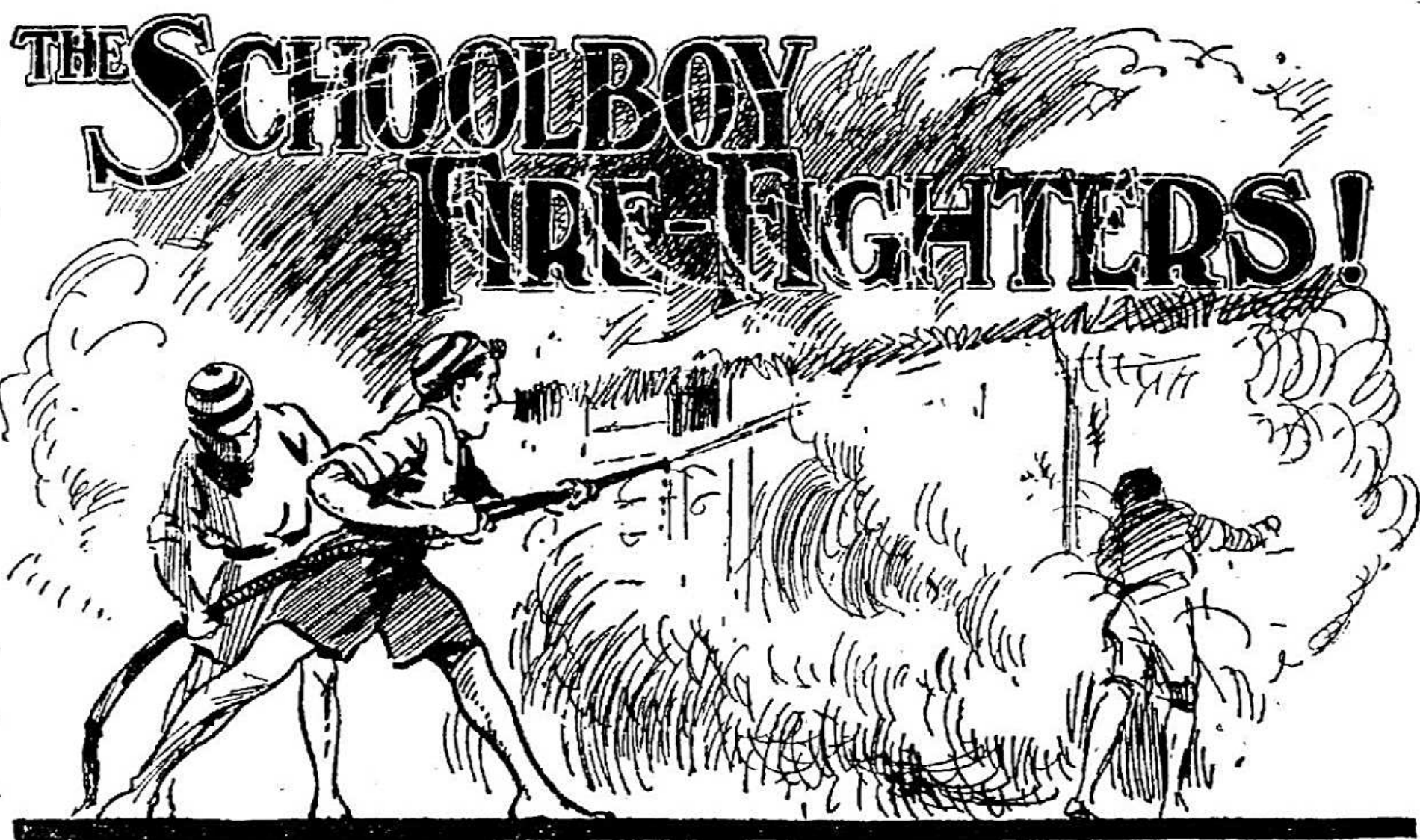
New Series No. 58.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

June 11th, 1927.



Suddenly there came a flash of lightning that seemed to crackle and hiss ; the trunk of the old oak tree splintered into fragments as though it had exploded. The juniors who had been sheltering under it from the storm were flung to the ground, dazed and half stunned. " Come on—we've got to get out of this ! " shouted Nipper.

The Blaze in the Storm!Thrills at St. Frank's!

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

*An exciting long complete story of school-life,
featuring the Fresh Air Fiends and the mysterious
Sir Lucian Dexter.*

CHAPTER 1.

Handforth's Latest!

"COME on!" said Handforth briskly. "Don't lag behind, you chaps!"

"Yes, but look here——"

"I don't want any arguments, Walter Church!" interrupted Handforth. "You fellows have got to obey orders, and if you don't toe the line, I'll jolly well——"

"Oh, all right!" broke in Church. "Have it your own way. It's too hot to argue!"

"It's too hot for almost anything this afternoon," said McClure, fanning himself.

The famous chums of Study D in the Ancient House at St. Frank's were walking across the meadows from the Open Air Camp to St. Frank's. The June afternoon was oppressively hot—indeed, irritatingly hot. Most of the fellows had a feeling that a change was near at hand. This heat was unusual.

There was not a breath of wind, and

although the sun shone from a cloudless sky, there was a curiously brazen hardness in the heavens. The whole countryside brooded in the sweltering calm.

Strictly speaking, this was the first day of the new term, and all the St. Frank's boys should have been in their respective Houses. But there were some exceptions—notably the occupants of the Open Air Camp, down by the River Stowe.

This camp had been organised under the auspices of Lady Honoria Dexter—the wife of Sir Lucian Dexter, the noted archæologist. The fact that Sir Lucian was a governor of the school, and the added fact that Lady Honoria was the Head's sister, had greatly influenced Dr. Stafford in consenting to the arrangement. His sister was a forceful woman, and she had had her way, in spite of the Head's objections.

And she still continued to have her way.

Those boys who had joined the Open Air Society were allowed to remain in camp.

But Dr. Stafford put his foot down on an increase in the membership. Lots of fellows wanted to join up, now that school had started again. But this ruse was too thin to work. Only the original members could remain in camp.

Church and McClure were somewhat irritable. Handforth was in one of his active moods, and no afternoon could have been more inappropriate for activity.

"It might help things a bit if you'll tell us what the game is," said Church wearily. "What are we supposed to be doing, Handy? What are we going to the school for?"

"Ropes," said Handforth absently.

"What?"

"Yes, we shall need ropes, of course," went on Edward Oswald. "A pick-axe might be useful, too. And we ought to have a supply of candles."

"Candles?" repeated McClure, staring. "What the dickens are you talking about? What do we want candles for? Isn't the sunlight enough for you?"

Handforth came to a halt.

"Look here, you fatheads!" he said gruffly, "I wasn't going to tell you anything about it, but I can see that I shan't get any peace unless I do. We're going treasure hunting!"

"We're going what?" asked Church and McClure in one voice.

"Treasure-hunting."

"Treasure-hunting!"

"Hunting," said Handforth, "for treasure."

"You silly ass!" roared Church. "How the dickens can we hunt for treasure when there isn't any treasure? What bee have you got in your bonnet now?"

"I don't wear bonnets," said Handforth coldly.

"It's those old Roman coins!" said McClure, taking a deep breath. "I've been fearing something of this sort for days. I thought he'd forgotten all about the giddy affair—but our luck's out!"

Handforth regarded his chums frigidly.

"You don't show much enthusiasm," he said with a frown. "I didn't tell you anything about it because I was afraid you'd get excited."

"We're raving!" said Church, with heavy sarcasm.

"We're so excited that we're dazed," added McClure. "Think how glorious it will be to find this treasure, and become millionaires. We can all buy Rolls-Royces, and you can give your Austin Seven to young Willy—"

"Don't be a chump," interrupted Handforth. "We haven't found the treasure yet. But Roman gold is as good as any other gold, and there's tons of it buried in the neighbourhood."

"Tons of it?" said Church.

"Tons!"

"Oh, well, if you know, we won't argue," said McClure. "But how do you get at it? And, if it comes to that, I don't believe those Roman coins are made of gold at all."

"We know that Sir Lucian is after the treasure—and I've made up my mind to ter-

stall him," said Handforth, lowering his voice. "That's the idea. We're going to find this treasure, and startle the world! I've got it all planned out."

"In that case we might as well give our orders for the expensive luxuries we're going to buy," said Church carelessly. "I think I'll have a new bike to start with."

"I want a good camera," said McClure. "None of your cheap things—but a fifty-guinea camera, with all the latest improvements. I think I'll have a saxophone, too. I've always wanted to learn the saxophone, and a good one costs about thirty-five quid."

Handforth was so astonished by this statement that he unclenched his fists.

"Thirty-five quid?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"For a saxophone?"

"Of course."

"My only hat!" said Handforth. "Do you mean to say people pay thirty-five quid for those rotten things? Why, it's dotty! I thought you could get 'em for fifteen bob!"

"According to the noise they make, they ought to be given away," said Church. "In fact, if there was any justice in the world, the manufacturers ought to pay people thirty-five quid to take 'em away."

"I'm glad you reveal a spark of sense now and again," said Handforth approvingly. "But why the dickens are we talking about saxophones? We're going treasure-hunting this afternoon, and that's that."

There was such an air of finality in Handforth's tone that his chums refrained from arguing. Of course, the whole thing was ridiculous, but to tell Handforth so would be worse than useless.

Over a week had passed since Edward Oswald had picked up those queer old Roman coins, and his chums had congratulated themselves on the fact that he had forgotten them.

And here he was, without warning, bent upon a treasure hunt!

Sir Lucian Dexter was undoubtedly keenly interested in antiquities in general, and in Roman relics in particular. And it was a further fact that the St. Frank's district was rich in ancient Roman associations. Nobody had taken much note of it, however, until just recently.

Sir Lucian had been acting rather mysteriously ever since he had come to stay at the school—his visit coinciding with Lady Honora's activities in the Open Air camp. While the good lady occupied herself with the camp, Sir Lucian pottered about, doing all sorts of unaccountable things.

He had been particularly overjoyed when a charabanc had fallen into a concealed cavity in one of Farmer Holt's meadows, seriously injuring several of the occupants. Lest Sir Lucian may appear callous, it must be explained that he was interested in the result of the accident, and not in the accident itself.

Four of those unfortunate men—and they were toughs of the worst type—were even now in the school sanatorium, recovering.

The charabanc itself had been salvaged and removed.

But the cavity in Farmer Holt's meadow remained.

The affair had happened on Bank Holiday, while the party of men had been fooling about. Driving the heavy motor-coach recklessly over the meadow, the ground had suddenly caved in, and the vehicle had shot straight down into the earth, carrying all its occupants with it.

Farmer Holt had always believed that meadow to consist of solid ground. In all probability, Mr. Holt's predecessors for many hundreds of years had believed in the solidity of that meadow, too. It had required a half-drunk party of trippers and a charabanc to explode the illusion.

Actually, there was a rich hoard of Roman relics hidden beneath the turf. Sir Lucian, who was learned in such matters, declared that he had discovered the tomb of a Roman governor who had ruled in Early Britain in the second or third century.

On the day of the accident, Handforth had picked up some dull old coins—obviously of authentic Roman origin—down in that supposed tomb. But until to-day he had made no mention of them, and his chums had almost forgotten the incident.

The fact was, Handforth had been very busy.

There had been one or two cricket matches during the week. The glorious weather had persisted, and there had been so many outings arranged and carried out that there had been no time for bothering with fusty old Roman relics.

And Sir Lucian had been quiet, too. Nobody had seen much of him, and this very inactivity of his had caused the juniors to forget.

But to-day, St. Frank's had returned to school, and there was a sort of lull. Handforth, scouting round for something to do, had suddenly remembered those old coins and the tomb in Farmer Holt's meadow.

"Of course, we shall need supplies," said Handforth, as they approached the school. "There might be tunnels stretching over that meadow, and we want to be well prepared. So we've got to take ropes and pick-axes, shovels, lanterns and things."

"Oh, rather!" said Church. "Wouldn't it be a good idea to take a few scaffold poles, in case the roof starts falling in? And we ought to have some barrows, so that we can shift the debris."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "You chaps can be sarcastic if you like, but you'll be surprised later on. You've only to follow my lead, and you'll have your names in the London papers. We're not going to let Sir Lucian Dexter get all the credit."

"Oh, well, I suppose you're right, Handy," said Church. "Now I come to think of it, this is a jolly good idea of yours. In fact, it's a brain-wave."

"I'm glad you admit it," said Handforth, nodding.

"It ought to be cool down in that old tunnel place," went on Church, fanning himself. "Phew! Anything to get a bit of relief! I say, I believe there's going to be a thunder-storm."

Handforth looked at the sky and scoffed.

"You hopeless cuckoo!" he said. "There's no sign of rain at all! This is just the ordinary June weather."

"All right, we shall see," said Church. "But if there isn't a big change by to-morrow I shall be surprised. Look at the haze over there, towards Edgemore."

"I'm looking at something else," said Handforth darkly.

"And feel how the air quivers——"

"Bother the air!" said Handforth. "My minor's coming this way—and he's got that five-bob-look on his face! By George! If he starts any of that rot with me to-day I'll soon settle his hash!"



CHAPTER 2.

Five Pounds Reward !

HANDFORTH was a bad prophet, for his minor not only refrained from "touching" Edward Oswald for five shillings, but he actually offered his major a pound.

"I've been lucky," he explained. "Two or three chaps came back from the hols. bulging with money, and they paid up their debts. If you're in need of a quid, Ted, just say the word."

Handforth found some difficulty in speaking.

"Are you offering to lend me a quid?" he asked, at length.

"Yes; but you needn't look frightened."

"Frightened, you young ass!" roared Handforth. "I'm startled! In fact, I don't believe you mean it!"

"Of course I mean it," said Willy coolly. "You see, Ted, if I lend you a quid, I'm always certain of getting it back, and it'll make it easier for me to wangle five bob now and again, when I get on the rocks. There's nothing like being prepared well in advance."

Handforth waved his minor aside.

"I wouldn't demean myself by borrowing your money," he said loftily. "I don't mind you touching me, but I'm blessed if I'll touch you! After all, it's an elder brother's privilege to tip his minor now and again."

Willy grinned.

"I wish you were as reasonable as this at other times, Ted," he said. "Still, I've got two witnesses here, and they'll support me the next time I want some cash. I'm just off to camp, to round up those slacking chums of mine. We've got to make our tent taut and snug, in readiness."

"In readiness for what?"

"The storm, of course," said Willy. "Can't you see there's a storm coming, or are you blind?"

"He's blind," said Church wearily. "I've told him the same thing, but he won't listen. Strictly speaking, we ought to get back to our old quarters, and chuck this camp altogether."

Church was only voicing the feelings of many others. The Fresh Air Camp had been a great success, but "enough was as good as a feast," and the juniors were ready for a change.

"You needn't worry," said Willy. "We shall be back in our old quarters by tomorrow. I don't think there'll be much enthusiasm for the open air life after we've had a good old thunderstorm."

"There isn't going to be a thunderstorm!" snapped Handforth. "Who's the silly ass who started the rumour, anyhow?"

He walked on, and Church and McClure smiled inwardly. They were both convinced that the long spell of hot weather was about to break.

In the Ancient House lobby, Handforth paused for a moment to wipe his brow.

"By George, it's nice and cool in here," he said. "Hallo, Nick, old son! How goes it?"

Nicodemus Trotwood, of the West House, took no notice. Which wasn't surprising, for he was really Cornelius, Nick's twin brother. But he looked round when Handforth clapped him on the shoulder.

"Ah, my dear Handforth," he said. "I rather thought it was you. Have you made any endeavour to secure the five pounds reward?"

"Reward?" said Handforth. "What reward? I've heard nothing about it. What do you mean?"

"I thought you would be," said Cornelius mildly.

"Eh? Thought I would be what?"

"A fellow of your activity is naturally keen," continued Trotwood minor, who was afflicted by deafness. "I wish you luck, Handforth. I shall certainly keep my own eyes open, too."

Handforth stared.

"What's the fathead talking about?" he asked blankly. "What do you mean, you'll keep your eyes open? Explain yourself, you dummy!"

"I don't understand," said Cornelius. "Why should you refer to my tummy?"

"I didn't say tummy!" hooted Handforth. "I said dummy! My only hat! I've been talking to this deaf ass all the time, and I thought he was Nick! Why the dickens don't you two wear labels?"

"I don't think Sir Lucian would tell fables!" said Cornelius doubtfully. "This offer of five pounds is obviously genuine."

"Oh, Sir Lucian is offering the fiver, is he?" asked Church. "What for? What's he up to now, for goodness' sake?"

"Of course it's not a fake," said the deaf junior. "The notice is signed by Sir Lucian himself—"

"Oh, help!" groaned Church. "You're a good chap, Corny, but life's too short. We'll have a look at the notice for ourselves."

They went to the baize-covered board, and,

sure enough there was a neatly-written notice affixed there by two drawing-pins. Cornelius had made them curious, and they were both grinning within the next minute.

"What price Handy's treasure-hunt now?" asked Church softly.

"Eh?" said Handforth, pushing up. "What do you mean?"

"Well, look at this," said McClure.

Handforth looked at the notice, and his eyes opened wider:

"£5 REWARD."

"Inadvertently, and owing to a worn pocket, the writer has lost a number of antique Roman coins. These may possibly have been dropped within the school grounds, and any boy who finds them and returns them to me will be rewarded as above."

"LUCIAN DEXTER."

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

"I hope you are!" grinned Church. "And I hope you'll give up this dotty treasure-hunt, too."

"Give it up? Why?"

"Because it's a crazy idea, of course," replied Church. "You found those coins down in that old Roman tomb, didn't you? And you naturally thought that they were part of a big hoard?"

"So they are!" declared Handforth.

"Rats!"

"Look here, you ass——"

"Sir Lucian was down in that place half an hour before you were that day, and he must have dropped the coins then," said Church. "What could be more natural? He was probably stooping about, and the coins got loose. Sir Lucian always carries relics of that sort about with him, I've heard. I expect he's been looking all over the place, and he's put this notice up as a last hope."

"Of course," said McClure. "There's no treasure at all, Handy."

Handforth was beginning to look indignant.

"Then it's a fraud!" he said thickly. "By George! I thought there was a treasure there, and it was only a few odd coins—dropped by Sir Lucian!"

"That's all," said Church happily.

"All!" hooted Handforth. "I'm dished!"

"Well, you needn't look so hurt about it," said McClure. "You've only got to take those coins to Sir Lucian, and he'll rake out a fiver. That's the kind of treasure-hunting I like!"

"Hear, hear!" agreed Church. "Five quid isn't such a bad treasure, Handy."

But Edward Oswald was disgusted. The prospect of receiving five pounds from Sir Lucian Dexter did not appease him. He had set his heart on a treasure hunt, and it now seemed that it would fizzle out.

"Well, we'd better be getting back to camp," said Church carelessly. "There's nothing to stay here for now, Handy. We're not going to fetch those supplies for the

treasure-hunt, and we might as well be thinking about tea."

"What about collecting that fiver first?" asked McClure.

"Fiver?" said three voices interestedly.

The chums of Study C had walked in—Nipper, Tommy Watson, and Tregellis-West. They all looked at Handforth with great interest.

"Did you say fiver?" asked Nipper politely. "Funds are rather low at the moment, and if there's any surplus cash knocking about—Hullo! What's this?"

He broke off to examine the notice on the board.

"Why, these are those coins that you picked up last week, Handy," he said, turning.

"Yes, I know," growled Handforth. "I thought they were part of a treasure—I thought they had been down in that old tomb place for sixteen or seventeen centuries."

"And they only fell out of Sir Lucian's pocket!" grinned McClure.

Nipper looked keen.

"Yes," he said slowly. "So it seems."

As a matter of fact, he was by no means satisfied. He said nothing to the others, but he did not accept this statement of Sir Lucian's as readily as Handforth & Co. did. He half suspected that Sir Lucian was merely attempting to draw a herring across the trail.

Those coins were, indeed, what Handforth suspected them to be—genuine Roman relics which had been undisturbed for centuries. But the clever old archæologist, in order to discourage any possible search parties, was trying to make it appear that the coins were his.

"H'm!" murmured Nipper to himself. "We shall have to keep an eye on Sir Lucian. There's still a good deal of mystery attached to his activities."

"When you've finished with day-dreaming, my lad, perhaps you'll accept this quid," said Handforth sarcastically. "I've been holding it under your nose for the last five minutes!"

Nipper started.

"Oh, sorry, Handy," he said, with a smile. "Thanks awfully. I'll pay you back as soon as the gov'nor arrives. He's bound to be here during the evening."

Many of the juniors were hard up—at least, those who had spent the holidays in camp. And Nipper was waiting until Nelson Lee arrived in order to replenish his own pocket cash.

"Well, what about collecting that fiver from Sir Lucian?" asked Church, when Handforth & Co. strolled out into the Triangle again. "Might as well have it, Handy."

But Handforth was looking very thoughtful.

"I'm not sure that we'll collect it yet," he said. "I believe there's something rummy going on."

"What do you mean—something rummy going on?"

"I can't explain," said Handforth gruffly. "But I'm not satisfied. Anyhow, before seeing Sir Lucian, I think we ought to go and have a look at the tomb again—just to make

certain. I don't see why we should be dished out of our treasure-hunt like this!"

"But, you ass, there isn't any treasure-hunt now!" said McClure, exasperated. "There's no treasure to hunt for, anyhow! Let's get back to camp, and see about some tea—"

"Blow tea!" interrupted Handforth. "I've made up my mind to—"

"Hullo!" broke in Church. "Talk of saints, and they appear! There's Sir Lucian now—making off towards the gates. Better go and collect that fiver, Handy."

Handforth glanced round, and, sure enough, Sir Lucian Dexter himself was in the act of passing through the gateway. But it was not like Handforth to take the obvious course, and to hand over those gold coins in exchange for real currency.

"No, by George!" he said tensely. "We'll follow Sir Lucian, and see where he's going! I'm jolly suspicious, my lads! The old boy is probably going off on one of his rummy jaunts again. Here's a good chance to do some investigating!"

"Yes, but we can't spy on the man—"

"It's not spying—it's ordinary detective work," interrupted Handforth. "You know as well as I do that Sir Lucian has been dodging about for weeks past—doing all sorts of mysterious things. Well, here's an opportunity to get on the track."

And there was a note of finality in Edward Oswald Handforth's voice. Church and McClure glanced at one another, shrugged their shoulders, and gave it up.



CHAPTER 3.

Handy Investigates.

HANDFORTH turned an excited face towards his chums.

"There you are!" he muttered. "What did I

tell you?"

"I don't know!" said Church wearily. "What did you tell us?"

"Why, that Sir Lucian is up to something mysterious," replied Handforth. "And here he is, prowling about Holt's Farm—trespassing, by George!"

"If it comes to that, so are we," said McClure. "We've no right on this property."

Perhaps there was some excuse for Handforth's animated condition. About twenty minutes had elapsed, and Sir Lucian Dexter was now approaching the old farmhouse. He had passed over one or two meadows, and it had been noticeable that he was particularly careful in his movements. Sir Lucian had not been exactly stealthy, but it seemed fairly obvious that he did not want to be observed. And Handforth & Co., well in the background, had been very cautious.

Sir Lucian was now on Holt's Farm, and approaching the ramshackle old house. Church and McClure did not find much thrill in the adventure, but Handforth appeared to be thoroughly enjoying it.

"It's more than likely that we shall discover something this afternoon," he said. "Anyhow, why is Sir Lucian here? What is he doing, dodging about Holt's Farm like this? Old Holt is away——"

"How do you know that?" asked McClure.

"I've heard it from two or three people," replied Handforth. "Holt's away, and the farmhouse is empty. And here's Sir Lucian Dexter, walking about the place as if he owns it!"

"Well, he's doing no harm," said McClure. "He's a queer old fish—we all know that. He's only looking for some of his relics, I suppose. He's interested in archæology, isn't he? Why make a mystery out of nothing?"

But Handforth would not listen to ordinary reason. He felt that he was on the track, and he meant to carry on. And his faithful chums could do nothing else but stick to him.

They finally came to a halt just behind a low hedge. Sir Lucian himself was now in the farmyard, and he was approaching the big, old-fashioned back door of the building. He even tried the latch, and stood there uncertainly for a few moments.

"There you are!" whispered Handforth. "He's trying to get in the place now!"

"Yes, it does seem a bit peculiar," admitted Church, peering through the hedge. "I wonder what his game can be?"

Sir Lucian was now cautiously approaching one of the windows, and he peered through it closely. After that he turned and had a look round in all directions, as though he half suspected that somebody was watching him. But he could see nothing of the three juniors as they crouched behind that protective hedge.

Apparently satisfied, Sir Lucian passed on to another window. He wasn't satisfied with merely looking through the glass of this one. He tried to open the window, shaking it vigorously. But it resisted his efforts.

"Well, this is a queer go," whispered McClure. "Sir Lucian is trying to get into the farmhouse!"

"I told you there was something squiffy about the old fellow!" said Handforth triumphantly. "It's a jolly good thing we followed him—we're getting right on the track!"

Sir Lucian was now approaching a third window—one at the very end of the building. And this one proved to be more susceptible, for after two or three efforts it swung open. Sir Lucian Dexter took another look round, then hoisted himself over the sill, and vanished within. He was careless enough to leave the window open behind him.

"Well, what do you think of that?" asked Handforth tensely. "The Head's brother-in-law! And what's he doing—that's what I'm asking you, my sons? What's he doing? Housebreaking!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Church uneasily.

"Well, you've seen with your own eyes, haven't you?" went on Handforth. "This farm belongs to old Holt, and Holt is away. And here's Sir Lucian Dexter breaking in—forcing an entry!"

"It's funny!" admitted Church, frowning.

"But I don't see that we can do anything. After all, it's not our business——"

"Never mind about that," interrupted Handforth. "You chaps wait here, and I'll do some more investigating."

"Look here, Handy——"

"I don't want any objections," said Handforth. "I'm going to creep to that window, and I'm going to get into the house. I mean to find out what Sir Lucian's game is!"

"But he'll spot you, you chump!"

"Will he?" laughed Handforth. "Don't you think I know anything about tracking? It won't take me long to get into that room, and then I'll follow Sir Lucian, and—and—— Well, I'll tell you what happens when I come back."

"How long will you be?" asked McClure.

"Not long, but you wait for me here," said Handforth. "Don't move from this spot. I'll come out again as soon as I've twigged Sir Lucian's little game."

And Handforth was off before his chums could make any further objections. In fact, they rather wanted to go with him now. When they had started following Sir Lucian, they hadn't believed for a moment that there would be any definite result. But they were now compelled to admit that there was something very strange in Sir Lucian's behaviour. It wasn't like a respectable gentleman to break into a deserted farmhouse in this way.

Handforth went at a run across the farmyard, and succeeded in getting to the window in safety. He crouched down below the sill, and cautiously raised his head. Then he peered into the room beyond.

It wasn't exactly a room, but a kind of deserted dairy—a place with wooden trestles round the walls, and with similar fixtures. There was no sign of Sir Lucian.

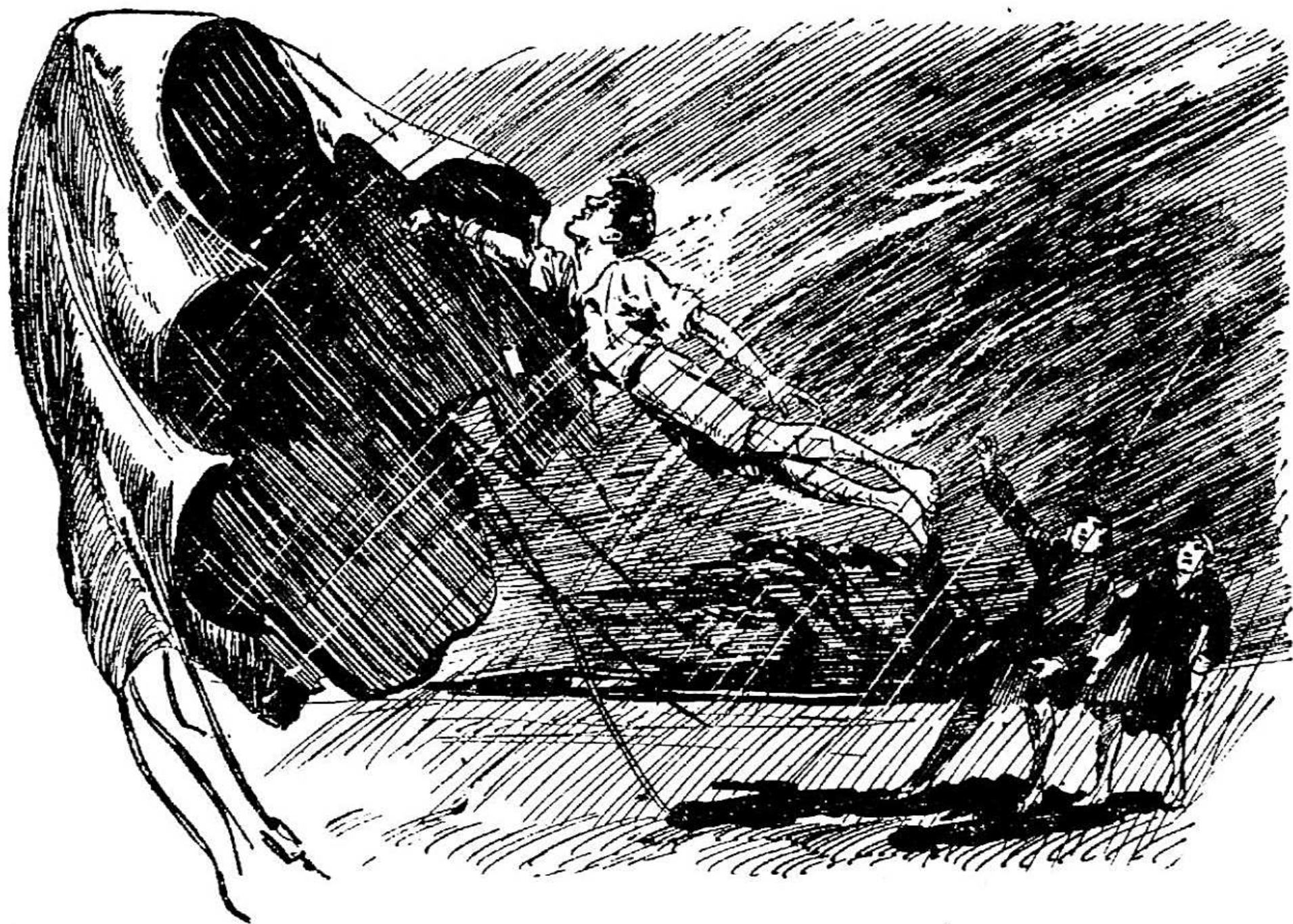
But a door, on the inner wall, stood half ajar. Obviously Sir Lucian had passed through the doorway. Handforth made up his mind quickly; he lightly vaulted over the sill, and landed within the room. He turned for a moment and waved to his chums. Then he vanished.

With cautious footsteps he approached the doorway on the far side, and found that a long, narrow passage led off into the interior of the old building. He listened for a few moments, but no sounds came to his ears.

Moving forward, Handforth found himself in semi-darkness. It was very gloomy in that passage; but it seemed to him that there was a sharp angle at the further end, and perhaps he would soon find himself in a section of the house where he would be able to get his bearings.

Like many other ancient farmhouses, this one was full of corridors and passages which seemed to branch off at erratic angles. It was easily possible to get oneself lost in a place like this.

Handforth turned off uncertainly, going down one of the many corridors. The whole house was deathly still, and there was a musty odour in the passage, as though this part of the building had been deserted for many years.



Whoosh! With a fiendish, hooting roar, a devastating gust of wind caught the loose canvas in its grip and sent the tent flying skywards like a kite—with Handy clinging helplessly to the entangled ropes!

Handforth took two or three steps forward, and then hesitated for a fraction of a second. It seemed to him that a movement had come from a recess, close against his right hand. But before he could turn round there was a sudden scuffle of feet. And then dramatically a great sack was thrown over Handforth's head and pulled down.

"Hi!" he gasped, startled. "What the —"

"Hold him!" said a deep, grim voice.

Strong arms were flung round the surprised schoolboy; it was impossible for him to fight owing to the sack. It was pulled right down, then drawn tight round his knees. And it seemed to him that ropes were placed round his middle, binding his arms to his sides. Something heavy was placed round the lower part of his face, so that his mouth was effectually gagged.

"Well, we've got him!" said a gruff voice. "Better hand him over to the police, eh?"

"Think so?" said another voice. "Isn't that a bit too risky?"

"He was housebreaking, wasn't he?" said the other. "We caught him red-handed, and it'll mean a serious charge."

"Oh, my hat!" said Handforth to himself.

He struggled, but it was useless. He had indeed been caught red-handed, and he wondered who his captors were. Two of Farmer Holt's men? It hardly seemed likely. And what of Sir Lucian Dexter? Where was he? Why didn't he come?

"Better put him down into one of the dungeons," suggested the first voice. "Let him lie there, it'll suit us better. Down into the deepest dungeon of the lot—that one with the steel-studded door. He'll never get out!"

"Yes, that'll be the best," said the other man.

And Handforth felt himself being led onwards. He was half dragged, half carried. It seemed to him that he went a tremendous way, although he did not descend many steps. And then, at last, he was flung forward, so that he lost his balance and tripped over.

As he sat there came the clang of a door, and then—silence.

Into the deepest dungeon!

It was a startling thought. Handforth was thoroughly alarmed by this time. His investigations had led him into a nice pickle! What chance was there for him? How long did these mysterious men mean to keep him a prisoner? And who were they?

For a moment Handforth hoped that Church and McClure would come to his rescue. But then he dismissed this idea. How could Church and McClure know what had become of him? And if they entered the farmhouse they would probably share the same fate as himself.

He turned over, struggling desperately. And then, with a little gasp of relief, he discovered that his bonds were not so tightly secured as he had first thought. The ropes

round the outside of the sack were loosening as he struggled. And, indeed, a couple of minutes later he managed to pull the sack completely clear, and he sat there, breathing hard.

"Well, that's done them!" he muttered breathlessly. "But I shall never be able to get out of this dungeon! If there's a steel-studded door——"

He broke off with a kind of gulp.

He had expected to find himself in total darkness, but now he saw that a few chinks of light were coming through the ancient walls. And there was a door immediately in front of him—a wooden door, with a crude, old-fashioned fastening. Handforth looked round him with a dazed expression in his eyes.

He wasn't in a dungeon at all, but in an old cowshed!

He leapt to his feet, dashed to the door and tore it open.

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

He wasn't a prisoner at all. The open daylight was there before him, and the farmyard was visible just in the distance. His mysterious captors had only fooled him—they had brought him to this cowshed so that he would soon free himself, and find that he was at liberty to go. Perhaps they had only acted in this way just to give him a scare—so that he would bolt as soon as he found that freedom was his.

At any rate, the whole affair was most unaccountable.



CHAPTER 4.

No Explanation.

HURCH moved uneasily.

"Well, the old ass has been gone a good time, hasn't he?" he murmured.

"Why doesn't he show

up, I wonder?"

"Goodness knows!" growled McClure. "But you know what he's once he starts on a thing like this. He's never satisfied. I think we'd better go to that window and get into the farmhouse ourselves. Let's go and search for him."

But just then they saw a figure at that open window. Sir Lucian Dexter was there! He looked out cautiously, and was apparently satisfied with his scrutiny. For he proceeded to close the window, and then he closed some heavy shutters inside. The two watching juniors could even hear the clatter of the iron bar as it was dropped into position.

"My hat!" said Church. "What does that mean?"

"Goodness knows!" said McClure, in a startled voice. "Handy's still inside, and his exit has now been closed. I wonder if Sir Lucian found him in there?"

"Blessed if I know!" said the other junior. "Anyhow, our own game is spoilt. We can't get in now."

They waited uncertainly. And, two or three minutes later, rather to their surprise, the back door opened. Sir Lucian came out—furtively, it seemed.

He closed the door with a slam, and immediately afterwards there came the sounds of heavy bolts being shot. Sir Lucian walked away quickly, and vanished round an angle of the building.

"I say, this is getting rummier than ever!" muttered Church. "There must be somebody else in the farmhouse, because those bolts couldn't have shot themselves. What does it mean? And where's Handy?"

They hardly knew what to do. They were anxious about their leader, and his non-return worried them. A minute later they received another surprise, for a hail suddenly came to their ears from the rear.

They turned and jumped to their feet. For there, a hundred yards away, and standing close to an old shed, was Handforth himself!

"How on earth did he get there?" asked Church blankly. "We didn't see him come out!"

"Well, never mind about that. Let's be thankful that he's out!" said McClure. "Come on! We'll get him back to the camp while he's safe!"

They hurried up to their leader, and he was looking at them queerly.

"Has anything happened?" he asked bluntly.

"Nothing much," replied Church. "Sir Lucian closed that window, and put a shutter up, and then he came out by the back door. But there must be somebody else in the farmhouse——"

"I know that!" said Handforth grimly. "The rotters! They've been having a game with me!"

And he related what had happened to him. Church and McClure listened in surprised wonder at first, but by the time Handforth had finished they were grinning.

"They must have taken me out by one of the other doors," finished Handforth. "Then they took me round, and dumped me in that giddy cowshed! I edged round, and came to look for you fellows. I thought perhaps they'd collared you, too!"

"Well, let's be thankful that it's all over!" said Church lightly. "Some of Holt's men, I expect—just having a bit of fun with you, Handy!"

Handforth started.

"Holt's men!" he echoed. "Not Joe Catchpole and those other chaps?"

"Well, you never know," said McClure.

"Rot!" snapped Handforth. "The men who did that to me were crooks. And I believe they're associated with Sir Lucian, too. I haven't finished with Holt's Farm yet. I mean to make some full investigations——"

"Oh, well, let's get back to camp," said Church hastily. "We can come here and make some investigations later on. Don't forget that we're trespassing."

And Handforth, much to his chums' relief, agreed to the proposition. They all went back towards the camp, and as they went

they discussed the mysterious events at Holt's Farm.

However, they could arrive at no satisfactory conclusion, and the subject was automatically dismissed from their minds when they unexpectedly came upon a charming figure dressed in nurse's uniform. The figure belonged to Dora Manners, and Handforth was naturally interested, since Dora was Irene's cousin. Her uniform only served to enhance her natural daintiness.

"Hallo!" said Handforth, as he raised his cap. "I thought you'd gone back home, Miss Dora! I thought you left the camp a day or two ago, practically at the end of the holidays?"

Dora laughed.

"Haven't you heard the news?" she asked. "Haven't you seen Irene lately?"

"Not for two or three days," replied Handforth. "It's good to know that you're here on a visit again——"

"But I'm not here on a visit," said Dora smilingly.

"Oh," said Edward Oswald, "then what——"

"If I please Dr. Brett with my work, I shall be at St. Frank's for good," went on Dora. "I'm the new under-nurse in the school sanatorium."

"What?" said Handforth & Co., in one voice.

"You needn't look so surprised," laughed Dora. "You knew I was a nurse, didn't you? And if I am at St. Frank's, here, I shall be quite near to Irene, and that will be very nice for both of us."

"I rather think Browne and Stevens will regard it as nice, too!" chuckled Church.

Dora blushed somewhat.

"Why should Browne and Stevens be pleased?" she asked carelessly. "I don't see that it concerns them!"

And she passed on, rather embarrassed.

Handforth & Co. chuckled to themselves. William Napoleon Browne and Horace Stevens, of the Fifth, were members of the Fresh Air Society, and of late they had been rather subdued. In fact, they had only joined the camp because Dora Manners had been with the girls' party. But since Dora's retirement, with the other girls, Browne and Stevens had felt that life was somewhat dull.

As it happened, the chums of Study D encountered the two Fifth-Formers only five minutes later, just as they were entering camp. They lost no time in imparting the information about Dora.

"This is glad tidings indeed!" said Browne heartily. "To-morrow evening, Brother Horace, we shall have Sister Dora in our study to tea. I trust she will accept a formal invitation——"

"Hold on!" interrupted Stevens. "I suppose you mean an invitation to our tent, in camp?"

"No, Brother Horace," said Browne firmly. "We have left the camp."

"Have we?" said Stevens. "I didn't know——"

"Definitely and positively, we have resigned," said Browne. "The camp is no place for us, Brother Horace. We will let these juniors carry on the good work unaided. We are required at the helm of the Fifth. Am I not the skipper? Can my services be spared? Think of the ruin that will result if the guiding hand is absent."

Handforth & Co. grinned.

"Yes, we know all about it," said Handforth. "I was jolly certain that you chaps would resign as soon as you heard that Dora was at the school. You funny bounders! What a terrible thing it is to be in love!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Church and McClure.

"You silly young asses!" roared Stevens, turning red.

"Let them have their simple jokes, Brother Horace," murmured Browne. "After all, why should we deny them this pleasure? This evening we resume our normal life. School, after all, has its own manifest attractions."

"By jingo, rather!" said Stevens as he thought of Dora. "Attractions is the right word!"



CHAPTER 5.

The Calm Before the Storm.

THE evening was even more oppressively hot than the day had been.

The river looked like a sheet of glass, and the sky was of a dull, flat, bronze hue. There was still no wind, and there was no sign of a cloud. The sun blazed down with sweltering heat, but it was an unhealthy-looking sun—an angry, sinister orb.

"I'm not sure about the weather," said the Hon. Douglas Singleton, who was strolling about the camp with one or two other juniors. "Looks threatening to me."

"You're all dotty!" said Handforth, as he glanced at the heavens. "It's a bit oppressive, but that's nothing. You mark my words, there'll be no change for days."

But there were not many fellows who agreed with him. And when it was time for turning in nobody felt sleepy. The evening had advanced, but that ominous calmness continued. Nobody in camp felt like turning in.

There was an oppressive feeling in the air, a sensation of impending disaster. Over in the West, where the sun had disappeared, a low line of clouds had appeared. They were not ordinary clouds, but a black, impenetrable mass.

Now and again the air seemed to perceptibly quiver. At times a little rustle would be heard in the willows—an uneasy stirring of the leaves. And as the night came down over the brooding countryside, there was none of the usual evening coolness. The air remained stifling.

"Hear that?" said Nipper, as he stood in front of his tent.

"Sounded like an explosion, miles away," said Watson.

"It was thunder," replied Nipper.

"Begad, I'm afraid we're in for a frightful storm, dear old boys," said Sir Montie uneasily. "If it does happen to come over this way, we shall know all about it. We shall, really. It won't be any ordinary summer storm."

"Well, there's no need to worry," said Nipper. "All the tents are snug, and we're not afraid of a downpour. I shall welcome some rain, as far as that's concerned. Anything to relieve this heat."

Even Handforth was beginning to lose his obstinacy.

"Well, what about your fine weather now?" asked Church when that heavy bank of cloud had risen higher until it seemed like a solid mass of mountains on the horizon. "Are you still certain about the elements now, Handy?"

"There might be a storm," admitted Handforth grudgingly. "But I don't suppose it'll be much. Just one of those summer showers, you know. I'm turning in, anyhow. No sense in losing sleep."

But the interior of the tent was like an oven, and after five minutes of restless tossing about on his camp-bed, Handforth came out again. Huge beetles were droning about in the air like miniature aeroplanes, and wherever there was a light, countless moths were fluttering.

Darkness was coming rapidly now—a sinister sort of darkness. And those distant rumbles were becoming more pronounced. Nobody could detect any actual thunder yet, but all the occupants of the camp were beginning to realise that this night would probably prove memorable.

"Well, I wish it would hurry up," said Handforth. "If there's going to be a storm, why doesn't it break?"

"When it does come, we shall have plenty to do," said Pitt as he strolled past with Jack Grey. "Coming down to the river? Jack and I are just going to have a dip."

"That's a good idea," said Handforth.

A good many of the fellows indulged in a bathe. It was one way of passing time, for it had been mutually agreed that nobody should turn in until the storm had passed. Sleep was out of the question.



CHAPTER 6.

In the Thick of It.

BOOM-OOM-OOM!

Startlingly, unexpectedly, a crashing peal of thunder broke out from somewhere in the distance.

The juniors had just dried themselves on the river bank, having been forced ashore by a sudden descending of almost complete darkness. The last glow of the summer's day had gone, and the night sky was inky.

"That's rummy!" said Watson. "There wasn't any lightning!"

"We didn't see any, but there can't be thunder without lightning," said Nipper. "The storm's getting nearer, although it's still a long way off. I give it about twenty minutes."

They looked up at the Stygian sky. Imperceptibly, the clouds had reached the zenith and had already passed it. There was not a star to be seen. Overhead there was nothing but dead blackness.

"Listen!" muttered Church.

From somewhere in the distance sounded a curious rustling noise. It seemed to be accompanied by a curious moaning. It was so intangible that the juniors wondered if their ears were deceiving them.

"What is it?" whispered Tommy Watson.

"The wind," said Nipper. "By Jove, anybody might think we were in the tropics! Ye gods and little fishes! This storm is going to be a real beauty! I pity the poor camp!"

"Don't you think the tents will hold against it?"

"I'd wager everything I've got that they won't," retorted Nipper. "I think we'd better sing out a warning before it's too late. Let everybody take their own tents down, and roll them up."

"Oh, rot!" said Handforth. "It won't—"

He paused. A gust of hot wind had come across the river like a blast from a furnace. It was so sudden that the willows near the bank of the stream swung over, protesting. For the space of twenty seconds the wind buffeted past, and then died away as suddenly as it had started.

"What the dickens——" began McClure.

Over in the south-west the entire sky was split by a vivid flash of forked lightning. The camp was dazzlingly illuminated in purple fire for an instant, and then the blackness shut down closer than ever.

Boom! Boom!

The thunder was much nearer—and the force of it was so great that the very ground quivered. One or two huge drops of rain splashed down, but they came to nothing. Within a minute the dead silence and stillness had returned.

"My only hat!" muttered Reggie Pitt. "Judging by this preliminary taste, we're going to have a nice picnic before long."

"We haven't got much time," said Nipper briskly. "The only thing is to take all the tents down——"

"But then we shan't have any shelter," objected Watson.

"Bother shelter!" said Nipper. "We don't want to see the tents wrecked, do we? It'll be touch and go, even as it is. And we're bound to get soaked to the skin, whatever we do. These tents may be proof against an ordinary rain storm, but——"

"My hat!" gasped Church. "There's another flash!"

Cr-crash!

It wasn't an ordinary peal of thunder, but a sort of explosion, and at the same instant a burst of wind came sweeping along. Two or

three of the juniors were sent staggering by the force of it.

"By George, this is good!" said Handforth enthusiastically. "There's nothing I like better than a genuine thunderstorm. None of your half-measures for me! Let's have a proper thunderstorm, or none at all!"

"This'll be a proper one!" said Nipper grimly. "We've only got about five minutes, I imagine—and perhaps less. Get a move on, you chaps! Put your backs into it!"

"But what shall we do?"

"Take the tents down, and lash everything into bundles," replied Nipper. "If we don't take precautions like that, there'll be no camp left. Hustle up, my sons!"

"Some of the chaps have gone to bed," protested Brent. "Archie, for one."

"I think he's about the only one," said Pitt. "And Archie would go to bed in the middle of an earthquake. You'd better go along, Brent, and lug him out."

But Alf Brent had already moved off, and another vivid flash of lightning enabled him to locate his own tent with ease. As the thunder boomed out, he parted the tent flap, and went inside.

"Archie!" he shouted.

"What-ho!" came the voice of Archie Glenthorne. "I mean to say, sundry disturbances, what? Alarums and excursions, and all that sort of thing! It's frightfully rough on a chappie when he wants to wrap himself round forty of the best!"

"You ass, you're not trying to sleep, are you?" grinned Alf.

"Absolutely!"

"Then you'd better get up—before you're washed away."

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie. "Washed away? Did you say washed away? Is the dashed river rising, dash it?"

"I don't know about the river, but if there isn't a deluge within a few minutes I shall be jolly surprised," said Brent. "We've got to take the tents down, and make everything snug. Out you come, Archie!"

Archie uttered a protesting yelp.

"But, my dear old fright, I can't absolutely do it!" he declared. "I mean to say, I'm attired in nothing but the good old pyjamas. A chappie can't dash about in the gloaming, so to speak, in pyjamas, can he?"

"There's no gloaming, and even your vivid pyjamas won't be seen in this darkness," said Brent. "There'll only be a bit of danger when the lightning happens. The reflection from those red stripes of yours might set fire to something."

"Odds slurs and insinuations!" said Archie Glenthorne. "These pyjamas are——"

Before he could go into any description of the garments, a flurry of wind came along, and the tent shook alarmingly. The canvas billowed out, and the flap whirled to and fro as though unseen hands were torturing it. A tremendous drumming noise sounded. Brent, who was standing near the exit, gave a yell. It seemed to him that somebody had thrown a bucket of water over his back.

"Whoa!" he gasped. "What the——"

Well I'm blessed! It's rain! I thought somebody had turned a hose on!"

He stood there, looking out. The lightning was becoming almost continuous now—flash after flash illuminating the whole scene. And the thunder was rolling out with alarming intensity.

"We're having a picnic all right," said Brent breathlessly.

He could see figures struggling frantically with the tents, and he viewed the scene through a haze. The rain was whirling down in such torrential floods that the whole camp was smothered in a sort of mist. In less than twenty seconds everybody was soaked to the skin. The great drops splashed down with ever-increasing velocity.

Boom-boom-boom!

It was apparently too late to complete the work which Nipper had instituted. The majority of the tents were only half dismantled, and the storm was finishing the job. But not in the way that the juniors had intended.

"Come on, Archie—out of it!" roared Brent. "My goodness! There'll be nothing left of the camp if this goes on!"

Close by, Handforth & Co. were struggling with their own tent, and, next to them, Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson were equally busy. The storm was just breaking in its full intensity.

"We can't do anything now!" gasped Church, as he clung to a rope with all his strength. "We've taken the pegs out, and we're done! The tent's doomed!"

"Rot!" roared Handforth. "We'll finish the job! It's all the fault of that fathead, Nipper!"

"What are you blaming me for now?" yelled Nipper.

"Why, if we hadn't touched these tents, they would have withstood the storm all right," shouted Handforth. "But now that we've got the pegs up we shall have the very dickens of a job."

"It doesn't make any difference, pegs or no pegs," sang out Nipper. "This storm'll be enough to uproot the whole collection."

Whether he was right remained to be seen. The point would be soon proved, for at least half the tents had not been touched, and were still pegged down.

Handforth & Co., struggling hard with their own canvas abode, were fighting a losing battle. Once they seemed to be gaining the mastery, and they even succeeded in getting the tent flat on the ground, in readiness to be rolled up.

"We're all right now!" gasped Handforth, as the rain tore down, and created a misty haze. "Where are those ropes, Mac? We'd better roll the giddy thing up, and——"

He broke off as a vivid flash of lightning split the heavens immediately overhead, and an appalling crash of thunder broke out. At the same instant the wind came hurtling along like a solid body.

"Look out!" gasped Church frantically.

The tent was like a live thing. The wind shot underneath the poles, and the canvas billowed up in bulging shapes.

"Better let it go!" roared Mac. "We can't do anything now!"

This was true enough, for both he and Church were flung over by the force of the wind. The tent reared up into the air, and Handforth tried hard to disentangle himself from the ropes. But there wasn't time.

• Whooooosh!

With a fiendish, hooting roar, a devastating gust caught the loose canvas in its grip, and sent it skywards. It went up like a kite, and soared slantingly through the air—with Handforth clinging helplessly to the entangled ropes.



CHAPTER 7.

Washed Out!

"ANDY!" yelled Church, in dire alarm.

"Great Scott!" panted McClure, as he stared into the blackness. "Where the dickens is he? He was here a second ago—and now he's gone!"

"He was blown away!" said Church, fighting hard to stand up against the wind. "Handy! Quick! He might be hurt!"

Handforth was hurt. For about twenty yards he was carried helplessly through the air, and then the force of that gust suddenly petered out. Handforth crashed blindly into one of the other tents, and rolled over and over in the soaking masses of canvas.

Really, he was lucky. If he had hit the hard ground with that force, he would have been badly injured. But the collision with the other tent had saved him. He fought desperately with the clinging folds, and sat up in a daze.

"Where am I?" he breathed. "Oh, corks! That beastly rope has half-skinned my wrist! Phew! That was nasty!"

A flash of lightning had nearly blinded him for a second, and his eyes positively hurt. But he had managed to obtain a fleeting glimpse of the camp, or what remained of it. Hardly any tents were left standing, and the whole scene was one of destruction.

"Is that you, Handy?" shouted a figure, as it ran up.

"Of course it's me!" snapped Handforth. "Why the dickens didn't you chaps hang on to those ropes? I might have been killed!"

Church and McClure had come up.

"Well, thank goodness you're not hurt," said Church, with relief.

"Not hurt!" howled Handforth. "You hopeless ass! I am hurt!"

"Well, nothing to speak of——"

"That's all you know!" groaned Edward Oswald. "By George, and I said there wasn't going to be a storm! It's not often I'm wrong, but I was wrong this time."

"It's hardly started yet," said Church. "Before it's over, there'll be nothing left of this camp——"

"Hey! What the—— Great pip!" gasped Handforth. "An earthquake!"

The very ground beneath him heaved, and he was startled.

"An earthquake!" he repeated. "This is serious——"

"Don't be an ass!" said Church. "There's no earthquake. There's no need to exaggerate!"

"Didn't you feel the ground rock just then?" asked Handforth.

"No, we didn't!"

"Well, it rocked where I'm sitting," said Handforth firmly. "I'm jiggered if I know why—— Whoa! There it goes again!"

"You silly chump!" shouted Church. "You must be sitting on somebody."

"What!"

Handforth scrambled up in haste. He dimly remembered that he had collided with another tent, and that the whole affair had collapsed. He hauled at the flapping canvas, assisted by his chums. It was difficult work, for the wind was blowing as hard as ever, and the rain stung their faces like something vicious.

"Good gad!" came a feeble voice. "First aid, what? Laddies, I take it that the avalanche is over?"

"It's Archie!" said Church, as the lightning illuminated a wet, bedraggled figure in striped pyjamas. "You fathead, Handy! You've been sitting on Archie all this time!"

"It's his own fault; he shouldn't have been in that tent!" said Handforth unreasonably. "It's a lucky thing he was there, as it happens. He broke my fall."

"It depends, dash it, upon the point of view," said Archie, in a weak voice. "I think it was frightfully unlucky, you blighter. It's a dashed pity you couldn't fall on some other dashed tent. Odds bruises and sprains! I shall only be able to stagger about for weeks!"

"Look 'out!" yelled McClure.

Archie's prophecy proved very untrue, for he not only staggered about, but he gave a leap into the air like a frightened gazelle. And only in the nick of time, too.

Another tent, whirling along in the grip of the gale, shot past, a mass of rags and tatters.

"I say, this is getting serious!" said Handforth, looking round. "Where the dickens is the camp? What's happened to everybody?"

Boom—boom!

It was impossible to answer for a few moments, for the thunder drowned every other sound. The storm was now at its height, apparently, for the rain had settled down to a steady, torrential deluge. Underfoot, the turf was soggy, and before long the whole meadow would become a marsh.

The lightning played continuously, and during the intermittent lulls, the campers shouted to one another, and located their bearings.

Efforts were still being made to save the rest of the tents.



"Quick!" gasped Church. "There's somebody coming!" Just then a flickering candlelight came into view, and a figure attired in a dressing gown entered the room. "Well, I'm blessed!" murmured Nipper. "It's Sir Lucian!" What was Sir Lucian Dexter—a school governor—doing in this deserted farmhouse?

Curiously enough, the ones which had been utterly destroyed were those which had been left pegged down. Standing, they had received the full brunt of the wind, and had been torn up during the first onrush of the storm. They were now strewn about the camp, and over the neighbouring countryside, in a litter of shreds.

Some of the other tents, however, had been held down by the desperate juniors. There were all sorts of personal belongings to be salvaged—clothing, cameras, cooking utensils, and similar articles. But these were all mixed up in the ruins.

Not a tent was left standing.

"You chaps all right?" sang out Nipper, as he hurried past. "We're trying to take the roll call. The best thing we can do is to muster on the towing-path——"

"What about our things?" said Fullwood.

"My dear chap, we can't hope to salvage anything in this smother," said Nipper. "A storm like this has got us beaten every time. We shall have to leave the salvage until the morning——"

"And then there'll be nothing to salvage!" interrupted Fullwood.

"Can't help that," said Nipper. "Lives

are more valuable than trifles of personal property. There's danger here, and the sooner we can get out of this exposed position, the better!"

"Danger?" said Handforth, looming up out of the darkness. "Rats! There's no danger in an ordinary thunderstorm!"

"This isn't an ordinary thunderstorm!" retorted Nipper. "You silly asses, do you realise that the worst hasn't come? The actual storm centre isn't immediately over us yet. We're all marks for the lightning. I'm not a nervous chap, but——"

He broke off abruptly. A terrible flash had just slashed the heavens overhead, and in that lurid light he had caught sight of several figures clustered round a group of willows. As the thunder crashed out like the roar of a dozen big guns he ran to that group.

"You silly idiots!" he shouted angrily. "Come out of that! Don't you know that it's dangerous to take shelter under a tree?"

"That's only an old wives' tale!" said Do Valerie. "We don't want to get hit by those tents. They're flying loose everywhere."

"Better be hit by a tent than struck by lightning," said Nipper sharply. "You ought to have more sense——"

Zzzzzzp!

He was interrupted by a flash of lightning that seemed to crackle and hiss. It struck down, and Nipper felt very muscle within him tingle. For a second he was paralysed. A splitting, crackling roar came from the river bank, near by.

An old oak tree was struck, and the trunk splintered into fragments as though it had exploded. De Valerie and those other reckless juniors were on the ground, dazed and half-stunned. Their limbs were stiff and tingling.

"Come on—and look sharp!" panted Nipper. "That flash might have struck here, and then you'd all have been killed. I tell you the storm has hardly started yet. We've got to get out of this—without any loss of time."

The other fellows realised the wisdom of his words, and they dragged themselves away from the spot—out into the open. They stood in a group, thoroughly scared. From every point came the tumult of the storm—the shouting of the wind, the hissing of the rain, and the occasional crash of a tree.

And underfoot the meadow was already flooded. Three or four inches of water were swirling about the feet of the washed-out campers. They had expected a heavy summer thunderstorm, but this tropical-like outburst of the elements had caught them unprepared.

"There's only one thing to do, and that is to get to St. Frank's," shouted Nipper, as he ran from group to group. "We must find shelter. This is about the worst storm that we've ever had here, and it's madness to stay out in it."

"Begad, you're right, dear old boy," said Sir Montie. "We might be struck any minute, an' if the lightnin' does happen to come down this way, it'll wipe us all out!"

Not one of the juniors could recollect such a storm. The very air itself seemed to be charged with electricity. Sheet lightning was continuous, and the peals of thunder followed one another in such confusing succession that conversation was only possible by loud shouting. And now and again, with appalling, terrible abruptness, came a flash of forked lightning which seemed to strike close at hand.

The drenched campers were in the very heart of the danger zone, and every moment was fraught with peril.



CHAPTER 3.

Struck by Lightning!

"HERE'S Lady Honoria?" asked Reggie Pitt wonderingly.

"She's not in camp!" replied Nipper. "I think there was a party, or something, in the

Head's house this evening, and I understood her to say that she would be staying at the school overnight!"

"She knew something!" said Handforth.

"So did Browne and Stevens!" added Pitt. "It strikes me we should all have been sensible if we had chucked up camp life to-day. I don't want to be carping or critical, but this open air business seems to me to be a wash-out!"

"In more senses than one!" said Jack Grey.

"There's nothing to beat camping when the weather's fine—but give me a solid roof overhead during a thunderstorm," said Pitt. "Well, I suppose we'd better be making a move, eh? We'll get straight to the school, and seek our little cots!"

"We shan't be able to get in!" objected Handforth. "The school's all locked up, and I don't suppose they realise that our camp's been wiped out. Why bother to knock them up?"

"Silly idea!" said Church. "Far better to stay out here all night!"

"We can take a swim across the meadows soon," added McClure tartly.

"I don't want any of your rot!" frowned Handforth. "What I mean to say is, why should we admit defeat? Why not find some other shelter until the morning? We could easily take refuge in the boathouse until the morning—or in the bicycle shed."

"That's not a bad idea!" put in Willy. "I'm going there, in any case, to see if my pets are all right!"

"I'd forgotten about your pets!" said Handforth curtly. "The bicycle shed is washed out!"

"And so is the boathouse!" growled Church.

"Then what about the cricket pavilion?" asked Handforth.

"Rats!" said Nipper. "We shall all catch cold, unless we get into warm, dry blankets. We're soaked to the skin—and we can't stay like this all night. The school's the only place!"

The others were of the same opinion. The rain had not diminished by one whit, and as they were standing out in the open, it was almost like being in a cold shower bath. Less than an hour ago they had been complaining of the oppressive heat, but now they were beginning to feel chilly. The breaking of the storm had reduced the high temperature, and the air was now quite chilly.

Boom-boom-boom!

With the thunder rolling and crackling, the campers collected in a big body. Nipper went round in the floods, making sure that everybody was accounted for. It was quite possible that one or two unfortunates had got hurt in the general destruction. But the roll-call was satisfactory. Everybody was safe.

As for the camp, it no longer existed.

Hundreds of pounds worth of damage had been done, and Lady Honoria Dexter would

probably be very upset. For all these tents were the property of the Open Air Society, and Lady Honoria was the president. In fact, she had bought all the equipment out of her own pocket.

But it was idle to make any attempt to rescue the stuff.

In this smother, nothing could be done. Over half the tents had been blown away completely, and were now strewn over the countryside. The other half were flattened down, mere wrecks. That bright little camp had been reduced to chaos.

And, really, the only thing to do was to get back to the school.

The juniors felt rather relieved. It gave them a good excuse to resume their normal existence, without appearing to be backsliding. They were longing to get into their comfortable beds in the junior dormitories.

"Well, come on, you chaps," said Boots, of the Modern House. "I'll tell you what. Wouldn't it be a good idea for us to separate ourselves into groups? I'll take charge of the Modern House chaps, Nipper can look after you Ancient House asses, and Pitt can round up the West House lot. Then we can march to our respective Houses, and there'll be no trouble."

"That's a good idea!" said Nipper, nodding.

And something like order was regained.

The Fourth Form fellows collected under John Busterfield Boots; the Remove divided itself into two sections under Nipper and Pitt, and Willy Handforth stood alone with his cronies of the Third. And in these groups, the fellows prepared to return to St. Frank's.

They didn't like deserting the camp in this way, but there was nothing else for it.

Already, the whole meadow was under six inches of water, and the drenching rain was adding to the flood all the time. After the storm had passed, the water would run away within an hour or two, of course. The whole countryside was parched after weeks of fine weather, and there was no danger of a real flood.

The wind was still the same—sweeping down in flurrying hurricanes, reaching tremendous violence at times. And what with the intense flashes of lightning, and the booming of the thunder, there was continuous confusion.

"All ready?" roared Nipper, at length.

"Yes, go ahead!" sang out Boots.

"Then march!" shouted Nipper. "Let's keep together, if we can—and hurry! I don't like the look of this lightning at all!"

And the soaked campers ploughed their way through the soggy meadow, and made off for the school. They were rather surprised that none of the masters had come down to find out what had happened to them, but perhaps the masters were unaware of the true position. They possibly thought that the boys were safe in their tents

"Hold on a minute!" said Nipper, as they were about to cross the playing fields.

"What's that over there?"

"We can't stop now," said Tommy Watson. "Let's get indoors as soon as we can."

But Nipper took no notice. He was staring across the fields, regardless of the pelting rain.

It seemed that the worst of the storm had gone now. The lightning was not so violent, and the thunder was becoming more distant. The storm was passing on.

"What's the idea?" asked Handforth curiously.

"I thought I saw a glow over there," replied Nipper. "There was a terrific flash about five minutes ago, and I believe the lightning struck something—Yes, there you are! Can't you see something now?"

"By jingo, yes!" muttered Handforth. "A sort of lurid orange glow!"

"Great Scott!"

"Something's on fire!"

"That's what I thought—but I wasn't sure!" said Nipper. "It's over by Holt's Farm, too. By Jove, the lightning must have hit one of the barns, or perhaps a haystack—or even the farmhouse itself. Anyhow, that's a fire."

"Oh, my goodness!"

"What the dickens shall we do?" asked Tommy Watson. "Hadn't we better rush to the school, and telephone to the Bannington Fire Brigade?"

"That'll be no good!" shouted Nipper, as a roll of thunder boomed out. "If Holt's Farm is on fire, it'll be gutted before the fire brigade can get anywhere near. Besides, it's more than likely that there are two or three fires in Bannington after a storm like this, and the brigade will be fully occupied."

"Let's dash to Holt's Farmhouse ourselves!" said Fullwood excitedly. "Perhaps we shall be able to help!"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "How the dickens can there be any fire in a down-pour of rain like this? Be reasonable, for goodness' sake!"

"If there isn't a fire, what about that glow?" asked Church.

"It's probably a meteorite!" said Handforth.

"What!"

"That was the flash we saw," went on Handforth. "I was reading about meteorites only the other day. And fireballs, too! They come down white-hot, and glow for hours——"

"Smother him, somebody!" snapped Nipper. "While he's jawing about meteorites, Holt's Farm is probably burning! Of all the idiots—to start talking about meteorites now!"

"Just what I was thinking!" growled Church. "Talk about Nero fiddling while Rome was burning! I say, that glow is getting worse. Come on, you chaps—let's run for it!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "What-ho! St. Frank's to the good old rescue, what! All correct-o? Then let's dash into it. laddies!"

They were all more or less excited. They had forgotten their discomforts. The storm was obviously passing. Indeed, in one or two places a feeble star was attempting to shine, and the rain was much less fierce. This was bad for any possible conflagration.

And there was no doubt that the lightning had struck something in the neighbourhood of Holt's Farm.

The glow which had attracted Nipper's attention at first was now obvious to all. It rose and fell flickeringly in the distance—an ominous, lurid radiance. There was no mistake about its nature. It was a fire.

But what sort of fire?

A haystack, an outbuilding, or the farm itself? At this distance, it was impossible to know. But the St. Frank's fellows were intent upon removing all doubt. At close quarters, they would know the actual truth.

They had dropped all idea of knocking up the school. They had forgotten their wet and bedraggled condition. There is always something fascinating about a fire in the distance, and the late campers had forgotten all in their new excitement.

At the double, they sped towards Holt's Farm.



CHAPTER 9.

The Schoolboy Fire-fighters!

As the fellows ran stumblingly over the fields and meadows, they could see the fire increasing in intensity. Sparks were now being flung skywards by the blustering wind, and the whole heavens were reflecting the menacing glow.

Yet, strangely enough, these juniors seemed to be the only people who were aware of the fire. Not a shout came from any direction, and there were no other running figures.

It was not surprising, really.

For all the country people were probably in their cottages, with thoughts for nothing but the terrific thunderstorm. And at St. Frank's the occupants would know nothing, for Holt's Farm was hidden by intervening spinneys. It had only been by chance that Nipper had seen that reflected glow.

And thus it came about that these isolated juniors were the only people who knew of the fire.

"It's Holt's Farm, sure enough!" panted Nipper as he ran. "By Jove, I'm afraid we shall be pretty helpless, though. We shall never be able to cope with a big fire."

"What about Holt's men?" asked Tommy Watson.

"They don't live at the farm," said Nipper. "You know that as well as I do, Tommy.

Joe Catchpole and all the other labourers live in that row of cottages, at Pelton's End. In all probability they don't know anything about this fire."

"Hadn't we better rouse them up, dear old boy?" asked Sir Montie.

"No time. It's in the opposite direction," replied Nipper. "There's something else, too. I've just remembered it. I don't know whether it's true or not, but I heard that Farmer Holt is away, and that the farmhouse is empty."

"Then it might have burnt down without anybody being the wiser," said Tommy Watson. "By Jove, this is getting exciting! What the dickens can we do? We haven't any hose-pipes, or——"

"Wait until we get there before we decide what to do," said Nipper practically. "It may only be a hayrick on the other side of the farmyard. It's always deceptive on a dark night."

They were approaching the farmhouse now. And they could easily see one another by the reflected, ruddy light. The thunder was only rumbling distantly, and the rain had now almost ceased.

The storm had gone on its way, leaving the aftermath.

The run had served the drenched juniors well, for they were now all glowing with warmth, and if any of them had been chilled they were not likely to suffer any ill-effects. Not that they thought of such matters. They raced round the outbuildings of the farm, anxious to locate the centre of the outbreak.

"Well, it's not the farmhouse itself, anyway," said Handforth. "That's a jolly good thing! In fact, I believe the whole thing's a fraud. It's only a straw stack, or something silly like that."

"By the way you speak, you seem disappointed," said Church. "I believe you wanted the whole place to be on fire!"

They ran round an angle of the old building, and then came to a sudden halt.

Flames were leaping up from the roof of a long building—a building which practically adjoined the house. Sparks were shooting up, too, and the farmyard was ruddily illuminated.

"The stables!" yelled Nipper.

"What?"

"Can't you see?" shouted Nipper. "We've been here often enough, haven't we? The stables are a-fire, and unless something is done smartly, it'll get hold of the main building."

"What about the horses?" gasped Pitt, in alarm.

"Oh, my hat!"

The juniors were startled. Their worst fears were realised. The farm itself was on fire. It was no mere isolated hayrick, but the main buildings. The stables were a low line of sheds, straggling out from the western angle of the farmhouse. The roof was a thatched one, and this accounted for the ready blaze.

Obviously, the lightning had struck that thatched roof, and had set fire to the heart

of it. The outer surface was wet, but the great bulk of that straw was tinder-dry beneath the outer layer.

"Come on!" yelled Nipper. "There's just a chance that we might be able to save the place. The fire's only confined to that small section of roof at present, and after we've got the horses out we might be able to swamp the fire. But the horses come first!"

"Rather!" said Willy, in anguish. "Oh, my hat! It'll be horrible if those poor beggars are trapped!"

Handforth minor was passionately fond of animals, as evidenced by his many pets, and the thought of the trapped farm-horses being burned alive alarmed him terribly.

He was one of the first to dash round the outbuildings and to rush for the stable doors. There was plenty of light here, for several yards of the thatched roof were roaring in a mass of flames. The yard was illuminated as though by a thousand torches.

Wisps of burning straw fell in every direction, carried by the wind, and a swift glance was sufficient to show that all the stable doors were closed.

Nobody else was here—a clear indication, it seemed, that the farmhouse was deserted. Joe Catchpole and the other men were in blissful ignorance of this peril.

"Listen!" gasped Willy, in distress.

They could hear shrill whinnying and the stamping of hoofs.

"The horses!" shouted Nipper.

"Good gad!"

"Come on—all of you!" yelled Willy.

They could hear a great commotion coming from within the stable. The door was flung wide, and smoke was rolling out. But the occupants were evidently imprisoned somehow. As a matter of fact, the horses were too scared to move—they were petrified from horror of the fire.

"Hold on!" yelled Nipper, trying to grab Willy. "Go easy, you young ass! We'll do what we can, but human lives are more valuable than—"

He broke off, for his effort had been useless. Willy had gone, and was in that doorway. The next second he was out again, his face expressive of alarm.

"There are horses in there!" he said tensely.

"Oh, I say!" muttered Nipper. "There's nothing we can do—"

"Yes, there is!" yelled Willy suddenly. "Who's got a knife? Ted, lend me your knife!"

"My dear young ass—"

"Quick!" shouted Willy.

Handforth gave him his pocket-knife before he could quite realise what he was doing. In a flash, Willy pulled open the blade and was off.

"Willy!" shouted Nipper. "What on earth—"

But the Third-Former had his own plan, and he was entirely reckless. He forgot any possible danger to himself—and the danger was not only possible, but starkly probable.

Willy's action was an extraordinary one.

Before anybody could stop him he took a flying run into the stable, and then leapt upwards. It was more or less of a blind spring, but luck was with him. As he had hoped, he landed fairly on a great horse's back.

He gained the manger beyond, clambering above it and slashing halters as he went, pulling them over the heads of the animals. Even then they were too terrified to escape, but he knew they would follow if he gave them a lead.

He jumped for another horse, and scrambled on to its back. The next second he was almost off, for the maddened brute rolled sideways. Only by a miracle was Willy saved from being crushed against the stable wall.



CHAPTER 10.

Battling with the Flames!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH was nearly crazy.

"Why didn't you stop that young idiot?" he shouted hoarsely. "Quick! We've got to go in after him!"

"It's no good!" panted Nipper. "We shall only be in the way. I'd no idea what he intended, but—"

"Look!" shouted Watson.

They stared in amazement.

Nobody knew exactly what had happened within that doomed stable. Even Willy himself was hardly conscious of the real truth. He was dazed by the heat and dizzy with the fumes.

The next moment he felt himself being tossed about like a cork in an angry sea. The animal, more by instinct than by anything else, reared up in that confined space and swung round. Other animals heard it go, and they swept through the flames after it. At the same moment the roof came crashing down in a mass of red-hot fire.

The St. Frank's fellows scattered in every direction, and caught a fleeting glimpse of Willy on the animal's back, other horses all around, galloping madly. Then came a terrific splash of water.

"Oh, my hat!" shouted Handforth. "What's happened?"

They ran across the farmyard, and were just in time to see the horse struggling out of the deep duck-pond and rushing madly off into the night with the rest. And Willy came to the surface at the same moment, and took a deep gulp of air.

"He's safe!" roared three or four voices.

"Hurrah!"

"Willy, you young fathead!" shouted his major. "You might have killed yourself!"

"That horse knew something," said Willy, as he waded out. "The one thing I wanted at that moment was water—and I got plenty of it. Don't look so scared, Ted. I'm all right."

"Goodness knows why!" said Nipper. "By all the laws of chance you ought to have been dead by now. I can't understand how the dickens you managed to escape with your life. By Jove, Willy, that was a plucky thing you did!"

"If you'd only start putting out the fire, instead of talking rot, you might be useful instead of being only an ornament!" retorted Willy coldly. "Anyhow, I saved the horses, and I'm happy. And here's a pond, and we only need some pails, and——"

"Hold on!" shouted Nipper. "What's that thing?"

He pointed to an apparatus on the other side of the yard—a thing on wheels, with two crank-like handles and a long length of hose.

"It's a fire-engine!" he shouted triumphantly. "One of those hand-worked affairs. Lots of farmers keep them in case haystacks catch on fire. Come on! All hands to the pumps!"

"Hurrah!"

There was a rush for the apparatus, and a brief inspection showed that it was in good order. The supply pipe was rapidly uncoiled and flung into the pond, and the hose was hauled off towards the blazing stables.

Half-a-dozen fellows pumped with all their strength, working the long handles up and down with swift force.

"Good egg!" shouted Nipper. "It's working! Keep it up, you fellows!"

A stream of muddy water came hissing from the hose nozzle. It was not particularly powerful, but it would be an immense help. The stables were now alight with a vengeance, and there was a serious danger of the fire spreading to the main building. Once that happened no efforts on the part of the juniors could save the whole range of buildings from destruction.

It was now or never!

Nobody had had time to observe the sky. But the storm had completely gone, and the stars were now glittering overhead. The summer's night was calm and placid, and a cool breeze was blowing after the tumult of the hurricane.

Nipper, with the hose nozzle directed at the blazing stables, did most of the headwork. It was useless to try to save the stables. They were doomed in any case.

The only thing was to isolate the fire to this low line of outbuildings, and with this object in view Nipper kept the water playing upon the end of the stable buildings where they adjoined the farmhouse. The fire had been creeping steadily in this direction.

And before Nipper could effectually check the flames the hose ceased to function. Pump as they would, the fellows could get no result.

"I was half afraid of it," shouted Nipper, flinging down the hose. "The thing is choked with mud. It'll take hours to free it, and the fire's creeping towards the farmhouse all the time!"

"What's to be done now?" asked Watson, in dismay.

"Pails!" said Handforth promptly. "Why not string ourselves out from the pond to the stables, and run a chain of pails continuously?"

"It's a jolly good idea, but where are the pails?" asked Nipper.

"Oh, corks!" said Handforth. "I'd forgotten that!"

"Never say die!" shouted Reggie Pitt, from the other side of the yard. "What price these? Tins, you chaps! Dozens of 'em!"

"You fathead!" roared Handforth. "We can't put a fire out by throwing tinsful of water on it!"

"It all depends upon the size of the tins," said Pitt, running up. "Look at these. They may leak a bit, but they'll do!"

Pitt had discovered a sort of rubbish heap, and these tins were almost as large as buckets. They were crude things with open ends and corrugated sides, and had probably contained some patent fertiliser. After being emptied they had been flung on the rubbish heap.

"They'll do fine!" said Nipper, with an anxious glance at the conflagration. "But, by Jove, we shall have to look sharp! I doubt if we shall be in time even now. It'll mean hard work, you fellows—without a minute's rest!"

"We're game!" said Handforth stoutly.

"Absolutely, laddie!"

And within three minutes the juniors were strung out in a double line, and a continuous succession of improvised buckets came along. The schoolboy fire-fighters took it in turn to hurl the water upon the flames. It was gruelling work.

But the method was a sound one.

Gradually the fire at the end of the stables died down, and foot by foot the flames were conquered. All along the further end of the outbuildings the flames were roaring unchecked. Nothing could save them from destruction.

But the farm was out of danger.

Nipper, however, allowed his men no rest until a black gap was created—a steaming, hissing gap over which the flames could not leap. And then, at last, the juniors stood back, and rested their aching limbs.

They were a dishevelled crowd.

Half of them were smothered in mud from the pond, and all were unutterably grimy. But they had succeeded. Farmer Holt was no friend of theirs, but they had not given this question a thought.

But for their intervention, the entire property would have been wiped out, and many valuable horses would have been killed. This night's work, alone, justified the formation of the Open Air camp.

"I say, what price getting into the farmhouse, and sleeping there for to-night?" suggested Pitt. "I think we deserve it, don't you? We can't go back to the school in this shocking state."

"It's a good idea," said Nipper, nodding. "Even Farmer Holt wouldn't raise any objections, considering what we've done. Yes,

we'll get in, and light some fires. We'll have a good old wash, we'll dry our things, and then get some sleep."

"What about some grub?" asked somebody.

"That's not a bad idea," said Handforth.

"This has been hungry work—although I hadn't realised it until now. By George, I'm famished!"

"Same here!"

"I'm afraid you chaps will be disappointed," said Nipper, with a weary grin. "Holt's away, and I expect most of the cupboards are bare. Still, we shall survive until the morning. It's a wash we need most—and sleep. Let's get inside. We can easily force one of the dairy windows."

They took a last look at the fire, to make sure there was no danger. But the conflagration had practically burnt itself out by now. The long line of stables had gone, and only a few smouldering heaps of debris remained, with stark, blackened walls, and burnt-out windows and doorways.

A window of the farmhouse was soon forced, and the juniors noisily climbed through. They went from the dairy into a vast old-fashioned kitchen. Here there was a huge fireplace. And two lamps were found handy. They were soon burning, and the fellows were fighting one another for places at the sink.

"Hallo!" said Nipper curiously. "This is a bit queer, isn't it?"

"What's queer?" asked Fullwood.

Nipper was at the open fireplace, bending over it.

"These ashes are hot!" he said, in a puzzled voice. "There's been a fire in this kitchen—and it hasn't been out for more than an hour or two."

The others came round, looking startled.

"Who the dickens has had a fire in here?" asked Handforth, with a queer glance at his two chums. "I'll bet those men who collared me—I—I mean there can't be anybody in the house, or they would have come down while we were putting out the fire. Farmer Holt's away—"

"Quick!" gasped Church from the other end of the great kitchen. "There's somebody moving upstairs!"

"What!"

Church was standing at the doorway, staring out across the rambling old hall. Some of the other juniors joined him, and then a flickering candlelight came into view. A figure attired in a dressing-gown was descending the stairs.

"Well I'm blessed!" murmured Nipper. "It's Sir Lucian!"



CHAPTER 11.

The Mystery of Sir Lucian!

SIR LUCIAN DEXTER!

This was a startling surprise, indeed!

Until this minute, the juniors had believed the farmhouse to be empty and deserted. And here was Sir Lucian Dexter—a governor of

St. Frank's—coming downstairs in a dressing-gown, as though he lived in the place!

But if they were surprised to see Sir Lucian, Sir Lucian was no less surprised to see them.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated, in amazement and anger. "What is the meaning of this? What are you boys doing here—and at this time of night? How did you get in?"

"We didn't know the house was occupied, sir," said Nipper, as Sir Lucian pushed his way into the kitchen, and faced the crowd. "We thought the farmhouse was quite empty—"

"That makes your position no less blame-worthy!" snapped Sir Lucian. "I can well believe that you thought the place empty. Outrageous! How dare you break into a house in the dead of night like this?"

The juniors were amazed at his tone.

"We got through one of the windows, sir," shouted Handforth. "We were so muddy and wet that we thought it a good idea to get straight in, and wash ourselves, and light a fire—"

"Enough!" interrupted Sir Lucian angrily. "I won't have my solitude disturbed in this crude fashion. Good heavens! Am I to get no peace at all? I come here for quietness and rest, and I now find that you boys are pestering me—"

"Pestering you!" roared Handforth. "We didn't know you were here, sir! We came to put the fire out!"

The others chorussed their agreement.

"What nonsense is this?" demanded Sir Lucian. "Why should you come here to put the fire out? What fire?"

"Ye gods!" breathed Pitt. "He doesn't know there's been a fire!"

"I wonder if he knows there's been a thunderstorm?" murmured Fullwood.

"What's that—what's that?" broke in Sir Lucian. "What are you muttering about? Thunderstorm? Yes, to be sure! Now you mention it, I believe there was a certain atmospheric disturbance, but I had no time to bother with it. You must all go at once. I disapprove of your presence. In fact, I won't have it!"

"Hold on, sir," said Nipper quietly. "Are we to understand that you are staying at this farm for a while?"

"The farm is mine."

"Yours, sir?"

"Mine, boy—mine!" snapped Sir Lucian.

"My only hat!"

"What the dickens—"

"Good gad!" The fellows were astounded. Church and McClure gave Handforth a significant look. No wonder Sir Lucian had "broken into" the farmhouse during the evening! It was his—and perhaps he had forgotten his key. All so simple now!

"Yes, mine!" shouted Sir Lucian. "Upon my word, is there anything startling in that? Why are you all staring at me so? I've bought the farm—but I realise that I was very remiss in not informing you all of my plans," he added sarcastically.

"We'd no idea, sir," said Nipper. "So old Holt has gone?"



The juniors caught a fleeting glimpse of Willy Handforth clinging desperately to one of the terrified horses.
Next instant they scattered in all directions as the maddened animals rushed out of the burning stable.

"Of course he has gone."

"For good?"

"It doesn't matter to me whether Mr. Holt has gone for good or for bad—he's gone," retorted Sir Lucian. "This farm is my property—bought and paid for! Therefore, I have a perfect right to order you out of this house, and to lock the doors on you. Go at once—the whole parcel of you! I don't want you here! I won't have you here. Infernal impudence on your part to come at all!"

Many of the fellows were resenting Sir Lucian's tone, and Handforth even clenched his fists preparatory to dotting the gentleman one on the nose. But Church and McClure held him back, and Nipper thought it just as well to put things on a level footing.

"Perhaps we'd better explain the position, Sir Lucian," he said quietly.

"It doesn't need explaining!"

"I think it does, sir——"

"Don't contradict me, boy!" shouted Sir Lucian. "You are here unlawfully, and that is enough! You broke into this house, looking like a crowd of disgraceful ragamuffins, and you have no valid excuse——"

"I think our excuse is about as valid as any reasonable man could wish for, sir," exclaimed Nipper. "Your farm was on fire, and we came over and put it out—and many of the fellows risked their lives on the job. If that's not a valid excuse, what is?"

Sir Lucian, who was about to burst forth into an angry interruption, checked himself. He stared at Nipper hard.

"What was that?" he said sharply. "You found the farm on fire?"

"Yes, sir."

"What absolute rubbish! You can't fool me——"

"We're not trying to fool you, sir, and if you'll only listen quietly for a minute, you'll probably change your tone," said Nipper gruffly. "That thunderstorm wrecked our camp—blew all the tents away—and we were going up to St. Frank's to get shelter when we saw a flickering glare in the sky. So we came here, and found the stables blazing."

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Sir Lucian, in sudden agitation. "The stables? On fire? I find it difficult to credit——"

"Our first job was to rescue the horses, sir, and I'm glad to say that we got them all out safely," continued the Remove skipper. "One of our fellows—Handforth minor—deserves the V.C. for his own action in saving horses that seemed doomed to the flames."

"Rats!" said Willy uncomfortably. "Cheese it, Nipper!"

"We let the horses run loose, sir, and we can round them up in the morning," continued Nipper. "The whole farmhouse was in danger of catching fire, and as it was impossible to save the stables, we confined the fire to those outbuildings, and let them burn themselves out."

"That's why we're in such a mess, sir," added Pitt. "We've been wallowing in the duck-pond, getting out buckets of water."

Sir Lucian was looking startled.



The juniors caught a fleeting glimpse of Will
Next instant they scattered in all directions

"Extraordinary!" he muttered. "And I knew nothing about it—absolutely nothing! I can see, boys, that you are telling me the truth, but I am astounded. I had no knowledge of this fire—no suspicion of it."

"Were you asleep, sir?"

"No, of course not!" said the new owner of Holt's Farm. "How could I sleep during all that tumult? I was working. I was sitting in my room writing——"

"That accounts for it, sir," smiled Nipper. "I expect your room is on the other side of the house, and as you had the blind down, you knew nothing about the fire. Perhaps you'll come outside, and look at the ruins? There's not a great deal of damage—only a few old thatched stables gone. But if we hadn't arrived on the scene, the whole farm would have been involved."

Sir Lucian absent-mindedly went to the kitchen window, and stared out across the



g desperately to one of the terrified horses.
animals rushed out of the burning stable.

farmyard. He was not seeking verification of Nipper's statement, but he received it, nevertheless. The glowing embers of the stables were in full view, and the blackened ruins were distinctly outlined.

He turned.

"Really boys, I thank you heartily," he said, after an awkward pause. "Really, I had no idea! Pray forgive me for my recent brusqueness. Naturally, the whole position is different. Why, bless my life, I might have perished in the flames without anybody being the wiser! I might have been trapped! And you saved the horses? Wonderful—wonderful! By all means stay here—do just as you please."

Now that he knew the truth, his whole attitude was different.

"I am greatly distressed," he went on. "After your heroic work, it was harsh of me to treat you so roughly. I'm sorry. And your

own camp is destroyed? Of course you must remain here until the morning."

"We thought about making a fire, and drying ourselves, and then having a sleep," said Nipper. "Then we can go along to St. Frank's at a respectable hour."

"Of course," said Sir Lucian. "That is the only sensible thing to do. Possibly you are hungry, too, eh?"

"Rather, sir," said a dozen voices.

"You'll find ample provisions in the cupboards," said the new owner. "I am sure I don't know where the cupboards are, but they have been well stocked. Help yourselves to whatever you please. I am afraid there aren't sufficient beds available——"

"Don't bother about beds, sir—we can sleep anywhere for to-night," interrupted Nipper. "You get upstairs again, sir—we'll be all right here. Only too pleased to have been of service, sir."

"Rather!" agreed Handforth. "We thought we were saving old Holt's property—but it's better to know that we saved yours."

"That's very nice of you, young man—very nice of you, indeed," said Sir Lucian. "Well, I'll leave you to your own devices. I'd help if I could, but I am afraid I am useless in such matters. Make yourselves at home, and don't forget to help yourselves to food."

"We shan't forget that, sir," said the juniors, in one voice.



CHAPTER 12.

Handforth's Big Idea.

ALF an hour later the scene had assumed a different aspect.

A great fire was blazing in the kitchen, and the schoolboy firefighters, clean and dry, were sitting round the old table, drinking tea and munching all manner of provisions. They had taken Sir Lucian at his word, and the store-cupboards had been drastically raided.

Nipper was looking very thoughtful, and the others were succumbing to their natural tiredness. Most eyes were sleepy.

"Well, what do you make of it, old boy?"

Nipper looked round at Sir Montie, and shook his head.

"I'm blessed if I know," he replied frankly. "Why, in the name of all that's mysterious, has a man like Sir Lucian Dexter bought this old farm? What's behind it?"

"Perhaps he wants to go in for farming," suggested Watson brilliantly.

"Rats! He's just as likely to go in for Channel swimming," said Nipper, with a frown. "Farming is no more in Sir Lucian's line than big game hunting is. He's a scientist—a professor of archæology. I'll bet he doesn't know the difference between a turnip and a cabbage, and he probably believes that wheat and barley grow on trees!"

"Oh, he can't be as bad as all that!" said Watson.

"Well, you know what I mean," said Nipper. "He's not a farmer, and never will be. Imagine Sir Lucian looking after the pigs and the poultry! No, my sons, there's something behind all this—and I think I've got a glimmering of the truth."

Tregellis-West nodded.

"Roman relics, dear old boy," he nodded.

"Yes, Montie," said Nipper. "You remember all those excavations a week or two ago? Mysterious people dug up Little Side, and made holes in other spots. And we found that Sir Lucian was responsible."

"But we've never discovered who the other men were," said Watson.

"That's nothing—they were probably servants of Sir Lucian," replied Nipper. "They might even have been two of the Head's grooms or gardeners. Sir Lucian has been staying at St. Frank's, don't forget, and he's the Head's brother-in-law. He's dotty after these Roman remains, and that's why he's bought the farm."

"That charabanc fell through one of Holt's meadows," nodded Sir Montie.

"It's Sir Lucian's meadow now," said Nipper. "Don't you see the wheeze? He can make as many excavations as he likes on this property now, and nobody can stop him. I believe he's looking for something definite. Not merely chance work, you know—but he's got a fixed objective. If he wasn't so beastly secretive, we might be able to give him a hand."

Tommy Watson yawned.

"Oh, well, let's see about getting some sleep," he said. "Blow Sir Lucian, and blow his Roman relics! How the dickens are we going to sleep to-night?"

"That's easily settled," replied Nipper. "This house is packed with old furniture—couches and chairs and settees. And I expect there are lots of beds upstairs, too, although they're not made. Every fellow for himself—that's the best order."

"It ought to be getting daylight by now," said Watson, looking at the window. "It's getting on for three o'clock—"

"My dear ass, it's not much after midnight," said Nipper calmly. "Twenty past twelve, to be exact," he added, after a glance at his watch. "There's been such a lot of action that you've lost count of the time. There's still a prospect of a good night's sleep."

Reggie Pitt joined them.

"Don't you think it's rather funny that nobody's been?" he asked. "I was expecting the Head, or some of the villagers. Surely the fire was spotted by somebody?"

"Doesn't seem like it," said Nipper.

"Well, as soon as the storm was over, I'll bet Mr. Lee, or some of the other masters went down to the camp, to see how we were

getting on," declared Reggie. "Lady Honoria, too, in all probability. What on earth will they think when they find the camp destroyed, and all of us missing? Oughtn't somebody to go along and report?"

Nipper considered.

"Yes, it's a good idea," he said. "I think one of us should go, just in case. It's a pity there isn't a telephone here, otherwise we could give the Head a ring through."

"I'll bet most of the wires are down," said Watson.

Willy Handforth volunteered to go to St. Frank's and report.

"I'll go to the camp first, and if there's nobody there, I'll dodge up to the school," he said. "If everything's quiet, and there aren't any lights in the downstairs windows, I'll come back without disturbing anybody. How's that?"

"Good," said Nipper. "But I think somebody else ought to go, Willy. After what you've been through to-night—"

"Rats!" interrupted Willy coldly.

He hurried off, and Nipper turned to the others.

"Now we'd better see about some temporary couches," he said. "I vote we— But I seem to be talking to myself!"

Handforth, at the other end of the table, was holding forth loudly. A number of other juniors were laughing at him.

"It's all very well to jeer, but I mean it!" said Handforth firmly. "You silly asses, it's the idea of the term!"

"Why be so modest?" asked Fullwood. "Why not go the whole hog, and call it the idea of the century?"

"What's the argument about?" asked Nipper.

"There's no argument," said Handforth. "I've suggested that we should stay here for good."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stay here for good?" repeated Nipper staring.

"Yes; and it's a great idea!"

"That's not an idea, Handy—it's a nightmare," said Nipper.

"That's what we keep telling him," grinned Church. "He says that Sir Lucian will only kill all the animals and other livestock by wrong management, and that it's our duty to rally round him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So it is!" roared Handforth obstinately. "While the farm belonged to old Holt, we couldn't do anything. We wouldn't work for old Holt in any case; he's too much of a beast. But Holt's out of it now, and we're in possession."

"Rot! We're only sheltering here—"

"I say we're in possession!" insisted Handforth. "We've been washed out of our camp, haven't we?"

"Well, that's generally admitted."

"We can't live in those tents again," continued Handforth. "But I don't see any reason why we should chuck up the open air life. My idea is for us to become farmers."

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Farmers!" roared Handforth. "Everybody knows that old Holt was a mean rotter, and that he neglected his property. Why shouldn't we stay here, and put everything shipshape? We'll plough the land, and make hay, and reap the wheat—"

"You ass, the wheat won't be ripe until August!" grinned Church.

"Well, we can reap something else," said Handforth, glaring. "Why quibble over trifles? Think of the joys of getting up in the early morning, and feeding the chickens and the cattle! In fact, I'll superintend everything. I'll mix the food for the chickens, and—"

"And kill the poor things?" suggested Pitt. "No, we couldn't leave that to you, Handy. You can look after the pigs, if you like."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass, Reggie!" grinned Jack Grey. "You speak as though the idea might come to something."

Pitt nodded.

"Well, so it might," he said. "I'm rather inclined to agree with Handy. I've often wanted to live on a farm. And here's the chance. We can twist old Sir Lucian round our little fingers—particularly if we can get Lady Honoria on our side."

"My hat! It might be done!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Lady Honoria would agree like a shot!"

"Yes, and she'd wangle the Head, too!"

An excited discussion started. Reggie Pitt's seconding of the proposal had put a different complexion on it. Before long, the majority of the fellows were enthusiastically supporting the scheme—much to Handforth's gratification.

"It's not a bad idea," grinned Nipper, at length. "Providing we run the farm properly—and not in a Handforthian style—that is to say, in a ragtime style—we might make a success of it. But there's one point you fellows have forgotten."

"Which point?"

"What about Joe Catchpole?" asked Nipper.

"Joe Catchpole?" repeated Handforth.

"Yes; and the other farm labourers?"

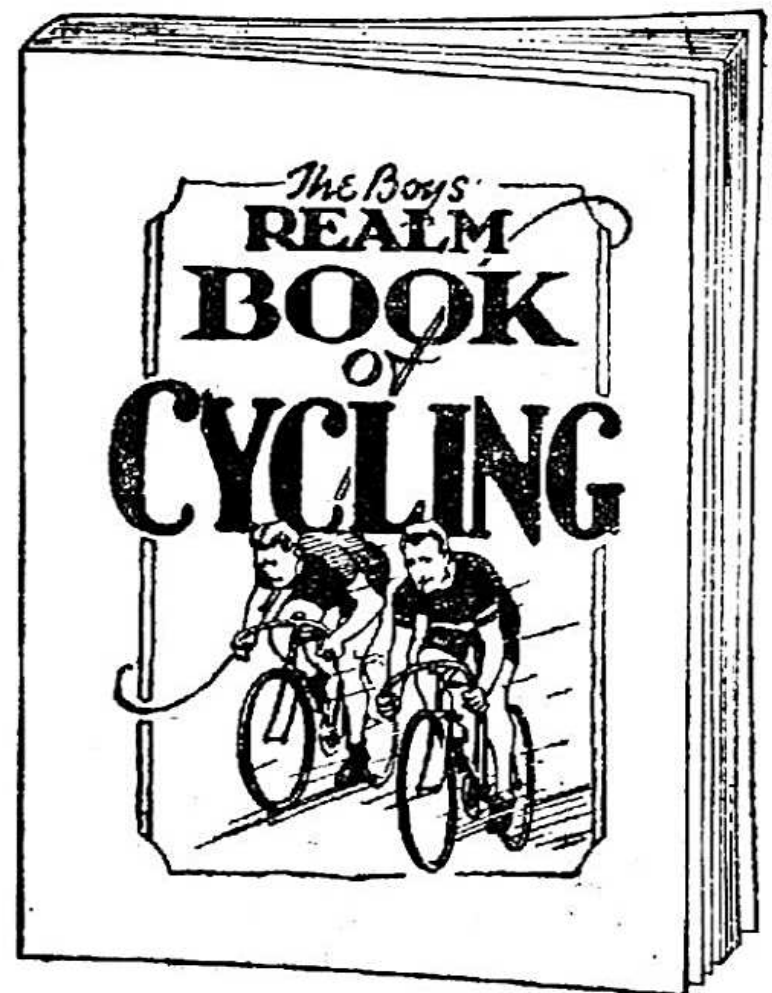
"Well, what about them?" asked Handforth aggressively.

"We don't want to do these fellows out of their jobs," said Nipper.

"H'm! I hadn't thought of that," admitted Handforth. "We can't play a dirty trick like that. But perhaps Sir Lucian has dismissed them already?"

"That's just what I was thinking," said Nipper. "In fact, I seem to remember something about old Joe. He was complaining in the village yesterday—said that he and his family would have to get out of the neighbourhood. I didn't take much notice at the time, but I think I can understand now. Holt sacked his men when he sold up, and Sir Lucian has probably forgotten to re-engage them."

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"Just like him!" said Pitt. "And, by jingo, now we can understand why the old boy has been so quiet during this past week. He's been negotiating this purchase, and he's only just come into possession."

Nipper nodded.

"Well, I suggest that we put it to Sir Lucian bluntly," he said. "He's got to take back Joe Catchpole and the other labourers, and we'll work on the farm as extra hands. Joe can direct the operations, and we'll take our orders from him. Oh, to be a farmer's boy!"

And the discussion continued.



CHAPTER 13.

Sir Lucian Disagrees.

HANDFORTH grunted.

"Hold on, you chaps!" he said. "Can't you stop jabbering for a minute?"

This is my idea, and I'm not going to be shoved into the background."

"What's biting you, old man?" asked McClure.

"Nothing's biting me, but I'm not going to be under the orders of Joe Catchpole!" retorted Handforth. "As the originator of the scheme, it's my privilege to act as foreman. Joe Catchpole will have to be under my orders."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm all in favour of letting the men have their jobs back, but I want to direct all the operations," continued Handforth. "In fact, I shall insist. I've got all sorts of ideas for improving the farm. All the old pigsties have got to be abolished, and dozens of other new schemes must be introduced. Old Holt has run the farm badly for years, and it's up to us to put it on its feet."

"And you insist upon being supreme chief?" asked Pitt.

"Yes."

"Then I'm returning to St. Frank's," said Reggie.

"Hear, hear!"

"You can run the farm yourself, Handy!"

"Absolutely, old lad!"

Handforth glared at the juniors.

"All right; you can all go and eat coke!" he roared. "I'm going to run this farm according to my own ideas—"

"Good gracious! What is that?" interrupted Sir Lucian, appearing in the doorway. "What are you saying, young man?"

Everybody looked at the new owner.

"What nonsense is this?" went on Sir Lucian. "I came down to see if you boys were comfortable, and I find this talk!

What do you mean, boy? What is this rubbish about running the farm?"

Handforth looked defiant.

"It isn't rubbish, sir," he replied. "As we've been washed out of our camp, we think it'll be a good idea to remain at the farm indefinitely, and to run it ourselves. You can leave everything to us, sir. We'll make the hay, and feed the pigs, and water the cattle, and plough the land, and reap the corn, and take the product to market, and—"

"Stop!" gasped Sir Lucian.

"I'm only mentioning a few of our duties, sir."

"Duties be hanged!" snapped Sir Lucian. "I won't have it! Certainly not! You boys mustn't stay here a minute longer than is necessary. In the morning you go—every one of you!"

"Yes, but—"

"You go!" shouted Sir Lucian. "Good heavens! I can't have you bothering me here! I bought this farm for a specific reason. That is to say, I desire quietness!" he added, with such haste that there was almost a note of alarm in his voice. "I do not intend to continue the farming work at all. That is all finished, and men are coming here to-morrow to buy the cattle, and to clear the whole livestock away."

"Oh!"

"Everything is arranged," continued Sir Lucian sharply. "So you can dismiss all such absurd ideas from your minds. I don't want you here, and I won't have you here. I am grateful for what you have done

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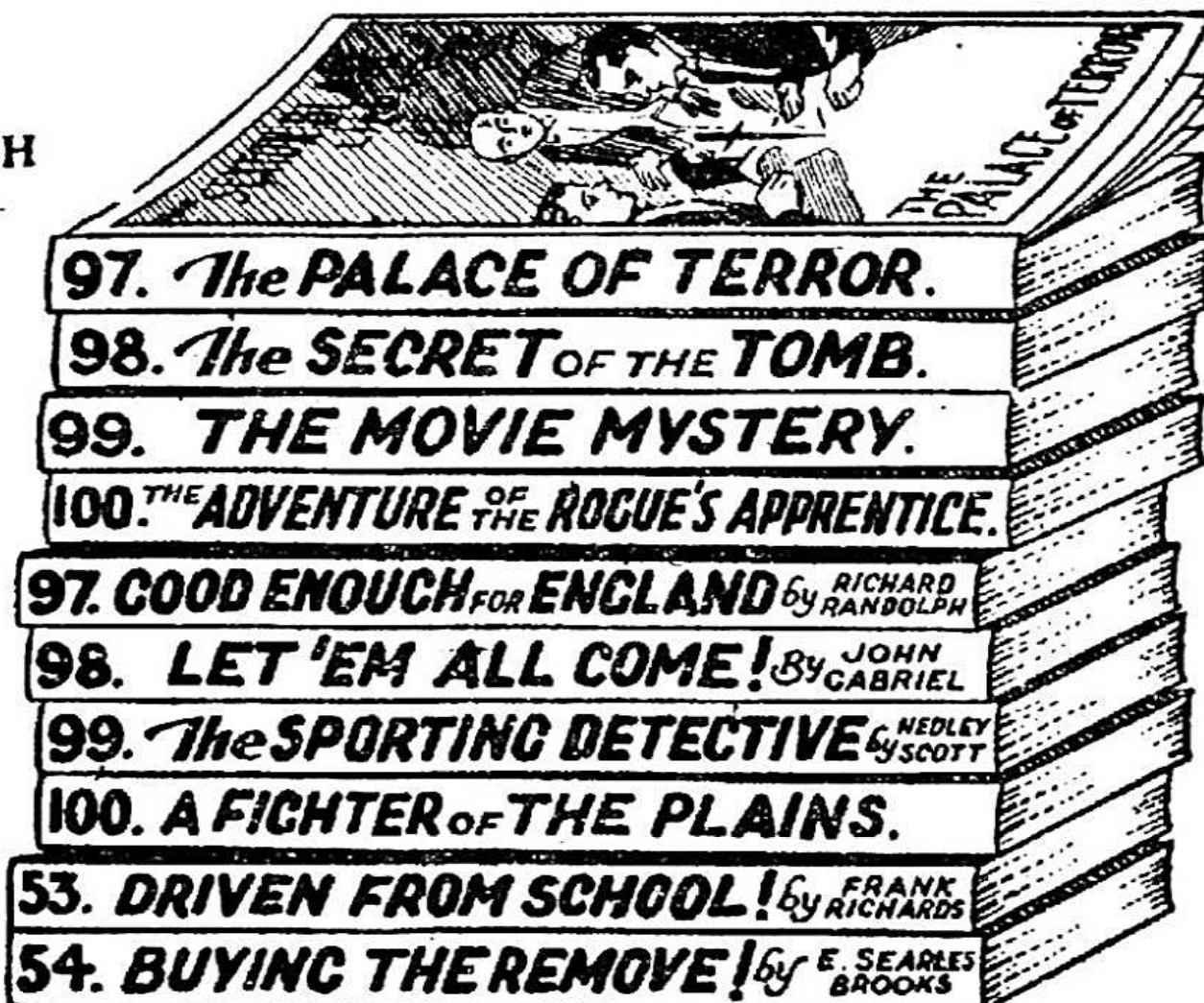
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to-night, but I am not going to be imposed upon. If you have been talking about running this farm, you can forget the whole project. That is final! Absolutely final!"

There was a moment's silence. Sir Lucian was so sharp in his tone that the fellows were nonplussed. Indeed he was acutely alarmed. The prospect of the boys remaining seemed to scare him.

Handforth set his jaw grimly. Any other fellow might have accepted the situation, but Handforth was an obstinate customer. He wasn't going to abandon an idea so meekly.

"Just a minute, sir," he said. "What about Joe Catchpole?"

"Joe Catchpole?"

"Yes, sir."

"And who, in Heaven's name, is Joe Catchpole?" asked Sir Lucian testily.

"He's Farmer Holt's foreman, sir," said Handforth. "What about Joe and the other labourers?"

"Oh, the labourers?" said Sir Lucian. "They have been dismissed. Naturally, since I have decided to sell the livestock, and to abandon the crops, there is no necessity for labour."

"But these men have worked on the farm all their lives, sir!" protested Nipper.

"I cannot help that; they must get work elsewhere!" growled Sir Lucian. "I must confess the point had not occurred to me before, and I shall have to consider some adequate form of compensation. But I do not require these men, and will not have them."

"And you're going to abandon all the growing crops, sir?"

"Naturally."

"But why naturally?" demanded Handforth. "It's—it's a sinful waste, sir! We can run the farm ourselves, and make a fine paying proposition of it. We've got it all planned——"

"I don't care what you've got!" interrupted the old archæologist angrily. "Let me hear no more of this nonsense. The idea! Am I to be dictated to by a parcel of school-boys? This is my property, and I will deal with it as I please. That is enough!"

"But we thought——"

"Enough!" interrupted Sir Lucian hotly.

"We're going to put it to Lady Honoria, sir," said Handforth.

"What!" gasped Sir Lucian, with acute alarm.

Handforth quickly seized his advantage.

"Yes, we're going to ask Lady Honoria's permission to run the farm, sir," he said. "We've been washed out of our original camp, and farming will be even better——"

"I forbid you to mention this matter to Lady Honoria!" shouted Sir Lucian fiercely. "Good heavens! It is the very sort of fantastic suggestion that would appeal to her! Not a word, boys—I command! I won't have you flouting me——"

"We don't want to flout you, sir, but we're all members of the Open Air Society, and Lady Honoria is president," said Handforth.

"We have naturally got to report, and we shall ask her advice."

"Good heavens!" murmured Sir Lucian briefly.

He turned on his heel, and went out of the kitchen, as though all the wind had been taken out of his sails. Handforth grinned.

"That gave him a nasty knock, didn't it?" he said. "As soon as he heard his wife's name, he crumpled up! But why the dickens was he so scared? Anybody might think we were criminals! Why doesn't he want us here?"

Nipper looked thoughtful.

"For the same reason that he has dismissed all the men," he replied. "Sir Lucian wants to be alone—so that he can do his work undisturbed. And when he heard that we're proposing to swarm over the farm he naturally got the wind up."

"What work?" asked Handforth in surprise. "If the old josses want to do some quiet writing, why can't he take a cottage somewhere? It's a shame to abandon this farm to rack and ruin! In fact, we won't allow it!"

Nipper smiled.

"I rather think it's a question for Lady Honoria to decide," he replied. "If she approves, then Sir Lucian will have to sing small. And perhaps the Head will sing small, too. We mustn't take anything for granted, though. And farming isn't such an easy thing as you seem to imagine, Handy. It'll mean hard work—with an accent on the hard."

"As far as I'm concerned, you can count me out," said Buster Boots firmly. "I'd rather go back to St. Frank's."

"Same here," said De Valerie."

"Rather!"

At least half the fellows were emphatic in their opinion.

"We don't want any unwilling spirits!" said Handforth gruffly. "A round dozen of us will be ready to stay, and that's quite sufficient. The rest of you can jolly well eat coke!"

"Hallo! Somebody coming!" said Church, looking out of the window. "There's a lantern coming across the yard, and two or three figures."

The big door opened, and the juniors collected round, waiting for the newcomers to approach. They turned out to be Dr. Stafford, Lady Honoria Dexter, and Willy Handforth.



CHAPTER 14.

The St. Frank's Farmers!

WILLY HANDFORTH waved a careless hand.

"Here you are, sir—all safe and sound," he said cheerfully. "I thought they'd be asleep, but they've been waiting for you to come, I expect."

"I am thankful to find you all safe, my boys," said the Head warmly. "I have heard

of your splendid efforts, and I have seen the gutted ruins of the stables. Splendid work! I am proud of you!"

"Oh, it was nothing, sir," said Nipper. "When we saw there was a fire here, we naturally did all we could. There was nothing special in it, sir. Sir Lucian has invited us to stay until the morning."

Lady Honoria seemed rather surprised.

"Really?" she said. "Sir Lucian is improving! I should not have given him credit for such thoughtfulness. I was not at all surprised to hear that my husband knew nothing of the fire until it was all over. I am afraid Sir Lucian is very absent-minded."

They went into the kitchen, and the Head looked round with satisfaction.

"Naturally, I shall think of some fitting reward for this splendid night's work, my boys," he said. "But for the moment I think you had better come back to the school. There is really no object in your remaining on the farm, and I fear there is a lack of accommodation, in any case."

"Oh, we'll manage somehow, sir," said Handforth.

"I am sure you will be willing to make do with a rough and ready bed, but there is no need for it," said Dr. Stafford. "Within half an hour you can be in your own dormitories."

Handforth very wisely held his tongue.

He wasn't usually so tactful. But this new scheme of his was in jeopardy, and he instinctively felt that if he spoke to the Head at once, he would kill every chance of attaining his end.

So he grabbed hold of Willy, and pulled him aside.

"Well?" he muttered. "What happened?"

"What do you mean—what happened?"

"Did you have to wake the Head up, or —"

"I went straight to the camp first, as we arranged, and found everything in a horrible state," said Willy. "The water's all soaked in, but most of the tents are blown inside out, and torn up, and everything is littered with wreckage. The camp's demolished."

"We know all that," said Handforth impatiently.

"Well, there was nobody there, so I went up to the school, and met the Head and Lady Honoria in the 'Triangle,'" explained Willy. "That's all. As the storm was over, they were going down to the camp, to see what had happened to us. So I explained, and after the Head had recovered we all came along."

"What do you mean—after the Head had recovered?"

"He nearly had a fit," grinned Willy. "Of course, I laid it on a bit thick about the fire, and at first he thought half of us were killed."

"You young rotter!" growled his major. "Spoofing the Head like that!"

"I didn't spoof him," said Willy coolly. "But how could I help it if he jumped to

conclusions? Anyhow, I put him all right in the end, and along we came. Lady Honoria is pretty upset, I think. It means the end of her camp, and all this open-air life, and she's peevish about it."

"Leave her to me," said Handforth crisply.

He hurried across to Lady Honoria, and drew her aside. The Head was hearing all the details from Nipper and Pitt—and Sir Lucian himself had come in, too. It was a good opportunity for Handforth.

"I've got an idea, Lady Honoria, and I hope you'll approve of it," he said. "The camp's wiped out, isn't it?"

"I am afraid so," said Lady Honoria sadly. "Not that I am discouraged. I still maintain that the open air life is the most health-giving form of existence known. And before long I shall have a new camp —"

"But why bother about a new camp?" asked Handforth. "Why can't we stay here?"

"Here?"

"On the farm!"

"Really!" said Lady Honoria. "I must confess I hadn't thought —"

"Sir Lucian has bought it, and it seems a pity to sell all the livestock and abandon the crops," continued Handforth quickly. "We're prepared to live here and run the farm, Lady Honoria. A dozen of us are, at all events. How about it? Is it a go?"

The good lady was startled.

"I'm not at all sure that it would be advisable," she said slowly. "My husband is very particular. He wants to be alone—he wants solitude. No, I am afraid the idea is impracticable—although it appeals to me!"

"But there's nothing to beat farming!" urged Handforth. "It's the real open air life, Lady Honoria! The camp was all right, but we had nothing to do all day! On the farm we shall be able to make hay, and look after the animals, and do everything! Everybody knows that farming is fine for the health!"

Lady Honoria's eyes sparkled.

"It is certainly attractive," she declared. "As you say, if there was one criticism that could be levelled at the camp it was on the point of lack of work. On the farm it would be very different. But Sir Lucian is very insistent upon being alone. In this one instance, I think I must respect his wishes —"

"But he only wants to be alone so that he can grub about for those old Roman relics!" said Handforth anxiously. "He can still go ahead with that, and we shan't interfere!"

Lady Honoria looked at him strangely.

"Then you know?" she asked.

"Know what, ma'am?"

"You know that my husband is searching for these Roman —"

"Why, of course!" said Handforth. "We've known it for days. In fact, he bought the farm because of his discovery in Holt's meadow, didn't he? If we are here



"I—I didn't think it would give way like that!" gasped Handforth, staring in amazement at the hole he had just made in the wall. He didn't realise it at the moment, but that impulsive action of his was to be the beginning of many startling developments!

on the spot, we can help in the excavations, if he wants us to."

Lady Honoria took a deep breath.

"This, of course, alters the whole thing," she said. "As you know of my husband's plan, there is no reason why this excellent farming idea should be abandoned. Leave it to me. You say that a dozen of you are quite willing to work on the farm?"

"Over a dozen!" said Handforth.

"Splendid!" beamed Lady Honoria, a firm, determined expression coming into her forceful face. "We will settle this matter now, young man. There is no time like the present."

She walked over towards the Head.

"We have just decided, Honoria, that the boys shall come back to the school at once," said Dr. Stafford. "Lucian is well pleased with the decision. The camp is naturally at an end, and the boys will resume their ordinary places in the school."

The Head spoke with a note of relief in his voice. And Sir Lucian stood by, gently rubbing his hands with satisfaction. It seemed that everything was going to be all right.

Yet they both experienced a tinge of uneasiness when they noted the calm, purposeful expression on Lady Honoria's face.

"The boys had some ridiculous idea of remaining at the farm," said Sir Lucian, with a forced laugh. "Quite preposterous, of course!"

"On the contrary, Lucian, I am entirely in favour of it," said Lady Honoria. "In fact, I have decided that the boys shall transfer from the camp to the farm, and continue the open air life here. I do not see why I should have my plans spoilt by a mere thunderstorm!"

They looked at her, aghast.

"But, my dear!" said Sir Lucian, in alarm. "You know very well that such a thing is out of the question!"

"I know that such a thing is, nothing of the sort, Lucian!"

"But, really, Honoria, I cannot allow this!" said the Head feebly. "These boys have been away from their studies too long as it is. They must return to the school, and——"

"We can settle these little points later," interrupted Lady Honoria, ignoring her dis-

tinguished brother's anxiety. "For the moment, we will decide who shall remain, and who shall not!"

She turned to the respectfully waiting juniors.

"I understand that some of you are willing to stand by the Open Air Society, and to work on the farm?" she said. "All those boys who are willing to do this, step forward!"

"Come on!" said Handforth briskly.

There was a moment's hesitation among the others. But when Nipper & Co. joined the chums of Study D, a good many others followed. Nipper was not so keen on the farming—but here was an excellent opportunity to be near Sir Lucian, and to investigate the mystery of the Roman relics.

Pitt and Grey joined, and so did Archie Glenthorne—and Fullwood and Russell and, naturally, Willy & Co.

All the Fourth Formers, under Buster Boots' wing, held back. A few Removites were with them, too.

"Nothing could be better," said Lady Honoria, at length. "Roughly, fifteen or sixteen of you. That will be ample. The rest can return to St. Frank's at once—as your headmaster has suggested."

"Then we can stay on the farm, Lady Honoria?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"Yes, it is settled," said Lady Honoria calmly.

"Hurrah!"

A few cheers went up, and Sir Lucian and the Head listened with dazed indignation. It was impossible for them to enter into an argument with the lady in front of all these boys.

However, they soon had a chance.

Boots, and all the other juniors who favoured a return to the school, went off—on the understanding that the Head would soon follow, in order to make arrangements for their admittance. Until he arrived, they were to wait in his own House.

Handforth and Nipper and the other would-be farmers went off upstairs to explore the rooms, and to find sleeping accommodation. So the Head had the kitchen to himself, with his sister and his brother-in-law.

"I am glad they have gone!" he said fervently. "Now, Honoria, what do you mean by this?"

"Yes!" snapped Sir Lucian. "What in Heaven's name do you mean by it?"

Lady Honoria did not flinch under their combined glares.

"I mean exactly what I say!" she said calmly. "I think it will do the boys a world of good. Farm life will set them up—it will build their muscles and strengthen their sinews!"

"But it is outrageous!" said the Head angrily. "I must say, Honoria, that your high-handed attitude is intolerable. You are taking a mean advantage of our relationship! You gave the boys permission to do this in my presence, and it was impossible

for me to enter into a wrangling competition. You took an advantage——"

"Don't talk nonsense, Malcolm," interrupted Lady Honoria calmly. "You ought to be pleased that your boys are so sensible. Cricket and other games are all very well, but a lot of heavy farm work will do them far more good than all your sports!"

"But their lessons!" protested Dr. Stafford.

"If necessary, they can devote certain hours to study," conceded Lady Honoria. "That is all a matter of arrangement. Not, however, that they will miss much. A week or two of farm work will double their strength. I shall have to institute the idea in other parts of the country—in fact, I shall buy farms for the special purpose of the Society. It will be a great movement. I am a firm believer in home produce. Let the British farms supply the British people! That's a wonderful slogan for the Society, Lucian. I must have fresh literature printed at once!"

Sir Lucian and the Head felt strangely weak.

"My dear, have you forgotten my object?" asked Sir Lucian huskily. "Have you overlooked the fact that I bought this farm in order to be at peace—in order to carry on my investigations in private? How can I do that with all these boys running wild over the property?"

"The boys know everything!" said Lady Honoria. "And a good thing, too. All this secrecy is ridiculous. The best thing you can do is to get them to help you in your exploration. Anyhow, they are here—and here they shall stay!"

"Honoria, I am very angry with you," said the Head furiously.

"So I see," smiled Lady Honoria. "And it's really very silly of you."

"Upon my soul!" fumed Dr. Stafford. "I insist——"

"And so do I!" interrupted his sister. "No, Malcolm, you can save your breath. You, too, Lucian. These boys will be the pioneers of the New Movement. Within a year the whole country will abound with these new branches of my Society. British Farm Produce For British People! Yes, I shall have to have large posters on every hoarding."

The two helpless gentlemen looked at one another in mutual agony.



CHAPTER 15.

A Strange Discovery!

NIPPER chuckled.

"Well, it's not so bad, and I dare say we shall survive until the morning," he said cheerfully.

"Are you fellows all right over there?"

"Comfy as you like," said Reggie Pitt drowsily.

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

"FARMERS ALL!"

Handy among the hay—also among the pigs!

The Fresh Air Fiends have a corking time down on Holt's Farm. Enoch Snipe is the only one who doesn't enjoy himself.

He learns, for the first time, that turkeys can fight!

Handy, Nipper and Co. dig deeper into the mystery surrounding Sir Lucian. There is treasure somewhere about, and they mean to find it.

You'll enjoy next Wednesday's splendid story, and you can make sure of getting your copy of the Old Paper if you ask your newsagent to reserve it for you.

More startling thrills in

"THE BURIED WORLD!"

Keep up with the amazing adventures of the Professor and Jim!



ORDER IN ADVANCE!

There were six or seven of the juniors in this particular room. It was one of the large upstairs rooms in the old farmhouse. The floor dropped away unevenly towards the south-west, and the walls were uneven and picturesque in their inequalities. The ceiling was low, with oaken beams. It was a real, old-fashioned room.

A solitary candle was burning, and by the light of this the fellows were preparing themselves for sleep. There were two big beds—quaint old four-posters—and a kind of lounge. There was plenty of room for them all, although there were no blankets.

But this did not worry them in the least, since the room was stuffy and warm. It still retained a good deal of the heat that had been generated the previous day. The storm had left the night air refreshingly cool, but indoors there was still plenty of warmth.

"This looks a bit runny, you know," said Church, as he looked at the end wall of the room. "What do you make of it, Handy?"

Handforth waved a hand.

"Don't bother me now, my son," he said. "I'm thinking. I'm planning out the day's work for to-morrow. Farming is a tricky business, and it needs a lot of concentration. I shall try my hand at ploughing in the

morning, and you fellows had better be cutting the hay."

"You can't cut hay," said Pitt.

"Why can't you?"

"It's grass when you cut it, you chump," grinned Pitt. "The sun turns it into hay, and then you cart it away, and make a stack of it."

"I know that, you ass!" roared Handforth. "What do you take me for? If you think you can teach me anything about farming—"

"My dear chap, I wouldn't try," said the West House junior languidly. "I'm willing to learn from you. Personally, I think this stunt is going to be interesting, although I don't give it longer than a week."

"Same here," said Nipper. "That's why I agreed."

"A week?" said Handforth, staring.

"Well, perhaps a little less—four days, say," amended Nipper.

"You funny idiot!" roared Handforth.

"We shall be here all the term!"

"That's just one of your little dreams," chuckled Nipper. "I thought it would be a bit of sport, so I joined in. But I don't mind wagering that we shall be back in our normal routine at St. Frank's by Friday.

If it lasts a bit longer, it won't matter, but there's no question of it being permanent. Running a farm is a topping recreation, but I'm afraid it's liable to become irksome in the long run."

But Handforth wouldn't admit it. He spoke as though they were settled at Holt's Farm for good. He seemed to imagine that their people might as well cease paying all the St. Frank's fees from that day onwards.

But the others knew better, although they said nothing.

"I believe this house was struck by lightning," said Church, from the other end of the room. "When that flash came, it didn't only set fire to the stables, but it hit the house as well."

"What makes you think that?" asked Nipper.

"Well, look at this crack here," replied Church. "There's a whacking great crevice all down this wall, and it's fresh, too. In fact, I don't like the look of it. I believe it's unsafe. You've only got to push it, and the whole wall sags outwards."

"What!" shouted the others.

Even Handforth was interested now, and they all collected at the other side of the room. Tommy Watson held the candle, and by its light they could see the uneven crack which had caught Church's eye in the first place. Nipper nodded after a brief examination.

"Yes, this is the wall nearest the stables," he said. "I expect the lightning did this. This wing of the house must have received an awful jar. This crack doesn't look particularly healthy."

"You press against the wall," said Church.

Nipper did so, and it perceptibly sagged.

"That's no good!" said Handforth, pushing forward. "Give a heave!"

"Steady!" yelled Nipper. "Don't be an ass!"

"Look out!" shouted McClure.

But Handforth, with his usual recklessness, had taken no heed. He put his shoulder to the section of the wall, and applied all his weight. A crumbling roar filled the room, and there was a devastating crash as the wall fell to pieces. The juniors staggered back, half-blinded by dust.

"You hopeless ass!" shouted Nipper.

"I—I didn't think it would give way like that!" gasped Handforth. "It's a jolly good thing I tested it—the whole house might collapse next! We'd better get out of here!"

The dust cleared away, and Reggie Pitt whistled.

"I say, this is funny!" he said. "There's no rubbish on the floor. That plaster and stuff has all dropped down inside somewhere. Let's have that candle."

There was a jagged cavity in the wall, five feet in height, and three or four feet wide in one section. Pitt took the candle, and held it cautiously within.

"Hallo, hallo!" he said. "What do we see? Stairs—leading downwards! Well, I'm jiggered! We've hit upon a secret passage!"

"Great Scott!"

"It must be a secret passage, because there's no door in this wall, and it doesn't lead from any other part of the house," said Pitt keenly. "It must be hundreds and hundreds of years old."

They were all rather excited. Even Nipper was intensely interested. Pitt's statement was undoubtedly correct. Handforth had blundered upon a hidden stairway—one that had probably remained a secret for centuries. But that thunderstorm had been the real reason for its discovery.

"We'd better not go down," said Nipper doubtfully. "Or, if we do, we shall have to go easy. Let me lead the way, Reggie—or you can, if you like."

Pitt cautiously passed into the opening, and felt each stair before trusting his weight to it. The others followed behind, picking their way through the debris which littered the downward path. The steps led straight downwards at a steep angle, and after a while the juniors knew that they had descended well past the level of the ground floor. It became very cold, and an earthy smell arose from far below.

But the candle still burned steadily. Pitt was watching it carefully. At the least sign of any change in that flame he would halt.

"Here we are at the bottom," he said at last. "By Jove, it's a tunnel, and a pretty old one, too. Look at these bricks."

"Built by the Romans!" said Handforth eagerly.

"You've got Romans on the brain!" growled Church.

"I don't know—I believe he's right, for once," said Nipper, as he examined one of the walls. "This tunnel was built ages and ages ago, anyhow. It'll be interesting to see where it leads to."

"Lead on!" said Handforth impatiently. "In fact, you'd better give me the candle."

But Pitt declined, and all further progress was stopped three minutes later, in any case. They came to a spot where the roof of the tunnel had caved in, and the way was barred.

"Can't we pull this stuff out of the way?" asked Handforth.

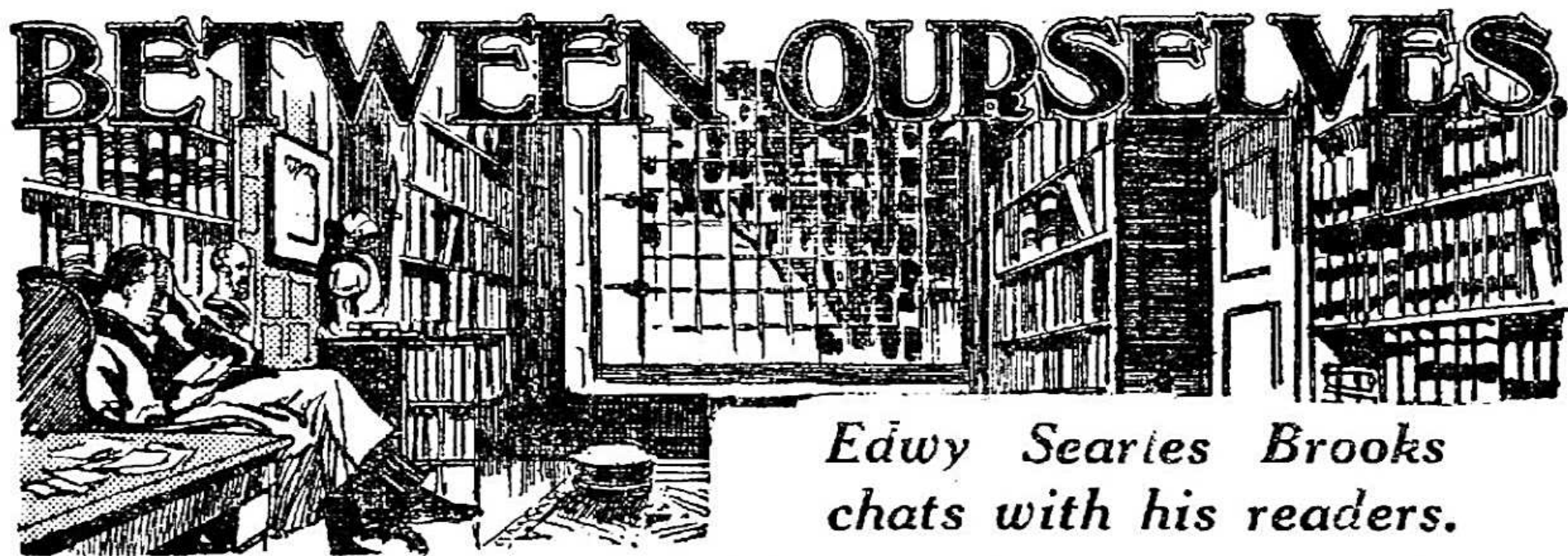
"Not to-night," replied Nipper decisively. "Look here, we'll keep this to ourselves, you chaps. Sir Lucian knows something about this old place, and he wants to keep it secret. I vote we get back, screen that hole, and explore thoroughly later on."

And the others agreed that this was the most sensible suggestion. They had made an important discovery, and they were content for the time being. On the morrow they would start as farmers—and, altogether, there was every prospect of some lively times.

But for the moment they were satisfied.

THE END.

(What is the mystery of this secret passage? You'll know when you read next week's ripping, long, complete yarn, entitled: "FARMERS ALL!" Handy, as a farmer, is a perfect scream, and you'll vote this one of the best yarns you've ever read!)



*Edwy Searies 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. Photo exchange offer open indefinitely. Mine for yours—but yours first, please.*

E. S. B.

NOW, this week, I am going to adopt a rather novel procedure. Instead of filling up these two pages with comments on the week's batch of letters, my scheme is to print various quotations from the letters themselves. I am not printing the full names and addresses of the writers, as I have not received their permission. But there are so many "doubting Thomases" about that I shall probably be accused of making up these letters myself! And that would rather ruin the object of my scheme. So I would like the readers whose words I have quoted to give me permission, as soon as they see this, and I will then print their names and addresses in a later issue.

* * *

As to my object, I want all you readers who are in trouble with your parents or guardians for reading Our Paper to show them this particular chat, and to ask them to read it. I know that many grown-ups are prejudiced against my stories, and I want to do my utmost to remove this prejudice—because I feel that it is undeserved. Well, here are a few acknowledgements first.

* * *

Jacob Whitboy* (Beaconsfield, S. A.), D. T. Sullivan* (Bankstown, N.S.W.), Clifford W. Taylor (Stourbridge), L. Hersey (Springvale, I.O.W.), "4076" (Essefell, Luimneach), Victor Cole (Croydon), "Boy Scout Admirer"* (Walworth), Gordon Mills (Shaw), George Burgess* (Arundel), "M.A.M.5640" (Johannesburg), Leslie Lucas (Croydon), Robert Potter* (Bury St. Edmunds), P. Young** (Liverpool), F. E. George* (Taunton), H. L. Watson (Darlington), Arthur Palmer (Leicester), Peter Murphy (Liverpool), Roelf Attwell (Muizenberg, Cape Town), "Alf 'Uggins" (S.E.1), H. W. A. Gibbons* (Blackheath), Eric Davenport (Coventry),

Norah D. Sheard* (Cleckheaton), Kenneth Trigg (Bristol), Robert P. Ross* (S.W.5), Cecil Jones (S.W.11), Leonard J. Smith (Ipswich.)

* * *

The following is from a letter sent to me from South Africa: "I feel that I must let you know my opinion of your stories. In the first place, Mr. Brooks, I wish to tell you that I love to read the special little corner, 'Between Ourselves.' In my opinion, the stories you write are splendid school stories. In our school we are encouraged to read as many good school stories and other good stuff as possible, but 'tis very seldom that we get such splendid school stories as we do from you in 'The Nelson Lee Library.' I have thoroughly enjoyed reading the Northestria series, and your special Xmas number, and as for the serial, 'Sons of the Men of Mons,' it was just stirring and splendid. As I find it's seldom that we, as school-boys, get such good stuff to read, I am doing my utmost to increase the popularity of the good old paper, by telling as many friends (who are ignorant of these fine stories) as I can get hold of about the good stories, and getting them to buy the paper and to read the stories for themselves. I have this week again introduced several new readers, and I am proud to tell you, Mr. Brooks, that all the boys in my class—matriculation, we are fifteen altogether—are enthusiastic supporters and readers of the good old paper."

* * *

Now, here is a quotation from the letter of an Australian reader: "I owe you thanks for many jolly hours spent apart from my own orbit in the company of dear old Handy & Co. Being one of the supposedly weaker sex, and certainly old enough to choose my literature discreetly, people think me crazy

when I roam about decorated with a 'Nelson Lee' and a broad smile at the seaside, or in the train; but, like most of the literary tribe, I have grown indifferent to opinion. Being an inkslinger myself, I can appreciate the versatile brain you must have. I like the Latin poets, I like 'deep' books, I love good books of every form, I subscribe to thick papers, but I wouldn't miss my St. Frank's friends for all the publications in the world. Which is a large thing for an author to-day. In both the Handforths you have created characters worth knowing, worth shaking hands with. My hearty congratulations to you, Mr. Edwy Searles Brooks. May you long delight the young-minded, whatever be their years, with your topping stories."

* * *

This is quoted from a letter from a "Boy Scout Admirer," aged 16, Walworth: "I am a Patrol Leader in the Boy Scouts, and I realise what Brotherliness is, and that's what you are aiming at. A lot of girls buy the Old Paper, chiefly because of girl characters; I most heartily approve of this, and would be very pleased to 'see' even more of them (I put 'see' because that's how it appears to me). In other school stories girls are very rarely mentioned, and the way you make your boy and girl characters pair off is 'real good,' as Farman would say."

* * *

The next quotation is from a Suffolk reader's letter: "I am writing to congratulate you for managing to write such interesting fun, sport and adventure week after week. Sometimes I feel sure that you must have a confederate to lend a hand." (No, old man, I write them all myself—always have done, and always shall, as long as my name appears on the first page.—E.S.B.) "I think I like the tales so very much because the characters are so very out of the ordinary and outstanding. For instance, Handforth has his manner, which is so typical of some schoolboys. Nipper—well, his outstanding point is leadership, and so on. As far as I can remember, I have never found any stupid errors in your stories. For instance, the school is 'there,' the villages 'there,' the river 'there,' and so on. I hope you can see what I mean. What I wish to impress upon you (I want you to take this as a testimonial from a reader of long standing) is that *there is nothing of the 'blood and thunder' trash about the stories.* They are clean, nothing blood-curdling or gruesome about them, and that is what is so greatly appreciated. I suppose you will be wonder-what my age is, having spoken of myself as a 'reader of long standing.' If you would care to know my age, it is 19, and I hope to read your stories (providing you will, as I hope, live to write them) till I am 90!"

* * *

This is from a Liverpool reader: "I must say your stories are better than ever. They have been unbeatable in the past, and each new series that is issued seems to be better than the last. It is a wonder to me how you can keep up to your high standard of fiction

(to tell you the truth, your stories are real life to me, and your characters real persons)."

* * *

"Waddy" (Ilkley), R. A. Bird (Chelmsford), G. Hurst (Leighmouth), Terence Sullivan* (Manchester), Edmund R. Browne (Durban), Jeffrey Ellis* (Johannesburg), Jack Keogh (Hobart, Tasmania), F. Taberer-Moore* (Nuneaton), Hugh R. Holmes (Regent's Park), "Bill Brewer, Jan Stewer, Peter Gurney, Peter Davey, Dan Whidden, Harry Hawke and Uncle Tom Cobleigh" ("Widdicombe Fair"), Edmund Paine (Montreal), E. Cotton (Burton-on-Trent), Fred Clarke (Eastleigh), Robert T. Wilkins (Tisbury), A. Horton, Jr.* (Manchester), A. Watson (Cobham), John C. Burch (Halton), Leonard Lambourne (Reading), Ivor Collis (Sandy, Beds), "Airman" (Oldham), Rhoderick M'Kie (Newcastle), G. Ryan (Kirkham), W. J. Lester (Chelsea), "Tennis" (Birmingham), "An Ardent Admirer of the Old Paper" (No Address), Violet M. Hutchinson (Cromford).

* * *

This is what a Midland reader says: "In my opinion, the stories of the boys of St. Frank's are easily the finest series of school-boy yarns that have ever appeared. Easily the most attractive and amusing character in the stories is E. O. Handforth. He is made a much more 'real' character by the fact that there are hundreds of his sort about. Indeed, I have a friend who is Handy to the T."

* * *

I often feel like quoting from letters, so it would help me when readers give me permission to use their names and addresses when quoting from their letters.

* * *

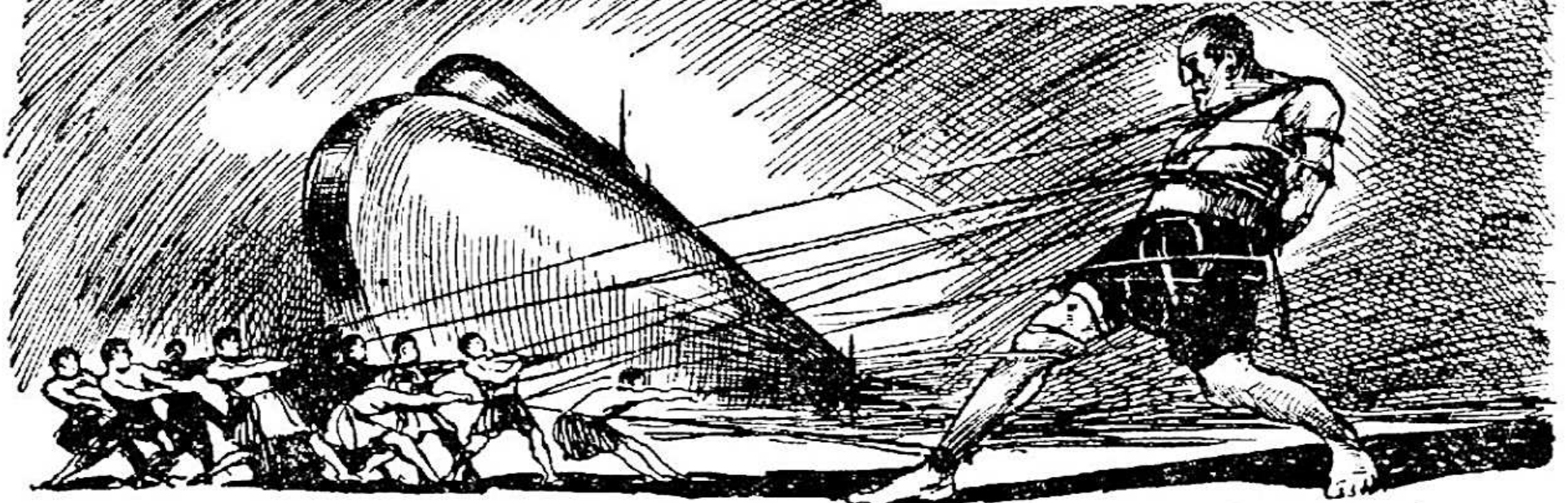
Well, there's no more space, I'm afraid. But there are just one or two answers that I would like to give. You had better write to the Chief Officer of the League, F. Taberer-Moore, about those amateur theatricals. He'll tell you everything that you want to know, I have no doubt. And you had better write to the Editor, Hugh R. Holmes, if you want to know more about the characters in "Sons of the Men of Mons." Oh, and by the way, Hugh, old man, you said that you wanted to see an acknowledgment within a week of your letter. Well, you've had to wait five weeks or so, haven't you? You see, it is absolutely impossible for any reader to receive an acknowledgment in less than four or five weeks—as the Old Paper always goes to press several weeks in advance. I hope other readers will take note of this.



Read These Amazing Chapters!Thrilling 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.)

The Peace-Maker!

QUITE unconscious of the fate that had overtaken Jim, Stanislaus Cripps carried out the task he had set himself of transporting into the Outer Cavern the unconscious Falta from the spot where he blocked the entrance to the Hall of the People.

Driving the tractor through the shattered opening, he guided it to the threshold of the hall, where already Masra and fifty assistants were struggling to raise that giant form.

"You'd better leave this job to me," Stanislaus Cripps exclaimed. "It's rather more than you can manage."

Making them raise the giant's legs, he drove the tractor under his body. Allowing the legs to rest on either side of the tractor, he worked the machine forward until that huge frame was balanced on the deck. Then, telling the Kru to support the giant's shoul-

ders so that he would come to no harm in his passage down the corridor, Cripps backed the tractor.

In a few minutes the giant had been safely deposited on the floor of the Outer Cavern. Squatting by his side, Stanislaus Cripps watched him until he showed signs of returning consciousness.

Presently the Falta opened his enormous jaws and yawned. Then he rubbed his eyes with the back of one of his huge hands. Abruptly he sat up, his enormous abdominal muscles contracting into the semblance of tree roots as he made this exertion. Stanislaus Cripps, who had risen to his feet, watched him cautiously, the cylinder of sleeping gas ready in his hand. The giant blinked at him.

"Have you had enough, O Falta?" Cripps exclaimed. "Or shall I give you some more sleep?"

A recollection of what had happened to him

in the Hall of the People seemed to occur to the giant. He looked almost nervously at the cylinder of sleeping gas, and then, twisting round, he dropped on his knees, bending his head to the ground.

"O Shining One, you are very great! Who is there who can stand against you? I am your slave. Have I not seen your power?"

Stanislaus Cripps grinned.

"You say true, O Falta. I am great. It would be foolish not to admit it. And this is the nature of my greatness. I could slay you here now, yet I hold my hand. Even as your comrade brutally tore the unfortunate Kru to pieces, so I could scatter your great, stupid body to indistinguishable fragments of flesh. I have but to press, and you will just cease to be."

The Falta twittered and whimpered, whereat Cripps made an imperious gesture.

"But peace is what I desire to build in this world," the scientist continued. "No more shall the Kru and the Falta be at enmity. Each shall labour for the common purpose. You shall be as one people—the great and the little. Go now to your brothers, and speak to them the words I have said. Tell them that they have but to come to me and submit, and all shall be well with them. No longer shall they know fear. I, the Shining One, have said it!"

Little did he dream, as he framed that message for the Falta, how he was playing into Ka-Ra's hands!

"I will do even as you say, O Shining One," the Falta twittered. "Is it your will that I go now?"

He was clearly anxious to get out of that dangerous neighbourhood as soon as possible.

"Yes, go!" Cripps nodded. "I will remain here, or in the neighbourhood. If the words of which I have made you the bearer let the light of wisdom into the minds of the Falta, they have but to come here and humble themselves, and I will be their father and protector!"

Anxiety Over Jim!

THE Falta rose abruptly to his feet, then strode swiftly away into the azure gloom. Stanislaus Cripps watched him until he had disappeared, and then looked about for Jim. There, a quarter of a mile away, were the stores over which he had left his companion to mount guard.

"Boy!" he shouted. "Boy, where are you?"

There was no answer save the echoes that repeated "Boy!" in mocking tones. Stanislaus Cripps strode to the spot where the stores were littered about the ground. There was no sign of Jim anywhere.

"What the dickens has happened to the fool kid?" he muttered.

As if the better to make his voice heard, he removed the headpiece of his diving suit, and, curving his hands about his mouth, sent his voice booming across the Outer Cavern.

"Boy! Boy!"

Receiving no reply to that summons, he shielded his eyes with his hands and peered into the gloom. Nothing moved among the boulders. Nowhere could he see any trace of Jim.

"What's got the boy?" he exclaimed. "I told him to wait here." He stood for a moment frowning, and then a grin lighted up his face. "That's it, I'll bet. He's gone to see Tinta. Still, I'd best make sure."

Taking an apple out of the barrel, he strode back to the entrance to the Inner Cavern, munching it as he went, the headpiece of his suit of armour dangling by his side. Finding Masra, he inquired if he had seen Jim.

"Did he not go out with you, O Hairy One?" Masra replied anxiously.

"He did. I left him to guard the stores while I got rid of that Falta. I was thinking, Masra, that he might have gone in search of your daughter, for anyone can see that he likes her. Where is Tinta?"

"She is in the Cave of Pain, whither you sent her to look after the wounded, O Hairy One."

"Well, we'd better go and see if the boy is there, Masra."

But there was nobody in the Kru's primitive substitute for a hospital save the unfortunate victims of the Falta's brutality and those who were tending them. Stanislaus Cripps saw that their wounds had been bathed and their dislocated limbs bound and set.

"You have done well, my dear," he exclaimed to Tinta. "Has the boy been here?"

Tinta shook her head.

"I have not seen Krim since I left the Cave of the People to look after these unfortunate ones."

Stanislaus Cripps scowled.

"What the dickens can have become of him?" he muttered to himself in English.

Instantly Tinta seemed to understand the thoughts that were passing through his mind. An expression of grave anxiety crossed her face.

"What has happened to Krim? Is he in danger, O Hairy One?"

Stanislaus Cripps explained the circumstance in which he had left Jim, and how he could find no trace of him. That troubled look deepened in Tinta's eyes.

"But if he was alone there in the Outer Cavern, the Falta must have caught him. O Hairy One, we must go and look. If the Falta have taken him we must rescue him."

Without more ado she hurried from the Cave of Pain and along the network of corridors to the shattered exit to the Inner Cavern. Stanislaus Cripps and Masra followed. Once they were in the Outer Cavern Stanislaus Cripps pointed out the spot where he had left Jim.

"He has been captured by the Falta!" Tinta exclaimed wildly. "Oh, Hairy One, I know it! We must go and search for him!"

Tinta's anxiety now found reflection in Stanislaus Cripps' mind. He remembered how Jim had risked his life to rescue him from the hands of the Falta—the courage and

resource the boy had shown during those dreadful moments before the coming of the great light. And, quite apart from this, Stanislaus Cripps was influenced by a real liking and friendship for Jim.

Insensibly, the youngster who had dared to beard him at Widgery Dene with a demand for the payment of his mother's bill had become a friend and companion. Between them now was the link of common adventure and the facing of death side by side.

"Cheer up, Tinta. We'll get the boy right enough. Bound to! If I have to blow the whole of these hypertrophied idiots to blazes I'll collect the youngster!"

The Coming of the Falta!

STANISLAUS CRIPPS led the way at a run towards the tractor, and, motioning Tinta and Masra to take their seats, leapt into his place at the wheel. The next moment the engines, springing to life, were driving the glittering machine at a brisk pace across the rock-strewn ground.

Ziz-zagging backwards and forward so that he could bring every portion of the ground under review, moving from the edge of the cliff to the shores of the lake, he had advanced about a mile when, ahead of him, there appeared a number of the Falta. Stopping the tractor, Stanislaus Cripps watched them approach.

"What do you make of this?" he asked his companions. "There must be nearly eighty of them—about the whole crowd. What do you think they're after?"

Neither Tinta nor Masra had anything to suggest. The Falta, marching ten abreast in some sort of rough order, were approaching the spot at a rapid pace. As each of their strides covered some eight yards of ground, it took them only a matter of a few minutes to reach the little party waiting in the tractor. Masra cried warningly.

"Be careful, O Hairy One! The Falta may mean treachery."

"If they make trouble, so much the worse for them," Stanislaus Cripps exclaimed. "Anyway, you needn't be anxious, Masra. If the worse comes to the worst, I can set this machine going at a pace which would outdistance them easily."

The Falta approached to within a hundred yards, then halted, the rear ranks coming level with their comrades in front, and making a long line that stretched for the better part of a mile. Then, with that peculiar twittering sound, they flung their twenty-foot bodies on the rocky floor.

"Great Scott! They're going to do physical jerks! 'On the 'ands down!'" Stanislaus Cripps exclaimed, with a laugh, speaking in English, and then added, as if addressing those giant forms: "On the feet up!"

Needless to say the Falta took no notice of those instructions. They knelt there, beating their foreheads on the ground and still continuing their twittering sounds.

Stanislaus Cripps was reminded of the message he had sent them. They had come to submit. This was just what he had told them they must do if they were willing to have peace. He gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"It's all right, Tinta. The Falta have recognised at last the futility of continuing this old feud with the Kru. I sent them word by that Falta we had to drag out of the Hall of the People that if they wanted peace they could have it by coming and showing themselves submissive and humble. That's what all this means. Now we shall be able to hear what's become of the boy."

Cripps Duped!

WITH his head still unprotected by the headpiece of his suit of armour, Cripps leapt excitedly from the tractor. Masra sprang after him in alarm.

"O Hairy One, it may be treachery!" he cried. "Have a care!"

Stanislaus Cripps shook off his hold almost roughly.

"The very worst thing would be to show fear, Masra. I tell you, this is what I expected."

"But do not go within their reach, O Hairy One. Their arms stretch out four times as far as a man can cover at a stride, and they are swift to seize, O Hairy One!"

"Do you take me for a fool, Masra?" Cripps retorted indignantly. "Could I not send these Falta to sleep if I wish to, or deal with them as I dealt with He-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken and that brute in the Hall of the People?"

With a fearless, resolute look in his eyes he walked calmly to within twenty yards of that line of cringing giants. Then he halted, and sent his voice booming through the Cavern.

"What would you with me, O Falta?"

One of the giants raised his head and answered for his comrades in his high-pitched, twittering voice.

"O Hairy One! We know how great and powerful you are. We know that we cannot fight any longer. Armed with your power and your wisdom, the Kru are too much for us. We would have peace, O Hairy One."

Stanislaus Cripps folded his arms, and let his eyes wander down that long line of giant forms. Right at the far end one of the giants was making curious movements with his hand, and, raising his face, was looking intently at Stanislaus Cripps, shaking his head as he did so.

But the distance of this particular giant from Stanislaus Cripps was too great for him to understand those signals, or to recognise the features of the faithful Gra.

"It is well, O Falta!" said Cripps. "Never is it too late to seek wisdom. But if there is to be peace between us, it must be on my terms."

"It is as the Hairy One wills," the spokes-

man of the party exclaimed. "The Falta are his slaves!"

"Considering my very superior intelligence, that is as it should be. Now listen, O Falta. I am willing to hold my hand, and neither to stretch you in sleep nor blast you to nothingness with the instrument I possess if this peace you ask for be a real peace.

"You must swear friendship with the Kru. No longer must you seek to keep the Fish Food that comes down the Great Drain for yourselves alone. You must share all things in common with the Kru. The Kru, on their part, will show you how to make clothing to cover you, give you to drink of the milk of their cattle, and the meat that they gather daily in the Cave of the Mushrooms. Is that understood?"

As if to show that they understood his terms, the long line of Falta beat the ground with their hands.

"Good," Stanislaus Cripps continued. "And there are other matters. There are to be no more sacrifices to your god, or any other god you happen to set up in place of the one I destroyed. There is to be an end of bloodshed and butchery."

Again those vast palms clapped the rocky floor, making a sharp rippling sound not unlike the firing of a nest of Lewis guns.

"And you have been idle, O Falta, and idleness is bad. I will have to show you how to work and build. It is to be understood, therefore, that between us my word is law."

"It shall be even as you say, O Hairy One!" their spokesman retorted.

"Then that's settled," Stanislaus Cripps went on. "You can arise and go your ways until I send you a message which will inform you of how you shall order your lives."

But none of the giants moved—only far away at the end of the line that same giant figure was waving his hand almost despairingly and shaking his head.

"Until the Hairy One touches one of us with his own hand we will not move," the spokesman exclaimed. "We shall know then that in truth he has forgiven us for daring to stand up against his might and magic."

Masra cried out warningly as Stanislaus Cripps moved towards the giant.

"O Hairy One, beware!"

But Stanislaus Cripps ignored that warning. It was only when Tinta called to him, reminding him that they did not know what fate had overtaken Jim, that he halted.

"There's one of the Shining Ones who is missing," Stanislaus Cripps exclaimed. "You must have seen him, O Falta!"

Their spokesman again raised his head.

"He came to speak to us, O Hairy One, when we were debating how we should make peace with you and the Kru. Even now he is waiting for you in the open space about our huts."

"The boy is all right, my dear. He seems to have taken a hand in bringing this scene about. Shows great intelligence and initiative on his part."

WHEN FULLWOOD WAS A POTTER!



There are lots of thrills and fun in this great yarn of schoolboy life and adventure at St. Frank's, now on Sale in

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Before the Traitor!

PERFECTLY satisfied that everything was as it should be—confident, as always, in his own judgment—and believing that these huge creatures had quite naturally and inevitably recognised his superiority, Stanislaus Cripps approached the Falta to perform the ritual on which they had insisted.

Selecting their spokesman as a suitable subject, he walked fearlessly towards him. There was the great head resting with its forehead on the ground. Stanislaus Cripps stretched out his hand and pulled the matted hair on the giant's head.

"Arise, O Falta! There is peace henceforth between us!"

As he uttered the words those great arms made a circling movement, and a huge hand closed about his waist. Before he could utter a sound, or even think of struggling, the giants on either side snatched the weapons from his belt.

Then the Falta who was gripping him rose to his feet. He looked Stanislaus Cripps in the eyes triumphantly.

"O Hairy One, you have been caught by a cunning greater than your own. Now how will your magic avail you? What can you do now that the sleeping and the destroying magic have been taken from you?" He chattered at his captive like some mysterious monkey behind the bars of a cage. "Great words you spoke to us just now. But they

were all lies! You intended to make us your slaves—slaves of the Kru!"

Stanislaus Cripps mastered the anger that was raging at his heart with difficulty. To be caught like this by one of these hypertrophied idiots—oh, it was the last word in humiliation!

"And now we will take you, O Hairy One, to him who has guided us," the giant Falta went on. "He will find means to make you tell the secret Magic of the Flying Thing. Then we will sacrifice you to our god, whom you blasted. Once before you were kept among us for the great sacrifice at the Coming of the Light. You escaped then; but this time, O Hairy One, you shall not escape!"

Stanislaus Cripps did not reply.

He felt bitterly angry with himself that he should have allowed the Falta to dupe him as they had.

But who, in the first place, had put the giants up to it?

There must be somebody behind them, for they were too ignorant to think of such a cunning plan themselves.

Cripps frowned perplexedly. The Falta had said that Jim was waiting for him in their huts. Surely he wasn't responsible for this?

Knowing the boy as he did, Cripps realised that was impossible.

Just then the scientist turned and saw the panic-stricken Masra and Tinta. A sudden idea occurred to him.

"Run!" he shouted. "Run! Bid the Kru come with their liquid fire!"

But before either Tinta or her father could move one of the Falta had stepped out of the ranks, and, with a sweep of his arm, had seized them.

"Here are others for the sacrifice!" he twittered.

"Bring them safely with you, and let them not escape," replied the Falta who had captured Stanislaus Cripps.

Then, with bird-like screams, the whole body of giants faced about, and strode across the boulder-strewn ground. In a few minutes they had gained the site of their stone huts.

There, on a great pile of stones which Stanislaus Cripps never remembered seeing before, stood a little figure before whom his captors bowed before speaking.

"O mighty and cunning one, here is the Hairy One whom we have captured, even as you said. Tell us now how we shall tear the secret of the Flying Thing's magic from his heart."

The Falta stretched out the hand with which he was gripping his captive, holding him only a few feet away from that little figure on the pile of stones. With a shock Stanislaus Cripps found himself staring into the dark, malignant features of the traitor Ka-Ra!

(This looks serious for Stanislaus Cripps and his two companions, doesn't it? And what has happened to Jim? You'll know when you read next week's thrilling instalment of this magnificent serial.)

HAVE YOU HEARD THESE?

A Puzzler!

Mr. Jiff (to Biff, who has a lame dog): "Say, why does your dog resemble a copy-book?"

Mr. Biff: "I'll be blessed if I know!"

Mr. Jiff: "Because a copybook is an ink-lined plane, an inclined plain is a slope up, and a slow pup is a dog that can't run!"

One Better!

An American and a Britisher were having an argument about a sausage machine.

"It's a big affair," the American explained, "and simply wonderful. All you do is to drive the pig down a plank through a hole in the machine, and five minutes later out come the sausages."

"What becomes of the hide?" queried the Britisher.

"The hide?" came the answer. "Oh, that falls out of another part of the machine in purses, shoes, or saddles—just a matter of setting a lever."

"Oh, is that all?" said the Britisher. "Well, we've used a machine like that for twenty years now, and, what's more, we've improved upon it. But sometimes the sausages were found not to be quite up to the standard."

"Well, what happens then?"

"Why, we just put 'em back in the machine, reverse the engine, and out walks the pig, as fit as a fiddle!"

Push Again, Then!

Wealthy motorist: "I want some petrol, boy, and please be quick. You will never get on in this world unless you push. When I was young I pushed, and look at me now. I'm worth thousands!"

Boy: "Well, guv'nor, I reckon you'll 'ave to push agin, 'cause we ain't got a drop of petrol in the place!"



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Our Magazine Corner.**GUARDIANS OF THE WILDS!**

*Some facts about the splendid men who serve
in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.*

Fifty Years Old.

THE most romantic body of police in the world is undoubtedly the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, better and more familiarly known among Canadians as the "Great Outfit."

But not always were they known by their present title. It was at the time of the Coronation of the present King that, out of admiration for them he gave them the appellation "Royal." Before that time they were known as the "North-West Mounted Police of Canada."

The original North-West Mounted were formed sometime during the late seventies for the purpose of policing the vast prairie lands of North-West Canada, which at that time was the haunt of countless outlaws and criminals.

A Picturesque Uniform.

Black knee breeches, with yellow stripes running down either side, a red tunic, broad picturesque Stetson hats, spurs, and a carbine was the uniform of those days, and it has never changed.

This uniform, however, is the one in which members of the force are usually seen, but it is not the only one they possess. The uniform termed "full dress" is a far more elaborate affair, and is only worn on special occasions.

This latter consists of a bright red coat, dark blue trousers, with a yellow stripe, and a white helmet, in place of the broad-brimmed Stetson hat, the whole bearing a close resemblance to the full-dress of the Dragoons.

But when the north lands the Mounted patrol are in the grip of the winter the ordinary uniform is replaced by a dress consisting of short coat of shaggy buffalo-skin, with a fur cap to match. The intense cold of this part of the globe in winter-time makes the wearing of boots an impossibility, since the leather would freeze and become so hard that it would injure the feet of the wearers. To avoid this, soft moccasins are issued, which not only serve to keep the feet warmer, but add to the picturesqueness of the men who wear them as well.

A Long Beat.

But if the dress of the Mounted is picturesque and attractive, the duties it is called upon are far from being so. Like the London

policeman, every member of the Mounted, who, by the way, is not called a constable, but a trooper, has a well-defined beat to attend to. But, unlike the London policeman, whose beat can usually be covered in about ten minutes, that of a trooper in the Mounted takes about a week's continuous travelling on horseback to cover.

Patrolling the Prairie.

Every Monday morning, from the various posts of the force scattered about the wild and bleak lands of North-West Canada, the men set out with provisions for themselves and their horses, each making his way along the route of the ranches and homesteads on his beat.

Every village or farm is called at, where the red-coated troopers ask "Any complaints?" This done, some responsible person signs a card the trooper carries to testify that he has carried out his duty. This process is repeated day by day, until eventually the trooper returns at the end of the week by a circular route to the particular post or fort from which he set out.

There are, of course, many other duties the Mounted are called upon to carry out, but since patrolling the prairie lands is the principal, there is no need to outline the others.

At the present time the whole force numbers about five thousand men, who between them patrol and police a territory considerably larger than Australia, a hundred men being taken to look after a district as large as the British Isles—no light order.

Must Be Fit.

1874 saw the first muster of the force, which was soon up to the number of 1,000 men, and the first place at which a Mounted post was established was Battleford, then the capital of the territories, and the next was Fort Pelly.

The headquarters of the force, however, are, and always have been, at Ottawa, the seat of the Canadian Government. Right from its inception a high physical standard has always been demanded of would-be members. But while every man must be physically perfect and with a clean medical record previously, he must be, in addition, not under five feet seven inches tall. At least eighty per cent of the Mounted are over six feet.

No more efficient and no better-disciplined force than the glorious (Royal) North-West Mounted Police exists in the whole world.

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 74.

SECTION

A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Membership with the Membership Number assigned to me, and Membership Badge.

SECTION

B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.), hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION

C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."

(FULL NAME).....

(ADDRESS).....

INSTRUCTIONS.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership: Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms fill in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. The second form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together, and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4. **Member Applying for Bronze Medal:** It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms, bearing the same number, are needed. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of

the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver or gold medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when the League reaches the required number of members, they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver or gold one, according to the number of introductions with which they are credited.

These Application Forms can be posted for f.d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

A FEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE.

You can write to fellow-members living at home or in the most distant outposts of the Empire.

You are offered free advice on choosing a trade or calling, and on emigration to the colonies and dependencies.

If you want to form a sports or social club, you can do so amongst local members of the League.

You are offered free hints on holidays, whether walking, biking or camping.

You can qualify for the various awards by promoting the growth of the League.

If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.

The ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

STARTING AN AMATEUR MAGAZINE**Hints and Tips on a Fascinating Project.****A Sound Scheme.**

Many inquiries have been made to the Chief Officer on the subject of club magazines. So soon as a club is started in connection with the St. Frank's League, the members appear to clamour for some sort of organ in which they can express their aims and ambitions, and in which they can try out such literary talent as they may possess.

This is all to the good, and the article which follows points out a few of the minor difficulties which will have to be overcome, and some of the pleasures which are to be obtained from such a magazine.

A Cheap Hobby.

Most boys are fascinated by the project, but many are put off by the idea of expense. As a matter of fact, the expense can be negligible. The only difficulty about running an amateur paper will be that it means a lot of hard work. But it will be interesting work. And for the boy who is thinking of making journalism a career, his experiences even on the most amateur paper should prove most useful.

Four Points to Remember.

The four things necessary for the successful launching of a magazine are: an editor; copy (the term used for all written matter before it is set up in type); circulation; and lastly, but most important, some method of producing quickly a large number of copies.

As to the first, there will be no difficulty in finding an editor. Suppose you start with a dozen boys from among your chums, all wishing to run the magazine. At least ten will want to be the editor. Well, only one can have the job. You must choose him, and he must be supreme boss. To assist him, another couple can be chosen. The rest must be content to contribute the copy. Too many cooks on the editorial staff will be sure to spoil the broth!

What Sort of Mag?

The first thing the editorial staff must do is to make up their minds with absolute clearness what sort of a paper they mean to run. It is no use changing policy, size, etc., every week. Let us suppose you start it as a weekly. Are you to make it a St. Frank's Magazine, a humorous paper, a fiction paper, a sporting paper, or a record of local news? You must first decide upon this—that is, the magazine must have a policy. Probably the

best would be to combine some fiction with a few pages of local notes on sport and other happenings of interest to all.

The Contributors.

Having decided on this, you must appoint some of your friends to send in each week their copy. A typical programme would be: Two short stories, a serial, some jokes, and a few pages of notes. The fiction would need three contributors each week, while the jokes and notes could be supplied by anyone who cared to send them in.

Now we come to the circulation. The biggest circulation will come to the paper which costs least. Therefore it is inadvisable to charge more than a penny. The people who will buy it are your friends in the neighbourhood and their parents and relatives. They will naturally only go on taking it if the magazine is always interesting.

Producing the Paper.

How are you to produce the paper? Well, there are various methods, from investing in a big printing press, to writing out the number, and dictating copies to the staff. But one way which is almost as good as printing will appeal to most readers. And the cost will be practically nothing.

At most stationers, for a sum varying from a couple of shillings to ten shillings, you can buy what is called a gelatine copier. This consists of a shallow tray or bath, which is filled with a substance which looks like jelly. You will then have to get, for a few pence, a bottle of copying ink, a pen, and some plain paper. That is all the expenditure that need be made.

How it's Done.

When you have got all your "copy" in for the week, you and your "subs" must copy it out either on a typewriter or by hand in the copying ink. You then press the sheets of paper on to the jelly. Leave it for about half an hour, and it will then be ready to take impressions—as many as you like. Using paper of the size of ordinary note-paper, you should be able to get two pages from each copier. With four baths therefore, you would be able to run an eight-page magazine for a capital outlay of about ten shillings. And as the circulation went up, you would be able to get more, and bigger, baths, and so increase the number of your pages.



THE CHIEF OFFICER'S CHAT.

All **LETTERS** in reference to the League should be addressed to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon St., London, E.C.4. Enquiries which need an immediate answer should be accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope.

Bored Stiff!

Of course, there's something radically wrong when anyone admits being bored stiff with life. To go round the world in such a state of mind argues either (1) a completely empty mind, or (2) a state of health which demands the attention of a doctor. A correspondent asks me what he had better do about a chum who is fed-up and morbid, and without a hobby. What about cricket?

Big Ben.

A Brighton reader asks me the origin of the name Big Ben given to the famous ticker at Westminster. The term was bestowed on the immense bell (weighing 13½ tons) in St. Stephen's Tower of the Houses of Parliament; it takes its name from Sir Benjamin Hall. This gentleman was the first Big Ben, for he was Chief Commissioner of Works seventy-one years ago when the bell was cast.

The Sulky Egotist.

This type of individual is most disagreeable, however he is considered. A South African reader asks me whether a fellow who walks off after accepting an invitation should be "cut." The best way is to leave the silly chap severely alone. He only acts in this fat-headed style so as to feed his own self-importance, and if he likes such diet, well—let him have it! No need to worry. He will soon be sorry for himself.

A Glasgow Chum.

Arthur Roberts, 35, Westmoreland Street, Crosshill, Glasgow, is particularly eager to get very old copies of the N.L.L. This correspondent is a very keen member of the Boys' Brigade, and his company—No. 113—has the best juvenile brass band in Scotland.

From the Land of Canberra.

Here's a capital letter from Jack J. S. Finch, 5, Richmond Terrace, Domain, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia. He says he would much like to hear from readers, and to answer questions about Australia and the life out there. He suggests that fellows who are going to settle in Australia should write to him for information.

HOW TO GET YOUR SILVER MEDAL.

All holders of BRONZE MEDALS who have qualified for SILVER MEDALS (see instructions on Application Form on page 41) and wish to exchange their medals for the higher award should send their bronze medals, accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope, to the Chief Officer, the St. Frank's League, c/o the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4. The SILVER MEDALS will then be sent to them.

"Biguma."

This is the title of a St. Frank's paper, edited by Cecil A. Westrope, 26, Victoria Road, Surbiton, and it's going great guns. All the Editor's chums say the mag. is a goer—and I agree with them!

Knows Better Than The Governor.

A chum up north is going to meet trouble. His father has advised him on a certain course of action, and he, being primed with high-power wisdom, thinks his father is wrong! Well, I can assure him his father is right. There is such a thing as thinking you know pots more than you do.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

Coenraad H. Basson, 84, Longfellow Street, East London, South Africa, wants to hear from readers in his district.

V. G. B. Hill, 4, Creswick Walk, Hendon, London, N.W.11, wishes to correspond with readers in quest of back numbers.

(Continued on next page.)

'You can
taste the
cream.'



2^D

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See the name 'Cadbury' on every piece of chocolate

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

(Continued from previous page.)

George Burgess, 271, North Stoke, **Arundel**, wishes to obtain early numbers of "N. L. L."—Nos. 2—32.

J. R. A. Cumming, 17, Hay Street, King William's Town, **South Africa**, wishes to correspond with readers in Gibraltar, St. Helena, Samoa, and Belgian Congo, who are interested in stamps.

D. Steele, 8, Eastwood Terrace, **Langley Hill**, Notts, wishes to hear from readers.

Member 5,688, 4, Ventnor Villas, First Tower, Jersey, **Channel Islands**, wishes to hear from readers.

F. Colecliffe, 17, Ashton Road, **Morecambe**, Lancs., wishes to correspond about sports, and stamps, at home and in Egypt, India, and China.

Ray Fuller, 32, Beaufort Street, Croydon Park, N.S.W., **Australia**, wishes to correspond with readers in America, Canada, and South Africa.

Frederick Redman, 19, Midland Road, **Bedford**, wishes to correspond with an American reader.

A. Jordan, 117, Norman Road, Leytonstone, **London E.11**, wishes to obtain copies of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, with portrait gallery.

William J. Scholes, 179, Hallam Street, Toronto, Ontario, **Canada**, wants Nos. 361, 366, 503, 499, 429, 432, 470, 472, 473, 475, 477, 480—487 of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. Also wants to correspond about pigeons.

Jack Bailey, 6, Montecath Avenue, Upper Hawthorn, Victoria, **Australia**, wishes to correspond with match-brand collectors who have rare specimens.

Winston Ridgway, 15, Toorah Road, South Yarra, Melbourne, **Australia**, wishes to hear from readers anywhere; also from those in his district, about forming a club.

Bob Whaite, Box 306, G.P.O., Adelaide, **South Australia**, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere.

William C. Blatchford, 17, Roschill, St. Blazey, **Cornwall**, has "N. L. L." back numbers for sale.

B. H. Woods, 12, Estcourt Avenue, Haddingley, **Leeds**, has back numbers for three years of "N. L. L."

Gerald G. Austin, Warroon, Gingham, via Yatpool, Mildura Line, Victoria, **Australia**, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere.

H. W. A. Gibbons, 145, Shooters Hill Road, Blackheath, **London, S.E.3**, wishes to buy "N. L. L." (new series) 1—19, 29—32, and 38.

J. Hammond, Rathdrum, Dартry Road, **Dublin**, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere.

Stanley Collingwood, 7, Wellesley Avenue, Hammersmith, **London, W.6**, wishes to hear from members—any subject bar collecting; also with a reader in his district.

Horace Banks, 27, Bonnett Road, Cambridge Heath, Bethnal Green, **London, E.2**, wishes to correspond with readers in his district.

A. Hudson, 373, Central Drive, **Blackpool**, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere.

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