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HANDFORTH'S TRIUMPH!

Everybody arrives—somewhat forcefully—just as Zuma the Mystic is about to do his work! A dramatic incident from the vivid long school yarn contained inside.

New Series No. 79.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY!

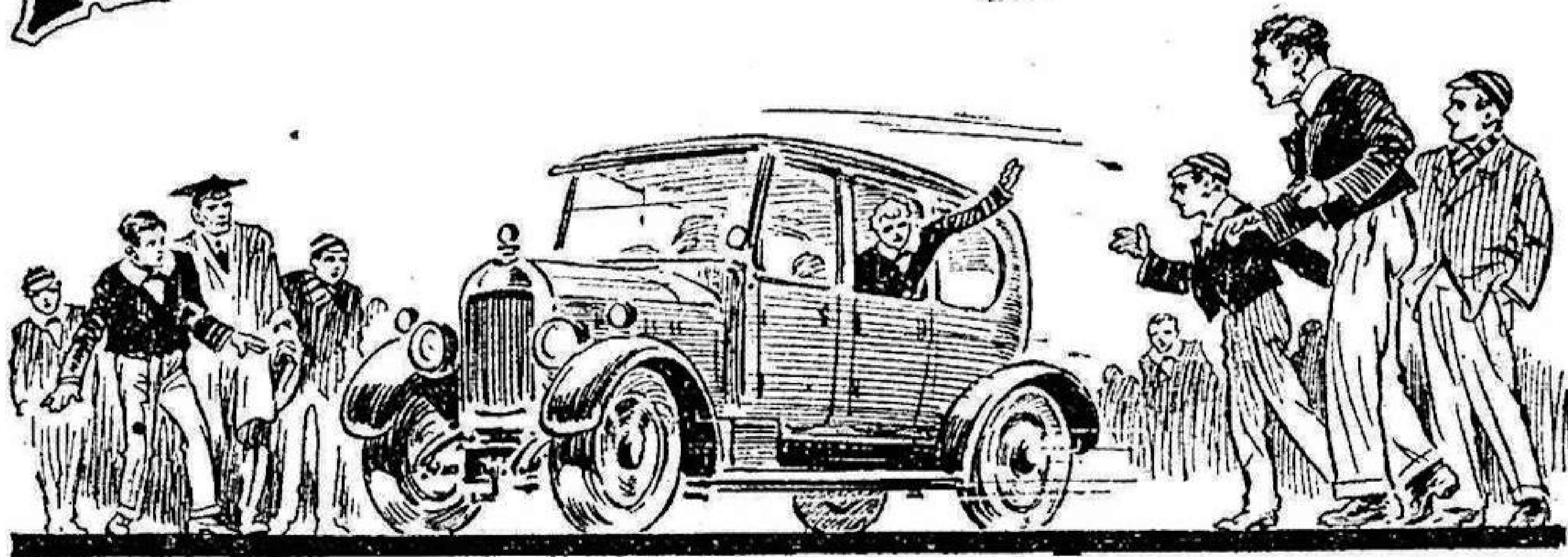
November 5th, 1927.



Handforth swung himself over the edge of the window-sill and gradually lowered himself, hand over hand, down the rope. Above, McClure looked on anxiously. Would their escape from the punishment-room be successful?

Back from the "Dead"!The Mystery Explained

HANDFORTH'S TRIUMPH!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

St. Frank's is fully convinced that Walter Church, of the Remove, is dead, so when Handforth persists in his story that Church is alive, his Form fellows think he has gone dotty and promptly lock him up in his study as a dangerous character! But that doesn't stop Handy; he's out to prove himself right, and his efforts in this direction, told in Edwy Searles Brooks' inimitable style, make one of the most thrilling and dramatic stories you have ever read.—ED.

CHAPTER 1.

Handforth the Shrewd!

"POOR old Church!" said Fullwood, shaking his head.

"The funeral's to-morrow, isn't it?" asked Russell.

"Yes, so I understand."

"Hard lines!" said Russell sadly. "Church was one of the best, too! The poor old scout is going to be buried to-morrow, and here we are, at St. Frank's, going on just the same as usual. Seems a bit awful, doesn't it?"

"It does!" said Ralph Leslie Fullwood soberly.

Handforth, passing through the Ancient House lobby, came to a halt. He had been looking very thoughtful, but he had heard those words uttered by the chums of Study I. For their part, Fullwood and Russell were feeling uncomfortable. They tried to avoid Edward Oswald Handforth's glance.

"What's that you were saying?" asked Handforth bluntly.

"Nothing, old man," replied Fullwood.

"Rats! You were referring to Church's funeral, weren't you?" asked Handforth.

"Well, yes, but——"

"Fixed for to-morrow, isn't it?" went on the leader of Study D. "Poor old Churchy! It's hard to believe that he's dead and gone!"

There was something so calm and matter-of-fact about Handforth's attitude that Fullwood and Russell looked at him very curiously. After all, Handforth was the best chum that Walter Church had ever had, yet he seemed singularly indifferent.

"We thought perhaps that you and McClure were going to the funeral," said Russell tentatively.

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start.

"Well, you two fellows were Church's best friends," said Russell. "And naturally, with the funeral fixed for to-morrow, we thought——"

"By George!" interrupted Handforth, his eyes gleaming.

He hurried off without another word, and vanished round the angle of the Remove pas-

sage. Ralph Leslie Fullwood and Clive Russell glanced at one another.

"Queer!" said Fullwood, frowning. "What's up with old Handy these days? He doesn't seem very out up about old Church?"

"I've noticed it, too," said the Canadian junior. "He's generally so open, too—he doesn't often conceal his feelings. But perhaps he's so deeply hurt over Church's loss that he's pretending to be normal. All the same, it's very funny."

In the meantime, Handforth had burst into Study D, and had caught Arnold McClure in the act of looking through one of Church's exercise books. Mac put it down rather guiltily. But he needn't have worried, for Handforth did not even notice what he was doing.

"Mac, I've got an idea!" said Edward Oswald tensely. "By George! It's the biggest idea under the sun! I've thought of a way to trap Mr. Lee!"

"What!"

"Absolutely!" continued Handforth exultantly. "I'll trap him into admitting that Church is still alive, and that he is being kept down at Moat Hollow for some reason. Mr. Lee thinks that I don't know—but I do know! And I'll make him tell me the secret!"

McClure looked at his leader in astonishment.

"But how?" he asked. "Mr. Lee isn't an ordinary man, you know. He won't be bluffed into saying anything, Handy. You'd better go easy, old man!"

Handforth paced the study, his face flushed with excitement.

"Be quiet for a minute or two, old son, while I think this out," he said. "For some reason, Mr. Lee and Dr. Brett and the Head have conspired together to make the school believe that poor old Church is dead. We all thought that he died the other day, but now we know differently."

"You and I do, Handy," said McClure. "All the rest of the school believes that he really did die."

"Yes, I know that," nodded Edward Oswald. "Nipper is the only other chap who knows the real truth, and he's as mum as an oyster."

"We haven't really asked him anything yet."

"And we're not going to ask him, either," frowned Handforth. "I don't want any favours! Church is our pal—our own special chum—and I don't like the way we're being treated."

"Perhaps they have a good reason——"

"No reason can be good enough for that!" interrupted Handforth, frowning. "No, we'll get to the bottom of this mystery ourselves, Mac! Everybody thinks that Church is dead, and that the funeral will be to-morrow. But last night I followed Mr. Lee down to Moat Hollow, and I'm jolly certain that poor old Churchy is being kept there, a prisoner."

"A prisoner!" ejaculated McClure. "Not a prisoner, Handy."

"Well, they're keeping him there on the quiet, anyhow," amended Handforth. "Goodness knows why! I saw him last night—twice. I believe the poor chap was in a kind of daze, or something, and just wandering about. Anyhow, I saw him, and later on I followed Mr. Lee to Moat Hollow. I'm not going to be satisfied until I find out what all this monkey business means! I've asked Mr. Lee to take me into the secret, but he won't listen to me. So I'm going to trap him."

"You'll be a clever chap if you do!" said McClure. "Mr. Lee isn't an ordinary House-master, you know. He's a world-famous detective, don't forget!"

"That's why I'm so jolly pleased at the thought of having him on toast!" grinned Handforth. "Look here, I'll tell you the whole scheme in a nutshell. To-morrow is the day fixed for Church's funeral, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"All right!" said Handforth coolly. "We'll go to Mr. Lee this evening, and we'll ask him for a special pass, so that we can go to London and attend Church's funeral!"

"But—but if Church is alive, there won't be any funeral!" protested McClure, staring.

"Exactly!"

"What do you mean—exactly?"

"That's the way we shall trap Mr. Lee!" said Handforth, with rare shrewdness. "Don't you see, my son? Mr. Lee knows jolly well that Church is down at Moat Hollow, and he knows that there won't be any funeral. So he'll get the wind up pretty vertically when we ask for permission to go to London."

"He'll simply refuse, that's all."

"Yes, and his very refusal will be an admission that Church is still alive," said Handforth sagely. "Mr. Lee's one of the best, and I can't imagine his refusing to let us attend the funeral of our closest chum. Don't you see the idea? If he refuses we shall know that all our suspicions are right."

McClure took a deep breath.

"Handy, old man. I never knew that you could be so deep!" he said wonderingly.

"Didn't you?" replied Edward Oswald. "My dear chap, this is only the first of my little surprises!"



CHAPTER 2.

Doing It Thoroughly!

McCLURE raised his eyebrows.

"What do you mean—only the first of your little surprises?" he asked.

"Well, I'm going to make Mr. Lee pay pretty dearly for treating us like this," said Handforth, with a frown. "It's been a heartless sort of business. They've tried to make

us believe that Church was dead—and we're his best chums. There can't be any excuses, and I'm not going to accept any. So I've made up my mind to give Mr. Lee a good old twisting."

"My only hat!"

"To begin with, I'm going into the common-room now," continued Handforth coolly. "You'd better come with me—because it'll be worth listening to! Only keep your face sombre and gloomy—we're supposed to be in mourning. We don't want to let any of the other fellows know the truth yet. We've got to find out the real secret before we start talking."

"But what are you going to say in the common-room?" asked Mac curiously.

"Come along, and you'll hear!"

And Handforth opened the study door, and strode out into the passage. They both went to the common-room, and found quite a number of fellows there. It was evening; outside the clouds were thick, and the darkness intense. A heavy wind was blustering round the old school, and the juniors were glad enough to be indoors.

A kind of reserve came over the Removites as Handforth and McClure appeared. For some days now, the rest of the Remove had avoided any conversation, or contact, with Handforth and McClure. For they were the closest chums of the unhappy junior who had recently died, and it was felt that they would want to be alone in their grief.

"I want to say something, you fellows!" explained Handforth, pulling a long face. "It's something rather important, too."

"Go ahead, old man," said Nipper.

"To-morrow is the day fixed for Church's funeral," said Handforth quietly. "That's right isn't it?"

"So we heard," said Nipper, nodding.

"Well, Church was a member of this Form," said Edward Oswald. "He was a popular sort of chap, too, and I think it's only right that every member of the Remove should be allowed to attend the funeral."

There was an immediate buzz.

"But we couldn't, Handy," said De Valerie. "The funeral's going to be in London, isn't it?"

"Look here, this is all nonsense!" said Nipper, before Handforth could say anything further. "Don't be so silly, Handy!"

"Silly?" repeated Handforth. "Is it silly to want to go to a chum's funeral?"

"I—I didn't mean that!" said Nipper hastily. "But the whole Remove can't go off to London—"

"Why not?" interrupted Handforth. "The Head has only to proclaim a whole holiday for all of us."

"My only hat!"

"A whole holiday!"

"Sounds good!"

There were many comments from the juniors. It is to be feared that they were thinking far more of the "whole holiday" than they were thinking of the unhappy

Church. But as the majority of them had never been really intimate with Church, their point of view was not quite so heartless as it would seem.

"Yes, Handy, it's a jolly good idea!" said Hubbard enthusiastically. "A whole holiday, eh? Fine!"

"Rather!" said Teddy Long.

"I think the Head ought to allow us to go!" said Bell. "Church was a member of this Form, as Handy has just said, and if his funeral is going to be held to-morrow we can easily catch the first train, and be in London in the middle of the forenoon. Gad, what a rippin' stunt!"

Handforth glared at him.

"What do you mean—a ripping stunt?" he repeated darkly.

"Well, a whole holiday—and in London, too!" said Bell. "We might be able to go off somewhere—pictures, or—"

"You rotter!" roared Handforth.

"What?" gasped Bell, with a start.

"Yes, and all the rest of you, too!" went on Handforth grimly. "You're all rotters!"

"Look here—"

"You're only thinking about the whole holiday!" went on Edward Oswald scathingly. "Not a thought for poor old Church! What do you care? You selfishly want this holiday, and you're just agreeing with me because you can see some hope of sneaking off and enjoying yourselves!"

Most of the juniors were abashed. McClure regarded his leader rather curiously—for he knew that Church was really alive. Handforth, however, was justly angered. All the juniors were under the impression that Church was dead, and yet they were acting in a very selfish manner. Handforth had every reason to glare round at them.

At the same time, he noted, with satisfaction, that Nipper was looking rather alarmed. For Nipper knew! It would be a fine kettle of fish if the Remove demanded to be excused from school to-morrow, so that they could attend the funeral. Handforth's little trap was already beginning to work, and he did not pause in his efforts.

"I'm beginning to change my mind!" he said gruffly. "I don't think the Head ought to grant permission for the whole Remove to go to the funeral. You don't deserve it—you're only thinking of your own pleasures. But it's different for Mac and me. We were Church's special pals."

"That's quite right, old man," said Fullwood, nodding. "I rather think the Head would jib if you asked him to grant a pass for the entire Remove. But if you and Mac attend the funeral, nobody can say a word."

"It's all wrong!" interrupted Nipper hurriedly.

"How do you mean?" asked Tommy Watson, looking at Nipper in astonishment.

"Yes, begad!" said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "Kindly explain yourself, dear old fellow. Begad! I might mention that you have been actin' somewhat strangely for two or three days, Nipper, boy!"

"Rats!" said Nipper. "I haven't been acting strangely at all! And when Handforth suggests that he and McClure should go to London, it's—it's, well, I don't think it's right."

"Oh, you don't think it's right?" repeated Handforth ominously.

"No, I don't!" said Nipper. "You two fellows have been hard hit already, without making matters worse. Now that Church has gone, it would be better to—to——"

"Forget him?" interrupted Handforth coldly.

"No, of course not," said Nipper. "I didn't mean that, old man. Don't misunderstand me."

He said no more—for the simple reason that he scarcely knew how to frame his words. While Handforth continued to pursue his arguments, Nipper slipped out of the Common-room, and hurried away—and that departure of the Remove skipper was not lost upon the wily Edward Oswald!



CHAPTER 3.

Rather Awkward!

NELSON LEE, the famous Housemaster-detective of St. Frank's, looked up with a slight frown as Nipper came bursting into his study in the Ancient House. Nipper did not fail to read that look of disapproval.

"Sorry, guv'nor!" he said breathlessly. "But this is no time for formalities!"

"What has happened, Nipper?" asked Lee, half rising to his feet.

"Nothing yet, sir—but it seems to me that Handforth is going to cause a bit of trouble," replied Nipper. "What do you think the fathead's latest idea is?"

"Goodness knows, Nipper!" said Lee, with a sigh. "I am afraid that Handforth is a very trying boy. And yet I can't be angry with him——"

"He's talking about going to the funeral, sir!" interrupted Nipper.

"Oh!"

Nelson Lee pursed his lips, and sat down again. He looked troubled.

"This won't do, young 'un," he said, with a frown. "H'm! Very awkward!"

"I should think it is!" said Nipper. "And I can't understand it, either—because I thought that Handforth suspected us."

"And so he does, my boy," said Nelson Lee. "Handforth is not such a dullard as we sometimes thought. In this particular case he is proving himself to be very shrewd. He guesses that Church is alive, and he is engaged in 'investigations' of his own."

"And yet he wants to go to the funeral!"

"I take it that he is throwing down a challenge to me," said Nelson Lee dryly. "After

all, Nipper, there is nothing unreasonable in this idea of Handforth's. He and McClure were Church's very best friends—they are still—and nobody at St. Frank's would be jealous if they were permitted to go to London to attend this mythical funeral."

"Blessed if I know what you can do, sir!" said Nipper. "You can't give him permission to go, and it'll look pretty bad if you refuse. It'll seem so heartless—so callous! If Handforth goes to London he'll know that Church is alive, because there won't be a funeral at all!"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"The whole affair is difficult—and Handforth is making it more so," he replied. "It is hateful to deceive the school in this way—but it must be done, in order to safeguard Church's life. He is only being kept down at Moat Hollow till we can be sure that everything is safe. Those mysterious enemies of his—the strange Indians—nearly got him once, and I do not intend that they shall have another shot!"

"Yes, they poisoned him by means of those rotten darts—those blowpipe darts," said Nipper gruffly. "It was touch and go with poor old Church! In fact, guv'nor, you brought him round—you saved him from certain death."

"Never mind that now," said Nelson Lee. "We really thought that Church was dead at the time, and when the report was given to the school it was circulated in all good faith. We pulled Church back from the edge of the abyss later, and it was far better to keep the truth from the school—to let everybody think that he had really died. He is only being kept at Moat Hollow so that those devilish brown men cannot get at him again. They are still at large—although I hope to heaven that they will soon be rounded up."

"And is there still no clue as to their motive, sir?"

"No clue whatever," replied Nelson Lee. "I can only tell you that Scotland Yard is making some very searching inquiries, but I have not yet had any reports. In the meantime, Church is safely at Moat Hollow, with Dr. Brett and Phipps in constant attendance. Not until those Indians are apprehended shall I publicly announce the fact that Church is really alive. It would be most unsafe to do so."

"But these enemies of his know that he's alive, sir," Nipper pointed out. "They discovered it last night, didn't they?"

"I believe so," replied Lee. "At the same time, we must carry on with this policy. We don't want a sensation in the district now."

"Wouldn't it be better to tell Handforth the full truth straight away, sir?" asked Nipper dubiously. "He'll only cause a pile of trouble if you don't."

"I am not going to be forced into anything by young Handforth," replied Nelson Lee, with a tightening of his lips. "Good gracious! Does this boy think that he can—"

get the better of me like this? No, Nipper! It is a challenge—and I shall not knuckle under. I know his little game!”

“I never thought he could be so deep, guv’nor,” said Nipper.

“Handforth has shown surprisingly shrewd qualities during these last few days,” said Nelson Lee. “In a way, I admire him greatly—for not once has he lost his faith. From the very first he has been convinced that Church is alive—and the curious part of the whole affair is that Handforth has been right. Without any actual proof, he has known that there has been a mysterious series of events, and throughout the ordeal Handforth has behaved splendidly. At first I was sorry for him—I was touched by his grief. But now that he is opposing himself directly to me—well, I will accept this challenge of his, and show him that I can be firm, too. I am not going to be forced by this young gentleman.”

“But you’ll appear awfully heartless, guv’nor, if you refuse permission for Handforth and McClure to go to the funeral,” said Nipper. “The whole school will say that you are callous.”

“Let them say it,” replied Lee calmly. “They will soon change their minds when they know that Church is alive. That will explain everything—and I shall be exonerated!” he added dryly. “As for Handforth, he will probably know why I am refusing; and it will only add to the piquancy of the situation. But if Handforth thinks that he can make me admit him into the secret, he is booked for a big surprise.”

Just then a tap sounded on the door—a rather loud, peremptory tap. Nipper made a wry face. He had been hoping that he would have time to get out before the chums of Study D arrived.

“Come in!” called Nelson Lee.

The door opened, and Handforth and McClure marched in.

“Then you think we’d better not have any football, sir?” asked Nipper, as though he had been discussing football all the time.

“No, I do not think it would be advisable, young ’un,” replied Nelson Lee gravely. “As you know, it is the date fixed for Church’s funeral, and it would be hardly fitting to play football on such an occasion.”

Handforth laughed.

“Jolly good, Nipper,” he said coolly, “but you haven’t fooled me!”

rapidly recovering. So he had no reason to feel mournful or unhappy.

“What do you want, Handforth?” asked Nelson Lee.

“You were just saying that to-morrow has been fixed for Church’s funeral, sir,” said Handforth. “Is that right?”

“Since you just heard what I said, there is no need for me to answer the question,” said Lee steadily. “I repeat, Handforth—what do you want?”

“Permission to go to Church’s funeral, sir.”

“I am sorry——”

“Both Mac and myself are Church’s best pals, sir,” went on Handforth quickly. “We three have always been the staunchest chums. Now and again I’ve had occasion to punch their noses, and to bang their heads together—but that’s all over now. Anyhow, Church was our chum, and we claim it as our right to have permission to go to his funeral to-morrow.”

“Oh, indeed!” said Nelson Lee. “You claim it as a right?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Handforth. “You agree with me, don’t you, Mac?”

“Yes!” gulped McClure.

“There you are, sir,” said Handforth. “We’re both determined.”

“You do not appear to be very sad,” said Lee. “The thought of Church’s funeral does not affect you very greatly, Handforth.”

“I’m rather good at concealing my feelings, sir,” replied Handforth coolly.

“You are certainly rather good at exhibiting your impertinence,” said Nelson Lee, with a frown. “I don’t like the way you come here, Handforth, demanding this, and demanding that. I am open to listen to requests, but I will not submit to dictation.”

“That’s all right, sir,” said Handforth. “Sorry! If I have said anything wrong, I apologise. And if it’ll make any difference, I’ll ask nicely. Can McClure and I go to London to-morrow to attend Church’s funeral?”

He looked straight into Nelson Lee’s eye, and Nelson Lee returned the gaze steadily.

“I am very sorry, Handforth, but you cannot go,” he replied.

“But you just said——”

“What I have just said is immaterial,” interrupted Nelson Lee. “It will not be advisable for either of you boys to go to London to-morrow. It has been rumoured that Church’s funeral is to take place to-morrow, but I am by no means certain that it will actually occur.”

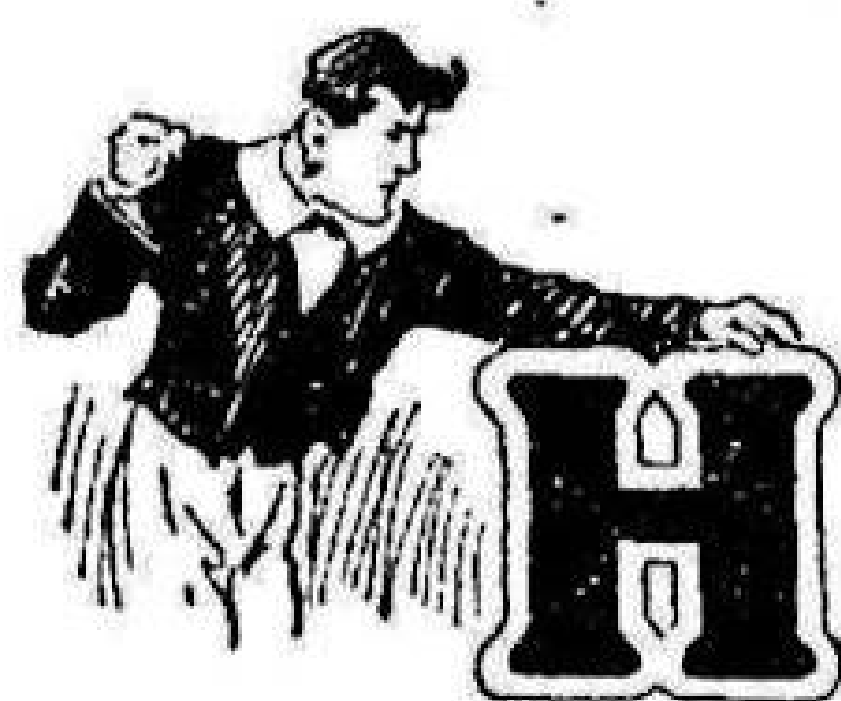
“Oh!” said Handforth eagerly. “Then you admit that he isn’t really dead?”

“I admit nothing,” replied Lee. “And I do not care to continue this interview, Handforth. I have told you that you cannot go to London, and let that be sufficient.”

**IT'S
COMING!**

CHAPTER 4.

Nothing Doing!



HANDFORTH was perfectly at his ease. He knew that Nelson Lee and Nipper had been discussing him a minute earlier,

and he knew that Church was alive and

Handforth shot a triumphant glance at the startled McClure. This was exactly what Handforth had predicted! Nelson Lee was refusing because no funeral had been arranged! It was direct proof that Church was still alive. Not that Handforth needed any proof—his heart had told him the truth from the very start. But it was very entertaining to have the great Nelson Lee in a dilemma. Handforth had no compunction in pursuing his course, because he felt that he had been badly treated. He had a grievance against Nelson Lee for keeping him in the dark all this time. Now he was going to make the famous Housemaster-detective pay!

He assumed an air of hot indignation. It was rather difficult for him to simulate this emotion, but he did it very well. He went a step nearer to the table, and brought his fist down upon it with a thump.

"It's not fair, sir!" he said hotly. "Church was our best friend! We've asked you nicely but you won't let us go! We claim it as a right! You're not entirely heartless, are you? Won't you let two mourning friends go to the funeral of—"

"That's enough, Handforth," interrupted Nelson Lee, with a grim little note in his voice. "You had better leave this room at once."

"Then you absolutely refuse, sir?"

"Yes, I do."

"All right—I'll go straight to the Head!" shouted Handforth, waving his arms. "I'm surprised at you, sir—I'm shocked!"

"Handforth! I won't allow you—"

"Yes, shocked!" went on Handforth, enjoying himself. "You can't punish me for saying a thing like that, because you know jolly well it's true! What will the school think? What will everybody believe when we tell them that you won't let us go to Church's funeral? It's unheard of—it's outrageous!"

Handforth was working himself into a real state of excitement now. He was doing this deliberately, so that Nelson Lee should be forced to tell him the secret. Handforth had an idea that if he threatened to go to the Head, Lee would call him back. Then the disclosure would come—and he and McClure would be taken into the full secret. That was Handforth's game. In fact, he had assured McClure that they would share every one of Nelson Lee's confidences before they came out of that study. For it was the only course that Lee could pursue. At least, Handforth thought so.

"Yes, I'll go straight to the Head!" he said hotly. "And I don't believe the Head will be so heartless!"

He turned towards the door, and McClure was glad to follow him. Mac, in fact, was getting thoroughly scared.

"Just a moment, Handforth!" said Nelson Lee grimly.

Handforth turned, his eyes gleaming with victory.

"In any other circumstances, young man, I should punish you very severely for

this outburst," said Nelson Lee. "But I will pardon you. At the same time, I must warn you against any more of this impudence. I've had quite enough."

"Haven't you got something to tell me, sir?" asked Handforth, rather surprised.

"No, I have not!"

"Then I shall go to the Head!" said Handforth obstinately. "Come on, Mac! Let's go straight away!"

He turned to the door again, and was quite certain that Nelson Lee would call him back for a second time. But Nelson Lee didn't, and the chums of Study D found themselves out in the passage, and the door was closed upon them. Edward Oswald was looking rather bewildered.

Apparently something had gone wrong with the works!



CHAPTER 5.

Interviewing the Head!

McCLURE was decidedly breathless.

"Well, it didn't work, after all!" he said, staring at his leader.

"Blessed if I can understand it!" said Handforth, frowning. "He didn't tell us the secret."

"I told you he wouldn't!" growled McClure.

"But he will!" said Handforth fiercely. "He'll have to! It's the only way to keep me quiet! I've started on this game now, and I'm going through with it—right to the bitter end! Don't you see that we've got him on toast, Mac?"

"But—but—"

"Absolutely on toast!" repeated Handforth. "He knows there's going to be no funeral, and so it's impossible for either Mr. Lee or the Head to give us permission to go. And if they don't give us permission, they'll have to explain the whole giddy business. If we knuckle under now, it'll be all up—we shall fizzle out like a couple of damp squibs. But if we carry on—we shall win!"

"But—but you're not going to the Head?" asked McClure, aghast.

"Yes, I am!" said Handforth. "I've got to keep it up now, or else look as small as a midge. I've got to carry on with it, you ass! And you'll have to help me, too!"

"But they won't let you force their hands like this," objected McClure.

"It's not a question of 'letting' me, my lad," said Handforth. "They won't be able to do anything else. Don't you see the cunning nature of my scheme?"

"Not exactly," confessed Mac. "I only know that you're jolly deep!"

"Why, if we keep on persisting, they'll see that something must be done," said Handforth, lowering his voice. "They'll tell us the whole secret about Church, and then they'll officially give us permission to go to



"We demand a pass to go to London to-morrow, sir!" said Handforth boldly. "Upon my soul!" gasped the Headmaster, and he looked about him in a futile way. He was at a loss for words.

his funeral. Of course, we shan't go, but we'll hop down to Moat Hollow for to-morrow, and spend the day with old Church. Then, when we go back to the school, everybody will think that we've attended the funeral. And when they ask questions, we'll make out that we don't feel like answering."

It was certainly a clever little scheme of Handforth's, and he did not feel inclined to give it up. In fact, he was eager to go ahead with it—so eager and determined, indeed, that he was inclined to be reckless.

They marched out of the Ancient House and crossed the dark Triangle to Big Arch. Then they went across Inner Court, and arrived at the doorway of Dr. Stafford's house.

"I don't think we'd better do it, Handy," said McClure falteringly.

"Cold feet?" asked Handforth sternly.

"Oh, chuck it!" said Mac. "But—but it seems so—so awful, you know. After all, we don't know anything certain about Church. We believe that he's alive——"

"Believe it be blowed!" said Handforth witheringly. "We know it! Didn't I see him last night?"

"Yes, at a distance," agreed Mac. "And there's just one chance in a thousand that you were wrong——"

"If there had been a chance in a thousand, there isn't a chance in twenty million now!" interrupted Handforth gruffly. "Why, you ass, isn't it as plain as the nose on your

face? If Church was really dead, and was going to be buried to-morrow, do you think that a decent chap like Mr. Lee would refuse permission for us to go?"

"No, I suppose not."

"He's only refused because there isn't going to be any funeral," went on Handforth. "He knows that I've got him on toast, and he'll have to knuckle under. Come on, we'll carry on the game by bearding the Head in his den. He's in this plot, too; he knows all about Church being alive. We'll give him a bit of a shock!"

He thumped on the door, and it was soon opened by a maid. The juniors had half-expected to see Phipps. This imperturbable individual acted partly as the Headmaster's butler, and partly as Archie Glenthorne's valet. But at present he was on leave of absence. In strict reality, Phipps was at Moat Hollow, doing the work of three or four men.

"We want to see the Head," said Handforth briskly.

"I'm not sure that you can disturb him now, young gentlemen," said the maid. "Dr. Stafford said that he mustn't be disturbed——"

"That's all right!" interrupted Handforth. "You needn't trouble to announce us. We'll walk straight in!"

"Here, hold on!" gasped McClure. "We shall get into awful trouble, Handy!"

"Rats!" muttered Handforth. "Our game

is to be very angry—very indignant! It won't look genuine unless we are! So back me up, you ass!"

He marched straight down the wide corridor, and arrived at the door of Dr. Stafford's study. He tapped upon it, then waited.

"Come in!" said the Head's voice, rather testily.

Handforth and McClure marched in. The Head, who was seated at his desk going over some important papers, looked up over the tops of his glasses and frowned.

"Upon my word!" he ejaculated, sitting back. "What is the meaning of this, Handforth? Why are you here without permission?"

"I'm sorry to intrude, sir, but I've got a complaint to make," said Handforth boldly.

"Indeed! Why did you not go to your own Housemaster?"

"Because my complaint is against Mr. Lee himself, sir!"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the Head angrily. "How dare you come here with such an outrageous statement, Handforth? No boy is allowed to complain to me of his Housemaster. I never heard of such a thing."

"But this is an exceptional case, sir," said Handforth. "We asked Mr. Lee for permission to go to Church's funeral to-morrow—and he refused!"

The Head became rather limp, and a startled expression sprang into his eyes. In fact, he was so agitated that he dropped his glasses into his lap.

"Really!" he ejaculated. "I—I— Handforth, I can only tell you that you must abide by the decision of your own Housemaster. I cannot have you coming here—"

He broke off, hardly knowing what to say, for, of course, he was in the secret—he knew that Church was alive, and within a mile of St. Frank's. And here were two boys coming to him, complaining against their Housemaster because they could not attend the funeral!

It was certainly a delicate situation for the startled Dr. Stafford!



CHAPTER 6.

The Only Way!

HANDFORTH felt—and looked—triumphant.

He could see that the Head was thoroughly non-plussed, and Hand-

forth was enjoying himself immensely. From the very first he had felt that the headmaster and Nelson Lee were greatly to be blamed for keeping him out of the secret. Well, now they were paying for it!

There was only one possible outcome of all this—according to Handforth's point of view. The Head and Nelson Lee would have to capitulate. They would be obliged to "come

across" with the full story. And then Handforth would have his triumph.

"Yes, sir," he went on indignantly, "Mr. Lee refused! Refused to let Mac and me go to our chum's funeral!"

"Ahem! This—this is very awkward!" said the Head helplessly.

He knew well enough why Nelson Lee had refused, but for the life of him he could not think of anything adequate to say. He decided, after a moment, to assume an air of anger. It was always a safe method with juniors.

"I dislike your tone, Handforth!" he said, rising to his feet with dignity. "I sympathise with you in your—in your present sadness, but I cannot have you coming to me with these complaints. You will leave this study at once!"

"Do you mean to say that you uphold Mr. Lee in this, sir?" demanded Handforth.

"Are you going to refuse us permission to go to our chum's funeral?"

"Mr. Lee has already dealt with you, Handforth, and I shall not pursue the subject," said the Head, deciding that he would remain on safe ground. "I refuse to discuss the matter any further."

"But we *demand* a pass to go to London to-morrow, sir!" said Handforth boldly.

"You demand it?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Upon my soul!" said the Head, glancing round him in a futile way. "I—I— You cannot come here, Handforth, using this tone. I am exceedingly distressed— Ah, Mr. Lee! I am glad that you have come!" he added, with infinite relief. "Perhaps you can deal with this impertinent boy."

Nelson Lee had just come through the doorway. Handforth and McClure turned and looked at him rather uncertainly. Lee was looking very grim.

"If I can be of any help, doctor, I shall be delighted."

"Yes, Mr. Lee, you can certainly be of help," said the Head. "These boys tell me that you have refused to let them go to—ahem!—Church's funeral to-morrow. I dare say that you have your own reasons—"

"I have, sir," interrupted Nelson Lee. "I do not wish these boys to leave the school. I have already told Handforth that I cannot grant his request, and McClure, of course, is passive in this matter. He is merely being led by his companion."

"He is not, sir!" said Handforth indignantly. "You're with me, heart and soul, aren't you, Mac?"

"Yes," gasped McClure.

"There you are, sir!" said Handforth. "We're as firm as a rock, the pair of us! We claim it as our right that we should be allowed to attend the funeral, and—"

"Be silent!" commanded the Head.

"It's not fair, sir!" shouted Handforth, working himself up. "I don't care if I'm flogged! I don't care if you threaten to sack me! I'm going to London to-morrow, permission or no permission!"

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated the Head, aghast.

"Yes, sir!" went on Handforth, utterly rebellious. "I'm amazed that Mr. Lee and you shouldn't let us go! You've told us that poor Church is dead, and——"

"Handforth!"

Nelson Lee's voice was very commanding.

"Sir?" said Edward Oswald, with a start.

"Be silent for a moment, while I speak to Dr. Stafford," said Lee sternly.

And Handforth was silent. At last Nelson Lee was about to let them into the secret!

"I think I can deal with this case, doctor," said Nelson Lee, looking at the Head. "If I may, I should like to make a suggestion."

"Please do, Mr. Lee—please do," said the bewildered Head.

"It is quite obvious that these boys are stubborn and self-willed," continued Nelson Lee, with a curious glint in his eye. "They have not only been impertinent, but rebellious. In the circumstances, I should not advise any punishment."

"No, no!" agreed the Head. "There is some—some excuse for them."

"Exactly," nodded Nelson Lee. "But if they are allowed to keep their liberty, they will cause a great deal of trouble. Handforth is a very determined boy when he likes—and I can see that he is in one of his most aggressive moods now. I suggest that both he and McClure shall be taken at once to the punishment-room, and locked in!"

"What?" gasped Handforth, with a jump.

"You really think that this is advisable, Mr. Lee?" asked the Head dubiously.

"I think it is not only advisable—but essential," said Nelson Lee. "I want these boys to be placed in the punishment-room in the Ancient House, and I shall also place a prefect on duty at the end of the passage. They must not escape. Rather than submit to their impertinence, we must——"

"But—but aren't you going to—to——"

Handforth broke off, gasping. He was thoroughly alarmed. His great scheme, after all, had gone "phut." Instead of Nelson Lee taking him into his confidence, there was every indication that the House-master-detective was to act with great strength. Handforth was thoroughly alarmed.

"Just a minute, sir," he ejaculated. "I—I didn't mean to be impertinent, you know! If you'll only tell us the full truth about Church, then we'll——"

"That is enough, Handforth!" interrupted Nelson Lee, with a glint in his eye. "I hope this will be a lesson to you. You must not attempt to enforce your will upon me—or upon the headmaster. Your conduct has been such that we must place you in the punishment-room, and McClure must go with you."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Handforth dizzily.

Nelson Lee meant every word he said, too! Forthwith, the unhappy pair were

marched off to the punishment-room in the Ancient House, and locked in. It was the only way of preventing them from causing a general sensation. With those enemies of Church still at liberty, Nelson Lee could afford to take no chances.



CHAPTER 7.

A Surprise For The Remove!

SO far as St. Frank's in general was concerned, nobody had the faintest idea that there had been any "monkey business"

with regard to Walter Church's death. Some days before he had been in the sanatorium, and Dr. Brett had officially announced that Church was dead. The school, shocked and hushed, had felt very depressed for the time being.

The following morning a motor-hearse had arrived, and had departed again, slowly and solemnly. Naturally, the whole school had at once concluded that Church's remains were being taken away for burial near his own home. It was the most natural thing to assume.

And so St. Frank's had gone on again as usual—rather relieved that the shadow of death had been removed.

How were the fellows to know that Church had only been in a trance, and that Nelson Lee had saved his life at the last moment? Church had some mysterious enemies in this district, too—relentless men who were determined to kill him. Nelson Lee had adopted the present subterfuge so that those rascals should be deceived. He wanted them to think that their deadly work had been duly performed, and so Church had remained "dead." But really he was down at Moat Hollow, an old, gloomy house near the village.

And the school had continued its duties and its pleasures, quickly forgetting the sturdy, cheery junior who had recently been in their midst.

So everybody was rather surprised when it got about that Handforth and McClure had been taken to the punishment-room, and locked in. It was rumoured, too, that they had been dealt with in this way because they had insisted upon attending their chum's funeral.

"It doesn't seem quite fair to me!" said Fullwood, as he stood discussing the affair in the lobby with two or three other fellows. "After all, why shouldn't they go to poor old Church's funeral? There's nothing unreasonable in it."

"Of course not!" said De Valerie. "I'm surprised at Mr. Lee!"

"And at the Head, too!" said Brent. "I can't understand it!"

"Why should you try to understand it?" asked Nipper gruffly.

"Oh, of course, you're bound to take Mr. Lee's part!" sneered Gulliver.

"Rats!" said Nipper. "But, according to all that I can hear, Handforth was fearfully impertinent to the Head. Went in to demand a pass for to-morrow. He told the Head that he didn't care whether he was flogged or sacked—and, naturally, Dr. Stafford couldn't stand that sort of thing."

"Perhaps you're right, dear old boy," said Sir Montie. "A headmaster, after all, must maintain discipline."

"That's true!" said Russell. "And if Handforth was deliberately insolent, he was only asking for trouble. All the same, it's hard lines. I think the Head could have excused him."

"Of course!" said De Valerie. "Handy and McClure were Church's best pals, and it's only natural that they should want to go to his funeral. But these school regulations are always heartless and callous. What do they care about a chap's feelings? I suppose Handforth and McClure will be kept in the punishment-room until to-morrow?"

"That's the idea, I think," said Nipper. "The Head has a notion that they might run away—in defiance of him. So he's scotched that idea by locking them both up."

Nipper was feeling rather unhappy about it all. He knew why the pair had been put in the punishment-room, and he secretly sympathised with them. But, naturally, he could do nothing.

However, there was one junior in the Ancient House who did do something. This junior was no less a person than Willy Handforth. The famous leader of the St. Frank's fags took a very serious view of the whole case.

"Something has got to be done!" he said to his faithful chums, Juicy Lemon and Chubby Heath. "We can't allow the school authorities to ride roughshod over old Ted and McClure like this."

"Well, what are we going to do?" asked Chubby practically.

"I don't know yet—I've got to think," replied Willy, frowning. "But the facts are quite clear. Ted and Mac wanted to go to London to attend poor old Church's funeral. Mind you, I think there's something rather rummy about that funeral. I won't say anything more—but I can keep on thinking."

"What do you mean?" asked Juicy, staring.

"Nothing—but I have my thoughts!" replied Willy. "Old Ted has been jolly queer this last two or three days. He hasn't been half so sorrowful as I should have thought. Still, we don't need to talk about that now. I understand that Ted was impertinent to Mr. Lee, and to the Head—and so he has been put into the punishment-room, and McClure's with him. They're not going to be allowed to attend the funeral to-morrow."

"It's a shabby trick!" said Chubby in-

dignantly. "Church was their best chum."

"I should have said that the Head doesn't *mean* them to attend the funeral," went on Willy. "But I do. I'm going to let those chaps out."

"That ought to be easy!" said Juicy, with sarcasm. "I suppose you know that there's a prefect stationed at the end of the corridor?"

"Yes, I know that."

"Then what are you going to do—hypnotise him, or something?" went on Juicy. "Handforth and McClure must have done something pretty bad, or they wouldn't take all these precautions. How the dickens can you help him while there's a prefect on guard all the time?"

"My poor, pitiful ass!" said Willy. "I'm not crazy enough to approach Ted from indoors. There's a window to the punishment-room, isn't there?"

"Yes, but——"

"And there's ivy on that wall, too," went on Willy calmly. "Jolly good ivy, as a matter of fact."

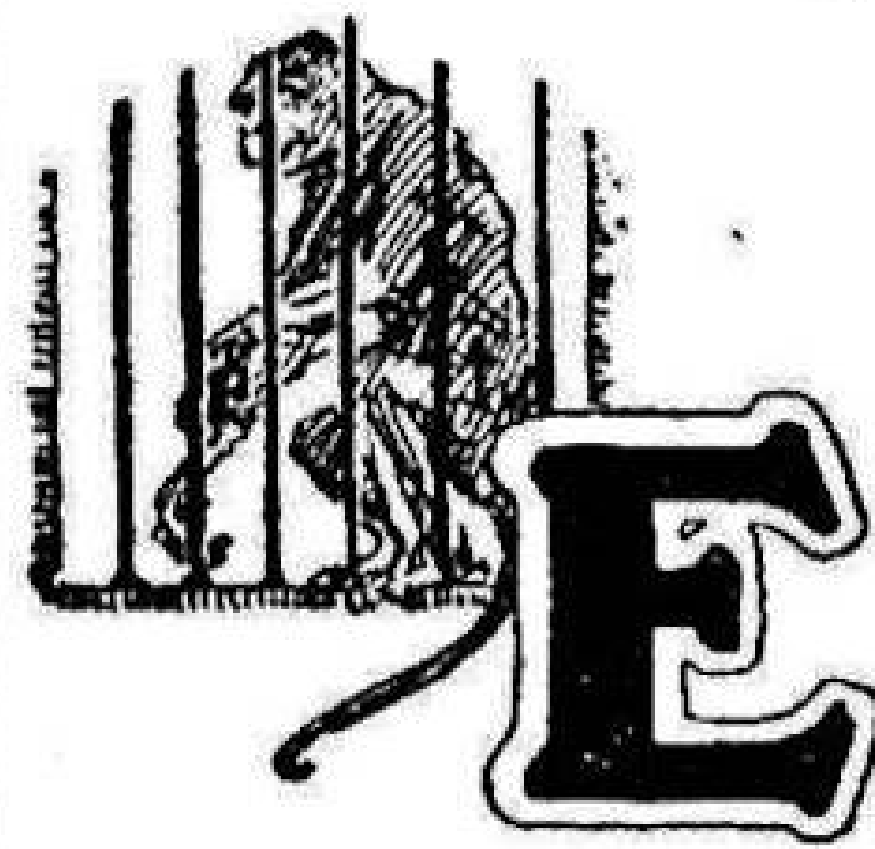
His two chums stared at him in horror.

"But, Willy!" gasped Chubby. "You—you can't climb that ivy! The punishment-room is right at the top of the house—it's a sort of attic! And the ivy right up there is only thin and weak. You'll kill yourself!"

"I haven't said that I'm going to climb the ivy," replied Willy coldly.

"Then who is?" asked Juicy blankly.

"Marmaduke!" replied Willy, with a quiet grin. "Good old Marmy! He'll nip up to that high window in about two shakes of a mule's starboard hoof!"



CHAPTER 8.

Willy's Resourcefulness!

DWARD OSWALD
HANDFORTH
grunted.

"That's right, keep it up!" he said bitterly. "How much

longer are you going to nag me, Mac?"

"I'm not nagging you, old man," said McClure, with an unhappy note in his voice. "But I warned you about this. I told you that you couldn't get the better of Mr. Lee."

"By George!" said Handforth, breathing hard. "How the dickens could I think of a thing like this? He's dished us, Mac—absolutely diddled us! We're locked in this room, and there's no escape. Even if we break the door down, it'll be no good. There's a prefect out there, watching us as though we're a couple of prisoners. It's disgraceful!"

"Well, you asked for it, old man," said Mac gently.

"Disgraceful?" repeated Handforth. "Just think of the heartlessness of the whole busi-

ness! Locking us in the punishment-room just because we asked to go to poor old Church's funeral!"

McClure shook his head.

"Don't kid yourself like that, Handy," he grunted. "You know as well as I do that there's no funeral. Mr. Lee knows that we know it, and so there's no heartlessness about it. He's done it just to put a stopper on you."

Grudgingly Handforth was compelled to admit that McClure had struck the nail on the head.

"And now we're done!" he said helplessly. "What a beastly shame! What a frost! I had planned to pop down to Moat Hollow to-night after lights out. I was going to break in—and find Church, in spite of all this trickery. Now I'm done!" he added, with a catch in his voice. "Oh, what a shame! And I do want to see old Churchy, too!"

He walked across to the window, and stood looking out at the twinkling lights below—and he was looking through heavy iron bars. The punishment-room was high up, but every precaution had been taken. Before now daring juniors had knotted sheets together, and had escaped that way. So the punishment-room window was now provided with heavy iron bars, like a prisoner's cell.

The door was very heavy, and it was provided with a patent lock. In addition to this, there were two bolts outside. The prefect who was on duty was not actually mounting guard outside the door like a warder. He was lounging at his ease in an adjoining room, enjoying a book in front of the fire. He would know at once if any attempt was made to get out of the punishment-room, for there could be no escape without a noise.

Handforth turned away from the window, his heart heavy.

"I'm sorry, Mac, for dragging you into this," he said. "I didn't know it was going to finish in such a beastly way. I thought we had Mr. Lee on toast, but he's too jolly clever for us!"

McClure was aware of a slight sense of relief.

"Well, after all, we're helpless here," he said. "And as there isn't any real funeral to-morrow, why should we worry? They'll let us out during the afternoon, I expect, when all chance of us running off has gone."

"But what about our jaunt to-night?" demanded Handforth.

"Well, perhaps it's better that we shouldn't go," said McClure. "When you come to think of it, Handy, it's a bit thick that we should interfere. Mr. Lee must have a very good reason for keeping us in the dark, and —"

He broke off, catching his breath in.

"What's the matter?" asked Handforth.

"I—I thought I saw something moving outside the window just now!" muttered

McClure. "I don't know what it was, but I could swear— There, listen to that!"

They both stared at the window. "It was dark in the punishment-room, for they were not allowed to have any light, and were supposed to go straight to bed. Actually they were still fully dressed, and did not feel at all like sleep."

"By George!" ejaculated Handforth. "There's somebody there!"

"But there can't be!" said McClure. "It's too high up. There isn't a ladder at St. Frank's that can get to this window."

Handforth strode across and flung open the lattice window, then he started back half a pace. A diminutive form was sitting on the window-sill, chattering at him gaily. In a flash Handforth recognised the visitor.

"Why it's old Marmaduke," he said in astonishment, "my minor's monkey!"

"Well, I'm blessed!" said McClure.

Marmaduke looked from one junior to the other with bright, twinkling eyes. He dropped something down on the window-sill with a thud, and then he hopped back a few inches, chattering again.

"Why, he's brought something up with him!" said McClure. "Look at this—rope, all tied up, and —"

"Rope!" gasped Handforth. "Good old Willy! Can't you see? This is Willy's doing. He's sent Marmaduke up to us with a rope, so that we can escape! No human being could get through those bars, but Marmy has done it!"

"Yes, but what's the good of rope to us?" asked McClure breathlessly. "We can't squeeze through these bars, can we?"

"By George, no!" said Handforth, with a sudden frown. "Still, Willy wouldn't be such a young ass as to— Hallo, what's this? What the dickens— Ye gods and little fishes! A file, Mac!"

"A what?"

"A whacking great file!" said Handforth. "Look at it! And there's a piece of paper wrapped round it. Let's have a look! Have you got a match?"

"Yes!" said McClure eagerly.

He struck one, and Handforth, unfolding a piece of paper which had been wrapped round the file, held it out. They both read the words that had been scrawled upon it:

"Good luck, Ted, old man! Here's a file and some rope. Take my advice, and get busy at about three o'clock in the morning. Take it easy, and don't make too much noise. You'll have plenty of time to shin down before daylight, and then you can catch the first train from Bannington. Don't thank me for this—thank old Marmy!"

Handforth drew a deep breath.

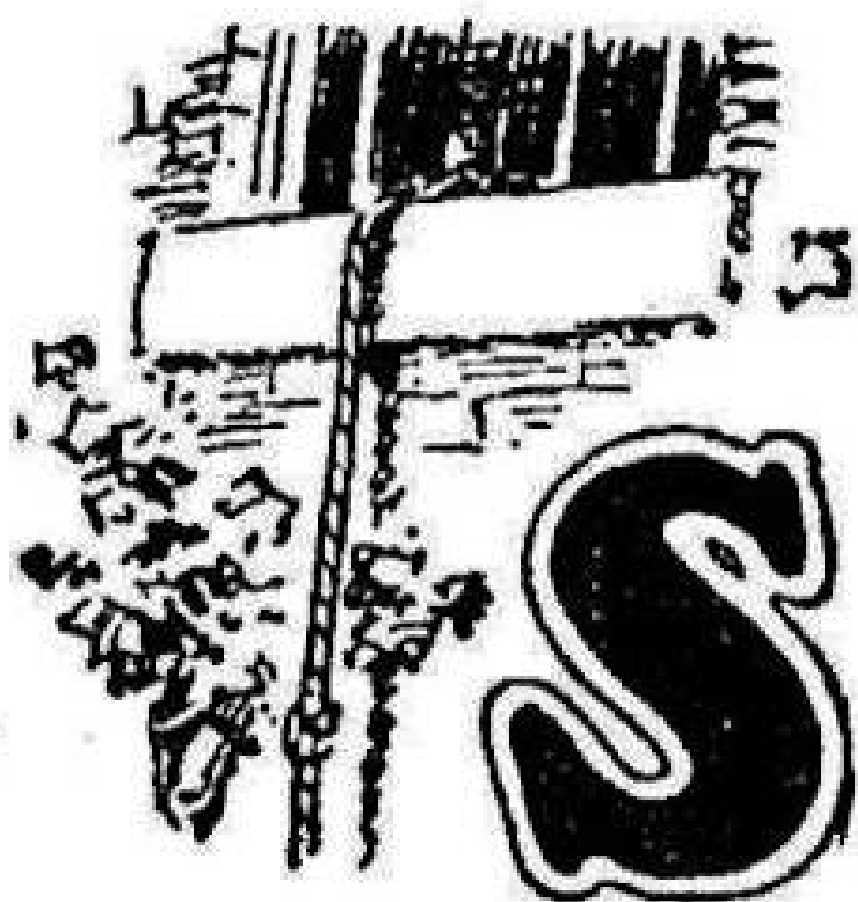
"Good old Willy!" he said enthusiastically.

**WHAT'S
COMING?**

"And good old Marmy, too! Mac, old man, we can go on that night jaunt, after all!"

"You—you mean——"

"I mean that we'll have the laugh on Mr. Lee, after all!" said Handforth exultantly.



CHAPTER 9.

After Midnight!

C R A P E — scrape — scrape!

Very cautiously Handforth worked away with the file, and the noise that

proceeded from it was very slight indeed.

St. Frank's was asleep, and the conspirators in the punishment-room were greatly helped by the blustering wind which kept hooting round the Ancient House. It served to disguise the sounds that came from the window.

McClure was over by the door, listening, ready to give the alarm if there should be any sound from the corridor. Once or twice footsteps had been heard, but only at long intervals. Perhaps the prefect was still on duty—and perhaps not. There was really no need for him to be, since those bolts were strong enough to keep the two prisoners within the room. Nobody had thought of guarding the window, since it was barred, and a great distance from the ground.

"Got it!" muttered Handforth triumphantly.

"You've filed through one of the bars?" asked McClure, as he ran across the room.

"Yes—look!" said Handforth. "You'd better help me here, Mac. It'll need all our combined strength to bend this bar aside. I think we can squeeze through after that, and it won't take us long to lower ourselves by means of this rope. I must say that young Willy is a stunner!"

"I'm not sure that we ought to go," said McClure uncertainly. "The Head may give us the sack, Handy, for breaking out of the punishment-room like this."

"Bother the sack!" said Handforth carelessly. "I've made up my mind to find Church—to come face to face with him to-night—and I'm not going to be put off!"

McClure said no more, for he was filled with the same curiosity as his leader. There had been so much mystery of late, so many unaccountable happenings, that the pair of them were thoroughly excited. They wanted to make an end of all the mystery once and for all.

"Heave-ho!" murmured Handforth.

Together they pulled on that iron bar, and bent it to one side. Handforth had sawn through it at the very base, and now, by lugging at the bar, they bent it in its socket. Soon there was sufficient room for them to squeeze their way through.

"Fine!" said Mac breathlessly. "What's the time, Handy?"

"I don't know, and I don't care," said Handforth. "After midnight, of course. The whole school's asleep, and once we've got down this rope we shall be able to get clear away."

"And old Willy thinks that we're really going to the funeral!" chuckled McClure. "Won't he be surprised when he knows the real truth?"

"We're going to something better than a funeral!" said Handforth, with sparkling eyes. "We shall see Churchy to-night, and grab his fist again. Good old Churchy! I'm dying to see how he's getting on these days! It seems years since we saw him last."

The rope was quickly knotted round two of the remaining bars. There was no danger of them giving way under the weight of the descending juniors, and the rope was thin, but very strong. Willy had provided the best.

"No need to hide our tracks, of course," said Handforth, as they prepared to depart. "We'll leave the rope hanging down, just as it is, and we'll leave this file here, too. Then they'll be able to see how we escaped. By George—a bit of a shock for them in the morning, eh?"

"What about that note of Willy's?" asked McClure.

"I've got it in my pocket," said Edward Oswald. "We don't want to leave anything that'll get Willy into trouble. I'll go first, Mac!"

"All right—but take it easily!" warned McClure. "There's no need for rushing, Handy. Don't be reckless."

Handforth wormed his way through, and then essayed the descent. It was a rather ticklish business, even for such active juniors as these two. One slip—one false grip—and they would be dashed to the ground.

They had taken the precaution to knot the rope at intervals of two or three feet—Willy had provided plenty of it, so there was ample to spare—and these knots provided excellent hand grips.

Handforth swung himself over the edge of the window-ledge, and gradually lowered himself, hand over hand, the rope entwined round his legs. The pressure he exerted acted like a brake—and those knots were very helpful, too. Down he went, foot by foot, and at last he reached the ground.

"All clear!" he whispered, giving the rope a shake.

He watched very anxiously while McClure followed. Mac possessed steady nerves, but that descent was rather a trial. He was glad enough when he felt the solid ground under his feet.

"Good man!" whispered Handforth. "Hurt your hands?"

"They smart a bit, where they slipped," replied McClure. "But it doesn't matter—I'm all right. What's the next move, Handy?"

"Why, we're going to get off the school premises as quickly as we can," replied Handforth grimly. "There might be a master prowling about somewhere, and we're not



"Why, it's my minor's monkey!" gasped Handforth, as he flung open the lattice window and saw the chattering form sitting on the sill. "Yes, and he's got some rope!" added McClure excitedly.

going to be collared. They wouldn't let us escape twice!"

Without any further ado, the two chums of Study D crept round the West Square, reached the school wall and dropped over into the dark lane. They stood there with the wind blowing against their faces. The sky was clouded, but now and again there was just a glimpse of the moon. The school clock solemnly chimed out the hour of one.

"Well, we've done it!" said Handforth exultantly. "We're out—and now for Moat Hollow! Old Church is in that house, and we're going to get to him, even if we have to smash our way in."

"Thank goodness it'll soon be all over!" said McClure, with a sense of relief. "I'm fed up with this uncertainty and mystery. It's so—so extraordinary, Handy! Why have they taken Church to Moat Hollow? Why are they keeping him there? And why have they let the school believe that he really died?"

Handforth gripped his arm.

"It's no good asking me those questions, old son," he said softly. "But they'll soon be answered—and they'll be answered by old Church himself, too!"

McClure took a deep, deep breath.

"You know, Handy, you're pretty marvelous!" he said admiringly. "You're a wonderful sort of chap!"

"Rot!" growled Handforth.

"I mean, the way you still persist in your belief that Church is alive and well," said McClure. "It's a fine thing to have a faith like yours!"

CHAPTER 10.

In Search of Their Lost Chum!



"HERE we are!" said Handforth softly.

Nearly a quarter of an hour had elapsed, and the two juniors were outside the wall of Moat Hollow. Not a sound broke the silence of the night, except the blustering of the wind. The gloom was very dense, and, in spite of himself, McClure could not help feeling just a little nervy.

Moat Hollow had a rather sinister reputation among the villagers. It had once been a school, it was true, but since then it had passed through many hands, and it had now been empty for some months. Some of the superstitious country folk believed that it was haunted, and all manner of stories had got about.

The house itself was most unprepossessing in appearance. It was a bare, gaunt sort of

building, and was surrounded by a high wall. As if the wall itself were not high enough, an additional fencing of wood had been built on the top of this. The place was more like a prison than a private house. There were two enormously high gates, but both these were locked and barred. Entry seemed impossible. Handforth was not deterred by trifles of this kind, however.

"How are we going to get over?" asked McClure, as they stared up at the high barrier.

"Rather a pity we didn't bring some of that rope," said Handforth, frowning. "We could have hooked it to something then, and swarmed up. Not that it matters. We'll prowl round until we come to a likely spot, and then we'll see what we can do."

But it was not so easy, after all. The wall was every inch of twelve feet in height. Even if McClure "made a back," and Handforth climbed on the top of him, it was impossible for him to reach the top of the fence. They went round the wall, searching for a spot where they might be able to climb over. But that barrier was very grim. There weren't any trees near by, so that they could not gain some assistance by swarming along a branch.

"I'm beginning to wonder if we're right, Handy," said McClure, with a doubt in his voice. "Everything seems so quiet—so uncannily still. Perhaps the old house is empty?"

"But I tell you I saw Mr. Lee come here—last night!" said Handforth.

"That doesn't prove anything," said McClure. "After all, Handy, it's only a theory of yours. Just because Mr. Lee came here—"

"Rats! It's as clear as daylight!"

"I wish it was!" muttered McClure.

"Perhaps your whole idea is wrong, Handy, and perhaps—"

"We don't want any more of this 'perhaps' business, my lad!" interrupted Handforth gruffly. "Church is in this old house—I'd bet my last collar-stud on it! And we're going to get in, too. By George! Do you think we'll let this silly wall beat us?"

"It's having a jolly good try!" said McClure.

Handforth gave a sudden start.

"By George! I've got an idea!" he said eagerly. "They're repairing the lane, about two or three hundred yards away. Don't you remember coming past those red lamps on the side of the road?"

"Yes, but—"

"Why the dickens didn't I think of it before?" said Handforth. "A part of the lane is cut off—there's a barrier there; and they've used a scaffold pole for the purpose."

"But what the thunder can we do with a scaffold pole?"

"We can carry it here, lean it against this high fence, and then swarm up it!" replied Handforth briskly. "In fact, it's the only

thing to be done. Come on! We shan't be long now!"

McClure had to admit that the scheme was a good one. They retraced their steps along Bellton Lane, and did not pause until they reached the spot where one or two red lamps were gleaming. The road repairers had been at work, and a solution to the juniors' problem was here. They seized the scaffold pole and carried it back towards Moat Hollow.

Arriving at the high wall once more, they set the pole up at an angle, and made sure that it was firm. Then Handforth wriggled his way upwards, until he had reached the very top of the fence. He swarmed over, and clung there.

"Come on, Mac!" he muttered. "It's easy!"

And McClure essayed the climb. It wasn't half so easy as Handforth had made out; but, by dint of hard effort, Mac reached the top.

"We shall have to chance where we fall," whispered Handforth. "There's only this fence here, and we can get down to the top of the actual wall without much difficulty. But after that we shall have to jump for it."

"I'm game!" said McClure.

They cautiously lowered themselves, then, almost at the same moment, they gave a leap, and landed amongst a tangle of dead leaves, weeds, and rank bushes. Handforth managed to keep his feet, but McClure rolled over, hurting himself a bit.

"It's all right—I'm only a bit bruised!" he gasped, as Handforth came to his rescue. "We're in, Handy—and that's the main thing! I say, the old place looks rather ghostly, doesn't it?"

"Yes, but don't let that worry you," said Handforth. "The next thing is to break our way into the house itself."

They stood there, looking at the building. It was very grim and forbidding—particularly as the moon had just peeped out from behind a cloud. It was hard to believe that there were any inhabitants here. McClure was more dubious than ever.

And just then, out of the gloom, came a figure.

"Look out!" gasped McClure. "There's something there—somebody moving!"

"Yes, I can see him!" whispered Handforth. "We'd better—"

"Halt!" came a grim, low voice. "Stand just where you are! If you move an inch I'll drop you in your tracks!"

"Oh, crumbs!" muttered McClure.

The figure came up, and proved to be a big, powerful man—a perfect stranger, attired in a heavy overcoat and a bowler hat.

"Oh, a couple of boys, eh?" said the man, with a sound of relief in his voice. "What do you think you're doing here? How did you get into these grounds?"

"We climbed over the fence," said Handforth. "And who are you?"

"Never you mind who I am!" said the man. "You're two of the boys from the school, eh? Well, you're going out—quick!"

You're trespassing here, and you're not allowed——"

"Quick, Mac!" shouted Handforth. "We're not going to be dished by this chap? Run for it!"

And, with one accord, they dashed across the ground towards the old house. The stranger, with a bellow of anger, tore after them!



CHAPTER 11.

The Voice!

HANDFORTH had acted on the spur of the moment, and he hardly knew which way to act now. But he was convinced of one

thing—he knew that whatever he did, he had to do it quickly.

The burly stranger was close at their heels, and he was not the kind of man to be flouted by a couple of schoolboys. Why he was there remained a mystery—and it was equally puzzling to know who he was.

But all Handforth's suspicions were redoubled. He knew that this man was a kind of guard—watching the place, in case anybody broke in. It proved, conclusively, that Moat Hollow was really inhabited.

And if Handforth and McClure wasted any time they would be seized by that powerful individual, and bundled over the barrier back into the road—and there would be no second entry for them!

So it was now or never!

"This way!" gasped Handforth, as they found themselves at the back of the house. "We'll dash in through the back door!"

He swerved just as their pursuer came running round the angle of the building, and flung himself heavily against the back door, which was hidden in deep gloom in a kind of porch.

"It's locked!" panted McClure, as he pulled up short.

"So it is!" said Handforth, with a gulp. "But we're not going to be done. We'll smash it down! Come on—both together!"

They drew back, and at the same moment that burly stranger came running up. The two juniors were within an ace of capture.

"Now!" yelled Handforth.

Crash!

They both hurled themselves at the back door with all their strength, and there was a splintering, rending sound as the wood-work gave way under the weight of their combined charge. The next moment they went blundering headlong into a dark passage, Handforth falling head over heels, with McClure on the top of him.

"By glory!" ejaculated the man. "These youngsters are pretty determined!"

"What the dickens shall we do now, Handy?" panted McClure, as he tried to pick himself up. "We're in, but——"

He broke off with a little gasp. Suddenly

a bright beam of light had flashed upon him, and he and Handforth found themselves staring and blinking into the eye of a bright electric torch. They could not see the individual who was holding it, but they were both aware of a curious thrill. Where were they? Who were these people in Moat Hollow?

For the first time, a tiny doubt was beginning to assail Handforth himself. True, he had seen Nelson Lee come into this place—but perhaps Lee had been investigating! Perhaps there were some crooks here!

"Get up—both of you!" said a stern, angry voice.

It was the voice of Nelson Lee himself!

"Oh, it's you, sir!" panted McClure. "Thank goodness. I—I thought—I hardly know what I thought!"

"Never mind that, McClure!" interrupted Nelson Lee. "I am quite convinced that Handforth led you into this escapade. Come with me—both of you. I am very angry!"

"I tried to stop them, sir, but they dodged me!" said the burly individual apologetically. "Then they smashed the door down before I could catch up to them."

"That's all right, Jenkins," said Nelson Lee. "You had better return to your duty outside. I suppose these boys climbed over the wall?"

"Yes, sir—they was over before I could stop them," replied the man. "They took me quite by surprise, confound 'em!"

The man retired, and Nelson Lee still stood there, flashing that torchlight upon the two juniors. They picked themselves up, dusty and dishevelled; then they were compelled to walk down the passage, and into a comfortable kind of living-room. There was a glowing oil-stove burning—a stove which sent forth a red, ruddy warmth. An oil-lamp was on the table, too, and the room was empty, except for the two boys and Nelson Lee.

"Well, we're here, sir!" said Handforth defiantly.

"So I see!" said Lee. "Upon my word, Handforth, you are a most determined boy!"

"I am, sir!"

"In spite of all my precautions, you have deliberately forced your way into this house," went on Nelson Lee angrily. "Really, I don't know what to do with you."

"Tell me the secret about old Church, sir, and I'll be satisfied," replied Handforth. "He's here, isn't he? We want to see him!"

"Your anxiety over your chum, Handforth, is rather touching," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I find it very difficult to deal with you as drastically as I would like. You have been most wilful—most disobedient. And yet I cannot be hard with you. How did you escape from the punishment-room?"

"We filed one of the bars through, sir, and got down by means of a rope," replied Handforth.

"Indeed! And where did you get the file from?"

"I say, sir, go easy!" protested Handforth.

"You don't expect us to answer that question, do you?"

"Well, frankly, no," replied Lee, with a touch of dryness in his voice. "But I have no doubt that some of your companions assisted you in this escape. Well, now that you are here, you must stay here."

"That's good!" said Handforth. "And you'll let us see Church, won't you?"

"Your persistence, young man, is positively extraordinary!" frowned Nelson Lee. "You will both remain in this room—until I am ready to take you back to St. Frank's. I shall not answer any of your questions regarding Church, and I have no intention of being thwarted by—"

"Oh, but it's not fair, sir!" shouted Handforth. "Hang it, haven't we proved that we deserve to be let into the secret? Be a sport, Mr. Lee!"

Nelson Lee couldn't help smiling.

"I hope that I am always a sport, Handforth," he replied. "Hang it, after all your trouble, I really think—"

"Listen!" interrupted McClure, his voice rising shrilly. "I heard it!"

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "You heard what?"

"Church's voice!" said McClure. "Listen!"

They both stood there, tense and eager. Sure enough, a voice came to their ears—from somewhere down that dark passage.

"Handy!" it came, anxious and eager. "Handy! Mac! Are you there, you fellows?"

Edward Oswald Handforth gave a wild whoop.

"It's old Churchy!" he yelled. "Come on, Mac! We've found him at last!"



CHAPTER 12.

The Re-union.

NELSON LEE tried to bar the way.

"Steady, Handforth—steady!" he said sharply. "Don't get so excited! I will

take you to Church now—"

But Handforth pushed past Nelson Lee as though he were a mere fag of the Third. He was so excited that he didn't care a jot for his actions. He rushed through the doorway, nearly knocking Nelson Lee over in his clumsy progress, and McClure, equally as excited, followed him. They found themselves blundering along the dark passage.

"Churchy!" shouted Handforth.

"Here I am, Handy!" came an answer. "Oh, my stars! Isn't it good to hear your voice again!"

A door opened further down the passage, allowing a flood of soft light to come out. Dr. Brett stood in the doorway. He was astonished and angry.

"Handforth!" he ejaculated. "What are you doing here?"

"Where's Church?" shouted Handforth hoarsely. "By George! Let me get in there—"

"No!" commanded the doctor. "You must not— Well I'm hanged! I might as well attempt to stop an avalanche!"

Handforth had barged through like a human battering-ram, and McClure was in close attendance. They found themselves in a kind of bed-room, and a genial glow was coming from another of those wonderful oil-stoves. A lamp was burning on a little side table, and there, seated in a deep easy-chair, his face flushed with excitement, was Church!

"Handy, old man!" he said breathlessly.

"Churchy!" gulped Handforth. "Oh, Churchy, we've found you!"

He rushed over, seized Church's fist, and held it tightly. Just for a moment he stood quite still, looking into Church's face, and then, very awkwardly, Handforth realised that his eyes were a bit moist. McClure was by his side now, grasping Church's other hand.

"Church, old son!" muttered Mac. "And—and we thought that you were dead!"

"I was—nearly!" said Church. "If it hadn't been for Mr. Lee, I should have been in my coffin by this time. He saved my life."

"Mr. Lee did?" panted Handforth. "And—and I've been saying all sorts of awful things against Mr. Lee!"

"Then you'd better take them back," said Church happily. "I owe everything to Mr. Lee—and to Dr. Brett and good old Phipps—and Nipper. They've been too wonderful for words."

"But there's something else that's too wonderful for words, too!" said Handforth, looking at his chum as though he were some curiosity. "We—we thought that you would be in bed, Churchy—we thought that you would be terribly ill—and hardly able to speak."

"I was terribly ill a day or two ago," said Church. "In fact, I was so ill that I broke out of this place, and wandered about the district like some lunatic. I don't know anything about it, but Nipper told me that I—"

"Yes, and we saw you, too," interrupted Handforth. "At least, I did. Mac wouldn't believe it. He thought you were a ghost. You see, everybody at St. Frank's believes that you are dead."

"I know," nodded Church. "It's a rummy sort of business, isn't it? But Mr. Lee says that it will soon be all over, and then I shall be able to go back and get thoroughly well in the sanny. I ought to be out and about again in a week's time."

"But what's happened to you?" asked Handforth, so happy that he could hardly keep still. "What cured your illness? And why have you been brought down here?"

Dr. Brett came forward, and his original anger had gone. But he was rather anxious now.

"I'm sorry, boys, but I can't allow you to stay here, questioning Church," he said.

"He's my patient, and he must have complete rest. It will do him no good to get into a thoroughly excited state."

Church looked round at the doctor and grinned.

"Cheese it, Dr. Brett!" he protested. "I'm not excited, and it won't hurt me to have a chat with my two chums. I'm so jolly glad to see them that it's doing me a world of good. It'll be unfair if you send them away now. Please let them stay."

"Well, I must say they deserve to stay," replied Dr. Brett dryly. "They've been persistent enough."

Handforth and McClure were still looking at Church as though he were some zoological specimen. They could hardly believe that they had really found him at last. After hearing that he was dead—after knowing that he had mysteriously disappeared—it was wonderful to be face to face with him, and to find that he was looking very much like his old self.

As a matter of fact, Church had improved marvellously during the past twenty-four hours. He had got his old colour again, and that wan, drawn look had gone from his face. And it was a fact that Handforth and McClure were doing him a lot of good. It was just what he had needed.

"We won't bother him, doctor," said Handforth gently. "And we won't let him talk too much, either. We're so jolly glad to see him alive and safe that we're ready to just sit here and look at him. But I would like to know what caused his illness."

Church looked surprised.

"Don't you know?" he asked. "It wasn't an illness at all, Handy."

"But you were terribly ill!" protested Handforth.

"I wasn't—I was poisoned!" said Church quietly.

"Poisoned!"

"Yes—by a couple of unknown Indians who seem to want my blood," said Church. "You know—old Zuma the Mystic and his pal!"

"Didn't I say so?" asked Handforth, turning excitedly to McClure. "I knew that rotter, Zuma, was mixed up in it somehow! And do you mean to say that he tried to kill you, Churchy? The rotter—the beast!"

"Why hasn't he been arrested?" asked McClure.

"They're trying to arrest him," replied Church. "Mr. Lee is in communication with Scotland Yard, and I believe that some of the detectives are on the spot already. They're guarding me, you know, in case Zuma makes a second try."

"You know too much, my lad!" said Dr. Brett gruffly. "It isn't good for you to know all this. I believe that Nipper has been telling you the bulk of it."

"Well, why shouldn't I know?" asked Church. "It doesn't do me any harm, and I'm an interested party, aren't I?"

"By George!" said Handforth, as a

thought struck him. "Then I suppose that chap we met outside—the man who tried to stop us—is really a detective?"

"Yes," said Dr. Brett. "One of the special men from Scotland Yard. I shall be wholeheartedly pleased when this unpleasant business is over. I'm tired of secrecy and subterfuge."



CHAPTER 13.

The Warning!

HALF an hour later Nelson Lee came into the room. He had purposely stayed out until now, so that the three chums should have a chance of talking together.

And Lee found it quite impossible to be angry with the determined Handforth. His face, and McClure's face, were so radiant with happiness that every trace of Nelson Lee's annoyance went. He could only admire the persistence of these two chums who had never rested until they had found their lost companion.

"Church has been telling us all about it, sir," said Handforth, as he looked up. "We think you've been marvellous—to save his life, and to look after him like this."

"Nonsense, Handforth!" said Nelson Lee. "I suppose you will now be inclined to crow—eh? You've beaten me, after all."

"We're not going to crow, sir," replied Edward Oswald quietly. "We're awfully sorry for defying you, and we're both ready to take our punishment."

"Yes, sir," said McClure eagerly. "We don't mind if we get a flogging. It's been worth it."

"It's worth getting the sack for!" said Handforth stoutly. "We know we did wrong to break out of the punishment-room, and—"

"Let us forget all about that, Handforth," interrupted Nelson Lee. "Your motive was a splendid one, and I must confess that I have had a sneaking sympathy for you all the time. You must go back to school very shortly now, and you must get into bed. You'll hear nothing more of the other affair."

"But the Head will be wild with us, sir," said Mac.

"I shall explain matters to Dr. Stafford, and I have no doubt that he will be lenient," said Nelson Lee. "You know the secret now, so we might as well be perfectly frank. From the very first, my boys, I have felt very sorry for you. I have admired your attitude, and—"

"Just a minute, sir," said Handforth. "Sorry to interrupt, sir, but there's one thing I can't understand. Why was it you

**A GREAT
SURPRISE!**

were so much against us? Why couldn't you have told us that Church was alive? We're his chums, you know!" he added reproachfully.

"I know that, Handforth, and I want you to believe that it hurt me very much to keep the truth from you," replied Lee. "But I have a warning to give you. The men who attempted to take Church's life are still at liberty. They will make another attempt if they only get the chance."

"But they won't get the chance, will they, sir?"

"You can be quite certain that they will not," replied Nelson Lee firmly. "We are taking every precaution. But it is only just recently that we have had the assistance of the police. At first there were only one or two of us—Phipps, Dr. Brett, Nipper, and myself. We, with the headmaster, were the only ones who knew that Church was really alive. It was most important that this secret should not be revealed, for if the school knew the truth the news would be all over the whole neighbourhood, and those mysterious enemies would start their grim work over again."

"But who's talking about telling the whole school?" asked Handforth, in surprise. "I simply said that you might have taken me into the secret."

"Well, that amounts to practically the same thing, Handforth," said Lee dryly.

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "You—you mean—"

"He's right, Handy!" said McClure, grinning. "If you had known, you couldn't have kept it to yourself. You would have given yourself away twenty times every hour!"

"What rot!" said Handforth indignantly. Church smiled.

"You've got to sing small here, Handy," he said. "Mr. Lee's perfectly right. If you had known that I was alive and safe, you couldn't have looked mournful, could you? I think it was better for Mr. Lee to do what he did."

"Oh, well, it's all over now, anyhow," said Handforth contentedly. "But it's a bit thick to say that I couldn't keep a secret!"

"I have no faith that you will keep it, even to-morrow," said Nelson Lee dryly. "Not that it matters so much now. There is every chance that these men will be apprehended to-morrow, so this secrecy need not last much longer. However, I want you to be very cautious. To-morrow is the day that was originally fixed for this youngster's funeral."

"Ugh!" said Church, with a little shiver.

"And so you must keep up the pretence for just a little longer, Handforth," continued Nelson Lee. "At the first moment I can I will come to the school, and report the good news to all and sundry. When I do that you will know that Church's enemies are under lock and key."

Handforth frowned.

"Isn't it funny that you couldn't collar these two men earlier, sir?" he asked.

"They're only a couple of beastly Indians, or Mexicans, or something. Why are they so dangerous?"

"Because they persist in lurking in the wood," replied Nelson Lee, "and it is no easy matter to search a big expanse of forest land like Bellton Wood. Furthermore, these two men are dangerous customers. They are armed with poisoned darts and blowpipes. We have had to be very cautious—very careful, indeed."

"So that's why you warned me not to go into the wood the other day, sir?" asked Handforth. "I'm beginning to understand everything now."

"These two rascals know that Church is here, but he is being well protected," said Nelson Lee. "I would much prefer him to be up at the school, but I am not going to take any risks. He remains here until those scoundrels are taken by the police. He will remain here, and he will be guarded day and night. They are relentless—inexorable."

"But why have they tried to kill him, sir?" asked McClure.

"I don't know, my boy, but I intend to find out," said Lee grimly. "Well, you must come now. You have seen Church, and you know that he is safe, and rapidly recovering his normal health. I hope you are now satisfied?"

"Satisfied, sir?" repeated Handforth. "My only hat! We're simply bubbling with joy."

"And at about this time next week, no doubt, you will be punching Church on the nose, or on one of his ears," chuckled Nelson Lee. "I am afraid that you show your affection in very curious ways sometimes, Handforth. Well, come along. I'll escort you back to the school, and see you safely in bed."

The two juniors rose to their feet.

"Right you are, sir," said Handforth. "We're ready to obey any orders. No more insubordination—no more defiance. We've seen Church, and we know that everything is O.K."

And, having bid their chum good-bye, they went happily and contentedly with Nelson Lee.



CHAPTER 14.

Very Remarkable!

ALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD came to a halt as he was walking along the upper corridor of the Ancient House. Clive Russell

was with him, and they both turned and stared at one another.

"Rummy!" said Fullwood, frowning. "Sounds like somebody whistling!"

"And it's coming from Handforth's dormitory," nodded Clive.

"But Handforth and McClure are in the

punishment-room," said Fullwood. "They were locked there last night."

It certainly did sound like whistling, although it suddenly ceased. The reason for this, after all, was very simple.

Within the dormitory, Handforth and McClure were getting dressed. They hadn't had a great deal of sleep, but they were both feeling serenely happy. Now they were getting up with the rest of the Remove, and they were finding it difficult to hide their true feelings.

"Better go easy with that whistling, Handy!" murmured McClure, as he turned round from the mirror. "Somebody might hear you."

"What does it matter if they do?" asked Handforth, staring.

"You ass!" said Mac, in alarm. "You're not supposed to know that old Church is alive!"

"By George!" said Handforth. "That's right! I shall have to be careful!"

The door suddenly opened, and Fullwood and Russell stood there.

"Why, hallo!" Fullwood said. "I thought you chaps were in the punishment-room!"

"Then you thought wrong," said Handforth gruffly.

"But how did you get out?"

"Oh, Mr. Lee thought better of it," replied Handforth, with a careless wave of his hand. "We came back to bed during the night, you know—and now we're going to carry on as usual. Ripping morning, isn't it?"

Fullwood stared.

"Is it?" he asked. "Personally, I thought it was a pretty rotten morning. There's a fearful wind, and it's raining like the dickens."

Handforth glanced out of the window, and started.

"Why, so it is!" he said. "Well, never mind."

"Did I hear one of you chaps whistling in here?" went on Fullwood, more surprised than ever.

"Whistling?" said McClure, with a puzzled look.

"Yes—whistling."

"I wasn't whistling," said Mac, shaking his head. "Were you, Handy?"

Handforth looked at his chum coldly.

"I should hope I have more feeling for poor Church than to whistle on a day like this!" he said in a severe voice.

"That's what I was thinking," said Fullwood. "It's Church's funeral to-day, isn't it?"

Handforth grinned—and then checked himself so suddenly that the two juniors standing in the doorway stared at him in amazement.

"Yes!" said Handforth, in a voice that was throbbing with assumed emotion. "Poor old Churchy! They said that this was the day for his funeral. We can't be sure, of course—but you can never tell."

"Have you given up all idea of going to London, then?" asked Russell.

"Yes!" said Handforth, shaking his head. "I think we'd better stay here. We couldn't do any good in London."

"Not a bit!" said McClure. "It's a lot better for us to remain at St. Frank's."

"Well, I must say that you've changed your minds pretty suddenly," said Fullwood suspiciously. "And you're acting pretty queerly, too. Last night you were positively mad about getting permission to go to London—to attend the funeral. Now you don't seem to care a toss."

"What's the good of caring?" asked McClure sadly. "The Head has forbidden it, and we've got to obey. We've been released from the punishment-room on condition that we don't go to the funeral. At least, we've promised that we won't ask to go."

"That's true!" said Handforth. "Well, are you ready, Mac? There's time to punt a footer about in the Triangle——"

"Oh, Handy!" said McClure reproachfully.

"Eh? What the dickens—— I—I mean——" Handy broke off, confused. "Of course not!" he added hastily. "You—you callous rotter, Mac!"

"What!" gasped McClure.

"You heartless bounder!" said Handforth. "Fancy talking about punting a footer about on a morning like this! I'm surprised at you!"

"But—but——"

"That's enough!" said Handforth curtly. "Don't let it occur again!"

Fullwood and Russell went out, shaking their heads. They didn't know what to make of Handforth. According to all that they had heard, this was the morning of Church's funeral! And here was Handy talking about punting a footer about in the Triangle—as though he didn't care a toss about his lost chum.

"What do you make of it?" asked Russell, as they went down the corridor.

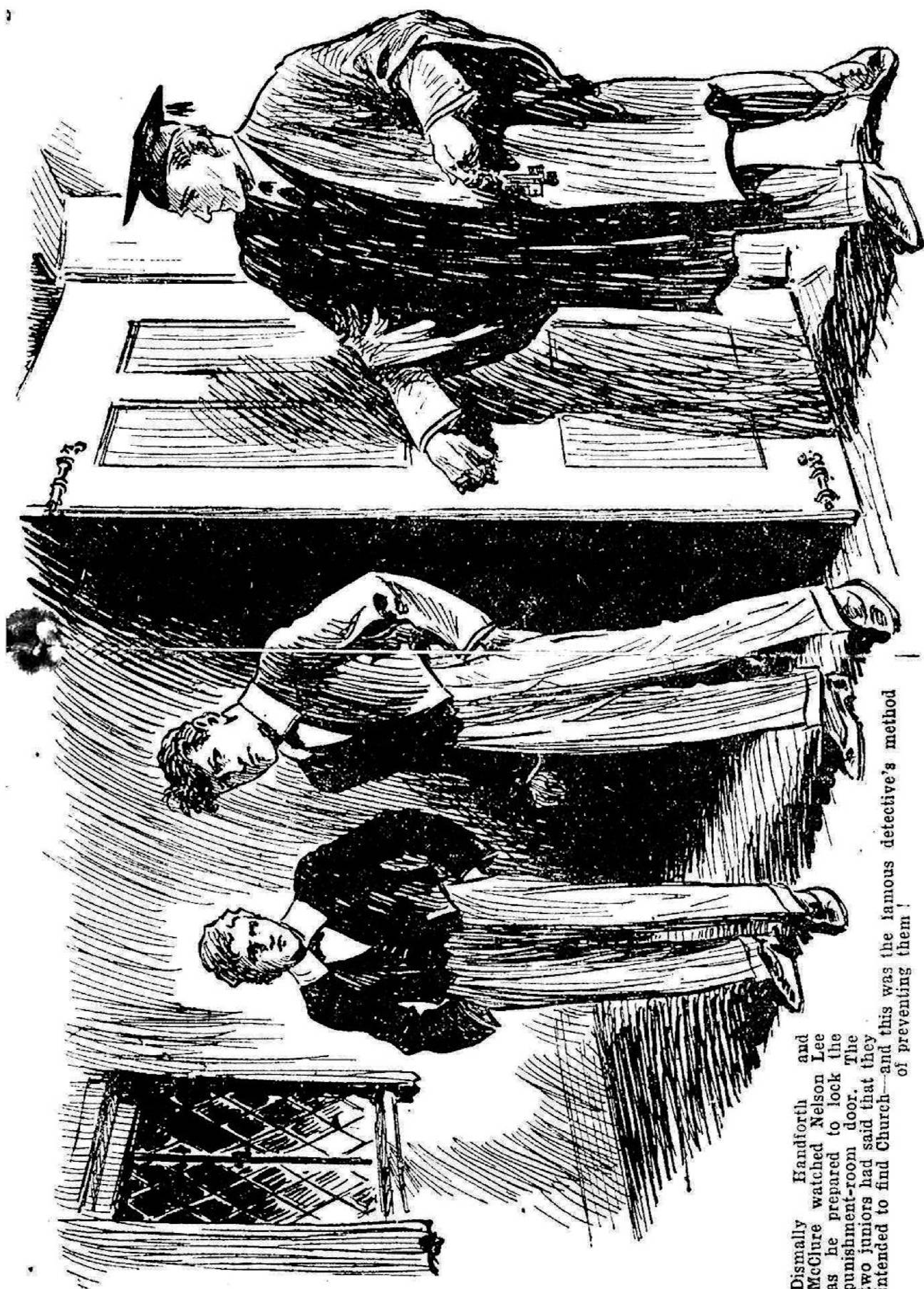
"I'm blessed if I can make anything out of it," replied Fullwood. "It's not like Handy. He's generally such a soft-hearted sort of chap. And this morning, of all mornings, too! He doesn't seem to care!"

They went downstairs, to find Archie Glen-thorne, De Valerie, and one or two other juniors collected in the lobby. They were all talking in low tones, and they were all looking very serious and troubled.

"We're just talking about Handy," said De Valerie, as the other two came up. "Hard lines on him, you know, being locked up in the punishment-room with McClure. It's a shame they weren't allowed to go to Church's funeral!"

"You're wasting your sympathy," said Fullwood. "Handforth and McClure are in their own dormitory."

"What! In their own dormitory?"



Dismally Handforth and McClure watched Nelson Lee as he prepared to lock the punishment-room door. The two juniors had said that they intended to find Church—and this was the famous detective's method of preventing them!

"Yes," said Fullwood. "They were released from the punishment-room during the night, and now they seem to be perfectly indifferent about going to Church's funeral. In fact, Handforth was whistling as he got dressed."

"Odds impossibilities and outrageousness!" said Archie Glen thorne, dropping his monocle in his surprise. "You don't absolutely say so, old sunbeam? I mean to say, I can't imagine Handforth whistling on the occasion of his pal's funeral. Good gad! Absolutely not!"

"Well, we can't swear to it, but it sounded very much like it," said Russell. "They don't seem to care a bit about going to the funeral, anyhow—and that's very different from what they were yesterday. McClure seems very much the same—sad, and all that; but Handforth is positively changed. If it wasn't so impossible, I'd say that he was looking happy!"

"You must be wrong," said De Valerie, frowning. "Handy's one of the softest-hearted chaps under the sun! He's been nearly crazy with grief about Church, since he died. It's only just recently that he's begun to recover—"

"Then he's completely recovered, I should think!" said Harry Gresham, of Study J. "Great Scott! Look at him!"

He pointed, and they all looked up the stairs. Edward Oswald Handforth was just coming down, and he was performing a sort of hornpipe on the top stairs, humming gaily to himself meanwhile. Finally, to the sheer amazement of the juniors in the lobby below, Handforth hooked himself over the balustrade and came whizzing downwards in a sheer ecstasy of exuberation!



G

CHAPTER 15.

The Callousness of Handforth!

GOOD gad!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"Handy!"

Edward

Oswald

Handforth came to himself with a start. He had just landed in the lobby, and he found himself surrounded by all the astounded juniors. McClure was hurrying down the stairs behind him, and Mac was looking concerned and worried.

"Handy!" he shouted. "What's the matter with you? Don't you know what to-day is?"

Handforth stared.

"Thursday, isn't it?" he said. "Or is it

Friday? I don't know—I've lost count!"

"Lost count!" yelled Fullwood. "D'you mean to say you don't know what the day is?"

"How should I know?" asked Handforth lightly. "And why should I care? I jolly well know that to-day is the most wonderful day—I—I mean, it's the most awful day— Look at it raining!" he added, pointing outside.

"Great Scott!"

"I trust, dear old onion, that everything is



Dismally Handforth and McClure watched Nelson Lee as he prepared to lock the punishment-room door. The two juniors had said that they intended to find Church—and this was the famous detective's r of preventing them!

all well in the rafters?" said Archie Glen thorne anxiously. "I mean to say, when a chappie acts like this on the morning of his best pal's funeral— Well, I mean, it's a bit mottled, what? Somewhat blue round the good old edges!"

"I—I'm hardly myself!" said Handforth, pulling such a sad face that he looked positively agonised. "How can I be as usual on such a morning? Please don't speak to

me, you chaps—please don't ask me any questions. I—I'd rather be left alone!"

"We'd both rather be left alone," said McClure pointedly.

Handforth walked outside, quite unconscious of the fact that it was raining hard. He had no hat on, and he strolled across the Triangle, his mind filled with the one glorious thought that Church was down at Moat Hollow in safe hands and thoroughly well. Perhaps not as strong as he ought to be, but well on the road to complete recovery. And

tend to be sad? According to everything that the chaps know, this is the day of Church's funeral!"

"I keep forgetting it!" said Handforth frankly. "But it doesn't matter—they'll soon know the truth."

"It *does* matter!" insisted McClure. "Didn't Mr. Lee warn us?"

"By George, you're right!" said Handforth slowly. "Perhaps we'd better be careful."

"We!" snorted McClure. "I've done nothing yet! You talk of punting a footer about—and then you blame me with it! These fellows will begin to think that you've gone off your rocker!"

"I can't help what they think," said Handforth truculently.

"Well, anyhow, it jolly well proves that Mr. Lee was right," said McClure gruffly. "Look what would have happened if you had known about Church all along! The very first morning after you've found him you act like a sandboy."

"What's a sandboy?" demanded Handforth.

"Oh, I don't know," retorted McClure. "But sandboys are always supposed to be happy, aren't they?"

They went indoors again, and they were compelled to run the gauntlet of many stares. A number of other juniors had gathered by this time, and they had listened in astonishment to the tale of Handforth's extraordinary callousness. On the very morning of Church's funeral he was going about with a smile on his face! What was the matter with him?

"Well, it hasn't taken him long to get over his grief, has it?" sneered Gulliver. "I don't believe he's been cut up about Church at all! He's only been pretendin'!"

"Well, hang it, it looks like it!" said Hubbard.

"Crocodile tears!" said Bell. "Just fancy! Handy has been shedding crocodile tears all the time!"

Handforth spun round, and glared at Bell.

"Are you calling me a crocodile?" he roared.

"I—I—I——" stuttered Bell, backing away under Handforth's fierce glare.

"Any more from you, my lad, and I'll biff you!" said Handforth darkly.

"Handy, old man!" said Fullwood earnestly. "You wouldn't knock Bell down this morning, would you?"

"Why not?"

"Well, I can't see why you should ask that question," said Fullwood. "I'm rather disappointed in you, Handy! I thought you would have more respect——"



before long he would be back at St. Frank's, in his old study, and then everything would be all serene. This was certainly a morning for rejoicing.

McClure came running out after him.

"Handy, you fathead!" he hissed. "You're spoiling everything!"

"Eh?"

"You're giving the whole game away!" said McClure fiercely. "Why can't you pre-

The Study D leader gave a start as he realised that once more he had blundered.

"Oh, rather!" said Handforth hastily. "I'll leave knocking Bell down until to-morrow! Poor old Church! Just fancy—this morning! Terrible, isn't it?"

He went off into the Remove passage, and McClure went with him—filled with exasperation. Handforth was quite impossible this morning. He knew the truth about Church, and he was acting like a lunatic. It was sheerly impossible for him to keep a secret. No wonder Nelson Lee had been so firm!

"Crazy!" said Fullwood, shaking his head, after the pair had gone.

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie Glenthorne, with concern. "I mean to say, the callousness of the blighter was absolutely frightful. On the very morning of the good old funeral—I mean to say, the distressing old funeral, as it were. I rather thought we were going to be somewhat subdued this morning, laddies."

"And so we are subdued," said De Valerie. "It's rather a solemn thought, you know—to realise that Church is being buried to-day. Poor old Church! One of the best, too."

"Rather!" said a sombre chorus.

"I say, you chaps!" shouted Duncan, running out of the Remove passage. "Have you seen Handy this morning?"

"Yes, we have!" growled Fullwood. "And we don't know what's the matter with him!"

"Neither do I!" said Duncan breathlessly. "I met him just going into Study D—and what do you think he was doing?"

"Well, I'll bet he wasn't shedding tears!" said Gulliver, with a jeer.

"No!" said the New Zealand junior. "He was dancing a sort of sailor's jig, and he was cackling like mad into McClure's ear, as though he were enjoying some huge joke!"

"My only hat!"

"And as soon as he caught sight of me he became as solemn as an owl, and pulled a face as long as a fiddle!" went on Duncan. "I can't understand it! And this is the day of Church's funeral, too! Handforth doesn't seem to care a jot! He's absolutely indifferent! I never thought he could be so callous and hard-hearted!"

"It's a bit sad!" said Fullwood unhappily. "I wouldn't have believed it of Handy. He's practically forgotten Church already—and on the morning of his funeral he acts like a chap who has just heard good news!"

The other juniors shook their heads in puzzlement—little realising that Handforth had received good news!

CHAPTER 16.

Letting It Out!



McCLURE was looking very grim as he closed the door of Study D.

"Now, you hopeless chump!" he said darkly. "What do

you mean by it?"

"I don't like your tone," said Handforth, with a stare.

"I don't care whether you like it or not!" snapped McClure. "You're the biggest ass I ever saw in my life!"

"Look here——"

"So you are!" insisted McClure. "What did you do just now? That's what I'm asking you, Handy! What did you do?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, just as Duncan was coming down the passage, you cackled like a hyena, and danced a hornpipe!" said McClure bitterly. "Is that what you call keeping the secret? It would have been pretty bad yesterday—but it's ten times worse this morning. You've got to be sad, you idiot—you've got to go about with bowed shoulders and a hopeless sort of look."

"But I'm not hopeless," argued Handforth. "I'm jolly happy."

"That doesn't matter!" yelled McClure, exasperated. "You've got to pretend! Oh, my hat, wasn't Mr. Lee right? He knew what he was doing when he kept the secret from you! You're going to turn me dotty this morning, Handy!"

Handforth realised that he had, indeed, been very incautious. McClure's plain speaking brought him to his senses. He was contrite at once—for Handforth was always ready to admit his faults, when he saw them. It wasn't often that he saw them, but the phenomenon did happen occasionally.

"Mac, old man, I've certainly been a chump," he agreed in alarm. "It won't do for me to go on like this, will it? They'll all be suspecting something."

"I'm glad you realise it," said McClure. "And if you want to know the truth, they're suspecting something already. If you pull yourself together and act your part properly, you may be able to retrieve the position. But you'll have to go jolly easy."

Handforth wandered to the window, and stood looking out into the West Square.

"Good!" he said. "It's stopped raining now. Let's go outside and get some fresh air. It feels a bit stuffy in here—and I want room to move about, too. I feel like jumping over a 'bus! I—I mean, I'll keep my feelings in!"

He opened the window, and climbed through. McClure was in a state of worry again.

"Come back, Handy!" he urged. "You'll only give yourself away again! My goodness!

ANSWERS

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It's a pity you weren't kept up in the punishment-room!"

Handforth was wandering away across the West Square, and he arrived under the arch just as Reggie Pitt, Jack Grey and two or three other West House Removites were approaching from the other direction. They all looked at Handforth very diffidently.

"Morning, Handy, old man," said Reggie Pitt, in a gentle voice.

"What's the matter—ill?" asked Handforth, staring.

"No, I'm not ill," replied Pitt. "But—but—"

"Then what's the idea of putting that rummy sort of note into your voice?" asked Handforth. "No need to worry about the weather—it looks like clearing up. There's a break in the clouds, I see. I'll bet the sun'll be shining soon."

The West House juniors looked at him in real astonishment.

"You don't seem very sad this morning, Handy," remarked Jack Grey bluntly. "I rather thought you would be thinking of poor Church. I understand that he is to be buried this morning."

"Buried!" grinned Handforth. "Not likely!"

"What!"

"You silly asses, there isn't going to be any funeral!" said Handforth. "Old Church is alive!"

"Handy, are you mad?" shouted McClure, running up.

Handforth gave a violent start.

"Eh?" he gasped. "Oh, crumbs! I—I was forgetting—I—I mean, poor old Churchy! Yes, fancy him being buried to-day! Rummy, isn't it? He might have chosen better weather! I—I mean—"

"Come away!" said McClure desperately.

He dragged Handforth out into the Triangle, and the West House Removites stared after them in blank amazement.

"What on earth's the matter with the chap?" asked Doyle. "Did you hear what he said? It's a funny day for Church to choose for his funeral!"

"Yes, and he said something rummier than that!" frowned Pitt. "He said that Church is alive, and that there isn't going to be a funeral!"

"Scatty!"

"Clean off his rocker!"

"And he seems as happy as you like, too!" said Singleton. "Why, I thought he would be practically sobbing this morning. Ever since Church died he's been as miserable as sin. And now this morning—on the very morning of the funeral—he's grinning all over his face, and acting as though he had suddenly come into a fortune!"

"It seems to me that he's been spoofing!" said Doyle. "He's been pretending to be sorry for Church, and he hasn't cared at all! He's been putting it on—just to fool us. I don't believe he's half such a pal as some of you chaps think."

"Rot!" said Pitt, frowning. "There's nothing wrong with Handy. Goodness knows why he's acting like this this morning."

"It's extraordinary!" agreed Jack Grey. "It would be bad enough on any other morning—but to-day— Well, I don't know what to say!"

"Listen!" said Singleton suddenly.

They stared out into the Triangle, and saw that Handforth and McClure were standing near the fountain, arguing.

"I don't care!" Handforth was shouting. "I'm fed up with it, Mac! How the dickens can I keep up this bluff?"

"There you are!" said Doyle.

"I'm blessed if I'm going to, either!" said Handforth, in a loud voice. "I'm no good at pretending—I can't keep a long face on me when I'm as happy as a lark! By George! I want to jump about—I want to leap across the fountain! I want to turn cartwheels all over the giddy Triangle! I've never been so joyous in my life, and I don't care if it snows!"

And not only the groups of Removites heard those words, but many Fourth-Formers, too. From every side of the Triangle astonished eyes were gazing at the reckless Edward Oswald.

"Did you hear him?" asked Fullwood, running up to Reggie Pitt and the others. "He says he's happy!"

"Yes, we heard him say it!" said Grey. "Happy—on the morning of Church's funeral! There's only one explanation—he's mad!"

"As mad as a hatter!" said half-a-dozen other voices.



CHAPTER 17.

Russell's Suggestion!

FROM every side, juniors were descending upon Handforth and McClure. By this time poor Mac had given it up as a bad job. It was evidently hopeless to argue with him any longer. He had thrown aside all pretence, and was giving way to the full exuberance of his spirits. It was more than Handforth could do to keep up this pretence. It wasn't in him.

"Just a minute, Handy!" said John Busterfield Boots, of the Modern House, as he came up.

"Talking to me?" said Handforth, turning.

"Yes, I am," said Buster Boots. "What's the matter with you? Why are you acting like this?"

"Acting like what?"

"Well, as though you were happy."

"I am happy!" replied Handforth, grinning. "I've never been so happy in all my life!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"Never been so happy in all your life?" repeated Boots, aghast. "But don't you know what to-day is?"

"How many more of you want to know that?" demanded Handforth. "What do I care what to-day is? It doesn't matter to me whether it's Guy Fawkes' Day, or St. Swithin's Day, or Pancake Tuesday! All that I know is that I'm happy."

"Happy because Church is dead?"

"No—because he's alive!"

"Handy, you ass!" said McClure frantically.

"Well, isn't he alive?" asked Handforth, with gleaming eyes. "By George! We saw him during the night, and he's looking lots better——"

"My goodness! He's gone off his rocker!"

"Must be the result of grieving so much."

"I don't think!" said Merrell, of the East House. "There's been a lot of spoof about Handforth's grief. He's proving it this morning. A fat lot he cares about Church!"

"Come away!" said McClure, pulling at Handforth's arm. "It's no good stopping

here, Handy. They—they don't understand you! They think you're happy, and—and all the time, it's only the effect of——"

"If it comes to that, you're not looking particularly miserable, either," said Boots suspiciously. "You don't seem to care much about Church, McClure!"

"Oh, yes, I do!" said Mac. "I care a lot—but I'm worried about Handy. He—he seems to have been talking wildly."

Somehow he managed to get Handforth away, and they had hardly got clear of the crowd before Willy came along, and Willy was looking severe.

"What's the meaning of this, Ted?" he asked. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh, I wanted to see you, my lad!" said Handforth kindly. "Thanks awfully for what you did last night. It's jolly decent of you, my son! We got out beautifully, and——"

"Yes, I can see that," said Willy. "But why didn't you take advantage of your liberty?"

"We did."

"But I thought you were going to catch the first train for London, so that you could

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go to Church's funeral?" asked Willy, looking at his major closely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth roared boisterously.

"I like that!" he chuckled. "Go to London—for Church's funeral! Why, you young chump, Church is alive!"

Willy looked at his major harder than ever.

"I've had a few suspicions in my mind for the past day or two!" he said. "I know you pretty well, Ted, and it seems to me that you've been acting pretty rummily. What do you mean by saying that Church is alive?"

"I mean what I say," replied Handforth. "And we went and saw him during the night, too. Thanks to you, Willy, we were able to get out of the punishment-room, and then we went down to——"

"Dry up, for goodness' sake!" urged McClure.

"Went down to where?" inquired Willy.

"Oh, it doesn't matter!" said Handforth, recollecting himself with a start. "Don't be inquisitive! I can't tell you—I'm not allowed to give the secret away."

"What secret?"

"Why, the secret of Church, of course," replied Handforth. "It's no good you asking me any questions, because I shan't answer them. I've made up my mind to keep this thing dark."

"So it seems," said Willy coolly. "So Church is alive, and he's hiding away somewhere?"

"Yes, at Moat Hollow," said Handforth, nodding.

"Handy, you idiot!" roared McClure fiercely.

"I—I don't mean at Moat Hollow!" gasped Handforth. "That is to say—Clear off, you young bounder!" he roared, attempting to cover his confusion. "What do you mean by coming here and asking me all sorts of questions? Haven't I told you that I won't reply?"

Willy pursed his lips and looked thoughtful.

"This is queer," he said. "So Church is alive, and hiding down at Moat Hollow?"

"Who told you that?" demanded Handforth, in alarm.

"Oh, my aunt!" ejaculated McClure. "Don't take any notice of him, Willy. He's—he's overwrought! Perhaps it's because Church's funeral has been fixed for to-day. I—I believe he's going scatty."

Willy nodded, and walked off. As a matter of fact, the leader of the Third had a very shrewd suspicion of the truth. He hadn't known anything for certain, but he had kept his eyes open of late, and although he had asked no questions, he felt that there was some secret. Now that Handforth had been talking so rashly, Willy considered the matter. He wasn't at all sure that Handforth was right—but he was beginning to suspect that Church wasn't half so dead as rumour had indicated.

While McClure was keeping Handforth

away from the other fellows, a kind of meeting was taking place in the centre of the Triangle. Buster Boots, Reggie Pitt, Fullwood, and all the other prominent juniors, were talking gravely. Never for an instant did they believe that Walter Church was really alive. It was too ridiculous to believe. This was the day of the funeral, and here was Handforth acting in this extraordinary fashion. There could be only one possible explanation.

"He's mad, of course," Fullwood was saying. "He tells us that there isn't going to be any funeral, that Church is alive, and that he has seen him during the night! There's only one possible thing to think."

The other juniors nodded gloomily.

"His grief has turned his brain!" said De Valerie. "That's about the truth of it. Poor old Handy! I never thought he'd go dotty like this!"

There was a momentary silence.

"Well, I think we ought to do something," said Fullwood. "We can't let him go roaming about, speaking in this way. Everybody will get a wrong impression—they'll think he's the coldest-hearted rotter on the face of the earth. He doesn't seem to care a jot about poor old Church, and yet he is supposed to have been Church's best chum."

"Why not look him up?" suggested Russell. "Let's go and grab him, look him up, and find Dr. Brett!"

"What's the good of Dr. Brett?" asked De Valerie tartly. "Dr. Brett is only an ordinary practitioner. What Handy requires is a

brain specialist!"

**SUPERB
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CHAPTER 18.

Prisoners Again!

WHAT'S the good of Mr. Lee telling you to be cautious, Handy?" asked McClure bitterly. "He might as well have spoken to a log! We haven't been downstairs for more than twenty minutes, and the whole junior school is talking about you!"

Handforth grunted.

"I can't help it!" he said. "Let 'em talk!"

"But that's no satisfaction," said McClure. "At least, you might remember to be decently sad—on a day like this. Think how rummy it must seem to the chaps. Only last night you were frantic because you couldn't get permission to attend the funeral. And now, this morning, you're joking and going about with a face like a Cheshire cat!"

"Look here, my lad——"

"Oh, don't start any of your high and mighty business!" said McClure fiercely.

"What!"

"I won't!" went on Mac. "You might do an awful lot of harm by talking as you have been talking. The whole school is wondering about you already, and——"

He broke off as he observed a number of juniors approaching. Fullwood, De Valerie, Gresham and Brent were prominent. They were all looking very determined.

"Better go easy!" warned McClure. "They've probably come to question you."

There was something sinister in the way the crowd of juniors surrounded the chums of Study D. It was a slow, deliberate movement, and it did not end until the pair were completely encircled.

From the Ancient House steps, Nipper was looking on—and Nipper was inwardly amused. He had heard from Nelson Lee that Handforth and McClure had been to Moat Hollow during the night, and that they were aware of the secret. Handforth had given it away already! Not that it mattered so much now—because there was every chance that Church's peril was practically at an end.

"What's all this?" asked Handforth, looking round at the circle of juniors.

"It's all right—don't worry yourself," said Fullwood soothingly. "Just take it easy—take it calmly."

"Take what calmly?" repeated Handforth. "What are you jawing about?"

"We know how grieved you must be about poor old Church," went on Fullwood. "We're sorry, old man—we sympathise. It must have been an awful blow to you!"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "I've never felt happier! I—I mean——"

"Rough luck that you were prevented from going to the funeral," said De Valerie gently. "We're all sorry."

"There hasn't been any funeral—and there won't be," said Handforth. "How can there be a funeral when there isn't anybody dead?"

"No, of course not," said Fullwood. "Silly idea!"

He gave the others a meaning look; then, with one accord, they sprang upon Handforth and McClure, and held them fast.

"Hi!" yelled Edward Oswald. "What the dickens——"

"Hold them!" shouted Fullwood. "Don't let them escape. Quick—rush them indoors!"

"Yes, but look here——" began McClure breathlessly. "You needn't include me——"

"They're both the same," said De Valerie. "They've both gone dotty with grief! We shall have to lock them up until the doctor comes!"

There was a dash, and the two unfortunate juniors were sent hurtling through the West Arch, and across the Square until they reached the window of Study D. Gresham and Duncan and one or two others climbed in first, and Gresham hurried to the door and took the key out of it. He passed through, closed the door, and locked it on the outside. In the meantime, Handforth and McClure

were being bundled in, and then the window was closed.

"My hat! Safe!" said Fullwood breathlessly. "We've got them indoors—and we'll keep them here, too!"

Handforth flung the window open.

"What's the idea of this?" he roared. "You silly fatheads! What do you think you're doing?"

"It's all right, Handy," said Fullwood. "We quite understand. But you've got to take it easily, you know. You mustn't excite yourself."

"What?" howled Handforth.

"You musn't let your imagination run away with you," went on Fullwood. "We know what a strain it has been——"

"You—you hopeless fathead!" hooted Handforth. "Do you think I'm mad?"

"Poor old Handy!" said a crowd of the others.

"I suppose you think I'm mad because I keep saying that Church is alive?" shouted Handforth, exasperated. "You idiots! Why can't you believe it? I tell you that he's alive! I saw him during the night, and he'll soon be here, too! I suppose you'll believe me when you see him in the flesh?"

"Let's get away from here!" said Brent uncomfortably. "Poor old scout! I never thought it would affect him like this. He's absolutely dotty—clean off his onion!"

"As mad as a March hare!"

"It's turned his brain!"

Most of them drifted away, but four remained on guard outside the window. Another four had posted themselves in the passage, behind the locked door. There was no escape for the two "lunatics."

In the meantime, a number of fellows were trying to find Dr. Brett or Nelson Lee, but, somehow, neither of these gentlemen could be located. Nelson Lee was not in the Ancient House, and it seemed that he was not anywhere within the school. Dr. Brett was conspicuous by his absence, too.

"Well, never mind," said Fullwood. "They're bound to come in sooner or later. I expect they've gone out somewhere this morning. We'll keep Handforth and McClure prisoners until we can hand them over to the doctor."

"Hadn't we better tell the Head now?" suggested somebody.

"Better not," said Fullwood. "We don't want to give the Head too much of a shock. I think we ought to let the doctor see them first. Perhaps he'll give them a sleeping draught, or something, so that they can go off into a quiet doze, and rest their fevered brains. Poor chaps! I'm awfully sorry for them!"

"We're all sorry!" said Gresham. "What a pity! Church dies, and Handforth and Mac go off their rockers!"

When the breakfast bell rang, at least eight members of the Remove refrained from going into the meal. They were still on guard outside Study D—seeing that the two demented youths did not escape.

Happily Handforth and McClure gripped the hands of the flushed and excited Church. "Oh, Churchy!" gulped Handy. "At last we've found you!"



And by now it really did seem that Handforth and McClure were demented. For they were shouting with anger—they were thumping on the door—they were uttering all sorts of threats against their guards. But it was no good. There was no exit.

The unhappy pair had lost their reason, and they were being kept under close observation!



CHAPTER 19.

Ready For The Fray!

CHIEF DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR LENNARD, of Scotland Yard, glanced at his watch.

"Well, Lee, we're all ready," he said briskly. "By this time the police will have collected at the appointed places. I suppose you'll come with us, won't you?"

"Yes, you may be sure of that," replied Nelson Lee. "I am very anxious to see these rascals rounded up."

"They won't escape from the net that we're spreading," said the chief inspector, with a nod. "We're doing the job thoroughly. They're a pair of tough customers, though, and we shall have to be wary."

The pair were speaking in that little sitting-room at Moat Hollow. It was quite early—at just about the time, in fact, that Handforth and McClure were being held prisoners in Study D.

"Yes, we know all about this precious pair," went on Lennard. "Thanks to your information, Lee, we have been able to trace them pretty thoroughly. They're both Mexican subjects—Indians, I believe, really. Anyhow, they arrived in this country with proper passports, and they were ostensibly music-hall performers. A kind of acrobatic turn, I believe."

"I thought they had slipped into England by some such subterfuge," nodded Nelson Lee.

"I hold warrants for their arrest," went on Lennard. "When we get hold of them they'll be charged with attempted murder, and in order to avoid all publicity, we shall probably have them deported as quietly as possible."

"I think we had better catch them first," said Nelson Lee. "As far as I know, they haven't shifted out of the wood. A very close watch has been kept over the whole neighbourhood, and no sign of them has been seen for two or three days past, and they are not inconspicuous characters. I'm sure they must be in the wood still."

Nelson Lee was feeling very relieved. It seemed that the end of all this mystery was in sight. For as soon as Church's enemies were apprehended, Nelson Lee intended to dispense with all the present secrecy. Church would be taken back to the school sanatorium, and everybody would be told the main facts. There would naturally be a great deal of excitement and jubilation, and St. Frank's would probably regard the whole affair as a first-class sensation.

There were a number of Scotland Yard

detectives on the spot now—headed by the bluff chief inspector. But in addition to these astute officers from London, there were many other men upon the job. Inspector Jameson, of Bannington, had come along with a big force of police-constables. In addition, there were gamekeepers, farm labourers, and all sorts of other people.

Bellton Wood was to be entirely surrounded, and then beaten out, foot by foot. Gradually the cordon of men would grow narrower and narrower—until the skulking intruders were rounded up. There could be no escape for them once the search actually commenced.

"I shall want you to leave at least two men here, on the spot," said Nelson Lee after a short pause.

"Why?" asked Lennard.

"Because the boy is here, and I do not wish to leave anything to chance," said Lee. "I think I have told you that these enemies of his are very cunning and resourceful."

"Yes, but man alive, they can't be anywhere near here," said Lennard. "The place has been too well protected. My men have been on duty for the last twenty-four hours, and——"

"All the same, Lennard, I want two men to remain," insisted Lee. "I have half a mind to stay behind myself, but I cannot resist the temptation to accompany you on this man-hunt."

Lennard nodded.

"Yes, there's always something rather thrilling in a man-hunt, isn't there?" he asked. "But a grim business—a nasty, ugly business, if it comes to that. Nevertheless, you can't get away from the fact that a man-hunt is the most thrilling of all outdoor sports!"

Very soon afterwards they took their departure. Church was safely indoors, fast asleep. He was doing famously—recovering by leaps and bounds. Dr. Brett had gone up to the school to attend to one or two patients in the sanatorium, and Phipps was on duty in the sick-room. Otherwise, Moat Hollow was quite empty.

But the two Scotland Yard detectives were told off by the chief inspector, and they took up their positions in the grounds of the old house. They were both rather disappointed. They had wanted to join in the hunt with the rest.

"Can't be helped," said the chief inspector. "Mr. Lee wants you to stay here."

"But couldn't we leave a couple of constables, sir?" asked one of the Yard men. "They'd be more useful here than us."

"There aren't any available just now," replied Lennard. "They're all at their appointed places, so I'm afraid it can't be done. You'll have to stay."

"Very good, sir."

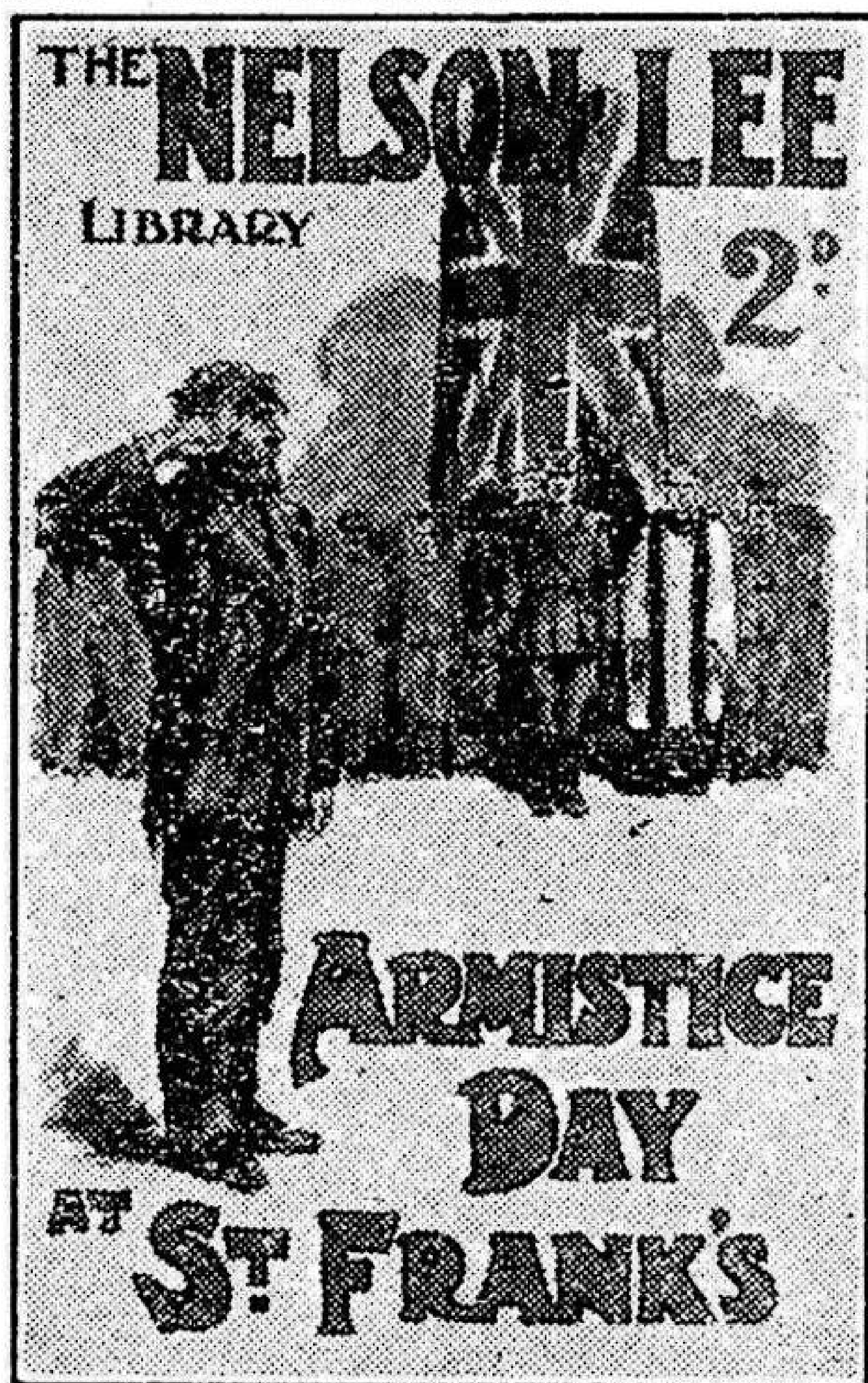
And so the search commenced.

Rumours had already begun to spread in

the village, and throughout the surrounding countryside. Bodies of policemen had been seen, and strange men were moving about in Bellton. The country people were all talking, and wondering what was in the wind.

Meanwhile Bellton Wood was being completely surrounded by a grim cordon. There were, indeed, hundreds of men engaged upon this task. It seemed strange that so many searchers should be engaged—but Nelson Lee was leaving nothing to chance. These two brown-skinned rascals were to be rounded up this morning without any possibility of failure. It had taken a good few days for the police to act, but

NEXT WEDNESDAY! ~~~~~



now that they were acting, they were setting about their task in a very thorough manner.

"They can't possibly escape!" said Lennard to Nelson Lee, just as the two were preparing to leave.

"I hope you're right!" replied Lee fervently.

And yet, in the simplest manner possible, those two slippery Indians eluded them!

For scarcely had Nelson Lee and Chief Inspector Lennard left the grounds of Moat Hollow, when there came a slight movement from the midst of a pile of dead leaves near one of the walls. Next moment a face looked out—a brown, cunning face with glittering eyes. They were evil eyes, and they were glowing with a sinister purpose!



CHAPTER 20.

The Last Attempt!

CHURCH opened his eyes, turned over in bed, and blinked. Then he sat up and yawned.

"Hallo!" he murmured. "Morning! I must have been asleep for hours!"

He looked out of the window rather long-

"ARMISTICE DAY AT ST. FRANK'S!"

Eleven o'clock!

The sound of a bugle—sharp and clear and throbbing. Not a movement from the solemn assembly standing in Inner Court at St. Frank's—the 'Two Minutes' Silence is about to begin.

Then, just as the last notes of the bugle die away, an unkempt, tattered, wild-eyed figure suddenly appears and stands smartly to attention, at the salute.

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ingly. He was alone in the sick-room, for Phipps had gone out to attend to a few culinary duties. Phipps had no fear that the patient was in danger. The police were beating out Bellton Woods to hound down the two foreigners, and the grounds of Moat Hollow were protected by detectives, so there was nothing to worry about.

Church got out of bed after a few minutes, and went across to the glowing oil-stove.

"I wonder where they've all got to?" he murmured. "Well, never mind; I've a good mind to get dressed."

He turned the thought over in his mind for a few moments, but he decided, after all,

that he would not do anything so rash. Nelson Lee might be annoyed, and Nelson Lee, after all, had been so thoroughly decent all through. Church did not want to put him out.

"Anyhow, I shall soon be a lot better!" he declared. "By jingo, I'm feeling wonderfully fit already! Marvellous what a difference there is in me in the last twenty-four hours! That poison must be practically out of my system by now. I shall be about again in a week—and playing footer, too! Oh, my hat, what a glorious thought!"

His mind reverted to Handforth, and he smiled contentedly as he strolled across to the window. Handforth and McClure were up at St. Frank's now, of course, keeping mum. But Church felt rather dubious on this point. He doubted Handforth's ability to keep mum. Church knew his leader thoroughly!

Meanwhile, outside in the grounds, that slight movement still continued under the heap of dead leaves, and the face that looked out belonged to Zuma the Mystic!

Nelson Lee had been prepared for cunning, but he had not expected such a move as this. For many hours Zuma and his ally had been tunnelling under the high wall of Moat Hollow. They had entered the earth by means of a burrow, ten or twenty feet from the high wall, and had wormed their way through, excavating tenaciously, tirelessly. They had skilfully covered up their tracks, using bushes and so forth, and now, after endless hours of toil, they were actually within the grounds of Moat Hollow!

For these men had known for some time that Church was here, closely guarded. So they had worked cunningly, determined to get at their victim. They had failed on the first attempt, but they were grimly determined not to fail again.

The Scotland Yard detectives were patrolling up and down, sublimely unconscious of the enemy's nearness. They never thought of looking at that heap of dead leaves.

Church, in the meantime, was standing at the window, looking out longingly. He was disturbed by the arrival of Phipps, carrying a tray.

"You shouldn't stand there, Master Church," said Phipps warningly. "Mr. Lee was most particular on that point."

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Church in surprise.

"Well, these enemies of yours, sir," replied Phipps, "I understand that they are pretty ugly customers."

"Yes, but they couldn't harm me here!" laughed Church. "Besides, there are a couple of detectives out there. I saw one of them pass not long ago."

"All the same, we'd better be careful," said Phipps. "These Indian chaps are full of tricks and wiles. It's best to give them no chances."

"Perhaps you're right," said Church. "But we needn't go to extremes, Phipps. Is that my breakfast?"

"Yes, Master Church."

"One of your special omelettes, eh?" said Church, with satisfaction. "I say, Phipps, I feel sort of guilty. Here I am, being pampered and petted, and treated like an invalid. Yet I'm feeling so much better that I want to get dressed and go out into the open."

"You'd better not let Dr. Brett hear you saying that, sir," said Phipps. "The doctor says you mustn't go out for another week, at least."

Church groaned.

"Tough luck!" he said. "I can't see why I should be bottled up for another week. Isn't it awful, Phipps—I mean, these enemies? Who are they, and why do they want to kill me? I've never done harm to anybody that I know of."

"It is all very mysterious, sir," said Phipps, "but I rather imagine that this attempt on your life must be in some way connected with your dead uncle."

Church looked solemn.

"Yes, poor old Uncle Geoff!" he said. "He died four years ago, and it is now fairly evident that he was murdered, and by these same men. Oh, I hope they're caught! The devils! The inhuman fiends!"

"I dare say that your uncle earned their enmity while he was exploring in Mexico," said Phipps. "That is Mr. Lee's opinion, at all events. He thinks it quite possible that these men are the descendants of the old Aztecs. Your uncle was very interested in Aztec exploration, wasn't he?"

"It was his life's work," said Church. "I think there must be something in the theory, Phipps. Well, don't let's talk about it. I'd much rather discuss that omelette."

"I hope you'll find it satisfactory, sir," said Phipps.

He then glided out to attend to further duties. Church was left to his breakfast, and he set to with a will. But he had hardly taken the first mouthful before a shaft of sunlight came streaming in through the window. It was the first sunlight that Church had seen that morning.

He went across, and threw up the sash. The sunlight was glorious just then, pouring in through the window in a radiant flood. Little did Church realise the danger of opening that window in that way, and standing there in full sight!

The two Scotland Yard detectives were just as ignorant of danger. They had seen nobody, and they were convinced that they had been left here for no purpose. How could the enemy get here, within these high walls?

And yet at that very moment, while Church was standing at the window, basking in the unexpected sunshine, Zuma was gradually worming his head and shoulders out of the pile of dead leaves. His eyes were filled with a wild sort of triumph, and his next action was a deadly, sinister one.

For he drew a curious little blowpipe from a part of his garments, and he placed it to his lips!



CHAPTER 21.

The Escape!

HANDFORTH fumed.

"How much longer are we going to stand this?" he asked, glaring at McClure.

"How much longer, Mac? I'm getting fed up with this!"

"How should I know?" asked McClure gruffly. "And you needn't glare at me like that, Handy. It's all your own fault!"

"My fault?"

"Of course it is," said McClure. "If you had acted your part properly, instead of giving the whole game away, these fellows wouldn't have taken it for granted that you were mad."

"Do I look mad?" roared Handforth wildly.

"That's the worst of it—you do," said McClure. "You mustn't forget that all these fellows have believed for days past that Church is dead. They think that he's going to be buried this morning, and when you go about saying he's still alive they naturally jump to the one conclusion. Goodness knows what'll happen now. Of all the reckless, thoughtless beggars, you take the cake, Handy!"

Handforth went to the window.

"Well, I'm not going to stand this!" he said, taking a deep breath. "We've got to escape from here. I want to go down to Moat Hollow. I want to see how old Church is. Mr. Lee said that there's going to be a big drive in the woods this morning, and I'm anxious to take part in it. These idiots aren't going to keep me away."

Mac looked at his companion curiously.

"You seem sort of anxious, Handy," he said.

"Yes, I am," said Handforth, with a frown. "I don't quite know why—but I've got a feeling that I ought to go to Moat Hollow. Perhaps old Churchy is in danger. Anyhow, we're not going to stand this sort of thing."

He looked out, and saw that the four guards were still on duty; strong as he was, he couldn't very well fight a quartette. Even if McClure joined in it wouldn't make much difference, for the guards would at once shout out the alarm, and then—

"Half a minute, though!" murmured Handforth. "I've just thought of something! Most of the chaps are in the dining hall, aren't they—at breakfast?"

"Yes," said McClure. "The gong went long ago."

"Then—then these chaps out here are alone!" said Handforth. "Even if they shout for help there won't be any response. By George! It's our chance! Why didn't I think of it before?"

McClure looked rather eager.

"Yes, that's certainly a good idea!" he

said. "You mean we can fight these four, and get free?"

"Of course," said Handforth. "Come on—let's make a dash for it."

He could not have chosen a better moment. The four fellows outside the study window were De Valerie, Gresham, Hubbard, and Jerry Dodd. Mr. Pycraft, the master of the Fourth Form, happened to be passing through the West Square, and he paused to ask the four juniors what they were doing there, hanging about the window. It wasn't Mr. Pycraft's business, but he was an inquisitive individual at all times.

Crash!

Handforth landed fairly upon De Valerie's back, and they both went rolling over. At the same moment McClure hurled himself at Harry Gresham. He didn't quite like doing so, for Harry was one of the best. However, it was essential that they should escape.

"Hi!" roared Gresham. "Rescue, Remove! They're escaping!"

"You bet we are!" roared Handforth. "It's like your giddy nerve to keep us here!"

"Boys—boys!" shouted Mr. Pycraft, startled. "What is the meaning of this?"

Handforth and McClure had reason to thank Mr. Pycraft for this intervention. They didn't often thank him for pushing his nose into other people's business, but this was a rare occasion. He had caused the four guards to relax their vigilance for a moment, and the way of escape was clear.

Handforth did not pause to fight. He only wanted to escape, and as soon as he and McClure had won free, they rushed to the West Arch, pelted across the Triangle, and shot out through the gateway. By the time the other juniors had got into the Triangle the pair were well down the lane.

"Oh, let them go!" said De Valerie breathlessly. "We can't catch them up now, anyhow. Blow them! I'm not so sure whether they're mad, after all!"

"Handy certainly seemed sane enough just now!" said Hubbard, with a grunt. "What the dickens does it mean? And why did they both go rushing off down towards Bellton? I can't make head or tail of it!"

They all hurried indoors then, hoping that they might still be in time to catch a little breakfast.

The two fugitives did not pause until they were half-way into the village, when, glancing back, they found that there was no pursuit. They eased down considerably.

"Well, we've beaten them!" said Handforth. "Like their nerve! Fancy thinking that we'd gone dotty!"

"Not so much of the we!" said McClure. "You're the one they thought was dotty! I don't wonder at it either—after the way you talked!"

"Well, never mind," said Handforth. "Let's get down to Moat Hollow, and see how old Church is. I shall be jolly glad when this rummy business is over. I like a mystery as a rule, but this one's a bit too thick."

They noticed nothing as they went past Bellton Wood. For by this time the comb-out was in full progress, and the police and the detectives were well into the wood. So the two juniors reached the high wall of Moat Hollow without noticing anything unusual.

"We'll borrow that scaffold pole again," said Handforth, as they halted. "These workmen have left it nice and handy—just against the bank here. Come on, Mac—lend a hand!"

"They might stop us," said Mac.

"Let them try!" growled Handforth. "It's no good us hammering at the gates—they won't be answered. We've got to get in this way."

"Yes, but hold on," gasped McClure. "Somebody might see us! These workmen, you know! These chaps who are mending the roads. They'll wonder why we're climbing over the wall!"

"Let them wonder!" said Handforth recklessly. "I want to see old Church!"

And McClure gave it up.

They set the pole against the wall, as before, and Handforth was the first to crawl up and worm his way over the top. A shout came from one of the detectives, further along the grounds; at the same moment a hail came from Church, who was standing at the window.

"Hallo, Handy!" he called. "Good man!"

But Handforth took no notice whatever of his chum's hail. As he was trying to get his balance on the top of that precarious fence, he found himself looking straight downwards—on to a heap of dead leaves, immediately below.

And Handforth saw a head projecting from those leaves—he saw also a blowpipe placed to the thin, cruel lips of Zuma the Mystic! Handforth felt strangely sick and giddy during that dreadful second. For the blowpipe was aimed straight at the unconscious Church!



CHAPTER 22.

A Narrow Save!

IT was a time for swift, instantaneous action.

And Edward Oswald Handforth, who was always a fellow of action at any time, now behaved with commendable promptitude. In fact, he didn't even stop to think. He just hurled himself over the top of that fence, and he fell sheer—straight on to that pile of dead leaves.

Thud!

He landed—on Zuma's shoulders. Church, at the window, uttered a shout of alarm. He thought that Handforth had slipped and had fallen, but a moment later he knew the truth. For Edward Oswald appeared to be having a terrific struggle with the leaves—and then a figure emerged from that pile, and Handforth and Zuma were struggling fiercely,

madly. Shouts came from the two detectives as they ran towards the scene.

In the very nick of time Handforth had prevented the Indian from blowing that deadly dart from the pipe. There was no doubt that this dart was charged with a swift, horrid poison, for these men were not going to give Church another lingering death. They would make sure of him in one short second!

But the blowpipe had been dropped now, and it was of no further use to Zuma. The second Indian had wriggled his way out of the pile of dead leaves, and he was rushing to his companion's assistance. For the second time Handforth had saved Church's life! There was something very remarkable in this. From the very first, everybody had attempted to keep Handforth out of the secret—out of the way—and yet it was Handforth who had been on the spot to save his chum from destruction.

"You murderous hounds!" he roared furiously. "Now I've got you—and now I'm going to make you pay!"

Crash! Slam! Biff!

Handforth was like a fellow transformed. A daring fighter at all times, he was now a veritable human cyclone. His fury was at fever pitch. These men were scoundrels—they had tried to kill his chum! And Handforth sailed into them with devastating effect. It was a thrilling scene while it lasted.

"Keep away!" yelled Handforth, as he saw the detectives rushing to join in. "These beggars are my game!"

Crash!

Another one of his rights found a billet in the very centre of Zuma's face, and the Indian went down, groggy and dazed. In a struggle Handforth would have been no match for these slippery brown men, but in a stand-up fight he had them beaten from the very first, and it gave him intense satisfaction to feel his fist thudding upon the muscles and sinews of the enemy.

It was soon over.

The two detectives would not be denied, and they were now feeling heartily glad that they had remained behind. For they would gain the credit of the capture! With grim clicks, handcuffs were forced home, and the two wretched prisoners were manacled together. In order to make doubly sure, the detectives immediately started blowing their police whistles—shrilly and urgently. They wanted to call their companions, and to get the chief inspector on the spot. There was no sense in continuing the search in the wood now.

"Good lad!" said one of the detectives, as he looked at Handforth. "You did wonders!"

"I don't see why you should have interfered," growled Handforth. "I was just enjoying it! I wanted to knock them out—until they wouldn't wake up for weeks!"

"They're pretty badly battered, my lad," said the other detective. "Gosh, you've got a punch in that right of yours!"

Zuma and his companions were cowed—Zuma, indeed, was so hard hit that he had almost lost consciousness, while the other man was quivering with fright, and his eyes were rolling in terror.

"Not me—not me!" he was babbling. "Zuma—Zuma! He guilty—he do it!"

"Never you mind about that, my lad," said the detective. "You'd better reserve that until later. You were both in this affair together."

"No, no, no!" mumbled the frightened Indian. "Not me! Zuma—he do it! He blow dart. I his servant—must obey—or death. Not me! Zuma—High Priest!"

Just then Detective-Inspector Lennard and Nelson Lee came hurrying in at the double. They had entered by the ordinary gateway, and they were followed by several others—who had heard the police whistles.

"What has happened?" asked Nelson Lee sharply, as he ran up.

"Nothing much, sir," replied Handforth coolly. "Mac and I got here just in time to pounce on Zuma and his pal!"

"Neatest thing I ever saw, sir," said one of the Yard men. "This young gentleman jumped down from the top of the fence, and caught the fellow between the shoulders. It's a wonder he didn't break his back."

"The hound was just going to blow a dart out of his blow-pipe, sir!" said Handforth fiercely. "And Church was standing at the window, in the sunshine—like an ass, of course! He ought to have had more sense! After his other narrow escape, too!"

"Where is Church?" shouted Lee anxiously. "Are you sure that this man didn't—"

"It is quite all right, sir!" came a shout from Phipps at the window. "Master Church is indoors, and quite safe. He has come to no harm."

"Thank heaven!" said Nelson Lee. "Handforth, I really don't know what to say to you. So you jumped on this man just as he was about to use his blowpipe? Splendid boy! A wonderful piece of work!"

"Oh, rats, sir!" said Handforth. "There was nothing wonderful about it. But I'd like to know how those rotters got into that pile of dead leaves! What's the good of having these detectives on the spot?"

"They are tricky brutes," said the Chief Inspector. "I expect they burrowed a tunnel under the wall—but we couldn't be prepared for that, could we? Naturally, there wouldn't be any sign until they showed themselves. It's a good thing you were on the spot, young man!"

"Well, it's all over now, anyhow," said Handforth. "These two rotters are collared, and they'll be taken off to the lock-up. And now, I suppose, we can take old Church back to St. Frank's, eh?"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Yes, Handforth, we can now take Church back to St. Frank's," he said thankfully. "And I don't mind admitting that I am exceedingly relieved. It has been a very

trying time during this past week. But everything is all right now—thanks, mainly, to you.”

But Edward Oswald Handforth wouldn't have it. He claimed no credit whatever.



CHAPTER 23.

The Mystery Explained !

NOT me — not me!” wailed one of the two prisoners. “Zuma — Zuma! He do it! He try to kill boy!”

Nelson Lee and Lennard turned, and looked at the man. Zuma was quite impassive—and he had not uttered a word. But the other was evidently anxious to speak.

“That’s about enough!” said the Chief Inspector. “The less you say the better.”

“On the contrary, Lennard, it might be a good idea to let this man speak,” said Nelson Lee. “Fortunately, I do not possess your official mind. So if you would like to retire for a minute or two, I will have a few words with the fellow.”

“What’s the idea?” asked the Chief Inspector.

“I want to find out the reason for this attack upon a harmless schoolboy,” replied Nelson Lee.

“Go ahead, then,” said the Chief Inspector, grinning.

And for the next twenty minutes, Nelson Lee questioned the strange-looking Indian very closely. The man was frantic—desperate in his protestations that he was only Zuma’s servant, and forced to obey his commands. Not that Nelson Lee took much notice of this talk. He only wanted to know the facts of the case, and he gleaned a surprising amount of information from the scared man, who seemed eager to tell all he knew in order to lessen his punishment.

At last, the two prisoners were carried off, placed in a waiting motor-car, and driven away. The Chief Inspector went with them, and after that the detectives and the police began to drift away—back to Bannington. The affair was over, and Bellton would be able to drop back into its usual state of rural quietude.

“Have you discovered the secret, sir?” asked Handforth curiously, as he approached Nelson Lee. “I don’t want to be inquisitive—”

“That’s quite all right, Handforth—you deserve to know,” said Nelson Lee, smiling. “And there is no reason why I should not tell you. But let us come indoors—because I think that Church ought to hear this too.”

Five minutes later they were with Church—Handforth, McClure, Dr. Brett, and Nipper,

the latter having come down while the excitement had been at its height.

“It is rather a queer story,” said Nelson Lee. “I can only piece it together from the disjointed account that this man gave me. Somehow, I think that he was telling me the truth—in an effort to mitigate his own punishment. There is no cause to doubt the story.”

“And what is the yarn, sir?” asked Nipper.

“Well, it seems that this unfortunate boy’s uncle—Mr. Geoffrey Church—was very interested in exploration in Mexico and Central America,” said Nelson Lee. “That is right, Church, is it not?”

“Yes, sir,” said Church, nodding.

“Well, it appears that Mr. Church, in the course of his explorations, unwittingly desecrated the tomb of an Aztec ruler, and a queer sect of Aztec descendants swore vengeance upon Mr. Church. Zuma, I believe, was a kind of high priest of the sect?”

“But where does Church come in, sir?” asked Handforth.

“I am coming to that,” replied Nelson Lee. “Mr. Church evidently reached civilisation before these priests could get at him. Then he came back to England, and settled down—little dreaming that these strange

Aztec Indians would trail him half across the globe!

“These demons trailed your uncle to his home, and then poisoned him in just the same way as you have been poisoned—by the deadly Issi-Kala. Your unhappy uncle apparently fell a victim to some dreadful disease, and was dead within three or four days. Nobody guessed that he had been

murdered.”

“But why try to kill me, too, sir?” asked Church, bewildered.

“Well, according to this man’s story, Zuma is the high priest—and several months ago his son, a boy of about fifteen, died in very mysterious circumstances,” continued Nelson Lee. “I don’t know what those circumstances were, and it really does not matter. Perhaps he was killed by some enemies of the sect. Who knows? Anyhow, it seems to be a law of these people that a life must be taken for a life—and a life of a similar age. So Zuma swore that he would come to England again, and take the life of a male Church. As Mr. Geoffrey Church had no children, Zuma chose to wreak his vengeance upon another branch of the family. You, Church, were chosen.”

“I’m not flattered, sir,” said Church, with a shiver.

Church’s schoolfellows also involuntarily shivered.

“It is really impossible for us to understand the ways and methods of these strange people,” continued Nelson Lee. “But, like many another sect of a similar kind, they will go to the ends of the earth for the sake of vengeance, and it often happens that

**WATCH
OUT FOR
DETAILS !**

their vengeance is unreasoning and unaccountable to our own ideas. We do not know how they think, or how they reason; we shall never know. Mind you, this story may not be the absolute truth. I only have this man's account to rely upon, but I imagine that it is very near the mark."

"And do you think there'll be any further danger, sir?" asked Handforth anxiously.

"I am quite certain there will be no danger whatever now," replied Nelson Lee. "These men will be made to answer for their crimes, and you may be quite certain that Church will never be in any further danger. The affair is over, and I'm heartily glad. There has been enough mystery—enough secrecy."

"And can I go back to St. Frank's now, sir?" asked Church, with an eager note in his voice.

"Yes, young 'un."

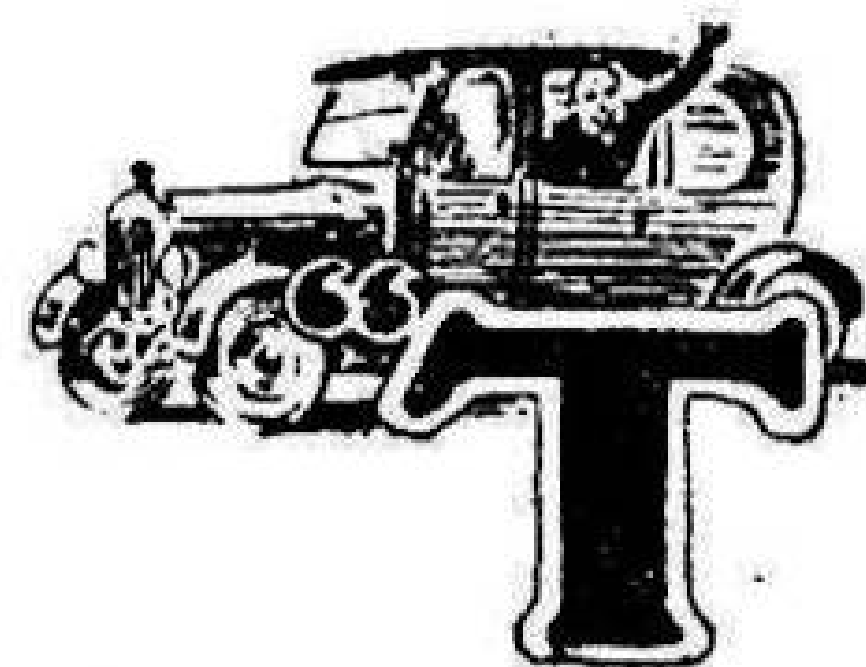
"And—and can I get dressed and walk back with these other fellows?"

"No, you cannot," replied Lee sternly. "The very idea! You're not strong enough yet, Church—you'll have to have at least a week in the sanatorium, to recuperate. The effects of the poison are working off very rapidly, and I am delighted at your rate of progress. But we can't take any chances. You must be an invalid at least for another week."

"But I don't feel an invalid, sir!" insisted Church. "I'm only just a little bit groggy—not quite so strong as I used to be. But I shall soon be right now."

"You will be right all the sooner if you obey my orders without question," smiled Nelson Lee. "I shall fetch my car, and you will be conveyed to St. Frank's at once."

"By George!" said Handforth, grinning. "And everybody will see him, too! We ought to get in just before lessons start for the day! I say, what a sensation there'll be!"



CHAPTER 24.

A Shock For St. Frank's!

HERE he is!"

"Collar him!"

Edward Oswald Handforth had just walked in through the gateway of St.

Frank's, and a number of shouts went up.

Handforth grinned cheerfully as he walked forward. He could afford to grin—for only a few hundred yards behind Nelson Lee's motor-car was coming up the lane, and would soon make its appearance in the Triangle. The bell for first lesson had already gone, and many of the juniors were drifting away towards the School House. But they paused as Handforth appeared, and crowds of them came surging round him.

"What's all the excitement about?" asked Edward Oswald calmly. "Do you still think I am dotty?"

"It all depends," said Fullwood. "You've got to behave very differently, Handy, if you want us to believe that you're sane. You know that this is the day of Church's funeral—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Handforth uproariously.

"Good gad!"

"Oh, my hat! He's worse than ever!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Handforth. "The day of Church's funeral, eh? You asses! What are you going to say when I tell you that Church is within a hundred yards of this spot now? He's coming up the lane in Mr. Lee's car!"

"Oh, he's absolutely hopeless!"

"As mad as a hatter!"

"Mad, am I?" shouted Handforth triumphantly. "Well, if you don't believe me—look! Here comes the car now, and Mr. Lee is driving it himself! If you look closely, you'll see Church in the back, wrapped up in blankets and things, with Dr. Brett!"

True enough, Nelson Lee's saloon car had just glided in at the gateway, and all eyes were turned towards it. But nobody believed for a single second that Church would be in it, for it was an accepted fact that this was the day of Church's funeral. The rank and file had not the slightest suspicion of the truth. They didn't believe Handforth. They thought he was raving.

"Am I dreaming?" gasped Fullwood, swaying dizzily. "There's—there's somebody sitting at the back, and he looks like— No, it can't be! It's—it's impossible!"

"Church!" went up a loud, swelling roar.

"Great Scott, it's Church himself!"

"Come back from the dead!"

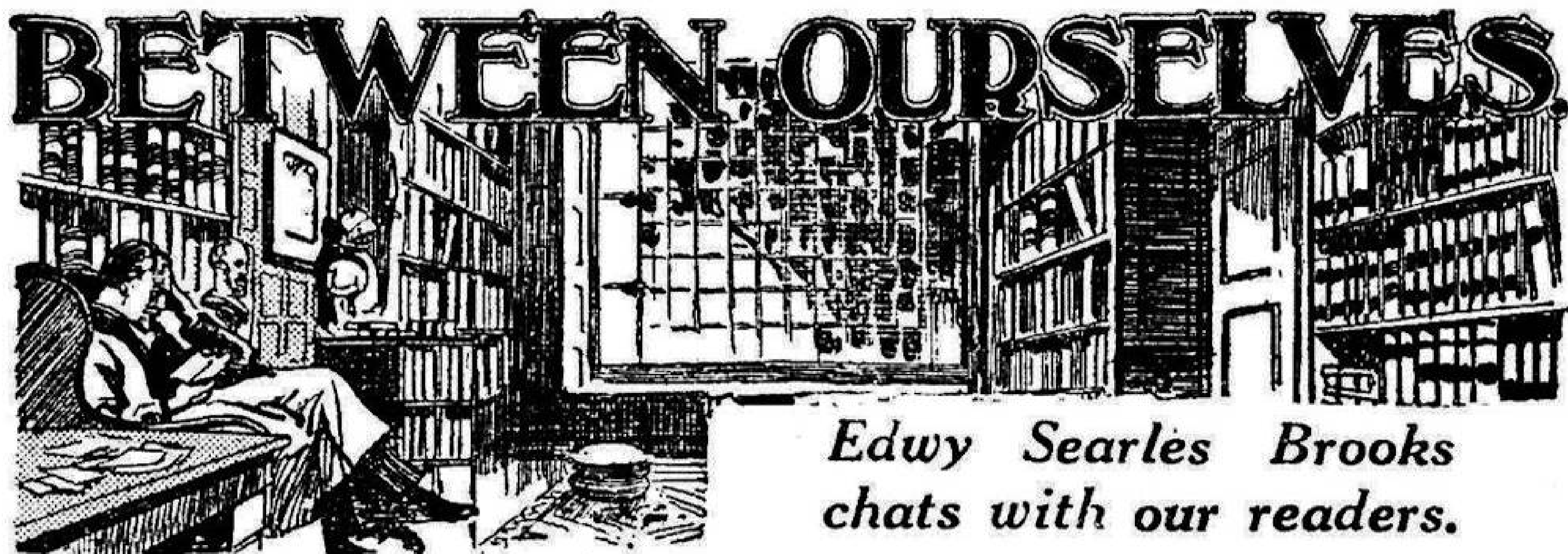
"Odds miracles and marvels!" said Archie Glenthorne, adjusting his monocle and gazing blankly at the stationary car. "I mean to say, good gad! It's absolutely Church in the good old flesh! Or are we gazing upon a spectral presence?" (Concluded on page 41.)

SCHOOLBOY EXPLORERS IN AFRICA!

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Not all the fags have their own studies, Edward C. R. Sumner. But at some period in the past Willy Handforth and his immediate chums got permission from their House-master to use a number of old box-rooms as studies. So Willy & Co., at least, have their own private quarters in the Ancient House. But the fags always do their prep in the class-room. Yes, the Third-Formers have common-rooms of their own. The captain of St. Frank's is Edgar Fenton.

I am sorry that you think your letter has gone straight to the waste-paper-basket, "Satisfied." Neither your letter, nor any other, is ever consigned to that fate. If you don't believe me, and would like to have a copy of your letter in, say, two years' time, just drop me a line, and I will let you have it, after turning up my files. Do you really think that I am trying to spoof you when I declare, in these columns, that I keep *all* letters that readers send to me?

I think you had better read what I have just said to "Satisfied," "R.A.S.H." The same remarks apply to you. Your letter has not been put into the waste-paper-basket, neither has it been used for lighting the fire. In just the same way as every other letter, it has been carefully filed away. You surely know that I treasure all these letters?

I'm afraid I can't help you with regard to those back numbers, "Dick," although I would like to, as I know how difficult it is to obtain the Old Paper in the United States. If you belong to the League, there is no reason why you shouldn't have a short advertisement inserted in Our Paper, and I have no doubt that you will get plenty of offers. If you *don't* belong to the League, all you have to do is to buy an extra copy one week, cut out the two League Forms, and fill them in according to the directions. In other words, give the extra copy away to somebody, and get him to give his name and address on the second Form. That's all.

We've got to chance whether he becomes a regular reader thereafter. But you've done your part, anyhow. Even though it does cost you an extra ten cents, I don't think you'll begrudge the money.

* * *

Liverpool readers! Why not show your loyalty to the League by immediately joining the Edgehill Branch? The Secretary is Mr. Percy Young, of 9, Wrayburn Street, Edge Hill, Liverpool, and this is what Mr. Young says to me in a recent letter: "We are still in need of a Club-room, and more members—especially the latter, as we need them before we *can* get a Club-room. Once we have more members, we'll then be able to do big things (washing elephants, for instance). We have got the billiard table, but cannot use it. It is such a pity, you know. We have everything for a good Club—billiard table (half-size), bagatelle table (full size), free library, numerous card tables, chairs, cards, draughts, chess sets, etc., boxing gloves, and training implements, and instruments for a band, and many projects in view. We have all these, but practically to no purpose, as we have no Club-room, and, up to the present, no visible means of getting any new members." Now then, again, Liverpool readers! Why not rally round, and join this Club as soon as possible? There's no need for me to tell you of the many advantages; and thanks, Percy Young, for your very entertaining letter. I quite agree with you that it would be unwise to borrow money for putting your Club on its feet. If the members roll up of their own accord, it will be much better. As you say, very wittily, "to borrow is human; to repay divine." I hope that you will obtain all the new members you want.

JOKER JONES' LEGACY!



By WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE

THE OPENING CHAPTERS IN BRIEF.

Robert Wellington Jones has unexpectedly inherited a moth-eaten property at Snayle-in-the-Hollow, Essex. Let it be said, without further beating about the bush, that this moth-eaten property consists of a School. It is presided over by Dr. Cobb Webb, a whiskery gentleman of doubtful qualifications, and with a tendency for slackness. Jones arrives at the

School in the guise of a new assistant master. It must be explained that Jones is a born practical joker, and nothing delights him more than to indulge his favourite pastime. He finds Snayle School in the last stages of gloom and lethargy; and Dr. Webb, having introduced Jones to the school, leaves him to take the boys in geography. And so we continue:

Novel Methods of Jones!

IT cannot be said, with any truth, that Robert Wellington Jones was exhilarated. His first half hour at Snayle School had undoubtedly given him the pip, and as he greatly disliked this condition he sought for a method of removing it. At all costs, he must be pipless.

He gazed at the class again. Roughly, there were thirty objects seated in front of him. It would be idle to describe them as boys since, in their present state of lassitude, they reminded Jones of inanimate Robots. (If you don't know what Robots are, brother reader, you have my sympathy).

Jones winced.

One steady look at those youthful blots gave him a pain. Decidedly, something had to be done. Month in and month out, these unfortunates had evidently been allowed to wallow in their own laziness. Now was the time to alter this state of affairs.

"Attention!" roared Jones.

His voice was like the sudden blast of a tornado, and its effect was astonishing. Those thirty boys jumped in their seats, awakened from their afternoon nap as they had never been awakened before.

"Ah!" said Jones. "Splendid! I am relieved to find, brothers, that you are imbued with life. I had begun to fear otherwise. The clockwork having run down, it is clearly my duty to produce the key and tickle it up. In other words, you are here to work, and I am here to see that you do work. Let us understand one another thoroughly."

The school, now thoroughly alive to the fact that they were in the presence of a Guiding Force, regarded Jones with awe and respect. It would be as well to make it clear that Jones' very appearance was eloquent of Power and Authority.

"Geography," said Jones, "is a highly important item of the curriculum. I am a new master in this benighted seat of learning, and you must go through the mill. Here," he added, "I have an atlas. Let me see the extent of your knowledge."

He swept the atlas open, and jabbed a finger at the nearest name.

"Tell me, brother—where is the village of Corner?" he went on, pointing accusingly at a vacant-looking face in the front row.

"Corner, sir?" repeated this unhappy youth.

"Corner!" said Jones firmly.

"I don't know, sir."

"Then stand out in front of the class, so that all may see an ignorant young rascal," said Jones, in a stern voice. "Corner is——" He paused, while he found his place. "Corner is situated in the County of Roxburgh, New South Wales."

"But you've got the atlas, sir!" pointed out the victim.

"No matter!" said Jones, airily waving his hand. "A detail. Now, brother," he added, turning a sheaf of pages over, and jabbing at the atlas again. "Give me the precise locality of Tharrawaddy."

The next victim made a valiant effort.

"India, sir!" he gasped.

For a moment, Robert Wellington Jones looked startled, and then a pitiful smile over spread his lean features.

"Stand out!" he said sternly. "Tharrawaddy, as all should know, is in Burma."

Again he swept over some pages.

"Now I am curious to know the precise situation of Srednerojestvarnskoj," he said calmly, gazing at another startled scholar. "I can vouch for the pronunciation, since the name of this town is now in front of my eyes. Do not imagine that I am attempting to trip you by a false name. This town of Sred-etc., is not far distant from Votkinski, and, indeed, is hard by Osa. Now, after these clues, where is Sred-what-I-said-before?"

"Russia, sir," said the unfortunate hopefully.

"Right!" said Jones, with regret. "I can only deduce that the skis gave you the necessary tip. But one moment, brother!" he added. "One moment before you allow that relieved expression to overspread your caramel-marked features. Name the Province of this interesting town."

It is needless to add that the pitiful wretch was flummoxed, and out he came before the class. In this way Robert Wellington Jones proceeded—until, at last, the entire class was standing out in front of itself. In other words, every boy had failed in this test, and now stood in fear and trembling.

"Disgraceful!" said Jones sternly. "Indeed, brothers, it is no exaggeration to say that your ignorance is appalling. I can only assume that you are still half asleep. Therefore we must originate some awakening process."

For a moment he stared thoughtfully out of the window.

"Our brain," he announced, "has functioned. Brothers, attention! Smart's the word! Right turn! Quick march!"

Something New in Exercise!

S NAYLE SCHOOL was startled.

Indeed, Snayle School was rocked to its foundations. It had been customary, from time immemorial, for afternoon lessons to proceed languidly and evenly. But Robert Wellington Jones was unquestionably throwing a nasty spanner into the works.

The boys shuffled outside somehow, more bewildered than ever. Nobody thought of protesting. There was a certain magnetism in Jones' personality that compelled obedience. He was cool, calm, and efficient.

In the courtyard, the school continued to shuffle, forming itself into some sort of order. Jones paced in front of the boys, like a general viewing his troops.

"Exercise," he said, "is the order of the hour. No doubt you have tasted the delights of marching down the lane, and marching back again. We must inaugurate something more strenuous. To begin with, we need ropes. Any boy who can supply ropes, stand forward."

About six of the surprised schoolboys stood forward.

"There's a lot of rope in the tool shed, sir," said one of them.

"Splendid!" beamed Jones. "Squad, attention! To the tool-shed forthwith! Proceed at the double, and return immediately with all the rope you can lay hands upon."

At last the scholars of Snayle School were beginning to realise that this new master was something of a novelty. Their fear and trembling changed to a growing excitement. Probably for the first time in their misguided young lives they were beginning to enjoy themselves.

While the squad hurried to the tool shed, Jones turned his attention to an ancient and pitiable caricature of a wagonette, which was standing amid the weeds and bushes at the side of the courtyard. It was rusty, it was mildewed, and it was tottery. But, notwithstanding these defects, it appeared to be fairly whole.

"This chariot?" inquired Jones, seizing the nearest scholar by the head, and turning him in the direction of the wagonette. "Tell me, brother—does it belong to the school? Is it included in the goods and chattels?"

"It's used at the beginning and the end of each term, sir," said the boy. "It used to be kept in a shed, but the shed was blown down——"

"It is unnecessary to harrow me with these details," interrupted Jones. "The chariot is our property. Good! Let it be immediately dragged forth into the centre of the arena. Forward!"

The school simply stared.

"You—you mean we're to pull the wagonette out here, sir?" asked somebody, in astonishment.

"I am glad to note that at least one scholar possesses a brain that works," said Jones. "Undoubtedly it creaks, but we will let that pass. Yes, brother, that is exactly what I mean. The wagonette is to be released from its moorings, and prepared for the road."

"But the horses are kept at Farmer——" began one of the boys.

"Let us not worry about horses," said Jones. "Ah, here are the stalwarts with the ropes. Fix four lengths to the front of the wagonette, and then prepare for action."

The school, partially recovering from its shock, obeyed orders. The ropes were fixed and then the wagonette, with much groaning and protesting, was pulled forward, while Jones superintended with a word of advice here and a nod of approval there.

Then he proceeded to climb into the atrocity. It must be confessed that he did this very gingerly, and having arrived in the driver's seat he stamped about once or twice, and was apparently satisfied.

"Sound," he commented. "Unpleasant, but unquestionably sound. Now, School—into harness! We are about to proceed on a five-mile drive into the country!"

The boys, in spite of their rust-encrusted brains, now grasped the full truth. Jones was to ride in the wagonette, and they were to pull him! As a novel method of exercise, the scheme had its good points.

With one whoop of enthusiasm the school leapt at the ropes!

Over the Hills and Far Away!

R OBERT WELLINGTON JONES was pleasantly surprised.

He had feared that there might be a minor rebellion on the spot, and he had already prepared one or two counter moves, should this occasion have arisen. But no. Snayle School, after long periods of dull routine, was glad enough to heave itself out of the rut.

The chariot was seized joyfully, and swung round so energetically that it was only by a semi-miracle that Jones maintained his equilibrium, to say nothing of his dignity. With a giddy lurch, and with the entire school hauling on the ropes, the wagonette swept through the outer gateway, and swung round on two wheels into the road.

"I am glad, brothers, to witness this exhibition of exuberance," roared Jones. "But be good enough to reserve your strength. Always remember that there are hills to be encountered, and bear in mind also that each mile of the return journey will seem like ten!"

It is doubtful if Jones' voice, in spite of its fine timbre, was even heard. For the school, with greater enthusiasm than ever, went tearing down the lane at the double, the wagonette trembling noisily and perilously, with Jones clutching at a rusty rail for support.

He deplored this outburst. He would have preferred the boys to get into low gear, and it pained him to see them starting away on top. Indeed, a doubt was creeping into his mind as to the wisdom of this jaunt. But it was too late to withdraw.

Shrewd readers will have noted that Jones' whole idea was to give the school some much needed exercise, while taking none himself. In theory, the plan had been ideal. In practice it was wonky. To be perfectly frank, Jones was probably taking far more exercise than his victims. The muscular strength required to hang on was considerable. But Jones was a stickler. Never had he been known to back out.

To his relief, a rise was soon encountered, and the chariot now proceeded at a more sedate pace, with the boys hauling on the ropes and gaining a great deal more exercise than they cared for.

"Keep this pace," said Jones comfortably. "All is now well. And remember, brothers, that when we come to the first hill—that is to say, the first declivity—all hands must back-pedal."

"Leave it to us, sir!" sang out one of the boys.

But Jones had his doubts. Leaving it to them seemed a precarious proposition. After due consideration, he decided that it would be safer, all round, for him to sacrifice a little of his dignity, and get down from his throne when the first declivity came within sight—

Unhappily, a bend in the road concealed this treacherous down gradient until it was too late. The wagonette swung round, and the next moment it was unmistakably overtaking its steeds. For the road dropped sharply, and went down at a steep angle. It may be mentioned, in passing, that a sharp turn was to be seen at the bottom of it.

"Hi, look out!" yelled one of the charioteers. "It'll be on us!"

"An observation," said Jones, "that I was about to make myself. Now, brothers, grab while the grabbing is good! Kindly get into reverse at once!"

But the scholars of Snayle School had all their work cut out to save themselves from disaster. They dived headlong into the hedge which bordered both sides of the narrow lane, and the wagonette swept triumphantly past, gathering speed with every turn of the wheels.

"This," said Jones, "is my lucky day!"

The Head Doesn't Approve!

BY some uncanny spirit of perversity, the wagonette utterly declined to swerve. It struck stone after stone, but the front wheels appeared to be fixed. Not by an inch did they deviate from their course, and the crazy vehicle continued its headlong plunge down the hill to that fatal corner.

If Jones had had time for thinking, he might have leapt into the nearest hedge at once. But

the whole thing happened so rapidly that the corner was reached before the celebrated Jones' brain could get into action.

He closed his eyes, and waited.

One thing, of course, was certain. Never could the wagonette get round that corner. By now it was travelling at about five hundred miles an hour—that is, according to Jones' estimation. Actually it was doing a sound thirty.

It reached the corner in great style, then shot across the grassy bank, dived giddily into a ditch, and spread itself over the surrounding landscape. Each wheel went in a different direction, and the body disintegrated in one fell swoop.

But let us not forget Robert Wellington Jones in our masterly description of the chariot's fate. After all, we can safely leave the chariot out of this record now, since it has served its purpose.

So to Jones. At the moment, since we must be frank, he is in mid-air. Soaring gracefully through the atmosphere, Jones had instantly recovered his composure. For, below him—hitherto hidden by the hedge—he now observed a placidly flowing stream.

He more than observed it. He partook of its crystal waters, outwardly and inwardly. With one clean plunge, Jones descended under the surface. But it is impossible to keep a good man down. Up he came, and with a couple of swift strokes he reached the bank.

The air was hideous with juvenile cries. Snayle School was sweeping down to the spot like a horde of yelling cannibals. If Jones had intended to shake the lethargy from these boys, he had certainly succeeded. They hadn't enjoyed themselves so much for years.

Jones stood on the bank just as they came bursting through the hedge. It was characteristic of this cool young man that he should languidly straighten his tie, and brush back his unruly, if matted, hair.

"Splendid!" he said indulgently. "Not only have I given you all some much needed exercise, but I have enjoyed the luxury of a cold bath. Boys, form into line! It is necessary for us to hasten schoolwards with all speed."

"But—but aren't you hurt, sir?" went up a shout.

"Hurt?" repeated Jones, in surprise. "Why should I be hurt? It takes more than a runaway wagonette to hurt a Jones! You will have noticed that I am blaming nobody for the disaster. Let it pass. Accidents will happen during the best regulated exercises."

And with Jones at their head, the boys marched home.

During the course of this hour, Snayle School had experienced many shocks. But the school's feelings now were settled. There were no two ways about it—this new master was the Goods!

His popularity was established. A man who could invent such a form of exercise, and come up smiling after being ducked in the river, was the greatest novelty that Snayle School had ever encountered. The boys hardly knew themselves as they turned into the courtyard once more.

Incidentally, the headmaster hardly knew them, either. He had last viewed them as a dull, lifeless gang of tortoise-like automata. Now he beheld them as a crowd of flushed, sparkling-eyed schoolboys. Jones' treatment had acted marvellously.

"Good heavens!" panted Dr. Webb, so taken aback that he clutched desperately at his beard for support. "What—what is this? Mr. Jones! What has happened?"

"Nothing, sir," replied Jones smoothly. "Do not excite yourself—"

"But you are drenched to the skin!"

"An insignificant detail," said Jones. "The

wagonette failed to turn at the first bend, and I became closely acquainted with the local river. I might add that the wagonette is now converted into a jig-saw puzzle, awaiting the arrival of some enthusiast to piece it together."

The headmaster accepted this statement with a snort of anger, while the school stood round, enjoying itself royally.

"The wagonette is wrecked?" thundered Dr. Webb. "You have the audacity to stand there, sir, and tell me that—that— Upon my soul! You have been here less than an hour, and you have disorganised the entire school!"

Jones nodded.

"My success," he remarked, "has been considerable. But let me point out, Dr. Webb, that this is merely the beginning."

"It is the ending!" thundered the headmaster. "You are dismissed!"

"We are all liable to make mistakes," said Jones kindly. "It is distinctly set down, in a clause of my agreement, that nobody but the trustee can dismiss me. So I shall remain, Dr. Webb. I hate to defy you in this cavalier fashion, but such is life."

"You—you—"

"As soon as I set foot within Snayle School, I

knew that Destiny had brought me here," proceeded Jones coolly. "I am here with a purpose. And until that purpose is achieved, here I remain."

The headmaster tottered with helpless rage.

"To-morrow, I go to London!" he stormed.

"Splendid!" murmured Jones.

"I go to London!" shouted the Head. "And when I come back I shall bring the trustee with me—and I shall see that he throws you out, sir!"

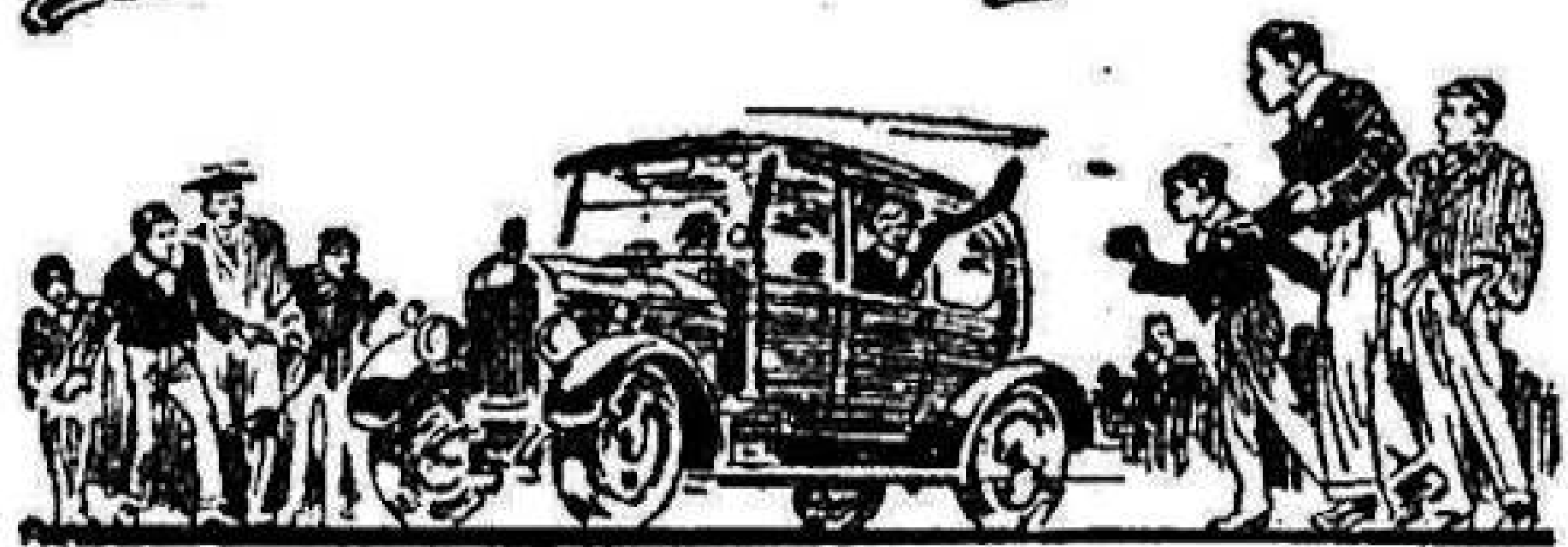
Dr. Cobb Webb then turned on his heel, and strode away like a human cyclone. Not that Robert Wellington Jones was perturbed. He stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"No doubt there is a telephone somewhere in this wilderness," he murmured. "I must ring up the excellent trustee, Mr. Pinch. I must also ring up a trusty friend who will consent to a little impersonation. Happily, I know many of the actor tribe. I rather think that the morrow will be noteworthy!"

And Snayle School felt relieved as it observed the calm, serene expression on the face of its new master!

(Next week, brothers, we have some strange developments. Do your best to wait in patience, and you will be amply rewarded.—W. N. B.)

HANDFORTH'S TRIUMPH!



(Continued from page 36.)

"It's Church—it's Church!"

"Steady, boys—steady!" shouted Nelson as the crowds swarmed round the car. "Don't get so excited. Church is by no means well yet."

"Don't you take any notice, you chaps!" sang out Church from the open window. "Within a day or two I shall be back in the Ancient House, and then you'll see Handy giving me a thick ear, or something!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ye gods!" gasped De Valerio. "Then Handy was right all the time!"

"And we thought he was mad!"

"Good old Church! Welcome back!"

"Hurrah!"

There were wild scenes of enthusiasm. After the first amazement had passed, the juniors collected round, cheering. Lessons were completely forgotten. Even the seniors came surging round, in order to catch a glimpse of this marvel.

Everybody, in fact, was startled beyond measure.

And when at last the car was allowed to proceed, it passed through into Inner Court, and the Triangle was left seething with excited fellows. This was one of the greatest sensations that St. Frank's had ever known. Church, the boy who had apparently died, had come back from the grave! It was an extraordinary affair.

The masters found it almost impossible to get the boys in to lessons. Even when they

did get in, there was no work done. There was only one subject of conversation—the resurrection of Walter Church.

When the farce of morning lessons was over, Handforth found crowds of fellows swarming round him, applying for information. Edward Oswald was having the time of his life, relating the adventures that had happened. He was a man of importance, and the rôle suited him down to the ground.

"I'll tell you what, you chaps!" said Nipper, pushing his way into the throng. "I think we ought to celebrate this occasion, don't you? Let's have a tremendous feed!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurrah!"

"Yes, that's it," said Handforth, with enthusiasm. "A feed! The entire Remove is invited, and I'll stand the exes!"

"Good old Handy!"

"It'll come to a pretty penny, old man!"

"I don't care!" said Handforth. "I've had a remittance from my pater this morning, and I'll blue the whole giddy lot! Didn't I tell you that I've never been so happy in all my life?"

"Yes, old man, you were right all along the line!"

And so that evening, amid great enthusiasm, Handforth was the host at a fine celebration feed. Never had the bluff Handy looked so radiant. His chum was back again, and all the trouble was over. McClure was just as happy as his leader. Within a very few days Church would be back in Study D, and then life would indeed be right again. For these three were truly inseparable!

THE END.

("Armistice Day At St. Frank's!" is the title of next week's grand yarn, and—it's the "goods"! Order your copy now to save disappointment. Also look out for further announcements concerning our coming series of Wonderful Free Gifts.)



Our Weekly Pow-Wow

By
The Editor.

Special News!

THERE is a simply wonderful bit of news this week, and as it concerns every reader of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, it is bound to take first place in this week's Chat. What I want to ask all my chums is to look out for a big surprise which is on its way. That it will send the "N. L. L." soaring even higher than usual I have not a shadow of doubt. The NELSON LEE always had a way of flying high, and the new special feature will see it eclipsing all records. More than this I need not say for the moment, but just pass the word that the coming treat beats anything yet. There will be such a boom rush for the paper that those who have not booked their copies in advance may be left out in the cold. I shall have something further to say about this matter next week. It is the event of the season.

A Cure for Feeling Down!

S. G. Thornton, Aubin House, Quail Street, Longreach, Queensland, sends me a grand tribute to the stories. "Any time," he says, "I feel out of sorts, I go and get an old number and read a few pages of Handy's doings, and I feel great again." I might mention that this loyal supporter is a keen hobbyist and photographer, and he has not missed a copy of the "N. L. L." for six years. What's more, he has kept the whole lot, all in perfect condition.

If anyone is thinking of going out to his part of the world and would like to get some first-hand information, S. G. Thornton will be glad to help in any way he can.

Quick Promotion!

Several readers have written to me this week complaining that they do not get on half fast enough. One is busy as a book-keeper in a plumber's business, and his employer went out of his way to say he did his work well, and should have a rise come Christmas. Employers do not as a rule tramp round handing out compliments. You can't expect the boss to be always "saying it in increases of screw."

Another chum, who is living in Liverpool, is dissatisfied because he has not been shoved into first place. This is all very well, but if advancement does not come along the next best thing is to increase the efficiency, so that when the change does come the individual is a bit more than ready for it.

A polite bit of grouching is all right in its way, but far too much energy is given to a regular campaign of discontent. Grumbling in itself unfits a fellow for the job he has got. I

advise both my correspondents to hold down their jobs and fit themselves for better ones.

Something About a Starling!

A Leith reader says it is easy to teach a starling to talk. Put the bird in a box cage in a corner of the house where it can hear human voices and talk to it. It will soon learn. Which is all very well—except for the starling.

In Sterne's old story, "The Sentimental Journey," the author describes how he stopped to listen to something a captive starling was saying over a shop door in Paris. The prisoner said, "I can't get out." There we have the starling's point of view of such experiments.

Criticism and Compliments!

A readable budget of hints came to hand this week. A correspondent in British Guiana wants to know why Mr. Brooks has not taken Handy out there on a personally conducted tour. I have passed this query on to E. S. B.

Two Eastbourne enthusiasts ask why it is Handy always has his own way. Most likely this is because he takes it. He gets there, like the enterprising tourist who nipped off and got into the one vacant bed while the rest of the bunch of travellers were busy casting lots as to who should have the couch. Handy is no common fellow. He hops in and out of the most amazing adventures always cool as a cucumber. It is not, of course, always wise to get your own way, because you are apt to hate it like poison once you have netted the thing. But that is by the way.

A chum at Arundel tells me that Mr. Brooks is right enough in his account of floods. The writer saw a flood in the Pulborough district, with the detached hen coops bobbing round in the water, and farm buildings just peering above the surge.

A Leeks reader mentions Mr. Brooks' "wonderful flights of imagination." It is a remark of this kind that makes an author get out his best Sunday smile and clap it on.

An over perspicacious NELSON LEE-ITE at Birmingham assures me that I say to myself, "I wish they would not write so many times." I never said it. I have witnesses. The more "they" write the better I am pleased, and that is that.

Wisdom from Jersey!

A cheery Jerseyite has put the wind up me on the subject of punctuality. "Never," he writes, "do to-day what you can do to-morrow."

This is a shocking sentiment! I am certain he never plucked it off one of those tear-off date calendars with their chunks of sapience. Is this the sort of thing that makes the world get a move on, I ask you? Would Henry V. have scored a win at Agincourt if he had post-dated the skirmish? Not so. Weigh in and you win. Do it now is the ticket.

Tame Pigeons.

A London reader asks how he shall feed his tame pigeons. He cannot do better than get some mixed grain from the corn chandler. Of course, pigeons take very kindly to bread.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

G. H. Boswell, 10, Claude Road, C-c-Hardy, Manchester, wishes to correspond with readers overseas and in his district; all letters answered.

C. Newson, 164, Goodwood Road, Goodwood, South Australia, wishes to correspond with readers interested in sports, pigeons, and stamps.

T. G. Rigby, 35, Union Street, North Brighton, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers in England, America, and France, interested in stamp collecting, sports, etc.

Harry McMahon, 50, Long Street, Broken Hill, N.S.W., Australia, wishes to hear from readers in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and anywhere in America. All letters answered.

George C. Pearson, 63, Newbridge Road, Hull, wants members for his club. He also wishes to correspond with readers anywhere, especially in Egypt, Turkey, Portuguese and French colonies. All letters answered.

George Bertram Thompson, 2, Newsham Road, Bowerham, Lancaster, Lancs., wishes to hear from readers in Africa, South Seas Islands,

China, France, America, Spain, and India, who are interested in Lancaster.

A. Shaw, 114, Milton Road, Gravesend, Kent, wishes to correspond with an Irish chum who is interested in stamps.

William T. Jones, 12, Dodge Street, Edge Hill Liverpool, wishes to hear from readers who are interested in his social club.

P. O'Regan, The Square, Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare, Ireland, wishes to hear from members in his district.

Harry Brereton, 50, High Street, Congleton, Cheshire, would like to correspond with readers in India, Australia, South America, and Spain.

Colin Elwis, 134, Woodside Lane, Pitsmoor, Sheffield, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere, Skegness especially.

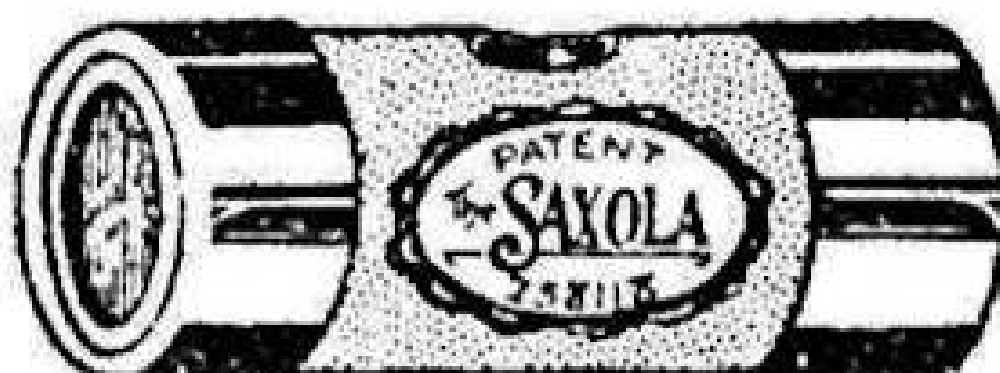
J. J. Hoser-Cook, 21, Rook Street, Poplar, London, E.14, wishes to contribute to amateur magazines. Also wishes to correspond with readers anywhere; all letters answered. He has some back numbers of the "N. L. L." for disposal.

Eric Davies, 6, Bethesda Street, Merthyr Tydfil, South Wales, has back numbers of the "N. L. L." from No. 485 (old series) to the present series for sale.

J. A. B., 328, N. C. Road, Phibsboro', Dublin, wishes to hear from readers in his district.

A. C. Merry, Bona-Vista, The Grove, Beltrington, Cheshire, wishes to hear from readers who will help to form a club.

**CHANGES THE VOICE
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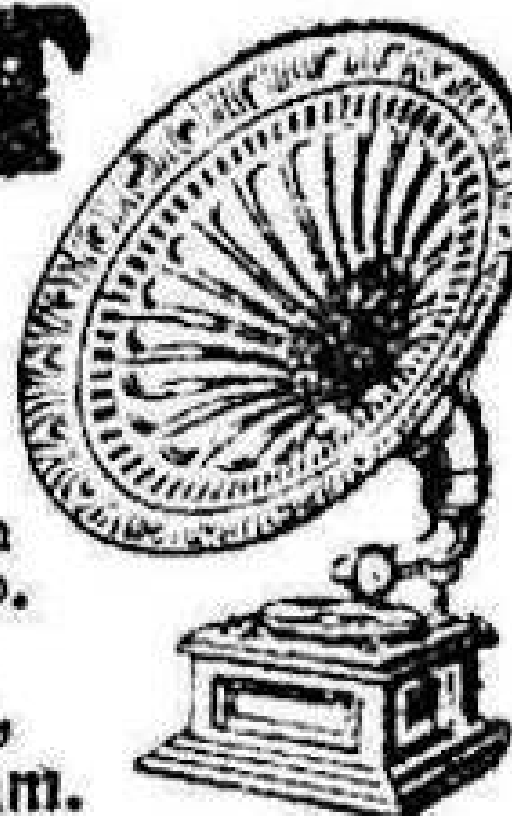
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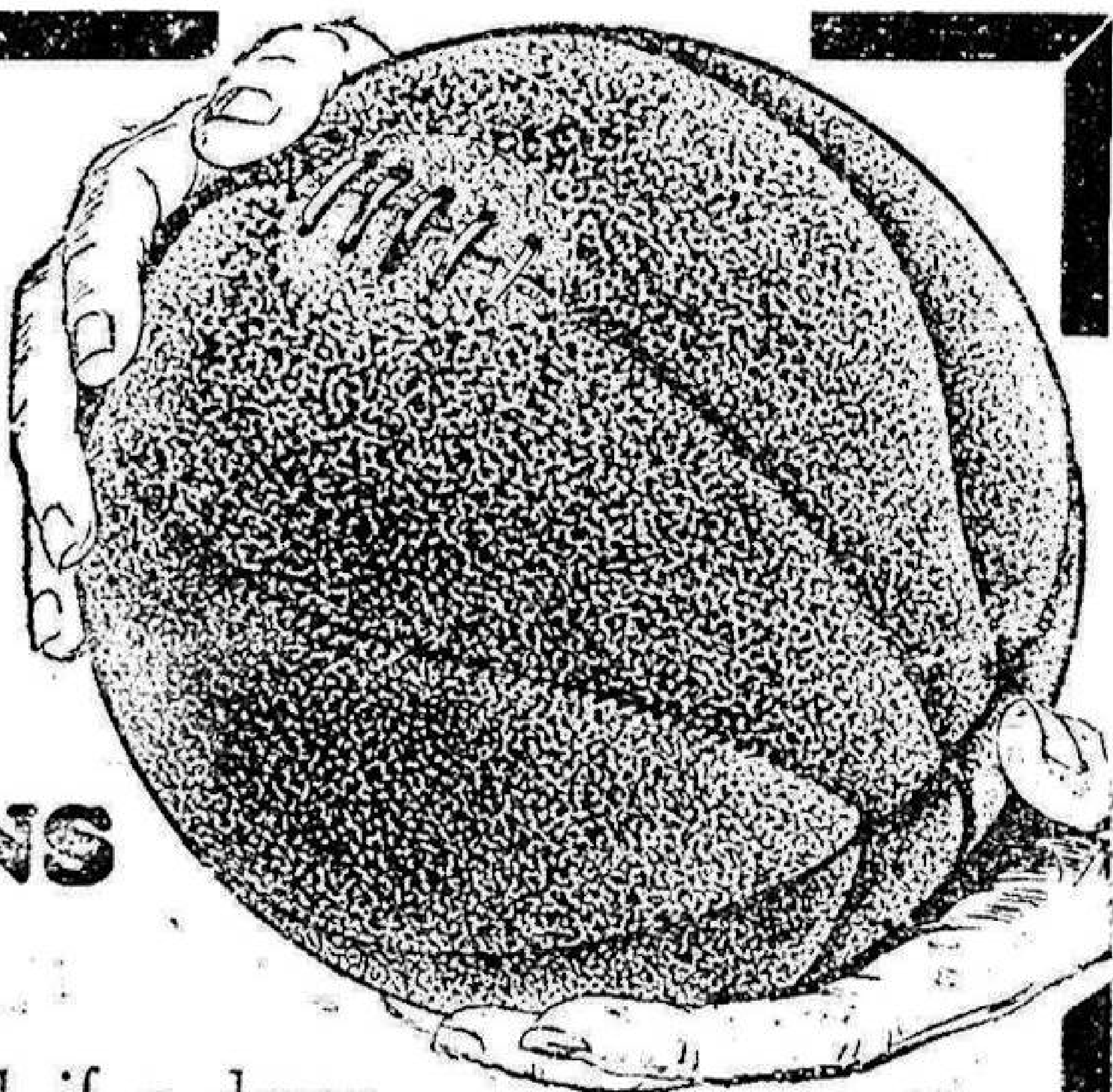
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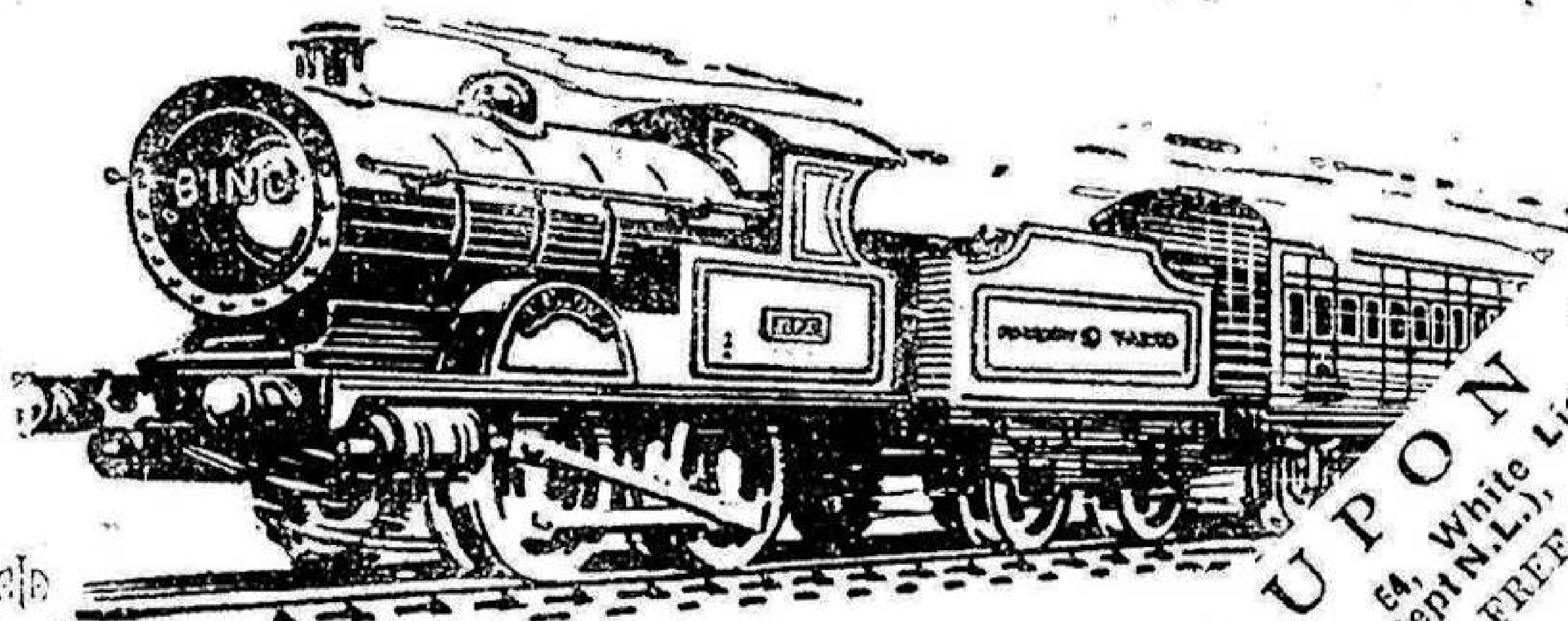
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