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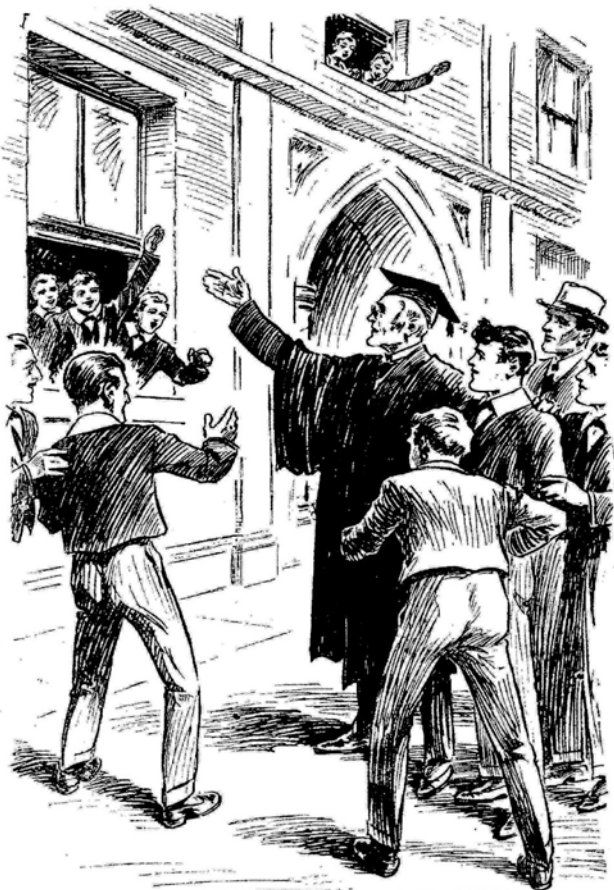
VICTORY FOR THE REBELS!

Amazing story of school life and adventure—inside.

New Series No. 89.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

January 14th, 1923.



The Head looked up at the cheering rebels. "Boys," he said, "I want you to know that Handforth is completely exonerated, and from this moment he is at liberty to take up his old position in the school. He will not be punished in any way!" "Hurrah!" yelled the juniors.

THE FINAL STORY IN THE "BARRING-OUT" SERIES!

VICTORY FOR THE REBELS!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

General Carfax is the sort of soldier who has to suffer a whole heap of reverses before he'll admit defeat. But, much as it goes against the grain, the general has to admit that the St. Frank's rebels have proved too much for him.

CHAPTER I.

A Letter for Snips!

"WE were wrong!" said Tommy Watson, of the St. Frank's Remove, in a weary kind of voice.

"Wrong, dear old boy?" inquired Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "About what?"

"About General Carfax!" growled Watson.

Nipper made no comment for the moment. The three juniors were sitting on the window-sill of one of the upper windows of the Modern House, and from this position they could look out upon the old Triangle. It was a sunny, if cold, January afternoon, and outside the air was crisp and inviting.

As far as the eye could see, St. Frank's was deserted. Not a soul was in sight,

and everything had an appearance of utter desolation. Not that this was very surprising. The entire Senior School was still away for the holidays, and the juniors would have been away, too, but for the fact that they were holding a sensational barring-out.

"Yes, we were wrong!" said Tommy Watson gruffly. "The general isn't beaten yet—and, in my opinion, he's getting ready for another dose of his famous strategy!"

"Well, old boy, what about it?" asked Sir Montie, turning to Nipper.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I believe that there's something in what Tommy says," replied Nipper thoughtfully. "Three or four days have gone by since we had that awful experience with the Bannington race gang, and the general has kept to his policy of secrecy ever

since. We don't know what he's doing, and——"

"He's doing nothing!" said Edward Oswald Handforth, striding up with Church and McClure. "There's a lot of spoof about General Carfax! He's not half so smart as he tries to make us believe!"

"Well, anyway, we mustn't be too cocksure," said Nipper. "There's a good deal of sound common-sense in the general's policy. He's keeping us on edge all the time. We don't know whether he's plainly stumped, or whether he's preparing another offensive. And there's nothing quite so bad as a feeling of uncertainty."

Handforth grunted.

"Well, something will have to happen pretty soon," he said. "The holidays will be over in less than a fortnight, and then the whole school will be back."

The St. Frank's rebels were certainly feeling the strain.

They had carried on the barring-out successfully, repelling all attempts to conquer them. General Christopher Carfax, the fiery old governor who had come down to the school specially to quell the rebellion, had been unable to shift these determined boys, despite his many strategic efforts.

But now, as all the juniors were willing to agree, the affair had become monotonous. They wanted a result—one way or the other.

Some of the weaklings were almost prepared to give in, but the majority, when put to the test, were firm in their determination to hold out. If they surrendered, it would mean the expulsion of Handforth, and everybody in the rebel force knew that Handforth did not deserve the sack.

"Hallo!" said Tommy Watson suddenly. "Here's the postman!"

"That doesn't interest us!" grunted Handforth. "I expect he's going over to the Ancient House—to deliver some letters to the general."

All the same, Handforth moved over to the nearest window, and stood looking out. Mudford, the village postman, had paused uncertainly in the middle of the Triangle, and he was looking at one of the letters in his hand. Then he glanced up, and his gaze roved in the direction of the rebel stronghold.

"Looks as though he's got something for us!" said Nipper briskly.

He leaned out of the window, and waved a cheery hand.

"Hallo, Muddy!" he called. "Got a letter there for me?"

The postman came nearer, and shook his head.

"It ain't for you, Master Nipper," he replied. "To tell you the truth, I don't rightly know what to do. I've got a letter 'ere for Master Snipe, an' I can't deliver it in the ordinary way, because you're all boarded up in there, an'——"

"Don't let that worry you," interrupted Nipper. "I'll buzz downstairs, and you can hand the letter through one of the gaps."

"Why bother?" said Handforth, with a glare. "The letter's only for Snipe!"

"But Snipe is one of us, even if he is a bit of a rotter," said Nipper.

He hurried downstairs, and a few moments later he was in possession of the letter—which the postman had poked through one of the holes in the barricades, at a lower window. Nipper found a crowd of juniors round him as he came into the lobby.

"Who's it for?" went up a general chorus.

"Snipe, of the East House," replied Nipper.

Enoch Snipe came forward. He was not a popular junior at St. Frank's, being regarded as a sneak—a cad.

"Here you are, Snipe," said Nipper, handing over the letter. "Just a moment, though! Whose handwriting is that?"

Snipe glanced at the superscription on the envelope.

He gave a start.

"I don't see, Nipper, that it's your business——" he began.

"Whose handwriting is it?" repeated Nipper.

"Well, it's Merrell's, as a matter of fact," said Snipe defensively.

A roar went up from every throat in the lobby, and the indifference of a moment ago turned to eager interest.



CHAPTER 2.

Need for Action!

ENOCH SNIPE backed away as the juniors came pressing round him.

"Here, I say!" he protested. "Chuck it, you chaps! This is my letter, and——"

"Hold on!" broke in Handforth grimly. "You say that letter is from Merrell—eh?"

"Yes, please, Handforth!"

"Then we want to hear what's inside it!" said Edward Oswald.

"Oh, but really!" panted Snipe. "That's—that's not right, Handforth! This is a private letter, and——"

But he was interrupted by a roar from the gathering crowd. By this time the lobby was packed, and there were Removites, Fourth Formers and fags by the dozen. Everybody seemed to guess that something special was in the wind.

"I say, dash it, you know!" protested Griffith of the East House. "Is this quite right, you fellows? That letter is Snipe's, and I don't see any reason why you should compel him to read it to you."

"But it's from Merrell, you dotty idiot!" roared Handforth.

"What of it?"

"What of it!" thundered Edward Oswald. "Isn't Merrell the chap who caused all the trouble, at the beginning of this rebellion? He and Marriott are a pair, if it comes to that. They're the rotters who dug that pit for Mr. Pycraft, and who led me into the trap. It was their doing that I was officially sacked, and the whole barring-out started from——"

"Yes, we know that, Handy," interrupted Nipper. "And in the circumstances we are perfectly justified in seeing this letter from Merrell."

"Hear, hear!" went up a general shout.

"But we don't want to pry into matters that don't concern us," continued Nipper. "We'll let Snipe read the letter first, and then we'll make him read out the parts that *do* concern us."

"But he won't do it!" protested Handforth indignantly. "You know what a liar Snipe is—you know what a tricky young bounder he is!"

"I'll soon settle the matter!" said Armstrong briskly. "I'll read the giddy letter myself!"

Before Enoch Snipe could prevent him he had snatched the letter out of his hand, and Snipe's efforts to regain it were of no avail—since he was held back by half a dozen juniors.

"Steady!" said Nipper uncomfortably. "After all, it is a bit thick, opening another fellow's letter like this."

Reggie Pitt and Buster Boots and Handforth were inclined to agree, after they had given the matter a thought. But while they were deciding what could be done Armstrong had torn the letter open, and had started reading it.

"By jingo, you chaps!" he shouted excitedly. "Listen to this!"

"It's not fair——" began Snipe desperately.

"Dry up!" frowned Armstrong. "Hang it, it isn't as though this letter was from your pater, or from a member of your family. We wouldn't dream of reading it then. But it's only from Merrell—and Merrell is the chap who caused all the trouble here. Besides, this letter is jolly important—to all of us!"

"Read it out, then!" yelled Griffith.

"There's a lot of stuff at the beginning that doesn't matter," said Armstrong, as he scanned the lines. "My hat! What rotten writing Merrell's got! No wonder he was always getting into trouble with old Pycraft!"

"Never mind that!" said Handforth impatiently. "Get ahead with it!"

"Here we are!" said Armstrong, as he turned the letter over. "Listen to this: 'My sister's wedding has been delayed, as you probably know. The mater was rather ill, so they put the giddy ceremony off for a week or two. Anyhow, she's getting married to-morrow, Thursday——'"

"That's to-day!" went up a general shout.

"Of course it's to-day," said Armstrong. "But don't interrupt! Of course, there'll be a pretty lively reception here at Little Oxham to-morrow night, and then on the next day—Friday—we're all buzzing off to London, to have a high old time. Marriott is here with me, naturally, and we shall be jolly glad to get out of Little Oxham—it's too close to St. Frank's for our liking. By the way, how's everything going down there? Are Handforth and Nipper and those other idiots as determined as ever?"

"Yes, we are!" roared Handforth.

"Listen to this!" said Armstrong. "They might as well save themselves the trouble, because they'll never beat the school authorities. Why don't you try to persuade the fellows to give up? It'll be a lot easier in the end—and better for me and Marriott. Once Handforth is sacked, everything will go smoothly."

Armstrong handed the letter back to Snipe, while everybody else talked at the top of their voices.

"That's about all," said Armstrong. "There's a lot of other stuff about playing cards, and all that sort of thing—but it doesn't interest us. Snipe can have the letter now."

"But I say, look here!" said Handforth excitedly. "Those two chaps—Merrell and Marriott—are leaving Little Oxham for London to-morrow."

"Yes," said Nipper grudgingly. "And then they will be beyond our reach."

"That means that we've got to act to-day—if we're to act at all!" nodded Reggie Pitt. "By Jove! What about it, Nipper? Shall we get busy on something?"

"Not so much hurry!" exclaimed Nipper, frowning. "We can't do anything in a rush. It seems to me that Merrell and Marriott are the key to the whole situation. I've thought so from the first, but the beggars haven't been available. But now we know—absolutely now certain—that they're at Little Oxham. And Little Oxham is only fifteen miles away from St. Frank's."

"Well, what are we going to do about it?" asked Tommy Watson. "That's what I want to know. It's about time that something definite was arranged—"

But just at that moment Archie Glen-
thorne came into the lobby, and there was something decidedly wrong with the genial ass of St. Frank's. For, strange to relate, Archie's eyes were welling with tears, and his cheeks were red and wet!



CHAPTER 2

Very Mysterious!

REAT Scott!"

"My only hat!"

"What's the matter with old

Archie?"

All sorts of shouts went up, and Archibald Winston Derek Glen-
thorne came wandering into the lobby in a dazed sort of way, as though he did not hear any of the inquiries. The tears continued to well out of his eyes, and to roll down his cheeks.

"The silly ass!" said Handforth, frowning. "Hang it, where's his strength? If there's anything I hate worse than another, it's the sight of seeing a chap crying. It's bad enough for a girl to cry, but when a chap does it—"

"Steady on, Handy!" said Church. "There may be some good reason."

"There can't be a good reason!" retorted Handforth. "There's no reason on earth why a fellow should cry!"

In the meantime, Archie found himself surrounded by a mob of juniors. They left a little space round him, and there he was, in the very centre, hemmed in.

"Poor old Archie!" said Bob Christine, with mock sympathy. "Didums, den! Didums nursie smack you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor ickle fellow!" said Christine tenderly.

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie, with a start. "I mean to say, you're not absolutely talking to me, Christine, old horse?"

"Never mind, den!" said Bob solemnly. "Didums hurt um's ickle finger!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You frightful chump!" said Archie, dashing a few tears out of his eyes. "You absolute fright! What I mean is, you frightful absolute! That is—"

"What's the trouble, Archie?" asked Buster Boots, grinning. "What on earth are you crying about?"

"Crying?" repeated Archie. "Oh, rather! I see what you mean, old thing! Well, the fact is, I don't blessed well know! A most frightfully mysterious sort of business, in a way of speaking. A dashed uncanny affair, don't you know!"

"I'm glad you admit it," said Handforth gruffly. "I should think it is uncanny when a chap of your age starts crying—"

"But just a minute, old boy," said Archie, with an expression of surprise in his eyes. "I'm feeling a frightful lot better now. That's rummy, too!"

"Why is it rummy?" asked Handforth. "And why were you crying?"

"Well, you see, it was like this," said Archie. "I thought it a rather priceless scheme to dodge into one of the studies, and to take forty of the best. What the doctor orders, you know! There's absolutely nothing like a dose of the good old dreamless—"

"Yes, we know all about that, too!" smiled Nipper. "Well, you went into one of the studies to have forty winks. What then?"

"And then, dash it, I fell asleep," said Archie. "Not, of course, that there is anything dashed surprising in that. But the rummy thing is—the thing that absolutely made me sit up and stare like anything—is that I woke up suddenly and found myself crying!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's no laughing matter, old screams!" said Archie, in distress. "I mean to say, it's a pretty frightful sort of business when a chappie starts sobbing. But there I was, lounging in the good old chair, absolutely welling at the optics. Large chunks of tear juice were cooing forth, in spite of all the Glen-
thorne will power. I tried to stop it, but—"

"You must have been dreaming," interrupted Handforth. "Some pathetic sort of dream, I suppose——"

"But that's the rummy part of it," said Archie. "I wasn't dreaming at all. Dash it, haven't I already said that I was having a doze of the dreamless? I suddenly woke up, and I thought of this, and I thought of that, and all the time the salty tears were oozing out of the eye department."

"Well, it's funny!" said Church. "Fellows don't cry without a reason."

"Absolutely not!" agreed Archie. "In fact, absolutely not, with brass knobs! But there it is, laddies—there's the fact! And the longer I stopped in that dashed study, the more I felt like sobbing. The good old tears wouldn't be kept back. So out I came, and now, dash it, I'm feeling all right again."

Nobody could make anything of Archie Glen thorne's extraordinary story. There seemed no earthly reason why he should cry. It was generally concluded that he had been dreaming, in spite of his denials, and that his dream had, in some way, affected him unconsciously.

In any case, the matter was then shelved—for Fatty Little performed a loud tattoo upon the gong. That was the announcement for tea, and, naturally, everything else was allowed to slide.

"What ho!" said Archie, brightening up. "The good old cup that cheers! Kindly lead me to it, laddies! I have never felt so much like a dose of the good old brew as I do now. I mean to say, there's nothing in the world so good as tea when a chappie is feeling slightly off the white line. It absolutely helps him to get round the jolly old curves!"

The rebels, forgetting all about Archie, and talking excitedly on the subject of that letter from David Merrell, went crowding into the big dining hall for tea. Somehow, there was a feeling in the air that to-day would be a red-letter day in the history of this great barring-out.

Unbidden, a tear had suddenly dropped out of his left eye, and had rolled down his cheek. His movement was a hasty one, for he felt ashamed. What on earth had made that tear come like that? After all that Handforth had said, it was a dreadful affair! And why should he be showing any signs of sobbing? He was about the last fellow in the world to exhibit that particular type of emotion, and, as a matter of fact, he was feeling particularly cheerful, too.

"Anything wrong?" asked Church, who sat next to him.

"No—nothing!" said Handforth hastily. "What do you mean—wrong?"

"Well, you said you were jiggered just now," replied Church. "You told me——Hallo! What's the matter with Christine, over on the other side of the table? I'm blessed if he isn't crying—just like old Archie!"

"My goodness!" said Handforth, staring.

To his dismay, however, all the juniors on the other side of the dining table were blurry. They danced grotesquely in Handforth's gaze, and it suddenly occurred to him that his eyes—both of them—were filled with tears. His vision had been completely blotted out! He could only see things through a watery mist.

"Here, I say!" shouted somebody else, from the other end of the table. "What's the matter? I can't see properly! My eyes are full of tears!"

"And so are mine!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"What's the matter with us all?"

In some strange, mysterious fashion, the malady was spreading, and it was spreading rapidly, too. The juniors, looking round the table through their tear-dimmed eyes, saw that everybody was catching the complaint. Tears were springing into the eyes of them all, and, try as they would, they could not keep them back.

"I rather think, dear old chappies, that there's something most frightfully wrong," said Archie Glen thorne mildly. "Dash it, there must be something in the atmosphere! Good gad! That's it! Odds mysteries and puzzles! What a frightfully frightful business!"

Everybody started sniffing the air, and looking suspiciously under the table. But there was really nothing to account for this strange epidemic of sobbing. The air seemed to be as pure as ever, and if there was any odour at all, it was a mixture of hot tea and buttered

CHAPTER 4.

A Tearful Business!



HANDFORTH suddenly paused as he was lifting his teacup to his lips.

There was an expression of surprise and bewilderment in Handforth's eyes.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he muttered, brushing a hand over his cheek.

toast. There was certainly nothing out of the common in the atmosphere.

"Here, I can't stand this any longer!" panted Clapson, of the Fourth. "Oh, help! I can't see a thing! I'm crying like a giddy baby!"

"Lots of these Third-Formers are just the same!" said Jack Grey. "Look at 'em—they're dropping tears all over the tablecloth!"

"There's something wrong!" said Willy Handforth, of the Third. "My chaps wouldn't cry like this ordinarily. I say, Chubby! Pull yourself together, Juicy! Now then, young Hobbs! Don't be such babies!"

"We can't help it!" shouted Juicy Lemon indignantly. "There's—there's something in the air!"

"Let's—let's get out of it!" gasped Christine, of the Fourth. "It's—it's getting into my throat now! I can't breathe properly!"

"Oh, -help!"

All sorts of exclamations went up as the juniors rose from the table. Half-blindly, they went staggering out into the passages, and into the lobby. There was a general stampede.

The rebels forgot all about their tea, and they went rushing out, most of them making for the windows. These latter were flung open everywhere, but it didn't seem to make much difference.

Inside the Modern House, the atmosphere was rapidly becoming unbreathable. In some extraordinary, uncanny way, the air itself, although seeming so pure, was vitiated by some unknown quantity.

Its chief effect was upon the eyes. It made all the inhabitants of this stronghold sob; it made the tears pour from their eyes; and, gradually, they were finding a certain difficulty in breathing, too. They all had catches in their throats, and even after they had gone to the windows, and had tried to gulp in the fresh air from outside, the symptoms remained. Even the opening of the windows made very little difference to the atmospheric conditions inside the Modern House.

"What are we going to do?" gasped Tommy Watson, as he blundered into Nipper, and peered at him through his tears. "We can't stand this, Nipper! Most of the fellows are getting desperate already!"

"I know it!" said Nipper, making rapid use of his handkerchief. "I can't understand it, you know! It's just as bad out here—in the passages—as it was in the dining hall! Archie Glenthorne was the

first fellow to notice anything, and we all laughed at him. But it's no laughing matter, Tommy!"

"But what do you think the explanation is?" asked Watson.

"I don't exactly know yet, but I have my suspicions!" said Nipper, with a grim note creeping into his voice. "Do you remember those rummy bombs that the seniors made, some weeks ago, when they tried to drive us out of the school stores?"

"My hat, yes!" said Watson, staring. "But—but you don't think—"

"This stuff is altogether worse than the chemical that was used then," said Nipper tensely. "There's no smell to it—there's no indication that it's in the air until we find ourselves crying and catching our breaths."

"You—you mean—"

"I mean that General Carfax is a tricky sort of merchant!" said Nipper significantly.



CHAPTER 5.

More Strategy:

GENERAL CHRISTOPHER CARFAX allowed a note of exultation to creep

into his voice.

"Keep it up, men—keep it up!" he said tensely. "That's the style! And don't forget—if you drive the boys out, there's a fiver each for you all round!"

"Leave it to us, sir!"

"We'll drive 'em out, sir!"

The two men worked harder than ever, operating the strange-looking pump with unflagging energy. In spite of the cold atmosphere of the January afternoon, both the men were perspiring freely, and never once did they pause in their efforts.

They were in one of the numerous out-houses behind the main body of school buildings, at the back of the Ancient House. Not far away was the little power-station, which provided St. Frank's with all its electric light. Comparatively near, too, was the school stores—that building which the rebels had originally seized as a fortress.

The general and the two men were now standing in a small, old-fashioned out-house—one that had long since been disused. Overhead, there were many pipes, leading away mysteriously, and most of them were rusty and twisted.

As a matter of fact, at one period of the past, this used to be the generator house. Before the electric light had been



The juniors, looking round the table through their tear-dimmed eyes, saw that everybody was catching the complaint. Tears were springing into the eyes of them all, and try as they would they could not keep them back.

"What's the matter with us all?" went up a shout.

installed at St. Frank's, the school had been lit by gas, and this gas, naturally, had been manufactured on the premises. But now the pipes were disused, and the generator house was merely regarded as a lumber chamber.

A length of flexible rubber pipe had been carried from one of the old gas mains to a strange apparatus which stood in the centre of the shed. General Carfax's two men were pumping hard at this apparatus, never once pausing in their efforts.

And the main, to which the rubber pipe was directly connected, was the old main which led straight across into the Modern House. That pipe communicated with no other building at St. Frank's. For in the old days each House had its own supply, and the gas went through separate meters, so that the authorities could keep a check upon the consumption of each separate House.

"We'll have them out this time!" said the general gloatingly. "Yes, by crackey, they'll never be able to withstand this!"

"Twenty minutes of it, sir, and they'll be bolting!" said one of the men, as he worked. "They'll never be able to put up with it for longer than that!"

"And once they're out, they'll be done!" said the general grimly. "Yes, by gad, once they're out, they'll be a

disorganised force! I've made up my mind to beat them, and I'm not going to be flouted! No, by crackey! A parcel of impudent schoolboys—eh? Huh! I'll show 'em!"

"All the same, sir, they're a game crowd!" said one of the men.

"Perhaps so—perhaps so!" grunted the general. "I'm not saying they're not! But, confound it, they're obstinate! And they must be taught that they can't defy a man like me!"

The pumps continued to work, and General Carfax continually urged his men to greater efforts.

This was merely another example of the old soldier's strategy. Having failed to get the boys out of their fortress by direct attack, he was now trying more subtle tactics.

In other words, he was pumping gas through that main pipe—direct into the Modern House. And although this gas was perfectly harmless, without any possibility of causing damage to the rebels' health, it was guaranteed to be effective.

The gas would only cause them to sob, and to fight for their breath. But immediately they got into the open air the symptoms would soon pass, and they would then find that they were none the worse for their adventure. General Car-

fax had made very sure about that before embarking on this desperate scheme.

Only by accident had he learned that all the old gas-pipes were left under the floors in the Modern House—in the walls, in the ceilings. And all those old gas-pipes were unplugged, just as they had been left by the electricians, years ago.

Since the gas had been definitely finished with at St. Frank's, there had been no reason why those pipes should be removed, for it would have caused a great amount of labour. Most of the floors would have suffered, and many walls, too. So it had been simpler to leave the pipes just where they were.

And now General Carfax was finding them useful!

For the gas was pouring out of all those unplugged holes—under the floors of the passages and rooms in the Modern House. It was oozing through thousands of infinitesimal cracks in the walls. The gas was permeating the atmosphere, from roof to cellar!



CHAPTER 8.

A Desperate Situation!

MAN came running into the shed, and he was not only breathless, but his face was flushed with excitement.

"Well?" barked the general.

"They're feelin' it, sir!" announced the man. "They're feelin' it badly!"

"Good!"

"We'll soon have 'em out at this rate, sir!" continued the newcomer. "They've flung open all the windows, an' they're hangin' out over the sills, like so many gaspin' fish that have been just landed! Never seen anythin' like it in all my life! I hope they ain't in danger o' bein' harmed, sir?"

"Not a bit—not a bit!" said the general fiercely. "Good heavens, man, do you think I'd do anything to really hurt them? It's only a temporary disablement. Once they're out in the open air, they'll be as right as rain again! But this stuff will drive them out, by gad! It'll have the effect that I desired!"

"Not 'arf it won't, sir!" said the man, grinning. "I shouldn't be surprised if they're runnin' out, even now—like a lot o' rats leavin' a sinkin' ship!"

"Go back and watch!" said the general. "And come and report to me as soon as there is anything definite."

"Right you are, sir!" said the man. "But there's several of our chaps there, now—waitin' with the hose-pipes."

"Fine!" gloated the general. "Splendid! That's the style, sergeant—that's the style!"

The man grinned again, and was off. Nearly all these helpers of General Carfax were ex-servicemen. They were thoroughly respectable, of course, and they were being well paid for their work. The general was an obstinate old fellow, and he was determined to get the better of these schoolboys. He would never be able to hold his head up again if they won the day. He—a man who had conquered in battle—being defied by a number of junior schoolboys. It was ridiculous, and the general was firm in his determination to beat them.

In the meantime, things were getting very desperate in the rebel stronghold.

Every window was filled with gasping juniors, and naturally there was not enough room for them all. Scores of fellows were rushing about in the corridors, their eyes filled with tears, and a choky feeling in their throats.

"There's only one thing to do, you chaps!" panted Handforth. "We shall have to desert the Modern Huse, and grab one of the other buildings."

"But we can't, Handy!" said Church desperately.

"Why can't we?"

"Look!" said Church, pointing.

Outside, in every direction, men were standing on duty, armed with hose-pipes! And it was clear, at a glance, that they were ready to keep the juniors back from the Ancient House, or the West House, or the East House, should they decide to make an attempt to seize any one of those buildings.

The idea, obviously, was to drive the rebels out of the Modern House, and to keep them outside altogether! The general was having no more of this nonsense. It really seemed that the barring-out was drawing to a close.

As the minutes passed, so the juniors became more frantic. It was impossible for them to engage in any fighting, because they were half-blinded by their unbidden tears. They only wanted to escape—to rush out into the open air, where they could gain some relief.

Nipper and Handforth, as the recognised leaders of the revolt, were almost at their wits' end to know what to do.

A kind of panic was sweeping through the rebel forces, and once it gained a firm hold, there would be no keeping the fellows back.

Nipper could see, plainly enough, that it was now merely a matter of seconds. If several of the juniors broke down the barricades, and plunged out into the open air, the rest would follow like sheep. And then, indeed, the general would have gained his victory!

"We've got to do something, Handy!" gasped Nipper. "By Jove! The general has played a trump card this time, and no mistake! Another five minutes of this, and we shall be nothing but a rabble!"

"Can't we get out on the roof?" asked Handforth, with a sudden start. "By George! That's the idea! If we all crowd on the roof——"

"It's no good, old man!" interrupted Nipper. "I've tried it!"

"You don't mean it's just as bad there?"

"Yes, it is!" said Nipper grimly. "The general is a cunning old fox—and he waited for a dead calm before he tried this stunt. There's not a breath of wind, you know, and this rummy sort of gas—whatever it is—is rising. It seems to be just as bad on the roof as it is indoors. The only way of getting any relief is to escape from the building altogether—to get completely away from it."

"But that'll mean defeat!" said Handforth, aghast.

"Not if we take advantage of our opportunities," said Nipper meaningly. "There's one thing the general has forgotten. Well, he hasn't exactly forgotten it—because he doesn't know! But there's one thing the general doesn't dream of."

"And what's that?" asked a dozen voices.

"Nipper was in the lobby, and many of the rebels were crowding round, wet-eyed and desperate.

"I'll tell you!" said Nipper, with a gulp. "It's now or never, you chaps! We can't get into the Ancient House by making an onslaught upon it. But we can get into it another way—by using that secret passage!"

"What!"

"My only hat!"

"We'd forgotten all about the secret passage!"

"Not all of us!" said Nipper. "I'll admit I nearly forgot it—but I've just remembered. And only in the nick of time, too!"

"Hurrah!"

"Come on, you chaps!" roared Handforth. "We'll diddle the general yet!"



CHAPTER 7.

The Counter Move!

IN the confusion and and excitement, the majority of the rebels had completely overlooked that all-important secret passage!

Yet it not only formed a perfectly safe way of retreat, but, if the thing was managed properly, the tables would be completely turned on General Christopher Carfax.

For the Ancient House was the general's own headquarters!

What a triumph for the rebels if they seized the general's headquarters, and turned them into their own new fortress! And this, indeed, was what they intended to do.

Until now, the rebels had not even thought of abandoning their old stronghold. But now it was imperative that they should get out. Either they must rush into the open air, and become a disorganised mob, or they must stick together, and find fresh quarters. And here was the Ancient House, ready for them empty! And in that secret passage there was a way of winning this new position.

"Now, for goodness sake keep your heads!" sang out Nipper. "We've all got to go in single file through the opening into the secret passage. It's only a small one, and there'll be the most hopeless jam if we lose our heads."

"Carry on, Nipper!" shouted Reggie Pitt. "We'll follow!"

"And remember—when we get into the Ancient House, not a single fellow must make a sound," went on Nipper warningly. "We don't want the general to know that we're there—or the fat will be in the fire!"

"Why will it?" asked somebody.

"Because we shan't have any barricades ready, and we might be driven out almost as soon as we get in," said Nipper. "But if we're quiet the whole affair will be mysterious, and the general won't know what's become of us. Time is what we want—time to consolidate our new position. My scheme is that we should get into the Ancient House, and erect as many barricades as we possibly can during the first half-hour."

"Hurrah!"

It was a cracked kind of cheer, for, to tell the truth, the juniors were nearly

voiceless by this time. They could hardly see, owing to the tears which constantly welled out of their eyes. Everything had happened very swiftly, and the idea of using the secret passage had only come to Nipper in the nick of time.

For even at that moment there were many parties of juniors getting ready to dash out of the Modern House windows. But Handforth, Reggie Pitt, Buster Boots and a few others went tearing round, giving the new orders, and more than one party of deserters was pulled up in the last second.

Then commenced the retreat.

It was a frantic affair, notwithstanding the warning that Nipper had given. The juniors were desperate now; all they wanted to do was to get out, and there was necessarily a good deal of delay in getting through that secret passage. For the boys could only go one at a time, in single file.

This passage was a very old one; it had been discovered quite by accident some months earlier, and General Carfax knew nothing whatever about it. One exit was in the junior Common-room of the Modern House, and the other end of the tunnel led straight into a cellar beneath the Ancient House.

With Nipper standing by, bent upon being the last to leave the "sinking ship," the rebels went through that tunnel in the Common-room. Stumbling, choking, they went down the stairs into the tunnel, and the situation was in no way improved by the fact that a great many of the fellows feared that they would be permanently injured.

"It's some sort of poison-gas!" said Armstrong desperately. "We shall be ill for weeks after this—and it might kill some of us!"

Many of the others thought the same, and it was only by the masterly efforts of Nipper and Reggie Pitt and the other "generals" that a stampede was avoided.

One by one, the desperate rebels emerged into the Ancient House cellar. Handforth, at Nipper's suggestion, had been one of the first to go, and he now stood in that cellar, helping each junior as he came staggering into view.

"Go straight upstairs, you chaps!" urged Handforth repeatedly. "Go anywhere you like, but don't show yourselves at the windows! We mustn't let the general or his men know that we've got hold of the place."

During the course of the next fifteen minutes, the rebels spread themselves over the Ancient House. The majority

of them flopped down in the passages, or on the floors of the rooms. All they wanted was relief, and here, in the Ancient House, they got it. For the air was pure—untainted by that strange gas which had so saturated the Modern House.

When they had arrived the rebels had found the general's headquarters empty. The general himself was over in that generator house, and his butler was helping with the other men. There were no ordinary domestics at St. Frank's at present—they had all been sent home, until this trouble was over and done with.

And so the rebels found that their task was a simple one.

Nipper was the last fellow to come through the tunnel, and he was well-nigh done when he finally arrived. But there was a feeling of great and glorious triumph in his heart as he stumbled up the final stairs, and found himself in the cellar.

"They're all through, Handy!" he panted gulpingly. "And the general's men don't know a thing! We've been successful, old man! We've beaten the general, in spite of his tricky move!"

"You bet we have!" chuckled Handforth exultantly. "Haven't we always said that there's to be no surrender?"



CHAPTER 8

Driven Out

AN'T see no sign of 'em, Bill, can you?"

"No; they all seem to have gorn!" said Bill.

Two of the general's men were standing in an obscure angle of the East Square, and from this point of vantage they could see many windows of the Modern House. All those windows were wide open, but there were no faces there—no schoolboy figures. Everything was quiet, and there was an almost unnatural calmness in the air.

"I hope nothin' has happened!" went on Bill, rather uneasily.

"What d'you mean—happened?" said the other man.

"Well, it's rummy, ain't it?" said Bill. "At first, all these young gents were hangin' out o' the windows, gaspin' for air. An' then, one by one, they sort of dropped back. Now there ain't a sign of 'em to be seen. Looks funny to me!"

They were both silent for a moment, and during the next minute they con-

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timed to watch the windows of the Modern House. But they were unwarded. There was no movement of any kind. The rebel stronghold was utterly and absolutely still.

"You don't think they've been overcome, do you?" said Bill, at length.

"Well, it looks a bit squiffy, don't it?" said the other man. "Seems to me like they've all dropped off, if you know what I mean. Maybe they're lyin' all over the floor, unconscious. That there gas stuff of the old boy's may be stronger than he thought!"

"Lumme! Hadn't we best go an' tell him?"

"Yes, I suppose we ought!"

The two men went off, not only hurriedly, but at the double. They were beginning to feel very alarmed. The absence of any movement or sound from the Modern House was significant. What had happened to the school-boy rebels?

Certainly they had not rushed out, as the general had expected. They had not stampeded into the open, a motley mob. Things were not happening as General Carfax's men had anticipated.

"Well?" barked the old soldier, as the two men came hurrying into the outbuilding.

"We thought we'd better come an' tell you, sir," panted one of the men. "There ain't no sign o' them boys now. They've all become quiet—an' we can't see none of 'em, neither!"

"Then we've beaten them!" said the general exultantly.

"I don't know about that, sir," said Bill, in an uncomfortable voice. "It looks—well, it looks queer to me, sir. Like as though the young gents might 'a' been overcome, if you know what I mean. This gas——"

"Stuff and nonsense!" broke in the general testily. "The gas is perfectly harmless. In no circumstances can it produce unconsciousness."

"That's what you think, sir, but——"

"Don't be a fool!" roared the general, exasperated. "Do you think I didn't test the stuff on myself before allowing it to be let loose upon these boys? Why, I was in a roomful of this gas for half an hour—until I could hardly breathe! Yes, and the stuff was at double strength when I tried it, too! I wanted to be thoroughly certain that it was safe before I allowed the boys to get any of it!"

"Oh, well, sir—that's different!" said Bill, with relief.

"Why, within ten minutes of coming out of that room, I was myself again!" growled the general. "I tell you this gas is perfectly harmless. If the boys can't be seen now, there's only one possible explanation. They have bolted!"

"But we didn't see 'em comin' out, sir!"

"You can't see everything!" said the general. "They must have left the building by means of the other windows. Anyhow,

I will go now and make an inspection. You men had better come with me."

"What about us, sir?" asked one of the workers at the pumps. "Shall we stop——"

"No—you'll carry on with it!" interrupted the general. "Carry on until I give you orders to cease!"

For a moment the men looked disappointed. Then:

"Right you are, sir!"

General Carfax hurried out, accompanied by Bill and the other man. They went right up to the windows of the Modern House; then, after hastily tying mufflers round their mouths, they climbed in through the windows.

They went down the passages, and from room to room—but not one junior did they find. The further they progressed, the more the general gloated.

"Well, we've done it!" he said, in triumph. "The boys are out—they've fled! They must have escaped at the rear, somehow. But what does it matter? They're out—we've driven them out at last!"

Bill and his companion were greatly relieved. Their fears, as they now found, had been needless. The floors of the Modern House were not littered with unconscious forms of the schoolboys.

"My, but you've been smart, sir!" said Bill admiringly. "Such a simple stunt, too! Them boys couldn't stand that gas—an' I don't wonder at it, neither! I dessay they're all over the fields now—tryin' to recover!"

"By this time they have recovered!" said the general. "But that doesn't matter. They're out—and they're disorganised. To all intents and purposes, this preposterous rebellion is over. I've beaten them!"

"And good luck to you, sir!" said Bill approvingly. "I don't hold with these boys defying authority! Saucy young rascals—that's what they are! What d'you suppose'll happen now, sir?"

"It doesn't much matter what happens," said General Carfax. "In all probability, the boys will trickle back in twos and threes—and they will be ready enough to obey my orders! Many of them, no doubt, will go for the train, and get straight home. But I don't care! The rebellion is smashed—and that is what I set out to accomplish!"

Unfortunately for General Christopher Carfax, he was speaking without a full knowledge of the facts!



CHAPTER 9.

The Shock :

"HAVE-HO!" said Handforth breathlessly.

"Absolutely, old boy!" said Archie.

"Kindly remember that I'm here!"

Between them, they got the heavy book-

case into position in front of the window, after which further articles of furniture were piled against the bookcase, and the position was consolidated.

This sort of thing was going on all over the Ancient House.

Parties of juniors were in every room on the lower floor, and barricades were being hastily but effectively erected. And it was all being done without noise—without a single voice being raised.

The rebels had met with much greater success than they had dared to hope for.

Nearly half an hour had elapsed since they had seized the Ancient House, and during that time not any disturbance had come. Nobody had attempted to enter the building. The general and his men were too busy elsewhere.

It was a case of making hay while the sun shone.

And the St. Frank's rebels were doing it! Much to their relief, they had found that the effects of the strange gas had quickly worn off. Ten minutes after getting into the Ancient House, the boys were no longer sobbing, and were breathing normally. In fact, they felt no bad after-effects whatever. Needless to say, they were all very much relieved—for they were satisfied, now, that General Carfax had not submitted them to any dangerous ordeal.

In a way, the general had succeeded in his design, since he had driven the boys out of the Modern House. But how could the general have known that they would merely transfer the entire force into another building?

There was something else, too.

That mysterious gas, although incommoding the victims at the time, really had a most beneficial effect afterwards. For as soon as the distressing symptoms had worn off, all the boys were aware of a most tremendous exhilaration. They were light-hearted—they were happy. They wanted to sing as they moved about the place.

"Have you noticed it, too?" grinned Handforth, as he found Church and McClure humming as they shifted some of the furniture into position. "I feel as though I'd just lost the toothache!"

"Same here!" chuckled McClure. "Must be that rummy gas that the general shoved into the Modern House!"

"It seems to have done us good!" said Church gaily.

Nipper came hurrying along.

"Everything all right here?" he asked. "Good! Then we're secure everywhere! All the lower windows are barricaded, and a crowd of the chaps are now preparing to get some tea ready. We'll show the general something!"

"What a surprise for the old boy when he finds out!" grinned Handforth. "By George! It'll be worth quids to see his face! Isn't it about time that we let him know?"

"Nearly!" smiled Nipper. "I vote that we all go upstairs to the upper windows—and then give out one long yell, at a certain signal!"

"Good egg!" said Handforth enthusiastically. "That'll show him!"

Reggie Pitt came running up.

"The general's in the Triangle!" he announced breathlessly. "What are we going to do, you fellows?"

"Let's dash upstairs now—and show ourselves!" said Handforth. "Come on!"

Very soon the rest of the juniors had caught the fever. They were tired of keeping quiet, anyhow, and the idea of letting out one concerted yell appealed to them. They would show the general who held the trump card!

It was undeniable that General Christopher Carfax was full of triumph at this particular moment. True, he was rather puzzled as to the exact whereabouts of the rebels. But, when all was said and done, what did it matter? They had probably run right off—across the fields.

And yet—

The general frowned as he stood there in the Triangle. Why had none of his men seen those boys? How had they got away so quietly and unobtrusively? Somehow, it wasn't natural. According to all the general's expectations, the boys should have come rushing out of the Modern House in a mob.

But they were out—and that was the main thing!

It was just at this minute that a big closed motor-car appeared at the gateway of the school and came gliding into the Triangle. General Carfax turned, frowned for a moment, and then an expression of satisfaction came over his face.

For he recognised the occupants of that car. One was Dr. Malcolm Stafford, the headmaster of St. Frank's, and the other was Mr. Nelson Lee, the Housemaster of the Ancient House.

General Carfax was not exactly surprised to see them. He had received a letter from the Head only that morning, to say that he—Dr. Stafford—might be coming down. It was for this very reason that the general had made such strenuous efforts to get the rebels dislodged.

And he had succeeded!

Before the headmaster had returned, the rebels were beaten!

As the car came to a standstill, General Carfax hurried forward, and his boisterous voice broke out at once.

"Well, well, Dr. Stafford!" he shouted. "Splendid! I'm delighted to see you, sir! And you, too, Mr. Lee! I'm very glad that you have come!"

Dr. Stafford, looking rather lined and worn, seized the general's outstretched hand.

"And the boys?" he asked anxiously.

"Don't worry about them, sir!" laughed the old soldier. "They're beaten! I have quelled them at last! It has been a long

struggle, but the young rascals are now a thoroughly disorganised rabble!"

And then, at that very second, came a thunderous roar through the still afternoon air!



CHAPTER 10.

Rough on the General!

H

URRAH!"

"No surrender!"

"Long live the rebellion!"

"Hurrah!"

Those shouts rang out like so many claps of thunder. General Christopher Carfax, spinning round, gazed with goggling eyes at all those upper windows of the Ancient House.

"Why, what—what—" he began incoherently.

All those windows were filled with cheering juniors—and in no circumstances could they be looked upon as a defeated force. On the contrary, it was obvious to anybody that they were as stubborn as ever.

"Good gracious!" said Dr. Stafford faintly. "Is this—is this what you call being successful, general?"

General Carfax gulped.

"I—I— That is, I am staggered!" he panted. "I had no idea— The boys were driven out! I—I can't understand—"

"And yet the thing is perfectly simple, as I read it," put in Nelson Lee quietly. "You have certainly driven the boys out of the Modern House, general, but they have taken refuge in another of the school buildings."

"So I can see!" roared the general, covering his voice. "But how—how? By crackey! How in the name of all that's miraculous, did the young scamps do it? My men have been watching all the time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a roar of laughter from the Ancient House. For the general's words had been plainly heard, and the rebel schoolboys were highly amused at the old soldier's mystification. They felt, too, that he deserved a certain amount of punishment for the questionable nature of his "strategy."

For a moment, Nelson Lee talked with the Head, and General Carfax stood aside, dumb-founded and chagrined. He seemed to have become six inches shorter during these last few moments. His humiliation was complete. In the very moment of his triumph, he now found that he had got no advantage whatever!

"This—this is amazing!" he muttered, at last, every atom of his former bluster having dropped from him like a cloak. "What can be done now? These boys have seized the Ancient House—my own headquarters—and they will be just as much trouble to get out of there—"

"I think, general, that a little diplomacy

might be the best policy," said Nelson Lee gently. "Dr. Stafford and I have heard of the regrettable incident that occurred last week—when a number of race gang hooligans attacked the Modern House, and did a considerable amount of damage. At all costs, that sort of thing must be avoided. Happily, the newspapers did not get hold of the story, and the good name of St. Frank's is still intact."

"But—but I was not responsible—" began the general indignantly.

"I realise that, sir," said Nelson Lee. "At the same time, there must be an end to this matter. You are nominally in charge of the situation, but I would suggest—"

"I have done with it!" shouted the general desperately. "I wash my hands of the whole affair! I will have no further dealings with these wretched boys!"

Without another word, he turned on his heel and strode away. He walked aimlessly—anywhere. He was beaten—and the very thought of it galled him. He might not have felt very pleased if he had seen the expressions of relief on the faces of Nelson Lee and Dr. Stafford.

"This is really all to the good, doctor," said Nelson Lee softly. "General Carfax has left the matter in our hands. Will you go to these boys, and parley with them, or shall I?"

"You had better go, Mr. Lee," said the Head promptly. "Do not imagine for a moment that this is an exhibition of weakness on my part. But you are more popular with the boys, and no doubt you will be able to coerce them."

Nelson Lee's methods were singularly different to those of the bombastic General Carfax. This was the first time that the popular Housemaster-detective had been asked to take a hand in the struggle, and he went straight to work with a directness that was refreshing.

He walked up to the Ancient House, and gazed at those packed windows.

"Boys," he said quietly. "I want to come inside, so that I can speak to you."

"Right you are, sir!"

"Buzz down and open the doors for Mr. Lee!"

"Hurrah!"

Without the slightest hesitation, a score of voices rang out. Nobody minded admitting Mr Nelson Lee! His very manner was disarming—and, moreover, the boys knew perfectly well that they could trust him to deal fairly with them. He would not attempt any trickery.

The barricades were torn down from the main door: they were dragged aside, and the door was flung open. Nelson Lee marched in, his face stern, his eyes grave. At the same time, a little twinkle lurked somewhere behind those eyes of his. For, in spite of himself, Nelson Lee could not help admiring these boys, who had stood out so valiantly and so fearlessly against all attacks.



"I've quelled the rebels at last!" General Carfax was saying triumphantly, as he greeted Dr. Stafford and Nelson Lee. Then, just at that moment, a thunderous roar sounded from the Ancient House. "No surrender! Long live the rebellion!" Very obviously the rebels were not quelled!



CHAPTER 11.

Nelson Lee's Way!

"NOW, boys, what's all the trouble?"

Nelson Lee asked the question in a conversational tone.

That stern look had died from his face, and he was friendly. He had decided that it would be the better way. At all costs, this barring-out must be settled—and, if possible, settled to-day.

Nelson Lee was well aware that his task was a difficult one. He could not ask the rebels to surrender—for after all the past events they would certainly not do so. Moreover, it would not be fair to make such a request. In his heart, Nelson Lee felt that the boys were more or less justified in their attitude.

In the lobby of the Ancient House, Nelson Lee stood with the rebels surrounding him in an excited crowd. They overflowed into the passages, up the stairs, and on the landing.

"There's nothing much for us to say, gov'nor," said Nipper. "We all rebelled to help old Handy, and we've stuck to him ever since. We're not going to see him expelled for something he didn't do. That's all there is in it, sir."

"H'm!" said Nelson Lee, stroking his chin. "Well, it's time this deadlock came to an end, boys!"

"If it comes to that, sir, we're all sick of the rebellion!" said Handforth frankly. "We haven't had any proper holidays, and even if the affair is settled to-day, we shall only have about a week at home. But we're not going to give in—never!"

"Never!" echoed a dozen other determined voices.

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Well, let me go to work in a direct way," he said simply. "I know that you boys don't want to indulge in—well, sneaking. So it is up to me to say the first word. I believe that Merrell and Marriott, of the East House, are really the cause of all this trouble? Is that so?"

There was a silence.

"I thought as much!" nodded Nelson Lee. "It has been well said that silence gives consent. Well, Merrell and Marriott are guilty of the misdemeanour for which Handforth was to be expelled, the whole difficulty can be quickly overcome. Merrell and Marriott must be brought to the school—and they must be made to tell the full truth."

"They're over at Little Oxham to-day, sir!" said Handforth eagerly.

"Little Oxham?" repeated Nelson Lee.

"Yes, sir—five miles this side of Helmsford," replied Handy. "It's only about fifteen

miles away from here. Those two chaps are going to London to-morrow, though, and then they'll be out of our reach. We thought about going over—"

"Just a moment, Handforth," interrupted Nelson Lee. "So Merrell and Marriott are over at Little Oxham? Then the matter becomes much simplified. I rather think I shall drive over to Little Oxham at once, and fetch those two young rascals back."

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Mr. Lee!"

"That's the way to do it, sir!" shouted Reggie Pitt. "Once those two rotters are brought back, everything will smooth itself out!"

"And yet I am inclined to hesitate," went on Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "Perhaps it would be better if a party of you boys went to Little Oxham. I would prefer not to be mixed up in the matter. It has been your concern from the start, and so you should deal with it. My suggestion, therefore, is that you should go to Little Oxham this evening, and you must bring Merrell and Marriott back with you."

"Good old gov'nor!" said Nipper enthusiastically. "Why, you chaps, the barring-out will be over by to-night—and Handy will be exonerated!"

"Hurrah!"

"We'll force the two rotters to confess!" said Buster Boots grimly. "They're in the Fourth—and I'm skipper of the Fourth! Just you wait until I lay hands on them!"

"But how are we going over to Little Oxham, sir?" asked Nipper practically. "We haven't any guarantee that we shan't be seized—and held as prisoners. That's what General Carfax has been doing, you know. None of us has dared to venture out—"

"For the period of four hours, we will hold an armistice," smiled Nelson Lee. "That is to say, any party of boys that ventures forth will not be interfered with in any way. You have my guarantee, young 'uns, that this will be so."

"Hurrah!"

"Thanks awfully, sir!"

"And what is more," continued Nelson Lee, "my car is at the disposal of the—the flying squad, shall we say?—for the purpose of this trip to Little Oxham."

"Oh, you're a brick, sir!"

"But mind you, there will be a very severe reckoning if you boys are wrong!" said Nelson Lee warningly. "If Merrell and Marriott are not guilty of the affair that led to this revolt, then the real culprits will receive the full—"

"We're ready to face that, sir!" interrupted Handforth confidently. "I'm not guilty—and I've always maintained it. So I'm perfectly ready to stand or fall by the result of this experiment. Once we've got Merrell and Marriott here—under the roof of St. Frank's—the whole truth will come out!"

"Yes, rather!"

"This ought to have been done at first, sir!" said Boots gruffly.

"Undoubtedly; but you must remember, Boots, that the situation was in the hands of General Carfax," said Nelson Lee, without even attempting to hide the twinkle in his eyes. "And General Carfax is a gentleman of—well, violent methods. The less we say about it, the better. After all, General Carfax is one of the School Governors, and it is certainly not my business to discuss him with the boys."

The juniors thoroughly understood. Nelson Lee had as good as told them that the barring-out could have been settled weeks earlier, if only common-sense methods had been used. But General Christopher Carfax had had his way—and he had failed.

Now the direct method was to be used—and there was every chance that it would be successful.

After Nelson Lee had gone, there was a lot of excited talk, and the rebels grew more and more optimistic.

"Well," said Handforth briskly, "let's be off!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Steady on, Handy!" said Nipper, with a grin. "There's no need for such hurry!"

"The sooner we go, the sooner we'll be back," said Handforth practically. "And the sooner we can make those cads own up, and—"

"I quite agree with all that, but it wouldn't be playing the game to interrupt the actual wedding ceremony," interrupted Nipper. "If we go off to Little Oxham now, we shall probably butt in just in the middle of the formalities. We haven't any quarrel with Merrell's people. It's quite likely that his sister is a jolly nice girl, and that his people are tip-toppers. I don't suppose they even know what a bouncer their son is. Anyhow, our quarrel is with Merrell himself, and with Marriott, so it'll be a lot better if we wait until the evening, and then go along and yank them out during the reception. I expect there'll be a ball, and all that sort of thing. It'll be rather a shock for Merrell and Marriott when we arrive, and drag them away."

"Besides," said Reggie Pitt, "we've got to select the members of the flying squad yet. Mr. Lee's car is a big one, Handy, but only a few of us can go—and even then we shall have to leave room for two more."

"That's true enough," said Handforth, frowning. "The question is, who's coming?"

It was soon settled. The flying squad, when selected, consisted of Handforth, Nipper, Reggie Pitt, Fullwood and Willy. Edward Oswald did not care for the idea of his minor joining in the enterprise, but Willy would not be denied. He said that he had as much right in Nelson Lee's car as his major, and there could be no denying the truth of this statement.

All the rebels were feeling in the highest spirits. Victory was almost within their grasp now. Once Merrell and Marriott were brought to the school, and forced to confess, everything would be all right. There was a general air of optimism in the rebel camp.

Handforth did not like this delay. He wanted to fetch Merrell and Marriott at once. Handforth was all for getting this business over and done with.

"It sounds easy, Handy, but we're really in the hands of Merrell and Marriott," said Nipper. "If those rotters remain obstinate, and refuse to confess, we shall be up against a blank wall."

Handforth bunched his fist.

"They'll confess all right!" he said aggressively. "I'll see to that! Once we've got them here—once they're face to face with the Head—they'll crumple up. You mark my words!"

All the other juniors hoped that Edward Oswald was right.

That evening crowds of rebels leaned out of every available window as Nelson Lee's car drove up outside the Ancient House steps. The flying squad went out of the Ancient House doorway, leapt into the car, and it immediately purred off towards the gateway.

A rousing cheer went up from all the other rebels.

They felt that it was the beginning of the end.

And the flying squad, grim and determined, sat in Nelson Lee's car, speeding towards Little Oxham!



CHAPTER 12.

A Dramatic Interruption!

DAVID MERRELL was not looking particularly happy.

He was lounging in a corner of the big hall at Oxham Manor, with his hands driven deeply into his trousers pockets. His clumsy, awkward figure was leaning against the panelled wall, and his unpleasant features were set in a gloomy frown.

Yet, strictly speaking, Merrell should have been very happy.

For this was his sister's wedding-day, and the Manor was filled with gay, laughing guests. There was a general air of festivity, and the whole place was gleaming with lights, for the wedding reception was in full swing.

"You don't look particularly chirpy, old man," said Marriott, coming up behind his chum and clapping him on his back.

"Don't do that!" said Merrell, turning and scowling at his companion.

Marriott looked at him in surprise. Merrell was a weedy kind of junior, with drooping shoulders. He possessed a receding chin, and characterless features.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked, staring. "Aren't you enjoying yourself?"

"It's not that," growled Merrell. "I was talking to my pater again about half an hour

ago, and he won't listen to any suggestion that I should go to another school, instead of St. Frank's. He says I've got to go back for the new term."

A shadow came across Marriott's features. "My people have decided the same thing," he said glumly. "We've got to go back to St. Frank's, and then—"

There was an eloquent silence for a few moments.

"And then we shall have to face the music," said Merrell huskily. "Do you think I'm happy about it? There's a rebellion going on at St. Frank's, you know. Snipe wrote and told us all about it. And all on account of that beast, Handforth. What's going to happen when we go back?"

"Goodness knows!" said Marriott uneasily.

As events were to prove, there was no need for Merrell and Marriott to worry themselves over what might, or might not, happen when the new term started. Certain interesting things were about to happen now—within five minutes! For while those two young rascals were talking in the big hall, Nelson Lee's big motor car was gliding noiselessly up the drive. Practically no notice was taken of it, for motor-cars had been coming and going all day, and when it pulled up opposite the great steps a footman came hurrying down from the open doorway, all attention. But to his surprise the two doors of the car flew open, and five junior schoolboys came piling out.

"It's all right!" said Nipper briskly. "You needn't announce us."

"But there's one thing you can do!" interrupted Handforth, looking at the footman. "Do you know where Merrell and Marriott are? I mean the two St. Frank's chaps—like ourselves?"

"Master David is in the hall, sir," said the footman. "And I think Master Marriott is with him. I will go and tell them—"

"No you won't!" interrupted Handforth. "We'll do the telling, if you don't mind!"

There was something in Handforth's tone which made the footman look rather uneasy. Indeed, the very manner of these five visitors proved that they were not friendly. All of them were looking determined and grim.

They mounted the steps, and went striding through the open doorway into the old hall. Merrell and Marriott, over on the opposite side, saw them at the very same moment. The two St. Frank's rotters turned pale, and started back.

"Great Scott!" gasped Merrell. "Handforth, and the other chaps!"

"Oh crumbs!" muttered Marriott feebly.

"There they are!" shouted Handforth, pointing. "Come on, you chaps! Grab 'em!"

Nipper bit his lip. That shout of Handforth's was rather unfortunate—since it gave Merrell and Marriott a direct clue as to what was in the wind. The two East House fellows turned on their heels, and ran. They had an idea in their minds that they were about to be "cragged." It never even occurred to

them that they were to be seized, and carried off to St. Frank's. They thought these juniors had come here to administer some kind of punishment. And so they fled—and they instinctively went towards the big ball-room. Once there, among all the other guests, they would be comparatively safe. These intruders would never dare to follow them right into the crowded ball-room, among all the guests—or so they thought!

"After them!" yelled Handforth, as he saw the move. "They're trying to bunk, the cads!"

"It's your silly fault, Tod!" said Willy tartly. "What did you want to say anything for? In another tick we should have surrounded them."

Handforth glared at his minor, then, remembering what he had come here for, reluctantly allowed the matter to drop.

They all hurried forward, and rushed after Merrell and Marriott as the pair burst through into the ball-room. It was comparatively early in the evening, of course, and only a small proportion of the guests had arrived. At the same time, the ball-room contained quite a number of people, and they all stared in mild astonishment as Merrell and Marriott came tearing in.

"Steady, young 'uns—steady!" said a severe-looking military gentleman. "You mustn't tear about in this fashion! You must— Upon my soul! What on earth—"

He broke off as the five other juniors came hurrying in: Nipper, Handforth, Willy and the others had no eyes for the guests. They had come here on a certain mission, and they were not going to be defeated by any subtlety of Merrell's.

"Sorry to intrude," said Nipper grimly. "But we want to have a few private words with these two chaps—and we can have those private words better outside. Merrell—Marriott! Are you coming quietly, or shall we drag you out?"

"Pater!" gasped Merrell, looking round wildly. "Where's my pater? These—these chaps are intruding! They weren't invited to the reception—they've no right here at all! Where's my pater? He'll have them chucked out!"

"You—you rotter!" roared Handforth aggressively. "Come on, you chaps—we've got then now!" And he rushed forward, followed by the others.

Merrell and Marriott stared round them wildly. There was no sign of Merrell senior, and there was every indication that the flying squad meant business. The other guests looked on, half amused, half startled. They certainly did not realise the gravity of the situation. They concluded that this was merely a schoolboy rag, and some of the people were laughing heartily.

But Merrell and Marriott were not laughing—neither were those who had come here to fetch them!



CHAPTER 13.

Waiting for Handforth!

"QUICK!" panted Merrell. "This way!"

He raced across the ball-room, straight for some French win-

dows, which led into an adjoining conservatory. Marriott tried to follow, but he was cut off by Willy and Fullwood. They seized him, dragged him back, and he slithered on the smooth floor and crashed over. The next second three of the St. Frank's fellows were sprawling over him, holding him down.

"Really, boys, this sort of thing won't do!" said one of the guests, striding forward and frowning. "You mustn't behave like this—"

"Sorry, sir—but it's a duty!" interrupted Nipper. "We want these two fellows, and we're going to have them. We shan't disturb you for more than a minute."

"I do not approve of these rough schoolboy games!" said an elderly lady, with asperity. "Disgraceful! I am surprised that David should have such questionable friends!"

The unfortunate Marriott managed to get his face free for a moment.

"They're not our friends!" he howled wildly. "They've come here to scrag us! Rescue! Hi, help me to get out of this!"

"You dry up!" said Reggie Pitt briefly.

Marriott subsided—for the simple reason that Reggie Pitt placed his cap over his face, and held it there firmly. Nipper was looking round rather anxiously. Merrell had completely disappeared, and so had Handforth.

"I say!" said Nipper, turning to a couple of the guests—young fellows, immaculate in evening dress, who were grinning widely at the proceedings. "Do you know where those other two chaps went?"

"Through the conservatory, I think," said one of the young gentlemen. "They're probably canoodling behind one of the palms!"

There was a general chuckle, and Nipper and the others frowned. They were not looking upon this affair as a humorous incident. Nipper, indeed, was rather anxious. He had no particular faith in Handforth's ability as a tracker. Merrell had bolted, and there was no telling when he would be rounded up.

"Come on!" said Nipper briskly. "Let's take Marriott out to the car, and we'll look him in. Then we'll have a look for Handforth and Merrell."

They all hurried out, much to the relief of the guests. This sort of thing was all very well for schoolboys, but it was hardly in keeping with the occasion. Merrell's people were very particular, and it was rather fortunate for the intruders that neither Merrell's father nor mother were on the spot at the time. The majority of the guests regarded

the whole incident as a mere schoolboy jape. In fact, now that it was over, they were laughing heartily over it. Even now they did not appreciate the seriousness of the affair.

Meanwhile, the flying squad had bundled Marriott into the car. Willy held him on one side, and Pullwood on the other. Reggie Pitt made doubly sure by tying a scarf round Marriott's hands, and another scarf over his mouth, so that he could make no outcry.

"Now we'd better go and find Handforth!" said Pitt. "Goodness knows where the fat-head's got to!"

They hurried across one of the lawns—Reggie Pitt and Nipper—and they soon came within sight of the conservatory. It stood out, brilliantly illuminated amid the darkness. The outer door stood wide open, indicating clearly enough that Merrell, with Handforth in full pursuit, had come out by this means. But there was no sign of them.

"Listen!" said Nipper, coming to a halt.

They stopped, but they could hear no sounds except for the sighing of the wintry wind in the trees overhead.

"Handy!" roared Nipper, raising his voice.

"This way!" came a faint, far-off voice, clearly recognisable as Handforth's. "The rotter bunked out here—through these trees! I can't locate him yet, but I'm on his track!"

"Where are you?" yelled Nipper.

"Over here!" came the reply.

But it was very difficult to locate Handforth's exact position. There were many trees in the garden, and there were rose-walks and lawns, and tree-lined pathways leading in every direction. Nipper and Pitt started off down one of these pathways, but they soon came to a halt. It was intensely dark here in the grounds of Oxham Manor.

"Let's give another yell!" said Pitt, after a few moments.

They did so, but no reply came. Handforth had evidently got farther afield—still in chace of Merrell. Nipper pulled up, and he grunted.

"It's no good!" he said. "We can keep it up all night if we like. We shall never be able to tell where Handforth is. The best thing we can do is to get back to the car, and wait until he shows up."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Reggie.

It was, indeed, the only sensible course. For, if they went in chace of Handforth at random, the chances were that they would be wandering about, a mile from the drive, when Handforth and Merrell turned up. Edward Oswald was bound to come back to the front of the house, where the car was waiting. So that was the spot to make for.

"It's a pity we didn't grab Merrell first," said Nipper regretfully. "Two of us ought to have gone for him, instead of leaving him entirely to old Handy. It may be an hour before they arrive now."

"But who would have supposed that Merrell would bolt like that?" asked Pitt. "Well, never mind—there's no particular hurry. It's not much more than six o'clock,

if that, and we aren't obliged to be back at St. Frank's by calling-over."

"Yes, but all those rebels are waiting for us," said Nipper, frowning. "We promised to be back within an hour, didn't we? They'll wonder what the dickens has happened when we don't turn up. Let's hope that Handy catches his man, and gets back quickly."

But it was a vain hope.

Fifteen minutes elapsed—twenty minutes—thirty. At Nipper's suggestion, Nelson Lee's car had moved down the drive a little distance so as to be away from the house. Mr. Merrell might come out and make inquiries, and none of the juniors wanted that. So they waited round a bend, and stamped up and down the drive, trying to keep their hands and feet warm. They kept a sharp look-out for Handforth and his prisoner. But they did not come.

"By jingo!" said Pitt, at last. "It's nearly seven! Over an hour we've been waiting—and we look like waiting the whole evening! Where in the name of goodness has that ass got to?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Nipper. "The trouble with Handy is that he never knows what he's going to do. He may have collared Merrell on some other road, a couple of miles away, and it would be just like him to ask somebody for a lift, and leave us here waiting—having forgotten all about us!"

"That's just what I was going to say," put in Willy. "You know what Ted is—as thoughtless as the dickens. I vote we go off to St. Frank's, and leave him. No sense in staying here like this. I'll bet you anything you like that he's on his way back already."

"We'll give him another ten minutes," said Nipper. "If he doesn't show up by a quarter-past-seven, we'll go off. How's that?"

The others agreed—but when the quarter-past arrived, there was still no sign of Handforth. In fact, they waited until half-past—with the same result.

Then, thoroughly fed up, they gave the chauffeur his orders, and they started back for St. Frank's—minus Handforth and Merrell.



CHAPTER 14.

No Satisfaction From
Marriott!

"HERE they are!"

"Hurrah!"

Nelson Lee's car had just come to a halt in front of

the Ancient House, and dozens of heads, projecting from the Ancient House windows, sent up a cheer. The flying squad was late—over an hour late, in fact—but it had returned at last. Nipper was the first to get out of the car. He looked up at the crowded windows,



Marrott made a dash for the French windows, with Handforth in close pursuit. Marrott, however, slipped on the shiny floor, and next moment three of the St. Frank's rebels were sprawling on top of him, holding him down helplessly.

"Any sign of Handforth?" he asked.

"Why, isn't he with you?" shouted Church.

"No—and we thought perhaps he had come home a different way," said Nipper.

"Merrell escaped, and Handforth went after him and we haven't seen him since. But we've got Marriott here."

"Yah! Rotter!"

"Cart him off to the Head!"

"That's just what we're going to do," replied Nipper. "Perhaps Marriott's evidence alone will be sufficient. Anyhow, we'll make him confess. And when Merrell turns up, later, it'll clinch the thing."

"Good egg!"

There was a further cheer, and a groan went up as Marriott was forced out of the car. As a matter of fact, the unhappy Marriott was in the last stages of fright. He was so unutterably scared that he could hardly say a word. He was pale and trembling, and his brain was in such a whirl that he scarcely knew whether he was on his head or his heels.

St. Frank's was so different! When he had left the school everything had been in perfect order. He well remembered how he and Merrell had gone off, after telling a tissue of lies against Handforth. But there had been no barring-out then—except for the trivial affair of Handforth & Co. locking themselves in Study D. Marriott, never a strong junior, was simply overwhelmed by the enormity of it all. The knowledge that he was to be taken before the Head robbed him of every shred of self-possession.

"This way!" said Nipper curtly.

A further shout went up from the rebels as the wretched Marriott was led off towards Big Arch. Practically every junior there felt that this was the end of the rebellion. Once Marriott told the truth, the Head would be compelled to admit that he had been in the wrong. He might not like admitting it, and he would probably find the pill a bitter one to swallow—but everybody knew that the Head was a fair man, and they relied upon his sense of justice.

The flying squad, with Marriott in their midst, went through Big Arch and then wended their way across Inner Court. Not until they were nearing the Head's House did the juniors remove the scarf from Marriott's mouth.

"Now, Marriott, you'd better understand that you've got to confess the whole truth!" said Nipper curtly. "We brought you here so that this rebellion can be ended. You and Merrell are to blame for the whole thing, and now you're going to—"

"But I won't!" gasped Marriott frantically. "We've done nothing—absolutely

nothing! You're not going to force me to say something against my will!"

"You're going to tell the Head the truth!" said Nipper.

"I won't speak—I won't say a single thing!" babbled Marriott.

"We'll see about that!" growled Nipper.

"Wait until we get you into the Head's presence!"

They all felt certain that Marriott would buckle up once he was under Dr. Stafford's



Merrell made a dash for the French windows, with Handforth in of the St. Frank's rebels were apr

eagle eye. They took no notice of his present attitude. He was scared, and it was quite natural that he should be scared.

Two or three minutes later, Dr. Malcolm Stafford was rather startled by the entrance of General Carfax's butler. The Head was holding a consultation with the general in his study, and, truth to tell, they were both at a deadlock.

"Hamilton and three other of the rebels to see you, sir," said the butler.

"Good gracious!" ejaculated the Head.

"Have these boys had the audacity—"

"They say that they have come under a

flag of truce, sir," interrupted the butler. "They have brought a boy named Marriott with them—and it seems that they have fetched Marriott to the school on purpose for this interview. They say they will only come in, sir, on condition that you give your word that they will not be interfered with in any way."

"Impudence!" fumed General Carfax, with a glare. "Gross impertinence! By crackey, have nothing to do with it, sir! Tell these boys to go about their infernal business!"

"One moment, general—one moment!" said the Head coldly. "Mr. Lee has mentioned this matter to me, and I have decided to hear what these boys have to say."

A few moments later, Frederick

and I am glad that he has not come with you on this mission. However, if Marriott has something to tell me, I will listen to him. Marriott, I am ready." And the Head gazed at the terrified junior sharply.

Marriott licked his dry lips, and only gave a kind of gulp.

"I—I—" he babbled incoherently.

"Speak up!" said Nipper. "The Head is waiting, Marriott."

"I—I've nothing to say!" gasped Marriott desperately. "It's—it's all a plot! These chaps are trying to force me to say something, and I won't! I won't! I won't!"

And there was something so final—something so desperately stubborn—in Marriott's tone, that the rebels felt just a little qualm of uneasiness.

Had all their efforts been for nothing?

What if Marriott refused to say anything. Their position would be no better—perhaps worse!

CHAPTER 15.

The Deadlock



DR. STAFFORD frowned more heavily than ever.

"What is this nonsense?" he demanded, glancing up at the rebels. "Why have you brought this wretched boy to me? He is in the last stages of terror. What have you been doing to him?"

"We've done nothing to him, sir," said Nipper quietly. "Marriott has no need to be afraid. We only want him to tell you the truth—just the bare, unvarnished truth. We brought him to you once before, but he only told you a lot of lies."

"I didn't—I didn't!" sobbed Marriott. "It was Merrell—I mean, Merrell and I told the truth at the very first."

Dr. Stafford could see that the boy was frantic with terror.

"Marriott," he said, "come here!"

"I—I—I—"

"Come here, Marriott!" repeated the Head. "You have nothing to fear—if you tell me the truth. You need

not be so terrified. I am not an ogre. Come, come! Pull yourself together, boy!"

Marriott made a great effort, but he was so scared that he had gone as pale as a sheet.

"Now, Marriott, these boys tell me that you have something to say," continued the Head. "Take your time over it, and think carefully. If you have any statement to make—"

"I haven't, sir!" broke in Marriott desperately. "I have nothing to say at all!"

"Nothing whatever!"



Marriott, however, slipped on the shiny floor, and next moment three boys were holding him down helplessly.

Marriott was brought into the headmaster's study. The juniors were breathless when they arrived, and they found the Head regarding them sternly. Dr. Stafford was on his feet now, and seldom had the juniors seen him so cold and grim.

"We have come, sir, because Marriott has something to tell you," said Nipper quietly. "We want to prove to you that Handforth was justified in rebelling—"

"There can be no justification of Handforth's outrageous conduct," interrupted the Head sternly. "Handforth, as you know, has already been expelled from St. Frank's,

"No, sir," babbled Marriott. "I've nothing to say—absolutely nothing!"

"Perhaps we'd better remind him of the facts, sir," said Nipper gruffly. "He and Merrell dug a pit for Mr. Pycraft to fall into——"

"Nonsense!" broke in General Carfax. "Handforth was the boy who did that—Handforth, with two of his own companions. That was proved long since. This boy had nothing whatever to do with it."

"That's right!" gasped Marriott. "I had nothing to do with it, sir! Neither had Merrell! These—these chaps are trying to fix the guilt on us, and it's not fair! We won't have it!"

"You fibber!" shouted Fullwood, exasperated. "You know well enough that you and Merrell are responsible for the whole thing! Handforth gave the pair of you a licking because you were torturing a cat, and you tried to get your own back on him by building that pit for Mr. Pycraft. You knew that Handforth would get the blame, and——"

"It's not true!" shouted Marriott. "The whole thing's an invention, sir!" he went on, appealing to the Head. "It was Handforth & Co. who dug that pit! Handforth had been threatening us for weeks and weeks! He's always been bullying us!"

"That's a lie!" put in Willy coldly. "My major doesn't bully anybody. He seems to be doing so now and again, but it's only his way. Ted's as harmless as a kitten, if you only stroke him properly. So don't tell any more lies."

"They're not lies!" screamed Marriott. "I'm telling the truth—I've been telling the truth all the time! I won't be forced into admitting something I didn't do! I won't—I won't! It's all a plot—it's all a dirty plot to trick me!"

There was something so frantic in Marriott's tone, and in the terror of his eyes, that both the headmaster and General Carfax came to the same conclusion. This was indeed a plot of the rebels. They were trying to terrorise Marriott into making a confession of something he had not done. The Head's brow became very black.

"Hamilton, I am astonished!" he said, pained and angry. "I am amazed that you should be a party to this despicable episode. You seem to have lost all sense of proportion and decency. This boy is obviously terrified by your methods—and it is clear to me that he knows nothing whatever about this matter."

Nipper compressed his lips.

"I'm sorry you should think things like that about me, sir," he said. "But you can

be quite certain that we made sure of our facts before we brought Marriott to you. He and Merrell are responsible for the whole rebellion. It has grown so big now that there can be no question of sneaking or informing. Marriott has something to tell you, and it he doesn't say it, it is because he is afraid of the consequences. He thinks he can keep these denials up, but we'll make him speak sooner or later."

"Please help me, sir!" sobbed Marriott. "They're going to take me outside, and frog's-march me—beat me—punch me until I'm black and blue! They're going to force me into a confession! That's what they mean to do, and—and——"

"I forbid you boys to lay a single finger upon this unfortunate youth!" interrupted the headmaster angrily. "Good Heavens! It will be possible to force him into saying anything if you use such methods as that. I won't allow it!"

"You needn't worry, sir," said Nipper. "We won't bully Marriott. But the fact remains that he can tell you the truth about this rebellior. If he won't speak, he won't."

The other rebels glanced at one another rather helplessly. Indeed, Fullwood had an inquiring look in his eyes—a puzzled expression. He was beginning to wonder if they hadn't made a mistake from the very start. And yet this was unthinkable really. For Edward Oswald Handforth had made a definite statement that Merrell and Marriott were guilty, and it wasn't like Handforth to say a thing of that sort unless he was sure. And yet——

Anyhow, a deadlock had arrived—and it seemed that there was no way out of it. Marriott refused to speak and, as matters stood at present, it would be impossible to "scrag" him, in order to loosen his tongue. For the headmaster would never believe his story then. The Head would assume that Marriott had been forced into a confession, just in order to save himself from further torture. It was a difficult position—a totally unexpected one, too.

What was to be done now?



CHAPTER 18.

Handforth's Little Way!

EMME go!" sobbed

David Merrell.

"Not likely!" panted

Handforth grimly.

"You rat! I'm not

likely to let you go after all the trouble I've had to collar you! By George! You led me a fine dance, you rotter!"

Merrell was sprawling on his back in the damp grass, and Handforth was sitting on his chest. They were at least four miles from Oxham Manor, and at last Handforth had tracked his quarry to earth. It had been a

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long chase—a tedious chase—but Edward Oswald had triumphed in the end.

More than once he had almost given up the hunt. At times he had lost all sound of his quarry, but more by luck than anything else he had heard Merrell crashing through some bushes as he sought to escape the attention of his pursuer. And, working his way round, Handforth had come face to face with Merrell just when that wretched youth was beginning to feel that he was safe. A single drive from Handforth's right, and Merrell was on the ground, sobbing. There could be no escaping from Handforth now.

"You leave me alone!" screamed Merrell, as he tried to get free. "You bully! You rotter! What are you going to do to me?"

"Keep your hair on!" said Handforth disgustedly. "I'm not going to smash you, unless you refuse to admit the truth. You're coming back to St. Frank's with me, and you're going straight to the Head. You're going to tell the Head that you and Marriott dug that pit for old Pyecraft, and that you wangled things so that I got the blame!"

"I won't!" shouted Merrell desperately. "I'm not going to admit that!"

"But it's the truth, isn't it?"

"What's the good of denying it?" panted Merrell. "You know it—I expect Snipe told you."

"I knew it before Snipe told me."

"Well, I'm not going to admit anything to the Head!" said Merrell desperately.

"I'm not going to get myself sacked!"

Handforth drew a deep breath.

"Oh!" he said slowly. "You're not going to admit anything to the Head, eh?"

"No, I'm not!"

"You absolutely refuse?"

"Yes, I do!"

"All right, my son, we'll see about that," said Handforth, his voice cold and calm. "I'll give you your choice. Are you going to face the Head, and tell him the truth as you stand—or would you like to be converted into mince-meat first?"

"If you dare to touch me——"

"Rats!" interrupted Handforth. "Come on—get to your feet—put up your hands!"

"I—I won't!"

"Put up your hands!" thundered Handforth. "You're going to fight me, Merrell! You're just as old as I am, and just as big! So if you start calling me a bully, you're only making yourself a fool! You're going to fight me—now!"

David Merrell knew that Handforth was speaking the truth. There could be no question of bullying in a case like this. If anything, Merrell really had the advantage. He was bigger and more brawny than Handforth. He himself had the reputation of being the worst bully in the East House. But he was mortally afraid of a fight with Handforth.

"Now, then, my lad—make up your mind quickly," said Edward Oswald. "I'm not in a mood for delay. What's it going to be? Are you coming quietly with me to confess

to the Head—or shall I paste you first? I can give you my word that it'll be a pretty first-class pasting."

"If you touch me, I'll—I'll——"

"On, rats!" broke in Handforth, exasperated. "I'm getting fed up with all this rot! Put up your hands and fight! Now, then—take that!"

"I—I refuse——"

Biff!

Handforth lost patience. He delivered a beautiful left which nearly lifted Merrell off his feet. Then, in a sudden fury, Merrell acted like a tiger. He leapt at Handforth, clawing and punching and kicking. He seemed to go utterly wild.

"You beast! You cad! You rotter!" he shrieked. "I'll fight you if you like! But I won't confess! I won't go to the Head and——"

Crash!

Handforth was as cool as a cucumber. He leapt aside and avoided Merrell's kicking feet. It was quite in keeping with Merrell's character that he should attempt to kick his adversary. But he had chosen the wrong customer. Relentlessly Handforth continued the "pasting." He slammed Merrell right and left until that youth was dizzy with pain. After about two minutes of it the latter staggered back, sat down and screamed.

"Stop!" Merrell shouted desperately. "I—I've had enough! Don't—don't touch me again! I'll confess—I'll go to the Head and tell him everything!"

"Do you admit that you and Marriott dug that pit for Mr. Pyecraft?" demanded Handforth.

"Yes!"

"Do you admit that you trapped me into——"

"Yes, yes—I admit everything!" sobbed Merrell. "Only don't touch me again!"

"Do you admit that you and Marriott went to the Head and told him a whole string of lies before you left St. Frank's?"

"Yes, yes!" panted Merrell. "We tried to make things worse for you, and—and we told all the lies we could think of."

Handforth drew a deep breath.

"That constitutes a full confession!" he said grimly. "All right, Merrell, you cad! Remember what I say! If you refuse to confess all this to the Head, I'll take you out and paste you even worse!"

"I—I'll go with you!" sobbed Merrell. "I've had enough—I'll do anything!"

Edward Oswald Handforth knew that his companion was beaten—hopelessly beaten. Merrell, in fact, was in such a state that he was willing to blurt out the whole truth the instant he came into the headmaster's presence. For Merrell instinctively felt that the truth must come out sooner or later. If he had been granted his own way—if he had been sent to another school instead of St. Frank's—he might have maintained his lying attitude. But what was the use? He was booked for St. Frank's again, and "would

be better to get the thing over and done with. Even if he was sacked it wouldn't matter so much now. In fact, all the better! For he would be able to go to another school after all! It would jolly well serve his father right for being so beastly obstinate! And in that mood David Merrell prepared for the end!



CHAPTER 17.

Handforth Solves the Problem!

"M!" said Handforth, staring up and down. "I wonder where the dickens we are?"

Ten minutes had elapsed, and he and Merrell were now on a main road. They had crossed one or two meadows, had forced their way over a sticky ploughed field, and now they had hit upon the road. But it was empty—dark and dreary. Even Merrell himself did not know where he was. He was still dazed and dizzy from the beating that Handforth had administered.

"Don't you know where we are, you ass?" demanded Handforth, shaking him. "We can't be far from your place. We can't be far from Oxham—"

"Yes we are—we're miles away," interrupted Merrell. "This is one of those roads that I never come on. And I don't know my way back now, either."

"We don't need to get back," said Handforth gruffly. "We want to get to St. Frank's. It doesn't matter about the other fellows—the main thing is to get to the school. You needn't worry—we'll walk on until we come to a village, or a town, then we'll find the station and get on the train. And you'll come with me, too, my son!"

He fixed his grip firmly on Merrell's collar, for he had no intention of letting his companion get away. But as luck would have it they had scarcely walked half a mile before the lights of a motor-car came into sight.

"By George!" said Handforth. "Here's our chance!"

He stood in the middle of the road, waving his one disengaged arm, and the motor car, which was provided with strong headlamps, came to a stop with a grinding of brakes.

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Handforth ran round, still keeping a tight hold on Merrell.

"What's wrong here?" asked the driver of the car. "What sort of a game do you call this, you young asses?"

To Handforth's satisfaction, he saw that the driver was a liveried chauffeur, and the car was otherwise empty.

"I say!" said Handforth. "Where are you bound for?"

"Caistowe, if you're particularly anxious to know," said the man.

"Could you give us a lift?"

"I dare say I could if I had a mind to," replied the chauffeur. "But what's the idea? What are you grabbing that other fellow for?"

"Just a little private quarrel of our own," replied Handforth. "I want to take this chap back to St. Frank's—it's important. No need to go into any details, I suppose? But if you'd like to earn a quid, it's yours."

"I'm on!" said the chauffeur promptly. "St. Frank's, eh? I don't think I touch that part of the country, do I?"

"St. Frank's isn't far from Belton," replied Handforth.

"But I don't go through Belton."

"You can, can't you?" demanded Edward Oswald impatiently. "If you're going to Caistowe, it's not much out of your way. I know the direct road to Caistowe is through Bannington, but it won't take you ten minutes longer to go through Belton—and to drop us outside the school gates. And a quid—"

"Right you are, young gent!" said the chauffeur. "I'm not in any particular hurry. I've got to pick my guv'nor up at nine o'clock, so I've got plenty of time. Hop in!"

"Thanks awfully!" said Handforth. "Here's the quid now—in case I forget it."

He handed it over, and the chauffeur was naturally delighted. It wasn't often that he had the chance of earning such an easy pound note as this. Merrell had said nothing, and he continued to be silent. That thrashing which Handforth had given him had left him rather helpless. Even now, when he was beginning to recover, he felt too weak and fagged to say anything. He sulkily entered the car with Handforth and sat down at the rear, and then the two juniors went in style along the main road towards Belton. Handforth did not realise it, but he was remarkably lucky.

The chances were that no other car would come along that road for an hour or so, on such a bleak winter's night as this. Even if there were a dozen cars there was no certainty that they would be going near Belton, or that their occupants would be willing to give these schoolboys a lift. But then, Handforth was generally lucky.

Handforth was feeling very triumphant. He had got hold of Merrell, and Merrell had confessed. That was all to the good—particularly as Merrell seemed in the right humour to repeat his confession to the head

master. Marriott, after all, was a secondary consideration. He was only the tool. Merrell had been the ringleader from the very start.

At last St. Frank's was reached, the chauffeur having gone a mile out of his way in order to drop his two passengers right outside the gates of the school.

"Thanks awfully!" said Handforth, as he bundled Merrell out of the car. "You're a good 'un, old man!"

"That's all right," grinned the chauffeur.

Handforth nodded, and went through the open gateway, while the car reversed, then continued on its journey again. Handforth was relieved when he saw Nelson Lee's car standing against the Ancient House. So the other fellows had returned with Marriott. Everything was well.

A number of voices sounded from the Modern House as the two juniors came into view of the lighted windows.

"Hallo!" sang out Church. "Here's Handy!"

"By jingo, so he is!" yelled McClure.

"And he's got Merrell, too!"

"Good old Handy!"

"Buck up, Handy!" sang out De Valerie.

"Those other chaps are still with the Head, and we haven't heard anything yet. We're still anxious."

Handforth waved his hand.

"All right—leave it to me," he said. "This rebellion is over, my sons, and in less than an hour we shall be off home!"

"Hurrah!"

Handforth marched off towards Big Arch, and in two or three minutes he was standing outside the Head's house. As it happened, he came face to face with Fullwood, who had just come from Dr. Stafford's study.

"Marriott won't confess," said Fullwood, after he had got over his surprise and delight at seeing Handforth and Merrell. "He's refused to say anything, and he maintains that you're guilty, Handy."

"By George!" said Edward Oswald darkly.

"Does he? All right—we'll see about that!"

"I shall refuse to confess, too!" panted Merrell, with a sudden resolve. "You won't make me say anything in front of the Head—"

"Shan't I!" interrupted Handforth, tightening his grip on Merrell's collar. "We'll see about that, too!"



CHAPTER 18.

One Way Out of the Difficulty!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH did some quick thinking. He was not usually very quick-witted, but

just at present he seemed to be unusually acute. Fullwood's words had given him food

for thought. Marriott had refused to confess! And now Merrell had taken his cue from his companion's attitude, and was about to adopt the same policy!

Handforth realised that the position was likely to be serious.

So, after a minute of quick thought, he came to a decision. He pushed Merrell into the Head's hall, and then looked round. He knew exactly what he was going to do now, and his eyes gleamed as he spotted the heavy door of a cupboard, almost hidden under the stairs.

General Carfax's butler was standing by. He followed the direction of Handforth's gaze, but made no comment.

"What's in that cupboard?" asked Handforth abruptly.

"Nothing, sir, except brushes and brooms, and such-like articles," replied the man.

"Good!" said Handforth. "This way, Merrell!"

"What are you going to do?" demanded Merrell breathlessly.

"You'll see!"

And Merrell did see: For Handforth opened the cupboard door, pushed Merrell inside, and then slammed the door. He turned the key in the lock, and put the key in his pocket.

"He'll be safe there for a few minutes," he said. "Are you going to stay in the hall?" he added, to the butler.

"I wasn't going to, sir, but if you particularly wish me to—"

"I do!" said Handforth pointedly. "Stay in the hall, and you see that Merrell doesn't come out."

The butler did not agree, and he did not disagree—but there was something in his attitude which told Handforth that Merrell would be quite safe. Edward Oswald strode towards the Head's study, knocked, and then entered.

"By Jove!" said Nipper, as he glanced round. "It's Handy!"

"Haven't you got Merrell?" asked Pitt.

"Merrell's safe enough!" replied Handforth. "He's outside now, and he won't be able to get away, either. I understand that—"

"Handforth!" interrupted Dr. Stafford sternly. "What are you doing here?"

"Has Marriott confessed anything?"

"No, I haven't!" panted Marriott defiantly. "I'm not going to confess—because there's nothing to confess! You're not going to force me—"

"Handforth, what is the meaning of all this—" interrupted the Head angrily.

"Just a minute, sir!" put in Handforth earnestly. "I want to bring this rebellion to an end just as much as you do. We're all fed up with it—we're all anxious for the school to get back to its normal course. Will you send Marriott out of the room for two or three minutes, please?"

"I see no reason—"

"You'll see the reason, sir, after Marriott

has gone," said Handforth. "It may mean the end of the rebellion, sir."

Dr. Stafford hesitated for a moment, and then came to a decision. He touched a bell-push on his desk. A moment later the butler appeared.

"Will you be good enough to take Marriott outside?" said the Head. "Stay within call, for I may want you again very shortly."

"Very well, sir," said the butler.

Marriott went—with an uneasy feeling that the trap was about to close on him. There was something very significant in Handforth's manner—something that Marriott could not understand. The door closed, and Handforth turned quickly to the Head. The other juniors were looking at him anxiously—eagerly.

"Well, Handforth?" said the Head icily.

"I've got Merrell outside, sir—locked in your hall cupboard," said Handforth.

"Upon my soul! What on earth—"

"I've locked him there, sir, so that he can't escape," interrupted Handforth. "He has confessed everything—from first to last. He has admitted that he and Marriott dug that pit for Mr. Pycraft, and he has confessed that he told a whole lot of lies to get me into trouble."

"Did you thrash Merrell before he made these statements, Handforth?" asked the Head grimly.

"Yes, sir—I patted him properly!" replied Handforth.

"Then I am afraid that the evidence is not particularly reliable," said Dr. Stafford. "The boy has obviously made these statements in order to escape further punishment from you. I cannot possibly accept—"

"Just a minute, sir—just a minute!" broke in Handforth grimly. "Merrell has confessed, and if you don't believe me, I can suggest a scheme that will clinch the matter."

"Indeed?" said the Head.

"Yes, sir," replied Handforth. "My idea is to have Merrell in here on one side of the room. Then I'll bring Marriott in afterwards."

"What will be the good of that?" put in General Carfax impatiently. "I have no patience with this nonsense—"

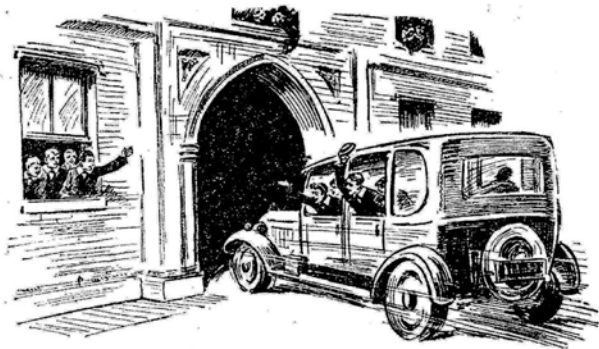
"It isn't nonsense, sir!" said Handforth, with indignation. "The whole thing is as simple as A B C. I suggest that these two rotters should be brought face to face."

"And what then, Handforth?" asked the Head, interested in spite of himself.

"Why, sir, you simply tell Marriott that Merrell has confessed everything, and see what happens. If Marriott is as innocent as you think he is, he'll be surprised, and he'll show it on his face, too. But if he's guilty, and if he knows that Merrell has confessed, he'll probably crumple up. It's only fair to apply the test, sir."

"Good man!" murmured Nipper approvingly.

Dr. Stafford was compelled to admit that Handforth's plan was a very sound one. He



A rousing cheer went up as the car moved away. For that car contained five rebels—rebels who, grim and determined, were setting out to capture the two juniors who could prove Handforth's innocence, and thus bring this barring-out to an end.

did not hesitate for more than a moment or two. Then he nodded.

"Very well, Handforth," he said. "Since you are the boy who has been expelled for this offence, it is only fair, perhaps, that this test should be applied. Go and fetch Merrell, and I will question him. Then we will proceed with your plan."



CHAPTER 19.

The Trap!

DAVID MERRELL was forced into the Head's study, and he was looking pale and shaky. But

there was a defiant gleam in his eye, too. Handforth couldn't touch him here—in the Head's presence—and Merrell had already made up his mind what to say.

"Just a minute, sir," said Handforth quickly, as the headmaster was about to speak. "You're going to question Merrell, aren't you, sir?"

"I am," said the Head.

"Then please don't, sir."

"And why not?"

"Because he'll only lie to you, sir—and complicate matters," replied Handforth. "He has confessed everything to me, and you can take my word for it. I'm not a liar, sir—and I'm not trying to put the blame of anything on to anybody else's shoulders. I'm only trying to bring the truth to light—I only want justice. Please

have Marriott brought straight in, and then go ahead as I suggested."

"You might as well do it, doctor," said General Carfax impatiently. "Marriott will soon explode this ridiculous story."

Merrell started forward.

"Please don't have Marriott in, sir!" he said desperately. "Don't tell him anything! Handforth has been lying. I haven't confessed anything!"

"Be silent, Merrell!" said the Head quietly. "If you are innocent, you have nothing whatever to fear. But I must say that your conduct is very suspicious. If you have no reason to be afraid—"

"It's all a lot of made-up lies, sir!" burst out Merrell. "Handforth forced me—"

"Be silent!" interrupted the Head. "Stand where you are, and do not utter a word until I command you. We will soon have this matter settled."

For the first time, Dr. Stafford was beginning to suspect that all was not as it had appeared. There was something very calm and relentless in Handforth's attitude. He did not look like a boy who was really guilty.

Again the Head rang his bell, and the butler appeared.

"Bring Marriott back into this room, please," said the Head.

Within a minute Marriott came in—looking more scared than ever. But there was an obstinate twist to his mouth, and it was clear that he was still defiant and sullen. He started when he saw Merrell there, while Merrell took a step forward, and tried to speak.

"Silence!" said the Head angrily. "Do

not utter a word, Merrell, until I tell you."

"Yes, sir, but——"

"Silence!" thundered the Head.

Merrell crumpled up. He slunk back, cowed.

"Now, Marriott, you have just denied all knowledge of the outrage upon Mr. Pycraft," said Dr. Stafford, fixing Marriott with his eye. "Listen carefully to what I have to say. Merrell has confessed everything——"

"He's—he's confessed, sir?" gasped Marriott frantically.

"Merrell has confessed, and——"

"I haven't!" panted Merrell.

"You fibber!" roared Handforth. "You confessed everything to me!"

"The only way for you to save yourself from expulsion, Marriott, is for you to make a clean breast of everything—here and now!" went on the headmaster grimly. "I am in no mood for delay, or for vacillation. Come, sir! What have you to say?"

"I—I—I—— It wasn't my doing, sir!" babbled Marriott, his self-control completely gone. "Merrell thought of everything! It was his scheme from the very start. He led me into it——"

"What!" shouted the Head, aghast.

"It was Merrell's doing, sir!" sobbed Marriott. "It was he who suggested that we should trap Handforth, and that we should dig the pit for Mr. Pycraft——"

"It's a lie!" roared Merrell. "Marriott thought of it first, and I——"

"Silence!" broke in Dr. Stafford, his eyes blazing. "Good heavens! Do you hear this, general?"

"By crackey. I have heard enough!" said General Carfax. "It seems that these boys are guilty, after all!"

"There can be no question of it!" said the Head. "Good gracious! Is it possible that I have misjudged Handforth so gravely—so wrongly? Marriott, tell me the truth! Tell me the full story!"

"There's nothing to tell, sir!" panted Marriott. "First of all Handforth smashed into Merrell and me because we—we ill-treated a cat."

"You admit this?"

"It wasn't anything much, sir—only a joke!" said Marriott, in desperation. "But you know what Handforth is—always ready with his beastly fists! Mr. Pycraft found us, and brought us here. Then Handforth threatened to have his own back on Mr. Pycraft, and that gave Merrell an idea."

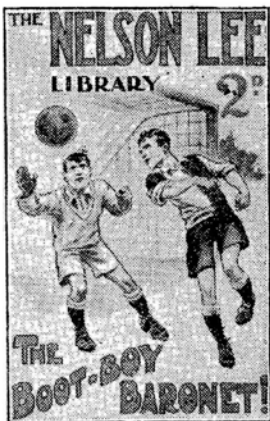
"It didn't!" roared Merrell. "You thought of it first——"

"It's not true!" shouted Marriott. "It was your idea from the very start, you rotter! I didn't want to have anything to do with it! You suggested that we should build a pit for Mr. Pycraft in the shrubbery—so that he would fall into it! And it was you who sent Handforth a note, daring him to go to the shrubbery with Church and McClure the

next morning. It was your idea to get Handforth there, so that he would be accused of the thing. And then you pinched the note afterwards, so that it couldn't be produced as evidence. It's true, sir!" went on Marriott, turning appealingly to the Head. "Merrell did everything to get his own back on Handforth. Handforth wasn't guilty at all—he didn't know anything about it. I—I didn't want to take part in it, but Merrell made me. Merrell's a bully, sir—he's always been bullying me."

Marriott broke down completely, and the whole story came pouring out—in every single detail. Dr. Malcolm Stafford, grim and grave, listened. There could be no doubt

NEXT WEDNESDAY! ~~~~~



about the truth now, and the Head was thoroughly startled. For he realised that he had been making a grave mistake from the very first. He had refused to hold an inquiry—he had refused to allow Handforth to state his case.

The realisation of this concerned the Head very deeply. For, with something of a shock, it came to him that Handforth had been justified from the very start in rebelling against a punishment that he did not deserve. The whole rebellion had started from that one incident—and thus the power was taken completely out of Dr. Stafford's hands. He knew that there was only one thing for him to do.



CHAPTER 20.

Just Like Handforth!

THE confession was abject and complete. And not only from Marriott. For David Merrell, when he saw that all hope was lost, came out with the full truth, too. Of what use to deny the story now? Marriott had blabbed, and that was fatal. Merrell knew that there might be some chance of his sentence being mitigated if he confessed everything openly.

"THE BOOT-BOY BARONET!"

Sir James Potts, Bart.—boot-boy in the Ancient House at St. Frank's!

Extraordinary? Very! But then, circumstances have forced about this "come down," and Jimmy Potts—that's how he's known at St. Frank's—accepts the position with his usual cheeriness.

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"SONS OF SPEED!"

Dick's still hurtling round the Targa Florio course, and there are thrills galore!

ORDER IN ADVANCE!

It so happened that Mr. Horace Pycraft came into the Head's study just then—just when the confession was being made. Mr. Pycraft had heard that Merrell and Marriott were on the spot, and he was rather alarmed. He wanted to know what these two boys were doing here. Incidentally, Mr. Pycraft had been expressly summoned to St. Frank's by Nelson Lee.

The Head himself was somewhat staggered. The whole thing had come to him as a shock. From the very first he had believed Handforth guilty. All the evidence had been against the leader of Study D. It had seemed utterly and absolutely conclusive. And now,

in a moment, the case was shattered. The truth meant that Handforth was innocent. By the same token, it meant that Handforth had had every excuse for refusing to be flogged on that memorable day—that day when the barring-out had started.

"Mr. Pycraft, I am amazed," said the Head. "I am glad that you have come, sir, for your appearance here is most opportune."

"I—I fail to understand, sir," said Mr. Pycraft nervously.

At the best of times Mr. Pycraft did not look prepossessing. But just now he had gone pasty, and he was so ill at ease that he could hardly stand still.

"I think you do understand, Mr. Pycraft," said the Head. "Did you not definitely accuse Handforth? 'Did you not state to me, positively, that he was the boy who built that trap for you in the shrubbery?'"

"But Handforth was there, sir—and he had threatened to have revenge on me," babbled Mr. Pycraft. "You cannot possibly imagine that—"

"I am imagining nothing, sir," said the Head. "But I do know that you jumped to a conclusion, and then made a definite accusation against a boy. I can only assume, Mr. Pycraft, that you were hasty. And I regret, exceedingly, that you should have been so unjust."

"Really, sir, I—I can do nothing but express my regret," said Mr. Pycraft. "If I did Handforth an injustice I—I am exceedingly sorry. But in all the circumstances, I cannot blame myself—"

He broke off, hardly knowing what else to say. Then he backed out of the study, and fled. Mr. Pycraft was completely confused, completely bewildered. For some little time past he had had a doubt in his mind, but he had not said anything about it. He knew, too, that he had wanted Handforth to be guilty. He had a grudge against Handforth, and he had unjustly kept silent. He realised that he would have a private interview with the Head later on, and something told him that this interview would not be particularly attractive.

As Mr. Pycraft went out of the room, all confusion, the Flying Squad grinned to themselves. None of them liked the Form-master, and they felt that he deserved the Head's polite "ticking-off."

As for Handforth, he was cool in his moment of triumph. It wasn't like the big-hearted Edward Oswald to crow over his enemies when they were down. He had won his victory now—he had proved that he had been innocent from the very start—and, naturally, the headmaster could not possibly maintain the sentence of expulsion.

"You refused to fetch Merrell and Marriott, sir," said Handforth, turning to the Head. "So we went over to Little Oxham this evening, and dragged them away from the reception. We brought them here, so

that they should confess. Well, it's all over now, and the rotters have told the truth. But, by George, it's been pretty exciting while it lasted."

The Head turned to Handforth, and his expression was full of concern.

"Why did you not tell me all this at first, Handforth?" he asked. "Why did you not—"

"I couldn't sneak, sir," interrupted Handforth. "And we gave you plenty of hints, didn't we? When things got to such a pass we asked you to fetch Merrell and Marriott, so that they could be questioned. And you refused."

"Ahem!" muttered the Head. "Yes, I certainly did refuse—and I now regret having done so. There can be no doubt that Merrell is the ringleader, and he instigated the whole wretched plot. In the circumstances, there is only one punishment—"

"Just a minute, sir," interrupted Handforth. "I don't want to be vindictive. I don't want to crow over these rotters. Don't you think it would be a good finish to all this turmoil if Merrell and Marriott were soundly flogged? There's no need to expel them, sir. They've had a pretty strong lesson, and they're not likely to go off the rails again."

"I am pleased with this attitude on your part, Handforth, but, really, I am afraid that—"

"Be sporting, sir," urged Handforth. "Why not call it quits? We've all done wrong—we've all defied the school rules. But it was only under provocation, you know. If you tell everybody that there won't be any punishments, I'll go back to the Ancient House and in less than ten minutes the rebellion will be over and almost forgotten. And I suggest that these two rotters should just be flogged. What do you say, sir?"

The Head pursed his lips.

"One moment, Handforth," he said quietly. "You are really an extraordinary boy. I am indeed sorry that I misjudged you so gravely. I hope you will forgive me for accusing you so unjustly."

"That's all right, sir. I've forgotten all about it," laughed Handforth. "We're all liable to make mistakes, aren't we?"

The Head turned aside, and held a brief consultation with General Carfax. This latter gentleman was looking quite startled. He had come to St. Frank's for the very purpose of bringing the rebellion to an end, and he was now finding that the rebellion had been justified. The strength was completely taken away from him. And, when all was said and done, there was only one way out of all this trouble.

"Merrell! Marriott!" said the Head, turning back to these two wretched juniors. "In consideration of Handforth's good-natured suggestion, I am inclined to save you from the disgrace of expulsion. You

will be soundly flogged. And you must consider yourselves extremely lucky to get off so lightly. Your half-holidays will be cancelled for the whole of next term, and you will both be confined to gates. I shall have a word with your Housemaster, and I shall see that you are both given extra work."

And that, as Nipper remarked, was that.



CHAPTER 21.

The Good News!

THE Head, to tell the truth, was somewhat confused. He was well aware of the fact that he did not show up in a particularly favourable light over this affair. He had made a grave mistake—mainly owing to the rash accusation of Mr. Pycraft.

But for Handforth's intervention, the Head, now that he knew the real facts of the case, would certainly have expelled Merrell and Marriott for their despicable caddishness.

The Head realised, too, that there was only one thing to be done now as regards the juniors who had been taking part in the barring-out.

On top of all his other emotions, Dr. Stafford was aware of a sense of great relief. He was heartily glad that the affair had been cleared up. The deadlock was at an end. The rebellion was over, and the fact that the rebels had won the victory did not cause Dr. Stafford much pain. For he knew that they had been justified. Nothing, of course, could excuse the general lawlessness that had been recently going on. But it would be better, in view of the circumstances, to wink his eye at those things. If the Junior School was punished for its recent behaviour, there would be an uproar—perhaps, a continuation of the barring-out—and that was not to be thought of. It would be far better to have complete peace.

Nipper and Handforth and the other members of the Flying Squad, watching the Head, almost guessed what was passing in his mind. They were expecting the Head to make a statement to them, and thus they were rather surprised when Dr. Stafford walked abruptly towards the door.

"Boys, come with me," he said briskly.

"What are you going to do, sir?" asked Handforth.

"You will see in a very short time, Handforth," replied the Head gently. "Please excuse me, General Carfax—there is a duty that I must perform at once!"

"Don't mention it, sir," said the general. "If it is your intention to bring this rebellion to an end, you have my full approval. Yes, by gad, you have my full sanction. There has been enough of this nonsense. Let it be over and done with."

Dr. Stafford led the way outside, and he did not say anything as he crossed Inner Court, with his gown waving in the wind. Nipper, Fullwood, Handforth and the other juniors followed him.

Complete silence reigned in the Ancient House. Word had already gone round that Merrell and Marriott had confessed. Somebody had got to know it, and it had passed from mouth to mouth with lightning-like rapidity. The rebels were breathless—waiting. They hardly knew what to expect. They all felt that the barring-out was practically at an end.

The Head did not come to a halt until he had arrived opposite the Ancient House, and then, looking up, he saw that every lighted window was filled with eager faces.

There was a tense silence.

"Handforth, come here!" said the Head quietly.

Although he spoke in normal tones, his voice could be heard by all. Handforth went to the Head's side, and stood there.

"Boys, I have come here to tell you that Handforth is not only pardoned, but he is reinstated to his——"

"Hurrah!"

The cheer broke out in spite of the school's determination to keep quiet.

"Good old Handy!"

"Perhaps I am wrong in saying that Handforth is pardoned," continued the headmaster. "Since he has done no actual wrong—excluding, of course, his activity in regard to the rebellion—he cannot really be pardoned. He is completely exonerated, and from this moment he is at liberty to take up his old position in the school. He will not be punished in any way, and I exceedingly regret the injustice that was done to him!"

"Oh, I say, sir!" said Handforth. "No need to——"

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for the Head!"

"Good old Handy!"

"The barring-out's over at last—and we've won the day!"

"Hurrah!"

"Cheese it, you fatheads!" roared Handforth. "There's no need to crow, is there? We've won, and let's be content with that! The Head's a brick, and I think we ought to respect him by keeping quiet."

"Hear, hear!"

"Give the Head another cheer!"

"Wait a minute!" roared Handforth.

"What about Mr. Lee? If it hadn't been for Mr. Lee, the rebellion would still be going on——"

"Yes, rather! Let's give three cheers for Mr. Lee!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

Nelson Lee himself had arrived by this time, and he was happy in the knowledge that the barring-out was definitely over



CHAPTER 22.

Victory for the Rebels

IT was a complete triumph for Edward Oswald Handforth.

Nobody knew, of course, what hap-

pened to Mr. Horace Pycraft. But it could be readily imagined that Mr. Pycraft went "through the mill" properly with Dr. Stafford that night. For nothing could alter the fact that Mr. Pycraft had started the whole barring-out by reason of his unjust accusation of Handforth. It was quite true that Mr. Pycraft had acted in good faith, but it was equally true that Mr. Pycraft had acted hastily and without a true sense of his responsible position. He had, in fact, allowed personal animosity to guide him.

"Good old Handy!" said Nipper, clapping Handforth on the back. "That was a great scheme of yours to bring Merrell and Marriott face to face, and to make Marriott confess. How the dickens did you come to think of it?"

"You funny ass!" frowned Handforth. "I'm always full of big ideas. The trouble is, you fellows won't give me any credit. But this time I was right, eh? I've been exonerated, and none of you chaps are in for any punishment. And Merrell and Marriott haven't even been sacked."

"Well, let's forget all about it!" added Handforth. "We've won the day, and the whole business is now cleared up. A barring-out is all very well, but you're inclined to get fed-up with it if it lasts too long."

"And so say all of us!" murmured McClure. "Don't you think we ought to have a big feed to celebrate the occasion?"

"No!" said Handforth promptly.

"Why not?"

"Because we don't want to make any big display of our victory," replied Handforth. "The great idea is to carry on in the same old way—without embarrassing the Head."

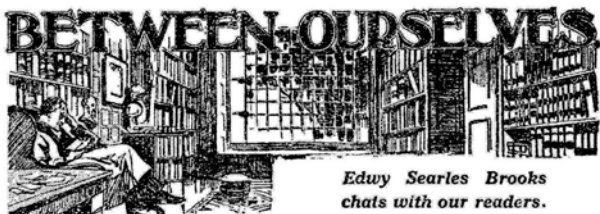
And all the other fellows in the Junior School agreed.

After all the recent strife and stress, good-will had come to St. Frank's again, and it soon became a kind of unwritten law that not a word of the barring-out should be spoken. It was over. The juniors had won the day, and they were thankful enough to be the victors, without embarrassing the headmaster by "rubbing it in."

And so the Junior School went home for the remainder of the holidays—with the certainty that on their return all would be "as you were."

THE END.

(Well, that's the end of that fine series, lads, and another new one will be starting next week. The opening story is entitled "The Boot-boy Baronet!"—and it's a real good 'un!)



Edwy Searles Brooks
chats with our readers.

NOTE.—If any reader writes to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed: EDWY SEARLES BROOKS c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY The Plectway House, Farringdon Street, LONDON, E.C.A. Every letter will have my personal attention. Letters of very special merit will be distinguished by a star (*) against the sender's name. My photo exchange offer is still open; my autographed photo for yours—but yours first, please.—E.S.B.

LAST week I asked readers writing me to sign their full Christian name at the end of their letter.

Here's one other little point I would like you to observe, please. You send me lots of charming letters, full of sincere sentiments. Some of the latter I would often like to quote, for the benefit of others, and because I think they would genuinely interest the majority of the other readers. But such quotations always carry infinitely more weight if I am able to attach the name and address of the writer. So I would very much like all of you to indicate in a postscript whether or not I have your permission to reproduce any of your remarks. I have, of course, made it an invariable rule never to print anybody's name and address without express permission has been given. At the same time, I do like to have this sanction, in case I wish to avail myself of it.

Sidney W. Le Roux* (Kingwilliamstown, S.A.), Norman R. Perkins (Abbotsford, Melbourne), W. Harry Knox (Durban, Natal), Walter Boylson* (Subiaco, W. Australia), Sidney Waite* (Highbury, N.S.), "The Green Archer" (Toronto), Howard Rawlings (Toronto), B. Le Cocq* (Alderney), J. Essex Coney (Kidderminster), Joseph Frackit (Montreal).

Micky E. Willmott (Windsor), Sydney H. Dyson (Cambridge), Michael J. Nolan (Stroudon, Hants), Clive Riddell (Middleton-St. George), "Cherchez la Femme" (Ilford), A. R. Bennett (Toronto), Terence Sullivan* (Tufnell Park), Antony A. Harrington-Weeks (Westminster, S.W.1).

You're quite right—Laurence S. Elliott (Butt Ham)—and I hereby contradict the rumour, given rise to by Eric W. Barber, of Peterborough (in his advertisement under "Correspondents Wanted," in New Series No. 70 of Our Paper, dated September 3rd, 1927) that the St. Frank's fellows have ever

been on a voyage to the moon. They have not. The confusion has probably arisen owing to a story of mine (written many years ago, under my *nom de plume* of "Robert W. Comrade"), entitled, "In Trackless Space." This yarn appeared in Old Series No. 504 of "The Boys' Friend Library." But, as I wrote this tale before St. Frank's College had even been thought of, it will now be quite clear to everybody that it is an entirely independent story, and that it has no connection whatever with St. Frank's and its characters—beyond, of course, having been written by the same chump.

Lots of you are asking me what the stars are for, after the names, in the acknowledgments. And many of you have jumped to the conclusion that they are a sort of return for praise of my work. Well, you're jolly well right off the mark! A fat lot of good praise would be if it was bribed out of you like that! No, as a matter of fact, stars are often given for just the opposite—adverse criticism—especially when I have deserved it. For a grumble is often more helpful than a pat on the back. But stars are also given for general excellence in the letters—in subject matter, penmanship, typewriting, neatness, or what not. Now and again—as in the case of Terence Sullivan—the stars are given for heroism as much as anything else. For I call anyone a hero (or heroine) who makes a resolve to write to me *every week*, and sticks to it!

A good many of you have made this resolve, but have *not* stuck to it. But I have, at any rate, one hero and one heroine among my correspondents. These are—Terence Sullivan (Tufnell Park), and Gladys Lake (South Norwood). Every week, without fail, a letter rolls in from each of these two. And I've got so used to them now that I should miss them sorely if ever they failed to arrive. So I'm hoping against hope that they never will fail to turn up. Just at present Terence

Sullivan is on his way to Australia, for a second visit. But I'm quite sure he's writing me his weekly letter, and that he'll post them to me all together as soon as he lands Down Under.

Now, there's an example—two examples, in fact—for you all! What about adding to my list of regular weekly correspondents? I can assure you I shall welcome every addition with open arms. But I warn you that it won't be easy! On the contrary, it'll be frightfully hard—especially as I can only promise to let you have a very occasional letter in return. But I know there *must* be other heroes and heroines among my readers. So I hope some of them will have a shot at it—and come through with flying colours. Even if the letters are almost entirely autobiographical, they will be none the less welcome to me on that account—perhaps more so. And they'll join those of Terence Sullivan and Gladys Lake in the special file which I keep for regular weekly correspondents, and they'll be read and re-read—and perpetually treasured. Now I've got to wait patiently until this appears to discover what amount of heroism there is about! Somehow, I've got a feeling that I shan't be disappointed. Anyhow, I've a notion there'll be a good few tryers. But how many of you will stay the course? As I told you before, it will be unbelievably hard—in fact, a real test of heroism.

Frank Williams (Hereford), "A 45-Year-Old Reader" (Hackney), H. Elvin (Immingham), R. Thorpe Long (Ilford), Norman F. Hoddell (Enfield), Gerda Lowenadler (Eastbourne), Gladys Howard* (Beckenham).

The reforming of Ralph Leslie Fullwood—J. H. Bulmer* (Durham)—was related in the South Seas Series in 1925—commencing with "Adventure Bound" (No. 529, dated July 25th), and terminating with "The Terror of the Pacific" (No. 536, dated September 12th). As to your idea that a "History of St. Frank's" should be compiled, and that it should appear in place of the present serial story at the end of the Old Paper, I am afraid it would be a very laborious and expensive undertaking. And if, as you suggest, it should include titles and plots of every St. Frank's story which has appeared—and full details of all characters and places which have been named in those hundreds of tales—it would also be a work of time. Remember how long that Sectional Map has been taking. Well, this would be a longer job still—although the research work entailed for the one could be utilised to a great extent for the other. But the great thing is: Do the majority of you readers want such a history? Do the bulk of you even want that Sectional Map which is still "going through the mill"? If an overwhelming majority of you *do* want these things, well then, it's up to you to clamour for them, in season and out of season, until you get them. And,

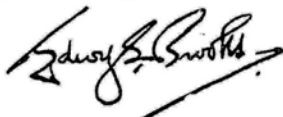
if the demand is large enough, and insistent enough, I shouldn't be at all surprised if, sooner or later, your wish is granted.

But, don't forget, you'd have to pay for it—either by the sacrifice of the serial story instalment, or of this chat between ourselves, or in another way. The pages of the Old Paper, large though they now are, will only hold a certain amount, you know. On the other hand, everybody concerned in the production of Our Paper is exceedingly anxious that that certain amount should embrace only such items as are most acceptable to the vast majority of you readers. The great job is to be sure, without a shadow of a doubt, what those items are. That once settled, the rest would be comparatively plain sailing.

A. C. Cleeve* (Sculthorpe (Errington, B.C.)), Gerda Lowenadler* (Wimbledon), Walter Tate (Southampton), Laurence S. Elliott (East Ham), John Franklin, Jr.* (Manchester), H. King (Liverpool), Myer Braverman (Runcorn), Chas. Irvine Smith (Edinburgh), William A. Lester* (Walsall), A. G. Jennings* (Ipswich).

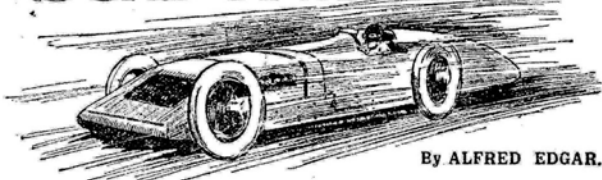
You're an enthusiast—R. Robinson**** (Haringay)—if ever there was one! You tell me that you introduced the Old Paper at the Finsbury Branch of Pitman's School, with the result that 150 readers were gained for it. And, now that you've left school, you've already made readers of six of your work-mates. Any more evidence of your enthusiasm? Yes. When on your holidays in Suffolk, you walked six miles each way, every Wednesday, in order to secure your copy of the Old Paper. Well, I'm blessed if you don't deserve four stars (a record, I think)—and because I believe your letter was written in all sincerity, I've given 'em to you. But if, by any chance, you've been writing me fairy tales, then I hope your conscience will prick you. As to your query, I'm still a young man, thank goodness. Why not exchange photographs?

If the six back numbers you mention—G. M. Joslin (Palmer's Green)—are not out of print, you should have no difficulty in obtaining them if you place an order for them with your newsagent in the usual way. If you are a League member, a free advertisement in the "Correspondents Wanted" Column will invariably obtain you any out-of-print back numbers from other readers. If you're not a League member, don't forget it's as easy as A B C to join, and that the benefits are many.



HIS AMBITION REALISED! It's always been Dick Barry's ambition to drive a racing car. He gets his chance at last when he pilots one of the Kent machines in the Targa Florio—the toughest and most dangerous race in the world!

SONS OF SPEED!



By **ALFRED EDGAR.**

HOW THE STORY STARTED—

DICK BARRY'S greatest ambition is to be a racing-car driver. He is a cheery, iron-nerved boy, and he acts as mechanic to his brother—

BIG BILL BARRY, star driver for Kent cars, which are owned by—

“**PROFESSOR**” **KENT.** Bill's greatest rival on the racing track is—

MARK LYNCH, who drives the Jace Eight racers. Big Bill and Lynch dislike one another, and Lynch never loses an opportunity of playing a dirty trick on Bill if he thinks it will make Bill lose a race. The professor has designed a wonderful machine known as the Kent Flyer.

(Now read on.)

planned to do two hundred and fifty miles an hour and break all speed records. Lynch's firm have built in opposition a machine called the Giant Jace Eight; on its trials it proves a failure, while the Kent Flyer is a great success. In order to baulk the professor and Bill, Lynch sets fire to the Flyer, severely damaging it. The car has to go into the repair shops, while Dick and Bill travel with the team of Kent racing machines to take part in the Targa Florio—the world's most dangerous race. An hour before the start, one of the Kent drivers doesn't turn up, and Bill says to Dick: “I want you to drive his car in the race!”

The Start!

“**I WANT** you to drive in the race!”

Dick stared at his brother as Bill spoke, the cablegram crumpled in his fist. Dick could feel his heart thumping, and there came a queer, thrilling little sensation somewhere inside him. So this was why Bill had let him handle a car over the dangerous circuit during practice! The big fellow had expected that Giovanni wouldn't turn up to drive, and he had meant all the time that Dick should take his place.

Dick turned to look at Number Three car. It stood at the back of the white-washed building, neglected and forlorn in the shadow, yet with power and speed in its every line. And he was being given the chance to take that out on the sun-scorched circuit, to hurl it round fierce corners and show its mettle against the world's best cars and finest drivers!

Out by the grandstands he could hear

machines being assembled for the start, their exhausts spanging and chattering through the rising, excited roar of the watching crowd. In a little while, he'd be in the thick of all that!

“Well, what about it, young 'un—are you game?” Bill's gruff voice jerked Dick back. He swallowed something in his throat, then he said:

“You bet! All right, Bill, I'll take her!” He tried to make his tone off-handed, but he knew that his voice was quivering.

He turned towards the machine and strolled off. As he went, Bill called:

“Hurst! Dick's taking Number Three! You'll ride with him!”

“Right you are!” yelled a cheerful voice, and the mechanic came up to the machine just as Dick reached it.

Hurst was a small, wizened-faced, little man who'd been in the game all his life. He was as lean and as brown and as dried-up as a walnut husk. But he was

chock-full of energy. He would have been a fine driver, but for the fact that he hadn't got the build and the beef to stand the strain of holding a hurtling car to the road.

As Dick reached the car, Hurst held out a tool-scarred, oily fist.

"Good luck to you!" he said, as Dick gripped his hand. "It's your first time at the wheel, ain't it? You can count on me. We'll show 'em something, boy! We'll give 'em our dust!"

His wrinkled, tanned face twisted in a grin, but his grey eyes narrowed as he looked at Dick, then he nodded as though to himself. He could see that Dick had lost some of his normal colour, but that made the square cut of his chin stand out the more, while his eyes had a fighting light in them.

Joey Hurst had seen famous drivers pallid and shaky while they were waiting for the start of a race; he'd seen their fingers trembling so that they could barely buckle a bonnet-strap. It wasn't because they were scared; it was just nervous tension. The moment that the race began they became changed men—cool and ready for the risks they must run.

So it was nothing against Dick that he was all ashake now, and he got a grip of himself as they became busy over the car. There wasn't much to do; it had already been prepared for the missing Italian driver. The machine was exactly the same as the one that Dick had driven in practice, so he had nothing fresh to learn about it.

Between them they went over the car, Hurst with a couple of spanners in his fist, in case he saw a nut that needed tightening. He spent a couple of minutes making certain that the two spare wheels clamped atop the tail of the machine were firmly in place, then he tried the spark gaps of the plug-points in the holder under the engine cover.

He made a score of little preparations like this—stock devices of a race-wise mechanic. Then he disappeared and came back with a couple of broad, soft, wrist-straps.

"Let's shove these on you," he said. "They'll help to steady your wrists where the road's rough. You've got a spring-spoked wheel, but you may as well have these as well." He buckled them on, and Dick was conscious of the support they gave him.

Out at the front of the building, Bill now had his car roaring. Number Two was there, with its driver climbing into

his seat, and his mechanic dropping down beside him.

"Might as well get ours out," said Dick, and the two of them pushed the car to the open. Hurst started her up, and while they were waiting for the engine to get warm, the other two cars surged away. Sight of them going made Dick want to be with them, but he restrained himself until Hurst leisurely climbed aboard and settled down.

Dick sent the car down the slope to the crowded road. A couple of gaily-uniformed soldiers prodded pedestrians with the butts of their rifles to clear them out of the way, then the Kent-racer was trundling along the road, traffic clearing as people heard the thunder of the powerful exhaust. Around a corner they were confronted by a barrier which soldiers moved, then Dick was on the course, rolling towards the grandstands and the starting-line.

Over to the right was a sort of siding, with the replenishment pits running along its length. Dick ran the car to the front of the Kent pit, stopped, and hopped out. Hurst helped to see that the petrol tank was loaded to the brim, that oil and water were O.K. After that there was nothing to do until the cars were marshalled on the starting-line.

There were cars at every pit. He could see other drivers laughing and joking, a few stood quietly by their machines, one or two were busy on their engines. Track stewards and marshals flitted about, yelling and waving their arms. Everywhere was noise and colour and thrilling excitement, with the early morning Sicilian sun scorching down.

Then Dick saw Mark Lynch. The man was strolling back to his car, and he stopped as, coming level with the Kent machines, he saw Dick ease himself off the side of No. 3, where he had been leaning. One quick glance Lynch gave at the trio of cars, and his dark, gleaming eyes flashed a little as he stepped towards Dick.

"You driving?" he snarled.

"Yes," said Dick.

Lynch regarded him for a moment or so, then looked past Dick to where Big Bill was by the pit-plank, eyeing him quietly. It was the first time Dick had seen the rival speedman since Bill had knocked him flat on his back at Sea-combe, and, from the look which flashed into Lynch's eyes, he hadn't forgotten it.

"Driving—eh?" A thin smile twisted his lips. "Then look out for yourself!" And he strode away.

It wasn't what Lynch said so much as the cold-blooded, menacing tone in which he spoke. Dick's fists bunched at the sound of them, and he stood watching the man as he moved on.

"If that fellow pins you on a corner, give him the road!" It was Bill who spoke as he tapped Dick on the shoulder. "Don't take chances with him, young 'un!"

Dick nodded. He knew that Lynch wouldn't be above running him off the road if opportunity offered. But he forgot all about the man as cars began to leave the pits for the starting-line. He and Hurst started Number Three up, then Dick drove the racer away from the pit.

Half a dozen marshals grabbed Dick's machine as it neared the white starting-line painted across the path; they rolled it until the front wheels were just touching the mark, then moved to position another car.

With the engine roaring, Dick sat looking about him. The stands—short and squat buildings—had flags hanging from every possible point, and banks of pinky-white faces marked the spectators. There was wooden palisading on either side of the road, and crowds were packed behind it. Little groups hung from windows of white and yellow buildings, or had clambered on to the roofs.

One building had been turned into a cross between a score-board and an observation post for officials. Everywhere were glaring, foreign-looking advertisements in Italian or French. Soldiers with slung rifles guarded every opening in the fencing, arguing furiously with everyone who tried to get on to the course.

Dick saw Bill in his car over to his right, and the big fellow grinned across to him. Dick grinned back. Beyond his brother he sighted Lynch, staring straight ahead of him at the row of cars in front.

On the road, right in the middle and before the three ranks of racing cars, was a rakish-looking machine. This car would lead them when the starter dropped his flag; it would go for half a mile up the road, then pull to the side as the cars crossed a line drawn there. This line formed the actual start, and when the leading car crossed it, the others would be free to go ahead.

A "rolling start" this was called, and it meant that all the speed machines would be doing a mile a minute when they actually jumped into the race.

"Two minutes to go!" Hurst yelled the words in Dick's ear.

Two minutes more—and he'd be in it!

Again that quivery sensation came inside him. He felt that the palms of his hands were warm and wet. His mouth went dry and his tongue seemed to become stiff and hot.

The thunderous roar of rival cars was lifting and swelling all about him now, a storm of shattering sound.

"One minute!" Hurst roared the words as he glanced at his wrist-watch. Dick revved up the engine, waited a few seconds, then slipped into bottom gear.

"No need to rush it—got to keep in position until the starter's car gets out o' the way!" Hurst yelled, and Dick steadied himself.

Out ahead, he saw the red starting-flag slash down. As it dropped, the whole line of cars surged steadily forward, with the leading machine sweeping ahead.

Dick changed up. Speed was increasing now, and his nervousness was going. He marked the distance of the black and white posts set either side of the actual starting-line. In front of him was a gap between two blue Bugattis; he'd try and slip through there when they did go away!

He slid into top gear. They were almost up to the posts. The starter's car was beginning to draw into the side. Over the back a man was leaning with a white flag. The flag dropped, the car scuttled off the road like a scared rabbit, as, with a smashing roar, the whole line of machines leaped forward.

Dick gave his Kent full throttle, and she streaked between the two blue machines in front of him. For an instant they seemed to hold level.

A moment after and he was past them, with the white road striking ahead of him.

The race was on!

Daredevil Dick!

ALMOST at Dick's right elbow, there suddenly woke a screaming roar, and, as though he were standing still, Big Bill rocked by with Lynch on his other side. Its bonnet nosing between the jerking tails of the two cars, there came a white, German Mercedes, crashing over the road with all the power of its mighty engine.

"Let 'er go—let 'er go!" Hurst yelled the words above the roar of Dick's machine. "Sit on their tails if you can!"

Dick had to let them go, because they were in front ere he realised it. He dropped behind the white Mercedes, and

on the instant a shower of grit and fine stones slammed to his radiator and slashed across his tiny, grid-guarded wind-screen.

He put his foot hard down now. Through the dust-cloud he could see Bill and Lynch struggling for the lead. Then the road swept upwards towards the mountains, and he got a glimpse of the first corner, still half a mile ahead.

Before he expected it, the three cars in front braked and went round the turn, with dust streaking out from their skidding wheels. He trod on his own brake-pedal, pulling the car wide. He was half-way round the corner when, like a blue comet, a low-built Delage cut inside him and roared in front, sliding half-across the road ere the driver pulled it

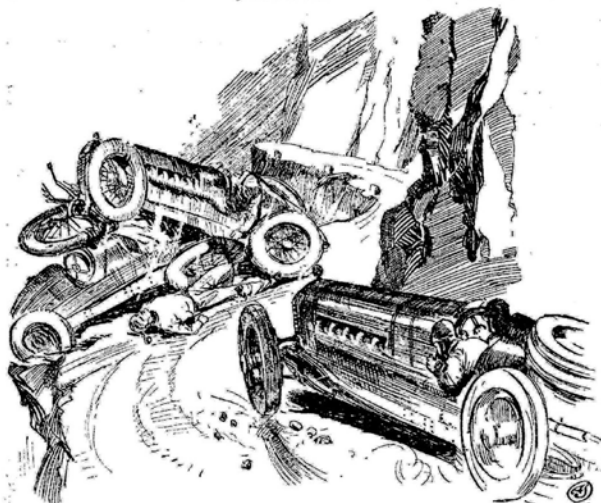
in front of him now, and three of them had taken the lead because of his bad cornering.

He gritted his teeth. At his side, Hurst, hunched in his seat, caught his expression, and reached up.

"You're all right!" he yelled. "Don't worry! Take it easy!"

Good old Hurst! But Dick wasn't going to take it easy. He heard another car challenging him for the next bend as the road grew even steeper. Slick, clean as a whistle, Dick changed to second and went into the turn with his engine screaming.

The other car dropped back. He changed up, and found himself at the tail of one of the two blue cars that had



Dick hurried round the bend—then was braking fiercely as he saw the tangled wreckage that blocked the course. Two cars lay nose to nose across the road and, with a gasp of horror, Dick saw that one was Bill's machine! Bill himself sagged half out of the cockpit, his face covered with blood!

straight and then went lurching on.

Dick realised that he'd have to corner faster than that. He changed down, losing speed—because he should have done this before. He felt Hurst double-patting his shoulder in a signal that somebody wanted to pass, and the two Bugattis screeched by him. There were six cars

just passed him. It was three hundred yards to the next corner. Dick gave the Kent all she'd got, and crawled along the length of the other machine.

He saw the driver watching him from the tail of his eye as they hurtled level for the corner. For one awful moment Dick thought that they were going to

take it together—and on the outside of the turn was a drop that went down to a valley in a tumbled slope of boulders and coarse bushes. The road was barely wide enough for the two of them! If he skidded—

He saw the Bugatti driver lift his right hand from the wheel, and suddenly make a snatching motion for Dick to go ahead. He was giving him the corner.

"Good sport, that driver!" thought Dick, as the Bugatti braked and dropped behind. He eased the pace of the Kent car a little, then they were rocking round.

They were fairly on the mountain now, and the road ran like a shelf cut along the side of it, with the slope on the outside dropping to the depths of a valley.

Along the shelf he could see cars strung out in a line—hurtling specks through whirling dust-clouds. He wondered if Bill was in the lead.

The road still climbed—up—up, with bend after bend. He came to a place where the road was masked by dust as though by a fog, and, with startling suddenness, the second blue Bugatti seemed to leap back at him. He trod on the brake-pedal and saw the other car suddenly swing to right angles for a hair-pin bend which Dick had forgotten was there.

He stood on the brake-pedal with all his strength, slinging the steering-wheel over. The tail of the car slashed round. He heard Hurst shout, and it seemed as though the rear wheels of the machine must strike the rocky wall on the outside of the turn—but they didn't.

At the right moment, Dick gave the engine full throttle. The threshing wheels plucked the car from danger, skidded her again, and then flung her to where the road straightened, shooting Dick past the Bugatti.

He had a glimpse of the French machine's glittering instrument-board, of the driver—dust on his crash helmet and on his face—then the Bugatti dropped behind. Dick looked ahead and saw only a sinking dust-haze. That meant that the other machines must be well ahead.

The road dipped down and turned outwards along a bulge of the mountain. Dick got a glimpse of the circuit which he had already passed over.

Cars were strung out on it like little black beetles, each with its trail of dust as they scuttled madly after him. Two, he saw, were passing one another, and the outer car looked as though its off wheels must be skimming the edge of the drop.

The route ahead suddenly opened up before him as he reached a bit of road that was edged by a precipice. A valley stretched below, its end blued by the distance. He could see a river threading through it, with a cluster of little houses on one bank.

Mountain peaks towered up into the air beyond, rocky and grim, then came another turn in the road, and—

"Inside!" The mad, hoarse shout came from Hurst's lips as they saw what was in front of them.

It was the squat, white Mercedes slithering half sideways on the road, with the tattered remnants of a burst tyre slashing out from one rear wheel. The car was leaping and pounding, and Dick could see the lamed wheel wobbling madly.

On the rocky bank there was a long mark, scored by the wheel when the car skidded from the burst, and even as he saw this the damaged wheel broke from its axle.

Dick saw the tail of the car cant down, dust rising like thick smoke as it slashed over the road, while the front of the machine pitched round—full in the path of the Kent racer!

The Smash!

DICK had only an instant in which to do anything. He saw the Mercedes slithering over the road out of control. To pull inside meant that he must hit it!

He twisted the steering-wheel, slammed the throttle wide, and sent the Kent full for the edge of the road and the yawning precipice beyond. He straightened up, with the outside wheels slamming loose earth into the depths. For one moment he thought that they were over, while the screaming tail of the Mercedes gouged the road at his side, almost touching the Kent car.

Then he was past, with the German machine slithering on behind them in mad sweeps, and Hurst looking back to watch. The mechanic saw the two blue Bugattis appear around the bend, both of them stopping like magic as the white machine slithered to a halt and stopped with one front wheel tilting over the drop, both driver and mechanic leaping out from it ere the earth crumbled and the car went over and downwards.

As it fell, a mighty trail of rocks and stones and dirt swept up behind, then the

machine was tumbling madly downwards—a white, smashing thing, with a plume of smoke rising on the air. The whole scene was blotted out as Dick took another bend.

"Narrow squeak!" he gasped. "Those chaps all right?"

"They hopped out! Car's gone over!" Hurst yelled.

As he drove onwards, Dick carried in his mind a picture of the wrecked car as he had seen it. Suppose that one of his tyres should burst? Suppose that the Mercedes had skidded the other way instead of against the rocky wall? They'd have been carried right over, without a chance to save themselves.

He tried to shut the thought out of his mind, and it was blotted away as the road began to creep up another mountain-side. At the top, he saw a pennant flying from a pole, and recognised the place as one of the Kent replenishment stations.

They had three of them on the course, besides the one by the grandstands. They had to be there, because the circuit was sixty-seven miles round; if a Kent car broke down, one of these stations could not be very far from it, ready to lend help. Other racing machines also had similar depots.

Dick saw the mechanics there standing up to wave and yell him on. Next moment they had vanished as the Kent machine surged onwards.

Another bend loomed in front, and Dick braked to take it. Perhaps he was still thinking of the smash which had taken place only a little while previously. Perhaps it had unnerved him slightly. Anyway, he took the bend rather badly. The Kent machine skidded precipitately, and Dick had to fight with the wheel desperately to right the racer. Hurst, who probably understood the boy's feelings, grinned encouragingly as the machine shot off again.

Now the first madness of the race had passed, and Dick began to settle down. He became conscious that heavy, hot fumes were flying back from the engine, through the foot-grid. He felt the heat of the burning sun on the back of his neck and on his hands. The car went leaping and bucking and bumping horribly over every inequality in the road, bringing bruises to his back and shoulders.

They were far out on the circuit now, where spectators were few. The dust haze on the road in front was hardly discernible, proving that Bill and Lynch and the Delage must be a long way ahead. Continually, Hurst kept watch behind,

looking to see if other cars were catching them up.

Now and again he saw the two Bugattis, and they seemed to be leading a regular string of cars, packed closely together. Hurst hoped that Dick would keep in front of them, because if that pack caught them up there would be some tricky driving when the machines tried to get past.

Hurst yelled the information to Dick, who heard it faintly above the roaring of the supercharged engine. He nodded understandingly, and immediately pressed his foot down harder on the accelerator. The car surged forward with renewed speed.

They came to a place where the mountain seemed to drop away, and for two miles they got a beautiful, undulating stretch of straight road, where the engine roared into a song of speed, and the exhaust crashed exultant defiance to the machines behind. Hurst grinned as he watched the revolution counter, judging from it that the car was notching above a hundred miles an hour. Dick wasn't afraid to put his foot down!

The straight ended in a gloomy, rock-walled gorge, out of which it climbed to a mountain ledge—the wildest and most distant part of the circuit.

At the end, the road seemed to double back on itself. Dick steadied the car, flung it round the blind bend, cleared the turn—then stamped on the foot-brake and snatched on the hand-brake with all his strength.

The brake-shoes screeched on the drums, and the locked wheels drew great, black skid-marks on the white road as the machine came to a shuddering, grinding stop—one yard from tangled wreckage that blocked the course.

Two cars lay nose to nose across the road—smothered with dust and their body-shells battered and torn. One was the low, blue Delage, its crew crumpled figures that were flung clear of the wreck. The other car was Bill's machine!

The mechanic lay prone on the side of the track. Bill sagged half out of the cockpit in the dust of the road, blood on his face, and one hand still gripping the wheel.

And in the distance was a black blotch marking Lynch on his Ince Eight, roaring away from the scene of the smash!

(What's going to happen now? It looks as if Bill's out of the race, and you can bet your life that Dick will do his utmost to catch up with Lynch and beat him. Can he do it? Next week's exciting instalment will tell you, boys!)

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 88.

SECTION

A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with the Membership Number assigned to me, and Membership Badge.

SECTION

B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.), hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me..... (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION

C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer)..... to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."

(FULL NAME).....

(ADDRESS).....

INSTRUCTIONS.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms leave in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. The second form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together, and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4. **Member Applying for Bronze Medal:** It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms, bearing the same number, are needed. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of

the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver or gold medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when the League reaches the required number of members they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver or gold one, according to the number of introductions with which they are credited.

These Application Forms can be posted for £d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

A FEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE.

You can write to fellow members living at home or in the most distant outposts of the Empire.

You are offered free advice on choosing a trade or calling, and on emigration to the colonies and dependencies.

If you want to form a sports or social club, you can do so amongst local members of the League.

You are offered free hints on holidays, whether walking, biking or camping.

You can qualify for the various awards by promoting the growth of the League.

If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.



Our Weekly Pow-Wow

By
The Editor.

A Wail About the Wheel.

A reader who calls himself a cycling chum writes from Somerset about biking in winter. This sport, he says, is the biggest mistake you can imagine. He ought to know, for he tried it, and came a nasty cropper on a mud slide called a lane. The trouble was caused by a cabbage which had rolled off a market cart and lay in the track of the unwary wheelman.

For all that, I consider the writer is going too far when he says winter cycling is N.G. True, a half-frozen pot-hole, meanly disguised to look solid, may land you in a mess with that frayed feeling as you set about collecting the spokes, but this is all in the game, after all.

Poetry.

I have put in that word to avoid mistakes.

*There was a young fellow called Hundy,
Whose skating was perfectly dandy.*

But he once met his fate,

With the trickiest "B,"

And, thanks to the spill, he walks bandy.

Thanks, too, to Jimmy, of Smethwick, for his graceful rhyme.

All Square.

They have just dug up a whole collection of square coins dating back to the days of mulberry doublets and swashbuckling swordsmen. This is nothing extraordinary. Square coins may have been clumsy, but I am sure they represented many a square deal. This fashion in money had one special advantage. The last coin you have got and which you want to pay the conductor can't, for the life of it, roll away when you drop it.

Perhaps the Master of the Mint will consider the advisability of introducing a square coinage. That will queer the mean dodge of a sixpence which travels under a piece of furniture and refuses to come out.

The Riddle of the Fiddle.

A highly interesting letter reaches me from South Africa about a violin which has a sentence in Latin inside. This legend shows that the instrument was made at Cremona in the year 1722 by the famous violin maker, Antonio Stradivari.

I hope the fiddle is genuine. In that case it is very valuable, and one may trust, too, that the lucky owner will be able to call forth the best music from his violin. After all, the fiddle is the premier musical instrument, only the trouble is that some players don't seem to have the knack of getting the best out of it.

Fishing for Witches.

Let there be no mistake about this matter. The witch in question has nothing to do with the unfortunate woman who, in the Dark Ages, happened to be accused of casting evil spells, or riding round on a broomstick.

The witch in this instance is a thin, flat fish with a large head, plenty of side fin and very coarse bones. I put in the facts because a correspondent in Cornwall asks about this denizen of the deep. It seems that the witch is often put on the market as a lemon sole. This sounds fishy!

More Travels for St. Frank's.

Several enthusiasts say that Handforth & Co. should make a grand tour in Australia. I have no doubt they picture Edward Oswald meeting the boxing kangaroo with the gloves on. Well, here are the plain facts.

The St. Frank's crowd have done a bit of globe trotting, and the idea is they should keep the show going a bit at the old school. This is not like staying in and being dull because it rains. There is as much sport in a school quad, as you can find anywhere. But as in the old song:

"I've been to Paris, and I've been to Dover,

I've been travelling the whole world over,"

there will be lots more jaunts for the favourites—even to the Antipodes, since it is to Australia so many readers wish the company to go.

Ambitions for 1928.

This is most discreditable. A warm sympathiser writes from Stoke-on-Trent to say that this old notion of getting up right early in the morning is an exploded dodge for making the world uncomfortable. He says that what he most desires of all things is to find a gold-mine and be rich ever after, so that he will be able to get up when—and not before, mark you—he pleases. Sneezes is a most popular rhyme to please, and I think there is something to be sneezed at here, although my sleepy old son of a chum does

draw a wonderful picture of the charms of lying in bed in those extra sunny hours which come after 7 a.m.

He assures me he can get down to brass tacks much better in bed, and that the sound of people clattering about and going to work, and murmuring things about the weather, inspires him in the most marvellous way. I should like nothing better than to quote some of the gems of wisdom he puts forward, but, convincing as it all sounds, I fear me much there is nothing in it, and that if the fashion were to turn up late in 1928, slack business would take the shine out of 1929.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

E. Evans, 8, Dovedale Road, Perry Common, Erdington, Birmingham, wishes to hear from a reader who is keen on music.

John Burke, 328, N.C. Rd., Philsboro', Dublin, wishes to hear from readers in his district who will help to form a social club; he has N.L.L. new series to sell.

G. Locke, 25, Selhurst New Road, South Norwood, London, S.E.25, wishes to buy No. 112, new series, "Nelson Lee Library."

A. Syrett, 10, Simon Place, St. Heliers, Jersey, Channel Islands, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere; he is a stamp-collector.

W. Mitchell, 10, Simon Place, St. Heliers, Jersey, Channel Islands, wishes to correspond with stamp-collectors, also with readers generally in Canada, South Africa, New Zealand and Guatemala.

H. Stohert, 9, Steiner Street, Accrington, Lancs., wishes to hear from members who would help him to form a club.

E. Robert Locke, 122, Cox Street, Coventry, Warwickshire, would like to correspond with readers all over the world, especially the British Empire, interested in football (both codes), boxing and stamp-collecting. All letters answered.

Ernest Skelton, 18, Plowright Street, Nottingham, wishes to correspond with readers in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Malta, Gibraltar, Spain, Holland and Denmark. All letters answered.

M. Howe, 19, Arundale Street, Petrona, Wellington, New Zealand, would like to correspond with readers anywhere.

J. P. Booth, Te Puni Street, Petone, Wellington, New Zealand, would like to correspond with readers.

A. L. Moxon, 59, Manor Drive, Leeds, wants to buy Nos. 211, 212, 214, 220, 240, 267, 318, 335 "Nelson Lee Library."

William W. Wade, Whisk Street, Windsor, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, wishes to correspond with stamp-collectors anywhere; is willing to exchange current unused Aus-

tralian stamps for current unused of any other country (same value).

I. Blankfield, 49, Auret Street, Jeppe, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere; all letters answered.

B. Bloch, 30, Myrtle Street, Commercial Road, London, E.1, wishes to hear from members in his district (Stepney) who would help to form a sports club—football and cricket; ages 10—12.

Syed Mahmood, Training College, Johore, Malaya, wishes to correspond with readers on any subject.

G. Newson and Alan F. White, 22, Trevelyan Street, Wayville, South Australia, wish to hear from Ben Yates, of Leeds, and L. Van Luyck, of Belgium, to whom they wrote; also from all readers who have received their circular letter. They wish to correspond especially with readers anywhere interested in wireless, stamps, pigeon racing, sports and photography. All letters promptly answered.

V. Coleman, 12, Collingwood Street, Auckland, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers in Canada, United States, Tanganyika, any part of Africa, also Spain, Portugal and France, for exchange of stamps.

A. J. Neilson, 25, Hassall Street, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers in Canada, Australia, and South Africa.

George Cook, 3, Cloudeley Square, Islington, London, N.1, wants to obtain No. 1 "Nelson Lee Library" (old series).

E. Wills, 18, Baker Street, Weston-super-Mare, Somerset, wishes to hear from readers on any subject. All letters answered.

Syd G. S. Thornton, Aubin House, Quail Street, Longreach, Queensland, Australia, desires to correspond with readers about photography and stamps; he also wants members for the Aust-World Correspondence Club.

J. Cross, 84, Poulton Street, Fleetwood, Lancs., wishes to hear from readers in Australia, Palestine, Egypt or Germany.

Frank W. Williams, 15, Cotterell Street, Hereford, wishes to correspond with stamp-collectors anywhere.

Harry McGregor, 10, Kinghorns Road, Dundee, Forfarshire, wishes to hear from members in Dundee and district.

Norman Jarvis, 31, Wrotham Road, Broadstairs, Kent, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere; any subject.

S. Orr, 22, Morden Hill, Lewisham, London, S.E.13, has started a social club, and would be glad to hear from readers in the district who are interested.

G. S. Hills, 28, Sunningdale Drive, Skegness, Lincs., wishes to contribute to amateur magazines, and to hear from readers in New York.

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