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THE
**SCHOOLBOY
HOUSEHOLDERS!**

A grand long yarn, featuring the cheery chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 97.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

March 10th, 1923.



Handforth whizzed round the bend at the foot of the hill without ringing his bell, and he did not spot the man walking in the middle of the road until it was too late. The man himself managed to jump aside, escaping injury, but his attache case, struck by the handlebars of Handy's bike, went flying into the air, papers being scattered in all directions.

A Stunning Long Yarn of Schoolboy Adventure, Drama and Fun!

THE SCHOOLBOY HOUSEHOLDERS!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

An ounce of practical help is worth a ton of pity. And no one is more eager to help the Earl of Edgemore in his fight against the overbearing millionaire, Gore-Pearce, than Handforth & Co., the cheery chums of St. Frank's.—Ed.

CHAPTER I

Fed Up With Claude!

"HE thinks too much of himself!" said Handforth of the Remove, as he absentmindedly came to a halt in front of the mirror and stared at his own reflection. "Yes, by George! He's too beastly conceited!"

Church and McClure, who were also in Study D in the Ancient House, looked at their leader in astonishment; and as he appeared to be addressing his remarks to his own reflection, they could be pardoned for falling into a natural error.

"You're jolly frank this morning, aren't you, Handy?" asked Church, with a grin.

"I'm always frank!" replied Handforth coldly. "It's one of my principles to be frank. I call a spade a spade!"

McClure nodded.

"Well, of course, it is about time that you toned down, old man," he said thoughtfully. "But I rather think you are too harsh with yourself."

"With myself?"

"Well, about being conceited, for example," said Mac. "I wouldn't exactly call you conceited, Handy. Now and again you show signs of swelled head, but you don't really mean it——"

"Conceited! Swelled head!" gasped Handforth wrathfully. "Why, you—— I wasn't talking about myself, you hulking great idiot!"

"But you were looking at yourself in the glass," said McClure, dodging adroitly round the table.

"I was talking about that new cad, Gore-Pearce!" roared Handforth indignantly.

"Oh, sorry!" grinned Mac. "My mistake! But you ought to be more careful, Handy. I agree with you that Claude Gore-Pearce is the most insufferable bounder who ever entered the Remove! I don't know what we've done to deserve such a punishment!"

"He's not only a cad, but he's an insufferable snob," said Church. "The very sight of him makes me sick!"

Edward Oswald Handforth took a deep breath.

"Sick?" he repeated bitterly. "I'm ill every time he comes near me! And whenever I look at his face I want to punch it!"

"Well, there's nothing in that, of course," said Church. "Where is there a face that you don't want to punch, Handy?"

"Think of it!" said Handforth, pacing up and down the study. "This rotter has been here for nearly a week now. A day boy, mark you! Up till now there haven't been any day boys at St. Frank's, and suddenly we find this—this insect pushed on us!"

"The fact that he's a day boy doesn't make much difference," argued McClure.

"It's the fellow himself who matters."

"Everything is wrong—the principle and the chap!" said Handforth fiercely.

"There oughtn't to be day boys at St. Frank's—it's against all our traditions. And when the fellow turns out to be the son of a rotter like old William Gore-Pearce, it's about time that something was done. I've tried to get up a petition to the Head, but nobody will support me!"

Church coughed.

"What would be the use, old man?" he asked. "The Head's all right in his own way, but he's a queer old bird. For some extraordinary, inexplicable reason, he can't stand being dictated to by juniors. Exactly why he should have this bee in his bonnet is one of the world's greatest mysteries!"

Handforth grunted, and failed to detect the irony.

"Every morning that chap comes here in a Rolls-Royce ear!" he said thickly. "He comes here with two liveried chauffeurs. Not one, mind you, but two! Anybody might think he was a prince! And every afternoon, just before lessons are over, that Rolls-Royce turns up again, and waits for Claude! Did you ever hear of such cheap, nasty pride?"

"Yes, it's pretty awful!" agreed Church thoughtfully. "The Gore-Pearces have taken a big furnished house on the other side of the village, and it wouldn't hurt Claude to walk to and fro. Yet he has to come and go in that whacking great Rolls-Royce limousine! Just display, you know! Vulgar ostentation!"

"You're right, old man," agreed McClure. "He may be a millionaire, but there's no reason for him to display his wealth like he does!"

"He's a vulgar rotter, and so is his son!" said Handforth. "And they're only in this furnished house temporarily, mark you! Old Gore-Pearce has bought Edgemore Manor, and he means to live here

permanently. Oh, crumbs! What a come-down for the district!"

"Isn't it about time that we heard something more of the old earl?" asked McClure slowly. "I have a great admiration for the old boy! Edgemore Manor is his home—his castle—and he won't let anybody else in! He's barricaded himself up, and he's acting like an old feudal lord of ancient times. Although the place has been sold over his head, he won't surrender possession!"

Handforth nodded, his eyes glowing.

"There's something rather fine about the old earl," he said approvingly. "Of course, actually he's in the wrong. Gore-Pearce has bought the Manor, and he's legally entitled to enter it. But the millionaire has proved himself to be such a bullying rotter that all my sympathies are with the earl, and I'm ready to support him in his fight against Gore-Pearce."

"Mr. Gore-Pearce isn't fit to lick the old fellow's boots!" said Church darkly. "And yet Mr. Gore-Pearce is the sole owner! It's a shame, Handy—but what can we do?"



CHAPTER 2.

"His Royal Highness"!

HERE he comes!" said Reggie Pitt, of the West House.

There was a cold note in Reggie's usually cheery voice. He was standing with Nipper & Co. on the steps of the Ancient House, and at that moment a magnificent Rolls-Royce limousine had glided through the gateway of the old school into the Triangle.

A silence fell on everybody present—excepting for a few members of the snobs' brigade. These hurried towards the Rolls-Royce, waving their hands and shouting greetings. They were such fellows as Gulliver, Bell, Merrell, Marriott and Teddy Long.

It was a fine March morning, and the sun was shining brilliantly. The Rolls-Royce certainly looked very spick and span, with its two attendants dressed in vivid uniforms.

One of these attendants sprang down as soon as the Rolls-Royce came to a stop. He opened the rear door, and Claude Gore-Pearce stepped elegantly out.

"His Royal Highness has arrived!" said Reggie Pitt solemnly. "Salaam, slaves! Down with you! O dogs, and sons of dogs! Hast forgotten the deference due to one of such exalted eminence?"

And Reggie, to set the example to the others, bowed so low that he bent double on the top steps of the Ancient House.

Unfortunately, Handforth came out at that moment—and when Handforth came out he seldom looked where he was going.

Crash!

Reggie Pitt went down the steps in a heap, and there was a yell of laughter. Incidentally, there was also a yell of wrath and pain from Reggie. He sat up on the gravel, flushed and indignant.

"Who did that?" he demanded hotly. "Of all the dirty tricks——"

"Sorry!" said Handforth, brushing past. "Didn't notice you, old man!"

And Edward Oswald, feeling that no further apology was needed, strode on and came face to face with Claude Gore-Pearce. The day boy was looking as elegant as ever, but it was a vulgar elegance.

"Clear off, you chaps!" said Handforth, glaring at Gore-Pearce's toadies. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves! What do you mean by always hanging round this overdressed toad?"

"You clear off, Handforth!" said Gulliver, with a scowl. "Gore-Pearce is one of our friends!"

"Hear, hear!" said Teddy Long eagerly. "I say, Gore-Pearce, old man, I suppose you couldn't lend me five bob until this afternoon—— Hi! What the—— Leggo, Handy!"

But Handforth did not let go. He sent Teddy Long shooting away, and by this time Nipper and Reggie Pitt and the others had come crowding round. The Rolls-Royce was gliding out of the Triangle.

"Leave him alone, Handy!" said Nipper. "There's no sense in picking a quarrel with the fellow——"

"I'm not going to pick a quarrel!" interrupted Handforth coldly. "By George! You don't think I'd soil my hands by touching this——this walking banknote, do you? He stinks of money!" he added contemptuously. "Pah! Archie Glenhorne and Travers are worth double this newly-rich rotter, but who'd know it? They don't make any display of their wealth!"

Claude Gore-Pearce scowled.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded. "I suppose you're jealous? Jealous because my father is a millionaire."

"You thumping great ass!" retorted Handforth thickly. "Jealous of your father? My hat! Some hopes! Money's all right when it's used properly, but money's a beastly curse when it's used

like your family's using it! And look here, Gore-Pearce—I've got a message for your father!"

"Oh?" said Claude Gore-Pearce, with a supercilious raising of his eyebrows.

"Yes! Tell him from me—and from the whole Remove—that his rotten Rolls-Royce isn't any too safe!" went on Handforth ominously. "One of these days we shall pelt it with mud, or something! We're sick of the sight of it!"

"Hear, hear!" went up a chorus from many of the other juniors.

"In future, you'd better walk to the school—and walk home again!" went on Edward Oswald. "It's only about a mile, and you're not a cripple!"

"I shall continue to come in one of my father's fleet of limousines!" said Gore-Pearce, apparently unconscious of the fact that every word he uttered was hateful with insufferable pride. "We shan't be in this furnished house much longer, either. That old fool at Edgemore Manor will soon be turned out. The last of the legal processes has been completed, and the Earl of Edgemore will soon be in the gutter!"

Gore-Pearce said these words with such relish that many of the juniors turned away from him in disgust.

"Oh, so the poor old earl will soon be in the gutter—eh?" said Handforth ominously. "And how do you know that, worm?"

"I would have you know that I object to being called a worm!" said Gore-Pearce passionately.

"And I'll have you know that I'll call you what I like!" retorted Handforth. "But it's all right—I've heard enough! You're soon going to turn the earl out, are you? Did you hear that, you chaps? This rotter's father has fixed things so that the eviction will take place, and Gore-Pearce is boasting about it! Boasting about the misery and downfall of a fine old chap like Lord Edgemore! What shall we do?"

"Bump him!" suggested Reggie Pitt.

And Claude Gore-Pearce was seized by the exasperated juniors and bumped—bumped very hard!



CHAPTER 3.

A Delicate Situation.

YOU'RE wanted, Travers!"

Vivian Travers glanced round as McClure came

hurrying up. Travers was chatting with

Sir James Potts, Bart.—better known in the Remove as Jimmy, ex-boot-boy. Jimmy was one of the best, and he was very popular with all the decent fellows.

It was the interval in the middle of morning lessons, and most of the Removites were sunning themselves in the Triangle. Travers and Potts were study-mates, for they shared Study H in the Ancient House. Originally, Ulysses Spencer Adams, the American boy, had had this study to himself, but Adams, becoming lonely, had shifted into Study J, with Gresham and Duncan. So Travers, with characteristic effrontery, had seized Study H for himself, and had invited Jimmy to share it with him.

"You're wanted—both of you!" said McClure. "There's not much time, and Handy says that it's urgent."

"Well, well!" smiled Vivian Travers. "So we are wanted by the great Handforth—eh? Do you think it's worth going. Jimmy, dear old fellow?"

Sir James grinned.

"If we don't go, we might get a few black eyes," he chuckled. "You know what Handy is."

"That's true!" nodded Travers. "So we might as well be on the safe side."

They accompanied McClure across to West Arch. Here, in this secluded, if gloomy, spot, Handforth was talking earnestly. Nipper and Tregellis-West and Archie Glenthorne and Reggie Pitt and a few others were already present.

"Something has got to be done!" Handforth was saying. "It's no good dilly-dallying—it's no good beating about the bush. We've got to decide on something."

"But, my dear chap, you don't seem to realise that the situation is delicate," said Nipper gently. "It isn't our affair at all. We don't want to butt in—"

"Rats!" interrupted Handforth. "Rot! In fact, piffle!"

"Thanks!" said Nipper.

"I don't mean to be rude," went on Handforth. "But I always believe in speaking plainly. You heard what Gore-Pearce said this morning, didn't you? His father has fixed things up, and at last they're going to turn Lord Edgemore out of the Manor."

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne, in distress. "A most poisonous state of affairs, dear old scream. I mean to say, isn't it rather up to us to rally round and to shove forth the assisting flipper?"

"We'll help in a jiffy, if there's half a chance," said Nipper promptly. "But if Mr. Gore-Pearce takes officers of the law to Edgemore Manor, what can we do? If it's a genuine eviction, carried out by

the bailiffs, we shall be pretty helpless."

"Why?" demanded Handforth. "Can't we go for these beastly bailiffs, and kick them off the property?"

"The point is, Handy, the bailiff's men would only be doing their duty," said Nipper patiently.

"That's true enough!" agreed Travers, nodding. "I don't suppose those beggars enjoy their work much. Everybody has to earn a living, you know, and it wouldn't be quite playing the game if we interfered with them in the course of their duty."

Handforth grunted.

"Well, I hadn't thought of that, of course," he said. "What the dickens can we do, then?"

"That's just it!" said Nipper. "The whole situation is delicate. We want to help poor old Lord Edgemore, but where's the sense in getting ourselves into trouble with the law? In fact, we mustn't do it. There would be the most frightful row with the Head, and a few of us would probably get sacked. No, Handy, we mustn't put ourselves in the wrong like that."

"It's rotten!" said Handforth, taking a deep breath. "I—I feel so helpless, you know! We've found out for certain that the poor old earl is broke, and that the Manor has been bought by that beast, Gore-Pearce. What's going to happen to the poor old boy after he's been turned out? He'll be stranded—he'll be like a fish out of water!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie sadly. "I saw the pater two or three days ago, and he was frightfully concerned about it all. I mean, who wouldn't be? The earl has lived at the Manor all his life. A proud old stick, in his way—but in the old days, before the dubloons began to dwindle, he was famous for the way in which he distributed the necessities of life to the sick and the needy. In other words, a stout old boy!"

"Rats!" said Handforth, taking the meaning of Archie's words literally. "The earl is as straight as a ramrod!"

"Stout-hearted, laddie!" said Archie gently.

"Well, you should say what you mean!" growled Handforth. "The question is, what are we going to do?"

Clang-clang!

"I rather think we're going indoors, to do another spasm of work," said Travers sadly. "Heigh-ho! What a bore it is—work, work, work! Who was it invented that foolish saying to the effect that Britons never will be slaves?"

"Ass!" said Jimmy Potts. "It's a half-

holiday to-day, isn't it? And aren't we going to play against the Fourth?"

"For the love of Samson, so we are!" said Travers. "I am cheered—my heart is lightened. And I rather think, Jimmy, dear old fellow, that we shall put it across the Fourth in the most devastating manner. What odds? I'll bet anybody a quid that we shall score six goals."

"No takers, old man," said Nipper. "You'd better quell those gambling propensities of yours. We don't bet."

Vivian Travers sighed.

"I don't know what's coming over me lately," he said, shaking his head. "I never knew I could be so good!"

CHAPTER 4.

A Surprising Interruption!

AS soon as lessons were over, the juniors poured out into the sunlit Triangle again, and many of



them glared antagonistically when they saw the Gore-Pearce limousine waiting in readiness.

"There it is, as blatant as ever!" said Nipper, with a frown. "By Jove! I'm sick of the sight of that car!"

"Let's go and turn it out!" suggested Handforth eagerly. "We'll tell the chauffeur that if he doesn't move outside we'll chuck him in the fountain pool! If he wants to wait, let him wait outside!"

"Don't bother Handy," said Church. "Gore-Pearce is just going."

Claude, in fact, was walking elegantly by. At least, he believed that he was walking elegantly. His stride was affected, and if the other juniors had not been so ratty, they would have yelled with laughter. For this young snob was comic in his exaggerated pride. Perhaps he was more to be pitied than blamed. His parvenu father was responsible for the spirit which filled him. Since childhood, Claude had been brought up in an atmosphere of vulgar wealth, and ever since he had been able to speak he had been urged to talk of nothing else but his father's money.

"Don't forget what I told you!" sang out Handforth. "You'll walk here to-morrow, my lad! We don't want to see that car again!"

Claude Gore-Pearce lifted his chin loftily.

"I shall make it my business to let the headmaster know of your attitude," he said sneeringly. "My father will probably telephone to Dr. Stafford, and——"

"Yah! Clear off, you worm!"

"Let's breathe freely!"

"Don't take any notice of them, old boy!" said Gulliver, linking his arm into Claude's. "They're jealous, that's all!"

"Wait until we're in Edgemore Manor!" said Claude witheringly. "It won't be long now. That doddering old idiot of an earl will be out this afternoon, or to-morrow!"

"By George! D'you hear that, you fellows?" roared Handforth wrathfully. "Come on—let's give him another bumping!"

But his chums and Nipper & Co. held him back until the Rolls-Royce had glided out of the gateway.

"Let him go, Handy!" said Nipper. "We can't be bumping the chap every time we see him. The best thing is to ignore him altogether. He's not worth it—he's a nonentity. I've never met a fellow of less importance."

"Hear, hear, and absolutely!" said Archie. "It wouldn't be a bad scheme to change the sub., what? Let's talk about the good old football. How about dashing to Little Side for some practice?"

"Yes, a good idea, Archie," said Nipper. "Football this afternoon, Handy, so we'll dismiss Gore-Pearce from our minds."

The weather was perfect for football. There was scarcely any wind, and there was a crisp, healthy feel in the atmosphere. True, the ground was very sodden, owing to the recent rain, and the footballers would probably get smothered from head to foot in mud. Not that they cared. Many of them preferred the ground to be muddy, since falls were less hurtful.

The fixture was an important one in its own way. Remove versus the Fourth. Not that there was any doubt as to the result. The Remove, of course, would win.

For most of the star players of the St. Frank's Junior School belonged to the Remove. There was Reggie Pitt, the brilliant winger, Nipper, the centre-forward, and, more recently, Travers and Potts had been added to the Remove team. The latter two were such excellent players that other juniors, considered good before the advent of Travers and Potts, were no longer included in the Eleven.

Not that to-day's match was to go down as a victory for the Remove.

The game started well, it was true. Within the first three minutes of play, Reggie made one of his celebrated runs down the touchline. He centred with that accuracy for which he was famous, and Travers, running in, scored a hot goal.

The Fourth Formers attempted to retaliate during the next two or three

minutes, but Handforth was there. And Edward Oswald, "between the sticks," was a force in himself. Buster Boots took a first-time shot, and it looked a certain goal. But Handforth stopped the ball with a daring sideways leap, and then kicked it away with apparent recklessness. The next moment the leather was in mid-field, and Jimmy Potts had pounced upon it.

What was more to the point, Jimmy tipped the ball with sweet and joyous precision to Nipper, who was well placed. Nipper, like a flash, slammed the leather past the Fourth goalie.

"I knew it was a cert.!" grinned Handforth. "With a forward line like ours, to say nothing of our defence, we're unbeatable! Before this game is over, we'll make the Fourth Formers look like infants!"

He was speaking to nobody in particular, and he watched with apparent indifference during the next few passages of the game. Then Bob Christine came flashing down the field, beating opponent after opponent, and at last Handforth began to take notice. Christine looked dangerous—and, in point of fact, he was dangerous.

With a swerving movement he ripped round McClure, who was playing full-back, and then he prepared to shoot.

But at that second there was a wild yell from mid-field, and the referee's whistle blew shrilly. Christine pulled himself up with a jerk, his face flushed, his eyes blazing with indignation.

"I wasn't off-side!" he roared, turning.

Then he stared. Willy Handforth of the Third was running on to the field of play, waving his arms!

CHAPTER 5.

More Important Than
Football!



BOB CHRISTINE
raced up to the
referee, who was
Biggleswade of the
Sixth.

"Why did you stop me, Biggy?" panted Christine, wrathfully. "I was just going to shoot, and it would have been a cert goal!"

"Sorry, kid!" said Biggleswade. "But you know the rules of the game, don't you? We can't continue playing while there's a spectator dashing across the field."

"You might have waited until I'd scored!" said Bob heatedly.

"Rot!" said Handforth, running up. "You wouldn't have scored, you Fourth Form ass!"

"Wouldn't I?" bawled Bob Christine. "I should have beaten you as easy as pie!"

"Well, you'll have a chance soon—when the ref. bounces the ball," said Handforth. "I want to know what my minor is doing——"

"It won't be the same thing then!" complained Christine, bitterly. "Oh, my hat! Such a glorious chance, too! So it's your minor, is it? I'll half skin the little idiot!"

By this time Willy Handforth was in the centre of the field, and the players were crowding round him. They weren't looking particularly friendly, either.

"What's the idea of this, Willy, you young chump?" asked Nipper. "Couldn't you see that we were playing?"

"Christine was just going to score!" roared Boots.

"Can't help it!" panted Willy. "I want you—all of you!"

"What the dickens——"

"Chuck the game up and come with me!" said Willy, who had a strange, warlike gleam in his eye. "It's an urgent case, and we're all badly wanted."

"The kid's off his rocker!" said Biggleswade, pushing up. "Look here, you Third Former, what's the idea? I'll give you a good hiding for this after the game!"

"No, you won't!" said the leader of the fags. "And this thing is more important than football——"

"Impossible!" shouted Handforth. "You silly young cuckoo, there's nothing in the world more important than football!"

"Of course there isn't!" said two or three of the other enthusiasts.

"Will you dry up, and listen to me?" demanded Willy impatiently. "I tell you there isn't a minute to spare. If we're going to act, we shall have to act at once! There won't even be time for you fellows to change! But you can shove your overcoats on over your football things, and jump on your bikes——"

"But what's the trouble?" asked Travers. "Is there a fire somewhere?"

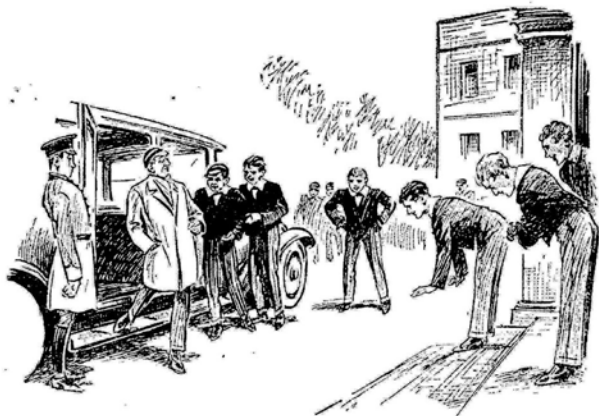
"It's about the old Earl of Edgemore!" said Willy tensely. "He's going to be turned out of the Manor by force this afternoon!"

"What!"

"By George!"

"How do you know this?" asked Nipper quickly.

"I just saw old Gore-Pearce go by in his car!" said Willy, in a breathless voice. "He had about ten men with him——"



Elegantly Claude Gore-Pearce stepped out of the enormous limousine. "His Royal Highness has arrived!" said Reggie Pitt solemnly. "Salaam, slaves! Down with you! O dogs, and sons of dogs! Hast forgotten the deference due to one of such exalted eminence?" And Reggie, followed by the other juniors, bowed obsequiously.

"In one car?"

"No, you ass! There were two or three cars," replied Willy impatiently. "And that cad Claude was with them. He yelled out that they were just going to evict the old earl. And it's true enough! Those men were bullies, by the look of them—and they were all carrying whacking great sticks. We're not going to let poor old Lord Edgemore be kicked out, are we?"

"No fear!" roared his major. "Come on, you chaps! To the rescue!"

"Hurrah!"

"But what about this game?" demanded Biggleswade, in dismay. "Clear off the pitch, you young fag! I'm referee here, and I'm not going to allow any interruption—"

"Rats!" said Edward Oswald. "Blow the game!"

"What!" gasped the Sixth Former.

"He's right!" said John Busterfield Boots. "We can play the game some other afternoon—when there's nothing else on."

"But the Earl of Edgemore is nothing to you!" said Biggleswade, in astonishment. "What on earth do you want to butt in for? Why can't you kids mind your own business?"

"Oh, you'll never understand—you're a senior!" said Reggie Pitt sweetly. "But we've decided to champion the cause of Lord Edgemore. We're up against His Imperial Highness Gore-Pearce. The man's a blot on the landscape, and as long as we can help the poor old earl, we'll do it!"

"Come on, then!" shouted Willy urgently. "Don't jaw! There's no time to waste! Those men went by five minutes ago—and they're in cars! Unless we look sharp, we shall arrive after the eviction is all over!"

"Yes, but look here!" said Nipper, who was beginning to get anxious. "We mustn't attack the officers of the law—"

"Dry up!" yelled Handforth. "We're going to help the Earl of Edgemore! We're going to help the weak against the strong!"

Nipper could have nothing to say against such a principle as this. So he bottled up his uneasiness, and he raced across Little Side with all the other footballers. The spectators had invaded the field, and had heard the startling decision. So not merely the twenty-two footballers, but half the other fellows in the Remove and the Fourth made a dash for the bicycle sheds. Juniors from all Houses

were determined to go on this exciting mission.

It promised to be far more exciting than football!



CHAPTER 6.

The Defiance of Lord Edgemoore!

HE Third, to a man, was ready.

Before dashing on to Little Side, Willy had sent his scouts

round, and every member of the Third had been rounded up. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon and Owen minor had been very busy, and they were looking somewhat the worse for wear. But Willy made no inquiries. He knew that his lieutenants had been compelled to fight certain rebellious elements in the Third, in order to make them obey.

But Willy was an autocrat among the fags. When he gave an order, it had to be obeyed; and Willy was determined that the entire Third should go on this mission to Edgemoore Manor. Willy had been with his major and the other chums of Study D during that queer adventure the previous week—when they had come in close contact with the earl himself—and he was as enthusiastic as the others to help Lord Edgemoore in his fight against the arrogant, bullying Mr. William Gore-Pearce.

These juniors did not trouble to go into the rights and wrongs of the case. They only looked at the human aspect. They didn't care whether Mr. Gore-Pearce had bought the property or not. The old earl was a pitiful figure, and he had captured their sympathy.

Fortunately there were no masters about during those tense minutes, so the juniors got out their bicycles and were off before anybody could stop them. True, it was a half-holiday, and Edgemoore was not out of bounds. But any master was liable to put a spoke in the wheel if he heard about the affair.

The sight was an extraordinary one, as the rescue party pedalled down the lane. It seemed to be a never-ending procession.

Such fellows as Nipper, Handforth, Willy, Travers and Reggie Pitt were in the forefront; behind them trailed the other cyclists—dozens and dozens of them. They were all fired by the excitement of this project. They didn't know what they would do when they arrived, but they were quite certain that there would be some fun.

The distance was not great—barely a mile and a half—and in less than ten minutes the first of the juniors had propped their

bicycles against the hedge near Edgemoore Manor, and they were running up the weed-grown drive.

The heavy iron gates had been forcibly removed, and there were the marks of many wheels on the neglected gravel.

Running round a bend of the drive, the juniors came in full sight of the Manor. They were on a little rise, and from this eminence they could see the entire scene.

Edgemoore Manor was a fine old place, an impressive Norman structure, with battlements and towers. It was more like a fortress than a private dwelling. Indeed, by many of the local inhabitants it was known as "The Castle."

"By George!" panted Handforth fiercely. "They're at it!"

"The brutes!" said Church. "They'll have the poor old chap out this time! Nothing can save him, Handy!"

"We can save him!" roared Handforth.

"But we can't!" urged Church, in alarm. "We mustn't butt in, Handy! It's not our business—"

"Mustn't butt in!" thundered Handforth. "Not our business! What do we care? Here's a case of might against right—with might using methods that the Huns of old would have hesitated to employ! Are we going to stand by and look on?"

Crowds of other fellows were coming up by now, and they collected on that rising ground, watching with eager eyes.

And certainly the scene was well calculated to make their hearts beat more rapidly. Near the terrace, several big cars were drawn up; opposite the main steps stood Mr. William Gore-Pearce, with one or two other well-dressed men round him.

At the top of the steps were other men, and they were using an enormous pole—a telegraph pole, by the look of it—as a battering-ram.

Crash! Crash!

Again and again the battering-ram was thudded against the heavy doors. But, so far, the stout old oak was resisting.

A little to one side several other men were attacking one of the windows, but they could not get in. The earl, obviously, had barricaded every lower opening—the doors and the windows. He was determined to keep the invaders out!

His home was his castle—that was the old earl's cry. Actually it was wrong of him to take up this stubborn attitude. His property had been sold—it had passed into other hands—and it was not his place to defy the law of the land.

And yet, who could keep from admiring the fine spirit of this old man? There can be no question that the Earl of Edgemoore would have capitulated with dignity if the new owner had acted with corresponding dignity. But, from the very first, Mr. William Gore-Pearce had behaved like a bully and a cad. He had aroused every instinct of defiance in Lord Edgemoore. And now it was a battle. It was active war between the besieged and the besiegers!

CHAPTER 7.

The Battle!



MR. WILLIAM GORE-PEARCE stood on the terrace, his big figure overshadowing all the others. The

millionaire was wearing a great fur coat, and he seemed to exude vulgarity from every pore.

For Mr. William Gore-Pearce was no ordinary millionaire. He was a man who had made money with incredible rapidity. Success had come to him rather late in life. During the past fifteen years he had done nothing wrong in business. Money had turned into more money, and now he was one of the wealthiest men in the wholesale grocery business.

And his success had got into his head. It was Mr. Gore-Pearce's ambition—or perhaps it would be more correct to say that it was Mrs. Gore-Pearce's ambition—to own a famous old country mansion. So they had bought Edgemore Manor; but, unfortunately, Lord Edgemore would not recognise the sale. He was in possession—and possession was nine points of the law.

"The old fool!" Mr. Gore-Pearce was saying. "I'm sorry it's come to this—but he's brought it on himself! I gave him plenty of chances to clear out of his own accord. Well, now he'll be kicked out!"

"The whole affair is most distressing!" said a lean, wizened man who stood beside the millionaire. "I am most worried, Mr. Gore-Pearce."

"Do you think I'm enjoying it?" snapped Mr. Gore-Pearce savagely. "Not that I care a twopenny hang about this doddering fool of an earl! He doesn't seem to have any relatives, or friends, or anything, and if he goes into the gutter I shall be glad."

"Really, Mr. Gore-Pearce—"

"Yes, glad!" insisted the millionaire harshly. "He's caused me enough trouble! But I'm worrying about the publicity. That's what's concerning me, Snell. Confound it! I shall have the very deuce of a job keeping this story out of the papers! Ten to one the people will side with Lord Edgemore. It's a pity if a man can't enter into possession of his property after he has bought it!"

"You are quite right, of course," said Mr. Lucas Snell. "As Lord Edgemore's lawyer, I have conducted the sale, and I know that it is strictly legal in every sense. Unhappily, his lordship will not recognise the legality of the transfer—"

"He'll recognise it to-day!" broke in Mr. Gore-Pearce. "There he is, confound him! Up on the battlements again! Defying us all, eh? Very brave—very theatrical! But it won't work!"

• Mr. Snell was running forward, and now

he stopped and looked up at the grey old battlements.

"My lord—my lord!" he shouted urgently. "In the name of the law, I ask you to put an end to this impossible position! Open your doors, and allow us to enter peacefully!"

"I do not recognise you as a representative of the law, Snell!" said the Earl of Edgemore bitterly. "Why speak to me of law? This is my home—my ancestral home! No alien foot shall cross its threshold if I can prevent it! And never shall I go, unless I am thrown out!"

Lord Edgemore stood there, a rather fine figure in his sombre, shabby, black clothes. His hair was white, and his lined face was clean-shaven. But there was no anger on his features—only an expression of pained, weary tiredness.

"It is inevitable that you must go, my lord!" said Lucas Snell urgently. "Within another ten minutes the doors will be broken down, and then you must suffer the humiliation of being led out—"

"No, no!" interrupted Lord Edgemore. "I shall never be led out, Snell! Never! You may throw me out, if you please—since you have brought your hired ruffians with you. But I shall resist every inch of the way! I am a lonely old man, and I have done my best to defend my fortress."

"Before it is too late, my lord, I beg of you!" shouted the lawyer. "Mr. Gore-Pearce is determined, and—"

"Go!" interrupted the earl coldly. "I do not want to speak with you, Snell. You are a snake—a traitor—a venomous turn-coat! I trusted you, and you betrayed me!"

Lucas Snell shrugged his shoulders, and his wizened face was savage as he turned away. Meanwhile, the battering-rams were continuing their pounding. Crashes and thuds sounded on the still afternoon air. But the defences still resisted the determined attacks.

On the rise, the strong force of St. Frank's juniors became more and more restive. This battle was going on, and they were idle onlookers! They didn't like it.

"Well, what about it?" Handforth was shouting. "We haven't come here to stare, have we? Action, you chaps! Follow me!"

"Hold on!" shouted Nipper. "We can't interfere, Handy."

"Why can't we?" demanded Handforth hotly.

"Because we shall only get ourselves into serious trouble if we lay hands on those bailiff's officers," replied Nipper earnestly. "Hang it, we can't defy the law itself! We only came here to be of use, if possible, but in these circumstances we're absolutely helpless. Do be sensible, Handy!"

"Nipper's right!" said Reggie Pitt. "We can't do anything, you fellows!"

The others began to realise it, too, and a silence fell over them. They were disappointed—for it seemed a sin and a shame to them that they should remain idle.

Then, just at that moment, the earl's voice came across to them—clearly through that still air.

"Come on—come on!" he was shouting mockingly. "I snap my fingers at you all! You are not officers of the law—you cannot delude me! You are the paid ruffians of this man! And I do not admit defeat to such scum!"



CHAPTER 8.

To the Rescue!

"ASH—crash!

There came a devastating sound of splintering wood-work; and, staring

across the intervening space, the St. Frank's fellows could see that the great main door had at last succumbed to the onslaught.

"They're in—they're in!" went up a yell. "Did you hear that?" panted Handforth excitedly. "Did you hear what the earl was just saying? These men aren't officers of the law at all! They're only Gore-Pearce's paid ruffians!"

"That lets us out!" said Travers heartily. "As long as we're not interfering with the law, we're safe! What about it, dear old fellows? Do we remove the brake?"

"Yes, rather!" shouted Nipper promptly. "You agree?" yelled Edward Oswald.

"Why not?" replied Nipper swiftly. "These men are only Gore-Pearce's hirelings, and I don't care how much trouble we get into with Gore-Pearce! The more the merrier! I had my suspicions about these men being hailiff's officers—but there's nothing like being sure! Come on!"

"Hurrah!"

"If we're lucky, we shall still be in time!" yelled Reggie Pitt. "Willy, you take your men and stay behind in reserve. We'll call upon you if you're wanted—"

"Rats!" sang out Willy Handforth. "The Third's going to be the first on the scene!"

"Is it?" bellowed Handforth. "Come on, Remove!"

"Rally round, Fourth!" panted Buster Boots.

And so they all went—speeding with fleet feet over the wilderness of weeds. They rushed to the attack like a flood. And Mr. William Gore-Pearce, hearing all those schoolboy shouts, turned, frowning.

"What in heaven's name does this mean?" he snarled, turning helplessly to Snell. "What are these boys doing here?"

"Why ask me?" snapped the lawyer. "They belong to the big school, St. Frank's, I believe. Upon my soul, they look dangerous, too!"

"Stand back!" bellowed the millionaire, striding forward and raising his hand. "How dare you? Get back, you young fools!"

"On him!" came a yell from Handforth. "Bow! him over, you chaps!"

Like an avalanche, the juniors swept upon Mr. William Gore-Pearce, Snell and the other men. They all went down like nine-pins, and the juniors rushed on. They had no time to waste. The hired ruffians were already through the great doorway, and they were probably spreading themselves over the grim old house. There was only one thing to be done, in the view of the schoolboys. That was to seize these invaders, and to hurl them out again. Then, afterwards, they would re-erect the barricades.

It is hardly necessary to say that the juniors were enjoying themselves hugely.

This affair smacked of a barring-out, and the excitement of the battle was intoxicating. With one tremendous rush, the foremost juniors poured through the smashed doorway. Removites, Fourth Formers and fags were included among those pioneers.

The others, at a word of command from Reggie Pitt and Buster Boots, spread themselves round the outer walls. There was a chance that some of the invaders would try to escape by the windows, and the juniors wanted to catch them as they came out.

Inside the great house, Handforth and Nipper and their followers were spreading themselves out through the passages and great corridors. There was something almost magical in their speed.

Handforth, with Church and McClure in close attendance, came upon one of the invaders in the great hall. The chums of Study D pounced upon him grimly.

"All right, you chaps!" shouted Handforth. "Leave him to us! You get along and deal with the others!"

"Here, what's this?" gasped the man, half-fearfully. "What are you kids doing in here? What the—"

"Outside!" panted Handforth. "Are you going quietly, or shall we kick you out on your neck?"

"You young idiots!" gasped the man—a coarse-looking ruffian. "I've been paid to break into this 'ere 'ouse—"

"Then you won't be paid to get chucked out!" retorted Handforth. "If you want compensation, get it from Gore-Pearce! Now then, you chaps—all together!"

The man realised that he was up against something desperate. He fought madly, kicking and cursing and punching. But Handforth & Co. were easily masters of the situation. They ran the fellow out at express speed, and shot him through the doorway like a sack of coal going into a chute. With a wild yell, the man sailed down the steps, rolling over and over, and he was immediately followed by two others. Handforth & Co were not the only juniors who had been busy!

Within five minutes, all the invaders had been ejected. Edgemore Manor was in possession of the St. Frank's juniors. They were overrunning the place, from cellars to roof.

"Now the doors!" shouted Nipper.

Many hands made light of the work. The

great doors were roared up, jammed into position and propped. Heavy articles were dragged and placed against them. In the meantime, other members of the rescue party had found their way on to the battlements, and they were cheering wildly and uttering loud defiance at Mr. William Gore-Pearce.



CHAPTER 9.

The Counter-Attack!

"COME on!" sang out Handforth excitedly. "We're ready for you! Try to get in again!"

"You've done it once, but it's the last time!"

"Absolutely!"

"Three cheers for Lord Edgemore!"

"Hurrah!"

The juniors on the battlements raised their voices in a loud and prolonged series of cheers, and the Earl of Edgemore, standing some distance away on another part of the roof, listened in a kind of stunned silence. He had encountered some of these St. Frank's fellows earlier, and he had distrusted them. But now he knew how wrong he had been, for nothing could be more obvious than their attitude now.

"And now three groans for Gore-Pearce!" roared Handforth.

The groans were given with tremendous effect, and on the ground there were many different expressions to be seen. Mr. William Gore-Pearce was purple with rage. Mr. Lucas Snell was pale with agitation. The hired ruffians were dusting themselves down and generally coming back to their senses. The chauffeurs of the cars were trying not to smile.

"Never," panted Mr. William Gore-Pearce, "have I encountered anything like this! It is the most outrageous piece of interference that I have ever witnessed! Good heavens, Snell, what does it mean? What are these boys doing, stopping my men at their work?"

The lawyer scowled.

"Isn't it clear enough, Mr. Gore-Pearce?" he retorted snappily. "The boys have taken

sides with Lord Edgemore, and if you want any advice from me, I should suggest that you abandon the attempt to enter the Manor this afternoon!"

"Abandon it!" bellowed the millionaire. "You're a fool, Snell!"

"Upon my word, sir, I would like you to remember—"

"Do you think I'm going to be hindered and stopped by a parcel of schoolboys?" broke in Mr. Gore-Pearce furiously. "St. Frank's boys, eh? They're from the school where my own son attends! Oh, yes, I know them! Claude has told me much—and I know how shabbily they have been treating him. The young scoundrels! I'll soon show them that they cannot play such idiotic games with me!"

He strode towards his men, who, clumped together in a group, were discussing the painful nature of their recent encounter.

"Well, what are you doing here?" shouted the millionaire, glaring. "Haven't I paid you to get into this house?"

"That's all very well, guv'nor, but you didn't say anything about these 'ere kids!" said one of the men aggressively. "We didn't bargain for such resistance!"

"Pah! They're only boys!"

"Mebbe they are boys, but there's a tidy few of 'em!" said the man sourly. "You told us as 'ow there was nobody 'ere but two old men. We're finished guv'nor! Understand! Finished!"

Mr. William Gore-Pearce danced with rage.

"I will admit that these boys are a surprise!" he said thickly. "But, since they are here, they must be dealt with. I will give you five pounds—in addition to your other money—if you will drive these boys out and seize the building."

"Five quid each?" asked two or three of the men, in one voice.

"Yes!" said Mr. William Gore-Pearce desperately.

"Come on, you fellers!" said the leader of the men. "Did you 'ear that? A fiver each! It's worth avin' a shot at, ain't it?"

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"You bet it is!" said one of the others greedily.

From the battlements there was a loud yell as the men were seen picking up the great telegraph pole again, and preparing to make a rush at the main doors.

"Stand by, you chaps!" came Nipper's voice. "Some of us had better go down and help to hold the barricades! They're going to make another attack!"

"Good egg!" said Handforth enthusiastically. "We'll give 'em something for their money!"

"Rally round, St. Frank's!"

"Hurrah!"

In less than ten seconds there was hardly a junior to be seen on the battlements. They were all rushing down to help in the work of maintaining the defences.

Crash—crash!

The battering-ram was getting to work again, and because of their previous experience, perhaps, the men were much quicker at their work now. The doors, weakened seriously by the first onslaught, sagged back, then collapsed. The juniors had been very hurried in re-erecting the defences, and once again the enemy was within.

Not that they remained within for long!

Half a dozen of them got through, and they were met by about twenty determined juniors. And these juniors did not wait for any attack. They simply ran forward, and went for the invaders bald-headed. There was a crash—a series of wild yells—a number of curses—to say nothing of thuds and roars.

"Out with 'em!" yelled Handforth breathlessly. "Good men! That's the way! We've got them on toast! Gangway, there!"

Handforth and two or three other fellows, carrying one of the struggling invaders, brushed past. The man was shot out precipitately, and within the next two or three minutes he was followed by all his companions. Once again they had gained admittance, and once again they had been ejected.

Without any question, this was more exciting than football!

CHAPTER 10.

Lord Edgemore's Gratitude!



NIPPER turned away from the main doors, and his expression was a contented one. "That's better!"

"They won't get in again, I'll bet! By Jove, Handy, you're a bit of a sight, aren't you? Excuse me grinning!"

Edward Oswald Handforth was standing near by. He was very much of a wreck.

His overcoat had been discarded long since, and he stood there in his football garb. His left ear was bleeding, his mouth was swollen at one corner, his nose—by no means insignificant at the best of times—was taking up more than its allotted space on his visage. Not that the leader of Study D cared.

"You can grin as much as you like, you ass!" he said. "I've been having a glorious time. Three fights within ten minutes, my lads! And what about yourself?" he said, inspecting Nipper critically.

Nipper, in fact, was nearly as badly off as Handforth. He was showing many scars of battle, but he hadn't known it until Handforth had pointed them out.

"Never mind!" he said cheerily. "We've chucked out the invaders, and now we're in possession——"

Nipper broke off, for at that moment a hush had fallen over the other fellows. They were in the great hall of the Manor, where the light was gloomy and subdued. Down the great staircase came the Earl of Edgemore—slowly, deliberately, impressively.

"It's all right, sir, we're on your side!" sang out Handforth, breaking the ice. "We've hiked them out again, and we'll hold the fort against all comers!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Kindly rely upon us to rally round with vim, sir!"

Lord Edgemore came to a halt halfway down the stairs, and when he spoke his voice was quiet, if trembling a little.

"Why have you done this, my boys?" he asked.

"Eh? Why, sir?" said Handforth. "Well, you see, we—we—— That is, we heard all about it, sir, and we thought we'd lend you a hand."

"Some of you are the boys who came to me several nights ago," said Lord Edgemore quietly. "I refused to admit you, although one of your number had been injured. I am inexpressibly shocked that I could have been so inhospitable—so blind to your true natures. But I fear that I am suspicious of everybody."

"Oh, cheese it, sir!" said Handforth. "We quite understand about the other night—and we don't want you to thank us for what we've done to-day. We've been enjoying ourselves immensely."

"Upon my soul!" said Lord Edgemore.

"You see, sir, we know something about Mr. William Gore-Pearce, and we don't like him," said Nipper, stepping forward. "We don't like his son, either. His son is at St. Frank's now, and for days he's been boasting and bragging about the way you were going to be pitched out of the Manor. So when we heard that Gore-Pearce and his men were on the job, we came along to help."

"And we'll keep on helping, sir!" added Handforth eagerly.

For a few moments, the earl made no reply. Apparently he was overwhelmed by the spirit that these boys were displaying; and the fellows, for their own part, felt very uncomfortable.

"You must forgive me, my boys, for appearing so unappreciative," said the earl, at last. "But I cannot find words to express my feelings. So there are generous hearts in the world still? I had begun to doubt it! But it worries me that you should mix yourselves up in my quarrels."

"It's our quarrel, just as much as yours, sir," said Handforth. "We're up against Gore-Pearce's son, and—"

"No, no, that will not do!" interrupted the old man, shaking his head. "You cannot put me off with such transparent denials. You are doing this for my sake, and mine only. And I thank you, my boys. I am grateful."

There was a silence, and then it was seen that Jenkins, the butler, had joined his master. The old retainer was looking flushed—and his expression was excited.

"They've drawn off, my lord!" he announced wheezily. "Ay, they've all gone back—and the rascals won't take no more heed of Mr. Gore-Pearce! There's nothing to fear yet awhile."

"There has been nothing to fear all along, Jenkins!" said Lord Edgemore, with dignity. "I do not fear these ruffians! If they drive me out, I shall accept the position with dignity. But I have resisted because I must stick to my principles. This house is mine, and no intruders shall set foot within its walls unhampered."

"But we're intruders, sir," said Nipper uncomfortably.

"No, my boys—no!" said his lordship. "You are my helpers—my champions. I do not regard you as intruders. I should be an ingrate indeed, if I held that view."

Handforth wanted to put an end to this delicate situation, and he suddenly looked round and pretended to be excited.

"Now then, you chaps!" he sang out. "We mustn't all stand here, jawing! We ought to be on the watch! We ought to be up on the battlements, so that we can keep an eye on the enemy. We'll be ready for the next attack!"

The other juniors, who were all feeling intensely uncomfortable as they listened to the earl's words of gratitude, saw what Handforth was driving at, and immediately took their cue.

"You're right, Handy!"

"We must be prepared!"

"Yes, rather!"

"To the battlements, you fellows!"

"Hear, hear!"

With a rush, the defenders hurried off to various parts of the old building. They went to the barricaded windows, up the staircase to the battlements outside. In fact, they went anywhere to escape the Earl of Edgemore and his expressions of gratitude.



CHAPTER 11.

Another Arrival

OUTSIDE, Mr. William Gore-Pearce was working himself into a state that bordered on frenzy.

"These infernal boys shall pay dearly for this, Snell!" he said harshly, as he turned to the lawyer. "Twice they have interfered with my men, and now the fools won't make another attack!"

"Can you blame them?" asked Lucas Snell bitterly. "These boys are overwhelmingly superior in numbers, and it is sheer folly, Mr. Gore-Pearce, to remain here. Our only course is to go."

"And admit defeat?" snarled the millionaire.

"What else?" retorted the other. "I think it is said of you, Mr. Gore-Pearce, that you have never been beaten—"

"And it is true!" rapped out Gore-Pearce.

"It may have been true until to-day, but nothing can alter the fact that these school-boys have gained a great victory. Your men have refused to take any further action, and it would only be a waste of breath to argue with them. Indeed, it would be undignified in the extreme."

"Pah!" snorted Mr. Gore-Pearce, clenching his fists and pacing up and down. "If you can do nothing better than this, Snell, you had better go away! I shall remain—and I shall not rest until I am in possession of the Manor. I came here for that purpose, and I shall not leave until my object has been accomplished!"

Mr. Snell made no comment. But he pursed his thin lips, and turned aside. He had no patience with a man who refused to see the red signal when it was blazed into his eyes.

"There is only one thing to be done!" said the millionaire suddenly. "We must get more men!"

"Really, sir, you cannot be serious!" ejaculated Snell, staring.

"I am serious!" retorted the millionaire. "And why not? There are plenty of men to be obtained! Money will buy anything—anything, Snell! And I don't care how much I spend this afternoon! I am not going to be defeated by these insolent, outrageous schoolboys! More men must be fetched—from the village, from Bannington—anywhere! I will stay here until they come. Then we will make such an attack that these wretched boys will be sorry that they ever defied me!"

"And the publicity?" asked Lucas Snell sourly.

"Eh? What's that? The publicity?" rapped out the millionaire. "What of it?"

Hasn't there been enough publicity already? A little more will make no difference!"

"It will make all the difference!" said Snell. "So far, you have only used picked men. But what sort of a story will get abroad if you hire ruffians from Bannington? And do you suppose the whole town is composed of ruffians? Where do you think you'll get the necessary number of hooligans? I urge you, Mr. Gore-Pearce, to think carefully before you take this serious step."

"I am tired—tired of being defied!" panted Mr. Gore-Pearce. "I tell you, Snell, that I am at the end of my patience. I will not wait another day!"

"Then you must blame yourself, sir, if you get into grave trouble," said the lawyer harshly. "I warned you against this action—I advised you not to take it. You know well enough that these men are not bailiff's officers. They are not representatives of the law. Another two or three days, and the whole issue will be perfectly plain. But no, in your impatience you ignore my advice, and—"

"Enough—enough!" snapped Mr. Gore-Pearce. "I don't want to hear your complaints, Snell! I am sick and tired of hearing—But who is this? By Heaven! If this fellow is a reporter, I'll kick him off the premises with my own boot!"

A car had come to a standstill some little distance away, and now a tall, active figure was striding up. At the first sight of that figure, the juniors on the battlements fell silent and watched anxiously.

"The guv'nor!" murmured Nipper. "Now for the fireworks, my lads!"

"Why?" asked Handforth, not without uneasiness. "Mr. Lee won't be hard-hearted enough to side with Gore-Pearce, will he?"

"I should hope not!" said Nipper.

"Then he'll have to side with us," said Handforth triumphantly. "Let's give him a cheer, you chaps, just to show him that we're glad to see him."

"But are we glad?" murmured Church.

The fact of the matter was, none of the juniors were glad. On the contrary, they were filled with uneasiness at the unexpected sight of Nelson Lee. And so the cheer wasn't given—for most of the juniors felt that it would be half-hearted and weak. They all collected there, on the battlements and at the barricaded windows, watching with growing anxiety.

They saw Mr. William Gore-Pearce stride forward, and bar the way of this new arrival.

"Well, sir," snapped the millionaire, "who are you? And what do you want here? Do you know that this property is private?"

Nelson Lee came to a halt, and he looked at Mr. Gore-Pearce very frigidly.

These opening words of the millionaire's had done much to convince Lee that the

boys had been justified in acting as they had done.

"I imagine that I am addressing Mr. Gore-Pearce," asked Lee coldly.

"You are!" retorted the millionaire. "Who else did you think you were addressing? Can't you see that I'm Mr. Gore-Pearce? What do you want here?"

"I came to order these boys to return to the school," replied Nelson Lee steadily. "But I am more than half inclined to change my mind, Mr. Gore-Pearce. I resent, in the strongest possible manner, your present tone."

The millionaire turned red, and stepped back a pace.

"Indeed!" he blustered. "And who are you to resent my manners? A schoolmaster, eh? Come to fetch your boys away! And it's high time, let me tell you! I shall report you to your headmaster the very instant I get within reach of the telephone! Now, sir! That will show you the kind of man I am!"

But Nelson Lee had already discovered what kind of a man Mr. William Gore-Pearce was!

CHAPTER 12.

Strange Behaviour of Mr. Lucas Snell!



URING those few moments, Nelson Lee felt a great deal of sympathy for the juniors. He knew

that they had come here in a generous spirit, and Lee, in his heart, felt very sorry for the Earl of Edgemore. But it had been rumoured that these boys had defied the bailiff's officers, and something had to be done. Nelson Lee, as a Housemaster, could not allow the boys to continue with this escapade.

"I am sorry that you should take such a delight in making yourself objectionable, Mr. Gore-Pearce," said Nelson Lee frigidly. "My name is Lee—Nelson Lee. I am the Housemaster of the Ancient House at St. Frank's. I understand that these boys have been interfering with the lawful—"

"Interfering!" broke in the millionaire. "Good heavens! I could use a stronger word than 'interfering'! Never in my life have I witnessed such an unexampled exhibition of impertinence and hooliganism!"

"I imagine that you are well acquainted with the various forms of hooliganism, Mr. Gore-Pearce!" retorted Lee.

"Are you daring to insult me?" raved Mr. Gore-Pearce, turning purple. "Who do you think you are? A schoolmaster—a paltry schoolmaster! I order you to take these boys away. Do you hear me? Get them out of this building, and take them away!"

If you don't, I'll have the school prosecuted for—"

"If you will compose yourself, Mr. Gore-Pearce, and talk less wildly, we may be able to come to some arrangement!" broke in Lee steadily. "But as long as you continue to regard me as one of your own unfortunate menials, I must decline to converse with you."

And Lee walked away before the millionaire could make any further comment. At the same moment, a hail came from the Earl of Edgemore, who was leaning over the battlements.

"One moment, sir—one moment!" he called. "The boys tell me that you are a schoolmaster. May I have a word with you, sir?"

"With pleasure, Lord Edgemore," said Nelson Lee.

"I would like you to be informed, sir, that these boys are my guests!" said Lord Edgemore. "They are remaining on these premises at my invitation. As you may know, they have helped me to defend my property against a band of ruffians. They are splendid boys, and I am grateful to them. Let me repeat that they are here now at my express invitation."

ing, since Mr. Snell had just come up from another part of the terrace. He looked at Nelson Lee casually—and then started. For he found that Lee was regarding him with a careful scrutinising gaze.

"Rather an unexpected meeting, Selwyn," said Nelson Lee pleasantly.

"I beg your pardon, sir!" panted the other, a choking sound in his voice. "You have the advantage of me! My name is Snell! I am Mr. Lucas Snell, Lord Edgemore's lawyer."



Handforth and Co. ran the fellow out at express speed, and shot him through the doorway like a sack of coal going into a chute. With a wild yell, the man sailed down the steps, rolling over and over.

"Hurrah!"

"That's the stuff, sir!"

Nelson Lee was looking keen now.

"Ruffians?" he repeated. "Were there no bailiffs' officers, Lord Edgemore?"

"None!" replied his lordship. "They were merely the paid hirelings of this—this purse-proud bully who is attempting to drive me out of my home!"

"Thank you," said Lee quietly.

He turned, and retraced his steps towards Mr. William Gore-Pearce. But on the way, he came face to face with Lucas Snell, the lawyer. It was quite an accidental meet-

Without another word, he hurried away and caught hold of Mr. Gore-Pearce by the arm.

"Come!" he muttered hoarsely. "This affair has gone far enough, sir! Let us go at once!"

"What on earth's the matter with you, man?" demanded the millionaire, staring.

"Nothing—nothing at all!" said Snell. "But this business is getting on my nerves! Leave it until another day!"

And Mr. Lucas Snell walked off—towards the drive gateway. His departure, indeed, was precipitate.

In the rear, Nelson Lee pursed his lips, and there was a queer little smile round the corners of his mouth.

"Interesting!" he murmured. "Yes, most interesting!"

He found that Mr. Gore-Pearce was approaching him, and his expression hardened.

"I am informed, Mr. Gore-Pearce, that you have no bailiff's officer with you?" he said inquiringly.

"What business is that of yours?" snapped the other.

"It affects the position very materially," replied Lee. "If my boys had interfered with the officers of the law, I should have acted very sternly with them. I should advise you to behave more like a gentleman, Mr. Gore-Pearce—and less like a boor!"

"I want no advice from you!" snarled Mr. William Gore-Pearce. "Bah! You have not heard the last of this! No, by Heaven, not by any means!"

He turned on his heel, almost incoherent with rage. He slammed his way into his car, and bellowed orders at his chauffeur. Three minutes later the millionaire and all his crowd had gone.

A rousing cheer went up from the battlements, and it was a derisive cheer, too.

The fortress had been left in their possession, and the enemy had skulked off with his tail between his legs!



CHAPTER 13.

Unwelcome Orders!

URRAH!"

"They've all gone—the whole bunch!"

"Down with tyranny!"

The defenders were shouting and cheering in glee. But they changed their tone a minute later when Nelson Lee waved to them for silence, and then spoke.

"Boys," he said, "come down here!"

It was a simple enough order, but it caused instant consternation.

"But we can't, sir!" protested Handforth in dismay.

"Indeed! And why not?"

"We're defending the Manor, sir!" said Edward Oswald, leaning over the parapet. "We've promised to give Lord Edgemore our support——"

"I am very sorry that you were so rash," replied Nelson Lee. "There is no need to defend the Manor any longer. Mr. Gore-Pearce and his men have gone, and there is little likelihood of their returning to-day. You boys must come back to St. Frank's, and you must remember that I am not Mr. Gore-Pearce. I expect obedience from you—not defiance!"

"Yes, sir!" chorused the fellows mournfully.

"Since Lord Edgemore has assured me

that you are his guests, I shall, of course, take no action in regard to your recent conduct," went on Nelson Lee dryly. "But there must be no repetition of it."

Up on the battlements, the juniors were grumbling and complaining.

"I thought it couldn't last long!" said Handforth bitterly. "Why the dickens couldn't Mr. Lee keep out of it? I thought he was more decent! I am disappointed in him—I am surprised at his lack of tact."

"Don't be an ass, old man," said McClure. "What else could Mr. Lee do? We're jolly lucky to get out of it without being punished!"

"Punished!" said Handforth. "Punished for sticking up for Right?"

"That's what people generally do get punished for in this world," said Church sagely. "We were all born to be misunderstood, Handy. But Mr. Lee is a decent chap, and he's going to wink his eye."

Five minutes later all the juniors were outside, collected in groups, talking excitedly and animatedly. And in the doorway Nelson Lee was talking with the Earl of Edgemore.

"You have acted very generously, sir," said the earl quietly. "It would hurt me exceedingly if these boys were punished for coming to my aid so splendidly."

"I can only hope, Lord Edgemore, that Mr. Gore-Pearce will not repeat these questionable tactics," said Nelson Lee. "If there is any way in which I can help, I shall be only too glad to place my services at your disposal."

"You are very generous, Mr. Lee," said the old man. "But I am afraid that I must face my troubles alone. I am poor—pitifully poor—and I cannot afford—— No, no, please do not imagine that I am deliberately causing offence. But I know that advice costs money, and I am an independent old man. I am afraid you must let me go my own way."

"As you will, Lord Edgemore," said Nelson Lee quietly. "A few minutes ago, I had a word or two with Mr. Snell. He gave me to understand that he is your lawyer!"

"The snake!" said the old earl fiercely. "He was my lawyer, Mr. Lee—he was! But now that it is too late, I realize my folly. For many years I have placed all my affairs in Snell's hands. I have left everything to him, and what is the result?"

He waved his hand upwards, indicating the pile all around him.

"Snell has sold my ancestral home over my head!" he said bitterly. "That is what he tells me—but I will not accept his statement. This is mine—and I will not surrender it! Fool that I was to leave my affairs in that man's trust! He has betrayed me shamefully—criminally!"

"If that is the case, Lord Edgemore, cannot you take action?" asked Lee earnestly.

"Action!" repeated the old man, with a helpless shrug of his shoulders. "I? What action do you suppose I am capable of

taking? I am alone, sir—there is not a soul in the world who cares for me. My son—my only son—was killed in the Great War. Nothing is left to me—except my home. What action can I take against this rascally lawyer?"

"If there is evidence of fraud——"

"Evidence!" broke in the earl. "There is no evidence except that of my own fancies, my own mind, and even if there were more solid evidence—what could I do? You are a man of the world, sir, and you know that actions of this kind cost money. Big money. The law courts—solicitors—counsel! Thousands of pounds, Mr. Lee! And where can I get that money? How can I bring an action against Snell? No, I am helpless. He is a cleverer man than I, and I must accept the inevitable. But, as I have repeated many and many times, I shall not leave my home until I am driven out!"

There was a note of finality in the Earl of Edgemore's tone as he said these words. Nelson Lee bowed, and a moment later he was with the boys.

"Come along!" he said briefly. "I hate doing it, young 'uns, but we've got to leave the old fellow to get on as best he can without us."

"Do you think he'll be turned out, sir?" asked Handforth anxiously.

"I fear there is no chance of anything else," replied Nelson Lee. "The bailiff's officers will certainly be at the Manor within a day or two, and then the law must take its course."

As they heard those words there was general gloom in the ranks of the late defending force.



CHAPTER 14.

Nelson Lee's Hint!

"I SN'T it a beastly shamo, sir?" asked Nipper soberly.

He and Nelson Lee were walking together—walking slowly, and Lee was looking very abstracted. All the other juniors had broken up into different groups, and were preparing to go home. The Third, for example, under Willy, was marching off in one big bunch. Handforth & Co. had joined forces with Vivian Travers and Archie Glenthorne and Sir Jimmy Potts. The others were separated into groups.

"A shame, Nipper!" repeated Lee. "Yes, indeed! A terrible shame! I am intensely sorry for this lonely old aristocrat."

"But can't something be done, sir?"

"I'm afraid not, Nipper, and yet——"

"And yet what, sir?"

"I have a suspicion in my mind that all is not as it should be," continued Lee, with a frown. "I have been making inquiries concerning the Earl of Edgemore, and I

have discovered that he was quite a rich man some years ago."

"But what's he done with his money, sir?" asked Nipper, in surprise. "He's always been a kind of hermit, hasn't he? He's always lived here with nobody but old Jenkins?"

"Not exactly that, young 'un," Lee replied. "It was the War that broke his lordship up. Previous to that he had always lived in a modest way. His household merely consisted of a few servants, Jenkins, the butler, and one or two horses and a carriage or so. But when his son was killed at the War, he broke up."

"I suppose that was when he started getting hard up, guv'nor?"

"By no means," said Lee. "For several years after the war, Lord Edgemore was reputed to be a wealthy man, and yet he lived in this seclusion—allowing the park to go into disuse. He was spending money nowhere. That is why I am so astonished to discover, now, that he is virtually a pauper."

"Something fishy, eh, sir?"

"Something decidedly fishy," replied Lee grimly. "As tactfully as possible, I suggested to the old man that I should help him. But he is independent—and he refused."

"You don't always take 'No' for an answer, sir."

"That's true!" admitted Nelson Lee dryly. "And in this particular instance, I have a mind to look more closely into these affairs. I am particularly interested in the character of Mr. Lucas Snell. He is a questionable gentleman, Nipper."

"He seems not half so bad as old Gore-Pearce!" said Nipper gruffly.

"Nonsense!" said Lee. "There is nothing criminally wrong with Mr. Gore-Pearce. I do not even think that he gained his millions dishonestly—at least, not in a manner that can be questioned by the law. Gore-Pearce is vulgar, and his head has been turned by his wealth. We can dismiss him, Nipper. He is a bragging, loud-voiced nonentity. But Mr. Lucas Snell is a man of a very different character. It was he, you must remember, who sold this property to Mr. Gore-Pearce, and it is in my mind to believe that he chose Mr. Gore-Pearce because of the latter's obtuseness. In his own sphere Mr. Gore-Pearce may be a brilliant business man, but where such property as Edgemore Manor is concerned, he is like a child in Snell's hands."

Nipper looked at Nelson Lee very closely.

"Do you know something about Snell, sir?" he asked, with a new note of interest in his voice.

"Yes, something!" said Nelson Lee. "For example, twenty years ago the excellent Mr. Snell was sentenced to five years' penal servitude for conspiracy and fraud!"

"Phew!" whistled Nipper. "Then he's a giddy gaul bird!"

"Yes, Mr. Snell served his time," agreed Lee. "I think Snell is his real name—but he was sentenced under the name of Selwyn. Since then he has spent a good deal of time in South America, and it is only since the war that he set up as a solicitor in this country. He probably believed that his old record would not tell against him. And it is a singular fact, Nipper, that Lord Edgemore's gradual downfall dates from the time when he placed his affairs in Snell's hands."

"But why did he do it?" asked Nipper, in amazement. "Why did Lord Edgemore trust a man like that?"

"Because Lord Edgemore knows nothing whatever about business—or of lawyers," replied Lee. "His old lawyer died soon after the Armistice, and the firm was wound up, I believe. Perhaps Snell was recommended to his lordship—we cannot tell, and it does not really matter. However, at the risk of being a busybody, I intend to look very closely into this case."

"Then things aren't so bad as I thought they were, sir," said Nipper cheerily. "The poor old earl may suffer all sorts of indignities during the next week or so, but you'll soon put things right, guv'nor."

"I shall try to, Nipper!" said Lee, with determination in his voice.



CHAPTER 15.

House To Let

FRIGHTFULLY frightful sort of business, laddies!" said Archie Glenthorne stoutly. "In fact, a

poisonous affair 'frem beginning to end! Absolutely!"

"Think of it!" said Handforth, in an exasperated voice. "We were in the place—we were in possession! We could have held out against a hundred attackers! And Mr. Lee must come along and order us out! I'm ashamed of him!"

Church and Jimmy Potts grinned.

"I dare say he'll get over it, Handy," Church said. "But what's the good of raving at poor old Mr. Lee? He couldn't help it—he had to act like that. We belong to St. Frank's, and we can't barricade ourselves in Edgemore Manor, and stay there indefinitely."

"Well spoken, dear old fellow," nodded Vivian Travers. "We routed the enemy this afternoon, and let us be satisfied with that."

"Well, I'm not satisfied with it—not by long chalks!" said Edward Oswald Handforth aggressively. "What's going to happen to-morrow—or the next day? While we're at lessons, perhaps, that beast Gore-Pearce will return with the bailiff's men,

and pitch the poor old earl out into the road!"

"Good gad!" said Archie, in horror. "I see what you mean, old boy! They'll absolutely pitch him out—what? Why is it that such blighters are allowed to live in this dashed world? I mean to say, justice, what?"

Handforth & Co. and the other three Removites were very depressed. All of them, except Handforth, realised that the adventure had ended in the only possible way. Nelson Lee had had no alternative. It was essential that they should all return to school. They had served the old earl during his hour of danger, but it was ridiculous to suppose that they could constitute themselves as his bodyguard for good.

They were trudging along the quiet lane at the moment, pushing their bicycles up a sharp rise. Most of the other fellows had gone on in advance, but it didn't matter. There was no hurry. They would get back to St. Frank's well in time for tea.

"I don't like it!" said Handforth gruffly, as he remounted his machine at the hill-top. "It seems all wrong that we should go away like this. Why can't these schoolmasters be broadminded? Why couldn't they give us leave of absence for a week?"

The others grinned.

"I would remind you, dear old fellow, that this is the twentieth century," said Travers. "We are no longer living in the age of miracles."

Handforth only grunted, and they all free-wheeled down the hill. As they went, McClure pointed.

"We're still skirting round the Edgemore estate," he said. "All this is the earl's property—or was."

"And now it belongs to that rotter, Gore-Pearce!" said Jimmy Potts, shaking his head. "It's a shame that a man like that should come into the district. He's lowering the tone of the whole place."

By this time they had got to the bottom of the hill, and Handforth was behind all the others. This was unusual, for Handforth generally insisted upon leading the way. But he was so thoughtful that he had forgotten to take his brake off, and when he reached the bottom of the dip, instead of pedalling like the others, he suddenly leaped from his machine and commenced shouting.

"Hallo! What's the matter with Handy?" asked Church, glancing round.

"Blessed if I know!" said McClure. "He's standing in the middle of the road, waving his arms like a giddy windmill!"

"Puncture, I expect!" said Jimmy Potts.

"How awfully frightful!" exclaimed Archie, dismounting. "I mean, a dashed puncture! How frightfully awful!"

"We'd better go back," said Church.

They returned, and they were rather surprised—and relieved—to see that both of Handforth's tyres were hard. In fact, he had pushed his bicycle into the hedge, and

now he was pointing to a small, picturesque cottage which lay slightly back from the road surrounded by leafless trees and a few evergreens.

"Look!" Handforth yelled.

"We're looking!" said Travers. "Wonderful! A cottage, dear old fellow. Actually a cottage! To the best of my recollection, I've never seen one before!"

"You silly ass!" roared Handforth. "The cottage is empty!"

"It's empty!" said Travers impressively, as he turned to the others. "Even more remarkable still. Behold an empty cottage. Wonders will never cease!"

"What are you getting at, Handy?" demanded Church, thinking it better to butt in in order to obviate slaughter. "We can see it's an empty cottage, can't we? What about it?"

"Look at that board!" said Handforth excitedly.

Very puzzled, the other juniors examined a dilapidated board which was hanging over the front hedge. It was at an acute angle, evidently having been blown into that condition by the recent gale, and it announced to all and sundry that the cottage was to let. It further informed the world at large that details were to be obtained from the landlord, Mr. Jacob Smithers, of the Elm Farm, Edgemore.

"Well, what about it?" asked McClure, staring. "Have you gone dotty, Handy, or what? There's nothing startling about that board. It only says that the cottage is to let, and that the landlord is a chap named Smithers."

"But—but you don't seem to understand!" yelled Handforth breathlessly. "This cottage is to let, and it overlooks Lord Edgemore's estate! Can't you see? The place is empty, and it's bound to be going cheap!"

"I'm frightfully afraid, dear old cheese, that we're dense!" said Archie Glenthorne, adjusting his monocle and regarding Handforth with frank curiosity. "Absolutely dense! I mean, I'm dashed if I can understand what you're driving at, laddie! Of course, it's frightfully unusual to see a place to let nowadays."

"Oh, I don't know!" said Church. "Things aren't so bad as they were. It's not exactly a novelty to see a house with a 'To Let' board outside."

Handforth fairly danced in his exasperation.

"But don't you think it's a great idea of mine?" he shouted. "Don't you think it's the idea of the century?"

Vivian Travers chuckled.

"After you've told us the idea, Handy, we might be able to judge," he said whimsically. "But as you evidently expect us to read your thoughts, we're a bit of a disadvantage. As thought-readers, we're simply awful!"



CHAPTER 16.

Startling!

HANDFORTH stared blankly for a moment, and then he started.

"By George!" he ejaculated. "Haven't I told you the idea yet?"

"Of course you haven't!" said Mac. "And if it's only one of your ideas, Handy, we'd better not waste any time. I don't want to be impolite, but your wheezes are generally the same as any other fellow's nightmares. In other words, they're impossible!"

But Handforth was too excited to take offence.

"Listen!" he said impressively. "Here's this cottage—empty—overlooking Lord Edgemore's estate. It's quite a picturesque little place, too."

"That's true enough!" nodded McClure. "It certainly is an attractive-looking cottage, and I expect it's a big rent, too."

"Possibly!" said Edward Oswald. "But you never know! It might be snapped up at any hour. We'd better rush along to Mr. Smithers, and see him."

"See him!" yelled Church. "But what for?"

"To get the cottage, of course!"

"Get the cottage!" howled McClure. "But what the dickens do we want it for?"

Handforth breathed hard.

"Haven't I just told you?" he snapped. "Haven't I just explained my idea?"

His chums groaned, and Travers and Potts and Archie chuckled.

"Good old Handy!" murmured Travers. "The one and only!"

Church seized Handforth by the arm. "Pull yourself together, old man," he said anxiously. "There's something wrong with your brain, by the look of things. You keep talking about an idea, but we haven't the faintest notion what it is. And why, in the name of all that's wonderful, should we go to this Mr. Smithers, and rent a cottage that we don't want?"

"But we do want it?" said Handforth promptly.

"Eh? Do we?"

"Of course!" said Handforth. "Now that I've explained my idea——"

"But you haven't explained it!" hooted Church.

"I've never seen such a dense crowd of fatheads in all my life!" said Handforth, glowering. "Here have I been standing here for ten solid minutes, telling you this idea, and you don't seem to know a thing! As soon as the old carl is installed in the cottage——"

"Good gad!"

"Kindly repeat that, Handy, dear old fellow," said Travers. "I didn't quite catch it."



Spending over the wilderness of weeds, the juniors—Remove, Fourth and Third—rushed to the attack like a charging army. And Mr. Gore-Pearce, bearing all their accolades, shouts, turned, frowning, "What does this mean?" the millionaire snarled. "What are those boys doing here?"

"I said, as soon as the old earl is installed in the cottage——" began Handforth.

"Installed in the cottage?" repeated Church. "The old earl? Oh, crumbs! There's no question about it, you chaps. He is dotty! Clean off his rocker! One of those hoodlums must have given him a bash on the head, or something, and his brain has got dislocated!"

They were all staring at Handforth in wonder. What fantastic idea had he got into that head of his now? Fortunately, he cooled down. Without the slightest warning he changed from hot to cold. This was quite characteristic of the leader of Study D. Instead of being wildly excited, he became calculatingly icy.

"I'm sorry! I forgot that I was talking to half-wits!" he said witheringly. "Perhaps I'd better begin all over again, and explain the scheme in every detail."

"Perhaps you'd better!" said McClure ominously.

"Well, here it is, in a nutshell," said Handforth. "Here's this cottage to let, and it's facing the Edgemore estate. If we hurry, we might be able to snap it up, and then it won't take us long to furnish it, and——"

"Just a minute, dear old fellow," interrupted Travers politely. "You didn't mention what kind of nutshell you had in mind. I take it that you meant a cocoanut."

The others grinned, and Handforth compressed his lips.

"Poor chap!" he said scornfully.

"Travers, I'm sorry for you!"

"Well, well!" murmured Travers. "I've somehow got a feeling that I've been squashed."

"My idea is to rent this cottage!" said Handforth, coming down to details at last. "You know as well as I do that Lord Edgemore is going to be pitched out of the Manor within a day or two. Perhaps to-morrow—perhaps on Friday. Well, where is he going to?"

"How should we know?" asked Church. "According to all the rumours, he's got nowhere to go to."

"Exactly," said Handforth triumphantly.

"Eh? You—you don't mean——"

"Yes, I do," said Handforth, grinning.

"I mean that we can rent this cottage, furnish it, and have it all ready for the poor old boy when he is evicted. There are lots of chaps with money in the Remove, and we can do this ourselves. We'll buy the furniture—or borrow some of it from our studies—and we'll equip the whole place. We'll have some coal in, and lamps, and paraffin for them, and everything. We'll even stock the larder with grub. Don't you see? As soon as the earl and his retainer are booted out, we'll escort them into this haven of refuge. And after that we'll look after 'em!"

The others were breathless. They stared at Handforth in sheer astonishment. It was

characteristic of Edward Oswald to think of such an idea as this. He was one of the most generous fellows at St. Frank's—he would always give his last away. Now, in the goodness of his heart, he had evolved this kindly plan.

"You're crazy!" said Church, at last. "Handy, old man, you're absolutely mad!"

"I never heard such a dotty idea in all my life!" added McClure. "Of course, it's generous enough—we're not denying that—but it's—it's so fantastic!"

"Odds schemes and notions!" said Archie



Spending over the wilderness of wood
charging army. And Mr. Gore-Pea
does this mean?" the r

Glenthorne. "It's a frightfully rummy suggesch, but, all the same, laddies, it rather appeals to me. Absolutely!"

"Good old Archie!" said Vivian Travers heartily. "Handy. I apologise! Humbly I crave your pardon. Let me bow low before you."

And Travers proceeded to bow.

"Idiot!" said Handforth darkly. "If you're pulling my leg——"

"Nothing is further from my thoughts!" said Travers. "Handforth deserves a medal. We've been wondering what we could do to

help poor old Lord Edgemore, and here's the solution—and, wonder of wonders, our own Handy has suggested it!"



CHAPTER 17.

Many Supporters!

WITHIN a couple of minutes, Church and McClure and Jimmy Potts were as enthusiastic as Vivian

Travers and Archie Glenhorne.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Church, scratching his head. "I thought that you fellows would say that Handy's idea was rotten!"

"You'll always find a grain or two of corn amongst the chaff," said Travers, nodding. "Out of every hundred ideas that Handy gets, ninety-nine of 'em are duds."



ove, Fourth and Third—rushed to the attack like a se schoolboy shouts, turned, frowning. "What 'What are those tows doing here?"

But the hundredth—! By Samson! The hundredth is an idea!"

"You see?" said Handforth eagerly. "We've virtually been forbidden to help the old earl at the Manor. We can't go there and protect the place for him, and, after all, if the bailiff's men are coming it's just as well that we should be out of it. But we can see that the poor old buffer isn't stranded. We can provide him with a shelter."

"It'll cost a bit of money, won't it?" asked McClure dubiously.

"It's the first time I knew you were mean, Mac!" said Handforth severely.

"I'm not mean!" denied McClure. "But I never have much pocket money, and a stunt like this will cost quids and quids. First of all, there'll be the rent of the cottage, then we shall have to furnish it, and find food and coal and—"

"Well, there are plenty of chaps in the Remove with money, aren't there?" broke in Handforth, looking straight at Travers.

"Plenty!" agreed Vivian Travers, nodding. "I'm one of 'em. As it happens, I'm pretty flush at the moment, dear old fellow, and I'll whack out twenty quid on the spot."

"Good man!" said Handforth heartily. "That's the spirit! You mean it, Travers, don't you?"

"Honour bright!" smiled Travers. "There's Archie, too—"

"Absolutely!" said the genial ass of the Remove. "Count on me, Handy, old tea-pot! Good gad! And that reminds me!"

he added, with a start. "Tea, what? There's a dashed aching void within me, laddies. Hadn't we better trickle onwards?"

"What about this cottage?" asked Handforth. "I suggest that we go to Mr. Smithers at once and—"

"After tea!" interrupted Travers. "Hang it, Handy, there's no such tearing hurry. Besides, we want to tell Nipper and Fullwood and a few of the other fellows. Before we can enter into any definite arrangement, we must settle the financial question. We want to know how many quids we can raise, as a starting fund."

Even the impractical Handforth saw the commonsense of this suggestion, and so, before long, the juniors were on their bicycles again, pedalling rapidly towards St. Frank's.

But when they arrived, Handforth didn't wait for tea. He insisted upon a meeting at once.

"We can't bother about meals now!" he said briskly. "We've got to settle this thing at once. After that, we've got to go to Edgemore and see Mr. Smithers. Mac! Churchy! Buzz round and gather all the chaps together!"

"Oh, but really!" protested Archie, in dismay. "Wouldn't it be a ripe scheme to brace ourselves with some tea beforehand? I mean to say, tea—"

"I'm surprised at you, Archie!" broke in Handforth sternly. "You're the kind of fellow who would fiddle while Rome burned! Let's get the chaps together, and talk about this cottage."

However, a kind of compromise was reached. It was agreed that there should be an exclusive meeting in the Ancient House Common Room ten minutes later. If tea

could be disposed of within that limited time, all well and good.

Actually, the ten minutes lengthened to about twenty before the meeting had gathered. The whole of St. Frank's was talking about the exciting events of the afternoon—but only a selected few were admitted into the Common Room. In the senior school there was much shaking of heads, and more than one Sixth-Former was heard to exclaim that these juniors were getting beyond all bounds. They were liable to forget that in their own junior days they were probably just as bad—and perhaps worse.

There was no question about the success of Edward Oswald Handforth's plan. At first the juniors were startled, but then they grew accustomed to the idea, and they became enthusiastic.

"But we've got to act now!" went on Handforth, after he had explained everything. "It's no use beating about the bush. We've got to go and see Mr. Smithers, and we must be prepared to pay rent in advance. So it's cash we need—and as much as we can get hold of! Hands up everybody with money!"

"We'd better form a committee," said Nipper practically. "We can't go ahead with a project of this sort unless there is system and order."

"I'll be president of the committee, then!" said Handforth.

"Good enough—it's your idea, so you can be president," agreed Nipper. "Now we'll form the committee, and after that we'll gather in the funds."

The committee was a large one, consisting of Handforth & Co., Nipper & Co., Archie Glen-thorne, Travers, Jimmy Potts, Fullwood, Russell, Gresham, Duncan and a few special fellows from the West House, including Reggie Pitt and Grey and Singleton. Incidentally, no Fourth-Formers were admitted into the programme. This was a Remove stunt, pure and simple.

Money rolled in amazingly.

There were plenty of fellows on the committee with rich pocket-books. Archie Glen-thorne and Singleton and Tregellis-West—to name only a few—were well-provided with cash, and they were liberal in their contributions. Not only were they genuinely sorry for the unfortunate Lord Edgemore, but they were revelling in this novel plan.

To offer charity to the dignified old earl was out of the question. But this was different. They were getting a little home ready for him—to be used, if necessary, at

the crucial moment; and they went forward with their good-natured work with ever-increasing enthusiasm.



CHAPTER 18.

Rent in Advance!

"HERE we are!" said Nipper briskly.

It was growing dusk as the three cyclists turned into

the little private lane which led to the Elms Farm, near Edgemore. The three cyclists were Nipper, Handforth and Travers.

It had been deemed unwise for the whole committee to descend upon Mr. Jacob Smithers, the farmer. A small deputation would be quite sufficient, and Handforth, as president of the committee, had selected Nipper and Travers as his two companions. Church and McClure felt very slighted over this, but there could be no denying that Handforth had chosen well.

It had been unanimously agreed that the whole project should be kept secret. Only the members of the committee knew what was in the wind. The rest of the juniors at St. Frank's were quite aware that something was "on," but they were given no details when they made inquiries. The committee wanted as little publicity as possible—until the earl and his retainer were installed in their new home. After that event took place, everybody could know, of course.

The farmhouse proved to be a substantial, old-fashioned building, surrounded by barns and piggeries and cowsheds.

Dismounting, the three juniors left their machines at the gate, and walked up a long path to the front door of the farmhouse. They knocked, and a buxom lady soon appeared, looking at them inquiringly.

"We're from St. Frank's School, ma'am," said Handforth. "Can we see Mr. Jacob Smithers, please?"

"My husband's just finished his tea, and I'm sure he'll be only too pleased to see you," replied the lady hospitably. "Come into the parlour, young gentlemen."

So they went into the parlour, which was very prim and proper, with countless photographs of the Smithers family, at all ages and all periods of their history, liberally distributed about the apartment.

Mr. Smithers himself appeared after a few moments. He was a big, burly, good-natured-looking man.

"We won't keep you long, Mr. Smithers," said Handforth bluntly. "You've got a cottage to let, haven't you—on the road between Edgemore and Belton?"

"That's true," said Mr. Smithers, looking at the juniors curiously. "A rare nice little place, too. Suitable for a retired gentleman, or for—"

"It's still to let, isn't it?" asked Handforth eagerly.

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"Ay, it's still available," agreed the farmer. "Queer, too. The last people were there for fifteen years, and I thought I'd have no trouble to re-let it, but—"

"We want it, sir," said Nipper. "If you're agreeable to letting the place to us, we'll willingly pay a month's rent in advance. Or a quarter's rent, if you want it."

Mr. Smithers scratched his head and frowned.

"What's this?" he asked suspiciously. "One of your jokes, young gents?"

"No fear!" said Handforth. "We mean it, Mr. Smithers! We want the place."

"No, no!" said the farmer. "I can't let a cottage like that to schoolboys! There's no telling what might happen if a crowd of you youngsters was to enter into possession. I suppose you want it for a club-room, or something. I am sorry, but—"

"Pardon me," said Travers gently, "may we inquire the amount of the rent?"

"Thirty pounds a year is what I'm asking," said the farmer gruffly. "Or, with rates included, forty pounds a year."

"We'll take it, rates included," said Travers. "And if you'll accept ten pounds now, Mr. Smithers, we'll call it a deal. I know it isn't usual to pay rent in advance for an unfurnished cottage, but as this is an exceptional case, perhaps you'll waive the point. We can't give references like any ordinary tenant, but you know that we're from St. Frank's, and—"

"Hold hard, young sir!" said the farmer. "It's no good going on like that. You can't have the place, and there's an end of it! Whatever will you boys be up to next! Why, within a week all the wallpaper would be off, and like as not the doors would have initials carved all over 'em. No disrespect to you, young gents, but I don't want school-boys as tenants."

Nipper grinned, and glanced at the others. "We'd better tell him, eh?" he said. "We can't expect Mr. Smithers to agree unless he knows why we want the cottage."

"Of course we'll tell him," said Handforth. "Look here, Mr. Smithers, we want that cottage, and we mean to have it. In fact, we've got to have it!"

"Oh!" said the farmer unpleasantly. "If that's the tone, young gent—"

"You know Lord Edgemore, don't you?" went on Handforth. "You've heard about that brute, William Gore-Pearce?"

"What of him?" asked Mr. Smithers. "Ay, I know the man! A vulgar, common outsider! It's a rare pity about the poor old earl. One of the finest gents breathin', and now, according to what they're sayin', he'll have to get out of the Manor. A shame, that's what I call it!" said Mr. Smithers fiercely. "A downright shame! There's been trickery, if you ask me! The earl was always a trustin' gentleman, and—"

"Well, Mr. Smithers," interrupted Nipper, "we're going to take you into our confidence. We know that Lord Edgemore is soon to be turned out of the Manor—kicked out like anyone who won't pay his rent—and we want your cottage for the earl."

Well, for glory's sake!" ejaculated the farmer. "You want my cottage for his lordship?"

"Our idea is to prepare it—furnish it, and put coal in, and lamps, and everything like that," said Handforth eagerly. "And then, when the earl is evicted, we'll take him to the cottage, and everything will be all serene. See? We don't need the place for ourselves, Mr. Smithers. It's for Lord Edgemore."

The farmer changed his attitude in a moment.

"Why are you young gentlemen doing this?" he asked curiously.

"Oh, I don't know!" said Handforth, with an uncomfortable shuffling of his feet. "We—we just fancied to, you know. We didn't like to see the poor old chap down and out."

"I suppose you mean this—honestly and truly?" asked Mr. Smithers.

"Honour bright, sir?" said the three juniors, in one voice.

Mr. Smithers rose to his feet.

"I'll get the key!" he said promptly. "You shall have the cottage, young sirs, and I don't need no references—or no agreement, either. If it's for his lordship, I'm with you. And you shall have it rent free, too! I never thought of this, or I might have—"

"Not likely!" interrupted Handforth, clutching at Mr. Smithers' arm. "We want to pay the rent, sir. It's our idea, and we'll stand the racket!"

"All right!" said the farmer. "The rent's twenty pounds a year, all in! And I won't take a farthing more!"



CHAPTER 19.

Moving Day!

HERE was general satisfaction, among the members of the committee, over the attitude of Farmer Smithers. He had certainly come up to the scratch.

And the very next day, at the first opportunity, the committee hurried off on bicycles to have a look at the interior of the cottage.

They were very impressed.

It wasn't such a big place, but it was cosy—homely. Handforth bustled about, planning which should be the sitting-room, which should be Lord Edgemore's own bed-room, and so forth. But as nobody took the slightest notice of him, no harm was done.

"We ought to get busy at once, you know," said Nipper thoughtfully, after they had completed their inspection. "We know what a temper old Gore-Pearce is in, and he'll have the earl out of the Manor before the end of the week."

"Very likely to-day," said Handforth. "We mustn't bother about tea to-day, and as soon as lessons are over we'll hurry out and cart lots of furniture here. There are

two or three hours of daylight, and we can do heaps."

"Where's the tape measure?" asked Reggie Pitt briskly, as he came up. "Did you bring it, Nipper?"

"Yes," said the Remove skipper. "Here you are."

"What do you want a tape measure for?" demanded Handforth, staring.

"My dear, impracticable chump, we've got to take measurements of these floors," said Reggie. "And, as soon as we get back to the school, we're going to order lino by 'phone. It'll be delivered during the afternoon, and about ten of us will have to get busy laying it down."

"By George! I'd forgotten the lino, for the moment," said Handforth, with a start. "There's plenty to be done, you fellows!"

"Yes, we shall all be kept busy!" agreed Nipper, with a thoughtful frown. "Upon the whole, Handy, I think it would be just as well if you stayed at St. Frank's this evening."

"If I did what?"

"Or, better still, you might go along to the Manor, and watch the place," said Nipper brilliantly. "How's that, Handy?"

"Rotten!"

"But, my dear chap, we've got to be careful!" urged Nipper. "You're the best detective in the Remove—you've often said so, so it must be true—and you're the one to watch Edgemore Manor."

Handforth received this suggestion coldly.

"And what's going to happen here, while I'm away?" he asked, with scorn.

"While you're away, old man, we can get on with the work," said Nipper gently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you howling idiot!" roared Handforth, turning red. "By George, I see your game now. You wanted to get me out of the way?"

"Of course!" said Nipper. "That was why I suggested——"

"Well, I don't want any more of your suggestions!" broke in Handforth sternly.



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"I'm the president of this committee, don't forget, and I'm the fellow who gives orders! Somebody else will be sent to watch the Manor. I've got to stay here, in command."

And he meant it, too. Most of the other fellows were sadly grieved over this decision—for Edward Oswald Handforth had an exasperating habit of distributing advice to all and sundry, and practically every atom of this advice was useless. Furthermore, he got in everybody's way, even his own.

But to argue with him was impossible—at least, it was fruitless. So he was accepted—much to his indignation—as a necessary evil.

That day, Mr. Crowell noticed a distinct restlessness in his Form. But after Mr. Crowell had threatened one or two of the fellows with detention, the behaviour of the Remove improved wonderfully. Never again was it necessary for the Form-master to call anybody to attention. They were not at all keen on extra lesson, on this day of all days.

There was general relief when afternoon lessons came to an end. All the members of the committee hurried off to their various duties, and the rest of the Junior School watched with astonishment and wonder. They had an inkling of what was going on, but nobody knew anything definitely.

It was only natural that there should be a big crowd of onlookers when Handforth brought his little Austin Seven round to the front of the Ancient House, and then commenced piling it up with furniture. Edward Oswald wasn't at all particular about which furniture he took. He seized two or three rugs from Archie Glenthorne's study, he took tables and chairs from other studies, and he proceeded to pile them all up in the poor little Austin as though he were under the impression that the car was a pan-technicon.

"You'd better go easy, Handy," protested Church, when the pile had reached formidable proportions. "You'll never drive there with this lot. It'll topple over!"

"No, it won't!" said Handforth, as he surveyed the carload of chairs and tables and bookcases. "It won't topple over, Churchy, because you're going to ride on the top of it all!"

"Eh?" gasped Church. "Ride on the top of it! Who? Me?"

"Yes, you!"

"You silly ass—"

"You'll either obey orders, or I'll punch you in the eye!" roared Handforth aggressively. "What's the good of me being president of the committee if I can't get obedience?"

Church groaned, and gave it up as a bad job. Very gingerly, he climbed to the top of the pile, and Handforth squeezed his way into the driving seat. There was hardly enough room for him, but he managed somehow.

Other juniors were leaving the school, laden with bundles of cooking utensils,

packages of crockery, and other articles too numerous to mention. An advance guard, under Nipper, had gone along empty-handed and at speed. They were the lino-layers, and there were beds to be put up, too, and other things. When the Remove went into an affair of this sort, it went into it thoroughly.

"Ready?" sang out Handforth, as he engaged his gears.

"You'd better go easy, Handy!" said Church breathlessly. "This doesn't feel too safe, and—"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "I packed everything on this car, and there isn't the slightest danger. You hang on there, and you'll be safe."

Church hung on, and he was safe—for about two minutes. They had just reached the gateway, and Handforth was accelerating in his usual reckless fashion. He had quite overlooked his heavy load by this time—for Handforth's thoughts were liable to stray at the slightest provocation.

"Hi, look out!" howled Church.

The little Austin swerved round out of the gateway, and shot into the road. And that sudden swing was disastrous. The piled-up furniture, with Church on top, swayed ominously, tipped over to an alarming angle, and then collapsed.

Crash!

Church and the furniture went flying in all directions, and they were strewn over the road, while the Austin careered on its way!



CHAPTER 20.

A Spot of Bother!

HANDFORTH gave a startled exclamation.

"What the dickens Oh, crumbs!"

He knew, even without glancing round, that something disastrous had happened. He took a hurried glance over his shoulder, and noticed that the load, including Church, was conspicuous by its absence.

Handforth put his foot on the brake, and pulled on the handbrake at the same time. The unfortunate Austin came to a stop, almost as though it had hit a brick wall. The wheels, locked, grinded on the road.

"What's happened?" panted Handforth blankly.

He leaped out, and stared back. His question was a most unnecessary one, for he could see what had happened at the first glance. There was practically no furniture left in the car, but on the road there was a wonderful assortment of debris. Even Church came within this category.

Church was sitting in the very middle of the road, with a wicker chair festooned round his head and shoulders. Other arti-

cles of furniture were littered all over the place.

Handforth ran back, his heart beating rapidly.

"Churchy, old man!" he shouted. "Are you hurt?"

"Hurt?" repeated Church, extricating himself with some difficulty, and staggering to his feet. "What an idea! I like this sort of thing, Handy! It's a wonderful game!"

"You silly ass!" said Handforth, frowning. "I don't believe you're hurt at all!"

"Oh, what's the use?" said Church wearily. Luckily enough, he wasn't hurt much. Only a bruise or two, and a graze here and there. He was more bewildered than anything else.

"You careless chump!" said Handforth accusingly. "What do you mean by upsetting the load like that?"

This was too much for Church; his recovery was now instantaneous.

"Are you accusing me?" he gasped incredulously.

"Yes, I am!"

"Why, you crazy lunatic——"

"I told you to look after that load—and you fail!" said Handforth sternly. "What's the good of a fellow I can't trust?"

"But it was your fault!" howled Church indignantly. "It was your fault—for whizzing out of the gateway at about sixty miles an hour! How the dickens could you expect the load to keep on? You ought to be jolly thankful that I'm not killed!"

Handforth started.

"By George!" he said, with a twinge of conscience. "Now you come to mention it, I did swing out of the gateway a bit too quickly, didn't I?"

"I'm glad you admit it!" said Church bitterly.

"Oh, well—there's no sense in making a fuss," said Handforth. "Come on! We've got to pile all this stuff on again!"

"No, we haven't!" said Church, with unusual firmness. "At least, you're not going to pile me on it again! Be sensible, Handy, and make two loads of it! More haste less speed, you know!"

Boots of the Fourth strolled up—to say nothing of a few other Fourth-Formers.

"Anything the matter here?" asked Buster Boots politely.

"No, there isn't!" retorted Handforth.

"Sorry! My mistake!" said Boots. "This is one of my new stunts, I suppose!" he went on, indicating the littered furniture. "Splendid, Handy! You've made the lane look quite homely!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Idiot!" snapped Handforth, turning red.

"Cave!" came a warning cry.

The next moment, a figure in mortar-board and gown came swinging out of the gateway. Mr. Horace Pycraft, the master of the Fourth, gazed at the scene with a sort of shocked expression for a moment; then he strode forward.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he demanded, indicating the debris.

"Nothing much, sir," growled Handforth.

"We had a bit of an upset—that's all."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Pycraft unpleasantly.

"And may I ask, Handforth, what you are doing with all this furniture? What idiocy is this?"

"We're only moving a few things, sir," said Church hurriedly. "It's all right—we'll soon have them off the road."

The Fourth-Formers vanished. They could see that Mr. Pycraft was out for trouble. It was his habit to butt in like this. He knew perfectly well what these juniors were doing—since half the school was talking about the affair. But it pleased Mr. Pycraft to affect ignorance.

"I shall make it my duty to report this matter to your Housemaster," he said unpleasantly. "I disapprove of the whole proceeding."

"All right, sir!" said Handforth, with a glare. "You can report us if you like——"

"I want no impudence from you, Handforth!" interrupted Mr. Pycraft. "I can see, quite plainly, that you are determined to bring the name of St. Frank's into disrepute."

"Disrepute, sir?" gasped Handforth indignantly.

"Yes!" said the Form-master. "It is most undignified for you boys to be here, on the public highway, acting as furniture removers! It is a discredit to the school!"

"But you know why we're doing it, don't you, sir?" asked Handforth, amazed.

"I have heard certain rumours—and I strongly disapprove!" said Mr. Pycraft coldly. "It's a pity that you boys cannot learn to mind your own business."

Handforth breathed hard, and in all probability he would have made some hot retort. But just then Church coughed.

"Here's Mr. Lee now, sir," he said sweetly. "Perhaps you'd better report us straight away, sir."

Mr. Pycraft turned, and found Nelson Lee approaching. His eyes glinted.

"Oh, Mr. Pycraft—just a moment, if you please," said Nelson Lee, as he came up. "There are some papers here that I should like you to look over——"

"One moment, sir, if you will pardon me!" said Mr. Pycraft. "These boys are not, I know, under my own jurisdiction. But I would like to draw your attention to their ridiculous——"

"Quite so!" murmured Nelson Lee, linking his arm into Mr. Pycraft's. "There seems to have been a little mishap. Any damage, Handforth?"

"Nothing much, sir," said Handforth promptly. "We'll soon have this stuff shifted."

"Splendid!" said Nelson Lee. "Now, Mr. Pycraft, if you will glance at these papers——"

And the Housemaster-detective drew Mr. Pycraft away, while the master of the



Snell looked at Nelson Lee casually—then he started. For he found that Lee was regarding him with a careful scrutinising gaze. "Rather an unexpected meeting, Selwyn," said Nelson Lee pleasantly. "I beg your pardon, sir!" panted the other, with a choking sound in his voice. "My name is Snell!"

Fourth gritted his teeth with vexation. Plainly, he could see that Nelson Lee was inclined to wink at this incident, and as Nelson Lee was Handforth's Housemaster, nothing could be done. Mr. Pycraft was unlucky for once!



CHAPTER 21.

"If At First You Don't Succeed——"

HANDFORTH grinned.

"Well, that was jolly neat!" he said complacently. "Good old Mr. Lee! He

wouldn't let Pycraft get a word in edgewise!"

"Yes, he was a brick!" agreed Church. "But what about all this stuff, Handy? Mr. Lee won't be a brick if he comes back here within ten minutes and finds it still strewn over the road. You've made an awful mess of this business!"

"Why, you silly ass——"

"Oh, come on!" said Church impatiently.

He picked up a couple of chairs, and walked off towards the Austin. Handforth, frowning, followed him.

"That's the idea—come empty-handed!" said Church sarcastically.

"I'm going to back the Austin up to all that stuff!" said Handforth coldly. "And when it's all on you'd better be more careful!"

Church said nothing; and he was very relieved when, five minutes later, Handforth inspected the load, and said that it would do. Only half the stuff had been replaced in the car this time. The rest was left along the grassy bank, at the side of the road.

"I suppose we'd better make two journeys of it," said Handforth, as though he had just thought of the idea. "After all, we don't want to take any more risks, otherwise we might smash something."

"Me, for example," said Church coldly.

"Never mind about you," said Handforth.

"I was thinking about the chairs and things!"

He climbed into the driving seat, and Church stood on the seat behind him, leaning over the cargo. In this way, he felt fairly safe, and he was able to steady all the stuff. And so they arrived at the cottage successfully.

"Hallo, here comes the first lorry load!" said Reggie Pitt, from the doorway. "Good man, Handy! You've been nearly as quick as if you had walked!"

"Ass!"

Many of the juniors came out to lend a hand with the unloading, and so it was quickly performed. Many hands made light of the work.

"There's another lot coming," said Handforth. "We had a bit of a mishap coming out of the gateway. Everything fell off, and we've got to go back for the rest."

"Splendid!" said Travers.

"What do you mean—splendid?"

"It is my custom to say 'splendid' when I hear good news," murmured Travers. "We all have our little idiosyncrasies."

"But where's the good news, you chump?"

"Surely it is good news to learn that you are going back for another load?" replied Travers smoothly. "For that means that you will be absent so many more minutes. And while you are away, dear old fellow, the rest of us can pitch into the work."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I haven't the time to punch your head now, Travers!" said Handforth darkly. "But later on—when this business is over—I'll attend to it!"

He strode off to his Austin, and the others chuckled. Church wanted to get out of this second journey, but he couldn't. Handforth insisted upon him accompanying the car. So they went back in the dusk, and found the rest of the furniture just where they had left it on the side of the road.

"H'm! There's room for a lot more on here!" said Handforth, when the stuff was in the car. "I think I'll pop indoors and get something else, just to complete the load."

"What else can you get?" asked Church impatiently.

"Well, we haven't got a really comfortable easy-chair," replied Handforth, with a thoughtful frown. "You know—the kind of chair that Lord Edgemore would really like."

A big chair with padded sides, and a deep, springy seat.

"Like that one in Mr. Lee's study?" asked Church, with a grin.

Handforth started.

"By George!" he said. "That's the very one! I'll get it!"

"What!" gasped Church.

"Come on!" said Handforth briskly.

"You can lend me a hand with it." He strode off, and Church clutched at his arm.

"Handy, you ass!" he ejaculated. "I only said that in fun!"

"And I said it seriously," retorted Handforth. "That's just the difference!"

"But you can't take that chair!" roared Church.

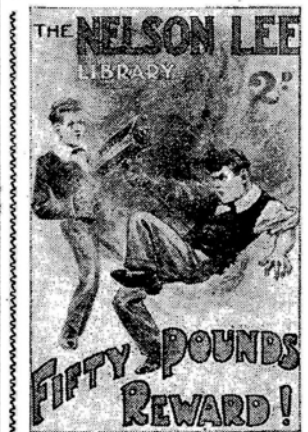
"Wait and see, my son!"

Handforth was very determined as he strode into the Ancient House. He made his way straight to Nelson Lee's study, tapped on the door, and walked in. But even he was rather taken aback when he saw that the schoolmaster-detective was sitting in the actual chair that he had come for.

"Yes, Handforth?" said Nelson Lee, glancing up.

"Er—the fact is, sir—I thought— Well, I mean to say, that chair, sir!" stammered

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



Handforth. "I had an idea— You see, our studies don't boast of any big chairs like that, and I was wondering— I say, sir!" he burst out. "Can you lend us that chair for a bit?"

Nelson Lee's eyes twinkled as he rose to his feet.

"It's not a bad idea, Handforth," he said dryly.

"I know it's an awful nerve, sir!" said Handforth, suddenly realising the enormity of his check. "But—but—"

"That's all right, young 'un!" chuckled Nelson Lee. "You needn't be afraid that I shall ask any awkward questions. You want

to borrow this chair, eh? Very well! You have my permission to take it."

"I say, sir, you're a good 'un!" said Handforth enthusiastically.

Church was quite speechless. Somehow he managed to help Handforth, and between the pair of them they got the chair outside. As they carried it triumphantly down the corridor, Handforth chuckled with glee.

"Well, what did I say?" he demanded.

"I give it up!" said Church breathlessly. "Of all the unadulterated nerve, Handy, this is about the limit! But I must say that Mr. Lee is a sportsman!"

"That's why I knew I should get the chair!" said Handforth complacently.

holders had not been at work for very long, but an army of magicians could not have done much more!



CHAPTER 22.

The Schoolboy Householders!

MAZING indeed was the transformation.

Long before darkness—even before the sun had set—the

little dwelling was a changed place. Twenty energetic juniors, working at express speed—and working in parties—were the wizards. It must be confessed that the lino was laid down in the most unprofessional manner—but it was certainly down. What was more, it looked quite good, until a close inspection was made.

Upstairs, Travers and a band of helpers were putting the beds up, and preparing the sleeping apartments. In the kitchens, Fatty Little was superintending the culinary arrangements. Fatty had been brought into the committee at the last moment, for it was felt that he could deal with the kitchen department better than anybody else.

Other juniors were arriving with supplies of foodstuffs, stocking the modest larder and cupboards. In fact, nothing was forgotten.

It was as though some magician had waved his wand over that cottage. Curtains appeared at the windows, smoke curled from the chimney pots, and the whole place was alive and bustling with strenuous activity.

And, as events turned out, it was just as well that the juniors should have been so energetic.

Handforth had only been on the scene for about twenty minutes—during which time most of the work had been sadly interrupted—when a breathless cyclist threw himself from his machine at the gate, and came tearing up the path.

"They're there, you chaps!" he panted excitedly.

He burst in, and crowds of perspiring less for the most part.

They were collarless, capless and waistcoatless for the most part.

"What's that?" shouted Handforth, pushing through the throng.

"The bailiffs!" gasped the junior who had just come in. "They've arrived—they're turning the old carl out!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And we're not ready yet!"

"Yes we are!" said Nipper briskly. "Half of us had better dash off to the Manor, and keep an eye on everything that's going on. We'll get hold of the carl and Jenkins, and lead them here after they've been turned into the road. All the others must stay and put the finishing touches to the home."

"Hear, hear!"

"FIFTY POUNDS REWARD!"

Fifty pounds reward for the recovery of a pocket-book worth about threepence! Why should Mr. Snell, the rascally lawyer who conducted the selling of Edgemoor Manor to Mr. Gore-Pearce, offer such a big sum for the recovery of his lost pocket-book? What does it contain to make it of such paramount importance?

That's what Nelson Lee, the famous Housemaster-detective, wants to find out; what he sets out to discover.

In the meantime the Removites are still looking after the Earl of Edgemoor, and Handforth, in the role of shopper and "housewife," causes endless fun.

A yarn you'll all thoroughly enjoy, this, so look out for it next Wednesday, chums!

"THE AIR PATROL!"

Another intensely exciting instalment of this amazing air serial—a serial which will prove without doubt to be one of the most popular that has ever appeared in the Old Paper!

ORDER IN ADVANCE!

Outside, they managed to set the chair fairly safely on the top of the other furniture. It was terribly rough on the Austin, but, as Handforth truly remarked, you never know what an Austin Seven will carry until you try.

Arriving at the cottage, Nipper and all the others were startled when Church informed them of Handforth's audacity. But they were delighted, too.

"Just the very thing we needed!" said Nipper enthusiastically. "Good old Handy and good old gun'or, too!"

Handforth was looking round him with wide-open eyes. Great changes had taken place in that cottage. The schoolboy house-

"By jingo! It's a good thing we've worked so hard!"

"Rather!"

There was fresh excitement. Everybody wanted to hurry off to the Manor to see how things were going. Handforth only made things worse by bellowing out his orders—orders which nobody obeyed.

In the end, while Handforth was still arguing, ten of the fellows, with Nipper at their head, sped away on their bicycles into the gathering dusk. In fact, they had gone before Handforth realised that he had been left behind. Even Church and McClure had deserted him.

"Come on, Handy—load a hand with these chairs and things!" said Reggie Pitt briskly. "We've been left behind to complete the work, and it's about time you did something, too!"

"You ass!" said Handforth. "I'm going to lead the party to the Manor!"

"Then you'll have to lead it from the rear, like that celebrated gentleman of comic opera fame, the Duke of Plaza Toro!" grinned Reggie. "My dear idiot, they've all gone!"

"Gone!" hooted Handforth. "By George! Of all the nerve!"

He dashed out, seized the first bicycle within sight, and leapt into the saddle. There was no time for him to use his Austin Seven, for it was in the process of being unloaded. Not that it really mattered. Edgemore Manor was only half a mile away, and it was just as quick to go by cycle.

Handforth got to the top of the rise, and then pedalled at full speed down the corresponding hill. He went recklessly—as usual.

He even neglected to ring his bell as he swung round the curve at the bottom.

And suddenly he gasped. Walking swiftly towards him in the middle of the road was a slim, skinny figure. He could just see it in the dusk.

"Hi!" he bawled, trying to find the bell at the same moment.

The man in the road leapt about a foot into the air, and jumped sideways at the same time. But, although he was just in time to save himself from being run down, another kind of disaster occurred.

For as the man flung himself aside, he raised his arms and, as he was carrying a leather attache case, the handle-bars of Handforth's bicycle struck this with a terrific impact. The case flew open as it was tossed into the air, and papers flew in all directions, descending like snow.

Handforth, swerving giddily, wobbled across the road, lost control in the grass, and dived headlong into the hedge.

He sat up, dazed and dizzy, but the very speed of his fall had saved him from harm. He picked himself up, gazed at the partially wrecked bicycle, and then staggered into the road.

"You young scoundrel!" came a snarling voice. "You might have killed me! My papers—my attache case! Great heavens!

In this gloom I shall never be able to recover everything! You young fool!"

Handforth pulled himself together. That voice did much to aid his recovery. For he recognised it as the voice of Mr. Lucas Snell, the lawyer.

"It wasn't my fault!" protested the leader of Study D, as he strode up. "You were walking in the middle of the road—"

"I have as much right to the road as you have!" raved Mr. Snell. "What do you mean by shooting round that bend without even giving a warning? Look at my papers! Do you see them, boy?" he went on, his voice rising almost to a scream. "Look at my papers! Confound your infernal recklessness!"

There was something strangely wild about Mr. Lucas Snell's manner. Handforth couldn't understand it. Why was this man so furious and alarmed? He might have been seriously injured—even killed. Yet he had suffered no hurt whatever. Only his attache case had been burst open, and the papers were distributed over the road. To Handforth's way of thinking, that was a very unimportant detail.

But Mr. Lucas Snell was of a different opinion!



CHAPTER 23.

The Eviction!

PERHAPS Handforth felt a few pangs of remorse. At all events, after bottling up his resentment at

Mr. Snell's harsh invectives, he busied himself in the task of picking up the strewn papers.

After about five minutes there wasn't one to be seen. Mr. Snell himself was arranging them in his attache case, searching through them, examining them one by one.

"Yes yes, they all seem to be here!" he said breathlessly at last. "You confounded young idiot! I've a good mind to—"

"I've heard enough of your insults!" interrupted Handforth, glaring. "I've helped you to pick up these papers, and there's an end of it! You've come to no harm, so you can't grumble. What about my jigger? It's half smashed up!"

"Do you think I care about your machine?" snarled the lawyer. "It was your own fault entirely! You wretched boy! You might have killed me!"

He swung on his heel and strode off. He was soon swallowed by the gloom, and Handforth stood there, vaguely aware of a dull pain in his left knee. When he walked he limped.

"Crumbs!" he muttered, bending down. "I must have hurt myself, after all! And that—that old rotter seemed to think that it was all my fault!"

He bent down near the side of the road, with the intention of examining his painful

knee. But as he did so he caught sight of something reddish, half concealed behind a tuft of thick grass. He reached out a hand, and a moment later he was looking at a small pocket-book, with red edges. It was much worn and tattered, and Handforth opened it curiously.

What he saw was meaningless to him. Rows of figures—written entries in a curiously stilted handwriting. But he knew at once that it belonged to Mr. Lucas Snell.

"I don't suppose it's of any value," muttered Handforth, as he put it into his pocket. "Anyway, I'm blowed if I'm going to run after him with it!"

It suddenly occurred to him that he had lost a good deal of time. Perhaps the eviction had taken place by now, and Handforth had badly wanted to be there when that painful episode had come off.

He ran down the lane as fast as his injured knee would allow him, abandoning his machine. It was useless now, anyhow—and, if it came to that, it wasn't his machine at all. It belonged to one of the other juniors. Handforth didn't know whom, and at the moment he certainly didn't care.

He had only gone about three hundred yards, and had vanished into the dusk, when Mr. Lucas Snell reappeared. And now the lawyer was positively panting with some great agitation.

"I must find it!" he panted hoarsely. "My private pocket-book—it's gone! Gone! Yet it must be here somewhere! I must find it! I must!"

Like a man demented, Lucas Snell searched the grass, the road, the ditches. As he searched his manner became more and more agitated. He was mad—and, also, he seemed to be frightened. He was frantic with fear.

The result of his search was nil. This was not very surprising, since his precious pocket-book was reposing in Handforth's jacket at that moment.

And Handforth was running up to a number of other juniors, who were just within the Edgemoor Manor grounds. They were watching the drama that was taking place close by.

"It's all over, Handy!" said Nipper, as the leader of Study D came up. "They've done it, the cads!"

"You mean that the poor old earl has been evicted?"

"Yes," said Nipper, between his set teeth. "The bailiff's men aren't cads, of course. They've only done their duty. But Gore-Pearce is there, and a number of his underlings. They're watching it all—gloating over it."

"But where's Lord Edgemoor?" asked Handforth breathlessly. "You fatheads! You haven't let him go away, have you? Why the dickens didn't I come earlier?"

"Keep your hair on, Handy!" said Church. "Lord Edgemoor and Jenkins, the retainer, are coming towards us now. I believe that Mr. Gore-Pearce allowed them to collect a few things together after they had been officially evicted. We were too late to see the actual thing."

"Well, what difference does it make?" asked Handforth, with a grunt. "We're in time to get hold of the earl, and we can lead him to his new home. Good egg! It's been a jolly close thing, but we've done it!"

"You've done something else, haven't you?" asked Church, peering closely at his leader. "What's that scratch on your face? And what the dickens have you been doing to your wrist, Handy? And your bags, too! Your left knee is all torn, and—"

"Never mind about that!" interrupted Handforth. "I had a spill, that's all. I nearly ran into old Snell, the lawyer, and I came a cropper. Don't bother about trifles!"

He moved away in order to avoid further questioning, and at that moment there was a general hush among the juniors. Two figures had appeared out of the dimness of the twilight. Up near the Manor lights were gleaming—lights from the motor-cars, lights from the great hall of the house.

But here, these two figures were coming along in the gloom. There was something faltering in their movements—something hesitating and uncertain.

They were the Earl of Edgemoor and Jenkins. Jenkins was carrying several bags, and his back was bent nearly double. But Lord Edgemoor was upright, his chin was high, and his step was firm.

That was the curious part about it. The old earl was walking firmly, but, at the same time, there seemed to be an aimlessness in his direction. He did not seem to know where he was going, and the watching juniors could understand.



CHAPTER 16.

The Schoolboy Champions

"WHAT on earth shall we do?" murmured Tommy Watson, acutely uncomfortable.

"Why, collar the earl, of course, and lead him to the cottage!" said Handforth. "By George!" he added fiercely. "Did you hear Gore-Pearce just now? Shouting and laughing! Gloating over the earl's downfall! What a low, common beast!"

All the juniors had heard Mr. William Gore-Pearce, and it was an undeniable fact that the millionaire had been acting like a cad.

Edgemoor Manor was now his. The law had taken its course, and the poverty-stricken old earl had been turned out. Evicted! Turned adrift, with nowhere to go. And Mr. William Gore-Pearce had stood by, gloating, laughing. Even his own men had been disgusted.

"Leave this to me, you chaps!" said Nipper earnestly. "Handy, old man—please!"

Handforth hung back. "Oh well, if you like!" he said, impressed

by Nipper's tone. "But I thought I was going to—"

"Afterwards, old chap!" said Nipper. "But we've got to be jolly careful now."

The situation was certainly very delicate. The Earl of Edgemore was nearly upon the juniors now, and he hardly seemed to notice them. He was like a child—he was walking mechanically, dazedly.

"Excuse me, sir!" said Nipper, pulling off his cap and halting in front of the earl.

"Ah, my boy!" said the old man, trying to steady his voice. "Good-evening! I am afraid there is nothing you can do now. I am beaten, boys—beaten at last! They've had their way. I'm turned out!"

"But surely things aren't as bad as all that, sir?" asked Nipper. "Some friends are waiting for you, I'm sure. Perhaps you'll be going to London, or—"

"Friends?" repeated Lord Edgemore, almost vacantly. "London? No, no, my boy! I have no friends! Jenkins, where are we going?" he added, turning wearily to the old servant. "Where are we going, Jenkins?"

When Jenkins spoke, his voice was a mere wheeze.

"I don't know, my lord!" he muttered. "Seems there's nowhere for us to go. You didn't make any arrangements, my lord."

This was good enough for Nipper. He had gained the information that he had wanted. It had been impossible to invite the unfortunates to the little cottage until something was known of their plans. But they had no plans. So the scheme of the Remove had not been in vain.

"Will you be offended, sir, if we suggest something?" asked Nipper gently.

"Offended?" repeated the earl. "Good gracious, no! You boys are my friends. You have proved it. But what can you do? You are good-hearted, I know, but there is nothing that you can do now. Thank you, boys—thank you for the thought. Jenkins, I must leave it to you."

"My lord, I don't know what to do!" quavered the old servant fearfully. "Oh, the brutes! They've turned us out, and they've given us no time. They've done their worst, my lord!"

It was evident that Jenkins was even more helpless than his master.

"This way, sir," said Vivian Travers, taking hold of Lord Edgemore's arm. "We know exactly what to do, sir!"

"Rather!" chorused the other juniors.

"Come on, sir," said Handforth, taking the earl's other arm.

Now that the die was cast, some of the other fellows seized Jenkins. They all walked out into the lane and turned down in the direction of St. Frank's.

The fellows expected that the earl would resist. But he did not. Truth to tell, he was still bewildered—still helpless under the crushing nature of this blow. He had known that it was coming—although he had sworn that he would never surrender his castle. Now that the calamity had occurred, he was utterly stricken.

Hardly a word was said as they all went down the lane. It was a very curious situation, and the juniors were heartily glad when they saw the gleaming lights of the cottage just ahead. Those lights looked very warm, very inviting.

As the earl and Jenkins came up with their escort, it could be seen that the rest of the Remove fellows were lined up and down the little garden path. The gate clicked, and it was the signal for a subdued outburst.

"Welcome home, Lord Edgemore!" went up a general cry.

"It's humble, sir—but it's a shelter!" said Nipper softly.

"And we'll do everything we can to make you comfortable, sir," added Handforth.

The old Earl of Edgemore was freshly bewildered. He was led into the front sitting-room, and he looked round without understanding. The room was cosy. A fire was blazing in the grate, there was an easy chair in position upon the hearthrug. The table was laid for a meal, and enticing foods were on the dishes.

"What—what does this mean?" asked the earl, looking dazedly at the juniors. "Where am I? What have you boys done?"

"We hope you'll forgive us, sir, but we've prepared this little house for you!" said Nipper quickly. "We can't stop now, sir—we've got to go!"

"But—but—"

"You'll find everything ready, sir!" added Handforth. "The beds are made, and Jenkins will soon get into the run of things in the kitchen. Good-night, sir!"

A general chorus of "Good-nights" went up, and then the juniors melted away. They did not want to remain here now. It would be much better for the earl to be alone with his old servant. The juniors knew that they would understand.

Left alone, Lord Edgemore gazed round that cosy living-room with a dull sort of wonder. Jenkins was quite overpowered.

"What does it mean, my lord?" he asked wheezily.

The Earl of Edgemore, feeling suddenly shaky, sank down into a chair.

"It means, Jenkins, that we have found a haven," he said, in a voice that quivered. "But that is not correct; the haven was found for us. Bless my soul, what splendid friends these schoolboys are!"

Jenkins, muttering to himself, wandered out of the room and went into the kitchen. He stood there, looking at the glittering utensils, at the neat orderliness of everything.

"Them boys did this!" he muttered, turning back. "My lord, I can't rightly believe it! Just them schoolboys!"

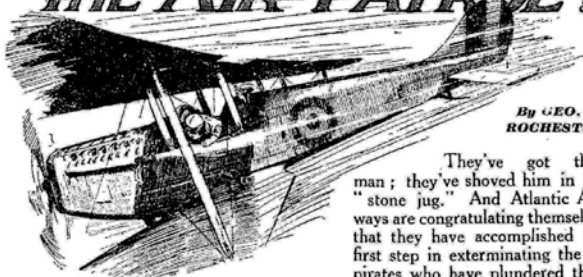
Lord Edgemore nodded.

"Words are of little use, Jenkins," he said soberly. "My heart is too full for words. I was weary, I was an outcast. And now, I can rest. Jenkins, let us not ask

(Concluded on page 44.)

THIS WONDER SERIAL HAS ONLY JUST STARTED!

THE AIR PATROL!



By GEO. E.
ROCHESTER

They've got their man; they've shoved him in the "stone jug." And Atlantic Airways are congratulating themselves that they have accomplished the first step in exterminating the air pirates who have plundered their bullion-carrying planes. But they congratulate themselves too soon!

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE FIRST INSTALMENT.

GUY HOWARD, youngest and most intrepid "scout" in the Atlantic Rangers—whose duty it is to guard the air routes between Britain and America—is attached to Aerodrome D, one of the six huge floating aerodromes placed across the Atlantic Ocean. Just recently the big bullion and passenger-carrying air liners have been attacked by air pirates, whose leader and headquarters are unknown. Guy has sworn to exterminate the pirates, for they have been particularly busy on his "beat." The latest pilot to be plundered is

STRUBEN, an American, whose machine is carrying bullion to the value of

£500,000, which is stolen. Guy goes along to investigate, and then escorts him back to the aerodrome, where Struben reports to

COLONEL MALCOLM, the commander of Aerodrome D. Later, Guy tells the colonel that he thinks Struben, together with his mechanic,

MULLER, has been lying, and that he is one of the mystery air pirates! After he has explained his reasons for thinking so, Colonel Malcolm tells him to go and arrest the American. Guy finds Struben playing poker with four other men, and going up to him, says: "I want you for murder!"

(Now read on.)

The Arrest!

STRUBEN'S chair scraped back. He leaped to his feet, his face livid. "Are you mad?" he snarled, his hand whipping to his tunic pocket.

"Stop that!" rapped Guy. "I have you covered!"

Struben froze into immobility, his head thrust forward, his lips drawn back in a wolfish snarl. With a quick movement, Guy Howard stepped forward and relieved him of his gun.

The action served to break the spell. Struben's muscles relaxed. With a shrug of his shoulders he turned to his companions.

"Guess he's mad!"

But Mortimer Montessor and Sauvage avoided his eyes. Only Danvers looked at him squarely, and said:

"Are you sure?"

Struben's fists clenched. Again passion blazed in his eyes.

"Confound you! What d'you mean by

that?" he shouted. "You don't figger I

"Cut that out, Struben!" snapped the Ranger. "Come on—walk!"

Guy motioned towards the door with his gun. Struben stood hesitating, irresolute. With the tip of his tongue he moistened thin, dry lips, and something akin to fear leaped for an instant into his eyes.

"Where're you takin' me?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Never mind! Get a move on!"

Then slowly, amidst a tense silence, Struben walked towards the door, the grim-faced Ranger at his heels!

For Trial!

THE cold night air and the driving rain seemed to act as a stimulant on Struben. By the time he and his captor reached Colonel Malcolm's office, his swagger had returned and his step was almost jaunty.

On the threshold he stopped short, amazement and fury in his eyes at the sight of the pale-faced Muller standing by the table. He recovered himself in an instant, and stepped towards Colonel Malcolm with hands outspread in a gesture of appeal.

"Sir!" he said shrilly. "I've lodged one protest to-day about the way in which a certain Atlantic Ranger does his job. And I'm hyar to lodge another protest about the same guy! The fool's accused me of murder, and I'm not standin' for it! Either he quits right now, or I do! Atlantic Airways isn't big enough to hold us both, and I reckon——"

"Howard was acting on my instructions when he arrested you on the charge of murder!" cut in Colonel Malcolm icily. "You are also accused of complicity in the theft of the bullion from your machine!"

"And on what evidence?" shouted Struben. "Where's your evidence?"

"There is our evidence!" replied the colonel grimly, and he indicated the trembling Muller. "Other evidence will, no doubt, be forthcoming at your trial!"

He picked up the telephone receiver.

"Say, what are you gonna do?" asked Struben hoarsely.

"I am going to ring for an escort to conduct you to the guard-room!" replied Colonel Malcolm.

"Wait—wait a minute, sir! You can't do that—not till you've given me a chance to speak! What has this lyin' hound, Muller, been sayin'?"

"He admits that you and he are in alliance with the air pirates!"

"He's crazy!" shouted Struben. "This is a frame-up!"

He wheeled on Guy.

"You've fixed this, you hound!" he yelled. "By glory, you've got Muller to come across with this yarn to save your own face! I'll get square with you for this, Mister Ranger! Confound you, you

"Silence!" thundered Colonel Malcolm. "You will have every opportunity to prove your innocence at your trial, Struben!"

He turned to the telephone again, and Struben waited in sullen silence till the heavy clump of feet outside told of the arrival of the escort.

A sergeant of Marines entered the room and saluted smartly. At a command from Colonel Malcolm, the escort of six Marines filed into the room and grouped themselves about Struben and Muller.

"You will take those men to the guard-room, pending removal for trial, sergeant!" said the colonel gruffly.

"Yes, sir!" said the sergeant, with a snap salute.

He turned to the escort and barked out an order. They moved towards the door with their prisoners. Guy stood aside to let them pass. On the threshold Struben paused. His blazing eyes were on the young Ranger.

"Some day," he said harshly, "you'll pay for this with your life!"

The door closed on escort and prisoners. Colonel Malcolm turned to Guy.

"An idle and foolish threat, Howard!" he said. "But a full report will be sent to our headquarters in London!"

He rose to his feet, holding out his hand.

"You have done well! I am very pleased with you!"

"Thank you, sir!" replied Guy.

A few minutes later he was on his way to the hangar, for he was due again on patrol.

The Way Out!

THE cell in which Struben and Muller were lodged was of the American type. It was of solid steel, and thick iron bars separated it from the gaoler's small office behind the guard-room.

Hickner, the gaoler, could keep a watchful eye on prisoners through the bars. Not that he ever had many prisoners under his care. His job was

more or less of a sinecure, but now and again a prisoner under extradition warrant spent a night in the cell.

But now Hickner was in a flutter of excitement. He sat on the high stool at his desk, and stared with little, watery eyes at the American pilot and mechanic behind the bars.

He couldn't believe it! No, by jiminy, he couldn't! Struben—arrested on a charge of murder and theft! Now, if it had been a European, there might have been something to it.

More than once Hickner tried to concentrate on his ledger, but always his gaze returned to those two, on the other side of the bars.

Struben was sitting on his low bed, his head buried in his hands. Muller was lying full length on his, breaking the silence with an occasional whimper which might have been caused by the pain of his wounded arm, or funk, or both.

"Hickner!"

The gaoler started. He had turned to his ledger when the word fell softly, sibilantly on his ears. He looked up to find that Struben had risen to his feet and advanced to the front of the cell.

"Yes, you wanting me, Struben?" he said.

The American pilot nodded. Hickner slid from his stool and approached the barred cell.

"What do you want, Struben?" he asked curiously.

Struben's eyes dwelt on the small, but firmly-knit figure of the gaoler.

"Aw I dunno, Hickner!" he drawled. "Reckon you're an American, aren't you?"

Hickner nodded.

"Yes, I was reared East," he replied.

"Yeah! I figgered you were!" replied Struben. "Waal, I guess I'm gonna show you somethin' you've never seen in your life before, Hickner!"

Hickner blinked his watery eyes.

"I don't get you!" he said, puzzled.

"Nope?" Struben smiled a trifle

wearily. "Waal, I'll show you jest as soon as ever I've smoked the cigarette that you're gonna give me!"

Hickner stepped back, shaking his head.

"Jumpin' snakes! I daren't give you any tobacco!" he said vehemently.

"Yeah! Jest one lil' cigarette, Hickner!" pleaded Struben. "It isn't a mighty lot to ask when a fellow's—"

He broke off abruptly.

"When a fellow's what?" asked Hickner curiously.

"Never mind!" replied Struben. "I'm gonna show you somethin' that you've never seen before, Hickner but first I

want a smoke. Aw, come on, Hickner! You're an American, and so am I!"

Hickner glanced cautiously round. Few, if any, ever invaded his office. He pulled a worn cigarette-case from his pocket.

"Just a few puffs, mind, Struben!" he mumbled. "You'll get me into trouble if I'm caught. But I know how you feel!"

He threw a cigarette and match through the bars into the cell. For he was wily, was the watery-eyed Hickner. He didn't want to come within reach of Struben's hands—hands which might clutch in a stranglehold on his throat and then grope for his keys.

Struben retrieved the cigarette, and, lighting it, leaned

against the bars.

"I reckon life's a mighty funny proposition, Hickner!" he said reflectively, drawing slowly at his cigarette. "You wouldn't have thought now, would you, that I'd pass out on the end of a rope?"

"But—but you aren't guilty?" gasped Hickner, his eyes wide.

Struben nodded.

"Guilty all along the line, Hickner!" he said. "In it right up to the neck! But they'd never have got me if that rat hadn't squealed!"

He indicated Muller with a contemptuous gesture.



VON SCHAUMBERG
who, unknown to Guy Howard, is the head
of the mystery Air Pirates!

"But—but, jumpin' snakes, you shouldn't tell this to me!" protested the gaping Hickner. "I—I might have to give evidence!"

Struben flicked his cigarette into a far corner of the cell.

"Nossir!" he drawled. "You won't have to give evidence against me! I told you I was gonna show you somethin' that you'd never seen before, Hickner! Waal, I'm gonna show you now!"

Before the staring eyes of Hickner he unscrewed one of the metal buttons on his tunic. From its hollow interior he shook a small, white pellet on to his hand.

"I'm not aimin' to hang, Hickner!" he drawled. "I reckon show you never seen a man kill himself in front of your eyes! Waal, you're gonna see it now!"

He clapped his hand to his mouth. With a cry of horror Hickner leapt forward. He knew what it was—poison. Struben had taken poison rather than face his trial!

White-faced, shaking, Hickner saw Struben sway backwards from the bars and crash face foremost to the floor of the cell!

The Wireless Room!

HICKNER was entirely to blame for what followed next. He lost his head completely. He admitted as much at the subsequent court of inquiry. Without waiting to summon assistance he opened the door of the cell and dashed to Struben's aid, hoping against hope that the prisoner for whom he was responsible was not dead.

And it was as he bent over Struben, shaking him, almost sobbing over the thought that this would cost him his job as gaoler, that Struben's strong hands clawed upwards and grabbed him by the throat.

Hickner was helpless, speechless in that grip. He realised then that he had been hoodwinked, that Struben had not taken the poison, but had only been bluffing. He writhed and squirmed, his goggle eyes glaring down into those of the American pilot. But only when he was numb, limp, and utterly unconscious did Struben release his grip.

And then Struben possessed himself of Hickner's gun. Rising to his feet, he turned to Muller, who was standing tremblingly by the bed.

"Listen, you rat!" he whispered. "I'm going to give you a chance of life! I'm only handin' it you because two have

a better chance of winning through than one! But, at the first false move, I'll blow your brains out! Come on!"

Struben quitted the cell and switched out the light in the gaoler's office.

"Now through the window, and quick!" he whispered.

Cautiously he raised the sash of the small window, and waiting till Muller had squeezed himself through, he followed suit.

Outside in the darker shadow of the building they stood for a moment, listening. From far, far away, high up in the night sky, came a faint, elusive drone.

"The night mail from New York to Paris!" muttered Muller, his expert ear attuned to the beat of the engines.

"She'll not be hyar for another twenty minutes!" replied Struben. "But she's our one chance of gettin' outa this! Lands hyar to change pilots, doesn't she?"

"Yes. Flying list details Montessoro and Sauvage to take over," replied Muller.

"Montessoro and Sauvage!" repeated Struben, and his voice was bitter. "Reckon they've had one shock to-night, but they're due for another! Now come on, and keep close to me!"

He struck away from the building, his head bent to the rain which was driving in from the night.

"Where are we going?" demanded Muller half-fearfully.

"To the wireless station!" replied Struben savagely. "You're rotten, Muller—rotten right through, but, by glory, I've gotta depend on you! Listen! I've gotta get word through to Von Schaumburg about what's happened hyar. There's only one operator on duty at this time of night. You'll take this hyar gun of Hickner's and guard the door. I'll look after Sparks with my fist!"

A sudden blaze of light sent Muller cowering into the shadows. The stretch of tarmac in front of the hangars had been lit up by powerful electric bulbs, backed by six-foot diameter reflectors, for the landing of the night mail machine.

But Struben kept straight on, his lean, gaunt figure starkly silhouetted against the blaze of light as he skirted the aerodrome. Perhaps even then he realised how hopeless was his chance of ever escaping from that floating island of steel.

Muller slunk at his heels, casting nervous glances behind him, squinting to right and left with fear in his eyes.

And thus, without incident, they reached the wireless room. Struben paused, to shove his gun into Muller's shaking hand.

"Aw, why can't you be a man, Muller?" he spat out angrily. "But I reckon you were born with the soul of a rat!"

With that, Struben quietly opened the door of the wireless room. The operator, little more than a boy, was seated with his back to the door, bent over the wireless telephonic transmission set.

Cowardly indeed was that blow, and delivered with terrific power. But it was the blow of a desperate man, and there was nothing of pity in Struben's eyes as he allowed the limp body of the operator to sag backwards in the chair.

"Now guard the door, Muller!" he snarled, and turned his attention to the Morse transmission set.



As the gaoler bent over Struben, the latter's strong hands clawed upwards and grabbed him by the throat. He realised then that he had been hookwinked. Struben hadn't taken poison: he'd only been bluffing.

He was talking, and Muller caught his breath at the words.

"D aerodrome calling all machines of Atlantic Airways! D aerodrome calling all machines of Atlantic Airways! Gale approaching from North Atlantic! Gale approaching from North Atlantic! All pilots will land on nearest aerodrome and wait for meteorological report at dawn! All pilots will land on nearest aerodrome and wait for meteorological report at dawn! D aerodrome calling all machines of Atlantic— A-a-a-ah!"

The words ended in a choking gurgle as Struben's arm slid round the operator's neck. Then Struben's clenched fist drove with crushing force against the youth's temple.

Struben's Message.

FAR to the north, on a lone, bleak island of solid rock rising stark and grim from a desolate sea, another wireless operator was bent over a powerful transmission and receiving set.

But his was surely as strange a wireless room as had ever been seen by man. The walls and floors were of black, glistening rock, lit by a powerful electric bulb which dangled from the lofty, rugged ceiling.

It was what it had been throughout the countless years—a natural cavern formed by some strange freak of Nature. And the whole island was honeycombed by such natural caves, some large, some small, but all of them adapted for use

by Von Schaumberg, merciless leader of the air pirates.

A notebook was by the elbow of the operator, and, almost mechanically, he was jotting down the messages which he was picking up from the ether. His sallow face was weary, for it was a monotonous job taking down thousands of words which Von Schaumberg would read, and, maybe, find utterly valueless.

Suddenly his lips twitched into a faint smile as there came to him through space a faint voice:

"D aerodrome calling all machines of Atlantic Airways! Gale approaching from North Atlantic! All pilots will land——"

But he faithfully recorded the message, although he knew full well that the gale, of which warning was being given, was at that moment howling outside as it roared down from the Arctic wastes. He wondered casually why the message ended so abruptly.

Then he stiffened in his seat. The Morse receiving set was buzzing loudly.

Dot—dot—dot! Dash! Dot—dot—dot!

"V.S.!" he muttered, and grabbed his pencil.

For V.S. was the signal of an urgent call from a friend.

Dot—dot—dot! Dash! Dot—dot—dot!

Again came the call, then:

Dot—dot—dot! Dash!

"S.T.!" muttered the operator. "That's Struben, speaking on the D aerodrome wave-length!"

He tapped out the "ready to receive" signal, and then, writing rapidly, he took down the message which came through. And, as he did so, his tired eyes glinted with excitement, and a faint flush crept into his sallow cheeks. He knew why Struben was using Morse. The message was coming through in code, and was one for the ears of Von Schaumberg alone.

The operator, well versed in the code, deciphered the message almost simultaneously with his receiving it. When it ended he scribbled it out in long hand, read it through, then leapt to his feet and dashed from the cave.

Outside, the gale almost whipped him off his feet. Bending his head against the stinging, cutting sleet, he battled his way along a flat jetty of rock till he came to a large iron door set in the face of the rock.

In it was fitted a small wicket gate, and through this he stumbled into a huge, brilliantly lighted cave. Stoves glowed red hot along each wall. A long T shaped table, covered with snowy linen

and glittering cutlery, ran almost the entire length of the floor. The roof, from which hung clusters of electric bulbs, was arched like the interior of a cathedral and towered high into the shadows.

At the head of the table sat Von Schaumberg, huge, black-bearded, and of an ugliness which was repulsive. Little rat-like eyes squinted through a tangle of matted eyebrow. A vivid scar ran the whole length of his right cheek, and was mercifully half-hidden by his beard, as was his cruel, thick-lipped mouth.

A great, hairy hand was clenched round a goblet on the table in front of him; the other was thrust into the pocket of the reefer jacket which he wore.

Ranged on either side of him were his pilots, grim-visaged, clean-shaven men clad in high-necked grey uniforms, on the right breasts of which glittered small golden wings.

The men who occupied the chairs at the lower part of the table were of a coarser type than the pilots. Only Von Schaumberg knew where he had found them. Recruited from the sweepings of dockland, from the scum of the seven seas, they looked what they were, bestial and brutal. But they served Von Schaumberg as mechanics, electricians and engineers, for every man of them had once had a job at his finger-tips.

The wireless operator hurried towards where Von Schaumberg was seated, and all eyes followed him curiously.

"From Struben, sir!" he said, and thrust forward the paper upon which he had scribbled Struben's message.

With a grunt, Von Schaumberg took it. He scanned it with little eyes which suddenly blazed with passion.

"They've got Struben!" he, roared, launching himself to his feet, and crashing a huge fist on to the table.

He straightened out the paper which he had crumpled in his hand.

"Listen to this!" he went on, his great, bull-like voice echoing through the cave. "Have been arrested for complicity in hold-ups. Muller has turned King's evidence. Have broken gaol, but little chance of escape. Will try French mail plane now landing. In case of failure get Howard of the Rangers; he is responsible for this! Get—get him!"

"STRUBEN."

As Von Schaumberg's voice ceased, hubbub broke out in the cave. But he silenced it with a snarl. His ugly face was distorted with passion, for only he

knew what the loss of Struben would mean to him and his plans.

"Men!" he roared, and raised clenched fists. "If Struben fails to get clear—and failure will mean death—we will go after this skunk Howard! And we will not rest till we get him! We'll bring him here and hang him from the cliffs which face the sea! Are we agreed?"

And a thunderous roar of assent was his answer!

The Landing of the Night Mail!

HIS message to Von Schaumberg concluded, Struben straightened up and shot a quick glance at his wrist-watch.

"Nine minutes since we quit the cell, Muller," he whispered. "They'll be gettin' wise to our escape almost any minute now!"

Muller nodded jerkily.

"We haven't a chance!" he whined.

"Not a chance, Struben!"

"Shut up!" snarled Struben savagely. "We've gotta take off in that French mail plane, somehow! Listen!"

Outside, the gale was freshening into almost a hurricane. But above it there came to the ears of the two men the deep, pulsating beat of powerful aero engines.

"That's her!" said Struben. "Give me the gun and let's go!"

They quitted the hut, leaving the wireless operator still unconscious in his chair. Dashing across the space which separated the hut from the tarmac, they crouched in the dark shadow of a hangar.

The tarmac in front of them blazed under the powerful illumination of the landing lights. Dropping down out of the night came the huge night-flying machine carrying mails and passengers from New York to Paris.

Her four propellers were ticking over as the pilot throttled down to make his landing. Her terrific wing-spread was lost in the darkness. The windows of the dining saloon and lounge were ablaze with lights, and between them and the box-tail were the curtained windows of the cabins where passengers were asleep in their berths.

"Now, listen!" whispered Struben earnestly. "She isn't going any farther till the dawn! She mightn't get away then if this gale don't ease up. Waal, them passengers will be transferred to the hotel and the machine housed for the night—see?"

"Yes," muttered Muller.

"A mechanic'll taxi her in towards the hangars," went on Struben. "Her engines'll be running and that's when we tries to make our getaway in her—see?"

"Yes," mumbled Muller. "But——"

He broke off hesitatingly.

"Waal?" demanded Struben.

"Supposing we get the machine," went on Muller quickly. "Do you reckon you can take her off in this gale; and if we gets off do you reckon she'll ride the gale?"

"Don't be a confounded fool!" snarled Struben. "We've gotta chance it!"

"Well, look at her now!" whined Muller. "I'll lay she isn't going to land without busting her shock absorbers!"

The huge air liner was less than one hundred feet above the hangars. She was swaying and rocking in the gale, her starboard and port planes doing a wild see-saw as the wind tore at her broad wing-spread.

The pilot circled carefully, dropping lower foot by foot, literally feeling his way downwards to the safety which lay below him.

On the macadam in front of the hangars, a group of officials and mechanics watched him anxiously. The wind was howling from out the dark waste
(Continued overleaf.)

ROUSING WAR YARN!



Do not miss the striking real-life War yarn, entitled:

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of waters, bringing with it blinding, icy-cold rain.

At fifty feet the pilot opened up his engines, and, roaring over the hangar climbed to two hundred feet before he throttled down and again essayed to make a landing.

"Curse him!" snarled Struben. "He's funky!"

He wasn't. But he knew the responsibility which was his and the lives which were depending on his skill. At fifty feet he had realised that he had overshot his mark, and that if he attempted to land then he would in all probability foul the hangars.

Four times he tried to bring the huge, swaying monster safely to ground, and four times he opened up his engines and climbed again. The wind was lifting the machine bodily, and every time the pilot throttled down the gale took control.

And, while Struben swore softly but fluently to himself, in the lee of the hangar where he and Muller were crouched, the group of watchers on the tarmac were silent and tense with forboding.

The lighted windows of the liner's saloon were darkened by the heads and shoulders of passengers peering anxiously downwards.

Again the pilot essayed to edge inwards and downwards to the macadam below him.

Then suddenly he leaned forward in his seat, and a look of relief leaped into his eyes. At the same instant a shout went up from the mechanics gathered on the tarmac in front of the hangars.

From down out of the night had dropped a single seater scout. At one hundred feet it glided past the nose of the French air liner, and dived swayingly towards the far side of the aerodrome.

Kicking on rudder, the pilot of the liner followed. Down, down, glided the two machines, one so small, the other so mighty.

And Struben, grabbing Muller by the arm, snarled:

"That's Howard—back from patrol! He bringing the mail machine in! Showing him the way!"

At twenty feet the scout's engine roared with throttle full open, and the swift little machine zoomed up into the darkness overhead. It circled, like a small silver moth, whilst the air liner swung back towards the hangars and landed bumpily on the hard macadam surface of the landing-ground.

Mechanics ran forward to assist the passengers to alight, and uniformed at-

tendants from the aerodrome hotel were there to collect such luggage as the passengers might require and convey it to the hotel.

"Five minutes!" muttered Struben. "By then there'll only be a couple of mechanics on that bus, running her into the hangar. That's our chance! Get ready, Muller!"

The Escape!

WAITING until the French air liner had landed, Guy Howard then glided down in the teeth of the gale and landed far out on the aerodrome, after which he taxied in towards the hangars.

Switching off his engine, he dropped from the cockpit. Fifty yards away stood the mail machine, now empty of her passengers. Two sergeant mechanics were mounting to the pilot's cockpit, and the engines were still ticking over.

Crack! Crack!

Two shots suddenly rang out in rapid succession. Simultaneously two men dashed out on to the brilliantly lighted tarmac and raced towards the mail machine.

Guy recognised in an instant the lanky form of Struben and the stocky, bare-headed Muller. In his hand Struben carried the automatic he had taken from Hickner.

Guy sprinted towards the air liner, drawing his own automatic as he ran. A party of marines poured round the hangar, where they had come upon Struben and Muller. For the half dead Hickner had been discovered, and a search had at once commenced for the escaped prisoners.

Whipping their rifles to their shoulders the marines fired a volley. But Struben and Muller had already reached the cover of the machine and, with agility bred of despair, they swung themselves up to the pilot's cockpit.

The two sergeant mechanics turned to face the intruders, completely at a loss as to what was happening. Before they had time to think of resistance, Struben's gun barked twice. And the range was too short for Struben to miss.

"Out with 'em!" he snarled, and the two mechanics were bundled overboard.

It mattered nothing to Struben whether they were dying or dead. He flung himself into the pilot's seat and yanked open the throttle. The propellers thundered and the great machine surged forward!

(Don't miss next Wednesday's exciting instalment of this fine serial, boys!)



Our Weekly Pow-Wow

By
The Editor.

Your Editor welcomes letters from all his readers; send him one now. Address it to The Editor, "Nelson Lee Library," Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.A.

A Sense of Humour.

SOME fellows have the strangest impression of what is out and out funny and what is not. There are always two sides to a joke. A reader up North says there is a humorist at his school who knocks your bait overboard when fishing. The fish down below probably pass a vote of thanks for the kind attention, but that's neither here nor there. I can imagine a keen fisherman being decidedly annoyed by the loss of his bait. He might be disposed to knock the head of the silly chump who drowned the bait on the first bit of hard material he could find. Luckily, the all-round practical joker who is always giving samples of his wit often catches something (not fish) in the end, and it is good for him to do so.

Can You Beat It?

Here's a record from the other side of the world. Alan F. White and C. Newson, 22, Trevelyan Street, Wayville, South Australia, have 160 correspondents, which is a wonderful number. But this does not satisfy these champion letter-writers. They will be mighty pleased to hear from more readers who are keen on wireless, sports, pigeon-racing, etc.

A Lonely Reader.

In my budget this week I find a letter from Victor G. Newman, who writes to say he would like to hear from readers in the British Empire and U.S.A. His address is 30, Ball Street, Bendigo, Victoria, Australia. "I am sixteen years of age," he says, "and can't walk, and I feel rather lonely sometimes."

Now's the chance to send along a cheery letter to this chum, who will have the best wishes of everybody for better days.

A Wireless Club.

This is bang up to date. A. Henderson, Jun., 25, Castle Street, Southampton, asks for letters from readers who are likely to be interested in his Wireless and Electricity Club. He is keen as mustard on wireless, and it certainly looks as if there might be a real right-down excellent opening for such a club.

The Giddy Problem.

A correspondent, who curiously describes himself as a "poor chap," wants to know what he should do about his job. He is not a poor chap, anyway, for his berth is a jolly decent one in the retail trade, and offers excellent chances of advancement. But my correspondent has worked himself into a state of nerves as to whether he is getting on fast enough. He asks whether he had not better haul up the stakes and seek his fortune in London. I don't think! He is not alone in this eagerness, which is all right in its way, but often all this business about chucking a job which is certain for the sake of some gloriously uncertain possibility does not pay.

I have had requests on the same subject from chums all over the country who are in a hurry. It cannot be too clearly recognised, however, that good jobs are far more likely to come the way of fellows who are sticking to their present work than to those who go floating round as out-of-workers. In the retail trade, or the building business, or the motor-ing line, you may be engaged in an unimportant corner of the world; but, though your job may seem insignificant, it is as well

(Continued overleaf.)



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OUR WEEKLY POW-WOW!

(Continued from previous page.)

to remember that you are in touch with all the other departments of the trade. Other jobs connected with what you are doing are far more likely to be heard of when you are working like a nigger in the same line than if you throw up a situation and go trekking round.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

A. W. Ellis, Postal Assistant, P.O. Deniliquin, N.S.W., Australia, wishes to correspond with stamp collectors; he is a keen collector.

William Edward Hall, 2, Church Cottage, Church Alkham, nr. Dover, Kent, wishes to hear from readers anywhere.

Joseph Pollard, 209, Preston New Road, Blackburn, Lancs., wishes to hear from League members in his district.

J. Asman, 38, Stratford Road, West Bridgford, Notts., wishes to hear from readers in the Dominions and China, also from readers in England who are keen on reading; age 13½.

Philip A. Wilson, "Clifton" Printing Co., Loxton, River Murray, South Australia, wishes to correspond with readers in England; he is specially anxious to hear of his people who lived at Corentry.

Norman Guthrie, 26, Scouller Street, Marrickville, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, wants to correspond with Scouts and amateur authors.

C. Newson and A. White, 22, Trevelyan Street, Wayville, South Australia, wish to correspond with readers anywhere about stamps, sport, pigeon racing, wireless and photography. All letters promptly answered.

John Harrison, 11, Haymarket Buildings, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, wants the complete set of "Nelson Lee Libraries" containing the North-eastern yarns.

"THE SCHOOLBOY HOUSEHOLDERS!"

(Continued from page 34.)

questions. For to-night, at all events, let us rest."

In the meantime, the juniors were on their way to St. Frank's. They were tired but happy. After they had arrived, and the Austin Seven and the bieveles had been put away, they collected in the Triangle.

"Well, we've done it, you chaps," said Nipper contentedly. "And everything went off like a dream, didn't it?"

"Rather!" said Reggie Pitt.

"We musn't forget that we've got a responsibility now," continued Nipper. "We've started this thing, and we've got to go on with it."

"We shall have to take it in relays, I suppose," said Travers thoughtfully. "We shall have to go to the cottage in parties, at different times of the day—to help with the work. Well, well! What a life we do lead at St. Frank's!"

"It seems that we shall lead a life somewhere else in the future!" said Nipper dryly.

Five minutes later the parties had separated—Reggie Pitt and his crowd going to the West Horse, and Nipper and the others to the Ancient House. The truth was, the Remove had adopted the Earl of Edgemoore, and they were delighted with the success of their plans. They were full of fresh schemes for the morrow.

For it was now the Remove's job to look after their queer protégé—and, taking everything into consideration, the immediate future promised much in the way of novelty and excitement.

And perhaps there would be a hint of mystery, too!

THE END.

(The next yarn in this splendid series is entitled: "Fifty Pounds Reward!" Get your messenger to order your next week's "N.L.L." NOW!)



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All applications for Advertisement Spaces in this publication should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, "The Nelson Lee Library," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

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