

THE NELSON LEE

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OUT OF THE PAST!

A thrilling incident contained in the school-life and detective yarn, featuring the Boys of St. Frank's, inside.

New Series No. 40.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

March 24th, 1928.

MEET THE CHEERY CHUMS OF ST. FRANK'S—

OUT OF THE PAST!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

When Lucas Snell, the rascally lawyer, realises that Nelson Lee has found him out, he makes one last effort to save himself. But that effort fails, mainly owing to Handforth & Co. Handy becomes the hero of the school—and the Earl of Edgemoore gets the biggest surprise of his life!

CHAPTER 1.

A Distinguished Visitor!

"GOOD gad!"

Archibald Winston Derek Glenthorne, of the Remove at St. Frank's, uttered that ejaculation as he came to a halt half-way down the Ancient House steps. A gust of wind had suddenly removed Archie's topper, and now it was sailing across the Triangle in an erratic course. The gust lost its strength, and Archie's topper descended with a dull "plop" into the fountain pool.

"Retribution!" said Reggie Pitt, of the West House.

"How do you make that out?" asked Alan Castleton.

"It's Archie's punishment for daring to come out on a gusty March evening in a topper," replied Reggie. "There's half a gale blowing, and it's no weather for toppers!"

Archie came running up, greatly distressed.

"How absolutely frightful!" he said breathlessly. "I mean to say, the good old gear-box cover has positively done itself in!"

"Rats!" said Edward Oswald Handforth, of the Ancient House. "What rot! The hat isn't damaged, Archie. It only needs a wipe!"

"Whoa! Steady!" warned Reggie Pitt, as he went towards the fountain pool with Archie. "Just a minute, old son! There's a race on!"

"Dash it all, Pitt, old scoundrel, you don't seem to realise the tragic nature of this dashed disaster!" said Archie sternly. "I mean to say, every second is of importance, and all that!"

Archie's topper was floating on the surface of the water, rim uppermost. A piece of flat wood was also on the water—a piece of wood with a penholder stuck in the middle of it, evidently in lieu of a mast. One of the lesser fags, no doubt, had been playing at boats.

"Good!" said Reggie, as a gust of wind sent Archie's topper well ahead. "Cambridge wins!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see the dashed joke, you blighters!" said Archie frigidly, as he rescued his silk hat. "Odds wrecks and derelicts! Gaze upon it, laddies!"

"Talking about the Boat Race," said Handforth, "I'll bet you anything that Oxford will win it this year!"

"But I wasn't talking about the Boat Race, dash you!" protested Archie.

"I'd give quids to be somewhere on the towing-path between Putney and Hammer-smith!" went on Handforth dreamily. "Lemme see! Saturday of next week, isn't it? I shall have to see what can be done! Perhaps we can wangle something."

"Never!" said Church.

(Continued on page 4.)

—IN THE MAGNIFICENT LONG YARN BELOW!

As the old Earl of Edgemoor and his faithful retainer entered Edgemoor Manor, the juniors lined the route. "Welcome home, Lord Edgemoor!" they shouted.

"OUT OF THE PAST!"

(Continued from page 2.)

"We shall have to be satisfied with listening to the Boat Race on the wireless!" said McClure, shaking his head.

"If you're satisfied by a broadcast of the Boat Race, I'm not!" retorted Handforth tartly. "I'm not saying that they don't do the broadcasting jolly well. But I want to see the race, my sons! And what's more, I'm going to see it! When I make up my mind to do a thing, I do it! No half measures for me!"

He turned aside, dismissing the subject, and he regarded Archie Glenthorne with interest. The genial ass of the Remove was standing quite still, gazing mournfully at his dripping topper.

"Take it indoors, and hold it in front of the fire!" said Handforth helpfully.

"Good gad!" gasped Archie, in horror. "I mean to say, odds rot and rubbish! Absolutely not, old thing! Holding it in front of the fire would only make ruination more ruinous!"

"That's what I meant," nodded Handforth. "All toppers ought to be prohibited by law!"

Archie went indoors, highly disgusted—but not to hold his topper in front of the fire. His idea was to give it to Phipps, his valet. Phipps was a marvel. Phipps would soon grapple with the problem, and emerge triumphant. Phipps always did.

"Well, we'd be better be getting indoors," said Church, after Archie had vanished. "It's a bit chilly out here, Handy—and, besides, it's tea-time."

"I was thinking about taking some things along to Lord Edgemore," said Handforth thoughtfully. "We might have tea at the cottage, if it comes to that. The old boy is generally pleased when two or three of us drop in."

Before his chums could reply, a diversion occurred. Church wanted to point out to his leader that Travers and Potts and one or two others had gone along to Lord Edgemore's to tea, and so there was no need for a further crowd to barge in.

But just then a car came rolling in through the gateway, and it drove straight through the Triangle towards Big Arch, with the evident intention of going through to Inner Court, and so on to the Head's house.

It was an open car, a two-seater, and there was only one man in it. Handforth & Co. stared simultaneously. Nipper, who was just coming out of the Ancient House with Tregellis-West and Watson, stared, too.

"Hi!" roared Nipper suddenly, running forward. "Well, I'm jiggered! Is that you, Mr. Lennard?"

"And why not?" asked Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard, as he drove by. "Cheerio, Nipper, my son! See you later!"

The famous Scotland Yard man did not stop. He was evidently afraid that he would be surrounded and mobbed by the juniors. After he had gone Handforth came running up, and his eyes were gleaming as he grabbed Nipper by the shoulder.

"By George!" he panted. "Chief Inspector Lennard! What does it mean, Nipper? Why is he here?"

"How should I know?" asked Nipper.

"But you suspect, don't you?" said Handforth keenly. "It isn't usual for a big Scotland Yard man to come down to St. Frank's. Your guv'nor has been up to something, Nipper!"

"I believe he has!" murmured Nipper, nodding. "In fact, Handy, I shouldn't be at all surprised if things moved pretty swiftly from now on!"



CHAPTER 2.

Handforth's Theory.

HANDFORTH dragged Nipper aside, still clutching at his arm.

"You mean—old Snell?" he asked somewhat breathlessly.

"I shouldn't wonder!" nodded Nipper. "I know that the guv'nor has been taking some sort of action, although, blow him, he wouldn't tell me much. But Mr. Lennard's visit looks significant. Let's hope it pans out well—if only for the old earl's sake."

Handforth, who fancied himself as an amateur detective, had been very exasperated, too, of late. For Nelson Lee, the famous Housemaster-detective of the Ancient House, was working secretly on behalf of the evicted Earl of Edgemore.

At the present moment the pauper earl was living in a little cottage which overlooked his estate. He had been installed there by the St. Frank's boys, and since the eviction they had looked after him.

Edgemore Manor was now in possession of Mr. William Gore-Pearce, the millionaire—the vulgar, ostentatious parvenu whose son, Claude, had been admitted into St. Frank's as a day boy—much to the indignation of the Remove.

Just now Mr. Gore-Pearce was living in a furnished house at the other end of the village, and all sorts of renovations were in progress at the Manor. In the village, too—but staying at the George Tavern—was Mr. Lucas Snell, the lawyer who had transacted all the business. For years Mr. Snell had been in charge of the Earl of Edgemore's affairs, but now, apparently, he had turned against his former employer. Mr. Lucas Snell was still on the spot, for it seemed that there were other legal matters to be dealt with.

"I've always said that Snell is shady!" exclaimed Handforth, in a low voice. "This proves it!"

"No, it doesn't!" said Nipper. "You mustn't jump to conclusions, Handy. Chief-Inspector Lennard may have come down on totally different business. It's a fatal policy for a detective to try these random shots. You shouldn't make a statement until you've had corroborative evidence."

"Rats!" said Handforth, waving his hand. "I'm different from the ordinary detective, my son! Snell is a crook—and here's a big man from Scotland Yard come to St. Frank's to see your guv'nor! Two and two make four—and it's as clear as daylight that Mr. Lennard is here in connection with Snell!"

"It doesn't follow, Handy!" insisted Nipper. "He may have come down to see Madame Rossiter about something."

"Madame who?" asked Handforth, staring.

"That French woman," replied Nipper. "She and her son are guests in the Head's house at present, you know—"

"Why the dickens do you drag them in?" demanded Handforth, in astonishment.

But Nipper preferred not to explain. So far, none of the other juniors guessed that Madame Rossiter was the widow of Lord Edgemore's son, who was killed during the War. None of the fellows even dreamed that the fair-headed little boy who had sometimes been seen running about the school grounds was actually the old earl's grandson! Yet Nelson Lee and Nipper were both satisfied about the relationship. So far, however, the Earl of Edgemore had not been informed—for he was, to all intents and purposes, a pauper. Madame Rossiter herself had not the slightest inkling of her father-in-law's real identity.

"Well, what are you going to do?" went on Handforth, with signs of impatience. "We ought to find Inspector Lennard, and question him."

Nipper grinned.

"Try it!" he said, with a chuckle. "No, Handy, it'll do no good to question Mr. Lennard. Just leave this to me. I'll have a word or two with the guv'nor at the first opportunity."

And Edward Oswald Handforth had to be satisfied with that. Of course, he wasn't satisfied at all—but there the matter rested for the moment.

Later Nipper went along to Nelson Lee's study in the Ancient House, and, as he had expected, Chief-Inspector Lennard was there. Both men were looking serious when Nipper tentatively edged his way into the apartment.

"Hallo, inspector!" said Nipper. "I thought I'd just come along to shake hands. Hope I'm not intruding, guv'nor?"

"As a matter of fact, Nipper, you are," said Nelson Lee pointedly.

"Sorry, young 'un, but this is an important conference," added the chief-inspector. "How's everybody? Bulging with good health? Fine! I may get a chance of seeing you later on!"

This was obviously a dismissal, but Nipper held his ground.

"It's a bit thick, guv'nor, to leave me out in the cold like this!" he protested. "I know most of the facts about Mr. Snell. I helped you over that affair of the red pocket-book that Snell lost—the one that contained all his entries in secret cipher. In fact, if it hadn't been for me, guv'nor, you might never have seen the book at all!"

"That may be so, Nipper, but just at this minute I cannot tell you definitely what is in the wind," said Nelson Lee quietly. "But this much I will say: Come down to this study after lights-out to-night."

"Yes, sir!" said Nipper eagerly. "You mean, just me?"

"Just you!" nodded Leo. "The business we shall be engaged upon will be of a very private nature, and there are many of the other juniors—notably one in particular—who would jump at the chance of a night escapade. But we can't have it, Nipper. So you must come to this study alone."

"That's good enough for me, sir!" said Nipper briskly. "I won't interrupt you any more. What time shall I get here?"

"Not later than half-past ten."

"I'll be here on the second, guv'nor!" promised Nipper.

He went out, inwardly glowing. And when Handforth met him soon afterwards he reported, with full truth, that Nelson Lee had imparted no information. Whereat Edward Oswald Handforth was much disgusted. Incidentally, Handforth was also suspicious. He had an idea that he was being left out of something—which, after all, was perfectly true.



CHAPTER 3.

Lucas Snell's Fears!

MR. LUCAS SNELL gathered his papers together, and tucked them neatly into his little dispatch case.

"Well, Mr. Gore-Pearce, I think that's all for this evening," he said, as he rose to his feet. "The other documents will do tomorrow. Now that I have obtained your signature to these papers, I can go straight ahead with the various negotiations, so that there will be no delay."

Mr. William Gore-Pearce nodded.

"That's what I want, Snell," he said, as he selected a big cigar from the box on the desk and bit off the end. "There have been enough delays already. We want to go ahead now. I'm tired of this furnished house. It's only temporary, at the best. I want to get settled into Edgemore Manor."

"Well, as far as the legal difficulties are concerned, we may safely say that they have now been smoothed away," declared the lawyer. "The property is yours entirely,

Mr. Gore-Pearce. Lord Edgemore has absolutely no claim upon it, and——"

"Claim upon it!" echoed Mr. William Gore-Pearce, with a laugh. "What the thunder are you talking about, Snell? I bought the property—paid for it! I have your receipts, and——"

"Yes, yes, of course!" said Mr. Snell hastily. "Unhappily, there has been a great deal of complication. You see, the property was involved—mortgaged up to the hilt. I have had a rare fight with creditors, distributing the money as Best I could. They were all clamouring. Even now there are considerable sums left owing. But that, Mr. Gore-Pearce, need not concern you. Edgemore Manor is your freehold property, and you may safely rely upon my word that everything has been transacted in a strictly legal and binding way."

Mr. Gore-Pearce looked at the lawyer through the blue wreaths of smoke which ascended from his freshly-lighted cigar.

"Sometimes, Snell, I wonder if you are on the square," he said bluntly.

"Really, Mr. Gore-Pearce!" protested Snell.

"No offence—no offence!" said the millionaire. "But you're a queer fellow, Snell. Heaven help you, my friend, if you have been playing tricks with me! I have trusted you over this transaction, and I have been more or less in your hands. I am a business man, but real estate is not in my line. Well, Snell, I'll bid you good-night."

"Good-night, Mr. Gore-Pearce," said Mr. Lucas Snell coldly.

"Oh, by the way," went on the millionaire, as Snell moved towards the door. "What about that pocket-book of yours? The one you were advertising for. I understand that you've recovered it?"

"Yes," said Snell briefly.

"From one of the boys at the school, eh?"

"Yes," said Snell again.

"Claude was mentioning something about it to me," went on Mr. Gore-Pearce. "It's a good thing for you, Snell, that that pocket-book of yours contains nothing but innocent notes."

"What do you mean?" asked the lawyer, with a sudden sharp note in his voice.

"Hallo!" said the millionaire, with a chuckle. "That doesn't look healthy, Snell! You started just now! You distinctly started! Do you know, I'm beginning to believe that you're a bit of a rascal!"

"I protest, sir!" shouted Snell angrily.

"What do you mean by these statements?"

Mr. Gore-Pearce laughed outright.

"I didn't know you were so thin-skinned, Snell!" he chuckled. "You see, the boy from whom you recovered your notebook was young Hamilton. So it'll be a bad thing for you if your notes were at all questionable."

"I do not understand!" protested Snell, becoming angrier and angrier.

"No?" said Mr. Gore-Pearce dryly. "My dear Snell, surely you know that Hamilton is none other than the celebrated Master Nipper? And surely you know that Nipper

is the assistant of the great Mr. Nelson Lee?"

Lucas Snell turned distinctly pale.

"The assistant of Mr. Nelson Lee!" he muttered. "Oh, but—but——"

"And I understand that Mr. Nelson Lee is very good at decoding ciphers!" said the millionaire. "I wonder if Mr. Lee knows your secrets, Snell? Ha! You're beginning to look guilty! So those cipher notes of yours are not quite so innocent, eh?"

"I absolutely object to these innuendoes, sir!" said Snell, realising that he had been acting incautiously. "The notes in that book are perfectly ordinary. Private, of course—otherwise I should not have taken the trouble to write them in cipher. But when you suggest that they may possibly be—well, questionable, as you put it——"

"Come, Snell! I was only having a joke with you!" said Mr. Gore-Pearce, rising to his feet and chuckling afresh. "What's the matter with you, man? I shall really begin to think that you are a rogue. Well, good-night! Good-night to you, Snell! Don't forget to be here in the morning. We've got to go over those others papers, and then we shall have to run into Bannington to see the taxation officials. You're all rogues—the whole lot of you! You've all been robbing me, right and left! Pay out—pay out—pay out all the time! That's my job, it seems! Well, good-night!" finished the millionaire, boisterously jovial.

Lucas Snell, as he departed from the house, felt a tinge of relief. The millionaire, at least, suspected nothing. He had only been facetious.

And yet how exactly he had hit the nail on the head!

For, now that Snell was alone in the darkness of the March evening, he allowed his expression to change. It was eloquent of alarm.

Was there anything in the suggestion that Gore-Pearce had put forward? Had Nipper taken the red notebook to Nelson Lee? Had Nelson Lee examined it?

"I've had nothing but worry ever since I lost that confounded book!" muttered Snell savagely, as he neared the George Tavern. "I thought everything was all right! I believed that the matter was over. But now Gore-Pearce has put fresh worry into my head!"

He went into his hotel, shaky and trembling. Which only proved how guilty those private notes of his actually were!

CHAPTER 4.

Restless Handforth!



ELL? Anything fresh?"

Nipper paused in the Ancient House lobby as Handforth, catching hold of him

by the shoulder, put the eager question.

"No, old man, nothing fresh," said Nipper, with a smile. "It's bed-time now, anyhow, and—"

"Bother bed-time!" interrupted Handforth. "What about Chief-Inspector Lennard? You've seen him, haven't you?"

"Not since early in the evening," replied Nipper. "He's gone now, anyhow. He went nearly a couple of hours ago."

"He went!" echoed Handforth blankly. "Then isn't there going to be any action? Aren't they going to arrest Snell, or something?"

"Forget about it, old man," said Nipper soothingly. "You shouldn't make these random guesses. We haven't any evidence at all, and yet you recklessly assume that Mr. Lennard came down here in connection with Snell."

"Well, don't you think that he came down here in connection with Snell?"

"I did," admitted Nipper.

"And don't you now?"

"Well, you see—Hang it, Handy, why pursue the subject?" said Nipper. "What can we do, anyhow? The governor hasn't told me anything, and I can't force him to speak, can I?"

Handforth looked triumphant.

"All the same, you jolly well know that something is about to move!" he said. "And I don't see why I should be left out in the cold—or you, either. I suggest that we go to Mr. Lee—"

"Bed-time, boys!"

came a familiar voice from the rear.

"Oh, my hat!" said Edward Oswald. "Yes, sir—just going!"

"That's right!" smiled Lee. "Oh, by the way, Nipper, Mr. Lennard asked me to give you his kindest regards."

"Thanks, sir," said Nipper, nodding.

"Has Mr. Lennard gone, sir—completely?" asked Handforth, with suspicion. "Isn't he coming back? Aren't you going to arrest somebody?"

Nelson Lee laughed.

"What a fellow you are, Handforth, for jumping to dramatic conclusions," he said dryly. "Off to bed with you! I'm awfully sorry, but I'm afraid that you can't indulge

your favourite hobby to-night. There's no detective work for you, Handforth."

"Yes, sir, but—"

"Good-night, Handforth!" said Lee briskly.

"Oh, but I was going to say—"

Nelson Lee, however, had moved on, and Handforth was freshly exasperated. He had an idea that he was being deliberately put off, and he wasn't far wrong, either! When he got into his own dormitory, he glared at Church and McClure, who had already arrived. Handforth's chums wondered what was in the wind.

"Who is it this time, old man?" asked Church gently. "Who has been looking for trouble?"

"Mr. Lee!" replied Handforth darkly.

"My hat! You're not going to fight Mr. Lee, I suppose?" grinned McClure.

"I'd like to!" snapped Handforth. "By George! I'd like to dot him one on the nose—and I'd do it, too, if it wasn't disrespectful!"

"You mean, if you wouldn't get the sack for it!" said Church blandly.

"I tell you there's something on to-night!" said Handforth, lowering his voice and pacing up and down the little dormitory. "Yes, there's something on! They can't fool me! Nipper tried to put me off, and then Mr. Lee used the same tactics. But I'm not so jolly dense! That man from Scotland Yard has gone, but where has he gone to?"



CHARLIE ROSSITER, who, known only to Nelson Lee and Nipper, is really the grandson of the Earl of Edgemore.

And why?"

"Oh, how the dickens should we know?" yawned McClure. "For goodness sake, Handy, give it a rest!"

And Church and McClure, having undressed, sensibly went to sleep. Handforth undressed, too, but when he got into bed sleep would not come to him. He lay there, wakeful. He tossed this way and that, but his brain was active all the time.

For some little time after lights-out he stayed in bed, and by now Church and McClure were sound asleep.

Ten o'clock had already struck, and even the seniors were in their dormitories. St. Frank's was quiet for the night. The wind

had died down considerably now, and outside all was comparatively still.

Then, just as the quarter chimes were sounding from the old school clock, Handforth abruptly sat up in bed. The unmistakable throbbing of a motor-car came to his ears. It grew more pronounced—it hummed and hovered in the air. Then suddenly it ceased.

"Somebody just come!" he muttered, leaping out of bed. "By George! That was Chief-Inspector Lennard's car! He's come back!"

Handforth felt for his clothes, and, as he commenced dressing, he called out to Church and McClure. Then he shook them in turn.

"What's up?" asked Church sleepily. "What the dickens are you doing, Handy? Why are you out of bed?"

"I'm getting dressed!" said Handforth grimly.

"Getting what?"

"Dressed, you ass!"

But it isn't time to get up—it isn't daylight yet," said McClure, in some confusion.

"You silly ass, it's only just a quarter-past ten!" said Handforth. "Chief-Inspector Lennard has come back—I just heard his car outside. Come on—up you get! We've got to investigate this!"

Church and McClure were now thoroughly awake, and they stared at their leader through the gloom in wondering bewilderment.

"But how do you know it was Mr. Lennard's car?" asked Church.

"I recognised the throb."

"You recognised—" Church paused, breathless. "Why, you silly ass, it might only have been the Head coming back from a visit—or some friends might have—"

"All sorts of things *might* be!" broke in Handforth. "But that car was Chief-Inspector Lennard's, or I'm a Dutchman! What's more, I'm going to—"

He broke off abruptly. He was quite near the door, and he was only talking in a whisper. But just then he distinctly heard a creak from outside in the corridor.

Shush!" he breathed tensely. He opened the door, and peered out. He was just in time to see the figure of Nipper, fully dressed, vanishing round the angle of the corridor.

There you are!" panted Handforth excitedly. "I know it! There's something special on—and I've been left out in the cold! By George! We'll see about that!"

easy. By ten o'clock, the lawyer was pale and shaky.

Now and again he told himself that he was a fool to take any notice of Mr. William Gore-Pearce's nonsense. Of course, that pocket-book of his had been seen by the schoolboys only; and they hadn't understood its real significance. The pocket-book had been lost, and one of the boys had found it. Well, there was nothing else in the matter.

Then, after calming his fears in this way, Snell would have doubts. Had Nelson Lee seen that book? Had he mastered the cipher? Had he read those secret notes? If he had—

But Lucas Snell feared to ponder over the results if Nelson Lee *had* deciphered those notes. Again and again he told himself that he was acting foolishly. It was only guess-work—pure assumption. Why, if Nelson Lee had really seen the book, some action would have been taken long before this. Days ago. It was almost a week since the book had been recovered, and—

"Any further orders, sir?" asked the George Tavern waiter.

Snell started, irritated by the man's unannounced entry.

"Why don't you knock when you come in?" demanded Mr. Snell testily.

"Sorry, sir!" apologised the waiter. "I was just wondering if you're wantin' anything further."

"If I want anything further, I'll ring for it!" snapped Snell. "Get out of here!"

Then suddenly he realised that he was unnecessarily sharp. As the waiter was leaving the room, he called him back.

"It's all right, fellow!" said Snell. "I didn't mean to be so curt. But I'm worried—I've been dealing with a lot of important documents this evening, and I daresay I'm a little irritable."

"That's all right, sir," said the waiter, easily mollified. "You gents what uses your brains must have a hard time of it now an' again. I dessey it's the same with them clever gents at Scotland Yard," he added, in an inconsequential way.

"Scotland Yard!" repeated Snell, with a start. "What has Scotland Yard got to do with it? What are you talking about, you fool?"

"Nothing, sir—nothing!" said the waiter hastily. "I was only thinking of that gent what went up to the school just now. That's the second time this evenin', so I understand," he went on, eager to impart the local gossip. "I shouldn't be surprised but what that there Mr. Nelson Lee is in the game, too."

"What game?" demanded Snell, rising to his feet and staring at the waiter. "What are you talking about?"

"Why, nothing, sir," said the waiter, startled by Snell's fierce expression. "Only

CHAPTER 5.

Alarming News.



H

ANDFORTH was not the only one who was restless that night.

Down at the George Tavern, in Bell-

ton, Mr. Lucas Snell was troubled and un-



Archie Glenhorne gave a gasp of consternation as a gust of wind suddenly removed his topper and sent it sailing across the Triangle—straight towards the Fountain pool!

there's talk goin' about that an important gent from Scotland Yard has gone up to the school. His car passed only five minutes ago. Not as I know anything about it, sir," he added defensively. "Tisn't anythin' to do with me!"

"No, of course not—of course not!" said Lucas Snell. "Well, that's all—you can go. Don't bolt the front door, because I shall probably go for a stroll soon."

"Very good, sir," said the waiter.

Left alone, Snell stared at his reflection in the mirror, and it seemed to him that he was looking as pale as a ghost.

A man from Scotland Yard!

And that man had gone up to the school—had only just passed in his car! What could it possibly mean? Perhaps it was just a normal visit—an everyday call. Some big pot from Scotland Yard who had known Nelson Lee in the old days, and who had just called—

"No, no!" panted Snell. "That won't do! It's too significant—too much of a coincidence!"

His thoughts were now clear-cut. A man from Scotland Yard had gone up to the school to see Nelson Lee. And Snell had been suspecting, all the evening, that Nelson Lee had read the entries in that secret pocket-book of his! Was it possible that there was any connection? Had Lee read those incriminating entries, and had he com-

municated with police headquarters in London?

"I must know! I must find out something!" panted Snell, almost beside himself with doubt and fear. "I must—I must! But how? What can I do?"

He was nearly crazy, and the more he thought of the situation, the greater became his fears. Was Nelson Lee going to take action? Had this man from Scotland Yard been brought down in connection with him—Snell?

It was sheerly impossible for the shady lawyer to rest in these circumstances. He had to find out something! It was imperative.

And so, less than five minutes later, Snell was out in the open, under the stars, and he was half-walking, half-running up the lane towards St. Frank's. He had no idea in his mind as to what he should do when he arrived. But perhaps he would see somebody—perhaps he would be able to scout round and get the lie of the land.

When Snell arrived, the main gates were standing wide open. The Triangle was dark and empty—a big expanse of blackness.

Like a thief in the night, Snell crept in. One or two lights were showing at the upper windows. All the lower windows were dark. All or them— But, no! One window of the Ancient House was illuminated—a lower window! Lucas Snell gulped. Surely this must be the window of Nelson Lee's study!



CHAPTER 3.

No Holding Him Back.

AFTER Handforth had spotted Nipper vanishing round the angle of the corridor, he was breathless with excitement. He closed the dormitory door again, and turned round to face Church and McClure.

"There you are!" he said tensely. "What did I tell you?"

"Goodness only knows!" growled Church. "Will you be sensible, Handy? Do you realise that it's nearly half-past ten? What the dickens are you getting dressed for? If you go out now, you'll be spotted by one of the masters—they're not in bed yet—and then you'll get a flogging, or you might even be sacked!"

Handforth waved these fears aside.

"I don't care!" he said. "I'm going to get dressed—and so are you fellows! Come on—we've got to move!"

"You crazy lunatic——"

"Nipper just went down the corridor—fully dressed!" said Handforth fiercely. "The traitor—the rotter! He's left me out of this—deliberately!"

"Well, that only proves his sense!" murmured McClure crossly.

"What's that?"

"I said, I think he must be dense!" said Mac hastily. "If Nipper is ass enough to get dressed, and to risk the chopper, it's his own look out——"

"He's risking nothing!" said Handforth tartly. "It's a put-up job! Everybody knows that Nipper is a special sort of chap. He doesn't like to take advantage of his position—I'll say that for him—but he's a sort of assistant to Mr. Lee. And Mr. Lee's going out to-night on some detective work. Nipper's going with him, and so is Chief-Inspector Lennard. Are you chaps ready?"

"No, of course we're not!" said Church.

"Then I'll give you just ten seconds!"

"But look here——"

"Ten seconds!" repeated Handforth grimly. "If you're not ready by then, I'll biff you right and left. I'm going out on the trail, and I need assistants!"

"Assistants!" said McClure bitterly. "It strikes me that you'll need assistance before you've done! But not the kind of assistance that Churchy and I can give you! What you'll need more than anything else will be a brain specialist!"

"He needs one now!" said Church gruffly.

But they dressed very rapidly. They could tell, by their impulsive leader's tone, that he was in earnest; and there was no sense in walking deliberately into the path of a tornado. Besides, as Handforth was determined to go, it was up to Church and

McClure to accompany him—just to see that he didn't get into mischief.

And so, two minutes later, the Study D trio silently left their dormitory and padded down the corridor.

Church and McClure, naturally, believed that Handforth had got a bee in his bonnet. He generally had. It was only on very rare occasions that his chance shots went home. But this occasion, as it happened, was one of those rare ones.

Astonishingly enough, most of Handforth's deductions were absolutely correct.

It was Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard's car that had driven up fifteen minutes earlier. It was quite true that Nipper had crept down to keep a special appointment with his famous master. It was equally true that Nelson Lee had some drastic business on hand to-night.

That was the remarkable feature of the case. For once in a blue moon, Handforth was not after a mare's nest.

"Well, what are we going to do now?" asked Church impatiently, as they reached the lobby. "I suppose you know that a master might come along any minute and spot us? What are we going to say?"

"We'll get out through our study window," whispered Handforth. "We've done it before, and so we can do it now."

"What are we going to do outside? Hide ourselves in the tool-box of the inspector's car?" demanded Church sarcastically. "Creep under the bonnet, and tuck ourselves behind the starting-plugs?"

"Fathead!" said Handforth gruffly. "You can sneer all you like, but before we've done you'll realise that I'm a smart amateur detective!"

Church and McClure were rather relieved.

There couldn't be much risk in creeping about outside. They had feared that Handforth, carried away by his enthusiasm, would creep up to the door of Nelson Lee's study, and listen. Quite apart from the fact that such a proceeding would be risky, there was also the question of its propriety. It would be too much like spying. Of course, Handforth would regard it as detective work, and he would call it scouting, or something like that.

But he wouldn't be able to do much outside—hence his two chums' relief.

So, soon afterwards, the three Removites were out under the March stars. And, curiously enough, they had no sooner crept into the inky darkness of West Arch when Handforth, who was leading, came to a halt.

"Look out!" he breathed. "Somebody coming!"

"Oh, crumbs!" muttered Church. "Let's get flat against the wall!"

But Handforth remained where he was—standing there, gazing out into the Triangle. A figure was just within sight—a dim, crouching figure. There was something very suspicious about it.

In a series of short runs, the figure approached the Ancient House, crouching lower and lower. Obviously, this was no master—no lawful inhabitant.

And when the figure finally came to a halt beneath the window of Nelson Lee's study, Handforth's suspicions were confirmed.

Yes, there was certainly something very much "on" to-night!



CHAPTER 7.

The Plan of Action!

CHIEF DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR LENNARD, of Scotland Yard, lay back in his chair and

grinned cheerily.

"If you ask me, Nipper, your guv'nor is jolly good-natured!" he said. "We don't need you at all to-night—in fact, you'll be more or less of an encumbrance. But out of the goodness of his heart Mr. Lee is taking you along."

"In reply to which I say, 'Rats'!" remarked Nipper coolly.

"And that's what St. Frank's does for the modern youth!" said the chief inspector, turning to Nelson Lee with a helpless gesture. "Have these boys no respect for their elders?"

"Many an old owl is far more aged than I am, Mr. Lennard—and yet I don't respect it!" said Nipper blandly.

The chief inspector gave it up. He was a bluff, hearty sort of man, and he was well accustomed to chipping Nipper, and to being clipped in return. In fact, he quite enjoyed the game.

"When you two have finished this comedy, perhaps I shall be allowed to speak?" suggested Nelson Lee mildly. "Nipper, I am allowing you to come with me because I mentioned last week, in an incautious moment, that I might need your help. I really don't think you will be necessary, as the inspector has just said. But if you like to come on this mission, you may do so."

"Thanks awfully, guv'nor!" said Nipper eagerly.

"Oh, you needn't look so intent," went on Lee. "We're not going to arrest anybody—we're not even going to perform any exciting stunts. Our mission, indeed, is singularly unattractive. It's highly probable that you will elect to go to bed when you hear what is afoot."

"Let's hear, sir!" said Nipper pointedly.

"Well, you know that I am well on the track of our mutual friend, Mr. Snell," said Nelson Lee, leaning forward over his desk. "I have to thank you, Nipper, for that. It was you who brought that note-book to me."

"But it was old Handy who found it, sir," said Nipper.

"That is really beside the point," went on Lee. "As you know, I succeeded in deciphering Mr. Snell's many notes, and I have already hinted to you, Nipper, that those notes are highly incriminating. To be quite frank, they deal with many swindling transactions which Lucas Snell has recently effected!"

The chief inspector nodded.

"It's amazing to me how these crooks keep record of their dirty work," he remarked. "And yet, strangely enough, dozens of 'em do it. The cleverest of 'em just look through our library at the Yard. And what folly to suppose that a comparatively simple cipher will protect them!"

It's got to be a clever cipher to defeat the guv'nor," said Nipper, with confidence.

"I am satisfied that the sale of Edgemore Manor was quite illegal," continued Nelson Lee, his eyes now taking on a keen light. "In other words, Nipper, the Earl of Edgemore was evicted unlawfully. Not only that, but Snell, in the capacity of Lord Edgemore's lawyer, has been robbing the poor old gentleman for years. There is no need for me to go into any intricate details with you. The simple facts will be enough."

"But aren't you going to have Snell arrested at once, sir?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"Not at once," replied Lee. "Not until to-morrow, at the earliest. You see, we cannot arrest a man until there is evidence against him—"

"Of course, we could hold him on suspicion," put in the chief inspector. "But, after a long consultation with the superintendent at the Yard, we decided that it would be better to ransack Snell's office as a preliminary. You see, Nipper, we're justified in doing that—in face of the information that Mr. Lee has supplied."

"Oh," said Nipper. "So we're going to Snell's offices in London?"

"Not in London," replied Lee. "Snell's headquarters are in Helmford, only about twenty miles from here. Snell has been practising in Helmford for many years. Our job to-night will be to go to Helmford, and to enter Snell's offices, and—well, ransack them. We have a warrant, of course."

"To break in?" asked Nipper, surprised.

The chief inspector grinned.

"Well, perhaps not exactly to break in," he chuckled. "But now and again a zealous officer will feel himself justified in taking the law into his own hands. Don't you worry about that, Nipper. I am officially in charge of this jaunt, and I'll take full responsibility. Before we can grab Snell, we've got to have the evidence—and I rather think we shall get a pile of it by going through Snell's private papers at his office. The local police, of course, know nothing about it. It's a Yard job entirely."

"And you think Snell will be exposed, sir?" asked Nipper.

"Utterly and completely," replied Nelson Lee, rising to his feet. "We only want to get our hands on these incriminating documents. Happily, the circumstances are all in our favour. Snell is staying at the George Tavern, in Bellton, and he is quite unsuspecting. Our plan is to go to Helmsford, obtain this documentary evidence, and then pay an early morning visit to the local justice of the peace. We shall get a warrant for Snell's arrest, and quietly nab him in bed before he gets up."

"And the old earl, sir?" asked Nipper quickly. "What of him?"

"I rather fancy that the Earl of Edgemore's troubles will soon be over," replied Nelson Lee. "He is not such a pauper as he imagines, and before long, Nipper, he will be back in the home of his ancestors."

"Yes, sir—and he'll have a grandson and an heir!" murmured Nipper delightedly. "Oh, how ripping! We've all been sorry for the poor old boy—and now he'll come into his own again."



CHAPTER 8.

Things Begin to Move!

UTSIDE stood a madman.

Literally, Lucas Snell was crazed.

Every word of conversation in Nelson Lee's study had come to his burning, terrified ears. Crouching near the window-sill he had listened; and, in the silence of the night, the voices had come out to him. Muffled, faint, dim—but Lucas Snell had heard.

He had come up to St. Frank's without any definite idea in mind. He only knew that he had been uneasy all the evening—and the knowledge that a Scotland Yard man was at the school had impelled him to make this journey. Luck, more than anything else, had played into Snell's hands.

And now his worst fears were realised.

The visit of this man from Scotland Yard was no friendly call. He had, as Snell had vaguely feared, come in connection with Snell himself.

The rascally lawyer was stunned—bewildered by the enormity of the disaster that was about to befall him. Until to-day he had gone on his way almost carefree. He had never dreamed that there was any possibility of him being exposed.

For years he had been conducting these illicit practices—for years he had been converting his clients' money to his own uses. And nobody had suspected—nobody had menaced him.

Now, in a flash, the thunderbolt had come!

Scotland Yard had been informed—a search was to be effected in his rooms—his offices. Of all men in the world Lucas Snell knew that this search would ruin him. It was true his most vital papers were locked away in his safe. But what was a safe to a man with Nelson Lee's reputation? Armed with that warrant from Scotland Yard, and in the presence of a Scotland Yard officer, Lee would rapidly unfasten that old-fashioned safe. And then Snell's criminal secrets would be at the mercy of the intruders.

Something had to be done, and done quickly, too!

That was the thought which kept throbbing into Lucas Snell's brain. Something had to be done! Without the evidence from the office the police could do nothing. But how could that evidence be destroyed? There were other papers in the office—valuable papers, vital documents of all kinds—mostly belonging to his clients. But Snell did not care about these.

He had been safe so long as no inquiries were made. But once his papers were examined by experts the end would be swift. There would be too many discrepancies—too many irregularities. The frauds would be exposed. It had been easy to keep the clients quiet—to talk them into submission. But it would be a different matter with the police!

Then, while Snell was thinking, the light suddenly snapped out in Nelson Lee's study. Snell was taken by surprise. He stood there hardly knowing what to do. But he dared not move. Indeed he could not move—for the moment he was bereft of action. He was so stunned and dazed by the completeness of the blow that had fallen.

Over in the shadows of West Arch, there were three other figures. Handforth and Church and McClure. They were waiting—watching that crouching figure under Nelson Lee's window. Handforth's idea was to pounce when the man moved—to capture him, and then triumphantly to display him to Nelson Lee. There was no object in making the capture until the mysterious intruder attempted to get away.

But Handforth's little plan was knocked on the head, as it happened.

For the main door of the Ancient House opened, and three figures appeared. Now, for the first time, the watching juniors saw a blacker shadow against the Ancient House wall, further along. It was Chief Inspector Lennard's car, standing there with lights out. But now the lights sprang into life, and the three figures climbed on board.

There was a whirr as the electric starter came into operation, a throb from the engine, and then a rattle from the gears. The next moment the car was gliding across the Triangle, and it turned out of the gate-

way and sped off towards the village—towards Helmford.

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

It had all happened so quickly that he had had no time to act. He knew perfectly well that Nelson Lee and Nipper and the Scotland Yard man had gone in that car. Handforth wanted to follow, but he couldn't. But his natural exasperation at being left behind was mollified somewhat by the knowledge that the mysterious intruder still crouched against the Ancient House wall.

Snell, in fact, had not dared to move. The lights from the lamps had nearly shown him up. Only by crouching behind a buttress had he saved himself from detection.

"It's Snell!" breathed Handforth, turning to his chums. "That chap who was listening outside Mr. Lee's window is Snell!"

"But you can't be positive—"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "Isn't it as clear as day-light? Who else but Snell would come up here like this? We'd better grab him now, while we've got the chance. That's the best—"

"By jingo!" panted Church.

"Look there!"

"Eh? What the—"

Handforth paused. A figure was streaking across the Triangle towards the gates. It was the figure of Lucas Snell. He was not merely hurrying—he was running madly. And once in the gateway, he turned towards the village and tore off as though demons were at his heels.

But this was quite wrong.

There were no demons at his heels—only Handforth & Co.!



T

THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY



THE EARL OF EDMORE—
who, through the unmasking of Lucas Snell's
rascality, finds his lost fortunes restored to him.

CHAPTER 9.

Desperate Orders.

THE fact was, Lucas Snell had suddenly conceived a desperate plan.

There was one

chance in a thousand that it would succeed. But it was the only move that he could make under these peculiar conditions. Nelson Lee and the Scotland Yard man were on their way to Helmford by car. Nothing that Snell could do could stop them now. It was sheerly impossible for him to be in Helmford in time to destroy that evidence; it was equally impossible for Snell to entrust the task to anybody else—except one person, and that person lived in far-away Helmford.

Yet, unless that evidence was destroyed, Snell's downfall would be inevitable.

There was every reason, then, for his mad

race to the village. Never once did he pause. Down the lane he went, running so rapidly that before he got to the village he was panting hoarsely. He was gasping in agony. But he never thought of this—he never paused.

And so frantic was his flight—so utterly self-centred—that he heard nothing at his rear. He might have done so, had he listened carefully. But it did not occur to Snell, in his present crazed condition, that anybody was on his track. Yet Handforth & Co. were fairly close behind—running, following. Since Handforth could not follow Nelson Lee, he could, at least, follow Snell. And, really, it seemed that Handforth would do far more good by following the lawyer.

By this time Lucas Snell was nearing

the end of his tether. Only the fear of the terrible consequences kept him going. He was rolling drunkenly from side to side, and more than once he fell to his knees, only to drag himself up with a superhuman effort.

"He's about all in now," said Handforth to his two chums, who were running alongside their leader. "Jove, I'm beginning to feel a bit puffed myself!"

"So am I," nodded McClure. "But we mustn't slow down. If once we lose sight of old Snell in this dark we might not find him again."

"Who said anything about slowing down?" snorted Handforth. "I could follow Snell all night if necessary, fathead!"

Church and McClure had now ceased to grumble at their leader. They were rather stunned by the knowledge that circumstances had justified his breaking bounds. He hadn't found a mare's nest, as usual!

In the village High Street, Lucas Snell was still running. It was only natural, perhaps, that Handforth & Co. should believe that Snell was making for the George Tavern. In fact, Handforth had already arrived at the conclusion that Snell was making a bolt for the inn, so that he could pack a few things, grab his valuables, and bolt. That was the obvious assumption.

And Handforth was already preparing for it.

They would wait until Snell came out of the tavern with his grip, or portmanteau, and then they would pounce on him. It would be very simple. He was a skinny enough man, and he was not the kind of fellow to show valiant fight—especially against three determined schoolboys.

Handforth was surprised, therefore, when Snell ran right past the George Tavern, and continued his way across the road toward the post-office. It was nearly eleven o'clock by now, and Bellton had long since gone to bed. Not a soul was in sight. Even the village policeman was conspicuous by his absence. Either P.-c. Sparrow was dozing somewhere—a most uncharitable thought—or else he was on one of his lonely beats.

"He's making for the post-office, Handy," breathed Church. "Keep back, you ass! Don't get too near! What the dickens can his game be? The post-office isn't open now—"

"But the telephone-box is!" put in McClure quickly.

"By George, you've got it!" said Handforth. "As a matter of fact, I was thinking the same thing!" he added hastily. "The telephone, of course! We're not so out-of-date in Bellton! We've got one of those new concrete call-boxes here—open day and night."

This was true enough. Not every village could boast of such a modern innovation, and, as it happened, this one in Bellton had only recently been installed.

Once inside the call-box, Snell nearly collapsed from sheer exhaustion. But he clutched the receiver from its hook, and he passed through an agony of dire suspense as the seconds ticked away and no sound came to his ears. Was the telephone out of order? Confound those post-office people! These telephones were never right! Whenever a call was urgent, there was something wrong—

"Number, please?" said a voice in the receiver, uncannily distinct.

"Eh?" gasped Snell. "Oh, yes! Helmsford, 2229."

"Helmsford, 2229," repeated the Bannington operator "Just a minute, sir."

While Snell waited, Handforth & Co. crept nearer and nearer. At least, Handforth crept near. Church and McClure were

further in the rear—ready to spring forward if necessary.

"Here's your number, sir," said the operator suddenly. "Five pennies, please."

"Good heavens!" panted Snell. "I had completely forgotten— Wait! I will see—I haven't any pennies! I can't—"

"Sorry, sir, but I can't connect you until you put the money in the box!" said the operator unemotionally.

A frantic search, and then Snell gasped with relief. In his inside ticket-pocket he had found the necessary coppers.

"Here you are!" he said tensely. "I've got them!"

With unsteady fingers, he dropped the coins, one after the other, into the telephone-box. And then, at last, he was through. Another voice came to him over the wire—more distant now.

"Is that you, Harper?" said Snell hoarsely.

"Why, Mr. Snell, is that you?" said the voice.

"Yes, yes!" panted Snell. "Listen to me, Harper! Something has happened! I cannot give you any details. There is no time. But you must act at once—you must act drastically!"

"What do you mean, sir?" came an agitated voice.

"Go to my offices at once!" said Snell, each word coming from him like the rasping of a file. "Go to my offices, and burn them down! Do you hear me, Harper? Burn them down!"

CHAPTER 10.

Handforth's Little Way!



DWARD OSWALD
HANDFORTH
started violently.

"Great jumping
corks!" he breathed,

hardly able to believe the evidence of his ears.

Handforth was pressed against the side of the telephone-box. He had recklessly placed himself there, but there was not much risk of Lucas Snell seeing him. For Snell had his back to this side of the box, and he was too engrossed in his conversation to turn round—to look for any possible eavesdropper.

Not that Handforth considered that he was eavesdropping. He was an amateur detective now, and he was justified in listening to the conversation of this criminal. That was the way Handforth looked at it.

"Burn the offices down," Snell had said. Handforth nearly jumped out of his skin—until he realised the significance of the words. And then, all in a flood, it came to him.

Snell knew that Nelson Lee and Chief-Inspector Lennard had gone to Helmsford. Of course! That was where the motor-car

had gone to! To Helmford—to search Snell's offices, to secure incriminating documents! And now Snell was telling some confederate of his to burn the place down before the car arrived!

Literally, this was Snell's scheme. A desperate plan—a last-minute chance. It was cunning and drastic. Harper was Snell's only employee—his clerk—and Harper was hand in glove with Snell, had been for years. Snell's secrets were Harper's secrets.

Yet Harper was probably the most startled man in Sussex at that minute.

"I—I don't think I heard you properly, sir!" he said agitatedly.

"You did hear me, Harper!" snarled Lucas Snell. "You must hear me. Go to my offices this minute. Yes, and take petrol with you—two or three cans. You have your key, so nobody can possibly dispute your entry. Take the petrol into the cellars. Spread it about, and then put a match to it. The building is old and dry—largely composed of wood. It will burn like a torch—like a bonfire."

"But—but you must be mad, sir!" gasped the other. "You must be mad!"

"I am mad—nearly!" retorted Snell, in a croak. "Don't you understand, you infernal fool? The police are on their way—they're going to search the offices! Before they can get there, the place must be on fire—so that everything is burned. Every document—every shred of evidence. See to it, Harper—do not waste a second!"

"But, sir!" pleaded the other. "What of the clients' papers? Wills—securities—insurance policies—ledgers—"

"They must all burn!" snapped Lucas Snell. "There is no time to save anything. Harper. The police will be there within twenty minutes, you imbecile! You'll only just have time to do it, even if you move like lightning. Set fire to the place, I tell you! If you don't, you'll be under arrest within twelve hours!"

"Yes, by George, and so will you!" said Handforth abruptly.

As Snell was in the act of slamming the receiver on its hook, the voice came to his ears. He had leaned back against the glass—weary, exhausted. The thing was done. He had given his orders. Now he would hurry to the George Tavern, he would collect his things, and he would bolt. From afar, he would be able to learn of the developments. He would leave a note for Mr. Gore-Pearce, making some excuse. Then, later, if the fire turned out to be successful, he could come back safely. He could snap his fingers at the police.

And then that boyish voice had come to him.

Dazedly, and with terror in his eyes, Snell turned. The door of the call box was flung open, and he found three figures there.

Curiously enough, in that tense moment, a thought flashed across his mind. Had the telephone operator been listening in? If so, would he inform the police? Would he pre-

vent that fire taking place? It was strange that such thoughts should come to Snell even while capture was at hand.

"Who—who are you?" he croaked.

"You rotter, we've got you!" panted Handforth. "Yes, and we're going to spoil your game, too! So you're going to burn your place down, are you—so that Mr. Leo can't find any evidence? All right—we'll see about that! Grab him, you chaps!"

Snell muttered an oath as he recognised Handforth. This was the boy who had knocked his attache case out of his hand in the first place—the boy who had caused the loss of that red, precious pocket-book! This boy who had caused all this turmoil!

"You young hound!" snarled Snell, beside himself with fury. "If you lay your fingers upon me, I'll—"

"There's no time to argue!" interrupted Handforth. "Come on—sharp's the word!"

He caught Snell by the shoulder, and caused him to reel out of the telephone-box. In another second, Church and McClure were grabbing, too. They fell upon the man, and forced him to the ground.

"Help!" screamed Snell.

But it was a very weak sound—made all the weaker by the fact that Handforth smothered Snell's voice by clapping a hand over his face.

"Your muffler, Mac!" said Handforth tensely.

In another minute Lucas Snell was helpless. One muffler was round his face, rendering him completely silent. Another muffler was tied round his ankles, so that he could not move his legs. His wrists were bound by means of a handkerchief, and, to make the job absolutely complete, Church and McClure were sitting on Mr. Snell, making it impossible for him to rise.

And Edward Oswald Handforth was in the call-box, his heart throbbing with many extra beats to the minute. Had he been justified in breaking bounds to-night? By George! What a question!



CHAPTER 11.

Not So Easy!

"ALLO! Hallo!" called Handforth impatiently, as he joggled the arm of the receiver. "Hallo!"

What the dickens—"

"Number, please?"

"About time, too!" snapped Handforth.

"Quick! Give me the Helmford police!"

"What's that?" said the operator, startled into an extraordinary alertness.

"I said, give me the Helmford police!" repeated Handforth. "Urgent!"

"What do you want the police for?" asked the operator.

"Never mind what I want them for!" roared

Handforth. "I know the regulations! And I know jolly well that all the police calls have got to be put through at once! Police calls—and fire calls! And this is both! I want the police first, and the fire station afterwards! Give me the police!"

The operator, evidently startled by Handforth's tone, put the call through. There was an exasperating delay, during which the line was utterly dead. Probably the operator was having a word with a supervisor, or some such official. At all events, after an appreciable delay, another voice came over the wire.

"Yes?" it said. "Who's that?"

"Are you the Helmford police?" remonstrated Handforth.

"Yes," said the voice. "I'm the sergeant in charge. Who are you?"

"I'm Handforth, of St. Frank's."

"Who?"

"Handforth, of——"

"Spell it!" came the voice.

"I'm blown if I'll spell it!" roared Handforth, exasperated. "What the dickens does it matter how you spell my name?"

"Look here, my lad, you'd better be careful who you're talking to!" said the sergeant at the Helmford police station. "St. Frank's, you said, eh? That's the school near Bannington, isn't it?"

"If you don't know what St. Frank's is by this time, you'd better go to school again!" said Handforth tartly. "Yes, I'm Handforth, of the Remove Form at St. Frank's. Is that good enough for you? Do you realise that you're wasting time?"

Handforth had never been famed for his tact; and, just at present, he was about as tactless as anybody could possibly be. He had already succeeded in putting up the back of this night sergeant.

"Well, what do you want?" asked the man.

"I want you to go to Mr. Lucas Snell's offices," said Handforth quickly. "Mr. Lucas Snell is a lawyer in your town——"

"Yes, I know that," said the policeman. "Well?"

"Five minutes ago Mr. Snell rang up from this very call-box, and gave instructions to somebody to burn his offices down——"

"To do what?" came the sergeant's incredulous voice.

"To burn his offices down!" repeated Handforth. "A Scotland Yard man is on the way there now with Mr. Nelson Lee, and they're going to search Snell's offices for criminal evidence. So Mr. Snell has given orders that the offices shall be burnt down. You've got to go there at once, and collar the man before he can——"

"Hold on—hold on!" said the sergeant sarcastically. "What's this—one of your latest schoolboy jokes?"

"No, it isn't!" roared Handforth. "I'm telling you the truth!"

"Don't be funny!" said the sergeant.

"Don't you believe me?" shouted Handforth.

"I think it's like your darned impudence to try a trick of that sort on the police!" said the sergeant severely. "You school-boys! There's never no telling what you'll be up to next! A fine thing, ringing up the police and telling them that somebody is going to set fire to his own premises! Mr. Snell is one of the most respected citizens in Helmford—a lawyer who's often seen in the Assize Courts. I know him personally—and a very nice gentleman, too. So you've made a little mistake this time, my fine young shaver!"

Handforth hadn't thought of this possibility. Lucas Snell, of course, was well known in Helmford—and it was only natural that he should be in and out of the courts. As a lawyer, his business would take him into such places. But even now Handforth did not quite realise that his story did, indeed, sound ridiculously fantastic.

To make matters worse, the Helmford police had not been informed by Scotland Yard that any action was being taken against Snell. They were quite in ignorance of Inspector Lennard's movements. So, on the whole, the night sergeant could not be blamed for his apparent obtuseness.

"Look here," said Handforth fiercely. "We've had enough of this! Every second is of importance! Snell's man is on the way to those offices now, and he's going to pour petrol down in the cellars, and set light to the place——"

"That's enough!" said the sergeant gruffly. "It's no good telling me the same story twice! I shall make it my business, young gentleman, to report this matter to your headmaster to-morrow. A fine thing, ringing up the police——"

"Then put me through to the Fire Station!" panted Handforth desperately. "The Fire Brigade has got to be told——"

"You'll be put through to nowhere!" said the sergeant wrathfully. "I've had enough of you, my lad! I don't know what you schoolboys are coming to nowadays!"

The line became dead, and Handforth nearly tore the instrument to pieces in his endeavours to get through again. At last the voice of the Helmford operator came to him.

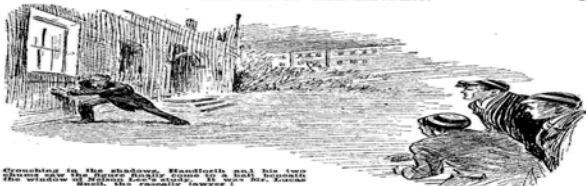
"That's enough, sir!" said the man protesting. "I've just had a message from the police telling me not to connect you any more."

"But I want the Fire Station!" gasped Handforth.

"Sorry, but you won't get it!" said the operator.

And he, too, rang off. Handforth staggered from the call-box, bewildered and stunned.

He had done some brilliant amateur detective work this night—he had discovered Lucas Snell's plan of action. Now, when he tried to warn the Helmford people of what was about to happen, they wouldn't listen to him!



Crouching in the shadows, Handforth and his two chums saw the figure finally come to a halt beneath the window of Nelson Lee's study. It was Mr. Lucius Snell, the famous lawyer!

And yet, with all due respect to Edward Oswald Handforth's feelings, the Holmford people weren't to be blamed.



CHAPTER 13.

Not Beaten Yet!

"WELL?" asked Church and McClure, in one voice. "They won't listen to me!" said Handforth breathlessly. "I don't wonder at it!" snapped Church. "The way you were coaxing through that telephone was enough to make anybody wild! Besides, you told the story in such a rammy way, Handy! You ought to have been salmer!"

"That's right—blame me!" interrupted Handforth, thoroughly exasperated. "By George! That sergeant at Holmford will go through the mill for this! You wait until tomorrow, after that place has been burnt down, and everything destroyed! That sergeant will be dismissed the force, I expect!" "Couldn't you get through to anybody else?" asked Church. "We can't stay here all night, Handy! And what are we going to do with Snell? We've held him down so far, but—"

"And you'll keep on holding him down!"

Interrupted Handforth, grimly. "Rats and blow! Dash and bust! If I get through to the Holmford Exchange again, they won't signet me! Of all this, middle-headed, incompetent, brainless—"

"You're only wasting time!" said McClure patiently.

"By George, you're right!" agreed Handforth, clenching his fists. "Well, what the dickens shall we do? That's what I'm asking you! What the dickens shall we do? Mr. Lee must be half-way to Holmford by now. I don't suppose they're hurrying particularly. No need to. They've got the whole night before them—and it might be better for them to arrive fairly late. They're probably dawdling on the way."

He broke off abruptly, and gasped. "I know!" he added, tensely. "What?" asked his chums, in unison. "My Austin!" "Eh? What on earth—?" "My little Austin Seven!" said Handforth, as the inspiration took firmer hold. "That's it! You chaps hang on to Snell—don't let him go, whatever you do! By George! Why the dickens didn't I think of this before?"

"But—but—" "Don't you see?" ejaculated Handforth. "While you chaps keep Snell here, I'll dash to the school, get my Austin out, and then

we'll bundle Snell into it and rush him to Helmford. Perhaps the police will believe me then!"

"Oh, crumbs!" said Church blankly. "You—you don't mean it, Handy?"

"I do mean it!" said Handforth grimly. "It's the idea of the century! If we take Snell with us, it'll be absolute evidence—whereas, if we went alone, these fatheaded police would think that we were just making up that story. Besides, Mr. Lee will be there to back us up."

"By jingo, you're right, old man!" said Church. "We've collared Snell now, and if we don't hold on to him he'll escape. He'll bolt. And we might just as well take him to Helmford as to Bannington. It's got to be one or the other. We can't sit on him all night!"

Without another word, Handforth sped off. He had made up his mind, and now he put his idea into operation.

Seldom had he streaked up the lane as he streaked now. Like a hare he ran, and it was only when he actually got to the school that he realised the necessity for caution.

He found the bicycle sheds locked, but Handforth was not the kind of fellow to be dismayed by a difficulty of this sort. The big double doors were only secured by means of a padlock and chain; and Handforth, searching about, soon found a length of iron piping. Ruthlessly he wrenched the chain completely off, and the next moment the doors of the bicycle shed were flung open. Handforth always kept his Austin here. It was such a small bus that it did not need to go into the regular garage.

And in the meantime Church and McClure were still sitting on the maddened Mr. Lucas Snell.

During this interval, Snell had had time to recover his breath—to review the situation. He had heard Handforth's remarks concerning the Helmford police, and he was relieved. He was even fascinated by the thought that even now he was safe.

By this time, perhaps, Harper had got to the offices, and had already fired them. If only the evidence was destroyed, there would be no case against him. When these boys handed him over to the Helmford police, he would glibly tell them that the story of the telephone conversation was false; that the fire must be an accident. There would be nothing to disprove his story, and the police would be compelled to let him go.

So Snell's wild, maddened fear now turned to rage and exasperation. Once or twice he struggled and tried to get up. He made musing sounds, endeavouring to trick his captors. Perhaps they would think that he was ill, and they would release him.

But Church and McClure were too shrewd for that. They knew that they hadn't hurt Snell, and they knew that they weren't hurting him now. So they sat there, loyally determined to back up their leader.

"It's no good, Mr. Snell!" said Church, after the lawyer had given another wriggle

"We're not going to let you get up. You're too tricky!"

"Perhaps we can give him a little breather," suggested McClure. "I'm getting stiff myself, as a matter of fact. He's bound hand and foot, and gagged, too. He can't get away. We'll take it in turns."

"No need 'o!" said Church. "Listen!"

They both remained perfectly still, listening. A familiar throbbing hum sounded on the still night air. Handforth's Austin Seven was on its way down from St. Frank's.

"Thank goodness!" said Mac, with relief. "I've been expecting somebody to come along at any minute. It's marvellous, when you come to think of it. Not even the village policeman—nobody at all!"

"It wouldn't matter much, anyhow," said Church. "They'd only think we were having a game of some kind. Still, it'll be all the better once we're in the Austin and away. Here he comes! By jingo, he's speeding!"

The Austin came humming down Belton High Street, and its speed was so great that Handforth nearly over-ran his chums. But with an application of the brakes that caused the rear wheels to skid, he brought the little car to a stop. The next second he had leaped out.

"Now then!" he said triumphantly. "In with him!"

And Mr. Lucas Snell was bundled uncereemoniously into the back of the Austin Seven, and McClure sat beside him. Then Handforth and Church leaped into the front seats, the gears were engaged, and the Austin purred off on its journey.

But it wasn't purring for long—for in less than half a mile Handforth had the throttle open fully, and the valiant little bus was fairly roaring!



CHAPTER 13.

On The Scene!

"WHAT'S it!" said Chief Inspector Lennard complacently.

He and Nelson Lee and Nipper were standing outside the front door of Lucas Snell's Helmford offices.

Everything was quiet.

The street was empty, and Snell's offices were in total darkness. They were situated in a rather quiet thoroughfare. It was right in the business section of the town—in the most select part of it—but Snell's premises were peculiarly isolated. They consisted of a general office below, and a private office above. Originally, the old place had been a picturesque sort of cottage. It was a timbered building, with quaint eaves overhanging the walls.

The lower window was covered by a sort of gauze, with Snell's name printed upon it

in gold lettering. There was also a brass plate upon the door.

Chief Inspector Lennard, after careful manipulation of several keys, had easily conquered the patent lock. Nipper had a vague suspicion that the Scotland Yard man was exceeding his authority by taking this action—not that Nipper really cared. They had a warrant to search these premises, and the Yard man was justified in making this entry. For the evidence that would be obtained would undoubtedly justify the act.

"Fairly simple, wasn't it?" asked Lennard genially, as they slipped into the lower office, and closed the door. "Now, let's see.

Where are we? Good man!" he added, as Nelson Lee flashed out a torch.

"This is the clerk's office, I assume," said Nelson Lee, as he glanced round. "There'll be nothing here, Lennard. We want to go into Snell's private sanctum."

"That'll be upstairs," nodded the chief inspector, as he looked towards a narrow staircase at the back of the low-ceilinged office. "Come on! The sooner this is over the better, you know. And it may take us some time yet."

They made their way up the stairs, and were then confronted by another locked door. But this soon succumbed to their efforts, and they now found themselves in Snell's private office. They closed the door, pulled down the blinds, and switched on the electric light.

"Easy!" grinned Lennard. "And now to business!"

Nelson Lee took a careful survey of the apartment.

"We had better divide ourselves up," he suggested. "I will attend to the safe, Lennard, and you can do your worst on the big desk. Snell's papers are bound to be here, and they will require a good deal of sorting, even after we have got hold of them."

"Where do I come in, guv'nor?" asked Nipper.

"I'm afraid you don't come in at all, young 'un," replied Nelson Lee. "You can

be having a look in that bureau, if you like—and in the letter file, too. But I don't suppose you'll find much there."

Within a minute they were all busy.

Chief Inspector Lennard was quite ruthless in his treatment of the desk. If the drawers would not respond to gentle treatment, he prized them open without compunction.

Nelson Lee was confining all his attentions to the safe, which occupied a corner of the room. It was quite an ordinary safe—painted green, after the usual fashion. It was an old one, too, and, to a man of Nelson Lee's vast experience, it did not present many difficulties.

At the same time, even old-fashioned safes cannot be opened without the keys, within the space of a minute or two. And Lee, armed with long wires, slender pliers, and other suspicious-looking tools, was deliberately and methodically getting to work.

"It's a good thing we've got you with us, Mr. Lennard," said Nipper, after a while.

"Why?"

"Well, if the police happened to spot us, there might be some awkward complications!" grinned Nipper. "We should be mistaken for burglars. Look at the guv'nor! He's handling that safe like a professional crook!"

"We needn't worry about the police," said Lennard, as he pulled out one of the drawers. "If they barge in here, I'll

soon satisfy them. Hallo!" he added, as a click came from the safe. "Have you done it already, Lee?"

"Give me a chance!" protested the great detective. "That was only a preliminary promise, Lennard."

Another five minutes passed, during which the chief inspector went methodically through a number of papers that he had taken from the drawers. And now and again he would ejaculate a triumphant "Ha!" or a satisfied "H'm!" Nipper, for his part, was dodging about from one piece of furniture to the other, and bringing any papers he found to the central desk.

"Well, that's that!" said Nelson Lee.

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"By jingo!" ejaculated Nipper, starting round.

The door of the safe stood wide open, and Lee was squatting on the floor in front of it, looking contented.

"Good man!" exclaimed the chief inspector, as he rose to his feet, and went across. "That was quick work! I rather think we shall find all the evidence in here."

Eagerly they investigated the safe. They pulled out drawers, they emptied the various compartments. And, as they looked through the numerous documents, Nelson Lee's expression became grim and hard.

"Well Lennard, I think we were justified in making this search," he said at length. "Do you see these agreements? And these promissory notes? And these secret accounts? Why, there's enough concrete evidence here to put Snell away for five years!"

"And this means that the old Earl of Edgemore will be able to recover his property, sir?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"He won't recover it, Nipper, because he has never legally lost it," replied Nelson Lee. "Snell had utterly no right to sell the Manor. For years he has been defrauding his clients—the Earl of Edgemore in particular. But the day of reckoning is very near at hand!"



CHAPTER 14.

A Startling Discovery!

HERE was every justification for Nelson Lee's satisfaction. From that first minute, two or three

weeks earlier, when he had come face to face with Lucas Snell in the grounds of Edgemore Manor, he had made up his mind to lay this rascal by the heels.

As Lee had said, a leopard cannot change his spots. Snell had served a term of penal servitude many years ago—and now, after re-establishing himself as a respectable lawyer in a part of the country where he was unknown, he was still continuing his shady practices. Well, this would put an end to his game.

The contents of Mr. Snell's safe would have disgusted most burglars. For there was really nothing of value in there. No notes—no money—nothing that could be turned into cash. But to the Scotland Yard man and to Nelson Lee, the majority of those crumpled, soiled papers were eminently satisfactory. For they would be brought into evidence at Snell's trial, and that trial promised to be a sensational one. Persistent fraud, extending over a long period of years, would be proved against this unscrupulous lawyer.

While Nelson Lee and Lennard bent over the desk examining the papers and setting aside the most vital, Nipper restlessly moved up and down. He was thinking about the Earl of Edgemore. Snell's downfall would mean the old earl's salvation. And that was

as it should be, since Snell had brought his lordship to this tragic pass.

Nipper was passing the door when he halted in his stride. He glanced up and sniffed the air. Then he looked across at the two men in the centre of the room.

"Can you smell anything, guv'nor?" he asked quickly.

Lee looked up.

"Smell anything?" he repeated. "No, I haven't noticed—"

"My only hat!" ejaculated Nipper. "I got another waft of it just then! There's something on fire somewhere! A horrid, pungent—yes, by Jove, look there!"

He pointed to the floor—to the crack under the door; and, sure enough, a few lazy wisps of smoke were curling into the room. As Nelson Lee and the chief inspector strode across, Nipper reached for the door-handle, grasped it, and flung the door wide open.

"Great Scott!" he yelled, backing precipitately.

For a billowing, choking mass of acrid smoke surged round him. It swept into the room, spreading into every corner of the apartment with extraordinary rapidity. And, from somewhere downstairs, a low, ominous crackling could now be heard. While the door had been closed this sound had been inaudible. But now it was apparent enough—mainly owing to the fact that the three intruders had remained perfectly silent for a tense moment.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said the chief inspector hoarsely. "The place is on fire, Lee!"

"Yes, but how?" snapped Nelson Lee. "We struck no matches downstairs, Lennard! We used nothing but my electric torch!"

"That's true!" said the Scotland Yard man. "There's something rather peculiar about this, isn't there? Shut that door, Nipper, for goodness sake! We don't want to be choked!"

"Yes, but hadn't we better dash down?" suggested Nipper breathlessly. "There may not be any too much time—"

"Keep your hair on, young 'un!" growled Lennard. "There's plenty of time."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Nelson Lee, as he went to the door, plunging through the billowing smoke. "Good heavens, man! Look at this! Quick! Can't you see?"

Even as Lee spoke there was a sudden change in the density of the smoke. Perhaps the opening of the door had caused a draught. At all events, the smoke abruptly cleared, and a number of licking tongues of flame came curling up the staircase, caressing the banisters, and they were accompanied by a sudden cascade of sparks. And from down below the crackling had changed to a terrifying roar.

"Oh, my goodness!" breathed Nipper.

During those tense seconds the entire situation was altered. In one clear glimpse, as the smoke vanished, Nelson Lee could see the

flames roaring up from several portions of the general office floor.

Then, a few moments later, one section of the lower floor gave way. There was a thunderous, grinding, shattering crash. A sound of rending timbers—a bellowing roar from the all-devouring flames. The sparks came hissing upwards in millions.

Slam!

Nelson Lee had shut the door with a crash, but not before hundreds of those white-hot sparks had come shooting through into the private office. They were all over the floor now, smoking sullenly as they sank into the carpet.

"Lennard, it's serious!" said Nelson Lee steadily. "This is no ordinary chance fire, either. There's something deadly about it—and I haven't the slightest doubt that the place was set on fire deliberately."

"But Snell 'knew nothing about our mission!" protested the Yard man.

"In all probability Snell has a companion—a man who knows his secrets!" snapped Lee, as he ran to the window. "This man saw us enter—and he guessed what our object was. So he set fire to the place. By James! We'll never be able to jump to the ground, either!"

"But we *must*, guv'nor!" gasped Nipper, as he stood at the open window and stared down at the hard pavement below. "Oh, my hat! There are no projections—nothing to grab on to! If we jump down it'll mean broken limbs, and if we don't jump down we shall be burned alive! Why, this floor will collapse in less than five minutes! The whole place is going up like a bonfire!"



CHAPTER 15.

Handforth on the Job!

TEADY. Handy!" gasped Church in dire alarm.

But Edward Oswald Handforth

took no notice. He was crouching over the wheel of his Austin, and the faithful little car was skimming along the main road between Bannington and Helmford at a tremendous speed. The dashboard was dark, and so the speedometer was invisible. But Church, who sat beside Handforth, hadn't the slightest doubt that the needle was pointing to the "50" mark.

"Chuck it, you ass!" yelled Church. "You nearly had us over round that bend!"

"What?" shouted Handforth.

"I say you nearly had us over round that bend!"

"Can't hear you!" thundered Handforth. "Don't talk! I want all my attention on the road at this speed!"

Church gave it up, and glanced back at McClure. The latter was sitting next to Lucas Snell, who was crouching in the con-

finied space at the rear of the little Austin, his knees lunched up, fairly jammed into that corner. He was still muffled, but his eyes were glittering not only with fear, but with fury.

"Can't you make him go slower?" shouted Mac.

"He won't listen to me!" said Church desperately. "It's a wonder we're still alive!"

"Oh, well, let's hope for the best!" said McClure. "If he doesn't tip us into a brick wall, or into the side of a house, we might come off with only a few broken legs and things!"

Mac tried to speak casually, but it was difficult. Both he and Church had an idea that their last hour had come. Never before had Handforth driven so recklessly—and Handforth was celebrated for his recklessness.

On every straight stretch of road Handforth's foot was pressed hard down on the throttle. The sturdy little bus was going all out. Only in the sharpest curves did Handy ease up. Even then he went careering round at a giddy speed, the Austin swerving and swaying, but holding the road wonderfully.

It was with a feeling of dull surprise that Church and McClure first saw the gleaming lights of Helmford just ahead. They had never expected to get here.

"I'll bet we've done it in under half an hour!" yelled Handforth gleefully. "By George, we've been moving, eh?"

"Ease up now!" said Church. "Hang it, Handy, I'm not windy, but there's no need to—"

"Rats!" broke in Handforth. "Every second is precious! Good old Austin! She always gets us there!"

The most astonishing feature of the entire ride, perhaps, was the absence of any mechanical trouble. In nine cases out of ten, Handforth forgot to put petrol in the tank, or he would leave the bonnet unfastened, and on one memorable occasion he had started out with the spare wheel half adrift.

Before Church and McClure could realise it, they were humming through the lighted streets of Helmford. The town was a fairly large one, with its own tramway system; a much more important town than Bannington. Nevertheless, it seemed only a few seconds before Handforth was applying his brakes in response to the frantic arm-waving of a policeman in the centre of the town. This officer had come out into the road, apparently from nowhere, as the Austin had zoomed up.

"There you are!" panted Church in alarm. "You're copped now, Handy!"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "This policeman is just the man I want to see!"

The Austin came to a standstill, skidding bodily for the last yard. The constable, a burly specimen, bent low over the diminutive car.

"What's the idea, sir?" he asked grimly. "You mustn't fear through the town at that speed! You mustn't— Why, bless me, it's



From below there came a shattering crash as part of the over floor gave way. Nelson Lee slammed the door, but not before hundreds of white-hot sparks came shooting into the room. "Lennard, it's serious," said Lee chokingly through the billowing smoke.

only a boy! A schoolboy!" he added blankly.

"Well, what about it?" demanded Handforth. "Look here, officer, I want you to tell me the way to Lucas Snell's offices. He's a lawyer, and we don't know his address."

"That's all very well, my lad," said the constable. "You can't get round me with a yarn like that. You were speeding, and—"

"Look here, there's no time to waste!" interrupted Handforth earnestly. "I've got a man in the back of this car—a prisoner. I'm going to take him to the police-station after I've been to Snell's offices. This chap here is Snell himself!"

"My goodness!" said the constable, staring.

"He's a crook!" continued Handforth. "He rang up from Bellton, and told somebody to set fire to his offices. I 'phoned up the police-station, but the idiot there wouldn't listen to me!"

The policeman started.

"A fire?" he repeated. "Why, bless me, there's a fire down the Southampton Road! A man gave the alarm not five minutes ago, and it looks like there might be something in your story after all."

"Southampton Road!" gasped Handforth. "Where is it?"

The constable pointed.

"Down there, and the first on the right," he replied. "But you'd best go to the police-station first if—"

But Handforth did not wait to hear the rest of the constable's advice. He jerked in the clutch, and the Austin leaped forward into motion.

"I knew it!" he muttered, as he deftly changed into second. "Oh, the blunders! I gave 'em warning, but they didn't take any notice! And now Snell has succeeded!"

In the rear of the little car, Lucas Snell experienced a sudden spasm of hope. But he didn't know that his confederate, Harper, had dallied, and had allowed the intruders to get into the offices before setting fire to the place!



CHAPTER 16.

Trapped!

HARPER, in fact, had been beset by doubts and fears.

After Snell had rung off, Harper had wondered if he had heard right. It had occurred to him that Snell had been drinking

—for Snell occasionally overdid it—or that possibly he had taken leave of his senses.

In the end, however, Harper had obeyed his chief's orders. He had got into the offices by means of a rear door, had plunged straight down into the cellar, spreading petrol



From below there came a shattering crash as part of the lower floor white-hot sparks came shooting into the room. "Lenna

liberally, and then igniting it. And, as he had entered at the rear and had gone straight down into the cellar, he had known nothing whatever of those searchers upstairs in the private office. He had fled precipitately, and had got as far away from the spot as possible.

Handforth & Co. arrived on the scene at a crucial moment.

Swinging into the Southampton Road, the three juniors uttered simultaneous ejaculations of alarm.

For only by a miracle did Hand-

"My hat!" gasped Church. "I thought it was all up then!"

"Silly idiot!" roared Handforth. "What the dickens does he mean by leaving his van stuck there?"

"I expect he was afraid to go on!" said

McClure breathlessly. "By Jingo! Look at the fire! Look at the sparks dropping down! No wonder the driver of that straw cart didn't want to go past!"

Only a hundred yards further on the darkness of the night was relieved by a ruddy, lurid glare.

A smallish building, fortunately separated from the other property in the street, was blazing with incredible fury. Flames were pouring from the lower windows, and they were licking up the walls hungrily. At a respectable distance a number of excited people were watching. As yet there was no sign of the fire brigade. In fact, everything had happened so rapidly that the fire-engines had not had time to get here.

Handforth brought the Austin to a standstill against the kerb, and he leaped out.

"You chaps stay here!" he panted. "Look after Snell—don't leave him for a second!"

"Yes, but—"

"I've got to find out where Mr. Lee is!" roared Handforth, as he ran on.

The next moment his way was barred by a police officer. The man was a sergeant, as Handforth could see by the stripes on his arm.

"Steady, my lad!" said the sergeant. "You can't go past here!"

Handforth pulled up short, and stared at the man with a sudden blaze of anger in his eyes.

"I know your voice!" he shouted. "You're the sergeant who answered me on the telephone!"

The sergeant jumped.

"Why, what do you mean, young gent?" he ejaculated hoarsely. "I—I—"

Words failed him. For, to tell the truth, this sergeant was the most startled man in the whole of Helmsford during this dramatic hour. He had had a good laugh over that "school-boy joke" when he had mentioned it to one or two of the other night constables. But the sergeant had changed his tone when a report had come in that Lucas Snell's offices were ablaze.



son Lee slammed the door, but not before hundreds of aid Lee chokingly through the billowing smoke.

forth avert collision with a great vanload of straw which stood half across the road. Until that moment, Handforth had not known that his way was barred. With a jerk the Austin mounted the pavement, slewed round, and the danger was over.

For the sergeant had known then that he had deliberately ignored a *bona fide* warning. And now, here was the boy himself!

"You're a find kind of chap!" said Handforth bitterly. "You wouldn't listen to me—and you wouldn't even let me get through to the fire brigade! This building could have been saved——"

"I didn't think you were serious!" panted the sergeant. "Why, I thought it was only a joke——"

"Joke!" broke in Handforth. "It looks like a joke, doesn't it? And what about Mr. Lee? What about—— Oh, crumbs!"

He broke off, and his voice took on a note of horror. For at that moment figures had appeared on the very top of the building. They had apparently moved round from one of the angles of the roof, and now they were creeping along near the gutter. They could be seen only occasionally as the bursts of smoke cleared.

"It's Mr. Lee!" roared Handforth. "Oh, look there!" he went on, grabbing at the sergeant's arm. "Look what you've done! They're trapped! They're caught in that burning building! And it's your fault—your fault!"

The police officer—who realised he had made a big blunder—had nothing to say. Until this moment he had never dreamed that there were any living beings within that inferno. The crowds of spectators, too, were shouting with horror now. They had thought that the place was empty.

And the fire brigade was still conspicuous by its absence.

"Why isn't the escape here?" shouted Handforth madly. "What's the matter with everybody in this town?"

He didn't know that the previous evening a water main had burst on the other side of the main street—quite near a bridge. As a consequence, the road was stopped. All traffic had to make a detour of two or three miles; and the nearest available bridge that would bring any vehicle into the Southampton Road was right outside the town. This was an exceptionally unfortunate circumstance.

For that building was doomed. At any moment it might collapse—for the entire foundations were eaten through by the flames. The lower floor was a livid, white-hot mass of fire.

And up there on the roof were those three figures. They were trapped—and it seemed that there was very little hope of escape. For, even when the fire brigade came, it

would be impossible to put the escape up against this detached building. The firemen would never be able to mount the ladder through the roaring flames.

The situation was desperate—horrifying!



CHAPTER 17.

The Escape!

N

ELSON LEE turned, half-choking with the deadly fumes—nearly blinded.

"It's no good, Lennard—there's no escape this way!" he panted. "We must wait. The fire brigade cannot be long in coming now!"

"Long!" croaked Nipper. "It ought to have been here ten minutes ago! Why don't they come, sir? Why don't they come?"

"Who'd have thought it?" grated the Scotland Yard man, as he wiped the grimy perspiration from his face. "I've often wondered how it is that people get trapped in fires, when there seemed plenty of time to escape. But now I know!"

It had come as a great shock to the chief inspector. At first he had been confident that they could all escape with the greatest of ease. He and Lee had wasted a few precious minutes while they had collected the vital papers—those papers that would condemn Lucas Snell. But then, when they had attempted to get to the ground, they had found themselves trapped.

The windows of the lower office had been forced out by the heat, and flames were pouring up the wall in deadly masses. To leap through them would have been to invite death. It was equally impossible to escape by means of the staircase, since this was now burning like tinder. The very floor under them had begun to tremble and quake.

So, in desperation, the trapped trio had got up through a fanlight in Snell's office—up into the rafters. It was the only way of escaping the spreading fire. From there it had been comparatively easy to smash a way through the old tiles, and to get into the welcome open air. Here, at first, they had experienced relief; and they had taken it for granted that the fire escape would soon arrive, and that they would be able to get down in safety.

But now that they were near the gutter, overlooking the street, they began to have doubts. This building stood alone—it was not supported by any neighbouring edifices. The entire lower section of it was tottering; at any minute the whole place might crash, and then, inevitably the three would go to their deaths.

"Hi!" came a yell from the street. "Mr. Lee! Nipper—Nipper!"

"That's Handy!" shouted Nipper excitedly. "Handy, old man! We're trapped

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*Handy's "good
turn" for the day!*

up here. Can't you do something? What's happened to the fire brigade?"

Handforth was about to reply, then he caught his breath in. He turned a horrified face towards the police sergeant.

"They don't know!" he gasped. "Even if the fire escape comes, it can't rescue them!"

"I know it can't, young 'un!" said the sergeant hoarsely. "I've never felt so helpless in my life! What can we do? There's nothing here! If they jump, they'll kill themselves. To think that we've got to stand here and see them go to their death—"

"Have we?" ejaculated Handforth tensely. "Well, you can stand here if you like, but I'm not going to! By George! I've got an idea!"

It was, indeed, a brain-wave—a brilliant plan—that came to Handforth in a flash. He was noted, as a rule, for his impracticable ideas. But this one was gilt-edged, and, as Reggie Pitt might have said, jewelled in every hole.

"That load of straw!" gasped Handforth, grabbing at the sergeant's arm.

"Eh?" said the officer. "Straw?"

"There—only a hundred yards away!" roared Handforth. "Can't you see it?"

"Yes, but what's the good of that?" said the police officer. "Straw! You're mad, young gent! If that straw comes any nearer, it'll catch fire, and—"

"Oo, my hat! The driver is moving away!" bellowed Handforth. "Don't you understand? If we can only get that load of straw under the pavement here, they can jump! And they won't hurt themselves—"

"Gosh, you've got it!" thundered the sergeant. "Come on! Hey, you men! You're wanted! As many of you as can come!"

The crowd responded valiantly, and in less than a second, twenty or thirty men were pelting down the road, excited and eager. It was a remarkable fact that Handforth should have suggested such a brilliant life-saving idea as this. There could be no doubt about it that had it not been for Handy, Nelson Lee and Nipper and Chief Inspector Lennard might all have died.

In an amazingly short time, the two horses were unharnessed from the load of straw. The driver protested hotly—but only at first. As soon as he knew what the plan was, he helped willingly. The men grasped the shafts, others heaved at the rear, and the great wagon load of straw commenced to

trundle along the road. It gathered speed as it went, until at last it bumped against the kerb, and came to a standstill. All the men backed away—for the heat from that blazing inferno was deadly. The flames were now pouring up in a continuous flood, and there were ominous sounds of crackings and crashings. The interior of the building was collapsing. At any second the outer walls would burst, allowing the roof to drop into the fiery interior.



CHAPTER 18.

Thanks to Handy!

WE can do it, guv'nor—we can do it!" panted Nipper exultantly.

"Don't talk, young un," said Nelson Lee, his voice strained and tense. "You first! Quickly, my boy!"

"No, sir—let the inspector go first!" said Nipper.

"Confound your young hide!" shouted Lennard harshly. "Jump, hang you!"

And Nipper jumped.

During those last few minutes they had believed that death was at hand. The fire escape had not yet arrived—although, now that the crucial moment had arrived, two or three vehicles could be seen thundering up the road. At last the fire brigade had succeeded in getting to the scene of the conflagration. But they would have been too late—for they could never have got the fire under, and they could never have reared the escape against those blazing walls.

Nipper and Nelson Lee and Lennard, watching the street, had seen that wagon load of straw rushed up. They had known in a flash what it meant.

Nipper jumped almost before the load of straw had come to a stop. Down he went.



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watched by hundreds of anxious eyes. With a thud he landed on the top of the load, clutched, slithered, and came rolling to the ground.

Many hands grasped him and pulled him back.

"It's all right!" he gasped. "I'm not hurt! That straw broke my fall beautifully, and —"

He was interrupted by a terrific roar from hundreds of throats. Chief Inspector Lennard had dropped, and he, too, had slithered to the ground. Now Nelson Lee was taking the jump—and only in the very nick of time! For the load of straw was blazing like a torch on one side, and the flames were spreading with diabolical speed. If Nelson Lee had not jumped at that second he would never have been able to escape.

Even as it was, he only just managed to slide to the ground before the wagon load of straw became a livid torch. Nelson Lee was half-blinded, his clothing was scorched, his eyebrows had nearly gone. He staggered into the arms of eager helpers.

"Back, back!" came a shout of alarm from the police.

There was a stampede, for those voices were full of peril. More ominous sounds had come from the blazing building, and as the crowds fled the roof dropped in with a crash that could have been heard for miles. Sparks rose in millions. Then the four walls tottered. Two of them crashed inwards, and the other two, hovering, fell outwards. The disintegration of the building was complete and utter. It was only by a miracle that some of the watchers were not injured.

"Handy, old man!" panted Nipper, as he found Handforth beside him in the crush. "Oh, good old Handy! You did the trick!"

"Rather!" said Handforth happily. "Thank goodness I came along in my Austin!"

"I was never more surprised in my life than when I heard your voice!" said Nipper.

"That was a brainy stunt of yours, about the wagon of straw. It was your idea, old man, wasn't it?"

"You bet it was!" said Handforth proudly. "Everybody else here seemed to be dazed. They couldn't think of anything. As for the fire brigade, there might as well not be one in this town!"

"Come!" said Nelson Lee. "Let us get away from here, boys. There is nothing more that we can do. Lennard, have you got that bundle?"

"Yes," said the chief inspector huskily. "And you? You brought some papers, too, didn't you?"

"Yes—I've got them here," replied Nelson Lee.

"Somehow or other they managed to fight their way through the rapidly gathering crowds. As they went, Nelson Lee placed a hand on Handforth's shoulder.

"Good boy!" he said quietly. "I don't

know why you are here, Handforth—but your arrival was Providential."

"I'll tell you why I'm here, sir," replied Handforth, flushing with pleasure. "I've brought Snell!"

"What!"

"Yes, sir!" said Handforth, with triumph. "Old Snell is in my Austin now—bound hand and foot, and Church and McClure are on guard!"

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

"You are certainly a boy of surprises, Handforth!" said Nelson Lee. "How in the name of all that's amazing have you done this?"

By this time they had arrived at the Austin, and Church and McClure were overjoyed to see them all safe. In rapid sentences, and talking eagerly and excitedly, Handforth told his story.

"It was the only thing we could do, sir!" he concluded. "We shoved Snell into the Austin, and hummed along. As for that sergeant at the police-station, he ought to be dismissed from the force!"

"There is not the slightest doubt that he will be very severely reprimanded," said Nelson Lee. "But when you look at the thing broadly, Handforth, you will not be so harsh with him. Many men in his position would have believed that the thing was a practical joke. But that does not excuse his neglect. He should, at least, have sent a man to investigate on the off-chance. You have done splendidly, Handforth. I am indeed proud of you."

Those words were the only reward that Edward Oswald Handforth required.

As for Lucas Snell, he was taken forthwith to the police-station, and for over an hour Nelson Lee and Chief Inspector Lennard were closeted with the superintendent of the Helmford police. Handforth & Co. and Nipper, in the meantime, sat in a waiting-room.

When Nelson Lee emerged he was looking quietly satisfied. There was plenty of evidence available to secure Lucas Snell a long term of imprisonment. He was in the cells now—and his trial would come on in due course. Chief Inspector Lennard stayed in Helmford, since there was no object in his returning to St. Frank's.

So Handforth's trusty little Austin Seven had a heavy load to take back. Not that she jibbed. She was so accustomed to being overloaded that she now took it as a matter of course.



CHAPTER 19.

A Shock for Mr. Gore-Fearce!

T eight o'clock the following morning, Nelson Lee emerged from the Ancient House and stepped

into his own car, which was waiting there,

The famous schoolmaster-detective was looking little the worse for his thrilling adventure. His face was scorched a bit, and his eyebrows and hair were singed, but that was the full extent of his injuries.

So far, the school knew nothing. Some of the boys were about, but there was no sign of excitement or curiosity. Sooner or later, of course, the story would be all over the school. Handforth himself would see to that! But, naturally, such a story would get about, even without Handforth. For the whole of Bannington was already beginning to talk.

It was only just eight o'clock now, and St. Frank's was hardly awake.

Nelson Lee drove out, and he made straight for the village. He pulled up in front of the big furnished house that Mr. William Gore-Pearce had rented. A minute later he was standing in the hall informing a rather surprised maidservant that he wished to see Mr. Gore-Pearce at once.

"The master isn't down yet, sir," said the girl.

"Then you will please have a message taken to Mr. Gore-Pearce, telling him that I will wait," said Lee smoothly. "You might add that the matter is very urgent."

Less than ten minutes afterwards Mr. William Gore-Pearce himself came blundering into his library, where Nelson Lee was waiting. The millionaire was heavy-eyed—and ill-tempered. It was obvious that he had made a hasty toilet, for his hair was tousled, and his clothes were rumpled.

"I am amazed, Mr. Lee, that you should be so insistent!" he said, glaring at his visitor. "What is the meaning of this early call? I had half a mind to send a message down saying that I would not see you—"

"Mr. Gore-Pearce, I thought it was better, in your own interests, to be the first to tell you that Mr. Lucas Snell is under arrest!" said Nelson Lee bluntly.

"What!" ejaculated Mr. Gore-Pearce, forgetting his irritation in his amazement. "Snell arrested! What on earth for?"

"For conspiracy and fraud," replied Lee. "I need hardly tell you, sir, that this arrest will affect you very materially."

"In what way?" demanded the millionaire, becoming pompous. "Are you daring to insinuate, Mr. Lee, that I knew anything about Snell's roguery? I have often felt rather uncertain about the man, but—"

"I am making no insinuations regarding yourself, Mr. Gore-Pearce," interrupted Lee quietly. "But I must tell you at once that the sale of the Edgemore estate was quite illegal. Mr. Snell had absolutely no authority to effect the transaction, and, indeed, the property is still legally owned by the Earl of Edgemore."

Mr. Gore-Pearce was so flabbergasted that he sat down with a thud. He stared at Lee blankly—dazedly.

"But—but this is nonsense!" he protested. "I have paid for it!"

"You have paid Snell."

"And Snell is the attorney for the Earl of Edgemore!" retorted Mr. Gore-Pearce. "He acted on the earl's behalf."

"I am sorry to inform you, Mr. Gore-Pearce, that Mr. Snell acted entirely on his own initiative," said Nelson Lee patiently. "For many years he has been swindling his clients—Lord Edgemore particularly. I do not doubt for a moment that you purchased the Edgemore estate in good faith."

"I did, Mr. Lee—I certainly did!" said the millionaire earnestly. "It was in the market cheap, and I was eager to obtain possession."

"You were so eager that you had the unfortunate earl evicted!" said Lee coldly. "However, Mr. Gore-Pearce, that was your business. But I am now here to inform you that the Earl of Edgemore is engaging a reliable lawyer, who will come to interview you in due course. The one vital fact is that your contractors and workmen are now in unlawful possession of the Manor, and it is your duty to have them removed at the first available moment."

Mr. Gore-Pearce mopped his brow.

"I will do so, Mr. Lee," he said, looking very much like a pricked toy balloon as he sagged in his chair. "Yes, certainly! In these circumstances I must do everything I possibly can. But I wish to repeat that I knew nothing of the irregularity of this transaction. I will relinquish all the documents, and I shall naturally require every penny of the purchase money refunded to me."

"That, of course, will follow," said Nelson Lee. "Everything of that sort will be looked after by the law. It has been established that Lucas Snell has an enormous balance to his credit in the Helmford bank—and it is only feasible to suppose that he has other banking accounts, too. For years he has been amassing a vast fortune by defrauding his clients. The one happy feature of the affair is that this money is still unspent. There is every reason to suppose that the Earl of Edgemore is still a comparatively well-to-do man."

Mr. Gore-Pearce rose to his feet.

"I am startled!" he said agitatedly. "This thing has hit me like a bombshell, Mr. Lee. Snell arrested! The sale of Edgemore Manor irregular! I hope to Heaven that I am not involved in any unsavoury scandal."

This was the one thought which seemed to haunt him. The possibility of being implicated in Snell's fraud. So perhaps it was not generosity, but selfishness, which prompted his next speech.

"To-day I shall see Lord Edgemore!" he said abruptly. "I shall offer him the resources of my own banking account. Surely, Mr. Lee, that will prove that I am perfectly honest in this affair? I will advance Lord Edgemore as many thousands as he requires—until the law permits him to use his own money."

"That is very generous of you, Mr. Gore-Pearce," said Lee dryly. "But, in the circumstances, I very much doubt if his lordship will avail himself of your suggestion."



Handforth dragged Mr. Snell from the telephone box and, aided by Church and McClure, forced him to the ground. In a minute he was helpless. "Quick! Give us your muffler, Mac!" said Handy tensely.



CHAPTER 20.

Handy the Hero!

"URRAH!"
"Good old
Handy!"
"Three cheers for
the hero!"

"Hurrah!"

"Let's chair him, you fellows!"

"Absolutely!"

Edward Oswald Handforth stood in the Ancient House doorway, aghast. Church was on one side of him, and McClure on the other. They had just come downstairs, and they were amazed to find the Triangle filled with yelling, excited juniors.

Handforth & Co. and Nipper had all been told to ignore the rising-bell that morning, and to sleep on until at least ten o'clock.

But Nipper, for one, had got up at the usual hour. He didn't want to sleep any longer. His one desire was to get down—to see Nelson Lee again, and to inquire further into the affairs of Lord Edgemore. In addition, Nipper wanted to spread the story of Handforth's braininess. Too often Handforth was the laughing-stock of the Junior School. Here was a chance to give him a real word of praise.

The story would get about, in any case, so Nipper saw no reason why he shouldn't be

the first to tell it. Everybody in Helmford knew of the exploit, and it would be sheerly impossible to keep it a secret from St. Frank's—even if it were necessary or desirable to keep it a secret.

So there had been plenty of sensational disclosures for the Junior School that morning. Firstly, that Lucas Snell was under arrest. Secondly that Mr. William Gore-Pearce would probably have to vacate Edgemore Manor. Thirdly, that the Earl of Edgemore would find himself once again in possession of his ancestral home. And, lastly, there was the story of that valiant dash to Helmford by Handforth in his Austin.

The juniors heard everything—and they became more and more excited.

As for the Study D trio, they had felt disinclined to lay in, too. They were just as keen as Nipper to get down, and to hear the latest developments. Now that they were down, they found the Triangle seething with Removites and Fourth-Formers and fags.

"Here, I say!" gasped Handforth, as a dozen fellows rushed at him. "What the dickens—Leggo, you idiots!"

"Good old Handy!"

"We know all about it, old man!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "You're a marvel! We've heard how you saved Mr. Lee's life, and Nipper's life—"

"Rot!" said Handforth, flushing. "Who's been telling you that silly yarn?"

"It won't do, dear old fellow!" said Travers indulgently. "You can't hide your

light under a bushel like that. We know how modest you are—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody laughed. But, in actual truth, Edward Oswald Handforth was modest. When it came to a matter of genuine merit—when a case or this kind was involved—Handforth hated to hear a word of praise. He considered that he had done nothing. It was only when he really *had* done nothing that he expected praise. Which, after all, was Handy all over.

Much to his indignation, he was hoisted on to the shoulders of Buster Boots and Vivian Travers and Reggie Pitt and Bob Christine. Then he was precariously carried round the Triangle, while all the other juniors cheered him to the echo.

In the middle of it all, Nelson Lee arrived, and Lee himself came in for a great ovation.

Fortunately, the breakfast bell rang, and this had a miraculous effect. Much as the fellows wanted to cheer the heroes, they were just as eager—nay, more eager!—to attend to the urgent voice of the inner man.

So it was that Nipper and Handforth & Co. were almost the last fellows left out in the Triangle. And Nipper was talking earnestly to Nelson Lee.

"You've fixed it, guv'nor?" he was saying eagerly. "Do you mean to say that old Gore-Pearce is going to clear out?"

"At once Nipper," said Lee, with satisfaction. "In fact Mr. Gore-Pearce has evidently been thinking things over, and he rather regrets his arrogant, overbearing attitude. He has already telephoned instructions to the contractors, and, long before mid-day, Edgemore Manor will be clear of all the workmen. Everything is to be left just as it stands."

"Well, thank goodness those 'renovations' haven't actually been started yet," said Nipper. "Old Gore-Pearce would have ruined the place with his inartistic ideas. And what about the earl, sir? Can he go back into his own home?"

"He can go back to-day, Nipper," replied Lee. "Mr. Gore-Pearce has generously offered to supply the earl with as much ready money as he needs—but I don't think this will be necessary. For the lawyers, between them, will probably set aside a substantial sum out of Snell's ill-gotten savings for the earl's use. However, we need not concern ourselves with those details."

"By George!" said Handforth, who was standing by, listening. "I've got an idea, sir!"

"Another?" smiled Lee.

"Will you let us tell the news to the earl, sir?" asked Handforth breathlessly.

"Directly after lessons, sir?"

"Well, Handforth, I was going along myself," said Lee dubiously. "But perhaps you boys have the most right to take these glad tidings to his lordship. It was you, after all, who installed him in that cottage."

"Thanks awfully, sir!" said Edward Oswald. "We won't tell him at once. We'll play another little trick on him—and we'll

take him back to his own home. His ancestral pile, eh? We'll give him a jolly big surprise, you chaps!"

"Rather!" grinned Nipper. "And there'll be another surprise for him, too, guv'nor!" he added, looking at Lee.

The great detective nodded.

"That will be my surprise, young 'un," he smiled. "But I shall reserve it until you have installed the earl at the manor."

Nelson Lee walked off, and Handforth & Co. stared after him wonderingly.

"What did he mean?" asked Church.

"You'll soon see, my son!" chuckled Nipper. "It strikes me that it will be a surprise to everybody else, too!"

NEXT WEDNESDAY! ~~~~~



CHAPTER 21.

The Illuminated Address!

HERE, I say, you chaps!" It was after breakfast, and Travers was addressing a group of Removites.

"I rather think that this is an opportunity for something special," he went on coolly. "We all know the facts—and we know that our own Handforth has been on the warpath to some purpose. In other words, he didn't

catch a mare's nest last night, as anybody might have expected."

"Somebody ought to chalk it up!" grinned De Valeria.

"Surely we can do better than that?" asked Travers, with mild reproach. "Chalking it up is, after all, a crude method. It occurred to me that the Remove might present Handforth with an Illuminated Address."

"That's not a bad wheeze!" chuckled Russell. "In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred he makes a hopeless mess of things. But last night he did wonders."

"Rather!" agreed Fullwood, with a nod. "And the rummy thing is, he doesn't want to be thanked! Yet, when he does some

him with an Illuminated Address," said Gresham, smiling. "He deserves one, anyhow."

"Exactly!" said Vivian Travers. "Beyond any dispute, dear old fellows, Handforth prevented that rascal, Snell, from bolting. And we can take it as a certainty that he saved Mr. Lee and Nipper from certain death."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Handy!"

Handforth, on the stairs, altered his mind. He decided that he wouldn't dash down and punch Travers on the nose. Taking everything into consideration, there seemed to be a certain amount of good in the fellow.

"So we must set up a subscription among ourselves—on the strict Q.T., of course," went on Travers. "We'll have this Illuminated Address prepared properly. It'll cost a good bit, you know—but Handy deserves it."

"Yes, but what can we say in it?" asked Jimmy Potts.

"Well, I've got it here," replied Travers, as he produced a big sheet of foolscap. "Of course, it's open to revision, but I rather think it meets the case nicely. If you'll all stand back, dear old fellows, I will now proceed to give you an earful."

"Half a tick, Travers!" grinned Fullwood. "I suppose you're serious about this?"

"Of course I am."

"You're not just spoofing us?"

"No."

"That's all right, then," said Fullwood. "I don't mind pulling Handy's leg at any ordinary time, but I rather think he deserves some genuine appreciation to-day."

Vivian Travers nodded.

"That's exactly my wheeze," he replied. "Now, listen to this—and there's no spoof about it: 'We, the undersigned members of the Remove Form of St. Frank's, desire to express our admiration—'"

"Hold on!" broke in a stern voice.

All the juniors in the lobby turned, and stared up at Handforth.

"Well, well!" murmured Travers regretfully. "This is a pity."

Handforth came down the stairs, and his expression was grim.

"Just a minute, Travers!" he said. "I happened to hear what you were saying just now. Do I understand that you're proposing to present me with an Illuminated Address?"

"That was the general idea," admitted Travers.

"And a good idea, too, Handy!" said Fullwood heartily. "You deserve it, old man!"

"Rather!"

"You're the hero of the hour, Handy!"

"Rats!" retorted Handforth gruffly. "Rot! Piffle! I don't want to be a hero! I'm not a hero! Only priggish kids in presentation school-books are heroes!"

"Ahem!" coughed Travers. "However, let us proceed. It might be as well, Handforth, if you retired—"

"I'm blown if I'll retire!" said Handforth, in a determined voice. "It's jolly decent of you fellows to think of a thing like

"THE BOAT RACE TRUANTS!"

It's Handforth's idea that a party of Removites should go up to London and witness the Boat Race; but it is William Napoleon Browne who is responsible for that idea being carried out—and even then the Headmaster does not suspect where they are really going!

And so the party finds itself in London—Browne and Stevens, Nipper & Co., Handforth & Co., Archie Glenthorne, and a few others. A gloriously exciting time they have, too—especially Handforth & Co. and Archie, culminating with the arrest of Handforth for assaulting a constable!

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"THE AIR PATROL!"

Guy Howard is hot on the trail of Von Schaumberg and his air pirates in next week's rousing instalment.

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dotty thing that doesn't matter twopence, he expects us to kow-tow to him!"

"There's no telling with these geniuses—or should it be geni?" observed Travers. "It has been well said that a genius is on the border-line of insanity. We all know that Handforth is more or less dotty."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was much amusement in the lobby, and nobody noticed the burly figure of Edward Oswald Handforth himself at the top of the stairs. But Handforth had paused, and he was frowning. He had caught a few of Travers' words, and he wasn't feeling particularly flattered.

"It might be a good wheeze to present

this, and I'd like you to know that I appreciate it. What's more, I'm perfectly willing to accept that Illuminated Address."

"Good man!"

"We knew you'd think better of it, Handy!"

The juniors were grinning. They could imagine Handforth glowing as he inspected the Illuminated Address on its completion; they could picture him hanging it in Study D, and gazing at it fondly every time he entered the room. But then, of course, there was no telling with Handforth. He was an unexpected fellow; one never knew exactly how he would take a thing.

He now took the sheet of foolscap firmly from Vivian Travers' grasp.

"Is this the Illuminated Address?" he asked sternly.

"Why, yes,—only it isn't illuminated yet," replied Travers.

"That's nothing!" said Handforth. "We'll soon remedy that little detail! I understand that all you fellows want to present me with a genuine Illuminated Address?"

"Yes, Handy!"

"And there's no spoof about it?"

"Absolutely none!" replied Travers.

"Thanks awfully!" said Handforth, nodding as he fumbled in his pocket. "I appreciate the honour, as I said before—but this is the only kind of Illuminated Address that I want!"

He struck a match and held the flame to the sheet of foolscap.

"There you are!" he said triumphantly.

"There's your giddy Illuminated Address!"

He threw the black ashes on the floor and trod on them.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's like your nerve to suggest such a thing, Travers!" went on Handforth indignantly. "Mind you, I realise that you mean well—"

"Thanks awfully, dear old fellow!"

"But I'm not that kind of chap!" said Handforth, with a glare. "I don't want any of your dotty Illuminated Addresses! And I don't want to be thanked fifty times for doing a thing that any chap would have done! You fellows had better forget what happened last night!"

"My only hat!"

"What's happened to him?"

"He's become modest all at once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's something more important to be discussed!" roared Handforth. "Instead of wasting time on these trifles, why aren't we getting out some plan about the Earl of Edgemore?"

"That's all right, Handy—everything's practically settled!" said Nipper briskly, as he came into the lobby. "I've been sending the word round, and we're going off to the earl's cottage directly after lessons. I've fixed it up with the gov'nor—"

"After lessons!" broke in Handforth coldly. "What's the good of that? Why can't we go now? Why can't Mr. Lee do the decent thing, and give us the morning off?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm afraid that's rather too much to expect, old man," said Nipper. "I argued with Mr. Lee for a bit, but it wasn't any good."

"Then you'd better let me go and have a shot at him!" said Handforth. "It's all rot—delaying the thing for two or three hours! Why, during the morning the rumours will spread up from the village, and then Jenkins will hear them. The tradesmen might bring stories to the cottage, and then Jenkins will tell the earl, and our own game will be spoilt! Why the dickens can't we go now, if it comes to that?"

"My dear chap, there isn't time," said Nipper. "We shall have to go in to lessons before long, and you don't seem to realise what a job we've taken on. First we've got to go to the cottage, then we must escort the earl to Edgemore Manor, and—"

"Yes, I know all that," interrupted Handforth. "But the whole thing is exceptional, and I think we ought to be allowed to cut lessons for once."

"And we all agree with you, Handy, dear old fellow," said Travers heartily. "The trouble is, our views don't count. If it comes to that, lessons of all kinds are a bore. I avoid them as much as I can."

There was much to be discussed before the bell rang, and the Remove fellows were very busy; they were preparing for the little ceremony that would take place as soon as morning school was over.

The Remove went into its class-room in a somewhat excited mood. There was very little prospect of the fellows settling down to concentrated study. In spite of the general noisiness of the Form, however, Mr. Crowell seemed to be in an excellent temper. He was beaming with unusual geniality, and, as soon as the class had settled down, he adjusted his glasses and looked across at Handforth.

"Handforth," he said heartily. "Stand out here."

Handforth looked up, startled.

"Who, sir?" he ejaculated. "Me, sir?"

"Yes, Handforth."

And the leader of Study D stood out before the Form, wondering vaguely why he was being placed on the carpet.



CHAPTER 22.

Handy Does the Trick!

MR. CROWELL, however, did not look particularly dangerous.

"My object, Handforth, in calling you before the class, is to congratulate you," he said warmly. "I am very proud of you, Handforth. I am proud that it was one of my boys who acted so astutely last night."

Handforth coloured.

"Oh, I say, sir!" he exclaimed uncomfortably. "You're not going to start, too, are you?"

"I have been having a chat with Mr. Lee, and I have also heard details of your exploit from others," said Mr. Crowell. "I am not at all surprised, Handforth, that the Remove is proud of you."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Handy!"

Handforth stood there, looking very self-conscious.

"It—it was nothing, sir!" he blurted out. "If it comes to that, I broke hounds, and I ought to have been punished."

"I rather think that your subsequent conduct exonerated you, my boy," said the Form-master.

"Well, I only collared old Snell, sir, and prevented him from bolting," said Handforth modestly. "I'll admit it was a bit of a rush to Helmford, and—"

"Yes, Handforth, I know the whole story," said Mr. Crowell. "I have heard it rumoured, on more than one occasion, that you are singularly apt to blunder. But last night's affair indicates to me that that rumour is truly a lying jade."

"Even the worst marksman scores a bull's-eye sometimes, sir," said Travers.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, Travers, you must not attempt to minimise Handforth's achievement," said Mr. Crowell, frowning. "I am very pleased with you, Handforth, he went on. "What you did last night was splendid. You not only showed resourcefulness and courage, but your determination was beyond all praise."

"Thank you, sir," said Handforth, as he shuffled his feet. "But, I say, I wish you wouldn't make such a song about it, you know, sir!"

"Very well, Handforth," smiled the Form-master. "I merely wanted to let you know that I was aware of the facts, and that I am particularly pleased with you."

A sudden eager light leaped into Handforth's eyes.

"That's awfully decent of you, sir," he said. "Perhaps— Well, I mean, perhaps you will be willing to— Look here, sir," he went on hurriedly. "You know about the Earl of Edgemore, don't you?"

"I know that you and the other boys of my Form have been taking a great interest in the earl's misfortunes," said Mr. Crowell. "I am delighted that all of you should be so generously inclined."

"Well, this morning, sir—as soon as lessons are over—we're going to take the old earl out of that little cottage, and we mean to install him in Edgemore Manor again," said Handforth eagerly. "That's the wheeze, sir. And we want to do it in a particularly tactful kind of a manner."

Mr. Crowell seemed rather surprised.

"Will it be possible for the earl to get back into his old home so speedily?" he asked.

"Oh, rather, sir," replied Handforth. "We've got it all planned. In fact, it would be a lot better if we could go straight to the cottage now—this very minute!"

"But, really, Handforth—"

"Don't you see, sir?" said Edward Oswald quickly. "We want to give the old boy a surprise. We've given him one or two already—but this will be the best of the lot! And if we have to wait until after lessons, it's more than likely that the earl will have heard rumours, and all our plans will be ruined!"

"Are you suggesting, Handforth, that I should give you permission to miss lessons?" asked Mr. Crowell wonderingly. "That I should give the entire class permission to miss lessons?"

"That's the very idea, sir!" declared Handforth heartily.

"My dear boy—"

"You said that you were jolly pleased with me, sir!" interrupted Handforth, pressing his advantage. "I don't want to make any capital out of it, but for the earl's sake— Well, you see what I mean, sir! And it's all in a good cause, too."

"Ahem! I am afraid, Handforth, that I cannot possibly sanction this," said the Form-master dubiously. "Indeed, it would not be possible for me to do so without consulting Mr. Lee; and he, I am sure, would never agree to such a departure."

"But it's a very special case, sir," urged Handforth.

"But not, I fancy, as special as all that," said Mr. Crowell dryly. "No, Handforth, you must not repeat this request of yours. You may return to your place—and now we must make some attempt to get on with the work."

Very disappointed, Handforth returned to his desk, and the Remove made a pretence of getting busy. But everybody was so excited that there was not much prospect of any real work being done.

Mr. Crowell realised this, and accepted it. He was very good-tempered that morning; he distributed no impositions, although practically everybody was talking. He turned a deaf ear to all these little irregularities.

"You ~~are~~, Handy!" murmured Church. "You might have known it wouldn't come off."

"Why not? There was always a chance!"

"Besides, it wouldn't be any good if we went now," said Church. "We've got to give old Gore-Pearce time to get his workmen out of the Manor. They'll all clear off during the morning, I understand."

"H'm! I hadn't thought of that!" admitted Handforth. "Still, what difference would it make, really? A few workmen wouldn't be in the way."

He spoke in an aggrieved voice. In his own opinion, the Remove had a perfect right to go off at once, and to neglect lessons altogether. But then, Handforth was always prone to get these strange ideas.

The interval came, and during this brief respite the Removes collected together in

excited groups, and further plans were made. Nipper went from one group to another, giving instructions and advice, and by the time the Remove went into its class-room again everything was out and dried.

All the fellows knew what to do. The instant the bell rang they would be able to dash off, and every fellow would know his own particular part. It was no good doing the thing in a haphazard way. It had to be properly organised.

Mr. Crowell came into the class-room, rubbing his hands together.

"Well, Handforth, I have some good news for you," he said genially. "In fact, I have some good news for the entire Form."

The Remove sat up.

"I have taken the opportunity of having a few words with Mr. Lee," proceeded the Form-master. "I understand that he is about to set off for Edgemore Manor almost at once."

Handforth sprang up.

"Mr. Lee's going to the Manor now, sir?" he shouted excitedly. "But—but that'll spoil everything! We've arranged—"

"One moment, Handforth!" broke in Mr. Crowell gently. "While I was with Mr. Lee I mentioned your somewhat remarkable suggestion to him—"

"Hurrah!" gasped Handforth. "Then—then we've got the rest of the morning off, sir?"

"Please do not be so hasty, Handforth!" said Mr. Crowell.

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Edward Oswald. "Then—then you mean that—"

"I have come to the conclusion that you boys are in need of exercise," said Mr. Crowell, with a twinkle in his eyes. "The day is quite fine, and I have no doubt that you will welcome an hour in the open air. But I must remind you that it would be inadvisable to make any demonstration over this," he added hastily.

The Remove, which had shown signs of getting excited, simmered down.

"You will leave the class-room in as orderly a fashion as possible," proceeded Mr. Crowell. "You will go out in double-file, and in the Triangle you will form up. And, please, let there be no noise."

"But what's the good of that, sir?" asked Handforth blankly. "What can we do in the Triangle?"

"You will march out of the main gateway in double file, and I shall leave the entire Form in charge of Hamilton," said Mr. Crowell smoothly. "He, I am sure, will be able to superintend. Precisely where you go after you leave the school grounds is—ahem!—a matter in which I am not particularly interested."

"Oh, good egg!"

"You're a brick, sir!"

"By Jove, rather!"

Mr. Crowell beamed on the Remove.

"Now, boys, attention!" he said smartly. "Hamilton—Fullwood! Lead the way out! Quick march!"

And the Remove, chuckling joyously, marched out into the Triangle, then out into the lane. It was difficult for them to refrain from cheering, but they managed it. Once well clear of the school, however, they gave vent to their satisfaction.

"We haven't got the rest of the morning off officially—but we're supposed to be exercising!" grinned Nipper. "And that means that we can buzz off to the cottage straight away, and give the old earl his surprise!"

"And I hope you won't forget that it was my wheeze!" said Handforth calmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Handy!"

"If it hadn't been for me, we should be stewing in the class-room now," declared Handforth, with a grin. "It only shows you, my lads, that if you want a thing you've got to ask for it!"



CHAPTER 23.

Turned Out!

THE Earl of Edgemore stood at the front window of that little cottage which had been rented for him by the St. Frank's juniors. There was a sad, wistful expression on the old peer's lined face.

"My home!" he murmured, almost brokenly. "The home of my fathers!"

A step sounded behind him, and old Jenkins, his one faithful retainer, stood there.

"Looking over into the estate again, my lord?" asked Jenkins, in his wheezy voice. "You mustn't do it, you know! You mustn't do it, my lord!"

"I cannot help it, Jenkins," said Lord Edgemore quietly.

"Ay, but it doesn't do you any good, my lord!" insisted the old servant, with pain. "It's rather a pity that this cottage overlooks the park. You're always reminded!"

"Perhaps you are right, Jenkins," said his lordship wearily. "Perhaps you are right! And yet I should be thankful that I have a haven of peace here. May Heaven bless those schoolboys. A fine body of young fellows, Jenkins—gad, a fine set of lads!"

He took another wistful look at those lands which had one been his—lands which were still his, if only he had known. There was something very kindly and lovable about this helpless old peer. He was so childlike in his simple trust. He was so guileless.

Yet there was nothing weak-minded about the Earl of Edgemore. He was, indeed, a man of letters of some note—and, in earlier life, he had distinguished himself in many branches of literature.

But since the War he had been almost a hermit. The death of his son, on the Western Front, had broken him up. Since that time he had taken little or no interest

in life—in his fellow beings; and so Lucas Snell had been able to do very much as he had pleased with the old man.

"The boys are coming, my lord!" said Jenkins, as he went to the door. "Bless me! A big crowd of them, too! What can it mean? They've only been coming in twos and threes this last week or so."

The Earl of Edgemore went to the door to welcome his young visitors—his benefactors. As they were turning in the gateway he noticed a strange difference. As a rule, they waved to him—they shouted friendly, cheery greetings. But to-day they were silent. Their faces were grave, their eyes apparently troubled.

In the forefront were Handforth, Nipper, Reggie Pitt, Castleton and Travers.

"Well, my boys?" smiled the old earl kindly. "Need I say how delighted I am to see you?"

"We—we— That is to say, it's rather difficult to put, sir," exclaimed Handforth awkwardly. "But the fact is, you can't remain in this cottage, sir."

"Absolutely not, sir!" said Archie Glen-thorne mournfully. "Frightfully sorry, and all that sort of thing, but there you are! We're absolutely here to biff you out!"

"I do not understand, boys," said the old peer, puzzled.

"It's simple enough, sir," said Nipper quickly. "You can't stay in this cottage any longer. We—we'd rather not explain, sir. But—but you and Jenkins have got to get out at once."

Lord Edgemore seemed to go a trifle pale, but he pulled himself up straight, and his voice was steady when he replied.

"Very well, my boys—very well!" he said quietly. "Since you say that we must go, there is no alternative. We are in your hands—and have been so during these past weeks. I can do nothing but accept your edict."

Handforth linked his arm into the old earl's.

"But it's not quite so bad as it might seem, sir," he said briskly. "We've got somewhere else for you to go, and we want you to come with us now."

"I will come as soon as Jenkins has prepared—"

"No, sir—now!" insisted Handforth. "We'll get your things together and bring them along to the new quarters afterwards. It doesn't matter so much about Jenkins, either—he can follow later."

"I'll go with his lordship!" said Jenkins quaveringly.

So the Earl of Edgemore and his retainer left that cottage—escorted by the crowd of solemn-faced juniors. They went down the lane, and it was with the greatest difficulty that the boys kept up this farce. But they considered that the climax would be worth all their restraint now.

As they had expected, the earl was taking it magnificently. Not a word of complaint—not a question. They had installed him

in that cottage, and he had been grateful. They were telling him to go, and he was going. His eyes were sad and troubled, but never a murmur of reproach left his lips.

At length, the familiar gateway of Edgemore Manor came within sight. Just for a moment, the old man stiffened, and a little droop came to his mouth. But he squared his shoulders, and prepared to walk bravely past.

"This way, sir!" said Handforth cheerily.

It seemed to be a kind of signal. For, as Handforth spoke, dozens of the juniors ran forward and lined themselves up in the gateway of the Manor. At the same moment, they doffed their caps and bowed.

"Welcome home, Lord Edgemore!" they shouted, in a joyous chorus.

And there, just outside the gateway, stood Lord Edgemore and his retainer. Their expressions were blank—they were bewildered.

"But—but I don't understand!" said the earl falteringly.

"You will, sir!" grinned Handforth. "Everything's all serene, sir! The Manor is yours again—it has always been yours! And now we've brought you home!"



CHAPTER 24.

The Boy Out Of The Past!

LIKE a man in a dream, the Earl of Edgemore walked up the drive with old Jenkins by his side. A turn brought the Manor into view—with its turrets and battlements, its grey walls and its age-old buttresses. In the bright March sunlight, the fine old place looked truly magnificent.

"Boys, tell me what this means!" pleaded the earl, as he halted and gazed at the juniors on either side of him. "I have been evicted from my home. It is in the possession of a stranger. I am penniless—I am not entitled to enter these walks again."

"That's where you're wrong, sir," said Nipper gently. "Your lawyer, Lucas Snell, is arrested. He's awaiting trial now."

"Good Heavens!" muttered the earl dazedly.

"The whole plot has come out, sir—mainly owing to Mr. Nelson Lee's inquiries," went on Nipper. "You're not penniless, as you think. There'll be lots and lots of money saved when everything is squared up. And Edgemore Manor is yours. Mr. Lee is inside, waiting to tell you everything in detail."

It was impossible for the old man to speak. He walked on falteringly. His eyes were ablaze now—ablaze with hope and excitement. He was bewildered—he was confused by all this sudden joy. And the juniors, seeing his state of mind, respectfully hung back.

With hesitating footsteps, the earl went towards the imposing flight of steps leading up to the great hall. When he reached the foot of them, however, he stopped uncertainly. It seemed as though, even now, he could not credit the amazing truth; seemed as though he were afraid to go inside, for fear he should be trespassing.

"Why have you stopped, sir?" called out Handforth. "It's all right. The whole place belongs to you—has belonged to you all the time, really. Go on, sir. There's a big surprise awaiting you inside—a pleasant surprise at that."

Passing a hand dazedly across his forehead, the Earl of Edgemore slowly walked up the steps and entered the manor. It was significant that none of the juniors accompanied him. Not even Handforth went—for Handforth was holding Jenkins back, assisted by two or three of the other fellows. There was a very strong reason why the Earl of Edgemore should be allowed to enter his old home alone.

For there, in the hall, he found Nelson Lee waiting. And not Nelson Lee alone—but a sweet-faced lady, and a fair-headed boy of about ten.

Nelson Lee decided to make his disclosure rapidly—since this shock would be one of joy, and the suddenness of it was not likely to cause any effect other than delicious happiness.

"Lord Edgemore," said Lee quietly. "There is one fact, I think, of which you are in ignorance. Your son, who joined the Army as Captain Charles Rossiter—using his family name, and omitting his title—was married in France before he died."

Lord Edgemore turned deathly pale, and he swayed slightly.

"Married!" he repeated dully. "No, no, it cannot be!"

Then suddenly, as his gaze alighted upon the little boy, he fell to one knee. Perhaps he had seen the resemblance in the child's face.

"You—you mean that—that this boy——" he began, in a choking voice.

"Yes, Lord Edgemore!" said Nelson Lee gently. "Your son was killed three weeks after his marriage to this lady. And, all unknown to you, a grandson was born to you. This is your daughter-in-law, and——"

"My Charlie's son!" muttered the old man tremblingly. "Thank Heaven! Come to me, child—come to me! Fear not! I am your grandfather!"

There was no hesitation about the boy. He ran forward into the outstretched arms of Lord Edgemore, while his mother looked on with tears in her eyes.

"My Charlie's little son!" breathed the old earl. "Now, my happiness is complete! From this hour, I shall live again!"

It was some moments before he rose to his feet. And then he took his dead son's wife into his arms while Nelson Lee went

out to tell the waiting juniors of the recent happenings.

The boys listened intently, and when the schoolmaster-detective had finished they all started to run towards the manor. But Nelson Lee called them back.

"No, you mustn't go in yet, boys!" said the Housemaster smilingly. "Give them a little time together."

But Lord Edgemore himself soon came out, and his face was changed. He looked ten years younger. His eyes were glowing with happiness—his whole figure was vibrant with new life.

"I cannot express what I think!" he said unsteadily. "But I know that you boys have done much. I know, too, that you, sir—" addressing Nelson Lee—"have worked hard on my behalf. I have to thank you all——"

"No, sir!" shouted Handforth. "We don't want any thanks. Everything's all right now, and we're all happy."

"Rather!"

"Three cheers for Lord Edgemore!"

"Hurrah!"

"Yes, by George, and three cheers for Lord Edgemore's daughter-in-law, and his grandson!"

"Hurrah!"

And the St. Frank's fellows made the countryside ring with their cheering. When they went back to St. Frank's they were happy and joyous. As far as they were concerned, that was the end of the whole matter.

The rest of it could be fought out by the lawyers—in the courts. Lord Edgemore was back in his ancestral home, and Mr. William Gore-Pearce would know the district no longer.

Nevertheless, it came as a bit of a shock to the Junior School to discover that Claude Gore-Pearce was to remain. As he was a scholar at the school already, his father arranged for him to stay on as an ordinary boarder. About the only fellows in the entire Remove who were glad were Gulliver and Bell. For Claude Gore-Pearce had automatically become leader of Study A in the Ancient House.

But what did it matter, after all? He was only a snob—a fellow of no account.

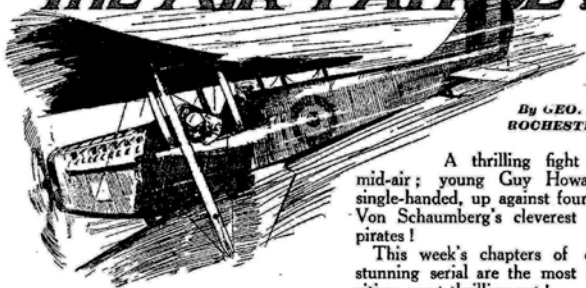
Upon the whole, the St. Frank's Remove felt that everything was decidedly all serene!

THE END.

(Everybody is surely interested in the Boat Race, and so next week's story is therefore of particular importance, since it centres around that great sporting event. The title of the yarn is, "The Boat Race Truants!" and if you miss it you'll miss a treat. How about ordering your next week's issue in advance to save disappointment, for there's sure to be a great run on this bumper number?)

Meet Plucky Young Guy Howard in the Stunning Story Below!

THE AIR PATROL!



By GEO. E.
ROCHESTER.

A thrilling fight in mid-air; young Guy Howard, single-handed, up against four of Von Schaumberg's cleverest air pirates!

This week's chapters of our stunning serial are the most exciting, most thrilling yet!

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENED-

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 is

VON SCHAUMBERG. The headquarters of the pirates is unknown. Guy has sworn to exterminate them, for they have been particularly busy on his "beat." The latest pilot to be plundered is

STRUBEN, an American; but Guy tells his commanding officer that he suspects that Struben, together with the American's mechanic,

MULLER, are accomplices of the air pirates! Later Struben and Muller are arrested and placed in the cells, but they get away, and escape in a big mail 'plane. They send a wireless message to Von Schaumberg, who, upon hearing what has happened, vows vengeance against Guy. Unknown to Struben and Muller, Guy has managed to board the mail 'plane, and they receive a great shock when he suddenly appears. There is a fight, in which Struben is killed and Guy wounded. When he is better, Guy asks his commander for a roving commission, so that he can search for Von Schaumberg and the unknown lair of the air pirates. This is granted; and at dawn to-morrow Guy is to start on the greatest, most perilous adventure of his already adventurous career!

(Now read on.)

War Reminiscences!

WHISTLING happily and smiling cheerily, Guy crossed towards the pilots' mess.

"I think I'll have a spot of lunch and a bottle of wine to celebrate!" he told himself.

Never before in his life had Guy felt so thrilled. He realised that his courage, his resourcefulness, would be tried to the full in the coming fight against the scoundrelly Von Schaumberg, and he was looking forward to it with eager anticipation. He was just tingling to be off; he could hardly curb his impatience. And, by Jove, when he did eventually start off on the trail he wouldn't rest until he'd found the air pirates' secret headquarters, and exterminated those wolves of the air!

Before entering the mess he decided to go across to the hangars and see if his tiny

"scout" 'plane was ready, for very shortly he was to escort a bullion-carrying machine to Aerodrome C. The mechanic sergeant reported O.K., and then Guy returned and entered the mess. A sleepily looking individual, sprawled in an armchair, and wearing the blue uniform and golden wings of an Atlantic Airways pilot, beckoned to him.

"Am I, or am I not, getting an escort?" demanded this individual, as Guy sank into an armchair opposite him.

"My dear old Ponsonby, do you think we'd let you take over the bullion machine without providing you with an escort?" laughed Guy.

"Then I'm getting one?"

"Yes, I'm going with you as far as 'C' aerodrome!"

Ponsonby closed sleepy eyes.

"Let us give three hearty cheers!" he murmured. "I will just toddle along at six thou-

sand feet, and if any of these blessed air pirates come popping down out of the blue, I shall leave 'em entirely to you! Leave 'em absolutely to you!"

"Thanks very much!" laughed Guy.

Ponsonby waved a deprecating hand.

"No thanks, I beg of you!" he murmured. "I'm not a selfish Johnny! I wouldn't deprive you of your fun. You can have 'em, and I'll wave you encouragement with my handkerchief. I wouldn't butt in, not even if you asked me!"

"Wouldn't you?" demanded Guy, eyeing the row of war ribbons below Ponsonby's wings.

"No, I wouldn't!" replied Ponsonby, idly watching the young ranger through half-closed eyes. "And don't you get any strange ideas by weighing up these ribbons of mine. I got 'em out of the box at the Air Ministry when nobody was looking!"

"You got 'em in France, you old fraud!" laughed Guy. "You got your Distinguished Flying Cross for keeping six Fokkers off an Allied machine whose pilot was wounded! You were riddled and your control wires were about gone before you drove 'em off, after bagging three of 'em!"

"Dear me! Dear me!" murmured Ponsonby. "What a weird yarn to get hold of!"

"It's jolly well true, Ponsonby, and you know it!" replied Guy. "I wish you'd tell me what your golden rule was in air fighting!"

Ponsonby hitched himself up in his chair with a jerk. He was wide awake now.

"You can always get me, kid!" he laughed. "The golden rule, you say? Well, there were two golden rules in the old days in France when we were fighting the Bosche in the air. One was, never to let an enemy machine come at you on your blind spot. The other was, when in doubt, *divet*!"

And Ponsonby, war ace and thundering good fellow, talked whilst Guy listened.

"A fighting machine has the whole sky to manoeuvre in, kid, but how many use it? I've seen 'em banking and turning as though they were fighting in a hangar! It's a fool's game! Hand on the control firm, but gentle! Gentle, mind you! You're hurting nothing but yourself if you grip like old Harry, and your machine'll wallow like an old tub! Don't bluff in an air fight unless you're hit. The other fellow might call your bluff, and, if he does, he'll get you! Go at him—straight at him—and always be on the offensive—the *offensive*!"

And thus he talked, recalling hectic days over the battle-fields of Flanders, drawing a conclusion here pointing a moral there. And Guy, expert air fighter that he was, listened eagerly.

Then suddenly Ponsonby stopped talking, and cocked his head in a listening attitude. From out over the Atlantic, far to the westwards, came the drone of high-powered engines.

"Here she is," he said. "The old bullion bus! I'd know her Birchington engines any-

where! They roar like a thousand compressed air-drills! Let's have a spot of lunch and then we'll get off!"

He and Guy had lunch, then walked across to the hangars. The bullion machine, an air liner from Paris, a large commercial, six-engined biplane from Berlin, and a glittering British passenger-carrying monoplane, were drawn up in a line on the tarmac. Mechanics were swarming around them, some overhauling engines and fuel tanks, others testing bracing-wires and flying-wires.

At the end of the line, dwarfed by the monsters of the air, stood Guy's fast fighting scout, propeller already ticking over.

Struggling into his flying kit and buttoning his leather collar about his neck, Ponsonby turned to Guy.

"You're off to-morrow then, kid?" he said quietly.

"Yes!" replied Guy. "You won't be landing before you reach the London Air Port, and, as I leave you over 'C' aerodrome, I'll say good-bye!"

He thrust out his hand. Ponsonby took it in a firm grasp.

"Good-bye, lad!" he said. "I wish you the best of luck! But you'll come through all right—you'll come through!"

Ten minutes later, in the pilot's cockpit of the bullion machine, he was lumbering out across the aerodrome. His port engine thundered as he swung into wind, then the starboard engine picked up till it was roaring at full revolutions.

The black macadam swirled past as the great machine rushed forward, then dropped away as Ponsonby pulled on the control. Waiting till the bullion machine was over the hangar, Guy, already in the cockpit of his fighting scout, jerked open the throttle. His tail came up as he raced into wind, and he took the air in a climb which brought him three hundred feet above the huge three-ruddered box-tail of the bullion machine.

Flaming Guns!

HIGH in the blue sky, midway between D and C aerodromes, circled four black single-seater seaplanes. Their height was all of twenty-two thousand feet. And the four pilots were the pick of Von Schaumburg's air fighters.

There was Zwolfe, the grim, hawk-visaged leader—he who had taken such grim toll of Allied machines during the War. There was the fair-haired, smiling Falze, whose pink and almost insane countenance masked the soul of a rat. There was the languid and elegant Vali di Courci, wanted by the police of Europe for murder on the Italian Air Mail Route. And, lastly, the hideously disfigured Larasche who had once fallen into the hands of the White Army of Russia, and who would carry to his grave grim token of the vengeance they had wrecked on him.

Aye, fighters they were, every one of them, pitiless, merciless and cruel.

Zwolfe, one gloved hand on the control stick, was peering over the fuselage, Zeiss glasses pressed to his eyes. His thin lips curved into a mirthless smile as he saw, far below him, the heavy bulk of the Atlantic Airways bullion machine and the small, insignificant scout which accompanied it.

He leaned back in his seat, shoving the glasses into their rack. He turned, surveyed his three companions circling about him, then his black-gloved hand shot up.

Sun glinted on jet-black fuselages, wings and struts as the four machines tore downwards with throttles full open. It glinted on black engine cowlings and synchronised gun casings, whilst the wind shrieked through flying-wires and bracing-wires, audible above the thunder of the powerful rotary engines.

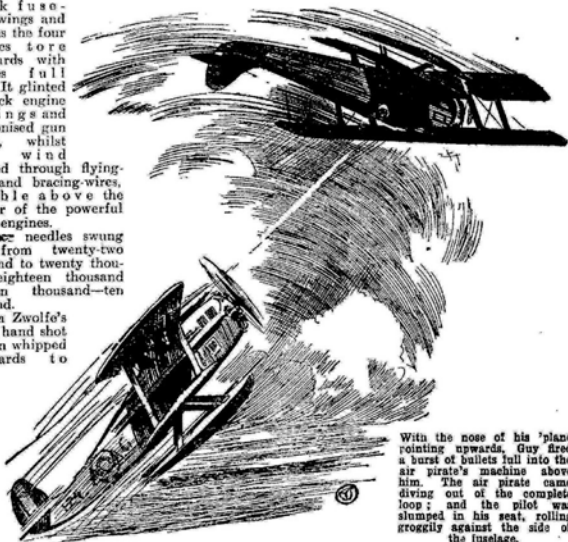
~~Under~~ needles swung back from twenty-two thousand to twenty thousand—eighteen thousand—fifteen thousand—ten thousand.

Again Zwolfe's gloved hand shot up, then whipped downwards to

the back, then the remaining three pirates were on him again.

Zwolfe was first, his lips drawn back from his teeth in a snarling grin. Straight at the ranger he tore, his gun muzzle spewing flame and lead. Guy turned neither to left nor right. It seemed as though the two machines, tearing towards each other, must crash propeller boss to propeller boss.

Zwolfe screamed a curse and shoved hard on his control stick. But, as the nose of his machine dropped for the dive and his tail came up, the ranger's bullets tore through his rudder socket fittings.



With the nose of his plane pointing upwards, Guy fired a burst of bullets full into the air pirate's machine above him. The air pirate came diving out of the complete loop; and the pilot was slumped in his seat, rolling groggily against the side of the fuselage.

curl on the trigger of his synchronised gun.

Rat-a-tat-tat! Rat-a-tat-tat! Rat-a-tat-tat!

Ammunition belts whirled through synchronised gun chambers. Four deadly, pitiless streams of steel-coated bullets tore straight at the scout, and flame licked back viciously from gun muzzles.

Guy Howard saw his dashboard riven as though by an invisible axe. Then he was tearing seawards to zoom up, roll, and dive hard on the tail of Vall Courci. His own gun roared into life. He saw di Courci slump forward over his controls, shot through

The rudder bar in the cockpit jammed. There was only one course open to Zwolfe in that moment. He dived, with engine full on, and his face was grey. For he knew that death was sitting on his tail.

It came to him within seconds; for Guy had banked, diving in a corkscrew turn, his gun aflame. Zwolfe was dead, riddled, before his machine, spinning sickeningly, hit the water.

Zwolfe's downward plunge, and the ranger's swing on his tail, had given Falze and Larasche a moment in which to review the situation. Zwolfe's blind rush at Guy had

balked their aim, but now they came roaring down on Guy with throttles full open and guns ablaze.

Something like a red-hot iron seared the boy's scalp, tearing away the leather of his flying helmet. Almost subconsciously, half-blinded by pain and blood, he whipped his control stick sideways and kicked on the rudder. The scout banked, level, and Guy kept her so. The whirlwind, breathless turn tested every strut and flying-wire, but it brought him out in the rear of the two pirate machines.

Larasche zoomed, hanging for the fractional part of a second on the top of his loop. Guy yanked back his control. The nose of his machine came up, hung, then the scout lost flying speed and, stalling, fell spinning towards the sea.

But during that brief instant of time, whilst he had hung with nose up, Guy had fired a burst of bullets full into the machine above him.

Almost of its own accord, Larasche's machine came diving down out of the completed loop. The propeller was barely ticking over, for Larasche had throttled down to take the loop.

Larasche was slumped in his seat, rolling groggily against the inner side of the fuselage. His gloved hand still gripped the control, but his flying coat was slowly staining with blood.

Down, down he went towards the sea, his ticking propeller carrying him in a long glide. Guy pulled out of his spin and locked round for Falze, but that individual was burning the wind, hitting the air trail northwards as hard as his thundering engine could take him. Falze had had enough.

Guy swung his machine in pursuit; glanced over his shoulder, downwards, at the wounded Larasche, who was landing clumsily on the water, then suddenly banked again and tore towards Larasche, with throttle wide open.

Northwards!

CIRCLING widely, a mile away and five hundred feet above the waters of the Atlantic, the bullion machine suddenly swung towards where Guy had landed on the water near Larasche.

Ponsonby's face was grim, that of his navigation officer was white. It had been mental agony for Ponsonby to stand out of that fight, but he was bound by the rigid rules of Atlantic Airways, in whose service he was.

For it was laid down in black and white by Atlantic Airways that no machine carrying passengers, mails, or bullion, should use any weapons they might carry, except to ward off attack.

Except to ward off attack! The bullion machine had not been attacked. And Ponsonby, although every atom of his being had cried out to him to go to the assistance of the

young Ranger, knew that his duty lay in preserving the bullion machine. And loyally, against his every inclination, he had done his duty, but never had duty been more bitter.

He should, perhaps, have run for the safety of "C" aerodrome, but he would not do that! No; dash it, that was asking too much!

Gliding to the water, he ran in towards where Guy's machine was lying wing-tip to wing-tip with that of Larasche. He shoved up his goggles, stared, then turned to his navigation officer.

"That kid's gone mad!" he gasped; but the navigation officer did not reply. Ponsonby turned and stared at Guy again.

"Dash it, what is the kid up to?" he added amazed.

For Guy was in Larasche's cockpit. He had pulled off his own flying kit and was donning the black leather flying-suit and helmet of Larasche. And he was working with frenzied haste.

"What the dickens are you doing, kid?" called Ponsonby.

"I'm going after that other pirate in this 'bus and in this kit!" shouted Guy jerkily, struggling into the black leather flying coat. "He can't know this fellow's done—he cleared off too quickly for that! He'll think I'm this chap, who's taken off and escaped! It's a chance, anyway—if I can catch up with him. I'm hoping he'll lead me home—to his base!"

"Oh, great Scott!" ejaculated Ponsonby. "Don't stand gaping there, you silly ass!" yelled Guy. "Come and tote this fellow into your 'bus and get him to 'C' aerodrome! He's in a bad way—dying, I think! I daren't risk waiting to question him! Come on, get him, and tell the commanding officer of 'C' aerodrome what's happened!"

"But is that 'bus all right?" demanded Ponsonby.

"Yes, yes! Come on, man, I'm ready to take off!"

Ponsonby wasted no more time in words. He saw the possibilities of the ranger's scheme. The remaining pirate, should he be overhauled by the black machine and its black-clad pilot, would never dream but that it was his companion who had succeeded in making good his escape.

So Ponsonby leapt on to the float of his machine and grabbed the unconscious Larasche, slithered down to him by Guy.

"Right, I've got him!" he cried, and stepped back leaning against the shock absorber casing of his under-carriage and supporting Larasche as best he could.

"Send a salvage machine for my 'bus!' yelled Guy "Cheerio!"

The engine of the black pirate seaplane roared into life. The machine swung away from the bullion plane, and tore across the water leaving behind a wake of creamy foam. Then the water slid away from beneath it as Guy pulled gently on the control. The boy wasted no time in climbing.

He roared northwards, no more than a hundred feet above the sea.

Hunched forward in the pilot's seat, he was scanning the sky ahead with anxious eyes. His quarry had not much of a start. Ten minutes at most. It must be possible to overhaul him. And when he did overhaul him, the finding of Von Schaumberg's base would be but a matter of hours, or less.

At the thought, Guy touched the bulging pocket of his black flying coat. There were handcuffs there, and a loaded automatic. He had transferred them from his own pocket before taking off.

For an hour he flew, heading due north. Slowly he began to despair. His quarry must have swung off the northern trail, for there was no sign of him.

Again and again Guy passed his gloved hand across the triplex glass of his goggles, then peered ahead. His head was aching, throbbing intolerably from his scalp wound. But he kept on, flying steadily, hoping against hope.

Then suddenly he stiffened in his seat. Far ahead, a speck in the distant sky, was a machine. Another half hour passed, and Guy had overhauled it sufficiently to make out that it was a black, single-seater sea-plane.

"The pirate—certain!" he cried exultantly.

His eyes moved to the dashboard in front of him. He started. Oil and petrol gauges were now getting low.

"Well, I've got as much fuel as that blighter!" he soliloquised. "I must have, unless the fellow who had this machine came away without filling his tanks, which is absurd! But I can't keep going much longer!"

Another five minutes crept past, and Guy's anxious eyes were more often on his fuel gauges than on Falze.

But Falze must have turned in his seat and sighted the hanger, for, suddenly, the nose of his machine dropped, and, turning in his dive, he came tearing towards him.

Distinctively the boy's hand moved towards the trigger of his synchronised gun. Then he checked the movement. He was banking on his bluff working!

The Tanker!

LIKE a black streak, the pirate machine tore downwards towards Guy. Falze was peering over his cockpit cowl. The young ranger tensed, waiting for the first hostile move. He kept straight on, and his goggle-protected eyes never left the black-clad figure of the oncoming pilot.

Then suddenly he relaxed and laughed aloud behind his leather face-mask. For Falze was waving; waving a gloved hand like an excited, hysterical fool. He roared past Guy, a foot only separating their wing tips, then pulled a sharp wing turn and ranged in alongside the boy.

Guy hunched himself forward in his seat till only the top of his black helmeted head was showing above the cockpit cowl. He shoved up a gloved hand in short, brief greeting. That much was entirely necessary. Then wing-tip to wing-tip, the two machines thundered onwards towards the north.

Do not blame Falze. A far cleverer man than he would have been hoodwinked by the ranger's ruse. For his eyes showed him nought but Larasche's black machine with a slim, black-clad figure in the cockpit. And how was he to know that the features behind the black leather face mask were not those of Larasche?

Again Guy's eyes turned to the fuel gauges on the dashboard in front of him. They were perilously low now, and he knew that he had petrol left for only another twenty minutes at the most.

He squinted across at Falze, who was jerking sideways in his seat, peering ahead past the racing propeller. Guy knew that Falze also must be very short of fuel by now, for the machines were similar in pattern, their design seemingly being modelled on that of the British Siskin Fighting Scout.

Falze suddenly leaned over his fuselage, bawling unintelligible words which were lost in the thunder of the powerful rotary engines. Then he swung a gloved hand outwards towards a point full thirty degrees on his port plane. His foot pressed on the rudder bar, and he altered his course that thirty degrees.

Guy saw ten miles away, on the water, a large oil-tanker, previously hidden from his view by Falze's machine. Falze was obviously heading towards it, and already the nose of his bus was down for a landing.

Grimly the young Ranger followed. He did not know what the next half-hour would hold for him, but he was determined to see the thing through to the end!

(Guy meets with many thrilling adventures in next week's instalment, not the least exciting of which is when he comes in contact with Van Schaumberg himself. What happens? You'll know next Wednesday!)



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Our Weekly Pow-Wow

By
The Editor.

Your Editor welcomes letters from all his readers and him one now. Address it to: The Editor "Nelson Lee Library," Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Right On The Wicket!

THAT'S the accepted record of "The Nelson Lee Library," and, with the mighty E. O. Handforth, efficient and bright-eyed as ever, well in the running, that's where the old paper will always find itself. Our Boat Race yarn for next week is the goods. Nail on to it! March straight into your newsagent's place of business, and tell him that you must have your number of the "N.L.L." Come to think of it, this Boat Race between Putney and Mortlake always tingles the blood, for it stands for the new open-air season, good long days for sports, and the spring. If you ever see the Boat Race, you will never forget the sight. You may only get a glimpse of the white-clad Tritons of the Isis and the Crew pulling like good 'uns, but wherever you are you see the crowd and the fun.

Hard Cheese!

Just at the start of the season, too! A chum Brighton way has had his jigger pinched. I am afraid there is no other word for it. My correspondent had left his machine leaning against a fence while he took a snap with his Kodak. While his back was turned, off went the bike into thin air. It is a mean business. One can't very well wear a jigger round one's neck for safety. You can't, either, explain this mysterious disappearance on the score of sheer absent-mindedness on the part of some fellow strolling that way, and who got it into his silly head that it would be a kindness to give the bicycle a home. There is nothing of that. I trust the police will be on the track of the professional bike-pinchers, who add not a little to the anxiety of a wheelman.

A Day In The Country!

Somehow, nothing sounds better than that. And we are coming to it hard and fast—those jolly runs out into the lanes. A half-holiday ramble is a pleasure not to be sneezed at, whether you walk or ride. Talking about the bike, a London reader asks me for a

short itinerary. As he lives south of the Thames, he cannot do better than aim for Leith Hill. This wonder stretch of Surrey is at its best now. My chum can spin south, via Wimbledon and Esher, turn out of the High Street of that village on the left by the Green, and follow the road past Oxshott to Leatherhead, Dorking, and Holmwood. He will find one or two new roads which resemble gentle switchbacks, where one can free-wheel all the time.

Making a Magazine.

A chum in Birmingham says he and his friends are starting a magazine, but they are put to it for a typewriter. They want to do the thing in style. Worse luck, they have only got 1½d. between the whole crush! Well, I have heard of cheap typers, but I would not trust 'em. These machines will let you down if they can—and they can—just when you have got to the most interesting part. I think my correspondent's best wheeze will be to ask somebody to loan him a machine for an afternoon. Otherwise, he must write out the magazine. I have done this myself. After all, this was the way the worthy old monks of yore carried on in the days when they were the only folks who could write. Everybody else made a mark. Some of them could not even do that!

Best Thanks!

Letters reach me from J. Herman, Tarkastad, South Africa; "Advocate," Natal; Geo. Jones, Botany Bay; P. R. Bhat, Calicut; Milton Jenkin, Stratford, New Zealand; F. Dayman, Wellington, New Zealand; Miss Helen Rewell, Gippsland; "Jockie," Aberdeen.

Free Copies.

I have been asked by Joe Krietzman, of 29, Ernest Street, London, E., to state that, as regards his recent offer of free copies of old "N.L.L.'s," he regrets he could not send them, as promised, to the hundreds of readers who made application to him. This was due

to the unavoidable delay in publishing his notice in the Old Paper, for by the time it appeared he had already disposed of the copies. The offer is now, of course, closed.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

R. J. Robinson, c/o Mrs. Ward, 82, Demison Street, Newtown, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, wishes to exchange stamps with readers anywhere.

Eric Looker, 117, Prospect Road, Newtown Geelong, Victoria, Australia, wishes to obtain Nos. 26-31, new series, N.L.L.

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R. W. Edwards, 100, Main Road, Sydney, nr. Crewe, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere; any subject. Also wants back numbers; is interested in sport, gym. work and football.

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tria, Prussia and South America. He would also like to hear from a Dover correspondent. All letters answered.

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Jack Bailey Box 154, Poverty Bay Club, Gisborne, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere.

R. Buckley, Solenne, 10, Park View Villas, Hove, Sussex, wishes to correspond with readers in U.S.A., Tasmania and Japan, interested in stamp collecting.

J. Waldron, 164, Kyriwicks Lane, Sparkbrook, Birmingham, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere, especially Africa and Canada.

Kyle Murray, 13, Rhyl Avenue, Wayville, South Australia, wishes to hear from members in Adelaide who will help him to form a club. He also wants to correspond with readers anywhere.

Syd G. Thornton, Box 156, Longreach, Western Queensland, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere; also wants members for the Australian (Ausworld) Correspondence Club; interested in travel, stamps, photography, etc.

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