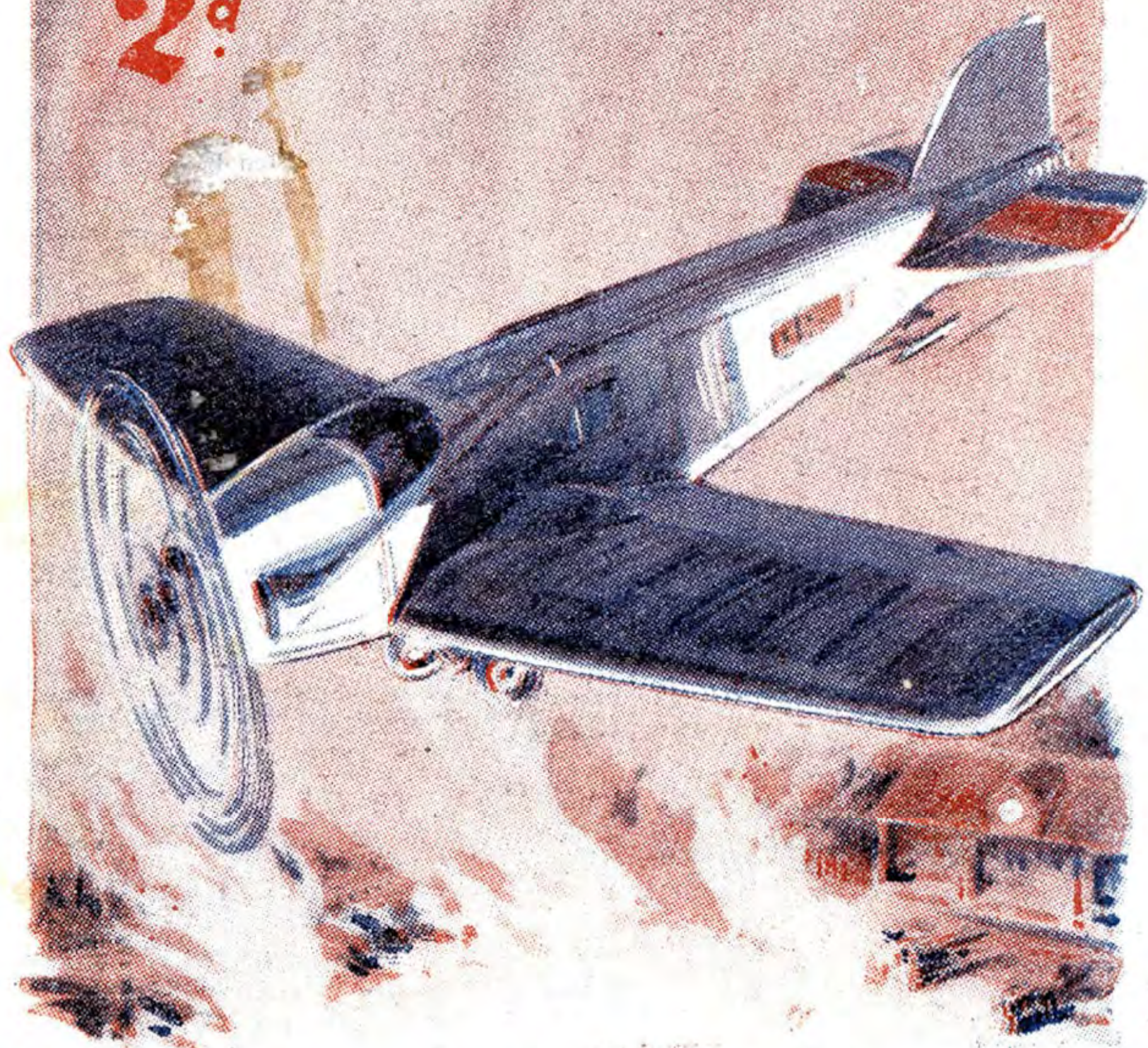


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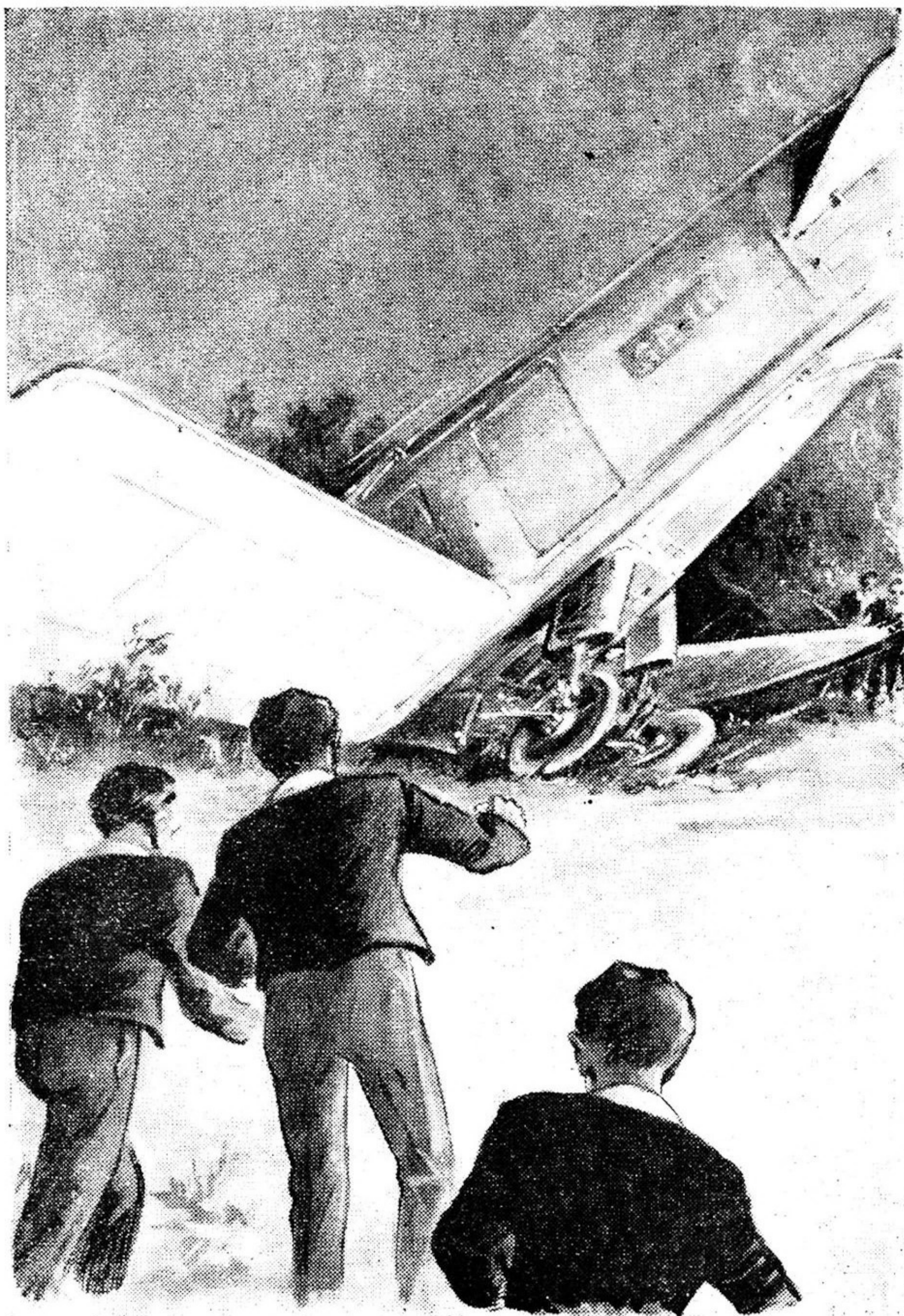
ATLANTIC FLYERS AT ST FRANK'S!

An enthralling story of school life and adventure
featuring the Chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 109,

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

June 2nd, 1928.



The machine charged at the fence. There was a dull crash—a splintering, shattering sound. Then, with a slow, deliberate movement, she tipped forward on her nose, and at last came to a standstill—her under-carriage smashed, her tail sticking high into the air!

A Unique Long Complete School Yarn!

ATLANTIC FLYERS AT ST. FRANK'S !



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

The news that Archie Glenthorne's two brothers are to attempt to break the world's non-stop flight record by flying from Canada to England is received with excitement by the St. Frank's juniors; that excitement increases when it is known that the flyers intend to land in Glenthorne Park, for Glenthorne Park is near St. Frank's, and the juniors will thus have a chance of welcoming the intrepid brothers—if they are successful. This intensely enthralling story will hold you breathless.—Ed.

CHAPTER 1.

The Man of the Hour!

"**H**ERE he is!"

A great shout went up from the gateway of St. Frank's as an open motor-car hove into sight down the lane.

Remove fellows by the dozen ran out and waved their hands; others pulled their caps off, and cheered. Fourth-Formers and Third-Formers came running from all the Houses, excited and noisy.

Even the seniors forgot their dignity to the extent of walking rapidly in the direction of the gates. Most of them were looking flushed and eager, and the atmosphere of the old Triangle was tense with subdued excitement.

"Hurrah!"

"Yes—yes—it's him!"

"Oh, good man!"

The new arrival was evidently somebody of paramount importance. It was the first day at St. Frank's after the brief Whitsun holiday, and the school hadn't settled down yet. In fact, there were still a large number of juniors and seniors to come. It was afternoon—nearly tea-time—and the weather was blazingly hot.

"He's here, you chaps!" went up a great shout.

"Oh, good egg!"

The big car drew nearer, and the chauffeur slowed down considerably as he approached the noisy, clamouring mob. The car was a powerful one, quite open, and sitting in the rear was a solitary passenger. He appeared to be arriving at St. Frank's in state.

Yet he did not seem to be particularly happy.

There was a worried frown on his brow, and his eyes were eloquent of mental tension; anxiety was written on his features.

The chauffeur glanced round.

"Shall I drive straight in, sir?" he asked hurriedly.

"Eh?" said the passenger, with a start. "Drive in? Oh, I see what you mean! Absolutely!"

And then the new arrival caught sight of the shouting crowd, and he fell back with a blank look on his face.

"Good gad!" he ejaculated feebly.

Archibald Winston Derek Glenthorne, of the Remove, was more upset than he could say. He guessed, in a moment, that these fellows were waiting for him. He had been half afraid of it—although never, in his wildest dreams, had he pictured such a demonstration as this. He had simply been horrified at the thought of the juniors crowding round him, and bombarding him with questions.

"Hurrah!"

"Here's Archie at last!"

It was by no means usual for Archie Glenthorne to receive this ovation when he arrived at the old school. Indeed, this was the first time in history that it had ever happened, and Archie was positively limp. He could only sit in the car, staring blankly through his eyeglass.

The car came to a halt just outside the gateway, for it was impossible for the chauffeur to drive through. The way was barred by the mass of excited Removites and Fourth-Formers and fags.

"What-ho!" said Archie, pulling himself together and standing up. "Odds cyclones and hurricanes! I mean to say, is it absolutely necessary to make all this dashed din, old pippins? I mean——"

"Grab him!"

"Yes, rather! All together, you chaps!"

"Hurrah!"

Archie opened his mouth to speak, but he seemed to be stricken with lockjaw. He was fascinated by the sight of those juniors, swarming round the car like an angry sea round an open boat. They surged and swayed, and now they were overflowing into the car itself.

Archie, as usual, was looking very spick and span. His Etons fitted his elegant person perfectly; his collar was spotless.

Indeed, he had felt—not without reason—that he was a credit to the countryside as he had driven over to St. Frank's. And now, to his horror, the entire Junior School was leaping at him like a pack of wolves at a timid rabbit.

"Young gentlemen—please!" shouted the chauffeur desperately. "The car! The paintwork——"

"Come on, Archie—we've been waiting for you!" yelled Fullwood.

He seized Archie Glenthorne by one arm and tried to pull the elegant junior out of the car. He was assisted by Russell and De Valerie and several others.

Unfortunately, Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey and about six more West House fellows were pulling at Archie from the other side. He swayed to and fro, and there were two or three ominous rending sounds.

"Odds frightfulness and horrors!" Archie gasped frantically. "I mean to say——"

"Hurrah!"

At last, one of the parties succeeded in yanking the unfortunate junior free. He went tumbling over the side of the car. He thudded to the ground, with a dozen juniors swarming over him. His hat went one way, his collar came unbuttoned, his monocle was crushed to a thousand fragments on the ground.

"It's all right, Archie—no damage done!" sang out Fullwood cheerily. "Good man! Where's your fist! I want to be the first chap to shake hands with you!"

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie, in a feeble whisper.

He was dazed and bewildered. Somehow, he had been dragged to his feet, and now, the centre of a roaring mob, he was hustled into the Triangle. A crowd of Fourth-Formers came surging up like a tidal wave. The Removites gave way under it, and the luckless Archie was down again.

"Hallo! Where's he got to?" yelled De Valerie.

But Archie had disappeared; he was somewhere beneath the pile of Fourth-Formers, but at last he was found. And there could be no denying that his appearance was marred to an extent.

His hat had gone, his hair was untidy and ruffled, and at least a dozen jagged rents were gaping in his Etons. He was smothered from head to foot in dirt, his collar had entirely disappeared, and one of his shoes had got torn off in the scrimmage.

Taking it altogether, Archie Glenthorne was feeling a bit doubtful regarding the meaning of this reception!



CHAPTER 2.

Somebody of Importance!

"HURRAH!"

The cheers were ringing out louder than ever, and the scene in the Triangle was an extraordinary one. There stood Archie, in the centre of an enormous yelling mob.

If he were capable of thinking at all—which was rather doubtful—he had a vague idea that the entire Junior School had a grudge against him. For some mysterious reason, they were intent upon destroying him by the simple expedient of tearing him limb from limb, and, being a peaceful sort of fellow, Archie wondered what he had done to deserve this drastic treatment.

"S.O.S.!" he said bleakly. "Laddies, kindly send for the good old ambulance! Good gad! Be good enough to get it over, and shove me out of ag.!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all right, Archie—the fellows only got a bit excited!" said Nipper, the cheery skipper of the Remove. "By Jove! You're

in a bit of a mess, too! Here, you chaps, cool down a bit!"

"We want to ask him about the flight!" yelled Boots of the Fourth.

"Never mind about the flight now," replied Nipper. "Let's brush him down first."

About a dozen fellows came forward to brush Archie down. He was in imminent danger of being knocked insensible. At last, however, the first excitement exhausted itself, and Archie was dusted down and tidied up generally. But, even after this treatment, he still looked more or less like a scarecrow.

"Well, well!" said Vivian Travers. "When you come to think of it, dear old fellows, it's a bit of a dirty trick on Archie. Don't you think that the welcome was a trifle too boisterous?"

"Well, he is in a bit of a mess!" admitted De Valerie.

"Oh, rather!" ejaculated Archie, gazing down at his person in horror. "Good gad! I mean to say—a bit of a mess! If it's all the same to you, laddies, I should describe it as a foul murkiness. I mean, of all the poisonous outrages——"

"They didn't mean it, old man!" laughed Nipper. "But everybody wanted to shake you by the hand at once, or to thump you on the back. You mustn't forget that you're the man of the hour!"

"Eh?" said Archie blankly. "I mean, what? The man of the hour?"

"Absolutely a personage of the highest importance!" said Nipper, nodding.

"Absolutely not!"

"My dear chap, there's nobody at St. Frank's who counts for two cents compared to you!" said Travers. "Even the Head doesn't get a look in with you!"

"Good gad!" said Archie, in bewilderment. "But why? That is to say, how? I mean, what, exactly, is this spot of bother?"

"Come off it, old son!" grinned Fullwood. "You know jolly well why you're so popular to-day. What about your two brothers?"

"Oh, rather!" said Archie, with a start. "Good old Bertie, what? And priceless old George! Absolutely! A couple of lively lads, as it were!"

"You're their brother, and you belong to the Remove—so we all feel a personal interest in the whole flight," said Nipper, by way of explanation. "That's why the fellows are giving you such a welcome, Archie!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Give him another cheer, you fellows!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Archie!"

The astonished Archie gazed round at the excited crowd.

"But I say, dash it!" he protested mildly. "I mean to say, dash it, with knobs on! If it comes to that, dash it, with various oscillations! What's it all about? What, exactly, have I done?"

"It's reflected glory, Archie!" chuckled Nipper.

"What priceless rot!" protested Archie indignantly. "Odds frightfulness and folly! I mean to say, the whole dashed affair is poisonously off-side! Not to say absolutely l.b.w.!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You crafty old bounder!" said Fullwood, digging Archie in the ribs. "Why didn't you tell us about it?"

"Eh? Tell you about it?" gasped the swell of the Ancient House. "Oh, I see what you mean! You mean, why didn't I tell you about it?"

"Yes, you rascal!"

"But, my dear old chappies, I've only just got here!" said Archie feebly. "I mean, I've only trickled in about two minutes ago."

"But didn't you know about it before the holidays?"

"Not absolutely," replied Archie. "Of course, there were certain rumours dashing about here, and dashing about there. I gathered that old Bertie was getting up some sort of stunt, but I didn't think much of it. It wasn't until I went home for Whitsun that I absolutely knew the good old truth."

"Well, let us know all about it!" said De Valerie firmly. "We've got you now, Archie, and we're not going to let you go until we've heard all the details."

"But look here, I'm not absolutely on the spot, really," said Archie, in protest. "That is, I'm not here at all!"

"What do you mean, you ass?"

"Well, the fact is, I've got special leave," explained Archie. "My people are over at Glenthorne Manor, near Bannington, and the Head has given me permission to stay there until Bertie and George roll up. I only came over this afternoon just to say 'Pip, pip!' and so forth, to the populace."

"And the populace nearly slaughters you in its enthusiasm!" grinned Nipper. "The fellows were jolly careless, Archie, but I'm sure you'll forgive them."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie, beaming. "Absolutely! But you'll have to let me dash indoors, so that I can repair the frightful damage."

"No fear!" said Fullwood firmly. "You're staying here, Archie, until we've heard everything! Grab him, you chaps! Don't let him go!"

"We won't!" said half a dozen firm voices.



CHAPTER 3.

Archie Explains!

ARCHIE GLEN-THORNE made a hollow, gurgling sound, not unlike the last pint of water

going down the bath plug-hole.

"Oh, I say!" he murmured feebly.

"Pull your socks up, Archie—we're waiting!" said Vivian Travers. "The sooner you tell us the details, the sooner we'll let you go."

"We read all about it days ago, in the papers," said Church, of Study D. "Old Handforth pointed out a big headline in the 'Daily Mail,' and——"

"Never mind Handforth!" interrupted Buster Boots. "He's left St. Frank's, anyhow, and we're not interested in him. Carry on, Archie!"

"But, dash it, I don't know what to say!" protested Archie. "All you chappies seem to know the whole dashed business, so where do I come in?"

"More than a week ago, we read in the papers that your two brothers were preparing for an Atlantic flight," said Nipper. "And this morning every newspaper announces that the flight has actually commenced. Every placard we've seen to-day says 'Another Atlantic Flight Starts,' or 'Intrepid Brothers Off.' Naturally, we're jolly interested."

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie, glowing. "In the good old circs., I suppose you would be. I mean, I'm a St. Frank's chappie, and Bertie and George are both Old Boys. So, I mean, it's a sort of St. Frank's affair, what?"

It was not surprising that the school was agog with excitement.

Days earlier, while all the fellows had been at home, they had read the first reports of the latest attempt to fly the Atlantic. Captain Bertram Glenthorne, of the Royal Air Force, was the chief pilot, and his brother, George Glenthorne, the well-known civil pilot, of cross-Channel service fame, was to accompany him. And that very morning the newspapers had been full of the flight. It was reported that the machine had successfully taken off, and had started on its long, perilous trip.

"Your brothers are out to beat the record, aren't they?" asked Nipper keenly.

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie, not without pride. "I mean to say, Bertie is a pretty reckless sort of chappie, in his own way. You see, the dashed machine is one of his own invention—although I believe George helped him here and there, so to speak."

"Yes, we read that," said Tommy Watson. "It's a special machine—designed entirely by your brothers, Archie. By jingo! I hope they succeed!"

"Hear, hear!"

Archie smiled confidently.

"What ho!" he observed. "I mean to say, dash it! Kindly remember, laddies, that there's absolutely no doubt about it. Bertie and George will appear in the offing to-morrow afternoon. I mean, to think anything else would be positively ghastly."

"All the same, Archie, they've taken on a pretty big job," said Travers soberly. "Flying the Atlantic is becoming pretty common

nowadays, but your brothers are attempting even more than that."

"Well, of course, they're starting from Lake Superior," agreed Archie, a little furrow appearing on his brow. "Absolutely, old lads! And Lake Superior, I mean, is a fairish distance away."

"Something over four thousand miles," said Nipper.

"Good gad! As much as that?" asked Archie, with concern. "The fact is, I never reckoned up, don't you know! Well, anyhow, Bertie and George mean to smash the good old record. Their scheme is to fly direct from ~~back~~ to England. Of course, they'll do it," he added confidently.

"Well, you can bet that we shall all be anxious until to-morrow afternoon," said Fullwood. "That's when they're expected, isn't it?"

"Well, of course, there may be a brief delay," said Archie, looking worried. "It's just possible that the dear old boys won't trickle over the horizon until five or six o'clock in the evening."

"And is it true that the machine is going to land in Glenthorne Park?" asked Harry Gresham eagerly.

"Oh, rather!"

"By Jove, that's good!" said Gresham. "Then the papers were right, you chaps! The Atlantic 'plane is coming down within the grounds of Glenthorne Manor!"

"Hurrah!"

"It was Bertie's idea," said Archie. "He thought it would be rather priceless if he brought the old air flivver down into the park. Of course, there was some talk of him making for Croydon, but he wouldn't think of it. His scheme was to start from ~~there~~, and come home."

This, indeed, was one reason why the flight was attracting so much attention and interest. There was something romantic in the thought of the two brothers winging their way across the Atlantic—on their way home. Not home in the wide sense of the word, but home in its true meaning. Upon getting to England, the brothers would descend in that picturesque park where they had spent their own boyhood—and where they knew every inch of the ground like a book.

This, of course, was another reason for the general excitement at St. Frank's.

For Glenthorne Park was only a couple of miles away, on the outskirts of Bannington. And there wasn't a fellow in the old school who hadn't decided to be gazing skywards at this very hour on the morrow. For it was a certainty that if the Atlantic flyers succeeded in their ambitious attempt, they would fly directly over St. Frank's on their way to Glenthorne Park. It made the great flight personally interesting to every St. Frank's boy.

The school would have been interested enough, even if the intrepid airmen had planned to land at Croydon. But it made

all the difference when everybody knew that the machine was to be expected right over the school itself.

And the one question in every mind at St. Frank's was—would the daring brothers succeed?



CHAPTER 4.

Gone, But Not Forgotten!

THERE was something reassuring in Archie's supreme confidence. If anybody expressed a doubt regarding the flight, he merely smiled, and said that everything would be all serene-oh. Never for an instant would Archie confess that he was troubled by any misgivings.

"Well, I wouldn't be so jolly sure!" said Gore-Pearce unpleasantly. "A good many Atlantic flyers have started out, and have never been heard of again!"

"Shut up, you cad!" said Fullwood hotly.

"Mustn't I give my opinion now?" demanded Gore-Pearce, with a glare. "You know as well as I do that I'm speaking the truth! Even the newspapers say that it's a perfectly crazy idea to make an attempt to fly from ~~Paris~~ to England. Glenthorne's brothers have practically committed suicide!"

"Just what I think!" said Merrell, of the East House. "In fact, any man who tries to fly the Atlantic at all is a fool!"

Archie's eyes gleamed.

"Kindly repeat that, you poisonous blighter!" he said, moving nearer to Merrell.

The East House cad had no reason to fear the dandified Archie.

"Of course I'll repeat it!" he sneered. "Only fools try to fly the Atlantic!"

"What-ho!" said Archie. "A certain amount of assault and battery is absolutely indicated! Shove up your dashed paws, you dashed rotter!"

Crash!

Archie's fist thudded into Merrell's face, and Merrell went over backwards with a wild howl. Never had he believed that Archie could possess such a devastating drive.

"Good man!" shouted Pitt. "Give Gore-Pearce one while you're at it, Archie!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie, whirling round.

But Claude Gore-Pearce had made himself scarce.

"The blighters aren't worth bothering about, dear old teapots," said Archie contemptuously. "Besides, when you come to absolutely think of it, you can't blame them. Two or three of the dashed newspapers have said that Bertie and George are never likely to appear again."

"They're made of the right stuff, Archie—and St. Frank's is proud of them," said Nipper quietly. "The very fact that they're Old Boys is good enough for the school. They're your brothers, too—and that's why

the Remove is so jolly keen about the flight."

"It's all-British, too," said Fullwood. "A British aeroplane, a British engine, and with two British pilots. It simply can't fail!"

"That," said Archie, "is absolutely the stuff to tune in, old cheese!"

"Talking about tuning in, what about the wireless to-night?" asked Reggie Pitt. "I'm going to get my set in working order, anyhow. There's bound to be some news about the flight in the nine o'clock bulletin this evening."

"By jingo, yes!"

"How many sets are there here?"

"There won't be enough to go round!" said Fullwood. "I'll bet there'll be a big rush just before bed-time!"

"Rather!"

Willy Handforth, of the Third, grinned cheerfully.

"I've got a big set in my study," he remarked. "I expect it'll be the only one to work, anyhow. You chaps can rely upon me to give you the latest news."

"Hallo, Willy!" said Nipper, with a nod. "And that reminds me. I suppose your major has gone to St. Jim's, eh?"

"He's there by now," replied Willy, with a chuckle.

"You don't seem to be very upset about it."

"Upset?" grinned Willy. "Why should I be upset? You know what an ass Ted is—and you know how obstinate he is. He made up his mind to go to St. Jim's, and wild horses couldn't keep him away from the place. But he always learns in time."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing much," replied the leader of the fags. "But if I were a betting chap, I'd wager my best Sunday topper that Ted will be back here again before the end of term."

"I'm not interested in your Sunday topper, but I'll bet you a level quid, dear old fellow," said Travers genially.

"Sorry; nothing doing," replied Willy.

"Well, that's a relief," said Travers, with a chuckle. "As a matter of fact, my opinion is very much like yours, dear old fellow. Handy is gone, but not forgotten. And one of these days he'll turn up again—as large as life, and twice as noisy!"

In the general excitement of the Atlantic flight, and of Archie Glenthorne's close connection with it, hardly any of the fellows had given a thought to the great Edward Oswald Handforth, of the Remove. Church and McClure, Handforth's old chums, were perhaps the only two fellows who had their former leader constantly in their thoughts. Everything at St. Frank's seemed dull and drab to them without Handforth. But, no doubt, this feeling would soon pass.

"We saw him to-day," said Church glumly. "In fact, he came round to my place in his Austin, to say good-bye. We had a last-minute argument with him, but it wasn't any good."

Church and McClure moved off, and Handforth was instantly dismissed from the conversation. Everybody started talking about Archie's brothers again. There were all sorts of conjectures as to where the aeroplane would be at this particular moment, and what sort of weather it would encounter out in the Atlantic.

Archie protested that he would have to be leaving. He had only come over to say, "How do you do?" to all his friends in the Remove. As he had special leave of absence, he would remain at home—at Glenthorne Manor—until his brothers had arrived, or until— But Archie positively refused to think of any other contingency.

At least, so he told himself.

Actually, he was filled with misgiving. He kept a smiling face, and his eyes glowed with confidence; but, in his heart, he was anxious. He was restless with a gnawing uneasiness. His two brothers—his only brothers—were risking their lives on this great adventure.

Even now they were winging their way through the air, *en route* across the Atlantic.

Small wonder that Archie Glenthorne was looking haggard behind his mask of serenity.



CHAPTER 5.

Growing Excitement!

NEWSPAPERS was the one thing that the school wanted that evening. And since it was difficult to obtain evening papers, the seniors and juniors alike relied upon the B.B.C. There was scarcely a fellow in the school who wasn't determined to listen in at six-thirty and at nine.

Archie Glenthorne had managed to escape—mainly because it was tea-time, and most of the fellows were hungry and thirsty. So Archie got back into the family car, and was driven home. He was glad that he had come, but it was a relief to him to be off, so that he could change into respectable attire. Besides, he wanted to be with his father and mother. It was natural that he should desire to be at home during this period of suspense.

For there could be no denying that it was a terrible ordeal for Colonel Glenthorne, and for Archie's mother. They were proud of their two sons, but their state of mind was pitiable.

There could be no question of the daredevil nature of the attempted flight. It was a grave enough risk to fly from New York to England, or to Paris. But Captain Glenthorne had started from as far inland as Lake Superior, in Canada. His object was to beat the non-stop record.

In Study C, in the Ancient House, while Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West busied themselves with the tea, Nipper worked hard at the wireless set.

It was quite a good one—a three-valve receiver, with a loud speaker. Bournemouth, of course, could be tuned in with ease, and it was equally possible to get the Daventry high-power station—5XX.

Nipper was now fixing the Daventry coils, and seeing that the batteries were in good order. Dance music was soon flooding Study C. Incidentally, that same dance music was to be heard in practically every corridor and passage of the school—in every house. For everybody else was tuning in, and seeing that their sets were ready.

Never before had wireless been so popular at St. Frank's.

"Well, that's that," said Nipper, at length. "She's O.K., you fellows. Now we'll wait until half-past six. There's bound to be some news in the first bulletin."

"It'll be a frightful frost, dear old boy, if we hear that the 'plane has come down somewhere between Lake Superior and the American coast," said Sir Montie, shaking his head. "It would be a shockin' blow to Archie, too."

"My dear old ass, there's no need to anticipate," chuckled Nipper. "Sling over some of that toast, and let's open that pot of chicken-and-ham paste."

The meal commenced, and the chums of Study C could not help noticing that everything seemed strangely tranquil and peaceful. For some little time they wondered at this—and then Nipper chuckled.

"Have you noticed how quiet everything is?" he asked.

"Begad, yes!" said Tregellis-West. "I was just thinking about it, dear old boy. I was, really!"

"Handy isn't here this term!" said Nipper significantly, as he pointed to the wall which separated them from Study D.

"Oh, that's it, then!" remarked Tommy Watson. "I couldn't quite make it out, you know."

They proceeded with their tea for a minute or two, and then Nipper got to his feet.

"I'm going to pop next door," he explained. "Church and McClure are probably feeling a bit lonely—so we'll invite them in, eh?"

"Rather!" said the others.

So Nipper went and looked into Study D. Things were very much as he had expected. Church and McClure were sitting at the table, silent and forlorn. The study looked extraordinarily neat and tidy, and the quietness of the place was deadening.

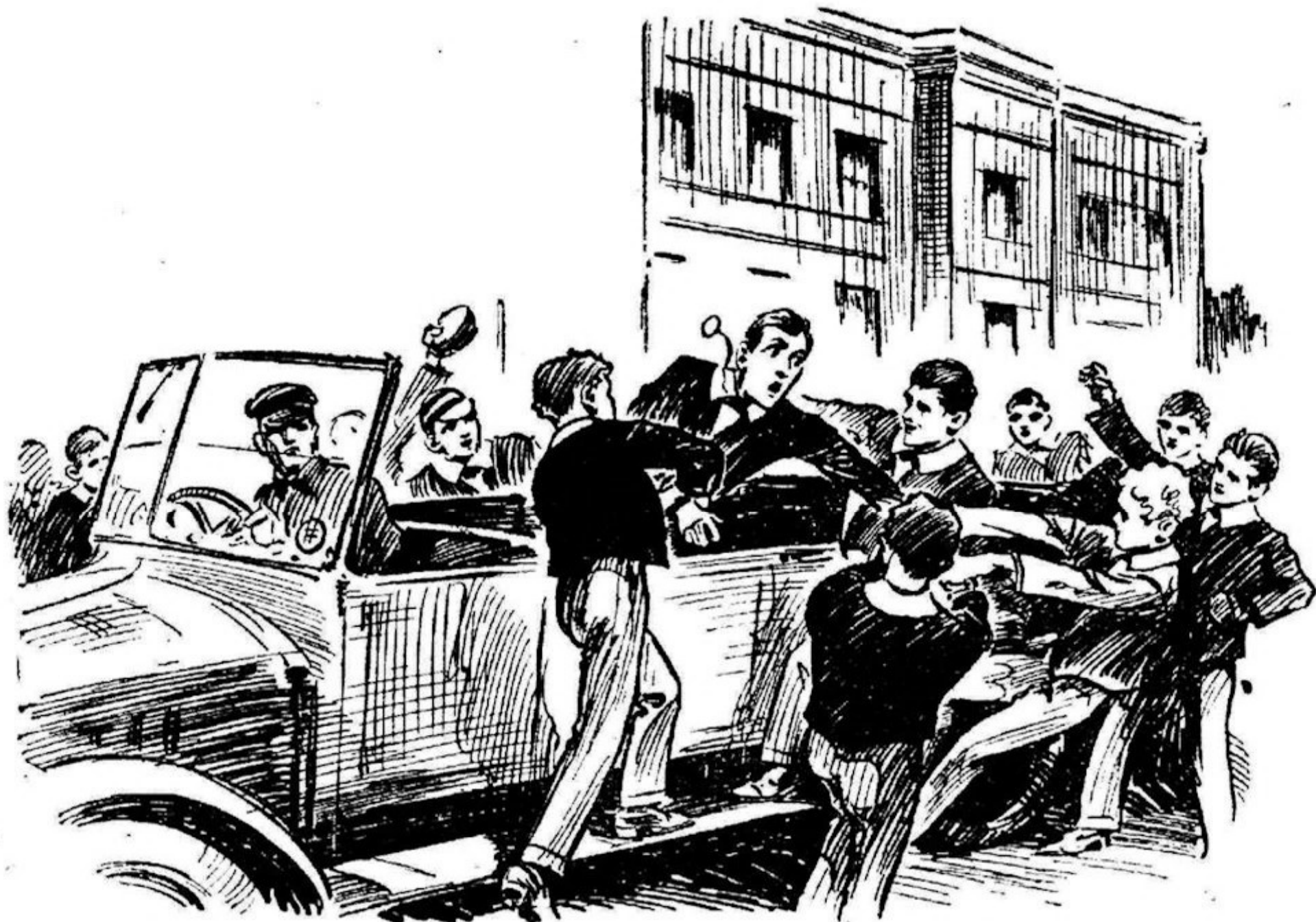
"Hallo, Nipper!" said Church dully. "Want to borrow a plate or something?"

"No, I rather thought about borrowing you chaps," said Nipper. "Why not come into Study C, and have tea there? You'll be as welcome as the flowers in May."

"Thanks all the same, but I think we'll stay here," said McClure, looking up.

"We've nearly finished tea, anyhow."

"Oh, what's the good of pretending?" growled Church. "The fact is, Nipper, we're thundering worried about old Handy!"



Archie Glenythorne swayed to and fro as the excited juniors tried to drag him from the car in two different directions. "Odds frightfulness and horrors!" gasped the unfortunate Archie.

"Why worry about him?" asked Nipper. "He'll be all right at St. Jim's."

"But what about us?" demanded Church. "We've grown so used to him that we shan't know where we are without him!"

"You'll be all right after the first week," said Nipper soothingly. "Besides, it won't be so very long before Handy's back again. I agree with Travers. I don't believe that Handy will be content to stay at St. Jim's. He only went there out of obstinacy, and when he gets homesick for St. Frank's he'll get round his pater to send him here again."

Church and McClure looked eagerly at the Remove skipper.

"Do you really think so?" asked Church, with gleaming eyes.

"I'm sure of it."

"Good man!" said Church. "By jingo! I hope you're right, Nipper! It'll be absolutely rotten for us here, without Handy."

"Well, don't forget to come into the next study if you want to hear the wireless," said Nipper, as he prepared to depart.

"Blow the wireless!" growled Mac.

"Don't you want to listen in to the news bulletin?"

"Why should we want to hear the news bulletin?"

"You ass!" shouted Nipper. "Have you forgotten Archie's brothers?"

Church and McClure both started.

"Oh, yes!" said Church. "Of course! Naturally, we shall want to hear the latest, Nipper!"

The Remove captain went out, shaking his head. In their misery over the missing Handforth, Church and McClure had forgotten all about the great Atlantic flight! But this was only a brief phase, probably. Within a day, or two, the chums of Study D would grow accustomed to the new order of things.

But it was difficult. Everything was so quiet and still. Study D reminded Church and McClure of a tomb. They could get no rest of any kind. They were like soldiers returning from the din of the battlefield, unable to sleep or rest in a quiet atmosphere.

But there surely ought to have been some consolation in the thought that they would henceforth go about with normal faces. During Handforth's reign, this had been sheerly impossible.



CHAPTER 6.

The Latest News!

PIP-pip-pip-pip-pip-pip! Six times it sounded from the loud speaker in Study C—the time signal from Greenwich, and all voices were hushed. Study C was packed to suffocation.

Nipper & Co. were in the room, to say nothing of Fullwood and Russell, De Valerie

and Somerton, Harry Gresham, Duncan and Brett. Out in the passage, a crowd of other juniors were pressing round the door. At the window, an overflow mob of fags was tensely waiting.

"There's only the weather report first," remarked Church, in a whisper. "There's not much of interest in that."

"Isn't there?" said Fullwood. "The weather's jolly important! They generally say what the conditions are like out in the Atlantic——"

"Shush!"

All voices were stilled as a crackling came from the loud speaker.

"This is London and Daventry calling the British Isles," came the voice of the B.B.C. announcer, as clearly as though he stood in the very room. "Here is a summary of to-day's weather——"

It appeared that while the south coast had basked in brilliant sunshine, North Wales and the north-west coast generally, had suffered from dull periods, accompanied by local rain. In Scotland, the unfortunate inhabitants hadn't seen the sun once.

The weather forecast followed, and everybody listened intently. The conditions, on the whole, were fair. There was an anti-cyclone somewhere out in the Atlantic, but its exact locality had been mislaid. There were some unpleasant rumours regarding a depression, and it was by no means certain that the fine weather would last.

When last heard of, the depression had been knocking about somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Azores, and it was quite on the cards that the beastly thing would make up its mind to pay a visit to England. Anyhow, the Air Ministry was quite certain that local thunderstorms were probable during the next twenty-four hours, and that the weather, on the whole, was showing a tendency to degenerate.

Taking everything into consideration, the weather report wasn't any too cheering.

"Oh, we can't take too much notice of it," said Nipper, during a brief pause at the studio. "Anyhow, there's no news of any storm-centre!"

"It's beginning to rain out here!" sang out one of the fags suddenly.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Dry up, you silly Third-Formers!"

The fags were exaggerating: one or two heat drops, certainly, had descended, and the sky was looking rather dull. But to say that it was raining was hardly true.

If any visitor had happened to pause in the Triangle just then, he would have been struck by the tomb-like silence which had descended over the entire school. Instead of the usual shouts of laughter, and general confusion of voices, there was nothing but stillness.

In all the Houses, the fellows were collected at the various wireless sets, waiting for the B.B.C. announcer to carry on.

"First news bulletin!" said the voice out of the loud speaker in Study C. "The Glenthorne Brothers' Atlantic Flight."

A quiver ran through the crowd, and all ears were strained.

"Here we are!" went up a murmur.

"Dry up, you idiots!"

"The Glenthorne brothers' plane was definitely identified as it passed over the town of Conway, New Hampshire," continued the announcer. "There is also a report from Camden, Maine, that the machine was seen heading out over the Atlantic shortly afterwards. It would seem, therefore, that the Atlantic flyers are on their true course, and heading for Nova Scotia and the Atlantic. So far, no information has been received regarding wireless messages from the aeroplane itself."

"Isn't that rummy?" murmured Travers. "I thought Archie said the machine was equipped with wireless?"

"So it is!" said Nipper. "Look out! He's talking again!"

"Air Ministry experts are somewhat concerned owing to the lack of wireless messages from the Atlantic plane," went on the announcer. "It is assumed that the apparatus is not in working order, for Captain Glenthorne, prior to the start, had stated that he would be in constant communication during the flight. The weather over Newfoundland and the western Atlantic generally is fairly favourable, although there are some indications of heavy clouds and fog. Very great interest, on both sides of the Atlantic, is being taken in this daring flight. All our listeners, we are sure, will join us in wishing God-speed to these intrepid brothers. Further news, if any is available, will be given in the nine o'clock bulletin this evening."

A babble of voices broke out a moment later—for the announcer switched off on to some news concerning a prominent Cabinet Minister's visit to Birmingham, and St. Frank's, at the moment, was no more interested in Birmingham than it was in the Cabinet Minister, and every wireless set in the school was switched off.

"Well, it's all right—as far as it goes," said Nipper, trying to squeeze out of the study. "Phew! Air! It's like an oven in this giddy study! Let's get outside!"

Apparently others had come to the same decision, for, within a minute, the Triangle was thronged. And everybody was talking about the latest reports.

"Well, they haven't come down—and that's one thing," remarked Fullwood. "They've been seen over New Hampshire, and over Maine, and by this time they must be well out into the Atlantic. But it's a bit rummy about their wireless. If the set isn't working it means that we shan't get any news at all—until the machine is seen somewhere over Ireland, perhaps."

"By jingo! That'll be pretty rough on Archie's people!" said Pitt, with a whistle. "Just imagine their feelings, you chaps! What an ordeal for them—what a time of suspense!"

It was, indeed, grave news to hear that the wireless installation on the cross Atlantic plane had broken down. For it meant that

if anything went wrong *en route*, the Glenthorne brothers would not be able to communicate with shipping, and they would be unable to send out any S.O.S. It also meant that everybody at home would be waiting anxiously and perhaps apprehensively.

St. Frank's, at all events, was already beginning to feel the strain.

CHAPTER 7.

Vivian Travers Goes to the Head!



AT nine o'clock, when the second news bulletin was due on the wireless, St. Frank's repeated its six-thirty performance.

Every study which boasted of radio was crowded. There was little further news regarding the Atlantic flight, but an announcement was made which created general interest.

There was nothing further to report regarding the flyers—except for an unverified story of a machine being seen, high up, somewhere over Nova Scotia. No wireless messages had come from the 'plane itself, and its whereabouts was now a complete mystery.

This, of course, was contrary to all expectations. Captain Glenthorne, before the start, had declared that he would communicate with ships *en route*, and give his position as frequently as possible. There was only one explanation—the aeroplane's wireless had broken down. But Captain Glenthorne was evidently carrying on with the flight, wireless or no wireless. It was an indication of his intrepid spirit. For many airmen, in such circumstances, would have landed before venturing out across the wide Atlantic.

"There is one announcement to make of special interest to Daventry listeners," said the B.B.C. man. "Such general interest is being taken in this flight that a further report will be given to-morrow morning, at ten o'clock, with the Daventry shipping forecast. The latest news regarding the Glenthorne brothers' attempt, if any, will be transmitted then."

And that, as Travers put it, was that.

For to-night, St. Frank's had to be satisfied. But it was something to know that there was a distinct probability of further news at ten o'clock in the morning.

"But what's the good of it?" demanded Fullwood disgustedly. "We shan't be able to listen in!"

"Why not?" asked Church.

"Lessons, old scout," said Nipper, shaking his head. "At ten o'clock, we shall all be in our class-rooms, working."

"We shall be in our class-rooms, but I doubt if we shall be working," remarked Travers. "For the love of Samson! How can anybody expect the school to work to-morrow?"

"Well, perhaps some of the masters will listen in—or a prefect or two," said Watson hopefully. "Then they'll buzz the news round."

"I'm thinking about to-morrow afternoon, too," said Reggie Pitt, frowning. "It isn't a half-holiday, and we shan't be free until the Atlantic flyers are due. What a frost it would be if the machine flew over the school while we were still in the class-rooms!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Gresham.

St. Frank's went to bed that night fairly settled in mind. There was some slight cause for misgiving in the news that had come through, but there was no need to feel any alarm. At least, there had been no bad reports.

Everybody was thrilled, too.

Seniors and juniors alike had taken this particular flight to their own hearts. They claimed it as a St. Frank's "stunt." Firstly, the Glenthorne brothers were old boys; secondly, Archie Glenthorne himself was in the Remove, and, thirdly, the 'plane was due to pass over the school, and to come down a couple of miles away.

Never, in the school's history, had the juniors jumped out of bed so promptly as they did on the following morning, when the rising bell clanged out. In every dormitory it was the same. The fellows dashed out of bed, and sped to the windows.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tommy Watson, as he looked.

Nipper and Tregellis-West joined him at the window. They beheld a dull sky, with high, threatening clouds. No rain was falling, and there was scarcely a breath of wind. The air was close, considering the early hour.

"It's not so bad," said Nipper, as he inspected the conditions. "Might have been a lot worse, anyhow."

"Yes, but it's pretty rotten weather for flying," said Watson anxiously. "If it's cloudy like this all over the Atlantic, Glenthorne's brothers might have an awful time finding their way."

Nipper grinned.

"I believe there are such things as compasses, to say nothing of all sorts of direction-finding instruments," he remarked. "You mustn't get the wind up over nothing, Tommy, my son. The weather doesn't look any too good, but these clouds may be only local."

Before anybody else was down, Vivian Travers strolled out of his dormitory, and leisurely made his way downstairs. He had awakened before the rising bell, and had immediately dressed.

Now, as cool and collected as ever, he went through Big Arch, crossed Inner Court, and presented himself at the Head's front door. Travers was as bold as brass when he respectfully asked for a brief interview with Dr. Stafford.

Phipps had answered the door, and Phipps shook his head.

"The headmaster isn't down yet, Master Travers," he said reproachfully. "It is not yet eight o'clock."

"Then I'm surprised!" said Travers. "I'm afraid I must look with grave misgiving upon this slackness, Phipps. Kindly take my compliments to the Head, and ask him to tuck up."

But Phipps, being a wise man, declined.

"You may come into the hall, if you wish, Master Travers, and you may wait," he said obligingly. "Dr. Stafford will probably come down within a few minutes."

"That's better," said Travers, as he walked in. "By the way, Phipps, you're a pal of Archie's, aren't you?"

"In addition to being the headmaster's butler, I have a certain unofficial position as Master Glenthorne's valet," replied Phipps imperturbably.

"Well, have you heard any fresh news?"

"I regret to say, none," replied Phipps. "And while admiring the enterprise and courage of Master Archie's brothers, I must say that I am deeply concerned."

"Well, so are we all, if it comes to that," replied Travers. "But as it won't make any difference, Phipps, we may as well keep concern to ourselves. Ah! Splendid! The great man himself!"

A footstep had sounded on the stairs, and a moment later Dr. Malcolm Stafford appeared.



CHAPTER 8.

Things Begin to Move!

VIVIAN TRAVERS stepped forward as the Head came down into the hall.

"Awfully sorry for disturbing you so early, sir, but may I have a few words?" he asked coolly.

"What is it you want?" asked the Head.

"And, by the way, what is your name?"

"Travers, sir—Ancient House."

"Ah, yes, to be sure, Travers," said Dr. Stafford, nodding. "And you wish to speak to me? Very well; come to my study."

They went into the study, and the Head closed the door. Then he turned and regarded the junior inquiringly.

"It's about the Atlantic flight, sir," said Travers.

"I hear that the school is intensely interested—and I am not at all surprised," said Dr. Stafford, nodding. "What is it you wish to discuss with me, Travers?"

"Oh, it's simple enough, sir," replied Vivian Travers. "Did you happen to listen in last night to the nine o'clock bulletin, sir?"

"I did."

"Then you must have heard the announcement regarding this morning, sir?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Well, that's it, sir," said Travers. "They're going to give further news regarding the Atlantic plane with the Daven-try shipping forecast."

"Really, Travers, I fail to see what you are driving at," said the Head, rather shortly. "Cannot you explain yourself more concisely?"

"I thought I had done so, sir," replied Travers. "You see, this report won't be broadcast until ten o'clock. And at ten o'clock, in the ordinary course of things, we shall be in the class-rooms."

The Head looked at him rather sharply.

"Oh!" he said, at length. "Really, my boy, you are not suggesting that I should permit the school too—H'm! Well, perhaps, in the circumstances—" He broke off, and moved towards the window, his hands clasped behind his back. "The school is certainly very interested," he went on, as though to himself. "And this flight, too, is an exceptional one from the St. Frank's point of view. I wonder!"

"You see, sir, both the Glenthornes are Old Boys," said Travers calmly. "And there's Archie Glenthorne himself, too. He's a Remove fellow."

"I quite understand that, Travers," said the Head, turning. "What were you about to suggest?"

"Nothing much, sir," said the junior. "But if you delayed lessons for a bit this morning, and allowed the school to collect together in Big Hall a few minutes before ten, it would be rather topping."

"But there is no wireless set in Big Hall."

"That'll be easily fixed up, sir," said Travers. "I've got a big six-valve receiver in my study, and there are all sorts of amateur electricians in the Remove. We'll have the loud speaker fixed up in Big Hall in less than half an hour—if you'll only give the word."

"Dear me!" said the Head, adjusting his glasses. "It is certainly a very good idea of yours, Travers."

"Thank you, sir."

The Head did not waste much time in coming to a decision. He realised that practically no work would be done if the boys went into their class-rooms at the ordinary hour; indeed, with the school in such a state of tension, it might even be unwise to insist upon the ordinary routine. Moreover, it wasn't as though any important exams. were on. It was only the second day after the holidays, and nothing was running smoothly yet.

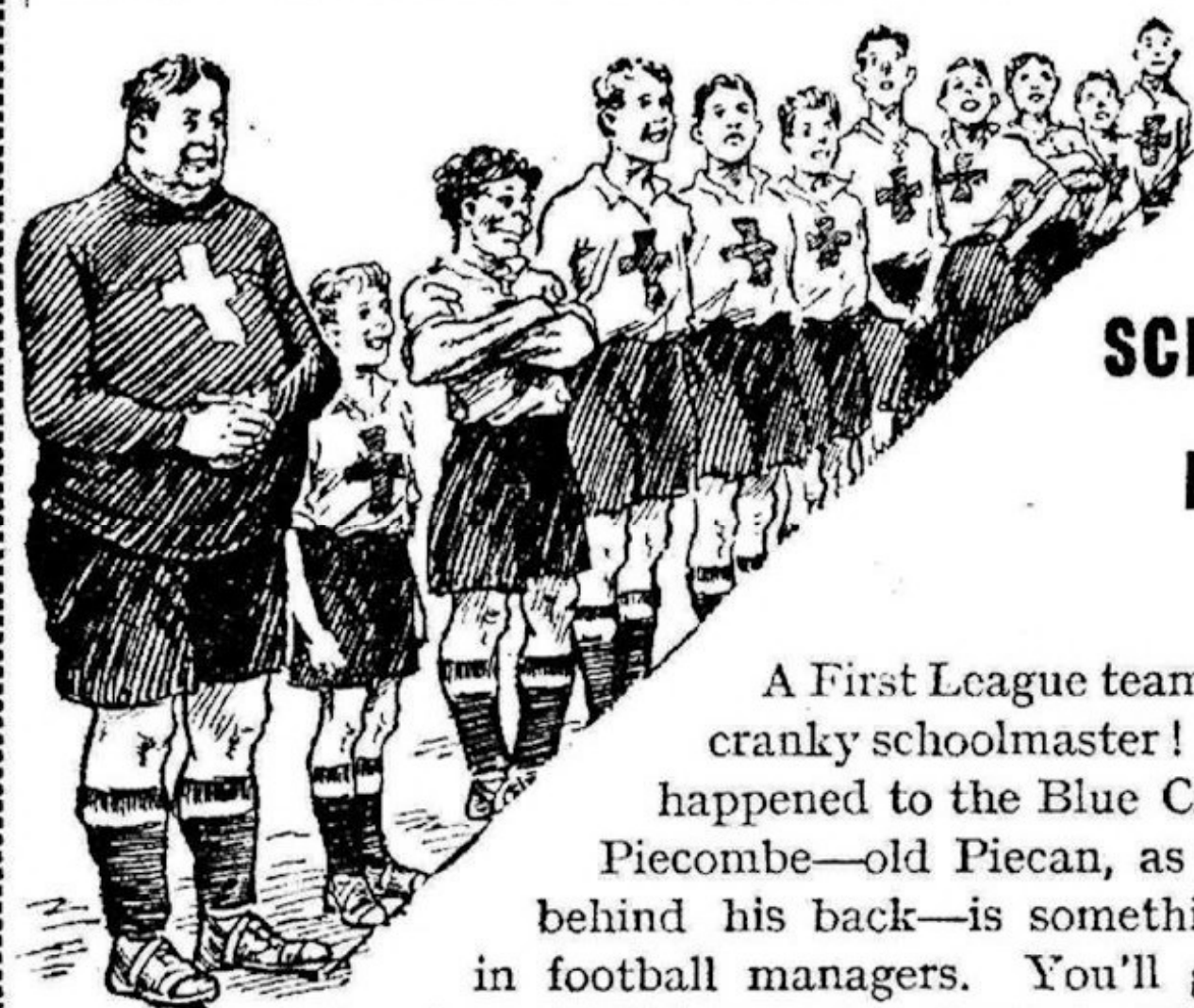
"Very well, Travers, I will adopt your suggestion," said the Head, after a few moments.

"Thanks awfully, sir."

"I will communicate at once with the various head prefects, and arrange the matter," continued the Head. "But if you are to fix up the loud speaker in Big Hall, you had better report to your Housemaster, and receive instructions from him."

(Continued on page 14.)

CLOSE-SEASON FOOTER & THRILLS ABROAD!



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ATLANTIC FLYERS AT ST. FRANK'S!

(Continued from page 12.)

Travers went away, quietly triumphant. When he got into the Triangle, crowds of fellows were about. The majority of them were looking hot and excited. All sorts of arguments were on the go—mainly connected with the ten o'clock bulletin from Daventry.

"Cheer up dear old fellows," said Travers genially. "I've just seen the Head, and we're all going to be in Big Hall at ten o'clock, so that we can hear the latest."

"What!"

"Don't be an ass, Travers!"

"You oughtn't to joke about it like that!"

"Well, well!" smiled Travers coolly. "If you don't believe me, ask any prefect. The Head, at this precise moment, is busy at the telephone, giving his orders."

There was tremendous glee when the news got round, for, within five minutes, it was known that the information was official. Travers had done the trick—and he was accorded a great ovation among the Removites.

Practically the whole school, to a man, had decided to make tracks for Glenthorne Park as soon as afternoon lessons were over. Seniors and juniors alike were making advance plans, and every bicycle in the school was being prepared.

Nipper took a tip from Travers, and lost no time in visiting Nelson Lee's study in the Ancient House. Nipper had a twofold reason for going to the famous Housemaster-detective.

"I know exactly why you have come, young 'un," said Lee, after they had greeted one another. "It's about fixing up the loud speaker in Big Hall, eh?"

"Well, that's one reason, sir," replied Nipper. "I hope you'll give us a free hand, sir. You can rely upon us to set the thing up properly. We're going to take Travers' big set along, and we'll carry the wires through one of the windows. It'll only be a temporary arrangement, and we shan't do any damage."

"I think I can trust you, Nipper," smiled Lee. "Well, what else did you want to see me about?"

"About this afternoon, sir," said Nipper keenly. "Look here, guv'nor, what about it? You know jolly well that all the chaps are on the *qui vive* about Archie Glenthorne's brothers. How the dickens do you suppose they can do any work in the class-rooms?"

"They must learn to contain their emotions," replied Lee dryly.

"Oh, come off it, sir!" protested Nipper. "This isn't an ordinary Atlantic flight. It's something special—you know that well as I do! And any fellow who works this afternoon will be a magician! It's a bit too thick to expect us to stew in the class-rooms,

so I'm putting it to you straight from the shoulder!"

"So I observe!" said Nelson Lee. "And you apparently forget that I am your Housemaster."

"That's true enough," admitted Nipper. "But you're the guv'nor now, and I've forgotten that you're my Housemaster for the moment. Now then, sir, what about it? Have a heart!"

Nelson Lee laughed.

"My dear Nipper, I don't happen to be the headmaster," he protested. "I haven't the power to grant the school a half-holiday."

"Yes, sir; but you can have a word with the Head!" said Nipper eagerly.

"As a matter of fact, I have already had that word."

"By Jove! You mean——"

"Run along, Nipper, and don't worry," chuckled Lee. "I rather fancy that Dr. Stafford will have an announcement to make shortly before ten o'clock, when the school congregates in Big Hall."



CHAPTER 9.

The Ten o'clock Bulletin!

T nine forty-five, Big Hall was crowded.

Not a fellow was absent. Even the recognised "rotters"

—such as Gore-Pearce & Co., of Study A, and Merrell and Marriott, of the Fourth—were now as keenly agog as any of the others. They had caught the "Atlantic flight fever." And, quite apart from their interest in the adventure itself, anything that meant a disorganisation of the usual school routine was to be heartily welcomed.

A loud buzz filled Big Hall, although it died down to a mere whisper as Dr. Malcolm Stafford appeared on the platform.

"I have been in communication with Colonel Glenthorne," said the Head at once. "And, as you may guess, the colonel himself is in almost constant touch with the Air Ministry. But, so far, no further news of the Atlantic aeroplane has been received."

"Oh!"

It was rather a dismayed gasp. The whole night had passed, and no further information had come to hand!

"I would add," said Dr. Stafford, "that many wireless messages are expected from the ships in the Atlantic, and reports may come in at any moment."

The Head glanced at the clock, and saw that he had a full seven minutes. Nipper and Travers were on the platform—much to the envy of the other juniors—ready to operate the wireless set. The prefects had wanted to perform this function, but as the set belonged to Travers, he and Nipper had gained special permission.

"There is one announcement that I have to make," said the Head. "In the special

circumstances, the whole school will be granted a half-holiday this afternoon——"

"Oh!"

It was another gasp—and this time a gasp of delight.

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for the Head!"

"A half-holiday—oh, good egg!"

The cheering lasted for some moments, and the Head waited patiently.

"All boys who wish may go to Glenthorne Park immediately after the midday meal," said Dr. Stafford dryly. "And here let me give a word of warning. Some of you, no doubt, will be inclined to rush off as soon as morning lessons are over. But do not be so rash. There is no possibility of the Atlantic aeroplane arriving before three o'clock, so you will merely go hungry for nothing."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I would add, that all boys must be in at the usual hour this evening," continued the Head. "There will be no relaxation of the rules other than the granting of the half-holiday. Calling-over will be held as usual, and every boy who fails to answer his name will receive the usual punishment for that offence—unless, of course, he can give a very satisfactory explanation."

The school was delighted. The Head was voted to be a great sportsman, and the excitement was tremendous.

Then came the broadcast from Daventry.

"This is Daventry calling," came the voice, out of the loud speaker. "Before giving the shipping forecast, we have an announcement to make regarding the Glenthorne Atlantic flight."

The school held its breath.

"We are informed, from the Air Ministry, that two reports have just come in," continued the announcer. "At least three ships have seen the Atlantic 'plane in mid-ocean, and these reports are not only encouraging, but very satisfactory. The aeroplane is stated to be on its true course, and on each occasion was seen flying at a great height, and at a very high rate of speed."

A tremendous buzz ran up and down Big Hall.

"Shush!" came the warning.

"It must be remembered, however, that these reports, although only just received, deal with last night. That is to say, the Atlantic 'plane was sighted in mid-ocean at approximately seven o'clock, nine-fifteen, and ten-twenty last night, Greenwich time. Since then, however, no further news has been heard of the 'plane.'"

There was a slight pause, and the buzz recommenced.

"My hat! Over twelve hours ago!" said Fullwood excitedly. "No news for over twelve hours!"

"It's an awful long time!" said Russell, in a sober voice.

"A certain amount of uneasiness is felt," continued the B.B.C. announcer. "The Air Ministry reports a deep depression in the eastern Atlantic, and if the 'plane holds to

its true course it cannot avoid striking this bad weather patch. Heavy thunderstorms are likely, and these may develop and spread over England and Wales during the course of the day."

After that followed the usual shipping forecast, and the school was dismissed. There was plenty to talk about.

"No news since dusk last night!" said Nipper uneasily. "There's no doubt about it—Archie's brothers are unable to use the wireless on their machine. And now they're coming on through a storm centre. Phew! It doesn't look any too promising!"

"Yes, but they're over half-way across!" said Tommy Watson eagerly. "In fact, they were half-way across last night!"

"They needed to be, too—if they're to reach Glenthorne Park by this afternoon," said Nipper, with a nod. "By Jove! It must be an awful time for Archie's mother and father! And the worst is to come, too!"

A general air of uncertainty and suspense had settled over the school now. No news since the previous evening—and storms in the Atlantic! The ten o'clock report, instead of bringing good cheer, had left behind it a sinister, unsavoury hint of tragedy.

Not only St. Frank's, but the whole country, was deeply concerned!

CHAPTER 10.

The Exodus!



LESSONS, of course, were a sheer farce.

But the Head had done all that could be expected of him by

granting a half-holiday. He was in agreement with his Housemasters that no work would be done during the morning. However, it was better for the school to be confined to the class-rooms.

There was a tension in the air now. Yesterday, the fellows had been very interested, and they had told themselves that this particular flight was a St. Frank's affair, more or less. But to-day the fascination of it had completely gripped them. The uncertainty of it all—the absence of definite news since last night—the evil reports of bad weather—everything contributed to putting the school on edge.

There was no question about the accuracy of the Air Ministry's warning, either. The day was very heavy, and there were dull clouds overhead.

Half an hour before the school was dismissed a local storm broke—quite a minor affair, but a good deal of rain fell. For some little time the gloom was as heavy as a mid-winter's day; then the clouds cleared slightly, and the rain ceased.

The school poured out into the Triangle, to find everything dripping. Overhead the sky had a very threatening look.

"It's pretty rotten!" said Nipper anxiously. "The weather seems to be getting worse as the day advances. Just look at the sun—or the rays of it. I've never seen it more angry-looking."

Towards the south the clouds were massed in deep formation, and long shafts of lurid sunshine were streaming through the banks. A wind had sprung up, too—a gusty, ugly sort of wind. And yet the air was hot and heavy.

It seemed ages before the bell rang for the mid-day meal. The bulk of the fellows obeyed the Head's injunctions, and waited for dinner. There was really no sense in going off now. All the same, a few excitable juniors had got their bicycles out immediately; and had started off for Glenthorne Park.

The general exodus followed later, after dinner had been disposed of.

Bicycles left by the score, and all those fellows who were unlucky enough to possess no bicycles went on foot. There was no available train, and they couldn't wait until the middle of the afternoon. Besides, it would be easy enough to cut across the foot-path, and to reach the park by short cuts.

Nipper went with a big crowd of Removites, including Fullwood & Co., Gresham, Travers, De Valerie, Pitt, and others. They were all on cycles, and they were prepared to meet with traffic congestion just outside Bannington.

Yet the actual state of affairs amazed them.

Progress was practically impossible. The main road from Bannington, right up to Glenthorne Manor, was packed and jammed with motor-cars of every description. The police were at their wits' ends. Cars had been arriving all the morning, apparently from all parts of the country.

Everybody, it seemed, wanted to be on the spot when the Atlantic aeroplane landed. Thousands of people had entered Bannington by train, and never in its history had the old town known such a sensation. Further relays of police were sent from Helmford and from other surrounding towns.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Nipper, as he and the others were trying to force their way through. "Other people in addition to the St. Frank's chaps are keen on this flight."

"Rather!" panted Fullwood. "Come on—here's an opening!"

At last, after about an hour of constant struggling, the breathless juniors found themselves within the grounds of Glenthorne Manor. They were ordered by the police to get into the roped-off enclosures, although how they were to do this they did not know. For these enclosures were already packed to suffocation.

Colonel Glenthorne, anticipating the general interest that would be taken, had thrown the park open to the public, and an enormous section of it had been roped off, with police on duty. But it seemed that this

space was not nearly large enough for the enormous crowds that were congregating.

By a lucky chance Archie Glenthorne happened to see the big crowd of Removites, and he came to the rescue.

"Laddies, you'd better come into the private grounds," he said. "The pater won't mind, I'm sure. Follow me, and I'll do the good old trick."

"By Jove! You only just came in time. Archie!" said Nipper breathlessly.

"Good man, Archie!"

They were feeling quite exhausted by the time they got into the private grounds of Glenthorne Manor. These, of course, were strictly reserved for the Glenthorne family and their friends. As Archie had said, Colonel Glenthorne raised no objection to the St. Frank's fellows making free use of the private lawns and gardens.

To tell the truth, Colonel Glenthorne and the police were fairly desperate. They had never anticipated such widespread interest as this. The crush was tremendous, and, with every hour that passed, more and more cars were coming, adding to the confusion.

"I don't know about all the other chaps, but we're all serene," remarked Reggie Pitt, as he and the big group of Removites collected on the main lawn. "Every man for himself, eh? By Jove! It's beginning to rain, too!"

A few drops were falling, and a heavy shower was in prospect. But nobody took much notice. The juniors were gathering round Archie Glenthorne, pressing him for further news.

"I'm frightfully sorry, dear old onions, but there's absolutely nothing to tell," said Archie, his voice rather husky. "I mean to say, we've heard nothing further since the wireless report. And, of course, it's absolutely ghastly. Not to say poisonous. I mean, nothing has been seen of the good old 'plane since last night, and there's a rotten patch of weather out in the dashed Atlantic. Kindly tell me how many grey hairs you can see on the good old dome, laddies!"

Archie spoke lightly, but his eyes were full of dreadful suspense. And just then, before any of the juniors could make any comments, a sort of rolling murmur arose from the great crowds out in the park. It grew steadily—until it became a roar. The air was filled with the triumphant, reverberating sound.

What could it mean?

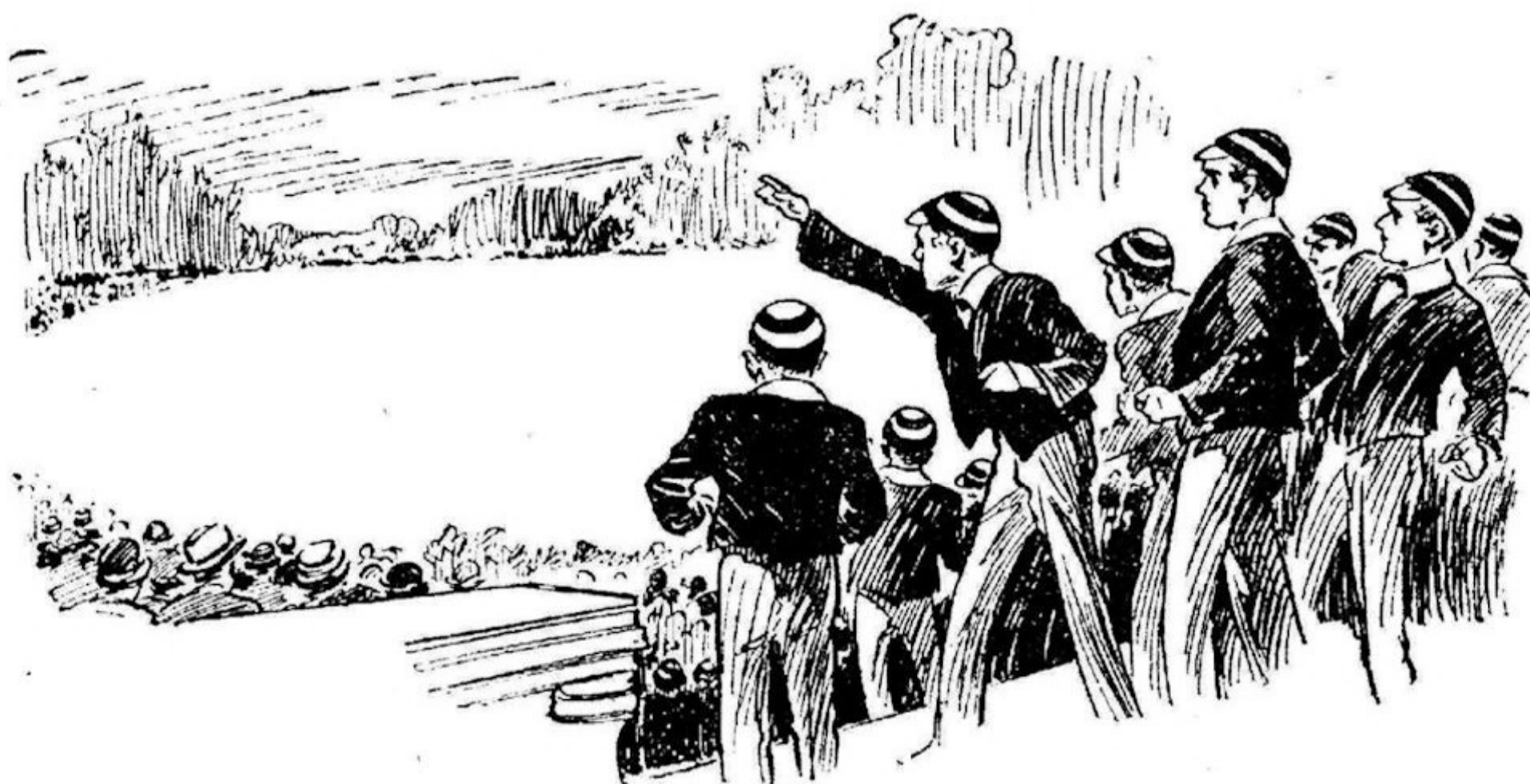


CHAPTER 11.

Tension!

"DDS hopes and fears!" ejaculated Archie, his face pale and drawn. "What's all that, old scouts?"

"Goodness knows!" said Nipper huskily. "Quick! Let's go and see!"



The juniors stared across the vast public enclosure. They could see people pointing, they could hear the tumultuous roars. "Hurrah!" It was a yell from Tommy Watson. He was pointing upwards—at a tiny speck in the sky, far, far away. Was it the expected Atlantic flyers?

There was a rush across the lawn to a big opening at the far end, which led out into the picturesque, rolling parkland.

This section was strictly reserved by Colonel Glenthorne, and only his own guests were allowed there. There were handsome trees growing in great stately clumps, but beyond everything was clear—a rolling stretch of smooth grassland. Here it was that the Atlantic 'plane was due to descend. This was the arranged landing ground.

In a great crowd the juniors swarmed beyond the trees, and stared across at the vast public enclosures. They could see people pointing, they could hear the tumultuous roars.

"Hurrah!"

It was a yell from Tommy Watson. He was pointing upwards, and the others could now see a tiny speck in the sky, far, far away.

"Good gad!" gasped Archie, clutching at Nipper's arm. "Laddie, I wonder? This is absolutely frightful!"

Nipper frowned.

"They're mad—all of them!" he said fiercely. "What are they going crazy for? It isn't time for the Atlantic 'plane to arrive yet, and it's nothing unusual to see an aeroplane in the sky twenty times a day nowadays!"

And, so it happened, Nipper was right.

The aeroplane grew larger and larger, and as it came nearer the excitement increased; then just as rapidly decreased. For it could be seen by all and sundry that the machine

was an ordinary two-seater. It circled round close to Bannington, and then made off again in the direction of the coast.

A sort of groan went up from everybody, and Archie bit his lip. Nipper, glancing at the elegant swell of the Ancient House, felt a pang of sympathy.

"Cheer up, old man!" he murmured. "There's plenty of time yet!"

"Oh, absolutely!" agreed Archie, nodding. "All the same, old horse, it's a pretty frightful sort of ordeal."

He said little more, but he had said enough. His face showed how he was suffering, and that false alarm seemed to add to the general uneasiness. To make matters worse, the rain commenced to fall in earnest. It pelted down steadily for some little time, and everybody who could sought shelter under the trees.

"I say, this is absolutely rotten!" remarked Reggie Pitt, as he joined Nipper and a few others. "The sky's clearing a bit, and I don't think the rain will last long. But the weather looks horribly threatening all round."

"Why tell us something that we know?" demanded Fullwood, whose nerves were on edge.

"I've just seen Mrs. Glenthorne, too!" went on Pitt soberly. "Poor old girl! She seems to have aged about ten years since I saw her last. She's looking awful!"

"Well, that's nothing to wonder at, is it?" asked Nipper. "These Atlantic flights are all very well if they come off, but they're an awful agony to mothers and fathers."

"There's not much difference in the colonel," said Pitt. "He's bearing up wonderfully—buzzing about as briskly as ever. But, although he doesn't show much, I expect he feels it. His two elder sons, you know. And the chances are that they're dead, somewhere out in the Atlantic!"

"Dry up, you idiot!" muttered Jack Grey. "Archie's not far away!"

Most of the fellows shared Reggie Pitt's tragic misgivings. And it wasn't even time for the Atlantic 'plane to arrive! It was the uncertainty of it all that was beginning to shatter the nerves of the watchers. It was this waiting game—this period of tension.

Everything contributed to making the ordeal worse. The absence of news—the hint of severe weather out in the Atlantic—the actual atmospheric conditions here, on the spot—everything was against the flyers. Even if they were still in the air it was not to be expected that they could arrive on time.

Happily the rain stopped after a few more minutes, and the sun came out—a watery, threatening kind of sun. However, it was better than the rain.

"What's the very latest that the machine can arrive?" asked Gresham.

"Well, according to Archie—and he's had it from his pater—there'll be practically no hope after seven o'clock this evening," said Nipper.

"Seven o'clock?" echoed Pitt. "But they're expected here at about three."

"I know that, but that's a pretty optimistic calculation," replied Nipper. "There's more than a chance that they've met with adverse winds, and that they've had to dodge storms. Anyhow, the experts reckon that Captain Glenthorne has sufficient petrol to keep him in the air until about seven o'clock this evening. By a miracle of luck, he might carry on until eight o'clock, but after that there'll be practically no hope."

"Eight o'clock!" muttered Fullwood. "Great Scott! Supposing nothing is heard between now and eight o'clock! It seems ages off! What about poor Mrs. Glenthorne—and the colonel and Archie? How the dickens will they be able to live through it if the 'plane doesn't arrive?"

And so the time passed—minute after minute, hour after hour. Three o'clock came—three-thirty—four o'clock. All eyes were strained skywards, all ears were listening.

Fortunately no further rain fell, and there seemed healthy indications that the weather was now clearing up definitely. The blue sky was in view in many places, and the clouds were lessening. But five o'clock arrived, and still there was the same absence of news.

The St. Frank's fellows, being privileged, heard the very latest reports, relayed by Archie from the colonel. But the news that came only added to their growing agony!



CHAPTER 12

The Dreadful Suspense!

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE was like a changed being.

All his indolence had gone; he was restless, jumpy. One minute he was hurrying indoors, and then he would come dashing out again. Never for a moment was he still. And his face was a picture of misery and hopelessness.

At half-past five he came hurrying out, and he found scores of St. Frank's fellows waiting for him.

"Anything fresh, old man?" asked a dozen voices.

Archie stared at the juniors dully.

"Good gad, no!" he muttered. "At least, yes! Absolutely! The mater rather thought that some of you chappies might like to trickle indoors for a spot of tea."

Archie tried to speak unconcernedly, but he made a hash of it.

"Thanks all the same, old man, but we don't want any tea this afternoon," said Nipper quietly. "It's very decent of your mother, but I'm sure she doesn't want us pestering her at a time like this."

"There's a frightful piece of news from the Air Ministry," said Archie dully.

"Not—not news of a disaster?" shouted Fullwood.

"No—not exactly," replied Archie. "But there are a few dashed heavy storms buzzing about in the Atlantic. Not ordinary storms, you know, but frightful things. Depressions, and all that. Cyclones, and adverse winds, and so forth. All dashing hither and thither over the blighting Atlantic!"

"But it doesn't matter now!" said Nipper quickly. "If your brothers have succeeded, Archie, they can't be over the Atlantic now!"

"By Jove, that's true!" said Pitt.

"But that's the dashed poisonous part of it all," said Archie, staring straight in front of him. "I mean, not a dashed word has come. And, according to the pater, the aeroplane should have been sighted over Ireland long before this."

"Perhaps they're slow in sending messages—"

"Absolutely not!" said Archie. "There are all sorts of chappies, dotted about all over Ireland, sending reports and things. The machine hasn't been seen."

"Nothing has been heard of it since last night—nearly twenty hours ago!" said Fullwood gravely. "And now she's more than two hours overdue! Archie, old man, it's awful!"

Archie made a curious choking sound in his throat.

"Good old Bertie!" he muttered brokenly. "And I mean to say—George, two of the best, what? Absolutely out there, dead! They must be dead by this time!" he added.

clenching his fists. "Odds horrors and tragedies!"

"Archie!" exclaimed Nipper. "You mustn't say things like that——"

"I can't help it, laddie!" panted Archie. "Don't you understand? It's hopeless now—absolutely hopeless! What with these storms and things, and no news— Isn't it as clear as daylight, dash it? Poor old Bertie and George are dead! They must have gone down in mid-Atlantic, and that's why we've heard nothing! Good gad! The old brain is positively going!"

Just for a moment, Archie broke down. But it was only for that moment. He sud-

trickle out of the ozone. Kindly excuse me for a few moments while I dash about and console the mater. I have a feeling that she needs a few kindly, cheering words."

He went off, and for a moment or two the other juniors were silent.

"Poor old Archie!" murmured Nipper at last. "He's hit pretty hard!"

"But he's true blue," said Pitt, with a gulp in his voice. "By Jove, it was wonderful the way he pulled himself together!"

Six o'clock came, and the tension had now passed the breaking-point. Hundreds of the spectators were beginning to leave, much to the relief of the police. By now a kind of

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"Hallo, old top!" said Handforth boisterously

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denly pulled himself together, and when he looked at the silent juniors again, there was a wan kind of smile on his face.

"Pray forgive me, laddies!" he said quietly. "All sorts of assorted apologies! I mean to say, dash it, it's a most frightful thing for a chappie to show a spasm of weakness like that!"

"You mustn't give up hope, Archie——" began Nipper.

"Laddie, kindly kick me!" said Archie, bending down in a convenient attitude. "And while you are about it, kick hard! Absolutely!"

Nipper did not oblige.

"Bertie and Georgie are alive!" proceeded Archie, with confidence. "Dash it, I'm not going to believe anything else! Before long, there'll come a sort of hum, and then they'll

settled gloom had descended over everybody. There was very little excited talking, but a great silence, with everybody scanning the sky constantly.

It was felt, by practically all and sundry, that hope was now dead. Something had happened to the intrepid flyers. Either they had fallen into the Atlantic, and were drowned, or they had been compelled to make a forced landing in Ireland, or perhaps they had gone right off their course, and were in Spain or France. There were a thousand and one conjectures. But it was felt that the Glenthorne brothers would not land in the Park grounds now.

To make matters worse, the promise of a fine evening was shattered. Heavy clouds were massing in the sky, to windward, and at intervals a rumble of thunder would sound.

The air had become still and stifling, except for an occasional puff or two of wind.

Never, indeed, had an evening seemed more sinister. An early dusk was beginning to fall, long before its appointed time. The black clouds were responsible for this.

And the St. Frank's fellows could see that gangs of men were busy with great searchlights. They were fixing them up all round the landing-ground. Preparations were being made for the coming darkness.

Whatever the public thought, Colonel Glen-thorne, at least, still believed that the aeroplane might arrive. No stone was left unturned; every precaution was being taken.



CHAPTER 13.

No Hope!

"H, I can't stand this!" said Reggie Pitt huskily. "It's getting on my nerves!"

"Same here, old man!" murmured Fullwood. "It's time we were getting back to the school, anyhow. The Head warned us that we should have to be in for calling-over, didn't he? Besides, nearly everybody else is clearing off. What's the good of staying?"

"No good at all!" said Pitt. "The machine won't come now. It can't come. Poor beggars!"

"What a rotten shame!"

"Oh, it's awful!"

The group of juniors, under one of the big trees, moved off towards the Manor grounds. They had been watching the erection of the great searchlight, the beams from which would serve as a beacon in the sky. But it seemed to the St. Frank's fellows that all these preparations were futile. How could there be any possibility of the 'plane arriving now?

It was long overdue, and there was still no news. Nothing! Not a word of any kind! Wasn't it perfectly clear that the machine had come down in mid-Atlantic?

"I'm dreadfully cut up about Archie's brothers, but they, after all, knew the risk they were running," said Nipper gravely. "They expected danger; they were prepared. But what about the colonel and Mrs. Glen-thorne? And Archie himself? They're the ones who are suffering! Oh, it's terrible for them!"

"Perhaps we'd better slide off without trying to find Archie again?" suggested Pitt. "It might be more sporty, eh? The poor chap won't know what to say to us, and words of sympathy in a case like this seem—well, they seem so useless."

The same feeling of depression had descended upon everybody. The crowds were clearing off, silent and grave. Many heads were shaking. Outside, in the road, the cars were leaving, and in Bannington itself everybody was talking. The people were mourning

for the two young men who were so well known in the district, who had started out on this rash adventure, and who had failed.

As it happened, the group of Remove fellows ran into Archie Glen-thorne as they were locating their bicycles. A few spots of rain were falling, and the rumbles of thunder in the distance were increasing. It was high time they left. The night promised to settle down wildly. More unfavourable weather for flying could not be imagined.

"Anything fresh, Archie?" asked Fullwood, unable to restrain the question.

"I'm afraid not, laddies," replied Archie, trying to steady his voice. "Absolutely not! Of course, it's all frightfully disturbing, and so forth, but Bertie and George will soon be here."

"Great Scott!" panted Pitt. "You don't still think——"

"Absolutely!" said Archie firmly. "Good gad! What else is there to think? The weather is somewhat poisonous, and it's rather foul to receive no further news. But Bertie and George are stout lads, and before long they'll stagger out of the offing, and slither groundwards. I mean to say, old onions, while there's life there's hope. What?"

"Poor old Archie!" murmured Nipper, pained. "I hope to goodness that you're right!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Dear old lads, I've got to be right!" said Archie simply. "Don't you understand? I mean, dash it, there's nothing else to think. The alternative, I mean, is too frightfully foul—— But absolutely not! Nothing doing! Bertie and George will come, if only we have patience."

There was something very fine in Archie's quiet confidence. Whether he actually felt it, the juniors could not tell. Perhaps this was a pose on his part—in order to make them feel comfortable. If so, his courage was even greater than they had supposed.

But never would Archie admit that there was any possibility of disaster. His brothers were on their way—they were coming! That was his simple answer to all doubts.

But there was nothing false in his manner. He made no attempt to be cheery. That, indeed, would have been an admission that he was acting. So he bade the juniors a quiet good-night, and wandered off towards the landing ground, where he stood motionless, watching the active preparations.

"Poor old Archie!" said Nipper gently.

Long before the juniors had got through the crush in the road, the searchlights were sending their beams dazlingly skywards, slashing through the gloom of the evening, and playing upon the massed clouds overhead. There was something eerie and mysterious in the very atmosphere.

On the way home, the Removites passed any number of fellows, walking. There were no cheery hails—no shouts and laughter. Everybody was subdued—saddened. They had expected so much this afternoon, and everything had gone crash.

At St. Frank's, lots of fellows were late for calling-over, but no questions were asked. No punishments were given. The masters were singularly sympathetic and reasonable.

After locking-up—after every fellow had reported himself—there was some talk in the various Common-rooms. Why couldn't they all wait up? What was the good of going to bed? In the Remove, particularly, the fellows were inclined to be indignant. It was a shame to send them to bed like this—with the fate of Archie's brothers still in the balance.

"It's no good, you chaps!" said Nipper, as he heard these remarks. "The Head's been jolly decent, on the whole, and we mustn't expect too much."

"But the thing is so exceptional!" protested Fullwood.

"We all know that," replied Nipper. "But how can the Head let the whole routine of St. Frank's go to pot? Be reasonable, you fellows!"

"We can't sleep!" grunted De Valerie. "They can send me up to my dormitory, but I'm blessed if I'm going to get undressed! I shall be at the window—listening for the 'plane!"

"You'll probably be listening to the thunder!" said Nipper, as a dull rumble came from outside. "The storm is gathering, and before long it will be doing its worst. Why can't you fellows settle yourselves? There's only one tiny hope—and that is that the Atlantic 'plane has landed somewhere in Ireland, or in another part of England."

But his words were more or less useless. The agitation continued, and, indeed, the whole of St. Frank's was uneasy and restless.



CHAPTER 14.

The Nine o'clock Bulletin!

BIGGLESWADE, of the Sixth, put his head into the Remove Common-room in the Ancient House at about twenty minutes to nine.

"Better get yourselves ready, you kids!" said the prefect. "The bell will ring for Big Hall in a minute or two."

There was a loud buzz at once.

"Hallo!" shouted Fullwood. "What's the idea? Why are we being ordered into Big Hall?"

"Because the Head knows that the school is jolly jumpy," replied Biggleswade. "He thought it would be a brainy idea for everybody to be in Big Hall at once, so that the nine o'clock news bulletin could be—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"That's right! We'd forgotten the wireless!"

There was a further babble of excited voices.

"There might be some news!" said De Valerie eagerly. "We've heard nothing official since four or five o'clock in the afternoon—and we got that through Archie. By gad! Let's get into Big Hall now, so that we can be in good time!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Come on, you fellows!"

"Steady!" shouted Biggleswade. "No need to get so darned excited! There's over a quarter of an hour yet!"

"Yes, we'd better wait until the bell rings," said Nipper steadily. "Right-ho, Biggy. We'll be ready!"

Biggleswade went, and the junior Common-room was filled with voices. A couple of juniors had just come rushing in to say that the thunderstorm was breaking over towards Caistowe, and that the lightning was terrific.

But nobody was interested in the weather just now.

"Radio is a jolly wonderful thing!" said Fullwood. "Even if some news comes in at two minutes to nine, the whole country can hear it at nine o'clock! And surely there's a chance that Glenthorne's two brothers may be alive? It's all rot to assume that they're dead. They might have landed in a hundred different places—in France, or Spain, or Ireland!"

"Of course they might!" said Russell. "Things have happened like it before. It'll be time to give up hope by to-morrow evening. News might trickle in from any old outlandish place."

Hope was being revived. The fellows were telling themselves that they had needlessly worried. And soon, when the bell clanged out, there was a rush for Big Hall.

Never had the fellows been so eager to obey a bell, and by five minutes to nine Big Hall was packed. The seniors and juniors were in their places, and a hush had fallen over the assembly when the headmaster appeared on the platform.

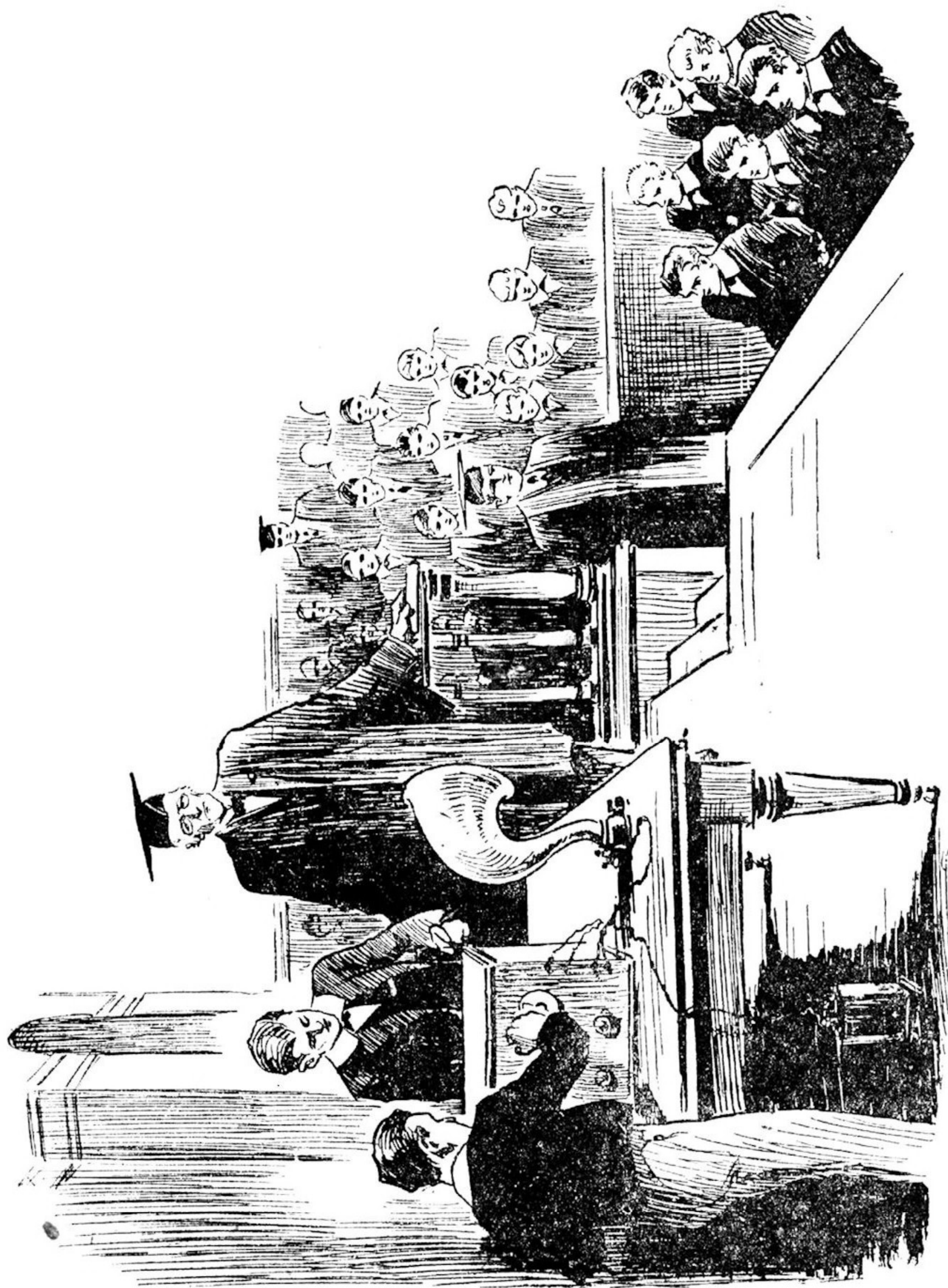
"There is very little for me to say," said the Head quietly. "You all know the situation, and, I think, we all share the anxiety that the whole country is feeling."

"Yes, sir!"

"There is just a chance that some fresh news may come through on the wireless," proceeded the Head. "But if there is none—and I am sorely afraid that this will be the case—I want all boys to go to their various dormitories quietly and in an orderly fashion."

The school was silent.

"There is no object to be gained by staying up," said the Head. "We all know that every possible precaution has been taken at Glenthorne Park. Searchlights are gleaming into the sky, to act as a guiding beacon to the flyers, should they still be on their way. We, here, can do nothing. I do not want to appear arbitrary; I do not want to issue any hard orders. But I certainly do ask you all to refrain from making any demonstration. When you are dismissed, you must go to your various Houses, and conduct yourselves normally."



Tensely everybody waited for news of the Atlantic flyers. Nipper and Travers got the wireless set working, and then came the voice of the B.B.C. announcer through the loud speaker. " . . . But it is felt by Air Ministry experts that a disaster has happened. There is practically no hope for the safety of the intrepid brothers ! "

"It's nine o'clock, sir!" said somebody anxiously.

The headmaster glanced at the clock, and nodded.

"Let there be silence!" he said, holding up a hand.

Vivian Travers and Nipper were again at the big wireless set. The seniors were quite indignant about this—for there were several good sets in the Upper School. But, after all, it made little difference who operated the radio. And there could be no denying that Travers' set was an exceptionally powerful one.

"This is London and Daventry calling!" came the voice of the B.B.C. announcer, after what had seemed an interminable wait. "It is precisely three minutes past nine."

"Now he's going to jaw about the weather, I suppose?" murmured Nipper, who was near the speaker.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised!" said Travers, in a low voice. "These people have no hearts, I am afraid!"

But he was wrong.

"The Atlantic Flight," said the announcer. "We much regret to tell our listeners that no further news has come in regarding the Glenthorne brothers."

A kind of groan went up from the whole school—but it was hushed, so that there should be no interruption.

"Since the aeroplane was seen last night by several ships in mid-Atlantic, no other report has been received by the Air Ministry, and there is every reason for grave anxiety. Heavy storms are centred in the Atlantic, and the weather over the Western coast of Ireland, and over England generally, is most unfavourable for flying."

St. Frank's felt dully shocked.

"Officials at the Air Ministry fear that there can be now no hope of the Atlantic aeroplane's safe arrival," continued the B.B.C. man. "It has been reckoned that the machine's supply of petrol must have become exhausted not later than eight o'clock this evening. There is, of course, a slim possibility that the machine may have come down in some remote part of Ireland, or on the Continent. But it is felt by Air Ministry experts that a disaster has happened. There is practically no hope for the safety of the intrepid brothers."

This, indeed, was the worst possible news!

The announcer switched on to other topics,

and the wireless set was turned off. The school dispersed, and all those fellows who had been telling themselves that a slight hope remained were now depressed and miserable.

"Well, that's done it!" said Nipper, with a sigh. "I say, how terrible for old Archie! His two brothers, you know—and heaps of our chaps knew them so well!"



Tensely everybody waited for news of the Atlantic flyers. The B.B.C. announcer through the loud speaker. "... practically no hope for

"It's too awful!" said Church. "I—I can't believe it! They must be safe!"

"You seem to forget that nothing has been heard of them for over twenty-four hours!" put in Fullwood. "Or nearly twenty-four hours, anyhow. What's the difference? Why the dickens did they start? It was a mad

thing to start all that way inland from the other side!"

Soon afterwards the Remove went to bed, and outside the storm was gathering. The rumble of thunder was becoming continuous, and flashes of lightning were splitting the heavens.

Without doubt, it was time for every hope to be abandoned!

CHAPTER 15.

The Watchers On the Tower!



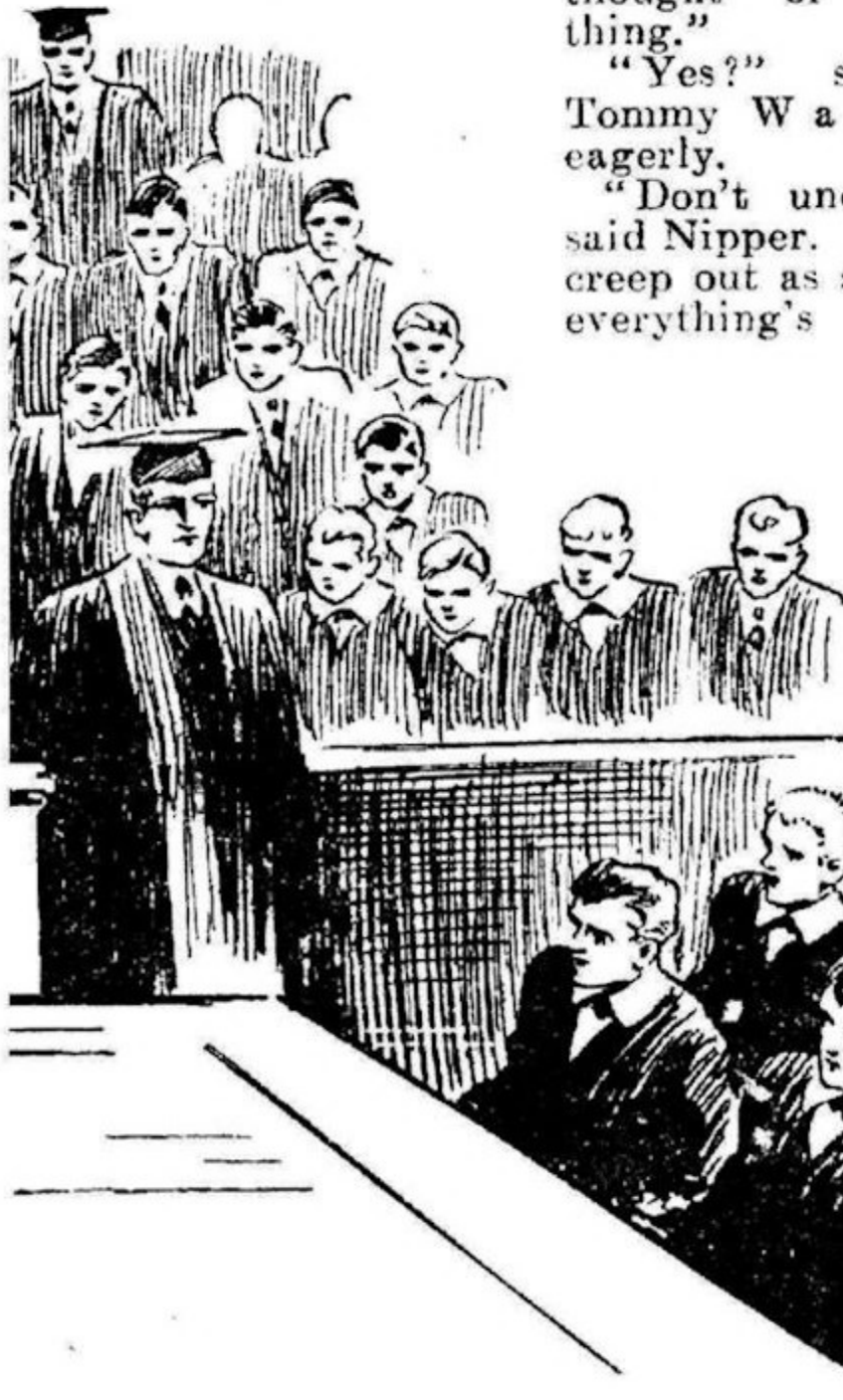
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NDRESSING, Nipper suddenly had an idea.

"Look here, you chaps!" he said, pausing in the act of unbuttoning his waistcoat. "I've just thought of something."

"Yes?" said Tommy Watson eagerly.

"Don't undress!" said Nipper. "Let's creep out as soon as everything's quiet,



shall be able to see the searchlights over at Bannington—and we shall know if anything is happening. Anyhow, it's no good trying to sleep."

Tregellis-West and Watson were quite keen on the scheme. They, too, felt that slumber would be out of the question. And, in fact, in all the Remove dormitories the juniors were wakeful.

The whole of St. Frank's was disinclined for sleep. It wasn't merely the uncertainty regarding the Atlantic flight that had caused this unsettled feeling; there was the gathering storm. The night promised to be a particularly violent one, and the distant flashes of lightning and the rumbling of thunder kept most of the fellows on the jump. There was an electrical tension in the air.

After lights-out, Nipper & Co. waited for about a quarter of an hour; then they got out of bed, fully dressed, and crept to the door.

"I say, dear old boys, is this quite playin' the game?" murmured Sir Montie dubiously.

"What do you mean?" said Nipper.

"Well, the Head," whispered Montie. "He didn't give us any orders, but he was frightfully earnest when he made his little speech."

"We can feel satisfied, Montie," said Nipper. "The Head didn't place us on our word of honour, or anything. We didn't make any promises. Come on and don't talk."

But outside in the passage they ran almost immediately into Vivian Travers and Jimmy Potts.

"Hallo!" said Travers whimsically. "Five minds with but a single thought, eh?"

"Where are you bound for?" demanded Nipper.

"The tower."

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Watson. "That's where we're going!"

"Exactly!" murmured Travers. "And, if it comes to that, I rather fancy that this telepathy has been spreading. Don't I observe Fullwood and De Valerie in the middle distance?"

Fullwood and De Valerie were accompanied by Somerton and Russell, and then another door opened, and Harry Gresham and Duncan appeared.

"Pretty nearly the whole giddy Remove!" said Watson.

"Where are you fellows bound for?" inquired Fullwood curiously.

"We thought we should be the only ones." "We're going up into the tower," replied Nipper in a low voice.

"By gad! That's a good idea!" declared De Valerie. "We thought about going outside into the Square. But this tower wheeze is ten times as good."

has got the wireless set working, and then came the voice of the Air Ministry experts that a disaster has happened. There is intrepid brothers!"

and watch. We can slip into bed with our things on until after lights-out."

"But what's the good, dear old boy?" asked Tregellis-West mildly. "Where can we watch?"

"From the top of the Ancient House tower," replied Nipper. "From there we

Thus it came about that ten minutes later the balcony of the Ancient House tower was crowded with figures. They were almost invisible up there, and there was not much chance of them catching cold, for the night air was distinctly warm.

"Better not talk too loudly, you fellows," said Nipper warningly. "I expect there are lots of chaps at the windows, and if they hear anybody up here, they'll get the same wheeze and then we shall be overcrowded."

"There's no room for anybody else, anyhow," remarked Gresham. "My only hat! Look at those searchlights over there! Aren't they clear?"

"They only seem half a mile away," said Fullwood in a murmur.

From this high elevation the scene was impressive.

St. Frank's lay below the watching juniors—a mass of dark buildings, with a stray gleam of light here and there. All round the countryside was black. There was no moon to-night, and the sky was clouded heavily. There was an oppressive, threatening feeling in the very air. Over beyond Bannington, which showed like a glow in the distance, a vivid flash in the sky appeared at frequent intervals, and the rumbling of the thunder came quivering on the atmosphere like the muttering of some fearsome monster.

They stood watching, all their gazes concentrated upon the searchlights. It was rather an eerie scene. Seemingly very close, the searchlights were sending their beams straight up into the heavens, and that beacon must have been visible for many, many miles. An aeroplane, flying high—or as high as the clouds would permit—could not fail to recognise the significance of the concentrated glare.

"Listen!" said Fullwood suddenly.

"Eh? What the—"

"Listen!" gasped Ralph Leslie Fullwood.

"I—I thought I heard—"

They all waited, tense and eager. From somewhere along the Bannington Road came the faint purring of a motor-car, and, staring in that direction, Nipper could see the car's headlights.

"Oh!" said Fullwood sheepishly. "Only a car!"

The others made no comment. They, too, had felt their hearts leap for a second. The

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minutes passed and nobody spoke. The murmurings of the thunder sounded more distinctly, and there was a sudden vivid flash beyond Bannington, followed by a dull, reverberating thud.

"Oh, what's the use?" said Gresham at last. "Why are we up here? What's the good of waiting? There's no hope now, you fellows!"

"Doesn't seem like it," admitted Do Valerie. "I expect we're a crowd of idiots really. But when I think of poor old Archie—Oh, I don't know, but somehow it seems rather callous to go to bed!"

Cecil De Valerie had expressed the feelings of most of the others, although they themselves might not have been able to put those feelings into words as he had done.

The fact that the juniors were wakeful and watching was indicative that they still hoped. In spite of their own convictions, and in spite of their words, they continued to hope.

They thought of Archie and his mother and father—waiting out there where those lights were gleaming. And if their own anxiety could be acute, what must be the anguish of those who were so near and so dear to the Atlantic flyers?

CHAPTER 16.

Waiting!



EGAD! This is unbearable—it is, really!"

Sir Montie Tregellis-West uttered

the words in a strained, tense whisper.

"Steady, old man!" murmured Nipper.

"I can't help it, dear old boy—it's all so frightfully agonising," said Sir Montie. "It would be different if there was some hope. But to stay up here looking at the sky and listenin' for the sound of a dronin' hum—Oh, it's nerve-shatterin'!"

"But it will be worse if you go down, Montie," said Tommy Watson tensely. "You'll never be able to sleep."

"Begad, that's true!" admitted Tregellis-West.

"Listen to me, you fellows," said Nipper in a low voice. "There is just a faint, vague hope."

They all listened eagerly—intently.

"What do you mean?" asked Travers in a curious voice. "What about the experts? Didn't they say that the plane's petrol must have given out at about eight o'clock? We're all mad to stay up here listening for something that can't possibly come. I know that—and yet, at the same time, I couldn't keep myself away."

"But I know something that you fellows don't know," said Nipper quietly.

"My only hat!"

"What do you mean, old boy?"

"Choke it up, Nipper!"

"Well, I managed to get a private word with Colonel Glenthorne," said Nipper. "As a matter of fact, the gov'nor was talking to the colonel at the time——"

"Yes, I saw Mr. Lee there!" said Gresham eagerly.

"Well, the colonel wasn't giving up hope," said Nipper softly. "There was something splendid in the way he maintained that his sons would get through, in spite of all the adverse conditions. It wasn't just talk, either—the colonel meant every word he said. His faith is absolute."

"But why?" asked Travers. "Why should he be so sure?"

"Well, for one thing, his two sons are in that 'plane," replied Nipper quietly. "What would the colonel's feelings be like if he *wasn't* sure?"

"But that was only a father's love," said Gresham soberly.

"No; it was more than that," replied Nipper. "It seems that his eldest son, Bertram, had revealed a little secret before setting off for America—or, rather, for Canada. The machine had been publicly announced to have a certain petrol-carrying capacity. But, actually, the petrol supply is more, and Colonel Glenthorne is satisfied that the machine can keep in the air until midnight, at least."

"My only hat!"

"That makes a big difference, you chaps!"

"Rather!"

"That's why I wanted to come up here," went on Nipper. "If there's a possibility of the machine keeping in the air until midnight—well, there's a possibility that it may still arrive! Don't you see? We know that there have been storms out in the Atlantic, and it's quite likely that Captain Glenthorne has been obliged to dodge them."

"That's true enough," said Travers keenly. "We all know that he's a pretty marvellous pilot, and if he once strikes the English coast, he'll be able to see that beacon."

And Travers pointed to the great blaze in the sky, caused by the concentrated searchlights.

"It isn't generally known that the machine is carrying an extra petrol supply," said Nipper. "By Jove! What a wonderful thing it would be if——"

"Listen!" broke in De Valerie.

But it was another false alarm. At short intervals, one or more of the juniors was quite certain that he heard a throbbing hum in the air. But it always turned out to be imagination.

Nipper's information, however, had made a big difference.

The juniors felt that they were not wasting their time, they were not up here without reason.

There was still a chance.

Till midnight! And it wasn't anywhere near eleven o'clock yet! Wild horses would

not have dragged those juniors down from the tower then. Nothing, indeed, would be able to shift them until after midnight had struck—and probably not until a further hour had elapsed beyond that. Only a dramatic crisis would be able to make them move—such as the actual sound of an aeroplane in the sky.

"It's getting blacker!" murmured Travers, after a long silence.

The others knew this, without his telling them. The night was close and inky. The black clouds seemed to be massing more menacingly than ever; but it seemed that they were still very high. They were unlike usual thunderclouds. Their great height could be easily gauged by looking at the searchlights, for the beams reached up into the air for thousands and thousands of feet.

"The storm will break soon."

"Here?" asked one of the others.

"In this district, anyhow," said Nipper, pointing. "Look over there—beyond Bannington. That seems to be the centre of it. Those lightning flashes are getting more vivid every minute, and the thunder is louder, too."

As if in verification of his statement, a dazzling flash of forked lightning split the clouds on the other side of Bannington. For an instant the whole sky was shattered by the jagged charge of electricity.

Boom-ooooooooom!

The thunder came distinctly—a shattering, crashing concussion, which died away in a rolling, monotonous rumble.

"Yes, it's getting nearer!" agreed Fullwood.

Their anxiety increased.

What was the good of hearing of the Atlantic 'plane's extra supply of petrol? How would the machine be able to get here in these conditions? The weather was steadily growing worse. So, at least, it seemed to the watching juniors.

As a matter of absolute fact, the weather was not unusual for the time of year. There was a storm centre off Southern England, but most of the thunderstorms were purely local. There was no widespread disturbance. At St. Frank's, for example, there was scarcely any wind, and no rain was falling.

Boom-ooooooooom!

The thunder came again, close upon the heels of the previous clap.

"Bannington is getting that storm!" said Nipper, with a nod. "It seems to have broken right over the town. Did you notice that last flash? It went right down to the ground—and seemed to strike something in the town. I'll bet they're having a pretty bad time of it."

"I'm thinking of poor old Archie—and his mother and father!" said Gresham. "They're in the middle of that storm, of course—and we can easily imagine what their feelings are. Oh, why doesn't something happen? When is this suspense going to end?"

Little did he realise that something *was* going to happen—and that within a very few minutes!



CHAPTER 17.

The Freak of the Storm!

H ALLO!" said Nipper, leaning over the parapet and gazing far down into the Triangle. "What's happening down there? Somebody's opened the door of the Ancient House! My hat! Look at the fellows!"

"Oh, the idiots!" said Fullwood.

They all leaned over and stared down. A crowd of figures could be seen in the shaft of light that came from the Ancient House doorway. They were not juniors, however—

but mostly members of the Fifth Form. All of them were fully dressed, and Wilson of the Sixth had appeared, too.

"Confound it, you fellows, why on earth don't you come in?" demanded the prefect. "I told you not to come out here——"

"You can tell us as much as you like!" broke in one of the Fifth-Formers. "I'm hanged if we're going to be bottled up indoors! If we get into trouble—well, it's our funeral! So you can go to bed as soon as you like!"

It was obvious that the Fifth-Formers were rebellious; and they were not the only ones, either. For figures were appearing from the Modern House, and from the West House, and from the East House. Everybody, it seemed, was wide awake and active.

"Well, I'm blessed!" murmured Nipper. "Don't make too much noise, you chaps—or they'll hear us. The whole school seems to be up and doing."

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"Can you wonder at it?" murmured Travers. "Well, well! This is going to be an eventful night!"

The Head had had good reason for fearing that the school would be restless. But there can be little doubt that the majority of the boys would have settled down quietly for the night but for that thunderstorm.

The booming in the distance, the lightning flashes—and the general air of humidity—all contributed to make the school wakeful. Added to this, the anxiety concerning the Atlantic flyers, and the reason for the rebellion was apparent.

But it was a very peaceful rebellion, and there were no attempts to quell it.

The masters very wisely decided that it would be bad policy to go out and hustle the fellows in. They were doing no harm out there in the open. There was every reason to believe that rain would soon commence pelting down, anyway, and that would have the desired effect.

"By Samson!" said Travers, blinking. "That was a beauty!"

Right on top of his words came the thunder—a devastating, crashing roar. All the juniors on the top of the tower stared over at Bannington. The glow from the town had lost some of its power, and this was due, no doubt, to the fact that heavy rain was falling. It tended to obscure the reflected gleams from the street lamps.

"We may not get it, after all," said De Valerie, as he stood watching. "It may be my fancy, but the storm seems to be veering off towards Helmford. Anyhow, it's getting over in that direction."

"It's not coming nearer, if that's what you mean," said Nipper. "I think it must have come along from the direction of Southampton, or down that way, and now it's going inland. But you can never really tell with storms. They dodge all over the place."

"It reminds me of that experience we had off Mersea Island," said Watson. "That was a pretty big storm, too. You remember it, you chaps—on Whit Monday?"

"Oh, blow Whit Monday!" said Gresham.

They had no desire to have their thoughts taken off the one all-interesting subject. Now and again they would turn and gaze out towards Caistowe, and over Bannington Moor. The sea lay beyond—and it was from this direction that the Atlantic 'plane might come.

"We're not so silly, really!" murmured Travers. "I mean, St. Frank's is on the aeroplane's course, and if she keeps to her course, she'll cross right overhead. And look what happened at Croydon—and at Paris—and even at Berlin—when other Atlantic flyers were expected. People waited in thousands—right through the night."

"Whew!" gasped Tommy Watson. "Did you see that?"

The most powerful flash of lightning of all

had just slashed down from the heavens. It seemed to split the very air, and it darted groundwards over Bannington—a wicked, blinding spear of destruction.

•Boom—boom—boo—ooo—oom!

There came the sound of a terrific explosion, and accompanying it, a lurid flash lit the darkened sky.

"Goodness!" gasped Duncan. "Whatever was that. Sounded like——"

"I say!" interrupted Fullwood in a shout, and flung out an arm. "Look there! What's happened to the searchlights?"

"Don't yell, you ass!" warned Nipper. "There's no need to tell the others— Eh? Oh, my goodness! All the searchlights have gone out!"

"Didn't I say so?" roared Fullwood excitedly. "What's happened?"

"Begad!"

They stared, and their hearts thumped like mad. Every one of those searchlights that were fixed round Glenthorne Park had been extinguished. They had flickered for a moment and then, in a flash, they had gone out. In that direction everything was blackness—inky, impenetrable blackness!

"Oh, this is awful!" said Tommy Watson hoarsely. "Don't you understand, you chaps? They've given up hope! They've come to the conclusion that there's no sense in waiting any longer!"

"It can't be that!" said Nipper, frowning.

"Why can't it?"

"Because Colonel Glenthorne, at least, wouldn't give up hope until after midnight," said Nipper. "Haven't I told you what I heard him saying to the gov'nor? It isn't eleven o'clock yet."

"Then they must have heard some news!" said De Valerie quickly. "That's it! By gad! They've heard something over the telephone!"

"You're probably right!" said Nipper. "They've had news at last! Either a ship has reported a disaster, or news has come in that the 'plane has fallen in Ireland or in France, or somewhere. So, naturally, they've put out all the searchlights."

"Then we might as well go down, eh?" said Gresham reluctantly. "Oh, my hat! What an awful frost! And we'd come up here expecting——"

"Wait a minute!" panted Nipper, his voice suddenly strained and alarmed. "There may be another explanation."

"What—what do you mean?"

"Look!" exclaimed Nipper, pointing. "Can't you see? Look at Bannington!"

"But—but I can't see Bannington!" panted Gresham.

"Neither can I," said Nipper. "And why? Because every light has gone out! That flash of lightning must have struck the power station—didn't you hear that awful explosion a few seconds ago?—and the whole town has been plunged into darkness!"



CHAPTER 13.

The Disaster!

IT was some moments before the full significance of Nipper's words had dawned upon the others.

"You mean—the searchlights!" said Vivian Travers at length.

"Yes!" replied Nipper. "Great Scott! What an appalling disaster!"

"But I don't understand!" ejaculated Duncan, clutching at Nipper's arm. "What are you getting at, you ass? What's an appalling disaster?"

"Can't you see?" said Nipper, his voice hard and anxious. "We saw that fearful flash of lightning, and heard that awful explosion a little while ago, didn't we? At just the same time all the searchlights went out, and now we've seen that there's no glow from Bannington. That means that the street lights are extinguished, too—and every other light!"

"It's pretty obvious," agreed Travers. "The power-station must have been struck by lightning, and all the juice is cut off. That's why the searchlights went out. They were being supplied by long cables from the main."

A feeling of alarm was spreading rapidly among these juniors on the tower.

"Then—then Colonel Glenthorne hasn't heard any news about the aeroplane?" asked Russell dazedly. "They haven't had any report. You—you mean that the searchlight has been put out by accident?"

"Of course!" said Nipper. "The town lights are all out, too, and that proves it. It's an awful thing!"

"How is it?" asked one of the others, still groping.

"Oh, can't you see?" shouted Nipper. "Supposing the Atlantic 'plane gets through, by some miracle? Supposing it's over the coast now, and looking out for the beacon?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"What will it mean?" went on Nipper. "Captain Glenthorne will search for that beacon—he knew that it would be there. It was arranged for! And now this thunder-storm has extinguished it! Just supposing the machine is cruising about now, looking for the beacon light? There'll be nothing to guide the pilot. He'll be floundering about in the air—in the darkness!"

The juniors were partially stunned by the enormity of this disaster.

"It's just the sort of thing that *would* happen, too!" said Travers. "Fate is always playing shabby tricks of that sort. It wouldn't be the first time, either."

Vivian Travers was thinking of the famous case of Commander Byrd, the renowned American airman.

Commander Byrd, with three companions, reached the French coast at night, after a

successful Atlantic crossing. But then they were lost—hopelessly lost in stormy weather, and without any beacon to guide them. Only by the merest miracle did they escape death.

For five hours, Commander Byrd piloted his machine over the blackness of the French countryside, during dreadful weather conditions. At one time during those hours of despair, two of the airmen had been on the point of throwing themselves overboard—just to put an end to their intolerable agony. Only the supreme confidence, and the dogged pluck of Commander Byrd had saved them all. They descended into the sea, only two hundred yards from the coast—and that, in itself, was a miraculous happening.

Was history repeating itself?

Was the Glenthorne machine flying about somewhere over England—searching, groping—fighting the storms, and looking for the beacon?

"What are we going to do?" asked De Valerie suddenly. "I mean, it's horrible to stand here like this——"

"We've got to make certain!" snapped Nipper. "The sudden dowsing of those searchlights is an awful mishap."

"But the electricity people in Bannington may get the juice on again within two or three minutes," said Watson. "It may be only a temporary stoppage——"

"And it may be a serious one!" interrupted Nipper. "Look here, let me get past, you chaps! I'm going down!"

"What for?"

"I've got to telephone!" replied Nipper. "I'll 'phone to Bannington—to the police station—or the fire station—and they'll be able to tell me what's happened."

"But we can't do anything, in any case!" protested Gresham.

"Perhaps not; but we can know the worst!" replied Nipper. "Anything is better than uncertainty!"

He pushed past, and tore down the tower steps. Some of the others were going to follow him, but Travers held them back.

"No, you chaps!" he said. "We might as well stay here."

"But—but——"

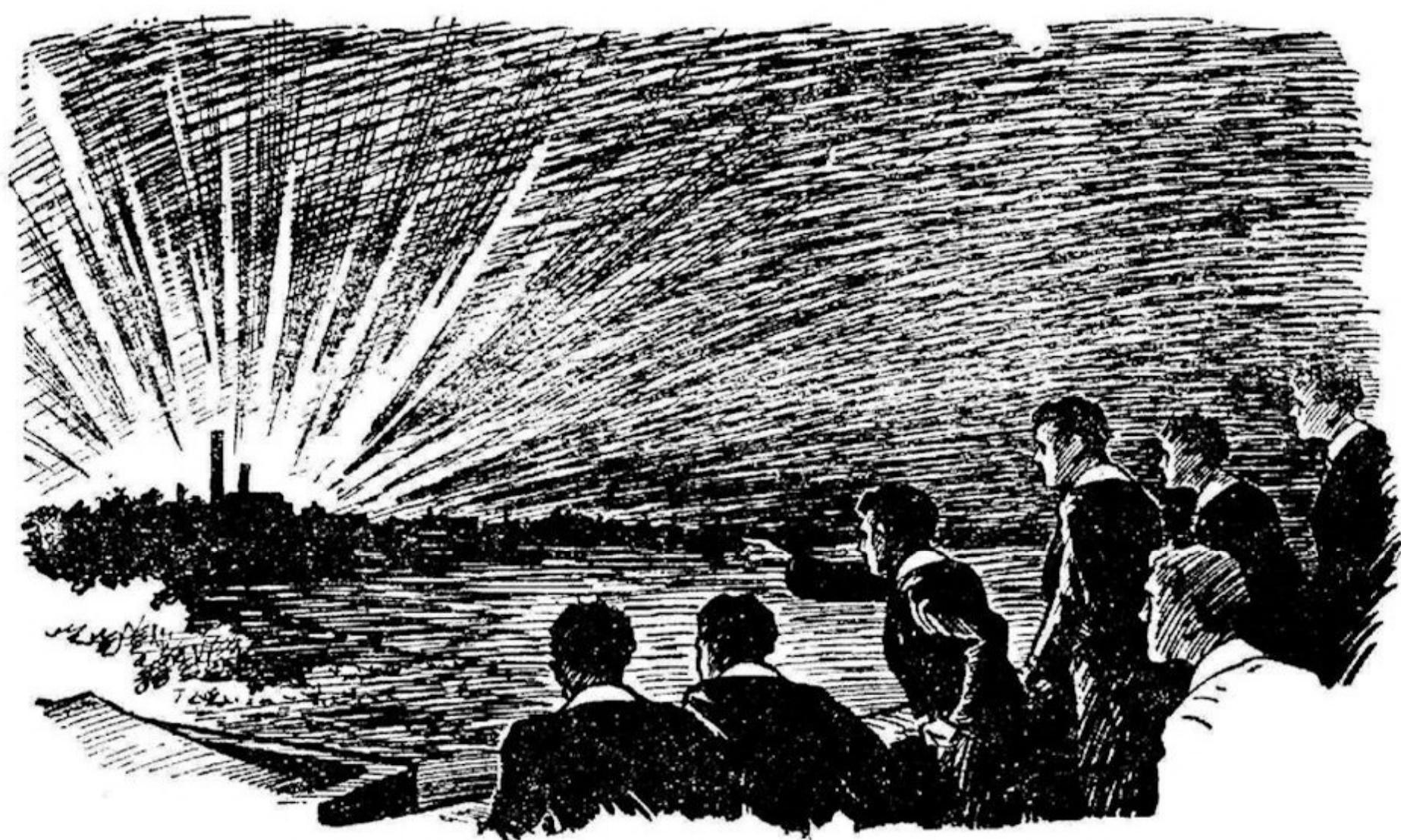
"We can't do any good by going with him," said Travers. "And we're wanted here. We've got to keep our eyes on Bannington, and if the lights come on again we can yell down to the others and tell them."

In the Triangle, the crowds had apparently scented that something was amiss. Shouts were coming—all sort of inquiries were being made. Travers, realising that it was impossible to conceal the presence of himself and his companions any longer, leaned over.

"The searchlights have gone out!" he yelled.

"Oh!" went up a roar from the excited crowd.

"The power station has been struck, and all the lights of Bannington are out, too!" shouted Travers. "It looks pretty bad, although we can't do anything, of course!"



A flash of lightning slashed down from the heavens. It seemed to split the very air, and it darted earthwards over Bannington—a wicked, blinding spear. Boom—boom—boom—oo—oom! There came the sound of a terrific explosion and, accompanying it, a lurid flash lit the sky!

Further shouts sounded, and then, abruptly, there was a hush. Lights were appearing from many of the lower windows, and the headmaster himself now came striding into the Triangle from Big Arch. Some of the juniors bolted into their Houses, but the others stood their ground.

"There is news—definite news at last!" shouted the Head, his voice trembling with emotion.

"Oh!"

In a moment, the crowds came surging round the Head, and more fellows were running up from every direction.

"Have they been killed, sir?"

"Is it bad news?"

Dr. Stafford raised a protesting hand.

"I am delighted to tell you that the news, so far as it goes, is good!" he exclaimed, in the hush. "Colonel Glenthorne has received a telephonic communication stating that—"

"Hurrah!"

"Good news!"

"Quiet, you idiots! Let the Head speak!"

The frantic crowd managed to subdue itself again.

"There is a definite report to the effect that an aeroplane was heard over Torquay, in Devonshire, shortly before ten o'clock!" said the Head, his voice vibrating with relief. "The machine was flying high, and there can be little doubt that it is the expected Atlantic 'plane."

"Hurrah!"

And the Triangle resounded with tumultuous cheering.



CHAPTER 19.

Good News—and Bad News!

SOMETHING definite at last!

The long suspense was over—and the St. Frank's boys relieved

themselves by cheering at the top of their voices. Everybody who hadn't come out so far, now came pouring from the doorways of the various Houses. Such a scene had never before been witnessed between the hours of eleven o'clock and midnight at St. Frank's.

Lights were gleaming in every window—for St. Frank's had its own power plant, and was not dependent upon the municipal supply.

The Head managed to make himself heard again.

"In the exceptional circumstances, I shall overlook this gross irregularity," he said. "I need hardly tell you that Colonel Glenthorne, when he spoke to me on the telephone, was almost overcome with joy."

"But mightn't it have been some other machine, sir?" asked one of the nearest juniors.

"It is very improbable," replied the Head. "This particular aeroplane flew over Torquay in a direct line, and then out towards the English Channel. But there can be no doubt that the pilot was heading across the bay towards Weymouth—his true course, if

he intended to follow the coastline to Sussex."

"Hurrah!"

"By careful calculation, it is reckoned that the aeroplane might fly over Caistowe—and then across this very school—during the next half-hour!" continued Dr. Stafford. "Let us all hope and pray, boys, that Captain Glenthorne will successfully bring his machine to earth."

"Oh!" gasped Reggie Pitt, his face turning pale. "But—but—Haven't you heard about the searchlights, sir?"

"What do you mean, my boy?" asked the Head sharply.

"The searchlights have gone out, sir!"

"Impossible!" said the Head. "Good heavens! What a ridiculous assertion, Pitt! Without the guidance of those searchlights, there will be no possibility of Captain Glenthorne landing in—"

"But there are some fellows up in the tower, sir, and just before you came they shouted to us that all the lights in Bannington had gone out!" panted Church. "The power station's been struck, or something, and the searchlights have been extinguished with all the other lights!"

There was a fresh sensation.

"I must see about this!" said the Head tensely. "It would be a dreadful tragedy if— But no! I cannot believe it!"

It was as Vivian Travers had said. Fate had intervened—most unkindly. Just when there came definite news of the machine—glorious news, that the Glenthorne brothers were on their true course and nearing home—the one beacon that was essential had been destroyed!

That Captain Glenthorne was relying upon that beacon was certain. He had arranged for it—he had made all plans, before crossing the Atlantic with his machine.

Probably, he had met with adverse winds, and dusk had been falling when he had found himself over Ireland. But, finding that he had a reserve of petrol, and that the engine was running perfectly, he had decided to come on, rather than land.

And he had made this decision—because he knew that Glenthorne Park would be illuminated, so that he could safely land!

What would happen if he arrived now? How could he bring his fragile ship to earth? The darkness was intense. There was not a gleam of moonlight—not even a glow of starlight. From the air the ground must have been one black expanse of mystery. Even to approach the earth, in search of a safe landing ground, was a perilous proceeding.

To follow the coastline would be easy, for both the Glenthorne brothers had flown hundreds of times along it. Each town would be recognisable—Torquay, Weymouth, the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth, and then Caistow, and home! Darkness or no darkness, the pilot would be able to distinguish those seacoast towns by their lights.

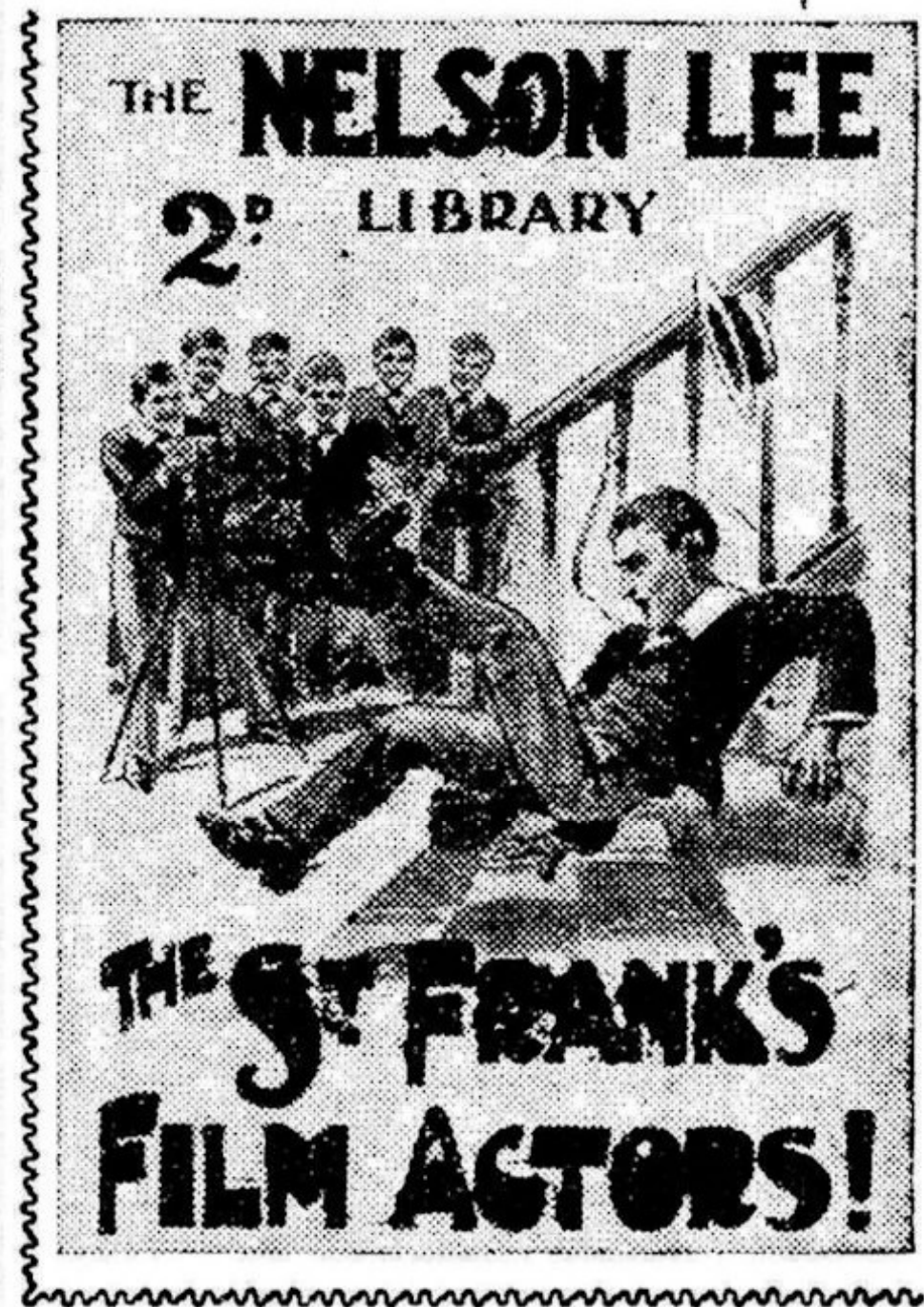
But what would happen when he turned inland? What could he do when he failed to find that expected beacon? He would fly at random—here, there, everywhere! And with a failing petrol supply—

The possibilities were fraught with horror.

After all this period of suspense and anxiety—after the machine had successfully accomplished its great and heroic task—to wander about in the darkness of a stormy English night, searching, searching!—And then the inevitable crash—the tragedy to end that marvellous flight!

Nipper, knowing nothing of what had happened in the Triangle, had rushed through the Ancient House, in order to use

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



a telephone. He had encountered Nelson Lee, and in a few brief words Lee had told him of the latest news—the splendid news.

Nipper, freshly horrified by this knowledge, had then blurted out the information regarding the lights of Bannington.

"It's too terrible, sir!" he panted. "They may be here at any minute—they may be searching for that beacon now! Can't we know something for certain? I wanted to telephone to the Bannington Police Station—"

"Leave it to me, Nipper!" broke in Lee sharply.

He hurried to his study, and in less than a minute he was at the telephone. Wisely, he rang up the fire brigade, and Nipper, standing by, heard the dreadful report. He only

caught a few words, uttered by Lee, but they were sufficient.

"Then it is true?" said the schoolmaster-detective. "Every cable, I understand? They are all dead?"

There came a pause.

"Five hours!" ejaculated Nelson Lee. "Of course, it's quite useless. But cannot something be done—some temporary expedient? Is there no current at all?"

He only waited for a few moments longer, and then he hung up the receiver.

"Five hours, sir!" said Nipper, leaning over the desk. "You mean that they can't get the current on again for five hours?"

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"Even then it will only be a temporary job, Nipper," said Nelson Lee, his voice grave. "The power station has been badly struck, and there is not a scrap of current available in the whole of Bannington. The beacon searchlights are extinguished, and there is absolutely no possibility of getting them working again!"

Nipper was stunned, and he had nothing to say.

He went to the window, and stared out dazedly. As though mocking at him, a star was peeping over the roof of the West House.

"And the storms are clearing, sir!" he said at last, as he turned. "The clouds are breaking up, and the stars are coming out! Oh, what a mockery! What's the good of it now? Even if Archie's brothers succeed in

their flight—right down to the last hundred yards—they'll never be able to land!"



CHAPTER 20.

The Drone from the Sky!



VIVIAN TRAVERS shook his head.

"No, there's no change," he said.

"Everything is as black as pitch over Glenthorne Park, and over Bannington. It looks serious, dear old fellows."

"And the machine is on its way—on the last lap!" said Harry Gresham huskily. "Oh, crumbs! What ghastly luck!"

"Look at the sky, too!" said Fullwood, with a groan. "The clouds are breaking, and the stars are coming out. That storm has cleared off towards Helmsford, and we haven't even had a drop of rain here."

"But that's all to the good," said Tommy Watson.

"Yes, I know; but it's so—so galling!" said Fullwood, between his teeth. "It seems as if that storm broke over Bannington just for the purpose of striking the power station, and putting out those searchlights. Captain Glenthorne's beacon has gone. There's nothing to guide him now!"

Jimmy Potts suddenly clutched at the stonework of the old balcony.

"Listen!" he panted. "What's that?"

"Well, well!" murmured Travers. "We mustn't get so excited, Jimmy, dear old fellow!"

"Keep quiet, confound you!" shouted Jimmy Potts, with unusual harshness. "Can't you listen? I heard something just then! I tell you I heard——"

"Yes, yes!" gasped Fullwood. "I can hear it, too! Oh, confound those fellows down in the Triangle! Why can't they be quiet?"

Travers, his eyes keen and bright, stared out into the darkness, over the roofs of the school. The other fellows up there on the balcony gripped themselves, and strained their ears.

"There it is!" whispered Potts. "Oh! Can't you hear it? I'm not mistaken, I tell you!"

"Yes, yes!" said Fullwood. "Great Scott! I believe he's right, you chaps!"

"Shut up, you idiot!"

Faintly, vaguely, they heard it. A low, throbbing sound—almost a drone. It came on the air, quivering and fading. Sometimes it seemed to get louder, and then it would dwindle away again.

"We mustn't be too certain, dear old fellows," murmured Travers. "It may be merely another motor-car on the road."

"It isn't!" insisted Potts. "Do you think I don't know the sound of an aeroplane engine? I tell you— There you are! What about it now? It's getting nearer!"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "There's not much doubt about it, old boys!"

Frantically they searched the black skies. But, naturally, they could see nothing. At least, nothing except clouds, and, here and there, a twinkling star as the clouds broke. It was impossible to tell from which direction the droning hum was coming. It seemed to be coming from all round them.

The juniors waited, every nerve tensed, their hearts beating rapidly.

"It's the Atlantic 'plane!" said Potts breathlessly. "It must be! Didn't you hear what the Head was saying down there? The machine was seen over Torquay, and it was making straight along the coast, and it ought to be here at any minute——"

"Listen!" said Fullwood. "It's getting louder!"

It was. There was no longer room for doubt. Somewhere in the distance an aeroplane engine was droning—a low, insistent throbbing sound. And it was getting louder and louder—very gradually, but certainly it was getting louder.

"Hey, you fellows!" yelled De Valerie, leaning over the balcony and cupping his hands to his mouth. "Be quiet! She's coming!"

"What?" went up a chorus from the crowds below.

"We can hear her!" shouted De Valerie.

"Quiet, everybody!" yelled Fenton, of the Sixth. "Now then, you fags! Are you going to shut up, or shall I come over there?"

A tense silence fell over the throngs in the Triangle.

By this time the droning throb of the distant aeroplane was beating on the air like a steady, rhythmic drumming. Everybody on the ground heard it now, for it echoed from the walls and it filled the air.

"Hurrah!"

The tension suddenly broke, and somebody cheered. In a second the whole crowd was yelling as loud as it could. The Atlantic aeroplane was not within sight, it was true—but it was within earshot!

"Quick, you chaps—let's rush to the playing fields!" roared somebody. "We can hear better there! And we can see, too! We might be able to spot her as she goes over!"

"By jingo, yes!"

"Come on!"

"Hurrah!"

Off they went in a mad mob. Racing and rearing, they flooded out of the Triangle, surged through the gates into Big Side and Little Side, and spread themselves over the playing fields, staring upwards, straining their eyes.

"It's about time we got down, you fellows!" said Fullwood crisply. "Come on! There's no sense in staying up here any longer!"

They all went dashing down, and by the time they came out into the Ancient House lobby they encountered Nipper, who was just on his way out.

"Have you heard it?" panted Fullwood.

"Yes!" said Nipper, his face eloquent of agony. "But what's the use? The beacon is out!"

"But won't they get it going again?"

"They can't!" said Nipper. "We've just heard from Bannington, and the power station is absolutely disabled. There'll be no current for hours and hours! And there's no other way of getting those searchlights on the go again!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"And the machine's here—almost flying overhead on its way to Glenthorne Park!" said Gresham hoarsely. "What the dickens will Archie's brothers do? How can they land without any guiding lights?"

"Heaven alone knows!" replied Nipper, in agony.

"Let's get outside—quick!" yelled De Valerie. "It's awful in here—we don't know what's happening!"

They rushed out, and they went off to the playing fields on the track of the others. But now the droning sound had throbbed away into silence, and a feeling of uncertainty had fallen over the school again.

The aeroplane had come near, or comparatively near, but it was evidently off its true course, or it would have flown right over the school.

Definite evidence that the pilot was already in difficulties.



CHAPTER 21.

Helpless!

IF the excitement had been great before, it was now well nigh hysterical.

The one feeling that affected the school beyond all others was the feeling of helplessness. What could they do? Here they were—hundreds of them—willing and eager to aid the lost flyers. And yet they could do nothing! They could only stand about, staring upwards into the black sky, their hearts filled with anxiety, their minds staggering at the horrifying possibilities of this dreadful hour.

Gone was the suspense, and in its place had come a fear.

Archie Glenthorne's intrepid brothers had succeeded! They had flown the Atlantic—right the way from Lake Superior, in Canada. Here they were, cruising over England, over the very county that was their destination.

And by cruel circumstances the guiding beacon was extinguished, and the night was unbelievably dark.

"They've gone!" said Nipper, when he reached the playing fields. "Of course, it's easy to see what's happened. Archie's brothers got over Caistowe, and then struck inland, as they had intended. Imagine it!

Everything has gone right—exactly as they had planned! They're a couple of wonders!"

"Rather!" said Reggie Pitt enthusiastically. "They've brought their machine all the way home without a falter."

"But after they cut inland from Caistowe they were lost!" continued Nipper. "Naturally, Captain Glenthorne—or his brother—came straight across country, thinking that he would spot the beacon at once. And now the machine is probably going up and down the coast, and Archie's brothers are wondering what has happened. They're all at sea—they may even think that they've mistaken Caistowe for some other town!"

"Listen!" said Boots, of the Fourth. "I think I can hear them again!"

"Silence, you fellows!" roared Nipper. "The machine's coming back!"

Instantly there was a hush.

True enough, the throbbing, droning sound of the aeroplane's engine could be heard on the night air, and this time there was not long to wait. The sound grew and grew, until the very atmosphere was quivering with the sound. The machine was coming direct for St. Frank's this time, and it was evidently at a lower level.

"Hurrah!"

"They're coming this way—straight over the school!"

"But it's awful!" panted Nipper. "They're lost, and they're trying to find their bearings. That's the simple truth of it!"

"I'll bet Captain Glenthorne saw that beacon before the power station was struck!" said Pitt, with a deep breath. "He must have seen it fifty miles away. And then, when it went out, he was flummoxed. Now he's trying to locate himself again."

Another idea struck Nipper.

"Yes, and there's something else!" he said. "It's only during the last five or ten minutes that all the lights have come on in the school. Before that practically every window was black. Now they're blazing. St. Frank's must stand out like a beacon itself from the air."

"You've hit it, dear old fellow!" said Travers approvingly. "Good man! That's the absolute truth, or I'm a Chinaman! They've spotted the lights of the school, and they're coming along to verify their bearings. Naturally, they'll recognise St. Frank's in a flash once they're directly overhead."

The excitement became more intense than ever now.

Zurrrrrrr!

The noise of the aeroplane was no longer a droning hum. It was a shattering roar—a throbbing, vibrating sound that was eloquent of immense power. But, search as they would, none of the boys could see the machine. It was up there somewhere—with in half a mile, judging by the noise.

Then, all at once, Chubby Heath of the Third let out a shrieking yell.

"There she is!" he screamed, pointing.

"Where—where?"

It was an absolute roar, and everybody jumped at Chubby.

"Can't you see?" shrieked the fag. "There she is! Right over there—look! Coming from the direction of the village!"

"By Samson, he's right!" ejaculated Travers.

"Yes, yes! She's coming straight over us!"

The wild excitement was no longer confined to the juniors. The Fifth-Formers and lordly Sixth-Formers were jumping about and shouting in just the same manner as the fags.

Up there in the sky, not more than a thousand feet above, a black shape could be seen—a swiftly moving blob against the gloom of the lessening clouds. It did not come directly over the school, but swung round towards the river, and then veered off over Bellton Wood.

"They're turning—they're circling!" shouted Fullwood huskily.

"My hat! So they are!"

Round came the black shape, and then dramatically the engine faltered, spluttered, and for a few tense seconds it was almost silent. There came the sound of the whirling propeller, the whine of the wind through the machine's wires, and then, with startling abruptness, a series of loud explosions from the exhaust. Flashes of fire—red, lurid fire—could be seen up there in the sky.

"They're coming down! They're going to land!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

But at that moment the engine opened up with even greater force than before. With a roaring, tumultuous crackle, the motor awoke to full life, and the machine itself swung round again, now heading straight over the school buildings.

She took shape, and even in that gloom the crowds could see that she was a big monoplane, with an enclosed body and a curiously-shaped tail. Against the sky she was clearly outlined as she swept overhead, looking like a great hawk. And every one of those spectators recognised her now. She was the famous Glenthorne aeroplane, the latest conqueror of the Atlantic.

Zooooom!

Lower and lower she came, till she was no higher than two or three hundred feet. Like a rocket she passed over the school, perilously close to the high clock tower, and in a second she was lost to sight beyond the trees. But she reappeared again, climbing, and then she headed off across the Stowe, far away across the meadows, in the direction of Bannington.

Everybody was cheering and shouting. But Nipper stood alone, biting his lip. He was filled with horror.

Archie's brothers had flown over St. Frank's to get their bearings, and now they were certain of them. But of what use was it to fly to Glenthorne Park?



CHAPTER 22.

A Desperate Chance!

"MARVELLOUS!" gasped Tommy Watson, as he clutched at Nipper's arm. "By jingo, Nipper, wasn't it wonderful?"

But Nipper made no comment.

"What's the matter?" asked Watson sharply.

"The matter!" said Nipper, between his teeth. "How the dickens can you ask a question like that, Tommy?"

"But—but Archie's brothers are here. They've succeeded——"

"Only to be wrecked at the very winning-post!" broke in Nipper almost harshly. "They recognised St. Frank's all right—that's why they came down so low and circled over us—and now they've gone off to Bannington, hoping to find the park. But can they do it, Tommy? Ask yourself!"

"Why, don't you think they'll land?" asked Watson blankly.

"How can they land?" replied Nipper. "They've more chance of reaching the ground here than at Glenthorne Park! There aren't half so many trees here, for one thing, and there are the school lights to guide them a bit. But there, there isn't a light anywhere! The whole town supply has failed! Even the Manor itself is in darkness!"

"But perhaps they've lit some flares or something," put in Travers shrewdly. "Hang it, dear old fellow, they wouldn't leave——"

"Flares!" interrupted Nipper, with a start. "That's possible, of course. But don't forget that there's been a terrific rainstorm in Bannington. Everything is soaked, and it would be an awful job to light bonfires, in any case. It may be raining there now. You know how severe some of these local thunderstorms are. One place will catch it hot, while another place, a mile away, doesn't get a drop!"

"That's true!" said Travers. "But all the same——"

"They're coming back!" shouted somebody near by.

There was another hush, and, sure enough, the droning sound of the aeroplane's engine could again be heard. It had died away into the distance, a minute or two earlier. But now it was apparent once more. Not so loud as before, and there seemed to be a faltering note in the engine's bark.

"I'll bet their petrol's giving out!" said Pitt despairingly.

"Yes, and they've already flown over the park, and found everything in darkness," said Nipper, clenching his fists. "Can't you understand? They're groping about again, trying to find a landing-place. They're desperate. They've got to land, because their petrol is nearly gone. And they can't find——"

He broke off and jumped.

"I've got it!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "Bonfires!"

"What?"

"Bonfires!" roared Nipper. "Oh, what fools we are not to have thought of it before! Over at Glenthorne Park they're probably wasting time, trying to get those searchlights going. But why shouldn't we light bonfires—all round the playing-fields?"

"Oh, my only topper!" gasped Watson.

"It'll be easy!" roared Nipper. "Little Side will make a fine landing-ground, and we can light the bonfires all the way round! It's the only hope—the only chance."

"Nipper, dear old fellow, you're a genius!" said Vivian Travers. "As soon as Captain Glenthorne spots the fires, he'll know that somebody is trying to help him. And he'll come over—and if the fires are bright enough, he'll be able to land."

"Quick, everybody!" bellowed Nipper. "Bonfires!"

"But you'll ruin the grass——" began one of the Fifth-Formers.

"Hang the grass!" shouted Fenton, of the Sixth. "Young Hamilton is right! Now, then, all you fellows! Grab anything you can that's burnable! We'll build the bonfires all round the ground, leaving the centre clear. Come on!"

"Hurrah!"

"All hands to the pumps!"

"They're here again! They're flying over the school!"

It was true. The aeroplane, at a higher level, was cruising over St. Frank's, swinging round and circling off towards Bellton. Very distinctly now, the excited school could hear the intermittent throbbing of the engine. It may have been that the petrol was giving out, or perhaps one or two of the plugs were failing to function. At all events, nothing could alter the fact that the machine was in a desperate plight.

Nelson Lee had now taken charge of the whole proceedings. Like a flash, he had recognised that Nipper's brain-wave was the one ray of hope. This idea of lighting bonfires was so obvious that it had escaped everybody's attention. The St. Frank's fellows, of course, worked like mad. If only they could be instrumental in saving Archie's brothers from disaster, then it would be a triumph for the school indeed!

Besides, how glorious it would be to have the machine land here—in the very grounds of St. Frank's!

Mr. Beverley Stokes, of the West House, was no less energetic than Nelson Lee. Between them, and aided by Nipper and such fellows as Fenton and Travers and Pitt and Browne, the crowds were organised into bands. They were rushed off to various points.

In a neighbouring paddock there was a big straw stack, and it was only a question of minutes before straw was being carried all round Little Side in great quantities, there to be dumped down in a whole series of bonfires.

Matches were being struck, for there was not a second to lose. Flames were licking up all round the playing-fields, growing more lurid, and smoke was rising. One after the other the bonfires glowed, smokily and dully at first, but then with gathering ferocity. But straw alone would not suffice. It was too liable to go dead, and to give forth vast quantities of pungent fog-like smoke.

In the middle of it all, the aeroplane came over again, swooping down, flying low.

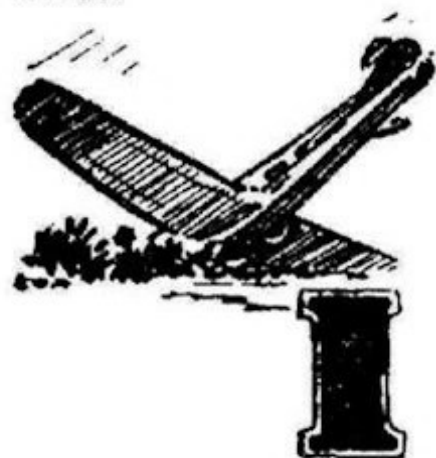
"Look out!" went up the yell. "They're going to land!"

There was a wild rush off the playing-fields. But no. The machine merely went over and then circled round again. And this very fact was encouraging. It caused the fellows to redouble their efforts.

For the meaning of this latest swoop was clear. Captain Glenthorne knew that these bonfires were being lit for his guidance, and he was waiting—waiting until the light was strong enough for him to see the ground clearly.

Away went the machine, circling over the surrounding countryside, and gaining height once more.

And in Dr. Stafford's study the telephone was busy. The Head himself was 'phoning to Glenthorne Manor, and sending the glad, almost unbelievable tidings throbbing over the wires.



CHAPTER 23.

The Landing!

IN this emergency there were no scruples regarding what should be thrown upon the bonfires. Two lives

were at stake—two precious lives—and it was no time to think of the material cost.

There were hundreds of deck-chairs packed in the pavilion, and these were all rushed out by the juniors and flung unceremoniously upon the fires. Other fellows were coming up from the paddocks with boxes, barrels, and great armfuls of faggots.

The whole affair reflected great credit on the boys. In an incredibly short space of time, these fires were sending their flames licking skywards, and converting the darkness of the night into a blazing brilliance. Little Side, instead of being a black patch of land, was now a great oblong of illuminated turf. On every side flared the fires, and the figures of the fellows, as they ran to and fro with fresh loads of fuel, were like so many demons of the night.

"That'll be enough, boys!" shouted Nelson Lee, his face streaming with perspiration and his voice hoarse with his exertions. "If the machine cannot land now, it cannot land at all. Everything will depend upon the next two or three minutes."

"She's coming round again, sir!"

"My hat, so she is—and she's dropping lower!"

"Stand clear—all of you!" shouted Lee, in an urgent voice. "Do you hear, boys? Run—run! Captain Glenthorne will never attempt to land while there is a single boy in the way!"

"Clear off, you idiots!"

"Back, there!"

"Hurrah!"

There was a wild rush. All those fellows who were coming in with fresh fuel dumped their loads. The others pressed round near the hedges and fences of Little Side. And the central space was clear now—a large expanse of deserted turf.

As though by magic, this landing ground had been prepared.

The sound of the aeroplane could be heard over towards Bellton Wood. All eyes were strained in that direction. But practically nothing of her could be seen owing to the dazzling glow of the fires, which burned in such profusion.

The scene was a remarkable one.

The big expanse of Little Side, with the fires burning all round—and with the St. Frank's boys crowding in dense masses between the conflagrations. Their faces were luridly illuminated, and all those faces were full of anxiety and excitement and tension.

Swinging round in a graceful half-circle, the Atlantic aeroplane veered towards the end of Little Side. Then, at the crucial moment, the sound of the engine ceased. There were just one or two splutterings—but now, above the crackling of the fires, everybody could hear the swishing of the propeller.

She was coming down—she was preparing to land.

At that tense, critical moment, a motor-car was tearing along the lane from Bellton to the school. It was an open car, and seated in the rear were Colonel Glenthorne and Mrs. Glenthorne. Next to the chauffeur was Archie. Archie—hatless, his hair untidy, and—wonder of wonders—minus a collar.

It is no exaggeration to state that Colonel Glenthorne's chauffeur had never driven at such a speed before with his master and mistress at the back. The car had roared through Bellton at over fifty miles an hour, scattering villagers by the blaring roar of the electric horn.

Behind Colonel Glenthorne's car came other cars—strings of them, rushed from Bannington at express speed; and one of these cars, significantly enough, was a motor ambulance.

The colonel's car turned into the gateway of St. Frank's, and the Triangle, in the glare of the car's headlights, looked singularly empty. Not a soul was in sight. Doors were open, lights were gleaming, but nobody was there. The whole school was over on the playing fields, including masters, domestics and others.

"There she is!" shouted Archie, leaping to his feet as the car came to a halt, with all wheels locked.

Over beyond the angles of the Ancient House and the School House, the whole sky was lurid with light; and in the glare the Atlantic 'plane was descending—coming down from the upper darkness.

Archie and his father and mother obtained a wonderful view of the machine. Its engine was shut off, and the propeller was ticking over. Down it came, its under surface clearly illuminated.

"It's all right, mater!" breathed Archie, turning. "Good gad! They're landing perfectly! They're here—at the good old school! I mean to say, cheers and so forth!"

"Thank Heaven my boys are safe!" murmured Mrs. Glenthorne tremblingly.

They got out of the car, but Archie did not wait for them. He couldn't. He was running like a hare. He reached the gate of Little Side, and tried to press his way through.

"Gangway, dear old boys!" he panted. "I mean to say——"

"Archie!" went up a yell. "Quick, here's Archie! Let him through!"

"Oh, Archie, old man, it's all right!"

Archie Glenthorne burst his way through, and stood there looking at the descending machine. Then his heart leapt into his mouth.

For the Atlantic aeroplane was just on the point of touching. It bumped, rose into the air again, bumped heavily once more—and then sped forwards over the turf.

"Hurrah!"

It was a wild, hysterical cheer—but it was choked almost at its outset.

For the machine failed to stop. It trundled on, rolling and rocking. There was a mad rush at the far end of Little Side, and everybody cleared out of the way.

"Look out!"

"Good heavens!" gasped Barry Stokes. "He's going straight into one of the fires!"

"Oh, stop—stop!"

With a giddy lurch, the machine swerved, one wing-tip almost touching the ground. The end bonfire was missed by inches, and then came a dull crash—a splintering, shattering sound.

For the machine had charged the fence, and with a slow, deliberate movement, she tipped forward on her nose, and at last came to a standstill—her under-carriage smashed, her tail sticking high into the air!



CHAPTER 24.

Hail, the Conquering Heroes!

"H!"

It was a long, despairing shout from hundreds of throats.

And then there was a rush—a tremendous wild stampede.

Had all these efforts been for nothing? Had the intrepid brothers landed, only to kill themselves at the very last second?

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie hoarsely.

He was one of the first to arrive near the 'plane. At close quarters she looked an enormous thing, tipped there, as she was, with her nose practically buried in the ground.

As Archie raced up, a little narrow door in the side of the body opened.

Then a figure appeared—the head and shoulders of a youthful-looking man in a leather coat. His face was strained, but he was smiling.

"Bertie!" yelled Archie joyfully.

"Why, hallo, Archie, old kid!" said Captain Bertram Glenthorne, with a weary smile.

"Hurrah!"

"They're safe! They're safe!"

Another face appeared in that little doorway—a more youthful face still, very similar to Archie's.

"Why all the fuss?" asked George, in surprise. "You were expecting us, weren't you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a roar of laughter—one of unrelieved happiness. Here were Archie's brothers, as cheery and as gay as though they had been for a mere joy ride, but who actually had flown over four thousand miles, and had just come precious near to death.

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for Archie's brothers!"

"Hip—hip—hurrah!"

The school let itself go. Seldom, indeed, had it cheered so lustily and so unrestrainedly.

Then, like magic, the crowds of fellows backed away. Archie's mother and father were on the scene, escorted by Dr. Stafford. With one accord, the two Atlantic airmen jumped to the ground, and the next moment they were greeting their parents. They cared nothing for the crowds. They embraced their father and mother warmly, fervently.

"Gad, boys, I'm proud of you!" said the colonel boisterously. "The whole country's proud of you! You've done fine—fine!"

"We got here, anyhow, dad!" said George.

Now that they had both landed, the brothers were looking unutterably weary. The tension was over—they were safe.

"You rogue!" went on the colonel. "Why, in the name of all that's infernal, are you so late? Why didn't you get here during the afternoon?"

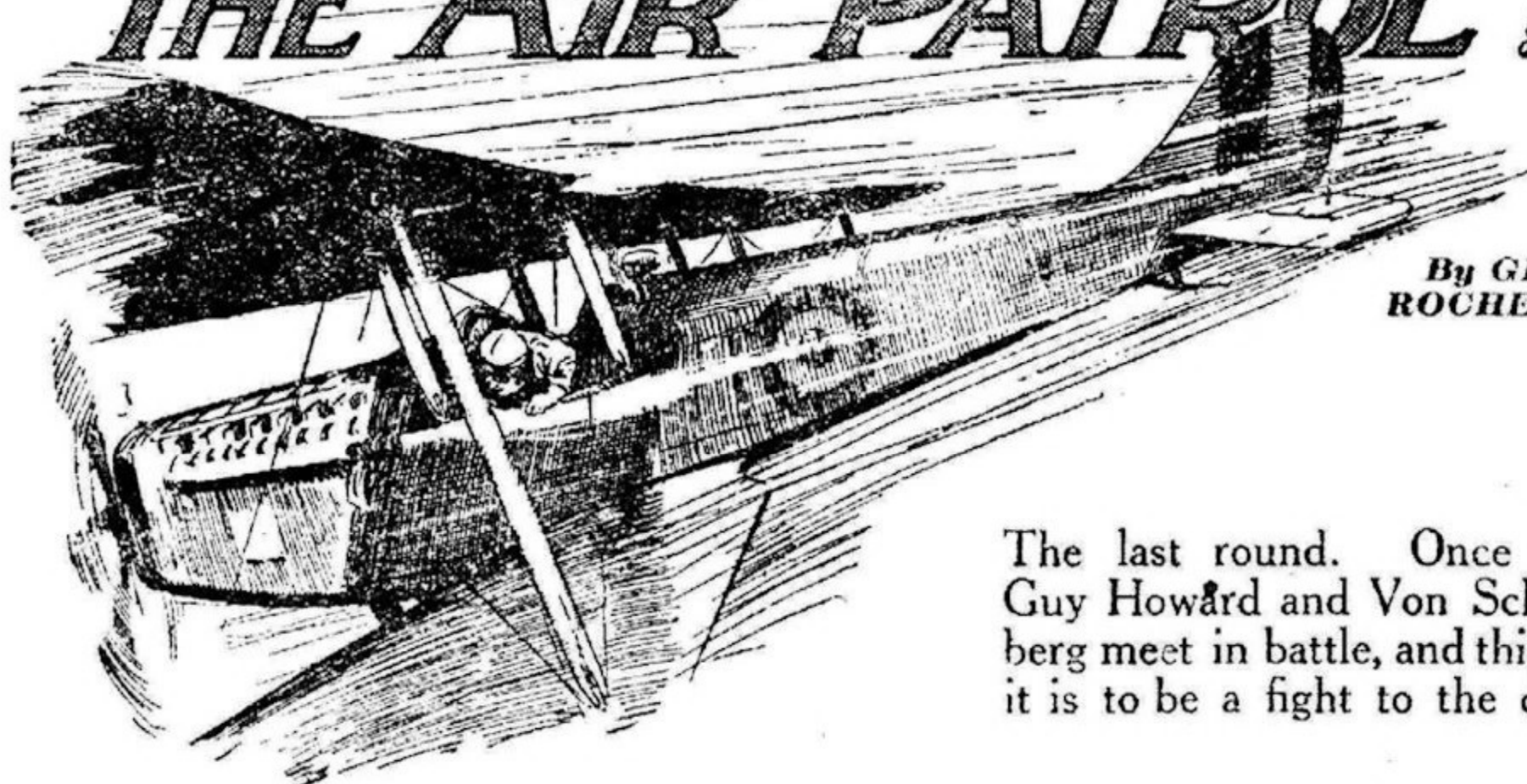
"Adverse winds, pater," said Captain Bertram. "We were blown off our course, too, and our wireless went phut during the first two hundred miles. Still, we carried on. We thought we were all right, but we couldn't locate our beacon——"

"And no wonder!" said the colonel gruffly. "The confounded power station in Bannington caught fire, or something. Gad, I thought it was all up with you boys. Yes, and it would have been, too!" he added fiercely. "It would have been but for these St. Frank's youngsters! Fine work! Wonderful work!"

(Continued on page 44, col. 2.)

Don't Miss Reading the Concluding Chapters of this Grand Serial!

THE AIR PATROL!



By GEO. E.
ROCHESTER

The last round. Once again Guy Howard and Von Schaumberg meet in battle, and this time it is to be a fight to the death!

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, and Von Schaumberg, on his part, has vowed vengeance against Guy for killing one of his confederates. Guy obtains a roving commission, and, discovering the pirates' headquarters, succeeds in capturing Von Schaumberg, but he is released by Vorzetzen, the pirate leader's chief lieutenant. Von Schaumberg tells his companion that

soon he will "strike in a manner which will startle the world!" They both disappear then, and nothing more is heard of them. In recognition of his services, Guy is promoted to commander of Atlantic Airway's new super-airship, Z.X.1. Meanwhile Von Schaumberg has had built a huge airship, and, with the idea of revenge, he appears over England. He learns that Z.X.1 is going on a trial flight and decides to attack it. Vorzetzen disagrees with the plan, because Z.X.1 is guarded by six Air Force planes. Von Schaumberg shoots his lieutenant for "mutiny." On board Z.X.1 Guy sees the six pirate planes—two of which are "bombers"—coming towards him and retreats, covered by two of the Air Force scouts.

(Now read on.)

The Message!

WHEN sending the two bombing machines to attack the giant British airship, Von Schaumberg had not foreseen that two of the escort would be covering Z.X.1's retreat from the scene of danger. Ah, had he but listened to Vorzetzen what a different tale there might have been to tell!

For the two Air Force machines guarding the airship's retreat wheeled to meet this new attack. With synchronised guns ablaze, they tore to meet the pirate bombers.

The pilots of the two bombing machines had time to use neither bomb-sight nor bomb-release. Their attention was concentrated on evading the two Air Force machines tearing towards them.

One of them, fool that he was, went upwards in a wild soaring zoom. And in that act he laid open the whole underpart of his machine from propeller boss to tail-skid. A

burst of bullets from the nearest Air Force fighting scout ripped through his lower planes, striking the bombs in the light rack carried beneath the wing.

Above the thunder of powerful aero engines sounded an explosion, deafening, appalling! The pirate machine was blown to pieces, and its companion, together with the two Air Force fighting scouts, were whirled hundreds of feet through the air, like leaves before the wind, by the terrific concussion.

With amazing dexterity the two Air Force pilots got their machines under control. But, white-faced and shaking, the pilot of the remaining pirate bomber was going seawards as hard as his thundering engine could take him.

The terrible fate which had been his companion's was not going to be his if he could help it. He landed on the water and switched off his engine.

It was surrender.

Meanwhile, the Z.X.I. wireless operator was in telephonic communication with the airship station at Stonehenge, sending out terse and dramatic news of the attack.

Then, breathless, he came running to Guy in the rear look-out cabin.

"Message from Sir Seton Milvain, sir!" he panted.

Guy snatched the slip of paper upon which the operator had scribbled the message from the President of Atlantic Airways.

With eager eyes, he read:

"To the Commander, Z.X.I.

"All orders countermanded! Use your own discretion whether to attack or return.

"MILVAIN."

Out of The Cloud Belt!

VON SCHAUMBERG sat alone at the table in his cabin, staring before him with unseeing eyes. His bearded face was drawn and haggard, and the scar which ran the whole length of his right cheek seemed more vivid than usual in its red ugliness. His lips moved, but the words were scarcely audible.

"Not one! Not one has returned!"

He sprawled his arms across the table; and on them buried his bearded face.

"Not one!" he whispered. "Vorzetzen—Vorzetzen, why did I not heed you, my friend! Ah, what folly to shoot you down

The door of the cabin opened silently, and there slipped across the threshold one who was grotesquely malformed. He stood there, his great ugly head thrust forward—a head which was out of all proportion to his dwarfish body. And in his eyes was a malicious smile.

"Is remorse, then, so overwhelming. Von Schaumberg?" he said; and the chuckle in his voice could not disguise its harshness. "Or is it regret at the loss of your squadron which so bows you down?"

Von Schaumberg jerked upright, wheeling angrily in his chair. Then the wrath died in his eyes as they dwelt on the figure by the door.

"It is you, Karl Max!" he said. "Come here, my friend!"

Karl Max, he whom the world had called mad, but in whom Von Schaumberg had discovered one of the finest chemists of the age, shuffled across the floor, rubbing his hands, wide mouth agin.

"Terrible, is it not?" he leered. "I scarce know which is the greater tragedy—the death of our good Vorzetzen, or the loss of our squadron!"

"Karl Max!" said Von Schaumberg hoarsely. "I would give my fortune to recall that mad act of mine!"

Karl Max nodded his great head.

"Yes, you mean the shooting of Vorzetzen!" he replied. "Ah, but nothing you can do now will alter what is past! Think,

therefore, of the future, my friend—a future without either Vorzetzen or your squadron."

"I can replace my squadron."

"Then"—and the sneer in Karl Max's voice was very evident—"I hope you will find better fighting pilots than those who have bungled this attack on Z.X.I. Tell me, how many of her escort were left in the air when our machines were all down?"

"Three, I think," replied Von Schaumberg angrily. "I could not see, towards the finish of the fight. A cloud-bank was forming at twenty thousand feet—coming in from the direction of the English Channel."

"And what do you intend to do now?"

Von Schaumberg pushed back his chair, and, rising to his feet, fell to pacing the cabin floor.

"I'll tell you what I intend to do!" he snarled. "If you look out of the cabin window, you will see the cloud-bank of which I spoke, five thousand feet below us. I am moving slowly forward towards Stonehenge at a height of twenty-five thousand feet. I intend to give them time to house Z.X.I., then, with the thermite bombs you have made for me, I'm going to blow the whole air station at Stonehenge to atoms!"

"But the anti-aircraft guns! Kurz spoke of anti-aircraft guns!"

"Confound the anti-aircraft guns!" shouted Von Schaumberg; and his companion chuckled delightedly. "I will come out of the cloud belt right over the airship shed, and I won't miss!"

"And then?"

"And then we drive eastwards to the China seas, make one gigantic raid, and disband."

"You are sure that Z.X.I. is heading for home?" remarked Karl Max, rising to his feet and shuffling towards the cabin window.

"Yes, I'm sure!" snarled Von Schaumberg. "Isn't she on a trial flight only? If she was properly armed, she would not have been accompanied by an escort. When I lost sight of her beneath this confounded cloud belt, she was running westwards as hard as her engines could drive her. If she had been at any height above fifteen thousand feet, I would have risked everything in an attack on her with this airship of mine. It would be suicidal for me to go lower."

It might well have been that Karl Max had paid no heed to these remarks of his chief. For, standing by the sloping window of the cabin, he repeated in a curious voice:

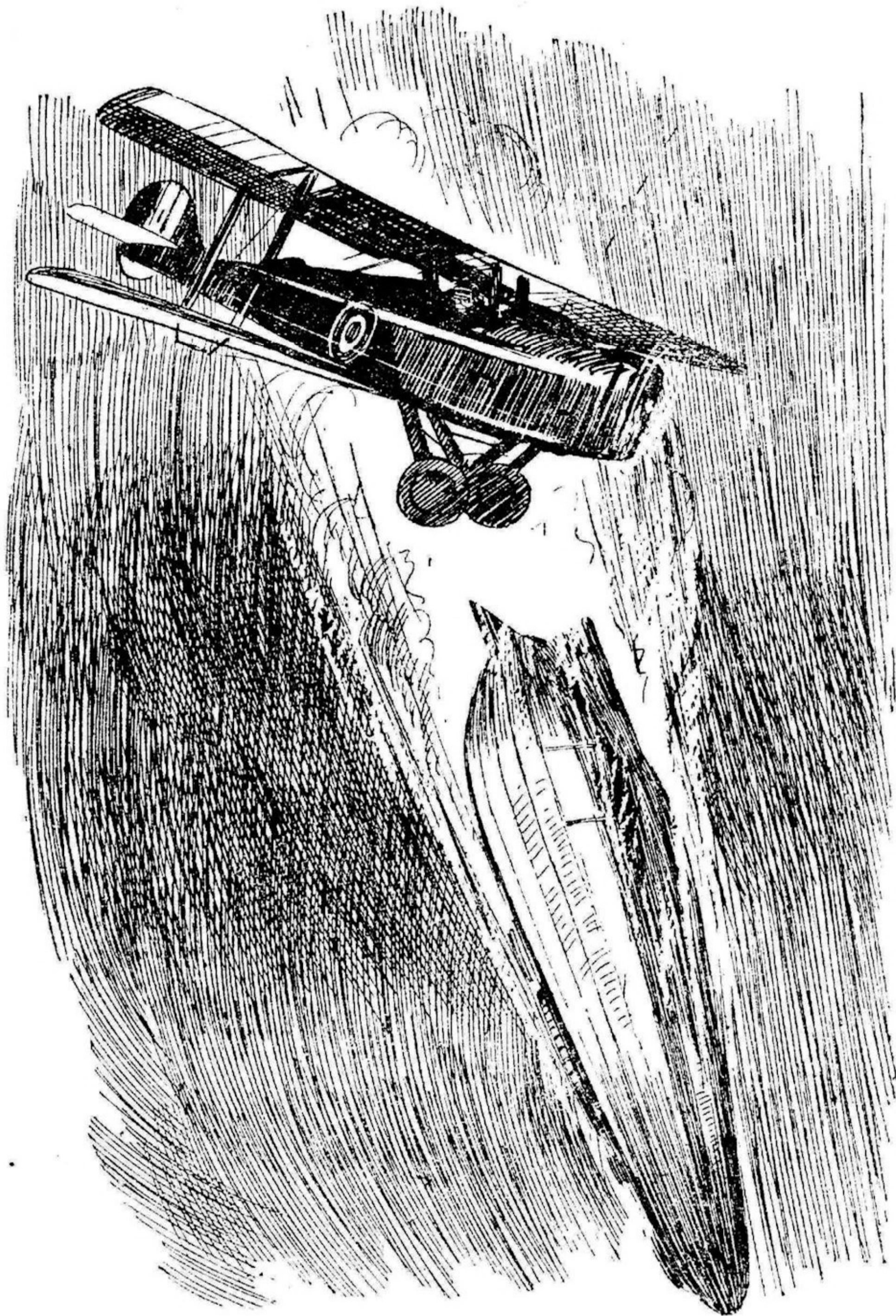
"You are sure she is heading for home?"

"I've just said so!" shouted Von Schaumberg.

"Then come here!"

Something in Karl Max's voice took Von Schaumberg to the window in two strides. As he stood peering down, his hands clenched, he caught his breath.

Below, like a vast rolling sea of glistening cotton wool, was the cloud belt. And emerging from it, like some strange, gigantic monster, was the mighty bulk of Z.X.I.—coming up into the clear sky above!



Half dazed by the fumes of the gas belt, Guy peered downwards. Below him Von Schaumburg's great airship was plunging earthwards, shrouded in leaping flames and swirling smoke. "Got him!" Guy whispered. "At last!" For he knew that not one could escape from that terrible flaming mass which was hurtling to its doom!

Above The Clouds!

"YOUR gas cylinders, fool!" yelled Von Schaumberg. "We must keep her off!"

Karl Max scuttled to the door of the cabin, and, wrenching it open, ran for the lift which led up to the hull of the airship, where were stored his cylinders of poison gas.

Von Schaumberg leapt to the table, and snatched up the mouthpiece of the telephone which connected with the pilot in the forward control cabin.

"Climb, Zuchtlos, you dog!" he shouted. "Climb as hard as you can!"

Dropping the receiver, he dashed back to the cabin window. Z.X.I. was a mile away, four thousand feet below the pirate airship. Her blunt grey nose had swung round, and she was driving upwards straight towards the pirate.

The six quick-firing, anti-aircraft guns, on the steel platform fitted on top of her hull were slewing their wicked muzzles slowly towards Von Schaumberg's airship. The gun crews, their oxygen apparatus fitted like gas masks, were working with cool, unhurried precision.

Even in those few moments, whilst Von Schaumberg watched, the starboard gun belched smoke. High above the cabin window of the pirate airship there came the white smoke-puff of bursting shrapnel.

It was enough to send Von Schaumberg dashing from the cabin. On the port promenade deck outside the gondola were mounted two long-barrelled six-pounders, and already the gunners were whipping off the tarpaulins, whilst others stood by the ammunition lift, which led upwards to the steel enclosed ammunition dump in the hull.

"Hurry, confound you!" screamed Von Schaumberg, and ran to the port side where the two guns mounted there were already being swung on their mountings.

The six 750 h.p. *Stahlfeder* engines were thundering at full revolutions, driving the airship upwards at an angle of full sixty degrees.

"Your orders are to keep firing—keep firing, you dogs!" shouted Von Schaumberg. "There's ten thousand pounds for the first man who riddles the hull of Z.X.I.!"

With that, he ran for the look-out cockpit high in the nose of the airship. It was more in the form of a control tower than aught else, for there were speaking-tubes connected with every quarter of the airship.

Fast as the pirate was driving upwards, Z.X.I. was remorselessly overhauling her. All six anti-aircraft guns of Atlantic Airways' great airship were now in action, and shrapnel was bursting perilously close to the pirate craft.

Von Schaumberg snatched up the speaking-tube which connected with the gas chamber in the hull. Pressing his livid lips against it, he shouted:

"Karl Max, where is your gas, you fool? She's almost on us, burn you!"

"Give me three minutes!" came back the harsh voice of Karl Max, and, with an oath, Von Schaumberg wheeled to watch the battle.

Z.X.I. was coming towards him nose on, thus rendering her gondola guns almost useless, but presenting only the diameter of her great hull as a target to the pirate's six-pounders on the promenade deck.

The two six-pounders mounted at the after part of the promenade deck were already firing. Von Schaumberg leapt to the tube which connected with the pilot's control cabin.

"Keep swinging, Zuchtlos!" he snarled. "Give all my guns a chance!"

Zuchtlos heard, and the control-wheel spun under his strong fingers. The pirate airship swung a few degrees to port, and both six-pounders on the port side of the promenade deck belched flame and smoke.

The long muzzles of Z.X.I.'s anti-aircraft guns were almost parallel with the steel gun-platform. Suddenly they ceased to fire, and Von Schaumberg, glasses to his eyes, saw that a new sighting was being taken by every gun.

He held his breath. He knew Zuchtlos was doing all that man could do to evade the hostile fire. Confound Karl Max! Why didn't the fool hurry—

CRASH!

In perfect unison the anti-aircraft guns of Z.X.I. fired simultaneously. The pirate airship reeled, the glass of the look-out cabin shattering into thousands of fragments. Bruised and bleeding, Von Schaumberg lumbered drunkenly to his feet from the floor of the cabin, where he had been hurled.

His airship was still afloat in the air. That was all he knew—all he cared. She had been hit, but not mortally. But she was going down. Zuchtlos was taking her down in a wild dive to avoid a further hit.

Yellow, choking fumes were eddying through the broken glass of the cabin. Frenziedly Von Schaumberg ripped a mask from the rack and adjusted it with shaking fingers.

The gas cylinders were working, and a cubic mile of poison gas would, within four minutes, enshroud the pirate airship. Curtained by this deadly ally, Von Schaumberg could carry the fight back to Z.X.I. He had been taken entirely unawares by the sudden appearance of the Atlantic Airways airship, and had been forced to run—to adopt the defensive. But now, enshrouded by his poison gas cloud, he could take stock of his position whilst Z.X.I. was held off by the deadly fumes!

The Only Chance!

GUY, in the look-out cabin of Z.X.I., saw the yellow fumes enshrouding the hull of the pirate airship. It had followed so closely on the hit registered by the anti-aircraft guns, that at first he thought the pirate was on fire.

But the volume of the rolling, eddying fumes, and the fact that the airship was still

under control, proved to him that his first impression was wrong, and he came to the conclusion that she was throwing out a smoke cloud.

Over a short-length telephone he was in direct communication with Fraser in the control-cabin.

"She's going down, Fraser!" he rapped. "Our fire has buckled her stern framework, but her rear elevators are working and she's under control! Climb above that smoke screen she's putting out!"

"Yes, sir!" replied Fraser, and up at a more acute angle went the blunt nose of Z.X.I.

The pirate airship was completely hidden by now in the dense fumes. A thin, eddying wisp of them came to Guy. They brought smarting tears to his eyes, and caught him chokingly in the throat. And there came, then, realisation as to what those fumes really were. Denser and thicker they commenced to swirl around Z.X.I.

"Fraser—Fraser!" Guy's voice was hoarse, terribly urgent. "It's gas! Run—for it—our only chance!"

Fraser needed no second telling. He was comparatively secure for the moment in his draught-proof cabin. The wheel whirled in his hands, and the giant airship swerved sickeningly. Her hydrogen-kerosene engines were thundering at full revolutions, and, with nose down, she tore earthwards, away from that deadly menace.

With streaming eyes, fighting chokingly for breath in the exposed look-out cabin, Guy fought to retain possession of his reeling senses. One thought was uppermost in his mind. He knew his gun crew must be similarly affected. If the pirate airship should come on them now, emerging suddenly from that screen of poison gas, then the great airship of Atlantic Airways would be at her mercy.

A man staggered into the look-out cabin, grabbing Guy weakly by the arm. It was Montessor, the gunnery officer.

"Ammunition—is done!" he gasped. "We hadn't much—it's done—all of it!"

Guy passed a shaking hand across his eyes. Z.X.I. was clear of the gas now by half a mile. Escape was easy, for she was faster than the pirate airship. Escape! Guy tried resolutely to put such a thought from him, yet he knew that he was responsible for the lives of his crew.

"What's our damage?" he asked hoarsely.

"The gondola is a complete wreck aft!" replied Montessor. "A shell hit us there! A flying fragment of wreckage penetrated the envelope, and number two gas-bag is leaking badly!"

"Then, listen!" said Guy urgently. "We have one chance left! Sling the two bombs we carry for experimental purposes on the rack of a machine, and get her out on the launching gear! It's our only chance!"

"It's madness!" protested Montessor.

"Go and do it!" shouted the boy, his eyes blazing. "Look there, man!"

He pointed backwards. The pirate airship was coming out of the poison-gas cloud. She swung towards Z.X.I., and came driving forward, propelled by the full power of her six Stahlfeder engines.

"What chance have we, unarmed as we now are, unless we run away?" snapped Guy. "But I've never quit yet, and I'm not quitting now! Get that machine slung out, and quick!"

Montessor hesitated no longer. The rush of clean air had revived both he and Guy. Turning, he dashed from the cabin. Guy spoke rapidly to Fraser over the connecting telephone.

"Fraser, I'm going off in an airplane! Keep the airship clear of Von Schaumberg—our ammunition is done! If they get me, make for home as hard as you can! The airplane is our only chance!"

The End Of It All!

IT was ten minutes later when the small fighting scout dropped away from the launching gear of Z.X.I. Guy, in the snug cockpit, knew that everything now depended on his skill.

Since the pirate airship had emerged from the poison-gas cloud, not one shot had been fired by Z.X.I. And it was evident that Von Schaumberg realised that her ammunition was done.

Fraser, by skilful piloting, and aided by his greater turn of speed, had done his utmost to keep Z.X.I. clear of the pirate's fire. But for all that the giant airship of Atlantic Airways was by now almost crippled.

Two of her engine-cars were a mass of twisted iron debris. Her great envelope was gaping in a dozen places, and the framework of duralumin, which served to protect numbers two and three gas-bags, was a twisted and buckled mass of gleaming metal.

Waiting till his thundering propeller gripped the air, Guy pressed on the rudder-bar, and pulling back on the control stick, went upwards in a wild, swinging climb. Then, with throttle full open, he tore towards the great bulk of the pirate airship.

They saw him coming and, maybe, they guessed his mission. For, from the gas vents in the hull, swirled dense fumes of the poison gas. They enveloped the airship and eddied up towards the approaching machine.

Guy, crouched over his controls, felt the bite of the fumes in his throat. But his fingers, firm as a rock, were already gripping the bomb release.

Then right into the fumes he went, and his hand jerked on the bomb release. In that same instant he yanked the control stick back, and went upwards in a soaring zoom into the clear air above the gas screen.

His close-fitting goggles protected his eyes, and, peering downwards, he looked in vain for some result of his bomb. Had he registered a hit—or had he missed?

But all he could see was that swirling yellow cloud. He felt sick, horribly sick, and it seemed as though a thousand needles were pricking into his lungs.

He circled once, drawing in great, choking breaths of the clean, pure air. Then, compressing his lips tightly, he whipped his stick forward and went straight into the heart of that gas cloud in a tearing nose-dive.

A gigantic, solid mass seemed to leap at him through the blinding, swirling fumes. He pulled back on the stick and jerked on the bomb release.

Above the roar of his engine he heard a thunderous, deafening explosion. His machine was lifted and whirled through the air like a scrap of paper. Dazed, sick, three parts unconscious, he fought almost instinctively to get his machine under control. Not five seconds had elapsed since he started on that wild dive into the gas.

His thundering engine took him clear as he kept the rudder-bar level and the control stick forward. Weakly he turned his head, peering downwards.

A thousand feet below him, Von Schaumburg's great airship was plunging earthwards, shrouded in leaping flames and swirling smoke.

Guy leaned back weakly in his seat.

"Got him!" he whispered. "At last!" For he knew that not one could escape from that terrible, flaming mass which was hurtling to its doom!

The sun was setting red beyond the rim of Salisbury Plain when, out of the mists of evening, Z.X.I. came limping home.

Soldiers, four deep, kept back the crowd which had gathered to welcome her, for news of the fight, sent out by her wireless operator, had swept England.

The Union Jack fluttered proudly at her stern, and, as the noise of her engines died gradually away, a thunderous cheer rose from the dense crowd.

"That's for you!" grinned Montessor, who was standing beside Guy on the promenade deck.

"Don't be a silly ass!" retorted Guy, and bolted into the control-cabin.

Then slowly, slowly, Z.X.I. dropped down towards the long shed which was her home.

THE END.

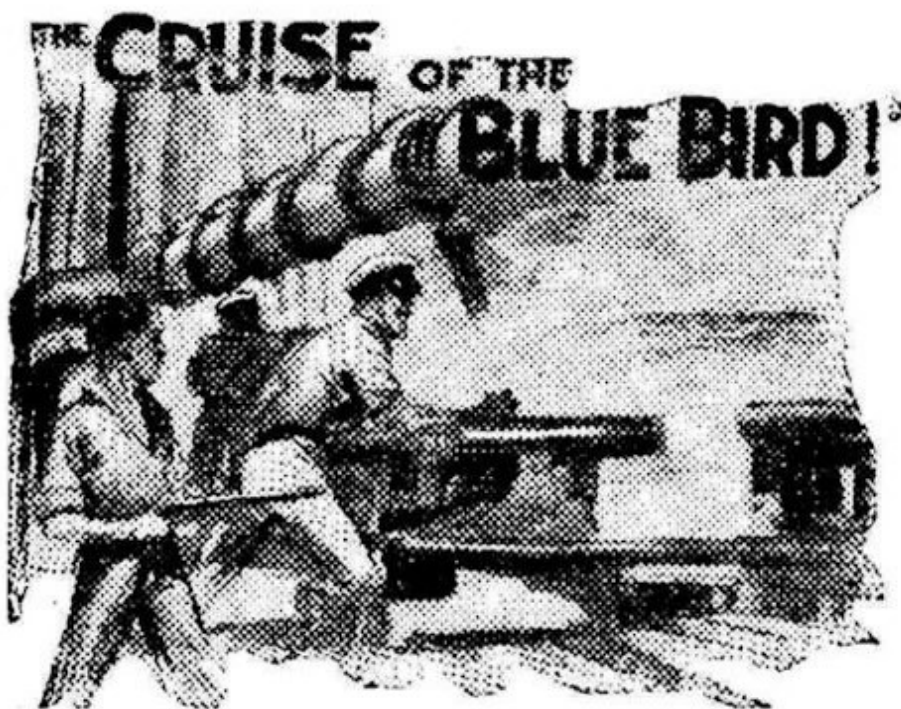
(Thus we come to a triumphant end of Geo. E. Rochester's rattling fine serial. Its successor, "The Cruise of the Blue Bird!" by Coutts Brisbane, is in every way as exciting. Just read the advert below and you will get an idea of what it is about.)

AMAZING ADVENTURE IN THE SOUTHERN SEAS!

At the wheel of the schooner, Blue Bird, stands Captain Manby—strong, lithe, hawk-faced, keen-eyed. Beside him are two youngsters; chums. Jack Manby, son of the captain, and his cousin, Ned Sutton. Adventure-loving lads, these; Jack, a young edition of his father, daring of spirit but inclined to lack judgment; Ned, daring, too, but for all that, cautious.

Gracefully the Blue Bird cuts through the waters of the Pacific. Ahead, seeming to rise and fall with the swell, shows a tiny speck of blue-grey surrounded by flashing foam; palm trees rear their slender trunks heavenwards—Graden Island. And that is the starting point of many exciting adventures to come; where Captain Manby will have his resourcefulness taxed to the full; where Jack and Ned will be beset on all sides with peril!

In "THE CRUISE OF THE BLUE BIRD," Coutts Brisbane has surely written one of the most exciting adventure stories of the year. All "N.L.L." readers will simply revel in its absorbing chapters. Look out for the opening instalment of this wonder serial which STARTS IN NEXT WEDNESDAY'S



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OUR WEEKLY POW-WOW!

By
THE EDITOR.

A Treat in Store!

WE have had many and many a rousing fine serial in the "Nelson Lee Library," but I am inclined to think the big winner in this line will be the magnificent story which starts next week. It deals with thrilling adventure in the South Seas, the magic realm of mystery and romance, colour and the unknown. The author is Coutts Brisbane, a writer who may be new to some of you, though, as a matter of fact, he has turned out some of the keenest, most dramatic tales ever penned. Coutts Brisbane is a genius who can bring the real romance of life into whatever he writes. He has done a good bit of rolling round the world himself, and he possesses the supreme gift of the born storyteller. So watch out for "The Cruise of the Blue Bird!" which starts next week!

Hooray!

That seemed to be the best heading for this paragraph. What's it all about, eh? Well, it's a bit of jolly fine news for all readers of the St. Frank's stories. That's what it is. Here is a real golden opportunity for all those numerous chums who have been asking and asking for stories about the early doings of the St. Frank's crowd of favourites. I am starting a grand series of St. Frank's yarns in the "Popular." The first appears next Tuesday, and tells how Reggie Pitt came to St. Frank's. For long enough my bulky letter bag has revealed a genuine longing on the part of readers to get the hang of all that happened at St. Frank's in the old days. Now they have the chance. Make sure of the "Popular" next week, and afterwards. There you will get in touch with the cheery chums of the famous school which is adorned with the presence of Nipper and his chums.

Measuring a Walk!

A chum in Manchester asks me a natty little question about a pedometer. What is it? How does the gadget work? The pedometer is a comfortable little arrangement which if properly fixed will show one how far one has footed it. It takes note of all strides from the short, quick paces into the room where the grub is served, to a hefty hoofing display on the road. The instrument may be likened unto a watch, with the one great difference. The balance wheel or pendulum operates the works, and not the works the balance wheel. Most pedometers are designed with a short pendulum to which is attached a small spring-controlled ratchet that engages the ratchet wheel. The movement of the body, as when walking, causes the pendulum to swing backwards and forwards—thus the ratchet engages and moves

the wheel in ratio to the distance it swings. The ratchet wheel is, of course, geared with other wheels that register the total miles and the tenths of a mile, on the lines of a speedometer. The teeth of the ratchet wheel are very fine, and, therefore, the distance swung by the pendulum picks up and moves the wheel by a similar amount. The longer one's stride, the more violent the body movement, and the further the pendulum will be swung.

THE EDITOR,
(Chief Officer).

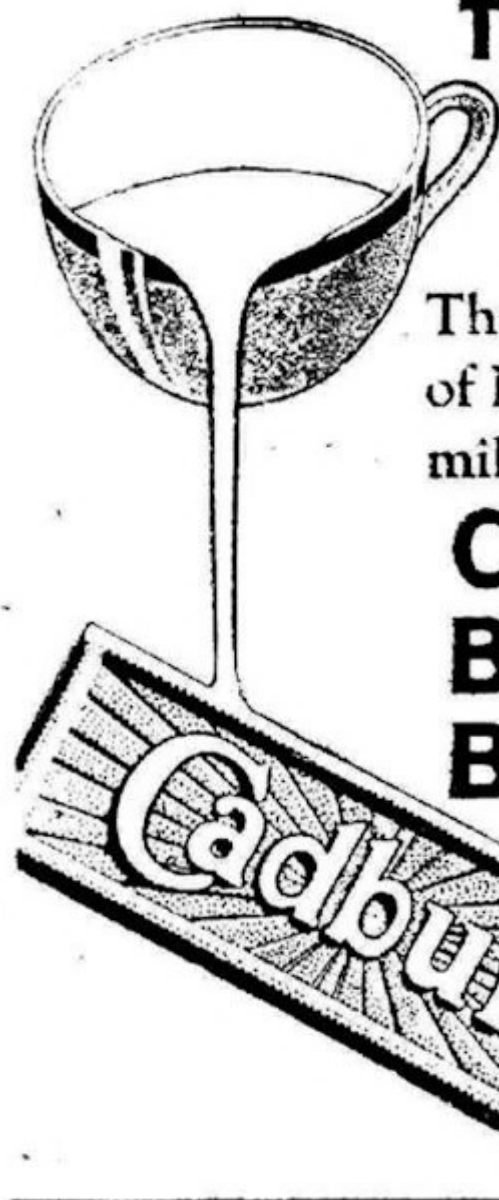
CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

F. Smith, 49, Arno's Street, Knowle, Bristol, wishes to hear from readers in Bath.

Miss Lena Appletree, 37, Sparkbrook Street, Coventry, Warwickshire, wishes to hear from girl readers anywhere; all letters answered.

(Continued overleaf.)

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CORRESPONDENTS WANTED

(Continued from previous page.)

G. Matthews, 5, Wingfield Road, Trowbridge, Wilts., wishes to obtain Nos. 1-42, inclusive N.L.L. new series. He also wishes to correspond with stamp collectors.

A. Cantoni, 40, Baker Street, Lloyd Square, London, W.C.1, wants back numbers of the N.L.L.

Frank W. Williams, 15, Cottrell Street, Hereford, wishes to correspond with stamp collectors.

Gilbert C. Smith, 35, Park Street, Hereford, wishes to correspond with readers interested in sport and stamp collecting.

C. H. Gosling, 10, Narrows Road, St. Werburgh's, Bristol, would like to hear from Leaguers in Bristol.

James Robinson, 139, Wakefield Street, Adelaide, South Australia, wishes to correspond with a reader in the hairdressing trade.

R. Dunn, 228, Danbury Road, Claydon, London, E., wishes to buy N.L.L. No. 2, new series.

Thomas Morrow, 5, Ebenezer Street, Rock Ferry, Birkenhead, wishes to correspond with readers living in Western or Central Canada.

Eric Miller, Coachbuilders, John Street, Ashton-under-Lyne, requires N.L.L. No. 1 old series and No. 112 new series, entitled "Nipper at St. Frank's." Sixpence offered for each.

LEAGUE MEMBERS PLEASE NOTE!

From now onwards all correspondence appertaining to the St. Frank's League must be addressed to: St. Frank's League, 5, Tallis House, Tallis Street, London, E.C.4.

ATLANTIC FLYERS AT ST. FRANK'S!

(Continued from page 38.)

"They saved our lives, sir," said Captain Glenhorne earnestly. "I was lost—absolutely lost! Then, when I saw those fires, I began to hope again. I'll guarantee there's not a pint of petrol left in the old tanks. We only landed in the nick of time."

And after that, of course, it was merely a matter of cheering and shouting.

The Atlantic machine was left just as she had landed, with a strong guard of police—for souvenir hunters were liable to make a nasty mess of her if they were allowed to have their own way!

There were wild scenes at St. Frank's that night.

The roads became choked with motor-cars. People were coming from all over the country, many of them from London. Air Ministry officials were on the spot, and police and Press men by the score.

Never had the old school known such an exciting night.

On the morrow, when the crowds were still about, the fellows felt proud of themselves. They had become famous. Every newspaper was full of their exploit.

—And who could say that St. Frank's was not deserving of the highest praise?

—But for the prompt measures of the school-boys, the Atlantic plane would probably have crashed to disaster and death.

And Archie Glenhorne — Well, of course, Archie was the most popular fellow in the whole school for days. For were not his brothers the heroes of England—the record breakers?

THE END.

(Next week's stunning yarn of school life and adventure is entitled "The St. Frank's Film Actors!" And don't forget that, starting with next week, stories dealing with the early adventures of the "Boys" of St. Frank's, written by Edwy Scarles Brooks, are appearing in our grand companion paper, "The Popular," which is published every Tuesday, price 2d.)



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