

NELSON LEE

2d



SNO' JOKE!

Handforth and Co. come a cropper—only one of the amusing incidents from this week's hilarious complete yarn featuring the cheery chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 47.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

December 13th, 1930.

HANDY, THE

CHAPTER 1.

Handforth's Latest!

"**B**Y George! Doesn't she look fine?" asked Edward Oswald Handforth enthusiastically.

Church and McClure, his faithful chums, took no chances; they withheld their opinions. Handforth was in a good mood, so why spoil it?

The three chums of Study D at St. Frank's were standing in an isolated shed on the edge of Parkington Grange, down in Kent. The Grange was the ancestral home of Kirby

Keeble Parkington — the celebrated K. K. of the Remove. Quite a big crowd of St. Frank's fellows were spending their Christmas holidays there. Irene & Co., of the Moor View School, were also much in evidence.

It was a fine, crisp morning, with several degrees of frost. The sun was shining on a great expanse of snow-covered parkland, with the frozen lake near at hand. Skaters were already turning out for the morning's sport.

But Handforth & Co., immediately after breakfast, had dodged into this shed, and had been busy ever since. Indeed, the other fellows had wondered at the repeated disappearances of the Study D trio during the past day or so. The three chums had developed a queer habit of

vanishing for hours on end. Extraordinarily enough, Handforth, usually so prone to let the cat out of the bag, had not obliged this time.

"Well, she's finished," he said, with pride. "Finished at last. This morning, my sons, we're going to show the chaps something worth seeing."

"I shouldn't be too sure, Handy," said Church cautiously. "Perhaps the—er—yacht won't sail so well as you hope."

"Even if it sails at all," murmured McClure.



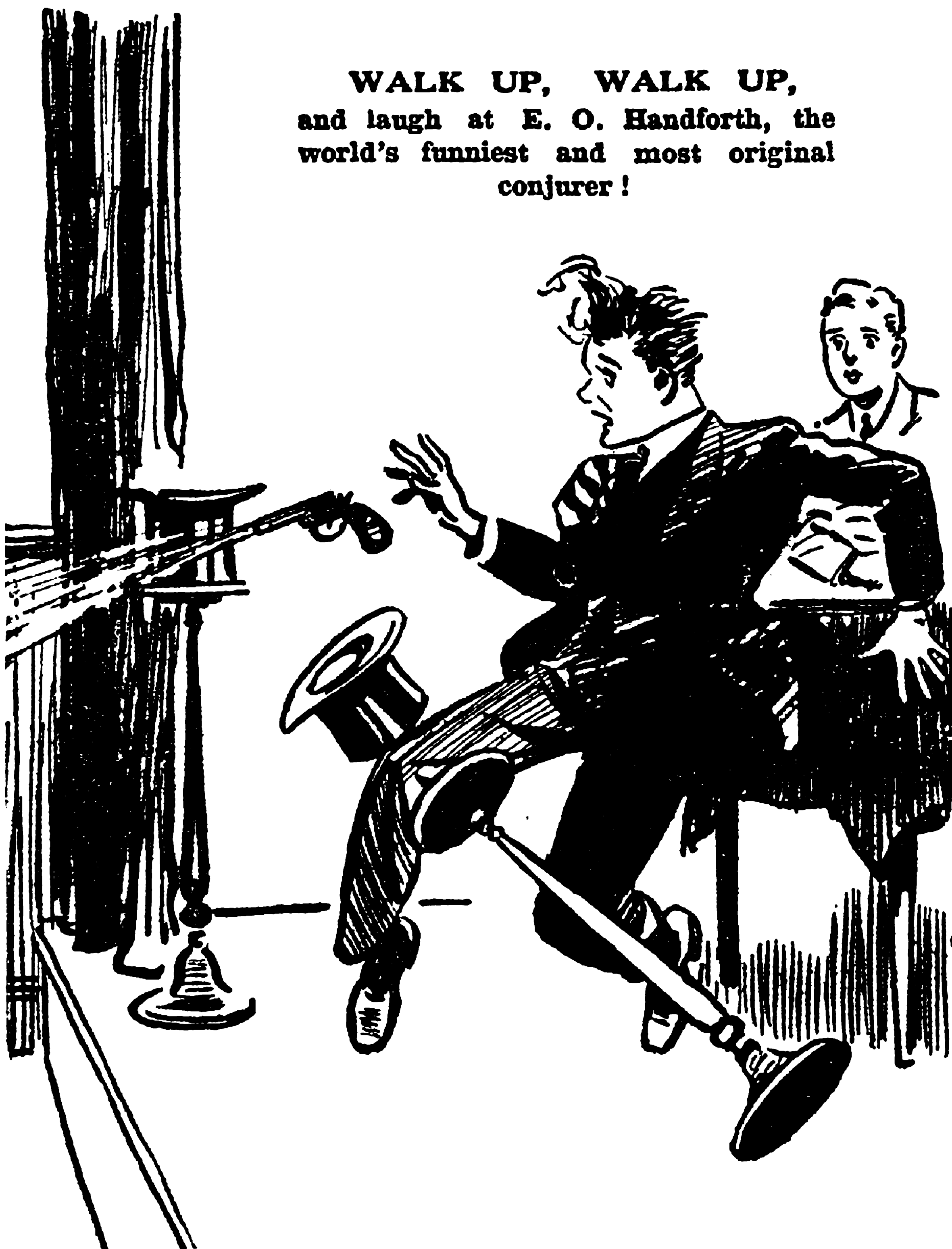
Kenneth
Brookes

—The St. Frank's Christmas Revellers!

CONJURER!

By
**EDWY SEARLES
BROOKS.**

**WALK UP, WALK UP,
and laugh at E. O. Handforth, the
world's funniest and most original
conjurer!**



And now it was made—and Church and McClure were full of apprehension.

They eyed it askance. It was unlike any other ice yacht that the world had seen. Handforth had planned it all out. There were two long runners to glide over the ice, and a spidery framework, held together by pieces of string and odds and ends of wire. From the centre of these cross members arose the mast. There was nothing unusual about the mast, for it had been lifted clean out of a small sailing yacht, which had been found in the shed.

Situated precariously abaft the mast, in the very centre of the spidery framework, was the pilot's seat. At least, Hand-

Church had hesitated over the word "yacht" because, for the life of him, he couldn't liken this weird contrivance to Handforth's description of it.

Some days ago he had conceived the brilliant idea of making an ice yacht. Why bother with skating or tobogganing when the far more exciting sport of ice yachting could be indulged in? Only one thing was lacking—the ice yacht itself. But this didn't bother the enthusiastic Handforth. He at once proceeded to make one.

Handforth dignified it by this name. It was really only a piece of six-inch floorboard, of sufficient length to accommodate the pilot in the centre, and a couple of passengers, one on either side.

"Well, let's get her out," said Handforth briskly. "She'll run as easy as winking over the snow, and it slopes down to the lake, so we'll have her going in two shakes. There's a ripping breeze this morning, too."

"It's half a gale," said Church doubtfully.

"The more wind, the better," said Handforth. "I reckon we ought to do at least eighteen miles an hour on the first run, and when we get the hang of the controls, we might even get her up to twenty-five."

"We?" said McClure coldly. "Where do you get that 'we' from?"

"You're coming with me, aren't you?"

The Scottish junior laughed at the joke.

"We've helped you to make the thing, we'll help you to push it down to the lake, but if you expect us to ride in it you've made a bloomer," he said firmly. "Churchy and I know where to stop."

"To a yard," agreed Church. "We'll stop on the edge of the lake."

Handforth regarded them in dismay.

"But, you silly asses, I can't sail the thing single-handed!" he protested. "It'll take me all my time to steer the giddy thing. You chaps have got to manage the sail. How the dickens can a captain handle a ship single-handed? He's got to have a crew!"

"Well, this crew's mutinied," said McClure finally.

The word acted upon Handforth like a tonic.

"So the crew's mutinied, has it?" he said fiercely. "We'll see about that! I suppose you know what a skipper does to a mutinous crew? He takes hold of the crew like this"—he seized Church and McClure before they could dodge—"and he bangs their heads together like this"—Crash!—"and again like this!"

Crash!

"Hi! Whoa!" howled Church, wrenching himself away. "You—you dangerous lunatic! You can risk your own life if you like, but Mac and I see no reason why we should risk ours. This thing's a death-trap!"

And he gazed at the ice yacht disdainfully.

"A fine pair of pals I've got!" said Handforth scornfully. "A fine crew for a skipper to rely on! You know jolly well I can't handle the thing alone, and you're deserting me! Funks!"

"Here, I say!" protested Church. "You know we're not funks!"

"Not funks?" roared Handforth. "After you've refused to sail with me? I'm not scared, am I? Of course you're funks!"

"It's no good, Mac," said Church fiercely. "Why jib any more? We knew we'd have to go from the start! Let's push her out. We'll show him whether we're funks or not!"

CHAPTER 2.

Not According to Programme!

WHAT is it?" asked Irene Manners wonderingly.

She was in mid-lake with some of the other girls and a number of the boys. All were well wrapped up, and they were bent upon a morning of keen

sport. Their faces were flushed with vigorous health, and the girls looked particularly charming in their business-like and gaily-coloured sweaters.

"You mean that thing over by the edge of the lake?" asked K. K., shading his eyes against the sun.

"Aren't they three of our chaps with it?" asked Deeks.

"One of them is Ted Handforth," said Irene confidently. "I'd know him anywhere. Besides, he just came an awful cropper—and you know how clumsy Ted is."

Nipper grinned.

"Now we know where those three chaps have been vanishing to for the past few days," he chuckled. "They're springing a surprise on us, my sons! They've been making some contraption, by the look of it, for use on the ice."

"Contraption is right," agreed K. K. "But what is it?"

"Let's go over and see," suggested Doris Berkeley.

They skimmed over the ice, and arrived just as Handforth & Co. had launched their wonderful craft on the ice. It stood there in all its glory, a conglomeration of odds and ends of old lengths of wood, some painted, some new, some even tarred. Handforth had not been particular in his choice of materials.

He grinned as the skaters came skimming up.

"I thought you'd buzz round like wasps after honey," he said cheerfully. "I was saying to Mac only a minute ago that as soon as you spotted this thing you'd come flying up."

"May we ask what it is?" inquired Irene politely.

"It's my new ice yacht."

"Your new ice what?" said K. K.

"Not ice what—ice yacht."

"I confess," said K. K., "that I don't know much about ice yachts. But if this is one, I'm the Sultan of Timbuctoo!"

"Of course, it's not an ordinary ice yacht," admitted Handforth. "It's my own special invention. I worked it all out on paper first, and it'll steer perfectly, luff up into the wind without capsizing, reach twenty-five miles an hour with any decent breeze, and give a thrill that will leave skating at the post."

"On paper?" asked Nipper kindly.

"Well, I haven't tested it yet, of course," confessed Handforth. "But if it goes all right in theory, it ought to go all right in practice. If you'll stand aside, and not maul it about, we'll give you a demonstration. I'm the skipper, and Churchy and Mac are my crew."

"We're not really keen on signing on," said Church casually. "If any of you other chaps would care to become the crew, you're perfectly welcome."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's it—cackle away!" said Handforth, worming his way amidst the frame-work and

perching himself on the pilot's seat—which sagged and creaked ominously as it took his weight. "Ready, you chaps? Get aboard!"

"I'm not sure that plank will bear the three of us," said Church, eyeing it dubiously.

Rather than face the laughter of the others, however, they climbed aboard. The plank creaked even more, but somehow it held. Many of the cross-members bent suggestively, and the whole contrivance took a sagging, lopsided list to port.

"Now then—quick!" sang out Handforth. "All together—pull! Up with the sail! Heave-ho, my hearties! Up she goes!"

The crew had evidently rehearsed, for the sail arose majestically, and the single yard swung out, held in check by a guy-rope. The breeze, freshening across the lake, caught the sail fairly and squarely, and it billowed out bravely. The ice yacht spun round like a top, then shot

an amazing speed. Skaters took one look and scattered in all directions. Their peril was very real.

Mercifully, they all got out of the way in time, leaving the ice yacht a clear field. It whizzed over the lake, making a bee-line for the opposite bank, gathering speed until reliable witnesses affirmed that it was doing at least seventy miles an hour. Perhaps this was a trifle exaggerated, but certainly the contraption was travelling at a terrific lick. Captain and crew were helpless. The rush of wind robbed them of their breath, and they could only hang on and wait for the inevitable.



With great gusto the Old-Timers seized the Red-Hots and hurled them into the large snowdrift.

twenty yards sideways with such startling speed that the skaters only raced out of the way in the nick of time. The skipper and the crew were nearly unseated by the violence of the movement.

"Whoa! Hold her!" gasped Handforth frantically. "By George! She answers all right!"

She answered far better than he ever anticipated. Before ten seconds had elapsed, the yacht was fairly leaping towards mid-lake, gathering speed rapidly. The wind was strong, and it took hold of the frail craft like a feather. Handforth was dumbfounded—and Church and McClure could do nothing but cling wildly to the cross-members.

"I say!" bawled Handforth. "I can't lower the sail—the rope's jammed! And she won't answer her helm! Hold tight, you chaps! We've run amuck!"

The crew needed no telling. They were startled out of their wits. The celebrated ice yacht was now shooting across the lake at

It came with dramatic force.

The confines of the lake were altogether too small for such a speed craft, and the ice yacht apparently made up its mind to take a trip across country. Unfortunately, there was a high bank in the way.

Handforth could see what was coming—he could see that his craft was hurtling at break-neck speed into that bank—and he did everything in his power to alter the yacht's course. But nothing happened. On paper, the controls were perfect; in reality, they didn't work at all.

Cra-a-sh!

The yacht, striking the lake bank fairly and squarely, was shattered to fragments. The mast went in one direction, the struts and supports in another, the runners in another, and the crew went straight ahead.

Handforth & Co. were catapulted out like shells from a howitzer. It was fortunate they were, or they might have been badly injured in the debris. As it was, they rose clear,

shot up in an arc, and plunged headlong into a great bank of snow by the lake side.

CHAPTER 3.

Another Brainwave!

THAT snowbank, fortunately, was soft. It wasn't an ordinary drift, but a great mass of snow which had been swept from the ice early that morning by Sir Trevor Parkington's men. Handforth & Co. plunged into it, and such was the force of their impact that they went clean through it.

There was a lane on the other side, and it was one of those sunken lanes. So the three schoolboys, hurtling out of the snow, fairly dropped into the lane, and Handforth, at least, collided violently against a frail, decrepit-looking caravan which was being hauled along by a still more decrepit-looking horse.

"Swelp me!" ejaculated a startled voice.

Handforth, sitting up dazedly, with snow clinging to him by the hundredweight, beheld a thin, wizened man on the driving-seat of the caravan. Handforth was bewildered.

"Where am I?" he gasped. "By George! Where's Church? Where's Mac? They must have been killed——"

"If you're looking for two other young fellows like yourself, they ain't far off," interrupted the wizened man on the caravan. "What's this, a new game? Seein' who can gather the most snow?"

Handforth whirled round and gurgled with relief. Two moving balls of snow near at hand resolved themselves into Church and McClure. The caravan driver, shaking his head dubiously, and having satisfied himself that his vehicle had come to no harm, drove on. Handforth watched it go with a sudden gleam in his eye—an excited gleam.

"I say, you chaps!" he ejaculated. "Did you spot——"

Before he could complete his sentence, crowds of rescuers arrived. Nipper and Travers and K. K. and many others leapt down into the lane, half expecting to find Handforth & Co. it only for the hospital. Irene and Doris and some of the other girls were almost as soon.

"Sorry, you chaps," said Handforth, glancing round casually. "The demonstration wasn't as big a success as I hoped. Still, we did get up a good speed, didn't we?"

"Aren't you hurt?" asked Deeks, almost indignantly.

"Sorry, old man, but I'm afraid we haven't obliged," replied Handforth sarcastically. "You ass! It takes more than a little crash like that to hurt me!"

"Your crew doesn't seem much battered, either," said Travers, relieved. "Well, well! Anybody else would have been smashed all up. But these chaps come the most frightful croppers, and get off scot free."

"Fools' luck," said Nipper, nodding.

"Eh?" ejaculated Handforth, with a start.

"No offence, old man, but you owe your escape to sheer ignorance of ice yachting," said Nipper. "If you had done anything to save yourselves, you might have been half killed. But you just let the yacht rip and you're not even scratched."

"Let her rip be blowed!" retorted Handforth. "She ripped without my letting her! You silly chump, I put the brake on, I tried to lower the sail, and I waggled the tiller, but she didn't even answer."

"Ha, la, ha!"

Everybody was relieved at the fortunate climax of the incident. It was just as well, too, that the ice yacht had been shattered to fragments. Handforth & Co. couldn't expect to come off scot free twice in succession.

Much to the astonishment of Church and McClure—and to their relief—Handforth seemed quite resigned when he saw the scattered remnants of his invention. Scraps of wood and oddments of sail were littered over a space of twenty yards.

"When there's a smash-up, I like it to be a good smash-up," said Handforth calmly. "Let it be one thing or the other. The ice yacht is finished; so we can forget it. Let's find our skates."

TO the amusement of the others, Handforth proceeded as though nothing had happened. His chums were slightly puzzled. There seemed to be something on Handforth's mind. But they didn't press him. They knew that he would soon "come across."

He did. After skating casually for ten minutes, he steered them away towards the house; and when they reached the bank he quickly removed his skates, and commanded them to do the same.

"What's the idea?" asked Church. "The morning's not half over——"

"Don't ask questions—come with me," said Handforth.

It wasn't until they were clear of the grounds, and trudging along the road towards Steeple Marlowe, that Handforth condescended to explain. And the explanation made Church and McClure snort with disgust.

"You chaps didn't spot it, but I did," said Handforth eagerly. "There was a rummy foreign name on that old caravan, followed by the words, 'The Great Conjuror.' Ten to one the fellow is giving a show in the village."

"Are we going there just to see this penny showman?" asked Church wrathfully.

"An idea came into my head," replied Handforth. "Dancing is all very well in the evening, and parlour games are good sport, but there's nothing like a bit of conjuring to liven up a party. My wheeze is to get this chap to come along to the Grange to-night and give his show."

"You—you silly idiot!" roared McClure. "Who do think you are? It's not your place to invite people into your host's house!"

"People be blowed," said Handforth. "Just this one conjurer."

He refused to argue any more, and was gratified to see, as they turned into the village street, the old caravan standing outside an inn.

And it was at this point that Handforth had another of his great ideas. He stopped dead in his tracks, his eyes glowing.

"By George!" he breathed. "Why not? Perhaps you're right, Mac. It would be a bit thick for me to invite this merchant into my host's house. I'll buy his giddy conjuring outfit, and give the giddy show myself!"

CHAPTER 4.

A Cooler for the Red-Hots!

"WELL, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Church, in astonishment. "It works!"

Four hectic hours had passed, and the chums of Study D were closeted in a spare room at K. K.'s home, and Handforth was practising. Strangely

enough, he was getting on famously.

It had been a comparatively easy matter to buy a conjuring outfit from the travelling showman. That gentleman had been ready enough to do business when he saw the colour and quantity of Handforth's money. He had parted with his spare kit, which was a fairly complete conjurer's stock-in-trade.

For the first hour or two, Handforth had concentrated upon reading the instructions and making himself familiar with the workings of the apparatus. They were of that type which requires little else but a thorough knowledge of their working. Sleight of hand was unnecessary. Handforth was such a born blunderer, however, that his chums never expected him to achieve any real success. Yet here he was, producing a rabbit out of a hat as deftly as any stage conjurer!

"It's just as well that you two chaps are here," he said gaily. "I shall require you as confederates. Even the best of conjurers can't do many tricks without confederates. Let me have your watch, Mr. Church."

"Eh?" said Church.

"All conjurers are polite," explained Handforth. "It wouldn't sound dignified for me to call you 'Churchy' at the show. Let me have that watch, you fathead!"

Church, grinning, handed over his watch, and Handforth proceeded to pound it into fragments. Church's grin vanished.

"I say, steady!" he protested indignantly. "My pater gave me that watch! If you've made a bloomer. Handy——"

"And here, ladies and gentlemen, we have Mr. Church's watch reduced to utter wreckage," said Handforth calmly. "Allow me to show you. Now, by the utterance of one single magic word, I shall not only proceed to restore the watch to its original condition, but I shall cause it to conceal itself within that gold-fish bowl you see on the opposite pedestal."

He made one or two swift passes, uttered a strange word, and the fragments mysteriously vanished. He plunged a hand into the gold-fish bowl, withdrew a water-tight rubber bag, unfastened it, and presented Church with his watch.

"It's mine all right!" said Church, with relief. "Still going, too!"

"My dear ass, it's as easy as winking—when you know how," grinned Handforth. "I dropped your watch into the gold-fish bowl while you weren't looking, and the

one I smashed up was a fake. It's only a question of being quick, and distracting the audience's attention. Besides, these tricks are nearly fool-proof."

"They need to be, with you as the conjurer," said McClure with conviction.

HANDY AMONG THE GUNMEN!

Thrilling new series of St. Frank's yarns starting next week—introducing Jake Diamond, a notorious New York gangster!

K. K. & CO., of course, had heard all about Handforth's purchase. And K. K. had blandly agreed to Edward Oswald's proposal. A conjuring show for the guests that evening? Why, certainly! And the announcements had been made.

It is to be feared that K. K. was relying upon Handforth to make a hopeless mess of the show. It would be so much funnier. When Church and McClure reported, therefore, that Handy was hot stuff at conjuring, the Red-Hots were sadly disappointed.

"Looks as if the show will be one of those tame amateur affairs, after all," remarked Goffin glumly. "And we shall have to sit there and clap, and pretend to be amused."

"Let's hope he mucks things up," said K. K.

"Why not jape him?" suggested Deeks eagerly. "After all, he's an Old-Timer—and we're the Red-Hots. It would be one up against that crowd——"

"No!" interrupted K. K. "The Old-Timers have behaved themselves as well as could be expected under my ancestral roof. They're guests, and we can't start any monkey business with guests."

It was a remarkable coincidence that the Red-Hots should be walking, at that moment, along the wide terrace which extended down the front of the great mansion, separating it from the lawns. They got to the end, and were about to make for the

lake when snow commenced falling in phenomenal quantities.

One chunk, about as big as a young football, hit K. K. fairly and squarely in the face and spread over his features. Another mass took Deeks in the chest, and his left ear was filled at the same time. Goffin came off just as badly. The three Red-Hots reeled back under the impact.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was an ambush, and they knew it. A fusillade of further snowballs came shooting out from the hedges on either side. Nipper, Travers, Fatty Little, and others had been lying in wait, and their stock of snowballs was extensive. Within twenty seconds, K. K. & Co. were nearly obliterated.

"Old-Timers for ever!" went up a yell. "Down with the Red-Hots!"

Parkington let out a mighty roar and grabbed for some snow, but he and his chums had no chance. Before they could even make any snowballs, they were bombarded again. This time the results were more dire. There was a sudden rush of Old-Timers, and K. K. & Co. were seized and hurled headlong into a snowdrift.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just to keep up the old friendly spirit, K. K.!" grinned Nipper. "Let's see if you can ambush us in the same way."

Still yelling, the Old-Timers retired. K. K. sat up, shook the snow out of his eyes, and looked hard at Deeks and Goffin.

"That's done it!" he said ominously. "If the Old-Timers are ready for japes, so are we!"

CHAPTER 5.

On With the Show!

"**L**ADIES and gentlemen—" "Go it, Handy!" "Ladies and gentlemen—" "Hear, hear!"

"Ladies!" roared Handforth defiantly. "It's no good addressing the gentlemen, because they keep interrupting!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have great pleasure in presenting my stupendous magical act for your approval," continued Handforth glibly. "We will commence the show by showing you how easy it is to change a couple of new laid eggs into a live rabbit."

Handforth was supremely confident. He had had another arduous rehearsal after tea, and he knew the entire routine by heart. He felt that he was about to give a show that would be long remembered at Parkington Grange. And there is no doubt that Handforth felt right!

Not only the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls were seated in the great ball-room, which, for the purposes of this show, had been filled with chairs. Sir Trevor himself and most of the grown-up guests were seated at the back, genuinely amused, and ready to give the schoolboy conjurer some encouragement.

Handforth had taken possession of the orchestra dais, and Church and McClure were standing by as his assistants. It all looked very professional and very business-like.

"I shall now ask one of my assistants to borrow a gentleman's hat," said Handforth, with a wave of his hand. "Any hat will do. Mr. Travers, will you kindly oblige?"

"Cheese it!" whispered Church. "I've got Archie Glenthorne's silk topper here, as you suggested."

"By George! I'd forgotten!" said Handforth hastily. "Ladies and gentlemen, we shall now proceed with the trick. Mr. Glenthorne has kindly loaned me his topper."

Archie Glenthorne, the elegant swell of the Remove, sat up with a jerk.

"Odds liberties and check!" he protested. "I mean to say, I gave the blighter no permission to borrow my topper! Good gad! He's absolutely breaking eggs into it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth, with deft precision, smashed two eggs into Archie Glenthorne's hat, and he placed the hat on a pedestal. Then he took another hat and swiftly showed the interior of it to the audience. It looked empty.

"You see, ladies and gentlemen, that this hat contains nothing," he said. "I shall place this second hat on this second pedestal. I shall now take a gun from my assistant and fire a single shot."

McClure handed him the gun, and Handforth pulled the trigger. But, instead of the crack of an explosive cap, a stream of water hissed out of the nozzle, wavered for a moment, and then splashed into the face of Archie Glenthorne, who sat in the front row.

"Whoa! S O S!" howled Archie, leaping up. "Dash it, you dashed fright, I'm in a frightful mess! I'm half drowned!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's happened?" gasped Handforth. "Who's been messing about with my pistol? Don't make such a fuss, Archie—a drop of water won't hurt you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get on with the show!" hissed McClure urgently.

"By George, yes!" said Handforth, with a start. "Ladies and gentlemen, you will now see the result of that magic pistol shot. Allez!"

With a flourish, he dived his hand into Archie Glenthorne's topper, and the look of dismay on his face when he found only a couple of smashed eggs, instead of a live rabbit, was worth quids. He withdrew his fingers, egg dripping stickily from them.

"Something's gone wrong!" gurgled Church, aghast. "Where's that special lining that you were supposed to put into that hat?"

"I put it in—and the rabbit, too!" roared Handforth.

The audience shook with merriment. For the conjurer to converse so frankly with his assistant was something out of the ordinary.



Amid howls of laughter from the audience, the conjurer and his two assistants started scrapping on the stage.

—especially as he was giving away all the secrets of the show.

"My only sainted aunt!" groaned Handforth. "I can't understand it. Sorry, Archie, but the trick went wrong. We'll get on with the next one. Be a sport and lend me your gold watch."

"Absolutely not!" said Archie coldly. "If you want to see the time, use your own beastly ticker."

"All right—I'll borrow Church's watch. Ladies and gentlemen, you see here a perfectly sound watch. I shall now take this——"

"You'd better stop him, Church!" interrupted K. K. warningly. "If that's a good watch, rescue it! Don't say I haven't told you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Church tried to rescue it, but Handforth wasn't having any. By this time, in fact, Church was beginning to get a glimmering of the truth—and so was McClure. The uproarious merriment of the Red-Hots was significant. Church and McClure knew that some practical joker must have been monkeying with the apparatus.

"Chuck it, Handy!" panted Church desperately. "This is K. K.'s doing——"

"Not likely!" snorted Handforth. "I'm going to do this trick!"

And he did it. He did it thoroughly. He pounded Church's watch to bent and battered fragments—and then discovered, too late, that he had not substituted the "property" watch. He would have passed hastily on

to another trick, but Church didn't see the fun of it.

"You—you dangerous lunatic!" he said fiercely. "That was a good watch—it was a present—and now it's scrap-iron! I'm off! You can get another assistant!"

"Same here," said McClure determinedly.

Handforth, forgetful of the audience, gazed at them with rising fury.

"Oh! So you're going to desert me?" he asked, clenching his fists. "All right! I'll show you what I mean to do!"

Crash!

He landed a beautiful straight left, and Church and McClure, desperate, fell upon him before he could do any further damage. Some kindly person lowered the curtain—in other words, pulled the draperies together—and the last the audience saw of the magician and his assistants was a tangled heap of humanity in the centre of the stage.

The audience, almost too exhausted to leave their seats, shouted with loud and prolonged laughter. As a conjurer, Edward Oswald Handforth had been a decided frost; but as an entertainer he had scored a triumph.

THE END.

(The St. Frank's boys among American gunmen and gangsters—first thrilling long complete yarn of a new series next week. entitled: "Jake Diamond's Foes!")

MYSTERY
THRILLS
ACTION

THE DEATH



CHAPTER 1.

Found Guilty!

“.... **A**ND may the Lord have mercy on your soul!”

The judge's solemn words came clearly and evenly through the hushed Old Bailey court, where for six days Edward Mason had stood his trial charged with the wilful murder of Hans Mortz, and at their utterance the man in the dock stood rigid, with eyes directed piercingly on that black-capped figure a few feet away as though he were striving to search the mind of the man who was sending him to his doom.

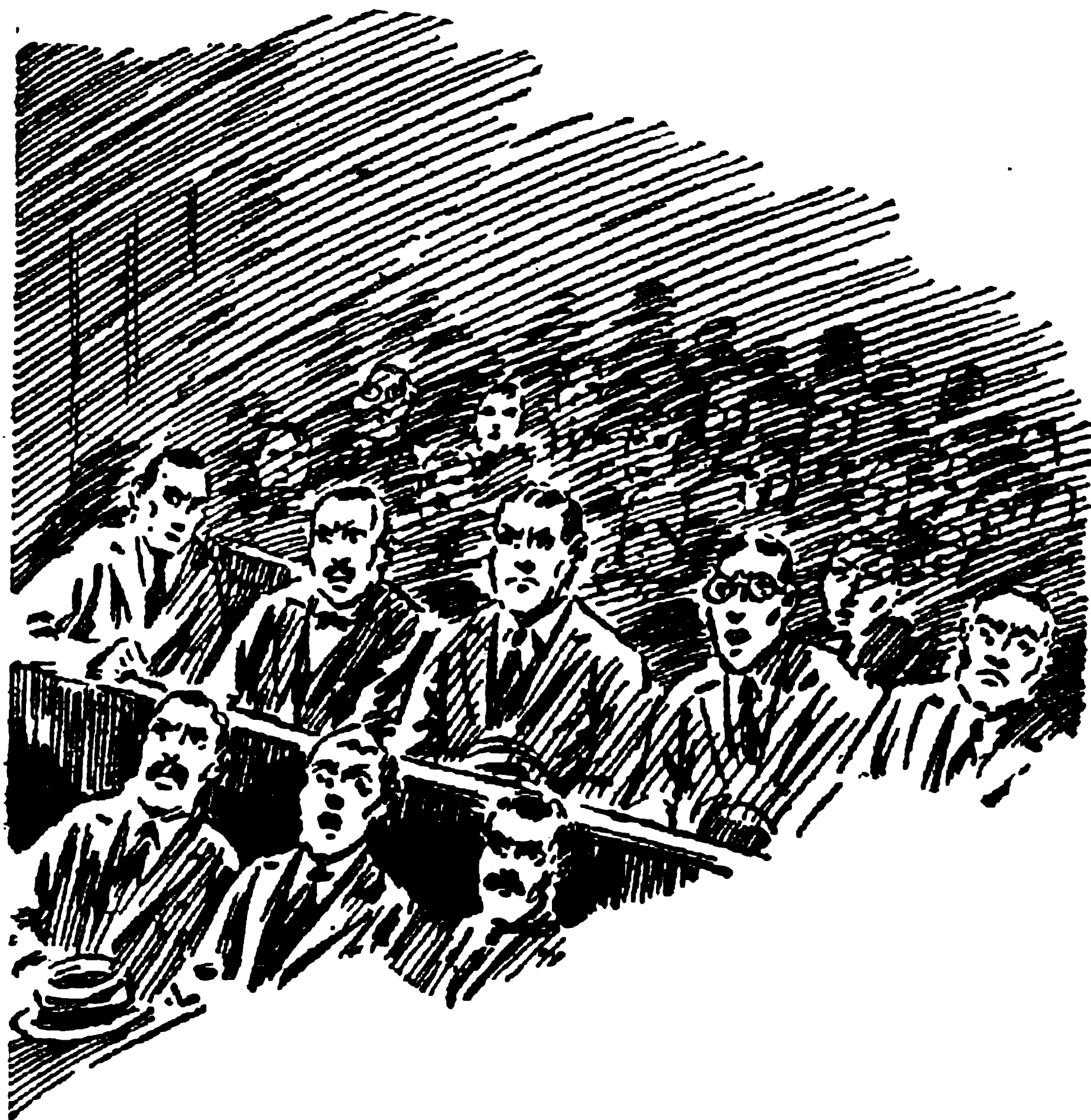
In reality Edward Mason saw nothing. His confused brain, torn with a dozen conflicting emotions, was juggling with the dreaded words which blasted his hope of freedom and laid bare the scaffold and the hangman's rope.

For two seconds he stood motionless. And then, as a faint sigh rose from the people on the public benches, the full realisation of his position seemed to dawn on the prisoner. In the same instant a warder stepped forward and tapped him on the shoulder.

But Mason, with burning eyes and quivering lips, brushed him aside. His back stiffened; his eyes swept round the court challengingly.

GRIP!

Mysterious and elusive is the Blackmailer; for long this super-crook has baffled Scotland Yard. Nelson Lee gets on the job—and events move swiftly, dramatically!



"I am innocent!" he cried, in passionate tones. "I declare before Heaven that I never killed Mortz! It's——" His voice trailed off to a whisper as his roving gaze alighted suddenly on a figure wedged in among the mass of spectators in the well of the court.

A startling change came over the man in the dock. His face, pale before, now became absolutely ashen, while his eyes blazed with a new and strange gleam.

"There he is!" he screamed, pointing. "Mortz, the man you say I killed—the man who is supposed to be dead—alive! Look at him, it is he! By heaven, you cannot hang me now!"

His voice had risen to a frenzied, piercing note, and his eyes, bulging almost out of their sockets, were the eyes of a raving madman.

"Look at him! It's Mortz, all right! He——"

"Take the prisoner away!"

At the sound of the judge's stern voice two warders jumped forward and caught the frantic man in their firm grasp. Mason struggled desperately as he was borne towards the rear of the dock, where a short flight of stone steps led to the cells beneath, and as he fought he shouted.

"They say I killed him! There he is—it's no ghost! Mortz in the flesh and blood! It's a plot——"

The condemned man's cries grew fainter and fainter as the warders half carried, half dragged him below, and finally they were swallowed up by the buzz of excited voices in the court itself.

"Let the court be cleared!"

At the command Nelson Lee, the famous detective, and also the headmaster of St. Frank's College, who had been a witness of the closing scenes of the drama, rose from his seat on the front benches and turned to his companion, a big, broad-shouldered man.

"Well, Lennard, what do you think of it now?"

Chief Detective-inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard, shrugged his shoulders.

"They all protest their innocence," he said, "and as for that outburst at the finish—well, it may have been due to imagination resulting from a suddenly disordered brain, or it may have been just a clever piece of acting in view

of an appeal on the grounds of insanity."

"Did you catch sight of the person he indicated?"

"I didn't. Too much of a crowd. In any case, it wouldn't have made any difference."

"Which means you are convinced that Mason was bluffing?"

"Either that, or mad," assented Lennard. He looked quickly at Lee. "Surely you haven't any doubts about the matter?" he asked.

Lee smiled.

"I know very little of the case," he confessed. "You forget that I have been away in Paris getting to the bottom of those jewel robberies, and I only returned to London over Christmas."

They were walking slowly in the wake of the people crowding towards the exits.

"The simplest job in my experience," Lennard explained. "Mason, as special crime reporter of the 'Evening Mail,' was out to make a scoop by discovering the identity of the mysterious individual who for months past has caused something of a sensation by blackmailing well-known members of society. For some reason or other he fastens on to the idea that Hans Mortz is the man he is after, so he gets into close contact with Mortz through his sister, Ethel Mason."

"Using her as a sort of catspaw, I take it?" put in Lee.

"Exactly. Then, according to the prosecution, Mortz becomes too familiar with the girl, and a quarrel ensues, during which Mason accuses him of insulting her. The next morning Mortz's body, badly battered, is found in the Thames, off Barking. In his pocket is a letter in Mason's handwriting, threatening his life. Pretty strong evidence, what? You can't wonder at the jury taking only ten minutes to bring in a verdict of guilty."

"You're right, Lennard," said Nelson Lee slowly. "The case looks straightforward enough, yet somehow, when he declared his innocence, I thought I detected a ring of truth in his words."

Outside the famous building was Lee's car, and in it were seated the detective's young assistant, Nipper, together with William Napoleon Browne, the skipper of the Fifth Form at St. Frank's. Browne originally had been invited by K. K. Parkington, of the Remove, to spend the Christmas vacation with him at his pater's place down in Kent. He had been unable to accept for various reasons, and then, at the last moment, had found himself stranded, so he had been only too pleased to avail himself of Nelson Lee's offer to spend Christmas with him.

"I suppose you are pushing off right away?" said Lennard.

"On the contrary, Lennard, if you could manage it, I'd like to stay behind and have a word with the prisoner."

The chief inspector stared curiously at the detective.

"I dare say I can arrange an interview," he said, "but I'm afraid you're wasting your time, Lee. Mason's guilt has been proved up to the hilt. There isn't a loophole."

"Nevertheless, Lennard, I would certainly like to see the prisoner for a few minutes," persisted Lee.

"All right," grunted the chief inspector. "I'll see what I can do."

Nelson Lee turned to Nipper.

"Hang on a bit longer, Nipper. I shan't be more than a quarter of an hour."

"Right, gov'nor!" came the cheery reply.

CHAPTER 2.

The Warning!

FIVE minutes later Nelson Lee was being shown into Edward Mason's cell. He found the condemned man in a state bordering on collapse.

"My name is Nelson Lee," began the detective, "and I would like to ask you a few questions—that is, if you feel you are able to answer them."

"Yes?" said the dazed man, and then as the well-known name took shape in his mind, he started up from the form on which he had been sitting. "Not Mr. Nelson Lee, the detective?"

Lee nodded.

"Tell me," he said, eyeing Mason steadily, "what made you think you saw Mortz in court just now?"

"There was something in that face—something about the features—that I recognised. Mr. Lee, I've hardly had time to think, but somehow it's all coming back to me now. I'm beginning to see things I didn't understand before. The chances are that Mortz was never murdered at all. The whole affair was plotted in some diabolical manner to get me out of the way. It must have been, for if that was Mortz I saw to-day——"

"Just a moment," interrupted the detective. "Let's have things a little clearer. First of all, you got into touch with Mortz because you were under the impression that he was the blackmailer whom the police were seeking?"

"Yes. I wasn't at all certain that he was the actual man, but the investigations I made led me to believe that he might be connected with the affair."

"And then?"

Mason flushed.

"I suppose what I did next was wrong. It's the only thing I regret. I got my sister to agree to make the acquaintance of Mortz, the idea being that through her I might be able to glean some more information."

"An idea that was knocked on the head through Mortz becoming too familiar with your sister," cut in the detective, and Mason nodded.

"The prosecution made a good deal of the altercation that took place afterwards," he said. "What actually happened was, I threatened Mortz that I would knock him down if he ever insulted Ethel again."

"That happened the day before the body was discovered?"

"Yes."

"What did you do that night?"

"I went for a walk, as I usually do every evening."

"Alone?"

"Yes. I'm a pretty fast walker, and I like a tramp on my own."

"The prosecution say that you made for Mortz's house at Putney, attacked him savagely, and then threw his body into the river."

"It's a lie!" cried Mason. "I never saw Mortz, and never went near his place that night."

"What about the letter they found on the body?"

"I never wrote it. It must have been a forgery—a clever copy of my handwriting. That's what beats me, Mr. Lee. If this thing wasn't deliberately schemed out to get me accused and convicted of murder, then why was that forged letter planted on the body?"

"If what you say is right—that this affair was fixed up to get you out of the way—then there is an aspect that is even more puzzling," said Lee. "Why should Mortz, or his associates, go to all this trouble when they could have murdered you and have done with it?"

"I don't know," faltered Mason. "I've tried to think, but everything seems to have been like a horrible nightmare. It's all—oh, so ghastly!"

"When we have discovered the reason for that we shall have gone a long way towards solving the mystery," said the detective.

The prisoner jumped to his feet once more, eyes aglow.

"That means, then, that you believe in my innocence?" he cried.

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I think I am inclined to believe you," he said.

"It's good of you to say that!" said Mason brokenly. "Mr. Lee, you are the only one, apart from my sister, who does not believe me guilty. But I don't see how you can do anything for me now."

"There are three full weeks ahead of us," returned Lee, "and a lot can happen in that space of time. I'll do my best. And now I must be going, for my time is up."

Mason gripped the detective's hand.

"Mr. Lee, I swear to you that if I have to go to the gallows it will be as an innocent man, just the same as I swear to you my firm belief that Hans Mortz is alive, for, unless I am going out of my senses, I saw him gloating at me in the court to-day."

"If Mortz is alive, I'll try my hardest to find him," assured the detective.

NELSON LEE made his way outside the building again. The pavement was thronged with Christmas shoppers, and as he crossed to where Nipper and Browne were awaiting him a man brushed by and thrust something into his hand.

It was a strip of pasteboard, the size of a visiting-card, and Lee glanced at it swiftly, then his keen eyes followed in the wake of the man, who was dressed in a shabby-looking suit of navy-blue and wore a grey cap. In a single stride the detective came abreast of the car.

"Browne," he jerked, "quick! There's a job for you. Follow that man in the blue suit!"

"O.K., Chief!" said Browne briefly.

His earlier training at the Detective Academy, before St. Frank's had been rebuilt, had taught him to obey orders promptly and without asking questions. Within two seconds of the command he was out of the car and on the trail.

"Anything fresh on, guv'nor?" asked Nipper. "I heard they'd found Mason guilty."

"I should think there is something on!" said Lee grimly. "About the biggest problem we've ever tackled! We are out to find Hans Mortz, the man for whose murder Edward Mason has just been sentenced to death, and, by Jove, I've hit upon a clue already!"

He opened his hand and glanced again at the strip of pasteboard, which bore the following cryptic message:

THE FIRST WARNING!

CHAPTER 3.

Lee Meets Mr. Morrell!

NIPPER dropped back in his seat and stared in amazement at Nelson Lee as the latter swung the big car round and drove off in the direction of Holborn Viaduct.

"I say, guv'nor," he gasped, "what does this mean?"

"It means that I have had a friendly hint from the gentleman known as the Blackmailer," said Lee grimly. "It means—well, quite a lot of things, Nipper."

"But," said the youngster dazedly, "you said you were out to find Hans Mortz!"

"Exactly!"

"Then you think Mortz is still alive?"

"Amazing as it may seem, I'm inclined to think he is."

Nipper drew in a deep breath.

"This is a bit too deep for me, guv'nor," he said slowly. "What connection can there be between Mortz and the Blackmailer?"

"That is something that has got to be established."

It took them only a few minutes to reach the detective's chambers in the Gray's Inn Road, where, to Lee's surprise, he found Inspector Lennard and another man awaiting his return.

Lennard's companion was a dark-complexioned man of medium height, with broad, powerful-looking shoulders and a firm, square chin, suggestive of unusual strength. There was just the suspicion of a glitter in his deep-set eyes, and he gazed keenly at Lee as the latter came into the consulting-room.

"Let me introduce you to Mr. Herman Morrell," said Lennard. "This is a surprise visit, Lee. As a matter of fact," he explained, "I was going straight back to the Yard, when Morrell, who has always wanted to meet you, suggested that I should take the bull by the horns and bring him along."

"I must confess I was intrigued by the Mason murder trial," said Morrell with a smile, as he extended his hand. "You were at the Old Bailey to-day, Mr. Lee; what did you think of it?"

"I have yet to form a definite opinion," returned Lee in non-committal tones.

The other arched his eyebrows.

"Surely the case was straightforward enough? Mason had hardly any defence to put forward. The verdict, to my mind, was evident from the first."

"Lee is inclined to believe in the possibility that Mason has been wrongly convicted," put in Lennard.

"Indeed?" said Morrell, and for a moment the strange glitter in his eyes seemed to become more pronounced.

"By the way," went on Lennard, turning to Lee, "you saw the prisoner, I suppose?"

"Yes. Thanks for managing the interview."

"And did he have anything to say to you?"

"Quite a lot. Unfortunately, he could not tell me anything more than he had already said in his defence during the trial."

The three chatted for a few minutes, then Morrell made his departure. When he had gone Lee turned to Lennard.

"Who is he?" he asked.

"Herman Morrell? A well-to-do bachelor. Mixes with society and travels a good deal. Just lately he's taken a great interest in criminology, possibly because he has nothing else better to do. He was most anxious to meet you; that's why we dropped in."

"Well, Lennard, now he's gone I can show you this," and Nelson Lee handed the strip of pasteboard to the inspector, whose eyes opened wide as they read the brief message.

"What do you make of it?" asked Lee.

"This looks to me like the work of the Blackmailer," said Lennard. "Red ink, similar writing, and same sized card. I ought to know, for I've seen enough of 'em! When did you get it?"

"After my interview with Mason. A man thrust it into my hand in the crush outside the Old Bailey."

The inspector whistled softly.

"The Blackmailer, whoever he is, has got something on you," he said suddenly. "What have you been doing to upset him?"

"Nothing—as yet," returned Lee grimly.

"What do you mean?"

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"Consider the facts yourself, Lennard. I have not the remotest connection with this mysterious individual who has been terrorising society, so why should he mark me down for one of his warnings? No reason at all—except that he is afraid I might unmask him."

"I can't take that in," grunted the inspector. "The Yard's been hot and fast on the job for two months without finding a single clue that would lead to the Blackmailer's identity. Do you mean to tell me that you've found out more in an hour than we have in eight solid weeks of hard work?"

Nelson Lee pocketed the card.

"To be quite candid, Lennard, I've discovered nothing definite, but I have a pretty shrewd suspicion who the Blackmailer is."

"The deuce you have! Well, who do you think he is?"

"Hans Mortz."

"What!" shouted the inspector, and Lee smiled.

"A matter of simple deduction, my dear Lennard. In the first place, Mason, in endeavouring to get a scoop for his paper by tracking down the Blackmailer, finds that the trail leads in the direction of Mortz. Secondly, Mason is of the opinion that Mortz is alive, for he says that he is positive he saw him in the court to-day. Thirdly, I get this warning *following my visit to the condemned man*."

"But——" began the inspector, when Lee interrupted.

"Just a moment, Lennard. I want to ask you this question. In what possible way can Mason, at this hour, prove his innocence?"

"Only by bringing forward definite evidence that Mortz is alive."

"Exactly. That is why our elusive friend, the Blackmailer, as soon as he found that I was interested in Mason's story, sent me this warning. Now can you see the connection between the two?"

"You mean that the Blackmailer, assuming that he is Mortz, is scared that you will discover his real identity. Oh, I can follow your reasoning all right, Lee," grunted the inspector, "but there are a few flaws in it. You forget, for one thing, that the body dragged out of the Thames was identified beyond all doubt as being that of Mortz."

"Beyond all doubt?"

"Well, all reasonable doubt," said the inspector.

"A body with features almost unrecognisable," Lee reminded him, "and bearing one or two letters and a few personal belongings. Now, Lennard, strictly speaking, would you call that a perfect identification?"

"Not on its own, perhaps. But you've got to take all the other circumstances into consideration," persisted the inspector.

"That's just it, Lennard. What I can see of it, all the evidence against Mason is purely of a circumstantial nature."

"Anyway, there's enough of it to hang a dozen men," said Lennard doggedly. "It's no good, Lee. I'm afraid you're on the wrong track for once. Mason did the job right enough."

"Can you arrange for me to examine the exhibits in the case?" asked Lee.

"Yes, I think I can fix that for you," Lennard hesitated. "What are you going to do about that warning?" he asked.

"Nothing, Lennard. I'm going to await further events."

"Look here, Lee," jerked the other suddenly. "I want to give you a word of advice. You don't know much about the Blackmailer and his little ways. With him a threat's a threat. So far he's not failed in a single instance to carry out his intentions. Whoever he is, he's got a cunning brain—the mind of a master criminal. Take my tip, Lee, and don't treat this too lightly. Be on your guard!" And with that solemn warning the inspector took his departure.

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE was hot on the scent. He had followed his man by the tube to Shepherd's Bush, and there the other had turned off into Norland Market, finally to come to a halt on the steps of a dilapidated-looking house in a mean thoroughfare of Notting Dale. The youngster saw him knock three times on the door, which opened after the lapse of a minute to admit the visitor.

Browne, some little distance down the road on the opposite side, fingered his ear thoughtfully.



As Nelson Lee walked across the pavement towards his car a man brushed past and slipped a piece of card into his hand.

"The question now arises, what are we to do next?" he murmured. "I don't know what's on, but Mr. Lee wouldn't have sent me after this merchant if there wasn't something important moving, and the chances are that the conversation taking place in that house is likely to be most interesting—not to say informative."

Pondering on the problem, the youngster walked slowly past the house, glimpsing out of the corner of his eyes the fact that there were no curtains at the window in the basement.

"Brother Nipper would be all for getting into the house to glean some information," he muttered, "and the odds are that Brother Lee would do the same. By the look of things, the basement is unoccupied. I think a little house-breaking on my part is indicated."

He entered the gateway of the house, and cautiously negotiated the flight of broken, snow-covered stone steps which led to the basement. Then, with his penknife in hand, it took him only a matter of seconds to force back the catch of the window.

Soon he was inside the room. The floor was coated with dust and there were cob-

webs everywhere. Browne made straight for the door which opened into a passage. There was a flight of stairs at one end, and he climbed them cautiously. Reaching the landing at the top, the sound of voices drifted to his ears.

"... The Boss' orders. Tucked it into his hand and got clear away, without his even seeing me. I say, Spadger, there's something big moving. Either that—or the boss has got the wind up."

"Not so likely," cut in a second voice. "Even Nelson Lee couldn't do any damage now. They found Mason guilty, and he'll swing as sure as little apples!"

The reference to the detective made Browne prick up his ears.

"But Lee went down to see him in his cell," came the voice of the man who had spoken first. "He wouldn't have taken that trouble unless he was interested in the case, and the boss knows as well as anyone else that Lee is the only man he need be scared of. Scotland Yard doesn't even smell a rat. They're right out of the picture."

"Scared! What has the boss to be scared about? As clever as Lee is, he couldn't rake up any evidence now."

"Couldn't he? There's one thing that'd give the whole bag of tricks away. If Lee tumbled to it——"

The voices died away, and Browne, feeling he had learned all he was likely to learn just then, crept down the stairs, and made his exit via the basement window, taking care to draw the sash down after him. Then he walked boldly up the steps and down the street.

Less than an hour later he was back in Nelson Lee's consulting-room, detailing to the detective his movements and all he had heard in the house in Notting Dale.

"They spoke once or twice about a certain clue which, if discovered, would upset their plans," he concluded. "Brother Spadger seemed annoyed at the suggestion that you might tumble to it, sir."

"Spadger! So he's in this game, is he?" remarked Lee thoughtfully.

"Do you know him, sir?"

"Yes. I've a fairly good acquaintance with the Spadger. He's a well-known character in the underworld. But I confess the talk about this clue puzzles me. This wants some thinking out. Anyway, you've done well, Browne."

Feeling highly bucked with himself, the St. Frank's senior went out and joined Nipper in the dining-room, where they exchanged views on the case, and discussed the question of how their school-fellows were enjoying the Christmas vacation.

CHAPTER 4.

The Clue of the Burnt Document!

THE following morning Nelson Lee, who had mapped out a course of action, had his plans rudely interrupted by an urgent telephone call from Inspector Lennard.

"That you, Lee? Good," came Lennard's voice over the wire. "I'm on a trunk call from Hythe. Think you can manage a trip down here? Something after your own heart, Lee—something of interest, I promise you."

"What is it?"

"Murder. Sir Richard Graydon was found dead in the study of his house early this morning. The Blackmailer has had a hand in the job."

Nelson Lee pricked up his ears.

"The Blackmailer! Are you sure?"

"Positive. How long will you be?"

"I'll drive down right away. No objection if I bring Nipper and Browne along with me?"

"None at all. Come straight to the house."

"Right!"

Ten minutes later Nelson Lee's powerful car, with the detective at the wheel, was threading its way through the busy traffic in Gray's Inn Road, Nipper and Browne alongside him.



Jokes from readers wanted for this feature! If you know a good rib tickler send it along now—and win a prize! A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke; all other readers whose efforts are published will receive a pocket wallet or a penknife. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

NOW YOU KNOW!

"Now, can anyone tell me what a fishing-net is made of?" asked the teacher.

"Yes, sir," replied one bright boy in the back row. "It's a lot of little holes tied together with pieces of string."

(T. Bastock, 82, Deykin Avenue, Witton, Birmingham, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

TIME!

The old gentleman tottered down the road carrying a heavy grandfather clock. Turning a corner, he bumped into a small boy.

"Why can't you wear a wrist watch, guv'nor?" demanded the lad indignantly.

(G. Newton, 2nd floor flat, 317, Mare Street, Hackney, E.8, has been awarded a penknife.)

IDEAL FOR THE PURPOSE.

Little Johnny (to uncle): "Uncle, will you sing for us?"

Uncle: "Why do you want me to sing?"

Little Johnny: "Me and Dicky are playing sailors and we want a foghorn."

(C. Skeggs, 422, Hamilton Road, London, Ontario, Canada, has been awarded a penknife.)

UNFORTUNATE!

Binks: "Professor Johnson is so absent-minded. The other evening he knew he wanted to do something but was unable to remember what, so he sat up till three in the morning trying to think what it was."

Jinks: "Is that so? Did he find out eventually?"

Binks: "Yes. He remembered he wanted to go to bed early."

(R. C. Gwilt, Old Post Office, Hatfield, near Leominster, Herefordshire, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

A PANTOMIME!

Ma: "It's no use your saying the cat takes the jam-tarts, Tommy, because there's a muddy footprint in the pantry."

Tommy: "Well, it might have been Puss-in-boots!"

(D. G. Dobie, 7, Coombe Road, Old Town, Eastbourne, has been awarded a penknife.)

THE journey to Hythe occupied a little over two hours, and Lee directed the car through the quaint, old-fashioned streets towards the Lodge, the residence of Sir Richard Graydon. It was a stately house set in its own grounds, and at the end of the short gravel drive they found Inspector Lennard waiting to greet them.

"Good man," said the inspector, gripping Lee's hand. "Better come right into the study. I've arranged for you to have every facility, so that you can set to work quite unhampered. By the way, someone you know is staying here—arrived last night with another guest."

"Who is that?"

"Morrell. You remember—I introduced him to you yesterday."

"Oh, yes!" said Lee carelessly.

They passed a constable stationed at the main entrance and reached the hall, where Lennard paused to outline the case briefly.

Sir Richard's body was discovered by Jenkins, the butler, who was in the habit of calling his master early. The baronet, apparently, had not retired to his bed-room that night. Apart from the servants, there were only two other people staying in the house—Herman Morrell, and another of Sir Richard's personal friends, a Mr. Henry Wharton. Lennard had taken separate statements from each, but none of them could throw any light on the mystery.

The body of the murdered man was found in a sitting position before his desk, and except for the fact that a revolver, loaded in every chamber, was in a conspicuous place on the desk, and that a small card—similar to the one handed to Lee on the previous day—was discovered in a pigeon-hole, it might have been an ordinary case of heart failure, for there were no marks of violence whatever.

The card, in red ink capitals, bore the following ominous message:

AT 2 a.m. TO-MORROW

"And you can bet your life," concluded Lennard, "that is the precise time that Sir Richard met his death, for the Blackmailer always carries out his threats to the second. What puzzles me—and the doctor who examined the body—is the cause of death. Each one of the Blackmailer's victims has died in the same way. No sign of violence, and never has he left a trace behind—except a visiting-card of this kind."

Lee pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"You say Morrell and Wharton received sudden invitations yesterday to spend the night with Sir Richard?"

"Yes. And it's pretty obvious why. Sir Richard was scared out of his wits on account of this message."

Lee nodded.

"Had he any enemies?"

A WASTE OF ENERGY!

The two tug-o'-war teams heaved and pulled and strained and sweated, but neither would budge. A dear old lady watched in puzzled interest.

"But wouldn't it be easier for them to get a knife and cut the rope?" she asked mildly of her neighbour.

(T. O'Neill, 13, Crescent Avenue, Limerick, Ireland, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

OBVIOUS.

The disappointed humorist was inclined to be bitter.

"Hang it all, sir," he said, to the unsympathetic editor, "you sit on every joke I send you."

"Let me assure you," said the editor, pressing a bell for the visitor to be shown out, "I should certainly not do that if there were any point to them."

(S. Taylor Smith, 14, Well-field Terrace, Felling-on-Tyne, co. Durham, has been awarded a penknife.)

MUSICAL.

Tommy: "John plays the piano wonderfully by ear."

Bob: "That's nothing. Pa fiddles with his whiskers."

(R. Wyatt, 63, Stafford Road, Waddon, Croydon, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)



GO HON!

Visitor: "Well, my little man, and how old are you?"

Johnnie: "Five."

Visitor: "And what are you going to be one day?"

Johnnie: "Six."

(T. Hutchinson, Box 4609, Johannesburg, S. Africa, has been awarded a penknife.)

GIVING THE GAME AWAY!

Headmaster (speaking on 'phone): "You say Tommy Brown has got a bad cold to-day and will not be able to come to school? Who is that speaking?"

Voice (hoarsely): "My father, sir."

(F. Marcantonis, 130a, Vauxhall Street, Upper Kennington Lane, London, S.E.11, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

A DIFFICULT PROBLEM.

Shopkeeper: "Yes, I want a boy; to be partly indoors and partly outdoors."

Boy Applicant: "Lumme! What happens when the door slams?"

(V. Lucas, 425, Bethnal Green Road, London, E.2, has been awarded a penknife.)

"None whatever."

"The servants?"

"Perfectly trustworthy and beyond suspicion. Apart from that, it's pretty well established that the job was done from outside."

"Oh? You have found something, then?"

"Yes. The study window was open. But that's no indication of the cause of death, which is what I want to get at."

"Any footprints?"

"There were," Lennard grunted. "A fall of snow in the night partly obliterated 'em, which is just my beastly luck."

At Lee's request, they made their way to the study, a small apartment situated on the ground floor at the rear of the house. The body of the dead baronet, covered with a sheet, reposed on a settee facing the window.

"There's the revolver, just where we found it," said Lennard, pointing to the weapon on the desk. "It belonged to Sir Richard."

At that moment Herman Morrell made his appearance. He looked white and drawn, and when he spoke it was in a dazed way, as though he had not yet recovered from the shock of this sudden tragedy.

"This is terrible, Mr. Lee," he said. "Sir Richard's death, and the mystery surrounding it, has come in the nature of a great blow to me, as you can well imagine. The remarkable coincidence about the whole thing is that only yesterday we were discussing murder—and now I am involved in this tragedy."

"Fate plays some strange pranks at times," agreed Lee gravely. He turned to Lennard.

"You say the revolver was fully loaded?"

"Yes."

"H'm!"

Nelson Lee fingered the weapon thoughtfully, then laid it back on the desk.

"Looks as though Sir Richard expected trouble," said Nipper who, with Browne, had been listening intently to the details.

"There's no doubt about it that he did," put in Morrell. "I can see that now, in the light of what has happened. He seemed very fidgety and nervous last night, and openly confessed that he had invited Mr. Wharton and me down to keep him company."

"Where is Mr. Wharton?" asked Lee.

"Gone back to town," replied Lennard.

"He could throw no light whatever on the affair, and there was no sense in keeping him here."

"I only stayed on," said Morrell, "in the hope that I might be of some use. I'd move heaven and earth to find the guilty party!"

Lee made no response. He walked over to the settee, pulled back the sheet, and glanced down at the dead man's features, which appeared quite calm and composed in death. Then suddenly he dropped down on one knee and began a minute examination through a powerful magnifying lens of the face, neck, wrists and hands.

Morrell watched the great detective with interest, and when the examination was completed he turned a look of inquiry on Lee.

"Any traces of violence?" he asked.

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"If there were any marks you wouldn't need a magnifying glass to see 'em!" grunted Lennard.

"Well, there doesn't seem any sense in my staying any longer," said Morrell. "With your permission, I'll get back to town also. I've some business on hand that must be attended to. I know you'll be good enough to keep me acquainted with any developments."

"I think you can rely upon Inspector Lennard to keep you well informed," returned Lee quietly.

FIVE minutes later, Nelson Lee, together with Browne and Nipper, made their way round to the grounds at the back of the house.

"Well, boys, I hope you've been keeping your eyes open," said the detective.

"We have, sir," said Nipper eagerly. "It's established that the revolver on the desk was Sir Richard's property, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then isn't it rummy that he didn't make an attempt to use it when he saw his assailant?"

"Splendid, Nipper!" said Lee, gratified. "That is a point—and a very big point—which apparently Inspector Lennard missed. Still, we all make mistakes at times."

"If that's the case, it looks as though the murderer didn't enter the study through the window," put in Browne.

"Unless I am mistaken," observed Lee, "the murderer climbed out of the window for some purpose, and then climbed back again. Now, boys," he added briskly, "I want you to make a thorough search of the grounds. Scout round the shrubbery for a start, and keep your eyes open for anything in the nature of a clue. Report to me at once if you find anything."

"O.K., chief!" chorused Nipper and Browne.

Not more than fifteen minutes had elapsed before they came running up to the detective excitedly.

"Well?" asked Lee keenly. "Have you found something?"

"I should jolly well think we have, guv'nor!" said Nipper, waving two scraps of paper which he held in his hand. "Look at these, sir—they're burnt, but you can read the printing. One bears the address of The Lodge, with yesterday's date written in ink underneath, and the other's got some writing on it."

Nelson Lee took the charred fragments eagerly. They were both obviously part of a letter-heading, for the first bore the address of The Lodge printed in full. But it was at the second piece of paper that Lee was staring. A sudden tense look spread over his features as his keen eyes read the three words which the fragment contained.

"...ans Mortz is..."

"Hans Mortz is—," he repeated to himself softly. "Obviously the first letters

are part of the Christian name 'Hans.' Where did you find this?"

"In one of the bushes," said Nipper eagerly. "Looks as though we're on the right track, sir. The Blackmailer sent you a warning because you became interested in the case of Mason, who was supposed to have murdered Mortz; now, in this case, we also find a reference to Mortz, and it's pretty well established that the Blackmailer did Sir Richard in."

"And, if we can go by what's written there," put in Browne, "it's certain that there is some connection between Mortz and the Blackmailer."

"This is indeed a discovery!" exclaimed

A stone crashed through the window and fell to the floor. Attached to it was a piece of paper—another warning to Nelson Lee from the Blackmailer.



Lee. "More valuable than you might think. If only I could have got hold of this document intact! There isn't much doubt that it was destroyed last night, or rather, in the early hours of this morning, and it explains why the murderer climbed out of the window. I don't think we shall have any difficulty in establishing the identity of the writer."

"Sir Richard Graydon, gov'nor?" suggested Nipper, and Lee nodded.

"Without a doubt," he said. "The man who got into that room and committed the crime found this paper and destroyed it, throwing away the ashes outside. In that case, the very act shows that this document

was incriminating to the murderer. By the way, I suppose you scoured the place thoroughly?"

"Absolutely, sir. There's not a sign of anything else."

"Well, it's enough to be going on with——" said Lee grimly, and then broke off as the burly figure of Chief-inspector Lennard came striding up.

"Hallo, Lee," he growled. "Found any clues? Looks as if the Blackmailer has got the better of us again. The one solid rock we're up against is how does he commit his crimes? On each occasion his victim has met with a sudden end. If only we knew the cause of death it might help us."

"I think I can assist you in that direction, Lennard."

"What!" cried the inspector. "You mean to say you know how Sir Richard was murdered?"

"That is exactly what I do mean," returned Lee quietly. "Come along to the study for a few minutes, Lennard, and I will endeavour to reconstruct the case."

CHAPTER 5.

The Second Warning!

"IN the first place," said the detective, when the little band had reached the chamber of death, "it is obvious that when Sir Richard Graydon received that final ultimatum from the Blackmailer he knew he was face to face with death.

"His first thought was to get protection, but instead of going to the police, he sent for two of his closest friends to keep him company. We can only imagine the state of mind that led him to this course. The probability is that his nerves were on edge, and that at the last moment he was seized with panic."

"But if he had worked himself up into such a scared state, sir," put in Nipper, "surely he could have explained the situation to his friends, and got them to stay in the same room with him?"

"No doubt that was his original intention," returned the detective. "But with a man of Sir Richard's temperament the chances are that he shirked the task when the time came, and chose to risk the danger rather than confess his fears, even to intimate friends."

"There's something in that," said the inspector.

"Now we know that he expected an attack on his life, and we can assume that sheer fright compelled him to stay up and be on the alert—if not all night, then to a time past the dreaded hour given in the message. In short, he was fully prepared to defend himself, yet to all intents and purposes he did no such thing. When you arrived on the scene, Lennard, you found no signs of a struggle. The revolver was on the desk fully loaded, and Sir Richard's body was in an attitude which ruled violence out of the question."

"That's so," admitted Lennard.

"Why didn't Sir Richard seize the revolver and make some fight for his life?"

"Because he was taken completely unawares," suggested the inspector.

"No, Lennard. It was because the murderer gave no indication that he was the Blackmailer. In other words, Sir Richard's assailant must have been someone well known to him—a man from whom he had no reason whatever to suspect danger!"

"By Jove, that's an idea, Lee. But how did he kill him?"

"By injecting a virulent poison into his system."

"A poison injection!"

"Yes; very likely hypholin—a deadly and little-known Eastern poison which causes almost instantaneous death, and leaves practically no trace behind. The operation is of the simplest character, my dear Lennard. Less than the mere prick of a needle! Sir Richard would hardly have noticed it—in fact, he would be dead almost before the needle had left his hand!"

"His hand!" echoed the inspector.

Lee nodded.

"I said hypholin leaves practically no trace behind. It doesn't except for a minute mark where the injection is made—a tiny red puncture surrounded by a thin blue circle, so small that it cannot be discerned by the naked eye. But under a powerful magnifying lens it shows up clearly. Sir Richard's right hand, towards the outer edge of the palm, below the fourth finger, bears a mark of this description."

"Well, I'm hanged!" exclaimed Lennard. "You discovered this, of course, when you examined the body?"

"I was looking for it," confessed Lee. "It struck me as peculiar that the Blackmailer's crimes have all been committed in the same manner. I have suspected all along that he got rid of his victims with the aid of some deadly poison."

"How do you suppose that the murderer gained his entry to the house?"

"He was already present in The Lodge, Lennard."

"Well, that narrows it down a bit," said the inspector, with satisfaction.

"Now what has been the Blackmailer's motive for committing these crimes?"

"Blackmail?"

"I'm inclined to doubt it. He may have helped himself at the expense of some of his terrified victims, but I should say there is more behind all this than mere blackmail. More likely the motive takes the form of revenge for wrongs inflicted in the past."

"By George!" broke in Lennard. "If there had been anything shady in the past lives of the murdered men you can understand their not seeking police protection—they would be scared that their history would be made public."

"That is just what I have in mind, Lennard. You are quite right, also, in assuming that the search for our quarry is narrowed down. We are now looking for a man who has stayed at this house recently and who cannot account for his movements on certain dates when the Blackmailer has been at work; moreover, an individual who has either travelled East, or who is well acquainted with Eastern customs—and poisons!"

"Morrell has travelled a good deal in China," said Lennard. "Why—d'you mean to say——" He gasped and stared at Lee, who nodded.

"Unless I am mistaken," said the detective, "Herman Morrell is none other than the Blackmailer—*alias Hans Mortz!*"

"HANS MORTZ!" Lennard almost shouted. "What are you getting at, Lee?"

For reply, Nelson Lee brought out the fragments of charred paper found in the shrubbery.

"Look at these, Lennard. They evidently form part of a document written by Sir Richard yesterday. I should say he penned it as an exposure in the event of his death. Why he did it, or what the document contained, does not affect the meaning of what

is written there. Digest those words, Lennard, 'Hans Mortz is'—not *was*!"

The inspector looked up from the scraps of paper to stare at Lee.

"You mean that it is a definite assertion that Mortz is alive?" he said. "Well, if that is so, and Sir Richard knew Mortz, what becomes of your case against Morrell? Do you think Sir Richard would have harboured in his house for one moment the man who intended to kill him? Why, your own theory is that he did not suspect danger from the murderer!"

"Exactly. But supposing Mortz has been living a double life? To pose under his other identity of Herman Morrell, all he would need to do would be to disguise himself in some subtle manner."

"That sounds all very well in theory, Lee. But how came you to suspect Morrell?"

"By a series of coincidences, Lennard. Consider them yourself. Yesterday, Mason shouted from the dock that he could see Mortz. Morrell was in court! I received a warning from the Blackmailer shortly after my interview with the convicted man, and who, apart from yourself, was aware of that visit? Morrell! Then we know that the man who murdered Sir Richard had a knowledge of Eastern poisons. Morrell has travelled in the Orient! Again, the murderer must have been well acquainted with his victim. Morrell was one of Sir Richard's guests! That brings us to Hans Mortz again. Although that final message came from the Blackmailer, it was Mortz from whom the dead man feared danger, for he wrote 'Hans Mortz is——' Is whom, Lennard?"

"The Blackmailer," hazarded the inspector.

"Yes. Purely a guess, I agree, but it fits in with the theory that the man who murdered Sir Richard, and endeavoured to destroy the document concerning Mortz, is indeed Hans Mortz himself—otherwise Herman Morrell."

Inspector Lennard grasped the detective by the arm fiercely.

"If you have known this—if you have suspected Morrell all along," he rapped out, "why did you let him leave the house? For all we know, he might have smelt a rat, and the chances are he will clear out of the country!"

"Until we can *prove* our suspicions against him we can do nothing," pointed out Lee. "And you needn't fear that he'll run away. Even if he thought we suspected him it wouldn't worry him, for he feels safe—doubly safe in the knowledge that at the slightest sign of danger he could remove us from his path as easily and as simply as he has despatched each one of his victims. We know the cause of death, but we have yet to find what diabolical contrivance he uses to produce that cause. Give him a little more rope, and that vital piece of evidence may come to light. Then——"

Crash!

The sound of splintering glass caused Lee to break off and whip round just in

time to avoid the flight of a missile which struck the wall behind him and rebounded harmlessly on to the carpet near his feet.

"A stone!" ejaculated Lennard.

"And something else!" snapped Lee, stooping swiftly and picking up a pebble to which, attached by a piece of string, was a familiar-looking strip of pasteboard.

The detective gave one glance at the message which the card contained, then, thrusting it into Lennard's hand, he made a bound across the room, wrenched up the window-sash, and clambered out.

Lennard's eyes took on a sudden glint as he read:

To Nelson Lee.

THE SECOND WARNING!

"By gosh, the Blackmailer!" he grated.

CHAPTER 6.

The Blackmailer's Trap!

THE whole incident had only occupied two or three seconds, and to Lee's satisfaction he saw the figure of a man scaling the snow-bound wall at the rear of the house about fifty yards away. By the scuffling sounds which came from behind, the detective knew that Nipper and the others were following, and without a moment's hesitation he dashed over the crisp snow in pursuit.

The man dropped into a narrow lane on the other side of the wall, and scuttled off to the right, to vanish round a bend a short distance ahead. In a trice Lee had negotiated the wall and was racing after him.

The sudden roar of an electric horn warned him that a car was approaching from the rear, and on the spur of the moment he jerked to a standstill and waved for the car to stop. At the signal, the driver of the car—a large saloon—applied his brakes.

"I'm a detective," Lee explained rapidly, "and I'm after a man who's gone this way. It's a very urgent matter——"

"Jump in!" snapped the driver, slipping into first gear as he spoke.

"Thanks!" said the detective gratefully. "He's on foot, so we ought to sight him round the bend."

The other did not reply. The car gathered speed. Then for the first time Lee glimpsed some bulky object, covered over with a rug, at the back of the car, and a sudden uneasiness swept over him. Instinctively his hand sought the pocket where he kept his revolver, but before he could withdraw the weapon the rug was flung aside. The next moment the detective felt his arms gripped as though by a vice.

"Got him!" rasped a voice. "And as neat as you like! Hurry up with the dope, Dave!"

In a flash Lee realised that he had fallen into a trap. This car had been kept handy for the purpose of warding off pursuit!

A hand jerked into view over his shoulder, and he felt something soft pressed against his face. A sickly odour penetrated his nostrils—chloroform!

With senses rapidly slipping away, Nelson Lee made one last desperate bid for freedom. So taken by surprise was his captor that for a moment he loosed his hold, and the detective lurched sideways in the driver's direction, with his right arm sprawling over the wheel.

Purely by accident, his arm came into contact with the small button in the centre, and the last thing of which the detective was conscious was the sudden piercing note of the horn—a prolonged blast that dinned and echoed in his ears. Then he lapsed into insensibility.

WHEN Lee regained consciousness he became dimly aware of the fact that he was sitting on a chair, to which his arms and legs had been firmly secured. For a few moments his brain refused to act, then the events of the day came back to him in a rush, and with the full realisation of his plight came also the knowledge that he was blindfolded!

As that fact dawned on him he moved his head weakly, and the same instant a deep voice sounded in his ears.

"He's coming to. Good! Now, boys, you can leave him in my care. I have something I want to say to him—alone."

Lee heard a clattering of feet, followed by the opening and shutting of a door. Then, after a silence lasting several seconds, that deep voice sounded again.

"Mr. Lee, I trust you have by now fully recovered your faculties?"

The detective nodded.

"Excellent! It is so essential that you should grasp the meaning of what I am about to say. First of all, Mr. Lee, I would like you to know that you are at this moment within hand's reach of that elusive individual, the Blackmailer!"

Cool and iron-nerved as Nelson Lee was, he could not suppress a start at the words.

"You mean you are the Blackmailer?" he said slowly, striving in vain to place the owner of that low, resonant voice. He was sure it was not Morrell's.

"Exactly. Let me hasten to assure you that for the time being you are in no danger whatever, Mr. Lee. I do not fashion my methods on rough or crude lines. When the

times comes, if it is necessary, I shall rid myself of you in a far different manner. But I hope that course will not be necessary. I have no quarrel with you. All I ask of you is to leave my affairs alone—to forget that the Blackmailer never existed.

"Mr. Lee, it is my habit to send only one warning. In your case I have extended



Just as the man hurled the poker at William Napoleon Browne, the door burst open and in rushed Nipper, accompanied by a number of plain-clothes detectives.

it to two, and the next intimation from me will contain the date and hour selected for your doom. I know what you are seeking, just the same as I know that you are my one dangerous adversary. But I assure you that you will fail, so why not be sensible, my friend, and drop this case? It would be a great pity to have to end such an illustrious career as yours."

"I regret that you have put yourself to all this trouble for nothing," returned Lee with deep sarcasm. "As it happens, I am not so much concerned with the activities of the Blackmailer as I am in discovering the identity of a person named Hans Mortz!"

If Lee had been expecting the other to betray himself he was disappointed.

"Again I tell you that you will not succeed!" hissed the deep voice in reply. "Remember, I have given you the warning. From now onwards you will be carrying your life in your own hands. I am going now, Lee. You are only a few miles from The Lodge, and I expect your assistants will soon be here. Good-bye."

SEVERAL minutes later Inspector Lennard came barging into the room with Nipper and Browne on his heels.

"Here he is!" exclaimed the inspector, whipping out a knife as he saw Lee's plight and severing the bonds.

"Thank heaven!" gasped Nipper. "We thought it was all up with you, guv'nor!"

In two seconds he had relieved the detective of the bandage about his eyes.

"How did you manage to get on the track?" asked Lee.

"That long blast on the horn did it," said

And the detective explained his strange interview with the murderer, while the others listened with growing amazement.

"Think of the audacity of the man," concluded Lee. "He had me in his power; yet he was content to let me go and bide his time—because he had not given me due warning that I was marked off as one of his victims. He must place extraordinary reliance in his death-dealing device and his ability to use it at the appointed hour. We are up against a master brain, Lennard."

"I can see we're on the wrong track," grunted Lennard. "If Morrell is the Blackmailer you'd have recognised his voice."

"On the contrary," returned Lee, "the fact that I was unable to recognise his voice removes the last doubt I had that Morrell is the man we are after. The knowledge that he is able to disguise his voice so completely explains why none of his victims suspected him of being Hans Mortz."

"Well, what's the next move, Lee?"

"The next move, I think, is for me to disappear for a while," said Nelson Lee.

"There are certain inquiries I want to make, and it would be better for me to go about my work unhampered by the attentions of the Blackmailer!"



CHAPTER 7.

The Message of Doom!

FOLLOWED anxious days for Nipper and Browne, who were staying at Nelson Lee's chambers in Gray's Inn Road. No news came to hand as to the detective's whereabouts. Lee, having made known his decision to carry on his investigation in secret, vanished completely.

Yet, worried as his two assistants were, they carried out their chief's instructions by taking it in turns to keep the Spadger's house in Notting Dale under observation, while Inspector Lennard, for his part, detailed one of his experts from the Yard to shadow Morrell's every moment.

But all their patience, all their diligence, went unrewarded. Morrell's mode of

Lennard. "We guessed something had happened, so we ran back, got your car, and followed the tyre marks, which were fairly plain, thanks to the snow."

Lee eased his aching limbs.

"You've missed the Blackmailer by about five minutes," he said grimly.

living appeared to be free from all blame. There was nothing in his conduct calling for the slightest suspicion, while the Spadger, as though he had received some secret warning, lay low, so that nothing could be gleaned from that quarter.

The days passed uneventfully.

It was the day before the date appointed for Mason's execution that Nelson Lee put in an appearance at Gray's Inn Road, and Nipper, with a cry of delight, bounded forward to meet him.

"Thank goodness you've come back, guv'nor! We were beginning to think that the Blackmailer had managed to get at you!"

"Your fears were groundless," said Lee, with a smile. "I deemed it advisable not to communicate in any way with you. Apart from that, I've spent most of the time abroad making inquiries into Mortz's past life."

"Any luck?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"Yes and no," returned the detective. "I have discovered some interesting facts which confirm the belief I have held all along that Herman Morrell is Hans Mortz. Further, I know now that the Blackmailer's victims were all business associates of Mortz at one time. However, we are still faced with the difficulty of proving that Morrell is Mortz."

"Time's getting short, sir. Isn't it possible to get the execution postponed?"

"I'm afraid not, my lad. I've already been in touch with Inspector Lennard, and he assures me that the Home Secretary would not move in the matter without fresh evidence of a definite character. You see, everything points so overwhelmingly to Mason's guilt."

"Then what we've got to do is to unmask Morrell as Mortz himself," observed Nipper.

"That's the whole thing in a nutshell," assented Lee. "Which reminds me, Nipper, we've made one bad blunder in this case."

"What's that?"

"We allowed ourselves to be lured from that house at Hythe. On second thoughts, I am convinced that the Blackmailer did not go to all that trouble merely to warn me. It is more than possible that some important clue was left behind—some damning piece of evidence which we missed—and he wanted time and the opportunity to get back into the house to secure that piece of evidence."

"The document?"

"No, Nipper. He was under the impression that he had destroyed that. No doubt it was something equally as vital—in all probability the missing link in the chain of evidence that would expose Morrell as Hans Mortz. And unless we can do that Mason will be doomed to walk to the scaffold at eight o'clock to-morrow morning."

NELSON LEE spent the rest of the day sifting and dissecting every detail in the case, striving to hit upon the clue he needed, but all to no avail.

The late post that night brought several letters for Nelson Lee, but one envelope caught his eye in particular. He ripped open the flap to find nothing but a strip of pasteboard inside.

"Just what I expected," he muttered, and drew out the card. It contained three words only, written in red ink:

AT MIDNIGHT TO-NIGHT.

For fully a minute he stared at the message. Then, after coming to a sudden decision, he summoned Nipper. Lee handed his young assistant the card.

"You understand what this means, Nipper?"

"Yes, sir," gasped the youngster, as the horrible significance of the message sank into his brain.

"Although there are only a few hours to go, the Blackmailer doesn't intend to take any risks. This is my death warrant."

"But—but what are you going to do, guv'nor?"

"What am I going to do, Nipper? I'm going to Morrell's house to-night!" replied Lee grimly.

CHAPTER 8.

An Interesting Interview!

IT was exactly half-past eleven when Nelson Lee arrived at Morrell's house in Mayfair. He presented his card to the butler, who ushered him into the library. Morrell joined him a few moments later.

"Ah, Mr. Lee, have you any fresh news?" he asked.

"Yes. The mystery surrounding the supposed death of Hans Mortz is practically solved," said Lee, keeping his eyes fastened on his host.

If Morrell felt any emotion at that statement he did not betray it, not even by the flicker of an eyelid.

"Indeed," he said. "You surprise me. I wasn't aware that the Mortz affair had any bearing on the murder of Sir Richard Graydon."

"Well, it has," returned the detective. "Perhaps you would like to hear the whole story, Morrell?"

"Most decidedly I should."

"I will be as brief as I can," Lee told him. "I ought to mention, first of all, that Hans Mortz is alive, and that in view of that fact Edward Mason will not die on the scaffold to-morrow."

Morrell arched his eyebrows.

"Most amazing—most amazing! Well done, Lee! I remember your saying that you were convinced of his innocence. But Mortz—alive! That is certainly startling news."

"Now to get down to my story," said Lee. "In the first place, I made the discovery that Mortz had financial interests in a large firm in Amsterdam, of which he was a director. There were some decidedly suspicious transactions in the conduct of this business, which led eventually to Mortz being arrested and convicted for fraud. His



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fellow directors cleared off and left him in the lurch. One of them, I believe, misappropriated a certain sum of money belonging to the firm, and Mortz never forgot this. No doubt, during his long sojourn in prison, he formed a plan of revenge.

"Upon his release he traced his former colleagues to England with the idea of getting that money back, with interest, and with the further idea of revenging himself by murdering them one at a time. The names of the people concerned may be familiar to you, Morrell. They are Philip Orford, Captain Leslie Stuart, Frederick Rumpelman, Ronald Purdew Pearce—and Sir Richard Graydon. As you are aware, each one of these men met his death at the hands of the Blackmailer."

Morrell made no sign. He had paled a trifle, but his features were still calm. The detective proceeded.

"Mortz realised the difficulties of pursuing a campaign of this description, but, possessed of a cunning brain, he overcame them all by assuming two identities. In the ordinary way he lived as Hans Mortz, but there were times when he chose to be known as the Blackmailer. On those occasions, being exceptionally fair-headed, he disguised himself by wearing a dark wig. He was able also to alter his voice, so that the double disguise enabled him to mix freely and unsuspected with his victims."

Lee paused for a moment, then resumed.

"But another difficulty occurred—an unforeseen one. One of his helpers, a man named Borden, was inclined to talk too much when under the influence of drink, and it

was this man who let drop some hints to Mason, who was out to track down the Blackmailer for his newspaper. Now, undoubtedly Mortz had found his dual identity rather embarrassing, so that, knowing Borden was not to be trusted, and that he was being pestered with the attentions of a crime reporter of a daily paper, Mortz devised a cunning plan whereby he could kill three birds with one stone—that is, get rid of both Borden and Mason, and finish off an identity that was no longer of any use to him, for the simple reason that while 'Hans Mortz' lived, it was always possible to discover a motive for the crimes the Blackmailer committed. Do you follow me, Morrell?"

Morrell nodded.

"Your method of explanation is fairly simple, Lee," he said quietly, but the detective noticed that his voice had gone suddenly harsh.

"And this is how he did it, Morrell. He faked a quarrel with Mason, killed Borden, taking care to batter the dead man's features out of recognition, and then, having planted sufficient evidence on the body to incriminate Mason, threw it into the Thames, knowing that when it was fished out it would be identified as his own. By the way, he placed a ring on the dead man's finger—one very similar to the one you are wearing now, Morrell. It takes the form of a coiled serpent, with a small diamond in its head."

"Is that so?" Morrell yawned. "Rather a coincidence, what!"

"A strange coincidence," agreed Lee. "I have an idea that he had this ring made

especially for the purpose—a copy of the one he was in the habit of wearing.”

Lee paused. He took from his pocket the strip of pasteboard he had received an hour or so previously and handed it to his host. Morrell read it with an amazed expression on his face.

“This, I take it, is a communication from the Blackmailer?” he queried.

“Exactly.”

“But, my dear fellow, this card says ‘At midnight to-night!’ What does that mean?”

“It means that the sender intends to kill me at twelve o’clock precisely.”

Morrell glanced sharply at the clock on the mantelpiece. The hands pointed to a quarter to twelve.

“Good heavens!” he exclaimed. “Why, it is only fifteen minutes to the hour.”

“Yes. In fifteen minutes time, Morrell, I shall be face to face with the Blackmailer.”

“Where?”

“In this house—in this very room!”

Morrell’s face underwent a sudden change. His features became tense, and his eyes glittered strangely as he stared hard at Lee.

“You mean that he will try to carry out his threat at the appointed hour?”

“I do—and he will fail!”

Morrell flung the stump of his cigar away and lit another.

“My word, this is thrilling!” he said. “We have only a few minutes to go. I propose we spend the time in silence.”

Lee nodded. Not for one moment had he taken his eyes off Morrell, and now the two sat watching each other, tense and alert. In the silence that ensued the ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece sounded like the beat of a hammer on metal.

Minutes passed. The silence was broken abruptly by the sharp ringing of the telephone bell.

Morrell rose to his feet, crossed to the instrument, and answered the call. He turned to Lee.

“It’s someone for you,” he said.

CHAPTER 9.

What Happened at Midnight!

JUST about the time that Nelson Lee arrived at Morrell’s house, William Napoleon Browne, accompanied by Nipper, reached the mean street in which the Spadger lived.

“That’s the place,” said Browne, indicating No. 13. “Now, we’ll do as I said. I’ll try to get in the way I did before, and you wait here.”

“I don’t half like the idea,” grunted Nipper, looking up and down the dark, deserted street. “Supposing someone’s inside, and you’re nabbed”

“This isn’t the time to raise objections, Brother Nipper,” said Browne softly. “It’s essentially a one-man job, and as I’ve been in that house before it stands to reason that I’m the chap to get in again. If I’m not

back in a quarter of an hour from now, you come along into the house yourself. There’s just the chance that we might hit against the clue that Mr. Lee wants, so it’s up to us.”

“All right,” grunted Nipper.

Browne walked away and cautiously approached the house. He crept down the basement steps of No. 13 with penknife in hand. In next to no time he had slipped back the catch and climbed into the room.

The front of the house was in absolute darkness and everything was as silent as the grave, but William Napoleon Browne went about his task cautiously. He did not use his pocket-torch until he had reached the passage leading to the flight of stairs. Then, with the light switched on to guide him, he reached the landing above, making for the room whence he had heard the voices on his previous visit.

The room, which had evidently been rigged up to serve as an office, was empty. There were one or two chairs, a table littered with papers, and, in the far corner, a cupboard.

Browne wasted no time. With the beam of light to aid him, he began searching hastily through the papers. They turned out to be ordinary documents of no apparent value, and, drawing a blank, he next directed his attention to the cupboard.

It was a tall, wide one, and it was locked; but to the resourceful Browne that presented only a minor difficulty. With the aid of a poker he soon had the door open.

The youngster looked into the cupboard eagerly. There was a fair amount of litter inside, but his keen eyes alighted first of all on a small attaché-case standing on the floor. He opened it. To Browne’s disgust, all the thing contained was a folded sheet of blotting-paper!

He was on the point of flinging the case and its contents back into the cupboard again when part of the ink markings on the blotting-paper caught his eye. For a few seconds he stood rigid, spelling one of the words backwards—“M-O-R-T-Z”! With a smothered gasp, he snatched up the blotting-paper and held it in front of a cracked mirror on the wall, directing the beam of his torch on the blurred ink markings.

The writing was indistinct and patchy, but Browne was able to make out enough of it to understand that this blotting-paper must have been used by Sir Richard Graydon when penning that document which had been found in the grounds of his house. Browne thrilled with excitement as he realised the importance of his discovery. By sheer luck he had hit upon the one piece of evidence they had all along been seeking—evidence that would expose the Blackmailer as Hans Mortz!

“Gosh, Brother Lee was right!” he gasped. “The Blackmailer did send back to the house—and this was what he was after! Sir Richard must have guessed that his number was up, and he left that document behind as a clue for the police!”

Even as those stunning facts sunk home into the youngster's dazed brain there came the sharp, echoing sound of a slamming door. In a flash he had stuffed the precious sheet of blotting paper into his pocket and snapped out the light of his torch. He listened.

Heavy footsteps in the hall warned him that the crooks had returned.

"Dash it!" he groaned. "Another couple of minutes and I'd have got clean away."

Swiftly and silently he nipped over to the cupboard, wedged himself inside, and pulled the door to after him. The footsteps halted. The door of the room opened and he heard the men come in. Browne felt his heart thumping against his ribs. He heard the scraping of a match, after that a pause.

"Spadger, someone's been here!" The tones of the speaker were harsh. "Look—we never left that attaché-case out here!"

Browne's heart seemed to miss a beat as he realised that he was doomed to discovery, but he gritted his teeth. The only thing to do was to make a fight for it! He opened the cupboard door an inch to peer through the slit. There were two men in the room. They had their backs to him and they were listening intently.

For a few seconds there was deathly silence; then Browne also heard the sounds that had attracted the crooks' attention—stealthy, muffled movements from below, which seemed to be coming nearer and nearer. Browne gave a gasp of relief.

"Nipper!" he breathed.

In the excitement of the last few minutes he had forgotten all about the arrangement made with Nipper. He looked at his watch. Over half an hour had elapsed since his entering the house.

Neither of the men spoke. One stooped down silently and picked up the poker; the other drew a revolver from his pocket.

"This is where I come in!" muttered Browne. Waiting until the last possible moment, judging the distance carefully, he sprang from his hiding-place. He wrenched the revolver from the Spadger's grasp before that worthy had even time to look round, and crashed it into the other man's startled face.

The crook staggered back with a smothered groan, but in the same instant the Spadger, who had recovered from his astonishment, grabbed at the poker, which had fallen to the floor. He sent it hurtling towards Browne, who ducked.

Crash!

The missile went clean through the window, shivering it to fragments. At the same instant the door came flying open, and into the room swarmed Nipper and a number of plain-clothes detectives. Nipper, fearing for Browne's safety, had, on the spur of the moment, 'phoned Inspector Lennard for assistance, and men had been rushed to the scene.

In two minutes the Spadger and his confederate were overpowered and handcuffed—while Browne seized the telephone and put through a call to Nelson Lee.

THE hands of the clock on Morrell's mantelpiece in Morrell's library indicated a minute to midnight as Nelson Lee replaced the telephone receiver on its rest and turned to face his host's questioning eyes.

"An important call, Lee?"

"Very important."

"Connected with the Blackmailer?"

"Connected with Hans Mortz. Mortz, most fortunately, was concerned in a motor-car accident some years ago. The car he was riding in burst into flames. I said 'most fortunately,' because Mortz suffered from the fire, and bears a scar to this day."

Morrell did not speak. His face had gone ashen, while he seemed to be struggling with some inward emotion.

There was a pause of a few seconds, then came a little whirr from the clock as it prepared to chime out the hour.

Slowly, solemnly, the twelve strokes of midnight sounded in the library. As the last one died away Morrell seemed to recover his composure.

"The fatal hour has passed, Lee," he said. "Your friend, the Blackmailer, has failed to put in an appearance after all. Allow me to congratulate you!"

As he spoke, Morrell extended his right hand. Lee made as though to take it, but with a sudden movement he seized the other's left hand as well.

Click!

With a snarl of rage, Herman Morrell looked down at the steel bands which locked his wrists together.

"The game's up, Hans Mortz!" said Lee sternly. "I'd advise you not to move!"

Covering his captive with a revolver, the detective backed towards the window and drew the curtains apart. At the signal there came a thunderous knocking on the front door, and a few seconds later Inspector Lennard burst into the room, followed by several of his men from the Yard.

"Ah, you didn't waste much time, Lennard!" said Lee. "Here's your man!"

"Have you got the proof?" asked Lennard.

"Yes. Somewhere on his body you will find a scar—the missing evidence that Herman Morrell is Hans Mortz, the Blackmailer."

"Good work!" exclaimed the inspector. "How did you find it out?"

"I didn't. My lads raided the Spadger's place in Notting Dale to-night, and young Browne found the blotting-paper used by Sir Richard Graydon, on which, it appears, there is reference to this scar. Browne 'phoned the news to me a few minutes ago."

"Bravo, Browne! I knew he was on the job, because Nipper 'phoned me to send men down to help them. Now we'll——"

"Be careful!" warned Lee. "That ring on Morrell's finger, unless I'm mistaken, it contains the poison of which I spoke. Don't let him grip you by the hand, or it will be your last moment on earth!"

(Concluded on page 43.)

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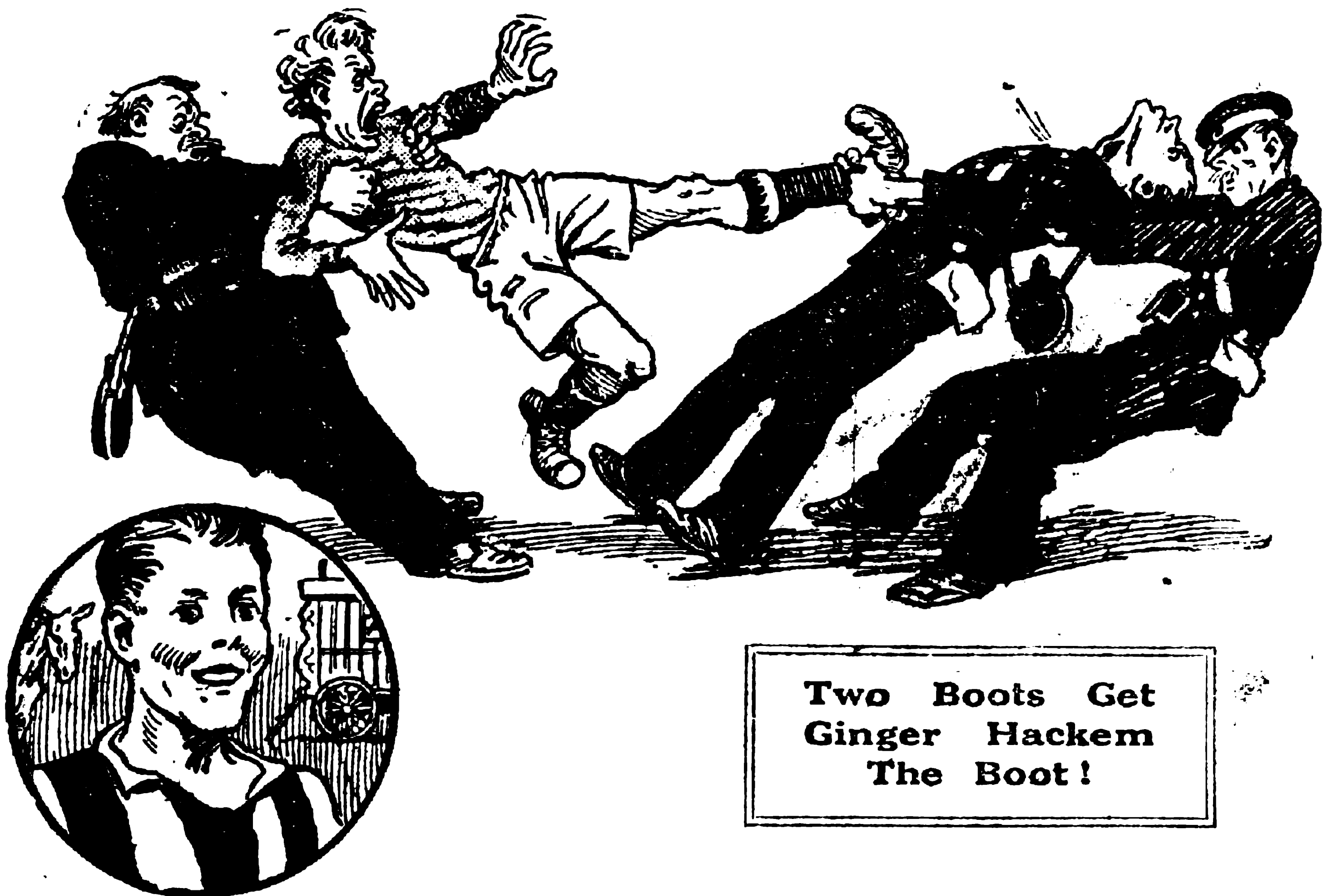
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BULL'S-EYE BILL!



**Two Boots Get
Ginger Hackem
The Boot!**

Gaol-birds On The Prowl!

“WATCHER, Bull's-Eye!”

It was early morning on Mud-bank Flats, and Bull's-Eye Bill, who had just brought back Gipsy Dick's yellow horse, Buttercup, from exercise, was surprised to see his big chum, Chip Rogers, coming across the deserted waste towards Gipsy Dick's caravan.

“You're out early, Chip,” said Bull's-Eye, with a grin of welcome.

“I know; I've got some news for you. I met Ginger Hackem, and Ginger says he's been invited to play in a trial game for the City.”

The City was the biggest professional football club in the neighbourhood. It was always making a bid for the League Championship, and it was an honour to be asked to play for it on trial. Ginger Hackem was Bull's-Eye's worst enemy, and Bull's-Eye frowned. Ginger Hackem was not nearly good enough for the City.

“How did it happen, Chip?” he asked.

“Well, as you know, the City paid thousand in transfer fees last season trying to get a centre-forward, and it was no good. I was told that Ginger got a crowd of pals to write in saying how wonderful he was as a centre. So they're gonna give him a trial.”

Bull's-Eye grinned.

“Ginger never could play forward,” he said. “He's always been a half-back. He can't shoot for nuts. Fancy him trying to put that over on the City, Chip!”

“Talking of shooting, Bull's-Eye,” returned Chip Rogers, “Ginger got quite nasty about you. Said you'd never score at all if it weren't for those magic football boots Gipsy Dick made for you. He said he'd score a crop of goals if he only had your boots, and there was something in his eyes when he said it that made me come right along here. Take those boots down from that peg near the door of the caravan, or Ginger Hackem, or one of his hooligan pals may come along and pinch 'em.”

The boots to which Chip referred could be seen just inside the door of the caravan, hanging from a nail: a pair of football boots made up of red, white, and blue leather. Gipsy Dick, who was Bill's best pal, and with whom Bill lived, was busy shaving at the end of the van.

“Don't you worry about Bull's-Eye's football boots, Chip,” he called. “I'm about most part of the day, and whenever I go into the town I lock the door of the van.”

Chip looked doubtful, but did not argue.

"When's Ginger going to play his trial?" asked Bull's-Eye.

"On Thursday, on the Park ground, against Northern United."

"I'm going over to see it, Chip," said Bull's-Eye. "If Ginger Hackem is good enough for First League football, then so'm I. But I think he'll prove a flop, somehow."

"Will you bring your caravan over, Dick?" called out Chip.

"Ay," answered Gipsy. "I'll make some special sweets for the occasion. It's not a long journey. I'm bound to do well there."

"We'll all go over together, then," said Chip. "There's just one other thing. Remember the Gaol-birds—Jawbreaker Jim, Darkey Dan, Tiny Martin, and that mob? I saw them loafing at a corner, talking to One Punch Pete, Bull's-Eye's stepfather, just after I left Ginger, and I heard 'em say something about the Flats. You keep your eyes open, Dick, for they're a dangerous gang."

After Chip had gone, Bull's-Eye thought he would go for a long walk beside the canal. Gipsy Dick busied himself making a fresh stock of sweets, for the excellence of which he was famous, in his portable kitchen, and then, having to go into the town for some stores, he locked up the van, saddled Buttercup, and rode away on the weird-looking beast—which had a roman nose and whiskers round its great hoofs—causing amusement wherever he went. Which was not surprising, for Gipsy Dick wore a cowboy's hat, favoured a drooping moustache, and let his hair tumble down on to his shoulders.

Dick had not been gone a quarter of an hour when the gaol-birds swooped down on the caravan. For Jawbreaker Jim to force the door with a jemmy was the work of a moment. He leapt inside, followed by Darkey Dan, a black-haired hooligan, and Tiny Martin, a sixteen-stone crook, with ten convictions.

"Come on, boys! We'll pinch Dick's dough," said Jawbreaker Jim.

But though they opened every drawer, ripped open Gipsy Dick's store-room below the floor of the van, and turned everything inside out, they could find no trace of any cash.

"Bust him!" snarled Jawbreaker Jim, tearing a whole line of china cups and mugs from their hooks on the wall of the van with one sweep of his fist. "He's done us, after all! 'E's got a secret 'idin'-place. But never mind! We'll find it!"

Then he saw Bull's-Eye Bill's tri-coloured football boots hanging from a peg on the door.

"Lumme!" he exclaimed. "Look what I found! 'Ere's Bull's-Eye's magic shootin' boots. An' what price Ginger 'Ackem gettin' a trial for the City on Thursday! 'E'd give a pile to score a crop of goals. I'm gonna sell 'im these boots for a five-pound note!"

Those "magic" boots were the only loot that promised any reward to the three gaol-birds, so they slid down out of the caravan, pulled the door to, and miked off, Jaw-

breaker Jim with the precious boots hidden under his coat.

Half-way across the Flats they ran into Gipsy Dick, who was ambling back to the caravan on the back of his raw-boned, shaggy-looking horse.

"You coming to see Ginger Hackem knock 'em cold in the League match on the Park ground on Thursday?" asked Jawbreaker Jim.

As he spoke, he flicked Buttercup's tender nose with his fist, and then took a pin out of the lapel of his coat and dug it into her flank. At the same moment, Dick gave the reins a jerk. The yellow horse, swinging round, let out with both her hind legs, having recognised the signal. Jawbreaker Jim took the double blow right in the seat of his trousers. As he hurtled through the air, uttering a yell of pain and rage, the tri-coloured boots dropped from under his coat to the pavement. However, Darkey Dan pounced on them so quickly that he felt sure that Gipsy Dick had not seen them.

Dick ambled on to the caravan, and betrayed no surprise when he found the door prised open. He saw the empty nail and missed the football boots. Calmly he set to work to straighten out the disorder, and he had nearly finished when Bull's-Eye Bill came back.

"Hallo!" said Bull's-Eye. Then he saw the empty nail and gasped. "Gipsy, someone's stolen my football boots!"

Gipsy pulled at his chin thoughtfully as he looked at the empty nail.

"No, Bill," he answered. "Your boots have been put away till you want 'em, that's all. The gaol-birds think they've taken the boots, but they're booked for a disappointment."

And more than that he would not say.

The Stolen Boots!

WHEN Ginger Hackem left the yard of the Town Stores at lunch-time, he found Jawbreaker Jim waiting for him with a parcel tucked under his arm.

"Ginger," said Jim hoarsely, "you remember what we talked about the other day? Well, I've got 'em!"

"Got wot?" asked Ginger Hackem shortly.

Jawbreaker Jim was a pal of his, but at the same time he didn't want all the town to see him talking to the gaol-bird in broad daylight, and almost outside the Stores. It might cost him his job.

"Bull's-Eye Bill's magic shootin' boots," answered Jim, undoing the parcel and displaying under shelter of the brown paper the pair of tri-coloured boots. "Pinched 'em from the nail inside the door of Gipsy Dick's van."

"Gimme 'em!" said Hackem eagerly, stretching out his hand.

"Arf a mo'! You gimme five quid and they're yours."

"Talk sense! I 'aven't got five bob! Tell yer wot, I'll pay yer by instalments, the first on Saturday, after I git my pay."



Buttercup lashed out and Jawbreaker Jim went sailing through the air.

Jawbreaker Jim wrapped up the boots again.

"Nothin' doin'. Don't forget the trial game's on Thursday. That's when you'll need 'em most. I'll find someone else who'll gimme more."

Ginger Hackem caught the crook by the arm as he was hurrying away.

"All right," he said hoarsely. "You shall have the money, even if I have to pinch it! Meet me outside here at six o'clock, when I knock off from my rounds."

At six o'clock, Ginger Hackem found Jim waiting. He handed him five pounds and took the boots. Hurrying home as fast as he could go, Ginger undid the parcel in the privacy of his bed-room. His eyes glistened as he turned the boots over and over, peered inside, rapped them with a hammer, as if he believed he could find out the secret of their remarkable goal-scoring quality.

Every time Bull's-Eye Bill had worn them he had scored a crop of goals. But though Ginger examined them from every angle, he failed to find any difference between them and an ordinary pair of football boots, save that they were coloured red, white, and blue.

He slipped them on, and found they fitted well enough; just a little tighter than his own maybe, but not so much as to matter. But it would never do for him to wear them as they were. Ginger Hackem spent the entire evening painting out the red and blue,

and changing the colour of the boots to a dingy yellowish white.

Poor Old Ginger!

WHEN Ginger Hackem turned up for his trial match at the City Ground, the first persons he saw after entering the gates were Gipsy Dick and Bull's-Eye Bill, selling sweets from the gaily-painted caravan. Gipsy Dick at once caught sight of him, and grinned from under the broad brim of his cowboy's hat.

"Hallo, Ginger!" he cried. "Going to buy some sweets?"

"I'd see myself frizzling before I bought any of your muck!" answered Ginger. "You've had me once or twice, but you'll never get me again!"

"All right! You needn't buy if you don't want," Dick answered gaily. "I've got plenty of other customers. What have you got in that parcel, Ginger? Your scoring-boots?"

In spite of himself, Ginger flushed a guilty red.

"Yes," he cried. "You watch me pop the goals on to-day! Bull's-Eye Bill won't be in it!"

Gipsy's lips stretched in a broad smile.

"Perhaps!" he cried.

Near the dressing-room, Ginger Hackem ran into Jawbreaker Jim, Darkey Dan, and Tiny Martin. The three gaol-birds were

sporting huge rosettes of the City colours, and had come to wish him good luck.

Ginger was furious with anger.

"Get away!" he hissed. "I don't want a gang of gaol-birds like you hangin' around here. You'll spoil my chances!"

"You didn't say that when I brought yer the boots," grated Jawbreaker. "All right! If you don't want us we'll mizzle."

As they walked away, Jim jerked a thumb over his shoulder back at Ginger.

"That guy's blown 'is 'ead out with gas," he remarked. "Soon it'll bust. But I tell you what, chums, if we want some dough we can git it to-night. Come and look at Gipsy Dick—he's raking in a fortune, and he'll 'ave to take the money back to the Flats, becos the banks are closed"

FIFTEEN thousand people gathered to see the match that afternoon, and among them were heaps of Ginger's pals, who had come to cheer him on.

The City lost the toss, and Ginger stood with the ball at his toe on the centre line, eager to show the City what he could do. As soon as the whistle blew, he streaked down the field, snapping up a return pass and racing for the goal like the wind. His shot sent the ball just an inch wide of the side post, and the crowd gasped.

Gipsy Dick caught Bull's-eye Bill by the arm.

"Bull's-Eye," he said, "Jawbreaker Jim pinched the boots I hung up near the door of the van the other day and sold 'em to Ginger Hackem. And Ginger believes that they are your magic shooting-boots. But they're not. They're just a second pair I made—in case."

"Where are my boots?" asked Bill.

"In a secret hiding-place in the van, kid. Now, listen! Ginger's had to colour out the red and blue and white. And whatever stuff he's put on those boots will make the leather shrink. Ginger won't score any goals to-day. Just you watch!"

As Ginger came up field, the clouds opened and rain drenched the pitch. Cheered by Ginger's promising opening rush, the City broke through time and again, but every time they passed the ball to Ginger they found him so slow to move that the Northern backs nipped in and banged the ball upfield.

Ten minutes later Ginger, who was hobbling badly, suddenly collapsed. The referee blew his whistle and the trainer came out.

"You hurt, kid?" asked the trainer sympathetically, for he had heard people speak of Ginger as a coming marvel.

"No," moaned Ginger. "It's my boots; they're crippling me. They've suddenly got too small. I can't even walk."

It was a fact, and they had to send for the ambulance men to carry Ginger in. A minor tug-o'-war occurred when they tried to pull off his boots in the dressing-room. Finally they had to cut the boots off his feet bit by bit. Ginger didn't kick the ball in that match after the first quarter of an hour, and

what the manager said to him when he went into the office to explain would occupy a book.

Ginger was still limping when he walked miserably home.

"Serve him right!" said Jawbreaker Jim as he and his gaol-bird cronies made their way in the dark towards the Flats. "And now, boys, we'll git Gipsy's dough!"

They filed on to the Flats, and crept stealthily in the direction of the lighted caravan. They moved warily, because they fancied someone else was lurking in the dark. They thought they saw a small, ghostly shape flit across the Flats towards the caravan, and it was a half an hour before they dared draw near enough to look in.

They saw Gipsy Dick and Bull's-Eye Bill sitting at a little narrow table. Gipsy was counting money, and dropping it into a tall round tin, with a slot in its lid. Jawbreaker Jim literally squirmed as he heard the coins chink down.

"He's countin' 'is dough," the crook whispered hoarsely.

Inside the caravan, Gipsy said in a whisper, without turning his head:

"They're outside, Bill. Sure they were Jim and Dan and Tiny?"

"Sure," answered Bull's-Eye. "They passed so near where I was watching, I couldn't help but recognise them. I heard them say they mean to have your money."

"Right!"

Gipsy rose, put on his hat, and moved towards the door of the van, dangling a long tin from his hand. He went down on to the Flats and started digging with a spade, which he pulled from under the van.

He set the tin in the hole and covered it with earth. Then, with the spade across his shoulder, he returned to the van, whistling. When he got back, Bull's-Eye wasn't there. Gipsy waited, smiling grimly.

It was Jawbreaker Jim who scooped up the earth and pulled out the tin.

"Dough!" he cried as he wrenched off the lid and thrust his hand in. Then he uttered a yell.

At the same moment the sound of a fast-approaching car startled them. The crooks ran.

Jawbreaker Jim had his hand stuck so deep into a gluey substance that he could not shake the tin off.

"Sold! It's the Flyin' Squad!" he yelled as he raced for the canal.

One after the other, the crooks plunged in and swam to the far bank for safety.

"What you want me for, Gipsy?" asked Sergeant Puffin as he dropped down from the police car.

Gipsy tossed him and the rest of the police a great bag of mixed sweets each.

"I asked Bull's-Eye Bill to bring you here to give you these," he said.

THE END.

(Another corking complete footer yarn about Bull's-Eye Bill next week, lads.)

Breathless Adventure In The Centre Of The Earth!



SUBTERRANEAN CASTAWAYS!

On Trial!

"JEFFERSON JETBY!"

Roddy Patterson gasped the name as the scoundrel advanced, a revolver in each hand. Jetby smiled sardonically.

"Sure thing it's me!" he answered. "Guess you didn't expect to see me again so soon, eh?"

"How did you get here?" asked Professor Patterson, Roddy's uncle, for the last thing the subterranean castaways had expected was that Jetby, their enemy, would follow them to this wonderful city of the Troglodytes.

When Professor Patterson and his two companions, Roddy and Spud Thompson, lost in the caves miles beneath the earth's surface, had

discovered an aerial ropeway which had brought them here to the secret city of the cave-dwellers, they had imagined that they had at last thrown Jetby off their track. There had only been one cage working on the cable, and, as they had taken that, how had Jetby managed to pursue them?

Jetby's answer amazed them more than ever.

"By means of a helicopter!" he answered, and then, noticing the looks of blank astonishment on their faces, he laughed harshly. "You were right when you thought there was radium to be discovered in these caves, professor," he explained. "But even you didn't expect to find a race of Troglodytes living down here—and Troglodytes who know how to make use of that radium! Listen!

This Week's Thrilling Yarn:
DOOMED TO DIE!

When you escaped in that cage affair I tried to cut the cable, but wasn't successful. I explored the brink above—and came across a helicopter. It's like nothing ever seen on earth, and it's worked by means of a radium engine! I tell you, these Troggs know a thing or two!"

"Why have you followed us, you scoundrel?" asked Roddy.

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, my lad, or it'll go hard with you!" snapped Jetby. "As a matter of fact, my men were left behind—the helicopter started to descend before they'd got on board. So I've come to make you an offer. We said it was to be war to the knife, and I reckon I've got the whip-hand. But I'll be merciful—on condition you throw in your lot with me?"

"And what, exactly, does that mean?" demanded the professor.

"Supposing we establish communication with the earth above; get the Troggs under our power and run a fleet of these helicopters up and down the shaft of an extinct volcano—why, we can command the mastery of the world!" replied Jetby. "This is my offer. Help me to make the Troggs disgorge their radium stores and build a fleet of their helicopters, and I'll give you a share in the proceeds. Don't you see what we can do? Why, with an extinct volcano as a base, we can terrorise the whole world! No one will ever be able to get us—for they can't follow us down here. We'll be rich beyond the dreams of avarice! The whole world will be at our feet!"

Roddy exchanged glances with the professor and Spud. Only too well did they realise that Jetby had spoken the truth. The professor had explained to the boys that it was quite likely that a shaft of an extinct volcano reached down to the caves, which were of volcanic origin. If such a thing as a radium-operated helicopter existed—and Jetby's presence was proof that it did—communication with the outer earth could be established!

In the hands of an unscrupulous scoundrel like Jetby, this knowledge was a menace to the civilised world!

It was the professor who answered Jetby.

"You utter scoundrel!" he said. "So you would use the precious radium to plunder the earth, instead of to alleviate the suffering of mankind. We'll have nothing to do with you or your schemes!"

"You've signed your death warrant, professor!" snapped Jetby harshly. "Perhaps, when I've dealt with you, these boys will realise what's coming to them if they don't kick in with me."

There was no mistaking the sinister meaning of his words. Slowly and deliberately he took aim at the professor with one of his revolvers. His eyes hardened, and he sneered as his fingers tightened on the trigger.

Crack!

The revolver spurted death. Roddy and

Spud expected to see the professor drop to the ground, a crumpled heap.

But the unexpected had happened!

Even as Jetby pressed the trigger of his automatic, the curtains behind the professor parted, and a Troglodyte entered. He was one of the chief Troggs who had welcomed the professor and the boys to the secret city, and, knowing nothing of the nature of the firearm, he rushed in between Jetby and the professor.

The bullet struck him. With a gasping cry, he dropped to the ground—dead!

What happened in the next few seconds was like a nightmare to the boys. It seemed that hordes of Troggs dashed into the chamber, and when they saw their dead chief they set up a terrific howling. In the meanwhile Roddy had pulled out his own automatic and turned to face Jetby. But the scoundrel was gone.

The Troggs saw the motionless form of their fellow-creature; they saw, too, an unknown weapon in the hands of Roddy. Without stopping to reason, they flung themselves on the boys and the professor. In a few seconds the three adventurers were battling against dozens of enraged Troggs.

Against such weight of numbers they could do nothing. They were bowled over like ninepins, after which they were securely tied up with thongs of leather-like substance.

Then, helpless in the hands of their captors, they were carried out of the chamber and borne along numerous corridors, until at last they found themselves back at the spot where they had first arrived at the city of the Troglodytes—the great circular hall.

Cries of execration rose on every hand as the three of them were taken on to the central platform. There they were thrown down roughly, while one of the Troggs who had previously welcomed them to the city, mounted beside them and commenced to harangue the crowd in the curious guttural language of the cave-dwellers.

"Gosh!" gasped Roddy. "They believe I killed their chief—and we're being tried for the murder, while that scoundrel Jetby has made his escape in safety!"

The Chasm of Death!

THAT such was the case was only too obvious. The howls of anger which punctuated the speech of the orator told the adventurers that the Troglodytes were demanding vengeance for their murdered chief. And the boys, not knowing a word of their captors' language, were unable to defend themselves.

The speechmaker was working himself up into a frenzy. With growing anxiety the captives watched him fascinatedly.

A final outburst as the orator threw up his hands, and they knew by the rising inflexion with which he had finished, that he was asking a question.

There could be little doubt as to what

that question was. He was asking what punishment should be meted out to these strangers from another world who had brought death to their chief.

"Yahk! Yahk!" cried the assembled multitude of Troglodytes in reply, and the professor gave a groan. For the way in which the word had been howled told, only too plainly, what it meant.

It was "Death! Death!"

Forgetting that the Troggs could not understand his language, Roddy burst out:

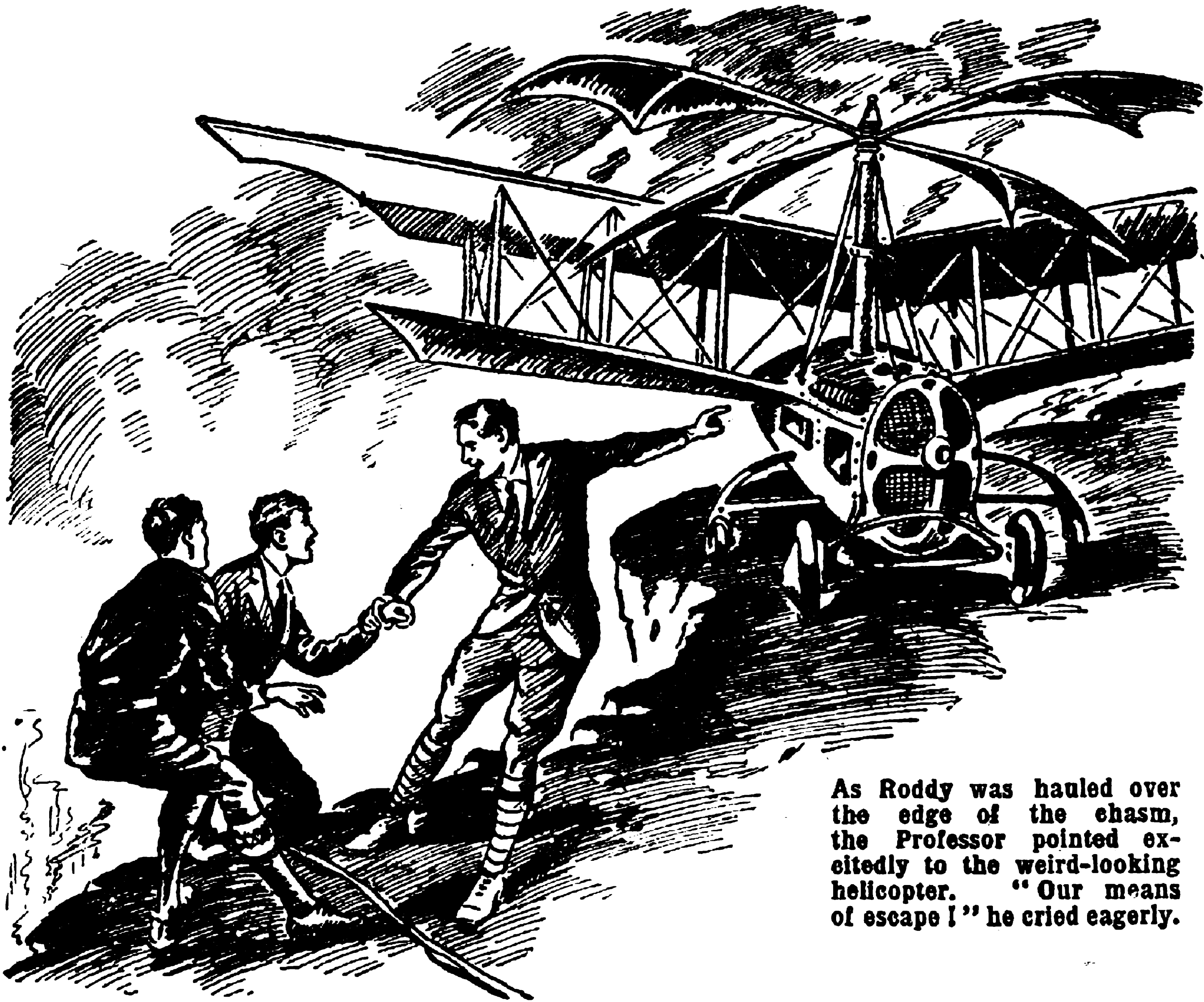
"You fools!" he cried. "It wasn't us! It was——"

A hairy paw closed over his mouth, and

see what was happening, saw that they had left the city behind and were approaching a place which glowed with a reddish glare. The boy gave a low cry of horror.

Deep down in the bowels of the earth, among the raging volcanoes, and it was to the brink of one of these that they were carried. They halted on the edge of a pit from which came whirling wisps of acrid smoke. His face was thrust over the brink for a moment, so that he could see the doom that awaited him. Far below, in the depths of the earth, there was a blinding glare of white-hot molten substance.

This place where they stood was a circular



As Roddy was hauled over the edge of the chasm, the Professor pointed excitedly to the weird-looking helicopter. "Our means of escape!" he cried eagerly.

cut short his further words. Sentence of death had been passed upon them, and there was no appeal from the verdict of the assembly.

Once again the three intrepid adventurers were taken up in the brawny arms of the Troggs. They found themselves borne into another vast cave and onwards.

Their captors pressed around them, separating them from each other. The howls of rage from the Troggs deafened all other sounds. They were struck and kicked by the angry cave-dwellers.

It began to grow hotter and hotter, and Roddy, twisting himself in an endeavour to

ledge, half-way down a volcano. Above a funnel-shaped opening led upward and carried off the gases and smoke from the volcano. Below the white-hot mass seethed and roared.

That this was a place of execution was obvious. Jutting out over the brink was a rocky platform, and to this the captives were carried in triumph. Their judge accompanied them, and two Troglodytes took their stand on the side of each prisoner.

A hush fell on the Troggs, and for the first time since they had been parted the boys and the professor found themselves able to converse with each other,



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"I am sorry, boys," said the professor. "I have brought you to your doom. They intend to hurl us down this shaft!"

Roddy and Spud said nothing. They were too horrified to speak.

For a moment everything suddenly went dark. A wave of smoke had clouded over the blazing mass below. It billowed up the funnel of the volcano, and then the roaring furnace below glowed more fiercely than ever. So powerful was the glare that it seared the eyes almost to look down upon it.

Two pairs of arms seized the professor. To the accompaniment of a curious chant he was lifted up and carried to the brink. His executioners drew back as the heat struck them, and then, recovering themselves, they dropped the professor over the ledge.

Roddy gave a choking gasp, but before he could say anything Spud was also seized and taken to the brink.

"Good-bye, Roddy, old man!" he cried chokingly. Then he, too, was launched over into the inferno below.

Two seconds later Roddy was seized by the executioners. He tried to struggle, but it was hopeless. The acrid smoke blinded and half-choked him as he was thrust towards the brink. He felt himself pushed forward.

The ground seemed to give way beneath him. He fell into space, hurtling down—down—down!

A Gleam of Hope.

CRASH!

With a thud that seemed to knock all the breath from his body, Roddy landed on something hard. For a moment he lay there dazed. He became aware of the fact that here the heat was not quite so intense. Something must be shielding him from the glare and the heat of the seething volcano.

"That you, Roddy?" came a voice from near at hand, and Roddy rolled over.

The glare from the inner shaft showed him two figures lying nearby. His heart gave a bound.

"You, Spud!" he gasped. "And you, uncle?"

"Yes, Roddy!" came the voice of Professor Patterson. "The almost impossible has happened! Instead of being hurled into the centre of the volcano we have escaped by a miracle. The heat was too intense to let the executioners throw us very far out into the shaft—and we have landed on a lower ledge similar to that from which we were thrown. It is not the first time that this has happened, for the ledge is littered with the skeletons of Troglodytes who have also been thrown here."

"Then there may be a chance of escape?" gasped Roddy.

The professor shook his head.

"I don't like to raise your hopes, boys," he said, "The skeletons show that other un-

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fortunates were not able to escape, and it is not likely that we will be luckier. But can you free your arms, Roddy?"

"I'll try, uncle," was Roddy's reply. "It ought to be easy. There are plenty of sharp corners sticking out from the rocks."

Rolling over, he managed to squirm his way to a pointed rock, and soon was sawing his bonds against its edge. For a long time he laboured, and then his bonds snapped. After that he severed the thongs which bound his feet, and commenced upon the bonds of his companions. Before long all three of them were free. But the hope which had sprang into their hearts was stifled a little while later. When they came to explore the ledge in search of a passage which would allow them to escape, they found nothing.

Like the Troglodytes whose skeletons littered the rock, they would be forced to remain there until the heat, combined with hunger and thirst, brought an end to their terrible sufferings.

HOW long they had remained there none of the adventurers knew. It seemed to them that ages had passed. They knew neither night nor day, for unceasingly the glow from the depths of the earth lit up the scene.

Every now and again they were sent into violent paroxysms of coughing by the acrid smoke and fumes. The heat was terrific, and the lack of water had parched their tongues and throats. Their sufferings were almost unbearable.

But, with a courage born of despair, they did not cease their efforts to find a way of escape. Several times Roddy and Spud had tried to scale the walls of the shaft in a vain endeavour to regain the ledge above, from which they had been thrown.

The walls, however, for the most part, were perfectly smooth, and the boys were unable to make much headway.

The heat and the effects of the fumes were now beginning to tell on them. Their skins were blistering, and they were almost unconscious. Spud and the professor dropped down and lay where they fell. They were very near their end.

Dogged determination kept Roddy going. Again and again he paced the narrow ledge, his eyes gazing upward to where the shape of the ledge above them was silhouetted. But there seemed no way of escape.

For the hundredth time Roddy had walked to the brink and gazed upward. For the hundredth time he had turned away, disappointed. And then—

Something caught him a smack on the back and sent him staggering. He kept his footing, however, and wheeled round. At first he could not believe his eyes. Then he gave a cry of amazement and jumped forward.

A rope had appeared from above—a long, leathery rope, similar to those with which he had been bound, only stronger and thicker.

It hung taut, and Roddy saw that there was a large piece of rock fastened to the end of it, almost as though the rock was being used as an anchor. Hastily he shook the others into wakefulness, and quickly told them of his discovery. In a few moments they were regarding the rope eagerly.

"We can shin up it!" said Roddy. "It comes from the ledge above. If we can get up there and hide—"

Hope returned to them again. How the rope had come to be there they did not know, but its coming was most opportune. Roddy turned to the professor.

"You'd better go first, uncle," he said. "Spud can follow you, and I'll bring up the rear. If all's well, give three jerks of the rope."

He led the professor over in the direction of the rope. Professor Patterson seized it and began, slowly and painfully, to drag himself upward. Roddy watched him in trepidation. Would his uncle manage without mishap?

A few moments later the boys saw him scramble over the brink above them, and three tugs were given on the rope. Spud went next, and he managed to gain the brink without much difficulty. Roddy watched him disappear, then caught hold of the rope and began to climb. Soon he was grasping the brink of the ledge, and the professor and Spud bent down, seized his hand, and dragged him on to the ledge.

"Look, my boy!" cried the professor, pointing. "A way of escape!"

Roddy followed the direction of his uncle's pointing finger, and gave a glad cry as he saw the shape of a curious machine standing on the ledge. In appearance it was something like an aeroplane, but it had no tail, although great wings stretched out from it. The most amazing thing about it, however, was the strange propeller. This was formed of four bat-like wings, which hovered over the body of the machine. As Roddy grasped the significance of them he turned to his uncle.

"The helicopter!" he gasped. "Then Jetby spoke the truth!"

"Yes," answered the professor. "And in that helicopter, boys, we may yet find our way back to civilisation—"

He broke off, for at that moment came the tramp of marching feet, coming nearer—ever nearer—towards them!

"The Trog!" gasped Spud. And just as escape is within our reach!"

(Will the Subterranean Castaways succeed in escaping? Next week's amazing yarn tells you. More exciting than ever—don't miss it.)

A Stirring Serial Of The Days When Turpin Roamed England!

Knights of the Road!

By DAVID GOODWIN



(Introduction on page 40.)

Kidnapped!

“WELL, Dick, are you wondering how far you will drop when they hang you?”

Dick glanced up, and his face cleared as he saw Black Bess trotting towards him, with Turpin's devil-may-care figure on her back. The young outlaw had been riding to and fro all the morning between Basing Hall and Hutton, chafing because he was unable to hear what was going on at the courts, where his scoundrelly uncle, Vane Forrester, was being tried.

It was the morning after the banquet at Sir Henry's; the time, close upon noon. Dick had been sternly forbidden by the old baronet to show himself near the court-house.

“Well met, Turpin!” he said. “Here have I been eating my heart out ever since this morning, wondering what is passing at Hutton. We had rare sport last night; but now there's going to be the deuce to pay. I was dining with Sir Henry Stanhope——”

“Ay, I know all about that,” said Turpin.

The chaise raced past. A boyish figure appeared at the window; a cry for help—plucky young Ralph Forrester kidnapped.

“I heard it before sunrise, from one of Stanhope's men. I am like to tell you more than you can tell me. What do you want to know?”

“I want to know how Vane came out of the scuffle,” said Dick, “for I doubt he has the best of us over this affair; we carried matters with too high a hand. And that's more than you can tell me.”

“Then you're wrong once more,” said Turpin coolly, “for this very morning I saw Vane catching it hot before the magistrates; and I'm first with the news, too.”

“What! Then where were you?”

“In the Hutton court-house.”

“'Od's bodkins! You don't mean that?”

“Why not,” said the highwayman, grinning. “Many a judge who hopes to hang me I have sat and listened to. It gives me many a useful hint for when my own time comes. I left Bess in a cottager's shed, and walked to Hutton with a labourer's smock-frock over my riding-clothes. Ho, ho! They

(Continued on page 40.)



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KNIGHTS OF THE ROAD!

(Continued from page 38.)

little thought Turpin sat by them, his pistols at his belt!"

"By the rood, you're a daring rascal!" said Dick, all anxiety to hear what had passed. "How did Vane fare?"

"He was brought in looking as green and as yellow as a half-ripe marrow, after his night in the cells. He protested that he was the squire of Fernhall; but they clapped him in the dock with his rascals, all in a bunch."

"Did they, so!" chuckled Dick. "I wish I had refused Sir Henry's advice and gone myself."

"A good thing he has more sense than you," said Turpin, "for you'd have wrecked the whole business. They read the charges against him, in language that made him wriggle and curse under his breath, and they called on him to answer for having assaulted a citizen in a private house."

"Citizen!" squeals Vane. "'Twas the highwayman, Dick Forrester, and Sir Henry Stanhope sheltered him. Where is this citizen who charges me? Bring him forth!"

"So the usher calls aloud for 'Richard Fernhall,' and, of course, you were not there. Old Sir Henry is no fool; he knew what he was about."

"It seems the prosecutor is not present," said the chairman of the bench, "so the case falls out."

"But I have been lying in the cells all night, like a common felon!" squawks Vane. "I say it was Dick Forrester, the notorious highwayman."

"If you are not quiet," says Sir Adam Vincent, in the chair, "I'll commit you for contempt of court! This charge is dismissed, since the prosecutor is not present. But there is a graver one to follow!"

"So the usher reads out a charge of resisting the King's officers. Half a dozen witnesses came up to prove that the ruffians in the dock had made a murderous attack on the King's Riders to rescue Vane."

"What have you to say, sir?" thundered the chairman. "Do you deny that these vile knaves of yours, by your order, tried to rescue you from the officers of the law?"

"Vane swore they were not his men; they

only tried to save him from a wrongful arrest by rascally Riders who had been bribed by Sir Henry Stanhope. But the ruffians themselves thought they could shelter themselves behind Vane, so they all owned they had only done what he had paid them to do."

"Vane nearly collapsed at that, and at first I thought Sir Adam would send him back to the cells. But it seems he couldn't do that; so he sent the ruffians there instead, and sentenced Vane to the biggest fine he could—twenty-five guineas. Vane wanted to stay and talk about the notorious highwayman, Dick Forrester, and the infamous Sir Henry who had refused to have him arrested; but they took the fine from Vane—he paid it as if it tore his heart-strings out—and bundled him out of court."

Dick laughed till his sides ached at Turpin's account of the trial. Then he became grave again.

"Did you see where Vane went when he left the court-house?" he asked.

"Nay, I did not. But he'll not trouble you any more for a while; he's had too severe a set-back. He'll get nothing out of the Hutton magistrates. In fact, he's at a deadlock."

"You don't know the knave," said Dick; "he's all the more to be feared. Vane is never at a loss for long."

"What can he do?" said Turpin. "Hark! What comes yonder?"

The two friends listened. The sound of wheels and hoofs beat upon their ears, and soon they saw a post-chaise swinging along the road past them at a spanking pace.

"Help—help!" cried a clear, boyish voice, and the head and shoulders of a youngster appeared out of the chaise window.

"Od's death!" cried Dick, clapping spurs to Black Satan and galloping off at full speed after the vehicle. "'Tis Ralph! That's Vane's chaise—he's carrying off the boy!"

Disaster!

RALPH FORRESTER it was. But no sooner had he uttered that one ringing cry for help than he was hauled back into the chaise by Vane, whose face, distorted with hate and fury, appeared in the window a moment later.

(Continued on page 42.)

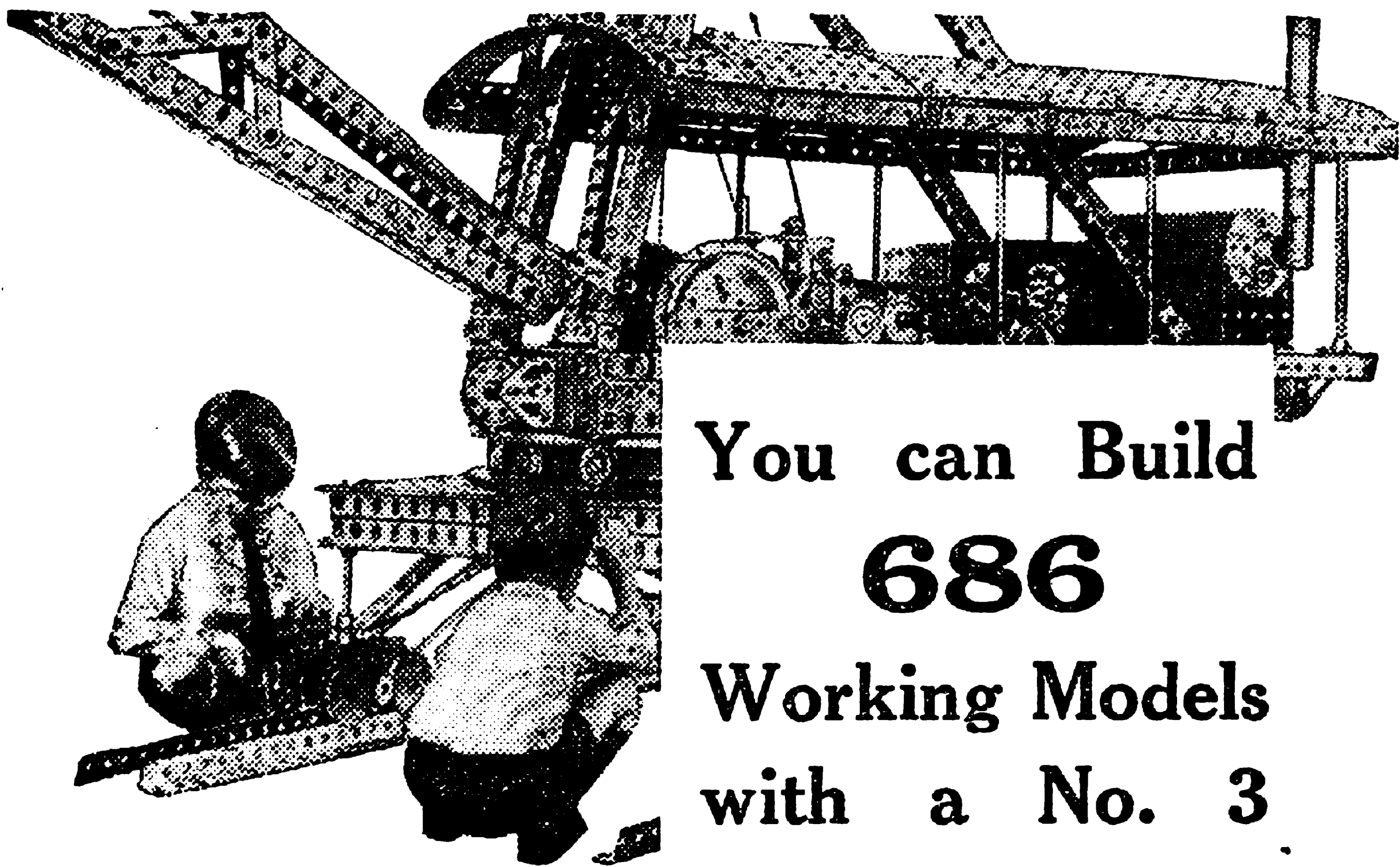
HOW THE STORY STARTED.

DICK FORRESTER learns upon the death of his father that all the vast estates and fortune, with the exception of a hundred guineas, have passed into the hands of his rascally uncle, **VANE FORRESTER**. The latter refuses to give the boy his money, and, appointing himself guardian, states his intention of sending Dick and his brother,

RALPH FORRESTER, to Duncansby School—a notorious place in the north of England. Travelling by coach, Vane and the two boys are held up by

DICK TURPIN, the famous highwayman. Dick joins forces with Turpin, while Ralph goes on to Duncansby. He has a terrible time there, but is eventually rescued by his brother—now a notorious highwayman with a price on his head—who takes him to St. Anstell's College, where he is known as Fernhall. Dr. Trelawney, the headmaster, discovers the secret, but because he is indebted to Dick for a service he takes no action. Sir Henry Stanhope, chief governor of St. Anstell's, invites Dick to a banquet. Vane Forrester is also a guest, and calls in the King's Riders to arrest the young outlaw. Sir Henry, angry at the interruption, has Vane himself arrested for assaulting Dick, and, in spite of an attempt by his hirelings to rescue him, he is taken off to Hutton cells.

(Now read on.)



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KNIGHTS OF THE ROAD!

(Continued from page 40.)

"Look out for his pistol!" cried Turpin; and the words were hardly out of his mouth when a spurt of smoke leaped from the window, and a pistol-ball, aimed at Dick's horse, grazed Black Satan on the flank.

"Don't shoot!" cried Dick to his comrade. "You may hit Ralph!"

"On, on!" screamed Vane to the driver of the chaise. "A hundred guineas if you outdistance them!"

The postboy plied whip and spur, and the vehicle raced on through the countryside.

"Od's death!" shouted Turpin, spurring forward. "The gravel-pits! Catch the horses, or the boy's lost!"

Right ahead yawned the mouth of a deep, sheer-falling pit, its edge fringed with bushes, and the frantic chaise-horses dashed straight towards it. Dick urged Black Satan to its utmost and made one desperate effort to reach the chaise in time.

But he was too late. Right to the pit's brink dashed the chaise and horses, despite Dick's frantic attempt to clutch the leader's head, and as the two pursuers reined their mounts back upon their haunches on the very edge, the chaise plunged over into the yawning pit.

"Ralph!" cried Dick, in agony. "He is lost!"

A scream came from the leading chaise-horse as it found itself hurtling downwards, a wild, ringing cry from inside the chaise as it disappeared over the edge of the pit. Then a moment's silence and a terrific crash, followed by silence once again.

Dick and Turpin flung themselves from their mounts and hurried down the slope to the pit's bottom. The wrecked vehicle lay on its side in the middle of a juniper-bush, which it had crushed flat to the ground. The horses lay atop of each other, both dead.

Dick raced up to the chaise. The whole vehicle was buckled and cracked like a wrecked vessel, and inside Dick saw only one form—his brother.

"Ralph!" cried the young highwayman in a choking voice, clambering in and bending over him.

The boy lay white and still; no answer came from his lips.

"He's dead!" said Dick with a sob. "Bear a hand, Turpin, and lift him out."

They bore the boy out tenderly and laid him on the turf.

"It's the end!" muttered Dick rising, with wild eyes. "Where is the hound that brought him to his doom? If I find one breath in his body I will rob him of it with these hands!"

"Poor lad!" said Turpin, with a sigh. "He was a fine, brave youngster, and his blood is on the head of that traitor, Vane! But I don't doubt vengeance is taken from our hands. He must be beneath the chaise, crushed. Prise it up and see."

They could not move the crushed vehicle with their hands, but soon they found an old strut-pole, and levered it up. To their amazement, there was nothing beneath it save the crushed bush.

"Where can the villain be?" exclaimed Turpin. "He is not under the chaise, nor the horses. His body must have rolled among the bushes."

They searched the tangled undergrowth without avail.

"I will find the scoundrel if he is above ground!" said Dick between his teeth, the white face of his young brother still haunting him. "He must have found strength to crawl away into some bush."

"That we'll soon prove," replied Turpin; and the two comrades, drawing their rapiers, made a thorough search of the pit, thrusting their blades into every bush and every nook and cranny. But they met again by the chaise, having found nothing, and more amazed than ever.

Dick turned to the still figure on the turf again, when a cry escaped him.

"Here, Turpin, quick! Have you brandy? There's life in him yet!"

Turpin thrust a silver flask into Dick's hands. The young highwayman's heart leaped within him as he felt the faint beat in his brother's breast.

He poured the life-giving spirit between the boy's teeth, bringing a faint tinge of colour to the white cheeks.

It was some time before Ralph's eyelids opened. He looked into Dick's face and recognised him, but he could not move.

"Are you much hurt, old boy?" asked Dick anxiously.

"Don't know," muttered Ralph. "My head sings like a kettle."

"Where is Vane? How did this all happen, Ralph?"

"He and one of his men sprang out on me, close by the school," said Ralph weakly. "Vane dragged me into the chaise and drove off. I saw you and Turpin follow us soon after, and Vane was in the chaise when it fell. I—I—"

He broke off, and his voice ceased.

"Do not trouble him with questions now," said Turpin. "Let us get him to a doctor."

They wrenched the door from the chaise, and, making Ralph as comfortable upon it as they could, they bore him to the outskirts of the school, whence Dick carried him in alone. Turpin hastened back for the horses and awaited his companion in the plantation. After some time Dick came out once more.

"The doctor says there is no great harm beyond a shaking; Ralph has had a marvellous escape," said Dick. "Now let us ride back and scour the neighbourhood for the villain that brought him to it."

(Will Dick and Turpin find the scoundrelly Vane Forrester? More dramatic chapters next Wednesday.)

THE DEATH GRIP!

(Continued from page 27.)

"By heck!" gasped Lennard. "So that's how he despatched his victims—with a handshake!"

"Yes," said Lee grimly, "and he tried to shake hands with me a few moments ago!"

"You've beaten me, and I admit it," muttered Morrell as the inspector approached him. "Yes I am Hans Mortz—you'll find the scar all right. But you won't take me alive!"

He clasped his hands together as he spoke, and a moment later he pitched forward full length on to the carpet—dead!

"Dash it!" roared Lennard. "He's cheated us after all!"

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THE END.

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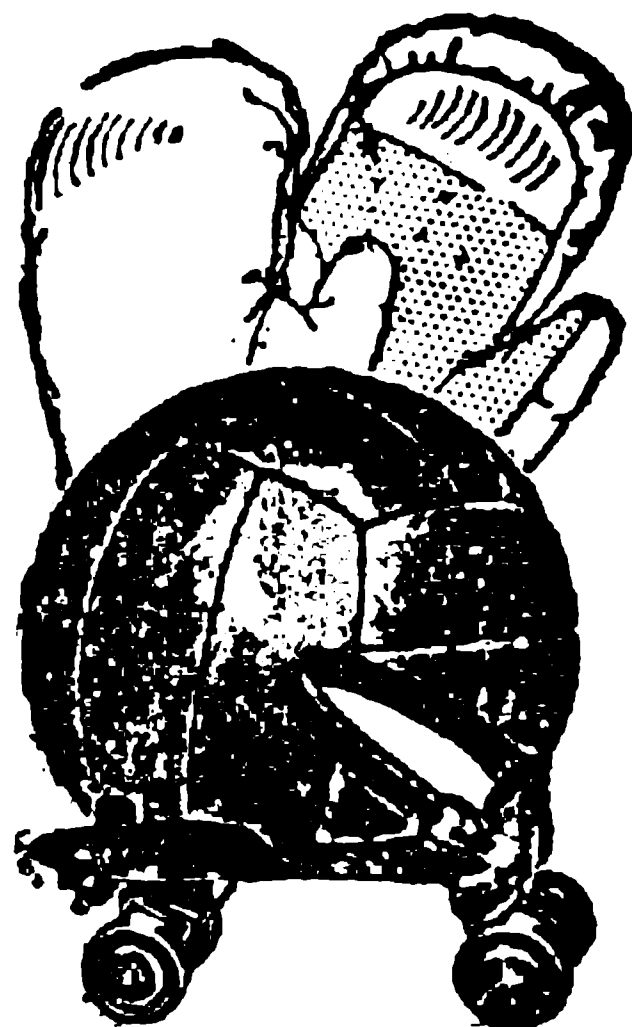
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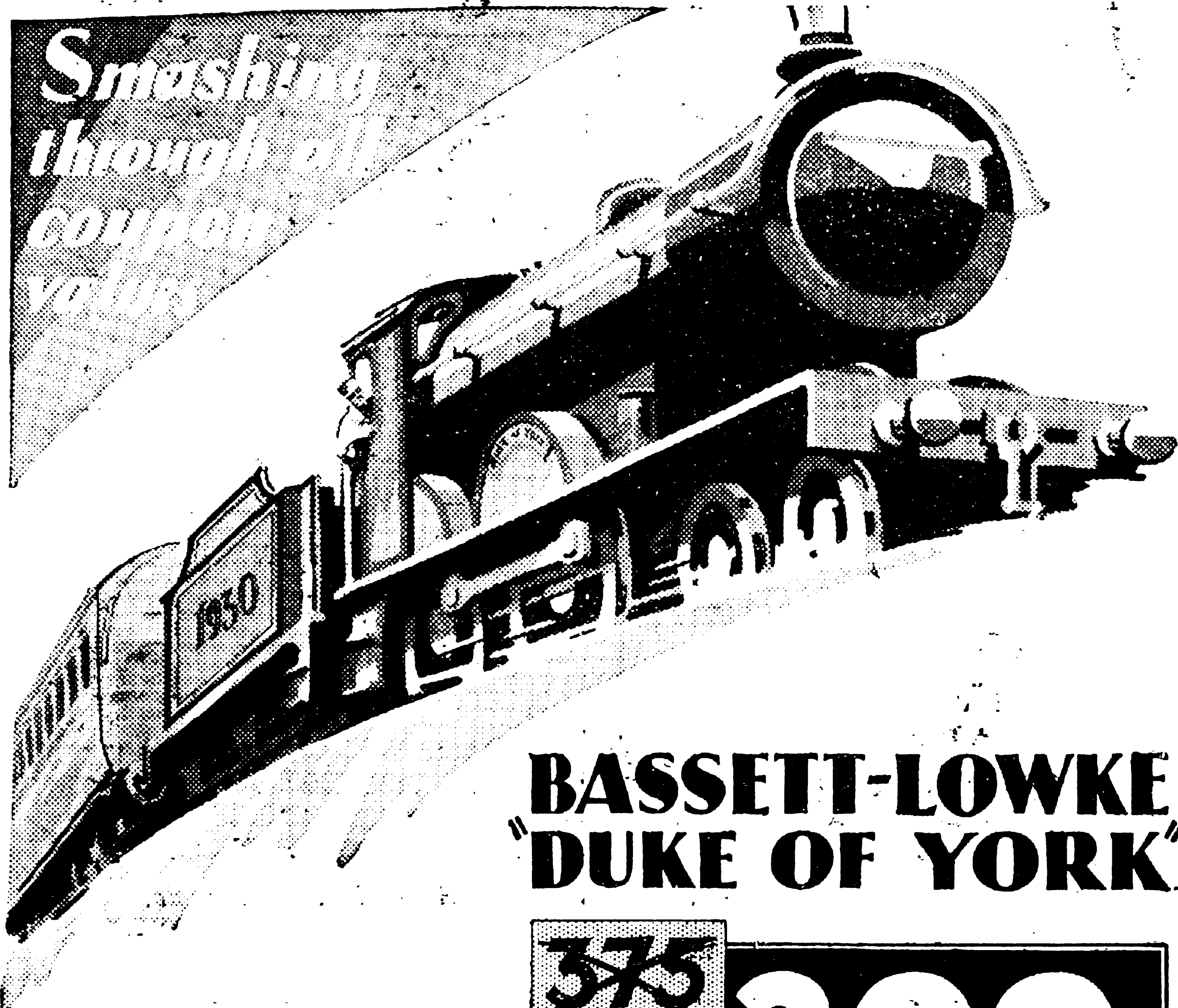
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BOYS AND GIRLS Can earn BIG MONEY in their spare time by distributing cards to their friends. Full particulars, stating age, to **SEEK SERVICE, Dept. A.9., 23, White London, E.C.2.**

AEROPLANE AND C 1/16th, 1/8th, 3/16, and 1/4d., 1 1/4d., 3d., and 6d. Greenaway, 5, New

300 STAMPS Old India, Nig W.A. WHITE

Be sure



BASSETT-LOWKE "DUKE OF YORK"

~~375~~

200
COUPONS

Even fewer coupons than ever! Instead of 375—only 200 needed now! Show father, brother, uncle, and all your grown-up friends this advertisement. Ask everywhere for B.D.V. coupons. You'll soon have 200 to send up!

B.D.V.

20 for 11½^d

**"—as good as the best
non-coupon cigarettes."**

Also coupons in every packet
of B.D.V. Tobacco, 11d. per oz.

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BOYS!! Here's the loco. you've always wanted! The L.M.S. "Duke of York"—exact in construction and colour, with crests, numbers and full railroad details. 14½ ins. long, weighs 2 lbs. 9 ozs. Develops high speed. Fitted with forward, reverse and stop levers operated from cab or track. Supplied also in S.R., L.N.E.R., or G.W.R. colours. Built by Bassett-Lowke and sold in the shops for 25/-. But free to all boys who collect B.D.V. coupons!

The
came from

"He's dead,
a hand, Turpin.

They bore the **UPON FOR LIST**
him on the turf. **REDUCTIONS**

"It's the end!" mutter
wild eyes. "Where is the
him to his doom? If I find
his body I will rob him of
hands!"

"Poor lad!" said Turpin, with
"He was a fine, brave youngster,
blood is on the head of that traitor,
But I don't doubt vengeance is taken
our hands. He must be beneath the chair
crushed. Prise it up and see."