

"ST. FRANK'S UNDER CANVAS!"

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**HANDY
LOSES
the TOSS!**

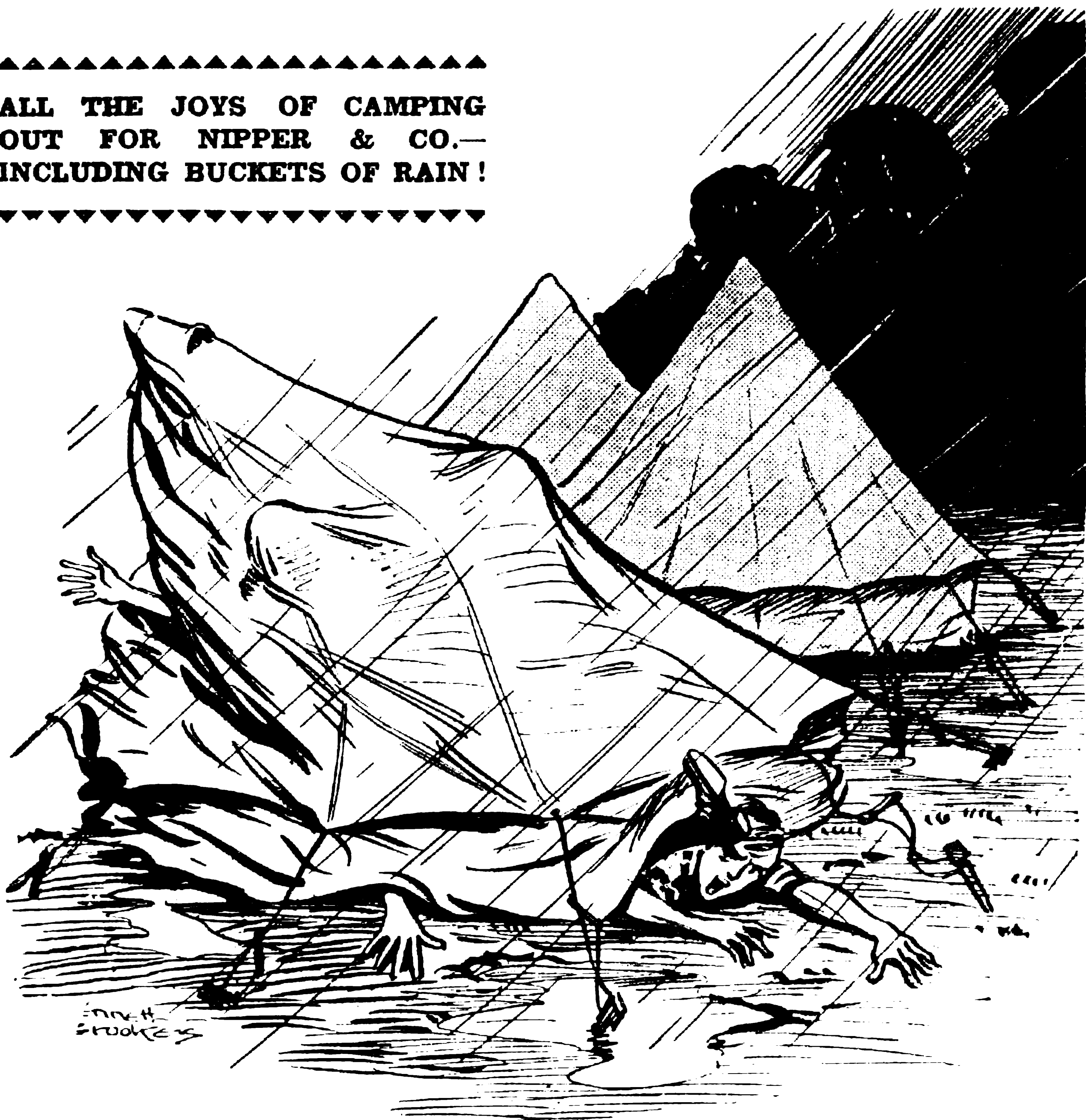
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New Series No. 75.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

June 27th, 1931.

**ALL THE JOYS OF CAMPING
OUT FOR NIPPER & CO.—
INCLUDING BUCKETS OF RAIN!**



He and the other two Fourth-Formers hurriedly entered the little car—before Handforth could change his mind. They were not at all averse to riding back to St. Frank's in this way. It was a lot better than taking the bus—and cheaper.

E. O. Handforth's Crash Into A Steam-Roller Puts—

CANVAS!

By **EDWY SEARLES
BROOKS**



Handforth grinned as he hopped round to the offside door, opened it, and slipped in. As he touched the electric starter, and the engine hummed into life, Church and McClure, his faithful chums, emerged from the café.

They stared for a moment, and then ran across the pavement.

"I say! What's this?" demanded Church wrathfully.

"The honourable Handforth has been condescendingly gracious enough to invite us to a ride home," said Yakama, beaming.

"Then you can be condescendingly gracious enough to get out—all three of you," said McClure, with some heat. "We're riding home with Handy—not you silly Fourth-Formers!"

"Oh, are you?" said Handforth, glaring. "Whose car is this, anyway?"

"Look here, Handy——"

"I can invite whomever I like into this car, and it's none of your business, Arnold McClure!" interrupted Handforth, with a sniff. "I'm fed up with you! Yes, and I'm fed up with Churchy, too!"

"Why, you—you drivelling idiot!" roared Church. "We've done nothing! We only tried to stop you making a fool of yourself!"

"I don't wish to discuss the matter, Walter Church, so you can dry up," said Handforth coldly.

Church and McClure nearly exploded. They were righteously indignant. They had gone into the Japanese Café with Handforth for some ice-creams; and Handforth had promptly "made eyes" at one of the pretty waitresses. She happened to be a new girl there, and Handforth, of course, immediately singled her out. He had a habit of "falling" for any pretty face.

His chums had done nothing whatever to incur his wrath. At least, they hadn't done much. Church had merely dropped an ice-cream down the open front of Handforth's tennis shirt, in order to cool him off; and McClure had stamped on his foot under the table. But instead of being grateful for these little attentions—which certainly had the desired effect—Handforth had stormed out of the place after emptying the contents of a discarded teapot over Church's head.

There had been a cricket match at the Bannington Grammer School that afternoon, and the Saints had won very decisively. They had comfortably beaten the Grammarians by seven wickets after an unexpected and totally inexplicable collapse of the home batsmen.

"Well, aren't we going to start?" asked Vandyke politely.

"Yes—when I'm ready," replied Handforth. "You're not in a hurry, are you?"

The Fourth-Formers were not quite sure of their position. Handforth was quite capable of changing his mind at a moment's notice, and ordering them to hop out. He was not, as a rule, partial to Fourth-Formers. He was quite friendly with them in a general sort of way, but if it came to a matter of choice he would rather punch their heads than invite them to a ride.

The Fourth-Formers now in the little Morris Minor were a curiously assorted trio. Terence O'Grady was Irish, and Herbert Vandyke was South African; they shared Study No. 8 in the Modern House. And Yakama, of course, was Japanese. Yakama was the sole occupant of Study No. 4, but of late he had grown tired of his loneliness, and he was now in the habit of spending about a quarter of his time in his own study, and the other three-quarters in Study No. 8.

"Sure, and it's a swindle entirely," whispered O'Grady. "He's giving us a ride home instead of his chums, and, faith, we're still at the place we started from!"

"Dry up!" murmured Vandyke. "He's getting a move-on now."

Handforth was engaging his gears, and he gave a last look at the discomfited Church and McClure, on the pavement.

"Well, so-long, you chaps," he said. "Let this be a lesson to you. You can come home by bus."

"Well, it'll be safer," said Church bitterly. "You don't think we like riding in your silly car, do you?"

Handforth was not in a position to reply. Standing immediately in front of him was an enormous, luxurious limousine, and he had to swing the steering-wheel to its fullest extent in order to get out. Even then the tip of his front bumper just touched against the rear off-side mudguard of the limousine, and there was a momentary shock.

"My only hat!" said Handforth, in alarm. "That's your fault, Churchy, you rotter!"

He stopped his car, got out, and ran round to the front. To his great relief, the bumper was in no way bent or damaged. As an afterthought he glanced at the glittering enamel of the wing of the limousine, but he failed to detect any scratch.

However, a big, florid gentleman was climbing hastily out of the limousine, and

as soon as he reached the ground he turned upon Handforth in a fury.

"You careless young idiot!" he shouted. "What do you mean by bumping into my car?"

Handforth always knew when he was in the wrong; and it was one of his good qualities to acknowledge his faults, freely and handsomely.

"I'm really awfully sorry, sir," he apologised. "I only just touched you—no damage at all. But it was my fault entirely. Sorry, sir!"

That frank acknowledgment of his "guilt" should have settled the matter then and there. But the big, florid man was by no means satisfied.

"I've a good mind to call a policeman!" he said threateningly. "Where's your driving licence? A boy of your age has no right to be driving a car. You're not capable of driving a car, anyhow!"

"Dash it, sir, I haven't done any damage," protested Handforth, his blood rising.

"Yes, you have!" retorted the other. "Look at this scratch!"

"Which scratch?"

"You're not blind, are you?" stormed the owner of the limousine. "There's a distinct scratch here—where your bumper struck. I've a good mind to give you a thrashing!"

Handforth controlled himself, went nearer, and examined the alleged scratch. It was the tiniest possible mark on the edge of the wing. It was so small that it was not even noticeable until one's attention was directly attracted to it.

"Well, it's not much, sir," said Handforth. "I've told you I'm sorry. I didn't quite judge the distance. I thought I was clear, but——"

"You shouldn't think—you should know!" interrupted the florid man angrily. "If you can't judge distances you shouldn't drive a car. A car!" he added contemptuously. "I suppose you do call this thing a car!"

He waved a walking-stick in the direction of the Morris Minor, and his expression was even more contemptuous than his voice.

"I'm only a schoolboy, sir, and I can't afford limousines like you!" said Handforth warmly. "I don't see any reason why you should sneer at my little Morris."

Vandyke and O'Grady and Yakama had scrambled out by now, and they were standing by with Church and McClure. A few people had gathered round, too, interestedly listening to the discussion.

The whole thing was absurd. There had been no damage done and there was no call for the limousine owner to make such a fuss. Clearly, he was an ill-tempered, pompous, unpleasant man.

"Don't you dare to argue with me, boy!" snapped the limousine owner. "You know who I am, don't you? I'm Mr. Whittle!"

"That's not my fault, sir," said Handforth warmly. "I can't help your name, can I?"

"You—you impertinent young puppy!" roared Mr. Whittle, growing red in the face. "I shall report you to your headmaster! I can see that you are a St. Frank's boy—and a very impertinent one at that!"

"If you call it impertinent to apologise, sir, you've got a funny idea of things," said Handforth indignantly. "Didn't I apologise, you fellows?"

"You have voiced the magnificent apology," agreed Yakama, nodding. "My dear sir, it was the unfortunate and unavoidable accident. Handforth, as he has shown, is full of the preposterous regret."

Mr. Whittle turned on him.

"I did not ask you to interfere, you yellow-faced little cub!" he said rudely. "Hold your tongue!"

"You are the unmitigated and insufferable boor!" said Yakama coldly.

"Faith, and so he is entirely," agreed O'Grady. "'Tis I who'll be agreeing with you, Jappy!"

"Oh, let's be going," said Handforth, turning back to his car.

"You'll not go until I give you permission to go!" said Mr. Whittle curtly. "You have the audacity to bump into the back of my car, and then you——"

"My dear sir, may I interrupt?" asked a small, elderly, gentlemanly stranger, as he stepped off the pavement.

"You certainly may not!" retorted Mr. Whittle, glaring. "Oh, it is you, Barfield!"

"Really, Mr. Whittle, you are quite wrong in this matter," said the stranger gently. "I witnessed the whole thing, and although the boy made a slight error of judgment the damage he caused was so trivial——"

"I shall be obliged, sir, if you will mind your own business!" shouted Mr. Whittle angrily. "You lawyers are too presumptuous!"

"Really, sir!" said Mr. Barfield.

"I know what this boy did, and I'm going to give him a lecture, sir!" went on the owner of the limousine. "He

needn't think that he can run riot with his miserable little apology for a car!"

Handforth, who had kept his temper well in the circumstances, now lost it.

"You leave my car alone!" he retorted. "I'm about fed up with your sneers."

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Whittle. "How dare you talk to me like that? My own car was stationary, and you had absolutely no right to bump into it."

"Haven't I told you I'm sorry?" demanded Handforth. "What else do you want me to do? Go on my knees and grovel?"

"You'll take this—this stupid little thing out of the way!" snapped Mr. Whittle, poking at the Minor with his walking-stick.

"Here, steady, sir!" yelled Handforth. "You're spoiling the fabric!"

"Nonsense! Take it away!" said Mr. Whittle.

He gave another jab, and great was Handforth's consternation when he saw Mr. Whittle's stick tear completely through the fabric of his much-prized little car, causing a jagged hole.

"Look what you've done!" shouted Handy wrathfully. "I say, sir, you've torn the fabric with that rotten stick of yours. You'll have to pay for that!"

"Bah!" said Mr. Whittle, turning.

He was rather startled by what he had done. He had jabbed viciously, having no idea that his stick would go clean through. Having done the damage, it was certainly up to him to voice his regrets, and to offer to make it good. But he did no such thing. He walked back to his own limousine—rather hurriedly.

"Here, just a minute, sir!" said Handforth, breathing hard.

Mr. Whittle took no notice.

"Get a spanner and dent one of his rear panels, kid!" advised a spectator. "I saw something like that on the films once——"

"Two wrongs don't make a right!" interrupted Handforth. "I don't go about deliberately damaging people's cars. I say, Mr. Whittle! What are you going to do about this? You've made a hole in the fabric of my car!"

Mr. Whittle condescended to turn.

"If you address me again, you insolent young fool, I'll call a policeman and give you in charge for annoying me!" he said fiercely. "Get out of my way!"

Handforth looked round wildly.

"Back up, Remove—back up, St. Frank's!" he yelled. "Let's duck this rotter in the horse trough!"

CHAPTER 2.

A Wetting for Whittle!

"GOOD egg!"

"It'll cool him off a bit!"

"And he deserves it!"

Fully a dozen Removites and Fourth-Formers rallied round in answer to Handforth's appeal. Mr. Whittle was startled to find himself grabbed by many eager hands.

"What—what is this?" he roared frantically. "How dare you? Let me go at once! Take your hands off me, you young ruffians!"

"Are you going to pay for that damage, Mr. Whittle?" asked Handforth.

"No, I am not!"

"All right, then; you're going into the horse trough!" roared Handforth. "It'll teach you not to fly into such rotten tempers!"

"It is incontestibly the stuff to give him," murmured Yakama.

The neat, elderly Mr. Barfield, who had been a spectator thus far, now retired. His eyes were twinkling. Perhaps he felt that Mr. Whittle thoroughly deserved what was undoubtedly coming to him. The crowd—now quite a large one—was positively enthusiastic.

Mr. Whittle, who had thought that this was a mere schoolboy's joke—and still thought so—tried some more of his blustering methods.

"Release me at once!" he panted savagely. "Good heavens! You young puppies! How dare you lay hands—Really! What on earth—Help! Help!"

At last Mr. Whittle realised, to his horror, that the schoolboys were in earnest. There was a big horse trough nearby, and Edward Oswald Handforth and his helpers were enthusiastically dragging Mr. Whittle towards it.

"Now then—all together!" roared Handforth. "We'll show him! We'll cool him off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Quite reckless now, the juniors hauled at Mr. Whittle, and a moment later he was pulled down, grabbed by many eager hands, and whirled into the air.

Splash!

He descended broadside, so to speak, in the very centre of the horse trough. The water surged up like a miniature tidal wave on either side, and for a moment Mr. Whittle vanished completely beneath the smother of foam. The waters heaved, and great splashes fell in all directions. Then Mr. Whittle sat up.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd enjoyed it immensely. One man, in fact, dashed up to Handforth and wrung the junior's hand.

"Well done, young 'un!" he said. "That was plucky of you! It's high time that Amos Whittle was ducked in a horse trough!"

"Amos?" repeated Handforth. "My hat! He would have a name like that!"

"Don't you know him?"

"Never seen him before, sir—or, if I have, I haven't noticed him."

"He's Amos Whittle, the owner of the big saw mills just outside the town," said the man. "A great pity his workpeople aren't here to see this! They'd enjoy it tremendously."

Mr. Whittle, roaring and spluttering, hauled himself out of the trough, and staggered across to his car, shedding cascades of water in all directions. A liveried chauffeur came to meet him.

"Take my arm, sir," he said. "Here, sir!"

"Home, you fool—home!" snarled Amos Whittle. "Open that door! By Heaven! I'll make those schoolboys pay for this outrage!"

"There's a policeman coming along, sir—"

"Confound the policeman!" panted Mr. Whittle. "Get away from here as quickly as you can! Do you hear me?"

"Yes, sir."

The chauffeur opened the rear door of the limousine, and he assisted his employer in. Mr. Whittle turned after the door had been closed, and he shook a wet, dripping hand at the St. Frank's fellows.

"You will pay for this!" he said thickly. "You shall pay dearly, you—you young hooligans! I shall be your neighbour very shortly, and then you will have reason to remember this day!"

He sank back into the car, and the chauffeur drove off. The neat Mr. Barfield, some little distance away, thoughtfully pursed his lips as he walked down the street and entered a shop. He had heard Amos Whittle's final words, and they seemed to impress him somehow.

"What's going on here?" demanded a heavy, official voice.

A police-constable, arriving after everything was over, strode amongst the schoolboys. Many of the spectators quietly vanished, not desiring to be drawn into any scene.

"It's all right—now!" said Handforth coolly. "Nothing to worry about, inspector."

"I'm not an inspector, and you know it!" said the constable.



The St. Frank's juniors grabbed hold of Mr. Amos Whittle and threw him into the horse trough to cool off.

"But you will be one day—and soon," replied Handforth. "A smart, sensible policeman like you won't be tramping a beat for long."

"None of your kidding, my lad," said the constable. "I want to know what's been going on here. Who was it you ducked in that horse trough? I suppose you know you're obstructing the traffic?"

"That's all right; we're going now," said Handforth. "In any case, that rotter, Whittle, jolly well deserved—"

"Mr. Whittle!" interrupted the policeman. "Do you mean to say you ducked Mr. Amos Whittle?"

"Well, look what he did to my car!" said Handforth defensively, as he pointed.

"H'm! You'd better be getting along," said the policeman, putting his notebook away. "So you ducked Mr. Whittle, did you? And Mr. Whittle didn't stop to make any charge against you? All right, then!"

He looked round, saw that there was no further obstruction, and he went on his way.

"A nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse," said Nipper, who had come up with Travers and several other Removites.

"It seems to me that everybody is jolly pleased with you, Handy! Ducking old Whittle has made you the hero of the hour."

The way in which the crowd had enjoyed the scene without making the slightest attempt to go to Mr. Whittle's assistance, proved that the man was exceedingly unpopular in the town. Everybody seemed to know him.

"You did the right thing, young gent!" said the driver of a laundry van, which was nearby. "A blustering, swanking blighter—that's Whittle. Thinks he's everybody."

"Well, he'll think he's a drowned rat now!" said Handforth.

"Always comin' in and out of the town in that car of his, and when he drives it himself he's nothing but a road hog," said the laundry man. "I've wanted to see him ducked in the horse trough for years!"

He grinned, nodded, and drove off. The remainder of the crowd dispersed. Handforth and Church and McClure went back to the Morris Minor.

"Well, are we going to start now?" asked Vandyke politely.

He and O'Grady and Yakama were standing by, ready. Handforth looked at them in some surprise.

"I've got room for one of you," he said. "Churchy and Mac had better go behind _____"

"Oh, had they?" interrupted O'Grady, with some warmth. "Faith, and didn't you invite the three of us to ride with you? Would you be leaving us to walk?"

"By George! I'd forgotten!" said Handforth, with a start. "I've had a row with Churchy and Mac, haven't I? Hop in! You two can go and eat coke!" he added, glaring at his chums.

"Now, be sensible, Handy——" began McClure.

"What am I going to do about this hole?" said Handforth, ignoring his outraged study mates. "My only sainted aunt! What a mess! It's a pity there wasn't a muddy ditch instead of a horse trough!"

He was justified in being angry. Mr. Whittle's walking-stick had made a nasty tear in the Minor fabric. Handforth had touched that limousine wing by accident; but Mr. Whittle had damaged the Morris Minor maliciously, in a fit of unwarrantable temper.

"You can't do anything with it now," said Church. "Let's get back to St. Frank's."

"Yes, I suppose we'd better," said Handforth. "Jump in, you chaps."

"We can't—those silly Fourth-Formers are in the car."

"Fourth-Formers?" repeated Handforth, turning round and staring. "Well, I'm jiggered! Of all the nerve! Hop out of it, you fatheads!"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Vandyke. "We could have walked home by this time! Have you forgotten what Church and McClure did to you in the café? Have you forgiven them?"

"By George! Of course!" said Handforth, with a start. "I said I'd teach them a lesson, didn't I?"

He ignored them completely, got into the car, and started the engine again. Church and McClure, thoroughly disgusted, strode off—to wait for the next bus.

"Everything seems to be ridiculously magnificent now," murmured Yakama contentedly. "We have really started off on the preposterous journey."

The Fourth-Formers thought they were lucky—but they weren't.

Handforth soon had the little car in top gear, and she hummed along sturdily. A heavy steam-roller was trundling along the High Street, coming towards Handforth on the other side of the road. A mail van was parked on the near side, but there was plenty of room for the Minor to get through, and Handforth did not even slacken speed.

At that second, however, he was called upon to make an instantaneous decision. Curiously enough, the man who ran out in front of it. To make matters worse, Barfield who had championed the boys a little earlier.

Mr. Barfield acted rashly. He saw a man on the other side of the road to whom he wished to speak. He thought the road was clear, except for that steam-roller, and he had plenty of time to run across in front of it. To make matters worse, two little boys followed Mr. Barfield at once, bent upon the same object. They evidently thought that if it was safe for Mr. Barfield to cross, it was safe for them.

Handforth was practically level with the mail van when Mr. Barfield ran right out in front of him.

"Hi!" gasped Edward Oswald.

His first instinct was to swerve to the near side, and he was horrified to see those children. Impossible to swerve that way.

The whole thing was over in a flash. There was no time for Handforth to stop. He couldn't swerve to the near side because of the children, and if he went straight on he would knock down Mr. Barfield. The only alternative was to swerve to the off side. And Handforth, realising full well what that swerve entailed, swerved magnificently.

He missed Mr. Barfield by about half an inch, and the Morris Minor crashed head on into the steam-roller.

Cra-a-a-sh!

Fortunately, Handforth had by this time applied his brakes, so the collision was not so disastrous as it might have been. But even as it was the impact sounded with a sickening smash, accompanied by the tearing and screaming of metal and the burst of a tyre.

"Ugh!" grunted Handforth, as the steering-wheel caught him in the stomach.

The front of the little Morris was a tangled, twisted wreck. The car had swerved round and had come to a halt broadside on, listing heavily, one wheel completely crumpled and smashed.

CHAPTER 3.

Handforth in the Limelight!

HANDFORTH'S first thought was for his passengers.

"You chaps hurt?" he asked, looking round.

"N-no, I don't think so!" gasped Vandyke. "What's happened?"

"I think we tried the honourable conclusions with the ridiculous steam-roller," said Yakama.

"Sure, and it's a fine ride we've had," grumbled O'Grady. "It's lucky we are to be alive!"

They all scrambled out, none the worse except for a bruise here and there. Crowds were collecting, and the driver of the steam-roller, an elderly man in greasy blue overalls, had got down from his own perch.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" ejaculated Handforth, as he surveyed the front of his car.

It was an even worse wreck than he had feared. One wheel was twisted into scrap-iron, the front axle was bent and battered; the wings were twisted into all shapes; the radiator was a hopeless ruin.

"My boy—my boy!" panted an agitated voice. "Let me take you by the hand!"

Handforth turned in some surprise, and he found his hand gripped in a trembling grasp. The quiet, elderly little man was as pale as a sheet.

"My name is Howard Barfield," he said breathlessly. "The fault was entirely mine. Oh, yes, entirely! You undoubtedly saved my life by your splendid presence of mind. I owe you a debt I can never repay, my dear boy!"

"That's all right, sir," growled Handforth. "Afraid I've made a bit of a hash of the car, though."

A policeman forced his way through the rapidly-growing crowd.

"Hallo! You again?" he asked, his voice now thoroughly unfriendly. "It seems to me, young man——"

"One moment!" interrupted Mr. Barfield. "The boy is in no way to blame, constable. He deserves nothing but the highest praise. He saved my life."

"Yes, and that's a fact, mister!" agreed the driver of the steam-roller. "The young gent hadn't no time to swerve—except into me. If he had gone the other way he would have killed a couple of children. And if he had kept straight on he would have run over you."

"I know—I know!" said Mr. Barfield. "I was a fool to run out as I did! It was entirely my fault, officer."

"Well, that's as it may be, sir," said the policeman. "But I shall have to take all particulars. Let's have a look at your licence, young 'un."

"The boy acted wonderfully," put in another disinterested spectator. "His presence of mind was superb. Rather than run these people down, he deliberately charged into the steam-roller. Well done, my boy!"

"No need to make a fuss about it, sir," said Handforth uncomfortably.

"You risked your own life in order to save mine," said Mr. Barfield warmly. "That is what it really amounts to. I think your name is Handforth, is it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am very proud to know you, Handforth," said Mr. Barfield. "I shall never forgive myself for being so absurdly rash. It will be a very long time before I run across a road again. You must, of course, allow me to meet the bill for the damage, and also to recompense you for the inconvenience you will suffer."

"I say, that's awfully good of you, sir——"

"Not at all," insisted Mr. Barfield. "I am a solicitor, and I know the rights and wrongs of these things. And I know that I was entirely in the wrong. You'll have to let me hire a Morris Minor car for you so that you will not be deprived of a car during the repairs."

"That's jolly sporting of you, sir, but you won't have to pay the repair bill," said Handforth. "My car's insured. It was an unavoidable accident, and the insurance people will do everything that's necessary."

"Sorry to interrupt you, but I shall have to have those particulars," said the constable, notebook in hand. "What about your licence, young man?"

And the formalities commenced. The crowd dispersed when it was known that nobody had been hurt, and when Handforth looked round again he found that Mr. Barfield had vanished. He was rather glad; that gentleman's expressions of gratitude had begun to get embarrassing.

But Mr. Barfield was back by the time the police constable had taken all the necessary particulars. It seemed that he had only been to a neighbouring garage, and he had instructed a breakdown gang to take the Morris Minor away. Furthermore, Mr. Barfield had fetched his own car, a big saloon, and it was near at hand.

"The least I can do is to drive you home to your school," he said firmly. "No, I won't listen to any protests. I want to

see your Housemaster, and I want to tell him of my appreciation."

"I hope you won't say too much to Old Wilkey, sir—I mean, Mr. Wilkes, our Housemaster," said Handforth dubiously. "He might think that I'm not capable of driving, or something like that."

"He won't think it after I have told him what occurred," replied Mr. Barfield. "A driver of twenty years experience could not have acted with greater presence of mind than you did. I have never actually been to St. Frank's College, and I welcome this opportunity. By the way," he added, a twinkle entering his eyes, "I want you to know that I thoroughly approve of your methods of dealing with Mr. Amos Whittle."

Handforth could not help grinning.

"As it happens, sir, it doesn't matter about that damage he did to my car," he replied. "The old bus couldn't be jiggered up much worse. Still, I'm glad you saw what happened, sir."

"Mr. Whittle has been asking people to throw him into a horse trough for many years," said the solicitor grimly. "School-boys are about the only people who would pluck up enough courage to do it. All I can say is—well done!"

"I hope you won't mention that incident to our Housemaster, sir," said Handforth.

"If I did, it wouldn't matter," replied the other. "You had right entirely on your side, my boy."

Church and McClure were lucky, after all. There was plenty of room in Mr. Barfield's saloon for them in addition to Handforth and O'Grady and Vandyke and Yakama. So they all drove back to St. Frank's in fine style.

Handforth was rather depressed over the accident to his little car; but his chums assured him that it would be in a better condition than ever when it came back. In the meantime, he would hardly miss it.

"The garage people are delivering a Morris Minor, identical with your own, to-morrow," said Mr. Barfield, on the way. "I have arranged that, Handforth."

"I say, sir, you shouldn't have troubled!"

"It is only right that you should have the car," said Mr. Barfield. "Insurance is all very well, but it does not provide an unfortunate owner with a substitute car while his own is under repair. The fault of this accident was mine, so it is my privilege to bear this trifling expense."

There was no doubt about it; Mr. Howard Barfield was wholeheartedly

frank. He knew what a narrow escape he had had—but, unlike most people, he was grateful, and he was anxious to show his gratitude in a concrete way.

"It is a curious fact," he commented, as they drove through the quaint little village of Bellton, "that people who live in a certain district rarely see much of that district. For example, I am a resident of Bannington, with an extensive law practice, and yet I have never visited your school. I could give you intimate details of Venice, Rome, Madrid Paris, and Berlin, and yet I don't even know whether St. Frank's is situated on the right-hand side of this road, or on the left."

"That's nothing, sir," said Handforth. "A born Londoner will probably have travelled to every corner of the earth, and yet he'll never have seen the Tower of London or the British Museum or the National Gallery!"

"Exactly!" agreed Mr. Barfield. "By the way, do you boys happen to know of a certain field called the Half Mile Meadow?"

"Why, of course, sir!" chorused the juniors.

"Which is it?" asked Mr. Barfield. "Can we see it from this road?"

He slowed down, and all the juniors grinned.

"Why, we're passing it now, sir," said Handforth, pointing. "This is the Half Mile Meadow. It's a very big one, adjoining the St. Frank's paddock at one end and reaching to Bellton Wood at the other. Then there's the river forming the third border, and this lane the fourth. But I thought you didn't know anything about St. Frank's, sir?"

"Really, I know practically nothing," said Mr. Barfield, bringing the car to a complete stop, and half standing up in his seat so that he could see over the top of the low hedge.

For some minutes he looked at the scene, nodding to himself.

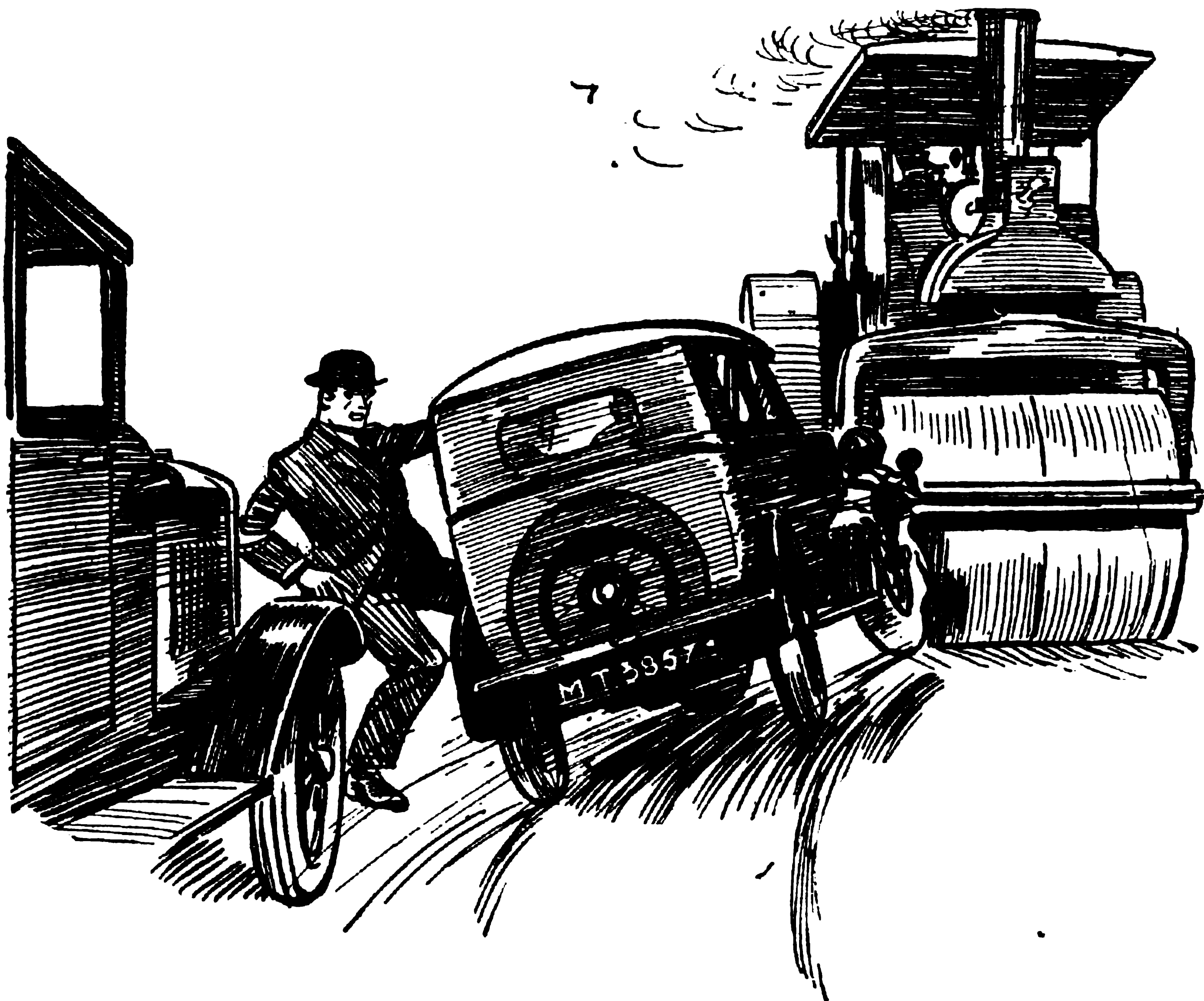
"A fine piece of pastureland," he remarked. "And quite close to the school, too, as I can see. You are certainly very quiet here. Everything is delightfully rural and picturesque."

"Oh, rather, sir!" said Handforth. "We pride ourselves on the unspoilt nature of the countryside about here."

"I wonder," said Mr. Barfield, "if it will remain unspoilt for long?"

"Why, what do you mean, sir?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all," said the solicitor hastily. "So this is the Half Mile Meadow? You say that the river runs alongside the further border?"



Handforth valiantly swerved to avoid Mr. Barfield—and his Morris Minor crashed into the steam-roller.

"Yes, sir—right along the straight stretch," said Church, pointing. "The river's at its widest just opposite this meadow."

"It would be," nodded Mr. Barfield.

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"One day, perhaps, you will understand," said Mr. Barfield enigmatically.

IN the Triangle of St. Frank's, a shout went up as the saloon appeared. And when Handforth stepped out he was immediately surrounded by an excited crowd of Removites and Fourth-Formers.

"Here, what's the idea?" asked Handforth.

"We hear you've had a smash-up, old man," said Buster Boots, of the Fourth. "It just shows you how much you can believe rumours!"

"Well, this time the rumour happens to be right," said Handforth. "I did have a smash-up."

"But we heard that you were half-killed!" said Boots indignantly.

"Oh?" asked Handforth, in a cold voice. "You sound disappointed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're not disappointed, old man," grinned Buster. "At the same time, we did expect you to arrive with bandages all over you."

Biggleswade of the Sixth, accompanied by William Napoleon Browne of the Fifth, paused before the crowd.

"That's funny," said Biggleswade. "I heard you were in hospital, Handforth."

"Oh, did you?" retorted Handforth. "Boots thought I was half killed, and you thought I was in hospital! I suppose the next chap who comes along will have heard that I was taken to the mortuary!"

"I venture to suggest, Brother Handforth, that it will take more than a motor accident to kill you," said Browne. "Rumours have been floating about very persistently during this last half-hour. The version I heard was that you had fallen under a steam-roller, and that the steam-roller was very badly buckled."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I will add at once," continued Browne, "that I entirely discredited the story. I know you are tough, Brother Handforth, and I believe that a motor-car could run over you and come off second best; but a steam-roller, no!"

Before Handforth could make any comment, Mr. Alington Wiles appeared; and the Housemaster of the Ancient House was looking unusually grave.

"Ah, Handforth," he said, approaching. "I am glad to see you looking so—er—whole!"

"Oh, my only hat!" said Handforth. "Then you've heard, too, sir?"

"Whatever you have heard, my dear sir, I want to assure you that this boy is deserving only of praise," said Mr. Barfield. "You are, I believe, a master?"

"This is Old Wilkey, sir—I—I mean, Mr. Wilkes, sir!" said Handforth hastily.

"I am delighted to meet you, Mr. Wilkes," said the other. "My own name is Howard Barfield, and I owe my life to young Handforth. But for his remarkable driving skill I should undoubtedly have been killed."

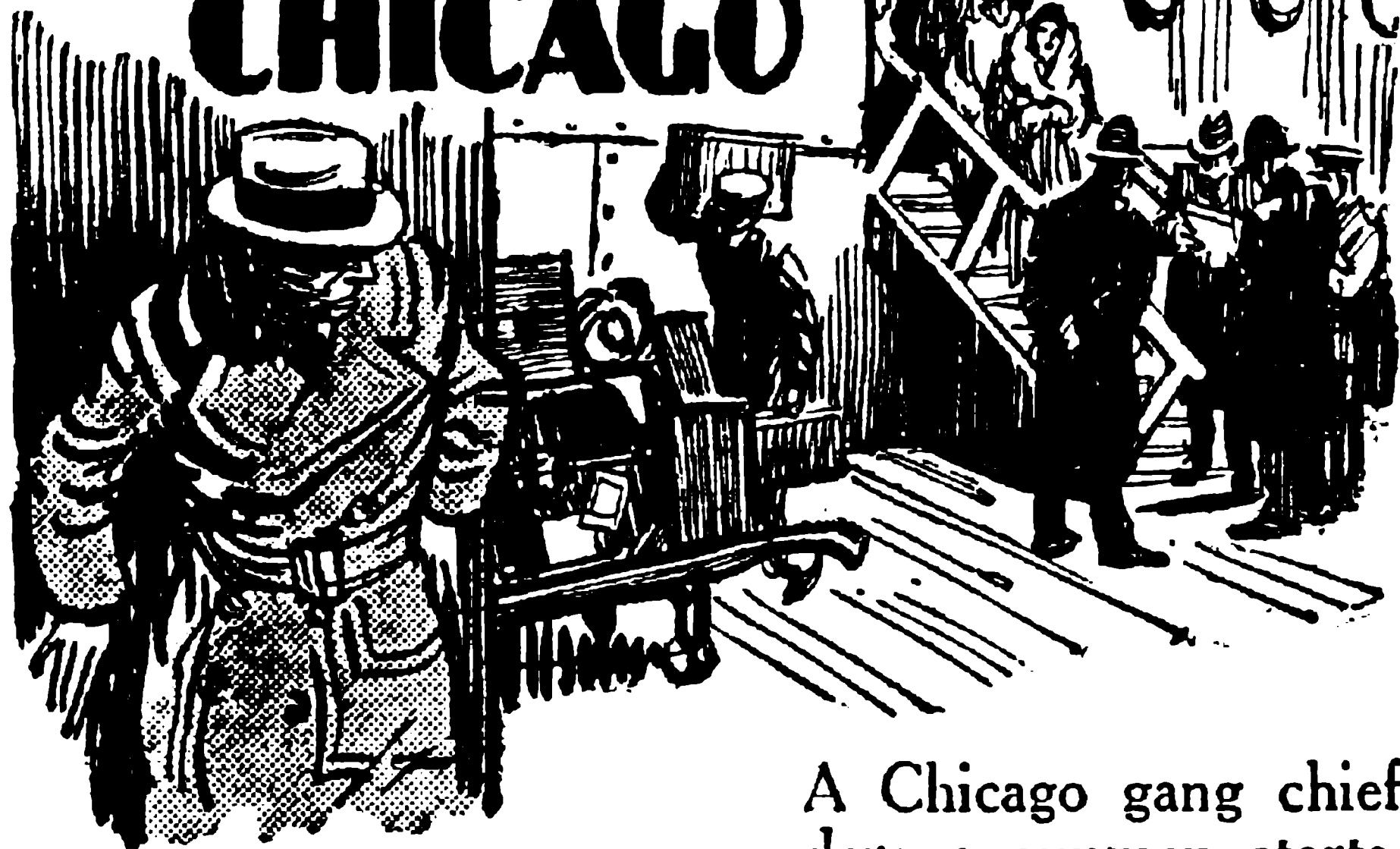
And Mr. Barfield, with much enthusiasm, proceeded to give a full and accurate account of the accident—killing, in one blow, all the rumours, and placing Handforth on a pedestal which he in no way desired to occupy.

CHAPTER 4.

Alarming News!

HANDFORTH was thoroughly relieved when Mr. Wilkes took the visitor off into his private quarters—to introduce him to his wife and daughter.

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Furthermore, Mr. Barfield had expressed a desire to see over the school; he was tremendously interested in St. Frank's now.

"Well done, Handy!" said Reggie Pitt, of the West House, as he approached Edward Oswald with a crowd of other Removites.

"Shut up!" roared Handforth, exasperated.

"Eh?"

"I'm sick and tired of hearing it!" snorted the leader of Study D. "Can't you fellows leave me alone?"

"Hang it, we were only praising you —"

"I don't want to be praised!" howled Handforth. "Anybody might think I'd done something marvellous. For goodness sake, give it a rest! All I did was to swerve because somebody got in my way. I either had to run into some children, knock a man down, or charge a steam-roller."

"And you charged the steam-roller," nodded Reggie Pitt. "And you don't think you did anything marvellous? Running those people down wouldn't have hurt you, but charging a steam-roller was asking for trouble. Good old Handy!"

The West House juniors chuckled. It was quite characteristic of Handforth to be modest about an affair of this kind. He would boast and brag over his precious "Handforth's Weekly"—which wasn't anything to brag about at all—but when he had a genuine excuse for getting a swelled head, he remained singularly calm.

"Of course, if you don't want to talk about it, all well and good," said Jack Grey. "You know best, Handy."

"I do—so kindly chuck it!" said Handforth gruffly.

Fatty Little suddenly appeared, running hard. He had dashed out of West square, and he was looking excited and eager.

"Where's the fire, Fatty?" asked Reggie Pitt politely.

Fatty halted.

"Haven't you heard?" he puffed. "There's free tuck at the shop!"

"What!"

"Free ice-creams—free ginger-pop—free doughnuts and pastries!" panted Fatty Little. "I've only just heard it—and I'm on my way there!"

"My poor chaps, somebody's been pulling your leg," said Pitt kindly.

"No; Larry Scott told me!" gasped Fatty. "I want to get there before everything's gone!"

He puffed off, and the other West House Removites gazed at one another in wonder. Larry Scott, who shared Study V with Doyle and Yung Ching, was quite an ordinary fellow in every way—except for the fact that he always told the truth. Of course, all the decent fellows were more or less truthful; but Scott just couldn't help it. He always told the literal truth, and sometimes it was most embarrassing.

"We'd better look into this," said Pitt briskly.

Handforth went with them, and they found the school shop besieged. Mrs. Hake and her assistants were being run off their feet.

"What's the idea?" asked Handforth, charging in. "Who's the millionaire? Is it true that it's free tuck for everybody?"

"Everybody in the Remove, anyhow," said Castleton, another West House junior. "And the Fourth, too, I believe."

"Somebody's birthday?" asked Pitt politely.

"Rats! Don't you know?" said Vivian Travers. "That new friend of Handy's—Mr. Barfield—came in here not long ago and told Mrs. Hake to supply everybody in the Fourth and Remove with free tuck. He's going to foot the bill."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth, startled.

It was a concrete proof of Mr. Barfield's appreciation. The Remove and Fourth came to the conclusion, without reservation, that Mr. Barfield was a sportsman to his fingertips.

MEANWHILE, Mr. Barfield himself was delighted with the school. As he had said, he had heard a great deal about St. Frank's, but although he had lived in Bannington for many years he had never visited the great school.

"I hope that you will do me the honour of remaining to dinner," said Old Wilkey, a little later in the evening. "Mrs. Wilkes is making the necessary arrangements, I may add."

"Oh, but this is really too good of you, sir!" said Mr. Barfield protestingly. "Naturally, I shall be delighted to accept. I am all the more anxious because there is a little matter I wish to discuss with you. In fact, a big matter—and one which concerns the school very closely."

But Mr. Barfield would say nothing further on the subject. His close contact with St. Frank's had made him very friendly towards the school and its in-

habitants. He insisted upon saying, too, that he owed his life to Handforth. This was not strictly the case, as Mr. Barfield might not have been seriously injured if he had been knocked down. However, it pleased him to think thus, and Mr. Wilkes did not argue the point.

It was during dinner that the visitor became strangely thoughtful.

"I am wondering, Mr. Wilkes, if you know of the danger to the Half Mile Meadow?" he asked unexpectedly.

"I beg your pardon?" said the Housemaster. "Did you say the danger?"

"Exactly," replied the solicitor. "Perhaps you do not quite realise what I am implying? The Half Mile Meadow practically adjoins the St. Frank's property——"

"Oh, yes, I know," interrupted Mr. Wilkes. "It is the big meadow just beyond the paddock. An excellent stretch of grazing land."

"Perhaps you did not know that that piece of land was owned by old Mr. Jeremy Whittle?" asked Mr. Barfield. "Old Whittle died some months ago. He was one of the quaintest characters in and around Bannington. An eccentric—and very rich."

"Why, yes," said Mrs. Wilkes. "I was reading something about him in the local paper. Wasn't he a fresh air fiend, or something like that?"

"Very much so," smiled Mr. Barfield. "I was not old Whittle's solicitor, and I have never acted for him in any way—or for anybody connected with him. But, being in the profession, I naturally know all these details. And, as I consider myself under an obligation to St. Frank's, the very least I can do is to give you a word of warning, Mr. Wilkes."

"Warning?" repeated the mystified Housemaster.

"Old Whittle, as Mrs. Wilkes has said, was a fresh air fiend," went on the solicitor. "He had all sorts of cranky ideas. His bed-room window, for example, had no frame in it whatever. On the coldest winter's night the wind and the rain would rush in, and he would declare that his health was all the better for it. Personally, I believe he would have lived ten years longer if he had not been quite so extreme in his views. However, that is neither here nor there. What I wish to talk about is the Half Mile Meadow."

Mr. Wilkes was looking very thoughtful now, as though trying to remember something.

"I seem to have a vague impression that the Half Mile Meadow was recently discussed somewhere, in some connection,"

he said. "I believe there was some talk of the governors purchasing the property."

"No; you are not quite right there," said Mr. Barfield. "Here are the actual facts: When old Whittle's will was read, it was found that he had bequeathed the absolute freehold of the Half Mile Meadow to the St. Frank's trustees."

"Ah, yes, that was it."

"But there was a proviso—a snag, as it were," continued the solicitor. "The Half Mile Meadow only becomes the property of the school under a certain condition. And that condition is that the whole school lives the open-air life on that meadow for the period of one calendar month."

"Exactly," nodded Mr. Wilkes, smiling.

"I remember quite clearly now. Mr. Stockdale was talking about it three or four weeks ago. Quite an absurd clause."

"But old Whittle was very much in love with the open-air life," continued Mr. Barfield. "He always considered that the St. Frank's boys did not spend enough time in camp. And he hoped, no doubt, that by making that proviso, he would more or less compel the school to take to the open. He no doubt considered that the experiment would be a great success, and that camping would become a regular feature of St. Frank's school life."

"I believe the governors discussed the matter some months ago," said Mr. Wilkes. "Of course, they were obliged to let the whole thing drop. It is quite impracticable for the entire school to go under canvas. Far better to let the meadow go."

"That is the view of the school governors?" asked Mr. Barfield curiously.

"Yes."

"They have decided to abandon the freehold of this property?"

"Well, since that freehold can only be secured by the compliance of a fantastic clause in a cranky old man's will——"

"Quite so—quite so," interrupted Mr. Barfield. "Perhaps you know that the property reverts, at the expiration of a certain time-limit, to Mr. Amos Whittle—the old man's nephew?"

"I didn't know it, but I am not at all surprised."

"Well, here is the crux of the matter," said Mr. Barfield, leaning forward. "I should have mentioned nothing about this—because, until to-day, I was not in the least interested in St. Frank's. But, curiously enough, young Handforth not only saved my life this afternoon, but he also had a remarkable encounter with this man, Amos Whittle. To put it quite bluntly, Handforth and his friends threw

Mr. Whittle into the Bannington High Street horse trough."

"How terrible!" said Mrs. Wilkes, rather shocked.

"Not at all," smiled the guest. "I admire the boys for their action."

He briefly related the circumstances, and old Wilkey chuckled heartily.

"I fancy that we'll keep this to ourselves, Mr. Barfield," he murmured, his eyes twinkling. "The less said about it, the better. Officially, I know nothing."

"But it will show you what kind of a man this Whittle is," said the solicitor. "He is hated throughout Bannington. And we can be quite certain that his feelings for St. Frank's are now definitely antagonistic. Indeed, as he entered his car this afternoon, after that incident, he uttered a thinly-veiled threat. The boys did not understand it, but I did."

"I must confess," said Mr. Wilkes, "that I cannot see how Mr. Whittle's animosity can effect the school."

"But you will see in a moment," replied the other. "I happen to know that the time-limit regarding the Half Mile Meadow will be up in just over four weeks from now. That is to say, unless the St. Frank's governors comply with old Whittle's will instructions, the freehold of the property will automatically revert to nephew Amos. That meadow will be his—absolutely."

"And will that be such a terrible loss to the school?"

"Supposing I tell you, Mr. Wilkes, that Amos Whittle does not intend to use that meadow for grazing?" asked Mr. Barfield earnestly. "Supposing I tell you that he does not require it for the hay? And what will you say if I state, as an absolute fact, that Amos Whittle is planning to erect an extensive saw-mill upon it?"

"A saw-mill!" ejaculated old Wilkey, startled. "A saw-mill—on the Half Mile Meadow!"

"That I am afraid, is Whittle's intention."

"But—but this is incredible!" said the Housemaster, with an alarmed look at his wife. "A saw-mill, in such close proximity to St. Frank's, will be an intolerable nuisance."

"Yet it is within the school's power to secure the meadow for itself—and thus frustrate Whittle's scheme," said the solicitor. "After all, the old man's first desire was for the school to own that property."

"But the governors have already decided against it," said Mr. Wilkes. "Of course, they had not the faintest idea

that there was any danger of a saw-mill being erected."

"You see, it is an ideal spot," explained Mr. Barfield. "It is parallel with the river, and the river, at that point, is at its widest for miles. Whittle already owns many power-driven barges, and these vessels will come up and down the river carrying the raw materials and the finished products. Bellton, in fact, from being a rural village will become an industrial centre."

CHAPTER 5.

Nelson Lee's Way!

MR. WILKES was thoroughly aroused by now.

"I take it, Mr. Barfield, that this is—official, shall we say?" he asked.

"Well, hardly official, since I am not acting for any party in particular," replied the solicitor, with professional caution. "However, you may take it as an absolute fact that what I am telling you is the truth. Needless to say, I am only interested in the matter now because of my meeting to-day with some of your boys. My whole outlook regarding St. Frank's has changed. Previously, I was indifferent; now I am closely interested."

"Bellton—an industrial centre!" said old Wilkey, pulling at his scraggy moustache. "H'm! Dear, dear! I don't like the sound of it at all."

"You will like the sound of the screaming saws still less, I fancy," remarked Mr. Barfield dryly.

"Screaming saws?" repeated the Housemaster, staring.

"Most assuredly," said the other. "Early in the morning, you will have the hooters, calling the people to work; then, all day, there will be the continuous commotion of the mills. Whittle is particularly anxious to secure that meadow, because it is an ideal spot for his purpose. His business is greatly increasing, and his present mill is totally inadequate. But it is difficult to find a suitable site."

"And he must needs select one next door to St. Frank's!" said the Housemaster bitterly.

"That is hardly the right way to put it," protested Mr. Barfield. "It was Whittle's uncle who selected it—and Whittle's uncle, you must remember, bequeathed the meadow to the school. Really, it is up to the school to awaken from its doze."

"How do you mean?" asked Mrs. Wilkes.

"I am referring, of course, to the governors," replied Mr. Barfield. "I have not betrayed any secrets by telling you what I have done. Your governors know all the facts—just as I do. But they seem to have shelved the matter completely. Of course, it is quite possible that they don't know of Whittle's intentions; but they could have known if they had made the most cursory inquiries."

Old Wilkey grunted.

"When you say that the governors are asleep, I agree with you," he said. "They'd see this thing happen under their very eyes, and take no action. Then, when it is too late, they'd start wailing. Just like them! I am very grateful to you, sir, for giving me this—er—tip. I shall act upon it at once."

"I was hoping you would," said Mr. Barfield. "I don't mind telling you that I shall be delighted to see Amos Whittle frustrated. I still remember his words when he parted with some of your boys to-day—'I shall be your neighbour shortly, and then you will have reason to remember this day!' That is what he said."

"He was, of course—er—annoyed, at the time," murmured Mr. Wilkes.

"Certainly," agreed the other. "But Whittle is a very vindictive man. He will be just as revengeful after he has cooled down. And that means that he will be more keen than ever to secure that meadow. It will be his particular delight to annoy St. Frank's in every possible way."

"With a saw-mill at his command, he will have plenty of scope for annoying us," agreed Mr. Wilkes. "But quite apart from this personal aspect of the matter, the situation is serious enough. Even a friendly saw-mill, Mr. Barfield, would be an undesirable neighbour."

AS soon as dinner was over, Mr. Wilkes took his visitor straight to the headmaster. He deemed that the circumstances warranted the step, and Mr. Barfield was willing enough to repeat his story to the Head.

And Mr. Nelson Lee—as old Wilkey well knew—was a man of action.

Lee was back after several weeks' absence, but he had frankly informed the governors that he was only willing to accept the headmastership as a temporary measure. The recent unfortunate incident of Dr. Inigo Scattlebury had put the governors into a flutter, and they were anxious to get the old school running normal again. Under Nelson Lee's guidance, St. Frank's was now "all serene."

The famous schoolmaster-detective listened attentively while Mr. Barfield gave the details.

"Well, gentlemen, I am disturbed to hear this," said Lee, at length. "I may tell you that it is news to me. I have been away for some weeks, and so I have been rather out of touch. In any case, I doubt if the governors would have consulted me on the subject."

"They don't seem to have consulted themselves much," commented Mr. Wilkes.

"No; it is obvious that they dismissed the matter as one of little or no importance," agreed Nelson Lee. "Deeming the conditions of the will too fantastic to be put into effect, they apparently decided to let the whole matter drop. But we shall have to see if we cannot revive it."

Lee's first act was to put a long-distance telephone call through to Sir John Brent, the chairman of the governors. Within five minutes Sir John was on the line.

"The Half Mile Meadow?" repeated Sir John, after Lee had questioned him. "Yes, I know all about it, Mr. Lee. Naturally, we would like to have the property, as it is so close to the school; but the conditions of the will are so absurd that we decided, at the last governors' meeting, to let the matter drop."

"Thus allowing the property to fall into the hands of old Whittle's nephew?"

"Yes," came Sir John's voice. "But, after all, it is only a meadow."

"Yes, at present," agreed Nelson Lee. "Do you know when the time-limit expires, Sir John?"

"At the end of July."

"That's alarmingly close," said Lee. "We are nearly into July already. If the school is to secure that meadow, the boys must go into camp without any delay."

"Surely you are not suggesting that we should obey the instructions of the will?" asked Sir John, in surprise. "The meadow isn't worth it, Mr. Lee!"

"You may think that the meadow is worth it when I tell you that Amos Whittle is planning to erect an extensive saw-mill and wood-yard on that property," replied Lee briskly. "With a chance of securing this meadow for ourselves, Sir John, it does seem a pity to let this man——"

"But wait!" came Sir John's agitated voice. "Did I understand you to say, Mr. Lee, that he is planning to erect a saw-mill?"

"Yes—and it will transform the countryside into a noisy industrial centre," replied Lee. "Whittle's barges will be constantly coming and going. The river will be completely changed."

"But why did we know nothing of this?" came Sir John's angry inquiry. "We understood, all along, that that meadow was for pasture only."

"There is no doubt that Mr. Whittle has been keeping it dark," answered Nelson Lee. "Naturally, he does not want to lose the property—therefore he was lying low. It was a case of letting sleeping dogs lie, Sir John. Within a few more days it will be impossible for the school authorities to comply with the conditions of the will. And then, no doubt, Whittle will come out boldly in his true colours."

"But cannot something be done?" asked the chairman of the governors. "Good heavens! We can't allow this, Mr. Lee! Isn't it possible to bring an action against this man?"

"Quite out of the question—he is not guilty of any offence. We are indebted to a gentleman who happens to be 'in the know,' and who has given us the information. It is for us to act upon it."

"But how, Mr. Lee? How?"



Gloomily Nipper & Co. surveyed the pelting rain. Camping out wasn't such great fun, after all.

"By complying with old Whittle's will, of course," replied Lee. "That is the only possible way. If the school goes into camp for one month, and remains in camp during that period, the property will be safe."

"But such a thing is quite impossible!"

"Not at all!"

"Think, Mr. Lee! Think of the difficulties——"

"I have already thought of them."

"And you say that this thing is not impossible?" asked Sir John, in amazement. "The entire school, don't forget, must go under canvas! Juniors, seniors, masters—everybody! Yourself included! And what about lessons?"

Nelson Lee laughed.

"If you will give me a free hand, Sir John, I will undertake to have the entire school under canvas within a couple of days," he replied smoothly. "We will comply with the instructions of old Jeremy Whittle's will,

and we will secure the Half Milo Meadow for ourselves."

"Really, Mr. Lee, you take my breath away!"

"The difficulties are more imaginary than real," continued Lee. "It is a pity, of course, that the matter has been allowed to slide in this way. It is almost too late—but not quite. Given plenty of time for preparation, the school could quite easily have gone into camp on this meadow."

"But, my dear Lee, we had no idea that old Whittle's nephew was proposing to erect a saw-mill!" protested Sir John. "I regard the man as a rascal! It is a perfectly scandalous proposition!"

"Yet he is within his rights," said Lee. "If that meadow becomes his, he can do what he likes with it. Naturally, he has not been broadcasting his intentions, for that would have put you on your guard."

"Well, Mr. Lee, I am very worried about all this," came Sir John's voice. "Of course, I give you an entirely free hand. You may do exactly as you please in the matter."

"That's all I wanted to hear, Sir John," said Lee crisply. "Very well, then! Don't worry any more—the Half Mile Meadow will become the freehold property of the school by the end of July."

A moment later, he rang off and turned to Mr. Barfield and old Wilkey.

"Well, gentlemen, that's that," he said, smiling. "Everything is arranged—St. Frank's is going under canvas!"

LATER, after Mr. Wilkes had surrendered Mr. Barfield to the boys, he went back to the Head's study. Nelson Leo was just hanging up the telephone receiver.

"Without doubting our friend Barfield's word in any way, I have just been corroborating his information, Mr. Wilkes," said Lee, sitting back in his chair. "I have been talking with the head of the firm of solicitors which handles the school's affairs. He tells me just the same as Sir John—namely, that it had been decided to let the whole matter slide. But we have just over a clear month, so I think everything will be all right."

"Well, I wish I could believe the same," said Mr. Wilkes. "But getting the entire

school under canvas, Mr. Lee, will be something of a proposition, won't it? I can't understand why the old man should have made such a condition in his will."

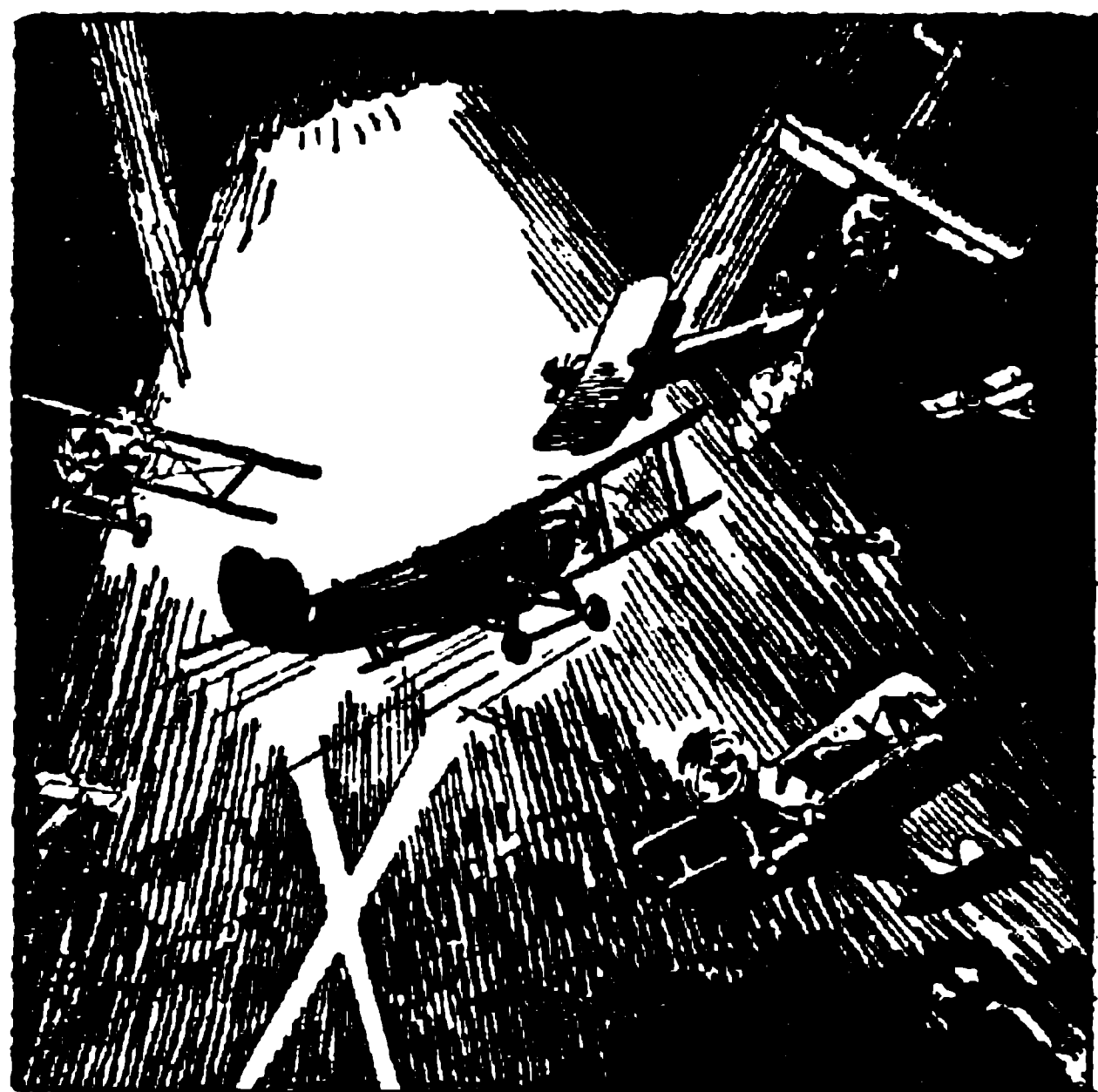
"That is neither here nor there," replied Lee. "The condition exists, and if we are to have that property we must comply with it. I may say that I am entering into this thing quite enthusiastically. I don't consider that Mr. Amos Whittle has been playing quite fair with us. He should, at least, have told us of his intentions, thus giving the school an opportunity of taking its chance."

"Whittle is not that kind of man, I understand," replied old Wilkey. "He seems to be acting in a somewhat underhand manner—although, of course, he is absolutely in the right. I blame the governors far more than I blame Mr. Whittle."

"Quite so," agreed Lee, nodding. "It was foolish of them to abandon all idea of securing the meadow without making sure of the full facts. It's rather lucky for us, Mr. Wilkes, that young Handforth smashed up his car this afternoon."

"Yes, so it seems," said Mr. Wilkes dryly. "And equally lucky that the boys had an encounter with Mr. Whittle. The combined circumstances induced Barfield to give us the friendly tip."

"We shall have to call the school together," said Lee, rising to his feet. "A thing like this cannot be kept secret. The



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school must know exactly why it is going under canvas, and I have no doubt that the boys will do everything in their power to help. We must all be enthusiastic, Mr. Wilkes. It is going to be a difficult month—and we must win!”

CHAPTER 6.

Whittle Gets the Wind Up!

MR. HOWARD BARFIELD took his departure from St. Frank's in a very genial frame of mind.

He was escorted to the gates by a great throng of Removites and Fourth-Formers, who had been heartily thanking him for his generosity in giving them the freedom of the tuckshop.

Mr. Barfield had expected to settle a largish bill with Mrs. Hake, but that bill had certainly given him a bit of a shock when the good lady had presented it. Not that Mr. Barfield really minded. He was in a generous mood this evening.

“Don't worry about your car, Handforth,” he said, as he shook hands with the leader of Study D. “You'll have a Morris Minor here to-morrow—and later, when your own car is ready for the road, you can make the change.”

“It's jolly decent of you, sir!” said Handforth heartily. “You're a brick!”

“Hear, hear!”

“Rather!”

“Let's give Mr. Barfield a cheer, you chaps!”

And the friendly solicitor was sent on his way home with an even greater liking for St. Frank's. He felt, indeed, as he drove home, that he had fully squared his account.

It was up to St. Frank's now.

The school came in for a surprise when it was called together in Big Hall, and when Nelson Lee made a speech from the platform.

There was a sensation, in fact, when the headmaster announced that a big open-air camp was to be established in the Half Mile Meadow immediately. A great many boys were to go under canvas the very next day.

“There are certain boys who already possess the necessary equipment,” said Nelson Lee. “I am referring, of course, to those of you who are Boy Scouts. You have your uniforms, your tents, your camp beds—everything, in fact. Other tents will be secured as quickly as possible, and ultimately the whole school will be under canvas—even including the masters.”

There were many murmurs of surprise—particularly from the Senior School.

“Good gracious!” murmured Mr. Pycraft, of the Fourth, into the ear of Mr. Pagett, of the Fifth. “Surely he cannot mean that, Mr. Pagett? The whole school under canvas! Even including the masters! Absurd!”

“I shall refuse to leave my quarters!” declared Mr. Pagett firmly. “What on earth is coming over St. Frank's lately? We had enough mad escapades with the un-

fortunate Dr. Scattlebury. Surely Mr. Lee is not going to emulate that gentleman?”

Nelson Lee, in a friendly way, was explaining a few details to the interested school. He went into the facts concerning the Half Mile Meadow—how it would become the property of the school if old Jeremy Whittle's will was obeyed.

“Now, we must all work together,” went on Lee. “I want the school to back me up in this—everybody. You juniors, I know, will be only too eager to get under canvas at this time of the year. But I want you other fellows—you seniors—to be just as hearty and as enthusiastic in the project. I want every master to fall into line, and to help.”

“May I ask, sir, exactly why we masters are required to indulge in this—er—enterprise?” asked Mr. Pagett abruptly.

“It is a condition of the will, Mr. Pagett, that the entire school shall spend one month under canvas,” replied Nelson Lee. “There must be no exceptions. In no circumstances must we allow the slightest loophole for Mr. Amos Whittle to step in and claim the property.”

“We're with you, sir!” went up a shout from the Remove.

“Hear, hear!”

“Rather, sir!”

“Down with Whittle!” yelled Handforth.

“We know him, sir—and he's a rotter!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Now, don't misunderstand me,” said Nelson Lee, when quietness was restored. “I don't want you to get the impression that we are at loggerheads with Mr. Amos Whittle. We may dismiss him entirely. We are merely attempting to comply with the clause in a certain will. If we fail, the Half Mile Meadow goes to Mr. Amos Whittle.”

“Why not let it go, sir?” asked Mr. Barnaby Goole, the Housemaster of the East House. “Is the meadow worth all this upheaval?”

“The meadow itself may not be worth it,” replied Nelson Lee. “But when I tell you that Mr. Amos Whittle intends to erect a saw-mill on that property, you will understand why the school authorities are so anxious to secure it for themselves.”

“Oh!”

“A saw-mill!”

“My only sainted aunt!”

“I need not tell you how much we desire to avert this catastrophe,” continued Lee. “I call it a catastrophe deliberately. The peace of St. Frank's will be gone if a saw-mill is erected next door to us. It is in our hands to prevent this.”

“We're with you, sir!”

“St. Frank's for ever!”

“Down with Whittle!”

Even the seniors were waxing enthusiastic now, and the spirit which Nelson Lee so desired was manifesting itself. It was highly necessary, too, that there should be a whole-hearted enthusiasm.

“I heard some of you shouting ‘Down with Whittle!’ just now,” continued Lee. “That is hardly the spirit I desire. I must

tell you frankly that Mr. Whittle will have a perfect right to erect a saw-mill if he comes into possession of the Half Mile Meadow, owing to the failure of St. Frank's to secure it. There must be no ill-feeling against Mr. Whittle. I advise you, in fact, to forget him altogether."

"But we can't forget him, sir," sang out Handforth excitedly. "He's the man who jabbed his walking-stick through my car this afternoon! Yes, and he threatened that he would get his own back later! He was thinking of the Half Mile Meadow—and the rotten saw-mill he means to build! He's up against us already, sir!"

"That incident, Handforth, has nothing whatever to do with the matter on which I have been speaking," replied Nelson Lee gravely. "I am sorry if you have a private quarrel with Mr. Whittle. I must warn you—and I mean all of you—that there must be no organised animosity against Mr. Whittle. If he becomes the aggressor—if he decides to regard this as a personal quarrel—it will be most unfortunate. But at all costs the school must keep its head, and it must avoid any conflict. I shall rely upon you all to keep this in mind."

Not that Nelson Lee's warning was heeded. In the Junior School, at least, the fellows were thoroughly excited, and just as thoroughly determined to prepare a "rod in pickle" for Mr. Amos Whittle, should that gentleman become nasty.

"The man's a rotter!" said Handforth hotly. "Didn't we prove that this afternoon? And when he knows that we're going to oppose him we can look out for squalls, too."

"Handy's right, you chaps," agreed Nipper. "But talking won't do any good. Let's buzz round and see about our equipment."

In fact, all the St. Frank's Boy Scouts got busy without any loss of time. Handforth, as leader of the Tiger Patrol, was in his element.

And not only the juniors became infected with this enthusiasm. The seniors, almost without exception, entered into the spirit of the fight—for a fight it actually was.

St. Frank's had prided itself for centuries on its charming surroundings. This district was one of the beauty spots of Sussex. Was that beauty to be marred by a noisy, blatant saw-mill? Not while it was within the power of St. Frank's to avert it!

NEXT day St. Frank's was all a-bustle. The Scouts, to their joy, were released from lessons. There were three troops at St. Frank's—the 1st being composed of Removites, the 2nd of Fourth-Formers, and the 3rd of fags.

With great enthusiasm the Scouts set up their tents in the Half Mile Meadow. They were the first on the spot—the first to open the campaign, as it were.

Meanwhile, great lorries were arriving at the school—bringing scores of new tents and other equipment. There were even marquees, which could be used as class-rooms and Common-rooms. The masters were provided

with special tents of their own. Nelson Lee himself, on the Half Mile Meadow, mapped out the entire formation of the camp. As near as possible, it was to coincide with the order of things at the school itself.

That is to say, a rough replica of the school was marked out. A Triangle was left in the centre of the meadow, and round this the tents were pitched—so many tents on one side, representing the Ancient House and the West House—so many on the other, representing the Modern House and the East House. Under Nelson Lee's able guidance the confusion soon gave place to orderliness.

Meanwhile, in Bannington, Mr. Amos Whittle learned of what was in the wind. At first he could hardly believe it. He had been going ahead with his plans for so long—they were, in fact, all cut and dried—that he had come to regard his ultimate possession of the Half Mile Meadow as a certainty.

Quite by chance, he heard that there was a lot of unusual activity at St. Frank's—that the school was apparently going into camp. Camp! The very word gave Amos Whittle a start. For he was very well acquainted, of course, with the conditions of his uncle's will.

Without a minute's delay he sent his works manager, a man named Mansell, to have a look for himself. Mansell returned within the hour. Whittle was in his office, and he looked up confidently as the works manager entered.

"Well, Mansell, it's all a scare, I suppose?" he asked. "I dare say the boys are merely establishing a small Scouts' camp, eh?"

"No, sir," replied Mansell. "The entire school is going under canvas—in the Half Mile Meadow."

Whittle leapt to his feet, his expression charged with alarm.

"The entire school!" he ejaculated. "Then the authorities have decided to make a bid for that meadow!"

"That's what it looks like," nodded Mansell.

"But how did they know?" demanded the other furiously. "Who warned them? My lawyers positively informed me that the St. Frank's governors had abandoned all thought of complying with my uncle's will. You know all the facts, Mansell—you know them just as well as I do."

"Yes, sir—but there's no doubt that the St. Frank's authorities have changed their minds," replied Mansell dryly. "There's well over a clear month before the expiration of the time limit. They mean to secure that meadow for themselves."

"If they do, all my plans are wrecked!" shouted Whittle. "I regarded it as a certainty that I should have that property!"

"There's nothing certain in this world, sir," remarked Mansell.

"Don't talk platitudes to me, man!" snapped his employer. "Why have the St. Frank's people so suddenly sprung to life? Somebody must have given them the tip!"

(Continued on page 24.)

LINE UP HERE FOR A GOOD LAUGH, LADS!



HANDFORTH'S Weekly

No. 10. Vol. 1.

EDITOR'S JAWBONE SOLO.

By the Chief Editor
(E. O. Handforth)
assisted by the sub-editor
(E. O. Handforth).

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Art Editor E. O. Handforth
Rest of Staff E. O. Handforth

June 27th, 1931.

PLAY THE GAME!

A Fine Poem by a Fine
Poet—viz. :

E. O. Handforth.

REGGIE PITT thinks he's awfully funny. This morning I asked him his opinion of my wonderful WEEKLY.

"My dear man," he said, "I prophesy that it will circulate for a week, and then die of a weak circulation."

Well, he's been proved wrong, hasn't he? By George, I'll make him eat his words. Here we are at No. 10, and still going strong.

The fact is, you don't often see a paper like this on the market ("Three cheers!"—Ed. N. L.). The public appreciates good stuff, and already this WEEKLY is being sold like hot cakes all over the world. In the snowy ice-bound wastes of Africa; in the blazing tropical heat of Greenland; among the Chinks in China, and the Red Indians of India. My WEEKLY is read by Dutchmen, Frenchmen, Americans, Russians, and even Scotsmen. (At least, I know one Scotsman who reads it. That's old Mac; and if he jibs—as he sometimes does—he promptly gets a thick ear.)

That's why I am so particular about filling up these columns with nothing but the very best. Only the best writers at St. Frank's are allowed to shove their spoke in—and the best writers at St. Frank's are willing to do so. There are only two of them, and I'm both of them.

Unfortunately, however the other chumps insist on being allowed to write for this paper, and as I have been howled down, I have had to agree. Bother them! I appeal to my readers all over the world to put up with the nuisance. I would like to write the whole journal on my own, but they won't let me. In the cirms, I am sure you'll overlook the awful tripe which these silly asses turn out. After all, you can always read my masterly efforts if you want a pick-me-up.

Another bumper issue coming next week.

E. O. HANDFORTH.

(NOTE.—The dramatic and musical rights of this poem are strictly reserved, and copy-right is in all languages, including the Scandinavian.—E. O. H.).

Play up, St. Frank's!
Play some pranks!
Ye jokers and japers!
Cut some capers!
Ancient and West
Give of your best!
Modern and East,
Don't be a beast!
I must not talk during lessons.
I must not talk during lessons.
I must not talk during lessons.
I must not talk during lessons.
Come on, you fellows!
With laughter and bellows!
Sing hip-pip-pip
Hip-pip-pip
Hooray! Hooray!
Hooray! To-day!
I must not talk during lessons.
I must not talk during lessons.
I must not talk during lessons.
We'll play the game
All the same!
No school ranks
So jolly high as St. Frank's.
Chaps of all sorts
All of them sports;
And whose who are not
Deserve to be shot.
I must not talk during lessons.
I must not talk during lessons.

(Note.—By George! I see what's happened. I mixed up some lines I was doing for old Crowell in this poem, and I must have sent it to the printer by mistake. Fancy the silly ass printing it. I suppose old Crows-feet has got part of this poem in with my lines. What a life!—E. O. H.)

BE GOOD!

By William Napoleon Browne

BROTHER HANDFORTH is a great man. Only a fellow with a true and instinctive appreciation of literary worth would have asked me to write an article for his paper. He wants me to give my gentle readers (if any) an idea of what I consider a really decent chap.

"Very good," said I. "And what, Brother Handforth, do you consider a really decent chap?"

"Any fellow like me," he replied, with his usual coy and blushing modesty.

True! Brother Handy is a good model. For rotters, knaves and fools who wish to turn over a new leaf and become decent fellows, Handforth is the great ideal. He is everything that he ought to be and nothing that he oughtn't. Courageous, kind, strong-minded and polite. Suaviter in modo, fortiter in re. (For the benefit of people like Brother Handforth, who do not know Latin from shorthand, I will construe: "Suave in manner, strong in deed.")

This being the case, there is little need for me to give you my idea of a really decent fellow. But I will do so in a few words.

Decent fellows, in my humble opinion, never use their strength to knock their pals about. Now this, as you all know, is quite foreign to Brother Handforth's character. Church and McClure, his two study-mates, will testify to this. They have an ideal time. Handy has never been known to raise his fist in anger against them; and as for the clipping of ears and the blacking of eyes—this is an art unknown to him.

Secondly, decent fellows are always modest. They never pretend to be able to do anything better than their friends. And it is here that Handy really shines. He is so modest that he pretends in class not to be able to construe a simple Latin phrase, and pretends remarkable well.

Thirdly, a decent fellow does not insist upon having his own way on every subject, but gracefully permits other people to know best. Handforth's most remarkable feature, this. He continually permits Church and McClure to order him about as they please.

Lastly, a decent fellow is silent and reserved. He does not unceasingly wag his chin upon topics about which he knows rather less than nothing, and his voice, when he does speak, is gentle and soft. In this, of course, Brother Handy is unsurpassed.

So my advice to the gentle blackguard who desires to reform is: Model yourself on Brother Handforth. If, however, you desire to become even better, my advice is: Don't model yourself on Brother Handforth.

St. FRANK'S LIMERICKS

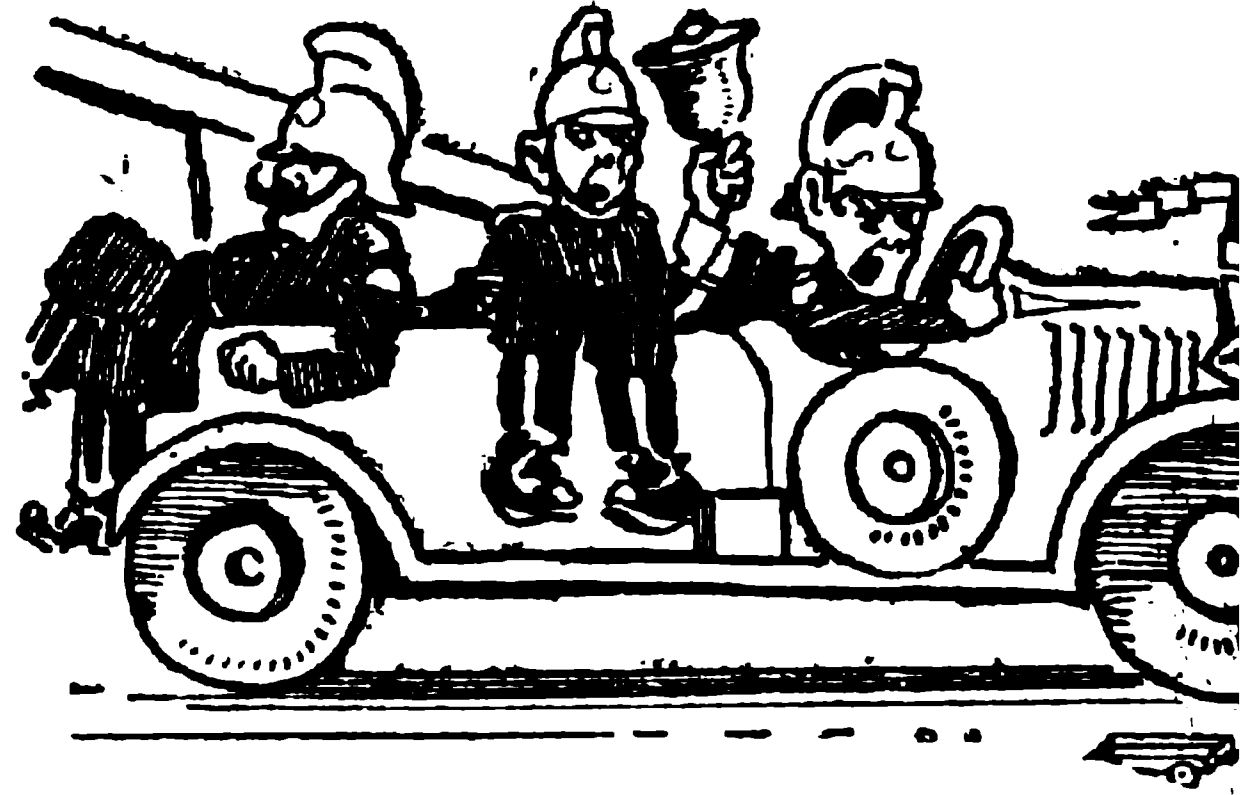
By Tommy Watson.

*A curious fellow named Church
Climbed a pear-tree and
started to search;
To the Head he said,
"Please,
I am studying trees."
(He studied another—the birch.)*

*The Remove have a rattling
good skipper,
Whom everyone thinks is a
ripper;
He plays the straight
game;
If you ask me his name,
I will tell you at once, it is
"Hamilton."*

*Ralph Fullwood one morning
at cricket,
Drove a ball from the field to
a thicket;
It should have been six;
But the umpire said, "Nix,
You're out, old bean! Leg
before wicket!"*

A Sizzling Short Story Which



("Handforth is, indeed, the greatest discovery of the age. His stories are without rival in the history of this country."—The Editor of HANDFORTH'S WEEKLY.)

TINKLE! Tinkle!

The brazen tones of the fire alarm rang out in the still night air. Instantly every man in the fire-station was on the alert. Some dived under the bed-clothes. Others jumped into their clothes and ran down the road, shrieking "Fire!" with all their might. One or two climbed on the roof with buckets of water, and spread the water all over the fire-station in order that it should not be set alight with stray sparks.

Such is the wonderful efficiency of our firemen.

Jimmy Jimson, a young fair-haired fireman, sat up in bed and stretched himself. He had enlisted only that week, and this was his first fire. He was very keen, therefore, to show his mettle.

Teddy Tedson, his pal, came into the room.

"There's the alarm going!" Jimmy yawned, undoing his dressing-gown.

"Yes!" gasped Teddy.

"Better get up, old bean. The chief sent me along to ask if you would mind turning out, as he's afraid we ought to put in an appearance."

"Right-ho! Is my bath ready?"

"Waiting, old son! Don't be longer than you can help. It's a big fire."

"Good! I'll be right down. Tell the chief to oil up the engine and put a spot of brass-polish on my helmet."

"Ay, ay!"

Teddy tiptoed out of the room and closed the door softly. Jimmy wasted no time. Within half an hour he had finished bathing, and was starting to dress. He wanted to look at his best for the big fire, so he put on his best



Our hero to ladder to

It is Red Hot!



**By that master of fiction,
EDWARD OSWALD
HANDFORTH.**

suit, and pinned a rosebud in his buttonhole.

In an hour or so he was fully dressed, and he went downstairs and joined the other firemen who were all standing about with fire-buckets in their hands.

"Are we all ready?" yawned Jimmy, after the chief had complimented him on the speed with which he had dressed.

"I think so," said the chief. "Now, gentlemen, let us get out the engine. Don't hurry. There's no immediate danger for awhile. Let us walk gravely and decently through the town, and show the people how dignified we are."

Such was the efficiency of the men that, hardly two hours after the alarm had first sounded, the engine was run out, the buckets placed aboard, the men all mounted and they were off, with a shrill clanging of their bell.

Clang, clang, clang!

The dreadful din echoed through the quiet streets, and the people all said to each other: "The muffin man's early this morning, isn't he?"

At the corner old Tommy Tomson, who was driving the engine, stopped and called to a small boy.

"Say, sonny, can you tell us the way to a fire?"

"Sure!" said the boy. He pointed his finger. "You see that big red blaze over there?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's quite close to that."

"Thanks! Here's a penny."

With a dreadful rattle and clang the fire-engine drove up to the scene of the fire. Huge flames were roaring up into the sky from the roof of a tall building, and sparks were shooting out in billions. The village constable was watching it in perplexity.

"Blamed if it don't look like a

'ouse on fire," he said to Jimmy, as the firemen came up.

Jimmy looked at the building closely.

"I believe you've hit it," he said enthusiastically. "Dash it all, it is a house on fire! I must tell the chief."

He went up to the chief.

"I believe this is the fire, sir," he said, indicating the blazing building.

The firemen all gaped at him, amazed by his wonderful instinct and observation.

"Forward!" roared the chief. "Let every man take his bucket and throw water on the building. Ah! I see a beautiful maiden at the top window. Hold my bucket while I rescue her."

"Pardon me, chief," said Jimmy, lifting his helmet politely. "I should be obliged if you would allow me to rescue the maiden."

"By all means, my dear fellow," agreed the chief. "Please do so. Jimmy is going to rescue the maiden, men!"

"Hooray!" roared the men.

They gathered round breathlessly as Jimmy mounted a steep and perilous ladder. As he went up rung after rung—with nothing to cling to except the ladder itself—there were hysterical gasps from the men, and some of them fainted. They dared not look up. Suppose Jimmy turned giddy and fell! The top window was fully twenty feet above the pavement. The situation was awful.

But presently Jimmy helped the maiden through the window. He clambered down the ladder. The maiden followed him. She was rescued!

"A wonderful deed!" blubbed the chief. "I resign from my position. You shall be chief in my stead."

"Hooray!" roared the men.

"I recognise this house now," said the chief. "It is mine. And this is my daughter. You have saved her life."

And, amid cheers from the firemen, the house slowly burnt to bits.

THE END.

NEWS IN BRIEF

By Ralph Leslie Fullwood

TWO woodpeckers were seen this week in the trees by the playing-fields. Handforth is careful to keep his cap on when he goes near them.

Mrs. Hake informs us that, years ago, she used to keep a fish-shop in Bannington. I am the only fellow in the school who has not yet made a pun on her name.

Mr. Crowell gave Teddy Long a lecture in Form this morning for dressing carelessly. He said Teddy looked like a scarecrow. A scarecrow to scare Crowell!

I found a book in the Triangle a week ago. It proved to belong to Fenton of the Sixth, and was a volume of plays by a merchant named Euripides. When I took it back this morning Fenton said: "You've been long enough in returning it, young 'un. What's the matter? Been reading it to improve your mind?" I answered: "No fear! I tried to read it, but it was all Greek to me." Fenton gave me a smile for my ready wit and 100 lines for not giving it back sooner.

Fatty Little is feeling unwell. The school doctor has diagnosed his case as an attack of stuffing-doughnuts-and-wolfing-pastries-itis.

There is great confusion in the Modern House. Charlie Talmadge appeared in public recently without a single ink-stain on his collar, and with his hair nicely brushed. Boots is angry about it. He feels that it is lowering the prestige of the House.

In the East House, of course, this could not happen. No East House man has ever possessed a collar without an inkstain on it.

ST. FRANK'S UNDER CANVAS!

(Continued from page 20.)

"I understand that that fellow, Barfield, was at St. Frank's last night."

"Barfield!" shouted Whittle. "You mean the solicitor? By heaven, Mansell, this looks bad! My plans for the new saw-mills are completed to the last detail; every inch of that property has been mapped out. I'm going to erect walls along the river front, and a canal is to be cut right through the centre of that meadow to the spot where the mills will be erected. An extensive wood-yard will adjoin the road. There will be complete docks for my barges, too. The river is at its widest just there—an ideal spot. We are handicapped at present."

"Well, I'm afraid things are going wrong, sir," said Mansell, shaking his head. "I don't think that we can do anything. If St. Frank's occupies that meadow for the month, it becomes theirs."

Whittle was furious.

"But I *must* have that property!" he raved. "There's not another spot for twenty miles up and down the river that I can secure! These present mills are obsolete—they're inadequate, Mansell. We've got to have a new site! And that meadow is ideal from every possible point of view."

He paced up and down, filled with agitation. He remembered the events of the previous day: That encounter with Handforth—that ducking in the horse trough, and then immediately afterwards, the altercation with Mr. Howard Barfield!

It all fitted together. Whittle was aghast when he realised, at length, that this devastating blow to his aims was the outcome of his own folly. Merely by thrusting his walking-stick through the fabric of Handforth's Morris Minor, he had brought this catastrophe upon himself!

It was an example of a small thing leading to a big one. Until now, it had been simply a case of "letting sleeping dogs lie," but those sleeping dogs were now very, very wide awake!

CHAPTER 7¹

St. Frank's Under Canvas!

"INCREDIBLE!" muttered Amos Whittle, as he sat down again. "I can't believe it, Mansell! All my plans—all my hopes—everything crashed! I took it absolutely for granted that there would be no opposition."

"Yet the possibility was always present, sir," said Mansell. "I reminded you, only a week or two ago, that you were being rash."

"Oh!" said Whittle, glaring. "And how was I rash?"

"By making any plans at all, sir, for the erection of the new saw-mill," replied the manager. "You can't keep people from talking—and it is quite clear that people have been talking now, otherwise Barfield could never have known of your plans. If

the St. Frank's people had continued to think that you were to use that meadow as grazing land, they would have taken no action."

Whittle only raved. It was not pleasant to realise that this present situation was the result of his own folly. It was quite true that Mansell had warned him. How much better it would have been if he had waited—if he had kept his plans to himself until that meadow had actually become his own property. By making his preliminary preparations prematurely he had allowed the cat to escape from the bag.

"The trouble, sir, I think, could be traced to the architects," said Mansell.

"What do you mean—the architects?"

"Well, you instructed them to get out complete plans for the new buildings—even including the walls and docks for the barges," replied Mansell. "The architect is a personal friend of Barfield's, and it is clear that they must have been talking. Nothing is known outside—but you can't prevent these professional people from discussing such affairs. And the very fact that you have arranged to build a saw-mill on the Half Mile Meadow—"

"I know—I know!" snapped Whittle savagely. "What's the good of telling me that now? Perhaps I ought to have waited until the end of July. But think of the time that would have been wasted, Mansell! I wanted to get things moving the very instant the property became definitely mine. What are we going to do about this?"

"There's nothing we can do, sir," replied the manager, shrugging. "It seems to me you'll have to find another site—"

"Don't be a fool!" interrupted Whittle. "You know perfectly well that there is no other site."

"In that case, there'll be no new plant," replied Mansell, who was becoming rather short-tempered. "What's the good of talking like that, Mr. Whittle? The school has gone into camp, and it remains in camp for a full month—"

"Ah, there you have it!" interrupted Whittle quickly. "I know that clause in my crazy uncle's will by heart. The school must remain in camp for a full month."

"I don't see—"

"If that meadow is left deserted, even for one moment, I can legally claim the property," interrupted Whittle tensely. "If I can prove such a thing, the St. Frank's authorities won't have a leg to stand on."

Mansell smiled.

"I'm beginning to get the idea, sir," he nodded. "The boys are at liberty to leave the camp as they desire, but they mustn't all leave at once, eh? If, by any chance, they did all leave at once, you would be able to step in?"

"Exactly," said Whittle, nodding.

"The trouble is, how could such a thing be arranged?" mused Mansell. "I'm with you, sir—right along the line. Of course, we shall have to be careful. If the school people get a breath of suspicion that we are up to any trickery—"

"What on earth do you mean—'trickery'?" demanded Whittle angrily. "Don't be a fool, Mansell!"

"I am not a fool, sir," replied Mansell coolly. "That's just where you've got me wrong. I'm willing to help you in this thing—but it'll mean trickery, and you know it, too. We may not be doing anything against the law, but if Bannington learned that you had got hold of that property by tricking the boys out of their camp—well, Bannington wouldn't feel any too well disposed towards you. It's just as well that we should have a thorough understanding at once, Mr. Whittle. I'll help you—but you'll have to make it worth my while."

"Why, you confounded blackmailer!" roared Whittle. "If you think I'll stand —,"

"I should advise you, sir, to choose your words with greater care," interrupted Mansell dangerously. "I'm not attempting to blackmail you, so don't say that I am. But this business is going to be—well, just a trifle underhand. We're only dealing with a parcel of schoolboys, I know—but we mustn't forget that the St. Frank's masters are there, too. Getting that camp deserted won't be an easy task—and it will involve some pretty funny business, one way or the other."

Amos Whittle growled and grunted, but he cooled down.

"Well, forget what I just said, Mansell," he remarked at last. "I dare say you're right. It won't be so easy. Now that the boys are in camp, they have all the advantage. But get them out of that meadow we must—by hook or by crook."

"Now you're talking, sir," said Mansell smoothly. "Well, to begin with, we might try something straight away."

They talked.

HANDFORTH, standing outside the little tent he shared with Church and McClure, opened his mouth and uttered an astonishingly alarming cry. It was a cross between an agonised howl and a tragic groan.

Biggleswade of the Sixth, who happened to be passing, halted in his tracks. He stared at Handforth in astonishment.

Handforth threw back his head and repeated the performance.

"I say, some of you kids!" yelled Biggleswade. "Come here—quick! Handforth's having a fit!"

Vivian Travers strolled up.

"That's all right, Biggy," he said. "Handy's been doing that for hours."

"Then he ought to see a doctor," replied the prefect, staring. "What on earth's the matter with him?"

Handforth gulped, turned red, and snorted.

"It's a pity if you can't recognise a Scout call when you hear it!" he said coldly. "Don't you know that I'm the patrol leader of the Tigers? That was the Tigers' call!"

Biggleswade was relieved.

"Well, I'm glad you've told me," he replied. "I thought you were on the verge of apoplexy!"

"Fathead!"

"Eh? What did you call me?"

"Well, you are a fathead, Biggy," insisted Handforth. "But I can't altogether blame you. You're not a Scout—and you don't understand these things."

"I understand that if you make any more of these noises, I'll fetch out my cane," said Biggleswade. "We're only in camp here to save ourselves from a saw-mill—and you're worse than the noisiest saw-mill that was ever erected! Cut it out, my lad! And don't forget that this is *not* a Boy Scouts' camp!"

"But I'm a Boy Scout," retorted Handforth.

"That's neither here nor there," said the prefect. "You kids only came here as Scouts because you had the equipment ready. You can play at Scouts if you like—but cut out that caterwauling."

He passed on, and Handforth fumed—whilst an amused crowd of Removites chuckled.

It was evening now, and the St. Frank's camp was an established fact. It was really a miracle of organisation—and it was Nelson Lee's brain which had made it all possible.

The Half Mile Meadow was transformed. From end to end, it was a hive of activity. Tents were erected by the score, and everything was in apple-pie order. Even the masters—many of whom had been grumbling—were feeling more satisfied. This camp life, apparently, was not going to be so bad, after all.

Each Form had its own field kitchen—for all cooking was done in the open. The masters had a special "mess tent" of their own—with a kitchen attached. Some of the ordinary St. Frank's servants—that is, the menservants—had been requisitioned for service.

At the present moment a number of camp fires were merrily blazing, and frying-pans were sizzling appetisingly, giving forth wondrous odours. Coffee-pots were simmering and many fellows were busy with cups and saucers and plates and similar trifles.

It was nearly the time for the evening meal, and St. Frank's was revelling in it. This month in the open air would be more like a holiday, it seemed, than actual school life.

"You can't get away from it—old Jeremy Whittle knew what he was doing," said Buster Boots, of the Fourth, as he sniffed the appetising aroma from the nearest fire. "There's nothing to beat camp life at this time of the year!"

"We're going to have a whole month of it, too," said Bob Christine gleefully.

A tall, thin junior, with a dreamy look on his face, was gazing abstractedly across the river, and some of the other fellows grinned as they spotted him.

"Old Clarence looks really poetical this evening," murmured Nipper. "I think he must be affected by the rustic beauties of the scenery."

The tall, thin junior—who was Clarence Fellowe, of the West House Remove—spread a lean hand skyward.

"The peace and calm of a summer's eve," he murmured. "Such sweetness one could scarce believe. The fields, the sky, all merged in one; the mists that hint that day is done."

"Oh, my hat!" said Handforth, pained.

"Leave him alone, you ass!" grinned Fullwood. "He's doing fine!"

"He kinda has fits this way, hasn't he?" asked Skeets—otherwise the young Viscount Bellton.

"You haven't seen much of him, old man—he's a West House chap," murmured Jimmy Potts. "He'll go on like this for hours, if we let him."

Clarence spread both his hands aloft in a dramatic gesture.

"Come eve, come shades of night!" he exclaimed. "Come moon, with all your stars so bright! Let peace descend upon this scene; let grey prevail where now is green!"

"Poor chap, he's getting worse!" said Handforth. "Hi, Clarence, you chump! Wake up!"

Clarence Fellowe started.

"You gave me quite a fright, you dolt—in fact, a most decided jolt!" he said severely.

"And you deserve a jolt!" retorted Handforth. "What's the idea of standing there, throwing your hands to the sky, and uttering all that drivel?"

Clarence was hurt.

"Of poetry your soul knows naught," he replied coldly. "But in the spell of evening I was caught. Alas, you are but common clay; a clod, indeed, who can but bray!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's one for you, Handy!"

"Old Clarence knows what he's talking about."

"Oh, does he?" roared Handforth. "Look here, Fellowe, you rotter, did you just call me a clod?"

"I'm in no mood to argue, friend—my thoughts turn in another trend," replied Clarence stiffly. "Behold the sky so clear and blue; not that it means anything to you."

He walked off, and Handforth grunted.

"He can't help it, poor chap!" he said. "The sky so clear and blue, eh? It might be in the direction he was looking: but what about this other side? I'm not frightfully gone on those clouds."

"It'll rain before morning, I expect," said Church, with a grin.

"That's what I was thinking," agreed Handforth. "It's bound to rain to-night—our first night in camp. You know how things go."

"Bother the weather," said McClure. "Supper's just about ready, so let's give our full attention to something important."

CHAPTER 8.

Open Air "Joys"!

"HALLO! Rain!" said Mr. Wilkes, holding out a palm.

He was squatting beside one of the camp-fires, and all round him were crowds of juniors. Old Wilkey was always popular—but never more popular than on an occasion like this. Somebody had provided him with an old banjo, and the Scouts had been having a merry sing-song.

It was a jolly scene, with the flickering light from the camp-fires playing on the youthful faces. The shadows had deepened over the Half Mile Meadow, and the many tents were standing out like ghosts in the gloom.

"Only a spot or two, sir," said Skeets. "Say, how about one more song?"

"Well, I don't know," replied old Wilkey. "It's time for you boys to turn in——"

"Just one more, sir!" shouted a dozen voices.

But the rain was coming down fairly fast now; big spots were falling, and it looked like developing into a downpour.

"I knew it!" grunted Handforth, as he got to his feet. "Didn't I tell you it was going to rain? My only hat! Look at the sky! As black as ink! We're in for a night of it!"

"That's right—be cheerful!" said Mr. Wilkes. "By Jove, though, it is coming down now! Better dodge into your tents, you chaps!"

"Right-o, sir! Good-night!" chorused the juniors, as they ran.

Reaching the cover of their tents, they stood in the doorways, watching the pelting rain. It was coming down heavily, and the beating of it on the canvas drummed noisily. In less than a couple of minutes the previously dry scene was very effectually dampened. Even the camp fires were beginning to look decidedly sick.

It is really surprising how rain, in an open-air camp, can transform light-hearted gaiety into depression. Within a very short space of time the majority of the boys were feeling thoroughly gloomy. The rain was coming down harder than ever.

"So this is camp life!" said Wilson, of the Sixth, in a disgusted voice. "Ye gods and little fishes! And we're in for a month of it!"

"Cheerful, isn't it?" asked Fenton, the school captain. "Well, personally, I'm glad to see it."

"Glad?"

"Of course," replied Fenton. "We shall appreciate the fine weather all the more when it returns. A little dose of rain now and then won't do us any harm."

"I'm not so keen on this stunt, if you want to know," said Wilson. "It's so—so crazy! With St. Frank's practically next door to us, we've got to sleep in these rotten tents! Where's the sense of it?"

"Would you rather have a saw-mill on the meadow?" asked Biggleswade.



Handforth peered out and was just in time to see two slinking figures vanish into the blackness.

"Saw-mills aren't so bad," replied Wilson, as he looked out at the rain. "Other big schools have factories near them—some of the best schools, too. It's a lot of silly fuss over nothing, if you ask me."

Other fellows, in other Forms, were saying very much the same thing.

"I don't see why we should stick it!" growled Grayson, of the Fifth. "We're not obliged to sleep out here if we don't want to. It's not an order. I vote we go back to the school."

"Rats!" said Stevens. "Didn't Mr. Lee ask us all to pull together? We're doing it for the sake of the school—and it's a lot better to do it without grumbling."

"Bravely spoken, Brother Horace," observed William Napoleon Browne, the Fifth Form skipper. "Brother Grayson, be good enough to talk sensibly—if such a thing is possible, which I doubt. I have heard it

said, on the best authority, that rain on the first night of camp is an excellent omen."

"Well, if there's much more of this, I shan't stick it," said Grayson sourly.

"On the contrary, Brother Grayson, you will stick it with the rest of us," said Browne. "The Fifth will stand together, solid. Rather than talk of retreat, let us take up the battle-cry of the Remove and the Fourth. Down with Whittle! Never shall Brother Whittle besmirch the landscape with his saw-mills!"

WITHIN an hour the St. Frank's camp was thoroughly wet.

The rain had apparently settled in for the night; the sky was still black, and the rain was coming down in torrents. The air was filled with a drumming sound as it beat upon the canvas; rivulets were forming round every tent.

"Gee! I've got to hand it to you guys that this country can break all the records when it comes to weather," grumbled Adams, the American junior, who shared Study J with Harry Gresham and Alec Duncan. "When a fellow starts camp life in England he sure starts in for trouble!"

"Rats!" said Gresham. "Better to have the rain at night than in the day-time. It'll probably be a glorious day to-morrow."

"You spilled a spoonful, boy friend," retorted Adams. "But what's the good of a climate that's full of 'probables.' Why, over in the States a guy can make his plans weeks in advance, and I guess he can be sure of fine weather, too."

"Yes; and he can be sure of tornadoes that ruin cities and kill hundreds of people," nodded Gresham promptly.

"Aw, forget it!" said Adams. "We don't get tornadoes in the Eastern States."

"No; you get weather very much like ours," grinned Gresham. "In New York it can be ninety degrees in the morning, with a blazing sun, and in the afternoon it can be pouring with rain and a temperature down to sixty. Don't you talk to me about our weather, you American chump!"

"If you want really good weather, you've got to come to my country—New Zealand," remarked Duncan. "Now, in New Zealand you do get real weather!"

"With an earthquake thrown in now and again, free and for gratis," grinned Gresham. "No, thanks! You can keep

your earthquakes—and your tornadoes. I'd rather have the good old English weather—including the rain! Well, who's ready for turning in?"

"Gee! We might as well be taking a bath," said Adams, as a trickle of water ran down the back of his neck. "I guess we're going to have a peach of a night!"

The prefects were not at all happy. Even in camp the ordinary school routine was in vogue, and it was the duty of the prefects to go round the tents, seeing lights out—just as they went round the St. Frank's dormitories. But it was a different proposition out here, in the open.

Clad in big boots and mackintoshes, they ploughed their way over the sodden turf, streaming with water, looking in at the tents, and giving their orders.

"And there are some people who say that camp life is pleasant," growled Biggleswade, as he went on his rounds. "Lights out here, you young sweeps!" he added, as he poked his head into a tent. "Didn't you hear the whistle? We're using whistles instead of bells."

"Wrong tent, Biggy, old man," grinned Nicodemus Trotwood. "This is the West House section. First turning to your right, and you can't be wrong."

"I'm blessed if I can tell the difference between the Ancient House tents and the West House tents!" growled Biggy.

"There's not much difference here—this is the first line of West House junior tents,"



Jokes from readers wanted for this feature. If you know a good rib-tickler, send it along now. A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke; pocket wallets, penknives and bumper books are also offered as prizes. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite House, London, E.C.4.

NOT A WATER BABY.

Billy (to father): "Will you buy me a pair of rubber gloves?"

Father: "Why, my son?"

Billy: "It will save getting my hands wet when I want to wash them."

(M. Matthews, The Choir School, Newland, Malvern, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

HAIR-RAISING.

Gent: "My wife has been and used that hair-restorer for cleaning the furniture."

Barber: "Then you want another bottle?"

Gent: "No, I don't. I want you to come and shave the hall-stand."

(R. Curnow, Junr., 29, Virgin Street, St. Ives, Cornwall, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

TOO LATE.

Park-keeper: "Would you mind getting off this seat a minute?"

Gent: "Why?"

Park-keeper: "I just want to put this 'Wet Paint' notice on it."

(D. Parish, 179, Haringay Road, Tottenham, N. 15, has been awarded a penknife.)

NOT VERY HELPFUL.

The motorist was lost. Noticing an approaching villager, he pulled up and questioned the man.

"Can you tell me where these roads lead to?" he asked.

"Aye," said the villager. "That road goes to my 'ouse, one goes to Farmer Brown's, and t'other goes straight on."

(G. Grant, "The Close," Norwich, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

A WHALE OF A CRY.

Teacher: "People say that Eskimaux never weep."

Bright Boy: "Please, sir, I thought they always had their daily blubber."

(B. Mitchell, 35, Pinderfield Road, Wakefield, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

HUNGRY.

Tramp: "Am I hungry? Believe me, lady, the only bite I've had this week was from a mosquito."

(R. Waugh, 38, Ann Street, Arncliffe, Sydney, Australia, has been awarded a book.)

said Trotwood. "We know that well enough—because Handforth & Co. have got the next tent to us, and we can't forget it. You're an Ancient House prefect, so why don't you go along there and stop that din?"

Morrow, the head prefect of the West House, joined Biggleswade at the tent entrance.

"Out with that light, you kids!" said Morrow. "Do you want to keep us prefects out here in the rain all night? What on earth are you doing, Little?"

"Feeding his face, as usual," replied Nick Trotwood. "He says he didn't get enough supper—so he's wolfing half a dozen doughnuts."

"Well he can wolf them in the dark—and get undressed in the dark, too," said Morrow. "Out with that lantern. I shan't come round again."

The juniors were left in the dark, and the prefect went on his wet round.

"It's all very well being a Boy Scout, but these camp beds are no good to me," said Fatty, after he had undressed. "Great pancakes! There's no room at all! How the dickens can I sleep in this thing?"

He had felt his way across to his bed in the dark, and it was quite true that there was insufficient room for him. But this was undoubtedly because he was attempting to get into the camp bed which was already occupied by Cornelius Trotwood—Nick's twin brother.

"I knew there was going to be trouble over this bed," moaned Fatty, as he forced himself in with a sudden lurch. "Hallo! That's better! More room than I thought! What was that I pushed just now? I believe there was something on my bed."

"Really, this is too bad!" came a feeble protest from somewhere near by. "Good gracious me! I believe I am sitting on the grass!"

"You silly chump, Fatty!" came Nick's voice. "You've got into Corny's bed—and you've pitched him out!"

"So that's why the bed seemed so small!" said Fatty, as he calmly spread himself out, and pulled the bedclothes over him. "Anyhow, you're wrong. This is my bed. Can I help it if that ass, Corny, gets into it?"

The unfortunate Cornelius, very damp, staggered to his feet, and felt blindly in front of him. His fingers encountered a miniature mountain.

"Really, can somebody tell me what is happening here?" he asked mildly. "What is this in my bed?"

"Take your hands away, idiot!" said Fatty Little. "It's me!"

"Somebody has apparently placed a great bale of something on my bed," said Corny, in alarm. "Nick! Where are you, my dear brother? Nick! There is an enormous obstruction on my bed!"

"It's me, you howling fathead!" roared Fatty Little. "What the dickens do you mean by calling me a bale?"

FORCE OF HABIT.

First Barber: "What makes you so late?"

Second Ditto: "I was shaving myself, and before I realised it I talked myself into a haircut and a shampoo."

(*E. Wainwright, 1184, Atwater Avenue, Montreal, Canada, has been awarded a book.*)

INSULTED.

Very Fat Man (to 'bus inspector): "I have been grossly insulted."

Inspector: "How, sir?"

Very Fat Man: "The conductor was telling people that the 'bus was full up, and when I got off he said: 'Room inside for three.'"

(*E. Peters, 39, Roden Street, Holloway, N.7, has been awarded a penknife.*)

WHAT A JOKE.

Victim (struggling in water): "Don't stand there grinning. Throw me a lifebuoy."

Scot: "Weel, I've heard it said that Scots hae nae sense o' humour, but I've a gran' joke for ye. The lifebuoy's awa' for repairs."

(*R. Trulock, 42, Heath Road, St. Alban's, has been awarded a penknife.*)

ALMOST THE SAME.

Bill: "Say, Pat, is that the same car you had last spring?"

Pat: "The same, bedad, all except the engine, the body, and three new wheels."

(*F. Bryant, 42, Aylmer Road,*

Shepherd's Bush, W.12, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

HENPECKED.

Tommy: "My father is a journalist. What's your father's occupation?"

Johnny: "My father does what my mother tells him."

(*P. Webber, 2, Psaila Street, B'cara, Malta, has been awarded a book.*)

STUCK.

"Did this bottle contain hair oil, mother?"

"Good gracious, no! That's gum."

"Then I suppose that's why I can't get my cap off."

(*H. Ewen, 36, William Street, Norwich, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

A BIG DEMAND.

Boy (in newsagent's shop): "Do you keep the 'NELSON LEE'?"

Newsagent: "No, we sell it; we never get a chance to keep it."

(*G. Waugh, 53, Lowson Street, Darlington has been awarded a penknife.*)

BOTH O.K.

New Recruit: "Is this—er—horse safe? I've never been on one before."

Sergeant: "Then you're just the man. This horse ain't never had anyone ride her before."

(*J. Child, 15, Ashley Street, Birmingham, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)



"I'm not surprised to hear that it is blowing a gale," said Cornelius. "Really, the weather is quite wretched. But, about my bed—Great Scott! This great obstruction is moving! I believe it's human!"

"You're wrong there," said Nicodemus. "Fatty probably thinks he's human, but that's only his conceit. You'd better get into this other bed, over here. This way, old son!"

Corny was deaf, and he naturally misunderstood.

"I quite believe it," he said. "The obstruction in my bed must certainly weigh a ton."

"Clear off!" yelled Fatty, hitting out. "How can I sleep with you messing about here? Oh, crumbs! Why did we ever come into camp?"

"I object to being called a tramp," protested Cornelius, with dignity. "Really, Nick, I believe it is Fatty, after all, and he has actually called me a tramp—"

"I didn't!" howled Fatty. "I asked why we ever came into camp! Can't you get into bed, and give us some peace? How do you think we're going to sleep?"

"Certainly, it's steep!" said Corny hotly. "I'm glad you admit it, Fatty! You roughly push me out of bed, and then you say that such behaviour is steep!"

"I said let's get to sleep!" bellowed Fatty. "Oh, help! You talk to him, Nick! He makes me feel weak!"

"A week?" said Corny. "But I thought we were in camp for a month? I must confess that one night will be sufficient for me!"

"This way, old son," said Nick, groping forward and grasping his brother. "You'd better get into this bed. It's really Fatty's, but it's just as good."

"Oh, yes, of course," said Cornelius. "I quite agree that Fatty's head is just made of wood. I have never known a more block-headed fellow! I mean, getting into my bed—"

"Gag him!" groaned Fatty. "He's so deaf that he can't even hear a steak when it's sizzling in the frying-pan! Great bloaters! Fancy being unable to hear a sound like that! What a life!"

"I desired no strife," said Corny coldly. "It was you who started it—"

"Here we are, my lad," interrupted Nicodemus soothingly. "This is your bed! In you get!"

Cornelius climbed in, much to the relief of Fatty and Nick, and they settled down for the night—with the sound of the rain beating mercilessly upon the canvas.

CHAPTER 9.

Figures of Mystery!

A STIFF wind had sprung up with the rain, and it was necessary for the campers to lace the flaps of their tents securely in order to keep out the elements.

"It's not so bad, you chaps," said Nipper, as he lay in his cosy camp bed. "We're

perfectly snug in here, and the tent's as tight as a drum."

"Everything's all serene," came Tommy Watson's voice, accompanied by a yawn. "I can't understand why some of the chaps are grumbling."

"The wind is like a gale at times, dear old boys," said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "Begad! Have you noticed how it sometimes assumes a fog-horn-like note?"

"That's not the gale," grinned Nipper. "Handforth's tent is next to ours, and Handy is still awake! He's worse than the gale!"

"If he doesn't dry up pretty soon, we'll go along and squash him," said Watson threateningly.

In the next tent, Handforth was sitting up in his bed, groping into the darkness. The canvas of the tent was quite near by, and it was billowing and flapping ominously. To make things worse, drops of water were occasionally striking Handforth's head, and some were trickling down his back.

"This is what comes of trusting you chaps to help me with the tent!" he said gruffly.

"It's so slack that it'll topple over on us before long!"

"I can't understand it," said Church. "The tent was beautifully taut just before we came to bed. Don't be an ass, Handy! Do you think Mac and I don't know how to fix a tent?"

"You ought to—you're Scouts!" replied Handforth. "At least, you call yourselves Scouts. You'd better both go out and tighten up the ropes."

"Do you know any more jokes?" asked McClure tartly.

"I'm serious, blow you!" roared Handforth. "This tent is a disgrace to the Tiger Patrol! Instead of being tight and secure, it's loose and floppy. And who's to blame?"

"You are!" said Church and McClure, in one voice.

"Eh?"

"You're the leader of the Tiger Patrol, and it's your job to see that the patrol's tents are properly erected," said Church coolly.

"Why, you—you—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Mac. "The tent was all right half an hour ago, and I can't understand why it's got loose. But why bother? It's a filthy night, raining in torrents, and blowing a gale, and I don't see why we should go out and get soaked through. Let's go to sleep."

"I'm getting soaked through as it is!" howled Handforth.

"Blame the weather—not us!" said Church. "My only hat! Camp life! I'm sick of it already! This rain is enough to make anybody weep!"

A gust of wind came along, the tent heaved, and a section of the loose canvas billowed in and slapped Handforth forcibly on the back.

"We shall have to do something!" he roared. "We can't leave things like this until the morning! And not so many grumbles about the rain, my lads! Rain won't hurt you. In camp you've got to take the rough with the smooth."

"All right—let it rain!" said Church. "Anything for a quiet life!"

"As far as I'm concerned, I like the rain," said McClure. "The sound of it beating on the tents is soothing."

"Oh, is it?" yelled Handforth. "Well, I don't think so! You're both dotty! You know jolly well that it's a beastly awful night, and this rain is enough to make a chap sick!"

Church sighed.

"What's the good?" he asked plaintively. "We grumble at the rain, and he doesn't like it. Then we say that the rain is nice, and he doesn't like that, either. Go to sleep, Handy, for goodness' sake!"

But Handforth was getting out of bed, and he made a bee-line for the tent-flap. He wanted to investigate things. The tent was certainly becoming more and more unstable.

Unfortunately, he stumbled headlong over McClure's bed, and the next moment Mac was pitched out, with Handforth on the top of him. They crashed against the canvas, and it was rather a wonder that the whole tent did not descend upon them in a heap.

"You clumsy idiot!" roared Handforth, as they sorted themselves out. "What do you mean by sticking yourself in my way like that?"

"Are you blaming me?" gasped McClure. "Don't you know any better than to go charging about in the darkness? My bed's collapsed! Where's the lantern? Oh, my hat! Why did we ever come into camp? Let 'em build their beastly saw-mills!"

"Traitor!" said Handforth coldly. "Have you forgotten how that beast, Whittle, drove his cane through my car?"

He reached the tent-flap at last, and peered out. He was rather surprised to find that he could see across the camp fairly distinctly. After the intense blackness of the tent interior, the outdoor scene was quite a contrast. It was still raining hard, but the sky was showing signs of clearing, for the moon was shining through a rift in the clouds. It was a weak, watery moon, but its very appearance was promising.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth, staring. "Two or three of our pegs are right out of the ground, and the ropes are all lying loose! That's funny! We rammed those pegs home so hard—Hullo! Who's that?"

It seemed to him that two dark, mysterious figures had just dodged from behind a tent some distance away; they only showed for a brief second or two, and then, crouching low, they vanished behind another tent.

Handforth blinked. He wasn't sure whether he had seen those figures, or whether they had been imaginary. He could hardly credit that any of the boys would be moving about the camp in this rainstorm, so long after lights-out.

"Hi!" roared Handforth. "Who's that over there?"

A chorus of sleepy voices answered him; they came from various tents in the imme-

diate vicinity, and they all advised Handforth either to drown himself, smother himself, or otherwise to put an end to his worthless existence.

"You can all go and eat coke!" retorted Handforth, as he withdrew his wet face into the tent.

In moving back he barged against the central pole, and the next second there was a catastrophe. The tent, billowing in a sudden gust of wind, fell in a heavy, all-enveloping mass. Handforth and Church and McClure were more or less obliterated.

There was no sleep for the occupants of the tents in the immediate vicinity after that. The roars and yells which arose were far worse than the gale. Juniors appeared at their tent entrances, and many came charging out, determined to take drastic action.

They were in time to see Handforth & Co., wet and bedraggled, crawling from beneath the collapsed tent.

"Who did that?" were Handforth's first gurgling words.

"You did it yourself, you clumsy idiot!" snapped Church.

"I didn't!" roared Handforth. "The tent was nearly on the point of collapse before I even touched the pole!"

Fellows in various stages of dress and undress collected round. Prefects came along, too, and they were looking angry.

"What's the matter with you kids?" demanded Wilson. "Don't you think we want some sleep in this camp? What's all this noise?"

"Our tent collapsed!" said Church.

"Then it shouldn't collapse!" snorted Wilson. "You call yourselves Boy Scouts, don't you? Haven't you learned how to put up an ordinary bell-tent?"

"Somebody has been monkeying about with the ropes!" said Handforth excitedly. "By George! That's it!"

"I believe he's right!" exclaimed Singleton, of the West House Remove, as he ran up and joined the crowd. "Our tent's just the same. It looks like toppling over at any moment. Half the ropes are loosened!"

"It must be the gale!" said Wilson impatiently.

"But I saw some lurking figures!" said Handforth breathlessly.

"What?"

"Lurking figures," repeated Handforth. "I happened to look out of my tent five minutes ago, and I spotted a couple of mysterious figures dodging behind some of the other tents."

"Rot! Who'd be fool enough to play jokes like that in this rain?" said Grayson of the Fifth. "I'm sick of the whole business! I vote we go back to the school!"

"Hear, hear!" said Shaw, shivering. "I've had enough of this camp!"

Yells went up as two more tents, in different parts of the camp, suddenly collapsed. A gust of wind, stronger than the previous gusts, had brought about this fresh

disaster. Smothered yells arose, and the rest of the camp was soon awake.

To make matters worse, three more tents went down in the confusion. And the rain, as though fiendishly enjoying the whole affair, beat down with greater intensity than ever.

"I say, let's clear out—now!" shouted Grayson excitedly. "Come on, you fellows! We'll make a run for it! Back to our own dormitories!"

"Hear, hear!"

"They can keep their rotten old camp!" said Bernard Forrest, of the Remove. "We're not obliged to stay here. I'm with you, Grayson!"

"So am I!" shouted Gulliver.

"Same here!" agreed Bell.

Teddy Long, Hubbard, Doyle, Owen major, and several other Removites, joined the miniature revolt.

"Just a minute!" said Nipper, as he strode amongst them.

"This is none of your business——" began Forrest.

"I think it is," interrupted Nipper. "I'm the captain of this Form."

"I don't see——"

"The Remove stands solid by this camp!" continued Nipper evenly. "There aren't going to be any backsliders. Understand?"

"Chuck it, Nipper!" shouted Hubbard. "We're all with Forrest in this——"

"And who are you all?" demanded Nipper scornfully. "A half-dozen—or a dozen at the most! A crowd of miserable weaklings. Afraid of a wet night! Anyhow, the first fellow who attempts to leave this camp will have to account to me!"

"Oh!" sneered Forrest. "You can't stop us, confound you! I'm going—and I'm going now!"

He attempted to move away, but Nipper swung him round.

"Just before you go, Forrest, I want to ask you a question," said the Form captain. "I'm putting it to you plainly. Would you prefer to stay here, and stick it with the rest of the Remove—or shall I knock you down?"

"And I'll knock down anybody else who attempts to go!" roared Handforth aggressively.

They all stood glaring at one another, and there were plenty of fellows who stood shoulder to shoulder with Nipper and Handforth.

Meanwhile, confusion was spreading throughout the camp. Tent after tent was collapsing in the wind. No sooner had one set of fellows been rescued than another set was smothered. Prefects were dashing about helplessly, and masters were appearing now.

Old Wilkey himself came into the Ancient House section of the camp, and even Forrest ceased his rebellious talk.

"Come, come, you fellows!" said Mr. Wilkes gently. "We mustn't allow ourselves to be upset on the very first night in camp. This rain is unfortunate, I'll admit—but the rain, alone, would not have inconvenienced

us much. I'm afraid that some foolish practical jokers have been at work."

"The Remove's all right, sir," said Nipper. "Nobody in this Form is thinking of deserting the camp." He placed his clenched fist close to Forrest's chin. "That's right, Forrest, isn't it?" he added softly.

"Yes, I—I suppose so," muttered Forrest, in a savage undertone.

"And the Fifth, Brother Wilkey, is equally staunch!" said Browne, who had linked his arm affectionately into Grayson's. "A certain amount of bustling activity, and the tents will soon be as firmly erected as ever. Up, brothers! Let us conquer this tin-pot revolt! Never shall it be said that St. Frank's allowed a saw-mill to be erected next door to it for lack of a little spirit! Down with Whittle!"

The rotters were squashed, and they were grumblingly compelled to help in the general work.

It was very much the same with the fellows of other Houses. Plenty of them were ready enough to desert the camp; but the staunch spirits prevailed. Within half an hour the collapsed tents were re-erected, and the whole camp was in apple-pie order again.

Nelson Lee, who was fully aware of the disturbance, had not intervened. But he was glad that the brief trouble had been overcome. He had been ready to step in if necessary; but the boys themselves had weathered the little storm—which was all to the good.

CHAPTER 10.

Handy the Cook!

DAWN broke brilliantly.

Nipper, happening to awake at about 4.30, was struck by the peace of the camp.

It was full daylight, and, unfastening the flap, he gazed out. The sun was shining dazzlingly across the wet meadows. The sky was a clear, crystal blue, and not a cloud was in sight. The wind had dropped to a mere zephyr breeze, and hundreds of birds were joining in a joyous chorus.

"By Jove! This is better!" murmured Nipper, taking in a deep lungful of the fresh morning air.

He was reluctant to get back into bed; it seemed a shame to neglect the glories of this typical English summer morning. Yawning, he toyed with the thought of getting into his bathing costume and having a plunge in the river. Another yawn decided him—and he got back into bed.

It was just as well, for he had two hours sound, dreamless sleep, and when the whole camp turned out there were many cheery comments.

"Now what have you got to say about our English weather, you Yankee lunatic?" asked Harry Gresham, as he grinned at Ulysses Spencer Adams.

"Gee! You've sure got one on me this time!" chuckled the New York boy. "I'm



"I—I thought it was mayonnaise," stuttered Handforth, and uttered a hollow groan as he realised that he had eaten a pot of boot cream for breakfast.

handing it to you guys that this is a peach of a morning. Yes, sir!"

"You unhooked a basketful!" nodded Gresham with a laugh.

"I guess New York couldn't show a much finer morning than this," said Adams.

"You'd better guess again!" retorted Gresham. "Where in New York could you show me the green of these meadows, and the tints of those trees in Bellton Wood? Look at the sun glinting on that line of willows down by the river——"

"I give in!" grinned Adams. "An English summer morning, when it's good and fine like this, is sure swell!"

"You unloaded a barrowful!" said Gresham coolly.

"Say, are you trying to kid me?" demanded Adams. "Listen, boy friend, I'm telling you——"

"Your mistake, old man—I'm doing the telling," interrupted Gresham. "People grumble at our English weather—but its

very uncertainty is its beauty. During the night we were all pretty miserable because of the rain. But think of the joy now—when we see the sky so blue, and the sun shining so brightly. People who live in California—where the weather's fine for months on end—never get that thrill. They take the blue sky and the sunshine for granted. But here we appreciate it."

"Yeah, I guess so," nodded Adams, moving off. "You see so darned little of the blue sky and the sun that you've sure got to make the best of it while it lasts."

Gresham chuckled. He and Adams were generally "kidding" one another in that way; but really they were the best of friends.

The first general move, of course, was towards the river. Everybody wanted to bathe, and after a glorious dip the campers were feeling in high spirits. The disasters of the night were a mere memory.

The seniors were able to linger over their bathe; but the juniors had less time at their

disposal. The Fifth and Sixth had special kitchens, and the fellows themselves had nothing to do with the preparation of meals. But it was very different with the Remove, Fourth and Third. All the juniors were Boy Scouts, and each patrol attended to its own feeding.

In some patrols, of course, everything went smoothly. Nipper, as leader of the Lions, superintended the preparation of breakfast with a master hand.

Nick Trotwood, the patrol-leader of the Curlews, had very little to do, since Fatty Little was in that patrol, and he, of course, was the cook-in-chief.

Amongst the Tigers, naturally, there were ructions, for Handforth had appointed himself cook.

Armed with a large frying-pan, in which sizzled a string of sausages, he sat beside the camp-fire. A delightful aroma filled the air. The trouble started when Handforth tried to toss the contents of the pan into the air. Apparently he thought it was the correct thing to toss sausages like one tosses pancakes.

Unfortunately he jerked the frying-pan too much—and the string of sausages sailed out of the pan and curled round the neck of Mr. Suncliffe, who was taking a morning constitutional.

Of course, there was a spot of bother, then. Mr. Suncliffe liked sausages, but he didn't like having them chucked round his neck. He gave Handforth a severe lecture.

Handforth felt thoroughly downhearted because his efforts at cooking had met with such a disaster, and the other Tigers were even more downhearted because their breakfast had "gone west" into a puddle.

However, Handforth was not beaten. He promptly announced his intention of cooking a really ripping and original breakfast.

Church and McClure and the other Tigers did their best to dissuade him, but Handy was adamant. They were ravenously hungry, and they shuddered when they saw the extraordinary mixture which Handforth was now preparing in the frying-pan. It certainly looked original!

"Look here, Handy, you ought to leave this to us," said Church diplomatically. "Why should you be bothered with cooking?"

"That's all right—it's no bother," replied Handforth. "I enjoy it."

"But shall we?" asked Mac, eyeing the frying-pan.

"Shall you what?"

"Enjoy your cooking," said McClure. "What's in that pan, anyhow?"

"Breakfast."

"You're our patrol-leader, and you oughtn't to be messing about with cooking," said Church firmly. "Hang it, Handy, a patrol-leader is an important fellow. Why not take a little stroll while the rest of us are getting brekker?"

"Not likely!" retorted Handforth. "You leave this to me. You can help me if you like. Shove some more sticks on the fire."

"What about those mysterious figures who were roaming round the camp last night?" asked Mac. "I reckon those practical jokers ought to be identified. You're pretty good as a detective, Handy; why not make an investigation?"

Handforth started.

"By George! That's a good idea!" he said eagerly. "I will!"

"Good egg! I'll take the frying-pan——"

"I will—after breakfast!" went on Handforth. "What are you trying to do, you fat-heads? Do you think I can't prepare a meal? Gi'me some eggs."

"But you can't put eggs in that frying-

COMING NEXT WEDNESDAY!



pan!" protested Church. "You've got the bacon mixed up with a lot of other stuff. What is it, anyway? What are those little black things all over the pan?"

"Currants," replied Handforth coolly. "Currants and sultanas."

"Why, you silly ass——"

"I've tried 'em before—and they're great!" went on Handforth. "Raisins are better, but we haven't got any at the moment. That other stuff you can see is cucumber. I'm afraid it's a bit burnt, but I expect it'll taste all right."

By the time Handforth had broken half a dozen eggs into the pan, the mixture looked too awful for words. The other Tigers, dismayed, busied themselves with cutting piles of bread-and-butter.

"We shall have to make do with bread-and-butter and coffee," said Church grumpily. "By the way, where's the condensed milk?"

"I've used it," said Handforth, glancing round from the frying-pan.

"Used it? What for?"

"There's a canful in this frying-pan," replied Handforth. "Condensed milk helps a lot, you know. A pity we haven't some tomatoes—they'd just add the finishing touch."

"By the time you've added all the ingredients, and cooked the whole conglomeration, I suppose you'll throw it away and open

"THE OPEN AIR HEROES!"

By E. S. BROOKS.

The St. Frank's camp flooded under three feet of water.

Here's a nasty mess for Nipper & Co.—but they're equal to it. Old Amos Whittle is at the bottom of the trouble, you can bet—and the St. Frank's fellows aren't going to be beaten by a rotter like him! Amos gets the surprise of his life when—

But just wait until you read next week's topnotch yarn in this corking new series of summer school stories. It's a winner!

"The Phantom Foe!"

By John Brearley.

This enthralling series gets more exciting each week, and the next smashing instalment teems with thrills.

"Handforth's Weekly!"

"OUR ROUND TABLE TALK."

ORDER IN ADVANCE!

a tin of sardines?" asked McClure sarcastically.

The Tigers were very reluctant to taste Handforth's extraordinary mixture; but when they saw him "wolfing" his own share with extreme gusto, they plucked up their courage. They were hungry.

Surprisingly enough, they found the mixture not only palatable, but appetising. Handforth had concluded the finishing touch by pouring a lot of tomato chutney and Worcester sauce into the pan. The general result was a kind of omelette—and it went down famously.

"Well, that's what I call a breakfast," said Handforth heartily, as he pushed his plate away from him. "By George! I'm fit for a big morning's work now!"

"It wasn't so bad," admitted Church. "Even now I can't understand it."

"We must regard it as one of the minor mysteries of life, dear old fellows!" chuckled Vivian Travers. "The only complaint I can make is that I occasionally get a vague flavour of turpentine."

"Say, I noticed that, too," remarked Skeets.

"Oh, well, we've finished breakfast now, so we might as well clear up," said Church. "Being Boy Scouts is all very well, but there's a lot of work attached to it."

Jimmy Potts was the sixth member of the Tiger Patrol, and he had enjoyed his breakfast as heartily as the others. Handforth, of course, was mightily pleased.

"This morning we'll get busy on that investigation," he said briskly. "Some funny fatheads were having a game last night—and they ought to be exposed. I'm going round on a tour of inspection, and before the morning's over I'll bet I'll have my hands on the culprits!"

"What about old Crowell?" asked Jimmy Potts.

"What about him?"

"He might want to know what you're doing, that's all," said Jimmy. "You haven't forgotten that we're taking lessons this morning, as usual?"

Handforth's jaw sagged.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "Lessons! But—but I thought we were in camp!"

"This isn't an ordinary camp, my poor fellow," said Travers sadly. "We're merely living in this meadow so that we can save it for St. Frank's. But school work must go on as usual. You know what these masters are—most unreasonable blighters. If we suggested missing lessons, they'd turn a deaf ear."

"Well, it's a swindle!" said Handforth indignantly. "I'd forgotten all about lessons!"

Church put his head out of the nearest tent.

"Any of you chaps seen my brown boot cream?" he asked.

"It was knocking about this morning, somewhere," replied Mac. "It's in a glass pot, isn't it? Creamy, yellowish stuff?"

"That's it," said Church. "A full pot, too."

Travers kicked something with his foot.

"Here's the pot," he said. "But it can't be yours, Churchy—it's empty."

Church pounced upon it.

"But it is mine!" he protested. "Who's been messing about with my boot cream? A new pot, too! I say, Handy——"

He paused, startled by the blank, horrified expression on Edward Oswald Handforth's face. The leader of the Tiger Patrol, in fact, was holding his stomach as though he had been afflicted by a sudden pain. He gulped strangely.

"Was—was that pot full of brown boot cream?" he gurgled.

"Of course it was, you ass!"

"My hat!" breathed Handforth faintly. "I—I thought it was mayonnaise!"

"Wha-a-a-at!"

"Well, it looked like mayonnaise!" said Handforth defensively. "All creamy and yellow and smooth. I never thought of smelling it——"

"Here, wait a minute, dear old fellows," said Travers, passing a tongue round his mouth. "You thought Churchy's boot cream was mayonnaise, Handy?"

"Ye-e-es!"

"And what did you do with it?"

"I—I put it in the omelette!" groaned Handforth. "It's a funny thing we didn't taste it——"

"We're all poisoned!" yelled McClure. "Great Scott! No wonder you chaps tasted turpentine!"

"What's the trouble here?" asked Mr. Wilkes, strolling up. "What's the matter with you fellows?"

"Nun-nothing, sir!" said Skcets feebly. "I guess we're all right."

"I made an omelette for breakfast, sir—and I put a pot of brown boot cream in it without knowing it!" moaned Handforth. "I—I suppose we shall all be ill!"

Old Wilkey looked grave.

"Do you feel any pains?" he asked, looking round at the six Tigers.

"Not yet, sir," said Potts.

"Well, I shouldn't worry," said the House-master. "A little brown boot cream won't hurt you. I expect it was thoroughly disguised, so you've only had a small proportion each. We'll see how things develop."

He smiled and passed on, thus dismissing the thing lightly. The Tigers, somewhat relieved, felt better. It was certainly true that, as yet, they had felt no harmful effects. But they decided then and there that all future meals should be prepared under their strict supervision.

CHAPTER 11.

Footprints!

NIPPER was examining the ground keenly.

"These footprints weren't made by any of our fellows," he said. "Look at 'em, Tommy. Size nine, at least."

"Some of our masters wear nines, I expect," said Tommy Watson.

"That's quite likely—but what master would crawl through a gap in the hedge?" retorted Nipper. "Look here! The hedge is all broken about—proving, clearly enough, that at least two men broke through. And here are their footprints, on this bare patch of ground, which they didn't notice in the darkness."

"Begad! I think you're taking a great deal for granted, dear old boy," said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "Anybody might have made these footprints—a couple of tramps, perhaps."

Nipper shook his head. The footprints were very clearly impressed upon the damp earth. One set, in particular, was most dis-

tinctive. There were marks of numerous studs.

Handforth came along, having mysteriously got wind of the fact that Nipper had found some footprints—and Handy was like a hound on the trail.

"By George!" he said excitedly, as he examined them. "This is a find! We ought to be able to get on the track!"

They found other footprints out in the lane, and the story was fairly clear. Two men had crept through that gap, and had penetrated the St. Frank's camp during the night. But it was really difficult to carry the investigation any further without resorting to guesswork.

"We can only form a rough idea of these men," said Nipper thoughtfully, "and even that won't carry us far. Then, again, we mustn't take it for granted that the men who made these footprints are the people who monkeyed about with our tents. I can't see any earthly reason why anybody should play such a trick!"

"Just malicious foolery," said Tommy Watson.

Nipper shook his head.

"It would have to be a stronger motive than that," he replied. "Don't forget how heavily it was raining. These men must have been soaked through—and they wouldn't creep about the camp, loosening ropes, unless they had a pretty strong reason. Think of the risk, too. They might easily have been spotted and caught."

"Another extraordinary point," went on Nipper, "is that these footprints are to be found all round the camp—but only on the outskirts. And it was those tents on the outskirts of the camp which were interfered with last night. Now, it's too thick to believe that any St. Frank's master would prowl about the camp like that. No; these footprints were made by an intruder, and he had a companion with him."

Handforth wanted to go round looking at those footprints himself. But as soon as the young investigators were back in the camp, Fullwood came running up to them.

"I say!" he sang out. "Do you chaps know who's here? Old Whittle!"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "Old Whittle's dead!"

"Well, you know whom I mean, you ass!" said Fullwood. "Amos Whittle, the owner of the Bannington Saw Mills! I'm jiggered if he hasn't had the nerve to come along here this morning!"

"What's he here for?" asked Nipper.

"Goodness knows! He's with Mr. Lee now, and they're going round the camp."

The juniors drifted towards the big central triangle, where large crowds of other Fourth-Formers and Removites had congregated. Everybody was surprised to hear that Amos Whittle had come to the Half Mile Meadow. It had been thought by all that he would avoid it like the plague.

But there he was, with Nelson Lee and

Old Wilkey, and they were taking him round the camp.

"That's the old blighter!" said Handforth gruffly. "By George! I'll bet he'll wipe that smile off his face when he spots me! I suppose he's telling the Head how we ducked him in the horse trough!"

"I don't think so," chuckled Nipper. "He seems to be remarkably friendly—suspiciously friendly, in fact. I don't trust the man."

It was a fact that Mr. Amos Whittle was chatting very amiably with the headmaster and Mr. Wilkes.

"Splendid—splendid!" he was saying, as he came into the triangular space with the two masters. "I am delighted to see all this, Mr. Lee!"

"I am glad you are taking it in the right spirit, Mr. Whittle," replied Nelson Lee dryly. "I was rather afraid that you might be upset at the idea of losing the property for yourself."

Amos Whittle laughed.

"On the contrary, I am more delighted than I can say," he replied. "Well, well! A splendid camp! You have performed something like a miracle within the last forty-eight hours. St. Frank's under canvas, eh? Just as my uncle pictured. The only pity is that he cannot see this for himself."

They had come well amongst the boys now, and Mr. Whittle looked round, beaming. Even when his glance fell upon Handforth he did not alter his expression. Yet he must have noted Handforth's uncompromisingly aggressive glare.

"Well, you boys, you're lucky!" said Mr. Whittle, addressing the crowd. "I have just been talking with your headmaster, and he has told me of the plan. Lucky youngsters! When I was at school I never had any such treat as this."

"It wasn't much of a treat last night, sir," said Nipper pointedly.

"Oh, you mean the rain?" asked Whittle. "Yes, I suppose it was trying—but this morning's sunshine makes up for it, eh? Well, I am very pleased that the St. Frank's authorities have decided to obey the instructions of my uncle's will. But, of course, it rests with you boys to put the whole thing through. If you fail, the school will lose the property. But you mustn't fail," he added, wagging a fat finger at them. "You must go right through and win. I am sure I wish you the very best of luck."

"**W**ELL, dash it, he's not such a bad old scout!" said Reggie Pitt, after Mr. Whittle had been escorted away by Nelson Lee and Old Wilkey. "I understood that he was several kinds of a rotter!"

"He's a sportsman about this meadow, anyhow," said De Valerie.

"Rather!" said Dick Goodwin. "He wished us luck, and he was as friendly as any man could possibly be. By gum! He's champion!"

But Nipper, with Tommy Watson, Tregellis-West, Handforth, Church, McClure Travers and one or two other Removites stood apart from all the others. And Nipper was looking unusually alert.

"I've called you fellows aside, because I want to show you something," he said. "Of course, you heard Whittle, didn't you?"

"We did," said Travers. "And if he really wants this meadow for himself, he's acting pretty queerly in advising us to stick to it."

"It's his policy to appear friendly," replied Nipper. "The camp is a fact now—and he can't prevent it. There'd be no sense in coming here and raving. Far better for him to be in favour of the whole business."

"That's true," admitted Travers. "I hadn't thought of it that way."

"And look here," went on Nipper. "Five minutes ago Mr. Amos Whittle walked over this patch of damp earth. His footprints are quite clear. Just have a look at them, you chaps."

They looked—and Handforth gulped.

"Why, they're—they're the same as those other footprints we saw near that gap!" he ejaculated.

"Exactly," said Nipper grimly.

"But—but——"

"The whole thing's perfectly clear," continued Nipper. "Whittle and another man broke into this camp during the night—in the middle of that rainstorm."

"My only hat!"

"They loosened a lot of ropes, and they did everything in their power to cause discontent in the camp," continued Nipper. "Don't you see the cunning of the wheeze? Whittle thought, perhaps, that the discontent would spread, and that the whole camp would abandon the meadow. He wants this land, and he means to get it. But his idea is to get it by trickery—by working unseen—whilst all the time appearing in the open as a friend."

"By George! You've hit the nail on the head, old man!" said Handforth breathlessly.

"The awful rotter!"

"He's a fraud!"

"And we can be quite sure that his plotting will become more desperate when he finds that the school is determined to carry on for the whole month," said Nipper. "We'll keep this to ourselves for the present, you chaps, but sooner or later the rest of the school may have to be brought into it. We must be careful—we must watch. If we don't, Whittle will win. He's cunning, he's rich, and he's determined."

The Removites were thoroughly aroused. This discovery was proof of Amos Whittle's unscrupulousness. The gauntlet had been flung down—and the battle was on!

THE END.

(Amos Whittle tries some more of his trickery to outwit the St. Frank's campers in next week's extra-long and extra-good school yarn. Entitled: "The Open Air Heroes!" Order your copy now.)

Gather Round, Boys.



A breezy chats on topics in general, conducted by the Editor and Edwy Searles Brooks.

MR. BROOKS acknowledges the following letters: Ernest S. Holman* (E.10)—two letters, G. Dodd (Birmingham), C. Cook* (E.12), Stanley Jonson (Port Elizabeth), W. A. Marlin (N.16), Wilfred Manard (Guildford), Arthur T. Moore (Saxmundham), Reginald T. Staples (Shanklin), Jeffrey Peters (E.16), John Howard (Taunton), Arthur J. Miles (Croydon), Alfred S. Newman (Chepstow), Dorothy Napper (Victoria, B.C.), Laura Lambeth (Birmingham), Charles W. Mephram (Pembury).

Laura Lambeth finishes her letter by saying: "Writing for the first time is rather a strain, as one always has misgivings as to whether the same is approved of by the receiver." Well, the receiver, in this instance, is always delighted to get letters from readers—particularly readers who have never written before. The best remedy is to write again, and thus the strain will be completely removed.

The full name of St. Frank's is St. Francis' College. Alfred S. Newman has brought up this subject, and it is quite possible that other readers will be interested. In the XI Century a Franciscan monastery was erected on the site of the old school—founded, of course, by St. Francis of Assisi, or members of his Order. Hundreds of years later, after the monastery was no more, the school was founded, and, quite naturally, it became St. Francis' College. Just as naturally, in these modern days of brevity, the name has been universally contracted to St. Frank's.

The Blue Crusaders Football Club has certainly not ceased to exist, Ralph Leadbeater. Of course, there's nothing doing at the Stronghold, the club's famous ground in Bannington, at the moment. But the Blues, under the management of Mr. Ulysses Piecombe, will be as active as ever in the

autumn. As most readers know, Lionel Corcoran, of the Fourth, is the proud owner of this celebrated club. You might also like to know, Ralph, that Bannington Town, the old club, has shifted to Helmford, thus necessitating a change of name. The club is now known as Helmford Town.

Here are the answers to some of your questions, John Marshall: Castleton's first name is Alan. The other boys you mention—Bonner, Langley, Haddock, Jepson and Fiske, have all left St. Franks, so their first names are of no interest to anybody. The other first names you ask for are as follows. Conroy minimus (Thomas), Fullerton (George), Kerrigan (Stanley), Simms minor (Ralph), Button (Edgar).

It is quite possible that Lord Dorrimore's famous yacht, the *Wanderer*, will appear in some of the forthcoming stories, Raymond R. Radmore. The vessel is a luxurious private yacht with one funnel. You are quite right in having looked upon her as a super-ship, for she is one of the most wonderful yachts ever built.

Mr. Beverley Stokes, otherwise known as "Barry," is just as much "one of the boys" as ever, Arthur E. Angus. Old Wilkey, of course, rivals him in popularity. But the West House boys are very friendly with their Housemaster, and quite often he forgets his dignity and drops in to a junior study for a chin-wag and a dive into the sweet-bag.

Readers are cordially invited to join in "Our Round Table Talk." Letters should be addressed to: The Editor, "Nelson Lee Library," Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. All queries for Mr. Brooks' attention will be forwarded to him, and the replies, if of general interest, will be given on this page.

The PHANTOM FOE!

*A thrilling mystery and
adventure serial by*

JOHN BREARLEY

(Opening chapters re-told in brief on page 41.)

Those finger-prints belonged to the Phantom's gangster whom Kyle's Kittens—the mysterious "hi-jackers" of the previous night—had captured alive. He was, at present, a prisoner in the cellar below Scrapper's gymnasium in White-chapel.

To Kyle's disappointment, however, the captive had proved useless. Scrapper, who knew nearly every crook in the underworld, had failed completely to recognise this one; and the rest of the Kittens who had been called in did not know him, either. Efforts to wring information from the man—and the stern Night Hawk had tried everything short of torture—had also failed. Because the prisoner knew nothing.

Just that. Beyond a dazed repetition of his orders concerning the armoured car raid, and incoherent mutters about the "Chief" and the "airship," he had not added a single thing to Kyle's knowledge. The scientist knew all about the Phantom's airship and something about the "Chief," too. What

he wanted was the names of the gangsters. And most of all, how the Phantom managed to cheat the police records of his men!

"For cheat them he certainly does!" mused Thurston Kyle. "Those men are disguised somehow—that I am sure. Many of his men, we know, are well-known crooks, and some of them, at least, must be among those the police have

The Phantom's Warning!

GETTING into his car, after leaving Scotland Yard, Thurston Kyle drove quietly home. A 'phone message came from the Yard two hours later, and, as he had expected, the Records Department had been unable to check the prints he had left. Hanging up the receiver, he lit a cigarette and fell into a long reverie.



found. Yet they cannot be identified. As far as the Phantom is concerned, Scotland Yard's Record Department may as well be scrapped. And the Phantom can replace his fallen gangsters any time from any gaol—without ever leaving a trail if they are recaptured later. I wish I could——”

Suddenly, as though galvanised by a sudden thought, he leapt to his feet, eyes gleaming deeply, and paced the room in long, excited strides.

“By gad—by gad, why didn't I think of it before? Fool that I am! I wonder—I wonder if that can be the answer?”

Leaving the room, he strode into his laboratory and crossed to a huge case of reference books; took one out and rifled the pages till he found what he sought. Triumph was mingled with sardonic amusement in his eyes when he replaced the book and laughed.

“Yes; just so. Clever—a stroke of genius, in fact. If only I could get inside the airship, or even find its headquarters, just to make sure! I——” He shrugged and turned away. “Well, it will keep—it will keep!”

From his pocket-book he took a letter that had arrived by the first post that morning. It was written in block capitals on cheap paper, and had been posted in the Strand. And he had not produced it at Scotland Yard.

“Thurston Kyle,—You should have minded your own business. I warned you once. Now I intend clipping your ‘wings’ for good.

“THE PHANTOM FOE.”

The Night Hawk merely smiled.

The Phantom Comes Abroad!

NIGHT had fallen. Across the dark spaces of Banstead Downs rolled the faint tolling of a bell as a distant clock-tower struck ten. All else was silent.

And, when the last note died away on the wind, the man who had been patiently lurking beneath a clump of trees for the last half-hour, stole out into the open.

Taking a flash lamp from his pocket, he pressed the switch, and a single bright blue light darted towards the sky. Only for a moment; the darkness was as close as ever next instant. But something like a star twinkled on high as if in brief reply, and the man grunted, stealing a cautious glance all round him.

No one was about. He opened the bag he carried and took out a hideous yellow

mask, which he fitted tightly over his head and face. Hardly had he done so than, slowly and noiselessly, a blurred, black object dropped towards him from the sky, settling upon the grass a few yards away with the faintest of thuds.

There it resolved itself into a small cage of thin duralumin—a fragile, precarious-looking affair. But the lurker on the downs opened the bars and ducked inside without hesitation. He pressed a small switch, heard the tiny hiss of compressed air in answer; and in a second was swinging high above the trees, up and up into the air.

The weird journey occupied less than a minute. Again came the sibilant whisper of air and the soft purr of a sliding trapdoor above the cage; whereupon, with a swift movement, the man inside donned a pair of thick purple goggles. The cage moved on again, stopped; the trap closed behind it. Instantly the veil of darkness dropped away, revealing the strange-glowing interior of the great airship hovering above the downs.

Down either side of the narrow main deck, men stood at their stations, controlling the instruments which, in turn, controlled the powerful almost-silent engines and the ultra-violet lighting apparatus that made the monster invisible. Others, off duty, were lounging aimlessly, and all wore the same purple goggles as the man who had just come aboard. None, however, dared to look towards the cage save one, a tall figure in shapeless yellow robe, who came forward quickly bearing a similar garment on his arm.

Without a word the newcomer donned it, and stood surveying the airship and all it contained with an air of pride and ownership, strangely mixed. At last, smiling bleakly, he turned; and, at his nod, the second man saluted and led the way aft into the private cabin there. As soon as the door was closed, however, he dropped his formal stiffness and thrust out an eager hand.

“Welcome aboard once more—Chief!”

The Phantom Foe, the erstwhile lurker on the downs, smiled again and readjusted his grim mask.

“Thanks, lieutenant. Well, my friend, things went badly for us last night—eh? After all our trouble, we were cheated of our prize—again!”

His lieutenant muttered violently.

“That devil with the wings caught us again, Chief; came straight for us and hammered the ship badly before we could beat him off, besides downing three of the crew. And, of course, our men on

the ground were finished, too. That's five more of the fighting force gone."

The Phantom shrugged.

"Yes; the police found them, all save one. Not that it matters—there's plenty more in the gaols. We'll have to make another raid in a couple of days. Is that all?"

"All?" protested the other. "I tell you, Chief, it's maddening losing men like this after we've trained and—prepared them. The other fools don't like it, either, and——"

"Bah! To the devil with what they like!" snarled the Phantom suddenly. "We shan't lose any more after to-night. It's that clever hound, Thurston Kyle, we're up against. His men settled ours last night and captured Smith—much good may that do them. As for Kyle—he finishes to-night! And in a way that will terrify others from following in his footsteps!"

"You sure about him, Chief?"

"Quite sure. He actually gave himself away to-day by producing Smith's new prints at Scotland Yard. Clever did I say? The fool! I wonder what he'd say if he knew I held the secrets of the Yard like—this!" He clenched a lean fist triumphantly, and his lieutenant chuckled in admiration.

"You're great, Chief! Still got 'em fogged?"

"Worse than ever now, friend. The net's out for Lucius Pelton. And Captain Arthurs, who's in charge of the hunt, swears he'll find him wherever he is. Do you—er—think he will, lieutenant?"

Both men looked at each other and laughed derisively. But suddenly the Phantom's humour changed.

"Now then—to business. Everything ready—our new batch of little pets prepared? Good! I'll inspect them and we'll start." I'll take charge to-night, lieutenant, and you can drop me again to-morrow at dawn."

"Ah! You're going down again, Chief? Be careful, won't you?"

The Phantom laid a firm hand on his confederate's shoulder.

"You're a good comrade, my friend. Yes, I'll be careful; have no fear of me. Soon I'll be ready to come aboard for good, for the Pelton hunt is on and we must give the Yard credit for some brains. I'll take no risks!" He flung up his head and turned to the door.

"But to-night we stamp out our greatest danger—Thurston Kyle. Come."

The Terrible Six!

TOGETHER the leaders of the mighty criminal enterprise strode the length of the main deck, watched with furtive respect by the silent, yellow-masked crew, until they disappeared through a small door forward.

And there they met pandemonium.

The door opened into a small, narrow chamber, with bunks against the duralumin walls, and a bare surgeon's table in the centre, bordered by a long glass case of wickedly-shining instruments. A man in white overalls sat there, too, head bowed wretchedly. The atmosphere, despite an airshaft, was heavy with the stale, sickening tang of ether. And chained securely, each in a bunk, were six other men.

Or, rather, the wrecks of men. Pale, wolfish faces, loose-lipped and thin, turned mechanically as the Phantom entered; yells and babbled curses from six throats greeted him. Madness glittered in every pair of eyes; for, only a short time ago, these men had been inmates in a Government prison, the most dangerous captives there; guarded day and night "during his Majesty's pleasure." They had escaped now—drawn into the clutches of the Phantom Foe; poor but terrible tools in his campaign!

Normal men, standing there and watching that grim scene, would have gone crazy themselves. But the Phantom and his lieutenant studied the six with expert, dispassionate eyes, as breeders study a herd of promising cattle. The Phantom rubbed his hands with satisfaction at last, and, stepping forward, clapped the man in the surgeon's overalls roughly on the shoulder.

HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

THE NIGHT HAWK, known to the world as Thurston Kyle, scientist, declares war on THE PHANTOM FOE, a ruthless criminal, who has commenced a reign of terror, killing, kidnapping, looting. Always he attacks amid a cloud of yellow gas, which stupefies his victims; then disappears literally into air, for he directs operations from an invisible airship. The Night Hawk discovers this, but in his first clash with the Phantom is defeated. Scotland Yard calls in Kyle, and he promises to assist them to bring the criminal to book. He outlines a plan to Captain Frank Arthurs, but, owing to a leakage of information, the Phantom outwits them. Then comes the sensational news that Lucius Pelton, of the Treasury, has vanished, and Arthurs immediately suspects that he is in league with the Phantom Foe.

(Now read on.)

"Well, friend Lawrence, how goes it?" he mocked.

Professor Lawrence lifted his weary head and glowered in sullen silence. Kidnapped from the Blackheath dinner-party at the outset of the Phantom's terrific career, few would have recognised in the haggard, frightened man the most famous facial and manipulative surgeon in America. His eyes behind their thick goggles burned with helpless fury at his captor. But there was fear in them, too, stark terror at this tall, unknown man who stood before him.

He waved a limp hand at last towards the men.

"They are ready—all except Number Four. His facial muscles would not yield to manipulation. I had to operate. You cannot use him to-night."

"Can't I? We shall see!" replied the Phantom contemptuously. "Why is he not ready? They call you the Miracle Man in America, don't they? You have had plenty of time!"

"Hang you!" Stung to frenzy, the famous surgeon leapt to his feet with a snarl. "You devil; this is my last job for you! Haven't I altered the faces and grafted the finger-ends of all your foul gang for you? Their hands, too? And now—madmen; fiends you intend to set loose on innocent men! You—you——"

The Phantom laughed harshly.

"You—you——" he jeered; and suddenly flung the little surgeon across the room with brutal force. "Be careful, my little beauty doctor; you become impertinent, I think. Do you require a little more—discipline?"

Professor Lawrence's frantic defiance broke down at that in a terrified gasp, and he held up his hands.

"No. No; not that. I cannot stand it again! I will obey—I will obey!"

"See that you do then!" was the grim retort. "I shall have more patients for you to alter in a couple of days. Bah!" He swung on his lieutenant again and rapped out a short order.

At once the lieutenant became busy. Taking a sheaf of cards and an ink-pad, he strode to the "patients," inked their fingers despite their futile struggles, and took the impressions. That done, he took another sheaf of cards and some photographs, compared them placidly, and handed them to his leader.

"Fine! O.K.! Lawrence has done well, Chief; everything different as chalk from cheese!"

The Phantom, too, studied them closely and nodded. The Miracle Man of America had certainly done well. The photo-

graphs and second sheaf of cards were copies of Scotland Yard records of each of the men in the bunks. But now those records would be useless if ever the six men fell into the hands of the police—thanks to Professor Lawrence's unique skill. The Phantom tossed the cards aside and drew a deep breath. Then, by sheer force of personality, he awed the captives to something like silence.

And when that was done, he began to speak to them, in a crisp, masterful voice that penetrated even their wild brains.

Professor Lawrence moaned and fainted.

An hour later, silent and unseen as a wraith, the great airship slid across the lights of London, heading north. Below, in a little cage, swung a keen-eyed observer with night-glasses glued to the ground.

Suddenly he pressed the signal switch inside; the great ship slowed down, turned gracefully on its course as the signals were repeated, and at last stopped in mid-air, held up by its whirling helicopters. The observer's cage was drawn up.

But presently another cage dropped down from the invisible craft; a larger one holding a terrible crew. Straight and true it sank until it came solidly to rest.

And when the door of the cage opened, eager as schoolboys on a treat, six men glided out—six maniacs, dangerous as ravening wolves, cunning as madmen! Without a sound they stole forward to their attack on the sleeping house of Thurston Kyle.

Overhead, their master, the Phantom Foe, rubbed his hands again and smiled.

Warned in Time.

WITH deadly efficiency, the Phantom's attack on Thurston Kyle's house began.

Softly the cage containing his six terrible raiders settled on the almost-flat roof of the old Georgian mansion; just as quietly the door slid back; the only sound a faint hiss of air that was lost in the rustle of breeze-shaken trees. The madmen crept out.

They were not a combined party—the kink in their minds prevented them from acting together under one leader. The only thing that held them was the impulse to kill, and their fiendishly-clever chief had banked on that, ruthlessly impressing instructions on them for entering the house—leaving what followed to their cunning instincts. He had set loose six devils; one at least fighting with whirlwind frenzy, must succeed.

Treading soft as prowling Redskins, the mad six scouted forth on their errand, until one, bent almost double, came across the trapdoor to the roof. Not a word was spoken; each moved like grim automations, one after the other dropping down into the little attic landing below. There they paused, drawing weapons that ranged from blue automatics to short rubber clubs.

Thurston Kyle and Snub, sleeping soundly in their respective rooms, were in the direst peril of their lives.

But the Phantom, in his desire to wreak terrifying vengeance on his most dangerous opponent, had made two serious mistakes. First he had neglected to clear the way for his weird raiders by swamping the house and its inmates with the Yellow Gas—perhaps not wishing to attract attention by the attendant glare against the night-sky. And more serious still, he had underestimated Thurston Kyle.

Living the adventurous life as he did, the far-sighted Night Hawk had long since raised defences to his house against foes other than the Phantom; defences that had been installed during his long alliance with Nelson Lee, the famous school-master-detective. Those precautions were still active.

Had the madmen launched their attack from the grounds below, they would never have gone three yards. As it was, the roof was a weak spot, allowing them to gain a footing. But once they were actually inside the house, the tables were swiftly turned.

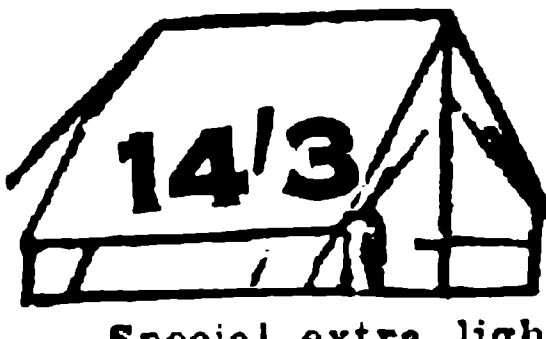
Scarcely had the foremost raider set foot on the narrow staircase leading from the attic-landing than, one floor below in Thurston Kyle's room, a tiny bulb sprang into crimson life beside the door; an electric buzzer snarled fierce, insistent warning above the scientist's head. He was awake in an instant, cool with the inborn alertness of the man of action. Another instant and he was out of bed, eyes narrowed ominously, while he snatched up a dressing-gown and a gun from the table-draw beside his bed.

Gently, too, a communicating door opened, and the sturdy figure of Snub Hawkins appeared, similarly garbed. Neither spoke. They prepared to meet their foes.

Noiselessly Thurston Kyle opened his door, Snub following close, and both listened intently along the dark corridor outside. Jaws hardened, hands took a firmer grip on the butts of deadly automatics. For the passage was full of faint sounds, sly, furtive creepings, eager, pent-up sighs as though hungry animals were roaming the gloom. Thurston Kyle slid an arm along the wall; turned on an electric switch. Brilliant light flooded the corridor immediately.

And revealed the terrible six clustered in a pack, not six yards away. There and then the savage fight began.

(Six against two—will the Phantom's killers triumph against the Night Hawk? Look out for a thrilling instalment next week.)



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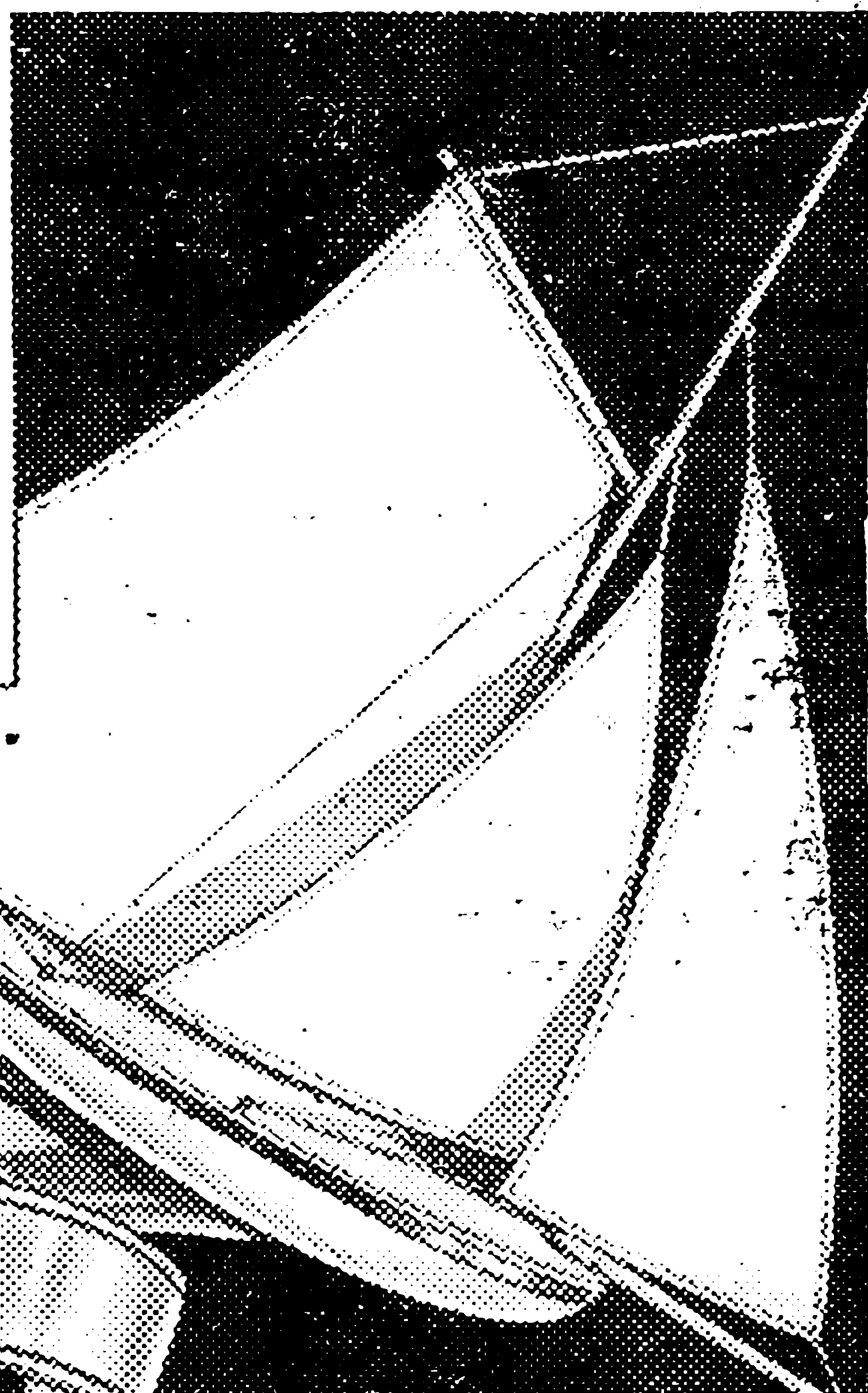
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