

"THE OPEN AIR HEROES!"

Corking Book - length
St. Frank's School
Yarn Inside.

THE NELSON LEE

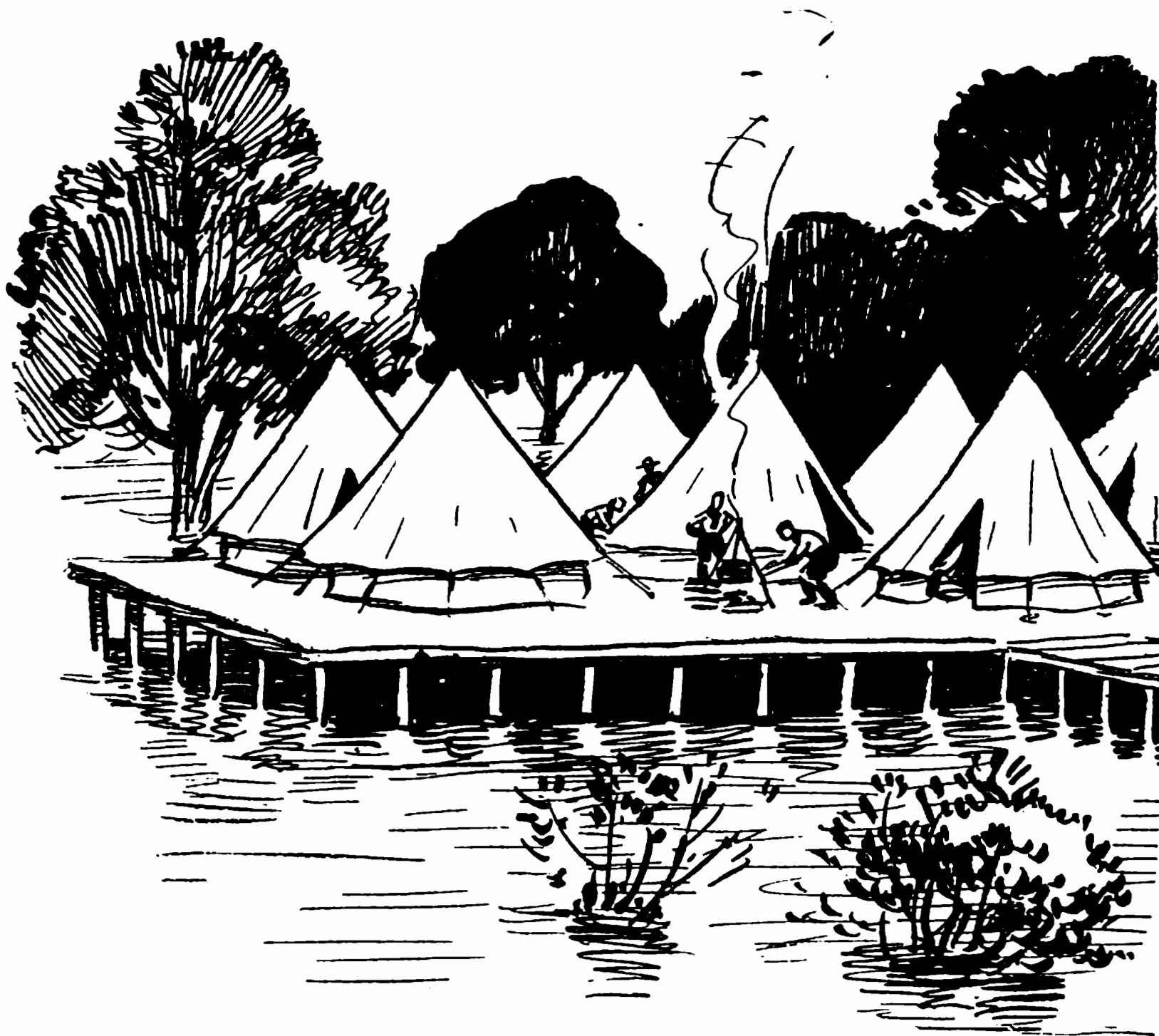
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**ST. FRANK'S
UNDER CANVAS
WATER!**

Nipper and the cheery Chums of St. Frank's Under Canvas.



CHAPTER 1.

A Crooked Crash!

THE St. Frank's camp basked lazily in the drowsy heat of the summer's afternoon.

It was a half-holiday at the school, and the camp itself was more or less deserted. Not twenty fellows were to be seen in and about the endless rows of neat tents. But from the distance came the pleasant sound of bat meeting ball, accompanied, occasionally, by vigorous hand-clapping and even shouting.

Cricket was in progress on both Big Side and Little Side. The whole countryside was bathed in hot sunshine, and the air was filled with the droning of insects.

"Phew! It's hotter than ever!" re-

marked Fullwood, of the Remove, as he emerged from one of the tents. "Coming up to see the cricket, Clive?"

Clive Russell, who was lounging on the grass, aroused himself.

"Might as well, I suppose," he replied. "Handforth's batting now, isn't he? He's a good old slogger, and worth watching."

"Let's go, then," said Fullwood. "H'm! Not many chaps in camp. Rather a good thing old Whittle isn't about."

They strolled towards the playing fields.

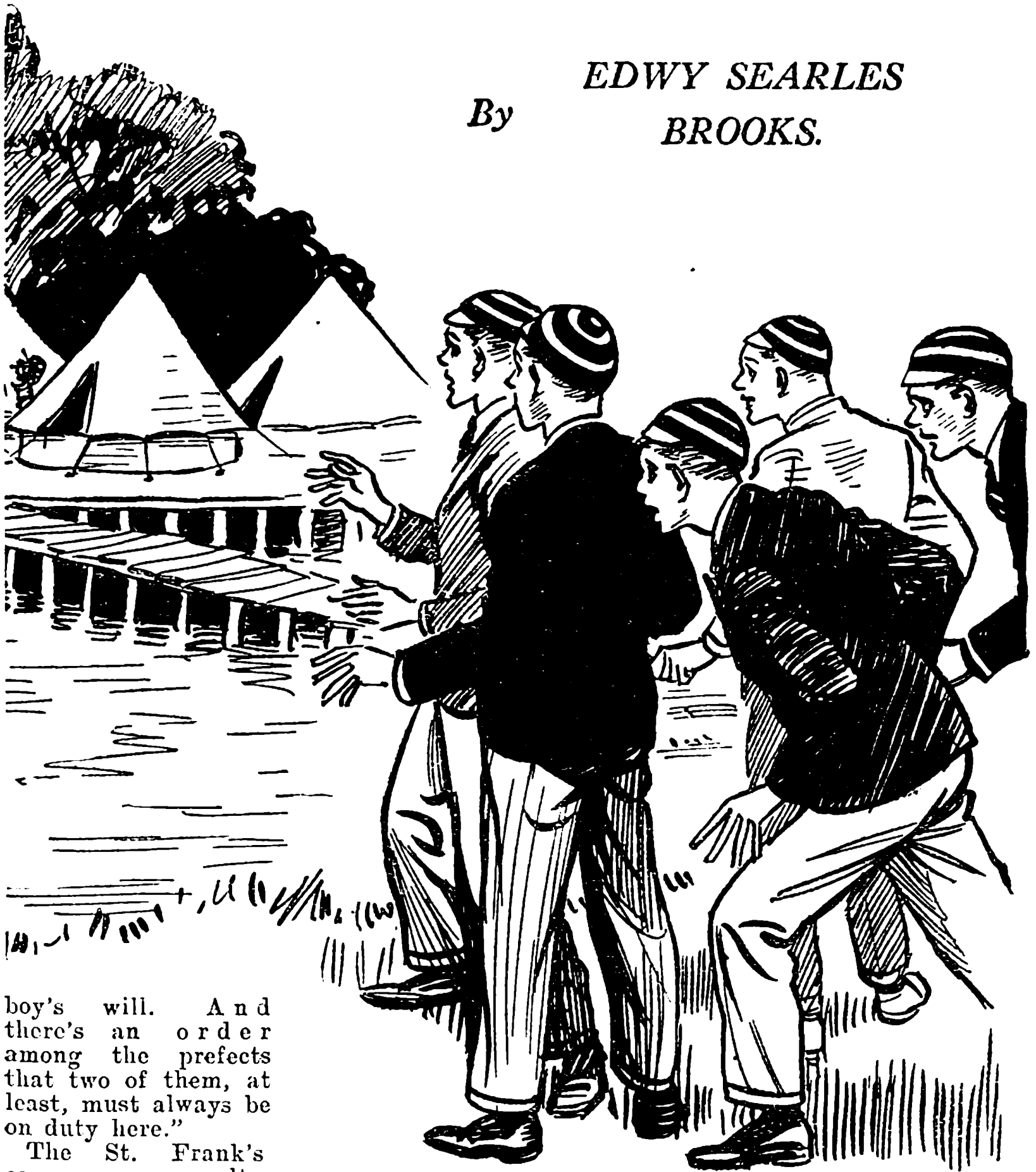
"It wouldn't matter if Whittle was about," said the other junior. "He couldn't do anything. The camp has got to be absolutely deserted before he can claim that we have failed in the instructions of the old

**Flooded under three feet of water--
but the St. Frank's campers RISE
ABOVE their difficulties!**

Novel Complete Schoolboy Adventure Yarn.

The OPEN AIR HEROES!

By *EDWY SEARLES*
BROOKS.



boy's will. And there's an order among the prefects that two of them, at least, must always be on duty here."

The St. Frank's camp was a novelty.

The entire school was officially under canvas, even including the masters. Ordinarily, no such camp as this would have been established so close to the school—practically within a stone's throw, so to speak. But the circumstances were exceptional.

Old Jeremy Whittle, one of Banning-

ton's richest men, had left a clause in his will to the effect that the Half Mile Meadow was to become the property of St. Frank's if the boys spent a full month in camp. Mr. Whittle had been a great believer in the open air life, and he had chosen that method of compelling the school to put the boys under canvas.

The governors had first of all decided to abandon the meadow—knowing that it would thus become the property of Amos Whittle, the old man's nephew. It really wasn't worth the trouble and expense of putting the boys under canvas for a month. Then it had come out—through the friendly tip of Mr. Howard Barfield, a solicitor—that Amos Whittle was planning to erect a huge saw-mill on the Half Mile Meadow, and to make special docks for his heavy steel barges.

Whittle had been planning in secret, hoping that the time-limit would expire before the St. Frank's authorities got wind of what he was doing. But, thanks to Mr. Barfield, the boys had been put under canvas in the nick of time. This was the first week of the month, and all was going well. At all costs, St. Frank's was determined to secure that meadow, so that the saw-mill—which would be a blot on the landscape—should not become a reality.

That clause in the old man's will had been very closely studied by the St. Frank's masters, and even by the boys. They all knew it by heart. Every boy of St. Frank's was compelled to feed and sleep in the camp—although, of course, they were at liberty to come and go as they pleased. Yet it was a condition that the camp was not to be entirely deserted at any one minute of any twenty-four hours. If, indeed, the Half Mile Meadow was completely abandoned—even for the space of ten seconds—Amos Whittle could step in and claim the property as his, since St. Frank's would have failed to comply with the full instructions. Even one trifling slip of that sort would give Amos Whittle his chance.

And although the saw-mill owner pretended to be friendly towards St. Frank's—although he openly stated that he was glad to see this camp—many of the boys knew for a fact that he was plotting to obtain the property for himself. He was constantly on the watch—awaiting his chance. On the first night of the camp, indeed, he had deliberately plotted to cause disaffection amongst the boys, so that they would desert the camp at the outset.

Since then, he had been quiet, and everything had been going smoothly.

"HALLO! Look at that merchant!" said Clive Russell, staring upwards, and shading his eyes from the sun.

"Seems to be something wrong with his engine," remarked Fullwood.

The two Removites were almost at the edge of the camp, and they had paused to stare at the light aeroplane which was circling overhead, some fifteen hundred feet up.

Usually, passing aeroplanes did not attract the St. Frank's fellows much. At this time of the year 'planes were frequently flying over, or near by.

But this particular one was different. The pilot was circling his machine in a curiously erratic manner, and his engine was spluttering in a way which indicated trouble.

"Seems to me he's looking for a place where he can land," said Fullwood, after a moment or two. "By Jove! He's certainly in difficulties, Clive!"

"Guess I'd rather be right where I am than in that 'plane," replied the Canadian junior, nodding.

The rest of the fellows in the camp had been attracted by the unusual sounds of the 'plane's engine, and they were all staring upwards. The crowds at the cricket matches were similarly distracted from the games. Even the cricketers were more or less disturbed.

The aeroplane, which was a privately-owned light machine, circled the school again, the engine missing badly; and occasionally the 'plane would sway, as though some of the controls had failed. Once, indeed, the tail drooped, and the machine nose-dived. The pilot just managed to straighten her out, missing some tree-tops by feet only, and laboriously the 'plane commenced to climb again, swaying from side to side.

"There's certainly something wrong," said Fullwood anxiously. "He's afraid to land because of the chaps on Little Side, and these tents. It seems to me that he won't get up very far with his engine spluttering like that. I hope he doesn't — Hallo! There he goes again!"

"He stalled!" ejaculated Russell excitedly. "I say, look! Why, he's diving straight for the links. The machine's out of control!"

They watched, fascinated, their hearts throbbing rapidly. The aeroplane was fluttering earthwards like some wounded bird, and with a sudden sideways lurch it dropped to the St. Frank's private golf links. There was a moment of extreme tension—

Crash!

Everybody in the St. Frank's camp heard that dreadful, ominous sound. The fellows round the cricket pitches heard it, too. There was an immediate shout, and a concerted movement in the direction of the links.

"Great Scott! He's crashed!"

"He must have been killed instantly!"

Shouting excitedly, the boys streamed away towards the links. And in the intense excitement everybody in the camp ran, too. Even the prefects forgot all about their orders; their one thought was to get to that aeroplane, in the hope that they might be able to do something to help the unfortunate occupant. These fellows in the camp were nearest to the golf links—therefore they were the first to move.

The camp basked in the lazy sunshine—without a living soul in sight amongst all the tents.

The crash had occurred only just beyond the hedge on the other side of Bell-ton Lane—not actually on the links, but in one of Farmer Holt's meadows, adjoining. As soon as the St. Frank's fellows broke through the hedge they saw the machine lying on the turf, one wing tilted slightly skywards, and the tail well up. She was not so badly damaged as the spectators had first believed.

"She's not on fire, anyhow!" panted Wilson of the Sixth, as he ran. "I say, is somebody bringing the school ambulance? It may be needed!"

"The accident was seen at the school, so the ambulance is bound to arrive within a minute or two," said Biggleswade, another prefect.

The two Sixth-Formers were the first to arrive at the crippled 'plane; and they were just in time to see the pilot climbing coolly out of the cockpit.

"Well, gee, I hope I haven't given you folks a scare," said the pilot, as he dropped lightly to the ground. "Pretty work, huh?"

"Put—but aren't you hurt?" gasped Biggleswade blankly.

The pilot, a lean-faced, hard-bitten looking man of about thirty-five, grinned amiably.

"Say, kiddo, I've crashed more ships than I can remember," he said pleasantly. "Walter G. Miller—that's my name. Meet me, boys—meet me!"

By this time a big crowd of fellows had collected round. Everybody was breathless—to say nothing of being surprised and relieved.

"Good egg! He's not hurt!" sang out Handforth, of the Remove. "But I'm jiggered if I can understand how he escaped!"

"The crash looked worse than it actually was," said Nipper. "What was the matter, sir?" he asked, moving nearer to the pilot. "Did you get into difficulties?"

"Not on your life!" replied Mr. Miller. "It was sure a pretty little crash, huh? You can always bet on Walter G.!"

"Say, this guy's an American!" shouted Ulysses Spencer Adams, the New York boy of the Remove. "Gee! I'm sure glad to meet you, old timer!"

"Well, if it isn't a young feller from the one real country on this earth!" said Mr. Miller heartily. "Put it there, kid! You're American, too, I guess!"

"You said a mouthful!" replied Adams. "New York's my home town."

"Some baby!" said Mr. Miller. "Walter G. Miller, of Oswego, Kan. Known from coast to coast as 'the guy they can't kill.'"

Mr. Miller seemed exceedingly pleased with himself, and he was smiling with huge enjoyment at the sensation he had created.

"Look here, Mr. Miller," said Biggleswade. "This was a real accident, wasn't it?"

"Use your eyes, son—use your eyes," said the American, indicating the crippled 'plane.

"I mean, you couldn't help crashing, could you?"

"Couldn't help it, huh?" laughed Mr. Miller. "Say, boy friend, I've crashed more of these ships——"

"You said that before, I think, Mr. Miller!" interrupted Mr. Alington Wilkes, the Housemaster of the Ancient House, as he pushed forward. "Am I to understand that you deliberately brought this machine to earth with—er—unnecessary violence?"

"Just a stunt," replied Mr. Miller, recognising the note of authority in old Wilkey's voice. "Maybe you've seen some of these Hollywood talkies? Well, I guess you've seen me, too! I've done more stunts for the talkies, around Hollywood——"

"Stunts!" shouted Nipper sharply. "So you crashed the 'plane on purpose!"

"You've got me!" grinned Mr. Miller. "Say, what's wrong with your film dump—Elstree? Those guys around there don't need me at all! So when I get an offer of doing one of my special crashes, I kinda jump at it. A bit of advertisement, huh? I guess this'll be in the newspapers, and then, maybe, I'll get some real he-man publicity."

"Why, it's a fraud!" said Handforth indignantly. "We messed up our game to come here and help this chap, and he's only a spoofer!"

"Yeah!" grinned Mr. Miller. "I guess the laugh's on you, sonny!"

"If you think this is funny, you'd better go back to America, where they may appreciate this kind of humour," said Handforth, turning and glaring at Adams. "I don't think much of your countryman, my lad!" he added tartly. "He gives us all a scare, and then stands there laughing at us!"

Adams was looking uncomfortable.

"Guess I don't think him of much account myself," he said. "Gee, Mr. Miller, this is sure tough! What was the big idea, anyway?"

Nipper, with a sudden look of consternation on his face, went up and confronted the airman before he could answer.

"Look here, Mr. Miller!" exclaimed Nipper. "Who hired you to crash this 'plane next door to the St. Frank's camp?"

The stunt man shook his head.

"Not on your life, sonny!" he replied. "Guess again! Did I say that anybody hired me?"

"Yes, you did!" shouted Nipper. "And I'll tell you who it was! A man named Whittle—Ames Whittle! Aren't you the airman who has been giving passenger flights and doing stunts at Helmford?"

Mr. Miller was rather taken aback, but he shook his head again.

"Well, say, it was only a publicity racket," he protested. "No harm done, sonny!"

"No harm!" shouted Nipper, spinning round and facing all the others. "Don't you understand, all of you? Whittle hired him to crash that 'plane!"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Handforth, aghast.

"What about the camp?" went on Nipper tensely. "Who's in command there? Whittle's idea was to get everybody out so that he could pounce down and claim it——"

"No, no!" interrupted Mr. Wilkes. "Surely he would not have descended to such trickery! In any case, Wilson and Biggleswade were left on duty——"

He broke off, catching in his breath. For at that moment he had seen both Wilson and Biggleswade; and the two prefects were looking dumbfounded.

CHAPTER 2.

Mr. Whittle is Unlucky!

MR. Ames Whittle, hidden by the undergrowth near Bellton Wood, laughed openly.

"Look at them, Mansell!" he said, with contempt in his voice. "Upon

my word! The thing has worked amazingly well!"

"I'm not surprised, sir," said Mansell. "An aeroplane crash is always a star attraction."

Mansell was the works manager of Amos Whittle's big saw-mill near Bannington. He was hand-in-glove with his employer in this little affair of hoodwinking the St. Frank's boys to leave the Half Mile Meadow deserted. It had been Mansell's idea, in fact, to hire the airman who had been giving exhibition performances at Helmford.

Whittle was quivering with suppressed triumph. He was a big, florid-faced man—really an unpleasant-looking specimen—and he was rendered all the more unpleasant just now by reason of his ill-natured satisfaction.

"Well, we can be making a move, Mansell," he said briskly. "They've all gone—every man-jack of them. Just as we expected!"

He produced a whistle from his pocket, and gave a single blast. It was not very penetrating, but it was heard by three or four of his men who were stationed in Bellton Lane and near the river. They immediately advanced into the St. Frank's camp. Mr. Whittle and his works manager advanced from the wood at the same time.

Passing between the rows of tents, they saw no sign of life. They looked into many of the tents—as, also, did the men. But there was nobody present. All had been irresistibly attracted by the crashing 'plane.

"Well, here we are, men," said Amos Whittle, as he joined the others in the big triangular space which formed the centre of the open-air camp. "There's nothing for you to do. Just stay here, and if you're wanted for anything I'll tell you. You can leave the talking to me."

"Yes, sir!" chorused the men.

Whittle drew aside with Mansell.

"There might be some bother," he murmured. "The boys will probably turn nasty when they know exactly what this means. That's why I brought these fellows."

"So I guessed, sir," said Mansell dryly. "Not that there's anything to fear. Some of the masters will be with the boys, and they won't allow any rough-house stuff. We shall be safe enough."

OF all the St. Frank's fellows, Biggleswade and Wilson, of the Sixth, were the most alarmed. In fact, they were conscience-stricken.



The St. Frank's fellows rushed back to the deserted camp—and found Amos Whittle in possession "This is my property now!" he exclaimed triumphantly.

"It's our fault, sir!" exclaimed Biggleswade, as he ran alongside Mr. Wilkes, with the crowd surging all round. "Wilson and I should have stayed in camp!"

"I'm afraid it's too late to talk now, Biggy, old man," said the Housemaster. "I'm beginning to believe that young Nipper is right about Whittle. The whole thing looks fishy."

"But I thought Whittle was friendly, sir," put in Wilson. "He wished us good luck the other day. He said he wanted us to keep the meadow for the school."

"That was only his bunkum," said Nipper. "I tell you that Whittle has played a trick on us. He hired that stunt airman to crash near the school, so that the camp should be emptied."

"And Wilson and I fell for it—like a couple of idiots!" groaned Biggy miserably.

"We thought the airman would be badly injured, and as we were the nearest we dashed off to help him," protested Wilson defensively.

"It's all right, old man—I'm not blaming you," said Mr. Wilkes. "In the excitement of the moment, you forgot that you were supposed to be on duty. You went to render first aid, and for that

you deserve all praise. Nobody will accuse you of wilful neglect."

A moment later, Nipper's fears were justified; for as the crowds rushed back into the camp they beheld Amos Whittle and his men standing in the centre. His very presence told them all that they wanted to know.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Wilkes," said the saw-mill owner, as old Wilkey and the prefects hurried up. "I'm afraid you're too late!"

Wilson leapt forward.

"What kind of trickery do you call this?" he demanded furiously.

"Steady, Wilson—steady," said Mr. Wilkes, laying a hand on the prefect's arm and pulling him back. "Leave this to me, will you?"

"Sorry, sir!" muttered Wilson, breathing hard.

By now, Nipper and Handforth and crowds of other Removites and Fourth-Formers were collecting round. Fifth-Formers and fags, too, were coming in at every moment. The sensation of the 'plane crash was nothing compared with this.

"What is the matter with the young fellow?" asked Mr. Whittle, glancing at Wilson. "What nonsense is he talking?"

"I think he said something about trickery, Mr. Whittle," said the Housemaster pointedly.

"And that is what I cannot understand," replied Whittle. "I merely happened to be near when I saw that aeroplane crashing. By the way, I hope the pilot is not very badly hurt?"

Mr. Wilkes looked at him very hard.

"We'll leave the aeroplane for the moment, if you don't mind," he said. "You were saying that you happened to be near by. Well?"

"I merely noticed that the camp was deserted," said Mr. Whittle, with a wave of his hand. "Not a single St. Frank's boy was left in this meadow. So I hope you will realise, sir, that by law this property now becomes mine."

A murmur arose, swelling into a roar of anger.

"You will notice," added Whittle, "that I have three or four witnesses with me—to prove clearly that the Half Mile Meadow was deserted when I entered."

Mr. Wilkes gave Nipper a sad glance—as much as to say "You were quite right, old man,"—and he sighed.

"And a few days ago, Mr. Whittle, you professed great friendliness towards the school," he said gently.

Whittle shrugged his shoulders.

"I fail to see how friendliness enters into the matter," he replied bluntly. "I am just as friendly towards the school, if it comes to that. But this is a point of law. It is with extreme regret, Mr. Wilkes, that I must enforce my rights."

"You tricked us!" shouted Biggleswade hotly. "You blackguard! You hired that airman to crash that machine—so that we should all clear out of the camp!"

Whittle went purple.

"Do you allow this, sir?" he demanded, turning on Mr. Wilkes. "Will you stand there and permit this young puppy to call me a blackguard?"

"Before I answer that question, Mr. Whittle, will you tell me one thing?" said the Housemaster. "Did you know that the aeroplane was going to crash just on the other side of Bellton Lane?"

"I don't know what you're talking about!" retorted Whittle angrily. "How should I know when an aeroplane is going to crash? I haven't the slightest knowledge of the machine. You speak as though it crashed deliberately."

"It did," replied Mr. Wilkes mildly. "The pilot has informed us that he was hired to make his—er—spectacular landing. And you really cannot blame the

boys for jumping to a conclusion which, I must confess, seems all too obvious."

"Nonsense!" snapped Whittle. "I merely happened to be near by at the time. And I will remind you again, Mr. Wilkes, that St. Frank's has forfeited all right to the Half Mile Meadow. You know the condition of my uncle's will as well as I do. Not for one single minute of the stipulated month must the property be left entirely deserted. Well, it has been deserted. I can prove it. If you school people are foolish enough to bring an action, you will not stand an earthly chance—"

"You—you rotter!" shouted Handforth hotly. "You're a fibber, too! You hired that stunt man!"

"You insolent young fool!" roared Whittle. "If you dare to—"

"There is no necessity, sir, to enter into a vulgar altercation with my boys," interrupted old Wilkey sternly. "Boys, be good enough to remain silent. It is satisfactory, at least, to know exactly where we stand with regard to this man."

"Are you referring to me, sir?" shouted Whittle, stung by the Housemaster's biting tone.

"Most certainly I am referring to you," said old Wilkey scornfully. "A few days ago, Mr. Whittle, you came to us with loudly-voiced expressions of friendship and goodwill. You have now proved quite clearly that you have been awaiting your opportunity to take advantage of the first slip. Like a wolf, you seize upon the one minute when the camp was left empty. A mere matter of law. Oh, yes, I know that you have the law on your side in this matter, but that does not render your conduct any the less contemptible."

Amos Whittle fairly boiled with fury.

"Go!" he shouted furiously, pointing with a quivering finger. "Clear off this property! It's mine! Do you hear—mine!"

A silence fell over the St. Frank's fellows. They realised that Amos Whittle had triumphed. By trickery he had beaten them.

And then, during those moments of tension, a plaintive voice arose from near by.

"I say, dash it, you chappies!" it complained. "I mean, how do you suppose a poor cove can indulge in forty of the best and sweetest while this frightful racket oscillates throughout the atmosphere?"

"My hat! Archie!" said Handforth thickly.

The incongruity of the situation relieved the tension. Here were the St. Frank's fellows being ordered off the Half Mile Meadow, and Archie Glenthorne was complaining because he couldn't sleep!

If the situation had not been so tragic, many of the fellows would have laughed. For it was, indeed, tragic. Amos Whittle would now be certain to erect his noisy saw-mills—right next to St. Frank's!

Archibald Winston Derek Glenthorne, yawning prodigiously, emerged from the loose hay at the top of a rick.

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie, suddenly becoming aware of the fact that there was something unusual "in the wind." "Odd shocks and surprises! I mean to say, something pretty important appears to be going on, what?"

"It's all right. Glenthorne," said Mr. Wilkes. "Something has certainly been going on, but I fancy it is over now."

"I say, that's frightfully good to hear, sir," beamed Archie. "Peace in the offing—what? I mean, a good old spot of the dreamless is indicated on a dashed hot afternoon like this."

"Oh, why listen to him?" asked Handforth impatiently.

"Wait a minute!" said Nipper, a strange gleam coming into his eyes. "By Jove! This might be important, you chaps! Wait a minute, Mr. Wilkes!"

He ran towards the hayrick, which stood between a line of tents and a neighbouring hedge.

"Archie!" shouted Nipper. "Pull yourself together!"

"Eh? What?" asked Archie. "Oh, I see what you mean! But, really, old boy, I am pulled together. That is to say——"

"How long have you been on the top of that haystack?" asked Nipper. "Better still, answer me this. When did you climb up there for your nap?"

"When?" repeated Archie, flustered. "Oh, I see what you mean! You mean, when did I come up here? Directly after dinner, old boy. As soon as you chappies cleared off for the cricket."

"And you've been there ever since?"

"Oh, rather!"

"That's good enough!" shouted Nipper triumphantly. "Now we know exactly where we stand."

He spun round, ran up to Mr. Amos Whittle, and he was looking cool and confident.

"Rather a pity, Mr. Whittle, that your little plan should have missed fire so badly," he said pleasantly. "Just now you ordered us to go. Perhaps you'll re-

consider that? It's our turn to order you to go!"

Whittle was taken aback.

"What do you mean?" he snarled. "You young fool! What are you trying to bluff me with?"

"It's not bluff, Mr. Whittle," replied Nipper. "Archie Glenthorne, the fellow on the top of that haystack, has been there for the past hour and a half. He slept all through the aeroplane incident, and he only woke up because we were making such a noise here. In other words, the Half Mile Meadow has not been deserted at all!"

A gasp went up, followed by a yell of exultant triumph.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Archie has saved the situation—without even knowing it!"

"Well done, Archie!"

Mr. Wilkes, stepping forward, patted Nipper on the shoulder.

"Brainy lad!" he said. "You were splendidly quick on that. Well, Mr. Whittle? What about it?"

Amos Whittle was looking bewildered in his dismay.

"But—but this is preposterous!" he shouted thickly. "This camp was deserted——"

"Oh, no!" interrupted old Wilkey. "We have plenty of witnesses who can prove that Glenthorne was on the property all the time. I think you know the conditions of your uncle's will, sir? St. Frank's only loses its claim if the Half Mile Meadow is completely deserted——"

"Bah!" snarled Amos Whittle, turning savagely on his heel.

He realised the folly of remaining here to argue. He had shown his hand—he had proved to all St. Frank's that he was the school's enemy, waiting and lurking for his opportunity to pounce. And all he could do was to retire, baffled, leaving the schoolboys in victorious possession.

Archie Glenthorne, to his utter bewilderment, was the hero of the hour.

He protested, in vain, that he had no desire for all this fuss; he protested, also, that whatever he had done he had done unconsciously.

But it made no difference. Archie had saved the situation, and he was the fellow of the moment at St. Frank's.

Everything in the St. Frank's camp was as before—no, not quite. For now the whole school knew that Amos Whittle was determined, by hook or by crook, to secure the Half Mile Meadow for himself. And the school, startled by this revelation of

Whittle's unscrupulousness, was just as determined that the Half Mile Meadow should be theirs.

CHAPTER 3.

A Question of Independence!

THE sun blazed in fully glory out of a cloudless sky upon the St. Frank's camp. But the St. Frank's camp slept. Not a movement was to be seen.

This was not very surprising, as the time was just a minute before 5 a.m. The neighbouring birds, however, saw no reason why they should waste these glorious early morning hours, and they were filling the air with song. Bees, anxious to get about their business of the day, were already in evidence, too. All Nature was awake, even if St. Frank's slept.

And then, suddenly, abruptly, a loud, devastating explosion shook the peaceful air. A puff of smoke lingered in the clear atmosphere; birds, rudely disturbed in the midst of their songs, flew in panic-stricken fear into Belton Wood.

Boom—boom! Boom—boom!

Four other explosions followed—two at a time. The detonations were terrific. And the camp, all in a moment, was wide awake.

"Great Scott! What's that?" gasped Handforth, sitting up in his camp-bed and blinking.

"Goodness knows!" exclaimed Church, leaping out of bed. "Sounded like gun-fire."

"More like bombs going off!" ejaculated McClure.

They dashed out of the tent in their pyjamas. Skeets Rossiter—otherwise the young Viscount Belton—Vivian Travers and Jimmy Potts, were just appearing from the next tent. These six juniors formed the Tiger Patrol, of the 1st St. Frank's Troop of Boy Scouts. Handforth was the patrol leader.

"What's happening?" yelled Sir Jimmy, gazing round excitedly. "I say! Look up there!"

Everybody was pointing, for by this time three-parts of the fellows had rushed out of their tents, all of them in their pyjamas. Fags, juniors, seniors, and masters were all emerging—all flustered and startled.

They were gazing up at the little clumps of white smoke which hung in the clear atmosphere, looking for all the world like patches of suspended cotton-wool.

"Maroons!" said Edgar Fenton, of the Sixth. "What on earth does this mean? Who's been letting off maroons—at this hour of the morning?"

"I say!" yelled Handforth. "Look at all those flags round that tent!"

He was not the only one who had noticed the flags. One particular tent, in the Ancient House section of the camp, was emblazoned with dozens of flags, all of which were gaily flying in the gentle morning breeze. But it was the design on the flags which attracted the boys more than anything else; for the design was that of the Stars and Stripes.

At that moment there was a sizzling hiss, something streaked skywards, and another terrific boom followed. Round about the gaily-decorated tent a number of red and green flares commenced blazing, vivid even in the full sunlight.

"What the dickens——" began Handforth.

But he was interrupted in the general outcry. Everybody commenced running towards that tent. Standing in front of it were two juniors—both Removites. They were fairly plastered with small American flags, even to the point of having them stuck behind their ears.

"Hey! What's the idea of making all this noise, you American fatheads?" demanded Nipper, as he ran up.

Ulysses Spencer Adams, of the Ancient House, and Justin B. Farman, of the West House, grinned cheerfully. They were both Americans, and firm friends. But Adams was a staunch Easterner, and Farman was a staunch Westerner. One hailed from New York State, and the other hailed from California.

"Whoopee!" sang out Adams. "I guess we kinda startled you some!"

"You've awakened the whole neighbourhood, if that's what you mean," said Nipper. "What's the big idea of all this? Letting off maroons and fireworks and smothering yourselves with American flags?"

"Aw, gee!" protested Adams. "Can you beat that, Farman?"

"I guess I can't even tie it!" said Farman sadly.

"Don't you fellers know that to-day is the Fourth of July?" went on Adams.

"The fourth of July!" ejaculated Handforth, pushing forward. "Anybody might have thought it was the Fifth of November! Supposing it is the Fourth of July? What about it?"

"Gee! The Fourth of July is Independence Day over in the States!" said the American boy. "Farman and I are kind of celebrating, that's all."

"All!" howled an angry chorus.

"Well, Independence Day is sort of special," said the boy from California.

"But why make all this fuss?" asked Nipper, staring.

"Say, you make me tired!" replied Adams impatiently. "Independence Day is a national holiday in the States. Everybody lets off fireworks and makes whoopee. It's just two minutes after five o'clock, which means that it's two minutes after midnight in little old New York. I'm figuring on starting the day well."

The other fellows gasped. The audacity of these two American boys left them breathless. For the sake of celebrating Independence Day, they had awakened the entire camp!

Prefects and masters were coming along now, but all of them stood aside as Mr. Nelson Lee himself put in an appearance. The famous headmaster-detective of St. Frank's was looking stern.

"You tell me, Fenton, that these two American boys are responsible for the disturbance?" he said, as he came along with the school captain. "Adams! Farman! What does this extraordinary affair mean?"

They explained—a great deal of their confidence oozing away.

"I see," nodded Lee, at length. "Merely because it is Independence Day in America, you thoughtlessly disturb not only everybody belonging to this school, but everybody in the village of Bellton, too."

"We kinda forgot that, sir," muttered Adams.

Dancing about and waving flags, Adams and Farman were kicking up a terrific din. "What's the giddy idea?" demanded Handforth wrathfully.



"I don't blame you for your enthusiasm," continued Lee dryly. "It is, I believe, regarded as a national duty in America fittingly to celebrate Independence Day. But your enthusiasm has evidently deprived you of thought for others. You may celebrate all you wish—but at the right time. You mustn't make any more of this noise—and you will each report to your Form-master with five hundred lines before nightfall."

"Yes, sir," said the two American boys, in thin, small voices.

And Nelson Lee, with a twinkle in his eyes, went back to his own quarters. He had come prepared to punish the culprits very severely; but in the circumstances he felt that five hundred lines would just about meet the occasion.

The Remove, however, thought very differently. For no sooner had the

masters and prefects vanished than a crowd of angry juniors surrounded Adams and Farman.

"Aw, say, what's the big idea?" asked Adams. "You guys ain't sore, are you?"

"Not half so sore as you'll be by the time we've done with you!" replied Handforth darkly. "You—you silly Yankee fatheads! We'll teach you to get us out of bed at five o'clock in the morning!"

"Listen!" said Farman warmly. "You can call Adams a Yankee if you like. But I'm not a Yankee!"

"Rats! You're an American, aren't you?"

"They only raise Yankees in the East," said Farman, with a sniff. "I guess I'm from the West—from the big open spaces."



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"Well, there's a big open space you're going to now!" said Nipper briskly. "It's rather a wet space, and it might be a bit deep." He turned to the others. "I think these two chaps need cooling off a bit, don't you? We'll chuck 'em in the Stowe!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Grab 'em!"

"We'll show them how to celebrate Independence Day!"

"Yes, rather!"

Ulysses Spencer Adams and Justin B. Farman, to their consternation and dismay, were seized by many hands and whirled towards the river. Fully dressed as they were, they were raised on high and heaved enthusiastically into the river. They descended with mighty splashes. And thereafter their enthusiasm for Independence Day was noticeably lessened!

"**N**O good going to bed again now," said Nipper. "What about changing into our bathing togs and having a good long dip?"

"Not at all a bad idea," said Tommy Watson.

Handforth and Travers and several other Removites heartily agreed. They were standing near the river, and Adams and Farman had crept back to their tent to change. The rest of the camp had decided to retire—for there was a good hour or more yet before the official rising hour.

"Hold on, you chaps!" said Waldo, of the Remove. "Just a minute!"

He was staring across the countryside towards the forbidding old house which just peeped from beyond the outskirts of Bellton Woods. All the boys knew this old house as Moat Hollow. It was a place with a sinister reputation; it was empty, and had been empty for some months.

"What is it, Waldo?" asked Nipper curiously.

"Perhaps I'm a bit suspicious these days," said Stanley Waldo, as he stared, "but I thought I saw— Yes, look! There are two men just climbing over that high wall!"

"Jiggered if I can see them!" said Handforth, shading his eyes from the sun.

"I can't see them, either," said Nipper. "But that's nothing. Waldo's got eyes like telescopes."

It was perfectly true. For this particular junior was the son of the famous Rupert Waldo, the Peril Expert, and he inherited many of his father's amazing qualities—super-keen eyesight, hearing, and touch. His strength, too, was phenomenal.

"I saw them quite distinctly," said Waldo. "They only appeared for a flash, just beyond those bushes. They dropped down from the Moat Hollow wall. By Jove! I suspected it! Look there! A car is just moving off!"

Nipper was the only other fellow who caught sight of that car, in the far distance. It had evidently been parked off the road, beyond the wall of the old house.

"It's funny," said Nipper thoughtfully. "I might have thought the fellows were tramps, but the car makes such an idea out of the question. Why should people with a car be in that lonely old house at five o'clock in the morning?"

"Perhaps they were disturbed by those maroons going off?" suggested Reggie Pitt, of the West House.

"That's about it," nodded Nipper. "But what they were disturbed at? And why should they bunk?"

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter," said Handforth. "Let's go and get into our bathing suits and have a dip."

They all went to their tents, but before they got there Church, glancing across Bellton Wood in the direction of Moat Hollow, noticed a column of blackish smoke rising lazily into the heavens.

"I say, there's something fishy about this, Handy," he said. "I'll swear that smoke is coming from Moat Hollow. What the dickens have those men been up to? That's not the smoke of a chimney, either."

Nipper stared, and he frowned.

"How about going along to have a look?" he suggested briskly. "It's silly, perhaps, to think of old Whittle; but don't forget how he tried to trick us yesterday."

"By George!" ejaculated Handforth excitedly. "You're right, old son! It's Whittle! I'll bet a penny to a quid that Whittle's at the bottom of this!"

"Come on!" urged Waldo. "I've a big hunch that it's something really important."

Within five minutes a dozen Removites, with Nipper at their head, dashed off.

CHAPTER 4.

The St. Frank's Fire Fighters!

THE juniors who hurried off to Moat Hollow whilst the rest of the camp went back to bed were mainly Scouts belonging to the Lion Patrol and the Tiger Patrol. They were all very keen—and very suspicious.

They leapt over the gate at the bottom of the Half Mile Meadow, gained the lane, and proceeded towards the village at the

double. The distance, as the crow flies, may have been shorter by going through Bellton Wood, but it would have taken much longer.

Moat Hollow stood back from the road, surrounded by its high wall, just at the junction of the lane which led parallel with the Stowe to the River House School.

The high walls might have formed a serious obstacle to a less agile party; but these youngsters, being Boy Scouts, were hardly delayed. Hoisting themselves upon one another's shoulders, they shinned up, and presently they were all within the Moat Hollow garden. It was a wilderness of weeds and bushes and rank grass.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Handforth breathlessly. "Look at that!"

Smoke was pouring from one of the lower windows, two or three panes of which were broken. The smoke came out in dense, sluggish billows.

"The place is on fire!" exclaimed Tommy Watson.

"We'll soon see!" said Nipper briskly. "Come on! It can't be much, anyhow, and we'll soon put it out! Seems to me that it's a jolly good thing we came."

They did not waste time by attempting to break down the back door, which was locked and bolted. They went straight for the window, Nipper and Handforth seizing staves of wood from an old rubbish pile.

Without hesitation, they attacked the window, smashing the remaining glass and wrecking the rotten frame. The smoke was now pouring out densely, and all the Scouts could hear an ominous crackling.

"Phew! We're not a moment too soon!" said Potts. "Look at that red glow through the smoke! This room is blazing already!"

"Where's some water?" asked Travers.

Nipper had dived through into the smother of smoke, and, groping his way forward into the room, his eyes smarting agonisingly, he located the source of the fire. Against the opposite wall a great pile of faggots and rubbish was blazing fiercely, the added draught from the window having helped the flames. In that one glance, Nipper knew that it would be touch and go. The fire was gaining a strong hold—and it was a fire which could not possibly have occurred accidentally. For Nipper plainly detected the odour of paraffin or petrol in the smoke-laden air. Once the fire gained a strong hold, it would spread rapidly, in-

volving the whole of that empty, tinder-dry old building.

Nipper groped his way back to the window, where other Removites were scrambling through.

"No!" gasped Nipper. "No sense in your coming in yet. We must have water. There's plenty in the well, I believe. Buck up, you chaps!"

"But what can we carry the water in?" gasped Handforth. "By George! I've got it! What about that rubbish heap? There are lots of old empty cans —"

"Go ahead, then!" urged Nipper. "Don't waste time!"

Fortunately, there was a well in the garden, surmounted by a pump which was in perfect order. And in the rubbish heap the boys found a number of empty tins, dilapidated pails, a leaky watering-can, a decrepit coal-scuttle, and similar useful articles. Half of them were more or less like sieves, but they held the water sufficiently long to be effective. The Scouts formed up in a line from the pump to the window, with Nipper and Handforth inside the room, receiving the water supply as it arrived.

It was an object lesson in level-headedness—in prompt action. Without the loss of a moment, the Boy Scouts had got busy, and, once busy, they kept at it without a moment's pause.

Presently clouds of steam were issuing from that window in addition to the acrid smoke. Nipper and Handforth, within the room, fought desperately. With their scarves tied round their mouths and nostrils, they kept up a continuous onslaught. They poured the water on to the flames; they dashed canful after canful into the heart of the fire. It was the persistence of their efforts which ultimately won success.

Waldo and Fullwood came in to relieve Nipper and Handforth, and at this point it was doubtful if the Scouts' efforts would be successful. The flames seemed to be gaining in strength.

"Keep it up!" croaked Nipper, through his muffler. "It's now or never, you chaps! If the fire gets a firm hold, it'll beat us!"

They kept at it desperately. Before long the flames were less; and once the turning-point had been reached, the rest was comparatively easy.

At last, with the Scouts more or less "all in," the conflagration was conquered. The air cleared, and now there was nothing but an acrid, pungent odour filling the atmosphere. The fire was out.

"WELL, we did it!" said Handforth breathlessly.

They had had a welcome rest, and the fresh morning air had completely revived them. Their lungs felt a bit raw and their eyes smarted, but they didn't care. They were now surveying the damage done by the fire.

It did not amount to a great deal. The floor was nearly burnt through across one half of the room, and the water-sodden mass of rubbish was still slightly steaming. The walls and ceiling were badly blackened; but owing to the brisk methods of the fire-fighters, the damage had been confined to that one half of the room.

"If we had been five minutes later, nothing could have saved Moat Hollow from total destruction," said Nipper.

"And even then we only saved the place because we worked like niggers," remarked Travers. "Who owns Moat Hollow, by the way? I think we ought to get a nice fat reward for this!"

"Never mind that now," said Nipper. "The point is—who started the fire, and why? It was obviously done deliberately!"

"Yes, by those men I spotted climbing over the wall and who escaped in the car," said Waldo, nodding. "Don't you think we'd better have a look round the rest of the house? We might be able to pick up a clue."

"By George, yes!" said Handforth eagerly. "Footprints — eh? Those blighters might have left other clues, too! Come on!"

He was the first out into the dark passage, with its stone-flagged floor. Moat Hollow was an old house, and although it was quite a large building the St. Frank's juniors knew every foot of it by heart. They had had many an adventure, in fact, within these quaint old walls.

Handforth strode into the room on the opposite side of the passage, and he gave a cursory glance round. Then suddenly he turned his head again, and his attention became fixed. His eyes grew wider.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated blankly.

"What is it?" asked Nipper, who was just behind him.

"Look at this!" said Handforth. "Well, I'm jiggered!"

All the Scouts crowded in, and they stared with equal amazement. The room was empty except for a pile of faggots and odds and ends of wood against the opposite wall. The air was heavy with the reek of paraffin.

But the most surprising thing of all was a candle burning on the floor, some distance from the pile of rubbish. The candle seemed to be embedded in a pool

of black powder, and a trail of this black powder led thickly across the floor to the paraffin-soaked faggots.

"Go easy!" advised Nipper urgently. "Mind how you walk, you chaps! If you upset that candle there'll be another fire!"

"But—but——" began Handforth.

Nipper, moving gently forward, bent down and picked up some of the black powder. He sniffed at it, and his expression was eloquent.

"I thought so!" he exclaimed tensely. "Gunpowder!"

"What!"

It was a general exclamation, and all the Scouts crowded in, freshly excited and bewildered.

"Gunpowder!" repeated Nipper. "By Jove! The cunning of it! When this candle burns down—and that'll take nearly two hours—it'll set fire to the gunpowder, and the gunpowder will blaze across to the paraffin-soaked wood. At least, it would do if we allowed the candle to burn."

He snuffed it out as he spoke, and the others felt somewhat relieved.

"A simple dodge—and a crude one," went on Nipper. "But pretty effective, all the same. And where's the evidence—afterwards? No paraffin-can—no trace of incendiaryism at all."

"No trace of what?" asked Handforth, staring.

"I mean, that if this house had burnt down, nobody would have been able to tell, afterwards, that it had been purposely set on fire," said Nipper. "We'd better have a look through the other rooms—especially on the ground floor."

"But I don't understand——" began Tommy Watson.

"None of us understands—although we can suspect," interrupted Nipper. "Anyhow, let's have a look at these other rooms before we go any further."

They looked, and they were more startled than ever. For in no less than eight rooms—every ground-floor apartment, and two big rooms upstairs—they found precisely the same conditions. Candles burning in little pools of gunpowder; trails of gunpowder to paraffin-soaked masses of inflammable rubbish. And in each case the candle had burned down to a similar point.

"Of course, you fellows can understand what this means?" asked Nipper, looking round. "All these candles would have burned down to the gunpowder at approximately the same minute. Roughly, at about half-past seven."

"Just when we were beginning breakfast," nodded Handforth.

"Exactly!" said Nipper. "The fires would have started in every room at the same minute—and nothing on earth could have saved Moat Hollow from total destruction. A dozen fire brigades would never have been able to fight such a fire."

"Well, anyway, dear old fellows, it proves that our gentle friend, Mr. Whittle, is in earnest," remarked Travers dryly.

"Whittle!" went up a shout.

"Who else?" said Travers. "Why should those candles have been timed to burn down at exactly seven-thirty?"

"We can't prove anything, of course, but I'm bound to admit that your theory fits very nicely," said Nipper. "Can't you picture what would have followed, you chaps? The whole camp at breakfast, and then the alarm. Moat Hollow on fire! In the excitement, it's pretty certain that the whole camp would have dashed off the Half Mile Meadow."

"Not after yesterday surely?" protested Fullwood. "We're not fools enough to be caught that way twice!"

"When a wave of excitement goes through a big crowd, that crowd doesn't stop to think," said Nipper. "That's what Whittle was relying on. And there wouldn't have been a shred of evidence against him, either. Nobody would ever have been able to prove how Moat Hollow had got on fire."

"But it was on fire!" objected Handforth. "Didn't we put it out?"

"That old saying, 'There's many a slip,' is a pretty true one," nodded Nipper. "It's funny, but we've really got to thank Adams and Farman for this. Those two American chaps saved Moat Hollow from destruction."

"Rot!" said Handforth. "They weren't even here!"

"No; but they awoke the whole camp with their Independence Day stunt," said Nipper. "We shouldn't have been awake until half-past six ordinarily, and not a soul would have known anything about these preparations."

"Yes, they would," put in Watson. "The whole house would have been ablaze by then."

"I don't think so," replied Nipper. "Something went wrong here—one of the fires started hours before it should have done. And I think we can be pretty certain how it started, too. Those maroons going off scared the men, and they shoved off in a hurry. Perhaps one of them slammed the door of that room, and upset the candle without knowing it. So that particular fire was started prematurely."

"By George, he's right, you chaps!" said Handforth eagerly. "Doesn't it just

show you how things can go wrong? Whittle ought to be prosecuted for doing a rotten thing like this! I vote we go to the police——"

"Oh, no!" interrupted Nipper. "We couldn't give the police any real evidence. We'd never be able to fasten this on to Whittle. We don't even know ourselves that Whittle is the culprit."

"Don't know?" repeated Handforth, staring. "But it's as clear as daylight!"

"Of course it is; but, at the best, we can only suspect him," replied Nipper. "We haven't an atom of real proof. So it would be dotty to go to the police. No; the best thing we can do is to clear up this mess here, take the gunpowder away and throw it in a pond or the river, and make the place safe. We'll say nothing about it to the prefects or masters, and then lie low and see what happens."

"And watch old Whittle's face the next time he comes round—eh?" grinned Travers. "By Samson! It'll be worth watching, too! After going to all this trouble and expense, he'll be a bit peeved to find out that nothing has happened!"

For a solid hour the Scouts worked hard, undoing all the work which the mysterious plotters had done.

There wasn't a doubt in any of those boys' minds regarding the identity of the plotters. Amos Whittle had been here—and it was now clearer than ever that Amos Whittle was an unscrupulous enemy.

CHAPTER 5.

The Plotters!

"GOOD old Independence Day!" said Nipper enthusiastically.

He clapped Ulysses Spencer Adams on the shoulder, and the U.S.A. junior grinned somewhat sheepishly.

"Aw, shucks!" he protested. "Forget it!"

"My dear chap, I'm one hundred per cent. for Independence Day!" declared Nipper. "Good old Fourth of July!"

"Say, quit your kidding, will you?"

"I'm not kidding, old man," said Nipper. "Ask Handy or Fullwood or Waldo or Travers. We're jolly grateful to you, Adams, for letting off those fireworks at five o'clock this morning. In fact, we're so grateful that we're all going to help you and Farman to do those five hundred lines."

"Gee! Is that on the level?" asked Adams eagerly.



Using buckets, jugs and any old thing they could lay their hands on, Nipper & Co. fought desperately to subdue the fire.

"Of course," said Nipper. "We'll do a hundred lines each—ten of us—and the job will be finished in no time. And even if old Wilkey spots something squiffy about the lines, he'll wink at 'em. He's a sport."

Farman was looking puzzled.

"I guess you fellows have changed a bit, haven't you?" he asked. "It's not so long since you pitched us into the creek."

"Don't you call our magnificent river a creek, my lad," said Nipper sternly. "And as for that ducking—forget it! We take it back. Just try to imagine that you weren't ducked at all."

"Say, have you guys gone cuckoo?" asked Adams bluntly. "What's the racket, anyway?"

Nipper and many other Removites explained. The two American boys, naturally, were mightily pleased with themselves when they realised how their early morning "hullabaloo" had frustrated the Moat Hollow plot.

"I'm not saying that everybody in camp would have dashed off to the fire, but there's just a chance that it might have happened," said Nipper. "That

means that you've saved the Half Mile Meadow from being seized by Whittle. Archie did it yesterday, and you American chaps have done it to-day. Good egg! After this, we'll be well on our guard."

The news, of course, had spread rapidly throughout the Remove and Fourth, and it was being talked of, too, in the Third. The Fifth and Sixth heard rumours, but they did not take much notice.

It was better, on the whole, that there should be no publicity about that Moat Hollow affair. The effect upon Amos Whittle—if he was indeed guilty—would be all the more devastating when he discovered that absolutely nothing had happened. He would be mystified—and therefore worried.

As a matter of fact, this is exactly what happened.

For Amos Whittle was the originator of the stunt. He was waiting in his office, together with Mansell. It was nearly eight o'clock, and Whittle was getting jumpy.

"I can't understand it!" he snapped, for the twentieth time. "Why don't we

hear something Mansell? Surely they'll call the Bannington Fire Brigade?"

"Almost certain to, sir," replied Mansell. "Perhaps the fire hasn't been discovered yet."

"It must have been discovered by now!" insisted Whittle, pacing up and down. "Didn't we experiment very carefully with those candles? They should have burned down by seven-thirty, and within a few minutes the whole of that house must have been in flames. It's now nearly eight o'clock. The fire-engines ought to have dashed past fifteen minutes ago."

They were at a disadvantage. Not daring to trust any of his men with such a secret as this, Whittle and Mansell had done the job entirely themselves. They had entered Moat Hollow at the first streak of dawn, not risking the use of any lights in that supposedly empty house. They had had little or no fear that they would be seen in the neighbourhood by any of the Bellton villagers. Or even if they were seen, nothing would be thought of their presence.

"I'm worried about those maroons that went off at five o'clock," went on Whittle. "Why did they go off? We were forced to leave in a hurry, Mansell——"

"But not before we had completely finished, sir," interrupted Mansell. "Every candle was burning—everything was prepared. Nobody saw us go, so what does it matter? The candles must have burned down by half-past seven, and it's just as certain that every room in that house is now blazing."

"And yet the Bannington Fire Brigade hasn't been called," grunted Whittle. "Why not? There's only a tin-pot fire-engine in Bellton—no earthly use at all against a big fire."

He looked at his watch, and found that it was just eight o'clock.

"I can't stand this any longer!" he snapped. "Come on; we'll drive to Bellton. I didn't intend to be seen there at all, but what does it matter? It might be all the better really. And at least we shall know for certain what is happening."

Within two minutes, they were in Whittle's car, driving towards Bellton.

"We needn't go all the way there," said Mansell. "We shall see the smoke and fire in the distance, and we can turn back as soon as we have completely satisfied ourselves. By the way, sir, your men are all ready near the meadow, aren't they?"

"Of course," replied Whittle. "The instant that meadow is empty, they'll enter and claim possession."

But Whittle was more uneasy than ever. He had decided that it would be advisable, on this occasion, to remain in the background. He had instructed his men to take possession of the meadow, and to telephone him the instant they had done so. Then he would arrive upon the scene as though the whole affair had been really accidental.

"I'm not sure that you're right, Mansell," he grunted, as they drove. "Ever since we prepared that fire I've been worried. It's too dangerous. Supposing something should have gone wrong?"

"There's no evidence against you, sir," said Mansell.

"But those boys aren't fools—they'll realise the truth," grunted the other. "I don't like this thing at all. I didn't like it from the first—and I told you so. I was an idiot to let you have your way. In any case, I don't believe the boys will desert the meadow at all. They're on their guard now. Confound you, Mansell, you forced me into this thing against my will."

Mansell was silent. It was true that he had suggested the plan; but Whittle had fallen in with the scheme enthusiastically. It was decidedly boorish of him to change his views now and to talk in this way.

Moreover, Mansell was otherwise engaged. He was staring across the meadows, in the direction of Bellton. In the clear morning air the red roofs of the village could be distinctly seen, with the quaint old church spire.

"Funny!" muttered Mansell, frowning. "Look over there, sir. You can just see a corner of Moat Hollow beyond those trees."

Whittle slowed the car, and stared in the direction his manager indicated. With Bellton Wood as a background, Moat Hollow was just visible—at least, a part of the house peeped out from behind some clumps of thick trees. But there was no smoke—no evidence of a fire. The old place looked as peaceful and as sleepily deserted as ever.

"This is extraordinary!" muttered Whittle agitatedly. "Why hasn't the fire started? Were we wrong about those candles?"

"We couldn't have been, sir," replied Mansell. "We experimented three or four times, and gauged them almost to a minute."

"Then what can have happened?" asked Whittle hoarsely. "What on earth can have happened, Mansell? And what are we going to do? How can we definitely find out the truth of this extraordinary business?"

"Well, we can't go to the house—that's certain," replied Mansell slowly. "If the boys have discovered anything, and they see us there—well, whatever they may have suspected will be confirmed. I don't think we'd better go into Bellton at all."

Mr. Whittle drove a little nearer until Moat Hollow, across the meadows, was more clearly in sight. Then he got out of the car, and he was visibly shaking.

"Somebody must have seen us getting away, Mansell!" he muttered. "Those boys, without question. They saw us, and they went into the house and put out those candles! Man alive, don't you realise what this might lead to?"

Mansell was alarmed, but he did not show it.

"Nobody saw us at close quarters, sir," he replied. "I don't suppose for a moment that anybody saw us at all. In any case, we could not have been recognised. It's obvious that something has gone wrong—or the house would be on fire."

"Of course it's gone wrong!" snapped Whittle. "I told you from the first that it was a crazy, dangerous idea. I was a fool to support you in it!"

"You were enthusiastic enough about it last night!" said Mansell sourly.

The faint sound of a bugle came on the warm breeze from the meadows beyond the wood.

"The camp is carrying on in just the same way as usual," said Whittle harshly. "Those boys are in possession, and they mean to remain in possession. Mansell, they mustn't beat us like this!"

"Don't worry about Moat Hollow, sir; there's no evidence that can possibly incriminate us," said Mansell. "We were very careful. We left no footprints, or any other trace."

"All the same, it was risky—too risky," insisted the other. "It wasn't worth it, either."

"So it's turned out, but we didn't know at the time that the whole thing would fizzle," argued Mansell. "If that old house had fired up, as we planned——"

"I don't think it would have worked, even then," interrupted Mr. Whittle. "The boys are too much on their guard. They won't be fooled by any such crude device. They know that I am definitely against them, and they will therefore take every precaution."



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He frowned, and his gaze drifted towards Moat Hollow again.

"No, nothing," he muttered. "Not a sign of smoke. I'd give fifty pounds to know what has happened, Mansell! Don't forget that we brought ourselves within reach of the law by doing what we did with those candles and that gunpowder. There's such a word as arson, my friend—and it's an ugly word."

Mansell laughed.

"Put that fear out of your mind," he said almost contemptuously. "How many more times must I tell you that there is no evidence against us?"

"Well, I'm not going to try any more plans of that kind," said Whittle. "They're too dangerous. Yet there must be a way to get the better of these school-boys. There must, Mansell!"

"There is, sir—if only we can think of it," said Mansell dryly.

Whittle waved his hand across towards the river, and the fair sweep of meadowlands.

"You can see the situation exactly here, Mansell," he said almost eagerly. "You notice how the river takes an acute bend, doubling right back on itself. It passes under the bridge just on the other side of Bellton, comes right down, turns again near the Caistowe Road, and then sweeps right back to Bannington. The Half Mile Meadow is the one spot, of all spots, for my new saw-mills."

"I know it, sir," said Mansell.

"Once I have established myself on the new site, I shall have further schemes to put into effect," continued Whittle. "It will be a comparatively easy matter to cut a canal from one bend of the Stowe to the other, thus shortening the distance to Caistowe by nearly two miles. That will mean a great saving of time. I must have this site, Mansell. I shall lose thousands of pounds if these boys succeed in defying me until the end of the month."

"We mustn't think of it," said Mansell decisively. "I have another plan—"

"If it's anything like the last I don't want to hear it," said Whittle curtly.

"But it's not," said the works manager. "Look here, sir," he added, pointing. "I've just noticed how the meadows dip beyond the wood. There's quite a hollow there."

"Yes; in the winter-time those meadows are generally flooded," agreed Whittle. "Not that it will make any difference to me; it will be an easy matter to reinforce the river bank and prevent any flooding in future."

Mansell's eyes were gleaming.

"Yes, sir, I have an idea," he said slowly. "And if this one doesn't work

the trick, I'll go back to the carpenter's shop and you can give my job to the office-boy!"

CHAPTER 6.

The Night Alarm!

ALL day long, of course, the St. Frank's boys remained on the alert. The seniors did not interest themselves very deeply in the precautionary measures which the juniors were taking.

"There's no need to be afraid of Old Man Whittle," said Biggleswade, voicing the general opinion of the Upper School. "He's shown his colours now, and if he tries any more of his tricks we shall know what to do."

But the seniors did not quite realise Mr. Amos Whittle's unscrupulousness. Nipper and Handforth and the other juniors were keeping that Moat Hollow affair to themselves. They did not want Whittle to hear anything; it would be so much better for the man to remain mystified and puzzled as to what had happened at the old house. But the Removites were all the more alert because of their startling discovery.

Although there was no occasion during that day for any special guard to be kept over the camp, certain juniors remained on sentry duty in turns. They were keeping their eyes wide open—they were watching for the first sign of activity on the part of the enemy.

But evening came, and there had been no move from Whittle.

"He's scared," said Handforth, as he sat round the camp-fire with the other Tigers. "That's what's the matter with Whittle. When he found that Moat Hollow didn't go up in a blaze, he got windy. So he's lying low."

"We mustn't take anything for granted, dear old fellow," said Travers. "We know that Whittle is a tricky blighter, and he's liable to spring a fresh surprise at any moment."

"But what else can he do?" asked Church. "Now that we're on the alert, we won't swallow any of his bunkum. He can't turn us off by force. After all, we're only complying with the instructions of his uncle's will."

"A man like that will descend to any treachery," said Handforth darkly. "Somehow, I've got an idea that he'll get busy in the middle of the night—when we're all asleep."

"Rats!" said Jimmy Potts. "What can Whittle do at night? That's just the time when we're absolutely safe—because every member of the camp is here."

"That's true," said McClure, nodding. "This camp is run just the same as St. Frank's. After calling-over, we're confined to the meadow—just as we're confined to gates up at the school. Everybody has got to be in by calling-over. Whittle's far more likely to take action during the day, when the camp is deserted except for a dozen or so fellows."

(Continued on page 24.)

LINE UP HERE FOR A GOOD LAUGH, LADS !

HANDFORTH'S Weekly



No. 11. Vol. 1.

EDITORIAL STAFF.

July 4th, 1931.

THE EDITOR REGRETS
that his usual "Chinwag"
will not wag this week.

Editor-in-Chief E. O. Handforth
Editor E. O. Handforth
Chief Sub-Editor E. O. Handforth
Literary Editor E. O. Handforth
Art Editor E. O. Handforth
Rest of Staff E. O. Handforth

TUCKSHOP TOPICS.
By
Clarence Fellowe.

THE fellows have been saying I take up too much of the paper with my Editorial chin-wag. Jevver hear anything like that. ME take up too much of MY OWN paper. What a nerve some chaps have got!

So just to put their noses out of joint, I'm not going to write an Editorial at all this week—in fact, I'm not going to write one single word in the whole of this issue from beginning to end. That'll show 'em.

By George, though! After I've been decent and generous enough to let fellows like Nipper and Pitt write awful tripe for my spanking paper, I really think this is a bit too thick.

So, take note, you rotters! If I hear any more complaints about my paper, I'll dish out a few black eyes and thick ears. I'll show you who's boss on this journal.

E. O. HANDFORTH.

CAN YOU READ THIS ?

THE following awful sentence was written, without any punctuation marks, in an essay on "Speaking Good English," by Teddy Long. It turned poor old Crowell's hair white, and even Mr. Wilkes could make nothing of it. And yet it was sense—after a fashion—when properly punctuated. Can you read the sentence?

SAY IT IS NOT NOT IT ISN'T OR IT'S NOT IT IS NOT IS NOT IT ISN'T AND IT IS NOT IS NOT IT'S NOT IT IS IT IS NOT.

Well, any luck? If not, look below. This is how it should read:

Say "It is not"—not "It isn't," or "It's not." "It is not" is not "It isn't," and "It is not" is not "It's not." It is, "It is not."

MRS. HAKE makes sad mistakes over the price of cherry cakes; her drink is prime, but it's nearly time she charged us less for lemon and lime. I mean to say, we have to pay a penny to take the bottle away; that's so much gain—it's perfectly plain that we don't get the penny back again.

That she will cop you on the hop unless you drink it in her shop is true enough, and it's rather rough to be compelled to drink the stuff in a tiny den of six by ten with forty-seven other men. If you won't agree to that, you see, you take it away and pay a D. It makes me sore, and, what is more, if you don't get there sharp at four, you're crowded out by some senior lout and have to wait for hours without a chance of being heard or seen until the Fifth and Sixth have been there first and eaten all the grub—aye, there's the rub; it makes me blub when louts barge in and eat the grub.

And Mrs. Hake ain't wide-awake. Oh, what an awful time she'll take to find and serve some cold preserve—she's growing old and losing nerve. She can't serve all the chaps that bawl; she simply gapes and hears them call: "Give me a spoon!" "A macaroon!" "Can I be served this afternoon?" "A doughnut here!" "One ginger-beer!" "Excuse, me, madam, can you hear?" "Ah! She's just heard!" Hot and flustered, she gives him a nice big glass of mustard.

But there's one mistake that Mrs. Hake—take it from me—will never make. She makes a practice to arrange never to give us too much change.

Of course, that's hard luck; but she sells ripping tuck, and her sweets are good to suck. And her sample of meat patty: "They're my favourite," says Fatty.

So up goes the cry to the skies on high, and heartily echoed by I: "Long live Mrs. Hake!" And that's no mistake—if only for the school's sake!

IMAGINARY INTERVIEWS. No. 2.

Our Interesting Interviewer calls on
William Shakespeare.

"MORNING, Bill," said I, strolling into the Globe Theatre, Southwark.

Mr. Shakespeare was discussing a flagon of wine in his dressing-room. He nodded genially to me.

"Faith, thou art come at a good season," he said. "I prithee share my sup o' wine."

"No, thanks, Bill. I'd rather have ginger-pop."

"As you like it!" he yawned. "But, faith, what would you with me, my master?"

"I've just dropped in to ask you whether you wrote those plays, or old Frank Bacon."

"That pig Bacon!" hooted Shakespeare. "Nonsense! I wrote them each one—measure for measure."

"Our master, old Crowsfeet, swears that Bacon wrote your plays," I told him.

"Ha, ha! 'Tis indeed much ado about nothing. As a matter of fact—this is between ourselves—I wrote Bacon's work as well as my own. 'S'fact!"

"Then what did Bacon write?"

"Him? Oh, he wrote advertisements for a margarine firm. He was nobody. Everybody thinks he was a big noise, but that's only a comedy of errors. I'm the boy who did all the work. And how! I tell you, laddie, I was a real swift worker. Why, I wrote 'She Stoops to Conquer' in six hours."

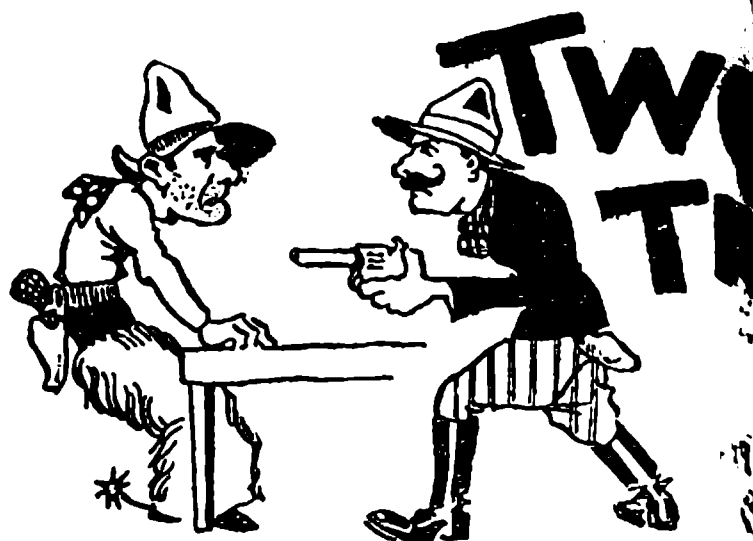
"But I thought Goldsmith wrote that?" I gasped.

Shakespeare frowned.

"Did he?" he muttered. "I think it was me. In fact, I remember it distinctly. I wrote it at the same time as I produced 'The School for Scandal.'"

(Continued at foot of col. 5.)

Gripping, Exciting Short Story



EDITOR'S NOTE: Professor Tucker ambled into my study the other day, and produced what he said was a short story of the Wild West. It was written on 436 pages of foolscap. I have burnt 433 of them, and boiled the rest down to just over two columns. In case you don't understand this story, I'll translate it as we go.—E.O.H.)

TWO-GUN THEOPHILUS sat in his Texas dwelling—which is, I believe, usually termed a shack. He was the Bad Man of Texas, and he was scowling horribly.

His glance rested upon a common house-spider (a Tegenaria Derhamii, not to be confused with the Lycosidae), and he watched it spin its web, which, as you know, originates from glands called spinnerettes contained in the unsegmented abdomen of the Arachnida, and is composed of a glutinous, viscid substance which interweaves to form a strand of remarkable tenacity and strength. (All this means that old Two-Gun What's-his-name was watching a spider. By George! Did you ever read such rot?—E.O.H.)

The Bad Man was entirely covered with guns, revolvers and pimples. These latter were the result of Acne—the Punctata, not the Rosacea—and were in a state of acute suppuration. These pimples were annoying and unpleasant, and Two-Gun didn't like them at all. In fact, that was why he was scowling horribly.

There was a footstep outside, and the Sheriff entered. This officer must not be thought to have any connection with the High Sheriff of an English County. The title of Sheriff is a very old one, and goes back to Saxon times, when the Sheriff of a village was its virtual chief. (This yarn's getting on, you chaps. This is WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN TOLD. Two-Gun Theophilus is

Sports Bulletin—Cricket.

ANCIENT HOUSE WINS.

By Nipper

RATHER to our surprise—for we were fielding a scratch eleven—we managed to beat the East House easily in our last match. We had expected a better showing from Armstrong & Co. Batting first, they started quite well. Freeman and Turner, the opening pair, put on 20 runs without being separated, and we thought the East House were going to knock up a hefty score.

But, after Turner had left for 12, Freeman for 14, Armstrong for 11 and Griffiths for 10, there was a sad collapse, the remainder of the eleven managing to put on only 16 more runs. The innings closed for 67 runs—4 extras. Travers carried off chief bowling honours—6 for 29.

The Ancient House started worse than their opponents, but finished much better. The Editor of a certain piffing weekly opened the innings

and permitted the second ball to hurl two of his three stumps to the ground. (By George! It was the worst fluke I've ever seen! The ball hit a molehill, or something, and simply whizzed!—E.O.H.)

The Captain of the Side—modesty forbids me to mention his name—played sparkling cricket for a score of 3 runs, after which he was given out l.b.w. by an umpire who wasn't looking. However, De Valerie and Fullwood came to our aid with a fine stand of 42 runs, and then Tommy Watson hit two sixes in a score of 31—and we finished with a grand total of 151 runs for the innings. (De Valerie 30, Fullwood 21, Church 17, Travers 15 and Clive Russell 12.)

East House is playing Modern House this week, and they will have to pull up their socks if they hope to beat Buster Boots & Co.

y that Goes with a Bang!

GUN THEOPHILUS



By

Professor Sylvester Tucker.

atching a spider covered with
mples when the Sheriff comes in.—
(O.H.)

The Sheriff raised his hat and dis-
osed a bald head and a grizzled
oustache. The hairs of his mous-
che were what is known as
oniliform hairs—that is, putting it
ore simply, it was a case of Trichor-
xis Nodosa. (Great Jupiter! Givo
e a wet towel!—E.O.H.)

The Bad Man's hand instantly
arted towards his lethal weapon—
y the way, I wonder how many boys
ow that a revolving firearm
ctually existed in the year sixteen
undred and something? Explosives,
course, have been discovered for
any hundreds of years. History
ecords the discovery of a powerful
xplosive by a Norman monk; but
bes not say what happened to him.
ome people think he has not come
own yet. (For goodness' sake cut
le cackle and get down to the story.
—E.O.H.)

The Sheriff, however, was what is
alled "quickest on the draw," and
e caught up his firepiece and
covered Theophilus with it. This
oes not mean that he stretched his
eapon over Theophilus to form a
vering or panoply above his head.
o, no. The term implies that the
heriff pointed—or, may I say,
velled?—his weapon at the shrink-
ng Bad man, and requested him, in
olite tones, to raise his hands in an
pwards—or antigravitational—direc-
ion. (All this simply means, "Hands
p!"—E.O.H.)

The Bad Man was not slow to
mply with this request, the more
pecially as the Sheriff hinted that
ilure to respond to his demand
ould necessitate the despatching of
bullet into the Bad Man's thorax.

Mind, I do not wish to state that a
ullet in the thorax would, of neces-
ty, prove fatal. It is to be borne in
ind that such a bullet might easily
biss the œsophagus, the thoracic-duct

and the bronchi of the lungs
—indeed, cases of this
actually happening are by no
means unknown. But it
would, at the very least,
cause a momentary and fleet-
ing inconvenience, and this,
as far as possible, the Bad
Man wished to avoid. (What
the Jumping Rattlesnakes
does all this mean? I'm
going potty.—E.O.H.)

The Bad Man accordingly
raised his hands— (Look
here, this will take up all the
rest of the paper. I'll tell
you the end of it in a few
words. The Bad Man
managed to dodge the Sheriff
and rushed out of the shack.
When he got outside, though,
he tripped on an iguana
(Anolis carolinensis), and fell
head over heels on the
ground. The Sheriff then
pranced up and pinched him.
and took him away to the
local gaol. And a jolly good
yarn, too—I don't think.—
E.O.H.)

Imaginary Interviews

(Continued.)

"But Sheridan wrote that!"
I ejaculated.

"Nonsense! Goldsmith and
Sheridan were just two pen-
names of mine. I was the
boy who wrote 'em."

"But Goldsmith and Sheri-
dan lived nearly two hundred
years later."

"What rot! That's what
you learn at St. Frank's.
You don't want to take any
notice of that sort of stuff.
They were merely pen-names
of mine—so were Dickens,
Thackeray, Addison and—
and all the rest of them."

"Phew!"

"And now—coming down to
serious business—can you
lend me a couple of groats
till next Saturday?"

I produced the groats.

"Good!" he said. "All's
well that ends well. Now you
can go and chase yourself.
I'm going out with old Mil-
ton. Chin-chin!"

"Good-bye, Mr. Shakes-
peare."

He turned back when he
got to the door.

"I forgot to mention," he
said, "that Milton is another
pen-name of mine. Good-
bye!"

READY WIT

FROM

REGGIE PIT

HALLO, everybody! This
is Station P.I.T.T.
broadcasting on a
wave-length of
1,000,000 kilowatts. For our
first item, on to-night's pro-
gramme we are going over to
the Gymnasium for the Big
Fight. Fatty Little is fight-
ing Timothy Tucker for the
heavyweight championship of
St. Frank's.

Whr-r-r-r! S-z-z-z-z!

"Ladies and gentlemen! On
my right, Mr. Fatty Little.
On my left, Mr. Timothy
Tucker. Seconds out of the
ring! Time!"

Slap!

"Ladies and gentlemen!
On my right, Mr. Fatty
Little. At my feet, Mr.
Timothy Tucker."



Hallo, everybody! We are
now going to try to broadcast
the nightingale from the roof
of the Tuckshop. Stand by
for one moment, please.

Wh-r-r-r-r! S-z-z-z-z!

"Meee-owwwwww! Wow-
wow-meee-ow!"

Second General News
Bulletin. A deep depression
is moving off Iceland, and is
expected to settle over the
Remove Form this afternoon
—the deep depression coming
about the same time as the
mathematics exam. There will
be a slight breeze in Form
to-morrow morning about the
time when Pitt is asked to
construe—as Pitt has not
done his preparation. The
slight breeze will not last long,
and things will be rather
warm for the said Pitt shortly
afterwards.

In response to the en-
thusiastic request of the whole
Editorial staff this station is
now closing down for one
week. Good-night, everybody!

THE OPEN AIR HEROES.

(Continued from page 20.)

Handforth grunted.

"That's what everybody's saying," he said tartly. "They reckon that there's no need to keep sentries on duty after lights-out. They say that all the masters are here—and all the prefects—and that it would be a waste of time. I don't believe it. What's more, I'm going to remain on sentry-go until midnight!"

"Good luck, dear old fellow!" grinned Travers. "And after midnight?"

"Church is going to keep guard until two a.m.," replied Handforth.

"Oh, am I?" said Church rebelliously.

"You are, my lad!" replied Handforth. "And you, Mac, will take duty from two until four. And you, Potts, from four until six. And that's how we'll go on—night after night. We'll keep guard in turns."

Travers yawned.

"Well, I'm glad I haven't been mentioned," he observed. "I seem to have escaped."

"You won't escape to-morrow night," replied Handforth firmly. "I'm the Patrol leader of the Tigers, and you chaps will obey my orders!"

"Rot!" said Church. "Why should the Tigers do everything? What about the Lions and the Wolves and the Curlews and all the others?"

"I put it to them, but they wouldn't listen," said Handforth. "I even went to Old Wilkey and suggested keeping watch—but he just patted me on the shoulder and told me not to be an alarmist. Did you ever hear such rot? Old Wilkey actually said that as all the masters and prefects would be here at night there was no need to keep a watch."

Some of the Lions strolled over soon afterwards, and Handforth was gratified to learn that Nipper had come to the conclusion that a watch wouldn't be a bad idea.

"I'll keep you company for the first two hours, Handy," he said briskly. "And after that Montie will do sentry-go with your next man. It's just as well to be on the safe side."

"But, my dear old fellow, Whittle can't do anything at night!" protested Travers. "It'll be just a waste of good sleep!"

HOWEVER, after the camp was all quiet for the night, two shadowy, silent figures remained on the alert. Nipper and Handforth were on the job.

"We can't expect the other chaps to see this thing in the same light as ourselves. Handy," murmured Nipper, when he and Handforth met on their rounds at about eleven o'clock. "They're not serious minded enough."

"They seem to think we're a couple of chumps!" growled Handforth.

"We've got detective minds—and they haven't," murmured Nipper. "That's just the difference."

Handforth peered at him in the gloom.

"You trying to kid me?" he asked suspiciously.

"Not at all, old chap," smiled Nipper. "Isn't it a fact that we're really the only ones who suspect that there might be dirty work during the dark hours? All the others scoff at the very idea. But I'm with you, Handy. Whittle is a cunning, treacherous rotter, and he's just as liable to spring a night surprise as a daylight one. The mere fact that the camp is full may be only a delusion and a snare."

"What are you getting at?" whispered Handforth.

"Why, everybody believes that the camp is safe during the night," said Nipper softly. "And so it is—on the face of things. The obvious course for Whittle to pursue is to take action when the camp is nearly empty—say, when a couple of cricket matches are on the go, and most of the fellows are away. But, by what I know of Whittle, he's not the kind of man to do the obvious thing."

Handforth warmed towards the Remove skipper.

"I wish all the other fellows were as sensible as you," he said gruffly. "Of course, everything's quiet just now, but I can't help having a hunch that something's going to happen before the night's out."

"Same here," murmured Nipper. "Whittle's been suspiciously quiet all day—ever since that rummy affair at Moat Hollow. When that fire didn't happen, Whittle must have had several fits. Well, so-long! See you later!"

They parted, and prowled round again. The camp was certainly very peaceful at this hour. All lights were out, and even the camp-fires had died down until not even a glowing ember remained.

Overhead the sky was flecked with light, fleecy clouds, and only a few stars could be seen twinkling. The moon had not yet risen. There was practically no breeze, and the summer's night was warm. So still was the air that the rippling of the river could be distinctly heard.

Nipper had not been "kidding." He really did believe that Amos Whittle would take some sort of action at the earliest possible moment. And there was no harm in being on the alert.

At midnight two other guards came on duty, and Handforth and Nipper went to their beds feeling that all was well. During the next two hours the camp remained as quiet and as peaceful as ever, and the moon arose to smile benignly upon the long rows of tents.

Waldo and Jimmy Potts were the next sentries—their spell being from two a.m. until three.

"We're lucky," murmured Jimmy Potts, as he and Waldo compared notes after their first round of the camp. "We've only got an hour

of this silly job. Then Skeets and Fullwood will have a spell from three until four."

"Well, it's just as well to divide it up," whispered Waldo. "To-morrow night, I understand, we're all going to do our spells—right the way through. It'll certainly be fairer."

"Jiggered if I can understand why we're keeping watch at all," grumbled Potts. "What's the good of it? How on earth could Whittle take any action in the middle of the night? The whole thing's crazy."

They parted, going off in different directions. Occasionally they would pause, listening carefully. But the only sounds which disturbed the stillness of the night were the occasional hooting of a distant owl, or the cry of some other night creature from Bellton Wood. The whole countryside was at peace.

Two-thirty had just chimed out from the school clock in the distance, when Stanley Waldo suddenly became alert. He was standing tense and motionless when Jimmy Potts cautiously approached him.

"Only another half an hour, old man," murmured the schoolboy baronet.

"Listen!" whispered Waldo, holding up a warning hand.

Jimmy stared.

"What's the matter?" he asked curiously.

"There's nothing——"

He broke off, for there was a puzzled expression on Waldo's face; and Waldo's whole attitude was one of concentrated alertness. He relaxed after a few moments, and frowned.

"Funny!" he murmured. "Didn't you hear anything, Potts?"

"Only the chiming of the clock a minute ago."

"I don't mean that," said Waldo. "Something that happened almost immediately afterwards. It seemed to be in the far distance, right up the river. A sort of shock. A thud. I felt it rather than heard it."

"Probably a rabbit about two miles away falling off a molchill," said Potts dryly. "Your ears are keen enough to hear a gnat turning over in its sleep!"

"No, don't be an ass!" said Waldo. "I heard something—really. It was a good distance away, I'll admit. I say, do you hear that?"

"Hear what?"

"That curious rushing sound," said Waldo tensely. "Listen! It's coming from the river."

Jimmy Potts strained his ears.

"Blessed if I can hear anything," he said, staring. "Look here, you ass, you're imagining things!"

But he moved off towards the river with his companion. They picked their way through the lines of tents, and presently they came to that edge of the Half-Mile Meadow which was bordered by the River Stowe. The tents, on this side, were pitched almost at the water's-edge.

The river looked peaceful and picturesque in the pale moonlight. It was very wide

just here—and deep, too. It was for this reason that Amos Whittle was so determined to secure this site. With scarcely no widening or deepening, the river would be suitable for the manœuvring of his heavy, power-driven barges.

"Well," whispered Jimmy Potts, grinning, "where's your sensation? Sorry, old man, but I'm not a bit excited. The river's just the same as ever."

"Listen!" urged Waldo, holding up a warning hand.

And now, when Potts listened, he certainly heard a most curious sound. A sound as of rushing water, which became louder and louder.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated. "What on earth is it? I thought you were fooling me, Waldo! I can't understand——"

"Look!" shouted Waldo, pointing.

"Here, steady! You'll wake everybody——"

"Look!" repeated Waldo.

Jimmy Potts looked. At first he could see nothing except the river. Then, his eyes growing accustomed to the scene, he noticed that the Stowe, some distance up, was rushing down upon them like a tidal-wave. The water at that spot was foam-flecked and angry.

"Great Scott!" yelled Sir Jimmy. "What's happened?"

He stood as though rooted to the spot. He wanted to run, but his limbs seemed paralysed. He could only stand there and stare open-eyed.

The next moment the miniature tidal-wave was upon them. Waldo and Potts, standing on the actual bank, were swept completely off their feet. The water, roaring down upon them, spread out fanwise over the grassy banks, surging across the meadows, sweeping everything before it with irresistible violence. It was a complete and utter surprise. Even Waldo, acute of hearing and seeing as he was, had not detected this danger until it was too late to give any warning.

Struggling in the water, the two sentries saw tent after tent swept down; they heard confused shouts and startled yells; and the flood swept and spread through the St. Frank's camp like a plague.

CHAPTER 7.

Flooded Out!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH
awoke with a start.

He had a vague impression that about two dozen fellows were executing a war-dance round the tent; and three or four more were holding his camp-bed and shaking it. In addition, the air was full of strange, confused sounds.

"Here, I say, what's the game?" gasped Handforth, blinking and staring round, and trying to penetrate the darkness. "Hi, stop it!"

His roar awoke Church and McClure—or, to be more exact, it thoroughly aroused them, for they had been half-awake already.

"What's happening, Handy?" came Church's startled inquiry.

"Jiggered if I know!" replied Handforth. "But somebody's playing a silly game! By George! I wonder if old Whittle—"

He broke off, fully awake now and fully aroused. He leapt out of bed, then gave a gasp of utter surprise and consternation. For he had leapt into about eighteen inches of icy-cold water!

He plunged forward, floundering in his surprise, and the next second he lost his balance and splashed headlong into the flood. Church, sitting up in his bed, now became aware of the fact that his mattress was soaked, and that he was actually sitting in a deep, cold pool.

"Great Scott!" gurgled Church, leaping out. "Where—where did all this water come from?"

Handforth came to the surface, spluttering water and gasping like a walrus.

"Who's done this?" he shouted thickly. "Hi! Look at the tent! Whoa!"

The tent, at that moment, had collapsed, and it buried Handforth & Co. beneath its clinging, enveloping folds. Somehow or other they pushed the heavy canvas aside, and fought their way out into the open.

The moonlight, after the darkness of the tent, seemed quite bright. The three juniors, struggling up and shedding water in cascades, beheld an amazing scene.

What had once been the Half-Mile Meadow was now a lake—a scene of devastation. Only a few tents remained standing, and figures wallowing and struggling in the flood were to be seen on every hand. All of them were dressed in pyjamas, and many were so bewildered by sleep that they hardly knew what they were doing. Bugles were sounding, shouts were arising on every hand.

"What—what's happened?" gurgled Handforth helplessly.

He turned his gaze towards the Stowe. The river was there just the same—flowing swiftly and strongly—but it was only distinguishable from the flood because of the swiftly-running current. Beyond, the opposite meadows were flooded in just the same way as the encampment.

Perched precariously on top of one of the tents was Vivian Travers. Travers possessed a keen sense of humour, and in his less energetic moments he was an enthusiastic angler. He was fishing now. Solemnly he dangled his line into the flood waters, and he let out a whoop of excitement when he hooked a small trout.

"I'm dreaming!" breathed McClure, pinching himself hard. "Oh, my hat! I hurt myself! I can't be dreaming after all! But how can there be a flood like this in midsummer? It's—it's idiotic!"

"I don't know about its being idiotic—it's beastly uncomfortable!" said Handforth

practically. "By George! I'm soaked to the skin!"

A camp-bed came floating serenely by, and in the moonlight Handforth & Co. and a number of other Removites near at hand saw that the bed contained a sleeping figure. Archie Glenthorne, to be exact, was totally unconscious of all the commotion which was going on around him. His expression, as he slept, was one of gentle repose.

"My only sainted aunt!" said Fullwood, splashing a handful of water into the unfortunate Archie's face. "Wake up, fat-head!"

Archie sat up with a start, and the bed rocked ominously. The water, over most of the Half-Mile Meadow, was between three and four feet deep—approximately waist-high. Archie Glenthorne found himself surrounded by half-submerged juniors.

"Good gad!" he ejaculated. "I mean to say, dash it! It's a bit too frightfully thick! Eh? Odds sights and spectacles! What's happened to the good old tent?"

He leaned over the side of his bed, and the bed, unable to stand this treatment, lurched violently and capsized. Archie, with a fiendish yell, vanished into the flood.

Nobody took any notice of him as he rose to the surface, gasping and floundering. There were more important things to do than pay any attention to Archie Glenthorne. Prefects were shouting all sorts of conflicting orders, masters were attempting to maintain some sort of discipline. But in that hopeless confusion no discipline was possible. It was a case of every fellow for himself. Nobody was in actual danger, but the camp had become a scene of ruin and desolation. It was no longer habitable. The Half-Mile Meadow, from corner to corner, was under water.

"This is absolutely appalling!" Mr. Pycraft of the Fourth was saying. "Boys—boys! Get to the school at once! Upon my soul! It is a wonder we were not all drowned!"

Buster Boots, of the Modern House Fourth, stared at Mr. Pycraft in cold disdain.

"We're not moving from here, sir," he replied stoutly. "If we all desert this meadow, St. Frank's will lose it."

"Don't stand there talking nonsense!" snapped Mr. Pycraft. "It is quite out of the question to remain in this meadow! Meadow, indeed! It is nothing but a lake! Every Fourth Form boy will obey my orders!"

"Hold on, sir!" said Lionel Corcoran, the skipper of the Fourth. "I'm beginning to think that this is a trick of Mr. Whittle's. We don't want to 'fall for it' so jolly easily."

"Don't be an idiot, Corcoran!" retorted Mr. Pycraft, exasperated. "How on earth can we remain here? The meadow must be abandoned—and at once! I insist! Good heavens! I have crippled myself!"

Plunging through the water, Mr. Pycraft had caught his naked foot against a tent



Like a miniature tidal wave the river swept down upon the Half Mile Meadow. Within a few minutes the St Frank's camp was completely flooded.

stake, and now, as he raised his foot in agony, he overbalanced and fell back into the flood with a wild howl of anguish. Nobody gave him any sympathy.

Mr. Pagett, of the Fifth, was issuing very much the same orders to his own boys. Mr. Crowell of the Remove was shouting instructions to the Removites. Mr. Wilkes, Mr. Stokes and the other Housemasters were doing their best to quell the commotion. Nelson Lee himself, plunging about in the flood, performed wonders in getting everybody calm.

"I am afraid we shall be compelled to vacate the meadow, Mr. Wilkes," said Lee,

after he had satisfied himself that nobody was hurt or in danger. "We cannot possibly keep the boys here after this. I hate to admit defeat, but the health of the boys comes first. They have no clothes, they are soaked, and practically every tent has been wrecked."

"It is all very mysterious," said Old Wilkey. "How could such a flood as this occur in July, sir? There's been no rain—no real rain—for nearly a week. Don't you think we'd better hang on for a bit? Perhaps the flood will die down as quickly as it arose."

Nelson Lee looked towards the river, and he shook his head.

"It may go down within twenty-four hours, but not much sooner," he replied. "The river is running very strongly. Something must have happened to cause this flood, and I fancy I know what it was."

"You mean the Edgemore Dam?" asked Mr. Wilkes quickly.

"Yes. This flood could only have been caused by a breach of the Edgemore Dam up the river," said Nelson Lee, with a touch of grimness in his voice. "And you will notice, Mr. Wilkes, that the flood itself is singularly local. This meadow, and the two meadows on the opposite side of the river, are in a hollow. The flood scarcely extends beyond them. Practically no damage has been caused anywhere, but these meadows remain inundated. It might be two days before they clear themselves of water."

"H'm! And we can't live like fishes for two days," admitted Old Wilkey. "What a shame! Do you think we shall really be compelled to abandon the meadow after all? What a triumph for Whittle!"

"Perhaps it will be a bigger triumph than you quite realise, Mr. Wilkes," said Lee quietly.

SOME little distance away, on the narrow country lane which led to Edgemore, Mr. Amos Whittle's saloon car was standing without lights.

Close by, standing on the top of a bank, Mr. Whittle himself was gazing at the moonlit scene, with Mansell by his side.

"Amazing!" Mr. Whittle was muttering. "By gad, Mansell, you were right! It's happened exactly as you said!"

Mansell laughed contentedly.

"Not all my ideas are duds," he said, with a touch of irony. "I think you'll admit, sir, that the Half-Mile Meadow is now quite untenable. Those boys will be off within the hour—every man-jack of them."

From the point where the two men were standing they could look right down into that flooded hollow. From here the flood appeared quite insignificant. They could see that only the Half-Mile Meadow and two other meadows on the other side of the river were affected. The countryside, in every other direction, was untouched.

"How long do you think this water will remain on the meadows?" asked Whittle suddenly.

"Does it really matter, sir?" replied Mansell. "If it has completely subsided by the morning our object will have been served. Those boys can't possibly remain in that flood. They're preparing to depart already. Everything's in confusion, but the masters are getting ready for the big retreat. Still, I don't suppose the meadows will be normal until the day after to-morrow. There is that breach in the dam to be repaired."

"Quite an unfortunate accident, eh, Mansell?" asked Mr. Whittle, with a chuckle.

"Accidents are always liable to happen," said Mansell, grinning.

This particular "accident" had been remarkably opportune, considering all the circumstances. One of Amos Whittle's largest steel barges, heavily laden with timber, had somehow got out of control at the Edgemore Dam, and before the skipper could rectify the error the barge had charged full tilt at the dam, making a very considerable breach.

It need hardly be mentioned that Mr. Whittle had had a private word with that barge skipper an hour or so earlier. The "accident," in fact, had been very cleverly engineered. The result was gratifying. The river, unleashed, so to speak, had poured down like a tidal-wave, and Amos Whittle's object in flooding the St. Frank's camp had been attained.

"Yes," said Whittle, "accidents are always liable to happen, Mansell. Let these confounded boys—and the masters, too—think what they please! They can prove nothing! I am taking full responsibility for the damage, and I'll make it good—and pay the cost. The authorities can do nothing. But that meadow will be mine! It's worth it, Mansell—worth every penny that I shall have to pay!"

He moved down from the bank, and his eyes were gleaming with triumph.

"We'll go to the boat," he added briskly.

"Don't you think it would be advisable, sir, to get straight home?" suggested Mansell. "Might it not be good policy on your part to keep right away until to-morrow?"

"Oh, no!" replied Whittle, who was reckless with triumph. "I've got to bluff this thing through, Mansell!"

"But your presence here, at such a time, will seem very suspicious——"

"Let it seem what it likes!" interrupted Whittle. "I tell you they can't prove anything against us! What do I care what they suspect? Besides, we've got to make the thing look natural. We've got to make it look logical."

"That's true."

"We'll assume that that barge really did charge the dam by pure accident," continued Whittle. "What would I do when I heard of it? Jump straight out of bed, dash to the scene, and find out the full extent of the damage. That's what I'd do, Mansell. And that's what I've got to pretend when I go into that camp. I must be flurried—agitated—deeply concerned. Just leave it to me. It would look far more suspicious if I did not turn up at all."

"Perhaps you're right, sir, now I come to think of it," agreed the manager, nodding. "Taking the bull by the horns is generally the safer way."

"Of course it is," said Whittle briskly. "Come along! There's another thing. I want to be on that meadow when the last of the boys clears off. And you must be there, as a witness."

"Supposing they refuse to clear off?"

"How can they?" said Whittle impatiently. "Man alive! That meadow is absolutely

flooded—the boys are soaked. They can't remain there. It would be madness. Even if the boys are willing to stay, and I'll admit that they're crazy enough for anything, the masters wouldn't let them. We're dealing with the masters, don't forget—not the boys. And we've got them definitely beaten."

TEN minutes later a small rowing-boat turned off from the swiftly-flowing river and nosed its way into the flooded Half-Mile Meadow. Mr. Amos Whittle sat in the stern, and Mansell operated the oars. The boys, who were now well sorted out and ready for departure, watched the boat's arrival with mingled feelings.

"It's Whittle!" yelled Handforth fiercely. "Great Scott! The rotter's had the nerve to come here to crow over us!"

"Looks like it," said Nipper.

"We won't let him—we won't give him the chance!" went on Handforth, getting excited. "Back up, Remove! Let's tip that boat over and duck the rotters!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good wheeze!"

"Come on, you chaps!"

But Mr. Wilkes, who was within hearing, put the veto on the idea.

"Cheese it, you young asses!" he said sharply. "Two wrongs don't make a right. Let's give Mr. Whittle a chance to explain. If any of you boys touch that boat I'll find a new use for this cricket-stump!"

Mr. Wilkes was sad at the thought of abandoning the meadow, and thus leaving the enemy victorious in the field, but there seemed nothing else for it. All the masters had come to the same conclusion. They were thinking of the health of their boys, and it was generally agreed that a return should be made to St. Frank's without delay.

"My dear sir," said Amos Whittle, as he caught sight of Old Wilkey. "Is your head-master available? I am here to express my deep regret at this most unfortunate happening."

"Unfortunate for us, Mr. Whittle, but not so unfortunate for you!" retorted Mr. Wilkes pointedly.

"Really, my dear sir, you do not think that I deliberately— How dare you!" flared Mr. Whittle, with admirable acting ability. "I shall be obliged, sir, if you will keep a check on your tongue!"

"Rats!" yelled Handforth. "Old Wilkey's right! You did this, you rotter—and you did it deliberately!"

And a roar of angry indignation, from scores of throats, proved that Handforth was well supported.

CHAPTER 8.

Sticking to Their Guns!

AMOS WHITTLE forced himself to laugh.

"But it is madness to believe that I could have caused the flooding of this meadow!" he said contemptuously.

"Ah, Mr. Lee! I am glad you have come. I must confess I find it difficult to remain calm with your—er—subordinates."

Nelson Lee eyed Whittle very deliberately. "Can you throw any light on this singular business, Mr. Whittle," he asked bluntly.

"Unfortunately, yes," replied Whittle. "I was brought here post-haste by an urgent telephone message. It seems that one of my largest timber barges—a power-driven craft—got out of hand at the Edgemore Dam. It caused some little damage, and the dam was breached. Hence this flood. A most unfortunate affair, Mr. Lee. I am more sorry than I can say."

"Is it not strange, Mr. Whittle, that it should have been one of your barges which caused this extremely useful flood?" asked Lee grimly.

"If you mean that I shall benefit, I can only say that I shall enforce my rights with extreme regret," replied Whittle. "In the circumstances, of course, I shall claim the meadow as soon as all your boys have retired. I can do nothing less. I am sorry, Mr. Lee. But do not accuse me of conspiracy, or I might lose my calmness. The deliberate breaching of that dam would have been a criminal act."

"No more criminal than trying to burn down Moat Hollow!" yelled Handforth.

"Really, this is outrageous!" protested Mr. Whittle angrily. "Did you hear that boy, sir? How can you stand there and allow them to insult me?"

"The boys are excited—and suspicious," replied Nelson Lee. "You cannot blame them, Mr. Whittle. The circumstances of this affair are—well, to be frank, very suggestive."

"Suggestive of what?" demanded Whittle hotly.

"Suggestive of trickery, sir," replied Lee. "It is your barge which causes the damage, and you are here in a really astonishingly short space of time—to see us off the meadow. I note that you take it for granted that we shall vacate the property."

"What else can you do?" demanded Whittle sourly.

Before Nelson Lee could reply, Fenton, of the Sixth, came plunging through the flood.

"I'll tell you what else we can do!" shouted the captain of the school. "We can stay here. We can defy you, Mr. Whittle! And that's what we are going to do!"

A roar of excited enthusiasm went up.

"Fenton, I hardly think—" began Nelson Lee.

"Please leave this to me, sir!" went on Edgar Fenton, striding up to the boat and glaring into Whittle's face. "You haven't won yet, Mr. Whittle! St. Frank's will have something to say! Before you can claim this meadow, every St. Frank's fellow has to vacate it! We haven't vacated it yet, and we're not going to! Flood or no flood, we're staying here!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Fenton!"

"We're with you!"

"Rather?"

Fenton warmed as he heard those excited shouts; and Amos Whittle, losing colour somewhat, began to bluster.

"You're out of your mind!" he snarled. "You can't remain here—in this flood! You're all soaked to the skin——"

"And you'll be soaked to the skin, too, in about ten seconds!" roared Handforth, plunging forward. "Come on, you chaps! Are we going to stand here listening to this rotter?"

"Not likely!"

Dozens of fellows were ready to follow Handforth's lead. Before Nelson Lee or any of the other masters could check them, the boys had seized the boat, and they had violently overturned it. Whittle and Mansell, with yells of consternation, splashed head-long into the waist-high flood. They went right under the surface.

"That'll do, boys!" said Lee smoothly. "Cool down, now! This sort of thing doesn't improve matters in the least!"

Whittle came to the surface nearly choking with rage.

"Aren't you going to punish those boys?" he shouted violently, clutching at Lee. "You saw what they did! Aren't you going to expel them from the school for——"

"The boys were excited, and just a little out of control," said Lee quietly. "I rather think, Mr. Whittle, that you had better leave. It will be so much safer. And later,

when you review this situation, you will realise, perhaps, that the boys have some little justification for their animosity towards you. You have very distinctly shown yourself to be an enemy. I think we need say no more."

He turned on his heel, and Whittle took a deep breath.

"Very well!" he snarled. "We'll see, Mr. Lee! Come on, Mansell!"

Mansell, by this time, had righted the boat; they both scrambled in, and they were soon rowing away. They reached the river, were caught by the current and carried off.

"This'll mean rheumatic fever for me!" panted Whittle savagely. "The last time I got soaked, I was in bed for a week!"

"Well, I warned you," growled Mansell. "I told you not to go near the camp. You know what those boys are——"

"I don't want any talk from you!" interrupted Whittle harshly. "We'll get back, Mansell. We'll get to the car and drive home."

"And then?"

"Then we'll come back, and we shall find that meadow empty!" replied Whittle, with returning confidence. "You don't think I believe that nonsensical bluff, do you? Those boys can't remain in that flood. It's out of the question! The masters won't allow them to. I tell you we've got them!"



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 Street, London, E.C.4.

ARTFUL.

Teddy (after unsuccessfully trying to open the pantry door): "It's no use, George. I can't make one of these keys fit."

George (resignedly): "All right, then. We'll wait till mother comes home, and ask her for something for being good boys."

(H. Huntley, Harrow Barn, Coles Avenue, Hamworthy, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

VERY WELL KNOWN.

Editor: "This book is not badly written, but I only accept work from authors with well known names."

Author: "That's fine. My name is Smith."

(L. Jones, Godwynhurst College, Leybourne Road, Dover, has been awarded a penknife.)

HE SAILED THE SEAS.

Tramp: "Yes, lady, I once lived on water for a whole month."

Lady: "It hardly seems possible. How did you do it?"

Tramp: "I was a sailor."

(F. Sadler, 21, Norfolk Road, Merton, S.W.19, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

A TONIC.

Doctor: "Well, Mrs. Jones, how is little Horace getting on? Did those red pills I left do him any good?"

Mrs. Jones: "Oh, yes, doctor, they did him a lot of good. He's been sitting up in bed all day playing with them."

(W. Teasdale, 9, Westbourne Place, Manningham, Bradford, has been awarded a book.)

HARD LUCK.

"So the magistrates fined you £5, Mick?"

"No, bad luck to them! I had to find them £5."

(A. Oddie, Boys' Hostel, Oudtshoorn, C.P., S. Africa, has been awarded a book.)

NOT SO DUSTY.

Teacher: "Willy, name a collective noun."

Willy: "A vacuum-cleaner."

(C. Stanley, 77, Humberstone Road, Plaistow, E.13, has been awarded a book.)

FENTON, surrounded by crowds of supporters, was looking determined and grim. Nelson Lee, facing him, could not but admire the skipper's stand.

"It's for the school, sir!" Fenton was urging. "We can't let Whittle win like this. I don't believe a word of his lying story. It was no accident which sent that barge into the Edgemore Dam. It was done deliberately!"

"Whatever we think, Fenton, we cannot produce proof," said Lee gently. "And it is a dangerous thing to bring an accusation without the support of definite evidence."

"Well, you're satisfied about Whittle, anyhow, sir," said Fenton gruffly. "We won't make any more accusations—but we're not going to leave this meadow. We're not going to fall into his trap so easily."

"My dear chap, how can you stay?" asked Old Wilkey. "There's three feet of water everywhere. The tents are mostly submerged; there's nothing but wreckage in every direction. Everybody is soaked and shivering."

"We'll stick it, sir," shouted Nipper.

"You leave it to us, sir!" added Handforth excitedly. "You masters can go back to the school if you like, but we'll stay here!"

Lee smiled.

"We're hardly likely to do that, young 'un," he said dryly. "Now, Fenton, if you have any feasible suggestion—"

"Dash it all, sir, it's too tame for us to

clear out like this!" protested Fenton. "Let the strongest of us, and those who are willing, stay in the camp. The rest can go back to the school. Even if only a handful of us remain here—say, twenty or thirty, selected from all the Forms—it will be enough. As long as we remain in possession, Whittle can do nothing. We can keep moving, and we shan't come to any harm. And to-morrow, perhaps, we can rig up some sort of shelter. We can get some boats, and remain in possession like that. We can be relieved, too, pretty soon. I don't see why we should knuckle under!"

Nelson Lee laughed.

"I like your spirit, Fenton—just as I like the spirit of all these other boys," he said. "Go ahead, then! Select as many volunteers as you please, and go your own way. Meanwhile, the masters and the other boys will return to the school and get dry. You'll be relieved as soon as it can be managed."

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for Mr. Lee!"

"Hurrah!"

"Down with Whittle!"

Only a comparatively small number of fellows did the cheering. Such enthusiasts as Nipper, Handforth, Travers, and Pitt, of the Remove, joined in; and Buster Boots and Corcoran, of the Fourth; and Brown and Stevens, of the Fifth; and even Willy Handforth & Co., of the Third. They were all fired by the determination to remain in

LOST BALL.

Small boy (to father who is playing golf): "Daddy, here's a ball for you."

Father: "Where did you get it from?"

Small boy: "It's a lost ball, daddy."

Father: "Are you sure it's a lost ball?"

Small boy: "Yes, daddy; they're still looking for it."

(*P. McLellan, 33, Rayne Street, Barnsbury Road, Islington, N.1, has been awarded a penknife.*)

TIT FOR TAT.

Billy: "If I had a face like yours I'd put it against a wall and throw a brick at it."

Sammy: "And if I had a face like yours I'd put it against a brick and throw a wall at it."

(*A. Goodhall, 51, Bampton Road, Smethwick, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

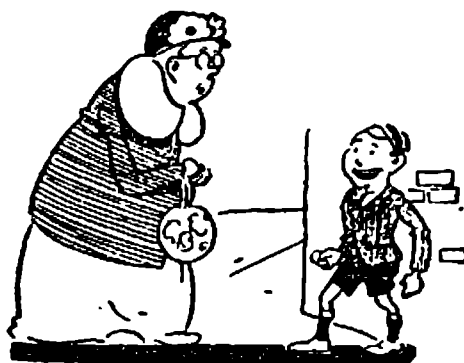
HE COULDN'T.

Manufacturer (showing a friend some of his goods): "These are some of our best goods; don't you think they are very finely finished?"

Friend (who is also a manufacturer): "Yes, but you couldn't hold a candle to our goods."

Manufacturer: "And what do you make?"

Friend: "Gunpowder."



(*R. Brown, 10, Bentink Street, Runcorn, has been awarded a penknife.*)

OBEYING ORDERS.

Mother: "Why did you eat that custard, Tommy?"

Tommy: "Well, you told me to put it where the flies couldn't get at it."

(*D. Stopford, 57, London Road, Wembley, has been awarded a book.*)

WILLING TO OBLIGE.

The scene was a crowded thoroughfare.

"Come on, my man—get out of the way!" shouted the impatient motorist.

"Right-o, gov'nor," retorted the costermonger in his donkey cart. "Where'll I go—up the lamp-post or down the drain?"

(*L. Pimington, 40, Ladywood Road, Grimethorpe, Yorks, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

NOTHING TO LAUGH AT.

Kind aunt: "Here is a penny for you, Johnny. Now let me see you laugh."

Johnny (breaking into a grin): "Please, auntie, I only smile for a penny."

(*J. Harris, Barkingside, Ilford, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

possession of the Half Mile Meadow. But there were plenty of fellows who were only too anxious to get back to the school—to get into dry things. They had lost all interest in the St. Frank's camp. This last half-hour had dampened their ardour very effectually.

"Look over there!" said Nipper suddenly.

Many eyes were turned in the direction of the river. Owing to the flood, it was difficult to tell where the river really existed; but there could be no mistaking the size and character of the heavily-laden vessel which had come into sight. It was a great steel barge, power-driven—and, just as certainly, it belonged to Amos Whittle. It was probably the barge which had caused the damage. And it was piled high with countless tons of timber.

"By Jove!" said Fenton, as he eyed the slowly-moving vessel.

A thought had suddenly come to him—the same thought, perhaps, which was even then in Nipper's mind.

"Whittle is the man we're up against," said Fenton keenly. "That's one of his barges, and it's filled with timber—planks, floor-boarding, and wood of every description and every size."

"Well, what about it?" asked Biggleswade, staring.

Several other Sixth-Formers drew nearer, to say nothing of Browne and Stevens, of the Fifth, and a whole host of Removites and Fourth-Formers and fags. They all gathered round Fenton, attracted by the urgent note in his voice.

"I want volunteers," said Fenton crisply.

"Good enough!" sang out Handforth. "I'm one!"

"Same here!" exclaimed Nipper.

"And here!"

"Me, too!"

Dozens of voices went up.

"Good enough!" said Fenton, with satisfaction. "Now, all of you, look at that barge! It's Whittle's—and it's full of timber!"

"You said that before, brother!" remarked Browne. "What is the exact brainwave?"

"There are only two or three men on that barge, at most—and we can deal with them quickly enough if we are determined," went on Fenton. "My suggestion is this. We'll seize that barge, drift her ashore as far as she'll come, and unload her."

"What!"

"Great Scott!"

"You—you mean——"

"I mean, we'll use that timber," said Fenton. "It'll mean hard work, you fellows, but hard work is what we require to keep us busy, and to prevent us from catching cold. How long will it take us to erect stagings with all that wood so handy? They may be crude and they may be rickety, but they'll get us out of this flood. Stagings all over this meadow so that we can rise high and dry over the flood. What's more, we can keep the camp going like that—all through the day, if necessary, and to-morrow night, too. We'll beat this flood! It's mid-

summer, and what do we care about a little water? Once we're high and dry above it, we'll be O.K."

"By George! It's an idea!" roared Handforth excitedly. "Good old Fenton! I'm on!"

"Hear, hear!"

"That barge appeared at the right moment," grinned Nipper. "But you took the words out of my mouth, Fenton. I was about to suggest the same thing."

The rest of the boys were startled by the ingenuity of the suggestion. Stagings all over the flood, so that they could rise high and dry above the water, and thus remain in possession of the camp. It was a stunning idea.

CHAPTER 9.

Dished, Diddled, and Done!

ONCE the decision had been taken the St. Frank's boys lost no time in putting the plan into execution.

Every Form took part in the attack upon the barge—Sixth, Fifth, Remove, Fourth, and Third. Stalwarts from every branch of the school entered whole-heartedly into this stunt. And they did not form a minority, either. Half the school, and more, had rallied to Fenton's banner. Only the weaklings and the spiritless had gone back to St. Frank's with the masters. Many of the masters, indeed, would have preferred to remain, but Nelson Lee suggested to them that it would be better if they went.

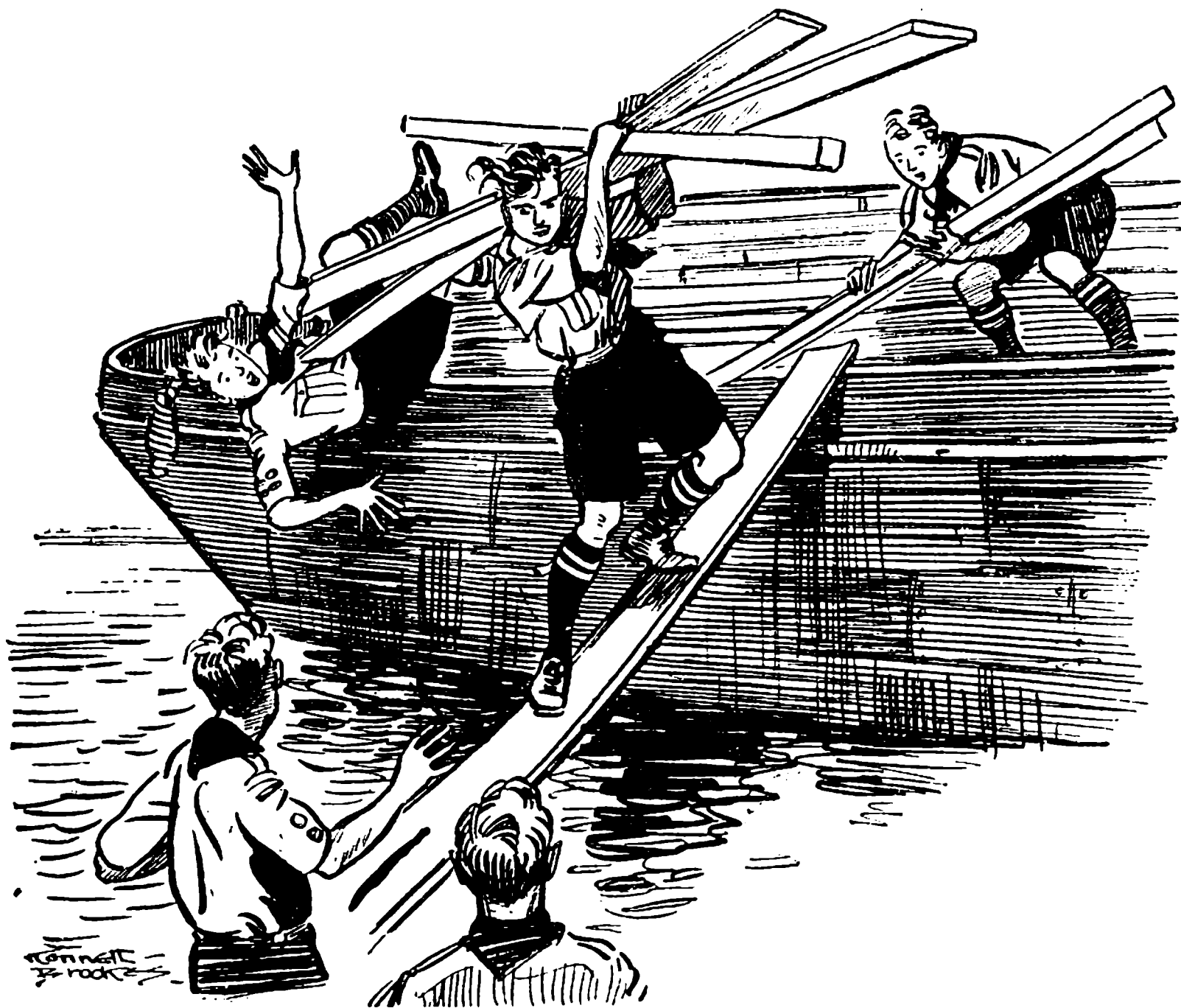
For Lee could see what was going on, and he felt that it would be better if the masters took no hand in that game. Amos Whittle, in his present mood, was capable of bringing an action against the masters if they forcibly seized the barge. But Whittle could not do very much against a crowd of schoolboys; and if no master was present, nobody would be responsible. Lee, at heart, was well on the boys' side, for Whittle had shown himself to be an unscrupulous scoundrel. This was essentially one of those occasions when a blind eye would be most useful. So when the attack on the barge was made every master had made himself scarce.

The boys waded until they plunged into the river proper, and then they swam. The current was fairly strong, but the distance was short; and all these boys, even including the fags, were powerful swimmers. They swarmed round the barge in dozens, and easily hauled themselves on to the low deck.

"'Ere, wot's the blinking idea?" demanded a gruff, angry voice from the rear. "Hi, Bill! You'd best come up, Bill!"

The man at the tiller felt that he was helpless against such a crowd. The barge, by now, was swarming with the boys. The engine was still running, and the heavy vessel was slipping downstream at a fairly respectable speed.

Fenton acted drastically. Supported by Wilson, Biggleswade, Browne, Stevens, and two others, he seized the man at the tiller



Handforth swung round, and the planks caught Church a wallop in the chest, knocking him into the river.

and yanked him aside. The barge itself was swung round broadside to the current, and sent charging at the bank—which, of course, was invisible, since the whole of the Half Mile Meadow was under water.

"That'll do—she's all right now," said Fenton crisply. "Hold her there, you chaps. All the better if the engine keeps running. She'll go well aground."

Another man came up from below—a short, stocky individual with a scrubby moustache and a leathery, weatherbeaten countenance. This was evidently "Bill."

"'Old 'ard, you young rips!" he roared, as he stared round. "Hi, what are you 'avin' a game at, Sam? She's off her course!"

"Them boys did it!" gasped Sam.

"Oh, they did, did they?" said Bill, glaring round. "What's your game, young shavers? I'm the skipper o' this craft—"

"There's only one thing I want to ask you, skipper," said Fenton, striding up to the man. "Does this barge belong to Amos Whittle?"

"It does, but I don't see—"

"Then I'm very much afraid that we've seized this barge," said Fenton coolly. "We've no grudge against you, and as long as you keep quiet you'll come to no harm.

But if you try any funny business we shall have to take strong measures. We shall probably lock you below in your cabin."

The skipper was helpless as he saw the strength of the enemy.

"'Ere, but what's the game?" he asked. "What's the idea o' sending the old tub ashore?"

"We want the timber—that's all," replied Fenton. "Our camping ground has been unfortunately flooded by—er—accident, so we've got to erect some stagings. Quite simple, Bill. Hope you won't mind?"

Bill, his jaw agape, did the sensible thing. He knuckled under. Perhaps he had a few twinges of conscience, since he was the man who had sent this very barge charging against the Edgemore Dam. Her bows were badly buckled and battered.

"Well, I give in," said Bill, shrugging his shoulder. "I can't do nothin' against a whole horde of you, can I? But when the gov'nor 'ears o' this, 'e'll have something sweet to say, I can give you my word!"

"We're quite prepared to hear anything that Mr. Whittle may have to say," replied Fenton. "And I fancy that we, too, shall have more to say than Mr. Whittle will like to hear. There's been some funny business

to-night, Bill. I'm not blaming you. You've got your job to think of, and I dare say that you have only been obeying orders."

Bill scratched his chin.

"So this is up against the guv'nor, is it?" he murmured in a hoarse whisper, as he leaned close to Fenton. "Well, between you an' me, sir, I'm with you. See? It didn't surprise me a bit when I come up on deck an' found all you young gents aboard. We don't often 'ave excitement in the middle o' the night, but there's exceptions, ain't there?"

Fenton smiled, and gripped Bill's horny hand.

"Right you are, Bill—I've got you!" murmured the school captain. "Take a tip from me and pop below. And take Sam with you. We shall be busy for quite a time. And if you think it would be better for us to turn the key in the cabin door, we'll do it."

Bill winked.

"Might just as well, young gents," he whispered. "Then the guv'nor—blight 'im!—won't 'ave nothin' against me. What could me an' Sam do against all you hefty young 'uns?"

Fenton was mightily glad that the men in charge of the barge were friendly. It made things so much better. For the boys had no quarrel with these men, and wished them no harm. Bill was probably one of the most honest old bargemen on the river, but he had been compelled to carry out his employer's orders.

DAWN was beginning to break when the boys got busy in earnest.

The river was quiet now, and the flood had subsided about eight or nine inches. But after that it remained stationary, and there was every prospect of the Half Mile Meadow remaining inundated for several days. So it was highly necessary that something should be done—and quickly, if the St. Frank's camp was to carry on and Amos Whittle was to be frustrated.

It was the first time, perhaps, that juniors and seniors had worked side by side with the same enthusiasm. Fags and prefects were equal in this enterprise. Everybody helped with a will. The unloading of the barge, Herculean as the task had first appeared, simplified itself once the boys had really got down to the task.

The cargo was mainly composed of sawn planks—just the type of stuff the boys required. There were endless quantities of heavy wood, too—great lengths of three-inch square timber baulks. For the foundations of the temporary stagings, nothing could have been better.

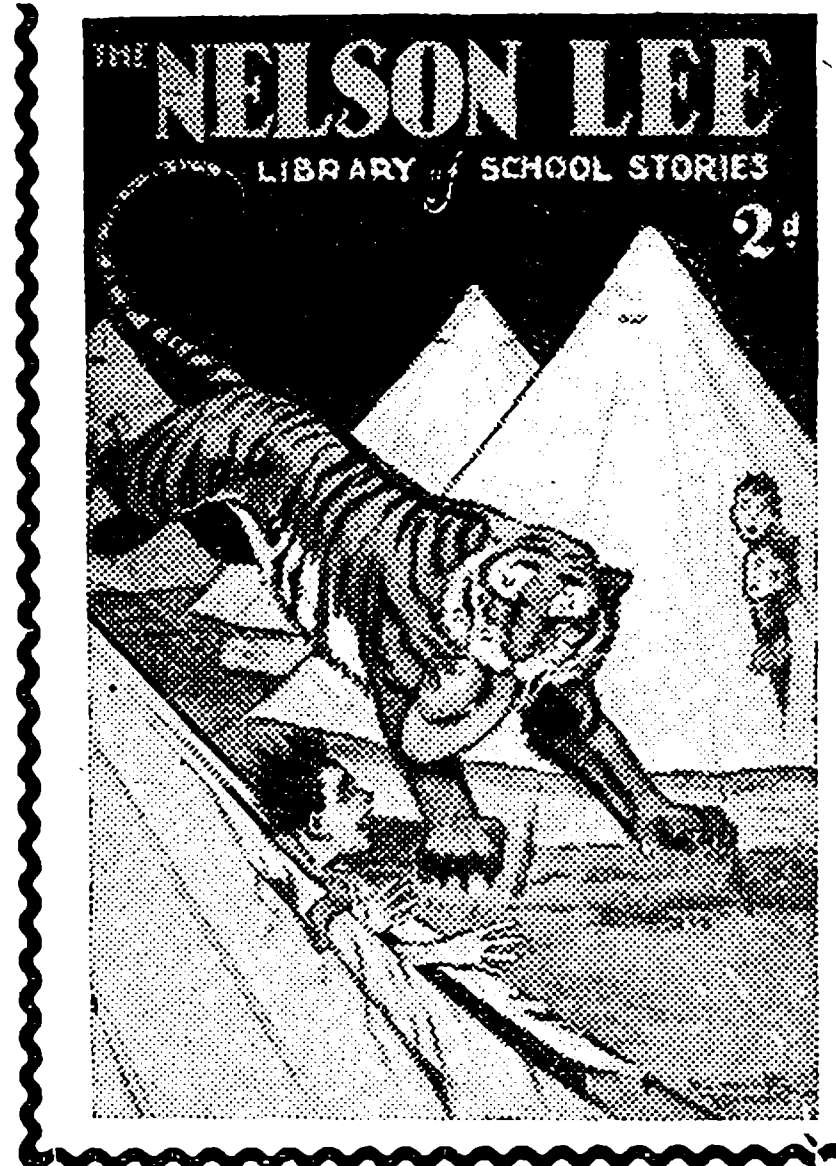
The barge had drifted half over one of the low-lying banks, and there she had stuck. The boys were able to wade right up to her side, and a gangway was placed in position to facilitate unloading operations. A party of fellows went aboard the barge. Grabbing hold of the stacked-up wood, they passed it on to the other boys, who came up and down

the gangway in a seemingly endless procession. It was hard work, hot work, and soon all the boys were perspiring freely.

Edward Oswald Handforth, being a clumsy fellow, naturally caused a minor disaster. Standing on the fairly narrow gangway, having received a length of wood, he swung round, and the end of his burden caught Church a wallop in the chest. Church gave a wild howl and toppled into the water. Thereafter, Church was very careful to avoid Handforth when that worthy was knocking around.

Half-way through the unloading operations, Fenton, who was in charge, dispatched

COMING NEXT WEDNESDAY!



Handforth and Travers and Boots, and a number of other juniors, to the school—to the carpenters' shops—to fetch saws, hammers, and nails, etc.

"It's a bit thick, these seniors taking charge of things like this!" grumbled Handforth, as he and the other reached the flooded lane and splashed their way up the slight rise and out of the water. "By George, it's good to be on dry land again!"

"Yes, but we're beyond the limits of the Half Mile Meadow now," said McClure. "As for the seniors taking charge, good luck to 'em! I like to see the seniors interesting themselves in things. Generally they're too much on their giddy dignity."

"Well, I don't suppose it matters," said Handforth. "We're all working with the

same object—to prevent a rotten saw-mill being built on that site. Come on! The sooner we're back, the better."

At the school it, was difficult to realise that there was any flood in the district. Everything here, of course, was exactly the same as usual. The dawn was breaking brilliantly fine, the birds were singing, and the air was delightfully warm. The juniors felt very conspicuous in their dripping pyjamas—for they had had no opportunity of changing into any proper clothes since the disaster. Time was precious, and pyjamas, after all, were comfortable enough, especially when they

"PERIL CAMP!"

By E. S. BROOKS.

A ferocious tiger let loose in the St. Frank's camp.

Everybody rushing helter skelter for safety—leaving the camp deserted.

And scoundrelly Amos Whittle awaiting his chance to step in and claim the camping ground as his own property. Does he triumph against the St. Frank's fellows?

There are many thrills and surprises; much excitement and fun in next week's corking open-air school yarn.

"The Phantom Foe!"

By JOHN BREARLEY.

Another smashing instalment of this enthralling serial—with the dynamic Night Hawk in greater form than ever.

"Handforth's Weekly!"

"OUR ROUND TABLE TALK!"

ORDER IN ADVANCE!

were constantly wading waist-deep through water.

"You can all change into your proper togs later," Fenton had said. "Nothing matters now—except to get this staging up. By breakfast-time we shall be high and dry above the water, and then we can go in batches to the school and rig ourselves out in fresh togs."

The juniors were not even questioned at St. Frank's. They saw none of the masters. Yet it was clear that nearly everybody was awake in the school. Many of the boys were to be seen—now fully dressed. They came in for some sarcastic chipping from Handforth and the others.

When they got back with the tools, the real business of building the stagings commenced.

A dozen saws immediately got to work, and fixed lengths of the foundation timber were cut. Then other fellows, using heavy baulks as hammers, drove the ends into the soft, water-soaked turf. Cross pieces were nailed into position, giving the spidery framework strength and rigidity. And with so many workers, the foundations grew at an amazing speed, spreading out wider and deeper.

Other gangs of boys, busy with the planking, laid a rough floor, and still others followed with hammers and nails. The air was filled with the noise of intense industry.

These stagings, high and dry above the flood, were situated almost in the exact centre of the meadow, and a pathway on stilts, as it were, led right across the meadow and through the dividing hedge on to dry ground. In this way, it would be possible for fellows to enter and depart from the meadow without even getting damp feet.

"She's coming along all right," said Fenton breathlessly, as he paused to take a breather. "By Jove, Biggy, we're doing fine!"

"We shall ache for weeks after this," said Biggleswade, wiping his brow.

"Yes, but we're saving this property for the school," said Fenton contentedly. "This little 'island' is pretty well big enough by now. By the time all the planking is down, we shall be able to erect half a dozen tents, at least. And that means that we can keep a constant garrison of twenty or thirty fellows here until the flood subsides. I rather think we've got Whittle on toast!"

The juniors, however, were tireless in their enthusiasm. They extended the "island" until it was almost double the size Fenton had first pictured.

TOWARDS eight o'clock, after nearly five hours of strenuous, hectic, continuous work, the schoolboy carpenters commenced streaming wearily towards the school. Their task was done.

Other boys, rested and fully dressed, were sent by Fenton to take the places of the workers. And these fellows received a mighty surprise.

For in the morning sunlight they beheld a great and imposing staging, stretching over the centre of the meadow. On it were pitched a number of tents, and preparations were already in full swing for breakfast.

The Half Mile Meadow, in fact, was as actively occupied as ever. Flood or no flood, these enthusiastic schoolboys were still in full possession.

Such fellows as Handforth and Nipper and Browne did not waste much time at St. Frank's. They merely washed and dressed; then, feeling comparatively refreshed, they dashed back to the camp. It was their labour which had created this new camp, and they wanted to be on the spot.

It was generally rumoured that there would be no lessons this morning, and that the workers would be allowed to take a well-earned rest. The others—those who had not helped in the erection of the staging—would

attend lessons, as usual, but in the St. Frank's class-rooms

On the whole, Nipper and Handforth and their fellow-enthusiasts felt that they were getting by far the better of the bargain. The others almost wished that they had worked now.

"Well, everything's all right," said Handforth contentedly, as he rubbed his tender hands together and examined the blisters. "By George, it was hot work while it lasted—but look at the result! Old Whittle is hoist by his own what-do-you-call-it?"

"Petard?" asked Church, grinning.

"That's it," nodded Handforth. "Hoist by his own petard! I used that expression once in one of my Trackett Grim stories."

"You would!" nodded McClure.

"But it's true in this instance," continued Handforth. "Think of it! Whittle planned this giddy affair deliberately, so that we should be flooded out and driven from the meadow. And it's his own giddy timber which has allowed us to carry on."

"By Jove, he's right, you fellows!" said Nipper. "Without Whittle's timber, we should have had practically no chance. We could have brought in a few boats, of course, but I doubt if that would have been legal."

"What do you mean—'legal'?" asked Tommy Watson.

"Well, Whittle would have thought of boats," replied Nipper. "And it's a point—in law—whether we can really be in possession of the meadow if we were floating on the top of it in boats. We shouldn't actually be on the property at all. But now we *are* on the property! That's just the difference. The camp's here, as cheery and as lively as ever. And old Whittle is dished, diddled, and done!"

CHAPTER 10.

A Shock for Amos Whittle!

NOT the faintest suspicion of the truth was in Amos Whittle's mind as he drove towards Bellton at about breakfast-time.

He had gone straight home after that ducking, and, fearful of rheumatic fever, he had tucked himself in bed, with hot-water bottles. To his relief, he found, upon rising, that he had suffered no ill-effects.

And now he was bent upon taking possession of the Half Mile Meadow. Mansell was with him, as usual, but Mansell was very thoughtful, and even worried.

"I'm not so sure about this thing now, sir," the works-manager was saying. "Those boys were a lot more determined than I expected them to be."

"But what can they do?" protested Whittle. "It's easy enough to talk about remaining in possession, but not so easy to accomplish. They were hot and excited. How on earth can they keep in that flooded meadow, Mansell? The masters would not allow them to stay there, even if the boys themselves were mad enough to attempt such a thing."

"They've got boats," said Mansell.

"Boats!" repeated Whittle contemptuously. "Didn't we discuss that point before? If they've moored a boat in the middle of that flood, thinking that it will enable them to comply with the condition of my uncle's will, they'll find that they've made a mistake. A big mistake, Mansell!"

"Are you sure, sir? They'll still be in possession——"

"Nothing of the sort!" interrupted Whittle. "If it comes to a point of law—and it probably will do if I am compelled to bring an action—the wording of my uncle's will is quite definite and capable of only one interpretation. The St. Frank's Camp must be maintained for one solid calendar month, without a minute's break. Do you realise that? The camp, Mansell! Not a boat, floating on a flood! The camp itself, with a number of boys engaged in the ordinary life of camp, must be maintained. I am quite comfortable about this, and if any of those young fools are floating about on a raft or in a boat, I'll soon turn them off! That meadow is mine now!"

They parked the car near Bellton Bridge, and here, securely moored, was the boat which they had used during the night. They got in, and Mansell seized the oars.

"Now we'll see!" said Whittle grimly.

They did see—and what they saw nearly struck them dumb.

The Half Mile Meadow was hidden for the greater part of their journey, owing to the intervention of Bellton Wood and a number of willows. But at last, turning a bend of the river, they came within full sight of the flooded camping-ground.

Whittle, who caught sight of it first, uttered a curious gurgling sound in his throat, and he sat bolt upright, his pipe dropping heedlessly from his mouth. He stared as though he could not believe the evidence of his own eyes.

The meadow was flooded—yes—exactly the same as before. But, rising from the water, in the centre, was a great, imposing edifice of wood. It stood upon stilts of timber, a clear three feet above the water. And on this elaborate staging were many tents, with flags gaily flying in the morning breeze. St. Frank's boys, many of them dressed as Scouts, were passing to and fro, just as dry as though they were upon solid land.

Between the tents there were even camp-fires burning—breakfast was being prepared. Frying-pans were on the go, coffee pots were singing. These fires had been built on metal trays, separated from the wooden staging by metal supports. There was plenty of water at hand in case a spark should cause a fire in the wrong place!

"But—but this is impossible!" burst out Whittle, when he found his voice. "Look Mansell! The camp's still there! And I tell you that it's impossible!"

Mansell, who had seen, and who was resting on his oars, grunted.

"It's no good saying that, Mr. Whittle," he replied. "It can't be impossible, because we can see it. But how in the name of wonder these boys built that island in this time beats me! Look at the size of it!"

"They're still in possession of the meadow!" snarled Whittle. "Good heavens, is there no way in which we can defeat them, Mansell? We're frustrated again!"

"It looks very much like it," agreed Mansell dryly.

"And you sit there, cool and cynical, and you can suggest nothing!" roared Whittle furiously. "Don't I tell you that these boys have frustrated us again?"

"Well, it's no good getting excited, sir——"

"I am not excited!" hooted Whittle. "I'm furious! Do you hear me, Mansell? I'm absolutely furious! I can't order these boys

off. They're on the property—actually on it! This flood means nothing."

"It means that you've gone to a lot of expense, and that St. Frank's has won the day," replied Mansell. "If I were you, Mr. Whittle, I'd turn back straight away. No sense in going any further. The boys may have no proof of what you did, but they're no fools. They suspect. And we don't want another ducking!"

Whittle nearly choked.

"By heavens—look!" he panted. "Now I understand! Don't you see, Mansell? The barge! She's one of our barges!"

Mansell transferred his attention from the camp to the barge, which was also within full sight. And he noted at once that most of her cargo was missing.

"Those boys are too darned clever," he

"Fine Score that!"



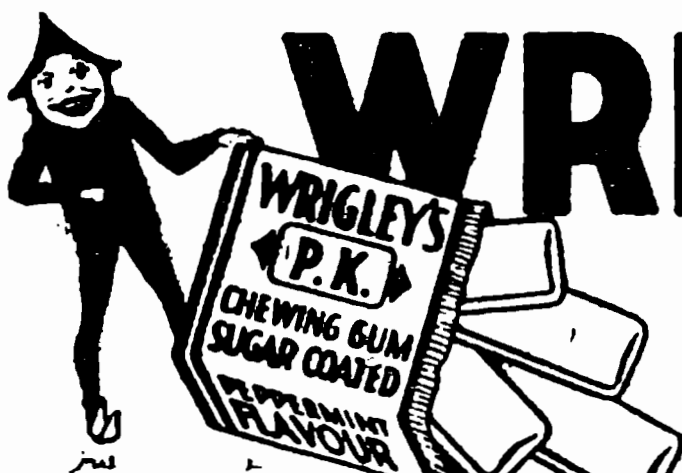
HE was well past the century before he was caught out. A fine score by a good player.

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said savagely. "So that's how they did it! They unloaded our timber, and built that island on stilts. Our own timber, Mr. Whittle! The cheek of it!"

Whittle's face was flushed.

"It gives us a hold over them!" he snapped. "Don't you see, Mansell? All this wood is mine, and these boys have seized it unlawfully. I've got them. Yes, Mansell, I've got them, after all!"

He urged Mansell to ply the oars again, and soon the boat grated alongside the barge, and the two men leapt aboard.

By this time all the boys in the camp had become aware of the boat's approach, and there was great excitement. Everybody knew that the "fireworks" would soon be going off.

"Horton!" roared Whittle, dashing along the barge's deck. "Horton! Where are you, man?"

Bill Horton, the skipper, let out a yell from down in the cabin. Mr. Whittle, almost falling down the companionway, found the cabin door closed and locked on the outside. He unlocked it, flung open the door, and found the two men within.

"What is the meaning of this, you fool?" shouted Whittle.

"It's no good blaming me, sir," replied Bill truculently. "How do you suppose me an' Sam could stop all them boys? Scores of 'em! Hundreds of 'em!"

"They seized this barge by force and locked you in the cabin?"

"Took us afore we could do a thing, sir," replied Bill, nodding.

"Very well! That's all I wanted to know!" snapped Whittle. "They seized this barge by force! An unlawful act, Mansell!"

He scrambled up the narrow stairs, reached the deck, and dropped into the boat again. He and Mansell rowed across to the staging, where dozens of fellows stood awaiting them.

Mr. Amos Whittle lost some of his heat as he saw the grim, determined expressions on the faces of all those boys.

"Hold on, sir," said Fenton, of the Sixth. "I shouldn't come any nearer, if I were you."

"You insolent young dog——"

"I'm thinking of your own safety, Mr. Whittle," interrupted Fenton coldly. "Many of these junior boys are excited, and I might not be able to hold them in check. If you have anything to say, you can say it just as well from the boat——"

"I have plenty to say!" roared Whittle. "All this timber is mine! You stole it from my barge!"

"We didn't steal it," denied Fenton. "We only borrowed it. You can have the whole lot back, Mr. Whittle, as soon as the flood subsides."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Fenton!"

"I'm going to have this timber now!" shouted Whittle, almost beside himself. "I demand that you boys shall give it up immediately!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do you know any more jokes?" yelled Handforth.

"We don't want to be unreasonable," said Fenton coolly. "If it comes to a pinch, Mr. Whittle, we'll buy this timber. We don't want to be on the wrong side of the law. We seized it, we admit—and we've used it for a good purpose. How much do you want for this wood?"

"The wood is not for sale!" snarled Whittle.

"Come, now," said Fenton. "The whole barge-load. How much will you take for it?"

"I tell you the wood is not for sale!" thundered Whittle. "The wood is mine, and I mean to have it!"

"But possession, Mr. Whittle, is nine points of the law," said Fenton gently. "The wood is in our possession, and since you won't sell it I am afraid your only alternative is to sue us."

"And I will sue you, too!" raved the furious man. "I'll bring an action against the school authorities——"

"But you can't do that," interrupted Fenton. "The school authorities didn't have any hand in this business. There wasn't a master within sight when we seized that barge. We did it ourselves—and I don't suppose the masters, or the school authorities, approve. If you mean to sue anybody, you'll have to sue us."

"You know perfectly well, you young fool, that I cannot sue you!" panted Whittle. "In the eyes of the law, you are all minors."

"Then I'm afraid it's too bad," said Fenton, shaking his head. "You won't sell us the wood, you can't sue us, and yet here we are in possession. I can't help thinking, Mr. Whittle, that you're more or less helpless."

"And the next time you try any tricks, we'll be ready for you again!" sang out Nipper. "You'd better not go to law, Mr. Whittle! Too many facts might come out!"

"Such as the 'accidental' breaking of the Edgemore Dam!" said Handforth. "And what about that tricky business at Moat Hollow? You giddy trickster! You daren't bring an action! We've got you whacked all along the line!"

Whittle seemed to be on the point of a fit.

"You'll surrender this wood to me, or I'll take it by force!" he shouted thickly. "It's mine—and you know it's mine! Do you hear, you young scoundrels? I'll take it by force!"

"All right, Mr. Whittle," replied Fenton calmly. "You can start just as soon as you please. But I'll give you fair warning that if you try force, we'll resist all the way. It won't be so easy to get this wood again. And I might mention to you that it's against the law to use force. Your only course is to sue us!"

"But I can't sue you!" howled Whittle. "You're under age!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Clear off, Mr. Whittle—your face gives us a pain!"

"Yah! Trickster!"

"This meadow's ours, and you're trespassing!"

"Let's duck him again!"

"Hear, hear!"

Amos Whittle looked round helplessly. He was alarmed now. Mansell was already plying the oars, and as the boat returned across the flood towards the river a great cheer went up from the victorious schoolboys.

"To the school!" snarled Whittle. "Row to the school, Mansell! I'm going to see the headmaster about this! He's responsible for what his boys do, and——"

"Better not!" advised Mansell. "Lee is no ordinary schoolmaster, and he knows the law inside out. He's taken no hand in this affair, and he'll twist you round his little finger. What does he care if you do bring an action against the school? Do you think that he doesn't suspect? Everybody suspects! They all know that this meadow was flooded deliberately. The best thing we can do is to get as far away as we can!"

"And it was your idea!" said Whittle bitterly. "You fool, Mansell!"

"These boys are too much for us!" growled Mansell. "We'd better give it all up, Mr. Whittle."

"No!" panted Whittle savagely. "I'll not give up! There must be a way of defeating them, and I shall find it!"

With the cheers from Nipper & Co. still ringing in his ears, he floated down the river. And the St. Frank's camp continued with full honours—and the boys cheered again and again at their triumph. But they all felt that the end had not yet been reached. Amos Whittle was temporarily defeated, but he hadn't give up fighting for the Half Mile Meadow yet!

THE END.

(Another corking story in this fine series next week—in which Amos Whittle once more clashes with the Chums of St. Frank's. Entitled: "Peril Camp!" Order your copy now.)

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Gather Round, Boys.



EDWY SEARLES BROOKS wishes to acknowledge letters from the following readers: G. R. Bartram (Southport), Wm. H. Aelberry (Boston), Jas. Brooks (Felton), Ralph Leadbeater (S.W.4), Herbert McCreery (Manchester), Bert Kilner (N.16), Bertram H. Mallett (Enfield), Barnet Kisner (Antwerp), John Marshall (N.16), Raymond R. Radmore (Woodlands), Abie Frumkin (South Porcupine, Ontario), Leslie W. Trevor—3 letters (Belmont), Reg. T. Staples (S.E.17), Ernest S. Holman* (E.10), Stanley Jonson (Port Elizabeth, S. Africa), J. Woolford (Kenton), Frank Williams (Nottingham), R. Corocran (Southport), Ernest E. Golt (Gibraltar), Alec Singleton (Egremont), Albert Barnard (S.W.3), Arthur E. Angus (Sheffield), H. W. Woollacott (New Malden), G. Warren Briggs (Brighton), "Tennis"* (Birmingham), Arthur Blount Turck* (W.2), E. Jas. Sparks (Widnes).

You ask if St. Frank's is much bigger than the River House School, Ernest S. Holman. Yes, much; double the size. Whilst St. Frank's is one of the greatest public schools in the country, the River House, although quite exclusive, with fees nearly as high as those of St. Frank's, is a private establishment.

Study B, in the Ancient House, is occupied by Claude Gore-Pearce, Arthur Hubbard, and Teddy Long—Stanley Johnson—and there is a boy at St. Frank's named Dale—Billy Dale, of the East House Third. Yes, the Third-Formers have studies of their own.

The titles you want, H. C. Woollacott, are as follows: Old Series, No. 353—"The Trials of Archie"; 354—"The Amazing Inheritance"; 355—"The Lost Schoolboys"; 356—"The New Page-boy"; 357—"The Fooling of Archie"; 358—"The Mystery of Handforth's Pater"; 359—"The Fun of the Fair"; 360—"Yung Ching, the Chineese."

It is very nice to know, Jean Elder, that you regard the St. Frank's story as your "weekly pick-me-up." There are no First and Second Forms at St. Frank's. There were many years ago, but they were discontinued. St. Frank's does not now admit boys under twelve years of age. Each of the four Houses at St. Frank's (not counting the School House, which is purely for work) boards Third-Formers, Fifth-Formers and Sixth-Formers. But the Remove is divided equally between the Ancient House and the West House, and the Fourth is divided equally between the Modern House and East House.

There's no need for you to say "I expect you will be annoyed because I am being candid, and I don't suppose you will finish reading this after me being so critical," Alex. W. Tustin. Candour and criticism are both welcomed. So it is hoped that you and other readers will not refrain from writing if you have a few little grumbles to ventilate. Grumbles, especially if they are thoroughly justified, can be very helpful.

The St. Frank's boys no longer wear Etons, I. Woolford, because the school authorities have awakened from their long, long sleep, and have decided that a great college like St. Frank's should move with the times. It was not Handforth who changed his Austin Seven for a Morris Minor, but his fond aunt. Before long, it's quite possible that she'll make another change, and substitute an M. G. Midget, or something.

Readers who wish to join in our "Round Table Talk" should address their letters to the Editor, NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, who will pass on to Mr. Brooks any queries for the author's individual attention.

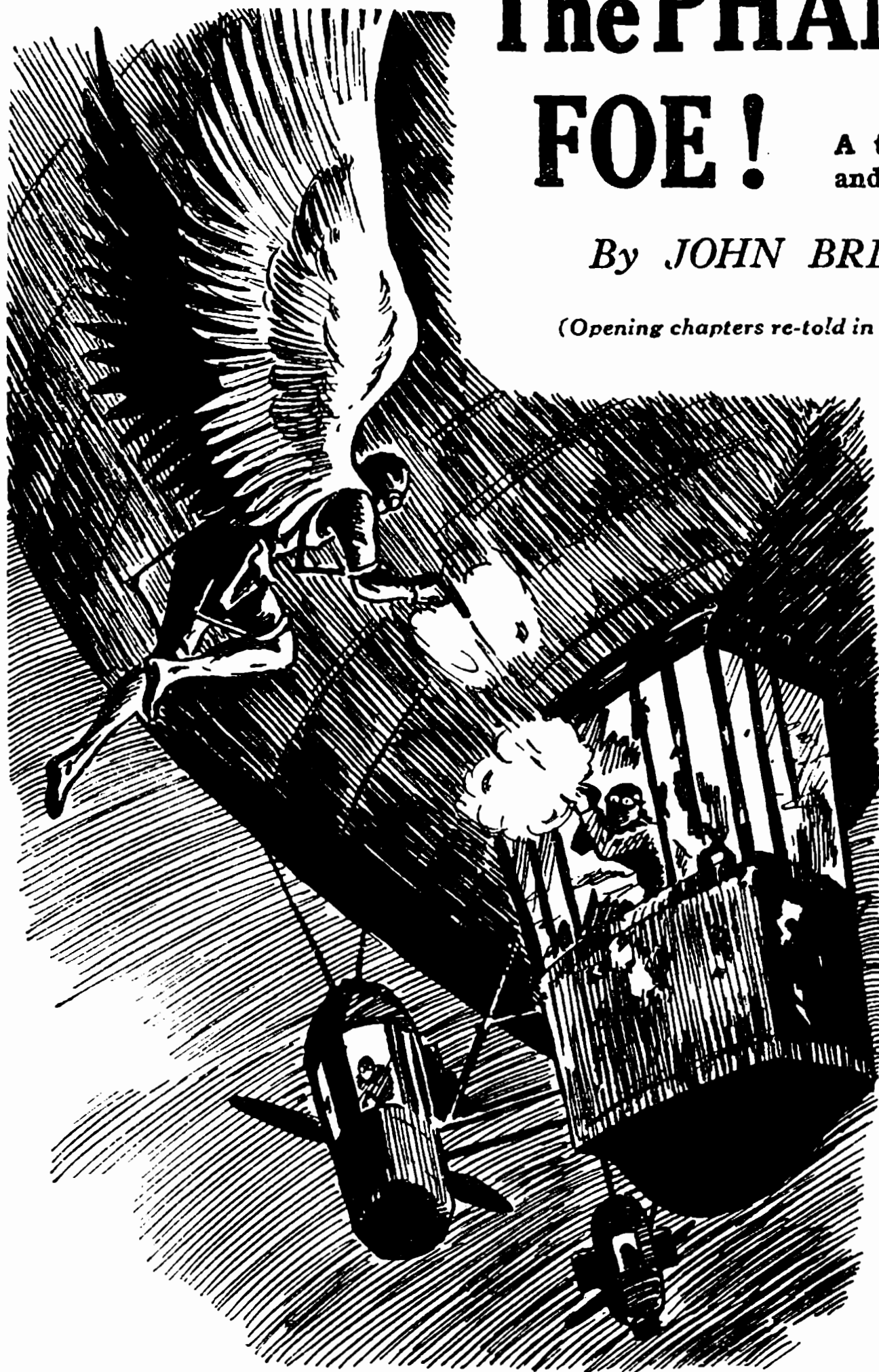
Night Hawk and Phantom Foe Meet in a Thrilling Mid-air Duel!

The PHANTOM FOE!

A thrilling mystery
and adventure serial

By JOHN BREARLEY

(Opening chapters re-told in brief on page 42.)



Fighting Fury!

JUST for a moment Thurston Kyle and Snub stood transfixed—horrified by the ghastly yellow masks the madmen wore, through which frenzied eyes glared with baleful light. The Night Hawk guessed who they were the moment he saw them, both from their numbers and the sudden wild yell that burst from their lips.

chorus of baffled yells, and a smashing impact as the pursuers crashed home on the barrier.

Kyle's advantage, however, lasted less than a second. The bed-room door that could withstand the tempestuous rush of five frantic killers had yet to be made. Hardly had the defenders time to draw a single deep breath than a panel split

The shock made him falter. And the pause was fatal, pardonable though it was, for, with another throbbing roar, the raiders foamed into action, hurling themselves to handgrips like furies.

Only the narrowness of the corridor saved the two from being swamped.

"Back, Snub!"

The Night Hawk, icy cool in a flash, swept the boy behind him into the room, flung up his gun, and dropped the leader of the rush limply in his tracks. Deftly then the scientist retreated, ducking a heavy knife that buried itself in the panels as he closed the door. There followed a

open, a shot wrecked the lock, and, to a worse din than ever, the Phantom's devils poured in like a flood, weapons raised.

But this time they were met by a man as demented as themselves—and twice as strong. One who turned at bay with the splendid recklessness of a cornered tiger—a desperate Hercules.

With a harsh roar, Thurston Kyle leapt squarely to meet them, gun aflame. A second man went down under a bullet, but, in falling, pitched against the Night Hawk's legs. The diving weight threw him off his balance, and a wildly-swung cosh jerked the gun from his hand. Recovering viciously, he punched the club-swinger senseless to the floor, whirled up a chair, and transformed it into a weapon that smashed the attack into confusion.

Snub's automatic spat snakingly at the same instant, the bullet downing a raving attacker who clutched fiercely at his shoulder as he hit the carpet. Thurston Kyle and his assistant were through the communication-door and into Snub's bed-room in a stride.

"Out of this, Snub—laboratory—get my wings ready!" came a hoarse gasp. "Watch outside; others may be coming! Ah!"

Obediently, Snub darted into the empty corridor and raced for the lab. just as the second door crashed open. The very man he had wounded led this attack, for only fatal shots could stop such fighters as these. Thurston Kyle, however, barred the way once more, using his broken chair with a cold, relentless fury that halted the raid in the doorway, beat the maniacs back, and not only back but clean through his bed-room and into the passage once more.

Even had the Phantom's men combined, the three still on their feet could not have stopped that tall, raging figure; and they did not combine. Each was fighting for his own hand, loosing off wild shots that emptied their guns, casting them away and sailing in with claw-like hands. One, running straight into a terrible, downward swing, sailed right through the door and sagged against the wall like an empty sack. The others, wrapping them-

selves round their solitary foe, strove to pull him down.

Backward and forward the three reeled, locked in conflict, staggering against walls, heedless of bruises or shock. Breathless and groggy though he was, Thurston Kyle still fought like a demon; hammered his way clear, flung his assailants down, and, in turn, backed slowly away towards the laboratory after Snub.

They caught him again as he retreated down a short flight of stairs; diving on top of him full-toss from the top step, so that all three toppled together. At the bottom they merged into another welter of vicious, thudding blows, smashes, and kicks.

Meanwhile, Snub had reached the laboratory. His first action was to throw on a master-switch that set every light in the house blazing with a glow that flooded the lawn. In lithe haste then, he laid out his master's flying gear, knowing that Thurston Kyle had formed some lightning scheme even in the fury of the bed-room fight—though what, he could not guess. That finished, he darted to the little veranda outside, gun in hand.

He was just in time to witness the arrival of fresh reinforcements from the Phantom's night-hovering airship.

The cage had been withdrawn from the roof the moment the terrible six had glided out. Now, however, alarmed by the sudden blaze of lights, the Phantom flung six more fighting-men into the raid to make a swift end of the fight that he guessed was still raging. This time the cage landed squarely on the lawn, the door slid open and the gunmen rushed for the lower windows of the house, planning an attack from a different quarter.

Their finish was swift!

From each man burst a sudden choking yell, followed by a stiff spasmodic leap into the air. Next moment, six ex-convicts, who had known nothing of the electric defences guarding the Night Hawk's lair at night, lay quiet and still on the smooth turf.

Other foes had attacked the same way in the past and shared the same fate, prepared by the ruthless, masterful man

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. One night the crook sends six madmen to attack the Night Hawk. Kyle and his young assistant, Snub Hawkins, are awakened, and a whirlwind scrap begins.

(Now read on.)

who disdained police protection and fought danger in his own way. Snub, with a bitter, defiant word, plunged back into the laboratory and heard a noise that made him rush to the door.

It opened; his gun went up, only to be pocketed next instant. For the powerful Night Hawk had won his battle at last with the two survivors on the stairs, and now lurched wearily in, hauling them after him by their collars.

Aided by Snub, he imprisoned them immediately in the small electric lift that ran from the corner of his laboratory, down a shaft to the little screened door below. Slamming the door upon their unconscious figures, he gripped the lad by the arm, panting heavily.

"Go back; see to the others. Haul any survivors in here and put them in the lift—keep them prisoners. Be careful—take your gun. Then lower the lift half-way and leave them—to cool!"

"And you, guv'nor?"

For answer the Night Hawk snatched a pair of goggles from a bench, ran out on the veranda and donned them. They were the goggles copied from such as the Phantom's own men wore; of anti-actinic glass, the only lens that would betray the whereabouts of the criminal's great airship, providing it was near enough to be seen. It was.

Craning his neck, he discovered the vessel at once, right above the house; a mere blur of faint violet light, of an intensity beyond the scope of the naked eye. Thurston Kyle's great fist clenched and rose in a single fierce gesture, unutterably vindictive.

"Madmen—eh?" he snarled. "You cur; stay there two minutes longer and, by Heaven, I'll be with you!"

Running in, he began throwing on his flying gear like a man possessed.

The Phantom Retaliates!

THE Night Hawk was as good as his word, for burning rage drove him to swiftest action. Indeed, the two minutes had barely elapsed before a dark, vengeful figure, borne by great wings, swooped from the laboratory veranda and streaked aloft at blinding pace, straight for the dimly-glowing airship that only he could see. For the third time, Night Hawk and Phantom were about to clash in an aerial duel—ornithopter versus dirigible; bird-man versus a modern master of crime!

The Night Hawk, as he flung himself upwards, was infuriated to a point where odds ceased to count. Twice before his

attacks on the Phantom's mysterious craft had been beaten off, but no thought of these failures checked him now. All he wanted was to come to grips once more, to smash and destroy, drive the airship off with wounds that would go some way to paying for the raid of the terrible six. And he held a strong card in his hand—that of surprise.

The airship still hung in the sky, motionless while her frowning commander stared down at the brilliantly-lighted house below. The Phantom was becoming impatient. By now the savage onslaught of his men should have been over long ago, and instinct told him that a snag had cropped up somewhere—a hitch on which he had not counted. Still, with twelve men attacking, success must come soon. Meanwhile, he and the rest of his gang were safe above, ready to flood Thurston Kyle's grounds with Yellow Gas should any attempt at rescue be made from outside. The last thing he expected just then was a lightning counter-attack from Kyle himself.

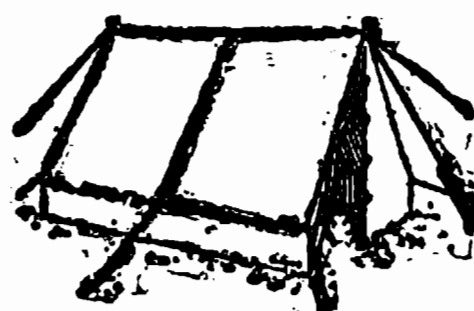
Thus, when the rude awakening burst on him with bewildering suddenness, the shock was doubly severe.

Like a shell from a gun, the Night Hawk flew unseen past the airship, banked dizzily on outstretched wings and came down from above to launch his first blow. As he flashed across the top of the vessel, his hand swung over and down in a long, clean throw, flinging a grenade with unerring aim squarely to the centre of the rear helicopter. To the sound of a staggering report, the spinning horizontal vanes vanished, shattered to splinters. And the airship reeled drunkenly, her stern, robbed of its upward lifting power, dropping with a sickening lurch.

The inexorable Night Hawk, in a single

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whirl of his wings, flashed lower at once to press home his advantage. His hastily-loaded belt held only two grenades, and now he hurled the second and last clean through a starboard window. Then, diving for the breach with reckless aggressiveness, he sent bullet after bullet flaming inside from his twin automatics.

Within the airship's main cabin, the effect of the lightning onslaught was terrific. One yellow masked gangster was devastatingly hit by the spiteful grenade, two others crumpled as whining bullets drilled them cleanly. Bewildered, almost unnerved, the others flung themselves flat to the deck, abandoning their stations in panic; so for a full fifty seconds the fate of the giant trembled in the balance. Then the Phantom and his lieutenant stormed from the control-cabin to take charge and fight back with ruthless resolution.

Whatever they were, they were not cowards. Heedless of flying lead, the Phantom dashed down the giddily-sloping deck, lashing his men upright with fiery, scathing tongue. His lieutenant, jerking a Tommy-gun from a rack, sent a blistering hail of bullets through the shattered window that narrowly missed the Night Hawk's head as he glided back to reload.

Brr-rrr-rr! In the face of that scathing death-hail, further attack there was impossible. He swirled away, searching for another loophole before the Phantom's smoke screen should gush forth as usual to blind and baffle him.

With a sluggish leap into the air, the great ship began to struggle for altitude, the Phantom abandoning his fighting-men below without a thought. And as the airship's crew sprang to arms and the smoke-screen cylinders began to hiss, he darted to a port window and glared for a single sulphurous moment at Thurston Kyle's house beneath him, a vivid target.

A savage oath burst from him when a second starboard window caved in beneath a stream of revolver shots. He knew from past experience that hitting the elusive enemy outside was a matter of merest chance, and, with his crippled ship, did not intend staying this time for a long fight. But he could and would launch a last attack below before sheering off.

"You clever dog! I'm not finished yet!" he spat, and acted swiftly.

Diving back into his cabin, he ran to the wall, strong hand gripping a lever there. Laughing harshly, he pulled it back. And from the bomb-release in the airship's keel, dropped a sleek object that swished earthwards at hissing speed.

In a long, curving line the huge aero-bomb dropped. It missed the house by many yards, but landed flush in the centre of the lawn. There came a yelling explosion that rose to the skies, creating a backlash so powerful that the airship felt the shock, followed by a ghastly lurid glare!

(Is the Night Hawk's mansion wrecked? And what of Smub, inside? Look out for another thrilling instalment next week, lads.)

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