

HANDSOME PRIZES FOR GOOD JOKES

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THE **NELSON LEE**

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The
**MIDNIGHT
DR-INK!**

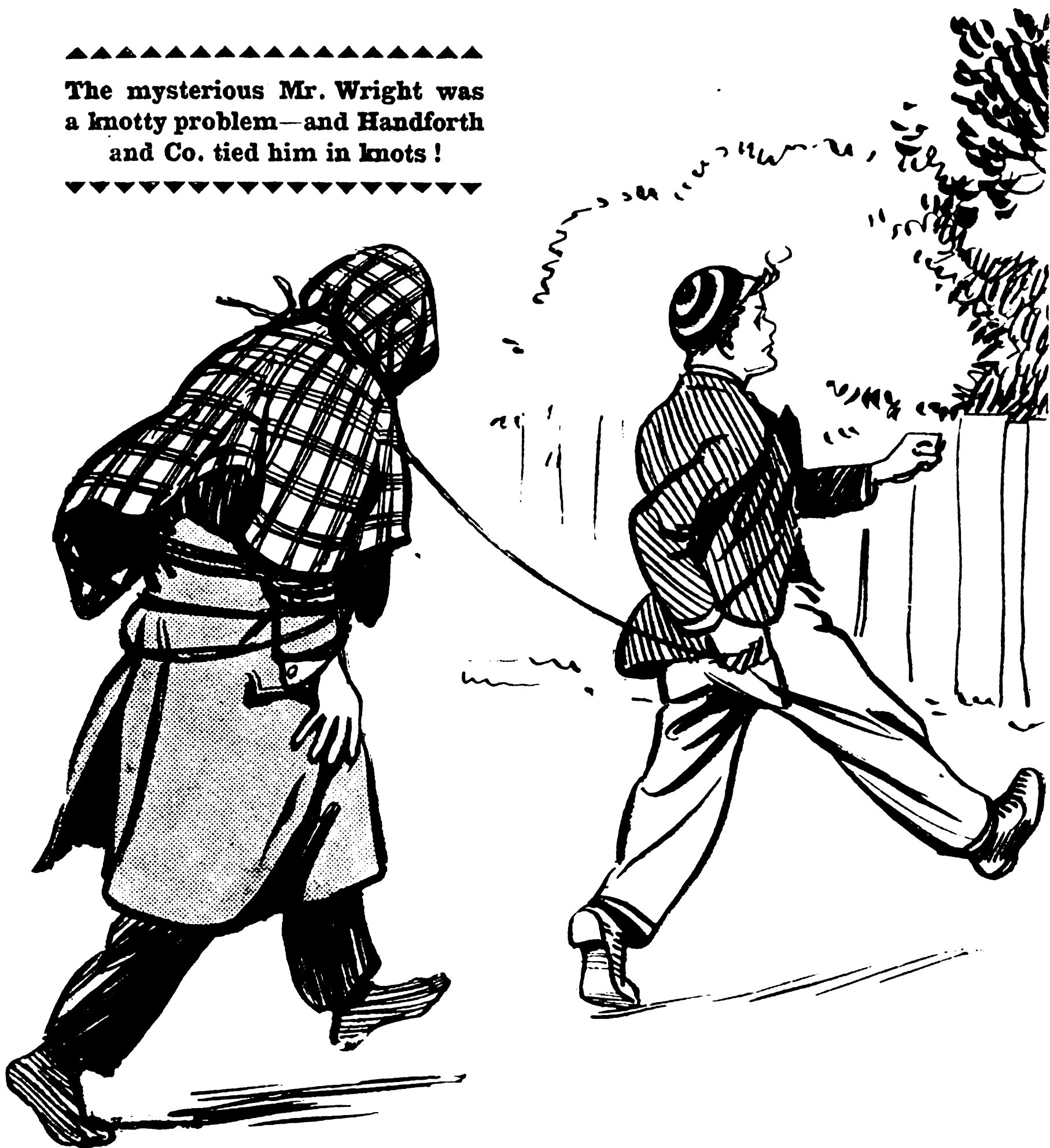
The wrong victim—but Handforth the japer doesn't know that! An amusing incident from this week's magnificent long complete school, fun, and mystery yarn featuring the cheery Chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 88.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

September 26th, 1931.

The mysterious Mr. Wright was a knotty problem—and Handforth and Co. tied him in knots !



The Late Arrival!

"Yes, fathead!"

"Of course!"

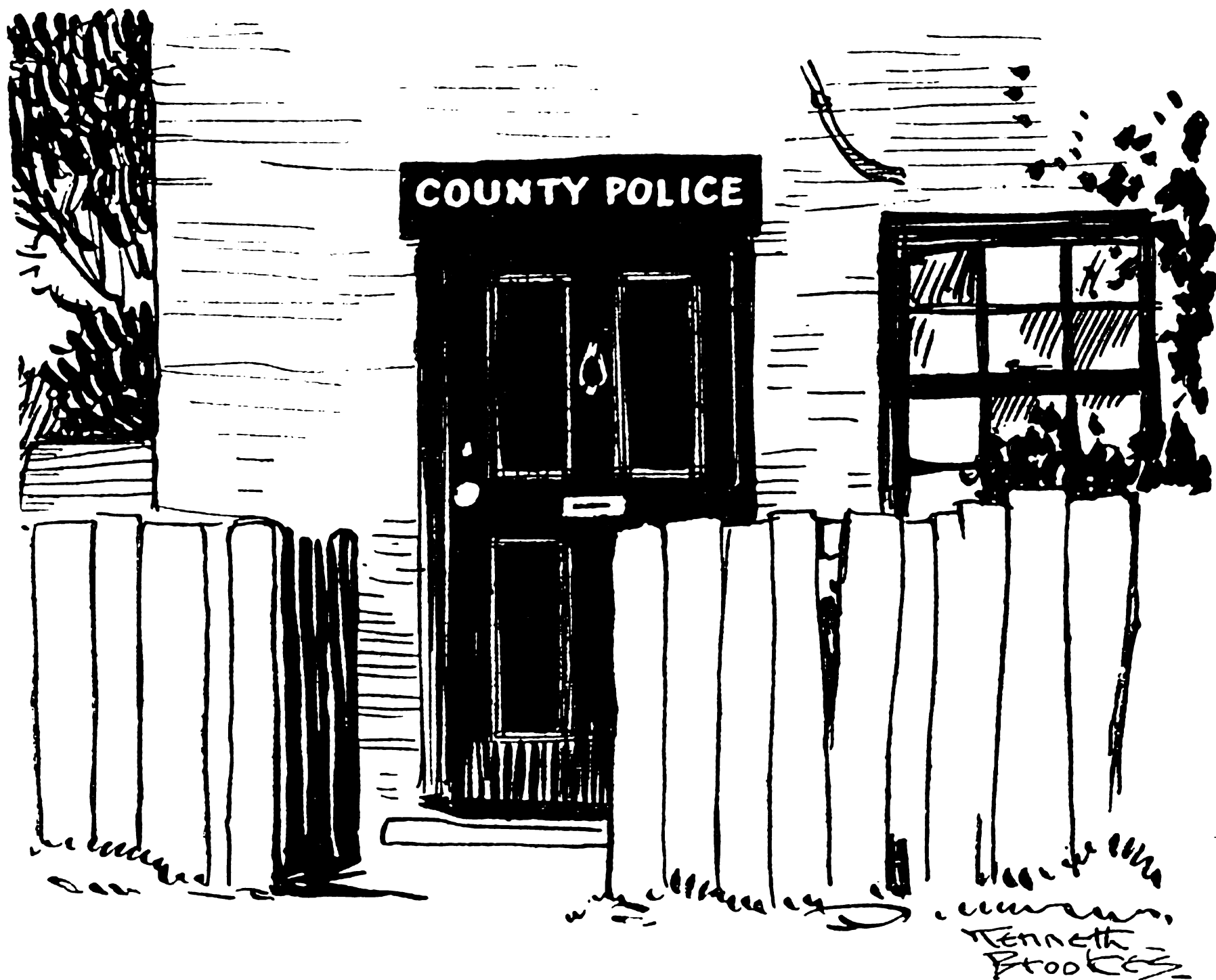
"We've got everything," said Church, in a tired voice. "If you keep on asking

"And the squiffy sardine oil?" It was necessary to be careful, for, "We've got everything," said Church, although it was long after lights out—in a tired voice. "If you keep on asking past eleven o'clock, in fact—there

But you can be sure that this complete school yarn is all right!

WRIGHT!

By **EDWY SEARLES
BROOKS**



was no guarantee that the masters were all in bed. And it was quite on the cards that some of the seniors were still awake.

The chums of Study D were armed with various bottles, cups and mugs containing weird and wonderful liquids, and it was their cheery intention to pour these weird and wonderful liquids into the sleeping countenance of Vivian Travers.

Earlier in the evening the enterprising Travers had played one of his amusing practical jokes on Handforth; he had had Handforth on a piece of string, in fact, and the Remove Common-room had roared itself hoarse at Edward Oswald's expense.

And Handforth was out for revenge.

"Well, here we are," he breathed, as they paused outside one of the dormitory doors. "Now, you chaps know what to do. I'm going in first, and as soon as I get in you'll hand me that bottle of ink. Then you'll follow me with that other stuff."

"All right—go ahead," said Mac. "We know. You've told us about fifty times."

"Don't forget, then," whispered Handforth sternly. "We don't want everything messed up at the last minute."

His chums sighed helplessly. There seemed every likelihood that Handforth himself would "mess everything up."

He gingerly opened the door and crept in. Only the sound of steady breathing came to his ears. The window was closed, although the September night was calm and mild. Vivian Travers and Sir Jimmy Potts and Skeets Rossiter were fast asleep.

"Here we are!" murmured Handforth, moving towards one of the beds. "Give me the ink. That'll do to start with!"

"Hi! Hold on!" gasped Church. "That's not——"

"Don't argue!" hissed Handforth. "Do you want him to wake up, you idiots?"

"But——"

"Gimme the ink!"

His chums gave it up. Handforth seized the bottle of ink. He leaned over one of the beds, and poised it over the peacefully sleeping face on the pillow. Church and McClure waited resignedly.

Zurrrrrrh! Zurrrrrrh! Zurrrrrrh!

"What's that?" asked Handforth hoarsely.

He knew very well what it was—the insistent hooting of an electric motor-horn. It was coming from the direction of the gates, and the sound floated in faintly through the closed window.

Zurrrrrrh! Zurrrrrrh! Zurrrrrrh!

The hooting was continued with the same persistence.

The sleeper over whom Handforth was bending stirred. He had been lying on his side, his face turned away from Handforth. Now he rolled over on to his back. He snored violently, his mouth opening wide in the process. Handforth waited for no more. He tilted the bottle, and a stream of ink dropped into the yawning cavity which loomed so invitingly below.

Splosh!

"Gug-gug-gurrrrh!" gurgled the unhappy junior, sitting up in bed like a Jack-in-the-box and spluttering out the inky contents of his mouth. "What the — Blub-blub! Groooh! What's—groooh!—happened?"

The other occupants of the dormitory were now fully awake.

"Hallo! Visitors!" came a calm voice from behind Handforth. "Well, well! If it isn't Handy again!"

Handforth spun round, his jaw dropping.

"Travers!" he said faintly.

"Well, what's the matter?" asked Vivian Travers. "Do I look like a ghost?"

"But—but I thought——"

"What in the name of Samson have you been doing to poor old Potts?" asked Travers, with concern. "He seems to have gone black in the face."

Sir James Potts, Bart., had leapt out of bed, and Church had thoughtfully turned on the electric light. Meanwhile, the electric hooter was sounding raucously and insistently outside.

"Say, fellers, what's the big idea?" grumbled Skeets, sitting up in bed. "What's all this darned hullabaloo?"

He suddenly started as he caught sight of the spluttering Jimmy Potts. Jimmy was not pleasant to look upon. His face was smothered in blue-black ink; his pyjamas were bespattered and blotched.

"Who did this?" he demanded thickly. "You—you rotters!"

"No need to blame us," said McClure defensively. "Churchy and I knew

there'd be a mess-up. We tried to tell Handy that he was tipping the stuff over the wrong chap, but he wouldn't listen."

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "Oh, my hat! Then you knew, all the time, that——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Travers. "So this little treat was meant for me? Well, well! Accidents will happen, you know, even with the best regulated japes."

Handforth slapped Jimmy Potts on the back.

"Sorry, old man!" he said, with real regret. "I didn't mean that for you at all!"

"But I've got it, haven't I?" growled Jimmy. "Why the dickens can't you be more careful! Groooh!"

"It was meant for Travers, the bounder!" said Handforth darkly. "I wanted to get my own back. I'll do it, too!"

"Are you responsible for that awful noise outside?" asked Travers politely.

"No, I'm not!"

"By the sound of it, somebody wants to get in," suggested Church. "I wonder who can be calling at this hour? Supposing we go along to one of the front windows, and have a look?"

"By George! That's not a bad idea!" said Handforth, dashing out.

He was only too glad to escape. Any excuse was better than none. And while the unfortunate Jimmy Potts went to the bath-room, to clean up, the rest went to one of the front windows of the House, which overlooked the Triangle. They cautiously raised it, and leaned out. They were just in time to see old Josh Cuttle, the head porter, attired in trousers, slippers and an old overcoat, opening the gates.

Outside was a smart two-seater, with a solitary occupant in the car. And by the time he drove in, lights were gleaming in the lower part of the Ancient House, and the main door had been opened. Mr. Alington Wilkes, the Housemaster, in his dressing-gown and slippers, was on the doorstep.

"This is worth watching," murmured Handforth from above.

Church and McClure felt that they were receiving some compensation for their loss of sleep. From the first, they had feared that Handforth's jape would go wrong. But this late visitor, alone in his car, was an unexpected and intriguing diversion.

"Dreadfully sorry to get here at such an unearthly hour," said the man in the car, in a cheery voice, as he leapt out. "The fact is, I didn't quite realize that you would be all locked up for the night."

"We are invariably locked up before eleven, sir," said Mr. Wilkes, in his mild way.

"Eleven!" repeated the stranger. "By Jove! I thought it was no more than half-past ten. I hope I didn't wake all the girls by sounding that hooter so much? The fact is, I didn't quite know what to do."

"The girls?" repeated Old Wilkey gently.

"Why, yes," said the stranger, as he mounted the steps. "I say, I've got you out of bed, haven't I? I really must apologise most profusely. If Miss Bond hasn't been aroused, it might be better on the whole——"

"Just one moment, sir!" interrupted Mr. Wilkes, smiling. "You have referred to girls, and to Miss Bond. Haven't you made a little mistake?"

"I don't think so," said the other. "This is the Moor View School for Girls, isn't it?"

"I'm afraid it isn't," said Old Wilkey, sadly shaking his head.

The boys at the window grinned amongst themselves. The stranger was staring awkwardly and with much embarrassment—as people will when they discover that they have made an absurd blunder.

"Not—not the Moor View School?" he stammered.

"This is St. Frank's College—for Boys," explained Mr. Wilkes calmly.

"Good heavens!" said the stranger, who, as far as the boys could see, was a tall, lithe, good-looking man of about forty. "St. Frank's! And I got you out of bed and—— I say, sir! You'll never forgive me for this idiotic bloomer. I'm really dreadfully sorry. What a fool I am!"

"Perhaps you are rather too hard on yourself, sir," murmured Old Wilkey. "The Moor View School is only two or three hundred yards up the road—and I take it, of course, that you are quite a stranger in these parts?"

"Oh, quite!" said the other. "Wright is my name—Mr. J. G. Wright. May I know to whom I have the pleasure of speaking?"

"I'm Mr. Wilkes, the Housemaster of this House," explained Old Wilkey. "Pray don't upset yourself further, sir. Little mistakes of this kind are bound to happen."

"Well, I must say that you are very nice about it, Mr. Wilkes," said the stranger. "But I'm not excusing myself. I saw some big gates, and a lot of build-

ings, and I took it for granted that the place was Moor View. Somebody in the village told me that the school was up here."

"A very natural mistake on your part, Mr. Wright," said the Housemaster, smiling. "Don't mention it. But if you are really thinking of going along to Miss Bond's establishment, it is only fair that you should know that it will be quite closed up and asleep. Miss Bond keeps even earlier hours than we do."

Mr. Wright was looking at his watch in the light which flooded from the lobby.

"I'm afraid I've made a pretty bad mess of things," he said ruefully. "On the whole, it's just as well that I didn't inform Miss Bond of my coming. I had better run back to the village, and get a room in one of the local taverns. Perhaps you can tell me of a good spot, sir?"

"Well, of course, there is the George," said Mr. Wilkes dubiously. "But I would hardly advise you——"

"You see, sir, I'm the uncle of one of the girls," went on Mr. Wright conversationally. "I didn't wire that I was coming, because I wanted to give the youngster a little surprise."

"Quite natural," murmured Mr. Wilkes.

"Unfortunately, I had a puncture between Helmford and Bannington—on one of the loneliest parts of the road," continued Mr. Wright. "I didn't think much of it until I found that my spare wheel had jammed, and I couldn't get it free for love or money."

"My spare wheel has played me similar tricks," said Old Wilkey sympathetically.

"The result was, I had to walk two or three miles to a garage," went on the visitor. "Then the idiot of a mechanic forgot the most important of his tools, and he had to walk back again. On the whole, over two hours were wasted. So, instead of getting here at eight-thirty, as I intended, I'm not here until after eleven. If I had realised that I should give all this trouble, I would have stayed in Bannington. I certainly don't think it would be advisable for me to arouse the girls' school at this hour. I couldn't see my niece until the morning, anyhow."

"That is quite true," agreed Mr. Wilkes. "In the circumstances, sir, it would be—er—just a little thoughtless."

"Then all I can do, sir, is to apologise once again for being such a nuisance, and to clear off," said Mr. Wright cheerily. "The George, I think you said? I'll come along to the school in the morning, and

surprise my niece then. It'll do just as well."

Mr. Wilkes coughed. The boys at the upper window knew what was coming, for it was fairly obvious to them that the stranger had been angling for an invitation. He had done it very delicately, of course, but Mr. Wilkes had twigged.

"Really, Mr. Wright, I cannot honestly recommend you to the George Tavern," said the Housemaster. "It is quite a good little hotel, as village hotels go. If you would care to remain here, at St. Frank's, you are most welcome to do so."

"Oh, really, I couldn't think of bothering you to that extent," said Mr. Wright promptly.

"There is a spare bed-room available, and you will not be causing any bother at all," said Old Wilkey hospitably. "You are perfectly welcome to remain, sir, and I shall be delighted to have you as my guest. I trust you will honour me."

"Well, since you put it like that, I can hardly refuse," laughed Mr. Wright. "I must say, sir, that you are really an awfully good sport. My car? If there is any place——"

"It will be quite safe in the Triangle, if you care to leave it there," said Mr. Wilkes. "We have a garage, but I do not think there will be any rain. At this hour, you know, the noise——"

"Quite so — quite so!" said Mr. Wright. "I'll leave her here, as you suggest."

He went to the car, switched off the lights, and presented himself once more on the lighted steps with a suitcase in his hand.

"Just like Old Wilkey!" murmured Handforth, with a grin. "He's a good old stick!"

"One of the very best," agreed Church.

"My niece?" came Mr. Wright's voice from the doorway, as he went in. "Oh, yes, you'll probably know her. A rather nice girl, named Manners. Irene Manners. Thanks most awfully. I am really very grateful——"

His voice grew fainter as he and Mr. Wilkes drifted indoors, and then the heavy door of the Ancient House was closed, and their voices were lost altogether.

CHAPTER 2.

"He's A Fraud!"

"MY only sainted aunt!"

Handforth murmured the words in a quivering, excited voice. And when the others looked at him they could see that he was widely excited.

"Well, the show's over, you chaps," murmured Church. "Might as well get back to bed. Mr. J. G. Wright, eh? And Irene's uncle! Funny thing, I've never heard her refer to him."

"By George!" breathed Handforth hoarsely.

He was fairly quivering as he shut the window.

"What's up, you chump?" asked Travers. "What's the idea of all this heavy breathing?"



Late at night a mysterious stranger drove into St. Frank's. Handforth & Co., watching from above, were vastly intrigued.



"That man!" panted Handforth.
 "Which man? Oh, you mean Mr. Wright? What about him?"
 "He's not Irene's uncle!"

"Eh?"
 "I tell you he's not Irene's uncle!" said Handforth tensely.
 "Rot!"

"He's not—he can't be!" insisted Handforth. "Do you think I don't know?"

"Cheese it, Handy!" said McClure. "The man himself said that he was Irene's uncle. What more do you want? You're not calling him a liar, are you?"

"I ought to know!" said Handforth fiercely. "Irene's never mentioned an uncle named Wright."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 The other juniors laughed softly—and derisively.

"Good old Trackett Grim!" grinned Church. "That doesn't prove anything, ass! Irene might have lots of uncles that she's never referred to."

"Oh, might she?" retorted Handforth. "Well, I jolly well know that she hasn't! I know Irene better than any of you chaps, don't I?"

They admitted that he did. Irene Manners was his favourite girl chum. His people were very friendly with her people, and *vice versa*. They were always visiting one another's homes at holiday times. Of all the people at St. Frank's, Handforth was certainly the one person who should know most about Irene's aunts and uncles.

"That man's a crook—he's a fraud!" said Handforth impressively.

He had suddenly become very cold—very cool. There was a melodramatic air about him.

"A crook?" repeated Travers politely.
 "That's what I said—a crook!" repeated Handforth. "Didn't you notice

the way he angled for an invite? He fooled Old Wilkey deliberately—for a set purpose!"

"And what's the set purpose?" asked McClure patiently. "I suppose you're going to tell us that the man has wormed his way into St. Frank's so that he can bag the school silver?"

"Yes!" replied Handforth, without hesitation.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 They laughed again—this time not quite so softly—and much more derisively.

"All right—you can scoff!" breathed Handforth. "I'll soon show you! I know what I'm talking about! That man's an impostor! Irene hasn't got an uncle named J. G. Wright, I tell you! He didn't know I was listening—but I'll be able to spoil his crooked game!"

The other juniors sighed. It wasn't so amusing now. It was just like Edward Oswald Handforth to get a fantastic idea of this sort into his head.

"Oh, come to bed!" said Church.

"Not likely!"
 "But, my dear fellow, you mustn't say things like this about Old Wilkey's visitors—even though they do drop in by chance," said Travers sternly. "You can't call people crooks and——"

"Wait!" interrupted Handforth. "I'll show you exactly what I mean! Go along to the dormitory, and wait there for me."

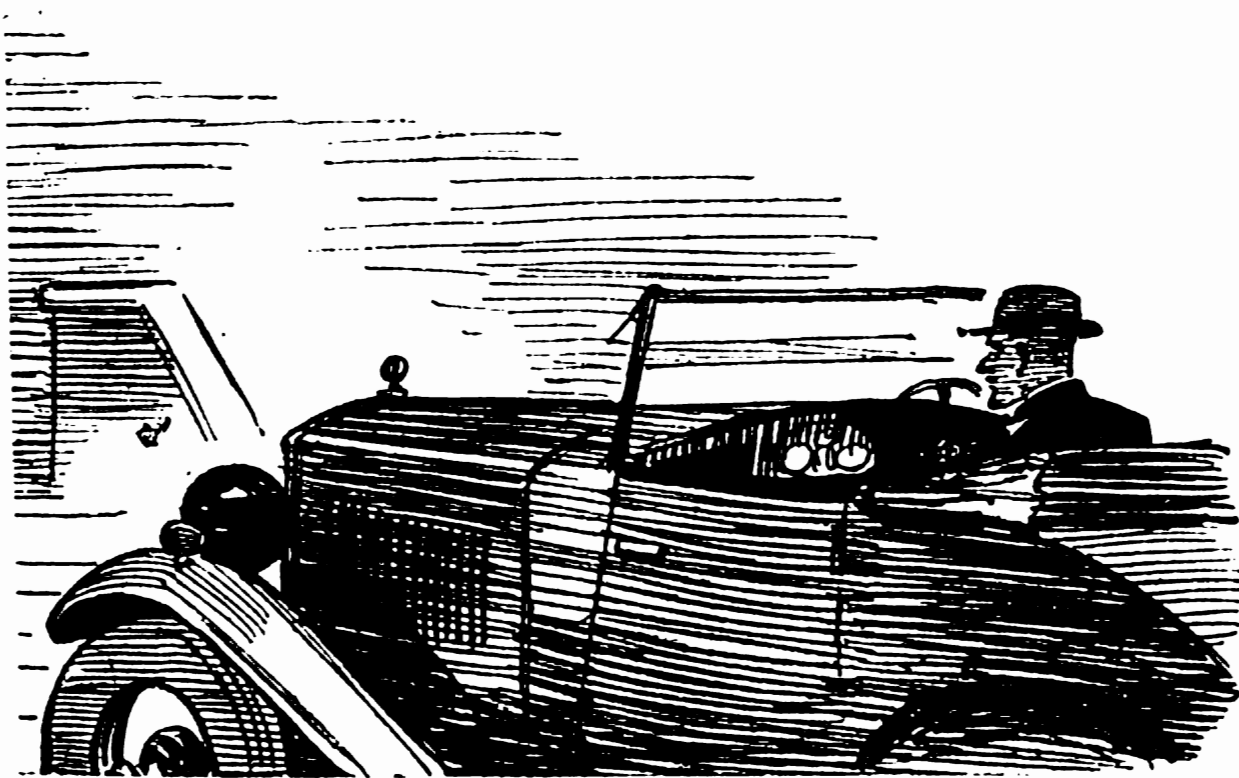
He dodged away before they could stop him. They were mystified. By the time they reached the dormitory, there was no sign of Handforth, and they hadn't the faintest idea where he had gone.

"Potty!" said Travers sadly.
 "Are you talking to me?" asked Sir Jimmy, who had washed, and was back in bed.

"Your name may be Potts, dear old fellow, but I wouldn't dream of calling you potty," replied Travers. "No; I was referring to Handforth's mental condition."

"He's more than potty—he's as crazy as a March hare!" grunted Sir Jimmy. "What's he been up to now? I might as well tell you that I've been into his dormitory, and bagged his sheets—and pillow, too! He's welcome to mine, including the ink."

The others chuckled.



Meanwhile, Handforth had hurried down to the Junior Common-room. A quick search, and he found the copy of the London evening paper he had been glancing at earlier. He fell upon it triumphantly, and dashed upstairs.

"Now!" he exclaimed as he burst into the little dormitory, and closed the door.

"What have you got there?" asked Church impatiently. "Look here, Handy, we ought to be in bed. A prefect might come along——"

"We're not going to bed yet—any of us!" interrupted Handforth. "There's work for us to do. We've got to catch that crook!"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Mac.

"You think I'm mad, don't you?" asked Handforth scornfully.

"We don't think—we know!" answered five voices as one.

"All right, you'll soon change your tones," growled the leader of Study D. "Just listen to this paragraph in to-night's paper. It says here that it has been printed at the request of the police. All I want you to do is to listen to it—without interrupting."

"Let him read it, you chaps," pleaded Church. "It'll save a lot of time."

Unfortunately, there was a brief delay just then, for the door opened and Nipper, the Remove captain, looked in.

"What's this—a secret feed?" asked Nipper suspiciously. "Why wasn't I invited?"

"You're welcome to all the feed you can find here, dear old fellow," said Travers generously.

"Who told you to come?" demanded Handforth. "Go back to bed! You'll only start chipping me, and I jolly well know that that man Wright is a wrong 'un!"

"How can he be wrong if he's Wright?" asked Travers mildly.

"Which man?" inquired Nipper, before Handforth could think of an adequate answer to Travers' pleasantry. "You mean the chap who just arrived? I heard some talk at the front door. That motor hooter woke me up, in fact."

The others obligingly told him what had happened—Handforth, meanwhile, seething with impatience.

"That's all we know," concluded Church. "Handy sticks out that the chap is a swindler—a crook. He says that he got into St. Frank's by false pretences—that he's not Irene's uncle at all."

"Draw it mild, Handy," said Nipper, with a grin.

"When are you blithering idiots going to let me read this paragraph?" de-

manded Handforth thickly. "You know exactly how that man got round Old Wilkey—you heard him! Well, listen to this!"

They glanced at one another, grinned, and prepared to listen.

"Householders," read Handforth, "particularly those in large, isolated country mansions, are warned against the depredations of a plausible scoundrel, owning a motor-car, who has been making a practice of calling at lonely mansions with a tale of engine trouble, and asking for a night's shelter. This man invariably chooses a house many miles from a village or hotel, and his plausibility is such that the unsuspecting householder generally extends him a welcome—only to find, in the morning, that the guest has decamped in the early hours, taking all the available valuables."

"The police wish to warn householders against this man. He is well educated, gentlemanly, aged between thirty and forty, dark, and of good appearance. At various times he has used the names of Captain Horace Gunby, Major Fitzwilliam, Sir Thomas Wright, and Lieutenant-colonel Russell. It is hardly likely, however, that he will use these names again. As recently as last week, this daring swindler imposed upon the Rev. Stanley Tracey, vicar of Great Bradfield, in Kent. In his usual way, he arrived at the vicarage at a fairly late hour, using a smart two-seater car. He pleaded shortage of petrol, and the vicar, deceived by the man's appearance, invited him to stay the night——' Well, there's nothing much else that matters," said Handforth breathlessly. "What about it? Isn't that good enough for you chaps?"

There was a silence for some moments.

"It's a bit thick, you know," said Nipper at length.

"He used the same name to-night, don't forget!" urged Handforth. "In the paper here it says 'Sir Thomas Wright.' And the name he gave to Old Wilkey was 'Mr. J. G. Wright.' What about that?"

"Coincidence, of course!" growled Church impatiently. "Do be sensible, Handy!"

"Well, what about the rest of it?" demanded Handforth. "It says that this man makes a practice of calling at lonely country mansions——"

"St. Frank's isn't a lonely country mansion," put in McClure.

"Perhaps it isn't—but it's a likely spot for grabbing some cash or valuables."

"Yes, but——"

"Then, again," went on Handforth, "he tells a tale of engine trouble. He varied

that a bit to-night. It was tyre trouble, wasn't it? Something to do with his spare wheel? But what's the difference? He wangled a night's shelter—and he's in this House, and Old Wilkey is unsuspicious."

"H'm! It does look a bit funny, of course," said Nipper thoughtfully. "I mean, you'd think that he would have told the Moor View people that he was coming. Uncles don't generally drop in like this—without even telling the school authorities. Again, it was rummy that he should have mistaken St. Frank's for the Moor View School."

"Rummy isn't the word!" said Handforth excitedly. "I tell you, the whole thing is a plant! And what about Irene? That's where the man made his fatal blunder! Old Wilkey doesn't know anything about Irene's uncles—but I do! Irene hasn't got an uncle named Wright!"

"You can't be absolutely sure of that, Handy," protested Nipper.

"But I *can* be!" exclaimed Handforth. "Irene's mother only has two sisters. Don't you think I know? One of them is married to a Mr. Warburton. He's Irene's Uncle Tom. Her other aunt—Aunt Julie—is a spinster. Always has been. An old maid. How *can* this man's yarn be true?"

"By Jove?" said Nipper keenly. "I thought, at first, that Handy had caught a mare's nest—as usual. But there seems to be something in this, you chaps. That man couldn't have known that you fellows were hanging out of that window listening. That's what he didn't reckon on."

"You don't really think that he's an impostor, do you?" asked Jimmy Potts, staring.

"I'm inclined to think that it's a bit fishy," said Nipper. "Mind you, I'm not certain—but it might be as well to make sure."

"Let's go and see Old Wilkey at once," suggested Church. "We'd better warn him, hadn't we? By the way, Handy, I've just thought of a snag."

"A which?" asked Handforth.

"A snag," said Church. "If this man is a crook, how did he know anything about Irene?"

There was a complete silence.

"Well?" asked Church at length.

"It's a facer, dear old fellow," murmured Travers dryly. "If Mr. Wright is genuine, he naturally knows all there is to know about Irene Manners. But we're assuming, aren't we, that he is this 'plausible scoundrel' the police have been warning householders about? And if he's a plausible scoundrel, spinning the yarn on purpose to wangle his way into St.

Frank's, it's rather difficult to imagine how he knew anything about Irene at all."

"He might just as well have picked on some other girl," nodded Nipper. "Yes, Handy, you've got to admit that this point is in Mr. Wright's favour."

"I don't admit anything," growled Handforth. "Wait a minute, you fellows! Let me think!"

"We'd all better think," said Nipper. "We don't want to make a silly mistake, and——"

"I've got it!" ejaculated Edward Oswald suddenly, with triumph in his tone. "By George! What a chump I was not to think of it before! Now I know that the fellow is a fraud!"

CHAPTER 3.

Handy's Big Idea!

THE others looked at Handforth interestedly.

"Oh, you know, do you?" asked Vivian Travers.

"Yes, I jolly well do!" retorted Handforth. "Didn't you chaps see yesterday's 'Bannington Gazette'?"

"Of course we did," said Church. "But I don't understand——"

"By Jove!" murmured Nipper. "Move up one, Handy! You mean Irene's photo?"

"Yes, I jolly well do!" said Handforth again. "Now do you understand?" he went on, turning to the others. "Don't you remember? Irene's photo was in yesterday's 'Gazette,' wasn't it? I can remember the very words underneath it: 'Miss Irene Manners, the brilliant captain of the Moor View School hockey team.' It was a report of the girls' hockey match against one of those Bannington schools. Don't you see how it all fits?"

"I say, we'd better go easy," muttered Church dubiously.

"Rats! The whole thing's as clear as daylight!" said Handforth. "This impostor chap drifts to Helmford, or Bannington. He's looking for a fresh victim. He spots Irene's photograph in the local paper, and he thinks it'll be a good wheeze to burgle St. Frank's. By getting here late, and using Irene's name, he can work the dodge. Don't forget that Irene was the only Moor View girl mentioned in the paper! She was not only mentioned, but her photograph was there, too!"

"It does seem to fit," admitted McClure uneasily.

"Fit! It can't do anything else!" retorted Handforth. "I tell you, this man is a crook! I suspected it from the first instant. Naturally enough, he'd primed himself with as much information as possible—but his idea was to fool the Housemaster only. No matter how carefully he planned, he couldn't know that some of Irene's friends would be hanging out of an upper window, listening."

There was another silence.

"This is all very well," said Travers at last. "But what are we going to do? It's no good standing here talking. We're only wasting our beauty sleep—and, goodness knows, Handy needs enough of that!"

"This isn't the time for being funny," said Handforth coldly. "We've got to nab this crook, my sons! For all we know, there may be a reward offered for his arrest!"

"We'd better go straight down to Old Wilkey and tell him," said Church. "That'll be the safest way."

"Fathead!" said Handforth.

"Eh?"

"Imbecile!"

"Look here——"

"Ass!" said Handforth scornfully. "If we went to Old Wilkey now, we should ruin everything. Where's our proof? We're satisfied that the man is an impostor, but we can't produce any real evidence."

"Not satisfied, Handy," murmured Nipper. "We all agree that the cirs. are a bit rummy-looking, but that's all."

"Well, anyway, if we told Old Wilkey now it wouldn't do any good," said Handforth. "This chap, faced with exposure, could bluff the whole thing out. He'd just tell a few more lies, and clear off. There's nothing against him—yet. What we've got to do is to catch him red-handed at his rotten game!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Once we do that, we'll have him on toast," said Handforth breathlessly. "Evidence is what we want—and evidence is what we'll have, if we keep awake and watch this man's movements."

"What movements?" asked McClure bluntly.

"You read the paragraph in the paper, didn't you?" said Handforth. "His wheeze is to wait until everybody is asleep, and then he creeps out, goes downstairs, and ransacks the place. Then he slips away and nothing is discovered until the morning. By then, he's in the next giddy county!"

Some of Handforth's excitement had spread to the other juniors by now. Even

Nipper was inclined to believe that Handforth's suspicions were justified.

"We've only got to nab the beggar red-handed, and we'll get all the credit," went on Handforth eagerly. "By George! We shall have our names in the newspapers, and—and everything! Isn't that worth the loss of a few hours' giddy sleep?"

Nipper suddenly held up a warning finger.

"Shush!" he murmured. "I thought I heard voices just now!"

He tip-toed to the door, and switched off the light. Opening the door, he listened intently. Voices were floating along the corridor from the direction of the Housemaster's private quarters.

"Not at all, sir—not at all!" came Old Wilkey's genial voice. "Mrs. Wilkes has been only too delighted to make the few simple necessary preparations."

"Really, sir, you are overwhelming me with your hospitality," came Mr. Wright's voice. "I don't know how I shall ever be able to repay you for your kindness."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow—nonsense!" laughed Mr. Wilkes. "We're only too glad to have you. My own daughter is a personal friend of Irene's. And any uncle of Irene's is welcome in my House. This is your bed-room, sir. If you will tell me when you would like to be called——"

The voices had become very indistinct, and Nipper slipped out, ran down the corridor, and went to the more private section of the House. He was just in time to see Mr. Wright ushered into a spare bed-room.

"That will be admirable," Old Wilkey was saying. "Then you'll have breakfast with my family, sir? I am sure Vera will be very interested in you. Vera is my daughter—she's at the Moor View School, too. After breakfast, you can go along with her, eh?"

Nipper crept back, and, meeting Handforth, pulled his arm. They both retreated.

"I've spotted the bed-room," murmured Nipper. "No need for you to go, Handy."

"What have they been saying?" whispered Handforth eagerly.

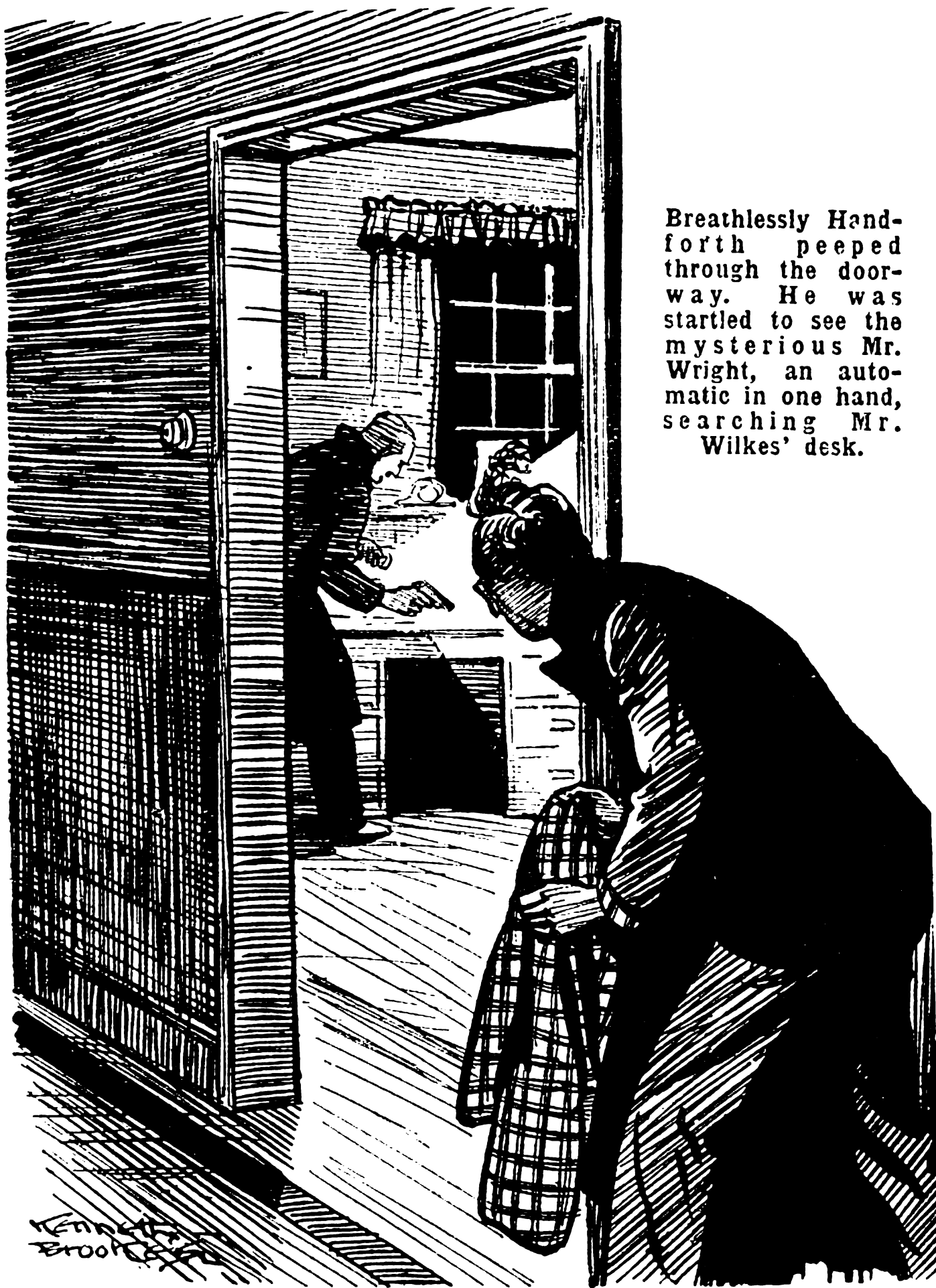
"Nothing much—only arrangements for the morning," breathed Nipper.

They arrived back in the dormitory.

"Well, we know where he's located," said Nipper. "So we can keep our eye on him—at least, on his bed-room door—and he won't suspect a thing."

"We'll nab him," said Handforth breathlessly.

"My dear chap, the thing is as simple as the alphabet," smiled Nipper. "All we



Breathlessly Handforth peeped through the doorway. He was startled to see the mysterious Mr. Wright, an automatic in one hand, searching Mr. Wilkes' desk.

demanding Handforth. "He'd thank us for our warning, and he'd tell us not to be silly idiots."

"Well, we should have done the right thing and we could keep watch afterwards, just the same," argued Church.

"I don't think so," murmured Nipper, with a chuckle. "You're both wrong. In the first place, Old Wilkey wouldn't scoff—he'd take the warning seriously. But I think it's very likely that he'd send us to bed, and get hold of some of the prefects. He'd watch himself, helped by the seniors."

"And we should be dished out of all the excitement," said Handforth gruffly.

Church was silent. He realised that Nipper's fear was justified.

"This is Handy's own game, and we must give him his head," said Nipper diplomatically. "I'm not going to butt in. Handy's the leader to-night."

"That's jolly good of you, old man," said Handforth gratefully. "I didn't expect you to be so broadminded. You usually butt in and take charge of things."

"Oh, do I?" grinned Nipper. "Well, I'm not butting in now. In fact, I'm going to suggest that you should keep the first watch—from now until one-thirty."

"Eh?"

"There's no earthly need for all of us to keep up all night," continued Nipper. "We can easily arrange a series of watches. Three of us from now until one-

have to do is to watch his bed-room. If he stays in it all night, he's genuine. But if he creeps out in the small hours—well, he'll have a job to explain himself."

"He'll creep out all right!" declared Handforth. "It's his game! He'll wait until everybody's asleep, and then he'll start his usual tricks."

"All the same, it would be better if we popped down and warned Old Wilkey," said Church. "It's only fair that he should be told—that he should be put on his guard."

"You poor, pitiful chump!" said Handforth, more in sorrow than in anger.

"What's the matter now?"

"Don't you understand, you ass, that Old Wilkey would pack us all off to bed?"

thirty—you and Churchy and Mac. Then you'll be relieved by three others—from one-thirty until three-thirty. Then three more of us can take over from three-thirty until five-thirty. If nothing has happened by then, it'll be pretty obvious that the man is O.K."

"That seems sensible," yawned Travers. "Well, good-night, dear old fellows! I'll take the spell from three-thirty until five-thirty, if you don't mind. Or wouldn't it be better to have still another spell—from five-thirty until seven-thirty? That one would suit me down to the ground!"

"Same here," murmured Jimmy Potts. "I'll take that spell, too."

Handforth was bubbling with eagerness; and his feelings towards Nipper were of the warmest. In his opinion, it was very sporting of Nipper to suggest that he—Handy—should take the first watch.

"Come on, you chaps!" murmured Handforth, looking at his two chums. "We'll get busy! So long, you others!"

"What about our relief?" asked Church.

"Leave that to me," said Nipper. "I'll get hold of Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West, and we'll take over at half-past one."

Handforth & Co. slipped out.

"What's the big idea?" asked Skeets curiously. "Why are you letting that big chump take the first watch, Nipper?"

"Because he would have kicked up a din if I had suggested anything else," replied Nipper blandly. "You need to use tact with old Handy. He's as pleased as Punch—and he doesn't even realise that we've spoofed him."

"Spoofed him?" asked Travers politely.

"My dear chap, if this man is a crook it's hardly likely that he'll make any move before two o'clock, at the earliest," explained Nipper calmly. "By then, Handy's spell of duty will be over. Don't you see?"

Vivian Travers gazed upon him admiringly.

"Brains!" he murmured. "That's all it is, dear old fellows—brains! I'd never have thought of a thing like that—but then, I never claimed to have any brains!"

CHAPTER 4.

The Midnight Watchers!

THE spare bed-room, which was occupied by the alleged Mr. J. G. Wright, was ideally situated as far as the schoolboy sleuths were concerned. It was a corner room, and the door was at the end of a fairly wide corridor.

At the other end of the passage was the private staircase down to Mr. Wilkes' hall. There was a wide landing up here, too, and from the further side of the landing the boys could crouch in comparative comfort. Not only were there recesses in which they could conceal themselves, but they could see right across the landing, down that corridor; and the moonbeams from the window at the end of the passage played upon the door of the room they were watching.

Thus, although they were a good distance away—so far away, in fact, that they could converse in whispers without the faintest danger of being overheard—they could maintain their watch in comfort.

"We'll have him on toast as soon as he steals out to rob the place," murmured Handforth tensely. "We can wait until he's half way downstairs, and then jump on him from behind."

"He might be armed," whispered McClure.

"All the more reason we should jump on him from behind," replied Handforth promptly. "We can't afford to take any chances with a desperate crook of his type."

A train of thought was set in motion.

"By the way, we'd better prepare," he went on, after a pause. "Come to think of it, we're a set of chumps!"

"Well, you're in charge," said Church.

"We're not ready for the rotter," continued Handforth. "Don't forget he's a bad lot. He probably does counterfeiting as well as burglary."

"With smuggling as a side line, perhaps," murmured Mac.

"Well, you can never tell," replied Handforth. "Anyhow, we'll be on the safe side. Now, let me see. What do we need?"

"How about a shot-gun and a couple of automatic pistols?"

"Don't try to be funny," frowned Handforth. "We need some rope, to start with. Yes, and a big blanket or a rug. That's the idea! As he creeps downstairs, we can chuck the rug over him, get him down, and then rope him up."

"Here, I say, steady!" said Church, in alarm.

"I'm conducting this case in my own way," said Handforth, a fierce note in his voice. "You chaps are just my assistants—see? I don't want any arguments or any objections. Buzz off and get a rug and some rope."

"Eh?"

"You heard me!"

"But, you silly ass——"

"A detective's assistants are supposed to spring to action at the word of command," said Handforth coldly. "What sort of assistants do you call yourselves? I can't go away from here because I have to keep watch. Go and fetch some rope—and a big rug. And don't argue!"

"Crumbs!" said Church feebly.

He and McClure departed. Handforth was in one of his most aggressive moods. He was, in fact, very pleased with himself. There was nothing he loved better than playing the amateur detective; and this case, it seemed, was a real corker.

Even Nipper himself could not fail to acknowledge that Handforth had been quite brilliant—astonishingly so, considering that he was usually a first-class blunderer. But there was a good reason for Handforth's brilliance; he had made the initial discovery, and he did not want the case to be taken out of his hands. He wanted all the glory. So it was up to him to prove that he was capable of conducting the case.

This latest idea of his—the procuring of ropes and a rug—was a good one. Even if the things were not actually needed, it was better to have them ready.

When Church and McClure returned, they not only had a big travelling-rug and some lengths of stout rope, but they had also brought a police whistle.

"What's this for?" asked Handforth, as he took it.

"It's a police whistle," said Church.

"I can see that, ass! But what's it for?"

"You blow it," explained Church.

"And when you blow it, it makes a shrill sort of noise."

"You—you dummy!" hissed Handforth.

"Do you think I don't know what kind of a noise a police whistle makes?"

"Well, you asked."

"We don't want this thing!" grunted Handforth, putting the whistle in his pocket.

"Mac and I thought that it would be a good idea to blow the whistle while we were nabbing the crook," said Church. "That would bring help pretty quickly."

"Which is just what we don't need," said Handforth, with a sniff. "If three of us can't handle one crook, then I'm a tadpole! Do you think I want half the chaps claiming that they collared the rotter? Not likely! We're going to do this thing ourselves—off our own bat! So when that burglar makes a move, don't forget that you've got to keep quiet. No yelling for help. Understand? We can do all the nabbing that's required—with-

out the others butting in and stealing all the thunder."

Church and McClure did not argue. They had been thinking during their brief absence; and, like Nipper, they had realised that it was very improbable that Mr. Wright would make any move before two o'clock. In fact, Church and McClure suddenly had a great respect for Nipper. They had twigged the Remove skipper's little wheeze. So it was just as well to humour Handforth.

Twelve-thirty was booming out when something happened. Handforth was just as startled as his chums. Optimist though he was, he had not expected any move by the criminal until at least one o'clock.

As the half-hour chimed, Mr. Wright's door opened, and a sudden flood of light filled the corridor on the other side of the landing.

"Great Scott!" gurgled Handforth.

He and his chums dodged into a recess, their hearts thumping. As quickly as Mr. Wright's door had opened, it was closed. The sound of soft, cautious footsteps came to the ears of the waiting boys. Handforth, after the first shock of surprise, recovered; he was ready for action. His chums felt bewildered, and they knew—now—that they had never really believed in Handforth's sensational theory. It gave them an unpleasant jolt. They were bewildered, too. It was so unusual for Handforth to be right!

Scarcely daring to breathe, they waited.

Mr. J. G. Wright was walking very cautiously—and this, in itself, was suspicious. Peeping round the angle of the recess, Handforth caught a glimpse of the man as he paused uncertainly at the head of the stairs. He was not fully dressed—wearing an overcoat over his shirt and trousers. He had removed his collar and tie, and also his shoes. His stockinged feet made hardly any sound as he walked.

After a brief halt, he padded silently downstairs.

"By George!" breathed Handforth, his heart thumping more madly than ever.

Now that the time for action had come, he was so flummoxed that he hardly knew what to do. He crept out of the recess, and peered over the landing balustrade. He was just in time to see Mr. Wright entering the passage which led to the Housemaster's private sitting-room. And Mr. Wright was now holding a tiny electric flashlamp in his hand, and the beam was splitting the darkness ahead.

"Come on!" hissed Handforth. "We've got him now!"

"Hadn't we better call the others?" asked Church excitedly.

"No fear!"

"But he's a desperate man——"

"Who cares? Three of us are enough, I should hope!" interrupted Handforth tensely. "Come on! Don't argue, you fatheads! I tell you, we've got him!"

Handforth was desperately keen upon making the capture unaided. He wanted this to be a Study D triumph.

Church and McClure were getting worried. Everything was turning out so exactly as Handforth had predicted that they suspected there must be some mistake somewhere.

Handforth seized the rug, and without hesitation he ran downstairs. Church and McClure followed. Their inclination was to yell at the top of their voices, so that the whole House would be aroused. It was foolhardy to tackle this crook in such

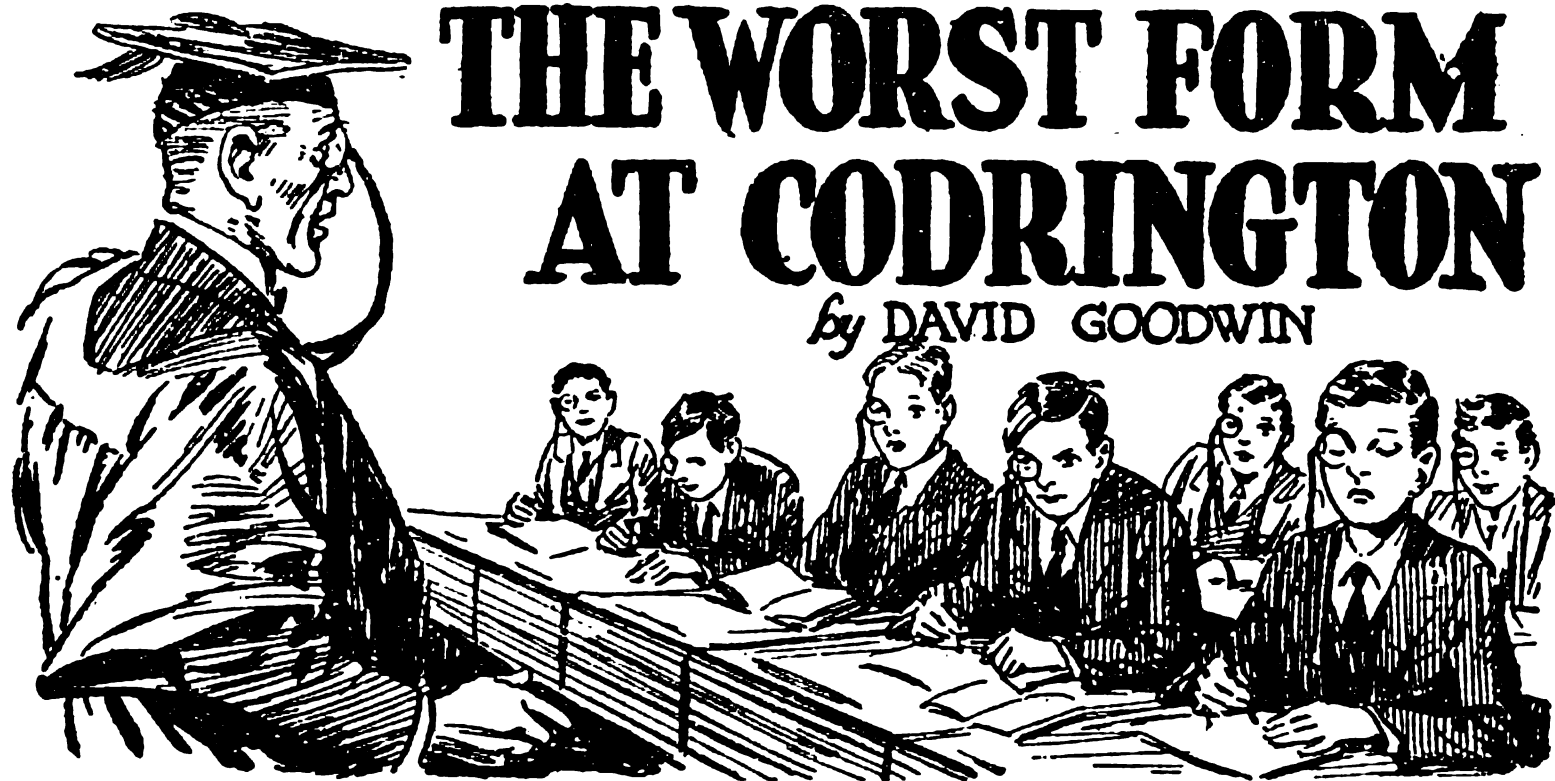
a way. But they were faithful to their leader, and so they backed him up.

When they arrived downstairs, they found Handforth creeping along the passage. The door of Mr. Wilkes' sitting-room was ajar, and a feeble glimmer of light from within told of the stranger's presence. Handforth, in front, heard the slight scraping sound of a moving chair. He crept nearer.

Reaching the doorway, he peeped round. And if he had needed any proof of Mr. Wright's criminal intentions, they were immediately provided.

For the man stood in front of Mr. Wilkes' private desk, which had been carelessly left open. In one hand he held the little electric torch, and in the other there was a gleaming automatic pistol!

Even the valiant Handforth hesitated. He had felt convinced all along that



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this man was the crook for whom the police were searching. But he had not suspected, until now, that the fellow was armed. He obviously must be a desperate customer! And, rash as Handforth was, he paused for a moment to consider.

Church and McClure had come up in his rear, and he was fearful lest they should make some noise—which would warn the gunman. At that very moment Mr. Wright placed the automatic on the desk, and he flashed his light about the room. He moved across to the opposite wall, to the sideboard. Handforth's heart leapt. The fellow had left that gun on the desk! Here was a golden opportunity!

It was no time for hesitation. Handforth abruptly stepped into the room, and with one movement he snapped down the electric-light switch. The room became flooded with dazzling light—and Mr. J. G. Wright twirled round, his face full of consternation.

"Quick, you chaps!" shouted Handforth. "We've got him!"

The man's face had gone pale, but an expression of relief came into his eyes when he saw that he was only facing schoolboys.

"Hallo!" he said, a little gulp in his voice. "You gave me a scare! What was the idea——"

"No, you don't!" snapped Handforth, as Mr. Wright moved forward. "Quick, you chaps!"

As Handforth spoke, he leapt. He had no intention of letting the man get his gun! The blanket whirled through the air, and before Mr. Wright could be aware of what was happening, the thick folds enveloped his head and shoulders.

Handforth grabbed. His muscular arms gripped the fellow, and a moment later they were rolling on the floor!

CHAPTER 5.

The Capture!

CHURCH and McClure dashed to their leader's assistance.

Church sat on Mr. Wright's legs, and McClure looped a coil of the rope over the man's head and shoulders. A slip-knot had been prepared, and in a flash Mac pulled it tight. Mr. Wright's arms were pinioned to his sides—and his head was still enveloped in the folds of the rug.

"Good work!" panted Handforth. "By George! That was smart of you, Mac, old man! Hold his legs, Churchy! We've got him beautifully!"

Beneath the folds of the rug, Mr. Wright was gasping and gurgling, and even trying to shout. But Handforth soon put a stop to this. He had a scarf handy, and he bound it round the man's head, effectually silencing him. More ropes were tied round his arms and body. Then his feet were tied, and his knees were tied. He was trussed up like a chicken.

"We've done it—and we haven't disturbed anybody else in the House!" said Handforth exultantly. "Good egg! It's a Study D victory all right! My sons, we've covered ourselves with glory! Didn't I tell you that we could do it on our own?"

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Church. "Are—are you sure that we're right, Handy?"

"What do you mean—sure?"

"Supposing Mr. Wright turns out to be Irene's real uncle?"

"Don't be a potty haddock!" retorted Handforth scornfully. "I know jolly well that Irene hasn't an uncle named Wright. This man isn't Wright—he's wrong! And we've messed up his game—we've stopped him from robbing Old Wilkey!"

"Wouldn't it have been as well to hear what he had to say?" asked McClure, with true Scottish caninness. "I mean, he might be able to explain things."

"He'd have a job to explain his movements in this room!" said Handforth grimly. "You silly asses! What about the gun?"

"Gun?" gasped the others.

"Oh, you didn't see, did you?" asked Handforth. "When I looked in the room, he had a beastly automatic pistol in his hand!"

"Oh, my only Sunday topper!" gasped Church. "And—and you went for him? He might have shot you!"

"I wasn't such a chump as that," retorted Handforth. "He was fool enough to leave the gun on that desk on the other side of the room. That's when I grabbed my chance."

Even the sceptical Church and McClure were convinced now. Handforth went over to the desk, gingerly picked up the weapon, and gave it a cursory examination.

"I say, go easy!" muttered Church. "It might go off!"

"I'll shove it in this desk," said Handforth, opening a drawer and depositing the pistol inside. "We can tell Old Wilkey about it in the morning. The police will want to see it, too."

"In the morning?" repeated McClure. "What's the matter with telling Old Wilkey now?"

Handforth was looking in one of his most stubborn moods.

"No!" he said decisively. "There's something else to be done just now. Lend a hand, my sons! We've started this job, and we'll finish it! We're going to lock the prisoner up in the cellar!"

"What!"

"We can't afford to take any chances with him," continued Handforth calmly. "The cellar's the place for Mr. Wright!"

"But—but——"

"Are you going to argue again?" demanded Handforth aggressively.

Church and McClure felt helpless. What fantastic idea was Handforth thinking of now? Wasn't he satisfied with having made the capture?

For the sake of peace, they gave in to him. And perhaps it would be just as well to place the prisoner in the cellar. They went over to Mr. Wright, and bodily lifted him. He struggled, but he was helpless.

They managed to carry him out, down the passage, and he was set down for a moment whilst Handforth unbolted the heavy door of the cellar. Then he was unceremoniously carried down the stone steps.

It wasn't merely one cellar, but a series of cellars, for they were stretched extensively beneath the Ancient House. Handforth took no chances. The prisoner was carried into an inner cellar which had a door of its own—a door of solid oak, and the bolts on the outside were old-fashioned and massive. A man, once imprisoned, would need a battering-ram, or dynamite, to aid his escape.

"This'll do!" said Handforth breathlessly. "Dump him down here. It's as dry as a bone, so he won't come to any harm until the morning. This blanket will keep him warm, too."

"But we're not going to leave him here until the morning!" ejaculated Church.

Handforth took no notice. He was unfastening the scarf—for there was no need to half-suffocate the unfortunate man. As a further precaution against any such tragedy, Handforth took out his pocket-knife, and cut a big slit in the rug opposite the prisoner's face.

"Now, my beauty, you'll stay here—until we hand you over to the police," he said coolly.

"Listen!" panted the man, in a desperate voice. "You don't understand! I'm not a burglar! Good heavens! I can explain——"

"Explain to the judge!" interrupted Handforth, quoting from an American talkie he had heard recently.

"But, my dear boy——"

"Don't you 'dear boy' me!" interrupted Handforth. "I know who you are—I saw the report about you in the newspapers."

"I—I don't know what you mean?" came the muffled voice from beneath the rug. "I tell you, you're wrong!"

"Come on!" said Handforth. "We'd better not listen to him, you chaps. These men are too jolly clever—they can make black look white. If we listen to him, he'll get round us. At least, he might get round you chaps, but not me! I know jolly well that I haven't made a mistake."

He went out of the cellar without another word, and closed the door, shooting the bolts.

They all returned to Mr. Wilkes' sitting-room, where the light was still on. There had been no alarm, for the three juniors were still alone.

"Now, you ass, what's the game?" asked Mac gruffly. "We've got to go to Old Wilkey and tell him everything!"

"We're going to bed!" said Handforth.

"But you're off your rocker!"

"No, I'm not," said Edward Oswald calmly. "It'll serve Old Wilkey right. He needs a lesson!"

"Eh?"

"What good could Wilkey do, anyhow?" went on Handforth. "There's really no need to hand this chap over to the police until the morning. We don't want a lot of commotion in the middle of the night, do we? He can't get out of that cellar—and, besides, we want to finish this job ourselves. This is my case, and I'm conducting it in my own way!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Church.

"It's like Old Wilkey's carelessness, admitting this crook into his House!" went on Handforth accusingly. "He was plausible enough, I'll admit—but it was rank folly of Old Wilkey to swallow that yarn so readily. I tell you, he deserves a lesson—and I'm going to give him one! When Old Wilkey gets up in the morning he'll think that Mr. Wright has vanished during the night—and he'll have the wind up about his valuables. Then we'll step in with our little yarn, and grab all the glory."

"I suppose it'll be all right," said McClure slowly. "But I don't quite like leaving that chap in the cellar all night. He may be a crook, but don't forget he's bound hand and foot, and after an hour or two those ropes will begin to hurt."

"Rats!" replied Handforth. "In a story I was reading the other day, the detective was bound hand and foot for forty-eight hours, and he wasn't hurt a

In spite of the man's protests that he was not a burglar, Handforth & Co. left him a helpless prisoner in the cellar.



bit. As soon as he got free, he knocked out a couple of crooks."

"I don't like it, all the same," said Mac.

"Then you'll jolly well have to lump it!" retorted Handforth. "Supposing we go to Old Wilkey and tell him? What will he do?"

"Ring up the police, I suppose," said Church.

"Of course he will!" agreed Handforth.

"He'll ring up the police! And the police will come, and they'll grab the prisoner, and claim all the credit! Not jolly likely! We're going to take this man to the lock-up ourselves—and then there can't be any mistake about who made the capture."

And Handforth, thoroughly satisfied

with himself, switched off the light in Mr. Wilkes' sitting-room and went upstairs. There was a minor uproar when he discovered that his pillow and sheets had vanished—taken by Potts—but Handy was feeling at peace with the world and he soon subsided and settled down for sleep. Meantime both Church and McClure were uneasy.

Quite independently, the same idea occurred to them. They would wait until Handforth was asleep, and then they would creep out and give Mr. Wilkes the tip. Also independently, they dismissed this plan. It savoured, somehow, of treachery; and Church and McClure were faithful to their leader. And when they

came to think things over, there wasn't very much risk. It would be rather ripping for them to get all the credit.

However, in going back to bed like this, they had forgotten one important point.

AT twenty-five minutes past one, Nipper quietly aroused Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West. He had previously told them of what had happened, and had warned them that they would be required for duty at one-thirty. Nothing had happened to disturb the stillness of the night; so Nipper naturally concluded that the burglar had not yet made any move. It was this matter of the relief guard which Handforth & Co. had overlooked.

"Come on, you chaps!" murmured Nipper briskly. "Time for our spell."

Tommy Watson yawned.

"The whole thing's dotty, if you ask me," he grumbled. "I don't believe the man's a crook at all. Why should we take any notice of Handforth's piffle? You know what a chump he is. He's bound to have got hold of the wrong end of the stick."

"That's what I thought, at first," said Nipper. "But for once there might be

something in Handy's rot. Anyhow, it's best to be on the safe side."

The half-hour was just chiming when they reached the landing. Everything was deadly quiet. There was no sign of the Study D chums.

"Handy!" breathed Nipper. "All serene! Here we are to relieve you."

There was no reply.

A quick search satisfied the astonished Nipper that Handforth & Co. were not present. This was totally unlooked-for. It wasn't like Handforth to desert his post. Nipper went to the balustrade and leaned over, listening. Not a sound came from below.

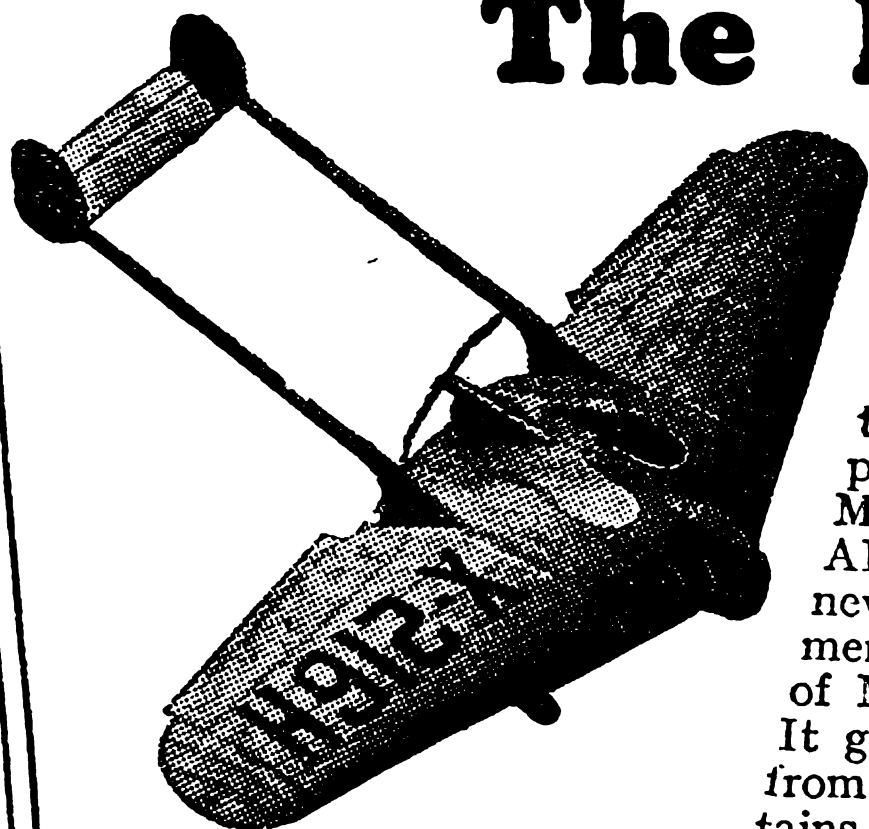
"Funny!" muttered Nipper. "Where the dickens are they?"

It was puzzling. Nothing had happened, evidently—or the alarm would have been given. Bidding his chums remain still, Nipper crept along to Mr. Wright's door and listened. Dead silence. Nipper crept back. He even went downstairs and had a cautious look round.

"I can't understand it," he said, when he got back. "There's not a sign of them!"

"Perhaps they've gone back to bed?" suggested Watson hopefully.

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"Handy was too jolly keen on the vigil to go back to bed," replied Nipper, shaking his head. "All I can suggest is that the man has crept out, gone somewhere, and that Handforth & Co. have followed him. They wouldn't have gone back to bed without telling us. They knew that we were coming on duty at half-past one."

They decided to go on a cautious prow, and it was while they were creeping down the dormitory passage that Nipper suddenly halted.

"Great Scott!" he breathed. "Listen!"

The sound of pronounced snoring was coming from one of the dormitories. Handforth's dormitory! And there could be no mistaking that snore!

Nipper charged into the room, switched on the light, and went red with wrath. Handforth & Co. were in bed—and sound asleep!

"Hi! What's the idea?" demanded Nipper, going to Handforth and shaking him violently.

Handforth lashed out.

"No, you don't!" he exclaimed thickly.

"We've got you, you crook! We—Hullo, what the——"

"Wake up!" growled Nipper. "You're not fighting a crook, you ass! It's only me."

"Oh, my hat! I was dreaming!" said Handforth, sitting up. "What are you doing in here, you fatheads? What's the time?"

"Half-past one—and we went along to relieve you, as we arranged!" said Nipper indignantly. "What are you doing in bed? I thought you were going to keep on the watch until one-thirty?"

Handforth's jaw sagged—and Church and McClure, in their own beds, were looking startled.

"By George! I'd forgotten that arrangement," said Handforth blankly. "We ought to have told you chaps, oughtn't we?"

"Told us what?"

"That we'd captured the crook."

"That you'd done *what*?" asked Nipper, startled.

"Begad! The dear chappie is still dreaming—he is, really!" murmured Sir Montie.

"Rats! I'm awake now," said Handforth. "Yes, we collared the slippery beggar! Caught him red-handed, you know. Sorry we forgot to tell you chaps about it, but it slipped our minds in the excitement."

Nipper eyed Handforth wrathfully.

"Oh, it slipped your minds, did it?" he asked. "And you collared the man? You caught him red-handed? That's jolly in-

teresting! And how did you collar him red-handed?"

"We followed him down to Old Wilkey's sitting-room—and we found him getting ready to rifle the desk," said Handforth. "He had an electric torch, and an automatic pistol, and everything! We chucked a blanket over his head and shoulders, bound him up, and locked him in the cellar."

The chums of Study C were somewhat breathless. They listened to Handforth's full story with mingled feelings. There was no doubting the truth of that story, for Church and McClure corroborated it.

"Well, don't you think we did all right?" asked Handforth, in conclusion.

"You took a risk, if that's what you mean," replied Nipper. "But let's get it clear. Do I understand that you've left this man down in the cellar, bound hand and foot, with a blanket over his head?"

"Yes. He's a desperate character, and we can't take any chances," said Handforth. "I'm not going to be dished out of the credit, so we're waiting until the morning—and then I'm going to take the prisoner to the lock-up myself. I'm going to do the job thoroughly!"

"Yes, and in doing it thoroughly I bet you tied his bonds tightly," pointed out Nipper accusingly. "Have you ever been bound hand and foot for hours on end? It stops the circulation of the blood and before long it means torture."

"I say, we did tie those ropes tightly," said Handforth, with concern. "It never struck me——"

"Well, we won't waste time," interrupted Nipper. "Let's go down and see how the fellow is. You dotty jackass! Locking him in the cellar would have been enough—it's as safe as a prison."

Handforth & Co. were quickly out of bed, and a minute or two later all six juniors were hastening towards the cellars.

CHAPTER 6.

A Spot of Bother!

THERE was electric light in the cellars, and Nipper turned the switch before descending the stone steps. He and the others went down, but even before they reached the door of that inner cellar they knew that something was wrong.

The sound of low, agonised moans came to their ears, and Handforth, who was more soft-hearted than many a girl, went quite pale.

"I say!" he muttered unhappily.

They flung open the door of the inner cellar, and the light, streaming through the aperture, revealed the huddled figure of the prisoner. He was groaning feebly.

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Handforth, in alarm.

It only took the juniors a moment or two gently to drag the prisoner into the main cellar. The bonds were cut away from his arms and body, and the rug was pulled free. Mr. Wright was unquestionably in a bad way. His face was wet with perspiration—from the effects of the muffling rug—and his not unhandsome features were contorted with pain. His lips were twitching, and he was breathing heavily.

"Thanks!" he panted, trying to move his arms. "Gad! It's worse than ever now."

His hands were swollen, and he groaned again.

"It's—it's the circulation coming back," he muttered hoarsely. "You're all wrong, boys! I'm not what you think I am—I'm not a burglar. I don't blame you so much for making the mistake, but you shouldn't have treated me like this."

"You'll be all right soon," said Nipper.

"I didn't think anybody was about when I went downstairs," gasped Mr. Wright. "I wasn't going to steal anything. You got me all wrong, boys! I can explain."

"That's all right," said Nipper. "Take it easy."

"Your Housemaster offered to put me up for the night," went on the man, his face still distorted with pain. "I arrived late—I thought this place was the Moor View School. But I was delayed on the road, and Mr. Wilkes was good enough to put me up."

"It's all Handy's fault," said Church, in alarm. "You see, Handy, you idiot! Mr. Wright isn't a crook at all! You're always jumping to silly conclusions!"

"Who says he's not a crook?" growled Handforth. "You don't think I believe this yarn, do you? Do you think he'd confess just because we cut his ropes? He'll try to spoof us just the same as he spoofed Old Wilkey. But Old Wilkey didn't catch him red-handed as we did."

"All right—you caught me red-handed," said Mr. Wright, who was now recovering. "I'm not denying it."

"There you are!" said Handforth triumphantly.

"But you made a mistake, just the same," said the man. "When I'm better, I'll explain. For goodness sake, cut those ropes from my ankles."

Nipper cut the ankle ropes—which, in the excitement, had been forgotten.

"By gad, that's better," muttered Mr. Wright.

Even as he spoke, he made a sudden leap to his feet. He took them all by surprise. It was a totally unexpected move. He dashed madly for the cellar steps, and had practically reached them before the boys could get into action.

"After him!" roared Handforth. "By George! He fooled us!"

They were after the prisoner in a flash. His desperate attempt to escape did not prove successful, however. Even as he reached the first stone step his legs, weakened by the loss of circulation caused by their being bound up, gave way under him. With a groan he collapsed, and next instant the boys had pounced upon him and had dragged him back into the cellar. But if his legs were useless, his fists were not. He fought frenziedly; his face had gone livid, and his eyes were blazing.

"You young fools!" he shouted thickly. "Leave me alone! I'll half kill you for this! You're not going to keep me locked up——"

"Get him down!" urged Handforth. "Don't let him get to those steps again! Didn't I tell you, all along, that he was a tricky blighter? By George! And he nearly got me fooled for a minute!"

Crash! Thud! Crash!

Considering that Mr. J. G. Wright—or whatever his name was—had six boys against him, he put up a magnificent fight. He stood in the middle of the cellar, with boys all round him, and he fought like a trapped tiger. He was in an overpowering rage; his fury was passionate in its intensity.

"I thought I'd get away from you!" he gasped. "If my legs hadn't given way——"

"But they did, and you're still our prisoner!" yelled Handforth. "And we're not giving you a second chance!"

Crash!

Mr. Wright's clenched fist thudded into the side of Handforth's face, and Edward Oswald reeled back. Church had already gone down, half-stunned by one of the man's desperate blows. Sir Montie was reeling about dazedly; Nipper's nose was bleeding.

The man fought desperately, and the fight swayed from side to side. With a tremendous effort he broke free, and again succeeded in reaching the steps. But Handforth, with a reckless fling, hurled himself at Mr. Wright's legs.

It was the deciding point.

The man crashed over, and the other boys, swarming on him, held him down.

(Continued on page 24.)

You'll enjoy lessons in this special laughter-making Lessons Number!



HANDFORTH'S Weekly

No. 23. Vol. 1.

EDITORIAL STAFF

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

September 26th, 1931.

WE HAVE LEARNT—

By the "H.W." Special
Reporter.

OUR exteemed Editor gave me the job of interviewing various fellows to find out from them exactly what they had learned during the week ending Saturday last. He desired to know whether school lessons are really any good. I met Nipper first and asked him to tell me the things he had learned in the Form-room that week. He wrinkled his brow thoughtfully.

"Lemme see," he said. "First of all, I learned that Reykjavik is the capital of Iceland."

"That ought to do you a lot of good," I remarked.

"Oh, tons. You never know when you might be stumped to remember what is the capital of Iceland. Suppose, when I am a detective on my own account, a client rushed in and wanted me to go to the capital of Iceland on the spot. Pretty ass I should look if I didn't know the name of it."

"And what about the capital of Greenland?"

"I learn that next week."

De Valerie said, in answer to my question:

"What have I learned? Oh, four beastly pages of beastly old Virgil; six rotten pages of Green's rotten History; eight ghastly irregular verbs and that Reykjavik is the capital of Norway."

"You've learned all that?" I ejaculated. "Repeat the eight verbs."

"Ass. I've forgotten it all now."

Sir Jimmy Potts was wringing his hands when I met him.

"What have you learned this week, Sir James?"

ratty when bitten by a greyhound.

3. That one sometimes gets into trouble when sliding down the banisters, and

4. That if you try to pull a straight ball you often get bowled.

This instruction is what Willy's pater pays immense fees to obtain.

Sir Montie Tregillis-West has learned that ink does no good whatever to a fellow's trousers and that Reykjavik is the capital of Something.

When I tackled Archie Glenthorne, he merely yawned and said:

"Ask Phipps, old chappie."

I therefore asked Phipps, and he said:

"Mr. Glenthorne made some progress with Virgil's *Aeneid*, having mastered a part of Liber Five. Mr. Glenthorne has also gathered several details of the Rye House Plot and the reign of Charles the Second, and has successfully tackled three propositions in Euclid's Elements. In Geography, Mr. Glenthorne has been instructed that Reykjavik is the capital city of Iceland. I believe I state the facts correctly, sir?"

"Absolutely," yawned Mr. Glenthorne.

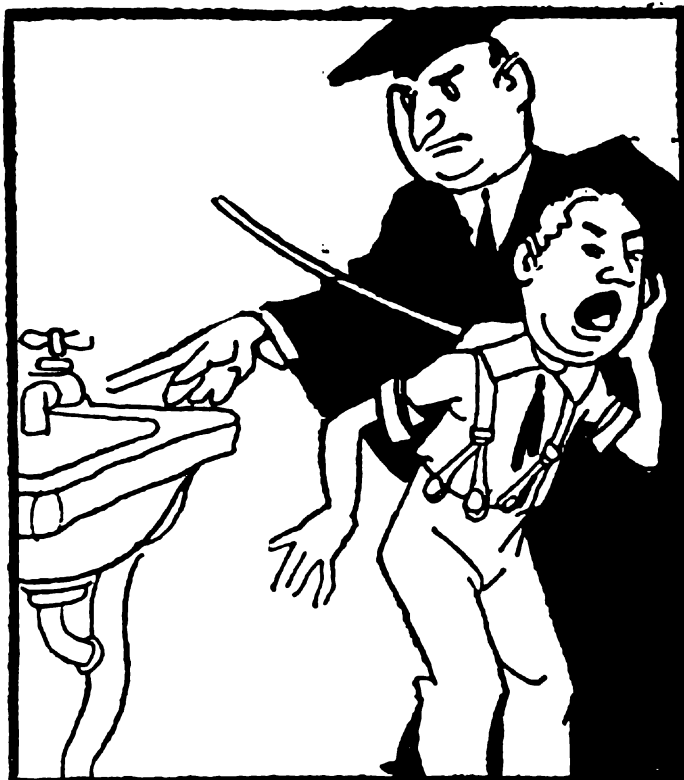
I withdrew and encountered Cornelius Trotwood in the corridor. I asked him what he had been taught in the class-room that week.

"A chill," replied the deaf junior wheezily. "That's what I caught in the bath-room!"

"It's a pity you didn't get caught in the plug-hole," I informed him wrathfully.

FIRST LESSONS IN LATIN.

(Illustrated.)



"Puer aquam non amat."

(The boy loves not the water.)

WEEKLY SCIENCE TALK.

By Professor Napoleon Browne.

This week: LEARNING.

LEARNING, my brethren, is not one of the popular sciences. Nobody seems to like it. Perhaps it is because a certain amount of personal discomfort often attaches to this science.

Consider the case of the youth who, with the best intentions in the world, carelessly balances a pan full of ink on some senior's study door. This senior, having washed-writing fluid off his countenance, will catch hold of a thick cane, and will speak thus to the youth:

"I'll teach you to leave booby-traps for me."

Now it would seem that the youth, having a fondness for booby-traps, would be very glad of this fresh instruction. But what do we find, my brethren? Too often the youth will back hastily away, and murmur that he has no desire to be taught this art.

But the senior is so kind hearted that he cannot rest until he has taught the youth to leave booby-traps, and he follows the boy up and, catching him firmly by the collar, gently but forcibly gives him the necessary instruction.

And yet he gets no gratitude for his kindness. The youth yells and howls as if he found the art of learning painful; and behold, when the instruction is completed, that youth will mourn and will not be comforted. All this is very, very strange.

And consider again the two types of youth to whom

the art of learning appeals so differently.

The first youth desires not to learn, and he finds no beauty in arithmetic and geometry. And his master calls him a "blockhead!" and commands him to stand upon a chair and to wear a paper hat. And, lo! all who pass by despise him.

And now look upon the other youth who enjoys learning above all things. Behold him blinking through his glasses his massive forehead concealing much wondrous wisdom. His companions do not praise this prodigy. Nay. They call him "swot" and "sap" and "chuckle-head," and lo! all who pass by despise him.

So what is one to do? I ask the question, and am willing to learn the answer.

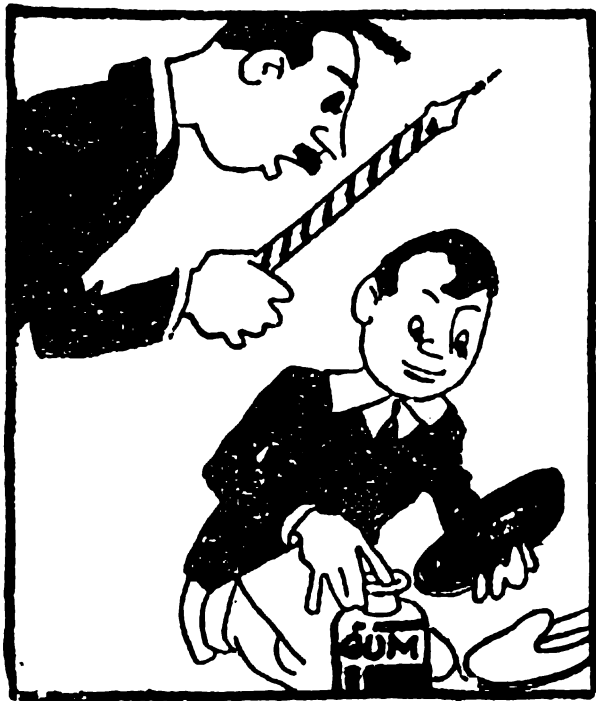
The art of learning flourishes best in the world of fags. For every fag seems to know about Birds of the World, Flags of All Nations, the World's Industries and Strange Manners and Customs. All these things the fag learns from sundry curious cards concealed within packets of cigarettes, and because these cards are meant to teach the fags, they are called "fag-cards."

Keep it dark, but I used to collect these cards, so I know. And cannot we learn a lesson from that? Yes, I thought not.

Next week: PARKING

FIRST LESSONS IN LATIN.

(Illustrated.)



"Magister servum vulnerabit."

(The Master will wound the Slave.)

GEOGRAPHY SIMPLIFIED

By WALTER CHURCH.

An island is a shapely piece completely surrounded in water.

Example of an Island: Archie having a bath.

Inland means nowhere near the water.

Example of Inland: Teddy Long having a bath.

An isthmus is a narrow strip running out to sea.

Example: Timothy Tucker going for a swim.

A mountain is a huge mass standing upright and apart from its surroundings.

Example: Fatty Little in bed.

A volcano is a mountainous mass noted for its fierce eruptions.

Example: E. O. Handforth.

A cloud-burst is a volume of water falling from above.

Example: A booby-trap.

A strata is a layer of earth in between two layers of differing strata.

Example: Ham-sandwich.

Unexplored interior means an inside tract still unknown and mysterious.

Example: Sausage.

Say, guys, get a low-down

GRESHAM'S

By HARRY

THE most widely-spoken to-day is the language I mean the "talkies," and everybody cannot understand this strange tongue.

With a view to satisfying an American grammar after German Primer. Below is the proper fashion.

LESSON 1.—ALPHABET bet is the same as our own and then some.

LESSON 2.—PRONUNCIANTS, in most cases, are. The vowels, however, are. *a* is always very short, (NOTE—The word "can" like "Kent.")

i is sometimes given a strangely enough, *i* in girls' *oy* in boys—i.e., "goils."

io is pronounced *ar*. *T* *ere* is pronounced also as

EXERCISE: Repeat the "The girls can't go" ("The goils kent go")

VOCABU

Al .. Albert or Alfred.
Big noise Important man.
Buncha Crowd of.
Buddies Friends.
Didja.. Did you.
Dips .. Police.
Huddle Action.
Hi.

Jacker Criminal.
Hunch Idea.
High-hat To sneer at.
Junior Son.

EXERCISE: Translate Didja give the dips the hi-jackers? Al soon snapp the big noise of the opposi

THIS KNOW

By FATTY

I know that when seven is The total is often four I can point out the count With Somerset stuck in I work out square roots That none of the others I recognise fractions and I'm hot stuff at algebra

But the lesson I think the I did not acquire in the It's always the way, for Mistakes a wise man for The wisdom I value more Is this: There's a cert In which you can get a la For twopence, a glass

on the American lingo!

GRAMMAR.

FRESHAM.

en language in England age that few can under- American language. You all the stuff you hear at is clamouring to learn

this demand, I am writing the style of a French or the first lesson, printed in

U. The American Alpha- It contains 26 letters,

CIATION. The conso- pronounced as in English. very different.

s a in cat. t" is pronounced almost

lipthongal sound. Thus, is pronounced almost like

aus violet becomes varlet. ar (i.e., here—hyar).

is sentence: ther violets here." her varlets hyar.")

LARY.

Kinda Kind of. Low- Secret down information.

On the Death- spot sentence.

Pull a Make a bone mistake

Razz .. To jeer at.

Racket Special crime.

Snap Act into quickly.

to English the following: ow-down on that buncha ed into a huddle and put ion racket on the spot.

WLEDGE

LITTLE.

added to seven

m; of Wiltshire and Devon, between;

nd quadratic equations can do;

ultiplications; too.

most useful and clever, school;

erience never

fool;

ighly than any

a small shop

ake for a penny;

of pop.

HISTORY FOR KIDS.

By UNCLE REGGIE PITT.

NOW kid-dies, it's time for your his-tory les-son. There was once a king cal-led Will-iam

Ruf-us who lived a long, long, long time ag-o, be-fore you were born. Fan-cy that now. And this king was not a good king and he was not a bad king. He was just ord-in-ar-y—though some peo-ple cal-led him a poor fish.

He was nam-ed Will-iam after his fath-er, and he was call-ed Ruf-us because he had a red top-knot. Isn't that fun-ny? Now-a-days we should call him Gin-ger or Car-rots, should-n't we?

Now this king was ver-y fond of sneak-ing into the for-ests to hido his red nut; and he be-came ver-y ang-ry when he found~but

that a lot of poor peo-ple had made their homes in the for-ests, and he said that these poor peo-ple would joll-y well have to breeze off out of it or he would know the rea-son why.

So he sent the brok-er's men in-to their homes and clear-ed them out. And the poor peo-ple were ver-y sad at be-ing turf-ed out of their homes, and they said drat the king we hope he drowns him-self.

But old Bill Ru-fus came in-to the for-est to see if the poor peo-ple had beet-led

off, and when he saw that they had, he stood in front of their homes and snig-gered.

"He, he, he!" laugh-ed the king. "I soon sent them pack-ing. Ho, ho, ho!"

Now in this for-est there was a poor man who made a liv-ing by burn-ing char-coal and sell-ing it for muf-fins. And when he saw the king's red nob through the trees, he said to him-self, he said:

"That's ei-ther the king or the sun-set," he said. "I think I'll fire an arr-ow at it to make sure."

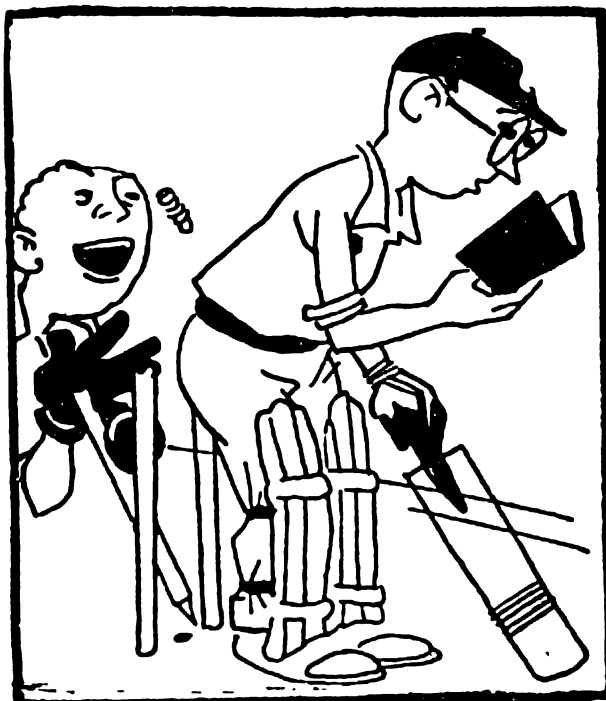
So he fire-d an arr-ow, and the arr-ow went clean through old Will-iam and

made him stop snig-ger-ing in no time. And the char-coal burn-er, he put Bill's body on a bar-row and wheel-ed it in-to town and said he had shot Bill in mis-take for a stag. So all the peo-ple gave three (3) cheers, and sent round the hat for the poor char-coal burn-er.

All they col-lec-ted was a large num-ber of but-tons. The char-coal burn-er was wrath-y, but he took them all the same. He heat-ed the but-tons, stamp-ed them out with a large stone—and sold them to the peo-ple as muf-fins.

FIRST LESSONS IN LATIN.

(Illustrated.)



"Puer libros amat."

(The boy loves books.)

GEOMETRY

By DOUGLAS SINGLETON.

Proposition 1. If you take a piece of paper, being rectangular and oblong, and having the outside measurement $8\frac{3}{4}$ ins x $5\frac{1}{2}$ in., and with printing on it "BANK OF ENGLAND Pay Bearer £5.", and if you measure carefully $3\frac{1}{4}$ in. from either end and $2\frac{3}{8}$ in. upwards and downwards from either corner and cut the paper into four unequal rectangular oblongs—RESULT: You won't be able to spend it.

Proposition 2. Obtain a circle, having a diameter of 1 in. and $\frac{1}{16}$ in., and inscribed upon it "One Penny." Place this in direct proximity to a slot, or oblong, of dimensions $1\frac{1}{4}$ in x $\frac{1}{8}$ in, marked CHOCOLATES. By insinuat-ing the depth measurement of the circle completely through the width measure-ment of the slot or oblong, it is possible to change the circle into a square or

oblong of much larger area and greater depth, being usually composed of some brownish viscid material, which will be found to be highly edible.

Proposition 3. To multiply the dimensions of a trapezium by 25.

A trapezium consists of four irregular lines, a figure quadrilateral and quand-rangular, but with lines neither equi-distant nor parallel and all the angles irregular. This figure may be made in semblance of the shape of a human face. The four lines used to draw it, may be supplemented by placing two dots, a small circle and a serrated line like a row of teeth in the inside area of the figure. Underneath should be written the words, "Old Crowsfeet."

By showing this drawing to Mr. Crowell, you will learn how it is possible to convert four lines into one hundred lines—with, maybe, an addition of six strokes as well. Thus you will have multiplied the four lines of the trap-ezium exactly 25 times.

THE WRONG MR. WRIGHT!

(Continued from page 20.)

"The ropes!" gasped Handforth. "Tie his feet!"

McClure managed to get a loop round the infuriated man's ankles.

"This is your marvellous idea, Nipper, you fathead!" panted Handforth fiercely. "He was being tortured, was he? Yet he jolly soon jumped to his feet as soon as we cut his ropes, didn't he? It was your wonderful idea to set him free! Perhaps you'll admit, now, that I did the right thing in the first place?"

"Sorry, Handy, old man," said Nipper, breathing hard. "I'll admit I was wrong."

As he was being bound up, Mr. Wright's rage increased.

"You young fools—you dolts—you little ruffians!" he grated. "I'll see that you get punished for treating me like this! Let me go, I tell you! If you don't——"

"You're not in a position to threaten us, Mr. Wright!" interrupted Handforth curtly. "We've had about enough of you! We're tying you up again—and your next move will be to the lock-up!"

"But you're making a mistake!" shrieked the man, almost beside himself.

"It's too late to trot out that yarn now!" said Church hotly. "We've got your number, Mr. Wright! And you're just about as wrong as you can be! Irene Manners' uncle, eh?"

"The sauce!" snorted Handforth.

The words seemed to calm the man.

"Who—who told you?" he asked. "Who told you that I'm Irene Manners' uncle?"

"Oh, we know!" said Nipper. "We know just what you told our House-master!"

"And it's true!" shouted Mr. Wright. "I am that girl's uncle!"

"Tell us that you're Tut-Ank-Amen's uncle, and we'll believe you just as much!" retorted Handforth. "Oh no! It's too late in the day to try explanations now. That story's as thin as air! We've heard it before! If you want to convince us that you're not a crook, you'd better trot out something that sounds more convincing."

The boys, having learned from previous experience, showed no mercy this time. They bound their prisoner's ankles, and they bound his wrists. But Nipper saw to it that the ropes were not excessively tight—although there wasn't a chance in a thousand of the man freeing himself.

"He'll do now," said Nipper at length. "We can leave him here until the morning, and he won't come to any harm. But

I'm not sure it wouldn't be better to tell the police at once."

"No fear!" said Handforth. "I'm going to take him to the lock-up myself!"

"Rats!" said Tommy Watson. "We'll go straight to Old Wilkey and tell him!"

"Yes, I think it would be better," said Nipper, looking at Edward Oswald.

The leader of Study D knew that they were in earnest.

"Have a heart!" he urged. "I can't stop you if you really want to go, but you've got to admit that this is my case, you chaps. I was the first to spot this man for a crook!"

"I'm not a crook!" shouted Mr. Wright. "I keep on telling you——"

"Dry up!" growled Handforth. "We've had enough from you! He's my prisoner!" he went on, appealing to the others. "I nabbed him, didn't I? He's shown you all what he is. We can safely leave him in the cellar until the morning. I'll be up especially early, and I'll take him down to the police. Be a sport, Nipper! Let me have my own way!"

Thus appealed to, Nipper broke into a grin.

"All right," he said. "It won't make any real difference. After all, he's right, you chaps. This man is his prisoner—and if he is so jolly keen on handing him over to the police personally, we might as well let him do it."

So they bundled Mr. J. G. Wright back into the inner cellar, bolted the door, and then they returned to bed. The night's excitement, it seemed, was over at last.

CHAPTER 7.

Handforth's Triumph!

AS six o'clock was striking, Edward Oswald Handforth leapt out of bed.

He hadn't slept very well. He wasn't at all keen on sleeping. It was morning now, and he was anxious to be up and doing.

Church and McClure, for once, offered no objections when he roused them and told them to dress. They had had their doubts all along about leaving the prisoner in the cellar.

"We'll be out before any of the others," said Handforth breathlessly, as he quickly dressed. "Just what I wanted! It's our own case, and we'll handle it ourselves! By George! What a sensation there'll be when the school gets to know!"

"Are you going to take him to the lock-up straight away?" asked Church.

"Yes, rather!"

"I couldn't sleep after I got back," said Church. "I was thinking. Supposing—just supposing—that man was telling the truth? I mean, we didn't actually catch him stealing anything, did we? What if he really is Irene's uncle? Think what awful fools we should make of ourselves if we handed him over to the police!"

"Don't be an ass!" said Handforth. "The man's a crook—you can see it in every line of his face! Have you forgotten the way he fought last night? Didn't he try to trick us?"

"Well, just to be on the safe side, I mean," said Church. "Of course, we can't get in touch with Irene until she's up—and that won't be for another hour or two. It'll mean waiting——"

"H'm! It's not a bad idea," admitted Handforth, as a sudden thought struck him. "It would make absolutely certain, wouldn't it? I'm perfectly satisfied that the man isn't Irene's uncle, but there's Old Wilkey to think of. He might cut up rusty—especially as we're doing the whole job on our own. He'd jump on us if we handed the fellow over to the police without making absolutely sure. I'll tell you what—we'll go straight to Moor View."

"What's the good of that?" asked McClure. "The girls won't be down until nearly eight."

"Perhaps not—but I'll be talking to Irene within a quarter of an hour, or I'm a Dutchman!" replied Handforth confidently.

"It's impossible!" protested Church, in alarm. "The girls are all in bed."

"Leave it to me," said Handforth briskly. "I know what I'm doing. Where there's a will there's a way."

His chums were startled. They tried to argue with him, but Handy was in one of his most obstinate—and aggressive—moods.

They were soon dressed, and when they arrived downstairs they found everything quiet. The domestic staff was only just stirring.

"How about having a look at the prisoner?" suggested McClure.

"When we come back," replied Handforth. "We don't want to waste time on that now. He's all right."

They passed outside and Handforth gave the stranger's car a suspicious look.

"Stolen, I'll bet!" he commented. "Ten to one that's a false registration number."

They found the gates closed, but when they tried them they proved to be unlocked. Handforth became excited.

"Another bit of evidence!" he said keenly. "By George! Do you spot the cunning of it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't that man, Wright, deliberately leave his car out in the Triangle—instead of shoving it in the garage?" asked Handforth.

"It was Old Wilkey himself who suggested that," replied McClure.

"Perhaps so—but Wright accepted it quickly enough," said Handforth. "And he took jolly good care that the gates were left unlocked. I'll bet he tipped old Cuttle, or something—probably said that he wanted to be off early. These confidence men are brainy enough for anything. His wheeze was to clear the House of its valuables, nip out in the small hours, and quietly vamoose. I'd wondered how he had planned to get his car out of the Triangle without rousing Cuttle—and now I know!"

They went to the Moor View School at the run, and, luckily enough, a maid-servant was just outside the front door, shaking mats, as they crossed the gravel. Handforth took a shilling out of his pocket, and gave it to the surprised girl.

"What's this for, Master Handforth?" she asked.

"I want you to do me a favour, Maggie," said Handforth briskly. "Buzz upstairs and tell Irene—that is, Miss Manners—that I want to speak to her at once."

"Lor', Master Handforth, I can't do that!" protested the maidservant. "Miss Irene ain't up yet. None of the young ladies is up."

"What does that matter?" retorted Handforth. "Can't you slip into the dormitory, shake Miss Irene, and tell her that I'm here? It's important. It's urgent."

Maggie looked at the shilling, and she looked at Handforth. She felt dubious. Handforth's idea of urgency was sometimes peculiar. However, he spoke so earnestly that she was impressed.

"I'll see what I can do, Master Handforth," said the girl.

"Good man! I mean, stout fellow!" said Handforth eagerly. "Tell Miss Irene to buzz some clothes on, and come down like a shot. It's really most frightfully important!"

It seemed an age to Handforth & Co. as they waited; but, really, Irene was remarkably quick. A boy could not have dressed quicker.

"Hallo, Ted!" she said, as she came out. "Where's the fire? What's all the excitement about?"

In spite of her hurried toilet, she looked fresh and dainty and pretty, and she was genuinely curious.

"Before I tell you anything, Renie, I want to ask you a question," said Handforth, his manner so mysterious that the girl opened her blue eyes in wonder. "Have you an uncle named Mr. J. G. Wright?"

"Why, no," said Irene, more astonished than ever.

"I knew it!" yelled Handforth triumphantly.

"Well, you needn't crow about it so much," said the girl. "You've known for ages that my mother only has two sisters, and one of them is a spinster. There's Uncle Tom, of course—Mr. Warburton."

"I know him," said Handforth, nodding. "But what about your other aunt? Aunt Julie? If you had an uncle named Mr. J. G. Wright, he'd have to be her husband, wouldn't he? I mean, you couldn't have an uncle named J. G. Wright any other way?"

"Of course I couldn't, you silly," said Irene, laughing at his earnestness. "I don't understand you at all, Ted! What in the world made you think that I had an uncle named Mr. Wright?"

Church and McClure had experienced a minor shock. All along, they had been half expecting that Irene would "throw a spanner into the works" by calmly asserting that she had an uncle named Mr. Wright. But her point-blank denial was good enough. She, of all persons, should know how many uncles she had, and what their names were!

"Listen!" said Handforth impressively. "I'm going to tell you a story, Renie."

She listened with mingled incredulity and wonder as Handforth related the surprising events of the night.

"Oh, Ted, you're making it up!" she interrupted once.

"No, I'm not," replied Handforth. "Am I, you chaps? Honest Injun, Renie! It's all the truth!"

"Yes, rather!" said Church. "Honour bright, you know! We wouldn't spoof you over a thing like this!"

"Why, it's too absurd for words!" said the girl, at length, her cheeks flushed. "Well done, Ted! Of course, the man is a criminal! He's that man the police have been warning people about! At any rate, he can't be my uncle, because I haven't an uncle named Wright. What's he like?"

They described Mr. Wright to the best of their ability.

"I've never seen the man," said Irene indignantly. "Oh, what a fraud! What an impostor! It's like his awful nerve to go to St. Frank's telling Mr. Wilkes that I'm his niece! And fancy saying

that he mistook St. Frank's for Moor View! That was terribly thin!"

"Of course it was—but Old Wilkey swallowed it," growled Handforth. "It was just an excuse to get in."

"It looks like it," agreed the girl.

"Well, that's all we wanted to know," said Handforth briskly. "I knew it all along, of course—but it was just as well to make sure. Thanks, Renie! We're going along now, and we're going to take that rotter down to the police station and give him in charge."

Leaving Irene more excited than ever, Handforth triumphantly dashed back to St. Frank's.

"Let him try to trot out that yarn again!" said Edward Oswald. "By George! He was a proper mug to come to St. Frank's, wasn't he? He might just as well have walked into a hornets' nest!"

"I hope he hasn't escaped during the night," said Church anxiously.

"Not likely! We roped him up too well!"

Handforth was right. When they went down to the cellar, they found Mr. J. G. Wright fast asleep, in spite of his bonds.

"There you are!" said Handforth coolly. "What did I tell you? We're going to get all the credit for this capture, my sons! You take his head and shoulders, and I'll take his feet. We'll bundle him into the car, just as he is."

Mr. Wright, only just awakened, eyed them ominously.

"You kids are going to get into trouble over this," he said darkly. "You think you're very clever, but——"

"The less you say, Mr. Wright, the better," interrupted Handforth. "We're taking you straight down to the police station, to give you in charge."

"The sooner, the better," said Mr. Wright, almost viciously. "The police will, at least, take these ropes off me, and listen to what I have to say! Go ahead! Take me! And don't waste any time!"

Handforth grunted.

"After we've handed you to the police, it's up to the police to hold you," he said. "You can tell 'em what yarn you like—but that one about your being Irene Manners' uncle won't wash."

"But I am her uncle!" roared Mr. Wright angrily.

"Oh!" said Handforth. "Supposing I tell you that I've just seen Irene—not ten minutes ago?"

"Eh?"

"Supposing I tell you that she has never heard of you?" demanded Handforth.



Mr. Wright made a desperate attempt to escape, but Handforth flung himself recklessly at the man's legs and brought him crashing to the floor.

"But—but—— That's quite right, too!" said the man, after the first moment of startled surprise. "She wouldn't know anything about it—I was going to surprise her with the news. That's what you don't seem to understand. You won't give me a chance to explain——"

"Oh, bring him along!" said Handforth gruffly. "He's already inventing a new yarn—and if we stop here and listen to it, he'll make us believe it!"

Handforth regarded Mr. Wright as a desperate character, and he was taking no chances. Spotting the rug which he had used the previous night to tie over the man's head, he again repeated the performance. Mr. Wright's vigorous protests became muffled as Handforth placed the rug over his head and shoulders and secured it with a length of rope round the man's middle. Then, without further ado, he was seized, carried up the cellar steps, and, to the astonishment of various domestics, bundled outside—and dumped into his own car.

Handforth managed to start the car without trouble. He was more accustomed to an Austin Seven, or his own Morris Minor, but all cars, nowadays, are very much alike. He drove off down the lane.

Handforth had been hoping that Bellton High Street would be crowded; he wanted lots of people to see him triumphantly taking his prisoner to the tiny lock-up. But, somehow, now that the great moment had arrived, he was glad that the High Street was empty.

It wasn't in Handforth's nature to be vindictive or spiteful. He even began to feel sorry for the prisoner. Then, remembering what had happened, he hardened his heart. This crook was the man who had been robbing people up and down the country—imposing on them—getting into their houses by their kindness, and then robbing them of their valuables. He was a bad lot. It was silly to waste any sympathy on him. And a further surge of indignation came over Handforth when he remembered that the man had actually claimed relationship with Irene!

So, when they arrived outside a little cottage on the edge of Bellton, Handforth was looking as determined as ever. On the front of the little house, just over the doorway, was a blue plate, with the words "County Police." It was the home of Police-constable Sparrow—and it also served Bellton as a lock-up.

"Come along, my lad!" said Handforth gruffly, as he stopped the car.

They half lifted, half dragged Mr. Wright out of the car, and only a short pause was made whilst the prisoner's legs were untied. Then Handforth strutted very importantly down the garden path, leading his prisoner behind him. Mr. Wright, his vision obscured by the rug over his head, stumbled and nearly came a cropper.

"For goodness' sake take this thing off my head!" came a muffled voice from within the rug.

Handforth turned, grunted, and then, after a moment's hesitation, did so. Mr. Wright glared at him ferociously, but said nothing. Gripping their captive tightly, Handforth & Co. led him up to the cottage.

Mrs. Sparrow came to the door in answer to Handforth's loud knock.

"Lor' bless my soul!" said the good woman, opening her eyes wide. "Whatever's this, young gentlemen?"

"We want to see 'Dicky-Bird'—that is to say, P.-c. Sparrow," said Handforth importantly.

"But whatever are you doing to this gentleman?" asked Mrs. Sparrow.

"He's not a gentleman—he's a thief!" replied Handforth.

"Oh, have your own way," said Mr. Wright in a weary voice. "Be good enough to admit me, Mrs.—er—Sparrow. Your husband is the constable, I understand? Perhaps I can explain things to him; these boys won't pay any attention to me."

"No, sir—they're rare trying at times," agreed the woman.

"Here, I say, you don't understand!" exclaimed Handforth. "Don't take any notice of this man, Mrs. Sparrow! He's a crook, I tell you! Where's your husband?"

"He ain't back from his beat yet, Master Handforth," said Mrs. Sparrow, giving the burly junior a suspicious look. "This ain't one of your games, I suppose? You young gents are rare fond of your jokes, ain't you?"

"No, it's not a joke," replied Handforth. "I like that! Here we've caught a man the police are looking for all over the country, and you think it's a joke! When will the policeman be home?"

"My husband won't be back until eight o'clock, at the earliest," said Mrs. Sparrow. "He's still on his beat."

"All right, then—we'll take this chap inside, and we'll shove him in the cell," said Handforth calmly. "That'll do just

as well. He can't escape from there—and we shall have done our duty."

Mrs. Sparrow wasn't the kind of woman to raise objections; and the prisoner was marched through the cottage and bundled into the tiny lock-up at the rear. Handforth himself closed the door and bolted it—but not until he had loosened Mr. Wright's bonds.

"I ain't sure that this is right, Master Handforth," said Mrs. Sparrow nervously. "What's the charge against the gentleman?"

"Don't I keep telling you that he's not a gentleman?" replied Handforth. "The charge is one of burglary and fraud and swindling! Tell old Sparrow—your husband, I mean—to come up to the school, and we'll give him all particulars."

And Handforth, having dealt with the matter thus airily, marched out.

CHAPTER 8.

Hard Luck, Handy!

MR. ALINGTON WILKES was very worried.

He was up rather earlier this morning, and one of his first tasks had been to knock at his unexpected guest's door. Mr. J. G. Wright had especially requested him to give him an early call, so that he could be washed, shaved, and dressed ready to go to the Moor View School by the time the girls were down.

But Mr. Wilkes, going to the visitor's bedroom, had received no answer in response to his knocking. Entering the bedroom, he had found the room empty, and, what was considerably startling, the bed had not even been slept in! The suit-case which Mr. Wright had brought was unopened.

"This is most peculiar," said Old Wilkey, with concern.

His next discovery was that Mr. Wright's car had gone. Then, on the top of that, he was astonished to see numbers of Removites about—and they weren't supposed to be down yet. Juniors were running about excitedly, shouting to each other. Evidently something of an unusual nature had occurred this morning.

Mr. Wilkes even went outside to make inquiries, only to be freshly bewildered by the spectacle of Mr. J. G. Wright's car driving into the Triangle with Handforth at the wheel, and with Church and McClure accompanying him.

Handforth was immediately surrounded, and all sorts of inquiries were shot at him. Fullwood and Russell were asking questions; so were Gresham and Duncan and Adams. Even Archie Glenthorne was down, to say nothing of De Valerie and Jerry Dodd and Somerton.

"What's happened, Handy?" shouted Jimmy Potts, making himself heard above the others. "What about that burglar chap?"

"You're too late!" grinned Handforth. "I've already taken him to the lock-up."

"What!"

"I thought we'd better get it over—to be on the safe side," explained Handforth coolly. "So I've taken our genial friend, Mr. Wright, down to Sparrow's cottage, and I personally locked him in the cell."

"Oh, my hat!"

"You'll be in the soup, Handy, if you've made a bloomer!"

Mr. Wilkes, hearing these shouts, stood stock-still. He did not understand much, but he had heard sufficient to startle him.

Mr. Wright—taken to the lock-up!

"Don't you worry!" Handforth was saying. "There's no fear of a bloomer. I made certain—by going up to the Moor View School first."

"Well, well!" said Travers. "So you are getting cautious in your old age, dear old fellow!"

"I was certain, in my own mind, but I thought it better to make absolutely sure," explained Handforth. "Irene, of course, said that she'd never seen the man. Didn't know him from Adam. Hasn't got an uncle named Wright—never has had. Well, of course, that clinched it. We pulled the fellow out of the cellar, and carted him down to the lock-up. So that's that!"

By this time Old Wilkey was very agitated. He distinctly remembered Mr. J. G. Wright's statement that he was the uncle of Irene Manners. But what Handforth had just said threw a different light on the whole matter. Mr. Wilkes decided that it was high time for him to go amongst the boys and to make rigid inquiries.

It was getting clearer and clearer that something of a sensational character had happened during the night.

But Mr. Wilkes was prevented from taking any action just then. A slim figure came running at high speed through the open gateway. It was the figure of a fair-haired girl, her face flushed and hot, her eyes wild with excitement.

"Ted—Ted!" she cried desperately.

Handforth, who had just jumped out of the car, swung round. The crowd of juniors parted as the girl came tearing up.

"Why, hullo, what on earth's the matter, Renie?" asked Handforth blankly.

"Where is he?" panted Irene.

"Eh? Where's—"

"Mr. Wright! Where is he?" asked the girl. "Oh, Ted! I've run like mad! Some of the other girls are behind—"

"Here they are now!" said Nipper.

Doris Berkeley, Mary Summers, Tessa Love, Marjorie Temple, and several other Moor View girls came running in, and the excitement increased.

"But—but what's the matter?" asked Handforth, bewildered. "We've taken that crook to the lock-up!"

"What-a-at!" gurgled Irene. "You've—you've taken him to the lock-up? You mean Mr. Wright?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Ted, he is my uncle!"

Handforth promptly collapsed into the interior of the car which stood behind him.

"Your uncle?" he repeated mechanically, heaving himself up with an effort.

"Yes, yes!" cried Irene, seizing him by the coat lapels and shaking him. "I tell you, Ted, he is my uncle! Oh, what have you done to him? You've made a terrible, terrible mistake! Ted—Ted!"

Something which was very akin to a rattle sounded in Handforth's dry throat.

"Wake me up, somebody!" he gurgled. "I'm having a nightmare!"

They took no notice of the babble of voices around them.

"You're dotty!" shouted Handforth suddenly. "I—I mean— Sorry, Renie! I—I didn't mean—"

"Oh, Ted, what does it matter?" panted the girl. "I think I must be dotty, too!"

"But you told me—positively—that you'd never heard of Mr. Wright."

"I know I did," groaned Irene. "But I didn't know—then! Something's happened since. Oh, Ted, I've had a letter from my Aunt Julie, and when I read it, I nearly fainted!"

"But—but I don't see—" began Handforth.

"Aunt Julie is married!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"To a man named Mr. J. G. Wright!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"He's really my uncle—and you've—you've done all that to him!" said Irene desperately.

"But how—I mean, when— That is to say, you told me that Aunt Julie wasn't married!" stammered Handforth. "I knew she wasn't married, too. I took it for granted that this man was a crook."

"Poor old Handy!" sighed Travers. "I'm afraid you're in the oxtail up to your collar-stud!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Handy's caught a mare's nest again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fellows were shouting with laughter now, for they could see the humour of the situation.

"You—you rotters!" roared Handforth. "It's nothing to laugh at! Can't you understand the seriousness of the situation?"

"Oh, don't bother about them, Ted," said Irene. "Listen to this. I won't read all the letter, but just a bit of it. 'Dear Renie,—By the time you get this, you will have had the big surprise. For, of course, Jim will have arrived, and he will have told you everything. Do persuade your headmistress to let you come to London. Weren't you thrilled when you heard that the old maid of the family was married? It all happened so suddenly—' Oh, I can't read it all," went on Irene breathlessly. "There's such a lot of it—Aunt Julie was always longwinded."

Handforth passed a hand over his brow. "We roped him up—we knocked him down—we shoved him in the lock-up!" he muttered.

"You see, Aunt Julie has been away on holiday—on the Continent," explained Irene quickly. "And when she arrived home she brought her husband with her. They met in Genoa, or somewhere, in July. They both belonged to Lady Somebody or other's party, and—and—you know what it is. When they got to Paris they decided to get married, and they didn't say a word to anybody. They decided to spring it as a surprise when they arrived home."

"It's a surprise all right," said Church feelingly.

"So they've had their honeymoon and everything," continued Irene. "And now that they're home they're holding a sort of house-party. Aunt Julie's husband is Mr. J. G. Wright, and he's a big stockbroker, or something like that."

"My hat!" breathed Handforth. "But—but what was the idea of his coming down last night—alone?"

"Well, it was his own idea—to fetch me," explained Irene. "Aunt Julie says that he thought it would be rather good to come down and spring the surprise on me, and auntie promised to write, so that I should get the letter this morning. In case I didn't believe him, I suppose."

"Then that story he told was true," said Handforth, with a gulp. "He did have a puncture, and he did mistake St. Frank's for your school! He isn't that crook at all."

"Oh, Ted, how could you mistake him for a crook?" asked Irene reproachfully. "Couldn't you see—by the very look of him?"

"It's no good going into that," put in Nipper briskly. "The thing we've got to decide is—what shall we do? You mustn't blame Handy alone, Irene. Quite a crowd of us were in it."

Handforth gave him a grateful glance.

"Yes, that's it," he said. "What are we going to do?"

Just then Mr. Wilkes strolled in amongst them.

"It's all right, you fellows—don't look so alarmed," said Old Wilkey mildly. "I really think I'd better take a hand in this—and give you some advice."

"You—know, sir?" asked Handforth hoarsely.

"I know a good deal," replied the House-master. "I could not help hearing your conversation, and it is apparent to me that there has been a little—er—mistake. I should like to know just how Mr. Wright came to be mistaken for a questionable character?"

"Handy saw a report in last night's evening paper, sir—warning people against a crook who goes about the country in a motor-car, imposing on them," explained Church.



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 and penknives are also offered as prizes. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

BOW-WOW.

Old Salt: "Why have you been staring at me for the last ten minutes?"

Small Boy: "Well, father told me you were an old sea dog, and I'm waiting to hear you bark."

(B. Brown, 17, Eltham Green Road, Eltham, S.E.9, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

FAME.

Eastern Guide: "This lamp was placed here by King Armid five centuries ago, and has never been put out."

American Tourist (blowing out lamp): "Well, for the benefit of those who come after me, tell them it was Silas B. Blowbag who blew it out."

(H. Williams, 11, Belle Vue Street, Manchester, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

READY FOR ACCIDENTS.

Neighbour (inquisitively): "What, got a puncture already, my boy?"

Tommy (proud owner of a new bicycle): "Oh, no. Mum always says prevention's better than cure, so I'm putting on two packets of patches to start with."

(R. Danford, 22, Lysia Street, Fulham, S.W.6, has been awarded a penknife.)

ANY OLD IRON.

A collector of scrap iron was noisily trundling his barrow along a very narrow road. Behind him was a somewhat ancient motor-car, the impatient driver of which was sounding his hooter incessantly in an endeavour to pass. The iron merchant looked round at the car, and then addressed the driver.

"All right, guv'nor; don't be in such a hurry. I'll call for it to-morrow."

(H. Everett, 209, Baron Road, Becontree, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

NOT TO BE RECOMMENDED.

Diner: "Waiter, this water is cloudy."

Waiter (unconcernedly): "No, sir, our water is always fresh. Only the glass is dirty."

(M. Hornsby, 110, Whytecliffe Road, Purley, has been awarded a penknife.)

RIGHT AND WRONG.

Teacher (during grammar lesson): "Now, boys, what is wrong with this sentence: 'The toast was drank with enthusiasm.'"

"He gets into big houses by false pretences, and then nabs the valuables during the night. He uses all sorts of names, and one of them is Wright. So Handy came to the conclusion that the man needed watching."

"H'm! I'm not blaming Handforth for that," said Mr. Wilkes. "He should have come to me, of course, but we'll let that pass. Well? And what happened?"

"We kept watch, sir, and Mr. Wright came out of his bed-room, tip-toed downstairs with an electric torch, and went into your sitting-room," explained Handforth. "We thought it was jolly suspicious. And when I peeped into the sitting-room, I saw Mr. Wright at your desk, with an automatic pistol in his hand!"

"Oh, Ted!" protested Irene.

"But I did!" insisted Handforth. "That's what made me so certain!"

"Well, perhaps Mr. Wright himself will be able to explain that," said Old Wilkey gently. "We mustn't make any further mistakes. I understand, then, that you seized this unfortunate man, locked him in the cellar, and left him there for the night?"

"Yes, sir!" chorused the juniors.

"And after that, Handforth, you went to the Moor View School, questioned this young lady, and she assured you that she had no uncle named Mr. Wright?" went on Wilkey. "Having satisfied yourself on that point, you took the man down to the police-station?"

"That's it, sir," said Handforth miserably. "But how was I to know? I mean——"

"In all the circumstances, you were not so much to blame," said the Housemaster kindly. "Your great fault was in keeping the whole matter to yourself. But your high-handed action in taking Mr. Wright to the lock-up might possibly save you."

"How, sir?" burst out Handforth eagerly.

"Well, there has been no formal charge against Mr. Wright, and, after all, he is only in Sparrow's cottage," said Mr. Wilkes, smiling. "I think I heard somebody say that Sparrow is not there——"

"And he won't be there until eight!" interrupted Handforth, with a jump. "By George! We've got time to buzz down and rescue him before old Sparrow gets in off his beat!"

"You'd better hurry down, then, and I'll leave it to you to explain things to Mr. Wright to the best of your ability," said Old Wilkey dryly. "It is a very good thing that you did not ring up the Bannington police, for then the situation would have been serious. Bring Mr. Wright to the school, and I will do my best to help you smooth things out a bit more."

"Oh, you're a brick, sir!" said Handforth gratefully. "Come on, you chaps! To the rescue!"

There was a dash for the village, and Irene was amongst the foremost.

Bright Pupil: "Please, teacher, it should be: 'The toast was eaten with enthusiasm.'"

(*J. Kerridge, 4, Longcroft Villas, Weymouth, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

NOT FAST ENOUGH.

Judge: "Speeding, eh? How many times have you been in front of me?"

Motorist: "Never, your honour. I have often tried to pass you, but my car will only do fifty miles an hour."

(*W. Bradley, 41, Garton Street, Melbourne, Australia, has been awarded a penknife.*)

HIS RESPONSIBILITY.

Traveller: "Who is the responsible person in this office?"

Office boy: "I don't know who is the responsible person, but I do know that I always get the blame."

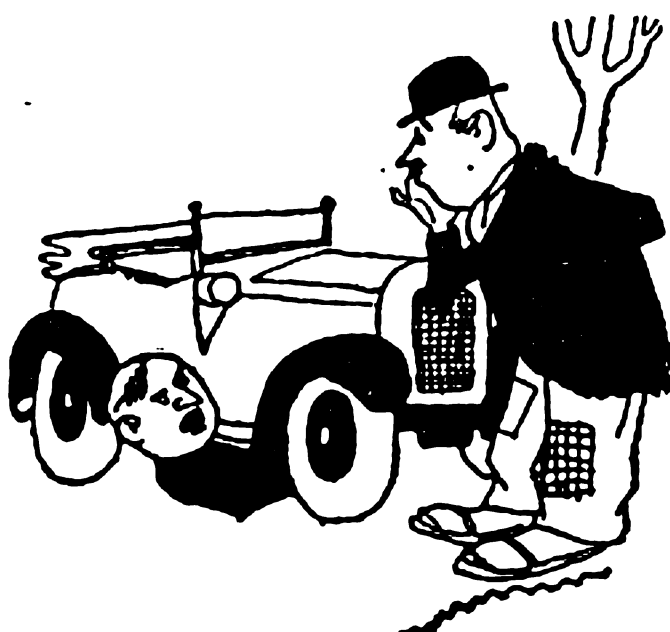
(*J. Cooper, "Thorn Tavern," 25, Ber Street, Norwich, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

A SILLY QUESTION.

Tramp (coming up to motorist who is lying full length beneath car): "Something gone wrong, mister?"

Motorist (sarcastically): "Oh, no, I only got under here to get out of the sun."

(*J. Bowles, 2, Reira Road, Wellington, New Zealand, has been awarded a penknife.*)



MY STARS!

Astronomer (looking at the sky with his telescope): "I can see everything in the sky."

Youthful onlooker: "I say, guv'nor can you see that balloon I lost yesterday?"

(*M. Nanporia, 16/23, Kitanocho, 2, Chome, Kobe, Japan, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

CUTTING.

Barber: "How's the razor, sir?"

Customer: "Didn't know I was being shaved."

Barber: "Very glad, I'm sure, sir."

Customer (grimly): "I thought I was being sand-papered."

(*R. Wilson, 6, Queen's Street, Leicester, has been awarded a penknife.*)

SARCASM.

It was a miserable day, and the tram conductor was not in a very amiable frame of mind. It so happened that one passenger discovered that he had not sufficient money to pay his fare, but he managed to find a couple of farthings and a halfpenny stamp. These he tendered to the conductor, who accepted them and then passed on to the next passenger.

"And what are you going to give me—jam jars?" he inquired with a bitter smile.

(*C. Pryke, 48, Edmonton Road, Edmonton, N. 18, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

CHAPTER 9.

More Complications!

HANDFORTH had forgotten all about Mr. Wright's car in the excitement. His heart was thudding feverishly. Old Wilkey had acted like a sportsman. There might yet be time to square things with the unfortunate Uncle Jim.

People in Bellton wondered what was the matter. St. Frank's fellows and Moor View girls were running like mad down the High Street; and shopkeepers, coming to their doors, attracted by the din, half expected to see a charging bull or a mad dog. Not that there was really any telling what these youngsters would be up to next.

Young Catchpole, the cheery skipper of the Bellton Rovers, happened to be outside the ironmonger's, and he paused in astonishment.

"Lumme!" he ejaculated.

He fell into a run alongside Nipper, who nodded to him cheerily.

"What's the excitement?" asked young Catchpole.

"We're just running along to the lock-up, Bob," chuckled Nipper. "There's been a bit of bother at St. Frank's this morning, and a gentleman who is really a visitor was mistaken for a burglar."

"I'll bet Master Handforth had a hand in it, too," said Bob, with conviction. "Still, that ain't what I wanted to speak to you about. You ain't forgot Saturday's match?"

"Not likely!" replied Nipper. "St. Frank's play the Rovers on Saturday—in the league."

Bob Catchpole's eyes were sparkling.

"You bet!" he said. "This here St. Frank's League is the best thing that ever happened for us chaps, Master Nipper. It gives us all a chance—makes us all interested in football more than ever. I s'pose you're ready to have a lickin'?"

"Quick ready, but I fancy we shall give you one instead," replied Nipper cheerfully.

There was no further talk of football then, for they had practically arrived at Sparrow's cottage. The previous Saturday the St. Frank's junior eleven had met Helmford College in the league, and the game had resulted in a victory for the Saints—three—one. It had been a home match, but the next one—against the enterprising Rovers—was to be away. Not far away, since the Rovers' ground was only in Bellton. And it promised to be a tough game.

"Here we are!" panted Handforth, as he ran up the little path of the cottage. "Let's hope we're in time."

He thumped on the door, and the others crowded round. Mrs. Sparrow received the second shock that morning.

"Lor', young gents!" she ejaculated. "What is it now? My husband ain't back yet—"

"That's all we wanted to know, Mrs. Sparrow, thanks," said Handforth eagerly. "You see, there was a mistake. That gentleman we put in the lock-up shouldn't have been put

there at all. He's not a burglar, as we thought. So we're going to set him free."

"These are nice goings on while my husband's away!" said the good woman indignantly. "I ain't so sure that I'll let you in, Master Handforth! Well, I never did! Playing fast and loose with the police force—that's what I call it! You young gentlemen ain't got any respect for the law!"

"Oh, cheese it, Mrs. Sparrow!" said Handforth, diving into his pocket and producing two half-crowns. "Frightfully sorry to give you this trouble. All a mistake, I assure you. You don't mind getting the kiddies some sweets and things, do you?"

Mrs. Sparrow took the money and was flustered. Her indignation subsided. Master Handforth, after all, wasn't a bad sort, although, mind you, rather wild.

So it came about that Mr. J. G. Wright, the husband of Aunt Julie—Uncle Jim himself—was fairly dragged out of the cell by Handforth & Co. and two or three other helpers, and hustled completely out of the cottage and into the road.

"What is it now?" asked Mr. Wright. "You're going to duck me this time, I suppose?"

"Not likely, sir!" said Handforth breathlessly. "This way, sir, if you don't mind! We don't want to be too near old Sparrow's cottage. He might be back soon."

Mr. Wright noticed a distinct difference in Handforth's tone and manner. Handforth was quite respectful now. All the other fellows were looking on excitedly and interestedly. They drifted some distance down the lane, and Mr. Wright was compelled to drift, too, for he was surrounded by the juniors.

None of the boys noticed, but Irene Manners had uttered a little cry at the first sight of the prisoner. Her blue eyes opened wide, and she caught in her breath with a little gulp.

"Here we are, sir!" said Handforth, at length. "We—we want to apologise, Mr. Wright."

"We do apologise, Mr. Wright!" chorused a number of others.

"Oh!" said Mr. Wright.

"We made a terrible blunder, sir," went on Handforth. "We jumped to a perfectly dotty conclusion—"

"He means that he did, sir," murmured Church.

"Well, I did," acknowledged Handforth. "I'm not trying to get out of it, sir. I'm the chap who made the mistake—I'm the chap who egged all these others on. So if there's any punishment coming, I'm for it!"

Mr. J. G. Wright looked at him hard.

"And may I ask what has caused you to change your opinion so completely?" he asked. "I tried to explain matters, but you wouldn't listen."

"I was a chump, sir," said Handforth penitently. "But—but, you see, I'm a personal friend of Irene's. I knew—or, rather, I thought—that she hadn't an uncle named

"I've taken Mr. Wright to the lock-up!" explained Handforth. "But he's my uncle!" shrieked Irene in horror—whereat Handy collapsed into the car behind him.



Mr. Wright. When I saw her this morning she told me that she'd never heard of you."

"Which was quite true," nodded Uncle Jim.

"Then, after we'd locked you up, Irene came along with a letter—from her Aunt Julie," continued Handforth. "And that explained everything—all about your getting married so unexpectedly, and all that. I nearly had a fit, sir. We've treated you rottenly, and we can't expect that you'll forgive us. I mean, last night—that cellar and—and—"

He paused awkwardly, and Mr. Wright made no comment. His face was grave.

"We feel, sir—that is, I feel, sir—that I've wronged you very seriously," continued Handforth. "I mean, look at you! No shoes on, or—or anything! We never gave you a chance—"

He went on in the same strain, and his apology was so abject, his expressions of regret were so heartfelt, that Mr. J. G. Wright soon found himself smiling. There wasn't any doubting Edward Oswald Handforth's sincerity.

"Come, young 'un, I'm not such a bad sort," said Uncle Jim kindly, at length. "I'm not bearing any grudge. Say no more about it!"

"You—you mean that you'll overlook it, sir?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"Of course I will!" laughed Uncle Jim. "Perhaps you were not to blame for the misunderstanding. You have told me about that newspaper paragraph, and the police warning. And the circumstances of my arrival were certainly unusual. Then, again, the way you found me creeping downstairs at midnight—"

"We haven't quite figured that out, sir," said Nipper pointedly.

Uncle Jim smiled.

"Yet the explanation is perfectly simple—as such explanations generally are. The fact is, I had noticed a telephone in Mr. Wilkes' sitting-room, and after I had been shown to my bed-room, it occurred to me that the hour was not long after midnight, and that my wife would still be up."

"Oh!"

"You see, she is holding a sort of reception—or was last night—and it occurred to me to 'phone her, and explain what had happened," said Uncle Jim. "There was really no reason why I should disturb Mr. Wilkes again, so I slipped downstairs, and was trying to find the telephone when you boys burst in upon me."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth. "It's so jolly simple now that we know! And we thought—I thought—that you were trying to locate Old Wilkey's cash-box!"

Everything was coming very clear now. Handforth had attributed all sorts of cunning cleverness to Mr. Wright. The school gates, for example. He had believed that Mr. Wright had deliberately plotted for those gates to be left unlocked, so that he could slip off in the middle of the night without attracting attention. The simple theory that Josh Cuttle, the porter, had forgotten to turn the key had never occurred to him.

"Well, let's forget the whole unfortunate business," said Mr. Wright. "I will confess that I was furious when you boys roped me up last night, and when you came down to release me from that rug, I really did 'see red.' I thought I had a chance of escaping from you then, and I took it. When you grabbed me, I fairly let myself go. I'm afraid I lost my temper."

"We're not blaming you for that, sir," said Nipper, with a chuckle. "Anybody would have lost his temper if he had been in your shoes. I think it's very sporting of you, sir, to take it all so nicely."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Uncle Jim!"

"I say!" burst out Handforth suddenly. "Where's Irene? Well I'm jiggered! We haven't introduced Irene, you chaps! She doesn't even know her own uncle."

For some reason Irene Manners had been keeping to the background, but she was compelled to come forward now. She did so hesitantly, and she found Mr. J. G. Wright looking at her with frank and open interest.

"Well," he said, "so you are my new niece, eh? You are Miss Irene Manners? Well, you don't know how pleased I am to meet you—after all this bother and delay."

"I'm pleased, too," said Irene frankly.

"You mustn't take too much notice of me at present," said Mr. Wright hastily. "I can assure you I'm not looking my best. I'm not really Uncle Jim just at the moment."

"No!" said Irene, with strange emphasis. "I'm sure you're not!"

He gave her a quick look.

"But after I've had a shave and a wash and a change of clothes, I'll be different," he went on, laughing. "I want to take you back to London with me. Julie is very keen on it."

"I don't know whether Miss Bond will let me go," said Irene. "Perhaps you had better come up to the school—my school, I mean—as soon as you can, Mr.—I mean, Uncle Jim!"

"My original plan was to be at the Moor View School for breakfast," nodded Mr. Wright. "I think I can still manage it, eh?"

It happened that Dr. Brett was passing through the village in his car, and the boys stopped him, crowded round, and commanded the car forthwith. So the shoeless Mr. Wright was given a ride to the school, with sundry juniors clinging to the

back of the car and to the running-boards. Others dashed behind as an escort. Dr. Brett didn't quite understand what it was all about, but he refrained from asking too many questions.

When they arrived at the school Mr. Wilkes was there, and Mr. Wilkes took charge of Uncle Jim and escorted him indoors for a wash, a shave, and a change.

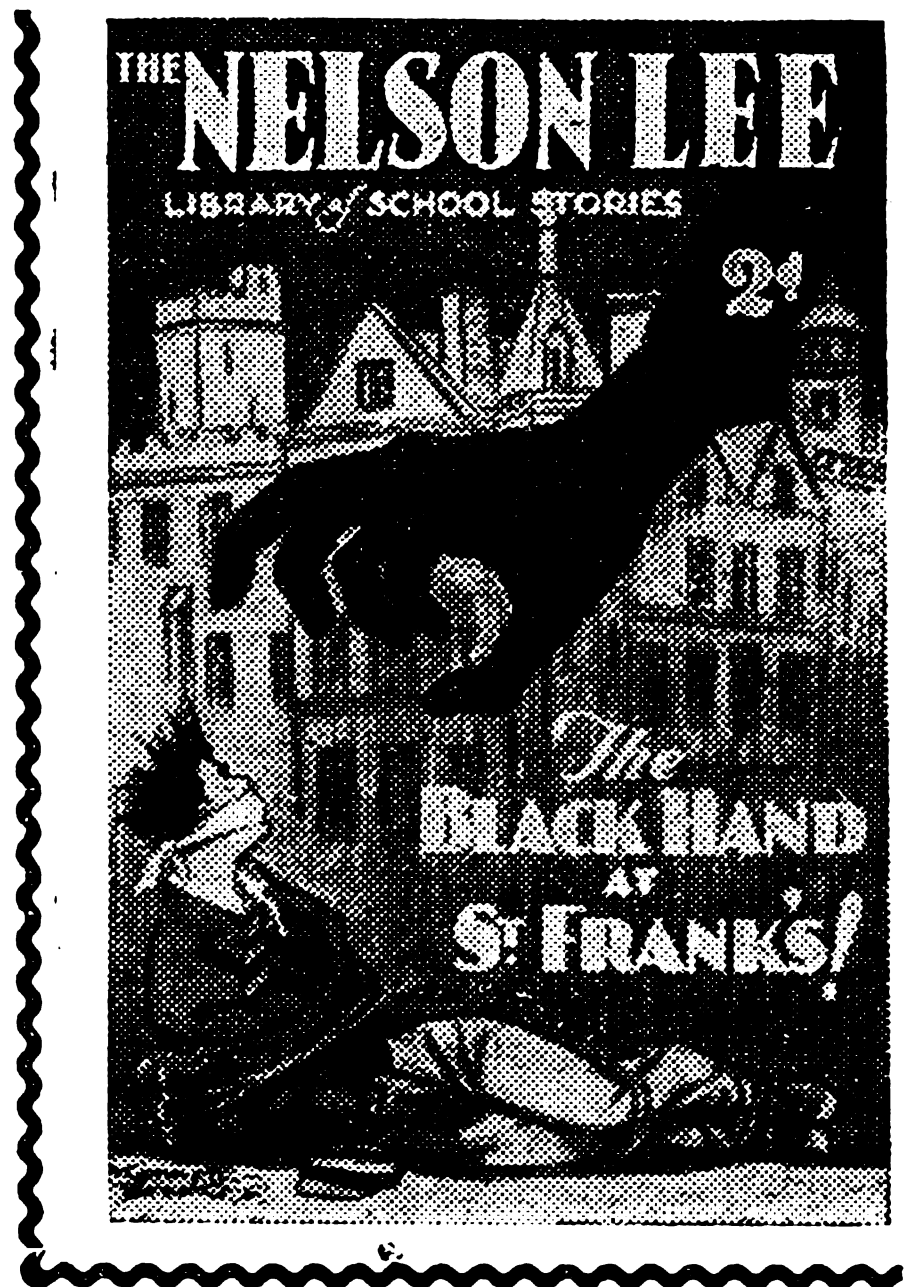
"By George, he's a sport!" said Handforth breathlessly. "He took it like a good 'un!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Good old Uncle Jim!"

"You're lucky, Handy," said Church, with

COMING NEXT WEDNESDAY!



conviction. "And now, perhaps, you won't brag so much. You and your crooks!"

Handforth wilted. In the excitement he had forgotten his own unenviable position. He had made a hopeless ass of himself—as usual! From first to last his sensational theory was just nonsense; all his base suspicions were without justification!

"All right, don't rub it in!" he growled unhappily. "I was wrong—I admit it!"

He was bitterly disappointed, but, with his usual openness, he was frank in his self-condemnation. And then it was that Irene pulled at his sleeve. He turned, and found the girl looking at him with fresh excitement in her blue eyes.

"Perhaps you're not wrong, Ted," said Irene, her voice quivering.

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "What do you mean, Renie?"

"I mean that that man who has just gone indoors with Mr. Wilkes is *not my Uncle Jim!*" said the girl dramatically. "He's the wrong Mr. Wright!"

CHAPTER 10.

Cornering The "Crook!"

IRENE'S statement, which had been overheard by nearly all the boys and girls, caused an immediate hush.

"The wrong Mr. Wright!" repeated Handforth faintly.

"THE BLACK HAND AT ST. FRANK'S!"

By E. S. BROOKS.

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"Handforth's Weekly!"

"OUR ROUND TABLE TALK!"

ORDER IN ADVANCE!

The others pressed round. This was a stunner! Even Irene's girl friends were staggered. They, like the boys, had taken it for granted that the "adventure" was over.

"I couldn't say anything before," went on Irene. "But as soon as I set eyes on the man I knew that something was wrong. Oh, I've been longing to tell all of you, but I couldn't until he went indoors with Mr. Wilkes."

Handforth went red, and his eyes blazed. The mere possibility that he was right, after all, filled him with wild excitement.

"Of course, Irene, you can't judge the chap by his present appearance," Nipper was saying. "He doesn't look much this morning, but——"

"Oh, I don't mean that!" interrupted Irene. "It's something else—something which absolutely proves, positively and definitely, that he is not my uncle, after all."

"But—but how can you say that?" asked Handforth. "You've never seen him before! So how can you know?"

"Ted, I believe you've been right all the time!" said Irene excitedly. "Oh, and it's only by sheer luck that we're able to know the truth! But we do know! We've got the proof!"

"But—but——"

"This letter from Aunt Julie," went on Irene. "Don't you understand? She says in her letter that she is enclosing one of the photographs—really a snapshot—of herself and her husband as they were leaving the registrar's office, or whatever stands for a registrar's office in Paris, after the ceremony. Another member of the party took the snap, and the snap's here!"

With a dramatic little gesture the girl whipped out the snapshot, and Handforth stared at it blankly.

"That's your Aunt Julie," he said at once, "but—but the man——"

"The man, of course, is Mr. J. G. Wright, her husband," said Irene. "My new Uncle Jim! *But he's not the man who just went indoors with Mr. Wilkes!*"

"Great Scott!"

"Oh, my only Sunday topper!"

"Well I'm jiggered!"

"The wrong Mr. Wright!"

There wasn't a doubt of it. The Mr. Wright of the photograph—actually snapped after the ceremony with Aunt Julie—was a finely-built, stoutish, jovial-looking middle-aged man. He and Aunt Julie stood on some steps, with their arms interlinked, and other people, all laughing, were in the background of the photo. That gentleman and the man who had just claimed to be Uncle Jim were not the same!

"I never dreamed anything was wrong until I saw that man coming out of the policeman's cottage," said Irene breathlessly. "But then, at the very first glance, I knew. He's not my Uncle Jim! How can he be? Oh, Ted, what are we going to do? That man's a fraud—an impostor! If he wasn't, he wouldn't have agreed so readily."

"By George, no!" roared Handforth. "He's tricked us again, you chaps! He's the crook!"

Handforth was triumphant. After all these misunderstandings, he was proved to be right!

"This is beginning to look serious," said Nipper. "Well done, Irene! It was brainy of you to keep quiet until the man had gone indoors."

"I—I hardly knew what to do," confessed Irene. "But I knew that if I kept mum there might be a chance of finding out who the man really is—and what his game is. If I had told him to his face that he wasn't my Uncle Jim, he might have made a dash for liberty. He might even have hurt some of

you boys. I didn't forget about that revolver! By keeping quiet, we've fooled him—he thinks he's safe!"

"Great Scott!" yelled Handforth. "That's another thing we'd overlooked, you chaps! That automatic pistol! He didn't explain it, did he?"

"I'll bet he was glad we didn't ask him!" said Church. "He couldn't have explained it!"

"He's the real crook, after all, and we've let him out of the lock-up, and—and everything!" said Handforth, with a gulp. "Oh, my hat! We'll expose the rotter and trap him!"

"Yes, rather!"

"That's what we'll do, Handy—show him up!"

"Hear, hear!"

"The glib way in which he explained why he went downstairs after midnight!" said Handforth indignantly. "By George! He went down to telephone, did he? We swallowed it whole, and thought it sounded convincing!"

"Well, it wasn't a bad explanation," said Nipper. "Better than the old excuse of going downstairs for a book to read. In fact, it was a jolly brainy explanation—for if the man was really Uncle Jim, it's just the sort of thing he would do. Midnight isn't a late hour in London, you know, and midnight is a good hour for telephoning."

"He went to Old Wilkey's sitting-room to pinch the silver!" said Handforth darkly. "I had him taped the first time! And if it hadn't been for Irene, we should have let the rotter go!"

"Don't give me any credit," said Irene. "I should have been fooled. It was this photograph which gave the man away."

She suddenly clutched at Handforth's arm.

"There's something else!" she went on anxiously. "If this man isn't my real Uncle Jim—where is Uncle Jim?"

"Eh?"

"He was supposed to come last night, you know," went on the girl. "But he didn't come, did he? Instead, this man worms his way into St. Frank's on an excuse."

"Great corks!" gasped Handforth, his eyes blazing. "I'll bet I know what happened! This crook met your real Uncle Jim on the road. Held him up, I expect, and then pinched his car!"

"Yes, but Mr. Wright would have told the police, and the police would have rung up the school, or something."

"Not if he was badly injured, or—or dead," said Handforth coolly. "This rotter isn't merely a robber—he's a gunman! It's as clear as daylight. He stopped your uncle's car, grabbed young uncle——"

"Oh, Ted!" cried Irene, horrified.

"Chuck it, Handy!" said Nipper gruffly. "There's no need to make these fantastic suggestions."

"He's right—he's right!" said Irene tensely. "If something dreadful hasn't happened to my Uncle Jim, where is he? Why

hasn't he turned up? Isn't it perfectly clear that this man met my uncle somewhere, and got to know of his errand?"

"That seems very probable," agreed Nipper. "But we mustn't let our imaginations run wild, old girl. Perhaps they met in a restaurant, or a smoking-room somewhere. Perhaps Mr. Wright got chatty with this fellow, who saw the possibilities. There are a dozen different ways in which he could have got rid of Mr. Wright temporarily. There's no need to assume that the poor chap was harmed."

"Oh, what shall we do?" cried Irene. "How can we get to know the truth? I'm worried now. Poor Aunt Julie! If something dreadful has happened to her husband——"

"We'll soon find out!" said Handforth fiercely. "Lock there, you chaps! Old Wilkey is just coming out with the man! We'll face him—we'll get the truth of this funny business straight away!"

He took a step forward, but paused. Mr. Wilkes and the alleged Mr. Wright were standing on the top of the Ancient House steps.

"Back up, you chaps!" muttered Handforth, turning. "Crowd round, and if the rotter tries to escape, grab him! You understand? We mustn't give him a chance to get away!"

"He—he may have another gun!" suggested somebody.

"That's not likely," said Nipper. "He can't escape if we crowd round him. Handy's right! Now's our opportunity."

And they all moved forward.

The wrong Mr. Wright was a very different-looking person now. He was immaculate, and he was laughing and chatting amiably with Mr. Wilkes. Quite obviously, he hadn't the faintest idea that exposure was near at hand. But then, he knew nothing of that snapshot which Aunt Julie had enclosed in her letter!

CHAPTER 11.

The Right Mr. Wright!

"JUST a minute!" said Handforth, in a stern, authoritative voice.

He was on the Ancient House steps, and ranged by his sides were Church, McClure, Nipper, Travers, Irene, Mary, and several other stalwarts of St. Frank's and Moor View. All round the bottom of the steps, surging and swaying, was an ever-increasing crowd.

"Hullo!" said Mr. Wright, without turning a hair. "What's the trouble now?"

"Really, Handforth, don't you think you've carried this affair far enough?" asked Old Wilkey mildly. "Mr. Wright has been very kind. He has told me everything, and in spite of the rough handling you gave him, he has very generously suggested that I shall waive all punishments."

"That's very good of him, sir," said Handforth, with a sniff. "But we're not believing any more of his bunkum!"

"Hullo! Hullo!" said Mr. Wright. "What's the matter now? Upon my word! These youngsters are hard to convince, aren't they?"

"You bet we are!" roared Handforth. "You fooled us not long ago, but you're not fooling us again! You're an impostor! You're a fraud! You're no more Mr. J. G. Wright than I am!"

"What!" gasped the stranger.

"Grab him, you chaps!" yelled Handforth. "Don't let him escape!"

"Stop!" thundered Old Wilkey. "Silence! How dare you!"

The crowd, about to surge forward, was arrested by the Housemaster's command. Mr. Wright made no attempt to escape. He stood his ground firmly, coolly.

"Now, Handforth, perhaps you will be good enough to explain this extraordinary accusation?" asked Old Wilkey sternly. "How dare you say such things? Not long ago you were apologising to Mr. Wright for your high-handed action, and he has been good enough to accept your apologies. You are now aggravating the offence by repeating it."

"He's got you spoofed, sir!" said Handforth. "You don't understand! I tell you, he's not Mr. Wright! He tricked the real Mr. Wright somewhere, and he came to St. Frank's to rob the school!"

"Well, I give in!" said Mr. Wright helplessly. "I thought I was past being surprised—but this leaves me flummoxed!"

"I urge you, sir, to leave this to me," said Mr. Wilkes earnestly. "Upon my word! I am ashamed of these boys. Handforth, how dare you! I shall punish you very severely—"

"You won't, sir, when you know what I know!" interrupted Handforth. "Irene! Help me, for goodness sake! Irene knows that this man isn't her uncle, sir!"

Irene stepped forward.

"That's true, Mr. Wilkes," she said breathlessly. "He's not my Uncle Jim."

"Indeed!" said Old Wilkey gently. "And what makes you so sure of that, Irene?"

"This!" said the girl, triumphantly handing him the photograph.

Mr. Wilkes looked at it rather blankly.

"That photograph was in my Aunt Julie's letter," went on Irene. "And she says that she's enclosing a snap of her husband and herself."

"Oh!" ejaculated the Housemaster.

A slow smile came into his eyes, and it gradually widened into a grin.

"I see," he murmured. "Perhaps you had better have a look at this, Mr. Wright. Well, in the circumstances, you boys and girls are not so much to blame as I thought. Naturally, this gentleman with me is not the gentleman who is depicted in the photograph."

"Then he's not Uncle Jim, sir!" shouted

Handforth. "By George, don't let him spoof you, sir! And don't forget what we told you about that automatic pistol!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mr. Wright.

"Yes, you can laugh!" shouted Handforth excitedly. "But you'll laugh on the other side of your face soon! What about that gun you had? We saw it in your hand, and we know—"

"Wait, Handforth!" interrupted Mr. Wilkes. He spoke quietly, but there was a world of command in his voice. "There is a very simple explanation of the—er—automatic pistol," he went on gently. "Really, Handforth, you shouldn't jump to such absurd conclusions!"

"Oh, my hat! He's spoofed you, sir!" groaned Handforth. "You don't know what a desperate character he is—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Mr. Wright, whose sense of humour apparently had got the better of his anger.

"Mr. Wright went downstairs to use my telephone," explained Old Wilkey. "The thought did not occur to him until I had parted with him in his bed-room—"

"That's the yarn he told us, sir."

"Don't interrupt me, Handforth!" said Mr. Wilkes. "The—er—yarn is quite true, and I am perfectly satisfied with Mr. Wright's explanation. He was welcome to use my telephone. You boys followed him, you saw him in my sitting-room, and you claim that you saw him with an automatic pistol."

"I saw him, sir!" declared Handforth. "In fact, you'll find the pistol in one of the drawers of your desk!"

"When Mr. Wright was in my sitting-room, he looked round for the telephone," continued Old Wilkey smoothly. "Quite naturally, he looked on the desk first, since telephones are generally to be found on desks. He saw there a weapon which looked very much like an automatic pistol. He picked it up and examined it. But it may interest you all to know that I left that pistol on my desk earlier in the evening."

"Oh!" exclaimed Handforth, his jaw sagging.

"It is not an automatic pistol at all—or even a revolver," continued the Housemaster. "It is a very clever imitation of one—in fact, a perfectly harmless affair which projects a spray of noxious liquid. It is merely intended to scare burglars or other unlawful people. It is not even mine; it was shown to me by Mr. Pagett, who had purchased it as a sort of protection. Mr. Pagett is rather a nervous man."

"Oh!" said Handforth again.

"So there goes your deadly automatic pistol into thin air," said Mr. Wilkes. "There goes your dangerously-armed criminal, too. You know perfectly well, Handforth, that Mr. Wright placed the pistol on my desk, and moved to the other side of the room, where the telephone happens to be."

"Yes, he—he did that, sir," admitted Handforth feebly.

"But, at the time, it did not occur to you that a desperate crook would not leave his gun lying about," said Old Wilkey. "It only proves, Handforth, that it is very risky to jump to conclusions—to allow your imagination to get the better of you."

"But the photograph, sir!" burst out Handforth desperately.

"The photograph, I will admit, puzzles me," said Mr. Wilkes. "But I am quite certain that my guest, whom I have accepted without question, will clear up the little mystery. Mr. Wright has already shown me a photograph of himself with his bride," continued the Housemaster. "And it does not tally with this one at all."

"Oh!"

Mr. Wright was grinning widely. In fact, he was thoroughly enjoying himself.

"So you youngsters thought that I had kidnapped the unfortunate Mr. Wright, eh?" he chuckled. "Well, your Aunt Julie is very much to blame, young lady," he went on, turning to Irene. "She's a very careless person—as you probably know. Do you mind having a look at this?"

He took a photograph from his breast-pocket, and Handforth and Irene and the others distinctly saw it. It showed Irene's Aunt Julie arm-in-arm with the man who was on the Ancient House steps. They were both smiling happily—and in the background of the photograph was the very man who appeared in the other snapshot.

Handforth had a vague idea that the bones of his legs had turned into table jelly. This photograph clinched matters completely. It proved, beyond all question, that the stranger was genuine.

"I—I say, sir, I'm awfully sorry!" faltered Handforth dismally. "I didn't know—I mean, I thought— You see, that snapshot—"

"Exactly," chuckled Mr. Wright. "The snapshot put you all at sea again, eh? Just like Julie! Always making mistakes, particularly when she's in a hurry or excited. I don't know for certain, but I can only conclude that my wife carelessly got hold of the wrong snapshot and enclosed it with the letter to her niece."

"Then—then you're really my Uncle Jim?" asked Irene, with relief.

"Yes, really," smiled Mr. Wright. "I do hope that I please you. And after all this misunderstanding—after I have been looked upon as a crook, a gunman, and a fraud—well, I think I deserve a kiss, don't you?"

"Yes, uncle," murmured Irene, with a little laugh.

"Just a minute, sir," exclaimed Handforth. "Who is that other man in the snapshot, then?"

"Well, he happens to be a very old friend of mine—Sir Joshua Martindale, to be exact," said Mr. Wright. "He was the best man at our wedding, and he insisted upon being photographed with the bride."

While Irene was giving her new uncle a hearty—and well-deserved—kiss, the rest of

the schoolboys and schoolgirls yelled with laughter. They laughed, unsympathetically, perhaps, at the discomfiture of Edward Oswald Handforth. So all his wild stories of crooks and gunmen had gone up into thin air! The unhappy Handforth had never felt so foolish in all his life. But it was characteristic of him to pull himself together and to square his shoulders.

"All right—all right!" he shouted. "I know I've been an ass, and I don't blame you for yelling your heads off at me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I hope I'm game enough to kick myself when I know that I'm in the wrong!" roared Handforth aggressively. "I've insulted Irene's uncle, and I've made an absolute hash of the whole business. I owe Mr. Wright an apology—and so I'm apologising now!" He turned round on Uncle Jim. "I've been an awful fool, sir," he went on impulsively. "Dash it, I—I don't know what to say! After what I've done to you, and after the things I've called you, you ought to take me by the scruff of the neck and give me a good tanning! Be a sport, sir, and kick me!"

Uncle Jim's eyes softened. Even the laughter died away.

"Say no more about it, young 'un," said Uncle Jim, thrusting out his hand. "We understand one another now, don't we? Let's shake on it. It's refreshing to meet a youngster who isn't afraid to acknowledge his faults. Put it there, Handy!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Handy!"

"Three cheers for Uncle Jim!"

Uncle Jim was obviously a real sport, and the boys had further proof of this later; for as he was triumphantly departing with Irene on his way to the Moor View School, he delayed for a minute.

"By the way, who's the leader of you youngsters?" he asked, smiling upon the Removites. "Who's captain of the Form?"

"I am, sir," said Nipper, smiling.

"Good enough!" said Mr. Wright dryly. "I've had quite a refreshing time at St. Frank's—I've had one of those adventures I shall speak of for years, and laugh over heartily every time I tell it. By gad, what a yarn to tell the fellows at the club! Well, here's a little something for a feed. You youngsters like feeds, don't you?"

Nipper gasped as he took the ten-pound note from Mr. Wright's hand.

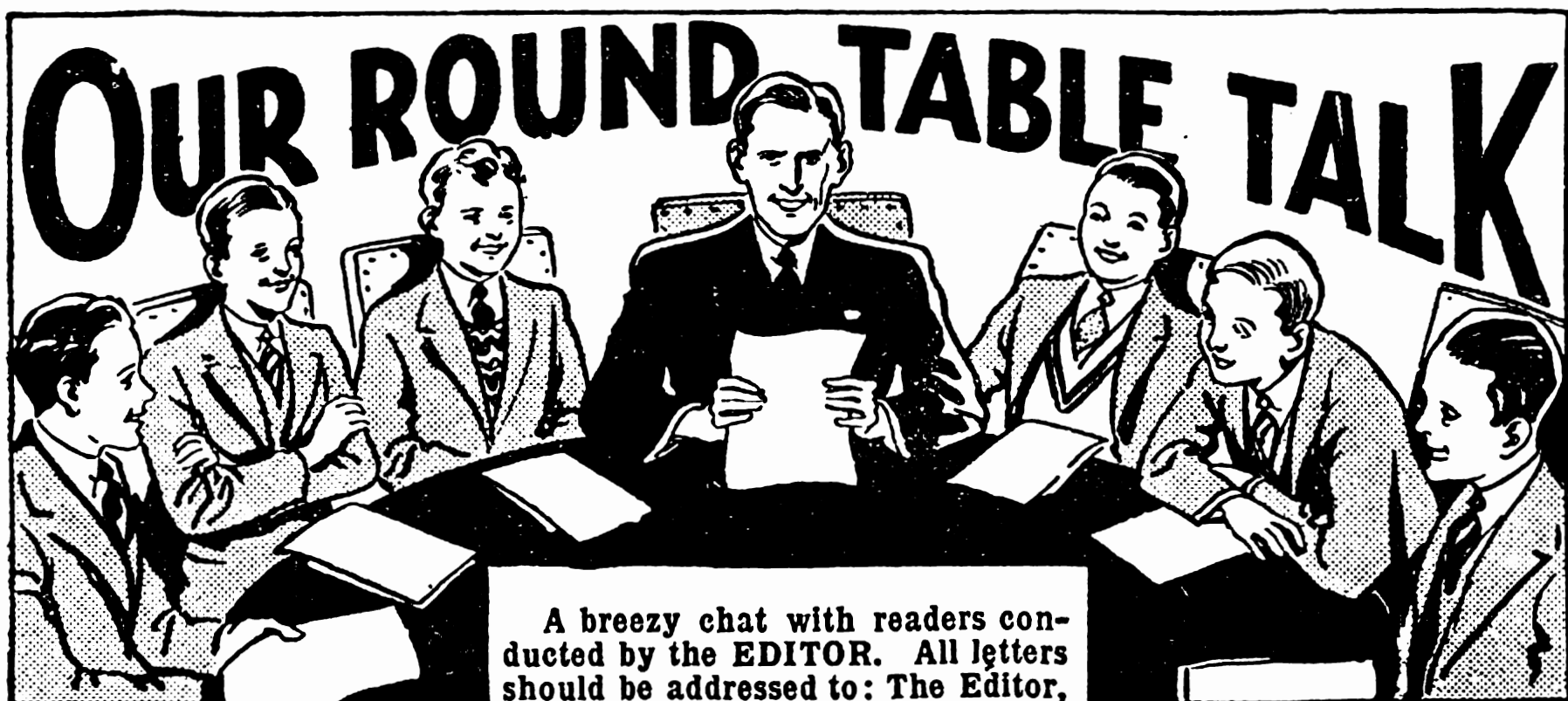
"I say, sir, this is too much!" ejaculated Nipper. "I mean, you're too generous—"

"Rats!" grinned Mr. Wright. "Take it—with my blessing! And when you're feeding your faces, be good enough to remember me as Uncle Jim, and not as the wrong Mr. Wright!"

THE END.

(Mysterious—and exciting—events happen at St. Frank's next week when E. O. Handforth falls into the clutches of a dangerous secret society. Look out for this gripping yarn. Entitled: "The Black Hand at St. Frank's!")

Have You Written To The Editor Yet?—All Letters Welcome.



NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

ALBERT GULLIVER and George Bell appeared in the very first St. Frank's story, Jack Godden (Hilton, South Australia), and their leader then was our old friend Ralph Leslie Fullwood, who was quite a bad lad in those days. There are two barbers in Bellton—John Pigg and Albert Clutterbuck. Ernest Lawrence, of the Fourth, is a better boxer than Nipper—which means that he is Good—with a capital "G."

Many thanks for the idea you suggested, John T. Kerr (Detroit, U.S.A.), and it seems that you are very much in favour of a series of eerie mystery stories. As it happens, Mr. Brooks is already writing a series on these lines which will appear shortly.

You can't really mean it, Alan Bresnahan (Melbourne), when you say about the St. Frank's boys: "There is something about the characters which makes them likable, although they supposedly have no faults." You cannot have gained that impression from the stories, for lots of the boys have many faults, and Mr. Brooks has never attempted to portray them as anything else but human beings. Some readers have said that Nipper never makes mistakes, but there are many stories in which he has blundered badly.

Harold Frinton is still at St. Frank's, Eric S. V. Ryland (Birmingham), and he is a prefect in the West House. Your query about the Dorrimore Cup needs no answer here—since the answer is contained in the series of stories which concluded last week.

Nelson Lee's only home, apart from St. Frank's, Harry Turner (Walthamstow), is his establishment in Gray's Inn Road. It must not be supposed that Nelson Lee merely has lodgings there. He owns the property

entirely, and his home is as complete as any bachelor could desire. It includes one of the finest libraries in Europe, a modern laboratory which any hospital would envy, and a Record of Crime and Criminals which is only second to that of Scotland Yard—and in some respects even more complete. Willy Handforth appeared for the first time in a story called "Handforth Minor," which was published in No. 386, Old Series, on October 28th, 1922.

There do not appear to be any girls at the Moor View School, Irene Randall (Sandwich), with long hair. They all prefer the bobbed or shingle style; in fact, long hair is against the regulations of the school. It is considered healthier, if not more becoming. There is no need for Vera Wilkes to cycle to and from school. For, although she is a day girl—living, as she does, with her parents, in the Ancient House of St. Frank's—Moor View is only a quarter of a mile away—just a minute or two's walk. Vivian Travers' parents live at Stapleton Towers, Halstead, Essex.

The most prominent Sixth-Formers mentioned in the St. Frank's stories are as follows: Ancient House—Edgar Fenton (captain), David Biggleswade, George Wilson, Hobart Conroy. West House—Arthur Morrow, Llewellyn Rees, Harold Frinton, Leslie Stanhope. Modern House—Walter Reynolds, Harold Carlile, Percival Mills, Francis Goodchild. East House—Simon Kenmore, Charles Payne, Guy Sinclair, Augustus Parkin. There are many others, of course, such as Stanley Clavering, but they are so seldom mentioned that the inclusion of their names would be of no interest.

St. Frank's College is situated in Sussex, Charles Glazebrook (Earl's Court), and the full address of the school is—St. Francis' College, Bellton, Sussex.

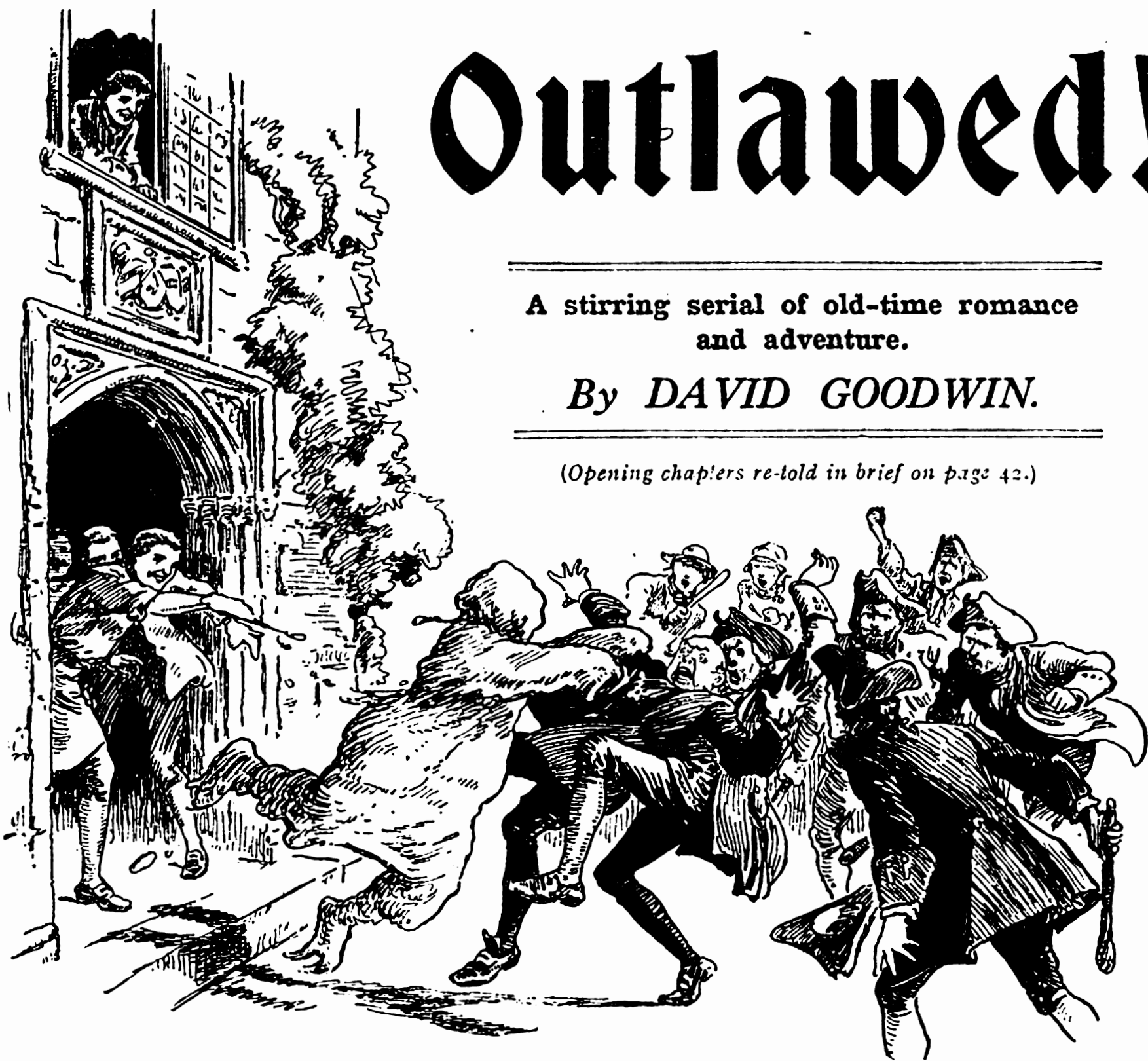
Defying the King's Riders—Dick Forrester in fine fighting form.

Outlawed!

A stirring serial of old-time romance
and adventure.

By *DAVID GOODWIN.*

(Opening chapters re-told in brief on page 42.)



Victory!

WITH shouts, cries and threats, urged on by the snarling voice of Hector Forrester, his men prepared for another attack upon Fernhall.

Dick Forrester and his brother Ralph watched anxiously. Already the first attack had weakened the defences, and another onslaught might well break down the doors—and then Hector and his men would sweep in victoriously. Dick smiled a trifle grimly. He was determined to fight for Fernhall to the very last. Not without a great struggle would Hector Forrester gain possession of the estate, which was not his by rights, but which, through villainy and trickery, he could claim his own by law.

"Bid the men hasten at strengthening those gates!" cried Dick to his steward. "Pile all you can against the inside for a barricade."

"Nay, trust to the stirabout!" said Ralph, laughing. "Half the rogues are

out of action already, and a second helping will finish the rest. Then muster all hands for a sortie from the gates, and we'll drive the knaves out of the park neck and crop!"

"You're a born general, Ralph," said Dick, with a grin. "Hubert Forrester, who fought under Marlborough at Blenheim, could do no better. John Blunt, do you muster all the men, armed with staves, and, when the moment comes, Ralph and I will lead you out against the foe. Smite hard and spare not! Here they come! Up with the cauldron, Ralph!"

Together the boys raised the large pot of warm stirabout and balanced it on the ledge of the window. Below, Hector Forrester's men, bearing a pine-log which they intended to use as a battering-ram, charged forward to the attack.

"Now, boys, put your beef into it!" cried the leader of the bailiffs. "The gates must fall this time, and then we

can gain possession and punish these villains for their defiance!"

Cra-a-ash!

Borne by a dozen burly men, the battering-ram struck the gate with terrific force, shattering them. But before the attackers could dash through, another deluge of stirabout cascaded down upon them as Dick and Ralph, above, tipped up the cauldron and emptied its steaming contents. Howls of anguish went up from the men. Pained consternation created disorder in their ranks, and they retreated with a rush, vowing that all Hector Forrester's money should not bribe them to assault Fernhall again. Ralph and Dick, racing down the stairs, were at the entrance in a moment.

"Charge, boys!" cried Dick to his men. And the two Forresters swept out through the shattered gates at the head of their retainers, and flung themselves on the routed mob.

Half a dozen of the enemy, who had not suffered with the rest, were just about to dart in and take legal possession, but the staves of the defenders drove them back, and Dick and his men swept on. The bailiffs tried to rally, but the household of Fernhall fell upon them with a cheer, and plied their staves so lustily that the gruel-covered bailiffs could not face them.

"Away, you scum!" cried Dick, smiting right and left. "Back to Hensford with you, and tell the sheriff that if he would take Fernhall he will need to send better men than you!"

"Stand to them! Don't give way!" screamed Hector. "You fools! You cowards! You are six to one against them!"

And so they had been before the stirabout thinned them out, but now half their number were cooling themselves in the pond, and the other half were utterly demoralised. Some of the hangers-on—poachers, wayside thieves and other riff-raff—made a stand with their cudgels, but so pluckily did the boys lead their stalwart retainers, and so shrewdly did they hit, that in less than a minute the whole crew—bailiffs, rogues and all—were in full flight, running for the park boundaries as fast as they could go, with the men of Fernhall in hot pursuit.

A Wash-out!

"GUARD the doors! See that no one slips in unawares!" cried Dick. "Where's that knave, Hector? I see him not! Has he stolen a march on us?"

"He thought to do so," said Ralph, with

a shout of laughter. "Ha, ha! Look yonder!"

Hector, realising that his men were routed, still did not lose hope, for if by some trick he could gain a foothold in the house, his warrant would hold good, and, having gained possession, he could return and bring armed men forcibly to eject the former owners from his newly-gained property. So, seeing the defenders outside busy routing the bailiffs, Hector ran swiftly towards the house, and made for one of the windows of the kitchen which had been unbarred.

He smashed the casement in with a club which one of the cudgel-men had dropped, and was triumphantly clambering in when he suddenly found himself face to face with Dick's head cook. She was a gigantic, stout woman with a fiery temper, and she carried a wet dishcloth in one hand.

"Who are you, ye skinny whipper-snapper?" she snapped, advancing fiercely upon him. "Who gave ye leave to come gallivanting into my kitchen?"

"Stand out of the way!" cried Hector, blundering through the window and waving her aside. "I come into my own! Out of my path, woman!"

"What, ye long, lean rascal!" bawled the cook, in a rage. "Did ye call me a woman?"

"Of course I did!" retorted Hector impatiently, trying to get past her.

"Then take this for your impudence!" cried the cook, flinging one brawny arm round him and rubbing her wet dishcloth in his face. "I'll woman ye, ye young sandhopper!"

"Let me go! Help!" yelled Hector, as the gigantic cook held him fast and scrubbed him with the cloth, which smelt abominably of greens. "Death and hounds! Let me go, I tell you!"

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"Come a-bustin' into my kitchen as if it belonged to ye!" said the cook, scrubbing away at Hector's face as if it were a saucepan-lid. "An' then call me a woman! Hold still, ye long-legged little varmint, an' have your face washed!"

"I'll have you whipped for this, you great fat harridan!" roared Hector, struggling frantically. "I'm the new master here, I tell you!"

"You the new master!" cried the cook. "A spindle-shanked, snipe-nosed, currant-eyed little shrimp like you master o' Fernhall! See here, then, I'll put ye in possession!"

And, picking up the kicking Hector under one arm, she soused him, head over ears, in the great trough in which the dishes were washed. Howling and spluttering, he came to the surface. Three times she ducked him under the greasy, warm water; then, with one final scrub, she crammed the dishcloth into his mouth, and shot him bodily out through the window again.

"Well done, Janet!" cried Dick and Ralph, laughing till their sides ached. "The fellow never comes to Fernhall but he gets a bath."

"What, is yonder the rascalion that thinks to turn ye out, Master Dick?" cried the cook, beginning hurriedly to force her huge bulk through the window. "'Od's, if I'd known that I'd have given him another dose! I thought the rascal was jestin'. Let me get at him again!"

But Hector hastily scrambled up and took to his heels, not stopping till he had put a hundred yards between himself and the house, when he turned and shook his fist at Dick.

"You will laugh on the other side of your mouth soon, you dog!" he cried. "You little think what is in store for you. In two hours I return with the carabineers to hunt you out of Fernhall with a bullet between the ribs—if it chance you are not by then on the road to the gibbet!"

"A brave accident to happen in two hours!" laughed Dick mockingly. "Pick

up your feet and run, my manniken; here comes the cook on your trail!"

With one last furious curse Hector Forrester hurried away after his man.

"Carabineers, ecod!" said Ralph, wiping the tears of mirth from his eyes. "Two can play at that. If it comes from stirabout to musket-balls, we could hold Fernhall against fifty. But what did he mean by saying you might be on the road to the gibbet? Think you that was some foolish threat?"

"Doubtless," said Dick. "Though me-thinks there's more afoot than I have learned of."

"Well, I'll ride off to Huntercombe and bring down a troop of my men," said Ralph. "Between us we'll make it so hot for the carabineers that they'll be blithe to leave us alone."

He saddled his horse and cantered away, leaving Dick to superintend the strengthening and barricading of the gates. By the time this task was completed the evening was fast drawing in.

"I think we may hold our own against a regiment now," said Dick to himself, with a feeling of satisfaction as he eyed the defences, "though what the upshot of it will be, goodness knows. Hallo! Who comes here?"

He turned as a dark figure on horseback, leading a second horse, came thundering at full gallop across the drives and flower-beds and pulled up with a jerk close by Dick's side.

"Turpin!" cried Dick. "What brings you here, comrade?"

"Up with you and ride!" cried the highwayman, for he it was. "Here is Black Satan, ready saddled, and the pistols in the holster! Up and away!"

"Nay, I will not run from a handful of carabineers," returned Dick. "Ecod, man, there's sport before us. They think to turn me out."

"Carabineers!" cried Turpin. "Ecod! Have you not heard? The gallows-rope is upon your neck! Barrington, the Secretary of State, is dead! Your enemies have seized their chance. Your

HOW THE STORY BEGAN,

DICK FORRESTER, once a notorious highwayman with a price on his head, thanks to the villainy of his uncle, Vane Forrester, now dead, has settled down to a life of ease and luxury on his estate of Fernhall. He sadly misses the company of his former cheery comrade of the road,

RICHARD TURPIN, the famous outlaw. But Turpin once again comes into Dick's life, when he seeks refuge in the young squire's house. He is being pursued by

CAPTAIN SWEENEY, the villainous leader of a gang of robbers. Sweeny and his men attack, but they flee when the King's Riders arrive. The footpad leader, in escaping, kills two of the Riders. Dick assists Turpin to elude the King's men, thereby breaking the law. More trouble comes to Dick when he receives a visit from Hector Forrester who, as Vane's heir, claims the estates. The boy throws him out, but later an attorney from London informs Dick that Hector has proved his claim; that he is now the legal owner of Fernhall. He also tells Dick that, owing to his assisting Turpin to escape, he has been deprived of all his estates and fortune. Hector Forrester, accompanied by bailiffs, and a number of hired men, come to take possession, but Dick resists and forcibly bars them out.

(Now read on.)

pardon is withdrawn, and the King's Riders are closing in upon us even now! Mount and ride!"

"'Od's wounds, do you tell me so?" cried Dick, springing to Satan's bridle. The great black horse he had ridden in his highway days, and which no other man save Turpin dare touch, neighed with joy to see his young master again. "Then Fernhall cannot save me from the gibbet!"

"Nay, 'tis the very place to trap you in," returned Turpin. "We must away to the open road with all speed. Look, here are the knaves down upon us already! Into the saddle with you. We shall have to fight for it."

A bugle sounded somewhere ahead, and the quick beat of horses' hoofs rang upon the night air. Turpin drew one of his double pistols, but Dick, after a swift glance round, dismounted.

"They are all around us!" he whispered. "Down with you, quick, and lead the horses in among the cedars here. They will come to the front gates, and while they wait there and search the house we can slip away unseen."

"Ay, that's the plan," muttered Turpin, slipping down quickly. "You know the ground best, Dick. But be quick, if you would save your neck!"

The Riders Outwitted!

DICK led the way, and in a few seconds the two comrades had led their horses in among the dark cedar-trees a little beyond the house. Well hidden, they awaited the arrival of the King's Riders.

"'Tis like old time—eh, Dick?" chuckled Turpin. "A good hiding-place, save that there's no coach-and-four for us to hold up at the pistol's point. Yonder come the rascals."

Hardly had they hidden themselves when eight or nine King's Riders rode out upon the gravel and made for the gates of the tower, passing so close that Dick easily recognised their leader as the lieutenant who had caused all the trouble when Turpin took refuge at Fernhall a week before.

"Scatter out and guard all the exits!" commanded the lieutenant. "We are bound to have him now."

"Are you, in sooth?" murmured Dick.

As soon as the Riders had passed on to the tower gates, he gave a low, chirping whistle.

A small figure that had been following the Riders some way behind, staring at them, started at the sound. Dick whistled again, and the figure on the

path slipped into the shrubbery and was soon at Dick's side. It was a small page-boy, devoted to Dick, and just the messenger he wanted.

"Johnny," whispered Dick, "slip into the house and tell all the serving-men and maids to leave it as soon as yonder men enter. They are searching for me. Off with you!"

The page saluted, and was away in a moment.

"Open!" said the lieutenant's voice, as he hammered on the gates. "Come, you men, gather round. There is but the one way he can escape, and that is here—they have barred up all the other doors. Six of you will enter the house with me, while two remain here to guard the gate."

A serving-man put his head cautiously through the little trap in the door and peered out to see who was knocking.

"Who be you?" he said to the lieutenant.

"I'll soon show you who I am, fellow! Open in the King's name!"

"Come, Dick," whispered Turpin, plucking at his comrade's sleeve. "They are all behind us now, and there is none to bar our path to the open. Let us ride on while we may."

"Nay, wait a little," murmured Dick. "See, all but two of them are to enter the house. Since they are so eager to visit Fernhall, perchance we can press them to stay there, while we ride our way."

He gave a sly wink.

"Burn me if I see what you're aiming to do," muttered Turpin. "However, I know you for a rare hand at tricking a foe, and if there's any sport to be had, let's at it. They are somewhat too many to fight."

"And no need for it," said Dick. "See, there they go into the house."

The lieutenant had shaken his sealed warrant before the serving-man's eyes, but that good retainer would have refused even the King's warrant for admittance without an order from his master. At that moment, however, the little page came up and whispered to him. The door was suddenly flung open.

"He is within!" said the lieutenant. "Hang me, I can smell him! Stand to the doors, Hawkes and Walters; the rest of you enter with me!"

And, holding the warrant in his left hand and a pistol in his right—for he had already felt Dick Forrester's teeth—the lieutenant marched fiercely in, with his six men behind him. Soon there was a great commotion inside the house, as the Riders searched it. The men of the

household came trooping out, according to Dick's orders to the page, till only the searchers were left inside.

"Now for it!" said Dick to his comrade, and he whispered rapidly in Turpin's ear.

The highwayman listened and nodded, a mischievous smile growing on his face. Separating, the two friends crept along through the shrubbery in opposite directions, stole across the drive and gained the walls of the house, one on each side of the gates, but at some distance from them. That done, they began to sidle gradually towards the gates.

The two riders on guard, one at each doorpost, were leaning forward and staring into the house, instead of looking out, as they should have done. Inside could be heard the banging of doors, the tramp of feet, and the sound of human voices, as the search-party ransacked room after room. Meanwhile, Dick and his partner slowly closed in upon the two sentinels.

Suddenly, with a rush, Turpin and Dick seized the two Riders from behind, and, with hand and boot, sent them staggering into the hall with such force that both fell headlong. Before they could rise the two friends pulled the gates together with a crash. Dick shot the outside bolts and let fall the crossbar.

"Trapped!" he cried, with a roar of laughter.

"Neatly done!" said Turpin. "A very pretty trick of yours, Dick. Now we may ride where we will and spare our horses."

They rode quickly over the moor for nearly an hour, talking light-heartedly of the future.

A feeling of elation surged through Dick, though in all truth he had little to be pleased about. He had been deprived of Fernhall and his fortune; he was once again a hunted outlaw. The boy's eyes sparkled. Of a restless, roving nature, he loved the life on the open road; the excitement of a stirring chase, tricking his pursuers by cunning and strategy—what a great adventure it was!

The rumble of galloping hoofs from behind caused Turpin to glance back over the moor. Dick also turned in his saddle, and then a cry of joy, which quickly changed to consternation, burst from his lips as he recognised the newcomer.

His brother, Ralph!

Dick knew Ralph; knew that the youngster would want to accompany him. And Dick, realising only too well that he was now an offender of the law—an outlaw, sought after by the King's Riders—had no wish to involve Ralph in the serious consequences which were bound to follow.

(Dick Forrester—an outlaw once more! Many stirring adventures await him and Turpin on the road: fights, chases, hair-raising escapes from their enemies. Next Wednesday's rousing instalment teems with action and thrills.)

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