

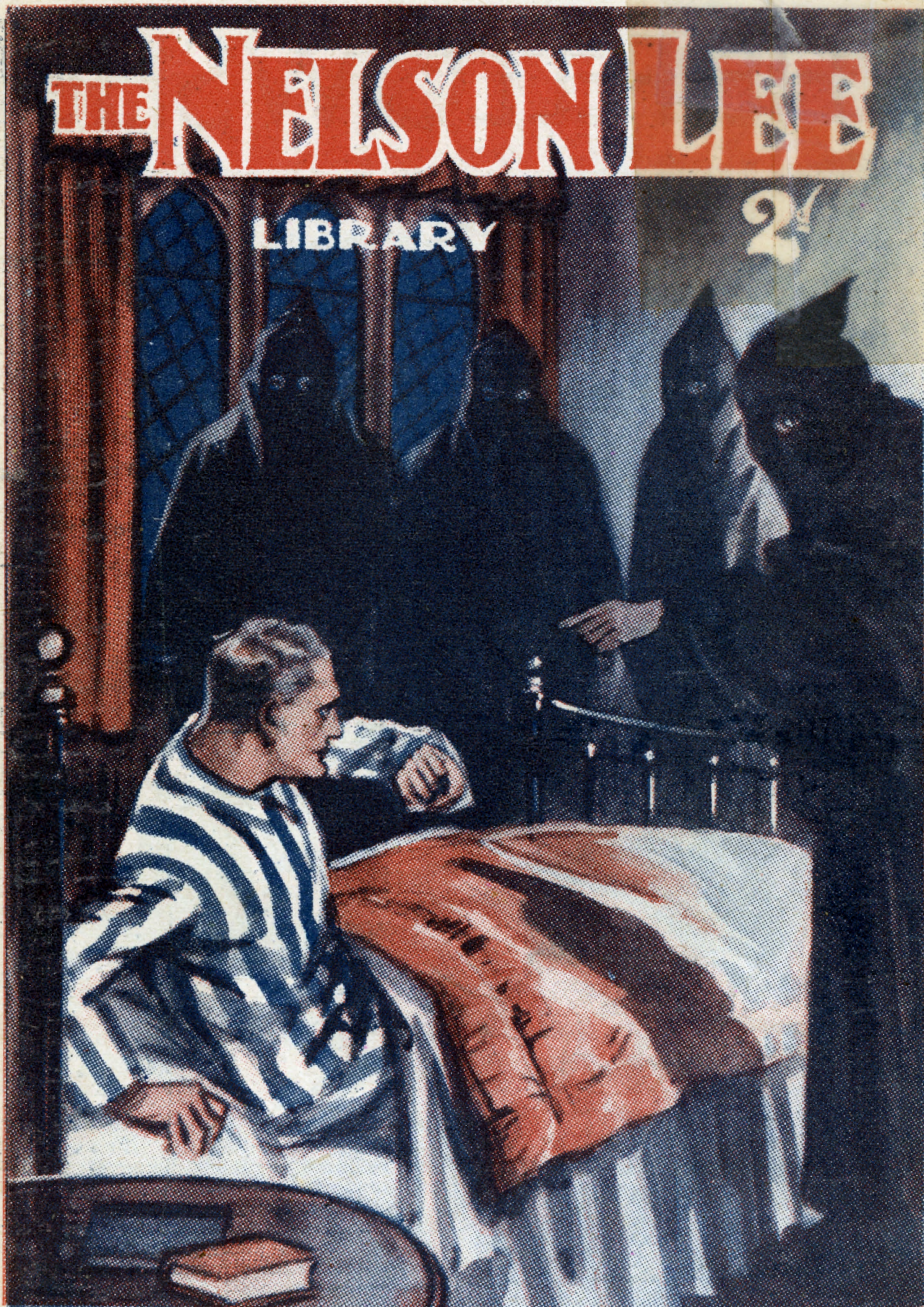
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"THE FELLOWSHIP OF FEAR!"

This Week's Gripping School and Detective Story.

THE FELLOWSHIP



CHAPTER 1.

The Clan of the Unseen Eye.

IT was a crisp, frosty January morning, and the roofs of the various Houses at St. Frank's College were almost as white as though there had been a fall of snow. The sun was shining, the sky was blue, and there was a fine invigorating tang in the air.

Cheery shouts from the playing fields told of enthusiastic footballers, who were glad of this fine weather for early practice.

But there was nothing cheerful about the

short, tubby figure which emerged in solitary state from the Ancient House. That figure belonged to Teddy Long, of the Remove; and Teddy was looking not only thoughtful, but considerably scared.

There was an unfolded paper in the junior's hand, so it was a reasonable assumption that Teddy Long, having come downstairs late, as usual, had found a letter in the rack. The busybody of the Remove very frequently found other people's letters, but he seldom had one addressed to himself. He hadn't been expecting one this morning, either—and that made its receipt all the more startling.

—The First Of A Series Of Astounding School And Detective Stories!

OF FEAR!

By
E. S. BROOKS



St. Frank's is in deadly peril. The Fellowship of the Free, a ruthless band of anarchists, have cast their net over the old school and terror lurks in every shadow. But Nelson Lee, the famous detective, has taken up the fight—a fight that is destined to test his powers to the full.

He had almost reached the fountain in the middle of the Triangle when he heard a footstep. He looked up hurriedly and grabbed for his cap; for the tall, athletic figure which was practically upon him belonged to no less a person than the headmaster.

"Goo-good-morning, sir," stammered Teddy, in confusion.

The Head paused.

"What is wrong, young man?" he asked good-naturedly. "You look troubled. No bad news, I hope?"

"No, sir! I—I mean, yes, sir," said Teddy, to whose lips lies came more readily than the truth. "I—I've had a bit of a shock, sir."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Long," said the Head gravely. "Is this news so private that I am not allowed to share it?"

Mr. James Kingswood—known at St. Frank's as "Fighting Jim"—had a very shrewd knowledge of Teddy Long's character. Mr. Kingswood made a point, in fact, of being personally acquainted with as many boys as possible. There was nothing of the stern, dignified headmaster about him. In every Form of the old school he was known as a great sport and a fine chap generally.

"It's—it's awfully private, sir," said Teddy. "It's—it's from my Uncle Robert, and he's in awful trouble."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Long."

"Yes, sir; he died yesterday afternoon——"

"What!"

"I—I mean, he—he thought he was going to die," panted Teddy desperately. "So—so he wrote to me."

"And thereby saved his life?" asked the Head gravely.

"Yes, sir," replied Teddy eagerly. "Eh? I—I mean——"

"I wonder why it is, Long, that you tell such lies?" inquired Mr. Kingswood. "Lying, in any circumstances, is wrong. It's silly. But your lies, young man, are just hopeless. All they do for you is to get you tied up into inextricable knots. If you weren't such a duffer, I should punish you. Let me see that letter."

"Nunno, sir!" gasped Teddy, in fear. "It's—it's private——"

"Nonsense," said the Head, a sharp note coming into his voice.

Teddy gave him one look, and surrendered. For Mr. Kingswood was an exceedingly impressive man—and quite a young man to hold such a position. He was a huge six-footer, broad and brawny in proportion to his height. His rugged face, clean-shaven, was full of strength. His square chin jutted out like a rock, and a pipe was clenched between his teeth.

As a matter of fact, he had already seen a portion of the letter, owing to Teddy's carelessness in holding it unfolded; and Mr. Kingswood knew, from that casual inspection, that it was no ordinary missive.

He took the letter and he saw that it was written upon a sheet of ordinary exercise paper. The writing, roughly daubed, and evidently performed by means of a paintbrush, was in crude capitals. The whole effusion was executed in glaring crimson. It wasn't red ink, but more like blood—which, no doubt, it was supposed to represent. Right at the top, in the centre of the page, was an atrociously drawn representation of a human eye, complete with baleful glare.

"Beware!" ran the remarkable message. "This is the first warning. The Clan of the Unseen Eye has marked you down! The

Unseen Eye is upon you! It is known to the Clan that you, Edward Long, have been sneaking into fellows' studies and bagging grub from the cupboards. You even had the nerve to bone a plum cake from Study D. So, beware! You can bag as much as you like from the other studies, but keep your hands off Study D! So it is written.—THE ALL-SEEING MASTER EYE."

It was with some difficulty that Mr. Kingswood kept his face straight. He understood, now, why Teddy Long had been so reluctant to show him this "private" communication.

"Did you find this under your pillow, Long, or attached to your study wall at the point of a dagger?" he asked gravely.

"No, sir. It—it came by post," faltered Teddy.

"H'm! The mysterious clan missed a good chance there," said the Head. "Well, young man, it seems to me that you will have to be very careful in future. A warning like this must not be ignored."

"But—but it isn't true, sir!" said Teddy indignantly. "It's just plain persecution. I don't go about bagging cakes from people's studies! It's—it's terrorism——"

"What did I say to you a minute ago about lying?" interrupted the Head. "Here you are, Long; take your letter. I can see that it is quite personal, and there is no reason why I should interfere. But I certainly advise you to heed this warning."

And, with a nod, Mr. Kingswood walked off—leaving Teddy rather flabbergasted. The tubby junior had expected a searching inquiry. But that was not Fighting Jim's way. This was essentially a matter which the juniors were dealing with in their own inimitable fashion. Secret societies like the "Clan of the Unseen Eye" were springing up and dying down constantly in the Junior school.

"My only sainted aunt!" gurgled Teddy, as he watched the Head taking long strides through Big Arch.

He swung round as he heard hurried footsteps. Then he found Hubbard and Gore-Pearce, his study-mates of Study B, bearing down upon him.

"Was the Head giving you a wiggling?" asked Hubbard.

"Nunno!" said Long dazedly. "He—he saw this letter, and he told me to heed the warning. Oh, crumbs! It—it must be really serious!"

"Warnin'?" repeated Gore-Pearce. "What the dickens are you dithering about?"

He and Hubbard seized the letter, and after a momentary start of surprise they read it. Then, to Teddy Long's indignation and amazement, they burst into a yell of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here, I say——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Hubbard. "You—you silly young ass! It's only a jape!"

"I know that!" roared Teddy Long.

"What!"

"Of course it's a jape!" hooted Teddy. "But we don't know who wrote it, do we? Somebody's trying to 'frame' me."

"Framing isn't good enough for you, my son," said Gore-Pearce. "You ought to be put in a glass case!"

"You—you funny idiot!" snorted Long. "I mean, it's a frame-up! Somebody's trying to prove that I go into people's studies and pinch cakes and things. It's outrageous!"

"But you do go into people's studies and pinch things, don't you?" asked Hubbard, grinning. "My son, you've been found out. That's all it amounts to. And this is a gentle warning."

Teddy's study-mates again shouted with laughter; and in the middle of it a crowd of footballers, fresh and ruddy, arrived on the scene.

"What's the joke?" inquired Vivian Travers politely.

"Read this!" grinned Gore-Pearce, handing over the precious warning, in spite of Teddy Long's protests.

Travers not only read the remarkable letter, but he read it aloud. Everybody was about to shout with laughter when Travers winked violently, and made other signs for them to suppress their mirth. A second later they understood, for three new figures were striding up, and they were similarly attired in footer togs and overcoats. Edward Oswald Handforth and his chums, Church and McClure, had arrived from Little Side.

"It's awful!" said Travers, as a clue to the others. "I don't know what to advise you to do, Long. If you take this thing to the police, you'll only hasten the vengeance of the dreaded clan."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Teddy, with a gulp. "You—you don't mean——"

"No good blinking at facts," went on Travers in a loud voice. "This letter is written in blood! Lurking somewhere amongst us, unseen, unsuspected, is a band of grim, relentless avengers. You have been marked down as the first victim, Long!"

"Awful!" chorused the others.

Handforth, big and burly, attempting to look only casually interested, joined the crowd. Behind him, Church and McClure were grinning openly. They were not so easily fooled as their celebrated leader.

"What's the excitement?" asked Handforth, with exaggerated carelessness.

"Are your nerves strong?" asked Travers solemnly.

"Eh? Of course my nerves are strong, ass!" said Handforth, staring. "What's all the mystery about?"

"Read this—and be brave," said Travers tragically. "And remember that you may be the next victim."

As Handforth took the letter, he started violently, and he read the message with such rapidity that one might have supposed that he had seen it before.

"Well, it's about time!" he said sternly. "I'm jolly glad to know that somebody has given this fat burglar a warning."

"But—but it isn't true!" protested Teddy. "What?"

"I—I mean, you can't prove anything," went on Long in desperation. "There's no evidence——"

"Ah, that's just where this secret society comes in!" said Handforth triumphantly. "Secret societies don't bother about evidence, my lad! They mark their man down, and

then they strike. If the victim doesn't obey the first warning, he gets it in the neck." He looked round with satisfaction. "Well, I'm glad of this," he continued. "A secret society in our midst, eh? Nobody knows how big the Clan of the Unseen Eye is; nobody knows the identity of the chief."

"The chief must be a clever fellow!" said Reggie Pitt in awe.

"Only a genius could have written a letter like that—and in blood, too."

"Rats! It's not blood," said Handforth. "I used a kind of paint——"

"Eh?"

"I—I mean, the fellow who wrote it must have used a kind of paint," said Handforth hastily. "That's obvious, isn't it? Nobody would use real blood, you fathead!"

"How do you know?" asked Travers. "The clan might have drawn that blood from its previous victim."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Teddy, with a shiver.

"Yes, you may well tremble!" said Handforth. "Let this be a warning to you, my son! If you come boning cakes from my study again, I'll jolly well send you another letter—— I—I mean—— The clan will probably get to know——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Handy!"

"Look here, you silly asses——"

"The one and only!" sighed Travers. "He goes to all this trouble, and he can't keep his own giddy secret for five minutes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody howled with laughter—and even then it was some moments before Edward Oswald Handforth realised that his leg had been pulled ever since he had arrived on the scene.

Then, when the truth did dawn upon him,



he characteristically turned round on his own chums.

"You—you traitors!" he said bitterly. "You gave me away!"

"Well, of all the——" began Church.

"Don't deny it!" said Handforth sternly. "You and Mac were the only two people who knew of that letter. I wrote it last night, and posted it——"

"And this morning you gave yourself away, old chap," said Travers, shaking his head. "Don't blame your study-mates. Not that it makes the slightest difference. One look at the letter is good enough for me. The authorship of it sticks out like a lighthouse!"

Handforth was thoroughly disgusted; and even then he continued to nurse base suspicions against his chums.

"Always remember, dear old fellow, that there is one golden rule for secret societies," said Vivian Travers, as he gave Handforth an indulgent pat on the shoulder. "If a secret society is to be really successful it has to be a secret."

But Handforth was too fed-up to listen to this excellent maxim, and he stalked indoors.

CHAPTER 2.

The Fellowship of the Free!

MR. JAMES KINGSWOOD frowned.

He was in his study, and a moment earlier he had been chuckling at the recollection of his recent encounter with Teddy Long. But now he frowned. He had just opened one of his letters, and it proved to be an extraordinary communication. Mr. Kingswood had not read it yet—but the very appearance of it had given him a start.

It was a single sheet of white foolscap paper, and the writing upon it, in dense black Indian ink, was executed in neat, printed characters. There was neither date nor address, and the signature at the end made it clear that the communication had come from "The Terrestrial Master" of the "Fellowship of the Free."

"The impudent young scamps!" muttered the headmaster, with some annoyance.

He was a good-natured man, but he disliked the boys to take liberties with him. He was generally free and easy with seniors and juniors alike; and they invariably responded to his friendliness by showing him the respect which was his due.

But it was one thing for the junior boys to form secret societies, and to send one another "mysterious" messages; but it was quite another thing for such a schoolboy secret society to address a letter to the headmaster.

Mr. Kingswood knew that secret societies, in schools, were epidemic in character. The boys of one House would start a society; and the boys of another House would retaliate by starting a rival. So it would go on until interest flagged, and all the various secret societies petered out.

This Fellowship of the Free was evidently a rival of the Clan of the Unseen Eye. By the appearance of this letter, too, it was a much better organised affair.

"H'm!" grunted the Head, as he leaned back in his chair. "Somebody's going to get into trouble over this."

The letter was even more startling than he had at first supposed. After he had read it he was amazed—amazed at the dictatorial tone of the writer; amazed at the staggering instructions it gave him; amazed at the revolutionary character of those instructions. The whole document was, in fact, startling.

Concisely, coldly, it informed the headmaster of St. Frank's that the teaching of this great Public school did not meet with the approval of the Fellowship of the Free. He was ordered, therefore, to make certain changes, and to insidiously introduce new methods. Secret emissaries of the fellowship would be watching, and would know if he obeyed. Later, fuller and more detailed instructions would be sent. Finally, he was warned that if he ignored the letter he would incur the displeasure of the fellowship. It was hinted that his very life might be taken. From first to last the letter breathed of a grim and sinister power. It was very well done. So well done that Mr. Kingswood had a hard look on his face as he refolded the letter, returned it to its envelope, and placed it in his breast pocket. His aggressive jaw stuck out more rocklike than ever.

"We'll see about this," he muttered ominously. "Pity I have to go to London to-day. The authors of this precious effusion deserve to be expelled."

He was angry. This was not the work of junior boys. It was far too elaborate, too learned. It was apparently the work of one of those intellectual senior cliques which considered itself brilliant and ultra-modern. Mr. Kingswood had no sympathy with such advanced movements, although he knew that they were to be found in every great public school. He did his utmost to render them innocuous by a process of quiet tolerance and ridicule. To prohibit them and to characterise them as dangerous and unhealthy—as they undoubtedly were—was a certain method of fostering them and making them even more harmful.

This impudent letter was going too far, however, and Mr. Kingswood decided that he would make a very careful investigation.

With breakfast over, he forgot the matter, for he was off to London at once, having been summoned to a special meeting of the school governors. It was quite unexpected, and, for the life of him, he could not understand why such a meeting had been called—or why his own presence should be required. He knew that the governors were perfectly satisfied with his work at St. Frank's.

By driving over to Bannington, and taking an express, he was in London well before noon, and it still wanted some minutes to twelve o'clock when he rang the front door bell of Sir John Brent's West End house.

He was expected, and he was ushered straight to Sir John's library. There he found the governors in readiness—three of them. Sir John Brent, the chairman, Lord Walberry, and General Milton. It was these three St. Frank's governors who had originally appointed Mr. Kingswood—and they had had no reason to regret their action.

Mr. Kingswood was inwardly intrigued as he noted the unusual gravity on the three faces. Sir John, usually a cheerful and

ing you my resignation? If there is any way in which I have failed in my duties——”

“Good gracious, no! Don't let's have any misunderstanding,” said Sir John hastily. “We don't want to lose you, Mr. Kingswood. We are very satisfied with the splendid work you are doing at St. Frank's.”

The other governors murmured their approval, adding to Mr. Kingswood's mystification:

“I merely hinted at your resignation because you may feel reluctant to carry on.



Handforth gave a startled gasp as he saw the ghostly, cowed figures loom suddenly in the fog. What these sinister figures were doing inside St. Frank's he did not know. Clenching his fists, he rushed pluckily at them.

hearty man, did not even offer his visitor a smile. He shook hands almost grimly.

“You are no doubt wondering why we thought it advisable to call you to London, Mr. Kingswood,” said Sir John, after the Head had taken a seat. “Well, I won't beat about the bush. We regard the situation as one of the utmost gravity, and we thought it essential that you should be warned.”

“Warned?” repeated Mr. Kingswood in wonder.

“Yes, Mr. Kingswood; and if, after hearing what we have to say, you decide to hand in your resignation, we shall not think any the less of you,” said Sir John with the same gravity.

“You amaze me,” said Fighting Jim. “What possible reason can I have for hand-

But I am afraid I am not making myself very clear,” said Sir John. “I will be blunt. There is a danger abroad, Mr. Kingswood—a danger to all headmasters of great English Public schools. So far, St. Frank's has escaped, but any day you may receive an impudent and extraordinary communication.”

Mr. Kingswood started.

“You don't mean—— No, no, that's impossible,” he said. “I'm sorry, Sir John. I did not mean to interrupt.”

“What were you going to say?” asked Sir John.

“Well, curiously enough, I did receive an impudent letter this morning, but I am satisfied that it was merely the work of some school secret society, or——”

“Good gad!” ejaculated General Milton,

leaning forward. "A secret society? Did the wretches sign themselves 'The Fellowship of the Free'?"

"Why, yes," said the Head in wonder.

"Good heavens! Then it has reached St. Frank's at last!" said Lord Walberry in agitation. "This is terrible, gentlemen—terrible!"

"I don't understand," said Fighting Jim, looking from one to another.

"Did you, by any chance, bring that letter with you, Mr. Kingswood?" asked Sir John quickly.

"Yes, I have it in my pocket."

"May I see it?"

Mr. Kingswood, more puzzled than ever, handed the letter over. Sir John Brent nodded grimly as he scanned the neatly-printed characters.

"Yes—yes, it's exactly the same," he muttered, a haggard look coming into his face. "Gentlemen, this is a nasty blow. Will you excuse me for one minute, please?"

Leaving Mr. Kingswood still in the dark, Sir John pulled a telephone towards him and gave a number. Within a minute he was through, and Fighting Jim was further astonished when the chairman of the governors again spoke.

"Mr. Lee? Mr. Nelson Lee?" he asked eagerly. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Lee, is it? I wonder if you could come round to my house immediately?"

Mr. Kingswood was baffled. Why was Sir John Brent ringing up Nelson Lee, the great detective?

"Yes, Mr. Kingswood is here now," continued Sir John. "Extraordinarily enough, the letter was delivered this morning, and he brought it with him. Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Lee. It's good of you."

He hung up the receiver and turned again to the headmaster.

"This letter, Mr. Kingswood, is not the harmless action of a schoolboy modernistic movement, but something of infinite menace," he said quietly. "The Fellowship of the Free is a highly dangerous secret organisation with headquarters, it is believed, somewhere in Central Europe—an organisation of anarchists, who desire a world upheaval."

"But this is incredible," said Mr. Kingswood in amazement.

"Unfortunately, it is only too true," continued Sir John, folding his hands in front of him and leaning grimly across his desk. "What will you say, Mr. Kingswood, when I tell you that the headmasters of six other Public schools in England have received similar mysterious letters? Some of them have received second, and even third, communications. There have been sinister warnings. Worse than that—"

He paused and glanced at his fellow-governors, who nodded.

"You had better tell him, Sir John," said the general gruffly.

"Is there no possibility of all this being a gigantic hoax?" asked Mr. Kingswood. "It seems so utterly fantastic—"

"That is just what other headmasters said," interrupted Sir John. "I won't tell you the names of the schools, but I can assure you they are world-famous names. During the past month three headmasters have vanished."

"You mean they have walked out of their schools?"

"I mean literally what I say," said Sir John. "They have vanished—apparently off the face of the earth. So cleverly were they kidnapped—for there can be no doubt that they were victims of the Fellowship of the Free—that the police have been unable to find a single clue. This very week the headmaster of another school was found dead in a lake five miles from his home."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Kingswood, thoroughly startled.

"The matter was hushed up as much as possible; a verdict of suicide whilst of unsound mind was reached," said Sir John. "The police secretly believe that that unfortunate gentleman was driven to suicide by the infernal machinations of the Fellowship of the Free. I am telling you, Mr. Kingswood, that this organisation is the very worst menace which has threatened civilisation in this century."

Mr. Kingswood took a deep breath.

"I cannot, of course, disbelieve what you have told me, Sir John," he said. "Yet you must forgive me if I seem incredulous. It is so—so bizarre. It is so amazing. You think, then, that there is a possibility of my sharing the fate of the headmasters who have vanished?"

"That is exactly what we think, Mr. Kingswood," said Sir John gravely. "And that is why we invited you to attend this meeting. You will now understand, perhaps, what I meant when I referred to your possible resignation. You have received the first communication, and that means that you are now in a position of danger."

"And if you care to resign, we shall understand," said Lord Walberry.

Mr. Kingswood shook his head.

"Thank you, gentlemen, but it is not my way to quit," he said quietly. "My boys know me as 'Fighting Jim,' and I'm ready to fight now. I'm not going to show the white feather because a gang of fanatics threaten me. With your permission, gentlemen, I shall remain headmaster of St. Frank's."

— —

CHAPTER 3.

Good News For Nipper.

NELSON LEE, tall, lean, and immaculate, was ushered into Sir John's study a few minutes later. The great detective had lost no time in answering the call.

"This is very good of you, Mr. Lee," said Sir John warmly. "A week ago, when I first approached you on this matter, you hinted

that you would be ready to give your attention to this extraordinary mystery. Now that the menace has reached St. Frank's, I'm wondering if you will give this accursed Fellowship your active attention."

"You may cease wondering, Sir John," said Lee. "The information you gave me over the telephone decided me. The menace, as you say, has reached St. Frank's. I intend to throw myself wholeheartedly into this battle—a battle against an unknown quantity. I shall be in good company, for not only is Scotland Yard commissioning its best brains to the task, but the Secret Service itself is hard at work. Yet I've an idea that by working alone, at St. Frank's, I may achieve some success."

"It all sounds so melodramatic—so impossible," said Mr. Kingswood, with a helpless shrug. "You speak of an unknown quantity, Mr. Lee. Don't you know who these men are? Don't you know anything about them at all?"

"Nothing definite is known," replied Nelson Lee. "The police and the Secret Service have obtained vague hints here and there. It is known that the fellowship is one of the greatest organisations ever formed, with ramifications in every country in Europe. It has spread its tentacles insidiously, silently, like some evil monster. Nobody knows who is the Terrestrial Master, or who are his generals and lieutenants."

"And the rank and file—what of them?"

"It is not even known if there is a rank and file," replied Nelson Lee. "It is believed that the fellowship is composed, mostly, of Russian, German, Polish and Italian fanatics. They are Anarchists, who would, if they could, turn civilisation topsy-turvy. Terrorism is, of course, their main weapon."

"But why should these crazy people waste their time on English public schools?" asked Mr. Kingswood.

"They do not regard it as a waste of time," replied the great detective. "And you must not suppose, Mr. Kingswood, that English public schools, alone, are affected. Great schools in Germany and France, and, in fact, all over the Continent, are being dealt with in exactly the same way. You will understand that all this is being kept absolutely quiet. Parents are difficult people to deal with, and if an alarm should spread the great schools of the country would be emptied within a month."

"Yes, that's quite true," agreed Mr. Kingswood. "I understand."

"So far, there is no hint that the boys of these schools are in danger," proceeded Nelson Lee. "The fellowship is confining its attentions to the masters—the headmasters. The object, of course, is clear. By terrorism, the fellowship expects to gain its object—to make the headmasters of great schools revolutionise their methods of teaching. The fellowship believes that the youth of the world should be brought up in accord-

ance with its own principles. It cannot be denied that there is cunning and brilliance in this offensive. These fanatics are seeking to train the rising generation."

"You mean, there is no immediate danger of world revolution, or anything of that sort?"

"I don't think there is a danger of world revolution at all," replied Nelson Lee, with a smile. "This insane fellowship will never achieve its end. But that does not mean to say that it is not a highly dangerous organisation—one which can do immeasurable harm unless it is checked. The leaders are patient, it seems; they are not expecting rapid results. They know that if they came out into the open they would be beaten. So, to begin with, they are giving their attention to the schools."

Mr. Kingswood's jaw protruded ominously.

"Well, I'm ready for them!" he said. "If they try any tricks with me I'll put up as good a fight as the next man."

"And probably a great deal better," smiled Lee. "But what I would like you to do, Mr. Kingswood, is to return to St. Frank's and carry on as though nothing had happened. Ignore this warning."

"And you, Mr. Lee?" asked Sir John anxiously.

"I shall be there."

"Splendid!" said Sir John.

"By gad, yes!" said General Milton, nodding. "Capital!"

"The very fact of your being at St. Frank's, Mr. Lee, will probably keep these wretches away," added Lord Walberry.

"I'm afraid that would not be very good strategy," said Nelson Lee dryly. "I don't want to keep the wretches away."

"Eh? But, good gracious me, you don't mean—"

"I shall not be at St. Frank's—in my own personality," continued Lee, with the utmost calmness. "I shall go in some other capacity—using another name. You don't mind, Kingswood, do you? I mean, you won't be offended if I appoint myself your body-guard?"

Fighting Jim laughed.

"Think I need one?" he asked.

"I know you need one," replied Lee grimly. "That's why I want you to carry on as usual—as though you were treating the fellowship communication with contempt. Something will happen—and when it does happen, I shall be there. With any luck, I might be able to get on the track of something which will lead to a definite line of investigation."

And they settled down to a serious, earnest talk, and certain plans were made.

Before Mr. James Kingswood returned to St. Frank's, he knew that this "scare" was no scare at all, but a very real danger. Never for a second did he think of running away from that danger. He returned to St. Frank's inwardly thrilled. He was not known as "Fighting Jim" for nothing.

IT was mid-afternoon before Nelson Lee returned to his famous chambers in Gray's Inn Road. On his lean, clear-cut face there was an expression of eagerness. His eyes shone with more than their usual fire. He was like a hound getting ready to take the trail; and if he had had hair on his back, one could have imagined it standing up in a ridge.

"You look peppy this afternoon, guv'nor," remarked Nipper, as he eyed Lee with intent interest.

Nipper was busy with some newspaper cuttings—and this was the kind of routine work he hated. However, it had to be done, and Nipper was not the sort to grumble.

"I shall be going away, Nipper," said Nelson Lee abruptly.

"Where to, sir?" asked Nipper.

"South America, I think."

"Great Scott! When do we start?"

"We don't start at all, young 'un," replied Lee. "I shall go to South America alone—it might be the Argentine, or it might be Brazil. Somewhere in the inaccessible interior of Brazil, I fancy. As for you—" He pursed his lips, and looked at Nipper thoughtfully. "How would you like to go back to St. Frank's?"

Nipper jumped.

"I'd love it, guv'nor," he replied. "But I'd rather be with you."

"Yes, you will return to St. Frank's as a scholar—you will resume your old place in the Remove," continued Lee. "For the sake of appearances, you will go down permanently—"

"Hold on, guv'nor!" interrupted Nipper grimly. "What's the game? You're kidding me, aren't you? You're not going to Brazil—and I'm not going to St. Frank's."

Nelson Lee sat on the corner of the table, and looked at Nipper with quiet earnestness.

"We're both going to St. Frank's, young 'un, if you want to know the truth," he said. "I shall be there—but you're not supposed to know it, and nobody else in the school will recognise me. We're after the Fellowship of the Free—known to the police of Europe as the 'Fellowship of Fear.' The Headmaster of St. Frank's has received the first warning, and that gives me my opening."

Nipper was breathless with excitement.

"You mean it, guv'nor?" he asked. "I say, what a case! How long do you think it'll last?"

"I can't tell—it may be a month or two, it may be much longer," said Lee. "Anyhow, you're going down to the old school

as a scholar—and you must let everybody think that you are there for good. Later, if we succeed—well, you can easily leave. But I want you to give your schoolfellows the impression that you have returned permanently, and that I have gone to South America on a difficult case, and that I am likely to be away for a very long time."

Thereupon, Nipper sat down and wrote a highly important letter.

CHAPTER 4.

A Reception in Style.

TOMMY WATSON, of Study C, gave a chirrup as he grabbed a letter from the rack in the Ancient House lobby.

"Good egg, Montie!" he said.

"It's addressed to both of us—and it's from Nipper. The boulder hasn't written for over a fortnight."

Sir Lancelot Montgomery Tregellis-West, Bart., shrugged his elegant shoulders.

"Don't be hard on the old lad, Tommy, boy," he said. "He has probably been busy on a dashed case. What a frightful life! Dashin' here, and dashin' there, and never knowin'—"

"Great jumping catfish!" yelled Tommy, in sudden excitement.

"Somethin' startlin'?" asked Sir Montie.

"Nipper's coming here—to-morrow!"

"That's good news—it is, really!"

"But—but you don't understand!" gasped Tommy, who was reading the letter, and who was so excited that he could not keep still. "Why don't you shout, or something?"

Sir Montie merely adjusted his pince-nez and smiled.

"Why shout?" he asked urbanely. "I understand perfectly, but there's no reason why I should act like a dancin' dervish. Nipper is comin' down to-morrow. Does he say if he can stay the night?"

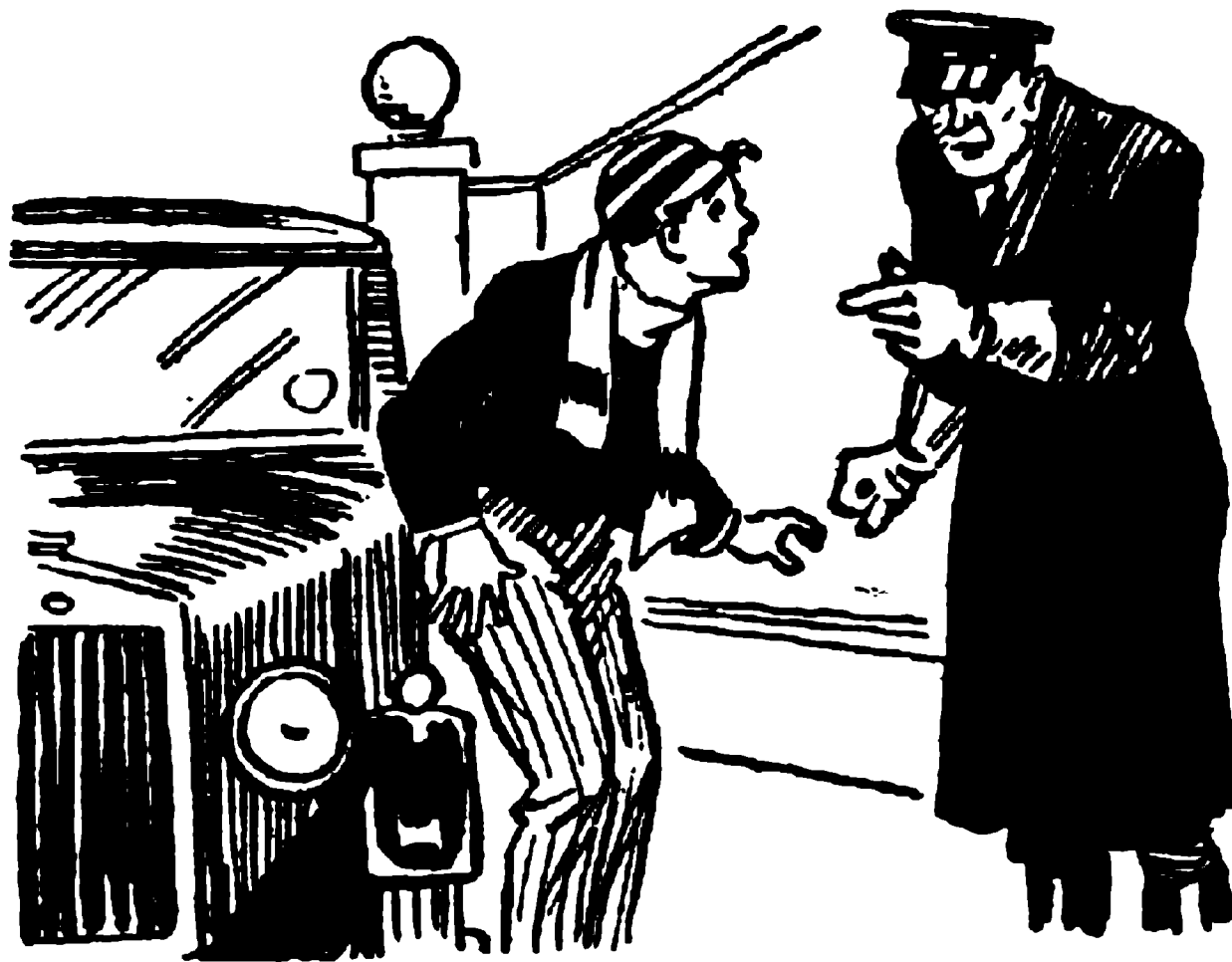
"Read this letter!" panted Tommy Watson. "He says he's coming for good—back into the Remove—back into Study C."

"What!" yelled Tregellis-West, his topper going in one direction, his pince-nez in another, his boasted self-possession shattered.

"I thought that would wake you up!" grinned Tommy.

"Lemme see!" roared Sir Montie. "Gimme that letter! Begad! Where are my dashed glasses? I say, this is frightfully annoyin'—"

Handforth, who happened to come along the Remove passage, was about to tread on Sir Montie's glasses when Church effected a neat rescue.



"Better put these things on, Montie," said Church. "Didn't you know there was an elephant about the place?"

"By George! Where?" asked Handforth, looking out into the Triangle. "Who's bringing elephants to St. Frank's? Is there a circus about?"

But nobody answered him. Sir Montie, having recovered his glasses, was reading Nipper's letter; and he was making all sorts of gloating sounds. It was so unusual for the debonair Tregellis-West to act in this way that quite a crowd gathered.

"Well?" asked Tommy Watson breathlessly.

"Begad, laddie, you're right—it's official," said Sir Montie gleefully. "I wonder if you people will mind if I cheer a bit?"

"Never mind cheering," said Handforth, pushing his way forward. "What's the matter with you two fatheads? Have you come into a fortune, or something?"

"Nothing so commonplace as that," grinned Tommy Watson. "This letter is from Nipper. He's coming back to St. Frank's to-morrow. Coming for good. Coming back to take his place in the Remove."

Handforth refused to throw a fit at this startling news.

"Well, what about it?" he demanded. "I'm not so sure that it's a good thing. Nipper's all right—one of the best—but he's a bit too cocksure. In the old days he even used to order me about!"

"Only when you deserved it—when you threw your weight all over the place," said Watson tartly. "You know jolly well that Nipper was the best skipper the Remove ever had."

"Well, he won't be skipper again," said Handforth. "That West House ass, Reggie Pitt, is Form captain. Goodness only knows why! I'm here, in the Ancient House, ready enough to take on the responsibility! I was skipper once, and there's no reason——"

"No reason why you should be skipper again," put in Travers fervently.

"Eh? I wasn't going to say that!"

"I know you weren't," agreed Travers. "And you're not going to say anything else, either. Do you want to start an argument, Handy, or shall we chuck you out into the Triangle on your neck?"

Handforth, in face of the organised opposition, dried up. Everybody else seized Nipper's letter and read it. The news spread. And it could not be denied that the Junior school, as a whole, was delighted to hear the news. Even Handforth admitted, later on, that Nipper's return would be a good thing. It was about time somebody bucked the Remove up. He even changed his mind about the captaincy, declaring that the Ancient House fellows should get up an immediate agitation and demand Pitt's resignation.

"We shall have to have another election!" declared Handforth. "It's only right and proper that an Ancient House fellow should be Form skipper. I've said so all along."

However, Reggie Pitt himself, like the good sport he was, astonished his own House and delighted the Ancient House by resigning forthwith.

This happened at a Form meeting which Reggie Pitt called immediately after morning lessons. Everybody turned up, even such undesirables as Bernard Forrest and Gulliver and Bell and Claude Gore-Pearce.

"Gentlemen!" shouted the skipper, as he stood upon the platform in the lecture hall, where the meeting was being held.

"Hear, hear!"

"Silence for the skipper!"

"Gentlemen. I am not going to say much——"

"Good!"

"But what I am going to say will be to the point——"

"Hear, hear!"

"We all welcome the news that one Richard Hamilton, otherwise known as Nipper, is returning to the fold to-morrow," continued Reggie. "This news is as unexpected as it is juicy. Nipper is a great chap, and I feel that we, as a Form, should do something special in the way of giving him a hearty welcome."

"Yes, rather!"

"Hear, hear!"

"It's got to be really corking," said Pitt. "If anybody has any brain-waves, trot them out! We've got to give our skipper a rousing reception——"

"Our what?" asked Jack Grey, staring.

"Our skipper."

"Rats! You're our skipper!" shouted Castleton, of the West House.

"You mean, I was," said Reggie Pitt coolly. "Didn't you know that I resigned ten minutes ago?"

"What!"

Uproar followed. The Ancient House fellows cheered to the echo; the West House juniors raved and groaned and protested. Reggie Pitt waited calmly for the storm to subside.

"Now that you've blown off some steam, what about listening to me?" he asked at length. "I told you, when I first got up here, that I wasn't going to say much—and I meant it. My children, Nipper was captain of the Remove before he went away from St. Frank's; he only left because his guardian, Mr. Nelson Lee, took him away for detective work. I have always regarded my position of skipper as temporary. Nipper's coming back to-morrow. Good enough. He steps straight back into the captaincy, just as he left it. That's fair. That's just. And if any of you idiots want an argument, step up here on the platform."

And Reggie Pitt suggestively pushed up his sleeves, indicating the exact type of argument he meant.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Pitt!"

"You're a real sportsman!"

It was the Ancient House fellows who were cheering; and quite a few of the West House

contingent joined in, too. They were sensible enough to put aside all feelings of rivalry. No vote was taken, for such a thing was unnecessary. Reggie Pitt's resignation meant that Nipper was again the Form captain, even before he had returned to the old school. There was nobody else in the Remove who would have had an earthly chance as a candidate. The thing was a foregone conclusion. Pitt's decisive action had settled the matter out of hand.

"And now we'll talk about to-morrow's ceremony," said Reggie briskly. "I think we'll appoint a reception committee. We know that Nipper is coming down by the afternoon train—and, luckily, to-morrow is a half-holiday. So we can spread ourselves, and do something big."

"Something big?" repeated Handforth. "What do you mean—hire a double-decker motor-bus, or something?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not big in that sense, you ass," grinned Reggie. "You're always too literal. I mean, something brainy."

"Oh, well, why didn't you say so?" retorted Handforth. "That's easy! I've got a brainy idea already."

"Don't forget that opinions differ, dear old fellow," said Travers.

"All you've got to do is to leave Nipper to me," said Handforth. "I'll meet him at the station with my Morris Minor, and——"

"Rats!"

"Forget it!"

"Blow your Morris Minor!"

Handforth was shouted down, much to his indignation. Bringing Nipper home to St. Frank's in an ordinary baby car was much too tame.

"What we need is something a bit spectacular," said Tommy Watson. "You know—so that Nipper will appreciate the honour. We want to make him feel that it's a red-letter day. How about hiring the station hack, decorating it up a bit, and——"

"Then fix ropes to it, and drag him to the school?" completed Fullwood. "That's a whiskery idea. As old as the hills."

"The old ideas are sometimes the best," replied Watson defensively.

"Perhaps he's right, my infants," said Reggie Pitt, with a twinkle in his eyes. "But we might get a new twist to that old idea. Supposing we had a chariot—a real, genuine Roman chariot, complete with decorations and gilding and everything? The Return of the gladiator, eh? We could fix coloured ropes to the giddy thing, and drag it in triumph through the village, and up to the school."

"It's a good idea," said Travers. "But where's your chariot?"

"In Bannington," replied Pitt promptly.

"Eh?"

"I've seen it," said Pitt calmly. "You know old Gossage's place, at the end of the High Street?"

"Of course," went up a chorus. "Everybody knows old Sausage."

"Well, he deals in second-hand furniture, and all sorts of junk," continued Pitt. "I was having a look round his yard the other day—we wanted a table in Study O—and I saw the chariot. The real thing. There were lots of them built by a film company, and when the film was completed the chariots were sold for next to nothing. Old Gossage bought one on spec.—and there it lies, in one of his sheds. We could hire it for practically nothing."

Nobody else had any brainwaves to suggest. None, in fact, were required. Reggie Pitt's wheeze was "the goods."

Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West, of course, were highly gratified. They had expected the Remove to display a certain amount of interest in Nipper's return; but this wholesale enthusiasm was really wonderful, and it spoke volumes for Nipper's popularity.

PITT and Handforth and Travers and one or two others went over to Bannington as soon as afternoon lessons were over, and they interviewed Mr. Gossage. They not only hired the chariot for a song, but they triumphantly took it back to St. Frank's with them.

During the evening a number of fellows worked on the ropes which had been purchased. They were red, white and blue, and they were now twined together, in order to make gay colours. Small flags were tied along the ropes at intervals. The chariot, too, came in for some decoration. By the time everything was finished the chariot was a gay-looking turnout.

The redoubtable John Busterfield Boots, skipper of the Fourth, expressed the desire, next day, to accompany the party to the station. It seemed that half the Fourth was of the same mind.

"You see, Nipper is not only captain of the Remove, but captain of the Junior School, too," explained Buster Boots. "We Fourth-Formers would like to show him that we are glad to see him back—just as glad as you fellows."

"That's it, exactly," nodded Bob Christine.

Reggie Pitt was diplomatic.

"Well, it's jolly decent of you, and we appreciate it," he said. "But we were rather looking upon this affair as a Remove stunt. Everybody in the Remove is joining in this march to the station; it's a sort of official order. Why don't you Fourth Form chaps get up a reception of your own? Something here, in the school—or perhaps in the village?"

"Yes, that might be a good idea," said Boots, nodding. "And we'll jolly well out-do your Remove stunt. Thanks for the tip!"

He coolly walked off, and Reggie frowned.

"No larks, you chaps!" he called after Boots.

"Of course not," grinned Buster, turning his head. "What an idea! If you think we can't get up a welcome for Nipper with-

out poaching on your preserves, then you don't know the Fourth!"

Reggie Pitt's uneasiness left him. He knew that he could trust Boots. And so, when the great hour arrived, the Remove, in force, went down to the station in a long procession, triumphantly hauling the chariot over the frosty road.

Many of the inhabitants of Bellton came to their doors to watch, and there were smiles—and headshakings, too. One or two of the shopkeepers got together, and wondered if they should put their shutters up. A large influx of St. Frank's juniors into the village generally meant a good deal of noisy ragging—and shop windows were not always safe.

However, the Remove seemed orderly enough, and when the station was reached the boys left the chariot out in the yard, with the ropes lying stretched out in readiness, so that they could be seized immediately by their allotted crews. Then, to the mild dismay of Mr. Spence, the station-master, the juniors ranged themselves like a company of soldiers on the platform—and they practically filled the platform from end to end. Reggie Pitt, the commanding officer, moved up and down, having a word here and there.

"Good enough!" he said, at length. "You look quite impressive, my children! Just in time, too—for here comes the train!"

CHAPTER 5.

A Change in the Programme.

"**I** THINK," said Hal Brewster, "that this is essentially a moment when we River House chaps should do our stuff."

He was in Bellton High Street, and with him were a number of other River House stalwarts, including Georgie Glynn, Dave Ascott, his own chums of Study No. 4. Then there were Kingswood, Norton and Robinson; Hawke, Riley and Brampton, and others. It was quite a force.

"It's not so easy," said Kingswood dubiously. "We're outnumbered, you know."

"More than two to one," added Riley. "By what I can see, the whole Remove is on the job. There's no sense in yelling for trouble, is there?"

But Hal Brewster refused to listen. The rivalry between the River House "commoners," and the juniors of St. Frank's was as keen as it had ever been. It seemed to the River House junior captain that this was a golden opportunity. It would be a sin to miss it.

"Wait a minute, you chaps," he said. "Think of the honour if we succeed! We know why the Remove has gone to the station."

"To give Nipper a welcome," said Ascott, nodding.

"Exactly," said Brewster. "I heard it from Handy this morning. He can't help gassing, poor chap. Nipper is coming back

to St. Frank's, and they've already re-elected him skipper. Well, why shouldn't we show him just where he stands? On his very first hour back at the old spot! My sons, it's got to be done, risk or no risk!"

"I've got an idea," said Georgie Glynn hesitatingly.

"Trot it out, then!"

"It's not particularly good——"

"Don't be so modest, my son," interrupted Hal. "This is no time for picking and choosing."

"Well, they've got that Roman chariot up at the station," said Glynn, with a grin. "They're going to drag Nipper through the village and—and—— Well, it'll be a kind of honour for him, won't it? I mean, riding up to the school in a giddy chariot!"

"Of course," said Brewster. "That's the very idea of it."

"Well, all those Remove chaps are on the platform—waiting for the train to come in," went on Glynn. "There's not one chance in a hundred that they've left anybody outside—to guard the chariot."

"Go on!" said Hal, his eyes gleaming. "I'm beginning to smell something good!"

"Look over there," said Glynn, pointing. "I was wondering if we could quietly bag the chariot and substitute——"

"My son, you deserve a medal for conspicuous braininess," interrupted Brewster, with a gurgle. "You're a genius!"

Brewster found himself looking into a little backwater of the High Street. There was a shed up there, where the local fire engine was kept. The property belonged to the Rural Council. And there, standing forlorn, and ramshackle; indescribably muddy, was—an ancient and decrepit dust cart!

Some months earlier, Bellton had been lucky enough to secure a new dust cart—one of those sanitary ones, with sliding lids. The old dust cart was of the open-topped variety, and, in its present condition, it looked too awful for words.

Brewster & Co. yelled with laughter as they realised the full humour of the plot. It was easily executed, too. There was nobody to stop them when they seized the grubby old dust cart, and hauled it out into the road. Then they awaited their chance.

As the train rattled into the station the River House boys dashed into the station-yard. The rest was easy.

Nipper happened to be in a compartment to himself, and as the train neared Bellton he pulled his gloves on, and tucked his ticket handily into one of them. Then he got his suit-case ready, lowered the window, and glanced out.

"By Jove! It's good to see the old scenes again," he muttered.

And he meant it. Nipper was no sentimentalist. But he had had many happy times at St. Frank's, and he was glad enough to be going back. He felt, in his heart, that he was a bit of a fraud; for, actually, he was here to work—to help Nelson Lee in that great fight against the Fellowship of Fear.

But he did not feel any qualms. For he had already made up his mind to take his own chums, Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West, into his full confidence. He knew from past experience that they could be trusted with any secret.

"There's the old station," he muttered, as the train rattled and swayed round a bend. "Same old twisted chimneys— Hallo, what the— My only sainted aunt! What are all those chaps doing on the platform?"

He had a shrewd idea of the truth, for there was no mistaking the junior caps. He flushed. He disliked any kind of fuss, but he was human. It was good to know that his old schoolfellows had arranged something in his honour.

A mighty cheer went up as the train pulled in. A few other passengers, most of them bound for Caistowe, stared out of the windows in wonder. Nipper alighted, grinning.

"Hallo, Remove!" he sang out.

"Welcome back, skipper!" went up a united chorus.

In that first minute Nipper knew of the honour which had been bestowed upon him. But, after warmly shaking hands with Watson and Tregellis-West, he shook his head as he grabbed at Reggie Pitt's fist.

"Nothing doing, old man," he said. "You're the Remove captain—"

"We won't argue," interrupted Pitt. "I've resigned, and you have been elected. That's settled. Jolly glad to see you back, skipper."

And again the chorus went up.

"We, the Remove, feel that the occasion is so exceptional that we have provided you with a fitting conveyance," continued Pitt. "It will now be my privilege to escort you to that conveyance."

"I hope you haven't gone to any expense over it," said Nipper, with a chuckle.

"This noble carriage, I may say, is symbolical of the Remove's feelings towards its old skipper," said Reggie Pitt. "It is the only conveyance, in fact, which can honour you as you deserve."

"Go ahead," said Nipper good-naturedly. "I must say, you chaps, that you are doing this thing thoroughly. And I appreciate it. I don't say that I deserve it, but—"

"Dry up!" interrupted Reggie. "We're doing all the talking. All you've got to do is to do as you're told."

"Sorry!" grinned Nipper.

Reggie seized his arm, the ranks parted, and the late skipper and the new skipper, arm-in-arm, passed through the booking office. Then, in double file, the Removites followed, making the whole thing an impressive ceremony.

"Behold!" exclaimed Pitt with an eloquent wave of his hand as he emerged into the station yard. "Behold the noble chariot which is the only fitting carriage for the return of such a valiant gladiator as yourself."

Unfortunately, Reggie Pitt wasn't looking at the chariot; he was looking at Nipper.

And Nipper, after one glance, gave a violent start.

"Thanks!" he said evenly.

And something of the intense satisfaction left him. This wasn't an honour at all; it was a jape, and not a particularly good-natured jape at that.

"A dust cart!" said Nipper grimly. "Thanks for the honour! So this carriage is the only fitting—"

He was interrupted by a sound from Reggie Pitt which was a kind of squeak. Reggie had just caught sight of the "chariot," and he nearly had a fit on the spot. The other Removites were crowding out now, and the air was filled with yells of consternation and amazement.

In place of the gaily-decorated chariot there now stood, in solemn and awful isolation, the old Bellton dust cart. It was mud-bespattered, rusty, and thoroughly disreputable. Attached to it were the gaily-coloured ropes, lying exactly as they had been placed earlier.

"Great corks!" yelled Handforth. "Something's happened!"

"Cheese it!" said Nipper. "What are you trying to spoof me for? I can take a joke —"

"Nunno!" stammered Reggie Pitt, in real distress. "Dash it, Nipper, we wouldn't play a dirty trick like this! We had a chariot out here—a real Roman chariot, complete with gilded wheels and everything! Oh, my goodness! You—you didn't think—"

He broke off, and his face went red.

"Boots!" he roared. "Boots and those giddy Fourth-Formers!"

"Where are they?" bellowed Handforth. "We'll slaughter them!"

"And Buster Boots told me he wouldn't get up to any larks!" went on Pitt hotly. "The—the awful rotter; I never thought he would tell whoppers like that."

"They must have bagged the chariot while the train was coming in," said Tommy Watson. "The noise of the train prevented us from hearing them. I say, Nipper, what a frost! We were going to give you such a triumphant ride to St. Frank's, too."

"But not in a dust cart, old boy," said Sir Montie. "Begad! You must have thought it a frightful insult."

"Well, never mind—" began Nipper.

"Look! Here they are!" went up a shout from Handforth. "Come on, Remove! The fatheads have been mad enough to come back!"

It was certainly a remarkable fact that Buster Boots and his merry men had arrived upon the scene. They were not empty-handed, either, for they were dragging the gay chariot. And they displayed an air of triumph which struck the Removites as being singularly rash.

"Down with the Fourth!" went up the cry.

"Hurrah!"

"Come on, Remove!"

"Smash 'em!"



Out of the wreathing mist loomed the mysterious bulk of the deserted prison. The sinister figure of the midnight prowler slunk cautiously nearer, making directly for the big entrance door.

Boots & Co. halted. Their expressions changed. They had only just entered the station yard, and they beheld a wild mob of Removites descending upon them with a purpose which was only too evident.

"Here, hold on!" roared Boots. "What the dickens— Cheese it, you idiots!"

The astonishing thing was that the Fourth-Formers were not wiped up on the spot. They owed their salvation entirely to Boots, who made himself heard above the din.

"What's the matter with you chaps?" he hooted. "We've done you a good turn!"

"What!"

"We've brought your chariot back!" thundered Boots.

"Yes, and a jolly good thing for you you did!" shouted Handforth. "It was like your nerve to bring the dust cart—"

"But we didn't!" howled Buster hoarsely. "The River House chaps played a jape on you—and we spotted them. Can't you understand, you hasty idiots?"

Even then it was touch and go.

"Wait a minute, you chaps!" sang out Pitt. "Hold your horses! What was that, Buster?"

The rivals were inextricably mixed—and Buster Boots & Co. were in a hopeless minority. They were, in fact, surrounded.

"That's better!" said Boots in a more

normal voice. "You crazy lunatics! It was Brewster and his gang who took your chariot away."

"Oh!"

"They shoved that dust cart there in its place," went on Boots. "We happened to come along and spot them. We Fourth-Formers were going to give Nipper a reception of our own in the High Street; but when we spotted Brewster's game we abandoned our own plans and went for the common enemy. Anyhow, we won't go into painful details. Here's your chariot."

"Boots, old man, many apologies," said Pitt handsomely. "We nearly slaughtered you by mistake. I hope you did something gory to those River House blighters!"

"We did!" replied Buster. "Well, as you've apologised, we'll say no more about it."

Nipper was an interested and amused spectator. He recovered his former spirits, too. It was not his own schoolfellows who had prepared the dust cart for him—but the "common enemy" of the River House School.

After that, everything went smoothly.

The ropes were unhitched from the dust cart, and the dust cart itself was trundled into a corner of the station yard. Then the chariot was duly harnessed, Nipper was placed inside, and the procession began.

The Removites attached themselves to the long ropes, and the Fourth-Formers made a guard of honour on either flank, and in the rear. Nipper had every reason to feel honoured. He was being given a reception which was seldom granted to any fellow.

The village turned out in force to watch—and the village, incidentally, was much relieved when the procession had passed.

In the lane, between the village and the school, the gleeful Removites understood what had happened to the common enemy.

Hal Brewster & Co., in fact, were in serious trouble. It was not their happy afternoon.

There they were, every one of them, securely tied to various trees of Bellton Wood, flanking the lane. There was a whole line of them—roped by their ankles, and hanging! They had been placed there by Buster Boots & Co., so that they would have an excellent view of the procession as it passed. And the procession, needless to add, yelled itself hoarse with triumphant laughter.

"And that's what you River House chaps will get every time you try to jape us!" sang out Buster Boots, grinning. "Cheerio, Brewster, old man!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Boots was considerate enough to release the last River House fellow in the line. He, in turn, would go along and cut down all the others. But there wasn't a doubt that Hal Brewster & Co. would think twice before japing their St. Frank's rivals again!

Thus Nipper came back to St. Frank's—in triumph. Little did the Removites realise just why Nipper was here, and what the future portended!

CHAPTER 6.

Carson, the New Chauffeur.

IN the headmaster's study, smiling Jim Kingswood was sitting back in his chair with his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat.

"Yes, these references are quite satisfactory," he said gravely.

"Thank you, sir," said the man who was standing on the other side of the desk.

"Your name is Carson, I understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Carson, you seem to have had a good deal of experience, and there's no reason why you should not be satisfactory in my service," said Mr. Kingswood, eyeing the man closely. "I hope you will be happy here."

"Thank you, sir. I think I shall, sir."

"I will get somebody to show you to your quarters," went on Mr. Kingswood, hesitating. "If there is anything you would care to say to me first—"

He hesitated again, and seemed doubtful. Carson remained respectfully at attention.

He was a well-built man, and he looked smart in his uniform. His clean-shaven face was of a ruddy colour—indeed, weather-beaten. His nose was inclined to be broad, and two of his upper front teeth projected

slightly, so that even when his mouth was in repose, the teeth just showed. His voice was deep and sonorous, with a curiously rolling burr.

Mr. Kingswood had every justification for his inward astonishment. This man, Carson, had presented himself in the ordinary way, applying for the job of chauffeur. The interview had been quite formal and commonplace.

But, at that private conference in London, Nelson Lee had arranged to come to St. Frank's in the guise of a chauffeur. And for the life of him, Fighting Jim could not associate the lithe, lean-faced detective with this broad-nosed, mahogany-complexioned stranger. There was not one solitary point of resemblance.

Indeed, Mr. Kingswood came to the conclusion that Lee had made a change in the plan—that this man, Carson, was a real chauffeur. It was absurd to imagine that the man was disguised. His hair was his own, he was clean-shaven, and—

"Yes, Kingswood, we might as well have a little private talk," said a soft voice.

Mr. Kingswood jumped in his chair. The chauffeur, having seen that the door was tightly closed, came nearer to the desk, and sat in a vacant chair—but in such a position that he could not be seen by anybody who happened to pass the window.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Mr. Kingswood, staring hard. "Then it is you?"

"Yes," replied Lee, in his own voice. "Do I pass muster?"

"It's too bad, Mr. Lee," complained the Head. "You had me guessing all the time. In fact, I'd abandoned guessing. I had come to the conclusion that you were an absolute stranger."

"Then that is very satisfactory—and you must forgive me for my little trick," said Nelson Lee. "But I wanted to put my disguise to the test, Kingswood. You, who actually know who I am, did not recognise me. That is very gratifying."

"It's amazing!" declared the Head. "I can't understand it even now. Your voice—yes. A man of your ability can easily change your voice—although I imagine it must be a severe strain to maintain a false voice for long periods."

"We get used to it," smiled Nelson Lee.

"But the face!" went on Fighting Jim. "It's an absolute triumph! How do you manage it without any apparent make-up?"

"Make-up is very dangerous," replied Nelson Lee. "Naturally, I have used some make-up, but the less the better. The more simple the disguise, the more effective it is. My nose has been broadened by simple devices—of my own invention, I may modestly add—which I wear inside my nostrils. Infernally uncomfortable to begin with, but after a time they are scarcely noticed. Like false teeth. I am wearing two false teeth at the moment, and their prominence alters the shape of my mouth."

"Well, it's astounding," said the Head, sitting back, and eyeing Nelson Lee with

continued admiration. "I think you're marvellous, Mr. Lee."

"After this, Kingswood, we must be careful," said Nelson Lee, speaking in a low voice. "If you meet me in your hall, or in the garage, or, in fact, anywhere outside, you must treat me as your chauffeur. It doesn't matter if we appear to be absolutely alone—you must still treat me as your chauffeur. We must only risk a private chat when we know that there is no possible danger of eavesdropping, as now. My life may depend upon the taking of these precautions—and your life, too."

"When do you expect—developments?"

"It is impossible to tell," replied Lee. "Something may happen within a week; or it may be delayed for several weeks."

"And, in the meantime, you will be acting as my chauffeur and nothing else?"

"Yes."

"Won't that be monotonous to a man of your ability?"

"I am saying nothing about my ability—but I do assert that my patience is almost akin to that of Job," replied Lee, smiling. "I don't mind waiting, Kingswood. This is a big game—with a big kill at the end of it. My time will not be entirely wasted, either, for I shall be watching over you—guarding you."

"Really, I don't think that's necessary——"

"Well, I do," said Lee. "It's a whole time job, Kingswood. You have all your work here—and I know just what that work is. You won't be able to keep on the lookout for possible enemies. But I shall—and, furthermore, when you drive abroad I shall be constantly with you, acting as a body-guard. All this may sound absurd to you, but I can assure you that I am not exaggerating. The Fellowship of the Free is determined to get results—and those men who defy them are dealt with drastically. Your job is to defy them—and I think you know that it is dangerous. But you're entering into the affair with your eyes open——"

"There's no danger for me—with you on guard," interrupted Fighting Jim. "Well, I hope something happens pretty soon. I'm a bit jealous of you on the quiet. This detective business must be thoroughly exciting."

Shortly afterwards, Carson, the new chauffeur, walked respectfully out of the headmaster's study, and he was shown to his own quarters.

Both Nelson Lee and Nipper were established at St. Frank's again.

NIPPER, in Study C, was the guest of of the evening. Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West had invited a number of special friends, including Handforth & Co., Reggie Pitt, Jack Grey, Travers—and, in fact, so many that the scene in Study C was reminiscent of a tube railway carriage during the rush hour. However, there was plenty to eat, plenty to drink, and everybody was noisy and happy.

Later, after the guests had gone, Nipper

had a chat about old times with his chums. He settled down in Study C as though he had never been away. He was again Form captain, and he came to the conclusion that the fellows at St. Frank's were the best in the world.

He said nothing to Tommy and Montie that night. Before he took them into his confidence, he wanted them to see Carson, the Head's new chauffeur.

IT was two days later—on a Monday, in fact—before Carson came into contact with any of the juniors. By this time Nipper had shaken right down. More than ever he felt that he had never left the Remove. He was taking an active interest in the football, and in all the general activities of the Form.

A parcel had come for Handforth that morning, and the contents of it proved to be a little gadget which could be affixed in five minutes to the carburetter of the Morris Minor. Handforth had seen it advertised the previous week, and he had sent for one. The makers claimed that this gadget not only effected an enormous saving in petrol, but it also gave the engine much greater flexibility.

Church and McClure were frankly sceptical.

"A sheer waste of money," said Church, as he and Mac helped their leader to fix the gadget. "You've had lots of these things, Handy, and, all told, they must have cost you quids. You could have bought a lot of petrol for that money."

"This one's different," said Handforth confidently. "Didn't you see what that Northampton man said? Commercial traveller, or something; he said he'd saved fifty-two gallons of petrol in six months, or something. There was another chap at Taunton, and his testimonial said that he roared up hills on top—hills he could only take, previously, on second."

Church looked at McClure, and McClure looked at Church. They did not think it worth while to argue. But they had very little faith in those testimonials. They were rather surprised that Handforth managed to get the fitment in position. But he did, and, astonishingly enough, when he pressed the self-starter, the engine awoke to life. True, it spluttered a great deal more than usual, but that was only a detail.

"Hop in!" said Handforth eagerly. "We're going out for a run."

"Mustn't forget brekker——" began Mac.

"Rats! We're not going far—just for a hop across the moor," replied Handforth. "We can do some speeding there. No hills, no bends, no cops, or anything. I'll show you whether this gadget is good or not."

In his enthusiasm he went roaring round the West House into the Triangle; and it so happened that the headmaster's big limousine was gliding in through the gateway at the same moment, with Carson at the wheel.

Nipper was standing on the Ancient House steps with Tregellis-West and Watson, and his heart leapt into his mouth. He knew that his "guv'nor" was a remarkably skilful driver; but the manœuvre which Lee now performed was a real joy to watch. On the absolute second, without hesitation, he swung the limousine round so sharply that two wheels rose from the ground. Then he straightened out, swerved, and with jammed brakes, came to a standstill. The Morris Minor had swerved past with scarcely an inch to spare. But for Lee's lightning-like move, there would have been a nasty crash.

"Crumbs!" gasped Handforth, trembling.

"You—you reckless fathead!" said Church. "You nearly killed the lot of us! The Head's car, too! You'll get flogged for this."

Fortunately, the Head himself was not in the car. But Nelson Lee quickly saw that this was an excellent opportunity for him to mix amongst the boys. He could only do so in a situation of this kind—so that his action would be unforced. The more he could test his make-up, the better.

"Just a minute, young gentlemen!" he said ominously.

He advanced with heavy strides, and Handforth had, by this time, got out of the Minor. A crowd of other juniors pressed round, and they were all talking excitedly. But something in the chauffeur's bearing silenced them.

"I say, I'm sorry——" began Handforth.

"Are you allowed to drive that sardine tin in here, you ag gent?" asked Leo angrily.

"This what?"

"You heard what I said."

"I know I did—and you'd better not call it a sardine can again!" said Handforth, with some warmth.

The chauffeur glowered at him.

"Drivin' across the quadrangle as though you was at Brooklands!" he said indignantly. "It's lucky for you that you didn't touch either of my wings. You'd have been crumpled up like a—a——"

"Sardine can?" suggested Travers politely.

"Crumpled up like a concertina!" said Lee, still glowering at Handforth. "And I shall have to report to my boss. A youngster like you oughtn't to be allowed to drive a car—even if it is only a small car! Huh!"

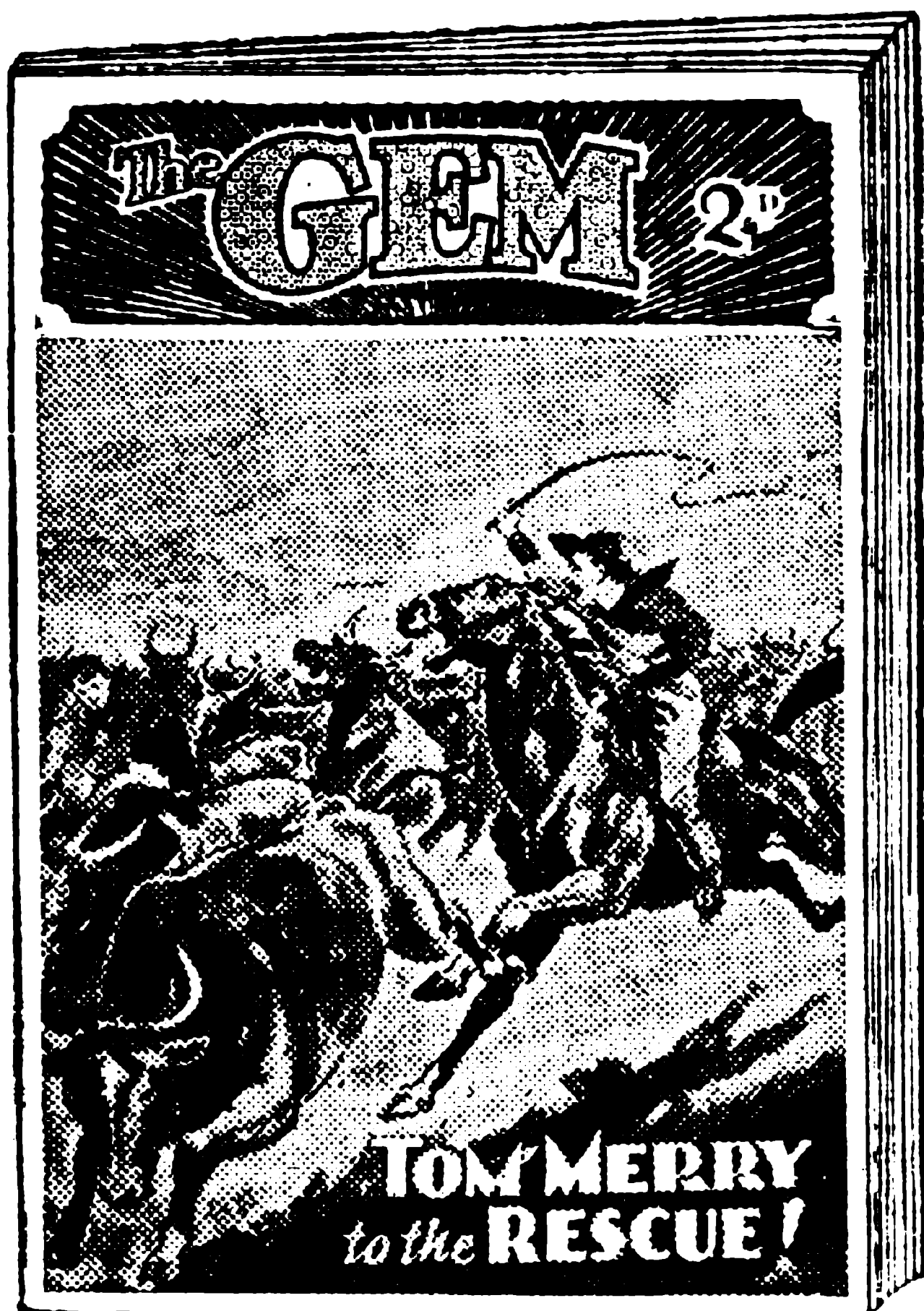
He turned up his nose at the Morris Minor and Handforth boiled.

"Look here, my man, I've a good mind to report you to the headmaster——" he began.

"You be careful that I don't report you!" broke in Lee. "I won't say nothing this time. I don't want to get none of you young gentlemen into trouble. 'Tain't my way to be nasty. But you be careful, my lad. That's all I've got to say."

Nipper inwardly chuckled. Nelson Lee had probably incurred Handforth's enmity.

"GUSSY, THE BRONCHO BUSTER!"



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but, at the same time, everybody else in the crowd approved of him. Handforth deserved a "ticking-off"; and Lee's statement that he would not report Handy to the Head was sporting. Any other chauffeur would certainly have made a fuss over that incident.

The limousine glided off, and Handforth sniffed.

"I don't like the look of that chap!" he said grimly.

"What's wrong with him?" asked Nipper, moving up.

"He looks a wrong 'un to me," said Handforth. "Didn't you notice his rummy eyes? Sort of piercing, and shifty."

"Why, you silly idiot——" began Nipper indignantly. And he checked, remembering himself. It was a fact that Lee had deliberately shifted his gaze rapidly; he was making a habit of it, so that it would appear a characteristic. Handforth, of course, being an ardent reader of detective stories, sprang to the conclusion that Carson, being "shifty-eyed," was no good.

"How do we know who he is?" he went on. "He may be a car bandit in disguise."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was reading in the paper the other day that a notorious car bandit escaped from the police by getting a job as a private chauffeur," said Handforth defensively. "Why should that chap jump down my throat?"

"It's no good, Handy—you haven't got a leg to stand on," said Travers. "You're in the wrong—and you know it. The Head's chauffeur was thoroughly decent about it, and you ought to be grateful to him. By the way, what's up with your engine? It's spluttering a bit, isn't it?"

"Never mind my engine!" growled Handforth. "Come on, Mac. You, too, Churchy!"

They got back into the little car, and it was soon off.

"We're a couple of fatheads, Mac," said Church suddenly. "What the dickens did we get back in here for? Handy will only kill us, or maim us. Besides, it's nearly breakfast-time."

"We've got twenty minutes—so don't grumble so much," said Handforth. "Plenty of time for us to go for a run over the moor and back. By George! That chauffeur chap interests me. I can't forget his shifty eyes! He looked at me as though he would like to murder me. I believe he's a crook."

Church and McClure allowed him to run on. Argument was useless. In fact, if they had been foolish enough to argue, they would only have egged him on.

The petrol-saving gadget was not a great success. Handforth had an idea at the back of his mind that it was responsible for the incident in the Triangle. The car was developing a habit of leaping forward with unaccustomed acceleration when he put his foot down. But it didn't keep it up; the engine spluttered and coughed and choked. In fact, it took a great dislike to the throttle,

and the Morris Minor's progress across the moor was not a happy one.

Church and McClure admired the scenery. It was delightfully fresh out here, for a keen wind was blowing, and the air was crystal clear. It was possible to see for miles. The moorland road was empty—as straight as a pencil across that barren expanse of white, frost-covered countryside.

"Don't you think we had better be getting back?" suggested Church, after a while.

"Might as well go as far as the old prison, and then we'll turn," said Handforth, who was worried. "Can't make this engine out. She's thoroughly warmed up now, and yet she still splutters. There's a rummy niff of petrol in the air, too."

"It's that rotten fixture on the carburetter," said McClure. "I expect the petrol's leaking somewhere. That beastly thing has upset all your mixture. Why can't you let well alone? If these petrol-saving gadgets were any good, the manufacturers would fit them, wouldn't they?"

"Not likely! The manufacturers are in with the petrol companies!" said Handforth darkly.

"You hopeless ass!" snorted Church. "The manufacturers of these small cars make a tremendous point of the small petrol consumption. The more miles they do to the gallon, the better. They'd fit these things as standard if they really gave you five or six more miles to the gallon."

So they argued, and Handforth became more and more annoyed. Secretly, he was beginning to feel that he had been a mug. Quite openly Church and McClure knew that they had been mugs—for coming on this trip at all. Breakfast was growing very remote.

"The old prison looks forlorn nowadays," said Church, seeking the opportunity to change the subject. "By jingo! What a desolate place!"

They had topped a little rise of the moor. Just below them, in full sight, lay the compact buildings of the old Moor Prison. This had been a very famous convict settlement—and, in the past, the St. Frank's fellows had had more than one exciting adventure with escaped convicts.

But in the early weeks of the previous autumn the Moor Prison had been shut up. The convicts were transferred to other establishments. This old prison was considered to be obsolete. It was damp and unhealthy. Last winter there had been a lot of complaints, and inquiries had been held, and so forth. So, this winter, everybody had been cleared out, and the prison was abandoned. Not even a caretaker had been left in charge. The place was derelict.

And it looked it.

"Ugh! It gives you the shivers," said Mac.

They approached, and now the Morris Minor's engine was behaving quite alarmingly, spluttering more than ever, and every now and again there would be an alarming

backfire. There was no village here, as at the famous convict prison on Dartmoor. There was no replica of Princetown. Just the prison itself, including the warders' quarters, and a number of now deserted out-buildings. Right next to the road, adjoining the big gates, stood a square stone house, ugly yet massive.

"Hallo! I thought the prison was completely shut up and empty?" asked Church suddenly. "Look! There's smoke coming out of those chimneys!"

"So there is," said McClure. "That's funny."

"Not so funny as this car!" growled Handforth. "There's smoke coming out of the bonnet!"

He pulled up almost exactly opposite the square house—which, in fact, had formerly been the governor's private residence. Armed with a spanner, Handforth lifted the bonnet and then got busy. He did so viciously, as though he had a grudge against the mechanism.

"What are you doing, Handy?" asked Church.

"I'm taking this rotten gadget off—that's what I'm doing!" snorted Handforth. "And when I've got it off, I'm going to chuck it in the ditch! I'm going to write to the manufacturers, and I'm going to tell them what I think of 'em!"

"Far better send the gadget back—and demand the return of your money," said McClure, with real Scottish wisdom. "Those sort of people don't like dissatisfied customers. They're bad advertisements. It's any odds you'll get your money back."

"H'm! Not a bad idea," admitted Handforth, as he worked.

The door of the house opened, and a man appeared. He was an elderly man, grey-haired, bent-shouldered, and he was dressed in faded garments which had once been black. His wrinkled face was kindly in expression.

"Is there anything I can do, my young friends?" he asked good-naturedly.

"Thanks very much, sir, but there's nothing wrong, really," replied Handforth, glancing round.

"I'm glad to hear that," said the old man. "If you were short of petrol, I might oblige you with a little. Or water, perhaps?"

They assured him that they had plenty of water and petrol, and that the trouble was purely local.

"I didn't know anybody lived here now, sir," said Handforth, who could not help being inquisitive. "You're not the caretaker, are you?"

The old man smiled, and his eyes twinkled. "Well, hardly," he replied. "My name is Matthew Merritt, and I was lucky enough to buy this house at a ridiculously cheap figure. It might not suit some people, but it suits me."

"Matthew Merritt, sir?" repeated Church, puckering his brow. "That name seems familiar. You're not an author are you, sir?"

"Not exactly."

"Well, that's funny. I can swear I've seen your name on a book," said Church. "Why, yes, of course! Professor Matthew Merritt."

"I must plead guilty," smiled the old man. "I am, in fact, a botanist, and I am afraid you are not seeing me at my best." His eyes twinkled again. "Out here, on the moors, I wear my oldest and shabbiest clothes. For I spend most of my time pottering about, identifying and tabulating the various types of mosses and lichens and ferns which are to be found on these wonderful moors in such abundance. I have found the place to be a perfect treasure house. And the loneliness does not worry me in the least."

By this time Handforth had disconnected the atrocity, and the Morris Minor was herself again. It is only fair to add that Handforth had, in all probability, fitted that gadget upside down, or back to front. Fitted by an expert mechanic, it would probably have functioned well.

Handforth began to take an interest in Professor Matthew Merritt. He was mildly astonished, for Professor Merritt was a very famous man.

"Don't you have a job to keep your servants, sir?" asked Edward Oswald, with a glance through the big gates at the stark and gloomy prison.

"I have given up attempting to keep servants," replied the professor. "I live quite alone. And it suits me." He turned abruptly. "Well, boys, since I cannot help you, I will be getting back to my breakfast. Good-morning."

The talk of servants, it seemed, had upset him. He went in and closed the door. And Handforth & Co., climbing back into the Morris Minor, were soon bowling St. Frank's-wards merrily. The little car was now reveling in her freedom.

"Something funny about that old chap" said McClure slowly, after a while.

"Living alone, you mean?" asked Handforth. "Nothing in that. He's a botanist, and he roots about on the moors, looking for moss and stuff. People who do that sort of thing must be half dotty."

"Why should they be half dotty?" asked Mac. "Some of the world's greatest discoveries have been made by these 'half dotty' people. I meant something else. He seemed to be on the alert all the while—almost as though he expected somebody else to come. Yet he said that he was alone. And did you notice his eyes?"

"What about them?" asked Handforth, staring.

"It may have been my imagination, but they seemed to contain a look, far back, of fear," said Mac. "You know—a kind of dread. Almost terror. He spoke kindly enough, and everything he said was casual. But there was that look there—at the back of his eyes—"

In the days to come, Handforth and Church were destined to remember those strange words of Arnold McClure's.

CHAPTER 7.

The Second Warning.

MR. JAMES KINGSWOOD awoke suddenly.

Darkness surrounded him. He could faintly see the outline of the window, and when he turned his head, and leaned across the bed, he could see the luminous dial of his wrist-watch—which was hung on a little hook near the head of the bed. The hands pointed to the hour of twelve.

Midnight.

Fighting Jim wondered why he had awakened. He had been asleep for less than an hour, and it was very seldom that he awoke, after once falling off. He was a sound sleeper, and generally slumbered on until his usual hour for rising.

The night was quite still—and, outside, foggy. Before Mr. Kingswood had got into bed he had had a look out of the window, and he had told himself that before morning the fog would probably be dense. It had been creeping in from the sea all the evening—a thin, wreathing mist, patchy and illusory. Then it had gathered, and St. Frank's had gone to bed amid a pall of utter silence.

Suddenly, Fighting Jim stiffened. He fancied he had seen a movement near the bed, on the left side. It was ridiculous, of course. How could anybody have got into his room? He reached out a hand, in order to press the hanging electric light switch.

"No, Mr. Kingswood, do not touch that switch!" said a soft, whispering voice.

The Head sat stock-still. He was startled. But his nerves were strong, and, with admirable strength, he kept a grip on himself.

"Who is it?" he asked. "Who are you? If this is some silly practical joke——"

He broke off abruptly. For unexpectedly a green glow had appeared overhead, yet Mr. Kingswood knew there was no lamp there. It cast a weird light over the bed and the immediate vicinity of the bed. And the headmaster caught his breath in with a gulp as he saw four figures—two on either side of him.

They were strange, grotesque figures—green in colour, wearing long, flowing robes. No features were visible, for their heads were covered with shapeless masks, and enormously high conical hats arose. Mr. Kingswood was reminded of illustrations he had seen at various times of the celebrated Ku Klux Klan, of America.

"If you move, or make any outcry, you will be dealt with harshly," said the voice.

"Mr. Kingswood, you are in the presence of four agents of the Fellowship of the Free."

It was with difficulty that Fighting Jim restrained an exclamation. This could be no practical joke! Not a soul in the school, barring himself and Nelson Lee, knew anything of the Fellowship of the Free! This, then, was the next move!

"This is absurd," said the Head angrily.

"You may call it what you will," went on the spokesman of the four. "We are here, Mr. Kingswood, to add to our earlier instructions—and to ask you why you have failed to obey those instructions."

The Head thought rapidly.

He pretended to be highly nervous, and acted well. Perhaps it would be better than putting on the bold front which his natural inclinations urged him to do.

"I ignored your instructions because I considered them to be outrageous," he replied. "I refuse to take my orders from unknown sources. I have a responsibility to the governors of this school, and responsibility to the boys——"

"All of which is beside the point," broke in the spokesman.

"You have been told

to ignore your employers. You have been watched during this past week."

"Watched? By whom?"

"By the agents of the Fellowship."

"That's nonsense! You can't bluff me that, your agents have been in the school——"

"Our agents are everywhere," said the grim voice. "You will be watched always. Wherever you go, whatever you do, the Fellowship of the Free will be constantly at your elbow."

Mr. Kingswood gave an excellent imitation of fear.

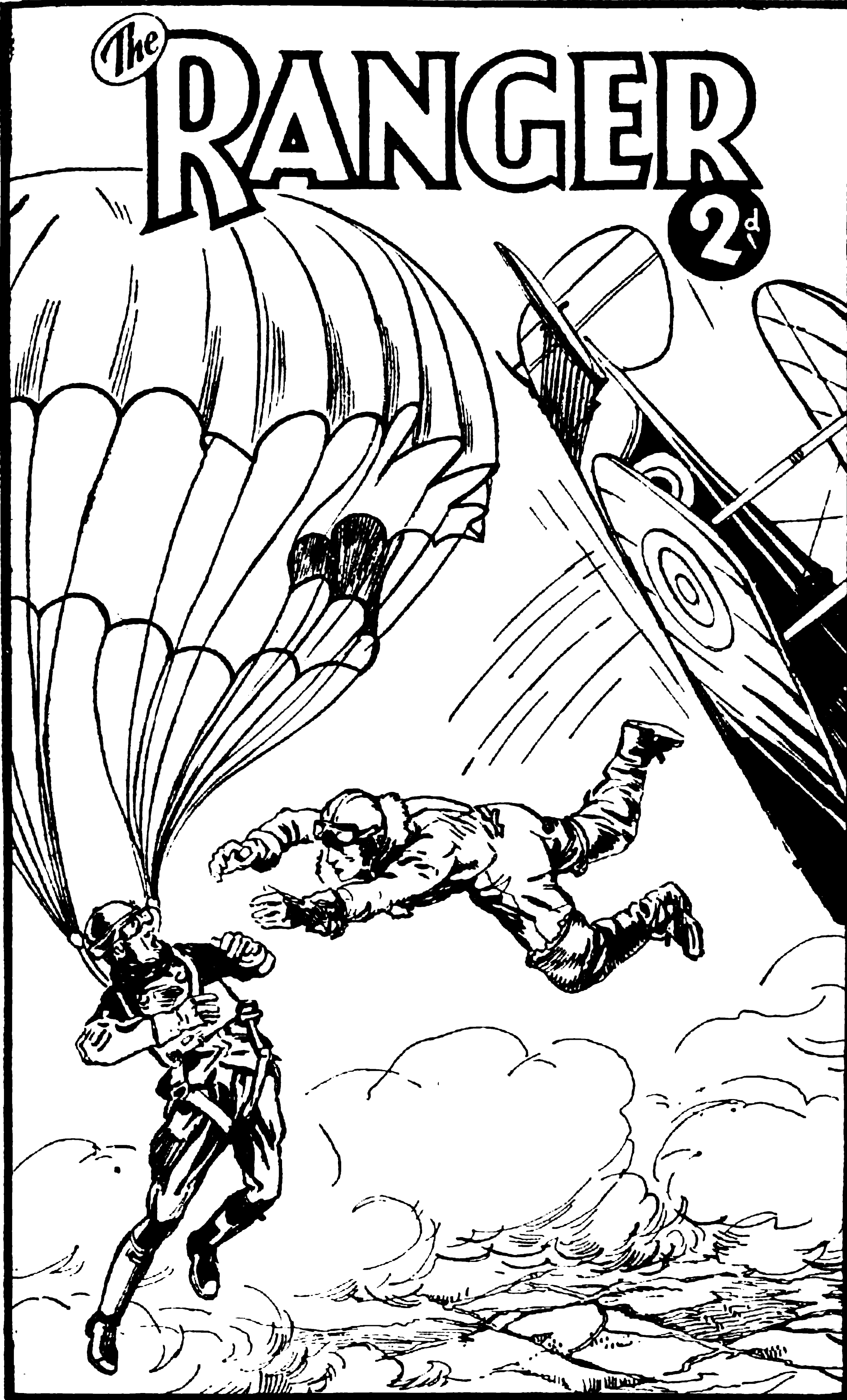
"Who are you?" he asked hoarsely. "Why do you persecute me in this way?"

"The persecution is of your own making," replied the spokesman. "Obey our bidding, and the persecution will not only cease, but you will be granted the full protection of the fellowship. Further than that, you will be marked down as a willing worker, and when the great day comes you will be a privileged and honoured man."

"I—I don't understand," faltered Mr. Kingswood, looking nervously from one figure to the other. "What is this great day? I do not believe in your nonsensical talk."

"Have you not had sufficient evidence of our power?" asked the spokesman. "We are in your house, in your bed-room, at your





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bedside. Bolts and bars do not deter the Fellowship of the Free. Whenever we please, we can be at your side."

"Good heavens!" muttered the Head.

"Therefore, take heed of this second warning," proceeded the spokesman relentlessly. "Since you received our original instructions you have been watched. You have not obeyed. You have made no attempt to obey. You will be given one more week."

"And—and then?" asked Mr. Kingswood.

"During this week of grace you will be watched; and if you continue to instruct your boys on the old lines—if, in fact, you make no alteration in the school curriculum, as our instructions order, then you will die."

Mr. Kingswood suddenly gave a laugh of scorn.

"So you think you can frighten me with this further threat?" he asked, appearing to be excited. "I don't take any notice of you! I shall not alter the school curriculum in any way. I have my duty to perform, and I'm not frightened of you and your cheap terrorism."

It was a kind of frantic defiance, mingled with fear; and it was just the right note. The intruders believed that Mr. Kingswood was a weak man in such a situation as this; and, like so many weak men, he was pig-headed.

"We have given you the warning; it is for you to utilise this coming week as we have instructed," said the spokesman. "Obey, and you will be safe. Disobey, and death will be your reward."

Even as the man was speaking he raised a hand from the folds of his gown. Something gleamed dully; a kind of automatic pistol. But when the man pulled the trigger a short, sharp puff of vapour shot out from the muzzle. It was silent, unexpected, and before Mr. Kingswood could move, the puff of vapour completely enveloped his head.

"You—you infernal——" he began.

And then he choked; he coughed once, his hands beat feebly, and he sank back upon the pillow, motionless.

The green glow overhead died away, and darkness fell upon the bed-room.

As the men noiselessly opened the door and passed out, a shadow, quite invisible, moved at the farther end of the passage.

For Nelson Lee had been ready.

Not only had he watched the arrival of the mystery men, but he had followed them to the headmaster's bed-room, and he had waited outside the door, gun in hand, ready to leap in if there was any sign of Fighting Jim being in danger. Lee had deliberately held his hand, for he was not ready to pounce yet—by a long way.

But the very words of the spokesman, reaching Lee's ears, told him that the Head was in no immediate danger. So the detective crept silently away.

Those intruders were careful; they were constantly on their guard. But never once did they know that a silent shadow followed them down the stairs. They left the building as they had entered—by means of a small rear window which had been easily forced.

Outside the fog was dense. No doubt the fellowship agents had waited for such a night as this. For the fog blanketed their movements, and, in the event of an alarm, it was a hundred to one chance that they would get away.

In complete silence they moved across Inner Court. Lee was fairly close behind them now, relying more upon his sense of hearing than his eyesight. He dared not approach too closely. But his hearing was as acute as that of an Indian tracker. And the great detective glowed with satisfaction as he realised that the intruders were making their exit from the school premises by means of Big Arch and the Triangle.

There had been a pause of some minutes just after the men had left the house. Lee had no doubt that they were removing and storing their fantastic gowns and hoods. Now they had reached Big Arch, and were passing through it.

Zzzzzzzzzh!

A little splutter sounded from the ground as the men were silently walking through the archway. The men started, for a flame had spurted up, but it died away again instantly.

"What—what was that?" whispered one of the mystery men.

"Curse! Nothing much—only a match-head," murmured another. "I must have trodden upon it."

It was a trivial enough incident; and it was over in a flash. Most people, at various times in their lives, have trodden upon carelessly dropped, non-safety matches. So the agents of the Fellowship of the Free passed on into the Triangle—with no thought of the truth.

Nelson Lee, in their rear, was gloating.

For, extraordinary as it may seem, he had actually succeeded in obtaining a snapshot of the four men! He had taken a chance—and it had come off.

For, concealed in a crevice of the stonework in the archway was a very special little camera—a camera which was provided with infra-red ray plates!

The "matchhead" had been a special contrivance of Nelson Lee's own invention. No matter where the men trod in the archway, they were bound to ignite the tiny spurt of flame.

And with an infra-red photographic plate, that one tiny, feeble flicker of light was sufficient. The fog would make no difference—for such photographic plates can take snapshots of startling clarity in the thickest of fogs.

Nelson Lee had certainly scored a trick here. When he came to develop that plate he expected to see something interesting. But it could wait. His task now was to follow these men, and to discover, if possible, their local headquarters. For Nelson Lee did not doubt that the fellowship agents were stationed somewhere in the district. Caistowe, perhaps. Caistowe had some reputation as a winter resort, and even in January quite a sprinkling of visitors were to be found there. And such visitors would

cause no comment. Perhaps the fellowship agents were staying openly at one of the hotels, presumably respectable men by day-time.

Nelson Lee hoped for the best. The chances were, the men would have different hotels or lodgings. Perhaps they would separate, and go different ways. Lee was prepared for anything.

CHAPTER 8.

Handforth Makes a Big Discovery.

"WHAT about it?" asked Handforth eagerly.

Church and McClure were at a loss for words. They knew Edward Oswald pretty well, and, wild as his suggestions sometimes were, they had long since got beyond the stage of being astonished.

But when he awoke them at midnight, and calmly suggested that they should get dressed and go on a prow in the fog—well, they were more or less speechless.

"You fatheads haven't gone to sleep again, have you?" whispered Handforth.

"We're not asleep—we're stunned!" said Church bitterly.

"This is no time to be funny——"

"Then what's the idea of waking us up, and talking like a lunatic?" demanded McClure. "Go to sleep!"

"I've hardly slept a wink since lights-out," replied Handforth, sitting up in bed and hugging his knees. "Don't you see what a grand opportunity it is? This fog is as thick as pea-soup."

"We're not hungry!" said Church. "We'd rather stay indoors. Besides, I don't think a lot of pea-soup, anyway."

"It's my private opinion that Carson is a crook," said Handforth grimly.

"Carson? Who's Carson?" asked Church. "Wasn't there a great Irishman named Carson? He's a lord, isn't he?"

"You—you imbecile!" said Handforth. "I'm talking about the Head's new chauffeur."

"Oh!"

"He's a funny-looking bird, and he's got shifty eyes," went on Handforth. "I'm not forgetting the way he talked to me the other day, either. I saw a case in the paper where a man got employment as a chauffeur, and then, when the first foggy night came, he not only pinched all his employer's valuables, but pinched the car, too, and made a clean get-away. The police never collared him. How do we know that this isn't the same man?"

Church and McClure groaned.

Their anguish was all the more acute because they were reluctantly compelled to admit that there was something in Handforth's argument. Generally, there was nothing in his arguments, and then they were able to squash him. At least, they would

have a jolly good try. Not that Handforth was ever really squashed.

And he was imbued with the fantastic idea that he was an excellent amateur detective. It was a mania with him. He would grasp at the lightest straw, if it offered any chance of detective work.

He got out of bed, and commenced dressing.

"Well, I've given you chaps the chance," he said firmly. "I've offered to take you with me as my assistants. But if you prefer to stay in bed, sleeping like lazy louts, it's up to you. I'm going out!"

"Oh crumbs!" moaned Church. "He means it!"

"Don't you think we'd be justified in knocking him on the head?" whispered McClure. "We can't have an ordinary fight—it would make too much noise. If we could only stun him with something——"

"You couldn't stun him with a sledge-hammer," growled the other unfortunately. "It's any odds that the sledge-hammer would be split open."

So Church and McClure resigned themselves to the inevitable. Unless they could dissuade Handforth from this preposterous night prowling, they would have to go with him. Their loyalty was really wonderful. If Handforth went out alone, it was any odds that he would make a noise, or smash a window, or do something to give himself away. And if a prefect or a master found him roving about the school at midnight, he would be in for a flogging, if not expulsion. And, much as Church and McClure hated the idea of getting out of their warm beds, they did not want to see their leader in serious trouble.

"Before Mac and I start dressing, what's the idea—exactly?" asked Church, in a resigned voice.

"That's better," said Handforth, recognising the well-known signs. "That's a lot better! So you've made up your minds to come with me?"

"Not yet," said Church. "We want to know what you're going to do."

"Watch Carson's quarters!" replied Handforth dramatically.

"Watch his what?"

"His quarters."

"We're not interested in Carson's quarters," said McClure, with a sniff. "I admit he seems to be a well-built man——"

"I mean his sleeping quarters, you idiot!"

"Why didn't you say so, then?"

"Carson sleeps over the Head's garage," continued Handforth. "Look how easy it would be for him to sneak out, bag Fighting Jim's valuables, grab the car, and scoot?"

"In this fog?"

"Why not?"

"Car thieves don't choose foggy nights, you hopeless ass!" said Church, in exasperation. "He'd be in a ditch before he'd driven a couple of hundred yards."

"H'm! That's possible," admitted Handforth reluctantly. "Still, it won't do any

harm if we have a look at his quarters—— I mean, if we prowling round the garage, and see that everything is all right."

"It'll mean getting into the Head's garden—and if we're found there we shall be sunk," said McClure.

"No need to go into the Head's garden at all," replied Handforth promptly. "We can get over the wall into the private lane, and dodge round and inspect the garage from that angle. Look here, I'll make a bargain with you chaps. We'll only stay there for a certain given time, and if nothing happens, we'll come back to bed."

"All right—we'll have to give in, I suppose," said Church. "Five minutes, then."

"Eh? What do you mean—five minutes?"

"We'll watch the garage for five minutes."

"Rats! We shall have to keep on the job for a couple of hours, at least," said Handforth. "That's the given time, my sons. Two hours. Is it agreed?"

His chums gave it up. In fact, they thought it better not to argue any longer. They trusted to the fog. Twenty minutes outside, in that chill mist, would probably cause Handforth to change his mind.

They dressed rebelliously, but said nothing more.

It occurred to Church that they might stage an effective collision in the corridor; or, by being extra clumsy, he and Mac might throw Handforth downstairs. The commotion would bring a prefect on the scene, and then Handforth's stunt would be knocked on the head. But after due consideration, Church dismissed the idea. It wouldn't be playing the game.

"Ready?" came Handforth's eager voice.

It was amazing how he enjoyed those nocturnal expeditions. Any sane fellow was glad enough to snuggle in his bed on winter nights. But the urge to creep out on a midnight prowling was, with Handforth, something like a recurring disease. It attacked him at intervals, and until the seizure had run its course, nothing could be done with him. He enjoyed himself immensely.

"Remember, not a sound as we go downstairs," he whispered. "We'll dodge into the cloak-room and get our mufflers and overcoats. It might be cold, standing about."

"Really?" asked Church, in mock surprise.

"Of course it'll be cold," said Handforth, who was seldom aware of sarcasm. "It's not summertime, is it? We've got some rubber-soled shoes down there, too. And I'd better dodge to the study to get my electric torch."

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to take a gun or two?" suggested McClure. "Or, we might bag some of Browne's golf-clubs. He's a careless ass, and generally leaves them in the cloak-room."

"That's a good idea!" said Handforth, to McClure's astonishment. Golf clubs are jolly handy as weapons. Come on! By George! This is going to be exciting!"

Little did he realise how exciting! There was something really uncanny about Edward Oswald Handforth's luck. He might have chosen any night for this mad escapade; but

it was just his luck to choose this one special night. There wasn't another fellow in the school who possessed his happy knack of blundering—absolutely blindly—into adventure.

They completed the preliminaries without finding trouble.

Having got downstairs safely, they went into the cloak-room, donned their overcoats, mufflers and caps, and changed into stout, rubber-soled shoes. They each took one of William Napoleon Browne's celebrated golf-clubs, and then they went along to Study D. Here Handforth took possession of an excellent electric torch, and then he quietly opened the window.

"Remember, you chaps—not a sound!" he whispered, clumping his shoe heavily on the windowsill as he started climbing through. "If we're seen, the results might be serious."

"A swishing each all round," murmured Church.

"Rats! I didn't mean that," said Handforth. "I was thinking of Carson. If he gets to know that we're on his trail——"

"All right—go ahead!" said Church hastily.

He and McClure sincerely believed that this adventure would be like many another. They would prowl about for a bit, Handforth would find one or two mare's nests, and then they would all return to bed, thoroughly cold, thoroughly irritable, and thoroughly fed-up. And it was a dead certainty that Handforth would blame his chums for the failure of the enterprise. He was a queer customer.

But he was such a good fellow at heart, such a downright sportsman, that Church and McClure were ever ready to forgive his eccentricities. His generosity was a by-word; and it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that he would have given his life for either Church or McClure if they were ever in a position of dire peril. They chaffed him, they quarrelled with him endlessly, but they knew that his friendship was of spun gold.

"You're going the wrong way!" whispered Church as they crept through the dense fog.

"Who's doing the leading?" demanded Handforth gruffly. "We're going straight towards the dividing wall, and were going to climb over it and get into the lane——"

"But we're not," broke in Church. "We're going towards West Arch, and that'll lead us into the Triangle."

"Do you think I don't know my way about better than that?" retorted Handforth. "If you chaps will only follow me, and keep your traps shut, everything will be all right."

"Go ahead, then—have your own way!"

Church and McClure gave him his head. As a matter of fact, Handforth had failed to take notice of his bearings after he had left the vicinity of the Ancient House wall. And that was a mistake. In such a fog as this, which closed round them like a blanket, it was very easy to take the wrong direction.

Church and McClure were right, of course. After walking on for some little way, they

suddenly saw, ghostly and mysterious, a wall in front of them.

"That's funny," said Handforth. "There oughtn't to be a wall here—not this kind of wall, anyhow. There are windows in it!"

McClure was feeling his way along.

"Here's the arch," he said briefly.

"Great pip! I—I thought we were walking in the opposite direction!" murmured Handforth, startled. "Well I'm jiggered! Well, we're not going to turn back now, or we shall lose our bearings again. We'll go through the arch, and then cut up the Triangle."

They crept through, and, as luck would have it, they made no sounds. Even Handforth was walking so quietly that he resembled a shadow more than a human being. He was the first to reach the other end of West Arch, and he continued to advance.

Then, suddenly, he halted, all his senses on the alert. Church and McClure were not alert at all. They didn't think it was necessary.

But Handforth had distinctly heard the sound of a pebble rattling. Somebody was out there, just in front of him, walking across the gravel! Indeed, even as Handforth checked himself he saw that the fog, ahead, was thinner. There was a small patch where the density was much less. And something was moving there.

"By George!" he exclaimed.

And, forgetting all his advice to his chums, he ran forward. He generally acted upon impulse, and his idea, now, was to grab the mysterious figure before it could get away. Church and McClure were left well behind, for they had heard nothing.

"Now then, my beauty!" hissed Handforth, as he ran. "I've got you!"

Almost before he knew it he was at close quarters; and he saw, to his startled astonishment, that there were three or four figures! They were just as astonished as he; but they were far more ready for action. Two of them, at the same instant, swung their hands outwards, uttering low exclamations of alarm.

Puff! Puff!

The discharges of vapour were almost invisible in the fog, but they enveloped Handforth in a cloud. He gasped, he gurgled, and instinctively he shut his mouth and closed his eyes. He staggered back drunkenly. His feet caught against something, and he overbalanced.

Splash!

Handforth's luck again! He had backed into the fountain pool, and he went clean under, making such a commotion that Church and McClure caught their breath in with dismay.

That ducking saved Handforth from the effects of the stupefying vapour. He had only taken one whiff, and although he was half-unconscious, the cold water partially revived him. Furthermore, he had backed out of the zone. Church and McClure, running right into it, without realising what they were doing, were soon reeling about in distress, and they both sank to the ground.



As the master-crook turned to leave the prison cell, the kidnapped headmaster leaped. In a struggling heap the pair crashed to the stone floor, fighting madly !

Fortunately, they had only breathed in a slight amount of the partially dissipated vapour.

As Handforth fell under the water he was as near as possible "out." And it is just possible that he would have remained in that condition, in spite of the reviving effect of the plunge. But help was at hand.

Quick, pattering footsteps sounded from the direction of the outer wall; a slight scrambling, and then a series of thuds as the intruders dropped into the road. But another figure leapt out of the mist, and in a moment it had clutched at Handforth and had pulled him up out of the disturbed pool.

Nelson Lee was furious.

He had recognised Handforth's voice, and he knew just what had happened. It was impossible to trail the Fellowship agents now. Handforth was in the fountain pool, and there was a chance that he was unconscious. He would drown helplessly unless somebody lifted him out. And Lee had dimly seen Church and McClure sinking to the ground.

There was only one thing to do, therefore—to lift Handforth out. And the detective gave up all idea of following the mystery men. Better not to now, in fact—for they would be doubly on the alert.

"You young idiot!" muttered Lee, in exasperation, as he laid Handforth on the ground.

He took out his electric torch and flashed it upon the prostrate boy. Handforth was wily. He thought, in fact, that he was very clever. He did not know who his companion was, but he meant to find out. And the easiest

way to find out was to pretend to be unconscious. It was easy enough, for his brain was still dulled, and the cold water had numbed him.

But even he did not realise just what his little pretence was to lead to.

For another figure merged out of the fog, coming, in fact, from the direction of the shrubbery. Lee turned his light upon it. The newcomer was Nipper, well-muffled.

"Guv'nor!" he breathed. "What's happened?"

"Hush!" warned Lee. "It's that young idiot, Handforth!"

"Great Scott!"

"You'd better take charge of him—and of Church and McClure, too," went on Nelson Lee rapidly. "They mustn't see me——"

"But what's wrong with them?" asked Nipper, in wonder. "I was on the watch in the shrubbery, as we planned, but I didn't see anything, or hear anything——"

"Never mind that," interrupted Lee. "The agents of the fellowship were here—four of them."

"My only sainted aunt!"

"I was on their trail—but Handforth interrupted, and the men used some special kind of vapour guns." Lee sounded very grim. "I don't think they're dangerous—they are designed merely to cause unconsciousness. They are silent and very effective. These boys caught a mere whiff."

"Leave them to me, guv'nor," said Nipper. "They mustn't see you, it's a cert."

A smothered sound came from Handforth. He couldn't help it. He had ventured to

open his eyes slightly, for, in his astonishment, he wanted to have a look at his two companions. Nelson Lee's presence at the school startled him. But when he saw the man who was with Nipper he was fairly dumbfounded. For, in the reflected light from the torch, and at such close quarters, he saw—Carson, the chauffeur!

"Look out!" warned Lee. "He's coming to."

"Cheese it, Mr. Lee," said Handforth, suddenly sitting up. "I've twigged you!"

Nelson Lee was not a swearing man, but never had he felt more like it than at that moment.

"You—you fraud!" hissed Nipper, in alarm. "You were only shamming!"

"I know—but I wasn't shamming at first," protested Handforth, with mingled excitement and eagerness. "I didn't know who it was who lugged me out of the fountain pool, and I wanted to find out."

"I'm afraid this is your doing, Nipper," said Lee in undisguised exasperation.

"Mine!" protested Nipper indignantly.

"I warned you, days ago, to always address me as Carson," said Lee. "In the excitement of the moment you forget—and Handforth was listening. The fat's in the fire now, I'm afraid."

The fat, in fact, was sizzling. Church and McClure had got over the effects of their partial dose, and had now staggered to the spot, and were looking on and listening, dazed and bewildered.

"I'm awfully sorry, guv'nor," said Nipper contritely. "You're quite right, of course. I was a fool. But I thought Handforth was unconscious."

"So did I," growled Lee. "You tricked us both, you young rascal!"

Handforth was rapidly recovering himself.

"I don't know that you can call it a trick, sir," he said calmly. "I thought it was pretty clever. Real detective work, eh? I thought I was fooling a crook, and all the time it was you!" His calmness left him. "You, sir!" he went on breathlessly. "We were on the prowl to-night because of you. I thought you were a crook——"

"You always think weird and wonderful things, Handforth," grunted Nelson Lee. "Well, it's no good crying over spilt milk. And it's no good staying here, either. You'd better come straight indoors and get out of those wet things. Come along. You look after the others, Nipper. We're lucky that nobody else has seen us."

Lee half-carried Handforth indoors, much to the latter's indignation. And Lee, in his mind, was thinking that he would be obliged to suddenly resign from his post, and appear at St. Frank's in a different personality. Such a secret in Handforth's keeping was dangerous. But it was an awkward position. If anybody else came to St. Frank's—a new gardener, a groom, or anybody like that—Handforth would give them his very close attention.

The whole situation was unfortunate, but it was not Nelson Lee's way to moan. He would have to make the best of a bad job.

They all went indoors, they stole upstairs, and while Handforth had a quick rub-down in a bath-room, superintended by Nipper, his chums were cared for by Nelson Lee. The detective was relieved to find that they were none the worse for their adventure.

Thus it came about that Handforth & Co. were in the great secret.

CHAPTER 9.

Sworn to Silence.

NELSON LEE was in a hard mood.

For the sake of privacy he had taken Handforth & Co. down to Study D. There was little or no chance of them being overheard. It would have been risky to hold this informal conference in the dormitory, with so many other boys at close quarters.

"Well, Handforth, what have you got to say?" asked Lee grimly.

Handforth cleared his throat. He had been thinking rapidly whilst rubbing down and changing into his pyjamas and dressing-gown. And he felt that he had one trump card up his sleeve. He was ready to play it at the right moment.

Study D was bright with the electric light. The blind was closely drawn, and the door was shut. Nelson Lee was wearing his full disguise with the exception of the false teeth. He had slipped them out, so that he could talk in his ordinary voice. But even now it was difficult to realise that this mahogany-featured man with the big nose was really the great detective.

"You're wonderful, sir," said Handforth, eyeing him with admiration.

"I did not ask you for an appreciation, Handforth," said Lee sternly. "I want to know what you were doing out of your bed after midnight. Quite apart from the fact that you upset all my plans, you know perfectly well that you had no right to be out-of-doors."

"I was suspicious, sir," said Handforth defensively.

"Of me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"Well, I'll admit I was wrong in my suspicions," said Handforth. "You haven't turned out to be a crook. But I was right in the main, wasn't I, sir?" he added triumphantly. "I mean, my idea that Carson, the chauffeur, was a suspicious character. And, by George, I've discovered that Carson is you! That proves that I was on a true scent."

Lee found it difficult to keep his face straight.

"Well, I'll grant you the point," he said. "But I'd like to know, young man, why you suspected me? Were my movements un-

usual? Was there something in my appearance—”

“It was your shifty eyes, sir,” said Church.

“Oh, indeed!”

“Handy didn’t like the look of ’em—and he thought you were a car bandit,” explained Church, with brutal frankness. “So I don’t see why he’s patting himself on the back. He was wrong all along the line.”

Nelson Lee sighed.

“It just shows you, Nipper, how careful I must be,” he said. “I adopt one or two mannerisms, in order to get quite away from my own personality, and Handforth immediately jumps to the conclusion that I am a dangerous criminal!”

“Well, now that we know so much, sir, perhaps you’ll tell us the rest?” asked Handforth, with his usual cool cheek. “What’s the game, sir? Can’t we be in on it?”

“It seems that you’re in on it whether I want you to be or not,” replied Lee gruffly. “But you’re breaking bounds after lights-out, and that is a grave offence.”

Handforth produced his trump card.

“But you can’t do anything, sir,” he said coolly. “You’re not a schoolmaster of St. Frank’s! You’re only the Head’s chauffeur! And the Head’s chauffeur hasn’t any authority over the boys!”

Nelson Lee laughed aloud.

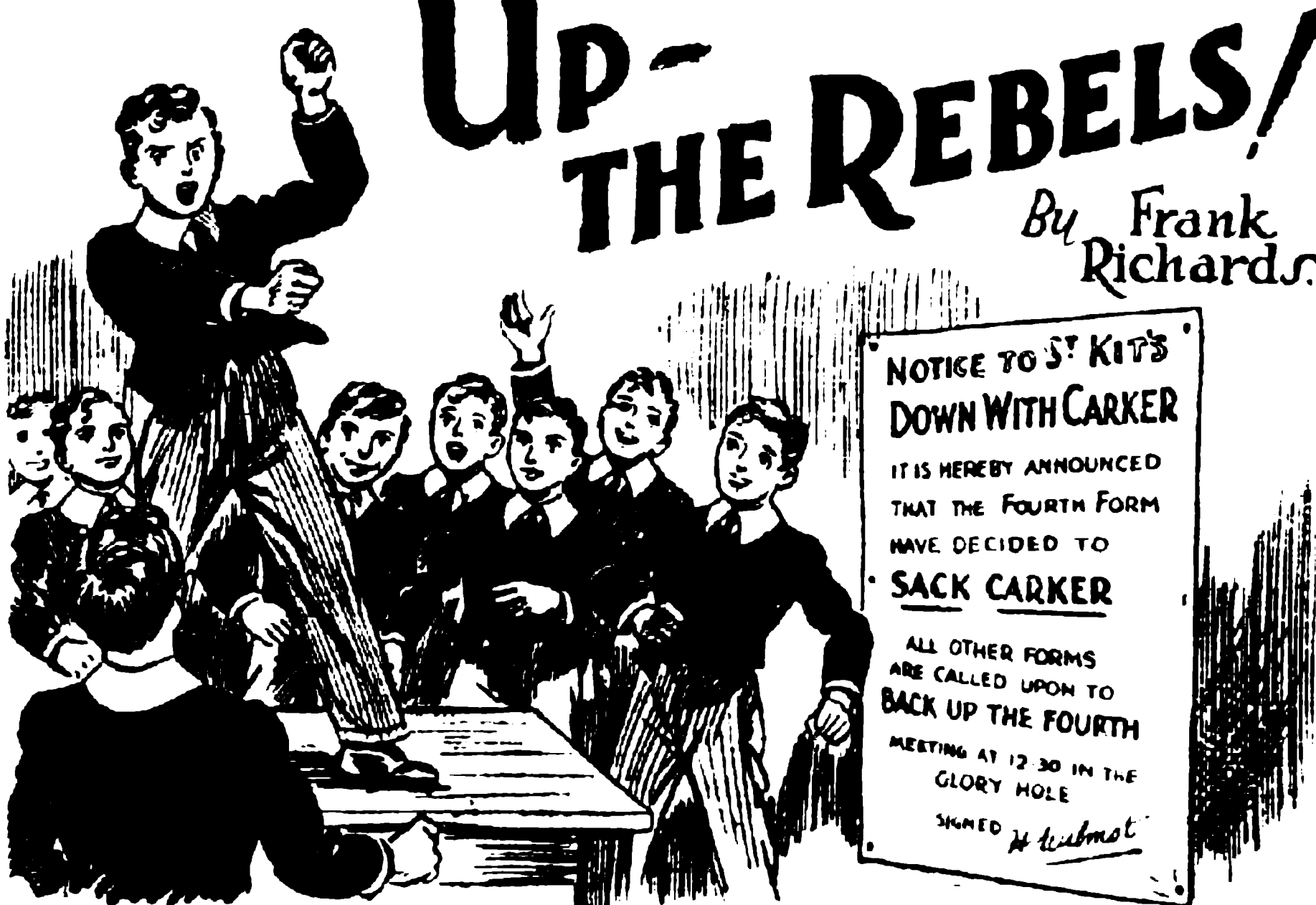
“You win, Handforth,” he said dryly. “You young rascal, you’re smarter than I thought.”

Whenever Handforth gained a point, he always knuckled under.

“Still, we’re in your hands, sir,” he said, becoming earnest. “It’s up to you. If you give us away to the Head, we’ll take our medicine without grumbling. But I’d like you to tell Mr. Kingswood that it was all my doing, and that Churchy and Mac were forced into it by me.”

Lee’s eyes twinkled.

“Well, Handforth, in the circumstances, we’ll say nothing about it,” he replied. “I’m not thinking entirely of you youngsters. I’m thinking of myself, too. Since you know so



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much, I find it necessary to take you more deeply into the secret."

"That's the order, sir!" said Handforth tensely.

"I am still very angry with you—and angrier with myself," continued Lee. "What I want you to get into your head, Handforth—and you others, too—is that this 'game' is of such importance, of such danger, that if you inadvertently give me away it might mean my death."

Lee was speaking very seriously, and Handforth & Co. listened just as seriously. The detective's tone was unmistakable. He was in grim, deadly earnest.

"But who's going to do anything like that, sir?" asked Handforth. "And why are you disguised in this way, and acting as Mr. Kingswood's chauffeur?"

"I'm not going to give you those details," replied Lee. "But I will tell you this much. Mr. Kingswood is in danger; he is being menaced by a remorseless secret society."

"My only hat!"

The men who attacked you to-night were members of that secret society," continued Lee. "They had just come from the headmaster's house. They had been giving him a warning. All this may sound incredible, but it happens to be the plain, unvarnished truth."

Lee was more serious than ever now.

"I took up my position here as chauffeur in order to protect Mr. Kingswood," he said, leaning forward. "Now, boys, I'm not exaggerating. If the agents of this secret society discover—by any means whatsoever—that I am not a chauffeur, and that I am, in fact, Lee, the detective, they will kill me without mercy. My very safety depends upon secrecy. Do you understand? You must not breathe a word of what you have discovered to-night. You must not take any of your schoolboy friends into your confidence; you must not answer any questions which might be put to you by strangers. No matter how innocent these strangers may look, you must profess complete ignorance. And, just as important, you must not discuss me—or Carson, whichever you like—out-of-doors. Far better not to discuss me at all. What I am trying to make you realise is that——"

"Is that if we are incautious, sir, we shall be the cause of your death," said Handforth.

"Yes, sir, we've got that. And you can be quite certain that we'll be jolly careful."

"I am going to pledge you to silence—swear you to silence," said Lee. "Now, boys, remember that this is a solemn oath. You must swear, on your word of honour, that you will keep this secret."

They swore fervently, fully appreciating the gravity of the situation.

"But isn't there any way in which we can help, sir?" asked Handforth. "I mean, now that we're in the know, what about it? There are three of us, and we're handy chaps. Just say the word, and we'll be ready. We don't mind the risks."

"That's very good of you, Handforth. and

I know that the offer comes from your heart," said Lee quietly. "But you must not imagine that there will be a lot of hectic adventures. It is more than likely that nothing whatever will happen for another week. I shall continue my duties in the ordinary way, and I doubt if there will be any more night excursions. But I will promise you that if I can find any way in which you can be used—I will use you. You will have to be satisfied with that. Now I want you to go to bed. And in the morning, remember. Absolute secrecy!"

"You can trust us, sir," said Church. "At least, you can trust Mac and me."

"Me, too," put in Handforth quickly. "I know I'm a careless sort of ass generally; I blurt things out, too. But you've impressed me with the seriousness of this case, sir, and you can trust me. By George! When I know that your very life depends upon my silence, you can take it as a cert that I'll keep mum. Honest injun, sir, you can bank on me."

"I believe you, Handforth," said Nelson Lee quietly.

They went up to bed. Even Handforth, inquisitive as he was, was sensible enough to refrain from further pointed questions. He was, indeed, strangely sobered. He had never been quite like this before. He had made a big discovery—quite by accident—and he felt the responsibility keenly. Nelson Lee's life might depend upon his discretion!

Then and there, he resolved to keep his eye upon Church and McClure, to watch them night and day, and to make sure that they did not utter an incautious word. A strange rôle for Handforth!

"Well, we've had a few rummy adventures in our time, but this beats everything!" said Church, when they were alone. "And to think that Mac and I tried to stop you from going out."

"We give you best, Handy," said McClure. "Still, you've got to admit that it was only by chance——"

"What was only by chance?" interrupted Handforth coldly.

"Why, coming across Mr. Lee so unexpectedly."

"Coming across whom?"

"Mr. Lee."

"Across whom?" insisted Handforth dangerously.

"Eh? What the dickens—— Coming across Carson, the chauffeur."

"That's better!"

"Great Scott! Are you looking after us?" breathed McClure in wonder. "It's generally we who have to look after you!"

"He won't keep it up," said Church. "I wish we knew more about that secret society——"

"What secret society?" demanded Handforth.

"Why the one Mr. Lee—I mean, Carson—— Eh?"

"We don't know anything of any secret society," said Handforth darkly. "We don't know anything about anything. Understand?"

My only Sunday topper! We haven't been alone five minutes before you asses start gassing! Before I've done with you I shall have to gag you! Don't you realise that it's risky to talk—even here?"

"Handy, old man, you're the world's greatest surprise-packet," said Church admiringly. "Good enough! Mac and I cave right in. And after this you'll never have cause to pull us up again."

Handforth sniffed.

"I hope you're right," he said. "But I doubt it."

NELSON LEE was looking at Nipper in a thoughtful way. They were both in the chauffeur's comfortable sitting-room, over the headmaster's garage.

"I don't think you should have come here, young 'un," said the detective. "I don't know why I allowed you to accompany me."

"It's safe enough, guv'nor," protested Nipper. "Those men have gone——"

"How many times, my lad, must I warn you never to take a n y t h i n g for granted!" asked the detective. "You think the men have gone. It is practically certain that they have gone. But we must not be too sure. Don't imagine that I am fanciful, or anything like that; but I am convinced that the Fellowship of the Free is one of the most dangerous criminal organisations which the world has ever known. It is particularly dangerous because the men at the head of it are not ordinary crooks; they are not out for plunder. They are men of ability, of learning. Most crooks are stupid, unintelligent. But the men who compose the Fellowship of the Free are fanatics, driven onwards by a burning fire of determination. They probably think that their aims are just and right. They will commit murder for the cause without compunction."

"Well, guv'nor, after this I'll be jolly careful," promised Nipper. "But, to tell you the truth, I wanted to be assured that you got indoors safely. What about Mr. Kingswood?"

"I'm going to communicate with him now," replied Lee calmly.

He went to a pedestal radio which stood on a little table. Opening the back of it, he removed the metal casing of one of its parts, and, to Nipper's astonishment, he produced a tiny telephone receiver.

"Great Scott!" said Nipper. "So it's a fake radio!"

"Not at all," said Lee. "This radio is very efficient; it brings in most European stations excellently. But there is a little

addition here which I fitted personally. I don't think many people would suspect its presence."

"I say, you're taking every precaution, guv'nor!" said Nipper admiringly.

"And I need to. A secret wire communicates with Mr. Kingswood's study and his bed-room. Mr. Kingswood is exceedingly interested in wireless." Lee's eyes twinkled. "He is so interested, in fact, that he has two radios. One in his bed-room, and one in his study."

"I twig," said Nipper, nodding.

"And when I press button 'A,' Mr. Kingswood's two radios oscillate slightly," continued Lee. "Quite a novel idea in telephones, eh, young 'un?"

He became alert.

"Oh, hallo! That you, Jim?" he said quickly.

"Yes, Carson," came Mr. Kingswood's voice, very softly and slightly husky. "I thought perhaps you'd come personally. Did you see those funny brutes?"

"Yes, but I lost them in the fog. Are you all right?"

"I am now—but I wasn't," came Mr. Kingswood's voice. "They gave me a warning—death by the end of a week unless I obey orders. Then,

when they went out, they shot some gas, or vapour, over me, and I lost consciousness. I must have been 'out' for over fifteen minutes."

"But you're quite all right now? No after-effects?"

"Only a little huskiness, and a soreness in my throat."

"Well, I don't think there'll be any further disturbance to-night," said Lee. "I advise you to go straight to sleep. I shall do the same. We'll have a talk over this to-morrow."

He rang off, and Nipper watched him in wonder.

"Why, that's a corking idea, sir," he exclaimed.

"You see, my position here is difficult," said Lee. "I cannot go to Mr. Kingswood openly at any hour of the day without causing comment. I must act at all times as a chauffeur. I can get him alone occasionally whilst we are driving. But at other times, especially at night, approach is risky. That is why I fitted up this private telephone. By its means Mr. Kingswood and I can converse in absolute secrecy whenever we like."

Nipper was impressed. More than ever he realised the importance which Nelson Lee attached to this singular case.



"Since you are here, perhaps you had better help me," continued the detective. "You ought to be in bed, really, but another fifteen minutes won't matter. After this, my lad, there must be no more gallivanting about."

"Rats!" said Nipper, grinning. "When you want me on the job, guv'nor, I'll be ready. I may be at St. Frank's as a schoolboy, but you know jolly well that I'm still your assistant. So don't come any more of your bunkum."

Nelson Lee sighed.

"And that's the way you talk to me, after all my training!" he said. "I'm afraid you're a hopeless case, Nipper."

"What's the job?" asked Nipper practically.

Lee produced the tiny camera, and his eyes were gleaming. He told Nipper of the trick he had played, and Nipper became excited.

"And do you mean to tell me, guv'nor, that a photograph can be taken in fog, by a mere flickering flare of match-head?"

"By means of the infra-red photographic plate, an excellent photo can be taken by the invisible rays from an ordinary flat-iron," replied Lee calmly. "I don't mean a red-hot iron. Just a hot one. It is one of the marvels of modern science."

"Well, nobody can say you're not up-to-date, guv'nor," said Nipper. "By jingo, let's have a look at that plate!"

No dark-room was necessary. Nelson Lee produced a patent developing tank and other apparatus. The slide was carefully removed from the camera, placed in the other apparatus, and Lee busied himself. Presently—within a few minutes, in fact—he was able to remove the plate.

"By James!" he exclaimed exultantly.

"Anything on it, guv'nor?"

"This negative, my lad, is as nearly perfect as it could be," replied Lee. "The definition is clear cut. Here they are—the four figures distinctly. Two of them, unfortunately, have their faces turned away. One is directly facing the camera, and there is a good profile of another. As I expected, the men had discarded their weird robes, and we shall thus see them as they actually are."

The detective was almost as eager as Nipper himself. He proceeded, without delay, to obtain a rapid print. He had all the necessary appliances.

"To-morrow, young 'un, I shall make an enlargement of this snap," he said. "It might be more important than either of us realise. In the enlargement we may recognise one of these men—perhaps two."

When the print was ready Lee laid it upon an ordinary breakfast plate—for it was soaking wet—and held it under the light.

"A powerful Coddington lens will serve as a substitute for the enlargement," he said.

"By James, Nipper! Do you see how excellent the photograph is?"

"It's just marvellous, guv'nor," said Nipper. "It's like a flashlight. I shan't believe—I say, look at that man's face!"

he went on eagerly. "Why, I know who he is! He's that landscape painter, over at Pine Cottage, near Edgemore."

"What!" exclaimed Lee sharply. "Are you sure of this?"

"Absolutely certain," said Nipper, with growing excitement. "I was out with some of our chaps for a cross-country run two or three days ago, and we came across Mr. Bentley—that's his name—sitting by the bank of the river, painting a winter landscape. It was beautifully done, too. He was as pleased as Punch when we paused to admire his work."

"Look again, Nipper—make sure."

Nipper took the powerful magnifying lens and inspected the face of the man who happened to be fronting the camera.

"Yes, that's Bentley, without a doubt, sir," he said. "Can't mistake a face like that. And do you mean to tell me he was one of those crooks who went to the Head's house to-night, all faked up in rummy robes—"

"I must repeat, my boy, that these men are not ordinary crooks," said Lee, his eyes ablaze. "This is an extraordinary stroke of luck."

"I don't call it luck; I call it brilliance on your part, sir."

"Nonsense! It was luck," insisted Lee. "The men might have left the school premises

A

Non-Stop Thriller—

**"ST.
FRANK'S
IN
PERIL!"**

—NEXT WEEK!

by a dozen routes. I took a chance in placing my camera in that crevice in Big Arch. So the respectable Mr. Bentley, the landscape painter of Pine Cottage, is one of the secret agents of the Fellowship of Fear! We are progressing, young 'un! We have got a definite line to work upon. I shall make it my business to give Mr. Bentley some close but unobtrusive attention."

CHAPTER 10.

The Secret Headquarters.

A SOLITARY figure, ghostly in the fog, trudged with weary footsteps across the bleak expanse of Bannington Moor.

It was between one and two o'clock, and the night was eerily still. The fog blanketed down over the moor like something tangible.

The man, dragging his footsteps, was a typical vagrant. His shoes gaped. His overcoat, buttoned tightly about him, was ragged and weather-stained. In lieu of a collar he wore a grubby-looking "choker." His cap, with its greasy peak, was pulled far down over his forehead.

He trudged on.

Out of the wreathing mist on the right-hand side of the road loomed the mysterious

bulk of a black, forbidding building. There was a glimpse of great gates, securely closed. The lonely wayfarer, in fact, was passing the grim and abandoned convict prison.

But he did not pass it completely.

He halted in the road when he arrived opposite the gateway of the governor's house—the house which was occupied by Professor Matthew Merritt, the kindly faced old botanist.

The silence was absolute.

The vagrant, after listening carefully for some moments, gently opened the gates and walked to the forbidding front door. In spite of the fog and the darkness he felt unerringly for the electric bell-push. Then he waited. He had given a number of short pushes and long pushes of a curiously set pattern.

A minute passed.

The door opened. But it did so quietly, and within all was darkness.

"Well?" came a single word in an inquiring voice.

"Chaka," said the vagrant softly.

"Come in."

The visitor entered, and the door was softly closed. Still in complete darkness, the tramp was escorted down a wide passage. Another door opened, and the two men were in the fog again—in the inner courtyard of the old prison.

They walked across without exchanging a word. Their feet made no sounds. Presently they came to another gloomy building. This one had formerly been the administrative wing of the convict settlement. It contained the governor's office, the chief warder's room, quarters for the wards, and so forth. Like the rest of the prison, it was in total darkness.

Another bell-push was used. The vagrant entered alone, the other man returning to the governor's private residence.

The vagrant was taken in darkness down a passage, and then a door opened. He was now in a comfortably furnished office, where a light glowed warmly, and where a powerful oil-stove was emitting a grateful warmth. Across the window there was a great framework, evidently a recent innovation. It effectively prevented any ray of light from escaping into the night.

Seated at a desk was a man of striking appearance. His age might have been anything from forty to fifty. His eyes were coal black and deeply sunken. His cheeks were lean, his eyebrows bushy. There was the look of the dreamer about him; the fanatic. His forehead was intelligent, and he had, in fact, the appearance of a University professor or a schoolmaster.

"Number Twenty reporting, sir," said the vagrant.

"Well?"

The man at the desk laid a pen down, and sat back in his chair. He directed his piercing gaze upon No. 20.

"The instructions were carried out to the letter," said the vagrant.

HEAD OF ST. FRANK'S KIDNAPPED!

St. Frank's has received the ultimatum of the Fellowship of Fear. Fighting Jim Kingswood has either to knuckle under and carry out the terrible instructions of this ruthless society—or take the consequences.

In next week's long complete story Nelson Lee, the famous detective, is putting all he knows into a desperate attempt to run the terrorists to earth. But in spite of all his efforts Fighting Jim Kingswood, the St. Frank's headmaster, is kidnapped.



Many other amazing events take place at St. Frank's in next week's grand story and you'll all vote it the best thriller you have ever read!

"You obtained entry into St. Frank's successfully?"

"Yes, sir."

"You saw Kingswood?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was his attitude when you gave him the warning?"

"Defiance," said No. 20. "He was obviously frightened, but he refused to obey orders."

The Master of the Southern Section of the Fellowship of Fear compressed his thin lips.

"These men are foolish, Number Twenty," he said. "I am beginning to think that you and your fellow men do not work with sufficient enterprise. It is your duty to put fear into the hearts of the men who are marked down."

"We did everything possible, sir," said No. 20 defensively. "Kingswood swore that he would not obey orders. We could do no more. We retired."

"You had no misadventure?"

"Nothing to speak of, sir."

"Nothing to speak of?" echoed the Sectional Master. "What do you mean by that?"

"On our way out of the school premises, we were suddenly approached by a school-boy who was apparently breaking bounds," replied No. 20. "We gave him a touch of gas, and he fell backwards into the fountain pool. We distinctly heard him splash into the water."

"You all escaped safely without giving any further alarm?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you hear this boy get out of the fountain pool?"

"No, sir."

"Then there is just a possibility that the gas took effect, and the boy died," said the Sectional Master, with satisfaction. "That will be excellent for us, Number Twenty. There will be no evidence, for the gas leaves no traces. The boy's death will be regarded as accidental; yet Kingswood will guess the truth. And that will put real fear into his heart. He will become submissive."

"Number Thirty suggested the same thing before we parted, sir," said No. 20.

"You separated at the agreed-upon spot?"

"Yes, sir; Number Thirty returned to Edgemore," replied the man. "Number Twenty-Five went to Caistowe. Twenty-two walked to Bannington. The fog rendered our movements entirely safe."

The Sectional Master eyed him ponderingly.

"There are likely to be many of these fogs during this month and next," he said. "They will help us. Well, Number Twenty, you may go to your own quarters. Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir," said No. 20.

He left the room; but not by the same door as he had entered. He went to another door at the farther end. This admitted him into a dimly-lit corridor. He passed along

it, went up some stairs, and entered a comfortably-furnished bed-room.

Every window of this wing was fitted with the interior shutters. No matter what lights glowed within the building, the outwards appearance of the place was one of absolute desertion. The Moor Prison was supposed to be empty, and the people who were now residing there were intruders. In a word, the Fellowship of the Free had taken possession of the place.

THE Sectional Master sat for some time, thinking deeply. He was disappointed. For he had been hoping that Mr. James Kingswood, the Headmaster of St. Frank's College, would be ready to "knuckle under." Mr. Kingswood's obstinacy was annoying.

"But we shall have our way in the end," muttered the strange-looking man. "Police protection, if he is foolish enough to seek it, will avail him nothing. Our methods are certain."

He rose abruptly to his feet.

Passing out of the room, he went down the corridor which No. 20 had used. But instead of going upstairs he opened a door at the end. He closed it after him, and now he was in total darkness, being, in fact, in a little lobby. He opened another door, passed out into the fog, and crossed an inner courtyard. He entered another doorway, exactly similar to the one he had just left. There was the same kind of lobby. Opening the inner door, he was within a lighted corridor. The walls were bare, the floor was stone-flagged. This was the central building of the prison.

Turning a corner, the Sectional Master came into a wide, gloomy, depressing hallway. A man, wearing a thick overcoat, was standing on duty. He was like a prison warder, except for the fact that he carried no rifle, or wore no uniform.

"All quiet?" asked the newcomer.

"Yes, sir."

"I'm going upstairs," said the Sectional Master.

He held out his hand, and a great bunch of keys was given to him. He walked across the hallway, and mounted some much-worn stone steps which led upwards to the gallery above, making a half-turn.

All along the gallery, which was in total darkness, were cells. Some of the doors were standing wide open, proving that the cells were unoccupied. But others were closed. And, now and again, the Master paused, and looked through the tiny spy-hole.

At length he opened one of the cells and walked in. As he closed the door, locking it after him, he switched on a squat electric lamp, and placed it on the little table. There was the regulation prison bed in this cell, and, reclining upon its hard mattress, covered by rough blankets, was the prisoner.

"Wake up, Dr. Westlake," said the Master, giving the prisoner a shake.

The man who sat up was a refined, kindly-featured man of about fifty; a strong, hale,

athletic man. His iron-grey hair had grown long; a three-weeks' growth of beard marred his chin. But, in spite of these drawbacks, Dr. Westlake still looked a man of dignity and good breeding.

"Why are you here?" he asked, with cold defiance. "Do you not visit me enough in the daytime, without disturbing my sleep?"

"The fancy took me to have a little chat," said the Master. "I have come to inform you that Mr. Kingswood, the headmaster of St. Frank's College, is likely to join you next week—unless he obeys our orders."

"Why do you tell me this?" asked the other bitterly. "You think that you are the master of the situation; but, my mad friend, one of these days you will be made to pay for this gross outrage—"

"Come, come, we must not get heated," said the Sectional Master. "You have been away from your school—from Hyde College—for five weeks. Would you not like to return, Dr. Westlake?"

"Not on your terms."—

"But they are so simple—so easy," said the other. "You are a gentleman and a man of honour. Give me your word that you will obey the instructions of the fellowship, and to-morrow you will have the privilege of a shave and a hair-cut. Your own clothes will be restored to you. At night you will be removed from this cell, and you will be taken to Hyde College. You may resume your former life just as you left it off."

"Always providing I give you my word of honour that I will carry out your instructions?" asked the unfortunate schoolmaster. "No! I absolutely refuse. You may keep me here for months—years! In the end, I suppose, you will kill me. But never will I consent to introduce the pernicious teaching of your infamous fellowship."

"To-morrow," said the Sectional Master, "your diet will be reduced. We will see what effects semi-starvation will have upon you. You are a fool! I offer you your freedom—knowing that you can give no useful information concerning this organisation."

This was quite true. None of the prisoners in the abandoned convict settlement knew where they were. When they had been kidnapped they had been rendered unconscious. They had awakened to find themselves in prison cells. And, by an insidious process of suggestion—mainly circulated through the guards—the unfortunates were given the impression that they were somewhere on the Continent. They believed that they had been brought here by aeroplane, whilst unconscious. All the daytime guards were Germans, and at times these men, whilst pretending to speak amongst themselves, referred to various events of the town. They talked of beer-gardens, and other typically German institutions. Nothing was said definitely to the prisoners themselves.

"Will you be good enough to leave me in peace?" asked Dr. Westlake coldly. "You pile indignity upon indignity. You talk of

starving me. Well, go ahead! My answer will always be the same."

Without a word, the Sectional Master switched off his light, and turned towards the door. At the same moment Dr. Westlake leapt. He was not a fighting man generally; but he had suffered tortures of late. This was the first time that the master had come to him unattended.

"You fool!" snarled the master.

They crashed over, and Dr. Westlake's right fist, swinging round, caught the other man on the side of the head. It was touch and go. Not that the prisoner would have had the slightest chance of escape; for every exit was guarded. This attack on his part was the outcome of his weeks of brutal treatment.

Hisssssss!

The Sectional Master, managing to back away, had a vapour pistol in his hand. He pulled the trigger, and Dr. Westlake, receiving the charge of gas full in his face, choked and sank back.

The Sectional Master had closed his eyes tightly and had held his breath. He backed to the end of the cell, felt for the door, unlocked it, and passed out. Not until he had relocked the door did he open his eyes or breathe. Even then he caught a whiff of the stuff.

"For this you shall pay!" he snarled, although he must have known that Dr. Westlake could not hear him. "You shall be placed in solitary confinement; for six days you shall have neither food nor water. Fool! Dog! I will teach you to strike me!"

Sounds were coming from some of the other cells. Men were at the gratings, looking out. They were excited. They were wondering what was happening. All of them were similar prisoners to Dr. Westlake—schoolmasters who had disappeared as though the earth had opened and had swallowed them up.

And here they were, incarcerated in the old abandoned Moor Prison!

The Sectional Master did not even look at them as he strode down the corridor. He went down the stairs, he flung the keys at the guard, and the man started back.

"To-morrow, you will place Dr. Westlake in solitary confinement!" snarled the master. "He shall have neither food nor water for six days. Report to me at this hour to-morrow."

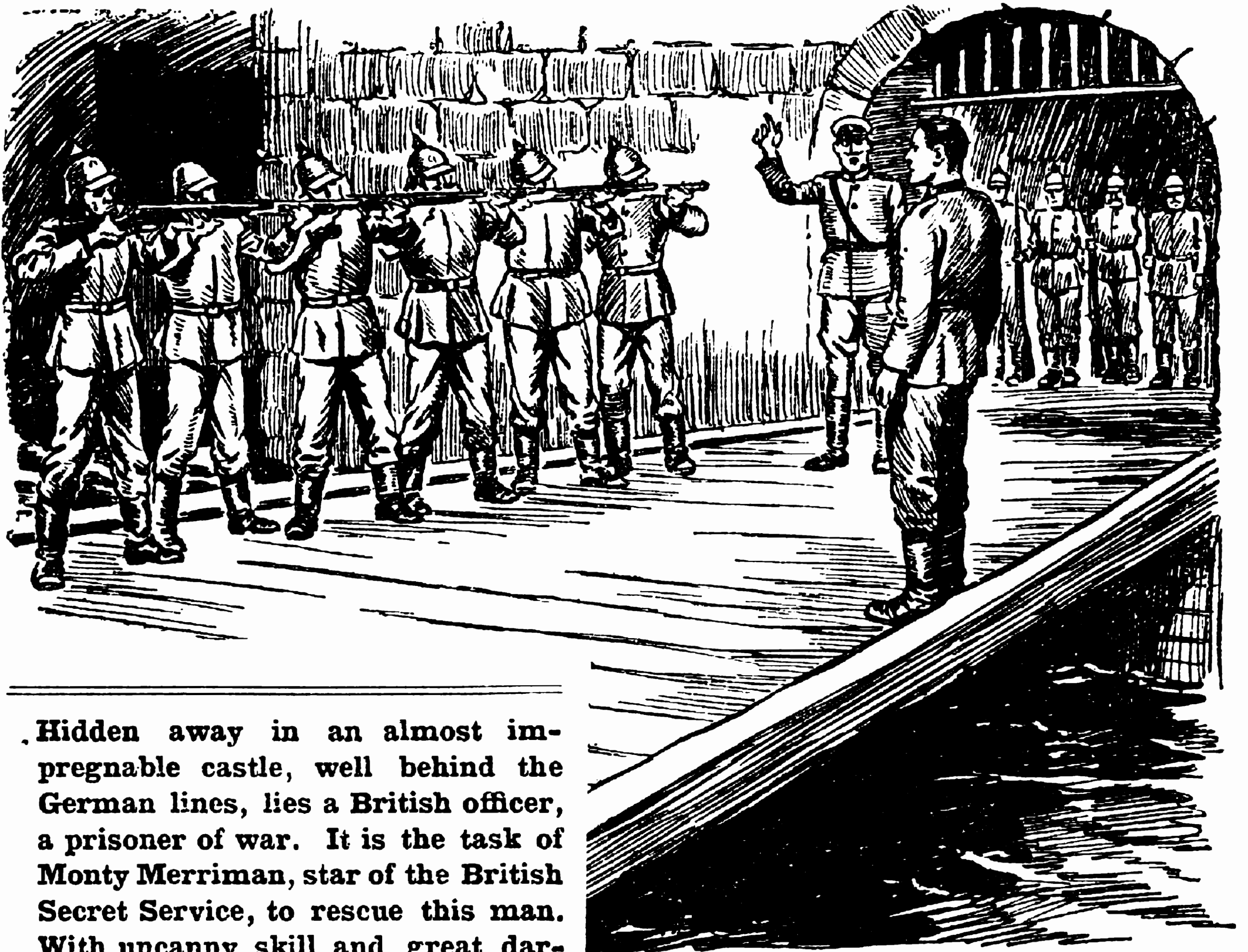
He walked away, and the guard, trembling, watched him go. During the daylight hours, the Moor Prison was quiet and still, for the inhabitants slept. Like vile creatures of the night, they only commenced their activities when darkness had fallen.

NELSON LEE, in coming to St. Frank's to commence his fight against the Fellowship of Fear, had certainly come into the right district!

THE END.

(Whatever you do, don't miss reading next Wednesday's grand school and detective story—"St. Frank's in Peril!" It thrills from start to finish.)

The GREEN BUTTON!



Hidden away in an almost impregnable castle, well behind the German lines, lies a British officer, a prisoner of war. It is the task of Monty Merriman, star of the British Secret Service, to rescue this man. With uncanny skill and great daring, Monty penetrates the enemy's defences, and sets out on the next stage of his perilous mission.

The Opening Hand.

CAPTAIN RICHARD SETON, of the Artillery, sat disconsolately in a damp, dismal dungeon deep in the basement of Arnstein Castle.

The castle itself was reckoned to be impregnable in the days before high explosives had been invented. The walls towered fifty feet above the slimy moat, which was twenty feet wide and deep. A bridge spanned the moat—a bridge that was raised at night. Around the moat were barbed wire entanglements, electrified after dark. Beyond was a bare space about two hundred yards wide, all round the castle beyond the moat. Then came more wire entanglements, with flood lights for the hours of darkness, and a system of sentries that was reckoned to be fool-proof.

Inside the castle were housed all those British prisoners who were either of supreme

importance, or had made trouble for their gaolers by many attempts to escape from other camps. If any of them ever succeeded in getting out of Arnstein they would be lucky indeed, and even then they had hundreds of miles of German soil to cover to reach the Dutch frontier.

And, to make doubly sure, Captain Dick Seton had been placed in a dungeon on a level with the moat—dark, damp and verminous. Three times a day he was taken to the commandant and ordered to tell where the missing formula of his invention was to be found, or to reveal the contents as near as he could. They made no bones about it. He would suffer worse things if he did not comply with orders. But Dick Seton only shook his head and defied them. What else would any decent fellow have done?

And by the light of early dawn he sat there reading a letter from his wife. Of

course, he got letters and parcels, all strictly censored, of course. This letter, however, puzzled him. He just couldn't make out why she kept mentioning her green frock—the one with all the ornamental buttons on it. Of course, he had admired it greatly; but even so, it didn't interest him as much as all that.

He toyed with the cake of soap she had sent him. That was worth having, anyway. Soap was a luxury in Germany in those days. The paper it had been wrapped in lay on the floor at his feet.

What little light there was came in through a small grating over his head. He noticed that in the shadow cast by the slightly crumpled paper, off the soap, the light shone through a number of tiny holes. He frowned at it, then picked up the paper. The holes were pinholes. He scrutinised the paper. He noted the letters marked by the pinholes.

"Watch for contents," it said.

"Either it's pure coincidence or this treatment is driving me batty," said Dick to himself. "What's it all mean?"

He sat down, toying with the cake of soap, thinking it over. He was a special prisoner; he knew that. He guessed they would realise that at home. If the War Office were interested in his invention they would be mad about his capture.

He sat up with a start. Suppose someone tried to rescue him?

He studied that scrap of magazine page again. "Watch for contents"! The contents of what? The letter? No, he didn't think so. Couldn't work it out that way. And he had received no parcels yet—only one cake of soap—the cake of soap. He held it in his hand—the cake of soap!

His eyes glittered as he took it in both hands and broke it, and then he gaped, open-mouthed—for there lay a green button. He laughed—it was ridiculous. Of what use was this to him?

Then an iron door clanged. The guard was coming! Dick seized the paper with the pinholes, screwed it up and dropped it through the iron grating so that it fell into the waters of the moat. It would get sodden there and rot to pieces. The soap he broke up to small scraps so as to hide the evidence of the scooped-out hole in the centre. The green button, of that green frock—he remembered it so well—that went into his pocket.

He was only just in time. He was seated on his stool, his head sunk despairingly in his hands, when they unlocked the door of his cell and ordered him out. He found himself in the centre of a file of Bavarians; the gruff command awoke all the underground echoes, and away they went along the dripping corridors and up the stone steps to the cold, fresh air of the courtyard, where Dick was set with his back against the wall.

"Will you be blindfolded?" asked the commandant harshly.

"What are you going to do?" snapped Dick.

"Shoot you—unless you tell us what we want to know. What is it to be, captain?"

"You can shoot!" retorted Dick hoarsely. "Don't trouble to blindfold me! Just shoot and be done with it. I'll never tell you—never. See you to blazes first! Understand?"

"So!" growled the commandant, stepping back.

He raised his hand, then dropped it. Dick stared at the file of soldiers before him, their weapons levelled at his heart. He was ready.

But only one gun sounded. The bullet flattened against the wall within a yard of his head, but Dick only blinked one eye.

"Will you tell?" asked the commandant.

"No. Finish your shooting!" snapped Dick huskily.

The German officer laughed.

"Not to-day, Englander," he said. "This will happen every morning at dawn. If you don't speak, then one morning all the guns will fire, and you will not speak any more. Take him away!"

The soldiers fell in around him and he was marched back the way he had come. He was grim. The reaction was making itself felt. The tension of that moment with his back to the wall had frayed his nerves rather. And he was to endure it every morning at dawn. Maybe he would get used to it; but tell them about his invention he never would—not if they carved him up in small bits.

He laughed ironically as they went along the passage.

"What are you laughing at?" growled the sergeant.

"You," said Dick. "Going to be mighty cold for you every morning at dawn out in the yard, and——"

The cell door was open. With a curse the sergeant thrust him in so violently that he half fell on to his stool. The soldiers withdrew, and only the sergeant remained there to close the door and lock it. He glowered down at the prisoner.

"Dirty Englander!" he growled. "It's bad enough to have this job at all, but if you mock me I will make you suffer for it—you——"

One hand was outstretched. A warning finger pointed down at Dick's face.

And then, as he stared at it—he couldn't help staring, for the hand turned over, the fingers straightened, the palm was held uppermost, and upon it lay—a green button!

Dick gasped. A Bavarian sergeant scowling at him—one of the enemy in field grey, in service equipment—and one of his wife's green buttons in his grimy hand.

But before he could stammer a word, the man withdrew, the door slammed, the key grated in the lock, and Dick Seton was alone—alone with two green buttons, one in his pocket, the other on the floor of his cell, to prove that his eyes had not lied to him!

In Danger of Discovery!

MONTY was no novice at the art of disguise, but he found it no easy matter to remember all the time that he was supposed to be a Bavarian sergeant. It is one thing to adopt a disguise and walk along a street, but Monty had to mix with the other Bavarian sergeants and even mingle with men in the sergeants' mess who had known Sergeant Adolph Muller for many years.

The real Adolph Muller lay in a dark and deserted house in the town of Arnstein, doped and drugged. Monty reckoned he would stay like that for forty-eight hours—certainly no longer. In that time he had to get Captain Dick Seton out of Arnstein Castle! Maybe, for once in his life, Monty had bitten off more than he could chew.

He made out he had taken to drink, and acted accordingly. The lager that went over to his corner of the mess-room and disappeared was amazing, but in actual fact it disappeared down a hole in the floor and not down Monty's throat, even if he acted as though it had.

"Come, Adolph," protested one of the sergeants. "It is foolish to get drunk. You will make some blunder and lose your stripes."

"Ach, what does it matter," growled Monty, in excellent, husky German. "I get tired of this war. Better to be a private than a sergeant. Those Englishers shoot the sergeants first. In a few weeks I go to the front. Let me then enjoy life in my own way while I have the chance. Himmel, it is better so, comrades!"

"But think of your wife and children, my friend," said another man impatiently. "By the way, you had leave last night. How did you find your folk?"

"Quite well, thank you," said Monty. "The children grow fast and cost much money to feed and clothe—more money than a sergeant can get. Then I shall go to the front and get killed and they will starve. Leave me alone with my lager, comrades. I prefer that to thinking."

He didn't want to be questioned too closely. He had no idea how many children the real Sergeant Adolph Muller had, and he was afraid of giving himself away. He had altered his appearance cleverly, and at sight he had succeeded in fooling everybody, but in the mess it was different. Already several of the sergeants were frowning at him as if something puzzled them.

Monty staggered over to his iron bed, and sat down, then began to sing in a drunken manner.

"The captain comes," exclaimed someone. "Hide yourself, Adolph, or there will be trouble!"

Monty started to his feet, looking scared.

"I'll go," he said, thankful for the opportunity. He darted out by the back door, and across the courtyard to the castle itself. He was recognised as Sergeant Muller. He saluted two officers, who scarcely looked at

him. Several privates spoke to him, and he answered them drunkenly, then dived into the castle and made his way along the stone corridors and down the stairs to the dungeons on the level of the moat.

He seemed to be acting carelessly, but Monty never did a thing unless he had it all thought out beforehand. He came to the corridor by Dick Seton's cell. A sentry was on duty there, but Monty sent him further along to the foot of the stairs. Monty was no longer acting drunk.

"I have to question one of the prisoners," he said. "You stay there. Let no one down—except an officer, of course."

The man obeyed listlessly, rather bored with his job in that cold passage. Monty went along to Seton's cell, unlocked the door, entered, and closed the door after him. As he slowly turned to face the prisoner he found Dick Seton sitting there watching him intently. It was plain that Dick had not forgotten the green button.

Monty made a gesture to caution him.

"Got to get you out of this to-night," he said, quietly, in English.

Seton had a tight grip on himself. He rose to his feet, his fists clenched in order to prevent the outburst of joy and relief he felt.

"Who are you?" he asked huskily. "Where did you get that button from—the green button? What's it all mean?"

"Steady, old man," said Monty, with a calm smile. "I'm Merriman—Secret Service. The Government want that formula. I understand you memorised the last page?"

"Who told you?"

"A gallant lady—your wife," explained Monty. "The button—I have others—was to prove I came from her. My orders are to get you out, if I can."

"Because of the formula?"

"Yes. Now, listen. This castle looks strong. With the moat, and the entanglements and electrified wires and things it is mighty hard to get in, but easy enough to get beyond the wall which is old and crumbling. I dare not waste time telling you all my plans. You must simply do as I tell you and trust me."

"Go on," urged Dick.

Monty fumbled in his uniform and fished out a chisel and a file.

"Your job is to loosen the bricks round that window of yours so that after dark, when I come to you, we shall be able to force the lot out and make a hole large enough for you to crawl out and drop into the moat. I reckon that's enough for you to get on with, old man. You'll find that easier than you think."

"And you?" asked Seton.

"Time enough for that, old chap."

"If I get away and then recaptured it will only be more rigorous confinement," said Seton. "But, if you get caught, it will be—shot at dawn."

Monty shrugged his shoulders.

"All in the day's work," he said. "I took

this on with my eyes open, and I'm seeing it through, if I can."

"But anything may happen. I may get shot in the attempt, and then the formula will be lost," said Seton. "Look here, Merri-man, I will repeat that missing formula to you. You memorise it as well, then, if you get through and I don't—well, it will be O.K."

"A good idea," agreed Monty, "but you must hurry."

They went to the corner of the cell farthest from the door, crouched down there, and Dick Seton recited the formula he had memorised, in hoarse whispers. Monty said it after him, over and over again, until he was word perfect.

They were so engrossed in the job, that the grounding of the sentry's musket at the foot of the stairs did not attract their attention. They knew nothing until feet sounded on the stone flags outside, to the accompaniment of jingling spurs and accoutrements. Then someone banged on the cell door, and the commanding voice of an officer sounded:

"Open, sergeant—at once!"

The sentry must have seen which cell the fictitious Sergeant Muller had entered, and had told the officers where he was to be found. The fact that the officers had come to talk to Dick Seton was not surprising seeing what it was they wanted to force him to tell.

But it was a tight corner—it looked like defeat before they had started on their dangerous enterprise. The two men stared at one another.

"The file and chisel!" whispered Monty. "Hide 'em, man!"

Seton went down on hands and knees, raised a brick of the floor in one corner, revealing a cavity beneath. The tools were hastily dumped and the brick replaced.

But when Dick rose to his feet Monty flew at him, took him by the throat, tore at his tunic and flung him this way and that, cursing him in fluent German.

"I say you have tools hidden! I make you speak, pig of an Englander!"

The officers banged violently on the door.

"Open, Muller!"

Monty let rip a German exclamation, and unlocked the door. It swung back on its hinges and the commandant of the castle, a big blonde Prussian stood on the threshold. He saw a Bavarian sergeant, flushed and angry, and the prisoner dirty, clothes torn, and scowling furiously.

"What are you doing here, Muller?" snapped the officer.

"I suspected the prisoner was planning to escape, comandant. I came quietly hoping to surprise him and seize the tools I believe he has concealed in his cell."

"What have you found, then?"

"Nothing, commandant. I was trying to force the truth from him."

"Ach, there is more to force from him than a little thing like that!" said a husky voice. "Pardon, commandant."

The commandant stepped aside, and another officer entered the cell. Monty stood stiffly at attention, but a little thrill of horror was creeping up his spine. He was face to face once more with Heinrich Kahn!

But Heinrich paid scant attention to the Bavarian sergeant. His sullen glare was fixed on Dick Seton.

"Are you trying to escape, captain?" he asked savagely.

Dick Seton grinned and shrugged his shoulders.

"Is there a way out of here, then?" he asked.

Kahn flew into a rage.

"I'm not here to bandy words with you!" he cried. "What tools have you got here?"

"You can see all my possessions," said Dick, indicating his toothbrush, the pieces of soap, and his few articles of tattered raiment.

Kahn's eyes seemed about to pop out of his head.

"Call your men, sergeant!" he snapped. "Have this man searched, here and now!"

Monty didn't like the situation a bit, but he dared not argue. He hastened away up the corridor to return with three men of the guard.

"Search the prisoner!" said Kahn. "You stand by the door, sergeant, and watch him to see he does not swallow anything!"

It was plain that Kahn knew quite a lot about the little ways of obstreperous British prisoners of war. While the men took Dick's tunic from him, Kahn was going round the cell, banging the walls and stamping on the floor for loose bricks and stones. But luckily he missed the brick under which the chisel and file reposed.

The contents of Dick's pockets began to make their appearance. Kahn snatched up the last letter from home—from Dick's wife. He read it carefully, and scowled with bewilderment. There was much he could not understand—especially the particular references to the green dress. He remembered that green dress. It reminded him of a rough time he had had with a masked man, of a crashing blow on the jaw in the hotel at Dahlborg, the finding of a green button.

He glanced up. The man had almost stripped Dick. His belongings were set out on his stool in an orderly array.

"There is nothing here," said one of the men.

"Nothing?" cried Kahn. "You call those things nothing?"

"Those?" said the commandant, stepping forward. "They are only green buttons!"

"Two green buttons!" gasped Kahn, snatching them up. He faced Dick, glaring at him savagely. "Where did these come from?" he asked viciously. "Answer me, or there'll be trouble!"

Dick was feeling as bad inwardly as was Monty, but he hid his feelings behind a careless grin.

"Why? Can two green buttons get me out of Arnstein Castle?" he queried.

"Answer me!" shrieked Kahn, shrill in his rage. "Where did they come from? How did they get here?"

Dick still grinned at him.

"Why should two green buttons—from a woman's frock—upset you so?" he asked blandly.

Kahn leaned forward and thrust an accusing finger close to the prisoner's face.

"You can't fool me, Englander!" he snapped. "I know where those buttons came from—off your wife's green frock! And listen to me, Englander. She was wearing that frock the last time I saw her in Surrey—after you had been taken prisoner! You understand?"

Dick Seton paled, and there was a haunted look in his eyes. But he held himself stiffly erect.

"Well?" he queried.

"Will you say how they came here?"

"No. I'll tell you nothing!" Dick rapped out crisply.

Kahn seemed to stare at him for quite a long time, and it seemed as if he sensed that he would get nothing out of Dick whatever he tried. He gave it up as a bad job, although his temper was at white heat.

"So!" he growled. "No letters and no parcels for this prisoner, commandant. Solitary confinement and no exercise. Bread and water. You hear me? Sergeant, lock this door, set a guard of two men outside. There is always to be a guard of two armed men at this door until further instructions. March!"

The party went out into the stone passage. Monty locked the door and ordered two of his men to remain there on guard.

The commandant of the castle was eyeing Monty now as if he were uncertain about something.

"If that man escapes someone will get shot!" he said firmly.

Monty stood at attention.

"Leave the matter to me, Herr Commandant," he said. "How can he escape now? As for the buttons, the prisoner received a cake of soap from England. The buttons might have been concealed in that."

It was unlucky for Monty that he did not know how Kahn had picked up one of these buttons in the hotel at Dahlborg. That fact made Kahn suspicious. If a green button could turn up at Dahlborg, why trouble to send more in a cake of soap to Arnstein Castle?"

"Idle words!" snapped Kahn, not disposed to say why he attached so much importance to the green buttons, although they meant to him that the man who had escaped from Dahlborg must be inside the castle. "Get a squad of men, sergeant. I will search this place from top to bottom!"

Shot at Dusk!

IT was a situation fraught with both humour and grave danger. Monty understood that Heinrich Kahn suspected more than he was prepared to admit even to the commandant. If only Monty had known about the green button he had lost at Dahlborg, things might have been different, although it was hard to say,

even then, what he could have done about it.

This much, however, was plain. Heinrich Kahn had been floored by a man at Dahlborg. Even if Kahn did not know who that man was by name, he knew it was a member of the British Secret Service, and the same member who had spoilt his game in Surrey. And now Kahn suspected that this man was inside Arnstein Castle.

He was right, too! The man walked beside him all the time! Monty was helping Kahn to look for himself! That made it reasonably safe for Monty. On the other hand, the slightest slip might give the show away. The real Sergeant Adolph Muller would have known his way all over the castle. Monty did not!

But he got over that by marching his men in front of him. Kahn raised no objections, because should there be any danger the privates would hit up against it first. Kahn was no coward, but he saw no sense in asking for trouble, and privates didn't amount to much with him.

It was an eye-opener for Monty. He missed nothing there was to see. He stored many details concerning the castle in his quick brain. They went to all the cells, to the store-rooms and magazine, and through the prisoners' dormitories, with the British officers making fun of them all the time. Monty saw men there he had known in London—jolly good pals of his, too—but he dared not shown a sign of recognition.

They visited the quarters of the Bavarian troops, the officers' mess, the commandant's quarters. There was no room nor cupboard that Kahn passed by without a careful scrutiny. The hours went by, and still he did not tire. Heinrich was nothing if not thorough. In addition to which he owed something to the man who had knocked him down before his own general. Kahn would rejoice to see that man with his back to a wall, facing a row of rifles in the grey light of dawn—or any other light, for that matter.

But the castle itself revealed nothing suspicious, so they went out into the courtyard and examined every storehouse there, without result. They passed through the arched gateway and over the bridge that spanned the moat, and along the farther shore to the buildings on the brink where the electrical generators were housed.

A sentry sprang to attention as they appeared. Kahn only inclined his head in acknowledgment of the salute. Inside the motors were humming, storing up the electricity that was used not only to light the old castle, but to electrify the wire entanglements beyond and provide current for the powerful searchlights mounted on the lofty walls.

Monty took in all there was to see. Should he and Dick Seton get a chance to break away, any little detail might be of service. He knew that it was child's play to get out of the castle and swim the moat—that is, if Sergeant Adolph Muller remained undiscovered! The real trouble would be to pass the electrified entanglements. And the key

to that situation lay here amongst the generators.

The place was not very strongly guarded. One sentry at the door. That was all. Inside were two engineers on duty, and they were armed. They found nothing there to arouse suspicion and passed out again. Beyond was a shed containing hand grenades and other explosive weapons, but apparently the sentry at the generating station had to keep his eyes on that shed as well, for they came on no other sentry there.

By that time Kahn was furious. They marched back into the castle. Heinrich went to the commandant's quarters, leaving Monty to dismiss his men.

He went to the sergeant's mess and his dinner, then flung himself down on his bed with a lot of lager bottles round him. The other sergeants wanted to talk about the officer from headquarters who had come down about the prisoner in cell No. 3, but Monty said he didn't want to talk. Some of the men put it down to the lager, others were not so sure.

"You don't look yourself, Adolph," said one man, eyeing him narrowly. "You are pale, comrade. You had better leave the lager alone and go to the doctor."

Monty told them he would do no such thing. He would stay there until he had to go the rounds again. And he got his own way. He pretended to fall into a drunken sleep until the time came; then he donned his full service uniform and went out to bully his men and march them into the damp, cold passages of the castle to relieve the guards down there. He meant to get another message to Dick Seton, if he could, and warn him that he must get out of Arnstein Castle that night or abandon all hope.

But Monty was doomed to failure in that. He came marching his men along one of the ground floor corridors, and he bawled a hoarse command as he saw the commandant standing by his office door, with Kahn beside him. There would have to be a salute.

But the patter of feet on the stone flags behind him caused Monty to forget all about military discipline. Besides, a hoarse voice was shouting, awakening all the echoes of the place.

"Herr commandant! He is an impostor! Seize him! Shoot him!"

Monty knew the game was up. The real Adolph Muller was racing down the corridor towards him, his uniform torn and ruffled, his hair in disorder, his eyes starting from his head. The effects of Monty's drugs had worn off a few hours too soon.

The commandant whipped out a heavy service revolver. Monty spun round and planted his back against the wall, facing them all. There was nothing to be gained by fighting the whole garrison single-handed.

But Kahn knocked up the commandant's arm and the bullet embedded itself in the ceiling.

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"He must be questioned!" snarled Kahn. Then waved his arm at the guard. "Seize him. Disarm him!"

"Thanks, Heinrich!" said Monty, with a grin, casting aside his disguise. "You saved my life that time!"

Monty did not resist arrest. In fact, he unbuckled his belt and handed it, with the bayonet attached, to the real Adolph Muller. Kahn was glaring at him.

"I know that voice!" he snarled. "I heard it at Dahlborg—I heard it in Surrey. And to think you walked by my side—but what's it matter? I have caught you at last—and you shall not escape again!"

Monty took out a cigarette and calmly lit it. The Germans were too amazed at his audacity to stop him at first; then the commandant found his voice.

"It is amazing! I thought there was something wrong with the sergeant, whom I have known for many years. This man shall die for this! Take that cigarette from him!"

"Your pardon, Herr Commandant," smiled Monty blandly. "But prisoners under sentence of death are allowed a few luxuries, I believe."

Heinrich Kahn led the way into the commandant's office.

"Bring him in here!" he snapped.

It was a dramatic scene, but Monty's grin spoilt it. They could not guess the desperate sorrow in Monty's heart. He had tried. He had failed. And yet he did not give up hope. All the time his keen eyes missed nothing, his quick brain was working rapidly and thoroughly. Experience told him that something might turn up at the last minute to offer him hope.

"Your name!" snapped Kahn.

Monty puffed out a cloud of smoke into the air.

"Come, come, Heinrich," he protested. "We have met before. We are old friends. Why waste time? You have caught me. You know I shall say nothing you want to hear me say. Why not make an end of it?"

It was bluff. He wanted to know just what Kahn intended to do next. He succeeded more thoroughly than he could have hoped.

"So!" cried Kahn, starting to his feet. "You are a spy. You shall be shot at dawn and your body flung into the moat!"

"At dawn?" queried Monty, for want of something else to say. He showed not a particle of fear.

"Well, what's the matter with the dawn?" snapped Kahn.

"Nothing," replied Monty. "But it gives me a few more hours of life—and anything may happen!"

The lieutenant was nervous. Kahn had had experience of this nameless man before. He took Monty's words as meaning that something might happen during the night, and he didn't want to take chances.

"Himmel, yes! But if we shoot you at dusk, Herr Spy, nothing will happen. I alter the verdict. You shall be shot at dusk,

your back against the wall—and your body shall be flung into the moat!"

Monty puffed out more smoke languidly. It helped to conceal the gleam of excitement in his eyes.

"Just as you like, Heinrich," he said calmly. "But isn't it a waste of energy to shoot me down by the wall and then have to carry me all the way down to the moat? Now, if I were you, Heinrich, I would work it better than that. Stand me with my back to the moat, then, when I am shot, I shall fall in and save you so much trouble!"

Kahn scowled at him.

"You jest about it—eh? Himmel, but you shall have your way. You shall be shot with your back to the moat—now—at dusk! Will you be blindfolded?"

"No. It will be dusk—dark, in fact," said Monty.

"So!" agreed Kahn. Then, to the guard: "Bind his arms."

"I must be a dangerous man," scoffed Monty. "Are you afraid I shall hit you again, Heinrich?"

Monty's bluff worked again.

"Afraid—no!" roared Kahn. "Don't bind him or blindfold him. Just take him outside, set him with his back to the moat, and shoot him like the dog he is!"

The guard hustled Monty to the door. He shook them off partially and hesitated on the threshold, smiling back at Kahn.

"Good-bye, Heinrich," he said, "for the present!"

"Himmel, I'll come myself and make sure of this!" vowed Kahn.

He fell in behind the squad. Monty was in the middle, still smoking his cigarette. They marched out into the dusky courtyard and away through the arched gateway to the bridge that spanned the moat.

"This will do," said Kahn.

He had brought up more men. A squad guarded one end of the bridge, and there was another squad drawn up at the other end. Half-way across was the shooting-party, Kahn and Monty. The prisoner was set on one side with his back to the turgid waters. The shooting-party formed up on the other side.

On a bridge over a deep moat, armed men at either end, a shooting-party confronting him—it looked like the end for Monty. But he stood there with the fast-vanishing cigarette in his lips.

"Of course," said Kahn, "if you care to say anything likely to be of use to the German Government——"

"Don't be insulting, Heinrich," retorted Monty. "You know I shall tell you nothing. Get on with the picnic, or your soldiers will catch cold."

Kahn spat out an order, and the shooting-party levelled their rifles.

"For the last time," said Kahn, "have you anything to say?"

"No, I don't think so," replied Monty calmly. "Fire away, Heinrich! See you later!"

Kahn cursed, and allowed his raised hand to drop sharply. The rifles roared; Monty threw up his arms and went over backwards with a terrific splash into the moat.

"Ach—so end all spies!" snarled Kahn.

He went to the edge of the bridge and peered over into the black waters.

"Bring a light," he snapped.

Someone handed him a pocket torch. He flashed the beam this way and that over the slimy surface of the moat. He saw a field cap, the butt of a cigarette, rapidly becoming sodden and falling to pieces. A few bubbles came up, burst and vanished. And that was all.

"I should have thought there would have been blood," said Kahn.

"Not always, Herr Leutnant," said the real Adolph Muller. "Some wounds bleed very little."

"You are sure you hit him?"

"He could not have escaped. Utterly impossible, Herr Leutnant."

"I should think so—Ja!" growled Kahn, as he strode away.

Monty's Plan.

BUT Heinrich Kahn and the real Adolph Muller were both wrong. Monty had escaped. He had plotted and planned and bluffed them all along the line. He had done nothing nor said anything without a definite reason. Even if his remarks had sounded like the bleatings of some cheerful lunatic, they had not been spoken without due thought, and for a purpose, and he had got his own way. He had been placed with his back to the moat, unbound, without a bandage over his eyes, to be shot—and at dusk, when the light was so bad.

If Kahn had not been in such a tearing rage he might have suspected. But he fell for Monty's bluff all the time, and when his hand dropped for the signal to fire, Monty had been watching closely. He acted, a second before the men could press their triggers. He flung up his arms and hurled himself backwards. He banked on the shooting party aiming at his heart. It was the usual thing, of course, and it saved him, for he fell quickly, doubling himself up into a ball. He dropped down to the slimy waters, and the scorching bullets screamed harmlessly a few inches above his head.

The water was slimy and cold, but that mattered little. He was alive! While he was alive there was hope. He swam below the surface, away to the dense shadows under the wall of the castle, where the piercing rays of the searchlights on the lofty walls could not reach. He kept below the slimy surface until he thought his lungs would burst.

When he could remain below no longer he came to the surface, cautiously, and found himself within a yard of the gaunt wall. A stroke sent him against the damp stones, and he hung on to a projecting ledge, panting

for breath, gaining strength and calming his frayed nerves. He saw Kahn and the sergeant peering into the water for his remains. He could not help allowing a grim smile to hover around his lips.

But supposing they discovered the trick he had played them? Supposing they guessed?

He hung there, cold, scarcely daring to breathe—waiting—watching. Then Kahn strode off, the sergeant mustered his men, formed them up, and marched them off towards the barracks inside the castle wall.

"What luck!" mused Monty. "I've got away with it!"

But he was too old at the game to feel too triumphant, or to get swelled head. The game was not finished yet, by a long way.

He took good stock of the position, then left his insecure perch and swam along the moat, keeping close to the wall and making as little noise as possible. His strokes were deliberately slow, with hardly a splash. He knew sentries would be pacing along the top of the wall. They would be fifty feet, or more, above the moat, but in the darkness of night sounds carried far, and he was running no unnecessary risks.

He came to where an iron grating was set in the stone wall, barely five feet above the water. He knew it to be the window of Dick Seton's cell. He had some difficulty in raising himself high enough to reach it, but after several attempts, clambering up on the uneven edges of the stone blocks that formed the crumbling wall, he managed to grab the bars with one hand.

The sound of Dick Seton's startled exclamation reached his ears, and, greatly daring, he called as loudly as he dared.

"Dick—Seton! You there?"

It was little more than a whisper, but the prisoner heard.

"That you, Merriman?"

"Yes. You've got to get away now—or never."

"But what the dickens are you doing out there?" asked Seton.

"I'll explain that later. Just been shot at dusk, that's all. Listen. You've got to get going on this grating. Hack the mortar from between the stones. The wall is half-rotten. You ought to make good progress."

"I have already. Another half-hour and I'll be ready to heave the grating clean out, and a hole to crawl through."

"Good!" whispered Monty. "Stick at it. I'll be back in about a quarter of an hour."

"Where are you going, then?"

"Over to bomb the generating station. So long, for the present."

"Cheerio! Good hunting!" whispered Dick through the darkness.

Monty slid back without a splash into the water, and swam away in a diagonal direction across the moat. That long search with Heinrich Kahn now served him in good stead. He knew far, far more about Arnstein Castle and its surroundings than he could have found out in any other way.

He knew where the generating station was. He knew that escape would be almost hope-

less unless he could stop the generators. He knew there was a shed containing hand-grenades near by, with only one sentry to both the electrical plant and the store, and two engineers inside the generating station.

His brain worked out the details, clearly, coolly, as he swam silently through the night. He made his way along in the shadow of the overhanging bank until he was abreast of the generating station, then he paused to make sure he was unobserved.

He clambered ashore and began to crawl forward on his stomach, flat to the ground, until he could see the dim figure of the sentry. The man was pacing along a level beat, from the door of the generating station to the door of the store hut, and back again—to and fro—a matter of thirty yards either way.

Between the edge of the moat and the buildings the ground was utterly bare of vegetation except for tussocks of grass here and there, and no man could hide behind those. Monty's only hope were small hillocks and hollows, and the general darkness.

Over his head moved the glaring beams of the searchlights playing along the wire entanglements. If they had depressed the lights to flood the banks of the moat he would have been seen, but they ignored that part. Fifty to a hundred yards ahead were the first entanglements. A hundred yards beyond that there were more electrified entanglements. And it was the bare ground between these guarded stretches that was always lit up at night, by searchlights and floodlights.

These blotches of illumination only made the darkness under the castle wall and by the moat all the blacker. Monty owed much to that fact. Indeed, he was banking on it all the time. He crept towards the store hut. As the sentry paced towards the hut Monty lay still. When the sentry paced towards the generating station, Monty crawled on.

It seemed like eternity. Actually, it took about ten minutes for Monty to reach the store shed. He got there when the sentry

was at the generating station. Monty planned that, of course. He hid by the shed and waited, crouching in the shadow. He heard the sentry's feet crunching on the hard ground, in a steady pace, coming nearer and nearer.

He drew back. Crunch, crunch, crunch—the sentry came nearer—nearer. Then Monty rose to his feet and drew back his clenched fist. He stepped out from behind the hut. The sentry was right on top of him. For a brief moment he saw the amazement in the man's eyes.

Then he struck, with all his might—a savage half-arm jab to the solar plexus. He found the button, too, even in that darkness. The fat sentry had no chance even to call out. He drew in his breath with an agonised gasp, and his knees gave way beneath him. Monty caught his rifle to prevent it clattering to the ground. Then, to make sure, he drove his fist to the man's jaw.

The sentry collapsed, and lay there like a bundle of old clothes. Monty lay down by him and waited—listening intently. But no suspicious sounds reached his ears. He bound the sentry's wrists and ankles with straps from his own accoutrements, borrowed his bayonet, ignored his rifle, for that would be too heavy and bulky to take.

The bayonet served to force the door of the store shed. Monty fumbled around, having no light nor the means to make one. His fingers found the grenades. He knew them by touch. He only took one. No sense in taking more. One would have to do.

But he had snapped the bayonet in two, in forcing the shed, so that weapon was left behind. He put the grenade in the pocket of his sodden tunic, and set out for the generating station, striding along with a crunch, crunch of his feet on the hard ground, just as the sentry had done.

(Can Monty effect the rescue of Dick Seton? It is a task fraught with unlimited dangers—and thrills. Don't delay—order your copy in advance to make sure of reading next week's instalment.)

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