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THE MYSTERY OF THE POISONED RIVER

The Boys of St. Frank's in a superb long yarn of mystery and adventure.

New Series No. 102.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

April 14th, 1928.



"Look out!" yelled Willy. Nipper, who was mounting the staircase, instinctively dodged back. Just in time, too, for next moment a heavy baulk of timber came whizzing down from the opening above. By a fraction of an inch it missed Handforth's head and thudded heavily to the floor.

Detective Work, Mystery, Fun and Adventure!

THE MYSTERY OF THE POISONED RIVER!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

When Willy Handforth notices a number of dead fish in the placid River Stowe he is surprised and concerned. When one of his chums falls in the river and soon after turns a vivid yellow, he is more concerned—and realises, too, that here is a mystery which will have to be investigated. He does investigate, with the help of many prominent Removites, and the results are both exciting and amazing!—Ed.

CHAPTER 1.

The Early Risers!

“**G**REAT Scott! Look there!” ejaculated Handforth blankly. The famous leader of Study D at St. Frank’s had just emerged from the Ancient House doorway, and his companions paused in mild astonishment as he pointed across the sunlit Triangle.

It was early morning—very early.

In fact, the rising-bell hadn’t yet rung. It was only a day or two after the school had re-assembled following the brief Easter vacation, and St. Frank’s had just settled down to school routine again. The April morning was gloriously fine, with brilliant sunshine, an azure sky, and with a cool, crisp air that was like wine.

Edward Oswald Handforth was accompanied by Church and McClure, his inseparable chums of Study D. Nipper, the Junior skipper, was there also, to say nothing of Vivian Travers and Tregellis-West, Watson, Fullwood and Russell.

These fellows, in fact, were the enthusiasts. Cricket was in the air. No match had actually been played yet, but the one thought in everybody’s mind was—cricket. Football was a back number now, and, with the summer season ahead, all the athletes of the Junior School were dreaming of the only game that really mattered in life.

There they were, resplendent in flannels, with pads and bats and stumps tucked under their arms. They were out for some early practice—at Nipper’s suggestion. There was just a chance that the grass would be dewy, but they were prepared to risk that.

“What’s the matter, Handy?” asked Nipper smilingly. “I can’t see anything startling.”

“Neither can I!” declared Church, looking up and down the Triangle.

“There—over by the gym!” said Handforth, pointing. “Can’t you see my minor?”

"Willy, of the Third?" said Fullwood. "What about him?"

"Willy—and two of those cheeky young fags of his!" said Handforth darkly. "Out here—at seven o'clock in the morning! Why, I never heard of such cheek!"

The others chuckled.

"Well, well!" said Vivian Travers mildly. "What are these daring youths coming to nowadays? How can they have the audacity to get up and to venture abroad without the permission of Handforth?"

"Shocking!" said Church, shaking his head.

"They'll come to a sticky end!" prophesied McClure.

Edward Oswald Handforth started.

"Look here, Travers, you ass, are you trying to be funny?" he demanded, turning to the whimsical Vivian. "Because, if you are, I can be funnier. And when I'm funny, I drive home the point of my jokes with my fist."

Travers nodded.

"Most of your jokes need driving home with a fist," he agreed. "Or, possibly, a sledge-hammer—the latter for choice."

"Keep smiling, Handy!" chuckled Nipper. "Don't take any notice of this fathead's chaff. As for your minor, why worry about him? He's at liberty to get up early if he pleases—"

"I'm not going to have him butting in on Little Side whilst we're at practice!" interrupted Handforth gruffly. "He'll put me off my stroke if he's standing by, criticising! Hi! Willy! Come here, you young fat-head!"

Willy Handforth of the Third, as sunny as the morning itself, obligingly came across the Triangle. He was accompanied by Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, his slaves of the Third.

"Well, wonders will never cease!" said Willy blandly. "Fancy you fellows being up at this unearthly hour! And fancy Ted being out, too! What's the world coming to?"

Handforth ignored these pleasantries.

"Where are you kids going to?" he demanded sternly.

"The river!" replied his minor.

"Eh? The which?"

"The river!"

"Oh!" said Handforth, nonplussed by his minor's direct reply, and by its unexpected nature. "The river!"

"That thing across the meadows," said Willy, vaguely pointing. "You know, Ted—the river. It's a sort of winding thing that flows along with lots of water in it."

Handforth turned red.

"You silly young chump!" he roared. "Do you think I don't know what a river is?"

"Well, I wanted to be on the safe side," grinned Willy. "Are we forbidden to go on the river for any reason? Does your royal highness disapprove? Because, if so, we'll go on the river just the same."

The others chuckled, and they were already moving off.

"Come along, Handy," said Church. "We'll waste all the morning here, unless we get a move on."

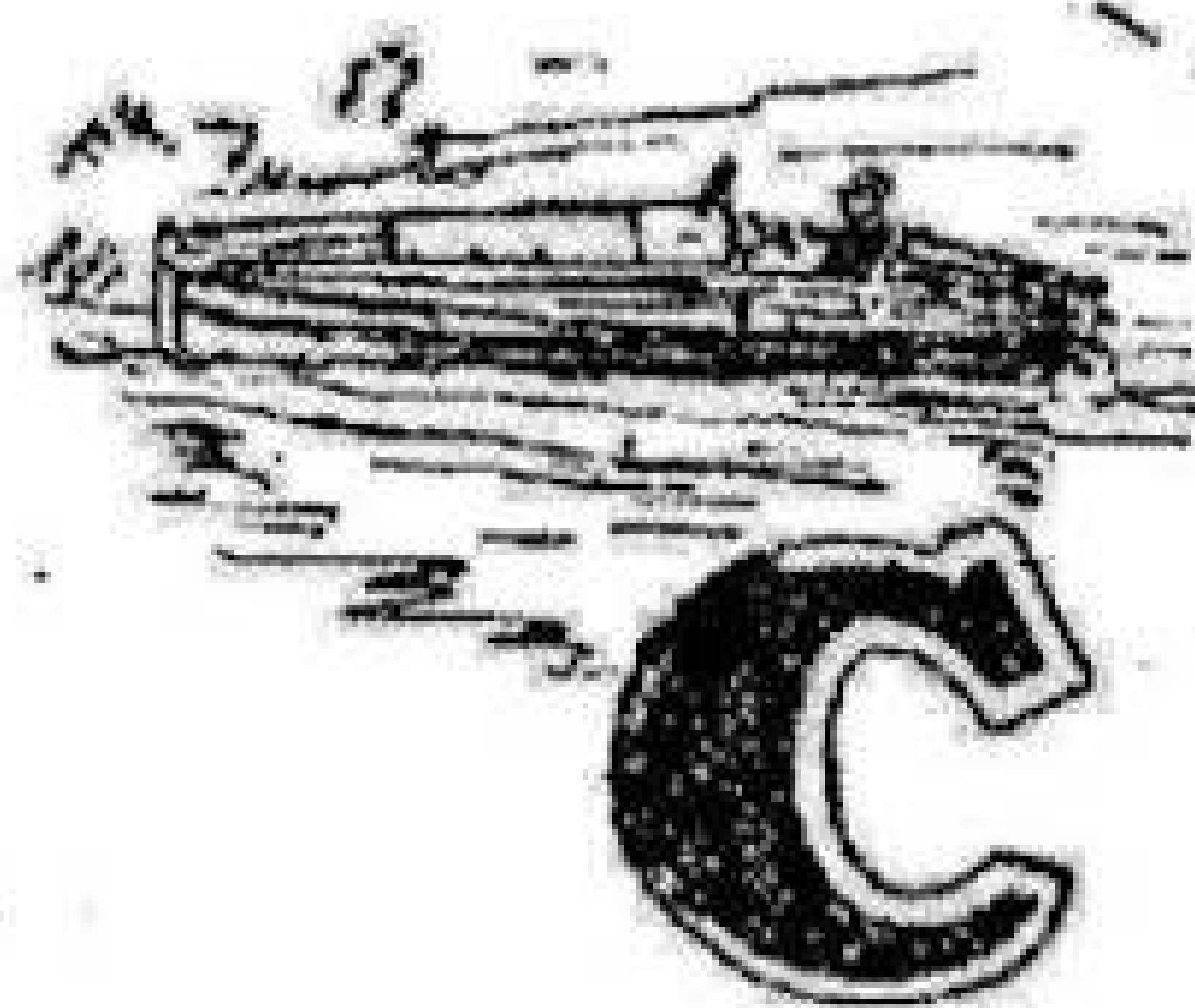
"As long as you youngsters aren't coming to Little Side, you can do as you please," said Handforth generously, as he turned to his minor. "But I don't want you hanging about the nets while I'm practising. Understand?"

"My dear old ass, we won't come within a mile of your silly nets!" replied Willy. "But I can quite appreciate your shyness, Ted. It's only natural that you don't want to make an exhibition of yourself before your own brother. I can see quite enough of you at any ordinary time of the day—without getting up early in the morning for it!"

And Willy & Co. of the Third marched off. Somehow, Handforth felt that where mere words were concerned, his minor had him beaten into a cocked hat.

CHAPTER 2.

The New Silent Two!



CHRISTOPHER LEMON — otherwise Juicy—glanced carelessly towards Little Side after the Re-

movites had vanished round the angle of the Ancient House.

"This early cricket practice stunt isn't so bad," he remarked. "It's a lovely morning, Willy. Why not put in an hour at cricket, instead of going down to the river?"

Willy Handforth eyed him coldly.

"We got up early this morning, Juicy, so that we could have the river to ourselves," he replied. "There'll be plenty of time for cricket practice later on in the day."

"Yes, I know, but—"

"And we're going to the river!" added Willy briefly.

"Oh, rather! Only I was thinking—"

"Then don't!" said Willy. "Thinking isn't your strong point, Juicy, old man. Leave all the thinking to me. In this cruel world there are those with brains, and those without. I needn't say which class you belong to."

Juicy opened his mouth to make some retort, but he thought better of it. Perhaps it was the expression in Willy's eye; perhaps it was because Willy started moving off at that moment. Anyhow, Juicy decided to let the matter rest. It was as clear as daylight that Willy had made up his mind to go to the river.

The fags certainly had the Stowe to themselves that morning. There wasn't a soul in sight when the Third Form trio arrived in the neighbourhood of the school boat-house. Up and down the river, the sun was gleaming on the crystal waters. Never had the stream looked more lovely than it looked now. The green meadows on either hand

were gay with spring flowers, and the graceful willows were in full leaf. Birds were twittering and chirping everywhere, and all nature was smiling.

"We couldn't have a better morning for the test," said Willy briskly. "By jingo, look at those rabbits on the other side of the river! As perky as you please!"

Willy was interested in all animals. He had many pets of his own, but wild life was also fascinating to him. Not that he was out for the purpose of studying nature this morning.

Continuing down the stream, the three fags arrived almost opposite Willard's Island. Here they paused, and entered an old ramshackle boathouse which stood half-hidden amidst the willows and a big clump of bushes. This boathouse had really nothing to do with the school, and nobody quite knew to whom it belonged. Not that Willy Handforth cared. He had been utilising it for his own purposes, since nobody else seemed to want it.

The three fags disappeared into the low building, and for some little time strange sounds emerged into the morning air. There were knockings, scrapings, and one or two sounds which closely resembled muffled protests.

Then, with a great creaking, doors were opened on the river side of the boathouse. These doors were right over the stream, and the boathouse itself had no actual floor. It had been built over a little backwater, so that boats could be floated right into the shed.

A churning sound now made itself apparent, and if there had been any early sportsmen on the river they would have beheld a surprising sight.

For, from that old boathouse, emerged a fearsome-looking craft.

It was, apparently, a motor-boat. A close observer might have detected that the lower portion of it was suspiciously like an ordinary river rowing boat. But a big superstructure had been added, and the bows were imposing in their height—impressive in their racy length.

From the rakish prow to well past amidships, the craft was covered, and towards the stern, in a sunken cockpit, with a wind-screen in front, sat Willy Handforth. A huge wheel was in his grasp, and he was whirling it round so that the queer craft swung round in the river and made off up-stream.

Astern, a wake of creamy foam was appearing, caused by the rapidly-churning propeller, and from within the mysterious interior of the motor-boat came muffled sounds of whirring chains and other machinery.

Strangely enough, there was now no sign of Chubby Heath or Juicy Lemon. These youths had apparently vanished into thin air. At all events, Willy Handforth was the only occupant of the cockpit, and it was an undoubted fact that his chums were not in the boathouse.

"By jingo, she's doing fine!" said Willy complacently, as he glanced round at the creamy wake. "Not as much speed as I would like, but we'll soon alter that!"

He grasped a short lever, which jutted out from the dashboard, near the wheel. He jerked the lever sharply, and two clanging notes rang out from within the hull.

Almost immediately, the remarkable craft increased its speed, and it went swinging past Willard's Island in fine style. There was something majestic in its progress—something almost magical. From stem to stern the craft was blue in colour, with snowy white decks, and she made a fine picture as she swung along, up-stream, in the morning sunlight.

So far as Willy Handforth was concerned, everything was fine. But where did Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon come in? Apparently they weren't sharing in the joys of this cruise.

But, then, this was no ordinary craft!

Willy was out for a thorough test, it seemed. For, after another few yards, he grasped the control lever again, and swung it over. There was a kind of plate behind this lever, with various words painted on it. It was, indeed, a species of engine-room telegraph.

As Willy moved it now, a single clang sounded from the interior, and the lever was pointing to "Stop." The effect was immediate, for the craft now glided forward, and there was no further churning from the stern.

"Now we'll try the giddy reverse!" murmured Willy.

Once more the lever was brought into play, and now four clanging notes sounded. The dial read "Full Speed Astern." Again the propeller started, but this time the motor-boat swung round backwards in the river, with Willy trying all sorts of evolutions with the steering-wheel.

He was so interested in these manoeuvres, in fact, that he nearly ran into the bank. But this disaster was averted. With a swift grab at the control lever, he signalled for "Full Speed Ahead." The craft seemed to shiver from stem to stern. Then she recovered, moved forward, and the danger of going aground was averted.

Once more she glided into mid-stream, and Willy sat back at the wheel, a contented smile on his cheery face.



CHAPTER 3.

Trouble in the Engine-room!

PROGRESS was quite satisfactory for about half a mile, and then there were alarming symptoms of trouble in the engine-room.

The first hint of anything amiss came when Willy's signals for more speed were ignored.

Operating the lever, he slung it across to "Full Speed Ahead," but he was convinced that the craft showed little tendency of racing.

On the contrary, the speed became even slower. Once or twice the boat rocked from side to side—as though sinister internal troubles were affecting her. And Willy Handforth's brow became black. Once again he slammed the engine-room telegraph, and the bell clanged with ominous insistence.

Not that this had the desired effect. Indeed, and to Willy's further indignation, the propeller ceased to revolve. The craft lost way, and drifted languidly across the stream.

"Mutiny!" muttered Willy grimly.

The entire for'ard deck of the boat now opened out on hinges, and the secret of those impressive bows was revealed. For there, now exposed fully to view, were Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon. They were both red-faced and perspiring. They were sitting on a kind of bicycle-like framework, and they were provided with bicycle saddles and handle-bars.

"What's this?" demanded Willy in a cold voice. "Didn't you hear my signals?"

"Rats!" said Chubby Heath, wiping his brow. "It's all very well for you to sit there, steering. But what about us?"

"It's too much like hard work!" said Juicy Lemon rebelliously.

Willy did not lose his temper, as his major might have done. He sat there, regarding the "engine" with silent scorn. And the longer he waited, the better Chubby and Juicy liked it—since they were getting a breather.

Upon the bows of this remarkable vessel her name was painted—"New Silent Two." And there was little doubt that Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were the "silent two." They were, in point of fact, the motor which supplied the power for the propeller.

The whole thing was ingeniously contrived.

The massive-looking covered bows were really deceptive. For that space was nothing but housing accommodation for Willy's companions. There, under that light cover, they were supposed to crouch, pedalling away according to the instructions that were signalled to them.

At one celebrated period of the past, Willy had produced his famous "Silent Two." This had been a kind of motor-car, and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon had been the engine in that masterpiece. This river craft was obviously an adaptation. Indeed, most of the machinery had been lifted out of the original, and was now being utilised in the latest product.

Taking everything in consideration, this "motor-boat" of Willy's was a remarkable achievement. For it did actually go, always providing that the engine supplied the power.

"You're a couple of nice assistants, aren't you?" said Willy curtly. "Luckily, there's

nobody looking, but it would have been just the same if the banks had been crowded. Here we are, stuck out here in mid-stream, and——"

"We knew there was nobody about!" interrupted Chubby Heath gruffly. "Look here, Willy, we want to make a new arrangement. It's jolly hard work pedalling, cooped under this cover."

"We're nearly exhausted already!" added Juicy, in a complaining voice.

"Exhausted!" said Willy with scorn. "Exhausted—after about half a mile! And you chaps have the nerve to call yourselves stalwart specimens of British boyhood!"

"Here, I say——"

"Where's your stamina?" demanded Willy sternly. "Where's your will power? Where's your determination? Before we started on this cruise, I made a bargain with you fellows."

"Yes, I know, but——"

"Let me finish, Chubby!" said Willy curtly. "We went into this thing in a business-like way. You chaps agreed to act as the engine-room staff. Is that right, or is it not?"

"Of course it's right!" said Chubby impatiently. "At the same time——"

"You agreed to serve in the engine-room, and we fixed the rate of pay!" continued Willy. "Threepence an hour is the figure we decided upon, and you agreed to it!"

"It's not enough!" said Juicy Lemon indignantly. "It's—it's a starvation wage! Threepence an hour—for pushing this hulking great thing through the water! Why, you're nothing but a—a sweater!"

"That's all!" agreed Chubby. "And we're not going to stand it, my son! Unless you agree to pay us double wages from this minute onwards, we won't do another stroke of work. Sixpence an hour—or nothing!"

They spoke very boldly, but, at the same time, they were eyeing Willy in a wary fashion. The leader of the Third, however, was perfectly cool. He was even grinning. He did not take the things very seriously, it seemed.

"Oh!" he said slowly. "So you're on strike, are you? Sixpence an hour each; or you won't do any more work? Is that it?"

"Yes," said Chubby Heath. "That's it!"

"You're a pair of cunning bounders!" said Willy. "You're like those chaps who help tourists up the Pyramids, in Egypt. When they get to a part which can't be negotiated without help, they demand more money. You've struck work in the middle of the river, and you know jolly well that I haven't any oars on board. I rely upon you chaps for motive power. And you've struck work—leaving me stranded!"

Willy's face had become more and more grim, and there was now a note in it which sounded distinctly ominous!

CHAPTER 4.

The Strikers!



THE new Silent Two drifted lazily, and almost imperceptibly, down stream. But she kept to the middle of the river. Perhaps Willy was responsible for this, for his hand never left the steering wheel.

"Well, I've considered this position," he said at last. "And I'm not going to stand any dictation from employees. Get back to your work!"

"Eh?" said Chubby, startled.

"Get back to your work!"

"Not likely!" broke out Juicy Lemon. "We want an advance——"

"Come to me after this cruise is over, and I'll consider your proposals," interrupted Willy. "But I'm the skipper of this ship, and I'm not going to have the voyage held up by my crew. You may regard this as a strike—but it's nothing less than mutiny!"

"Oh, come off it!" grinned Chubby. "You don't realise what hard work it is, pedalling this beastly thing!"

"I don't care how hard it is—I'm not going to have a pistol held at my head!" said Willy grimly. "I'll give you ten seconds to get back to work, my lads!"

"Does that mean that we don't get the double pay?" asked Chubby.

"Yes, it does!"

The members of the crew looked at one another in dismay—but they were obstinate, too.

"All right!" said Chubby, with a glare. "We won't do another stroke of work! Will we, Juicy?"

"No fear!" said Juicy Lemon.

Willy was perfectly ready for this.

"All right!" he said. "You've given me your ultimatum, and here's mine. Either you return to work at once, at the old rate, or you'll be sacked on the spot."

"Sacked?"

"Sacked!" repeated Willy. "And that will mean—— Well, you can guess the rest. When people are sacked from their posts, they have to go!"

"But—but we're in mid-stream!" protested Chubby.

"Exactly!" said Willy, with a nod.

His meaning was all too clear. Unless the crew went back to work at the old rate of pay, they would be biffed out of the vessel; and Willy, as skipper, would do the biffing. He was quite capable of it, too, as his chums knew to their cost. And, much as they enjoyed swimming, they were not very keen on a plunge in the River Stowe this morning. The weather wasn't warm enough for swimming yet.

"Look here, can't we compromise?" suggested Chubby, who seemed to be the spokes-

man for the strikers. "How about fourpence-halfpenny an hour——"

"I've said all that I mean to say!" broke in Willy. "If you want more money, come to me at the end of this cruise. Come to me like decent citizens. I'm not going to stand this mutiny. If you have a good case, I'll listen to it sympathetically, and I'll probably raise your rate. But not here. We agreed upon threepence an hour each, and threepence an hour each is all you'll get. Either that, or immediate dismissal!"

And there was a note of finality in Willy's voice. He was perfectly calm—perfectly collected. Indeed, there was something so nonchalant in his tone that the crew knew, on the spot, that their attempt had failed.

"All right, then—give us half a minute!" said Chubby gruffly. "We want to hold a meeting."

"Granted!" said Willy. "You'll have exactly half a minute. If, at the end of that time, if you haven't reached a satisfactory decision, you'll be sacked. And you'll be kicked out of the vessel."

Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon withdrew into the mysterious interior of the "engine-room." They pulled the covers down upon them, and Willy grinned as he heard excited mutterings.

"That's the way to deal with 'em!" he told himself cheerfully. "It requires a strong man to handle a situation like this!"

He glanced at his watch, and found that the half minute had expired. With a sudden jerk he clanged the engine-room telegraph, and there was a yell from below. One of the flaps came up, and Chubby's head appeared.

"You silly ass!" he ejaculated. "What's the idea of clanging like that? You nearly startled us out of our wits!"

"Time's up!" said Willy curtly.

"We haven't finished yet——"

"Time's up!" repeated Willy, rising in his seat, and rolling up his sleeves. "There's been enough of this foolery, and I want a decision, here and now. Are you going back to work, or do you want to get the push? Just say the word!"

Chubby ducked his head down, and whispered fiercely with Juicy for a second or two. Then his head bobbed up again, and he was flushed and hot.

"All right!" he said thickly. "We've had our meeting, and we'll stay on."

"At the old rate?"

"Yes, blow you!"

"Good men!" grinned Willy. "That's the way to deal with a strike, my son! Complete victory for the boss!"

"You know jolly well that you've got us on a piece of string!" said Chubby indignantly.

"I've merely turned the tables—that's all!" replied Willy. "You thought that you had me on a piece of string, didn't you? Well, I wasn't having any—I'm too wise a bird to be caught napping like that. Get back to your work, crew, and don't let's have any slacking. When I give signals, they've got to be obeyed."

"That's all very well——"

"And they've got to be obeyed promptly!" added Willy. "We might meet a barge coming down stream, or a motor-boat—anything. And it'll mean a terrible collision unless you fellows obey orders."

"A—a collision?" said Juicy Lemon, poking his head up.

"If my motive power fails me at a crucial moment, anything might happen," replied Willy. "So don't forget that, my lads! And when there's a collision, it's generally the engine-room staff that goes down with the ship!"

"My hat!" said the engine-room staff blankly.

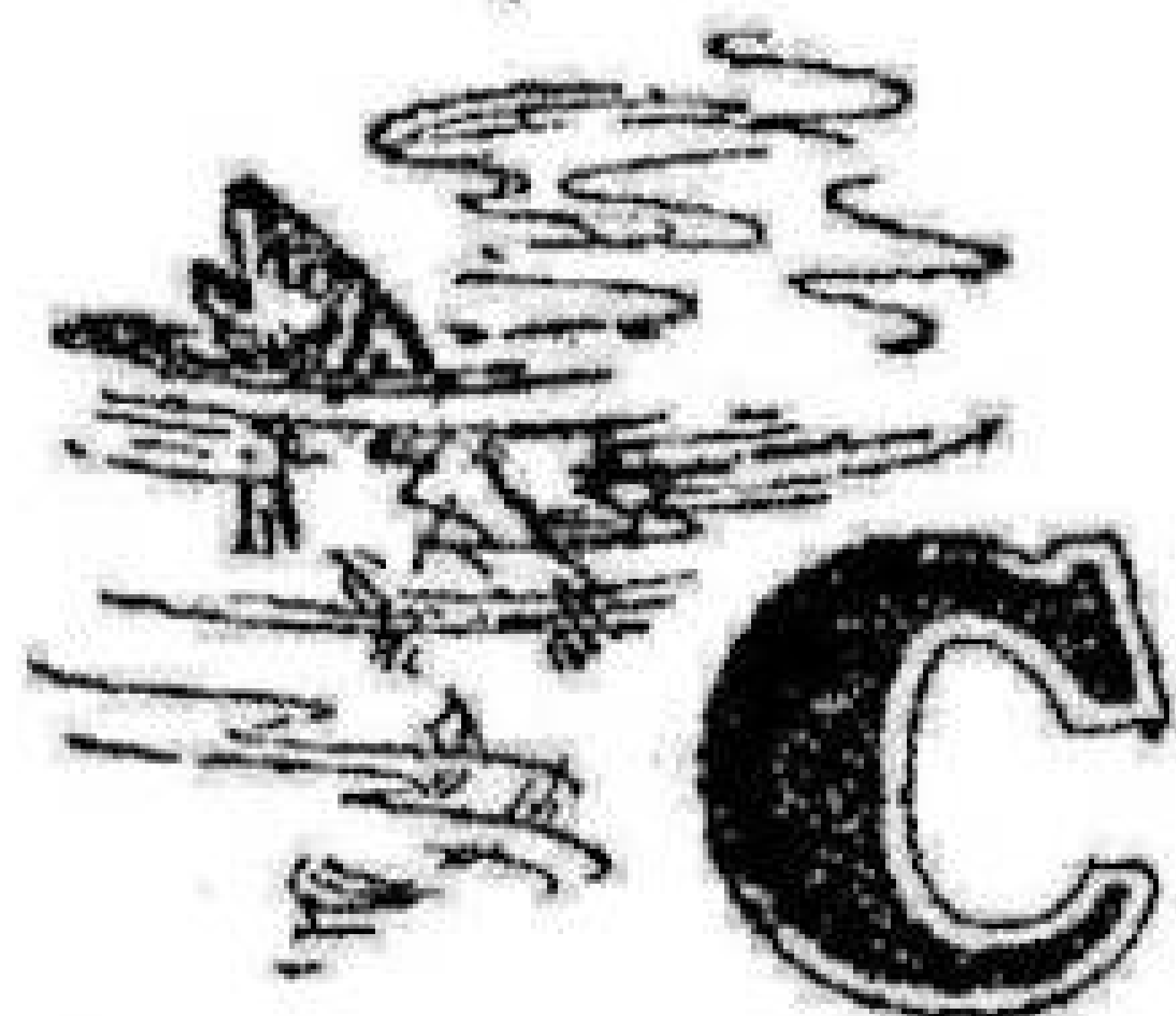
They hadn't thought of it in that way—and yet, strictly speaking, there was a grain of truth in Willy's alarmist picture. In the event of a sudden emergency, it was highly necessary that all orders should be promptly obeyed. Otherwise, the new Silent Two would be out of control.

So, without further ado—and feeling considerably crushed—Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon took their seats once more on the bicycle saddles. The flaps were closed down, and the engine-room telegraph clanged.

The new Silent Two swung slowly round, her propeller churning, and once more she set off sedately up the sunlit river.

CHAPTER 5.

The Beginning of the Mystery!



LANG—clang!

About half a mile had been covered at half-speed, and the engine-room staff was discovering that the work wasn't so very hard, after all. Once they were accustomed to it, indeed, they found that they were able to take things fairly easily. And now the engine-room telegraph had instructed them to go "Dead Slow."

"My only hat!" came an audible exclamation from the skipper.

Then, almost immediately afterwards, the telegraph clanged again. This time it signalled for a complete stoppage.

"Rummiest thing I've seen for years!" came Willy's voice again.

In the dim gloom of the engine-room, Chubby Heath twisted round and looked into Juicy Lemon's face.

"Wonder what's up?" said Chubby.

"Goodness knows!" replied the other member of the engine-room staff. "Hadn't we better lift the flaps and have a look?"

"He might get shirty if we do anything like that," said Chubby, with a sniff. "Don't forget that we're only workmen—we're members of the crew! If we do anything without receiving orders, we shall get the sack! My hat! We'll get even with the bounder for all this!"

However, there was no necessity for them to act without orders. For, a moment later, Willy's voice came down to them.

"Just a minute, you chaps!" he said urgently. "Come up here!"

There was no attempt this time to pretend that they were anything else but fags. Willy was treating them now as his chums—which proved that something very unusual was in the wind.

Up went the flaps, and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon emerged. They raised themselves, and sat on the edge of the engine-room well.

"What's wrong?" asked Chubby, staring round.

"Can't see anything!" remarked Juicy Lemon.

They looked about them with interest. They were in a particularly quiet part of the river, some little distance up stream. St. Frank's was out of sight, hidden by trees. On both sides of the river stretched the meadows, flooded with the bright morning sunshine. In the distance, Bellton Wood looked impressive and picturesque. Not a soul was in sight, and not even a cottage could be seen from this particular bend of the river. The water was wide here, and the current almost non-existent. The new Silent Two floated there in mid-stream, placid and lazy.

"What's the idea of stopping here?" asked Chubby, looking at Willy Handforth in surprise.

But the young skipper of the Third was taking no notice of his chums. He was leaning out of his cockpit—he had deserted the wheel—and he was staring down at the water. His face was expressive of wonder—and concern. Seldom, indeed, was it that Willy looked so grave.

"What's all the mystery about?" demanded Chubby impatiently.

And then Willy looked up.

"Mystery is right!" he said in a strange voice. "You've hit on the right word, Chubby, my son! There's a mystery here that's got me beaten! I've never seen anything so rummy in all my life! Never! It's—it's positively uncanny!"

Once again the other two fags stared about them, but they saw nothing to warrant Willy's surprising statement.

"Dotty!" said Juicy, at length. "The poor chap's gone off his rocker!"

"Clean as a whistle!" agreed Chubby.

But now Willy was pointing even more intently.

"Look down there!" he said. "No, not at the meadows—not at the trees! Look here—into the water! On the surface of the water! Can't you see something peculiar?"

"Those fish?" said Chubby, after a long stare.

"Yes—those fish!"

"What about them?"

"Poor little beggars!" muttered Willy, breathing hard. "Just look at 'em!"

Exchanging a surprised glance, Chubby



The engine-room telegraph clanged, and the new Silent Two, her power derived from the bicycle-like contrivance driven by Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, set off sedately up the sunlit river, with Willy Handforth at the helm.

and Juicy gave their whole attention to the surface of the river. And, sure enough, a good many fish could be seen on the surface. Many of them had their mouths out of the water, and they were gasping painfully. But Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon did not see anything remarkable in this sight.

"I'm blessed if I can understand!" said Chubby, scratching his head. "Everybody knows that the Stowe is full of fish. Roach and tiddlers and——"

"But have you ever seen them gasping like this before?" interrupted Willy grimly.

"Not that I can exactly remember," replied Chubby. "But what about it? I've often seen goldfish gasping in that way at the top of a bowl of water."

"Yes!" agreed Willy indignantly. "Because the water hasn't been changed! Because some careless owner has been neglectful. Goldfish can't live unless the water is constantly aerated—unless it is pure. All fish are the same, if it comes to that. Haven't you been in an aquarium? Haven't you seen the air pipes in the tanks, sending bubbles of air constantly into the water?"

"Yes, but I don't see——"

"This isn't a tank!" continued Willy, waving his hand towards the river. "It's an open stream—aerated naturally. Then why are these fish at the surface, gasping? By Jove! Look at this one! Look here, you chaps! Great Scott!"

Willy suddenly leaned over, and the new Silent Two took a big list to starboard. When Willy assumed an ordinary position again he was holding a good-sized roach in his hand. It was quite dead.

"Well, this beats me!" he said, shaking his head. "Look at it, you chaps—dead!

And all these other fish are dying! What the dickens can it mean? I've seen a few rummy things in my time, but this beats all!"

It must be confessed that neither Chubby Heath nor Juicy Lemon saw anything sensational in this discovery. But then they were made differently from Willy. He loved all animals, all birds, all living creatures. His numerous pets, indeed, were the talk of the Junior School. And when Willy Handforth saw any of the creatures in difficulties his heart went out to them.

"Yes, there's something wrong here!" he said concernedly. "All the fish are on the surface of the water, and they're all gasping. They're dying, and lots of them are dead. What can it mean?"

CHAPTER 6.

An Unexpected Disaster!



WILLY HANDFORTH was a changed being. Five minutes earlier he had been sunny, cheery and light-hearted. He hadn't a care in the world. He had been thoroughly enjoying this early morning cruise, this secret trial of his patent Silent Two.

But now his sunniness had vanished. His eyes were full of deep concern, his young brow was puckered. He could not take his gaze from the surface of the river, from those helpless fish.

"I don't see why you should look so jolly startled, Willy," said Chubby Heath at length. "After all, they're only fish!"

Willy turned upon him.

"How would you like to be at your last gasp?" he demanded. "How would you like to be floating at the surface of the water, your eyes glazed, your movements becoming more and more feeble?"

"But I'm not a fish!" protested Chubby hotly.

"We're all living creatures!" replied Willy soberly. "And these poor things are a lot more helpless than we humans. There must be some reason for this tragedy," he went on, leaning overside again and taking a palmful of water in his cupped hand. "H'm! It looks all right, too!"

He sniffed at the water, and then he sipped it.

"Tastes all right," he reported. "As far as I can tell, there's nothing wrong with the river at all."

"What did you expect to find wrong?" asked Juicy Lemon, with a grin. "Do you think the river's poisoned, or something?"

Willy Handforth started.

"Poisoned!" he muttered. "By Jove, I wonder!"

"Oh, come off it!" said Juicy, who had only made a chance shot. "How the dickens can the river be poisoned? Talk sense, do! I expect these fish are dying of old age, or something."

"Including these baby ones, eh?" said Willy, pointing to several of the gasping creatures. "No, Juicy, there's nothing natural about this business. These fish are dying by the dozen, and there must be something wrong with the river."

By this time the new Silent Two had drifted broadside across the stream, and had slowly glided down towards the bend where the river narrowed slightly. The next reach was not visible, owing to a screen of leafy willows.

Not that Willy took any interest in the local geography. He didn't care how far he drifted. He was looking at the river, wondering what could be the matter with these fish. For indeed there was something extraordinarily wrong. To a young naturalist such as Willy the problem was a fascinating one. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were altogether too matter-of-fact to be interested in such trifles.

"I believe you're right, Juicy," said Willy, after a short silence. "The river's poisoned in some way. And it must be quite local, too."

"How do you make that out?" asked Chubby.

"Well, half a mile down the river there's not a sign of this trouble," replied Willy. "And that looks as though the water there is fairly pure. The fish, floating down the stream, get out of the poisoned zone, and perhaps they recover. Let's hope that the majority of them do. We'd better make a

move again and get higher up. Perhaps we shall be able to locate the——"

"Hi!" yelled Chubby suddenly. "Look out!"

"What the dickens——" began Willy.

He swung round, and was just in time to see a long, narrow boat shoot round the curve. It contained four St. Frank's seniors and a steersman, and they were going all out.

"Sculling practice," said Willy quickly. "Get back to your posts, you chaps; we shall have to get out of the way. We're right in the fairway!"

A lusty shout came from the seniors.

"Hi! Get that tub off the river!"

It was obvious that something would have to be done quickly. Just at this particular point the river was not very broad, and the racing craft, with its extended oars, required all the space. And there was liable to be trouble with the seniors if these fags impeded them.

But Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon got into a bit of a mix-up. They both reached for one of the engine-room covers at the same time, on the starboard side. The new Silent Two gave a lurch to starboard and heeled right over. Matters were made worse by Willy, who was bearing over to starboard at the same time. Nobody knew exactly how it happened, but the next moment the strange craft heeled over, and water went pouring down into the engine-room.

"Look out!" roared Willy.

Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon became more confused than ever. Chubby, in fact, fell right overboard, and he grabbed at the side of the boat. It was just sufficient to pull the craft right over. With a slow, sluggish movement, but deliberately disastrous, the new Silent Two heeled completely over. Willy was pitched out, and a shout of laughter came from the seniors as they swung by, pulling at their oars.

"Carry on!" sang out one of the Sixth-Formers. "The water's only shallow there. Those fags can look after themselves!"

And the rakish-looking racing-boat sped by, and no attempt was made to help the fags.

It seemed that the seniors were justified in their action. Willy and Chubby were practically standing on the river bed, for the accident had happened close in to the bank. And there was the new Silent Two, her keel only visible. She had completely turned turtle, and Chubby Heath was splashing about, trying to cling to the stern.

"You silly asses!" spluttered Willy fiercely. "It was all your fault! I warned you long ago that the boat was a bit top-heavy. Why the dickens did you both lean over the same side?"

"It's no good blaming me!" gasped Chubby, the cold water making his voice unsteady. "It was Juicy's fault. I told

him not to— Hallo! Where the dickens is he? Where's Juicy?"

"Eh?" said Willy, looking round with a sudden anxiety. "Hi, Juicy! Where are you, you thundering ass?"

"Juicy!" howled Chubby Heath frantically.

Until that moment they had believed that their companion was splashing about in the water with them. But no. There was no sign whatever of Juicy Lemon!



CHAPTER 7.

A Narrow Escape!

IT was a time for quick action, and Willy was the fellow for the job.

A minute before the situation had been purely humorous. The overturning of a freak craft like this was nothing to worry about. Those seniors were still laughing at the incident, indeed.

But now in a flash the comedy had turned to drama. Was it possible that it would change to tragedy? It was a startling thought, a terrible thought.

"Juicy!" yelled Willy, at the top of his voice.

But there was no reply.

There lay the new Silent Two, keel uppermost, and Chubby Heath and Willy Handforth swam round, searching. But Juicy Lemon had gone. In a flash Willy knew the truth. Either Juicy had been struck by the boat and had been stunned, and was now lying at the bottom of the river, or else he had been trapped underneath the overturned vessel. In either case, the possibilities were alarming.

"He's gone—he's gone!" gasped Chubby Heath, panic-stricken.

"Steady, old man!" said Willy. "It's no good getting the wind up—"

"Help, help!" screamed Chubby wildly.

"It's no good doing that!" snapped Willy.

"Those seniors are well beyond earshot now, and there's nobody else. Lend a hand with this boat, and look sharp! He may be imprisoned underneath!"

"Look, look!" gasped Chubby abruptly.

He pointed, and Willy caught his breath in. A few bubbles were appearing on the surface of the water, curling round from underneath the overturned craft. Proof! Proof that Juicy Lemon was under the wreck.

"Come on!" panted Willy.

Somehow or other they managed to get the boat over. Frantically they pulled at it, half swimming, half wading. Although it seemed a hopeless task at first, they continued their efforts, and at length the boat came sluggishly over, and was even half floating.

But the two fags did not notice this at the moment. Their attention was concentrated upon the figure which now came into view—the still, silent figure of Juicy Lemon, floating head downwards in the water. At least, he was in a kind of doubled-up position, with his head completely submerged.

"Oh, he's dead!" said Chubby, pale to the lips. "He's dead!"

"Keep your hair on!" said Willy. "It'll take more than this to kill a chap like Juicy. Let's get him to the bank. He hasn't been in long enough to get drowned."

Willy's coolness was all to the good. And, in a businesslike way, he started on the job of getting Juicy Lemon to the bank. Chubby helped with a will, and in less than two minutes the unconscious junior was stretched out on the grass, and his companions were losing no time in their first-aid efforts.

"Artificial respiration—that's the only thing!" said Willy crisply. "Come on, Chubby—you know what to do. We're both Scouts, and we'll soon put plenty of life into him."

"I believe's he's dead!" panted Chubby hysterically.

But Willy knew differently. He hadn't made any close examination, but he was quite sure that Juicy Lemon was still very much alive. He had probably swallowed a good deal of water, but this wouldn't do him much harm. The main thing was to bring him round—to restore consciousness.

There was nothing gentle in Willy's treatment. He and Chubby commenced pumping for all they were worth, and the unfortunate Juicy was mauled about in the most drastic fashion. And yet this treatment seemed to have an excellent effect. For in less than five minutes he was showing signs of recovery.

"That's better!" panted Willy, when he saw these indications. "Good egg! Keep it up, Chubby—he's coming round!"

"He's brought up about half the river!" said Chubby breathlessly. "My only hat! He must have swallowed an awful lot!"

"We've got most of it up," said Willy, in a satisfied voice. "But we only dragged him out of the river in the nick of time, Chubby. Another two or three minutes, and he would have been past all hope. Phew! Doesn't it only show you how quickly these things can happen?"

"I wouldn't have believed it!" said Chubby soberly. "I say, what the dickens are we going to tell people? If it gets about that Juicy has been nearly drowned, there'll be the dickens of a row! That boat of yours might even be forbidden, Willy. Not that that wouldn't be a good idea!" he added thoughtfully.

"Nobody's going to know anything about it!" said Willy sternly. "At least, none of the prefects or masters. We'll have Juicy round before long, and he's a hardy beggar. He'll be all right before breakfast-time. There you are—he's coming round now! Good man!"

Juicy Lemon had suddenly made a convulsive movement, and now he managed to sit

up. There was a rather bleary look in his eyes, and he stared about him dazedly.

"What's—what's all this?" he muttered. "What the dickens are you chaps doing? Oh, I say, I'm all wet, you know! I'm absolutely drenched—"

"That's all right!" interrupted Willy. "We all fell in the river, Juicy, old man. You were trapped under the boat, and—"

"I—I don't seem to remember!" muttered Juicy. "Yes, I do, though! That rotten boat of yours came down on top of me, and I was pushed under the water. Then I biffed my head, or something, because I don't seem to remember much more. Ugh! I feel rotten, you know!"

"Let's carry on a bit longer," said Willy soothingly. "We've been getting up lots of water—"

"You keep your beastly hands off me!" said Juicy. "I've had enough of it! And there's no reason why you should make such a giddy fuss! I only swallowed about a gallon!"

"That's all right, then!" nodded Willy. "We must have recovered at least seven pints, so there's not much left in your tummy. You'll be all right in a few minutes!"

"I'm all right now!" said Juicy feebly. He got to his feet and shivered. The sunshine was warm, but there was a breeze and he was feeling chilly. Willy and Chubby, on the other hand, were quite warm after their energetic first-aid tactics.

"The best thing you can do, Juicy, is to run up and down for a bit," advised Willy. "Never mind if you feel a bit dizzy. You'll soon be all right—especially after you've warmed yourself up."

"Yes, that'll be best!" muttered Juicy Lemon.

And then, before he could even take a single step, his knees seemed to sag, his jaw dropped, and he collapsed in a heap!



CHAPTER 8.

An Alarming Theory!

"LOOK out!" yelled Chubby.

But it was too late. Juicy Lemon had fallen, and the next

moment Willy and Chubby were kneeling by his side in the grass. There was a curious change in Juicy now. He had gone as pale as a sheet, and he was somehow different. His skin seemed to be drawn and stretched, and his eyes were half open.

"Juicy, old man!" said Willy earnestly. "Pull yourself together! You'll be all right in a few minutes!"

But there was no response from the unfortunate Juicy. Willy shook him, but it made no difference.

"Oh, what's the matter with him?" asked Chubby Heath hoarsely. "He was all right

a minute ago! He came round splendidly, and I thought he was himself again. What's the matter with him, Willy? Is he—is he—dead?"

"Don't be an idiot!" replied Willy curtly. But his voice was unusually strained. And it was rather significant that he placed a hand over the region of Juicy Lemon's heart.

"Well?" breathed Chubby. It was unnecessary for him to put that query, for the expression on Willy's face was eloquent. He was tremendously relieved.

"It's all right, you scaremonger!" said Willy. "His heart's beating steadily enough. He's fainted, that's all."

"But why should he faint?" asked Chubby. "How should I know?"

"People don't faint after drinking a few gallons of water," said Chubby. "Besides, we got most of it up. I've seen lots of fellows hauled out of the river after being nearly drowned. They're generally seedy for a bit, and then they're themselves again. But just look at Juicy! Look at his face! He—he looks ghastly!"

Willy Handforth frowned. "Yes, there's something unusual about this," he agreed. "He hasn't merely fainted—he's lost consciousness. He's absolutely dead to the world."

"Dead!" gasped the other. "I don't mean really dead, you fathead!" frowned Willy. "He's only temporarily senseless. And I can't understand it. He recovered from the effects of the ducking all right, but something else seemed to hit him then."

"What do you mean—something else?" "I don't know—it's a mystery," replied Willy. "I suppose we'd better do something. We'd better carry him to the school, or—"

"Hi, you fellows!" yelled Chubby suddenly. "Help! Here! Quick! We're in trouble!"

Willy glanced round, and found that Chubby Heath was waving his hands frantically. In the distance a group of figures had appeared. They were clad in flannels, and Willy could recognise the form of his major amongst them.

"Yes, I suppose you're right," he said slowly. "It's rather a pity to have Ted messing about, but we shall have to do something. Juicy seems to be in a bad way."

In response to Chubby's calls, the figures approached at the double. They turned out to be Edward Oswald Handforth of the Remove, Nipper, Archie Glenthorne, and Church and McClure. Having finished early cricket practice, the Remove fellows were taking a stroll by the river.

"What's wrong here?" asked Nipper, as he came running up.

"Bit of an accident," replied Willy briefly. "Great Scott!" ejaculated Nipper, falling on his knees beside Juicy Lemon.

"Odds tragedies and disasters!" said Archie Glenthorne, adjusting his monocle and gazing

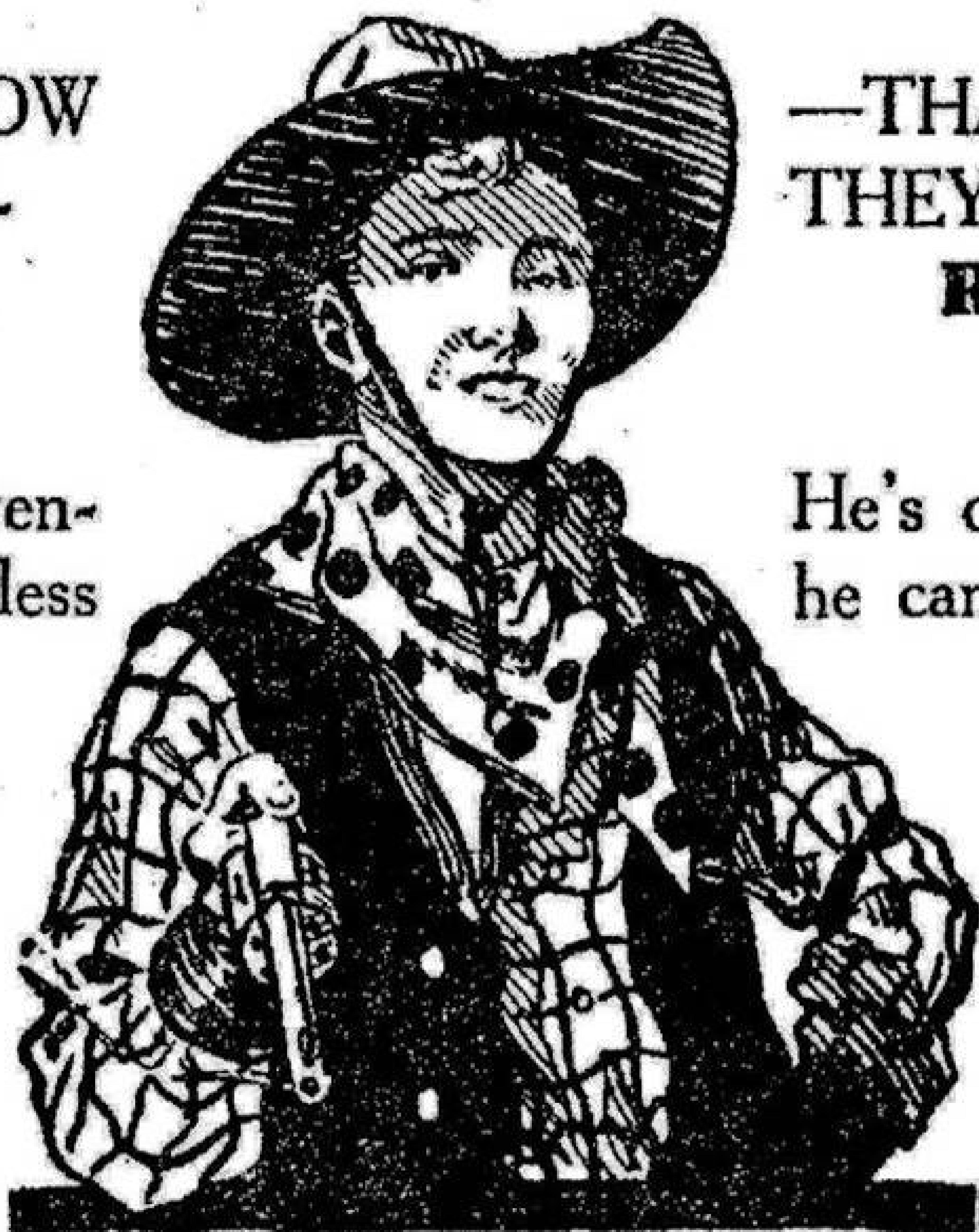
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OUTLAW.

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escapades

appear every
week

IN THE



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he can beat any gun-
man on the
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pair of heels to
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blankly at the still figure. "You don't mean to absolutely say that the poor old lad is defunct?"

"No, of course not," replied Willy. "He's only fainted."

Handforth major gave a snort.

"It's about time that you reckless fags had a lesson!" he said sternly. "Playing about with your silly boat, eh? I heard rumours that you were——"

"You shouldn't take any notice of rumours, Ted," interrupted Willy. "The boat's all right, but we overturned in getting out of the way of some seniors."

And Willy gave a few details of the mishap.

"Well, it's very rummy," said Nipper at length, as he frowned down upon Juicy. "You say you got up nearly all the water that he swallowed?"

"Practically all of it," replied Willy. "We applied artificial respiration, and everything. We thought he was all right, and then suddenly he collapsed again."

"Well, I'm blessed if I can understand it," said Nipper. "The kid almost looks as though he'd been drugged."

"Drugged?" repeated Chubby, staring.

"My only aunt!" said Willy, a gleam coming into his eyes. "Drugged! You—you mean poisoned?"

"Not exactly, but it's very much the same thing," replied Nipper. "Still, that's rot. Juicy couldn't have received any poisoning from the river——"

"Couldn't he?" broke in Willy tensely.

"Oh, goodness!" said Chubby, with a start.

The two fags were looking so alarmed that the Removites stared at them in wonder.

"What's the secret?" asked Handforth.

"What an idiot I was not to think of it before!" said Willy rapidly. "Of course! Poor old Juicy has been poisoned!"

"Good gad!"

"Yes, poisoned!" went on Willy. "It's the only possible explanation! The whole river's poisoned, you chaps! Juicy swallowed an awful lot of water, although he brought most of it up. Perhaps the poison got into his system——"

"What utter rot is this?" interrupted Edward Oswald impatiently. "What the dickens are you talking about, you young chump? How can the river be poisoned? Whoever heard of such piffle? Besides, you

and Chubby were in the water, too, weren't you?"

"Yes, but we didn't swallow any of it," replied Willy quickly. "A mouthful or two, perhaps, but nothing to count. Juicy was nearly drowned, and he had a tummyful. That's why he's affected, and we're not."

"Kindly cheese it, laddie!" said Archie Glenthorne. "I mean to say, dash it! It's a bit thick when you say that the good old river is somewhat poisonous."

"Look out there!" said Willy curtly. "If you don't believe me—look at those fish!"

All eyes were turned towards the river. And now, for the first time, the Remove fellows understood what Willy was getting at. There was nothing unusual to be seen at first, but when the attention was concentrated upon the surface of the river little bubbles could be seen here and there. Fish, large and small, were at the surface, gasping and gurgling. In one or two odd places fish were floating down the stream, dead.

"Phew!" whistled Nipper, with a startled look at the others. "Willy's right, you chaps! There's certainly something wrong with this water. The fish are dying by the hundred!"

"Odds riddles and puzzles!" said Archie.

"Well, I'm blowed!" declared Handforth. "You're right, Willy. I've never seen fish like this before! What on earth can it mean?"



CHAPTER 9.

The Mystery of the River!

OR a few tense moments there was a silence. All the juniors were thunderstruck by the discovery. And, one and all, they were staring down at the unconscious form of Juicy Lemon.

If this mysterious poisoning could kill the fish, then it could have a similar effect upon Juicy Lemon! He had been trapped under that overturned boat, and he had swallowed an enormous amount of water. Owing to the prompt efforts of Willy and Chubby, most of this water had been brought up, but perhaps the poison had remained in his system!

"Look here, we'd better rush him to the school!" said Nipper suddenly. "It's no good standing here and discussing the problem. The poor kid may be dying. We'll get him into the sanny, and Dr. Brett must have a look at him. It may be deadly serious!"

"Just what I was thinking," said Handforth. "Willy, you young ass, why didn't you call us before? It'll be a terrible thing if Juicy dies—"

"We'd no idea he was so bad!" interrupted Willy defensively. "He only fainted a

minute or two before you came in sight. And it's all rot to start blaming me—"

"What-ho! Laddies, kindly gaze upon the patient!" put in Archie Glenthorne. "It seems to me that the old tissues are somewhat restored. In fact, the young blighter is absolutely quivering at the eyelids!"

"Thank goodness!" said Willy fervently.

They all forgot the mysterious pollution of the river. Juicy Lemon was coming round! There was no mistake about it. His eyelids were moving, and he was not looking quite so pale and drawn.

"It's all right, Juicy, old man," said Willy gently, as he took his chum's head in his arms. "You'll soon be yourself again now. Buck up, old son!"

"What's—what's happened?" muttered Juicy Lemon, staring about him dazedly. "Hallo! When did these fellows come? I—I didn't see them—"

"That's all right," said Nipper. "You're not quite well, Juicy."

"Rats!" said the fag. "I—I'm only feeling a bit sick. It must be the rotten water I swallowed. Oh, my hat! Lemme get away!"

Rather to their relief he struggled to his feet, and ran off rapidly. Apparently there wasn't very much the matter with him now. He vanished behind a clump of bushes, and ominous sounds disturbed the peace of the morning.

"Now that he's recovered, I don't think he'll take long in pulling right round completely," said Willy, with satisfaction.

"Yes, we'd better leave him alone for a few minutes," said Nipper, eyeing Willy and Chubby very narrowly. "You two kids aren't looking particularly bright, either," he added. "You're both a bit shaky."

"Oh, that's nothing," said Willy. "We had a wetting, and we're a bit chilly."

Both he and Chubby knew differently. They were feeling shaky—trembly. An ordinary ducking in the river would not produce these effects. In a very slight degree they had the same symptoms as Juicy. But then, they had swallowed hardly any water, and that was probably the explanation of their comparative immunity.

While the juniors were standing in groups, discussing the surprising affair, a boat came into sight round the bend of the stream. It contained the Sixth Formers. They were coming down river after their practice.

As the slender craft came nearer, the watchers from the bank could see that the seniors were looking strangely exhausted. Only two of them were making any attempt to row. The others were leaning forward with bent backs and with drooped heads.

"You seniors have been overdoing it!" sang out Nipper, as the craft came gliding past.

"No, we haven't," said Wilson of the Sixth. "There's something funny in the air this morning."

"In the air?" repeated Handforth.

"We can't understand it," replied Wilson. "We're all pretty well exhausted, although we've gone over the same course dozens of times without any effect. An' yet this morning, we feel as ill as dogs!"

"Ill!" whispered Willy. "Phew! Did you hear that, you chaps?"

"Have you been drinking any of the river water?" shouted Handforth.

"Don't be an ass!" retorted Wilson. "Of course we haven't. And it wouldn't make us ill even if we had! The air seems all right this morning, but it must be enervating, or something."

A moment later, the seniors were out of earshot—and out of sight round the bend. The Removites and the fags gazed at one another significantly.

"Those seniors don't suspect a thing!" said Willy. "They put it down to something in the air. But it's as clear as daylight that the river has affected them."

"But Wilson says they haven't drunk any of the water!" protested Chubby.

"We didn't drink any!" said Willy. "The river's polluted, I tell you. It's poisoned in some way. Poor old Juicy has copped out most because he swallowed a lot of the water. We're feeling shaky and trembly because he had a ducking. And those seniors are just weak because they've been well up the river—where the pollution seems to be coming from. What the dickens can it mean?"

Nobody answered, for nobody had an explanation. And then Juicy appeared, looking much better. He came up to the group rather sheepishly.

"Sorry, you chaps," he said. "I'm feeling heaps better now, though."

"Did you bring up any more water?" asked Willy pointedly.

"About a pint," said Juicy, with a shudder. "Oh, my hat! I felt absolutely rotten. But I'm better now, though. Still shaky, but I'm not a chap to make a fuss over a ducking."

"It isn't the ducking we're worrying about, my lad," said Handforth major. "You've been poisoned—just like these fishes!"

"Poisoned!" ejaculated Juicy, with a jump. "Oh, corks, that—that explains it, then!"

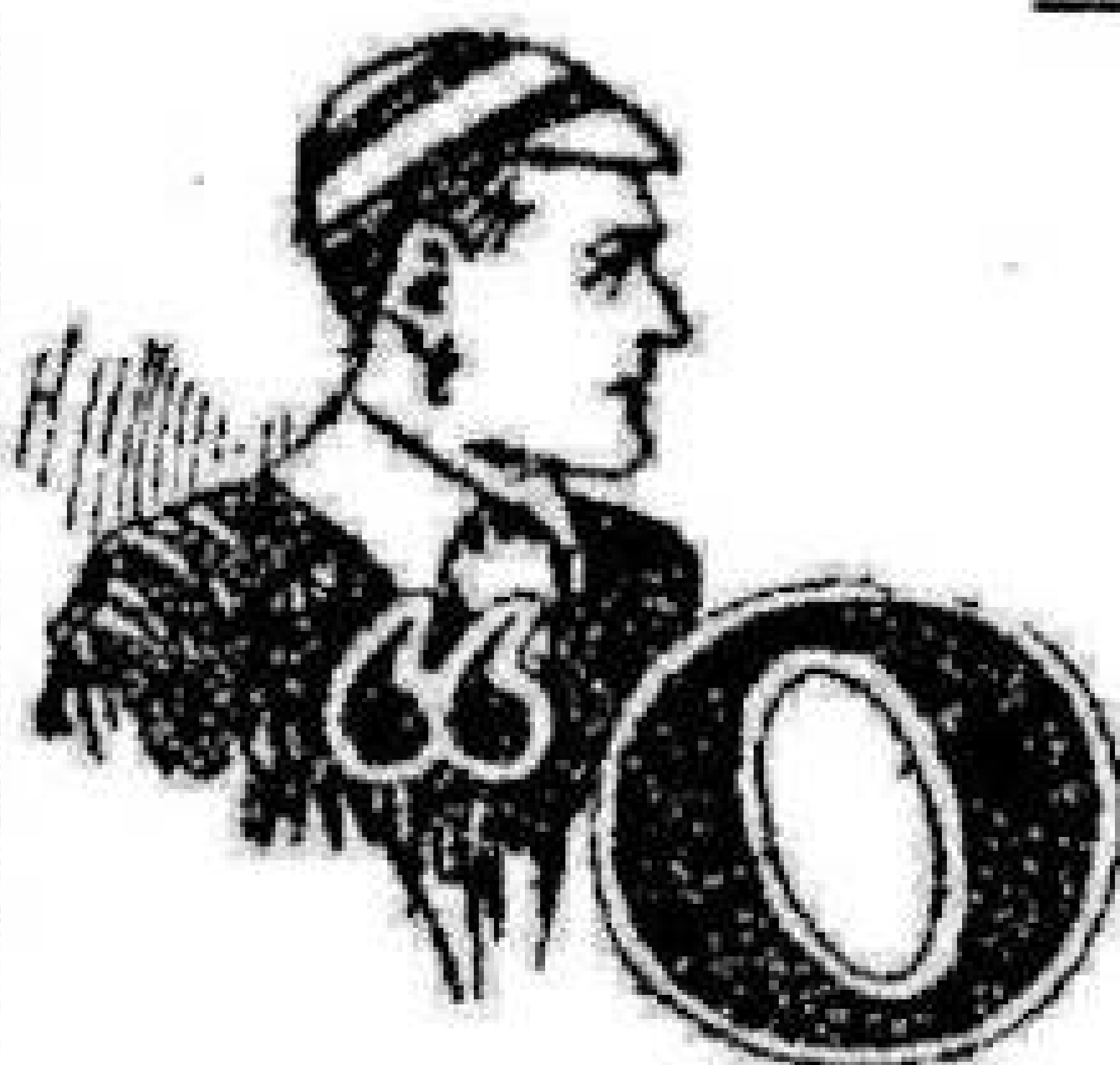
"It's nothing much," said Willy. "You'll be yourself again in no time, Juicy, old man. If these fellows will help us to put the old motor-boat on an even keel, we'll bale out the water, and then get back to the boat-house. It must be near to breakfast-time, anyhow."

"You'd better not go on the river again!" said McClure warningly.

"Oh, rats!" replied Willy. "It won't do us any harm—particularly down stream, where the water doesn't seem to be affected much. Besides, I'm not going to leave my new Silent Two here. Be sports, you chaps, and lend us a hand!"

And within five minutes the new Silent Two was righted, and most of the water had been baled out. But all those juniors—Removites and fags alike—were still thought-

ful. They were very startled by the surprising events of this dramatic morning!



CHAPTER 10.

The Decision!

"Of course," said Nipper, "we can't leave the thing like this!"

"Like what?" asked Edward Oswald Hand-

forth quickly.

"We shall have to make a report," said Nipper. "We shall have to tell our Housemaster—or the Head—that there's something wrong with the river. If we don't, other chaps might be getting ill."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "Good gad! I'm not sure that I'm not feeling a bit wilty already, dash it!"

Willy shook his head.

"Better say nothing," he advised.

"But, my dear kid—"

"Take a tip from me, and keep mum!" went on Willy. "We're the only chaps who know about this mysterious pollution, and the sensible thing will be to say nothing. Those seniors don't suspect the truth, and there's no reason why they should be enlightened. They haven't the faintest idea that the river is responsible for their exhaustion. I don't suppose they noticed the dying fish."

"They couldn't have done," said Nipper. "But I'm not so sure about keeping mum, Willy."

"All right, have your own way," said Willy, shrugging his shoulders. "But you'll regret it, if you report this business to the Housemaster. Mr. Nelson Lee may be your guv'nor, Nipper, but he's a master, just the same. And all masters are funny beggars. They haven't any consideration for us chaps. And before you know where you are, the river will be out of bounds."

"By George!" said Handforth. "There's something in that, you know!"

"There's a whole lot in it," agreed Church, nodding. "Willy's right. The river will be placed out of bounds like a shot if the Head gets to know about this affair."

"But he's bound to know about it, sooner or later," argued Nipper.

"Sooner or later—yes!" said Willy. "But you know what masters are. It may be days before they get wind of this rummy business. It may blow over altogether. Perhaps the pollution is only temporary. In any case, I feel like investigating on my own. Just us chaps, I mean."

"That's a pretty brainy idea!" nodded Handforth. "By George! An investigation, eh? We'll probe the mystery ourselves! Willy, my son, that's a dashed good idea!"

"Yes, I thought of it just in time," nodded Willy calmly. "It was on the tip of your

tongue, Ted, wasn't it? You were just going to suggest the same thing, eh?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I was," said Handforth, in surprise.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The famous Edward Oswald had had no idea that his younger brother was pulling his leg. But the other juniors appreciated the joke keenly. Handforth always "thought" of ideas that somebody else had just suggested.

"It's all very well to talk about making a personal investigation," said Nipper. "And it's all very well, too, to talk about keeping the thing dark. You may be right, Willy, when you say that the masters will probably know nothing for days. But what about young Lemon?"

"He's all right," replied Willy promptly. "Aren't you, Juicy?"

Juicy Lemon, who was looking pale and shaky, gave a feeble grin.

"Well, not exactly," he said. "I feel shaky, and——"

"But you're all right—aren't you?" insisted Willy.

"Oh, rather!"

"You don't want to be taken to the sanny, do you?"

"No fear!" said Juicy hastily.

"You wouldn't like to have Dr. Brett examining you, eh?" continued Willy. "You wouldn't like to be kept in the sanny for a week, my lad? In fact, and to put it bluntly, you haven't the faintest desire to see a doctor, have you?"

"Not the faintest," said Juicy, in a weak voice. "I—I'm feeling as fit as a fiddle!"

For Juicy had seen that Willy Handforth's eye was fixed upon him. And there was something in Willy's look that made any other answer impossible. Truth to tell, the unhappy Juicy was feeling unutterably "rotten." His legs were unsteady, his head was aching abominably, his eyes were shooting with pain. But he pulled himself together, and almost succeeded in deceiving himself as well as the others.

The juniors themselves felt that Juicy's ill-effects were only temporary and would soon pass off completely.

And so it was settled.

These fellows were the only ones who knew anything about the unusual condition of the river, and they would keep mum about it. For Willy had been quite right in saying that the Stowe would be placed out of bounds if anybody in authority heard of the mysterious "poisoning." And for the river to be out of bounds at this season of the year would be disastrous.

Indeed, these juniors felt that they owed it to the rest of the school to keep quiet. Why should they compel everybody to suffer, just because Juicy Lemon had swallowed a gallon of the water? Besides, perhaps this sensational pollution, or whatever it was, would be all clear by the morrow.

And if the story reached the ears of the Head the river would be barred, there would be a long investigation, and days would drag on before the fellows could use the stream again. Perhaps weeks. The better part of the term would go while dilly-dallying experts came down and made all sorts of unnecessary examinations.

"Yes, it's far better to keep quiet about it," said Nipper later, when they had reached the school. "I've just been having a word with old Browne of the Fifth, and he's heard about those seniors already."

"They don't suspect the truth, do they?" asked Handforth.

"Not a bit of it," said Nipper, with a smile. "It seems that they all attended a special supper in Wilson's study last night—and they're blaming the grub."

"Good egg!" grinned Handforth.

"That's just it," said Nipper, with a chuckle. "Eggs were the chief item on the menu, and those seniors believe that the majority of them were bad eggs. They haven't the faintest suspicions against the river, and they feel a lot better now, anyhow. Their weakness was only apparent while they were in the boat. And that proves, Handy, that the river is poisoned."

"Well, it's a rummy affair," said Edward Oswald, scratching his head. "How the dickens can the river get poisoned? It seems so—so idiotic! And what are we going to do about an investigation?"

"We'll form a little party directly after lessons this afternoon," replied Nipper. "We'll take a boat, and go up the river. We'll try to track the thing to its source."

"The river?" said Handforth, staring.

"No, you ass—the pollution," replied Nipper. "It can't be very far up-stream. A thing like this is bound to be purely local. It's too concentrated to be a general complaint."

And so they went indoors, vaguely uneasy, and full of mystification.

CHAPTER 11.

The Cricket Fiend!



MR. AUSTIN SUNCLIFFE sat dreaming at his desk in the Third Form classroom.

The Third was supposed to be at work, but none of the fags thought it necessary to remind Mr. Suncliffe that ten minutes of the first lesson had already gone, and nothing whatever had been done.

The Third was enjoying itself.

Various stalwarts were drawing rude and uncomplimentary caricatures of Mr. Suncliffe on odd scraps of paper. Others were whispering together. One or two were surreptitiously eating doughnuts and similar



With a slow, sluggish movement the new Silent Two heeled completely over, and Willy Handforth and his two chums were thrown out into the river!

delicacies. One rash sportsman was even cracking peanuts.

Work, of course, was the last thing to be thought of.

And Mr. Suncliffe still sat at his desk, dreaming. Perhaps it was the weather that was affecting him. At any rate, the Form-master was gazing absent-mindedly out of the window, across the sunlit Inner Court. From here he could see a goodly portion of Big Side, and now and again a white figure would appear in sight. Some of the seniors were busy at the nets, being coached.

The Third, of course, knew exactly why Mr. Suncliffe was so abstracted. He was thinking of cricket. For the whole of the summer term, Mr. Suncliffe would think of little else but cricket.

As soon as Easter was over, Mr. Suncliffe always began to live. For a few brief months he would be deliriously happy—excited, eager, distracted. And then, with the opening of the football season in the autumn, Mr. Suncliffe would go into a condition that was closely akin to hibernating. Throughout the winter months he would be dull and listless. He would do his work quite well, it was true, but he had no other interests in life.

Cricket was his passion.

It was a familiar sight to see Mr. Suncliffe, during the summer term, dashing down to the village at the double, in order to obtain the first editions of the evening papers. He wasn't satisfied with following the fortunes of the St. Frank's cricketers. He always had his eye on all the counties. Unless he knew exactly where Middlesex or Surrey stood overnight he would not get a wink of sleep. And when any big county championship game was left in a crucial stage, Mr. Suncliffe would be like a cat on hot bricks.

"Pity it isn't a half-holiday to-day, sir," remarked Willy innocently.

Mr. Suncliffe started.

"Yes, Handforth minor—yes!" he said. "A great pity!"

"Ripping weather for cricket, sir."

"Perfect—perfect!" agreed Mr. Suncliffe happily. "I have a conviction that there will be an extraordinary number of fine days during this forthcoming summer. Cricket will be gloriously successful."

"I hope it will be fine for the Remove match against the River House chaps next week, sir," said Willy cheerfully.

"Yes, we must all hope for the best," said Mr. Suncliffe. "Naturally, the Remove boys will win this match. In no circumstances must they allow the River House to prevail. That would indeed be a tragedy."

"Oh, rather, sir!"

The rest of the Third sat tight, and grinned. It was nothing unusual for Willy Handforth to deliberately "rag" the Form-master in this way. Willy's tone was so conversational that Mr. Suncliffe had completely forgotten that this was no moment for the discussion of Junior cricket problems.

"I think the seniors will have a good season, too, sir," went on Willy brightly.

"I am very confident," said Mr. Suncliffe, getting up from his seat and strolling over towards the window. "Very confident indeed, Handforth minor. Fenton has many splendid men this season. Browne, of the Fifth, is a power in himself, and there are many others. Take, for example, Morrow, of the West House. Morrow may be slightly temperamental, but he is a staunch man—Dear me! What are you doing, Parry?"

Parry minor, of the West House, looked very much as though he were eating a doughnut. As a matter of fact, he was.

"Who, sir?" he gulped. "Me, sir?"

"Yes, Parry!" said Mr. Suncliffe, with a jump. "You are eating!"

"No, I'm not, sir!" gasped Parry, opening his mouth wide. "Have a look, sir!"

Mr. Suncliffe winced.

"I have not the slightest desire, Parry, to gaze into your mouth," he replied coldly.

"Good gracious me! Whatever time is it? What are we doing? Upon my word! Why haven't you boys got your lesson books out? This won't do—this won't do!"

The Form sighed, and came to the conclusion that the entertainment was over.

"You were speaking about Morrow, sir?" suggested Willy gently.

"Ah, yes!" said Mr. Suncliffe. "Now, Morrow is a very reliable bat, and he can— Ahem! You must not speak of cricket, Handforth minor! Kindly remember that we are working!"

"Yes, sir," said Willy meekly.

"There must be no further references to cricket!" went on Mr. Suncliffe, adjusting his glasses and gazing at the Form. "I am surprised at you, boys, for this lamentable exhibition of slackness. Come! Let us get to work!"

There was a slamming of desks, books were brought out, and Mr. Suncliffe stationed himself by the blackboard.

"Looks a bit like rain, sir," remarked Chubby, after a few minutes.

"Rain!" shouted Mr. Suncliffe, leaping towards the nearest window. "But rain will utterly spoil the trial match— Nonsense, Heath! The sky is perfectly clear, and there is no sign—"

He broke off as a chuckle rippled throughout the Form-room.

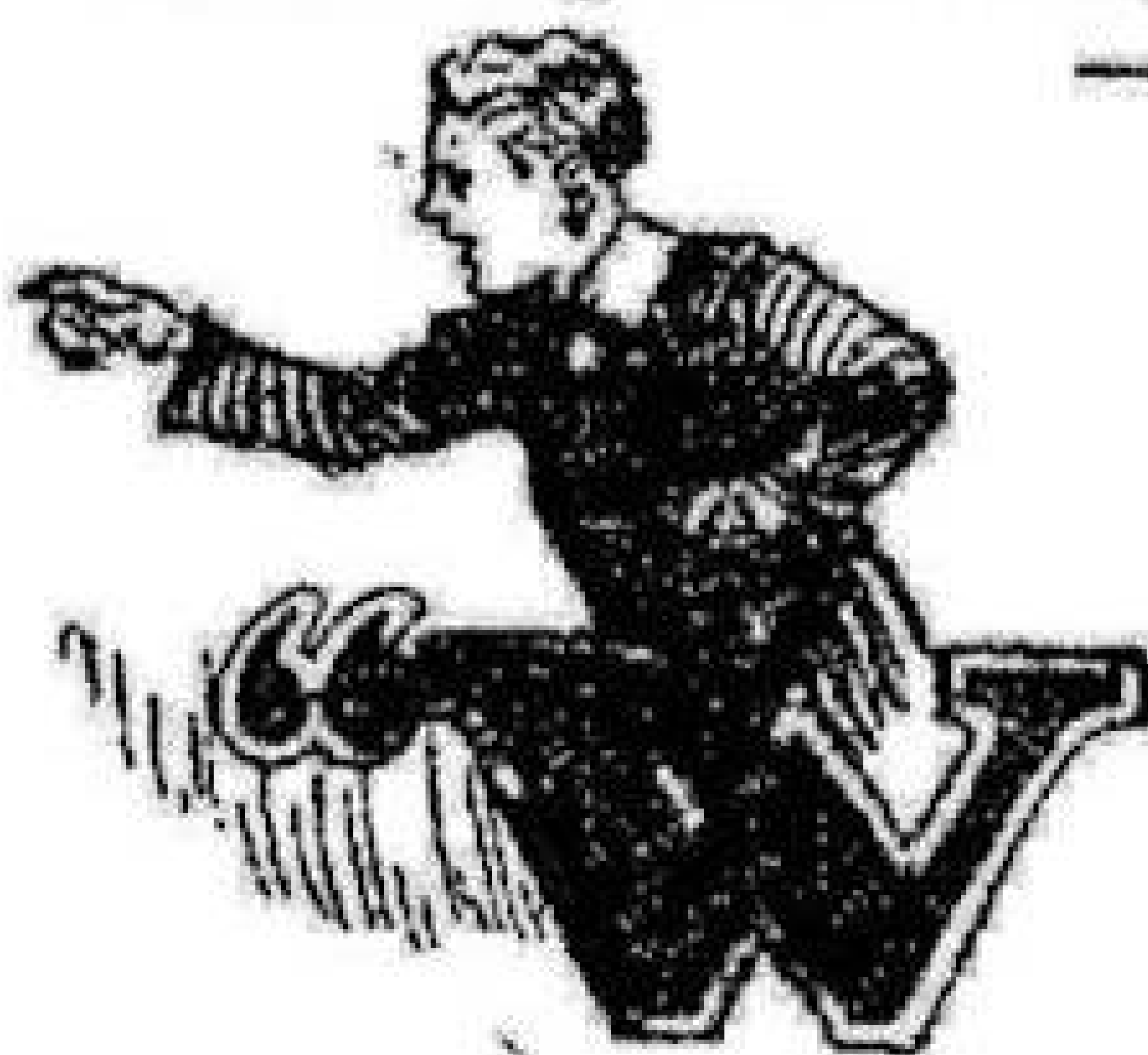
"How dare you, Heath?" said Mr. Suncliffe tartly. "Have I not already told you that you must not mention cricket?"

"But I didn't mention cricket, sir," said Chubby Heath defensively. "I only said that it looked a bit like rain."

"Ahem! Well, we will say no more about it," declared Mr. Suncliffe. "Now, let us get to work."

But the Third had found another attraction. Willy Handforth suddenly noticed that several fags were looking searchingly at Juicy Lemon. A few of them were whispering excitedly together. And in less than a minute the whole Form was staring in the one direction. Everybody in the apartment was looking at the discomfited Juicy.

And they had every reason to do so!



CHAPTER 12.

An Extraordinary Development!

"WELL I'm jiggered!"

"What the dickens is the matter with him?"

"Oh, my hat!"

Mr. Suncliffe rapped upon his desk as he heard sundry whispers and ejaculations.

"Silence!" he commanded. "Boys! How dare you! What are you staring at?"

"Look at Juicy, sir!" ejaculated Owen minor excitedly.

"Juicy?"

"Lemon, sir," said Owen minor.

Mr. Suncliffe frowned.

"I am well aware, Owen, that most lemons are juicy, but I see no reason— Ah, you mean Lemon?" he added hastily. "I see—I see! How dare you refer to Lemon by such a preposterous nickname?"

"But just look at him, sir!" urged Owen minor, in alarm.

"I see no reason for this alarm and agitation!" said Mr. Suncliffe angrily. "It is merely an attempt to delay the commencement of lessons. And we are already very late. Attention, everybody!"

"I think you'd better have a look——" began Freddy Mason.

"Mason!" snapped Mr. Suncliffe. "Silence!"

"Yes, sir, but——"

"I can see that I shall have to cane some of you!" fumed Mr. Suncliffe excitedly.

"Now then! Attention! I will attend to Lemon after you have got over this ridiculous excitement. I cannot bear people who get excited!"

The Third sat still and smiled. They had their own opinions on the subject of excitement. Mr. Suncliffe himself was one of the worst offenders.

"Now, Lemon, come out here!" said the Form-master.

"Please, sir, I'd rather not!" said Juicy Lemon awkwardly. "There's nothing the matter with me, sir."

"I thought not!" retorted Mr. Suncliffe. "We will therefore turn to our books——"

"But there is something the matter with him, sir," said Owen minor grimly. "He's just trying to spoof you, sir."

"Will you be quiet, boy?" roared Mr. Suncliffe. "Good gracious, me! I am getting very tired of these interruptions. Lemon, come here!"

"Please, sir, if you don't mind——"

"Come here!" thundered Mr. Suncliffe. "It seems that an inspection of your—er—exterior is the only way of obtaining order."

Juicy Lemon, with a glare at the rest of the Form, left his place and stood out in the gangway between two rows of desks.

"H'm! I can see nothing particularly wrong," said Mr. Suncliffe, peering forward.

"Do you feel all right, Lemon?"

"Yes, sir."

"No pains?"

"None, sir."

"Then what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Just as I thought!" said Mr. Suncliffe triumphantly. "You will go back to your place, Lemon."

"Thank you, sir."

But before Juicy could dodge back to his

desk, Owen minor had left his seat, and he was dragging Juicy towards Mr. Suncliffe.

"I'm sorry, sir, but you've got to have a look at Lemon more closely!" said Owen minor firmly. "You're a bit short-sighted, you know, and you can't see him at that distance. Please adjust your glasses, sir, and give him a closer look."

"Of all the impertinence!" fumed Mr. Suncliffe. "Owen minor, I— Good gracious! Lemon! Why, I—I— Good heavens!"

Quite unconsciously, Mr. Suncliffe had obeyed Owen minor's instructions. He had adjusted his glasses, and he had peered closely forward at Juicy Lemon. And now, suddenly, that junior had ceased to be a mere blur, and had become a definite object. And at the very first glance at Lemon's face Mr. Suncliffe experienced a shock. Owen minor returned to his place, satisfied.

"This—this is extraordinary!" said Mr. Suncliffe, adjusting his glasses again and peering even more closely. "Lemon! Whatever is the matter with your face?"

"Nothing, sir!" said Juicy miserably.

"He was born like that, sir," said Willy. "He's not responsible for the shape of it, you know. But he wasn't always that colour."

"I should hope not!" said Mr. Suncliffe, in alarm. "Upon my soul! Lemon, you are yellow!"

Juicy, who was vaguely aware of this fact, groaned. It had been coming on for quite a little time now—but during the last half-hour the development had been extremely rapid. In some extraordinary, unaccountable way, he had completely changed colour.

Willy Handforth and Chubby Heath had their own thoughts—but the rest of the Third knew nothing about that episode in the River Stowe. And Willy thought it advisable to appear just as surprised as any of the others. Chubby Heath had taken the tip, and was acting likewise.

"You are yellow, Lemon!" went on Mr. Suncliffe. "I have never seen anything like it in the whole of my life! What have you been doing to yourself? How dare you come into the Form-room in this condition?"

"I didn't do it, sir!" protested Juicy indignantly.

"Nonsense!" said the Form-master. "Your face is painted, Lemon! Is this some—some joke? I am aware that lemons are generally yellow, and it seems to me that some humourist has been—"

"But it's not true, sir!" insisted Juicy. "I've done nothing! I've—I've gone like this!"

"Gone like it?"

"During the last half hour, sir," said Juicy. "I feel all right, too! There's nothing really wrong with me—I'm not ill!"

Mr. Suncliffe, convinced at last that this was a very unusual case, wetted a finger, and drew it along Juicy Lemon's cheek. Then he inspected his finger-tip, and found that none of the yellowness had come off.

"Good Heavens!" he said huskily. "Whatever is the matter with the boy?"

He stared at Juicy in real alarm now. For Juicy was not merely sallow, he was not merely pasty. He was positively, atrociously, vividly yellow. And this yellowness had an aggressive quality. The unfortunate fag was a truly remarkable sight, as he stood there in front of the Form

But Juicy had already caught Willy's eye, and Willy's eye had contained a warning. Not a word about that river episode! And Juicy was filled with acute uneasiness!

CHAPTER 13.

Poor Old Juicy!



WILLY HANDFORTH and Chubby Heath were uneasy, too.

They had never anticipated any such development as this! During breakfast, Juicy Lemon had seemed to recover with remarkable speed. He had even declared that his sickness was all gone, and he had partaken of a hearty meal. And, upon going in to lessons, he had announced that he was as right as rain.

True, at the time, Willy noticed that Juicy was just a little strange in colour. But he had thought nothing of it.

Now, however, in this dramatic fashion, Lemon had turned as yellow as a guinea.

And it would be idle to say that Juicy himself wasn't frightened—he was. In fact, he was badly frightened. He thought it highly necessary to give an account of what had happened at the river that morning. But Willy had given him a clear warning, and he dared not ignore it.

Mr. Suncliffe was very excited.

"Do you assure me, Lemon, that this remarkable colour of yours is perfectly natural?" he demanded.

"Of course it's not natural, sir," protested Juicy.

"Ah! Then it is nothing more nor less than a practical joke—"

"No, it isn't, sir!" broke in Juicy. "When I say it isn't natural, I mean that I didn't do it myself. It's not a jape, sir—it's not a rag! I've just turned yellow—that's all!"

"You didn't apply this colour yourself?" asked Mr. Suncliffe suspiciously. "It seems to me that your skin has been dyed—"

"It hasn't, sir—it hasn't!" burst out Juicy frantically. "Nobody's touched me! Why, when I came into the Form-room, sir, I was all right. You saw me then, didn't you? It's all happened since I've been in here. I've turned yellow!"

Mr. Suncliffe was convinced at last.

"Handforth minor, Heath!" he said, turning. "You will go with Lemon at once to the sanatorium. Take him to Dr. Brett. I fear that the poor boy must be developing

some extraordinary disease. Take him to the sanatorium this instant!"

"Oh, crumbs!" moaned Juicy.

"Come on, old son!" said Willy briskly. In ten seconds they had yanked Juicy out of the Form-room, and Willy was extremely glad that he and Chubby had been chosen as the escort. Nothing, in fact, could have been better.

"You're not going to take me to the sanny, are you?" asked Juicy breathlessly.

"Yes, we are!" replied Willy, as they emerged from the School House. "Dash it, we've got to obey old Sunny's orders, you know."

"But I'm all right! I feel as fit as——"

"It doesn't matter how you feel, old man—you look awful!" said Willy. "Of course, it's that stuff in the river! It must have got right into your system!"

"I—I was thinking the same thing," said Juicy, in anguish. "Shall I be like this always? I haven't seen myself properly yet—but my hands are yellowish, too."

"It's your face that's got the full blossom," said Willy, inspecting Juicy's face with a critical eye. "My hat! You look like a walking sunflower! Don't forget, my lad—not a word about the river!"

"But why not?" protested Juicy. "I've got to say something, haven't I?"

"You can say anything you like—except that."

"But I ought to explain!" said Juicy. "Perhaps I'm dangerously poisoned. Perhaps I've got some horrid disease. And the doctor won't be able to do anything unless he knows——"

"That'll be his trouble—not yours," replied Willy. "You feel all right, don't you? Very well, then! Why should the whole river be put out of bounds for days—perhaps weeks—just because you've turned yellow? You may be all right again within a few hours."

"Yes, but supposing I'm not?"

"Well, in that case, we shall explain everything," said Willy. "But we'll give you a few hours, anyhow, Say until this evening. If you're no better by this evening, Juicy, we'll tell the Housemaster. But as you're feeling fit in yourself, we'd better keep the thing dark for a bit."

Juicy could not fail to see the force of this argument, and so he made no further protests. Hurrying across Inner Court towards the sanatorium, the fags encountered Browne of the Fifth. Browne paused, and allowed himself to express a little mild surprise.

"Ah, this, I take it, is some preparation for amateur theatricals?" he inquired politely. "Splendid! At the same time, no real Chinaman is quite so yellow——"

"You long ass!" said Willy. "Juicy isn't made up as a Chinaman!"

"No?" exclaimed Browne. "You surprise me!"

"He's come over like this!" put in Chubby. "Everybody noticed it in the Form-room.

The silly chump has gone all yellow, and we're taking him to the doctor."

"You could do nothing better!" said Browne enthusiastically. "By all means let Brother Brett give him the once-over without delay. And if Brother Brett can do nothing, allow me to make a suggestion. I have heard, on the best authority, that sand-paper, judiciously applied——"

But the fags did not wait to hear the remainder of William Napoleon Browne's advice. They walked on, and a moment later they were within the sanatorium, and Dr. James Brett was staring at Juicy Lemon in very real astonishment.



CHAPTER 14.

Time For Action!

"REMARKABLE!" said Dr. Brett, at last. "In fact, most extraordinary!"

He had given Juicy Lemon a very close inspection, but could make nothing whatever of the case; and Dr. Brett was quite a clever medical man, too. Willy Handforth and Chubby Heath had been sent back to the School House, and Juicy was now alone with the doctor.

"Is—is it serious, sir?" asked the fag timidly.

"Really, Lemon, I cannot tell you," replied Dr. Brett, frowning. "It is certainly serious in the sense that your appearance is utterly grotesque. But I am hoping that you will return to the normal."

"I'm hoping that, too, sir," said Juicy fervently.

"And you cannot tell me how this strange thing first occurred?" asked the doctor. "You cannot give me any clue as to its cause?"

Juicy Lemon felt that he could, but he remembered the compact.

"I just came like it, sir," he replied.

"Wait here, Lemon," said Dr. Brett, rising to his feet. "I shall not be long."

"Yes, sir."

Dr. Brett went out, and if Juicy had had any idea of escaping, this was soon knocked on the head. For Dora Manners, looking very charming in her nurse's attire, came in to look after Juicy during the doctor's absence.

Brett went straight to Nelson Lee, and gave him the details.

"I would like you to come and have a look at the boy, Mr. Lee," concluded the doctor. "You are, I know, an expert on poisons, and I feel sure that this boy is poisoned in some way."

"It is certainly a strange case," said Nelson Lee, with some concern. "But surely, doctor, if the boy had been poisoned, he would show other symptoms, too. You tell me that he is quite normal in every ordinary way?"

"Yes," said the doctor, "That's the infernally funny part of it. His pulse is normal, his heart is beating strongly, and he assures me that he feels no pain."

"Then it cannot be particularly serious," smiled Nelson Lee, with some relief. "Are you quite sure that it isn't a trick? Some of these boys are past-masters in the art of spoofing, you know. They think it a great joke to rag a master, or a doctor, and——"

"There's nothing like that about this case," interrupted the doctor, shaking his head. "Young Handforth was up there, and he assured me, on his honour, that none of the boys have been playing tricks. And I know Handforth minor well enough to be able to accept his word."

Five minutes later, Nelson Lee was examining Juicy Lemon very closely. And the famous schoolmaster-detective was very astounded. He had hardly expected to find Juicy so vividly yellow.

"The doctor tells me, Lemon, that you feel no pain," said Lee. "Your pulse is normal, and there are no indications of poisoning. At least, not ordinary poisoning. When did this strange effect first become apparent?"

"Just before lessons, sir."

"Why did you not report your condition to your Form-master, or to a prefect?"

"I didn't think anything of it at the time, sir," replied Juicy. "Besides, I thought I would get right. And instead of that I got a lot worse. I shouldn't have said anything about it, even then, only all the chaps were staring at me, and Mr. Suncliffe sent me here."

"What have you been eating this morning, Lemon?"

"Nothing, sir—only breakfast."

"You are sure of this? You haven't indulged in any cooking, by any chance?" went on Lee. "You haven't made some concoction——"

"No, sir—honest!" replied Juicy. "All I've had since last night has been breakfast and a couple of doughnuts from the tuckshop."

"What did you have last night?" put in the doctor.

"Nothing, sir—only the ordinary supper, and perhaps a sardine or two, and some cakes," said Juicy. "I haven't eaten anything yellow, sir. I haven't taken any pills or—or anything."

He badly wanted to explain about the river, but he loyally kept mum. Willy Handforth had said he mustn't say anything—until this evening, at all events—and so Juicy obeyed his leader's orders. Of course, one word from him on that subject would lead to an immediate investigation in the river. But as Nelson Lee and Dr. Brett knew nothing whatever of the Stowe's strange condition, they were naturally in a quandary concerning Juicy Lemon.

The fag himself was feeling no pain—indeed, he felt as fit as a fiddle. All the effects

of his ducking in the river were gone—except for this yellowness.

"Well, Lemon, we shall have to keep you here, in the sanatorium," said Nelson Lee. "I don't think you need get into bed, as you seem to be so fit. But, until the cause of your present condition is discovered, we shall have to keep you under observation."

"Yes, sir," said Juicy resignedly.

After all, it might not be so bad. He wouldn't be in bed, so he could just laze about, reading, and having a good time generally.

At break, Willy and Chubby made a point of seeking out Nipper and Handforth and the other juniors who were "in the know." They reported on this unexpected development.

"Phew!" whistled Nipper. "So Juicy is in the sanny now? Have you heard what happened?"

"Yes, I nipped across and had a word with Dora a couple of minutes ago," replied Willy. "Juicy seems to be as right as rain, and he's having a good time in there. But he's still yellow, and both Dr. Brett and Mr. Lee are flummoxed. They can't understand what's the matter with the chap."

"But didn't you explain about the river, you young idiot?" demanded Handforth.

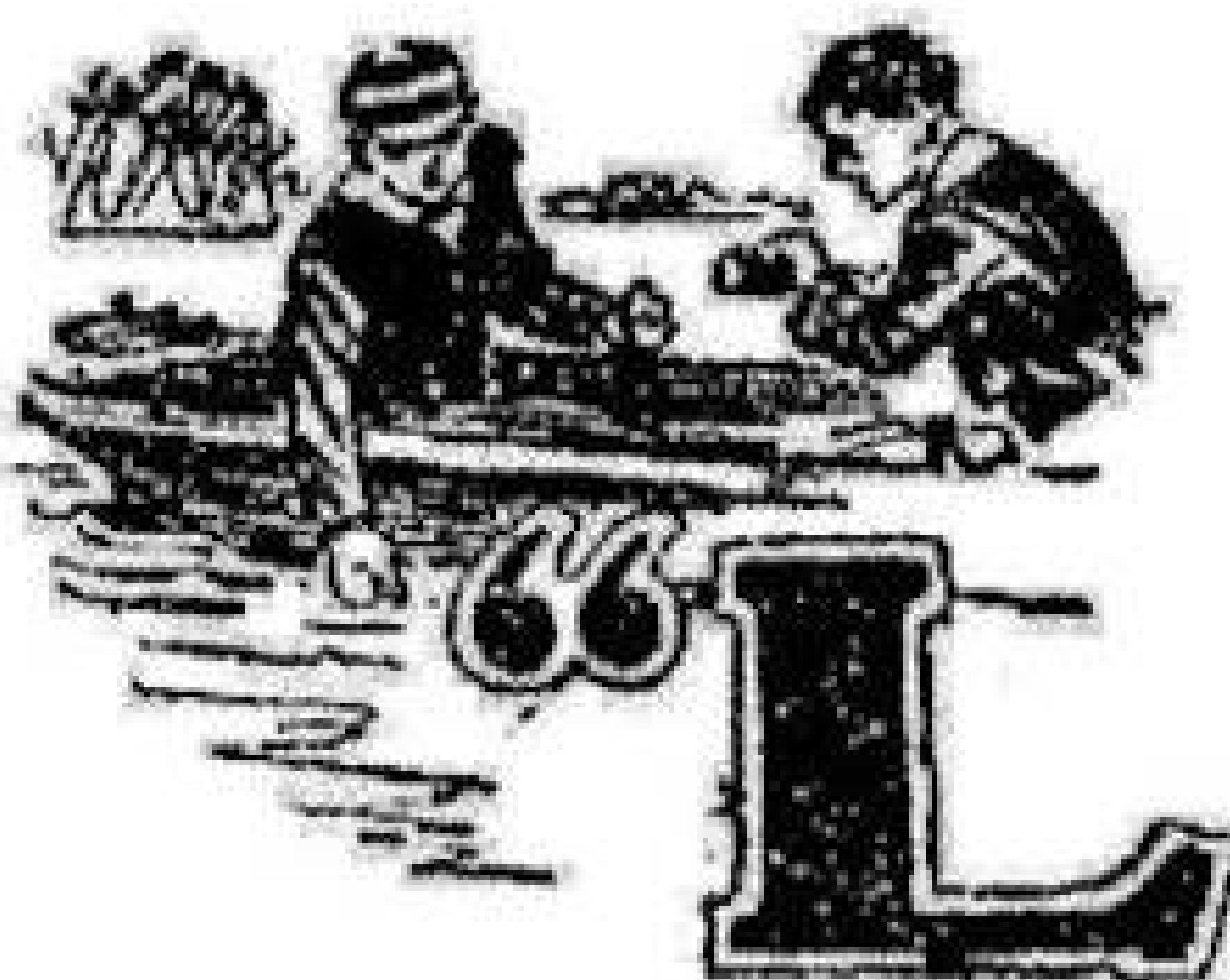
"Of course I didn't, Ted!" replied Willy. "We're going to investigate the river ourselves, aren't we?"

"By George, yes!"

"If we had explained anything, the river would have been out of bounds in a tick!" went on Willy. "And then we shouldn't have been able to do a thing. My idea is to keep mum about the whole affair until we've had a look round. And then, if we can't find anything, we'll go and report to Mr. Lee. But an hour or two won't make much difference, and I'm as keen as mustard on this investigation."

"I think you're right," said Nipper keenly. "That was jolly brainy of you, Willy. In the evens, we'll go up the river immediately after lessons—and, if necessary, we'll cut dinner."

And all the others were so eager to probe the mystery that dinner, for once, had become a matter of insignificant importance.



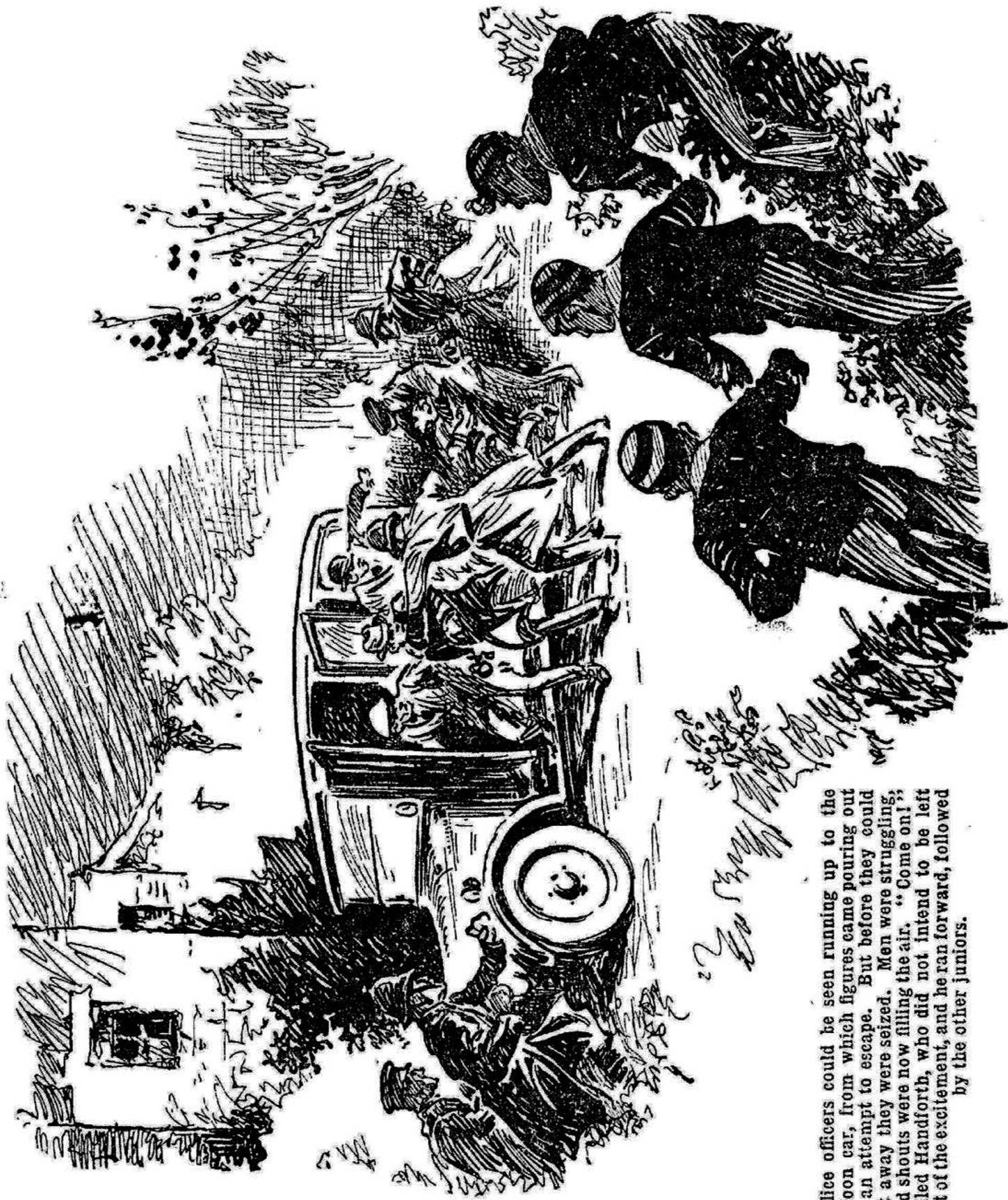
CHAPTER 15.

The Investigation!

"LOOK! It's just the same!" said Willy keenly. "Oh, poor beggars! Look at them—floating down on the water, dead!"

They were on the river. Lessons had been over for less than ten minutes, and yet the investigators were already on the bosom of the Stowe.

There were six of them all told. Handforth & Co. were naturally there, and they



Police officers could be seen running up to the saloon car, from which figures came pouring out in an attempt to escape. But before they could get away they were seized. Men were struggling, and shouts were now filling the air. "Come on," yelled Handforth, who did not intend to be left out of the excitement, and he ran forward, followed by the other juniors.

occupied one boat. Nipper and Willy and Chubby Heath were in a second boat. Archie Glenthorne had been too slow, so he had been left behind.

It was a gloriously sunny day, and it seemed incongruous that there could be any danger in the river. The waters were sparkling, and on every hand there was the green of the spring countryside. There was no hint of anything wrong. Nothing—except the fish on the surface of the water, gasping painfully, and now and again a little body, glinting all colours in the sunshine, would drift past the boats.

On every hand the glory of spring—but in the river, death!

None of these juniors cared a fig about dinner. They were gladly missing the meal. Something had to be done about Juicy Lemon—and it had to be done quickly. For if these juniors could not solve the mystery themselves, they would have to make a report. Juicy's strange condition necessitated this. But they badly wanted to have a look up the river on their own account before telling anybody else.

In these upper reaches of the river all was solitude. The Stowe meandered along between grassy meadows, with patches of woodland on either hand. Now and again there would be a bridge, where some little by-lane crossed the stream. But there was hardly a house or a cottage to be seen. It was a very quiet, peaceful stretch of country.

And after a while the juniors began to feel strangely weak. They were still quite fit in the ordinary sense, but they were listless. It became an effort to wield the oars. They felt dull and heavy.

"It must be the river!" said Nipper, after Chubby Heath had commented upon this phenomenon. "There's some rottenly poisonous stuff in it, and perhaps the sun is causing it to evaporate, and we're getting it in the form of gas. That's the only explanation that I can think of."

"Then—then we shall all turn yellow, like Juicy?" asked Chubby Heath, in dismay.

"No, I don't think so," replied Nipper. "We're not getting enough of it for that. Don't forget that Juicy swallowed nearly half the giddy river!"

A hail came from the other boat, which was a little in advance.

"I say, you chaps, things are worse here!" shouted Handforth. "There are lots more dead fish now. Half a mile down the river they're only gasping, but here they're dying!"

"They'll probably recover when they drift lower down the stream, Handy," called

Nipper. "That's how I figure it out, anyhow. The pollution isn't so bad farther down, and when the fish get there, they recover. And in due course they become normal. Only the weaker ones die."

"In that case, the trouble must be somewhere along here," said Willy keenly, as he eyed the prospect ahead. "But, dash



Police officers could be seen running up to the saloon car, from which figures came pouring out in an attempt to escape. But before they could get away they were seized. Men were struggling, and shouts were now filling the air. "Come on!" yelled Handforth, who did not intend to be left out of the excitement, and he ran forward, followed by the other juniors.

it, where can the poison come from? It's all rot, Nipper!"

"It's certainly very peculiar," agreed Nipper. "If there were a chemical factory near the river, I could understand it. Chemical factories often pollute streams and kill the fish. But there isn't a chemical factory in the whole district."

"In this particular section of the river there's nothing except that old mill," said Willy, nodding towards a picturesque building, some little distance up the stream. "The trouble can't be coming from there, can it?"

This old water-mill was a familiar landmark up the river. It was a deserted place—a ramshackle building near the water's edge, and at this point, too, there was a deep mill-pool, covered with water-lilies, and picturesque with age and neglect. The



old mill itself had not been used for many years. It was, indeed, partly a ruin.

Slowly, the two boats rowed past and went along to the next reach of the river, where the stream widened out into a stretch of wonderfully placid water. Here, above the mill, was the anglers' paradise. But this morning the river was deserted.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Willy suddenly. "Pull up, you chaps! Stop rowing!"

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Nipper. But he ceased rowing, and Handforth & Co., in the other boat, drew alongside. Everybody copied Willy's example, and stared downwards into the crystal depths.

"Not many fish here," said Church at length.

"Not on the surface," said Willy. "But if you look closely enough you'll see one darting about, every now and again, far down. There goes one, look—speeding like the dickens!"

"Well, what about it?" demanded his major.

For a few moments they continued staring. And now and again they could see fish, large and small, darting about in the depths of the water. Nipper's eyes were keen when he looked up.

"You've got it, Willy!" he said crisply.

"What do you mean?" asked Handforth. "What has Willy got?"

"My dear chap, don't you understand?" said Nipper. "The fish up here aren't affected at all! They're darting about with full energy—just in the ordinary way. There's not a single one gasping on the surface."

"That proves that the pollution is *only* below the mill," said Willy. "And, unless you're absolutely dense, Ted, the inference is obvious."

Handforth started.

"By George!" he ejaculated. "You mean that the pollution—or the poison, or whatever it is—is coming from the mill itself?"

"Exactly!" said his minor.

CHAPTER 16.

The Mystery of the Old Mill!



WITH one accord, the investigators turned and stared at the

picturesque ruin, only a couple of hundred yards down the stream. It seemed incredible that the poisoning of the river should come from that peaceful-looking spot.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Church breathlessly.

"Well, anyhow, we've located the source of the trouble," said Willy, with satisfaction. "And that's what we came out to do, isn't it? Up here, above the mill, the river is perfectly pure. But down stream, below the mill, the fish are dying by the dozen. That proves that the poison is flowing into the river from the mill. We'd better investigate!"

"But you're needed down here, old man—in case there's an attack from the enemy!" said Nipper solemnly. "There's no telling in a place like this. There may be danger."

"Oh, by George!" said Handforth. "Perhaps you're right! Still, if there's anything rummy up there, don't forget to yell. And we'll come up as quick as lightning!"

Nipper led the way to the old stairs, and Willy was close behind him. As a matter of fact, Handforth was there, too—for Edward Oswald meant to remain at the bottom of the stairs on guard.

"Chuck it, Willy," said Nipper, as the fag tried to mount first. "I'm leading the way, if you don't mind."

"Blow you! All right, then!" said Willy.

Nipper started to mount the staircase, and at the exact same moment a gasping yell came from Willy.

"Look out!" he exclaimed.

Nipper instinctively dodged back. Just in time, too, for next moment something came whizzing down from the opening above.

By a fraction of an inch it missed Handforth's head and thudded heavily to the old floor. The juniors leapt aside, staring blankly. There on the floor was a heavy baulk of timber.

"Did it hit you, Handy?" asked Nipper quickly.

"No!" gasped Handforth. "But I felt it whistle past my ear! Phew! I might have been brained!"

"One of the narrowest squeaks I've ever seen!" said Church unsteadily. "The murderous hound!"

"Who?" said Handforth, jumping round.

"Why, the chap who threw it, of course," said Church. "That great chunk of wood couldn't have come down by itself! Somebody threw it—deliberately!"

"Hold on!" said Nipper, staring upwards. "I'm not so sure about that. When I touched this old ladder it shifted a bit—it's loose. Perhaps that piece of timber was dislodged and fell by accident."

But Handforth saw no reason why he should accept this uninteresting explanation.

"Rats!" he said. "What about those footsteps we heard? There's somebody up there—some scoundrel! The rotter who has been poisoning the river! He tried to murder one of us!"

There was a pause, and Willy, who was just as cool as Nipper, glanced at the ladder.

"Well, what are we going to do?" he asked. "Is it worth risking? Shall we go up?"

"Better not!" advised McClure. "There's no sense in asking for trouble, you know. I'm not a funk, goodness knows, but this is a horribly dangerous position. One fellow above there could easily kill the lot of us."

Nipper held up a warning hand.

"Hey!" he called loudly. "What's the idea up there? What's the game?"

They all held their breath, but no sound came in reply. Nothing but a mysterious creak or two, which might easily have been made by any ordinary natural cause.

"Well, let's go up," said Nipper briskly.

But while he spoke he still held a warning hand up to the others. In the meantime he had grasped a stick, and he pushed this against the rickety stairway and moved it. He was standing well clear himself.

It was a good ruse. For if, in reality, some enemy were lurking overhead, he would be fooled. But there was no result. No second piece of timber came hurtling down.

"I thought so," said Nipper, with relief. "We must have dislodged that piece of wood by accident, you fellows. There's nothing to prove it, of course—and we may possibly be wrong—but it's the most likely assumption. We don't want to be too sensational."

"Well, let's make a move!" said Handforth impatiently.

Again Nipper held up a warning hand.

"No!" he said, with a note of finality in his voice. "We won't risk it. We won't go up these stairs at all!"

But almost before he had finished speaking he made a sudden rush at the old stairs. In less than five seconds he was at the top, and the others had hardly had time to realise the meaning of this new manœuvre. While they were still gasping, Nipper's voice came down to them.

"O.K.!" he sang out. "There's nobody here, you fellows. You can come up as soon as you like."

They all scrambled up, forgetting that they were supposed to remain below while Nipper and Willy investigated. And when they arrived at the top they found themselves in a kind of loft, with bins surrounding the place, most of them without lids. Everything here, too, was rotting with age and disuse.

"I'm not so sure about there being nobody here!" said Handforth, as he peered round. "This is a huge place, and there might be half a dozen men hiding, for all we know. Look at those great bins! We'd better be ready for a fight, anyhow."

Handforth was rather disappointed. He had already been imagining all sorts of dramatic possibilities, and they were all tumbling to the ground.

This upper part of the mill was indeed a labyrinth of mystery. Beyond this big open section, with the bins surrounding it, there were places where the building narrowed, and one could peer right through into the other lofts. There were piles of broken timber, there were other great bins, and, here and there, treacherous holes yawned in the floor.

Nipper noticed that the floors were, on the whole, perfectly dry and clear. It wasn't possible to detect any footprints on them. So, even now, nothing definite could be decided. Perhaps there was somebody up here—some strange, mysterious enemy; perhaps there was not. Who could tell?

But, in spite of themselves, the juniors could not believe that the great baulk of timber had fallen down accidentally.



CHAPTER 18.

No Clue!

“WELL, come on!” said Nipper briskly.

“We haven’t half looked over the place

yet!” protested Handforth.

“I’m not suggesting that we should go down again,” said Nipper. “But this is a big place to explore, and we’d better get busy on it.”

“Hadn’t we better take some of these old pieces of wood?” suggested McClure. “They might be handy, you know, in case there’s any trouble.”

“What’s the matter with our fists?” asked Handforth.

“We haven’t all got fists like you, old man,” retorted Mac.

It was an excellent idea, and before a minute had elapsed all the investigators were armed with formidable chunks of wood, which they had found lying about on the floor. They felt much more comfortable with these in their hands. If an attack came, they would be ready.

All the old bins were examined, and found to be empty. Then the juniors passed through, and went into another section of the great, rambling loft.

But, wherever they went, there was nothing but silence and decay.

No sign of life—nothing to indicate that other human beings had recently been here, or were here now. In fact, everything went to disprove this, for on more than one occasion the birds went fluttering and scurrying out through gaping holes in the roof.

“I think we’re the first here for months!”

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said Nipper, as he paused. "Those birds wouldn't use the place if any men had recently been here. It's only a deserted ruin."

"Hallo!" said Willy. "There's another staircase here, leading downwards. I expect it goes down into the back part of the mill. Shall we chance it?"

"Yes, rather!" said his major.

"Let's finish exploring up here first," said Nipper. "Although there's not one chance in a thousand of discovering anything, we might as well make a thorough job of it."

And so, for the next ten minutes, the juniors went into every corner—into every gloomy recess. They examined every hole and crevice. But they were not rewarded.

And so, at length, they gingerly descended those stairs. These hadn't been tested, so it was necessary to go with caution; and when at last they found themselves at the bottom, they were now on a much lower level than before.

This second staircase went down much further—right down to the water's level, on the river side of the mill. They could hear the current gurgling somewhere, and everything here was of stone. The walls reeked with moisture, and there was a great rusty iron cogwheel in view, and an even rustier iron shaft.

"I think we're pretty near to the old water-wheel," said Nipper, as he looked round. "In fact, this must be a kind of basement—almost a cellar."

"There are lots of dark corners and holes, anyhow," said Church, with a shiver.

The temperature down here was very low. Compared with the warmth of the April day outside, this cellar was chilly; and, in spite of themselves, the juniors felt rather creepy. There was certainly something sinister about the old place.

And it was exasperating to take all this trouble and to find nothing. Not a single clue had they obtained.

"I think we'd better start afresh, you know," said Nipper, as the others grouped round him. "We've been rather put off the track by that chunk of wood that fell down."

"How were we put off the track?" demanded Handforth, who always liked to argue.

"Well, my dear man, we came here to discover the reason for the river being polluted," replied Nipper. "And ever since that baulk of timber fell, we've been looking for mysterious enemies. I think we'd better concentrate now upon the other track. Let's see if there is any rotting stuff in any of these cellars—anything that could cause the poisonous flow into the stream."

Willy was sniffing the air.

"I say!" he ejaculated. "Do you notice a rummy niff about the place?"

They all started sniffing keenly.

"I noticed it at first," said Nipper. "It is a bit peculiar, isn't it? Different from the ordinary dankness that one associates with a cellar."

"That's what I was thinking," nodded Willy. "It sort of catches you in the throat, if you know what I mean. A bit like ammonia—only it doesn't smell the same as ammonia."

"Then it must be due to rotting vegetation, or something like that," said Handforth firmly. "Everybody knows that there's lots of ammonia in things that have gone rotten."

"Yes, but this is different, as Willy says," remarked Nipper, as he went probing round. "Well, it won't take us long to explore this part of the place. There's only this stone basement, and a passage leading from it. No cellars, or anything like that. If we go down this passage, I expect we shall find ourselves outside somewhere."

"Let's go and see!" said Handforth eagerly.

They went crowding out, and Willy remained behind for a moment, still sniffing the air in a suspicious way. He turned at last and made off after the others, who were now crowding down the narrow, tunnel-like passage.

And then suddenly came a hiss.

It was a most peculiar hiss—very much as though some steam had suddenly escaped. Willy spun round, but he could see nothing. The next second, however, he clapped his hands to his face, and uttered a wild gasp.

"Oh! I—I— Quick, you fellows! I'm blinded! I—"

He broke off, choking. He reeled back, and collided against the wall.

But the others had been talking so loudly in the confined passage that they had heard nothing of Willy's gasps.

Gulping chokingly, reeling from side to side, Willy followed. He didn't know how he got out of that passage, but he managed it somehow. And just when he got to the end Chubby Heath turned and saw him.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Chubby. "What the dickens— Hi, you chaps! Something's happened to Willy!"

"What!" yelled Nipper, dashing back.

He was just in time to see Willy Handforth stagger into Chubby's arms, and then sink to the floor in a limp, silent heap!



CHAPTER 19.

Time to tell Nelson Lee!

"H, what's the matter with him?" panted Chubby Heath desperately.

Willy Handforth was lying on the grass, with the sunlight pouring down upon his face; and he was utterly unconscious. In some dramatic fashion he had been struck down—just as Juicy Lemon had been struck! Only, in Willy's case, it had been much more dramatic—much more unexpected.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Handforth huskily. "My minor, you know! What's wrong with him? There isn't a bruise on him, or anything! He hasn't been hit!"

"He's got some of the same poison as Juicy," said Nipper grimly. "By Jove! What on earth can it mean? We only left him behind for a moment, and I'll swear there wasn't a soul there! What happened to him? It's no good asking him questions, because he can't answer!"

"But how are we going to bring him round?" asked Handforth in dismay.

They had only brought Willy out a moment or two before, and they were now standing round him, breathless. Out there, in the sunshine, everything seemed safe and peaceful. They were all relieved to be outside, in the warm spring air. But this sudden disaster had startled them all.

"Look here, I'm going to dash back!" said Nipper swiftly. "I want to have a look at that cellar again—while the trail is hot. You other fellows had better do all you can for Willy. Put some water over his face, and massage him."

"Hold on! I'm coming with you!" said Handforth.

"But your minor——"

"The others can look after him!" said Handforth. "It can't be anything serious—his heart's beating all right, and he isn't injured. I'm coming with you, Nipper!"

They went back, but all in vain. That cellar reeked more strongly than ever of that strange odour—it caught them in the throats. Indeed, after a while their eyes were watering, and they found it rather difficult to breathe. But there was nothing to account for the strange collapse of Willy.

"We'd better get out of here!" muttered Nipper at length. "By Jove! It will get us next, Handy! I can feel it now—clutching at my throat. Come on!"

They stumbled out, and reached the open air again. They found Church and McClure and Chubby gathered round Willy, thumping him, rubbing him, and generally knocking him about.

This treatment, although drastic, had an excellent result. For after about ten minutes Willy opened his eyes, and looked blearily about him.

"Chuck it!" he muttered. "Lea' me alone! Wha's the time? I didn't hear the rising-bell—— Eh? Oh, crumbs! Where am I?"

He recovered rapidly, and looked about him with a growing understanding.

"It's all right Willy, old son," said Handforth, dropping on to his knees. "You're safe enough. We're out here, at the old water-mill——"

"Yes, I remember now," said Willy, rubbing his eyes. "Yes, I was in that old cellar, wasn't I?"

"That's right," said his major. "Well, what happened? We want to know."

"And so do I want to know," said Willy

unsteadily. "But I'm jiggered if I can explain it. I heard a sort of hiss, as far as I can remember, and when I turned round something surged into my face—a sort of rotten gas. It caught me in the throat, it blinded me, and it choked me."

"But didn't you see anything?" broke in Chubby.

"Nothing."

"Not even the gas?"

"No," said Willy. "It was an invisible gas—like most other gases. It wasn't a vapour that you can see. It just hit me in the face, and took me in the throat. I don't know how the dickens I got out of the place!"

There wasn't much satisfaction in this account. For the investigators, even now, could not tell how that deadly stuff had been released.

"Perhaps it's a kind of natural gas," said Nipper thoughtfully. "Perhaps it's released periodically, you know—just like the geysers in New Zealand. And perhaps it condenses, and trickles down into the river in the form of liquid."

"Rot!" frowned Handforth. "There's dirty work afoot! You're not going to tell me that all this is natural! There must have been somebody in that cellar—in a secret recess, or something—and he suddenly loosed off some of that rotten stuff at Willy. Tried to murder him!"

Nipper glanced at his watch.

"Well, it's getting on, you fellows," he said. "We'd better give it up for now, and get Willy back to the school. Even as it is, we shall only arrive in comfortable time for afternoon lessons. If we hurry, we might be able to have a snack at the tuckshop before the bell goes."

They were all ravenously hungry, having gone without their dinners, and this suggestion appealed to them. Somehow, their keenness for exploring the old mill had worn off. All they wanted to do was to get away from it.

And so they made their way round to the mill, found their boats, and pushed off into mid-stream. As the minutes elapsed Willy declared that he was feeling practically himself again. He had a sensation of sickness, but this was passing.

"I shall be all right," he declared. "But I'm blessed if I can understand what happened. I don't like it, you chaps. I don't like being dished in that way. Unconscious for over a quarter of an hour, eh? Beats me!"

They wasted no time in getting back to the more familiar stretches of the river. As they approached the St. Frank's landing-stage, near the big boat-houses, they became aware of a commotion near the bank. And now they saw a crowd of Fourth-Formers there, with Buster Boots and Bob Christine prominent amongst them.

"Hallo! What's the trouble here?" asked Nipper, as his boat glided up against the landing-stage.



“Hi, you chaps!” yelled Chubby Heath in alarm. “Something’s happened to Willy.” Nipper and Handforth turned, and they were just in time to see Willy stagger into Chubby’s arms, and then sink to the floor in a limp, silent heap!

“It’s no good asking me!” said Buster Boots, looking round. “Two of our chaps, like fatheads, decided to have a bathe—”

“A bathe!” yelled Willy.

“You needn’t be so startled about it,” said Buster. “It’s too early for bathing, of course, but there are always plenty of idiots about. They were Yorke and Talmadge, and they were all right for a bit, but Yorke suddenly started shouting for help. Said that he felt weak and dizzy. And then Talmadge started on the same stunt.”

“My only hat!” said Handforth blankly, as he glanced at the other Removites.

“You fellows seem to know something!” said Boots, looking at them closely.

“Perhaps we do,” said Nipper. “But tell us what happened. We’re very interested!”



CHAPTER 20.

The Secret Out!

JOHAN BUSTERFIELD BOOTS was joined by Bob Christine and Clapson, and one or two of the others.

“Well, nothing happened much,” said Boots. “We took a boat out, and hauled the fatheads in. They complained of feeling weak and ill, and they’re changing in the dressing-

sheds now. I suppose the water must have been too cold for them.”

“I don’t believe it,” put in Bob Christine. “The water isn’t so cold as all that—and besides, it wouldn’t make them feel ill. I’ve heard other rumours this morning, too. Some of the seniors were complaining. They went on the river, and they came back as groggy as the dickens.”

At this point, before Nipper or any of the other Removites could explain anything, a familiar figure appeared, approaching from the direction of the school. It was the figure of Mr. Nelson Lee.

“What has been happening here, boys?” he asked sharply. “I have been informed that two members of the Fourth Form were nearly drowned—”

“Oh, I say, sir, that was an exaggeration!” protested Boots. “Yorke and Talmadge are the chaps, and they’re all right now. They’re dressing, sir.”

And Boots briefly explained the details. Nelson Lee was looking relieved when he had heard the full story.

“I am glad to find out that the tale was grossly exaggerated,” he said. “Thank you, Boots. I will have a word with these two boys as soon as they come out.”

He turned to Nipper and Handforth and the others.

“Why were you boys not at your places during dinner?” he asked pointedly.

"We went up the river, sir—just for a row," said Handforth, in a careless voice.

"And is it usual for you to go up the river—just for a row—and miss your meals?" asked Lee. "Come, Nipper! I require a better explanation than that. In ordinary circumstances, I would not ask for any explanation, as you know. But I have a suspicion that there is something unusual afoot."

"How's Lemon, sir?" put in Chubby Heath eagerly.

Nelson Lee looked at Chubby keenly.

"Oh, so there is some connection between Lemon and the river, eh?" he said. "Thank you, Heath, for the clue. Two Fourth Form boys are feeling ill, because they have been bathing. Do you know if Lemon bathed this morning?"

"He didn't, sir," replied Willy promptly.

"Did he fall into the river?"

There was no getting round a question of that sort.

"Look here, gov'nor, we'd better tell you the whole yarn," said Nipper, coming to a sudden decision. "Young Lemon *did* fall into the river this morning, and he was nearly drowned, too. He swallowed about a gallon of water, but most of it was brought up. Willy will tell you—"

"Just one moment," interrupted Nelson Lee and, seizing hold of Willy by the shoulder, turned him half round. "Handforth minor, what have you been doing?"

"Doing, sir?"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Handforth, staring. "I'm blessed if Willy isn't going the same as Juicy! Look at his face! He's turning yellow!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"That—that gas!" shouted Church excitedly. "That's what's done it!"

And so, of course, the whole story came tumbling out. Everybody wanted to tell it at once, but Nelson Lee silenced them all except Nipper, and Nipper, very concisely and clearly, explained the full details.

"You should have told me this before, you young rascals," said Lee, at length. "Lemon might have been very seriously affected. As it is, he is rapidly recovering, and the yellowness is going."

"Oh, that's good hearing, sir," said Willy, with relief.

"Without question, the river is dangerous," went on Nelson Lee. "Or, if not dangerous, it is decidedly a place to avoid. From this minute, boys, the river is out of bounds."

"There you are," said Willy, turning to the others. "What did I tell you? The very first thing they do is to put the river out of bounds!"

Nelson Lee's eyes twinkled.

"So that was the reason you kept the thing to yourselves, eh?" he said dryly. "But it's no good, boys. You can't keep a thing like that secret for long."

"We didn't mean to, sir," said Nipper. "Only we wanted to go up the river and explore for ourselves. We've done it, too—and

we've located the cause of the trouble in the old water-mill."

Nelson Lee heard all about the investigations in the mill, and he was thoughtful afterwards.

Indeed, that afternoon, he made a point of visiting the mill himself, and he went all over it. But nothing happened. He saw nothing suspicious, and in the end he was obliged to come away, baffled.

He made many researches in the river, too. He took samples of the water; he took several of the dead fish. And later, in the laboratory, he made elaborate tests. But still with the same result. He could arrive at no satisfactory explanation.

NEXT WEDNESDAY! ~~~~~



In the meantime, consternation reigned at St. Frank's.

The story had got abroad by now, of course—and everybody was indignant and dismayed when they learned that the river was completely out of bounds—until further notice. That meant, of course, that it would probably remain out of bounds for days—weeks. And it was just that period of the year when the river was urgently needed.

"We're not going to stand it, of course!" remarked Reggie Pitt, of the West House, as soon as afternoon lessons were over. "It's all rot! Why should we be barred from the river? It's just the beginning of the season."

"Dear old fellow, it's no good kicking up a fuss," remarked Vivian Travers. "The powers that be have decided the thing, and who are we to jib? Besides, you don't want to be yellow, do you?"

"It seems to me that it's a job for the sanitary authorities," said Castleton. "If the river's polluted, the council people ought to get busy. It's their job, isn't it?"

"But we've never had anything like it before," said Reggie Pitt, frowning. "I don't see how the river can be polluted—not by anything natural, anyhow. Why didn't those Ancient House bounders tell us about this affair? Oh, well! I suppose we can only await developments now."

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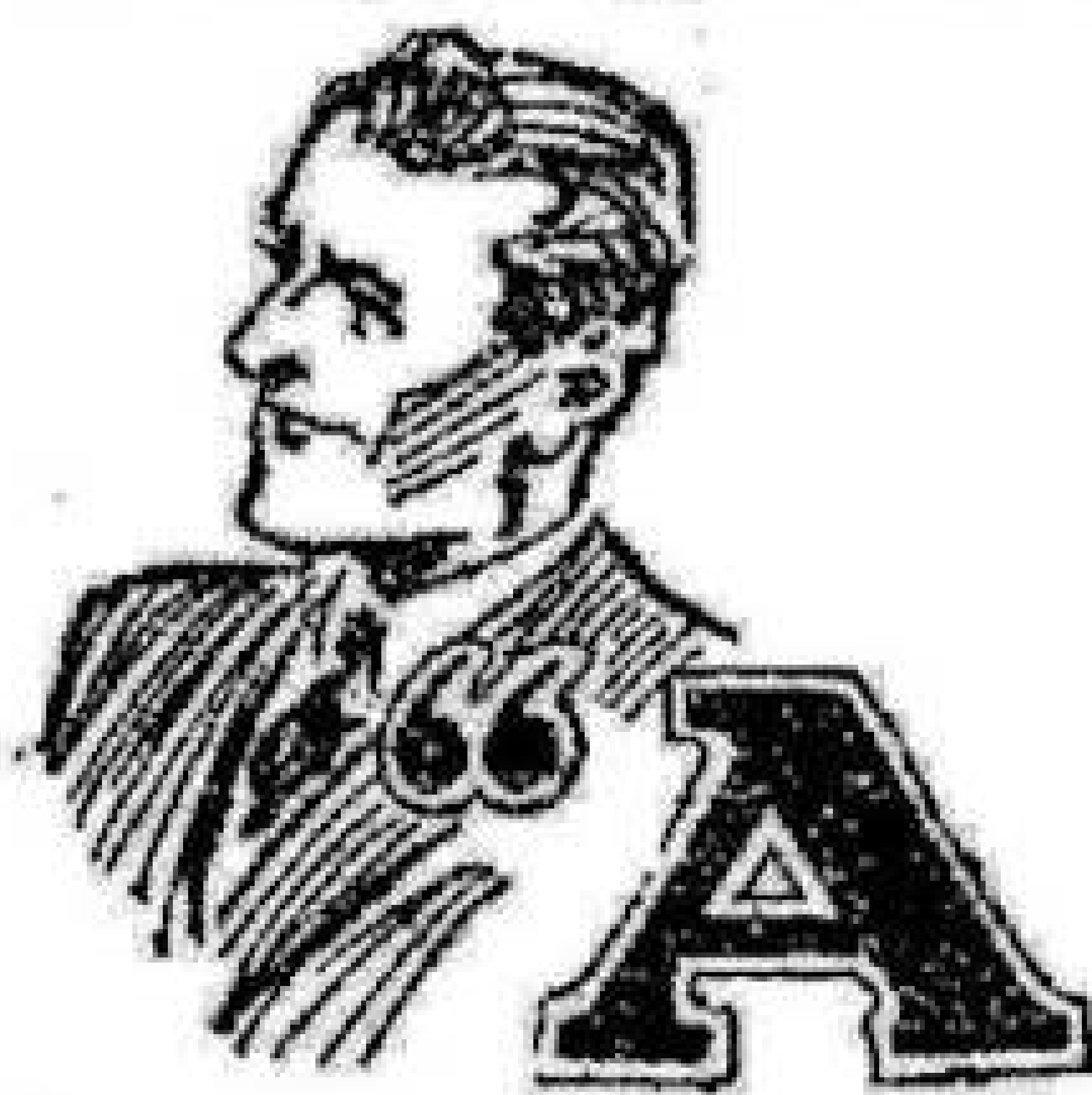
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And so the school had to wait. As it happened, this period of waiting would not be so very long, after all!



CHAPTER 21.

A Significant Report!

"Nothing fresh?" asked Nelson Lee at tea-time, when Dr. Brett came into his study in the Ancient

House.

"No, nothing," said the doctor. "Lemon

is progressing satisfactorily. The yellowness is disappearing very quickly, and I think he will be able to leave the sanatorium by to-morrow."

"That's good hearing," said Nelson Lee, nodding. "Sit down, Brett. Care to have a cup of tea?"

"Thanks," said the doctor.

"Have you had a look at young Handforth?" went on Lee, as he poured out the tea.

"Yes, but there's nothing much wrong with him," said Brett. "He is only very slightly affected, in comparison to Lemon. As for those Fourth Form boys, there is nothing the matter with them at all. By the way, here's an early edition of the evening paper, if you'd care to look at it."

He laid it on the table, and sipped his tea.

"I'm mystified about the whole business," he went on, frowning. "So it's something to do with the river, is it? What do you make of it, Mr. Lee? Have you any theory?"

"None—except that this strange pollution is some kind of poison," replied Nelson Lee. "It is not ordinary poison, either. Its effects are not deadly, as Lemon's case proves."

"The Head's in a rare way about it," said the doctor. "I was having a word with him about half an hour ago, and he's talking about making a report to the governors, and writing to the sanitary authorities, and doing all sorts of things. He's in a proper stew."

"I went to that old water-mill this afternoon, Brett," said Lee thoughtfully. "Although nothing actually happened, I'm very suspicious. I don't believe this pollution is natural. There's something going on at that mill—or it has been going on, at all events. This poison stuff is obviously a chemical. But how can there be chemicals, in an ordinary way, in an old disused mill?"

"It's no good asking me a poser like that," said Brett.

"I was particularly struck by the fact that there were tracks of a motor-car along the little lane which leads into the Bannington main road," continued Nelson Lee. "Recent tracks, Brett, which did not go past the mill. That proves, quite conclusively, that a motor-car has been in the habit of coming to this mill quite frequently of late. For these tracks were beaten down, one on top of the other."

"And that's all you discovered?"

"That's all—for the time being, at all events," replied the schoolmaster-detective. "Going, Brett?" he added, as the doctor rose to his feet. "Well, if you see the Head, tell him not to worry too much. I have already rung up the police, and Inspector Jameson will be here within the hour."

Dr. Brett, who was turning towards the door, stared.

"The police!" he repeated. "Good heavens! What on earth have the police to do with it?"

"I'm not quite sure," replied Lee. "But I think it is advisable to station one or two constables in the mill this evening. These precautions may be unnecessary, but—"

"Well, I'm hanged!" broke out Dr. Brett abruptly.

He seized the newspaper that he had put upon the desk, and now he was staring at it with eager eyes.

"Listen to this, Lee," he exclaimed. "I hadn't looked at the paper before—at least, I'd only looked at the latest scores of that trial match at the Oval. But listen to this! 'Extraordinary Yellowness of Victims! There was a big raid this morning—'"

"Let me see it!" interrupted Lee keenly.

"In the early hours of this morning there was one of the most daring motor bandit raids ever known!" read Dr. Brett, as he scanned the newspaper. "Apparently it happened on the outskirts of London—at a bank. No, it wasn't in the early hours—but just after the bank opened."

He continued to read, very excited.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated. "It seems that the manager and his assistants were all rendered unconscious by some kind of poison gas, which the bandits loosened as soon as ever they entered the bank. The bandits themselves were wearing gas masks, so they weren't affected. They got away with an enormous amount of money."

Nelson Lee took the paper at last, and read that sensational report.

"H'm! Very remarkable!" he said at length.

"Do you think there is any connection?" asked Dr. Brett, bending over the table.

"Think? My dear man, there's no question about it whatever," replied Nelson Lee. "Of course there's a connection. It is far too obvious to be a coincidence."

"Yes, but I cannot possibly understand—"

"The manager of this bank and his assistants were all rendered unconscious by some unknown device—a sort of poison gas, discharged from weapons that looked like ordinary pistols," said Lee. "And later, the victims turned vividly yellow. My dear Brett, here's the very same thing here, at St. Frank's. This river is polluted by some chemical or other. A Third Form boy swallows a good deal of it, after nearly being drowned, and he turns a vivid yellow. Young Willy Handforth gets a dose of that gas, and he goes yellow, too. And the source of it is that old mill, up the river. I am very glad, indeed, that I telephoned to Inspector Jameson."

"If there's going to be any excitement, I want to be in it!" said the doctor promptly. "Promise me, Lee, that you'll give me the tip. What do you actually suspect? Do you think that this gang of motor bandits has had its headquarters at the old mill?"

Lee was looking very keen.

"I think I told you, Brett, of the motor-car tracks along that little-used lane," he said slowly.

"By Jove, so you did!" ejaculated the doctor. "That's significant, isn't it? Infernally significant! Why, man, you might have been murdered when you went there this afternoon!"

Nelson Lee smiled

"I fancy that I am capable of taking care of myself, old man," he replied. "In any case, there wasn't the slightest danger, because the mill was deserted. Whether it will remain deserted is another question. I fancy not. I am convinced, at all events, that somebody was there when the boys went over the mill."

"They were lucky to get away safely, then."

"Very lucky," agreed Lee. "Possibly there was only one man there, so he dared not make any open attack, since he would certainly get the worst of it. But as soon as the boys had gone he probably went into Bannington, and used the telephone. That was why I found the place empty. If these fellows have got the alarm, it is most unlikely that they will abandon the place as it stands. It is far more probable that they will return this evening. You must remember that only schoolboys, to their knowledge, have invaded their headquarters. They know nothing of Lemon's mishap, and of the clue that it has given us."

And when Dr. Brett left Nelson Lee's study, a minute or so later, he had a feeling that that evening would provide some unusual excitement!



CHAPTER 22.

Getting Ready for the Fray!

THE door of Study C in the Ancient House passage burst open violently, and Handy came barging in.

"Don't knock!" said Nipper politely.

He and Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West were having tea, and they had been busily discussing the events of the river. For Nipper's chums were now, of course, in the know.

"Look at this!" roared Handforth, slapping a newspaper down on the table in the midst of the bread and butter and cakes.

"Well, hang it, don't get so excited!" protested Watson. "Look what you've done with the jam, you silly ass! You've tipped it into the sardine dish—"

"Never mind about the giddy sardine dish!" shouted Handforth. "Look at this report, Nipper! What do you make of it? I'll bet these rotten motor bandits are the chaps who have been poisoning the river!"

They're a crowd of crooks, and it's up to us to—"

"Steady!" said Nipper. "Let's have a look! It seems to be something fairly unusual, anyhow."

He read the report—the very same report that Nelson Lee had been reading only a short time earlier. And Nipper was looking very keen when he rose from the table, a minute afterwards.

"By Jove!" he said breathlessly. "Handy, old man, you're right!"

"Of course I'm right!" roared Handforth. "What are we going to do about it?"

"Really, dear old boy, this is frightfully puzzlin'—it is, really," said Sir Montie, in a protesting voice. "Begad! You come dashin' into the study like a cyclone, and you upset the jam and the sardines, and then you talk about doin' somethin'!"

"For once Handy is excused," said Nipper. "Read this, Montie, and then you'll understand."

But before Tregellis-West could start reading, a number of other juniors came crowding in, led by Church and McClure, who had evidently gone to fetch them. They were Willy Handforth, Chubby Heath, Vivian Travers, Reggie Pitt, and one or two others.

"Well, well!" said Travers genially. "Sorry to barge in like this, dear old fellows, but we've been told that it's important."

"And so it is," said Nipper. "But there's no reason why we should tell anybody else in the House. We'll keep this to ourselves as much as we can. There aren't likely to be many newspapers in the school, anyhow."

"I got this one for old Sunny!" said Chubby Heath excitedly. "He wanted to see the scores of some match or other, I believe. Anyhow, he gave the paper to me, and Willy spotted that bit about the bank raid."

"And then my major came up, and grabbed the paper," grinned Willy. "Well, Nipper, what about it? Pretty clear, isn't it?"

"I'm going straight to the gov'nor," said Nipper promptly.

"Hold on!" said Reggie Pitt. "You might let us know what it's all about. We came here to hear something, and we've heard nothing except a lot of jabber."

Nipper quickly explained, and all the other juniors were impressed.

"You see, two and two always make four," said Nipper. "Here are these motor bandits, in London, robbing a bank—and they made their victims helpless by gassing them. And these people have all turned yellow."

"I see!" said Travers. "And young Handforth turned yellow this morning, after sampling the gas? You mean to say that it's the same chemical?"

"Well, isn't it obvious?"

"Not absolutely obvious," said Vivian Travers. "It might—mind, I say might—be only a coincidence. There's no direct evidence."

"Rot!" said Handforth.

"Of course, Travers is quite right," said Nipper. "There's certainly no direct evidence. And it isn't always a wise thing to jump to conclusions. But this is so startling that we can't help thinking there's a connection. It would be pretty good, wouldn't it, if we collared those motor bandits—including all their booty—on the same day as the robbery?"

"By George!" said Handforth breathlessly. "What a thought! But look here, why tell Mr. Lee anything about it? Why shouldn't we do it on our own? Let's go off to the mill, and make a thorough attack upon it."

"We can't do that, old man," said Nipper, shaking his head. "My gov'nor has got the case in hand now, and it's up to us to tell him everything we know. Besides, it's too risky."

"Well, I'm not afraid!" retorted Handforth.

"Don't be an ass," said Nipper. "Nobody's afraid. But you seem to forget that these bandits are armed—they're desperate criminals. What chance should we have—a party of schoolboys—against them? We should probably mess the whole thing up, and then they would escape. Fine chumps we should look afterwards, shouldn't we?"

And, without any more ado, Nipper hurried off to Nelson Lee's study. As he went, he thought of the strange chance that had led to this direct connection between the motor bandits and the deserted old mill.

But for the seeping of that chemical into the River Stowe, nobody in the district would have had the slightest cause to suspect the old mill. Nobody could have imagined that the motor bandits were closely associated with this neighbourhood. And so there would have been no inquiries—no investigation.

Nipper arrived in Nelson Lee's study full of tense excitement, and he was relieved to find his gov'nor alone. He placed the newspaper into Lee's hands.

"Read that, sir!" he said tensely.

"I've read it!" replied Nelson Lee, with a smile.

"Oh!" said Nipper, his face dropping. "I might have expected it, though! So you know all about it, gov'nor?"

"Yes, Nipper, I know all about it," said Lee. "And I am rather alarmed to find that you all know about it, too. I suppose it means that a good many of the other juniors also know?"

"Yes, sir—Handforth and Pitt and Travers and one or two others."

"And, of course, they'll all want to be in this adventure," said Nelson Lee. "I'm sorry, Nipper, but it can't be done."

"Why not, sir?"

"Because the police wouldn't allow it—for one thing," said Nelson Lee. "Even if I were inclined to waive a point, the police wouldn't be. You see, Inspector Jameson of Bannington is due almost at any minute, and he has the whole thing in hand. I am very much afraid that he won't want the co-operation of schoolboys."

Nipper grunted.

"Then Inspector Jameson doesn't know when he's well off!" he said tartly.



CHAPTER 23.

Not to be Outdone!

NELSON LEE could not help smiling as he noticed Nipper's crest-fallen expression.

"Cheer up, young 'un!" he chuckled. "I don't suppose you'll be missing so very much. It will be a weary job, watching the mill—and the excitement won't be particularly spectacular, even at the climax. There's no guarantee that the bandits will come anywhere near the place."

"I suppose you're satisfied, sir, that the mill has been used as a kind of rendezvous by these bandits?"

"Yes, Nipper, I am quite satisfied on that score—although, of course, there is no direct evidence," replied Nelson Lee. "But I think we can, for once, take one or two things for granted. These motor bandits have been traced out of London, and they are known to have entered Sussex. But since being seen a few miles this side of Tunbridge Wells, all trace of them has been lost."

"You think they are hiding somewhere, sir?"

"That seems to be fairly obvious," replied Lee. "They are lying low—perhaps in a wood. So if they come to this mill at all they will come later on in the evening—presumably after dark."

Nipper went back to the others, and reported the unwelcome tidings.

"I say, what a frost!" exclaimed Reggie Pitt disappointedly.

"I call it a lot of rot!" said Handforth, aghast. "Do you mean to say that we're not allowed to help?"

"It's a bitter pill to swallow, Handy, old man, but there's the truth of it," said Nipper. "The police have the matter in hand, so, of course, the gov'nor hasn't got a free hand."

Handforth glared.

"Well, they're not going to keep me out of it!" he said grimly. "Not likely!"

The others thought that it was merely some of his usual "gas." But Church and McClure were feeling rather alarmed—they knew their volcanic leader's moods, and they wondered how they were going to keep him in check.

Soon afterwards, an order went round the school to the effect that everybody—seniors included—was confined to gates. There were certain police activities afoot, and no St. Frank's fellows were allowed abroad. This effectually put an end to all hopes of joining in the fray.

It also led to a good deal of talk. There was a regular sensation in the Lower School,

All sorts of rumours were floating about, the majority of them entirely without any foundation.

But it couldn't be denied that the situation was dramatic. It was very seldom indeed that the school was confined to gates in this way. Fellows hung about in the Triangle in groups, and when Nelson Lee emerged from the Ancient House, accompanied by Inspector Jameson, soon after seven o'clock, in the gathering dusk, there were further wild conjectures.

But Nipper went boldly up to Lee and caught his arm.

"Any fresh news, gov'nor?" he asked.

"I can only tell you, Nipper, that the mill is under constant observation," replied Nelson Lee. "Needless to say, the observers are all hidden. A man who was approaching the mill at about five-thirty was arrested, and we have every reason to believe that this man was in the mill when you boys went over it."

"Then that baulk of timber was deliberately thrown at us, sir," said Nipper grimly.

"Possibly, my lad," put in Inspector Jameson. "We have reason to believe that the arrested man is well known to Scotland Yard."

This piece of news was all to the good. The man who had been arrested had apparently been left in charge of the rendezvous. But now he was well out of the way, and the police were watching in secret. Nelson Lee and the inspector, it seemed, were now going to the scene in order to take up their own positions.

"If these rotten bandits are collared, old Juicy ought to feel pleased with himself," remarked Willy Handforth to Chubby Heath. "If Juicy hadn't fallen in the river and swallowed all that water the secret of the old mill might never have been discovered."

"Yes," said Chubby. "It's rummy how these things happen by chance."

The dusk grew into darkness, and still no more news came. The greater proportion of the school went indoors, and things quietened down.

But one junior, at least, was not to be outdone. And that junior, needless to say, was Edward Oswald Handforth. In Study D he was preparing to make a move.

"I don't care what you fellows say," he said, glaring at Church and McClure. "I'm going!"

"But you'll get the sack if you're collared," urged Church.

"I'm willing to risk it!" said Handforth. "I'm not going to be left out of this bit of excitement! It's dark now, and the coast's clear. We'll nip across the playing fields, and then creep over the meadows towards the mill. We needn't go right up—we can watch from the high ground just above. Then, if there's anything doing, we can join in at the critical moment."

It was useless to argue. Handforth had made up his mind. Even when Nipper and

Willy came in, shortly afterwards, he was just as obdurate.

"Well, there's only one thing to be done, of course," said McClure, at last. "We shall have to hold him here by force!"

"Just what I was going to say!" exclaimed Church.

Nipper grinned.

"But why?" he asked. "I'm all in favour of Handy's scheme."

"What?" gasped McClure.

"Good man!" grinned Willy. "What say we all go?"

"Exactly what I was going to suggest!" said Nipper calmly. "Why should we be left out in the cold?"

Handforth stared blankly.

"I say, are you trying to pull my leg?" he asked.

"No, of course not," said Nipper. "We're game to back you up, Handy. We'll all creep out, now that it's dark, and we'll have a look at the activities. There's safety in numbers, you know. If you went alone, you might get the sack—but the Head would hardly sack half a dozen of us. It'll only mean a swishing, at the worst, and it's worth it."

"Good man! Stout fellow!" said Handforth heartily, clapping Nipper on the back. "By George! That's the style! There's no interest in life unless a chap takes a risk now and again!"



CHAPTER 24.

The Capture!

NIGHT had fallen upon the River Stowe, and upon the neighbouring meadows and spinneys.

Low in the sky, just over Bellton Wood, the moon was rising, shedding a soft, silvery light over the landscape. But, as yet, the moonlight was weak and feeble. It only served to change the darkness into a dim, mysterious radiance.

On the bank of the river stood the ruined old water-mill. Nothing moved near it, and not a light was showing anywhere. Faintly and indistinctly from the distance came the low hum of a motor-car.

"I wonder!" murmured Nipper.

He shifted his position slightly, in order to get some ease. For he and the others had been crouching in the shadow of the hedge for nearly an hour, and they were cramped. Below them they could see the river, with the indistinct outlines of the mill.

"You mean that car?" whispered Willy. "Of course, it may be only a car going along the Bannington road."

"We've heard other cars going along the Bannington road," said Nipper. "And they were more distant, more indistinct. Listen!

This one seems to be getting nearer all the time."

And it certainly was. Somewhere down there in the Stowe valley a motor-car was travelling. It was approaching. The throb of the engine was becoming more and more pronounced.

"Can't see any lights, though," came a whisper from Handforth. "By George! There's just a chance——"

"Not so loud, you ass!" warned Church.

They all remained still, intently listening. Truth to tell, they had begun to get fed-up with this vigil. Even Handforth had realised that the game was hardly worth the candle. Nelson Lee had been quite right—there was nothing exciting in this waiting game. The police had to do it, because it was their duty. If necessary, they would wait all night without moving from their posts.

But if the St. Frank's fellows had only realised it, they were extraordinarily lucky. For the wait proved to be singularly short. The sounds of the motor-car grew more and more pronounced, until at length there could be no further doubt. The car was just crossing the bridge near the mill and was slowing down—was in second gear.

"It may be only the police," murmured Church.

"The police wouldn't come up openly like that," argued Nipper. "No, it seems too good to be true, but I believe those rotten bandits have come. They haven't the faintest idea that their secret is known, and that——"

"Look!" gasped Handforth suddenly.

A blazing searchlight had suddenly snapped out into the darkness. It was immediately followed by two others. They were apparently headlamps from motor-cars, and they were suddenly focused upon an angle of the old mill, just where a big saloon motor-car had suddenly come to a stop. The very fact that the car was now in full view proved that it had come up without showing any lights.

"There they go!" said Willy eagerly.

"My hat! What a scrap!" Police-officers could be seen running up into the focused light, and figures were pouring out of the motor-car, attempting to escape. But before they could run out of the light they were seized. Men were struggling, and shouts were filling the air.

"Come on!" yelled Handforth.

He was on his feet in a flash, tearing down the slope towards the mill.

"That's done it!" said Nipper. "It's no good hanging back now. We've got to support Handy all along the line, so we might as well all go!"

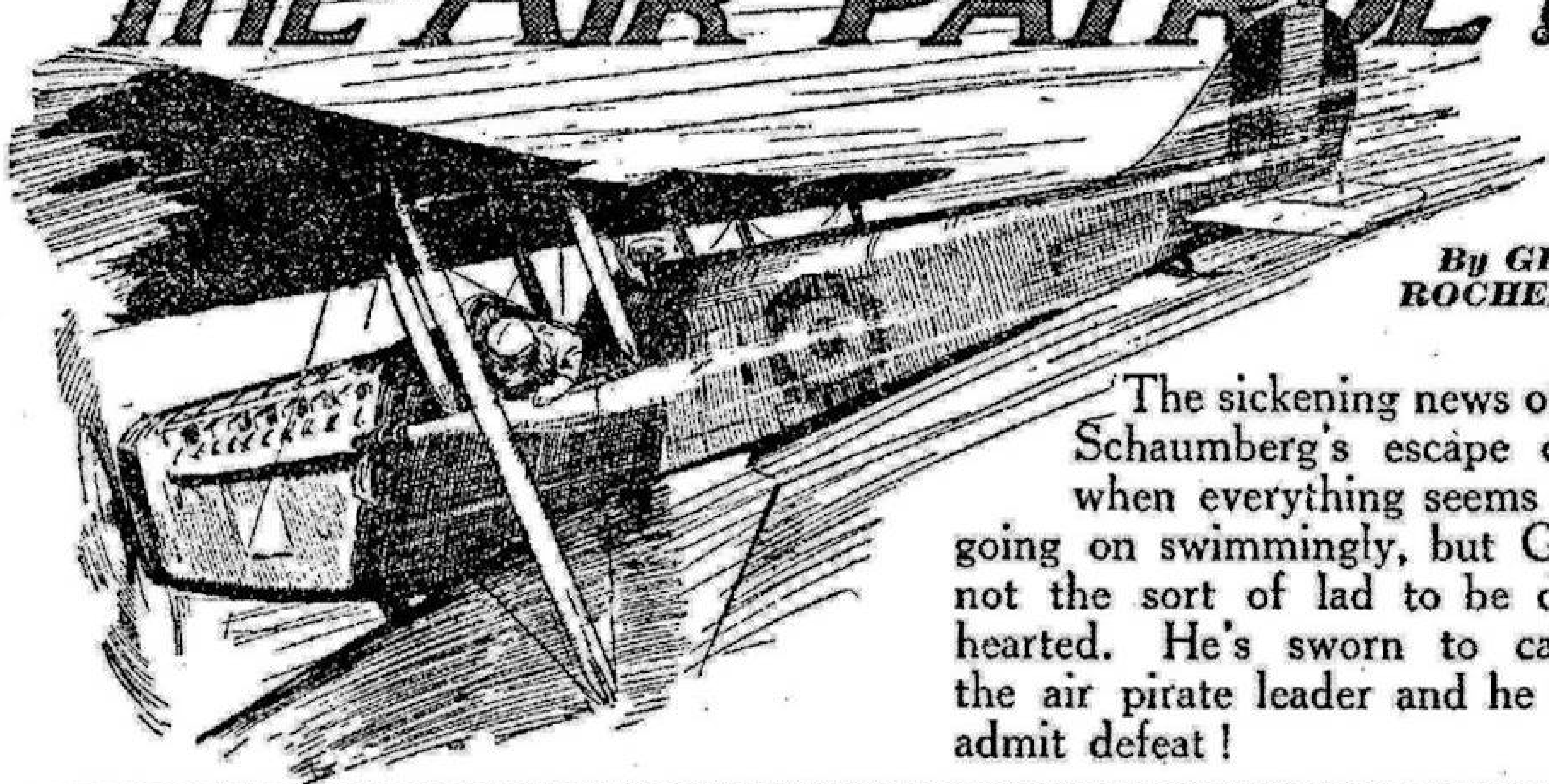
"Hurrah!"

They went rushing down, and any chance of being severely punished for the disregard of orders was obviated by an incident which almost immediately took place. For as the

(Concluded on page 41.)

Great Sensation—Amazing Escape of Air Pirate Leader!

THE AIR PATROL!



By GEO. E.
ROCHESTER

The sickening news of Von Schaumberg's escape comes when everything seems to be going on swimmingly, but Guy is not the sort of lad to be down-hearted. He's sworn to capture the air pirate leader and he won't admit defeat!

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENED:

GUY HOWARD, youngest and most intrepid "scout" in the Atlantic Rangers—whose duty it is to guard the air routes between Britain and America—is attached to Aerodrome D, one of the six huge floating aerodromes placed across the Atlantic Ocean. Just recently the big bullion and passenger-carrying air liners have been attacked by air pirates, whose leader is VON SCHAUMBERG. The headquarters of the pirates is unknown. Guy has sworn to exterminate them, and Von Schaumberg, on his part, has vowed vengeance against Guy for killing one of his confederates. Guy obtains a roving commission, and, discovering the pirates' headquarters, succeeds in capturing Von Schaumberg. The ranger takes his

prisoner to Vladmir, a small whaling station, and, leaving the pirate leader in the cells in charge of a man named Stefansen, then flies off and reports on board H.M. Aircraft Carrier Eagle. Soon after twelve fighting scouts—one containing Guy—and two giant bombers, under the command of Major Boyd, take off and fly towards the pirates' headquarters. As they approach, sixteen pirate seaplanes appear; in fighting formation. Suddenly Major Boyd's hand whips up. Down go the noses of eight scouts, and, with rotary engines thundering at full revolutions and synchronised guns aflame, the naval squadron tear down towards the pirates!

(Now read on.)

Battle!

Nothing could stand against that solid wedge of blazing guns. The pirate leader pulled on his control. The nose of his bus came up then, as he slumped forward over the controls, shot through the forehead, his machine stalled and fell spinning to the sea.

The remainder of the pirates banked, wheeling wildly from the death which thundered down upon them. Right through their scattered formation roared the naval 'planes, zoomed upwards, then wheeled again to the attack.

Like silver hawks, deadly in their precision, they drove once more through that ill-fated pirate squadron. Anxious eyes in the bombers, circling eight hundred feet above the battle, saw five black machines spinning seawards, shrouded in flames and thick, pall-like smoke.

Up again in a zoom went the naval squadron. Wheeling, they broke formation. It was every man for himself now. The fight was all but over, could they but hold the advantage given them by that first pitiless attack.

With synchronised gun spewing flame and steel-coated lead, Guy roared downwards on a swinging pirate 'plane. The black-clad pilot saw him coming, and kicked frenziedly on rudder to meet the attack.

Guy had a vision of thin lips asnarl in a livid face. Then, as he pulled hard on his control to avoid a crash, he saw the black-clad pilot leap to his feet, gloved hands clutching at throat. The nose of the pirate seaplane dropped and the machine tore seawards with engine full on, its pilot's dead body sprawled full across the control-stick.

Wheeling, Guy had a moment in which to view how the fight was faring. Six black pirate machines were still in the air, and five of the original eight attacking scouts.

He saw a red Verrey light flare outwards from Major Boyd's machine. And, at the signal, the four escort machines of the bombers came thundering downwards to finish off the battle.

With merciless precision each pilot picked his man. Like silver streaks they tore seawards, each synchronised gun trained on a pirate plane. And when that mad dive was over and they had come upwards in a zoom, all that remained of the pirate squadron was flaming and half-submerged wreckage floating on the sea!

The One at Large!

BOO-M!
A reverberating, sullen rumble, scarcely audible above the roaring engines of the circling planes, rolled out across the cold, sun-kissed waters. White smoke, like some strange, fantastically-shaped ball of cotton wool, hung for an instant above the machines, then drifted away, merging into nothingness.

Boo-m!

Again it came, that reverberating explosion, and again white smoke puffed out above the naval squadron. Guy was conscious of a vicious crack—crack! And something whined past his head, ripping the fabric of the lower port plane a full eighteen inches.

"Shrapnel!" he exclaimed, and, kicking on rudder, dived down towards the water which fringed the beetling cliffs of Von Schaumberg's base.

It was, indeed, shrapnel—the last shot in the locker of the marooned pirates. Poor, misguided fools! Had they hoisted, then, the white flag of surrender which they hoisted from the topmost cliff some quarter of an hour later, broken and mangled bodies would not have strewn the rocky surface of their stronghold.

But, during that fifteen minutes 112-lb. high-explosive bombs hurtled downwards from the big naval bombers, whilst the crew of the anti-aircraft gun lay sprawled face-downwards on the gun emplacement, riddled by bullets from the fighting scouts of Guy and Major Boyd.

Grim, indeed, was the clean-up of Von Schaumberg's base.

But it was over at last, and the naval machines glided down to the water, their adaptable floats downward for the landing.

Grouped on the jetty which Guy knew

so well stood all that was left of Von Schaumberg's mechanics and engineers. At their head stood a huge brute of a fellow clad in torn blue jersey and stained blue serge trousers. A blood-stained bandage was around his head, and he watched with sullen eyes as Major Boyd vaulted on to the jetty, followed by Guy and three of the pilots.

"Aye, we surrender!" he snarled, in reply to the major's curt, formal question.

"Very good!" replied Major Boyd coldly. "You will be transferred aboard His Majesty's aircraft-carrier Eagle on her arrival here to-night!"

He turned to Guy and asked:

"Would you like to question this fellow, lad?"

"Yes, sir!" replied Guy promptly.

"What happened last night when your leader, Von Schaumberg, was taken from this island?" he demanded of the man.

"Vorzetzen went after him!" was the sullen response.

"Alone?"

"Aye, alone!"

"Why did he not take other machines with him?"

The man laughed harshly.

"Because we wouldn't let him, that's why!" he snarled. "We knew the game was up when that durned ranger got away from here with Von Schaumberg. We hadn't a ship, we had nothing to take us off'n this island, so we seized the machines. All except Vorzetzen's, for we reckoned there was a chance that he'd bring Von Schaumberg back!"

"And why did you seize the machines?"

"So that we could at least make a fight for it if the worst came to the worst!" was the bitter reply. "We knew them pilots would desert us if they could. But they couldn't, for we mounted a guard on 'em and sent 'em up when your squadron come in sight this morning!"

"I see! You held them till they either had to fight or be shot down!" replied Guy quietly. "And Vorzetzen never returned?"

"Nó!"

"Do you think"—Guy's voice was casual—"that Vorzetzen, realising that all was lost, ever went after Von Schaumberg? Do you not think that he might have flown for the mainland in an attempt to save his own skin, and clear out whilst he had the chance?"

"I'd think that of any of 'em but Vorzetzen," was the response; and Guy knew the man did not lie. "Vorzetzen was Von Schaumberg's second in command, and he would never desert him!"

"Never?"

"No, never, confound you! He was not like that!"

Guy nodded and turned to Major Boyd.

"Sir!" he said "I also knew this Vorzetzen—he was the only man who dared to go for his gun when I arrested Von Schaumberg last night!"

"You—it was you?" shouted the men's leader, and took a threatening step forward.

But he froze into immobility, then retreated with slumped shoulders as one of the pilots jabbed an automatic into his ribs.

"I know Von Schaumberg is safe in gaol at Vladmir, sir," went on Guy. "But now that this show is over I would like to hop across there!"

"Why, lad?" said the major wonderingly. "Surely you do not think this Vorzetzen can give us any further trouble? His arrest is only a matter of time!"

"We know Vorzetzen is at large, sir," replied Guy stubbornly. "And we know upon what mission he left this island. I am responsible for my prisoner, and I feel that my place is with him till he is put aboard the Eagle!"

"Then go, lad!" replied Major Boyd. "I think you are worrying yourself unnecessarily, but you may hop off just as soon as you wish!"

Too Late!

HIS tanks filled from the petrol dump on the island and his ripped wing hastily repaired, Guy took the air. And, as he roared towards Vladmir, there was in his heart a vague, indefinable dread.

Almost savagely he tried to analyse the feelings, as, crouched over the controls, he drove the fighting scout forward at full revolutions of her powerful rotary engine.

Why should he fear? What should he fear?

Vorzetzen!

Yes, that was the answer. Once again there came into his mind a vision of that swarthy face, those calm, inscrutable eyes, that steadily-moving hand towards the pocket wherein had lain the automatic.

Ah! Cold and calculating was Vorzetzen—a man to be feared even when the cards were stacked against him—a worthy lieutenant of that fiend, Von Schaumberg.

But Vorzetzen could have no knowledge that Von Schaumberg was a prisoner at Vladmir. And even if he did, by some chance, discover that fact, what could he

do? Surely the stone gaol and the dour, phlegmatic Stefansen were sufficient guard.

And thus cold reason and logic battled in Guy's mind against vague presentiment.

"I'm getting nervy!" he muttered once, in self-disgust.

Maybe there was some excuse for that remark. The events of the past twenty-four hours had left him heavy-eyed, and drawn and haggard of face.

Then, far away on the distant horizon, he saw the faint bluish blur of the mainland. He swung a point to port, heading for the whaling station of Vladmir. It was when his nose was down for the landing that a grim look crept into his eyes.

The squat *Pride of Macbride* was still riding at anchor. Her master, Captain Mactavish, had intended sailing at dawn. Then why hadn't he?

There might be a hundred plausible reasons, but vague fear that all was not well surged anew in the ranger. Landing, he ran alongside the whaler, and, almost before his machine had lost way, he leapt for the low deck.

Alec, the youthful second mate, came running from for'ard to meet him. Guy took one look at the youth's pale face and excited eyes, then gripped him by the arm.

"What's the matter?" he snapped. "What's wrong—why haven't you sailed?"

"Man—man!" wailed Alec. "Come ashore—come ashore! Cap'n Mactavish'll tell ye——"

He literally dragged the ranger towards the boat which lay moored by the ship's side.

"Pull yourself together, man!" replied Guy savagely. "What's happened?"

"Stefansen's bin murdered!" wailed Alec. "An' yon preesoner o' your'n has gone! But it wasn't our fault! We didna' ken that yon black pilot wasna' anither ranger like ye'sel'! Man, man, we didna' ken——"

He broke off, shrinking from the fury which blazed in the boy's eyes.

"Do you mean to tell me," demanded Guy gratingly, "that Stefansen has been murdered and Von Schaumberg has escaped?"

"Aye, oh, aye!" babbled Alec. "Shot reet through th' heed, pair body! But man—man, us didna' ken that yon glib-tongued, hard-faced feller what comed iust after ye'd gone was aught but anither ranger. Aw, come ashore—come ashore! T'owd man will tell ye jist hoo it all happened!"

Guy dropped into the whaler's boat without another word. Alec scrambled for the oars and rowed lustily for the water front.

Once he opened his mouth as though to speak, then shut it again, appalled by the expression on the face of the young ranger.

Reaching the creosoted jetty, he led the way, almost at a double, towards Stefansen's quarters. A group of gaping sailormen were gathered in front of the office door. Guy roughly shouldered his way through them, and they stared at him curiously as they broke to give him passage.

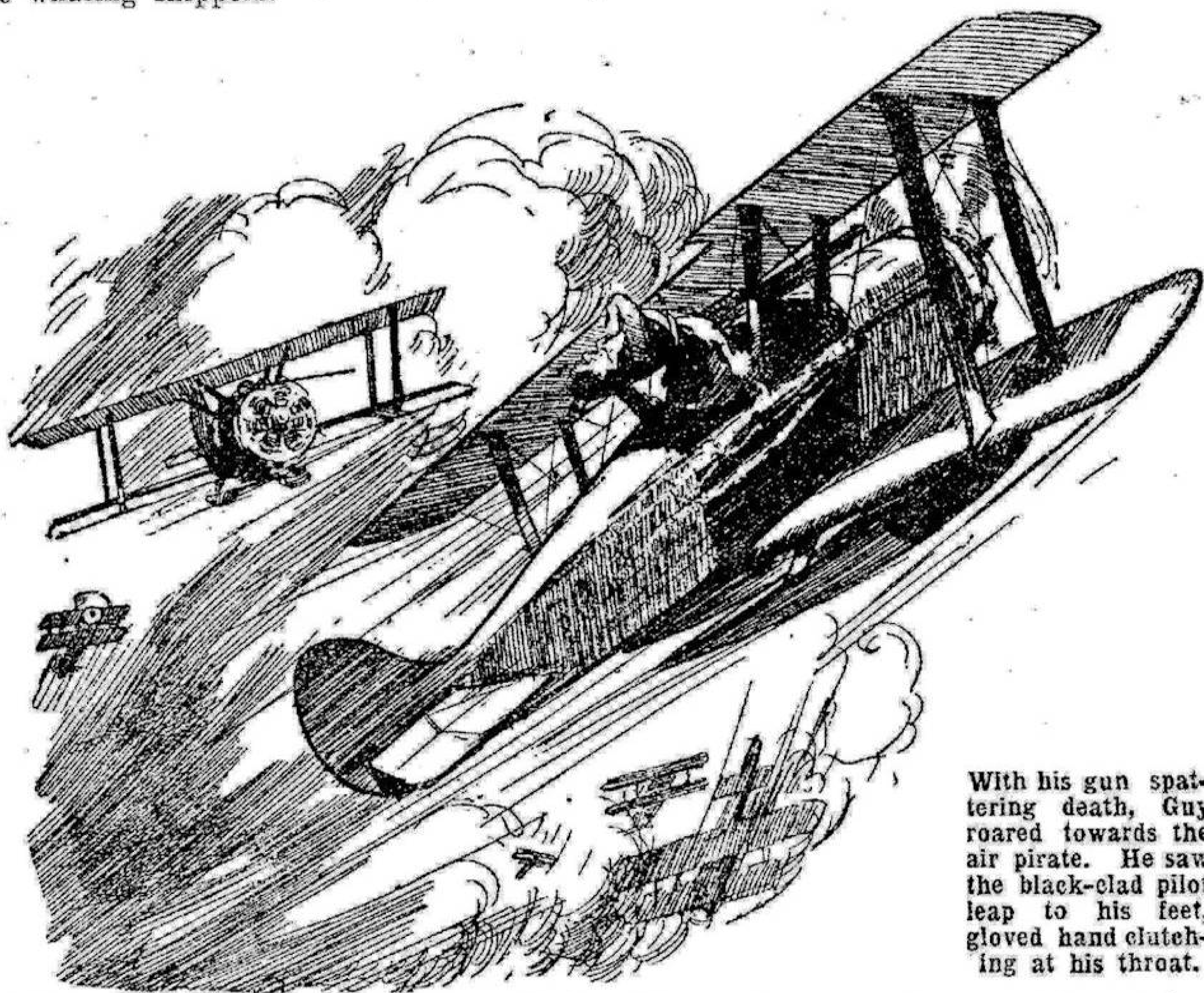
Inside the office was Captain Mactavish, in earnest conversation with two other men, who, by their dress, Guy judged to be whaling skippers.

"Poor—poor fellow!" murmured Guy. He turned to Captain Mactavish. "Tell me just how it happened?" he said quietly.

The Skipper's Story!

"SHORTLY after you left this morning," said Captain Mactavish, "a black, double-seater seaplane landed on the water and hailed us. As you know, the *Pride of Macbride* was lying to seawards of the other vessels, so there was no coincidence in that!"

Guy nodded, and the skipper continued:



With his gun spattering death, Guy roared towards the air pirate. He saw the black-clad pilot leap to his feet, gloved hand clutching at his throat.

"Is this true?" burst out Guy. "That Stefansen has been murdered and Von Schaumberg has escaped?"

Captain Mactavish laid a hand on the boy's shoulder.

"I'm afraid it is, lad!" he said quietly.

Turning, he led the way into a small bed-room behind the office. Lying on a bunk was the body of Stefansen. He had been shot through the temple at a range of inches.

Guy stood staring at the inanimate form in silence. It seemed incredible that Stefansen could be dead.

"The pilot came aboard. He was a thick-set, swarthy-faced fellow!"

"Vorzetzen!" interposed Guy. "That's certain! He's Von Schaumberg's second in command!"

"In the light of what happened, I've no doubt you're right!" replied the skipper grimly. "Well, naturally, I had no suspicions of the fellow at the time for his self-assurance was superb. His exact words to me were: 'I understand that my colleague, Howard, of the *Atlantic Rangers*, landed here during the night with a prisoner!'"

"He'd be chancing his hand with that remark," commented Guy. "I suppose they'd told him at Nevinska that I was heading this way!"

"Exactly! He admitted that much—admitted it quite calmly. He said that he had been engaged with you in the tracking of Von Schaumberg, and that he would remain with the prisoner at Vladmir till either you, or a battleship, arrived here!"

Captain Mactavish paused, then went on earnestly:

"I want you to quite understand, lad, how utterly unsuspecting I was. I am a seaman, and I can fathom the childish, mischievous tricks of sailormen. But this fellow was too deep for me, with his assured, straightforward manner. Moreover, he landed in a machine very similar to yours. He spoke of you with easy familiarity, and he hoodwinked me completely. I might have asked him to show me his badge of authority. That thought did occur to me, but I reckoned it was Stefansen's business and not mine. I had no right to see his credentials!"

"No; he would have been justified in refusing to show them to you—if he had any!" replied Guy.

The skipper nodded, and continued:

"We offered to put him ashore, but he refused, saying he wanted to moor his machine by the water front. Another point calculated to allay suspicions. So he ran his machine inshore and moored her there with one mooring-rope. We'd told him how to find the gaol behind Stefansen's office. I saw him set off along the water front, then I turned my attention to getting the ship under way for the whaling grounds."

He paused, and his voice trembled as he went on:

"Heaven forgive me, but I thought he was straight—that fellow!"

"It was not your fault, captain," replied Guy, for he knew how distressed the honest old Scotch skipper must feel. "Any man would have been completely taken in!"

"Maybe, yes, and maybe, no," replied Captain Mactavish bitterly. "Anyway, we had the anchor up, and were just heading out to sea when Alec, who was with me on the bridge, gives a look aft, then grabs me by the arm. I looked round and sees this Vorzetzen, as you call him, shoving Von Schaumberg into the rear cockpit of the machine!"

"Could you see if Von Schaumberg was handcuffed?" asked Guy.

"Yes, he was! I had my glasses on the seaplane, and he was still handcuffed. I gave the order to about ship at once, for

I couldn't understand Stefansen letting the prisoner go, and I thought I'd have a word with him and see if everything was ship-shape and in order. Man, somehow I felt a personal interest in that prisoner, after being in on the job so intimately, if you understand!"

"Yes, I quite understand!"

"Before we got the *Pride of Macbride* turned about, that fellow took off. He roared over our masthead, and he waved to me—aye, waved to me!"

And Captain Mactavish's voice was very bitter as he repeated the words.

"Which way was he heading?" asked Guy, but he knew that it mattered little what the answer was. Once out of sight of land, *Vorzetzen* might swing off to any point of the compass.

"He went straight out to sea," replied the skipper. "I dropped anchor and went ashore. The front door of Stefansen's quarters was locked. I got no answer to my knocks, and, going round to the rear, I found that door locked as well. But a window was open, and I went through it. I found Stefansen lying dead in his office, and his keys gone!"

"But did no one hear the shot fired?" demanded Guy. "It's perfectly obvious that *Vorzetzen* just walked into the office, saw Stefansen, ascertained where the keys were, and shot him dead!"

"There's few about at that hour of the morning," replied the skipper. "One fellow, a loafer, did hear the shot. And, what's more, he saw *Vorzetzen* walk from the back of the building with the prisoner!"

"And hadn't he the sense to know that something was wrong?"

"No, he hadn't," replied Captain Mactavish, with a short, grim laugh. "For *Vorzetzen* walked up to him and asked him to assist in taking the prisoner as far as the water front. On the way, he casually explained the shot, saying that he expected trouble with the prisoner, who was being taken in on a charge of murder, and that he had been testing his automatic. He said he dare take no risks with a struggling prisoner in a seaplane, and that he would not scruple to shoot, should it become necessary!"

"He had a nerve!" muttered Guy.

"Yes, it was nerve which carried him through. Nerve—and the utter simplicity of his plan. What transpired in Stefansen's office before Stefansen was shot, I suppose we'll never know!"

"No; unless we get *Vorzetzen*," replied Guy grimly. "And get him we will, you can bet your boots on that!"

The Interrogation!

SHADOWS of the coming night were creeping across a grey and desolate sea when Guy arrived back at the island base. Briefly, he told Major Boyd what had happened. And there was grim resolution in his eyes as he concluded:

"And now, sir, with your permission, I will interrogate the men's leader. I think it is possible that Von Schaumberg has some place to which he can retreat should trouble occur. Presuming he has such a place, there is a chance that he and Vorzetzen have made for it!"

"I doubt if they would, lad!" replied the major. "They would run a terrible risk of recapture!"

"But they must get petrol for their machine from somewhere, sir," protested Guy. "I don't think Vorzetzen could have much left when he quitted Vladmir this morning!"

"It is a faint—a very faint—hope!" said Major Boyd. "And I doubt if the men's leader will talk, even if he knows there is such a spot as you suggest. Still, you may certainly question him."

"Thank you, sir," replied Guy grimly. "I'll make him talk!"

He gave the order for the leader to be brought to the main cave, which Von Schaumberg had used as living and dining quarters for himself and his men.

Two of the naval pilots marched the fellow in.

"Sit him in that chair, and tie him so that he can't move!" ordered Guy curtly.

Waiting till the man was securely bound, the ranger picked up an iron crowbar.

"I'm going to ask you one or two questions," he said grimly. "You're going to answer them truthfully, and you're going to answer them quickly!"

And with that he shoved one end of the crowbar into the heart of a glowing stove!

(It seems as though Guy is going to use forceful methods to obtain information. But then, he's absolutely determined to get on the track of Von Schaumberg again, and he has no scruples. Next week's instalment is intensely exciting and dramatic!)

THE MYSTERY OF THE POISONED RIVER!

(Continued from page 35.)

juniors were nearing their objective Nipper caught sight of a fleeing figure over towards his left. One of the bandits had escaped from the cordon and was getting away.

"Here, you fellows!" yelled Nipper.

With one accord the juniors tore into the fray. A few seconds later the juniors had piled on the fugitive, and were holding him down.

Triumphantly the juniors frog-marched their victim up to the mill. And there they found three well-dressed men, handcuffed, dishevelled and savage-looking. The fourth prisoner was added to the bag.

"We thought we'd come along to give a hand, sir," said Nipper, as Nelson Lee came striding up. "And you can't say anything to us, either, because we captured this man as he was getting away."

Nelson Lee smiled slightly.

"You young rascals!" he said. "I'm not sure that you will escape punishment. We shall have to see what the headmaster has to say about this. Jameson, here's your other prisoner. Rather a lucky thing that these boys were nearby."

"Yes," admitted the inspector grudgingly. "How on earth the fellow managed to slip away I can't understand. But I'm glad that he's been roped in."

Of course, the juniors received no punish-

ment. The Head was inclined to be very severe about it all, but in the circumstances he pardoned the juniors. And there was a good deal of general satisfaction when it was learned that the bandits had been captured with every penny of the money that had been stolen from the bank in the morning.

As for the mill, a thorough examination revealed a hidden cellar. It was proved that this place had been used for the manufacture of a special poison-gas—harmless in its ultimate effects, but drastic in its immediate effects.

The man who had first been captured proved to be a clever chemist, one who had for years been associated with criminals, and that gas was his own invention. But never had he guessed that the waste matter from his chemical processes, flowing into the River Stowe, would lead to the capture of himself and his associates. The river had only been poisoned in a very confined area, and even in this section the pollution had only affected the main current along one bank. But it had been sufficient to cause the temporary illness of Juicy Lemon, and the apprehension of the crooks.

They had come to this old mill because they had felt that it was safe, but it had proved their undoing.

(Next week sees the commencement of another amazing series of stories with Edward Oswald Handforth playing the most prominent part. It's entitled: "ALL HIS OWN FAULT!" and is one of the most vivid and dramatic yarns Edwy Scarles Brooks has ever written.)

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 95.

SECTION A	READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP. I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with the Membership Number assigned to me, and Membership Badge.
SECTION B	MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS. I, Member No..... (give Membership No.), hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me..... (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.
SECTION C	NEW READER'S DECLARATION. I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."
(FULL NAME).....	
(ADDRESS).....	

INSTRUCTIONS.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms leave in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. The second form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together, and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4. **Member Applying for Bronze Medal:** It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms, bearing the same number, are needed. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and

writes his name and address at the bottom of the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when they have secured the requisite number of readers they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver one.

These Application Forms can be posted for ½d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

A FEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE.

You can write to fellow members living at home or in the most distant outposts of the Empire.

You are offered free advice on choosing a trade or calling, and on emigration to the colonies and dependencies.

If you want to form a sports or social club, you can do so amongst local members of the League.

You are offered free hints on holidays, whether walking, biking or camping.

You can qualify for the various awards by promoting the growth of the League.

If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.

NOTICE!

The St. Frank's League has now attained such proportions that we are compelled to discontinue the offer of gold medals in connection therewith. The silver and bronze medals will still be available, however, as heretofore, to those who qualify for them in accordance with the rules.



Our Weekly Pow-Wow!

By
The Editor.

Your Editor welcomes letters from all his readers; and him one now. Address it to: The Editor, "Nelson Lee Library," Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Speed Records!

A bunch of letters reaches me about the motor-cycling speed record. This stands at the figure of 121 miles p.h., but nobody knows when it will make a jump, like the proverbial cat. - No sooner is one's back turned than a new record pops up, gay as the morning. Best thanks to all friends who have written in about this matter. Of course the big speed record is that of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, which goes gliding on its way to greater success. It's Number 1 for the Popularity Prize, and it's making headway every week. In short, the N.L. is the stuff to give 'em!

Signatures!

It strikes me as one of the extraordinary things of this or any age that people do not write their names clearly. Why is it? They were better off in the old days. People made a mark. You can read a mark. It is ten to one whether you can read some of the signatures. You remember the old story. "Is that your signature, sir?" asked the manager. "Thanks very much. Now, please write your name." Some signatures are like nothing on earth. But it is a mighty important thing for a signature to be legible. Nobody loves the individual whose name is a puzzle. It means so much dead loss of time. The postman is flummoxed. The man at the desk who has to answer a letter with an indecipherable name at the end finds his hair turning grey. Small wonder if he goes completely bald-headed!

A Lecture on Printing!

A chum in the North says he is down to give a lecture on the printing of a newspaper, and he wants all the facts about this business. It is a tall order. He will have to study up the subject in the encyclopedia, and then, as he lives in an important city where several dailies are published, he should write for permission to see the work in progress. Few sights are more fascinating than a huge printing office when the machinery is in full blast, turning out thousands of folded copies, all ready for the motor-vans, which speed away with the stores of news to the railway stations and the big distributing agencies,

which hand the cargo on to hundreds of newsagents all over the country.

A Champion Collector!

A Birmingham chum tells me he has kept every letter and postcard he has received since he was seven. That's a record, I should say. I keep a good many letters for a time, but the hour comes when a clearance has to be made. I know it seems no end interesting to keep papers and so forth. One says to oneself: "Oh, I will have another look at that one day." All a mistake. The day never comes. Most of us have quite enough to handle with the new letters that come in. You find some people similarly minded to my correspondent in the Midlands. They can't positively bring themselves to throw away any letter or card. The result is that there is hardly room to get inside the house. It is a dusty squeeze for dear life in the "den." There are papers, shoals of them, on the chairs, or the mantelpiece, all along the top of the bookcase, and on the floor. A sight like that makes a conscientious charlady weep salt tears. Enough to make her.

Getting on the Films!

A London reader is very anxious to become a film actor, but he has had no experience, and is puzzled as to how he should proceed.

(Continued overleaf.)



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OUR WEEKLY POW-WOW!

(Continued from previous page.)

This calling is much overcrowded. Of course, my chum might get a hearing if he applied to a film company for employment, but there is no certainty as to that point. If he is absolutely set on the work, he should keep on worrying the people who are connected with the profession, but the work is not dependable unless the aspirant has something special in his favour. I advise my correspondent to look out for some reliable job for the time being. Then, if some tempting offer came along, he could snap it up.

This Sun Business!

A Warwickshire supporter is perplexed by the work the sun does. He asks how it is the sun manages to light the world and to cause day and night. Night is caused by the earth's shadow when it revolves away from the sun. The earth spins round once in every twenty-four hours, and moves round the sun in the course of a year. If it were possible for an airman to rise sufficiently high in the heavens he would eventually find perpetual sunshine. If he went high enough, he would even escape the effect of an eclipse of the sun when the moon glides between the earth and the great luminary. Of course, what concerns most of us is the slack way in which, in this country, the sun appears to do its work for in England people are always complaining of the shortage of sunshine.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

C. T. Browne, 74, Victoria Road, Lower Edmonton, London, N.9, wishes to secure in good condition Nos. 1-36. "N.L.L." new series; 1s. per copy offered. Write first.

R. E. Yanson, International Correspondence Club, 76, Vogelkersstraat, The Hague, Holland, wishes to hear from readers in Surinam, Alaska, Canada and South America.

Miss Sylvia Castle, 10, Pleydell Avenue, Stamford Brook, London, W.6, would like to hear from girl readers anywhere; ages, 14-18.

H. Slater, 16, Lime Street, Nelson, Lancs., wants to correspond with readers anywhere; any subject; all letters promptly answered; Halifax readers especially.

B.M./S.N.S.3, London, W.C.1, would like to obtain old series "N. L. L." entitled "The Schoolboy Crusoes"; also to correspond with readers overseas.

Norman Guthrie, 26, Scouler Street, Marrickville, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, would like to correspond with readers anywhere.

Alex Henderson, 25, Castle Street, Southampton, wishes to correspond with readers interested in wireless; also readers in Africa. He has back numbers of "N.L.L." for disposal.

G. F. Hodgson, Sunny Side, 70, Scalby Road, Scarborough, Yorks, has thirty "N.L.L.'s," old series, for sale; also seventy-five new series. He would like to hear from readers and magazine owners.

A. Shaw, 114, Milton Road, Gravesend, Kent, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere, especially in Australia, Egypt, Morocco, South Sea Islands and New Zealand.

Harold Lewis, 123, Shepherd's Bush Road, Hammersmith, London, W.6, wishes to hear from members in his district.

T. Rhodes, 18, Jackson Street, Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancs., wishes to obtain "N.L.L.'s" before No. 547. Please state what numbers available when writing.

J. L. Fennessy, 5, Mackay Street, Seddon, Victoria, Australia, wishes to hear from readers who are fond of sport and books.

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