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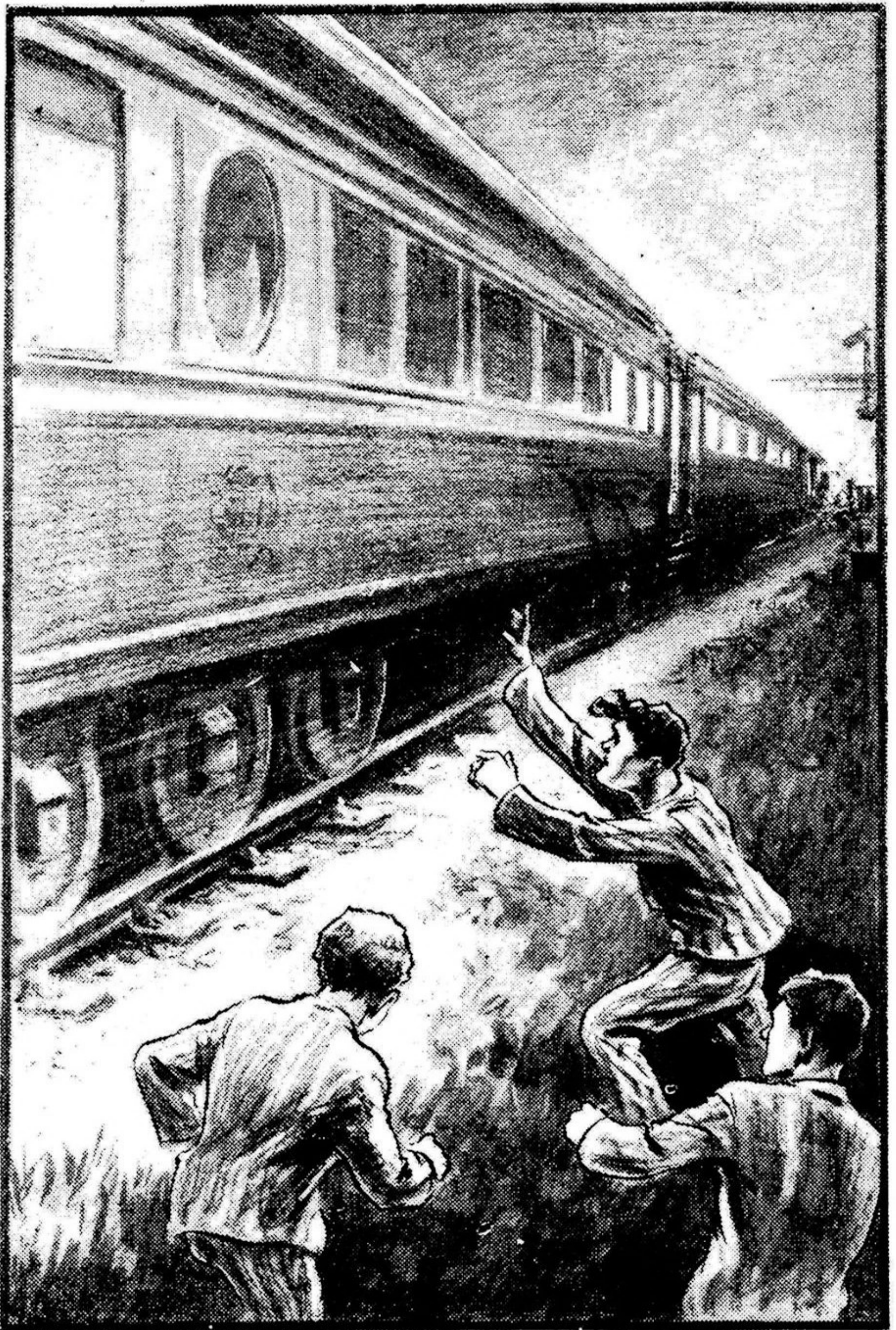
THE ST. FRANK'S SCHOOL TRAIN !

The opening yarn of an amazing new series of school and adventure stories featuring the famous chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 160.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY

May 25th, 1929.



"Look out!" gasped McClure. "The train's going!" It was only too true. The three chums made a rush forward, but then they stopped as they saw that it was hopeless to try and board the moving carriages. The St. Frank's School Train had started — and Handforth & Co. were left behind!

JOIN IN WITH THE BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S IN THEIR TRIP ROUND
GREAT BRITAIN, CHUMS!

THE ST. FRANK'S SCHOOL TRAIN!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

(Author of the St. Frank's yarns now appearing every Tuesday in "The Popular.")

Meals in a train—sleeping in a train—lessons in a train—and swishings, too! Oh yes, everything is the same, even though the boys of St. Frank's are on tour. But they don't care. They're going to have a jolly good time—which is all that matters!

CHAPTER I.

Suspense I

"GOOD luck, Travers, old man!"
"Thanks!"
"Have a good time!"
"Rather!"

"And don't forget to kiss the bride!"

"That's one of the first duties I shall perform when I get home," said Vivian Travers sadly. "But as the bride is my own sister, I'm afraid it'll be a formal sort of business."

Quite a crowd of St. Frank's juniors was at Bellton Station, seeing Travers off. It was late afternoon, and the May day was sunny and warm. The local train was already standing against the little platform, and Travers was leaning out of the compartment window, smiling benignly upon the throng.

"I suppose you'll get home some time about midnight?" asked Handforth, of Study D, whose geographical knowledge, as his Form-master would have verified, was vague. "You live somewhere in the wilds, don't you?"

"Not far from Halstead, in Essex, dear old fellow," said Travers.

"That's what I thought," nodded Handforth. "In the wilds. I've never heard of Halstead, anyway. What is it—a hamlet?"

"Don't take any notice of him, Travers, old man," said Nipper, the Remove captain. "Considering that he once visited your home, his ignorance about the district is too thick for words."

"By George!" said Handforth, with a start. "I remember now! Of course! Halstead's quite a town, isn't it? Well, give it my love!"

Travers allowed a frown to overspread his usually calm features.

"I'm not thinking about Halstead, or my home, or my sister's wedding," he said slowly. "I'm wondering if I shall come out well in the exams. For the love of Samson! I shall be worrying myself grey until to-morrow. Be a sport, Nipper, dear old fellow, and send me a wire as soon as the lists are up, won't you?"

"I'll send you one so quickly that it'll arrive red-hot," said Nipper promptly. "You can expect it any time to-morrow morning."

Travers sighed.

"I expect it'll come during the ceremony," he said. "Only put one word, dear old fellow—'Failed.'"

"But I might have to put 'Passed,'" smiled Nipper.

"Never!" said Vivian Travers solemnly. "I know I haven't passed, but I'm frightfully anxious, all the same. Can't you see the lines of suspense on my classic features? There's always a chance that the examiners might have blundered, and allowed me to slip through. One never knows."

"You're dotty," said Handforth, staring. "Of course you'll pass! Didn't you stay here for a couple of days after your special leave commenced—on purpose to finish the exams? You could have gone home to your sister's wedding last Saturday if you'd liked, and now it's Tuesday."

"Well, they sprang that extra paper on us for Monday," said Travers. "Unless I had stayed I couldn't have finished the course. Not that it really made any difference," he added, shaking his head.

"Well, keep your pecker up, old man," said Nipper. "Hallo, the guard's awakened from his hibernation. I believe the train's going."

"They'll have a job to start it," said Handforth tartly. "I'll bet the wheels have got rusted to the rails."

However, the local train, in spite of these disparaging remarks, successfully potted off on its brief trip to Bannington, where Travers would change into the main line express.

"Well, that's that," said Nipper. "He was only spoofing us, of course. I know the word I shall use on that wire to-morrow."

THERE had been frantic days at St. Frank's during the past week. Returning to the old school after the brief Whitsun holidays, everybody had expected to face a lazy, free and easy term. Wasn't the summer term always like that? Sunny days, cricket, languid hours on the river, lounging under shady trees, with work thrust well into the background.

But this term St. Frank's had received a shock.

On the very first day of assembly, Dr. Morrison Nicholls, the headmaster, had announced that a series of special exams was to start immediately. Shock No. 1. Shock No. 2 had come when the school had learned that these exams were for a very special reason. Twenty-four boys out of each Form were to be selected by these exams—and the rest eliminated. In other words, one hundred and twenty fellows were, in a way of speaking, to select themselves—by their own efforts in these exams—to take part in a very unusual enterprise.

But wait a minute. There's a better way of telling this!

LOOK!" ejaculated Handforth breathlessly.

"Oh, come on!" said Church. "We've got to get back to St. Frank's for tea, and there's cricket practice—"

"Blow tea!" roared Handforth. "Bother cricket practice! Look up the line! The School Train's coming!"

"What!"

"It must be the School Train!" yelled Handforth. "It can't be anything else."

The juniors were on the point of leaving the platform, after having seen the "local" out of sight round the bend. Now they all stared fascinatedly. There were about a dozen of them—Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson, Handforth & Co., Jimmy Potts, Gresham, and two or three others.

"Great Scott!" said Nipper. "I believe he's right, you chaps."

They stood there, spellbound. The train that was slowly approaching was undoubtedly something out of the ordinary. Never had such a train appeared on this local line before. Never had such a train, in fact, appeared on any line before.

Ever since the first day of term St. Frank's had been talking about the School Train. And here it was! Without the slightest doubt, this was *it*. It couldn't be anything else.

As it came round the curve the Removites could see that there were at least twelve Pullman-type coaches. But they were special coaches, bigger and longer than the ordinary kind, and the train was consequently the longest that had ever been seen on this track in its whole history.

The coaches were brand new, gleaming and shining in the May sunshine. They were finished in two shades of blue—the lower parts dark blue, and the upper light blue, something after the fashion of the latest style in duo-tone motor-cars. The effect was simply gorgeous.

"It's the School Train!" ejaculated Gresham eagerly. "Oh, my hat! It beats anything I've ever seen! Look at the size of those coaches!"

"By Jove! It's wonderful!" said Nipper. "Phew! I hope we haven't made a bloomer, you chaps! It'll be an awful disappointment if—"

"No fear!" shouted Tommy Watson. "Look! I can read the lettering on the coaches now! What does it say on this first one? 'Service Car.' And on the next one it's got, 'Third Form Dining Car and Classroom.'"

"There's ours—next!" bellowed Handforth, pointing. "Look! 'Remove Fourth Form Dining Car.' Oh, my only aunt! This is too good to be true!"

The train seemed to be slowing up outside the station, and the juniors went running along the platform, and then on to the permanent way, so that they could obtain a nearer view. The indication signs were not actually painted on the coaches themselves,

but on special long runners, which fitted into slots near the roof of each car.

The train was pulled by a dirty old goods engine, which looked incongruous next to so much splendour. But this engine was evidently employed merely to pull the train into Bellton—where, no doubt, it would be shunted into the siding.

"It's here!" said Watson breathlessly. "All ready for us to get into when the time comes. By Jingo, I wonder who'll pass the exams?"

"We've all got to pass!" said Handforth fiercely. "We must! By George, I'm going to pass, anyhow!" he added defiantly. "I'll bet I'll come out on top!"

"You always were an optimist," said McClure dubiously. "We'll be jolly lucky, Handy, if we scrape through the last five. Even if we do that we shall be safe, thank goodness."

"Yes," said Nipper, nodding. "The fellows who fail to qualify for this trip will be the rank duffers—who don't deserve any special favours, anyhow. It was a brilliant wheeze of the Head's to weed out the undeserving. I reckon we fellows are safe enough. We're not slackers, anyhow, and we've worked like mad over these exams."

Extraordinarily enough, the news of the School Train's arrival in Bellton spread like magic. Nobody knew how the school got to know, but it was a fact that within ten minutes dozens of breathless cyclists arrived from St. Frank's, many of them hatless, and some of them jacketless. Others were running up, dusty and perspiring.

The idea of the School Train had intrigued the fellows from the very first. The fairly-recent voyage on the School Ship had been novel enough, but for every schoolboy who is interested in ships there are a dozen who are ten times more interested in railways. And the thought of spending the whole summer term touring the length and breadth of the land was not only fascinating, but bewildering.

And it was no dream—but a certainty.

DR. NICHOLLS' plan was extremely simple.

As he had told the school, on that memorable first day of term, the trip was definitely fixed. St. Frank's had to thank their old friend, Lord Dorrimore, for the School Train. His lordship was a millionaire, anyhow, and he had always been singularly reckless with his money.

Seeing how tremendously the boys had enjoyed their voyage abroad, Lord Dorrimore had got the idea of building a special train, with class-rooms, dormitories, studies, and every imaginable comfort on wheels. Dorrie saw no reason why the boys shouldn't get closely acquainted with their own country—and how better than by travelling from place to place during term?

The train, when completed, was necessarily composed of many duplicate cars. Some

had to be used for sleeping, others for feeding, and still more for work. They couldn't all be occupied the whole time, or the overcrowding would be hopeless. A train of twelve great Pullman coaches would ordinarily carry many hundreds, but this special train, designed as a travelling school, could accommodate no more than a hundred and twenty boys—with a special coach for masters.

Hence the Head's eliminating exams.

He frankly told the school that only twenty-four boys from each Form could go. It was only fair that all boys should have the same chance. So the exams. were held, and the



two dozen fellows of each Form who obtained the highest marks would qualify; the rest would remain at St. Frank's, and carry on as usual.

Such fellows as Nipper and Reggie Pitt and Browne and Fenton were overjoyed. They knew that they would safely be within the first two dozen. It was the rank and file which suffered the agonies of suspense. It was the slackers who were distracted with uncertainty.

There had been practically a week of exams.—a week during which sport and pleasure had been forgotten. Work, work, and more work. On the Friday the task had been completed, and the verdict was expected on the morrow—Wednesday. At the last minute—on the Saturday morning—an additional paper had been sprung on the school. This was why Travers, who had got special leave to attend his sister's wedding, had not left until the very eve of the ceremony. That additional paper was not likely to delay the main results of the exams.

As Nipper had remarked: with twenty-four Removites, twenty-four Fourth-Formers, twenty-four fags, and forty-eight seniors on the train, it could be truthfully held that St. Frank's would be on tour. The fellows who were left behind would be less truly representative of the school. In a word, they didn't matter. The School Train could well get on without them.

CHAPTER 2.

The Verdict!

"NEVER seen anything like it!" said Reggie Pitt, of the West House.

He and Jack Grey and a number of others were standing on the embankment, bewildered by the magnificence of the great School Train. Its gleaming blue paintwork, its gilt lettering, and its general air of vastness—all this was enough to make anybody feel rather dazed.

"I expected something pretty good, but this takes the giddy biscuit!" said Jack Grey breathlessly. "My only Sunday topper! Think of it, Reggie! Think of travelling about from place to place in a glorious train like this! I hope to goodness we pass the exams!"

"We're safe enough," said Reggie confidently. "But look at Doyle! Look at Hubbard—and those Fourth-Form chaps, Skelton and Bray and Webb and Steele! They're the chaps who are in a funk!"

He was right. It was the indistinguished fellows who were on tenterhooks of uncertainty. Not all the prominent juniors were definitely safe, either. Church and McClure even had private doubts regarding their own leader. It would be just like Handforth to fail by a mark or two.

There was Archie Glenthorne, too—a notorious slacker. How would he come out? Archie himself wasn't quite sure whether he wanted to come out well or not. He had a pretty frightful idea that this School Train business would be a bit strenuous. It might be a ripe scheme to fail in the exams., and thus spend a lazy, free-and-easy term at St. Frank's. Still, he had done his best, and he was perfectly calm as to the result. He was in the happy position of not caring a jot, one way or the other.

"I say, can't we have a look inside?" asked Handforth, as he hustled along the permanent way. "Where's the guard? Who's in charge of this train, anyway?"

"Don't be an ass, Handy," said Nipper. "The train hasn't officially arrived—it's only been brought here so that it can be shoved on to the siding. We're not supposed to be here at all. I believe we're trespassing, really."

"I want to see inside!" persisted Handforth. "Look at these ripping cars! Some of 'em are class-rooms—and there are two or three fixed up for studies, too. I expect they're full of private compartments. Good old Dorrie! He did the thing thoroughly while he was about it!"

"Dorrie's a brick!" said Nipper.

"Hear, hear!" went up a chorus.

Quite a number of the fellows raised a cheer, but just then the station-master came along. He was quite friendly, although rather worried.

"You shouldn't be here, young gentlemen," he said reprovingly. "I can quite understand your interest, but I might get into trouble if anything happens. I wish you'd quietly disperse."

"Can't we go into the train?" asked Handforth.

"I'm afraid you can't," replied the official, shaking his head. "For one thing, it's locked, and I haven't the faintest idea where the keys are. My instructions are to see this train placed on the siding and that's all. The next move must come from your own headmaster."

"I'd love to see inside," said Handforth dreamily.

BUT just then a dramatic interruption came.

Hal Brewster, of the River House School, came running up, looking flushed and excited.

"You lucky bounders!" he ejaculated, after he had stared at the train. "By Jove! I wish I were a St. Frank's chap. I'd give quids and quids to go on this trip with you."

"Better speak to your people about it," grinned Nipper. "I always thought it was a mistake for them to keep you at that mouldy old River House."

"You silly St. Frank's fathead!" snorted Brewster, with a glare. "The River House is better than St. Frank's any day!"

"And yet, a moment ago, you were wishing yourself at St. Frank's!" murmured Nipper.

"Oh, well, you know what I mean!" growled the River House junior leader. "By Jove! What a lucky crowd you are! I expect most of you have come out well in the eliminating exam., haven't you?"

"We don't know yet," said Nipper.

"Don't know! But the results are up."

"No," said Nipper. "They won't be up until the morning."

"My dear ass, I've just come from St. Frank's, and the whole place is seething like a cauldron," said Hal Brewster. "The results were posted up ten minutes ago, and there's a free fight going on round every notice board."

"What!" roared the juniors.

"Are you trying to kid us?" ejaculated Nipper, grabbing Brewster's arm.

"Of course not! It's true—honour bright!"

There was a wild rush. Nobody had expected the lists to be posted up until the next morning. Bicycles were grabbed—anybody's—and when these were exhausted the rest went on foot. The School Train was forgotten. The most important thing in life, at the moment, was to know if one's own particular name was on the list!

"SAFE, thank goodness!" said Church fervently.

"Of course we're safe," retorted Handforth. "I'll admit I was a bit windy about you chaps—"

"You fathead!" interrupted McClure. "We're safe enough! Church and I were windy about you!"

"Why, you—you—"

But Handforth paused. He felt that he was hardly justified in getting indignant.

Extraordinarily enough, his own name figured almost at the bottom of the Remove list. To be exact, he was twenty-second—doubtless some idiotic blunder on the part of the examiners.

The truth was, Handforth had been very rusty in one or two important subjects, and very weak marks for these particular papers had made his aggregate look rocky. Handforth was a masterly footballer, a keen cricketer, and a general all-round sportsman, but as a scholar his light failed to shine brilliantly.

There was much jubilation—and much gnashing of teeth. Such fellows as Hubbard and Teddy Long and Owen major were going about almost weeping and wailing. They were bitterly complaining about the injustice of the whole thing.

All the prominent juniors had come through all right—Nipper & Co., and Travers and Potts and Archie. Gresham and Jerry Dodd were safe, too, and Nipper was pleased to find that Charlie Bangs, the new Australian junior, was booked for the tour.

"We shall be able to field a full-strength Junior Eleven," said Nipper contentedly. "Not one of our star players has failed us. And we're going to have lots of cricket on this trip, you chaps. Think of the schools we can play in the Midlands and up in the north."

"I'm sure I shall wake up soon," said Reggie Pitt.

He was well-pleased because the West House would be prominently represented. Such fellows as Castleton and Fatty Little and Singleton and Hussi Khan were safe. Even the Trotwood twins had come through on the right side. Clarence Fellowe, the lanky poet of the Remove, was also one of the successful ones.

In the Fourth, such stalwarts as Bob Christine & Co., Corcoran & Co., and Boots & Co., were all secure.

"Jiggered if I can understand how some of these rotters wangled it," said Handforth, frowning. "Look at these names! I'm blessed if Merrell and Marriott aren't through!"

"What about Gore-Pearce and Gulliver and Bell?" asked Fullwood bitterly. "I've failed—and yet they've done the trick!"

"You've failed?" asked Handforth, staring. "Oh, Fully!"

"Chuck it!" growled Fullwood. "I thought I should fail, somehow. I suppose I've been slacking too much. But I'm jolly certain I haven't been slacking so much as those beastly cads of Study A!" he added indignantly. "By Jove! They must have cribbed their way all through the exams."

This was probably the true explanation. Gore-Pearce & Co. were notorious cheats at

exams.—and they were just as notorious as slackers. It was obvious, therefore, that they had "wangled" their passage.

Of course, nothing could be done about it. Handforth, hot-headed, wanted to kick up a dust and get Gore-Pearce & Co. disqualified so that Fullwood and one or two others were put in their places, but Fullwood wouldn't hear of it. And it was really impossible to expose the cads without sneaking.

So it seemed they would go with the School Train.

DR. MORRISON NICHOLLS smiled in a friendly way on the assembled school. It was later in the evening, and Big Hall was packed.

"I am glad that the results were published earlier than we had expected," said the Head pleasantly. "A good many of you, no doubt, are put out of your suspense. I don't intend to say much to you now, but I would like to say that I have received a very nice telegram from Lord Dorrimore—"

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for old Dorrie!"

The Head was interrupted as the school lustily cheered.

"Is Lord Dorrimore coming down, sir?" shouted somebody.

"I'm afraid not," replied the Head, smiling. "At the moment Lord Dorrimore is somewhere in Brazil, and he sent his wire just before setting off into the interior. He has been very generous over this whole matter, and I hope that St. Frank's will justify his faith, and make this venture a complete success."

"Rather, sir!"

"There are one or two points that I feel impelled to emphasise," said Dr. Nicholls, becoming serious. "First and foremost you must remember that this tour is far from being a pleasure jaunt. All you boys who are booked for the School Train will carry on with your lessons in exactly the same way as the rest of the school. There are to be no alterations whatsoever—no concessions and no

privileges. Lesson times will remain unaltered, and the identical discipline that you now experience will be in force. You must not get any ideas into your heads that you are off for a joy trip."

"But we shall have our half-holidays, sir."

"Yes, you will have your half-holidays—and your evenings," said the Head. "But during your evenings there will be prep.—just as here. So you mustn't think that you can go off for jaunts here, there and everywhere, leaving your work to take care of itself. I am telling you this now so that you won't get any disappointments later. The



St. Frank's governors only consented to this new departure on the definite and distinct understanding that the full routine would be maintained."

The school was by no means disillusioned. Everybody had known this from the first, although some of the fellows had certainly hoped that there would be a few privileges.

"Mr. Nelson Lee, who was in charge of the School Ship," went on the Head, "will also be in charge of the St. Frank's Train——"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Mr. Lee!"

"Bravo, sir!"

"I have not the slightest doubt that Mr. Lee will keep you all in order," continued Dr. Nicholls dryly. "The Sixth and Fifth Forms will be jointly conducted by Mr. Pagett. The Remove and Fourth Forms will be jointly conducted by Mr. Pycraft——"

"Oh!" groaned the Remove in dismay.

Mr. Horace Pycraft, who was on the platform, lost some of his complacency as he heard that unmistakable sound from the Removites. The Fourth-Formers remained indifferent. They were used to Mr. Pycraft, anyway.

"Isn't Mr. Crowell coming, sir?" asked Handforth anxiously.

"Mr. Crowell will remain at St. Frank's in charge of the Remove and Fourth Form boys who are left behind," said the Head. "Special adjustments have been found necessary. But I have no doubt that the School Train, once on its travels, will settle down into a normal routine. There is one other point that I should like to emphasise here.

"Some of you may have been thinking that lessons will be relieved by the passing panorama as the train moves from place to place. If this is the case, I might as well disillusion you at once."

"Why, are we going to travel with the blinds drawn, sir?" asked somebody.

"I am afraid that such a device would be ineffective," replied Dr. Nicholls, smiling. "No; there will be a different rule in force. The School Train will only travel at night."

"Oh!"

"The governors considered this matter most carefully, and were of the opinion that any daytime travelling would be detrimental to study," said the Head. "I am in full agreement with that view."

"But if we only travel at night, sir, nobody will see the School Train!" protested Handforth indignantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That, I admit, will be a drawback," smiled the Head. "However, we cannot have it all ways. And I dare say the good people of the various towns you visit will have ample opportunity of inspecting your wonderful train. But I must also point out—lest you should think with undue harshness of the governors—that the railway authorities insisted upon this arrangement.

"Your train is a special one, and cannot therefore be run from place to place with a

total disregard of the railways companies' usual schedules. During the daytime the ordinary traffic is too heavy. To run the School Train during such hours would mean confusion and disorganisation. Incidentally there would be a tremendous expense involved.

"So you will move from place to place during the night, when the lines are comparatively clear. Now and again perhaps you will travel in the daytime—but only on Sundays. As a general rule you will go to bed in one town, and wake up in the next."

"But not every night, sir!"

"Of course not," said Dr. Nicholls. "You will remain in some towns for three or four days. In fact, you will remain just as long as it suits the railway company. For the School Train is to be shifted from place to place at the convenience of the authorities—and this is the only possible method. It cannot be expected to have precedence over all other traffic. Quite the reverse will be the case. I dare say you will be frequently shunted into sidings in order to make room for goods trains.

"The train will start its travels to-morrow night," added the Head. "Fortunately to-morrow is a half-holiday, and there will be no interruption in your studies. Further instructions will be issued to-morrow."

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo, sir!"

All the fortunate boys cheered lustily. The rest felt very much out of it.

"On Thursday morning you will awaken to find yourselves in East Anglia—in Colchester, to be exact," said the Head. "This tour will extend over the whole term, and during the course of it you will visit such places as Sheffield, Newcastle, Glasgow, Liverpool, Cardiff and Southampton. These are only a few of the great towns that you will touch. Fenton assures me that he is mapping out a full programme of cricket fixtures, and he is getting into touch with certain big schools all along the route. I am sure you will have a very good time, and I hope you will always remember that, although sport is important, your lessons come first and foremost."

And Dr. Nicholls made the school somewhat impatient by continuing in the same strain for a while. Which, of course, was ridiculous. Lessons might be important in his eyes, but the school regarded them in a totally different light!

CHAPTER 3.

All Aboard!

IT is to be feared that work the next morning was a farce.

It was all very well for the Head blithely to state that lessons were to go on as usual, but who could be expected to work on the morning of the day that the train would set out on its travels?

Such a thing was out of all reason. Anyhow, no work was done, and the Form-masters were in no way surprised. They



While Handforth was arguing with the motorist, it took only a few moments for Church and McClure to exchange the spare petrol cans from one car to another. They little realised the amazing adventures that were to befall them as a result of that action!

hadn't expected any work to be done. It was, as the Head had said, a good thing that the day was a half-holiday.

During the afternoon everybody wanted to hurry down to the School Train to examine it thoroughly—inside and out—but no such early privilege was allowed. The fellows were not permitted to swarm helter-skelter through the train.

"It's a swindle!" protested Boots, of the Fourth. "It's our train, and we can't even see inside it."

"Don't be impatient, old man," said Nipper. "You know what these masters are."

"We do!" said Boots feelingly.

"It's a lot of nonsense!" growled Handforth. "Do they think we'll run off with the giddy train, or something?"

Later on in the afternoon Mr. Pycraft took charge of the forty-eight Removites and Fourth-Formers who were now under his care. He explained that he would do them the honour of escorting them to the School Train and showing them their own quarters.

"I must warn you that there must be no disorderly behaviour," he said sternly. "You must conduct yourselves quietly and with decorum. I will have no wild rushing about or loud shouting. I am particularly addressing you Remove boys."

"Why us, sir?" asked Handforth, glaring.

"For too long have you boys been allowed to run loose," said Mr. Pycraft, with relish. "Now that you are under my control, you will act differently—or the consequences will be serious."

The Removites mumbled rebelliously. Mr. Pycraft was soon starting his games! The Fourth-Formers were used to them; the Removites weren't.

If Mr. Crowell had been in charge he would have got the whole crowd to promise that they would behave themselves, and he would have let them go. And the crowd would have respected that promise.

Not so Mr. Pycraft.

It pleased him to be officious, and to stalk about full of his own importance. Consequently, when the juniors made their first acquaintance with the School Train they were under the eagle eye of Mr. Horace Pycraft.

NOT that Mr. Pycraft's presence really mattered, once the train had been entered. He couldn't be everywhere at once, and he was soon forgotten.

"By George! This looks like the real thing!" said Handforth eagerly. "So this is the junior class-room? Well, I'm jiggered!"

He and a number of others were standing at the end of one of the huge coaches. From inside it seemed even larger than it had

seemed from outside. There were desks and comfortable seats, with a little raised platform at the end for the master. There was ample accommodation for forty-eight scholars, and there would be no cramping, either.

"Heaps better than our class-room at St. Frank's," said Church. "By Jingo, look at the windows! They're frosted glass!"

"That's a swindle!" grinned Harry Gresham. "I'm blessed if I can see the necessity for frosted glass, anyhow. If we're not going to be travelling while at work, why can't we look out?"

"There's a pretty good reason," said Church. "We shall be stuck in some siding or other during lesson time—at Leeds, or Bradford, or Blackpool, or somewhere like that—and there's generally plenty of activity near those big stations. We mustn't have any distractions while we're at work, my sons!"

"What rot!" said Handforth. "What with these exams, we've done enough work for the whole term already. I don't see why they should bother with lessons at all."

"None of us can see it," grinned Jimmy Potts. "But perhaps we're short-sighted, or something. You never know!"

They passed down the long coach, and found themselves in the next car. This was vastly different. It was divided up into sixteen private compartments—each one being a replica of the next. They were comfortable little dens, with one or two chairs, a small table, and bookshelves.

"Studies!" said Handforth eagerly.

"This is a luxury we hadn't looked for," said Nipper, with a whistle. "They're not particularly big, but, by Jove they're comfy. We can still have tea in our studies, as usual. And I expect we shall do our prep—"

"Why drag in unpleasant subjects?" asked Handforth.

He strode to the door, produced a piece of chalk, and put a big "D" on the polished panelling.

"There you are!" he said triumphantly. "We're not going to have any changes. This is Study D, and from this minute onwards it'll always be known as Study D."

"But it may not be your study at all," said Nipper mildly.

"Eh?"

"Mr. Pycraft will decide which compartments we shall share—"

"Studies!" frowned Handforth. "Not compartments!"

"Well, studies, then," chuckled Nipper. "Have it your own way. It's not a bad wheeze, either. It'll save a lot of confusion if we use the same letters or numbers that we've been accustomed to."

THERE was much rejoicing when it was officially learned that three fellows would share each compartment of the study-coaches. The seniors were in no way privileged. Rather to their

dismay and indignation, they were obliged to make each study serve for three. At St. Frank's they were accustomed to studies all to themselves.

But the juniors were greatly bucked. They were used to such crowding, and it was all to the good from their point of view, because things would go on much the same as usual. Handforth and Church and McClure, for example, were allocated to one compartment—which automatically became Study D.

Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson shared Study C; Corcoran and Armstrong and Griffiths promptly labelled their own compartment Study No. 12, and so on. It was very simply and was liable to avoid all confusion.

In one or two cases, of course, there were changes. At St. Frank's Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey, for instance, had had no third companion in Study K. Now they had Castleton with them. Archie Glenthorne, who had only had Alf Brent as a companion, found himself saddled with Vivian Travers and Jimmy Potts. For, much to Archie's consternation, the unhappy Brent had failed to qualify. There were a few other similar changes, but in the main study chums were enabled to remain "as you were."

Then came the inspection of the rest of the train—the sleeping and dining cars, and everything else. The juniors found that their sleeping coach was a kind of dormitory, with permanent bunks ranged on both sides of a narrow corridor, in double rows—lower and upper. This was after the style of the American trains.

"I'm going to collar one of these lower beds to start with," said Handforth promptly.

"Lots of chaps will start that game, I expect," said Church. "There's likely to be some squabbling over these beds. I don't want to be stuck up near the giddy roof. Yet some of us will have to take the upper beds."

Morrow, of the Sixth, came along just then.

"You needn't argue about these beds, you kids," he said. "You'll all be given your particular places to-night—and, if you don't like them, you'll have to lump them. You'll sleep where you're put or there'll be trouble."

"I say, Morrow, when do we move in?" asked Potts.

"Not until this evening—after calling-over at St. Frank's."

"Then we shall have supper on the train?"

"Yes, of course."

"Good egg," said Handforth. "There's no reason why the trip shouldn't be started properly. Let's go and have a look at the dining-car, you chaps."

They found, before they had done, that there were even bath-rooms on the train, and many other special conveniences—such as no other train in the world possessed. For, after all, this train was to be a sort of permanent home for the whole term.

EVERYBODY was impatient until the evening. Then, after calling-over, there was another meeting of the whole school in Big Hall—a quite unnecessary delay this, in the school's opinion. Dr. Nicholls wished good luck to his departing scholars, and stated his intention of coming down to the station to see them all comfortably aboard the train.

After this there was a pathetic scene in the Triangle, where crowds of luckless juniors and seniors watched the departure of the triumphant hundred and twenty. There was some consolation in the rumour, which had been going about for some hours, to the effect that the rest of the school would have its turn later on.

Supper on the train was a huge success.

Not that the food was any different from usual. Somehow, however, it seemed better amid these novel surroundings. The train was equipped with complete kitchens, and there was an ample staff of stewards.

Dr. Nicholls retired to the Masters' Car after the meal was over. This was a very splendid coach, with large, beautifully furnished studies and sleeping quarters, each master having a study and a bed-room to himself. The whole car was self-contained, too, having, in addition, a couple of bath-rooms and a common smoking-room and lounge.

"Well, Mr. Lee, to be frank, I envy you," said Dr. Nicholls, smiling. "I rather wish I could go on this trip myself. It promises to be most interesting."

"My only regret is that the train could not be large enough for the whole school," replied Nelson Lee. "In that case, you would naturally be with us, Dr. Nicholls."

The Head pursed his lips.

"I'm not sure that I agree with you," he said. "In my opinion it is better that a certain proportion of boys should remain at St. Frank's—to keep the flag flying, as it were. Actually, this travelling school will really be St. Frank's, since it contains all the most brilliant scholars."

"That is so, of course," agreed Nelson Lee. "However, it's rather rough luck on the fellows who are left behind."

"They all had the same chance, so there is no excuse for them," pointed out Dr. Nicholls.

He looked round with interest.

"You appear to be very comfortable here, and I am quite satisfied that the boys themselves have every convenience," he went on. "I shall be perfectly satisfied that you will all suffer no discomforts on your journeys. And, from an educational point of view, it is decidedly beneficial that the boys should tour the country. The idea is sound."

This was an opinion which everybody else on the train shared.

CHAPTER 4.

Left Behind!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH

grinned. "Well, I wish you luck!" he said amusedly. "Personally, I don't fancy another chap sharing my bed. I believe in being comfortable. I don't like somebody's knees bashing me in the middle of the back."

"What about your knees bashing somebody else?" asked Nipper pointedly.

"The whole thing's dotty," said Handforth. "I'm surprised at you, Nipper, for allowing Watson to dig with you in this bed. Still, we all have our own fads and fancies, I suppose."

Tommy Watson stared.

"What do you mean—fads and fancies?" he asked. "It's the rule on this train. At St. Frank's we had a bed each, but it's different here, and we can't expect anything else, either."

They were standing in the Junior Sleeping Car, and Nipper and Watson were preparing to get into their own bed, which was

one of the lower ones. All was darkness outside, and the last of the sightseers had long since departed.

"The rule?" repeated Handforth, with a start.

"Of course," smiled Nipper. "You don't think you're going to have a bed to your-

self, do you?"

"What?" gasped Handforth. "Do you mean to say—Great Scott! Have I got to share my bed with another chap?"

"I don't know who the unfortunate is, but at a random guess I should say he'll be either Church or McClure," replied Nipper. "Poor chaps! They'd better take it in turns."

"But—but—I'm not going to put up with it!" roared Handforth. "If I can't have a bed to myself I shan't go on the trip at all!"

"That's a good idea," said Nipper, nodding. "That'll solve the problem quite easily."

"You silly ass—"

"Good-bye, Handy!"

"What do you mean—'good-bye'?"

"Aren't you going?" asked Nipper. "You just said—"

"No, I'm not going," interrupted Handforth tartly. "I shall insist upon having a bed to myself—"

"Then you can keep on insisting," said Biggleswade of the Sixth, who came into the coach just then. "Some of you kids are never satisfied! You want a whole coach each, by the sound of it! What's the matter with you, Handforth?"

"Oh, he's always growling about something!" said Church impatiently. "What's he got to grumble at, anyhow? Mac and I are the ones who ought to kick. We've



decided to take it in turns with him, and we've tossed up for first go. I've lost."

There were many chuckles from the other juniors, and Handforth grunted.

"Oh, you've lost, have you?" he said aggressively. "And as soon as you get into bed you're going to kick?"

"I didn't say that," protested Church.

"Yes, you did!" retorted Handforth. "If you start on any of those games, my son, I'll soon settle your hash!"

It was useless to explain to Handforth that Church had been using a general term. Handforth always took things literally. He didn't really object to sharing his bed with somebody else, but it was his way to make a fuss over nothing.

"Oh, well, I suppose I shall have to put up with it," he said grudgingly, as he went to his own bed, at the extreme end of the coach. "Thank goodness I've got a lower bunk, anyhow. Who's above?"

"Travers is booked to share this section with us," said McClure.

"But Travers isn't here."

"Not to-night, but he will be to-morrow," replied Mac. "Nipper sent him that wire yesterday, and Travers wired back. He's going to join us after we get to Colchester to-morrow. It's better for him, because Colchester is only sixteen or seventeen miles from his home."

Handforth wasn't listening.

"Well, anyway, I'll have a bed to myself for the first night," he said triumphantly. "So I shan't be bothered with you, Mac!"

"Me?" said McClure. "You ass, I won the toss."

"I know that," replied Handforth, starting. "If you won, it naturally follows that you've got the privilege of sleeping with me."

Church snorted.

"Don't kid yourself!" he said promptly. "You silly ass, it was the loser who had the privilege of sleeping with you! Privilege!" he added, with a sniff. "You mean the torture!"

Handforth turned very red.

"You mean to say that you tossed up, and—and— Why, you rotters!" he ejaculated indignantly. "You ought to consider it an honour to sleep with me."

"The whole thing's a farce, anyhow," said McClure gloomily. "There'll be no sleep for the chap who shares your bed, Handy. Churchy and I would only get a rest every other night! I think we'll let you have your bed after all—and take it in turns in the bath!"

They had had one or two previous experiences of sleeping with Handforth, and they were filled with misgiving. Handforth was all right as long as he kept still. But he was a restless sleeper, and he had a habit of dreaming violently. And as his dreams nearly always included a free fight of some kind, his bedfellow suffered considerably.

Church and McClure had inspected the sleeping quarters with much concern. There wasn't a great deal of room, and it was

any odds that Handforth would pitch his companion out of bed at least once every night. It was a mercy they had one of the lower berths.

"LIGHTS out!"

"I say, what rot!" protested Handforth, who wasn't fully undressed.

"What's that?" asked Morrow, who was the prefect in charge. "Now then, Handforth! I'll give you ten seconds to get those things off and get into bed. What's the matter with you?"

"There's no need to be so sharp on time," said Handforth. "It's a special night, isn't it? Why can't we stay up, and wait until the train moves off?"

Morrow grinned.

"Don't you understand, my cheerful ass, that the ordinary routine is to go on without the slightest interruption?" he asked. "That's the whole essence of the thing. Everything is unaltered. Lights out are the same as usual—rising bell the same—breakfast—lessons. Nothing's altered at all."

"It's a bit too thick," said Handforth gruffly.

"And if you're thinking about staying up until the train moves off, you'd better forget it," continued the prefect. "It isn't ten o'clock yet, and we shan't get an engine on this train until after eleven. By that time we'll all be asleep—or we should be. And when we wake with the rising bell, we shall be on our siding in Colchester."

Morrow passed along the crowded sleeping-car, seeing that everything was ship-shape. There were, of course, no curtains over the berths, as in the ordinary American sleeping coach. This was a school dormitory.

Having seen that everybody was in bed, Morrow switched off the light, and passed on. And Handforth, lounging luxuriously in his own bed—all to himself—considered that he had scored a victory. It was undeniable that he had a bed to himself, but this was only by pure chance.

Church and McClure, above him, were congratulating themselves on their own luck. Suddenly, a head appeared above their bed.

"I say, you chaps," whispered Handforth.

"Better get back into bed, Handy," said Church. "Old Pycraft might dodge in. You know what a blighter he is for nosing round. If he finds you out of bed he'll give you a hundred lines."

"Blow old Pycraft," said Handforth promptly. "I've got an idea."

"My only hat!"

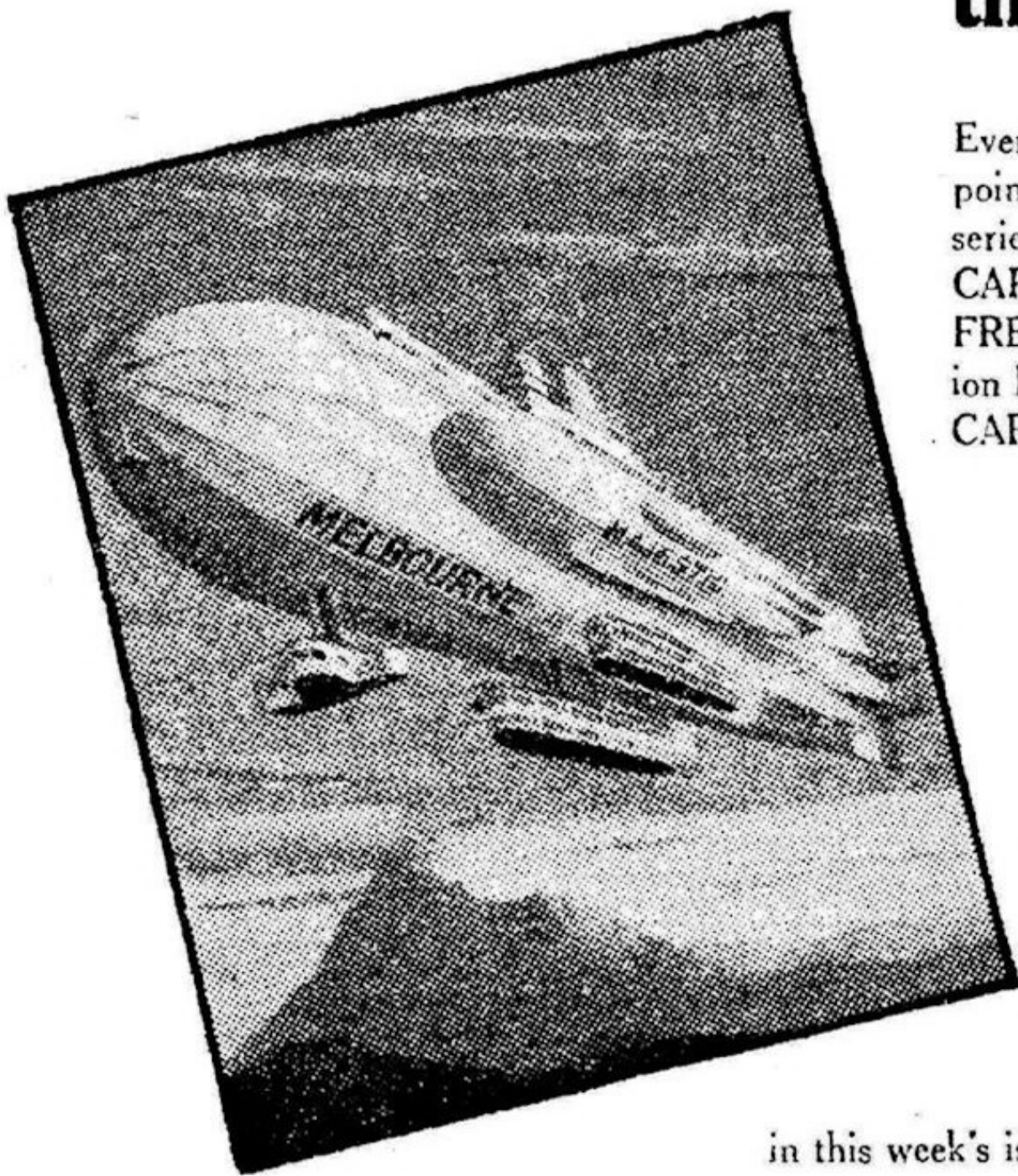
"We'll keep awake," whispered Edward Oswald. "I don't see the fun of being asleep while the train starts on its first journey. Let's wait until it gets through Bannington, anyhow."

"Rats!" said Church. "It might be hours before we start."

"We're going to sleep," added McClure. "We shan't get another chance of peaceful rest like this."

(Continued on page 14.)

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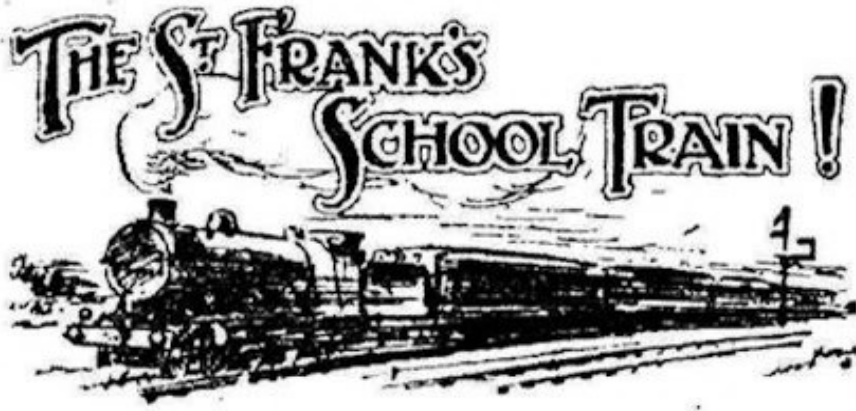
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(Continued from page 12.)

And Handforth was obliged to give it up. Not that he was alone in this desire of his. Quite a number of the fellows wanted to keep awake. But everything was so quiet, and the bed was so comfortable, that long before ten-thirty struck the whole Junior Coach was sleeping.

Even Handforth, in spite of his determination, had dropped off. However, he awoke shortly afterwards as a heavy locomotive clanked past the stationary School Train. Half the school awoke, to tell the truth.

"By George!" murmured Handforth.

He was up in a moment, and he had an idea simultaneously. He crept out of bed, and pushed his head over the edge of the upper berth once more.

"You chaps awake?" he asked softly.

"My hat! Here he is again!" said Church, turning over. "Go away, Handy!"

"That's just what I'm going to do," retorted Handforth. "We can't see out of these windows—they're all curtained. I'm going to pop along to the bath-room and have a look out. I want to see what's happening!"

Church groaned.

"For goodness sake, Handy, be sensible!" he urged. "I'll bet the masters are still up, and you don't seem to realise that all the old St. Frank's rules apply here. If we creep out of this coach we shall be breaking bounds—just the same as if we left our ordinary school dormitory."

But Handforth waved the objection aside.

"I can go to the bath-room if I want to!" he retorted. "Anybody's liable to want a drink of water."

And off he went. Two minutes later, Church and McClure crept after him—not because they wanted to "see what was happening" outside, but because they were Handforth's chums. They were anxious to keep him out of trouble.

THEY found him in the bath-room. It was dark, and Handy was struggling with the window. Being new, it had stuck a bit, but as they entered it suddenly shifted and opened.

"Cheese it, Handy!" protested Church. "What do you think you're doing?"

Handforth was leaning out of the window. His chums closed the bath-room door, and locked it in order to be on the safe side. It was quite a commodious compartment, with a long row of washbasins in addition to the bath, and any amount of lockers, too.

"They're just shoving the engine on," said Handforth, as he turned his head. "Whoa! Didn't you feel the bump just then?"

"By jingo! That means we shall soon be starting," murmured Church.

He and McClure professed to be wild with their leader, but, to tell the truth, they were just as interested as he was. And they forgot their desire to get back into the dormitory. With the bath-room door locked, they felt safe.

"Let's have a look," whispered Mac.

"Half a tick," said Handforth, as he craned further out. "I can't see a soul! They must be on the other side of the train. Hallo! The signal's just gone green up the line. I believe we're off."

"Look out, fathead!" gasped Church. "You'll fall out!"

Handforth had had no intention of falling out—and he wouldn't have fallen out if the train hadn't given a sudden jolt just then. This window overlooked the grass embankment—not the other set of rails. Handforth took a neat header out of the window, and landed with a thud in the grass, well clear of the permanent way.

"I knew it!" ejaculated Church. "Oh, the hopeless ass! Quick, Mac! Come on!"

"What are you going to do?" asked Mac, staring.

"He'll never get back without help, and if he's found out he'll be half-skinned!" replied Church promptly. "Come on! It won't take us two ticks to get him back!"

They slithered out of the window and dropped to the ground, one after the other. Handforth was just sitting up, looking rather dazed. All three juniors were in their pyjamas, and wearing nothing on their feet but slippers.

"What happened?" asked Handforth dizzily.

"You fell out, that's what happened!" snapped Church. "Of all the careless asses—"

"Hi!" gasped McClure, in frantic alarm. "Look out! The train's going! Here, stop it, somebody!"

Handforth leapt to his feet as though something had suddenly stung him. They all three stared at the School Train—which was not only gliding out of the siding, but gathering speed with every revolution of the wheels.

Handforth started to run, but his chums checked him. What was the use? They could never hope to get in through that bath-room window again, and it would have been madness to make any attempt to climb on the footboard.

They were left behind!

CHAPTER 5.

Handforth's Bright Idea!

DON'T get the wind up," said Handforth calmly. "Keep cool, you fatheads! The train's only moving out of the siding. It'll stop in a minute, and then we shall be able to get

through that window. Come on! Let's follow it!"

Church and McClure, who had been thinking of shouting frantically at the top of their voices, checked themselves. After all, there might be something in this idea. Besides, what was the good of shouting? Their voices would never be heard, and, even if they were, they would only get themselves into serious trouble.

Unfortunately, Handforth's surmise was totally wrong.

The train passed on to the main line, and, instead of stopping, went straight ahead. The signal turned to red, and the chums of Study D had the mortification of seeing the tail lights of the train disappear round the bend, to the accompaniment of the lusty puffing of the great engine that pulled it.

"It's gone!" said Handforth tragically.

"I hope you're satisfied!" groaned Mac. "My only sainted aunt! Left behind on the very first trip! And all because of your idiotic wish to see what was happening! What are we going to do now?"

"I know!" gasped Handforth. "Look! There's somebody in the signal-box! We'll dash there and tell the signalman to have the train stopped in Bannington. Then we'll join it. If it comes to a pinch, we can run all the way along the line. It's under three miles."

Church and McClure were by no means enamoured with this idea. True, the May night was surprisingly mild, but they were wearing nothing but pyjamas, and they felt extremely conspicuous—to say nothing of feeling a bit chilly.

However, they ran to the signal-box with Handforth, and considerably startled the signalman, who was on the point of putting out his lights and locking up. There was no night traffic on this branch line. The signalman appeared to be the only official left at the station.

"Bless my life!" he ejaculated, staring. "What's this? What are you young gents doing here? And dressed like this, too."

"We fell out of the train!" panted Handforth.

"Bless my life!" repeated the signalman.

"He means that he fell out," said Church bitterly. "He fell out, and we jumped out after him, to help him back. But we couldn't do it. The train was going. It wasn't worth the risk."

"Quite right, too, young gent," said the signalman approvingly. "No sense in risking your life for nothing. Looks like you're in a bit of a mess now, don't it? What do you think you'd better do?"

"We want you to telegraph to Bannington, and have the train stopped," said Handforth. "We'll get there as quick as we can, and—"

"Couldn't be done, mister," interrupted the signalman. "Your School Train's going straight through. Not stopping at Bannington at all."

"But if you telegraph—"

"It wouldn't be no good," said the man, shaking his head. "They can't delay the train like that. She's being sort of fitted in. If she was to be stopped, everything would go wrong. I'll telegraph and say that you're safe, but that's the most I can do."

"Then—then we're stranded?" asked Handforth blankly.

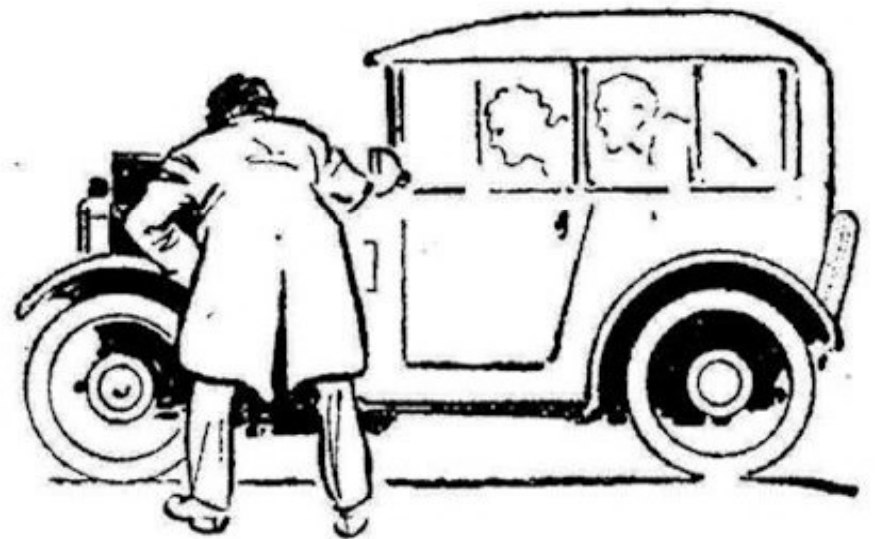
"Looks very much like it, young gent," nodded the man. "Still, it ain't so bad as it might be. You'd best run to the school, and get into bed. I'll send a message on that'll be handed to the guard o' your train at the first stop."

"Where's that?"

"Don't know," replied the signalman. "Might not be until they get near London. You see, it's a special train, and—"

But Handforth & Co. were not listening. With a dull sensation of consternation, they realised that there was no way of their joining the train that night. However, as the signalman had said, the situation was by no means grave. They were within a mile of St. Frank's and, although they were only wearing pyjamas, the night was mild, and they were not likely to meet anybody on the way.

"I HOPE you're satisfied!" said Church grumpily, as they crossed the station yard and approached the road. "My only hat! What a frost! We don't even go with the School Train on its first trip! And all because of your silly—"



"It's no good growling now!" interrupted Handforth, with surprising serenity. "I've just thought of a way out for us."

"You always think of something," said McClure, with a sniff. "What are we going to do? Hire a car, like they do on the films, and race the train?"

"No need to hire a car," replied Handforth. "We've got one."

"Eh?"

"Which?"

"My Austin Seven," said Handforth calmly.

"You—you silly ass—"

"We'll sneak it out quietly, and buzz off," continued Handforth. "The School Train is bound to be delayed for hours here and there. We shall probably get to Colchester first, and everything will be all serene."

Church and McClure were staggered.

"But it'll be impossible!" protested Church. "Don't be an ass, Handy! Have you forgotten that we're only wearing pyjamas?"

"That doesn't matter," said Handforth lightly. "The night's mild."

"Yes, but dash it, it's not as mild as all that!" said McClure. "And, besides, what about your licence? You haven't got your driving licence on you."

Handforth waved a hand.

"What does it matter?" he asked. "No bobby is likely to stop us in the middle of the night. I want to be in Colchester as soon as the train. We're not going to have those other chaps getting a laugh over us."

"That's all very well," said Church. "I don't fancy losing my night's sleep for nothing. We might just as well go back to St. Frank's, knock somebody up, and explain what happened. It'll be the better way in the end, Handy. We can easily go on by train to-morrow. You can't keep your Austin Seven in Colchester, even if you take it."

But Handforth listened to none of these objections.

"We're going to be in Colchester before the School Train," he said determinedly. "And if you fellows are worrying about your giddy night's sleep, you're mad. Why can't you sleep in the car?"

"With you driving?" asked McClure sarcastically.

"Why not?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter," said Mac, with a grunt. "The more we argue the more determined you'll be—so I suppose we'd better agree."

They felt very conspicuous as they walked through the village. Fortunately it was very dark, and they were prepared to dodge if anybody should unexpectedly appear. As it happened, however, they reached St. Frank's without having met a soul; and the walk had warmed them up, and they were feeling quite fit.

IT was an easy matter to shin over the school wall and to get round to the garage at the rear of the Ancient House.

Church and McClure were hoping that the garage would be so securely fastened that Handforth could not open it. But there was only a padlock on the door, and Edward Oswald made short work of it. He ruthlessly forced the catch completely off, using a piece of old rusty iron that he had found near the garage wall.

"There'll be trouble over this when it's found out," said Church dubiously.

"What do we care?" asked Handforth. "We shan't be here!"

Church and McClure exchanged glances. They were wondering if these noises had been heard. If so, they would not be at all sorry. Handforth would be compelled to explain, and then they would be ordered to bed. But no interruption came. Handforth was always lucky.

"Better start the engine," said Church carelessly.

"No fear!" replied Handforth. "Somebody might hear it, and then we should be stopped. We can easily push her out into the road and run a good way down the lane before we need start the engine."

"What about the gate?" asked Church. "It's certain to be locked."

"We'll soon open it," replied Edward Oswald confidently.

And they did. A little gentle persuasion—of Handforth's kind—made short work of the gates. And the faithful Austin Seven was pushed out, and the chums of Study D took their seats inside. There was a distinct slope here, so when Handforth removed the brake the little car glided forward, and was soon noiselessly speeding down towards Bellton.

"Now we're all right," said Handforth contentedly. "Why, you chumps, if we had awakened the school the Head might have kept us at St. Frank's for the whole term. You never know what these masters are going to do. I believe in being on the safe side, and we ought to get to Colchester before the School Train. Mr. Lee is a good 'un, and he won't drop on us too heavily."

"Perhaps you're right," admitted Church. "We've found a couple of rugs behind here, and they'll come in pretty handy."

"There's an old overcoat, too," said McClure. "You'd better shove it on, Handy. Churchy and I will have the rugs."

"Good man!" said Handforth.

He stopped the car, got into the old coat, and felt much more contented in mind. He had been rather worried at the thought of passing through the various towns *en route*—including London. There would be bright lights, and policemen might reasonably stop this car, driven by a youngster in pyjamas, and make a few awkward inquiries—particularly with regard to Handforth's driving licence.

But with that overcoat on everything would be all serene. There wasn't one chance in a thousand that the car would be stopped; and Church and McClure in the rear could easily camouflage themselves with the rugs.

The little car was soon humming along the Bannington Road, the headlights gleaming brightly. Handforth, at least, was perfectly happy. Greatly as he admired the School Train, he was far more contented at the wheel of his own little "bus."

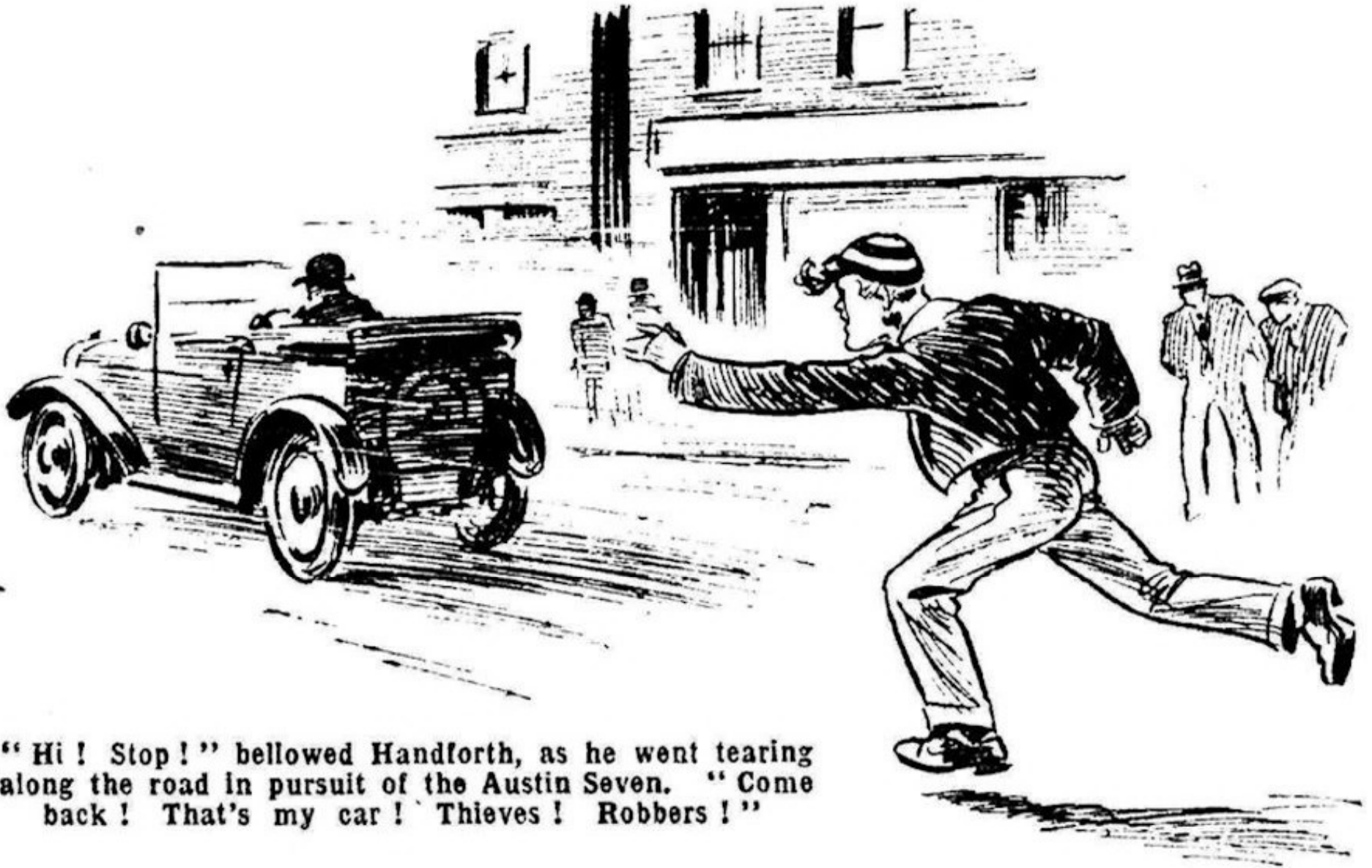
"How about petrol?" asked Church drowsily.

"We're all right," replied Handforth. "I've got a pretty big supply in the tank—over three-quarters full—and there's the spare can on the wing, too."

"Hadn't we better stop in Bannington and make sure?" asked McClure.

"We've got no money, fathead!"

"That's why I'm suggesting that we should stop in Bannington," said Mac. "The garago man knows you there, and he'll trust you for a fill-up of petrol. When we get further on you won't be able to get any juice on the nod."



"Hi! Stop!" bellowed Handforth, as he went tearing along the road in pursuit of the Austin Seven. "Come back! That's my car! Thieves! Robbers!"

This was a very sensible suggestion; but, as usual, Handforth scoffed at it.

"The garage man in Bannington might think it fishy and tell the police or something," he said. "Then they'd 'phone up St. Frank's and we should be diddled. No; we're not going to take any chances. Besides, why should we? We've got enough petrol to go a hundred miles and more."

"Well, we've got to go a hundred miles and more," said Church.

"What rot! It's not more than sixty to London."

"And then another fifty from London to Colchester," replied Church. "You can't dodge London, either. The only way to get to Colchester is to pass right through London, and then out of it on the other side—through Stratford and Ilford and that way."

"You needn't tell me the way!" said Handforth coldly. "I'm driving this car, my lad!"

The steady humming of the engine and the lulling motion of the car soon had effect on Church and McClure. Although they declared that it was impossible for them to sleep while Handforth was driving, they were both soundly off long before the Austin Seven had reached Helmford.

In fact, they didn't awaken until the outskirts of London were being approached. Handforth was feeling just a bit drowsy himself, but this soon wore off whilst passing through London. There were no stoppages here.

Policemen were to be seen at various spots, but they scarcely gave the little Austin a glance. The hood was up, and the side-curtains were in position. So Church and McClure were very effectively concealed.

And on they went again, through Mile End Road, through Stratford, and so on towards the outer suburbs.

CHAPTER 6.

The Wrong Road!

NIPPER stirred as he heard somebody moving quite near him in the Junior Dormitory Car of the School Train. Everybody else seemed to be asleep; the train was gliding along smoothly, but at no great speed.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" asked Nipper in a low voice.

"That you, young 'un?" asked Nelson Lee, who was the intruder. "I was hoping that none of you would awaken."

"It was you who trained me to be a light sleeper, guv'nor," chuckled Nipper. "What's wrong, anyway?"

"Fortunately there is nothing much wrong," replied Nelson Lee. "H'm! Handforth and Church and McClure are not here. Do you happen to know when they left their beds?"

"Why, no, sir," replied Nipper. "I thought they were fast asleep."

"They're left behind."

"What!"

"The Bellton signalman sent on a message, and I have only just received it," said Nelson Lee. "It seems that Handforth and Church and McClure somehow got out of the train before it started, and before they could get back on board the train went off, leaving them stranded."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Nipper. "If that's not like Handy! I suppose they've had to go back to St. Frank's, sir."

"I imagine so," said Lee. "They were wearing nothing but pyjamas, anyhow, and it was necessary for them to find some sort of shelter pretty quickly. I shall have something to say to them to-morrow when they turn up."

And Lee went off to have a little confab with the guard. Together they forced open the bath-room door, and there they found the open window.

"It is a very good thing we got that message from the Bellton signalman," said Lee, "otherwise we might have feared that something tragic had occurred."

"You're right, sir," nodded the guard. "I was afraid we'd have some trouble with these boys. A trainload of mischief—that's what I call it! They've soon started their capers, anyway!"

MEANWHILE, Handforth & Co., in the little Austin, were approaching Chelmsford in Essex. Ilford, Romford, Brentwood and Ingatestone had been passed serenely, with the little car going well. Church and McClure had slept most of the way, but Handforth had now got his "second wind," as it were, and all traces of weariness had left him. He was thoroughly enjoying this night ride.

"Where are we?" asked Church sleepily, as he stirred himself.

The street lights of Chelmsford had probably awakened him, and he peered out through the side-curtains.

"I don't know where it is," replied Handforth, glancing round. "Some big town, by the look of it. Ipswich, probably."

"You ass! Ipswich is thirty or forty miles on the other side of Colchester!"

"Then it can't be Ipswich," said Handforth.

"It must be Chelmsford," put in McClure. "Good egg! We shan't be so long now. Does anybody know what the time is?"

"Blow the time!" said Handforth. "We shall get to Colchester long before the School Train, and that's the main thing, my lads! By George, we'll give those chaps a surprise, won't we?"

He found himself confronted by a wide fork. One road led off at a tangent towards the left, whilst the other went straight ahead. Handforth chose the latter route, and he soon found himself in the centre of the town. There were plenty of lights here, although scarcely a soul could be seen.

The Austin glided over a little bridge, and at this point Handforth should have turned sharply to the right, which was the Colchester road. But there was a policeman on duty here, and Handforth did not want to make inquiries. He took it for granted that the main road led straight through the centre of the town, so he drove straight on, and it certainly seemed that he was going right. He soon came to the station, where a railway bridge extended across the road-

way. Up a slight rise, and then he saw a signpost.

"Round to the right, I suppose," he muttered, as he caught sight of the word "Braintree."

They swung round, and were soon bowling onwards at an increased speed.

"You've come wrong, Handy," said Church. "You shouldn't touch Braintree to get to Colchester. You'll be going miles out of the way."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "Of course it's the right road. We've got to go through Braintree to get to Colchester."

"Oh, well, you're driving," said Church languidly. "Don't blame us if you find yourself miles off your course."

Handforth had a suspicion that Braintree should not be touched on this particular journey, but he did not feel inclined to go back and make inquiries. It would be risky to approach any police-constable when he hadn't got a licence. Far better to get to Braintree, and he could easily find the right road from there.

All went well until they got a little way past Little Waltham. No traffic of any kind had been encountered; and, indeed, no living soul had been seen on this quiet secondary road. Then, just after the Austin had climbed the hill out of Little Waltham and was on the point of descending a dip, the engine began to splutter. Before the bottom of the dip had been reached there was no response to Handforth's repeated pressure on the foot accelerator.

"Hallo!" he murmured. "The engine's dead! Must have run out of juice!"

The stoppage of the car awakened Church and McClure, who had dozed off again. They were rather anxious as Handforth got out, lifted the bonnet flap, and "tickled" the carburetter.

"Dry as a bone!" grunted Handforth. "That's funny, too! I thought I had another couple of gallons in the tank."

"We told you to get a supply in Bannington," said Church, leaning over the driving-seat.

"We've got the spare can," retorted Handforth. "It won't take me a jiffy to empty it into the tank. It holds a gallon, and that'll be heaps to get us to Colchester."

There was some consolation in this thought. However, when Handforth had released the simple fly-nut which held the spare can in position, he experienced a bit of a shock. For the can felt exceedingly light. It was not an ordinary two-gallon can, but a special fitment, made expressly for the Austin-Seven, with a sloping base so that it would fix squarely on to the wing.

"My only hat!" said Handforth. "There can't be more than two or three pints here! This won't get us to Colchester!"

"Oh, you hopeless chump!" said Church. "Don't you remember? You used some of the spare petrol a couple of days ago. Didn't you have the can filled again?"

"I forgot it!" said Handforth lamely.

"Well, we shall have to look out for a garage, that's all," said Church. "Let's hope there's one open along this road."

It did not take long to empty the petrol into the tank, and Handforth was very silent. He knew that he was to blame. He had taken it for granted that the spare can was full, having forgotten all about the incident a day or two earlier, when he had used some of the spirit. He realised now that it would have been far better if he had stopped in Bannington to get the tanks completely filled.

"Oh, well, we needn't worry," he said, as he climbed back into the driving seat. "This car goes nearly forty miles on a

strip of thoroughfare, the road widened out a bit. And there, in full sight under a big electric street standard, was a policeman!

Handforth had no thought of stopping now. Not that there was any garage here, anyway. He should have turned sharp to the right to get on to the Colchester road, but he could not be blamed for making a mistake. He went straight on, the road bearing to the right, and he was now on his way to Halstead and Sudbury.

He breathed a sigh of relief after the bend had been taken, and the policeman was out of sight.

"I thought that bobby was going to stop us," said McClure. "He gave us a pretty keen look, anyway. What are we going to do now, Handy? We're practically out of the town. There isn't a garage open anywhere."

"Never mind!" said Handforth gruffly. "We'll find one soon."

They went down a long slope, and then came to a sort of garage here, but it was all closed up. There was nothing else to do but carry on, and hope for the best.

It was six miles to Halstead—the next town—and the little Austin was still hopping along valiantly when Halstead was reached.

"Well, we'll get some petrol here, or I'll know the reason why!" said Handforth doggedly.

They went gliding down a long hill into the heart of the little town. But no lights were showing anywhere. They went over the railway crossing, bore round with the road over the bridge which spanned the River Colne, and then Handforth opened out the engine as he saw a wide, fairly steep hill in front of him.

This was the main thoroughfare of the town—the High Street.

"There's a garage—at the top!" said Church, as he peered out. "Over to the right, Handy. Better pull up and knock somebody up. The tank must be practically empty by now."

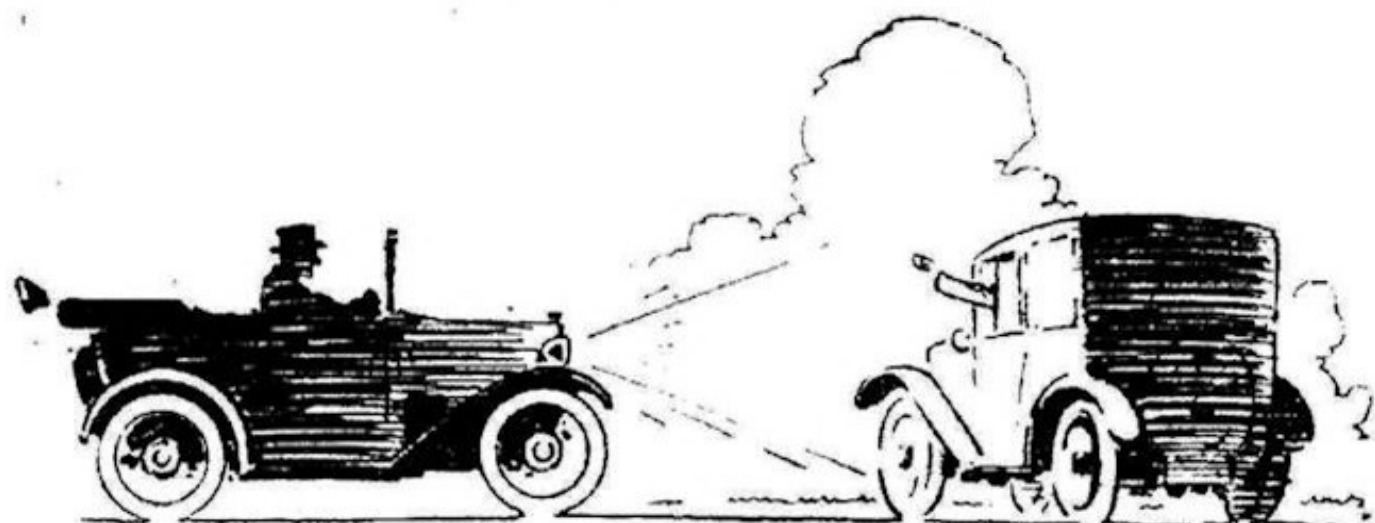
Handforth came to the same decision.

"Yes, rather," he agreed. "Of course, I know this place now! We've been here before. Travers' home—Stapleton Towers—is only about a mile away."

He was about to pull in near the garage at the top of the hill when he suddenly caught his breath in and accelerated. The garage was all black and quiet, and there, standing in the roadway at the top of the hill, was a policeman.

"We can't escape 'em!" muttered Handforth hopelessly.

He daren't stop outside the garage, or the policeman would certainly come up and offer to help. And what the policeman would



gallon, and it can't be more than six or seven miles to Braintree. There's bound to be a garage there."

SO they went on, Church and McClure now very wide awake. They were on the look-out for an open garage, for they were filled with uncertainty and suspense. It is always rather nerve-racking to be motoring at dead of night, in a part of the country that is somewhat off the map, with the petrol-tank containing only a pint or so of "juice." One feels that the engine is about to splutter out at any moment, leaving one stranded.

The chums of Study D had no cause to be cheerful, either. For, although they passed an establishment called "The Highland Garage," it was closed up completely. Even an automatic petrol pump—a shilling-in-the-slot affair—would be useless; neither Handforth nor his chums had any money on them. Getting petrol would be a difficult job, in any case, and it might easily lead to some unpleasant inquiries. Handforth was feeling pretty unhappy by the time Braintree was reached.

And here again everything was utterly silent and dead. Not a garage was open—not a soul could be seen.

They went gliding through the extraordinarily narrow streets of the old Essex town. Just past the Central Picture Theatre Handforth found it necessary to make a quick decision. One road led straight on, and another turned to the left, where it became narrower still. By chance he happened to catch sight of a sign—"Colchester"—and he bore round to the left. Having passed through an extremely narrow

say when he found three schoolboys in the car, clad only in pyjamas, was difficult to imagine. It would be almost impossible to fool the constable with those blankets and with that overcoat. In all probability he would ask to see Handforth's licence.

Handforth trod on the accelerator—hard. He swung round at the top of the hill, and shot off to the left, along North Street.

"This is the wrong way, fathead!" said Church. "You're going away from Colchester now."

"I know it!" replied Handforth, glancing round. "This is the Hedingham road. Travers lives along this way—only about a mile off. I've got a wheeze! We'll go to his place, knock Travers up, and get him to let us have some juice."

"We'll never get there," said McClure. "Still, it's not a bad idea. Better than risking that bobby, anyway."

They were soon out of the little town, and on the undulating country road. Handforth remembered the route well, and after a while he turned sharply to the right, up a very narrow rural lane. The engine was still pulling strongly, but he knew that there could now only be a very small supply of petrol left. At any minute the engine might splutter out.

"By George!" ejaculated Handforth abruptly.

Some way ahead, he had caught a gleam of white light. Another car was approaching! In a moment, Handforth's mind was made up. He would beg some petrol from this other motorist! Better to be on the safe side—and he could easily trot out some plausible excuse.

He noted that the road was particularly narrow just here. He pulled the little car to a standstill right in the centre of the fairway, slewing it across somewhat, so that no other car could get past. At the same time, the headlights of the approaching vehicle came into sight round a bend. Handforth switched his own lights on and off several times, as a sort of signal.

"What's the idea?" asked Church, staring.

"Another car!" replied Handforth calmly.

"We'll have some juice now, my lads!"

There came a loud blare of an electric horn. The approaching car seemed, for a moment, as though it would crash into Handforth's, but in the nick of time the driver pulled it to a standstill. He had been coming along at a smart pace, and only at the last moment did he realise that he could not clear the obstruction in the roadway.

"Hallo! Another Austin Seven!" grinned Handforth. "Good egg!"

The other car—which was indeed a Baby Austin—stood there, its engine throbbing quietly. A man's head was thrust out.

"Hi!" he bellowed. "Get out of the road! What d'you think you're doing, anyway? Let me pass!"

Handforth climbed out, pulling his ancient overcoat tightly about him.

"Sorry, sir," he said, approaching the other car. "We've practically run out of juice, and I wanted to make certain that you'd stop. Can you let us have——"

"No, I can't!" said the driver of the other Austin, his voice sharp and angry. "I haven't any spare petrol! I'm in a hurry, too! Get out of my way!"

There was something strangely strained in his tone—almost an alarmed note.

Indeed, if Handforth had been less surprised at the other's tone, he might have detected an absolutely scared light in the man's eyes.

CHAPTER 7.

St. Frank's in Colchester!

THE stranger waved an excited arm.

"Get that car out of the road!" he went on harshly. "I tell you I've got no petrol!"

"But there's a spare can on your wing!" said Handforth, pointing to it.

"It's empty!" snapped the other, with a kind of gulp.

There seemed to be no reason for his anger—and less reason for his dire alarm. Handforth & Co.—all three of them—took it for granted that the man was unwilling to oblige them with any petrol. They did not believe that the spare can was empty. The stranger's extraordinary eagerness to proclaim it empty seemed to hint that this was not the truth.

"Oh, I say, look here!" protested Handforth. "We're in an awful mess, you know! We haven't got any money on us, and I haven't even brought my licence. There was a bit of trouble when we started. We're only in our pyjamas, and it's a very urgent case."

"I can't help your troubles!" said the other, climbing out of the car and looking quite threatening. "If you don't move this car out of the way I'll move it for you. Understand? I'm in a hurry. Mine's an urgent case, too! Confound your infernal impudence!"

He looked positively dangerous as he advanced on Handforth. But the leader of Study D did not shift his ground. He was becoming indignant.

"Well, that's a fine sort of help to give a stranded motorist!" he said warmly. "Let's make sure about your spare can, anyway. It won't take two minutes to get it off——"

"I tell you the can is empty!" shouted the other furiously. "Don't you think I know? I've got no spare petrol! And I haven't enough in the tank for my own journey. So get out of the way!"

He was a thin, smallish man, well-dressed, but very unpleasant. His features were sharp and ugly, and his eyes were shifty. His acute alarm seemed to be wearing off as he satisfied himself that these three people were only schoolboys. It almost seemed that he had been expecting them to be something else.

Handforth argued in vain. And while he was arguing Church and McClure had got out of the car. It was Church who noticed that the stranger's spare petrol can was identical with the one on Handforth's own wing.

It was a standard fitment—not supplied by the car company, but by a big accessory firm. Hundreds of Austin Sevens were fitted with that particular type of spare petrol can.

Church suddenly had an idea. He was feeling as indignant as Handforth, for he was convinced that the stranger's spare can was full. Anyhow, it was a matter that could soon be tested. While the other motorist's back was turned—while he was arguing with Handforth—Church quickly loosened the fly-nut, and took the can off.

"I knew it!" he muttered, glancing at McClure. "It's full!"

"Good egg!" said Mac. "No need to tell him anything! Let's change 'em!"

"My hat! That's a good idea!" grinned Church. "I hadn't thought of it!"

It only took them a couple of moments to release Handforth's empty can, and to fasten it on the wing of the other Austin Seven. That change was effected in a very few moments. The stranger knew nothing of it—even Handforth knew nothing of it.

"I've never known such a piece of impertinence in all my life!" the stranger was shouting. "D'you think I'm going to be delayed here by you young fools? I tell you there's no petrol in my can. Are you going to shift this car, boy, or shall I shift it for you? I'm not in the mood to stand any more nonsense! I'm in a hurry!"

"We'll pay you for your old petrol!" said Handforth. "We don't need much—"

The stranger muttered something, and laid hands upon Handforth's precious Austin.

"Here, let go of that!" shouted Handforth. "I'll move it, you rotter! Blow you—and your petrol, too! We can get on without you!"

He jumped into the driving-seat, pressed the electric starter, and a moment later he had shifted the car to the side of the road. The stranger leapt into his own little "bus," and was soon humming away. Indeed, his departure had been positively precipitate.

"Queer sort of bird!" said Handforth, frowning. "Anybody might have thought he was scared. Too mean to give us a couple of pints of juice!"

"Cheer up, Handy," grinned Church. "I think you must have been mistaken about your spare can. It's full!"

"Don't try to be funny!" said Handforth sternly.

"All right; feel this!"

The spare can was quickly removed, and Handforth took it in bewilderment. It was certainly full now.

"But—but I emptied it!" said Handforth, bewildered.

"Not this one!" chuckled Church. "That rotter was so unpleasant that we thought we'd diddle him. We changed the cans while

you were having your little argument. They were both exactly the same."

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Handforth, with mingled pleasure and disapproval. "I say! Wasn't that a bit thick, though? I mean, after all, the man had a perfect right to refuse us. It was his petrol, when you come to think of it."

Church and McClure stared.

"Well, there's gratitude!" said Church indignantly. "We've got you out of a mess, and—"

"Yes, I know that," interrupted Handforth. "But we oughtn't to have pinched that rotter's petrol! It wasn't honest!"

McClure grinned.

"He deserved to have his petrol boned," he said. "In any case, Handy, you can rest your conscience. I thought that we ought to pay for the petrol, so I shoved my rug into the back of that fellow's car. It's worth ten times the price of that gallon of petrol."

Handforth's face cleared.

"That was a pretty brainy wheeze of yours," he said approvingly. "Never mind the cost. It was worth it to us—to be out of this bother. Anyhow, that man can't say that we were dishonest."

It was perfectly true that the stranger had received by far the better value. The rug was nearly a new one, and was worth anything up to a pound or twenty-five shillings. But, as Handforth had said, the exchange was worth while. For, with this gallon of petrol, the troubles of the schoolboy motorists were over.

Handforth quickly emptied the petrol into his tank. Something seemed to rattle in that spare can as the last of the "juice" was pouring out, but Handforth took no notice. If he thought anything at all, he thought that there were some loose bits of metal in the can—perhaps a nut or a bolt had got in there by mistake.

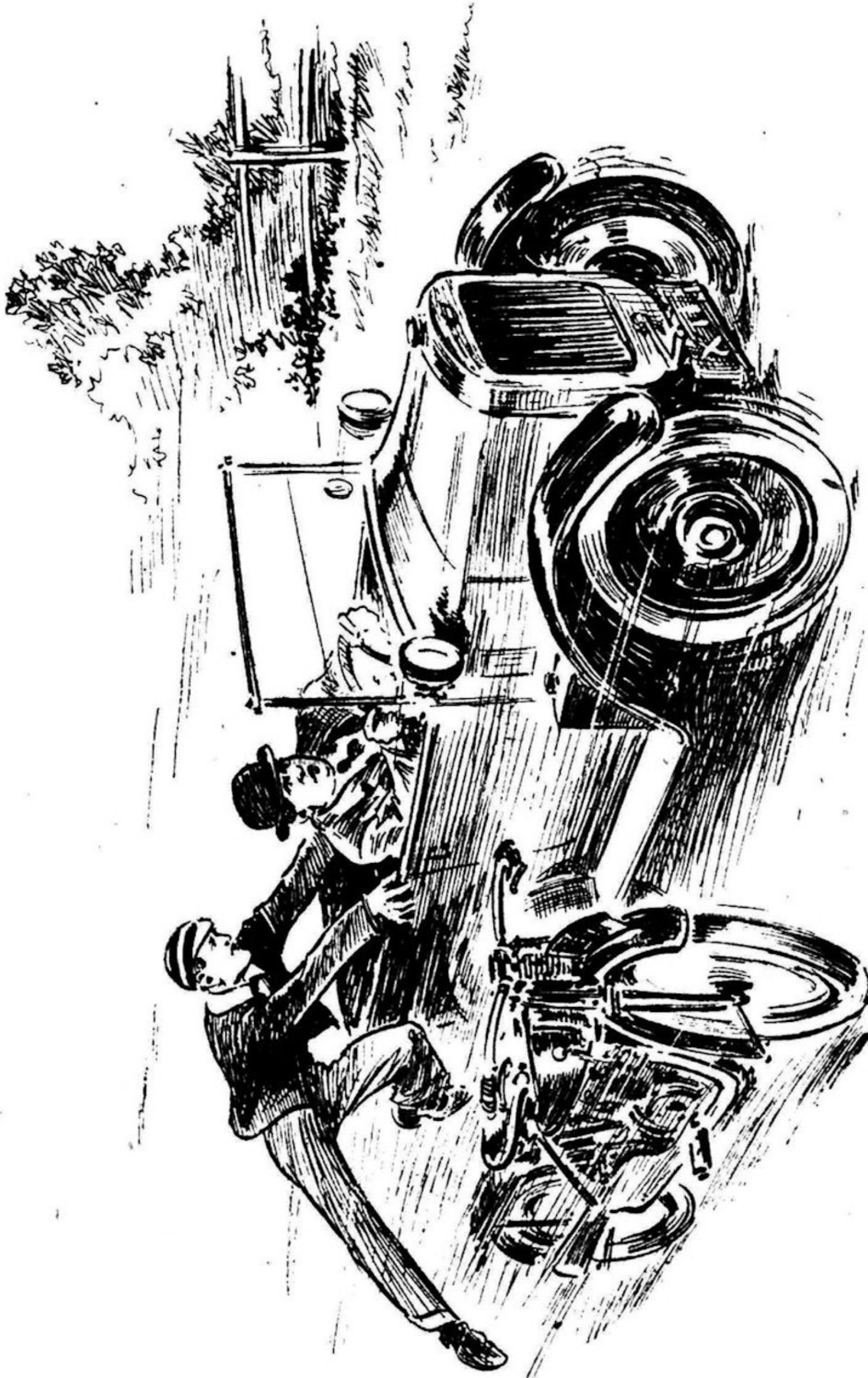
"We shan't need to bother Travers now," he said complacently, as he fixed the can on the wing. "We can go straight to Colchester. Hop in, you chaps."

Church and McClure shared one blanket now—and they didn't mind. Colchester wasn't very far off, and they were glad enough to be within sight of the end of their night journey.

It was just beginning to get daylight, too, and the three juniors felt that life was rather good.

There was no further trouble, and, having gone through Halstead again, Handforth soon found the correct road for Colchester—through Earls Colne and Lexden.

It was a wise decision on his part to go straight to Colchester Station, and not to bother Vivian Travers. It would have been all right if Travers himself was the only one affected. But Travers' people might not have been too pleased at the arrival of three junior schoolboys in the small hours of the morning, clad only in pyjamas, seeking a supply of petrol. In all probability



It was a dangerous thing to do, but Travers revelled in dangerous stunts such as this. Whizzing up alongside the swiftly-moving Austin, he took his hands from the handlebars, gripped the side of the car, and then swung himself through the air into the vehicle.

Handforth & Co. would have been kept there, and that would not have suited them at all.

When Colchester was reached the daylight was practically full, and the three juniors were beginning to get a bit worried again.

"I say, we shall be in a mess if the train hasn't arrived," said Church.

"Just what I was thinking," agreed Handforth. "My only hat! We can't show ourselves like this—in pyjamas! I'm not so bad with this overcoat, but you fellows will get yourselves locked up!"

"We shall have to stick in the car," said McClure. "A pity we couldn't get here in the dark."

"We should have done it easily if Handy had taken the right road from Chelmsford," said Church, with a sniff.

At the corner of the High Street Handforth ventured to ask an early pedestrian which was the way to the station. He was told, and a few moments later the little car hummed down North Hill and was soon at Colchester's main station.

Instead of driving straight up to the chief booking-office, Handforth drove round to the goods yard. His eyes gleamed with satisfaction as he beheld in a siding a long line of duo-tone blue coaches, looking extremely smart and attractive in the early morning light.

"She's here, you chaps!" said Handforth gleefully. "By George! This is topping! Why, if we're lucky we can get into the train and be in our beds without anybody knowing that we've ever been out!"

But this optimism was certainly unjustified. And so it soon proved. Handforth managed to drive his little car almost up to the train, which could not have been in for long, for an engine was just shunting away, and there were one or two officials standing about. He had hardly climbed out of the little car, however, when his heart nearly stood still. Nelson Lee had just emerged from the School Train, and he was gazing hard at the Austin Seven.

"That's done it!" muttered Handforth blankly.

Nelson Lee approached, and he was looking very stern.

"Oh!" he said. "So, Handforth, you have turned up! I presume that Church and McClure are in the car?"

"Yes, sir."

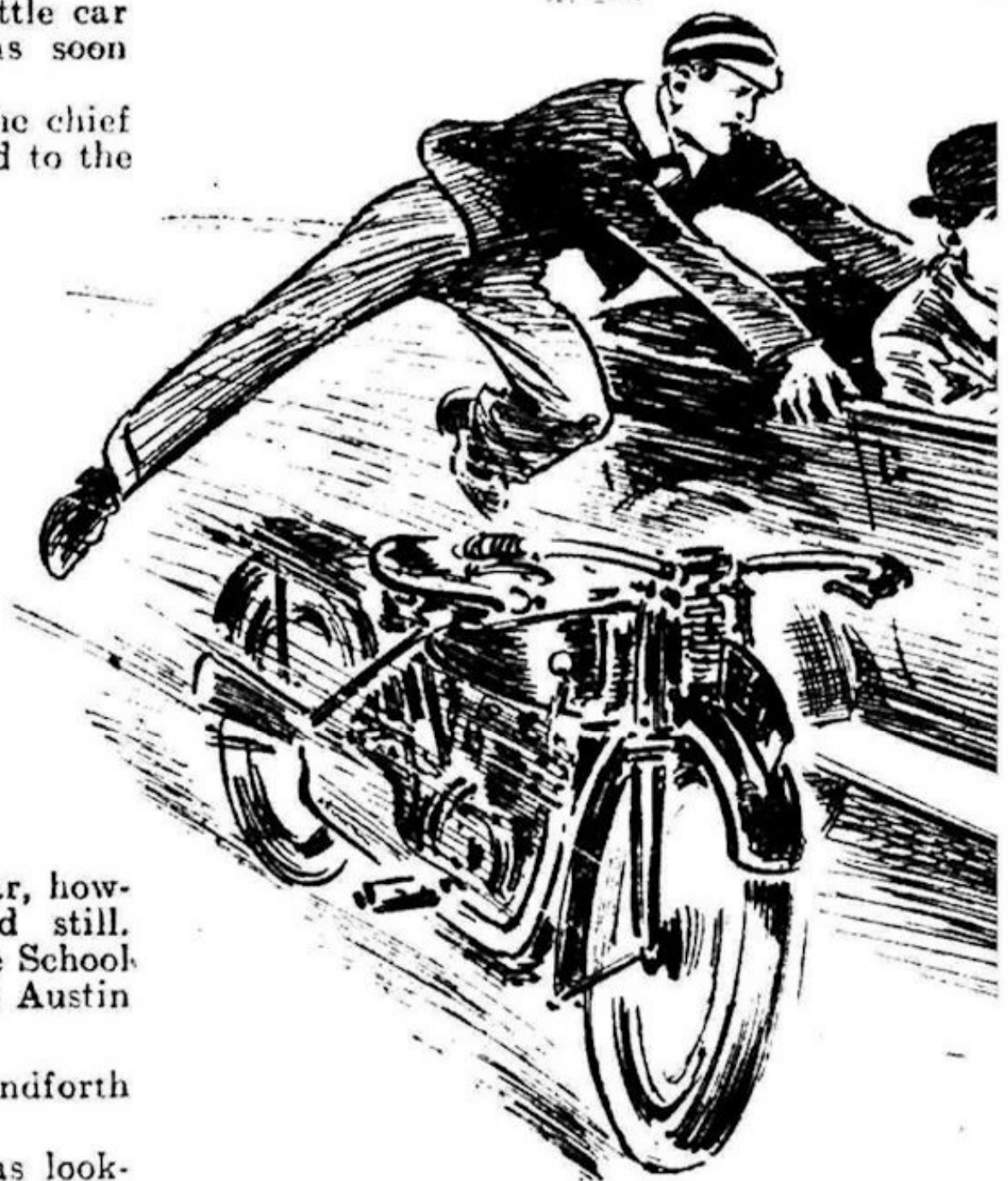
"Clad in your pyjamas, I see," went on Nelson Lee. "Upon my word, what an extraordinary boy you are, Handforth! Do you mean to tell me that you took your car out from St. Frank's and drove straight here without telling anybody?"

"Yes, sir," said Handforth. "I—I thought it better, you know, sir. There wasn't any need to bother the Head."

"You had better get into bed—all three of you," said Lee. "I'll see that your car is taken to a garage, and you'll have to make some arrangement about it later on. I shall decide upon your punishment for this escapade during the course of the day. Get as much sleep as you can now."

"I say, sir, you're not going to punish us, are you?" asked Handforth protestingly. "We've had all the punishment we need, haven't we? I mean, we've lost some sleep, and we've had a pretty anxious time."

"I'll see," interrupted Nelson Lee dryly. "You had no right to leave your dormitory



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and to lock yourselves in that bath-room, and you had still less right to fall out of the train."

"But that was an accident, sir," said Handforth. "I was only leaning out to see—"

"Yes, yes—exactly!" said Nelson Lee. "Come along, you others," he added, turning and addressing Church and McClure, who were inside the car. "Get into the train as quickly as you can. It is a lucky thing that only a few people are about."

Nelson Lee was inwardly amused at Handforth & Co.'s "stunt." He was also relieved to find them on the spot. There would be no need to make a fuss over the affair.

So five minutes later Handforth & Co. were back in their beds in the Remove dormitory on the train. And none of the other fellows knew anything about their coming.

SOME little time later an Austin Seven, dusty from a long journey, turned into a private garage in Tottenham, London. It was the garage of a small, semi-detached villa of the modern type.



stunts such as this. Whizzing up alongside the side of the car, and then swung himself over the vehicle.

Before the driver of that little Austin could close the garage doors, another man appeared from the house.

"You're late, Fred!" the latter said anxiously.

"Yes, about an hour," said the man who had just arrived. "It was a bit more tricky than I expected. Still, the job was a success."

"You cleared the stuff?"

"I didn't touch any of the big things," replied Fred complacently, "but I got hold

of the most valuable. You wait until you see it all, Baxter."

Mr. Frederick Reed spoke in a very self-satisfied voice. The other man, Baxter, was somewhat plump—a genial, jovial-looking man. Yet a close observer might have noticed that his lips were thin, and his eyes were set too closely together.

"Well, Fred, you said you were going to make a success of this rural job," remarked Baxter. "That's the best of being friendly with these maidservants. Did she help all right?"

"Yes; but she didn't know she was helping," replied Mr. Reed smoothly. "I fooled her beautifully, old man. I'll tell you all about it afterwards. Let's get indoors. I'm hungry, and I need a drink, too. Had a bit of a scare just after I'd left the place. I'll tell you about that, too."

He went round to the other side of the little Austin, and commenced unscrewing the fastening of the spare petrol can.

"What's the idea?" asked Baxter.

"You needn't do that now. Where's the stuff?"

"In here!" grinned Reed.

"In that can—in the petrol?"

"Why not? Pretty safe place, wasn't it?" asked Reed, as he finished unscrewing the nut. "I thought it would be pretty safe to— Why, what—"

He broke off and swore violently. For now that he had the petrol can free, he could feel that it was empty. He shook it frantically, but no sound came to his ears except a faint splash of a few drops of petrol.

"Gone!" he gasped, dumbfounded. "The stuff's gone, Baxter!"

The other man was looking very startled.

"Gone?" he repeated. "But I don't understand! What do you mean? What's happened?"

"I don't know!" panted Reed. "I put everything in this can—right in the petrol! It couldn't have leaked out—"

He broke off, unscrewed the top of the can, and shook it madly. Nothing came out except a few drops of petrol.

"Those boys!" muttered Mr. Frederick Reed suddenly. "Those infernal schoolboys! There's nothing else to think, Baxter! By thunder! They must have changed the cans without my knowing it! And they've got everything—diamonds—pearls—all the whole lot of stuff!"

CHAPTER 8.

The Man in the Castle Grounds!

CLANG-CLANG!

"Hallo! Rising bell!" mumbled Tommy Watson, turning over in bed and stretching himself. "Rats! It's only the first bell, anyhow."

He turned over to go to sleep again, but a hand grabbed his shoulder.

first class. Its fame is spreading. The whole town is talking about it. I believe some of the worthy inhabitants think that it's a kind of travelling circus, and they are expecting us to perform in due course."

"They'll have to wait until Handy gets fairly going," chuckled Nipper. "How's everything, Travers? Wedding go off all right?"

"First rate," said Travers, nodding. "The only slight detail that somewhat marred the proceedings were the burglary last night. Half the wedding presents were nabbed."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Gresham.

"Fact, I assure you," declared Travers. "We've got the police there, and all sorts of people dodging about. I thought I'd come off early, to get out of it. I hate excitement of that kind."

"Are you really in earnest?" asked Nipper curiously.

"Honour bright, dear old fellow," said Travers. "Burglars—or, at least, a burglar—broke in last night. Cleared off a whole pile of stuff, including bags of jewellery from the guests. A regular haul. When it was discovered this morning, the pater sent out a frantic S O S for the police, and the mater sent out an even more frantic S O S for the doctor. I left them grappling with the great problem."

Travers treated it very lightly—so lightly, in fact, that Handforth & Co. never thought of connecting the man in the Austin Seven with the burglary at Stapleton Towers. Lots of fellows, indeed, believed that Travers was just spoofing, and the story of the burglary scarcely had any attention.

Under normal conditions, perhaps, there might have been some talk, but the School Train was keeping everybody fully occupied. Breakfast, for example, was quite an exciting meal. The juniors, at least, voted that feeding on the train was a lot better than feeding at St. Frank's.

Many fellows feared that there would be a lot of crushing and confusion. But this was not so. The train was a complete, self-contained travelling school, and there was accommodation for all—with plenty of space to spare. Even in the study coaches there was very little pushing or shoving. Now and again, perhaps, two or three juniors would get jammed together in the narrow corridor, but nobody seemed to mind. They were lucky enough to have studies, in any case.

Even the Third-Formers were allowed the same privileges as the others—much to the disgust and indignation of the Fifth and Sixth. Willy Handforth and his fellow fags were in proud possession of two combined coaches. One coach, for instance, was divided into two sections especially for the Third—half of it being a dining-saloon, and the other half a class-room. In just the same way, the Third's other coach was half dormitory, with a kind of Common-room next to it, and the remainder of the coach was given over to the guard's compartment, and luggage space.

LESSONS, that day, were very much of a bore for everybody on the School Train. Even the seniors were rather difficult to handle, for everybody was restless and inattentive. The Removites and the Fourth-Formers came in for some of Mr. Horace Pycraft's choicest ill-temper, and it was only by minding their p's and q's very carefully that they were spared from detention. Mr. Pycraft was not the kind of man to make any allowance whatsoever. Indeed, he was only too eager to jump on the fellows at the flimsiest excuse.

Everything went on as usual. Morning lessons—recreation—luncheon—afternoon lessons. Then, when the school was released, the real day began.

Nobody bothered about stopping at the School Train for tea. This was the first real day of the tour, and it had to be adequately celebrated. So juniors and seniors crowded into Colchester, to have a look round the old town.

Tea, of course, was the first consideration. Joselyne's Restaurant and Wright's Restaurant were well patronised by the seniors. The juniors were more or less crowded out, and they were content to patronise the smaller establishments.

But tea, after all, was of less importance than having a good look round. Colchester is a very wonderful old place—indeed, the oldest recorded town in Great Britain—with nineteen centuries of history!

Colchester was important at the very dawn of the Christian era. Even to-day it boasts of the largest Norman Castle Keep in the country. Nowadays, this Keep is a museum, and lots of the St. Frank's fellows decided to have a look at the museum at the earliest opportunity.

Large sections of the Roman wall, which was originally ten feet thick and about thirty feet high, still remain—after almost nineteen centuries of battle and storm. Indeed, on the crest of Balkerne Hill the base of the massive towers of the Balcon Gate still remain for all to see.

One can easily imagine the great importance of this East Anglian town, from its selection as the site of the great temple which was built to commemorate the Claudian Conquest of Britain, at about the year A.D. 44. And in the year A.D. 62 the British forces, under Boadicea, stormed the defences and captured the temple after a two days' siege. Then, later, Colchester was re-conquered by the powerful Roman force, and its massive walls were built by the victors.

Quite a number of the fellows were interested in these historic details. Others, more completely modern, were much more interested in the moving pictures at the Hippodrome, or the Empire, or the Headgate Picture Theatre. Others were anxious to know what was on at the Playhouse—Colchester's splendid new theatre.

"They're giving a twice-nightly show this week, I believe," said Handforth con-

tentedly. "If the Playhouse isn't out of bounds—and I don't see why it should be—we ought to be able to manage the first house all right. Plenty of time to get back for calling-over, if we leave a bit before the finish. Besides, we might be able to get special passes."

"Oh, well, it doesn't start until half-past six," said Nipper. "Let's go to the museum."

"What about a visit to the Albert Hall and Art Gallery?" asked Tommy Watson. "There ought to be something interesting to see there."

"We don't want to be stuffed up in any giddy art gallery on a fine evening like this," said Handforth. "I vote we have a look at the castle."

SO Colchester Castle was visited, not merely by Handforth & Co., but by dozens of the fellows. They were all enchanted by that visit. The castle itself covers more than an acre of ground—and measures a hundred and forty feet east and west by a hundred and two feet north and south. Some believe that it is a Roman building, and others are just as certain that it is Norman, built with Roman materials, and probably standing on the site of the Temple Claudius, or perhaps on that of the old Roman Forum.

This last suggestion is probably the most reasonable, for there can be no doubt that the materials are Roman. Yet the style of the gateway and the fireplaces and the other details are truly Norman. Comparatively speaking, traces of the Roman foundations of an earlier building have been discovered.

It is believed that the Castle was built by Eudo Dapifer, in about the year 1078. In some ways, the ground plan is similar to that of the White Tower of London, and some people believe that it was designed by the same architect—Bishop Gundulf.

"Well, it's all jolly interesting," said Handforth, as he and his chums strolled in the Castle park—a charming, well-laid-out pleasure ground. "What about a visit to the Museum now?"

"Why not leave it until to-morrow, Handy?" suggested Church. "Exploring is all very well, but one is apt to get a bit fed up with it. I vote we go and see some pictures."

"Bother the pictures!" said Handforth. "We can see pictures any old time. Now that we're visiting all these towns, we can't do better than add to our store of knowledge."

Church and McClue grunted. If they had suggested further exploring, Handforth would probably have scoffed at them and voted

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for the pictures. He was a perverse sort of fellow.

However, something else was destined to happen just then—something very unexpected, and, in a way, very thrilling.

CHAPTER 9.

Nothing Doing!

ALTHOUGH Handforth & Co. did not know it, a great deal of interest had been taken in their movements by two men who were now discreetly hidden behind some friendly bushes. In a word, Mr. Frederick Reed and Mr. Baxter were on the track.

"Don't make any mistake, Baxter," Reed was saying. "They are the kids, and I don't think you can do better than approach them now."

"But how can I?" asked Reed's stout companion. "What can I say? How am I supposed to know that these boys own an Austin Seven car? Hang it, we've got to be careful, Fred!"

Mr. Reed frowned.

"I know that; but the thing's getting on my nerves," he said. "Unless we do something drastic, how do you suppose we can ever get hold of the stuff? I was hoping that these boys would get their car out of the garage. Then it wouldn't be necessary to approach them at all. But we don't know where the garage is, or anything. We've simply got to get at the boys themselves."

Reed and Baxter had been in Colchester nearly all day. Naturally, they had read about the School Train in the papers, and it had not taken Mr. Reed long to put two and two together. He quickly came to the conclusion that those three schoolboys of the Austin Seven were attached to the Train. All day he had been afraid that some sensational news would be published. He was prepared for the shock of learning that Handforth had discovered the jewellery in that petrol can. In such an event, the schoolmasters were bound to find out—and then the police would know—and the newspapers would publish the story without delay.

But nothing like this had happened.

There was a report in the papers about the burglary at Stapleton Towers. No real clues had been discovered, however, and Mr. Reed was feeling quite safe. He knew that he had covered up his tracks well. And it was now becoming evident that the three schoolboys had not yet discovered the presence of the stolen property in that borrowed petrol can.

Yet it was necessary to go very, very cautiously.

One word to these boys about the petrol can—any anxiety to acquire it—might lead to disaster. For it was likely that the boys would become suspicious. They would put two and two together, and they would certainly refuse to part with the petrol can. Mr. Reed believed in being on the safe side, and he had resolved upon another scheme.

HANDFORTH & CO. were just about to leave the Castle park when they were cheerily accosted by a big, jovial-looking man who was all smiles.

"Ah! I believe you're the young fellows I want!" said the stranger boisterously. "Doesn't one of you own an Austin Seven car?"

Handforth looked at Mr. Baxter anxiously. "Yes," he replied. "It's mine. What about it? Mr. Lee told me he had put it in a garage. Is anything wrong with it?"

Mr. Baxter was gratified at this quick success.

"No, no, of course not," he replied. "Only it happens that I'm in want of an Austin Seven just now. And as you boys are on this School Train, and as you haven't much opportunity of using a car, I thought perhaps you might be willing to take an offer."

"Oh!" said Handforth.

He regarded the stranger with greater interest. Baxter, for his part, had adopted a care-free attitude. By attempting to acquire the whole car—naturally, petrol can included—there was not much chance of Handforth becoming suspicious.

"Yes," said the stranger genially. "My name's Baxter—Walter Baxter, of Bayswater. I do a pretty big business in used Austin Sevens. A good little car—always saleable. It you're agreeable to a deal—"

"I'm not interrupted Handforth. "Sorry, and all that, Mr. Baxter, but I don't want to sell."

"Well, of course, that all depends upon the offer," smiled Mr. Baxter. "I happened to see your little car in the garage this afternoon, and I was told that it belonged to a schoolboy. It occurred to me that you might not want it now—"

"But I do want it," said Handforth. "I couldn't sell it, anyhow. It was a present. My aunt gave it to me, and if I sold it she would be horribly offended. People don't give presents away—or sell them, either."

"Not usually, perhaps," agreed Mr. Baxter smoothly. "But a car is different. One cannot always keep a car. Wouldn't you rather have a newer model, my boy? There are some very smart sports models out now, you know. Something special—something showy. That's what you need."

"Do I?" asked Handforth.

"Of course you do," said Mr. Baxter. "Anyhow, I'll give you seventy-five pounds—solid cash—for your Austin Seven. As I've told you, I'm an agent, and I know something about these little buses—"

"Seventy-five quid!" broke in Handforth. "Not likely. That car cost one hundred and twenty-five pounds—"

"Yes, I know, but it's second-hand," said Mr. Baxter. "Seventy-five pounds is a very fair offer—a very generous offer. Still, as I'm keen on getting it—as a matter of fact, I've got a customer waiting for one—I don't mind going to a hundred pounds."

Church and McClure looked at Handforth interestedly. They wondered what he would say to this. A hundred pounds was indeed a remarkably fine offer. For the life of them, they could not understand why Mr. Baxter—a dealer—was suggesting such an extraordinary price. The car was certainly not worth it.

"A hundred quid!" said Handforth, staring. "I say, this isn't some joke, I suppose?"

"Joke?" repeated the big man. "Does this look as if I'm joking?" He produced a pocket-book, and flashed large numbers of fivers. "No!" he said. "There's no joke about it, young man. I particularly want your car, and I'm ready to pay for it. If I pay you a hundred pounds, I shall lose on the deal—but I'm particularly anxious not to disappoint this customer of mine. He's a good man, and I think there's a big deal to come later. So it'll be worth my while."

Anybody else, perhaps, would have jumped at that offer. But Mr. Baxter did not know his man. Handforth was different.

"If it's worth a hundred quid to you, it's worth a hundred quid to me," he said doggedly. "Sorry, Mr. Baxter, but there's nothing doing. I'm not selling."

"You're very foolish," said the other. "A hundred pounds is a ridiculous price for your car. You'll never get another chance like this. I'm ready to pay you now—on the spot. You can deliver the car up to me after you've got the money. That's fair enough, isn't it?"

Handforth compressed his lips.

"No!" he said finally. "My car stays in the Northern Garage."

"You'd better think it over——"

"I've thought it over already," said Handforth. "There's not going to be any sale. Sorry, but I've made up my mind."

Mr. Baxter shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he said. "You're very foolish. I've told you why I want this car of yours——"

"And I'm jiggered if I can understand it!" said Handforth. "There are plenty of others about. I've seen 'em marked up for forty-five or fifty quid. What's the idea of offering me a hundred? It looks fishy to me."

"Fishy!" roared Mr. Baxter, inwardly alarmed, but outwardly affecting an air of indignation.

"We don't want to argue," said Handforth coldly. "Come on, you chaps. Let's be going."

He turned away; and Mr. Walter Baxter bit his lip, and strode off in the other direction. He knew that he had failed, and that it would be sheer folly to increase his offer. He rejoined Reed, and there was nothing jovial about his expression now. The two men were well hidden from the schoolboys.

"Well?" asked Reed eagerly.

"Nothing doing," grunted Baxter. "The young fool got suspicious."

"What?"

"Oh, not in that way!" muttered Baxter. "He seemed to think there was something fishy about it. I don't wonder, really, because no sane man would offer a hundred pounds for a second-hand chummy Austin Seven. Anyhow, the young idiot wouldn't listen to me."

"You must have gone to work in the wrong way," said Reed harshly. "You were too blunt, I expect. You ought to have been diplomatic——"

"I put it to him as plausibly as I could," said Baxter, glaring. "Anyhow, it's clear enough that the boys didn't know anything about that stuff in the spare petrol can. If they had known anything they would have given themselves away in no time. I was watching them pretty closely, I can tell you."

"That's a relief," said Mr. Reed, frowning. "But what are we going to do? How're we going to get hold of the car? If the boy won't sell, and if——"

"He let out where it's garaged, anyhow," said Baxter with satisfaction. "It's in the Northern Garage—wherever that happens to be. We ought to be able to locate the place easily enough."

"We'll go there at once," said Reed keenly. "It'll probably be down North Street somewhere—towards the station. That's where the boy would keep the car."

"But what do you mean to do?" asked Baxter, staring.

"Take the car, of course!" snapped the other. "What else? We can't afford to take any chances now. We can easily fool the garage people—say that we're schoolmasters, or something. Anyhow, we'll get out with that car, and by the time the boy discovers his loss we'll be half-way to London. We don't need the car. We can abandon it. Once we've emptied that petrol can we shall be all right."

And they went off without any further discussion.

"**T**HEY can't fool me," said Handforth firmly.

"Well, it looks a bit squiffy, I suppose," admitted Church. "Your car isn't worth fifty pounds—let alone a hundred."

"Not worth fifty?" said Handforth, staring. "You silly ass! I wouldn't sell her——"

"No, no, of course not," agreed Church hastily. "But according to the market price, Handy, a hundred quid is a ridiculous figure. I'm pretty certain that that man was a wrong 'un. I didn't like the look in his eyes."

"He seemed all right to me," said McClure.

"He was too jolly careless and jovial," said Handforth. "And the way he flashed that money, too, was fishy. Offered to pay me on the spot—even before he had a good look at the car."

"Yes, that was suspicious," said Church.

"I'll bet that money was counterfeit," went on Handforth. "I dare say the man is a giddy forger. This is one of his wheezes for getting his dud money into circulation. He



Whiz ! Crash ! A chunk of coal hurtled through the open window of the compartment and struck Handforth on the side of the head. He swayed dizzily, while the petrol can fell to the floor with a clatter.

goes about buying people's cars, and pays them with squiffy bank-notes."

In any other circumstances Church and McClure would have scoffed at this suggestion, but for once it seemed to them that Handforth was not so outrageously off the mark.

"It was a bit unwise of you to give him the name of the garage where the car is kept," said McClure, shaking his head. "If the man is a wrong 'un, he might go there and—"

"By George!" broke in Handforth. "Did I give him the name of the garage?"

"Of course you did."

"Then we'd better go there and make sure that everything's all right," interrupted Handforth anxiously. "It may be a wheeze, you know! I'll bet those men are motor-car bandits! That's it! They're members of a gang—"

"Just now they were forgers!" said McClure tartly.

"I was wrong!" ejaculated Handforth, flushed and excited. "They're not forgers at all—they're motor bandits."

"But there was only one!"

"He was just the decoy," said Handforth keenly. "Come on! Where can we get a

'bus? We shall have to hurry like the dickens."

They hastened into the High Street, and, as luck would have it, no 'bus happened to come along. There are no longer any tram-cars in Colchester, but there is a very splendid service of municipal 'buses, to say nothing of many privately owned 'bus services, too.

Outside the Hippodrome, however, there was a taxi rank. Handforth leapt into the first taxi, and Church and McClure followed him.

"Northern Garage—and drive like the dickens!" said Handforth crisply.

He took no notice of some shouts from Harry Gresham and Jack Grey and one or two other fellows who were looking at the Hippodrome posters. A group of fags was just emerging from Woolworth's a little lower down, and they, too, waved to Handforth & Co.

But the taxi was off at once, and it sped up the High Street, past the Town Hall, and then turned sharply to the right down North Hill. The journey was quite brief. Some little distance along North Station Road the taxi prepared to come to a halt outside a garage.

And just at that moment an Austin Seven sped out, and came gliding along.

"Look!" yelled Handforth, flinging open the door of the taxi before the vehicle had stopped. "It's my Austin! It's Baxter at the wheel! He's pinched my little bus!"

MR. REED had decided that it would be more than risky for him to enter that garage, so Baxter had done the thing single-handed. It had proved an easy task, too. He had strolled in confident and smiling, and had told the youth in charge that he was one of the masters attached to the St. Frank's School Train.

There was an Austin Seven here belonging to one of the schoolboys. The garage hand agreed. Well, Baxter wanted to take it away, and the garage hand raised no objection. It wasn't one of those big garages where a strict check is taken of all cars brought in. Mr. Baxter looked so genial, and he "put it over" so perfectly that the youth could hardly be blamed for allowing the car to be taken out.

But for the fact that Handforth & Co. had turned up at this particular moment, the thing would have been a complete success. Baxter would have picked Reed up some little distance along the road, and they would have driven serenely out of Colchester.

As it was, things became exciting.

"Hi! Stop!" howled Handforth, as he leapt wildly out of the taxi.

He managed to keep his balance, and he went tearing along the road waving his arms.

"Come back!" he bellowed. "That's my car! Thieves! Robbers! You've pinched my Austin Seven!"

"Well, well! What's the trouble?" asked a familiar voice.

And Vivian Travers slid up to Handforth, mounted on his gleaming motor-cycle.

"Eh?" gasped Edward Oswald. "Look! That man has stolen my Austin Seven! He's gone! He's half-way up the hill!"

"It's true!" panted Church, running up. "Handy's Austin has been stolen! Can't you do something, Travers?"

"One never knows," replied Vivian Travers genially. "Leave it to me, Handy, dear old fellow. Uncle Vivian is just pining for a bit of excitement."

CHAPTER 10.

The School in Ipswich!

VIVIAN TRAVERS was off like the wind.

As a matter of fact, he had seen the bulky stranger shooting out of the garage in that Austin Seven, and he had thought at the time that the car looked very much like Handforth's. This was no occasion for asking questions or for delay. Travers kicked his engine into life, let in the clutch, and went roaring away in pursuit.

Meanwhile, Mr. Walter Baxter was decidedly upset. He had heard those shouts,

and he had caught a glimpse of Handforth, too. The thing wasn't to be so easy as he had imagined. It was now impossible to stop and pick up Reed, who was waiting not far off. Baxter decided to bolt for it, and to keep on bolting. At this period he had no idea that a motor-cyclist was on his trail.

And what a motor-cyclist! At St. Frank's Vivian Travers was renowned for his suicidal recklessness on that machine of his. Travers was a remarkably clever stunt artist, and more than once he had nearly caused heart failure amongst the juniors. He was daring, his nerves were of steel, and nothing

COMING NEXT WEEK!



delighted him more than a bit of real excitement. He looked like getting a sample now.

The Austin Seven shot up North Hill famously. Fortunately for Baxter the policeman at the top of the hill was holding the road clear, and the Austin sped into Head Street, the constable giving Baxter a very stern glance. Baxter's idea was to take the Lexden Road—the main road for London.

But almost as soon as he had got to the corner of Crouch Street he found the constable holding up the traffic, and without hesitation Baxter turned sharply to the left and went down the hill between the Headgate Picture Theatre and the Playhouse.

In the meantime, Travers was having a bit of trouble. He had roared up North Hill with terrific velocity, only to find the constable's hand against him at the top. Not that Travers took any notice. This was no time for formalities. He knew that the Austin had gone straight on into Head

Street. With a daring that caused the passers-by to gasp, Travers shot round an approaching 'bus, nipped between a private car and a motor-coach, and shot on like a streak.

"Stolen car!" he bellowed. "I'm giving chase!"

The constable probably heard nothing, for he was shouting and waving his arms furiously. Travers just caught sight of the Austin turning down into St. John's Street, and he was glad that he had lost no time. Otherwise, he would probably have gone on the Lexden Road, and so lost his quarry. As

"ST. FRANK'S IN THE MIDLANDS!"

Nipper & Co. in a Sheffield steelworks—watching the huge blast furnaces, the big overhead cranes carrying ladles of molten metal, and all the other mighty marvels in this tremendous hive of industry.

Edwy Searles Brooks vividly describes this scene in next week's stunning yarn—and also the many other amazing adventures that befall the Boys of St. Frank's during their visit in Norwich and Sheffield.

This new School Train series is one not to be missed, chums. Make sure you read the second story, which is coming next Wednesday. And as it prominently features William Napoleon Browne, you can be certain that it's an extra good one!

"RIVALS OF THE RAMPANT!"

Look out for the second instalment of Stanton Hope's magnificent new naval serial next week, chums!

ORDER IN ADVANCE!

it was, he was quite close behind when Baxter turned into Queen Street, somewhere down in the bottom of the town. Baxter rather lost his head here, for instead of turning to the right, which would have taken him into the open country, he went to the left, and almost before he knew it he was making for the High Street again.

In the nick of time he realised his mistake, and he turned to the right down East Hill. By now Baxter knew that this motor-cyclist, so close behind, was not friendly; he knew that he was being chased.

He spun into Priory Street and doubled back on his own tracks, reaching Queen Street again. Then he went shooting past the Empire, up the Mersea Road.

This was better. He was practically out of the town now, and he congratulated himself upon his success. He had got the Austin Seven, and if he couldn't shake off this motor cyclist it would be remarkable.

VIVIAN TRAVERS dropped behind after the centre of Colchester had been cleared. He was cool and calm, and he was determined to get the better of this car thief. But he realised that nothing could be done just yet. Far better to wait until the open country was reached. So Travers eased his motor-cycle considerably, and dropped so far behind that Baxter believed that his pursuer was being shaken off.

But Travers was only biding his time.

He was wondering what his best course would be. Car thieves, according to all he had read, were rather desperate characters. They would not usually give in without a struggle. However, this particular thief was alone, and he might be a mere novice at the game. Better to give him a chance.

So after the last of the houses had been left behind, Travers opened up the throttle of his machine and fairly streaked along the road. He had had an occasional glimpse of the Austin, and he knew that the little car was sticking to the main highway.

This machine of Travers' was a terror. It was one of the latest type motor-cycles—a regular speed demon. It roared up in the rear of the Austin, drew alongside, and Baxter turned a startled face. When he beheld a mere schoolboy, however, he was slightly relieved.

"Better pull up!" shouted Travers. "That car's not yours, and I've come to take it back. It'll easily go on my carrier!"

Baxter did not hear all that Travers said—but he heard enough. He trod on the accelerator, and the trusty Austin surged forward at increased speed.

"Aren't you going to stop?" roared Travers.

Baxter bent over his wheel, and there was an evil glint in his eye. He swerved across the road, and Travers only just managed to steer clear. His expression hardened.

"So that's the game, is it?" he muttered. "All right, my beauty!"

For a moment he wondered if he should get ahead, and try to block the road. But this would be difficult. The road was wide, and an Austin Seven can nip through a very small space. There was only one certain method.

It required a fellow of Travers' recklessness to do it. He allowed the Austin to get ahead again. Then he overtook it on the off side, and as he came alongside he took his hands from the handlebars, made a swift grab at the Austin's body, and pitched himself into the car.

It was all over in a flash.

The car lurched, swayed and wobbled. The motor-cycle shot off at a tangent, and smashed its way into the hedge. Travers was on his feet now, and he quickly whipped his fountain pen out of his pocket and jabbed the end of it into Baxter's fat neck.

"Stop!" he commanded. "I've got you this time!"

Baxter collapsed. The very fact that this schoolboy had jumped from his motor-cycle

into the car proved his daring. Baxter did not doubt that that cold object against his neck was a pistol. He put both his feet down, the car swerved to the side of the road, and came to a standstill.

Travers was prepared for squalls, but even so Baxter surprised him. The man, without warning—without even turning—lunged his right elbow backwards. It was a most unexpected move. The elbow caught Travers on the side of the head with terrific force, and he reeled across the little car, half stunned.

Baxter struggled out, looked up and down the road, then bolted down a footpath, close by. He decided that it would be madness to keep with the car. The best thing he could do was to make a bid for liberty.

“**T**HERE it is!” roared Handforth.

He was standing up in the back of a powerful open car, which had just appeared round a distant bend. Church and McClure were there, too, to say nothing of a policeman and the man who was driving. This latter gentleman was the owner of the garage, and he had lost no time in giving chase when Handforth had rushed up to him to say that somebody had stolen the Austin Seven.

“Your bus seems all right,” said Church breathlessly. “Good old Travers! Look! He’s all by himself.”

Before Handforth could reply, the car pulled up and everybody jumped out. Travers, looking a bit groggy, was just recovering from that blow.

“Hurt?” asked Handforth concernedly.

“For the love of Samson, no!” replied Travers. “It’s nothing, dear old fellow. The blighter biffed me with his elbow before I could guess what he was up to. He seems to have hooked it.”

“Which way did he go?” asked the policeman.

“Across those fields, I believe,” said Travers, pointing. “I suppose you haven’t seen anything of my jigger? I left her behind somewhere.”

They listened in amazement as he explained how he had effected the capture. He treated it very lightly, as though the exploit was a mere commonplace.

“Darn me if you’re not a caution!” said the garage proprietor, at last. “Why, you might have killed yourself! It was a mad thing to do.”

“Possibly,” agreed Travers. “But, you see, I’m mad. At least, I’m a reckless beggar when it comes to a stunt of that kind. To tell you the truth, I thoroughly enjoyed it. Nothing like a bit of excitement now and again!”

They went back along the road, and Travers was gratified to discover that his motor-cycle was scarcely damaged. It had crashed through the hedge before falling over, and the hedge had saved it.

“Well, well,” he said complacently. “It just shows you, doesn’t it? The faster you’re going, the less the damage.”

“That’s not a good principle to go on, young man,” said the policeman dubiously. “You young motor-cyclists are too reckless, as a rule—although, in this case, I dare say you were justified. Now, let’s see about taking your names and addresses.”

“What about the rotter who pinched my car?” asked Handforth, staring.

But the policeman decided that any chase would be futile—and in this, no doubt, he was right. For there were any amount of trees just here, and Baxter could easily have made himself scarce by now.

So, after the constable had taken the names and addresses of everybody in general, and after Handforth had satisfied himself that the Austin Seven had come to no harm, they all started back for Colchester. And the affair remained very much of a mystery. It was assumed that Baxter was merely an ordinary car thief, and that this exploit had failed.

NEXT day, the School Train was in Ipswich, the capital of Suffolk.

The school awoke to find itself on the new location, and everybody was quite certain that this form of school life was the best that had ever been invented. It undoubtedly provided a lot of change.

As in Colchester, none of the boys was allowed into the town until the day’s lessons were over. Work went on uninterruptedly.

Handforth’s first thought, after the juniors had been released from lessons, was for his Austin Seven. He was beginning to get a bit anxious about it nowadays. Hitherto, nobody had ever tried to steal it.

“We’ll buzz down to the garage, and see if she’s safe,” he said, to Church and McClure. “It’s only about five minutes’ walk. I gave definite instructions about her, and if she’s not there somebody’s going to get into trouble.”

Handforth had arranged, in fact, for the Colchester garage man to take the little car to Ipswich, and to leave her there. This had been fixed for the previous evening, so by now the little car should be waiting and ready.

“But you can’t go on like this, Handy!” said Nipper, smiling.

“Can’t go on like what?”

“I heard what you were saying to Church and McClure just now,” said Nipper. “You’re not going to cart your Austin about the country with the School Train, are you?”

“She’ll come in handy—for little excursion trips round and about,” said Handforth vaguely. “I shall be lost without my Austin. I can easily arrange for her to be taken on to the next town.”

“It’s all right as long as we’re making a short jump of this sort—from Colchester to Ipswich, and Ipswich to Norwich,” said Nipper. “But sometimes we shall go a couple of hundred miles. It’ll cost you a small fortune. In fact, you won’t have enough money to pay the exes.”

“H’m! I’ve been thinking of that, too,” said Handforth, looking worried. “I’ve

written to the pater about it, but I doubt if he'll be sensible."

"Send the giddy car back," advised Church wisely. "Get somebody to take her back to London, and she'll be at home for you when the summer holidays start. Better than being hampered with her like this."

Handforth knew that this was a common-sense suggestion. But he frowned and resolutely shook his head.

"No fear!" he said stubbornly. "I'm not going to be without my Austin Seven. Where I go, she goes."

"My dear ass—"

"And that's settled!" said Handforth finally.

His chums said no more. They knew that he would come to his senses sooner or later—perhaps after Norwich had been reached. For the School Train would go straight from Norwich to Sheffield, and that jump was liable to be a bit too costly for Edward Oswald. Experience is a great teacher, and Church and McClure decided to let Handforth have his own way. He would soon get tired of the game.

CHAPTER 11.

Getting Desperate!

MR. FREDERICK REED pointed. "They're the boys," he said softly. "See them? Those three walking by themselves—those three in white flannels. The biggest one, with the rugged face, is the owner of the car. All you've got to do is to follow, find out where that car is, and then lift the petrol can."

"It won't be so easy," said Reed's companion.

"Don't be a fool," retorted Reed. "That Colchester dodge failed. It's too risky to make another attempt to get the car itself. All I need is the can. And the longer we delay, the more chance there'll be of those infernal boys discovering that there is something in that can besides petrol."

Reed was getting desperate. The failure of Baxter's attempt had alarmed him exceedingly. Fortunately, nothing had developed. Neither the schoolboys nor anybody else suspected the truth behind that car theft. And it was obvious that the jewels were still undiscovered, because the newspapers reported that the hunt for the missing property was still continuing.

Reed had been compelled to come on to Ipswich. He had watched closely—had seen the car driven away from Colchester—had learned that the School Train had gone to Ipswich. So Ipswich now harboured Mr. Frederick Reed, too.

Baxter was out of it. After what had happened, he couldn't show himself again. Reed had brought his own brother into the job—an unpleasant-featured young man of a weedy type. He had been promised a certain percentage of the spoils if he got hold of that petrol can. Reed himself dared not go near, in case Handforth & Co. recognised him.

Reed was exasperated. All this commotion and bother over nothing! He had brought off the best coup of his career, and his booty was still intact—tantalisingly affixed to the wing of Handforth's Austin Seven! And nobody dreamed of its presence there.

"See where the boys go, and as soon as you get a chance, get that can," said Reed. "Any excuse will do. Pretend to be another motorist, if necessary. Or, if you find the garage busy, you might easily walk in, take the petrol can, and nobody will even notice you. But don't do anything rash. For the present, just keep your eyes open. Now, Jim, it's up to you."

So when Handforth & Co. reached the garage, Jim Reed was in close attendance. He was chagrined, however, when Handforth & Co. emerged in the Austin, and went off for a run. There was nothing he could do until the car came back. The only consolation was that Handforth had had the petrol tank filled up before starting off; so there was scarcely any risk of him touching the spare can.

"Now we'll see a bit of Ipswich," said Handforth complacently, as he sat at the wheel. "Fancy saying that we don't need my Austin! We've got the drop on all the other chaps."

"I suppose that's true," admitted Church.

"This is pretty good, anyhow," said McClure cheerfully. "What about going to the museum and the art gallery? I've heard they've got a ripping museum here."

"On a fine evening like this?" asked Handforth, as they glided into Princes Street. "Not likely! We're going to see a bit of the place."

They went out of Princes Street into the wide space near the Post Office. Turning to the right into Tavern Street, Handforth nearly had an argument with one of the municipal trackless trams—for Tavern Street is rather narrow. After driving the length of Carr Street, Handforth decided that this part of the town was not particularly interesting, so he turned back.

"Why not go to the Buttermarket?" asked Church. "Somebody said there's a wonderful old building there known as the Ancient House. It was built in fifteen and something, I believe."

"The Ancient House!" repeated Handforth. "Nerve! Pinching one of our St. Frank's names."

When they arrived in the Buttermarket, they found quite a number of other St. Frank's fellows there inspecting the quaint old buildings. Handforth was completely unmoved. Scenery and quaint old buildings never aroused any enthusiasm in him.

"Oh, blow it!" he said. "Let's go for a run out into the country—along the Norwich Road."

They went as far as Claydon, and then McClure issued a reminder that calling-over was fixed for a certain time, and that there might be a bit of trouble if they were late. Very reluctantly, Handforth turned back,

and the car was garaged just five minutes before time.

"Now be careful with this bus," said Handforth, to the attendant. "Somebody tried to pinch her in Colchester, and for all we know he might be still at the game. So don't say you haven't been warned."

The attendant grinned.

"Your car's safe enough here, young gent," he replied. "There's never been a car stolen from this garage."

"Hurry up!" urged Church. "There's no time! You know what a beast Pycraft is!"

"By George!" said Handforth, with a start. "Come on!"

He swung round, ignorant of the fact that he was standing on a patch of motor oil. His rubber heel skidded from under him, both his legs shot into the air, and he descended with a crash.

"That's done it!" ejaculated McClure. "Great Scott! You're smothered!"

Handforth rolled over, and made things far worse. By the time he picked himself up his white flannels were smothered in oil and dirt.

"Look at my bags!" he howled. "They're ruined! Brand new, too! I shall claim a new pair——"

"We can't be responsible for that, sir," interrupted the attendant. "You ought to have seen what you were standing on. Petrol's the only stuff that'll clean them—and they'll need a bath of petrol, too."

"I'm in an awful mess!" snorted Handforth. "You shouldn't leave patches of oil lying about on the ground——"

"You'll be in a worse mess if you don't buck up, Handy!" urged Church. "Pycraft will detain you for the next half-holiday. For goodness sake, come on!"

"Petrol!" said Handforth fiercely. "Quick! Grab that spare can off my car. We'll smuggle it into our study, and I can clean these bags after prep. There's no time now."

McClure swiftly unscrewed the spare can, and Jim Reed had the utter mortification of seeing the can carried away. He was leaning negligently against the fence near by, apparently reading a newspaper. He had heard everything—and he knew exactly why the can had been taken.

Handforth & Co. were successful in getting the petrol into their study without being observed. If a prefect or a master had spotted the can it would have been barred, of course. Even Church and McClure were a bit dubious about it.

They just managed to scrape into the Junior Class-room Car in time to answer their names—and fortunately Mr. Pycraft, having only a front view of Handforth, failed to observe Edward Oswald's condition.

"**W**E'RE done, Fred!" said Jim Reed blankly.

"Couldn't you have stopped those boys?" demanded Fred, his voice harsh and acute.

"How could I?" protested the other.

"There were three of them, and I couldn't hold them up——"

"No, I suppose you're right," admitted Fred, frowning. "It would have been too obvious. So they've taken the can on to the train now! Gosh! It looks as if we're finished!"

CHAPTER 12.

Thanks to Handforth!

WILLY HANDFORTH sniffed the air suspiciously.

"You needn't come here nosing about like a bloodhound!" said Edward Oswald sternly. "What do you want, anyhow? If you're after grub, you'll be disappointed. Our cupboard's empty! We had tea in the town at the Picture House Cafe."

Willy was standing in the doorway of Study D. As a matter of fact, he had come along the train to borrow the small sum of five shillings from his major, but he had forgotten the matter for a moment.

"Have you got any petrol in this place?" he asked pointedly.

"What if we have?" asked Handforth.

"That's not an answer, Ted," said Willy. "You're dotty if you've got any petrol here! Inflammable stuff like that—— My only sainted aunt!"

He broke off as he fished out the can, and felt it.

"You leave that alone!" said Handforth. "I'm going to give my flannel trousers a petrol bath after prep., and——"

"And burn the train up!" interrupted Willy. "You mustn't do it, Ted! It's too dangerous!"

"That's what we've been telling him," said Church wearily. "It's so dangerous that Mac and I are going to clear out when he starts. We don't want a flogging."

"I meant dangerous because of the risk of fire," said Willy.

"There's not much danger of that," said Mac, shaking his head. "It's electric light here, and he'd naturally have the window open. But think of the niff up and down the corridor! A prefect would be sure to smell it."

"You can all go and eat coke!" said Handforth coldly. "I want to wear my bags again to-morrow, and I'm going to clean 'em."

"Can't you do the job outside, in the open air?" asked Willy.

"I could do—and I would do—if you idiots would leave me alone," replied Edward Oswald, with all his famous perverseness. "As it is, I'm going to clean 'em in here. I'll do the job last thing, directly after supper, while all the chaps are in the other car."

"Oh, all right—have your own way," said Willy, shrugging his shoulders. "But don't say that I haven't warned you. Now, there's a little matter of five bob——"

"What!"

"You heard," said Willy, holding out his hand.

WILLY got his five shillings, of course—he always did. And after supper, while most of the juniors thronged into the Class-room Car, which was used in the off-time as a common-room, Edward Oswald Handforth went along to his study.

He was determined to get that job done. He little realised that there were two keen-eyed watchers outside. Since darkness had fallen, Reed and his brother had ventured near, but they had been unable to make any move yet. There were too many people about—train attendants, masters, prefects, and railway officials.

But now that the night had descended it was different. And Mr. Frederick Reed was gratified to see Handforth's familiar figure at the lighted window of one of the study compartments. It was the very thing Reed had desired.

"Luck's with us, Jim," he muttered. "The kid's going to use that petrol now. It's our chance."

In the study, Handforth locked the door, cleared the little table, and set a bowl on it. Then he took the petrol can out from the locker where he had concealed it, and triumphantly prepared to unscrew the cap. He would show his chums and Willy what he thought of their silly fears!

But before he could get the cap off something happened.

A chunk of coal, flung with bad aim, shot past his head and crashed against the metal door of the compartment. Handforth spun round, so startled that the petrol can dropped out of his hand, adding to the noise.

"What the dickens——" he began blankly.

Whizz! Crash!

Another chunk of coal shot through the open window, and this time the aim was more accurate. Handforth was struck on the side of the head, and he swayed dizzily. At the same moment Reed followed up his advantage. He leapt up to the open window, wormed his way half through, and reached for the can. He just managed to seize it.

"Hi!" gasped Handforth. "What the—— Let go, you burglar! Why, I'm dashed if it isn't the chap——"

He broke off, bewildered. He was still half-dazed from the effects of that knock, but he had recognised Reed as the man he had met on the road near Vivian Travers' place. And in the same second Handforth remembered that this petrol can was, strictly speaking, this man's property.

That he should come for it in this fashion, however, was fantastically absurd. Besides, hadn't the man got Handforth's own can? It was just as good—identical, in every way. As for the cost of that petrol, there was that rug to compensate——

At this point Handforth's thought petered out. A terrific hammering sounded on the study door. Reed, in the meantime, had

slipped from the window and had vanished, can and all. Handforth took no notice of the hammering. He had rapidly recovered, and he flung himself at the open window.

As usual, he was too ram-headed. He caught against the corner of the table, lost his balance, and ended up in the corner of the little study. This time he was really hurt. His leg had twisted under him, and he was in agony.

"What's wrong in here?" came a shout in Fenton's voice. "Open this door, Handforth! What was all the noise a minute ago?"

"Wait a minute!" gasped Handforth. "I'm hurt! Don't get excited! If you want to do anything, rush out and stop a man who has just pinched my petrol can."

But Fenton could hardly be blamed for ignoring this apparently senseless suggestion. He hammered on the door again, and in the meantime Mr. Fred Reed was well clear of the siding on which the School Train stood. He and his brother, with their spoils intact, got clear away.

PHEW! I thought we weren't going to do it!" breathed Fred Reed.

They had reached an isolated spot some distance from the railway, and here they had paused to recover their breath.

"We'll get rid of this rotten can now, eh?" said Jim, with a gulp. "It's a bit risky to carry it. Let's empty the stuff out——"

"That's what I'm going to do," interrupted the other.

Kneeling on the ground, he unscrewed the cap at the top of the petrol can, then put his own tweed cap down and commenced pouring the liquid into it.

"What's the idea?" asked Jim, staring.

"We don't want to lose any of the sparklers, do we?" replied his brother. "This petrol will soak through the cap easily enough, and it'll catch—— But what's this? It's not petrol at all! It's water!"

"Water!"

"Of course it's water?" snarled Fred, with sudden alarm.

The water gurgled out, and Fred Reed shook the can violently. There wasn't the slightest sign of a scrap of jewellery!

"We've been done!" he panted hoarsely. "Those kids have fooled us, Jim. We've had all our trouble for nothing!"

It was a fearful shock, but Reed made a mistake in giving the credit to Handforth & Co. How was he to guess that the jewels had been discovered by sheer accident—and only ten minutes before Handforth had locked himself in his study?

"Hadn't we better go back to that train?" suggested Jim.

"Go back? Now? After this?" said Fred bitterly. "Yes, we can go back if we want to get nabbed, you young fool! I tell you we're done! The best job I ever tackled——"

entirely ruined by these infernal school kids!"

And Mr. Frederick Reed made haste to get as far from the neighbourhood as possible.

EDGAR FENTON, the captain of St. Frank's, looked at Handforth in a stern way.

"What's all this about?" he asked impatiently.

He had just got into Study D, Handforth having unlocked the door. There was nothing much wrong apparently, scarcely any disorder beyond some pieces of coal over the floor. Handforth himself was looking a big groggy, with an ugly smudge on the side of his head—blackish, and tinged with red.

"Did somebody throw coal at you?" asked Fenton sharply.

"Yes, somebody did!" replied Handforth. "And somebody grabbed my can of petrol, too! Just when I was going to clean my bags!"

"You ought to have more sense than to bring petrol on this train," said Fenton. "It's a good thing someone did come along and grab it."

"I don't mean one of the chaps!" shouted Handforth. "He was a burglar! A thief! At least, he was the man who refused to let me have some petrol near Halstead the other night. I suppose it was his can really, but that was no reason why he should try to brain me."

"This is double Dutch to me," said Fenton helplessly. "What on earth are you talking about?"

But just then Willy Handforth arrived, with Vivian Travers and Nipper. Church and McClure and a few others were crowding in the corridor, too.

"I can explain this, Ted," said Willy calmly. "I didn't know a man would come along and try to pinch that can so quickly. I thought there was only petrol in it."

"Only petrol!" said Handforth, staring. "What do you mean?"

"Look at these, then!" said Willy.

Fenton uttered an ejaculation. The Third-Former was displaying his cricket cap, and it was half-filled with necklaces and rings, and all kinds of other jewellery. Diamonds, pearls and rubies gleamed and glistened in profusion, and the whole lot exuded a strong odour of petrol.

"What are these?" asked Fenton incredulously.

"They're real diamonds and other precious stones," said Willy. "They were in your can of petrol, Ted."

"Wha-a-at?" yelled Handforth.

"Don't you see?" asked Church excitedly. "Now we can understand. That's why that chap tried to pinch your car in Colchester, Handy."

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"When I heard that you were going to clean your bags, I thought I'd better do something," said Willy. "So I came along and emptied the petrol out, and filled the can with water—just to give you a surprise, Ted. But I got one myself when I tipped out all these jewels. Travers knows something about them."

"Oh, does he?" said Fenton, looking at Travers.

"It's simple," said Travers coolly. "All this stuff was pinched from my home the other night. Didn't you read about it? Burglars broke in and tried to pinch the wedding presents, too. And all these jewels, worth thousands of pounds, have been resting in Handy's petrol can without anybody knowing it."

"But I don't understand it!" said Edgar Fenton blankly. "How in the name of all that's strange could they be in Handforth's petrol can?"

"Great Scott!" yelled Handforth. "I've got it! That man on the road! He refused to give us any petrol! So we changed cans, and—and— Well, I'm jiggered! Who'd have thought it? Travers, my son, you've got to thank me for diddling these burglars."

"Thanks, old man!" said Travers promptly.

"Rats!" snorted Church. "Why not thank me? It was my idea to change those petrol cans. Not that I claim any credit for dishing the burglar. I didn't know the can was full of rubies and diamonds!"

NELSON LEE, of course, was quickly informed, and the recovered property was handed over to the police. In the circumstances, Handforth didn't get into any hot water over the petrol business. It was discreetly dropped.

It turned out that every one of the missing articles had been recovered, and, although the culprits were never arrested, this was only a small point.

And when the School Train moved on to Norwich, a day or two later, Handforth's Austin-Seven was left behind—to be taken back to London. There had been quite enough trouble over that little car already. But it could not be denied that she had played a very useful part in this particular adventure.

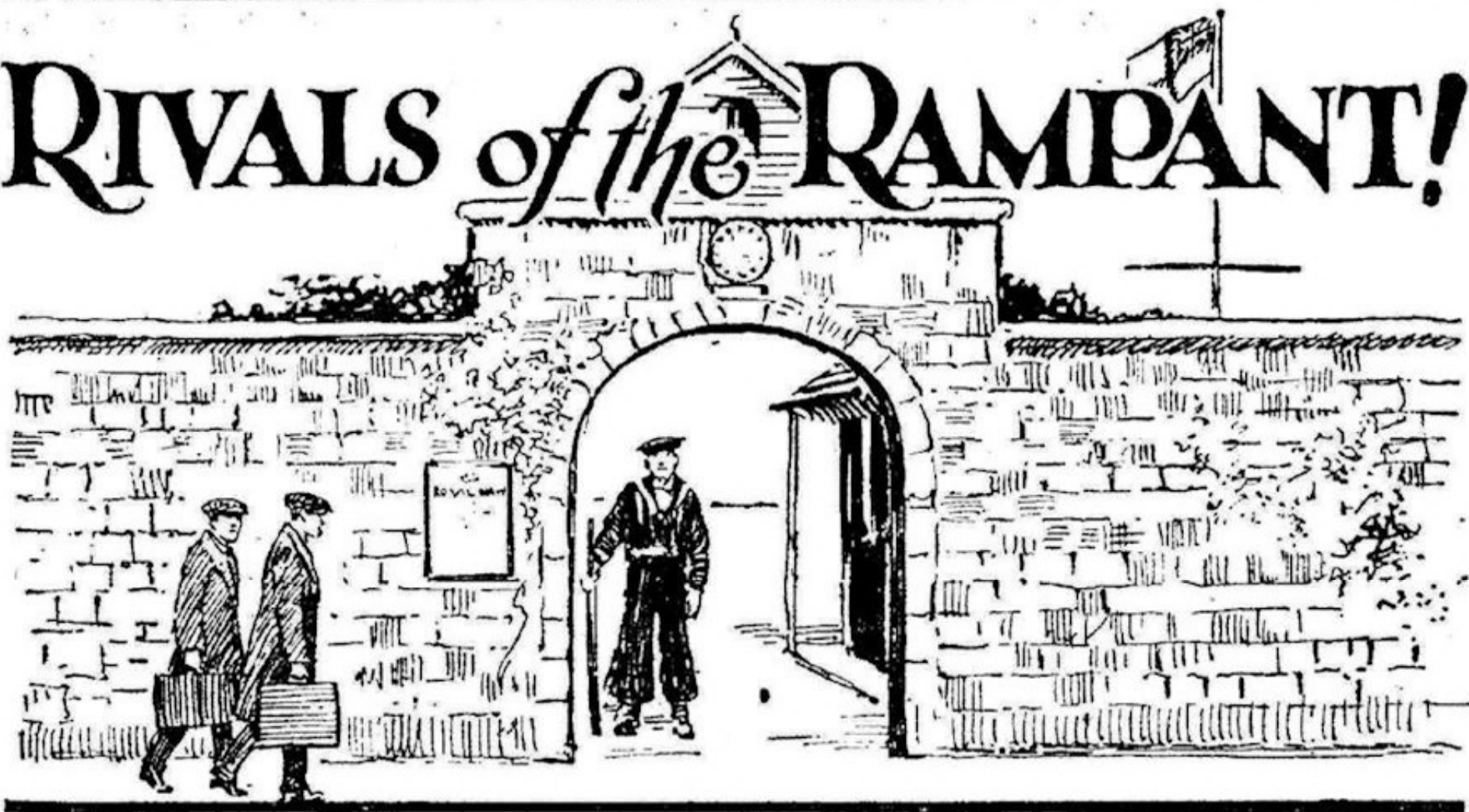
THE END.

Look Out For

"ST. FRANK'S IN THE MIDLANDS!"

Coming Next Wednesday!

RIVALS *of the* RAMPANT!



The Cellar in Brass Alley!

“SO long, Jack matey! See you at the docks to-morrow.”

With that cheery adieu of a work-mate ringing in his ears, Jack Gilbert, a fair-haired boy who looked rather more than his fifteen and a half years, tramped on his way homeward.

Despite the chill and darkness of the evening, this street in the East End of London, where the last of his pals had taken leave of his, was noisy with life. A group of children on the wet pavement, playing a mysterious

game called “gobs and bonsters” with the glass stoppers of lemonade bottles, paused to pipe a merry greeting as he passed. Tired-looking women on the doorsteps of their dwellings broke off in their gossip to toss him a motherly “Good-night, Jack!” A man in shirt-sleeves at a window removed his pipe to exclaim:

“Glad to hear you’ve landed a job, ole son!”

To all of which Jack responded with the good humour which had made him a popular character with these inhabitants of Wapping by the riverside.

The frank kindness of these people, many almost as poor as himself, touched his heart. They knew he had never known the care of father or mother, and so tried to make life a little easier for him.

But it seemed as though the weather became more chill, the night more dark, as he turned into the narrow street, set well back from the respectable district, where his own

home was situated. For this thoroughfare which bore the name Brass Alley was a notorious haunt of crooks and hooligans.

His step quickened to pass a gang of young toughs half-way down the street, and at the same time his ears were assailed by a raucous shout.

“Jest look at ‘im, the stuck-up cock-sparrer! Anyone ‘ud think ‘e’d been to ‘Arrow Collidge wiv the nobs instead of to a blessed reformatory school!”

There had been occasions when Jack had resented hotly the bullying of the Brass Alley

gang, even to the extent of hammering Bill Burke, their leader, flat in the gutter—and this in spite of savage thrashings with the hooligans’ belts.

This evening he was too tired, too fed up to care what Burke and his cronies said or did. Without turning his head he plodded on towards that hovel which was his “home” at the

Jack Gilbert’s only living relative is his uncle—a waster and a scoundrel. But Jack is made of sterner stuff; he wants to lead a better life. If only he could join the Navy.... and one day his chance comes!

far end of the alley.

Thump!

The half of a stale cabbage smote against a tenement wall within a yard of his head, and for a moment or so he paused, his fists clenched, and burning inwardly to tackle his tormentors.

“Oh, what’s the use?” he mumbled.

Worn out physically, and mentally as he was this evening, Jack retained only one ray of hope—that his uncle, Lew Bonner, with whom he lived, would not be home. All he else desired was a hunk of bread and a long sleep.

Moving on through the damp darkness of

the alley, he came to the open door of No. 26. No light was burning in the narrow hall; that other occupants of the dwelling were home was evident by the disputes going on behind closed doors.

The rooms which Jack and his uncle occupied were two on the left-hand side of the passage, and a cellar which on many an occasion had done duty as Jack's own bedroom.

A small gas-jet was burning in the front room, which was "parlour" and bedroom combined. His uncle was not here. Jack passed through a door to the untidy kitchen, and saw that a light was shining up the stone steps that led to the cellar.

"Is that you, y' young cub?" exploded a thick voice from below. "Where've you been all day?"

With his faint hope of a peaceful night extinguished, Jack descended the cellar steps and faced the man seated at a dirty deal table to one side of the basement.

"I've been working," Jack said.

"Working!"

"Helping to load sacks of sugar on lorries down at the docks," Jack volunteered. "Later I'm hoping to get to sea."

His uncle regarded him with watery eyes.

"Oh, you are, heh!" he growled. "Well, get that idea out of your mind and lively, or pink me, I'll flay the hide off you! Where's your pay?"

"I don't get paid until to-morrow," returned Jack.

With a dissatisfied grunt Lew Bonner unrolled a brown paper parcel which was on the table, together with an oil lamp, a partly filled bottle of whisky, and an enamel mug.

Despite the fact that Jack and his uncle each wore shoddy clothes and a cheap scarf about the neck, the contrast between the pair in the mellow light of the lamp was remarkable. The boy's clothes were rough but not dirty; his shoulders had the set of an athlete, and his grey eyes were clear and steadfast. Bonner, on the other hand, looked the human derelict that he was—a dirty and shifty rogue, howbeit of wiry built, who had as little respect for himself as he had for the law.

The crackle of stiff brown paper alone broke the short silence as Bonner, with gnarled fingers, unwrapped the parcel and rolled out a packet of silver fish-knives and forks.

"A bit later to-night, me lad," he growled, "I want you to take these along to the 'fence,' and tell the rotten old shark that I won't take less than a couple of quids for 'em!"

As though hypnotised, Jack regarded the glistening cutlery.

"Where did you get 'em?" he asked.

"Broke into the pantry o' the Superb Café down in Waldo Street," answered his uncle. "The easiest job I've done for months—like lifting pennies out of the cap of a blind pavement artist. Now take a quiz at this."

From the pocket of his coat he drew out a

grubby envelope on which was a pencilled plan.

"This is the place in Hampstead I was telling you about," he said. "Chockful of val'ables, it is, waitin' like ripe plums, and as the skylight's too small for me, it's up to you to do the picking. You're nimble, and with a bit more enthusiasm, boy, you could be the smartest cat crib-cracker in the profesh."

There was less colour in Jack's face as Lew Bonner finished speaking. He had expected that with his uncle's ability as a cat-burglar on the wane owing to evil living, the occasion would come when he would be expected to take up the profession seriously for the up-keep of them both, and—well, the time had come sooner than he had imagined!

The Fateful Night!

WHILE the crook slopped liquor into the mug and gulped greedily, Jack remained thoughtfully regarding him.

The boy had never known a mother; she had died when he had been born. His father—a mate in the Merchant Service, in which Bonner himself had served before he had taken to crime—had been killed by a derrick accident before the lad had reached his fifth year. From that time Jack had been in charge of his dissolute uncle.

Early on in his career of crime, Bonner had fallen foul of the police and served a sentence of ten months in the second division. Jack, who, too young to understand, had been pushed through a window to open the door of the burglarious exploit, had been sent to a reformatory school for three years—solely for his own good.

When Jack's three years were up, his guardian again took charge of him, and, for purposes of his own, showed a deal more kindness than the world at large.

Then gradually, by playing on the boy's fear of the police, the rogue had made him perform such services as taking booty to the "fence," or receiver, or keeping watch on a policeman's beat while a "job" was in progress.

And how Jack had hated it all! Only the kindness of the honest folk who lived in the neighbourhood near Brass Alley had made life tolerable at all.

"Now go and get a doss, me lad." His uncle was speaking thickly to him again. "I'll give you a shake when it's time to go along to the job."

Jack moistened his dry lips.

"I—I can't do it," he said.

Bonner jerked himself upright and leered unpleasantly.

"Funky, eh?" he growled.

"You don't understand, uncle," Jack said quietly: "I'm through. I've done with this sort of life; I want to get away from here and start afresh—to do a fair day's work in decent surroundings."

Ciumsily, Lew Bonner got out of his chair,

his face purpling at the boy's defiance. Then down came his gnarled right fist on the deal table with a crash that sent the empty mug rattling on the dirty floor.

"You ungrateful young gutter-snipe!" he snarled. "So this is what I get for looking after you all these years, is it—a parcel o' cheek slung at me when I most need a helpin' hand. Why, you whelp, I've only to pass a word to the cops about your deals with the fence to have you clapped in 'the cooler.'"

Brought up as Jack had been, the threat struck terror in the boy's heart. To his credit, however, he stuck to his guns.

"Why not cut out this rotten game, uncle?" he said. "What good has it ever done for you?"

Lew Bonner spluttered with rage.



Lew Bonner went hurtling backwards. There came a sudden splintering sound as his heavy body hit the dirt floor, and next moment, to Jack's horror, his uncle disappeared through the jagged aperture.

"You young prig!" he ejaculated. "Think I want a lecture from you? You ought to be helpin' down in the mission in the High Street. Now go and get your doss, 'cause I'll have to be calling you soon to take along this silver I picked up in the restaurant to the fence afore we go to that Hampstead crib."

"I'm done with the fence, too," remarked Jack.

Bonner burst into fresh rage.

"You ain't goin' to crack that crib, heh? You ain't goin' to the fence?"

"Neither."

As Jack turned toward the stone steps

that led out of that cellar which so often had come in useful for storing stolen property, his uncle's hand closed round the neck of the black bottle on the table.

Crash!

The boy first realised the crook's intention as the bottle fanned his hair, struck the steep stairway ahead of him, and among shattered fragments of glass, poured its contents in little rivulets down the steps.

"You brute!"

All the misplaced loyalty Jack had retained for his uncle fell from him on the face of this cowardly attack. All his revulsion from the sordid life he had been forced to lead surged up into an apex of rebellion against this man who would keep him in his chains.

As through a red mist, he saw his uncle

come lurching across the cellar toward him. He saw two hands clawing through the foul cellar air to clutch him—and, on the impulse, he struck with all his force at the leering, unshaven face of his evil genius.

The blow caught Lew Bonner on the side of the mouth, spun him round and sent him reeling heavily against one of the dank brick walls. Then, as though his legs had become putty, he collapsed on all fours, moaning like some stricken beast.

"Uncle!" cried Jack. "Oh, uncle!"

With a fresh fear in his heart, the boy darted across to him, and gripping him under the arm-pits, partially raised him.

In a dazed sort of way, Bonner drew the back of a dirty hand across his cut mouth, and reached up to the boy's shoulders.

Jack felt the powerful fingers tighten upon him, and releasing his own hold, strove to extricate himself. But now his dissolute uncle had scrambled to his feet; he felt the man's hot breath on his cheek and heard the rumbling volley of abuse directed against him.

"I'll flay you alive for that, me fightin' cock-sparrer! S'help me, you'll wish y'd never been born by the time I've finished with you!"

"Let me go!" panted Jack. "D'you want to raise the whole tenement?"

Bonner laughed harshly as he strove to shift his grip to Jack's throat.

"To blazes with 'em—and the cops, too!" he rumbled. "They won't find you, anyway—not unless they drag the river."

A cold shudder passed through Jack's frame as he saw his uncle's watery eyes glance down to some dirty matting which covered a trap-door in the middle of the floor. Most of the floor was of boarding covering solid stone, but under that matting was a trap-door that led through to an underground stream that emptied itself between the Wapping wharves into the Thames. But hitherto its use had been confined to an occasion when the police had called, and it had been necessary for his uncle to dump in a safe place several perfectly good jemmies and other incriminating tools.

By a violent wrench, Jack freed himself and ducked in time to avoid a smashing left which his uncle hooked at his jaw.

As a further check to the crook's designs, Jack hammered home a brace of short-arm jabs in a postman's knock to the scoundrel's ribs. Instantly, Bonner came across with a snorting right that caught the boy on the neck just below the left ear and flung him headlong to the floor.

"Hold that one!" he raved. "I'll learn you to defy me!"

In a fine fury, he wrenched the leg from a partly-broken chair that lay in a corner and launched himself upon the boy as he rose.

To save himself, Jack flung his arms round his uncle's waist—and the savage blow which would have fractured his skull crashed down upon his shoulder-blade. Then, before another blow could be struck, he hooked a leg behind Bonner's ankles and threw all the weight of his youthful body against his brutal assailant.

Hurled from his balance, the crook went skittling backwards, and came down full length backward on the strip of matting which covered the middle of the dirty floor. On the impact of his body, the matting suddenly ripped away as though snatched by an invisible hand; there was the harsh shattering of woodwork and a resounding splash.

And Jack, with a cry of horror, stared down at a jagged hole in the cellar floor where his uncle had fallen, and at the fan-

tastic yellow reflection of the oil lamp upon swift-flowing water!

The River of Night!

BEREFT of all power of movement, Jack stood by the edge of the rotten old trap-door which had smashed under his uncle's weight, and gazed wide-eyed into the underground stream. In that poignant moment a flood of terrifying thoughts raced through his brain. His uncle would be drowned, he himself had been responsible; already he felt a policeman's grip on his shoulder, heard himself accused of the capital crime, and his own appeal of self-defence rejected.

Only for a moment—and he came out of that nightmare of horror into which he had plunged with the same appalling suddenness that his uncle had hurtled into that dark underground stream. Then without even removing his coat, he threw himself feet foremost through the aperture in a madly brave attempt at rescue.

The water swallowed him in its icy cold grip. A couple of swift kicks and he was on the surface, and, half-turning, saw the dancing reflection of the cellar lamp on the water for an instant before he was swept round a bend into a blackness more enshrouding than the darkest night.

"Uncle! Uncle!"

His voice sounded hollow and strangely unlike his own, and came echoing back into his ears from the reeking walls and roof. No other sound could he hear save the wash of the stream as it hurried to pour itself into the Thames.

Wildly Jack beat himself away from the walls he could not see, as he was flung against them by the current, and groped in search of Bonner whom he knew was but a weak swimmer despite his Marine Service experience.

He could neither feel nor hear the man he sought. It was as though he were in some underworld of watery chaos—a lone, lost soul himself being borne onward through an eternity of terror.

Good swimmer though he was, Jack found the task of keeping his head above water in the inky darkness a matter of greatest difficulty.

At one point an underground sluice poured into the narrow river, and as he was caught in the vortex formed at the junction, he was flung round like a top in the blackness and twice crashed against the confining walls with a force that almost knocked the remaining breath out of him. And then, when he pictured a mean death like a rat in a drain, he saw a dull gleam of light that roused him to a last fierce effort for his life.

The light grew stronger as he was swept downward, illuminating the overhanging walls, so that he was able to keep a course down the middle of the stream.

Ahead lay the wide River Thames with pin-points of light on a string of barges on

the far side, and gaunt black buildings silhouetted against the night sky beyond.

The stream emptied itself from under some warehouses, and, turning on his back, Jack kicked himself free of the current and followed the direction of the tide until he could get a hand-hold on a jutting jetty

No one was about, and after a rest he dragged himself up some wet, weed-covered steps and gazed at the dark, sluggish river flowing past

No human power, he believed, could aid his uncle. In his mind was the thought that the man who had been the evil influence in his life had passed on into eternity.

"Crums!" muttered Jack, suddenly pulling himself together. "That—that was a narrow squeak!"

There was no feeling that he had done anything heroic as he crept away from the jetty and among the warehouses of the river-front, and with every step a sense of relief grew stronger within him. Tonight he realised he had achieved freedom. The old sordid associates, Brass Alley, the dirt and squalor of the home which he had shared with his uncle—all these were in the turned-down pages of the past. The pages of the future, clean and unblotted, were open before him.

A drizzle of rain began to fall, and soon became a steady downpour. The additional wetting mattered little to the boy after his immersion in the river, but the bitter cold set him shivering and coughing.

Repairs were being made in a street not five minutes' walk from the river, and the cheery glow of a charcoal brazier drew him like a magnet. Squatted in a shelter working out a crossword puzzle was an old watchman, who at first regarded him suspiciously. Then, as the orange light of the fire fell on Jack's haggard face, he beckoned him into the shelter.

"Pink me, young matey," mumbled the old watchman, "you've got yourself soaked through in this 'ere rain, so you 'ave. Ain't you got no 'ome?"

Gratefully Jack stretched out his shivering hands to the warmth.

"None as I can go to," he mumbled.

The watchman gave a grunt of sympathy; as a boy he himself had been kicked out into the streets by a brutal father.

"Well, get yourself dried out, son," he said. "And here—'ave a bite of bread and cheese and a swig o' this 'ot tea."

Soon Jack was steaming away in front of the fire, and the blood was running warmly again in his veins from the effects of the tea and wholesome food.

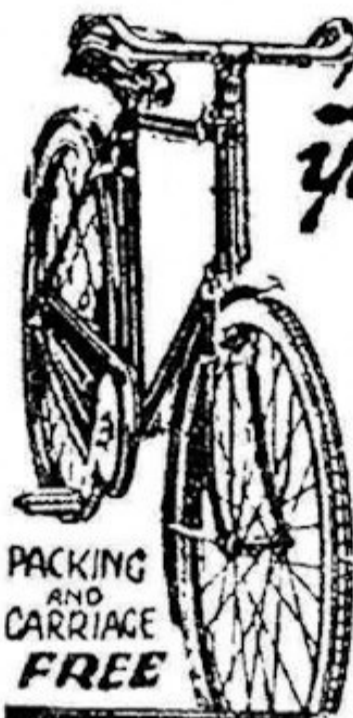
"Ain't you got no relations, boy?" inquired the watchman at length.

"None."

"Huh! You'd better doss here, I s'pose, and to-morrow you can go along to the mission."

"It's jolly good of you," Jack said huskily.

(Continued on next page.)



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RIVALS OF THE RAMPANT

(Continued from previous page.)

"In the morning I'll drift round to an old pal of mine."

That night he slept soundly in the watchman's shelter. In the morning, after thanking the man, he went off and spent most of the morning in the gardens near the Tower of London. The firm he had worked for down at the docks owed him money, but he did not go to collect it. He was done entirely with the old Jack Gilbert, and if he were believed to be dead, then so much the better.

The Call of The Navy!

SHORTLY after two o'clock Jack made tracks for a certain London County Council fire-float station to see the pal he had mentioned to the watchman—the one real friend he had in the world.

There, surely enough, was old Barny Morland, seated on the floating pier, and following his usual occupation of watching with critical eye the men of the fire brigade polishing the brasswork of their trim fire-fighting craft.

At the sight of Jack the old man's eyes lighted with pleasure.

"Hallo, young Jack!" he exclaimed cheerily. "How comes it you're here to-day? Thought you'd got a job?"

"So I had, Barny," Jack answered, as he settled near the man, "but I've quit."

He paused and averted his head as he felt the old man's eyes upon him—shrewd, kindly eyes which had missed very little in life. He felt a rough hand steal across his shoulders and heard Barny's gruff voice demanding:

"What's up, sonny?"

Well did Jack know he could get sympathy and help from this old friend with whom he had often sat to hear spin yarns of by-gone days. For old Barny, who had served in the Royal Navy and later in the London Fire Brigade, had been everywhere and seen everything. Some said he was very well-to-do, and in any case he had a wealth of knowledge of human nature and a wonderful kindness that made all that knew him love and respect him.

And into the sympathetic ears of old Barny Morland Jack poured the amazing story of his night's adventure, while the old man sucked on his pipe and listened without a word.

"Well, Barny," said Jack, after a pause at the end of his narration, "what shall I do?"

The old man tapped out his pipe on his boot.

"So that swab Lew Bonner is gone?" he mumbled. "To my idea, boy, it's a kindly providence that's taken a hand to set you free from a rogue you ought to have run away from long ago. Still, I'm not to blame you for sticking by the fellow who brought you up, and who was the only relation you had in the world, bad egg though he was. O' course, the police have got to know about it."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"And you've got to have a clean start, Jack, my boy."

Jack nodded.

"I hoped to get a berth in the Merchant Service," he said.

"A good life, my boy," commented Barny; "but why not the Royal Navy?"

"The Navy!" A sparkle came into Jack's tired eyes, but almost instantly died again. "My hat, there's nothing I should like better in the world, Barny, but what hope has a chap like me of getting accepted? There's no one to give me a character—'cept a bad one, and what d'you think they'll say when they ask my school and I tell 'em it was a reformatory?"

He laughed bitterly, and old Barny lighted his pipe and puffed vigorously at it for a few minutes in silence.

"Look here, Jack," said the old man suddenly. "I've been turning things over in my mind, and, tar me, I think it can be worked! You've got no relations, and I'll take on as your guardian and get you in somehow."

"But the reformatory and—"

"Forget 'em!" snapped Barny, almost biting through his pipe stem. "Bury the past. Lie low for a while, and start life afresh in the Royal Navy as the adopted boy o' old Barny Morland."

With that old Barny ambled off to make inquiries; and Jack, whose Christian name alone was known to the firemen, remained in the vicinity of the float.

For nearly an hour he watched the traffic on London's river, lost in his own tangled thoughts, and only roused as he heard footsteps approaching. Instead of Barny, whom he expected, he saw the old man's only nephew, Clement Smith—a lad of about his own age, whose father, a policeman, had lost his life in an affair with East End crooks.

His nerves on edge, Jack gave a start, and the colour mounted in his wan face. He had no liking for Smith, a burly and bullying youth, who, according to Barny, badly needed "smarterin' up."

"So you're here again, you young slacker!" was Smith's greeting. "You seemed mighty scared when I came along—thought I was a cop perhaps?"

"I—I thought it was Barny," Jack muttered.

"Huh!" sneered Smith. "Come to sponge on him for money again, I s'pose?"

Jack stiffened, his eyes flashing angrily.

"Your mistake," he snapped. "I'm not like you!"

Smith laughed contemptuously.

"And you'd better not say you are," he retorted. "I'd knock seven bells out of you if you'd said you were like me—you beastly young crook!"

(Jolly fine scrial, isn't it, chums? Next week's gripping instalment is even better than the first, and you'll follow the adventures of Jack Gilbert with breathless interest.)



E. S. BROOKS

BETWEEN OURSELVES!

OUR AUTHOR CHATS WITH OUR READERS

NOTE.—If any reader writes to me I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed, EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.



WYN SMITH

I'LL bet you're not always so serious—Wyn Smith (Blackwater)—as you appear in your photo, which looks out on us from the top of the page this week. At any rate, I hope you're not. You certainly make out a good case for the girls when you say: "Girls have quite as much sense—even more—than boys. For instance, several boy friends of mine thought the NELSON LEE too utterly boring for words, until I explained about different characters and interesting facts in the stories; and, lo and behold, each one takes in the NELSON LEE now! H'm! Where is all this 'boy' sense?" All I can say is—echo answers where. Naturally I keep a list of all my St. Frank's characters. I think I've got a pretty decent memory, but I don't want to tax it too much.

Simon Kenmore, of the Sixth, has been very quiet lately—Peggy Rodgers (Maida Vale). He's not such a rotter as he used to be, and he *has* turned over a new leaf. You'll probably hear something of him before long. As for Willy's dog, "Lightning," of course he is still with his young master.

About thirty Third-Formers, sixteen Fifth-Formers, and sixteen Sixth-Formers have been mentioned in the stories—C. Rollins (Birmingham). The masters are: Dr. Morrison Nicholls, Head; Mr. Nelson Lee, Housemaster, Ancient House; Mr. Beverley Stokes, Housemaster, West House; Mr. Arthur Stockdale, Housemaster, Modern House; Mr. Barnaby Goole, Housemaster, East House. Mr. Robert Langton, Sixth; Mr. William Page't, Fifth; Mr. James Crowell, Remove; Mr. Horace Pycraft, Fourth; Mr. Austin Suncliffe, Third. There are some other masters, such as Professor Sylvester Tucker, science, and so on.

Willy Handforth's pets—C. Morgenstern (Finchley)—are: Lightning, his dog; Marmaduke, the monkey; Priscilla, the parrot; Rupert, the rat; Septimus, the snake; Ferdinand, the ferret; and I think he has one or two more. If he hasn't I expect he'll soon be adding to his collection.

All the St. Frank's stories in the Old Paper have been written by me—J. L. Tunks (Eastbourne)—in addition to the bulk of those which appeared before St. Frank's was introduced. The reason why Lord Dorrimore can now fly an aeroplane, whereas in the earlier stories he couldn't, is that he has become a pilot in the meantime. Not much of a mystery in that, is there? The cost of postage to Australia is just the same as the postage at home—1½d., providing your letter doesn't weigh more than an ounce.

No—F. O. Hammond (Accra)—the Moor View School is not a part of St. Frank's. It's quite a separate establishment. I shall be pleased to get some further cards of Accra, if you care to send them.

Nipper was not at St. Frank's in No. 1, Old Series—R. Rigby (Southport). The school didn't appear until No. 112. Handforth's Austin-Seven was given to him, as a birthday present, by a dotting aunt. Considering what it has already gone through, I think it is wearing very well.

The titles you want—R. J. Hipperson (Wanstead Park)—are: No. 1, Old Series, "The Mystery of Limehouse Reach"; No. 3, Old Series, "The Clue of the Straw Sailor Hat"; No. 5, New Series, "Handforth the Martyr."

The most popular prefect—Cyril J. Whittington (Ventnor)—is undoubtedly Edgar Fenton, the school captain. His popularity is mainly due to his sports prowess, and because he is such a thoroughly decent fellow. Biggleswade is perhaps next, Biggy being such an easy-going chap with the juniors.

OUR WEEKLY POW-WOW!

By The Editor.

A Bumper Issue!

A GRAND new series of yarns featuring the Boys of St. Frank's and a stunning new serial written by one of the most popular authors of boys' stories—that's the programme in this week's number of the Old Paper, and therefore I think I am well justified in calling it a bumper issue.

The St. Frank's School Train series, I feel certain, is going to cause tremendous interest among readers of the NELSON LEE. For one thing, the idea is something new and novel. Never before has any school story paper published a series of stories in which the characters go for a trip round Great Britain in the novel fashion Edwy Searles Brooks describes. Then, again, readers will keenly anticipate the week when Nipper and his chums visit their own particular town or district. This latter fact, perhaps more than any other, makes me think that the School Train series will prove one of the most popular that has ever appeared in the Old Paper.

Next week finds the St. Frank's boys in Norwich and Sheffield. Naturally readers in those districts will be especially interested, but my other chums elsewhere will also thoroughly enjoy this fine yarn. Don't forget to write and tell me what you think of this new series; and if you want to do me a good turn, tell all your pals about the St. Frank's School Train.

THE EDITOR.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

F. W. Stone, 13, Somerset Street, Church Road, Battersea, London S.W. 11, wants correspondents in Scotland, Ireland, and South Africa.

R. T. Staples, 4, Colworth Grove, Browning Street, Walworth, London, S.E. 17, wants correspondents anywhere.

W. Harwood and Bruce George, 10, Fir

Grove, South Shore, Blackpool, wants back numbers, new series.

Stanley Worthington, 37, Oldham Road, Failsworth, Manchester, wants correspondents anywhere.

Raymond P. Dixon, 71, Boston Road, Mt. Eden, Auckland, New Zealand, wants correspondents anywhere; interested in stamps.

J. Badger, Old Bar, Manning River, North Coast, N.S.W., Australia, wants correspondents anywhere.

Michael J. Schultz, 1, Marlborough Avenue, Glebe Pt., Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, wants correspondents in England, America, India, and New Zealand. Will T. G. Mercer, Waterloo, Liverpool, send details of his stamp club?

Roy Field, 32, Bellevue Street, Arncliffe, N.S.W., Australia, wants to correspond with a Spanish or French reader.

Wm. J. Sherlock, 620, Victor Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, wants correspondents anywhere.

James Lowe, 497, 13th Street, Brooklyn, N.Y.S., U.S.A., wants correspondents anywhere.

G. F. Mills, Kelvin Hotel, Te Huiti, New Zealand, wants back numbers.

Reginald B. Huggett, 54, Stoats' Nest Village, Coulsdon, Surrey, wants correspondents overseas.

Miss Annie Bothma, 23 25, Caledon Street, Cape Town, S. Africa, wants girl correspondents anywhere.

E. Watkins, 174, Baker Street, Brighton, Christchurch, New Zealand, wants to hear from readers in his district to form a correspondence club; also from Brian Snowball, Rangoon.

Roy Gallimore, 15, Ringmer Avenue, Fulham, London, S.W. 6, wants correspondents who are stamp collectors in the British Empire, Roumania, Hungary, Persia, and Grand Lebanon.

C. Barker, 53, Alexandra Road, Windsor, Berks, wants N.L.L. Nos. 539, 549, 552, old series; 34-37, 40-44, 46, 49, 51, new series.

Owen M. Hughes, 382, David Street, Albury, N.S.W., Australia, wants correspondents who are stamp collectors in England, America, and Australia.

Miss Ivy Tippet, 10, Jervois Street, Torrensville, Adelaide, South Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers.



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