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THE KIDNAPPED SCHOOLBOYS!

A thrilling incident from the magnificent long complete yarn of school-boy adventure, featuring the famous chums of St. Frank's, contained in this issue.

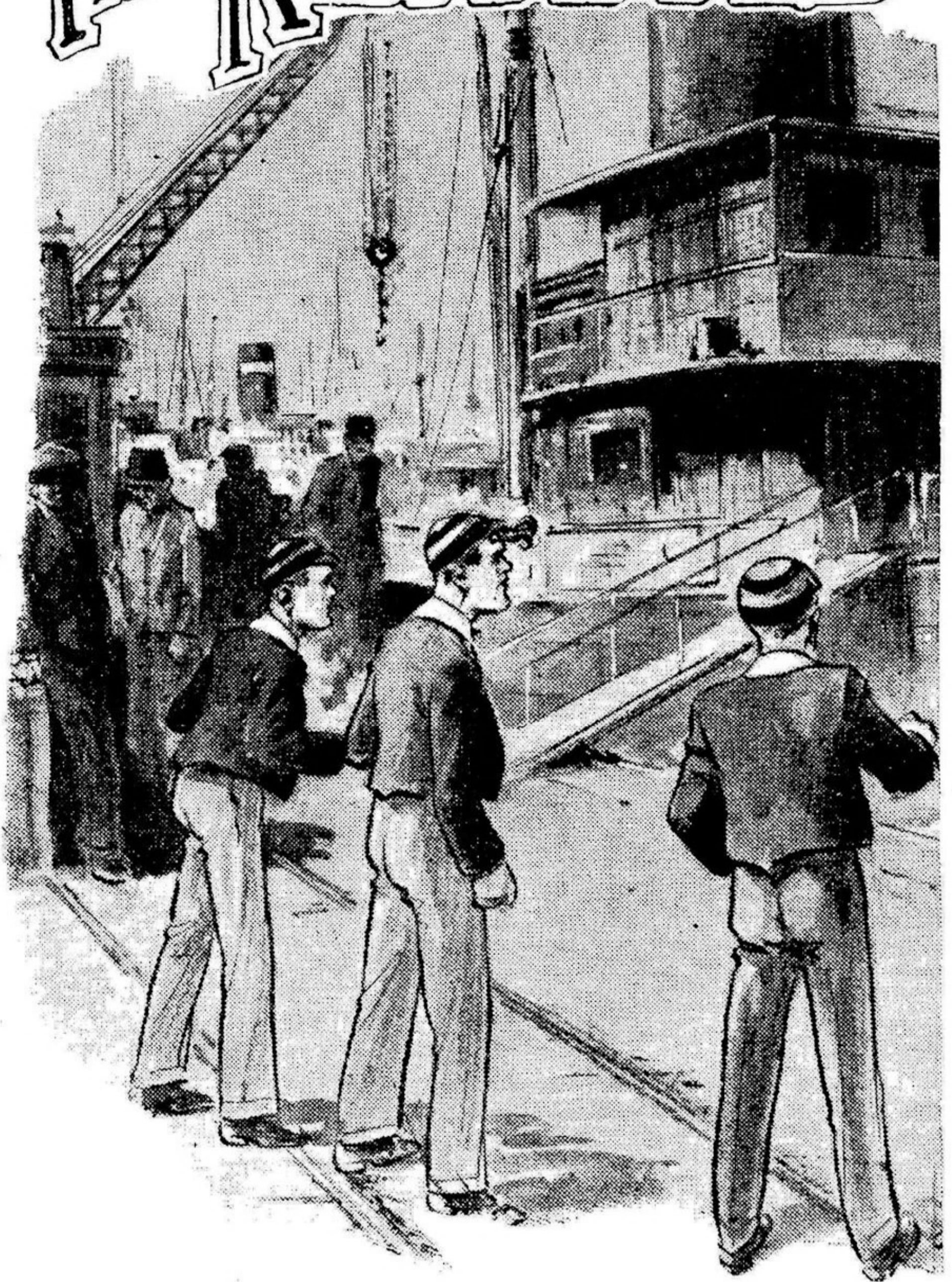
New Series No. 165.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

June 29th, 1929.

READ ALL ABOUT THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF NIPPER & CO.—

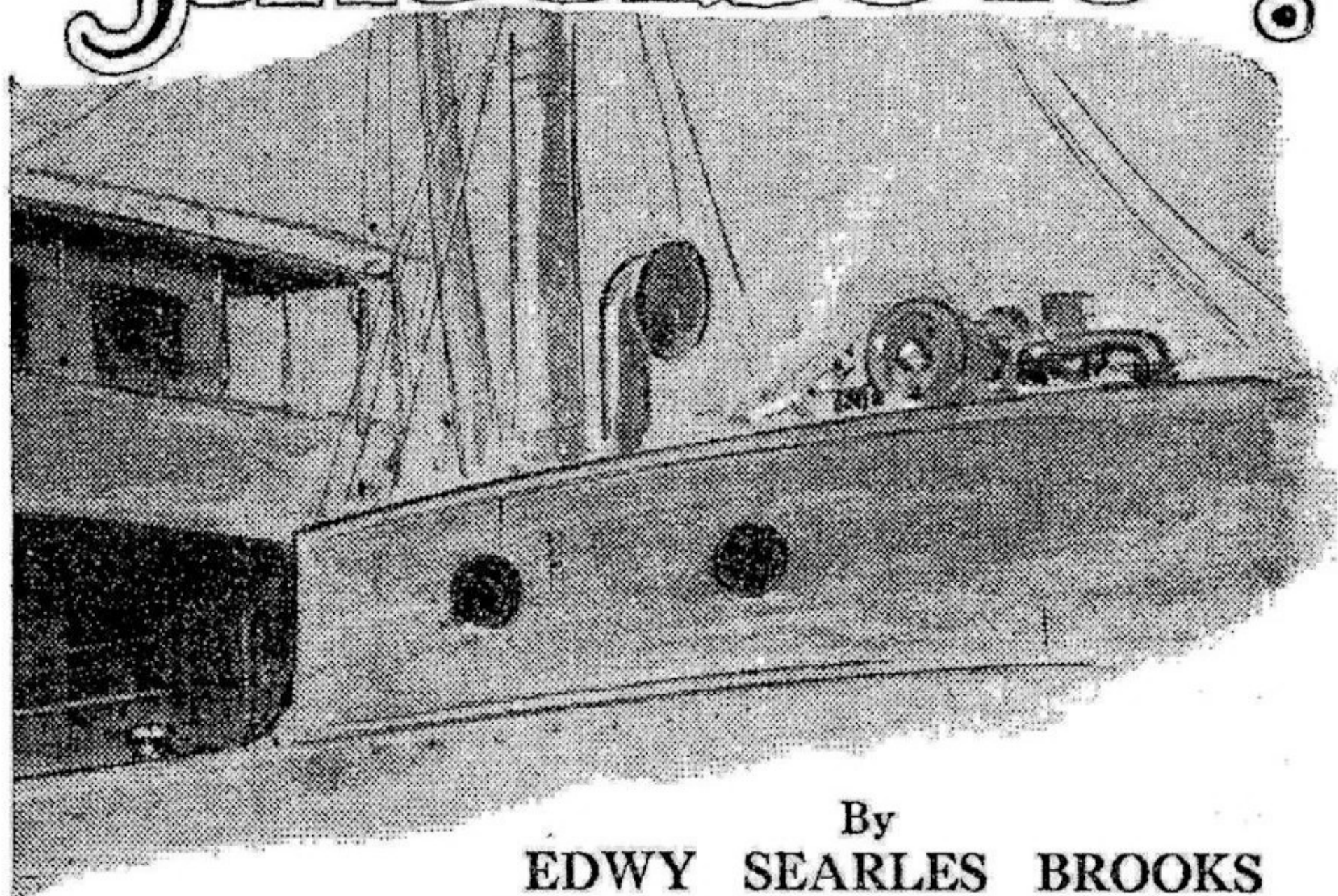
THE KIDNAPPED



Moored against the quayside was a typical ocean tramp, and Handforth & Co. gazed at it with intense interest.

—THEY MEET WITH TROUBLE IN THE LIVERPOOL DOCKS THIS WEEK!

SCHOOLBOYS !



By
EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Edward Oswald Handforth is never happier than when he's mixed up in a lot of excitement. This week he gets plenty of it; too much, in fact— for it's no fun to be kidnapped and held to ransom!

CHAPTER I.

Looking for Trouble!

“WHAT shall we do now?” asked Handforth.

The celebrated leader of Study D, in the Remove at St. Frank's, looked up and down Lord Street with an eager light in his eyes. Church and McClure, his faithful chums, were in close attendance, only they were looking rather anxious.

“Better get back to the School Train,” said Church.

“Rot!” frowned Handforth. “Plenty of time yet. The evening has hardly begun, and the weather's top-hole. My idea is to go down to the docks and have a good squint round—”

“Far better go for a tram ride,” said McClure hastily. “We don't want to go down to the docks, Handy.”

“Why not?” retorted Handforth. “We're in Liverpool, my sons, and I've heard that Liverpool is a ripping place. Down by the docks they've got Chinese opium dens and chop-suey houses, and all that sort of thing. We shall meet lascars and dagoes and all the rest of 'em. In a great port like this you don't know who you're rubbing shoulders with, in fact.”

The worst fears of Church and McClure were confirmed. Handforth was not satisfied with looking round the ordinary sights of Liverpool—such as the museum, the art gallery, the parks, and so forth. Nothing would please him but to penetrate to the more dingy dockside districts, where he could “rub shoulders” with the more or less questionable characters of that great city.

THE School Train—already famous throughout the land—had arrived on the outskirts of Liverpool in the early morning of that same day, having come along from Blackpool. The train would stay here for two or three days, and then move on to Manchester. Naturally, at the first opportunity, the juniors had ventured forth to have a good look at Liverpool.

Nipper and Vivian Travers and Reggie Pitt and Harry Gresham and a crowd of others were somewhere about, but Handforth & Co. had missed them. This was no fault of Church's or McClure's, who had done their utmost to keep with the main party. But Handforth had deliberately tried to give the others the slip. He wanted to go off on an exploring expedition of his own.

So now, having just emerged from the Edinburgh Café in Lord Street, Handforth was bent upon looking for trouble.

He and his chums stood outside a smart boot shop next to the café, and they were rather undecided. Trams were passing every now and again, to say nothing of other traffic. Lord Street is one of Liverpool's principal thoroughfares.

“There's a theatre booking-office just across the road,” remarked Church brightly. “How about popping in and seeing if we can get some seats for one of the shows?”

“Nothing doing,” replied Handforth coldly. “We're going down to the docks.”

“But there isn't time—”

“Come on!” said Handforth briskly.

It was, of course, impossible to let Handforth go by himself; he would inevitably get himself into a hopeless mess somewhere. Liverpool wasn't like a village. Handforth would lose himself sooner or later, and then there would be a lot of trouble. Church and McClure felt bound to stick closely to their leader.

So they walked down Lord Street and then into James Street, approaching the Mersey. Very soon they came out upon the wide, imposing space in front of the head offices of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board. Here, too, was the great Cunard Building, and also the Royal Liver Building. The ferries were busy on the great river, and the whole scene was interesting and attractive.

“What's the matter with going on a ferry trip?” asked Church hopefully. “We can have a look at Birkenhead if we do that, and it won't take very long.”

Handforth sniffed.

“A fat lot of thrills—going across the Mersey on a ferry!” he said tartly. “Not for me, thanks!”

“Well, let's get on the Overhead Railway,” said McClure, the Scottish member of the Co.

“The Overhead Railway?” repeated Handforth. “No, my son! I went into the Edinburgh Café to please you—you being a Scot—but this time I'm going to please myself.”

“But I thought you wanted to see the docks?” asked Mac.

“So I do.”

“Well, we can't do better than have a trip on the Overhead Railway,” retorted McClure. “Somebody told me that we can get a magnificent view of miles of docks from the Overhead Railway—because the train travels right along the front. We shall be able to see everything, and we can get on the train in two jiffies, because James Street Station is just near.”

“I think Pier Head Station is nearer,” said Church. “It's only just round on the other side of the Liver Building.”

“Are you sure the train takes us all along the docks?” asked Handforth suspiciously.

“Of course it does—and if you don't believe us, ask one of the railway officials,” replied Church. “We can go right up as far as Seaforth, and then come back again. I believe the return trip is only about a shilling first-class.”

Much to their relief Handforth agreed, and before long they were at Pier Head Station, and Handforth soon discovered that his chums had told him the truth. The Overhead Railway ran right along the front, and it would give them a splendid view of Liverpool's famous docks.

There was not long to wait, for there were trains every few minutes, and soon the chums of Study D were seated in one of the carriages, experiencing a real thrill.

“By George, this is pretty good!” said Handforth reluctantly. “This is what I call an overhead railway, too. It's better than the New York Elevated.”

“And this was the first electric overhead railway in the world,” said Church contentedly. “My hat! Look at all those docks! Look at the ships! Doesn't it give you a thrill when you realise that those ships have come from every corner of the earth?”

“Don't use such silly expressions,” said Handforth, frowning. “The earth hasn't any corners—it's round.”

“But it's a common enough term—”

“I don't care about that—it's wrong!” insisted Handforth. “What price getting off at one of these stations and having a real look at the docks? What's this one? Clarence Dock Station, isn't it?”

“But we've paid for the whole trip!” protested Mac. “We don't want to get off yet. Let's go the whole journey, and then return to our starting-point.”

"Oh, all right—but I'm not sure about returning to our starting-point," said Handforth. "I want to have a look at the Chinamen and the lascars and the dagoes."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Church. "You might walk for miles and not see one. Don't be so potty, Handy! And what about calling-over? We shall be late——"

"Who cares?" said Handforth. "We shall only get a hundred lines or something like that. If the school authorities had any sense they would allow us to be out late when we arrive in a new town for the first time."

"But you know that all the St. Frank's rules and regulations are in force on the School Train—just as if we were at the old school," said Mac. "That's the whole idea of the thing—and that's why it's such a success. Work is going on all the time. At least, there's as much work being done on the train as there would be at St. Frank's, although that's not a fat lot to boast about."

"Speak for yourself!" said Handforth, frowning.

His chums chuckled and continued to look out of the window.

"What about going through the Mersey Roadway Tunnel?" suggested Handforth after a while. "I've heard a lot about it, and it ought to be a good trip. Perhaps we can get a car——"

"Ass!" interrupted Church.

"Eh?"

"Fathead!"

"Look here——"

"The Mersey Tunnel isn't finished yet," said Church. "I don't suppose it'll be completed until about nineteen thirty-one, although they started it in nineteen twenty-five."

"They're taking their time," pointed out Handforth sternly.

"That's because it's a tremendous job," said Church. "It's nearly two and a half miles long all told, and they reckon it'll cost something like five million quid."

"Oh, well, we'll have a look at the tunnel next time we're in Liverpool," said Handforth complacently. "We're in no hurry."

They thoroughly enjoyed their ride on the Overhead Railway, for there was an ever-changing panorama of docks and ships to watch. In the evening light the Mersey looked very impressive—quite different from what it would look, perhaps, on a dull, dreary, winter's day.

THE worst happened on the way back.

Church and McClure were just beginning to think that Handforth had given up his wild ideas and that he was prepared to get back to the School Train after this little trip was over, but at one of the dockside stations he jumped up and was out of the train before his chums could know what he was about.

"Come on!" he said briskly.

So they jumped out, rather alarmed.

"What's the idea?" demanded McClure.

"Didn't I tell you that we were going to have a look at the docks at close hand?"

"But we shall only get ourselves lost——"

"We're not kids!" interrupted Handforth coldly. "We've got tongues, haven't we? If we get off the track we can soon find it again. Which is the way out?"

Church and McClure glanced at one

another, and they gave it up as a bad job. They resigned themselves to the fact that they would have to write an imposition of three or four hundred lines when they got back to the School Train.

They found themselves in a rather dingy street. They hadn't the faintest idea where they were—they only knew that Handforth had selected one of the grubbiest parts of Liverpool, right on the dockside. And, sure enough, it wasn't long before they saw a few lascars lounging about—and Chinamen, too.

"This is the place!" said Handforth enthusiastically. "Now we shall be able to see the real Liver-

pool."

"This isn't the real Liverpool, you fathead!" said Church. "If anything, it's the unreal. It may be risky walking about here, you know."

"My hat! You're not funky, are you?" asked Handforth, staring.

"Of course we're not, idiot!" retorted Church. "At the same time, there's no sense in asking for trouble like this. Anybody——"

"By George! Look at this!" interrupted Handforth, his eyes sparkling. "A giddy tramp steamer! Just off to Singapore, or some other place on the other side of the world, perhaps—the Straits Settlements, for example."

"Singapore is in the Straits Settlements," grinned McClure.

WRITE TO E. O. HANDFORTH!

The great Edward Oswald Handforth has expressed a desire to hear from readers of the Nelson Lee Library, and he has stated that he will answer any questions they care to ask him. Accordingly Mr. E. S. Brooks and the Editor have passed on some of their letters received from readers, and Handforth will reply to these next week in a new feature entitled:

"HANDFORTH REPLIES!"

Handforth has stated that readers may write to him on any subject "under the sun," and he will answer them to the best of his ability. The Editor will not be responsible for the veracity of these answers, but they will at any rate be amusing! Readers should write to Handforth now at the following address:

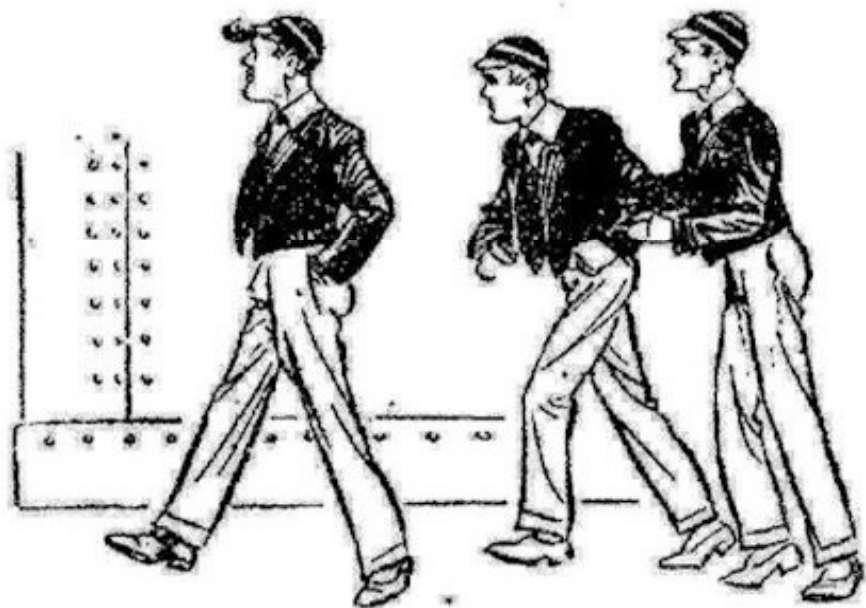
E. O. HANDFORTH,
c/o THE EDITOR,
THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY,
FLEETWAY HOUSE,
FARRINGDON STREET,
LONDON, E.C.4.

"Oh, well, what's the difference?" said Handforth. "Those big liners are all very well, but if you want to have a real thrill you want to see these ocean-going tramps."

The juniors were right against one of the docks, and there, moored to it, was a dirty-looking old steamer—a typical ocean tramp.

There was nothing doing at the moment; hardly anybody was about, and the gangway itself was deserted.

The three St. Frank's juniors walked up



and down, looking up at the decks, and Church and McClure were just as interested as their leader by now. The sight of that ship conjured up all sorts of pictures in their minds. A haze of smoke was rolling lazily from the single funnel, and there was a wisp of steam, too. Somewhere on board a clatter of crockery sounded, and there was a mixed odour of oil and tar and frying onions.

"I'll tell you what," said Handforth suddenly. "Let's go on board."

"Too risky," said Church, shaking his head. "We should only get chucked off."

"Well, it wouldn't hurt us, would it?" grinned Handforth. "Why not have a shot at it? Let's walk boldly up the gangway, get on board, and have a look round the decks. If we meet an officer, we'll tell him that we're St. Frank's fellows, and that we're interested. The chances are that he'll take us below, and show us the engine-room and all the rest of it. Isn't it worth it, my lads?"

"By Jingo, perhaps it is!" said McClure eagerly. "And, as you say, even if it comes to the worst they can only throw us off."

"Come on, then!" said Handforth briskly.

His chums had lost all their reluctance now. They were eager to look over that tramp-steamer. So, as bold as brass, they went up the gangway, climbed on board, and strolled across the deck as though they owned the whole ship.

CHAPTER 2.

Shanghaied!

"HALLO! What the thunder are you boys doing on board this craft?"

Handforth & Co. spun round as a harsh voice sounded in their ears. They had got to the other side of the deck, and they were standing against the rail,

looking across the water. Now they beheld a big, aggressive-looking man in a blue reefer jacket, and with a peaked cap cocked over on one side of his head. He was eyeing the three boys suspiciously.

"Oh, hallo!" said Handforth brightly.

"Just having a look round."

"Oh! Having a look round, eh?"

"Yes."

"And who gave you permission to just have a look round?"

"Well, nobody," replied Handforth. "You see, we walked up the gangway and—"

"That's enough!" snapped the man. "I'm the chief officer of this ship, and I shall have to keep you here until the captain returns. Schoolboys, aren't you?"

"We're St. Frank's chaps," said Church anxiously. "From the School Train, you know."

The officer's eyes opened wider.

"Oh, the School Train?" he repeated. "I was reading about it this morning, in one of the papers. So you're from the St. Frank's School Train, are you? Very interesting! And do your masters allow you to wander about like this, trespassing on private property?"

"Oh, I say, cheese it!" protested Handforth. "We're not doing any harm. We only wanted to have a look round the ship. We thought you might be willing to take us below and show us the engine-room."

"I'll take you below all right," said the officer, "but as sure as my name is Paxton I won't take you to the engine-room. Of all the infernal nerve!"

"No need to get so huffy about it," said Handforth. "What harm have we done? This is a British steamer, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then why not be a sport and show us round?" asked Handforth. "It won't do you any harm, and—"

"That's enough!" interrupted Mr. Paxton curtly. "You'd better come with me!"

Handforth & Co. looked at one another in alarm. If they were to be kept on board until the captain returned the results might be serious. Perhaps the captain wouldn't come back until late in the evening, and that would mean a lot of trouble on the School Train when the three truants finally turned up.

"Come on!" yelled Handforth suddenly.

It was his idea to make a bolt for the gangway and to escape, but the officer apparently had anticipated some such move as this. As Handforth started running, he leapt forward and grabbed the junior by the arm.

"No you don't!" said Mr. Paxton harshly.

Church and McClure, who were on the point of running, checked. They couldn't leave Handforth like this. And then, before anything else could be done, a couple of men appeared—rough-looking customers, who dashed up in response to a shout from the officer.

"Hold these kids!" said Mr. Paxton curtly.

And after that there was no possibility of escape.

"Look here!" panted Handforth, glaring. "What's the idea of making such a fuss over a trifle? There was no harm in us coming on board, was there?"

"No harm!" echoed Mr. Paxton, in a tone that implied that the juniors had committed a crime. "We'll see about that, young 'un—when the captain comes aboard!"

"But we were only having a look round!"

"I dare say you've been in the habit of dropping into people's orchards, and running wild over people's gardens in general," interrupted the officer. "That sort of thing may be all right ashore. It's not serious trespassing, and no harm is done. But it's different aboard a ship."

"How is it different?" asked Handforth in amazement.

"I can't waste my time by telling you how," retorted Mr. Paxton. "You came on this ship without a permit, and it's for the skipper himself to deal with you. Come on, men! Bring them below."

"Oh, my only hat!" ejaculated Handforth.

Church and McClure said nothing. They couldn't blame Handforth for this predicament, for they themselves had been eager enough to steal aboard this ship. They were all in the same boat—literally.

THEY found themselves hustled down a companionway, where there was a mixed odour of oil and tobacco smoke and cooking. They were hurried into a dark, iron passage, and then thrust into a narrow doorway.

The place proved to be a small cabin, where one tiny electric light was burning. There was no porthole—at least no open porthole. The door clanged to, and a key turned in the lock.

"Three likely youngsters," the officer was saying. "I dare say the skipper will be glad to hear about them—may come in useful—never know."

The footsteps died away, and the three juniors looked at one another with rather scared expressions.

"What did he mean?" asked Church in a whisper.

"Goodness only knows," replied Handforth. "Off his rocker, I think! I've never heard of such rot! Locking us up like this, just because we go on deck to have a look round! It's outrageous! When I get ashore again I shall complain to the dock officials."

"Can't do that," said McClure. "We haven't a leg to stand on. We came aboard without a permit, and we must suffer the consequences. My only sainted aunt! There'll be an unholy row over this, Handy! I expect we shall be gated for the rest of the tour!"

"Well, Handy *would* come down to the docks," said Church tartly.

"Yes, but, hang it, how was I to anticipate anything like this?" protested Handforth. "I could understand it if this was a foreign steamer, with some beastly dagoes in charge.

But it's a British boat—with British officers!"

"Well, there are plenty of British rotters," said Church. "Everybody can't be saints, and we've happened to strike the wrong sort."

They looked round the little cabin, and found no encouragement. There was a porthole of sorts, but it was closed on the outside—and clamped. There was no possibility of escape by that means. Even if the port had been open, it was so small that the boys could not possibly have squeezed through.

The door was strong, and resisted all Handforth's efforts to open it.

"Oh, well, we shall have to wait," he said at length. "But it'll be pretty rotten for us if the captain doesn't turn up until about midnight."

"I wonder what kind of a ship it is?" asked Church after a bit. "It looks a dirty old tub, anyhow, and perhaps we were a bit rash to come on board."

"Rash!" said Church bitterly. "There's not much question of that!"

"By George!" ejaculated Handforth suddenly. "I'll bet I've got it, you chaps! She's a rum-runner!"

"What!"

"She's got a cargo of evil spirits on board—I mean, illicit spirits," said Handforth, his eyes gleaming.

"Don't be an ass!" said Church. "Spirits aren't illicit in England."

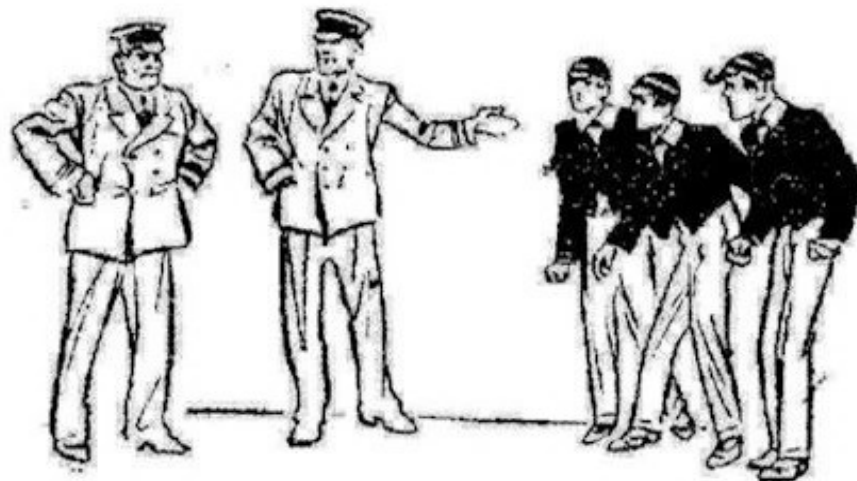
"But they are in America," replied Handforth. "I'll bet this ship has a full cargo of whisky and rum and stuff, and she's going to America to sell the stuff to the rum-runners! That's why that beastly officer was so startled when he spotted us on board."

"Why should we startle him?"

"I dare say he took us for spies," said Handforth.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Church. "What an imagination you've got, Handy! How in the name of all that's marvellous could anybody mistake us for spies?"

"Well, you know what spies are," said



Handforth. "They get up to all sorts of dodges, and adopt all sorts of disguises."

"But it's not necessary for anybody to spy on a ship on this side of the water!" objected Church. "This ship couldn't leave the Mersey without her papers, you ass. Liverpool is a properly conducted port. Smugglers can't come in and out on the quiet. Don't be so dotty!"

Handforth was rather baffled.

"Oh, well, I'll bet there's something squiffy about her," he said grimly. "You can't fool me! This is no ordinary tramp-steamer! Either she's got a cargo of illicit spirits on board, or else she's a gun-runner. Probably taking rifles and ammunition to one of the South American republics, so that they can hold another revolution."

It was impossible to make Handforth regard any such incident as this in a normal, sensible light. He always jumped to some melodramatic conclusion. Church and McClure decided to say nothing, for if they disagreed with him it only made him worse.

"Shush!" whispered Church, holding up a hand. "Somebody's coming!"

They all remained motionless.

"Yes, in here, captain," came the first officer's voice. "Thought I'd better make sure of 'em."

"You did well, Mr. Paxton," said another voice—a deep, gruff voice. "You say that nobody saw them come on board!"

"Nobody that I know of, sir."

"That's good!" said the captain. "From that fool School Train, eh? Well, they won't be missed until late to-night—and by then it will be too late."

"Crumbs!" whispered Mac. "What does he mean?"

A key rattled in the lock, and the door opened.

MR. PAXTON came in first.

"It's all right, sir—they're still here," he said shortly.

The other man entered the dingy little cabin. He was a short, stocky, square-shouldered man, with a grizzled, weather-beaten face, and his eyes were almost hidden by the wrinkled folds of skin around them, and by the heavy, bushy eyebrows over them.

"Huh!" he grunted, as he looked at the three juniors. "Three likely youngsters, if ever I saw any!"

"Are you the captain of this ship, sir?" asked Handforth breathlessly.

"I am!" said the short man. "Captain Sharke—that's me."

"Well, I suppose you're going to let us go, aren't you?" demanded Handforth. "We only came on board your ship to have a look round, and—"

"I know all about it, young man—I know all about it!" interrupted Captain Sharke harshly. "Mr. Paxton has told me how he found you skulking round the starbo'rd deck. I'm taking no chances. See? You're staying on board."

"But we can't!" gasped Handforth. "We've got to go back to the School Train!"

Captain Sharke laughed, and glanced at his first officer.

"Well I never!" he said heavily. "They've got to go back to the School Train, Mr. Paxton!"

"Too bad!" said Mr. Paxton.

"I'll let you out of this cabin in about a couple of hours," said the skipper. "And if you want to get back to the School Train

—well, you can walk. It might be a bit difficult, because we shall be some distance from the shore."

"What!" gurgled Handforth & Co. in one voice.

"We're warping out of dock within the hour," continued the captain, with a malicious note in his voice. "I'm afraid you kids have got yourselves into a mess."

"But—but you can't keep us on board like this!" yelled Handforth. "We've got to go ashore I tell you!"

The skipper's face changed; he scowled.

"I am the master of this ship, and if I decide to keep you aboard—well, aboard you'll stay!" he snapped. "That's enough! You're right, Mr. Paxton; they're the very type we need."

"Need!" breathed Mac. "You—you don't mean that you're going to keep us on this ship?"

"That's just exactly what I do mean!" nodded the captain.

"I knew it!" panted Handforth. "Didn't I tell you chaps so? I'll bet this ship is full of contraband! Guns, or whisky, or something!"

Captain Sharke and Mr. Paxton exchanged startled glances.

"That settles it!" rasped the skipper. "Gosh, you were smart, Mr. Paxton! It wouldn't do to let these kids go!"

CHAPTER 3.

Bound for—Where?

TO say that Handforth & Co. were startled would be putting it very mildly. The three Removites were utterly dumbfounded. At the very worst, they had expected to be kept in this cabin for an hour or so, taken before the skipper, lectured for their recklessness, and then sent off. Never had they dreamed that they would be kept on board until after the ship sailed!

"Yes, that settles it!" said Captain Sharke grimly. "I dare say we can make use of you boys on the voyage. We don't need three cabin boys, but perhaps you'll be able to take it in turns. There's other work, too."

"Where are you sailing for?" asked Handforth desperately.

"China!"

"Wha-a-at!" gurgled Edward Oswald.

"China, darn you!" said the captain. "And you won't see daylight until we get there, let me tell you! I'm taking no risks with you kids. On second thoughts, I'll keep you below all the time. And when we get to China—well, we can easily sell you to some of the pirates up the Yang-tse River!"

"But—but—"

"That's enough!" said the skipper. "And if you start yelling or kicking up any kind of a row, I'll come down here with a rope's end!"

He turned on his heel, strode out, and he was followed by Mr. Paxton. The door



“Three likely youngsters,” said the officer to somebody, as he went out of the door. “I daresay the skipper will be glad to hear about them—may come in useful—never know.” Handforth & Co. looked at one another in horror. What did the man mean?

slammed, and Handforth grasped at the little table for support. His knees felt weak and trembly.

“Oh, corks!” he murmured. “China! we’re—we’re shanghaied, you chaps! These rotters are going to sell us to pirates!”

Church looked bewildered.

“It’s—it’s too dotty!” he said breathlessly. “I’ve never heard of such an awful thing in all my life! We’ve done nothing to deserve it!”

“No, but Handy let the cat out of the bag!” said McClure.

“Eh?” said Handforth. “What do you mean?”

“So you did!” said Mac. “You let the skipper know that we suspected him of gun-running. And I believe you’ve hit the mark, too, Handy. Didn’t you notice how the skipper and the first officer exchanged glances?”

“By George! So they did!” said Handforth. “That’s why they won’t let us go ashore! They’re afraid of what we’ll say!”

“A pity you couldn’t keep your mouth closed!” groaned Church. “It was only a chance shot, too. We thought you were off your rocker.”

“Well, I wasn’t,” said Handforth, with a touch of gloomy triumph in his voice. “I was right all the time! And now we’re shanghaied! We’re booked for a long

voyage—and we’re going to be sold to slave traders on the Yang-thingummy River. Oh, my only sainted aunt!”

It seemed incredible—impossible—fantastic. Here, in Liverpool, on the Merseyside—to meet with an adventure like this! In all innocence, the three juniors had come on board this old tramp steamer, just to have a look round. Now they were prisoners below, with the knowledge that the ship was to leave her moorings within the hour.

And there seemed to be no ray of hope. It was impossible for them to escape. They would simply vanish—without leaving a trace. Nobody had seen them come on board, and although Liverpool and Birkenhead and all the surrounding districts would be searched high and low, no trace of them would be discovered. Even when they reached the end of their voyage, they would not be able to communicate with their people. They would just disappear for good. They hardly liked to contemplate their ultimate fate if they once got into the hands of the Chinese slave traders.

IN the skipper’s cabin two men were drinking. They were also grinning, to say nothing of laughing loudly.

“Captain Sharke—that was good!” said Mr. Paxton, holding his sides.

"Honest, sir, I didn't think you had it in you! You put it over wonderfully."

"Nonsense!" chuckled the skipper.

"But you did, sir," said the first officer. "I'll guarantee that those schoolboys are scared half out of their wits."

"Well, they deserve to be, between you and me," said the captain. "It was like their nerve to come on board without any permit, and to wander all over our decks. It won't do 'em any harm to have a fright for an hour or so."

"Well, you always were one for a good joke, Captain Marsh," said the first officer, with a chuckle. "What are you going to do with the kids, anyhow?"

"Nothing, of course—except to put them ashore when we get across to Birkenhead, in our new dock," replied the captain lightly. "They'll have had a lesson by then, and we shall have had our laugh. We'll have all hands chuckling over this for days!"

The skipper finished up his drink, and put his cap on his head.

"Well, I've got to go ashore to the office," he said briskly. "Those youngsters belong to the St. Frank's School Train, don't they? Didn't I read in the paper that the train is connected by telephone wherever it stops?"

"Yes, I think you did, sir."

"Good!" grinned the skipper. "I'll ring up the School Train and have a word with one of the masters—just to let 'em know that everything's all right with those youngsters. I dare say they'll appreciate the joke as much as we do."

And ten minutes later Captain Marsh was having a friendly word with Mr. Nelson Lee, the School Train's Head, over the 'phone.

"They're all right, of course," said the skipper. "Locked below in one of the cabins—and they think they're going to China to be sold to slave traders on the Yang-tse River."

"Surely they didn't believe that yarn?" came Nelson Lee's voice, over the wire.

"I think they did," chuckled the skipper. "Anyhow, with your permission, sir, I'll take 'em across to Birkenhead, and then see them safely ashore and put them on a train. It'll do 'em good!"

"They certainly deserve some punishment for their recklessness," agreed Nelson Lee. "But don't you think they've had enough scare already? Wouldn't it be better to put them ashore straight away? I would prefer you to do that. I don't want them to be too late."

"Oh, come!" protested the skipper. "We're getting ready to enjoy this joke. I'm going to have some more fun after we've got the engines going. You leave it to me, Mr. Lee. I'll see that the boys come to no harm."

And he rang off before Nelson Lee could make any further protest.

"Send 'em back now, indeed!" he murmured, with a chuckle. "Not me! Not before I've had another laugh!"

AND Handforth & Co., locked in the cabin, hadn't the faintest idea that the whole thing was a joke. True, both Church and McClure had had a breath of suspicion at first; the thing had seemed too startling. Then gradually they had changed their minds. Perhaps it was Handforth's influence. At all events, they felt that they were in a desperate predicament, and that there was very little hope of getting out of it.

"I've never seen a more ugly couple of villains in all my life," said Handforth, as he paced up and down the little cabin. "Desperate characters, my lads—that's what they are! Taking guns to China, and just because I was cute enough to get hold of their wheeze, they're going to shanghai us."

"Cute enough be blowed!" grunted Church. "It was only guesswork on your part."

"Guesswork or not, I hit the nail on the head," said Handforth, little realising that "Captain Sharke" and Mr. Paxton had deliberately exchanged that startled glance in order to fool him. "If only we could escape from this cabin now, before the ship sails, everything would be all right."

"It's no good talking like that—we can't escape," said McClure. "How is it possible?"

"Isn't there something that we can smash the door with?"

"A fat lot of good smashing the door," said Mac. "I dare say there's somebody on guard, and as soon as we start making a row they'll be on us. No, Handy; we're prisoners, and all we can do is to take our gruel quietly."

"I don't believe in taking any gruel quietly—I don't like gruel, anyhow!" retorted Handforth. "We need to get our wits to work here, my son. By George! We're not going to be diddled like this! We're still in Liverpool, still at the dockside, and once we're out of this cabin we can—"

"What's that?" broke in McClure suddenly.

Thud-thud-thud-thud!

It was a slow, rhythmic beat, which seemed to penetrate the entire ship. The three juniors exchanged startled, hopeless glances.

"The engines!" muttered Church. "The engines are going! It's too late, Handy—we're off!"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Handforth. "I believe you're right!"

There was no question that Church was right. The old tramp-steamer's engines were revolving, and this proved that she was leaving her moorings. She was setting off down the Mersey, out into the open sea! Captain Sharke had kept his word!

"We must do something!" said Handforth desperately. "If the worst comes to the worst, we can jump overboard while we're still in the river, and swim ashore!"

"You're mad!" gasped Church. "We can't do anything like that. This river is full of currents—full of dangers. We should

only get drowned, and that would be worse than going to China!"

"Let's have a look at that port-hole," said Handforth, breathing hard. "If only we can get that cover off, we might be able to yell for help. I dare say there are some police boats going up and down the river."

But when they attempted to wrestle with the port cover they were baffled. It was utterly impossible to shift it, since it was clamped securely on the outside.

"Somebody coming!" hissed Church, turning towards the door.

The key sounded in the lock, the door swung open, and Mr. Paxton appeared, with two rough-looking men behind him.

"Come on—out of it!" said Mr. Paxton, making his voice as gruff and as rough as possible.

"Are you going to let us go ashore, then?" asked Handforth, with a gulp.

"Don't be a young idiot!" retorted Mr. Paxton. "We're out in the river now, bound for the open sea. The skipper has changed his mind. You might as well come on deck. You can't get ashore unless you swim for it—and I don't think you'll be rash enough to try anything of that sort in this river."

Handforth & Co. were hustled out, taken along the iron passage, and then up the stairs. They were rather surprised when they got on deck to find that it was still full daylight. The evening was not so very old, after all.

Captain Sharke stood on deck, awaiting them.

"Now, young 'uns, I'm treating you generously," he said. "But remember this. If you make any signals to any other ship, or to any passing boat, I'll take you below to the deepest store-room on board this ship. You can move about on this deck, but don't try to go anywhere else. Understand?"

"Why can't you put us ashore?" asked Church. "It's not fair to take us to sea like this! We've done nothing!"

The skipper waved his hand.

"Do you promise me that you won't signal, and that you won't make any effort to leave this part of the deck?" he demanded.

"No, I'm blowed if I do!" replied Handforth fiercely. "I don't promise anything—and these chaps won't promise, either! If we can escape we shall escape, and rats to you!"

Captain Sharke scowled, although he secretly approved of Handforth's spirit.

"Oh, so that's your tone, is it?" he snarled, making his voice terribly ferocious. "Back with them, Mr. Paxton! Take them below! And don't put them in a cabin this time, but in a store-room, without any chairs, without tables, and without light! I'll break them!"

CHAPTER 4.

Comedy!

THE School Train, dignified and imposing, stood on its siding on the outskirts of Liverpool. The sumptuous blue Pullman coaches looked splendid in the evening sunshine, and groups of fellows were standing about near by, in the shade, having a final airing before calling-over.

"No sign of that ass, Handforth, yet," Nipper was saying. "I wonder where the dickens he could have got to?"

"What's the good of wondering, dear old fellow?" asked Vivian Travers, of Study H.



"Handy is an unknown quantity; one can never tell what he is going to do next."

"Well, Church and McClure are with him, so he can't get up to much mischief," remarked Jimmy Potts. "Still, it looks as though they're going to be late for calling-over this evening."

"Yes, we're a mile or two out of Liverpool, and Handy is always liable to forget the time," said Reggie Pitt. "I heard him saying something about exploring the docks. Reckless youth! It'll be a wonder if he hasn't lost himself."

Considering the close proximity of Liverpool, the School Train's "parking place" was a secluded one. There were plenty of houses in the district, and factories, too, but this siding was a kind of backwater. There was a quiet lane alongside, and a special gate had been made so that the schoolboys could go direct from the train to the road without crossing any of the tracks. This kind of arrangement was generally made, since it would have been unwise to allow the boys to wander at random over the permanent way. There were very strict orders in this respect.

"You fellows ready?" asked Morrow, of the Sixth, as he hustled along. "Calling-over in a minute."

"Adsum," grinned Reggie Pitt.

"And if you're still looking for Handforth, you'd better give it up," said Morrow. "He and Church and McClure will be late."

"That'll be nothing new," said Nipper. "Handy is generally getting his chums into trouble."

"They've apparently found some—down by the docks," said Morrow dryly. "The cap-

tain of a ship 'phoned up not long ago, and had a word with Mr. Lee."

"Oh!" said Nipper. "What did he 'phone up for?"

"I don't know exactly, but it seems that Handforth and those other fellows went on board this ship without permission," said Morrow. "There's some sort of joke on. They've been collared by the captain and the officers, and they're going to be sent back later."

Morrow moved off, and Regie Pitt shook his head.

"It seems to me that it's a paying game to be reckless and fatheaded," he remarked. "Look at Handy, for example. He's always blundering into something or other, and he generally comes out on top."

NOT that Handforth & Co. were feeling very lucky at that particular moment.

They hadn't the faintest suspicion that the whole affair was a joke, and when they were taken below for the second time and were thrust into a dark, evil-smelling store-room, they felt that the situation was pretty rocky.

Mr. Paxton and the skipper had played their parts well, for they were really enjoying the little joke tremendously, and as the ship was certainly moving under her own steam, there was nothing to tell the three juniors that she was merely moving across the Mersey from one dock to another.

"Well, we're off," said Handforth gloomily. "Off to China!"

"Hang it, it seems too—too awful!" muttered Church in the darkness. "They can't take us all the way to China like this! The ship is bound to call at other ports on the way. Perhaps we shall be able to escape——"

"Escape!" echoed Handforth bitterly. "What chance shall we have of escape?"

"Hallo!" came McClure's voice. "I thought you were the optimist?"

"So I am, as a rule," grunted Handforth. "But this affair has hit me pretty hard. How can we hope to beat these desperate crooks? They'll only let us out on deck again when we're in mid-ocean. As soon as we get near a port they'll pack us below and lock us up again."

"And all because we chanced on the discovery that they're gun-runners, or something," said Church. "That's why they won't let us go, Handy. They're afraid of us—afraid of what we might tell the police or the port authorities. They're not going to allow all their plans to be smashed by three schoolboys."

"And it's all my fault!" said Handforth huskily. "That's why I'm so cut up about it, you chaps. I wouldn't mind for myself, but I dragged you into it, too."

"Cheese it!" said Church uncomfortably. "We didn't need to be dragged. Mac and I were just as keen as you were to have a look round this ship. How could we know that

the captain and the officers were such desperate criminals?"

"Well, it's no time to sit down and groan," said the Scottish junior. "Let's see what this prison is like. Anybody got any matches?"

"I've got some," came Handforth's voice.

He struck one, but the result of looking round was not encouraging. The store-room was small and empty except for the three boys. The walls were of metal, there was no porthole, and the door was solid and immovable. The only ventilation came in through some little slits in the metal-work, high up on one of the walls.

"What's the good?" asked Handforth helplessly. "Might as well try to get out of a Bank of England strong-room!"

And, indeed, it was quite hopeless for the three juniors to make any attempt to escape. There was no escape.

And so they languished there in that dingy prison for nearly two hours. This was a really unforeseen delay. Captain Marsh had expected to keep the schoolboys below for perhaps half an hour or forty-five minutes. But there had been a little trouble in getting into the dock on the Birkenhead side of the river—an unexpected check—and the skipper and the officers had been so busy that they had completely forgotten their young prisoners.

Two hours had elapsed before the boys were remembered, and by this time the vessel was comfortably berthed in her new quarters, and everything was shipshape.

When the engines had stopped Handforth & Co. had been rather excited. Edward Oswald, of course, immediately jumped to a sensational conclusion.

"We're saved, my sons!" he said breathlessly.

"Saved?" repeated his chums.

"Yes, rather! The engines have stopped!"

"And how is that going to save us?"

"The port authorities must have twigged the game," replied Handforth, with an amazing return of optimism. "The giddy ship has been seized by the police, and before long we shall be rescued. You wait!"

Church and McClure did not feel inclined to reply; there was no justification for this hopeful spirit.

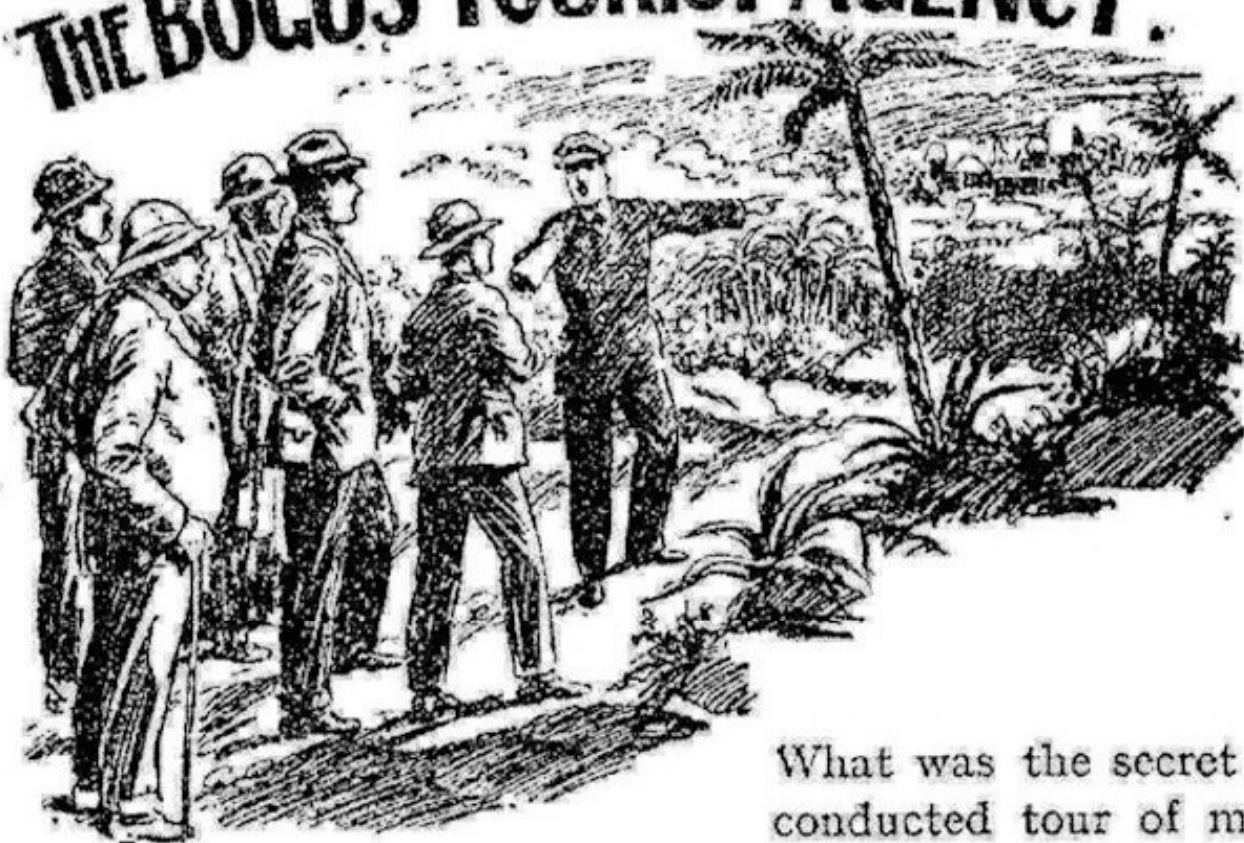
"They'll be here soon," continued Handforth after a while. "Why don't you chaps say something?"

"There's nothing to say," replied Church bluntly. "Don't be an ass, Handy! I expect the ship has stopped because of the tide, or perhaps she's dropping her pilot before going out into the open sea. There might be one of twenty reasons, but I'll bet everything I've got that you've hit on the wrong one!"

Even Handforth's cheerfulness began to desert him after the lapse of another twenty minutes. Nothing had happened, and nothing seemed likely to happen.

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FOOTSTEPS sounded out in the corridor, the door was flung open, and a lantern shone into the eyes of the three school-boy prisoners.

"Come on! Out you come!" rapped Mr. Paxton's voice.

They could not see the first officer, because their eyes were dazzled by the light. But after a few moments they got over this, and they stumbled out of the store-room.

"What's the game now?" demanded Handforth aggressively.

"You'll see—when you get on deck!" said Mr. Paxton. "Now then, no lagging! You'd better understand, young men, that you'll have to obey orders on this ship! Any insubordination and you'll get a taste of a rope's end!"

He swished something suggestively, and Handforth & Co. saw that it was a length of rope with two or three knots tied at the end. Things were beginning to look ugly.

Mr. Paxton hustled the boys before him, and at last they emerged upon deck—to find,

much to their surprise, that some grimy-looking warehouses were positively towering in close proximity to the ship. The vessel was, in fact, in dock again. Complete darkness had not fallen even yet, and the lingering twilight of the summer's evening had a mellowing effect upon the whole scene.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Handforth, as he stared round. "I thought we were out at sea by this time!"

"We're in dock!" said Church, startled.

They found themselves looking at some members of the crew—a rather mixed lot, wearing nondescript clothing, and all of whom were grinning expansively. Captain Sharke strode forward, his once stern expression now replaced by an infectious smile. His eyes were twinkling mischievously.

"Well, boys," he exclaimed, clapping Handforth on the back, "no need to look so scared! We've had our little joke, and now you can go!"

Handforth glared.

"Trying to be funny, eh?" he said, breath-

ing hard. "You rotter! I knew you were a crook as soon as I set eyes on you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Paxton roared with laughter at this, which struck him as being an excellent sally. Even Captain Marsh himself broke into a loud guffaw.

"That's news, Mr. Paxton!" he chuckled. "So I look like a crook, do I?"

"Well, these boys ought to know, sir," said Mr. Paxton dryly.

"You're both crooks!" roared Handforth. "This Paxton chap looks a bigger crook than you do!"

The skipper fairly howled with laughter, and Mr. Paxton's expression changed a bit.

"That's one for you, old man!" gasped the skipper, when he found himself capable of talking. "Gosh! We must look a pair of hard-bitten toughs, eh?"

"You men can wipe those grins off your faces," said Mr. Paxton tartly, as he turned upon the members of the crew. "You don't think this is funny, do you?"

"You bet it's funny, sir!" said one of the men, with a yell of mirth.

Handforth & Co. looked round, dimly astonished. They could not understand this situation. It was so unexpected.

"Come, come, boys!" chuckled the captain. "It was only our little joke, you know. You're not being taken to China, and I don't think we'll sell you to the pirates. Mr. Walters will be here presently, and I'll get him to take you ashore. He will see you safely over the river, and then home to your School Train. We were only having a bit of fun at your expense."

Church and McClure flushed with excitement and hope, but Handforth was still suspicious.

"What's the game?" he demanded. "You can't bluff me like this——"

"My dear kid, how many more times must I tell you that you're free?" asked the captain. "There's the gangway; you can go as soon as you like. We've only moved from Liverpool to Birkenhead—not a particularly long voyage, although we ought to have been here an hour ago. Still I've telephoned to your schoolmaster, and he's enjoying the joke as much as anybody."

"Our schoolmaster?" ejaculated Handforth blankly.

"Mr. Lee, I think his name is," nodded the skipper.

"Then—then it's true!" yelled Church, with untold relief. "Don't you see, Handy, it's all been a spoof? We're not prisoners at all! These men have been playing a joke on us!"

"Of course we have," chuckled Mr. Paxton. "Great Scott! You don't think that these sort of things happen in real life, do you? You don't think that English schoolboys are shanghaied in Liverpool and taken to China to be sold to pirates?"

And they all yelled with laughter again.

"My only sainted aunt!" said Handforth,

with a sheepish look overspreading his face. "Then—then it's true! We've been spoofed, you chaps!"

"Spoofed, diddled, and dished!" grinned McClure. "But who cares? What fatheads we were to believe that yarn! Oh, my hat! What a relief!"

In fact, Handforth & Co. were so overwhelmed by their sudden sensation of joy that they forgave their tormentors on the spot.

When everything had seemed so black, everything was really rosy.

But was it?

CHAPTER 5.

Drama!

HANDFORTH experienced a revulsion of feeling after the first few moments—after the relief had passed.

"You bounders!" he said indignantly, as he glared down from Mr. Paxton to Captain Marsh. "You spoofed us properly! And it wasn't playing the game!"

"How do you make that out?" asked the captain good-humouredly.

"Well, if you were schoolboys it would have been all right," replied Handforth. "If we'd believed the yarn then, it would have been our own fault. But how the dickens could we suspect anything in this case? How could we be prepared? And when anybody's got a name like Captain Sharke——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Officers and men shouted with laughter again.

"That was another part of the spoof, my lad," said Mr. Paxton. "There's no such person as 'Captain Sharke.' This is Captain Marsh, and, when I found you wandering across our deck, I decided, on the instant, to play a little game with you. The captain is always fond of a joke, and I knew that he would join in."

Church grinned.

"Be a sport, Handy," he said. "We've been beautifully dished, and it's up to us to take it in the right spirit. Thank goodness we can get back to the School Train—and thank goodness, too, that Mr. Lee knows all about it. We shan't get into much trouble now."

"You won't get into any trouble at all," said Captain Marsh kindly. "I've made it all right for you with your schoolmaster. He understands, and, although you'll get home a bit later than I expected, it won't really matter. Mr. Walters will explain——"

"I don't think Mr. Walters is coming aboard, sir, until later," said one of the men. "He told me he wouldn't be back until nearly midnight."

"H'm! That's a nuisance," said the captain, frowning. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind, Mr. Paxton——"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I've got an appointment with some friends in half an hour," said the first officer.

"And I've got to go across and see my owners," said the captain, scratching his head. "I don't quite know what we can do. Infernal nuisance, Walters dodging off—"

"What's the idea, anyhow?" broke in Handforth. "You're not suggesting that somebody should take us back to the School Train, are you?"

"Well, I promised your schoolmaster—"

"We're not infants!" said Handforth coldly. "My only hat! Don't you think we're capable of finding our own way about?"

"That's just the trouble," replied the skipper dryly. "I'm afraid that you might find your way into another adventure. You schoolboys are so confoundedly high-spirited."

Handforth looked at his chums.

"Do we need somebody to take us ashore?" he asked with some wrath. "Do we need a guide?"

"Of course we don't!" said Church and McClure in one voice.

"I should think not!" went on Handforth. "We can soon find our way back, sir—and we don't need a nurse, either!"

The captain chuckled.

"That's the spirit, young man," he said. "Well, you'll have no difficulty in finding the ferry. It's not far away, and once you get across to Liverpool I dare say you'll know your way about well enough."

"I'm going ashore, sir," said one of the men. "I'll show them the ferry, if you like."

"Good!" replied Captain Marsh. "That's settled, then, boys. This man will take you to the ferry, and after that I think I can trust you to see after yourselves, eh? Well, there's no ill-feeling, is there? Just a joke, you know—and we've enjoyed it thoroughly. If you'd care to come along to-morrow and have a look over the ship, I shall be only too pleased to show you round myself," he added, extending a hand. "Let's part friends, my lads."

"Rather, sir," said Handforth heartily, as he took the hand. "We don't bear any ill-feeling."

And Church and McClure shook hands with the skipper and Mr. Paxton just as heartily.

"ONE moment, Marley," murmured Captain Marsh.

The three boys were moving towards the gangway with Mr. Paxton, and the captain drew the man aside who had offered to show Handforth & Co. to the ferry.

"Yes, sir?" he said.

"Here's ten shillings for you, Marley," said the captain. "Don't let those boys know, but you go across on the ferry, too, and keep your eyes on the youngsters. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"See that they get back to the School Train all right—and, in fact, you go there, too, only don't let them know it," continued the captain. "Have a word with Mr. Nelson Lee, and explain the whole thing. I wouldn't like those boys to get into any trouble."

"All right, sir," said Marley with a grin.

"Can I trust you to do this?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good enough," said the captain.



He joined Handforth & Co., and he was now feeling quite comfortable. He knew that the juniors would not only get back to the School Train in safety, but that Marley would give an explanation to Nelson Lee. The captain felt that he had done everything that was required of him.

Five minutes later, Handforth & Co. departed, after shaking hands again. They found that they were in a rather dingy, dock-side district, and the dinginess looked even more pronounced in the fading light of the summer's evening. The hour was getting quite late now.

"I feel an awful ass, you know," said Handforth, as they walked along. "My giddy aunt! Fancy us being spoofed by that dotty yarn! Of course, I didn't really believe it—"

"Rats!" grinned Church. "You were more ready to believe it than we were. What's the good of denying it? Anyhow, we're safe now, and everything is all serene. I never thought these seamen chaps were so jolly ready for a joke."

"The cap'n is a regular terror for practical jokes," remarked Marley, as he paced along with the juniors. "I could tell you a few yarns about the cap'n, I could! Once, out in 'Frisco—"

"Look here, old man," interrupted Handforth, coming to a halt. "We don't really need you, you know. No offence, or anything like that, but it's all rot. We can find the ferry."

"I dare say you can, young gent—but this is a rather tricky district, and you might get yourselves lost," said Marley. "I promised the cap'n to see you on the ferry, and I

ought to do it. Maybe he's a bit anxious about you—he wants to be certain that you'll get home all right."

"But we're not babies!" protested Handforth. "I don't like being looked after like this!"

Marley chuckled.

"No need to be sensitive, young gent," he said. "We shall be at the ferry within a minute or two, anyhow. As soon as we get to the bottom of this street, I'll point out the way, and then you can go on your own."

"Oh, all right!" said Handforth.

They were having a glimpse of Birkenhead that was not exactly enlightening, but just at present they were not keen on sight-seeing, anyhow. Their chief concern was to get across the Mersey again and to reach the School Train. After what Captain Marsh had said, they were not afraid of getting into trouble, but it would be just as well to make haste on the homeward journey.

"Just a minute, young gents," said Marley suddenly. "There's a short cut down this alley. Just remembered it. You'll save about half a mile."

"Go ahead, then," said Handforth.

"But I shall have to come with you," said Marley. "You'll only get yourselves lost in these little alleys. That's one reason why it's better for me to be with you—it'll save time in the long run."

He led the way into a narrow alley which was quite deserted. There were only warehouses about here, and these had long since closed up. Some of them backed right on to the river, and at this hour of the evening there was no activity of any kind.

"If we go through here we shall soon be at the ferry," said Marley briskly.

He indicated a narrow opening, and the three juniors walked in unsuspectingly. Church was last, and immediately after he had followed his chums, Marley suddenly gave him a violent shove.

"In with 'em, Hooker!" panted Marley, his voice tense and vibrant with sudden excitement.

"Here, what the——" came Handforth's voice.

It was dramatic and unexpected. Handforth, leading the way, found himself floundering in gloom. Somebody had pulled him by the coat, and had jerked him clean through a narrow doorway into a building. McClure followed, stumbling and gasping, and then Church was literally hurled after the others. A door slammed, and darkness added to the confusion.

"Quick with 'em!" came Marley's voice again. "They're hefty kids, and they'll put up a fight unless we're careful."

"All right—all right!" came another voice, coarse and harsh. "They're in now!"

Helpless in the darkness, confused at the abruptness of this move, Handforth & Co. had no opportunity of putting up even the ghost of a scrap. They were pushed about, and they were sent stumbling headlong down some steps. Handforth sprawled over, and

his two chums crashed on to the top of him. They found themselves on a slimy, damp floor, and the very air was evil with dampness and unpleasant odours.

"You'll be all right there, kids," came Marley's voice from the top of the steps. "I don't suppose you'll be kept here long. Just another couple of hours, perhaps."

Handforth managed to struggle up, bruised and startled.

"What's the game?" he panted. "Is this another spoof?"

"Not this time, my lad!" replied Marley. "There's no fooling about this. The cap'n was having his little bit of fun—but my mate and me mean to get some money for you kids."

"Rot!" gasped Handforth. "You can't make me believe that silly yarn!"

"All right—you'll see!" snapped Marley. "Hooker and me thought we might as well make a bit of soft money out of you kids. We'll do it, too. Everything's all set, and you needn't think you can get out of here. And snivelling won't do you any good, neither."

"Who's snivelling?" roared Handforth.

A door slammed, and the three startled juniors heard bolts being shot. There was a grim significance in that sound. The very roughness with which they had been handled indicated that these two men were, indeed, in earnest!

"LUMMY!" said Hooker. "A bit risky, mate, ain't it?"

"Risky be blowed!" retorted Marley. "Where's the risk? The cap'n thinks those kids are goin' straight 'ome, and he's forgotten 'em already, I expect. We've got the night to ourselves, and if we work things proper, it'll be as easy as shellin' peas!"

The two men were standing in a gloomy, narrow passage. The place was an ancient, ramshackle warehouse, and the cellar in which Handforth & Co. were imprisoned was so far from the street that no matter how hard they shouted, their voices could not possibly penetrate to any chance passer-by.

Mr. Marley and Mr. Hooker were making hay while the sun shone. They were taking advantage of the peculiar circumstances.

Like all the other members of the crew of that old tramp steamer, they had heard all about the joke, and had laughed with the officers. Then Marley had conceived the idea of making a bit of money for himself, and he had confided his scheme to Hooker, who was a dull, unintelligent sort of fellow, but possessed of much brute strength.

"I saw the thing coming hours ago," said Marley, with satisfaction. "When I offered to see the kids to the ferry, I knew it was all right. The cap'n agreed, and now we can play the game without any danger. It's a cert, Hooker."

"But how do we get the money?" asked Hooker. "That's wot I want to know, mate. If we go to them schoolmasters, they might tell the cops, an' then we should



"In with 'em!" exclaimed Marley. Handforth found himself jerked clean through the doorway, and Church and McClure were bundled in after him. Handforth & Co. had been kidnapped!

look fine, shouldn't we? I ain't so sure about it, meself. Seems a bit too risky."

"We shan't go to none o' the masters," replied Marley. "You won't go anywhere, in fact. You'll stay here, and keep your eye on that cellar. You wait 'ere till I get back. See? There's nothin' for you to do. Just hang about in this passage, and wait until I turn up again."

"And how long do you think you'll be?" asked Hooker doubtfully.

"Maybe an hour—maybe a couple of hours," replied Marley. "It all depends. Anyhow, it's up to you to keep things right at this end. There ain't much chance o' them kids gettin' out, but we mustn't be too sure. So I'm relyin' on you."

"I'll keep my eye on 'em all right," said Hooker. "Wot I'm worryin' about is whether you can get the money."

"Whatever I get, you'll 'ave a quarter of it," said Marley. "That was the arrangement, wasn't it? I'm doin' most of the work, so I deserve most of the money. You won't get less than a fiver, anyhow, and there ain't any risk. Even if the worst comes to the worst, we can always say that it was a joke. We 'aven't harmed the kids, and don't mean to."

A minute later Mr. Marley went briskly out of the alley, and he proceeded to develop his cunning little scheme.

Handforth & Co. had been detained aboard that tramp steamer as a joke—but now the comedy had turned to drama. The events of the next hour or so were likely to be very interesting!

CHAPTER 6.

The Plot!

MR. HORACE PYCRAFT, the master of the Fourth Form at St. Frank's, tapped on the door of Nelson Lee's study, and entered. It was growing late, and the School Train was quiet; nearly everybody had retired for the night.

"Er—is there any fresh information concerning the missing boys, sir?" asked Mr. Pycraft diffidently.

"None," replied Nelson Lee, looking up from his desk. "I was hoping that they had returned by now, Mr. Pycraft."

"There has been no sign of them, sir."

"It's all very well for these ship's officers to have their fun, but I rather think they have overstepped the mark," said Lee, frowning. "You must remain on duty, Mr. Pycraft, until Handforth & Co. arrive. I do not suppose they will be long now."

Mr. Pycraft grunted. He hated being kept on duty like this. Although he was the Fourth Form-master, he was also in charge of the Removites during this tour.

Nelson Lee was looking just a bit worried. Not that he felt really concerned for the safety of Handforth & Co. He had already been told that they were victims of a joke, and he had no reason to believe that anything was really wrong. In any case, he could do nothing, since he did not know the name of the ship concerned. However, as the boys had still failed to turn up, the time was now rapidly approaching when some inquiries would be necessary

'Ting-ting-ting!

The telephone-bell rang, and Nelson Lee seized the instrument on his desk. His study on the School Train was a very comfortable, compact apartment, and not particularly small, either. Mr. Pycraft, at the door, prepared to depart, but Nelson Lee held up his hand.

"Just a moment, Mr. Pycraft," he said. "This may be about those boys. I am not expecting any other call."

He lifted the receiver.

"Hallo!" he said. "Who is it?"

"This is Mr. Walters, third officer of the Ramsey," came an easy voice. "I'd like to speak to the master in charge of the School Train."

"You are speaking to him," said Nelson Lee.

"Good!" came the voice. "Mr. Lee, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Captain Marsh has asked me to ring up, sir," said the other. "We've had a rare bit of fun with those three youngsters of yours, and they've enjoyed the joke as much as anybody."

"I am glad to hear it," said Lee drily.

"We were delayed a bit owing to an unexpected difficulty in docking," continued Mr. Walters. "The captain is giving the youngsters some supper in his own cabin now, and he thinks it's rather too late to send them back to-night. He wants your permission to keep the youngsters aboard until the morning."

"I don't see very well how I can object," said Nelson Lee, frowning. "Really, Mr. Walters, you seem to have overstepped the mark a bit in this joke on those three boys. I have no objection to a little fun, but your captain really should not have kept them so long."

"Well, he didn't mean to, but it just happened," said the voice. "Awfully sorry, sir, but there's no need for you to worry. Plenty of room aboard, you know, and the kids themselves are as pleased as Punch."

"I dare say they are."

"They're having the time of their lives," came the voice, with a chuckle. "We're looking after them, and giving them a fine old time. I'll bring them up personally in the morning, sir, and deliver them safe and sound into your care. If there's any particular time that you would mention, I shall be happy to fall in exactly with your suggestion."

"Well, in the circumstances, perhaps you had better keep the boys on board overnight," said Nelson Lee, after a moment's thought. "It is too late to bring them back now. But I want them to be here not later than eight o'clock."

"Good enough, sir," came Mr. Walters' brisk voice. "They'll be there at five minutes to eight, and I think it's awfully good of you to be so sporting about it. Good-night, sir! I'll tell you the whole yarn in the morning."

He hung up, and the line became dead. Nelson Lee put his own receiver on the hook, and turned to Mr. Pycraft.

"Well you can go to bed, Mr. Pycraft," he said, smiling.

"I take it that the boys are not returning?"

"They are being kept aboard this ship by the captain," smiled Lee. "The young rascals seem to be having a very good time of it."

"Huh! I feel compelled to remark, sir, that I do not approve," said Mr. Pycraft stiffly. "If I may venture to make a suggestion, I should advise you to punish these boys very severely when they turn up."

"That would be grossly unfair, Mr. Pycraft," replied Lee sharply. "The boys themselves are not to blame. And I cannot very well cane Mr. Walters when he comes, can I? Good-night, Mr. Pycraft."

The Fourth Form-master retired, feeling rather squashed. And Nelson Lee had no reason to suspect that he had been made the victim of a trick. The voice of "Mr. Walters" had sounded refined and genial. The message had come on the top of the previous message, which had been genuine enough. Alert and keen as Nelson Lee was, he was not a magician. He felt quite comfortable that the three boys were safely on board the steamship Ramsey, and that they would be brought to the School Train by the third officer in the morning.

IN reality, of course, it was Marley who had spoken over the 'phone—who had impersonated Mr. Walters. And Marley's object was obvious. He wanted to satisfy the school authorities that the three boys were safe and sound. In this way there would be no inquiries, and thus the way would be clear for Marley to put his own plan into execution.

Marley was not rash enough to approach any of the masters for "ransom money." That would indeed be putting himself within the grasp of the law. But by dealing with the boys alone, the matter was not much more serious than a practical joke—a sort of elaboration of Captain Marsh's own plan. The chance had come, and Marley had cunningly taken advantage of it.

He left the telephone-box near the ferry at Birkenhead, and the expression on his face was one of complete satisfaction. There would be no inquiries—no hue and cry. The school people thought that Handforth & Co. were in good hands. Now was the time to get busy.

The hour was not so late—at least, it wasn't late for ordinary people. For school-boys, no doubt, it was late; but Birkenhead and Liverpool were still abustle with vibrant life.

Mr. Marley soon crossed to Liverpool, and he had no difficulty in finding his way to the School Train. So famous was the train that one or two simple inquiries had informed him of its precise location.

He was glad to find upon approaching that the siding was quiet and deserted. There was an unfrequented road alongside, and as Marley grew near, in the gloom of the summer's night, he could see the long line of Pullman coaches, the majority of them in complete darkness. Only one or two lights were showing—from the windows of masters' studies or bed-rooms.

"Now we'll have a bit of trouble," murmured Marley, as he stood against the fence and surveyed the train. "I don't want to get hold of the senior boys. Might be too risky. But how am I to tell were the junior kids sleep? The wheeze is to get in touch with the pals of those three kids."

Mr. Marley had heard that these St. Frank's schoolboys were pretty flush; many of them were in constant possession of quite considerable sums of money. And Marley had already worked out his little plan of campaign.

As luck would have it, chance gave him an unexpected opportunity. Something happened which he had not anticipated, and which fitted very well with his own ideas.

He was leaning against the fence, trying to puzzle out this little problem, when he became aware of soft footsteps. Marley turned his head sharply, and crouched nearer to the fence. He saw a slim figure approaching. There was something stealthy in its movements, and as it grew nearer Marley could see that it was the figure of a junior schoolboy.

The man decided to act.

Without warning he stood out from the fence, took two strides forward, and grasped the boy by the sleeve.

"Oh!" came a gasp. "I—I didn't know you were there, sir. I was delayed, and I lost my train and I couldn't help being late, sir. I'm not really breaking bounds—"

The boy paused, seeing that his companion was not, after all, a St. Frank's master.

"Oh!" said Mr. Marley. "So you're one of the school kids, eh? Just coming back from a spree?"

Claude Gore-Pearce, of the Remove, started at that bull's-eye. He had, indeed, been on the spree. He had wanted Gulliver and Bell to go with him, but Gulliver and Bell had been too nervous. They had only promised to keep a dormitory window open, and to help Gore-Pearce in when he returned.

"Who are you, anyway?" demanded the cad of the Remove, as he peered suspiciously at the stranger. "What are you doing, hanging about here?"

"You're one of the schoolboys, aren't you?"

"Yes, but that's not the point," said Gore-Pearce. "I don't have to answer to you for being late."

"Perhaps not," said Mr. Marley quietly, and taking a firmer grip on the boy. "But I need you, young 'un: Do you happen to know a kid named Handforth, and two others who are his pals?"

Gore-Pearce grunted.

"Of course I know them," he said. "They're in the same Form as I am."

Mr. Marley was glad to hear it.

"Good!" he said. "Well, my son, look here. I'm going to tell you something that will startle you. But you'd better keep quiet about it—and you'd better keep calm. Are you ready?"

"I don't know what the deuce you're talking about," said Gore-Pearce.

"You will in a minute," said Mr. Marley smoothly. "You may have heard that those three boys were kept on board a ship?"

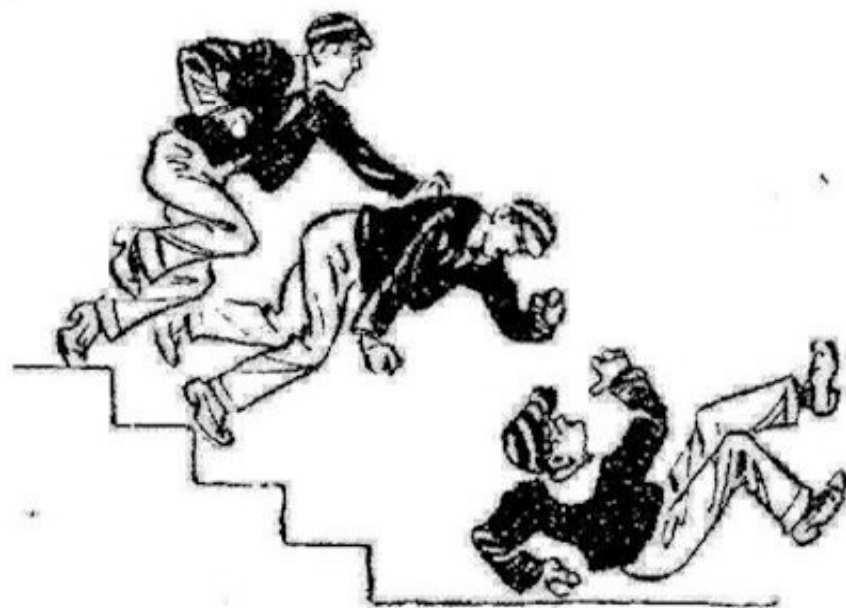
"Of course we've heard," said Gore-Pearce. "Some joke of the captain's, wasn't it?"

"Yes," replied Marley. "The captain let them go, and sent them home. But I thought I could see a bit of money in the affair, and a pal of mine helped me. We got busy, and we so wangled things that the three kids were taken—unknown to a soul except us, remember—down into the hold of a cargo-boat that is sailing for South America with the early tide in the morning."

Mr. Marley brought this out very glibly. It was a yarn especially invented for the ears of the schoolboys. It would never do to tell the boys that Handforth & Co. were merely locked in a deserted warehouse.

"By gad!" said Gore-Pearce, startled.

"Now I want you to see some of your friends," said Mr. Marley. "Tell them what I've told you. Collect all the money you can—every penny of pocket-money you've got—and bring it to me. Is that clear?"



"What's your game, anyhow?" asked Gore-Pearce curiously.

"It's clear enough, isn't it?" snapped Marley, tightening his grip. "Me and my pals have decided to make a bit of side money—see? We know that you public schoolboys have plenty of cash, and we want it. All you've got! There's a good many of you on this train, and if you rake out your pockets I dare say you'll find as much as twenty or thirty quid."

"You're an optimist!" said Gore-Pearce sourly.

"No, I'm not—I've read about you boys," said Marley. "There's a kid named Glen-thorne, isn't there? And another named

Somerton? You've been in the papers too much, my lad! I've got you all taped!"

"And what's going to happen if we don't bring this money to you?" asked Gore-Pearce in wonder.

"I shall simply go away, and me and my pal will get aboard our own ship," replied Marley. "That other boat will sail with the early tide in the morning, and your three friends will be well on the way to South America before they can get out of that hold. Simple, isn't it? If you want to save them from this adventure, you'll have to pay over that money."

Gore-Pearce caught his breath in. The simplicity of the dodge startled him afresh.

"And you needn't think that you can double-cross me," went on Marley grimly. "You'd better not go to one of your masters and tell him about this, because if you do you'll get no satisfaction at all."

"How do you make that out?"

"My dear kid, I'm safe enough," said Marley contemptuously. "If you bring one of your masters I shall tell him that it's only a joke of mine. I shall swear that I don't know a thing about those kids. And even if the police are told—if I'm arrested—it won't make any difference. They can't prove anything against me. I'm safe. Get that right into your head, and drive it home. If you blow the gaff to your masters your three pals will be in the cart. Nothing can be proved against me, and I shall deny all knowledge of the whole affair. The police can't detain every ship in the Mersey, and before they can get busy on making any inquiries the boat will have sailed."

"Phew!" whistled Gore-Pearce. "You've thought it all out pretty thoroughly, haven't you?"

It was indeed a clever dodge. Mr. Marley was safe, whatever happened. And he had been remarkably wise in approaching the boys and not the masters. Whereas the masters would have resisted him, would have put the matter into the hands of the police, the boys were far more likely to "shell out" for the sake of their missing chums.

CHAPTER 7.

Rallying Round!

CLAUDE GORE-PEARCE laughed softly.

"You're a cute one!" he said.

"You want me to tell the chaps about this, do you? And to collect up all the money I can get? All right. I'll put it to the fellows straight away."

"Remember—not a sound to your masters!" warned Marley.

"You needn't worry about that," said Gore-Pearce easily. "I'm not likely to tell any of the masters—for my own sake. I don't want them to know that I was creeping in after breaking bounds. You can rely on me to be discreet."

Mr. Marley could not quite understand this schoolboy. He did not know, of course, that Claude Gore-Pearce was totally indifferent as to the fate of Handforth & Co. Gore-Pearce would be quite pleased if Handforth & Co. vanished for good. Indeed, the thought occurred to him that it might be a great idea to get on to the train and say nothing—so that the chums of Study D would be taken off to South America.

But after a moment's consideration Gore-Pearce knew that this wheeze was full of leaks. Mr. Marley would become impatient, and would make inquiries. On the whole, it would be better to arouse the Removites and Fourth-Formers and tell them everything.

Thus it was that Nipper and Reggie Pitt and Vivian Travers and Archie Glenthorne and all the rest were aroused from their slumbers by being gently shaken in their bunks. Gore-Pearce was going round, rousing them all. Gulliver and Bell, considerably startled, had heard a few words of what was in the wind, and they were more or less bewildered.

"What's it all about?" asked Nipper, as he beheld moving pyjama-clad figures up and down the central corridor of the long sleeping-coach, and as he heard whispers from all sides. "Whose brainwave is it to wake us up like this?"

"Mine," said Gore-Pearce softly. "Better go easy, though; we don't want anybody to interrupt."

"You're fully dressed," said Nipper, looking at him. "Just come in, I suppose, after a spree?"

"That's it," said Gore-Pearce coolly. "None of your business, though."

"My dear ass, if you like to take these risks you're perfectly welcome," said Nipper scornfully. "You're an idiot, all the same."

"Never mind that," said Claude. "I suppose you know that Handforth & Co. haven't turned up?"

"Mr. Pycraft came in after lights-out and said that Handforth & Co. won't be back until the morning," put in Reggie Pitt. "They're being kept on board a ship by the captain, and they're having a fine time."

"But that's all wrong," said Gore-Pearce, rather puzzled by this story, but assuming that Marley was somehow responsible for it. "Handforth & Co. are kidnapped!"

"Rot!"

"Rats!"

"Rubbish!"

"They're kidnapped, and they're down in the hold of a ship that's sailing for South America by the early morning tide," continued Gore-Pearce coolly. "The kidnapper is outside now, and he wants us to make a whip round, and get all the money together we can. If we pay up, Handforth and his pals will be released. If we don't pay up, they'll be left to their fate. I might as well tell you now that I'm not going to contribute a brass farthing!"

The story sounded so ridiculous that nobody believed it. All sorts of sceptical comments went up and down the sleeping-coach, and there were one or two expressions of indignation, too.

"Silly idiot!" grunted Boots. "Let's bump him, you chaps! Waking us up like this, and spinning a cock-and-bull story——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Grab him!"

"Steady!" gasped Gore-Pearce. "Don't be such idiots! I tell you, it's true! The man's outside now—behind the fence!"

"Rot!"

"If you don't believe me, go and find him!" panted Gore-Pearce, who could see that the situation was getting tricky.

"Honour bright!"

"What do you know of honour?" asked Reggie Pitt curiously.

"Hang you, there's no need to be sarcastic!" snapped Gore-Pearce. "I tell you—honour bright—that I'm speaking the truth. The man collared me as I was sneaking in. He's in earnest, and Handforth and Church and McClure are in danger."

There was a change in the expressions of the other boys.

"Look here, Gore-Pearce, is this absolutely right?" asked Nipper sharply.

"Honest injun, are Handforth & Co. in trouble?"

"Trouble's a mild word," said Gore-Pearce. "But I don't ask you to believe me. Go outside and have a word with this man yourself.

You're the junior skipper, anyway, and it's your job. I wash my hands of it. Personally, I shall be heartily glad if Handforth *does* go off to South America!"

NIPPER thought it just as well to look into the matter himself—and at once. He rapidly drew on his trousers, without wasting any time in removing his pyjamas.

"You fellows had better be dressing while I'm gone," he suggested. "I shan't be long. I just want to find out the real hang of things."

He slipped out of the window, moved across the shadowy space near the School Train, and reached the dividing fence. The gate which led on to the road was locked, but Nipper very easily climbed over the fence.

At first he could see nobody; then he thought he detected a shadowy figure about fifty yards away. Evidently Mr. Marley was a man of caution. He was ready to bolt, in case things went wrong. However, when he saw only one slight figure he gained confidence, and approached.

"Are you the man who was just speaking to Gore-Pearce about Handforth and those other two fellows?" asked Nipper bluntly.

"My name's Marley," replied the other. "I've already told your friend what will happen to the three boys unless——"

"He's not my friend at all, but that's neither here nor there," interrupted Nipper.

"I understand that you have captured Handforth and Church and McClure, and have bundled them into the hold of a ship that's sailing in the morning for South America? Have I got it right?"

"You have—right in every detail," replied Mr. Marley. "And who do you happen to be, anyhow?"

"My name's Hamilton—I'm one of Handforth's best friends," replied Nipper. "Gore-Pearce says that you want money, or that those three juniors won't be released?"

"Right again."

"But there's something in your story that doesn't quite ring true," said Nipper grimly.

"Mr. Lee, our headmaster, has had a telephone call that the boys are quite safe, and that they're being kept on board a ship by Captain Marsh——"

"Don't be a young fool!" interrupted Marley. "It was I who telephoned."

"You!"

"Of course," said Marley. "I didn't want any inquiries to be made when those three youngsters didn't turn up, so I fooled your headmaster. I made out that I was an officer, and that I was giving

a message from Captain Marsh. Your master thinks that the three boys are safe until the morning. What's actually happened is that after they left the ship I collared them with the help of a pal of mine. They're in—well, they're in another ship now which is sailing for South America first thing in the morning, and nobody knows they're aboard. They're hidden right down in one of the holds."

Nipper thought rapidly. He could easily understand how it was that Nelson Lee had accepted the story. It was no reflection upon Nelson Lee's keenness that he had been so easily deceived. For Lee had no reason to doubt the authenticity of that second telephone message.

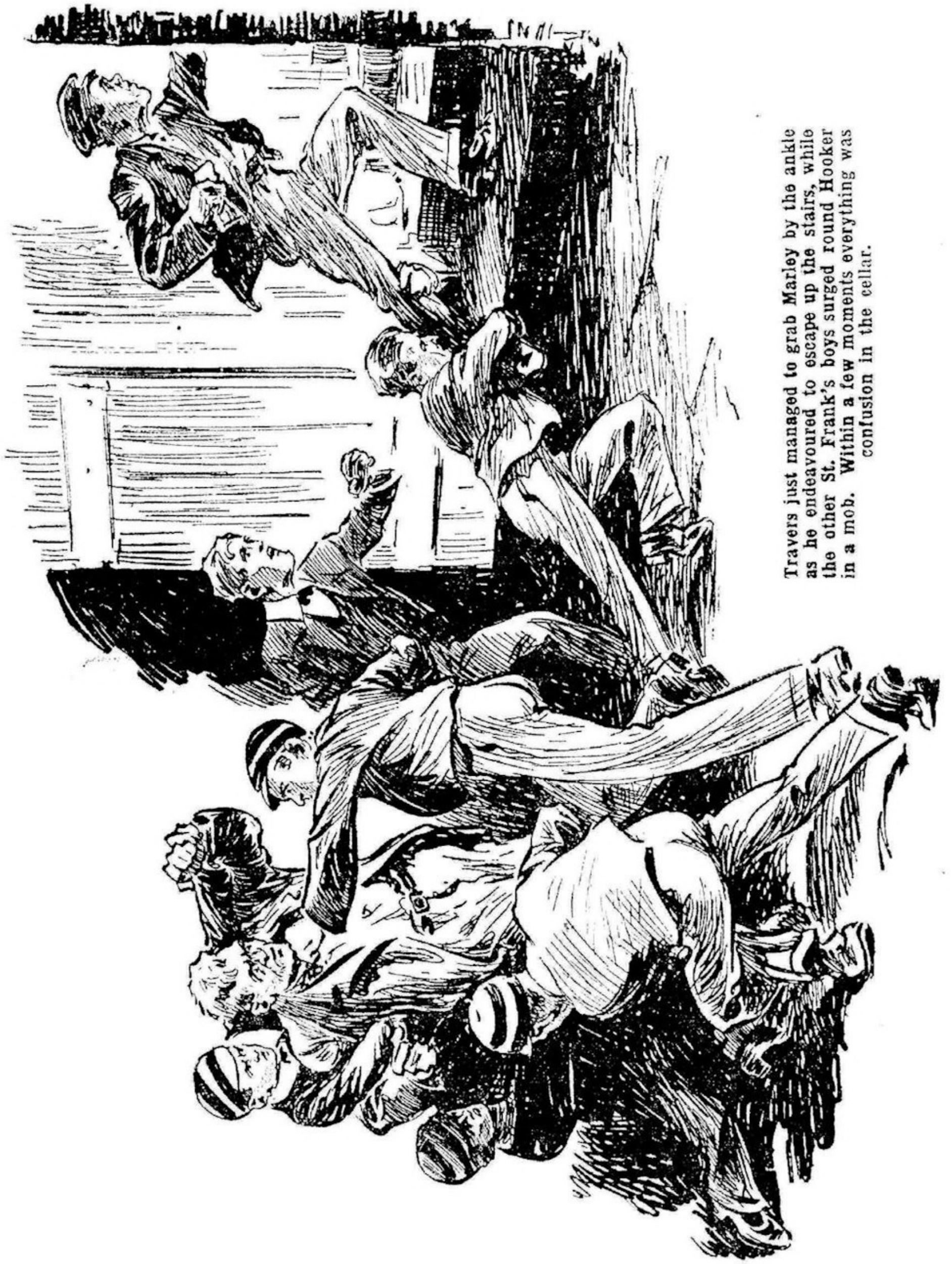
"Look here, kid, no beating about the bush," said Marley harshly. "You go back to your young friends and collect all the money you can. Understand? Then come out to me with the cash, and I'll take you to the place where your pals are imprisoned."

"And supposing I refuse?"

"You'd better not!" retorted Marley. "You don't want those boys to go off on that long voyage, do you? I can give you my word there's no escape for them—un-

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Travers just managed to grab Marley by the ankle as he endeavoured to escape up the stairs, while the other St. Frank's boys surged round Hooker in a mob. Within a few moments everything was confusion in the cellar.

less you come across with that money. And you needn't think that you can do any good by telling your masters. If you try that dodge, I shall see them coming, and I shall bolt. Then you won't know where to look, and there'll be no hope at all. Even if I'm captured and handed over to the police, it'll be just as useless. I shall laugh at the whole thing, and say that it's a joke. I'll deny all knowledge of the boys, and there's not a thing to prove—"

"All right—you win!" said Nipper curtly. "How much money do you expect to get, though?"

"Not less than—fifty pounds," said Marley, hesitating for a moment over the figure.

"You won't get it," said Nipper. "We can't rake up as much money as that!"

"I've heard that lots of you boys are rich—"

"So some of them are—but they don't go about with large sums of money on them," said Nipper.

"Well, if you bring less than thirty quid you won't see your pals again," said Marley grimly. "Thirty quid is the lowest, see?"

"I'll see what I can do," said Nipper shortly.

He turned on his heel, walked away, and then climbed over the fence again. A minute later he was in the Junior Dormitory Coach.

"It's true," he said, as the juniors swarmed round him. The man's out there, and he demands at least thirty quid!"

"Phew!"

"My only hat!"

"What did I tell you?" asked Gore-Pearce, from his bed. "You wouldn't believe me, would you?" Nipper took no notice of him.

"This man says that one of us has got to go back with him!" he exclaimed. "That's all rot, of course. He'd grab the money, and then we might not see Handforth & Co. at all. I want eleven of you to come with me."

"We're ready!" went up a number of eager voices.

"A dozen of us ought to do the trick," said Nipper. "Breaking bounds in these circumstances is justifiable."

"Why not do the bold thing and tell Mr. Lee?" asked Harry Gresham. "This man ought to be arrested—"

"We can't!" said Nipper. "There's no proof against him—and, naturally, if he finds himself up against any of the masters, or against the police, he'll close up like a clam. He'll deny all knowledge of this. It may not even be true that Handforth & Co. are prisoners in the hold of a ship. Personally, I don't believe it. But is it worth the risk? It *might* be true, you know. As Handy's pals, I think it's up to us to whack out this money, and to make certain of his release."

"Hear, hear!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne. "Kindly call upon me, laddie, if any cash is required. As it happens, I'm frightfully flush at the moment."

"Well, we need thirty quid," said Nipper. "The rotter mentioned fifty, but I told him there was nothing doing. Thirty quid is bad enough, goodness knows, but what else can we do? We've got to pay it."

"For Handforth's sake?" sneered Gore-Pearce. "I wouldn't pay thirty cents!"

"You won't get anything out of me, either," said Gulliver. "If Handforth is fool enough to get himself into a mess—"

"Dry up, you cads!" broke in Buster Boots promptly. "We'll deal with you when we come back. If Handforth and his chums



are in trouble, it's up to us to help them out. They're the victims of treachery, and if we make the slightest move to tell the authorities—to save ourselves paying this money—the poor chaps'll be in the cart. As Nipper says, we *must* pay!"

"How do we know that this rotter will hand the prisoners over?" asked Reggie Pitt.

"We don't know—but we can be pretty certain by taking a good number of chaps,"

replied Nipper. "Twelve of us will be sufficient, I think. Leave it to me."

THREE minutes later the twelve rescuers were outside. Eleven of them were on one side of the fence, and Nipper was talking to Mr. Marley.

"Well, I'm ready," he said. "But there's one point that we must settle."

"If I go with you alone, how shall I have any guarantee that you will deliver up Handforth and Church and McClure?" retorted Nipper. "No; we'll only consent to this plan on the one condition that twelve of us go back with you. And we'll stick to the money until those three fellows are handed over. As soon as they are safe with us, you get the money."

Marley hesitated.

"I don't agree!" he said at length.

"All right—it's all off," replied Nipper. "I give you my word—my solemn word of honour—that as soon as those three fellows are handed over, safe and sound, I'll give you the money."

Marley stood there, biting his lips. Then his face suddenly cleared. There was something in Nipper's tone that was earnest and sincere. He had given his word of honour—and Marley knew that he must take it. Otherwise, his whole plan would come to nothing.

"And do you promise that you or your friends won't make any attack on me?" he said. "Do you give your word of honour on that, too?"

"Yes," replied Nipper quietly.

"Good enough, young 'un—I'm on!" said Marley. "I'm taking your word, and I'm relying upon you to keep it."

The rascal was glowing with inward satisfaction. His game had succeeded! He would keep twenty-five pounds of that money for himself, and give Hooker the other five. With twenty-five pounds he could get to London, could have a fine old time.

Everything was going very smoothly.



vers just managed to grab Marley by the ankle he endeavoured to escape up the stairs, while other St. Frank's boys surged round Hooker's mob. Within a few moments everything was confusion in the cellar.

"Have you got the thirty quid?" asked Marley eagerly.

"Yes—and I've got eleven other chaps waiting on the other side of this fence," said Nipper. "A dozen of us are going—"

"No, you're not!" said Marley. "None of those games! How do I know that you won't spring on me after you've handed over the money, and grab it back again?"

CHAPTER 8.

The Man of Action!

HANDFORTH paced up and down like a caged tiger.

"Action—action!" he muttered. "That's what we want, my sons! I'm not the kind of fellow to sit still in a situation of this sort! By George! We've got to do something!"

"It's all very well to talk like that, but what can we do?" asked Church in a gloomy voice. "We've used practically all our matches—"

"No, we haven't," interrupted McClure. "I've got nearly a full box. Handy's used his."

"Well, what's the good of 'em, anyway?" grunted Church. "We've found out that we're in a rotten damp cellar, with solid brick walls and a brick floor. There's no

escape from this place. It's worse than that cabin on the steamer!"

"And this time it's real!" said Handforth huskily. "We've been really collared, my lads! No practical joke about it—no spool! We've been kidnapped!"

"I can't believe it, even now," said Mac. "It's too—too silly."

"It isn't silly at all," retorted Handforth. "Those officers were having some fun—but these men have seen a chance to make some money. They're holding us for ransom!"

"And we're helpless," said Church.

It certainly seemed that this was true. Handforth & Co. could do nothing to improve the situation; it seemed that they could only wait and see what the developments brought.

By matchlight they had examined their prison; they found it to be a small, dank cellar, without even a grating. There were a few worn stone steps, and there was a heavy door at the top of them. The juniors had attempted to force this door open, using a rusty iron rod they had found on the cellar floor, but they had been compelled to give it up, for Hooker, on the watch, had advised them to "chuck it." They knew that this man was on guard, and that even if they forced the cellar door open they could never escape. For Hooker would not hesitate to use violence—and he could easily hold that doorway against the three boys, since it was a narrow one, and they would be handicapped by the steps.

No, there was no chance of getting out through the doorway. With Hooker constantly on the watch, and listening, there wasn't a ghost's chance.

"Let's have a look round again," said Handforth suddenly. "I'm fed up with this! Inactivity is awful. If only we can escape we can get back to the School Train, and then these rotters will be diddled. They may demand a tremendous sum of money for our release."

"Probably a hundred quid," said Church in a scared voice.

Handforth snorted.

"Is that what you call a tremendous sum of money?" he said. "More like five thousand quid."

"Cheese it!"

"It wouldn't surprise me to learn that they've demanded ten thousand quid," said Handforth, who was always prone to look on the worst side of things in such circumstances. "They'll get in touch with Mr. Lee, and tell him to get the money from our people, I expect."

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Handforth evidently set a good price on himself. He might have been surprised—and, indeed, humiliated—if he could have known that Messrs. Marley and Hooker were prepared to accept the comparatively modest sum of thirty pounds.

Handforth assumed, of course, that the men were real kidnappers; that they were genuine crooks. In reality, Hooker was a comparatively decent sort of fellow, and he was decidedly "windy" about the whole business. He had been influenced by Marley.

And Marley himself was no genuine crook. He was only a petty wrongdoer. He did not actually regard it as a crime to get thirty pounds from the friends of these boys. In Marley's opinion the whole thing was a mere elaboration of the original practical joke. It would be over quickly, and as the result of the night's work he would be twenty-five pounds in pocket, while Hooker would get a fiver for himself. It was simple, and it was certain.

Handforth generally exaggerated things out of all proportion, however, and he led Church and McClure to think in the same way. They now all believed that they were in the hands of a desperate gang, and that it would cost their people pots of money for their release.

Handforth's anxiety to escape, in consequence, was very acute. He wanted to save his father from paying the huge sum of money that his imagination had led him to believe would be necessary.

"Let's have your matches, Mac," he said tensely. "We'll have another look round."

"What's the good?" asked McClure.

But he handed over the matches, and Handforth struck one. The light illuminated the dingy cellar, at first dazzling the three somewhat bedraggled occupants.

"Wait a minute," said Church. "I've got a weekly story book in my pocket. I'd forgotten it until now."

Handforth stared in the light of the flaring match.

"You silly idiot!" he said tartly. "You don't suppose I'm going to stand here striking matches so that you can read, do you?"

"Keep your hair on," said Church. "I'm going to make these sheets of paper into long spills. They'll burn ten times more brightly than those matches, and we shall be able to see a lot better. Besides, they'll last quite a decent time."

"Oh!" said Handforth. "Why didn't you say so, then?"

"You didn't give me the chance," said Church, producing his weekly story paper.

In a minute he had screwed some of the sheets into long torches, and one of them was lit. The difference was remarkable. Holding the torch, Handforth was able to go round the cellar examining it with much greater thoroughness.

"By George!" he said abruptly.

"Found something?" asked McClure, running over.

"Look at these bricks down here," said Handforth, pointing. "They look pretty loose, don't they? Perhaps we can get one of them out. The rest will easily follow."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Mac, shaking his head.

"I saw a film once where a couple of men were imprisoned in a dungeon," said Handforth. "They found a loose brick, and in next to no time they had the whole wall down."

"That was in the film, and the wall was especially prepared so that it would come down easily," replied the Scottish junior tartly. "You can't expect things like that in real life, Handy. This wall wasn't built by a film producer."

But Handforth was not discouraged. It was undoubtedly a fact that the wall was very ramshackle at this particular point. The building was evidently an old one, and it was questionable if it was still in use. Perhaps it was a condemned building—one that was to be pulled down to make place for a larger and more up-to-date premises.

"Where's that piece of iron?" asked Handforth eagerly. "Here, Mac, you hold this torch! Light another one as soon as it's burnt down. Church, you keep him supplied. I'm going to see what I can do with that piece of iron."

"Better go easy," murmured Church. "That man on the other side of the door might hear."

"I shan't forget him," said Handforth.

He was the man of action now—as always. To sit still "twiddling his thumbs" was not in his line at all. And although in his heart he felt that it was a hopeless task to get through that wall, he started on the job as though he was certain of success.

Marley had never anticipated any such move as this. He was contemptuous of these three schoolboys; he believed that they would be so scared by their predicament that they would not make any attempt to escape. Besides, wasn't Hooker on guard all the time?

Marley had not examined that cellar very carefully. He knew that it had no window and no grating, and it seemed to him that this was sufficient. Curiously enough, however, after Handforth had been at work for a few minutes, and after three of the precious torches had been burned, one of the bricks from the wall fell out of place and thudded to the floor.

"By George!" breathed Handforth. "That's the first one, anyhow! These others seem to be pretty loose, too. The mortar is as rotten as sand, and I can shift lots of these bricks."

"For goodness' sake do it quietly!" urged Mac.

He and Church were now thoroughly excited. They were beginning to get a trace of hope. And when Handforth loosened a second brick and a third and a fourth, their hearts commenced to beat thumpingly. That

wall, in fact, was utterly rotten. And as Handforth had said, once the first brick was out, the others came more easily.

"This is the last piece of paper," said Church in a whisper.

"Never mind the paper," granted Handforth, as he worked. "I can feel what I'm doing now, and if you strike a match now and again it'll be enough. Look at this! These bricks are all loose behind, and——"

He broke off suddenly. Pressing on the second layer of bricks, he had felt them moving slightly. Now, when he exerted some pressure, they gave way completely. There came a sound of dull splashing, as the bricks dropped into some water. A draught of cool air came through the opening and struck Handforth in the face.

"We're through!" he breathed. "Oh, my hat! I've made a hole right through the wall! Didn't I tell you we should get out?"

"My only sainted aunt!" murmured Church breathlessly.

Handforth was now pulling at the bricks with redoubled vigour, and they came away with surprising ease. Yet not so surprising, perhaps. The mortar was rotten, and the more bricks removed the easier the work, for Handforth was able to get a firmer grip.

"It's nearly big enough for us to squeeze through now," he panted after a while. "And as soon as it is big enough we're going to bolt for it. We won't wait a second. That man might come down at any minute——"

"That's what I'm thinking," said McClure. "If only we can get out in time we might be able to escape completely. What's on the other side of the wall? Can you see?"

"I haven't looked yet," replied Handforth. "Time enough to look when the hole's big enough for me to squeeze through."

"Let me have a go at it," suggested Church.

"No fear! I'm stronger than you chaps," replied Handforth. "And if this hole is big enough for me to get through it'll be big enough for you fellows. Another three or four bricks and I think I can manage it."

The bricks came away easily, and as they were loosened, Church and McClure took them and laid them gently on the heap of debris so that there was no noise.

In the meantime, Mr. Hooker was lounging about, smoking, totally oblivious of the fact that his prisoners were escaping practically under his very nose. But then, Mr. Hooker was not a man of brains.

"That's done it at last!" murmured Handforth. "By George! I can get through now! Isn't this night air glorious? Puts new life into a chap."

He squeezed his way through the opening, and then he experienced a bit of a shock. For instead of looking out upon an old yard, as he had half-expected; he found the river immediately below him—the river stretching out to right and to left and ahead of him.

Nothing but water and a blank, bare wall against which it lapped!

CHAPTER 9.

Gone!

"MY only hat!" murmured Handforth. He was disappointed, but he was not discouraged. He took another look at the scene. There were many twinkling lights in the distance, but just here, against this old warehouse, there was nothing except darkness and the blank wall through which he was squeezing himself. And below, the water. Not even a ledge upon which he could swarm round to—

"Hallo! What's that?" he muttered.

Now that his eyes were growing more accustomed to the gloom he could see a small dark patch in the water some little distance away.

"It's a boat!" murmured Handforth exultantly. "Good egg! A rowing-boat waiting there ready for us to escape in."

He drew back into the cellar, and Church and McClure wondered what was wrong. They had expected their leader to climb through the hole and then to vanish.

"Why didn't you go?" asked Church. "Can't you get through?"

"Yes—but the river's out there," said Handforth.

"Oh, my hat!"

"The—the river?"

"The Mersey, I expect," said Handforth. "There's no other river about here, is there? The only thing we can do is to dive in and swim for it."

"But—but we can't do that!" gasped Church. "Isn't there any other way?"

"Why can't we do it?" said Handforth. "It's summer-time. The water isn't cold. Besides, what if it is? We're in a desperate plight, my sons, and it's up to us to escape and diddle those crooks. There's a boat just handy. We can swim to it, and then row across the Mersey to Liverpool."

"You're mad!" said Mac. "Why row across the Mersey? What's the matter with the ferry boats?"

"We don't want to run any risks," replied Handforth. "If we swim ashore to Birkenhead we shall have to go to one of the docks, and we might be spotted there. Then we should be collared, and all our trouble would have been for nothing. There's a boat handy, and we can't do better than row right across to Liverpool. Then we shall be safe. Come on!"

"Half a minute!" gasped Church. "Hadn't we better talk this over—"

But Handforth was already squeezing through the hole in the wall, and a moment later there came a dull plunge as he dropped into the water.

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"Come on!" said McClure. "We can't let him go alone."

One after the other they slid through, and dropped down into the waters of the Mersey. It wasn't so cold as they had expected, and they followed Handforth as he swam towards the handy boat. By the time they reached it he was already on board, and had unfastened the rope which secured it.

"Easy!" he panted. "We've done it, you chaps! We're out!"

His chums floundered into the boat, and Handforth lost no time in getting the oars out, and rowing away.

"Well, if those rotters come now, we've dished 'em!" he said gleefully. "By George! We'll show 'em! We're not the kind of chaps they can monkey about with!"

Church and McClure could scarcely believe in their good fortune. But presently, when they had left the docks behind, when they were rowing out into the river and could feel the strong current tugging at the boat, they knew that this was a reality.

What they didn't realise, perhaps, was their danger. Here, on the bosom of this mighty river, in the darkness, without lights! And Handforth, being at the oars, was not any too careful. He just rowed briskly, his enthusiasm overpowering all other emotions.

"Better let us have a go at the oars, Handy," suggested Church.

"No fear! I'm doing all the work—I'm the man of action," said Handforth. "You chaps trust yourselves to me——"

"But we're cold, and we need some exercise," interrupted McClure.

"That's true," admitted Handforth. "I'd forgotten that. All right, then; perhaps you had better take an oar each, and I'll have a bit of a rest."

"Where are we making for?"

"Anywhere—as long as it's on the other side of the river," replied Handforth. "The tide seems to be pulling a bit, and I've allowed the boat to run with it. It doesn't matter much where we land. We're safe from those crooks now."

"I say!" interrupted Church, with an anxious note in his voice. "That ship seems to be uncomfortably close, Handy. I believe it's bearing down on us, too. We're going right across its path!"

"Which ship?" asked Handforth, looking round. "Oh, you mean—— Great Scott! She's coming at a good rate, too! My only topper! I didn't think that there was any chance of—— Oh! What the——"

It all happened in a moment.

In the gloom, the big ship had seemed to be some little distance away; but now, all in a flash, it bore down upon the little boat like some gigantic aquatic juggernaut. Before the juniors could even attempt to turn the boat, or to get out of the way, the vessel was upon them.

Even before they could yell out their alarm, the disaster took place.

Surging straight towards them, the sharp prow of the steamer came plunging through

the water. Handforth did manage to articulate something, but he was so startled that very little sound came.

The next second the great vessel's bows cut into the very centre of the little boat, slicing it in two as though it had been made of thin glass. It shivered to fragments with a faint, dull crash. Mercifully, Handforth and Church and McClure had dived into the water in the nick of time.

They vanished beneath the surface, while the great steamship rolled onwards down the Mersey!

"HERE we are!" said Mr. Marley briskly.

He had come to a halt in that little dingy alley in the obscure backwater near the docks in Birkenhead. Nipper and Reggie Pitt and Travers and the rest of the St. Frank's fellows were crowding round him.

"It's a funny kind of ship, dear old fellows," murmured Travers, as he looked at the dilapidated building.

"As a matter of fact, kids, that was only a yarn of mine," said Marley. "Your pals aren't in the hold of a ship at all. They're here—bottled up in a cellar."

"I half-expected as much," said Nipper. "So there's no danger of them being carried off to South America on the early morning tide?"

"No; but there's danger of them being kept prisoners unless you come across with that money," retorted Marley.

"I vote we don't pay," said Harry Gresham excitedly. "The man has lied to us! Handforth & Co. aren't in danger of being shanghaied at all!"

"Hold on!" said Marley unpleasantly. "This youngster gave me his word of honour that he would pay over the money as soon as your pals were restored to you. Are you going to get out of that——"

"Don't worry," interrupted Nipper. "Bring Handforth and Church and McClure here, and you'll get your money. A bargain's a bargain. Produce the prisoners."

Mr. Marley looked relieved.

"I knew you'd keep your word, kid," he said. "All right! Come on!"

He led the way into another narrow little alley, and a startled exclamation came to his ears.

"Who's that?" asked a hoarse, frightened voice.

"Don't be scared," said Marley. "I've brought some of the kids along with me."

"Oh!" said Hooker. "I didn't know who you was."

"Everything all right?" asked Marley. "Had any trouble with those three kids?"

"A bit," replied Hooker. "They started monkeying with the door, but I soon stopped 'em. They've bin quiet ever since. I dare say they've gone to sleep."

"Then you'd better wake 'em up," said Marley. "Tell 'em that their pals 'ave come to bail 'em out."

"What about the money?"

"As soon as they're handed over we get the cash," replied Marley.

"You ain't goin' to trust these kids?" asked Mr. Hooker, in amazement. "Why, you fool, as soon as we release them three, the whole crowd will set on us."

"No, the whole crowd won't," said Nipper. "We've promised, and we'll keep our promise. Bring out those three chaps, and you'll have your money. Here it is—all ready for you."

He produced a sheaf of banknotes, and the two men eyed them greedily. A number of the other juniors, however, gathered round, just in case of accidents.

"Fetch 'em out, Hooker," said Mr. Marley.

Hooker went to the door of the cellar with alacrity. There was a kind of narrow passage here, leading out of the alley. The door was at the end of the passage. Hooker unbolted it, and thrust it open.

"All right, kids—you can come out now," he called.

There was no reply.

"Hi!" said Hooker, in a louder voice. "You ain't asleep, are you? Come out of it!"

Still there was no reply, and Hooker grunted. He felt his way down the stone steps, and when he arrived at the bottom he struck a match. He expected to see Handforth & Co. sprawled in one of the corners, sound asleep, exhausted after all their adventures.

Instead, he saw something quite different.

"Ere!" he gasped, in a strangled voice. "Ere, Marley! They've gorn! Them kids 'as escaped!"

"What!" snarled Marley, fairly leaping down the cellar steps.

Nipper and the juniors came racing after him. Four or five of them struck matches, and in the flickering light the heap of debris could be seen—and the significant hole in the wall.

"You blamed fool!" snapped Marley, turning on Hooker. "I thought I left you here to look after those boys?"

"So I did look arter 'em!" shouted Hooker. "I guarded the door, didn't I? 'Ow was I to know that they'd break through the wall? Lumny! I never see'd anythink like it!"

"My only hat! Good old Handy!" said Nipper delightedly. "Trust Handy to get into action if there's the slightest chance! They've escaped, you fellows!"

"Good egg!" chorused the others.

Mr. Marley realised that his game had gone wrong. With the prisoners escaped, there was no chance that Nipper would hand over that money. So Marley thought it just as well to make certain of it.

With a sudden dash, he grabbed the sheaf of banknotes from Nipper's hand. The movement was so unexpected that Nipper had no opportunity of saving them. But he recovered in a flash.

"Look out!" he yelled. "Hold that rotter! He's grabbed the money, and——"

Travers was the nearest, and he reached out just as Marley was disappearing up the steps—and just as the last match flickered out. In the nick of time, Travers grabbed Marley's foot, and held on.

"Got him!" he roared. "Quick, you fellows! Lend a hand!"

Marley was dragged back, swearing and panting. There was a tremendous confusion in the darkness and in the confines of that cellar.

Two or three of the fellows struck matches, and this was fortunate. The rest could see what they were doing, and Marley was dragged over, the money was wrenched from him, and he was knocked about pretty severely.

Hooker started to make a fight for it, but these two men stood no chance against the twelve angry, triumphant St. Frank's boys.

CHAPTER 10.

Suspense!

"GOT 'em!" said Reggie Pitt victoriously.

Mr. Hooker and Mr. Marley were flattened out on the floor of the cellar—with half a dozen fellows on each of them. The scrap—if it could be called a scrap—had been short and sharp. The money was back in Nipper's pocket, and the two rascals were helpless.

"Better hand 'em over to the police, hadn't we?" suggested somebody.

"I don't know," said Nipper. "Perhaps we'd better let them go. Their scheme has come to nothing, anyhow, and Handforth & Co. have escaped. They haven't got any money out of us, so there's not much case against them. Anyhow, there'd be an awful lot of bother."

"Let 'em go," said Travers. "We don't want to be hampered with them."

So Marley and Hooker were allowed to get to their feet.

"Now clear out!" said Nipper. "You can consider yourselves jolly lucky to get out of it so easily!"

"Better chase 'em out," suggested Tommy Watson.

"When Mr. Lee gets to hear of it, he mightn't be so generous," said Buster Boots. "He'll probably tell the police, and then these two rotters will be rounded up."

The precious pair were fairly hounded off the premises. All the fellows chased them out, and they went running away down the alley at top speed, to vanish round one of the corners into the gloom.

"That'll do," said Nipper, coming to a halt. "We don't want to attract any attention. I'm a bit anxious about Handy, too. Goodness only knows where he and those other two chaps are by this time. You know what a fellow Handy is for getting into trouble."

"Hadn't we better search for them?" asked Reggie Pitt.



Handforth squeezed himself through the hole in the wall, and then he experienced a shock. He had expected to find a yard; instead he could see nothing but one vast stretch of water. Escape from here seemed impossible.

"First of all, we must have a look at that cellar," replied Nipper.

They went back, and they were considerably startled when they looked through that gap in the wall—to find that there was no means of escape except by plunging into the river.

"This looks bad," said Nipper anxiously. "Great Scott! They must have swum for it! And there's no telling how tricky the currents are, or what happened to them!"

"You don't think they're drowned?" asked Jimmy Potts, aghast.

"I hate to think of any such thing—but they must have been desperate," replied Nipper. "They broke through that wall and plunged into the river. That much is certain. How do we know that they got back to land all right?"

"Can't we make some inquiries?" asked Pitt.

"How?" said Nipper. "We might spend half the night in making inquiries. Look here, my sons. This is serious now. I'm going to 'phone to the gov'nor at once."

"Best thing you can do," said Travers, nodding. "Mr. Lee will know how to deal with the matter."

They tried to find a way round, so that they could get a look at that stretch of the river from a different angle, but it was im-

possible. There was no dock just there, and there were so many buildings, and so many different streets, that it was all very confusing. And in the dead of night like this, the difficulty was increased.

It was better, therefore, for Nipper to ring up Nelson Lee without any delay. Previously, he had been barred from telling Lee anything about the matter; but now it was easy for him to do so. In fact, it was high time that Nelson Lee should know the exact truth.

"**Q**UITE a remarkable story, Nipper," came Nelson Lee's voice over the wires, after Nipper had given him the details. "I do not blame myself, however, since I could not possibly know that the man who telephoned me was not Mr. Walters."

"You don't seem very alarmed, sir," said Nipper.

"I'm not alarmed," replied Nelson Lee. "But I am considerably annoyed. I am annoyed with Captain Marsh and his officers. They did not intend their practical joke to lead to anything like this, but it cannot be denied that they are mainly to blame. They gave these two rascals the opportunity to put that plan into execution. Fortunately, the plan has failed."

"Handforth and Church and McClure are still missing, sir," Nipper reminded him.

"I will set inquiries afoot at once," said Nelson Lee. "In fact, I will come straight away, and investigate on the spot."

"We're afraid that those three chaps might have met with some sort of disaster, sir," said Nipper anxiously.

"That they might be drowned, eh?" said Lee. "I don't think so, Nipper. They're all good swimmers, and there is no reason for any of you to jump to such a tragic conclusion. All of you must come back at once."

"But Handforth, sir—"

"Leave him to me," said Lee. "In the circumstances, I will excuse you all for having broken bounds. You could scarcely do anything else. But you must return to the School Train now. The matter is in my hands, and I will deal with it."

"All right, sir—just as you say," said Nipper.

He went out of the telephone box, which was in one of Birkenhead's principal thoroughfares, and, joining the other juniors, told them what had been said.

"So we've got to go back, eh?" said Reggie Pitt. "Well, I'm not surprised. We could hardly expect Mr. Lee to give us permission to keep out all night."

"I wish we could find out something about those Study D chaps," said Nipper, frowning.

On the ferry, they did hear something—something not merely startling, but positively sensational.

They noticed that they were stared at rather strangely by some of the other passengers, and at length one man came up to them. He sadly shook his head.

"Ay, by gum, that was a nasty affair in the river," he remarked vaguely. "You lads have come from the School Train, maybe, to find out some of the details?"

"Nasty affair?" repeated Nipper. "What do you mean?"

"Ay, but have you heard nowt of it?" asked the man, staring.

"Of what?"

"Why, sithee, I'm sorry I said anything," went on the man. "But I thought you knew. Three of your boys were drowned in the river to-night!"

It was only a rumour—and a false rumour at that—but the man gave it out as an established fact. The majority of rumours are trotted out in that way.

"What!" gasped Nipper, losing some of his colour. "Are you sure? Drowned! Three of our chaps!"

"Ay, sure enough," said the man. "Seems they was crossing the river in a little boat—which was nowt but foolishness. One of the big steamers came along and cut the boat in half. They say that the bodies haven't been recovered yet."

He gave out this piece of information with a kind of gloomy satisfaction. The juniors gathered round him, startled and horrified.

"Is this true?" asked Gresham frantically. "Are you sure about it?"

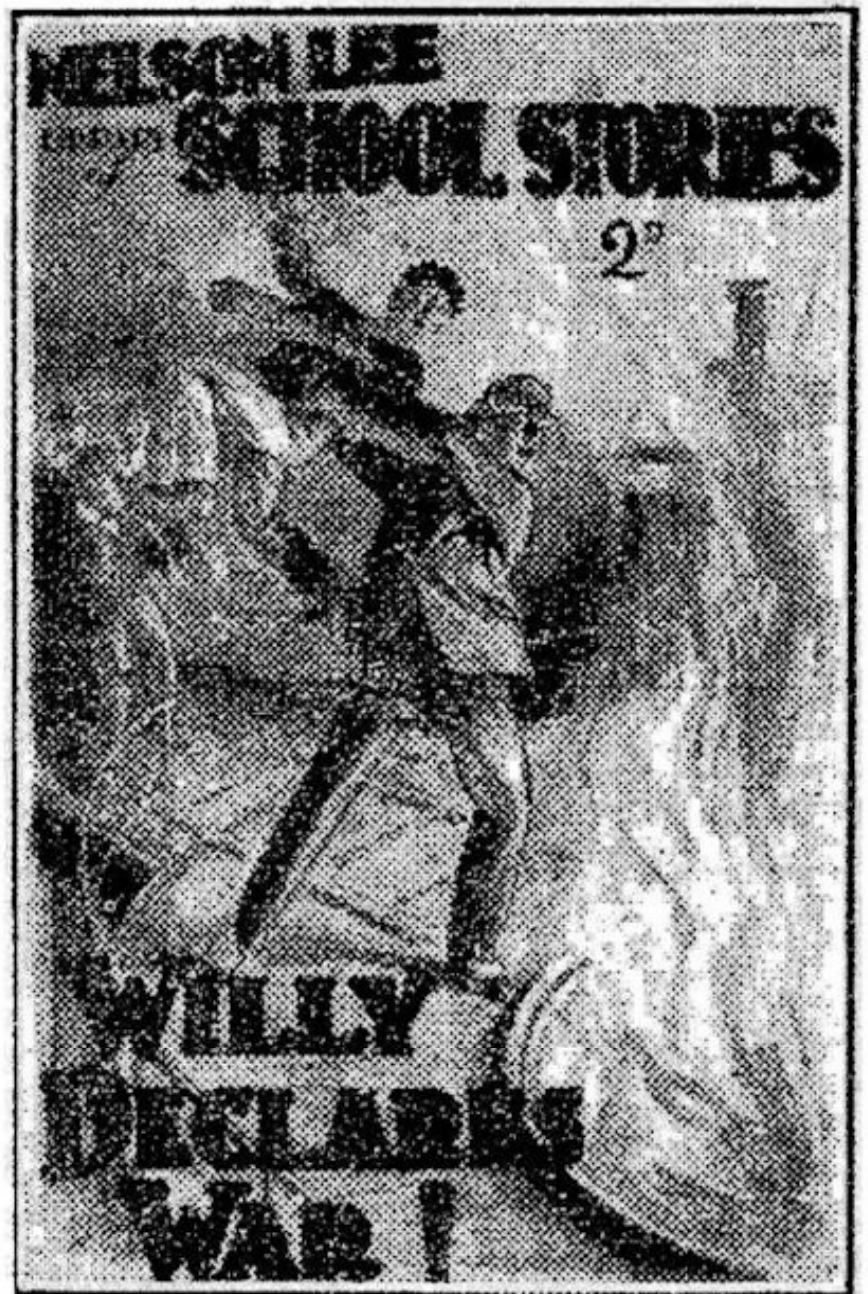
"Did you see the accident?" asked somebody else.

"I didn't see it," replied the man slowly, "but I've heard talk. I'm afraid it's true enough, lads."

When they got off the ferry they were looking haggard and worn. From other people, too, they had heard of that rumour.

"I don't know what to do," said Nipper huskily. "I don't feel like going back to the School Train now. Yet what else is there to be done? If those poor chaps are drowned, we can't help them."

COMING NEXT WEEK!



"But—but it's unthinkable!" protested Reggie Pitt. "Good old Handy! I mean, how awful to think—"

"Laddie, kindly refrain from any such foul suggestion," said Archie Glenthorne. "Good gad! I absolutely refuse to believe this dashed rumour. You will have noticed that nobody could tell us anything definite."

"We can't even report to Mr. Lee—because he'll be gone when we get to the train," said Nipper. "Still, that won't make much difference—he'll hear all about it as soon as he gets down to the riverside. I think we'd better obey orders and go back. We can leave the guy'nor to do everything that's necessary."

It wasn't long before they heard another rumour—to the effect that the three boys

had been picked up. It was all very confusing. And, as a natural consequence, the juniors were in a state of acute suspense. Not knowing the exact truth, one way or the other, was worse than anything.

"I wish we hadn't let those two crooks go," said Nipper. "It's their fault. They locked Handforth & Co. in that cellar, and they're to blame for this tragedy—if it is a tragedy. We ought to have handed them over to the police."

MR. MARLEY, at that particular moment, was a very frightened man.

He had left Hooker five minutes

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after they had got away from the juniors. Hooker, after all, was only a tool. Marley was the real offender and he knew perfectly well that if he and his associate ever got into the hands of the police, he would get the bulk of the punishment.

And Marley did fear the police now. For he, too, had heard the rumours of that tragedy in the Marley. And Marley had had sense enough to realise that the school authorities would give full information to the police—and that the police would take action.

This simple little dodge, which had seemed so easy to Marley, looked like developing into something grimly serious. He felt it was necessary, in fact, to get to a place of safety without any loss of time.

It was impossible for him to go back to his own ship, so he took a step which, considering everything, was quite remarkable. A small cargo boat was leaving within the hour for the Isle of Man, and Mr. Marley happened to meet one of the engineers. The engineer was looking for a stoker to replace a man who had failed to turn up, and Marley promptly offered to go.

Thus it was that the rascal was on his way to the Isle of Man long before the police knew anything about the affair. Once in the Isle of Man, Marley intended to lie low. He had an idea that the police would not think of looking for him there. He knew some people in the Isle of Man—in Douglas—and he could rely upon them to help him.

He didn't realise that he was bound for the one place on this earth from which he should have kept away!

CHAPTER 11.

An Unexpected Meeting!

HANDFORTH and Church and McClure slept.

They did not look very dead, at all events; and judging from Handforth's snores, he, at least, was not particularly hurt. As a matter of fact, none of them was hurt, and they were only sleeping so soundly now because they were thoroughly tired out.

The rashness of Mr. Marley in going to the Isle of Man will be seen when it is explained that Handforth & Co. were themselves on the night steamer which was bound for Douglas. At this time of the year there are plenty of midnight sailings by the splendidly equipped boats of the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company, Limited. It was one of these boats, in point of fact, which had run Handforth & Co. down, just after sailing from Liverpool.

Rumour, as usual, was a lying jade. The disaster to the chums of Study D had not only been seen, but prompt measures had been taken by the ship's officers to rescue them.

The vessel's engines had been reversed. lifebelts had been flung out, and within a very short space of time the three juniors had been hauled on board, hardly any the worse for their adventure.

And the steamer, without further delay, had continued her voyage. The captain saw no reason why he should further upset his schedule by taking steps to put these three schoolboys ashore. They could very well go to Douglas and return in the morning.

And so, whilst the Removites and Fourth-Formers were filled with anxiety and suspense for the three missing juniors, Handforth & Co. were snugly asleep in three exceptionally comfortable beds!

"BY George!" said Handforth.

It was morning now—quite early morning, and the steamer was at her berth against the landing pier in Douglas, Isle of Man.

Very few people were about yet, and Handforth & Co., as they stood on the deck of the ship overlooking the sweep of the harbour, were much impressed. The early morning sun was shining gloriously, and there was a keen nip in the air. The juniors were not looking their smartest, since their clothes had been dried overnight and were now somewhat in need of a regular press. Not that Handforth & Co. minded in the least.

"We're jolly lucky to be alive, Handy, old man," said Church. "What about getting back to the School Train, though? I'll bet Mr. Lee is in an awful stew."

"Of course he isn't," said Handforth. "The captain told me that he has wirelessly to the Steam Packet Company's agents in Liverpool."

"Thomas Orford & Son, I think," nodded McClure.

"Anyhow, Mr. Lee knows all about it by this time," said Handforth. "He knows we're safe, and that giddy affair of last night is over and done with."

"Still, the sooner we can get back the better," said Church. "I'm told that the boat for Liverpool sails at nine o'clock this morning."

"Nine o'clock?" repeated Handforth. "What's the good of that? Now that we're in the Isle of Man we want to have a look round. That's a silly time for the boat to sail."

"You'd better complain to the company," said Mac. "The next sailing isn't until four o'clock in the afternoon."

"That'll do!" said Handforth promptly. "We didn't ask to be brought to the Isle of Man, did we? And now that we're here, nobody can blame us if we go back by the afternoon boat instead of the morning boat."

The captain was not at all sure about it. These juniors were not ordinary passengers; they had been picked up by mere chance, and the captain felt that it was his duty to take them back at the first opportunity—or to see that they were taken back by one of the other boats.

But Handforth would not hear of it.

"Not likely!" he said. "If we go by the four o'clock boat this afternoon we shall be back at the School Train before locking-up, and you're not going to diddle us out of a whole day's holiday, are you, sir?"

* The captain laughed.

† "That's not the point," he said. "Your schoolmaster will be anxious about you."

"I'll send him a wire," said Handforth brightly. "I'll telegraph to Mr. Lee and tell him that we're not coming back until the four o'clock boat this afternoon. That'll put things all right. We'll pay our own fares, of course."

In the end he got his own way, and after they had bade the captain and the officers good-bye, they sallied out into Douglas to have a look round and to search for some breakfast.

As a matter of fact, Handforth was very anxious to get away from the ship, for the captain had been rather too keen on finding out what he and his chums had been doing in the Mersey in a small boat. They had explained the truth—how they had been kidnapped and thrust into the old warehouse cellar, and how they had broken out, but somehow this yarn had sounded so incredible that nobody had quite believed it. The boys were only too glad to get by themselves, away from the ship altogether, where they could discuss things quietly and make their plans.

"My dear chaps, leave it all to me," said Handforth. "We'll send that telegram to Mr. Lee, and by this time he knows that we're safe, anyhow. So what is there to worry about?"

"Punishment, when we get back!" said Church pointedly. "My dear ass, we shall be gated for the rest of the tour if we take French leave like this."

"French leave be blowed!" retorted Handforth. "We're not in France. It's Manx leave!"

Handforth was not particularly interested in the beauties of the Isle of Man; he was merely curious. None of the juniors had been to the Isle of Man before, and they were greatly interested. Church and McClure found much to admire in the expansive, crescent-shaped Bay of Douglas. They were astonished, too, to find Douglas a place of very considerable size. Douglas, in fact, contains about half the population of the island.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth, after a while. "I always thought that the Isle of Man was a dead sort of place, but they've got railways and electric trains and bus services and—and everything!"

"Ass!" said Church. "You didn't think that the Isle of Man was a kind of uninhabited coral island, did you? Look at Douglas! Look at this promenade! I don't think I've ever seen a better one."

Douglas was beginning to awaken by now, and as Handforth & Co. strolled along the front they could hear lots of genial Lancashire and Yorkshire talk—for the Isle of Man is visited by many thousands of people during the summer months from the northern counties of England, and from Ireland and Scotland, and all other parts of the country, too.

"It's a rummy sort of place, you know," said Church, after they had breakfasted in one of the splendid hotels. "It's hard to believe, but the Isle of Man is a kind of kingdom, although there's no king."

"How the dickens can it be a kingdom, then?"

"Well, it's not under the rule of the ordinary British Parliament," said Church. "It's got its own House of Keys."

"House of which?"

"My dear chap, what do you go to school for?" asked Church impatiently. "Every fathead knows that the Isle of Man's got its own Parliament. They make their own laws here, and everything is—well, different. I reckon it must be jolly to live in the Isle of Man."

"I don't like the cats," said Handforth. "The cats haven't got any tails. They don't look properly balanced."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned McClure. "Fancy objecting to the giddy cats! I was talking to somebody in the hotel just now, and he tells me that there are some marvellous castles in the island—with dungeons and everything. The trouble is, we shan't have time to explore them."

"We don't want to see any dungeons," said Handforth coldly. "That cellar last night was too much like a dungeon for my liking!"

"There's Peel Castle, and there's Castle Rushen, and Castletown," said Church. "Still, it isn't much good talking about them—we can't go."

It was, indeed, a pity that Handforth & Co. would not have time to explore the Isle of Man—a wonderland of mountain and fell, of flower-strewn valleys and heather-coloured braes. If they could have gone, they would have seen the comfortable little whitewashed villages, with the hedgerows of fuchsias, and the sandy bays with the ruins of the castles on their shoulders.

And Snaefell, too, over two thousand feet high—from the summit of which one may see the Cumberland hills in the eastern distance, misty and mysterious. One can also see the heights of Ayr, far away to the north, and there, peering over the edge of the western horizon, the Irish coast.

During the morning Handforth & Co. took a trip out of Douglas on the electric line, and they went as far as Laxey; and even Handforth was enchanted by the glories of the scenery.

One minute they were dipping through glorious woods and pulling up at little stations amongst the trees; then they would go on again, whirling and twisting, with a flower-decorated hotel near by, perhaps.

They had lunch in a quiet little inn near Laxey; and, of course, they could not come away without viewing the famous Laxey Wheel—a gigantic structure designed by a Manx engineer, and originally used for pumping the lead and silver mines upon which Laxey was once dependent.

They had a fine view of Snaefell, at the head of the Laxey Valley.

In fact, upon Handforth's suggestion, they not only had a view of it from a distance, but they went on the electric car from Laxey Station and made the journey right to the summit. From there they obtained some glorious, never-to-be-forgotten views.

It was half-past three by the time they got back into Douglas, and Church and McClure were beginning to get a bit anxious about their boat.

"We'd better make straight for the pier," said Church, as they walked along the Harris Promenade. "If we miss this boat, Handy, we shan't be able to leave until to-morrow."

"I don't think I should mind much," said Handforth. "Still, I dare say we'd better go back to-day. There'd only be a lot of trouble."

They went along the Loch Promenade, and arrived at the Victoria Landing Pier. And there, suddenly, Handforth came to a standstill.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated, in a startled voice.

"What's the matter?" asked his chums.

"Look!" whispered Handy. "That man—leaning over the stonework, looking into the harbour! Don't you see him?"

"It's—it's the rotter who shoved us into that cellar last night!" ejaculated Church.

It was true. The man was Mr. Marley himself!

He had spent a very anxious day in Douglas, and even now he was awaiting some definite news regarding those three boys who had been drowned—or who might have been drowned. Marley did not know, and he was full of worry.

Before long he was booked to be even more worried!

CHAPTER 12.

Handforth's Way!

"JUST a minute, my beauty!" said Handforth agreeably.

Mr. Marley spun round, gasping. He found himself grasped by Handforth and by Church and by McClure. He looked at them in an utterly scared way.

"Gosh!" he gurgled. "I—I thought you were dead!"

"No such luck for you, my son!" replied Handforth promptly. "We're very much alive!"

"I'm glad," muttered Marley, who was indeed intensely relieved. "I didn't like to think of you kids being drowned in the Mersey. I heard that you'd been run down by a steamer—"

"We were run down—and that's why we're here," said Handforth coldly. "We were picked up by the night packet for the Isle of Man. But we didn't expect to find you here."

Marley cursed himself. If Handforth & Co. were surprised to see him, he was ten times more surprised to see them. And, somehow, he did not like Handforth's expression.

"Well, what are you going to do?" he asked uncomfortably.

"You kidnapped us last night, and you held us prisoners," said Handforth. "If we hadn't been pretty lively, we might have been down that cellar now."

"No," said Marley quickly. "I went to your train and got some of the boys to come to fetch you—but you were gone when we got there."

"Why bring some of the chaps to fetch us?" asked Handforth suspiciously. "Oh, I see! You made them bring money. Ransom, eh?"

Marley was silent.

"You're a tricky rotter!" said Handforth, with a glare. "It's a jolly lucky thing for you that we're alive, strictly speaking, or you might find yourself in the dock for manslaughter, or something like that. It was your fault that we had to row across the Mersey in a small boat."

"You can't blame me for that!" blustered Marley. "The affair's over now, anyhow—"

"No, it isn't!" said Handforth. "It isn't over by long chalks!"

"Handy, don't forget the boat!" urged Church. "We shall miss it unless we're careful!"

"Bother the boat!" said Handforth. "Plenty of time yet! Now look here, my beauty! I'm going to give you your choice. Shall we hand you over to the police here, and charge you with kidnapping us last night—or will you come with us quietly?"

"I—I don't know what you mean!" blustered Marley, thoroughly scared. "You can't hand me over to the police! You can't charge me with anything!"

"Can't we?" retorted Handforth. "We can charge you with conspiracy—and you know it! You'd better decide within a minute, because we're in a hurry. There's a policeman within sight, so don't start any funny business! Shall we call him over, or will you come with us?"

"Where to?"

"Never mind where to," said Handforth. "Take your choice! Come with us quietly, or I'll call that bobby."

"I'll come—I'll come," said Mr. Marley hastily.

BACK in Liverpool, the School Train was still standing on its quiet siding, and in the dusk of the evening a number of fellows were standing about near the train, taking the air. It was after locking-up, but the fellows were not compelled to remain on the train, for the evening was warm.

"Still they haven't come," said Nipper, glancing at his watch. "It was like Handforth's nerve to send the gov'nor a wire saying that he wasn't coming back until the afternoon boat!"

"Just like Handy, though," chuckled Travers. "Well, well! Why shouldn't he have his fling? If I found myself in the Isle of Man in the early morning, I'm blowed if I'd come back by the morning boat!"

"Same here," said Reggie Pitt. "I don't blame Handy for staying behind to have a look round."

"Those Study D chaps get all the luck!" grumbled Bob Christine of the Fourth. "They go blundering about and get themselves into an awful mess, and in the end they come out on top. We haven't had the luck to get a trip to the Isle of Man!"

Everybody knew the full details, of course. In the very early morning the news had come that Handforth & Co. were perfectly safe, and that they were on board the steamer for Douglas, having been picked up after the accident. Nelson Lee, too, had been in telegraphic communication with the steamship authorities, and he had also communicated with the police. Not that this was really necessary now. The whole affair had ended up satisfactorily, and there was no need to make a police-court case out of it.

Needless to say, Captain Marsh was extraordinarily upset when he heard the news. For he blamed himself entirely for what had happened; he should have sent one of his officers home with the boys.

"Here they are!" went up a sudden shout.

"Hail, the conquering heroes!" murmured Travers. "Dear old fellows, it pays to be naughty! We've been such good little boys, and we don't get cheered, do we?"

Handforth & Co. had just been spotted. They were coming down the road towards the School Train. Presently they arrived, and they were surrounded by a yelling mob of Removites and Fourth-Formers. Then it was seen that the chums of Study D had brought somebody with them.

"Steady on!" grinned Handforth. "What's all the fuss about?"

"Good old Handy!" shouted Jimmy Potts. "We thought you were dead, you know."

"It's not so easy to kill me," replied Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Thanks for what you fellows did last night," continued Handforth. "I understand that you rallied round a good bit, and that you came along with some money. But we couldn't wait for you."

"You escaped, you bounders!" said Nipper, pushing forward. "Good luck to you, Handy! It was pretty wonderful the way you broke out of that cellar and got away."

"It was even more wonderful the way he escaped being drowned in the Mersey," chuckled Vivian Travers. "Upon my Samson! Isn't this our genial friend, Mr. Marley?"

It was. Mr. Marley, much against his will, had been compelled to come all the way home with Handforth & Co. He considered that this was better than being handed over to the nearest policeman. For never once had Handforth budged from his resolve. Either Marley came quietly, or he would be handed to the police.

BUT before any of the fellows could make any inquiries, Nelson Lee arrived on the scene.

"I am glad that you boys have returned safely," he said, as he confronted them. "I shall not punish you for this escapade, because it was not entirely your own fault in the first place. You were wrong, perhaps, in going on board that cargo-boat

without permission, but it was only a trivial offence."

"Thanks awfully, sir!" chorused Handforth & Co.

"It was Captain Marsh's little joke which led to the night's incidents," said Nelson Lee. "Who is this man, by the way?"

"He's the rotter who tricked us, sir," replied Handforth. "He's the man who shoved us into that warehouse cellar, and who came up here to get money from the chaps."

"Oh!" said Nelson Lee, turning to Marley. "What have you to say about this?"

"I didn't mean any real harm, sir," muttered Marley. "I only thought I'd make a bit of cash for myself and for a mate of mine. It wasn't a real crooked job. I've always run straight until now. I've lost my work, and I daren't go back on board."

"You deserve to be very severely punished," said Lee curtly.

"That's why I've brought him back, sir," said Handforth eagerly. "We don't want to make a police job of it, do we? The rotter didn't make anything out of the game. It failed horribly. We found him in the Isle of Man—he'd gone there to keep out of our way."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And instead of that, we ran right into him!" grinned Handforth. "So we collared him and brought him along."

"Why did you bring him here?"

"Because we want him to be punished, sir," said Handforth. "And I want you to give me your permission to punish him. Leave it to the Remove and the Fourth, sir."

Nelson Lee considered for a moment. He quite agreed that there was no real case for the police as things had turned out. It would only mean a lot of complications and delays if he gave Marley in charge and prosecuted him.

"Very well, Handforth," said Lee dryly. "Since this man attempted to victimise you juniors, and came very near to succeeding, it will only be justice if you juniors deal with him. But don't take too long over it."

"Thanks awfully, sir," grinned Handforth. "You're a brick!"

Nelson Lee made himself scarce, and Mr. Marley looked round uncomfortably. He now found himself surrounded by a shouting mob of excited schoolboys.

"What—what are you going to do to me?" he asked, breathing hard.

"What do you suggest, Nipper?" said Handforth.

"Well, we can start with the frog's-march, and then make him run the gauntlet," said Nipper thoughtfully.

"Hear, hear!"

"Grab him!"

"And after that we can take him to that horse-trough down the road and duck him," said Nipper. "Finally we can roll him in the dust, and—"

"You—you young ruffians!" gasped Marley. "What kind of a game do you call this? Twenty or thirty of you setting on one man? I thought you schoolboys were famous for your sportsmanship?"

"It's not a question of setting on you," said Nipper. "You deserve to be punished, and frog's-marching and running the gauntlet are two of our recognised forms of punishment."

"Hold on!" said Handforth grimly. "If this rotter is going to talk like that, I've got another suggestion to make. Hold my coat, Churchy!"

"What are you going to do?" gasped Church.

"Thrash him!" retorted Handforth briefly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A true Handforthian touch, by Samson!" murmured Travers. "He brings him all the way from the Isle of Man, and now he's going to deal with him single-handed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A ring was quickly formed, for Handforth was determined. He was not going to have this rascal telling everybody that the St. Frank's juniors were unsporting.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH made a thorough job of it.

And Nelson Lee, as he watched from the School Train was completely satisfied. Marley was a full-grown man, but he was very much out of condition. Handforth, on the other hand, was as fit as a fiddle, and just now he was feeling righteously angry. Furthermore, whilst Handforth had an excellent knowledge of boxing, Mr. Marley was a mere exponent of kick and rush methods.

And these were futile in dealing with a fellow like Handforth—and particularly with such a crowd of schoolboys surrounding the fight. Marley was not allowed to adopt any foul tactics.

The fight lasted for exactly five rounds, and Handforth enjoyed himself immensely. At the beginning of the fifth round Mr. Marley was very groggy, and he went down like a log after half a minute, knocked out by a clean drive from Handforth's left.

"And that's that!" said Edward Oswald contentedly.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Handy!"

"That's the way to deal with rotters of his type!"

"Yes, rather!"

And Marley, after a bucket of cold water had been thrown over him, crawled away—with a great and lasting respect in his heart for these touring schoolboys!

THE END.

(Jolly fine yarn that, eh, chums? There's another corker coming along next week when the cheery boys of St. Frank's are in the Manchester and Birmingham districts. It's entitled "Willy Declares War!" Look out for it on the bookstalls next Wednesday.)



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.



VERA COOPER

YOU'VE been reading the St. Frank's yarns for over eight years—M. J. C. Walker (Bangor, Co. Down)—since the first story you read, the title of which you ask me for, was "Adrift in Mid-Air," and it appeared in No. 305, old series, on April 9th, 1921. And since then, I understand, you haven't missed a single copy. Congratulations, old man! I am quite sure that I shouldn't have the courage to read over four hundred stories, one after the other, week after week, by the same author.

* * *

Those two League Application Forms you sent me—Derrick Butts (Johannesburg)—should have been sent to the Chief Officer. And that wouldn't have been any good, either, now I come to think of it, so they shouldn't have been sent to the Chief Officer at all. You see, you used odd forms, and that renders your application for membership n.g. You *must* have two forms from the same week's issue—one to be signed by yourself, and the other by the person to whom you introduce the paper. Please understand that this person is not required to make any pledge that he or she will become a reader, and is under no obligation to buy a single copy. We hope that the free copy he receives from you will *make* him a reader. Get the idea?

* * *

If it will fill you with joy—Lewis Hall (South Bundaberg, Queensland)—to send me a full account of the manufacture of sugar, I shall be most delighted to read it. I think it is very sweet of you to think of me like this!

* * *

Sorry—Alec Singleton (Egremont)—but I can't let you have my photograph until you have sent me one of yours. That's the rule, you know, and I must stick to it. As soon as you get yourself snapped, send me a print, and you shall have my autographed photo by return. If you haven't got a camera of your own, I expect some of your friends have. Perhaps one of them has a single exposure left on a roll of six, and wants to find any old thing to finish the lot so that he can get

the roll out of the camera. That's just where you'll come in. If not, there's generally a photographer not far off, ready to pounce upon a likely customer. You've only got to give these chaps half a chance, and they'll have you in front of the studio camera before you can say "knife."

* * *

You'll be pleased to hear—no doubt you've already seen announcements—Doris Hill (Melton Mowbray)—that a Portrait Gallery is to be started next week. You'll find full descriptions of Nipper and Vivian Travers and Reggie Pitt in this.

* * *

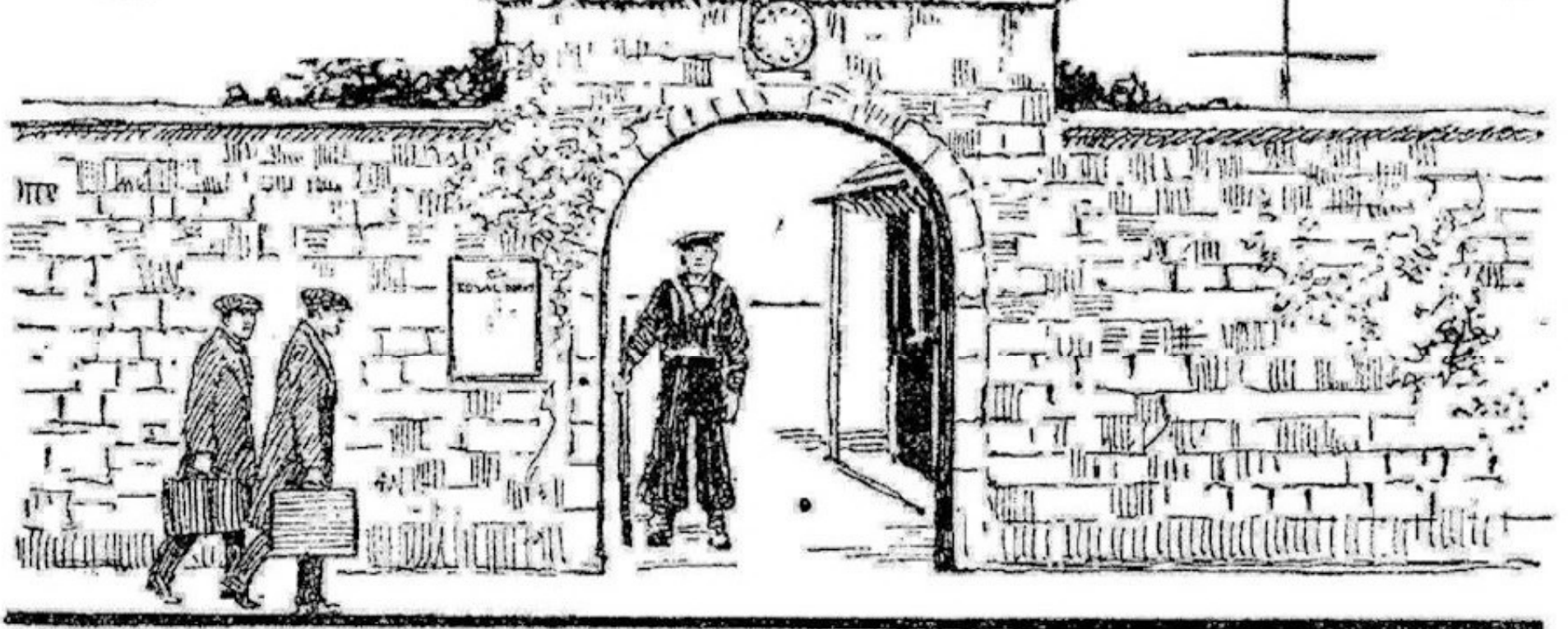
Naturally, I can't reply to every letter I receive—Vera Cooper (Mitcham Junction)—but I don't pick one at random, you know; I read every letter, and do my very best to reply, either on this page or by post, to those points which really call for an answer. In just the same way, I can't pass on every readers' photograph to the Editor for publication. Yours, which appears this week, is quite a good one, but a lot that I receive are quite unsuitable for reproduction, being either too dark, or too blurry, or too faint, or too something else. That's why I always ask readers to send me clear photographs whenever possible.

* * *

So Vivian Travers is your favourite character—"Supporter" (Barnsley). You're not the only one by long chalks who thinks the same. I've had numerous letters from readers who tell me that they like Travers. He was first introduced in the Boot-boy Baronet series, which started in No. 90, New Series, dated January 21st, 1928. Yes, I should very much like to receive your photograph, and if it is suitable it will certainly be published in the Old Paper.

This Fine Serial Is Breaking All Records For Popularity!

RIVALS of the RAMPANT!



By STANTON HOPE

The Chase!

OF course, Jack had not been robbing the poor-box, but all sort of complications would arise if he fell into the hands of the police. Doubtless he would be able to prove his innocence, but his escapade in breaking leave would be discovered. Worse still, the police might make awkward inquiries about his past history, and discover that episode of the reformatory school which he had hushed up when he had joined the Navy.

At all costs he must keep clear of the law!

Pheeeep!

Again that blood-chilling shriek of the whistle burst out on the damp air.

A couple of burly navvies were coming out of a hostelry called The Sheer Hulk as a voice within bellowed: "Time, gen'leman!"

"Stop him!" bawled the policeman, turning the corner.

The burly labourers turned and flung out their arms. Jack darted between them, and the two comrades, lurching forward, found themselves in a fond embrace.

The doors of two or three dwelling-houses opened and disgorged the occupants.

"What's up?" yelled somebody.

"That young sailor!" panted the policeman. "Get a-hold of him!"

The spirit of the chase entered into the householders and others in the street. And

Jack, straining every muscle to keep ahead of his pursuers and evade any people who appeared in his path, got a very fair idea of what a fox feels like when it hears the hoofs of the hunters behind it and the air ringing with exuberant "Yoicks!"

An old gentleman, with great presence of mind, slung his rubber-ferruled stick. It got Jack across the legs, and brought him headlong in the gutter.

A local lad, made over-bold by the fact that there were about two hundred people coming up in the rear to support him, leaped on to the boy as he rose.

Crack!

Jack's fist came round in a trice, connecting with the fellow's jaw, and as his attacker reeled backwards, took to his heels again.

A fine natural runner, Jack sprinted as he had never done

before, for the fear of being caught winged his feet. Though he had no intimate knowledge of this part of Porthaven, he had a general idea in which direction lay the naval training schools. Dodging down another street, he saw a policeman hurrying from the far end.

"C-crums!" panted Jack, in di-may.

It seemed as though it was all up, when a narrow turning to his left hand caught his eye. It proved to be a long mews between the back gardens of two rows of

"Breaking bounds" within a few hours of arriving at a Naval Training School is hardly the right way to create a good impression with the authorities. Yet Jack Gilbert breaks bounds for reasons that you'll agree with, even if the authorities don't!

houses. Racing up it he found himself confronted by a six-foot wall at the far end.

Behind him rose the sounds of the chase, perilously near. There was nothing to do but take a chance and shin over it, which he did with the nimbleness of an expert Navy gym instructor!

Blindly he crashed across a yard littered with the boards, barrels, and other gear of a contractor in a small way, vaulted another wall beyond, and found himself in a narrow passageway leading past a house on his right.

An elderly lady opened a side door, hearing the roar of the pursuit, but at the sight of the flying figure of the young blue-jacket racing past her abode, staggered back yelling for the police, and slammed the door shut again.

The street in which Jack, hot and breathless, emerged from the passageway was deserted, save for two girls some distance off.

Taking the opposite direction which was the way to the Rampant, Jack put on a final spurt and reached that street which passed the high wall over which he had climbed less than an hour before. To him it seemed that, although he had reached the wall, he was just as badly "snookered" as Busky Smith would have been had he played with those billiard sharks who had marked him for their prey. Then a long object leaning against the wall caught his eye, and a gasp of relief left his lips as he saw it was a builder's scaffolding pole.

Obviously, what had happened was that Busky Smith, after leaving the vicinity of the convent, had legged it back as fast as he could by a short cut, and had obtained this pole from the half-completed buildings opposite.

Now it stood Jack in good stead, and he shinned up it like a monkey. Very cautiously he gripped the spikes and lowered himself on the far side. As he did so, he heard the crowd beginning to collect at the main gates of the Rampant three hundred yards away round a corner. Of course, the policeman would have known instantly that any boy as young as Jack must belong to the

Rampant training schools, and, having lost sight of him, would naturally go there to report. It was up to Jack to get back to his dormitory before the petty officer at the gates turned out the guard to make a search.

Jack dropped to the ground, noticing that the rope was still hanging from the wall farther along, and ran toward the shelter of the gun-sheds. To his dismay one of the Royal Marine sentries appeared, his rifle at the slope, and his fixed bayonet gleaming white as paper in one of the small electric lights which were set at intervals throughout the training school area.

Jack, who did not yet know the geography of the schools, turned away to the right and passed into the shadow of a long shed as the sentry's challenge rang out:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

With fast-beating heart, the boy raced from out the shelter of the shed, and, to his further consternation, found himself on a broad walk facing the long and narrow pool where certain instructional exercises in cutters and other boats were given to the advanced classes.

The Marine who had challenged him appeared at the far end of the pool on his left; another Marine, attracted by the challenge of the first, came hurrying from the other end.

The second sentry also let rip the challenge:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

Jack hesitated and said nothing. The two men raced towards him, and the second fellow, who was little better than a recruit, pushed down the safety catch of his rifle, and, raising the muzzle, fired from the hip!

The Get-Away!

BANG! As the report burst out upon the sleeping schools and a flash of flame stabbed the night air, Jack stiffened himself. His hands instinctively went down

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

JACK GILBERT, a cheery youngster of some fifteen years, has his whole career changed in the course of one night. It happens when his rascally uncle, and his only living relative,

LEW BONNER, asks the boy to burgle a certain place. Jack refuses. A fight ensues, in which Bonner falls through a trapdoor, and is swept away by an underground stream—apparently to his doom. Jack thereupon decides to forget the sordid past and to start afresh. He tells his story to his only friend,

BARNY MORLAND, who takes him under his wing. Barny gets Jack to join H.M.S. Rampant, a naval training school at Porthaven, along with his—Barny's—nephew.

CLEM SMITH, a worthless individual, who hates Jack. Barny tells the boys that he intends to leave a sum of £2,000 to the one who acquits himself best in the Service. Crossing by ferry on the way to the school, the boat in which the two boys are travelling collides with a steamer. Jack is horrified to see his uncle on this latter boat. The lad saves the ferry boat from sinking, but everybody thinks that Smith is responsible for the heroic action, and a collection is made for him. At the Rampant, Smith—who becomes known as Busky—is looked upon as a hero. One night Busky "breaks bounds," taking with him the ferry collection money. He intends to have a "good time." Jack follows him, and makes Busky put the money in a convent poor box, after which Smith goes off in a rage. A policeman then comes along and collars Jack, accusing him of robbing the box. The boy escapes, and the policeman gives chase!

(Now read on.)

his sides, as though seeking to find where he had been shot.

Then he realised it was only a blank charge which had been used, and the recoil of the gun had slewed the "Jolly" half round, and almost wrenched his arms from their sockets. The other sentry bellowed some angry remark to his mate, and rushed along the broadwalk.

Instantly Jack made up his mind. He dared not retreat, and he was unlikely to get past either of those armed sentries. He took the only other course, and leaped into a dinghy some feet below in the basin, and moored to the wall by a rope.

As the Marines rushed towards him, he whipped out his jack-knife, severed the painter, and shoved off with an oar.

"Belay!" bellowed one of the Marines. "Put back, there!"

Flopping on to a thwart, Jack got out the other oar, and, keeping his cap well down on his forehead and his face averted, vigorously pulled for the far side.

The two Marines hesitated for a moment or two, and then began to run the length of the basin.

Long before they could make the distance Jack's boat bumped against the opposite side, and, without waiting to tie it, he gripped a ring-bolt and scrambled ashore. Then he sprinted for the gun-sheds, dodged among them, and reached the Collingwood Block.

Here fortune favoured him. The sentry he had evaded on his way out was at the far end of his patrol and gazing across to the main gates which were besieged by the uproarious crowd. Thus the boy, almost dead-beat, was able to stagger up the stairs without being seen, and plunge into the darkness of the small New Entries' dormitory.

"Phew!" he panted. "Oh, m-my aunt!"

The whole dozen New Entries were sitting up in their hammocks. They had been awakened by Busky's return a few minutes before, and they peered harder through the gloom in the attempt to see who else had come in.

Jack got a glimpse of Busky in flannel vest swinging into a hammock, and then he heard the tense voice of his new "raggie," Ginger Jones, addressing him.

"Is that you, Jack?"

"Aye, chum," returned Jack hoarsely, as he tore off his jumper. "But I—I'll tell you about things later. Pink me, I've roused a fair giddy hornets' nest to-night!"

As Jack rapidly stripped down to his blue-ribbed vest, two or three of the other boys recognised him and began firing off a volley of questions. Already they had questioned Busky, who had responded only with angry snarls.

"Where've you been?" demanded someone.

"What have you and old Busky been up to?"

"Oh, dry up!" panted Jack.

He was in no mood for a cross-examination.

Nor was Busky, who suddenly sat upright in his blankets and roared with rage.

"Clew up your jaw tackle!" he bawled,

using a phrase he had borrowed from Petty-officer Teak. "I'll punch the heads of any one who says anythin' more about us leavin' the dormitory to-night!"

The sounds of voices and marching feet came from outside. It seemed as though the whole of the training schools had now been aroused.

Heavy footsteps sounded on the polished stone stairs.

"We'll soon find out if there're any of 'em adrift," rumbled the gruff voice of Petty-officer Teak.

A moment before the electric light was switched on, every head went down on the hammock pillows.

"Shake a leg!" bellowed the P.O. "Arise an' shine!"

A healthy chorus of snores greeted the order.

"Tar me!" roared Teak. "Tumble out, there! Don't try 'swinging the lead' here, me hearties! There's not a one of you who's asleep!"

The boys sat up and blinked innocently.

"They're all here, sir," said Teak, addressing the lieutenant who had followed him up the stairs.

"Have any of you boys been adrift to-night?" demanded the petty-officer.

A chorus of "No, sir!" greeted the remark, and Jack's silence went unnoticed.

"It wouldn't have been any of these fellows, sir," mumbled Petty-officer Teak. "None of 'em know their way around yet."

"Humph!" grunted the lieutenant. "Well, the whole matter will be investigated in the morning."

To the relief of the New Entries, especially Jack and Busky, the lieutenant and Petty-officer Teak took their departure.

The authorities apparently had the idea that whoever it was who had eluded the sentries was still lurking among the many buildings of the training schools area. It came as a surprise, therefore, when a swift examination of all the other dormitories revealed that every boy was in his hammock.

The crowd was dispersed, and the policeman sent away with the promise that he might return on the following morning, when the matter could better be investigated.

So once more sleep descended on H.M.S. Rampant, except that it steadfastly eluded both Jack and Busky Smith.

While the other New Entries were sleeping the sleep of the just, Busky slowly and silently swung down from his hammock and crossed to Jack.

"What happened?" he growled. "Where'd you get to, and what was all the bobbery about?"

Jack, who was racked by anxiety, gritted his teeth. He felt that he had had quite enough of Busky Smith during the last two days to last him a life-time.

"Oh, go and chop chips!" he snapped.

Busky swung his foot as though to bring it

up under Jack's hammock, but, thinking better of it, ambled back to his own sleeping place and turned in.

Still sleep refused to come to Jack's heavy eyes.

Had the policeman recognised him? Or could one of those Marine fellows pick him out from among his fellows? If so, his career in the Navy would probably come to an abrupt end.

So he tossed restlessly in that unaccustomed bed which swung to his every movement.

What would the morrow bring forth?

The Identity Parade.

PRAYERS were over on the following morning, and the boys in their divisions were standing motionless on the parade ground, or "quarter-deck," as it was more often called.

High on the flagstaff the White Ensign drooped miserably in the damp, chill air. And the chill of impending trouble was in the heart of every junior present.

Presently Captain Hedworth Orr and members of the staff, followed by a Porthaven policeman, approached. To Jack Gilbert and Busky Smith among the New Entries, the crunch of their footsteps on the gravel seemed like the approach of grim Fate itself!

There was some small ceremonial when the senior officer reported all present and correct. Then the deep voice of Captain Hedworth Orr boomed forth.

"I regret," he said, "that a serious report has been made by the police against a boy of these training schools."

He made an impressive pause and resumed:

"Some miscreant, to whom the honour of the Rampant means little, was adrift last night in Porthaven. Under cover of darkness he scaled the outer wall of the school by means of a rope, and, shortly after ten o'clock, was seen by a policeman outside the convent—robbing the box placed there on the wall for the purpose of collecting money for needy orphan children."

As he paused again, the assembled boys drew a deep breath, and in almost every face there showed a flush of shame that any boy of the Rampant could have stooped to so foul a purpose.

"I demand," thundered Captain Orr, "that the miscreant who has thus besmirched the honour of the Rampant shall take a pace forward!"

The ensuing silence—like Egypt's plague of darkness—could be felt.

But not a boy moved. All remained so still that they might have been carved out of stone.

"Very well," rumbled the commanding-officer, "I will request P.-c. Nolan, of the Porthaven Force, to identify the culprit."

Jack Gilbert, standing between his pal, Ginger Jones, and Busky Smith, felt a slight nudge.

"Gr-rrrh, take your gruel!" grunted Busky in the faintest whisper. "D'you want to get others 'in the rattle?'"

P.O. Teak glanced back.

"Clew up your jaw tackle, there!" he rumbled. "Another sound, and, spike me, I'll hot it up for the lot of you!"

Outwardly frozen, Jack inwardly was a seething furnace of emotion. What was he to do? The captain had demanded that the boy who had been interrupted in the act of robbing the collecting-box at the convent should step forth. Neither he nor Busky had done that.

He stood fast and said nothing.

Plainly the constable was in difficulties. Starting with the senior classes, he peered at boy after boy, and sometimes paused and scratched his head under his helmet. Then, accompanied by the captain, he came and inspected the squad of New Entries.

Both Jack and Busky tingled in every nerve, as though galvanised by an electric battery. They felt the eyes of their fellow members of the squad upon them. They saw the constable scrutinising them intently. Would he recognise him as the culprit? thought Jack in palpitating suspense.

There was a respite as a "paybob" approached and saluted.

"A telephone message has arrived from the police-station, sir," he said to the captain. "The convent people have opened the box and discovered no less than £8 in it and a pencilled message. I have copied down the words of it for you."

Captain Orr glanced at the paper handed to him, and gave a murmur of relief.

"Then it was not attempted robbery, after all," he muttered.

The commanding-officer and the policeman spoke together for a moment or two; then the former addressed the divisions.

"I have just received information," he stated, "that puts a very different complexion on the affair. Step forward—Clement Smith!"

There was a general stir as Busky, red as a lobster, stepped out of the ranks.

"You were the boy that put the ferry-boat aground, Smith," said the captain, "and I understand a collection was taken up for you by the grateful passengers. I have here a copy of the note that was put into the collecting-box at the convent last night. It reads: '£7 15s. 9d.—From the boy who beached the ferry.' Did you write and leave that note in the convent collecting-box last night?"

Busky moistened his lips.

"Y-y-yes, s-s-sir!" he stammered.

Captain Orr addressed the constable.

"It appears," he said, "that, instead of taking money out of the box, this boy was putting funds into it."

The policeman scratched his head.

"It's a fair knock-out," he mumbled. "Yet I'd ha' sworn in any court o' law that the boy I saw was prising a 'alf-crown out of the box and not putting one in. His general behaviour was suspicious-like."



The constable looked along the line of boys; his gaze rested upon Jack, who was palpitating with anxiety. Would the constable recognise him as the boy who had "broken bounds" from the Rampant?

"You mean he ran away?"

"I mean he butted me in the belt, sir. The young varmint wriggled out of me clutch like an eel. He laid out two navvies; he hooked a local bloke twice his size to the jaw, and put him in the gutter. Then he hurdled over some garden walls and, running like a hare, got clear of a crowd of more than two hundred people."

"Phew!"

Sheer admiration was now in the breathless gasp of the young sailors.

"In addition," added the captain, "the culprit evaded two Marine sentries, cut a dinghy adrift on the basin, got across in it, and escaped to his dormitory."

"And now, constable, do you recognise in this boy the one who attacked you?" asked the captain.

The policeman glanced over the New Entries, and for a moment his eyes flickered on Jack's face. Actually, he had never properly seen the features of his youthful attacker, but he had imagined that the boy was smaller and lighter than Busky Smith. However, in view of this evidence, it must have been Busky Smith, and, anyway, he was a hefty lad, more likely to upset a policeman than anyone else he saw. He nodded.

"Yes. So far as I can say, sir, this was the young ruffian."

"Are these allegations true, Smith?" demanded Captain Orr.

It had been on the tip of Busky's tongue to deny vigorously everything, except that he had been adrift, but he recognised the admiration in the general murmur of his "shipmates," and a cunning gleam came into his eyes.

By obtaining the credit for the heroic act performed by Jack on the sinking ferry-boat, he believed he had made himself more popular with his uncle, old Barny Morland. And here was another heaven-sent chance; this time to make himself popular with the Rampant fellows.

"What he says is right, sir," he answered after a momentary pause.

"I see," rumbled the captain. "So you broke out of the schools for the purpose of putting that money in the convent box?"

"Exactly, sir," answered Busky eagerly. "After all, it was only my duty to try and save the lives of those people in the ferry, and I couldn't a-bear to think of keeping the money that they had collected for me, when there were orphans and such-like in more need of it."

"But as you put a note in the box with it," said Captain Orr sternly, "it was obvious that you did not wish to remain anonymous. Why, therefore, didn't you take it to the convent on some occasion when you had leave during the day-time?"

(That's a bit of a poser for Busky. Will he get himself into trouble, or will he bluff it out successfully? Don't miss next week's grand instalment, chums.)

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 105.

SECTION

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

A

I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with the Membership Number assigned to me, and Membership Badge.

SECTION

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

B

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.), hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

C

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."

(FULL NAME).....

(ADDRESS).....

INSTRUCTIONS.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms leave in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. The second form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together, and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

Member Applying for Bronze Medal: It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms, bearing the same number, are needed. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his

name and address at the bottom of the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, providing that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when they have secured the requisite number of readers they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver one.

These Application Forms can be posted for 3d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

A FEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE.

You can write to fellow members living at home or in the most distant outposts of the Empire.

You are offered free advice on choosing a trade or calling, and on emigration to the colonies and dependencies.

If you want to form a sports or social club, you can do so amongst local members of the League.

You are offered free hints on holidays, whether walking, biking, or camping.

You can qualify for the various awards by promoting the growth of the League.

If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.

NOTICE!

The St. Frank's League has now attained such proportions that we are compelled to discontinue the offer of gold medals in connection therewith. The silver and bronze medals will still be available, however, as heretofore, to those who qualify for them in accordance with the rules.



Our Weekly Pow-Wow!

By
The Editor.

Your Editor welcomes letters from all his readers; send him one now. Address it to: The Editor, "Nelson Lee Library," Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

LAST week, chums, I announced that a St. Frank's Portrait Gallery was on the way, and that a special prize-winning scheme for members of the St. Frank's League would also be starting shortly. I further intimated that a number of other new features would soon be introduced to make the Old Paper even better and brighter than ever, and that this week I would tell you all about them.

Right-ho!

The Portrait Gallery!

This will appear next Wednesday—beginning with Edward Oswald Handforth. Good old Handy, with his recklessness, his blundering methods, his good-natured disposition and his amusing antics, is one of the most popular characters in the St. Frank's yarns. The fact that he is to open the portrait gallery will meet with everybody's approval, I'm sure.

The portraits, of course, are being drawn by the same artist who does the sketches for the stories, and you can take my word for it that he has excelled himself in this new feature.

Prizes for League-ites!

Last week I gave you a brief idea of this prize-winning scheme for readers of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY who belong to the St. Frank's League, and FULL details will be published next Wednesday. For readers who missed my previous announcement, however, I will repeat what I have already said. Briefly, I want League-ites to write to me and tell me anything interesting they've done or heard of in connection with the League.

This should be quite easy, especially for those of you who are secretaries of St. Frank's League clubs. The best and most interesting of these letters will be published week by week, and the senders will receive handsome pocket wallets or penknives.

Watch out for full details of this scheme next week—and in the meantime, if you're not already a member of the St. Frank's League, join now by filling in the Form which appears on the opposite page.

"The St. Frank's League Corner!"

By now the St. Frank's League is a big organisation; its membership numbers many thousands of enthusiastic Nelson-Leeites. And therefore it is only right that they should have a page or two of the Old Paper to themselves, so to speak.

Accordingly I have arranged for a new feature to start next week, entitled: "The St. Frank's League Corner." In this, as Chief Officer, I shall chat to my fellow League-ites on interesting topics; here I shall be pleased to help and reply to members who write to me. The "Correspondents Wanted" feature will also continue to be published regularly week by week.

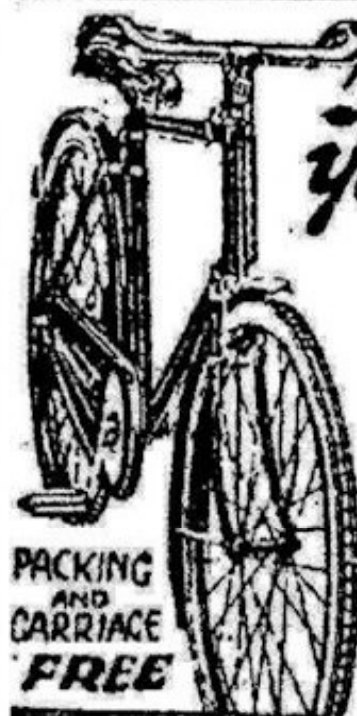
Oh, yes! In future the St. Frank's League will have its own little corner in the NELSON LEE LIBRARY!

"Handforth Replies!"

Edward Oswald Handforth has always been an energetic sort of chap, and when he suggested to me that he wanted to start a little feature of his own in the Old Paper I immediately assented. For I knew that all readers would approve of it.

And so "Handforth Replies!" is going to start next week. I want everybody to write to Edward Oswald—Handy himself says he

(Continued on next page).



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OUR WEEKLY POW-WOW!

(Continued from previous page)

doesn't care how many letters he gets. Drop him a line now, chums. I can assure you that his answers will be amusing, if nothing else!

"How I Keep Fit!"

Another contributor in the NELSON LEE LIBRARY next week will be Fatty Little, of the St. Frank's Remove!

Apparently Handforth has been going round telling everybody at the famous school that he is writing for the Old Paper. The other fellows, not to be outdone, have followed his example, with the result that I have received articles from many of them on many and varied subjects. These will appear in due course. Fatty Little's effort is the one to be published next week, and it's entitled: "How I Keep Fit!"

So you can see that next Wednesday's issue of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY is going to be a real bumper one, chums. Order your copy NOW to make sure of it.

THE EDITOR.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

L. Vosper, Badenscoth House, 6, Timbercroft Lane, Plumstead, London, S.E.18, wants correspondents interested in conjuring.

Geo. W. Moody, 4, Marshfield Road, Goole, Yorks., - wants correspondents in Egypt, China, Cuba, etc.

Raymond Dixon, 71, Boston Road, Mt. Eden, Auckland, New Zealand, wants members for his Kiwi Club. Also wishes to correspond with members and readers anywhere.

J. F. Gilbert, 8, Mayfield Road, Coventry, wishes to correspond with stamp collectors.

Conrad Basson, 84, Longfellow Street, East London, South Africa, wants correspondents anywhere.

G. E. Mills, Kelvin Hotel, Te Kuiti, New Zealand, wants copies of the N.L.L. from No. 1, new series.

L. Eddison, 34, Brunswick Road, Morecambe, has back numbers of the N.L.L. for sale.

"Jimmy" W. Cook, c/o 21, Rook Street, Poplar, London, E.14, wants to hear from readers in Cirencester and Walton-on-the-Naze.

Kevin McMahon, 24, Murphy Street, Richmond, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers; he is a process engraver, and has pictures of all Australian dirt-track racers—a sport on which he is keen.

G. Bradshaw, 33, Perry Road, Shepherd's Bush, London, W.12, wants to correspond with readers in India, China or British Guinea; keen on stamps.

Jack Bailey, Gisborne, New Zealand (Poverty Bay Club), wants correspondents in America.

John Bland, Mokoia Road, Birkenhead, Auckland, New Zealand, wants correspondents anywhere.

R. E. S. Harris, 232, Gordon Road, Camberley, Surrey, wants correspondents anywhere.

Geo. Feather, 107, Devonshire Street, Keighley, Yorks., wants correspondents interested in birds' eggs.

J. Stanley, 65, Graham Street, City Road, London, N.1, has films for sale.

Miss Lottie Garrad, 34, Northcote Avenue, Southall, Middlesex, wants girl correspondents, ages 16-18.

Eric Burkitt, 30, Patey Street, Longsight, Manchester, wants correspondents in Derbyshire.

Sydney G. Nock, 4, Adrian Street, Moston, Manchester, would like to hear from those who would join a motor-cycling trip from July 30th.

Clive Rosser (17), 13, Bishops Place, Kensington, Adelaide, S. Australia, wants correspondents in South Africa, U.S.A. and England.

B. Pountney, 35, King Richard Street, Coventry, wants correspondents anywhere.



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Printed and published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement Offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4. Registered for transmission by Canadian magazine post. Subscription Rates: Inland and Abroad, 11/ per annum, 5/6 for six months. Sole Agents for South Africa: Central News Agency, Limited. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Limited.