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# THE MYSTERY OF THE CAVE!

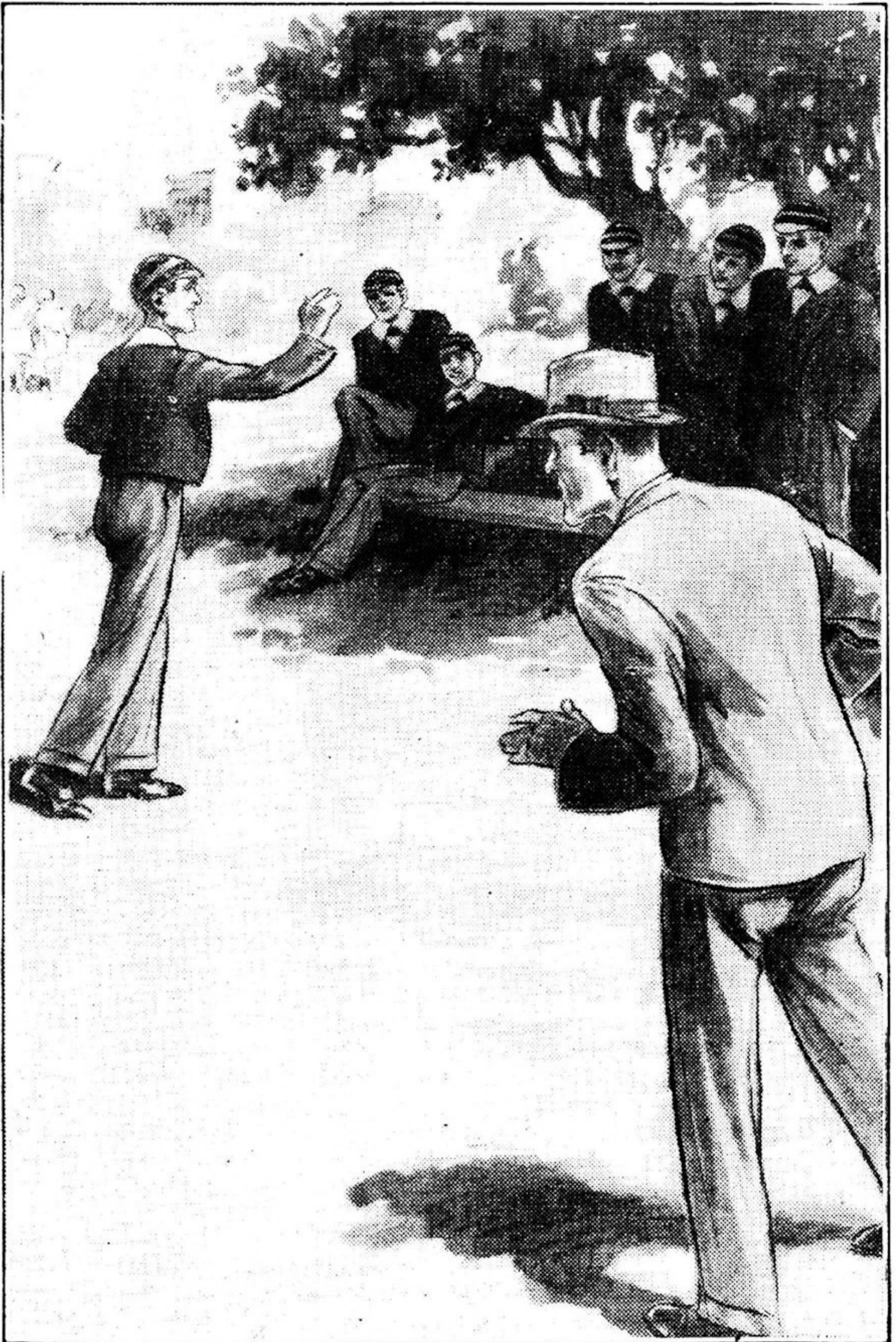
A gripping long complete yarn of schoolboy mystery and adventure,  
featuring the famous chums of St. Frank's on tour.

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OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

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Hipper & Co. gazed at the stranger curiously. He had jumped up from his seat and was gazing at somebody with intense interest. Then suddenly he cried: "My son! My son!" The juniors looked to see who was approaching. It was Reggie Pitt; and yet the stranger was calling him his son!





By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

*Handforth turns 'ec! Handforth on the trail of a missing schoolboy! Need any more be said? All readers will revel in this topping fun, mystery and adventure yarn—settle yourselves down to enjoy it right now!—Ed.*

## CHAPTER 1.

### The Man in Cathays Park!

“SEEMS to be something wrong with the man,” remarked Nipper, in a low voice.

“Just what I was thinking,” nodded Tommy Watson.

“He appears to be frightfully worried, dear old boys,” murmured Sir Montie Tregellis-West. “Begad! He’s holding his head in his hands now!”

The chums of Study C, of St. Frank’s, looked at the man who was the solitary occupant of the park seat some little distance away. As Sir Montie had said, he was bending forward, holding his head in his hands, and rocking himself slightly to and fro.

“Oh, well, it’s none of our business,” said the Remove captain, after a while. “I mean, we can’t interfere, can we? We can’t go up to the chap and ask him what’s wrong. He’d probably flare out at us and tell us to mind our own giddy business!”

Watson glanced at the clock tower of the imposing Cardiff City Hall.

“Time Reggie Pitt was here,” he said, with a grunt. “In fact, he’s late.”

“Well, we shall have to wait,” said Nipper. “If we move, he might come along, and then we should miss one another. I don’t suppose he’ll be long.”

The St. Frank’s juniors were in Cathays Park, Cardiff, and the hot summer’s sun was beating down upon the buildings of the City Hall, and the National Museum of Wales, near by. Nipper & Co., however, were in the shade, and they were feeling rather lazy.

They had had an afternoon of sight-seeing—to-day being a half-holiday—and they had only recently finished the tour of Cardiff Castle.

They had found much to interest them in that unique building—on the site of which, during the first century, the Romans established their camp. Since then this site has been in constant occupation.



In Cardiff Castle one may see works covering a period of nearly twenty centuries. The Romans, the Normans, and the builders of the medieval age, in addition to the builders of each successive century, have all left their traces.

In this way alone, Cardiff Castle is a remarkably interesting building.

The juniors had felt impressed when passing along the roadway through the North Gate. For they knew that this led to the Via Julia, along which marched the armed men of the Roman legions.

And then, rather to the west of the Roman Gate, there is the Norman Keep. This was the castle of the eleventh century and onwards. There is much to be seen here of the massive, and perhaps crude, defensive works of the early Normans.

"The more we see of our own country, the more we marvel at it," remarked Nipper thoughtfully. "By Jove! Since this School Train tour started, my sons, we've had a really marvellous time. We've seen so many historical places, so many great industrial areas, that our knowledge has increased enormously. The School Governors knew what they were doing when they sent St. Frank's on tour."

"Rather!" agreed Tommy Watson. "I shall be jolly sorry when the trip ends."

Most of the fellows were of the same opinion. A few, of course, were longing to get back to the quietude and hum-drum life of St. Frank's; but the majority were keenly interested in this tour. The School Train was on its way south now, after having been as far north as Scotland, and at present it was located some little distance outside Cardiff, on a comparatively quiet siding.

The train had been in Cardiff for several days, and the fellows had found something to occupy every moment of their spare time, for, on the School Train, the usual work went on in just the same way as at St. Frank's. It was only during "off" hours that the fellows were permitted to do their exploring. The authorities allowed a few concessions in this respect—a later hour for calling-over, wholesale permission to be out until supper-time, and so on—and only a very few of the fellows had taken a mean advantage of these favours.

Cardiff had proved to be a wonderland of fascination. There had been the old historical associations on the one hand, and the vast modern activity of the city on the other. The docks themselves—some of the most expensive and perfect in the world—had interested the schoolboys in a very marked way.

They had watched the cricket, too, in the Cardiff Arms Park, they had taken extensive rides on Cardiff's extensive tramway system, they had explored the ancient cathedral of Llandaff City, and they had been on a special motor-coach trip to Caerphilly Castle—an enormous ruin owned by the Marquis of Bute.

This ruin covers an area of over thirty acres, and it is stated to be one of the most extensive of the kind in the kingdom. Caerphilly Castle was occupied alternately by Romans, Normans, Welsh and English forces, and played a very important part in English and Welsh history. It will be remembered that King Edward II took refuge in it from Queen Isabella's forces.

Quite a number of the St. Frank's boys had gone out to Barry Island, with its beautiful bay and sandy beach; they had enjoyed the bathing and boating, and, altogether, they had decided that Cardiff and its surroundings were providing them with some glorious hours of enjoyment.

"THERE'S certainly something wrong with the man," said Nipper uneasily.

They were looking at that solitary figure on the other park seat, not so far from them. The man was sitting upright now, staring straight before him. He had been in this rigid attitude for some moments. He seemed to be staring—staring far into the distance.

"Here comes Reggie Pitt at last," said Tommy Watson. "About time, too!"

The popular leader of the West House juniors was in sight, and it seemed to Nipper that the stranger was staring at Reggie. Indeed, there was positive proof of this a moment later, for the man abruptly leapt to his feet with a hoarse cry, and the boys could see that his face was flushed and his eyes burning.

"My son—my son!" he panted joyously.

"Must be dotty!" said Watson, staring. "There's nobody in sight but Reggie!"

This was not literally true, since there were quite a number of people within sight, yet there was no other boy at whom this man could possibly be looking.

He took a pace or two forward, and then, as suddenly as he had started up, he stopped. His shoulders seemed to droop; the colour fled from his face.

"No, no!" he muttered. "I was wrong! And yet it seemed to me— Oh, I must be going mad!"

He sank back on to the seat, groaning.

"Don't you think we ought to do something, dear old boys?" murmured Sir Montie, in distress. "I'm frightfully upset about this man—I am, really."

"We'll see," said Nipper.

They waited for Reggie Pitt to come up, and in the meantime they glanced unostentatiously at the stranger. He was still looking at Reggie—still watching him fascinatedly. And there was such an expression of misery and worry on his face that the schoolboys were touched. He was a man of about middle age, very well dressed, and obviously refined. There was something about his face, too, which was extraordinarily likeable. He seemed to be a man, who, in normal circumstances, would be jovial and lovable. He was rather stoutish, not very tall, and he was clean-shaven



Reggie Pitt arrived, and sat down by the other juniors.

"Late, aren't I?" he asked, glancing at the City Hall clock.

"About five minutes," said Nipper.

"That fathead, Handforth, stopped me," said Reggie.

"He's coming along soon, I believe. Said he wanted to take a trip to Ninian Park. There's no football there, of course, at this time of the year—but it's the ground where the Cardiff City team plays, and Handy wants to see it."

"Well, he's welcome to go," grunted Tommy Watson, "but he's not going to drag us with him."

"I say," murmured Reggie Pitt. "Do you know anything about that man just across there? He gave me a pretty straight look as I came up. I wondered what the dickens was the matter. He keeps looking at me now, as a matter of fact."

They told him what had happened a few moments earlier.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Reggie. "His son, eh? He mistook me for his son? And then he suddenly groaned and sat down again?"

"He only mistook you at first when you were at quite a distance," said Nipper. "It almost looks as though he's expecting his son. I've a good mind to go across and ask him if we can be of any help."

"A frightfully good idea, Nipper, dear old boy," said Sir Montie promptly.

"Better wait a minute," said Nipper. "Handforth's coming."

"Then we shall have to wait about an hour!" said Reggie Pitt tartly.

Five new figures had appeared in sight, and the stranger was again staring—staring at these new-comers. But there was now no flush on his face, no gleam in his eyes. He was looking at the St. Frank's fellows dully, abstractedly.

Handforth & Co. were accompanied by Archie Glenthorpe and Vivian Travers, and they were all walking briskly.

"YOU lazy bounders!" said Edward Oswald Handforth, as he approached. "Haven't you got anything better to do than sit here?"

"We've been admiring the municipal buildings," said Nipper.

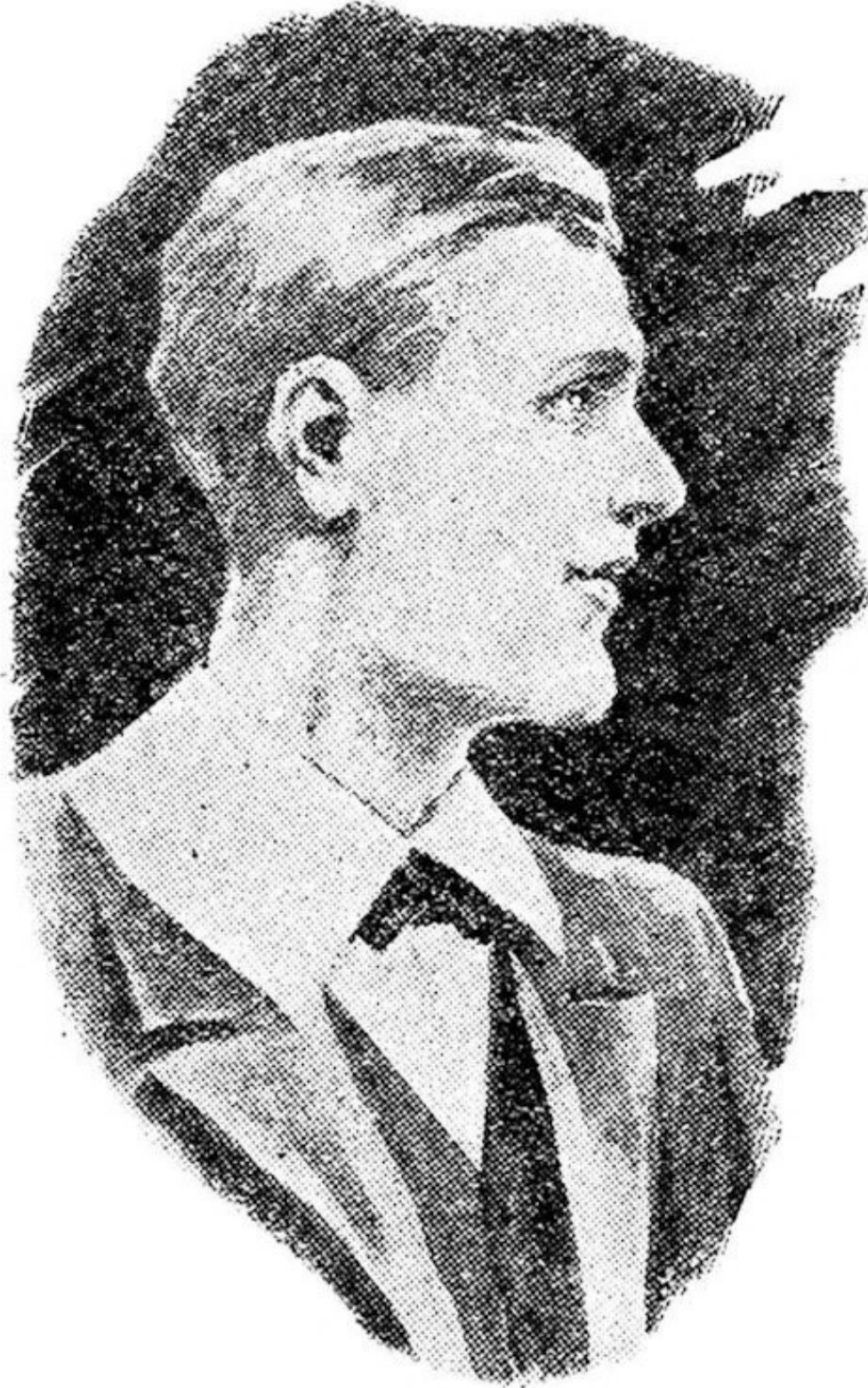
"Which—these?" asked Handforth, looking at the City Hall and the Museum with considerable disrespect. "Nothing much to look at there."

"You'd better not let any of the Cardiff inhabitants hear you saying that," remarked Travers, with a grin. "They're rather proud of their City Hall, dear old fellow."

"Oh, they're not so bad," said Handforth condescendingly.

"You silly chump!" said Church. "There's hardly another city in the kingdom that possesses such wonderful civic buildings. We came in from Park Place, and I couldn't help admiring the scene as we saw the Law Courts on our left, and the City Hall in the centre, and the Museum on the right. There's a rummy old thatched place just

## WHO'S WHO AT ST. FRANK'S.



**NIPPER (DICK HAMILTON).**

**Remove Form.**

**Study C.**

*Junior skipper at St. Frank's and deservedly one of the most popular boys in the school. Of sterling character, and as staunch as they make 'em. A born leader. A brilliant all-round sportsman, and equally clever in the class-room.*



beyond the Law Courts, too—and that looks rather ripping amid these surroundings.”

Church was undoubtedly right. There are few cities that can boast of such an ideal spot as Cathays Park, with its dignified civic buildings.

“Well, come on,” said Handforth briskly. “Let’s be going.”

“Back to the School Train?” asked McClure, the Scottish junior.

“No fear!” replied Handforth. “We’re going to Ninian Park.”

“You can go—but we’ll trot along to Queen Street for some grub,” said Nipper.

“We can pop in the Carlton Restaurant.”

“H’m! That’s not a bad idea,” admitted Handforth. “I’m getting a bit peckish, now I come to think of it. All the same, Ninian Park—”

“Blow Ninian Park!” interrupted Reggie Pitt. “There’s no football at this time of the year. Before we go, I’m going to have a word with that man on the seat. I want to know why he mistook me for his son.”

“Which man?” asked Handforth, looking round in surprise.

They told him what had happened.

“Better not butt in,” advised Handforth. “He might jib, you know.”

All the same, Pitt decided that he would not be satisfied until he had made a few inquiries.

## CHAPTER 2.

### The Missing Schoolboys!

“I BEG your pardon, sir, but can I do anything?”

The stranger looked up as he heard Reggie Pitt’s quiet voice. He seemed startled and confused; then he slowly shook his head.

“No, my boy, I’m afraid not,” he replied. “May I inquire what led you to assume that I was in need of any help?”

“Oh, I don’t know, sir, only you look so worried,” replied Reggie. “And the other fellows tell me that as I was coming up you started to your feet and mistook me for your son.”

“Yes, indeed,” said the other. “For a moment I thought— But did I exclaim aloud, then?”

“I believe so, sir.”

“I must be careful,” said the stranger. “I am sorry if I have caused you boys to concern yourselves over me. When I saw you in the distance, I must confess that for a fleeting moment I believed— The same figure, the same style of walk— It was very foolish of me.”

Reggie Pitt wondered if he should stay longer. The man was obviously distressed. He spoke in a soft, gently modulated voice—a typical Welsh voice, with just a slight intonation to indicate his nationality.

“Were you expecting your son, then, sir?” asked Pitt tentatively. “I don’t want to be inquisitive, or anything like that—”

“I do not regard it as inquisitiveness,” interrupted the other quietly. “You are perfectly justified in taking this interest in me. I realise that I have been—well, indiscreet. But, my boy, I am worried. My son has vanished. He is missing—my only son.”

“I’m awfully sorry to hear that, sir.”

“He ran away from school several days ago,” continued the stranger abstractedly. “A foolish thing to do—and yet, as I understand it, he was almost driven to do it.”

Reggie suddenly became more interested.

“Is your name Evans, sir?” he asked.

“Yes—Llewellyn Evans,” said the other, nodding. “No doubt you have seen my son’s name in the newspapers?”

“Yes, sir, I saw it this morning,” replied Reggie Pitt. “Morgan Evans his name is, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“I remember seeing a headline—‘No Trace of Missing Schoolboys’—and I glanced at the paragraph.”

“Morgan is about your size,” said Mr. Evans thoughtfully. “The same height and build and colouring. A dark, slim boy—and just about the same age as yourself, too. He has been missing for several days now, and you can imagine my state of mind.”

“The papers don’t seem to think it’s very serious, sir,” said Reggie. “I mean, they treat the whole affair rather lightly—more as a joke than anything else.”

“I wish I could bear my trouble as lightly,” said Mr. Evans bitterly.

“The papers say it’s only a kind of school-boy escapade, sir,” said Reggie. “They reckon that your son is roaming about across country, and that he’ll soon be found. He’s got a friend with him, hasn’t he?”

“Yes, another boy; slightly older than himself,” said Mr. Evans. “It was this other boy—Rees—who was the ringleader. I shall not easily forgive him.”

He looked up, and noticed that Nipper and Handforth and the others were hanging back.

“Let your friends come,” he said, looking at Pitt. “I dare say they are wondering what is wrong with me, too, eh?”

Reggie Pitt beckoned, and the other juniors came up.

“This is Mr. Llewellyn Evans,” said Reggie. “For a moment he mistook me for his own son. He’s missing—the boy they’ve been talking about in the newspapers, you know.”

“Well I’m jiggered!” said Handforth. “I was reading about that chap only this morning.”

“They traced him to Swansea, didn’t they?” asked Nipper.

“Beyond Swansea—Mumbles, to be exact,” said Mr. Evans, nodding. “My son and this boy, Rees, were first seen in Bridgend, and then again in Aberavon. All trace of them was then lost until somebody recognised them at the Mumbles—a seaside resort only a few miles from Swansea, and



round on the other side of the Bay. There are many witnesses who swear that my son and his companion were at the Mumbles. But every trace of them has since been lost. Nothing has been seen of them for at least two whole days."

"The papers reckon that they must be wandering inland, sir," said Nipper. "Perhaps they've got into England by this time—"

"Perhaps—perhaps—perhaps!" broke in Mr. Evans impatiently. "It is always perhaps! If this and if that! Nothing definite is known—nothing definite can be discovered! At least, nothing definite except the one solid fact that my son was last seen at the Mumbles."

He was on his feet now, excited and worried.

"What of the last two days?" he went on. "Has Morgan vanished into thin air? If he and Rees were indeed tramping across country, they would certainly have been seen. I have a dreadful fear that some disaster overtook them at the Mumbles. There are many cliffs there—jagged, rugged, treacherous cliffs. I was at the Mumbles only yesterday, and I could do nothing. I have left my wife and daughter there, and they are still searching. I came back—to my business. Yet I wish that I had remained. I cannot concentrate on my work, and I cannot cease worrying. And the police! Confound them, the police seem to regard the whole affair as a joke, and refuse to make any concentrated investigation."

"You can't very well blame them, sir," said Nipper gently. "It often happens that a couple of schoolboys take it into their heads to start off on a ramble. They generally turn up safe and sound—perhaps hundreds of miles from their starting point."

"If my son tramped on beyond the Mumbles, how is it that he has not been seen—and recognised?" demanded Mr. Evans. "The papers have made much of the case, particularly here in Wales. Everybody has been on the look-out, I understand. And yet nothing definite has been learned. Plenty of rumours—plenty of false reports. Oh, yes! But nothing certain."

"You've got to remember, sir, that such places as Mumbles are overcrowded with visitors at this time of the year," said Nipper. "There must be hundreds of schoolboys there—and at other places along the coast, too, and if the police aren't making any determined search, it's quite likely that your son will keep the game up for a week or two."

"I cannot believe it," said Mr. Evans. "It is good of you to try to comfort me in this way, but I am dreadfully afraid. Sometimes I tell myself that I am foolish; but what if some disaster took place? My greatest fear is that my son met with an accident on the Mumbles cliffs. Perhaps he is dead—drowned—"

"You mustn't think that, sir," interrupted Handforth impulsively. "Dash it, there's no evidence of a tragedy! If anything like that had happened, the—the body would have been—I mean, somebody would have found— That is—"

He paused awkwardly.

"Perhaps you are right," said Mr. Evans slowly. "No doubt my son's body would have been picked up, if, indeed, he had fallen over the cliffs, as I fear. Yet I cannot help thinking that there is something dreadfully significant in the fact that neither of these boys have been seen since they were recognised a few days ago at the Mumbles."

"Why weren't they stopped and questioned at the time, sir?" asked Handforth.

"Because, at the time, nobody knew that



they were runaways," replied Mr. Evans. "It is only during the past two days that the newspapers have published any details of the story."

"Well, doesn't that give you a bit of hope, sir?" asked Nipper.

"Hope?"

"Well, sir, your son has probably seen the newspapers," explained Nipper. "He and this other boy know that there's a big search for them, and if they want to avoid being collared they'll naturally take care not to get spotted."

"That, I will admit, is a comforting thought," said Mr. Evans.

"Why did they run away from school, anyway?" asked Handforth bluntly.

"It was a wrong thing to do—and yet I cannot altogether blame them," said Mr. Evans slowly. "My son wrote me a letter on the day he ran away, and it seems that his Form-master had made what is called a dead set, I believe, against him and this other boy, Rees. There had been a lot of bullying throughout the term—undeserved canings, long detention, and so forth. It seems that this Form-master was positively persecuting the two lads. Morgan did not like to come home, because he feared that I should only send him back to school; moreover, as I have told you, he was influenced by his friend. Rees is one of these adventurous youths. Merely running home did not suit him in the least. He wanted an adventure, and Morgan was only too ready to fall in with his ambitious plan."

"It's rather a frightfully difficult sort of thing," remarked Archie. "I mean, it's a



wonder that your son hasn't written to you, sir. I mean, written again."

"That is why I am so dreadfully concerned," said Mr. Evans. "He has no reason to believe that I shall turn against him, and he could at least have kept his parents informed of his safety."

"But is that reasonable, sir?" asked Nipper. "A fellow who is running away from school is pretty cautious, as a rule."

"Well, he could have told me that he was safe and well," said Mr. Evans.

"But would a schoolboy think of such a thing, sir?" went on Nipper. "Besides, what about the postmark on the letter? That would give you a clue at once."

"An inquiry is now afoot at my son's school," said Mr. Evans, pursing his lips. "This Form-master has been suspended pending the inquiries; and I have not the slightest doubt that he will be dismissed. There seems to be a tremendous volume of evidence to prove that he has been persecuting his pupils for years."

"If that's the case, sir, your son and this other chap were justified in bolting," said Handforth.

"Whether they were justified or not makes no difference to the present situation," said Mr. Evans, frowning. "My son has vanished. No word has been heard of him for at least two days. He and Rees were last seen at the Mumbles, and since then they have apparently vanished into thin air. Are they wandering somewhere about the countryside—or did they meet with disaster on that rocky coast? That is the thought that I cannot get out of my head."

"Well, you've been to the Mumbles, sir, and you've found nothing," put in Travers. "And if the police are on the look-out—"

"The police!" broke in the distracted father. "I tell you they are doing nothing! How can we expect them to do anything? There's no direct evidence of anything serious. The police have merely been instructed to keep their eyes open for two wandering schoolboys. And that, as you will probably know, amounts to nothing. I have been to the Mumbles, and I will confess that I did not find anything of the slightest value in the way of a clue. My wife and daughter are there now, and I suppose I should settle myself to wait in patience. But I cannot. Somewhere deeply within me, I feel that my son is in deadly danger. Curiously enough, I cannot feel that he is dead. No. Not dead. But certainly in danger. I cannot explain why this obsession has gripped me, but there it is. No doubt I am a fool."

"Nobody can call you a fool, sir, for being worried about your own son," said Nipper quietly. "But as the police aren't searching, and as you have this—well, obsession, that your son is lost somewhere at the Mumbles, how would you like us to join in the hunt?"

"By George! That's a good idea!" said

Handforth eagerly. "I was just going to suggest it myself."

Mr. Evans took no notice of the smiles that went round at this statement from Handforth; he had only heard Nipper's words.

"How can you boys help?" he asked in wonder. "It is some little distance to Swansea, and—"

"We belong to the St. Frank's School Train, sir," said Nipper.

"I gathered that," nodded Mr. Evans. "Yet I cannot see— Ah, you mean that the School Train is leaving Cardiff?"

"To-night, sir," said Nipper. "We're going on to Swansea, and we shall be there when we wake up in the morning. And it isn't far to the Mumbles, is it?"

"Only a matter of a few miles," said Mr. Evans tensely. "I see—I see! It is very good of you—"

"Not at all, sir," broke in Handforth. "We'll get the whole school on the job—the Remove and the Fourth and all the rest of the chaps! We'll comb the Mumbles from end to end. We'll search the caves, and we'll conduct a thorough investigation. And if we don't find these missing chaps you can call me a Hottentot!"

### CHAPTER 3.

#### Handforth on the Job!

MR. LLEWELLYN EVANS was cheered by this promise on the part of the St. Frank's fellows. It seemed that business ties rendered it impossible for him to remain constantly at the Mumbles. He was obliged to keep in Cardiff. If there had been some definite information, he would probably have remained with his wife and daughter, but as there was absolutely no positive clue as to the whereabouts of his son, it was a needless waste of time to return to the Mumbles.

It came as a great relief to him when the St. Frank's fellows offered to make a determined search. He was glad that he had "wasted" his time in coming into Cathays Park. He had met these St. Frank's boys, and they were sportsmen. He felt, somehow, that he could rely upon them to do their very utmost.

In Handforth, at least, he had an ardent worker. A missing schoolboy—a mystery—the possibilities of something dramatic! The leader of Study D was agog with excitement. Here was a case after his own heart—a real, genuine, gilt-edged case! And Handforth rather fancied himself as an amateur detective. Everybody else knew that he was a hopeless muddler, but this made no difference to Handforth's enthusiasm.

"All of you other fellows can leave the case in my hands," he said, later on that evening in the School Train Common-room. "I'm in charge, and I don't want any assistants."





"We're looking for a chap named Morgan Evans," said Handforth to the girl behind the counter. "Do you know him?" The girl laughed. "If you look in the telephone directory you'll find that there are hundreds of Morgan Evans, in Swansea," she said. Handforth gulped. The search for the missing schoolboy was not going to be an easy task, obviously!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can't grab the case like this, Handy," said Nipper, shaking his head. "It was my idea in the first place—"

"Rats! I thought of it at the same time, only you happened to speak first!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We won't argue on that point," said Nipper gently. "We'll all go into this investigation together; we'll do it systematically and thoroughly. We'll divide ourselves into small parties, and make an intensive search."

"Oh, all right!" grunted Handforth. "I suppose I shall have to agree. We'll comb the Mumbles from end to end."

"He thinks the Mumbles has got hair on it!" grinned Reggie Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Combing is the right word!" retorted Handforth coldly. "When the police are searching for a desperate criminal, they comb the district. You can't teach me anything about the methods of detectives."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll form ourselves into a schoolboy Flying Squad," went on Handforth enthusiastically. "By George, that's a good idea! Pity I haven't got my Austin Seven here—and a pity that Nipper and Travers haven't got their motor-bikes! We could form a genuine Flying Squad then."

Nothing could dampen Handforth's ardour. He was thoroughly excited at the prospect of searching for the missing Morgan Evans, and a night's rest did not reduce his enthusiasm.

By the morning the School Train was ideally situated from the point of view of the would-be detectives. The railway company had shunted the School Train on to a siding within a stone's throw of Swansea beach. Actually, the siding was one which belonged to the quaint little Mumbles Railway—one of the most curious railways, perhaps, in the United Kingdom. In spite of its smallness, however, this railway uses the standard gauge, so the School Train was able to use its track.



And now, near St. Helen's Road Station, the School Train was "parked." In one minute the fellows could be on the beach; they could get into Swansea itself with equal ease, for a tramcar would quickly take them into the centre of the town—into Oxford Street, with its busy shops, its bustling throngs, and its continuous traffic.

During the day the juniors were rather impatient; they wanted to get off to the Mumbles so that they could start their investigation. But it was a five-mile journey, and there was no hope of going until lessons were over.

However, some of the fellows seized an opportunity at midday to have a quick run into Swansea. And Handforth, at least, saw no reason why he should not commence his inquiries at once. He and Church and McClure happened to be in a confectioner's shop in High Street, not far from the corner of Alexandra Road, and near to Swansea's main railway station.

"We're looking for a chap named Morgan Evans," he remarked casually to the girl behind the counter.

She laughed.

"Morgan Evans?" she repeated. "There are lots of Morgan Evanses in Swansea."

"My only hat!" said Handforth, staring. "Lots of them?"

"Yes, indeed," laughed the girl. "If you look in the telephone directory you'll find hundreds, I expect. Morgan Evans is a very common name."

"We could have told him that, miss," put in Church tartly. "It's a schoolboy we want."

"Oh, you mean that missing schoolboy?" asked the girl, nodding. "I don't believe he's in the town, or anywhere near. He and the other boy are probably hundreds of miles away by this time."

Church and McClure got their leader out of the establishment.

"You chump!" said Mac. "Don't you know that Evans is about the commonest name in Wales? And don't you know that Morgan is nearly as common?"

"Well, it's hard luck," said Handforth, frowning. "How the dickens can we find the chap now? If there are thousands of Morgan Evanses about everywhere, we're in a mess!"

"No, we're not," said Church. "The Morgan Evans we want is a schoolboy, and once we get on his track we shall easily be able to locate him. The trouble is, there's not much chance of getting on his track."

"Well, let's go to the docks, to start with," said Handforth briskly.

Church and McClure exchanged glances. They had vivid recollections of Handforth's visit to the docks at Liverpool. There had been quite a lot of trouble that time. Handforth seemed to have a fascination for the docks.

"Why go there?" asked Church. "We shan't find him there."

"It's my belief that those two chaps have bolted to sea," said Handforth. "That's why they're missing and there's no trace of them.

finding themselves in Swansea, they got on a ship and became stowaways."

"Oh, my only sainted aunt!" groaned McClure. "What evidence is there of this, Handy?"

"Evidence?"

"Yes."

"There's no evidence," admitted Edward Oswald. "But I've got an idea in my head—"

"Then get it out!" snapped Church. "Real detectives don't take any notice of chance ideas. They only go on clues—on evidence. Why, if you go down to the docks with the idea of inquiring about all the ships that have left during the last week, you'll be kept busy for a month! Don't you understand that Swansea is one of the busiest ports in the country?"

"We might pick up a clue," said Handforth obstinately.

"Yes, and we might pick up a swishing if we're late for lunch," said McClure impatiently. "We shall have to hurry like the dickens, even as it is!"

They went through Castle Street into Wind Street, and soon found themselves—to the dismay of Church and McClure—in the dock-land area. It was all they could do to drag Handforth along until they got to the Oystermouth Road, alongside of which ran the Mumbles Railway.

They only just managed to reach the School Train in time for the midday meal.

Afternoon lessons promised to be a frightful bore, for the day was hot and fine, and the sea was calling to the schoolboys. A crowd of them went over on to the beach as soon as the meal was over, and Handforth was inclined to be indignant.

"It's all rot!" he said. "Why bother about afternoon lessons to-day? They ought to give us a holiday, so that we can search for this chap Evans."

"Why not go and ask Mr. Lee?" suggested Harry Gresham, grinning.

"I will!" said Handforth promptly.

"Don't be an ass!" chuckled Nipper. "You know as well as I do that the ordinary school routine is in force on the train. Besides, it's about time that you came to earth, Handy."

"To earth?"

"Yes."

"What are you talking about—I'm on the earth, aren't I?"

"Don't get any dotty ideas into your head about these missing schoolboys—Evans and Rees," said Nipper. "We promised Mr. Evans that we would keep our eyes open for his son, but you know jolly well that there's hardly any chance of us finding him."

Handforth stared.

"Hardly any chance?" he repeated. "You blithering ass! We've got to find him!"

"There's only the barest possibility that he's anywhere in this district now," continued Nipper. "We'll do all we can, of course, but we're not magicians. If Evans and Rees have got up into North Wales, or over into Shropshire, or something like that, we shall be helpless."



"You're a fine chap!" said Handforth sternly. "Didn't we promise Mr. Evans—"

"We promised him that we would do all we could in the Swansea district," put in Nipper, "but there's no certainty that Morgan Evans is here now. Don't take things for granted, Handy. As I said before, come to earth, old man. As soon as lessons are over we'll take a trip to Mumbles and we'll have a look round. We'll make some inquiries, too. But I'm jiggered if I can see what else we can do."

Everybody, with the exception of Handforth, was of the same opinion. No definite clue existed, and that was the difficulty. It was only known that the missing schoolboys had been last seen in Mumbles. The very fact that no trace of them had since been found clearly indicated that they were no longer in this district.

Not that Nipper's advice had the slightest effect upon Edward Oswald Handforth.

"I'm going by what Mr. Evans said," he declared. "Mr. Evans is certain that his son is still at the Mumbles. He doesn't know why he's certain, but he's got a—a hunch."

"Well, let's hope he's right," said Church. "Anyhow, we can't do more than keep our ears open and our eyes skinned."

During the afternoon Church and McClure were looking anxious and harassed. Somehow they had a hunch, too. But their hunch was a different one. It amounted to a certainty.

In their bones, they felt that Handforth would get himself into a whole pile of trouble before the day was out!

## CHAPTER 4.

### The Mumbles Caves!

**N**IPPER organised the Removites and the Fourth-Formers into various groups as soon as afternoon lessons were over. In the absence of any definite starting-point, nothing could be done except make a general kind of tour. Each party would concentrate upon the task in hand, bearing in mind, at the same time, that the Mumbles was an interesting place, and that there was no reason why they should blind their eyes to the beauty spots.

So they got on the Mumbles Railway, which carried them round the Bay, practically alongside the main road. There was a halt at Sketty Road, and then another at a little place called Blackpill. Here the railway left the road and wandered off on its own, keeping closer to the sea.

Arriving at Oystermouth Station the crowd of fellows alighted. Handforth wanted to go on until the train reached Mumbles, but, as Church and McClure pointed out, the

train didn't go any further than Oystermouth, and, as they further pointed out, Mumbles really is Oystermouth, being a part of it.

And Oystermouth itself is within the Borough of Swansea, although it is quite a little town itself. The coast just beyond runs to a point. Here there is a great detached rock, and this is crowned by the famous Mumbles Lighthouse.

Near by there is Mumbles Pier, with a Pavilion in which concert parties gave their entertainments. There was also a large bandstand, and any amount of attractions for the summer visitors.

"What was that old ruin we saw as we came along?" asked somebody, as they all walked away from the little station.

"Oystermouth Castle, I expect," said Nipper. "It's an ivy-covered ruin, just on the top of the rise at the back of the town."

"By George!" said Handforth with a start. "I wonder if those two missing chaps are there?"

"In Oystermouth Castle?" asked Church.

"Why not?" retorted Handforth. "Perhaps they went exploring; perhaps they went into a dungeon, and the door closed upon them. My only hat! Supposing they're imprisoned?"

"Supposing you talk sense?" asked Nipper politely.

"You silly ass—"

"Oystermouth Castle is a regular show place," continued Nipper. "I expect there are people in charge of it, and they

keep their eyes open for people who wander about in the dungeons—if there are any. I don't think we need waste any time in Oystermouth Castle."

"We shouldn't be wasting our time, you chump," said Reggie Pitt. "I love looking over old castles."

"We'll take our pleasure after this duty is finished," said Nipper. "I shall enjoy going over the Castle, too—but at the moment we're looking for clues concerning these chaps, Evans and Rees, and we shall be wasting our time if we go there expecting to find any."

"In fact, we shall probably be wasting our time wherever we go, dear old fellow," said Vivian Travers. "We'll just wander about, and make a few inquiries here and there."

They did not get much encouragement from the local inhabitants.

The first man they spoke to was a bit of a pessimist. He knew at once to whom they were referring when they mentioned Morgan Evans's name.

"Indeed to goodness, yes," he said nodding. "The boys were here at the beginning





of the week, but they haven't been seen since. And if they were alive we should know something about it. Everybody here has been on the look out."

"You don't think they're dead, do you?" asked Handforth staring.

"Look you," said the man impressively. "There are many caves round the coast from the Mumbles Head."

"Caves!" said Handforth, with a start.

"Yes, indeed," replied the man. "And don't schoolboys enjoy exploring caves? Some of these caves are filled with water at high tide, and if those two boys were exploring, and if they got trapped, what hope would there be for them?"

"Were they seen near the caves, then?" asked Nipper.

"They were seen on the beach, walking towards Langland Bay," replied the other. "Langland Bay is round the headland, and there are many cliffs and many rocks between."

"But if they had been caught by the tide and drowned, their bodies would have been found," said Nipper impatiently. "There's no need to fear such a tragedy, is there?"

The man shook his head.

"They're dead," he said with conviction. "Sometimes the tide brings lots of seaweed, and it's so easy for the seaweed to bury those two drowned boys—perhaps in one of the caves, or in a gully, or a pool. They were seen on the beach, and then they vanished. Sooner or later, of course, their bodies will turn up."

"Well, he's a little ray of sunshine, I must say," remarked Nipper, after they had walked on. "Of course, there's a certain amount of justification for his theory—but it's absurd to take anything for granted."

"Well, supposing we explore these caves to start with—just to satisfy ourselves?" suggested Reggie Pitt.

"Before we do anything else, I think we'd better introduce ourselves to Mrs. Evans," said Nipper. "Mr. Evans said that he was going to write to her and tell her that we should be here. It will look impolite if we don't all go along and see her."

**T**HE next move, therefore, was to find the hotel where Mrs. Evans and her daughter were staying. This was easy enough, and within ten minutes Nipper and Handforth and the crowd of others were temporarily forgetting the real object of their visit.

Mrs. Evans was a sweet, motherly lady; but with the daughter also present, it was rather difficult for the St. Frank's boys to confine their attentions to Mrs. Evans.

For Frances Evans was not only a remarkably pretty girl, but she was cheerful and high-spirited, too. She was typically Welsh—dark, with flashing eyes. Her age was not

more than fifteen, and she was still at school.

"I don't think there's anything to worry about at all," she declared. "Morgan is quite safe, and he'll turn up soon—you mark my words. Father's all wrong when he thinks that something awful has happened."

"I wish I could share your optimism, dear," said Mrs. Evans worriedly.

"Oh, but you know that Morgan is a splendid swimmer," protested the girl. "He can swim like a fish," she added, turning to the juniors. "He's a clever climber, too—the Alps wouldn't scare him in the least—and he's self-reliant and strong. He's not the kind of boy to get drowned."

"Have you any theory, Miss Evans?" asked Nipper. "Any idea where he might be?"

"Not the slightest," replied the girl, shaking her head. "But I do know that he hasn't been silly enough to get himself drowned or lost. He's too good a swimmer, and too level headed."

Having met Morgan Evans's sister, the fellows were keener than ever to undertake their search. She was such a really ripping girl that they now had a greater incentive. Handforth, indeed, showed alarming signs, and but for the fact that he was desperately anxious to get busy on the investigation, he would undoubtedly have succumbed to Frances's charms.

"By George!" said the leader of Study D, with gleaming eyes. "I'm going to be the chap to find Morgan Evans! I've got to, my sons!"

"Why have you got to?" asked Church.

"Because he's got such a topping sister," replied Handforth. "I'm going to be the chap to earn her gratitude. By George! Think of it! And after he's found I can find time to—to—"

"Spoon?" asked McClure helpfully.

"Fathead!" said Handforth, colouring.

"As soon as we got into Wales I knew that we should have trouble with you," went on Mac. "These Welsh girls are too bright-eyed—too lively and pretty."

"No girl can be too pretty!" said Handforth coldly.

"Oh, I don't mean they're too pretty in that sense," said McClure. "They're too pretty to be safe with you roaming about amongst them. You'll fall in love with two or three girls at a time. Of course, they're not so nice as the Scotch girls—"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "The English girls are the best."

Church grinned.

"Well, we won't argue about 'em—they're all ripping," he said diplomatically. "How about going along to Mumbles Pier? I hear they've got some decent attractions—"

"Blow the pier!" put in Handforth. "We're going to explore those caves. The other chaps are setting out already."



# CLOTHES MAKE A CHAPPIE!



*An amusing article by Archie Glenthorne—in which the genial ass of St. Frank's discusses the "most priceless subject on the dashed universe"—clothes. Readers are advised not to take too much notice of his ideas on the said subject, for they certainly are priceless—in more ways than one.*

**O**DDS yawns and snores! It's a dashed fag having to sit down and write this effusion, but it's got to be done. I mean to say, a matter of vital importance is on the agenda, and even at the loss of forty winks on the good old lounge this article's got to be written.

But it's always the way with we Glenthornes. We never fail to rise to the occasion when duty calls, however great the effort and sacrifice. Absolutely! Cheers and all that sort of thing!

About this jolly old matter of import. It concerns clothes—clothes, the most priceless subject on the dashed universe.

I've just managed to stagger in from the Junior Common-room, and—odds horrors and nightmares!—never have I cast my optics upon a more scarecrowish collection of chappies.

Hardly any of them have got a crease in their trousers; their coats are ruffled and covered with thousands of ink spots; their collars are appallingly grubby, their ties all askew, and—well, I mean to say, it's all wrong! Absolutely!

Why don't these chappies realise that their clothes are the most important point about them?

Yet when I gently remonstrate, what happens? I get insulted; that blundering,

blithering blighter of a Handforth biffs me on the jolly old Grecian proboscis.

**E**VERYBODY ought to realise that clothes make a chappie. Without them—ahem, that is to say, improperly dressed—oh, what I mean to say is, imperfectly dressed—one becomes a mere blot upon the landscape. Absolutely, with ten thousand knobs on!

St. Frank's needs reforming, if you get what I mean. I'd have formed a Dress Reform Society myself, only the good old tissues wouldn't stand the terrible strain entailed. Anyway, I shall certainly have to speak to Phipps about it when I get back to St. Frank's.

I have often been asked by sundry chappies how many suits and ties one should possess. I never have less than seven suits—one for every day of the week, don't you know—and about fifteen shirts and at least thirty ties. There's nothing more priceless than variety in dress, you know!

And now I propose to give you a little advice about selecting fancy waistcoats—(Oh, no, you don't, Archie! We've had quite enough of your nonsense already, thank you.—ED.)

**T**HE tide was well out—although not completely out—when the juniors arrived on the rocky beach, beyond the headland. The general idea was to work round as far as Langland Bay, and then compare notes.

The boys divided themselves into various groups, and every narrow opening amongst the rocks was explored and examined. Handforth & Co. kept to themselves—for Handforth was determined to be the one to discover the first clue to Morgan Evans's

whereabouts. Church and McClure, in his opinion, did not count.

The scenery round that part of the coast is really magnificent—great rocks, with many caves, and with the coastline stretching round in picturesque beauty. Above the cliffs there is plenty of grassland, and one can take a fine invigorating walk along those cliff-tops.

The schoolboy investigators did not get much encouragement from their quest. There was plenty to interest them, of course,



but by the time the conference took place, at Langland Bay, there was nothing to report.

Group after group came in with the same story. No result whatever. Not a clue—not a trace.

Handforth & Co. were last, Handforth being the most obstinate fellow in the whole party. But even he had to confess that the whole thing was a failure.

"Of course, we didn't expect anything else," said Nipper. "Those two fellows have been missing for two or three days, and there's not much chance that they're anywhere near Mumbles now."

"Unless they're deliberately hiding in a cave," said Reggie Pitt thoughtfully. "There's always the chance that they're playing some sort of game, you know."

"But would they do that?" asked Nipper. "What about their parents? Would they allow their parents to be so worried?"

"Well, there are some chaps who don't think much on such points as that," said Reggie. "They're careless and thoughtless—so keen on their own giddy affairs that they don't think of other people. And then you've got to remember that they're run-aways."

"Yes, there's that," admitted Nipper. "They may be thinking that their school authorities are searching for them—ready to give them some extra heavy punishment when they're found."

"We've only just looked into the caves so far," remarked Gresham. "I mean, we haven't had time to explore them thoroughly."

"That's just it," said Nipper. "I think we'd better fix on some theory, and then conduct our investigations accordingly. If they fail, we can get hold of another theory and see where that leads us."

"How do you mean?" asked Reggie Pitt.

"Well, supposing we assume that these two chaps are deliberately hiding—say in one of these caves," said Nipper. "Well, in that case, they'll need food, and as they haven't been seen for a day or two, it stands to reason that they must have enough food to last them for some little time. So we shall have to go about Oystermouth, inquiring for a schoolboy who bought up a lot of grub two or three days ago. If we can find traces of such a chap, then we shall be on the right track."

"It's a good idea," said Reggie promptly. "There aren't many food shops, so we can soon put that theory to the test."

Handforth scoffed at the whole idea.

"I'm not going to waste my time messing about like that!" he said tartly. "I'm going back along the coast—to look for clues again."

"Fine!" said Nipper. "Perhaps you'll beat us all yet, Handy."

"There no 'perhaps' about it!" retorted Handforth.

He went off with Church and McClure, and Nipper grinned.

"We shall get along more comfortably without Handy," he said complacently.

## CHAPTER 5.

### The First Clue!

"BY Jove! Come and have a look at this!" said Church eagerly.

He was standing on the edge of a rock pool, looking into the limpid depths of the sea water that had been left behind by the receding tide. It was a deep pool, and the water was of a crystal greenness, and deep down there was a glimpse of sand and seaweed and rock.

"We can't waste time like this," said Handforth impatiently. "We've got to find something before we go back into the town. We can't go and tell Frances Evans that we've failed."

"But we can't do miracles, old man," said Church. "If there isn't any clue there isn't, and there's an end of it. Still, you never know. There might be something here."

"Where?"

"In this pool."

"A clue?"

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Church, with exasperating calmness. "Anyhow, come and look."

They had left Langland Bay behind now, and were making their way round the headland towards Mumbles once more. And Handforth was feeling impatient and irritable. He quite failed to realise that this quest was a most dubious one. He quite took it for granted that something tangible would turn up during the first hour. Of course, nothing tangible had turned up, and nothing seemed likely to do so.

And then, just at that time, it was Church who made an interesting discovery.

"COME and have a look into this pool," he repeated, his voice full of intensity.

"Rats to the pool!" snapped Handforth. "Blow the pool! What do you think I care about pools just now? We're looking for Morgan Evans—not for tiddlers!"

"Well, I'm not asking you to look at Morgan Evans in this pool," retorted Church tartly. "He's not here. But there's something else—something that doesn't really belong to the sea. Still, I'm not getting any dotty ideas into my head; there are thousands of holiday makers on this part of the coast, and any one of them might easily have dropped a cap."

"A cap!" yelled Handforth.

"A school cap," nodded Church.

"Where?" roared Handforth excitedly.

"Here, at the bottom of this pool."

"Great Scott!"

Handforth was like a bloodhound just taken off the leash. He bent over the pool, and stared down into its green depths. McClure was looking, too, and Church pointed.



"Can't you see it?" he asked.

"No, I'm blessed if I can," panted Handforth.

"There—just against that tangle of seaweed."

"By George, yes!" said Handforth, breathing hard. "How can we fish it out?"

He was tremendously excited by this time. But, as Church had said, it was more than likely that this cap would prove to be a mere derelict, in no way associated with the missing Morgan Evans. Still, it was just as well to make sure.

Handforth was reckless. He had no stick, and so he dived his hand into the pool, bending close over it. His jacket was considerably soaked by the time he had grasped the cap, but he didn't care.

"Got it!" he said tensely.

It was a green cap, with a cloth badge sewn into the front of it. The colours had run into one another, but even so it was easily possible to distinguish the lettering.

"Look here!" gasped Handforth hoarsely. "Cardiff! Here's the word 'Cardiff'! I can't make out the name of the school, but—"

He turned the cap over, and then he fairly gulped. For, on the lining, printed with indelible ink, was the name—"Morgan Evans"!

"It's his!" muttered Handforth. "It's a clue, my sons!"

"A pretty rotten clue, too," said Church soberly.

"You mean—"

McClure paused, and his face was grave. All three Removites were rather shocked at this discovery. Neither Church nor McClure had believed that the cap would prove to be a genuine clue. That it was so took them completely by surprise.

"I don't believe it!" said Handforth stoutly.

"Don't believe what?"

"That's he drowned," said Handforth. "That's what you meant, Mac, wasn't it, when you paused just now?"

"Well, doesn't it look significant?" asked McClure. "We find his cap in this pool—"

"That doesn't mean anything," interrupted Handforth. "Any chap might lose his cap in the wind. There's no evidence that Evans was drowned. We mustn't jump to conclusions like that."

"That's pretty rich—from you!" said Church tartly. "You're always jumping to conclusions, you ass!"

"He's somewhere along this beach!" declared Handforth, looking up and down. "I don't care what you say! He's here—somewhere between Langland Bay and Mumbles Head!"

"In one of the caves, do you mean?"

"Where else?"

"But we've looked into the caves—"

"Not thoroughly," said Handforth. "And there are some of them that we couldn't even enter. The water goes right in—even at low tide, I believe. Those two chaps are playing a game of their own, and I'm going to beat them! It's a dirty trick for Evans to keep his parents in a state of suspense like this! When I find him, I'll jolly well tick him off!"

"The poor chap may be dead," grunted Church. "It's all very well for you to talk in this way, Handy, but there isn't a shred of evidence to support your theory."

"A real detective doesn't need any evidence," replied Handforth, with a wave of his hand. "He forms a theory—and, if he's a good detective, it's a correct theory."

"Oh, my hat!"

"We must get a boat," said Handforth suddenly.

"A boat?"

"A rowing-boat."

"What the dickens for?"

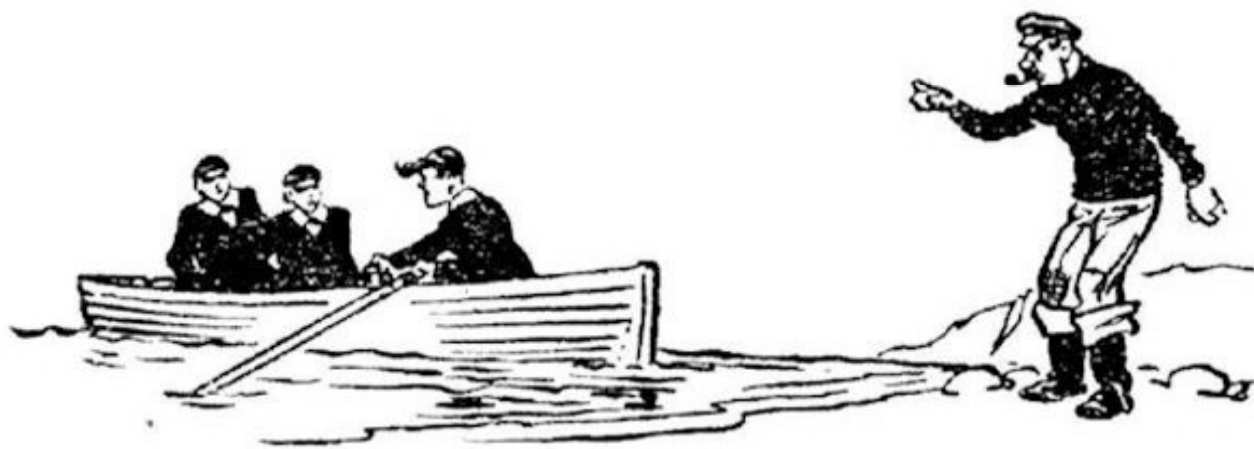
"So that we can conduct this investigation thoroughly," said Handforth. "So that we can go right into these other caves—the ones we had to miss during the first search."

"My dear old ass, there isn't time," protested Church.

"What do you mean—there isn't time?"

"We're due back at the School Train for calling-over—"

"Calling-over?" echoed Handforth in amazement. "Who the dickens cares about calling-over at a time like this? I'm surprised at you, Churchy! We've got to go on with this case until we bring it to a successful conclusion!"



"Oh crumbs!" said Church helplessly.

"And you fellows are going to stick to me, too!" continued Handforth grimly. "No backing out, my sons! You're my assistants, and you've got to help. And if you start talking about calling-over again, I'll bash your heads together!"

**H**ANDFORTH was so thoroughly worked up that the St. Frank's rules and regulations struck him as being ridiculous and preposterous. As for earning punishment, he didn't care a jot.

"What's more," he said, "we mustn't say anything to the other fellows."

"Why not?"

"Because I say so!"

"But why do you say so?"



"This is our discovery—and we'll keep it dark," said Edward Oswald. "See? We don't want Nipper and Travers and the other chaps to queer our pitch."

"You're talking rot!" said McClure tartly. "We agreed to investigate as a crowd, and the first fellow who makes a discovery ought to tell all the rest. I vote that we find Nipper and show him this cap, and——"

"We'll do nothing of the sort!" broke in Handforth. "We're going to get that boat."

"But, dash it, I found the cap!" protested Church. "You've got nothing to boast about, Handy."

"Eh?"

"You heard what I said."

"I know I did, but you're a member of the Co., and your finding of the cap makes it my finding," said Handforth coolly. "And I'm not going to say anything to the other chaps. You're not going to say anything, either—unless you want a couple of black eyes each."

Church and McClure gave it up as hopeless. There was no arguing with Handforth in this present mood. It wasn't much good arguing with him in any mood, if it came to that.

Church and McClure could not share their leader's optimism. In their view, the finding of the cap was significant of tragedy. Perhaps they were wrong—they hoped they were—but they certainly could not see how any good could come of pottering about these caves. Far better take the cap to Nipper, and for Nipper to inform the police, and for the police to commence a really intensive search. So far the police had refused to take much notice because there was really nothing for them to go upon.

The finding of the cap, however, would make all the difference.

Perhaps Handforth saw this; perhaps he thought that the "case" would be taken out of his hands. At all events, he was determined to carry on in his own way.

And, having come to a definite decision, he wasted no time. He marched off vigorously, and it wasn't long before he and his chums arrived at a spot where they could obtain a small rowing-boat.

"I don't think we ought to do it, Handy," said Church with a glance at the sky. "The conditions don't look any too healthy to me."

Handforth looked up.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "It's fine enough. No wind, and thundering hot."

"You've used the right word—thundering," said Church, nodding. "In my opinion, there's a storm brewing somewhere. It's been tremendously hot all day, and I don't like the look of those clouds over towards Swansea."

"Rats! We're not going to be stumped by the weather."

"And we ought to be getting back to the School Train——"

"If you say that again, I'll biff your face, Walter Church!" said Handforth thickly.

"Bother the School Train! I'm conducting this case, and I'll conduct it in my own way."

"You couldn't conduct a tram-car!" said Church bitterly.

"Look here——"

"Oh, all right—keep your hair on!" said Church. "Mac and I will stick to you. Where you go, we'll go."

He did not think it wise to explain that they would only stick to Handforth because they feared for his safety.

They were quite right, of course, in deciding that it would be better to tell all the other fellows of their discovery. But Handforth was making sure that they did not go anywhere near the other fellows.

He did not leave the beach.

AND at that particular time Nipper & Co. were in Oystermouth, comparing notes after having visited most of the grocers' and confectioners' along the front and down the minor streets.

The only information they had obtained was that two schoolboys, in the earlier part of the week, had purchased a good supply of biscuits and sardines and cheese from one of the grocers. This gentleman was quite sure that those two boys had been Evans and Rees.

"But we're really no further," said Nipper. "If the chaps had been tramping on they might have bought biscuits and cheese. There's nothing to prove that they meant to make a camp somewhere here, and lie low."

"The rummy thing is, everybody here seems to treat the affair as a joke," said Buster Boots of the Fourth. "I've spoken to lots of people, and they've all smiled and chuckled."

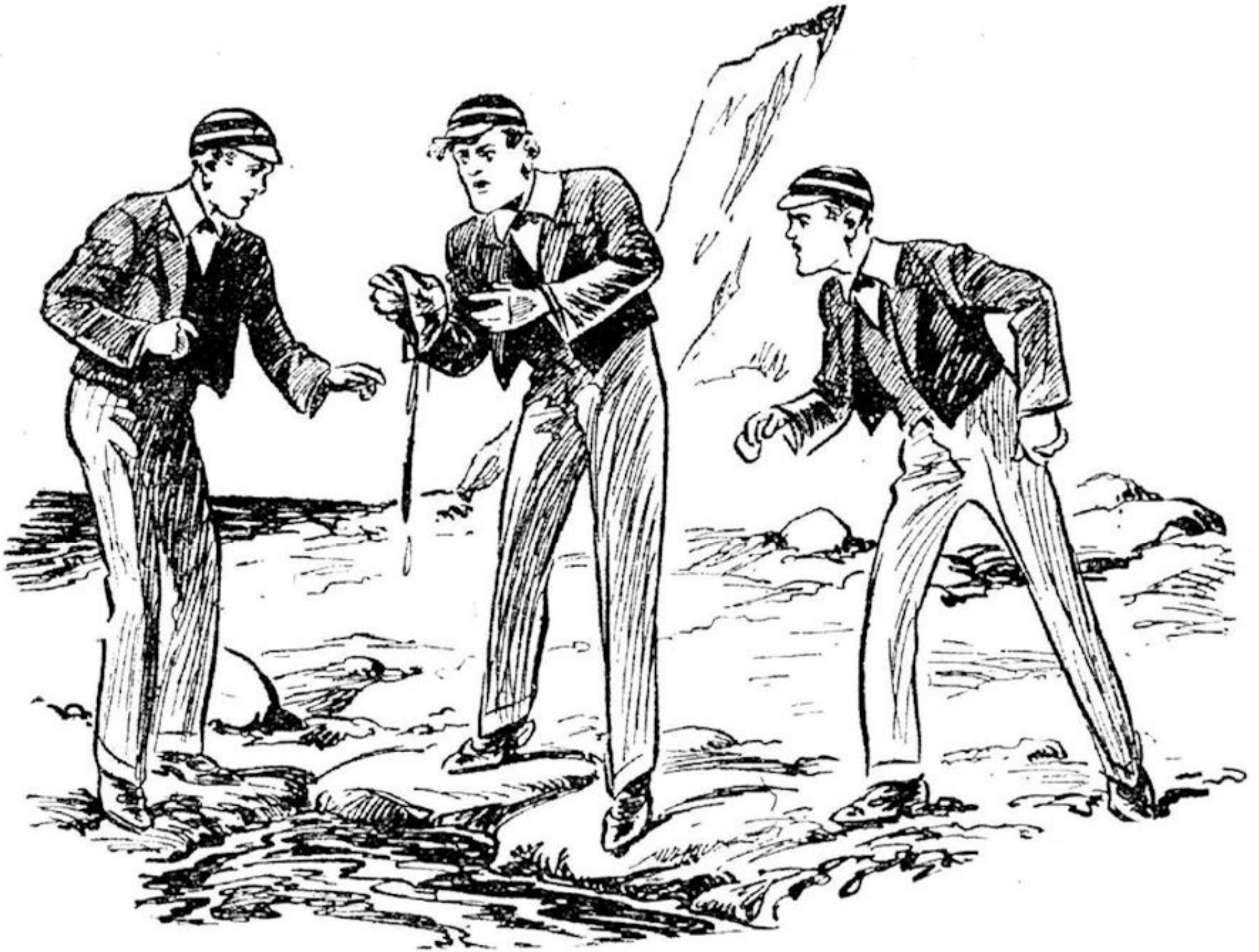
"There's more interest in Cardiff than there is here," said Nipper. "That's because Mr. Evans is a pretty prominent Cardiff man. The case would naturally be of more interest to Cardiff people than to Swansea people. Everybody here is absolutely certain that those two chaps are playing a game."

"Yes," nodded Reggie Pitt. "When we suggest that there might be something tragic in it they scoff. Nearly everybody is the same. That first man we spoke to is about the only exception."

"And so, of course, nobody has troubled to make any inquiries, or to put two and two together," said Nipper. "There might have been lots of significant incidents—but none of these Oystermouth people know it because they have taken no interest. It's a pretty hopeless job for us—coming along two or three days after the chaps have vanished. I don't really see what we can do."

"Well, supposing we get something to eat to start with?" said Tommy Watson, eyeing a handy restaurant. "Might as well fortify ourselves, and then we can continue with the search afterwards."





Handforth eagerly examined the cap he had taken out of the pool of water. On the front was the badge of a Cardiff school; and inside was the name: Morgan Evans! "By George!" he cried excitedly. "It's a clue. We're on the trall all right now!" "Yes, but it's a pretty rotten clue," said Church significantly, looking at the deep pool of water.

"Anybody seen anything of Handforth?" asked Nipper, looking round.

"Goodness only knows where he is," said Travers languidly. "Why worry about Handforth? He's probably searching for footprints in the sands!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or turning over the seaweed and looking for the bodies," continued Travers. "Personally, dear old fellows, I think we're making mugs of ourselves. I don't believe those two chaps are here at all."

"Well, we promised Mr. Evans that we'd do all we could, and we must keep that promise," said Nipper. "After tea we'll have another search, and then get back to the School Train. I really think that we shall have kept our word then."

But a lot was to happen before they returned to the St. Frank's School Train!

## CHAPTER 6.

### The Unrehearsed Effect!

"**B**BETTER be careful, young gentlemen," said the old boatman. "There's a good deal of shallow water round here—particularly when the tide's going out. You'd better keep fairly close—and mind the rocks, too."

"All right," said Handforth. "No need to tell us that, old chap. We've handled boats before."

They were just setting off, and the boatman gave them further warnings regarding the shallow water and the trickiness of the tides. Church and McClure listened, but Handforth was impatient to be off and hardly paid any attention.

"I shouldn't be too long, either," continued the old boatman. "The sky don't look any too promising."

"That's what we thought," said Church.

"Storm coming up, I think," said the boatman.

"Do they come up suddenly here?"

"Yes, indeed—as suddenly as they do in other parts," said the old fellow. "There's never any telling with a thunderstorm. It may pass over, or we may get it again."

"We haven't had it once yet," said Handforth.

"He didn't mean again in that sense," said Church, as they were rowing away. "These Welsh people say 'again' when they mean another time, or later on."

"I can't help their troubles," said Handforth absently.

"Better mind where you're going," said McClure. "There's a big mudbank in the distance, and I think we shall have to go



right round it—there doesn't seem to be any channel nearer the shore."

Handforth glanced round, and grunted.

"You're right," he admitted. "We'll get out into the bay a bit, and then work round. It might be a good idea. From a distance we shall be able to see the mouths of the caves better. We can take a sort of survey and then decide which caves we shall explore."

"I'm glad you haven't thought of exploring the lot," said Church sarcastically.

"We shall do them in turn—one after the other," said Handforth calmly. "But we naturally want to explore the most likely ones first."

"We look like being in this boat for a week or two!" said Mac.

**H**ANDFORTH always did things thoroughly; and he wasn't satisfied with merely just passing beyond that mudbank. He went farther out, right into the bay, so that he could get a long-distance view of the cliffs. As he pointed out, the cave-mouths would stand out darkly from that distance.

He entirely overlooked the fact that the tide was going out, and this resulted in an entirely unlooked for effect.

Before Handforth had rowed out over these smooth waters of the bay he had taken a good look at the shore, and he had noted a wide channel just beyond the headland. It would be easy enough to get close to the beach by means of that channel.

But Handforth was ignorant of this coast. He did not know, for example, that a very large portion of Swansea Bay becomes completely drained when the tide is out. One can walk for miles across these sands and flats. It is even possible to cross on foot from Mumbles Head to Swansea under favourable conditions—right over the bay, with the coastline, in the region of Blackpill, quite a mile or two away.

"I'll just make a rough sketch," said Handforth, pulling out some paper and a pencil. "We'll mark the most likely cave entrances. Hold up, you chaps, and keep the boat still. In fact, you'd better cast that anchor overboard."

Church and McClure held up, and they cast overboard the anchor which had been lying in the bottom of the boat. Then they glanced rather anxiously at the sky, which was now becoming dark and forbidding far down on the southern horizon. Dense masses of clouds were collecting; there was an ominous stillness, and a hot, close atmosphere.

"I don't think we ought to have come out," remarked Church. "I believe the tide's gone out, and this water's beginning to look jolly shallow. Just now I touched the bottom with my oar—and I thought it was fairly deep here, too."

"We shall be all right," said Handforth. "Leave it to me."

He finished his rough sketch, put his paper and pencil away, and glanced round.

"Now we'll go into that channel, and—Hullo, where is it? Well, I'm jiggered!"

His expression was blank.

"The tide's gone out," said Church, with a sniff. "The old boatman warned you—"

"But where's all that water?" demanded Handforth, in dismay. "There was about a mile of it here not long ago! Well, I'm blessed! There are lots of mudbanks between us and the shore now—over the very places we rowed."

"Hullo!" said Mac. "W've just touched bottom."

"Here, quick!" gasped Handforth. "Haul up the anchor and grab those oars, you chaps! Unless we're careful, we shall be stranded out here! There'll be no way of getting back!"

Church and McClure were equally startled—for they, too, had been taken by surprise. The tide had gone out with astonishing suddenness, leaving nothing but exposed flats where they had expected to see sea.

Really, they were not to be blamed. They had had no previous experience of this coast, and it was only natural that they should assume that the water would remain in the bay, instead of draining completely out.

Church hauled up the anchor. Handforth grabbed the oars, and commenced rowing frantically. It was a rash thing to do, for suddenly one of the oars caught in the sand, or on a scrap of rock—just when Handforth was pulling his hardest.

Crash!

There was an ominous snapping of wood, the oar broke in halves, and Handforth sprawled headlong in the boat, with his legs kicking up in the air.

"That's done it!" said Church, in alarm. "Oh, Handy, you ass! You've broken one of the oars! How are we going to get back now?"

Handforth scrambled hastily to his feet in the boat.

"The water's not a foot deep!" he gasped. "And when we stopped it was fathoms deep!"

"It seemed to be fathoms—but it must have only been pretty shallow then," said Mac. "We're stranded now!"

There wasn't a doubt of it. They were stranded sure enough. For within the next few minutes the boat grounded completely, and there was no hope of moving it. The water trickled away on every hand, leaving them high and dry on a sandy bank. The shore was quite a good distance away. Figures could vaguely be seen, looking ridiculously small, on the cliffs and on the beach, but nobody was taking any notice of these schoolboys in the boat. If anybody thought anything at all, they assumed that the boat was out there for some purpose—probably dredging for oysters, or something like that.

"Pity we didn't go somewhere and have some grub," said Church disconsolately. "We shall be half starved by the time we get back."





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"What do you mean—half starved?" asked Handforth, staring. "We're going back now. If we can't go by boat, we'll walk."

"Across these mudbanks?" asked Church. "You're dotty! I'll bet they're not safe. We shall have to wait here until the tide turns—until there's enough water to float us. Even then it'll be a bit of a job, because we've only got one oar."

But Handforth was not so pessimistic as this.

"Oh, rot!" he said. "We can get back easily enough."

He stepped over the side into the shallow sea, and almost immediately a startled expression sprang into his eyes. For a moment he had felt himself to be standing on what seemed a solid surface; then, in a most uncanny way, his feet began to sink quivering into the sand. He felt himself being dragged down, as though by some hidden power.

"Great Scott!" he gasped. "It must be a quicksand! I'm going!"

"Give us your hand!" ejaculated Church. Handforth was dragged back into the boat, and he was by no means so confident now.

"My hat!" he breathed. "It's awful! These sands are semi-liquid! I was being dragged down!"

"Then we can't get out and walk," said McClure decidedly. "We shall have to wait here until the tide turns, Handy—and that'll be hours."

"More trouble," said Church, with a grunt. "There'll be an unholy row when we get back to the School Train."

"Who cares about the School Train?" asked Handforth, exasperated. "What about our investigation? What about exploring those caves? It looks as though we're going to be dished!"

"We are dished!" said Church pointedly. "There's no looking about it."

"But it's all rot!" said Handforth, glaring round. "I'd made up my mind to explore these caves one after the other.



What rot! How long do you think it'll be before the tide turns?"

"About an hour, perhaps," said McClure, "and then it'll be another hour before the water gets to us. By that time it'll be nearly dark, and when we get back to the train we shall have a nice, juicy little interview with Mr. Pycraft——"

"Don't keep talking about the train!" roared Handforth. "A fine pair of assistants I've got—I don't think!" he went on bitterly. "What the dickens was the good of bringing you with me?"

"Are you trying to blame us for this mess?" asked Church indignantly.

"Yes, I am!" replied Handforth. "As my assistants, it was your job to keep your eye on the tide."

"That's the worst of these tides," said McClure. "We did keep our eye on it, and we spoke to it severely, too—but it took no notice. It went out just the same. It's time somebody like you, Handy, took them in hand and made them obedient."

"If you're trying to be funny——"

"Don't let's squabble," put in Church hastily. "Let's make the best of a bad job. I've got some chocolate here. Who wants a bit?"

Handforth was too disgusted to eat any chocolate, and said so in the plainest of plain terms. So Church and McClure consumed it with gusto—only to find, after they had eaten the last bit, that Handforth desired chocolate more than anything else on earth.

"It's all gone," said Church. "You're too late, old man."

"You greedy gluttons!" said Handforth witheringly. "Wolfing the whole giddy lot without even offering me a bit!"

"Why, you silly ass, you refused it!" said Church glaring. "You told me to chuck it into the sea! You told me to bury it!"

"Oh, all right—it doesn't matter," said Handforth gruffly. "I hope to goodness somebody comes out to us," he added, scanning the shore. "Dash it, they can't leave us stranded like this."

"How can they get out to us?" asked McClure. "If we can't walk on these quicksands, neither can they. I tell you, we shall have to wait until the tide comes in, and then trust to luck."

A puff of hot wind came over the boat, and although it was noticeable that the black clouds were increasing and becoming more menacing, nobody said anything.

The air was fairly quivering, and now and again there came a low kind of rumble—a far distant growl. Undoubtedly, the elements were preparing for some violent display.

"CAN'T understand it at all," said Nipper, frowning. "Where on earth can those idiots have got to?"

"We'd better not waste any more time," said Reggie Pitt. "We've been round the headland, and some of us have been to

Langland Bay. Others have gone to the pier and along Oystermouth beach, and there's no sign of them."

They were talking about Handforth & Co. There was a large group of juniors on the front, opposite a big pierrot pavilion on the front at Oystermouth. The evening had become lowering, and a premature darkness was descending. There was every evidence of a gathering storm—and a violent one, too.

All the Remove and Fourth forces had gathered, but Handforth, and Church and McClure were missing. There wasn't a chance that they had gone back to the School Train. They were somewhere about, for Handforth was known to be as keen as mustard on this investigation.

"We don't like to go back without those Study D chaps," said Nipper. "I don't mind admitting that I'm uneasy."

"No need to be uneasy, dear old fellow," said Travers. "Whatever trouble Handforth gets into, he gets out of. He bears a charmed life."

"And Church and McClure are generally the charmers," said Reggie Pitt. "They get him out of more trouble than providence does."

"Well, well, I dare say you're right," admitted Travers. "What do you think has happened, Nipper?"

"They're probably exploring the caves," replied Nipper. "Once Handforth starts on a game like this there's no stopping him. They might be trapped in a cave when the tide comes in. You know how reckless Handy is."

"It seems to me, dear old screams, that we're between the devil and the deep sea, as it were," remarked Archie Glenthorne. "I mean to say, if we go back to the School Train now we shall feel frightfully uncomfortable; and if we remain behind we shall be just as frightfully uncomfortable later on. I mean, a swishing always makes a chappie uncomfortable."

"I don't think we shall be swished, Archie," said Nipper. "In fact, I'll go to the nearest telephone box, and have a word with Mr. Lee. I'll tell him what's happened, and that Handforth & Co. are missing, and he'll probably give us extra leave to stay out late to search for them."

"That's a brilliant suggestion," declared Reggie Pitt. "I didn't know you had it in you, Nipper, old man."

"If it's going to mean extra leave for us, then I'm ready to admit that Handforth has his uses, after all," said Travers complacently.

Nipper phoned up, and got the necessary permission, and the other fellows were duly pleased.

"Now we can go to the pierrots," said Tommy Watson contentedly. "No need to worry about Handy and those other chaps. They're bound to turn up soon."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Nipper. "Bother the pierrots! We came here to



search for Morgan Evans, and now we're searching for Handforth! What a chap he is for finding trouble."

But lots of the others refused to take Handforth's disappearance seriously, and they lightheartedly went off seeking pleasure. They felt that they had done enough searching for the day.

"The bounders!" said Nipper indignantly. "Taking an unfair advantage of this extra leave!"

He protested with some of them, but they only laughed. In their view, it was ridiculous to worry about Handforth. Didn't he always turn up like a bad penny?

But Nipper, of course, had every justification for being uneasy.

## CHAPTER 7.

### The Coming of the Storm!

"LISTEN to that!" said Church uneasily. Far away across Swansea Bay, in the neighbourhood of Briton Ferry or Port Talbot, there sounded a low rumbling, growing louder and more menacing."

"That's nothing," said Handforth, glancing round. "Only thunder."

"I know that, ass—but it's getting louder."

"Well, what of it?" asked Edward Oswald. "You've heard thunder before, haven't you?"

"I don't like it," said Church. "There's a big storm coming up—and with a thunderstorm there's generally a lot of wind. We shall be in a fine mess, shan't we, if the storm happens to break just when the tide's coming in? The sea will be rough as the dickens, and we shall be helpless with only one oar."

"And there are lots of rocks on this coast, too," said McClure.

Handforth made no comment. He wasn't worrying about the storm, or at the possibilities of wind. He was exasperated because his precious investigation had fallen through. Optimist though he was, he knew perfectly well that there would be no investigation that evening. For by the time they got ashore the hour would be late, and it would be necessary for them to make all haste back to the School Train.

"It's rotten!" growled Handforth. "Tomorrow isn't a half holiday, and we shall be kept at lessons until the middle of the afternoon. How can a detective follow up his clues if he's hampered like this? When I'm on a case, they ought to give me special leave!"

Church and McClure were of the opinion that Handforth ought to be permanently locked away, but they did not voice these views. They didn't want any further arguments.

It was growing dusk even now—a rather premature dusk, perhaps, brought on by the heavy clouds that were now rolling up over the zenith. A little earlier it had seemed that the storm would break at any moment;

but nothing had happened. The clouds had opened out somewhat, and had lost their massed appearance.

A little wind had sprung up, too—a cooling, grateful wind. Perhaps, with luck, the thunderstorm would pass away inland somewhere without touching Swansea Bay at all. In that case, Handforth & Co. would not be in any trouble. Once afloat, they could manage to get the boat ashore somewhere with comparative ease. They would only be in difficulties if a strong wind came up, causing the sea to roughen with the rising, incoming tide.

Handforth was usually to blame for any such predicament as this, but in the present



case he could not be justly blamed. Church and McClure had been equally surprised, for they had had no suspicion that their boat would be in any danger of stranding. When they had started out, the sea had looked quite deep. Yet it was an undeniable fact that this boat trip was entirely unnecessary—a mere whim of Handforth's.

So far there was not much sign of the tide turning. The water was some little distance away still, although it was now very different in appearance. Previously the surface had been calm and unruffled, but now the sea had sprung to life and was active, vigorous, purposeful.

"It's on the turn all right," said McClure, as he glanced round. "Thank goodness for that! Once it starts really coming in it'll get a big move on. It won't be long before we're afloat now."

"It's a funny thing the other chaps haven't come to look for us," said Handforth, frowning at the cliffs. "I've been expecting to see some of them waving or signalling."

"They don't know we're here," Church pointed out. "Have you forgotten that you carefully avoided them?"

Handforth grunted.

"They've got eyes," he retorted. "Couldn't they see us out here?"

"We're a mere speck—practically invisible against the background of the flats," said Church. "It's dusk now, too, and I don't suppose we can be seen by anybody. We're a good way from the shore, you know."

They tried to make themselves believe that everything would be all right. Yet the sky was becoming more lowering than ever; more clouds were rolling up, and every now and again there was a blinding flash in the





The boat containing Handforth & Co. rocked and swayed perilously as it was tossed about on the storm-swept sea. Suddenly a huge wave surged forward and sent the boat hurtling against the rocks. Crash! There was the rending sound of shattered woodwork, and next moment Handforth & Co. were pitched into the angry sea!



distance, accompanied—or, to be exact, followed—by a deep rumbling.

"They're getting it beyond Swansea," said Church, as he looked. "My hat! Did you see that flash just then? Regular forked lightning. It split the whole sky for a second."

Boom-oom!

The peal of thunder this time was distinct and positive; loud and aggressive, followed by a deep, rumbling echo.

"That storm's coming nearer—and it's coming right overhead, too," said McClure with conviction. "You can't fool me! Within half an hour we shall be in the middle of it. The wind's getting up stronger every minute. Can't you feel it?"

"Only a bit of an evening breeze," said Handforth.

But he was wrong—and he knew it. The wind that was now sweeping across the bay was a forerunner of the squall that was to come. The tide was now tumbling in. The waves, small and unimpressive at first, were now making quite a lot of noise. The sea was becoming turbulent, as though uneasy.

"Shan't be long now," said Handforth, trying to speak cheerfully. "By George! Look at the water coming in! It's not merely creeping up—it's racing. Pity we broke that oar. Everything would be smooth-running but for that."

Church and McClure did not point out the injustice of Handforth's "we" in that last remark. His own ramheadedness had been responsible for the loss of that oar.

"Of course—there's no danger," continued Handforth lightly. "We can easily get the boat round to a safe piece of beach. Plenty of daylight yet. Silly, when you come to think of it—us being in this fat-headed position."

"Silly isn't the word," murmured Church.

The darkness was creeping on with astonishing speed. As the clouds gathered, so the pall of gloom grew thicker and thicker. And now, from the sea, the wind was coming in gusts—uneasy, uneven bursts. Now and again a dead calm would fall, only to be succeeded by a sudden whirl of atmospheric action.

"I reckon the water will be deep enough for us to float the boat long before the storm breaks," said Handforth. "Look! It's coming round the boat now. It won't be long before we're afloat."

"The waves are pretty big," said Church dubiously.

"That's nothing," scoffed Handforth. "We're not afraid of a few waves, I suppose?"

A tremendous flash of lightning blazed out into the sky, nearly overhead, to be instantly followed by a roaring, devastating clap of thunder. It was deafening in its intensity.

"Here she comes!" said Mac, glancing up.

There was no rain just yet, however. The wind freshened, dropped for a moment, and then came sweeping over the sea with great force. Like magic the waves rose higher, noisy and restless. The boat began to shift



The boat containing Handforth & Co. rocked sea. Suddenly a huge wave surged forward and rending sound of shattered woodwork, and n

a trifle, rocking from side to side as the foaming sea struck it on the quarter.

There came another lull, and a large number of enormous raindrops fell, pattering noisily upon the woodwork of the boat, the impact being audible even above the swirling and foaming of the sea.



"The rain will come in earnest in half a minute," said Church, trying to speak calmly.

HE was right.

There came another lightning flash, another thunderclap—and then the rain, pelting and pouring down with incredible violence. In a flash, Swansea Bay was completely blotted out; the headland was lost to sight. Only the re-



ously as it was tossed about on the storm-swept billowing against the rocks. Crash! There was the Handforth & Co. were pitched into the angry sea!

Reflection of the light from the Mumbles Lighthouse gleamed out vaguely amid the smother. The gloom now became so intense that complete darkness seemed to have fallen.

"Whoa!" gasped Handforth suddenly. "Here we go! Off at last!"

"Right in the middle of the storm!" panted Church. "I knew what it would be!"

A succession of fairly big waves had lifted the boat completely, and it was now being tossed away, broadside on, and practically out of control. Handforth was frantically attempting to steer her by means of the one oar, but he was not accustomed to this sort of work.

The three juniors were already drenched to the skin, and they were bewildered by the thunderclaps, the rushing of the wind, and the swishing of the spray. The rain, too, only added to the general smother.

Everything had happened so quickly.

At one moment it seemed that the boat was still aground, with little chance of getting afloat. Now, all in this minute, the storm had broken, the rain had commenced, the wind was howling, and the little boat was being caught up by the vicious waves of the incoming tide.

One would hardly have believed that such a sea could rise in so short a time—especially on a summer's evening such as this. But the sea, already vigorous with the incoming tide, was lashed higher and fiercer by the storm.

And in the gloom and the pelting rain, the boat was tossed at random, with Handforth & Co. entirely helpless!

## CHAPTER 8.

### Another Clue!

"PHEW! This is pretty sudden, dear old fellows," said Vivian Travers.

He and a crowd of other St. Frank's juniors were sheltering in the big doorway of a shop on the Oystermouth Front. Not many of them had spent any time on pleasure. On second thoughts they had decided that such a misuse of this special leave would be rather mean.

So parties of them had gone up and down the front and on the beach, some of them as far as Mumbles Head. But not the slightest sign of Handforth & Co. had been discovered.

"What are we going to do now?" asked Harry Gresham.

"Stay here for a bit," replied Reggie Pitt. "If we go out in this we shall get drenched through. I'm getting fed up with looking for Handy, anyhow. I don't suppose he's in any danger."

"He might not have been ordinarily, but with this storm coming up I'm not so sure," said Nipper, in an uneasy voice. "But you know what Handforth is—always on the look-out for trouble."

Just then Bob Christine, of the Fourth, came running up.









*Edward Oswald Handforth undertakes to answer, in his own unique fashion, any question "N.L." readers care to submit to him. But, although of a certainty the results will be amusing and entertaining, the Editor takes no responsibility for their veracity. Write to Handforth, C/o the Nelson Lee Library, to-day.*

**T.R.** (Manchester). Thank you for your letter. You say that if you met Gore-Pearce and Gulliver and Bell you'd give them a thorough good hiding to cure them of their bad habits. You'll be pleased to know that I've just been round to Study A and done it for you. No, don't thank me; it's a pleasure!

**W.B.R.** (Portsmouth) asks who is the best athlete in the Junior School at St. Frank's. Nipper is the second best; I'm not going to tell you who's the best, because you ought to know such an obvious thing.

**"INTERESTED"** (Manchester) wants to know how many people there are in Bannington. What do you take me for? If you think I'm going round counting them all one by one, you're jolly well mistaken, my lad!

**"ADMIRER"** (London). You'd like to meet me, eh? I'm a jolly fine fellow, am I; and good-looking—and **GENEROUS**? Oh, I've twigged your game now. Well, I'm not going to meet you. You're not going to get any five bobs out of me. It's like your cheek, indeed!

**B.S.** (St. Albans). Thanks for those riddles you sent me with your letter. You

bet I don't solve them, do you? Write to me again, giving the answers, and I'll soon see if they are right or wrong!

**"AQUATIC"** (Hounslow). Why don't I have a go at swimming the English Channel? Well, I've often thought about it, but that's as far as I've got, old man. Of course, I could do it—easily. As a matter of fact, I was speaking to Ulysses Spencer Adams, the American junior, about this subject some time ago. He says he'd like to do it himself; he would, in fact, if he could buy up the English Channel and take it home with him to practice in during his summer vacation!

**"SUPPORTER"** (Swansea) would like to meet Archie Glenthorne. What the dickens for? That lazy slacker is a disgrace to St. Frank's. Why, I have to go into his study about six times a day to punch him on the nose and stop him snoring. Speaking of Archie, this laziness seems to run in the family. Only the other day, in an unusual spasm of wakefulness, he told me that one of his uncles takes a ride in an old Ford car to save himself the trouble of shaking the ash off his cigar!

EDWARD OSWALD.

**"WHAT** does the meddling old chap take me for?" mumbled Bob Christine, after the man had gone out. "Does he think I don't know how to look after myself? And does he imagine that I'm going to stroll along at leisure in the middle of a rainstorm?"

"Never mind him," said Nipper, with a keen light in his eyes. "Something has just struck me, you chaps."

"About what that man said?" asked Tommy Watson.

"Yes," replied Nipper. "Since Tuesday nothing has been heard of Evans and Rees—and it was on Tuesday that this unknown

boy was run down by a motor-car, and taken to hospital. I am wondering if he was either Evans or Rees."

"Oh, I say!" protested Tregellis-West. "Cheese it, old boy! I mean, really!"

"Well, it's not so far fetched," argued Nipper. "According to what that man said, nobody knew the boy in Oystermouth—nobody came forward to claim him after the accident. I think we ought to make some inquiries."

"But if one of those chaps was injured like that, the other would have shown himself," said Buster Boots.

"Not necessarily," replied Nipper.



"Well, anyway, there would have been a lot of talk," continued Boots. "You can't deny that. And considering what a hullabaloo there has been about these missing schoolboys—"

"That's where you're wrong," interrupted Nipper. "There's been very little hullabaloo here. Most of the people smile when we ask about those two chaps. They think there's been a lot of fuss over nothing. Nobody ever thought of connecting this accident with the two missing chaps. It was one boy who got run over—not two. I don't suppose the people associated the two things at all."

"I don't associate them, either," said Reggie, shaking his head. "No, Nipper, old man, it's rather too thick."

"I don't agree with you," said Nipper. "Who was this boy? Nobody knew him—nobody claimed him. There aren't many boys like that in a seaside town. Anyhow, I'm going to telephone the hospital."

AS it happened, there was a telephone at the back of the teashop. Nipper was soon using it, and it was not long before he got through to the hospital.

"Yes, the boy is still here," said the house-surgeon, when Nipper got through to that gentleman and made his inquiry. "Rather a bad case of concussion. The poor youngster has been unconscious for three days."

"Do you know who he is, sir?" asked Nipper.

"I didn't until this evening," replied the doctor. "He only recovered consciousness this afternoon, and now he has taken a decided turn for the better. I understand that his name is Rees."

"Rees!" yelled Nipper.

"Hallo! Why the shout?" came the doctor's voice over the wire. "Do you know him?"

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"No, sir; but isn't he one of those boys who have been missing for the best part of a week?" asked Nipper.

"Missing?" came the voice. "I don't seem to remember— Oh, yes, of course! There was something in the newspapers, wasn't there? Two boys ran away from school, didn't they? Last seen at the Mumbles. Yes, I remember now. H'm! I must admit that I hadn't connected this boy with those two."

"Well, it's the same name as one of them, sir—Rees."

"I believe you're right, now I come to think of it," said the doctor. "Possibly he is one of those boys. But you mustn't take it for granted. Rees is rather a common name in these parts."

"Common or not common, sir, it's too much of a coincidence. It must be one of those chaps, and perhaps he'll be able to explain where Evans is. You see, Evans is still missing."

"Well, I'm afraid the boy cannot be disturbed now," said the doctor decisively. "He has dropped into a sound sleep, and he needs complete rest. I think he'll be out of hospital in a few days now that he has taken a turn for the better. There's no bones fractured."

"I think something ought to be done, sir," urged Nipper. "Finding Rees in the hospital clearly proves that the two boys can't be tramping over the countryside. It's pretty alarming. I mean, what can have happened to Evans? It's a funny thing that he didn't come forward after the accident."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said the doctor. "I'll have to look at the boy soon, and if he's awake, I'll ask him a few questions."

"May we come to the hospital, sir?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"You may come, but I won't guarantee that you can see the youngster," replied the doctor. "Much will depend upon his condition when I examine him in about half an hour's time."

"Thanks awfully, sir," said Nipper.

He hung up almost immediately afterwards—before the house-surgeon could change his mind. When he returned to the other fellows he told them of the information that he had gained.

"We've got to go!" he said, as the juniors buzzed with excitement. "We'll call at the School Train on the way and tell Mr. Lee."

"But what about Handforth?" asked Gresham.

"I suppose some of you had better stay here, to have a look round when the storm's over," said Nipper. "It's getting better already—the rain's nearly stopped. There's no need for the whole crowd of us to go to the hospital; just one or two will do."

And so, five minutes later, Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson started off for

Swansea—hotfoot for the hospital. The rest of the juniors remained in Oystermouth, to be handy in case some news turned up with regard to Handforth & Co.

As Travers remarked, their first day in the Swansea district was proving to be fairly strenuous.

## CHAPTER 9.

### On the Rocks!

"LOOK out!" yelled Handforth.

Crash!

The little boat, with its occupants, was flung with tremendous violence upon a half-submerged rock. In a second the boat splintered up, and the three boys were flung headlong into the foaming water.

For some time Handforth & Co. had known that only a miracle could save them from being pitched into the sea. What with the storm and the rising tide, the sea had gathered tremendous force, and it was impossible to control the boat with that one oar.

She had tossed about, had pitched perilously, and a great deal of water had come aboard. The three juniors had known that they were getting nearer and nearer to the treacherous rocks which abounded on that section of the coast.

And now the disaster had happened.

The thunderstorm was passing; the sky was lightening a trifle, and was showing reddish towards the west, where the clouds were broken. Only an occasional flash of lightning came, and the thunder was distant.

But the storm had done its worst; it had caused Handforth & Co. to be flung out of their boat and to be tossed into the foaming waves of the heavy sea.

It was not so heavy as it looked. Well out from the shore it was only just a little broken. But here, amidst the rocks, the waves came charging in with thunderous crashes, sending the spray yards into the air. And Handforth & Co., struggling in the water, had an idea that a veritable hurricane was raging.

As it was, they found themselves swimming, fighting against the force of the sea. And, as luck would have it, they had been pitched into a kind of channel or gully, which penetrated between two walls of rock, apparently right into the face of the cliff.

The waves came sweeping in, breaking unevenly, and the three boys were lifted up again and again, to be thrown nearer to the rock wall, which appeared to be an impenetrable barrier just ahead.

"We're safe so far!" gasped Handforth. "Keep close to me, you chaps! Thank goodness the water's pretty warm!"

"But what are we going to do?" asked Church, as he looked wildly round. "We can't climb these rocks—they're sheer! And we can't swim out of this place—the tide's too strong. We're caught in a trap."



"We shall be drowned in the end," said McClure. "We shall get exhausted, and——"

"Look out for this one!" panted Handforth warningly.

Another big wave was coming up behind, and it caught the three juniors in its grip, and sent them hurtling forward—right towards that rock-face which they could dimly see in the dusk.

Yet, curiously enough, the waves failed to break on that cliff; they failed to come surging back, baffled by the barrier.

And a moment later Handforth & Co. understood why.

For they felt a kind of force tugging at their legs and bodies, under the surface. In spite of themselves, they were pulled down—dragged under. There was some strong undercurrent here—some opening through which the water was surging.

They all went under together, gasping, unprepared. One and all, they thought that their last moments had come.

As Handforth had been dragged under, he had instinctively clutched out, and, more by luck than by anything else, he had succeeded in grabbing Church's clothes with one hand and McClure's with the other. Even in that dramatic moment Handforth's first thought had been for his chums.

But really he could do nothing.

He felt himself dragged down, down, and then flung forward. The water was all round them, tumultuous and thundering. Church had already gulped a good deal down, and he was confused and nearly panic-stricken.

Was this the end? Were they to be sucked under like this, to be drowned in this cul-de-sac of the rocks, like rats in a trap?

**A**ND then, almost before they realised it, they felt their feet touching bottom. They heard a tremendous roaring in their ears, like the breaking of the sea on a shingle beach. They were flung forward in a heap, battered and buffeted. Yet Handforth continued to grip his two companions. Nothing could make him release that vice-like clutch.

He felt the sea tugging at him, trying to pull him back. And quite suddenly his head came out of the water—into the air. He opened his eyes wildly, but an utter and absolute blackness confronted him.

His ears were filled with that terrific roaring, and he could hear Church and McClure spluttering noisily just near him.

"We're all right!" he gasped. "Come on! There's a beach of some sort here! I'm jiggered if I can understand it, though."

They all exerted their strongest efforts, and they charged up through a mass of spongy seaweed, and then on to some shingle. Behind them the sea was breaking with a great noise, echoing and re-echoing, as though there were confining walls all round.

"I thought it was all up with us!" gurgled McClure.

"A bit farther!" urged Handforth. "By George, that's better! The sea's behind us now—we're on the beach. But it's as black as your hat."

"I don't believe we're on the beach!" came Church's voice. "It's too dark for that—and, besides, listen to our voices. They're echoing so rummily that——"

"I know!" shouted Handforth. "We're in one of those caves!"

Handforth had hit on the truth.

Outside, it seemed as though the cliff was solid. Yet, under the surface of the water, there was a cave entrance. And the three juniors had been drawn down, and then flung forward through the submerged cave entrance, and beyond. They were now on the shelving floor of the cave, having crawled out of reach of the water.

"It's a submerged cave!" said Handforth tensely. "That's it! No wonder we were confused for a bit!"

"But we're trapped!" gasped McClure in a horrified voice. "The tide's coming in, Handy! It'll probably fill this cave completely! There'll be no escape for us at all! We shall be done for!"

Handforth caught his breath in. He had forgotten that the tide was still coming in. The possibility that this cave was one of those which completely filled at full tide was one which could not be overlooked.

"If we had a light, we might be able to get our bearings," came Mac's voice. "But all our matches are ruined, and——"

"A light!" ejaculated Handforth. "By George! What about my electric torch?"

He was very proud of his electric torch. He never failed to carry it with him when he was on one of his "detective cases." It was an extra special torch, too. When he now pulled it out of his sodden pocket, and pressed the switch, a beam of light shot out, and played on a rock wall close by.

"Thank goodness!" said Church fervently. "Oh, I've never been so pleased to see a light before!"

"It only shows you how sensible it is to be prepared," said Handforth with satisfaction. "Hallo, no need to worry, my sons! Look up there! This cave goes up for yards and yards—and there's plenty of dry sand at the top. The sea doesn't get up as far as that, even at high tide."

"Well, that's a relief," said McClure breathlessly.

They crawled higher up, and satisfied themselves that the sand was, indeed, perfectly dry. They sat there, Handforth turning his torch about and revealing the cave as fairly low and long, and with jagged rocks on every hand. Even at low tide there was a big pool of water left outside in that gully, so this cave had been missed during their earlier investigations.

"We shall be all right now," said Handforth. "Better get up soon, and move about, so that our wet clothes won't do us





Handforth stepped over the side of the boat confidently. For a moment his feet seemed to be secure enough; then he felt them gradually sinking down into the soft sand. "Help! Quick, you chaps! I'm sinking!" he exclaimed in alarm.

any harm. We've got to wait until the tide goes down before we can get out! By George, though, I thought it was all up at first!"

"Listen!" said Church in a scared voice.

"Eh? What the dickens——"

"I thought I heard something just then—before you started speaking, Handy," went on Church hoarsely. "From back here—behind us, among the rocks, up that crevice!"

"You're mad!" said Handforth. "There can't be anything there——"

"Listen!"

They all became perfectly still. And then——

Thud-thud!

Unmistakably there came the sounds of knocking, as though from the very bowels of the earth.

"Help! Help!"

The voice was so faint, so vague, so ghostly that Handforth & Co. felt their skin tingling. They could hardly believe that they had really heard the cry.

"Did you hear a—a voice?" whispered Mac.

"Yes—shouting for help!" said Handforth, his eyes burning. "I thought it was my imagination at first——"

"It wasn't!" said Church. "I heard it, too."

Handforth lost no further time. He went scrambling up to the top of the cave, where the crevice was so narrow that he could hardly squeeze through. Church and McClure were obliged to come behind, in single file. And Handforth seemed to be going on for ever. He crawled and crawled, twisting this way and that way, right amidst the crevice of the rock.

Then abruptly he checked. He found a yawning hole right in front of him, preventing any further progress. He shot his light down into it, and he could see a great cleft, an abyss, descending far, far down.

"Hey!" he shouted. "Anybody there?"

"Oh, thank goodness!" came a voice. "At last! I had given up hope! Is it you, Rees?"

Handforth started violently.

"Rees?" he gasped. "Who are you? What's your name?"

"Evans!" came the weak voice.

"We've got him!" yelled Handforth excitedly. "It's Morgan Evans! Here in this cave—imprisoned at the bottom of this hole!"

Startled exclamations came from his rear; but neither Church nor McClure could come up, owing to the narrowness of the approach. Handforth was now bubbling with triumph. All along he had had a "hunch" that Morgan Evans was in one of these Mumbles caves. And now, by the sheerest chance, he had found at least one of the missing boys. The fact that Evans had asked him if he were Rees proved that the other Welsh schoolboy was not here.

And in that dramatic moment Handforth thought of Frances. As he had hoped, he was the one to find her brother! This was topping!

It took him scarcely any time to unwind the rope from about his waist. Knowing the nature of his quest, he had prepared himself with everything—rope, electric torch, water flask, and one or two other first-aid articles.

"Grab hold of this rope, you chaps!" he said briskly. "This fellow down here seems



to be pretty well exhausted. I'd better go down and make sure of him. Go easy—let me down foot by foot!"

"Right-ho!" came Church's voice. "Go ahead. We've got the rope!"

It was quickly done. Handforth went slithering down into the abysmal depths. The rope was a strong one and a long one, but even so he helped himself by as many projections as he could find, and he shouted up to Church and McClure to go easy when the end of the rope was drawing near. But, as it happened, he got to the bottom with plenty of rope to spare. And he was immediately clutched by a pair of quivering, eager hands.

"It's all right," said Handforth, breathing hard. "You're safe now, old man. You're Morgan Evans, aren't you?"

"Yes, indeed!" breathed the other. "I want water! Oh, if you can let me have some water——"

"Here you are!" said Handforth briskly.

He unscrewed his flask, and Morgan Evans drank greedily. As Mr. Evans had said, his son was of about the same build as Reggie Pitt—dark-haired and slim. Now he looked pale, haggard and drawn, in the glaring light of Handforth's electric torch.

"We've been searching for you," said Edward Oswald, eyeing the youngster critically. "By George! You seem to have been having a pretty rough time of it. How long have you been down here?"

"I don't know," muttered the other, clutching at Handforth. "It seems weeks, but I suppose it's only a few days. Indeed to goodness, I have had a terrible time!"

"Have you been alone ever since Tuesday?" asked Handforth, aghast. "Alone in this place—in the darkness and the silence?"

"The darkness!" panted Morgan Evans. "It has been terrible. Look you, I can scarcely see now. Your light is so bright for me. But I am saved—I am saved!"

## CHAPTER 10.

### The Truth!

TEN minutes later, Morgan Evans was in the outer cave, sitting with Handforth & Co. The electric torch was propped in the sand, casting a reflected light upon the little group.

"We'll soon be out," Handforth was saying. "When the tide goes down we can escape and climb the rocks, and soon be in Oystermouth. Your mother and sister are there, you know, and I'll bet they'll be pleased to see you!"

"But how did you find me?" asked the Welsh boy.

"Well, I'll admit it was a bit of an accident," confessed Handforth. "We've been looking for you half the day, really, but we chaps had a bit of a game in the storm. We were only thrown into this cave by chance. Funny how these things happen."

"By chance!" muttered Evans. "Then Rees meant what he said! Perhaps more! Oh, the hound—the rotter! Yet I can't believe it, because he has always been such a pal of mine."

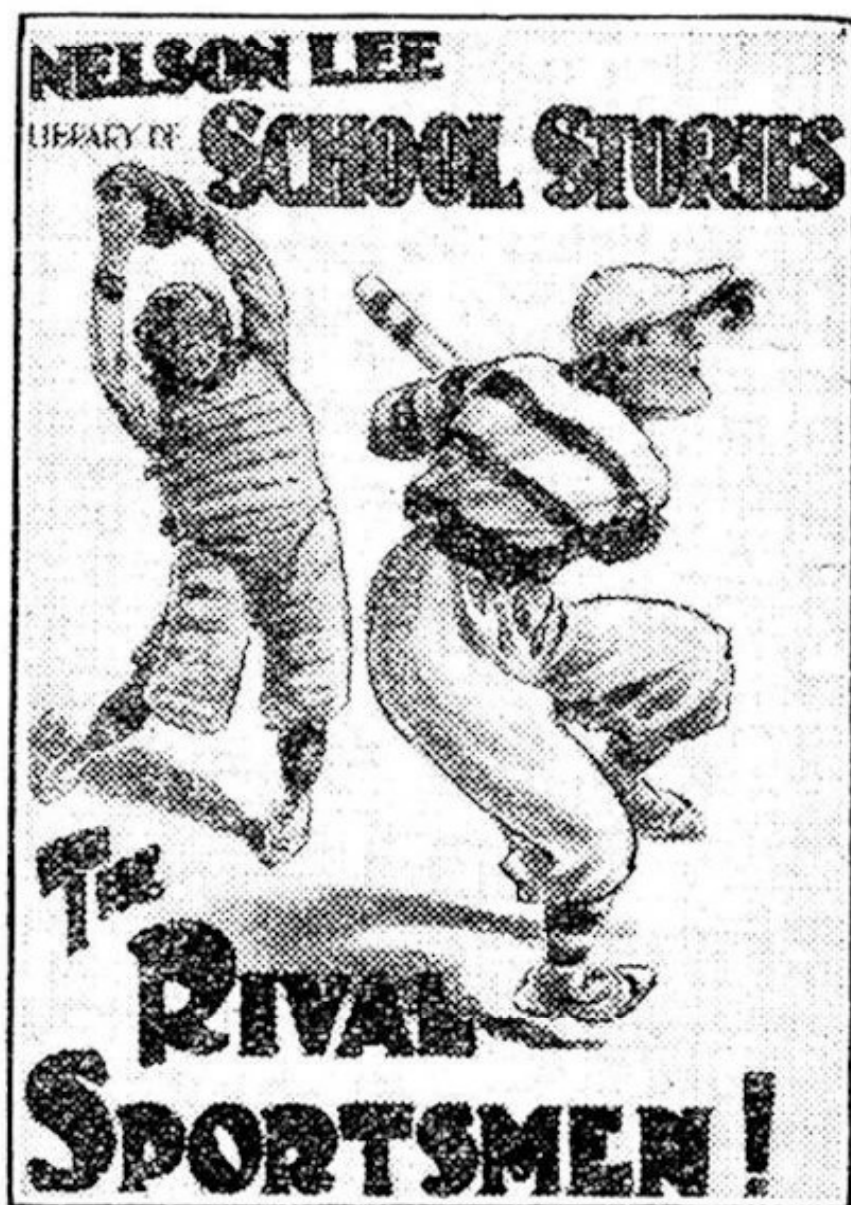
"Why, what happened?" asked Handforth, staring. "Did he leave you down in that shaft deliberately?"

"Yes!" whispered Evans.

"My goodness!" said Church, aghast. "But no chap could do such a diabolical thing as that!"

"He did!" insisted Evans. "Yes, indeed! We came to the caves because we heard that

**COMING NEXT WEEK!**



people were looking for us. We thought we should be safe. We found that shaft, and there was an argument. I said that it would be possible to live down there for a week in the darkness, without food or water. Rees said it couldn't be done."

"Well?"

"It was silly of us. We argued until we got angry," continued Evans. "Then we had another argument about how deep the cleft was. Like a fool, I said that I would go down, and Rees lowered me on a rope that we had."

"And what then?"

"No sooner was I at the bottom than he threw the rope down after me!" panted Evans. "He laughed, and said that he was going. He said that he would make me prove my words! He would leave me here for a week—without food or water—and then



come back to find out what had happened. He was in a temper, I think, and he sounded awful."

"And do you mean to say he went off—leaving you there like that?" asked Church, in amazement. "Why, the chap must be a perfect devil!"

"I can't understand it! Indeed, I can't understand it!" said Evans, who was obviously weak and exhausted. "It has only been three days, but it seemed like three weeks! If I had remained there for the full week, I should have died. Rees meant to

## “THE RIVAL SPORTSMEN!”

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## ORDER IN ADVANCE!

kill me. It's a horrible thought, but what else can I believe?"

"Well, it's jolly rummy," said Handforth grimly. "Rees has vanished, too. Nobody has seen any sign of him."

"He is lying low—perhaps in one of the other caves," said Evans. "He meant what he said, you see. And, look you, he left me with only a bottle of water and a few sandwiches. They lasted me over the first day, otherwise I might have been unconscious by now."

"Well, cheer up!" said Handforth brightly. "We'll soon have you out, old son, and back with your mother and sister. It won't take you long to get strong again—only a day or two. And you can bet your boots that we'll find Rees and make him pay dearly for this filthy piece of work."

"But if you had the rope, Evans, why

couldn't you escape?" asked Church. "Couldn't you manage to throw it up and hook it on to a piece of rock?"

"I tried," muttered the other. "I tried until I was exhausted—until I was nearly mad with desperation. The sides have projections, but I could not catch the rope on one. So at last I gave it up, and waited—waited for unconsciousness. Oh, I can never tell you of the awful time that I spent down there in the darkness!"

NELSON LEE glanced at Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson.

"Perhaps you had better come up with me, Nipper," he said. "You other boys remain here until we return."

"Yes, sir," said Tommy Watson and Sir Montie.

They were in the hospital, and the house surgeon had just given them permission to go up to see the boy Rees. He was better, and, according to the nurse, very excited over something. This was not doing him any good, so the doctor thought it just as well for Nelson Lee and Nipper to go up and see him. Perhaps his excitement would then subside.

Lee had heard the story from Nipper, and, although he was concerned about the disappearance of Handforth & Co., he was not worried. Handforth had led him a dance on too many occasions!

When they arrived in the accident ward, they found Rees in bed, propped amongst a lot of pillows. His head was bandaged, but otherwise he seemed to be fairly normal.

"Are you the doctor?" he asked eagerly, as Nelson Lee stood beside the bed.

"No," replied Lee. "I am Mr. Lee, of the St. Frank's School Train. I think you are one of the two boys who have been missing for some days? You ran away from school

"Yes, sir," said the boy in the bed. "I've just remembered—only a little while ago. How about Evans? Is he safe, sir? Have you got him out, sir?"

"I don't understand you," replied Lee quietly. "You must not get so excited, young man. Unfortunately, we have seen nothing of Evans. Perhaps you know that you have been unconscious for three days

"Then he's still in the cave!" panted Rees. "Oh, please go at once, sir! Please bring him out! I only meant it for a joke!"

"Only meant what?" put in Nipper. "What are you trying to get at? We heard that you had been knocked down by a car, and I wondered if you were one of those two boys from the Cardiff school. So I made inquiries, and found that your name was Rees."

"Yes, yes!" said Rees. "But don't waste time, please! Evans is in danger. He's in a cave—at the bottom of a great cleft, helpless!"



"But why?" asked Lee. "If you knew this before you met with the accident, why did you keep quiet? Why did you leave him there?"

"I tell you, it was a joke, sir!" panted Rees. "We had had an argument about that deep gully, and Evans said that anybody could live there for a week without food or water. I didn't believe him, and then I got him to go down on a rope—and I threw the rope after him, so that he could not escape."

"An extraordinary thing to do, my boy," said Lee gravely. "A dangerous thing."

"I didn't mean it to be dangerous, sir," said Rees. "I only meant it as a joke. I told him I was going to leave him there for a week—but I meant to go back after two hours. My idea was to give him a bit of a scare. I was feeling wild, and I'm ashamed of it now. But, honestly, sir, I didn't mean to keep him there!"

He spoke so earnestly, so sincerely, that Lee and Nipper were obliged to believe him.

"As soon as I got out, I lost my temper, and I laughed," continued the boy. "We were both running away together, and——"

"Yes, yes, I know that. But what of Evans?" asked Lee.

"I meant to go to a shop and buy some food," replied Rees. "Then I was going back with the food, and I meant to bring Evans up out of that pit. I just remember running across the road, and hearing a shout. And—and after that I don't know anything, until I woke up in this bed."

"I see—I see," murmured Nelson Lee, pursing his lips. "An extraordinary mischance, my boy. You meant to go back to Evans, and then you were knocked over by that car—and you have been lying unconscious in this hospital for three whole days. In the meantime, that unfortunate companion of yours has been a prisoner in that black cave. I hope he is still alive."

"I didn't mean anything wrong, sir," said Rees desperately. "Oh, I hope you believe me——"

"I do," interrupted Lee. "I can see that you are telling me the truth. It is rather strange that your own relatives have not made inquiries——"

"They're abroad, sir, for the holidays," put in Rees. "That was one reason why I ran away from school—because I couldn't appeal to my people. It was my fault that Evans came. I influenced him. Oh, but won't you go at once, sir? I'll tell you where the cave is. I wish I could come with you——"

"No, you must remain here," said Lee. "You won't be well enough to leave the hospital for some days yet. We will take immediate steps to find your friend, and to rescue him."

They received full instructions from the anxious Rees, and the doctor was glad

enough when they had gone. For the patient was doing himself no good by all this excitement and perturbation.

However, the little mystery was solved, and now it remained to be seen whether Morgan Rees was still alive in that black prison of his. Little did Nelson Lee and Nipper realise that they had been forestalled.

"**B**BETTER be going now!" said Handforth briskly. "The tide's gone out, and we've only got to splash through this pool, and we can get round the rocks."

He and Church and McClure were standing in the entrance to the cave. At last the tide had receded. The prisoners could escape, although they would have to wade through a good deal of water before they could get round to the higher rocks. Not that this worried them in the least.

Evans was looking stronger now. The water had done him good, and the knowledge that he was safe had restored his nerve.

Handforth & Co. were seething with fury against the unfortunate Rees—knowing nothing, of course, of the real facts. They were determined to find that wretched boy, and to make him suffer dearly for his brutal trick.

"Come on!" said Handforth.

"Wait a minute!" ejaculated Church in a startled voice. "What are those lights? Can't you see them twinkling just by that rock? And voices, too! My only hat! It must be a search party looking for us!"

"Good egg!" said Handforth eagerly. "Hi, this way, you chaps! Here we are!"

A series of yells sounded, and a moment later there came a great splashing as Nipper and Travers and Watson and a lot of others came into sight. Nelson Lee was there, too, much to Handforth's consternation.

"The chopper!" he muttered, looking round at Church and McClure. "It's Mr. Lee! We'll probably be sacked for this, my sons!"

The rescuers came plunging round through the water.

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Nelson Lee. "You here, Handforth! And Church and McClure, too! Well, I'm exceedingly glad to find you!"

"You bounders!" shouted Nipper. "So you were first, after all? You've found Evans, haven't you?"

"You bet we have!" replied Handforth proudly.

They were soon surrounded by the whole crowd, carrying lanterns and torches. And Morgan Evans was given into Nelson Lee's charge.

"We've got to find that chap, Rees, sir!" said Handforth fiercely. "He's a brute! He deliberately left Evans here to starve in the darkness——"



"I do not blame Evans for thinking such harsh things of his friend," interrupted Nelson Lee. "But there happens to be no truth in that accusation. Rees was knocked down by a car an hour after he had left you, Evans, and he has been unconscious in hospital until this very evening."

An expression of relief and then consternation passed over Evans' face.

"I knew that he could not be such a cad!" he said eagerly. "Look you, Rees has always been my friend, sir. Is he hurt much? Is he in danger?"

"He suffered rather severely from concussion, but he is mending rapidly now," replied Lee, smiling. "So, you see, everything is quite easily explained. You were left in that cave by mischance. There was nothing deliberate about it, my boy. However, you have to thank these St. Frank's youngsters for their very excellent help."

"Oh, rats, sir!" said Handforth. "We did a bit, but we only found him by accident. One of the rummiest things I know of!"

**N**EEDESS to say, Mrs. Evans and Frances Evans were overjoyed when the missing boy was brought to their hotel. There was quite a scene, and a good deal of excitement throughout the whole hotel. The story got about rapidly. And the look of gratitude that Frances flashed at Handforth was quite sufficient reward for the leader of Study D.

The next day Mr. Evans himself arrived, and all the papers were full of the remarkable case. Mr. Evans came to the School Train, and personally thanked the juniors for their part in the whole affair.

"I am glad to tell you," he added, "that my son's Form-master has been dismissed from his school. It was proved that he's a bully—a tyrant. The boys were justified in running away from their school, and they will receive no punishment whatsoever."

"Why send him back, sir?" asked Nipper. "Why not let him join our School Train and come to St. Frank's? We like him tremendously."

"Yes, rather!" said Handforth. "Evans is one of the best. And we can do with a Welsh chap in the Remove. We've got a Scottish ass, as it is."

"A splendid idea!" said Mr. Evans enthusiastically. "You St. Frank's boys have proved yourselves to be generous and sporting. I should very much like my son to be in such a fine school—where they produce such types."

So the Remove felt that it had gained over this adventure—for Morgan Evans did become a St. Frank's fellow—and more will be heard of him in due course.

THE END.

(Watch out for next Wednesday's lively yarn! It's entitled "The Rival Sportsmen!" and it hits the bulleye! Order your copy in advance to make sure of reading it.)

## The St. Frank's Skipper!

By "Rhymster"

**C**OME, here's a toast to Fenton, E,  
A captain staunch and true.  
The idol of St. Frank's is he,  
And British schoolboys, too.  
With beef and brawn, as tough as nails,  
He stands for all that's "straight,"  
A "winner" all along the rails,  
And always up-to-date.

\* \* \*

Hats off, you men, he's worth his weight  
In gold, you will agree.  
But woe betide you if you're late,  
And been out on the spree.  
Such habits turn away the smile  
Upon his handsome face;  
He does not think it worth the while  
To go the giddy pace.

\* \* \*

A whale at sport of every sort;  
He's always up to scratch,  
With nerve and sinew keen and taut,  
Throughout a thrilling match.  
And in the Form he does his whack;  
At classics he's no fool.  
At work or play, he's never slack—  
A credit to the school.

\* \* \*

On footer fields his ball control  
Is canny to behold.  
The fags his praises they extol  
In manner loud and bold.  
"Good man!" "Well played!" and  
"Oh, that's hot!"  
The fags yell out in glee.  
For Fenton's scored a ripping shot  
And won the match, you see!

\* \* \*

Come, fill the cup with ginger-pop,  
And be upstanding, too;  
And drink his health—leave not a drop—  
Such chaps as he are few.  
St. Frank's is proud; they bless the Fate  
That placed him 'neath their wing.  
Then give three cheers; that's good, first-  
rate—  
We've made the rafters ring!



# Gossip ABOUT St. FRANK'S



## Things Heard and Seen By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

**P**EOPLE are too fond of complaining about their bad luck. There's an example of it at St. Frank's just now, for most of the fellows who failed to qualify for the School Train trip bitterly speak to me of their "bad luck." If they had had more "luck" they would have been with the rest of the chaps in Swansea this week. Now, in my opinion, this is all nonsense. Gordon H. Sewell, of Southampton, mentioned this point in a letter to me, and I am in full agreement with him. In fact, he accuses me of bringing too much luck into my chronicles of St. Frank's, and quotes an instance where Nelson Lee goes off on a hazardous adventure. I was misguided enough to say that Lee needed plenty of luck on that trip. After due thought, I think that Mr. Sewell is right in saying that the word "Providence" would have been the more appropriate word. We all want Providence to look after us, but I'm afraid we shall fare pretty badly if we count on luck.

\* \* \*

**T**AKE the fellows at St. Frank's, for instance. What's the good of them telling me that they were unlucky in being left behind? They know jolly well that they failed to qualify for the trip because they were slack, or lazy, or indifferent. It was the industrious chaps—those who secured the most marks in the eliminating exam—who were selected for the School Train trip. Were they lucky? I don't think so. They just earned their right to go. And it's generally like this in every other walk of life, I find. There's no such thing as luck. Put a "p" in front of it, and you get the right word. The people who get on are those who have plenty of pluck. I've been telling this to Doyle and Freeman and a few other juniors who are now lamenting their lot at St. Frank's. And the young idiots seem to think that I'm lecturing them. So in case you readers think the same, I'd better change the subject.

**H**ANDFORTH'S a good chap, but he sometimes makes me impatient. He takes everything so literally; and if you don't know him as I do, you might think that he's trying to pull your leg. Only the other day, when I saw him in Cardiff, he wanted to know what the printers meant by running out of ink. It seems that he wanted to get hold of a back number of the Old Paper—one in which he prominently appeared—and the newsagent told him it "was out of print." And the fathead jumped on me and said that the publishers had no right to run out of print like that. Rupert F. O'Brien, of Invercargill, New Zealand, asks the same question—although I don't for a moment call him a fathead, or liken him to Handforth. When a paper is "out of print," it simply means that the supply is exhausted, and that no more copies of that particular edition are available—although, of course, there may be plenty of copies knocking about in second-hand shops, or on the bookshelves of readers who would be willing to sell them.

\* \* \*

**I**HAD a good laugh the other day when I chanced to stroll into Kenmore's study, in the East House. Kenmore is a very quiet sort of fellow these days, and I'm glad to say that he's showing no signs of backsliding. When I went into his study, he jumped up and looked suspiciously guilty. I thought for a moment that he was reading a racing paper, but it turned out that he had merely bagged about a dozen "bloods" from Churchman of the Fourth, and, instead of tearing them up, he had decided to read them himself, and was jolly interested in them. Of course, they weren't bloods at all, but merely various copies of the "Gem" and the "Popular," etc. Just a wheeze of Kenmore's to get some good reading on the cheap. I was glad when he told me that he intended giving the papers back to Churchman when he had finished with them. As a prefect, he couldn't very well lower his



dignity by openly reading these journals—the silly chump!—but as he had confiscated them, it was his duty to read them in order to give them his official O.K. He's not the only prefect who does this sort of thing. Leslie A. N. Muddell, of Faruham, tells me that the same sort of incident happened at his own school before he left. You may not believe it, but he actually states that the Old Paper itself had to be read on the sly, as "bloods" were prohibited. Bloods, indeed! And one day he found a prefect with about fifty confiscated copies of the Old Paper, reading them on the quiet—when he thought nobody was looking. Well, I don't blame him, really. That prefect wasn't such a "highbrow" as he pretended to be.

\* \* \*

**O**UR old friend, George Seaman Hunnable, who lives in Mistley, Essex, has asked me where the St. Frank's fellows are going for the summer holidays. How should I know? I had a word with Nipper and Handforth and Travers and a few others, and none of them seemed to know what they're going to do in August. Anyhow, this School Train trip will come to an end when the term finishes. The fellows won't be so keen on the Train during the holidays. They'll want to go farther afield, I expect. Handforth has some hope of making a trip to Mars, or the moon. But as I told him, until there's a pretty big improvement in our present-day flying craft, he'll have to keep on hoping. Archie Glen-thorne says that all he wants to do is to relax, at Glenthorne Manor—just as if he ever does anything else but relax. Perhaps I am gifted with a sixth sense, for although these fellows haven't the faintest idea where they're going, I seem to have an inkling that they'll be destined to spend their summer holidays abroad.

\* \* \*

**O**UR photograph this week (which you see here) is of P. B. Saunders, of Chiswick. I don't know whether his name's Philip or Bertram or Plantagenet or Bartholomew. But that's his fault—and the fault of lots of other readers, too. Sometimes I don't even know whether they're male or female. I wish all you readers would sign your full names when you write to me. How would you like it if I always referred to the St. Frank's chaps as E. O. Handforth and A. W. D. Glen-thorne and W. N. Browne and V. Travers and R. L. Fullwood? And how would you like the Moor View girls referred to as I. Manners and D. Berkeley and M. Summers and W. Pitt? You'd think it a pretty rotten

state of affairs, wouldn't you? Just look at this, for example:

"R. Hamilton came along Bellton Lane with T. Watson, and when they got to the stile they met D. Berkeley and I. Manners.

"Hullo!" said D. Berkeley. "Didn't expect to meet you here!"

"If it comes to that, we didn't expect to meet you," replied R. Hamilton, glancing at I. Manners."

Awful, isn't it? I don't mean the writing—that's taken for granted—but the use of initials instead of names. Any new reader, glancing at that bit, couldn't possibly tell which were boys and which were girls. So I hope that P. B. Saunders will be the first one to take the tip when he next writes to me.

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**A**ND here's a chap named Maurice Stodel, of Shoreditch, who tells me that he didn't like it at all when I failed to acknowledge a letter that he wrote to me some months ago. He

#### OUR READERS' PORTRAIT GALLERY



P. B. Saunders.

oughtn't to grumble, really, because I have repeatedly said that I cannot possibly answer, or even acknowledge, a tenth part of the letters that reach me. I can only choose those letters which seem to call for an answer more than any of the others. Maurice wants to know when Archie Glenthorne first came to St. Frank's. Now, here's something definite. I spoke to Archie about it the day after I got Maurice's letter, and he jammed his monocle into his eye and told me I ought to know better than he does. Too much frightful fag for him to keep dates and things in his dashed head. As a matter of fact, Archie burst into prominence in the story called "The Coming of Archie," which appeared in No. 352, Old Series. Nipper's advent at St. Frank's—which Maurice also wants to know—was described in No. 112, Old Series.

\* \* \*

**T**HERE'S been a lot of discussion about those empty studies in the East House—18, 19, and 20. So I asked Mr. Goole, the Housemaster, why they had no occupants. He said it would be possible, of course, to take some of the fellows out of some of the other studies—most of which contain three each in the Fourth—and rearrange them. But he doesn't like to do this because it might have the effect of breaking up some friendships. So I hope that G. J. Gilmour, of London, E., will see this little explanation, and look upon it as an answer to his letter.

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.



It's Not Too Late to Start This Grand Serial Now!

# RIVALS of the RAMPANT!



By STANTON HOPE

## Aboard the Target Ship!

**F**LINGING his legs over the side of the target ship, Jack rapidly shinned down the sea-gangway, and Ginger started to follow him.

"Stay there, chum!" Jack ordered. "We shall have to get Teak out of it, and you can help better up there."

Evidently, what had happened was that a sharp fragment of shell had beaten downward after the explosion, then ricocheted from the surface of the sea and plunged through the motor-boat below the water-line. To Jack's relief, Petty Officer Teak himself had not been hit, but he was lying with the sea-water rising slowly over him.

Splashing down into the water in the bottom of the motor-boat, Jack splashed some of it over the P.O.'s face in an effort to rouse him, and failing to bring the victim of Busky's awkwardness back to his senses, he dragged open a locker in the stern of the boat.

He wasted no time in attempting to stop the leak, for he had no means of doing this, and instead dragged out a length of thin rope.

Whizzzzz—CRASH! Whizzzzz—CRASH!

Two more shells came over, one thumping into the Thunderous astern, and the other bursting over the bridge super-structure, and showering the deck with metallic hail.

Fortunately, the motor-boat was to leeward—on the blind side of the ship—so that the target vessel herself provided a shelter to the boy as he rapidly set to work in the boat. All the time the Thunderous was moving through the water directed by wireless from some distant destroyer, and the rapidly filling motor-boat was towing by the rope alongside. Already, however, the target-ship was altering course, and soon she would come round, exposing the side where Jack was working.

Jack reasoned that he would then be seen, but possibly not before more guns of the Fleet had hurtled their steel messengers of death over the leagues of heaving Channel.

It took but a few moments to hitch the rope with a bowline knot round Teak's still form, and as he did so, Jack's mind reverted for a fraction to dear old Barny Morland,

who had first taught him how to tie nautical knots on the fire-float station by the Thames.

"Catch, Ginger!" cried Jack, and he flung the loose end of the rope upward, to be caught in seamanlike manner by his pal.

The sea in the motor-boat was burbling round his calves, and a moment later he swarmed up the sea-gangway to lend a hand with the hauling of Teak aboard the Thunderous.

In the meantime, the distant Fleet was getting busy. The flagship had ranged, and

*Stranded on board a target ship—with the mighty guns of the Fleet hurling shells at it as fast and as accurate as they can! That's the perilous position in which Jack Gilbert finds himself. Read all about it in this week's thrilling instalment.*



other battleships and battle cruisers were starting to fling sudden death across the waters by the hundredweight. Great armour-piercing shells hammered into the target-ship, making her reel drunkenly on her progress through the sea; others burst short, over, ahead or astern, their detonation marked by leaping columns of spray.

Flinging himself over the side, Jack took the rope from Ginger's fingers.

"Kick that worm into life!" he roared into the din of bursting high-explosives.

There were no cleats or bollards near for Jack to take round a turn of the rope, and he braced his feet against the bulwark and held taut on the rope, ready to take the strain of Petty Officer Teak's body as the motor-boat dipped lower into the sea.

The Thunderous shivered and rocked; it was like the steel hammer of some Olympian giant relentlessly crashing down upon her. There was little enough wrong with this long-range gunnery, and Jack, with the perspiration breaking in beads from his forehead through his exertions on the rope, knew that, as they could not possibly be seen from the ships of the Fleet, this bombardment would assuredly mean injury or death to some of them unless they got below.

That was their only chance—to get Teak aboard as quickly as possible and get under cover, considering there was no escape now in the damaged motor-boat. He had heard of target-ships before, and knew that they were so conditioned for this special service that they were unsinkable, no matter how badly battered.

Near to him, Ginger was vigorously striving to rouse Busky to some semblance of common-sense and regard for duty.

"Get up and lend a hand, you lobster!" howled Ginger.

Thump! Thump! The square toe of his boot thudded against the coward's stern-sheets.

"Ooch! Groogh!" spluttered Busky. "Lemme alone!"

He cringed against the bulwark, and Gin-

ger became fighting mad. This fool was jeopardizing not only his own life, but the lives of them all!

Savagely gripping Busky at the back of his white-ribbed sailor's collar, he dragged him round and drew back his left fist.

In a lull between the firing, his voice rasped out with a savagery that drained the blood from Busky's cheeks as the shells had done.

"Lay on to that rope!" snarled Ginger, gritting his teeth. "If you don't, I'll douse both your lamps and turn you adrift on this here deck to get what's coming to you!"

"Lemme alone!"

It was no time for kid-glove tactics, and Ginger slammed his knobby left to Busky's right eye. Crack!

Almost simultaneously, a shell carried away some fragments of the deserted bridge in twisted metal, and Busky, reeling back with a gasp, seemed to associate the burst of the shell with the vicious stab in his right eye. For a fraction he became limp in Ginger's grip, but the red-haired boy had no mercy.

"Lay on that rope, I tell you, you big skate!" he howled. "Or shall I douse that other lamp o' yours?"

Recovering temporarily, a fresh fear assailed Busky's craven heart. To be turned adrift blinded upon that shell-swept deck was unthinkable, and, emitting a whine like a whipped cur, he groped with his hands.

Immediately, Ginger flung him just astern of Jack, and thrust the rope between his clawing fingers, and then laid on to it himself.

"Oho, heave!" gulped Jack. "Yeo-ho! Again together—heave!"

In a brief respite, Jack peered over the side while the others took the strain of the petty officer's bulky form, and he saw that the motor-boat was completely awash, with only the rail of her bows showing, and had only been prevented from sinking to the sea-bed by the rope to which she was moored. Teak, held by the rope tightly fixed round his chest and under his arm-pits, was slowly

#### HOW THE STORY STARTED.

*JACK GILBERT, a cheery youngster of some fifteen years, has just joined H.M.S. Rampant, a naval training school at Porthaven. His only living relative is his scoundrelly uncle,*

*LEW BONNER, and the less he sees of him the better Jack will be pleased. The boy joins the Navy along with*

*CLEM SMITH, or Busky, as he becomes known at the Rampant. Smith is of the bullying type, and is very jealous of Jack's friendship with his—Busky's—uncle,*

*BARNY MORLAND, who has just died. It was Barny who got the two boys to join the Navy, and in his will he stipulates that a sum of £2,000 is to go to the boy who acquits himself best in the Service. Both settle down at the Rampant, and Jack makes a friend of*

*GINGER JONES. One day the three lads, together with Petty Officer Teak, are sent out in a motor-boat to retrieve a torpedo. Another boat makes off with it, and Jack recognises one of the occupants as his rascally uncle. Just then a thick mist sweeps over the sea, and Jack and his companions lose their bearings. All night they drift; to make matters worse, P.O. Teak strikes his head on a gunwale and becomes unconscious. Then a warship looms up. Jack, Ginger, and Busky go aboard. Suddenly shells begin to burst around them, and Jack realises that they are on board a target ship, and that the Fleet is firing at it. He looks over the side, and, to his dismay, sees that the motor-boat has been holed by a piece of shrapnel! Their only way of escape from the target ship is thus gone.*

(Now read on.)



swaying against the warship's grey side, and blissfully unaware of the hazardous efforts of his juniors on his behalf.

"B—buck up!" hooted Busky in desperation. "Make it slippy or—yow! S—sufferin' shrimps!"

A hundred feet above the now speeding Thunderous, a shell burst into a white wool-pack of smoke, and a snorting rain of leaden pellets descended like miniature thunderbolts hurled by the gods! In the very nick of time, Jack braced himself against the steel side, and clung on to the rope with Ginger as Busky slackened his grip.

"Shrapnel!" cried Jack. "This is getting a bit too hot! Oho, heave!"

To do him credit, Busky now worked like a nigger in an effort to get the job done as soon as possible, because he had a sharp reminder about his slackness from the boot of Ginger who, with commendable strategy, had positioned himself behind him.

Again there was a lull in the firing. Jack, as he worked, wondered why no planes from some naval aircraft-carrier were observing the results of the shooting from high overhead. Instantly, however, he remembered the treacherous weather conditions and that there was a great deal of mist still about overhead and over certain areas of the sea.

No doubt the respite in the firing was due to some technical reasons connected with the practice, for in a real fight an enemy ship could have been accounted for long before this. It was a foretaste to the lads of the terror of a real sea battle!

A last titanic effort, and the trio hauled Petty Officer Teak over the side. The shelling had stopped, and Busky, breathlessly spluttering something about going to see if any hatch were open, reeled hurriedly aft, leaving his two comrades of the Rampant to get on with it. Jack dragged the rope from Teak's body and jerked a finger toward his feet.

"Get hold, Ginger!" he said briskly. "We've got to get him somewhere under cover!"

The Thunderous had swung round, the wake from her propellers cutting the olive-green hillocks of the Channel in a broad arc that resembled a dusty white lane.

The grey horizon was stabbed again with orange light.

"Crumbs!" ejaculated Ginger, who had hoisted the P.O. by the feet while Jack supported him under the shoulders. "Here comes another cart-load of old iron!"

It proved to be a raking broadside from one of the practising ships, and it arrived like a tropic typhoon! Two of the shells slashed the water into fountains astern; one ricocheted from an old gun casement and ripped up five yards of steel deck like shears cutting through paper. The remaining missiles punched into the hulk's starboard side, listing her sharply over ten degrees, from an even keel to port, with the sheer force of that metallic punch.

### Danger!

**T**HROWN off their balance, Jack, Ginger and the blissfully unconscious petty officer went hurtling over the deck and brought up in a confused heap at the foot of the bridge ladder. Then, as the Thunderous rolled back, the two boys scrambled to their feet, hoisted their burden again, and staggered aft.

There was no sign of Busky, but one circular steel hatch had been unscrewed and opened. A ladder led below, and it was obvious that their mate of the naval schools had taken this way into the interior of the ship.

Ginger got down on to the companion ladder, and Jack, gripping the P.O.'s wrists, helped to support the dead weight as he followed down.

Directly Teak had been got without mishap to the deck below, Jack darted up the ladder and lowered the steel hatch-cover; then he rejoined his chum. Below, under hatches, it would have been in pitch darkness but for a mellow glow of light from deeper down in the ship, where the dynamos and engines were running. It was all positively uncanny, this crewless ship that was yet vibrant with life.

Jack remarked on the uncanny feeling it gave, and added:

"It's as well that Busky left that hatch open, although there was the danger of a shell finding its way right into the ship."

"There they go at it again!" exclaimed Ginger, as another storm of steel hit the vessel. "We can thank our stars, Jack, old pal, they're keeping it to fairly small stuff! If the Terror, f'r instance, starts getting fresh with a broadside from those sixteen-inch pop-guns of hers, this hooker's going up like a nest of rockets in the giddy Crystal Palace fireworks display!"

"They're not likely to fling about much sixteen-inch stuff," returned Jack. "The Terror has nine sixteen-inch guns, and it was only the day before yesterday that P. O. Teak mentioned that it cost a ship like that a couple of thousand quids to fire a broadside of H.E. shells. Jolly good luck for us that they're using smaller stuff for practise purposes and the old kind of armour-piercing ammunition."

Both the boys, in the short time they had been in H.M.S. Rampant at Porthaven, had seen guns fired, and knew what tremendous difference there was between the missiles flung from secondary armament of 6-inch and 4-inch guns, and the ton-weight shells which could be hurtled through the air for twenty miles from the monster guns of goliaths such as the Fleet flagship.

Before going on a tour of inspection aboard, the two boys staggered to a cabin formerly occupied by a senior officer, and stowed Petty Officer Teak in a bunk. So deep was it that he would be safe from falling out unless the ship almost turned turtle.

Jack made a further examination of the petty officer, and made certain that there was no fracture of the skull through his



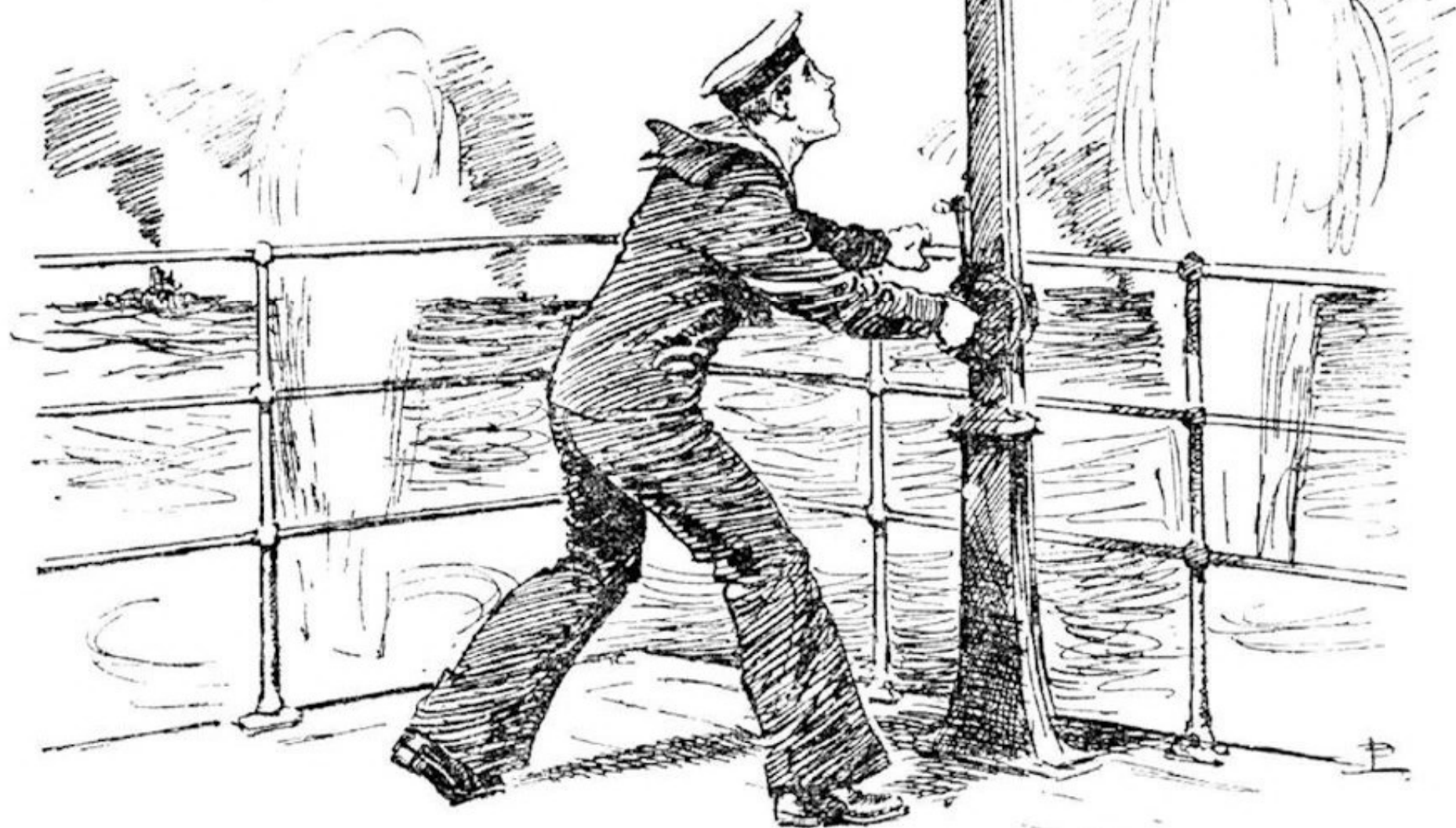
head coming into contact with the motor-boat's thwart. It was a case of severe concussion, and he was convinced it would only be a matter of a short while longer before Petty Officer Teak came to his senses. The only thing was to let him remain lying down, so they tied a handkerchief which had been wetted with sea-water round his forehead, and removed their own jumpers to pack round his feet and legs for warmth.

Crash! Thud! Again the Thunderous reeled like a stricken ox, and the two chums found themselves spreadeagled upon the deck.

"Cigars or n-nuts?" queried Ginger shakily, as he forced a grin. "The chaps out yonder have got our range all right!"

Owing to the necessity for rescuing Teak, there had been no chance to seek some way of making a signal to the distant Fleet that the Thunderous had been boarded. Had

**Crash! Thump! Crash! The shells hurtled aboard and around the target ship, but still Jack stuck gamely to his task and moved the semaphore arms. Would the other warships see his signal?**



the motor-boat remained afloat, the powerful glasses of the control officers or signallers must have noticed the craft when the target-ship was turned by the wireless operating her steering gear. As it was, the ships across those miles of sea were in complete ignorance that there were human beings in the old hulk that they were hammering with such hearty good-will.

What had happened to Busky, Jack and Ginger neither knew nor cared. There were scores of compartments in the after part of

the Thunderous which he might have converted into a funk-hole. Back in the Rampant, he had been a lion among his naval schoolfellows since his supposed exploits on that momentous night of the bounds'-breaking. Here, though, in the testing-time of danger, the straw of his moral make-up was ruthlessly exposed.

Instinctively the two boys turned toward the light that led from the engine-rooms, and

Jack felt Ginger's hand upon his arm.

"See here, raggie," murmured Ginger; "what was back of all that bizny of the ferry and the night you and that big skate got adrift from the schools? Busky Smith—the cowardly lubber—no more beached that boat than I did! He could no more have butted a bobby and slammed fellows bigger than himself than my old aunt could go rat-catching. The way I've sized it up is that it's more likely you that beached that boat and——"



"Ginger!" broke in Jack earnestly. "If you want to be a pal o' mine, you'll dry up about those things. You've seen how the giddy hero acted aboard here, and you can draw what conclusions you jolly well like from it. I'm saying nothin'."

The little Cockney shook his head. His keen wit had told him that for some reason or other Jack was nursing a secret in connection with the affair of the ferry; he was certain now, but his chum's attitude about it forbade further questioning.

Making their way through the ship, the pals clung to every hand-hold they could find. The Thunderous rolled on her course, not because of heavier seas but from the momentum given her by the pounding of shells. Extreme caution was necessary because at any moment another broadside might come aboard and the jolt fling them from their feet. Flung heavily against the steel bulkheads, they might easily sustain fractured skulls.

Hearing groans, they turned aside and found Busky Smith lying full-length next to a bulkhead, or steel wall, for safety, his boots braced against a locker and his hands gripping an iron ring-bolt.

The ship shivered and lurched under the shock of fresh explosions.

"We're done for!" moaned Busky, at the sight of his comrades of the Rampart. "We're going down! Oh, corks!"

Jack released his grip on a rifle-rack formerly used by the Royal Marines, and wedged himself in a narrow doorway, which was one of the entrances to the engine-room.

"Corks!" he echoed with a laugh. "There are thousands of 'em aboard here, and they're the very things that are going to keep us from going down; so don't worry!"

He indicated some compartment along the side of the ship, and through the broken port of one could be seen part of a great square chunk of cork. Those compartments were tightly packed with such squares of cork, part of the means adopted for converting the Thunderous into a target-ship and to render her unsinkable. Without such precaution, the target-ship would quickly be sunk by the battering of the guns, and another hulk required—a policy too expensive for the modern Navy, which has to economise.

Leaving the abject Busky, Jack and Ginger made their way below, where special electric lamps in wire cages afforded illumination, gripping each steel rung of the ladder firmly to prevent being hurtled down by any further jolts of the warship.

Deep down in the Thunderous, the shock of the discharging shells was not felt so much, but it was far more eerie than elsewhere aboard. The turbines were roaring unattended, and the indicator needles quivering with life on the various dials; oil-fuel was being fed automatically into the furnaces. The engine and boiler-rooms pulsated with life, and yet not a living soul was in attendance.

But, several miles away, a destroyer was controlling the engines, furnaces and steering-gear of the obsolete battle cruiser by unseen electrical power. By the marvels of wireless, the target-ship was changing her course and altering speed in the manner of a ship seeking to evade enemy guns, and to Jack and Ginger it seemed almost incredible that there was no one at all on board save themselves and the other two fugitives.

In the boiler-rooms which they visited, the din was deafening. Overhead roared giant steel fans driving air down, for terrific draught was needed to feed the flames of the furnaces. The oil-fuel was being sprayed in the form of vapour into the furnaces, and the heat of the fires was so great that the young bluejackets were glad to get out and back to where they had left P.O. Teak.

"I s'pose, Ginger," panted Jack, mopping his face, "that the engineers and stokers attached to the old hooker get the fires going and so forth and then push off?"

"That's about the ticket," agreed Ginger; "and then some other ship, specially fitted, takes over control by wireless, old sport."

Together they clung to the edge of the bunk, gazing at Teak, who was still breathing hard but showing a little more colour and other faint signs of returning consciousness.

While they stood there, the bombardment of the target-ship became intensified, and, from the gigantic blows, the pals began to suspect that the Terror and other ships were getting busy with bigger guns.

Time and again they were almost flung from their feet, and the muscles of their arms ached from the wrenchings sustained as they frantically strove to hold on.

"T-tar me!" breathed Jack. "If that last wallop wasn't from a 16-inch chunk of sudden death, I'll eat my boots! The giddy Fleet's out on holiday—and hang the expense!"

"Jiminy! I believe you're right, raggie!" gurgled Ginger. "Cork or no cork, this hooker's going to meet a sticky end! She won't sink; no—the old box-o'-tricks will be smashed into bits of scrap-iron first!"

There was a respite, and Busky came squirming into the cabin, raised himself up, and gripped the bunk. He appeared to be past speech; his cheeks were saffron, like old parchment, and he seemed to have aged years since he gaily set out aboard the destroyer Firedart to watch the torpedo practice. Unlike other animals of the lower order, he did not seek loneliness and darkness in what he believed to be his last few minutes of life; he wanted the company of his fellows in misfortune.

There was a flickering of Teak's eyelids, and the petty officer moaned slightly. For a brief interval, he looked up in an unseeing kind of way.

"Thank goodness, he's coming to," murmured Jack fervently.

Intelligence dawned in the P.O.'s look, and his lips moved slightly.



"Hallo!" he mumbled weakly. "Where did you spring from, Boy Smith?"

Busky moistened his dry lips, but there was no need for him to find response, for Teak lay back quietly and breathed more easily.

"Don't try to rouse him," said Jack; "it will be better if he can sleep."

Crash! Thump! Wallop!

The thunder of sound and the terrific jarring of the ship was nerve-racking beyond description. It seemed as though Ginger's grim prophecy might well come true—that the Thunderous would be hammered to pieces, and they with her.

Between the shattering roar of the shells, another sound percolated to their ears, a sound more sinister and terror-breeding even than the bursts of the explosives. It was the hissing and burbling of water inside the ship!

"G-good-night!" exclaimed Jack, hurling himself out of the cabin. "Things are getting a bit too unhealthy, Ginger! Look at this, chum!"

His plucky Cockney pal reeled out of the cabin after him, and found himself among swirling wisps of steam rising from the boiler-rooms below.

The same thought occurred to both boys simultaneously. One of the big shells must have holed the Thunderous in some weakened part of her hull below the water-line. The sea was rushing in, and if it got to the flaming furnaces and the steam-filled boilers, the Thunderous and themselves would go up in a final big burst, like the eruption of a volcano!

#### Jack's Plucky Action!

**W**HOOH! What's to be done?"

Ignoring Ginger's hoarse query, Jack beat his way to the hatch that led to the engine-room, but hastily drew back again as the steam burst in white clouds about him.

His mind reverted to what old Barny Morland had told him of terrible things that happened during naval fighting. He had heard that a shell through a boiler-room would kill every stoker instantly; he had heard of men scalded in an inferno of steam when the water in a leaking ship had reached the furnaces and boilers.

Undoubtedly, the Thunderous had been holed below the water-line, and, as there was no means of getting the pumps to work, the boilers would blow up when the encroaching sea got high enough to reach them.

Whether the water pouring into the ship was rising fast or slowly, he and Ginger had no means of telling. To attempt to beat their way below and shut the valves that fed the oil-fuel to the fires was out of the question; and, even if it were possible, it would not prevent the final catastrophe.

"Hang it!" exclaimed Jack in desperation.

"We can't stay to die here like rats in a steel trap!"

"Better to go above," panted Ginger. "At any rate, we could chuck ourselves into the sea and swim for it."

This seemed to afford little enough chance of escape when they thought how the water round the target-ship was lashed by the shells of the Fleet. Also, they recalled Petty Officer Teak lying in that deep bunk and still unable to help himself. Another problem was Busky Smith, who was in the cabin with Teak.

"We can't do that!" bawled Jack above the hissing of steam. "We can't get Teak away except in a boat, and there aren't any boats aboard this blessed old Aunt Sally of a ship."

"And I'm jolly sure," groaned Ginger, "that nothing short of a red-hot poker astern of him would drive Busky up on deck! Where the thump's all that steam coming from, I wonder?"

"I should think," answered Jack, "that it's from water getting to the hot steel plates of the deck below and spattering against the bulkheads. But this is only like mother's scullery on washing-day to what it's going to be! There's only one chance, Ginger; somehow I've got to make it known to those ships blazing off their pop-guns that there are chaps aboard here."

Ginger made toward a steel companion ladder.

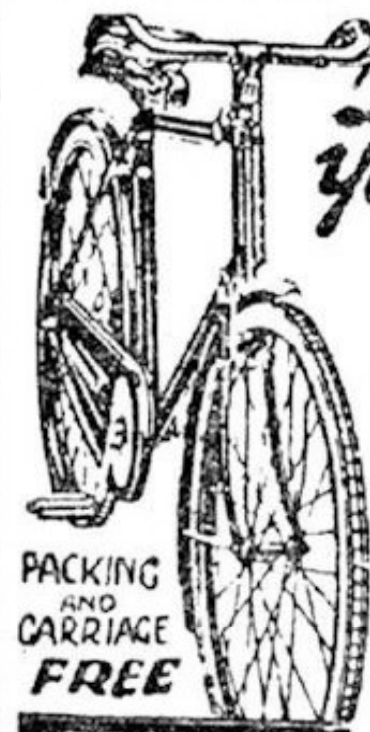
"I'll come on deck with you, Jack," he volunteered.

His chum thrust him aside.

"One at a time!" he hooted. "There's no need for the pair of us to go out into that giddy thunderstorm of scrap-iron. Give me ten minutes, and if I don't come back and report by then, you can come out and have a go."

The plucky little Cockney protested that he might be of help, but Jack persuaded him that their chances of success would be better if one went at a time. Judging by

(Continued on next page.)



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(Continued from previous page.)

the racket and the drunken lurching of the Thunderous on her track, the Fleet were making good gunnery practice, and, if they were together, a single shell might wipe out the pair of them.

"Right-ho, Jack!" agreed Ginger reluctantly, giving his pal a hand-grip. "I haven't got a watch, but I'll count up the minutes and follow you out if you are not back pretty prompt."

Thrusting up the circular steel hatch, Jack wriggled out on to the deck and dropped the cover after him.

To an extent, the roar and detonation of the shells had been muffled to their ears below decks, but out here the din was ear-shattering.

The mist had cleared and visibility had become good. The Thunderous was steaming on altered courses in a general sou'-westerly direction. The grey bulk of battle-ships and battle-cruisers could be seen four or five miles distant, steaming in line ahead and with the smoke pouring away from their funnels.

Miles away on the target-ship's starboard quarter was one of the giant aircraft-carriers of the Fleet—a floating wasps'-nest from which the fighting 'planes of her brood were leaping into the air alternately from her flight-deck.

"Sufferin' Mike!" gulped Jack, steadying himself momentarily. "A few bombs from aeroplanes would just about put the tin-hat on us!"

A whole broadside from the Terror leaped into flame, and, noting the simultaneous flash of fire, Jack flung himself to leeward of the after super-structure and lay full length, with hair all a-tingle, awaiting for the big punch.

The thunder of the guns burst upon his ears a second before the arrival of the several tons of steel which hammered into the battered old target, listing her so sharply to port that Jack took a swift slide into the scuppers. Fortunately, on this occasion, the shells were not filled with explosive, doubtless for the sake of economy, and as the target-ship recovered, the youngster leaped to his feet and raced for the bridge. Several smaller shells roared into or over the ship, and one carried away part of the bridge ladder in twisted metal.

Without waiting to go round to the other side, Jack took a flying leap from the deck upward, and, gripping the upper part of the ladder, hauled himself up with the nimbleness of a monkey. A flying fragment ripped the sole from his left boot, and for a moment he thought that he had been wounded. When he reached the navigating bridge, he paused, and found to his relief that he was unharmed; and then he beat his way aloft again to the signalling bridge.

A glance told him that the locker consisting of a number of pigeon-holes in which the signal flags were normally kept was empty,

but this he had expected. There still remained the old mechanical semaphore, much riddled with shrapnel, but still erect like a great, gaunt finger.

The firing had become subdued, but the few small shells that came over were unpleasantly well-aimed. It was Jack's dread that at any time another broadside of "big stuff" would come over, and ever present in his mind was the danger that the water would reach the boilers and an explosion lift the decks out of her.

Hurling himself across the bridge, he gripped the handles that worked the semaphore. The apparatus, rusty though it was from disuse, responded after one or two desperate efforts on his part.

Then suddenly the chains and wires began to operate, and the two arms leaped outward to right angles at the top of the semaphore post.

At first Jack made no attempt whatever to semaphore by the usual code, which he had made an effort to learn at the Rampant, and knew but very imperfectly. All he did was to wield the handles and cause the two arms of the semaphore to wave violently.

His job was to attract attention and cause the signallers of the Fleet to take note that there was life aboard the target-ship, for, although the vessel herself could be moved by wireless control, the semaphore could not possibly be worked except by hand.

Crash! Thump! Crash!

Shells hurtled aboard the Thunderous, but Jack gamely stuck to his post, striving to think of how to spell out the word "Help." Strangely enough, all that he could think of in this desperate predicament was the simple trick word most easily learnt and signalled by a youngster new to the code—"B-A-N-A-N-A." Still, he made the curious signal after one or two attempts, and was sharp enough to realise that the very incongruity of it would be bound to rouse instant comment by the expert signalmen of the Fleet.

Crump! A shell carried away part of the bridge rails, and a flying fragment cut away the top part of the semaphore as though it had been smitten with an axe, and sent it hurtling through the air.

All Jack was aware of at first was a hurricane of wind, and that he was picking himself up from the deck and feeling his body gingerly for wounds. Again fortune had favoured him, and he had escaped physical harm; but Jack's gratitude for this was marred by the sight of the twisted chains and wires hanging from the broken post of the semaphore. They were doomed unless the one word he had signalled had been received!

(Has Jack's signal been read? In any case, he and the others are in a dangerous position, for the target ship is likely to blow up at any moment! Be certain to read next week's rousing chapters, chums, they're packed with thrills!)



# The ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE CORNER!



*The Chief Officer Chats  
with his Chums.*

*Here's his address if you want to  
write to him: The Chief Officer, The  
Nelson Lee Library, Fleetway House,  
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.*

## The Call of the Open.

**T**HE spells of glorious weather that are with us during the summer months have inspired many Leagueites to write to me asking for advice on camping out. Like so many others, they have heard the call of the open road, and would very much like to answer it. But, therein lies a few difficulties.

Leagueites who do not belong to such splendid organisations as the Boy Scouts, and Boys' Brigade, find themselves rather up against it when they contemplate a holiday in camp. And, like the sensible fellows they are, these chaps have written for advice before taking the plunge, and perhaps landing themselves in difficulties.

Now I hope these few timely words will solve any problem that may crop up to mar your holiday camp.

I have been in several camps myself, and I find that the less you take the better it is. I suggest, then, that your outfit should consist of the following: Rucksack, blanket, waterproof sheet, billycan, toilet-bag, knife, fork and spoon, etc., matches and map.

If not more than three form the party, then a bivouac tent is sufficient. But for more I suggest a patrol tent, which, at a squeeze, will accommodate eight fellows.

There are certain laws governing the choice of a camping site which you will do well to remember. Never camp in a valley; always

on fairly high ground, but which has sheltering trees. But before you even put up a tent, ask permission of the owner of the land.

Build only a small fire, and don't chop down trees for fuel. You will find more than enough wood lying on the ground.

It is not advisable to carry food with you, for you will be able to obtain this at the villages near where you pass or camp.

At the conclusion of your camp see that you clear your site before leaving. Bury all refuse, and cover over the traces of the fire. That is

one of the golden rules all good campers observe. It leaves the way clear for the next man. Now, chaps, make this holiday a camping one, and you will never regret it, and it will always have pleasant memories.

THE CHIEF OFFICER.

## THIS WEEK'S WINNING LETTER!

*Dear Mr. Editor,—Although I have read the Nelson Lee Library since 1918, I regret to tell you that this is the first time I've written you, but hope it will not be the last. You deserve one each week!*

*I had a lot of back numbers to dispose of and you were good enough to put an advertisement in the book for me. The back copies were sold in 24 hours, and although I had 39 readers writing for them, I replied to every one, telling them the books were disposed of. Some of the readers asked whether I would correspond with them. Now I have pen-friends all over the world. They all praise the Nelson Lee Library, and I think the readers living in Wales are especially loyal. One of them living in South Wales has promised to meet me in August as I'm attending the 21st Scout Birthday Jamboree to be held at Arrowe Park, Birkenhead. Another reader (I have never seen him) asked me (his parents extended his offer), to spend Easter at his home, which offer I could not unfortunately accept owing to an earlier arrangement. So you see what a host of real pals there are amongst your readers.*

*Best wishes,*

*Yours loyally,*

*(Signed) R. POTTER (League No. 8995).*

*(For this letter, R. Potter, of Bury St. Edmunds will receive a handsome pocket wallet.)*

All members of the St. Frank's League are invited to send to the Chief Officer letters of interest concerning the League. The most interesting will be published week by week, and the senders will receive pocket wallets or penknives. If you don't belong to the League, look out for the entry form which will appear next week—and then join immediately.



## CORRESPONDENTS WANTED

Still the "Correspondents Wanted" notices continue to pour in. This feature, small though it is, must be one of the most popular in the Old Paper. I do want to impress upon readers, however, that their notices cannot appear immediately upon receipt. They will be published in strict rotation.

One Leagueite in Salford has written me a very doleful letter bewailing the loss of his St. Frank's League badge. Can he have another one, please? Most certainly. I have already dispatched him another, in fact.

Other Leagueites should note this. If they have lost their badge I am always willing to replace them. But please don't make a habit of it.

H. Springall, 74, Cornwall Road, Brixton Hill, London, wants to hear from readers in Canada, China, Australia and South Africa, on any subject, especially football. All letters answered.

S. Cross-Jones, 110, Commercial Road, Spalding, Lines., offers 300 old series N.L.L., and all new series. Wishes to correspond with readers anywhere.

J. R. Dixon, 71, Boston Road, Mt. Eden, Auckland, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere.

Louis Harvey, 54, Newington Road, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, wants to correspond

with readers; ages about 12-14. Hobbies: stamps, reading and woodwork.

Arthur Lonquist (age 17), 28, Murphy Street, Richmond, E.1, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to hear from readers anywhere, particularly U.S.A., Canada, India, Singapore and Fiji.

H. W. Addison, 50, John Street, Petersham, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere.

Reginald C. Pienaar, Box 1783, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with readers in China, India and Australia.

D. Powell, 1, Willis Street, Kimberley, South Africa, wishes to correspond with readers in England; ages 15-16.

William James Hooper, 30, Elam Street, Camberwell, London, S.E.5, wishes to correspond with readers overseas.

Michael Kenefick, 18, Murtagh Road, Dublin, W.6, wishes to correspond with readers in Spain, Portugal and Florida, interested in cycling, reading and model-making; ages 14-16.

Miss Annie Anderson, Path Head, Cowden, Dollar, Clackmannanshire, N.B., wants to correspond with stamp collectors in South America, Portugal and Spain.

Tom Hopwood, 24, Hudswell Street, Sandal, Wakefield, Yorks., wishes to hear from readers who have a pair of good binoculars to sell.

Ronald Bodington, 195, Ordnance Road, Enfield Wash, Middx., wants to hear from readers who can tell him what the St. Frank's League is doing in his district.



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All applications for Advertisement spaces in this publication should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, "The Nelson Lee Library," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street London, E.C.4.