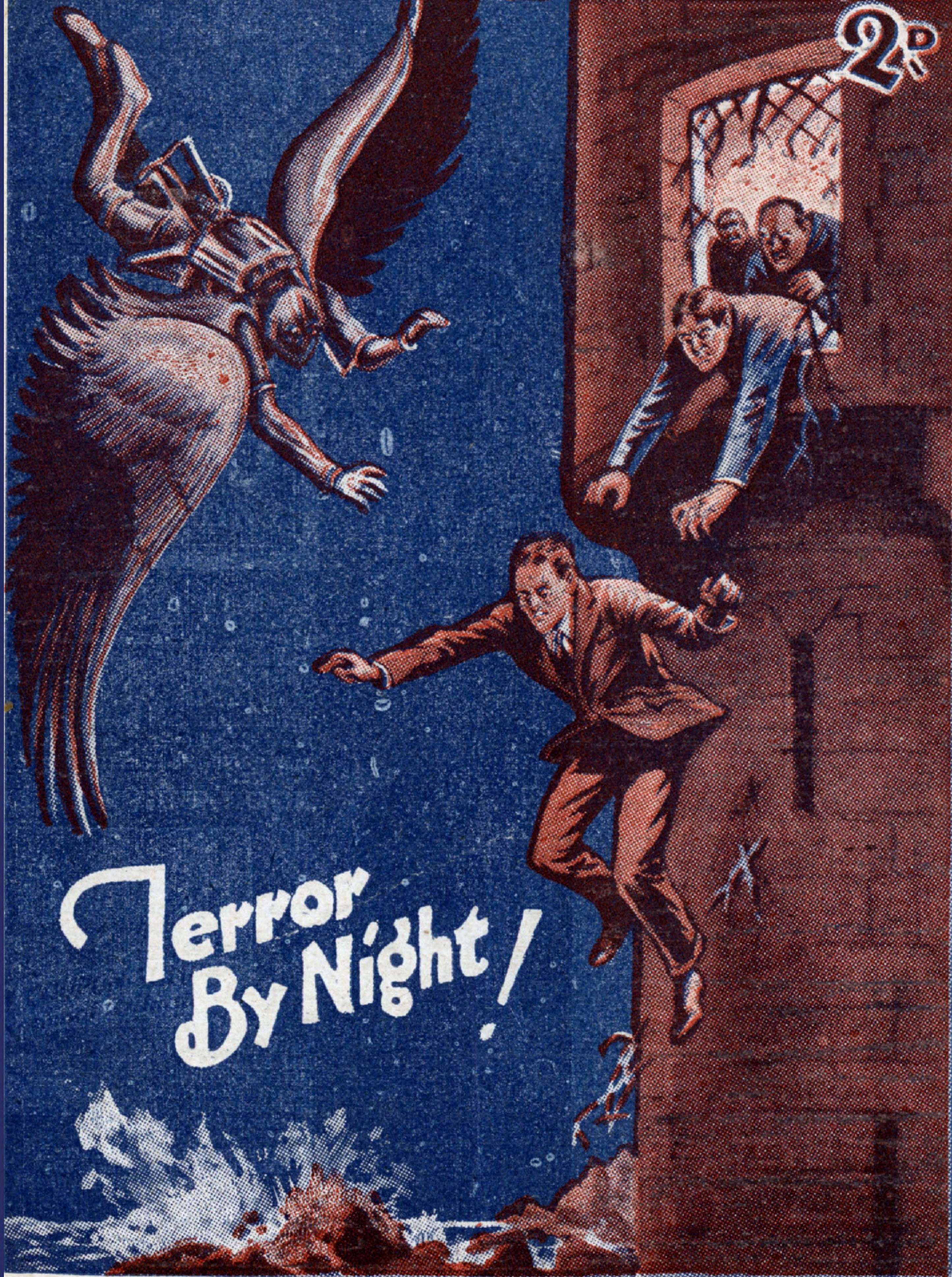


NELSON LEE

2^d



Terror
By Night!

Amazing new series of thrill stories featuring Nelson Lee and the Night Hawk—first gripping complete yarn inside.

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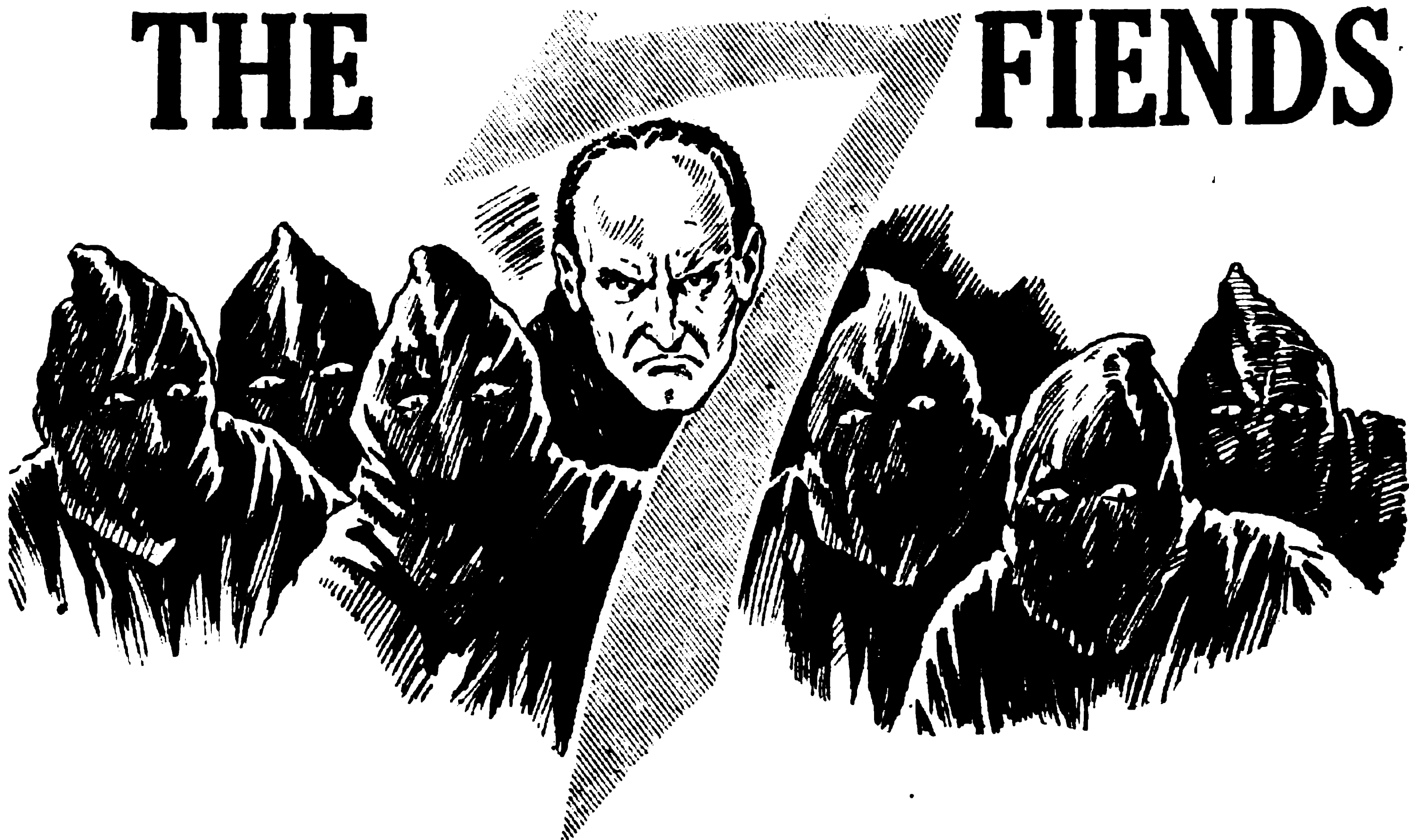
OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

January 10th, 1931.

Nelson Lee and The Night Hawk in a New Series of Thrill Yarns!

THE

FIENDS!



By **JOHN BREARLEY**

Terror in the Fog!

THE demon fog was abroad!

In the industrial town of Milton, men and women crawled cautiously through streets of dreadful gloom; thick lurid mist, that gripped their coughing lungs, shrouded the narrow roads, transformed the stark buildings into shapeless monsters of darkness, more sordid even than in the light of day.

Fog!

And under its grisly cloak terror crept into Milton on soft feet.

In the goods yard of the Milton Chemical Dye Works, that huge factory in which most of Milton's wage-earners were employed, Parker, the night watchman, shuffled across the greasy cobbles on his round. He was an oldish man, Parker; thinking wistfully of his cosy shelter while he pattered along, knuckling his eyes and flickering the torch he carried here and there in an effort to pierce the gloom around him.

"Last round fer me ter-night!" he grumbled thickly. "'Tain't fit fer a dog, ter-night ain't—"

Out of the murk behind him, a dim figure stole noiselessly, arm upraised. The arm descended; and, like a flash, the heavy throwing-knife zipped through the air from two yards' range, burying its keen blade to the hilt in the watchman's neck.

He died without a sound. Only the clink of his torch, dropping from his nerveless hand on to the stones, marked his passing.

As if that clink were a signal, other lithe figures prowled forward. They went to work quickly and coolly, without a word. Two of them picked up the dead man, the others darted ahead to the side door of the great silent factory.

There was a second's delay while the door was opened with the watchman's key. And after that, one remained outside on guard, and the others glided within—slinking ghosts on a vile errand.

Fifteen minutes later they came out again; and, melting into the fog-shroud, vanished, to meet again in a nearby alley where a long, lean car waited in the gloom. They piled in swiftly, the engine purred; the car faded away into mystery.

And Bedlam broke

out in Milton!

From the central mass of the dye works came suddenly a terrific explosion—rending, thundering, smashing its way outward through shattered walls. A livid tongue of fire leapt upwards like a serpent through the breach; others followed, as swiftly as they were born.

The sickly yellow fog became all at once tinged with a glaring, sinister stain.

With appalling speed, such as only a fire started by expert incendiaries can travel,

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**Seven scoundrels menace Britain.
 Nelson Lee and the Night Hawk
 join forces to oppose them—and
 war is declared!**

the blaze roared through the building, devouring it, wrapping it round in hissing sheets of flame. Scarcely a few minutes had passed before the whole of the works was one great furnace.

But those few minutes were enough for the alarm to race through Milton like a tempest.

"Fire! Fire!"

Muffled shouts rang through the fog; alarm bells jangled; there came the rush and stirring clamour of the Milton Fire Brigade, driving recklessly down the darkened streets.

And presently, above the bustle and stir of the fire-engines, the crackle of the flames and the heart-gripping rumble of falling masonry, came another sound—the swift pattering of agonised footsteps, hoarse cries, women's tears and sobs.

The words had sped:

"The works! The works! The works are afire!"

There was only one "works" in Milton; one place making a background for hundreds of families and thousands of workmen in the town.

Milton, in a solid stampede, rushed through the fog to see its livelihood sinking under a torrent of hideous fire and smoke!

CLANG, CLANG, CLANG! Clang-a-lang, clang-clang!

The crowds huddled together, watching in stupefied despair. Not even when other brigades, summoned by frantic calls, came racing in from neighbouring places to take their part in the fight, did the townsfolk do aught but move aside grudgingly to let the engines through.

The works afire! The words clutched their hearts, dazed their minds.

In the goods yard, the entrance yard, at every point where they could wedge in and bring a hose to bear, quick, alert firemen were making the effort of their lives to quell the flames, even though one glance was sufficient to tell the more experienced ones that it was hopeless.

The gang had done their work well; already the flames they had started had gained too big a hold. Thousands of gallons of water ripped into them, tried to beat them down, only to recoil in hissing clouds that mingled with the rolling, choking smoke.

And the throng outside the main-gate, forced back by a cordon of police, could only stare dully.

Suddenly, from the alley where the gang's car had been parked, a wild-faced man, carrying a box, rushed into the heart of the throng. Banging his burden down on the ground, he leapt on it so that he towered above the sea of heads, waving his arms, shouting in a voice that compelled attention even in that turmoil.

"Men of Milton!"

Some peered instinctively towards him through the fog, others glowered sullenly at the flames. He went on in a lusty roar:

"Men of Milton, you see that fire! Look

at it—gaze on it, and weep. Yes, weep, I tell yer. You know what it means? No work for you to-morrow—nor the next day—nor for months to come. That's what it means!"

His clarion voice carried to the outskirts of the throng. In a moment he had gripped his audience like an expert; he had put into words the dumb fear gnawing at every heart there.

The crowd turned solidly this time; a dull roar answered him. He waved his arms again and met it with a flood of oratory.

"An' what's behind it, mates? This is the fourth great plant burnt down in two weeks. There was the ship-yard at Harton, the cotton mills at Rackburn, the North-pool steel foundry—all burnt! Twenty thousand people chucked out o' work—to starve. All in two weeks!"

He made a weird picture, raging and foaming in the midst of the throng, his bearded, sweating face dimly visible through the fire-lit fog, like that of some evil spirit. Hoarse-voiced he raved at his hearers, using his arms and shoulders in gestures that were suspiciously foreign.

And his purpose was plain. He was there to stir up strife.

"To-morrer," he shrieked, "to-morrer you'll read in your papers 'The Fire Gang at work again!' That's what the papers call these fires—the work of crooks. It's a lie!" He gathered himself for a mighty effort. "It's the bosses themselves who start these fires!"

In saner moments the crowd would have jeered at that last maniacal statement. But just now they were not sane. All they saw was the grim spectre of unemployment leering at them hideously through the sheets of fire enveloping the biggest and most prosperous factory in Milton. And the agitator raved on.

He screamed at the throng for fools; he told them they were dupes in the hands of fat financiers. And presently—growing more vicious under the constant cheering—he urged them to stick together, to rise and destroy, burn and tear down the houses of more fortunate citizens. Finally he breathed into them the spirit of riot and civil war!

Intoxicated with excitement, lashed into frenzy by his tongue, the crowd brandished their fists and roared again. Just for a second the man stopped yelling while he surveyed his handiwork. Across his bearded face came a fleeting smile of contempt.

Now was the time to crash into his top note—to throw the final splash of petrol into the flames he had been sent to light.

"Mates!" he bawled. "You ask for civil war, do you? Then I can tell you the finest leaders for that—'the Destroyers!'" He mouthed the name lovingly, and the throng pricked up their ears. "Arise, you men of Milton! In the name of the Destroyers I call on you to—"

What happened then few people saw in

that tricky light; fewer still could describe it.

Some say they saw a face, cold and keen as a glittering blade, appear through the mists above the fellow's head; saw the fire reflected for an instant on two enormous wings, and heard a fierce laugh. But they were not believed.

Yet something happened—something that paralysed the throng into sudden superstitious terror and stopped the rising tempest at a blow. From the midst of a swirl of fog two long black arms flashed down and whipped the speaker from his box. He gave a shriek of awful fear, like a rabbit gripped by a stoat; his legs were seen in the fire-glare, kicking madly on high.

Then, in front of hundreds of astonished eyes, he was drawn upwards into the gloom!

The Night Hawk Swoops Again!

"ANOTHER APPALLING FIRE!

"MILTON DYE WORKS DESTROYED!

"INCENDIARIES AT WORK AGAIN!"

THROUGHOUT the length and breadth of Britain next day the papers screamed the story of that terrible blaze to a startled nation.

The fourth industrial outbreak in two weeks, and Scotland Yard secretly acknowledged itself baffled for the present.

The outrages seemed so senseless. No motive could be traced, no person or persons profited by them, for it was significant that each of the factories to suffer had been prosperous concerns, leaders in their particular industries.

The only result was thousands of good, honest workers thrown out of harness.

Two nights after the Milton calamity, the mysterious wreckers struck again.

From a rusty Norwegian tramp anchored in the Pool of London a dinghy glided out softly just as the City clocks were striking eleven. With two men at the oars and a third handling the tiller, the boat stole swiftly downstream.

Even had curious eyes studied her for a moment they would have seen nothing beyond an ordinary ship's dinghy going on an errand. The sturdy "Evinrude" auxiliary motor in the stern was hidden under a pile of tackle, and the two concealed passengers aboard lay flat beneath the rowing thwarts. And all the way down the steersman clung to the cover of dark banks and moored shipping with anxious care. The boat rippled on its course.

Stealthy and wraith-like it crept on past Poplar and round the river bend towards Deptford. Overhead a sullen moon shone raggedly now and then through the stormy clouds, making occasional patches of light on the river. And as the boat slipped quickly across one of these, a grim shadow hovered above her fleetingly—the shadow of a great

hawk, with wings outspread and almost motionless.

Only for an instant did the moonlight betray its presence high above the rowers' heads, and they, unheeding, sculled on to where a line of barges wallowed in the half-tide.

On the bank a long, low building lay behind its own wharf—the East London celluloid factory.

In the lee of the middle barge, hidden by its gloomy sides, the boat checked, and the men snapped noiselessly into action. The two beneath the thwarts crawled forward to the bows, where they were busy for some minutes over a squat, bell-shaped tube mounted on a block and connected with wires to a firing key.

From a thickly-padded box they took out a clumsy iron "sausage" and fitted it with tender care into the mouth of the tube. Any veteran of the Great War seeing the ugly weapon would have recognised it immediately for what it was—a trench-mortar capable of lobbing a heavy projectile for fifty or sixty yards, there to explode with terrific force.

"All set!"

The two gunners brought the mortar up to its right elevation, one man's hand closed on the firing-key. Everything was ready to launch over two pounds of deadly ammonal explosive into the heart of a building that contained tons of one of the most inflammable materials known, with no louder sound than a dull plop!

It was at that moment, even as an arm was raised to give the signal to fire, that the Night Hawk swooped.

He came with his usual uncanny silence and speed, great wings slicing the air like knives, paralysing the villains with terror by a sudden ringing shout from twenty yards up. From his left hand an automatic spat twice in twin streaks of scarlet fire. One of the gunners fell stiffly across the mortar without a sound, the other flung up his arms and rolled slowly into the Thames.

Whirling in his own length, Thurston Kyle reached for the hand-grenades in the belt behind his back. His right arm swung viciously even as the men in the boat came out of their panic and began madly to stab the water. There was a swish, a thud, then a burst of terrible flame, followed by a yelling, shrieking explosion as the ammonal bombs went up.

For a few seconds that seemed an eternity the deafening riot continued; the Thames glowed redly under the East London wharf, and shapeless objects hurtled through the air. When stillness returned at last, only a great fracture in the wall of the wharf marked the place of execution. Of the boat, its crew and mortar, no trace remained.

High and safe overhead, Thurston Kyle, the Night Hawk, flung back his flying vizor and smiled sternly to himself. Excited footsteps were already pattering down on the river wall; shouts and orders drifted to his ears.

But he did not wait. With a single slash of his powerful pinions he went floating across the factory-top into the huddled medley of streets beyond, flying low, his keen eyes hard and alert.

And presently he saw what he was looking for. His hand reached swiftly for his gun.

At dawn next day a policeman discovered a man lying in a heap in the corner of a narrow cul-de-sac. He had been shot through the head and had been dead for some hours. Later he was identified as one, Jacob Mahlkoff, a man who had been forced to flee from the Russian Ukraine because of his bitter, mischievous speeches, and whom the British police wanted badly for the same reason.

His death added yet another mystery to the ghastly explosion near the East London celluloid factory in which five men had been killed—as far as could be traced.

Later that morning, in the peace and quiet of St. Frank's School, Nelson Lee, the headmaster detective, received a 'phone message from his ally, the Night Hawk, that made his eyes gleam and his lips tighten eagerly.

"Right! I'll be with you in an hour!" he said, and rang off.

The Hunchback of Murdorn Tower!

"CURSE it!" Lord Murdorn, hands clasped behind his back, strode moodily to the window of his study in Murdorn Tower and glowered down at the English Channel, the grey waters of which snarled and foamed eternally over the rocks four hundred feet below.

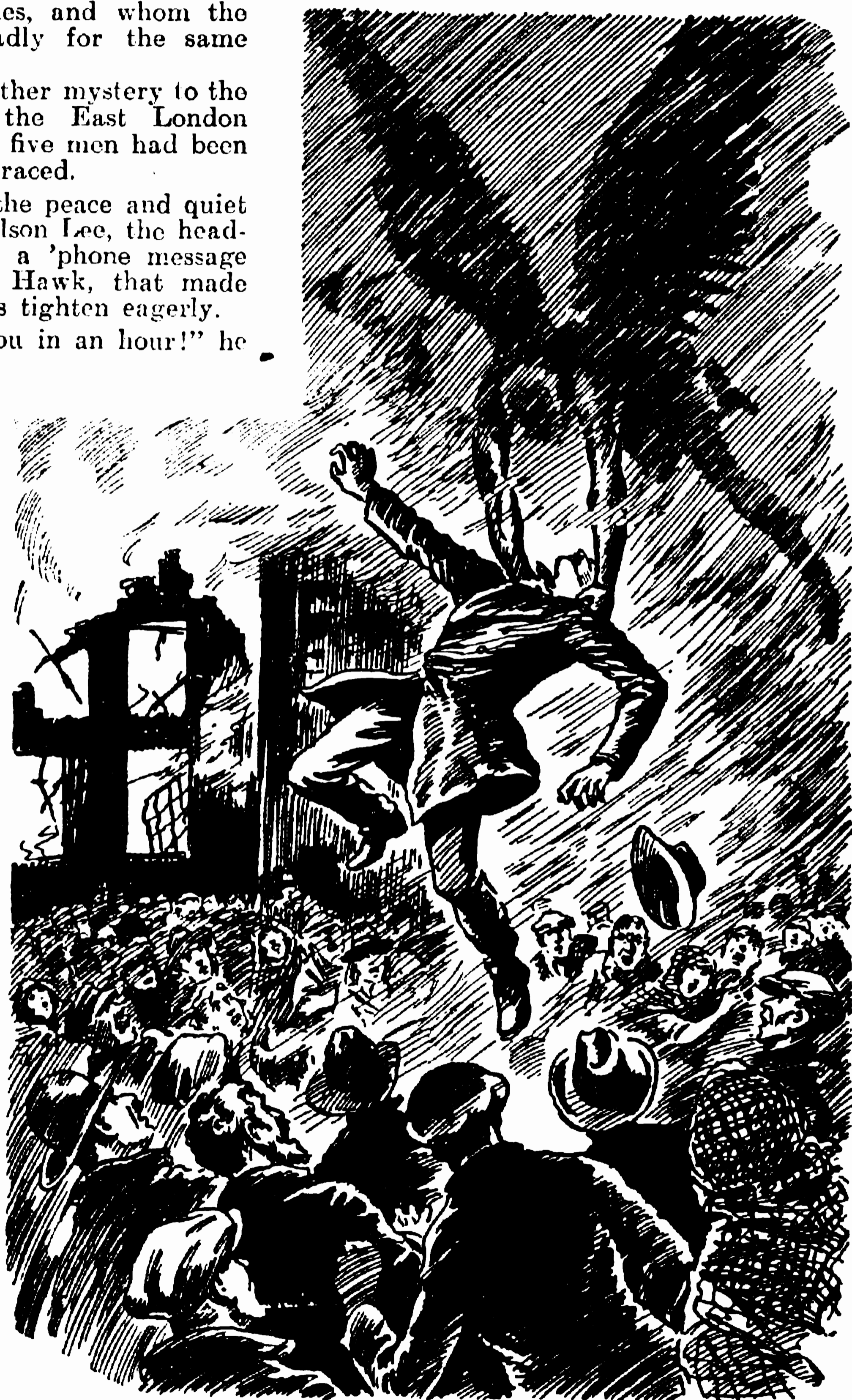
From where he stood, Lord Murdorn could actually see the rocks. No garden or ledge of ground beneath the window obscured that turbulent view. For Murdorn Tower, built in 1141 by the great robber-baron of King Stephen's reign, was perched on the edge of a cliff, which ran sheer down to the sea.

Behind the castle, the great Sussex Downs towered in majestic silence, cutting it off from the outside world. It was a wild, bleak fortress even now, as grim a relic of the old fighting-days as could be found in Britain.

Lord Murdorn stared broodingly down at the sea-foam. He was a tall spare man of fifty, whose handsome aristocratic face was spoiled by his dissipated eyes and weak mouth. There was something furtive and frightened, too, in the droop of his shoulders and head.

Turning impatiently from the window at last, he picked up the morning paper from his desk and read again the account of the mysterious explosion near the East London celluloid factory during the night. His frown grew more petulant.

"Curse it!" he repeated, crumpling the



Two arms flashed down and whipped the agitator from amidst the crowd. He was drawn upwards into the gloom.

journal into a ball. A soft voice at his shoulder made him spin round violently.

"So! Your lordship is worried—no?"

A malicious chuckle followed the words.

The newcomer had entered without knocking, his feet making no sound on the pile carpet of the elegant study. He stood now, just inside the door, a little hunchback with swarthy cheeks and fleshy hooked nose; and his eyes—bright and beady as a serpent's—studied the peer closely for all they appeared to smile.

But the most remarkable thing about the man was his great domed forehead. It was the brow of a genius. Fringed by stiff black hair, it made his head seem somehow too big for his fragile neck and shoulders, giving him an oddly vulture-like appearance. And, in spite of his meagre, stunted figure, an overwhelming authority lurked behind his repellent smile—lurked in the thick foreign voice.

Lord Murdorn glared.

"Confound it, Monsieur! I wish you'd kindly knock before entering my room. You made me jump. It—you—"

A gesture stopped him—slight, but imperative. Lord Murdorn might be the owner of Murdorn Tower and the few poor acres still left to his family estates, but it was plain he was dominated by his strange guest. His indignation died away feebly.

The hunchback nodded placidly.

"That is better. Now, my friend, you are nervy. What you English call 'wind-up,' huh? Why?"

"Nervy!" Lord Murdorn snorted. "Who wouldn't be with the game we're playing, Monsieur?" He turned and faced his guest squarely, a badly-rattled man. "Do you realise our last two coups have been failures? There was the Milton affair—partly successful, I know. But just as Voisier was getting to the top of his speech—he vanished. Why? Where? And look at last night—a failure absolute! The factory was untouched, our men blown to atoms and that little spitfire, Mahlkoff, who could have roused the local crowd to frenzy—found shot at dawn this morning! Our most valuable man!"

He swung away and began pacing the study with long strides, while the hunchback called "Monsieur" watched him, still smiling his broad, mirthless grin.

For the past two months he had been a guest at the Tower, occupying a suite of rooms in an old wing of the building, waited on by his own valet, also a foreigner.

To the servants of the castle, who knew him only as Monsieur, he was supposed to be a Rumanian astronomer in whom his lordship was interested. Certainly he spent most of his time in one of the highest turrets among the ancient battlements. But what the servants, or anyone else in the quiet countryside, did not know was that the turret contained not a single astronomical instrument. Instead, it was fitted up simply with a very powerful wireless installation.

If the servants had learnt little of Monsieur

during these two months, however, he had learnt a lot at Murdorn Tower. And one of them was how to deal with Lord Murdorn. He nodded thoughtfully to himself before speaking again.

"So that is why your lordship is nervy—huh?"

Lord Murdorn turned savagely.

"Yes, it is, Monsieur. It's all very well for you, planning these industrial disasters and using them to stir up mischief and riots in the country. That's your job, and you do it marvellously. But, if you fail, you can always bolt. The whole Continent will shelter you. But for me—an English peer of the Realm—" He shrugged hopelessly. "I'm sick of it!"

If anything, Monsieur's smile grew wider.

"And where would you have been, my English peer of the Realm, without the fifty thousand pounds my society—the glorious Society of Destroyers—paid for your services?" he purred gently. "Behind the prison bars now, huh? A thief, a swindler; one who gambles when he cannot pay, and forges—"

"That's enough, confound you!" Murdorn turned with a snarl, fists clenched, eyes blazing. Yet, for all his bluster, he was obviously cowed. And the hunchback foreigner, whose whole life had been spent dealing with such tools as Lord Murdorn, nodded and smiled again.

"Quite enough!" he agreed. "Now listen, friend, and do not let us quarrel. You have been heart and soul in the Destroyers up till now—till now when some slight hitches come into our plans. The other three fires we made were all right, huh? But now you get cold feet. That must not be!"

His smile faded all at once; his face became a cruel mask.

"In America our society is triumphant; in France, too. We get stronger every day in Germany and make progress in Italy also. But it is Britain we must conquer—she is our gold-mine. Her wealthy manufacturers and merchants, they must be made to contribute to our coffers. We must be cruel to be kind—to ourselves, huh?" He cackled at his little joke. "Take away their factories and foundries so that we can lash them into submission later. For you British are obstinate, my lord—very obstinate and tight-fisted!"

He tapped Murdorn on the arm deliberately.

"And you, Lord Murdorn, cannot back out now—neither you nor the rest of the Council of Seven. You have joined the Destroyers, worked for them and accepted their pay. Therefore, let us have no more talk of leaving them. If you do"—he smiled—"we have a stern way with traitors, as the American papers will tell you!"

There was a long aching silence in the study while his quiet words sank home. At last his lordship made a weary gesture.

"All right, all right!" he growled. "I'm just as heart and soul for the Destroyers as you and the others, really. Heaven knows

we can't afford to fall out with you now. You are the leader of the Council of Seven, and your word is law. But, frankly, Monsieur, I'm worried!"

The hunchback's smile broadened, and he sank into a chair.

"That is better. Now, I am worried, too!" he acknowledged candidly. "It is as you say—our last two coups have failed. Voisier would have made serious trouble in Milton in a few more minutes had he not been spirited away. As for last night, I confess I am bewildered. Something tells me there is big danger for us somewhere! I feel we have some unknown enemy against us. And that enemy seems to know our plans exactly!"

He rose and walked to the window, while Murdorn stared with horrified eyes. Suddenly he wheeled again.

"Can it be that we have a traitor in our own camp, huh?"

The question hit his lordship like a blow. He was on his feet in a second, stammering:

"Im-impossible, Monsieur! At least, I—I know nothing. Why should we betray each other? We're all in the same boat. Fellows like Gotchen and——"

"Silence!" Monsieur's voice crackled, harsh and abrupt. His huge head was flung back. "You know our rules, Murdorn. No names—ever! You will refer to members by their numbers, please. Don't let me have to tell you that again!"

Stung by his arrogance, the British peer flushed with fury and exasperation.

"That rot again!" he blustered. "Here we are, seven grown, serious men, up to our eyes in tricky schemes, behaving like schoolboys. You make us creep in and out of our council meetings muffled in dominos, like a lot of black crows. We have passwords—numbers. It—it's childish! Who's going to spy on us in this bleak, accursed castle of mine?"

The hunchback's look was deadly.

"Nevertheless, my lord, it is the order of the Destroyers that members of a council, no matter in what country they are working, shall attend meetings hooded. That is a world-wide order from Chicago to all our branches, as you know. It is not for you to object—now!"

He paused, studying the disgruntled weakling with reflective eyes.

"Yet your foolish words have given me an idea, my friend. We must act. We must examine ourselves to find if any weak link exists anywhere. To-night, in view of what has happened, we shall hold an extraordinary council meeting here. I go now to send out the summons to our members. The password will be 'Let us discover!' It will be most appropriate, I promise you!"

Allies in Council!

MEANWHILE, in the magnificent laboratory in Thurston Kyle's secluded house at Hampstead, Nelson Lee and the Night Hawk were listening to every word spoken at Murdorn Tower.

In response to his ally's message, the famous detective had motored up from St. Frank's immediately, bringing Nipper with him. They had arrived just as Snub Hawkins, the Night Hawk's assistant, had turned from the radio cabinet and signalled to his master.

Together the allies had slipped the great earphones over their heads. And silence had reigned while they listened.

Throughout his alliance with the Night Hawk, Nelson Lee had never ceased to marvel at the scientist's wonderful instrument, far in advance of any existing radio yet known.

By its aid Thurston Kyle maintained a constant espionage over public offices such as Scotland Yard, the Home and War Offices and the Admiralty, for instance, as well as more than a score of prominent men who would have been paralysed to learn that the strange personality in the old Hampstead mansion could overhear their every secret if he wished.

It was merely a matter of the Night Hawk flying through the darkness to secrete his intricate and tiny microphones somewhere among the eaves or chimneys of any house he desired to keep under observation, and Snub Hawkins in the laboratory tuned-in on the minute sound-waves whenever necessary.

The radio cabinet was simply another of the amazing weapons Thurston Kyle had invented in his life-long campaign against crooks or crime—or for his own ends!

In astonishment at first, giving place rapidly to grim intentness, Nelson Lee had followed the conversation between Lord Murdorn and the hunchback called Monsieur. The schoolmaster-detective listened for a few seconds more, then slipped off his earphones. Thurston Kyle did likewise. They stared at each other, smiling dourly.

"Very interesting!" drawled Nelson Lee at last. "So the Society of Destroyers is behind all those fires lately, eh? Another smashing onslaught to bring Britain under the sway of racketeers and blackmail, eh, Kyle? I've been expecting a call from Scotland Yard any day."

Thurston Kyle inclined his head. He was clad as usual in his brilliant Chinese gown, and although his deep voice was as calm as ever, Nelson Lee could detect a trace of excitement lurking in the dark eyes and cold, handsome face.

"Yes; a pretty plot straight from Chicago, I think. The Destroyers, by burning and smashing a few huge factories, plan to blackmail all other manufacturers and merchants into buying safety for their own plants at cruel prices. Also, by depriving workmen of their living and, *at the same time*, inciting them to riot while their hearts and brains are seething with dismay and the fear of poverty, they will create serious trouble for this country as they have done in others—even to the point of civil war!"

"But how did you first find this out?"

asked Lee swiftly. "How did you get on the track?"

"By sheer luck, three nights ago," replied the Night Hawk. "I was at Milton when the dye works there exploded into flames. I had been on a long cruise, and suddenly, passing over the town, I saw an enormous burst of fire come through the fog.

"Naturally, in view of the extraordinary number of fires this last fortnight, I flew down for a closer view. There was nothing to be done, of course. It was a chemical factory, and burning furiously in a few seconds. But for some reason the crowd clustered in the street beyond presently began cheering—an ugly cheer, my dear Lee, that meant mischief.

"I hovered above for a while in the fog, and soon discovered the cause. A man, obviously an expert street-corner orator, was stirring up the crowd violently. I imagine the fire was a terrible blow to them all, and the absurd but dangerous speech this man was bawling was rapidly going to their heads.

"Having accused their employers of starting the fire, he began to rouse them to fever-pitch. Very soon there would have been serious trouble. It was when he began talking about civil war and that highly-criminal body, the Society of Destroyers, that I thought it time for him to go." The Night Hawk laughed ironically. "I fancy his manner of going gave some of the crowd a shock."

Nelson Lee nodded without speaking.

"He was a nasty little object, I assure you, Lee—a foreigner, too. At first I frankly confess I saw no connection between his vicious behaviour and the dye works fire. I thought him merely a mischief-maker taking advantage of the tumult, and I intended teaching him a lesson. But"—the Night Hawk leaned forward—"when I came to examine him I found there *was* some connection. He had been sent to Milton with orders to stir up trouble *the moment the fire commenced.*"

"Ah!" Nelson Lee did not need to ask how his friend had made the prisoner talk. He had received a demonstration of his methods in that line before. "And then?"

"Then, of course, I dragged out every bit of information he had in him. It was not a great deal, but it was priceless. He told me his employer was a man whom he called Monsieur—nothing more—and that this Monsieur had his headquarters at Murdorn Tower, Sussex.

"To cut the story short, I flew down there at once, as you may guess, and placed my microphones among the battlements. I thought it best to find out more about this Monsieur before striking. Nothing happened till early yesterday morning, when Snub heard Monsieur and Lord Murdorn arranging for five men to fire trench-mortar bombs into the East London celluloid works that night, while Jacob Mahlkoff, one of the most dangerous men in London at present, was to make the same sort of speech afterwards as my prisoner had made at Milton."

The Night Hawk's eyes glowed fiercely.

"I attended to those five men—and Mahlkoff. The rest of the story you have just heard."

Very thoughtfully Nelson Lee took out his cigarette-case. His keen brain was working swiftly.

So the Society of Destroyers, that evil organisation of "racketeers" which had started in America and spread like a blight into the more prosperous European countries, was alive in Britain. The ground work was being laid.

Nelson Lee registered a silent, bitter vow they would not succeed.

To report Thurston Kyle's news at Scotland Yard, however, was impossible. Never for a second would the scientist agree to police intervention, and for that reason Lee's hands were tied. Besides, he himself much preferred alliance with the grim mysterious Night Hawk than with the police.

Sending a spiral of smoke rings to the ceiling, he leaned back, musing.

"Let us see what cards we hold, Kyle!" he said quietly. "First, we know the Destroyers' headquarters here; and that the gang in this country is led by a 'Council of Seven,' who always meet disguised by hooded dominoes. Their password for to-night's meeting is 'Let us discover.' Also, we know three names: 'Monsieur,' Lord Murdorn and a man called Gotchen!"

Thurston Kyle's eyes gleamed deeply.

"You know them, Lee?"

"'Monsieur'—No!" replied Nelson Lee. "The others—yes! Concerning Murdorn, he is the last of his line, a turf and Stock Exchange gambler, and was desperately pushed for money a short time back. Recently, too, Lennard of the Yard thought he was connected with a forgery case that was hushed up at the last moment. Gotchen—I only know one man of that name: Sir Rudolph Gotchen, the financier. Before the war he was Rudolf Gottheim, a naturalised German. One moment!"

Seizing the 'phone, he called up Scotland Yard and spoke for some minutes to Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard. His eyes were keener still when he rang off.

"Yes, Sir Rudolph sounds promising. He too, has been hard up, and acquiring a very shady reputation in the City lately. I think we might look him up, Kyle!"

"We must look them all up," snapped the Night Hawk. "This precious Council of Seven—this council of seven fiends—must be identified, Lee, and stamped out. Thanks to my radio, we can always overhear any plots from Murdorn Tower and defeat them. But with such a vast organisation as the Destroyers, the sooner its leaders in Britain are destroyed, the better!"

"Agreed!" smiled Lee. "And to-night, at least, we may perhaps discover the other four names."

A piercing look came from his ally.

"Ah! How, Lee? You forget it is their strict rule never to mention names at their



The figure on the running board pressed an automatic behind Sir Rudolph's ear. "Get out of your car!" snapped a voice.

meetings. We shall listen to them, but we shall be no wiser that way. But perhaps you have a plan?"

Nelson Lee nodded.

Lying back in his chair, with Nipper and Snub listening wide-eyed, he told them.

Nipper and Snub-Bandits!

SIR RUDOLPH GOTCHEN was angry.

He was not a nice man, Sir Rudolph, too flabby in body and mind. He had arranged a cosy dinner for that evening with a certain young man who had more money than brains. Sir Rudolph loved that sort of young man dearly; and like a good Teuton, he loved food and good wine, too.

But—a meeting of the Council of Seven had been called. And nothing could stand in the way of that!

Thoroughly savage and disgruntled, the financier left his Kensington mansion at seven o'clock that evening in the little two-seater he kept solely for driving down to Murdorn Tower. He quite failed to notice

the slim touring car that followed him through Knightsbridge into South London, and on to the Portsmouth Road, always at a respectful distance, yet never losing touch.

At a steady pace, Sir Rudolph bowled along, grumbling to himself as he left the last fringe of London, and the road through the countryside grew ever darker. As he ran through Pulborough, the pursuing car began to creep up on him a little, and just when he was negotiating a steep winding hill the other side of the village, a long slender shape roared past him at wicked speed, scraping by his off-wing with a saucy and breathless daring that reduced the financier's nerves to shreds on the instant.

"Filthy road-hog!" he screamed as the other's tail-light flashed up the dark hill. In his fright, he had nearly run the two-seater into the hedge and "killed" his engine.

Restarting, he negotiated the rest of the hill, taking a sharp bend at the top. Then he jammed his foot on the brake once more; for, squarely in the middle of the road, stood

the "road-hog," with its youthful driver by its side, obviously waiting for Sir Rudolph to come along.

The moment the financier's car halted, only a few yards behind the other, the lad trotted up, raising his cap politely.

"Sorry to stop you, sir—run out of juice! Could you—"

It was the last straw. To be ditched by this young cub and then held up with a request for petrol! Sir Rudolph, purple in the face, spluttered furiously.

"You—you vile young road-hog!" he bel-lowed. "No, sir; I have no petrol for you. Push your beastly car aside—"

He stopped with a sudden gasp of fear. On to the running-board of the car another figure stepped silently up behind him. The cold muzzle of an automatic pressed icily into the tender hollow below Sir Rudolph's ear. A gentle voice spoke firmly.

"Get out of your car, Fatty!"

Eyes bulging with fright, the financier gazed wildly around. Car bandits! The road was dark and deserted. There was no chance of help whatever.

The gun pressed harder on Sir Rudolph's neck. He stumbled into the road on palsied legs, panting. The moment he was out, four strong hands seized him and ran him down the road towards the derelict car. In less than no time, securely gagged and handcuffed, he was wedged into a back seat, with one of his captors sitting beside him. The other started the engine and pulled the car into the side of the road.

Then came the most extraordinary feature of the outrage, to Sir Rudolph Gotchen's mind. No sooner was he forced out of sight than he distinctly heard the two-seater behind—his car!—purr into life, then come zip-ping past swiftly towards the sea. And as it went by, two youthful voices shouted clearly:

"Good luck, sir!"

Nelson Lee, in Sir Rudolph's car, heard the shout, and smiled to himself. He was also smiling because, in a little gladstone bag in the two-seater, he had found Sir Rudolph's black-hooded domino—the regalia of the Council of Seven.

His car gathered speed and swept down the road towards the coast—and Murdorn Tower.

COOLEYED and cool-nerved, Nelson Lee motored on through the dark Downs.

The risky mission he was undertaking did not make him turn a hair—although he knew only too well that discovery by the other members of the Council of Seven would probably mean a spy's death, swift and sure. One strong card he held at least—the fact that the Council of Seven met in disguise.

His plans, once he was among the Council, were vague as yet, of course. Somehow, though, he must contrive to find some clue to the identities of the other four men there. He must also discover more about their leader, the mysterious and masterful Monsieur! After that the gang could be

destroyed quietly and at leisure, with the aid of Thurston Kyle, the Night Hawk. It was a task he would enjoy.

Murdorn Tower was eventually reached. A lane through a neglected private park led to the Tower's main gates. They were locked. But, in the glow of his sidelights, Nelson Lee saw fresh car tracks skirting the old wall, and he followed them cautiously. He gave a fresh sigh of relief when, presently, they led him to a rusty side-gate, open wide.

Edging slowly through the gate, he saw, half hidden by an overhanging elm, the dim shapes of three other cars. Bringing his own to a halt, he opened the gladstone, and donned Sir Rudolph Gotchen's cowl and cloak.

He was not a minute too soon; for out of nowhere seemingly a big man loomed up, head and shoulders covered. A muffled foreign voice challenged him curtly.

"Ze password?"

"Let us discover!" mumbled Lee thickly.

Without another word, the sentinel bowed and turned. Following closely, Nelson Lee was taken down the path and under an arched gateway, which led into a stone vault.

A winding stairway came next, cold, dark, and long. After climbing many flights, the guide stopped suddenly and flashed a torch on to a great oaken, steel studded door. He opened it, and bowing once more, motioned Nelson Lee inside.

With all his senses alert, the detective stepped over the threshold. He was in a huge stone room, lit by a single candle that stood on a long refectory table. The rays of the candle failed completely to reach the shadowy corners and high ceiling of that enormous chamber. Around the table, faintly visible in the light, were six silent men, heads and bodies shrouded by the black garments they wore.

Nelson Lee was among the Council of Seven—the blackmailers of Britain!

Like spectres from another world they stood watching him. The detective waited, tense as a hairspring; his eyes, in one lightning glance, took in as much of the chamber as he could see.

He smiled with grim satisfaction to note, at the other end of the room, a bare turret window, through which the stars shone distantly. Evidently the Council, in their high lair, feared no eavesdropping from that direction.

Yet, in spite of such a small light as the candle gave, some reflection, thought Lee, must show through the panes. And even as he stared, the far-off stars were blotted out for a split second by a dark human head outside!

Only for that tiny space of time did he see it; then it was gone. A sharp voice broke the ghostly stillness.

"Well, Number Three! The password?"

"Let us discover!" mumbled Lee once more.

A faint rustle came from the hooded men.

The detective moved forward to the one vacant chair round the table.

"You are late, huh?"

It was the sharp voice again; Lee recognised the tones of the unknown Monsieur, as he had heard them over Thurston Kyle's radio that morning. Lee bowed an apology, and, as if satisfied, the leader raised his hand, whereupon the Council of Seven sank into their seats.

Tap, tap, tap! Three times Monsieur tapped the table impressively. Then he, too, sat down.

"The council is open, brothers!" he intoned.

Another rustle answered him as the conspirators settled themselves for business. None spoke; they sat turned towards their leader, who presided alone at the head of the table. He drew a paper towards him, and his voice now was suave.

"We have met to-night, brothers, for a special purpose. I regret it if you have been inconvenienced by this sudden call. But the interests of our glorious society comes first!"

The cowed heads nodded in unison.

"As you are doubtless aware, our last two blows at the swollen plutocrats of England have failed. One partly; the other entirely. The Milton coup would have been successful but for the inexplicable disappearance of Voisier, our agitator, under cover of the thick fog surrounding the town. The destruction of the factory at Deptford last night was a fiasco that lost us five valuable men, and Jacob Mahlkoff, our finest speaker!" His voice deepened. "Those men were deliberately killed!"

Again the heads bowed. A subtle tension seemed to creep into the atmosphere. Something serious was impending.

"It is plain, I think, that our plans for these two affairs miscarried!" went on the even voice. "I, as your leader, have thought matters over deeply. I have also consulted with Number Two. We have decided that one of two things is happening: either that we have some secret enemy against us, more swift and powerful than the slow British police; or"—he paused for a bombshell—"there is a traitor amongst us!"

The figures round the table stiffened. Not a sound broke the hush.

"I have called you here to-night that we may thrash this out speedily. We must first examine ourselves. And if we find we are still all loyal to the Destroyers, then I shall be satisfied that our enemy is someone outside the Council. We shall take steps to discover him!"

Slowly he rose to his feet, a small figure, yet radiating an evil power by the quick flashes of his beady eyes through the slits in his cowl. The others waited tensely.

"As you know, our society order is that we shall meet in council—disguised. There are those amongst you who do not know each other's names even now. We have always preserved the strictest secrecy. To-night we relax that secrecy!"

His hand rapped the table sharply once more.

"It is my order that to-night each member of the Council shall remove his hood—for the first time in our meetings!"

The Tables Turned!

A GASP of dismay burst from the rest of the Council. But their plight was nothing compared with that of Nelson Lee. A little chill gripped his heart. He had banked on the order of the Council that dominos must be worn. Now he saw in a flash that his strategy had been for nothing.

A thousand thoughts raced through his mind. If this order was obeyed, he would certainly see the faces of the other men. But—he smiled thinly—so would they see his!

From the man next him came an abrupt and nervous protest.

"But, Number One, surely this is against the rules!"

Heads turned solemnly. Monsieur's bright eyes glittered.

"Rules are meant to be broken—sometimes, Number Seven!" The words were slow, deliberate, like little drops of ice. "They must be broken now. It is necessary for me to conduct a searching examination of the Council. That being so, I prefer to see each brethren's face clearly when he replies to my questions!"

At a wave of his hand, the man on the right rose and went to a corner cupboard. He returned bringing back six more candles, which he lit and placed round the table, one before each hooded figure. Monsieur spoke again, softly.

"I must warn you, brothers, that Feodor, my servant, is outside. He has strict orders to deal with any brother who disobeys me or attempts to leave this room!"

Another mutter of protest broke out, but Monsieur silenced it with a gesture. One by one the members of the Council fiddled with their hoods; one by one the cowls were thrown back, sullen faces glowered in the candle light.

Still Nelson Lee did not stir. He was taking stock of the men as they exposed themselves; and only then did he realise the power and evil of the Destroyers in Britain.

With one exception he knew them all. There was Lord Murdorn, Number Two; Roger Thurlow, the ex-M.P., who had done seven years in Dartmoor for public embezzlement; an Irishman named Feenhy, whom the Free State had exiled; Naponi, the Italian king of Soho; and a lean, pallid man, who looked like a Pole. He was the only one Nelson Lee did not know. But a livid scar puckered his cheek, and the detective docketed that blemish in his mind for future reference—if there was to be a future.

And now all the Council were unmasked, save only himself and the leader Monsieur. Finally the latter, too, threw back his cloak entirely, disclosing his malformed back and

huge, black-fringed pate, more repulsive than ever by the flickering lights. There remained Nelson Lee alone. All eyes switched towards him.

The hunchback leaned across the table.

"We wait for you, Number Three. Or shall I say Sir Rudolph Gotchen!" he sneered spitefully.

Nothing could be done. Nelson Lee was trapped. His fingers closed on his gun for a second, but he realised it was useless. He might draw it and shoot, but at the best he could not hope to get them all. Someone would be sure to down him. And an armed man guarded the passage outside.

Coolly, then, without haste, he raised his hands to his hood, drew it up, threw it back on his shoulders. With a little debonair smile, he bowed mockingly.

"The trick is yours, Monsieur. Good-evening, gentlemen!"

The Council of Seven recoiled, frightened, amazed, gasping. Even Monsieur glared wildly; a strangled cry of "Spy!" burst from Roger Thurlow's lips.

Then, by a great effort, the Italian, Naponi, recovered. He thrust out a thick, trembling hand.

"I know him, brothers. He is Nelson Lee!"

"NELSON LEE!"

Hand outstretched, the Italian faced him, a frozen statue of fury. The others echoed the name hoarsely. A dread silence fell.

"So! Nelson Lee, the so-famous English detective, huh?"

It was Monsieur who broke the silence—his eyes glittering with triumph.

Lee smiled.

"You flatter me!"

"I think not, friend. It is you, then, who has spoiled our plans, huh? You smuggled yourself into our last council in place of the good Sir Rudolph, huh? But this time you are unfortunate!"

Nelson Lee did not correct him. If the hunchback thought this was his second visit to the Council of Seven, so much the better. He only shrugged.

"Sir Rudolph warned me I might be so!" he lied calmly.

His words had the effect he intended. The faces around him grew savage.

"So Sir Rudolph knows you are here, then? He is the traitor in our camp, huh? That will be bad for Sir Rudolph one day!"

"If you find him, Monsieur!"

The scarred Pole struck in silkily.

"We mean to, Mister Police-Spy. In my country we have means and ways of doing so, too. Perhaps I will show you—soon!"

Monsieur's teeth flashed in his mirthless smile.

"A good thought, Number Five. There may be others besides Mr. Lee who know about us. In this so-old castle, doubtless there is a vault where we can be undisturbed, huh? What say you, Lord Murdorn?"

Nelson Lee grew rigid. For just a second

he shot a glance at the window and saw again the dark head hovering outside in the night. But for betraying his hand, he could have laughed in the conspirators' faces. He had but to shout, and the merciless Night Hawk, guns blazing, would crash in to his rescue.

This, however, he did not desire. It would not suit him yet to have these leaders of the Destroyers stamped out. The rank and file of the vast organisation had to be unearthed, too; the "firebugs" who started the big blazes, and the skilled agitators who followed them. He had discovered the leaders. That was sufficient for the time.

Yet he must escape now, even if it meant calling in the Night Hawk. Inwardly he was seething with mortification at his failure, but having played a bold game and lost, he must make the best of it. And while he turned the position over rapidly in his mind, a wild, desperate plan came to him.

It meant taking a terrific chance, and trusting his winged ally to the hilt. But he had learnt to do that.

Alertly he listened to Lord Murdorn muttering some reply to his leader's mocking question concerning a torture-chamber. His lordship gave Lee a burning glare.

"Yes, Monsieur, there is a suitable vault. The old 'question-room' of my ancestors. The dog will be made to howl there——"

At that moment Nelson Lee swept into action. His hands grasped the edge of the table, and with one powerful movement he heaved and overturned it. The candles fell to the floor and were doused. Again the detective snapped into action.

A terrific right knocked Lord Murdorn flying, another outed the Italian. A wild scuffle ensued, a yell of fury ripped from Monsieur. But Nelson Lee, chair in hand, went smashing through like a Rugger forward going for the line, and heaving up his burden, crashed it through the window, following it with his left leg.

"Lights! Lights! Feodor! Come in, Feodor! Shoot at the window!"

Monsieur was screeching from under a pile of men. The door burst open. But with it, from the window, came the spurt of Nelson Lee's gun, spitting rapidly through the darkness. A moan of pain answered the shots, followed by a heavy fall.

And then the detective was out on the window ledge, free. The wind, whistling round the tower, made him gasp; while far below, through an aching void of night, he could see dimly the greyish-white of furious waves foaming over broken rocks.

There was no time to waste, however. Clutching hands were already reaching for him desperately. Lifting his arms above his head, Nelson Lee poised himself on the ledge. His voice rose in a shout.

To the men in the room it sounded like a last cry of despair—a death-wail. Really it was a call for help. And with it Nelson Lee, cooler than ever in his life before, dropped; dropped into space, straight for the cruel rocks four hundred feet below.

One by one they unmasked—
until only Nelson Lee was left
hooded. "We wait for you,
Number Three!" sneered the
leader of the Council.



Down, down he went, hurtling towards the sea. And then, from the star-lit sky above him, straight as an arrow, mighty wings whistling, streaked the Night Hawk in his wake.

Fifty feet below the cliff top his strong arms flashed out, closing securely round Nelson Lee's rigid body. Then, in a long, clean swoop, he carried his ally away over the waters. Presently his huge, slashing wings brought them both back safely to land, on a lonely shore two furlongs away.

Back in the stone turret of Murdorn Tower, white faces peered over the empty sill, and into the night. The Irishman, Feenhy, was the first to speak.

"Gone! We'll find his body at dawn!"

"You won't!" Lord Murdorn gulped. "This was my ancestors' favourite death-drop."

Monsieur, the hunchback, smiled. He was well content, after all!

"THAT was a gallant feat, Lee!"

The Night Hawk, tall and erect in his black flying costume, the tips of his wings just touching the sandy

beach on which the allies had landed, smiled down at Nelson Lee.

Not a light was to be seen; only the cold stars and the blurred glimmer of foam on the breaking wave-crests a few yards away. Nelson Lee lit a cigarette carefully and rose.

"That's better!" He blew a grateful cloud of smoke. "I had to do something, Kyle, quickly, and I knew I could trust you to act. Thanks!"

They gripped. The Night Hawk snapped sternly:

"A word from you, Lee, and I'd have shot those scum—"

"I know!" smiled Lee. "But it is better this way. They know nothing about you, and they think I am dead. Thus we can work under perfect cover. I know the names and faces of the Council now; you can keep watch over that hunchback's schemes."

The campaign, Nelson Lee and the Night Hawk versus the Destroyers, had commenced!

THE END.

(Next week's thrilling yarn in this amazing series is entitled: "WINGS OF VENGEANCE!" Look out for it, lads.)

THE HERO OF



CHAPTER 1.

Birds of a Feather!

WHAT does that ass think he's doing?" asked Handforth aggressively.

The burly goalkeeper of the St. Frank's Junior XI. was standing between the sticks, but instead of watching the game he was intent upon the manœuvres of a light Moth-type aeroplane three or four hundred feet overhead.

"Trying to show off, by the look of it," said Tommy Watson, who was watching the game, from behind the net.

Edward Oswald Handforth was not the only player affected. Several other Removites were forgetting the game to look upwards. The droning of the 'plane's engine was distracting.

It was not a very important game—Remove versus Fourth, in fact—and the Removites were already two goals up, with every indication that they would leave the field easy winners.

Chambers, of the Fifth, who was refereeing, became quite impatient, and he blew a shrill blast of the whistle.

"Hold on, everybody!" he sang out. "We'll wait until this funny idiot sheers off."

He was obviously right. The pilot had throttled his engine down to a mere purr again, and the 'plane was gliding down for Big Side. But the pilot, it seemed, feared that he would not have sufficient landing space—his machine would foul the hedge.

"I say, look out, you fellows!" yelled Travers.

The 'plane's engine roared for a moment, died away, and the machine zoomed over the hedge, dipped, and landed bumpily on Little Side. It came running forward, slewing sideways as the pilot tried to keep control. Only by running hard did the footballers successfully get out of the way.

The 'plane came to a standstill in mid-field, and the engine petered out. The footballers ran up from all sides, and were astonished to see a young man standing up in the cockpit, grinning with complete complacency.

"Not a bad landing that—what?" he remarked. "Sorry to make you run, kids, but I didn't mean to land on this part of the ground at all, really. It was the hedge that made me change my mind."

Nipper, the first to arrive, glared at him.

"It's a pity you didn't change your mind and land five or six miles away!" he retorted. "What the dickens do you mean by messing up our game?"

"You might have killed somebody!" added Travers accusingly.

The young man stared in surprise, and a haughty expression showed itself on his face.

"Well, that's a nice welcome, I must say!" he exclaimed resentfully. "I rather thought I was giving you kids a treat."

"Well, you'd better think something else!" said Chambers notly. "And don't call me a kid, either. Get this bag-of-tricks off our footer ground."

The airman climbed out of the cockpit, and dropped to the ground. He pushed his crash-helmet back, then eyed the juniors coldly.

"Perhaps you don't know who I am?" he asked.

"We don't, and we're not at all curious," said Handforth.

"Well, my name is Gore-Pearce—Aubrey Gore-Pearce," said the new arrival. "My young brother belongs to this school—"

"That explains it!" said Handforth tartly. "By George! Why didn't we guess? I see the resemblance now—not only in his face, but in his manner!"

The juniors were more fed up than ever. Claude Gore-Pearce, of the Remove, was every kind of a snob, and a most unpleasant fellow generally. He was the son of a millionaire, but this fact did not make him popular. His elder brother was exactly the same stamp—conceited, boastful, haughty.

Aubrey had apparently thought that his landing on the St. Frank's playing fields would be quite a sensation, and that he would be the hero of the hour. But he was wrong. He was about as popular as a fog at a Cup Final.

"By Jove! Hallo, Aubrey!" came a panting voice. "How awfully decent of you to drop in like this!"

Claude Gore-Pearce was running up, excited and puffed.

"These precious friends of yours don't seem particularly pleased to see me," said Aubrey with a sniff.

"They're not friends of mine," said Gore-Pearce. "But why shouldn't they be pleased to see you? It isn't every day that aeroplanes land on our playing fields. If it comes to that, there aren't many fellows who have airmen brothers!" he added triumphantly.

"Archie Glenthorne has got two brothers—both airmen," said Handforth gruffly. "Two of the cleverest airmen in the world, too. They've flown the Atlantic, and done all sorts of marvellous things. But they don't come down to St. Frank's, messing up football matches, and trying to show off!"

Aubrey Gore-Pearce flushed.

"Look here, young fellow!" he said haughtily. "I don't want any more sauce from you! I don't know who you are—"

He broke off abruptly. A sudden hush had fallen on the footballers, and, glancing up, Aubrey saw that a master was approaching. At least, he assumed that the new arrival was a master—although he didn't look it.

The figure was dressed in baggy flannel trousers and a shabby old Norfolk jacket, to say nothing of a battered tweed soft hat. But for that sudden silence, Aubrey would have supposed that the newcomer was the gardener's assistant.

"May I ask who you are, young man?" asked the man in flannels, planting himself in front of Aubrey.

"I'm not sure that I shall tell you," said Aubrey sourly. "Who are you, anyway?"

"My name is Mr. Alington Wilkes, and it so happens that I am the Housemaster of the Ancient House," said the other. "As our headmaster is away just now, I am acting in his place. You will therefore take it that you are addressing the headmaster of this school."

Aubrey's jaw sagged. He had meant to "tick off" this fellow but now he changed his mind. The footballers were beginning to enjoy themselves.

"Oh, well, if you're the headmaster, you're the man I want to see," said Aubrey boldly. "This is my young brother, you know—he's in your House, I believe. I just dropped in to spend an hour or two with him."

"You are perfectly welcome to spend an hour with your brother, Mr. Gore-Pearce, and the hospitality of my House is at your disposal," said Mr. Wilkes gently. "But you must allow me to remonstrate with you for the mode of your—er—dropping in. Fortunately I witnessed your landing, and I cannot help saying that it was a most reckless and unpardonable offence."

"Offence!" said Aubrey Gore-Pearce, bristling. "In what way?"

"I: you desired to land upon our playing fields you should have notified me, and

I would have had the playing fields cleared," replied Mr. Wilkes. "But to drop down from the sky, and to interrupt a football match and scatter the players—well, I cannot find words strong enough to condemn it. You will please understand, Mr. Gore-Pearce, that you must not do such a thing again. You would not have looked so pleased with yourself, perhaps, if you had gravely injured one or more of these boys."

"You don't understand flying, sir," said Aubrey indulgently. "Being an experienced pilot myself, I know that my landing was perfectly safe."

"Your experience, Mr. Gore-Pearce, is not so very extensive," murmured Mr. Wilkes. "Your brother has been telling me about you; he is very proud of you. I understand that you have recently joined a private flying club, and that you obtained your certificate a week or so ago."

"Well, I know more about flying than you do," said Gore-Pearce's brother truculently.

"You boasting idiot!" burst out Handforth. "Mr. Wilkes was a major in the Royal Air Force during the War, and he was the terror of the enemy. There's nothing he doesn't know about stunt flying!"

Aubrey's dismay was so palpable that a few chuckles went round. The juniors were only too pleased to witness his discomfiture.

"We will not discuss the matter," said Mr. Wilkes softly. "I will merely request you, Mr. Gore-Pearce, to remove your machine as quickly as possible. I cannot allow it to remain here after this afternoon. For the present, the boys will wheel it beyond the limits of the playing pitch. But as soon as you can, you will take it to an authorised flying ground. There is one, I believe, at Bannington."

Mr. Wilkes walked away, and Aubrey gritted his teeth. He disliked being ordered about in that way, and it was so totally different from what he had expected. He was very full of his own importance, and he anticipated a rousing welcome, with the boys cheering him to the echo. He was an airman—he was somebody!

AUBREY GORE-PEARCE was really only a comparative novice, and one of those novices who possessed any amount of swank and reckless confidence. He had only flown to St. Frank's in order to show off.

"Well, Claude, I don't think much of your Housemaster," he said sourly, after Mr. Wilkes had gone. "And as for taking this machine away, I'll leave when it pleases me."

"You'll take it away from the playing field at once—or we'll take it for you," said Chambers truculently. "And what do you mean by saying that our Housemaster—"

"I wasn't talking to you!" interrupted Aubrey.

"Well, I'm talking to you!" roared Chambers. "Mr. Wilkes offered you the

hospitality of his House—which, in my opinion, is more than you deserve. Come on, you chaps! Let's shift this kite!"

Aubrey's protests were unheeded. A crowd of juniors seized the aeroplane, and wheeled it off the playing pitch; and after that the game was resumed. Aubrey fussed about his machine, complaining that the juniors had soiled the fabric.

"You ought to be jolly well kicked!" said Claude Gore-Pearce, addressing a crowd of spectators. "My brother's feeling pretty sore about this. He was going to give some stunt flights, just as an exhibition, but I doubt if he'll do it now."

"Stunt flights!" sniffed De Valerie. "It was as much as he could do to land. If he's fool enough to try any stunts, he'll break his neck."

"You wait till you see him looping the loop and doing a roll," boasted Gore-Pearce.

There was more talk about this stunt flying. Aubrey himself, having recovered his temper, made grand promises of the loops and rolls he would perform for the edification of St. Frank's, as soon as the game was over.

But all this talk of stunt flying came to nothing—as the fellows expected. Whether Aubrey Gore-Pearce would have gone up to give exhibition flights is doubtful; but he wasn't allowed to. For, before the House match was over, a high wind sprang up, bringing low banks of scudding clouds; rain began to fall in torrents.

It was when the light 'plane lifted and pitched that Aubrey grew alarmed. He yelled for ropes, and some of the fellows were obliging enough to supply them. The machine was secured to the ground by means of ropes and stakes.

The rain proved to be nothing serious; but the wind rose menacingly. The afternoon developed into one of those wild, blustering, wintry days which are characteristic of January in England.

And Aubrey Gore-Pearce, having flown to St. Frank's with the idea of staying an hour or two, was obliged to remain at St. Frank's for the rest of the day.

CHAPTER 2.

The Lighthouse Alight!

IT was a half-holiday, and as the House-match had finished by mid-afternoon, there was a good hour and a half to fill in before tea-time. Nipper, for one, was attracted by the sudden wildness of the weather.

"We can't stick indoors on a ripping afternoon like this!" he said, after he and the other footballers had changed.

"Ripping afternoon, dear old fellow?" repeated Travers politely.

"Well, isn't it?"

"A matter of opinion, I suppose," said Travers. "Personally, I consider it a perfectly foul afternoon. A book by the fire-

side and an easy chair are clearly indicated."

"Lazy boulder!" said Nipper. "You'll get no appetite for tea like that. What's wrong with putting on our thickest boots, and going for a ramble across the downs? It's just about high tide now, and the sea ought to be magnificent at Shingle Head."

"Upon my Samson! It sounds attractive, too!" said Travers. "I'm with you, dear old fellow."

Tommy Watson, Tregellis-West, Handforth & Co., K. K. Parkington, and others enthusiastically seconded the idea. So, ten minutes later, a regular party of Removites tramped out into the stormy wind, well booted, well overcoated and eager to face the elements.

"Bad luck on Gore-Pearce's brother," grinned Jimmy Potts, as they set off across the meadows. "His stunt flights haven't materialised."

"And never would!" said Handforth, with a sniff. "A real airman would have jumped into his machine as soon as this wind sprang up, and flown to the Bannington Aerodrome. Nowadays people aren't afraid to fly in the wind. That chap is all swank!"

"Nipper could fly it to Bannington, if it comes to that," said Tommy Watson. "He could get straight into the cockpit now and do the job easily."

"Draw it mild!" protested Kirby Keeble Parkington.

"Perhaps you don't know, old boy, that Nipper has a pilot's certificate?" suggested Tregellis-West mildly. "When he and Mr Lee are on their detective cases, he often has to do a bit of flying."

K. K. and the other Red-Hots were astonished. Although they had been at St. Frank's a considerable time now, this was news to them. Yet it was quite true that Nipper held a pilot's certificate; but it wasn't his way to talk of such things.

"Oh, bother Aubrey Gore-Pearce and his 'plane!" said the Remove skipper lightly. "Isn't this wind ripping? There's something exhilarating in having to fight our way against it."

"What price making a detour and calling at the Moor View School?" suggested Deeks. "Let's get some of the girls to join in this ramble!"

"No good!" growled Handforth. "I thought of that, too. But the girls have gone off somewhere this afternoon. The pictures in Bannington, probably."

The juniors trudged on, thoroughly enjoying their battle with the wind, which was now blowing with gale force. By the time they reached the cliff tops, over the downs, a magnificent spectacle met their gaze. The tide was right up, and the sea was booming monstrously all along the rocky coast. Shingle Head, jutting out seawards, was half obscured by the flying spray. The lighthouse on the promontory looked almost ghostly.

The sea, as far as the eye could reach, was covered with "white horses," chasing themselves over the broken surface. The great

waves crashed down upon the beach, creating large masses of creamy foam. There is something grand and awesome in watching the sea when the elements are in an angry mood.

The boys scampered down the cliff path, and when they reached the beach they could hardly hear one another speak. The wind was whistling round their ears, buffeting them until they had to fight their way along; and the roar and thunder of the breaking waves was as good as a tonic.

"This is the stuff to give you an appetite!" roared Handforth. "You don't realise how much ozone we're soaking in."

"The masters ought to have come down for a ramble, then," chuckled Travers.

"Why the masters?" asked somebody.

"Haven't they a special dinner on to-night, in Bannington?" said Travers. "It's just as well to have a big appetite when there's a special dinner. I understand it's going to be quite a big do."

"Rather," said Parkington. "And we shall have a high old time at St. Frank's on the quiet. When the cat's away—what?"

"The prefects aren't going," said Gresham.

"Who cares about the prefects?" retorted K. K. "The only masters who aren't going are Professor Tucker—and he doesn't count—and old Pycraft of the Fourth. What a lark if we can work some jape on Pycraft!"

He wasn't the only junior who was toying with such an idea. This evening would provide a golden opportunity for something special. For all the St. Frank's masters, with the exception of the two K. K. had named, were attending a grand function at the Grapes Hotel, in Bannington.

The Grapes was famous for these public dinners; it possessed an enormous banquetting hall, and all such affairs were classy in the extreme. Many of the Bannington Grammar School and the River House masters would be there, too. It was a kind of political dinner, with all sorts of important speeches afterwards—most of which would be broadcast by the Bannington station. The Mayor of Bannington would preside, and the Member of Parliament for the constituency was to be the guest of honour.

"We ought not to let this chance slip by," said Handforth. "This giddy dinner only happens once a year, and it's the only evening when St. Frank's is left practically without any masters. What a ripping opportunity for a big rag!"

"We'll think of something," said K. K. confidently. "In fact, you Old-Timers had better look out for yourselves. We Red-Hots will be on the warpath as soon as the beaks have cleared off!"

"Rats!" scoffed Handforth. "Do you think we're afraid of you silly Red-Hots? If you try any funny business with us, my lads, we'll wipe you up!"

As a matter of fact, the Old-Timers were intent upon getting in a blow at their rivals. Things had been rather quiet at St. Frank's recently. Ever since the rival gangs of

gunmen had disturbed the peace of the old school, a period of "humdrumness" had set in. It was time to liven up things.

"Better be getting back, hadn't we?" suggested Jimmy Potts.

"There's no hurry," said Handforth. "Over an hour before tea, and I thought it would be rather a good idea to go out on those rocks."

"And get soaked through?" asked Church politely.

"Not afraid of a little spray, are you?" retorted Handforth.

In the end, most of the fellows voted the idea to be a good one, and they started off enthusiastically. It was good sport dodging along the slippery rocks, avoiding pools

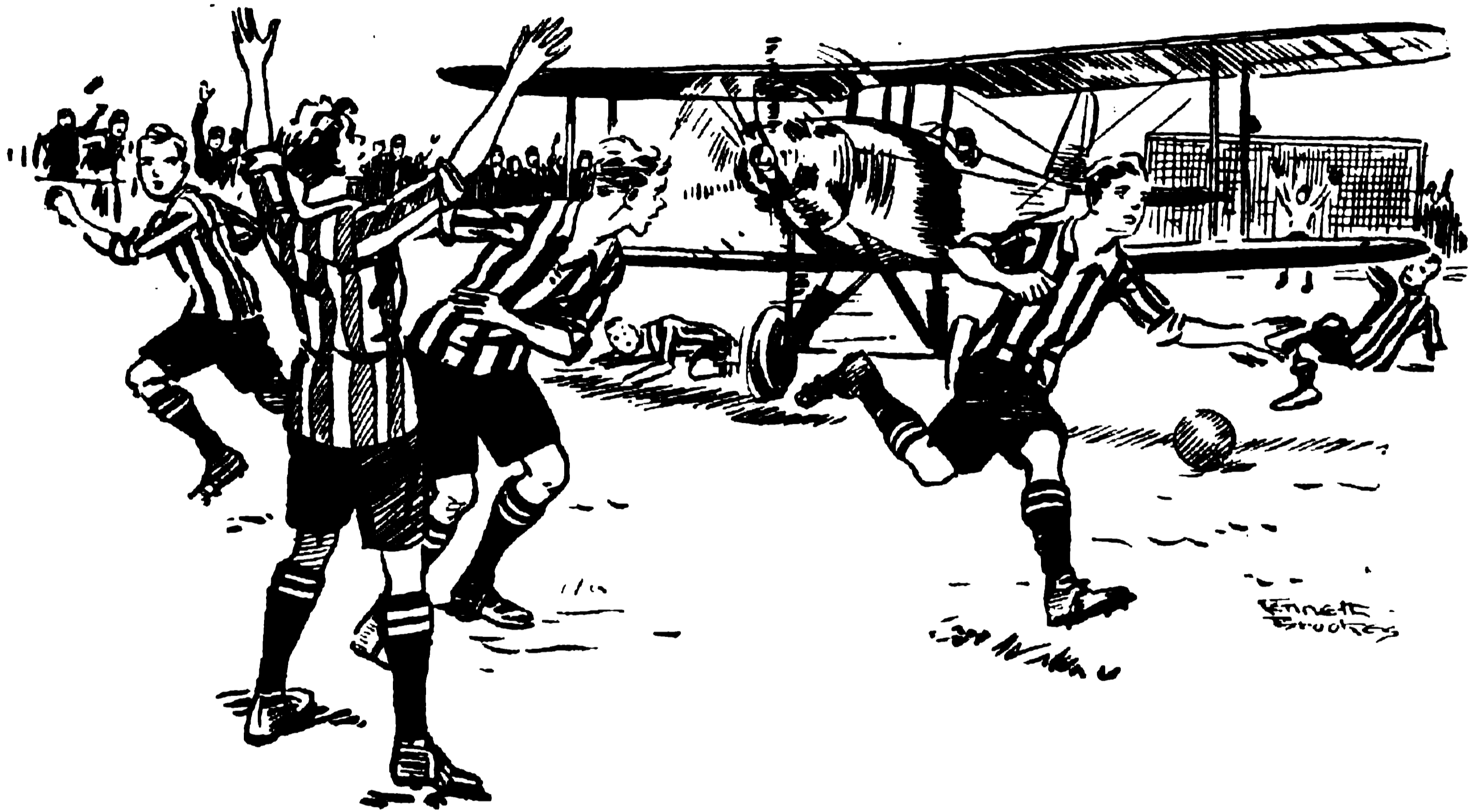
was easy enough for them to get to the road from here, for all the lighthouse supplies were brought along this track, and it was a recognised highway.

"Just a minute, you chaps!" said Nipper, as he turned to take a last look at the sea. "Haven't you noticed something?"

"Yes—the lighthouse isn't going yet," said Travers.

"By George! That's funny!" said Handforth, protecting his eyes from the wind and staring. "That light usually begins to flash as soon as dusk comes down, and it's nearly dark now."

However, they were impatient to get home, and they did not give the matter any more thought. It really wasn't dark yet, and at



The aeroplane came bumping down on to Little Side, and the junior footballers were forced to bolt to escape being run down.

of sea water and leaping out of the way of the flying spray. It was exciting, exhilarating. They were so engrossed in it that the time passed without their realising it. Dusk was settling down by the time they finally decided to make a move for home.

"Well, it doesn't matter if we're a bit late," said Nipper philosophically. "And there's no mistake about our appetites."

"It wouldn't be so bad if we hadn't wandered such a long way over these rocks," said Tommy Watson. "We've an awful way to go before we got to that cliff path. Look where we are! Right against the Shingle lighthouse, half way along the headland."

"Who cares?" said Travers lightly.

They were all in a happy mood, and the weather conditions tended to brighten their spirits. It was impossible to be anything but brisk and boisterous with Nature in this mood.

The dusk was deepening by the time the juniors reached the narrow track which ran along the headland to the lighthouse. It

any moment the flashing beam might gleam forth. They continued on their way for some minutes, and then Nipper stopped abruptly.

"Hallo! What's that?" he asked, pointing. "Can't you see something rummy—a flickering glow in the light tower?"

"I suppose something must have gone wrong with the works," said Tommy Watson. "The lighthouse keepers are trying to get the thing going—"

"Looks like a fire!" interrupted Jimmy Potts excitedly.

"You chaps, it is a fire!" exclaimed Nipper. "They must have had an accident with the lamp! The top part of the tower is on fire!"

"My only sainted aunt!"

"Can't we do something?"

"Come on, Remove!"

"Hurrah! St. Frank's to the rescue!"

With one accord, the boys broke into a run and dashed along the headland track. The lighthouse was not very far distant,

perched on the rocks nearly at the end. The tide had turned now, and the fury of the waves had abated. Nevertheless the sea was still bursting over the Shingle rocks in large clouds of spray.

As the boys neared the lighthouse, they could see the fire was becoming more serious. They dashed across the paved yard, and just as they reached the heavy door at the foot of the tower, the door opened and one of the keepers came hurrying out.

"What's wrong?" gasped Nipper.

"Ah, I'm mighty glad to see you boys!" said the keeper huskily. "There's big trouble aloft! Maybe you can help? I was dashing to the coastguards—but the quicker we get help the better."

"You buzz off, then—we'll do all we can in the meantime!" shouted Nipper. "Come on, you chaps!"

He rushed in, and the others followed. They went tearing up the stone stairs of the tower, and when at last they arrived breathlessly in the great lamp-room, they found the senior keeper battling valiantly but hopelessly.

The great lamp, with its intricate mass of mechanism and reflectors, was hidden by great flames. The place was filled with acrid fumes and smoke. The senior keeper was operating a big fire extinguisher, but the patent fluid seemed to have little or no effect upon the conflagration.

"Water!" he panted, without pausing to inquire how these boys had got in. "There are buckets below—fill them—bring them up!"

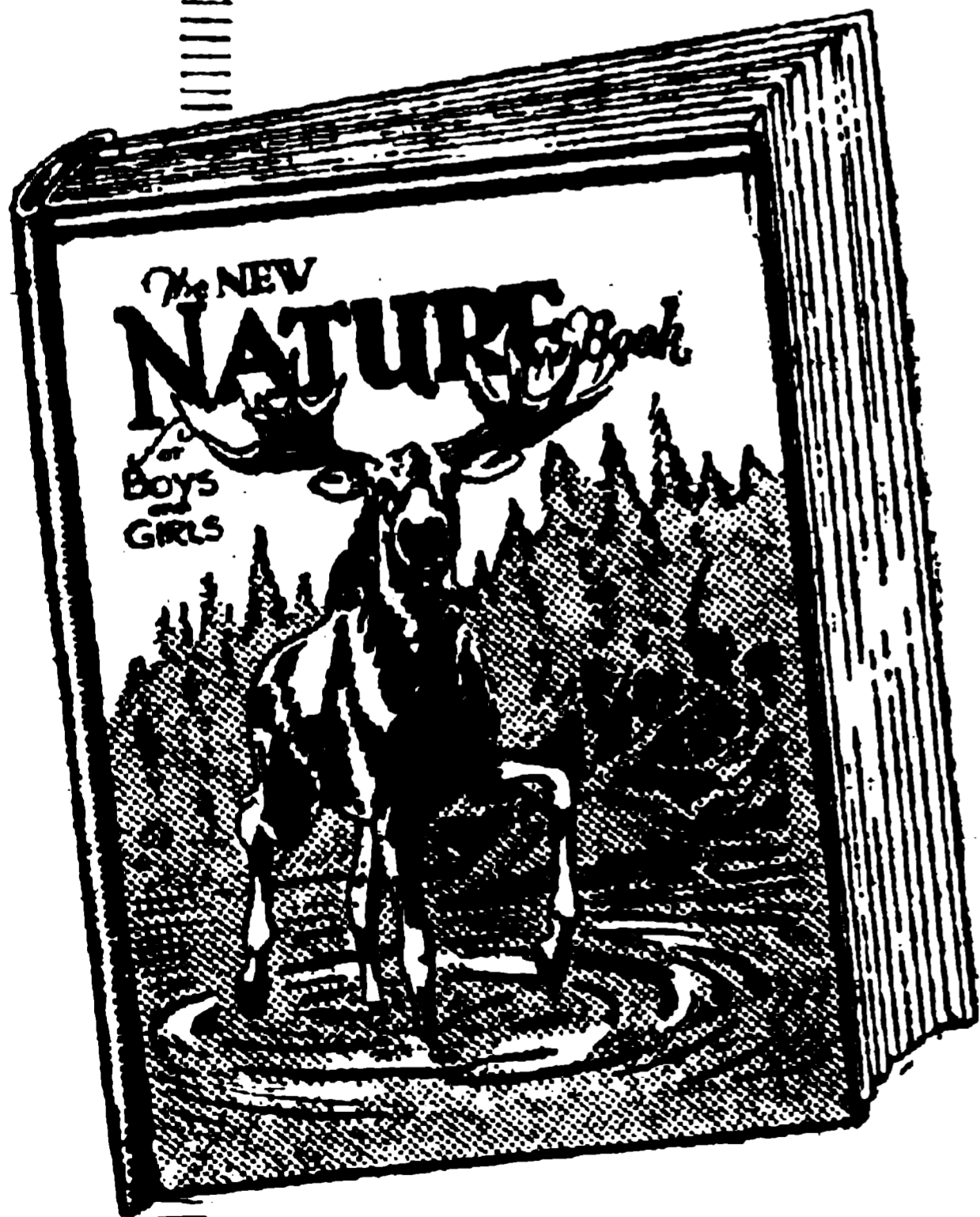
The juniors rushed down again. That glimpse of the fire had told them that the urgency was great. Nipper, as he ran, shouted directions.

"Don't all come down!" came his voice. "String yourselves out down those stairs—and we'll pass the buckets up in relays. It'll save a lot of time."

The orders were shouted back, and in a miraculously short space of time something effective was being accomplished. The boys belonged to the St. Frank's fire brigade, and their training came in useful now. Those at the base of the tower rapidly filled the buckets and passed them on to the others. They were conveyed up to the lamp-room with speed and efficiency. The keeper, half-choked by the fumes, but fighting gamely, seized the filled buckets as they reached him, and before long the mass of water began to take effect.

For some time it seemed that all efforts would be useless. Then the turn came. By continuous efforts, by hard, slogging work, the fire-fighters succeeded. The boys were valiant; they did not spare themselves. They kept on the go without a pause, and many of them was nearly on the point of collapse

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when the report came down that the worst was over.

They slackened a bit, for it was humanly impossible to keep up that hectic pace, but now it did not matter. They had won the battle.

CHAPTER 3. Startling News!

JOHAN BRADY, the senior keeper, was like a man demented.

Jim, his assistant, had arrived back by this time, bringing a coastguard officer and two men with him. As Jim had feared, they arrived too late to be of any service, for the coastguard station was some distance away.

"Well done, my boys!" said the coastguard officer approvingly. "Splendid work! I'll see that your headmaster is told of this."

"Only too glad to have been of help," said Nipper.

"Rather!" chorused the others.

"If you hadn't acted so promptly, the lighthouse would have been absolutely destroyed," said the coastguard officer. "The situation is bad enough as it is—the lamp is completely out of commission, and I don't see how it can possibly be got working to-night."

John Brady, exhausted as he was, started up.

"It must be got working!" he panted fiercely. "There's a storm! D'ye hear me? It must be got working! And have ye forgotten the Southern Hope? It's Wednesday night, and she always comes round the headland on Wednesday night! She'll go on the rocks in this murk, she'll lose her bearings without the light!"

"We must do all we can to warn her," agreed the officer quietly. "And the most we can do, here, is to light flares. I'll get my men to build an immense bonfire on the headland, and that, perhaps, will serve. It is all we can do in this emergency, anyhow."

He was right, as the boys realised. They had seen that lamp-room, and they knew how serious the destruction was. The great lamp was a mass of twisted wreckage and charred remnants. Before the lighthouse could be in effective operation again, an entirely new apparatus would have to be installed.

"The old man's right about the Southern Hope," said Jim, as he talked in a low voice to Nipper and two or three other Removites. "She's likely to be in a bad way."

"What is the Southern Hope?" asked Nipper.

"Coasting steamer—always comes round here on Wednesday evenings," replied the keeper. "Poor old John is naturally worried. His son is second officer of the Southern Hope."

"My only hat!" breathed Handforth, startled.

"She generally calls at Braxley Point, down the coast, during the afternoon," went

on Jim. "Sometimes she gets passengers for Caistowe—cargo, too. She's due in at Caistowe later on in the evening. And she's bound to be making bad weather of it to-night."

"Can't she be warned at Braxley Point?" asked Nipper.

"Too late now," replied Jim, shaking his head. "She left Braxley hours ago. She's due off the headland here within an hour, though she's likely to be late to-night, fighting against this gale. About the only steamer in danger, too. All the other shipping keeps well out in the Channel. The Southern Hope hugs the coastline."

"But surely, when they fail to see the light, they'll go out to sea?" asked Church.

"That's just the trouble, young gent," said the under-keeper, shaking his head. "In this murk she'll think she's still in safe water, and she'll believe that the Caistowe light is farther along. It's ten to one that she'll go right on the rocks. And even with a bonfire it won't help much. Old Captain Clarke will be watching out for the flashing beam."

Everybody in the lighthouse—both the keepers and the coastguards—were intensely worried. They knew that the tide was running strongly, and the currents were treacherous. To make matters worse, a surface mist had developed, and the sea was half-hidden in the murk. The wind had dropped considerably.

"I say!" exclaimed Handforth suddenly. "What about wireless? Can't she be warned by wireless?"

"She don't carry wireless," said Jim gruffly. "People have talked to Captain Clarke about it, but he's only laughed. Why should he carry wireless—a tin-pot little coasting tub? He only runs up and down this coast, and never gets out of sight of land. That's just the trouble. He keeps too close inshore—and without the light he won't even know that he's running into danger."

The coastguard officer suggested that the boys should all leave, and he escorted them into the open. He was grateful for their help, but there was nothing more they could do.

"You'll hear more of this later, I can promise you," he said. "You've done splendidly—and we're all grateful. I really think you had better get back to your school as quickly as possible."

"Sure there's nothing else we can do?" asked Handforth eagerly. "What about that bonfire? Can't we help?"

"My men are attending to that now," replied the officer. "Don't worry, boys. We'll do everything that's humanly possible to warn the Southern Hope—and any other shipping that might be out on this wretched night."

BUT the St. Frank's fellows were feeling very uncomfortable as they made their way back towards the school. They were worrying about that little coasting steamer which was even now battling its

way through the heavy sea—bound for Caistowe, round Shingle Head, with old John Brady's son aboard.

"Isn't there some way in which we can warn that steamer?" asked Handforth.

"If the coastguards can't do it, there's precious little chance of our succeeding," said Nipper. "They have their own methods, and they'll do the right thing. They'll probably send up warning rockets or something of that sort."

They were nearing St. Frank's now, and the welcome lights of the school were attractive. They did not feel so keen on their proposed rag now; they were all disturbed by the recent disaster, and the possibilities of what might follow.

As they came out on the golf-links footpath and were about to cross the road towards the gates, they saw two shadowy figures. The figures resolved themselves into a couple of Moor View girls, well-overcoated and with sou'westers covering their heads.

"I say, you chaps!" cried one of the girls. "Do you know anything about the Shingle Light? There's a rumour going about that there's been a fire there, and people are wondering because the beam isn't flashing as usual."

The girls proved to be Phyllis Palmer and Betty Barlowe, and their excitement and curiosity was understandable.

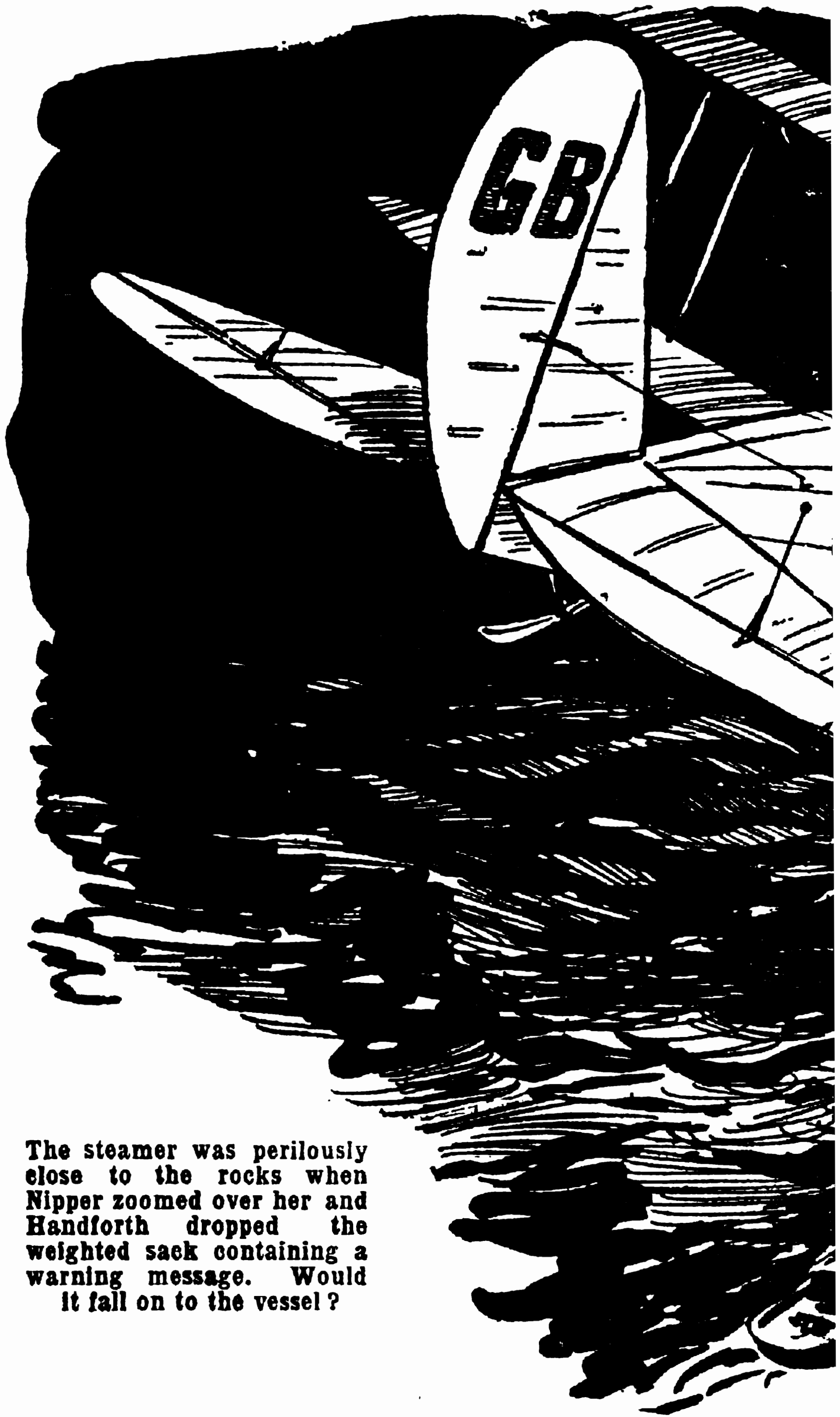
"Yes, things are pretty bad there," said Nipper. "There was a fire, and we helped to put it out."

"Oh, how thrilling!" cried Betty. "Tell us how it happened. What did you do? And what about the light? Won't they get it going to-night?"

"Better come indoors—it's cold out here," said Nipper. "How about having tea with us?"

They all went in, and they felt better in the comfortable warmth of the Ancient House. But the two girls were impatient, and they compelled the boys to give them all the details whilst they still lingered in the lobby. The fellows, meanwhile, were shedding their overcoats and mufflers and caps.

"There's only one worrying possibility," said Travers, after he and the others had gone into all the details. "They can't get the light going to-night, so they'll have to rely upon a big bonfire. And there's just a chance that a coasting steamer will misunderstand the temporary signal and go on the rocks."



The steamer was perilously close to the rocks when Nipper zoomed over her and Handforth dropped the weighted sack containing a warning message. Would it fall on to the vessel?

"A coasting steamer?" asked Phyllis sharply. "What coasting steamer?"

"A little tub called the Southern Hope."

"Oh!" cried the two schoolgirls, in one startled voice.

"What's the matter?" asked Nipper, staring.

"Did—did you say the Southern Hope?" faltered Betty, wide-eyed.

"Yes."

"But Irene and Doris and Marjorie and Mary are on the boat!"

"What!"

The juniors were startled, and they gathered round with flushed faces.



"You're kidding!" said Handforth gruffly. "This is a bit too thick, you girls——"

"But it's true—it's true!" cried Phyllis. "Irene and the others thought it would be a good lark, and they went to Braxley Point directly after dinner so that they could go on board and have a cruise as far as Caistowe."

"Oh, my hat!"

"The weather was lovely at dinner-time," went on Phyllis breathlessly. "You know it was! Why, there was even an aeroplane flying over here in the early part of the afternoon. Nobody dreamed that the weather would get so rough."

"That's true enough," admitted Nipper. "This storm came up suddenly."

He was looking very anxious. Mary Summers—one of those girls aboard the Southern Hope—was his own particular chum. So the little ship's peril now had an added significance. Handforth and Archie Glenthorne and Reggie Pitt were similarly affected, for Irene Manners and Marjorie Temple and Doris Berkeley were their own special chums, too. The Southern Hope's danger had become a personal matter.

Yet what could be done. The little coasting steamer had no wireless, and it was impossible to communicate with her in any way.

Impossible?

Perhaps not. Perhaps there was a way, after all. Nipper, at all events, thought of one, and his eyes were blazing with excitement and hope as he turned to his companions.

CHAPTER 4.

French Leave!

"LISTEN, you chaps!" said Nipper tensely. "There is a way! It's risky, and I'm not altogether sure that it can be done, but it's a chance."

"What do you mean?" went up a chorus.

"Gore-Pearce's brother's aeroplane," said Nipper quickly.

"What?"

"Great Scott!"

"You're mad!"

"I'm not mad," said Nipper. "The wind has died down a lot now, and aeroplanes can be flown in the darkness almost as easily as in the daytime. Night flying is easy. Where's Gore-Pearce's brother? We'll have to put it to him."

"But it's impossible!" protested Travers, seizing Nipper's arm and gripping it tightly. "Pull yourself together, dear old fellow. It's—it's not reasonable to ask such a thing!"

"Reasonable or not, I'm going to ask him," said Nipper fiercely.

Now that he knew that his girl chum was aboard that ship he was feeling reckless—even desperate. And it seemed to him that the hand of Providence had been at work here in bringing that aeroplane to St. Frank's at such a time. If only the flight could be accomplished, it was the one certain way of warning Captain Clarke of his vessel's danger.

There were not many fellows who sympathised with Nipper in this project; they thought it altogether too hazardous. In any case, Aubrey Gore-Pearce was not a skilled airman. This suggested night flight over the coast was asking too much of a man who was little more than a novice.

But Nipper took no notice of the shouts that were directed at him. He hurried into the Remove passage, and burst into Study B. Hubbard and Long and Gore-Pearce were the normal occupants, but this evening they had a visitor. Aubrey was there, and Nipper was glad to have run his quarry to earth so speedily.

Aubrey had been telling Hubbard and Long of his flying experiences—and Hubbard and Long, much to Aubrey's satisfaction, had listened attentively, and with a satisfactory amount of awe. It did not occur to Aubrey that those two juniors had been putting it on. They were living in hopes of a fat tip, knowing that Aubrey was a millionaire's son.

Aubrey, leaning negligently against the mantelpiece, stared at Nipper as the latter entered.

"What I like about your form-fellows, Claude, is their exquisite politeness," he said sarcastically. "They are so well mannered —"

"This is no time for politeness or good manners!" interrupted Nipper. "Gore-Pearce, I've come to speak to your brother."

"Go ahead," said Gore-Pearce. "But I'm not sure whether he'll answer you."

"It's an urgent matter, Mr. Gore-Pearce," said Nipper, turning to the young man. "There's a ship in distress—or, at least, it might be in distress soon. The Shingle Head Light has failed."

"What of it?" asked Aubrey. "I'm not to blame, am I?"

"There's a coasting steamer out there," said Nipper tensely. "She is making for Caistowe, and there's a terrible risk that she will run on the rocks off Shingle Head."

"Frightfully unlucky for those on board, I'll admit," said Aubrey, "but what has all this got to do with me? How do you think I can help? Do you want me to go on the cliffs and flash an electric torch?"

His brother and Hubbard and Long grinned; but Nipper saw nothing funny in that facetious remark.

"You've got an aeroplane out on Little Side, Mr. Gore-Pearce," he said deliberately. "She's all ready for flying—and she's a two-seater. Will you pilot her over the coastline? I'll sit in the passenger seat, and if we can only spot that ship I'll drop a warning—"

"What the deuce are you talking about?" interrupted Aubrey, in amazement.

"You heard what I said."

"You're mad!" said the young man. "You can't possibly be serious."

"But I am—"

"You expect me to go out, on an evening like this, in pitch darkness, and risk my neck?" asked Aubrey, not without justifiable

indignation. "Either you're trying to pull my leg, or you're out of your mind."

"Night flying is not difficult," insisted Nipper. "Besides, the wind has gone down a lot, and the weather's fairly good for flying. It's not far to the coast—we could be there within a minute or two after taking off. An aeroplane can do a trip in ten minutes that would take hours and hours by any other method. You know that as well as I do."

"And I know that I'm staying here," replied Aubrey Gore-Pearce angrily. "Why, of all the outrageous, preposterous suggestions!"

"It would be outrageous and preposterous if I asked you to do this just for a joy-ride," said Nipper. "But it's an attempt to warn a ship of its danger."

"I'm not responsible for the lighthouse giving up the ghost, am I?"

"Of course you're not, but that doesn't make any difference to the position," said Nipper impatiently. "Can't you look at this thing in the right light? If you're as clever in the air as you have been telling us, a job like this ought to be easy."

Aubrey flushed somewhat.

"Are you trying to be rude?" he snapped.

"I'm only attempting to stir some enthusiasm in you," replied Nipper bitterly. "I'm sorry if I have made a mistake. I thought you could loop the loop, and do tail spins and fluttering leaf rolls. I even heard you telling somebody that night flying is as easy as winking."

Aubrey flushed more deeply than ever. It was perfectly true that he had been boasting on those lines, and that he had made some reference to the safety and ease of night flying. But he had not expected that he would be put to the test.

"You'd better get out of here," he said roughly.

"I will—now that I understand you're only a gasbag, a boaster and a braggart," said Nipper, his voice charged with contempt. "There's not only the ordinary crew on that ship, but five young girls, too—four of them from the Moor View School, which is close by here."

"My only hat!" ejaculated Hubbard. "Is that true?"

"They're all in danger of their lives—and you can help them!" said Nipper, looking hard at Aubrey. "I'll do the navigating—I'll tell you exactly where to go. I'm familiar with this district—"

"You'll do nothing of the sort—because I'm not shifting out of this room," interrupted Aubrey Gore-Pearce angrily. "I told you before that I think the whole thing is mad. I'm sorry about your girl friends, but they'll have to get out of their own troubles. I'm not going to risk my neck in the crazy way you suggest."

His tone was so final that Nipper compressed his lips, and went out of the study. He found Handforth and K. K. and a number of other fellows in the passage. They had heard everything, of course, and they were

looking at Nipper uncomfortably. In spite of themselves, they could not help thinking that Nipper was a little bit "touched." His request had been unreasonable.

Aubrey Gore-Pearce, perhaps, had been quite justified in refusing; but he might, at least, have refused in a nicer way. His manner, from the outset, had been unpleasant.

Nipper stood there, his hands clenched, his eyes burning. Perhaps he was a fool—perhaps he was worrying over nothing—but he had a dreadful foreboding that the Southern Hope would meet with disaster.

He paced up and down, clenching and unclenching his fists. The other Removites watched him in wonder; they had seldom seen him in such a state as this. He was usually so cool, so self-possessed.

"What's the time?" he demanded suddenly. "Oh, never mind! The masters have gone, haven't they?"

"Over half an hour ago," said somebody. "I can't even go to Old Wilkey and ask him to lend me a hand," said Nipper. "Wilkey might be able to persuade this fellow to take his machine up."

"Wilkey might have gone himself!" said Handforth.

"By Jove, yes!" agreed Nipper, with a start. "Wilkey wouldn't have hesitated for a moment. Is it too late to get him? Where is he?"

"Oh, be reasonable, old chap!" protested Watson. "All the masters are at the Grapes Hotel by now, and the dinner is just about starting."

A sudden fire burned in Nipper's eyes.

"Come here, you chaps—Handy, K. K., Travers—all of you!" he exclaimed. "Come outside!"

Curious, they followed him as he hurried to the lobby, where he put on his overcoat and cap. There was a light of settled determination in his eyes.

"Where are you going?" went up a chorus.

"I'm going to do this thing myself!" replied Nipper.

"But—but——"

"Gore-Pearce won't pilot that machine—so I will!"

"Good gad!"

"Hold him, somebody!" shouted Travers. "He's off his rocket!"

"If any chap tries to interfere with me, I'll knock him down!" said Nipper dangerously. "I'm a certificated pilot—and I'm not afraid of flying in the dark. If you chaps will come and help me to unrope that machine, I'll take her up."

"My only hat!"

"For the love of Samson!"

They stared at him, aghast, but, at the same time, they admired him.

"All the masters are gone—I don't count Pycraft—so there's nobody to stop me," went on Nipper. "We can do it quietly, and once the engine's started I'll be off the ground within a few seconds. Those light

'planes get up in no time. Now, there's not a minute to be lost. I want an answer, one way or the other. Are you fellows going to help?"

"Yes, rather!" roared Handforth excitedly.

"We'll help, sweetheart, if you really mean it," said K. K. "But it's most frightfully dangerous."

"Don't do it, Nipper!" pleaded Watson. "You'll kill yourself!"

"There'll be two killed, then," said Handforth suddenly.

They all looked at him.

"I'm going, too!" went on Handforth. "There's a second seat in the 'plane—and Nipper will want somebody to help. He can't pilot the machine and give the warning, too."

He glared at Nipper with defiance, expecting a point blank refusal; but Nipper regarded him warmly.

"Thanks, Handy, old man," he said. "You'll do."

"You'll take me?"

"I'm only too glad," replied Nipper. "As you say, you'll be needed."

Everybody was tremendously excited. Nipper's determination was obvious, and the fellows could see it would be utterly useless to attempt to turn him from his purpose. Not that they really wanted to; they became enthusiastic.

They all went hurrying out to Little Side. St. Frank's was rather more noisy than usual, owing to the absence of the masters; and nobody took any notice of the crowd of fellows that went out towards the playing fields.

"By jingo, the moon's out!" said Handforth eagerly. "Look! A full moon, too! Why, it won't be like night flying at all!"

"Perhaps it isn't even necessary to go," said Travers. "If the moon's out, the Southern Hope will be able to see her danger."

"It's misty near the ground—and over the sea," said Nipper. "That's where she'll be hampered. Her captain will be looking out for the Shingle Head light, and he won't see it. He'll think he's safe, while he's really in terrible danger. We must go!"

It was quite true that the weather had suddenly changed again. There was only a breeze now, and except for a few scudding clouds the sky was clear. It was far more favourable for flying than most of the fellows had believed.

Nipper's brain was working rapidly.

"We want to do everything we can to ensure success," he said. "Can some of you fellows prepare a written note? You needn't say much—simply that the Shingle Head Lighthouse is damaged, and that the light is not working. Give a warning that the ship had better make for the open sea."

"But you can't drop a note from an aeroplane!" protested Church.

"It had better be put in a sack, and the sack can be quarter-filled with earth, saw-

dust, or something like that," said Nipper. "Better prepare two of them—even three, if there's time. Then, as I fly over the ship, Handy can drop the message. He can hardly fail to score a bull's-eye with one of them."

"We don't even need two," said Handforth. "Do you think I can miss a whole ship?"

So while one crowd of fellows unroped the aeroplane and wheeled her across Little Side so that she could take off up wind, another crowd rushed away to prepare the messages and the sacks. It was Kirby Keeble Parkington's brilliant idea that the sacks should be daubed on the outside with luminous paint—some paint of his own manufacture.

Excited and breathless the juniors watched whilst Nipper wound the propeller. He had already instructed Handforth to switch on at the given word.

"Contact!" said Nipper abruptly.

He swung the blade again, and with a sweet purring hum the engine came to life.

"Stand well clear, you chaps!" shouted Nipper.

He ran along and leapt into the cockpit just as Handforth was settling down into the passenger's seat. Nipper revved up the engine, and she roared exhilaratingly. At the same moment a furious shout sounded from somewhere across Little side. Aubrey Gore-Pearce was on the scene!

CHAPTER 5.

To the Rescue!

"GOOD luck, old dear!" yelled K. K., staring up at Nipper.

"Thanks!" said Nipper. "I think I'll do it all right. And I say, K. K.!"

"Yes?"

"Get the chaps to bring their motor-bikes, and Handy's Morris Minor out here—have all the headlamps alight, and get a few bonfires going."

"What the dickens——"

"It might not be so easy landing," explained Nipper. "Do your best, old man."

"Leave it to me!" shouted Parkington, understanding.

He ran quickly away from the machine, and he bumped violently into the running figure which had just come up. In fact, it was such a violent bump that the figure went sprawling.

"Sorry," said K. K. blandly.

As Aubrey Gore-Pearce staggered to his feet, the engine of his precious aeroplane opened up full, and she went forward across Little Side, gathering speed rapidly.

"Stop!" howled Aubrey wildly.

"I'm afraid it's too late, Mr. Gore-Pearce," said K. K.

"He'll wreck my machine!" bellowed Aubrey. "He'll kill himself! Get out of my way, confound you! Who knocked me down just now?"



Jokes from readers wanted for this feature! If you know a good rib-tickler, send it along now. A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke; pocket wallets, penknives, "Holiday" Annuals and "Nature" Annuals are also offered as prizes. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

AN IDLE DREAM.

The class had been asked to write an essay on the subject, "What I would do if I had £5,000." One bright lad sat idle until the papers were called for, and then handed in the blank sheet.

"What does this mean?" demanded the teacher angrily. "Where is your essay?"

"That's it," answered the lad. "That's what I'd do if I had £5,000—nothing!"

(L. Hester, 161, Risley Avenue, Tottenham, N.17, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

MORE CORRECT.

Teacher: "I should like you all to take more pride in your personal appearance. Now, you,

Jimmy. How many collars do you wear a week?"

Jimmy: "Please, miss, do you mean how many weeks do I wear a collar?"

(M. Lane, 2, Caroline Street, Wellington, New Zealand, has been awarded a penknife.)

A KNOCK OUT.

Fair young thing (at her first boxing match): "What a cowardly lot of chaps those seconds are! As soon as any trouble starts they step out of the ring!"

(J. Shaw, 15, Freehold Street, Primrose Hill, Huddersfield, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

HIGHEST INTELLIGENCE.

Mistress: "What's this greasy mess?"

Maid: "The candles got wet, ma'am, so I put 'em in the oven to dry."

(N. Lewis, 25, Regent Street, Oakleigh, Victoria, Australia, has been awarded a penknife.)

A WRONG 'UN.

Plumber: "Did you want a plumber, ma'am?"

Lady: "Did I want one! I wrote last July."

Plumber (to his assistant): "Wrong house, mate. Party we're looking for wrote last May."

(W. Rolf, 34, New England Road, Brighton, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

"Quite an accident," said K. K. "In any case, Mr. Gore-Pearce, it doesn't make any difference. Look! She's off! By my grandfather's beard! Did you ever see a prettier take off?"

"Hurrah!" roared the juniors.

"Well done, Nipper!"

Cleanly, gracefully, the light 'plane had lifted from the ground, and now was circling over Big Side, gaining height rapidly. Her engine was settling down into a powerful, steady purr.

Nipper did not waste time in circling the entire school whilst gaining height. After that one half-turn he guided the aeroplane's nose towards the coast, and as he flew he gained altitude.

It seemed to Handforth, in the passenger's seat, that St. Frank's was left behind in a twinkling. He looked back once, and saw below the lighted buildings, now looking very small and dim. Then, when he looked again, there was nothing. The countryside was black and vague. There was no actual mist, but a thick sort of murk, which the moon was vainly attempting to dispel.

There was really more wind than Nipper had led the other to believe. The going was very bumpy; the 'plane tipped and rolled and bumped continuously. Nipper, however, was enjoying himself in a fierce, reckless way. He had not piloted an aeroplane for some time, but this type of machine was familiar to him, and he had full command over her.

"Look!" yelled Handforth suddenly.

Almost before he knew it, they were within sight of Shingle Head. Below, he could see an enormous ruddy glow—the great bonfire which had been lit as a warning to shipping, in place of the lighthouse beam. Nipper was glad of it, for it served as an excellent landmark. He had relied upon that fire from the first. With that to guide him, his task ought not to be so very difficult.

Arriving directly overhead, he zoomed round in a half-turn, and Handforth, looking over, saw some tiny specks round the bonfire; men who were tending it, and who were looking up in amazement at the vague shape of the aeroplane, far above them.

Having got his bearings accurately, Nipper flew down the coast. The wind was behind him now, and the little machine was tearing along at anything between one hundred and one hundred and twenty miles an hour. At such a speed it would be easy enough to over-run the mark unless he was careful. For in one minute he could travel as far as the Southern Hope could travel in an hour—in such a sea.

Following the coastline was child's play. Even through the murk the creamy line of the surf could be seen washing the blackness of the land, where a twinkling light here and there denoted cottages and houses.

Handforth was throbbing with excitement. This was just the kind of adventure he revelled in.

VERY ANTIQUE.

Assistant (in Antique shop): "Yes, sir, this is King Alfred's axe."

Customer (impressed): "I think I'll purchase it."

Assistant: "Very good, sir. A real bargain, a real antique. It's only had seven new shafts and three heads."

(*H. Kutner, 22, St. Andrew's Road, Stoke Newington, N.16, has been awarded a penknife.*)

A CHAMPION.

He was a raw novice at golf. Three times he had tried to hit the ball; for the third time he had missed and the club, slipping out of his grasp, had gone sailing away through the air.

"If you keep on like that, I can see you being champion of England," remarked the caddy.

"What, at golf?" asked the novice hopefully.

"No, at throwing the 'ammer!"

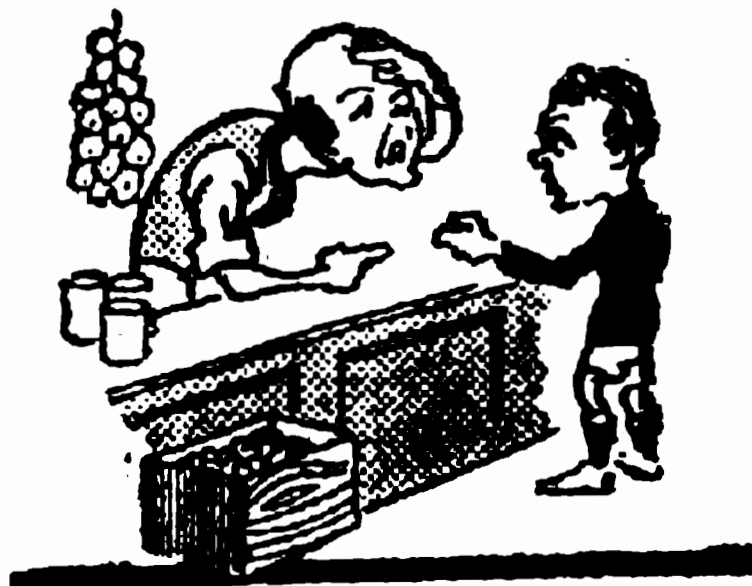
(*J. Cawley, "Austyn," 31, Cavendish Road, Bognor, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

A MINISTERING HAND.

"Can I see the Minister of Agriculture?" inquired the dear old lady.

"Well, he is very busy, madam. What do you want to see him about?"

"I want him to tell me what is wrong with this geranium of mine."



(*T. Overington, The Forge, Durrington, Worthing, has been awarded a penknife.*)

NO CHANGE.

Scotsman (entering gramophone shop): "There's something wrong with that gramophone I bought a year ago."

Shopkeeper: "What's wrong? Isn't it working properly?"

Scotsman: "The gramophone is all right, but the needle is wearing out."

(*B. Coopen, Admiralty Cottage, Harbour End, Broadstairs, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

THE DASH-ABOUT.

Manager: "You want to buck up your ideas, my lad. Look at the way that boy dashes about."

Junior Office-boy: "Oh, 'im! 'E's lookin' for the bloke who's pinched 'is lunch!"

(*F. Evans, 33, St. John's Street, Wolverhampton, has been awarded a penknife.*)

SCENTED.

Small Boy (to grocer): "A cake of soap, please."

Grocer: "Do you want it scented?"

Small Boy: "No, I'll take it with me."

(*C. Hill, 91, Holyhead Road, Handsworth, Birmingham, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

"Keep your eyes skinned, Handy!" yelled Nipper. "We ought to be sighting her soon."

"Hi! Whoa!" roared Handforth. "Haven't we passed her? What's that down there—just behind us? I thought I saw a red light twinkling——"

He gasped as the 'plane zoomed round in a sharply-banked turn, and Nipper caught his breath in as he saw, directly below, a darker blob on the surface of the sea. Intermingled with that blob were one or two glows of yellowish light.

"Yes, it's a ship!" yelled Nipper.

He was startled. How easy it had been to fly right over that vessel and not see her! And there she was, battling against the seas, in dangerous proximity to Shingle Head! That the vessel was the Southern Hope Nipper had no doubt. His heart almost stopped beating when he realised that their warning, even now, might not be in time.

"Get ready, Handy!" he shouted. "I'm going to dive!"

"Go ahead!" roared Handforth.

There was something terrifying in the way the 'plane dropped almost sheer—or so it seemed to Handforth. She dived dizzily, and it was not until the last moment that Nipper straightened her out. With the engine purring, she flew over the Southern Hope, passing directly from stern to bows, and she was only fifteen or twenty feet above the tops of the masts. It was a skilful, daring manoeuvre, but Nipper's hand was as steady as a rock. The 'plane was flying so low that Handforth, leaning over the fuselage, had the impression that he was on a bridge, and that the ship was passing underneath.

Nipper's heart beat rapidly when he detected a little group of smallish figures near the rail, amidships. He knew, in a moment, that they were the Moor View girls—Mary Summers and Irene Manners and the others.

"Now, Handy!" bawled Nipper.

But Handforth had already flung his weighted, luminous sack. He followed its flight down. At first it seemed to be going fairly and squarely amidships; but the wind must have caught it, for it swerved, hit the rail and disappeared in the sea.

"Well I'm dashed!" gasped Handforth. "It's not so easy as I thought!"

Nipper had not seen, for he was concentrating on his own job.

"Did you do it?" he shouted abruptly.

"No!"

Nipper asked no more questions; he caused the machine to bank round, and a moment later she was flying with the wind, and the ship had gone in a twinkling. Once again Nipper performed the same manoeuvre. He came up from the stern, flying even lower this time, and Handforth, profiting by his previous experience, dropped the second sack a shade earlier. He had the satisfaction of seeing it fall slantingly, strike against the roof of a little deck-house, and land on the

deck. He even saw two sailors run out from somewhere, seize the sack, and stare upwards.

"O. K.!" bellowed Handforth. "They've got it!"

His heart leapt, for it seemed to him that one of the ship's masts was only a foot below him as the 'plane shot off. Nipper had, indeed, taken a big chance this time—he had flown dangerously low.

He opened up the engine now and, circling, climbed. He had no intention of flying back to St. Frank's until he received a signal from the ship below them. The note inside that sack had requested Captain Clarke to light a flare as an indication that the message had been received and thoroughly understood.

The first thing that Nipper and Handforth noticed, as they continued circling, was that the Southern Hope had altered her course; already she was beating out for the open Channel, leaving the coastline astern. Captain Clarke, having realised the danger, had taken prompt measures.

Then came the flare. It was not a signal of distress—as this might easily have led to a misunderstanding ashore. It was just a blaze of sudden lurid fire which appeared near the bows. It burned for some moments, and then died out.

"We've done it, Handy—they're safe!" shouted Nipper triumphantly. "Oh, by Jove, I'm glad!"

"You're a giddy marvel!" bawled Handforth.

He was still feeling rather bewildered. Without quite thinking the matter out, he had assumed that this flight would be a long one—a tense and arduous search down the coast. But now that he came to think of it in its true perspective, he knew that the trip was really short. Just a mile or two from St. Frank's to the coast, and then a mile or two down the coast. In an aeroplane, a mere hop.

And now the machine was on its way back.

Nipper did not make the mistake of crossing the coastline at once. He might easily have lost sight of it by doing that, and then he would have been compelled to make a forced landing—with, perhaps, disaster. It was far better to keep to the coastline until he was over the big bonfire on Shingle Head, and then cut inland straight across to the school.

He carried out this plan exactly.

The men round the bonfire waved their hats wildly as the light machine passed overhead. They realised what the plucky juniors had done. Then, after that, St. Frank's seemed to materialise within a minute. A swift rush through the cold air over the dark countryside—and then, below, the gleaming lights of the school buildings. And something else—something which made Nipper heave a sigh of relief.

The four corners of Little Side were clearly shown by blazing bonfires, and at intervals there were motor-cycle and car headlamps, turned on full, bathing the playing pitch with a flood of brilliant light. Nipper also noted



"Why, ain't you heard?" asked the policeman, when Handforth & Co. went up to him.
"All the St. Frank's masters who attended the banquet have been poisoned!"

that the goalposts had been removed. Round about, on all sides of the playing field, were scores of fellows. Seniors as well as juniors had come out. The whole school, of course, had soon got to know of Nipper's plucky exploit, and everybody had been awaiting his return anxiously.

The 'plane, getting lower and lower, purred quietly over the school grounds. Then, turning up wind, she dipped her nose earthwards for the landing.

"Hurrah!"

Even Nipper and Handforth could hear the cheering. Handforth's heart seemed to be in his mouth; Nipper was concentrating all his energies upon his task. The lighting was deceptive, and the wind was tricky. Effecting a good landing would not be an easy task.

"He'll smash her up—I know he'll smash her up!" wailed Aubrey Gore-Pearce, as he stood watching. "The young fool!"

"Oh, shut up, you!" said Chambers, of the Fifth. "Five minutes ago you were saying that your precious machine would never come back—that Nipper would drop her into the sea!"

"He couldn't have been near the sea!" retorted Aubrey. "There hasn't been time. I knew what would happen! The young idiot funk'd it at the last minute, and came back!"

"The less you say, the better!" growled Chambers. "Look at that! A glorious landing! Oh, by Jove, well done!"

There had been a hush as the tiny machine dipped slightly, and then her landing wheels touched the turf, sprang up, touched again, and then ran smoothly along. Although handicapped by the darkness and the dazzling lights, Nipper had made a better landing than Aubrey had made in the full daylight of the afternoon.

"Hurrah!"

"Well done, Nipper!"

Figures were running from all sides. The 'plane slowed down, her engine now completely stopped. She slewed a bit as the wind caught her, and now she was at a standstill.

Handforth was in the act of getting out of the passenger's seat, when a gust of wind, swirling across from the moors, got well under the 'plane's left wing. The wing lifted, the machine tipped; the next second she stood completely on her nose, and went over with a splintering crash!

CHAPTER 6.

Mr. Pycraft in Command!

"O H!"

"Look out—she might burst into flames!"

The rush of fellows was only held up for a moment. Then they ran on again, full of consternation and alarm. It was ex-

traordinarily bad luck that that gust of wind should have turned the machine on her back after Nipper had made such a perfect landing. Within another twenty seconds a score of fellows would have been there to hold her.

"Nipper!" yelled Tommy Watson, who was one of the first to race up.

"All right, old man—I'm not hurt," said Nipper, crawling out from beneath the fuselage. "Where's Handy?"

"Don't bother about me," said Handforth, picking himself up. "I was just tipped out—that's all—not even bruised."

"Thank goodness!" ejaculated Church, who had run up with McClure.

Others were swarming round now, and Aubrey Gore-Pearce was in the forefront.

"Sorry, Mr. Gore-Pearce," said Nipper coolly.

The young man nearly choked.

"Sorry!" he babbled. "You—you infernal young fool! You've wrecked my 'plane!"

"Aren't you exaggerating?" asked Nipper. "The wind tipped her up after she had stopped, and there's not much damage, anyhow. A smashed propeller and one or two broken struts. The wings are all right in the main, and the fuselage——"

"She's wrecked!" wailed Aubrey. "My new 'plane!"

"There's no need to make all this fuss, Gore-Pearce," said Fenton of the Sixth, as he pushed his way forward. "Nipper, you young swœp, I'm afraid you'll get into serious trouble for this. How did you get on?" he added, laying a hand on Nipper's shoulder and bending closer. "Well done, young 'un!" he murmured. "You've got grit!"

"Thanks!" said Nipper warmly. "We gave the warning all right. The ship's safe!"

"Hurrah!"

"Then it doesn't matter about the machine being smashed!" shouted Travers. "They warned the ship, and everything's all right."

But Aubrey Gore-Pearce was in a tearing rage; evidently he did not think that everything was all right.

"I'll have you prosecuted for this!" he fumed. "I'll make you pay to the last penny!"

"Aren't you making rather an exhibition of yourself?" asked Fenton sharply. "You've heard that these boys succeeded in their effort—and a mighty fine effort, too. All honour to them for their pluck!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Fenton!"

"All praise to them for saving a ship from destruction, and saving, perhaps, many precious lives," went on Fenton. "It was no easy job for Nipper to pilot that machine on an evening like this, and to bring her back safely."

"Safely!" howled Aubrey.

"Yes, safely," said Fenton sternly. "Nipper made a perfect landing, and he was in no way to blame for this slight damage. The wind overturned your 'plane, Gore-Pearce, and it might have happened just as

easily if the boys had not gone on this trip at all."

"Don't talk rot!" shouted Aubrey, beside himself. "The machine was roped down, and she would have stayed roped down until the wind dropped. It's all Nipper's fault, and I tell you I'll make him pay!"

Everybody was disgusted with Gore-Pearce.

It was understandable, perhaps, that he should be upset over the damage to his 'plane, but this was not the moment for any such demonstration. The machine had been used for a humane purpose—for going to the rescue of a ship in distress. If Aubrey Gore-Pearce had had any decent feelings he would have taken Nipper's hand, and he would have praised him for what he had done. His exhibition of temper was inexcusable.

All he thought about was his own selfish ends. He was galled, too, by the knowledge that Nipper had succeeded in that desperate effort after he—Aubrey—contemptuously refused to undertake the flight. This mere schoolboy had shown him up. It was this thought which added more to Aubrey's rage than the actual damage to his machine.

"I'll have experts over here to-morrow," said Aubrey hotly. "There'll be a big bill, by gad! The machine will have to be dismantled, carried away in lorries, and a new engine will be necessary, and a new propeller. This is going to cost hundreds of pounds!"

Nipper strode up to him.

"Look here, Mr. Gore-Pearce, things aren't so bad as you make out," said the Remove captain quietly. "I don't think the engine is damaged at all——"

"You get out of my sight!" snarled Aubrey.

"I am sorry you take it so badly," said Nipper. "If you think I wasn't justified in taking your 'plane without permission, Mr. Gore-Pearce, I'll willingly answer for the consequences. I can't say more than that."

"You've said too much!" growled Handforth. "Does he expect us to grovel at his feet and ask his forgiveness? Huh! I've a good mind to punch him on the nose!"

Aubrey Gore-Pearce was in no way mollified.

"You won't make matters better by adding insult to injury!" he snapped. "What's the good of this kid saying that he accepts the responsibility? How can he pay?"

He strode off, and a number of Fourth-Formers and Removites and fags hooted him generously. They were sick of him. His unsportsmanlike conduct had antagonised them completely. The hooting, of course, only enraged Aubrey the more.

As he was nearing the border of Little Side he ran into Mr. Horace Pycraft, the master of the Remove.

MR. PYCRAFT was feeling guilty, and he was very flustered.

Nominally, he was in charge of St. Frank's for the time being. This really meant nothing, for there was only a remote possibility that anything requiring his

authority would happen during the absence of the Housemasters and all the others. Mr. Pycraft, knowing this, had taken a bath. Quite a reasonable, harmless sort of indulgence. A hot bath on a cold evening is quite enjoyable.

But actually Mr. Pycraft was supposed to be on duty in his study in case he was needed by any of the prefects. It was the worst of bad luck that something should have happened during Mr. Pycraft's retirement behind the locked door of the bath-room.

He had gone into the bath-room this evening just before Nipper had started off on that flight, and so he had known nothing about it. The bath-room in the East House, where Mr. Pycraft lived, was very secluded—that is to say, his own particular bath-room. It wasn't until Payne, of the Sixth, had hammered upon his door, and had bawled that he was badly wanted, that Mr. Pycraft knew that anything was wrong.

Now he had appeared, muffled to the eyes, and in a state of considerable irritation. It was against all his principles to come out of doors after indulging in a hot bath. He was convinced that he would be in for a bout of pneumonia. However, duty was duty.

"What is all this?" he demanded petulantly. "Morrow! Here! Why are all these boys out on the playing-fields? What are these motor-cycles and motor-cars doing out here with their headlamps on? Goodness gracious! Cannot I have a bath without—Ahem! I mean, explain!"

"But don't you know, sir?" asked Morrow, surprised.

"If I knew, you stupid fellow, I wouldn't be asking you!" snapped Mr. Pycraft.

"There was a ship in distress off the coast—in danger of going on the rocks because the Shingle Head Lighthouse is out of order," said the prefect. "Nipper took Mr. Gore-Pearce's 'plane and flew out to give warning."

"Nipper?" repeated Mr. Pycraft sharply. "And whom, may I ask, is Nipper?"

"You know as well as I do, sir, that I'm talking about Hamilton, of the Remove," said Morrow warmly.

"And you are telling me that Hamilton, of the Remove, took an aeroplane and flew out to sea?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you trying to joke with me, Morrow? Why are you telling me these absurd lies?"

"If you think they're lies, sir, I've nothing more to say!" snapped Morrow, turning on his heel and walking away.

Mr. Pycraft nearly choked.

"Morrow!" he shouted. "How dare you? Upon my word! Such impertinence!"

It was at this moment that Aubrey Gore-Pearce ran up.

"Are you one of the masters here, sir?" he panted.

"I am."

"Well, my name is Gore-Pearce, sir—Aubrey Gore-Pearce," said the other. "I want to complain to you about what's

happened. My machine's wrecked! These boys——"

"Tell me exactly what has happened, Mr. Gore-Pearce," said the Form-master.

He listened eagerly—even excitedly. Whenever a chance occurred to get in a blow against Nipper or Handforth or the other prominent Removites, Mr. Pycraft seized it with both hands. Aubrey could not have come to a better man for his purpose.

"Scandalous! Disgraceful!" said Mr. Pycraft at length. "I am absolutely amazed that this boy could have piloted the machine, in any case. An astoundingly precocious accomplishment. Of course, he had no right whatever to take your machine, Mr. Gore-Pearce. You may rely upon me to see that he is suitably punished."

"I thought you would look at it like that," said Aubrey, calming down at last. "It's the damage I'm so angry about."

"He took your machine, exposed it to danger—and risked his own life and Handforth's—and then partially wrecked it upon landing," said Mr. Pycraft, nodding. "Yes, I quite understand. Yes, leave this to me."

As a matter of fact, he only had a partial grasp of the situation. He did not fully understand about the saving of the Southern Hope; he was half under the impression that Nipper had taken the machine for a foolhardy joy-ride. He now stalked across Little Side, watched by crowds of fellows, and he singled out Nipper.

"I want to speak to you, Hamilton—and you, too, Handforth!" said Mr. Pycraft importantly. "Come here, both of you!"

Crowds of Removites and Fourth-Formers gathered round. They could hardly conceive it possible that Mr. Pycraft should be on the point of giving Nipper a lecture. Surely this was one of those cases which prove the exception to the rule?

"I understand from Mr. Gore-Pearce, Hamilton, that you borrowed his aeroplane without permission, and that you went off on a reckless and foolhardy flight?" said Mr. Pycraft.

"Yes, sir."

"And I went with him!" said Handforth defiantly.

"You admit that it was reckless and foolhardy?"

"It may have been both, sir, but the circumstances were exceptional," said Nipper.

"I think you know just why I took the machine, sir—and what I did. I have already explained to Mr. Gore-Pearce, and I have said that I am willing to take the consequences."

"I am very glad to hear that—for the consequences will probably be grave," said Mr. Pycraft sourly. "Yes, Hamilton—grave! Indeed, if I were the headmaster of this school I should seriously consider your expulsion."

A murmur of indignant protest went up, and Mr. Pycraft glared round.

"Silence!" he snapped. "As it is, I am in temporary charge," he continued. "That

being the case, Hamilton, I must censure you in the severest possible terms for your outrageous conduct. You and Handforth will both go indoors, and you will remain indoors. I am horrified at your audacity—at your folly. I shall, of course, report you to your Housemaster as soon as he arrives back, and I shall consider it my duty to recommend you for drastic punishment!"

CHAPTER 7.

The School Without Masters!

THE murmur of protest which had gone up before was as nothing compared with the tumult which broke out now.

Mr. Pycraft's decision was unpopular, as might have been expected. It was just like him to take an entirely wrong view of the affair, and to make himself as nasty as possible.

Nipper seemed the coolest fellow there.

"All right, sir—I'm satisfied," he said contentedly.

"Are you attempting to be insolent?" demanded Mr. Pycraft.

"Not at all, sir," said Nipper. "As soon as my Housemaster hears all the facts, I am quite sure that he will understand, and I am not afraid of any punishment that Mr. Wilkes might give me. Or Handforth, either. We've done nothing to be ashamed of."

"I should think not!" sang out K. K. "Everybody's proud of you both!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Three cheers for the hero of Shingle Head!"

"Hurrah!"

Mr. Pycraft looked around him with compressed lips.

"Oh, indeed!" he snapped. "I see! You all consider that these boys were justified in risking their necks and in smashing a visitor's aeroplane? Very well! I shall suggest to Mr. Wilkes that he punishes the entire Junior School!"

The Form-master stalked off with quiet dignity—or what he assumed to be quiet dignity.

SMASHING

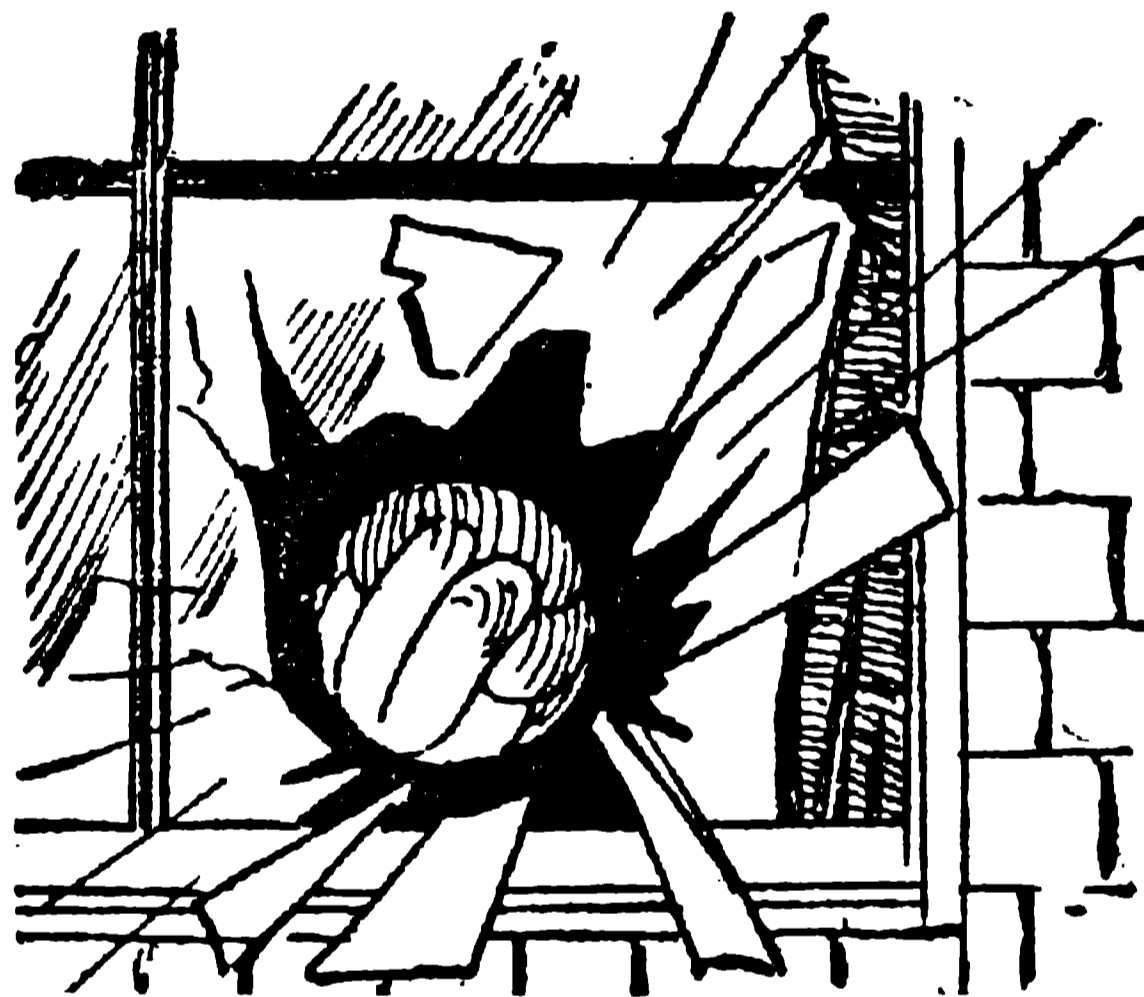
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And the Junior School seethed with indignation.

"THERE'S no need to worry," said Nipper in the Common-room half an hour later. "Everything's all right now. The Southern Hope is safe, and later on we shall get news that she has made port all right."

The Common-room was crowded. The motor-bikes and the cars had been removed, and the "wreckage" of Aubrey's machine had been roped down and made thoroughly secure. A further examination had indicated that the damage was very slight indeed.

"The trouble is, we can't be sure of Pycraft," said Handforth darkly. "We know him, don't we?"

"We ought to," said Church, with feeling. "He was our Form-master for a time, wasn't he?"

"And it's a certainty that he'll spin a rotten yarn to old Wilkey," went on Handforth. "Pieface will get his story in first and make things hot for Nipper and me."

"We can tell him our side of the story afterwards," smiled Nipper.

"It won't have so much effect by then," replied Handforth. "Old Wilkey is all right, but he's human. The fellow who gets his story in first stands the best chance. And don't forget the precious Aubrey. He'll be with Pieface, and they'll both hammer at old Wilkey."

"I don't believe old Wilkey will even give you an impot," said K. K.

But Handforth was by no means convinced. He knew that Mr. Pycraft's tongue could be venomous, and he was very anxious that Mr. Wilkes should have the true end of the story first.

Presently he dragged Church and McClure outside.

"What's the idea?" asked Church.

"We're going to Bannington," said Handforth promptly.

"Now, look here, Handy——"

"We're going to Bannington right away, and blow breaking bounds!" said Handforth. "That dinner is probably over by now, and if we send word in that we want to have a word with old Wilkey, he'll be sport enough to come out."

Church and McClure considered. It wasn't such a bad idea, after all.

"We can get there in twelve minutes or a quarter of an hour," said Handforth eagerly, relieved to find that his chums were not objecting. "Ten minutes with old Wilkey, another ten minutes home, and who's to know? We can easily do it before supper!"

Church grinned.

"Well, you do get a bright wheeze now and again, Handy, old man!" he admitted. "This isn't bad at all. Think of the shock for Pieface when Wilkey comes home! Pieface will think that he's the first with the yarn—and Mr. Wilkes will know all about it!"

"That's just the idea," said Handforth. "Come on! Let's do it!"

They had the Morris Minor out within five minutes. It was quite easy to do so, for there were no masters about. Mr. Pycraft could not be here, there and everywhere all at once.

The Morris Minor purred into Bannington smoothly, went down the length of the High Street, and slowed down as it approached the imposing magnificence of the Grapes Hotel.

"This affair must be more important than we thought," remarked Handforth, staring. "Look at all the cars out there! And the people! I wonder what all the excitement's about?"

"The speeches after dinner, I expect," said Church. "They're being broadcast, aren't they? They've probably got loud-speakers outside."

But this did not seem to be a likely explanation. There was not a big crowd outside the Grapes, as crowds go. There seemed to be a lot of hectic excitement. Men were running about, and Handforth & Co. now saw, to their astonishment, that the cars outside the main entrance were not ordinary cars. Three of them, at least, were ambulances. Police were there, too—lots of police. Inspector Jameson was much in evidence inside the big foyer, talking to an obviously agitated manager.

"My only hat!" said Handforth. "Something must have happened!"

They got out of the car, and were trying to make their way into the hotel, when they were stopped by a police sergeant.

"Sorry, young gents—can't go in," said the officer.

"Oh, come off it, Mr. Watkins!" said Handforth. "We want to see one of our masters."

Sergeant Watkins looked at the boys hard. He knew them well, and he was, in fact, quite friendly with them. He was a stoutish, jolly individual—very different from the pompous Inspector Jameson.

"Haven't you heard?" he asked.

"Heard what?"

"About what's been happening inside?" said the sergeant, jerking a thumb over his shoulder.

"They've had a big dinner, haven't they?" asked Handforth, staring. "The Mayor of Bannington, and all our masters——"

"Not that," said the sergeant. "About them being poisoned, I mean."

"Poisoned!" gasped the three juniors, in one voice.

"Ay—and badly, too," said Sergeant Watkins. "There's going to be a big sensation over this, I can tell you! No wonder the manager of this hotel is looking so worried. It'll do him a terrible lot of harm—not that he's to blame."

"But—but we don't understand!" said Handforth aghast.

"Ptomaine poisoning—that's what it must be, young man," said the sergeant sagely. "I had ptomaine poisoning once—and I know what it is. Ten days in hospital, and

three weeks off duty. And even then I was as weak as a kitten."

Handforth grabbed at his uniformed sleeve.

"You—you mean that all our masters are poisoned?" he ejaculated.

"Every one of them!" said the sergeant. "Not only your masters, but a good many from the Grammar School—and from the River House, too. Ay, and the mayor, and all the other guests!"

"But—but——"

"I was on duty in the banqueting hall, as it happened," went on the sergeant, with apparent relish. "Thank goodness, I wasn't having any of the dinner! It took three or four of them at once—regular ill they were. Then some more followed, until, within about fifteen minutes they were all helpless. Fair amazin', it was!"

"Great Scott!" said Handforth feebly.

Church and McClure were excited and startled, too. The story seemed incredible. Yet, when they looked about them, they had to believe that it was true. Even then a number of people were being carried out on stretchers.

"Look," panted Mac, "there—there's old Wilkey!"

They hurried over, and they were freshly startled when they saw that one of those figures was that of Mr. Alington Wilkes. The unfortunate Housemaster seemed to be unconscious, and his face was pale and haggard and distorted.

Another came out—Mr. Stockdale, of the Modern House; and another—Mr. Crowell, the Remove master.

Handforth & Co. stepped back, dazed. This was a terrible calamity. Handforth managed to get hold of one of the hospital doctors.

"Is it really serious, sir?" he asked hoarsely. "Haven't any of our masters escaped?"

"You are from St. Frank's, aren't you?" asked the doctor. "I'm afraid that nobody has escaped, my boy. It is a case of general poisoning—and very serious. They are all being removed to the hospital, and will receive immediate treatment."

More than that Handforth could not ascertain, and the boys left the hotel.

"This seems to be an evening of sensations," said Church. "I mean, all our masters laid up! That means that old Pycraft is the only one left to take charge!"

Handforth's jaw sagged.

"That's not a sensation!" he said. "That's a tragedy."

CHAPTER 8.

Confusion at St. Frank's!

THERE was only one thing to do—get back to St. Frank's as quickly as possible.

And Handforth drove his faithful little Minor as he had never driven her before. The journey was done in record

time, and when the car arrived at the Triangle, the three juniors poured out of her and dashed into the Ancient House.

"Hallo, what's the rush?" asked Biggleswade, of the Sixth, who was in the lobby.

"Where's everybody?" panted Handforth.

"Having supper, of course," said the prefect. "What's the idea of coming in—Well, I'm hanged!"

Handforth & Co. had rushed off to the dining hall. They burst in and caused a minor sensation. But this was nothing to the sensation they caused a moment later.

"Everybody's poisoned!" yelled Handforth breathlessly.

The tables were well filled, and the fellows stared at the excited newcomers in astonishment.

"What's the idea of bursting in with a silly statement like that?" asked Fenton sharply. "What do you mean, Handforth—'everybody's poisoned'?"

"Mr. Wilkes—old Crowell—all the other masters!" shouted Handforth. "We've just come from Bannington! Something was wrong with that dinner, and everybody's been carted to hospital!"

There was an uproar at once. Seniors and juniors started to their feet, and a crowd swarmed round Handforth & Co. The prefects tried desperately to maintain order. But before Handforth could be questioned, Mr. Pycraft came running in, pale to the lips.

"Fenton! Where's Fenton?" he panted hoarsely. "Oh, Fenton! I want you at once!"

Edgar Fenton pushed his way through the mob, and eyed Mr. Pycraft closely.

"Have you heard the news, then, sir?" he asked.

"Good Heavens, yes!" said Pycraft. "All our masters poisoned—taken to hospital! It is appalling—stupefying! The hotel management has just rung me up and informed me. What shall we do, Fenton? What on earth shall we do?"

"The first thing, sir, is to keep our heads," said Fenton shortly.

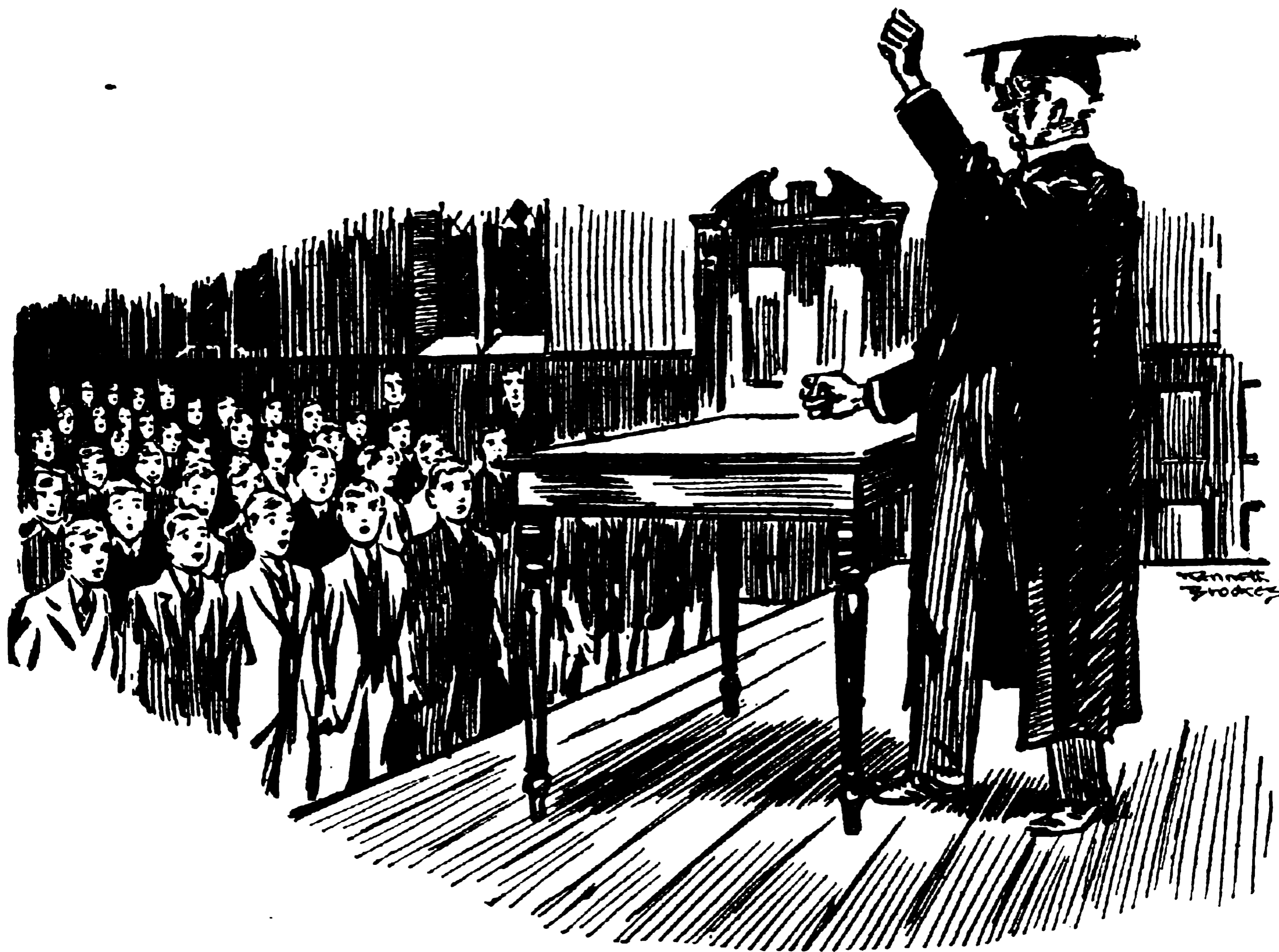
Mr. Pycraft gulped.

"Yes, yes, to be sure!" he said, trying to pull himself together. "I must go over to Bannington at once—at once, to find out the absolute truth of this! I cannot believe it—it is too staggering! I am at my wits' end!"

As the only master left in charge of the school, Mr. Horace Pycraft was not making a very credible exhibition of himself. His conduct was not calculated to restore confidence amongst the boys.

"Perhaps I had better go to Bannington, sir," said Fenton. "You are the only master now; we cannot count Professor Tucker, because nobody ever takes any notice of him. I think you should stay here, sir."

"No, no—certainly not!" said Mr. Pycraft frantically. "I tell you I must go to Bannington—I must find out the truth of this. I have come to you, Fenton, because I want you to take charge during my absence. You



“I have an important announcement to make!” said Mr. Pycraft. “I have been appointed acting headmaster of St. Frank’s!” A gasp of consternation went up from the assembled boys.

understand? You must take full charge.”

And Mr. Pycraft dashed out, excited, flurried, and trembling with nerves. He was hardly the man to rely upon in an emergency.

Mr. Pycraft had hardly gone before Tubbs, the page-boy, pulled Nipper aside.

“You’re wanted on the ‘phone, sir—urgent call!” said Tubbs. “Miss Summers, sir,” he added confidentially.

Nipper dashed off, and was gratified when he heard Mary’s voice at the other end of the wire.

“Oh, Nipper, we’ve had such an adventure,” said the girl. “Thank goodness, we’re safe now. I thought I’d ring you up as quickly as possible to let you know, because I thought you would be anxious.”

“Where are you, old girl?” asked Nipper.

“In Caistowe. We got into the harbour about twenty minutes ago,” said Mary Summers. “Somebody told me that it was you who flew over us in an aeroplane, and dropped the warning. Oh, Nipper, is it true?”

“Well, as a matter of fact, yes—only don’t make a fuss about it,” said Nipper uncomfortably.

“We all thought it was marvellous!” said Mary, her voice full of admiration. “It was too marvellous for words! We should have gone on the rocks if you hadn’t warned us in time. Captain Clarke knew nothing

about the light being out, and he was terribly close to the shore when you dropped that message. He says we only escaped by a matter of minutes!”

“Well, so long as you escaped, that’s all that matters,” said Nipper thankfully.

After he had rung off, he told some of the others—not that they took much notice. In the light of the other sensational news which had struck St. Frank’s like a bomb-shell, the telephone message from the girls was not given the attention it would otherwise have received. The whole school was in a tumult, and the prefects were incapable of keeping order.

Although it was past bedtime, nobody thought of going to bed—nobody took any notice of orders. Juniors were standing about in groups, talking excitedly. Seniors were doing the same. The fags were frankly taking advantage of the situation and larking about to their hearts’ content.

MEANWHILE, Mr. Pycraft, in Mr. Stokes’ car, had arrived in Bannington—at the hospital. He thought it better to go straight to the hospital. He was received by the senior house surgeon.

“Is it true, Dr. Stanhope?” asked the agitated Form-master. “I cannot believe —”

“I’m afraid you will have to believe it, Mr. Pycraft,” said the doctor quietly. “Unfor-

unately, it is only too true. Only one or two of those unfortunate people escaped the poisoning. Some, of course, are worse than others—but I am afraid that all your St. Frank's people are badly down."

"I must see Mr. Wilkes, at least!"

"You cannot possibly see Mr. Wilkes!" said the house surgeon briefly.

"But I tell you I must!" insisted Mr. Pycraft. "Mr. Wilkes is the acting headmaster of St. Frank's, and I want to know what to do until he can resume control! You don't understand, Dr. Stanhope——"

"I understand that you are making a request that I cannot possibly grant," interrupted the doctor impatiently. "When I tell you, Mr. Pycraft, that Mr. Wilkes is unconscious, you will realise, perhaps, the futility of your demand."

"Unconscious!" ejaculated Mr. Pycraft, dazed.

"All these poisoning cases are serious—I do not think any of them will be fatal, but in one or two instances it might easily be touch-and-go," said Dr. Stanhope gravely. "The poisoning is of an acute form. The whole matter is so grave that the police are investigating. Personally, I do not think that there has been any foul play—merely rank carelessness on the part of the chef. However, that is not my business, and I am not concerning myself in it."

"But is there nobody else?" faltered Mr. Pycraft, in a feeble voice. "Mr. Stockdale—or Mr. Stokes? Or even Mr. Crowell, or Mr. Langdale, or Mr. Pagett?"

"Really, my dear sir, you must pull yourself together," said the doctor, not unkindly. "I can quite understand that you are distracted. Please let me repeat that none of the gentlemen you have named is in a condition to see you. They are suffering intensely—some, as I have said, are unconscious. It will be a few days before any of the patients can receive visitors."

"A—a few days! Then how long will it be before they can resume their duties?"

"A fortnight, or three weeks, at the very least," said the doctor. "It may even be a month."

MR. PYCRAFT went away from the hospital feeling almost stunned.

He had expected to hear bad news but not such disastrous news as that. Two or three weeks—perhaps a month! And it was impossible for him to see anybody! The whole thing was like a nightmare!

Amid the chaos of Mr. Pycraft's mind, one necessity thrust itself forward. He must have advice! In this acute situation, he must inform somebody in authority. And Mr. Pycraft's brain functioned to such good purpose that he dashed for the telegraph office—the Bannington office was open all night—and scrawled a long and somewhat incoherent telegram to Sir John Brent, the Chairman of the St. Frank's Governors.

Mr. Pycraft braced himself.

"It is up to me!" he told himself firmly. "Yes, indeed! I must take command of this situation—I must show the governors that I am capable of controlling the school when the necessity arises!"

Coming home from Bannington, he made all sorts of brave plans; but when he arrived in the Triangle, to find it full of boys who should have been in bed, he was nonplussed.

"Boys—boys! What are you doing out here?" he shouted wildly, running up and down with waving arms. "Why are you not in bed?"

"It's no good, sir—they won't go!" said Morrow, of the Sixth. "And you can't blame them. They want to know what's happened. They're anxious for news."

"The only news I have brought, Morrow, is bad news," said Mr. Pycraft. "All the St. Frank's master have been poisoned, and they are all in the hospital, incapable. It may be weeks before they can return to their duties!"

"I say!" ejaculated Morrow, whistling.

Mr. Pycraft did not behave in a way that was calculated to help. After raving up and down for a time, shouting to everybody to be quiet, he fled into his own House, calling to some of the prefects to follow him for a conference.

The boys, of course—particularly the juniors—could easily see that Mr. Pycraft was at his wits' end. And it was only natural, perhaps, that they should take advantage of the general situation. They point blank refused to go to bed, and they ignored all the orders of the prefects. The chaos and confusion was complete. St. Frank's was without a controlling hand.

When Mr. Pycraft entered his study the telephone bell was ringing. He fairly flopped into his chair, and unhooked the receiver.

"Yes, yes, what is it?" he asked. "Who is that? What? I cannot hear you! Who is it?"

"I must speak to Mr. Pycraft," said the calm, steady voice. "This is a trunk call——"

"I am Mr. Pycraft," said the Form-master. "Do you understand? You are speaking to Mr. Pycraft."

"I am glad of that," said the voice. "I am Sir John Brent, and I have only just received your extraordinary telegram!"

CHAPTER 9.

Mr. Pycraft—Headmaster!

THAT voice had the effect of calming Mr. Pycraft considerably. Here was somebody in authority, indeed! The Chairman of the Governors!

"I am thankful, Sir John, that you have communicated with me so promptly," said Mr. Pycraft, fairly clutching at the telephone.

"Yes, it is quite true. I have just come from the Bannington Hospital."

"But I cannot believe this incredible story!" came Sir John's anxious voice. "Tell me everything, Mr. Pycraft!"

Mr. Pycraft told him. And as he did so he became calmer. The recital of the facts steadied his nerves. Moreover, he would now be told what to do.

"Terrible—terrible!" came Sir John's agitated voice, when he had heard all. "Unfortunately, I am in London, and cannot possibly get down to St. Frank's until to-morrow at the earliest. I understand, then, that not one master escaped this dreadful epidemic of poisoning?"

"Not one, sir, except myself," said Mr. Pycraft. "As you know, I did not attend the dinner—which was lucky. There is Professor Tucker, but he is so little interested in the affairs of the school that I doubt if he knows anything of this catastrophe. We cannot possibly rely upon him for help."

"But you are at St. Frank's—and that is something to be thankful for," came Sir John's voice. "I cannot believe that these poisoning cases are as serious as you fear, Mr. Pycraft. Surely the masters will be out and about again within a few days?"

"I sincerely hope so, Sir John, but I was told at the hospital that it may be several weeks."

"Well, we will see—we will see," said Sir John Brent. "In any case, Mr. Pycraft, you must carry on until some fresh plans can be made."

"Carry on?"

"Certainly," said Sir John. "Disastrous as this matter is, the school must be looked after."

"Oh, yes—of course," said Mr. Pycraft. "Of course, Sir John."

"You are there, so I want you to take full charge," said the chairman of the governors. "So you will understand, Mr. Pycraft, that until some fresh arrangements can be made, you are in the position of acting headmaster. You have full authority."

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Pycraft dizzily.

"I will try to get down to-morrow, but, in any case, I will communicate with you,"

continued Sir John. "I am relying upon you, Mr. Pycraft, to maintain order. This is a very serious situation, and you must rise to the occasion."

When Mr. Pycraft rang off, he was feeling more dizzy than ever. Acting Head! Sir John Brent himself had given him his authority. He was in full control of the entire school!

After a brief spell, Mr. Pycraft recovered himself completely. He was no longer a Form-master. He was the Head! His word was law!

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TEN minutes later, Mr. Pycraft was facing the head prefects of the four Houses at St. Frank's—Fenton, Morrow, Reynolds and Payne.

"I have called this conference because I have something of importance to tell you," said Mr. Pycraft, standing with his back to the fire, and thrusting out his chest. "Yes, something of very great importance, indeed!"

The prefects waited, wondering what was coming. The change in Mr. Pycraft was astounding. When they had seen him last he had been a frantic, excited nonentity, incapable of giving a coherent order. Now he was pulling himself up to his full height, and there was a gleam

of almost gleeful satisfaction in his eyes.

"I have been talking with Sir John Brent over the telephone," said Mr. Pycraft, smacking his lips, and rising on tiptoe and falling back on his heels. "Sir John has been acquainted with the situation, and he has, I think, done the best possible thing in the circumstances. He has appointed me headmaster of St. Franks!"

"Wha-a-a-at!" gurgled the four prefects, in one startled voice.

"There is no need for you to appear so astounded," said Mr. Pycraft, frowning. "Who else was there to appoint? I am in full authority. You will please understand that now—once and for all. I shall, of course, take possession of the headmaster's house without delay, and in future you will attend me in the headmaster's study."

The prefects listened, dazed.

"The school, I understand, refuses to go to bed," continued Mr. Pycraft. "Well, we will see about that. You will go at once, and you will see that the entire school is marshalled into Big Hall. I have decided to address the school."

"But—but I'm not sure that it would be wise, sir——" began Fenton.

"I am not interested, Fenton, in what you think," said Mr. Pycraft coldly. "You have heard my orders, and you will obey them. Go!"

He pointed to the door, and his tone was peremptory. The prefects went, reeling slightly as they passed through the doorway.

"Pycraft—Head!" breathed Reynolds, of the Modern House. "Oh, help! What on earth are we going to do?"

"It can't last long, thank goodness!" said Fenton. "It's only a temporary appointment, of course."

"But a man like Pycraft can do all sorts of things in a very short space of time," said Morrow. "Look at him now! As puffed up as a pigeon! I doubt if the fellows will take any notice."

But the fellows did.

The news went round like wildfire. Old Pieface had been instructed by Sir John Brent to take control of the school! Pieface was Head! And he had told the school to collect in Big Hall!

The school collected—not because it was anxious to obey, but because it was filled with curiosity. Everybody wanted to see what would happen; everybody wanted to hear what Pycraft would have to say. Seldom had Big Hall filled so rapidly.

Mr. Pycraft, receiving the information that all the boys were in Big Hall, misunderstood. He took it for granted that the school was in fear and trembling of his authority. It added greatly to his conceit. Already his head was several sizes larger than normal, so to speak. This responsibility, thrust upon him so suddenly and so unexpectedly, turned his head completely.

When he appeared upon the platform, there was a deep hush—and again Mr. Pycraft misunderstood. He strutted like a proud turkey-cock, and if the situation had not been so serious the school would have burst into laughter. But nobody could forget that all the Housemasters and all the other masters were in hospital, gravely ill.

It was as clear as daylight that Mr. Pycraft was eaten up with his own importance. He waited for some moments before addressing the school, continuing to strut up and down—evidently pleased with the impression he was making.

"Boys," he said at last, "you have, of course, heard the—er—unfortunate news. There is no need for me to tell you anything, except that our masters are in hospital. In the meantime, I am in full charge of this school. You will please understand that. You must regard me, from now onwards, as your headmaster."

He paused to allow his words to sink in. A sort of flutter went round the entire school.

"It is past your usual bed-time, but, as it happens, I am glad that you have not yet retired," continued Mr. Pycraft, a cunning note coming into his voice. "In my new capacity as headmaster, there is a duty that I must perform. The first step I shall take, as it were, as Head."

St. Frank's waited, wondering.

"A certain incident took place this evening, and I have already said that I should report it to Mr. Wilkes," continued the new Head. "But, as Mr. Wilkes is not available, I feel that it is my duty to deal with the matter myself. I am sorry that I must begin my regime by inflicting a flogging, but there is no help for it."

"A flogging!" went up a general shout.

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Pycraft. "A boy belonging to the Remove Form committed an unpardonable act of folly this evening——"

"Great Scott! He means Nipper!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Good gad!"

"Will you be silent?" roared Mr. Pycraft. "Hamilton, step forward upon this platform!"

Nipper, rather dazed, obeyed.

"This boy had the audacity to seize an aeroplane belonging to a guest of this school," said Mr. Pycraft, pointing accusingly at Nipper. "Not only that, but he wrecked that aeroplane——"

"No, no!"

"Nipper didn't do it all, sir!"

"The machine was damaged by accident!"

"If there is any further disorder, I shall punish the entire school!" raved Mr. Pycraft. "I am taking this action because I wish to show you that I am in earnest. I am the headmaster of this school, and I am going to make it plain that I shall stand no nonsense! This boy is going to be flogged—as a lesson to him not to be reckless with other people's property."

The school seethed. So this was how Mr. Pycraft was beginning his regime of authority!

"May I speak, sir?" asked Fenton, standing forward.

"What do you wish to say, Fenton?" asked Mr. Pycraft coldly.

"Only that young Hamilton received a telephone message not long ago, sir," said the captain of St. Frank's. "That ship he went out to warn was actually in danger of going on the rocks. But for the message that Hamilton dropped, it would by now have been a complete wreck, with, possibly, the loss of many lives."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Fenton!"

"You will therefore understand, sir, that Hamilton's action in taking Mr. Gore-Pearce's aeroplane was thoroughly justified," continued Fenton firmly. "In my opinion, sir—and, I think, in the opinion of the

school—Hamilton should be honoured for what he did. He acted bravely and risked his own life in order to save the lives of others."

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for Nipper!"

The whole school broke into a tumult of cheering, and Fenton himself came in for a big ovation, too. It was just like the good-hearted captain to put in that word for Nipper.

But Mr. Pycraft was only enraged. He thundered for silence, and when, at last, the tumult ceased, he strode to the edge of the platform.

"I will admit that Hamilton acted bravely," he said grudgingly. "Whether or not he saved the lives of people on that ship I cannot say. But I do know that he acted against the authority of this school—and I intend to punish him. Hamilton, I shall flog you."

"Go ahead, sir," said Nipper. "If you think I deserve it, I am quite content to take it."

AND while the school boiled and bubbled with fury and indignation, Nipper was flogged. Mr. Pycraft himself administered the swishing, and he did it thoroughly. Long before it was over, the Removites and the Fourth-Formers were hooting and jeering—and the prefects made no attempt to quell the tumult. For the prefects themselves were completely out of sympathy with the new Head.

It was rather surprising that Big Hall was cleared after what had happened, and

when the fellows went out they were shouting and cheering and making a tremendous noise. Mr. Pycraft, satisfied at having had his own way, was inwardly dismayed at the uproar he had caused. But he was the Head—he was going to do as he liked—and the school should know it!

He was too full of his own importance to realise that within the brief space of an hour he had got the school seething with latent rebellion.

For the sake of the prefects—who were almost exhausted—the boys consented to go to bed. Nipper, of course, came in for a tremendous ovation in the Remove—he was the hero of the hour. He was a martyr—and that flogging had done a tremendous lot to add to his popularity.

The general feeling was that St. Frank's would stand Pycraft for a bit—but if anything like this happened again, St. Frank's was certainly going to kick him out, neck and crop!

And so the famous old school went to bed, restless and excited. Nobody quite knew what the morrow was to bring. All the masters were incapacitated, and Mr. Horace Pycraft was Head.

One thing, however, was certain—the immediate future was to be full of excitement!

THE END.

(Startling developments at the old school next week, lads. Nipper & Co. in a whirl of excitement. Don't miss this corking yarn, entitled: "REBELLION AT ST. FRANK'S!")

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED

Harold J. Crispin, 10, Halsbury Road, Victoria Park, Cardiff, wants members for his Universal Correspondence Club.

Miss H. M. Michel, 177, Frances Street, Observatory, Johannesburg, Transvaal, S. Africa, asks for girl correspondents; ages 17 and over.

Miss C. Ratzker, 14, Frances Street, Yeoville, Johannesburg, Transvaal, S. Africa, would like girl readers to write her; age 17.

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Miss Jean Fell, Walter Street, Sandhill, Launceston, Tasmania, wants girl correspondents; age 18.

This Topping New Adventure Serial has only Just Begun!



By
**LAD-
BROKE
BLACK**

The VALLEY of HOT SPRINGS!

Eric Denning and his uncle have the key to enormous treasure—and that's why they receive a visitor; one Boss Maunsell, a scoundrel to the backbone!

Foul Play?

"YES, treasure!" the professor went on excitedly. "These runes—I must translate them. Here, help me to take this up to my study. This is most interesting. This must be the object which Peters wished to consult me about. A narwhal's horn."

With difficulty, Eric carried the horn upstairs to the room which the professor used as a study.

"We'd better have dinner, hadn't we, uncle, as Mr. Peters evidently isn't coming?"

For answer, the professor took the youngster by the shoulders, twisted him round, and literally ran him out of the room.

When Eric recovered himself on the landing, it was to find the door closed. There was nothing for it but to report the latest news to Danny.

"We'll give it another hour, Mr. Eric, and then this dinner will have to take the count. It won't last another second."

All the same, in the hope that Mr. Peters might arrive, they sat talking in the kitchen until nearly ten. Danny then went upstairs and knocked at the professor's study door. Eric could hear a sound that was like the rumble of thunder, and the next moment Danny was back.

"No use talking to him about food!" he exclaimed. "He's off on one of them investi-

gations of his. By the looks of it, he means to be up all night."

"Come on, then, Danny, you and I will have some grub. I just can't hold out a moment longer."

It was already after eleven when they had finished, and when Danny had washed up and tidied everything away.

"I wonder what happened to that Mr. Peters?" Danny asked. "It's a rum do when you come to think of it."

Eric, now half-dozing in his chair on the opposite side of the hearth, sat up blinking.

"What do you mean, Danny?"

"The Augantic arrives at five. This bloke comes ashore and shoves his luggage in a taxi. Then he goes away and never comes back."

The old fighter fingered his bulldog jaw.

"Some rum things happen down at the dockside. I know. When I was in the game I've seen some funny things down east. There's blokes as'd cut your throat for sixpence."

"You aren't suggesting that Mr. Peters has been murdered, are you, Danny?"

"You never know. Some of them hooligan gangs'd be up to anything. All I say is, it's rum he hasn't turned up. By what the taxi-driver said, he was a bloke that was a bit balmy, and a balmy bloke with money on him in them parts—well, it's asking for trouble!"

"We'd better sit up for a bit, Danny," Eric said. "By the looks of it, uncle's got his nose to that narwhal's horn and his old runes or whatever they are, and there'll be nobody to receive Mr. Peter if he does turn up."

The Night Raiders!

ERIC settled himself more comfortably in his chair, and abandoning all thought of the missing Arctic explorer, gave himself up to his own reflections. His mother had died when he was a child, and three years before he had lost his father.

Since then he had been under the guardianship of his uncle, Professor Denning. His uncle, who was a professor of Anglo-Saxon

at one of the great universities, had wanted his nephew to follow in his footsteps, and it had taken the greater part of three years for him to discover that that was never likely to happen. Since then he had used his influence to secure for Eric an appointment in the Imperial Police, and the boy was waiting to hear that he had secured the post.

He had lost himself in a dream of the future when he was startled by a loud snore. Sitting up and blinking, Eric saw that Danny had fallen asleep, and that it was already half-past one.

It didn't seem any use sitting up any longer. Obviously, Mr. Peters wasn't coming that night. He might just as well go to bed. Without disturbing Danny, the boy crept upstairs. Before going to his own room he paused to listen at the door of his uncle's study. From the sound of deep breathing and the violent ejaculations that reached his ears, the professor might have been engaged in some physical struggle with desperate foes. With a grin Eric entered his bed-room and closed the door.

Moonlight was streaming through the casement window. Without turning on the light, he made his way across the floor and seated himself on the broad sill. He felt curiously unlike going to bed now, after all. He looked out at the encircling beechwoods. The cottage stood on the summit of the Chilterns, two miles from the village of Chalcombe. The nearest other human habitation was a mile away.

Under the influence of that peaceful scene, Eric had just lost himself in his dreams again, when his quick ear detected a familiar sound. It was very faint at first, but it rapidly grew louder. Suddenly, where the road swept round from the right into the clearing in front of the cottage, the trunks of the beech-trees were picked out by the glare of headlights. Two beams swept into the glade. A car came into view.

"Peters!" Eric exclaimed to himself.

He was in the act of rising when, following the car, there appeared a covered one-ton lorry. The sight of that lorry made the youngster hesitate. The car, assuming it was John Peters arriving, was understandable;

HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

ERIC DENNING, a cheery, adventure-loving youngster, lives with his uncle,

PROFESSOR DENNING. The professor, absent-minded and interested in nothing save his studies, is expecting a visit from John Peters, an Arctic explorer who has discovered a narwhal's horn, on which is written in Runic writing the key to tremendous treasure in Greenland. The horn arrives, but not Peters. For Peters is dead—murdered by one of a gang of scoundrels, the leader of which is

BOSS MAUNSELL. Maunsell is after the narwhal's horn, and he and his gang are on their way to the cottage in the heart of the Chiltern Hills, where Eric and his uncle live. Meanwhile Eric, Professor Denning, and

DANNY, the professor's man-of-all-work and an ex-pugilist, are examining the Runic writing on the horn.

"Eric," exclaims the professor excitedly, "there's something about a treasure here!"

(Now read on.)

but the lorry was a different proposition altogether.

Eric leaned forward and stared through the window. Both the vehicles had stopped. Out of the car four men sprang, and the next moment they were joined by eight others from the lorry.

This was becoming interesting, Eric felt. At any time of the day the arrival of twelve men at that lonely spot would have been remarkable, but at two o'clock in the morning it was something more than extraordinary. It looked suspicious.

The boy slipped off the sill, and, kneeling on the floor, where nobody could catch sight of him, surveyed the scene below. Seen in the moonlight, the faces of the men outside only served to increase his feeling that there was something wrong here. They looked the worst collection of roughs and toughs Eric had ever set eyes on.

They had gathered round a dwarfish-looking figure with a huge head and bowed legs. They were talking in whispers, but so still was the night that Eric could distinguish nearly every word. The little man, who appeared to be the leader, was doing all the talking.

"Get round the house, boys, and lie 'possum until I want you. I'll try peaceful methods first. I'm going to knock 'em up, and say I've come for Mr. Peters' luggage—tell 'em the tale that this Peters has changed his mind and isn't coming out here after all. Then if they part up we'll get away with this narwhal's horn and the secret it contains, and there'll be no trouble."

Eric's body stiffened as he listened. The man continued:

"If that don't go—well, they're for it! It ought to be an easy job!"

"Say, boss, what about the telephone wire?" one of the men interrupted.

The man nodded.

"Cut it," he said shortly. "Best to be on the safe side in case."

With a little glow of excitement Eric watched one of the men swarm up the nearest telephone post. The boy's brain was working swiftly. This was an adventure such as he had never dreamed of. These men had come there to try and get possession of that narwhal's horn with which the professor was so closely closeted in his study. They meant to have it, if not by fraud, then by force. There wasn't a moment to waste. Once the telephone wire was cut it was useless to think of getting in touch with the one policeman at Chalcombe.

Bending low, Eric slipped noiselessly across the floor and downstairs into the kitchen. Danny was still asleep in his chair, but at the touch on his shoulder he was soon awake. In a breathless whisper Eric poured his story into the other's ear. He saw the old pugilist's face change from one of amazement into an expression of almost joy.

"I don't know what it's all about, Mr. Eric, but they've got Mr. Peters for some reason or another, and, as they missed his luggage—this here something or other horn

you were talking about—they come up here after it. They think they've got a soft thing on. Gosh, but we'll show them!"

He was on his feet with the light of battle in his blue eyes.

"Strategy, Mr. Eric. Before you get out of your corner, always think what you're going to do. I've got this here contest taped; and it goes just one round."

Seeing that there were twelve men, Eric felt that Danny was taking too rosy a view of the situation.

"This little guy you was telling me about—he's coming along to tell the tale, ain't he? Well, you open the door for him. I'll be hiding in the recess under the stairs. You go as if to collect Mr. Peters' luggage. Act as if you'd fallen for it. The bigger mug you look, the better."

"And then, Danny?"

A grim meaning look appeared on Danny's battered face. His big fists bunched.

"Just you wait and see, Mr. Eric!"

As he spoke there was a resounding knock on the front door, and the electric bell on the wall rang violently.

"Take off your coat and waistcoat and collar and tie, Mr. Eric," Danny whispered. "Don't hurry. Let 'em think you've been woke up and got out of bed. I'll get to my corner."

Following Danny's advice, Eric divested himself of his collar and tie and coat and waistcoat. Meanwhile, the knocking went on and the bell continued to ring at intervals. Closing the kitchen door, Eric made his way across the hall. In the recess under the stairs he could see the shadowy outline of Danny's burly figure. The youngster's heart began to beat more quickly as he slid back the bolt, and, turning the knob, opened the front door on the chain. A very white face under a mop of grey hair peered at him through the gap.

"Is this Professor Denning's?" the man inquired.

"Yes, that's right," Eric replied, "but I'm afraid he's gone to bed. Who is it, please?"

"I must apologise for rousing you at this hour, but I was sent by my friend, Mr. Peters—Mr. John Peters. Unfortunately he's been taken ill at my place, and he asked me to call for his luggage, which had been sent here by mistake."

"Of course you shall have it. Just one moment."

Eric closed the door, and, having slipped off the chain, opened it again.

"Please come in, won't you? I know my uncle will be very sorry to hear that Mr. Peters has been taken ill. We thought something of the kind must have happened to him when his luggage arrived without him. I'll get you his things in a moment."

The boy closed the door.

"I won't be two seconds," he added. "Will you sit down?"

Boss Maunsell came into the hall. his hands

in the side-pockets of his overcoat. He was smiling. Still playing his part, Eric placed a chair for his visitor, quite close to the recess under the stairs. As the man seated himself, the youngster began to ascend the stairs. Arriving at the top, he made a noise as of opening a door and then glanced over the banisters. From under the stairs crept a dark-coated figure.

Eric held his breath. The black-coated figure was just behind the man's chair. Then, with the speed of lightning, he had stepped forward and to the left. As he did so his fist came up to Boss Maunsell's jaw. Eric saw the man's figure sag in the chair and then slowly slip forward on to the floor.

The boy was just about to cheer Danny's prowess when the door of his uncle's study opened and Professor Denning burst out on to the landing, his eyes blazing, his right hand above his head, shaking a piece of foolscap.

"Eric! Danny! The greatest discovery of of age! Runes of the fifteenth century—one of the strangest mysteries in the history of human civilisation cleared up for all time! The biggest treasure in the world! Gold and platinum! Tons of it!"

He gripped Eric by the arm, and then added excitedly:

"We start for Greenland and the Valley of Hot Springs to-morrow, Eric!"

Trouble Brewing!

ERIC'S mind was in a whirl. Events were happening with such rapidity that he felt almost dazed.

Before he could begin to sort out his jumbled thoughts, however, the professor, with one hand resting on the banisters of the landing and with the other holding a sheet of foolscap, was leaning forward over the well of the staircase, like a lecturer addressing an audience.

"By way of preface, gentlemen, I will run over the known facts. Greenland was discovered in 981, and soon afterwards colonised by a number of families from Iceland. The settlements increased rapidly. In 1406 there were nearly two hundred villages—I cannot proceed, gentlemen, if this noise is going to continue."

From under his shaggy eyes he glared down into the hall. Following the direction of his gaze Eric saw Danny hastily put his hand over his victim's mouth, from which was coming a string of groans.

"I can clap a silencer on him for a bit, guv'nor, but I've got to let him breathe!" Danny exclaimed.

The professor, lost in his subject, merely glared at him.

"Towards the beginning of the fifteenth century the whole of this Norse civilisation disappeared. Its ruins were not discovered until one hundred and fifty years later, when Davis made his famous voyage to Greenland in 1585. Until to-night nobody has known how that civilisation was wiped out."

Drawing himself very erect the professor combed his beard with his fingers, adjusted a pair of horn-rimmed glasses on his nose, and then studied the sheet of foolscap.

"I now come to the remarkable narrative of Eric the Red. His story explains in part the story of that remarkable mystery."

There was a snort from below. Danny had removed his hand for a moment from the lips of the unconscious man.

"Eric the Red was a student of the ancient Norse writing," continued the professor, "and he used that medium—the Runic writing, gentlemen—to set down on a narwhal's horn the tale of his adventures before he died. His body, perfectly preserved, with the narwhal's horn by his side, was found by my friend Mr. John Peters."

Danny, having tied a handkerchief over his victim's mouth, was coming soft-footedly up the stairs. Still imagining that he was addressing a class of students, the professor's voice went booming on.

Meanwhile, Danny was plucking at Eric's arm.

"I found these on that gang leader, Mr. Eric. Regular Woolwich Arsenal. Looks to me as if we're going to have a rough house. Those blokes outside will be getting impatient soon—and then there's going to be plenty of trouble!"

(More excitement in next week's enthralling instalment of this grand serial, lads.)

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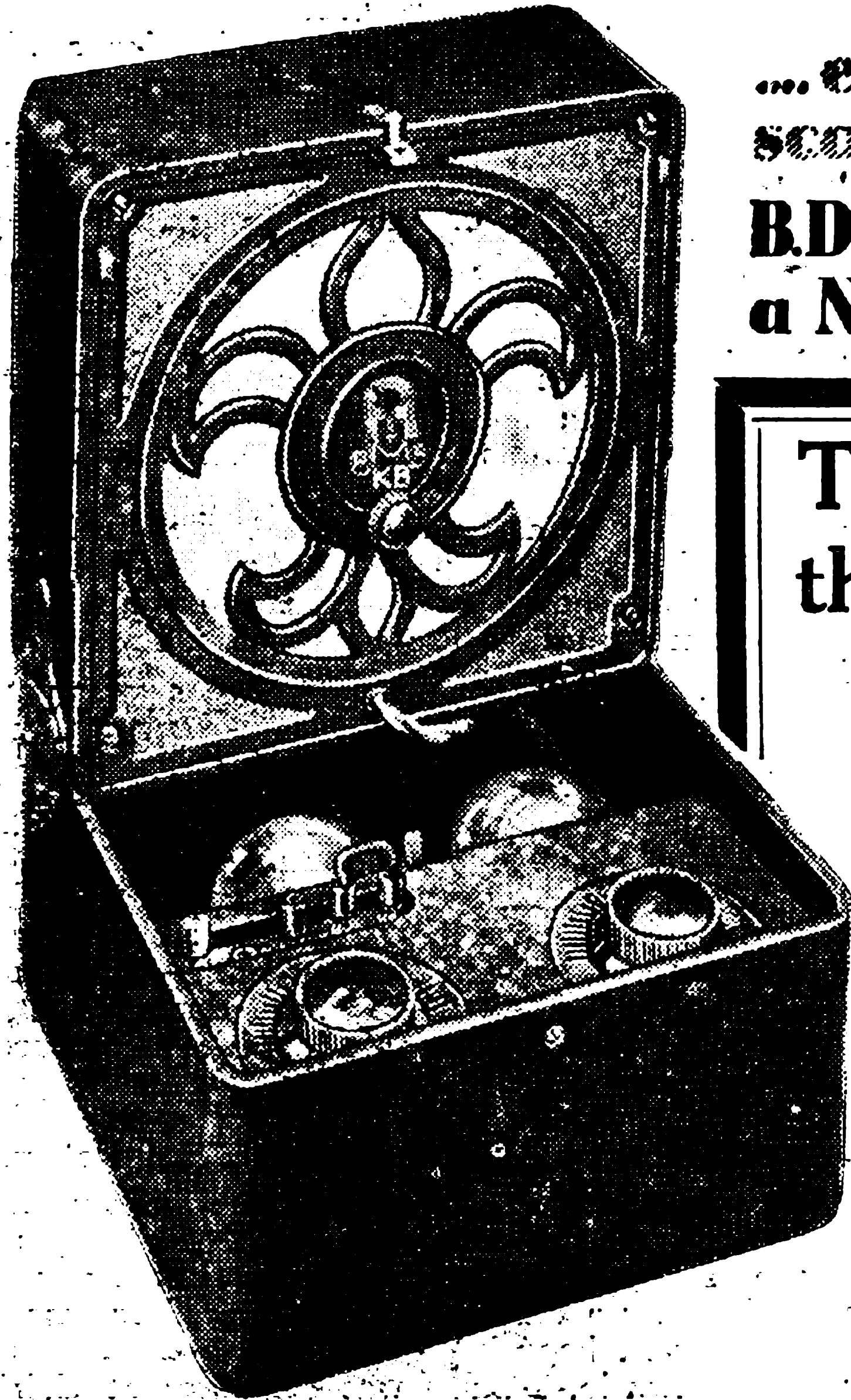
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