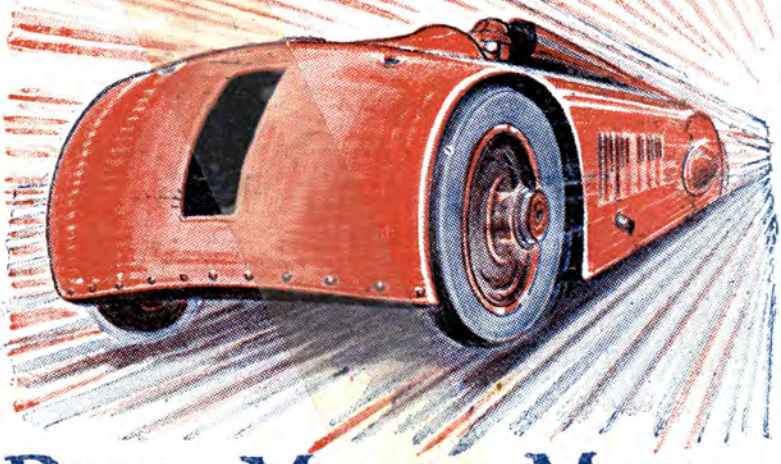
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REAL METAL MODEL OF WORLD'S FASTEST CAR

FREE GIFT NEXT WEEK

New Series No. 81. OUT ON WEDNESDAY. November 19th, 1927.



"Come on!" roared Colonel Glenthorne and, brandishing his walking stick as though it were a sword, he dashed out of the concrete pill-box and charged at an imaginary enemy. Behind him came the man who had lost his memory, his face flushed, his eyes glittering.

DON'T FORGET, BOYS, NEXT WEEK'S GRAND ISSUE CONTAINS A TOPPING FREE GIFT!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

When Nipper, Handforth, Archie Glenthorne, and a few other Removites set out on a cross-country run they little imagine that it is to be the forerunner of a sequence of startlingly dramatic events. Not the least of these is their trip to the battlefields of Flanders—whither they go without first obtaining permission from the Headmaster! This superb yarn will capture your interest from the first chapter.—Ed.

CHAPTER 1.

Hare and Hounds!

"READY?" said Handforth briskly.

The famous leader of Study D at St. Frank's burst into one of the bed-rooms in the Ancient House. And Archie Glenthorne turned round from the mirror, and screw his monocle into his eye.

"Really, old bean!" he protested. "I mean to say, this cyclone business! You absolutely gave me a frightful start!"

"Can't help that!" said Edward Oswald Handforth. "Everybody's waiting for us, you giddy slowcoach!"

"Well, the fact is——"

"Are you ready?" roared Handforth.

"Absolutely!" replied Archie. "That is to say—absolutely not! Odds fits and starts! You're making me go all of a dither, dash you! Kindly buzz off, and leave me to stagger down in due season!"

"Never mind about the season!" said Handforth tartly. "Everybody knows that we're in November! All the fellows are waiting for us, Archie—and I'll give you just twenty seconds to clear out of this dormitory!"

"Good gad! Kindly be reasonable——"

"You'll either go through this doorway on your two feet, like any decent human being, or you'll go through it in a heap!" said Handforth grimly. "I give you your choice, Archie. And don't forget—twenty seconds!"

Archie Glenthorne gave a groan. He knew Handforth of old—and he knew, moreover, that the volcanic leader of Study D would be as good as his word. So Archie hastily made his final preparations, and he was surprised to discover that he was practically ready.

Both he and Handforth were attired in shorts—a chilly-looking costume for this time of the year. But, the fact was, a paper-chase was on the programme for this afternoon. It was a half-holiday at St. Frank's, and the Remove was indulging in a cross-country run. Much to Archie's consterna-

tion, he had been selected as one of the hares; Handforth was the other.

"This'll be a good old gruelling for you, my lad!" said Handforth, as he finished counting twenty seconds. "Ready? Good! We'll buzz down, then!"

"I'm not absolutely certain about the good old footgear," said Archie, in distress. "It's a positive fact, Handy, old onion, that one dashed shoe is slightly soiled, and the effect is——"

"Blow the effect!" interrupted Handforth. "Both your giddy shoes will be more than slightly soiled before long! There's plenty of mud about!"

"Really?" said Archie, with a start. "Oh, I see what you mean! Mud, what? Good gad! You don't mean to say that we shall dash into a lot of mud?"

Handforth wasn't listening.

"I've got an idea about this paper-chase," he said musingly. "And I'm going to let you into the secret, Archie."

"That'll be rather priceless," said Archie, looking at his shoes with great concern.

"Now, the plan is for us to go round by Bannington, isn't it?" went on Edward Oswald. "After that we can choose our own course; but we've got to work round towards Edgemore, and then home."

"That, I believe, is the general scheme," said Archie. "A foul scheme, of course. I mean, all this dashing across the good old countryside. What I mean is—why? It wouldn't matter so much if I were one of the good old hounds, because a hound can drop out of the good old chase if he feels a spasm of that tired sensation. But the hares have to keep on all the time, and keep ahead——"

"I know what a paper-chase is, so don't try to tell me!" broke in Handforth tartly. "And we're going to keep ahead, too, my son! By George! You don't think these silly hounds will catch us, do you? Now, look here, my idea is this!"

"But aren't the dear old boys waiting for us?" said Archie mildly.

"Let 'em wait!"

"But you mentioned, a short epoch ago, that twenty seconds was the limit——"

"My idea is to work round by Bannington—and to buzz through the grounds of Glenthorne Manor," said Handforth. "You know Glenthorne Manor, don't you?"

"Eh? Oh, rather!" said Archie, nodding. "You mean, Glenthorne Manor? Well, as a matter of fact, old boy, I was born there. I believe I *do* know it, now you come to mention the matter."

"You silly ass! It's your pater's place!" said Handforth, glaring. "I'd forgotten that, for the minute! Anyhow, we'll go through the grounds of Glenthorne Manor—and, as it's such a sunny afternoon, there's a distinct chance that we shall run into your pater, and, with luck, we might see that wild man of the woods!"

Archie looked thoughtful.

"But he isn't a wild man, Handy," he protested. "That was only a tale, don't you know——"

"Yes, but everybody calls him the wild man, because his real name isn't known," continued Handforth. "You remember what happened last week, don't you? You remember Armistice Day?"

"Absolutely," nodded Archie. "The poor old cove buzzed out of the offing, and claimed friendship with Major-General Osborne, the chappie who was doing the unveiling stunt. Good gad! Wasn't the general frightfully shocked?"

"He couldn't tell us who the wild man was, though," said Handforth, with another frown. "I'm surprised at the general! What's wrong with his memory?"

The two juniors were referring to the dramatic incident which had occurred a few days earlier—to be exact, on Armistice Day. The unfortunate creature who had been terrorising the district for the past few days had turned out to be a harmless gentleman who had lost his memory, and who had been wandering in the woods, half-starved and half-dead with exposure.

There could be little doubt that the man was a gentleman by birth—that he had been an officer during the Great War. Furthermore, he was an Old Boy of St. Frank's, and Colonel Glenthorne, in the goodness of his heart, had taken the unfortunate into his own home, and was looking after him until his relatives could be traced.

But so far nothing further had been learned.

"The wheeze is for us to kill two birds with one stone," said Handforth briskly. "We'll get well ahead of the hounds on the way to Bannington, and then we shall have time to pause for five minutes or so at Glenthorne Manor. And we might be able to hear some news. What do you say, Archie? Are you game?"

"Oh, rather!" agreed Archie Glenthorne. "Absolutely! As a matter of fact, five minutes' rest will be a priceless boon!"



CHAPTER 2.

The Paper Chase.

ALL St. Frank's was keenly interested in the mystery of the so-called wild man. The very fact that he was an Old Boy intrigued the school. There was something pathetic about his case, too. For many days the unhappy man had been mistaken for a dangerous character. Indeed, by many of the villagers he had been looked upon as a kind of ghost—a creature of the wilds to flee from in terror.

But, actually, the man was perfectly harmless—a gentleman to his finger tips. He did not know who he was, or where he had come from—and he had been penniless, destitute in every possible way. There were two things only that he *did* know—firstly, that he was an Old Boy of St. Frank's, and, secondly,

that he had served in Flanders during the Great War. He seemed to remember, in a vague kind of way, that he had seen service in the Ypres district.

Colonel Glenthorne had taken the poor man into his home, and there, for the time being, the matter rested. St. Frank's was continuing its normal course, and many of the boys had almost forgotten the "wild man." But a few enthusiasts, such as Handforth and Reggie Pitt and Nipper, kept the stranger in their minds. They were determined, if possible, to learn his identity, and to help him to the best of their ability.

Still, this afternoon, a paper chase was on the programme, and a paper chase, in the Remove, was an important event. Handforth was about the only fellow who would have thought of combining the paper chase with an investigation of the hapless stranger.

"And about time, too!" said Nipper sternly, as Handforth and Archie appeared on the School House steps. "We were just coming indoors to grab the pair of you."

"It was Archie's fault," said Handforth.

"Oh, I say," protested Archie indignantly.

"Well, never mind!" chuckled Nipper. "You're here now, and that's the main thing. Are you ready to start?"

"Of course we are," said Handforth. "Come on, Archie."

"Hold on," said Reggie Pitt, of the West House. "Haven't you forgotten something, Handy?"

"No, you ass!" retorted Handforth. "Of course I haven't forgotten anything!"

"Sorry—must have been my mistake," said Reggie. "But I always understood that the hares carried a certain amount of torn paper. Silly of me to make such a blunder."

Handforth started.

"By George!" he said. "I've forgotten my bag! Who's seen my bag? I had it all ready on the study table, and——"

"Here it is!" grinned Church, as he came forward, accompanied by McClure. "We found it on the study table after you'd gone, Handy, so we thought we'd better collar it. Sling it over your shoulder, and get along. It's cold standing about here."

Handforth's faithful chums were two of the hounds, and they had both made up their minds to exert themselves to the utmost in order to catch their leader. It would be a great triumph for them if they did so—for Handforth had been making it plain to everybody in the Remove that whatever happened to Archie, he, at least, would never be collared.

A few minutes later, the two hares were off, and as they went down Bellton Lane Handforth was already beginning to scheme out the general route.

"No need to waste much paper here," he remarked, as he and Archie trotted along. "Just a few odd bits here and there will be enough. Now, my idea is go over the stile, and into Bellton Wood. But we won't keep to the path."

"No?" said Archie. "But they'll rather expect us to, dear old boy."

"Exactly!" nodded Handforth. "They'll expect us to go straight along the path, and they'll run on for two or three hundred yards before they find out that they're wrong. My plan is to cut off, after going about twenty yards, and then we'll take a roundabout course through the trees, laying the trail thickly. Then we'll come back to the path again, do a sharp sprint for two or three hundred yards, and dodge off towards the river. See the wheeze? We'll zig-zag a bit through one or two of those little spinneys, and then we'll bolt over the rustic bridge, and make straight off towards Bannington. By the time the hounds get to the rustic bridge, we shall be a mile ahead of them."

And so the two juniors went on. The trail was spread well, so that there could be no possible break in it.

At last Handforth and Archie were on the main Bannington Road, but they did not keep to the highway for long. They cut off at the first footpath and cut across the fields and meadows towards the outskirts of the town. They had no intention of going straight through Bannington. It would be much better to confuse the hounds by chopping and changing about. But, during all these manœuvres, Handforth kept Glenthorne Manor in mind. He was as determined as ever to learn the latest news concerning the "wild man."

And, ultimately, the two hares broke through a hedge at the bottom of the Glenthorne grounds, and then they skirted the lake. Archie knew every inch of this ground, of course—since he had spent all his childhood there.

"I rather think, Handy, that we're going to be lucky," said Archie, as he turned a corner in the drive. "Odds luck! I'm dashed if the dear old pater isn't taking a good old constitutional on the terrace now—and the stranger is with him!"

Handforth looked across the grounds, bathed in the bright wintry sunshine, and his face flushed with eagerness.

"You're right, Archie!" he declared "By George! This is lucky, and no mistake!"

NEXT WEEK'S THE WEEK, BOYS! LOOK OUT FOR OUR FIRST FREE GIFT! IT'S THE REAL GOODS!



CHAPTER 3.

The Unknown!

COLONEL GLENTHORNE nearly dropped his spectacles in astonishment as the two juniors came running up. For the colonel had recognised his hopeful son.

"Well, bless my soul!" he ejaculated. "Whatever has come over you, Archibald? What on earth are you doing, in that extraordinary rigout? And on such a cold day, too!"

"We're the hares, sir!" panted Handforth, as he came to a halt.

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "I mean to say, pater, I'm not absolutely such a dashed slacker as all that, dash it!"

"Hare and hounds!" murmured the stranger, as he stood looking at the two juniors. "Yes, of course! A paper chase! They caught me last week, when I was running round Caistowe, and——"

"Last week, sir?" said Handforth, staring.

The stranger started, and smiled with sudden self-consciousness.

"No, of course not," he said wearily. "It couldn't have been last week, could it? And yet it seems only a few days ago—— Oh, it's no good!" he added, with a helpless shrug of his shoulders. "I try and try to remember. But what's the use?"

"You mustn't despair," said Colonel Glenthorne gently. "Sooner or later, your memory will return, sir. For the present, just let your mind be at rest—take things easily, and——"

"But how can I?" broke in the stranger, his voice filled with anxiety. "How can I take things easily? I don't know who I am! I don't know my own name, even! And there may be relatives who are anxious about me. I may have a wife—children! Oh, it's maddening! I don't know—I don't remember! What can I do?"

He turned away, and attempted to compose himself. The colonel said nothing, and Handforth and Archie felt very uncomfortable.

The stranger was a pale, refined-looking gentleman. He was well dressed now—wearing borrowed clothes, in fact—but when Colonel Glenthorne had taken him in he had possessed nothing but rags and tatters. For weeks, it seemed, he had been lurking in the woods, living on practically nothing. Some instinct had probably drawn him towards St. Frank's—his old school. It was the only familiar ground that he knew.

Nobody could tell whence he had come. Perhaps his home was right on the other side of the country. It was impossible to say. For, although many advertisements had been put in the papers—indeed, one or two of the London dailies had actually printed special paragraphs about him—nobody had come forward. Not a soul had claimed him.

This was all the more extraordinary—for it was clearly evident that he was an Old Boy of St Frank's. Surely, then, he must have influential relatives somewhere? Why had no inquiries been made for him?

"Hasn't anything been discovered yet, sir?" asked Handforth tentatively. "I don't want to be inquisitive, but——"

"Do not imagine, my boy, that I regard your interest as inquisitiveness," said the stranger, turning. "I am gratified—overjoyed, indeed—to know that you St. Frank's boys are taking such an interest in my welfare. I only wish I could help you. But I can't—I can't! My mind is blank."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "But wasn't there some talk of popping over to Flanders, or Ypres, or some such frightful place?"

"I think your brother is arranging something," said Colonel Glenthorne. "I cannot say for certain, but there is just a chance that he will take our friend across to Ypres by air."

"By George!" said Handforth, his eyes gleaming. "That's a great scheme! By air, eh?"

"Oh, absolutely," said Archie. "The dear old chappie is one of the pilots on the cross-Channel service, you know. A ripping sort of job, in its own way, I should imagine. Not, of course, that I'd care much for it. Too dashed strenuous!"

Archie's eldest brother was a very famous airman, and just recently he had been doing excellent work in civil aviation. He was now one of the star pilots in the cross-Channel service, and occasionally he went in for long-distance flights, and races.

"Look out!" shouted the stranger suddenly.

His outcry was so sudden—so unexpected—that Handforth and Archie jumped. They stared at the man, and they saw that he was pointing excitedly down the terrace.

"The hounds!" he went on. "Quick, boys—quick! They're nearly on you!"

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Handforth. "We've been standing here talking, and I forgot all about——"

"Run—run!" urged the stranger. "Come along! They'll catch us unless we get a move on!"

"I say, really, but——"

Archie paused as the stranger gripped him by the arm and ran off.

"We won't let them take us!" said the man, with a chuckle. "Oh, no! They caught me last time, but not this! Where's the paper? Let me have some——"

"Oh, but I mean—— That is, you see—— Dash it, sir, you mustn't exert yourself like this!" stammered Archie.

But the stranger was running hard, and it was only too evident that he had entered into the spirit of the paper-chase—just as he had done years before, when he had been

a schoolboy at St. Frank's. His mind was still back in his schooldays, and in the excitement of the moment he believed that he was taking part in this paper-chase.



CHAPTER 4.

Archie's Little Dodge!

THE situation was decidedly embarrassing. Shouts in the distance proved that the hounds had spotted the hares, and were racing up at full speed. Until that moment, Handforth and Archie had forgotten all about the hounds, and now that they had been sighted they were in a rare state of anxiety. It would be a dreadful disgrace if they were caught so early in the chase.

Fortunately, Colonel Glenthorne managed to seize hold of the stranger, and he pulled him up.

"Really, my dear sir!" panted the colonel. "You must pull yourself together! You are no longer a schoolboy—indulging in a paper-chase! And you must not exert yourself in this way, quite apart from——"

"I am sorry!" muttered the other, coming to himself with a start. "For the moment I lost myself, and——"

He hardly knew how to finish, and Colonel Glenthorne felt glad. In his heart he held a great pity for this man—this ex-officer, whose mind could only grasp at vague memories of his schooldays.

Handforth and Archie Glenthorne were rushing away at full speed, their minds now concentrated upon the paper-chase once more. For they were in danger of being caught. The hounds were in full cry, and the two startled hares could hear their shouts in close proximity. They hardly dared glance back.

"This way, laddie!" panted Archie, as he swerved down one of the garden paths.

"No, you ass!" shouted Handforth. "They'll cut us off, and——"

"Kindly place yourself in my hands, you frightful chump!" said Archie. "I mean to say, I know every dashed stone in this place, and I rather fancy that I shall be able to diddle these hounds. Leave it to me, old thing!"

Handforth didn't like leaving anything to anybody, but in the special circumstances he was obliged to give way. This was no time for indulging in an argument. The hounds were hot on the trail, and unless some sort of strategy was employed the hares would be caught.

Handforth had no faith whatever in Archie's ability as a strategist, but it was an undoubted fact that Archie knew this ground better than anybody else, and therefore there was a faint chance that the hounds might be eluded.

"Here we go, old thing!" panted Archie, glancing behind him. "Follow me through these trees—and be dashed careful to tread absolutely in my footsteps."

"It doesn't matter about that——"

"You'll pardon me, dear old egg, but it does!" insisted Archie. "Why, dash it, this place is an absolute bog!"

"A what!"

"One of those foul spots where the mud oozes in considerable chunks," said Archie. "Odds horrors and disasters! You don't suppose I'd go through this place unless I knew my way, what? If you do any swerving stunts, you'll absolutely go wallowing into the mire. So kindly follow the good old leader, and ask no questions!"

Handforth's eyes were gleaming now.

"By George!" he said. "A bog, eh? And you know the way through it, Archie! Good man! This will do the beggars in the eye!"

It was certainly a brainy idea of Archie's. As he had said, he knew every inch of this ground, and at this time of the year there were many muddy and boggy sections. The particular ground they were going over now looked solid enough—but Archie knew better. More than once he had come a cropper in this apparently harmless grass.

Actually, there was only one solid pathway through it. Bushes and trees grew on either side, so that any unwary trespasser would know nothing of the treacherous nature of the ground. But Archie, through long use, knew the way by heart.

And Handforth, for once, allowed somebody else to know best. He wanted to lead the way himself, and to select a short cut to the neighbouring road. But if he had done so he would certainly have found himself in trouble.

"The place seems all right, Archie!" he panted as he ran along in Archie's wake. "Why couldn't we cut off here, to the left, and——"

"Kindly allow me to do all the leading, old lad!" interrupted Archie, glancing over his shoulder. "If we go off to the left, we shall find ourselves up to our necks in mire. This is one of those priceless occasions when the long road is the shorter."

"All right—you know best!" admitted Handforth grudgingly. "If only we can dish those hounds, we shall——"

He broke off as a number of shouts sounded in the rear, and, glancing back, Handforth grinned with joy. Two or three of the hounds were already in difficulties. Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey and a few others had thought it a good move to cut across the "grass" in an endeavour to head the hares off. But they soon found out their mistake!

For they had hardly taken five steps before they were up to their ankles in thick mud. The next moment they were floundering helplessly, and the other hounds were obliged to pause, in order to help their hapless companions.

"That's done 'em all right!" chuckled Handforth gloatingly. "Good man, Archie! We shall get clear now—unless these chaps jump to the truth and follow our footsteps!"

"Imposs, dear old chunk of cheese!" said Archie. "The ground isn't particularly soft where we're running, you know, and they'll never spot the footprints. At least, not mine. I'm not so absolutely sure about yours, dear old chap. I mean to say, when a chappie is blessed with footprints like yours——"

"If you're trying to say that I've got big feet, you silly ass, I'll punch you on the nose!" roared Handforth. "And you'd better let me do the leading now—we're out of this bog, by the look of it."

"No, we're not," replied Archie. "There's about another twenty yards to go, and then we shall find ourselves just against the road. And, laddie, we can be half a mile on our way before the good old hounds get clear of the soup."

As a matter of fact, this turned out to be the truth. The hounds, in their eagerness to catch the hares, found that it was a case of "more haste, less speed." They did not pick their way carefully, and, as a result, practically all of them were soon wallowing in the bog. It wasn't a dangerous bog, of course—only a perfectly harmless stretch of muddy ground, in which their legs sank up to the knees. By helping one another, they could easily get out. But a full ten minutes had elapsed before they found themselves on the other side of that treacherous stretch. By then, as they could easily guess, the hounds had vanished into the distance.

To make things even more difficult for the hounds, a trace of fog had crept up from the sea, and the lane, in the distance ahead, was becoming hazy. The trail of paper, nevertheless, was perfectly visible.

And Edward Oswald Handforth and Archie Glenthorne went on their way, a full mile ahead—once more content. They felt confident now that they would complete the run without being caught.

But the adventures of this afternoon were not yet over!



CHAPTER 5.

The Voice through the Fog!

HERE it comes!" said Handforth, with a grunt.

"Absolutely, dash it!" agreed Archie. "Not, of course, that we can expect anything else in November. I mean to say, fogs are rather the order of the day, what?"

"Yes, but it's like the cheek of this blessed fog to come down on us during a paper chase!" grumbled Handforth. "It might have had the decency to wait until to-morrow, or something!"

"That's the worst of fogs, old boy—they're so disobliging," said Archie mildly. "All the same, if you talk to this one nicely, it's just possible that it may lift."

Handforth grunted.

"If you're trying to be funny, you'll notice that I'm not laughing!" he said tartly. "Not that we need worry ourselves about this fog, in any case. What does it matter? It may be all to our advantage. As long as we lay the trail clearly, the hounds will be able to follow us—and yet they won't be able to spot us at a distance."

Archie nodded.

"Exactly what I was thinking," he agreed. "It won't worry me if the fog comes down in absolute chunks. The more of it, the better."

During the past five minutes a great change had occurred in the weather. The sun was still shining, in all probability—for there was not much likelihood that clouds had overcast the sky. But this thick blanket of fog which had come rolling up from the sea had obscured the whole countryside.

The hares were now on the Edgemore road, their object being to make their way through the little hamlet, and then continue onwards to Bannington Moor, and afterwards make tracks for St. Frank's by a devious course. This fog would certainly help them in the programme—for they would be able to perform all sorts of twists and turns on the open space of the moor without being seen from a distance. It was now practically certain that they would reach home without being caught.

In consequence of this, Handforth was rather inclined to take things easily. But Archie, the slacker, would have none of it. Archie believed in doing things thoroughly. When he slacked, he made a good job of it, and he was famed throughout St. Frank's for his laziness. But on those rare occasions when he went in for long-distance running he was just as thorough in his methods. His one idea now was to get back to St. Frank's in the shortest possible amount of time. The sooner they arrived, the more honour.

"Steady on, Archie!" panted Handforth. "No need to fag ourselves out like this, you chump! We can slow down a bit now."

"Absolutely not!" said Archie firmly. "Laddie, I'm surprised at you! Besides, the sooner we can get back, the sooner we shall be able to imbibe a dose of the good old brew. The cup that cheers, what! Good gad! It makes trickles run down my back to think of it!"

"This is no time to think about tea!" growled Handforth. "If you're thirsty, we can stop at one of these brooks, and——"

"I absolutely refuse to have anything to do with cold water!" said Archie frigidly. "And as for slowing down, I refuse to——"

He broke off abruptly, for just at that moment a hazy obstruction loomed up immediately ahead. The fog was so thick here that the two runners had almost collided with the obstruction before they could pull



Thinking they could take a short cut, Reggie Pitt and the other "hounds" suddenly found themselves wallowing up to their ankles in thick mud. Handforth and Archie—the "hares"—turned back and grinned from the distance. "That's done 'em!" chuckled Handy.

up. They now saw that it was a baker's cart. The horse, quite indifferent to the fog, had pulled over to the side of the road, and was sampling the hedge.

"Well, this is like somebody's carelessness!" said Handforth indignantly. "Fancy letting the cart stand broadside across the road in this way! What if we'd been coming along in my Austin Seven? We should have crashed straight into it!"

"If we'd been coming along in your Austin Seven, old bean, we should probably have been crawling at about one mile an hour," Archie reminded him. "And we were running at about sixteen."

They made their way round the end of the cart, and were preparing to continue their run. The fog was so thick that they could not even see the house at which the cart had stopped. But it was quite obvious that a house, or a cottage, at least, was somewhere near. For the van had no driver, and the flap at the rear was open, exposing a friendly assortment of loaves, cakes, and sundry pastries.

Just then a voice sounded through the fog—surprisingly distinct. There was something uncanny about it, too—for it came so loudly and so unexpectedly. The two juniors paused in sheer surprise—not because of the voice itself, but because of the words that were uttered.

"I'm very sorry, Mrs Compton, but my orders are that you cannot have any more bread until the bill is paid. And that's final. The guv'nor distinctly told me this morning, before I came out, that I wasn't to leave so much as a roll."

Another voice came now—a woman's voice—in a tone of alarm.

"But you must!" she said. "To-morrow I will come to the shop, and I will see your employer, and——"

"I'm very sorry, ma'am, but I've got to obey orders!" insisted the man's voice, firmly and gruffly. "If you pay the bill I can let you have the bread. But you seem to forget that this account has been running on now for more than five weeks, and——"

"Yes, I know that!" interrupted the woman's voice. "But I've told you that my husband is in London, and that——"

"Well, there it is, Mrs. Compton," said the man. "I'm only wasting my time by staying here. I'm sorry I can't leave the bread, but I've got to obey the guv'nor's orders. And I don't mind sayin' that he was thunderin' wild yesterday when I got back without the money. Why, unless that bill's paid this week, I shall have to find it out of my own pocket."

"Yes, but——"

"So I'll bid you good-afternoon, ma'am," went on the man. "I'll take it as a favour if you'll call and see the guv'nor to-morrow—so as to straighten this thing out. I can't afford to pay no five weeks' bill—an' that's what it'll come to unless you fix things up at the shop."

A crunch of footsteps sounded, and Archie still hesitated. But Handforth was no longer in a mood for hesitation. He was an im-

pulsive fellow at all times, and the words he had just heard had aroused him.

"Look here, Archie!" he muttered. "We've got to see this fellow and scrag him! Of all the nerve! Did you hear what he was saying? He refused to leave any bread——"

"Absolutely, old boy!" said Archie in distress. "How absolutely frightful! I mean to say, there was the poor old woman—or young woman, as the case might be—absolutely pleading for bread, and the foul blighter refused! I rather think that we ought to burgle the good old cart, and——"

"Never mind about burgling the cart!" interrupted Handforth. "We'll grab this chap, and ask him what the dickens he means. And unless he can give us a good explanation we'll chuck him in the first ditch!"

Handforth spoke very indignantly. He had forgotten all about the paper chase now—and Archie, too, was equally intrigued. Then they were both startled to hear the sound of cart-wheels crunching on the muddy road, and the next moment they both ran forward into the fog—to have a few words with that baker's man!



CHAPTER 6.

Handy is Inquisitive!

STRICTLY speaking, neither Handforth nor Archie Glenthorne had any right to question this baker's man and ask him his customer's business. But, in the circumstances, both the juniors forgot that little point. Here was the case of a woman who evidently needed bread badly, and who had been refused. And it wasn't as if she were living right in a village, or a town, where she could obtain supplies from some other source.

This little cottage was miles from anywhere—and in weather of this kind it was obviously impossible for the unfortunate lady to walk into Edgemore, or any of the other surrounding villages. Besides, why should she? Here was the baker's cart, at her very door—and the man had refused to leave any bread, simply because a paltry bill was unpaid!

"Hey, wait a minute, there!" sang out Handforth in a husky whisper, as he clutched at the rear of the departing baker's cart. "I say, driver—just a word!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "In fact, two words, dash you!"

The driver, in considerable surprise, pulled his steed to a standstill, while the two juniors came round to the front of the cart and stared up at the man through the fog. At such close quarters they could see that the fellow was an ordinary-looking specimen, with no particular distinctions. In fact, he was what one would expect a baker's man to look like.

"What's the matter, young gents?" he asked in surprise.

"Just get down from that cart and talk to me for a minute!" said Handforth aggressively. "I don't know who you are, or where you come from, but you're a rotter!"

"Look here——"

"A callous rotter!" insisted Handforth, as the man, with an angry expression on his face, climbed down from the cart. "What the dickens do you mean by refusing to leave bread at that little cottage just now?"

"Oh!" said the man, frowning. "So you heard me, did you?"

"Yes, we did!" said Handforth. "We heard you telling Mrs. Compton, or Compson, or whatever her name is, that your guv'nor gave orders that you weren't to leave any more bread. What's the idea? People can't live without bread!"

"And my guv'nor can't live without his bills being paid!" retorted the man, with some heat. "And I should like to know what it's got to do with you, anyhow! Who do you think you are, ordering me to get down off my cart, an'——"

"Just a minute, laddie—just a minute!" interrupted Archie. "This is a case, Handy, where a little tact is required. I'm frightfully afraid that you're somewhat too blunt. The fact is, old cheese, we happened to overhear the distressing conversation a few moments ago. Perhaps you'll be good enough to give us the facts of the case?"

The man looked somewhat mollified.

"That's better!" he growled. "But I don't allow no schoolboys to cheek me! Understand? If you want to know the truth, I'm sorry for the woman—and I'd leave her the bread in a minute, if I could. But orders is orders——"

"Blow your orders!" said Handforth indignantly. "Couldn't you leave the bread, in any case, and risk whether you got paid for it? Was there anything to prevent you charging it up to yourself?"

"That's all very well, young gent—but I've done that sort of thing before!" said the man. "Not once—not twice—but many times! And how many times have I got paid? I can't afford to go deliverin' bread here, there, and everywhere, and charge it up to myself! I'm sorry for the woman, but——"

"Well, look here—who is she, and why can't she pay?" demanded Handforth. "We'll jolly soon take some bread to her. But before doing that we want to know a few facts. Who is she?"

"I don't know no more than you do," replied the baker's man. "Her name's Mrs. Compton—that's all. She lives in this little cottage with a couple of kiddies——"

"Kiddies!" roared Handforth. "And you refused to leave any bread!"

"I can't help that——"

"You won't be able to help my fist in a minute!" said Handforth gruffly. "You callous rotter! You'd let people starve rather than——"

"Just a moment, old dear!" put in Archie gently. "We understand that this lady is named Mrs. Compton, and that she lives in

the cottage with two little children. She hasn't been able to pay her bill for five weeks, and all supplies have been cut off in their prime. Is that the posish?"

"Yes, that's it!" said the man, nodding. "It's a rare pity, too—because the lady is—— Well, she's a lady. Not like one o' these 'ere countrywomen. Not what you might call a villager, or the wife of a labourer. She's a real sort of lady. An' them kiddies of hers are just the nicest youngsters you ever set eyes on."

Handforth was about to explode again, but Archie forestalled him.

"And why did your guv'nor give orders that the bread was to be stopped?" he asked. "If this lady is so dashed ladylike, what's the idea? Couldn't you trust her for another week? Hasn't she got a husband, or anything like that? I mean to say, hasn't she got somebody to pay the good old bills?"

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"She keeps talking about her husband—but that's all we know," he replied. "He's in London—working on a job there. But, somehow, he don't seem to send any money. An' people can't live nowadays without payin' their bills. That's all I know about it, young gents."

"And who's your guv'nor, anyway?" said Handforth.

"Why, Mr. Day, of Bannington," replied the man. "He's not so bad—he's let lots of accounts run on, and then got left in the cart. He can't afford to be doin' that sort o' thing every day, you know. At first, this Mrs. Compton paid for the bread as she took it. Then she asked for a week's account, an' the guv'nor agreed. Well, it was all right as long as it went on for a week, or a fortnight—but when it comes to five weeks——"

"Well, there we are!" interrupted Archie. "It's no good arguing about the matter. As far as I can see, Handy, the good old baker has something to be said on his side. And kindly remember that the hounds are creeping nearer and nearer to us as we wait here. So let's collar a goodly assortment of loaves and cakes and things, and dash to the rescue."

The baker's man looked rather pleased.

"I'm glad to hear it, young gents," he said. "I can tell you, it hurt me to come away from that cottage without leaving any bread. An' me thinkin' o' those kiddies, too. . What would you like to take?"

"Whatever we take, we're not going to pay for!" said Handforth firmly. "We can't pay for it—because we haven't any pockets in these running shorts of ours. But we're St. Frank's chaps, and if you can't trust us——"

"That'll be all right, sir!" said the man. "I know that you young gents are from the big school. I'll tell the guv'nor, when I get back, and——"

But Handforth did not wait for the man to finish. He went round to the back of the cart, and proceeded to fill his arms with loaves of bread. One might have imagined that Mrs. Compton had two dozen children, instead of two—but Handforth always believed in doing everything thoroughly.

When the baker's cart went on its way, it was the lighter by at least ten loaves, and two or three dozen cakes and pastries!



CHAPTER 7.

A Delicate Situation

"JUST a minute, old scout!" said Archie hastily.

Some railings had loomed up through the fog, and Archie judged—rightly—that they were close to the little cottage. And an idea had occurred to the Genial Ass of the Remove.

"Why wait?" said Handforth. "This poor woman is waiting for the bread——"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "At the same time, Handy, we've got to be careful. I mean to say, the baker's chappie distinctly told us that this Mrs. Compton is a lady. I mean to say, a person, as it were, of some refinement. And it seems to me that she might jib with considerable emphasis if we dash up with these consignments of foodstuff."

"Jib?" repeated Handforth, staring. "Why should she jib?"

"Well, I mean to say—charity, and all that sort of thing," said Archie awkwardly. "No refined person likes to accept bread and cakes and things from strangers, what? It's quite on the cards, Handy, that she'll be very polite, and so forth, and then where are we? I mean, we can't very well dash along over the rest of the course, loaded up with all this stuff!"

"If she won't accept it, we can leave it on the windowsill!" said Handforth brilliantly.

"A rather brainy idea, but it doesn't appeal to me," said Archie. "What we've got to do, old boy, is to use tact. I know jolly well that you don't possess any tact—but that's where I come in. We've got to make the lady accept this bread as a loan. Do you see? And first of all we've got to verify what the baker has said."

"Verify it?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "For example, I'll trickle in, and interview the good lady, and find out if there's any fodder in the house. If there's nothing at all, we shall know jolly well that it's an extreme case, and that we shall be justified in——"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Handforth, frowning. "It's all very well to talk about getting into the house, and finding out if there's any food there, but how do you propose to do it? We can't go to the woman's cupboard, and inspect it, can we?"

"Not exactly," said Archie. "But there are ways and means, laddie—providing we use our brains. Now, I suggest that we get up some sort of a stunt. I'm not really good at these things, because the old grey matter refuses to function at such times. But it so happens that I've clicked on this occasion. In other words, a dazzling idea has bazzed through the top storey."

"Let's hear it!" said Handforth briefly.

"Well, here we are," said Archie. "Kindly grab hold of my arm, Handy. Grab it, and hang on. My scheme is to do a good limping act. You'll assist me to the door of this cottage, and we'll kindly ask the lady for assistance."

"By George, that's not so bad!" said Handforth. "Pretend to be lame, eh? She'll swallow it whole, too, because it's the most natural thing under the sun, when you come to think of it. In that way, we'll get inside. But how shall we find out if there's any food in the place?"

"After we're in," said Archie, "I'll make sundry remarks to the effect that a cup of tea would be somewhat priceless."

"And if she's got any tea, she'll promptly trot it out, eh?" said Handforth, nodding. "And if she hasn't got any, she'll make excuses. I must say, Archie, you're revealing a glimpse of brain power that I never suspected. We'll put these loaves and things under the hedge in the meantime."

It was a simple enough plan, and it was almost certain to work. Leaning heavily on Handforth's arm, Archie limped with exaggerated painfulness. They both found the gate in the little fence, and proceeded towards the front door. Arriving, Handforth rapped upon it with his usual force, and the door shook ominously.

A moment later, it was opened, and a rather sad-looking lady stood there, regarding the boys with some surprise. She was quietly dressed, and they could see, at the first glance, that she was intensely worried. There was a haggard expression on her face, and her eyes were red, as though she had just been crying.

In the background were two little children—a small boy of perhaps five or six, and a little girl a year younger. They were both very neatly dressed, and they, too, were red-eyed.

"Awfully sorry to trouble you, but do you mind if we come in?" said Handforth blunderingly. "The fact is——"

"Is your friend hurt?" asked Mrs. Compton quickly.

Archie made no intelligible reply, but he uttered a low groan. Handforth heaved him up, and propped him against the doorpost. Mrs. Compton could do nothing else but back away, and allow the two juniors to enter. It was quite a small cottage, and the front door opened right into the main living-room.

In less than half a minute Handforth and Archie were seated, and the door had been closed. One rather significant fact was that the fire grate was empty. The room was very cold, and there seemed to be no artificial heat of any kind. Mrs. Compton herself had a shawl over her shoulders, and the two children were wearing outdoor overcoats.

"We're from St. Frank's!" explained Handforth. "A paper-chase, you know—and the hounds will be coming along presently. I don't think Archie—that's this chap—has really got a sprained ankle, but you never know. I suppose there isn't any chance of a cup of tea, or something like that, just to buck him up?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie feebly. "The very stuff, dear lady! A cup of good old tea will shove me to rights."

Mrs. Compton looked very distressed.

"I—I—— Yes, of course!" she said confusedly. "I would give you a cup of tea in a moment, but I am afraid—— You see, the—the coal hasn't been delivered, and we are unable to have a fire at the moment."

"No fire?" said Handforth, aghast, looking round the little room. "Do you mean to say that—— No fire!" he added dazedly. "And it's November, you know! Oh, I say, this is too frightful!"

"I—I expect the coal will be delivered soon," said Mrs. Compton hastily.

"Well, could you let my friend have a glass of milk, then?" said Handforth. "A glass of milk would do fine. Anything, in fact, in the food line. Even a piece of bread-and-butter——"

But the expression on Mrs. Compton's face was eloquent enough. It was quite clear that she was unable to provide anything whatever in the food line. The story of the baker's man was true in every detail. This poor lady and her little children were not only without any food, but without fires. Their plight was truly serious.

Something certainly had to be done!



CHAPTER 8.

Handy Does His Best!

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE was shocked.

He was not only shocked at the plight of Mrs. Compton and her children, but at his own position. For Archie had a keen sense of the fitness of things, and he seemed to feel, right in his bones, that the lady would resent any suggestion of help.

She was obviously refined, and the very idea of her accepting a cash advance from two schoolboys was not to be thought of. Archie went hot and cold all over when he saw that Handforth was preparing to speak, for it needed no massive brain-power on Archie's part to guess what Handforth had in mind.

Archie suddenly remembered, too, that they had left all those loaves of bread, and the cakes and pastries, outside, just under

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the hedge. They were safe enough there, of course, but if Handforth made any mention of them the fat would be in the fire. Mrs. Compton would certainly refuse to accept them.

"What-ho!" observed Archie, rising to his feet and stamping vigorously. "Good gad! The jolly old ankle appears to be absolutely cured. I rather think, Handy, old article, that we'd better be shoving along, what?"

Handforth, who had his mouth open, ready to give utterance, gave a gasp.

"Eh?" he ejaculated. "What the—"

"Absolutely!" said Archie sternly. "It's time for us to be pushing off, old dear."

"But your ankle——"

"My ankle is absolutely all correct-oh!" said Archie. "In other words, laddie, it's time for us to be on our way."

Handforth was quite bewildered. He couldn't understand why Archie had suddenly wrecked the whole scheme. As long as Archie pretended to be injured, they had an excuse for remaining in the cottage. But now that the ankle had so miraculously recovered the only recourse was to get out. And Handforth badly wanted to stay.

"You silly ass!" he said, frowning. "You don't know what you're talking about! Your ankle's just as bad as it was when we came in. You sit there and take a rest. Now, Mrs. Compton, look here!" added Handforth, turning to the lady. "What I want to say is this——"

"Exactly, old dear!" put in Archie hastily. "In other words, exactly! Or, to be more precise, absolutely! Kindly remember that the hounds are dashing along in full pursuit——"

"Blow the hounds!" growled Handforth. "What the dickens does it matter about the hounds when these poor people are starving——"

"Oh, frightfully sorry!" gasped Archie. "A thousand pardons!"

He had suddenly blundered against the table, sending it a yard across the floor, and causing a terrific clatter. Fortunately the noise had drowned the latter part of Handforth's sentence, so that Mrs. Compton had not heard his words. That, of course, had been Archie's intention.

"Odds disasters and horrors!" murmured Archie to himself. "The blighter will absolutely shove his foot into it if he goes on like this!" He turned to the door and made a grab at the latch. "This way, Handy!" he added audibly. "We've got to be moving on——"

"Rats!" roared Handforth. "You can go if you like, but——"

"Kindly be guided by me, dear old

volcano!" said Archie, seizing Handforth by the arm and pinching him so tightly that Handforth winced. "Dash it, we're intruding here. I mean to say, it's a bit thick when two chappies barge in and——"

"We're not barging in!" denied Handforth. "And I'm not going to leave this cottage until——"

"Listen!" gasped Archie, as a sudden idea occurred to him. "What's that? Did I hear footsteps, laddie? The hounds! Good gad! We've got to fly!"

And Handforth, before he could raise any objections, was lugged through the doorway, and Archie succeeded in getting him to the little gate before he could recover his breath. Through the fog they could just see the figure of Mrs. Compton in the doorway of the cottage. Archie waved to her.

"Thanks frightfully, dear lady!" he called. "We shall probably see you later, but at the moment we're too frightfully hurried to remain. Now, then, Handy, we've got to rustle!"

Archie succeeded in getting his companion nearly a hundred yards down the road before Handforth recovered his usual aggressiveness. Then he came to a dead halt, and refused to go another yard.

"What's the idea, you silly dummy?" he demanded thickly. "What's the wheeze? What do you mean by dragging me out of that cottage, and pulling me——"

"You frightfully frightful fright!" interrupted Archie coldly.

"Eh?"

"You priceless chunk of Portland cement!"

"Look here——"

"Absolutely!" insisted Archie. "I've always had an idea, Handy, that your head was made of granite. But, dash it, it's nothing but Portland cement! It's absolutely fixed—and contains nothing but solidity!"

"You silly idiot!" roared Handforth, grabbing Archie by the shoulder and glaring into his face. "What the dickens do you mean by insulting me like this?"

"I mean, you hopeless dummy, that you've got no more tact than——"

"But—but——"

"I mean it!" said Archie sternly. "Why, you silly chump, do you suppose for one moment that Mrs. Compton would accept money?"

"Eh? Why wouldn't she accept money?"

"Why?" said Archie, in amazement. "He asks me why!" he added, appealing to the fog. "Don't you understand, Handy, that there are certain things that you mustn't do? It would be all right if that woman was the wife of a labourer, or somebody of that sort. But she's refined—she's a lady in every sense—and what do you suppose she would do if you asked her to accept five bob, or——"

"Rats!" interrupted Handforth. "I wasn't going to ask her to accept five bob. My idea was to offer her a quid!"

Archie gave a hopeless gulp.

"What's the difference, dash you?" he demanded. "Five bob or a quid or twenty quid! It's all the same—it's the same thing in the end. You mustn't offer to lend her any money at all."

"But I wasn't going to offer to lend her any money!" shouted Handforth, exasperated. "I wanted to give it to her!"

"But that would be worse still!" groaned Archie. "You mustn't lend it or give it."

"In that case, how the dickens are we going to help her?"

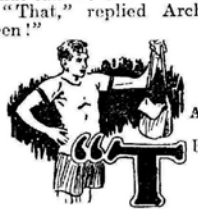
"By diplomatic methods, old boy," replied Archie firmly. "It's the only possible way. You mustn't blunder into a thing of this kind. If you do, you'll be courting disaster. Mrs. Compton will refuse help from us—she'll refuse it in a firm, stern voice. You can't expect anything else. Dash it, people like that have some sort of pride, don't you know? They'd rather starve than accept charity!"

"My only hat!" said Handforth, staring. "I hadn't thought of that, you know!"

"You never do think of these things, you frightful fright!" said Archie, with a sigh of relief. "But thank goodness I've driven some sense into that head of yours at last! As for all that bread and stuff, we shall have to leave it there—or take it away with us. We can't offer it to Mrs. Compton."

"Then what are we going to do?" asked Handforth. "It's all very well for you to stand there and say what we *mustn't* do. But what *can* we do?"

"That," replied Archie, "remains to be seen!"



CHAPTER 9.

A Surprise for the Hounds!

"WHAT'S funny!" said Nipper, frowning.

He had suddenly pulled up short, and the other hounds with him all came to a halt, too. They were rather breathless, for they had been running hard, and they gathered round the Remove skipper in a group.

"I'm jiggered if I can understand it!" said Church, scratching his head. "How the dickens have the hares managed to get so far ahead? We've been running tremendously hard, and yet there's no sign of them!"

"They can't be far off now," said Reggie Pitt cheerfully. "If it wasn't for this fog, we'd probably see them two or three hundred yards ahead. What's the idea of pulling up like this? We're wasting time!"

"But the trail had ended," said Nipper. "We can't go on any further."

It was quite true. There was no longer any paper trail on the road. This was rather strange, too, for the road was fairly wide here, and up till now the trail had been very distinct. In fact, the hounds had commented upon the lavishness of the hares in distributing their paper scraps along the road.

"Here we are!" sang out McClure suddenly. "There are two scraps of paper up here all by themselves."

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Harry Gresham, running up. "He's right, you fellows! What does it mean?"

"Well, I can suggest only one explanation," said Church, with a grunt. "Handy must have been distributing the trail!"

"Looks like it!" agreed Nipper, nodding. "For the last half-mile he's been throwing it away by the handful, and now he only puts down one or two scraps. I suppose we'd better carry on."

"It's the only thing to do," agreed Pitt. "The hares couldn't have broken through the hedges here, because they're too thick—and the trail certainly leads onwards. We'd better follow it up and see where we get to."

They were on a straight stretch of the lane, but they could only see a few feet ahead, owing to the enveloping fog. It was thicker than ever now—and had settled down over the countryside like a white pall.

"Here's another scrap of paper!" announced Church, after they had covered twenty yards or so. "I say, we'll scrag those giddy hares when we do catch them! Of all the nerve—leaving one or two scraps of paper every hundred yards! How can they expect us to follow them at all? And this fog only makes it worse!"

"Look out!" shouted Nipper, as he swerved. "There's something in the way here. Hold on, you fellows!"

Something had loomed out of the fog, and they could now see that it was a cart of some kind. It had pulled up close to a little wayside inn, and the driver was on the point of climbing into his seat, preparatory to driving off.

Quite by chance Nipper glanced at the rear flap of the cart, and then he started. The rest of the hounds were surging past, continuing on their way.

"Just a minute!" shouted Nipper. "Look here, you fellows! What do you make of this?"

They crowded round, and there were many shouts as Nipper pulled a haversack from the back of the cart. It was certainly one of those haversacks which Handforth and Archie had taken with them at the beginning of the chase.

"Well, of all the giddy swindles!" said Pitt indignantly. "Don't you understand, you fellows? They've tricked us!"

"What!"

"They've shoved their bag on the back of that baker's cart, and we've been following the cart, instead of the hares!" said Pitt. "We might have come four or five miles out of our way, for all we know!"

A perfect roar of indignation went up.

"But that's not playing the game at all!" yelled Jack Grey. "How can we expect to catch the hares if they——"

"Hold on!" interrupted Nipper. "Handy wouldn't play such a trick as this—deliberately. There must be something behind it—something that we can't understand. Perhaps the man on the cart will be able to explain."

"A thing like this will need some explaining!" growled Church. "It's just like Handy, though! Goodness knows what games he's been up to! No wonder we couldn't catch him!"

"Now then, young gents—now then!" expostulated the baker's man, as he found the crowd of hounds swarming round his cart. "What's the idea? None of your tricks, you know! Only last week I had a rare time with some o' them Grammar School boys——"

"Don't worry about your precious load!" interrupted Nipper. "We only want to ask you a few questions. Have you seen anything of the hares?"

"The which?" said the baker's man.

"The hares."

"Oh, you mean them two young gents down the road?" said the man. "Yes, I've seen 'em."

"Where were they?" went up a general chorus.

"Why, about a mile back, close to Mrs. Compton's cottage," replied the man. "You mean the two young gents who were dressed in the same sort of togs as you are?"

"Yes," replied Nipper. "They're the hares, and we're the hounds. This is a paper chase, you know. A cross-country run——"

"Yes, I know!" agreed the man. "Well, the last I see o' them two boys was down by Mrs. Compton's cottage. They stopped me, they did, an' put all sorts of impudent questions to me about that woman."

"What woman?" asked Church.

"Why they happened to overhear me tellin' Mrs. Compton that I couldn't leave any more bread," replied the man. "What's more, they bought a big armful of loaves, to say nothin' of cakes an' pastries an' other things. They didn't pay me—but promised to make things right with Mr. Day, my guv'nor."

"That's enough, thanks!" said Nipper grimly. "All right, baker, we won't detain you any longer. Thanks for the information!"

The cart rattled away, and the hounds gathered together in an excited group.

"What does it mean?" asked Gresham.

"Well, isn't it as clear as daylight?" said Nipper. "Handy overheard that baker's man refusing to leave any bread at some cottage, and he promptly went and bought half the cart! I expect he and Archie are now in that cottage! They've forgotten all about the paper chase, and we shall catch them red-handed if we buzz back quickly enough."

"But the trail continued right on to here!" protested McClure.

"Of course it did—because Handforth left his bag on the back of the cart!" said Pitt, grinning. "Just like one of Handy's careless pieces of work, too. I don't suppose for a moment that he left it there deliberately—and the jerking of the cart caused the paper to fall out, and it automatically laid the

trail. No wonder it was so clear about half a mile back. Come on, you fellows!"

And the hounds, with one accord, turned on their heels, and retraced their steps down the foggy lane.



CHAPTER 10.

Solving the Difficulty!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH paced up and down the foggy lane, his brow corrugated in thought, his hands clasped behind his back. He had been doing this for some minutes, and Archie Glenthorne, after watching for some moments, thought fit to expostulate.

"I quite appreciate, dear old boy, that the mind is somewhat exercised," he said. "But what's the exact idea of this Felix business?"

Handforth came to a sudden halt.

"This what?" he said, glaring.

"I mean to say, why dash up and down, doing an imitation of Felix the Cat?" protested Archie. "Dash it, you absolutely disturb me! How can I think while you're waltzing about——"

"We've got to do something, Archie!" interrupted Handforth grimly. "We've got to do something for Mrs. Compton. Understand? It's no good sticking out here in the fog, jawing at one another. This is where action is required."

"Absolutely, old fruit!" agreed Archie. "For once we are in accord. At the same time, kindly let me remind you that nothing can be done without tact——"

"Rats!" interrupted Handforth. "I'm fed up with you and your tact! Here's this poor woman and her kiddies starving to death! They haven't any coal in the house, or any food, and you're quibbling about things that don't matter a toss!"

"But they do matter, old boy!" said Archie quietly. "It's absolutely impossible for us to rally round with cash offerings and——"

Archie broke off suddenly. Footsteps could he heard approaching. The fog was very thick now—a dense fog which enveloped the lane completely. The two juniors could only see for a few yards in either direction. Even the hedges were only blurred, indistinct outlines on either hand.

"By George!" whispered Handforth, with a start. "The hounds!"

"You'll pardon me disagreeing with you, old horse, but I don't think the hounds have iron hobnails in their running shoes," said Archie. "I gather that the approaching merchant is one of the local inhabitants. We'll wait until he goes by before continuing our discussion."

A figure loomed out of the fog, and resolved itself into a small boy. As Archie had suspected, he was wearing hobnailed boots—and excessively large ones, too. He was carrying a school satchel, and he gave the two St. Frank's fellows a close and intimate inspection as he strolled past.

"Good gad!" murmured Archie, with a start.

"What's the matter?" asked Edward Oswald.

"Nothing is the matter, dear old boy—absolutely nothing!" replied Archie. "But a brain-wave has just buzzed through the attic. I was thinking of absolutely nothing, when—zing!—it arrived! In other words, a scheme!"

"Yes, but——"

Archie did not stop to explain. He ran off down the lane, and caught the country boy by the shoulder.

"Just a minute, laddie!" said Archie. "There's stout work for you to do!"

"Work?" repeated the boy, staring. "'Ere, what's the idea? I don't know you, and I don't——"

"A matter of no importance!" broke in Archie. "Kindly come with me, and listen to the priceless plan."

But there was no need for the boy to come, for Handforth had arrived by this time.

"Here," said Archie, "we have the ambassador."

"We have the what?" said Handforth.

"The ambassador, dear old cheese," replied Archie. "This young gentleman is now about to be loaded with loaves of bread, cheesecakes, custard-tarts, and various other delicate pastries. In other words, the problem is solved. Mrs. Compton and her family can now indulge in their belated breakfast."

"But—but——"

"It's easy!" went on Archie. "Laddie, come with me!" he added, turning to the staring country boy. "Come with me, and you shall receive a rich reward for a small service."

The country boy scratched his head.

"Blessed if I know what you're gettin' at, young gent!" he said, puzzled. "If you're gettin' up to any larks——"

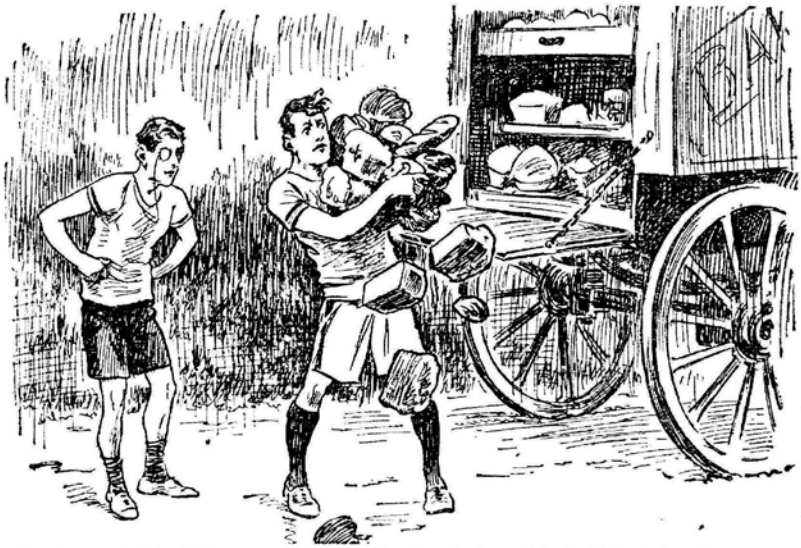
"No larks at all!" Archie assured him. "I take it that you are partial to doughnuts? I have a small task that will occupy three or four minutes of your time—and, in payment for that time, you shall receive one dozen doughnuts. What is the verdict?"

"Let's have a look at the doughnuts!" said the country boy sceptically.

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Handforth. "You mean——"

"Exactly!" smiled Archie. "A simple scheme, what? I rather pride myself, Handy, that the grey matter has been working to some purpose. I confess that I should have preferred a more presentable ambassador, but this is no time for quibbling. Any port in a storm, what?"

They went a few further yards down the lane, and halted at the spot where they had left the spoils. There, just in the hedge, were the loaves of bread and the various bags of pastry that had been obtained from the baker's cart. The country boy opened his eyes wonderingly as Archie proceeded to pile him up with loaves of bread.



Handforth proceeded to fill his arms with loaves of bread and cakes, while Archie looked on in amusement. Handy always did a thing thoroughly, and certainly poor Mrs. Compton and her two children would not lack bread and cakes for a few days!

"'Ere, what's the idea?" he protested.

"I gather that you know Mrs. Compton's cottage?" asked Archie.

"Why, yes—it's just along the road——"

"You must go to that cottage, knock on the door, and deliver this consignment of fodder," proceeded Archie. "If Mrs. Compton makes any inquiries as to the source of your instructions, kindly remain dumb. Just deliver the stuff, and say nothing."

"Yes, but I ain't no errand boy!" protested the youngster. "I don't see why I should——"

"Upon your return, you will receive this bag of one dozen doughnuts," said Archie impressively. "But, remember, you will only receive it on condition that you remain dumb. Deliver these things at Mrs. Compton's door, and say these words: 'The goods from Mr. Day's shop, ma'am.' Is that quite clear, laddie?"

"No, I'm blessed if it is!" said the boy. "'Ow can I say all that, if I'm to be dumb?"

"You are to be dumb except for those few words," said Archie patiently. "What I mean to say is, if Mrs. Compton puts any questions to you, just shake your head, and look silly. I gather that the latter part will be perfectly easy."

Fortunately, the boy did not appreciate the significance of Archie's remark, and he soon went off with his load of food.

"By George, I believe it'll work!" whispered Handforth, with satisfaction.

They stood there, listening intently. They heard the crunch of the boy's feet as he neared the cottage; they heard him open the gate, and proceed up the short path to the front door. Then they heard him give a resounding thud upon the woodwork. A murmur of voices soon followed, and then the door was closed again. The boy appeared out of the fog.

Handforth and Archie went forward to meet him.

"Well?" demanded Handforth. "What did Mrs. Compton say?"

"Nothink!" replied the boy. "Leastways, she only seemed surprised, an' I said what you told me, about the stuff comin' from Mr. Day's shop, an' then I come away. What about them doughnuts?"

"Here they are, and my blessing goes with them," said Archie, beaming. "Let me urge you, however, not to eat them all at one sitting."

The boy opened the bag hastily, and took a good look at the doughnuts—and an expression of relief came into his eyes. Obviously, he had not believed in this story, but seeing was believing. He went off, perfectly happy, and Archie looked at Handforth in a contented way.

"Well, that's that, old article!" he said genially. "Now we must deal with the problem of the coal!"

Handy nodded.

"Quite right," he agreed. "Now we've started we'll do the job thoroughly. Mrs. Compton hasn't any coal, so it's up to us to get her some!"



CHAPTER 11.

The Hounds on the Trail!

"I T can't be far away now," said Reggie Pitt.

"No, we ought to be coming across it at any minute," said Nipper, as he peered through the blanket of fog. "The last man we asked said that Mrs. Compton's cottage was only half a mile further along this lane, and we couldn't have missed it. We've walked nearly a mile since then."

"There's somebody else coming, I believe," put in Church. "It might be a good idea to stop him, and ask direction."

The hounds were hot on the trail again. They could only see the hedges indistinctly, but they were quite certain that they had not passed any cottage. And now they were aware of approaching footsteps. A moment later, the figure of a boy appeared, and the boy was holding a large bag in his hand. The mouth of it was open, and the mouth of the boy was full of doughnuts.

"He seems to be too busy to talk," grinned Pitt. "Still, we might as well stop him. Half a minute, young 'un!"

The boy halted, and looked at the white apparitions in the fog. It wasn't often he saw so many schoolboys dressed in running shorts, and wandering over the countryside on a cold, foggy November day.

"Anything I can do, young gents?" he asked eagerly, apparently having the idea that another bag of doughnuts might result.

"Yes, you can tell us where Mrs. Compton's cottage is," said Nipper. "We hate interrupting your meal like this, but——"

"Why, Mrs. Compton's cottage is only about a hundred yards further on," said the boy, pointing vaguely into the fog. "You can't miss it. It's just on the right, round the bend. I've just come from it, as a matter of fact."

"Good man!" said Nipper. "Thanks!"

The hounds proceeded on their way, leaving the rustic boy looking somewhat disappointed.

"Now we shall get to know something definite, at any rate," said Nipper, as he and the other hounds came within sight of the little cottage. "I think the rest of you had better stay out there, in the road. There's no sense in a whole crowd of us going up to the door."

"But suppose Handy and Archie are still in there?" asked Gresham. "We want to grab them, don't we?"

"I'll give you a hail if I catch sight of them," said Nipper. "Perhaps you'd better come, too, Reggie. Just the two of us."

The other hounds were rather disappointed, but they remained out in the road while Nipper and Reggie Pitt opened the gate, and walked up to the door. Their rubber shoes made no sounds as they drew near, and Nipper was about to raise his hand to rap on the door, when he paused. A woman's voice was coming through the ill-fitting door quite distinctly.

"Yes, dear, I expect daddy sent it," she was saying. "But you mustn't ask any questions."

"You said that daddy would send us some food, didn't you, mummy?" came a child's voice. "But why doesn't daddy come? We haven't seen him for weeks and weeks, and ——"

"Hush, dear!" said the woman's voice. "Daddy is very busy in London. He's working hard, so that we can be comfortable here. Daddy will come back one day, and then——"

"I say," murmured Pitt. "Let's knock!"

"Yes," said Nipper. "But it's pretty clear that Handy and Archie aren't in the cottage now, or we shouldn't have heard Mrs. Compton talking to the kiddie like that. It won't take us half a tick to make an inquiry."

He rapped on the door; a moment later it was opened, and Mrs. Compton herself stood there. In the rear were two children, busily engaged in eating some pastries.

Mrs. Compton looked at the juniors inquiringly.

"Awfully sorry to disturb you, Mrs. Compton, but can you tell me if two of our fellows have been here?" asked Nipper. "I think you're Mrs. Compton, aren't you?"

"Yes," she replied. "Two of your boys did come here not long ago. I think one of them was slightly hurt. But they've gone now."

"Thanks," said Nipper. "So that's the explanation," he went on, turning to Reggie. "A sprained ankle, or something like that, I suppose. Could you tell us which direction they took when they left?" he added, turning again to Mrs. Compton. "Did they say anything about going straight back to St. Frank's by the footpath, or——"

"They didn't say anything," she interrupted. "Indeed, they left rather hurriedly—they seemed to be having a little argument."

It was quite clear that no definite information could be obtained from the lady, and there was no sense in remaining. Handforth and Archie had been here, as the hounds had suspected, and now they were on their way again. But it was clear enough that the hares had forgotten all about the paper chase, since there was no trace of a trail anywhere. The hounds, therefore, would not be able to continue the chase as it had been originally planned.

"Thanks very much, Mrs. Compton," said Nipper, smiling gratefully. "We shall have to find them, somehow, but this fog makes it difficult. I'm sorry we had to trouble you."

She smiled at them and closed the door. They could not help noticing the look of relief that was in her eyes. There was a certain sadness lurking behind that relieved expression, however, and the two juniors

were feeling a little sombre as they returned to the gate, where the other hounds were waiting.

"They've gone," said Nipper briefly.

"We'll scrag them when we find them!" said Church with a grunt. "It's just like Handy! The whole thing's messed up now——"

"Listen!" interrupted one of the other juniors, holding up a hand. "I heard something just now!"

They all stood motionless and listened intently. The fog had the effect of stilling everything. No sound at all came to their ears for the first moment or two, but then the silence was broken by a well-known roar.

"You're mad!" came a voice out of the fog. "It was a good idea about the bread, Archie, but you're dotty to talk about going into Bannington now. We've got to get some fuel for——"

"Absolutely!" came Archie's voice. "But I'd like to point out, you frightful ass, that we can't find fuel on the roadside. Neither can we grab it out of the thin air."

Nipper grinned.

"They're not very far off, after all," he chuckled. "Come on—we'll make a rush and grab 'em!"

The hounds, with one accord, tore down the road, and in less than a minute two white figures loomed up. They were standing in the middle of the lane, arguing. The next moment they were completely surrounded!



CHAPTER 12.

Rallying Round.

"CHUCK it!" said Handforth tartly, as he shook off several of the hands that grasped him. "What's the idea, you silly idiots? What are you grabbing me for?"

"You're caught!" said Church and McClure in one voice.

"Eh? Caught?" repeated Handforth with a start. "Oh, you mean——"

"You and Archie are the hares, and we've collared you, my lads!" said Harry Gresham. "You can't get away from it——"

"Rats!" interrupted Handforth, frowning. "Rot! Piffle! The paper chase is off—and it's been off for the last half-hour! Something a jolly sight more important has cropped up!"

"You've led us a fine dance, anyhow!" said Nipper. "I suppose it was your bright idea, Handy, to leave your knapsack on the back of that baker's cart? Do you know that we followed that baker's cart for a couple of miles, thinking that we were on the trail of the hares?"

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie. "You don't absolutely mean to say—— But, I mean, what a frightfully funny thing, don't you know! I rather wondered where Handy's knapsack was, and now we know."

"Blow it!" said Handforth. "I shoved it on the back of the cart while we were talking to the man, and it's not my fault if the papers dribbled out, is it?"

"We won't press the point," said Nipper diplomatically. "What we want to know is this—why have you abandoned the chase? And why have you been interesting yourself in a perfect stranger?"

Between the pair of them, Handforth and Archie told the story. Handforth wanted to do all the talking, of course, but the hounds wouldn't let him. As Reggie Pitt remarked, if they let Handforth explain the situation, they would be there until darkness fell. And Archie was not very much better. In his own long-winded way, he explained how they had delivered the food at the cottage by a subterfuge, and the hounds began to realise that the situation certainly did demand some special attention.

"Now we've got to see about the coal," urged Handforth firmly. "There's that poor woman and her two kids, without any fire in the place. Her husband's in London, by what I understand, and——"

"Yes, we heard her telling one of her children that her husband was in London," agreed Nipper. "And they haven't any coal in the place, eh? Looks like a sad case. But I'm not sure that we should interfere. It's a delicate subject, you chaps. People aren't always thanked for butting in on a thing like this."

"There's an exception to every rule!" declared Handforth firmly. "And this is one of the exceptions. What do we care if Mrs. Compton *does* resent it? We've got to think of those little kids! There they are, nearly frozen to death! If she's silly enough to be offended—well, she can jolly well be offended! But it's our plain duty to see that something is done. My idea is to go along into Edgemore and get some coal."

"But we can't get any in Edgemore," said Church. "There's no coal-yard there!"

"But there's an inn and some shops," replied Handforth. "We can go and beg two or three hundredweight——"

"Absolutely not!" said Archie. "Dear old boys, kindly rally round and support me. Just before you came up I was having an argument with this foul blighter, and he wouldn't listen to reason. It's absolutely imposs. for us to go into Edgemore."

"Why?" demanded Handforth.

"Because we don't want to advertise Mrs. Compton's distress," replied Archie quietly. "Good gad! I mean to say, odds horrors and nightmares! You know what it's like in these small villages. Everybody knows everybody else's business. What would happen if we went round, begging coal at the inn and at the shops? They would want to know why we wanted it, and, even if we didn't tell them, somebody would discover the truth. We can't have Mrs. Compton being talked about——"

"You're quite right, Archie," agreed Nipper. "The idea is squashed, Handy. No going into Edgemore!"

"But the case is urgent——"

"We know it's urgent, but we've got to think of Mrs. Compton's feelings," said Nipper. "The best thing we can do is to abandon the paper chase altogether, and call it a draw. We'll all go back to St. Frank's ——"

"Back to St. Frank's!" echoed Handforth, staring.

"We'll all go back to St. Frank's, by way of Bannington," proceeded Nipper. "We'll call at the coal merchant's—at one of them, anyhow—and order some coal to be delivered this afternoon. We'll tell the firm to deliver the coal, and Mrs. Compton will probably believe that the order has come from her husband. Anyhow, the coal will be there, and that's the main thing."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "You see, Handy, old darling, what happens when a massive brain gets on the job. The thing becomes simple. We merely stagger into Bannington, order a few chunks of coal, and there you are! The whole thing's done!"

"Well, it's simple enough, I'll admit," said Handforth grudgingly. "But how do we know that the coal merchant will deliver the stuff this afternoon? You know what they are!"

"Well, we'll try," said Nipper.

And so they all formed up into a double line and set off at a trot for Bannington. The town was three or four miles distant, but the run did them good. They were all thoroughly warmed up by the time they arrived at the coal merchant's office. In Bannington the fog was much less—only a thin kind of mist, which made the High Street indistinct and blurry. Overhead, the sun was trying to shine, but it was not making much of a success of it.

The coal-merchant took the order readily enough, but when it came to a question of delivery a bit of trouble arose.

"This afternoon?" said the manager indulgently. "It simply can't be done, young gentlemen! We've got more orders now than we can deal with, and every other coal-merchant in the town—there are only two of them—are in just the same fix. People leave their coal orders until it's too late. They wait until the cold weather comes, and then they all want delivery at once."

"Yes, but this is an important case——" began Handforth.

"We can't help that, sir," interrupted the manager. "There are lots of important cases. All orders must be delivered in rotation. It's a ton you want, I think? Well, it'll be delivered on Monday."

"Monday!" roared Handforth. "Do you mean next week?"

"I think Monday falls next week," nodded the manager. "It's absolutely impossible to deliver before——"

"But this is all rot!" shouted Handforth excitedly. "How do you think Mrs. Compton is going to get on until Monday? What's she going to do during these three or four days?"

But the coal-merchant was adamant. Perhaps there was a good deal to be said for him—for customers were always demanding delivery as soon as they brought their orders in, and delivering coal, in country districts, was not as simple as the St. Frank's fellows seemed to imagine.

"Monday is the very earliest," insisted the manager. "If you like to leave the order, I shall be pleased to take it."

"We'll pay you extra for immediate delivery."

"I wouldn't take it, even if I was allowed to," said the man. "To tell you the truth, there isn't a cart available. They're all out—in other directions. And they're all booked for every day of this week."

Thus a deadlock was reached, and the juniors crowded together in the coal office, discussing the situation.



CHAPTER 13.

An Unexpected Meeting!

NIPPER gently took Handforth by the shoulders.

"It's no good getting excited, old man," he said soothingly. "We've got to accept these things as they come. These coal people can't deliver until Monday, and it's no good growling."

"But I am growling!" said Handforth indignantly. "Why can't they make special concessions——"

"Why should they?" put in Reggie Pitt. "I expect other people have been waiting nearly a week for their coal, and it's only right that they should be served first. But there's not the slightest necessity for anybody to get excited. There's a very simple way out of the difficulty."

"Then trot it out!" said Church.

"It'll mean some work on our part, but I don't think we're afraid of it," went on Reggie. "Let's order this coal—say, half a ton—and give instructions for it to be put aside in the coal-yard—in a separate heap. Then we'll deliver it ourselves."

"Odds mysteries and riddles!" said Archie, staring. "Deliver it ourselves? But, my dear old lad, how do you suppose that we can yank half a ton of coal down the country lanes to Mrs. Compton's cottage?"

"We'll bring our bicycles, and we'll all have suit-cases and things," explained Pitt. "If there are a dozen of us, we can take nearly half a ton with us in one go. Anyhow, we can deliver several hundredweight during the first journey, and that will be enough to keep Mrs. Compton on the go until the coal-merchant can deliver the rest. Are you fellows game?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth, staring. "It's a funny thing, but that's the

very idea that I had in mind myself! I was just going to suggest it——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Handy!" chuckled McClure. "You always think of these ideas and then forget to mention 'em! They only come to you after somebody else has been talking."

"Of course, it'll be a frightfully dirty business, but who cares?" said Archie. "I mean, carting coal about is the foulest proceeding imaginable. Still, it's all in a good cause, so why should I object? I'm quite ready to do my own little bit."

So back they went to the desk, and the manager was considerably surprised when he heard the plan.

"Well, it's up to you, young gents," he said. "If you want to deliver the coal yourselves, I shan't raise any objection."

"We want it ready in half an hour," said Handforth. "That'll give us time to get back to the school and get our bikes——"

"It can't be ready until the morning," said the manager.

"Not until the morning!"

"There isn't an ounce of coal in the yard," replied the merchant. "A number of trucks should have come in this morning, but I expect this fog has delayed them. We've had definite assurance, however, that they'll be in the yards by this evening. And it won't be any good you going to another office, because they're in the same fix as ourselves. There's been a lot of trouble about deliveries lately, and——"

"Well, if the coal isn't there, we can't have it," said Nipper. "But we want to be on the scene at about half-past seven in the morning."

"That half-ton of coal will be waiting for you," said the manager. "I'll give instructions to have it put aside, and——"

"But, look here, we can't be on the spot at half-past seven!" broke in Church, staring at Nipper. "Rising bell doesn't ring until then!"

"Is there any reason why we shouldn't be up at half-past six for once?" asked Nipper. "My idea is for us to turn out in the early morning, and to do this job before breakfast. It'll give us a jolly good appetite, and it won't interfere with the rest of the day."

All the other juniors voted the idea to be a good one, and after making final arrangements with the manager they departed.

"Well, that's the best we can do, I'm afraid," said Nipper, as they crowded out into the street. "Mrs. Compton and her children will have to be fireless for to-day, but they'll be all right to-morrow."

"What shall we say when we arrive there in the morning?" asked Pitt thoughtfully. "We can't keep up the pretence that the order has come from her husband, you know. We can't very well disguise ourselves as coalmen!"

"We shall have to think of some sort of explanation," said Nipper. "And, as Handy has said, this is no time for scruples. We've got to think of those little kiddies."

One very noticeable thing about this little affair was that the St. Frank's juniors took it all as a matter of course. They did not realise that they were performing any kindly action. Handforth, of course, was full of wild ideas. He wanted to go round to the other shops, and to give orders for all sorts of luxuries to be delivered. But Nipper put a stopper on this. There was such a thing as going too far.

"We don't want to interfere in the lady's business," he said. "After all, we know practically nothing about her. Her husband is in London, and it is his job to see after his wife and family. Perhaps there's some reason why he didn't send money, or make arrangements for the bills to be paid. We can't tell. But this Mr. Compton might be thundering wild if he discovered what we've been doing. So we'll confine ourselves to the simple necessities of life. And we mustn't make it look like charity."

"I'd like to meet this Mr. Compton!" said Handforth aggressively. "He's a fine kind of husband—I don't think! He goes off to London to work, and he forgets all about his wife and children! Leaves them here, in this cottage, without any coals, and without any grub! If I came across him now, I'd punch him on the nose! You didn't see those youngsters, you fellows! I'm not much of a chap for kids, but when I saw them with tears in their eyes, and looking all pinched up with cold, I felt pretty rotten."

"Well, we've done all we can," said Nipper briskly. "The best thing we can do now is to get back to the school. Come on—it's chilly standing here."

They went off down the High Street, but they had not proceeded more than a hundred yards when they caught sight of two figures on the other side of the misty road. The

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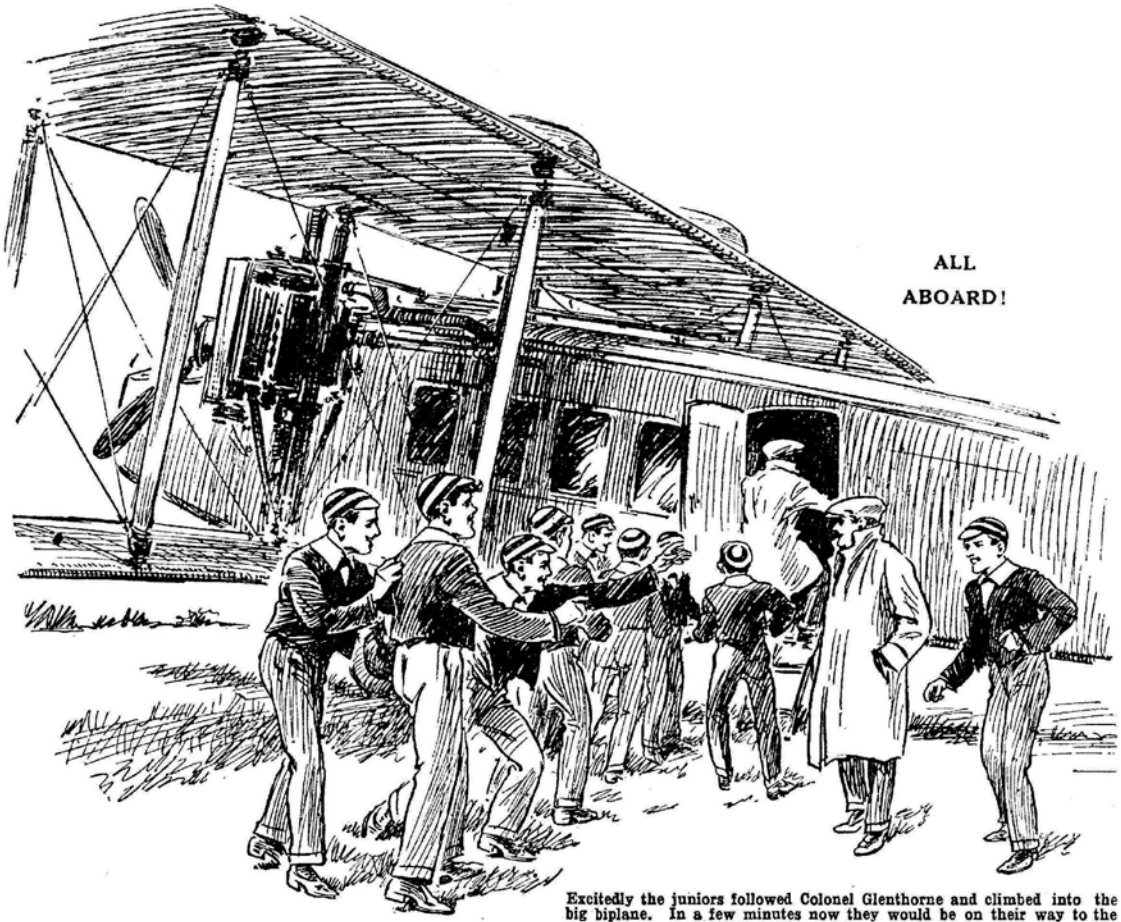
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Excitedly the juniors followed Colonel Glenthorne and climbed into the big biplane. In a few minutes now they would be on their way to the battlefields of Flanders!

juniors automatically came to a halt, for those two figures belonged to Colonel Glenthorne and the mysterious stranger.

"By George!" said Handforth. "Let's run across and ask if there's any further news. Perhaps the man has recovered his memory."

They were soon crowding round Colonel Glenthorne and his companion, and Archie's pater expressed considerable surprise when he saw the hares and hounds.

"You caught them, then?" he said boisterously. "Well, well! I was rather hoping, Archibald, that you would succeed in eluding capture. I'm afraid you didn't run hard enough."

"Dash it all, pater, it wasn't my fault!" protested Archie. "Sundry things happened, don't you know. In other words, the good old paper-chase is off. We've been rallying round Mrs. Compton and her children."

It was rather a pity, perhaps, that the St. Frank's fellows failed to observe the sudden start given by the stranger. Just for a moment a look of eagerness came into his eyes. He frowned and passed a hand across his brow. Then he shook his head, and seemed to give it up.

What did the name of "Compton" mean to him?



CHAPTER 14.

Interesting News.

THE light of sudden intentness had rapidly died from the stranger's eyes. Only for a flash had it appeared there, and not one of those St. Frank's fellows had noticed it.

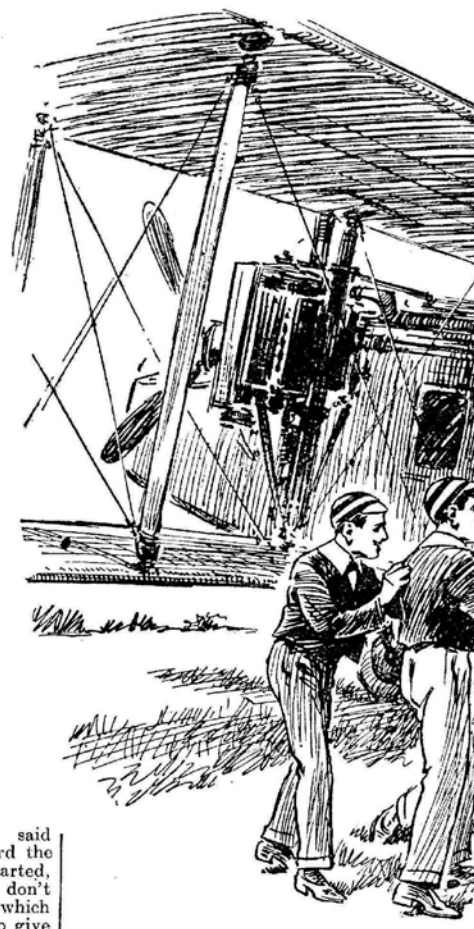
Yet the name of "Compton" had certainly stirred something within the stranger's dormant memory. If Nipper or Handforth or Archie had seen that curious light in the unfortunate man's eyes, they might have questioned him in the hope of obtaining a clue—but they did not.

"Well done, Archie—well done!" said Colonel Glenthorne, after he had heard the story. "You always were a bit soft-hearted, weren't you, my boy? Well, well! I don't blame you in the least for the way in which you tricked that poor woman in order to give her and her children some food."

"Dash it all, pater, Handy was the chappie who insisted so much," protested Archie. "I mean to say, if it hadn't been for me, the frightful ass would have shoved his foot into the good old soup right up to the knee. An affair of that kind needed sundry assortments of tact."

"And the delivery of that coal will need a further assortment of tact, I fancy," said Colonel Glenthorne dryly. "However, that's your business, young men—and I wish you luck. But you'd better be careful. By all that you have told me of Mrs. Compton, she will not be willing to accept consignments of coal as a present."

"Leave it to us, colonel," said Nipper, with a grin. "We'll manage it all right. In fact, I've got an idea all ready."



Colonel Glenthorne and the stranger went on their way. It seemed that the colonel was just taking a walk with his guest in the hope that the Bannington streets might bring back some incident that would restore his memory. But it appeared that nothing would serve. Even the mention of Mrs. Compton's name had not done the trick.

"Now, what's this idea of yours?" asked Handforth, looking at Nipper.

"It's a perfectly simple one, old man," said Nipper. "We'll pop back to the coal merchants, and tell them to send a delivery note by to-night's post. Mrs. Compton will think that her husband has given the order for the coal."

"But we're going to deliver it, aren't we?" asked Handforth.

"Yes—but that won't make any difference," said Nipper. "We'll tell Mrs. Compton that we heard her coal was being held up, so we thought of the idea of bringing it ourselves. I don't suppose she'll guess the truth—and, anyhow, she'll get the coal."

"A brainy scheme, laddie," said Archie approvingly. "And now, if you're all ready,



Then the juniors followed Colonel Glenthorne and climbed into the machine. In a few minutes now they would be on their way to the battlefields of Flanders!

I rather think we'll trickle to the station and get the next train back to Bellton."

"While we're waiting for the train, we can walk it," said Nipper. "Besides, we came out for a cross-country run, and trains aren't allowed, Archie."

Archie groaned.

"I rather thought you'd say that, dash you!" he said mournfully. "What-ho! The dear old guv'nor is making frantic signals. I rather fancy he desires further conversation with us."

They glanced up the High Street, and saw that Colonel Glenthorne had paused, and was waving.

The juniors went forward, and soon arrived at the spot.

"Oh, by the way, Archie," said the colonel, "I forgot to mention something. Your brother George will probably be here to-morrow, so if you can manage to get the morning off—or the afternoon, even—you might like to see him."

"What-ho! I mean to say, rather!" said Archie. "Good old George, what? Absolutely! I haven't seen that dear chappie for weeks, and months. I'll mention the matter to my Housemaster, pater, and I daro say he'll give me leave to come over for an hour or two. Thanks most frightfully."

"And who's George, anyhow?" demanded Handforth, mystified.

"My brother," said Archie.

"Rats! Your brother is named Captain Bertram Glenthorne!" said Handforth. "He's an officer in the Air Force, and——"

"Absolutely!" nodded Archie. "But you're thinking of my eldest brother. George is the chappie who came between Bertie and me. A rather priceless sort of cove in his own way."

"Isn't he in the Army?" asked Nipper.

"In the Reserve, of course," replied Archie. "All the Glenthornes are military chappies, you know. Fighting blood, and all that sort of thing. But George rather had a notion for civil aviation. He's one of the good old pilots on the cross-Channel service—always dashing about between Croydon and Paris, and occasionally shoving in a trip to Copenhagen or Cologne or some such frightful place as that. You never know where he's going to be next. He's only just got back from a trip to India, and as soon as the spring comes he'll probably be flying the Atlantic. What time's he arriving, pater?"

The colonel hesitated.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I don't quite know," he replied. "In fact, now I come to think of it, by gad, I'm not sure that I ought to have mentioned his visit at all. It is in connection with a very special little mission."

And the colonel gave a curious glance at the stranger while he was speaking. Then abruptly he saluted the juniors, and walked away.

"What did he mean?" asked Handforth, looking puzzled.

"Don't ask me, old sport," said Archie. "How should I know? It isn't often that the pater is mysterious, but I gather that

George's visit will be something special. However, we shall see to-morrow, I suppose."

"Oh, well, don't let's bother about it now," said Nipper briskly. "It's practically tea-time, and we must be getting back——"

"Teatime!" interrupted Archie, unconsciously smacking his lips. "Good gad! The very thought of a cup of the good old juice makes me feel warmed up. Let us proceed to dash homewards."

And Archie was so keen on that cup of tea that he not only succeeded in keeping pace, but he outran the rest of the juniors, and was the first of the crowd to arrive home.



CHAPTER 15.

Quite a Good Idea!

"READY?" asked Handforth, putting his head into Nipper & Co.'s bed-room.

"Shan't be two ticks, old man," replied Nipper. "But what's happened? We were just coming along to call you, Handy. We never dreamed that you would be out of bed, and dressed."

"Rats!" said Edward Oswald. "When it's a special occasion, I always lead the way. It's nearly seven o'clock, and we ought to be off. Unless we go pretty soon, some inquisitive prefect or master will ask us why we're up so early, and may prevent us going out. So buck up!"

There were a good many early risers that morning. Nipper & Co., and the chums of Study D, were prominent among the early risers in the Ancient House—to say nothing of such fellows as Harry Gresham, Archie Glenthorne, Alf Brent and two or three others. Over in the West House, Reggie Pitt & Co. were up, too. All told, there were over a dozen of these energetic juniors.

They had not confided their plans to the Remove in general. It wasn't a subject they could freely discuss, for there were quite a number of fellows who would laugh at them—and who would regard the whole business with derision.

Handforth was inclined to boast of the fact that he was the first out—although he omitted to mention that it was Church who had called him. Indeed, if Handforth had been left alone, he would have slept peacefully till the rising bell had clanged out. The leader of Study D was not renowned for his light-sleeping qualities.

"Well, you'll find me down in the bicycle shed," said Handforth, as he prepared to leave Nipper & Co.'s dormitory. "And don't forget to bring your suitcases."

"We've got them ready," said Tommy Watson.

In ordinary circumstances, the juniors would have jibbed at the idea of carrying coal in their suitcases. But this was a very special occasion, and, after all, with a little care, the suitcases would not come to much harm.

And a dozen of them, well filled, would be able to carry quite a respectable amount of coal from Bannington to Mrs. Compton's cottage. Nipper had especially ordered nuts, so that the coal could be easily packed.

When Handforth got down to the bicycle shed, he found Church and McClure there in advance, and they were busily engaged on the task of strapping their suitcases to the carriers of their bikes.

"I'm afraid they'll be a bit wobbly, you know," said Church, as he inspected his handiwork with a dubious eye. "And when they get full of coal we shall have an awful job to ride. These carriers weren't made to take such big loads, you know."

Reggie Pitt, who had just come in, chuckled

"Why bother about these suitcases at all?" he asked dryly. "Why not use old Handy's Austin Seven as a delivery van? Think of the trouble it would save!"

Church and McClure grinned, expecting a loud outburst from their leader. Their surprise was great, however, when Handforth slapped his thigh, and gave a whoop.

"By George, that's a good scheme!" he declared. "It's a rummy thing I didn't think of it myself! Of course! My little Austin can easily carry half a ton of coal!"

"What?" gasped Pitt, staring.

"We can shovel it in easily!" went on Handforth enthusiastically. "Then we can take it straight to Mrs. Compton's cottage——"

"But—but you don't think I meant it seriously?" asked Reggie, aghast. "You're not going to use your Austin as a coal cart?"

"Why not?" demanded Handforth. "Think of the trouble it will save!"

The other juniors looked at him in amazement. It had often been said in the Remove that one could never tell how Handforth would take a thing—and he was now proving that these words were not idle. Reggie Pitt had only made the suggestion facetiously—and here was Edward Oswald taking it in all seriousness!

"You silly ass!" grinned Reggie. "I didn't mean it! You can't do a thing like that, Handy. You can't put your smart little Austin to such a base use."

"Base use?" repeated Handforth, glaring. "You mean a good use! We're taking coal to this poor woman——"

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"But you'll ruin your car, you chump!"

"No I shan't!" replied Handforth. "My Austin Seven is capable of anything. Understand? Anything! People can laugh at these Austin Sevens, and call them crystal sets, and things like that—but they're jolly fine cars. And there's no reason why mine shouldn't be converted into a coal cart for once!"

"But it will get into the most terrible mess!" protested Church.

"What do I care?" said Handforth. "As soon as we get back, you and Mac can clean it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth's indifference to the state of his Austin was explained. Church and McClure, after giving violent starts, expostulated loudly.

"If you think we're going to clean your beastly car, after you've been carrying coal in it, you've made a mistake, Handy!" roared Church. "Of all the nerve!"

"If you're going to start raising objections, Walter Church, I'll show you the size of my fist!" said Handforth aggressively. "It's all in a good cause, isn't it?"

"Yes, but——"

"But nothing!" said Handforth darkly. "I'm surprised at you! Here's this poor woman, waiting for the delivery of that coal, and you're raising objections because you have to do a little cleaning!"

"It's your car!" shouted Church. "If anybody ought to clean it, it's you! I don't care if you carry ashes in your giddy car, if it comes to that. You can go round the school, and empty all the dustbins into it! It's nothing to do with me! But when you expect Mac and me to clean it afterwards——"

He broke off indignantly.

"I'm ashamed of you!" said Handforth sternly. "And what's more, I'm fed up! I don't want to hear any more of these objections. I'm going to use my Austin Seven to carry that coal, and you chaps are going to clean it out after we get back!"

"All right—just as you like!" said Church, shrugging his shoulders. "We're not going to argue about it!"

"Of course not," said McClure. "We'll clean it out for you, Handy. There are plenty of brooms knocking about, and we can easily turn the hose-pipe on the giddy car, and then scrub it down with the brooms. Of course, if the upholstery gets a bit ruined during the process, that'll be your fault."

Before Handforth could think of a suitable retort, Nipper came along, together with the rest of the schoolboy coalheavers. They all tried to persuade Handforth to give up this idea. But he was quite firm, and when they all started out on their generous errand, Handforth went in his Austin Seven.



CHAPTER 16.

The Schoolboy Coal-Heavers!

HALF-PAST seven was just striking when Handforth drove his Austin Seven into the coal-yard, near Bannington Station. The cyclists came in two or three minutes later, and they found Handforth in a high state of jubilation.

"It's all right, you chaps!" he said exultantly. "There's no need to worry about my Austin. All the coal is here, in this open shed, just as that manager chap promised. And it's all in clean sacks, too!"

"Yes, I arranged with him to put it into the cleanest sacks he could find," said Nipper. "Good man! This makes it all the easier."

The coal was, indeed, well packed. It was placed in half-hundredweight sacks, but each sack only contained twenty-eight pounds. The sacks themselves were quite dry, and, considering what they contained, comparatively clean.

"Well, this is dashed decent of the manager chappie," said Archie, with approval. "I mean to say, he couldn't deliver the good old stuff on one of his own carts, but he has done the best he could in the circs. We'll now proceed to bung it into the perambulator, what?"

"Where's the paper?" asked Church, looking into the Austin.

"What paper?" said Handforth.

"Why, didn't we arrange to bring a pile of old newspapers, so that we could spread them on the seats, to protect them?" asked Church. "You said you would put them in, Handy——"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "I thought you attended to that!"

"But you distinctly told us to go and eat coke!" said McClure. "We left it to you!"

"It just shows you!" said Handforth bitterly. "What's the good of having a couple of chums like you fellows? I can't trust you with anything!"

This, of course, was most unjust. For both Church and McClure had wanted to attend to that little detail, but their leader had refused to let them. Now, with only himself to blame, he was putting the onus on to Church and McClure. But, as they were well accustomed to this sort of thing, it didn't matter much.

It did not take long to load the sacks of coal into the Austin. When nearly half of them were inside the handy little car, Nipper raised an objection.

"That's about enough, old man," he said. "These cars aren't made for this purpose, you know, and you mustn't overload them."

"Don't you worry; she'll carry the lot!" said Handforth briskly. "Come on, you chaps! Let's have the rest of those sacks!"

"You silly chump!" shouted Church.

"You can't expect this Austin Seven to carry half a ton!"

"Why not?"

"Because they're only supposed to carry about thirty-two or thirty-three stone," said Church. "You'll break the springs, or——"

"I know what my car can do!" interrupted Handforth coldly. "It's no good taking any notice of the makers on these subjects. Why, before now I've piled eight or nine fellows into this Austin, and it hasn't jibbed once, or even turned a hair. Half a ton of coal will be child's play to it!"

"Well, have your own way, but don't blame us if the springs suddenly break," said Nipper, shrugging his shoulders. "If you drive slowly and easily, you might possibly get there in safety."

It was quite possible that Handforth felt, in his own heart, that he was overloading the faithful little "bus," but, of course, he would never admit it now. And when he finally took his place in the driving-seat, with sacks of coal piled up all round him, the springs were so depressed that the body-work was nearly touching the wheels. But the Austin moved off smoothly enough, and settled down to its task with valiant courage.

Some of the good people of Bannington were considerably surprised when the procession came out of the station yard, and moved off up the road. The Austin Seven led the way, piled up with its sacks of coal; all round were the cyclists, forming a kind of escort. The weather this morning was particularly fine, with the sun shining out of a clear sky. All trace of the fog of yesterday had gone. A keen wind was blowing, and the weather conditions were perfect.

"Well, thank goodness it's early," said Nipper. "There's hardly anybody about yet, so there won't be much talk."

"Yes, and we shall be able to get back to St. Frank's in time for brekker," said Tommy Watson. "We shall be at the cottage within ten minutes, and then we can have the coal unloaded, and be off at the end of another five. By Jove, it makes you feel pretty good, doesn't it? These poor people will be able to have fires again—and they need them this weather, too."

"There's the food question to consider," said Nipper thoughtfully. "Mrs. Compton has only got some bread, you know, and people can't live for long on bread alone. I thought it would be rather a good idea if we called at one of the Edgemore farms, and arranged for a regular delivery of milk."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "A brain-wave, old boy! I second the proposal, and I

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gather that it is passed unanimously. And wouldn't it be a bright scheme, at the same time, to have a brace of chickens sent along? Or a bullock, or something like that?"

"We'll see about it," said Nipper.

They were outside the town by now, and the Austin was laboriously climbing a sharp hill, just in advance. Under ordinary conditions, the little car would have roared up that hill, but Handforth was now driving very cautiously—not because he was cautious by nature, but because he had felt one or two ominous bumps from the rear, proving that the springs were occasionally touching the chassis.

And so, when he came to the foot of that hill, he was only driving very slowly. Now, on low gear, the car was finding a very difficult task ahead of it. Indeed, half-way up the hill, the engine spluttered significantly, hesitated once or twice, then sighed in a choking kind of way, and finally gave up the ghost.

The cyclists came riding up, and gathered round.

"There you are, Handy!" said Church. "We warned you, didn't we? The car needn't have been overloaded, and now——"

"Rot!" said Handforth, climbing out. "She's run out of petrol, that's all."

"Just like Handy!" groaned McClure. "He's always forgetting how much petrol he's got in the tank! Now what the dickens are we to do?"

"That's an easy one!" said Handforth, grinning. "I suppose you've forgotten that I've got a spare can on the running-board—eh? I never go out without my spare petrol, my lad! You can trust me to be prepared!"

With a triumphant flourish, Edward Oswald unscrewed the spare can, but as he lifted it from the running-board, a blank expression came over his face.

"My only hat!" he muttered, aghast.

"What's the matter?" asked Pitt gently. "Can I have one guess, Handy? I'll bet that can's empty!"

"It is!" said Handforth, in a hollow voice.



CHAPTER 17.

An Unforeseen Interruption!

"THERE'S nothing like being on the safe side, Handy!" said Church sarcastically. "You never go out without your spare can of petrol, do you? The trouble is, you only take the can!"

"We're all liable to forget things, aren't we?" demanded Handforth, with a grunt. "Of course, I remember now! When I went out, two or three days ago, with you fellows, we ran out of juice, didn't we?"

"Yes," nodded McClure. "And you emptied the spare petrol into the tank, and said that you would have it refilled at the next garage."

"Well, why didn't you remind me?" demanded Handforth aggressively. "What's the good of having a couple of chums who don't even——"

"Here, steady!" said Church. "How the dickens could we remind you when we weren't there?"

"But——"

"Before we got to the next garage you pitched the pair of us out of your rotten car!" said McClure tartly. "Don't you remember the row we had? You went round a corner too recklessly, and Church made a bit of a protest; you pulled the car to a standstill, and told the pair of us to get out. In fact, you made us walk home!"

"Why go into these harrowing details?" asked Reggie Pitt gently. "Why pain us with such unhappy memories? The fact remains that there's no juice. And even an Austin Seven won't go without petrol—although it'll do practically everything else. If I were you, Handy, I'd have two petrol tanks fitted—two extra cans, and it might be a good idea to strap a third one to the luggage grid."

Handforth received no sympathy from Church and McClure. In fact, they were inclined to grin. They had often warned him that such a contingency as this would arise, and he had always scoffed at them. They felt that they were having a bit of their own back now.

"This is what comes of relying on a fathead like Handforth!" said Nipper. "It's partly our own fault, too—because we know him. We ought to have had a look at the petrol tank and the spare can before we started out. All we can do now is to find some petrol somewhere. Where's the nearest garage?"

"There isn't one nearer than a mile," replied Pitt. "We're a mile out of the town, and——"

"A mile!" interrupted Handforth. "That'll mean an awful delay, and we shan't be able to get back to St. Frank's in time for breakfast. Mrs. Compton will be left without any coal, and——"

"Well, it's your fault, Handy, so don't start grumbling," interrupted Nipper. "The coal is loaded into your car now, and the quickest thing we can do is to get some petrol."

"Odds luck and good fortune!" ejaculated Archie, with a start. "I mean to say, good gad! Laddies, kindly observe this wall!"

He indicated, with a sweep of his hand, a high stone wall which bordered the road on one side.

"Very pretty!" said Reggie Pitt, inspecting it. "Very picturesque! But is this a moment, Archie, for admiring architectural handiwork? Can't you leave that sort of thing for a more opportune time?"

"Really, old boy, I'm afraid you don't see the significance," said Archie. "This wall is the limit of the Glenthorne estate, what? In fact, and to be absolutely precise, it is

only about two hundred yards, as the crow flies, to the Glenthorne garages. I mean to say, any chap with a little nippiness could easily buzz——"

"Oh, I see what you mean!" interrupted Nipper. "Archie, that's a brain-wave of yours. I'd forgotten about Glenthorne Manor. Of course, now I come to think of it, we've been riding alongside the estate for some little time. And we're quite close to the house, you say?"

"Not exactly the house, dear old boy—but the garages," explained Archie. "They are some little distance from the Manor itself."

"Well, that's good enough," said Nipper briskly. "I'll pop over, and I'll be back with a tin of petrol in four or five minutes. Perhaps you'd better come with me, Archie, so that you can act as a guide. I don't want to lose myself."

Archie looked rather blank as he inspected the wall.

"Just as you like, old fruit, but I mean —— Well, the fact is—— Dash it, this wall!" he protested. "To say nothing of the frightful ground beyond, under those trees. Wouldn't it be better if we trotted back a little way, and used the good old drive?"

Nipper grinned. Archie was dressed up for the occasion—he was wearing his smartest attire—and, naturally, the idea of climbing over dirty walls and ploughing through piles of dead leaves did not appeal to him. But these objections of his were ruthlessly thrust aside. A chorus of derision went up, and he resigned himself to the inevitable.

"Oh, well, perhaps so," he said sadly. "All in a good cause, what? I mean, at various times in our careers we are called upon to become martyrs. I shrink from the ordeal, but the celebrated Glenthorne courage has gained the upper hand. Kindly lead on. Archie will follow, even if he makes himself look like a tramp!"

"Well, it might be a good idea if you fellows went—instead of standing here and gassing," said Handforth pointedly. "For two pins I'll jolly well go myself! In fact, Archie had better not go at all—he'll only cause all sorts of delays!"

But Archie was already at the wall, with Nipper giving him a hand up, and, surprisingly enough, the two juniors succeeded in getting to the other side without even soiling their clothing. The wall wasn't half so dirty as Archie had made out, and the dead leaves, on the other side, were comparatively few.

In fact, after breaking through the belt of trees which grew just beyond the wall, they found themselves on an open stretch of parkland, where the grass was like a great rolling lawn. In the distance, not very far away, stood the noble pile of Glenthorne Manor; nearer were some picturesque outbuildings, which were the garages and other erections. They nestled to themselves amidst a group of yew trees.

"This is jolly lucky, Archie," said Nipper, as they ran across the grass. "We shall be able to get the petrol within two or three minutes, and then we'll be on our way again. Fancy old Handy forgetting to refill his spare can! Of all the chumps! Just like him, though, of course!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "I'm frightfully afraid that Handy's memory is ——"

He broke off, and unconsciously turned his face skywards. Nipper, too, had performed the same action. The droning of a powerful aeroplane engine had made itself heard over the trees in their rear. In fact, there were at least two engines to be heard, and it was obvious that a big aeroplane was flying overhead. Nipper and Archie weren't particularly interested in aeroplanes at the moment, but their glancing skywards was quite automatic.

They were considerably surprised, a moment later, when the droning of the engines abruptly ceased, and they caught sight of a great passenger-carrying machine diving towards the wide stretch of grassland across which they were moving!



CHAPTER 18.

Archie's Brother!

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE stood stock still, staring at the descending aeroplane.

"I mean to say!" he protested. "That is, if you know what I mean, dash it all! Utter impertinence and effrontery! It's a bit thick when this airman-chappie has the nerve to use the good old Glenthorne estate as a landing ground! He isn't in difficulties, either, because his engines were buzzing to some purpose only a few moments ago. Dash it, he's landing now! The pater will be frightfully wild when he hears about this!"

The machine, which was a heavy passenger-carrying biplane, had touched the turf lightly, and was now running forward and coming to a stop. It was the type of machine which is in daily use on the cross-Channel service.

"Well, there's no need for us to waste our time," said Nipper briskly. "We'll hurry along and get that petrol——"

"Kindly allow me to interview this blighter and to remonstrate with him," said Archie firmly. "I mean to say, I'm a good-natured sort of chappie as a rule, but when the family estate is used as an aerodrome, it's time that a responsible member of the Glenthornes dashed up and gave voice to a fruity ticking-off. Kindly come along, laddie, and give me your moral support."

"Yes, but——"

"I would remind you that the old mind is absolutely made up," said Archie sternly.



"Good gracious! What's this mean?" exclaimed Colonel Glenthorne as he saw the waiting juniors—each one of whom carried a sack of coal on his shoulder. "We've brought the coal for Mrs. Compton!" replied Handforth.

Nipper, realising that it would be a saving of time to agree, said nothing further. They ran across the grass, and came to the spot where the great aeroplane was standing. At close quarters, it seemed even bigger than ever—an immense machine which towered up everlastingly into the air.

A slim young gentleman, attired in an ordinary lounge suit, was just emerging from the cockpit, and as the two juniors came up he waved a cheery hand.

"Hallo, Archie, old kid!" he said, grinning. "Well, well! Who would have thought it? Absolutely on the spot to meet me!"

Archie Glenthorne started, and his monocle dropped out of his eye. He had screwed it there a moment before, so that he could have his full dignity when facing this intruder.

"Good gad!" he said blankly. "I mean to say, absolutely! George! Well I'm dashed! In fact, I'm not only dashed, but blowed!"

Nipper grinned.

"Is this what you call ticking him off, Archie?" he inquired mildly.

"My dear old chappie, you don't know who this merchant is!" said Archie with delight. "Kindly allow me to do the intros. George, this is Nipper—Dick Hamilton, you know, of St. Frank's. Nipper, old cheese, let me introduce you to my brother George. A rather priceless sort of chappie, in his own way. Came down from Oxford not so long ago, and——"

"How do you do, Mr. Glenthorne?" said Nipper, as George jumped to the ground and shook him by the hand. "I can see the family likeness now."

"For Heaven's sake don't say that!" exclaimed George in horror. "You're not absolutely telling me that I resemble Archie in the slightest degree, are you? I'm pretty strong physically, but a shock of that sort is inclined to knock me over!"

"Oh, I say!" protested Archie. "Dash it, George, you ought to take it as a compliment——"

Here the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Colonel Glenthorne himself. He came bustling up, puffing vigorously, and he clapped George on the back with vigour.

"Well done, my boy—well done!" he said with enthusiasm. "You promised to be here early this morning, but I didn't expect you before ten o'clock, at least. Splendid! And the weather is perfect, too. Have you made all the arrangements for the trip? Can we go?"

"It's all fixed up, pater," said George smilingly. "They've lent me this machine, and we can pop off as soon as you like. How is the mysterious stranger? Still juggling with his memory?"

"Now and again he gets a flash of the past," replied Colonel Glenthorne. "I am hoping that a visit to Ypres—to the war zone that he knew in the old days—will effect a

sudden recovery. We can, at least, only try it. I'll bring him out straight away, and we can be off as soon as you like."

"That'll suit me all right," replied George. "It's only a bit of a hop across to Ypres, anyhow—two or three hours, at the most. And in perfect flying weather like this, it'll be as dull as riding on a traction engine."

Colonel Glenthorne bustled off again, and George discovered that Archie Glenthorne and Nipper were eyeing him with even greater interest than before.

"So that's why you came?" asked Nipper. "You're going to fly over to Ypres with this poor chap who's lost his memory?"

"Yes, it was the pater's idea," nodded George. "Rather a good stunt, too."

"Good gad!" said Archie. "You brought a large-sized machine, didn't you?"

His elder brother grinned.

"I was originally coming in a three-seater, but the engine was a bit wonky when I tested it this morning," he replied. "This passenger bus was doing nothing, so I thought I'd give the old boy a little comfort on the trip across."

Just then a number of shouts sounded in the distance, and, glancing round, Archie and Nipper saw that the rest of the St. Frank's fellows were running towards them at the double. They were all looking very excited. In fact, they had seen the machine fly overhead, and they had known that it had descended into the Glenthorne estate. Curiosity had made them follow Archie and Nipper into the park, for they wanted to find out who the airman was and why he had landed.

They came up at a run, and Archie was compelled to make introductions all round. At least, he wasn't compelled to—but he felt that it was necessary. Archie was famous for introducing people. He was horrified if two strangers talked to one another without the preliminary formality of an introduction.

"By George!" said Handforth, when he heard the facts. "So you're going across to the Ypres district, eh? Going across with that stranger? And you've brought a whacking great machine like this! I say, couldn't we all go?"

George cast his eye over the group of juniors.

"Well, the old bus is made to carry about twenty and she flies better when she's loaded," he replied. "As far as I'm concerned, you can come if you want to. I don't care a hang. I'm an agreeable sort of chap, and you're as welcome as the flowers in May!"

"Great Scott!" shouted Handforth excitedly. "Do you really mean it, or are you just pulling our legs?"

"My dear kid, what fun should I get out of pulling your legs?" asked George. "Of course you're welcome to come! The more the merrier!"



CHAPTER 19.

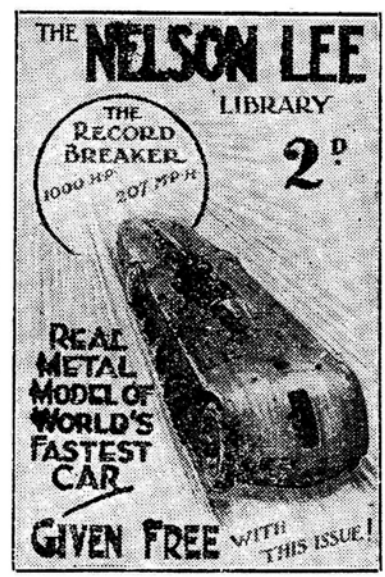
Off to Flanders!

NIPPER was looking rather dubious as he glanced at the flushed faces of his companions.

He was satisfied that Archie's brother had spoken with all sincerity, but Nipper, as captain of the Remove, wasn't at all sure that it would be wise for them to go. Handforth and the others, naturally, were not troubled by any such thoughts. Here was an unexpected chance for them to fly across to Ypres, and the prospect was too good to be missed. They didn't get such a chance every day.

In their excitement, too, the juniors had completely forgotten about Mrs. Compton and the load of coals they had been taking to her. The prospect of a trip across to Flanders—of the possibility of seeing the stranger recover his memory—had driven all such thoughts from their heads. Even Nipper had forgotten that he had come here originally to get some petrol for Handforth's Austin Seven—although this was probably

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



due to the fact that he was worried because the juniors were thinking of going on this flight without official permission.

"Well, of course, if it's O.K. with you George, we might as well buzz along with you," said Archie delightedly. "We're all keen on this poor chappie whose memory is buzzing somewhere in the offing, and we should like to see him grab it again. I mean to say, it would be frightfully interesting to be on the actual spot when he bagged it."

"That's all very well, Archie, but we oughtn't to go," said Nipper, frowning. "If you fellows haven't the sense to see——"

"Great Scott!" interrupted Handforth, staring. "Are you going to raise any objections?"

"A good many!" said Nipper, nodding. "In the first place, we've got to get back to St. Frank's for morning lessons, and——"

"Bother morning lessons!" said Handforth. "We've got permission to go, so why should we have to go back?"

"We've only got George's permission—and he's an irresponsible-looking merchant, by all that I can see," said Nipper, grinning at Archie's brother. "But we haven't got permission from our housemaster, have we? Or from the Head? Just imagine what the Head will say when he gets to know that we've all flown off to Belgium! He'll have about four fits on the spot, and they'll have to call half a dozen specialists from London to bring him round!"

Handforth shrugged his shoulders.

"Why worry about the Head and his troubles?" he asked. "I expect we shall all be hauled on the carpet when we get back, but who cares? It will mean detention for two or three days, perhaps—or a good old swishing all round. But isn't it worth it?"

"Rather!" chorused all the others.

"But that's not the point," said Nipper impatiently. "I don't want to be a wet blanket, or anything like that, and I don't want to start preaching. But if we go on this trip we shall go without permission—without official permission, I mean—because George doesn't really count. And it seems rather like cutting lessons deliberately——"

But the others wouldn't listen to him, and, in any case, Colonel Glenthorne and his guest arrived at that moment. They were both well wrapped up in overcoats, and it was clear that they were prepared for an immediate start.

The colonel's somewhat cryptic reference to George the previous afternoon was now explained. The colonel had known all along that George had planned to bring an aeroplane here this morning if the weather was fine, so that a trip could be made across to Flanders. There had been talk of this Flanders visit for over a week, but none of the juniors had believed that the journey would be made by air.

The stranger himself was looking flushed and excited—quite as excited as any of the schoolboys. There was a keen light in his eyes, and his haggard expression had gone.

"I have a feeling that this experiment will be successful!" he was saying, as they came up. "If only I can gaze upon those scenes again—if I can walk near the old trenches, and see the old landmarks. Any little thing might do the trick—the sight of something familiar might bring my memory back to me. I feel that we shall be successful."

"Of course we shall—of course we shall," said the colonel. "Hallo, hallo! What are you boys doing here? Good gracious! Some of them are actually climbing into the machine! Come out of that at once, you young rascals!"

"It's all right, pater, I've given them permission to come along," said George genially. "No reason why they shouldn't, is there?"

"Eh?" said Colonel Glenthorne, with a start. "Upon my soul, George, what a fellow you are for impulse. You don't mean to tell me that you have invited all these boys to come with us?"

"Yes, I have," grinned his hopeful son. "Why not? The old bus goes better when she's fully loaded—they're made to carry a lot of passengers, and they're rather bumpy unless they're filled. Besides, why not give the kids a treat? I was at St. Frank's once."

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he added feelingly. "It wasn't often that I got a chance like this!"

"Good man!" said Handforth approvingly. "It's all right, colonel; we may get into a bit of trouble when we return, but we don't care! Besides, we're awfully interested in Mr.—Mr.—— I mean, in this gentleman. We want to see him recover his memory!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "In fact, pater, I've set my heart on it."

Colonel Glenthorne shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I don't altogether approve," he said. "I don't think you boys should come. But it's not my machine—and I can only conclude that George is just as irresponsible as ever he was. Well, get aboard, as you're going. But you mustn't expect me to make any excuse for you if your headmaster approaches me. I shall tell him quite frankly that——"

But the rest of the colonel's sentence was lost as he climbed into the machine. Handforth and the other juniors were grinning. They knew Colonel Glenthorne of old—and they felt quite sure that if the headmaster actually did make any inquiries, the colonel would stoutly defend them.

Less than five minutes afterwards, the big machine ran across the smooth parkland, then rose gently from the earth. In the big passenger cabin, with its comfortable chairs, the St. Frank's fellows were lounging at their ease. This was a treat they had never expected. In fact, they could hardly believe their luck, even now.

In a way of speaking, they were sneaking off, and the headmaster of St. Frank's would certainly receive a considerable shock when he heard about the escapade. But what did it matter? They were off—bound for Flanders—and they could afford to leave the future to look after itself!

It was while the big biplane was crossing the Channel that Nipper suddenly remembered about Mrs. Compton and the coal they had intended delivering to her.

But by then, of course, it was too late, and the juniors, genuinely ashamed of their forgetfulness, realised that they could do nothing—for the time being, at any rate.

"Never mind," said Nipper consolingly. "We'll deliver it when we arrive back in England—better late than never, you know!"



CHAPTER 20.

The Old and the New!

HANDFORTH looked rather aggrieved.

"Well, it's a swindle!" he said scornfully. "I thought we were going to have a jolly long trip, with all sorts of excitement on the way, and here we are, preparing to land, and absolutely nothing has happened!"

"What did you expect?" asked Church. "Did you think that we should turn two or three somersaults and land in the sea, or something?"

"How could we land in the sea?" demanded Handforth. "The whole thing's a fraud! We thought it was going to be exciting, with lots of adventures, and we've been travelling along just as smoothly as though we were in a railway train."

This, of course, was true enough—hence Handforth's disappointment. He was a fellow who loved adventure and excitement, and travelling in one of the modern passenger-carrying aeroplanes was all too mild for a fellow of Handforth's temperament. As many aerial passengers have discovered for themselves, flying is a rather dull business, and on the cross-channel services many passengers habitually fall asleep.

From the windows, as the big aeroplane was gliding downwards, the juniors could see a large vista of flat-looking country, wooded here and there, with towns and villages dotted about. It was a perfectly clear morning, with brilliant wintry sunshine. The weather, indeed, was as perfect as it could be.

When, at last, the machine landed—evidently at a prepared spot—a number of Belgian mechanics came hurrying round, and there were some officials, too. It was not a fully equipped aerodrome—but merely a large stretch of grassland. But George, it seemed, had made all the preliminary arrangements, and the aeroplane was expected.

"Where are we?" asked Handforth, after they had climbed out, and were once more standing on terra firma.

"Somewhere near Ypres, I think," said Nipper, as he looked at the landscape with interest. "That must be Ypres, over there. The idea was to bring the stranger straight to the scene, you see. He has been plumped down right on the vital spot, as it were."

There was very little delay in moving off. Colonel Glenthorne had taken the patient by the arm, and he was walking away towards a tree-lined road which bordered the end of the landing ground. Apparently there had been a deliberate object in coming here, away from any definitely civilised centre.

"Well, what shall we do?" asked Nipper, as he glanced at the other juniors. "Shall we wait here, by the aeroplane, until they come back, or would it be better to go with them?"

"Go with them, of course," replied Handforth firmly. "We want to see what happens when the poor chap recovers his memory."

"If he does!" said Church.

"We must hope for the best, anyhow," said Handforth, in a sombre voice.

For once, the mighty Edward Oswald was feeling rather subdued. There was a certain solemnity about the occasion—which was very apparent now. At first, the juniors had regarded this trip in the light of a pleasant, exciting little jaunt. But now they realised its full significance.

So, leaving George with the aeroplane, the juniors followed closely behind Colonel Glenthorne and his companion. There was much to interest them—although there were not many indications that this had once been a battle-scarred war zone.

They were, in fact, fairly within the Salient, and before long—after walking for some little time—they found themselves west of Zillebeke Lake. Colonel Glenthorne paused here, and pointed.

"There, in that direction, was Shrapnel Corner," he said. "Does it bring anything back to your mind?"

"Nothing!" said the stranger, shaking his head helplessly. "It is most peculiar—most exasperating. I feel, within me, that I know all this ground—that it is vaguely familiar. And yet I cannot recall anything definite."

They looked across the railway embankment—towards Zillebeke Lake. They looked over the sloping ground north of the Lake, where the British batteries had once tried to dig themselves in, but had found it impossible to do so, owing to the all-pervading mud.

They walked on, and crossed the railway at Shrapnel Corner, and again the colonel paused.

"By gad, this was a spot!" he said solemnly. "Remember how the ammunition column drivers and transport men often came past here in a tornado of shells? Do you remember how they had to wait, poor beggars, while killed horses and men were cleared out of the way?"

"I seem to remember a little!" said the other huskily. "Yes, this ground is more familiar than I first thought. It seems to me that I can see—— But, no, it won't come clear!" he added helplessly.

In 1917 this same spot had been a mass of mud and shell holes and dugouts; as far as the eye could see, there had been nothing but trenches and scarred tree stumps. Now there was a very great difference—tilled fields, well-laid-out roadways, cattle grazing unconcernedly. Ten years ago, too, this ground was nobody's property. To-day it was private—and one had to keep to the roads and footpaths, otherwise one was trespassing.

The colonel shook his head rather sadly as he looked at it all.

"I'm glad to see it changed so much—glad to see that the scars of war have been so removed," he said. "But I'm afraid this scene is of little value for our purpose. It is so different—so utterly changed."

"What are those?" asked the stranger suddenly, in a rather queer voice, as he pointed.

"Eh? Which?" said the colonel, starting.

He turned, and looked at the objects that the other had pointed out. He recognised them at once.

"Pill-boxes!" he replied. "Gad, how they persist! Four or five of them, eh? Shall we go and give them a closer inspection? We may be trespassing, but I don't think it will matter."

Thirty or forty yards from the roadway these old German pill-boxes were still standing—mellowed by age somewhat, but still grim reminders of those dreadful war days!



CHAPTER 21.

The Colonel's Trick!

NIPPER and Handforth and the other juniors hung back while Colonel Glenthorne and his companion penetrated into one of those ramshackle old pill-boxes. Truth to tell, they were beginning to fear that the experiment would fail.

"Well, as far as I'm concerned, it's a frost," said Handforth firmly. "Somebody said that we were coming to a battlefield. And all we can see is ordinary-looking fields and roads—with villages between."

"But, my dear ass, you didn't expect to find the place just the same as it was during the war?" asked McClure. "It's over nine years ago, you must remember—and nine years is a long time. These Belgian farmers have been doing some pretty wonderful things——"

"Hallo!" interrupted Reggie Pitt. "Look at the colonel!"

All the juniors stared, for Colonel Glenthorne had appeared at a rough opening in one of those concrete pill-boxes, and he was pointing out across the field into the distance.

"There they come!" he shouted hoarsely. "Now then, men! Get ready! There must be five hundred of the devils, if one! We're surrounded—and we've got to go down fighting!"

"What the dickens——" began Handforth.

"Hush!" whispered Nipper. "There must be some reason for this!"

"Yes, we'll go under fighting!" roared the colonel at the top of his voice. "No surrender, then! And we won't be taken prisoners! Come on—let's go out to meet them! Let's show them what we're made of!"

With a jump that was extraordinarily agile, considering his bulk and strength, Archie's father leapt through the opening and charged at the imaginary enemy. Immediately behind him came the stranger, his face flushed, his eyes glittering.

"Leave this to me, Henderson!" he shouted. "You stay there, man! You keep behind that shelter——"

He broke off abruptly in the middle of his sentence. For in getting out of the jagged opening he went sprawling: a wild sort of cry escaped him as his head struck the ground.

Colonel Glenthorne, turning sharply, cried out aloud with alarm.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "I'd no

idea—— Boys—boys—come here quickly! The poor fellow has stumbled and——"

But the stranger was already struggling to his feet, and he had unconsciously gripped a wooden stake which had been lying near him. He was upright now, and contemptuously he brushed aside a trickle of blood from a gash in his forehead.

"Have they gone?" he muttered hoarsely. "I don't seem to remember—— What? Why, where——"

"Never mind about that!" shouted Colonel Glenthorne harshly. "Don't stand there staring at me, you fool! Don't you understand that we're in danger? Quick! What's your name? What's your regiment? I've got to know——"

"Compton, sir—Major Compton," said the other hoarsely. "I was——"

He broke off, and a quick light leapt into his eyes. Then, as he stared at Colonel Glenthorne, all the colour fled from his flushed face.

"Why, what did I say just now?" he asked, passing a hand dazedly over his face.

"You said that your name was Major Compton," replied the colonel quickly. "Man alive! Don't you understand? You've told me your name! You've told me——"

"Compton!" yelled Handforth. "Then—then——"

"Shut up, you fathead!" muttered Nipper, pulling his arm. "Don't interrupt him now!"

"But I'm thinking of that woman in the cottage——"

"So are all the rest of us!" said Nipper. "But let him recover his memory. It may have been the colonel's trick that did it, or it may have been that fall. Probably both of them together."

The stranger was swaying somewhat, and Colonel Glenthorne held him firmly.

"Steady!" he said soothingly. "Take it easily, major. I think you'll be all right now, but you mustn't strain yourself."

"It wasn't the fall!" said Major Compton quietly. "That was nothing—nothing—just a scratch. But for the moment I was living back in the past—and I seemed to see——"

"By gad!" interrupted the colonel, with a start. "Major Compton. That name seems familiar to me now. Aren't you the man who took one of these pill-boxes single-handed? Aren't you the fellow who was awarded a V.C. for conspicuous bravery?"

"It was nothing—absolutely nothing!" said the other. "I was awarded the V.C., I will admit—but I did not deserve it. Let us think of something else. I'm trying to recall—— Yes, I am remembering things now. It is all vague and indistinct, but everything is becoming clearer."

He turned aside for a moment, and the colonel made a motion towards the juniors, but before they could obey—before they could move off—Major Compton turned again, and now his eyes were filled with alarm.

"Yes, by heaven, I can remember!" he muttered huskily. "I went to London, in answer to an advertisement—I went to get a job. And my wife—my children! I left them, and—— What is the date?" he went on fiercely. "Tell me, what is the date today?"

He was told, and he uttered a groan.

"Five weeks!" he panted. "That was five weeks ago! And when I left that cottage my wife had nothing but a few shillings—and a promise from me that I should write and send——"

"Hold on, sir—hold on!" shouted Handforth, running forward. "There's no need for you to worry yourself. Mrs. Compton is all right—although I believe she's been going through a pretty rotten time lately. And the kiddies are all right, too!"

The major seized Handforth so firmly by the shoulders that the leader of Study D winced.

"How do you know?" he demanded. "Tell me! How do you know?"

"Why, we saw Mrs. Compton only yesterday," said Handforth, trying to struggle free. "And we were going to take her some coal this morning, but owing to the excitement of this trip, we forgot all about it. Still, we intend delivering it immediately we get back."

"Yes, we completely forgot about Mrs. Compton!" said Church. It was too bad of us! We were so keen to come on this trip that we overlooked——"

"You tell me that you saw my wife yesterday?" interrupted Major Compton breathlessly. "Is it possible that—— I left her there, and it was my intention to return within a couple of days. I told her that I might be two or three—perhaps a week. I left it indefinite, because it was my idea to surprise her when I returned. Thank Heaven she is still safe—and my children are well, too?"

"They're not only well, but before the day's out we'll have them all comfortable, too!" said Handforth firmly. "You can leave it to us, sir—and the sooner we get back to England the better! We've had enough of this place!"



CHAPTER 22.

The Re-union!

IT had seemed to the boys that the outward trip had been all too short. But on the journey home, it seemed to them that it would never end. They were anxious to get back, and they had lost all count of the hours. Actually, the afternoon was well on its way when the aeroplane dropped once again into Colonel Glenthorne's park, and alighted safely on the rolling grassland.

"Well, we're back, anyhow!" said Nipper, as he climbed down. "And now, you chaps, the best thing we can do is to buzz off to the school as quickly as we can!"

"We're not going back to St. Frank's until we've delivered that coal!" interrupted Handforth firmly. "We've got to finish our job. Besides, we want to see what happens when Major Compton gets back to his wife and kiddies."

During the return journey, the juniors had discussed the situation in all its bearings. And they had marvelled at the singular coincidence—at the fact that that unfortunate lady should be the wife of the stranger who had been wandering about in the district for so long a time.

Some of the fellows had wondered why Mrs. Compton had heard nothing of the "wild man"—and they had wondered why she had not made any inquiries for her husband.

But the thing was quite clear, really.

For it seemed that Major Compton had gone to London, telling his wife that he would be away for a few days, and that he would write to her from his lodgings in town. Actually, he had written, telling her that he had secured the post that he had hoped for, and almost immediately after the letter had been posted, his mental derangement had occurred. He could not tell exactly when, or how, he had lost his memory. But for many weeks—for months—he had been seeking work, and the constant strain had told upon his constitution to such an extent that he had not been able to stand it.

It was obvious that he must have wandered down into the St. Frank's district by some sort of instinct—but, instead of finding his way to that little cottage, he had lurked in the wood, probably because he knew it all by heart. He was an old St. Frank's boy, and all recollection of the past years had faded from his mind. He had been living again in his boyhood, and so he had never known that he had been within a few miles of his wife and children.

It was just as natural that Mrs. Compton had known nothing of her husband's plight. For she had waited there, without newspapers, and without communication with any of the townspeople. She had believed that her husband was in London, and, even if she had heard rumours about the "wild man," she would never have connected him with the major.

In just the same way, the newspaper paragraphs concerning the unfortunate officer had had no result—since Mrs. Compton had never seen them, and it turned out that the major had no intimate relatives.

Immediately upon arrival, Colonel Glenthorne had one of his cars brought out, and they drove off for the cottage.

The boys, very enthusiastic, hurried back to that hill where the little Austin had been left. There they found it backed into the grass border of the road and left derelict. But they brought petrol now, and within a very few minutes the little engine was humming away as industriously as ever.

All the bicycles were there, too—just as they had been left. It seemed very wonderful that all the juniors had been to Flanders during these intervening hours.

"I'm not sure that we ought to deliver this coal now," said Nipper. "The situation is changed, you know. The major might not like it—and we can't keep up that spoof that he ordered the coal, can we?"

"That doesn't matter!" said Handforth briskly. "We've got the stuff, and we know jolly well that Mrs. Compton hasn't any fire! So this coal is jolly well going to be delivered. If you chaps don't like to come with me, I'll go alone!"

But the other fellows were enthusiastic for the completion of their task, and, before long, the procession was once more going on its way, as though there had been no interruption.

"Well, here we are!" said Handforth, as they came within sight of the cottage. "There's the colonel's car standing outside, too. What do we care? Who's going to lend a hand with these sacks?"

Everybody expressed his willingness, and within another minute the juniors were going up to the door of the cottage in a procession—with sacks of coal on their shoulders. Handforth led the way, and he thumped heavily on the door.

It was opened by the colonel, and he opened his eyes in wide surprise as he saw that unusual spectacle.

"Why, good gracious, what's all this?" he demanded.

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"We've brought the coal, sir!" replied Handforth brightly.

"The coal?" said Colonel Glenthorne. "But I don't—— Ah, of course!" he added. "Come in, young man—come in! Where do you want the coal, Mrs. Compton?"

Mrs. Compton, who had been standing with her husband near a little window, moved forward, and the light of recognition came into her eyes as she saw the St. Frank's fellows.

"I didn't know that any coal was ordered," she said. "And I am quite sure that these boys have brought it on their own initiative. Oh, Frank, you don't know how good they have been to me!"

"I think I do know!" said Major Compton quietly. "There's nothing much that I can say, and still less that I can do. And I am not going to be foolish enough to refuse this coal, since I know that we need it so badly. Bring it in, boys—and I hope that you will understand that we appreciate——"

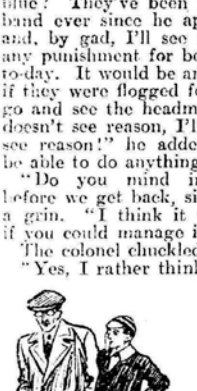
"Oh, cheese it, sir," said Handforth uncomfortably. "It's nothing. We've got the stuff, and we want to get rid of it. And some of the other fellows have gone into Edgemore on their bikes to get some milk and a joint of meat, and——"

"Good lads—good lads!" chuckled Colonel Glenthorne. "That's splendid! Didn't I tell you, Mrs. Compton, that these boys were true blue? They've been interested in your husband ever since he appeared at St. Frank's, and, by gad, I'll see that they don't receive any punishment for being absent from school to-day. It would be an infernally unjust thing if they were flogged for their generosity. I'll go and see the headmaster myself, and, if he doesn't see reason, I'll—I'll—— But he will see reason!" he added fiercely. "He won't be able to do anything else!"

"Do you mind interviewing the Head before we get back, sir?" asked Nipper, with a grin. "I think it will be the safest way, if you could manage it."

The colonel chuckled.

"Yes, I rather think it would!" he agreed.



CHAPTER 23.

All Serene!

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE led his father aside, ten minutes later, and they paced up and down the lane, some little distance from the cottage.

"There's one thing I want to chat about pater, before we buzz back to the school," said Archie solemnly. "Now, about this chappie—about the good old major. I mean to say, what about him?"

"Well, it seems to me that everything is very satisfactory now," replied the colonel. "He has recovered his memory, and his injury, after all, is only a graze. He has been restored to his wife and children, and, so far as we are concerned, the matter is ended."

"Absolutely not!" said Archie firmly. "Good gad! Ended? I suppose you mean ended? Without wishing to be positively impolite, pater, kindly be good enough to talk sense!"

"What, exactly, are you trying to get at, young man?" asked his father sternly. "What idea have you got in that peculiar mind of yours?"

"Well, it's like this," said Archie. "I mean, about Major Compton. Here he is—a priceless sort of chappie, with a priceless war record. In fact, he's priceless in all sorts of ways. An Old Boy of St. Frank's, an ex-officer of the Army—a distinguished soldier—and the poor cove is absolutely without any work. What about it? I mean, just think of his posish! An educated gentleman—an officer—going about, practically starving. Can't something be done?"

Colonel Glenthorne's expression softened.

"So that's what you're getting at, is it?" he asked. "Well, it's rather a delicate subject, Archie. I understand that Major Compton has no work at all. The post he was after in London—quite an insignificant position—was filled when he arrived. And I believe that he earned a few odd shillings in a manner—— Well, he didn't quite like to tell me, but I gather that he was not averse to doing menial work in order to keep the wolf from the door. But I agree with you that it is all wrong. A man like Major Compton deserves a good position in life. Alas! I am afraid that many of our valiant soldiers are to-day fighting hard for their very existence."

"But when we come upon a case that we can help, pater, why can't something be done?" asked Archie. "I know, of course, that we can't offer charity, or anything like that. Dash it all, there's a question of pride, what?"

"If it will relieve your mind in any way, Archie, I'll tell you something," smiled his father. "Within a month from to-day, the steward of my estates is resigning his post."

"Good gad!" said Archie. "Old Jevons? You don't absolutely mean to tell me that good old Jevons is retiring?"

"After thirty years' faithful service," nodded his father.

"Well I'm dashed!" ejaculated Archie. "I mean, dear old Jevons has been part of the estate, as it were. And so the old boy is retiring, what?"

"Yes, and I shall be requiring a capable, trustworthy man to take his place," said Colonel Glenthorne thoughtfully. "I don't know, of course, whether Major Compton will be qualified for such a post—but I have it in mind to give him a trial. It is a gentleman's position, of course, and I am hoping that the major will find it acceptable. At all events, I intend to install him on the Glenthorne estate at once—as assistant steward. If everything goes well, he will be a permanency there."

(*Concluded on page* 40.)

JOKER JONES' LEGACY!



Written specially by

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE

of the Fifth Form at St. Frank's.

WHAT'S HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS:

Robert Wellington Jones has unexpectedly inherited a moth-eaten school at Snayle-in-the-Hollow, Essex. He has discovered that Dr. Cobb Webb, the whiskery headmaster, has been doing a considerable amount of twisting for many years. While the Head has gone to London, to effect Jones' dismissal, Jones has entirely redecorated the school, with the help of the boys. Until now, Dr. Webb believes that Jones is merely an assistant master, and he harbours the delusion that all will still be well. With him is a certain "Mr. Muggeridge"—but Dr. Webb does not know that this meek gentleman is really one of Jones' actor friends, and that he is playing a part, according to Jones' instructions. So now let us carry on with this week's treat!

Worse and Worse!

"YES," said Dr. Cobb Webb angrily to Mr. Muggeridge, who was looking very solemn, "we'll find this—this impudent young puppy, and you shall dismiss him instantly!"

Mr. Muggeridge merely muttered something unintelligible under his breath.

Then suddenly, and with a roar that resembled the foghorn of an Atlantic liner, Dr. Cobb Webb raised his voice.

"Jones!" he bellowed. "Jones! Confound it, where are you?"

But there came no reply from Robert Wellington Jones, and the Head suddenly glanced at his watch.

"Ah, of course!" he said, with a gulp, "Jones is obviously taking the school at prep in the class-room! Come, Mr. Muggeridge—we must go to the class-room at once."

"Anything you say!" nodded Jones' pal.

"And what is more, we will humiliate this outrageous young upstart in front of the whole school!" continued the Head gloatingly. "I shall expect you, Mr. Muggeridge, to dismiss him—to give him his marching orders in the hearing of all the boys! We have had enough of this foolery!"

Dr. Webb turned on his heel, and strode off down one of the passages, keeping well to the centre of the flooring, as though he feared that the walls would come out and hit him. Well, in a way of speaking, they did so—for their brilliant colouring was enough to hit anybody.

"Outrageous!" fumed the Head. "Appal-

ling! I cannot imagine how the man did all this within the space of twelve hours!"

Jones' pal said nothing, but he could understand perfectly; he knew exactly what Jones was capable of! All the evidence he had seen in Snayle School was as nothing compared to many of Jones' previous exploits.

Into the class-room they went—only to find that it was deserted. The walls, of a delicate vermilion, seemed to mock at the newcomers. Dr. Webb stared round in amazement. What had become of the school? Where were the boys?

"I cannot understand it!" ejaculated the Head, staring at Jones' pal in bewilderment. "Where are they? What has become of them? What has Jones done?"

"Ah!" said the alleged Mr. Muggeridge.

"There shall be a reckoning when I find him!" fumed the headmaster. "Of all the impudent scoundrels! He has ruined the school—he has utterly transformed the place."

"I don't pretend to know what it was like before Jones took a hand in the matter," said Jones' pal, "but I must admit I can't understand your point of view, Dr. Webb. What's the matter with the place? It's nice and bright—nice and cheery! There's nothing like colour, after all. And the youngsters rather need plenty of light."

Dr. Webb stared at his companion with a dull kind of horror.

"But—but, Mr. Muggeridge, you don't agree to all this—this decoration?" he asked frantically. "You don't approve?"

"Well, it looks rather frisky, if you know what I mean," said Jones' pal. "Strikes a novel note in school decoration, eh? I always was rather keen on originality, you know. I'm beginning to think that this fellow Jones isn't such a bad lot as you have made him out to be."

The Head tore frantically at his whiskers.

"But where is he?" he panted. "Where is he? And where are all the boys? When you see him, Mr. Muggeridge, you will change your mind! You will realise that he is utterly unsuited for the position of assistant-master in this school! And I insist that he shall be dismissed!"

"Fine!" said Jones' pal, nodding. "That's the way, Dr. Webb! You keep on insisting—you show your authority! You're the headmaster, after all, and I'm only the owner of the place."

The headmaster gulped—probably because he suspected that Jones' pal was being sarcastic. Let it be admitted at once that Jones' pal was thoroughly enjoying the situation, and that Dr. Webb's rapidly-growing uneasiness was giving Jones' pal a great deal of simple pleasure. In fact, he was remarkably braced.

"Where is the man?" went on the Head. "That's what I want to know, Mr. Muggeridge?"

"Isn't there anybody here who can tell you?" asked the other mildly.

"Yes, yes, of course!" said Dr. Webb. "The servants! Good heavens! Surely the servants haven't left the place, too? What is the meaning of this extraordinary mystery?"

He dashed away, and went into his study, with the intention of ringing for a servant at once. It was far more dignified to question the menials in the privacy of his own sanctum.

Jones' pal was struck by the dinginess and drabness of the Head's study—for this apartment was about the only one that had not been tampered with. It remained "as you were," stark in its unbeautiful ugliness.

And there, in the very centre of the headmaster's desk, stood a square of cardboard, and it contained these enlightening words: "Have taken the school to the pictures. Am sure that you will not begrudge the boys this harmless pleasure. Will see you when we get back.—JONES."

The Return of the Prodigals!

AN inarticulate sound escaped from the gap in Dr. Cobb Webb's face. He seized the cardboard, tore it into little pieces, and scattered them on the floor. Then he turned to Jones' pal, and was just in time to see that gentleman grinning with appreciation.

"Now, sir!" bellowed the Head. "Isn't this enough?"

Jones' pal pulled himself together.

"Well, of course, I'm not surprised——" he began.

"Not surprised?"

"Well, I mean—it's just the sort of thing that he *would* do!" said Jones' pal. "That is to say—— Hang it, I nearly forgot! After all, there's not much harm in it, is there?" he added meekly.

"There is a great deal of harm in it, sir!" snapped the Head. "What about the school's discipline? The pictures, indeed! How dare this—this upstart take my boys to the pictures?"

"But isn't it usual for schoolboys to go to the pictures?" asked the supposed owner.

"No; not in this school!" replied Dr. Webb. "I never allow my boys to go anywhere! It is my policy to keep them locked up here—under my own eye! I am always very particular not to allow them—ahem!—I should say, Mr. Muggeridge, that I am always most careful to——"

As a matter of fact, the old boy didn't absolutely know how to go on. He had got himself into a bit of a knot, owing to his rage, and he was thankful enough when various sounds from outside caused an interruption. Jones' pal was the first to notice the disturbance, and he walked towards the nearest window, curious to discover the next move in this little game.

"Ah!" he said. "Here we have Mr. Jones and his young friends. They have returned, Dr. Webb!"

"Now we shall deal with the young scoundrel!" said the headmaster harshly. "And I am relying upon you, Mr. Muggeridge, to back me up. You have seen how

utterly irresponsible this young man is—and you must realise how unsuited he is to the position. He must be dismissed—and you are the man to——"

"We will see!" interrupted the other. "You surely must admit that Jones displays a certain originality—a kind of refreshing breeziness!"

By this time, Dr. Cobb Webb was in a condition of sheer agony. For he was beginning to detect a wavering note in the voice of this young man—whom he assumed to be the owner of the school. With a bellow of anger, he rushed for the door, and a moment later he was outside in the courtyard.

By this time, the school had all arrived, and all the boys were in full view. The gleams from the lighted windows were sufficient to illuminate the whole courtyard.

For a moment Dr. Cobb Webb stood there goggling. It is the only word to be used. And who shall blame him for this optical demonstration? Was there not sufficient reason for anybody to goggle?

Robert Wellington Jones was at the head of his boys, and he was smiling and happy. Every boy carried a big parcel. Some of these parcels were innocent of wrapping, and so the Head could easily detect what they consisted of.

One boy carried a football, another was struggling under the weight of a wireless set. Still another carried a huge loud speaker. At least three boys were entrusted with a gramophone, and there were dart-boards to be seen, punching-balls, boxing-gloves, and a score of similar articles that are dear to the heart of a schoolboy.

The Head took all this in with one comprehensive glance, and if his anger had been at fever-pitch before, it was now quite Vesuvius-like.

"Jones!" he thundered, striding forward. "So you have returned, eh? So you have brought the boys back?"

Jones waved his hand.

"And, as you will see, Dr. Webb, they are all cheery and bright," he said amiably. "Now I ask you, as man to man, were these boys in this condition of happiness prior to my arrival? Cannot you see the vast and gratifying difference that my advent has made?"

"What—what are all these things?" bellowed the Head, pointing to the parcels. "Where have these boys been?"

"Well, the general idea was to go to the pictures," replied Jones. "But on second thoughts we decided otherwise. So we made a round of the town, and made a few purchases. It occurred to me, Dr. Webb, that the boys might like to indulge in some simple form of amusement."

"You—you impudent young rogue!" roared the Head. "Not content with converting this school into a jazz palace, you must now go to the town and waste your money——"

"One moment!" interrupted Jones. "Not my money, Dr. Webb."

"What do you mean?" said the Head. "If it is not your money, whose is it? The boys themselves were not sufficiently——"

"The explanation is perfectly simple," said Jones. "All these things have been purchased out of your quarterly salary, Dr. Webb!"

"Out of *what?*" gasped the Head.

"Out of the quarter's salary that would have been due to you within a few days," said Jones benevolently. "It is some little mark of compensation, in my way of thinking. For years you have been robbing these unfortunate youngsters, and the time has now arrived when all that irregularity must cease. In a word, Dr. Webb, your little game has come unstuck!"

Good Old Jones!

IF the sky had fallen at that moment, Dr. Webb would not have been more surprised. Here was this upstart—this under-master—daring to talk to him in this fashion! Only by taking a firm grip of himself did the Head keep his voice under control.

"Enough!" he panted. "Mr. Jones, I can only conclude that you are mentally deficient! Here—standing next to me—is the sole owner of this school!"

"What about it, Jones?" asked the fake owner, rather out of his depth.

"Leave it to me, old man," said Jones. "I gather that you have done your part with all your usual efficiency. I rather think we have arrived at the moment when the balloon goes up. Dr. Webb, allow me to introduce myself as Robert Wellington Jones, nephew of Miss Muggeridge, the sole owner of Snayle School and all its appurtenances!"

Every boy in that courtyard gulped, and then, the next moment, a rousing cheer arose on the night air. So this was the explanation! Jones was the owner—Jones was the man who could give orders without fear of the consequences! No wonder he had been doing all these miraculous things!

As for Dr. Webb, his face turned pale, and he wilted at the knees. He pulled himself together with an obvious effort.

"Nonsense!" he bellowed. "Mr. Muggeridge is here—and he is the sole owner! I have interviewed Mr. Pinch, and——"

"That's all right, old chap," said Jones' pal. "That was merely a bit of bluff on our part. My name isn't Muggeridge at all. I'm Ronny Winston, one of Jones' friends. He asked me to get up this stunt, just to fool you! Jones is Miss Muggeridge's nephew."

Jones bowed.

"And as I refuse to dismiss myself, Dr. Webb, I have no alternative but to dismiss you," he said genially. "Not to put too fine a point on it, I am perfectly safe in saying that you are a mouldy old twister!"

"Sir!" gulped the Head.

"In fact," said Jones, "you are several kinds of a swindler. For years you deluded

my unfortunate aunt—you wangled the accounts every quarter, and pocketed money right and left. You half-starved your boys; you deprived them of the pleasures that were rightfully theirs, and you allowed them to live in a condition of continual gloom. If I weren't an easy-going sort of merchant, I should have brought a policeman back with me."

The whiskery Head staggered, and everything seemed to swim before his eyes. Exactly how a courtyard full of boys could swim is a problem which we do not intend to elucidate. So we will let it pass.

"But—but there is some mistake!" panted the Head frantically. "You do not realise that——"

"I realise that I am a soft sort of chap," said Jones. "I don't blame you so much as I blame my poor aunt. She allowed you to go on in this way, Dr. Webb, and you took every advantage of her trusting nature. But you've come to the end of your little game now—so you can clear out as soon as you like. I might as well add that if you have not cleared out at the end of half an hour, my friend and I will kick you out!"

"Hurrah!" roared the school enthusiastically.

"And I gather," said Jones, "that the school will willingly lend a hand in that process, Dr. Webb."

Precisely ten minutes and fifteen seconds later, Dr. Cobb Webb bolted out of Snayle School by the back door, and exactly what happened to him after that is unknown. He vanished—discredited and dishonoured. Taking all in all, he was lucky, indeed, to get off so lightly.

And—well, that's the end. Jones, of course, closed the school forthwith, and sent all the boys to their various homes. Ultimately, a new headmaster was procured, and the school was entirely reconditioned. But that's nothing to do with us. You've heard the yarn of Joker Jones' Legacy, and if you're not satisfied, then we can only assume that you do not know a good story when you read it.

If, in the course of this narrative, you have seen any resemblance between Robert Wellington Jones and myself, I can only say that I chose, as my central character, the finest type of fellow I could think of!

THE END.

(The first instalment of a thrilling new motor serial by Alfred Edgar, entitled "Sons of Speed" will appear next week. Don't forget, too, that this same issue will contain the first of our grand Free Gifts. Tell all your pals about this wonderful offer—and order your copy IN ADVANCE!)



(Continued from page 36.)

"Pater, you've absolutely lifted a load from the good old mind," said Archie. "I mean to say, this poor chappie——"

"Yes, I know all about it!" interrupted his father gently. "Well, here come the other boys—and I think they are ready to go back to St. Frank's. So you must go with them, Archie. And don't worry yourself about Major Compton. From to-day onwards he and his family will be perfectly all right."

And Archie was thoroughly satisfied on that point.

Colonel Glenthorne, true to his promise, went in advance of the juniors, and by the time they arrived at St. Frank's he had already had an interview with Dr. Malcolm Stafford. Nobody exactly knew how that interview had gone—but all the truants were called on the carpet, and they were obliged to face the Head.

Naturally, they heard a rather severe lecture. They were told of their recklessness in going off on such a trip without asking permission. They were informed that if such a thing ever occurred again they would be punished with the utmost severity. But the fact remained that they were all let off with a caution—and it was thus clear that Colonel Glenthorne's eloquence had had effect.

"Three cheers for Colonel Glenthorne!" said the juniors, in one voice, afterwards.

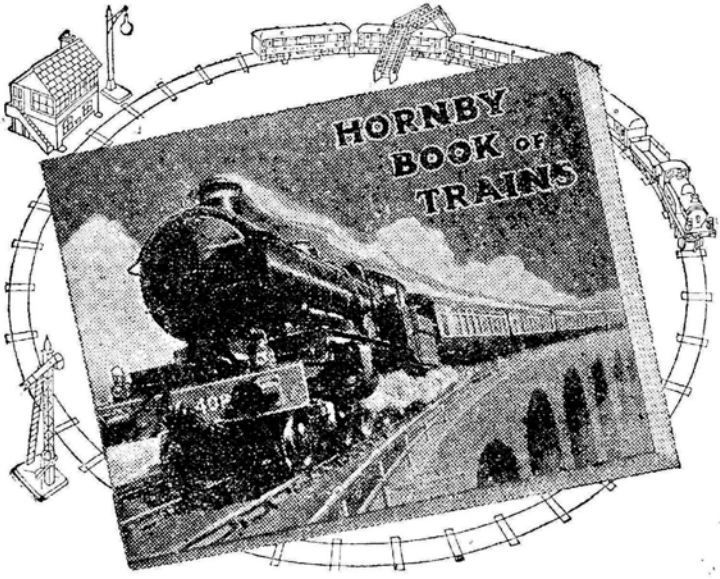
The rest of the school, of course, went green with envy when it heard all the facts. There had been a great deal of talk during the day, concerning the mysterious absence of so many Removites. All sorts of wild conjectures had been made—and all manner of inquiries had been put round.

But now that the affair was over, the school could talk about it freely—and there was scarcely a fellow, either in the Upper School or the Lower School, who wasn't glad that the mystery of the "wild man" of Bellton Wood had been solved.

THE END.

("Handforth's Barring Out!"—the title of next week's grand, long yarn—is the first of a new and novel "barring-out" series. Handy and his two chums, Church and McClure, are accused of committing a caddish action for which they are not responsible. The headmaster sentences Handforth to a public flogging, but Handy isn't taking any. Instead, the three chums defy the Head, and start a private barring-out in their study. Such is the main idea of next week's yarn, and it is written in Edwy Searles Brooks' usual inimitable style. Make sure you don't miss next week's bumper Free Gift issue!)

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Our Weekly Pow-Wow!

By The Editor.

The Free Gift of the Year!

FREE GIFTS! Why, the very sound of the words gives a thrill to most of us, especially when the nature of the gifts has been kept a secret. But most secrets find an outlet somewhere, and this week readers of the "Nelson Lee"—and other observant people—have been let into the secret. The coloured cover of this issue is telling the world what we are presenting Free to readers next week—a unique coloured metal model of the World's Wonder Car, the thousand h.p. Sunbeam—and a beautifully finished model at that. It was on this amazing car that Major H. O. D. Segrave accomplished a feat which might well have been thought impossible. The Sunbeam was planned to attain a speed of 200 miles per hour. It actually reached the total of 207 on one stretch of the Drayton Beach in Florida. Just think of it, you chaps—this gallant Britisher was hurtled through space at the terrific speed of 207 miles an hour. And a wonderful metal model of the speed car in which he accomplished this record-breaking feat is being given Free to Readers next Wednesday!

Something to Treasure!

This handsome model—a most perfect little reproduction of the record distance devourer imaginable—is a souvenir that will, I feel sure, occupy a very exalted place in the collections of boys and girls, for its giant parent has proved to the world just how good and reliable is British skill and engineering. I want all my chums to make absolutely certain of the N.L.L. next week; it would be a pity indeed if any one of you missed this superb gift. "Order in advance" is a phrase that appears regularly in your favourite paper, but it has a special significance this week. All readers are strongly urged to pay a visit to their newsagent To-day and place their order for next week's bumper Free Gift Number. I rather fancy we will all see in this splendid souvenir of the Sunbeam 1,000 h.p. car a useful little hint that it and the "Nelson Lee Libary" have this in common—they are both putting on the pace. Next week, then! Don't forget!

A Brilliant New Serial!

In view of the fact that our grand Free Gifts take the form of metal models of famous racing cars, it is only right and proper, so to speak, that the new serial which starts in next Wednesday's issue should deal with the motor racing track and all its accompanying thrills. All you chaps know Mr. Alfred Edgar; well, he's written, specially for the occasion, a full o' thrills motor racing yarn that will hold your interest from first to last. I'll say no more at this juncture, except that if any of you fellows miss the opening chapters of "SONS OF SPEED!" you'll be missing the treat of the year!

Puzzled!

Well, we are all that at times, and with far more reason than an ambitious fellow, under seventeen, by the way, who is out and out displeased with Fate because his screw is now only one-pound-five a week. Moreover, he has to do some jolly hard work for this money. He says he has dodged about from job to job, and left one because he never saw his home in daylight. What should he do about it? He likes dances and reading, and wants more spare cash, for the bulk of his earnings have to go to his keep, as is most reasonable. I did not regard this letter as that of a mere seeker after a soft job. The fellow who finds a soft job may think he has got what he wants, but he is not very likely to get much farther, and for this reason—namely, that it is not the soft-job man who wins. It is the real hard worker who picks up renewed stocks of energy at various periods of a long day just because he is keen on the business in hand. He is no clock-watcher. This is not a question of any special calling. You may be in a works with grime on the hands, or out in the open—that merchant keeps in the best trim physically—or at a desk in a town office. It is keenness all the time, and it is quite right there should be some discontent. By discontent one does not mean the cultivating of a grievance. Grievances are no company for men, and should be scrapped out of hand. I hope my chum will hold down his special job until another comes along.

The "Stapenhill Magazine."

Congratulations to Desmond Richardson on the "St. Frank's Magazine" he has sent me. This mag. contains articles on radio, cycling

and other up-to-date subjects. The editor had to fall back on writing, as the typewriter ribbon failed him, but the result, anyhow, is admirable. Those interested should write to 22, Astil Street, Stapenhill, Burton-on-Trent.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

L. Garritt, 12, King's Avenue, Burley Lodge Road, **Leeds**, wishes to correspond with readers in Canada, Australia and New Zealand who are interested in motors and motor-cycles.

Jimmy Cumming, 17, Hay Street, King William's Town, Cape Province, **South Africa**, wishes to correspond with Cecil A. Westrope, 26, Victoria Road, Surbiton, and M. Koji Mohamed, 191, Arab Street, Singapore; also with an S.F.L. club with a magazine. He would like to hear, too, from stamp collectors in Sheffield and Northern Ireland.

Edward A. Morley, 97, Gladstone Avenue, Noel Park, Wood Green, **London, N. 22**, is forming a club, ages 14-17, and wishes to hear from readers in his district.

E. F. G. (Member No. 6854), "Sarisbury," 126, Little Marlow Road, **Marlow**, Bucks, wishes to obtain the "Voyage to the Moon" series of the N.L.L., also the "Schoolboys' Own Library" No. 4, entitled: "The Fighting Form at St. Frank's."

Bert Johnston, 22, Miller Street, Essendon, Melbourne, Victoria, **Australia**, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere, especially in Canada.

Wilfred Moore, 59, West Street, **Congleton**, Cheshire, asks readers in any part of the world to correspond with him. General subjects, hobbies specially; ages 18-19. He also asks Masani Mochiyuki of Yokohama to write.

David B. Bennett, 1, Arnold Place, **Tredegar**, Mon., South Wales, wishes to correspond with readers.

J. J. Hoser-Cook, O.O., 21, Rook Street, Poplar, **London, E. 14**, would like to hear from readers on matters of general interest and topical subjects. All letters answered.

F. W. Williams, 15, Cotterell Street, **Hereford**, wishes to correspond with readers who are interested in sport and have sports photos to exchange.

Chas. V. Brereton, 50, High Street, **Congleton**, Cheshire, would like to hear at once from readers in United States, Peru, Spain, and New Zealand.

E. White, "Oxford House," Poplar Avenue, Norwood Green, **Southall**, Middx., wishes to correspond with readers in any part of the world; ages 15-18.

Harold Dell, Parsonage Road, **Ringwood**, Hants, wishes to correspond with readers in Australia, Canada, Straits Settlements, Bermuda and India. All letters answered.

S. W. Boucher, 18, Horsman Street, Grosvenor Street, Camberwell, **London, S.E. 5**, wishes to obtain No. 43, N.L.L., old series, dated March 25th, 1916.

Edwin F. Ebborn, Mount Leyshon, via Charters Towers, Queensland, **Australia**, wishes to correspond with stamp collectors and readers interested in photography.

Member No. 6840, 23, Rowlls Road, **Kingston-on-Thames**, wishes to correspond with readers; ages 17-19.

Leonard Rogers, "Marma," Rowcliff Street, Quarry Hill, Bendigo, Victoria, **Australia**, wishes to correspond with readers in England, and he would like some hints about cricket.

THE EDITOR.
(Chief Officer.)

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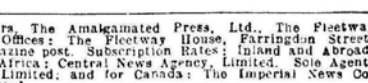
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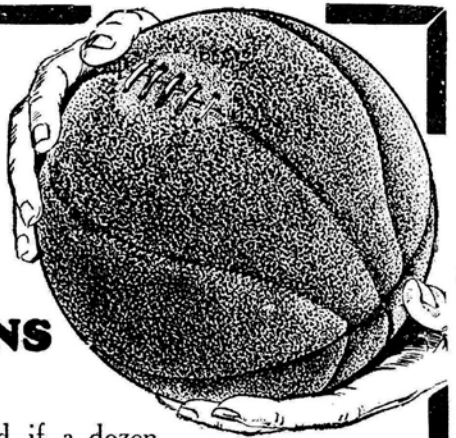


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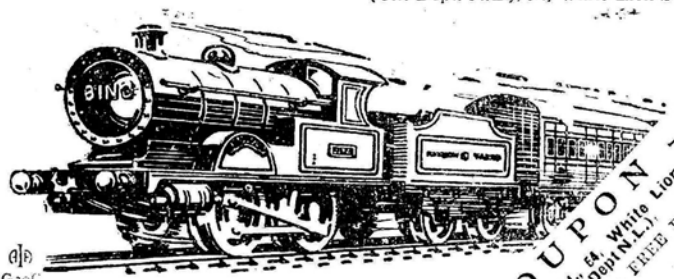


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