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FIFTY POUNDS REWARD!

An amusing incident from the grand long school yarn inside,
featuring the Chums of St. Frank's.

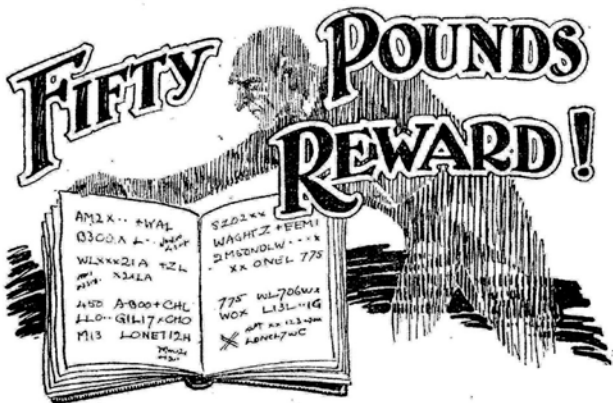
New Series No. 93.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

March 17th, 1923

**CLAUDE'S COWARDLY ACTION !**

Knowing what to expect from the aggressive Handforth, Claude Gore-Pearce decided to act first. With a swift, lightning-like movement, he ducked. His head went down, and he butted Handforth violently below the belt. "Ugh !" groaned Handy, in agony, and toppled backwards.



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Why should Mr. Lucas Snell, the lawyer who conducted the selling of Edgemore Manor to Mr. William Gore-Pearce, offer a big sum like fifty pounds for the recovery of his lost pocket-book? What does it contain that is of such paramount importance? That's what Nelson Lee wants to know; what he finds out. He finds out, too, other amazing things which concern the Earl of Edgemore! Start reading this superb yarn now.—Ed.

CHAPTER 1.

The First Eleven's Latest!

VIVIAN TRAVERS, of the Remove, strolled out of the Ancient House at St. Frank's and found Handforth & Co. on the steps, in the friendly March sunshine.

And Vivian Travers paused. It seemed to him that something was wrong. The famous chums of Study D were all silent. Edward Oswald Handforth himself was leaning against the stone balustrade, and his face was screwed up into a thoughtful frown, while he chewed the end of a

pencil. Church and McClure were standing by, gazing intently at a piece of paper.

"Well, well!" said Travers mildly. "Most remarkable!"

Indeed, it struck him as being uncanny. This was the first time that Travers had ever found Handforth & Co. silent. It was invariably the rule to find these three juniors wrangling, or arguing, or scrapping. But this was evidently the one occasion that proved the exception to the rule.

"Good-morning, dear old fellows," said Travers smoothly. "Any assistance needed?"

"No, thanks!" said Church briefly.

"Just as you like," smiled Travers. "But I'm rather good at cross-word puzzles."

"This isn't a cross-word puzzle, you ass!" said Handforth, looking up and frowning. "We're making out a list of the things that we've got to buy to-day—for Lord Edgemoor. Fatty Little reports that the grub is running short, and we've got to replenish the larder."

"Good men!" said Vivian Travers heartily. "Don't forget to call upon me if any cash is needed."

"I've got your name down on the list!" nodded Handforth. "We shan't want much, Travers—only a few quid, and it ought to be easy to collect. Now, lemme see," he added, chewing his pencil again. "Butter, ham—"

He reeled off a list of foodstuffs, and Church checked them on the paper.

"Yes, that's about the lot, I think," said Church at length. "We'll take this list to the grocer after lessons, I suppose? The stuff can be delivered by the van—"

"Not likely!" broke in Handforth. "We'll collect everything in my Austin Seven, and deliver it ourselves."

Nipper, the popular captain of the Remove, strolled up with Tregellis-West and Watson. The chums of Study C were smiling.

"Heard the latest, you fellows?" asked Nipper.

"About old Gore-Pearce?" said Handforth, glaring. "Yes, we have! All those beastly workmen at the Manor—"

"No, not about Gore-Pearce," said Nipper. "About the seniors."

"Blow the seniors!" said Handforth briefly.

"They've invited a French footer team over, and they're going to have the match on Saturday," said Nipper. "The beggars have been keeping it secret until this week. Thought they'd spring a surprise on us, I suppose."

"A French team?" said Handforth, staring.

"Yes."

"Here, at St. Frank's?"

"Yes."

"And they're going to play football?"

"Don't be an ass, Handy!" protested McClure. "Nipper spoke plainly enough, didn't he? There's a French soccer team coming to St. Frank's to play the seniors—"

"Rot!" interrupted Handforth. "Whoever heard such piffle! You're not going to tell me that French chaps can play football!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear ass, what do you think they are—cannibals?" asked Nipper, with a chuckle. "Soccer is almost as popular in France as it is here—and they've got some jolly hot teams, too. These French fellows are from the famous school at Corvigny, not far from Paris. They're in England now, touring round and playing different English public schools."

At any other time, perhaps, Handforth would have been indignant. He would have wanted to know why these French boys were not booked to play the juniors. But just at present Handforth was fully engrossed with the affairs of the unfortunate Earl of Edgemoor, and he had very little time to waste on the seniors.

"We shall have to rub up our French a bit," said Church dubiously. "Not that we shall come in contact with these Frenchies much, I suppose. They'll be completely monopolised by Fenton and his merry men."

"Oh, it'll be easy enough," said Handforth. "We shan't have to say much—just a few greetings."

"Comment allez - vous?" murmured Travers.

"Eh?" said Handforth, starting.

"He was only saying—How do you do?" in French!" chuckled Church. "You surely know that, Handy?"

"How the dickens am I supposed to understand his rotten accent?" asked Handforth tartly. "You've got it all wrong, Travers. If I meet any of these French chaps, I shall go up to 'em, and I shall say: 'Jee vous souhay un bonny fate.' They'll understand that all right!"

Nipper sank back into the arms of Tregellis-West and Watson.

"Help!" he murmured. "Oh, Handy, Handy!"

"What's the matter with you, fat-head?" demanded Handforth.

"I suppose you meant to say 'Je vous souhайте une bonne fête'?"

"That's what I *did* say!" retorted Edward Oswald.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Church and McClure and Travers and the others howled.

"I suppose you're cackling because you think that my accent was a bit wrong?" asked Handforth sourly. "Well, my accent is good enough for me! And if the French chaps don't like to understand it, it'll be their own fault!"

"We weren't laughing at that, Handy!" gasped Church. "We were laughing at the expression! I suppose you know that you were wishing somebody many happy returns of the day, don't you?"

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start. "You ass! You don't know what you're talking about! I was just saying the French for 'I'm very pleased to meet you.'"

But the other Removites simply refused to believe this, and they roared afresh.



CHAPTER 2.

The Remove's Protégé!

CHURCH was looking hot and uncomfortable. After all, Handforth was the leader of his study, and he ought to have known better.

"You must be absent-minded this morning, Handy!" he said gruffly. "You know jolly well that the French for 'Very pleased to meet you' is 'Charme de faire votre connaissance.'"

"Mercy been!" retorted Handforth sarcastically. "And in case you don't know it, that's French for 'Many thanks!'"

"Poor old Handy!" murmured Travers. "He meant to say 'Merci bien,' I gather? Well, well! If he uses any of his French on these French footballers, they'll probably think that he's talking in Siamese!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Travers chuckled, and moved off.

"Hi!" roared Handforth. "Just a minute, you funny fathead! I've a good mind to punch you on the nose, Travers!"

Vivian Travers shrugged his shoulders.

"Je suis bien a votre disposition," he said blandly.

Handforth stared.

"What's that he was saying about my disposition?" he asked darkly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear chap, he was only saying that he was quite at your service!" chuckled McClure. "My own French is a bit rusty, I know, but yours must be absolutely corroded!"

Handforth snorted.

"Blow Travers—and blow French!" he said. "We've got to see about this grocery order, and if anybody talks to me in French again, I'll smash him! As if there aren't enough English footer teams to play the seniors—without their inviting Froggies over here! Never heard of such rot!"

Handforth didn't mean this, of course. When the French footballers arrived at the end of the week, he would probably be among the first to welcome them.

But at the moment he was giving all his attention to the affairs of the Earl of Edgemore.

The whole of St. Frank's was talking about the Remove's elderly protégé. The whole district knew that the good-natured schoolboys had furnished a comfortable little cottage for the penniless earl, and that they were looking after him.

The old peer had been in that haven of refuge for nearly a week now. He and his butler, Jenkins, had nothing to worry about so far as food and housework were concerned. The Removites did everything.

They paid daily visits to that little cottage, which overlooked Edgemore Park. They kept the larder well filled, they did the cooking, they lit the fires and, in fact, performed every office that was necessary.

During this same week, there had been great activity at Edgemore Manor, too. Mr. William Gore-Pearce was in full possession. The millionaire, having turned Lord Edgemore out into the road, was now fulfilling his earlier boasts. He had an army of workmen on the spot, and many "improvements" were being made to the fine old mansion.

It would be a long time before the Removites forgot their battle with the vulgar, ostentatious Mr. William Gore-Pearce. Again and again Mr. Gore-Pearce had attempted to drive the Earl of Edgemore out of his home, but the St. Frank's fellows had sided with the helpless old earl, and had helped him to retain possession of his ancestral home.

But the law had taken its course.

The bailiffs had arrived, and Lord Edgemore had been evicted. Everybody in the district had talked of this extraordinary affair—and the London papers had made quite a story out of it.

In his own way, the earl was eccentric. For years his fortunes had been declining, and he had lived in that castle of his—that quaint Norman building, with its turrets and towers. He had lived alone, with the exception of his one faithful retainer, Jenkins. But the estate had been sold over his head, and now he was an outcast. Penniless, apparently without friends or relatives, the earl was living in that picturesque little cottage, cared for by the St. Frank's juniors. It was indeed a strange situation.

Now and again some of the more thoughtful Removites wondered how it would end. For this sort of thing, naturally, could not go on indefinitely. Such fellows as Handforth and Archie Glen-thorne were prepared to carry on week after week—but there were others who

knew that a time must come when different arrangements would have to be made.

The headmaster, knowing the nature of the situation, had winked his eye at the whole business. He took care to make no open inquiries. These juniors, out of the goodness of their hearts, were spending much of their pocket-money on the old earl, and they were utilising a good deal of their spare time, too. It was generous of them—and as they were transgressing none of the school rules, the Head said nothing.

But he, too, sometimes wondered.

CHAPTER 3.

Handy Goes Shopping!



AS soon as lessons were over, Handforth got his little Austin Seven out, and he and Church and

McClure prepared to go down to the village.

"I'm not so sure about this, you know," said Nipper, rather dubiously.

"Not so sure about what?" asked Handforth.

"About you going to the village to buy all those things for Lord Edgemore," said Nipper. "I rather think that I ought to do the job, Handy."

"Then you'd better rather think something else!" said Handforth tartly. "Why, you ass, I'm the very man for the job! The grocer has only got to bundle everything into my Austin, and we can deliver the lot within twenty minutes!"

"That's true!" put in Church. "And you other fellows are going along to the cottage, aren't you?"

"Some of us," nodded Nipper. "Must look after the old boy, you know. He's our protégé." He turned to Handforth again. "I suppose you've got the list all right?" he asked.

"Of course I have."

"And the money?"

"Every penny!" grinned Handforth, tapping his pocket. "In fact, I shan't need to spend it all. Travers and old Archie were generous—and so was Singleton. I expect I shall have some money left over for the next grocery order. Well, so-long!"

He accelerated the engine, slipped in the clutch, and a moment later the little Austin was purring off to the village. In the meantime, a number of Removites had got their bicycles out, and they were

pedalling off towards the picturesque little cottage, which had been rented from Farmer Smithers, of Edgemore. Incidentally, Farmer Smithers was very eager to help the unfortunate old earl, and he had made a very loose arrangement with the St. Frank's fellows. They had rented that cottage without any legal agreement, and the rent itself was half what it ought to have been.

In Bellton, Handforth brought his Austin to a standstill outside the grocer's shop, and he and his chums marched into the establishment. The grocer, behind his counter, eyed Handforth warily. He had had some experience of this human volcano.

"We want some goods!" said Handforth bluntly. "Groceries and things. Ham and sugar and biscuits and stuff. As soon as you've got them wrapped up, you can take them out and shove them into my car."

"Thank you very kindly, young sir," said the grocer, licking his pencil.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" asked Handforth, after a pause. "I've told you what I want, haven't I?"

"Cheese it, Handy!" said Church. "You've got to give the items."

"I've given them!"

"But what about the amounts?" said Church. "You can't just tell the grocer that we want ham and eggs and biscuits and things. He wants to know how many biscuits—how much ham—how many eggs. Where's your list?"

"By George, yes!" said Handforth, with a start.

He trotted out the list, and planked it down on the counter.

"There you are!" he said. "Now you can get busy."

The shopkeeper took the scrap of paper, adjusted his spectacles, then frowned. He went nearer to the light and frowned again. At last he looked up at Handforth.

"I am very sorry, Master Handforth, but I am afraid I can't make head or tail of this list," he said hesitatingly.

"It's plain enough!" said Handforth. "It ought to be, anyhow! I wrote it myself!"

"Ahem!" coughed McClure.

"Really, I quite fail to understand your writing," said the grocer. "Perhaps you were in a hurry——"

"My only hat!" interrupted Handforth impatiently. "Lemme have a look at it! I took a lot of trouble over that list, and it's a pity if you can't—— My only topper! What the——"

"Algebra!" murmured Church, looking over Handforth's shoulder.

"Why, this isn't the list at all!" said Handforth indignantly.

"Anybody can see that!" grinned Mac. "It looks very much like a crib, Handy. I say, did you do any cribbing at maths. this morning?"

"You silly ass!" roared Handforth. "I'm not a chap who cribs! These are just a few notes I made."

He hastily put the piece of paper away, and produced the real list. The grocer was greatly relieved—until he had that list in his hand. Then he was inclined to believe that it was nearly as bad as the algebra. After much trouble, however, he did manage to decipher the various items, and he and his assistant got busy.

In the meantime, Handforth wandered about the shop, having a general look round.

"There are lots of things here that we haven't got down on that list," he said at length. "We'll take a big bag of these pea-nuts to begin with—"

"But, hang it, Lord Edgemore won't eat pea-nuts!" murmured Church.

"Why not?"

"I don't know, but it doesn't seem likely—"

"Rot!" said Edward Oswald. "I like pea-nuts, and you like pea-nuts. So it stands to reason that Lord Edgemore will like pea-nuts! We might as well take some of these sugar-coated biscuits, too. These ones—all colours and shapes. He'll rather like them."

"My dear chap, those biscuits are for kids!" protested Mac. "We'd better stick to the oaten and the plain sorts."

"Who's doing this shopping?" demanded Handforth aggressively.

"Oh, all right—go ahead!"

And Handforth certainly went ahead. He thought it only right that a box of Turkish delight should be included in the order, to say nothing of liquorice allsorts and pomegranates and chestnuts. These and similar delicacies were added to the order.

Handforth, in fact, selected all the things that he himself had a partiality for. He took it for granted that the old Earl of Edgemore would be just as enthusiastic over them. In vain Church and McClure attempted to dissuade him.

At last the order was completed, and Handforth found that he had very little money over. He had indulged in so many extras that all the available cash was gone, with the exception of a few shillings. But he didn't care. His Austin was practically full, and there was hardly

room for Church in the back. In fact, he had to squeeze in the front, on McClure's lap.

And so they started off in triumph for the cottage.

"When we do a thing," said Handforth comfortably, "we do it thoroughly!"



CHAPTER 4.

The Schoolboy Housekeepers!

URING bravely, the little Austin Seven turned the bend near the Moor View School, and Hand-

forth instinctively eased the throttle. As he had half expected—and as he had certainly hoped—two or three of the girls were standing out in the gateway. One of them was Irene Manners and, naturally, Handforth trod on the brake.

"Can't stop for more than a minute," he said cheerily, as he raised his cap. "We're just going along to the cottage, you know. Got a car load of groceries and things."

Irene Manners and Doris Berkeley and the other girls smiled as they looked at the load.

"My word! You've certainly been busy!" said Irene. "And who's paying for all this stuff?"

"We are!" replied Handforth, colouring slightly. "That is to say, the Remove. Some of the chaps aren't paying much—but that's not their fault. They can't contribute if they haven't got any. We're all doing our bit, you know."

"You're real sports!" said Doris frankly. "We girls feel rather out of it, too. I say, couldn't we help? Couldn't we go along to the cottage and do some of the housework?"

"That's a good idea!" said Mary Summers eagerly. "After all, it's more appropriate that girls should do housework—"

"Awfully sorry, and all that sort of thing, but there's nothing doing!" interrupted Handforth firmly. "This is a Remove job."

"Oh, Ted!" said Irene pleadingly.

For a moment Handforth almost melted. Then he received a nudge from Church, and he pulled himself together.

"Here, I say chuck it, you know!" he protested. "You mustn't try to get round me like that, Renie! Honestly, the Remove has taken on this affair, and the Remove wants to see it through. We're

not even allowing the Fourth to butt in. I thought you'd understand—"

"And so I do!" said Irene smilingly. "All right, Ted! Have it your own way. Good luck to you! You're all doing wonders!"

While Handforth was dallying on the road like this, Fatty Little was impatiently waiting in the tiny kitchen of the old-fashioned cottage. Fatty was in full charge of the culinary department, and he wouldn't even allow the earl's faithful old retainer to interfere. Fatty Little was lord and master of the kitchen. He had several assistants under him, and they were all busily polishing the saucepans, scrubbing the sink, and cleaning the cooking stoves.

"Why the dickens doesn't that ass come with the grub?" demanded Fatty, for about the tenth time. "Great pancakes! What's the good of leaving a job like that to Handy? Everybody knows what an ass he is! He's probably pitched the whole consignment into the ditch!"

"Cheer up, Fatty!" grinned Fullwood, putting his head into the kitchen. "Somebody heard a hoot a minute ago, and it may be Handy's car."

"About time, too!" said Fatty gruffly. "How the dickens can I prepare tea without any butter, and without any eggs?"

The surmise proved to be correct, and Handforth & Co. arrived, a moment later, with the goods. They marched into the little sitting-room, loaded up to their chins with parcels.

Lord Edgemore, who was sitting before the blazing fire, watched everything with rather dim eyes. They were not dim because of old age—but for quite another reason.

"My boys—my dear boys! You shouldn't do all this!" he protested, shaking his head. "I don't know how I shall ever be able to repay you for all—"

"All sorts of apologies for interrupting, sir, but this is our show!" said Vivian Travers smoothly. "All you've got to do is to sit there and look on. Later you'll have to eat. As for thanking us, why waste your breath? There's nothing to thank us for."

"Absolutely correct—oh!" said Archie stoutly. "Nothing, dash it, whatever, sir!"

But Lord Edgemore thought differently. He was preparing to put his thoughts into words, too, but Handforth stopped him.

Handforth was just coming through from the kitchen, having delivered his first load of groceries. He gave a grunt as he wiped a finger across one of the articles of furniture.

"Look at this!" he said accusingly, as he stared round. "Has anybody cleaned this room out to-day?"

"Yes, I have!" said Somerton. "Val and I gave it a thorough sweep—"

"Is this what you call thorough?" interrupted Handforth sternly. "Look at the dust on here! And look at the floor, too! Look in these corners. Great Scott! The place looks like a barn!"

"If you think you can clean it up better, why don't you get busy?" asked De Valerie, somewhat heatedly.

"That's just what I am going to do!" retorted Handforth. "Where are the brooms and brushes? I'll show you how this room ought to be cleaned!"

Many of the juniors exchanged alarmed glances.

"Chuck it, Handy!" said Somerton urgently. "You can't start cleaning out the room now. Lord Edgemore is in here, and we can't have him disturbed. We cleaned the place out while he was having a walk, and—"

"He won't mind!" broke in Handforth. "Will you, sir?"

Thus appealed to, the old earl had no alternative but to agree.

"By all means go ahead!" he said. "However, do not trouble yourself on my account. I am perfectly content with the room as it is. Indeed, I thought that it was exquisitely cleaned, and I fail to see the necessity for further work. However, if you are not satisfied—"

"I'm not, sir, if it's all the same to you!" said Handforth firmly. "I just want to show these fellows how the job ought to be done. I'm ashamed of them! You're sure you don't mind?"

And Handforth, without waiting for a reply, bustled off. Two minutes later, to the consternation of the other fellows, he reappeared, armed with brooms and dustpans. His sleeves were rolled up, and he looked round him with a businesslike air.

"Now then, you chaps—you can all clear off!" he said briskly. "I don't want you messing about while I'm cleaning out this room!"

"What shall we do with him—smother him?" asked De Valerie, appealing to the others.

It was impossible to take such drastic measures under the very eyes of Lord Edgemore, however, so the rest of the schoolboy housekeepers felt that their best policy would be to clear out. But they promised themselves that they would give the arrogant Handy a warm five minutes later on, when they got him alone.



Handforth's efforts to speak French were excruciatingly funny, if painful. One particular effort, in which the accent was atrocious, caused Nipper to fall back into the arms of Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson. "Help!" he murmured feebly.

So Handforth, full of energy, proceeded to show everybody exactly how a room *should* be cleaned out!



CHAPTER 5.

Handy on the Job!

EGAD!" ejaculated Sir Montie Tregellis-West, in alarm.

He and Nipper and Tommy Watson

had just alighted from their bicycles at the cottage gateway. And they all stared at the open front door.

"The place is on fire!" said Tommy Watson blankly.

"Rats! That's only dust!" said Nipper. "What the dickens are those asses up to? We'd better look into this, you chaps!"

They strode up the path and plunged through the haze of dust into the sitting-room. There, in the centre of the apartment, was a dim figure, hardly visible in the smother. He was brushing away at the carpet with all his strength, using a heavy yard-broom with stiff bristles.

"Handforth, you Billy chump!" roared Nipper.

"Eh? What's that?" spluttered Handforth, pausing in his labours. "Clear out, you chaps! I'm busy!"

"What on earth do you think you're doing?" demanded Nipper. "Who told you to make all this mess?"

"Mess!" yelled Handforth. "I'm cleaning up!"

"By the look of things, you're making the room ten times as bad as it was before you started!" said Nipper indignantly. "Just look at this dust! You mustn't sweep a carpet like that! It wants to be taken up, and beaten outside!"

Handforth himself was feeling a little dubious. He had started on this task with the intention of showing the others how the room ought to be cleaned up. But now he was doubtful. Perhaps he oughtn't to have gone to work in this way. Incidentally, Lord Edgemore had discreetly retired, and he was now upstairs ostensibly preparing for the evening meal.

"If you felt that you had to sweep the carpet, why didn't you use the vacuum cleaner?" demanded Nipper. "What the

dickens was the good of us providing a Whirlwind sweeper unless—"

"By George!" said Handforth, with a start. "I'd forgotten all about the thing!"

"Then you'd better remember it!"

Handforth threw his broom down, strode into the kitchen, and proceeded to create havoc. Fatty Little was busily engaged in cooking, and the air was thick with appetising odours.

"You clear out of here!" said Fatty hotly.

"Hi! Mind those cakes, you dummy!"

"Which cakes?" said Handforth, turning—and in the process of turning strewn them all over the floor.

"And look at that dust coming in here!" yelled Fatty. "Close that door, somebody!"

"I want the vacuum cleaner!" said Handforth. "I can't be bothered with your silly cooking, Fatty. Where's the vacuum cleaner?"

Somebody hastily informed him that it was in the cupboard, under the stairs, and he was finally pushed out of the kitchen, after which the door was closed and locked. At last, Handforth got hold of the vacuum cleaner, and then he commenced work afresh.

It wasn't an electric cleaner—since there was no current laid on in this remote country cottage. It was a self-contained contrivance, which created its own suction by means of powerful driving wheels.

"Ah, this is the thing!" said Handforth with satisfaction, as he commenced pushing the machine to and fro. "It's a rummy thing, though! It seems to make more dust than the broom!" he added, with a puzzled frown, as clouds of dust came spurting up out of the works.

"It might be a good idea to put the bag on it," suggested Church, who was looking on. "Those things generally have bags, Handy, to catch all the dust."

"They're more trouble than they're worth!" grunted Handforth, as he searched for the container.

He found it after a little trouble, and fixed it on. Then, once more, he strode to and fro, barging into the furniture and generally giving an impression of a tornado.

After about ten minutes, the dust had subsided, and there was something like order in that sitting-room. At this point, however, the vacuum cleaner went wrong. It stuck, and refused to work. Handforth went on his hands and knees, and examined it.

"I think you've done enough, old man," said Church gently. "The room looks fine now. Not a speck of dust anywhere!"

"Yes, you'd better take that thing away!" put in Tommy Watson. "It wouldn't be a bad idea to shove it out into the garden, and to bury it."

"Rats!" frowned Handforth, who looked very much like a nigger. "These things work toppling if you only understand them. Just give this wheel a twiddle, Mac, old man. I'll soon have it going right."

McClure obliged, and he not only gave the wheel a twiddle, but a hefty whirr round.

Handforth had the machine upside down, and he had taken off the dust-container.

Zzzzzzzzz!

The result of McClure's activity was startling. Perhaps he turned the wheel the wrong way; possibly Handforth had dropped a lot of the dust into the machinery. At all events, a terrific cloud of blackness came shooting up out of the cleaner. It smothered Handforth like a black pall, and he fell over backwards, gasping wildly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help!" gurgled Handforth feebly. "Oh, my goodness! What the—— I'm choked!"

Nipper came striding in.

"What's all this noise in here?" he demanded. "How much longer is Handy going to be—— Oh, my hat! What's happened?"

"Handy is just showing us how a room ought to be cleaned out!" said Travers blandly, as he looked over Nipper's shoulder. "Splendid, isn't it?"

Nipper looked at the others.

"I put it to the vote!" he said grimly.

"Are we going to let Handforth carry on, or are we going to push him outside and lock him out?"

"We're going to push him outside and lock him out!" came a general chorus.

And Edward Oswald Handforth, protesting and gasping, was ejected. After that, in a miraculously short space of time, the other juniors—by businesslike methods—created order out of havoc.

When the Earl of Edgemore came downstairs, a quarter of an hour later, the sitting-room was clean and tidy again. And Handforth was only readmitted after he had promised, on his honour, that he wouldn't do any more housework.

Thereafter, the events were interesting.

Fatty Little provided a gorgeous spread, and the juniors stayed on as Lord Edgemore's guests. When they went away, later on in the evening, they were well satisfied. Their protégé was happy, and everything was going fine.

But how long could it last?



CHAPTER 6.

Asking For It!

HANDFORTH clenched and unclenched his fists. Then, with sinister deliberation, he commenced rolling up his sleeves.

"Lemme get at him!" he said ominously.

"Steady, Handy!" muttered Church. "You don't want to cause a scene in the Triangle!"

"Yes, go easy, old man!" said McClure, in alarm.

But Edward Oswald Handforth took no notice. With that rugged jaw of his set determinedly, he descended the Ancient

House steps and strode off towards the gymnasium.

It was Saturday morning, and while most of the St. Frank's fellows were talking about the unusual football match that was to be played that afternoon, a certain knot of undesirable juniors evidently had other matters to discuss. And Handforth could easily guess the subject of their conversation.

Claude Gore-Pearce, of the Remove, was leaning negligently against the wall of the gymnasium. Round him were Gulliver and Bell, Teddy Long and Merrell and Marriott. All these were nonentities—juniors who practically counted for nothing at St. Frank's; and, incidentally, they were fit companions for Claude Gore-Pearce.

This latter young gentleman was the son of Mr. William Gore-Pearce, the millionaire. He was a day boy at St. Frank's—the only day boy in the old school. Many juniors were indignant that this should be so. They failed to see why an exception should be made in the case of such an outsider.

The Gore-Pearces had taken a big, furnished house at the other end of the village—this being merely their headquarters for the time being. When the "improvements" had been made at Edgemore Manor, they would move in with all the pomp and splendour of their vulgar wealth. And Claude, because he was rolling in money, was a favourite among the snobs of the Junior School. All the decent fellows ignored him. That is to say, with the exception of Handforth. To Handforth, Claude Gore-Pearce was very much like a red rag to a bull.

The snobs were so amused at the subject of their discussion that they did not even notice Handforth's approach. They were cackling mightily.

"Yes," Claude was saying, "on the dust-heap, you fellows. That's where it is now—with all the other rubbish."

"The right place for it, too!" said Merrell, of the East House. "You don't want the earl's coat of arms at Edgemore Manor now that you've got possession of the place, Gore-Pearce."

"Of course we don't," agreed Claude. "It's a sort of shield, you know—with the coat of arms embossed on it. We have a coat of arms of our own," he added, with insufferable pride. "So, of course, we're going to fix our own up—"

"Just a minute!" said Handforth fiercely, as he barged into the circle.

"You clear off, Handforth!" said Gulliver unpleasantly. "You're always causing trouble! Isn't it about time that you minded your own business?"

"I'll deal with you later!" said Handforth, brushing Gulliver aside as though he were a straw. "Now, Gore-Pearce, look here! What's that you were saying about Lord Edgemore's coat of arms?"

"It seems that you heard everything!" sneered Claude Gore-Pearce. "It's a bit

thick for a fellow to listen to a private conversation, and to—"

"Private be blowed!" roared Handforth. "I heard you half across the Triangle! If you want to talk privately, don't stand out here in the open!"

"What's the trouble?" asked Reggie Pitt, of the West House, as he came up with Nipper and one or two others.

"There's no trouble!" replied Gore-Pearce nastily. "But Handforth seems to take a pleasure in butting in—"

"This—this worm was just boasting that the earl's coat of arms has been chucked on the dust heap!" broke in Handforth indignantly. "Do you hear that, you chaps? The Edgemore coat of arms! Chucked on the rubbish heap!"

"Is this true, Gore-Pearce?" asked Nipper sharply.

"Why not?" asked Claude, with a supercilious curl of his lips.

"Then you admit it?"

"There's nothing to admit!" sneered Claude. "The Earl of Edgemore has been kicked out of the Manor, and my pater hasn't any use for his rotten coat of arms."

"You unutterable cad!" said Nipper hotly. "Not content with pitching the poor old fellow out, you've got to insult him by destroying his coat of arms! Haven't you enough decency to realise that the Edgemores have lived in that old house for centuries?"

"What's that got to do with me?" demanded Claude. "The Edgemores are out of it now—and they'll never enter it again! The place is my pater's—lock, stock and barrel! He's bought every yard of it, freehold! What do we want with the old fool's coat of arms? It's been thrown on the dust heap, with a lot of other rubbish!"

"You—you—you—" began Handforth thickly.

"Steady, old man!" interrupted Nipper, seizing Handforth by the arm. "There's work for us!"

"There's work for me!" said Handforth, preparing to tear off his jacket. "I'm going to smash this sneering cad—"

"There's more important work than that, Handy!" broke in Nipper. "Come on, you fellows! We shall have to miss brekker this morning, but it doesn't matter."

He drew them aside, and Claude Gore-Pearce and his satellites took the opportunity to move hastily away. It was necessary to hold Handforth tightly, in order to prevent him charging after them.

"Lemme go!" he panted. "I tell you I'm going to smash—"

"We've got to get over to the Manor—at once!" broke in Nipper. "By missing brekker, we can just do it. Don't you understand, Handy? We've got to rescue that shield, and hand it over to the earl!"



CHAPTER 7.

An Urgent Mission!

"B" Y George!" said Handforth, with a start.

He stared at Nipper blankly for a moment, and then he

lost his warlike expression. His eyes now took on a light of eagerness.

"That's a pretty ripping idea!" he went on keenly. "Buzz to the Manor, rescue the coat of arms from the rubbish heap, and take it to the old earl—eh?"

"That's it!" nodded Nipper. "We shall just have time if we hurry off on our bikes. And it'll give the old boy no end of pleasure to have his coat of arms nailed up in the cottage. It's a good thing that Gore-Pearce was fool enough to boast about the respectable piece of work. It's given us a chance to save the coat of arms from the dust heap."

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne, with heat. "Good gad! I mean to say, odds horrors and tragedies! Adding insult to injury, what?"

"That's exactly what it is, Archie," said Reggie Pitt. "Insult to injury! They've done everything they possibly can to the poor old fellow, and now they're heaping contempt upon the family coat of arms! By jingo! It never occurred to me that Gore-Pearce's pater was coarse enough to do an action like that!"

"Well, let's get off," said Nipper practically.

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "You mean, trickle away, what? Absolutely! In other words, laddies, tally-ho!"

Within five minutes the Removites had got out their bicycles, and were speeding down the lane towards the hamlet of Edgemore.

The distance was not very far, but they reckoned that it would take them the better part of an hour to accomplish their mission. The breakfast bell had sounded just as they had set forth, so they would have to go without their morning meal. Not that they cared a snap about breakfast. Their indignation was greater than their hunger. They could easily afford to wait until the mid-morning interval, when they could pay a visit to the school tuckshop.

When they arrived at Edgemore Manor, they found a tremendous amount of activity afoot.

The building was very much like a feudal castle—built of grim, grey stones, with ivy clinging to many of the old walls. The battlements were perfect, and, indeed, this was one of the finest Norman structures in the South of England.

There was nothing peaceful about Edgemore Manor now.

Workmen were to be seen everywhere. Lorries were standing out in the drive, scaffolding was erected across the front of

the building, and glaziers were busy at the windows. Men were moving in and out constantly, and nobody took much notice of the juniors as they jumped from their machines.

"We're safe!" said Nipper. "Gore-Pearce won't be on the spot yet."

"What does it matter, anyhow?" asked Handforth. "We're not afraid of Gore-Pearce!"

"But he might make things unpleasant for us," said Nipper. "After all, he's the boss—he's the owner of the place now, although we hate to admit it. And if he likes to make himself nasty—as he certainly would—he could order us away. But I expect the fat old blighter is still having his breakfast."

They left their bicycles against some of the stately trees, and hurried forward on foot. One of the workmen paused as they approached, and there was a curious look of amusement on the man's face.

"Morning, young gents!" he said, grinning. "You're safe just now—although I wouldn't say as how you'll be safe for long. His Royal Highness is comin' soon, and—"

"Meaning Mr. Gore-Pearce?" asked Nipper.

"Lumme, he ain't half a caution!" said the workman. "Anybody might think he was king of the earth by the way he swanks! An' he ain't over fond of you young gents, neither!" he added confidentially. "You'd best not get up to any of your tricks—"

"That's all right!" interrupted Handforth. "We want to find the rubbish heap."

"Beggin' your pardon?" said the workman, staring.

"The rubbish heap," said Nipper. "There may be two or three, so we shall be obliged if you'll tell us where they are. We've heard that a coat of arms was thrown on the dust heap, and we want to rescue it. The Earl of Edgemore's coat of arms, you know—on a big shield."

"Oh, ah!" said the workman, nodding. "That's right! That young whipper-snapper of a Master Claude chucked it there himself yesterday."

"What!" roared Handforth. "Claude chucked it there?"

"I saw him do it!" declared the man, not without heat. "The young feller went into the big hall, took the shield down, an' carried it off to the dust heap. Fair boasted about it, too. I was goin' to tell His Highness about it this mornin'. Seems to me it ain't quite right, young gents. After all, that shield may be worth somethin'!"

"It's worth very little to Gore-Pearce, or to you, or to us, if it comes to that," said Nipper. "But it's worth everything in the world to the Earl of Edgemore. We want to get hold of it, and we want to take it to him."

"That's real good of you, lads!" said the workman, nodding. "My, but you ain't half a set of young cautions! We've heard all about what you're doin', an', between you an' me an' these here trees, we're on your

side! We're real sorry for the poor old gent, an' I wouldn't like to say what we think of the guv'nor! I've got a few words in mind, but they might shock your innocent young ears!"

"Then leave them unsaid!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "I rather fancy that we can guess the gist of them!"



CHAPTER 8.

The Exile!

HE shield was soon recovered.

It was found at the back of the Manor, thrown on a great

heap of miscellaneous odds and ends. With careful hands, the juniors picked the coat of arms out of the rubbish and dusted it down. They noted, with satisfaction, that it was undamaged.

"You'd better not say anything to Mr. Gore-Pearce now," said Nipper, looking at the workman, who had accompanied him. "Ignorance is bliss, you know."

"You can trust me, young gent!" grinned the man. "I ain't lookin' for trouble! I was goin' to say something to him, but it doesn't matter now."

"And you say that Claude chucked the coat of arms on this rubbish heap?" asked Handforth.

"I saw him with my own eyes!" nodded the workman.

"All right! There'll be a hot five minutes for Claude later on!" said Edward Oswald darkly. "I thought his pater had done it—but it makes the thing ten times worse. That beastly cad will wish he hadn't been born by the time I'm done with him!"

"Just between ourselves, young gents, I hope you make him smart!" said the workman, lowering his voice. "Many's the time I've wanted to fetch him a clip across the ear. Nasty, snobbish young whelp, that's what he is! Only this is private like, an' I hope you won't let on what I've—"

"You bet we won't, old man!" said Reggie Pitt. "Thanks for helping us."

"Decent chap, that!" said Nipper, as they

remounted their bicycles a few minutes later, and rode off.

"Nearly all these workmen would love to see Gore-Pearce chucked into the river," said Handforth. "What's the time? We don't want to be late for lessons, you know."

"Good gad!" said Archie. "You're not always so eager to be on time, Handforth, old screamer!"

"Fathead!" said Handforth. "Do you think I want to be detained this afternoon?"

"No, by Jove!" said Nipper. "There's the footer match against the French chaps, and it would be perfectly rotten if we were stuck indoors, at extra lesson, during the match!"

So they pedalled hard, and very soon they arrived at the little cottage.

They left their bicycles outside, and walked

up the short path. After tapping on the door, they entered, and found themselves in the comfortable living-room. A fire was burning in the grate, and the old Earl of Edgemore was sitting at the table, spectacles on his nose, glancing at the morning newspaper. He looked up with a kindly smile as the juniors piled in.

"Ah, my dear boys!" he said, removing his glasses. "Splendid! I did not expect to see you so early as this. My champions—eh? Upon my soul, I shall never be able to thank you for all that you are doing!"

"I wish you would not keep on saying that, sir!" said Nipper awkwardly. "Nearly every time we come you trot it out! And we don't want any

thanks—it only makes us feel uncomfortable!"

"Absolutely!"

"We've brought this shield, sir!" said Handforth hurriedly. "From the Manor, you know. We thought you might like to have it here."

The old man rose to his feet. He was as straight as a ramrod, and his eyes glowed as he beheld the Edgemore coat of arms.

"I am even greater in your debt!" he said, with a touch of shakiness in his voice.

"It's nothing, sir!" said Nipper. "We're in a bit of a hurry to get off—"

"My coat of arms!" murmured Lord Edgemore. "I had been wondering what had become of it. Thank you, boys—thank you

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from the bottom of my heart! I am glad to have at least one more reminder of—"

"That's all right, sir!" said Nipper quickly. "Come on, you fellows! We shall only just do it, even if we pedal our hardest. Good-morning, sir!"

"Oh, but really—"

"Good-morning, sir!" chorused the others. They bundled out before the old man could shower any further thanks upon them. They had decided to say nothing about the rubbish heap. There was no reason why Lord Edgemore should be distressed by the knowledge of Claude's despicable action. It was sufficient that the coat of arms was once again in the old man's possession.

"Well, that's that!" said Nipper, as they hammed off towards St. Frank's. "By Jove! It does my eyes good to see the colour back in Lord Edgemore's cheeks! He's looking miles better, you fellows!"

"That's the result of our treatment!" grinned Handforth. "We're not giving him any time to brood. There's a sort of sad look at the back of his eyes, but we'll soon have that away, too."

"I don't think so, Handy," said Church, shaking his head. "The poor old chap has been turned out of his ancestral home, and he'll never be happy again—not really happy—until he gets back. And, according to everything that we hear, he never will get back!"

"Won't he?" said Handforth. "That's all you know, my lad!"

CHAPTER 9.

Handy Enjoys Himself!

ONLY by the skin of their teeth did the juniors scrape into the Remove Form-room in time to answer their names. So Handforth, much to his disgust, was unable to have that interesting five minutes with Claude Gore-Pearce. But he could wait. True, he was an impatient sort of customer, but even Handforth deemed it inadvisable to blacken Claude's eyes in the Form-room under the eagle gaze of Mr. Crowell.

And owing to Handforth's unhappy propensity for talking during lessons, he was detained for the interval. So not only was he denied the pleasure of smashing Claude, but he couldn't even partake of that snack at the tuckshop that he had been so looking forward to.

However, Church and McClure managed to smuggle in a few cakes, and Handforth rather incautiously partook of these during maths. It was only by the sheerest of miracles that he escaped Mr. Crowell's eye.

When lessons were over, Edward Oswald was one of the first out of the School House. Church and McClure were in close attend-

ance, and as soon as they emerged into the Triangle they paused, and stared upwards.

"My hat!" said Church.

"We'll wait for him here!" exclaimed Handforth darkly. "He's bound to come in a minute or two, and—"

"Half a tick, Handy!" said McClure.

"Look at all these giddy flags!"

"Flags?" said Handforth. "Where? Oh, those! What's the idea?"

"The seniors must have been busy during morning school," said Church. "Can't you see? They're nearly all French flags. In honour of the visitors, of course."

In any other circumstances, Handforth might have made some characteristic comments. For the old Triangle was gay with flags and bunting, and the colours looked bright and brave in the March sunlight. But just at present Handforth was looking for Claude Gore-Pearce, and he had eyes for nothing else.

"Here he is!" he said suddenly.

Most of the other juniors had poured away. The majority had hurried off to Big Side, to see the preparations there. Others were making inquiries as to whether the French footballers had arrived, or not. Just within the main gates stood an imposing Rolls-Royce limousine—and the very sight of it had made Handforth glare.

For that limousine belonged to Mr. William Gore-Pearce, and it came regularly to take the insufferable Claude home. There was no end to the pomp and display of the Gore-Pearces.

Claude himself had just emerged from the School House. With him were Gulliver and Bell, but these two youths thought it advisable to vanish discreetly when they saw Handforth standing there, his fists clenched, his eyes glittering. They had a suspicion as to what was coming.

"Just a minute, Gore-Pearce!" said Handforth darkly.

Claude came to a halt, and he stared at Handforth with cold disdain.

"What do you want?" he asked. "I'm in a hurry. The limousine is waiting for me."

"Let it wait!" broke in Handforth. "By the time I'm done with you, you cad, you'll need an ambulance—not a limousine!"

Claude turned pasty. An uneasy light came into his unpleasant eyes.

"What do you mean?" he panted. "If you touch me, Handforth, I'll shout for help!"

"You—you miserable worm!" roared Handforth. "It was you who flung the old earl's coat of arms on that rubbish heap! Yes, I heard all about it—and now I'm going to smash you to pulp! You cad!"

It was a decidedly risky proceeding to precipitate a fight in the open Triangle. But Handforth had no thoughts for masters or prefects at that moment. As far as he was concerned, he might just as well have been on a desert island. To be caught fighting would mean detention for the whole after-



noon, and detention was the one punishment that Handforth wished to avoid. But he had forgotten all about that.

"Here!" gasped Claude frantically. "You—you— If you touch me—"

"Put up your rotten hands!" bellowed Handforth.

He was giving Claude Gore-Pearce a chance to defend himself, but Claude seized that opportunity in a different way. He knew what was coming, and he knew, also, that he was no match for this burly junior.

With a swift, lightning-like movement, he ducked. His head went down, and he butted Handforth violently below the belt.

"Ugh!" gasped Handforth, in agony.

He went over, taken utterly by surprise. That cowardly attack had lifted him nearly off his feet, and he went down with a thud. The next second Claude was kicking and punching at him wildly.

"Stop that, you rotter!" shouted Church.

"Grab him!" said McClure.

They both seized the maddened Claude, and dragged him back. He continued to kick and claw; he was like a wild thing. When Handforth picked himself up, his face was still screwed up with agony. With an effort, he straightened himself, and his fists were white as he clenched them.

"Leave him to me!" he said thickly.

Crash!

Claude Gore-Pearce went backwards, staggering on his heels. That blow had caught him full on the nose, and he howled wildly with pain.

Biff! Crash! Biff!

Handforth's fists came round—right, left—right, left! The bombardment was truly terrific. In less than ten seconds, Claude was battered in the most frightful way. Both his eyes were due to be closed up before half an hour had elapsed. Those blows of Handforth's had inevitably decided this.

"Now you can clear off," panted Edward Oswald, as he stood back. "I'm sick of the sight of you! You—you whining rat!"

Claude picked himself up, and he bolted—running erratically, sobbing with pain and rage.



CHAPTER 10.

Reggie Pitt's Find!

LUCKY isn't the word for it!" said Church breathlessly.

The chums of Study

D were standing on

the Ancient House steps, and they had just seen the Gore-Pearce limousine glide out of the gateway. They had seen Claude tumble into the magnificent car, and they had heard him give shrill instructions to the chauffeur to drive straight home. And, by some extraordinary chance, the recent scrap had apparently escaped the attention of all in authority.

"You reckless ass, Handy!" said McClure. "If a prefect had spotted you, you would have been detained—"

"I don't care anything about that!" interrupted Handforth, holding both his hands over his waistcoat. "By George! That—that awful rotter winded me! Did you ever see such a rotten, cowardly attack?"

"Well, never mind—you paid him out!" said Church. "By jingo, you've marked him pretty well, Handy! His eyes will be bunged up within half an hour, and his nose will be twice its normal size! You've given him a lovely present for the week-end!"

"He didn't get half what he deserved!" growled Handforth.

A number of other juniors came round, congratulating Handforth upon his good work. They had seen the affray from afar, but had kept well out of it, in case a master should arrive on the scene.

And there, just at the spot where the scrap had taken place, a little red pocket-book was lying on the ground. Church and McClure had not noticed it in the excitement of the moment, and Handforth, naturally, hadn't the slightest notion that the pocket-book had dropped from his clothing. He was notoriously careless in such respects.

But the fact remained that that little red book had slipped out of his pocket when Claude Gore-Pearce had bowled him over. There it remained, on the ground, obvious to anybody who happened to pass.

It wasn't Handforth's, either. It belonged to Mr. Lucas Snell, the lawyer. Mr. Lucas Snell was the gentleman who had transacted the transfer of Edgemoor Manor from the old earl to Mr. William Gore-Pearce.

As to how that book had come into Handforth's possession, the explanation was very simple. Nearly a week ago, Handforth had collided with Mr. Snell in the dusk, and had knocked the lawyer's attaché-case flying. All of Mr. Snell's papers had been distributed over the road, but that little pocket-book had escaped attention in the gloom. Handforth had found it afterwards, had put it into his pocket, and had then forgotten all about it.

But Mr. Lucas Snell hadn't. Since that seemingly unimportant incident he had thought of very little else.

Once Handforth had come across the pocket-book, and had decided to send it by post to Mr. Snell—because he didn't want it. But the very instant the book had gone back into Handforth's pocket, he had forgotten it again. If he had only realised the significance of that soiled and tattered object, he would have been rather more careful!

But, fortunately, it fell into good hands.

Reggie Pitt happened to be the first fellow to walk past the spot. Whistling cheerily, the junior skipper of the West House paused in his stride, and his whistle ceased. He bent down, picked up the pocket-book, then looked round him inquiringly.

"Somebody's been careless!" he murmured. "I'd better see who it belongs to."

He opened the thing, but there was no name on the fly-leaf—no writing that Pitt could understand. He frowned as he turned the pages over.

"Rummy!" he murmured. "Of all the jumbled nonsense! What the dickens is it?"

He frowned more than ever. Every page was filled with curious figures and words. From end to end, the book was written in red ink, and there was no rhyme or reason in the jottings. Letters seemed to be jumbled incoherently. Most of the pages were well marked, and it was clear that the red book had been used a great deal.

"Some sort of a cipher, I suppose," murmured Pitt, at length. "Oh, well, it's not mine—and why should I bother my head? Some silly ass has been amusing himself, I expect. But who does it belong to? I can't go about the school asking everybody!"

It was, indeed, a superhuman task. It might belong to a senior—to a Fifth-Former, or a Sixth-Former. It might belong to a fag. It was even possible that it was the property of a master. As there was no name inside it, or any clue to the identity of the owner, Reggie Pitt took the only possible course.

Having asked one or two fellows if they knew anything about it, and having received negative replies, Reggie stuck a notice on the board in the lobby of the West House:

"FOUND—Red pocket-book, containing umpteen entries in double Dutch. Owner can have same, free, gratis and for nothing, upon applying to Study K."

After that, Reggie Pitt forgot all about it. His thoughts were centred upon the coming football match, for, like all the other juniors, he was far more interested than he pretended to be. This was purely and simply a senior affair—but the Junior School was very eager to see the French boys, and to see the First Eleven win that interesting game.

It wasn't very surprising that Teddy Long, of the Ancient House, was the first fellow to spot the notice on the board in the West House lobby. Teddy was on the prowl, as usual—trying to nose his way into somebody else's business. This was Teddy Long's favourite recreation.

And as soon as he saw that notice on the board his eyes glinted eagerly. It only took him about five seconds to think of a cunning plan!



CHAPTER 11.

Nothing Doing!

EDDY LONG was hard up.

In fact, he was "broke." True, it was Saturday, and he had already had his week's pocket-money. But he had borrowed so heavily during the week that he had been obliged to pay it all

out. Not willingly, of course—but sundry enthusiastic juniors had laid him flat on the floor, and had gone through his pockets. This was about the only way of getting Teddy long to pay back any cash that had been advanced to him.

Now, on Saturday, with a half-holiday staring him in the face, he possessed nothing more promising than a halfpenny with a hole in it.

But that notice on the board of the West House had put an idea into Teddy's scheming brain.

"Why not?" he muttered. "Pitt's found this giddy pocket-book, and he doesn't know who it belongs to. It'll be as easy as winking! I'll claim it, and then I'll go about the school until I've found the real owner. And I jolly well won't give it up until I get five bob reward!"

It was a simple plan, and it seemed certain of success. Unfortunately, Teddy Long was too obtuse to see the difficulties. He thought he would get the pocket-book without the slightest trouble. After that, of course, the rest would be plain sailing. Besides, there was just a possibility that the pocket-book would contain some personal entries, and Teddy might be able to make capital out of these.

Breathless with anticipation, the tubby junior hurried along to Study K. He burst in, his face flushed, his little eyes gleaming.

"Come in!" said Reggie Pitt. "Don't trouble to knock!"

"Sorry!" gasped Teddy, as he looked round, and saw that Jack Grey was also in the study. "I—I've come for my—my pocket-book."

"Your which?" said Pitt, suddenly becoming grim.

"I—I lost a pocket-book, you know," said Teddy hurriedly. "A red one, with—with writing in it! It's mine, and—"

"Rats!" said Pitt. "Shut the door as you go out, Long!"

"Eh?" gulped Teddy. "But—but—"

"None of your tricks, my lad!" said Pitt. "That pocket-book doesn't belong to you!"

"I tell you it does!" roared Teddy, alarmed by this unexpected snag. "Why, there it is!" he added, pointing to the table. "That's mine! I lost it this morning, and it's very important!"

Pitt looked at Teddy Long closely. There was a remote chance—about one in a million—that it actually was his. But Pitt knew Teddy's habits too well.

"If this is yours, my son, you can have it," he said blandly.

"Oh, thanks! I'll take it now——"

"No, you won't!" said Jack Grey. "Don't be an ass, Reggie! Long always claims things, and you know jolly well that he's the biggest liar in the Remove!"

"Oh, I say!" protested Teddy feebly.

"If this is your book, you'll be able to tell me what's inside it," said Reggie. "Give me proof of ownership, my son, and you can have it."



When Mr. Lucas Snell heard that Reggie Pitt of Study K was in possession of a pocket book he became frantic. "Study K!" he said, and grasped hold of young Dicky Jones. "Where is Study K? Quick, boy! Take me to this room at once!"

"It's—it's full of writing!" said Teddy desperately.

"Good! What sort of writing?"

"In—in pencil!"

"That's a bad shot!" said Reggie, shaking his head. "You've got a very poor memory, Teddy, my lad! Are you sure you didn't use blue-black ink to make the entries in your pocket-book?"

"Yes, that's it!" gasped Teddy Long. "Of course I did! Blue-black ink!"

"That's funny!" said Pitt, looking puzzled. "It's all turned red!"

Jack Grey grinned, and Teddy Long saw his plan crumbling to pieces. He had been trapped, and he knew it. But he wasn't going to be done. Teddy was a fellow who never knew when a failing dodge had reached its limit.

"I tell you it's mine!" he shouted. "I shall complain to the Housemaster, Pitt! That's my pocket-book, and I mean to have it!"

And, acting upon a sudden impulse, Teddy made a grab for the pocket-book, seized it in his grubby hand, and bolted.

"My hat!" ejaculated Pitt angrily.

By the time he got round the table, Teddy Long was streaking down the passage. But luck was still against him. As he swerved

round into the lobby, he collided full tilt with Nipper.

"Hold him!" yelled Pitt, from further down the corridor. "Get that book out of his hand, Nipper!"

"Certainly!" said Nipper, seizing it and wrenching it away.

"That's mine!" howled Teddy. "You—you rotter!"

"That's enough!" snapped Nipper.

Long bolted, nearly sobbing with vexation. He realised that the game was up now. For Reggie Pitt was almost on the scene, and it was very unwholesome to remain in this immediate neighbourhood.

Nipper glanced at the book, looked inside, and then he started.

In that second, just before Pitt reached him, he remembered something. Handforth had made some mention of this little pocket-book. It couldn't be any other. For Handforth had distinctly said that it was full of red entries, all jumbled together, so that there was no rhyme or reason in them.

And Nipper knew that it belonged to Lucas Snell!

Nipper was surprised—for he had taken it for granted that Handforth had returned the pocket-book earlier. If Nipper had had a suspicion otherwise, he would have asked Handforth for it.

"The little worm!" said Reggie, as he came up. "Thanks for stopping him, Nipper."

"How did you get hold of it?" asked Nipper curiously.

"Why, the young liar claimed it as his own," said Pitt. "I found it in the Triangle not long ago, and as there isn't any name in it, I put a notice on the board on the chance that the real owner would spot it. Do you know who it belongs to?"

Nipper was about to answer, but he suddenly pulled himself up short.



CHAPTER 12.

Nipper's Wise Move!

DURING those moments, Nipper's brain worked like lightning.

"Rummy sort of thing!" he said, as he turned over the pages of the book, and ignoring Reggie Pitt's query, "You say you found it in the Triangle?"

"Yes," said Pitt. "Can you make anything of it?"

"Well, hardly," replied Nipper. "Look here, Reggie, you'd better leave this with me. I'm the Form captain, and I'll alter Study K on that notice of yours to Study C. Do you mind?"

"My dear chap, why should I mind?" laughed Pitt. "As you say, you're the Form skipper, so perhaps you'd better be responsible. Of course, it doesn't belong to Long. It was only a dodge of his—he probably wanted to pry into the book, just out of curiosity. You know what a young spy he is!"

"Yes," nodded Nipper. "Well, all right, Reggie. I'll put another notice up in the Ancient House. Perhaps the real owner will soon turn up."

Nipper went away then, rather anxious to avoid any further questioning, and Reggie Pitt forgot all about the matter. He was certainly a bit puzzled over Nipper's attitude, but it never struck him that there could be any importance about this red pocket-book.

Out in the Triangle, Nipper paused, thinking.

He was the last fellow in the world to interfere with anything that did not immediately concern him. But there are exceptions to every rule; and Nipper vividly remembered a brief conversation he had had with Mr. Nelson Lee, nearly a week earlier.

They had been talking about Mr. Lucas Snell, the lawyer who had acted for the Earl of Edgemore for many years. Lee, in fact, held told Nipper that Lucas Snell was an old gaolbird!

It was a startling enough revelation. Many years ago Snell had served a sentence of five

years' penal servitude for some fraud or other, and truth to tell Lee was not satisfied with things. The Earl of Edgemore had been turned out of his ancestral home as a pauper, and yet, only a few years earlier, he had been comparatively rich. His wealth had apparently dwindled into nothingness—and the earl himself, being a man who knew nothing whatever about business, it seemed to Lee that there was something radically wrong here.

And Nipper knew that this pocket-book belonged to Mr. Lucas Snell!

Obviously, Handforth had dropped it. Instead of sending it back to the owner, Handforth had carelessly kept it in his pocket, and had now even more carelessly lost it. Nipper really thought that it was up to him to pass it on to Nelson Lee for inspection. The very fact that it was written in cipher was significant—intensely significant. Ordinarily, perhaps, Nipper would have thought very little of it. But after having heard that there was something fishy about the transfer of Edgemore Manor, this pocket-book, with its cipher entries, became important.

So, three minutes later, Nipper was in Nelson Lee's study in the Ancient House.

"Yes, you'd better leave it with me, young 'un," said Lee, after Nipper had briefly explained. "H'm! Very interesting!"

"Do you think there's anything squiffy about it, sir?" asked Nipper eagerly. "It belongs to Snell, you know, and you were telling me that Snell is crooked."

"I told you that that Snell was crooked, Nipper," interrupted Lee. "He may be crooked now—since it is an old axiom that leopards cannot change their spots. I have a suspicion that Mr. Snell has been playing a very deep game with the Edgemore estates. It was very shrewd of you to bring this pocket-book to me so promptly."

"Do you think you'll be able to decipher it, guv'nor?"

"My dear Nipper!" protested Lee.

"Sorry, sir!" said Nipper. "Of course you will!"

"I may not be able to decipher it while you wait," said Lee pointedly. "The best thing that you can do, my boy, is to leave it here. And if anybody comes forward to claim it—which is very improbable, in the circumstances—report to me at once."

"Handy might see the notice, sir," said Nipper.

"Ho might—but Handforth is notoriously blind," smiled Lee. "It may be two or three days before he sees that notice. In any case, you can easily deal with him if he comes to you."

It was obvious to Nipper that Nelson Lee did not wish to talk further, and so Nipper left. He was feeling rather exasperated. It was like his "guv'nor" to leave him guessing in this way. For Lee's very attitude had told him, clearly enough, that he regarded this pocket-book with great significance. The one important fact was that it belonged to

Lucas Snell—and an almost equally important fact was that it was written in cipher.

But there was something else that Nipper did not know.

If he had known it he would have been quite excited. In itself, the pocket-book was worth, perhaps, threepence. It might have cost a shilling originally, but it was now soiled and tattered. Indeed, it was practically of no value at all as it stood, since all the pages were filled.

Nelson Lee thoughtfully drew a newspaper towards him. It was the "Bannington Gazette," and it was that day's issue. Nelson Lee turned to the small advertisements, and he glanced at one of these entries, printed in bold, unusual type:

FIFTY POUNDS REWARD.

LOST, small, red pocket-book, of no value to anybody except owner. Lost somewhere between Bellton and Edgemoor. Anybody bringing this pocket-book to Mr. Lucas Snell, George Tavern, Bellton, will receive the above reward.

Nelson Lee pursed his lips as he glanced through that remarkable advertisement.

"Fifty pounds!" he murmured. "H'm! Quite a sum! Fifty pounds for this insignificant-looking little pocket-book! I rather fancy that I shall be well rewarded after I have conquered this cipher!"



CHAPTER 13.

Good News For Mr. Snell!

T just about this time, a rather interesting interview was taking place on the other side of Bellton.

While St. Frank's was preparing to welcome the French footballers, and while Nelson Lee was busy in his study, Mr. Lucas Snell entered the library of Mr. William Gore-Pearce, in the latter's furnished house.

"Ah, Snell!" said the millionaire, as he rose to his feet and shook hands with the lawyer. "You needn't have hurried, you know. I sent a message for you, but it would have done later on."

"I thought I had better come at once, Mr. Gore-Pearce," said Snell. "Is it anything important?"

"Well, no," said the millionaire, sitting down again and looking at Snell curiously. "To tell you the truth, I've been wondering. That's all. Just wondering. Why are you so infernally anxious about that pocket-book of yours?"

Lucas Snell started.

"Pocket-book?" he repeated, almost stammering.

"Two or three times this week you have asked me about it," said Mr. Gore-Pearce. "And now, this morning, I find an adver-

tisement in the local paper. Man alive, are you serious when you offer a reward of fifty pounds for that pocket-book of yours?"

The lawyer licked his dry lips.

"It—it contains important entries," he said falteringly. "You wouldn't understand, Mr. Gore-Pearce."

"I don't understand!" said the millionaire bluntly.

There was almost a note of suspicion in his voice, and for a moment or two there was silence in the room. One might have thought that Mr. William Gore-Pearce would have invited his lawyer to stay in his temporary home. But, whatever Mr. Gore-Pearce's mind was in this matter, Mrs. Gore-Pearce had to be reckoned with; and Mrs. Gore-Pearce, from whom Claude inherited most of his snobbishness, had set her foot down very firmly. A lawyer was a gentleman, no doubt, but he was not going to be invited into the home of a millionaire. So Mr. Snell was staying at the George Tavern—and, incidentally, he was much happier there.

"No, Snell, I don't understand!" repeated Mr. Gore-Pearce. "Why on earth are you offering this ridiculous sum?"

"I would remind you, Mr. Gore-Pearce, that I am in a position to know my own business," said Snell curtly. "As I told you before, that pocket-book contains some very valuable references. Indeed, I do not know what I shall do without it. There are figures—statements—intricate calculations. It will mean an enormous amount of work for me if I do not recover the book. And fifty pounds, after all, is a comparatively small sum."

"Well, I won't say any more about it," said Mr. Gore-Pearce. "Only this: I've heard that a lot of village youths and boys are positively infesting the lane between Bellton and Edgemoor. They're searching everywhere."

"All the better!" said Mr. Snell eagerly. "That is the very reason I offered such a large reward. I want that pocket-book to be found. I have been over the ground twenty times—fifty times. But all to no purpose."

It was rather curious that Claude should be making his way towards his father's library just at that minute. Claude had managed to get indoors without being seen, and, after a wash, he had done his utmost to remove the traces of the recent scrap. But Claude might just as well have attempted to turn himself into a nigger.

Both his eyes were ominously blue-black, and they were so puffed up that he could hardly see. His nose was an enormous size, and, altogether, he looked a wreck. Now he was coming to his father to complain—he was coming with his heart filled with vindictive fury.

He opened the library door, and prepared to enter.

"If necessary, I'll pay fifty pounds for the recovery of that red pocket-book!" said

Snell's voice. "My time is valuable, Mr. Gore-Pearce. It will save me weeks of research if I can only get that book back. So—"

"I say!" burst out Claude, as he entered the library.

"Good heavens, boy, what have you been doing?" ejaculated his father, staring at Claude. "Fighting—eh? You young idiot—"

"I haven't been fighting!" broke in Claude. "That—that cad Handforth attacked me! I want you to write to the headmaster and complain, pater! I'd like to see Handforth sacked!"

He suddenly turned to Mr. Snell.

"But what's that you were just saying about a red pocket-book?" he went on.

"Oh, nothing!" snapped the lawyer. "Nothing you would understand, Claude!"

"But I do understand!" said Claude. "If you've lost a red pocket-book, I can tell you where it is."

Mr. Snell leapt.

"You can tell me?" he gasped, with such eagerness and frenzy that both father and son stared at him.

"Well, you needn't get so excited," said Claude. "I saw a red pocket-book lying on the ground, at St. Frank's!"

This was perfectly true. In a subconscious way, Claude had seen that pocket-book as Handforth had come for him—but he had forgotten all about it until that moment. Mr. Snell's mention of fifty pounds reward had given Claude quite a jolt.

"Where—where?" demanded the lawyer, leaping forward and shaking Claude by the arm. "You say you saw this pocket-book? Where?"

"You needn't shake me!" snapped Claude. "It was in the Triangle—somewhere near the School House. I expect somebody dropped it—one of the fellows, perhaps."

"Of course," said Mr. Gore-Pearce. "Don't you see, Snell? One of the boys must have picked it up and carelessly dropped it again. You'd better go to the school and claim it while you've got the chance."

But Mr. Lucas Snell had already gone. He had fled out of the library like the wind!



CHAPTER 14.

An Anxious Quest!

IF Lucas Snell had been less perturbed, he might have realised how strange his actions were.

He left Mr. Gore-Pearce's presence without a word of excuse—he fled through the hall and did not even stop to don his overcoat and hat. He was so excited that he ran out just as he was, bareheaded. And, at the

double, he went through Bellton and panted on his way towards St. Frank's.

Without question, that red pocket-book, with its cipher entries, was something of very unusual importance!

At that very moment it was in Mr. Nelson Lee's hands—and Mr. Nelson Lee was bending over his desk, making notes on a writing block, comparing figures and applying tests.

Since there is no object in withholding the fact, it might as well be explained at once that Nelson Lee had conquered the cipher completely. That red book, with its mysterious entries, was now as easy to read as a newspaper. Nelson Lee was reading, too—deciphering word by word as he went along.

Any ordinary man, perhaps, might have puzzled for days—weeks—over that incomprehensible jumble of letters and figures. But Nelson Lee had an enormous advantage over the ordinary man.

Although he was a schoolmaster at St. Frank's, he was also one of the world's cleverest detectives. And Nelson Lee's knowledge of ciphers was very comprehensive. In the course of his career, he had come across some hundreds of different ciphers, and he knew the keys to many of them.

And although this particular cipher of Snell's was tricky, it soon succumbed to Nelson Lee's trained methods. Test after test he had applied, and then, suddenly, he had seen the solution. It wasn't exactly cleverness on Nelson Lee's part—it was merely the result of experience; and, in this world, experience is the most valuable of all things.

As Nelson Lee bent over his desk, his eyes were not merely gleaming with a triumphant glow, but they were burning with intent concentration. Already he had read enough to convince him that he was dealing with a clever criminal. The leopard had not changed his spots!

Outside, Lucas Snell had just turned into the gateway of the Triangle. He found himself face to face with a number of fags. They were just on their way to the village, in fact—to meet the French footballers, who, it was understood, was coming by motor-coach. The fags wanted to be the first to catch sight of the "Froggies," as they impolitely called them.

"Who's this rummy-looking bird?" asked Chubby Heath, staring at the hatless Mr. Snell.

"No need to ask who he is, you ass!" said Willy Handforth. "Don't you recognise him? He's old Snell! He's the chap who sold Edgemore Manor to Gore-Pearce! We saw him at the Manor the other day, when we had that scrap."

"By jingo, so we did!" said Chubby Heath.

Mr. Snell came running up to the fags.

"Tell me!" he panted. "Have any of you boys seen a red pocket-book lying about on the ground?"

"No, we haven't," said Willy bluntly.

"I must find it!" said Mr. Snell. "I have heard that a pocket-book has been seen lying on the ground here. It is mine! Do you understand? It is mine!"

"Well, you needn't get so excited about it!" said Willy, looking at the man very closely. "What's the matter? If the pocket-book's here, you'll be able to find it."

"I say, half a minute!" said Dicky Jones, pushing forward. "I'm a West House chap, and as I was coming through the lobby just now I spotted a notice on the board."

"What about it?" asked Willy.

"Why, Reggie Pitt's got a pocket-book!" said Dicky Jones. "He says that the owner can have it free, gratis and for nothing if he applies at Study K. It may be yours for all I know!"

"Study K!" said Mr. Lucas Snell, grasping Dicky Jones by the shoulder. "Where is Study K? Quick, boy! Take me to this room at once!"

"When you've done, sir!" growled Dicky, shaking the clutching hand away from his shoulder.

"Here, I will give you half-a-crown!" panted Mr. Snell. "Quick! Show me to this boy's study!"

Dicky Jones was by no means averse to accepting half-a-crown for such a slight service. But he suddenly caught sight of Willy's eye, and he shook his head.

"I don't want your money, sir!" he growled. "That's the West House over there," he added, pointing. "Go straight inside, and turn down the passage. All the studies have got the letters painted on the doors. You can find it without me."

"Good man!" said Willy, after Mr. Snell had hurried off. "You'd have had a biff from me, young Dicky, if you'd have accepted his beastly money!"

"It's a bit thick!" growled Dicky Jones. "I'm hard up, too, and—"

"Never mind that!" broke in Willy. "I'll lend you half-a-crown, if you like! But we don't want that chap's money! He's a wrong 'un! He turned the old earl out of Edgemore Manor, and that's good enough for us! I wonder why he's so beastly excited about the rotten pocket-book? Don't see why he should think that it's his, anyway."

In the meantime, Mr. Snell had reached Study K, but when he flung open the door he found that the little room was empty. He was nonplussed—he was defeated. Fortunately, a voice came to his ears.

"Do you want something, sir?" it said.

Mr. Snell spun round, and found Singleton near him.

"Yes, yes!" said the lawyer. "I am looking for a boy named Pitt."

"You'll find him out in the Square, sir," said Singleton. "It'll be your quickest way to go out by the rear door. Pitt's out there, talking to— Well, I'm jiggered!"

For Mr. Snell, without even waiting for Singleton to finish, had hurried away. With-

out any question, that pocket-book of his contained something that was very, very important!



CHAPTER 15.

Tricking Mr. Snell!

IR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST looked into the doorway of Study C, and he nearly dropped his

pince-nez in astonishment.

"Begad!" he said mildly. "What are you doing here, Nipper, old boy?"

Nipper looked up from the easy-chair, and started.

"Oh, nothing, Montie!" he said. "Just thinking."

"But they're here!" said Tregellis-West.

"Eh? Here? Who are here?"

"The French footballers, of course," said Montie, staring.

"Oh, yes, rather!" said Nipper, getting to his feet. "The French team, eh? How do they look, Montie?"

"I don't quite know—really, I don't," replied Sir Montie. "I've only just heard that the team has arrived. I must say, dear old boy, that you don't seem particularly bucked about it."

"That's all right, Montie—I'll be along in a couple of ticks," said Nipper, sitting down at the table. "I'm just going to write out a notice, then I'll join you in the Triangle."

Rather to Nipper's relief, Sir Montie went away, closing the door after him. As a matter of fact, Nipper had been thinking deeply—and he was still feeling exasperated. He wanted to know the secret of that little red book, and more than once he had been more than half inclined to go to Nelson Lee's study to find out what progress the school-master-detective had made. But he had checked this impulse.

Now he suddenly remembered that he hadn't altered that notice on the board in the West House lobby; that he hadn't written the notice to put up in the Ancient House lobby.

He pulled a piece of paper towards him, and was dipping a pen into the ink when he heard voices out in the West Square. The window was open, and the voices came floating in quite distinctly.

"I tell you, boy, that it is mine!" said a shrill, excited voice. "Where is it? I can give you proof that it belongs to me! I want that book at once—"

"All right, sir—keep your hair on!" came the steady tones of Reggie Pitt. "It's in charge of my Form captain, and—"

Nipper did not hear any more. He was on his feet, and he was looking out of the window. There, on the other side of the Square, Reggie Pitt was talking to Mr. Lucas Snell. The latter was hatless, and his excitement was obvious. Nipper knew in a flash that Mr. Snell had seen the notice on



"Ei! Mind those cakes, you dummy!" roared Fatty Little, in alarm. "Which cakes?" said Handforth turning—and in the process of turning strewn them all over the floor!"

the board in the West House lobby—or, at least, somebody had told him something about it—and now Snell himself had come to claim his property!

There was every need for Nipper to think rapidly.

For that pocket-book was in Nelson Lee's possession, and the chances were that Lee had not yet conquered the cipher. There might be a serious complication if Mr. Snell got to know that his pocket-book was in the hands of Nelson Lee!

In a flash, Nipper turned, sped out of the study, and streaked down the corridor. In less than fifteen seconds he was in Nelson Lee's study, and he found his "guv'nor" bending over his desk, pencil in hand.

"Really, Nipper, you shouldn't disturb me now!" said Lee protestingly. "I gave you to understand that—"

"Sorry, guv'nor!" panted Nipper. "But Snell's here!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir!" said Nipper. "I just spotted him talking to Reggie Pitt, and he's come for that pocket-book of his! Reggie will send him to me, of course. What shall I tell him?"

If Nipper had been quick, Nelson Lee was quicker.

He opened one of the drawers of his desk, and took out an old, dilapidated pocket-book with a dingy, reddish cover. He tossed it, quickly across the desk.

"Give him this!" he said briefly.

"But that's not the one, sir!" protested Nipper, staring.

"When Snell comes to you, give him this!" insisted Lee. "If the gentleman is not satisfied with it, all well and good. But just at the moment I am not ready to return him his own property. That's all, Nipper. Cut off!"

"Right you are, guv'nor!" said Nipper, with a sudden grin.

He picked up the pocket-book, and turned towards the door. He now understood the braininess of Nelson Lee's little plan.

"I suppose there's nothing in this that matters, sir?" he asked, as he prepared to dash out.

"No—or I wouldn't have given it to you," replied Lee. "It's an old pocket-book that has been in my drawer for months. Don't waste time, young 'un!" he added sternly.

Nipper made no reply, but darted out and raced back along the passage. As he did so, he managed to glance into the pages of the pocket-book, and his grin widened. For, while most of the pages were blank, there were others that were full of entries in red ink. They were all written in a schoolboyish

hand, and dealt mostly with cakes, pastry, and hobbies. Nipper guessed, in a moment, that Lee himself had prepared this pocket-book—ready for such an eventuality as this.

Nipper was only just in time, for he had hardly sat down in Study C before a quick footstep sounded in the corridor; the next



"Hi! Mind those cakes, you dummy!" a turning—and in the process

moment the door burst open and Lucas Snell entered.

"Hallo!" said Nipper, with assumed surprise. "Is anything the matter?"

"Forgive me for bursting in like this, but—but the matter is important!" said Mr. Snell. "I have been informed that you are taking care of a pocket-book that was found in the Triangle. Is this true?"

"Quite true, sir," said Nipper, elevating his eyebrows. "But I can't quite understand why it should interest you. It's only an ordinary sort of pocket-book, and—"

"It is mine!" interrupted Mr. Snell. "I feel convinced that it is a pocket-book which I lost one day this week. I insist that you shall hand it over to me!"

"I certainly did find a pocket-book," said Nipper, pretending to be cautious and playing his part to perfection. "And if you can prove that it is yours, you can have it with pleasure." As he spoke, Nipper opened a drawer, and took out the pocket-book. "Here you are, sir! Is this the one?"

Mr. Lucas Snell uttered an inarticulate



CHAPTER 15.

Divided Interest!

MR. LUCAS SNELL, threw the pocket-book on the table, and snorted.

"No, this isn't mine!" he snapped. "I might have known it! Confound! All this infernal trouble for nothing!"

He flung himself out of the study, slamming the door as he went. He was looking positively sick as he made his way across the Triangle and left the school property. Never for an instant did he suspect that a substitution had taken place.

No, the thing seemed quite obvious. Claude had seen this pocket-book on the ground, and had quite reasonably mistaken it for Mr. Snell's. When the lawyer came to think it over, it was just what he might have anticipated. Among all the boys of a big school like this there were probably hundreds of pocket-books, and it was only feasible that one of them should now and again be lost.

Nipper, in his study, grinned cheerfully to himself.

"Well, we've diddled Mr. Snell all right!" he murmured. "By jingo, that was a good stunt of the guv'nor's! And it looks promising, too! It means that Snell's pocket-book is pretty valuable. But I don't think I'll make any more inquiries just yet."

So he tried to stifle his curiosity, and he went out to join all the other fellows. Not that the French footballers were on view just yet. They had gone straight to the headmaster's own house, and they were being entertained by a number of the seniors.

Later on, just before the match was due to start, groups of Sixth Formers and Fifth Formers were to be seen going round the school,

pointing out the beauties of the architecture. Each group of seniors was accompanied by three or four of the French visitors.

So far as the juniors were concerned, they were quite out of the picture. They weren't allowed anywhere near the guests. As soon as they approached, the seniors gruffly told them to go and play.

"After all," said Nipper, "what else can we expect? These seniors invited the Frenchies here, and they don't want us to butt in. Fine looking fellows, aren't they?"

"Some of them must be eighteen or twenty," said Reggie Pitt, nodding. "They're a hefty crowd."

"Well, I call it a swindle!" said Handforth, with a sniff. "As far as I can see,



alarm. "Which cakes?" said Handforth and them all over the floor!

shout. He grabbed at the pocket-book, and the next moment every trace of excitement left his face. He fairly exploded with wrath and disappointment.

"This is not mine!" he said harshly.

"Hard luck!" said Nipper sympathetically, but inwardly he was smiling.

So great was the lawyer's rage, so acute was his disappointment, that he looked as if he would like to throw himself upon the junior before him. After all his hopes, after all his anticipations, he now found that the pocket-book was not his!

these French chaps look almost the same as our own seniors!"

"How did you expect them to look?" asked Church.

"Oh, I don't know!" growled Handforth. "But I expected them to look French, anyhow."

"Poor old Handy!" said Travers, shaking his head. "He's had a terrible disappointment. After all his anticipations, he now finds that the visitors look human!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You funny idiot!" said Handforth, with a glare. "Of course they're human! But I thought they'd be waggling their hands all over the place, and shrugging their shoulders, and all that sort of thing!"

"That's the worst of seeing these foreign films!" said Vivian Travers sadly. "When a foreign producer depicts an Englishman on the screen, he's generally an awful caricature wearing an eyeglass and looking like nothing on earth. He's generally an imbecile, too, amiable and—"

"We're not talking about films!" interrupted Handforth tartly.

"No, but it's all on the same scheme," said Travers. "You shouldn't see so many of these pictures, dear old fellow. The producers are just as bad when they show a Frenchman. They seldom show a true portrait—but a caricature. And so, when you see the real thing, you feel quite surprised."

The French schoolboys were, indeed, a fine body of young fellows. They were all well built, muscular and good looking; and when, soon afterwards, they came out on Big Side, dressed in their soccer attire, they presented an even more striking appearance.

"This is going to be a big fight, my sons!" said Nipper happily. "The seniors may be confident of winning, but, by Jove, they'll have to go all out!"

"Rather!" said Tommy Watson. "Let's give 'em a cheer, you fellows."

"Hurrah!"

Others were cheering, too, and some of the French schoolboys waved their hands and grinned in reply. Then a perfect roar went up when Edgar Fenton, the captain of St. Franks, led his men out from the pavilion.

"Good old Fenton!"

"Play up, St. Frank's!"

"Hurrah!"

By this time the ropes were absolutely crowded. The Fifth and the Sixth were there to a man, and there were very few juniors who were absent. This game was

going to be worth seeing, and nobody wanted to miss it.

The teams were lining up, and there was an air of intense expectancy when Nipper allowed his attention to stray from the field. He beheld Nelson Lee walking towards the pavilion, accompanied by a stranger. And Nipper came to a sudden decision.

"By Jove, I will!" he muttered. "The guv'nor will let me go with him into the pav., and I might be able to get a few words with him in private about old Snell. I'm jiggered if I feel like waiting until after the game!"

Truth to tell, Nipper's interest was divided. Much as he wanted to give his whole attention to this game, he was thinking all the time of the red pocket-book and the possibilities that it might hold. He wanted to see Nelson Lee as soon as possible—to hear the latest news.

And so a moment later, making an excuse to his chums, he made his way round towards the pavilion. He succeeded in reaching Nelson Lee and the stranger just before they entered the enclosure.

"Can I come, guv'nor?" asked Nipper, with all the assurance in the world.

"Certainly, my boy!" said Nelson Lee, with a twinkle in his eye. "Come, by all means. Monsieur Girard, this is the youngster I was telling you about," he added, turning to his companion. "This is Nipper, my assistant in many an exciting adventure."



CHAPTER 17.

A Vague Impression!

NIPPER felt rather uncomfortable as he acknowledged the introduction. He had heard from several of the other fellows that Monsieur Henri Girard was the English master at the big school at Corrigan. He was, of course, a Frenchman, but he spoke perfect English, without any trace of an accent. He was in charge of the touring football team, and he was a bluff, breezy, genial sort of man.

"But this is splendid!" he exclaimed, as he held Nipper's hand. "I am delighted, my boy. So you are Nipper?"

"Yes, sir," said Nipper. "I hope Mr. Lee hasn't been telling you a lot of fairy tales about me?"

"On the contrary!" said Monsieur Girard. "I am assured that Mr. Lee has been telling me nothing but the truth. But is not Nipper a most curious name? I ask your pardon if I am most impertinent—"

"Nipper isn't my real name, sir," said the junior skipper. "I'm Hamilton—Dick Hamilton. But everybody calls me Nipper. The guv'nor's called me Nipper ever since I was a kid. Hallo!" he added, with a start. "There goes the whistle!"

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"Good!" said the Frenchman. "And as you say, may the best team win!"

They made their way into the pavilion. Nipper eagerly watching the opening movements of the game. In fact, he was so engrossed with the tactics of the St. Frank's forwards that he was sitting down almost before he knew it. And he found that Monsieur Girard was talking to him.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir!" said Nipper, looking round.

"I want to introduce you to my sister," murmured the Frenchman. "Yes, and to her little son, my nephew, Marie!"

Nipper felt freshly uncomfortable. He resolved to have a warm five minutes with Nelson Lee after the game. What on earth had his guv'nor been saying? He found himself introduced to a sweet-faced lady—Madame Rossiter. Her little son was with her—a bright, fair-haired youngster of not more than ten or eleven. There was something singularly English-looking about this boy. Nipper would never have believed that he was French.

He was rather surprised to find that both Madame Rossiter and her son spoke to him in English that was just as perfect as Monsieur Girard's.

"You cannot know what joy it is for me to be here," the lady was saying, her eyes glowing, her whole face alight with some emotion which Nipper could not understand. "And little Charlie, too. He has always longed to come. At last his dearest wish has been accomplished. He is here—at the great school of St. Frank's. He is here, in Sussex, amongst these wonderful landscapes of yours."

"Oh, rather!" said Nipper. "The scenery about here isn't at all bad."

He was still puzzled. Somehow he felt that Madame Rossiter's reference to the countryside was not merely politeness. There was something deeper behind it. She spoke almost reverently of St. Frank's and of the surrounding district. Why? She was a Frenchwoman, and it was obvious that she had never been here before. Why did the St. Frank's neighbourhood hold such a fascination for her?

Again, there was something vaguely familiar about this youngster, Charlie. Nipper was rather startled to find himself wondering where he had seen the boy before.

Of course, he couldn't have seen the boy before—that was impossible—and yet, in that tantalisingly vague way, the French boy's face struck a familiar chord in Nipper's mind. What could the explanation of it be?

It was rather a trying time for Nipper just then. For he was dividing his attention between Madame Rossiter, her son, and the game. He was still wondering about the boy when a tremendous yell went up from the surrounding crowds. St. Frank's had scored the opening goal.

It had been one of Fenton's best efforts, and he had cleaved his way through the French defence in a masterly way. But the

visitors were playing magnificently. They were putting up a fine game—steady, clever and strenuous, and within five minutes they had equalised, one of their forwards slicing through and scoring an individual goal that earned him thunderous applause.

But just after that there was a slow spell, with most of the play in mid-field. Nipper found his attention wandering again. Constantly he looked at little Charles. The boy himself had eyes for nothing but the game. He was following it with a tenseness and with an eagerness that was good to see.

Happening to glance up, Nipper saw that Nelson Lee was watching the youngster, too. And there was something in Nelson Lee's eyes that caused Nipper to stare harder, for Lee himself, completely oblivious of the game, was taking no ordinary casual interest in Madame Rossiter and her son, while his whole attention was concentrated on these people in his immediate vicinity.

"Where the dickens have I seen that youngster before?" murmured Nipper, racking his brain. "It beats me! I believe the guv'nor's seen him before, too. Or his father, perhaps. I wonder why his father isn't here?"

Then Nipper flushed. He felt guilty—embarrassed.

For he had just heard one or two words casually uttered by Madame Rossiter, and she had said something about her "late husband." Nipper felt thankful that he had not obeyed a sudden impulse to ask the little boy where his father was.



CHAPTER 18.

The Edgemoor Coat of Arms!

OAL!"
"Oh, good old
Morrow!"
"Hurrah!"
"Well scored, Mor-
row!"

Nipper started, and stared out across the playing field. Another goal had been scored—this time by Morrow of the West House—and St. Frank's was one up again, and the spectators were declaring that this game was one of the most exciting and thrilling that had ever been fought out on Big Side.

Nipper felt rather annoyed with himself. He had been looking forward to this game for days—and now he was hardly giving it any attention. He told himself that he would forget Madame Rossiter and her son for the time being, and that he would give all his attention to the play.

But he couldn't quite do it—for the youngster himself started speaking to him, and distracted his attention once more.

"Do you play football?" asked the little French boy suddenly, looking up at Nipper.

"Eh? Oh, rather!" said Nipper. "I'm the captain of the Junior Eleven."

"I would like to see you play, too," said the boy simply. "I would like to be at St. Frank's," he added, with a wistful note in his voice. "Perhaps mother will let me when I grow old enough. I'm not old enough yet, am I?" he added.

"Well, I don't know," said Nipper doubtfully. "In a year or two, of course, you'll be all right for the Third. But do you really mean it? Wouldn't you rather go to a French school—to a school where these big fellows come from?"

"No, no, no!" said Charles, with remarkable vehemence. "I want to come to St. Frank's! I want to be at school here, in England! I am half English—and sometimes mother tells me that I am all English. She says that I take after my father only."

"Well, you look English," said Nipper, smiling.

"What are you chattering about, Charlie?" asked Madame Rossiter, bending over and smiling at her little son.

"It's all right, mother—I was only telling

Nipper that I want to come to St. Frank's as a pupil," said the boy. "My father was at St. Frank's, wasn't he?"

Just for a moment Madame Rossiter looked sad.

"Yes!" she said softly. "Charlie is mad to be at school in England," she added, looking at Nipper. "And he won't talk French if he can possibly help it, you know. He only wants to speak in English."

"English is my tongue!" said the boy, with strange fierceness. "I speak English, mother, because I am English!"

A swelling roar from the crowds caused a welcome diversion. Nipper looked out across the field, and Charlie rose to his feet and shouted excitedly. Two of the French forwards were running up, beating the St. Frank's defence with clever, skilful manoeuvring.

But while everybody else in the pavilion and round the ropes watched with palpitating interest, Nipper was only vaguely thrilled. He was thinking of this little



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French boy—half-French, rather. Clearly, his father had been an Englishman, and the boy had made up his mind to be English, too. It seemed that this was his first visit to England, and he was full of it. There was something peculiarly impressive in his insistence that he was English—that he wanted to come to school at St. Frank's.

Nipper heard Monsieur Girard speaking.

"I'm afraid we shall never make a good Frenchman of our little Charlie, Mr. Lee," the French schoolmaster was saying. "He is all for England—always. Everything English fascinates him. Now and again, when he is in a quick temper, we get a glimpse of his mother, but—"

"Henri!" protested Madame Rossiter.

"Is it not true?" chuckled her brother. "We all have our tempers, have we not? And little Charlie has his—and he has inherited it from you, my dear—not from his father. But see—see! Our boys are at it again! Splendid—splendid! All of them are splendid—everybody on the field!"

Nipper bent over the little boy at his side.

"I expect you want your own team to win, though, eh?" he smiled.

The youngster looked up right into his eyes.

"I want the English to win!" he said quietly.

But Nipper hardly heard the words. Charlie had opened his overcoat within the last minute or two, and now Nipper could catch a glimpse of the neat suit which lay beneath. The little boy was wearing a kind of serge blouse, and in the front of it there was a fastening of some kind—a sort of brooch. But it wasn't the brooch itself which caught Nipper's eye. It was the design upon it.

It was a design that Nipper had seen only two or three days earlier. He had seen it at close quarters. He had examined it carefully, interestedly. It was the coat of arms of the Earl of Edgemoor!

And here it was—embossed on this brooch which the son of Madame Rossiter was wearing! It was such a startling discovery that Nipper felt bewildered! What could it mean?



CHAPTER 19.

A Startling Theory!

HALF-TIME arrived almost immediately afterwards, and Nipper was still so puzzled that he quite forgot to clap the players as they came in.

He had come to this pavilion on purpose to speak with his governor—to ask Nelson Lee about Snell—to ask if there were any developments in the strange affair of the old Earl of Edgemoor. Now, by this most extraordinary chance, these French people themselves had brought the subject back to the old earl.

There, on little Charles' blouse, was the Edgemoor coat of arms!

Nipper wanted to get Nelson Lee alone—to question him—to bombard him with inquiries. Lee was beside him, talking to the little boy, and Nipper looked keenly into Nelson Lee's eyes. He could see that the great detective was looking at that brooch, too.

"Well, Madame Rossiter, our boys are leading by two goals to one," smiled Nelson Lee. "Are you very disappointed?"

"Why should I be?" asked the lady. "It is only a game—and I, too, feel a little bit like Charlie. Perhaps I want your boys to win, Mr. Lee. For although I have never been to St. Frank's before in all my life, I feel that I would like to stay here. This was my husband's country," she added quietly.

"You mean the district?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Yes—here!" she answered, waving her hand towards the landscape. "And yet I know so very little! You see, I knew my husband for such a brief time. Now, when I look back upon it all, I sometimes wonder if it really happened."

Then she turned to her little boy.

"But it did happen," she said softly, as she placed an arm round him. "It must have happened, Mr. Lee."

"If the subject is not painful to you, Madame Rossiter, I should like to know just a little more," said Nelson Lee. "Please do not think that I am inquisitive. But I know this district intimately, and I may be able to help you in your search for your husband's relatives. Monsieur Girard has been telling me that you have never traced his people."

"I'm afraid we have never made any serious attempt to do so," she replied. "My husband was an English officer—Captain Charles Rossiter—and I met him during the war, Mr. Lee. It was out in France, near our old family home. Captain Rossiter was billeted in my father's home, and only three weeks after we were married he was killed in action."

They were silent. Outside, the seniors and juniors were shouting and laughing excitedly. They knew nothing of this tragic little scene within the pavilion.

"Only three weeks!" went on Madame Rossiter. "Was it not tragic, Mr. Lee? The years have passed since then, and so I am able to speak bravely. Once or twice I tried to find out if anybody named Rossiter lived in Sussex. But yet my efforts were only half-hearted. Not once did I receive any communication from my husband's family. It was always silence. They never wrote—they never inquired. So why should I? You must remember that there was all the turmoil of the war for years after my husband was killed. My old home was wrecked by a bombardment, and we were refugees for many months. And then, later, there was my son. He took all my attention—all my time."

"Yes, I quite understand," said Lee gently. "And so, of course, you never made any real search for your husband's family?"

"I am making no search now," replied Madame Rossiter, shaking her head. "Why should I do so? I came to England with my brother—mainly because I knew that the team would be visiting St. Frank's; and Charles had many times referred to St. Frank's. He knew the school—he lived quite near. Perhaps, before I go back, I might be able to learn something."

Nipper found himself gulping. He wanted to say something—to blurt out some words. But then, almost subconsciously, he found that Nelson Lee's eyes were upon him. And Nelson Lee's eyes said "No"!

Nipper's bewilderment was so apparent that Monsieur Girard was watching him wonderingly. Nipper, realising this, suddenly pulled himself together. He turned red, then he got up from his seat and walked out of the pavilion. He wanted to be in the open air—so that he would be able to think more clearly.

What was this staggering theory that had come into his mind?

He tried to sort out his ideas. Here was this little English-French boy—the son of an officer who had been killed during the war, a brief three weeks after his marriage; whose father had come from a part of England that was in the neighbourhood of St. Frank's!

And there, on the little boy's blouse, was the Earl of Edgemore's coat of arms!

As surely as two and two made four, the assumption here was that— And yet—and yet—

"Well, Nipper?" said Nelson Lee softly.

Nipper spun round, and found the school-master-detective beside him.

"Guv'nor!" panted Nipper. "Why—why wouldn't you let me speak there in the pavilion?"

"For many reasons," replied Lee. "I have come up to you now because I want to give you a word of warning."

"But—but it's so staggering!" ejaculated Nipper. "This—this little boy—and his father! His father was an officer in the war, and he was killed in action. Old Lord Edgemore had a son, sir—and he was killed in action! Lord Edgemore has always believed that he has no heir—that he is alone in the world!"

"And now a grandson turns up, eh?" smiled Nelson Lee.

"By Jove, sir, do you really think that this boy is the earl's grandson?" asked Nipper.

"In my opinion, Nipper, there's not the slightest doubt about it!" replied Nelson Lee.

CHAPTER 20.

Not the Right Time!



NIPPER looked at Lee eagerly.

"If there isn't any doubt about it, sir, why don't you tell

Madame Rossiter the truth?" he asked.

"Think how it would bring joy to her! The old earl, too! Think of him, in that little cottage—"

"I am thinking!" interrupted Lee. "And, Nipper, because I have been thinking, I must enjoin you to silence. You must remember that I said 'in my opinion.' There is no absolute proof that this young boy is the Earl of Edgemore's grandson."

"But it must be so, sir!" urged Nipper. "There's nothing else to think! You saw that brooch on the boy's blouse, didn't you? It's got the earl's coat of arms on it! Besides, he looks like the earl!"

"I, too, noticed the resemblance," said Nelson Lee. "As soon as I set eyes on that youngster, I recognised the family resemblance. Yes, the old Earl of Edgemore is living again in this fair-haired youngster, born of a French mother."

"Can't you do something, guv'nor?" asked Nipper earnestly. "The boy's father was named Captain Charles Rossiter. Can't you find out what Lord Edgemore's family name is, and—"

"That is not necessary," interrupted Lee. "I already know Lord Edgemore's family name."

"You do!" panted Nipper. "And what is it, sir?"

"Rossiter."

"Then—then it isn't in doubt at all!" yelled Nipper. "You've got the proof—"

"Steady, young 'un—steady," said Lee, laying a hand on Nipper's shoulder. "There's no need to shout. As far as I am concerned, I am perfectly satisfied that this boy's father was Lord Edgemore's only son. But the time isn't ripe yet for me to speak—even to the mother or the grandfather."

"Why not, guv'nor?"

"Because, for one thing, we must have the definite positive evidence," replied Nelson Lee. "There is another point which you seem to have entirely overlooked. Then, again it is safe to assume that the Girards were never told by Captain Rossiter that he was the son of an earl. If they have made any inquiries at all, they have made inquiries for somebody named Rossiter. As you know yourself, for many years the Earl of Edgemore has been locked away inside his fortress—a hermit. He would have heard nothing of these inquiries, even if they had been made."

"That's true," nodded Nipper thoughtfully.

"In just the same way, the old man was never told of the marriage," said Lee. "Very possibly the son did not like to write to his father and tell him such a startling piece of news. For it would have been startling, Nipper. A conservative old English peer would not be very delighted to hear that his only son and heir had married a French girl. I think we can safely assume that the unfortunate young man intended to bring his wife home at the first opportunity. But, alas, he was killed in action very soon after his marriage, and so the old earl never knew that he had a daughter-in-law—and



Nipper opened a drawer and took out one or two pocket-books and other odds and ends. At sight of a red pocket-book among the collection, Mr. Snell leaned forward excitedly. "That is mine!" he panted, almost choking.

to this day he is in ignorance of the fact that he has a grandson."

Nipper's eyes were soft as he looked up at his gov'nor.

"By Jove, sir, won't the poor old boy go dotty with joy when he hears about this," he said. "A grandson! An heir! And he has believed, for years past, that he is the last of his line. It was because he held that belief that he let himself go—that he made himself into a kind of hermit. He didn't care. The loss of his son had been a deadly blow, and he lost all interest in life. Why, this news will take years off him, sir! Why not tell him to-day?"

"No, Nipper—not to-day," said Lee firmly.

"And what's that you said a few minutes ago, sir?" went on Nipper. "What was the point that I had overlooked?"

"You have brought it up again by your very suggestion," said Lee. "We must not tell the Earl of Edgmore to-day, Nipper, because it would be cruel."

"Cruel?"

"Have you forgotten that the old earl is virtually a pauper?"

"Oh, my goodness!" said Nipper, with a start.

"At first, no doubt, the old man would be overjoyed," said Lee quietly. "But then, afterwards, the reaction would come. How would he like his little grandson to find him in such dire straits? How would

he like his French daughter-in-law to find him an exile—evicted from his ancestral home, living virtually on the charity of the St. Frank's schoolboys?"

"Oh, hardly that, sir!" protested Nipper uncomfortably.

"It is true!" insisted Lee. "Where would the earl be, but for the kindly attentions of you boys? No, Nipper, we must face the facts; and this is certainly not the time to bring about this meeting."

"But when can we tell the earl, sir?" asked Nipper eagerly. "It may be weeks—months—before the earl is in better circumstances."

The Housemaster-detective shook his head.

"I don't think so!" said Nelson Lee, a grim light creeping into his eyes. "After looking into that little red book, Nipper, I certainly do not think so!"

"My only hat!" ejaculated Nipper. "Then you've solved that cipher in Snell's pocket-book? You—you mean—"

"I mean that some big things are brewing," said Lee. "The Earl of Edgmore is not such a pauper as one would believe. No, Nipper, I'm not going to say any more now. But you can take my word for it that Mr. Lucas Snell is a despicable rogue!"

Before Nipper could put any further questions, Nelson Lee had walked away, and Nipper was left alone, his eyes gleaming. He hadn't the slightest doubt that something big was brewing!



CHAPTER 21.

Handforth's Mission!

"JOLLY good, eh?" said Handforth enthusiastically, as he thumped Nipper on the back.

"Eh? Oh, rather!" said Nipper, with a jump. "Here, steady, Handy! Go easy with your confounded mule's hoofs!"

"Rats! I only gave you a tap!" said Handforth, grinning. "What do you think of the result, my lad?"

"The result?"

"Yes."

"The result of what?" asked Nipper, staring.

"Cheese it!" grinned Church. "Don't look so innocent! The result of the match, of course."

"Oh, the match!" said Nipper hastily. "Yes, rather—the match! Oh, fine!"

Handforth & Co. stared at him wonderingly. Over by the senior pavilion, crowds of juniors were cheering the footballers. The game was over—and Nipper hadn't realised it until this second. The last thing he remembered was the French boy's equalising. The fact of the matter was, Nipper was so entirely engrossed with the startling development in the affairs of the Earl of Edgemore that he had lost all interest in the football match.

For some time he had been pacing about on the turf, wondering how Nelson Lee would act with regard to Lucas Snell. For it was now clear that Snell was a crook. Snell had somehow swindled Lord Edgemore out of his property, and had sold it to Mr. William Gore-Pearce.

Nipper was filled with doubt. What was the extent of Snell's villainy? How would the law be able to deal with him? Would the old earl recover his property and his lost fortunes? What did Nelson Lee intend to do about it all?

Nipper knew well enough that it was quite unnecessary for him to worry his head about these matters. Nelson Lee had the case in hand—and Nelson Lee was capable of dealing with it. Yet, at the same time, Nipper could not rest his mind. He was afraid that Madame Rossiter would learn something about the earl independently—he feared that she would go to that cottage, and take her son with her. And then Nelson Lee's plans would be spoilt. Wouldn't it be a lot better to take immediate action?

"What on earth's the matter with you, you fathhead?" said Handforth, taking Nipper by the shoulder and shaking him.

"I've been thinking!" said Nipper, glaring. "Keep your giddy hands off me, you chump! I can think I suppose, can't I?"

"You've no right to think!" retorted Handforth. "You ought to have given your full attention to this match!"

"Well, perhaps I ought," admitted Nipper. "It's rather a pity that the first eleven couldn't have won the game—"

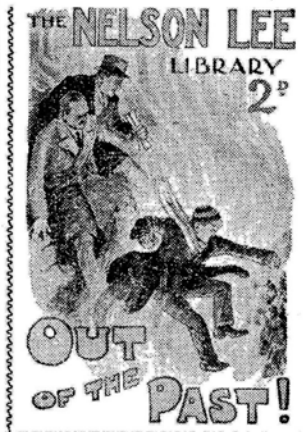
"Couldn't have won the game?" yelled Handforth & Co., in one voice.

"I mean, it's a pity that it was only a draw," said Nipper.

"You crazy, fathhead, dithering lunatic!" roared Handforth. "The first eleven *did* win!"

Nipper started. "Oh, my hat!" he grinned. "The first did win, eh? What was the score?"

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



"Three—two!" said McClare. "Weren't you here?"

"Yes."

"And you didn't know the score?"

"I wasn't attending to the game," said Nipper. "As I told you before, I've been thinking."

He walked off before Handforth & Co. could recover from their amazement.

"He's going dotty!" said Handforth, at last. "Clean off his rocker! Poor chap, if he goes on at this rate he'll be in the lunatic asylum within a week!"

"It's certainly very rummy!" said Church, scratching his head. "Nipper—the junior skipper—on the ground all the time, and

didn't even know what the score was! There's something fishy about it."

"Fishy?" repeated Handforth.

"Something must have happened," said Church, nodding. "Something about the Earl of Edgemore, perhaps, or something about old Gore-Pearce."

"That reminds me!" said Handforth, with a start. "I saw some ripping cigars in the village. Really good ones, I mean—eightpence or ninepence each. I thought about getting a dozen of them, and giving them to the Earl of Edgemore as a little present."

"Better not waste your money on cigars, old man," said Church dubiously. "I don't believe the earl smokes."

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"I'll bet he does—only he hasn't been able to afford any cigars lately," said Handforth. "Anyhow, I'm going to buy him a dozen, just for luck. You wait until he sees these Coronas!"

"You silly chump; you won't get Coronas for ninepence each," grinned McClure. "Well, anyhow, let's get indoors to tea. We'll have a word with Nipper, too, and ask him—"

"We're going to the village first," said Handforth bluntly.

"Oh, look here!" protested Church, in alarm. "Bother your silly cigars!"

"We're going to the village now!" roared Handforth aggressively. "I want those cigars at once!"

Vivian Travers strolled up.

"Better go easy with that voice of yours, Handy," he said warningly. "You don't want to tell the whole school that you've gone in for cigar smoking."

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "Why, you cuckoo, I've never smoked a cigar in my life!"

"Then it seems that you're going to start!" said Travers, nodding. "Take my advice and go carefully. I've tried it—and I know what they're like! You'd far better play safe and stick to cigarettes."

"You—you—you hulking idiot!" hooted Handforth. "I wouldn't smoke your filthy cigarettes for a pension. I want to buy some cigars for the Earl of Edgemore, and—"

"Oh, of course, that's different!" smiled Travers. "Why didn't you say so at first?"

And he went off, chuckling.



CHAPTER 22

Fifty Pounds Reward!

CHURCH and McClure knew that it was perfectly useless to argue. Handforth had made up his mind to go to the village for those cigars before tea, and he wasn't going to be diverted from his purpose.

For a few moments Church and McClure thought about rebelling. But it was hardly worth it. Why should they go about for two or three days wearing scars of battle? It was far safer to accompany Edward Oswald, and to sidetrack him in the village truck shop after the cigars had been purchased. Tea in the village, when all was said and done, was practically as good as tea in Study D. Perhaps better. There was a greater variety of good things at hand.

So, while the seniors fêted the French footballers, while the headmaster entertained Monsieur Girard and his sister and nephew, and while the juniors enthusiastically attacked tea, Handforth & Co. went to the village.

The first part of the programme was dealt with satisfactorily. Handforth bought his cigars, and he was pleased to find that they were all in a nice little box. Before going out of the shop, he purchased an evening paper—one that had just come in.

"Well, that's that!" said Church, as they emerged into the High Street. "What about a visit to Binks, Handy?"

"Yes, rather!" said Handforth. "Might as well have tea here, eh? Jolly good idea, my son. Just a minute, though, I want to see who won the Cup Tie in Bannington."

"Oh, yes!" said Church. "I hope the Bannington chaps pulled it off!"

Handforth was about to open the newspaper when something caught his eye amongst the small advertisements. The next moment

he uttered an ejaculation, and stood there, stock still.

"Well, I'm jiggered," he said blankly.

"Did they lose?" asked McClure.

"Look at this!" said Handforth, his face suddenly flushing and his eyes gleaming with excitement. "My giddy aunt! Fifty Pounds Reward!"

Church and McClure craned their heads round, and read the advertisement.

"Fifty Pounds Reward!" said Church, reading aloud. "Lost, small red pocket-book, of no value to anybody, except owner——"

"Why, that must be that pocket-book you found, Handy!" ejaculated McClure eagerly. "Yes, by jingo! It was Snell's, wasn't it? And it says in this advert. that the pocket-book is to be taken to Lucas Snell, at the George Tavern——"

"And the George Tavern is only just across the road!" said Handforth. "By George! What do you think of that, you chaps? Fifty quid! The man must be up the pole! The pocket-book isn't worth twopence!"

"It isn't worth twopence to us, but it evidently must be of great value to him," said Church. "You haven't let us look at it properly yet, Handy. You said there was a lot of cipher in it, or something—and that you were going to elucidate it. I suppose you haven't had time?"

Handforth grunted.

"It's not my business," he said gruffly. "I don't want to pry into Snell's affairs. I don't like the man—I think he's a wrong 'un—but that's no reason why we shouldn't go and claim this reward, that fifty quid will come in jolly handy for the Edgemore fund. Sort of poetic justice, you chaps. Snell practically turned the poor old boy out of the Manor, and now Snell's money will be used to buy food and comforts and luxuries for him. In fact, Snell's money is better than anybody else's for this purpose!"

Church grinned.

"That's about right, too!" he admitted. "I suppose you've got that pocket-book with you?"

"Of course I have," said Handforth. "I've carried it about all the time. Come on—let's go into the George Tavern, and claim the money."

They were all excited.

It amazed them to know that Mr. Lucas Snell was prepared to give a big sum like fifty pounds for the return of that insignificant-looking pocket-book. It had been in Handforth's coat for nearly a week, forgotten and neglected. He had hardly given it a thought. On one occasion he had decided that he would send it back to Mr. Snell—because it wasn't his. But Handforth had thought it so trivial that he had forgotten it again.

"I'm not sure that we ought to hand it over!" he said abruptly, as they neared the

hotel entrance of the George Tavern. "Let's think it over first."

"There's nothing to think over, you chump!" said Church. "The pocket-book belongs to Snell, and he's offering fifty pounds for it."

"Yes, and it looks fishy!" said Handforth suspiciously. "If it wasn't fishy, why should the man be willing to give so much? I'll bet there's some incriminating evidence in that pocket-book! Only it's in cipher, and we can't read it!"

"In that case, it's valueless to us," pointed out McClure. "So we might as well have the cash. Don't forget poor old Lord Edgemore, Handy."

"You're right!" admitted Handforth, making up his mind. "We're not getting this money for ourselves—but for the poor old boy in the cottage. Come on! Let's see Snell, and get it over!"

And they marched into the George Tavern!



CHAPTER 23.

A Bit of a Shock!

MR. LUCAS SNELL was in his private apartment, partaking of tea. At least, tea had been served, but so far Mr. Snell had not touched it.

For a week Mr. Snell had been worried, and now, this evening, he was well-nigh distracted. For his advertisement had, so far, borne no fruit. He was grievously disappointed over the result of his visit to St. Frank's. He had been certain that the pocket-book was there—but never, for a moment, did he suspect that he had been tricked. One glance at that little book which Nipper had handed him had been enough.

A tap sounded on the door, and Snell looked up irritably.

"Come in!" he snapped.

A waiter entered.

"There are three young gents from the big school, sir, asking to see you," said the waiter. "They say it's important, sir!"

Mr. Lucas Snell jumped.

"Show them in—show them in!" he said quickly. "Bring them to me at once!"

The waiter departed, and a moment later Handforth & Co. marched in. Mr. Snell's expression changed as he beheld the leader of Study D. A scowl came over his face, and his eyes glittered.

"You!" he said ominously.

"Yes, me!" said Handforth. "Good-evening, Mr. Snell!"

"This is no occasion for politeness!" snapped the lawyer. "You are the boy who brought all this trouble on me! You are the boy who nearly ran over me in the lane! But for your rank carelessness I should never have lost that pocket-book!"

"Well, you can keep your hair on, sir—I've come back with it!" said Handforth.

"You've got it!" shouted Snell. "Where? Give it to me!"

"I've had it all the week!" said Handforth, staring. "I picked it up that same evening, and it's been in my pocket ever since. I didn't know you wanted it so badly. I forgot all about the blessed thing!"

"You are telling me that it has been in your pocket ever since it was lost?" shouted Mr. Snell, his anger rising. "Why, you infernal young idiot! You knew it was mine, didn't you? Why didn't you bring it back? What do you mean by keeping my property like this?"

"I tell you I forgot all about it!" replied Handforth. "But I just saw your advert in the paper, and I was reminded. If you'll hand over the fifty pounds reward, you can have your pocket-book back."

Mr. Snell fairly quivered.

"No!" he shouted furiously. "Of all the impudent demands! Of all the extortionate proposals! I shall not give you a penny, you young scamp! The pocket-book was never lost, as you have admitted, and therefore you are not entitled to any reward!"

This, in a strict sense, was true enough. But, as Handforth intended to use the reward money for the Earl of Edgemoor, he was not over particular.

"Well, I like that!" he said indignantly. "You're offering fifty pounds for the return of that pocket-book, and when I come in with it you say that you won't pay up! All right—we'll go!"

"No, you won't!" shouted Mr. Snell. "That pocket-book is mine, and you know that it is mine! Give it to me this instant! I can see your game—I can see clearly through it! You have been holding the pocket-book for these past few days—waiting for me to offer a reward. You unscrupulous young—"

"Here, steady!" interrupted Handforth aggressively. "You'd better not accuse me of anything like that, Mr. Snell! I didn't know you were going to offer any reward—but now that you have offered it, I want it! Unless you dub up the fifty quid, you won't get the pocket-book! An offer is an offer. What the dickens does it matter to you where the pocket-book comes from as long as you get it?"

This was sound logic, and Mr. Snell was compelled to capitulate.

"Very well!" he said thickly. "The matter is not worth arguing about. You shall have your money—but not until you have handed the pocket-book over to me. Let me see it! I cannot waste my time in quibbling with schoolboys. You are taking advantage of me—you are acting with gross dishonesty. Very well! I can do nothing but submit!"

Handforth turned red.

"All right—keep your rotten money!" he shouted. "If you think that about us, Mr. Snell, we won't take any reward at all!"

"Good egg!" said Church. "We don't want his money, Handy!"

"You're right!" said Handforth. "I've changed my mind, Mr. Snell! You can have your pocket-book back, and we won't take that reward. You're not going to spread any talk that we've been dishonest over it! Not likely!"

He opened his jacket, and dived his hand into his breast pocket. Then a blank look came over his face.

"That's funny!" he said, frowning.

He felt in his other pocket, slowly at first, and then frantically. Pocket after pocket was turned out, but all to no purpose.

"Well?" said Mr. Snell, at last.

"I've lost it!" said Handforth dazedly.

"What?"

"I've lost it!" repeated Handforth. "I can't understand it either. It was in my pocket this morning. I felt it there! In this same jacket, too."

"You've lost it!" shouted Snell shrilly. "You—you infernal young idiot! What do you mean by coming to me and saying—"

"By George! I remember," said Handforth, with a start. "I'll bet it dropped out of my pocket when that cad, Gore-Pearce, butted me over in the Triangle!"

"That's about it!" said McClure. "You went over an awful wallop, Handy. But you needn't worry, Mr. Snell," he added, turning to the lawyer. "Somebody has picked it up by now, I expect, and you've only to go to the school and—"

"Go!" snarled Lucas Snell hoarsely.

An extraordinary change had come over the man. He looked evil; he looked almost insane. A burning light had come into his eyes.

"Go!" he croaked. "I have heard enough. Get out of this room!"

Handforth & Co. went—freshly startled and puzzled, while Lucas Snell cursed and raved after they had closed the door behind them!



CHAPTER 24.

At Last!

"TRICKED!" panted Lucas Snell harshly.

There was some reason for his abrupt change, for the mad light that burned in his eyes. For it seemed to Snell that the truth was obvious. He had been tricked—he had been fooled by that boy at St. Frank's!

For, according to Handforth's story, the pocket-book that Claude Gore-Pearce had seen was actually Snell's own pocket-book. It wasn't that other one that Nipper had handed to him. Therefore, beyond all question, Nipper had fooled him. The real pocket-book was at St. Frank's all the time!

With a sudden movement, Snell rang the bell, and when the waiter came he glared at the man.

"Is there a taxi here?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir."

"Have it ready within one minute!" snapped Snell. "I want to go to St. Frank's College at once, and the matter is urgent. I cannot waste my time by walking. Quickly, man! Have the taxi at the door within one minute!"

Ten minutes after Snell had given that order, he was jumping out of the ramshackle Ford taxi in the Triangle of St. Frank's. He ran towards the Ancient House, and lost no time in presenting himself in Study C. It was really lucky that Nipper happened to be there alone. Tregellis-West and Watson had gone off to the common-room only a few minutes earlier.

"So!" said Mr. Snell, closing the door and breathing hard.

Nipper looked at him steadily. In a flash he knew why Snell had come. His mind worked quickly, but he showed no trace of mental disturbance.

"What's the matter, Mr. Snell?" asked Nipper. "Why are you so excited?"

"You young reprobate!" snarled Lucas Snell, as he bent over the table, planting both his hands on the surface. "What do you mean by it? What do you mean by fooling me as you did this afternoon?"

"Fooling you?" repeated Nipper, his voice even but grim. "You'd better be careful, Mr. Snell. I don't like people to come into this study and accuse me—"

"Enough of this nonsense!" broke in the lawyer. "I have learned definitely that it was my pocket-book that was dropped in the school grounds to-day. That pocket-book was placed in your possession. I have had plenty of evidence of that. Well, where is it? What do you mean by giving me a totally different pocket-book? I want mine! Do you hear me, boy? Mine!"

Nipper looked at him in wonder. He began to understand why Nelson Lee had seemed so pleased just before tea. Lee must have found some very incriminating evidence in that book. Snell's anxiety to recover it was almost a mania.

"If you would cool down, Mr. Snell, and compose yourself, we could get on better," said Nipper. "You seem to forget that you're in a big public school, and that the fellows are often losing things. Why, it isn't at all unusual for one or two pocket-books to be dropped during a week."

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. Snell. "I want my property—"

"And I'll help you to recover it," said Nipper curtly. "You came to me this afternoon saying that you had lost a pocket-book—a red one. Well, I showed you one. It wasn't yours. I couldn't help that, could I? I'd like to remind you that I'm the captain of the Form, and lost property is either brought to me or to the Housemaster. Have a look through these, Mr. Snell. Perhaps your book is among this lot!"

Nipper opened a drawer and took out one or two pocket-books, a wallet, and a few other odds-and-ends. Like a dog pouncing on a rat, Mr. Snell snatched at a small red book among the collection.

"This is mine!" he panted, almost choking.

With feverish, trembling fingers, he turned the leaves. The book was intact; everything was safe. Not a page was missing, not a page even torn. It seemed obvious enough that this book had been lying in Nipper's drawer all the time.

"Is that the one?" asked Nipper.

"Yes, yes!" panted Snell, recovering himself with singular rapidity now. "Forgive me, my boy—forgive me for being so agitated. But you don't realise how important this book is to me."

"Yes, it seems to be pretty important," agreed Nipper.

"I feared that you had tricked me," said Snell. "But, of course, I apologise. I now understand the position. Naturally you could not know which book was mine. Thank you, young man—thank you!"

"That's all right," growled Nipper. "You're welcome, Mr. Snell. I rather think there was some question of a reward, wasn't there? You've been advertising—"

"Eh?" said the lawyer, with a start. "I do not see any reason why I should—"

"Oh, I'm not going to ask for the money!" broke in Nipper coldly. "That pocket-book of yours has been carried about by one of our fellows for nearly a week past. He's a careless chap, and he forgot all about it. Yet he knew it was yours all the time, so it wouldn't be quite fair of us to ask for that reward. I'm sure I can't see why you should make so much fuss!"

Mr. Snell realised how incautious he had been.

"I am excitable," he said. "Of course, I should not have made a fuss. But, as I told you, I thought that you were playing a foolish trick upon me. I regret that I should have been so mistaken. I should like you to accept five pound, my boy, as a compensation for—"

"No thanks!" interrupted Nipper. "If you're very anxious to give away five pounds, Mr. Snell, distribute it in the village. Half the youngsters down there have spent the day looking for your pocket-book, in consequence of your advert. Good-evening, Mr. Snell."

The lawyer went out, feeling very small, very insignificant. But, for all that, there was a triumphant gleam in his eyes, for that precious pocket-book of his was once again back in his possession. And even now he suspected nothing. He assumed that the book had been seen by no eyes other than those belonging to these junior schoolboys, and they didn't matter, for naturally they could have made nothing of those cipher entries.

But Mr. Lucas Snell was labouring under a sad delusion!

CHAPTER 25.

A Question of Evidence I



HANDFORTH stared down the lane

"That was old Snell!" he said, in a wondering voice.

The cnums of Study D had just arrived at the main gateway of St. Frank's. They had shifted out of the way at the sound of a motor-horn, and they had caught a glimpse of the passenger as the George Tavern taxi had driven out. The aged vehicle was now rattling on its way to the village.

"Yes, it was Snell right enough!" said Church, nodding. "He wasn't long here, was he? That looks as if he has recovered his rotten pocket-book!"

"We shall have to make some inquiries," said Handforth. "I expect some ass picked it up, you know."

They marched into the Triangle, and they had hardly got into the lobby of the Ancient House when they encountered Nipper.

"Just a minute!" said Handforth. "Do you know anything about a red pocket-book?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I do," said Nipper. "You're a careless fathead, Handy! That pocket-book belongs to Snell, as you know, and you dropped it in the Triangle to-day."

"I didn't drop it!" said Handforth warmly. "Gore-Pearce butted me over, and it must have fallen out of my pocket then. Has Snell got it back?"

"Yes," said Nipper casually. "He's only just left, in fact. Reggie Pitt found it, and as I'm the captain of the Form he gave it into my charge. So Snell came to me. Naturally, I handed it over."

"Did he give you any reward?"

"He wanted to, but I wouldn't take any," replied Nipper. "I don't like Snell—I believe he's a wrong 'un, and so I don't want his money."

"Good man!" said Handforth approvingly. "That's the style! I thought I had that giddy pocket-book myself, and I went into the George Tavern to claim the reward. Fifty quid, my lad! What do you think of it?"

"And then I suppose you found you hadn't got the book at all?" grinned Nipper. "Isn't that just like you, old man? As for the reward, there's something squiffy about it."

"That's what we think!" said Handforth eagerly. "I believe that Snell is a criminal, and that that pocket-book contains the names of his gang, or something. He may be the leader of a great secret league."

"Help!" said Nipper, fanning himself. "If you're going to let your imagination run riot, Handy, I'll buzz off!"

And Nipper nodded and walked away. Incidentally, Handforth & Co. dismissed Snell's pocket-book from their minds from

that moment. And this was all to the good.

Nipper himself went to Nelson Lee's study, and the famous schoolmaster detective looked at him with interest as he closed the door.

"Well, young 'un?" said Lee. "Did it work? He swallowed the story?"

"Hook, line and sinker, sir," said Nipper. "That was a jolly cute dodge of yours to keep it for a few hours like that. I did exactly as you told me, and Snell has gone away thinking that I've had the book in possession all the time—ever since it was dropped in the Triangle."

"Splendid!" said Lee, his eyes gleaming. "I rather think, Nipper, that we shall soon have Mr. Lucas Snell where we want him."

Nelson Lee's wits had been at work here. It was he who had planned the whole thing. Nipper had been obeying his guv'nor's instructions from start to finish.

"But you haven't told me about that cipher, sir!" said Nipper eagerly. "Have you decoded all of it?"

"Every word."

"And what does it mean, sir?" asked Nipper. "Have you got the proofs that you want?"

"Not yet," replied Nelson Lee. "This proof is enough to satisfy me—and perhaps you, Nipper. But it will not do for the police. I shall have to obtain much more concrete evidence. And I have no doubt that the obtaining of it will prove exciting."

Nipper's eyes gleamed.

"Does that mean that you're going to get busy on a real detective job, sir?" he asked.

"Does that mean that you're going for Snell in genuine earnest?"

"It does!" replied the schoolmaster-detective. "The whole situation is delicate, Nipper. The Earl of Edgemore, at present, is a pauper. His own grandson is here—at St. Frank's! And I've just heard that Madame Rossiter and her son are to remain here, as the Head's guests, for at least a week. Before that week has elapsed, I want to get Snell into the trap, and so pave the way to a fitting climax. I may be wrong, but I believe that the Earl of Edgemore's fortunes are soon to take a turn for the better."

Nipper leaned over the table.

"Can I help you, guv'nor?" he asked eagerly. "Will you let me come on this job with you?"

"Perhaps, Nipper—perhaps!" replied Lee, smiling into Nipper's eyes.

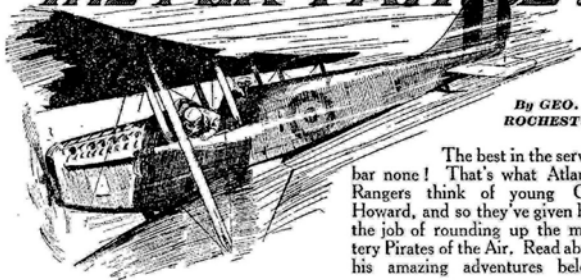
And Nipper went away happy. He knew that something extra big was brewing. Events at St. Frank's were likely to prove exciting during the forthcoming week!

THE END.

(They do prove exciting, as you will find out for yourself when you read next week's corking yarn entitled, "OUT OF THE PAST!" And as it happens to be the last story in this series, you had better make sure of obtaining your copy by ORDERING NOW!)

Have You Told Your Pals About This Grand Serial?

THE AIR PATROL!



By GEO. E.
ROCHESTER.

The best in the service bar none! That's what Atlantic Rangers think of young Guy Howard, and so they've given him the job of rounding up the mysterious Pirates of the Air. Read about his amazing adventures below.

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENED:

GUY HOWARD, youngest and most intrepid "scout" in the Atlantic Rangers—whose duty it is to guard the air routes between Britain and America—is attached to Aerodrome D, one of the six huge floating aerodromes placed across the Atlantic Ocean. Just recently the big bullion and passenger-carrying air liners have been attacked by air pirates, whose leader is

VON SCHAUMBERG. The headquarters of the pirates is unknown. Guy has sworn to exterminate them, for they have been particularly busy on his "beat." The latest pilot to be plundered is

STRUBEN, an American; but Guy tells his commanding officer that he sus-

pects that Struben, together with the American's mechanic,

MULLER, are accomplices of the air pirates! Later Struben and Muller are arrested and placed in the cells, but they succeed in escaping. They send a wireless message to Von Schaumberg, who, upon hearing what has happened, vows vengeance against Guy. Meanwhile a big mail plane from New York to Paris has just landed at D aerodrome for change of pilots. When it is deserted Struben and Muller board it; in spite of the raging gale they intend to make a desperate attempt to escape—the plane starts off and it seems as if Guy, who is in hot pursuit, will be foiled at the last moment!

(Now Read On.)

A Desperate Chance!

FAINTLY above the roar of the engines came a crash of firing from the marines. Bullets ripped through woodwork and fabric. Struben, his lips drawn back in a wolfish snarl, kicked hard on the rudder.

The tail skid whisked hard over, and the huge machine swung round with a lurch which severely tested every strut and flying wire. The whole episode had taken but seconds.

As the air liner commenced to move forward with ever-increasing impetus, Guy

sputtered. He doubled to avoid the slipstream of the racing propellers, crouched, then leapt inwards, his hands clawing at the great shock-absorber casings of the under-carriage.

His arms felt as though they were being wrenched from their sockets. But he hung on grimly, feeling frantically for a foothold on the cold, wet iron of the casings. Above him loomed the black spread of the lower planes and fuselage.

The machine was tearing across the aerodrome at a terrific speed. It lifted slightly as Struben pulled on the control stick, bumped, then lifted again.

The brilliant patch of illuminated macadam seemed to drop away beneath Guy. The machine was in the air. Then, as she rose, the full fury of the gale struck her. It seemed to Guy as though giant fingers were endeavouring to pluck him from his precarious hold.

Something was slapping the casings and fabric of the under-carriage with sharp staccato reports. It impinged on Guy's hearing above the thunder of the powerful engines.

Then came sudden realisation as to what it was, and the ranger laughed grimly.

"I've got a chance!" he murmured, and, wedging himself in between two of the Y-shaped casings of the shock-absorbers, he groped upwards with gloved hands for the rope-ladder, which neither Struben nor Muller had thought to haul up through the open trap-door on the floor of the engine-room!

Over The Atlantic!

"**W**ERE clear, Muller, you rat! We've won through when we hadn't got a chance!"

Struben's voice was exultant. He pressed on the rudder-bar and swung the machine round till the compass-needle flickered at due north.

It was warm in the triplex-glass-enclosed cabin. Muller wiped his bloodless lips with the back of his hand. The other arm, torn from its sling, hung curiously twisted and limp by his side.

He leaned back in the seat he occupied next to Struben, the seat used by the machine's navigation officer.

"My arm!" he moaned. "My arm——"

"Curse your arm!" laughed Struben, but his voice was harsh. "I've saved your life for what it's darned well worth!"

He glanced down. Far below was the light-house of D Aerodrome, flashing out its monotonous dash—dot—dot! The lighted landing space looked little more than a golden postage stamp shining against the dark background of desolate sea. Like tiny fairy lanterns shone the lighted windows of the living quarters and hotel.

Struben laughed again, and there was something almost maniacal in his laughter. For he was near to madness in the reaction which had set in. But, first-class pilot that he was, his firm hands on the controls might have been those of an automaton.

"Good-bye!" he shouted, and spat on

the floor in disgust and contempt. "Good-bye—curse you!"

Raising his eyes, he peered ahead into the blackness of the night.

"Look, Muller!" he snarled. "Look there! Mighty fine huntin' some day for Von Schaumberg and his wolves!"

Muller stirred in his seat. His closed eyes flickered open.

"What d'you say, Struben?" he asked weakly.

"Aw, you haven't any stamina!" snapped Struben. "You're about all in, aren't you! Look there, man, and see if that doesn't send the blood coursing through your greaser's veins!"

Muller stared ahead through the triplex glass. A thousand feet above them, racing westwards towards E Aerodrome, was a mighty leviathan of the air, the latest triumph of the British airship factories.

Her huge cigar-shaped envelope glimmered ghostly in the darkness. Her cabins, from bow to stern, were a blaze of golden lights. She passed, tearing westwards at one hundred and thirty miles per hour, half-running before the gale.

"Couldn't stop her if they wanted to," sneered Struben. "Break her back, if they tried to turn her in this wind. 'Less, of course, Mister Clever Howard was pilotin', then I guess we'd see some-thing mighty smart and original."

He broke off with a cackle of laughter. It was a cackle which ended with astonishing abruptness as a cold ring of steel was pressed against the nape of his neck, and a voice said pleasantly:

"Thank you. Thank you very much, Struben."

For a long moment Struben sat as though turned to stone. Then slowly, slowly, he turned his head. Standing behind him was Guy Howard.

The ranger's face was bruised and battered, but the ungloved hand which held his gun was firm and steady. And the eyes which stared into Struben's were cold and deadly.

Muller, slumped in his seat, seemed but half conscious, and was totally oblivious as to what was happening.

"You will turn back, Struben," said the ranger, his voice audible above the muffled beat of the engines.

"Where—where the blazes have you come from?" demanded Struben hoarsely.

His hands were still on the controls, but he was flying, in that moment, purely by

the instinct which comes, sooner or later, to every pilot.

"Never mind that!" replied Guy. "You will turn back."

Struben laughed harshly.

"You're crazy!" he snarled. "I'm not turning back!"

"I will give you just one minute in which to change your mind, Struben!" warned the ranger.

"If I go back I hang!" snarled Struben. "I'm not going back, an' you can do your worst!"

Turning, he kicked Muller on the shins.

"Wake up, you weevil!" he snapped.

"Hyar's death, in the form of your old pard, Howard."

Struben Fails!

MULLER jerked into instant wakefulness.

"What the——" he began angrily, then, as he saw Guy, the words died on his lips.

The blood drained from his face, leaving it deathly in its pallor. His eyes, literally, seemed to protrude from his head.

"You—you——" he gasped.

"Yes, me, Muller!" replied Guy.

"He's given me just a minute in which to decide whether or not we're going to turn back," said Struben.

"You have half a minute left, Struben," warned the ranger coldly.

Struben stiffened in his seat.

"What you aimin' to do when I don't turn back?" he demanded, and there was the faintest of faint tremors in his voice.

"Your life is forfeit, and I will shoot you dead for evading arrest!" replied Guy sternly. "You have fifteen seconds left in which to reconsider your decision!"

Struben wetted his lips with the tip of his tongue.

"If I die the bus crashes!" he said jerkily.

"The bus will not crash!" replied Guy. "You know that."

Struben did know it. If the ranger

meant what he said and Struben was shot dead as he sat, then it would be the work of a moment to pull his body aside and get the machine under control again.

"You have five seconds left!"

Guy Howard's voice was cold, emotionless.

"Don't play the fool, Struben!" whined Muller. "He means it, man; he means it! Turn back, Struben! There's a chance at the trial——"

"There's no chance!" snarled Struben. "Thanks to you."

The cold ring of steel pressed closer into Struben's neck, and the voice of the ranger cut in on his words.

"You have had your opportunity, Struben"—the ring of steel was pressing, pressing—"it is your own fault! The time is up."

"Stop!" shrieked Muller. "You can't shoot him like that! You can't—you can't——"

He staggered to his feet, horror in his eyes. The events of the past hours had utterly unnerved him. Then, with something approaching a sob, he swayed and crashed face foremost to the floor of the cabin.

"Don't shoot!" Struben spoke hoarsely through dry lips. "You've beat me. I'll turn!"

He pressed on the rudder bar with his foot and the control wheel spun round in

his hands. Banking at an acute angle the machine turned towards the south, where lay D aerodrome.

"You've got nerve, Howard." Struben spoke jerkily. "The cold-blooded nerve of the killer! But I reckon if you've got a spark of humanity in you, you'll look to Muller. I reckon he's about all in."

His face was averted from Guy, and there was a crafty look in his eyes.

"I shall attend to Muller with pleasure," replied the ranger. "But first I'll have your gun, Struben."

"I haven't got a gun, confound you!"



VON SCHAUMBERG,
the ruthless leader of the Air Pirates,
who has sworn vengeance against Guy
Howard!

"Pardon me. The butt is sticking out of your tunic pocket."

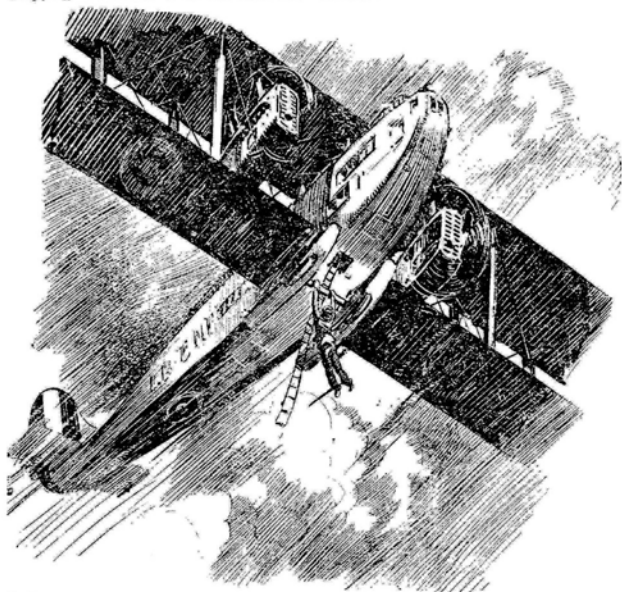
Struben laughed forcedly. Almost casually his hands moved the controls into neutral, and his finger pressed on the safety catch.

"All right, it's your call, I reckon, Howard," he drawled. "Take the gun."

Then, without warning, and with the agility of a panther, he leapt to his feet, whipping his hands from the fixed con-

trols as though his shoulder had been bored by a red-hot iron. Through the swirling smoke he saw Struben swaying on his feet. Then, as Struben's gun fell from his nerveless hand, Guy leapt towards the controls.

He heard a dull thud as Struben pitched heavily to the floor of the cabin. The next instant he was fighting desperately to get the lurching machine under control!



As the big machine rose into the air the full fury of the gale struck her. And Guy, hanging to the undercarriage of the plane, felt as though giant fingers were endeavouring to pluck him from his precarious hold!

trols. He wheeled, one clenched hand swinging viciously for the ranger's chin, the other streaking to his tunic pocket.

Guy sprang backwards. He had a momentary vision of Struben's gun flashing into view. His finger tightened on his own trigger.

Bang! Bang!

Both guns roared simultaneously. Guy

The Threat!

"NEARLY fit again, Howard?" asked Colonel Malcolm, with a kindly smile.

"Yes, sir," replied Guy Howard. "The doctor has promised to allow me to get up to-morrow."

It was three days since, with the dawn, Guy had come limping back to D Aero-

drome with the French mail machine. He was now sitting, propped up by pillows, in one of the aerodrome hospital beds.

"There's not really much the matter with me, sir," he went on. "I seem to have lost a whacking lot of blood, and that's about all the damage that Struben's bullet did to me."

Colonel Malcolm nodded gravely.

"Struben is dead," he said. "And the man Muller is under lock and key, awaiting trial. But the air pirates are still at large, and they must be rounded up at all costs. I have had machines out surveying the North Atlantic as far north as Jan Mayen Island, but we have failed to discover their base."

"Muller knows nothing, sir?" asked Guy.

"Nothing at all, except that the leader is a man called Von Schaumberg, and that their base lies somewhere to the north. He swears, under most rigorous cross-examination, that he has never been there, and that he is ignorant of the precise location of the place."

"It was Struben who inveigled Muller into the business, I suppose, sir?"

"Yes. Struben appears to have been one of this Von Schaumberg's right-hand men—one of the villain's most trusted accomplices," replied the colonel.

"Sir," said Guy earnestly, "in a few days now I shall be quite fit enough for flying again. If it is possible, I would like a roving commission. I will go north and try to find this base of Von Schaumberg's. Could—could it be arranged, sir?"

Colonel Malcolm looked at the boy's eager face with grave but kindly eyes.

"The risk would be terrible should you, going alone, fall in with these pirates and be discovered for what you are—an Atlantic ranger," he said.

"I know, sir, but—but I would like to go," replied Guy. "I have a special reason, sir, a personal one!"

"A special reason, Howard?"

"Yes, sir."

From a pile of letters on the table by his bed, Guy selected an envelope bearing the American stamp. He pulled from it a folded sheet of thin notepaper, which he handed to Colonel Malcolm.

"That came with my mail this morning, sir," he said. "It was posted yesterday in New York."

Colonel Malcolm took the sheet. On it was scrawled,

"To Guy Howard, Atlantic ranger.

"You killed Struben, you skunk, and we'll get you for that!"

"VON SCHAUMBERG."

"You see, sir"—Guy's voice was eager—"they're after me. I'm not going to run away. I want to carry the fight back to them. Let me go, sir, and I'll find their base!"

Colonel Malcolm rose to his feet, his eyes glinting.

"You can go, Howard," he said grimly, "just as soon as you are fit. It was but your youth which made me hesitate in allowing you to embark on such a hazardous and perilous mission as this. There are older men than you in the service, but none"—he paused, then added with a grim smile—"but none in whose courage and efficiency I have greater faith. Good luck to you, my boy!"

"The Best Pilot—Bar None" I

"**Q**UITE fit again, sir?"

"Quite, thanks!" replied Guy happily. "I'm just going to take the old bus up to see if I've lost the knack!"

The sergeant mechanic grinned, then stepped back as Guy swung himself up to the cockpit of his single-seater fighting scout.

The engine roared as Guy gave it the throttle. His gloved hand whipped up, and the mechanics yanked away the wooden chocks from in front of the tyred wheels of the undercarriage.

The machine raced across the macadam surface of the aerodrome, then swung into wind as Guy pressed on the rudder bar. The thunder of the rotary engine rose to a high, pulsating note as the scout shot forward. Her tail came up, and, as Guy pulled back on the control stick, she took the air in a steep upward climb.

"He'll stall her in a minute!" grunted one of the mechanics, watching from the tarmac.

"Not him!" snorted the sergeant. "He's a flyer, that lad! You watch him, and I'll bet you'll see something. He's just crazy to get up again, and has been ever since he came out of hospital three days ago!"

Guy shoved forward the control and flattened out at the top of that climb. He was just in time to prevent a stall. But what did he care? Jove! It was good to be in the air again!

It was a week since Struben's bullet had drilled him. One long, weary week of dreary, endless days. But he was fit again

now, for the doctor had passed him out. Pit, and just itching to get on the trail of Von Schaumberg and his air wolves!

Kicking on rudder he shoved forward the control and tore downwards, engine thundering at full revolutions. The watching mechanics scattered with a yell. But, below the level of the hangar roofs, Guy pulled back on the control stick and zoomed upwards. Back—back—he kept the control stick till the machine was upside down, at the top of a loop, then he righted her in a perfect Immelman turn.

Down he came again in a mad, tearing rush; roared across the flat landing surface, his tyred wheels scarce three feet above it, then swung upwards in a turn so sharp that his starboard plane almost brushed the macadam.

"I told you!" gasped the sergeant. "Strewth! What a flyer!"

And Guy, in the cockpit, was grinning joyously. Of one thing only was he conscious, and that was to keep the bus in the air. That was his job. For the

rest, mind and muscles were working in perfect harmony.

At two hundred feet he screwed the control stick round as though he were stirring a pudding. The scout dropped downwards in the "falling leaf" stunt. Then he gave her the throttle again and, zooming upwards, pulled nearly every stunt known in aeronautics.

The tarmac in front of the hangars was crowded with watchers. But Guy was oblivious of them. Sticking to his seat like a leech, his helmeted head just visible above the cowlings, he revelled in the breathless rush of air, in the clean, sweet song of his engine.

Down he came again, dropping gently now, with propeller ticking over. The nose of the machine was pointing straight towards the centre of the macadam landing ground.

And, at fifty feet, he yanked open the throttle.

Like a silver streak, the scout tore downwards. Guy, tensed in his seat,

(Continued on page 44.)

GRUB, GRUB, GLORIOUS GRUB!

That's all Baggy Trimble of the Fourth thinks about, and, as a natural consequence, this weakness of his lands him into trouble, with a capital "T"! Trouble and Trimble being well-known to each other, adventures and misadventures are bound to follow.

In this week's extra-long and extra-good story of St. Jim's they follow in an unending stream.

Read how Baggy Trimble fares through them all in—

"TRIMBLE, THE TRUANT!"

By Martin Clifford,

the magnificent long complete school story of Tom Merry & Co. appearing in this week's bumper issue of—

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The Push-bike!

I HAVE before me as I write this chat an extremely interesting letter from a staunch reader of the "N.L.L." who lives in Christchurch, New Zealand. Apparently he is a keen cyclist, and he tells me that Christchurch, with a population of 120,000, has over 40,000 cyclists! One in every three. Good going that! He wonders how London would look with that same proportion.

I myself am an enthusiastic cyclist, and nothing delights me more than to amble along the country lanes on a fine day. Of course, England differs from New Zealand in the fact that there are many more cars and motor-cycles on the road, and it is often somewhat disconcerting to have various speed merchants whizzing by one at umpteen miles an hour. These johnnies seem to delight in hurtling past you and just missing you by the fraction of an inch. Still, even in England we have pretty country lanes which have not as yet attracted these nuisances; and nothing is more enjoyable than to jog along a quiet lane on the good old jigger.

From India!

One of my most regular correspondents, and certainly one of the Old Paper's most enthusiastic supporters, is M. Koji Mohamed. He has just written to tell me that he is now in Portnov, S. India, having gone there from Singapore. In the latter place he did great work in promoting the growth of the St. Frank's League, and he intends to do the same in Portnov. That's the stuff to give 'em! Carry on with the good work, M. Koji Mohamed, you have my most heartfelt thanks!

We Wish Her Luck!

I am a strong advocate of gymnastics or any form of athletics, and so I was immensely interested when a girl reader of London, S.W.1, wrote telling me she intended to take up gymnastics, and asking for advice on same. Apparently she is a Girl Guide, and wants to win her gymnast's badge.

Giving advice on this subject, however, is rather difficult. It's all right when you are on the scene, so to speak, with trapezes and parallel bars, etc., surrounding you. Then you can show the learner what to do, how to do it, and how not to do it. Writing about it in this Chat is an altogether different matter. I should not be able to explain things at all clearly, and probably everybody would be none the wiser at the end.

What I advise my girl chum to do is to join a gymnasium, and then she can get the instructor to give her all the tips she requires. Here's the best of luck to her. May she win that gymnast's badge!

Speed Records!

F. L., of Birmingham, asks me what are the highest speeds reached by the various forms of locomotion—i.e., running, cycling, motor-cycling, motoring, seaplanes, etc.

This should be of interest to a large majority of my readers, so, although I have replied to F. L. through the post, I am also going to give the answers in these columns.

The highest speed attained by a runner is 21 miles an hour. On a pedal cycle Jean Brunier reached the amazing speed of 75 miles an hour. The motor-cycling record is 107 m.p.h., while quite recently Captain Malcolm Campbell travelled at the breathless speed of 214 m.p.h. on his Blue Bird car, his official record time, however, being 206.9 m.p.h.

The record for a steam-driven train is 102 m.p.h., but this was well beaten by an electric train which reached 120 m.p.h. The highest speed of all, of course, was attained by Flight-Lieutenant Webster in a seaplane, when he did 235 miles an hour, but since then an Italian aviator is said to have travelled at over 290 m.p.h.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

Allan E. Griffiths, 70, Park Street, Hereford, wishes to correspond with readers.

F. J. Hurst, 2, Aboretum Avenue, Lincoln, wishes to correspond with readers.

E. J. A., 14, Whymark Avenue, Wood Green, London, N.22, wants to obtain the copies of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY with "The Downfall of the Snake."

J. Asman, 28, Stratford Road, West Bridgeford, Notts, wishes to hear from readers in his district.

D. Hawell, 54, Upper Ross Street, Doornfontein, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere and on any subject. All letters answered.

Henry Stothert, 9, Steiner Street, Accrington, Lancs, wants to hear from readers in his district.

Thomas Crosbie, 69, Hawes Side Lane, Marton, Blackpool, wishes to correspond with readers in foreign countries.

R. Fry, 15, Webling Street, Brantford, Ontario, Canada, wants correspondents anywhere, especially Africa and New Zealand; collects stamps. All letters answered.

Arthur Fluck, 25, Hopkins Street, Weston-super-Mare, Somerset, would like to hear from readers overseas, especially in Central Africa, China and Denmark. Also wishes to correspond with readers about football. All letters answered.

Lawrence Godden, Rowland Road, Hilton, South Australia, wishes to hear from readers.

E. Turnbull, 59 (back) Heaton Park Road, Heaton, Newcastle-on-Tyne, wants to hear from readers in Newcastle, so that he may start a club.

John Maxwell Gray, 25, Avoca Street, South Yarra, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to hear from readers anywhere.

Alan F. White and C. Newson, 22, Trevelyan Street, Wayville, South Australia, wish to hear from readers anywhere, particularly in England and the Empire. All letters answered.

Frank M. Thompson, c/o Tarsenso Limited, Little Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers on anything interesting.

P. Mainwaring, 66, Summerhill Road, West Green, London, N.15, wants NELSON LEE LIBRARIES containing "The Schoolboy Magician."

Joe Kreitzman, 29, Ernest Street, Mile End Road, London, E., wishes to exchange NELSON LEE LIBRARIES and other boys' papers for stamps.

Charles Gregson, 208, Copsierhill Road, Oldham, Lancs, wishes to correspond with readers in Australia, India, Spain and Canada. He is 16, a Scout and Patrol-leader.

James McCambridge, Ballinlea, Ballycastle, Co. Antrim, Ireland, wants back numbers of the N.L.L. containing "The Reforming of Ralph Fullwood" and "Drummed Out of St. Frank's."

Gaston F. Coculle, 23, Milner Street, Swinton, Manchester, wants some back numbers of the N.L.L. He also wishes to correspond with readers in his district.

Geo. F. Hodgson, Sunnyside, 70, Scalby Road, Scarborough, would like to hear from readers in India, Africa, U.S.A., Canada,

New Zealand, Australia, China and France; any age 14-20; all letters answered.

Edward A. Morley, 97, Gladstone Avenue, Noel Park, Wood Green, London, N.22, wants to hear from readers in Canada.

L. W. Tilbury, 126, Ongar Road, Brentwood, Essex, would like to hear from readers and League members in his own district on the subject of forming a club; also from members of his own age (13) in Canada.

Fred Jackson, Braxted, London Road, Hutton, Essex, wants to join a club in his district.

A. D. Luke, 3, Paradise Place, Plymouth, Devonshire, would like to exchange other books for NELSON LEE LIBRARY numbers.

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"THE AIR PATROL!"

(Continued from pag. 41.)

pulled back on the control stick. His tyres almost brushed the ground as the machine, taking the control, zoomed upwards.

He kept the control back till his helmeted head was pointing earthwards. Fingers closed on the throttle, and the scout came out of the loop in a perfect landing.

"What did I tell you?" cried the sergeant triumphantly, as Guy turned and taxied towards the hangar. "He's the best pilot on Atlantic Airways—bar none!"

Orders!

LAVING his machine to be overhauled and returned to its hangar by the mechanics, Guy reported at Colonel Malcolm's office.

"Then you are satisfied, Howard, that you are perfectly fit for duty?" remarked the colonel, his appraising eyes on the boy. "Remember the locating of Von Schaumburg's base may well be a dangerous and arduous job."

"I'm all right now, sir," replied Guy firmly. "Just asking to be off! Von Schaumburg's letter was in the nature of a challenge to me. I'm ready for him. I'll trail him all over the world if necessary.

and if I don't beat him in the end why, sir, I'll—I'll eat my blessed 'plane!'"

There was a determined ring in Guy's voice, and Colonel Malcolm smiled.

"Very well, Howard," he replied. "You may leave at dawn to-morrow. You have, of course, a roving commission. You will endeavour to keep in touch with us as far as ever possible."

He consulted the flying chart on the table in front of him.

"The bullion machine from New York to the London air port is scheduled to land here at one-thirty this afternoon. It takes off again at two, after changing pilots. You, deputy, does not report for duty until this evening. You will, therefore, escort this bullion machine as far as 'aerodrome.'"

"Very good, sir!" replied Guy.

"And as for to-morrow, I will see you before you leave."

"Very good, sir."

Guy saluted smartly and left the office. He was conscious of a feeling of triumph, of exaltation, of anticipation.

He had been granted a roving commission! To-morrow—at dawn—he was to start off on the greatest, most perilous adventure of his already adventurous career!

(Off on the track of Von Schaumburg and the mystery air pirates! There are some lively times in store for plucky Guy Howard, but he's prepared for anything. He's out to beat Von Schaumburg, and he won't be content until he's done it. Don't miss next week's exciting chapters.)

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