

THRILLING SCHOOL AND MYSTERY YARN INSIDE!

THE NELSON LEE

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THE FIGURE OF FEAR!

Mystery and terror at St. Frank's! Read this week's dramatic long 'complete school yarn of the famous Chums of St. Frank's—exciting, gripping, thrilling!

New Series No. 91,

OUT ON WEDNESDAY,

October 17th, 1931,

The SEVEN STARS!



brought their overcoats, or their caps, either; but it was only a few yards to the West House, and they prepared to run.

There was a crunch of heavily-shod feet on the gravel, and a figure loomed up out of the gloom.

"Evening, young gents."

They recognised the figure of Mudford, the local postman. He lumbered up the steps and passed into the lobby

"Just come from the West House, haven't you, Muddy?" asked Reggie Pitt. "Did you leave anything for us?"

The postman eyed them uncertainly.

"Can't rightly say, young gent," he replied. "Mebbe there a letter for one of ye, but I don't take much count of names. Not that there's ever many letters for you young gents by the evening post; they mostly come of a morning."

"You're late, aren't you, Muddy?" asked Jack Grey.

"Ay, to be sure I am," agreed the postman grumblingly. "Seems that the wind blew a tree down acrost the Bannington Road, and the mail van was delayed for nigh an hour. I ought to be home, havin' my supper now. Rare queer weather we're having lately."

He was examining some letters in the electric light, and the juniors could not

help spotting a small registered packet. There was a foreign looking stamp on the label, and foreign stamps interested two of the juniors, at least.

"H a l l o ! That's Egyptian, isn't it?" asked Evans keenly. "Let's have a look, Muddy!"

"Cheese it!" said Dick Goodwin, who shared his

By
**EDWY
SEARLES
BROOKS**



study in the West House with Evans and Levi. "You can't bag that, you ass!"

"But, look you, it's from Cairo!" said the Welsh boy eagerly. "Let's have it for a minute, Muddy!"

"Sorry, young gent, but I've got to get a receipt for this," said the postman. "I ain't allowed to——"

"It's addressed to Travers, of the Remove," interrupted Evans. "He doesn't collect stamps, does he?"

"I think he's more interested in collecting cigarette coupons," murmured Reggie Pitt dryly.

"As he's not a collector, he'll let me have this stamp," said the Welsh boy. "My collection's weak in Egyptian stamps, anyhow."

"Well, ye can't have it now," said the postman impatiently. "I don't allow nobody to interfere with his Majesty's mails. And don't forget that this 'ere is a registered packet. I'm responsible for it until this receipt is signed and——"

"Keep your hair on!" interrupted Evans. "I say, Handy! Just a minute!"

Edward Oswald Handforth, the famous leader of Study D, had entered the lobby at that moment with Church and McClure, his faithful chums.

"What's the trouble?" he asked, striding forward. "What are you West House fatheads doing here? If you're thinking of stirring up any trouble——"

"Rats!" interrupted Reggie Pitt. "We've been here on business—a footer conference with your skipper. Don't you try to start anything!"

"Well, that's different," said Handforth, in a disappointed voice.

"Where's Travers?" asked Evans.

"How should I know?" retorted Handforth. "I'm not supposed to look after the chump, am I? He's probably in his study, or in the Common-room——"

"He's out," said Church, in a tired voice. "And Handy knows he's out."

"By George, that's right," agreed Handforth, with a start. "He said he was going into Bannington, didn't he? And he asked us if we wanted anything. What do you want him for, anyhow?"

"Nothing much—I only want to bag this foreign stamp," replied Evans. "I'll come across later, after he's back."

Handforth glanced at the registered packet without interest; and he allowed Mudford to pass on. Handforth was not interested in philately.

"So you're one of those silly stamp collectors, are you?" he asked, regarding Evans with curiosity. "Of all the dotty hobbies! Where the dickens is the fun of pulling mouldy old stamps off mouldy

old envelopes, and shoving them into mouldy old albums?"

Evans glared.

"But, look you, stamp collecting is one of the most interesting hobbies!" he said excitedly. "Yes, indeed!"

"Not to say, whatever!" said Handforth, with a sniff.

"You silly Ancient House donkey——"

"You fatheaded West House lunatic——"

"Peace, children—peace!" interrupted Reggie Pitt, with a chuckle. "You chaps don't want to start a House row on your own, do you? Come on, Evans!"

Jack Grey and Dick Goodwin discreetly seized the Welsh boy's arms, and the four West House Removites took their departure. It was just as well. Handforth was an aggressive junior, and he was for ever seeking an excuse to use his fists.

"My poor infant, you mustn't fall for Handy's bunkum like that!" said Pitt, as he and the others hurried towards the West House steps. "He'd think nothing of yelling for the crowd, and the crowd would cheerfully throw us out on our necks."

"Looks like rain to me," said Grey, changing the subject.

The others glanced up at the pitch-black sky.

"I suppose you mean it feels like rain?" asked Reggie Pitt politely. "If you can see anything, you must have eyes like a cat. Even the clouds aren't visible."

It was true. The pall overhead was murky—so murky, in fact, that not a single star could be seen gleaming. Another gust of wind had come sweeping down, and it moaned and hooted round the angles of the old school buildings.

"Hallo! What's that?" asked Jack Grey suddenly.

They were on the West House steps, and Reggie Pitt was about to open the door. But they paused at Grey's words, chiefly because he spoke them in such a startled tone.

Grey was pointing vaguely into the night sky, and the others were just in time to see the reason for his astonishment. Somewhere across the Triangle, in the direction of Big Side, a strange phenomenon was visible in the extreme blackness.

Hovering mysteriously in mid-air was a little group of seven blood-red stars. Their redness was intense, yet they did not seem at all brilliant. They just glowed mystically; and even whilst the boys were gazing, the seven stars faded into nothingness.

CHAPTER 2.

The Figure of Mystery!

"**D**ID—did you see, you chaps?" asked Jack Grey, in a curiously-awed voice.

"I don't know—I believe I did!" replied Goodwin uncertainly. "We couldn't have imagined it, could we? There were six red spots of light, like stars——"

"Seven," corrected Reggie Pitt. "I counted seven."

"But what were they?" asked Grey, in wonder.

"Fireworks, perhaps?" suggested Evans, who was still thinking about his Egyptian stamp.

"It's too early for fireworks—and, besides, who'd be letting off fireworks on Big Side?" objected Jack Grey. "I'll swear that wasn't a firework. We didn't hear any bang, and—and—— Oh, well, when a firework expires, it sort of drops."

"Seven red stars," murmured Pitt. "Rummy how they hung there for that minute. They hardly moved, did they? And did you notice how they seemed to fade? They didn't just fizzle out, or drop, like the luminous stars which a rocket sends out. One second they were there, and the next second they weren't."

"By gum!" muttered Dick Goodwin. "I'm beginning to believe that we didn't see anything at all. It's—it's so uncanny!"

"Let's go across to Big Side and have a look," said Pitt. "You're not going to tell me that there's no explanation."

Boom-oom!

A flurry of wind, more fierce than the others, came hooting and shrieking out of the night. The force of it nearly knocked two of the juniors over; and there was a sound almost like thunder as the gust bellowed through the archways.

"Let's get our overcoats and have a look round," suggested Pitt briskly.

They dashed in, and it only took them a moment to secure their overcoats, caps and scarves from the cloak-room. When they ventured out again the wind had died down strangely. It was hardly more than a low whisper.

"I suppose those funny stars couldn't have been caused by electricity, or anything?" suggested Goodwin. "I thought I heard thunder just before we went in."

"That was only the wind," said Grey.

"I'm not so sure; it might have been thunder," persisted the Lancashire junior. "And that thing we saw in the sky might have been a peculiar form of lightning."

"Draw it mild!" protested Pitt, with a grin. "I've heard of ball lightning, or

whatever they call it, but those glowing stars were red—blood-red. A jolly mysterious business, if you ask me."

They were passing between the Modern House and the senior wing of the School House now, and presently they reached the gates which led on to Big Side. The wide, dreary expanse of the playing fields lay ahead of them, black and forbidding. They did not proceed far across the damp turf before they paused. Now that they were here, their quest seemed ridiculous.

Another gust of wind came thundering down; a fierce, violent squall. It carried with it a few drops of rain, and the juniors had some difficulty in maintaining their balance.

"We're crazy!" grunted Jack Grey. "Who the dickens would be out here, on an evening like this, playing tricks? It's so silly!"

"Let's get back," suggested Evans.

They all felt rather foolish. Indeed, they were almost beginning to think that they hadn't seen the seven stars at all.

"There doesn't seem to be any explanation," grunted Pitt. "And what puzzles me is the unreality of the whole affair. We only caught the merest glimpse, you know—just for a second or two."

"And they were in this direction—those stars," said Jack Grey, with conviction. "I expect there's some silly little explanation, and when we find out what it is we'll call ourselves the most hopeless mugs."

They wandered uncertainly towards the centre of the playing fields—not because they expected to find anything, but just out of curiosity.

The night was pitchy dark; so intensely black that they could only dimly distinguish each other even at close quarters. Their surroundings were completely hidden in the gloom.

"I say," came a murmur from Jack Grey. "This is getting on my nerves, you know. Hadn't we better be getting back? We have our prep to do, you chaps. Who's got an electric torch, or something?"

But nobody had one. They halted again, and they knew, from their sense of direction, that they were not very far distant from the pavilion. Straining their eyes, they were just able to discern its bulk rising against the blackness.

The wind came in squalls, wild and tumultuous whilst it lasted; then a brief period of comparative calm would follow.

It was calm now, but as the juniors stood staring into the darkness, they could hear a queer, far-off roaring.

"That's not the sea, is it?" asked Goodwin, in a low voice.

"No; it's another squall coming, and it has just about reached Bellton Wood," replied Reggie Pitt. "We can only hear the surf on the beach when the wind is in a different direction. By Jove! This squall must be a pretty hefty one——"

"Listen!" urged Evans suddenly. "What was that?"

They all remained still.

"I didn't hear anything unusual," murmured Jack Grey. "What did you think——"

"A sort of laugh," muttered the Welsh junior.

"A which?"

"I don't know—I didn't hear it properly," said Evans, with an uncomfortable feeling that the others were looking at him with derision. "I was mistaken, I suppose. But I thought I heard a low, uncanny sort of laugh. It was horrible."

"I heard something, too," said Reggie Pitt quietly.

"A laugh?" asked the others.

"I'm not sure; some of you were talking at the time," replied Reggie. "I'll tell you what it is, my children. This giddy thing is getting on our nerves! We're just acting the fool, you know. It was only the wind, I expect, and——"

The rest of his words were drowned in the roar and flurry of the squall, which had just arrived. They were compelled to battle against it, and from somewhere comparatively near at hand—close to the river—they heard the sudden crashing of a tree. The squall went hooting away towards the moor, and another period of comparative calm prevailed.

"I say, what a rotten evening!" muttered Jack Grey. "I wouldn't like to be at sea in this sort of weather, you chaps! Let's get indoors—where it's light and warm and cheerful."

"Ay, that's a champion idea," said Dick Goodwin.

They were about to turn away, when Reggie Pitt caught his breath in sharply. He clutched at two of his companions.

"Here, steady——" began Goodwin.

"I have an idea, my sons, that my eyesight is doing the dirty on me," said Reggie Pitt carefully. "Perhaps you will be good enough to make sure, one way or the other. Have a look towards the pavilion."

Pitt was speaking so deliberately that the others spun round at once. They stared intently. They saw something which made them stand as though transfixed to the spot. Startled amazement shone in their eyes as they beheld a curious, semi-luminous patch; glowing redly, with a blood redness, and moving

strangely and mysteriously to and fro like a will-o'-the-wisp.

"What is it?" asked Goodwin, in a strangled voice.

"That's what I want to find out," replied Reggie Pitt, with an effort.

He was relieved. The others saw it, too. So his eyes weren't fooling him. There was something there!

Either their eyes were growing keener, or the mysterious glow was growing stronger. At all events, the four juniors suddenly knew that they were gazing at something definite, something which had taken on the shape of a human being.

It seemed to be getting closer to them; it was walking. It grew larger, seemed to materialise and become definite out of the inky blackness.

Two of those boys, at least, were on the point of bolting; but some hideous sort of fascination held them. Reggie Pitt was holding himself back gamely. His heart was thudding, but he was not yet really frightened.

The apparition, so red, so dim—and yet, strangely enough, so clearly defined—was the figure of an extraordinary-looking man. They could see his rich, flowing robe, his peculiar headgear; his mask-like face. And the eyes. They weren't like human eyes, for they glowed with a blood-red depth, and they had in them a relentlessness, a menace, which was terrible to behold.

CHAPTER 3.

Man—or Ghost!

"OH!" breathed Jack Grey, his voice strangely unsteady.

"What is it?" whispered Evans.

"I don't know, but we'll soon find out," snapped Reggie Pitt, who was keeping his head better than the others. "Come on! All together!"

There was a dark suspicion in his mind. This was a jape of some sort—Boots or Corcoran, or some of those other Fourth Form idiots, were having a game! Reggie Pitt was angry with himself for having been enticed into the trap.

"Come on!" he repeated fiercely.

He ran forward, and the others, after a moment's hesitation, backed him up. In a body they hurled themselves towards the mystic figure.

And then something staggering happened.

A low laugh, blood-curdling in its hideousness, sounded on the night air. In the same instant the figure leapt. It was

Handforth was astonished to see four juniors rushing towards the Ancient House. Their faces were expressive of terror.



no ordinary leap. In one bound the thing swept upwards, and it rose higher and higher. Incredible as it seemed, the apparition jumped clean over the roof of the pavilion!

"Look!" panted Goodwin, aghast.

They had all halted; they were all staring in a stupefied way. And before their very eyes the phantom thing vanished. In mid-air, whilst it was in the act of clearing the roof of the pavilion, it faded away. One second it was there, and the next second there was nothing but the Stygian blackness. A second low, mocking laugh sounded, only to be drowned in the fierce roar of the next squall as it came hooting across from the meadows.

Pitt ran forward, his commonsense refusing to believe the evidence of his eyes and ears. He was scared, and he would have been the first to admit it. But he kept his head. He dashed forward recklessly.

Crash!

The others heard that ominous sound; they heard, too, a groan of agony. Then silence. The wind was dying away again.

"What's happened?" panted Jack Grey. "What was that? Reggie! Reggie!"

"Oh, corks!" came a sorrowful groan in Reggie Pitt's voice. "I'm half dead!"

The others went forward, and they discovered that they were practically alongside the pavilion. They hadn't known it until then, for in the gloom they had believed the pavilion to be some little distance away.

Pitt had miscalculated completely, and he had charged full tilt into the front steps. He had come a terrific cropper, and had bruised himself considerably.

"I'm all right," he muttered, after a few moments. "I thought I'd broken my arm at first; but it's only grazed a bit, and bruised. I ran right into the giddy steps before I realised they were there."

"But—but that thing we saw?" asked Evans huskily. "Where—— I mean, how——"

"Did you see it jump?" broke in Reggie.

"We all saw it!"

"I'm glad to hear that. I thought I was suffering from hallucinations," said Reggie. "Look here, you chaps, do you recognise one thing? That ghost, or whatever it was, was standing right in front of the pavilion, here."

"Yes, I know," said Grey.

"And when we charged, the giddy thing jumped clean over the pav.!" went on Reggie.

"And disappeared in mid-air!" added Goodwin. "By gum! I've had enough,

you chaps! I'm going in! There's—there's something horrible about all this!"

"Either something horrible, or something fishy!" said Pitt. "Let's have a look round the back while we're here."

They separated; two of them went one way, and two the other. They encircled the pavilion, but they saw nothing whatever to account for the amazing occurrence of a minute ago. Baffled, they were compelled to abandon the search.

"One thing's certain—it couldn't have been human!" said Evans. "Nothing human could have jumped like that!"

"But it was human—at least, human in form," said Jack Grey hoarsely. "Didn't you see the figure? A sort of rummy-looking man in a long gown?"

"Not an ordinary gown," said Reggie Pitt. "It was more of a robe, and the headgear was suggestive of something. I can't quite place—Yes, by Jove! I know!"

"What do you mean?" asked one of the others.

"That figure was like an Egyptian priest—one of the priests of ancient days," said Reggie.

"You're right!" said Evans tensely. "Isn't he, you chaps? That figure was like a priest of ancient Egypt. And all red—horribly red."

"It—it was a ghost!" said Jack Grey, his voice shrill. "What's the good of our standing here? It was a ghost, I tell you! Didn't we hear that horrible laugh, and—and——"

"Here, go easy!" interrupted Pitt. "No need to get into a panic, old son. Take it calmly."

But the others were equally as scared as Jack Grey; and Pitt himself was by no means steady. Evans and Grey started running back towards the school, and the other two quickly followed. Once running, they ran like mad. Every now and again they turned their heads to look over their shoulders, half-expecting that some horror was chasing them.

CHAPTER 4.

The Remove is Dubious!

"HALLO! Where's the fire?"

Handforth asked that question, and he asked it in a surprised tone. He had just come to the Ancient House doorway, to have a look at the weather. And he was in time to see four figures racing past at top speed towards the West House. The four figures halted; then they changed their

course and dashed into the Ancient House lobby.

"This'll do!" panted Jack Grey breathlessly. "Oh, thank goodness we're in! Close that door, Handy, for goodness sake!"

"Yes, close it—close it!" sobbed Evans. "And lock it!"

Handforth stared at the four West House boys in amazement. In spite of their breathless condition, they were all looking pale and shaken. There was terror in their eyes. Reginald Pitt, usually so cool and collected, was palpably frightened. That run had made him lose some of his nerve.

"All right, Handy; don't stare so much," said Pitt, pulling himself together. "Close the door, there's a good chap."

"But—but what's the matter?" demanded Handforth. "What's happened? Have you seen a ghost?"

"Yes," said Evans huskily.

"Wha-a-a-at!"

"We have—we've seen a ghost!" shouted Goodwin shrilly. "Don't you believe us, you idiot? Shut that door! It—it might come in!"

"My only sainted aunt!" ejaculated Handforth.

He closed the door after taking a brief glance out into the dark Triangle. There was a footstep on the stairs, and Nipper, the cheery captain of the Remove, appeared. He halted half-way down, looking at the West House juniors very hard.

"I thought you fellows had gone back to your own House long ago," he said, coming down into the lobby. "You're all looking a bit white about the gills, I must say. What's the trouble?"

"Nothing much; they've seen a ghost, that's all," grinned Handforth.

"You needn't scoff," said Jack Grey. "I'm scared, and I'm not ashamed to admit it! You'd have been scared, too, if you'd seen that awful apparition!"

Nipper, with one keen glance, saw that the four juniors were badly shaken. This was no ordinary scare, for Nipper knew that Reggie Pitt, at least, was a fellow of sound commonsense and steady nerve. It would need something startling to rock him on his heels as obviously this affair had done.

"Better come into the Common-room," suggested Nipper carelessly. "There's a nice fire there, it's warm, plenty of light, lots of chaps there."

They all went to the Common-room, Handforth bubbling with curiosity. A cheery fire was burning, and there was the appetising odour of roasting chest-

nuts. A number of fellows were squatting round about the fender, chatting.

"Good gad! West House blighters!" observed Archie Glenthorne, adjusting his monocle and surveying the four juniors from the rival House with suspicion. "Make yourselves frightfully at home, old screams, but remember where you are. And let me add that you are outnumbered."

"It's all right, Archie; we invited them in," said Nipper. "They've seen a ghost."

"Odds shocks and staggerers! I mean to say——"

"Dry up, you fatheads!" roared Handforth, as a minor commotion arose. "We haven't heard anything yet. Of course, I don't believe this rot about a ghost, but they must have had a pretty nasty jar. Anyhow, they were in a blue panic when I spotted them legging it across the Triangle."

Reggie Pitt laughed uncomfortably.

"Yes, I suppose we made asses of ourselves," he admitted. "I'm not denying what Handy says. We were in a panic, and I'm not proud of it."

"Yes, but what did you see?" asked Nipper.

"Well, first of all, as we were going back to our own House, we saw seven rummy-looking stars in the sky——"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "There's not a star to be seen this evening!"

"Not ordinary stars, Handy—blood-red stars!"

"I say, cheese it!"

"They just hovered for a moment, and then faded away," continued Pitt soberly. "They seemed to be somewhere in the region of the playing fields, so we——"

And he proceeded to give a full account of what had happened. A deep silence reigned whilst he told his story. And Pitt realised how ridiculously absurd it sounded. Told like this, in cold black and white, so to speak, it was just so much bunkum.

"And you expect us to believe this?" asked Nipper politely.

"Of course, I realise it sounds a bit thick," confessed Reggie. "Still——"

"Thick?" repeated Nipper, grinning. "No, my son, it doesn't sound thick. It sounds feebly thin. My poor child, what, exactly, is this? What do you take us for?"

Pitt shook his head as many of the other Ancient House juniors pressed round indignantly. He knew what they were thinking. He and the other three "victims" were West House boys;

and these others had jumped to the conclusion that the whole thing was an attempted spoof.

"You're wrong, Nipper," said Pitt. "I'm not trying to pull your leg. Honest Injun, this thing happened exactly as I have described."

"Oh!" said Nipper, changing his tone. "Then it's not a jape?"

"Of course it isn't!"

"Honour bright?" demanded Handforth sternly.

"Honour bright!" insisted Reggie Pitt.

"And do you other three chaps support Pitt's rummy yarn?" asked Nipper.

"Every word of it," said Jack Grey, breathing hard. "I know it sounds mad. We thought we were being japed at first, but it couldn't have been anything like that."

"That ghost wasn't human," said Morgan Evans, with a shudder. "How could any human being jump clean over the pavilion? Even if a fellow had springs in his heels, or anything fantastic like that, he couldn't jump more than three or four feet into the air. But this thing simply soared, and then it vanished!"

There was a silence. If one of these West House juniors had told the story, it would have been discredited on the spot. But there were four of them—and they had all seen the same thing. They were so earnest, too, that their listeners were deeply impressed. Clearly, the adventure on Big Side had been something very much out of the common.

"Well, I'm whacked!" admitted Nipper, scratching his head. "If Teddy Long or Hubbard or any of that crowd had spun this yarn, we should have laughed. But you're different, Reggie—and so are these other chaps. You're not the kind to be easily tricked. Yet I can't see any connection. I mean, seven queer-looking stars floating in the sky—you are sure there were seven?—and then this phantom figure in the queer robes and headgear."

"That's right," said Pitt, nodding. "The only connection I can think of is that the stars in the sky were intended to attract us to the playing fields——"

"So that you could be easily spoofed," nodded Handforth. "Rats! You're not kidding me with this fatheaded yarn!"

"But I tell you——"

"Oh, I'm not accusing you of fibbing," interrupted Handforth. "You've been spoofed, that's all. Boots and Christine, and some of those Modern House chaps, perhaps—or Brewster & Co., of the River House School."

10 "THE GREYFRIARS CASTAWAYS." Harry Wharton & Co. in quest of treasure.

"Could any of those fellows jump over our pavilion?" demanded Goodwin excitedly.

"You must have imagined that bit," grunted Handforth. "It's—it's impossible! It's fantastic!"

"We're not denying it, are we? Of course it's fantastic," said Reggie Pitt, with a grunt. "So fantastic, in fact, that I'm beginning to wonder if we imagined it all. A ghost of an old monk—yes! Such a thing would be appropriate with a centuries-old monastery close at hand. But why an Egyptian priest? That's what I can't fathom!"

"Well, well!" said a voice from the doorway.

They turned, and found Vivian Travers standing on the threshold.

CHAPTER 5.

The Ring of the Seven Stars!

VIVIAN TRAVERS, cool, immaculate, and self-possessed as ever, strolled into the Common-room.

"Funny thing," he commented. "You seem to be talking about something Egyptian, and I've just received a parcel from Egypt."

"Is that what you call a parcel?" asked Handforth, indicating the little package in Travers' hand.

"I'd almost forgotten it," said Evans suddenly. "I say, Travers, do you mind if I have that Egyptian stamp off the label? I'm rather keen you know, and —"

"Dear old fellow, you are perfectly welcome to it," interrupted Travers genially. "Stamps, foreign, Colonial, or home-produced, I regret to say, do not excite me in the least. But what's all the stir about? Why is everybody looking as approximately near to a boiled owl as it is possible for human beings to get?"

"You can can the wisecracks, Travers," said Adams, the American boy. "These West House guys have seen a ghost!"

"Why wasn't I there?" sighed Travers. "Ever since I was a toddler of three, crawling blithely about in my rompers, I have longed to see a ghost!"

He turned his attention to the registered package.

"You fellows needn't mistake this bulky—er—parcel for a consignment of tuck," he went on coolly. "It happens to be from my pater—and paters don't specialise in tuck, anyhow."

"Is your pater in Egypt, then?" asked Handforth unnecessarily.

Travers sighed again.

"The dear old boy, I'm sorry to say, has caught the exploring fever," he explained, with his usual flippancy. "He's been working frightfully, frightfully hard in the City for a month or two, so now he feels he needs a year's solid rest. So he's gone to Egypt to potter about amongst the tombs of the dead but not forgotten Pharoahs. A cheery enough old lad, my pater, but inclined to be slightly morbid. Tombs seem to fascinate him. I would add that my mater is away in the United States on a lecturing tour. She seems to think that the Americans like that sort of thing. Personally, I'd rather be involved in one of New York's gangster wars than listen to one of my mater's lectures," concluded Travers unfeelingly.

"You're getting away from the point, aren't you?" asked Nipper tartly. "You were speaking about your father."

"Yes, he's in Egypt," grinned Travers blandly. "Delving about in the Temple of Osra, burrowing into the tombs, and making the acquaintance of long-deceased, but mummified ladies and gentlemen who lived considerably earlier than the Year One. It wouldn't surprise me in the least to find that this registered package contains the false teeth of Tut-Ank-Amen's thirty-ninth wife."

"Fathead!" said Handforth scornfully. "False teeth weren't invented in those days!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth couldn't quite understand the laugh. Travers cut the string, broke the seals, and nothing more startling than an ointment tin was revealed. There was a crumpled letter, too. Before Travers read this, he opened the ointment tin, parted some cotton wool, and took out a quaint-looking ring.

"For the love of Samson!" he ejaculated. "This is rather good! We're going in for jewellery, dear old fellows."

He glanced at the letter, and grinned.

"Only a few lines from the pater," he went on. "It seems that this ring is a relic of one, Raamses, a venerable johnny who used to be the High Priest of the Temple of Osra. My pater didn't actually find it in the temple, but he bought it off one who knows; in other words, an Egyptian coolie, or whatever they call those people out there. Bought it for a mere song—which probably means anything from fifty to a hundred quid. My pater's a bit lavish in that way. He has sent it to me as a curio. By which I imagine that he is after much bigger game."

The ring was certainly interesting. The gold was dull, and it was richly engraved.



Standing in the Triangle was a strange-looking boy with an owl perched upon his shoulder. What was Ezra Quirke, the mystic schoolboy, doing at St. Frank's?

It was set with seven tiny red stones, which looked like rubies. The setting was in the form of a six-pointed star, and there was a ruby at each point, and one in the centre. They sparkled with a blood-red glow in the electric light.

"I say!" muttered Reggie Pitt suddenly, his eyes fixed fascinatedly upon the ring.

"What's the matter, Reggie?" asked Nipper sharply.

"That ring," muttered Pitt. "Can't you see? Seven stars! Seven blood-red stars!"

"Oh!" breathed Jack Grey, with a catch in his voice.

The others seemed to realise the significance; glances were exchanged, and faces became flushed. Vivian Travers, who had only just come back from Bannington, and who knew nothing about the astonishing events of the evening, looked round with exaggerated politeness.

"Forgive me if I am inquisitive, dear old fellows, but may I inquire why you're looking at my new chunk of property so queerly? Is there anything the matter with it? Personally, I think it's rather handsome."

Dick Goodwin forced his way through the crowd, and looked intently at the ring.

"Yes, seven stars!" he exclaimed. "This can't be a coincidence! It's too—too uncanny! We saw seven red stars in the sky, and we saw them not two minutes after this ring had come into the school!"

"And that—that figure!" muttered Jack Grey. "An Egyptian priest! The ghost of the High Priest of the Temple of Osra!"

"Oh, crumbs!" said Evans shakily. Travers began to lose his patience.

"What is this?" he asked. "Have you chaps gone dotty, or what?"

"Listen!" said Reggie Pitt. "I'm going to tell you something, Travers."

And Vivian Travers was told. He listened in astonishment at first, but by the time he had heard the whole story he was grinning cheerfully.

"And you think that there's some sort of connection between this prehistoric ring and the funny things you saw out in the dark?" he asked. "I'm fearfully sorry, dear old fellows, but I've only one comment to make. It's brief, and it is pointed. Bosh!"

"It's all very well to talk like that!" said Evans excitedly. "It's all very well"

to be so superior. Yes, indeed! But, look you, Travers, we not only saw the seven stars, but the Egyptian figure, too! How could that have been a coincidence?"

"I can only say—more bosh!" exclaimed Travers, shaking his head.

But there were many others in that Common-room who were beginning to look uneasy.

CHAPTER 6.

No Explanation!

NIPPER, perhaps the most level-headed of them all, frowned and shook his head.

"You can't dismiss it as bosh, Travers," he said quietly. "There are some very strange features about this affair."

"All ghost stories sound strange until you hear the explanation," replied Travers, with patience. "For goodness sake, don't make a mystery about this ring my pater has sent me. It's so—so dotty! How can there be anything mystic in it?"

He looked at the ring in a troubled sort of way.

"All I can suggest is that somebody has been spoofing these West House chaps," he went on. "What other explanation can there be?"

"Just a minute," said Nipper. "You'll admit that all this is rather more than a coincidence?"

"All which?"

"My dear chap, look at it," said the junior captain. "These fellows see seven blood-red stars in the sky; they go to Big Side, and they see a rummy-looking apparition—a figure they recognise as an ancient Egyptian priest."

"Well?"

"And all the time this package of yours was waiting with the evening letters," continued Nipper. "The package contains a ring with seven rubies—seven stars! And it was once the property of the High Priest of the Temple of Osra! Don't you see? The seven stars, here in this ring, and out there in the sky! The high priest, the one-time owner of this ring—and out there, on Big Side! It's no good saying that it's a coincidence!"

Travers seemed somewhat impressed.

"H'm! I must admit it seems jolly queer," he grunted. "There does seem a connection, doesn't there?"

"That's the point," said Nipper. "How can there be a connection? Not a soul in this school knew what that registered

packet contained until you opened it, just now, in front of us all. It was sealed—just as it was sealed, in Egypt, before your father posted it. That's what makes this affair so extraordinary."

Travers whistled.

"By Samson! I get you now!" he said, deadly serious. "It couldn't have been a jape, could it? Nobody knew about the Temple of Osra, or the seven-starred ring!"

"If you had opened this packet earlier, and some of the fellows had seen it, we might have suspected a jape," continued Nipper. "The chaps would have had the opportunity of faking something up."

"Did you know anything about this earlier?" asked Pitt quickly. "I mean, did your father write to you some time ago, telling you that he was going to send you the ring?"

"No," replied Travers. "I didn't know a thing until I opened the packet in this room."

"Well, it's uncanny—that's all I can say!" declared Jack Grey huskily. "I've often heard that these relics from the Egyptian tombs are cursed in some way

"Hold on!" said Nipper sharply. "Cursed, eh? Look here, Travers, come clean, as Adams would say. Spill it!"

"Spill what, dear old fellow?"

"Don't stand there pretending to be mystified," growled Nipper. "You weren't at the school when that package arrived, were you? And I seem to remember that you have a pretty record as a practical joker. Always japing somebody or other, aren't you?"

Travers looked startled.

"But, hang it——" he protested.

"Easy enough for you to get that package at the post office, open it, and then do it up again," continued Nipper. "So easy for you to send it to the school, so that it would arrive apparently in the ordinary way! Then the little game, and in you stroll, as innocent as a baby, and you open the package."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Reggie Pitt, disgusted. "You—you tricky spoofer!"

A yell went up, and it grew louder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You West House fatheads have been nicely dished—eh?"

"But look here——" began Travers.

"You can't kid us any longer, my son," said Nipper. "All I can say is that it was thoughtful of you to choose these West House chaps, instead of some of your own pals."

"Don't you remember that other affair, some months ago?" demanded Handforth excitedly. "Travers found a scarab, or something. And it was supposed to be cursed. That was before K.K. went back to Carlton."

"Of course!" exclaimed Harry Gresham. "Old Kirby Keeble Parkington had you on a piece of string that time, Travers. You thought you were cursed by the scarab, didn't you? And it was one of K.K.'s japes all the time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ought to have got your own back on K.K.—not on us!" said Reggie Pitt wrathfully.

Vivian Travers was not amused.

"There's just one difference, dear old fellows," he said quietly. "That other affair was admittedly a practical joke. This isn't."

"What!"

"On my word of honour, I assure you that I never set eyes on that package until I came back to the school, a quarter of an hour ago," said Travers. "Those seals weren't broken until you saw me break them here, under your very eyes. I haven't played any jape, and I know no more about the whole business than you do."

There was a complete silence. Nipper was looking grave now.

"That's your word of honour, Travers?" he asked.

"I've already said so," replied Travers gruffly.

"Sorry, old man," replied Nipper. "You're not above telling a few fibs, I know, but I believe you now. And that makes this business more than ever uncanny."

He turned to the others, who were silent and startled.

"Yes, uncanny," he repeated quietly. "Not a living soul in England knew what that packet contained—for it was sealed and posted in Cairo, by Travers' father. Travers himself knew nothing. Yet, within five minutes of the registered packet's arrival, these extraordinary manifestations occur. It's—it's— Well, it's weird. There's absolutely no explanation—and no possibility of an explanation!"

Vivian Travers turned the ring over in his fingers, and the red stones seemed to leer redly in the electric light.

"Somehow," he said, "I don't think I'm going to like this ring."

He shivered. It may have been imagination, but it seemed to him that a cold breath, as though from the tomb, enveloped him!

CHAPTER 7.

Enter—Ezra Quirke!

"COMING over, Browne?" asked Biggleswade of the Sixth.

"In one moment, Brother B.," said William Napoleon Browne, the lean, long-legged skipper of the Fifth. "I have merely to impress upon Brother Reynolds, here, that his ambition to figure in the forward line is singularly fatuous. As a half-back, Brother Reynolds is fairly efficient. But there can be no doubt——"

"Well, cheerio!" said Biggleswade amiably.

He did not feel inclined to wait for Browne. Browne was notoriously long-winded, and once he started a football argument with the Modern House prefect, it was liable to continue for at least an hour. And Biggy was in a hurry.

"Alas! I regret to note this impatient strain in your character, Brother B.," said Browne, with regret. "Since you are so pressing, I will accompany you—for I realise how keenly you desire my company. I will continue my observations on football to-morrow, Brother Reynolds."

"Yes, if you get the chance!" said Reynolds tartly. "As far as I'm concerned, you can boil yourself!"

"Come on!" said Biggy hurriedly.

He threw open the big door, and Browne, finding that Reynolds had passed out of the lobby, sighed deeply. He had thought up an excellent retort, and now it would be wasted.

"It is a pity that Brother Reynolds so fancies himself in the forward line," said Browne, as he and David Biggleswade passed down the Modern House steps.

"Leave it to Fenton," said Biggleswade complacently. "Fenton's the senior skipper, and he'll deal with the matter. If it comes to that, Reynolds can't play real footer in any position. He is too clumsy. Nine times out of ten he sits on the ball instead of passing it."

"An entirely selfish method of playing, since it deprives other players of the ball," said Browne, nodding. "Let Brother Reynolds confine himself to his chemicals. In the lab., I believe, he is supreme in the art of manufacturing unsavoury smells."

"It's always a mystery to me why these lab. men fancy themselves at sports," remarked Biggleswade. "Now, there's Stanhope, of the West House. A good prefect, and, incidentally, the editor of the Senior School Magazine. A great man in his own line; he can write poetry that really does sound a bit like poetry. Yet

when he's left out of the eleven he kicks up enough fuss——"

"One moment, Brother Biggy," interrupted Browne softly. "There is nothing I hate worse than interrupting, but will you kindly inform me if you see what I see?"

"Eh?" said Biggleswade.

"Yonder," said Browne, taking Biggy's arm.

"Great Scott!" gasped Biggleswade. "What—what is it?"

"Keen and unfailing as my eyesight usually is, I must confess that I am floored," said Browne. "We appear to have a visitor, and, at a random guess, I imagine that he is slightly uncertain as to his bearings."

Biggleswade took no notice; he was not in a mood for Browne's pleasantries. The figure which moved uncertainly near the

centre of the Triangle was sufficient to give anybody a start. It could be seen distinctly in the flood of light from the Ancient House doorway, which was wide open.

The figure was that of a boy of about fifteen or sixteen, but he was no ordinary-looking boy. He was slim, and he wore a long black overcoat which made him look taller than he actually was. He was bareheaded, and his lank hair had been so rudely disturbed by the wind that it drifted over his head and over his face in matted, untidy masses. The face itself was almost expressionless; pale to the point of chalkiness, mask-like, with flat eyes which stared unseeingly. But, most remarkable of all, an owl sat upon his right shoulder, its great eyes wide open and staring.

"Great Scott!" muttered Biggleswade.

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- "It's human! Gave me quite a turn for the moment."

"Even I experienced sundry spasms up and down the spinal column—and we Brownes are composed of stout stuff," nodded the Fifth Form skipper. "I rather fancy, Brother Biggy, that a few inquiries on our part would not be out of order."

They approached the strange-looking visitor, and Biggleswade suddenly started.

"Why, hang it, I know this chap!" he ejaculated. "Don't you remember him, Browne? He used to be at St. Frank's at one time. You know his name—Birke, or Dirke, or something."

"Quirke," corrected Browne.

"That's it—Quirke," said Biggleswade. "Ezra Quirke, of course! Always was an uncanny sort of young blighter! What the deuce is he doing here with a chicken on his shoulder?"

"It is just as well that owls are not too familiar with the English language, or Brother Quirke's boon companion might be mortally offended," said Browne. "I cannot imagine any self-respecting owl being mistaken for a chicken and lying down meekly under the insult."

They expected Ezra Quirke to make some comment; but the strange-looking boy did not even glance at them. He had paused, and he was hesitating uncertainly, as though he did not know which direction to take.

Without doubt, he was Ezra Quirke—that strange, mysterious boy who had at one time belonged to the St. Frank's junior school. He was a mystic; a dabbler in the occult. He had always believed in every kind of superstition, and, in consequence, the other fellows had more or less scorned him. Yet, at the same time, they had never ceased to feel that he was endowed with some dark and sinister power. He gave one that impression.

"A pleasant, if blustery evening, Brother Quirke," said Browne conversationally. "You have called, I presume, to have a little chat with the school ghost? I'm sorry to inform you that the old boy hasn't walked for some time, so you look like being out of luck."

"Chuck it, Browne!" muttered Biggleswade. "I don't like the look of this kid."

"In all truth, I must agree that I am not very much in love with his looks myself," nodded Browne. "However, one's looks are one's misfortune—or fortune, as the case might be. Take myself, for example——"

"We don't want to talk about you," interrupted Biggleswade. "But if that's your view, I'm sorry for you. You'll have misfortune to your dying day! Quirke,

what's the matter? Why are you staring in front of you like that? What are you doing here? Whom do you wish to see?"

But Ezra Quirke neither looked at the two seniors, nor heeded their words. They might have been non-existent for all the notice he took of them.

"I say, I don't like this!" went on Biggy. "The young blighter seems to be in a kind of trance!"

Browne took Quirke's arm, and a queer feeling came over him. That arm felt so rigid, so unlike an ordinary human arm.

"Come, Brother Quirke, confide in me," murmured Browne. "If you are not well——"

Browne paused. Quirke was looking at him with expressionless eyes; the owl regarded him immovably with eyes that gleamed wickedly, their brightness intensified by the blackness of the night. Browne felt a queer sensation pass through him. Even his usually ready flow of words failed him.

"H'm! I hardly know what to make of him, Brother Biggy," he said, staring hard into Quirke's face. "He doesn't seem to be entirely all there."

He passed a hand rapidly in front of Quirke's face, but the eyes did not blink. The strange boy seemed to be in a hypnotic trance.

"Come, come, Brother Quirke——" began Browne, again.

At that moment a squat, tubby figure dashed out of the Ancient House. It was Teddy Long, of the Remove. Teddy had been standing in the doorway for a moment or two, and he had heard the name.

"What's that you said, Browne?" he gasped excitedly. "Quirke? My only sainted aunt! It is Quirke! Ezra Quirke!"

The busybody of the Remove was startled. He had just heard that astonishing story in the junior Common-room. And now, right on the top of that uncanny happening on Big Side, Ezra Quirke, the mystery boy, had unexpectedly come to the school!

To Teddy Long it was a hint of impending evil!

CHAPTER 8.

Quirke is Queer!

LIKE a whirlwind, Teddy Long burst into the Common-room.

"Quirke's here!" he gasped. "Out in the Triangle, with Browne and Biggleswade!"

The other Removites stared at him.

"What's that?" asked Nipper sharply. "What did you say, Long?"

"Quirke! You remember Ezra Quirke, don't you? He's here!"

"Quirke!" went up a general roar.

The boys were not likely to forget Ezra Quirke. That remarkable boy's appearance generally signalled something eerie and mysterious. On this occasion the eerily mysterious something had occurred prior to Quirke's arrival. But it was impossible to disregard the significance of Quirke's presence at such a time.

"There's something fishy about this," said Nipper firmly. "We all know what Quirke is—a dabbler in mysticism and the occult. The fellow seems to believe in himself, but we've found him out in his trickery more than once."

But how could Quirke be guilty of trickery now?" asked Vivian Travers. "While agreeing with you that he is several kinds of a fraud, I don't quite see how he could be mixed up in this Egyptian business. Even Quirke, with all his mysterious ways, couldn't possibly know that a registered package, containing a relic from the Temple of Osra, had come for me this evening."

"That's true!" said Handforth breathlessly. "Quirke couldn't know anything, could he? Oh, rats! Why make a mystery of it? It's just a coincidence, I expect."

But even the stubborn and disbelieving Handforth was impressed by the startling nature of the coincidence—if coincidence it really was. Ezra Quirke's dramatic and unexpected arrival was extraordinary. He did not even live anywhere near St. Frank's; his home was at Market Downing, some miles beyond Bannington, where he lived quietly with an aunt of his.

"We'd better go out and see him," said Nipper briskly. "Now, you chaps, for goodness sake don't get excited and make a row. No need for you all to come out. We'll soon get at the truth of this."

When he went out of the Common-room he was accompanied by Travers, Handforth, Jimmy Potts, Gresham, De Valerie, and one or two others. The rest of the crowd hung behind. The fellows weren't so keen on going out into the bitter blackness of the wintry evening.

There was a feeling of "queerness" in the air. Reggie Pitt and the other West House fellows, who were also eager to see Quirke, were hoping against hope that there would be a simple and reasonable explanation of the mystery. Yet, for the life of them, they could not see how Quirke could supply the solution.

As it happened, it wasn't necessary for the juniors to go out, for Browne and Biggleswade had led Ezra Quirke into the warmth and light of the Ancient House lobby. Somebody had shut the door, and the whining and moaning of the wind could only be heard faintly.

"Ah, Brother Nipper," said Browne, glancing up. "You have come opportunely. We have a visitor. Perhaps you will be able to get a word of some sort out of him. It is said that a Browne never acknowledges failure, but I must confess that Brother Quirke is doing his best to give a fair imitation of an Egyptian mummy."

"Egyptian!" yelled Handforth.

"What have I said?" asked Browne in astonishment.

"It's nothing—only another queer little coincidence," said Nipper quickly. "It's funny that you should talk of anything Egyptian, Browne."

William Napoleon, for once, was nonplussed.

But nobody was taking much notice of him. All eyes were directed towards Ezra Quirke. The boy looked even more grotesque now, in the full electric light. His lank hair was dreadfully untidy; his mask-like face was set as in a trance. He seemed to be absolutely unconscious of all that was happening around him.

"Quirke!" said Nipper sharply, as he took Quirke's arm. "Hallo, Quirke! Don't you know me?"

Quirke took no notice.

"Fooling, isn't he?" murmured Handforth suspiciously.

"I don't know; it's always difficult to tell," said Nipper. "He's one of the cleverest actors off the stage. We know that, from past experience."

If Quirke was acting now, he was certainly doing it well.

"Pull yourself together, Quirke," said Nipper loudly, giving the boy's arm another brisk shake. "My only hat! He seems to be all rigid."

"I observed the same peculiarity," murmured Browne, nodding.

Nipper was beginning to feel uncomfortable; there was something unpleasant, uncanny, about Ezra Quirke's trance-like appearance. The other fellows, standing well back, were deeply impressed.

"Somebody had better fetch Old Wilkey," muttered Church. "And Dr. Brett, too! The chap's ill!"

"He gives me the creeps," said Tommy Watson, with a shiver.

Without doubt, Quirke's condition was alarming. He had always been a queer sort of fellow; but never had he acted in this way before.

Quirke gazed at Travers' ring with fascinated horror. A wild scream left his lips, and he collapsed to the floor in a limp heap.



"I may be hard-hearted, but I can't quite swallow this," said Vivian Travers, striding forward. "It's all very impressive—all very clever—but we know this man too well! Now then, Quirke, snap out of it! For the love of Samson, you don't think that we're fooled, do you? What's your game?"

And now, for the first time, Ezra Quirke showed some signs of animation. His eyes, previously so lack-lustre, commenced to burn with a strange, intense fire. He turned them upon Travers, and his thin lips parted. He took one or two deep, long breaths, and for some moments he seemed to be labouring in agony—striving to bring himself back to the world of realities.

"It is near!" he whispered, in a voice so low that only those nearest to him caught the words. "Yes, yes! I can feel it—I know it! Somewhere— But no, it is becoming too vague!"

His hand moved like that of automaton, and he passed it wearily over his eyes. Suddenly he seemed to have aged. He looked weary to the point of exhaustion.

"Let me sleep," he muttered. "I am tired—so tired. Let me sleep!"

CHAPTER 9.

More Mystery!

EZRA QUIRKE'S behaviour was different from what the juniors had been expecting.

But his words caused them to pay more attention to his figure. They could see that his long overcoat was mud-stained; his shoes were exceedingly muddy, too. Clearly, he had been trudging about for some hours, and his route had taken him into some strange places. There were thorns sticking in his overcoat, and many plucks and little tears were showing.

"I would mention," said Browne, "that Brother Quirke is not quite complete. When he first arrived he had a long-eared owl on his shoulder."

"Great Scott!"

"But the bird seemed disinclined to enter the lighted doorway, and when we brought Quirke in it flew off," continued Browne. "I'm wondering——"

He ceased to wonder, for at that moment a shout went up from some of the juniors. They were pointing. A long, moaning gust of wind had swept round the walls of the Ancient House. At the same second a vision appeared at the narrow window;

a great, gaunt bird, with wings outstretched, fluttering against the glass, its eyes staring weirdly. It was Ezra Quirke's owl—out there, waiting for its master!

Only for a second did it appear, then it flew off into the wind and blackness.

Nipper, whose thoughts were steadier than most of the other fellows', remembered Ezra Quirke's first arrival at St. Frank's; and there was a striking similarity between that event and this. Quirke had first come on just such a night—and in October, too. There had been a gale, and Quirke had first been seen in the Triangle; his owl had been with him then, too.

It was all very puzzling.

The strange boy stood in the centre of the lobby, with Browne and Biggleswade near at hand, and with crowds of juniors pressing round. He was in no way disconcerted; in fact, he seemed to have no idea of what was happening.

Ezra Quirke's face was more like a mask than any human face the boys had seen. It was utterly expressionless, and it had the pallor of death. The cheekbones were high, and the cheeks sunken in. His deepset eyes were black and mysterious.

His lips were thin, bloodless; his hands were long and tapering, with sinuous fingers. And his voice, when he spoke, was soft and curiously silky—yet, at the same time, it was toneless.

Those nearest to Quirke shivered now and again. The very atmosphere round about him appeared to be chilly. It was as though he carried an icy draught with him wherever he went.

It was hardly surprising that the St. Frank's fellows thought of this boy as "Quirke, the Mystic." In the past he had proved himself to be very much of a trickster, yet, at the same time, he was undoubtedly possessed of powers which were beyond the ordinary understanding.

"Take him out of here!" said one of the Removites uncasily. "He's—he's not human!"

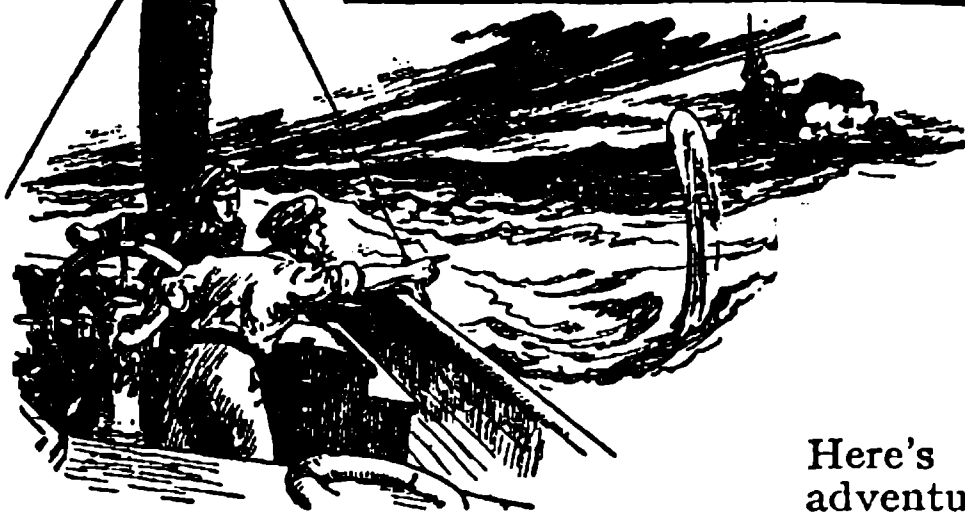
"Steady, you ass!" said Nipper gruffly. "He's human all right. And even now I'm not satisfied. Quirke!" he added, raising his voice. "Listen to me!"

Ezra Quirke took no notice.

"Lend a hand, Travers," said Nipper. "We'll shake him. And if he doesn't show any signs of life, we'll try a pin!"

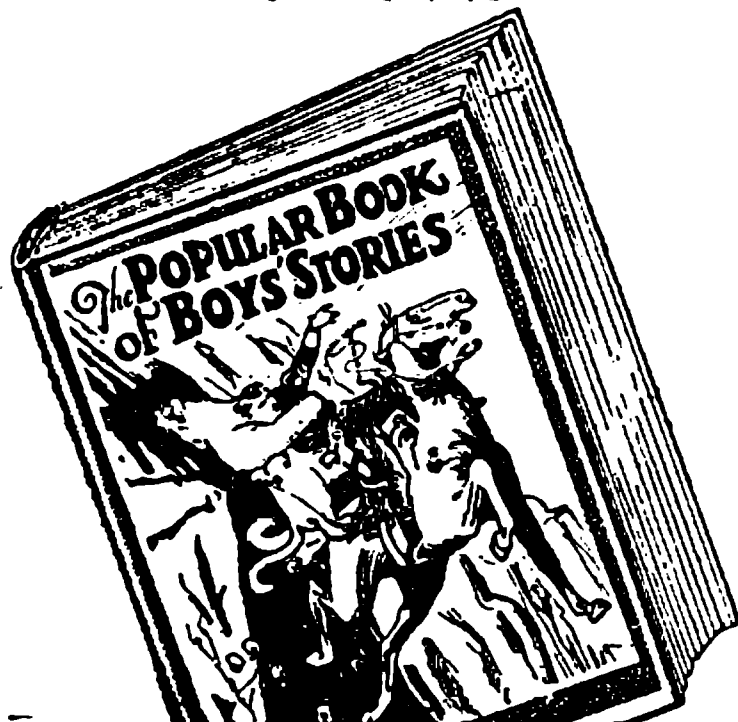
"A sound scheme, brother," said Browne approvingly. "Go to it!"

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Nipper was in no mood for half-measures. He was convinced that Quirke was play-acting—although nine-tenths of the other boys were equally convinced that Quirke was in a genuine trance.

"Now!" said Nipper curtly.

He and Travers grasped Quirke, and they shook him vigorously. Browne obligingly reached across with a long, business-like pin.

Whether it was the threat of what was to come, or whether there was some other reason, remained obscure; but Ezra Quirke rapidly showed signs of returning animation. The pin was not needed. But it was not towards Nipper he turned, but towards Vivian Travers.

"I am near—very, very near," he said, in his soft, silky voice.

"Quite near," agreed Travers. "I have here a pin—in fact, two pins——"

"Give him a chance, Travers," interrupted Nipper quietly. "Well, Quirke, what about it?"

Quirke moved his strange eyes, and looked at Nipper with an expression of surprise. But it was only his eyes which denoted his return to the normal. His face remained as mask-like as ever.

"This is strange," he said, in a whisper. "I am at St. Frank's, am I not?"

"You ought to know," said Nipper. "You walked here from Market Donning, judging by the appearance of your shoes. And you didn't come along the main road, either. You haven't been pushing your way through hedges by any chance—or walking over ploughed fields?"

"Wise words, O Chief," murmured Reggie Pitt, with quick understanding. "Let's see how he answers that one!"

Nipper's suspicions were being shared by some of the others now. Was Quirke responsible for the "phenomenon" of Big Side, which had been witnessed by the West House boys?

"I do not know what you mean," said Quirke tonelessly. "Until this minute I did not even know that I was at St. Frank's. I have a vague recollection of leaving my home. Yes, it comes back to me now. I was reading by the fire. You know where I live?"

"At Market Donning, in a comfortable little cottage," nodded Nipper. "I think your aunt——"

"She is away for a few days," muttered Quirke. "I was alone, reading."

"Some light work of fiction, no doubt?" put in Browne politely. "'The Oracle of the Occult'? Or, possibly, 'The Hidden Secrets of the Dead'? Something light and trifling of that nature, possibly?"

Ezra Quirke took no notice.

"Yes, I was reading," he went on monotonously. "An engrossing volume on the subject of Egyptology."

"What!" went up a general yell.

Quirke seemed to wilt at the sound.

"What have I said?" he asked, in a frightened voice. "Egyptology is a great and wonderful study. I have been spending many weeks——"

"Never mind that," said Nipper. "You were reading in front of the fire, in your cottage at Market Donning—and you were reading a book on Egyptology. What then? What made you leave your fire-side, and walk to St. Frank's?"

Quirke passed a hand over his brow.

"I do not know," he replied, in a whisper. "I do not even remember leaving my chair—— But, yes! There is a vague and dim impression that something—— But I cannot get it clear. It is all so vague."

He looked round helplessly.

"Why am I here—at St. Frank's?" he asked. "I feel that there must be some reason—some explanation."

"Strangely enough, that's how we feel, too," said Nipper shortly. "And we're waiting for the explanation, Quirke."

"A power greater than myself took possession of me," whispered Ezra Quirke. "It was so strong, so compelling, that I couldn't resist it. There is something here—something at St. Frank's—which brought me. And I am frightened. Already I can feel the horror of it upon me. Yes, there is something here!" He looked round with terror in his eyes.

Vivian Travers deliberately thrust his hand into his pocket, and brought out the Ring of the Seven Stars. He held it forward.

"Was it this that brought you here, Quirke?" he asked mockingly.

The result was sensational. Travers had only acted on the spur of the moment—in a spirit of characteristic flippancy. At the most, he only expected Ezra Quirke to display an eager interest in the ring.

But Quirke gazed upon it for a moment with fascinated horror; then a wild scream left his lips, and he collapsed into a limp heap on the floor.

CHAPTER 10.

Handy is Helpful!

FOR a moment there was absolute silence. Ezra Quirke's dramatic collapse had taken everybody by surprise. Then, in an instant, there was a rush forward.

"Great Scott! He's fainted!"

"Keep back, you fathheads!"

"Fetch him some water!"

"Give him air!"

Yells went up from the boys. Most of them were excited; and they were frightened, too. Quirke's shrill scream of fear still rang in their ears.

Browne, Biggleswade, Nipper, Travers, and Pitt were bending over Quirke, and they gently lifted him from the floor. Biggleswade was a prefect, and he suddenly remembered the fact.

"Dry up, you kids!" he said sternly. "Not so much noise! Make way, there!"

"Better take him to my study," said Nipper quickly. "It's as near as anywhere."

"I was thinking that Old Wilkey—" began Biggy.

"Better not bother Mr. Wilkes," interrupted Nipper. "In any case, he's out this evening."

Quirke, limp and inanimate, was carried along. At the last moment it was decided to take him to the junior Common-room. There was a big lounge there, on which he could lie. The room was more airy, too.

"Well, well," said Travers. "We're getting a lot of excitement this evening, one way and another. Why in the name of all that's mysterious did Quirke faint when he caught sight of this old ring?"

"Did he faint?" retorted Nipper.

Quirke was on the lounge, with Nipper bending over him. Nipper took a portion of Quirke's flesh between his fingers—the flesh of the forearm—and he pinched hard. But there was not the slightest response.

"I say, chuck it," said Biggleswade sharply. "You'll hurt the poor kid."

"I meant to hurt him," replied Nipper. "I'm not at all satisfied that he is really unconscious."

"Then you're dotty," said the prefect. "Any idiot could see that he fainted."

"Any idiot can be spoofed by a faked faint," replied Nipper. "But I'm not so green."

"If you mean me—" began Biggy indignantly.

"No offence," said Nipper. "But we know Quirke better than you do, Biggy. He's as tricky as a cartload of monkeys. H'm! He seems to be in a faint all right, though. He didn't move a hair when I nipped his arm."

Secretly Nipper was glad that no masters had been brought into this affair, and he would have been better pleased if Biggleswade had not been there.

Nipper's mind was working rapidly. Deeply suspicious as he was, he was nevertheless struck by the singular facts of the case. It was quite impossible that

Ezra Quirke could have known anything about Travers' ring. Why he should faint at the sight of it, therefore, was puzzling.

One of the juniors had fetched a bowl of water, and a good deal of it was splashed somewhat carelessly upon Quirke's face. A quantity of it ran down his neck. More of it was forced between his clenched teeth. Handforth wanted to try another expedient, and he had already dispatched Church to Study D for an unfailing remedy. Breathlessly Church arrived back with it—a bottle of Worcestershire sauce.

"This is the stuff," said Handforth, as he shook the bottle, and pulled out the cork. "Better than all your water. A swig of this, and he'll be as lively as a cricket!"

Before anybody could stop him, he thrust the opened bottle into Quirke's mouth and tipped it up. A quantity of the sauce found its way down Quirke's throat; the rest of it followed the course of the water down his neck—on the outside.

But Handforth was right; the effect was almost instantaneous. Quirke gurgled, gasped, and nearly choked. Worcestershire, taken neat, is exceedingly potent.

"Good man!" said Nipper approvingly.

That sauce was even better than pinching Quirke's arm. For Quirke, by an effort of will, could easily pretend that he hadn't felt the pinch. But the heat and strength of the Worcestershire sauce caught him in the throat, and he simply had to recover.

"Oh! Oh!" he gasped, trying to sit up. "What—what have you given me? My throat is on fire! I am poisoned!"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "It's only Worcestershire sauce. My own invention, in fact," he added proudly. "The bottle was getting a bit low, so I added some vinegar and three or four spoonfuls of mustard and pepper. Hot stuff, eh?"

"My throat is burning," said Quirke resentfully. "Why do you play these tricks? You're just the same as ever, Handforth. Please give me some water."

He held his throat tenderly, but there was no question of his recovery.

"You can leave him to us now, Biggy," said Nipper, glancing up at the prefect. "You and Browne needn't stay here, unless you like. We'll look after Quirke—and we'll see him safely off the premises, too."

Biggleswade was glad enough to get away.

"The sooner he goes, the better," he said. "We don't want him here. If

(Continued on page 24.)

Unbutton your waistcoats before reading these three pages of chuckles!



HANDFORTH'S Weekly

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EDITORIAL STAFF.

Editor-in-Chief E. O. Handforth
Editor E. O. Handforth
Chief Sub-Editor E. O. Handforth
Literary Editor E. O. Handforth
Art Editor E. O. Handforth
Rest of Staff E. O. Handforth

October 17th, 1931.

EDITOR'S CHIN-WAG

By
**THE GREAT MAN
HIMSELF.**

POETS' CORNER

OH, WHY?

HAVE you ever played a game of word-making? You know how to do it. You take a word like "Constantinople," and the competition is to see how many other words you can make from it.

This afternoon I wrote the words "Editor's Chin-wag" on top of a sheet of paper, and I was wondering what to write about, when it suddenly occurred to me that I could make the words "Dear Readers" from it—which would be very appropriate.

Travers was standing by. I mentioned it to him. The ass grinned.

"You could make something even more appropriate, dear old fellow," he said.

"What's that?" I asked.

He seized a pencil and wrote:

"I write rot!"

A lot of the silly chumps chortled, so I glared at the words and tried to make something else out of them. Then I had a fine idea. Underneath Travers' sentence I put:

"I write great words."

"There," I said triumphantly. "That's a true sentence, and all the words can be made out of 'Editor's Chin-wag.'"

"Let's have another go," laughed Travers. And he promptly wrote underneath my sentence:

"What a change!"

"You can't make that out of those two words," I roared.

"Fathead! Check it, and see."

And I found out that he was right. After this, all the chaps began to evolve words out of "Editor's Chin-wag," and it developed into a regular game. Each

(Continued at foot of next col.)

THEY give us Virgil to construe;
Oh why, oh why, oh why?
What good can beastly Latin do?
It's all my giddy eye;
If books of some sort we must scan,
Why can't the masters let a man
Construe the tale of Bloodstained Dan?
Oh why, oh why, oh why?

Why did old Virgil write such rot?

Oh why, oh why, oh why?

Why did he think we'd like a lot

Of stale mythology?

Why didn't he come up to scratch

And write about a football match?

The whiskery old bandersnatch!

Oh why, oh why, oh why?

Why didn't Cæsar do him in?

Oh why, oh why, oh why?

What made the silly ass begin

That footling history?

What made him perpetrate that crime?

And why do I waste precious time

In turning out this silly rhyme?

Oh why, oh why, oh why?

(Vivian Travers.)

(Continued from previous col.)

time a fellow thought out some beastly sentence, he promptly made me a present of it. I became so fed up that I retreated to my study for safety.

By George! The game became quite a craze at St. Frank's for a little while. The fellows were taking words like "Handforth's Weekly," etc., and getting up little competitions to see who could make the most insulting sentence. Even that fathead Archie instructed Phipps to make up a few select sentences to send me.

Yours sadly—E. O. H.

WEEKLY SCIENCE TALK.

By Professor Napoleon Browne.

This week: ACTING.

THERE are so many different forms of acting that it is rather difficult to mention them all in one small article. The most important are: Acting the giddy goat; acting the fool and acting like a chump. Brother Handforth excels in all three.

Before you start learning how to act you should ask yourself three questions, i.e., "Is it necessary to act at all? Have I the face and figure for acting? Why did the chicken cross the road?" If your answers to these questions are satisfactory, you then consider what type of acting you desire to take up.

There are two main classes. One type of actor strides on the stage and says: "To be, or not to be—that is the question. Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to—to— Oh, dear! I forget this bit! Why don't you prompt me, you ass? What? Oh, yes! Suffer the slings and arrows of—of— All right, Travers, you rotter! I saw you throwing pellets." This is the way the Remove Dramatic Society act "Hamlet."

The other type of acting usually takes place on the sports field. The captain of a footer team sprains an ankle and has to go off. What does he do? He immediately turns one of his players into



"Giving him the bird."

an actor by making him Acting Captain. The same thing applies to Acting Substitute in cricket.

When a man can act sufficiently well to be appointed Acting Captain, he often uses his position to act the giddy goat. In this case the spectators sometimes do a spot of acting themselves by procuring an ancient duck or decayed chicken and flinging at his head. This is known as "giving him the bird."

It is necessary to be careful how you act. You must never look suspicious or watchful. People have often been arrested for "Acting in a suspicious manner."

If you are arrested in this fashion, don't act the fool by being polite to the magistrate. A man I know did this once. He said:

"Good morning, your worship. How are you?"

And the magistrate replied:

"Fine—five pounds!"

TRUTH IN ARITHMETIC. By Walter Church.

OUR school arithmetic book needs to be brought up to date. The problems in it are so hopelessly old-fashioned that fellows cannot possibly get the right answers. For instance: If a man sells eggs at seven for fourpence—you don't need any more. The answer is plain. Either the man would be bankrupt or the hens would go on strike.

Here is what the man who wrote the book calls a simple problem: A bricklayer carries sixteen bricks in his hod, and makes the return journey to a new building thirty-four times an hour. How many bricks will he have carried in a day—working from eight till six?

He gives the answer as 5,440 bricks. Well, he might know something about bricks, but he doesn't know a thing about bricklayers. The correct answer is, of course, about thirty bricks—(two having dropped off the hod on the way).

Here's another: A street is seven furlongs in length. A man walks at the rate of four and a half miles an hour. If he walks up and down this street for six

hours, how far will he walk? The answer should be: As far as the nearest police station. Colney Hatch would also be correct.

A man owes his tailor two-thirds of the money he possesses; he owes the butcher one-quarter of the remainder; he owes the newsagent one-sixth of the amount he owes the first two; and he owes his grocer £1 13s., which is half the amount he would have left after paying his debts. How much money has he? Answer: A jolly sight more than he ought to have.

Here's another: What would you have if you multiply $\frac{1}{8}$ by $65\frac{1}{2}$ by $2\frac{1}{2}$? Answer: A bad headache.

Let's have really up-to-date arithmetic problems, such as the following:

What is the result of taking 1 motor-bus, 1 taxi and 1 train. Answer: Hiking.

Divide one horse into five, and each part into five. What proportion would the latter division bear to the whole? Answer: A mutton chop (as served in the dining-hall).

NIPPER'S PUZZLE

ONE or two of this week's word is the letter W. Take away the first letter and be a bit of it left. the second letter be a bit left. If take away the third still find it is the word?

A word of five letters to it, shorter.

How do you pronounce VOLIX?

Can you arrange words of these form the names of the St. Frank's?

I LEAVE
YAWN LO
LATER GR

Solutions:

- 1.—Habit. (A bit)
- 2.—Short—shorter.
- 3.—VOLIX is pronounced "Nine."
- 4.—De Valerie; Albert Gulliver

ODDS AND ENDS

DO you know what contains in the corner of the corner of London owns all the green has an address of it is: The Port of North Quay, South East London.

*

You have often but have you ever was so called? of society, many a custom to give Pic Nic Suppers various dishes and the guests had article they drew a man drew a paper on it, he had to him. A jolly good inexpensive supper.

*

When you see a climbing plant, look those curly little around the pea-twig twist round in a circle. Never the reason is that the round its course.

Alington

CORNER.

word puzzles
chaps. What
It is a five-
If you take
there will still
you take away
there will still
carry on and
better, you will
What is the

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ER.

LEAD.

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Puzzles.

bit—it.)

anced “Volume

Stanley Waldo;

ENDS.

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his kind. Here
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West India Dock,

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o bring whatever
om the hat. If
with “Chicken”
g a chicken with
way of giving an

sweet-pea, or any
at its tendrils—
ings which twine
k. They always
east-to-west direc-
posite way. The
follow the sun

Wilkes, M.A.

FATUOUS FABLES.

By Aesop Minor (Jimmy Potts).

No. 1: The Poor Man and the Cow.

MANY years ago there dwelt in the far country of Whereizzit, a poor man who begged his bread by the wayside. Every day stood he there, begging bread of them that passed by; but behold, he received but little, for few of the passers-by had any bread with them. And he grew exceedingly hungry.

So he planned within himself to change his mode of living, and said unto himself: “Behold! There are many fools in the world, and though they will give no bread to a beggar, they will give good gold to a fortune-teller, seer or prophet. Lo, I will tell fortunes for money.”

And he sat, as before, by the wayside, inviting travellers to cross his palm with silver; but they did laugh and did jeer at him, and his hunger grew apace.

There came by a rich farmer, who saw the poor fortune-teller and, willing to content his soul with a joke, spoke thus to him:

“Friend! Thou pretendest to tell the fortunes of them that cross thy palm with silver. Now, I prithee, if thou canst tell how much money I have in the village bank I will give thee my finest brown cow. Is it a go?”

“Atta boy!” replied the prophet, which, being translated, means, “I will do even as thou commandest me, my

father.” Then said the poor man: “Thou hast no money whatever in the village bank.”

“Thou fool!” laughed the farmer. “I have great riches in the village bank.”

“In sooth, thou hast not. The village bank was burned to ye ground last night. I saw it with my own eyes.”

Then fell the farmer to harsh words and many mutterings; but the poor man claimed the cow as his just reward, and the farmer was perforce to keep his word.

And the poor man went straightway and bought a milkman’s barrow, and set up in business as a milkman. And behold, he had a large round, and it brought him in much profit. And certain neighbours came to him and said:

“Oh, milkman, tell us how you, with one solitary cow, can manage to get enough milk to supply thy large round.”

And the poor man laughed and said:

“Oh, fools! Is there not hard by a spring of the purest water? Yea, verily, it is so. Go thy ways, and ask me no more.”

And the poor man prospered all his days.

MORAL: *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.*

ANSWER TO A READER

By The Editor.

OSCAR KRXTSWZVTCH, of Jxcht, Poland, writes: “Is it true that you are the champion goalkeeper of St. Frank’s, or is it only swank?”

Look here, Mr. — I mean, look here, Oscar, don’t you give me any cheek. Of course I’m a good goalie. Ask anybody who is the best junior goalkeeper in England. I daresay you’d be surprised if they said, “Handforth.” So should I.

Let me tell you a little story, Oscar.

Some time ago a party of St. Frank’s fellows and Moor View girls were captured by brigands. I was one of the party, and I ventured to check the chief brigand by asking him if he was going to reap his whiskers at harvest time. I was condemned to be shot, and they brought out an ancient cannon. They loaded it with gunpowder, and put a huge iron cannon-ball into its works.

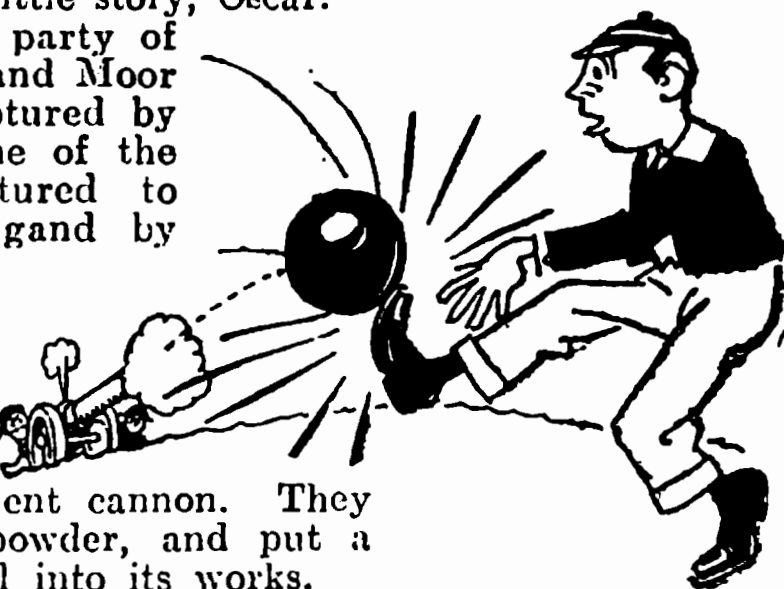
I said “Good-bye” to the lads, and was just wondering what the St. Frank’s Junior XI. would do about getting another goalkeeper who could save penalties like I could, when there was a terrific bang.

I jumped. And then I saw a huge round object hurtling towards me. For the moment I forgot where I was. I thought I was keeping goal again. I saved the cannon-ball neatly, and took a drop-kick at it. The iron ball hurt my

foot a bit; but it was all in a good cause, for the cannon-ball sailed into the air, fell on the chief brigand, and knocked him out for good.

What about that for a smart bit of goalkeeping?

(N.L.L. Editor’s note — And then Handforth woke up!)



THE RIDDLE OF THE SEVEN STARS!

(Continued from page 20.)

there's any more funny business, you'd better report to the Housemaster. Come on, Browne."

The two seniors went out together—Browne rather reluctant.

"Now, Quirke, we'll be glad to have an explanation from you," said Nipper, his voice steady and relentless. "You needn't think that you fooled us just now. You pretended to faint."

"That is not true," interrupted Quirke excitedly. "I did not pretend. I fainted—I fainted genuinely. I am ashamed to admit it, but that—that terrible ring." He shuddered. "I tell you, I fainted! It was the Worcestershire sauce which brought me to."

Nipper shrugged. It was difficult to give the lie to Quirke's explanation. For it was, indeed, quite possible that he had really fainted. That Worcestershire sauce was strong enough to bring anybody out of a faint.

"Well, we won't go into that," said Nipper. "What we want to know is—why did you faint at the sight of Travers' ring? You've never seen that ring before, have you?"

"Never," replied Quirke, his old immobility returning. "But I have read of it—I have seen it described. Not that it was necessary. The instant I set my eyes on that ring I knew why I had been brought to St. Frank's. For I did not come here of my own will."

"But I don't see——"

"I tell you I was impelled to come here by some power beyond my own will," went on Quirke tensely. "That ring! It had influenced me. The ring of Osra!"

Nipper and Travers exchanged quick glances, and the other boys were equally surprised.

"What do you know about Osra?" asked Travers curiously. "We haven't mentioned that name before—in your hearing."

"I know that this ring, with the seven ruby stars, was once the property of the High Priest of the Temple of Osra," replied Quirke. "It is a ring of mysticism, of evil. You will scoff at me, you will think that I am mad, but I know! It was the hideous, evil influence of that ring which brought me here against my will—which took me out into the wild and bitter night."

"Just a minute," said Nipper. "I think you've made a blunder there, friend Quirke. When you first went out to-night this ring was not even at St. Frank's!"

"By George! That's true," said Handforth excitedly.

"You must have left your home hours ago," went on Nipper relentlessly, staring at Quirke. "And this ring did not arrive at St. Frank's until this evening by registered post. So what have you to say to that?"

CHAPTER 11.

The Warning!

EZRA QUIRKE did not flinch.

"It is because the ring was not at St. Frank's when I first started out from Market Donning that I am here," he replied quietly. "It was near to me some hours ago—and its nearness influenced me. I cannot explain how. I do not know why. I can only hazard the guess that I am unusually receptive. For many weeks I have been delving into the hidden mysteries of Ancient Egypt; I am soaked in the lore of the ancients. I have been reading much of that Death Ring, and I can assure you that I am not talking without good reason. The ring possesses a dreadful power—a sinister, hideous power for evil. The night I was sitting by my fireside. Suddenly I felt the nearness of this accursed ring, and I was irresistibly drawn in its wake——"

"You don't know what you're talking about," interrupted Nipper. "That ring wasn't near to you until you got to St. Frank's. How could it have been? That's the point I floored you with before, and you haven't answered it."

"I was not floored, and I am not floored now," replied Quirke, with an intentness which was impressive. "I will confess that I was puzzled. But a solution of the mystery has occurred to me—and it can be the only possible solution. I say that the Ring of Osra was near to me earlier in the evening; the very fact that I was compelled to leave my home proves that. And when you tell me that the package arrived by registered post, then I know the truth. The ring was near to me in the early evening."

Nipper admired the strange boy's coolness. Yet, for the life of him, Nipper could not understand how he could produce any reasonable explanation.

"Go on!" said the Remove skipper.

"The mail van passes my door," said Quirke quietly.

"Eh?"

"I think you heard what I said."

"But what on earth—— What do you mean, anyway?" demanded Nipper. "The mail van passes your door? What has that to do with it?"

"You laugh at me, you scoff—but sooner or later you will change your tone," said Quirke tensely. "You do not believe. You never did believe. But I know. Whilst I was sitting reading before my fire, I heard

the ham of the mail van. Do you not understand? Perhaps you do not. But I am satisfied. I know why I went forth into the night."

"The fellow's dotty!" said Handforth with a snort. "If it comes to that, we've always said he was dotty. What the dickens has the mail van to do with it?"

"I think I know what Quirke means," said Nipper. "Are you trying to tell us, Quirke, that you were influenced by that ring because it happened to be in the registered mail-bag inside that van?"

"What other explanation is there?" demanded Quirke, fixing his strange eyes upon Nipper. "Did I not tell you that the ring was near to me? Yes! It was in that van, and the van passed close to my door!"

"For the love of Samson!" ejaculated Travers, his jaw sagging.

"And the mail van was delayed, owing to a fallen tree," put in Reggie Pitt; "but that was between Bannington and Bellton. Hang it, there must be something in Quirke's yarn, you chaps. Don't forget what happened out on Big Side! We've had no explanation of that mystery yet. And if that ring has some mystic power, it might have forced its influence upon Quirke. At least, we know that it was in the mail van—and we also know that the mail van passes through Market Donning, past Quirke's aunt's cottage."

It was a fantastic enough theory. It sounded incredible, absurd. But if it was just an invention, what could the true explanation be? How could Quirke have known of that ring; why had he come to St. Frank's?

The strange boy rose to his feet, and he looked round steadily at the crowd. Everybody was silent. There was something impressive in Quirke's bearing.

"You will think, perhaps, that I am mad," he said quietly. "You will ask why the ring has no effect upon you. But you are different. I am possessed of strange powers—occult powers. This ring, which to you is a mere curio, is to me a thing of living, vital menace. It passed my door, sealed and wrapped, and hidden away in a mail-bag. Yet its power came out to me and forced me to——"

"To go out into the wild and wintry night?" suggested Nipper ironically.

"You fool!" hissed Ezra Quirke, taking a step forward and fixing his burning eyes upon Nipper. "You sceptic! You unbeliever!"

"I'm all of those," nodded Nipper coolly. "At least, the last two. I shouldn't advise you to call me a fool again, Quirke."

"Do not mistake me," said Ezra Quirke. "I do not call you a fool in an offensive sense. You are foolish because you refuse to believe that which is in front of your very eyes. That ring, which affected me so strangely, has caused the death of many men throughout the ages. It is accursed. Wherever it goes it spreads a trail of de-

struction and misery. I do not know why, but I have been sent here to warn you." He spun round upon Travers. "To warn you! Do you understand? I come, not because it is my wish to come, but because I cannot help myself. I am here as your friend, to advise you, to warn you. I hope to gain nothing—for there is nothing for me to gain. But I tell you, with all the solemnness of which I am capable, that you are in deadly danger."

"Solemnness?" repeated Vivian Travers. "Well, well! Is there such a word, Quirke? Don't you mean 'solemnity'?"

Ezra Quirke's eyes blazed.

"You quibble at words!" he said, his voice trembling. "You mock at me! Ah, my friend, you do not know the dread horror of that vile thing you have in your pocket. A ring—a curio! Yes! But it is the emblem of the High Priest of Osra, one of the greatest sorcerers of Ancient Egypt! And when he died, his evil spirit entered into that ring of gold and ruby. Fantastic, you call it? I agree with you—but it happens to be true. Wherever the ring of Osra goes, there also goes the phantom of the High Priest—spreading disaster—and sometimes death!"

So emphatic were Ezra Quirke's words that the Removites were held silent and motionless. In spite of their common sense, in spite of their better judgment, it seemed to them that there was something about this story which rang uncannily true. Even Nipper was beginning to waver.

Were his suspicions unjust? Was Ezra Quirke a fraud, or had he come here to give a timely warning?

CHAPTER 12.

Travers' Decision.

REGINALD PITT and the other three West House juniors were struck by one fact. Ezra Quirke had just said that the ghost of the High Priest of Osra always accompanied the ring. Nobody had told Quirke of that apparition which had appeared on Big Side.

Thrusting all disbelief from one's mind, it certainly did seem that the ring of Osra was a thing of horror. For its arrival in the school had been signalled in exactly the way that Quirke spoke of. And how could Quirke, by any conceivable stretch of the imagination, have been responsible for that ghostly manifestation? Admittedly he had been out in the night at the time, but could Quirke, or any other human being, jump twenty or thirty feet into the air, and vanish like a puff of smoke?

Nipper's mind was working rapidly, too. There was always the question of motive. What object could Quirke have in faking a ghost? There was only one possibility—that he wanted the ring. It might be more valuable than Mr. Travers supposed, and

Quirke was spinning this yarn in order to make Travers get rid of the thing.

"All this sounds very mysterious and sensational, Quirke," said Nipper evenly. "But what do you propose? What do you think Travers ought to do with that ring?"

"Destroy it," said Quirke instantly.

"Wouldn't that be a pity?" asked Nipper. "An ancient ring like that, with such a unique history! Wouldn't you like to have it yourself, Quirke?"

"I? I possess the accursed Ring of Osra?" said Ezra Quirke with a shudder. "No, no! Never! I would not so much as touch it—for touching it means evil!"

"Then I'm in for a packet, apparently," said Travers coolly.

"Not only you, but everybody in this school," said Quirke impressively. "The influence of the ring is not confined to one individual. Disaster follows everywhere it goes. The ring is valuable, yes. As an antique, it is worth hundreds of pounds. It is of solid gold, and the rubies are rare. But what is mere value compared with life? Destroy that ring, and you will for ever kill the menace it has carried with it throughout the ages."

He took a step nearer to Travers, and his whole frame was quivering.

"Destroy it!" he went on fiercely. "Do you hear me? Pound it to smithereens, throw it into the heart of the hottest fire! Destroy it utterly and completely. Do that now and the stark danger will be averted. Do not let my visit to St. Frank's be fruitless. Do as I tell you, Travers—destroy that object of menace."

Nipper reconsidered his views. Quirke evidently didn't want the ring, then. He would be content to see it thrown into the fire and reduced to powder. In fact, it was more and more apparent that Ezra Quirke was in earnest—that he was sincere.

"Sorry, Quirke, but I'm not going to oblige you," said Travers steadily. "I'm probably as big a—er—fool as Nipper, but I don't believe in all this scaremongering bunkum."

"You call it bunkum?" asked Quirke in amazement. "I tell you that the Ring of Osra has cursed a whole Egyptian dynasty! Kings were cast down and killed by its spell. Queens were destroyed. Not one man, but hundreds of men in the course of centuries have paid for their unbelief! Wherever that ring goes it spreads disaster and death. For the sake of the school, you must cast it forth. It is not merely your own danger, but the danger of all those about you. For they will all be involved."

Travers shrugged his shoulders and shook himself.

"Confound it, Quirke, you're making me feel creepy," he grumbled. "I've heard more than enough, dear old fellow. Dry up! I am not going to cast the ring forth, or burn it, either. My pater sent it to me as a curio, and I'm keeping it."

"Then you are mad—you are utterly mad."

"It's my privilege to be mad if I want to," said Travers coolly. "As for you, Quirke, you can go and eat coke—and the more you eat, the better I shall like it!"

"I am warning you——"

"To the dickens with your warnings!" roared Travers, suddenly exasperated. "I tell you I don't take any notice of your idiotic hokum. And I'm not so sure about that ghost that was seen on Big Side, either."

"Ghost?" said Quirke quickly. "What ghost?"

"Don't you know anything about it?" asked Travers mockingly.

"How should I know? Oh, heavens! Has the Phantom of the High Priest already appeared?" asked Quirke in a low, awed voice. "What did I tell you? What of my warning?" he went on, his voice rising shrilly. "And yet you do not heed! Yes, you are indeed mad."

"Don't you think you'd better take notice, Travers?" asked Reggie Pitt uncomfortably.

"I think you'd better pull yourself together, dear old fellow," retorted Travers. "Quirke hasn't scared me an inch. My pater sent me this ring, and I'm keeping it. I'll write to him, if you like, and ask his advice. But until I get the reply—nothing doing! The ring remains with me."

"And that is absolutely final?" asked Ezra Quirke. "You definitely decide to keep the ring?"

"I don't know how many more times you want telling—but that's what I definitely decide," said Travers gruffly.

Suddenly Quirke seemed to grow limp; his shoulders drooped, the lack-lustre dullness came into his eyes again. He looked like a fellow who had spent a week without sleep.

"I can do no more," he muttered hopelessly. "I have tried—and I have failed."

He sank back on to the lounge and covered his face with his hands. When he looked up he was more composed, and he rose steadily to his feet.

"I shall go," he said dully. "I am not required here."

He walked towards the door, but he swayed once or twice on the way. He seemed utterly exhausted.

"Come along, Quirke, we'll see you to the door," said Nipper, not unkindly. "Are you sure you'll be all right? Don't you think you'd better rest for a while?"

"Rest? Under the same roof as that accursed ring?" said Quirke in a whisper. "No, no! I want to get away—as far away as possible! I am afraid—and I am afraid because I know! You are unafraid because you do not believe!"

"But, my dear chap, you're in no fit condition to go out now," said Nipper. "You can't walk home to Market Donning."

"There is a bus, is there not?" asked Quirke. "If you will be good enough to escort me as far as the bus——"

"That won't be necessary," interrupted Handforth. "I'll take you home, Quirke. I have a little car of my own, and I don't mind driving you back."

He felt sorry for the strange boy; and it was like Handforth to offer to drive him home. Little did Edward Oswald dream of the extraordinary incidents that were to befall him during the journey.

"You honestly assure me, Handforth, that this visitor is incapable of returning home by the ordinary means?"

"Well, hardly incapable, sir," replied Handforth. "But he's certainly very groggy, so I thought——"

"All right, old man—go ahead," said Mr. Wilkes kindly. "But be back by supper-time."

"Can I take Church and McClure, too?"

"Have they done their prep.?"

"I'm afraid not, sir."

CHAPTER 13.

The Figure in the Road!

IT seemed to most of the Removites that many hours had passed, for there had been so much tense excitement. Actually, the evening was comparatively young. At least, Handforth would be

With a hideous laugh, the awful apparition jumped clean over Handforth's car.



able to get back from Market Donning before supper-time. It would mean missing his prep., but that was rather an advantage.

He went straight to Mr. Alington Wilkes, the Housemaster.

"There's a chap here named Quirke, sir," he explained. "Comes from Market Donning. He used to be in the school, and now lives with an aunt of his."

"Well?" asked Old Wilkey.

"Well, sir, Quirke has come over a little queer," said Handforth, seeing no reason why he should go into close details. "We don't quite like to put him on the bus, and I thought—— Well, you see, I've offered to take him back home in my little car. Do you mind, sir? I'm afraid I shall have to miss my prep., but I'll make that all right with my Form-master. I'll get back by supper-time all right."

"Then I'm afraid not, too," said Mr. Wilkes. "You may go, Handforth, because you are needed to drive the car, but you mustn't take anybody else with you."

"All right, sir—thank you, sir."

And Handforth went. He hadn't really expected that his two chums would be given permission to go. When he had fetched his faithful Morris Minor round to the front of the Ancient House, he found the door wide open and the lobby thronged with juniors. Ezra Quirke was in the midst of them.

"It's all serene," sang out Handforth as he rang up the steps. "Old Wilkey's given me permission—but I can't take anybody except you, Quirke. Are you ready?"

"I am intensely grateful for your kindness, Handforth," said Ezra Quirke. "My

only regret is that Travers should be so determined——"

"We needn't go into that again," interrupted Travers gently. "Good-night, Quirke! I hope you don't dream about this too much. If it will relieve you at all, I'll put the ring in the Housemaster's care until I get a reply from my pater."

Quirke looked at him in sorrow.

"And do you think that will nullify the danger?" he asked. "You will only bring disaster upon your Housemaster."

"All right—I'll keep the ring myself," said Travers obligingly.

"You will be sorry—very sorry," said Quirke quietly.

Without another word, without glancing at any of the other boys, he walked out of the Ancient House and climbed into Handforth's car.

"Back before supper, you chaps," said Handforth, getting into the driving-seat.

They drove off at once; and with Quirke's departure the boys in the lobby felt considerably relieved.

"He's a queer beggar—that chap, Quirke," said Nipper slowly. "I've often tried to get to the bottom of him, but I've never succeeded. He's a mixture of fakery and sincere belief."

"Well, I'm snapping my fingers at his silly warnings," said Travers, taking out the ring and looking at it. "By Samson, though, this thing does look a bit mysterious, doesn't it? But I don't forget that rotten scarab, and how K. K. spoofed me. I fell for that properly, and I was scared out of my wits. But I'm jiggered if I'm going to fall for this! Besides, I'm not the only one. This ring, according to our dear pal Quirke, is going to bring disaster upon all and sundry under this fair roof."

Reggie Pitt grunted.

"This is all very fine, Travers—and you too, Nipper," he said. "But Quirke's arrival has rather diverted things from the main issue. I'm jolly glad he's gone! What about those stars I saw floating in the sky—and that queer-looking Egyptian figure?"

"Yes, indeed," said Evans quickly. "We all saw it, Travers. You may laugh and sneer at Quirke, but personally I believe in him. And look you, you had better destroy that ring."

"Quirke gave you some good advice," said Jack Grey. "Burn it, Travers."

There were plenty of others of the same opinion. The mysterious happenings of the night; Quirke's unexpected appearance and his sinister warnings had unnerved many of the weaker juniors. Indeed, only Nipper and Travers and a few others remained unaffected.

"We'll let things stew for a bit," said Travers calmly. "We'll just see what happens, eh? It's been a pretty dull term so far, so perhaps things will wake up. Let's hope for the best."

Meanwhile, the Morris Minor was bowling quickly through Bellton. Handforth was not

particularly delighted with his companion. Ezra Quirke sat still and motionless in the passenger seat. He had not uttered a word since the commencement of the journey.

"If you come back to St. Frank's again, my son, you'd better come in a more cheerful mood," said Handforth as they left Bellton behind. "Whenever you appear you bring yards and yards of mystery with you."

Quirke remained silent.

"Do you hear me?" asked Handforth.

"I hear you," said Quirke. "But you do not understand."

"What's your game, Quirke?" demanded Handforth bluntly. "If you really believe what you think, then you ought to be shoved in Colney Hatch! I don't believe in ghosts, anyway, and when you tell me that a rotten old Egyptian ring is——"

He broke off abruptly and gasped with alarm, for without the slightest warning his headlamps had failed. And the little car was bowling along at a good thirty-seven.

Such a thing had never before happened to Handforth's car, and he was unprepared. It plunged on blindly into the utter blackness, and although he thrust both feet down, so that his clutch was released and his brake applied, the car still careered on.

In the same second a strange apparition appeared in the centre of the road, immediately ahead of the car—the figure of an Egyptian priest, glowing ruddily and eerily. There was no time for Handforth to swerve, no time for him to stop.

But at the last dramatic second a hideous laugh rang out upon the night air, echoing above the blustering of the wind, and the figure rose immediately in front of the car and leaped clean over the top of it!

CHAPTER 14.

Ezra Quirke remains!

IN the same second Handforth's headlights came on again. Yet he had not touched the switch. With a grinding of brakes, the car jerked to a standstill. Ezra Quirke was lying back in the passenger-seat, motionless. He had fainted again.

Handforth was almost too confused to think.

The unaccountable failure of the lights, the apparition in the road, the leap, the return of the lights again, Quirke's faint—all had happened in a swift, bewildering series of events.

Handforth gave one glance at Quirke, then opened the door and leapt out.

From somewhere out of the darkness came a mocking, ghastly laugh. Handforth spun round. He thought he caught a glimpse of a faint glow; it appeared to leap over the telegraph wires, some distance away. He ran, but there was nothing. Neither did he hear the laugh again. Perhaps it had been his imagination. The wind was roaring and blustering, sighing through the trees, and

whistling and humming amongst the telegraph wires.

He turned back, and saw his Minor standing in the middle of the road, the lights full on. There was not a living soul in sight—not another indication of humanity.

It struck Handforth then, much as he desired to believe that Ezra Quirke was up to some trickery, that Ezra Quirke could not have been a party to this extraordinary adventure. Indeed, Quirke had fainted from the shock of it. Why had he fainted? Not because he was weak—for Quirke was wiry and sinuous. Handforth could only conclude that the strange boy had fainted from terror, because he knew the deadly danger.

Handforth walked back to the car, his mind fairly buzzing. He had been sceptical of Reggie Pitt's story, but he was not sceptical now. For he had seen that phantom figure, and he was only just recovering from the shock.

He was a firm disbeliever in ghosts. He laughed at them; he scorned them. Yet, for the life of him, he could not see how that weird figure could have been anything but a phantom presence. Nothing human could have got out of the way of the car in time, and certainly nothing human could have leapt clean over the top of it in that dramatic fashion.

Then, again, the lights.

How had the lights gone out? And how had they come on again? Quirke could not have done it, for he would have had to lean forward; and, in any case, Handforth would have seen or felt his hand at the switchboard. Quirke had been leaning back all the time, his hands on his lap. Handforth was ready to swear that. Ezra Quirke could not have interfered with the lights. Yet they had failed at the crucial moment—just when that phantom had appeared in the centre of the road! And as soon as the apparition had leapt, the lights had come on again.

It was all very startling.

Handforth, standing there, realised that he was very much alone. He hardly counted Ezra Quirke. In fact, he would rather have been without Quirke's presence, for he felt somehow that Quirke had caused the "materialisation," or whatever it had been. Not knowingly, but because of his occult powers.

"Oh, rats!" muttered Handforth. "That's as good as admitting that Quirke is right in his potty opinions! And I don't believe anything of the sort!"

He walked back to the car, and it was only by a strong effort of will that he prevented himself from looking backwards over his shoulder.

"Rouse up, you!" he said roughly.

Quirke was lying motionless in his seat. Handforth shook him, but it made no difference.

"Huh! You need some more Worcester-shire Sauce, by the look of it," growled the leader of Study D. "What the dickens am I to do?"

He soon decided. He couldn't very well take Quirke home like this, and he realised that he was only two or three minutes' ride away from Dr. Brett's house, in Bellton. Better take him to the doctor.

He jumped into the car again and turned her about. His nerves were in such a condition that he half expected the lights to go off again, and that awful apparition to reappear. But nothing happened. He arrived at the doctor's, and Quirke remained the same. Handforth leapt out, ran up the short garden path, and hammered on the door.

Dr. Brett himself answered the summons. The doctor was a clean-limbed, cheerful-looking man, and quite young.

"Why, hallo, Handy!" he said familiarly. "Anything wrong?"

"Jolly glad you're in, doctor," said Handforth, pulling at the doctor's arm. "Chap in my car—fainted. We've had a rummy experience. Tell you later. You'd better have a look at him."

The doctor needed to hear no more at the moment. He accompanied Handforth to the car. He was the school doctor, and he was very well acquainted with all the boys.

"Hallo, hallo! This looks rather bad," he said as he bent over the limp figure of Ezra Quirke. "H'm! Had a nasty shock, I should think. Looks like a bad faint."

"He's not spoofing, sir, is he?" murmured Handforth.

"What earthly reason would he have for—er—spoofing?" said the doctor sharply. "Don't be absurd, Handforth! Here, you take his legs. We'll carry him indoors, and I'll get something to pull him together."

They carried him in, and he was laid on a sofa. Dr. Brett dabbed his face with cold water and forced a little brandy between his teeth. He felt his pulse, frowning.

"Not too good," he muttered. "Yes, he's had a pretty bad shock. What happened, Handy? I seem to know this boy, too. Queer-looking youngster."

"Of course you know him, doctor—he's Quirke."

"By Jove, yes—Ezra Quirke," said the doctor, looking at the patient with new interest. "Good! He's showing some signs of coming round."

Handforth briefly explained what had happened—and Dr. James Brett looked at him hard.

"I think you'd better tell me another!" he said dryly at length.

"Don't you believe me?"

"I certainly do not," said the doctor. "What do you take me for? What's all this nonsense about an Egyptian priest appearing in the middle of the road, your lights failing and—"

"But it's true, doctor—it really happened!" insisted Handforth. "That's what gave Quirke the shock."

It was some little time before Dr. Brett credited the story—and even then he was inclined to believe that Handforth, influenced by what had previously happened at the

school, had allowed his imagination to run riot.

However, further discussion was avoided by the partial recovery of Quirke. He came to his senses again, but he was weak and slightly hysterical. Although the doctor questioned him, he could not say anything coherent.

"What shall we do with him, doctor?" asked Handforth worriedly. "We can't take him home because his aunt is away, and he would be left alone all night—and in his present condition that would be unwise."

"You're right there, Handy," agreed the doctor. "You'll have to drive him back to St. Frank's, and I'll come with you. The best thing we can do, I think, is to fix up a room at the school for him to-night. In the morning, no doubt, he'll be more fit."

Thus it was that Ezra Quirke went back to St. Frank's.

CHAPTER 15.

The Hand on the Stairs!

"**H**OKUM!" said Bernard Forrest contemptuously. "Balderdash and poppycock."

He was in Study A with his two pals, Albert Gulliver and George Bell. They were looking pretty scared, which was

not at all surprising. Gulliver and Bell were not renowned for their pluck.

"It's all very well to say that," growled Gulliver. "Only fools scoff at spirits and ghosts. Anyhow, I don't think we ought to go out to-night."

"Same here," said Bell eagerly.

Forrest regarded them with scorn. They had all heard Reggie Pitt's story; they had witnessed Ezra Quirke's departure, and events in the Ancient House were now proceeding on more or less normal lines.

"So we're going to abandon all our plans because those idiotic West House chumps see a ghost?" asked Forrest sourly. "Well, if that's what you think, you've got another guess coming!"

"But look here——"

"I don't want to hear any more about it," interrupted Forrest. "We fixed up with those River House chaps, and we're going to keep the appointment."

"But—but it means getting out after lights-out—and going across Big Side, too, on the way to the towing-path," said Gulliver in a frightened voice. "And it was on Big Side that——"

"That Pitt and those other fools saw the ghost, eh?" sneered Forrest. "Well, I'm not afraid of ghosts! And you fellows are coming with me—or I shall know the reason why."

"Why can't you go alone?" asked Bell rebelliously. "If you're so brave——"



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

REDUCING EXPENSES.

Mr. Skinnem ran up to his friend, waving a paper in his hand.

"Look!" he shouted excitedly. "The price of petrol is going down."

"Well," said his friend. "you haven't a car."

"No," replied Mr. Skinnem, "but I have a petrol lighter."

(S. Strevens, 51, Churchfields, South Woodford, London, E.18, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

GENEROUS.

Dear old lady (to cab driver): "Here you are, driver, sixpence for the fare, one penny for yourself—and if you take this jam jar to the grocer, you can have the half-penny on that, too."

(L. W. Jones, 43, Douglas Avenue Wembley, has been awarded a penknife.)

HARD PRESSED.

Scotsman: "How much will you charge to press this pair of trousers, please?"

Tailor: "Two shillings, sir."

Scotsman: "Well, here's a shilling. Just press one leg, and I'll have my photograph taken side view."

(A. Wilson, 23, Gordon Road, Clifton, Bristol, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

A PROBLEM.

A kind old gent met a little boy who was crying.

"Why are you crying, my little man?" he asked.

"I don't know what to do," sobbed the boy. "Mummy won't let me stand on my head, and daddy grumbles because I wear out my boots."

(W. C. Copsey, 29, Amidas Gardens, Dagenham, has been awarded a penknife.)

HE DESERVED THE JOB.

The employer was dealing with a long queue of boys who had appeared in response to his advertisement for an office boy.

"Well, my boy," he said to one, who looked a likely candidate, "you've seen that long queue of boys outside waiting for this job. Is there any particular reason why you should have the post?"

"I'd go alone like a shot—and be glad to," snapped Forrest. "But the Hon. Aubrey and his pals have fixed up two or three tables, and if you don't turn up, everything will be upside down. So you're coming with me."

Bernard Forrest was firm. A "spree" had been arranged with the Hon. Aubrey de Vere Wellborne and his pals of the River House School, for some days. There was to be smoking, card-playing for money—of course—and even a bottle of alleged champagne. It was somebody's birthday, and Wellborne & Co. were celebrating.

"Listen!" said Bell suddenly. "Isn't that the sound of Handforth's Minor again? He's back jolly soon!"

"Who cares?" yawned Forrest.

But he went out with the others, and all three of them were surprised to see Ezra Quirke come into the Ancient House with Handforth and Dr. Brett. Nipper and Church and McClure and a number of other fellows gathered round, too.

"No good asking questions now, you chaps," said Handforth briskly. "Quirke's in a bad way—had a shock. We shall have to put him up for the night."

Quirke looked round listlessly.

"I am sorry," he muttered. "I know I am not wanted here."

Then suddenly the dull light went out of his eyes, to be superseded by one of fear.

"The ring!" he whispered. "Good

heavens! I had forgotten! I cannot stay here, under this roof! Let me get out!"

"Steady, you young ass," said the doctor sharply. "You'll stay where I tell you to stay. Come along with me."

He took Quirke to Mr. Wilkes' study, and Handforth accompanied them.

"So he came over queer again, did he?" asked Old Wilkey, after he had heard a brief recitation of the events. "Of course, doctor; I'll see to it that a bed is made up for the boy at once. He can have the little room on the second floor, at the end of the passage."

Mr. Wilkes did not inquire too deeply into the story of the "ghost." Indeed, he took it for granted that it was just an exaggerated yarn. As far as Mr. Wilkes could see, Quirke had been visiting the school and had suddenly come over ill. He did not want to make a mystery out of a trifle.

So, when bed-time came, the fellows knew that Ezra Quirke was somewhere in the House. He had gone straight up to his room some time earlier, and by now was probably fast asleep.

In one of the dormitories, Vivian Travers undressed cheerily. Sir James Potts and the young Viscount Bellton—who were his distinguished study mates, and who shared the dormitory with him—were not particularly impressed.

"Guess it won't do, Travers," said

"Yes, sir," was the bright reply. "I'm the only boy who's brought his dinner."

(G. Pitt, 54, Lynholme, Road, Anfield, Liverpool, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

JOHNNY WON.

Mother: "Good gracious, Johnny, you look like a nigger!"

Johnny: "Yes, ma; Willie and I had a contest to see who could put their head farthest up the chimney, and I won."

(W. Gordon, Beach House, 56c, Cambridge Road, Southport, has been awarded a penknife.)

QUITE SAFE.

Porter (of small local railway): "Our railway is the safest in the world."

Visitor: "Really?"

Porter: "A collision is impossible."

Visitor: "Are you sure?"

Porter: "Yes, we have only one train."

(R. D. Copplestone, 13, Hale Street, Church Road, Portsmouth, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

FORGETTING HIMSELF.

Barber (about to part customer's hair): "Centre, sir?"

Customer (a cricket enthusiast, absent-mindedly): "No, gimme middle and leg."

(E. Broomfield, 37, Frankland Road, South Chingford, London, E.4, has been awarded a penknife.)

VERY HELPFUL.

"My boy," said the gentleman. "Can you tell me where No. 30 in this street is?"

"Sure, guv'nor," replied the youngster. "You'll find it next door to No. 29."

(E. O'Moore, 59, Falcon Grove, Battersea, London, S.W.11, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

HAD ITS USES.

Irritable person: "What's the use of your time-table if the trains never keep time?"

Porter: "Well, how would you know they were late, if it wasn't for the time-table?"

(J. Stone, Mount Pleasant, Great Billington, Leighton Buzzard, has been awarded a penknife.)

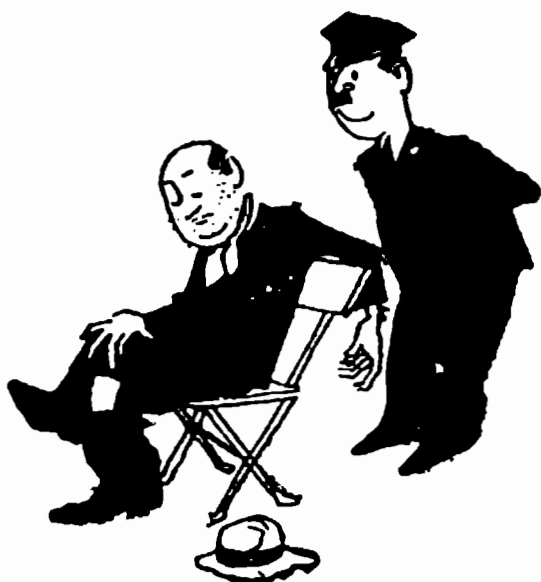
HEARD IN THE PARK.

The park-keeper, who was about to close the gates, found a tramp sleeping on one of the seats.

"Hi, you!" he exclaimed, shaking the man's shoulder. "I'm going to close the gates."

"All right," murmured the tramp, "don't slam them, there's a good fellow."

(R. Pardis, 142, High Street, Deptford, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)



Viscount Bellton—otherwise "Skeets." "You can't pull that line on us."

"Pull what line?" asked Travers innocently.

"You're not kidding us, old man," said Jimmy Potts. "You're not half so cheery as you pretend to be. That ring is worrying you, isn't it?"

Travers laughed ruefully.

"Well, in a way, I believe it is," he admitted. "It all seems so idiotic, but—but— Well, I hardly know how to put it. Do you chaps think that there's anything in Quirke's fantastic yarn? I mean, do you believe that this ring is—well, cursed, or something?"

He took the ring out of his pocket, and the small red stones gleamed evilly in the glow of the electric light. Skeets and Sir Jimmy exchanged dismayed glances.

"I thought you'd left that rotten thing down in the study," said Jimmy. "You told us you were going to."

"On seconds thoughts, I decided I'd bring it up."

"Hang it, we're not superstitious, but why sleep with the beastly thing in the bedroom?" asked Potts. "Nobody will pinch it. You can lock it in the bureau, can't you?"

Travers suddenly shivered.

"Somehow, you know, I don't like the look of it," he said uneasily. "I wish my pater hadn't sent it."

He felt that he was acting foolishly, especially as he had scoffed at the other juniors for their fears; and his two chums, in spite of their earlier statement that they were not superstitious, had now proved that they actually were.

"Perhaps I'd better take it down," said Travers shortly.

He slipped on his dressing-gown and went out. He wondered if it was his imagination, or if he really heard a sudden ghostly patter of footsteps. But the corridor was empty. The wind was beating furiously against the window at the end.

"Oh, rats!" he muttered.

He hurried to the stairs, and found that the lobby below was in total darkness. Only for a second did he hesitate, then he commenced walking down. Suddenly, something out of the darkness clutched at one of his ankles—yet he knew perfectly well that the stairs were empty. Sufficient light was coming from the corridor behind him to show that no presence, human or ghostly, was there.

The next moment the clutch seemed to tighten, he lost his balance, and he crashed headlong down the stairs from top to bottom. Bruised and battered and dazed he lay there, and he had made such a commotion that doors were opening all along the corridor, and fellows were running out. Somebody switched on the lights.

"Great Scott! Who's that?" went up a yell.

Nipper and Handforth and one or two others ran downstairs. They helped Travers to his feet.

"What happened?" asked Nipper sharply.

"I—I don't know," muttered Travers. "I was coming downstairs, and suddenly something gripped my ankle and tripped me. I came an awful cropper!"

He was badly shaken, but fortunately he had broken no bones. He went upstairs and examined them. There was nothing to account for the mystery. He thought hard. He knew that his imagination had not played tricks with him. Something *had* gripped his ankle.

Travers put the ring into the study, locking it in the bureau, and then he felt better. But the incident caused him to readjust his views. That talk about the ring's being cursed—Quirke's warnings of danger and disaster—perhaps they were not such nonsense, after all!

Sleep did not come readily to many of the Removites after that disturbing incident. They were uneasy. It may have been the wildness of the night, but as they lay in bed, unable to sleep, they felt that a grim menace was hovering over the school.

CHAPTER 16.

A Fright for Forrest & Co!

THREE of the Removites kept awake longer than the others.

By eleven o'clock nearly every light in the school had been extinguished, and the juniors had at last dropped off to sleep. But Forrest and Gulliver and Bell crept out as the hour was striking. Gulliver and Bell were not at all keen on the adventure, but Forrest, who was made of sterner stuff, insisted.

Even Forrest, however, was rather sorry that the appointment had to be kept. The night was wilder than ever as he and his pals slipped off across the playing fields towards the towing path. This was a short cut to the River House School. It was pitchy black; the wind was buffeting vigorously, and it had an icy, bitter sting in it.

However, the cads saw nothing whatever to scare them. They arrived safely enough at the River House School, where they were secretly admitted by the young rascals who were giving the forbidden spree.

Nothing happened at St. Frank's until nearly two o'clock.

Then a fluttering, greyish-white thing hovered uncertainly over the roof of the West House for a moment or two. It sank down, dropping across West Square, and finally settled upon the window-sill of a room on the second floor of the Ancient House. A moment later the window was opened. The creature hopped in, to perch upon the shoulder of Ezra Quirke.

"You are not afraid to fly in the darkness of the night, my beauty," muttered Quirke. "You have brought the message, eh?"



Nothing struck Travers; he did not trip—yet he suddenly staggered and crashed head-first into the goal-post!

Quirke seemed to have recovered completely. He was fully dressed, too; evidently he had been awaiting the coming of the owl.

He took from the bird's legs a tiny roll of paper, which had been securely fastened. He unrolled it, and read it by the light of a small electric torch. His peculiar eyes were glowing.

"We go out now, my friend," he whispered, fondling his strange pet. "Let us hope that the spirit of the High Priest of Osra is not abroad. But no! I am a believer, and therefore I am safe. It is only those who express contempt who are in peril."

Like a shadow he passed downstairs; without making the slightest sound he reached the ground floor, and got out through one of the smaller windows. Still with the owl perched on his shoulder, he climbed over the school wall and ran down the lane; at the stile which led into Bellton Wood, he halted. A shadowy figure was waiting there.

"Quirke?" it said, in a voice so low as to be almost inaudible.

For answer, Ezra Quirke flashed on his electric torch. The light revealed a hideous face—a face which was twisted so grotesquely that the mouth was all askew, and there was an ugly scar running across the right cheek. The face was brown and wrinkled, and a lock of lank hair peeped out from beneath the misshapen hat.

"Put out that light, you young fool!" snarled the voice.

Quirke put it out. The figure of the man was evidently as misshapen as his face and hat. One shoulder was higher than the other, and he was bent.

"We are on dangerous ground, Zenas," said Ezra Quirke in a low, toneless voice. "Already the spirit of the High Priest of

Osra has manifested itself. We dabble with death!"

The Man with the Twisted Face grunted.

"It is well that you are back in the school," he said. "You will be there to-morrow."

"I shall be there to-morrow," repeated Quirke.

"Then listen, boy," said Zenas. "Listen carefully."

They talked for some little time, and Ezra Quirke said very little. It was the man who did most of the speaking.

"You understand?" he said at length.

"I understand," replied Quirke. "You may rely upon me, Zenas. But do not forget that every minute is fraught with peril. The Ring of the Seven Stars is at the school. The spirit of evil is abroad."

At two-thirty was booming out from the old clock tower, three figures crept silently into the West Square. Forrest & Co. were returning from their spree. They had had a good time, and they were feeling comfortably tired. To their great satisfaction, they had not met with any mysterious adventures, either on the way to the River House or on their way home.

Forrest had already opened the window and was half-way through when a strange thing happened. Overhead, in the pitch darkness of the sky above West Square, a small clump of red stars suddenly appeared. They glowed and twinkled eerily. The stars spread out slightly, forming a circle of six, with one star

in the centre—almost exactly the same as the rubies were set in Travers' ring.

"Look!" gasped Bell abruptly. "Oh!"

Gulliver took one look and screamed wildly. His nerves had been on edge for some time, and the sight of those stars hovering in the sky, after the story he had heard in the Common-room during the evening, proved too much for him.

"You fool—you madman!" snarled Forrest. "You'll have the whole school about our ears—and that'll mean the sack!"

But the frightened boy screamed again, and the sound rose shrilly on the night air. Many fellows were awakened, but fortunately they were only juniors. The prefects slept on the other side of the building, and there were no masters' bed-rooms near by.

Somewhat Forrest dragged his two companions through the open window, and he stared out again. The sky was pitchy black. There was no sign of the stars. They had vanished as mysteriously as they had come.

"You fools! You blundering, hopeless maniacs!" grated Forrest. "If we're collared, and if we're put on the carpet for this, I'll——"

The door burst open, and Nipper and Travers and Handforth and one or two other Removites burst in.

"What's happening?" asked Nipper sharply.

"For goodness' sake keep your voices down!" urged Forrest. "Is there anybody else awake—any prefects or masters?"

"I'm rather sorry there isn't!" snapped Nipper. "Then you would have been caught red-handed, eh? Been out on a spree, I suppose? Well, we all have our own ideas of pleasure. Still, I don't see any reason why you should come back to the school screaming——"

"It wasn't me," interrupted Forrest. "It was these fools! They saw something in the sky—seven red stars."

"What!" went up a general exclamation.

"I saw them, too," said Forrest uneasily. "I'll admit I was a bit scared, but I didn't scream. I can't understand it. I don't know how the thing happened."

"The seven stars again!" said Vivian Travers, in a low voice. "At half-past two in the morning! Dear old fellows, I don't mind confessing that this wretched business is getting on my nerves."

They went upstairs, Forrest & Co. fortunate not to have been bowled out. As they reached the upper passage, a figure, attired only in pyjamas, came down from the stairs which led to the second floor. It was a wild-looking figure, with untidy hair and a mask-like face. Ezra Quirke!

"The stars—the stars!" he said feverishly. "Did you see them? I heard voices, and I came——"

"Oh, you saw them, too, did you?" asked Nipper sharply.

"I was asleep, but something awakened me—a scream, I believe," muttered Quirke. "I went to the window, and there in the sky——"

"Yes, we know," said Travers.

"Destroy the accursed ring," urged Quirke, gripping his arm and clutching so tightly that Travers winced. "Do you understand? It is your only hope! Once again the curse has manifested itself! You must destroy that ring, so that the power of the evil spirit will be for ever crushed."

An obstinate strain in Travers caused him to shake Quirke's hand free.

"Go back to bed," he said. "I'm not going to destroy that ring. Do you understand? It is a present from my father—and until I hear from my father I shall keep it here."

COMING NEXT WEDNESDAY!



Ezra Quirke backed away, shuddering.

"If you only knew," he whispered, his queer eyes fixed upon Travers. "You fool—you fool! If you only knew!"

CHAPTER 17.

A Day of Disaster!

NIPPER looked at his team cheerfully. "Don't forget, my sons, that we're well at the top of the League table," he said. "This game ought to be easy picking for us. We're playing at home, and the Grammar School is only half-way up the table. We ought to whack them handsomely."

"Nothing easier," said Handforth. "I'll do my bit in goal, anyhow. You chaps had better do some scoring."

They were on Little Side. The afternoon was blustery—although the wind had lost some of its previous ferocity. There were clouds overhead, but now and again the sun peeped out. It was a typical October afternoon—an ideal afternoon for football, although the wind might prove a little troublesome.

It cannot be said that the St. Frank's players were in the best of fettle for an important match. They were too disturbed in

"THE CURSE OF OSRA!"

By E. S. BROOKS.

"Destroy that ring or you will meet with disaster!"

Thus Ezra Quirke—and his ominous words are borne out with startling accuracy. Disaster after disaster, nearly ending in tragedy, befalls Vivian Travers. Sinister events happen at St. Frank's. Mystery piles upon mystery.

What is the significance of Travers' seven-starred ring?

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mind—and it requires a free, untroubled mind for the playing of first-class football.

There had been endless discussions during the morning, at every available opportunity. Ezra Quirke was still at the school, as he had expressed a wish to witness the football match—but he would be leaving before darkness.

"No!" he had said. "Never will I remain here during the black hours of darkness again. Not whilst the Ring of Osra is at St. Frank's! The risks are too terrible."

Vivian Travers had reported fit, and he was in the forward line. He was slightly bruised from his fall downstairs, but he made light of his hurts.

Reggie Pitt was playing, too—and so was

Jack Grey. But both of them were still thinking of their queer adventure of the evening before. Somehow, they could not rid their minds of it.

The story had been spoken of so much that nearly everybody in the Junior School was half-expecting blood-red stars to appear in the sky, even in broad daylight. And Ezra Quirke's very presence cast a sort of blight over everybody. He had that effect. Yet they could not very well tell him to go, for he was quite inoffensive.

There was every reason to suppose that the game would be an easy one. Only last week, mainly owing to Handforth's brilliant goalkeeping, the Saints had beat Barcliffe School by three goals to nil. And that was away from home.

To-day's game against Bannington Grammar School was at home, and the Grammarians were not very dangerous. At least, they weren't on paper.

But when the game commenced the Saints received a shock. It was really Handforth's fault. Within a minute of the start, he happened to note that Ezra Quirke was standing comparatively near to the goal, and he did not quite like it. Quirke got on his nerves.

"I say," he complained to some other Removites who were near by, "can't you take that walking mummy somewhere else?"

"We're not supposed to look after him," said one of the juniors.

"Well, he worries me," growled Handforth, glaring at Quirke. "Of course, I don't care twopence whether he stops there or not, but every time I look at him——"

"You'd better look at the game, Handy," yelled somebody. "Whoa! Look out!"

Handforth spun round, startled. He had not expected to find work for him just yet. He was a shade too late. One of the Grammarian forwards, running through unexpectedly, slammed in the leather with terrific force. It eluded Handforth's outstretched fingers, and thudded into the back of the net.

"Goal!"

"That was your fault, Quirke!" roared Handforth unreasonably as he collected the ball. "Clear off!"

Ezra Quirke did not seem offended.

"I do not blame you, Handforth, for thinking that I am to blame," he said quietly. "But it is the curse of Osra which is upon this school—and upon this game! You do not heed my warnings. But one day you will realise that I am right."

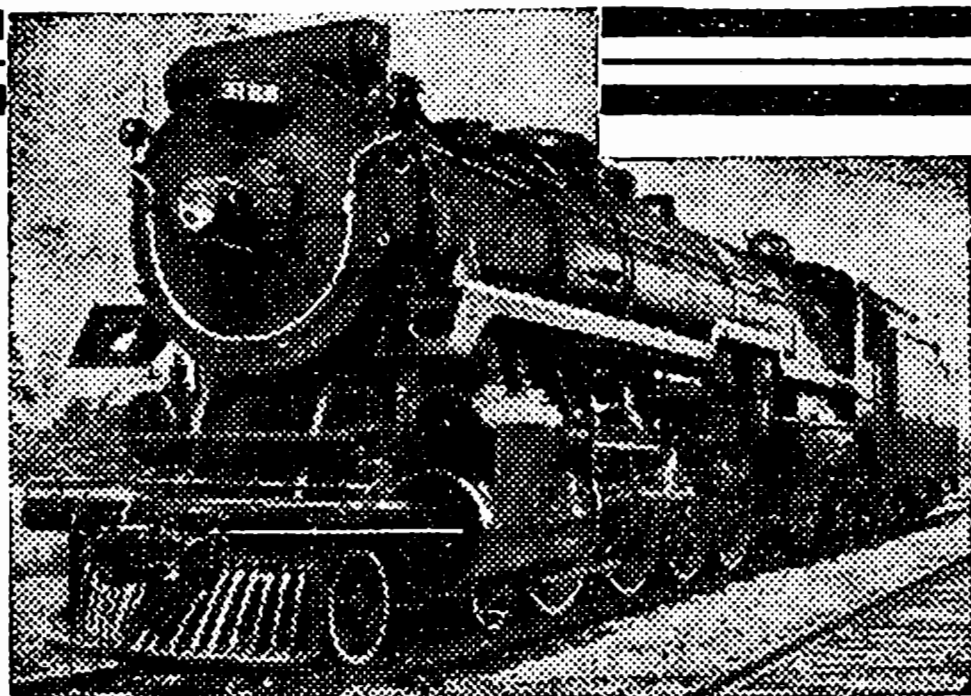
He walked off without another word, and Handforth glared at Church and McClure.

"Did you hear that, you chaps?" he said to his backs. "The curse of Osra is on the game! That's lively for us, isn't it?"

"Never mind the curse of Osra," grunted Church. "You look after your giddy goal!"

The other players—a good few of them, at least—had heard Ezra Quirke's words, and they were not feeling any the easier in

(Continued on page 37.)



A Railway Monarch

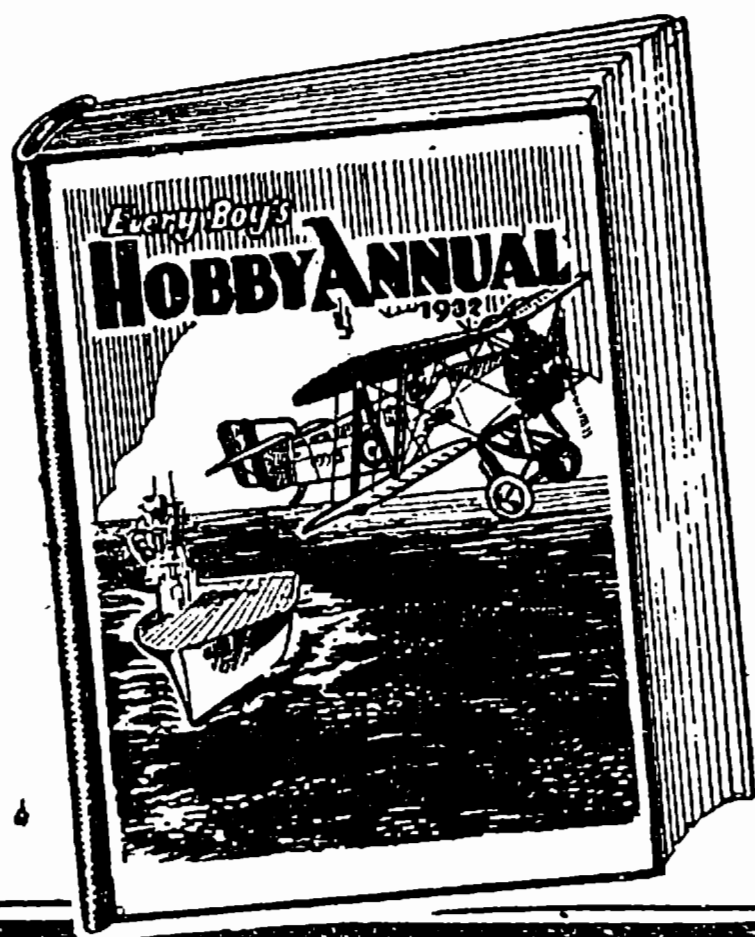
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THE RIDDLE OF THE SEVEN STARS !,

(Continued from page 35.)

mind because of them. The curse of Osra! It was very unsettling.

The Saints did not realise it until then, but their nerves were on edge; and nerves, on the footer field, are fatal. They played raggedly. They played with a total lack of their usual sparkle. Reggie Pitt, on the wing, was a shadow of his real self. As a consequence, the Grammarians, who were fighting for points, swamped the home team.

It was one of those games, too, in which everything went wrong—for St. Frank's. Passes failed to reach their objective—the ball generally went to the feet of opponents. The Saints could do nothing right. Within five minutes a second goal was scored—and at the end of the fourteenth minute, a third.

Three goals down—and the whole game going to pieces!

Handforth was frantic; the first Grammarian goal had been more or less of an accident; the second was a really brilliant effort, and Handforth had done his best. The third had come from a corner, the ball slicing into the net off somebody's knee, with Handforth hopelessly misplaced.

It was just a long series of misfortunes, one after the other.

Try as the St. Frank's forwards would, they failed to score—or even to look like scoring. The Grammarian backs were always there, ready to smash up every raid. At half-time the score stood at four—nil. The St. Frank's Junior XI was receiving the hiding of the season!

And how could the boys be blamed for immediately jumping to the conclusion that something was radically wrong—something over which they had no control?

The Curse!

Exactly as Ezra Quirke had prophesied, things were going badly. He had said that there would be trouble at St. Frank's. And now, on the very first day, the Junior XI was getting thrashed.

"Quirke was right about that ring, Travers," said Jack Grey, when he happened to come across Travers during a brief spell while the ball was out of touch. "He told you to destroy it!"

"How can the ring effect this game?" asked Travers stubbornly.

"I don't know how—but have you ever seen a game go like it before?" demanded Grey. "Hang it, I'm not superstitious, but—but there's something about this affair which frightens me. Look at the way you fell downstairs last night—an unseen hand gripped your ankle and tripped you up! That hasn't been explained, has it?"

Travers was silent.

"Nobody can play this afternoon," went on Grey. "Reggie is all at sea. Handforth, in goal, can't stop a ball! There's a curse on us."

"We've got nerves—that's all," grunted

Travers. "We're rattled because the game's going against us."

"It's something more than that," said Jack Grey, with conviction. "Whatever we do, we can't win. I don't believe we can even score."

CHAPTER 18.

The Working of the Curse!

DURING the brief half-time interval, the players collected together, with gloomy faces. Vivian Travers, usually so cheery, was the gloomiest of them all.

"Well, my sons, we look like suffering our first defeat of the season," said Nipper.

"The second," growled Handforth. "Bell-ton Rovers whacked us in September."

"That was an away game," said Nipper. "I mean our first defeat at home. We've had victories every time until now. What's the matter with us?"

"We could play a lot better if that blighter Quirke wasn't wandering about," said Handforth, glaring. "He's like a giddy Jonah! I was looking at him when that first goal was scored—and that was the beginning of the rot."

"It's not fair to blame Quirke," said Nipper. "No matter how tricky he is he can't possibly affect a game of football."

"Perhaps I ought to have destroyed that ring," said Travers unhappily. "But how was I to guess—"

"You couldn't," interrupted Boots, of the Fourth. "We've heard a lot this morning of what happened last night. I'm the last chap in the world to believe in ghosts and things like that, but doesn't it look as though there is a curse on the school?"

"Quirke told us that there would be misfortunes for us," said Jack Grey quickly. "He warned us."

Vivian Travers shook himself.

"It all seems so fantastic cut here—in the open daylight," he said. "For the love of Samson, let's pull ourselves together! We're four goals down, but we're not dead yet!"

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We'll fight in the second half! We'll play like mad!"

"That's the spirit," said Nipper heartily. "Never say die! Five goals in a second half wouldn't be a record, by any means. Come on! Let's show the Grammarians that we're fighters."

When the second half of the game started, it really did seem that the Saints were to bring about a dramatic reversal. They played brilliantly—dazzlingly.

Nipper came within an ace of scoring when he sent in a pile-driver. The Grammarian goalie kicked at it wildly, and cleared more by luck than judgment. The ball fell at the feet of Reggie Pitt. Pitt, usually so sure-footed, made to send it whizzing goalwards, but slipped at the crucial moment. He missed, and a Grammarian back, rushing up, cleared with a mighty lunge which sent the leather soaring into mid-field.

"There you are!" said Grey disgustedly. "What's the good? I tell you there's a curse on us! We ought to have scored then, but we just can't!"

Like lightning, the Grammarian forwards were following up their advantage. They were sweeping towards the St. Frank's goal. The leather shot across the goalmouth, and fell at the feet of a Grammarian forward. He kicked. The ball swerved, struck the cross-bar, bounced out, hit Church on the shoulder, and rebounded into the net.

"Goal!"

It was the flukiest goal imaginable, but it counted! Undoubtedly luck was dead against the St. Frank's players. Five goals down!

Then, to make matters far worse, Stanmore, the Grammarian skipper, put in a beautiful piece of work on his own. He ripped through the St. Frank's defence as though it did not exist; by a brilliant individual effort he raced through, and the goal he scored was a certainty from the very moment the ball left his foot. Handforth dived, but he could do nothing else. The leather bounced just in front of him, and shot over his prostrate form into the net, to give the Grammarians a lead of six clear goals.

Travers was miserable, and he was frantic, too. More than ever he felt that this was all his fault. He was playing an atrocious game; he was kicking wildly, he was wasting his opportunities. And that ring of his must be responsible!

But no—no! Desperately Travers tried to convince himself that such a theory was fantastic, ridiculous. Yet—strange that such a series of remarkable misfortunes should have occurred after his coming into possession of that ring! Mysterious, too.

Travers thoughts were chaotic, muddled. He knew well enough that the spectators—if not the players—were blaming him and the ring for St. Frank's heavy defeat. If only he could score! Surely that would prove that the curse was not real! Surely that would convince them—and convince himself, too—that the curse was only imaginary!

He must score—must!

Travers' opportunity came soon afterwards—within three or four minutes of the finish. Perhaps the Grammarians were easing up. They were certainly tired by now, and with such a handsome lead they could afford to take chances. Travers trapped the ball, ran deftly past the centre-half, and raced for goal.

"Go it, Travers! Shoot, man—shoot!"

And then something strange happened. In the very act of shooting from close range, Travers staggered blindly. Nothing had struck him; he had not tripped. He gave a hoarse cry, flung his hand to his face, and stumbled. Running at full tilt, he was unable to check his blind progress.

With sickening force, he struck against the left-hand goal-post, and it was his head which took the brunt of the collision. Without a groan, he collapsed to the ground in a limp heap, and the referee's whistle blew shrilly.

There was a rush—of spectators and players alike. Travers lay motionless. Across his forehead was an ugly gash, and it was bleeding profusely.

"He's badly hurt!" panted the Grammarian goalie excitedly. "I don't know what happened to him!"

"Didn't you see?" shouted Nipper. "Did anything hit him?"

"Nothing at all," replied the goalie. "He just reeled as he ran, as though somebody had struck him a blow between the eyes. Then—then this happened."

Nipper glanced round, and his eyes grew hard. Ezra Quirke was standing behind the Grammarian goal. And then Nipper shook himself angrily. What folly it was to think of Ezra Quirke as the culprit! How could that strange boy have done anything? There were others near him, and, in any case, he had been many yards from Travers at the time of the accident. No; there was something deeper behind it all—something ugly and sinister.

They gently lifted Travers, and they bathed his wound. He was carried unconscious to the school sanatorium and put to bed.

The game was finished, and the St. Frank's players were glad that there were only two or three minutes to go.

"You will not be angry, my friends, if I say 'I told you so'?" said Ezra Quirke unemotionally after the game. "Do you think that you can defy the inexorable powers of the Supernatural?"

The Supernatural!

Could it really be possible? The St. Frank's Junior XI, on the day following the arrival of the Ring of the Seven Stars, had suffered an overwhelming defeat. Vivian Travers was unconscious in the sanatorium!

What could it all mean?

THE END.

(The mystery of Vivian Travers' seven-starred ring becomes more intriguing in next week's enthralling long complete school yarn of the Chums of St. Frank's. Entitled: "The Curse of Osra!" One long thrill throughout—order your copy now!)

Gather round, chums, for this week's cheery chat with the Editor.



NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

MR. BROOKS' is very grateful to Jack Godden (Hilton, South Australia), for the informative and useful book on the Australian game of football. Soccer, of course, is the game which is played at St. Frank's, and it is very doubtful if Mr. Brooks can introduce the Australian game at the old school. However, there is always the chance that the St. Frank's boys will re-visit Australia, and if this should happen to coincide with the footer season—well, Mr. Brooks will be able to describe the Aussio game most graphically.

No, Jack Godden, the fags at St. Frank's do not receive any official pay for their services. They would be very insulted, in fact, if any such system came into force. Fagging at a great public school is regarded as part of the usual routine; and even the fags who are overworked always have the satisfaction of knowing that one day they will rise to the Sixth, too, when it will be their turn to do the commanding, instead of being commanded. It is a thought which bucks them up wonderfully. Naturally, fags get all sorts of perquisites, and a senior needs to be very mean, indeed, if he doesn't whack out a tip at intervals. Talking of fags, Jack, Willy & Co. have their own studies, but they are neither numbered nor lettered. The fags prefer to have their own peculiar signs. For instance, there is an emblem of the skull and crossbones chalked on Willy's study door—until he thinks of something better and rubs it out. The school colours, as distinct from the House colours, are blue and red, and the Junior XI wear the same colours as the Senior XI.

Here are the thumbnail word-sketches of three more Sixth-Formers, following on the three which were given last week, and continuing in alphabetical order. **EDGAR FENTON.** The Captain of St. Frank's, and

the popular favourite of everybody. Sturdy, well-set-up; a thorough sportsman to his fingertips. His only enemies in the school are the rotters. Firm and resolute, but absolutely just in all his actions. **HAROLD FRINTON.** Not a particularly bright specimen as far as brains go, but good-looking, and good-tempered. He has a mistaken impression that he is irresistible to the girls, and his greatest passion is having his photograph taken. He presents these to his friends whether they want them or not. **FRANCIS GOODCHILD.** A learned and thoughtful senior. His habitual air of gravity, in fact, causes the juniors to refer to him as "The Owl." One of the great thinkers of the Sixth; the scion of a noble family, aristocratic and quiet.

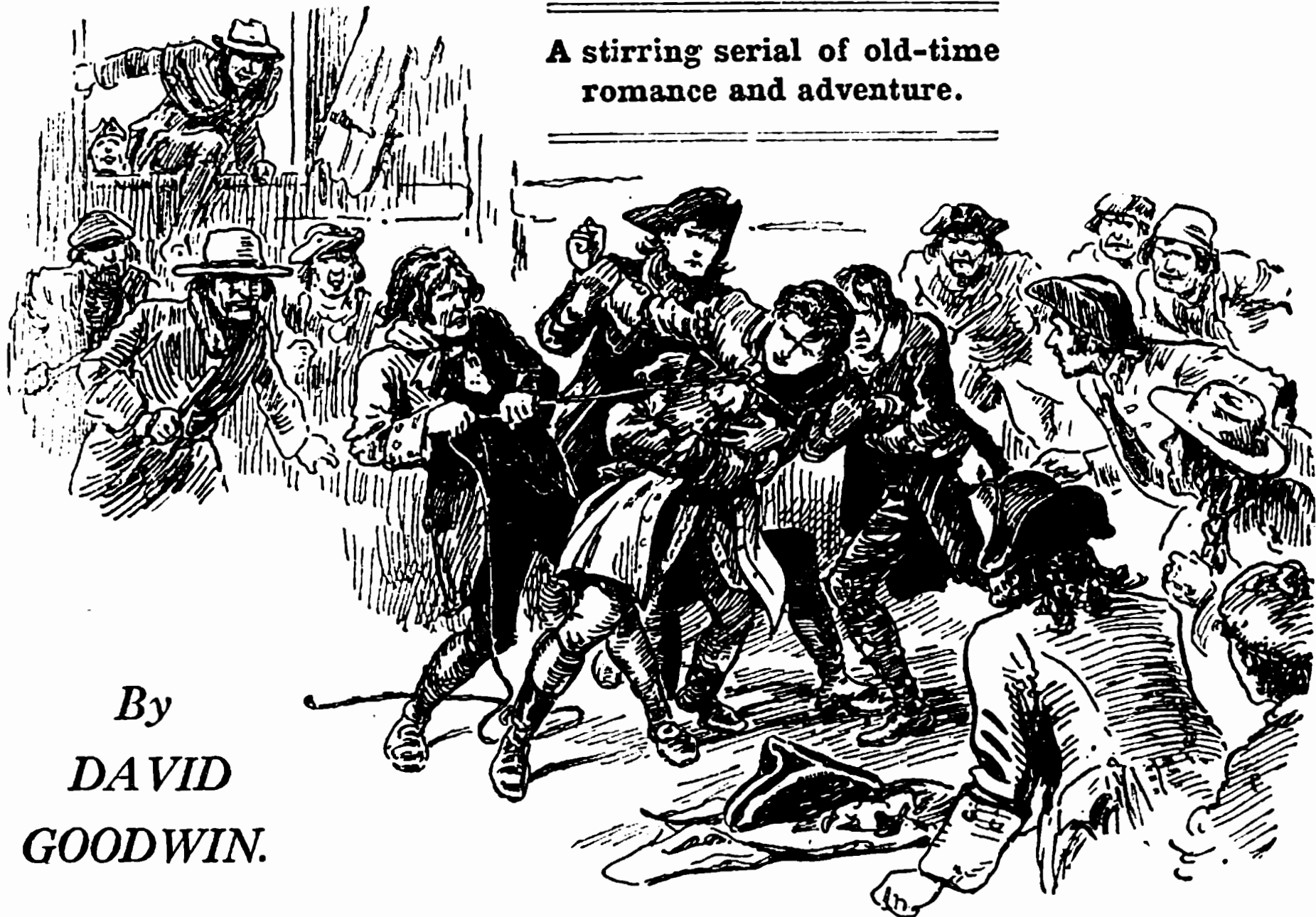
Claude Gore-Pearce first arrived at St. Frank's, Peter Ashe (Old Hill, Staffs.), in the series of stories where old Lord Edgemore (now dead) was in danger of being turned out of his ancestral home. It was Gore-Pearce's father who desired to purchase Edgemore Castle, and the St. Frank's boys rallied valiantly to the old man's assistance, defeating the ends of the rascally lawyer who had robbed the earl for years, and who had deceived Mr. Gore-Pearce. This series was published in 1928, the first appearing on March 3rd (No. 96, 1st New Series), entitled "The Mystery of Edgemore Manor." The "manor" in this title refers actually to the castle, the more dignified name having been used later.

The average age of the boys in the Third, Beryl Everton (Oldham), is between 12 and 14; the average age of the Remove and Fourth Form boys is between 14 and 16, although the great majority are about 15. Yes, St. Frank's has a private chapel of its own, and it is situated in the Triangle, near the main school buildings—and is, in fact, one of the main school buildings.

Dick Forrester Tricked and Trapped by his Enemies!

Outlawed!

A stirring serial of old-time
romance and adventure.



By
**DAVID
GOODWIN.**

Sweeny's Revenge!

DICK FORRESTER struggled desperately with his captors. They had taken him unawares, and he was completely at a disadvantage. He succeeded in shaking himself free for a few moments, and during that time his whirling fists sent three men staggering.

But the odds were hopelessly against him. Once more his assailants swarmed to the attack; he was quickly overpowered. Ropes were produced, and he was bound hand and foot. Then, helpless, he was propped on his feet against the wall.

The old man advanced slowly, his glittering eyes fixed on the young highwayman.

"Well met, Dick o' the Roads!" he cried.

It was Captain Sweeny.

"This," said the footpad captain, waving his hand round the hut, "is by way of a little lesson to teach you that I always keep my word. I fear, however,

you will not live long enough to profit by it."

Dick did not reply at once. His gleaming eyes glanced round the hut. Most of Sweeny's followers were there—an evil-looking, villainous crew. Many of them Dick recognised as those who had attacked Fernhall. They laughed in coarse mockery at their captive's plight.

"So I have fallen into the hands of the poultry thieves," said Dick calmly. "You are flying at high game, Captain Sweeny. Take care you have not captured more than you can hold. Mayhap it would have been safer for you to keep to snatching shillings from little girls sent to the village grocer's upon errands, which is a trade that better suits you and your rufflers than this!"

Captain Sweeny gloated upon him with cruel, glittering eyes. Triumph and the lust for revenge were written on every line of his swarthy face, and, in spite of Dick's cool contempt for him, he looked what he was—the cunningest and most dangerous knave in England.

"Ten days ago," he said harshly, "I nailed on your door a death warrant, warning you that your end was near."

"You did," agreed Dick; "and the kitchenmaids of Fernhall used it to light the fires. I have to thank you for it."

"You will sing a softer note ere long," said the footpad. "I have now fulfilled the first part of my promise, and the second part will shortly begin. You esteem yourself a youth of quick wits, I believe, but you are neatly tricked this time."

"You have a certain low cunning which serves you well," remarked Dick, "and I was off my guard."

"You dog!" snarled the footpad captain, enraged by the young outlaw's coolness. "Enough of your hanged tongue! Do you not see that you are in my power at last? Cringe, grovel, you dog! Beg for mercy, as befits one who has fallen into my hands! Cower, and pray for your life!"

Dick laughed in his face.

"Did you think a Forrester would so much as blink an eyelid before such scum as you?" he said contemptuously. "Is there aught you hope to do that would make me cower, you creeping, ditch-skulking, chicken-stealing son of shame?"

"You shall pay for every word!" rasped Sweeny. "You shall scream for mercy! No man has ever crossed my path and lived, nor bearded me and lasted to boast of it! I am Sweeny, you whelp—Sweeny! There is no hamlet in England but trembles at my name!"

"Enough of bragging," retorted Dick. "Do your worst! Why, you swaggering guttersnipe——"

Sweeny spat out an oath and smote Dick across the face with all his force, leaving a livid mark upon the young highwayman's cheek and lips.

Dick said nothing, but his eyes glared defiantly, and Sweeny turned to his men.

"Now to our sport, lads! What shall it be—the fire or the little knife?"

"The fire, captain!" cried half a dozen voices. "'Tis a cold night, and we shall warm ourselves round it while he grills!"

"Here is a post that will serve for a

roasting-jack," said a long, lean rascal, who was plainly Sweeny's lieutenant. "See, it is already driven into the ground."

"Well said, Jack!" cried Sweeny. "Take the whelp and bind him fast against it. By the plague, we will soon wring different music from that tongue of his!"

Laughing brutally, they dragged Dick to the cattle-post in the centre of the barn, and bound him to it so tightly that the cords cut into his wrists and ankles. But the boy gave no sign of fear.

"Bring up those bales of straw and gorse," ordered Sweeny. "Pile them about him—not too thickly, for we do not want too fierce a heat at first. The night is long, and the sport would last us an hour or two."

They made a cross-pile of sheaves round Dick, who looked straight before him, and whose face was motionless as if it had been carved in wood.

Yet his wits were working swiftly. Half a score of plans occurred to him, but he saw no way out. The footpad captain was not fool enough to let himself be tricked of his prey, now he had him tight.

"They mean to burn me," thought Dick, "and I see no help but to suffer it with what fortitude I may. 'Tis an end of me at last. Heaven give me strength to bear it like a man, for to show fear before such riff-raff as these would be shame too bitter!"

He groaned inwardly at his folly for letting himself be tricked. Yet the trap was a clever one, and well set. It showed a deep knowledge of Dick's ways, for the alleged wrongs of the "old man" by the roadside was a certain bait to draw the young highwayman into a trap. Dick had not dreamed that Sweeny was in the neighbourhood, nor that he was clever enough a knave to lay such a trick and work it so well.

Now the arrangements were complete, and Sweeny, lighting a torch from a barn lantern that one of the rascals carried, advanced to the pile of sheaves.

"Prepare to die!" he said, with a coarse guffaw. "You have a nimble tongue, but

HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

DICK FORRESTER, formerly a young highwayman, has been deprived of his estate and fortune by the trickery of

HECTOR FORRESTER. This is only the beginning of Dick's troubles, for he next falls foul of

CAPTAIN SWEENY, the notorious leader of a gang of footpads, and is also wanted by the King's Riders for assisting his former comrade of the road,

RICHARD TURPIN, the famous highwayman, to escape capture. Dick is forced to become an outlaw, and he and Turpin ride off together. They are pursued by Riders, but make their escape after a fierce fight. Turpin goes off on a mission, arranging to meet Dick three days later. Dick helps an old man on the roadside, only to find it is a trap. Lured to a lonely hut on the moors, he is made a prisoner.

(Now read on.)

it will grow far nimbler when the flames take hold!"

The Flood!

SWEENY stooped to apply the torch, but raised himself again and looked into Dick's face.

"Wait," he said. "I will give you one chance. 'Twill deprive us of some sport, but I am always willing to exchange a ruby for a diamond. Since you took the roads again you have been riding with Turpin."

Dick made no reply.

"I have a longer score against him than against any man in Britain, and, I confess it, he has the strangest luck. So far, he has slipped through my fingers."

Dick laughed scornfully.

"Ay, and always will, until one day you will fail to slip through his."

"Bah!" said the footpad. "Not he, nor fifty like him, will turn me from my path. But I own I have found him troublesome. It has come to my knowledge that you are the only one he trusts. Now, you may buy your release from the flames if you will tell me where he is and help to bring him into my hands."

"You may set your torch to the pile," returned Dick fiercely and without hesitation. "It is not our custom on the road to sell each other. As for Turpin, he is out of your reach, and lucky is it for you. Were he to appear in that doorway, with his double pistols cocked, there would be a rare rush of footpads for the window!"

Captain Sweeny swore softly to himself.

"He has chosen the roasting; so much the better sport for us. There is one more thing. Jack, do you search him for his black velvet mask and clap it upon his face. He boasted that, though I might beat Forrester of Fernhall, Galloping Dick was too much for me, so it is as Galloping Dick he shall die. Search, man! It should be in the fob of his jacket."

The lieutenant of the gang put his hand inside Dick's laced coat, and drew out the young highwayman's mask. He fixed it roughly on Dick's face, slipping the band behind his head. The footpads laughed loudly and triumphantly.

Sweeny bent down. He thrust the torch to the bales of straw and furze. The flame caught, and blazed up with a crackle and a flare.

"Gather round, lads! Warm yourselves at the blaze, an' Galloping Dick shall sing you to sleep!" cried Sweeny.

The men gathered round, flinging taunts at the prisoner. The flames took fierce hold of the bales, and volumes of

sparks and smoke arose, but as yet the fire did not reach Dick.

A high wind was roaring overhead, and the long-gathering storm had burst at last. The thunder crashed and rolled, and torrents of rain swept in through the open roof, but no rain could now put out the fiercely burning straw and furze.

The storm howled and the thunder-claps echoed like great guns down the narrow valley. The fury of the elements seemed a fitting accompaniment to the tragic end of the young highwayman's life.

A smother of curling smoke rose from the dampened straw, causing Dick to gasp and fight for breath. Sweeny's voice rang out above the roar of the wind that raged round the hut.

"Pull the damp bales away; they will not serve. We do not want the whelp choked with smoke before the fire reaches him! Cast on dryer sheaves from the far end of the barn."

The smoking bales were pulled away and dryer ones cast on. These took flame at once, and Dick felt the full heat of the fire mount up to him and grip his body.

In a few moments the flames would have him for their own. Dick set his teeth and dug his nails into his palms. Through the glow of the fire he saw Sweeny's evil face, gloating upon him with greedy eyes; saw the hulking forms of the ruffians lying round the blaze, watching him cynically. He wondered if, when the agony gripped him, he could still keep his tongue between his teeth, and die silently, like a Forrester.

He felt the skirts of his riding-coat catch the flames, which licked up with increasing fury. Dazed and fighting for breath, he was still conscious of the storm that raged and thundered overhead.

A dull roaring was heard in the distance, growing nearer, fast as a galloping horse. The men round the fire rose to their feet apprehensively. Within a few moments the floor was a foot deep in water, which seemed to rise from nowhere, running swiftly from end to end of the hut.

Still the fire blazed, but the distant roar became louder. Oaths and shouts arose among the footpads.

"A cloud-burst up in the hills!" shouted Sweeny. "The valley's flooded! Run for the high ground!"

Before a man could reach the door, the walls of the hut shook, collapsed, and were borne down before a great torrent of water. It swept out the fire with a hiss and a rush, and Dick gave a wild

heartfelt cry of relief as the cold flood enveloped him.

But his joy was short-lived. The hut had collapsed; the footpads were swept off their feet and swirled along on the roaring waters, crying and cursing aloud as they were borne away. Sweeny's voice called hoarsely on his men to save him, but none answered—each was fighting for his life.

Saved from the fire, Dick found himself sacrificed to a quicker death. Bound to the stake, helpless and immovable, the flood claimed him for its victim. It surged and roared deep over his head, inky darkness enveloped him.

Subconsciously Dick realised that the end was near. The flood water had saved him from a terrible fate, only to plunge him into another. But the spirit to live is strong within everyone. A hundred thoughts seemed to flash through his brain in those brief seconds, but, helpless, he could only struggle like a tethered colt.

He had taken a deep breath as the flood enveloped him. Now the water was over him, and he believed his end had come at last.

Suddenly he felt himself sway forward.

A ray of hope shot through him. The post was moving! Already loosened in its foundations by the water, the tremendous pressure of the racing torrent was tearing it from its hold. Dick felt as if his lungs must burst for want of breath, but he made a mighty effort, and flung all his weight forward. The stake was suddenly wrenched free.

Post and prisoner shot to the surface, and Dick drew in a deep, gasping breath. He caught a glimpse of the dark sky and the flicker of the lightning. It seemed as if he were suddenly cast up from the dead world into the land of the living again.

Over and over he rolled, whirled along on the breast of the torrent, now drawing deep breaths, now spluttering in the water. The valley widened, and the flood became calmer and less foaming, but still Dick was swept along at a giddy speed.

He blessed the post to which he was bound, for in his exhausted state he would never have kept up in that raging flood without it. A little while before it had held him to meet his death, but now it acted as a lifebuoy, and kept him above water. He floated along on his side, the wooden baulk bound to his back. For the moment, at least, his life was saved.

"Am I going to get out of this alive?"

he thought. "Has Sweeny been cheated of his prey for once?"

The cold was gripping him to the marrow, and he felt numb and helpless. The black velvet mask was gone; it had been washed from his face by the water. When he had first come to the surface he heard faint cries and shouts echoing through the darkness, doubtless from Sweeny's men. But now all was still.

Gradually the young outlaw felt his senses leave him. A numb, sleepy feeling grew upon his brain; it seemed as if an icy hand were laid upon his heart. The on-sweeping torrent, strengthening, rolled him over and over; his head struck against a spur of rock, and he knew no more!

Dick's Dilemma!

DICK'S first impression upon regaining consciousness was a strong burning in his throat. He coughed violently, and opened his eyes.

"Are ye better?" said a gruff voice. "Take another nip."

A second dose of raw, rasping spirit was poured down Dick's throat. It scorched him like liquid fire, but it made the blood pulsate quicker in his veins.

Now he was able to look round and take stock of his surroundings. He saw that he was in a rocky cave, dimly lit, yet strangely warm and close. Bending over him was a man with a swarthy, ill-shaven face. The man held a tin pannikin in his hand, which he made to put to Dick's lips again.

"Hold, friend!" gasped Dick. "I thank you from my heart, but that liquor of yours has done its work."

"Ay, thou'll do now," said the man, putting away the pannikin. He squatted down in front of Dick, and fixing a pair of surly, penetrating eyes upon the young highwayman, stared at him for some time without saying a word.

Dick, feeling much revived, sat up and made a more complete survey of his surroundings. He was in a large, low cavern with rocky walls and roof, and a floor which sloped down towards a narrower tunnel which looked like the entrance.

A charcoal fire, giving no smoke, was burning on a large open hearth, and over it was a great iron tripod. In one part of the cave were three large iron vessels, several tubs, and a number of wide metal pipes, mixed up with other gear. At the upper end stood a vessel like an enormous flat butter-tub with a lid big enough to hold a couple of men. A strong, drowsy smell filled the place.

The man watched carefully as Dick glanced round. The young outlaw was puzzled, and, finding his voice, he turned to the man.

"How did I come here?" he asked.

"I found tha' floatin' down on t' flood-water, tied to a bank, an' I pulled thee out an' browt thee in here," said the man, scanning Dick from top to toe.

All the events of the night came back to Dick with a rush.

"Then I owe you my life," he said. "You will find me grateful, and I will find means to do you as good a turn as you have done me. I never forget a service."

He took another glance round the large cavern, for he was still puzzled as to the nature of his surroundings; and the dangers of his calling made it necessary that he should always know where he was and with whom he was dealing.

"Where am I?" he asked. "What place is this?"

The man's eyes grew cunning.

"If tha' doesn't know, tha'll do well enow wi'out tellin'," he replied grimly. "Don't seek to learn too much, an' tha'll find it healthier."

Dick's suspicions were aroused at this, and one more look round confirmed them. He had the key to the mystery now.

He was in an illicit "still"—a hiding-place in the wolds where "potheen" and raw spirits were made to supply the

drinking dens on the moorland roads, and to cheat the King's Customs.

Dick thought it no very savoury trade, and he knew what a low reputation the men who worked it bore.

"A mighty dark spot I've fallen into," thought the young outlaw. "However, 'tis no affair of mine, and the man saved my life."

"How shall I repay you for what you have done, friend?" inquired Dick. "Is there aught I can do for you?"

"I'll tak' whatever price tha' sets on tha'self," said the man.

Rather relieved that it was only a question of money, Dick felt in his pockets. But his purse was in the left holster of his saddle, as was Dick's custom to carry it on a long ride, and where Black Satan was the boy did not know.

"I fear for the moment I have no money," he said; "but you shall not lose by that."

Instantly the still-keeper's attitude changed. He regarded Dick with glowering eyes.

"So tha' hast no money—eh?" he snarled, and now there was a threat in his voice which boded ill for the young outlaw!

(Dick is obviously in another tight corner. Dramatic developments take place in next Wednesday's absorbing chapters of this magnificent serial. Place an order with your newsagent for next week's issue of the Old Paper now!)

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