



By K. E. HOWARTH.

CHAPTER I.

"If ever I distinguish myself, it shall be by doing or inventing something absolutely unique—entirely my own affair, so that no one can meddle, or share, or anything." Thus announced Tom Factor, as he lay on his back in a meadow, gazing up into the sky.

"Not particularly sociable, or generous, that," remarked his next neighbour, Will Tweedie.

"That selfishness," added the small Jerry Bouncer, sentimentally, "would recoil on your head, and you would repent it in your old age."

"You, my son, will repent scoffing in your youth," returned Factor, rolling over and regaining his feet. "Let us come on and explore 'this picturesque Surrey village,' ere we go back to the Five Bells for supper."

Our three heroes were enjoying the early hours of a three days' exeat from school, and had arranged a bicycle tour through the district of Surrey nearest to them.

They had already ridden half the distance, and on arriving at a remote village which took their fancy, as well as in view of a rising bank of dark thunder-cloud, they decided to spend their first night there, and meanwhile, make some explorations on foot as long as the coming storm held off.

"Do let us go back over the bridge to that forsaken old place balancing itself along the roadside," said Jerry. "There *must* be ghosts there, even by daylight."

The old house which had excited the boys' curiosity, certainly had very much the appearance of balancing itself, for the walls bulged here and there, and at one end, a gap showed where a chimney had fallen. Moreover, a man hanging round, whom they questioned,

informed them that it had been an inn, in the old coaching days; but now that the bridge was not strong enough for heavier traffic, and the railway station was in another part of the town, this road had only become a side lane, and the wide rambling premises, too large for a dwelling, stood empty, with doors and windows boarded up; and it *had* its ghosts, he added. Two of them. Before being an inn, it was a monastery, and two monks still lingered in their earthly home. Why, or wherefore, history could not say, or tradition either.

A wide platform of stone flags, grass-grown between the joints, extended along the front. The principal entrance showed some remains of decorative stone-work, and was closed by a pair of wide rickety doors, one fastened up with boards and nails, and the other partly unhinged, leaned back into the building.

The air now became more and more oppressive, and distant rumblings made themselves heard. The "native," as Jerry called him, retreated up the road towards the village, and the boys stood back under a high brick wall just opposite the building.

"Let's make a rush in at that door," suggested Tweedie. "There's an archway inside, and we shall be in shelter."

They did so, and found that the archway led into a large quadrangle, beyond.

"We'll remain here," said Jerry, "and sit on our heels. It's dry at all events, and—what on earth is that?"

In the midst of the evening stillness there suddenly burst upon the ears of the astonished lads, a sharp rattling roar as of dynamite blasting; so close overhead, that they rushed and gazed up at the space of sky over the quadrangle. Almost over them, they beheld