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ST. FRANK'S IN LONDON

Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, introducing NELSON LEE and NIPPER and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "The Sea of Doom," "Alexis the Mysterious," "The Great Fire at St. Frank's," etc. *Sept.* 13, 1919.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

SOMEWHAT CROWDED!

McCLURE, of the Remove, frowned.

"There's no sense in making a fuss, Handy," he said bluntly.

"Well, I don't like it," declared Handforth. "I'm an easy chap to get on with, as a rule, but when we've got three other fellows pushed into our study, I consider the limit has been passed!"

"But it's only temporary."

"Very likely," said Handforth grimly. "But I don't see why we should stand it. I wouldn't have minded if we had had decent fellows dumped in here, but Holroyd and Munroe and Cobb are three of the worst rotters in the College House."

"There isn't any College House now," remarked Church.

"Well, you know what I mean!" growled Handforth. "Holroyd isn't so bad, and Munroe might be worse. But Cobb makes me sick. The swanky ass deserves to have his big nose punched three times a day, and yet I can't touch him because he's a guest. It's fairly sickening!"

Church and McClure grinned.

"If you think it's funny, I don't," roared Handforth.

"It'll soon be over," said Church soothingly. "We shall all be moving away from St. Frank's within a week—so what's the good of making a song? It's a tight fit for six of us in this study, I'll admit, but the poor chaps haven't anywhere else to go——"

"What about Study C next door?"

"Christine and Talmadge and Yorke are in there" said McClure.

"Oh, well!" grunted Handforth. "I'm fed up!"

These grumbles on the part of Edward Oswald Handforth were not taken seriously by his faithful chums. Handforth was always grumbling. Church and McClure would think that he was ill if he didn't grumble

Holroyd and Munroe and Cobb, of the College House, were not exactly the pick of the Remove, and there was some slight cause for Handforth's heated words. But, as McClure had said, there was no sense in making a fuss. The situation was not likely to last for long.

The Ancient House at St. Frank's, to tell the truth, was packed to suffocation; it was considerably overcrowded. An invasion had occurred. Senior studies and junior studies fared the same. All were crowded out. We could hardly squash past one another in the passages.

Not that I minded much. I knew that there would soon be an alteration. The simple fact was that the whole personnel of the College House had been dumped, without notice, into the Ancient House. And, naturally, we were feeling not only cramped, but positively sardine-like.

It wasn't fair to blame the Monks—they couldn't help it. The College House, so stately and magnificent three days earlier, was now nothing but a shell—a shell consisting of four blackened, blistered walls.

There had been a great fire at St. Frank's.

The College House had been gutted—burned to the ground.

Only the bare walls were left standing. Studies, bedrooms, dormitories—all had vanished in the furnace of heat. It had been a terrific fire, and even now the ruins were sullenly smouldering.

Fortunately, the blaze had been confined to the College House. The other buildings of St. Frank's had not been affected.

And the Monks, homeless, had been dumped upon us in the Ancient House. They had to be somewhere, but everybody admitted that the overcrowding was uncomfortable, and that it couldn't last for long.

The fire had been no accident.

It had been caused deliberately—by a fellow who rejoiced in the name of Titus

Alexis. He was a Greek, and, to everybody's relief, he was no longer at St. Frank's.

He had come to the school at the beginning of the term; and he had got himself into trouble on his very first day. He seemed to hate everything English, and he made the fatal mistake of expressing his views freely.

Naturally, the fellows didn't like it, and Master Titus found himself in the wrong box. He possessed a frightful temper, and when he was aroused he was like a wild beast.

The masters could do nothing with him; even Nelson Lee found it impossible to quell the Greek junior's rebellious spirit. The climax had come after I had received a flogging at Alexis' hands.

Taking advantage of the fact that I had been "ragged," and that I was bound hand and foot, Alexis had slashed me with a cane until my back resembled a chunk of raw meat. Fullwood and Co. were responsible for the jape which had placed me in such a bad position; but the Nuts had had no evil intentions.

Of course it all came out, and Titus Alexis was flogged before the whole school. The noise he created was appalling, and every fellow in the two houses at St. Frank's decided to bar the cad completely.

The Greek junior's enmity had been turned against Dr. Stafford and the great fire was the result. Alexis had soaked the College House cellars with petrol and oil, and he had set light to it at dead of night.

Only by extremely prompt action had everybody been saved. And Alexis, after attempting to throw himself into the flames, had been rescued by Nelson Lee. The fellow had left the school now, and he would never return. But his father would probably be required to foot a formidable bill.

And that was the situation.

With their own House burned out, the Monks were obliged to seek shelter in the Ancient House. Such a state of affairs could not last, for we were falling over one another all day long.

It had been announced, however, that a change was to come very soon. Dr. Stafford himself had told the school that St. Frank's was to be transferred very shortly to London—the whole caboodle, so to speak.

To London!

That's all we knew at the moment; but it was enough to make everybody eager and excited. A large number of fellows openly rejoiced over the fact that the College House had been burned down.

And while we were all in London, it seemed, the College House was to be rebuilt, and numerous alterations and improvements were to be made in the Ancient House. I knew for a fact that Nelson Lee was mainly responsible for the idea. He had prevailed upon the governors to adopt his suggestions.

The governors were a prize collection of old fossils—that is how they were described by the juniors. And certainly those staid, elderly gentlemen had often proved themselves to be narrow-minded and pig-headed.

I happened to meet Nelson Lee in the Triangle after morning lessons, on the third day after the fire. And I came to a halt.

"Hallo, guv'nor!" I said cheerfully. "Any news yet?"

"About what, Nipper?"

"Going to London, of course."

"There is nothing that I can tell you——"

"Oh, rot, sir!" I protested. "It was your giddy idea, and you know everything. Where shall we go to in London? What sort of a shanty shall we find——"

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I repeat, Nipper, that I have nothing to tell you," he said. "The arrangements have not yet been completed, and until they are completed, it is impossible for me to give you any details. You must be patient."

"But look here, sir——"

"My dear lad, you needn't try to pump me!" chuckled the guv'nor. "You will know the details when the Head announces them, but not before."

"Oh, all right!" I growled. "If you don't mean to tell me, there's an end to it. But I don't think it's very sporting of you, sir."

"I am deeply sorry," said the guv'nor gravely.

"You're about as sorry as my boots!" I exclaimed. "And what about Alexis? I suppose you'll tell me about him, sir?"

"What do you want to know about Alexis?"

"Well, guv'nor, he caused the fire, didn't he?" I asked.

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Alexis undoubtedly committed arson," he said. "But the lad is too young to be prosecuted, Nipper, and he has gone from St. Frank's for good. It is really of no interest to us what is done in the way of coming to some settlement. Do not worry your head on the subject."

"I'm not exactly worrying, sir," I said. "But a few days ago you mentioned to me that the school governors were inclined to accuse the Head of carelessness. They hold him responsible for the fire."

The guv'nor looked rather grave.

"Yes, Nipper, I am deeply afraid that there will be some trouble on this question," he said. "The governors are mad to bring any accusation whatever against Dr. Stafford."

"You don't mean to say they accuse him, sir?" I asked aghast.

"The Head is held responsible for the safety of the school, and some of the governors are of the opinion that Dr. Stafford was not sufficiently wide awake. However, we need not discuss the matter now, my boy. And please do not say anything to the other juniors."

The guv'nor walked away while I was still pondering. I knew well enough that the governors were old fashioned and out of date. But it seemed to me grossly unfair that they should suspect the Head of carelessness and neglect.

Meanwhile, the squashing in the Ancient House junior studies continued.

Tea was rather a trying meal. For it is decidedly difficult for six juniors to gather in comfort round a small table which is constructed for the accommodation of two only. There was also an appalling shortage of crockery and cutlery. But, as Handforth pointed out, it wasn't necessary for all the fellows to take tea in the studies. In fact, Handforth plainly stated that it was up to the Monks to have their tea in Hall, and so alleviate the congestion.

"There's no sense in going on like this," said Handforth firmly. "Even if it's only for a few days, we can't be all squashed in here like pilchards in a tin! And at teatime it's particularly off-side."

"Are you suggesting that we should clear out?" demanded Cobb warmly.

"Oh, no!" said Handforth. "Not at all!"

"Because, if it comes to that," said Cobb, "I don't see any reason why you shouldn't clear out, if you're so particular about it."

Handforth stared.

"You—you burbling lunatic!" he roared.

"What the dickens——"

"Do you think we're going to clear out of our own study?" roared Handforth.

"My dear chap, this is our study," said Cobb calmly. "This study belongs to Holroyd, Munroe, and me."

Handforth clutched at the table.

"It—it belongs to you and Munroe and Holroyd!" he gasped.

"Exactly!"

"And where do we come in?" inquired McClure politely.

"You happened to be here when we arrived, and as we're not bad sorts, we didn't think it necessary to turn you out," explained Cobb. "As long as you're well behaved we're willing to let you stay on."

"That's the idea!" chuckled Holroyd.

"But, of course," said Cobb, "if there's any nonsense, well—the kick-out"

Handforth thought he was dreaming.

He rose to his feet and he commenced to roll up his coat sleeves. There was no mistaking his intentions.

"We'll see who's the owner of this study!" he shouted. "By George! I'll show you what——"

"Steady on!" grinned McClure.

"What!"

"Don't be an ass, Handy!"

"Are you suggesting that we should submit to this terrific nerve?" demanded Handforth, glaring ferociously at his chums. "Why, for two pins I'd slaughter——"

"But, my dear ass, they're only pulling your leg!" grinned McClure.

"Eh?"

"That's all," put in Church. "Couldn't you see that, Handy? They were only rotting!"

"Of course!" chuckled Cobb. "We thought we'd chip you a bit, Handy. We're all lumped together in these studies, and there doesn't seem to be any other way out of it, so what's the good of growling?"

"You silly asses!" bellowed Handforth

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Under the circumstances Handforth could not very well proceed with his plan of slaughtering the invaders on the spot. And tea in Study D progressed as amiably as possible under the circumstances.

The juniors need not have been concerned, however. A change was very shortly to come about.

And Dr. Stafford had another announcement to make, too.

CHAPTER II.

THE HEAD'S ANNOUNCEMENT.

THE great moment had arrived.

Big Hall was packed to suffocation. The school had been called together immediately after morning lessons—on the day following. Everybody knew that something was in the wind.

All thoughts of the ruined College House were cast aside. There was something new to be discussed and arranged. The fellows only knew that St. Frank's was to be removed to London.

Details were absolutely lacking, and it was details they required.

Dr. Stafford, as everybody believed, was now about to explain the whole matter fully and clearly. So Big Hall was packed; there was not a single absentee. Seniors and juniors were in their places to a man.

The Head appeared on the raised dais, and a cheer at once went up. The Head was extremely popular with all the boys, and that cheer was rather one of sympathy for Dr. Stafford was looking haggard and worried. He seemed to take the burning of the College House very much to heart.

The Monks themselves had been rather upset to begin with; but when they learned that they were to be transferred to London in consequence of the fire, they were secretly pleased over the whole affair.

For, as Bob Christine said, they would not only get a change in London, but when they returned, St. Frank's would be a new place: great improvements would be made, and all sorts of additions would be found for the comfort of the boys. So the great fire came to be regarded as something of a blessing.

The juniors could not quite understand why the Head was looking so worried.

"Well, boys, I am facing you once again," said Dr. Stafford. "I promised you a few days ago that I would have a further announcement to make. I told you then that St. Frank's was to be removed to London in its entirety. I am pleased to add that the

arrangements have now been fully completed."

"Hurrah!"

"I am aware that life is rather uncomfortable under the present conditions," continued the Head. "The Ancient House was already full before the fire, and it is extremely embarrassing for all of you to live in such close quarters. Three or four hundred boys have been added to an already filled House, and such a state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue.

"Therefore, the school governors have decided to seize this opportunity to make certain alterations in the school while the College House is being rebuilt. During that period, you will all receive your education in London."

"Oh, good!"

"Where shall we be, sir?"

"If you will remain silent, I will explain," continued the Head. "The exact locality of your new quarters is almost in the heart of London—in short, just off Holborn itself, and in the thick of the City's traffic."

"Oh!"

"Right in the giddy City!"

"We'll have some ripping times!"

"Rather!"

"And off Holborn, too," I murmured, with sparkling eyes. "Why, dash it all, we shall only be a few minutes' walk off the guv'nor's place in Gray's Inn Road. Perhaps the guv'nor and I will be living at home!"

"Begad! That'll be rippin'!" said Tregellis-West.

"Silence!" shouted Morrow of the Sixth.

The burst of excitement died down somewhat, and the Head proceeded.

"There will be no question of overcrowding when you arrive in London," he exclaimed. "The premises which have been secured are roomy and of ample proportions; they are capable of accommodating every boy, with plenty of room to spare. You will wonder what this building is?"

"Yes, rather, sir!"

"Well, years ago it was a very famous school, known as the Turret College," said the Headmaster. "Owing to bad management, it fell upon evil days, and at length it closed down, a dead failure. For a good many years the place remained utterly neglected and forlorn.

"But just before the war an enterprising gentleman purchased the property outright, and it was his intention to re-open the school on modern lines. The whole building was redecorated from roof to cellar. Electric light was installed, and every modern improvement made.

"But, sadly enough, the gentleman I have referred to lost his life during the war in one of the numerous air-raids which London experienced so badly. His trustees were not in favour of continuing the project, and at the present moment that great building tucked away behind Holborn is still vacant.

"It is useful only as a school, and the idea of removing St. Frank's to London was the original suggestion of Mr. Nelson Lee ——"

"Three cheers for Mr. Lee!"

"Hurrah!"

"You really must allow me to finish, boys," smiled the Head. "You see, Mr. Lee has his own property almost within a stone's throw of this school, and he knew the whole history of the place. When, therefore, the College House was burnt down, Mr. Lee naturally thought of the Turret College as a likely spot for the temporary housing of you all."

"Hurrah!"

"Originally it was suggested that the College House boys alone should be removed to London," continued the Head. "But it is far better that you should all go—that the school should be maintained intact."

"Rather, sir."

"It is hoped that St. Frank's will be ready for occupation by the commencement of the new term," continued Dr. Stafford. "You will all be conveyed to London on Monday next—that is to say, in four days' time."

"Hurrah!"

"The day will be a whole holiday——"

"Hurrah!"

Everybody yelled, and the juniors fairly let themselves go.

The Head smiled as he waited.

"It seems to me that you are not exceedingly grieved over the disaster, which has befallen our old school," he said severely. "On the contrary, I suspect that the majority of you are secretly glad."

"There's not much secret about it, sir," shouted Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you do not worry yourselves as we elderly folk do," went on the Head, with that personal note which so endeared him to his boys. "It will be a change for you, and I hope you will enjoy yourselves. Under the headmastership of Mr. Howard Martin, I wish you every success while you are in London."

The whole school caught its breath in, and stared.

"Aren't you coming, sir?" asked Fenton, amid a deadly silence.

"No, my boy—I'm afraid not," said the Head gravely.

"Oh, sir!"

It was a general exclamation of dismay, and the Head turned slightly paler, and I saw him clutch at the lapel of his coat. There was no mistaking the tone of that "Oh, sir!" The boys were genuinely disappointed.

"But I don't understand, sir," exclaimed the captain of St. Frank's. "Mr. Lee is coming, isn't he?"

"Yes—and all the other masters, also."

"Then why won't you be with us, sir?"

Dr. Stafford coughed.

"I should like to be with you, Fenton—I should like to be with all of you," he said in a low voice. "Perhaps I'd better make a brief statement on the subject at once, because I really feel that you will be interested. The governors have decided that an inquiry must be held regarding the origin of the

disastrous fire which destroyed the College House."

"But it was Alexis who did that, sir!"

"Of course it was, sir!"

"We are all aware of that, my lads," continued the Head. "But I am the Headmaster of this school, and, in that position, I am responsible for the safety of you all, and for the safety of the property itself. So, under the circumstances, the governors have come to the conclusion that it will be advisable for you to have another headmaster while you are in London—pending the inquiry."

"Oh, sir!"

"So I will take this opportunity to say good-bye——"

"Not good-bye, sir!"

"Well, we will say au revoir," went on the Headmaster, with a faint smile. "I may not address you all again in this manner before you leave. So, my dear boys, I hope that you will enjoy your sojourn in London; and I hope, also, that I shall continue to rule over you when the new St. Frank's is ready. Dismiss!"

That word was the signal for a tremendous uproar.

Not only the juniors, but the seniors let themselves go with a vengeance. The cheers which went up seemed likely to shake the rafters loose. The Head's popularity had never before been so apparent.

"Three cheers for Dr. Stafford!"

"Hip, hip——"

"Hurrah!"

"We want him in London!"

"We won't go to London without him!"

"Hurrah!"

"Down with the governors!"

"Booh!"

"Three groans for the governors!"

The groans were delivered with extraordinary vehemence, and as somebody called for cheers for the Head at the same time, the effect was somewhat startling. The crowds surged out into the Triangle, and meetings were held on the spot.

The Head, quite unconsciously, had set a spark to a fuse which was likely to lead to a very big explosion in the near future. Dr. Stafford had no idea that his few words of farewell would have such a tremendous effect.

I was in the midst of the swaying crowd of Removites. Fellows were urging me to make a speech; but at the moment I was listening to Handforth. Edward Oswald, an ass on most occasions, generally came to the top in a matter of this kind.

"We won't stand it!" he roared indignantly. "Are we going to submit to the decision of a lot of mummified old jossers like the governors?"

"No!" howled the crowd.

"Are we going to submit to the dotty ideas of an antidiluvian set of fossils?" shouted Handforth. "The Head's got to come with us, or we don't go at all! Now is the time to take up a firm stand!"

"Hear, hear!"

"It's an absolute disgrace—"

"Rather!"

"It's a shame——"

"Good!"

"Am I going to speak or not?" bawled Handforth, glaring.

"Go it, old son!"

"On the ball!"

"It's a disgrace and a shame that the Head should be suspended from his duties because of this fire," went on Handforth, his voice filled with wrath. "The governors hold him responsible for the fire——"

"The rotters!"

"And they've practically given the dear old Head the sack!" shouted Handforth. "There's an inquiry going to be held—an inquiry, mark you. Why we're as bad as a giddy Government office!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to laugh at!" thundered Handforth. "I suggest that we all rise in a body, that we all weld ourselves together, and refuse to leave St. Frank's until the governors agree to let the Head go with us!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good!"

"In a case like this we must act promptly and decisively," shouted Handforth, warming to his work. "There's no sense in talking only! Listen to the Fifth Form chaps over there——"

"How can we?" demanded Pitt.

"Eh?"

"How can we listen when your voice is filling the air with unmusical noises?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Listen to the Fifth, I say!" roared Handforth. "Listen to the Sixth—to the Third, even! They're all talking and shouting—they're all indignant and angry about the way the Head's being treated——"

"Shame!"

"The governors ought to be kicked——"

"Hear, hear!"

"It's a sin to hold the dear old Head responsible for what that beast Alexis did," continued Edward Oswald. "Everybody with a grain of sense knows that that Greek cad fired the College House!"

"Even you know it!" said De Valerie.

"Of course I do!" shouted Handforth.

"And you've only got half a grain!" grinned De Valerie.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth glared.

"I appeal to you!" he bawled. "Is this a time for rotting?"

"No!"

"I agree with Handy," I shouted, joining in. "This is a serious matter, and we needn't joke about it——"

"Speech! Speech!"

"Go it, Nipper!"

"Look here——" thundered Handforth, glaring round. "I was saying——"

"Shut up!"

"Let Nipper speak!"

"Good!"

"There's not very much to say," I shouted. "We all know the facts. The Head has been suspended from duty—it practically

amounts to that—until an inquiry has been made into the cause of the fire!"

"Shame!"

"It is a shame," I agreed. "But you have all overlooked the fact that a Board of Governors is not a piece of machinery which is calculated to act sensibly or reasonably. A Board of Governors is something like a Town Council——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or a Government——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is chiefly for looks," I went on. "When it comes to action they generally act the wrong way. Public opinion is necessary to force a government to perform an action which ought to be performed without any fuss at all."

"Hear, hear!"

"Just the same as St. Frank's," I declared. "The governors have acted foolishly, and public opinion will compel them to withdraw their orders, and to make new ones. We're the public, and it's up to us to get to work."

"Hurrah!"

"That's exactly what I was going to say!" roared Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can grin all you like!" snorted Edward Oswald. "I know what I'm saying, and I know what's right. Personally, I shall refuse to budge from St. Frank's until the governors decide to withdraw their rotten orders!"

"They'll have to give in, of course," said Pitt solemnly. "They couldn't stick out after you made that terrible threat——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We've all got to refuse!" yelled Handforth. "Don't you understand? It's no good a few of us doing it. We must amalgamate—we must become one solid block!"

"Like your head?" asked Pitt politely.

"Exactly!" roared Handforth. "Like my head—— I—I mean—— You silly idiot——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth glared round, his face rather red.

"If you can't help being funny, Reginald Pitt, you'd better clear off!" he roared wrathfully. "As I said before, this is a serious matter. The idea is to get up a round robin——"

"A which?"

"Don't you know what a round robin is?" demanded Handforth testily. "It's a protest, signed by everybody—all the names are put in a circle, so that there won't be any prominence to any particular name. But we needn't do that—there's no need. Our round robin will be a petition, and everybody's got to sign."

"Hear, hear!"

"We're game!"

"Who's the petition to?"

"The Chairman of the Governing Board, Sir Rupert Manderley," said Handforth. "I used to think that Sir Rupert was a decent old bird, but——"

"Hold on," I interrupted.

"Oh, don't chip in now, Nipper——"

"Wait a minute," I said. "You've made a mistake, Handy."

"Rot!"

"Sir Rupert Manderley isn't the chairman," I declared. "Sir Rupert resigned before the beginning of this term."

"Oh!"

"How do you know?" asked Handforth suspiciously.

"Mr. Lee told me," I replied. "Is that good enough for you? Sir Rupert hasn't been very well of late, and the responsibility was too much for him. He's a fine old chap—genial, kind-hearted, and generous. He was chairman for ten years, and everything went smoothly during his time——"

"Who's chairman now?" asked Handforth.

"General Ord-Clayton."

"General which?"

"Ord-Clayton," I repeated. "I don't know much about him, except that he is a retired Army officer. It's ten to one that he's responsible for the Head's treatment. I've heard that he dominates all the other governors."

"My hat!"

"The old rotter!"

"Good!" roared Handforth. "We'll show the old idiot what we think of him! The nerve of the beast! To treat the dear old Head like this! Why, I'll tell him what I think of him when he comes!"

"And get the sack!" I put in. "You'd better be careful, Handy——"

"Rats!" shouted Handforth. "I'm not afraid. The governors—and particularly the chairman—ought to be abolished! I vote that we draw up a petition to that effect. Governors are only a nuisance!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The uproar continued. And in other parts of the Triangle other meetings were in full swing. The Third was tremendously excited. Owen minor, the leader of the fags, seemed to be doing his utmost to break his voice. And his supporters yelled continuously. Owen's speech, if not exactly oratorical, was certainly a success.

"Are we going to stand it?" shrieked Owen minor.

"No!" roared the fags.

"Are we going to stand by and see the Head trodden down?"

"No!"

"Are the governors any good?"

"No!"

"Are we going to take any action?" shrieked Owen minor.

"No!" hooted the fags loyally.

"You—you silly asses!" yelled Owen. "What do you mean by saying 'no'? Of course we're going to take action!"

"Rather!"

"Hurrah!"

"We're going to march to the Head, and we're going to take him along by force—if he can't come any other way," declared Owen minor. "That's my plan. It'll be easy enough for us to smuggle the Head up to London!"

"Good!"

Owen's suggestion was enthusiastically adopted by the fags, but the chances of the idea being carried out were extremely remote. However, the Third Formers were pleased at the moment, and little else mattered.

There was a Fifth Form indignation meetting, and this, needless to say, was of a far less noisy character, for the Fifth, as seniors, considered themselves to be above shouting and noisy demonstration.

At the same time, they forgot their dignity somewhat on this occasion, and there were a good many shouts and cheers. Even the Sixth looked serious and grave, and it was a well-known fact that the Sixth was determined to support any sensible line which the other fellows decided to take up.

The whole of St. Frank's, to tell the truth, was highly indignant with the school governors, and there was not the slightest doubt that some kind of trouble was in the wind.

CHAPTER III.

BY DEMAND OF THE SCHOOL.

TEA-TIME arrived, and the school was still in a ferment.

In fact, the excitement was increasing. The masters did not fail to observe the signs; and they knew well enough why the fellows were so indignant. The masters made no attempt to interfere. They were probably in agreement with the boys—and, in any case, interference would have made matters worse.

In Study D, Handforth was talking—as usual.

"About this round-robin," he exclaimed. "First of all, it's got to be drawn up—a really impressive petition. That's the idea. It needs a fellow like me to do it properly ——"

"Your tea's getting cold, Handy," observed McClure.

Handforth glared.

"Do you think I care about tea?" he roared.

"It looks as if you don't," said Church shortly.

"Of course, I don't!" snapped Handforth. "Tea is only for gluttons at a time like this. I'm amazed to see you chaps scoffing all that bread-and-butter—when the Head's sitting in his study, groaning with anguish!"

McClure grinned.

"I don't think the Head takes it so much to heart as all that," he remarked. "And, in any case, his troubles haven't affected my appetite——"

"You heartless rotter!"

"Oh, come off it!" said McClure. "There's nothing heartless in being hungry, I suppose? Why don't you have something to eat—instead of being so excited?"

Handforth looked dangerous.

"Who's excited?" he bellowed.

"You are!"

"Why, you—you——"

"Heard the latest?" inquired De Valerie.

"Go away!" bawled Handforth. "I'm just going to slaughter these idiots, and I don't want to be interrupted. They're eating tea——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By George!" snorted Handforth. "If you don't clear out, Cecil De Valerie, I'll chuck one of those cakes at your face!"

"Good!" said De Valerie. "We only had bread-and-butter in Study M, and those cakes look rather appetising."

"You—you funny idiot!" snorted Handforth.

"It's queer how you always call people things that are far better suited to yourself," said De Valerie calmly. "You're funny enough, Handy—and it's a matter of history that you're an idiot."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But about that news," went on De Valerie, before Handforth could speak—or act. "I heard five minutes ago from Fenton that General Ord-Clayton is due to arrive here this evening, with two other governors."

Handforth lowered his fists.

"By George!" he exclaimed, taking a deep breath.

"Just our chance," continued De Valerie. "By the time the general arrives the petition will be all drawn up and signed. We shall be able to hand it to him, and the result will be known before we go to bed."

"Fine!" said McClure.

"Rather!" agreed Handforth. "That reminds me! We shall have to buck up with that petition——"

"You needn't worry," put in De Valerie. "Everything's going on all right. The Sixth have signed to a man, and the Fifth are signing now. It'll be our turn in about twenty minutes——"

"What the dickens are you talking about?" roared Handforth.

"The round-robin, of course!"

"I know that——"

"Then what did you ask for?" asked De Valerie mildly.

"You burbling ass!" howled Handforth. "How can the Sixth and Fifth have signed the round-robin when it isn't even drawn up yet? I was just talking about it when you came in. I'm going to start on the job at once."

De Valerie grinned.

"I shouldn't trouble, if I were you," he said.

"Shouldn't trouble!" shouted Handforth. "Why, you fatheaded cuckoo, our chance has come——"

"My dear old Handforth, your great point is talking," interrupted De Valerie. "And while you've been jabbering, other fellows have been acting. The petition was drawn up an hour ago!"

Handforth stared.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "Of all the terrific nerve! Who had the cheek to do it? By George! I'm going straight away now, and I mean to punch his nose!"

"I wish you luck!" grinned De Valerie. "Fenton drew up the petition."

"Fenton!"

"Exactly—our respected school captain," said De Valerie. "If you care to punch the nose of the head prefect, I don't know what will happen to you—but it will probably be something lingering, with boiling oil in it. Good old Fenton has been jolly busy, I can tell you."

Handforth calmed down somewhat.

"It makes a difference, of course," he admitted. "Fenton, eh? Good man! Perhaps it's better that he should do the thing—I don't mind confessing that he's a better hand at that kind of game than I am. It's taken a load off my mind. But I reckon I ought to be the first fellow in the Remove to sign."

"You're welcome to that honour, as far as I am concerned," chuckled De Valerie, as he took his departure.

He went down the Remove passage, and there were considerable signs of animation. I was chatting with Morrow, of the Sixth, outside the door of Study C.

"You're skipper of the Remove," Morrow was saying to me, "and it's up to you, Nipper, to get all the fellows together."

"Rely on me," I said.

"Good!" declared Morrow. "This petition isn't merely a protest by one section of fellows—it concerns the whole school. Every boy—senior and junior—has got to sign. In fact, it's a demand from the whole school that the Head shall continue to rule over us while we're in London."

"That's the stuff!" remarked Watson, with a nod.

"Begad!" said Tregellis-West. "Rather, dear old boys. Even a fiery old fellow like General Ord-Clayton will take notice of a petition signed by the whole school. He can't do anything else, begad!"

"Hardly," agreed Morrow. "Well, I'll leave it to you, Nipper. Fenton will be round soon—he's nearly finished with the Fifth—and he'll expect you to be all ready for him in the Common-room."

There was a considerable bustle shortly afterwards. Fenton of the Sixth arrived with the petition. It was a big wad of foolscap, and there were already a very large number of names down.

The Remove signed to a man. Fullwood and Co. were not keen upon it, and they wouldn't have cared if the Head had gone away for good. But the cads of the Remove were compelled to sign—because they knew well enough that if they refused, trouble would follow.

The petition was somewhat mauled about after it left the hands of the Remove—for the fags took possession, and the latter pages of the document chiefly consisted of blots and smudges.

At last it was finished, and Fenton took charge of it. He went away to his own study, and it was generally understood that he would present the petition in person, backed by several other prefects.

The juniors, meanwhile, gathered in the Triangle—waiting for the arrival of the three governors.

"Can't be long now," remarked Christine, glancing up at the old clock. "They were due five minutes ago, I understand. Has anybody seen this general, by the way? What's he like?"

"Goodness knows," said Pitt. "I expect he's been to St. Frank's, but we don't notice everybody who comes and goes."

"Morrow's seen him," remarked Watson. "He says that General Ord-Clayton is a shrivelled-up old chap, with a face like a monkey—all lines and wrinkles. I believe he's lived abroad nearly all his life."

Handforth snorted.

"And that's the kind of chap we've got as Chairman of the Governors!" he exclaimed, with disgust. "Talk about madness——"

"Here they come!"

The shout came from the gateway, and there was an immediate rush. A great many juniors filed out into the road, others stood round the gates, but the great majority remained in the Triangle, waiting.

A big, open motor-car was coming up the lane, and seated in the rear were three elderly gentlemen. Two looked amiable enough, but the gentleman in the centre was rather formidable in appearance.

His size was not particularly imposing, for he was slim and somewhat skinny. His face, however, wore a constant expression of ferocity. It was not red, but tanned brown, and wrinkled excessively. His white eyebrows—to quote Handforth—looked like toothbrushes.

"That's the general!" shouted somebody. "Give him a groan!"

There was a tremendous response, and it occurred just as the car was entering the Triangle. General Ord-Clayton sat up in his seat with a start, and he looked round in amazement.

"Boo-o-o-oooh!"

There was no mistaking that sound, and it was repeated continuously—by hundreds of youthful voices. There was a tremendous commotion in the Triangle, and the fellows crowded round the motor-car with angry faces.

"His-s-ssss!"

The booing was followed by storms of hisses, some of the fellows were groaning, some hissing, and some booing. It was a demonstration which meant only one thing. The governors were not popular!

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed one of the old gentlemen. "This—this is surely amazing! Can it be possible that we have been mistaken for somebody else? It is scarcely conceivable that the boys would dare to greet us in this fashion deliberately!"

General Ord-Clayton compressed his lips.

"By gad!" he exclaimed. "There must be some mistake."

He stood up in the car.

"Silence!" he shouted, in a voice which was literally a bark. "Silence at once! How dare you——"

"Sit down, you old rotter!"

"Booh!"

"You're not wanted, General Ord-Clayton!"

"Yah! Go away!"

"Good gracious!" gasped the general. "This—this is outrageous! It seems to me that we were fully justified in suspending Dr. Stafford. It is apparent that he is incapable of conducting his boys——"

The rest of his words were drowned in another storm of shouting. Prefects were now appearing on the scene, and the juniors were not quite so noisy. The motor-car drew up in front of the Head's house, and General Ord-Clayton leaped out.

His face was red with anger, and his eyes were blazing.

As he entered the Head's private doorway there was another outburst of hissing, in spite of the prefects' presence. The general, without waiting for his colleagues, charged down the corridor, and burst into the Head's study.

"Outrageous!" he thundered.

Dr. Stafford, who had been standing by the window, turned with a troubled face.

"I deeply regret that this should have occurred, General Ord-Clayton," he exclaimed quietly. "If I had had any suspicion that such a demonstration was intended I should have cleared the Triangle——

"That is no excuse, sir," roared the general. "It is disgraceful—scandalous! that I, the Chairman of the Board of Governors, should be treated with such gross insolence and impertinence!"

"I am sorry——"

"Sorry be hanged, sir—sorry be hanged!" bellowed the general. "It is quite apparent that you are utterly incapable of conducting this school as it should be conducted! Sir Rupert Manderley was altogether too negligent——"

"Really, general——"

"Don't dare to argue with me, sir!" shouted the enraged chairman. "I'm extremely glad that I have had this opportunity of witnessing how you conduct the school. I have no longer any doubt with regard to the disastrous fire which destroyed the College House. It was your negligence——"

"Really, general, you must compose yourself!" exclaimed one of the other governors, who had just entered the study. "You are speaking to Dr. Stafford in language which can only be characterised as violent."

The general swallowed hard.

"You will be good enough to mind your own business!" he thundered. "It may interest you to know, Mr. Somerset, that I am the chairman——"

"We are not likely to forget that," interrupted Mr. Bertram Somerset—who was a mild, kindly old gentleman. "So far as I can see, Dr. Stafford is not to blame for the demonstration which has just occurred outside. The boys, I understand, are indignant with us."

"And why?" demanded the general.

He received his answer from an unexpected quarter.

There was a tap at the door, and Fenton of the Sixth appeared. Fenton had decided to waste no time. He was looking grim and determined, and behind him there were five other prefects.

General Ord-Clayton glared at the seniors ferociously.

"Well, what do you want?" he demanded harshly.

"We are a deputation, sir," said Fenton. "We represent the whole school—from the Sixth downwards——"

"Go away—go away!" snapped the general. "Confounded impertinence! How dare you come interrupting me now? It is amazing to me, Dr. Stafford, that you should allow these boys to behave like this! Infernal impudence!"

Fenton bit his lip.

"We have come without Dr. Stafford's knowledge, sir," he said. "Our object is to present a petition to you."

"A what?" barked the general.

"A petition, sir——"

"Let me see it, confound you."

General Ord-Clayton snatched it away from Fenton as the latter held it out, and he fished from his pocket a pair of glasses. Jamming them upon his nose, he glared at the petition with a gaze which was calculated to bore holes through it.

"Huh!" he snorted. "What's this—what's this? Drivelling nonsense, I'll be bound! Huh! Upon my soul! 'We, the undersigned, respectfully beg to submit that it will be to the interest of all if Dr. Stafford is retained in his capacity as Headmaster during the school's enforced stay in London, and we——' Good gracious me! This—this is outrageous!"

General Ord-Clayton glared at Fenton.

"You require an answer to this?" he thundered.

"Yes, sir, I do!" said Fenton grimly. "I represent everybody in the school in this matter——"

"Here is my answer to this insolent demand!" barked the general.

He took the petition in his two hands, tore it in half, and screwed the remains up into a ball. He flung it into the fireplace with a snort of anger, and then pointed to the door.

"Get outside!" he ordered harshly.

Fenton's eyes blazed.

"Am I to understand, sir, that the Board of Governors has finally rejected the request made by the whole of St. Frank's?" he asked, with deadly calmness. "Am I to understand that your word is final?"

"Yes, it is final!" roared the general. "Go!"

"Very well, sir," said Fenton. "But I should like you to understand at once that I shall accept no responsibility for the behaviour of the boys—and particularly the

junior boys. I am the head prefect, but in this particular matter I shall make no attempt to preserve order."

"How—how dare you?" bellowed the chairman.

"It is impossible for me to cope with the uproar which will commence almost at once," went on Fenton. "Let me warn you, sir, that this hasty and ill-considered action on your part will mean trouble——"

"Confound you, boy, do you want me to pitch you out of this room?" snapped the general. "If your Headmaster is incapable of dealing with you, I will show you that I am not to be trifled with!"

Fenton bowed.

"Very well," he said ominously. "I have done my best, and I have failed. You will be sorry for this before long, General Ord-Clayton."

Fenton turned and left the study, and he was followed by the other seniors. Out in the passage they gazed at one another with blazing eyes. And they all knew that there would be a great deal of trouble for General Ord-Clayton before the evening had advanced very far!

The Chairman of the Board of Governors had elected to ignore the demand which had been made by the whole school.

Very well—there would be ructions!

CHAPTER IV.

DIRECT ACTION!

"THE rotter!"

"The cad!"

"We'll half skin him!"

There were many shouts of a similar nature ringing through the old Triangle. The juniors had just learned that General Ord-Clayton had torn up the petition. And the indignation, which had been high before, rose to fever heat.

The Junior School was ablaze with anger.

Fenton had told us all about it in a few words. At first, the fellows were not ready to believe that the general had actually turned down the petition. The juniors would hardly believe their ears when Fenton made the momentous announcement.

Handforth was nearly off his head with righteous fury.

"It's—it's an outrage!" he roared. "What I want to know is this—are we going to stand any nonsense from such a rotter?"

"No!" roared the crowd.

"Something must be done!" went on Handforth. "It's no good jabbering and making a fuss. The governors have slapped us in the face—that's what it amounts to—and we've got to show them that we're capable of hitting back!"

"Hurrah!"

I stepped forward.

"Look here," I said grimly. "It's no good wasting a lot of time in having a row out here. The situation is serious. Unless something is done—and done quickly—we sha'n't have the Head with us while we're in London—"

"Shame!"

"It seems to me that General Ord-Clayton has got the idea in his head that he can dictate to the whole school just as he likes. The time has come for direct action—it's no good attempting to argue the matter out."

"But what can we do?" asked Pitt.

"The general will be leaving before long," I said grimly. "Talking to him is as much good as talking to a gate-post. But if we show him that we're in no mood for nonsense, he'll probably think in a different strain."

"We'll scalp him!"

"We'll duck him in the fountain!"

"Hear, hear!"

"It's all very well to talk like that," I went on. "You mustn't forget that he's the Chairman of the Governors, and it might mean the sack for the ringleaders——"

"I'm game to risk it!" roared Handforth.

"Same here!" said Pitt.

"We're all in it together!"

"And don't get too wild," I warned. "We've simply got to show the general that we're determined, that's all. There's no need to scalp him, or duck him. All he needs is a good scare—and he'll get that sure enough."

If the feelings of the Removites were high, they were no different from those of the other Forms. The Third was seething with indignation; the Fifth was furious; and the Sixth Form fellows looked really dangerous.

This was no ordinary matter. It was not merely a question of one section of boys; the whole school had signed that petition, and it had been rejected—contemptuously, and without consideration.

The school was in no mood for that kind of treatment.

Fenton did not interfere in the slightest; he had no intention of taking a hand in any disturbance, but he gave no orders to the juniors. He would have been false to himself if he had told the fellows to let the thing drop.

In the prefects' room there was quite a little scene.

"Look here, Fenton," said Morrow warmly. "We're the Sixth, don't forget, and the rest of the school looks to us to set an example. If you're content to take that insult lying down, I'm not—because that's what it is. An insult to all of us."

Fenton nodded.

"It is an insult," he agreed. "But we can't set an example of violence, Morrow—and we can't set an example of bad discipline. It seems to me that arguing is out of the question. The general has made up his mind to treat us as a Prussian officer treats his soldiers—with contempt——"

"Hear, hear!" said two or three other prefects.

"And you needn't think that I mean to

take that sort of thing without a kick," continued Fenton quietly. "But the Junior School is in such a condition of unrest at the moment that we can't very well act now. When Ord-Clayton goes out he'll meet with the surprise of his life——"

"Well, you warned him," said Morrow.

"I did!" agreed Fenton. "And I don't mean to warn him again. He's asked for trouble—and it's only right that he should find some. I'm not generally content to rely upon the juniors—but, in this case, I think they'll deal with the affair better than we could. So it's my idea to give them a chance."

Morrow grinned.

"You mean they'll frog-march the old idiot?" he asked.

"Something of that sort," said Fenton. "They're waiting out in the Triangle now—and I'm going to stay here. If they fail to alter the general's attitude—well, we'll take a hand. I've got a plan in mind."

The one fact that the general had torn up the petition without considering it made everybody—seniors and juniors—hard-hearted. The fiery old general was to find that the St. Frank's fellows were not mere puppets.

Personally, I'm always against disturbances and "direct action." An uproar amongst schoolboys frequently leads to something worse. Boys are rather prone to let themselves go rather too thoroughly, and they bring disaster, not only upon themselves, but upon others as well.

In this particular instance, however, I was as keenly determined to create a disturbance as I was usually determined to prevent one. General Ord-Clayton thoroughly deserved to be taught a lesson.

Just consider the facts. He had interfered in the most unwarrantable fashion. After all, he had absolutely no right to give a single order at St. Frank's. He had practically taken the Head's job into his own hands—and nobody was obliged to accept his authority.

And, after the whole school had expressed its earnest desire to have Dr. Stafford in London, he had thought fit to scorn the request. The whole thing was wrong—wrong from the start. The Head was blameless in the matter of the fire; yet he was "suspended!" It was an insult to a fine gentleman.

Dr. Stafford felt this insult more keenly than we did, no doubt, and I was afraid that he would resign for good. That is why we were anxious to force the general's hand at the earliest possible moment.

The whole of St. Frank's regarded Ord-Clayton as an outsider. He was a newcomer, in any case, and he had started badly. Sir Rupert Manderley had always been genial and kindly and considerate. More than once he had granted requests which the boys had made. He had never set himself upon a pedestal; he had never acted the tyrant.

At my suggestion, a number of fellows were stationed outside every door of the Head's house. It was possible that the general, seeing the signs, would attempt to sneak out quietly by a rear doorway. And we weren't going to be cheated in that manner.

Handforth's idea was to wait in a crowd in the Triangle—and to seize the general as soon as he appeared. But I was against this.

"It's no good!" I declared firmly.

"Look here——" began Handforth.

"And you look here," I broke in. "Supposing we collar the bounder, as you suggest? Within a minute the Head will be out—and he'll order us to release the general on the instant——"

"We can refuse!" snapped Handforth.

"I suppose we can," I agreed—"and the Head won't be able to do anything. But it would be rotten to get into trouble with the dear old Head—particularly at a time like this. It would be off-side to disobey his orders."

"That's right enough," said Pitt. "But what else can we do?"

"There's the lane," I replied significantly.

"Eh?"

"The lane," I repeated. "The general's motor-car will go down the lane, you know, and it'll be easy for us to stop it. Then we can have a little—argument. The Head won't be there; not a single master will be there. We can do just as we like. And the village duck-pond isn't far off," I added casually.

Handforth's eyes glowed with joy.

"Nipper, you're a wonder!" he declared clared enthusiastically. "I always said that you were the only sensible chap in the Remove—barring myself!"

"That bit about the duck-pond is interesting," said Grey. "It's full of thick mud at present——"

"But it is only to be used as a last resort," I put in. "If the general will listen to reason, all well and good. But if he is obstinate—well, it may be necessary to use a certain amount of persuasion."

"Good!"

The general's car was still waiting outside the Head's house, so it was obvious that the visit was only to be a short one. A crowd of about twenty fellows, with me at their head, marched down the lane.

We concealed ourselves behind the hedges and waited.

"It's a frightful thing that we're thinkin' of doin', dear fellows," murmured Sir Montie, shaking his head. "General Ord-Clayton is a shockin'ly big pot, an' he's wearin' a rippin' suit."

"I expect it'll be ripping before we've done with it!" said Watson grimly.

"Begad! I didn't mean that," exclaimed Montie. "I am always against ruinin' a fellow's clobber. It is a frightful crime to

spoil a pair of really well-cut trousers—it is, really!"

"Then we shall all be criminals!" declared Pitt.

"Souse me! You're right there, messmate," said Tom Burton.

We waited, behind cover, and as the minutes passed, we began to fear that our preparations had been for nothing. Then a soft purr sounded on the still evening atmosphere.

I pushed my head through the hedge.

"The car's coming!" I said briskly. "Be ready!"

Everybody waited tensely until the car was within a hundred yards of the spot. Then I gave the signal.

"Now then!" I shouted.

We all sprang out into the road—the whole crowd of us. The big motor-car was absolutely unable to pass, for the road was blocked. The only course was to pull up—unless the chauffeur ran us down.

He pulled up, and the car came to a stand within a yard of us.

"What's the idea?" shouted the driver angrily.

Before we could reply General Ord-Clayton jumped to his feet in the rear of the car. His two companions looked rather alarmed.

"How dare you?" roared the general. "Infernal impertinence! Clear out of the way, you young rascals!"

"Not just yet, sir!" I said calmly.

"Eh?"

"We want a word with you, general——"

"What!" he thundered.

"We want to talk——"

"Get out of the way of this car, and don't dare to utter another word!" roared General Ord-Clayton. "Never, in the whole course of my career, have I met with such insolence, and——"

"Pardon me, sir," I interrupted, "there's no question of insolence about this. We represent the Remove, and we understand that you have refused to give any consideration to the petition which was presented to you——"

"Silence!"

"Just one moment, sir," I went on. "Speaking on behalf of the Remove, I want to tell you that everybody in St. Frank's desires Dr. Stafford to retain his position as Headmaster—and we all consider it most unfair and unjust that he should be suspended until an inquiry is conducted with regard to the fire. Dr. Stafford is no more responsible than you are, and it's shameful that he should be treated——"

"Don't dare to utter another word!" bellowed the general, red with fury. "Hoskin, drive on!"

The chauffeur looked helpless.

"I can't drive through these young gents, sir!" he protested.

The general fairly danced.

"If you don't move out of the way, you young hounds, I will get out of the car and deal with you drastically," he shouted. "Do you hear me?"

"Yah, rotter!"

"We want the Head back!"

"Hurrah!"

The juniors let themselves go. Handforth's voice was louder than anybody else's, and he didn't care what he said. The general's attitude was calculated to enrage the fellows to fever pitch.

"Hold on!" I shouted. "We'll give the general a chance. If he promises to reconsider his decision with regard to the Head, we'll not touch him——"

"Boy!" thundered the Chairman of the Governors. "Do you realise what you are saying? I will have you soundly flogged for this insubordination! Your new Headmaster will stand no nonsense!"

Those words were quite sufficient. It was clear that the general had made up his mind to ignore us—to ignore the expressed wishes of the whole school. And most of the Removites lost their heads then and there.

"Collar him!"

"Grab the rotter!"

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, you chaps!"

The crowd surged round the motor-car. Both doors were wrenched open, and nearly a dozen juniors piled in, regardless of the general's shouts, and regardless of the startled exclamations from his agitated companions.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Somerset. "Boys! You must control yourselves——"

"Sorry, sir!" panted Handforth. "We want the general!"

Before the latter gentleman could protest or act, he was seized by dozens of hands and pulled forcibly out of the car. He fell into the road on his back, with seven or eight juniors piling on the top of him.

The noise was tremendous.

I took no actual hand in the "rag," for Handforth and his excited supporters were taking everything into their own hands. General Ord-Clayton was carried to the side of the road, and deposited in the grass.

"This is terrible—terrible!" gasped Mr. Somerset. "Boys, be reasonable——"

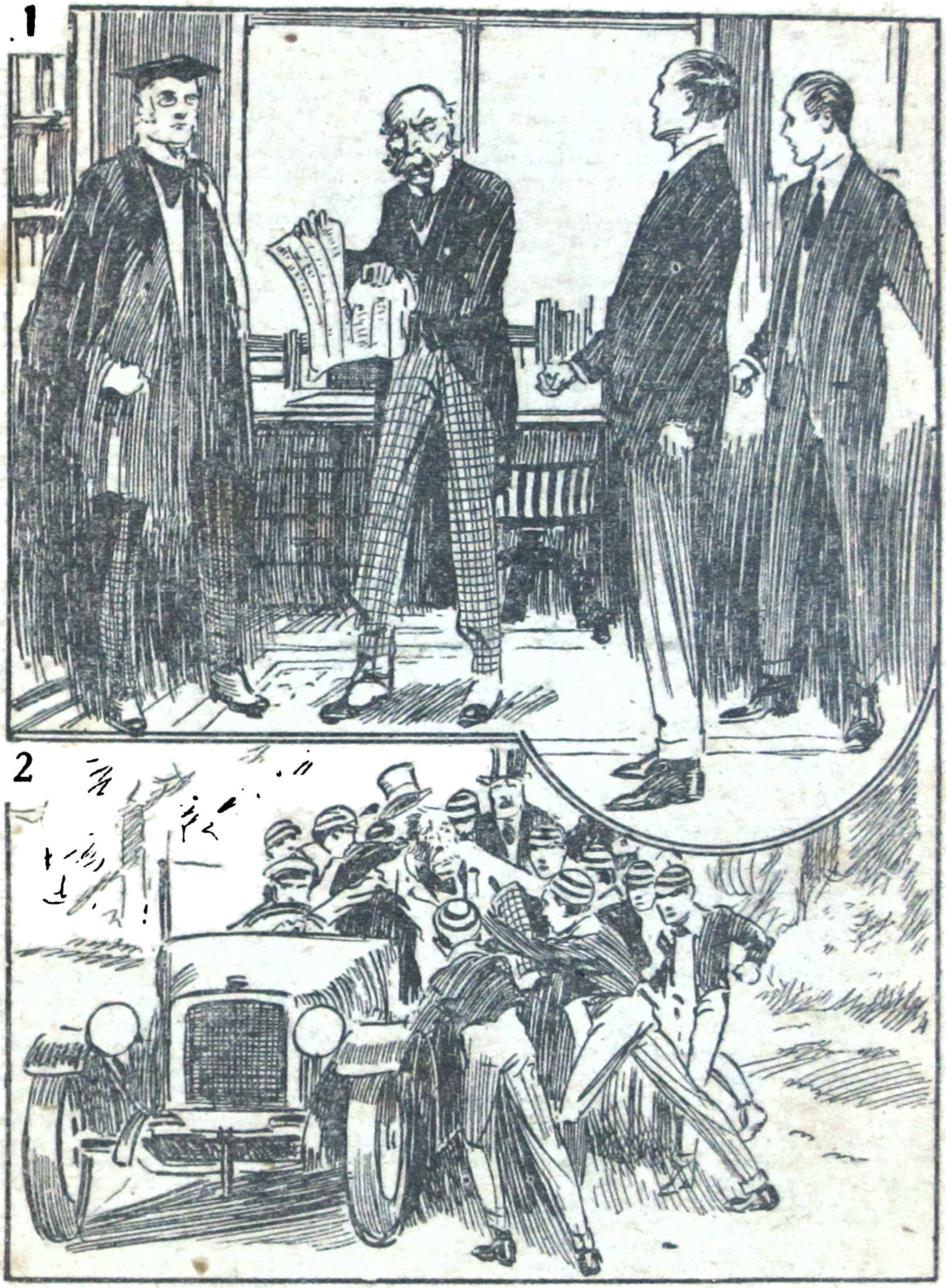
But he realised that he was talking to the air, and he touched the chauffeur on the shoulder.

"Drive back to the school at once, Hoskin," he ordered.

"Yes, sir!"

The car was allowed to go; nobody interfered with it. There was no hostility towards the other governors. They were known to be mild and harmless. It was this new chairman—this abusive fire-eater—who was responsible for the trouble.

In the thick of the juniors, General Ord-Clayton had absolutely no chance of escaping. And at last he showed signs of being scared. His face was no longer red with



1. "Here is my answer to this insolent demand!" barked the general.
(*See page* 9.)

2. Before the general could protest or act, he was seized by dozens of hands and pulled forcibly out of the car. (*See page* 12.)

fury. It had turned rather pale, and there was an anxious light in his eyes.

"Boys—boys!" he gasped. "For heaven's sake cease this outrageous——"

"There's nothing outrageous in what we're doing, sir," I interrupted, pushing forward. "You've only got yourself to blame for this state of affairs. St. Frank's won't stand any nonsense—not even from the Chairman of the Board of Governors!"

"Hear, hear!"

"You—you insolent puppy——"

"Booh!"

"Gag him!"

"Down to the duck-pond!" roared Handforth. "It's the only way with a rotter like this! Talking to him is about as much good as talking to a sheep's head! Action is the only course. Now then, altogether!"

There were plenty of willing hands.

General Ord-Clayton, now thoroughly frightened, was yanked off his feet again, and carried head downwards along the lane. For a moment or two he kicked and struggled convulsively; but he soon realised the futility of resisting.

Other fellows came up by this time, for the commotion had attracted attention. Crowds of fags were dancing round, and quite a good number of Fifth Formers had appeared on the scene.

Chambers and Bryant, of the Fifth, were enthusiastic.

"Good for you, kids!" shouted Chambers approvingly. "That's the stuff to give him! Continue with the good work, and you'll have my blessing! We don't want brutes of his type in command!"

There were representatives of the whole school in the lane—and every voice was hostile. The crowd swelled with every minute that passed. And General Ord-Clayton suddenly realised that he had stirred up a hornets' nest—and unless he was very sharp, he would be badly stung.

The general was no fool—even if he was a rotter.

"Boys—boys!" he gasped. "Listen to me——"

"Shut up!"

"Gag him!"

"Down to the duck-pond!"

"But boys, listen——"

The general found it impossible to obtain a hearing, and he began to fear that he had left it until too late. He felt almost faint as he realised that he was about to be pitched into an awful duck-pond.

He, a general—the Chairman of the Governors—was to be thrown into a duck-pond! It was too appalling to be thought of, and the general went into a cold, clammy perspiration.

At any cost, he must escape from this terrible position.

"Boys!" he screamed. "I will listen to your request——"

"Dry up!"

"I am prepared to reconsider——"

"Smother him, somebody!" roared Handforth.

But I was not so excited as the others.

"Hold on!" I exclaimed. "I think the general is coming round. We'll hear what he has to say before we chuck him into the duck-pond. It may not be necessary to carry out that part of the programme at all."

Handforth glared.

"Do you think we're going to let him off?" he bellowed.

"Yes, if he agrees to our terms," I replied shortly.

There was a general halt, and the general was allowed to get upon his feet. He did not waste a second.

"I—I am prepared to—to overlook this gross conduct if you will release me at once!" he panted. "I have never been treated so shamefully in all my life—but I will say no more. With regard to Dr. Stafford, I am prepared to reconsider my decision, and to place the matter before my colleagues——"

"You've got to promise us that the Head shall be free of all suspicion, and that he will come to London with the school!" said Handforth grimly.

The general swallowed hard

"I—I will grant your—request!" he exclaimed between his teeth. "But you must let me go now, or I will withdraw——"

His words, however, were drowned in the uproar which followed. The fellows had won! General Ord-Clayton had caved in weakly, and in the most humiliating fashion. Nobody respected him, and he was regarded by all as a contemptible funk and a rotter of the first order.

But St. Frank's had won the day.

CHAPTER V.

ARRIVING IN STYLE.

"HURRAH!"

"Three cheers for the Head!"

"Hurrah!"

"For he's a jolly good fellow!"

The refrain was sung with terrific enthusiasm, and St. Frank's shook with the din. It was nearly supper-time, and the fellows were streaming out of Big Hall. Only a few minutes earlier General Ord-Clayton had addressed the school.

He had briefly announced that the governors had held a meeting, and had discussed the situation. Realising that the school was anxious with regard to Dr. Stafford's welfare, the governors had arrived at a definite conclusion.

An inquiry would be held into the cause of the fire, as originally intended. It would be unfair to blame Dr. Stafford for anything which had occurred. Therefore, until the inquiry was concluded, the Head would continue his duties as hitherto. The general concluded by adding that he and his fellow governors were highly anxious to retain Dr. Stafford's services for many years to come.

He would go to London with the school, and would continue his headmastership.

The cheers which followed were uproarious—but they were all for Dr. Stafford. There was no ovation for General Ord-Clayton. The boys, seniors and juniors alike, regarded him as an outsider.

He had agreed to their wishes, but he would not have done so in the ordinary course of events. The threat of a ducking had worked the miracle. It was not surprising, therefore, that almost everybody regarded the general with contempt.

"Personally, I think it's rotten!" declared Handforth, with a touch of indignation in his tone. "It was just like the old rotter to agree to our demands!"

"What did you want, then?" I asked.

"Well, I didn't want him to agree until he'd crawled out of that muddy duck-pond," said Handforth warmly. "We were nicely dished out of the bit of sport! Blessed if I can see anything to shout about!"

And Handforth marched off to his own study, rather fed-up. At the same time, he was very glad to know that the point had been settled, and that the school had beaten the governors.

Exactly what Dr. Stafford thought, I can't say. But the position had not been a very comfortable one for him, and it was rather a surprise to me that he did not resign. He could afford to do so, if he wished, and he had certainly been treated with gross unfairness and humiliation.

I fancy that he was rather affected by the tremendous proof of his popularity, and he was willing to remain at the head of the school because the boys wanted him to do so.

The Head was greatly endeared to St. Frank's, and to its occupants. And there was much joy when the fellows knew that Dr. Stafford had consented to continue his headmastership.

This point being settled, there was plenty to occupy the thoughts of all. On the Monday the school would be transferred from St. Frank's to London. And the whole situation was so novel, that nine-tenths of the boys were eager and anxious to make a start.

Those who were discontented—who would rather remain in the old school—were mostly seniors of a studious disposition, fellows of the Fifth and Sixth who were anxious to continue their studies without interruption.

Everybody else was enthusiastic, and on the Saturday afternoon cricket was allowed to peter out somewhat. The juniors were packing, and making all arrangements for the move on Monday.

It was necessary, of course, to cancel several cricket fixtures, for the fellows of several schools would not be able to travel up to London in order to meet us on the field.

This reminded me of the fact that we had heard nothing with regard to any recreation-ground in London, so I questioned Nelson Lee on the point at the first opportunity.

"Playing-fields, Nipper!" repeated the guv'nor. "Well, there is a fairly big field behind the school—completely enclosed by a high wall—but it does not compare with our recreation grounds here."

"Well, that's only natural, sir," I agreed. "But there's something?"

"Oh, yes," said Nelson Lee. "The First Eleven will be considered before the juniors, of course, and you will have to take your turn. Junior sports must wait until their turn arrives. You ought to be thankful that you'll have a playing field at all."

"Well, it's certainly a relief to know there's something, sir," I remarked. "Perhaps we shall be able to fix up some matches with some local crowds. One never knows, you know."

I was rather relieved to hear that piece of news from the guv'nor. And I continued my packing, and all the rest of it, with a lighter heart. It would have been hard lines if we had been compelled to drop sports during our stay in London.

On the Sunday there were further demonstrations of excitement among the juniors. We were due to leave St. Frank's by the midday train on the Monday, when, of course, there would be no lessons. The seniors, with the exception of one or two prefects, were going by the early train, and they would be in possession of the London premises when we arrived.

It was generally considered to be a good idea to let all the juniors go together. But, at the last moment, this was altered. The Third went by the same train as the seniors, and the Remove was left to journey to London on its own.

The reason for this, no doubt, was that the Head thought there would be too much noise and commotion if the fags travelled with us. Nobody in the Remove was sorry at the change.

And when the time came for us to depart, we left St. Frank's without any feelings of disappointment. We liked the old school well enough, but there was something novel in this change. It would be rather exciting to spend a month or two in the heart of London.

I took possession of an empty compartment as soon as the train entered the station. Watson, Tregellis-West, Pitt, De Valerie, and a crowd of others, piled in after me. And then we slammed the door.

"Good!" I exclaimed.

"Any room in here?" demanded Handforth, poking his head in.

"No!" shouted the whole crowd.

"Rot!" said Handforth. "The train's full, and I can't find any room——"

"Go in the guard's van, then," suggested Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You rotters—"

The guard's whistle blew shrilly.

"My only hat!" gasped Handforth.

He raced down the train, and piled in somewhere. It was necessary to change at Bannington, and when Handforth emerged on to the platform it was quite clear that he had been arguing.

His collar was crumpled, and one end of

it was torn. His jacket looked as though it had been rubbed in the dust; his cap was missing, and his tie was under his ear. And his nose was looking even larger than usual.

"Had some trouble?" I inquired politely.

Handforth snorted.

"Somebody has!" he snapped. "Those rotters jumped on me when I got into their compartment. By George! I gave them a bit of something, though!"

I grinned as I looked across at a crowd of fellows who were standing on the platform. I could see Doyle and Armstrong and Merrell and Hubbard and several others. One or two of them were somewhat difficult to recognize, however.

Hubbard, for example, had both his eyes "bunged up," as somebody elegantly put it. Merrell looked as though he had just emerged from a coal-cellar, and Doyle resembled a butcher. At any rate, his face was smeared with blood, which had obviously been drawn from his nose.

"Yes," I remarked, "you do seem to have given those chaps a bit of trouble, Handy. How did it happen?"

"When a crowd of rotters jump on me, I don't stand any rot!" said Handforth grimly. "I had as much right in that carriage as they had. I jumped in hurriedly, I'll admit, but it wasn't my fault that I trod on Hubbard's toes, and put my fist into Armstrong's mouth?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to laugh at, you asses!" snorted Handforth. "They jumped on me, and we had a terrific time all the way along. Merrell hid under the seat all the time, the cad, and it's a wonder that Noys is alive. Some ass opened the door, and Noys was over half out when we yanked him back!"

"You'd better travel with Church and McClure in the express," I suggested.

"Not likely!" said McClure promptly.

"But he needs somebody to look after him," I explained. "Why not label him, and shove him in the luggage compartment?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

I noticed that Noys was certainly looking a bit shaky, and when the express arrived he and Handforth's late companions selected a compartment at the bottom of the train—because Handforth was at the top.

Fortunately, there was no trouble in the express. Of course, there were two prefects with us to keep order, but they kept about as much order as Handforth did. They knew the task was hopeless, so they never attempted it.

London Bridge was reached at last, and here the prefects actually did succeed in asserting their authority. The Remove was lined up, and marched out of the station in triumph.

In the big yard there were three private motor-omnibuses waiting, all ready to receive us. Arrangements had been made in advance, and there had been no hitch. The 'buses would take us straight to our new school.

But things did not go quite smoothly at the start. Half the fellows marched off, heedless of orders, and besieged two confectioners' shops which were handy. There was no hurry, and the juniors didn't see why they shouldn't purchase a few good things while they had the chance.

Pitt and De Valerie and the Duke and Augustus Hart were in a clump with two or three other fellows. They were waiting for the main crowd to emerge. And they found themselves attracted by the contents of a shop window.

There was a display of carnival robes and dresses—all of them obviously second-hand—possibly the remains of some celebration or other. Pitt and Hart put their heads together, and a hurried consultation was held.

Purses were fished out, and the Duke of Somerton produced a well-filled note-case. Then the party charged into the establishment, which, it appeared, also sold other second-hand articles. Musical instruments of several kinds were on view.

"What's happened to Pitt, and those fellows who were with him?" demanded Conroy major of the Sixth, bustling up. "I'm hanged if you kids aren't more trouble than you're worth! We've got to get off."

"I don't know where they are," I said. "I saw the whole bunch over by a shop window five minutes ago, but they've disappeared somewhere."

The prefect glanced at his watch.

"If they don't turn up within three minutes we'll go without them," he said grimly. "I'm not going to be humbugged about!"

"But they won't know their way!" said Watson.

"That'll be their look-out!" snapped Conroy major.

I heard laughter, and saw that Handforth was busy with something. He had climbed on to the leading 'bus, and had removed the board which usually indicated the vehicle's various stopping-places.

The back of it was blank, and this had been exposed to view—the 'bus being engaged on private work. Handforth, with the board resting on the rail, was busily daubing the board with red paint.

A crowd was standing below, watching. In fact, we were creating considerable attention, and the public was much interested.

"What's Handy up to?" I asked.

"Dear fellow, don't ask me," said Sir Montie. "There is no tellin' what Handforth will get up to, begad! He's a frightful bounder—he is, really! He just took that pot of paint, an' the brush; they belong to the fellow who is decoratin' that shop-front."

"The ass will get himself into trouble," I said severely.

A yell went up as Handforth replaced the board in its correct place, in the front of the motor-'bus. I strolled round, and

grinned. Daubed in great red letters were the words

"ST. FRANK'S HAS ARRIVED!"

"We might as well let people know who we are," said Handforth.

I nodded.

"It's just as well," I remarked. "After seeing you, Handy, they might think we'd all escaped from a lunatic asylum——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The public laughed as well as the juniors, and Handforth glared.

"Funny, isn't it?" he roared.

"Yus, mate—not 'arf it ain't!" yelled a newsboy. "It's as funny as a door-knocker. You're talkin' about your face, ain't you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fortunately, Pitt and Co. appeared at that moment, or we should have been edified by the sight of Handforth and an unknown urchin scrapping in the courtyard of London Bridge Station.

"Great Scott!" I gasped. "What—what's this?"

Pitt and Hart and De Valerie led the way, followed by their companions. At first I didn't recognise them, for a vast change had been wrought. All the juniors were attired in gorgeous, highly coloured costumes. Their faces were as black as coal, with great painted red lips.

And each junior carried a musical instrument. Hart was hugging a concertina, De Valerie had a banjo, Pitt flourished a side-drum. The others were similarly equipped.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody roared as the party mounted to the roof of the leading 'bus. There was a bit of trouble then, because a number of fellows had taken possession of the front seats. But Pitt and Co. soon turned them out.

"What the deuce——" began Conroy major.

But he couldn't help grinning as the painted ones struck up on the "band." Not one of them could play properly, and the noise was truly terrific. This, coupled with their appearance, caused tremendous amusement.

Then the motor-'buses started.

With the "band" playing, and with all the other fellows yelling, there was not much doubt in the minds of the public regarding our arrival! The painted notice was hardly required!

Under the railway-bridge we went, and, incidentally, Pitt was nearly knocked off the 'bus, for he had been standing on the seat. There's not much room to spare between a 'bus top and the railway-bridge at that spot.

Crowds stopped to watch us pass, and grins were general. Over London Bridge we went in a kind of triumphal procession, the noise being tremendous. St. Frank's had undoubtedly arrived!

Our 'buses went on their way through the traffic, up King William Street, then along Poultry, Cheapside, and Newgate Street, Holborn Viaduct was clear, and the 'buses buzzed, with the juniors creating pandemonium.

By the time we reached Holborn Circus we were famous, and crowds watched our progress. Up Holborn we went, and at length turned into a tiny side-street, and pulled up before a pair of massive wrought-iron gates.

We had arrived at St. Frank's the Second.

CHAPTER VI.

ST. FRANK'S THE SECOND.

"FINE!"

"Tophole!"

"A 1!"

Everybody was delighted with the new quarters, and there were many exclamations of approval. The Turret School was, indeed, a finely-equipped place, and it was amazingly roomy.

There was no lack of accommodation within the old walls—for the building was extremely aged. One could see this easily enough from the outside. The grey walls were ivy-covered and picturesque. The interior, however, was quite modern in every possible way.

The man who had acquired the place in order to turn it into a school—and who had been killed during the war—had had the work thoroughly performed. Electric lights blazed everywhere; the most modern heating system was installed; the decorations of the place were on a lavish scale.

There were two main buildings, although they were not exactly separate. Originally, they had been divided by a stretch of grass—to judge from the old print which was found hanging on the wall.

But the two buildings were now joined together by the apartments which formed the class-rooms. These rooms were light and airy, for, as there was only one storey, they had excellent skylights.

The Ancient House fellows were accommodated in one building, and the College House fellows took possession of the other—with the class-rooms dividing the two sections. The Monks at once termed their side the College House; and the Fossils were not long in following their rivals' example. Our side of the building was soon dubbed the Ancient House.

It was easier for us all, and avoided all confusion. And the school, as a whole, was already known among the fellows as St. Frank's the Second.

The Head and Nelson Lee had their quarters in the Ancient side—Mr. Crowell also. The other masters were accommodated with the Monks. Of studies there were plenty. The Remove had feared that all the studies would be seized by the Fifth and the Sixth, but there was still a sufficient number left over for the Remove.

These studies were not even numbered, so it was only natural that we should seize

upon rooms approximating in position to our studies at St. Frank's. Thus, Sir Montie and Tommy and I immediately took possession of the third room in the passage—and we called it Study C.

Doyle and Armstrong and Griffith piled into the one next door; but Handforth arrived, and there was a little argument. Doyle and Co. retired, beaten, and Handforth, Church, and McClure took possession of the room—Study D. The other fellows, after a little sorting out, found everything quite to their liking.

The dormitories were large and comfortable, and everything, in point of fact, was so well arranged that a good many of the juniors declared that it wouldn't matter a toss if St. Frank's was burnt down for good.

However, these were only temporary premises—but as such, they were first class. The only drawback consisted of outdoor space. There was no wide Triangle for the boys to wander in—no spacious playing-fields.

In the front of the school there was nothing at all. The building was only a few yards from the narrow roadway, and was divided by high iron railings. In the back a square enclosure, with high walls around it, did duty as the Triangle. A big, wooden gateway led into the playing-fields.

This, considering the position of the school, was necessarily small. But it was rather good to have a stretch of grass of any sort. When the First Eleven was playing the other elevens would find it necessary to look on—and vice versa. However, the cricket season was practically at an end, so it didn't matter much. We should return to St. Frank's before the winter had really set in—so King Football would come into his own all right.

"Yes, it's not such a dusty hole," remarked Pitt, as he strolled into the common-room after tea. It was rather decent of the Head to ignore that little bust-up of ours. He must have known about it, though."

I grinned.

"Well, we've let the whole of London know that we've come up to town," I said. "I expect there'll be reports about it in the evening papers to-night."

"That doesn't concern me," said Pitt. "This common-room, by the way, is jolly comfortable. I hope they'll decorate St. Frank's as well, now they've got the chance. It's about time it was done."

I pictured the Ancient House common-room to myself. I remembered the pink-distempered walls, splashed with ink and scribbled all over with pencilling. This common-room was very different. The walls were papered in dark green, the paint-work was fresh and bright, and the furniture was new.

Many of the fellows wanted to go out during the evening; they wanted to stroll down Holborn to the City, and others were anxious to have a look at the West End. But nobody was allowed to go.

After dark every place was out of bounds. Locking-up was at seven-thirty, and call-over at eight. The Head had not posted up the rules as yet, but they were generally known.

At nine-thirty the Remove went to bed. The dormitory was comfortable, and the beds were comfortable, too. It had been a somewhat tiring day, but I expected the juniors to sit talking for fully an hour.

I was mistaken, however.

Before twenty minutes had passed every fellow in the dormitory—with the exception of myself—was asleep. I remained awake with a reason. For I had no intention of turning in for the night—yet.

During the evening I had had a chat with Nelson Lee. And that chat had made a great difference in my plans.

"Yes, Nipper," the guv'nor had said, "it will seem like old times again. It is rather fortunate that we are so close to Gray's Inn Road. I shall run over there after you have gone to bed."

"I say, sir, that's a bit off-side!" I protested. "I should like to go with you, just for the first time——"

"I'm afraid it is impossible, Nipper," interrupted Nelson Lee. "You mustn't forget that you are a member of the Remove, and all junior boys have orders to remain indoors. You may run over to-morrow, but not this evening."

"Yes, but——"

"It is really useless, young 'un," said the guv'nor.

And that was the end of it. It was impossible to argue with Nelson Lee; besides, he had walked off, and I hadn't another opportunity of talking to him. That's why I had no intention of turning in.

"It's likely I'm going to stand that sort of thing!" I told myself, as I slipped out of bed and commenced dressing. "If there's any way out of this blessed place I'm going to slip away—and the guv'nor can't very well say much when I get there. I'll give him a bit of a surprise."

Having dressed, I went to the door, and passed out into the corridor. The hour was not later than ten-thirty. At St. Frank's it would have seemed rather late; but here, in London, it struck me as being absurdly early. It makes a great deal of difference to one's idea of lateness—living in London.

I could hear the rumble of the traffic in Holborn, and I wanted to be out there. The great difficulty was in finding an exit. Before going up to the dormitory I had discovered that a narrow public passage ran flush with the wall at the bottom of the playing-field.

This little alley ended in a narrow street which led into Holborn itself. It was one of those by-ways of London which are only known to those people residing in the immediate neighbourhood.

"If I could only get out of the school I should be O. K.," I told myself, as I softly crossed the corridor. Now, I want the back of the house—and it's not a bit of good going downstairs."

I had made sure of that fact. All the lower windows were barred—protection against burglars, I suppose—and the outer doors were fitted with strong locks—not latch locks either. So it would be impossible for me to get out.

My only hope, therefore, was from a first floor window.

There was a window at the end of the corridor, and I softly pulled the curtain aside and raised the lower sash. The night was by no means dark, for a moon was sailing above—although it was rather a hazy article.

But there was sufficient light for me to easily distinguish the various objects. I had believed that I should find it necessary to get to the ground by means of a rope. But, fortunately, it was not such a hard task as I had anticipated.

Almost immediately beneath the window was the roof of a building which had been recently added—and which I recognised as the school gymnasium. The roof was of slate, and the slope was not at all formidable.

When this had been built the designer had forgotten that it provided very easy access to the house by means of the upper corridor window. But, of course, no burglar in his right senses would break into a school full of boys.

I slipped down, chuckling, and pulled the window-sash into its place. Then I softly crept down the sloping roof until I reached the gutter. It was quite a jump to the ground, but I was not afraid of it.

However, it was not necessary for me to take the leap, for, leaning over, I saw that there was something which would help my descent considerably. At one time a large tree had grown flush with the wall, but it had probably caused trouble to the roof, owing to the constant dripping during wet weather. Anyhow, the tree had been cut down, and a stump, five feet in height, remained. This was turned into an ornamental arrangement, with a flower-plant growing in a hollowed-out portion at the top.

It was the easiest thing in the world to lower myself until my foot rested upon the stump. Then I slipped to the ground, and chuckled afresh.

"It might have been planned out for me!" I murmured. "This'll come in handy. I never know when I might want to slip away after lights out."

I was standing in the courtyard, and when I got to the gates which led into the paddock, or playing-fields, I found that they were locked. However, it only took me a few seconds to scramble over.

The final obstacle was the wall at the bottom of the field. It was only six feet in height, and there were no spikes on the top—and no glass fragments. I had made sure of this in the daylight—for it doesn't do a fellow's hands any good to clutch at the top of a wall which is besprinkled with broken glass.

I got over easily, dropped into the alley, and then set off towards the street, feeling cheerful.

Five minutes later I was in Holborn.

I had taken care to wear my overcoat, so that my Etons would not be particularly noticeable. I was also wearing an ordinary cloth cap. The motor-buses and taxis were speeding by in each direction, and there were plenty of people about.

I felt at home once more, and instinctively turned towards Gray's Inn Road—where the guv'nor's house is situated. It is not a particularly select road, but times are different now to what they used to be.

When Nelson Lee first went there, there were no electric trams shooting up and down the thoroughfare. And his house is one of the best in that quarter of London—although, from the outside, it doesn't look much.

I grinned as I walked along Holborn, and I wondered if Nelson Lee would be very wild when I calmly marched in.

"Well, he can't eat me!" I told myself. "That's one consolation."

I marched on, whistling, and I had only gone a few yards further before a hand was clapped upon my shoulder. I hadn't expected the guv'nor to be out, and I was rather taken aback. He would probably send me to the school again!

"Hallo, guv'nor——" I began.

"No, it's not the guv'nor this time," said a well-known voice. "What's the meaning of this, young man? I thought you were in school, doing lessons?"

"Well, I'm blessed!" I exclaimed. "How are you, inspector?"

"I found myself looking into the smiling face of Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, of the C.I.D., New Scotland Yard. He was a very old friend, and I hadn't seen him for some months.

"Well, this is rather good, Mr. Lennard," I exclaimed, grabbing his hand. "I didn't expect to find you here. It's ages since I saw you! You're looking just as well fed and ugly as ever, though!"

"And you're as cheeky as ever, I notice," grinned the inspector. "I should have thought that stern school discipline would have knocked some of the sauce out of you, you young bounder!"

"I'm breaking bounds," I said. "That looks like stern discipline, doesn't it? And let me put you right on a certain point. We're not in the habit of doing lessons at this time of night, as you seem to imagine. The Remove is all asleep—and I'm supposed to be with 'em."

Lennard sighed.

"You're a hopeless case," he remarked. "It's a wonder to me how Lee's hair keeps colour. It ought to have been grey years ago. What have you been up to since I saw you last? Mischief, I'll be bound. And haven't you been gallivanting about in Africa or Morocco, or some other heathen spot?"

I grinned.

"You are referring to that trip of ours

during the summer holidays?" I asked. "Yes, we had a bit of excitement then. And now we're in London—because the College House at St. Frank's was burnt out——"

"Yes, I know all about it," interrupted the chief inspector. "Lee told me the whole affair, and I'm on my way to have a chat with him now."

"By jingo!" I exclaimed. "That's ripping. I'm going to give the guv'nor a surprise, so we might as well go together. He forbade me to come, but I'm taking the chance. You can act as my moral support."

Detective-Inspector Lennard shook his head.

"You needn't rely on me for that," he said firmly. "The chances are that I shall help Lee to kick you out, neck and crop. That's just a warning in advance, so you needn't be surprised at what happens."

"I've heard your tales before!" I grinned. "Well, come along, Mr. Lennard. It seems quite like the old days, doesn't it?"

"Yes, by Jove," said the chief inspector, "it does!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE BEGINNING OF A MYSTERY.

"HOW does it happen that you're paying a visit to the guv'nor just now?" I asked, as we walked along. "Just a coincidence?"

"Not at all," replied Lennard. "Lee 'phoned me up about an hour ago, and asked me to go over for a little talk. I'm rather glad that you're in London again. You and Lee must be getting rather stale."

"Don't you make any mistake," I replied. "You may think it's dull being at a public school, but it's surprising what a number of mysteries we find knocking about. And some of the problems have been jolly interesting, too."

"Well, Lee knows his business best, I suppose," said the inspector. "But I'm not at all sorry that you had that fire at St. Frank's."

Within a few minutes we arrived at our destination. The inspector rang the bell, and then we waited. After only a short wait the door was opened, and Nelson Lee appeared, attired in his old dressing-gown, and with his favourite pipe between his teeth.

"Good man!" he exclaimed heartily. "I didn't expect you here so soon, Lennard. How are you? But I see——"

"Nipper, sir," I said promptly.

Nelson Lee removed the pipe from his mouth.

"You young rascal!" he exclaimed.

"Thanks, guv'nor!"

"How did you get out of the school?"

"Ah, that would be telling!" I said, with a grin. "Don't ask any questions, guv'nor, and everything will be all serene. You needn't pretend to be cross, because I know you're not."

Nelson Lee frowned.

"You seem to take it for granted, young 'un," he said grimly. "Well, you'd better come inside now—but I may find it necessary to report you to Dr. Stafford for a gross breach of the school rules."

"And then you'll get it in the neck!" remarked Lennard calmly. "You'll get it somewhere else, too, I expect—and I dare say you deserve a good few thrashings. I know you of old, my son!"

We all went upstairs into Nelson Lee's consulting-room. The soft electric lights were glowing, and everything looked exactly the same as it had always looked. Not an article had been moved.

Mrs. Jones, the guv'nor's respected housekeeper, had always kept everything in spick and span order, ready for our immediate reception, if necessary. And it sometimes happened that the guv'nor and I made a flying visit to London.

I closed the door, removed my overcoat and cap, and sprawled into an easy-chair.

"Take a seat, guv'nor," I said languidly. "You're welcome."

"I think he needs a thrashing on the spot, old man," remarked the chief inspector. "It's no good leaving it over until to-morrow. This cane of mine is nice and pliable. I'll hold the culprit while you deliver the goods."

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"I suppose I must let him remain now," he said. "He has broken bounds, and it makes little difference whether he returns at once or whether he returns when I do. The young rascal generally gets round me."

Lennard shook his head.

"I thought it was a farce all along," he observed. "And you're supposed to be a Housemaster——"

"Not here!" I put in. "I say, chuck it, and let's talk about something more interesting."

They took the hint, and within a few minutes their cigars were glowing, and they were sitting opposite to one another, chatting amicably. Meanwhile, I was wandering about the room, looking at well-remembered articles.

"So you reckon to be in London for quite a decent time?" asked Lennard.

The guv'nor nodded.

"For two months, at least," he replied. "It's possible that we shall remain here until the end of this present term—in fact, almost certain."

"I'm as wise now as I was before," said Lennard. "What do I know about terms, and that sort of thing? I am better acquainted with terms of imprisonment for criminals, you know."

"That's where we laugh!" I grinned. "Ha, ha!"

The chief inspector ignored my remark.

"So we shall be seeing a good deal of one another, I hope," he went on. "By the way, Lee, it happens that one of our men has been engaged in this vicinity for several days past. There's a little mystery concerning this quarter which is occupying the attention of Scotland Yard."

"It'll mean employment for some well-deserving detective for months to come," I said, with a nod. "Now, if you place the matter in the guv'nor's hands, it would be all finished within a brace of shakes."

Lennard frowned.

"Any more of your sarcasm, my lad, and I'll use this cane myself," he threatened. "And you needn't rub it in about Lee, here. We all know that he's smarter than any man at the Yard——"

"How much do you want to borrow?" I asked politely.

The inspector picked up a paper-weight significantly, and I dodged.

"Pax!" I grinned. "No fighting allowed."

"And I really must be allowed to remark, Lennard, that you have been talking nonsense," said Nelson Lee. "Flattery is not a thing I welcome——"

"Flattery be hanged!" snapped the inspector. "It's the truth—and I'm not fool enough to kid myself otherwise. You've got an amazing knack of getting to the root of a mystery in double quick time, Lee. I'm not asking you to look into the particular affair I mentioned, because I don't think you'll be interested enough. I merely brought it up because it concerns this immediate neighbourhood."

"Well, what is it, anyhow?" asked the guv'nor.

The inspector leaned back in his chair.

"Well, it concerns drugs," he replied—"opium and cocaine, chiefly. As you know, there's been a deal of fuss in the newspapers lately concerning the drug traffic—and not without reason, either. It's an undoubted fact that a considerable amount of opium and cocaine is being distributed secretly. And we have traced large quantities of the stuff to this district."

"I hope you're not accusing us," I put in. "Some fiction detectives consume barrels of cocaine, I know, but the guv'nor is a live man. If he resorted to cocaine, he'd be of less use than a corpse!"

Lennard nodded.

"Well, I dare say you're right in that respect," he admitted. "A drug fiend is pretty nearly a hopeless case, and in many instances he would be better dead. The fact about this matter is that these drugs have been traced to Holborn; but our people cannot discover the actual source."

"I expect they will succeed before long," remarked Nelson Lee. "Although it is frequently a very difficult task to get to the root of such evils. Will you be placed on the job, Lennard?"

"Not that I know of," replied the chief inspector. "It's hardly important enough, for one thing, and I shouldn't care for it, any way. And Gregson is quite a good man. You've met him, I believe."

The subject veered round to Gregson, of the Yard. Lennard proceeded to tell us of a rather exciting encounter with drug traffickers which Gregson had experienced a few weeks earlier.

And from that the conversation turned about in different directions, and it seemed to me that Lennard and the guv'nor were fixtures for hours to come. When the clock pointed to twelve-thirty I yawned somewhat noisily.

"When will you be coming sir?" I asked.

"Not for an hour yet, my lad," replied Lee. "Lennard wants to hear all about that holiday trip of ours—and I know I sha'n't get rid of him until he is satisfied. Perhaps you had better get back into the school—by the same method as you made your exit. And I'll know nothing about it."

"Oh, all right," I said. "I've been here, so I don't mind. It's ripping to see the old place again."

I bade the guv'nor and Lennard good-night, and then took my departure. It was getting on towards one o'clock by now, and the streets were very quiet. I strolled down Gray's Inn Road, passed into Holborn, and quickened my pace.

Five minutes after that I halted in the little alley, and leapt at the wall. I scrambled over, and dropped into the "St. Frank's" property. The moon was still shining through a haze, and I could see near objects fairly distinctly.

The courtyard of the school building was divided from the playing-field by a four-foot wall, with large gates in the centre, and as I walked softly through the grass I realised how easy it was for anybody to get into the building.

I also realised how private everything was in those grounds although the place was surrounded by busy streets and hundreds of houses and offices. It was one of those backwaters which are practically unknown to the general public.

The outer walls were all high, and it happened that there were no windows which overlooked the grounds. In the distance there were some high buildings which could be seen in broad daylight, but at night the school enclosures were absolutely private and secret.

Then, as I walked, I suddenly checked myself.

Was it fancy, or had I seen a movement against the wall on my left? I remained perfectly still, watching and listening. I had made no sounds myself, and if anybody happened to be there, he must have been unaware of my presence.

I soon discovered that my eyes had not deceived me.

There was another movement, and then, like a shadow, a figure moved stealthily along the wall in the direction of the court yard. I followed, wondering greatly. It struck me that the mysterious figure might be Fullwood, out on the prowl—for Fullwood was rather fond of breaking bounds after lights-out.

I lessened the distance between myself and the other; and then I found that my surmise was incorrect. For the figure was slim, and was attired in some kind of long robe.

Then he moved his head, and I gave a start.

For I had distinctly seen a pigtail!

The man was a Chinaman! What could it mean? What on earth was a Chinaman doing in the grounds of this school at the hour of one a.m.? I didn't feel quite sure of myself, and I determined to know the truth for certain, at all cost.

So I ran lightly forward.

The strange figure turned completely round—and now I was near enough to see an evil yellow face. The man was undoubtedly a Chinaman, and he acted on the instant. He twirled round with amazing swiftness, and ran like a deer across the grass.

He vanished behind some trees which grew in a corner of the paddock—but there were high walls beyond, and the fellow was cornered.

I raced after him, pulling out my electric torch.

"Now then!" I exclaimed. "What's your game?"

I plunged into the trees, flashing my light about—and being prepared for any sudden attack. But I reached the corner where the two walls met, and I did not see a soul.

The Chinaman had vanished!

For five minutes I searched, but it was useless. And at length, deeply puzzled, I got back into the school, and resolved to tell Nelson Lee of the incident in the morning.

The Remove dormitory was quiet when I stole in. I undressed and slipped into bed without awakening anybody. But I could not sleep immediately, for I was pondering over what had occurred.

And, quite abruptly, a rather startling thought came to me, and sleep was even further off than before.

"A Chinaman!" I murmured. "I expect it's mere fancy of mine, but I can't help thinking that there's something significant about the fellow's presence in that paddock."

For I remembered what Detective-Inspector Lennard had said. There were drug smugglers at work in this very neighbourhood—men who dealt in opium and cocaine. Opium! Was it surprising that I connected the mysterious Chinaman with the inspector's story? Was it possible that that man I had seen had any connection with the drug traffic which Lennard had referred to?

I was still pondering over the matter when I went to sleep. But my last waking thoughts were that I should keep my eyes open, and remain on the alert—in the future. If there was any mystery to be unravelled, I meant to be in it. And it certainly did seem to me that the mystery was closely concerned with St. Frank's the Second!

Well, we had arrived in London from Bellton, and the school was established in full going order, so to speak. And it seemed that we should find a ready-made mystery on the spot for us to occupy our attention.

The prospect, in fact, was decidedly interesting.

THE END.

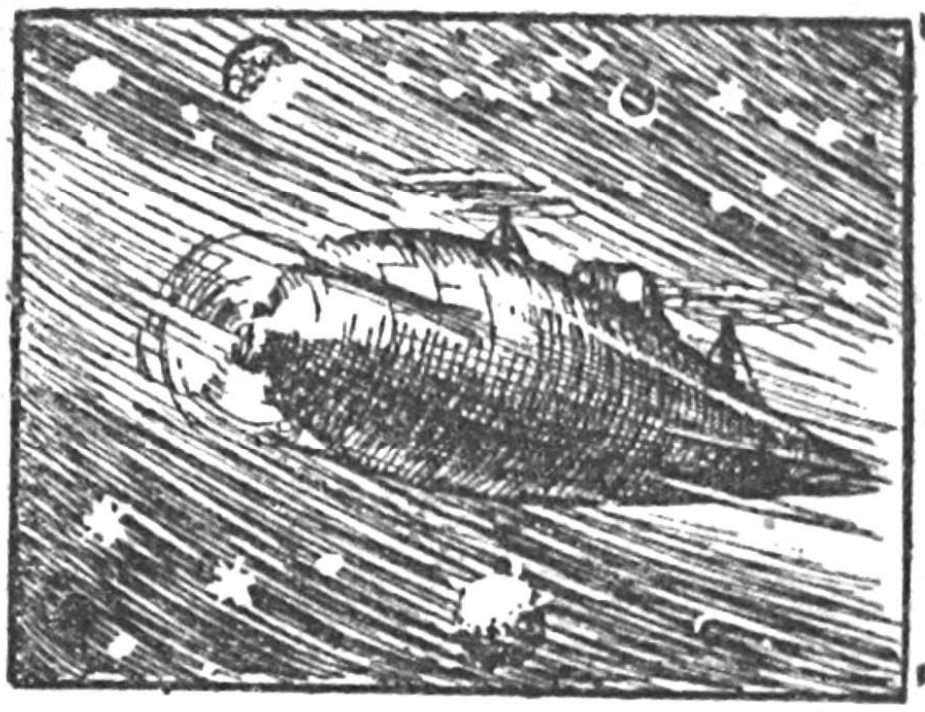
TO MY READERS.

The return of NELSON LEE and NIPPER to London recalls their earlier activities in the Gray's Inn Road. Not long ago the veil was lifted upon the sinister spread of the cocaine habit among certain depraved circles of Bohemia. The death of a young, popular actress turned the limelight on some of the mysterious means by which this forbidden drug was trafficked in, and it was found to have been procured from Chinamen in the neighbourhood of Limehouse. As to how Nelson Lee, assisted by Nipper, bring about the capture of a gang of these yellow fiends, who have been surreptitiously trading in cocaine, will be told in next week's story, entitled "THE YELLOW BAND."

My invitation to readers to write to me made me the recipient of a large number of welcome letters, all of which I have answered personally. I regret not being able to spare space yet awhile for a correspondence page. Nevertheless, I will endeavour to deal with each communication through the post, provided my correspondents give their real names, as the Post Office does not deliver letters addressed to individuals incognito.

THE EDITOR.

GRAND NEW SERIAL JUST STARTED.



IN TRACKLESS SPACE.

A Thrilling Account of a Wonderful Voyage to the Moon, Venus, and Mars, and of a Flying Machine known as the "Solar Monarch," the Most Marvellous Invention of the Age.

By ROBT. W. COMRADE.

Author of "The Stowaway's Quest," "Scorned by the School," etc.

INTRODUCTION.

ROBERT GRESHAM, an inventor, is captured by cannibals in Central Africa. As a last hope he contrives to write a message telling of his approaching doom, which he inserts in a leather water-bottle and drops into a river. It is carried down stream for ten miles, and picked up by an exploration party consisting of FRANK HILLSWORTH, his chum, MACDONALD GUTHRIE, both sons of millionaires, their old college friend, PROFESSOR MONTAGUE PALGRAVE, a renowned scientist, and ABBIE, a burly negro. They succeed in rescuing the inventor, who has been badly tortured. During convalescence he tells them of his wonderful invention—a flying machine that will travel through space. As a reward to his benefactors, he invites them, one and all, to accompany him on a voyage to the solar planets. Since none of the party have any home ties, and are ready for any adventure, they willingly accept. They all return to England, where for some months the flying machine, christened the "Solar Monarch," is secretly constructed. At last everything wa in readiness for starting. When all were aboard, Robert Gresham pulled a lever and the "Solar Monarch" shot up into space, heading for the moon, their first objective. From 950 miles an hour the speed soon rose to 2,000 miles an hour. In a week the moon would be reached. An experiment was made in reversing the attraction towards the earth. The result was a tremendous shock, one and all being thrown to the floor. (*Now read on.*)

The Journey to the Moon.

FRANK scrambled to his feet, white and shaken, with difficulty, for the Solar Monarch was acting as if she had been precipitated into a tempestuous ocean. She was heaving up and down, longways and sideways, and Frank could hear the joints and bolts creaking and groaning as if in dire agony. Mac and Professor Palgrave managed to get to their feet at that moment, both looking as scared and shaken as Frank himself.

"What's happened?" cried Mac, in alarm; "the shippie'll break her back if she dinna stop this caperin'."

"Look at the speed-indicator," cried out the professor, in a startled voice.

The two young men dashed over and looked at the instrument. The needle was whirling about as if suddenly seized with madness, going first one way and then the opposite. Also, when they looked wild-eyed out of the windows nothing could be seen but an indistinct blur.

"What can be the matter?" cried Frank. "Good heavens, surely Gresham must know that there is something radically wrong with the vessel."

"I'm gangin' down tae see for masel'," cried the Scot, making his way with difficulty to the conning-tower door.

The others followed him. Mac reached the head of the companion safely enough, but just then the Solar Monarch gave an extra heavy lurch, and twirled round like a top. Mac flung out his arms to save himself, but turned giddy with the motion, and pitched headlong down the stairway. He sat for a moment dazed, then his senses came back to him, and he rushed through the saloon and burst into the aft machine-room.

Then he recoiled with a cry, for on the floor, still and pale, lay the inventor, blood streaming from his head. Mac gave him but one glance, then swiftly looked at the mechanism around him. The biggest lever he could see was in the opposite position to when he had last observed it. Making up his mind with lightning-like rapidity, he grasped this and pulled it over. Almost immediately the Solar Monarch ceased her mad capers and careers. Once more she resumed her placid and seemingly motionless flight.

Mac staggered back, and saw in the doorway, both much dishevelled, Frank and Palgrave. He pointed grimly to the still figure on the floor.

The professor took in the situation at one swift glance, and bent over the body of Gresham. Then he looked up, a relieved expression on his face.

"It's nothing much," he declared—"nothing to worry about, anyway. He must have fallen and knocked his head against something pretty hard, to judge from the

aize of this lump on the side of his head. Ah, he's coming round already—see!"

The inventor slowly opened his eyes and stared around him in bewilderment. Frank touched the bell. By the time Abbie—a frightened and scared-looking Abbie, it must be admitted—had answered his summons, Gresham was on his feet.

"Fetch a bowl of water and a clean bandage, Abbie," Frank said to the scared nigger —"and be quick, too!"

"Right, Massa Frank, sah!"

In a moment Abbie returned, and Frank bathed the place on Gresham's head. After a few minutes he was feeling considerably better, and when the bandage had been placed round his head he declared that he was as right as a trivet. That being so, Mac inquired how it had happened, first explaining the alarming capers the vessel had indulged in.

"I'll tell you," Gresham replied. "The only thing I did was to pull this lever slightly outwards; after that the vessel seemed to give a sickening lurch, which flung me on to a piece of iron, and I then lost all further interest in the proceedings."

Frank laughed.

"Well," he said, "it's a deuced good job it wasn't worse. As it is, you've got a whacking great lump on your head as large as a young egg. But suppose we go into the conning-tower and ascertain if we're still travelling all right? I can't make out what the dickens happened. The whole ship whirled round as if it had suddenly gone out of its mind."

On entering the glass-surrounded apartment they found that their speed still held at 2,000, and everything appeared to be in order. Except for a few crockery breakages nothing seemed much hurt. The professor asked the inventor what he thought had occurred so abruptly.

"That's more than I can tell you," Gresham replied, lighting a cigar. "I wish now that I'd taken your advice, Palgrave. However, nothing serious has resulted; and it serves to show that it won't do to play tricks with the old earth's attraction. I tremble to think what would have resulted had I brought all the earth's attraction to bear. As you saw, I had only just started pulling the lever out. Had I succeeded in my object, we should now be doubtless in eternity. Professor, this is the last time I'll play about when flying through space. As to what really took place I cannot pretend to state—I'm as much in the dark as you are yourselves. There's one thing, however, I wish to do——"

"And that is?"

"To thank Mac here for saving both the ship and her crew," Gresham said, extending his hand warmly.

Mac flushed, and denied that he had done anything praiseworthy.

Nothing of note happened during the next few days; but the journey was far from monotonous. There were always plenty of fresh sights to occupy the explorers' attention. Most of the planets—Mars, Venus, Mercury, etc.—were now looking miniature moons themselves in broad daylight, while the earth's satellite was gradually assuming gigantic proportions. So they went on, until at last, according to the cyclometer in the conning-tower, they had travelled 230,000 miles. This left but 7,000 to complete the journey. Accordingly, it would take them three and a half hours to reach their destination.

It was early morning, and a subdued excitement was prevailing throughout the Solar Monarch. Even Abbie's black visage was glowing with an unusual light as he served breakfast. When the meal was over Gresham rose, and, followed by his fellow-adventurers, ascended to the conning-tower. The moon's surface was now practically within reach—the glow had left it, and it appeared to be an ordinary world, with mighty mountain ranges running across its surface.

"I am now about to cut off the moon's attraction," Gresham exclaimed. "That will, I think, slow down our flight considerably. When we have completely stopped I shall let the ship move forward at as slow a rate as I can manage."

He left the tower and made his way to the forward machine-room, where, after a few minutes' examination of the mechanism, he grasped the lever which let the metal rod slide into the tank. Usually it worked with perfect ease, but now, when Gresham tugged at it, nothing resulted. The inventor was puzzled, and closely examined the inner workings of the lever. The next moment he recoiled with a cry of alarm.

The rod had disappeared, and he could now see the ruins of it lying on the floor under the lever. In some unaccountable way his former experiment must have had some unknown effect on the metal, which had caused it to fuse and melt out of shape. If he were to save the ship, there was no time to be lost. He had had the foresight to bring with him a couple of emergency rods made of this peculiar substance, but it would take some little time to fix, and for all he knew the Solar Monarch would take three hours to come to a standstill. He rushed up to the others, bursting in amongst them, a strange figure with his bandaged head, and swiftly explained the situation to them, and impressed upon their minds the need of hurry. Frank and Mac descended post-haste to the engine-room to procure one of the two rods, which were there stowed in a box.

But after five minutes' vain search they were forced to admit that the box was not in the engine-room. It could scarcely be elsewhere. They were compelled to tell themselves, with a growing sense of terror, that the emergency rods had been forgotten.

"Forgotten?" cried Gresham, when he

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heard the result of the search, letting the spanner fall to the floor with a crash. "Then Heaven help us! We are doomed! Unless those rods are found, and one of them put into position, nothing within human possibility can save the vessel from crashing into the moon at the rate of two thousand miles an hour!"

Arrival on the Moon—In the Dark Fissure.

AS Gresham made this announcement, his three companions looked at one another in consternation. Was this to be the end of their adventure—being dashed to pieces on the moon, almost before the journey had commenced?

"We'll have a good search, anyhow," exclaimed Frank quickly. "It's not the least use standing here looking at one another like a flock of frightened sheep."

"Quite correct, Frank," said the professor huskily. "The best thing we can do is to employ ourselves. Anything is preferable to idleness. We will look in the engine-room again as a start."

They all hurried below. Abbie, in his galley, was singing cheerfully about a dusky maiden in far-off Tennessee, sublimely unconscious of the impending danger. Gresham heard his voice as he passed, and decided not to enlighten the negro until all hope of deliverance had passed. They searched the engine-room through with feverish haste, and the result was the same as before. The box containing the two massive rods had certainly been overlooked. Just as they were quitting the room, however, Mac had an inspiration.

"Hoots," he cried excitedly, "was the box aboot the size of this, Mr. Gresham?"

"Just about," the inventor replied, looking at the box Mac indicated—one filled with tinned meats, which had somehow found its way into the wrong apartment.

"Weel, I'm thinkin' we maun gang up into the store-room and search there. It's mair than probable that the box was taken into that apartment, conseedering that this one is sae far frae its proper place."

"By George, that's not at all a bad notion," cried Gresham. "As Mac says, the two boxes may have got misplaced."

He led the way into the store-room, and they commenced a rapid scrutiny. Nothing resulted at the end of five minutes, and they were beginning to think that Mac had raised falee hopes, when Frank uttered a glad cry.

Gresham hurried to his side, and after a moment's examination of the box which Frank had at his feet, he announced, in quite a calm voice, that the missing rods were discovered.

There was silence for a moment, then Mac cried out:

"Mon, that's guid hearing! We'll no be gettin' smashed tae smithereens on the mune, after all."

"That all depends," said the inventor, swiftly breaking open the case and extracting one of the two pieces of metal. "I am by no means convinced that we shall be able to stop the ship in time to avoid the catastrophe. You must remember that we are but five thousand miles distant from our destination."

"Then all I can say is," Frank remarked cheerfully, "we'd better get a hustle on us if we want to see the old earth again. Come on—all hands to the pump!"

Between them the metal rod was rapidly being fixed, and, when at last it was done, Gresham, with methodical precision and with no sign of flurry, pulled the lever, so cutting off the moon's attraction. Immediately afterwards he pulled another handle, which communicated with the aft machine-room, and brought to bear the attraction of the earth once more. Almost immediately the effect of the change was felt. The Solar Monarch still kept perfectly level and steady, yet it felt to the explorers as if a brake had been applied. At the scientist's suggestion they hurried up to the conning-tower and looked at the speed-indicator.

Frank started back.

"My word," he exclaimed, in a surprised voice. "I'm hanged if the thing doesn't register five hundred miles an hour! I can't believe it's correct. Only five minutes ago we were travelling at two thousand!"

"It is correct, nevertheless," said Gresham. "See, it's lower already—450—now 420. In a moment I shall have to cut the earth's attraction off again, or we shall start going backwards."

A quarter of an hour later the speed-indicator showed that the inventor was right, for the needle pointed to nothing; and they were still 4,000 miles from the moon, hovering stationary in mid-space. Knowing that it was possible to check their flight so swiftly and easily, Gresham decided to continue the journey at full speed until he got within 800 miles of the moon's surface.

This he did, and when they reached that point the vessel progressed at the slow speed of 100 miles an hour. Gresham had found it possible, by means of his invention, to travel forward at less than ten, and when at length their destination was reached the Solar Monarch grounded with scarcely a quiver. The momentous journey had been undertaken successfully.

"My friends," said Gresham, as the projectile landed, "we are on the moon at last. We have completed a journey that was—and still is—considered an impossibility. The time is barely one by earth time, and I take it that we shall not require any lunch just yet? No? I thought not. There are matters to attend to far more important than eating and drinking. The first thing I intend to do is to ascertain whether the atmosphere here

(Continued on page iv. of cover.)

is at all breathable. If this turns out to be the case, we will at once set about fixing the propeller and suspensory-screws."

Five minutes later excitement ran high, for the inventor's experiment had resulted in the discovery that the air was sufficiently dense to be breathable. True, it was scarcer than the earth's atmosphere, but as long as it was safe to emerge out into, Gresham and his companions were satisfied. Through the glass of the saloon windows could be seen the surrounding landscape. It looked bare and chill. The ground appeared to be very rocky, and what little vegetation there was looked dark and dismal. The sun was shining brilliantly. Not a sign of life of any description could be discerned.

As Gresham unscrewed the massive door a blast of cold air rushed into the ship and took the adventurers by surprise; it made them gasp and catch their breath. In comparison to the artificial air on which they had been existing for the last week it seemed decidedly refreshing after the first few moments had passed, although they could feel a peculiar kind of catchiness at the back of their throats all the time. Mac was first out, and he stood on the tiny platform just outside the conning-tower door taking in the landscape.

"Hand out the ladder," he requested; and Abbie went and fetched it. From the top of the Solar Monarch the ground was close upon thirty feet, and Mac, after fixing the ladder, made all haste to descend. Unfortunately, in his eagerness, he tripped on a length of rope, and with a cry of alarm plunged headlong to the ground.

"Good heavens!" cried the professor, aghast. "He must have killed himself!"

"Or at least got a limb fractured," put in Frank anxiously. "Poor old Mac—he was too eager to get down—— Why, great Jupiter, look there!"

(To be continued.)

Printed and Published every Wednesday by the Proprietors. The Amalgamated Press, Limited. The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4. Advertisement Offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4. Subscription Rates: Inland and Abroad (except South Africa and Australasia), 8s. 10d. per annum; 4s. 5d. for six months. Sole Agents for South Africa: The Central News Agency, Limited. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Ltd.; and for Canada: The Imperial News Company, Ltd.