

NO. 239.—A MAGNIFICENT NEW YEAR STORY!

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FATTY LITTLE FEASTS TOO WELL.

THE NEW YEAR HEROES

A 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 "Exit the Tyrant," "Dorrie's Christmas Party," "A Yuletide of Mystery," etc.

January 3, 1920.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

FATTY LITTLE OVERDOES IT.

"TEN sausage-rolls, six beef-patties, eight mince-pies, and a few cakes," said Fatty Little. "That's all I had before brekker. A fellow must have a snack the first thing in the morning to give him an appetite, you know!"

I grinned.

"Is that what you call a snack?" I inquired.

"Well, is it anything else?" demanded Little.

"It's a meal—a feed for a dozen!" said Reginald Pitt. "And you scoffed twice as much brekker as I had, on the top of it! Great Scott! Where do you put all the stuff?"

"Oh, don't be dotty!" protested the fat boy of St. Frank's. "A chap must have grub, I suppose? I've got a bigger appetite than most fellows, I'll admit, but that's because I'm large. You seem to forget that I've got a big frame to keep going."

"Judging by your appetite, I should say you'd got a tabloid boarding house," chuckled De Valerie. "You eat enough grub for five breakfasts—and then you call it a snack!"

It was the last day of the old year, and a group of fellows were chatting in the big lounge hall at Cliff Castle—the great old mansion which Lord Dorrimore had rented for the especial purpose of entertaining a large Christmas party.

There was a good few St. Frank's juniors in that party, including myself. Naturally, Nelson Lee was also present.

We were nearly at the end of our visit.

The Christmas festivities were over, and on the morrow—New Year's Day—we should leave Cliff Castle. Nelson Lee and I would go to London, to our old address in Gray's Inn Road; the other fellows would go to their various homes, to spend a week or so before returning to St. Frank's for the new term.

We had had a splendid time under Dorrie's roof. Fatty Little had revelled in the holiday whole-heartedly. The amount of stuff he had eaten was somewhat staggering. But he seemed to stand it wonderfully.

Many of the juniors had predicted that Little would finally end up by choking himself; others had declared that he would die from over-eating.

But the fat boy demolished large amounts of indigestible pastry, and thrived on it. Nothing seemed to harm him.

His appetite was enormous, and food was the one thing he lived for. On the whole, Fatty was a good sort—one of the best, but his weakness was grub. He freely admitted this himself, since he could do nothing else.

The St. Frank's juniors knew him well, and had expected great things from him in the way of feeding; but he had surprised everybody.

To those who did not know him well.

he seemed to be a veritable glutton. But this was not really the case. Little needed the food. His capacity was terrific, and he possessed an appetite which was never satisfied. He did not eat for the sake of eating. When he had demolished sufficient—which was a very rare occurrence—he would demolish no more, no matter how tempting the tuck happened to be. But for Fatty Little to be satisfied was something of a miracle.

Lord Dorrimore happened to be coming down the big staircase into the lounge hall while we were discussing the "snack" which Little had disposed of before breakfast. And his lordship came down, lounged up to the fat boy, and seized him by his broad shoulders. Little grinned and waited.

"I suppose you were jokin' just now, young man?" said Dorrie.

"What about, sir?"

"You mentioned something concerning a dozen sausage rolls, a few mince pies, and such like," said Dorrie. "Is it a fact that you packed away all that grub before you came into breakfast this mornin'?"

Little coloured slightly.

"Well, you see, sir, the tuck was all set out on the sideboard, for chaps to help themselves as they pleased," he exclaimed. "I didn't think there was any harm in having a snack——"

"Harm!" interrupted Dorrie. "Good gracious! Who's talking about harm? You're welcome to a thousand pastries, if you can eat 'em. That's not the point. At breakfast this morning you ate as though you hadn't tasted food for months—and now I hear you packed away about a ton before comin' into the breakfast room. My lad, let me give you a word of advice—a word of fatherly warnin'. Open your ears, an' listen to the words of the sage."

"Yes, sir," grinned Little.

"One of these days you'll over do it, you know—you'll eat so much that you'll have frightful pains inside your tummy," said his lordship, wagging a finger. "I'm just speakin' to you in a friendly way, an' I know you won't get offended. Once, out in Central Africa, I knew the king of a native village. He was just about your size, an' he was so fat he couldn't see his feet. That poor chap had an appetite that was a positive disease. That's what you've got, and you'll find it out one of these days."

"Did the poor chap peg out, sir?" asked Pitt, grinning.

"By gad, no!" said Dorrie. "I cured him."

"How did you manage that, Dorrie?" I asked.

"Ah! That's a secret," said our host. "But I cured the old buffer, and before I left his kraal he was as thin as a rake. I shall have to think about takin' you in hand, young 'un."

"But I'm all right as I am, sir," said Jimmy Little. "I'm healthy enough, and I'm active, and nobody can accuse me of being a glutton."

"I wouldn't dream of making such an accusation," said Lord Dorrimore. "It ain't your fault, my son. It's a disease, and it'll grow on you frightfully. In the end you'll grow so big that you won't be able to carry your own bally weight!"

And with that awful prophecy, Lord Dorrimore strolled out of the hall, winking at me as he did so. Fatty was in no way offended, and he grinned cheerfully after Dorrie had gone.

"There you are, my beauty," I said grimly. "You can see what's going to happen to you, unless you mend your ways. How would you like to go about in a bath chair—because your legs are incapable of supporting your bulk?"

"Bath chair!" exclaimed Handforth. "He'll need a motor lorry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Little took the chaff all in good part, and shortly afterwards he was found helping himself to other pastries. It was really amazing, and Lord Dorrimore couldn't quite understand it. He took me aside.

"Just a word, Nipper," he said mysteriously. "Have you noticed this before?"

"Noticed which?" I asked.

"This appallin' propensity for packin' grub away—on Master Little's part," said his lordship. "Is it a new complaint?"

I chuckled.

"He can't help it," I explained. "Fatty's sole trouble at St. Frank's is grub. Grub is second nature to him. It's grub in the morning, grub in the afternoon, and grub at night. Every farthing of his pocket-money—and he gets a liberal allowance—goes on food-stuff."

Dorrie shook his head wisely.

"It's bad—shockin'ly bad," he exclaimed. "I don't blame the kid, of

course. He's a frightful size, an' he needs a lot. But the way he scoffs the stuff is simply unbelievable, by gad!"

"Don't you worry about him," I chuckled. "He'll always be the same, I expect. His pater is just as bad——"

"That's nothing," said Dorrie. "Do you think he'll make a raid on the sideboard this evenin'?"

"He's bound to," I declared. "That sideboard is like a magnet—it draws Fatty to it irresistibly."

Lord Dorrimore nodded.

"Good!" he said. "I'll tell you what, Nipper. Keep Little with you this evenin' until seven o'clock. Then bring him along to the sideboard, an' let him pack away as much as he likes—but don't have anything yourself."

"Why, what's the idea?" I asked curiously.

"You'll see, later on," said Dorrie smoothly. "Can I rely on you to do this for me? Is it a go?"

"Of course it is," I promised.

"An' you won't touch any grub yourself?"

"Not likely," I grinned. "After this warning, I wouldn't eat a crumb—and, in any case, I should have nothing at seven o'clock, considering that we all dine at eight. Fatty, of course, will feed at any old time."

"To-morrow is the first day of the new year," said Dorrie. "I want Master Fatty to start the new year well—that's why I'm keen on givin' him a little lesson to-night."

"You won't harm him, I suppose?" I asked.

"Harm him?" said Dorrie. "Good lordy, no! My treatment will do him good—piles an' piles of good. You'll see. Just you wait, my son, an' you will see. I always believe in doin' a chap a good turn."

His lordship lounged off, his eyes twinkling; and I knew that Fatty Little was in for something novel. Whether he would approve of Dorrie's "treatment" remained to be seen.

There was dancing in the big ball-room that evening, and I wished Dorrie and his ideas in Timbuctoo. For I was unable to dance with anybody—although Watson's sister, Violet, was booked to me for at least two dances. I couldn't even watch the fellows who were dancing, for my eyes were needed in another quarter.

I was compelled to keep watch over Little. I had given Dorrie my word, and a promise is a promise. Little was not interested in anything except food, and he repeatedly tried to sneak away from the ball-room.

"You don't want to go away," I said briskly. "Stay here, Fatty, and look at the next waltz. You ought to take lessons——"

"Oh, dry up," said Little. "It's a quarter to seven, and we've got to wait over an hour for dinner! Great pickled herrings! I can't last out until then. I'm starving!"

"Rats!" I exclaimed. "I want to jaw with you."

"You can jaw in the breakfast-room," said Little. "There are heaps of good things on the sideboard there, and I was thinking of having a little biting-on—just a mouthful, you know."

"Such as a dozen sandwiches, and a dozen sausage-rolls——"

"Oh, ease off," grinned Little. "Well, I'm going—— Hi, leggo——"

He didn't go. I held him firm, and kept him so busy talking and arguing that the quarter-hour went fairly swiftly. I heaved a great sigh of relief as the clock chimed the hour of seven.

"A whole hour before dinner," groaned Fatty. "By chutney! I can't wait until then, you ass! I shall faint with weakness——"

"Oh, come on," I said briskly. "Let's go along to the breakfast-room, then. We can easily slip out in the middle of this fox-trot."

"Thank goodness," said Little happily.

We left the ball-room and made our way to the sideboard. The apartment was quite empty except for our two selves, for the room was left deserted for the evening. The sideboard, however, groaned under the weight of the good things which were displayed on its surface.

Fatty Little clasped his hands in ecstasy.

"Look at 'em—look at 'em!" he said. "Great doughnuts! And these things were here all the time. Ain't you going to sample a few?"

"No, thanks," I said. "I want some dinner."

"I shall get my appetite back again by dinner——"

Fatty was unable to say any more, for his mouth was too full. He sampled the

pastries, he sampled the cakes, he sampled anything and everything. And each sample was sufficient for any ordinary meal.

Where he packed the stuff was a mystery.

At last he was satisfied, and he heaved a sigh of comfort.

"Now I feel all right," he said. "It's rather a pity to leave these good things here——"

"You'll do until to-morrow," I remarked. "You can't eat any dinner——"

"What rot!" interrupted Fatty. "By eight o'clock I shall have a fresh appetite. This was only a mouthful!"

"My hat!" I grinned. "You fairly take the biscuit!"

I steered him out of the breakfast-room, and saw him safely across the lounge-hall. Then I dodged back. As I had suspected, Lord Dorrimore was in the breakfast-room, examining the remains.

"Now, Dorrie, what's the game?" I asked bluntly.

"You'll see before long—an' you'll hear, too," said his lordship complacently. "I see the grub's been goin'. You can't tell me that Fatty devoured all that frightful amount unaided?"

"He did; and he called it a mouthful," I said.

"Ye gods and little winkles!" ejaculated Dorrie. "The poor chap will be in a shocking condition. But you'll see soon. Yes, by gad. You'll see. Just you wait, Nipper!"

I couldn't get any more out of him, and my only course was to wait. I found Jimmy Little in the ball-room, sitting on a lounge, and looking supremely happy. Handforth strolled up as I did so.

"Hallo, Fatty," he said. "You're looking mighty pleased over something."

"He's just been feeding," I explained. "He is responsible for the disappearance of about twenty-eight pounds of rich pastry——"

And I reeled off the articles in succession.

"It's serious," said Handforth, regarding the fat boy as though he were some weird zoological specimen. "After all that stuff you'll be ill, Fatty. You'll over-do it one of these fine days, mark my words."

"You'll have pain in your interior," I declared.

Fatty Little grinned.

"I'm all right," he said. "I've eaten twice as much——"

He paused, and a surprised expression came into his face. His hands went to his waistcoat for one moment, and he caught his breath in. Then he looked up with an air of relief.

"Anything the matter," I asked curiously.

"Nunno!" stammered Fatty.

"Just a spasm?"

"Something seemed to catch me—— Yow!" gasped the fat boy. "Oh, great doughnuts! Yarooch! Oh, goodness!"

He doubled himself up, panting.

"What's wrong, you ass?" demanded Handforth. "Don't make that disgusting noise here! Can't you see the young ladies looking at you——"

"Ow—yow—yarooch!" roared Fatty.

A good many juniors collected round.

"Hallo! What's wrong?" asked De Valerie.

"You'd better ask this porpoise," said Handforth. "He's just eaten enough pastry to stock a confectioner's shop—and I suppose the stuff is having a bit of a fight with his interior works. I don't wonder at it!"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie Tregellis-West, adjusting his pince-nez, and regarding Little severely. "This is frightfully unmannerly of you, Fatty, old boy, it is, really. I hate to reprove you——"

"Yarooch!" gasped Fatty. "I'm dying! I'm poisoned! Yow! I've got horrible pains—— Oh, chutney! Oh—yow!"

"Pains!" said Handforth, with a sniff, "well, I'm glad of it, my son! It ought to teach you a lesson! Perhaps you won't want your dinner now!"

Fatty Little was almost yellow in the face, and his features were screwed up painfully.

"Ow!" he groaned. "Help—help me out, somebody! Have pity—yarooch!—have pity on me! I can't walk upright—— Ow!"

The fat boy was half carried out of the ball-room, and the juniors, who did not know that Lord Dorrimore had been busy—simply took it for granted that Little had been over-eating himself.

Fatty thought so, too.

He crawled away into a corner, and we left him. Then I sought out Lord Dorrimore, and found him chuckling as he chatted with Nelson Lee. The guv'nor was grinning, too.

"What the dickens have you done to

Fatty?" I asked. "He seems to be dying in the most horrible convulsions!"

Dorrie beamed.

"Good!" he said heartily.

"You callous bounder——"

"That's just where you make a mistake, my son," grinned Lord Dorrimore. "I'm kind-hearted an' thoughtful. Master Little has been eatin' more than is good for him, an' if he doesn't ease up before long he'll fill out like a balloon—and then somethin' truly shockin' will happen. So I thought it about time to take action."

"Yes, I know that," I said. "You doctored that grub—but, by the look of Fatty, I should say you poisoned it. What awful stuff did you use?"

"It's quite all right, Nipper," put in Nelson Lee. "Dorrie has not harmed the lad in any way, although I will admit that his treatment was somewhat drastic."

"Drastic!" I echoed. "Fatty's in a frightful state."

"That's because he ate so much," said Dorrie. "You see the idea? The more he demolished the worse the pain. But it'll do him good in the long run: it'll do him a terrific amount of good. You see, this stuff I put in the pastry is an extraction from an African herb. Umlosi knows all about it, an' it's the finest thing for reducin' weight there is. A month's course will make a chap ten times as healthy, an' bring him down to normal size."

"And does he have shocking pains with every dose?" I asked.

"That's just it," said Lord Dorrimore. "The stuff's all right—quite harmless and beneficial; but I'm afraid it wouldn't do as a commercial proposition. Elderly ladies and gentlemen with obese tendencies would probably jib at goin' through agony with every dose."

"They would," I agreed firmly. "But are you sure it's quite harmless, Dorrie? I felt a bit anxious when I saw Fatty writhing, and heard him yelling."

"That's only the way it acts," said his lordship complacently. "As I told you before, the stuff is splendid. It can't do anything but good. In the mornin' Little will be as bright as a lark——"

"And he'll have a bigger appetite than ever, I suppose?" chuckled Nelson Lee.

"That's quite possible," admitted

Dorrie. "But, you see, he'll be frightened to eat too much, because of the pains. We've got to make him believe that he's ill because he packed too much grub away. He mustn't know a word about this special treatment, or the whole game will be ruined. So you keen mum, my son!"

"Trust me," I said.

I was quite satisfied that Dorrie had done no harm to the fat boy of St. Frank's. If it had been otherwise, Nelson Lee would not have stood by smiling. And I certainly agreed that the lesson was necessary, although at that time I had no idea of the consequences.

I saw Little shortly after leaving Dorrie, and I found him in a quiet corner, groaning to himself. He looked up at me with a sickly expression, and his fat hands were clasped over his waistcoat.

"Feeling bad?" I asked sympathetically.

"It's awful!" moaned Fatty. "Great coconuts! I can't understand why I got these spasms. I haven't had pains in my tummy for years."

I shook my head.

"You've got to ask yourself why you're ill," I said. "Just think of the grub you've eaten here—just consider the enormous amount of indigestible pastry you've demolished. It won't do, Fatty. Even your interior won't stand it!"

"I—I think I shall go to bed," said the fat boy miserably.

"What about dinner——"

"Ow! Don't talk about it!" groaned Fatty.

"But I thought you liked to talk of grub," I said in surprise. "We're having a splendid feed to-night—roast beef, with plenty of fat, and——"

"Ow-vow! Go away, you ass!" gasped Little. "You're making me feel worse!"

"And gravy with nice oily——"

But Little didn't wait to hear any more. He staggered down the passage, clutched at the balustrade of the staircase, and hauled himself up to bed. I grinned as I watched him.

"It's the first of January to-morrow," I shouted. "Take my advice, Fatty, and turn over a new leaf."

But Fatty Little had gone.

And not a sign of him was seen during the remainder of the evening.

CHAPTER II.

NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS.

FIRST of January," remarked Tommy Watson. "Well, we've started on another year, and Christmas is over. Before long we shall be back at St. Frank's, and everything will be going on as usual."

We were standing in the doorway of Cliff Castle. New Year's Day had dawned bright and sunny. A hard frost was in the air, and the snow was crisp and powdery under foot.

The previous night we had stayed up until midnight—until the old year went out, and the new year came in. We had heard the church bells of the village, and there had been a bit of a celebration.

But we were all feeling bright and fresh, and everybody was active in some way or other, for we were due to leave Cliff Castle that day. The majority of the fellows were off home, to spend the remainder of the holiday with their own people.

Nelson Lee and I were going straight to London, where we should stay at Gray's Inn Road. If possible, we meant to pay calls upon Sexton Blake and Tinker, and other friends.

And the majority of us would meet again at St. Frank's when the new term commenced.

Breakfast was not yet ready, but we were quite ready for breakfast, for the sharp air gave us keen appetites, and we were all hungry. A chuckle from some of the fellows caused me to turn, and I saw the reason for the amusement.

Fatty Little had just appeared.

"Not dead yet, then?" remarked Pitt cheerfully.

"You look all serene this morning, Fatty," said De Valerio.

"Oh, I'm all right now," replied Little. "I had some horrible spasms last night, after I'd got to bed, but then I fell asleep, and didn't wake up until this morning. Great pumpkins! I had an awful time!"

"Let it be a warning," I said solemnly.

"Eh?"

"A warning, not to over-eat yourself," I went on. "A few more bouts like that, Fatty, and you'll be finished. You wouldn't like to go through those tummy troubles every day, would you?"

Fatty Little shook his head soberly.

"By chutney, I should think not!" he exclaimed. "Once is enough for me. I can tell you. I'm going jolly easy at brekker this morning; in fact, I don't think I ought to take anything at all—but I'll risk a snack!"

"A normal snack, or one of your own brand?" inquired Pitt.

"A snack is a snack," said Fatty.

"Is it?" grinned Pitt. "Allow me to differ, my fat porpoise. A snack to me would be a sandwich and a bun. A snack to you would consist of a dozen sandwiches and two dozen buns. That's just the difference!"

Little looked round at the grinning crowd.

"Well, I sha'n't eat much for brekker, anyhow," he said. "If any of you fellows think I'm going a bit too strong, just give me a reminder. I don't want to risk another bout like last night!"

And at breakfast the fat boy displayed remarkable control. He partook of no more than the other juniors. He ate normally, although he certainly cast many longing glances at the well-filled dishes. But Fatty had made up his mind, and he resisted all temptations.

"Good for you, my son!" said Lord Dorrimore, when breakfast was over.

"I—I don't understand, sir," said Fatty.

"You curbed your abnormal twist," explained Dorrie blandly. "You held yourself in check when you wanted to demolish the rations. That's rather a good word, you know. What you ought to do is to ration yourself to a certain amount of grub every day—just that and nothing more. Then you won't have any more trouble with your little Mary. Beg pardon—I mean your big Mary!"

Little grinned.

"Yes, sir, it's a pretty good idea," he said. "I don't want any more of those pains. I enjoyed brekker this morning."

"But you would have enjoyed double the amount—what?" asked his lordship.

"Of course you would! But if you only make a point of curbin' your natural desire for grub, you'll soon find that you'll be able to do with less—an' you'll feel stronger an' healthier. Think it over, my son."

Dorrie strolled away, and Little apparently did think it over, for shortly afterwards he came into the lounge-hall.

where a number of us were strapping up our bags and doing various other preparatory jobs.

"I say, you chaps," said Little, "I've come to a decision."

"That's interesting," I remarked, looking round. "Let's hope it'll be a sensible one."

"It is," said Fatty. "To-day is the first of January——"

"Go hon!" grinned Hart.

"It's a day when quite a lot of people make resolves," went on Little. "Well, I've decided to make a new year resolution of my own. And I'm going to keep it—always. It's an important step."

"I suppose you're going to ration yourself?" asked Pitt, with a chuckle.

"Well, not exactly," replied Fatty. "It's this way. Last night I took a bit too much—I don't mind admitting it. So, in future, I mean to eat normally—that is to say, I'll have the grub the school provides, and nothing more."

"Oh, you mean when you get back to St. Frank's?"

"Of course," said Fatty. "That's the idea. Last term I spent all my pocket-money on grub, but I've been thinking, and it seems to me that the money was rather wasted. I've resolved to spend nothing at all on tuck."

"My hat!" said Watson. "That's a pretty severe step."

"Dear fellow, I admire you—I do, really," said Sir Montie. "But you must allow me to remark that your resolve is a trifle too sweepin'——"

"Don't discourage him, you ass," I interrupted.

"Begad! I wasn't meanin'——"

"I haven't finished yet," interrupted the fat boy. "There are exceptions, of course. That's only natural."

"Ah! Now we are getting to it," grinned Pitt.

"I suppose there'll be exceptions six times a day?" inquired De Valerie.

Little shook his head.

"Oh, no!" he replied. "I want you chaps to hear my resolve, and I want you to make me keep to it in the new term, if I show any sign of weakening. I've decided not to spend any pocket-money on grub—except for tea in the study."

"Well, that's only natural," I said. "We all spend money on study teas."

"Exactly," said Fatty Little. "When I get back to St. Frank's I'm going on

this plan: Brekker in hall, and then nothing at all until dinner-time——"

"Nothing before brekker, of course?" asked Pitt.

"No, nothing; and then from dinner I'll go to tea-time without a break," declared Fatty firmly.

"And at tea-time, I suppose, you'll make up for all the time you've lost?" inquired Pitt, with a chuckle. "You'll have a terrific bust up——"

"Nothing of the kind," interjected Fatty. "At tea-time I'll go equal shares with the Trotwoods—and they generally spend about a bob each for tea. I whack out my bob, and no more. And then I'll go until supper-time in the ordinary course. In short, I won't spend any more on tuck than the Trotwoods!"

"That's a resolve?" I asked

"Yes."

"You're absolutely firm?"

"Of course I am!"

"Good!" I exclaimed. "We'll keep you to it. Don't forget, Fatty, that you mustn't eat anything except the school grub until tea-time—and then you mustn't spend any more than a bob!"

"That's right," said Fatty. "But, of course, if the Trotwood twins spend a bit more on tea, I can do the same—stand my usual share."

"That's understood," I said. "Good for you, Fatty. It'll be a bit of a task, you know, and you'll need a strong will to keep that resolution."

"It'll be a fight," said Fatty, shaking his head. "but I'm capable of it, and I'll stick to my guns. If I don't—if I show any sign of weakening—I want you chaps to bump me."

"If we do that we shall need a crane!" grinned Hart.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Better still, I'll hand my pocket-money over to a committee," went on Fatty brilliantly. "We can decide that on the first day of term."

He was full of his resolve, and he evidently meant it. Fortunately, he was unaware of the fact that the food which had caused him so much pain had been doctored. Had he known that interesting fact, there would have been no resolve at all.

But Fatty set the fashion that morning.

It was the first day of the new year, and, as Little had said, it was just the

time for the making of good resolutions. The famous Edward Oswald Handforth was the next fellow to fall into line.

The trouble started on the wide steps of Cliff Castle. Handforth and Church and McClure were having a little argument—not that there was anything particularly novel in this. Never a day passed without an argument of some kind cropping up. And Handforth, of course, was always right—in his own opinion. His long-suffering chums were not allowed to have any opinion. Their leader had a fist with a terrific punch behind it, and Church and McClure had learned to be very wary of that fist.

"You're an ass, Arnold McClure, and you always will be an ass," exclaimed Handforth sourly. "You must be dotty to suggest that we should go from Victoria to my dad's house by bus!"

"But it'll save money, and we're a bit short——"

"That doesn't matter," said Handforth. "I thought you had brains! Can't we go by taxi, and send the pater's butler out to pay the man off?"

"My hat!" grinned McClure. "That's not a bad wheeze."

"Jolly good, in fact," said Church. "I didn't think Handy had enough sense to think of a dodge like that."

"Eh?" said Handforth.

"I didn't think you had enough sense——"

"If you say that again, I'll punch you into the middle of next week!" roared Handforth. "You rotter! I suppose you know I'm more brainy than you are?"

"I didn't know it," said Church. "I thought——"

"It's a queer thing you can think at all," sneered Handforth. "It's a bit of a puzzle, in fact. How can a chap think when he's got nothing to think with?"

"There's no reason for you to be wild," said Church. "We all know what your brains are like, Handy—everybody here has had an insight into your marvellous capacity. I'll bet the kitchen cat has got more sense than you have!" he added warmly.

Handforth rolled up his sleeves.

"That's done it!" he bellowed. "Take that, you insulting bounder!"

Church attempted to dodge, knowing what was coming, but he was just a shade too late. The huge fist struck

him on the nose, and he went over backwards, tripped over a couple of steps, and fell into the snow with a thud which sounded quite alarming.

Church lay quite still, his eyes closed. "Good heavens!" gasped McClure.

"Get up, you shamming rotter!" roared Handforth. "I didn't hurt you!"

But Church remained quite still.

"Oh, my goodness!" gasped McClure. "You—you've stunned him, Handy! He went over with a terrible crash!"

Handforth gave a gulp, and turned pale. Then he rushed to Church's side, and knelt down in the snow. His rugged face was alight with concern and anxiety, for he realised that Church was not shamming.

"Buck up old man!" he said huskily. "You're all right——"

"Look at this whacking great stone," interrupted McClure. "He caught his head on it as he fell—it was lying in the snow, and we didn't see it. You're too jolly careless with your fists, Handy——"

"Oh, dry up," panted Handforth. "Look! He's coming round."

Church was certainly opening his eyes, and he blinked at his chums rather dazedly.

"What is the matter here?" demanded a sharp voice. "Good gracious! Is Church hurt in any way? Let me get past, boys."

Nelson Lee appeared in the doorway, and he pushed his way through the knot of juniors who had hurried out to see what was wrong. I was there, too.

The gov'nor hurried down to Church's side.

"How did this happen?" he asked sharply. "Church, you are looking rather pale—there is a nasty bruise on your head——"

"I—I tripped over, sir," said Church loyally. "Only a sharp knock, sir—I shall be all serene in a minute or two."

Handforth looked grim.

"That's not right, sir," he said. "I gave Church a punch on the nose, and knocked him down. He fell on his head. I'm awfully sorry—I didn't think for a minute that he'd hurt himself."

Nelson Lee turned to Handforth angrily.

"I don't like to speak cross words

just now, Handforth, but I am compelled to do so," he said curtly. "I have had occasion to speak to you on this subject before. You are altogether too free with your punches—and I am surprised that you have not caused grave injuries to your school fellows on other occasions. It is perfectly unwarrantable for you to use your fists so recklessly."

"Yes, sir," said Handforth meekly.

"I am particularly surprised to find that you should knock your own friends about with such malicious disregard for their safety——"

"But it wasn't malicious, sir——"

"I repeat the word, Handforth—malicious!" snapped Nelson Lee. "Were you at all careful, you would not deliver your punches so rashly. It is very lucky that Church is not badly injured, as he might well have been!"

"Don't rag him any more, sir," said Church, scrambling to his feet. "I'm all right now—only a bit of a headache. Handy didn't mean to hurt me."

"That is not the point, Church," said Lee. "I am quite certain that Handforth had no intention of hurting you. But he has a habit of punching hard when there is no provocation, and unless he learns to control himself, he will one day do somebody a real injury. Take that to heart, Handforth."

"Yes, sir," said Handforth lamely. "I didn't mean to hurt Church at all—and I'm awfully cut up about it. I—I'll be more careful in future. Thank goodness he's all right now!"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I'm pleased to find that you acknowledge your fault, Handforth," he said. "It is all to your credit, my boy."

The gov'nor turned and entered the castle again, leaving Handforth looking somewhat subdued.

"You got it in the neck, that time, Handy," said Christine.

I expected Handforth to get wild at the good-natured taunt—for, after all, it was a taunt. But Handy merely nodded.

"Yes, I did! I got it in the neck properly—and I deserved it, too!"

"You—you admit?" gasped De Valerie.

"Yes, of course I do," said Handforth. "What Mr. Lee said was right on the nail. I have been a bit too free with my punches. In future I shall have

to ease up a bit. Forgive me, Church, old man for swiping you like that."

"Don't be an ass," growled Church. "It's all right."

Handforth shook his head.

"It might have hurt you badly," he said. "I shall have to——"

He paused, abruptly, and his eyes glittered.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "It's the first of January to-day, and I've a dashed good mind to follow Little's example!"

"Spend no pocket money on grub?" chuckled Yorke.

"No, you ass—I've a good mind to make a new year resolution."

"That's the ticket!" I said heartily.

"Never spoil a good one, Handy."

"I'll do it!" declared Handforth with set lips. "There couldn't be a better time for coming to a decision of this sort. I ought to follow Mr. Lee's advice—and keep myself in check. So, from now onwards, I resolve never to punch any chap's nose again—unless he hits me first!"

"Great pip!" gasped McClure. "Do you mean that?"

"I do!"

"Honest injun?"

"It's a resolve—and resolves ain't made to be broken," said Handforth grimly. "I won't punch anybody unless I'm punched first—and then, of course, I shall be compelled to retaliate. That's only natural. But you won't find me hitting out in the first place. I'll keep my fists in check."

Church and McClure exchanged meaning glances.

"Right you are Handy—we'll see that you keep that resolution," said McClure briskly—"and I call upon you other chaps to witness it!"

"We've witnessed it all right," said Reginald Pitt. "From now onwards Handforth is pledged not to punch any fellow until he is attacked. It's a go, and life at St. Frank's will be all the easier for it!"

Church and McClure, at least, were heartily in agreement. Life for them in Study D would be totally different. Hitherto they had always been wary in an argument. But from now onwards they would stand in a very different position.

New year resolutions were certainly in fashion!

CHAPTER III.

MORE RESOLUTIONS.

EVERYTHING was ready.

Two big motor-cars were waiting outside Cliff Castle, and they were piled with luggage. A crowd of juniors was waiting about the steps, attired in their overcoats, and carrying small articles of personal luggage.

The last minute had arrived, and the party were off to the station, to catch the express for London.

"Sha'n't be long now," I said cheerfully. "We've had a ripping time here, and I'm almost sorry to leave. Dorrie has been a fine host, and I've never spent a happier Christmas!"

"Hear, hear!" said several other fellows.

"Still we must go home for a bit," remarked Somerton. "Our people will be wondering if we don't. There's not much time before we get back to St. Frank's, for the new term."

"We shall all be together until we get to London, anyhow," said Pitt. "At Victoria there will be a loving parting, and we shall all go our various ways. There's a pretty long trip before some of us, too."

Lord Dorrimore emerged from the hall, and eyed the scene genially.

"Well boys, we shall be partin' before long," he said. "I'm comin' to London with you, but then we shall separate—by gad!"

His lordship paused, and gazed at Somerton curiously.

"By gad!" he repeated mildly.

"Anything the matter, sir?" asked the Duke of Somerton.

"I was just lookin' at your clothes, old man," said Dorrimore. "I was wonderin' what has happened to your trousers. There's somethin' missin'!"

"Missing?" said the duke, startled.

"A button, perhaps," grinned De Valerie.

"No, not a button," said Dorrie, winking at me. "I was thinkin' about the crease. Trousers are supposed to have a crease, you know; but yours are baggy. They're shockingly baggy."

"Are they, sir?" said Somerton, flushing a trifle.

"They're in an appallin' state," said Lord Dorrimore, who was really only

pulling Somerton's leg. "An' look at your boots! They're down at the heel, an' I'm hanged if there isn't a burst in the left toecap!"

Somerton regarded his boots anxiously. He was a duke, and possessed estates with an enormous rent roll. But the schoolboy duke was probably the most careless fellow in the Remove. A stranger would have mistaken him for the son of a very poor business man.

He wore his clothing anyhow. It was a standing joke in the Remove that the Duke of Somerton always wore an inky collar. His collar wasn't inky just now, but it was certainly a bit crumpled. For his own personal appearance he didn't care a jot. He was free and easy by nature, and free and easy in his habits.

He failed to notice the grins which were apparent on every face. Lord Dorrimore was as serious as a judge—although, of course, he was merely poking fun at the youthful duke.

"An' then your overcoat," he remarked. "I don't believe it's been pressed or cleaned for months. Did you buy it in a second-hand shop?"

"Oh, by Jove!" protested Somerton. "The coat isn't so bad, sir——"

"And look at your collar—it's in a shocking state," went on Dorrie severely.

"A collar like that ought to be clean, an' tidy. Are you aware of the fact, my lad, that you are simply a walkin' exhibition?"

"An exhibition, sir!" asked the duke blankly.

"Simply that an' nothin' more," declared Dorrie. "An exhibition of frightful slovenliness. Take my advice, an' smarten yourself up a bit. If you don't, you'll be mistaken for an errand boy!"

Dorrie could keep his face straight no longer, so he turned, and entered the hall again—leaving the crowd of juniors chuckling at Somerton's obvious discomfiture. The duke was certainly startled.

He regarded his boots and trousers with much concern.

"I say old chap?" he asked, appealing to me. "Do they really look bad?"

"Awful!" I said solemnly.

"Terrible!" declared Pitt.

"Disgraceful!" said De Valerie.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Somerton did not join in the laughter.

"Now I come to think of it, I suppose I do look a bit of a wreck," he admitted, with concern in his voice. "I ought to take more care of my appearance, you know. I shall have to mend matters."

"Better mend your clothes first!" grinned Hart.

"Yes!"

"I'll do what Handy's done—make a resolution," said Somerton firmly. "Yes, that's it! The very idea! When I turn up at St. Frank's for the new term, I'll come in a complete new outfit."

"That's what you did last term," I chuckled. "And within a week you were looking like a tramp!"

"I sha'n't this time," declared Somerton. "I'll always have a crease in my trousers, and I'll always wear a clean collar, and I'll always make a point of going about smart. Nobody shall ever tell me that I'm shabby or untidy. It's a resolve. From now onwards I'll be as smart as—as Tregellis-West!"

"Begad!" ejaculated Sir Montie.

"You'll have to be pretty careful, then," I said, grinning. "Don't forget that Montie is the mould of fashion, and the——"

"Really, old boy," protested Montie. "Pray do not be so frightfully absurd."

"He isn't absurd," said the duke. "You're the smartest chap in the Remove, Tregellis-West, but next term you'll have to look out for yourself—because, if you're not careful I shall beat you in the dandy line."

"That's frightfully interestin'—it is, really," said Sir Montie mildly. "I shall have to look to my laurels, begad!"

He did not speak with much concern in his voice; for Somerton would find it necessary to make extraordinary advances in his personal appearance to outshine the recognised swell of the Ancient House.

Lord Dorrimore had been really joking—it was his nature to be humorous if he saw half an opportunity.

"That's three new year resolves," I remarked, with a smile. "I wonder how many of them will be kept up?"

"All of 'em—for a day or two," said Pitt. "It'll be rather interesting to watch how things develop, when the new term starts. I wonder how long it will be before Handy punches some poor chap on the nose?"

"We're all wondering that," chuckled De Valerie.

It wasn't long before we got off in the big cars. Some of the guests had departed already; others would go later, but we boys went by ourselves, except for Dorrie and Nelson Lee.

At the station there was rather a long wait for the train, for we got there sooner than we had expected; and, to make the delay longer, the train was expected to be somewhat late.

"Well, we needn't hang about the platform," I said, stamping my feet on the hardened snow. "There's a refreshment room just along the platform, and we might as well have a cup of coffee."

"Good idea," said Handforth.

Many others agreed, and a crowd of us entered the little refreshment room, and collected round the counter.

"Hallo!" I said, looking round. "Where's Fatty?"

"Outside!" grinned Watson. "He wouldn't be tempted."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I don't blame him," I said. "He's made a resolve, and he's keeping to it. If he starts well, there's a chance that he'll continue well."

We partook of coffee and various other items, including mince pies and pastries of all sorts. The quality of the stuff was not up to the standard of the pastry we had had at Cliff Castle, by any means, but the keen air sharpened our appetites, and we quite enjoyed the snack. I felt rather sorry for Fatty Little, pacing up and down the platform, manfully trying to make himself believe that he did not require any tuck.

"Train's signalled," remarked Watson, glancing out of the window.

"We'd better buck up, then," I said. "I want the bill——"

"Pray leave that in my hands, dear boy," said Sir Montie gracefully. "I shall be quite delighted to settle up the triflin' account."

"But look here, Montie——"

"Dear fellow, I insist—I do, really!"

There was no time for an argument, and so Montie paid the bill. The figure ran into something like thirty shillings, for a good few of us had partaken of the snack—and refreshment-room charges are not precisely cheap.

The train steamed in, and we scram-

bled on board. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore went by themselves, and the juniors tumbled in anywhere.

"Feeling all serene, Fatty?" I asked cheerfully, after we had started.

Jimmy Little nodded.

"Fine, thanks," he said.

"You don't require any grub yet?"

"Grub doesn't interest me now," said Fatty, with an effort. "I don't suppose I shall eat anything until I get home—and it'll be all the better. I shall enjoy my tea."

Under ordinary circumstances, the fat boy would have practically made the refreshment room barren; but he had made his resolve, and he was sticking to it. Most of the juniors laughed at the idea; but it was no laughing matter with Fatty. He was something of a hero.

In London there came a parting. Shortly after we had arrived in Victoria most of the fellows had gone off in various directions. Some by taxi home, others to different termini, to continue their journey.

Tregellis-West and Watson came along with Nelson Lee and I to Gray's Inn Road, where they would have tea with us, afterwards going on to their respective homes, which were in London.

Nelson Lee and Dorrie took a taxi by themselves, leaving we three boys to follow on at our leisure.

"We'll go by bus," I said. "We can see London better from a bus; and I'm quite glad to be back in the old spot. There's nothing like London, after all."

Tregellis-West shook his head.

"I don't quite agree with it, dear fellow," he said. "A 'bus is all very well, but it's not exactly the ideal of comfort, begad. I certainly think it would be better to go by taxi."

Before we could object Sir Montie had secured a cab, and we all tumbled in. We drove as far as Holborn Circus, when I called a halt, and we jumped out, and Sir Montie paid off the taxi.

"Dear fellow, what's the idea of stoppin' here?" he inquired mildly. "We haven't got to Gray's Inn Road yet——"

"We're not far off," I said, "and we might as well look at some of the shops. It'll be a bit of a change, after being buried in the country so long."

"It's not a bad idea, old boy," said

Montie. "Begad! Those neckties look rather rippin', I must admit!"

"Bother the neckties," said Watson. "Drag him away, Nipper——"

But Sir Montie refused to be dragged away. He examined an array of neckties in a brilliantly illuminated window with much interest. He certainly did not require anything in the nature of neckwear, for he had a tremendous assortment.

However, he plunged into the shop after inspecting the window, and proceeded to purchase a dozen ties of the most expensive variety. Other articles took his eye inside the shop, and by the time he had finished the bill came to a considerable amount. He paid it, and the shopman promised to send the goods on to Gray's Inn Road within the hour.

"Rippin' idea of yours, stoppin' the taxi in Holborn, Nipper," said Sir Montie, as we emerged from the shop.

"Yes, wasn't it?" I said. "It's made you spend a good deal of money, anyhow. Why on earth did you buy all those ties?"

"I shall probably wear them, dear fellow."

"I'm glad you said 'probably,' because there's no certainty about it," I remarked. "You've got so many neckties that you could put a different one on for every day of the year, and still have a few left over."

Tregellis-West smiled.

"You are exaggeratin' in the most frightful degree," he declared. "However, I presume you are only jokin'."

A little further on the swell of the Ancient House was attracted to another brilliant window—with the result that a pair of boots was added to his purchases. They were endoubtedly fine, but so they ought to be considering that the price was somewhere near five guineas.

By the time we arrived at the gov'nor's place in Gray's Inn Road, I was just wondering how much Montie had spent since we had departed from Cliff Castle. His hand had been in his pocket without a pause.

"How much money did you start out with to-day, Montie?" I asked casually, while we were having a wash in the bathroom.

Tregellis-West looked up from the folds of a towel.

"I really couldn't tell you, old fellow," he said.

"Well, roughly?"

"Somethin' like twenty-five pounds, I believe."

"And how much have you got left now?" I asked.

"To tell you the truth, Nipper boy, I am runnin' rather short," said Montie. "However, the matter can be rectified in the mornin'—"

"That's not the point," I said, wagging my finger at him. "Allow me to inform you, my son, that your extravagance is enormous."

"Begad!"

"You've been studying economy the wrong way about," I went on. "It's time you turned over a new leaf. Those neckties, for example—you didn't need them. Unnecessary expense."

"Yes, but dear old fellow—"

"Wait until I've done," I went on. "Those boots—they were certainly a luxury. Unnecessary expense again. We came from Victoria by taxi, instead of a 'bus. Still more unnecessary expense. You've been spending money like water, and it's time you called a halt."

Montie regarded me rather blankly.

"Now you come to mention it, dear boy, I suppose I have been rather lavish," he remarked. "I don't believe in spending money over luxuries. I think I'd better make an alteration—"

"Or make a new year resolution?" grinned Watson.

"Begad! That's not at all a bad idea," said Sir Montie. "I might as well be in the fashion, you know. Yes, I will certainly make a resolve on the spot. From this minute onwards I will study economy. I will only spend money when it is vitally necessary to do so. Extravagance is a sin, and I will not be guilty of it in the future. Yes, old boys, I hereby resolve to study economy!"

"Good!" I grinned. "We'll see how it works."

I was wondering, as a matter of fact, how long the new order of things would last. A great many resolves had been made that day by the juniors, but four of them were outstanding ones.

I was curious to know how Handforth, Little, Somerton, and Tregellis-West would keep to their new year resolutions. Somehow, I couldn't quite believe that they would last throughout the whole twelve months!

CHAPTER IV.

THE HEROES.

"HERE we are again!"

I made that remark as Watson and I strode briskly through the massive gateway at St. Frank's, into the familiar old Triangle.

A good many days had passed, and the new term at the old school had commenced. It was early afternoon, and the major portion of the fellows had already arrived. Others were dribbling in by every train that came to Bellton.

"Well, I don't know whether to be glad or sorry," remarked Watson. "It's rather a pity the holidays are over, but I must say it's ripping to be back at the old place. I reckon we shall make great strides with the footer this term."

"Rather," I agreed. "We're going to whack everybody—at home and away. Hallo! Can't I see the slim figure of Little over by the tuck-shop?"

"My hat, yes," said Watson. "We'd better get on his track. You haven't forgotten the resolve of his, I suppose? No money to be spent on tuck except at tea-time, then only a bob's worth. I'll bet he's dropped his determination already. Grub always was his undoing."

We strolled across the Triangle to Mrs. Hake's little shop. The place was crowded out, for Mrs. Hake always did a roaring trade on first day of terms—and got in extra supplies for the occasion.

The fellows were flush on that day, and the good lady saw no reason why she should not have a share in the general affluence.

Jimmy Little was standing about outside the tuck-shop as we arrived. He was oblivious of our approach, for he was engaged in the highly pleasant task of counting his money over.

In addition to silver he possessed a good number of notes.

"How goes it, Fatty?" I asked cheerfully. "Glad to be back again for the new term?"

Fatty Little looked up with a start.

"Great doughnuts! You startled me," he said. "Jolly pleased to see you again, Nipper. Same to you, Watson. I—I suppose you're going into the tuck-shop for some grub?"

"We weren't thinking of it," I said; "but it's not at all a bad suggestion."

"I—I can't very well come in," began Fatty.

"Rather not," interrupted Watson. "What about that resolve of yours? No tuck between meals—and only a nominal amount for tea. You haven't been getting weak on the point, I suppose?"

"Nun-no! Not at all!" stammered Fatty. "I—I'm feeling a bit peckish, that's all—awfully peckish, in fact. I—I could eat a quid's worth of tuck on the spot. But I'm sticking to that resolution."

"Good man," I said heartily. "You've got a strong will."

"You're a hero!" grinned Watson.

"Great pickled herrings! I should think I am a hero," declared Little. "I don't know how I shall keep it up, but it's got to be done. Mrs. Hake's grub looks better than ever to-day—just when I can't have any!" he added plaintively.

"Then don't be such an ass!" I said.

"Eh?"

"Don't stand here, looking at the stuff!" I exclaimed.

"You—you mean I should be justified in—in going in?" asked Fatty eagerly. "It's the first day of the term, and I suppose there's a difference——"

"None of that!" I said sternly. "You're weakening, you bounder! I meant, go somewhere else—somewhere far away from the tuck. It'll only tempt you, if you keep looking in at this window."

"Yes, I suppose you're right," said Fatty, in a sad voice. "I've got tons of tin, too—more than I can do with, really. It seems a pity. But I'll be firm," he added stoutly. "I'll keep to the resolution!"

"Good man!" I chuckled.

Fatty wandered off, looking like a lost sheep. His usually sunny face was doleful and worried. His position was a difficult one. He had resolved not to partake of grub between meals—and that resolve had been made in the hearing of a fair number of juniors. He couldn't possibly back out of his pledge without revealing himself as a weak-willed fellow.

"Poor old son," said Watson grinning. "I expect he'll cave in before the end of the week. We'd better get along to Study C. What the dickens happened to Montie, I wonder?"

"Blessed if I know," I said. "We arranged to meet him at Victoria, and he failed to turn up. I expect he'll come down by the next train."

"He may come by the express to Bannington, and taxi from there," remarked Tommy Watson. "If so, he'll be in presently."

"Too expensive," I said. "He's practising economy, don't forget."

"Oh, yes, of course," grinned Watson.

We glanced over to the gateway, and saw three juniors striding in. They were Handforth, Church, and McClure. The famous trio in Study D had arrived. They came marching across to the Ancient House doorway.

"Still alive and kicking, I see," I observed cheerfully. "How goes it, my merry children. Glad to be back again?"

"Well, we're not exactly sorry," said Handforth. "Hallo! Here's the one and only Fullwood—looking more flashy than ever, too. Where did you buy that fancy vest, Fully? It looks rather gaudy."

Ralph Leslie Fullwood scowled. The cad of the Remove was himself, as usual. Holidays had not changed his character.

"Mind your own rotten business!" he said sourly.

"How sweet!" exclaimed Handforth. "How remarkably polite and courteous! I suppose you don't happen to be looking for a thick ear, Fullwood?"

Fullwood glared.

"No, I don't," he said shortly. "Rats to you."

"You'd better go easy, my son," said Handforth. "I'm not prepared to stand any of your beastly rot. Two more words from you, and I'll lay you flat on your back. That would improve your nice new suit, wouldn't it?"

Fullwood scowled again.

"You can go and eat coke!" he said sneeringly. "I've heard that pigs rather like eating coke occasionally!"

"Why, you—you——" Handforth paused, and glared round. "Did you hear him?" he roared. "Did you hear that cad call me a pig? Great pip! I'll wipe him up and pulverize him!"

Fullwood was walking off, and Handforth rushed after him. But I made a swift movement, and caught Handy by the coatsleeve. He swung round, protesting violently.

"Lemme go, you silly ass!" he howled. "I'm going to wipe Fullwood——"

"No, you're not," I interrupted calmly. "You're not going to touch Fullwood!"

"But he insulted me——"

"I can't help that," I said. "You shouldn't speak to him—and then you wouldn't get answered back. You started the conversation, don't forget. Anyhow, you're not doing any punching."

"Ain't I!" bellowed Handforth. "I'll punch you——"

"Oh!" I said, in surprise. "And is this the way you keep your wonderful new year resolutions?"

Handforth gasped.

"My—my which?" he stuttered blankly.

"You heard what I said."

"Oh, my goodness——"

"Of course!" ejaculated McClure. "We'd forgotten all about it. Handy is pledged not to punch anybody this term!"

"By jingo, yes!" said Church joyfully.

Handforth looked like a newly landed fish.

"Yes; but—but that's all rot!" he said weakly. "We—we were only joking, you know——"

"Of course, if you regard a solemn resolve as a joke, I won't say any more, and you can go ahead with punching Fullwood," I said grimly. "But I always thought you were a fellow of your word, Handforth. You made a positive resolve the day we left Cliff Castle—and I thought you meant it."

Handforth turned red.

"I did mean it," he panted. "That is to say—— Well, of course, I'll stick to it. A resolution is a resolution. You won't find me backing out of anything I've agreed upon."

"Good man!" I said. "I thought you were the right stuff, Handy."

I was as serious as a judge—outwardly. Inwardly, I was chuckling. Handforth's discomfiture was considerable. He had probably forgotten his precious resolve while he had been at home, and he was rather staggered to find that we had not forgotten it.

But he was obstinate, and he wasn't likely to give in. He looked after Fullwood sadly, and his hands hung limply by his sides. A good few other juniors

were standing by, listening, juniors to whom this resolve was news.

"What—what did I say—exactly?" asked Handforth, in a strange voice.

"You resolved not to punch anybody this term—in fact, for always," I said.

"Great pip!"

"That's ripping!" remarked Owen major. "We sha'n't be in fear of Handy's fists in future. We can punch him—and he daren't punch back!"

"Oh, my goodness!" said Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hold on!" I put in. "That's not quite the arrangement. Handforth's resolution was this; he won't punch anybody unless somebody punches him to begin with. In that event, he can punch to his heart's content."

An expression of great relief came upon Handforth's face.

"My only hat!" he exclaimed. "I'd forgotten that bit!"

"He'll store all his punches up in future," chuckled Hubbard. "Then, when some fellow digs him in the ribs, he'll regard it as a blow, and he'll let fly. Woe betides the chap who forgets himself!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on, Handy, let's get along to Study D," said McClure. "We've got to get our things straight; and there's always a lot of work to do on the first day of the term. We shall be in a muddle until to-night!"

"Right," said Handforth. "Come on, and remember, Nipper, I'm a fellow who keeps a resolve when he makes one. I'm going to keep this!"

"If you do, you'll be a hero!" grinned Owen major.

The chums of Study D marched into the Ancient House, and they were followed by a good few chuckles. Not many fellows really believed that Handforth would keep to his extraordinary resolution.

"How long do you give him?" asked Watson.

"About a week—no more," I said. "If he keeps it up for a week, he'll be a marvel, because he'll have to stand a terrific amount of cheek from the other chaps. He'll go nearly dotty by the end of a week. Punching is like eating and drinking to Handy; he can't live without it."

"Well, we'll see," said Watson. "I've got an idea—— Hallo! Some more arrivals by the look of it."

The station cab had just driven into the Triangle. It was loaded right up with noisy juniors. They had apparently engaged the vehicle, and were sharing the expense, which couldn't amount to much individually.

"Pitt and Grey," I said, strolling over towards the cab. "And Hart—— Can't see any sign of Montie, though. By jingo! Just have a look at Somerton! Do my eyes deceive me, or is it really true?"

"Great Scott!" grinned Watson.

The Duke of Somerton had just descended from the cab, and he presented a remarkable appearance. Instead of baggy trousers, a crumpled jacket, and a grimy collar, he wore his clothes in a manner which Sir Montie Tregellis-West himself could not surpass. The duke, in fact, was spruce to a degree.

"Hallo, Somerton! How goes it?" I said cheerfully.

"Glad to see you again, old chap!" exclaimed the duke. "I'm in a terrible state of discomfort—— Er—I mean I'm feeling ripping, you know! I suppose you've noticed a little difference?"

"No," I said.

"You—you haven't noticed——" began Somerton blankly.

"Not a little difference—a jolly big difference," I explained. "My dear chap, you look as if you've just stepped out of a tailor's window. Splendid! Keep this up, and you'll beat Tregellis-West at his own game."

"These new year resolutions are all being kept," chuckled Watson. "I don't mind saying that I'm surprised. You look topping, Somerton, although there's a speck of mud on your collar——"

"By Jove!" ejaculated Somerton. "Really? I'd better buzz indoors, and put a clean one on."

He hurried off, and we grinned.

"It's wonderful," I said. "Of course, they're very keen just at present. But it can't last for long, it's against human nature. There aren't many resolutions made that are rigidly kept. I've tried it myself."

We went into Study C, and arranged our books and other things quite neatly. And we decided that everything should be kept tidy in future. Probably this state of affairs would last three or four

days, and then Study C would take on its usual homely appearance of fearful disorder.

Tommy and I strolled out into the Triangle again after that, and almost the first person we saw was Sir Launcelot Montgomery Tregellis-West. Our noble chum was just entering the gateway.

To our astonishment, Montie was carrying a heavy suit-case in one hand and a bulging Gladstone bag in the other. He looked rather untidy, and he was certainly fagged.

"Begad! So there you are, dear fellows!" he exclaimed, setting his luggage down. "I'm frightfully glad to see you—I am, really. I was hopin' that you'd be at the station to meet me——"

"You silly ass!" said Watson. "We arranged to meet at Victoria!"

"Dear old boy, I tried to get there in time, but my 'bus was held up in the traffic," exclaimed Montie. "I was awfully cut up, but it couldn't be helped."

"Your bus?" I repeated. "Do you mean a motor-bus?"

"Exactly."

"I didn't know there was a taxi strike on," said Watson.

"There isn't, that I know of," remarked Sir Montie. "I went to Victoria by 'bus, you know. An' I was shockingly disappointed when I found neither of you chaps at the station to meet me. I had to carry these bally things all the way up by myself!"

"But why?" I asked. "What about the cab? Wasn't it there?"

"Oh, it was there all right!" said Sir Montie.

"I suppose he wouldn't take you for some reason?"

"Dear boy, I didn't ask him," explained Montie. "You apparently forget that I came to a firm resolve——"

"What another!" yelled Watson.

"Begad! No! I've only made one," said Tregellis-West. "One resolution is quite enough for me to deal with, begad! It is, really! Studyin' economy is simply a frightful fag."

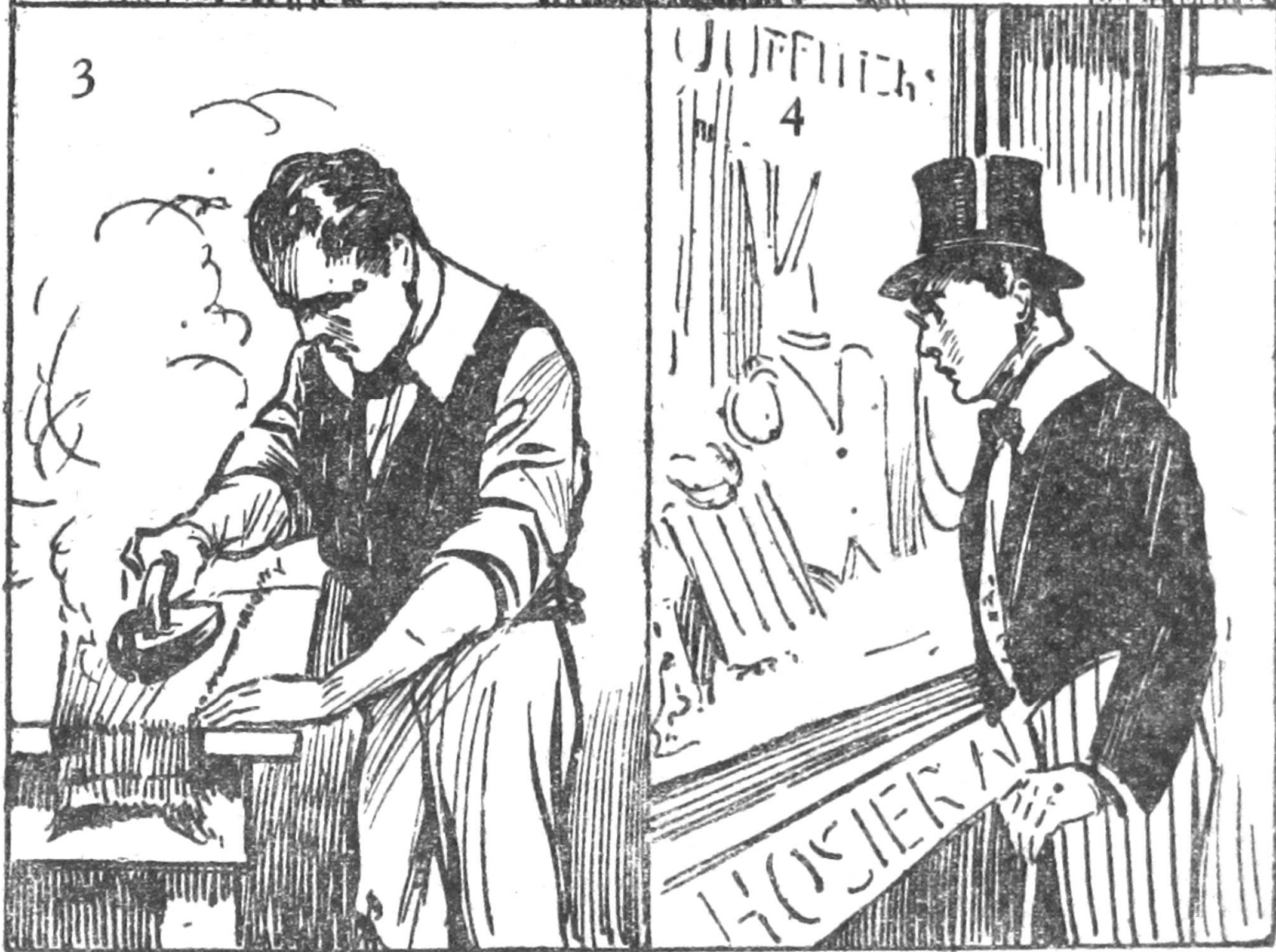
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is no laughing matter, either——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, dear old boys——"

"So that's the explanation!" I chuckled. "You went to Victoria by 'bus, and missed your giddy train, and walked up from Bellton, instead of taking the



SOME NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS.

1. Handforth refrains from using his fists.
2. Fatty Little avoids the allurements of the tuck-shop.
3. The Duke of Somerton pays more attention to his attire.
4. Sir Montie pays less for his.

cab. Good old Montie! Studying economy is not as easy as it sounds."

"Nipper, boy, you are right," agreed Montie. "It entails a frightful amount of hard work. But I made the resolve, and I must stick to it."

"Good for you!" grinned Tommy.

"By the way, how are the others gettin' on?" asked Tregellis-West curiously. "Handforth, I mean—Handforth an' Little an' Somerton? I sincerely trust they are stickin' to their guns?"

"Like glue!" I replied. "Fatty won't touch any grub, although he's got pocketsful of money. Handforth can't punch any noses, and the duke is looking like an edition of your past self."

"Begad! My past self?"

"Exactly. You're not looking your best just now, Montie," I explained. "Your glory has departed, owing, I suppose, to the exertions of the day. A chap can't lug bags about and look well groomed all the time."

A worried expression came into Montie's face.

"That is what has been concernin' me so frightfully," he said. "Begad! I'm not so sure that taxis and cabs ain't economical after all. It'll cost me far more to buy a new pair of trousers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

We couldn't help roaring, but Sir Montie Tregellis-West was looking quite serious as we assisted him with his baggage into the Ancient House.

All the resolutions were being kept. How long would they last?

CHAPTER V.

GETTING THEIR OWN BACK.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH looked round Study D, in the Remove passage, with an expression of discontent on his rugged face.

"Things don't seem to be right, somehow," he remarked. "That bookcase is in a different position, for one thing. Some silly ass must have moved it——"

"I did," said Church calmly.

"You did?" snapped Handforth.

"What for?"

"Because we had it in front of the

window all last term, and the thing was a nuisance," explained Church. "It's far better where it is, in that recess."

"Rot!" said Handforth. "It's dark there, and we can't see any titles. Shove it under the window, and buck up about it. I remember we had a bit of a bust-up last term over that fatheaded bookcase."

"I know," said Church. "You forced us to put it where you wanted it. This time we're going to have our own way—ain't we, McClure?"

"Rather," said McClure.

Handforth glared.

"That bookcase is going under the window!" he snapped. "If you think you're going to be bosses here, you're mistaken! I'm the leader of this study, and if you don't buck up and move that piece of furniture, I'll——"

"Well, what will you do?" asked Church sweetly.

"I'll punch your silly head!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you—you——"

"How can you punch my head when I haven't even touched you?" asked Church. "You seem to forget that you mustn't hit anybody until somebody hits you."

Handforth gasped.

"You silly idiot!" he roared. "That doesn't apply in this study!"

"Oh, doesn't it?" said Church. "I think you've made a bloomer there. A resolution like yours includes everybody. Clurey and I have come to a decision. Last term we stood a lot of your rot——"

"My which?"

"Your silly rot," said Church calmly. "But this term we're not going to be such soft asses——"

"Great pip!" said Handforth.

"We're going to make a stand——"

"A—a stand?"

"Exactly," said Church. "We've decided that we shall get on a lot better if you keep your own place, Handy——"

"My—my own place?" gasped Handforth faintly.

"Of course," put in McClure. "Last term you seemed to think that you were the lord and master of Study D, and Church and I were a couple of asses to remain under your thumb so long. That's all altered now."

"Is it?" said Handforth dazedly.

"Yes; it'll be quite different in future——"

"Dif—different——"

"So different that you'll hardly know what's happening for a day or two," said Church pleasantly. "That bookcase affair is one instance. McClure and I have decided that it shall be in the recess, and it'll be there. This study has got three votes, and the majority is against you, Handy."

"My—my goodness!"

"Then there's the little matter concerning footer boots," went on Church thoughtfully. "We're not going to stand any more of your rot in that way, Handy. We're not going to let you shove your dirty footer boots in the fender. It only makes the iron rusty, and then we have to clean it. Of course, if you make the fender dirty in future, you have to clean it yourself!"

"Exactly," grinned McClure.

Handforth stared at his chums blankly. Then his expression changed, and his face grew red. He raised his fist, and brought it down with a thump which shook the table violently.

"Now listen to me!" he roared. "If you think I'm going to stand any of this tommy rot, you've made a bloomer! I have always been boss of this study, and I'm going to be boss still. If you don't shift that bookcase within ten seconds I'll shift it myself!"

"Oh, will you?" said McClure warmly.

"I'll shift it now!" bawled Handforth.

He made a rush at the bookcase. When he arrived, he half turned, ready to deal with his chums as they lay fingers on him. But Church and McClure merely looked at their leader, and Handforth was rather nonplussed.

"Go ahead," said Church, nodding. "Shift it!"

"Ain't you going to stop me?" demanded Handforth warmly.

"Not likely," said Church. "If we touched you, you'd make that an excuse for landing out with your fists. And we're not going to risk that, thanks!"

"You thought we'd fall into the trap, didn't you?" grinned McClure.

Handforth clenched his fists, and gazed at them helplessly. They were large and formidable, and capable of doing great damage. But he was tied hand and foot; he couldn't strike unless he was struck!

"My only hat!" he muttered. "Something'll go bang in a minute!"

Something did. He grabbed the bookcase, carried it across the room, and slammed it down in front of the window

with such a crash that it collapsed, strewing the books all over the floor.

"And we don't want any temper, either!" snapped Church sharply. "You can just pick those books up——"

"You—you—you—— Oh, my only Aunt Jane!" gasped Handforth. "I'd give a whole week's pocket money just to deliver one punch—one terrific punch—in the middle of your confounded face!"

"That's very interesting," said Church. "You can punch if you like——"

"You give me permission?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"Well, not exactly," replied Church hastily. "But if you punch me you will have broken your resolution—on the very first day of term! A fine name you'll make for yourself, won't you?"

Handforth sat down abruptly.

"You'd better dry up—the pair of you!" he exclaimed. "Human nature can only stand a certain amount, and when that certain amount is exhausted something's got to happen. I've warned you—be quiet! If I have any more of your infernal nerve, I shall let myself go."

McClure laughed.

"That doesn't concern us," he said.

"We're not going to be closed up in our own study. You have my full permission to go and eat coke!"

"I—I'll——"

Handforth paused, and stared in front of him unseeingly. Then he rose to his feet, strode to the window, and gazed out into the Triangle. When he made that resolution, he had never dreamed that anything of this nature would occur. His eyes were opened, and he was staggered.

He turned from the window, and gazed into the mirror over the fireplace. He wasn't looking at himself, although he appeared to be. His thoughts were very far away. With a feeling of horror, he realised that his days of power were over.

"Well, can you see anything particularly impressive?" asked Church. "I suppose you think you're rather handsome?"

"Eh?" said Handforth, turning.

"As a matter of fact," went on Church, "you're ugly. I've often wanted to tell you so, Handy, but I didn't think it worth the trouble. Your face looks very much like a design for a gargoyle!"

Handforth went purple.

"You—you rotter!" he roared. "You're taking advantage of that resolution of mine! Last term you wouldn't have dared to say a thing like that!"

"The truth must be told sometimes," said Church. "Last term the truth would have caused trouble—this term it can't. That's just the difference. Your clumsy, great hands are powerless."

"My which hands?"

"They remind me of legs of mutton," said Church. "How on earth you carry them about with you is a puzzle to me, Handy. I've often wanted to tell you these things, and now I'm able to do it."

"I didn't think you were such a pair of caddish rotters," said Handforth sourly. "My own chums can do nothing but turn against me. Just because my hands are tied, you stand there and insult me right and left——"

"Yes; but look here——"

"You're not worth punching even," went on Handforth bitterly. "I don't think I should whop you, even if I could. You're not worth spending the energy on! A couple of insulting rotters—that's what you are!"

McClure grinned.

"My dear old chap, that's just where you make the mistake," he said. "We haven't insulted you once yet."

"Didn't you compare my face to a gargoyle?" roared Handforth.

"Church did."

"Well, wasn't that an insult?"

"Of course not," said McClure. "It was simply the truth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Church. "The truth must be told sometimes, Handy—even if it's rather unpleasant."

Handforth breathed hard.

"Well, I won't say any more just now," he exclaimed. "I'm disgusted with you—I'm fed up to the neck. I've never met such a couple of cads in all my life. You don't deserve to have a leader like me!"

"You can let one of us be leader, if you like," said Church. "It's about time there was a change, anyhow. And why don't you pick up those books, Handy? They look untidy lying there—and Clurey and I won't touch 'em."

Handforth gazed at the books, he gazed at his chums, and then he marched out of the study. He marched out simply because he couldn't trust himself for a second longer. He felt that he had to hit something—it didn't exactly matter what, but it was highly necessary to punch somewhere.

He slammed the door, and went charging down the passage. He had

decided to rush to the gymnasium, where he could punch a ball about to his heart's content. In the lobby he was just passing out when he ran into Fullwood and Co.

"Look where you're goin', you clumsy elephant!" said Fullwood sharply.

"And take care of those barges you call feet!" said Gulliver.

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "Are—are you rotters speaking to me?"

"Of course we are," said Gulliver. "We're just tellin' you to mind where you're goin'. We're not prepared to stand any of your bunkum this time, Handforth. You can go an' fry your face!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Handforth, in anguish. "What a dotty ass I was to make any resolves at all!"

There were three noses he was simply longing to punch—noses which deserved punching—but he was unable to exert himself. For one second he thought of breaking his resolve on the spot, but then he got himself under control again, and he stalked out into the Triangle.

He came out waving his hands wildly, and he nearly walked into Tregellis-West and myself, who were just coming over from the College House, where we had been paying our respects to Christine and Co.

"Hallo, Handy—go easy!" I said. "What's wrong with you?"

Handforth stopped, and regarded us with set lips.

"I'm going dotty!" he said hoarsely.

"Begad!"

"That's impossible, Handy," I said.

"Eh?"

"A chap who's dotty already can't go——"

"Oh, don't try to be funny!" said Handforth sourly. "You chaps have done a fine thing for me with your beastly resolutions! I've been insulted more this afternoon than I've ever been insulted before!"

"Well, I like that!" I said. "I really like that! We've done it for you! You silly ass, you made the resolution of your own free will, and I dare say the insults you refer to are merely a few home truths."

"That's about the size of it, dear old boy," said Sir Montie. "Some of the chaps have been mortally afraid to speak to Handforth in the correct way, because they were wary of his frightful great

fists. But that's over now; you can't land out, Handy!"

Handforth glared.

"I know I can't," he growled. "If I could, I'd land out at your fat-headed nose! I'd flatten it into your silly face!"

Handforth stalked on, breathing hard, and Montie and I chuckled.

"I don't think I give him a week," I said. "He won't be able to stick it, you know. Poor old son! Unless he punches somebody soon, he'll go off his rocker."

Handforth marched into the gymnasium. He marched straight to the punching-ball, and he delivered a swipe which broke the thing clean away from its fastenings and exploded it.

"Well I'm blessed!" said Handforth.

The force he had put into that punch would have knocked any fellow insensible, so it was lucky that the blow had been delivered on such an object. Handforth proceeded to punch away at various other articles. He punched until his fists were sore—until he realised he was hurting himself.

Then, feeling much better, he went back to Study D.

"Oh, good!" said Church. "Tea's just ready, Handy. You can have the cup with the chipped edge."

"That's your cup!" snorted Handforth. "I'm not going to have——"

"You're going to have what's given to you," said Church. "You're late, and late-comers can't have any choice. Either Church or I had that cup all last term, and now it's your turn. Besides, you chipped the cup in the first place."

Handforth sat down at the table.

"I don't mind telling you that I've got a stronger will than I thought I had," he said grimly. "I'm sticking to my resolution, although many strong chaps would have given way long ago. Let me just warn you that human endurance can't stand too much—and if I do break my resolve, I'll break it properly."

Church and McClure realised that there was something in what Handforth said, and they thought it was just as well, perhaps, to give him a rest. They had certainly got a great deal of their own back, and they had told their lordly leader a few things they had never expected to tell him.

Tea in Study D proceeded peacefully.

This, in itself, was remarkable, for tea in that particular study was generally an exceedingly noisy meal. With Handforth helpless, Church and McClure were able to talk freely, and to tell their leader to dry up if they wished to.

Handforth was a hero to put up with it for so long. Whether he would be able to continue was a doubtful problem.

Personally, I don't think he was capable of standing the strain.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WEAKNESS OF FATTY.

"GREAT pancakes!"

Fatty Little sat on the stairs in the Ancient House, and held his plump hands over his waistcoat. He was feeling terribly empty, although he certainly didn't look it.

He had tasted no food since dinner except that which the school provided. At tea-time, of course, he had shared a feed with the Trotwood twins in Study L, but it was a mere snack to Fatty's mind.

The Trotwoods had done themselves particularly well, they considered, it being the first day of term. They had spent five shillings on tea, and Fatty had accordingly spent half a crown.

The food obtainable for half a crown was a mere mouthful for Fatty, and, when tea had finished, he had been hungrier than ever. Supper, in hall, was a mere appetiser, and now that bedtime had arrived, Jimmy Little was feeling almost faint for want of food. At least, he told himself that such was the case.

As a matter of fact, he had had quite enough for any healthy boy; but his appetite was an appalling proposition, and he always felt hungry after a square meal. He really required two square meals, one immediately following the other, to actually satisfy him.

"Someone in the family dead?" asked Pitt concernedly.

Little looked up, rather startled.

"Eh?" he said. "I didn't hear——"

"You look as if you'd lost a dearly beloved relative," said Pitt. "Why the worried frown, Fatty?"

"I'm hungry!" said Little plaintively.
 "Hungry?" echoed Pitt. "Hungry, after all the grub you had at supper-time?"

"Oh, don't talk rot!" protested Fatty. "I didn't eat much—only the same as any other fellow. And now I'm simply starving to death. I sha'n't get a wink of sleep all night—not a wink!"

"Poor old son!" grinned Pitt.

"This is what comes of making resolutions," went on Little sadly. "How I'm going to last out the term, I don't know. I—I think I'd rather commit suicide than keep on in this way. It simply amounts to the same thing; I'm starving myself to death!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Little was not likely to gain much sympathy, and when he went up to bed with the Remove he was chaffed a great deal. But he was chaffed no more than Handforth. There was a considerable amount of fun between the two of them.

Fatty lay groaning in bed, but he didn't groan for long. Somehow, in spite of his fears, he fell off to sleep within a few minutes.

"A week or two of this, and he'll get a lot of his weight down," remarked Pitt. "It'll do him good, too. He'll save heaps of money, and he'll be all the healthier. Resolutions are fine things to make."

"It's a pity you didn't make one, then," sneered Handforth.

"My dear chap, it wasn't necessary," said Pitt blandly. "Why should I make a resolution when I've got nothing to resolve? With you it's different; it's high time you controlled your fists!"

"Hear, hear!" said Teddy Long. "We've put up with Handy's rot for terms and terms—and now we can tell him to his face what a potty ass he is! He, he, he!"

Handforth clenched his fists.

"You little worm!" he roared. "I may be willing to put up with rot from other chaps, but I'm not going to stand any of your beastly nerve! Another word, and I'll smother you in your own bed-clothes!"

"Yah!" shouted Long. "You daren't touch me!"

"You'd better dry up, Teddy," I said grimly. "I'll punch your nose——"

But this was unnecessary, for Handforth was already taking action. He

stalked over to Long's bed, and seized the cad of the Remove firmly by the shoulders. Long was greatly alarmed.

"Lemme go!" he roared. "You mustn't touch——"

"I resolved not to punch anybody," said Handforth grimly. "I didn't say anything about giving a little cad a well-deserved whopping!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

Handforth took the struggling Long across his knee, and he proceeded to slap away with all his strength.

"Yaroooh!" howled Teddy wildly. "Ow! Lemme go! Yow-ow! You—you rotter! You've broken your——Yaroooh!"

The cad of the Remove struggled violently, but he couldn't get free.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"A fine resolution, wasn't it?" sneered Fullwood. "He's broken it before the first day is over!"

"Rats!" panted Handforth. "I haven't punched the worm yet!"

"Handy's quite right," I put in. "He made up his mind not to punch anybody until he was provoked. He's simply giving Long a spanking, and I don't blame him, either. Long deserves it."

Most of the other fellows agreed, and it was considered that Handforth had not broken his resolution. He had proved, however, that he was not willing to put up with insults from cads. Delivering a spanking was not forbidden.

The Remove dormitory settled down to sleep at last. On the first night of a new term there was always a good deal of noise and a fair amount of trouble, particularly if any new fellows happened to be present.

There was no new fellow on this particular night, although I understood that a new junior was really due for the Remove. He would probably come down in a day or two.

In the morning, the first junior to awaken was Jimmy Little. He opened his eyes soon after dawn had broken, and before the rising-bell clanged out its urgent note. And Fatty blinked at the ceiling and felt an aching void.

"By chutney! I'm jolly hungry," he murmured sleepily. "Never mind, I've got heaps of tin, and I can get a big lot of grub before brekker."

But his thoughts came to an abrupt halt, and a sinking feeling assailed him.

"Oh, great doughnuts!" he murmured dolefully. "I mustn't touch anything—not even a crumb! What a potty ass I was to make that resolution at Cliff Castle. I must have been off my chump." Fatty found it impossible to sleep. His hunger was so great that all he could do was to lie in bed and think of luscious things of an edible nature—things which were forbidden to him.

The thoughts were so maddening that at last he could stand it no longer. He decided to get up and go for a walk. Anything was better than hanging about. He would go for a walk until breakfast-time.

The fat boy dressed himself, and was just on the point of leaving the dormitory when the rising-bell rang. Most of the juniors opened their eyes and gazed about them dreamily. I was fully awake in a second.

"What's the idea, Fatty?" I asked, sitting up. "A bit of an early bird, aren't you?"

"I'm going for a walk," said Little bluntly.

"A walk—alone?"

"Yes. I can't stand thinking about the grub until breakfast-time," explained Fatty. "Over an hour yet—just imagine it! An hour of agony! So I'm going for a walk, and I shall try to drown my thoughts."

"Mind you don't get near a tuck-shop," I said warningly. "You may be firm enough now, Fatty, but as soon as you spot some grub you'll be done for. You'll fall—and then where will your resolution be?"

"I—I shall be all right," said Fatty. "Don't you worry."

He passed out of the dormitory, and Pitt shook his head.

"We ought to have commandeered his money," he said. "It's all very well to let him loose, but it's risky. I don't think he's strong enough to stand before a shop window, and then pass on—unless the shop happens to be an iron-monger's."

"Well, we can't form a guard round him," I grinned. "If he breaks his resolution, he breaks it—and it won't be very surprising. Our heroes in the Remove will soon be their old selves. I imagine."

Meanwhile, Fatty Little had emerged into the Triangle.

It was a clear, bright January morn-

ing, and there was a distinct frost in the air. The sun was shining down quite brilliantly. Little glanced at Mrs. Hake's tuck-shop for a second, and then he turned his back and marched across towards the gates resolutely.

"I'll be firm!" he murmured. "I'll be as firm as a rock!"

He succeeded in getting out of the Triangle somehow, although powerful ropes seemed to be pulling him in the direction of the tuck-shop. He had to strain hard in order to wrench himself away.

Out in the lane, he set his footsteps towards the village. He didn't intend to enter Bellton, for he felt that such a move would be too risky. Little knew well enough that he couldn't trust himself once he was in the midst of shops—alone.

His plan was to walk to the stile, and to go for a stroll in Bellton Wood and across the fields beyond.

"My hat!" he murmured, his eyes sparkling. "I—I might be able to get something after all—and still stick to my resolution."

He had visions of turnips and carrots. There were plenty of fields about, and surely it was possible to pull a few turnips? Then it occurred to him that turnips were probably not in season—and there would not be much satisfaction in eating a few seeds.

By the time he reached the stile he had come to the conclusion that the turnip and carrot idea was out of the question. And he hesitated as he was about to haul himself over the old woodwork.

He considered.

"I'll be strong!" he murmured. "There's no reason why I shouldn't step into the village. I can pass the giddy shops without walking in—even if I can't buy anything, I might as well have a look!"

It was a fatal decision, but Fatty simply couldn't help himself. He walked to the village briskly—for, in spite of his size, he was quite active. He reached the tuck-shop in the old High Street, and determined to walk straight past.

Unfortunately, Mr. Binks, the shop-keeper, was just in the act of placing a dish of cakes in the middle of the window. The dish caught Fatty's eye, and he paused. He turned his attention to the tuck-shop.

"I might as well see what they've got," he told himself. "It's just as well to know, because we shall want something for tea."

He gazed into the window, and fingered his money lovingly. He had enough to purchase every article in the shop front, but, simply because of that ridiculous resolution, he was prevented from buying a modest sixpennyworth!

It was absurd—absolutely dotty!

Why on earth should he stand by it, he argued with himself as he gazed into the window. And what if he did buy something? Who would know? It was early, and none of the fellows were about yet.

Only a bare minute elapsed before Fatty Little came to a firm decision. He gave himself a shake, uttered an uneasy laugh—and marched into the shop.

He had fallen!

"I want some grub," he said eagerly.

Mr. Binks looked at the fat junior over the tops of the glasses.

"What would you like, young gentleman?" he inquired. "Pastries, cakes, biscuits? I've everything you could wish for—"

"I don't care what it is," interrupted Fatty hurriedly. "Shove five bobs' worth of stuff into a bag, and hand it over—quick. I'm starving!"

Mr. Binks eyed the fat boy curiously.

"Ye don't look it, young sir," he remarked. "Starvin'! I wouldn't have believed it—that I wouldn't!"

Fatty waited impatiently while the old fellow leisurely selected an assortment of cakes and pastries, and placed them in a big bag. Fatty would have preferred ten shillings' worth, but he felt guilty enough as it was, without making the matter worse.

Moreover, he was in a tremendous hurry to get out of the shop. If any fellow happened to see him emerging, he knew that it would be all up—he would be exposed as a weakling.

"Here you are, young gent," said Mr. Binks.

"Oh, good!"

Little planted some money on the counter—he wasn't quite sure whether it amounted to five shillings or over—but he didn't wait to find out. He emerged into the High Street, and gave a gasp as he observed Reginald Pitt and Jack Grey further along the road.

But, apparently, they had not seen

him, for they immediately turned into another shop.

Fatty tucked the parcel inside his overcoat and marched on. He had to pass that shop on his way to the school, and he hardly breathed as he went by. Somehow, he managed to get past successfully, and he hurried on towards the bridge. Once in the lane, he would enter the wood in order to dispose of his secret purchases.

But fate was against him.

He had not proceeded far when he heard a hail from the rear. He turned, his heart in his mouth, and saw Pitt and Grey hurrying up the road towards him.

"Hold on, Fatty!" shouted Pitt. "We might as well all walk together."

Little stood rooted to the spot. He carried the bag in his hand now, and he had an instinctive feeling that he would be caught with the goods on him. He looked round with anxious eyes, and then came to a decision.

He pitched the bag over the hedge, and prayed that his action had not been seen by the other two juniors. He waited in the middle of the roadway for the others to come up.

"Getting an appetite for breakfast?" inquired Pitt genially. "You'll be pretty hungry by the time you get back to school, Fatty. Rather an unwise thing to come out like this!"

"Unwise?" said Little. "Why?"

"You'll only make yourself hungrier—this keen air, you know," said Pitt. "I suppose you haven't been eating anything in the village?"

"No," said Little truthfully. "Not a mouthful!"

"You're sticking to your resolve, then?"

"Ye-e-s!" said Fatty flushing slightly. "Great doughnuts! Of course I'm sticking to it. I haven't touched a bite of anything since suppertime last night. It's been a terrible struggle, but I've won through."

"That's good," said Pitt. "I thought we could rely on you to stick it, Fatty. Well, come along. What's the idea of standing here? It'll be time for brekker soon. Buck up!"

"I—I—I—"

"Well?"

"I—I think I want something from the village, you know," stammered Fatty. "If you don't mind, I'll just pop back

while you chaps go on. I don't suppose I shall be more than ten minutes."

"None of that," put in Grey. "You mean to visit the tuckshop. I expect you were going there when you spotted us in the High Street. Oh, Fatty, how could you do it? How could you break your resolution—"

"But I'm not going to the tuckshop!" roared Fatty. "I give you my word, I won't go anywhere near a place where they sell food. I won't spend a farthing on tuck of any sort."

"Honour bright?"

"Yes—honour bright!"

Fatty was quite safe in making that promise, for he had already purchased the materials for a good snack! But Pitt and Grey were not to know this, and Fatty considered that he had got out of the difficulty very neatly.

"That's all right, then," said Pitt. "We've got your word that you won't buy anything in the village—anything in the food line, I mean. We take your word, of course."

"Thanks!" said Fatty. "I'll be getting back, then."

He turned and walked briskly towards the village. Pitt and Grey continued their own journey to St. Frank's, but as soon as they turned the bend in the lane, Little came to a halt.

"Phew!" he breathed. "That was a narrow shave! But the bounders didn't see anything, and I've dished them nicely."

He had no intention of going to the village, of course; he had merely made the excuse in order to get rid of his unwelcome companions. And now he was intent upon recovering his parcel from the other side of the hedge.

He knew the spot exactly, for he noticed that an old tree stump was jutting out just at that point.

He reached it, and pushed his way through a gap in the hedge. But when he reached the other side, he got something of a surprise.

There was a sudden scamper, and three grimy little village urchins rushed away across the field. Their mouths were full of pastries, and each urchin held cakes in his hands.

Upon the ground lay an empty bag.

Fatty Little stared at it in a dazed kind of way, and all the joy went out of his heart.

After all his trouble, after all his scheming, the feed was lost by a ghastly piece of luck. Those village youngsters had been behind the hedge, and they had demolished Fatty's snack.

He knew that it would be useless to give chase. All the food would be gone by the time he caught the young rascals—even supposing he caught them at all.

He stood there, a dull feeling within his breast.

"By chutney!" he murmured. "I can't stand it—I simply can't put up with it much longer. I shall die of starvation!"

He picked up the bag hopelessly, and there was not even a crumb. So, with heavy heart, he turned his face towards St. Frank's again. And he groaned at the thought of the breakfast which the school provided. It was ample for any normal appetite—but a mere mouthful for Fatty's.

He was to have that, and nothing more!

By the time he reached St. Frank's he was feeling unhappy and disconsolate.

New Year's resolutions were all very well, but they were terribly difficult to stick to. Somehow, Fatty had an instinctive feeling that the end must come soon. He had held out like a hero so far—but it couldn't last for ever.

CHAPTER VII.

HANDFORTH BREAKS THE SPELL.

NELSON LEE beckoned to me as I was going towards the Ancient House that evening, after coming from Little Side.

I walked up to the guv'nor at once.

"Just a word, Nipper," said the schoolmaster-detective. "There is a new fellow coming down to-morrow, I believe. He will be for the Remove, by what I understand, and it is almost certain he will enter the Ancient House."

"We'll make him comfortable, sir," I said cheerfully. "Is he anything particular?"

"Well, I hardly like to speak of the boy before he arrives," said Nelson Lee. "His name is the Hon. Douglas Singleton, and I have an idea that he will be

rather a remarkable youth in many ways."

"You're pretty vague, sir," I said.

"I don't quite mean to be," said the guv'nor, "but Singleton is new to public school life, and perhaps you will find it necessary to forgive him for many little idiosyncrasies. You are the captain of the Remove, and it will be your duty to see that the other boys do not take advantage——"

"Dash it all, sir!" I protested. "you're not going to appoint me the new chap's guardian, I suppose? Can't he look after himself?"

"I fancy he can, and I've no intention of requesting you to act as the lad's guardian," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "I don't wish to say too much on the subject, as the information I possess may be exaggerated."

"You're making a mystery, sir," I chuckled.

"Well, it will soon be solved--that's one thing about it," smiled Nelson Lee. "The Hon. Douglas Singleton will arrive some time during to-morrow, and then you will be able to see for yourself, and to draw your own conclusions."

The guv'nor would say no more at the moment, and I was left wondering. Obviously the new fellow was something of a novelty, otherwise Nelson Lee would not have taken the trouble to speak to me as he had done. I was certainly rather curious.

I went along to Study C, and found Tommy Watson busily preparing tea, while Sir Montie was writing a letter. A newspaper was propped up in front of him, and he consulted it frequently.

"Tea," I exclaimed. "That's the ticket, Tommy. I'm hungry. Why aren't you helping, Montie?"

"Dear fellow, I'm writin' a letter," said Sir Montie.

"Some giddy advert," exclaimed Watson. "Montie's found something that attracts his noble eye, and he's writing off straight away. Some neckties, or a fancy vest, or something!"

Tregellis-West looked round.

"To tell the truth, dear fellow, I am rather struck by this advertisement," he explained. "They are makin' a special line of some rippin' half-hose—socks, you know. They're real silk, and something frightfully special."

"How many pairs are you ordering?" I asked.

"Only a dozen pairs, dear fellow," said Montie. "I am also requestin' the firm to send some of their latest neckties, and there is really a splendid dressin'-gown goin' at fifteen guineas."

"What's wrong with the dressing-gown you've got now?" I demanded.

"Nothin'," said Tregellis-West, "nothin' at all. But this article seems to be rippin'——"

"Now, look here, Montie, this won't do," I said severely.

"Eh? Begad, I——"

"It won't do at all," I went on. "Good heavens! You are studying economy, and yet you sit there ordering fifteen guinea dressing gowns——"

"Only one, old boy," said Montie lamely.

"One is more than enough," I declared. "And socks! Great Scott! You've got about a hundred pairs of socks upstairs, and enough neckties to go round the whole giddy school! Is this what you call studying economy? What about your resolution, you—you weak beggar?"

Sir Montie removed his pince-nez in some confusion.

"Begad! I—I—— Really, old boy!" he exclaimed. "I didn't realise that these things would be extravagant——"

"Extravagant isn't the word," I said grimly. "They're unnecessary—they're needless luxuries. It can't be done, Montie. Tommy and I forbid you to write off for those—those fal-de-lals!"

"Begad!" said Montie blankly.

"So you'd better screw that letter up, and throw it into the waste-paper basket," I went on. "You've got to spend your money on sensible articles—not on things that are useless to anybody!"

Tregellis-West sighed.

"Very well, old boy," he said resignedly. "I suppose you know best. It's frightfully rough, but that is one of the penalties of makin' hasty resolutions. Begad! I never realised that studyin' economy would be so shockingly difficult!"

Tommy Watson and I exchanged a wink.

We were highly amused at Sir Montie's "ordeal," and we knew that it could not last for long. Meanwhile things were coming to something like a crisis with Edward Oswald Handforth.

Life in Study D had been somewhat strained during that day. Church and McClure were out of hand. They "jawed" at their leader to their heart's content—and he was unable to hit out.

Handforth heard more about himself that day than he had heard for years. He knew exactly what his personal appearance was like; he knew how melodious his voice sounded; he knew everything that was worth knowing.

And Handforth was just about fed up. He stalked out of Study D, and made his way to the lobby, intending to walk about the Triangle to get cooled off. He was wondering what could be done—if he would be justified in breaking his resolution.

Then he became aware that Fullwood and Co. were standing in the lobby, chatting. Handforth heard his name mentioned, and he came to a halt on the Ancient House steps. He listened, his blood rising.

"An ass, did you say, Gully?" said Fullwood languidly. "Well, everybody knows that. He's the most frightful ass we've got in the bally school, by gad! I really believe a sheep has got more brains than Handforth!"

"You bet!" chuckled Gulliver. "And just look at his face!"

"Don't!" put in Bell. "Don't ask us to look at it, Gully. It's bad enough to catch a glimpse every now an' again. Are you sure it's a face, though? It's always struck me as being a door-knocker."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Fullwood and Gulliver.

Handforth felt like smashing the whole school.

"It's about time somethin' was done——" began Fullwood.

"It is!" roared Handforth furiously. "By George! It is!"

He spun round, and stamped over to the Nuts.

"Hallo!" said Fullwood languidly. "Who put this thing here? You might take it away, you chaps. It's makin' me feel quite ill——"

"Listen to me!" bellowed Handforth. "I warn you——"

"By gad! It can talk!" said Fullwood, in astonishment. "It can actually talk, if you can call that noise talkin'. This is really interesting——"

"If I have any more of your rot."

roared Handforth, "I'll take you up, and lay you across my knee, and swipe you. I've stood your nerve until I can't stand it any longer! Do you think I'm going to be checked by you—you? The most miserable set of cads in the whole school?"

"Better be careful," said Fullwood sharply.

"Oh, yes, I'll be careful!" shouted Handforth. "Church and McClure and the other chaps I can stand—at a pinch. They only rag me for the fun of it. But I'm not going to stand your sneers and jeers and taunts. You're the biggest funks and blackguards and cowards in the whole of St. Frank's——"

"Hold on!" snarled Fullwood. "If you call me a blackguard, I'll knock you down!"

Handforth's face became illuminated with hope.

"Do it!" he said joyfully. "Hit me! Have a shot, my son!"

But Fullwood hung back.

"I'm not soilin' my hands, thanks!" he sneered. "I wouldn't touch your beastly person with boxin' gloves on. I'm rather particular about my hands, you know, an' I don't want to——"

"Oh, don't talk to the chap, Fully!" said Bell. "I don't see why we should waste our time on this—this funk!"

"This which?" demanded Handforth fiercely.

"Funk!" said Bell. "You're afraid of a Second Form fag! I heard one of 'em cheekin' you this mornin', and you simply looked at him!"

Handforth clenched his fists.

"You know I resolved——"

"Oh, we know all about that!" chuckled Fullwood. "Rather a neat excuse, by gad! You funk most of us, an' you hide yourself behind this bally resolution business. It's only a dodge to keep out of trouble, you—you miserable coward!"

"Say—say that again!" panted Handforth, with a gulp.

"I called you a miserable coward," said Fullwood obligingly. "I'll go further, an' call you a contemptible cur——"

"By George!" shouted Handforth thickly. "That's done it!"

Crash!

Handforth, exasperated beyond endurance, landed out. He was justified. When the Remove heard about the affair afterwards, it was generally agreed that

Handforth had acted in the only possible way.

His fist landed upon Fullwood's nose with a thud which sent Ralph Leslie over on to his back like a sack of coke. He sprawled down, and lay there howling with pain. His nose was streaming red.

"You—you rotter!" gasped Gulliver. "You've broken—— Yaroooooh!"

Smash!

Handforth's big fist landed in Gulliver's face, and Gulliver joined Fullwood on the floor. Bell attempted to escape, but Handforth was not to be balked. He grabbed Bell, swung him round, and punched his face with vigour.

"Yow! Ow!" howled Bell. "Yaroooh! You—you—— Ow-ow-ow!"

The three Nuts lay sprawling on the floor.

"Want some more?" roared Handforth, rolling up his sleeves. "I'm game for any fight—any number of you! I'll take half a dozen——"

"What about your resolution?" demanded Owen major, who had come up to see what the noise was about.

"What about it?" said Handforth, with a fierce laugh. "It's done with: I've finished! Resolutions were never any good, anyway! I was an ass to keep this farce up so long!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'd better not laugh, either!" roared Handforth. "Look here, Hubbard, if you grin at me——"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Hubbard.

He fled, for Handforth looked very dangerous. And at that second Fatty Little came along the passage, his eyes gleaming, his hair ruffled. He gazed at the fallen Nuts in dazed joy and wonderment.

"Who—who knocked those cads down?" he asked faintly.

"I did!" roared Handforth. "I'm going to knock them down again when they get up! I'm going to knock them down every time—until they apologise!"

"I—I apologise now, Handforth!" said Bell hurriedly.

"Rot! I'm going to knock you down three times yet, you ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Little uttered a whoop of excitement.

"You've—you've chucked up your resolve?" he asked feverishly.

"Yes; rats to it!"

"Oh, great pancakes!" gasped Fatty. "I'm off!"

He rushed out into the Triangle as though demented. The spell was broken, and new year resolutions were off!

"The fat ass!" said Handforth. "What did he run away for? I wasn't going to hurt him——"

"You ass!" grinned De Valerie. "Fatty's off to the tuckshop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Fatty was! He charged into Mrs. Hake's little establishment, and thundered against the counter with enough force to smash it down. He set the dishes and plates rattling.

"My goodness gracious!" said Mrs. Hake. "Whatever is the matter, Master Little?"

"Gimme some tuck—anything!" panted Fatty. "Some of those pork-pies, and some of those beef-patties, and some of those mince-pies, and some of those doughnuts, and some of those——"

"Bless the boy!" said Mrs. Hake breathlessly. "He must be mad!"

Fatty didn't wait to be served. He grabbed the tuck, and proceeded to eat it as though he hadn't tasted food for weeks. He pulled a pound note out of his pocket, and tossed it across the counter.

"I want to spend all that," he mumbled, with his mouth full. "I'll have another quid's worth later on—for tea. We'll have a terrific spread in Study L to-night. Rats to resolutions!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A crowd of juniors were at the door, watching the elephant feed, as Pitt put it. Little didn't care. His time of trouble and worry was over, and he felt that a great weight was lifted from his mind. It was a certainty that he was placing a great weight somewhere lower down!

"Go it, Fatty! Eat away!" grinned De Valerie. "You'll break the record!"

"Come on, help yourselves!" invited Fatty. "I'll stand treat, you chaps! Take what you want. This is my joy-day, by pepper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Meanwhile, Handforth had easily obtained promises from Fullwood and Co. that they would be good boys in future. They had apologised humbly, and, feeling sore and humiliated, the Nuts were allowed to crawl away.

Handforth strode straight to Study D. Church and McClure were just about to commence tea. They had heard a slight commotion in the distance, but they had not connected it with their famous

leader. They knew nothing of the change.

"Oh, here you are!" said Church. "Good job you came, Handy. We shouldn't have left anything for you, you know. Sit down, and keep quiet for once. We're rather tired of your voice."

"It grates on us," explained McClure.

"Is that so?" said Handforth, with deadly calmness. "My voice grates, and you want me to keep quiet?"

"That's it," said Church, pouring out the tea.

"Then perhaps this'll grate on you, too?" roared Handforth.

Crash!

His fist thudded on to Church's head, and Church toppled over, teapot and all. The tea poured over McClure, and there were many howls.

"Ow! Yaroo!" bellowed Church, holding his head.

"Ooooooh!" screamed McClure. "I'm scalded! You—you silly idiot——"

"Get up!" shouted Handforth. "Get up, and I'll knock you down again!"

McClure staggered to his feet, and Handforth delivered a punch which sent his unfortunate chum staggering back to the wall. Thud! McClure struck the wall, slithered down, and sat on the hard floor.

"Yow—ow!" he exclaimed lucidly. "Oooh! Yaroo!"

"He's mad!" gasped Church faintly. "Oh, my goodness! It's turned his brain——"

"I'm not mad," said Handforth, sitting on the edge of the table. "I have been mad, I'll admit. But I'm sane enough now. Church, you blighter, you'll shift that bookcase to its proper place before the window. If you don't do it within ten seconds, I'll punch your nose again!"

Church stared at his leader dazedly.

"But—but what about your resolution?" he gasped.

"I've chucked it up! I've done with it!" explained Handforth grimly. "Two seconds left, my son. You'd better—— Ah, that's right!"

Church made haste to shift the bookcase. He and McClure realised that their time of ease and freedom of speech was

at an end. Handforth was his old self again, and the new term would go on as the old term had left off. Trouble and strife would continue in Study D.

The heroes of the Remove were heroes no longer. Somerton and Sir Montio were delighted to hear the news. The duke, who had been going about in agony for two days, became careless at once, and before an hour had passed there was a remarkable difference in his appearance.

Tregellis-West followed the example of the others, and economy no longer appealed to him. He wrote his letter, ordering the socks and the dressing-gown and the neck-ties, and he was happy.

By the following morning everything was as usual.

Somerton looked inky and untidy, Handforth had a couple of scraps in the dormitory while getting dressed, and Fatty Little expended five shillings in the tuck-shop before breakfast.

"I thought it couldn't last," I said, with a chuckle. "Still, it was interesting for a couple of days. Handy led the fashion, and I don't blame him. It was more than human flesh and blood could stand, to listen to Fullwood and Co. taunting and jeering him.

"Well, it's over now, and the New Year resolutions can go begging," said Watson. "I've noticed that things generally happen like this. What's that you were saying about a new fellow, Nipper?"

"Oh, yes!" I said. "He's coming to-day."

"Some titled Johnny, isn't he?" asked Pitt, joining us.

"Well, he's an 'honourable,'" I replied. "His name is the Hon. Douglas Singleton, and he's booked for the Remove. Let's hope he turns out to be a decent sort. He's a bit of a mystery so far."

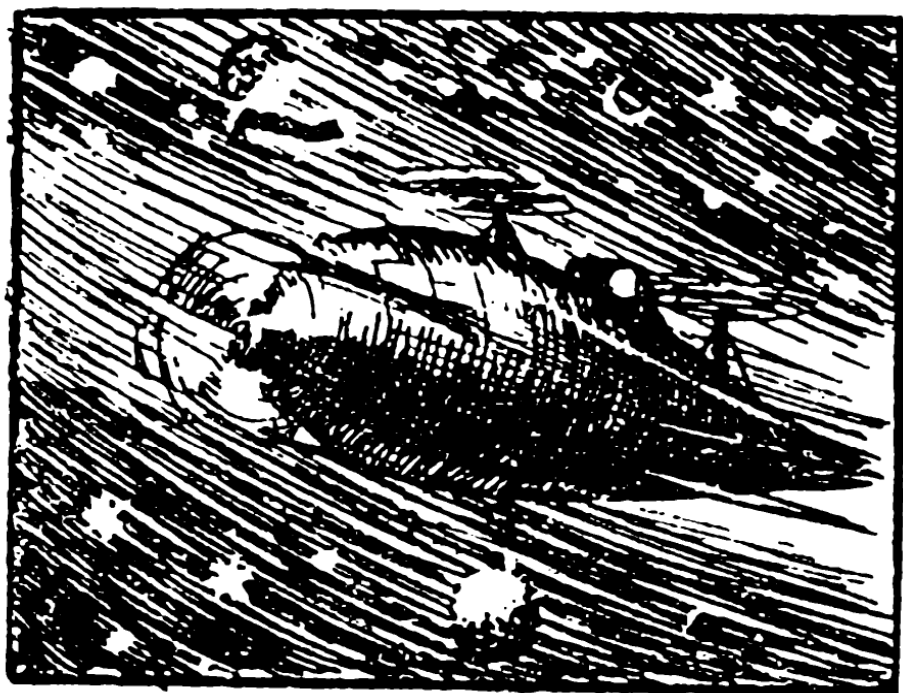
When the Hon. Douglas Singleton actually arrived, the Remove was somewhat flabbergasted. For the Hon. Douglas turned out to be a fellow of amazing habits, and he succeeded in creating something like a sensation.

He was undoubtedly a youth of startling character!

THE END.

**An interesting NEW CHARACTER will be introduced in
NEXT WEEK'S STORY called
THE SPENDTHRIFT OF ST. FRANK'S**

MAGNIFICENT STORY OF ADVENTURE AMONG THE PLANETS



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, inventor of the Solar Monarch, an airship designed to travel through space, decides to put his theories to the test by making a journey to the moon and other planets. He is accompanied by

FRANK HILLSWORTH and MACDONALD GUTHRIE, both wealthy young adventurers; PROFESSOR PALGRAVE, a renowned scientist; and ABBIE, a burly negro, who acts as cook and engineer. The airship is secretly constructed in England. At last everything is in readiness to start. The adventurers are aboard, and as Gresham pulls a lever the Solar Monarch shoots up into space. The moon is reached in a week, the projectile attaining a speed of 2,000 miles an hour. The surface of the moon appears destitute of life, but the explorers learn, after many exciting adventures, that the dark fissures and caves are inhabited by strange monsters. They return to the Solar Monarch, and set off for Venus. In this world of whiteness the adventurers encounter many extraordinary beings and fresh scenes, such as have never before been seen by the inhabitants of our Mother Earth. They next proceed to Mars and in the following chapter you will read of some of their exploits, adding new experiences to their remarkable series of adventures.

(Now read on.)

Marooned on Mars.

"Is the river there?"

"No. It's a road this time, from what I can see, and the passage is illuminated, too." Frank lowered his glasses. "That's what's

puzzling me, you know," he said, leaning his back against the rail and addressing Mac. "Where does the light come from? It worries me."

"I shouldn't let it," smiled the professor, tucking his hands farther into his warm gloves. "The light's here, and there's an end to the matter. I don't say that I shouldn't welcome an explanation, but it's not necessary."

They arrived at the tunnel-mouth, and, having slowed down, proceeded through the burrow with due cautiousness. Unlike the river-tunnel, this was a short one, being no more than five hundred yards in length. They met nothing; the place was deserted. Finally they emerged into another illuminated cavern, but this was vastly different from the one they had just quitted. It was very much smaller, the opposite rock-wall being clearly visible, and the whole place literally teemed with hundreds and thousands of Martians. They were working, by all appearances, and the centre of the labour lay in the middle of the cavern. Here a gigantic hole was visible, while all around lay the hard rock which had been excavated therefrom.

"They're boring another shaft," said Frank, "but I'm dashed if I can see for what reason. And look at the way they're carting the rock out! Did you ever see anything like it in your life? Jove, they'd give a fortune for that patent in London."

"Remarkable," exclaimed Gresham, "but I am afraid it is beyond human comprehension. Except for a kind of elaborated cage, operated by endless wires and rails, I can make nothing of it."

For a considerable time the Solar

Monarch hovered over the busy scene, and I shall not attempt to put down the hundred and one strange sights they witnessed. For one thing, I have not grasped Gresham's explanations sufficiently to do so; for another, I am afraid the matter would be uninteresting.

And while the aeronef continued her wonderful journey, the adventurers decided to snatch a little something to eat. Mac looked at his watch as they sat down in the saloon.

"Hoots!" he cried. "I'll have ye ken it's half-past seven. If we were on the surface now we should see the sun setting in the west, I'm thinking."

"I'd no idea it was so late," Gresham said, stirring his steaming tea. "We shall have to get out of these underground places before we sleep, though. I shall feel safer on the surface, under the stars and moon. Ah, there's nothing to beat good old England, after all," he went on smilingly, as he gazed at a picture of the Strand, which hung on the wall. "I don't mind admitting I'm getting home-sick, lads. How do you feel?"

"Well, I could do with a sight of the London streets, with their noisy trams and motor-buses," said Frank longingly. "Ah, wouldn't it be a change to feel yourself in an ordinary taxi once again, speeding through the silent city, on the way to a theatre?"

"In fact, you're almost as eager for that as you were to come to the planets, eh?"

"That's it," Mac said with a sigh. "Mind, I'm mighty interested in the planets, but, for a' that, I winna deny that I'm fair gaspin' for a breath of good auld London fog!"

The others laughed.

"Well, boys, I'd better tell you now that as soon as we get back on the surface I mean to turn the nose of the Solar Monarch homewards——"

Frank pushed his chair back.

"But what about Jupiter and Saturn and Mercury?" he said in surprise. "Aren't we going to visit them?"

"Not this trip, Frank. You seem to forget that we can get to Mercury from the Earth just as easily as we can from here. The Earth is, in fact, a kind of half-way house, and we shall simply call there to get a fresh supply of provisions."

"You mean, after we get back we

shall start on another journey?" questioned Frank eagerly.

"Precisely. It is an ideal arrangement, I consider. We shall have a sight of dear old England again, refresh ourselves, as it were, and then start out again seeking further marvels, with new blood in our veins."

"It's a ripping idea," cried Frank. "I hadn't looked at it that way before. We shall simply stop at our own planet—pay an afternoon call sort of thing—on the way to another."

"It couldna be better," Mac declared excitedly. "My hat, won't we create a sensation when we alight on earth! We shall be the talk of everybody. Hallo!" Mac turned in his chair. "We're at the end of the cavern and stationary. Well, Abbie, how goes it?"

"By golly, sah," broke out Abbie, "we'm jest about to enter 'noder tunnel, an' I dunno weder to go froo it; it ain't 'luminated, sah."

"Well, I think we'll risk it, Abbie," Gresham said. "If you'll go below again I'll switch the searchlight on to show us the way."

The tunnel negotiated in safety—it was quite deserted—the explorers found themselves in yet another vast underground cave. But this one, unlike all the others, besides being in total darkness, contained nothing but water—a great silent, stagnant lake, still and rippleless.

"Ugh! What a beastly place," Frank shuddered, looking at the black depths beneath him. "For goodness' sake let's find a hole and get out into the open!"

"We'll see what's on the other side first, Frank."

At twenty miles per hour they traversed the silent waters. When they had been going for about five minutes a tiny island made itself visible ahead. The ship slowed down, and the powerful pencil of light illuminated the island brilliantly. It was composed of rock, but covering all the centre were thousands of glittering stones—diamonds they looked like—and they reflected the rays of the searchlight in a thousand colours, flashing and scintillating bewilderingly.

"Do you think they're diamonds?" asked Mac in a subdued tone.

"We shall soon know, anyhow," the professor cried in an unusually loud

voice. "Lower the ship, Gresham; I mean to see what they are."

The aeronef grounded, and almost before it had settled Palgrave was on the ground. A moment's scrutiny, and he turned a wildly excited face towards them. In his hand he held several of the stones.

"They're diamonds!" he cried elatedly; "diamonds of the very first water and of stupendous size! They appear to have been cut, too—another marvel of this planet, I suppose. Come down quick and fill your pockets. It is a chance of a lifetime!"

Although not excited to such an extent as the scientist, the others leapt to the ground and hastened towards the professor. The diamonds were literally lying about in heaps, and the two younger members of the party buried their hands in them with cries of wonder. They picked out several as large as hens' eggs, and showed them to Gresham. They were magnificent. For some minutes they stood there admiring the beauty of them, then Mac looked round.

"Hallo!" he said, half in alarm. "Where's the professor got to?"

"Somewhere behind those rocks, I suppose," Gresham said without looking up. Then his face grew grave as he heard the soft whirr as the screws commenced turning. He gazed about him quickly, then darted towards the aeronef.

"Too late!" came a voice hardly recognisable as Palgrave's, from the vessel's deck. "You're foiled! I'm going home, to England, and shall proclaim myself the inventor of the Solar Monarch, and the sole discoverer of the planets."

And a wild laugh rang out. As the three stupefied travellers gazed at one another dazedly, the aeronef grew smaller and smaller, until finally the light was snapped out and all was darkness.

They were marooned!

They stood silent for some moments, gazing hopelessly at the spot where the Solar Monarch had last been seen. They were dazed; even then they failed to realise the dire extent of the calamity which had befallen them. They could not bring themselves to look the matter in the face: that they were on a tiny rock, in the centre of a stagnant lake,

in one of Mars' great caverns, with no hope of succour!

To all appearances they were doomed. Nothing could save them except the aeronef itself, and that was in the hands of a madman—insane for the time being. And even supposing he recovered his senses in a day or two hence, would he succeed in finding his companions? Before he could do so they would be dead. There was Abbie, certainly; but Palgrave could bring him to reason at the point of a revolver. Gresham was the first to break that awful silence.

"My poor lads," he commenced brokenly, "I am afraid the professor's unlooked-for lapse from sanity will mean more to us than you can realise at the moment——"

"I think not, Mr. Gresham," Frank said quietly, dropping his handful of precious stones to the ground. "Both Mac and I know very well where we are, and that if we are to escape a miracle must happen. It is no good giving way to despair; if we are to die on this isolated rock, it is not for us to——"

"Well spoken, Frank. It gives me courage when I know that you are calm in the face of danger—when you know for a practical certainty that we are destined to die of starvation and exposure." His voice caught a little. "After all the adventures we have experienced together, just when we were planning the homeward journey, this comes extra hard."

"Weel," Mac interrupted, "I must say you are two cheerful companions for a fellow! Ye take it for granted that we shallna see the shippie again. I'm o' the opeenion that Abbie'll make matters turn out a trifle different."

"Mac," said the inventor, "you make us feel ashamed of ourselves for displaying such hopeless resignation. You have put new hope into my breast. As you say, there is a possibility that Abbie will turn the tables."

"Unless the professor——"

"Now, Frank, no disquieting remarks," cried Gresham in a joking voice. "Our sole efforts will now have to be used to the keeping of one another cheerful——"

"Hark! Don't you hear a splashing?"

(Continued on page 111 of cover.)

They all listened intently, and from far out on the still water came an unmistakable commotion. They waited there, wondering what it could be. The sounds grew rapidly nearer, then, with a final ripple, something landed on the rock with a dull, metallic clang.

"Come, it is some unknown monster of this strange lake," Gresham said in a whisper. "We must find a place in which to hide; it would never do to fall victims of this creature."

Both Frank and Mac carried their electric torches, and these they produced now. Soon they were stumbling over the loose stones—diamonds!—and from behind could be heard the clattering of the weird Martian as it followed in their wake. Whether it intended catching them they knew not, but it was wisest, in any case, to be prepared. The torches throw a bright light in front, and suddenly Gresham suggested entering a narrow cave-like hole in the face of a large and jagged rock.

"Anywhere'll do," gasped Frank, for he had been hurrying swiftly; they were all breathless. "It seems to me we're coming in for all the fun this trip!"

They squeezed into the cavity, and Frank flashed his torch about. Yes, there was plenty of room there; it was a kind of cave. They retired a little farther back, and the lights were extinguished. And they were not one moment too soon. Shortly after the lights had been switched off the strange sliding, metallic sounds grew loud and near. Their hearts stood still for a moment. Then the noise grew a trifle fainter—they had been passed undiscovered.

But that was not all. As the monster grew farther away, the marooned travellers became aware of a most overpowering stench, and they were forced to apply their handkerchiefs to their noses. It nearly made them sick, and Frank gurgled from the folds of his muffler. But happily, as the thing grew far distant, the unpleasant odour faded, and finally, with a heartfelt sigh of relief, they heard a mighty splash as the Martian took to the water again.

"Well, boys, that was far from a cheering experience," said Gresham. "But we are still alive, and that's one thing. While there's life there's hope, and I suggest——"

"Great guns!" gasped Mac, who had been exploring. "There's a passage here which leads straight downwards. Suppose we see——"

"It can't go far," Frank interrupted. "The sea's not more than a hundred yards from where we're standing, anyhow. Still, it'll be something to occupy the time."

With Gresham's approval they commenced walking, in single file, down a steep declivity. They were one and all trying to make the others forget their awful predicament. But each was certain in his own heart that they were destined to live their last on this planet—that they would never see the Solar Monarch again. The passage they were in was narrow, and sometimes they had a job to squeeze through. They did so, however, and progressed for some twenty minutes; then Frank, who was leading, stopped dead.

"We can't be under that island all this time," he exclaimed with conviction. "We must be walking right beneath that stagnant ocean."

"Then all I can say is, it's a verra shallow one," Mac declared. "The question is, where does this lead to?"

"We're now about to find that out." And once more they trudged onwards, hopeless at heart, cheerful in manner. They cared not one jot what they did so long as they did not sit down and mope. All at once those behind heard an audible exclamation from Frank. The next instant he turned an excited face towards them.

(To be continued.)

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