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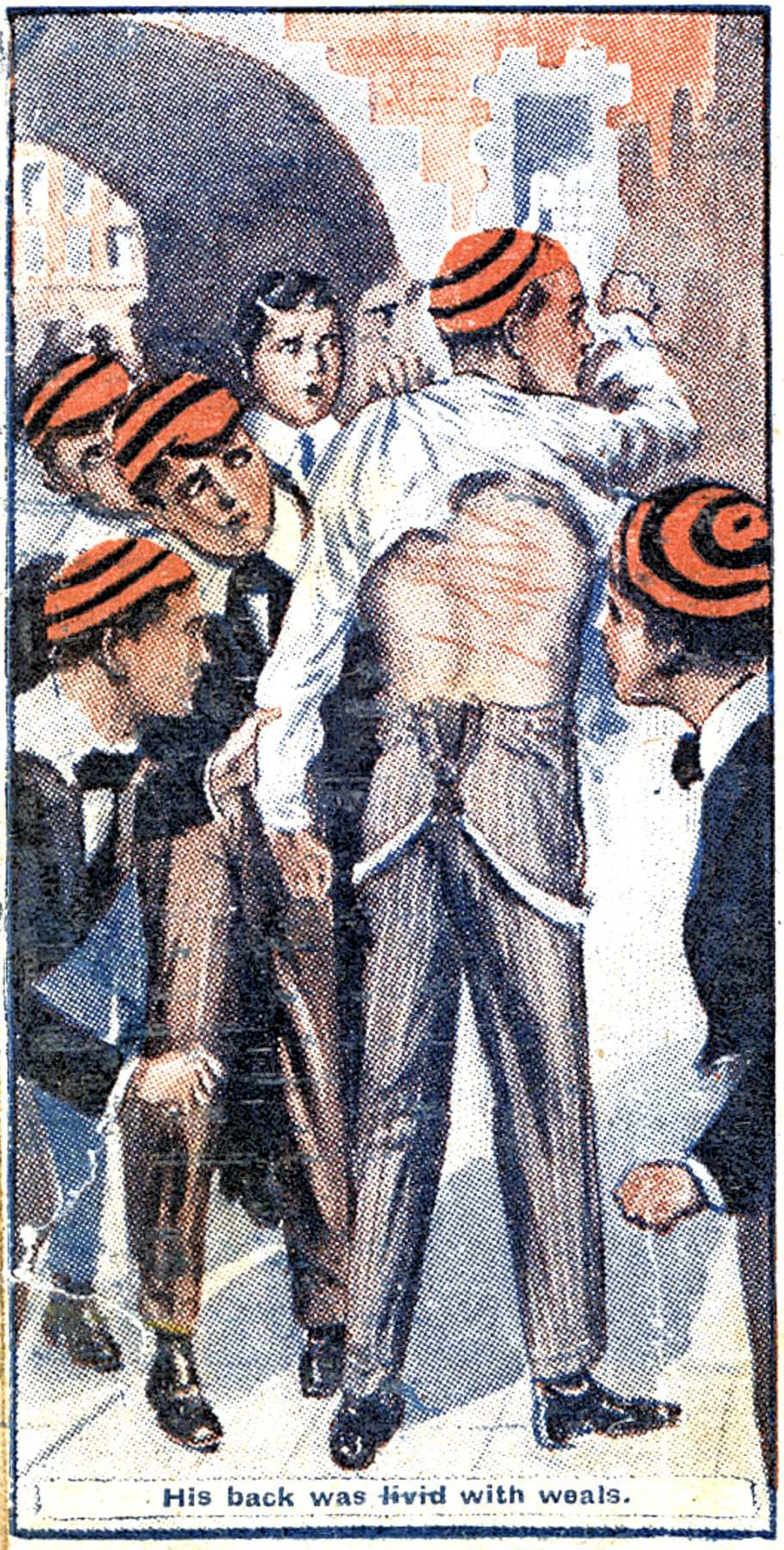

His back was livid with weals.

NEW SERIES No. 1

Contents :—

30,000 Word Long Complete School Detective Romance,

"THE HEAD'S OTHER SELF."

Opening chapters of the World's Most Famous : : School Tale : :

New and Revised Edition

"TOM TARTAR AT SCHOOL"

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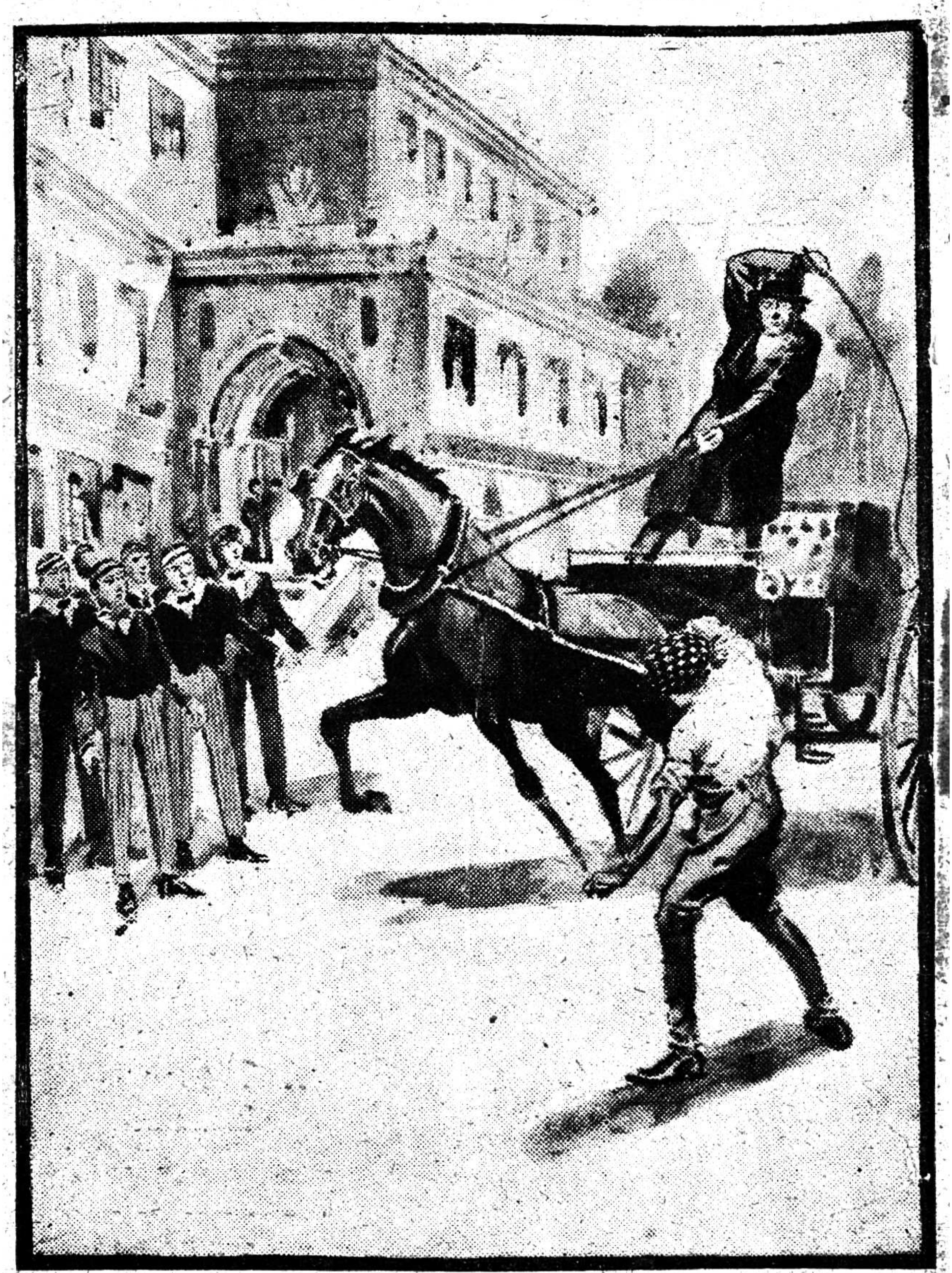
GIVEN AWAY—

No. 1 of "NIPPER'S MAGAZINE."

PORTRAITS OF : FAMOUS : FOOTBALLERS.



"I'll teach you, you confounded brute!" thundered the Head. Swish! Swish! Swish! The whip came down again and again upon the horse's back.

THE HEAD'S OTHER SELF.

The Opening Story of a Grand New Series of Long Complete Stories of School and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's College, introducing NELSON LEE, NIPPER, and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "For His Parents' Sake," "The Fifth at St. Frank's," "The Secret of the Box-Room," and many other Stirring Tales.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

ONE FOOTBALL AND TWO FELLOWS!

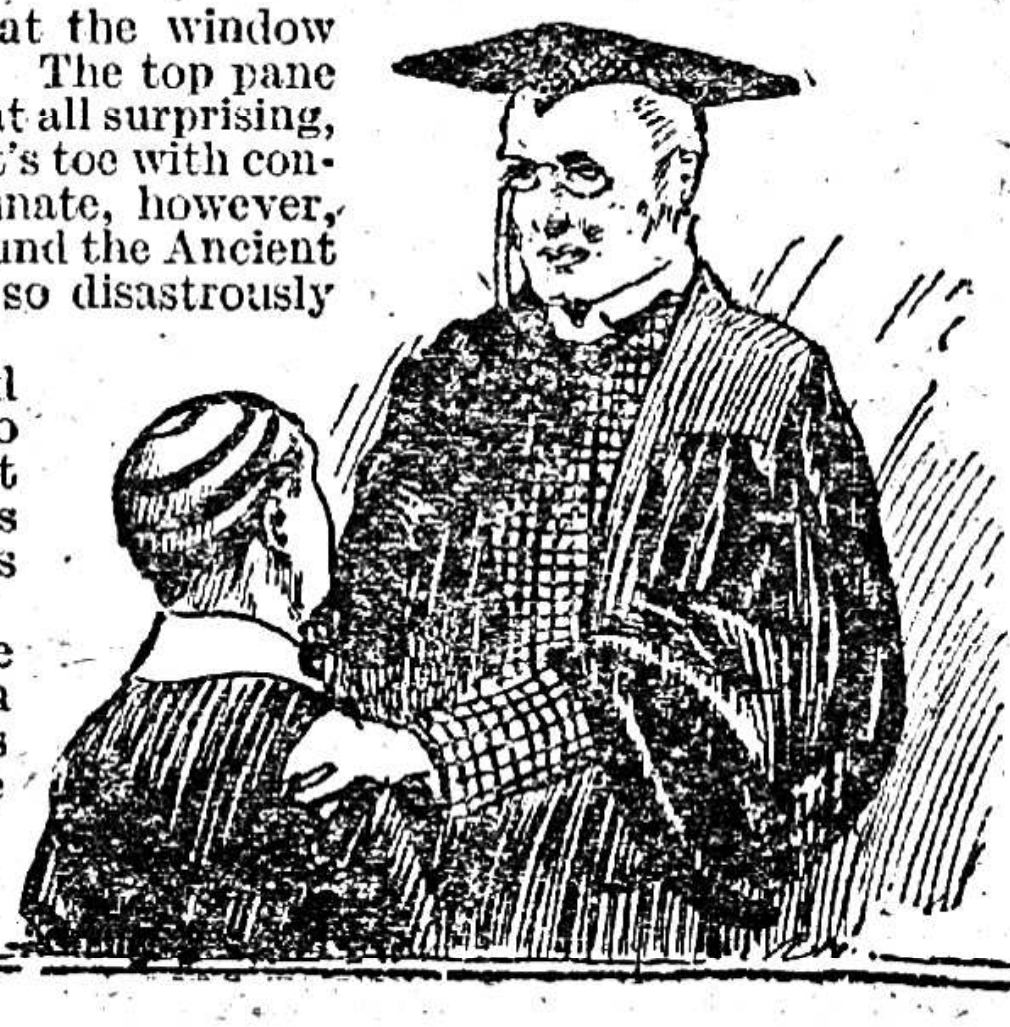
CRASH!

"Oh, my hat!"

Reginald Pitt stared aghast at the window of Dr. Malcolm Stafford's study. The top pane was shivered to atoms, and this was not at all surprising, considering that the football had left Pitt's toe with considerable force. It was most unfortunate, however, that a gust of wind, eddying fiercely round the Ancient House, should have carried the leather so disastrously out of its course.

It was morning, and Reginald Pitt and De Valerie, and Handforth and one or two others had been punting the football about the Triangle. Strictly speaking, this was against the rules, but most of the masters and prefects winked at the defection.

I happened to be standing on the Ancient House steps, and Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West, my chums of Study C, were with me. Sir Montie adjusted his pince-nez, and stared.



"Dear old boys, I'm seriously afraid that Pitt is in for a frightful wiggin'," he observed. "Begad! That window is in a shockin' state—it is, really."

"Yes, it looks slightly bent," grinned Watson. "The awful ass! Kicking it into the Head's study window!"

"I don't think it was Pitt's fault," I remarked. "He kicked the ball all right, but he didn't know that gust of wind was coming."

Pitt was still standing his ground—he made no attempt to scuttle off, as many fellows would have done. He was to blame, and he was quite prepared to stand the racket

From sheer instinct many juniors had made themselves scarce, and now they were watching from various handy corners—from behind the old chestnuts, and other points of vantage.

The door of the Headmaster's house opened, and Dr. Stafford came striding out, a frown upon his brow. The Head was rather a striking figure of a man—tall, well built, perfectly straight and with a kindly face. His head was covered with iron grey locks of curly hair.

"Pitt!" he exclaimed severely.

"Yes, sir?" said the junior.

"Who kicked that football through my window?"

"I did, sir."

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed the Head, coming towards the Removite. "You kicked the football through my window, Pitt? I cannot possibly believe that it was a deliberate action on your part——"

"It wasn't, sir—honour bright!" said Reginald Pitt, quickly. "It was a sheer accident, and I've never been so surprised. You see, sir, I kicked towards the gates, but just at that very second a gust of wind came shooting round the corner, and it caught hold of the football and sent it smashing into your study."

"Quite a plausible explanation, my boy," said the Head drily. "No doubt it is true, for the wind is certainly very gusty and erratic this morning. Nevertheless, I am greatly annoyed with you, Pitt."

"Yes, sir," said Pitt meekly.

"The fault was yours entirely, and I shall certainly not allow you to put any blame upon the innocent wind," went on Dr. Stafford curtly. "Possibly you are aware of a certain rule, Pitt, which forbids all boys to kick football in the Triangle?"

Reginald Pitt looked at his feet.

"Ye-es, sir!" he confessed.

"You are aware of that rule?"

"Of course, sir."

"Then you have absolutely no excuse," declared the Headmaster. "You stand before me, Pitt, self-confessed, and guilty of a serious offence. I suppose I ought to take you to my study and give you a severe flogging."

"I—I'll pay for the new pane, sir——"

"Tut—tut—tut!" snapped Dr. Stafford. "Don't be so absurd, young man! I shall not be so harsh as to make you pay for the damage. But I want you to realise that you will be seriously inconveniencing me by this careless act of yours. The weather is cold, and a broken window is certainly not an added comfort to one's study. Furthermore, there are fragments of glass strewn over my desk and papers, and it was only by pure chance that I escaped being cut."

"I'm awfully sorry, sir," said Pitt penitently. "I—I hardly know what to say——"

"Perhaps you'd better say nothing," interrupted the Head, with a slight smile. "There, there, my boy, we won't make a mountain out of a molehill. But let this be a lesson to you for the future—and bear in mind the school regulations. For your breach of rules on this occasion you will write me two hundred lines!"

Pitt looked up in astonishment.

"Thank you, sir!" he ejaculated eagerly.

The Head nodded, and turned towards his doorway. But, just before entering, he looked back once more.

"I will throw the ball out to you," he said. "But don't attempt to kick it about the Triangle any more."

"Oh, thanks awfully, sir!" exclaimed Pitt.

A minute later the ball came dropping out, and Pitt seized it, and tucked it under his arm. Then he removed himself as quickly as possible from the scene of his crime. He was at once surrounded by a crowd of fellows.

"Lucky bounder!" exclaimed Handforth. "I thought you were going to be licked! How many lines did he give you?"

"Two hundred!"

"Well I'm blessed!"

"He's a brick!" went on Pitt enthusiastically. "You can't get away from it, you chaps, the Head's a real stunner. Two hundred lines for breaking his window and strewing glass all over his study!"

"Well, it's just like him," I said. "The Head always has been kindly and considerate—one of the best. I don't think he could be really harsh, even if he wanted to be. It's not in him."

"But, I say, we shall have to go easy," said Pitt. "I was an ass to kick that ball so hard. On a windy day like this we must avoid punting the giddy leather about in the Triangle."

"Rather," I said. "Well, come on!"

There was plenty of time for a little exercise on the playing field, and so off we went. Handforth remained behind, but this was only because he was in the middle of an argument with Church and McClure.

"Oh, dry up!" said Church, at last. "What does it matter which way the wind was blowing? Pitt broke the window, and there's an end to it."

"Exactly," said Handforth. "But I maintain that if he'd kicked properly, the ball would have gone over towards the shrubbery. Pitt was an ass to—— Hi! Come back, you asses!"

Church and McClure, tired of the argument, had walked off. Handforth glared after them, and then he became aware of a soft chuckle. Turning, he saw that Hussi Ranjit Lal Khan, the Indian junior, was near by.

"Well, what are you cackling at?" demanded Handforth tartly. "Who told you to mix in, you—you giddy chunk of chocolate?"

Hussi Kahn showed all his white teeth in dazzling smile.

"I regretfully make the honourable apology if I was of the great rudeness," he observed.

"And surely it is only the hen which performs the sound of cackling? I was merely preposterously amused——"

"Nobody told you to be amused!" snapped Handforth. "I still stick to what I said at the start; Pitt was a fathead to kick that ball so high. If I'd have kicked it, no window would have been smashed."

Hussi Kahn smiled.

"The august Pitt was preposterously upset by the action of the wind," he said. "As you probably observed, the wind swept round the building with extraordinary violence and gentility. Such a gust as that was unexpectedly calculated to lift the honourable football upon its bosom and carry it through the exquisite window of our ridiculous Headmaster."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Handforth. "My dear chap, I can't stay here talking to you, or I shall be in the same place all the morning. You ought to learn shorthand, so that you can say everything by dots and dashes!"

And Handforth stalked off, to avoid any further argument. He was a fairly talkative fellow himself, but Hussi Kahn could give him points any day. The Indian junior was a terror when once he got going.

Morning lessons soon commenced, and when the juniors were released at dinner time they observed that the Head's study window had already been repaired. And the incident was almost forgotten, except by Pitt, who had to write the two hundred lines. However, he didn't mind this much. It was a very light punishment in comparison to what he had anticipated.

During the afternoon the wind dropped, and the weather became dull. There was every sign of rain in the air, but it did not descend. After dark it could do what it liked, but we wanted the time immediately after lessons to put in some serious practice on Little Side.

We were particularly keen on football this term, and the Junior Eleven had been doing great things—chiefly owing to the remarkable prowess of Reginald Pitt. He was not only a fine forward, but one of the best in the country, and it was not so long since he had proved his worth on the professional field.

We were therefore quite pleased when lessons were over to find that the rain still held off. Watson and Tregellis-West and I sallied out, Watson with the football under his arm. It was the very same ball that Pitt had kicked through the Head's window.

"Here you are, Nipper," said Tommy, as we ran down the Ancient House steps. "Pass it back to me."

He dropped the leather on the ground, and gave it a gentle tap. As we ran along I tapped it back to Watson. He then indulged in a little exhibition of dribbling, and was just on the point of passing to Sir Montie when he was brought up short.

"Watson!"

The voice was cold, sharp and commanding.

"Eh? Why, what——".

Tommy Watson came to an abrupt halt, and his heart jumped. For Dr. Stafford was striding towards him, very stern and severe. Watson stood quite still. After all, he had done nothing.

"Speaking to me, sir?" he asked.

"You know very well, Watson, that I am speaking to you!" retorted the Head. "I think you are fully aware of the fact that you are breaking one of the school regulations by playing football in the Triangle?"

"But—but I'm not playing football, sir!"

"Don't dare to argue with me!" snapped the Head. "I say you were playing football, and I intend putting a stop——"

"But—but all the fellows do it, sir!" protested Watson. "It's nothing new—ever since I can remember, we've punted a football about in the Triangle without being pulled up."

Dr. Stafford frowned.

"Simply because the masters and prefects have been somewhat lax in their duty, it does not mean to say that you must take advantage of the fact," he exclaimed sternly. "I punished Pitt this morning for kicking the football through my window, and now I find that you have the audacity to repeat his offence."

"But there's no wind now, sir; it's practically dropped," said Watson. "Besides, I was only dribbling the ball——"

"I have no intention of arguing the matter out with you, Watson," broke in the Head. "You will come with me to my study at once."

Tommy Watson's heart gave a jump.

"Why, are—are you going to flog me, sir?" he asked.

"That, my boy, you will find out!" replied the Head coldly. "Come!"

Tommy gave a glance round at Sir Montie and me. We returned expressions of deep sympathy—notifying our feelings by grinning. We couldn't very well do anything else under the circumstances. But I was certainly surprised. I had hardly expected the Head to pull Watson up as he had done.

The junior followed Dr. Stafford into his private doorway, and a few moments later they were both in that stately apartment which was regarded with a certain amount of awe by most juniors. The Head's sanctum was a comfortable room, lined with bookcases, with a soft carpet on the floor, luxurious easy chairs, and other comforts. A cheerful fire blazed in the grate.

The Head seated himself at his desk, and gazed across at Watson, who was standing at attention.

"Now, Watson, I intend to have a serious talk with you," said the Head. "I want you to thoroughly understand that I mean to put a stop to this constant breaking of the school rules. By this I do not mean to imply that I shall make an example of you, but I am severely annoyed by the general behaviour of you junior boys in the Triangle."

"I—I didn't know that we were doing any harm, sir," said Watson.

The Head's eyes suddenly blazed.

"You didn't know!" he shouted. "How dare you make such a ridiculous statement?"

"I—I didn't mean to be ridiculous, sir," stammered Tommy.

"If you answer me back I shall flog you severely!" said the Head harshly. "Don't dare to trifle with me, sir! I will not stand it—do you hear? I will not stand it! I have

suffered enough through being annoyed and irritated!"

Dr. Stafford had risen to his feet, and he came round the desk and towered over Tommy Watson, who was rather startled. He had hardly been expecting such an outburst as this.

"I—I m sorry, sir!" he muttered. "I—I didn't mean to trifle, sir!"

"Don't mumble at me—speak up, boy!" shouted the Head, with strange violence. "I am keeping my temper in with difficulty, and if you dare to try me further I shall cane you!"

There was something rather peculiar about the Head's tone. His voice seemed to quiver with hidden fury. And Watson was not the only one who was surprised by this unusual exhibition.

To tell the truth, Dr. Stafford himself was startled.

He had brought Watson into his study merely for the purpose of lecturing him—of pointing out, quietly but firmly, that kicking footballs about in the Triangle must stop. But, somehow or other, the junior's voice irritated Dr. Stafford beyond all measure. But why should it? Even the Head himself didn't know.

And, in spite of himself, he found that he was losing control of his temper. He had a fierce inward desire to seize Watson by the scruff of the neck and beat him—for the sheer pleasure of seeing him in agony.

This, indeed, was a startling thing to realise. The Head fought against it—he was positively astounded with himself. By nature he was kindly and gentle, and for him to suddenly become aware of this change was staggering.

He clenched his fists and held himself in hand, although, vaguely, he felt that the slightest spark would act as a fuse to the explosive bomb within him. Only by a supreme effort did he retain his self-control.

"All right, my boy, all right!" he said with forced calmness. "We will not proceed with the matter. You may go."

"Thank you, sir," said Watson, with relief. "I didn't mean to annoy you, sir, and I hope that you will forgive me."

Again the Head's eyes blazed.

"I did not tell you to speak, Watson!" he thundered. "Go at once! Go, before I do you an injury!"

"Oh, my goodness!" gasped Tommy Watson.

That was a very unfortunate remark, but it had been wrung from him by the light which had suddenly leapt into Dr. Stafford's eyes. The words acted like a bombshell upon the Head. They irritated him to such an extent that all his efforts to keep himself within check were of no avail.

The Head uttered a low, inarticulate cry of savage fury. He reached forward, grasped Watson, and the junior gasped with pain at the fierce grip. And he was startled, too.

For the Head's face was distorted with hideous rage until it was almost unrecognisable!

CHAPTER II.

ON THE CARPET!

TOMMY WATSON was like a baby in the convulsive grip of the Head.

What was the meaning of this strange and terrible change which had come upon Dr. Stafford with such appalling abruptness? How was it possible that such a naturally kindly man could behave so savagely?

Tommy Watson was frightened—positively scared out of his wits by this unsuspected exhibition of brutality. And, if Watson had only known it, the Head himself was equally frightened.

He knew well enough that he was acting like a brute—he knew that he was behaving in a manner that he would have been the first to condemn with bitter scorn and contempt. And yet, in spite of all his efforts—and he fought fiercely to keep control of himself—he could do nothing. Some demon within him had taken full possession of his body.

It was ghastly—it was overwhelmingly horrible!

And then the Headmaster hardly knew what he did. He only knew that a fierce, exultant joy was thrilling him. He had this boy in his grasp—and he was about to beat him unmercifully. To the Head's horror he found that the prospect delighted him. Indeed, his emotions were so complex and extraordinary that he hardly knew whether he was sane, or whether madness had come upon him.

"What—what's the matter, sir?" gasped Watson, in a sobbing voice.

"Don't speak to me, boy—don't goad me on!" choked the Head thickly. "By heaven! I will thrash you within an inch of your life! Don't struggle—don't attempt to thwart me!"

But Watson did struggle—he tried to tear himself away with all his strength. Dr. Stafford was like a beast. His voice had changed—his expression had become brutal and revolting.

The junior was terrified. Tommy Watson was no coward, and he was the last fellow in the world to squeal when he had to take punishment. Watson was true blue from top to toe. A straighter fellow did not exist in the Remove. For all his bluntness and stolidity, Tommy Watson was cute enough at times. And just now something told him that a terrible thing had happened. In his heart he believed that the Head had gone insane. He was in the grip of a madman! And his terror was not so much because of any peril that might come upon himself, but it was rather the terror of suddenly discovering this awful knowledge.

"Let me go—let me go!" shouted Watson fiercely.

The Head laughed with savage glee.

"No, no—not yet!" he muttered softly. "Not yet, Watson! I have not done with you, my boy—I have not finished with you. This shall be a lesson to you not to disobey the school rules again. And it may also teach you the folly of answering me back!"

In spite of his fright Watson could not help being struck by the Head's words, for, surely, they indicated that he was quite rational?

There was no madness about the Head's speech. Had he really become insane he would have made no reference to that incident at the time. No, the Head was himself all right, but some inner demon had taken temporary possession of him.

Swish!

The Head grasped his cane, and brought it down with all his strength. It struck Tommy Watson upon the legs, and he jumped wildly. But the only sound he uttered was a sharp hiss as he drew his agonised breath in.

"Now this will teach you!" said the Head, with tense satisfaction.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

Again and again the cane descended—fiercely, powerfully, and accurately. It smote Watson upon the back, on the arms, and upon his thighs. The pain was appalling, for each cut was like the sear of a red-hot iron.

"Oh!" panted Tommy, at last. "Oh! Stop, sir—I—I can't stand it!"

Swish! Swish! Swish!

The thrashing unmercifully proceeded. Racked with pain in every limb, fighting and gasping for breath, but still uttering no cry, Tommy Watson sank weakly to the floor.

And then Dr. Stafford staggered back, and flung the cane from him. He was gulping for breath, and he suddenly uttered a hoarse cry of horror. He swept a hand across his brow, and stared at Watson dazedly.

"What have I done?" he muttered brokenly, his voice hoarse and strained. "Heaven above, what have I done?"

He swayed as he stood, and then sank back into a chair. His mind was filled with horror. All in a second, it seemed, that awful impulse had gone from him. He had returned to his real self again. That mysterious influence within him had faded away—had lost its power.

But yet, even while Dr. Stafford was thinking in this way, he somehow knew that the slightest draught would again fan that wild spark into flame. Even when he looked at Tommy Watson he felt the longing come over him to seize the boy and thrash him afresh.

But it was too awful for words—too terrible to be really true.

Could it be a dream—a nightmare? The Head hoped with all his heart that he would soon awaken to find that this fantasy had no real existence. And thus he sat, fighting for breath—fighting to regain his lost self.

Tommy Watson stirred, swayed up into a sitting posture and looked round. His face was filled with pain, and his cheeks were very white. Never before had Tommy Watson received such an unmerciful thrashing.

He had been too dazed towards the finish to know whether it had actually finished or not. But now the numbness of his limbs was departing—to be replaced by a smarting agony which would not be denied. Try as he would Tommy Watson could not prevent his features from twisting. And he looked over towards the Head with a scared, fierce gaze.

At that moment Watson hated Dr. Stafford as he had never hated any man in his life before. He regarded him as a brute—a tyrant—a wild beast! And, mixed with Watson's other emotions, was one of blank amazement. He had always regarded the Head as a man of kindly nature. Even in his floggings Dr. Stafford had never been harsh or cruel.

"My good name is dragged into the mire," added Dr. Stafford, with bowed head.

But this was appalling—too terrible to contemplate.

What had Watson done? Nothing—absolutely nothing!

The Head had dismissed him, telling him he could go. And then, just because Watson had uttered a few innocent words, the Head had changed into that savage tyrant. He had thrashed the junior for no earthly reason.

Watson did not wait for the Head to dismiss him.

His one thought was to get out of the study—to get beyond Dr. Stafford's reach—and so, pulling himself to his feet, he staggered slightly, and then moved towards the door.

Every movement brought fresh agony to him, and he instinctively felt that if the Head touched him again, he would turn. He would not remain docile, but he would attack his persecutor with every remaining ounce of strength.

"Stay!" exclaimed the Head, hoarsely.

Watson grasped the door-handle and turned it.

"Do you hear me, Watson?" came Dr. Stafford's cold voice. "Stay here! I command you to halt——"

Watson wrenched open the door and tore himself out, and as he pelted down the passage at a swaying run, he heard the Headmaster thunder across the study. A wild cry of rage came to Watson's ears.

He didn't look round. He didn't turn.

But at last, when he arrived in the Remov

passage, he slackened down and glanced behind him. There were other fellows within call here, and if the Head came he would be safe.

But Dr. Stafford did not come.

Just then the door of Study D opened, and Edward Oswald Handforth emerged. He was in a hurry, for he turned sharply down the passage and was about to break into a run, when he caught sight of Watson. Handforth came to an abrupt halt.

"Great pip!" he ejaculated.

He continued to stare, and Watson said nothing.

"What on earth's the matter with you?" demanded Handforth. "You're as pale as a ghost, by George! Ain't you feeling well, Watson? I say, pull yourself together, you ass!"

"I—I'm all right!" muttered Watson. "Anyhow, I shall be soon. I—I'd like a glass of water."

Handforth looked alarmed, and just then Pitt and Jack Grey appeared.

"Quick—come here!" shouted Handforth. "This fathead's ill, or something! He's going to have a fit, I believe."

"I—I tell you, I shall be all right soon!" panted Watson. "I'm not going to have a fit, and there's nothing wrong with me. Where's Nipper? Does anybody know where Nipper is? I want him; I want to speak to him."

"Why, he's out in the Triangle!" said Pitt, "I think he's waiting for you. Great Scott, you're looking jolly seedy and as white as a sheet! Feeling out of sorts?"

"I'll explain later," said Watson dully. "Let's go and find Nipper first."

"All right, I'll hurry on and get hold of him in the Triangle. You follow quietly, old son."

A moment later Grey found me waiting just against the Ancient House steps. I was with Sir Montie Tregellis-West, and we were both wondering what had happened to Tommy Watson to delay him so long.

"I say, Nipper, Watson's taken queer," said Grey, as he hurried up.

"Taken queer?" I repeated, staring.

"Yes; he looks awfully bad!" exclaimed Grey. "He's as pale as a ghost, and his voice is all funny. He's in the Remove passage now with Handforth and some of the chaps. He says he wants you particularly. He is coming out now."

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "This is shockin', dear old boy! I'm frightfully concerned to hear that Tommy is unwell!"

When Watson appeared, looking decidedly groggy, he tried to recover his composure.

And he certainly was feeling a lot better. The acute smarting was dying down, leaving only a dull, aching pain, and a little colour was returning to his cheeks. A glass of cold water had revived him.

"Oh, here you are!" said Handforth. "The poor chap's gone dotty, I think. We've asked him to sit down six times, but he won't take any notice. He says he'd rather stand up."

"What's wrong, old son?" I asked concernedly.

"I—I've been through the very dickens of a time!" replied Watson huskily.

"Where?"

"In the Head's study."

"He didn't lamm you, did he?"

"The worst licking I've ever had!" replied Watson quietly.

"But what on earth for?" I asked blankly. "He gave Pitt two hundred lines for breaking his window with a football, so he couldn't possibly give you more than fifty for just punting the ball about in the Triangle."

"That—that's what I thought," muttered Watson. "But he went mad, I think. Oh, my goodness! I've never been so scared in all my life. I—I can see him now, staring at me!"

And Tommy shuddered, in spite of himself. We all looked at him curiously, quite unable to understand. There was something very queer here—something of a most unusual nature.

"Scared?" I repeated. "What were you scared of?"

"The Head."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" protested Handforth. "Nobody's ever scared of the Head; he's such a good old sort!"

"Of course he is!" agreed Pitt readily.

"Good old sort!" echoed Tommy Watson bitterly. "He's a beast, a brute, a—a wild animal!"

"Here, steady!" I protested. "You mustn't talk about the Head like that, Tommy!"

"But he is—and worse!" said Watson fiercely. "He's a tyrant—a bully! He slashed into me like a savage. You remember that bounder, Mr. Hunter, who was temporary Head for a time?"

"Remember him!" I echoed. "Everybody remembers Hunter. He was the worst bully and tyrant the school's ever seen!"

"You're wrong! Dr. Stafford is worse!" said Watson deliberately.

"Oh, you're properly mad!" exclaimed Pitt. "Don't talk rot like that, Watson. The Head's not a bully, and he's not the kind of man to act in a cruel way——"

"Don't you call this cruel?" interrupted Watson harshly. "Don't you call this the work of a beast?"

He pulled up the left sleeve of his coat, and there, to our horror, we saw several fierce, ugly-looking weals. There was no mistaking their character. The man who had inflicted those marks was an inhuman wretch!

CHAPTER III.

THE SCIENCE MASTER'S ADVICE.

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST uttered a cry of horror.

"Dear old boy!" he protested. "This—this is appallin'! You are not suggestin' that the Head caused those shockin' weals?"

"Yes, I am!" said Tommy Watson grimly.

"But it's impossible!" said Pitt. "It's

absolutely impossible, Watson! Why, somebody's been slashing into you with fearful force! The Head would never do a thing like that, and you can't make me believe it!"

"Rather not!" said Handforth.

Tommy Watson was feeling stronger now, and the scepticism of the juniors revived him even more. He held out his arms to me.

"I'll show you some more," he said quietly. "Help me off with my coat, Nipper; I'm too sore to manage it alone."

Pitt and I complied, and then Watson requested us to pull up his shirt. We did so, revealing his bare back. We almost recoiled with horror, for his back was livid with terrible bruises and weals.

"Good heavens!" I gasped. "This—this is terrible!"

"Awful!" said Grey.

"I—I've never seen anything like it!" muttered McClure.

The fellows were silent while we tenderly replaced the coat. I mentally resolved to take Watson to the dormitory almost at once, so that I could rub his sores with soothing ointment; but at the moment we were all anxious and eager to hear how these terrible marks had been made.

"Look here!" said Watson.

The poor chap had been literally beaten about all over his body, and he was sore from head to foot.

"My only hat!" said Grey. "Whoever's done this is a bullying cad, right enough! What are you going to do, Watson? You ought to complain to the Head. He'll skin the chap who whacked you like this!"

"Don't you believe what I say?" demanded Watson hotly. "The Head did this himself. Do you think I'm telling lies? I was in the study; I ought to know! I've never been so staggered in all my life!"

"But it's almost beyond belief!" exclaimed Grey.

"Well, I believe it, anyway," I said quietly. "Watson isn't a fellow to spin a yarn, you chaps. Why, we all know that he's as straight as a die, and doesn't even know how to tell a whopper! But there's something behind it—something beyond our understanding. I want to get to the bottom of it."

"And so do we!" said Pitt grimly.

"If you'll let me do a bit of talking, I'll tell you what happened," said Watson. "No; I won't sit down. I don't feel up to it. The Head took me into his study and jawed on about breaking the regulations. That was nothing; I was expecting it. Then he seemed to get a bit fierce, but it passed off and he told me to go."

"He dismissed you?"

"Yes."

"Well, what then?"

"I thanked him, and that seemed to get his rag out, for some unearthly reason," went on Watson. "Anyhow, he grabbed hold of me, and his face was like a demon's! It was the Head's face all right, but there was an expression of absolute cruelty and savagery on it. I hope I'll never see another face so distorted with awful brutality!"

"I say, draw it mild!" protested Church.

Watson looked at him steadily.

"However strong the terms I use, I can't possibly express to you in words the horror of the whole thing!" he exclaimed. "I wish to goodness somebody had been there to see it. The Head turned into a wild animal!"

To say that we were astounded is putting it very mildly. To hear such news of our beloved Head was a tremendous bombshell. Dr. Stafford was honoured and respected throughout the school. It was generally acknowledged that he was the kindliest Headmaster who had ever ruled the destinies of the famous old school.

To believe that he had acted as Watson had described was almost beyond comprehension, and yet we couldn't doubt the stolid Tommy. He wasn't the sort of fellow to exaggerate or draw upon his imagination. In nearly everything he was as blunt as they make 'em, and always to the point. He neither made too little nor too much of anything. He was as reliable as a grandfather's clock.

I glanced round at the juniors. They were all looking serious and concerned, and they were gazing at Tommy Watson in an awe-stricken manner as we made our way to study C.

"Poor old Tommy!" I said softly. "You've been through it awfully! I'm sorry, old fellow—terribly sorry!"

"Begad! We all are, dear old boy!"

"I should think so!" added Pitt. "We've been so surprised that we haven't had time to sympathise. But I reckon somebody ought to be made to pay, even if it's the Head himself."

"You ought to write to your people about it!" said Church bluntly.

Watson shook his head.

"I won't do that—I don't want to stir up a pile of trouble," he said. "Perhaps the Head was worried about something, or he might be going dotty. I don't know. Anyhow, he seemed to go raving mad while he was whopping into me."

"Let's have a look at those weals again," said Handforth. "I'm not the kind of chap to stand and jaw—I'm all for action. But even if I get the sack I'm going to make the rotter pay!"

Watson lifted up his sleeve again, and while Handforth was examining the arm, Tommy suddenly noticed that somebody was standing in the doorway, for the door itself had been carelessly left open.

The somebody was Mr. Hugh Trenton, the science master of St. Frank's.

"Anything wrong, boys?" he asked cheerily.

"Nunno—nothing much, sir," said Tommy Watson.

Mr. Trenton entered the study. He was a fairly youngish man, upright, and pleasant faced. He had not been at St. Frank's very long, but he was quite popular with all the fellows. He had a free and easy style, and made it a habit to mix with the juniors, interest himself in their work and pleasure, and generally make himself agreeable. He was what the juniors called a "pally" master.

"Nothing much?" he repeated. "Now then, my boys, that yarn won't wash—not with me, anyway. I saw some marks on that arm

of yours, Watson. Who's been lamming into you with a cane?"

"Oh, it's all right, sir," said Watson uncomfortably. "I'd rather not say anything, if you don't mind."

"Well, that's a pity," said Mr. Trenton. "I don't want you chaps to think that I've been eavesdropping, or anything like that. But as I was coming along the passage I happened to hear something about the Head. Do you mean to tell me that Dr. Stafford thrashed you like this, Watson?"

"Oh, well, if you know, sir, there's no sense in my keeping quiet," said Tommy. "Yes, sir, the Head did this."

And, briefly, he explained the circumstances.

"Amazing!" said Mr. Trenton gravely. "I can't help believing, young 'uns, that you are exaggerating a bit. But that can't be possible, either, because those weals speak for themselves. It's rather terrible, and I shouldn't like a story of this sort to get about too much."

"How do you mean, sir?" asked Handforth. "I'm going to tell everybody; I'm blessed if I'll stand by silent while——"

"But you don't realise, my dear chap, what it means," interrupted the science master. "From all I've heard, the Head is a kindly man, and not the sort to ill-treat a boy."

"He's got the finest reputation of any Headmaster, sir," I said quietly.

"That's what I thought," said Mr. Trenton. "Well, kids, don't be too harsh with him because of this; it seems to be his first lapse. Goodness knows it's not my place to discuss the Head. Who am I? Only a science master, after all. But it seems to me that Dr. Stafford might have been in a fit of temper—a special kind of fit, I mean. Don't make too big a song about it, but just wait and see how things go on. That's my advice."

Pitt looked at him warmly.

"You're a brick, sir," he said. "It's splendid of you to talk like that, but it really depends upon Watson himself. I'm not quite sure what I should do if I had been treated like he has."

Watson sighed.

"I shan't say much—what's the good?" he exclaimed dully. "You can bet I don't feel particularly amiable towards the Head. At the same time, I wouldn't dream of complaining to the Governors, or anything like that. After all, he's the Head, isn't he? Perhaps we'd better let it pass."

"You good natured ass!" growled Handforth. "The man who slashed into you like that ought to be horsewhipped!"

"My dear Handforth, you can't go and horsewhip the Head," said Mr. Trenton drily. "There's only one course to take—and that is to complain to the Governors. And I know Watson won't do anything of that sort To begin with, it wouldn't do any good, and, besides, it's quite likely that the Head himself will make amends in some way when he cools down."

There was no doubt that the fellows were impressed with the science master's generous attitude. But, try as I would, I could not help vaguely feeling that Mr. Trenton was not absolutely sincere. Why I should have this idea I don't know, because the science master was everything that could be desired, cheerful, friendly, free and easy and altogether likeable.

But the idea stuck—and I couldn't get rid of it.

Mr. Trenton went off after a few minutes, then I tenderly took hold of Watson's arm, and led him towards the door.

"Come along—upstairs!" I said softly. "We've got to attend to you, my son. We can do some more talking afterwards."

"I'm all right!" growled Watson.

"No you're not, and you've got to come."

Tommy was not feeling strong enough to resist, and we got him out into the passage, and then along to the lobby. We were hoping that we should not be stopped by anybody. But it was fate which brought Nelson Lee along at that very moment. The famous schoolmaster detective noticed on the instant that something was amiss. He fixed his gaze upon Watson.

"Dear me! What is this?" he asked kindly. "Watson! Not unwell, surely? Not our sturdy Watson?"

"It's nothing, sir," said Tommy hastily.

"But it is something, Watson, as I can plainly see," said Nelson Lee. "Good gracious! What is that mark upon your leg?"

And then, of course, the truth had to come out. Nelson Lee listened with an incredulous expression in his eyes as we told him. Indeed, I had very seldom seen the guv'nor express such amazement.

"But this is extraordinary!" he exclaimed, at length. "I can only assume that Dr. Stafford was labouring under a delusion, Watson. He must have imagined that your offence was far greater than it actually was."

"Don't you believe me, sir?" asked Watson

"Certainly I do."

"Then you're wrong about what you just said, sir," exclaimed Tommy. "The Head wasn't under any delusion. Why, he told me to go. And then, just because I said a few words he turned into a wild beast!"

"Come, Watson——"

"It's true, sir, absolutely true!"

"Are you sure that you didn't provoke Dr. Stafford?"

"Quite sure."

"You said nothing cheeky or disrespectful?"

"Nothing whatever, sir."

"And yet the Head flew into an overpowering rage?"

"I don't know whether you can call it rage, sir," said Watson. "I've never seen anything like it before. I believe he'd have murdered me if I'd stayed. He called me back, but I bunked; I was scared out of my wits. I heard him rush to the door, and he made an awful cry."

"And what then?"

"I don't know, sir. He went back into his study, I suppose," said Watson. "I came along the passage, to join the other chaps; I

thought I should be safer. Oh, I do wish you'd see the Head, sir, and find out if there's anything wrong."

Nelson Lee looked thoughtful.

"What precisely do you mean by that?" he asked.

"Well, sir, I've got half an idea that the Head went out of his mind," replied Watson. "And yet that can't be right, either, because he knew what he was doing, and he knew why he was lamming into me."

"It is all very mysterious and unaccountable," said Nelson Lee. "And I want you boys to keep as quiet as possible about this. It would be appalling if the whole school got to know about it. I have no doubt, Watson, that your own feelings towards Dr. Stafford are bitter and——"

"I don't know, sir," interrupted Watson. "I've always respected the Head very much. In fact, I've looked upon him as the best Headmaster a school could possibly have. So I'm not going to judge him too harshly because he let himself go for once."

"You're too jolly good natured," growled Handforth.

Nelson Lee was just about to speak when Tubbs, the Ancient House page-boy hove into view. He quickened his pace as he saw Nelson Lee. And when he came up he was looking somewhat scared.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said. "Can I have a word, sir?"

"What is it, Tubbs?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Why, sir, the 'Ead would like to see you in his study at once, sir," replied the page-boy. 'The 'Ead says, says 'e, will you please go along and see 'im as soon as you possibly can. It's most important, says the 'Ead, sir."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Very well, Tubbs, I will lose no time," he said. "I must leave you now, boys, but I will see you again, Watson."

And Nelson Lee hastened off. We gazed after him for a moment, and then turned our attention upon Tubbs. But we didn't need to question the page-boy. He was only too eager to talk.

"I say, young gents, I dunno what's come over the 'Ead!" he whispered confidentially. 'He's looking something queer, I can tell you."

"How do you mean—queer?" I asked.

"I dunno; he scared me," said Tubbs, in an awed voice. "Rang for me, he did, and when I got in 'is study, he was looking as pale as a sheet of paper. 'Go and fetch Mr. Lee,' he says. And so I come along."

"Was the Head angry?" I asked.

"Lor' no, Master Nipper," replied Tubbs. "Not what you might call angry, but sort of irritable and impatient-like. And he don't look well, neither. There's somethin' strange-looking about him."

We couldn't get much more out of Tubbs, and we led Tommy Watson upstairs to be attended to. And, in the meantime, Nelson Lee arrived at Dr. Stafford's study. He tapped, and walked in.

CHAPTER IV.

HIS SECOND SELF.

MR. MALCOLM STAFFORD looked up sharply as Nelson Lee entered.

"Ah, Mr. Lee, I am glad you have come so promptly—very glad!" he exclaimed, in a somewhat trembling voice. "I fear there is something wrong with me—something very wrong. I need your advice."

Nelson Lee regarded the Head critically.

"I trust it is nothing actually serious?" he said, quietly. "You certainly look somewhat pale, Dr. Stafford, and I judge that you have been recently labouring under some powerful emotion?"

"Sit down, Mr. Lee—please sit down!" said the Head, motioning Lee to a chair. "One moment, though—just one moment. May I trouble you to get me a small glass of brandy from the sideboard? I think it would brace me up."

"Certainly!" said Nelson Lee.

He fetched the brandy, and Dr. Stafford sipped it at first, and then gulped it down. This was the first time that Nelson Lee had ever seen the Headmaster partake of spirits. It was a most unusual occurrence.

"Now, Mr. Lee, I want to take you into my confidence. I want to explain what has occurred in this study. I am staggered—I fear that I am going out of my mind. For I have committed an unpardonable crime."

"Dear me!" said Nelson Lee. "You are speaking very harshly about yourself, Dr. Stafford——".

"And with reason," interrupted the Head. "You will agree with me, Mr. Lee, that I have acted as no normal human being could possibly act. And I feel weak and ill with the horror of it all."

Nelson Lee again gave the Head a critical glance. There was no sign of anger here—no animal-like ferocity, such as Tommy Watson had described. Lee did not disbelieve the junior, but he certainly had an idea that Watson had exaggerated to a considerable extent.

"Please tell me what is worrying you," said Lee, quietly.

"I have sent for you, Mr. Lee, because I feel that you might be able to understand—that you can possibly help me," said the Headmaster. "In many ways, you are as skilled in medical science as any doctor. Indeed, I have reason to believe that the average doctor is a mere baby in knowledge compared to you. That is why I am anxious to have your opinion."

"You flatter me, Dr. Stafford," said the detective.

"No, no—that is not my intention," denied the Head. "I will be blunt—I will not spare myself. Less than half-an-hour ago I had a junior boy in my room here—Watson, of the Remove. Mr. Lee, I treated that boy as only an inhuman brute would treat a dog. I caned him until I was exhausted—until he fell to the floor, white and drawn with agony."

Nelson Lee's face hardened somewhat.

"I am astounded that you should say this, Dr. Stafford," he exclaimed quietly.

"There is one thing I want to ask, Mr. Lee—have you seen Watson?"

"Yes, I have."

The Head leaned forward.

"Tell me," he said eagerly. "Is the lad very bad?"

"He is able to walk, and I do not think he is at all injured," said Nelson Lee. "But there is not the slightest doubt that he has been brutally treated. I am staggered, Dr. Stafford, that you should tell me that you have treated Watson in this manner. It is almost beyond belief."

"I caned him until I was no longer capable of wielding the weapon of agony," said the Headmaster. "To tell you that I am grieved and ashamed is but a feeble attempt to express my emotions. I am degraded—I am humbled in the dust, Mr. Lee. I feel that I can never hold my head up again."

The situation was somewhat delicate, and Nelson Lee was rather at a loss for comment. He therefore remained silent.

"I have told you the worst—I have made my confession," went on the Head. "And now, Mr. Lee, I will tell you the rest. I flogged this boy—without reason and without mercy. But I performed this basely cruel act against my own will—against my own inclinations."

"I must confess that I am at a loss to understand," said Lee.

"And I fear that I shall never be able to make you realise my own feelings," said Dr. Stafford. "But I will do my best to tell you how it came about. I'll try to put my own emotions into words."

"Possibly that would help us."

"You may remember, Mr. Lee, that I had an outburst of this character on the Fifth of November—a week or two back?" continued the Head. "I went outside, raving, and forbade the boys to proceed with their firework celebrations."

"Quite so—I remember distinctly."

"At that time I could not understand what possessed me to act in such a way," said the Head. "I was harsh, and I was tyrannical. But it was merely a passing phase, and I concluded my bout by fainting. A complete day's rest made me as well as ever. And, until to-day, there has been no recurrence of the disease—for I can use no other suitable term."

"The whole thing seems to be very strange and complex," commented Lee.

"Strange is not the word, Mr. Lee—and I fear that my brain must be giving way," said Dr. Stafford, quietly. "Yet that is an extraordinary thing, for this morning I was feeling in far better health than usual—and now, except for a slight faintness, I am just myself."

"How did this remarkable outburst commence?"

"I do not exactly know—but I was exceedingly irritable during the afternoon," replied the Head. "I don't know why I should have been, because there was really nothing to irritate me. I was angry with myself for being so touchy and bad-tempered. And so I went for a short walk. I had just arrived back when I met Watson in the Triangle. The boy was kicking a football about—which, as you know, is contrary to the strict rules of the school. However, under ordinary circumstances, I should never have noticed this innocent breach."

"But this evening, I gather, you felt abnormal in some way?"

"Precisely—precisely!" said the Head, quickly. "That is the exact word, Mr. Lee; I was abnormal. And I stopped Watson and commanded him to come with me into my study. Somehow or other I felt that I wanted to talk to him, and I had an uncontrollable desire to lay my hands upon the lad and punish him then and there."

"But, in your heart, you had no desire to harm him?"

"None, whatever," said the Head. "When he was in my study, I tried in vain to keep myself in complete control. But, strangely enough, his very words seemed to goad me on to an excess of violence. Heaven alone knows why they should have done, because the boy was submissive and respectful."

"Why, then, did you act in such a way?"

"I cannot tell you, Mr. Lee—I can give you no plausible explanation of my dastardly conduct!" confessed Dr. Stafford, humbly. "I can only tell you what I felt—what I suffered. I told Watson to go, and he made some remark to me—quite innocent—and an intense and overpowering desire to seize him and thrash him came over me. It was not my own will—in some vague way I knew that a demon within me was guiding my brain."

"It is all very peculiar," said Lee, frowning.

"It seems so to you, and I fear that this explanation of mine seems weak and paltry," explained the Head. "It must sound like the feeble excuse of a brute who has realised his own fault. But that is not the case, Mr. Lee. I fought against that desire for cruelty—Heaven, how I fought! But it was no good. My will-power was gone, and I grasped Watson and held him."

"And that strange influence was still at work?"

"It was stronger than ever," replied the Head. "A fierce, horrible joy took possession of me as I felt my fingers grasp the lad's shoulder. And then, before I could attempt to control myself, I was beating him—hitting him again and again with every ounce of my strength. Even while I was doing this I knew that I was a blackguard and a scoundrel. But I couldn't hold my hand—I couldn't check myself. Then, exhausted and surfeited with this bestial orgy, I staggered away."

"H'm! Peculiar—very, very peculiar!"

"And that is all I can tell you, Mr. Lee," concluded Dr. Stafford, weakly. "I tried to stop the boy from leaving the room—and I am indeed thankful that he took no heed of my commands. I tremble to think of what might have occurred if he had come back in response to my order."

"And after he had gone?"

"I lay in my chair, and recovered my breath. And, in some subtle way, I returned to my normal attitude," said the Head. "It appeared, Mr. Lee, as though a second self came to the fore. My own personality was obscured—obliterated. And in its place there stood forth

this harsh brute of a being. It was me—all that is bad in me—with my good qualities dulled into inaction. But now I am myself, and I pray that I may never have another such experience!"

"You have given me a problem of most bizarre characteristics, Dr. Stafford," said Nelson Lee, quietly. "In one or two minor details your story reminds me of the case of a man who was under the influence of hypnotism."

"Good heavens! You do not suggest——"

"No, no! That is impossible," said Nelson Lee. "If you had been under any such influence Dr. Stafford, you would have remembered nothing of your actions afterwards. There is no trace of hypnotism here. But I am nevertheless convinced that some evil influence was at work. How this influence affected you, or where it emanated from, are questions which I cannot hope to answer at this early stage of my investigation. However, you may be quite sure that I shall do my utmost to arrive at a solution of the mystery."

"And in the meantime," asked the Head, "what is the school thinking of me? What will all the boys say when Watson explains how harshly and cruelly I treated him? What can they say?" he added bitterly. "I shall be condemned—and justly. My whole reputation is utterly and irretrievably lost. My good name is dragged into the mire!"

And Dr. Stafford bowed his head between his hands.

"I hardly think it is so bad as that, Dr. Stafford," said Nelson Lee. "Only a few boys know of what happened—and they, I feel sure, will keep it completely to themselves. Indeed, they have promised me that such will be the case."

"I am relieved to hear that—intensely relieved," said the Head. "And yet it is not right—it is not just. Why should this brutal crime of mine be hushed up? Why should I be excused for my terrible conduct?"

Nelson Lee rose to his feet.

"Come, come, Dr. Stafford, there is no reason why we should make too much of it," he said, smiling. "As I have already said, I am convinced that you are not responsible—and, that being so, I will assist you, and do all that I can. Do not worry too much, and take my advice; go to bed almost at once."

And, a few minutes later, Nelson Lee took his departure. But the Head did not go to bed. He sat there in his study, in front of the crackling fire. He gazed into the burning embers, and his face was grave and troubled.

Little did he imagine that this was only just the start of the strange events which were soon to take place at the old school.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN IN THE FOG!

"FOGGY!" exclaimed Handforth grumpily. "What rotten weather, if you like! We might just as well be in London, with all this murk and fog and drizzle. It's enough to give anybody the hump!"

He was standing by the window in Study D, gazing out into the blanket of inky thick, foggy drizzle which enshrouded the Triangle. It was rather late in the evening, and things were quiet in the Remove passage.

Church and McClure were just finishing their prep, and Handforth had been puzzling his wits over a short story which he was contributing to the Magazine—my own particular little journal, which had recently started publication. Whether Handforth's contribution would ever be published was quite another question. So far, his literary outpourings had been singularly prolific—and singularly awful. The only fellow who couldn't see this was Handforth.

"Never mind the weather," said Church, looking up. "It's jolly cosy in here, and there's no need to grumble. I wonder how Watson's getting on?"

"Oh, he's all right," said Handforth. "I was in Study C just now, and he's a lot better, doing his prep, I think. But I'm not going to think about that business now—there's something more important on hand."

As a matter of fact, Tommy Watson was a very great deal better. After my treatment he bucked up, and his pains decreased. He was a sturdy beggar, and within two or three days he would be quite himself.

"Fat lot of good having study mates," went on Handforth. "You chaps are about as much use as wooden statues."

"What's biting you now?" asked McClure.

"Nothing's biting me, you fathead!" snapped Handforth. "But I'm just starting a ripping boxing story—a regular stunner. In fact, it'll be the best boxing story that's ever been written!"

"Well, of course, there's nothing like modesty!" observed Church.

"There's no need for a genius to be modest!" said Handforth. "I'm not boasting, of course, but I've discovered that I'm a perfect terror when it comes to writing."

"You are!" said Church.

Sarcasm was lost upon Handforth.

"That's just what I said," he agreed. "A perfect terror, my sons. I didn't even realise it until I started writing. And then I found that I could reel off the most dramatic stuff by the yard. Of course, I could write these stories, and get them published in the best London magazines—but I don't want to take my talent away from the school!"

Church and McClure tried hard not to smile. Handforth wasn't actually bragging—whatever his faults, he wasn't a boaster by nature. He really and truly thought that he could do these things, and he was stating them as a matter of fact.

"If you're so jolly smart at that sort of business, why do you want any help from us?" asked McClure pointedly. "We ain't clever—we're just dull and ordinary. We don't claim to be genial asses!"

"What?"

"Geniuses, I mean!" added McClure hastily.

"Even if you did claim it, nobody would believe you!" said Handforth tartly. "What I want to get at is this. In my story there's a champion boxer—a young kid in the Third. He is pushed along by a giddy promoter who is a bit of a swindler. And this kid is booked to fight Jack Dempsey for the world's championship."

"And I suppose he wins it?" grinned Church.

"Of course he does—he knocks Jack Dempsey flying," explained Handforth. "The kid's only twelve, but that's a detail. I'm making him a marvellous boxer——"

"He must be marvellous, too!" chuckled McClure.

"Well, he's something like me!" explained Handforth modestly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling fatheads——"

"Dash it all, Handy, that's going a bit too far!" said McClure. "Why, you can't box half as well as Churchy. You may be a jolly good fighter when it comes to slamming, but taking boxing as an art—a science—Church can show you a good few points."

"You—you pitiful ass!" snorted Handforth.

"My dear chap, it's true—you can't deny it," said McClure. "Hang it all, give credit where credit is due. Church couldn't knock you out, any more than he could knock a house over. But at an exhibition of real boxing he could show you thousands of points. I'm not making an idle statement—you can prove it just when you like."

Handforth rolled up his sleeves.

"I'll jolly well prove it now!" he roared.

"Here, steady on!" gasped Church, backing away. "This is nothing to do with me. What the dickens did you start him off for, Clurey?"

"Do be sensible, Handy," put in McClure quickly. "I didn't say that Church could fight you. Fighting's different to boxing. You're heavier than he is, and not in the same class."

"Huh! You're dotty!" snapped Handforth. "I'll tell you what. I'm not going to let this thing stand as it is. We'll soon put it to the test properly. Come over to the gym, and we'll shove on the gloves, and get some of the chaps to act as judges—there's bound to be a few there."

"Right!" said McClure promptly. "Are you game, Church?"

"Of course," said Church.

Handforth glared.

"Come on—we'll soon settle this!" he said grimly.

Church was quite confident. He knew well enough that he couldn't lick Handforth in a fist fight. But at a sparring exhibition he was quite capable of taking all the honours. Handforth was a slogger—a hard hitter and a fighter who simply didn't know the meaning of the word surrender. But when it came to a pretty boxing exhibition, Handforth was miles in the rear.

The three juniors donned their caps and sallied out. They went along the passage, through the lobby, and then out into the Triangle. The fog was certainly very thick. Wreathing billows of it swirled across the doorway, and it was impossible to see the lights of the College House through the murk. There was scarcely a breath of wind, and all ordinary sounds were deadened.

"My hat!" said Church. "It's like pea soup!"

"Doesn't taste like it!" grunted McClure.

They charged into the mist—for, although thick, there was not much dirt about it. It was a sea fog which had come up from the coast during the evening. The juniors wended their way over the damp Triangle in the direction of the College House. They seemed to be walking in a world of their own, but they knew their way, and could have found the gymnasium blindfold.

And, just as they were opposite the old chestnuts a little puff of wind came along and cleared the fog for the moment. The trees stood out clearly, and were then swallowed up again. But, during that brief spell, the juniors saw something which rather surprised them.

Standing against one of the old trees was a figure—the cloaked figure of a man!

There was no mistaking it. He had moved slightly, probably in an attempt to hide himself in the fog. He was certainly not a member of St. Frank's. He wore a strange cloak, and his soft felt hat was drawn over his eyes. Handforth came to an abrupt halt.

"Did you see him?" he whispered tensely.

"Yes; who was it?"

"Somebody who oughtn't to be here," replied Handforth. "What does he mean by lurking about the Triangle? I'll bet he's a burglar—waiting for everybody to go to bed!"

"Oh, rats!" said Church. "You always were a chap to imagine things——"

"I'm going to have a look into this!" said Handforth. "If the man's O.K., he'll be able to give an account of himself. But it's thundering fishy—that's all I can say. If he'd come on real business he wouldn't lurk over there among the trees. And even if he isn't a burglar, he might be a bookie, or some scallywag of that sort—waiting to have a word with Fullwood, or Kenmore of the Sixth. We'll touch him up!"

Handforth wasted no further time, but ran swiftly towards the trees, with Church and McClure in close attendance. They arrived, and Handforth nearly drove his nose into one of the trees before he could pull up.

There was a movement near by, and a shadowy figure hurried off.

"There he is!" shouted Handforth. "This way!"

He ran sharply, and could just see the dim figure moving in the fog ahead. Handforth increased his pace, and grasped the stranger's shoulder. But his hand was shaken off, and the man plunged blindly on.

All three juniors were excited by now. The very fact that the fellow had fled proved that he was not here on legitimate business. And Handforth & Co. were so close behind that there was hardly any possibility of their quarry getting away. More than once Handforth got hold of him, only to lose his grasp again.

They went charging on through the fog. And then something happened which the juniors had been half-expecting. Their sense of direction told them that they were making towards the shrubbery, behind which lay the monastery ruins. And suddenly, the stranger went plunging wildly into a thick mass of bushes. He had not known they were there until it was too late to pull himself up.

And so great was his speed that he crashed right through the first bush without losing his balance. Handforth & Co. crashed after him. It was unfortunate that Edward Oswald should have fallen over just then, his ankle catching upon a broken branch. Church toppled over his back, and McClure charged into the pair of them. And by the time they extricated themselves, there was no sign or sound of the stranger.

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth. "Where—what—— You—you blundering asses!" he roared. "We've lost him now—and it's all your fault!"

"Our fault!" yelled Church.

"Of course!"

"You—you——"

"Oh, it's no good arguing—that won't do any good!" interrupted Handforth. "Didn't you come blundering over me after you'd tripped me up?"

"Who tripped you up?"

"You did!"

"Why, you awful fibber!" shouted Church. "You fell over that bush, and we stumbled over you. It was your fault entirely, Handy, and it's like your nerve to accuse us. It was a sheer accident, so what's the good of talking? The man's gone, and we can't hope to find him in this soup!"

"We'll jolly well try to, anyhow," said Handforth doggedly.

They pressed on, skirting round the bush. And just then Handforth remembered that he carried a pocket electric torch. He had forgotten it until this moment. As he had explained to his chums, a detective never went out without an electric torch. And as Handforth considered himself a detective, he was naturally well supplied.

He jerked out the electric lamp, and switched it on. A bright beam of light shot out, but the rays were only cast back by the fog, and the light hardly penetrated more than four or five feet.

Handforth and Co. went through the shrubbery, and then continued their investigations among the old monastery ruins. But, after spending ten minutes at this job, even Handforth realised that it was a sheer waste of good time. The mysterious stranger had easily given his pursuers the slip, aided by the friendly mist

"Oh, well, it's no good!" growled Handforth. "Still, it's rotten, all the same. We shall never know who that chap was, or why he was lurking in the Triangle. And I'd have given a quid to find out. It might have been a real case this time, my sons!"

"Let's get back," said Church, shivering. "Ugh! This fog's as cold as ice!"

They wended their way through the ruins, and then back through the shrubbery, and past the bush which had been the main cause of the trouble. Handforth still had his electric torch going.

"Hold on!" said Church suddenly. "What's that?"

"What's what?"

"I just saw something glinting in that bush."

"Glinting?"

"Never heard the word before?" asked Church sarcastically. "Just shove the light on that bush again, and you'll see what I mean. I don't suppose it's anything important, but you never know; and you're always searching for clues."

"Blessed waste of time!" growled Handforth.

He directed the light of his torch upon the bush. But it was some moments before the object which had attracted Church's attention was found. He had caught that one glint at an angle.

However, at last the thing was located. It seemed to be of silver, and was tangled among the twigs and branches. Church picked it out, and then discovered that the little silver object was affixed to a silken cord. The ends of the cord were frayed and broken.

"This looks jolly queer!" said Church. "I wonder what it can be."

"What is it? A shilling?" asked Handforth.

"A shilling? No, you ass!" went on Church. "It's about the same size as a shilling, and it's a disc. But it's much thinner, and there's a design on it. Look! It seems to be a kind of a circle with a diamond inside it!"

"Diamond?" asked McClure. "Then it must be worth something!"

"Not a real diamond, you chump!" growled Church. "That's the design—a diamond shape within a circle. It must mean something, I suppose. That chap we chased must have dropped it as he ran."

Handforth smiled pityingly, and grabbed the silver disc.

"You blockhead!" he exclaimed. "Dropped it! Of course he didn't drop it! I'll bet he wore this thing hanging on his waistcoat, like a watch-chain. And the cord caught in a twig, and it was pulled out without him knowing anything about it. Let's take it into the lobby and look at it properly."

Church felt like asking how the disc could have been pulled from the stranger's waistcoat when that waistcoat was completely covered by a heavy cloak. But he didn't want to raise any further arguments. So the three juniors found their way back to the Ancient House lobby.

I was just passing through as they entered, and Church called to me at once.

"I say, Nipper," he said. "Come and have a look at this!"

"Who told you to call Nipper?" demanded Handforth darkly. "This is our mystery! We don't want any outsiders in this. I'm going to investigate the affair thoroughly, so you needn't worry."

I grinned as I came up.

"What's the dark and terrible secret?" I inquired. "Hallo! That's a rummy looking thing you've got, Handy. What is it?"

"Find out!" replied Handforth gruffly.

"Professional jealousy, I suppose!" I chuckled. "All right, Handy. I won't butt in. I'll allow you to investigate the problem to your heart's content. In fact, I'm not interested in the least."

But Church and McClure—who had a sad lack of faith in their chief—insisted upon telling me all about it. They explained how they had chased the mysterious stranger, and how the disc had been discovered. I listened with growing interest, until, indeed, I became convinced that this was not one of Handforth's usual wild-goose chases. There was something really serious behind it.

"And this little thing was hanging on the bush?" I asked.

"Yes," said Handforth. "I found it there."

"I found it, you mean," remarked Church. "Anyhow, I saw it first."

"Of course, you'll claim all the credit!" said Handforth tartly. "I found it, I tell you. It was evidently fixed to the man's waistcoat, like a watch-chain, and it was pulled off——"

"No," I interrupted. "It's far more likely that it was round his neck. That's why this silken cord is so long. When he plunged head-first into the bush, a branch caught him, and the cord was pulled out and broken. I don't suppose the man knew anything about it."

"You can have your own opinion, of course," said Handforth airily. "Personally, I think that's a dotty idea. Just as if a chap would carry a disc of this sort round his giddy neck!"

"Well, it's far more likely than carrying it across his waistcoat," said Church. "I reckon Nipper's idea is the most plausible. But what are we going to do about it? Don't you think we'd better tell somebody?"

"I don't know yet," I said. "Of course, the whole thing may be a fizzle; Handforth's detective chases generally are——"

"What!" snorted Handforth. "You rotter! This is what comes of letting you into the secret. You can jolly well clear off——"

"Now, boys, no quarrelling!" said a pleasant voice from the rear. "What's the merry argument? Let your uncle hear all about it!"

Mr. Trenton came up, smiling.

"It's nothing much, sir," said Handforth. "You see, we found—— Why, great pip! What on earth——"

Handforth broke off abruptly, for the science master had changed colour, and he was staring fixedly at that curious silver disc. He staggered back slightly, and a hoarse exclamation rose in his throat.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERY OF THE SILVER DISC.

WE stared at Mr. Trenton in astonishment.

What could be the reason for his startled gaze? Why was he staring at that little silver object so fixedly? What could it mean to him; for, obviously, it meant something to him that we could not understand.

"Anything the matter, sir?" I asked curiously.

"What? Oh—er—nothing!" exclaimed Mr. Trenton, hastily pulling himself together. "Nothing at all, Nipper. Quite a curious little object. Where did you say you found it?"

I could tell at once that Mr. Trenton was forcing himself to be calm, and that it was only by an effort that he succeeded in assuming a careless tone. His eyes were gleaming strangely—almost with a look of fear, I thought.

"We got it off that bush, sir," said Handforth lucidly.

"Bush? What bush?"

"Out in the Triangle, sir."

"You young ass! That's no explanation!" said Mr. Trenton sharply. "What do you mean—you got it from a bush in the Triangle?"

"You see, that man left it there when he escaped," explained Handforth.

Again the science master started.

"What man?" he demanded.

"Why, the fellow we were chasing," explained Handforth. "He managed to get away from us, but he left this behind as a clue."

"Let me see it," said Mr. Trenton.

"There you are, sir," said Handforth, dangling it in front of the science master's eyes, but taking care not to let it out of his own possession. "It's a clue, sir, and it might lead to the arrest of the burglar. I'm going to investigate the whole mystery."

"Don't you be such a young monkey!" said Mr. Trenton, still trying to be careless. "Quite an interesting little relic, by all appearances. I can't imagine what it represents, but it seems to be a badge, or something of that kind. You'd better leave it in my keeping, Handforth."

"I'd rather not, sir."

"Nonsense! Come along!" laughed the science master. "Hand it over!"

Handforth looked obstinate.

"I don't want to offend you, sir, but I found it, and I'm entitled to keep it until the right owner is discovered," he said firmly. "In any case, if I gave it to anybody at all, I should ask my Housemaster to take charge of it."

This, in a way, was a slight upon Mr. Trenton, and the latter was not slow to see it. He looked grim for a second, but then broke into a laugh.

"Well, hang it all, we're not going to quarrel," he said lightly. "Have your own way, Handforth; I won't press you, my obstinate young spark. Keep your blessed disc, and I wish you luck with it. May it bring great riches down upon your unlovely head!"

And Mr. Trenton, chuckling, strolled away.

"He's a decent sort, but he needs putting in his place now and again," remarked Handforth.

"Likely I was going to hand it over to him! It's a clue, and there's no telling what it may lead to. There's a mystery here, my sons, that means a tremendous lot of investigating. I'm going on the track at once."

"Out in this fog?" asked Church.

"Yes, of course."

"Oh, draw it mild-----"

"Out in this fog!" said Handforth grimly. "Don't you know that it is always better to get on the track of a criminal while the scent's hot? Ask Nipper here—he'll tell you all about it."

"Well, that's a good principle, of course," I agreed. "At the same time, Handy, it mustn't be taken too literally. I don't see how you could very well get on this scent to-night. As far as I can understand, you lost the chap hopelessly in the fog."

"Yes, we did," said Church.

"Then it'll be a sheer waste of time to go out," I said. "You might just as well look for a needle in a haystack. Take the advice of an old hand, my sons. Go straight to Mr. Lee, and tell him all about it, and give that silver disc over into his care."

Handforth shook his head.

"Not likely!" he retorted. "This is my case, and I'm not going to present it to Mr. Lee. I'm going on the track at once, and you can jaw until Doomsday, and you won't make me change my mind."

"Oh, all right! Have your own giddy way!" I exclaimed. "But I warn you, you'll go on a fruitless journey. It's a sheer waste of time and energy to go out into this fog."

I walked off, considerably puzzled about what Handforth and Co. had told me. Previous to that I had been sorely exercised in mind regarding the singular behaviour of the Head.

And now this second mystery had come—although I hardly suspected that there was any particular significance about the silver disc. The fellow whom Handforth & Co. had seen was probably a tramp on the lookout for what he could sneak. In that case the little badge was quite valueless, and meant nothing.

Handforth & Co. remained in the lobby for a little while. Church and McClure looked out into the fog, and shivered. The night was cold and miserable, and Study D seemed particularly cosy when the two juniors thought of it. Church shook himself vigorously.

"Well, there's no sense in stopping here," he remarked. "Come on, Clurey—we might as well get to the study if Handforth's going out. There's no reason why we should stay here."

"None at all," agreed McClure promptly.

Handforth glared.

"Your old tricks, eh?" he snapped. "So you think I'm going on this trip alone?"

"Of course you are!"

"Well, I'm not—you're coming with me!"

"Oh, ring off, Handy!" protested Church. "It's your wheeze—we don't want anything to do with it. Besides, a detective can always follow a trail better if he's by himself. That stands to reason. We're awful blunderers, and we should only get in your way at every turn. If you want to secure good results, you couldn't do better than go by yourself!"

Handforth seized his two chums firmly and determinedly.

"We're all going!" he exclaimed. "And if you chaps want to back out you ought to be ashamed of yourselves. You ought to be only too jolly pleased that I'm taking you with me."

"We're not pleased!" roared Church. "We don't want to go!"

"Well, you're coming—but first of all we'll slip into the study, and make out a little plan of action," said Handforth. "We can't very well discuss matters here—there's no privacy in the lobby. Come on."

The three juniors hurried along the Remove passage until they came to Study D. They entered, Handforth switched on the electric light, and closed the door. McClure went over and poked the fire into a blaze.

"Ah, that's better," he said. "In any case, it'll soon be supper time, and there's no chance of going out on an investigation. Do be sensible, Handy, and give it up."

Handforth made no reply. He was standing near the table, examining the little silver object under the strong light of the electric lamp. He turned it over and over and over, but could make no more of it. Just a silver disc with that quaint design on one side.

Handforth put it down after a while, and left it on the table. Then he went over to the easy chair, successfully turned McClure out of it, and sat down. He stared absentmindedly into the fire.

"I can see it all!" he murmured, after a while.

"Eh?"

"I've reconstructed the whole crime!" said Handforth.

"What crime?"

"Why, the—the—— Well, I know exactly why that man came here, and what he meant to do," went on Edward Oswald. "I've been deducing things. All you need is brain power on a job of this kind. You need a clear head, and all that kind of thing. Listen to me, and I'll explain."

"Oh, go on!" groaned Church.

"Well, first of all, the man came to St. Frank's with the idea of committing burglary," said Handforth. "That was his chief scheme."

"How did you deduce that?"

"Easy! Why should a man come to St. Frank's, and lurk in the Triangle? Not because he wanted to see anybody, or he'd have walked straight in. Not because he was merely a common or garden tramp, for in that case he would have gone round at the back, cadging things from the domestic quarters. That's absolutely logical, and you can't get away from it."

"Well, anything else?"

"Of course—a lot else," said Handforth. "This chap was standing in the Triangle, and he was probably waiting there for an hour."

"How do you know it was an hour?"

"Because I took a squint at the ground under the trees, and found a lot of footprints there," said Handforth wisely. "That shows that the

chap had been walking round and round, digging up the gravel with his boots."

"Oh, first class!" said Church. "I suppose you've forgotten that a crowd of fags were playing about around those trees earlier in the evening? Racing round them, and stirring up the ground?"

Handforth frowned.

"That's nothing—footprints I mean were made by this man," he said. "Then again, I deduce that he was about five-foot-six, fairly young, and quite active. That would serve as a good description for the police."

"What was his face like?" asked McClure.

"How do I know, you ass!"

"But can't you deduce that?"

"You fathead! A detective can't deduce things unless he sees 'em!" snorted Handforth.

"My dear old Handy, deduction isn't seeing things," said Church. "Deduction is getting at facts without seeing anything at all."

Handforth rose to his feet.

"Do you think you're going to teach me my own giddy business?" he snapped. "I know what I'm doing—and I know that you chaps will get some prize thick ears if you don't shut up. I'm right in the middle of my thoughts, and I don't want any more interruptions. You'd better hand me that silver disc. I want to give it another examination."

Church was about to pick it up when a most unexpected occurrence took place. Without the slightest warning the lower sash of the study window was flung up with a crash. A billow of mist came rolling in, and it was so thick that only the shadowy outline of a man outside could be seen. Church and McClure stared at the window, rather startled, and Handforth twisted round.

"Who's that?" he demanded sharply.

There was no reply.

"Trying to be funny, eh?" roared Handforth, leaping to his feet. "By George! I'll punch your giddy nose for playing a trick like this——"

Hisssssss!

There was a sudden sound of small objects shooting through the air. The juniors had a glimpse of stones coming into the room with great force. They instinctively ducked. The man outside in the fog had obviously picked up a handful of coarse gravel, and had flung it.

Bang—bang—bang—pop!

The pebbles rattled against the wall and the door. And several of them smashed against the glass electric lamp—the single bulb which provided the study with light. There was a loud pop as it exploded into a hundred fragments, and the room was plunged into inky darkness

CHAPTER VII.

VANISHED!

NELSON LEE stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"A very peculiar story, Nipper," he exclaimed. "I must confess that I am rather puzzled. It is a pity I was not out in the Triangle at the time, or I might have caught a glimpse of this mysterious stranger."

"Only Handforth and his chums were there, sir," I said. "Of course, they messed it up—they let the chap get away——"

"We can hardly blame them because of that, young 'un," interrupted the guv'nor. "In such a fog as this I am not surprised that the stranger eluded capture. Indeed, it would have been rather astonishing if he had been held. But what is this story about a silver disc attached to a piece of silken cord?"

"Well, you see, sir, the man was hanging about the Triangle for some reason, when Handforth & Co. disturbed him," I explained. 'He bunked, and they chased him. In the fog he blundered into one of the bushes against the shrubbery. I suppose he caught his neck, and a twig caught the cord off, and broke it."

"Leaving this peculiar disc attached to the bush?"

"Exactly."

"H'm! Quite probable, Nipper—quite probable," mused Nelson Lee. "It was rather astute of Handforth, I must say, to rescue that disc, and take possession of it. You saw it, I think?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was it like?"

"Well, I wanted you to come along to Handforth's study and look at it for yourself," I replied. That'll be a lot better than me describing it—although there's nothing much to describe."

"It is quite likely that I shall do as you suggest, Nipper," said Lee. "However, there is no reason why you shouldn't tell me how the disc is designed. Are there any letters upon it?"

"No, sir—it's simply a circle with a diamond inside the circle," I replied. "Quite a simple affair, but rather striking in effect. It seems to me that it must be an emblem, or a badge. Possibly it's simply the badge of a giddy society or a special trade union," I added, with a grin.

"I hardly think that, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "I shall certainly come along to Handforth's study and have a look at it. The circumstances are entirely peculiar—and, I may say, most significant."

"Why significant, sir?"

"Well, Nipper, I think we can assume, with a fair amount of accuracy, that this lurking stranger was in the Triangle for the sole purpose of meeting Mr. Hugh Trenton, our worthy new science master."

I looked at the guv'nor hard.

"My hat!" I exclaimed. "You—you don't suspect Mr. Trenton——"

"I have no suspicions against Mr. Trenton—yet," interrupted Nelson Lee. "It is possible that I shall never have any suspicions against him. But, my dear lad, it must be patent to you that Mr. Trenton knows something about this circle and diamond emblem. His very attitude when he saw the thing proved that. Now, there are several theories which we may proceed to develop. For example, is Mr. Trenton associated with the stranger who lurked in the Triangle, and, if so, what does

this association amount to? Again, is Mr. Trenton in fear of this stranger, and was he alarmed when he caught sight of that sign?"

"Well, he looked a bit scared," I said.

"There are many lines of inquiry which we can take up," went on the detective. "I am aware, too, Nipper, that your description of this disc awakens a kind of echo at the back of my mind."

"An echo, sir?"

"Yes, it has struck a chord of my memory," said Lee thoughtfully. "I cannot recall where I have heard of that disc previously, or in what connection. My memory is an excellent one, I believe, and this seems to indicate that I have previously had only a casual knowledge of the badge. But I certainly have met with it somewhere, and I mean to discover the truth."

"Do you think there's anything criminal at the bottom of it?" I asked.

"It would be most unwise of me to think anything of the sort," said Nelson Lee. "The business may be simple and innocent. On the other hand, it may be complex and sinister. In spite of myself, I am inclined to the latter view, although, strictly speaking, we should keep our minds quite open. I don't like all this mystery, Nipper—it means something. We have got to discover the real lie of the land."

Nelson Lee rose to his feet and crossed the study.

"You're coming along to see Handforth now, sir?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Oh, good!"

I led the way out, and we were soon hurrying towards the Remove passage. Just when we reached it we heard a sudden noise, like the rattle of stones upon a door. And this noise was accompanied by a soft, peculiar bang.

"Hallo!" I said. "What was that?"

Nelson Lee compressed his lips.

"I don't know—but I suspect——"

He got no further, but ran on at full speed. Arriving at the door of Study D, he wrenched it open and found the apartment in total darkness. Church came blundering into the detective, and Handforth's voice could be heard.

"After him, you fatheads!" he roared. "Don't stand looking! There you are—I've got him! Quick! Bring a light!"

The room, plunged into total darkness by the sudden extinguishing of the electric light, had brought about great confusion. Handforth & Co. floundered about the study, bewildered and rather alarmed.

They instinctively knew that some intruder had entered the room—that black figure who had been outside in the fog. Why he had come in Handforth did not know, and could not guess. There was not much time for thought.

And then, in the total gloom, Handforth grabbed hold of the figure—he had seen it looming near the window, dimly and vaguely outlined against the fog. Incidentally, the figure belonged to McClure, but Handforth was not aware of this fact. He clung desperately to his chum, and yelled for lights.

"You fatheads!" he roared. "Don't stand there blocking up the doorway! Bring a light before this rotter gets away!"

"Gug—gug—gug—grooooh!" mumbled the prisoner.

I dashed into the study, pulled out my electric torch, and switched it on. Handforth was revealed, clutching McClure lovingly round the neck. Edward Oswald looked up triumphantly.

"Hold him!" he gasped. "Lemme a hand!"

"No necessity," I said shortly. "McClure doesn't need holding!"

"What!"

Handforth gazed at his prisoner wildly, and dropped him.

"You—you silly lunatic!" roared McClure furiously.

"Do—do you mean to say that I was grabbing you all the time?" snorted Handforth. "Why, you babbling fathead, why didn't you tell me?"

"How could I tell you when I was nearly choked?" gasped McClure. "You ought to have had more sense——"

"Well, what the dickens do you mean by getting in my way?" yelled Handforth. "A nice mess you've made of it, I must say. We've lost the chap now—absolutely lost him! Pah!"

Handforth turned towards the door glaring.

"And don't stand there, blocking all the light out!" he snapped. "Move, you silly ass!"

"Don't be quite so impatient, Handforth," said Nelson Lee quietly.

Handforth nearly fainted.

"I—I didn't know it was you, sir!" he panted. "I—I didn't mean to call you a silly ass, sir! I—I thought——"

"It really doesn't matter what you thought, Handforth, and I quite overlook your hasty method of address," said Nelson Lee. "It appears that there has been a little excitement here?"

"Yes, rather, sir," said Church. "We were all talking when somebody threw up the window——"

"Did you see who it was?"

"No, sir, the fog hid him completely."

"That was unfortunate. And what then?"

"Why, sir, the rotter threw a handful of pebbles," said Church. "He chucked them at the electric light, and smashed it at once, leaving us in darkness. But I don't think he came into the room."

"Of course not!" said Handforth. "I saw to that. I dashed to the window at once, and guarded it all the time."

"I rather fancy you are wrong, Handforth," said Nelson Lee. "Unless I am mistaken, I can plainly see some muddy footprints on the carpet, and the Triangle, as you know, is quite muddy just now."

"So he did come in!" exclaimed Handforth warmly. "By George! I'll find out who it was, and smash him to a pulp!"

"It won't be quite so easy—— Ah, that's Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "Now we can have a look round."

I had just come in with the electric lamp from Study C. I removed the smashed lamp from

the holder and put the new one in its place The study was immediately flooded with light.

We all looked round curiously.

The window was still wide open, and the fog was entering in thin wreaths and whirls. And there, on the carpet, quite distinct, were some blurry footprints. They had undoubtedly been caused by the man who made the raid.

"But what did he come in for?" asked Handforth. "That's what I can't make out. There's nothing valuable in this study——"

"One moment, Handforth," interrupted Lee. "Have you got that silver disc you found out in the Triangle?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, you have?"

"Of course, sir," said Handforth. "I was looking at it only ten minutes ago, and when the window was flung up I was concentrating my mind upon the problem. I've got a certain theory, sir, and I mean to collect all the available data, and then proceed with this investigation. The exact hypothesis of the case——"

"Really, Handforth, I do not think it is necessary to waste time in this way," interrupted Lee, vainly endeavouring to repress a smile. "Let us deal only with facts. Theories are not required just now. You say you were looking at the silver disc ten minutes ago?"

"Yes, sir," replied Handforth. "By the way, how did you know anything about it?" he added suspiciously. "Who told you——"

"My dear boy, you are most aggravating!" interrupted Nelson Lee sharply. "Why do you ask these unnecessary questions? Nipper told me about the silver disc, if you must know."

Handforth snorted.

"I wanted to investigate this case alone!" he grunted.

"Perhaps so, Handforth, but it appears to me to be of some importance," said the detective. "Please let me see that silver disc."

"Oh, all right, sir," growled Handforth. "But I don't think it's quite playing the game. This is my giddy case, and—— Why, hallo! What the——"

Handforth broke off, and stared hard at the table.

"Anything wrong?" I asked quickly.

"Which of you chaps took it?" asked Handforth, staring at his chums.

"Eh?" said Church. "Took what?"

"That disc, of course!"

"We haven't touched it——"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" snapped Handforth. "You know jolly well I left it on the table! It couldn't walk off of its own accord, I suppose. I left it here—just in the middle, against this inkstand. And now it's gone!"

Nelson Lee gave me a grim look.

"So our mysterious intruder was successful in his enterprise," he said smoothly. "I feared as much, boys."

"What—what do you mean, sir?" gasped Handforth.

"Come, come!" protested Lee. "To a crime investigator of your wonderful ability it should surely be as clear as crystal that the silver disc was removed from the table by the unknown gentleman who entered by means of the window?"

"Well I'm blessed!" said Handforth blankly. "So—so that rotter came in, pinched that disc, and cleared off again?"

"Undoubtedly."

"The thieving bounder!" snorted Handforth. "Now I can understand!"

"Yes, you're just beginning to get a glimmering of what we knew from the very start," I explained sweetly. "You'd make a fine detective, Handy, if your brain worked a little faster. At present it seems to be rusty, and badly needs oiling. A chap can't think with a rusty brain——"

"You—you rotter!" roared Handforth. "I'll—I'll——"

"You'll do nothing, Handforth!" interrupted Nelson Lee firmly.

Edward Oswald clenched his fists.

"I'm jolly well going out on the trail, though!" he declared. "It's likely I'm going to let this burglar Johnny break into my study and escape scot free! I'm going on his track, and I'll collar him before bedtime!"

Nelson Lee seized Handforth firmly by the shoulder.

"Listen to me, young man!" he exclaimed grimly. "I forbid you to leave the school premises—in any case, you are well aware that it is not permissible for you to go out of gates at this hour. This matter appears to be of some importance, and I cannot allow you to engage in any of your amateur efforts. Take notice of what I say, Handforth, for I am in stern earnest."

The leader of Study D looked blank.

"But—but——"

"Protesting is useless, my boy," went on Lee gently. "It may be a disappointment to you, but I daresay you will get over it. There is another point. Keep your tongue still about this matter. Don't talk to the other boys about it. It is most important that there should be no gossip."

"We promise, sir," said Church and McClure promptly.

"And have I your word, Handforth?"

"Why, yes," said Handforth reluctantly. "Of course, sir. If you wish it, I'll keep as mum as an oyster. But—but I wanted to go out and pick up the trail——"

"I am very sorry to dampen your enthusiasm," interrupted Nelson Lee. "But I really think your efforts would be futile, Handforth. This fog renders any attempt at pursuit well-nigh hopeless. Now, boys, remember what I said, and try to forget the whole affair."

And Nelson Lee smiled, nodded to us, and passed out of the study. I looked after him thoughtfully. If he wanted us to forget the whole affair, I was pretty certain that he wasn't doing any forgetting.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HEAD LETS HIMSELF GO.

"SILENCE for the speaker!"

The junior common-room was crowded. It was within a quarter of an hour of supper-time, and most of the Remove had collected together round the cheery fire in the common-room.

They were all talking at once, and the din was considerable. Handforth & Co. had just come in, and, of course, Handforth was shouting at the top of his voice. He had lost no time in getting into an argument with Reginald Pitt and Jack Grey.

I wanted to make an announcement regarding the football, but I couldn't get a word in edgeways. It was De Valerie who had yelled for silence. He might as well have addressed the four walls.

"It's no good," he said, turning to me. "The asses are all babbling at once. You'll have to leave it until we're in the dormitory—we shall all be there, and there'll be some chance of making yourself heard."

"All right," I replied. "That'll do, I suppose."

The noise continued. It was generally like that towards supper-time, but this evening the fellows seemed to be particularly bad. Handforth was the main culprit. He insisted upon making himself heard, so he adopted the simple expedient of yelling above all the other voices, and, as everybody else yelled as well, the result can be easily imagined.

Handforth was feeling a bit sore. He had badly wanted to investigate the mystery of the silver disc. And here he was in the common-room, and all his marvellous abilities in the detective line were running to waste. He felt decidedly indignant about it.

And the only way to relieve his feelings was to roar at somebody. He had started by practising upon Church and McClure. But they had fled to the common-room, and, Handforth, of course, had followed.

And, while the din was at its height the door burst open, and Teddy Long whirled into the room. He was hot and breathless, and his face was red; his eyes shone with excitement and alarm.

"Cave!" he gasped.

"What's the matter with you, worm?" asked Owen major politely.

Teddy Long panted for breath.

"The—the Head!" he said huskily. "Keep quiet, you fatheads!"

"The Head?" repeated Owen major.

"Yes."

"What are you getting at, you young dummy?"

"He—he's coming!" panted Long. "He—he's got a cane in his hand and an awful look in his eye. I've never seen him so fierce before. I—I believe he's coming to the common-room."

I had heard Teddy Long's words, and so had Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregelis-West. We exchanged significant glances. Was it possible that Dr. Stafford was in another of those extraordinary savage moods—those moods which only had manifested themselves quite recently?

"What's that you were saying, Long?" I asked sharply. "Oh, for goodness' sake keep quiet, you chaps!"

My sharp tone had some little effect.

"It's—it's the Head!" exclaimed Long, gazing round at the juniors. "He's coming here with a cane."

"Rats!"

"Piffle!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"I tell you he is!" shouted Teddy, glaring. "I—I happened to pass him in the lobby just now. He—he looked awful. And I had to jump yards, or he would have swished my legs."

"Pity he didn't," remarked Pitt.

"I tell you he's in a terrible temper," said Long. "There was a look in his eyes that fairly made me hop."

"Anything would make you hop, you miserable little coward," said Hubbard. "Don't take any notice of him, you chaps. He's my study mate, and I'm ashamed to admit it, and I know what he's like. If he ever told the truth I'd give him five bob—just for the novelty of hearing it."

"Character readings given free," grinned Jack Grey.

"You—you disbelieving rotters!" shouted Teddy Long. "Well, I don't care. I only came to warn you for your own good. If you don't like to believe what I say you can jolly well do the other thing! Rats to the lot of you! I'm off!"

"Who said so?" asked Handforth grimly.

He reached forward, seized Teddy by the shoulder, and swung him round.

"Yow—yaroooh" roared Long violently. "Ow—yow—— Help!"

"My hat!" gasped De Valerie. "What sort of a row would he make if he was hurt?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Long believed in the policy of yelling first. He had discovered that it was a far less painful method. If he started roaring before he was hurt it generally happened that he had to suffer very little.

And Dr. Stafford, outside in the passage, came to a sudden halt.

For once in his life, Teddy Long had been speaking the truth, and it was the irony of fate that his own yelling voice should cause the Head to make straight for the common-room.

Dr. Stafford was indeed carrying a cane. He looked fierce and angry, and his usual kindly expression was displaced by one of malevolent fury. He had been aware of a noise in the junior quarters, and he had set out with the intention of putting a stop to it—swiftly and effectively.

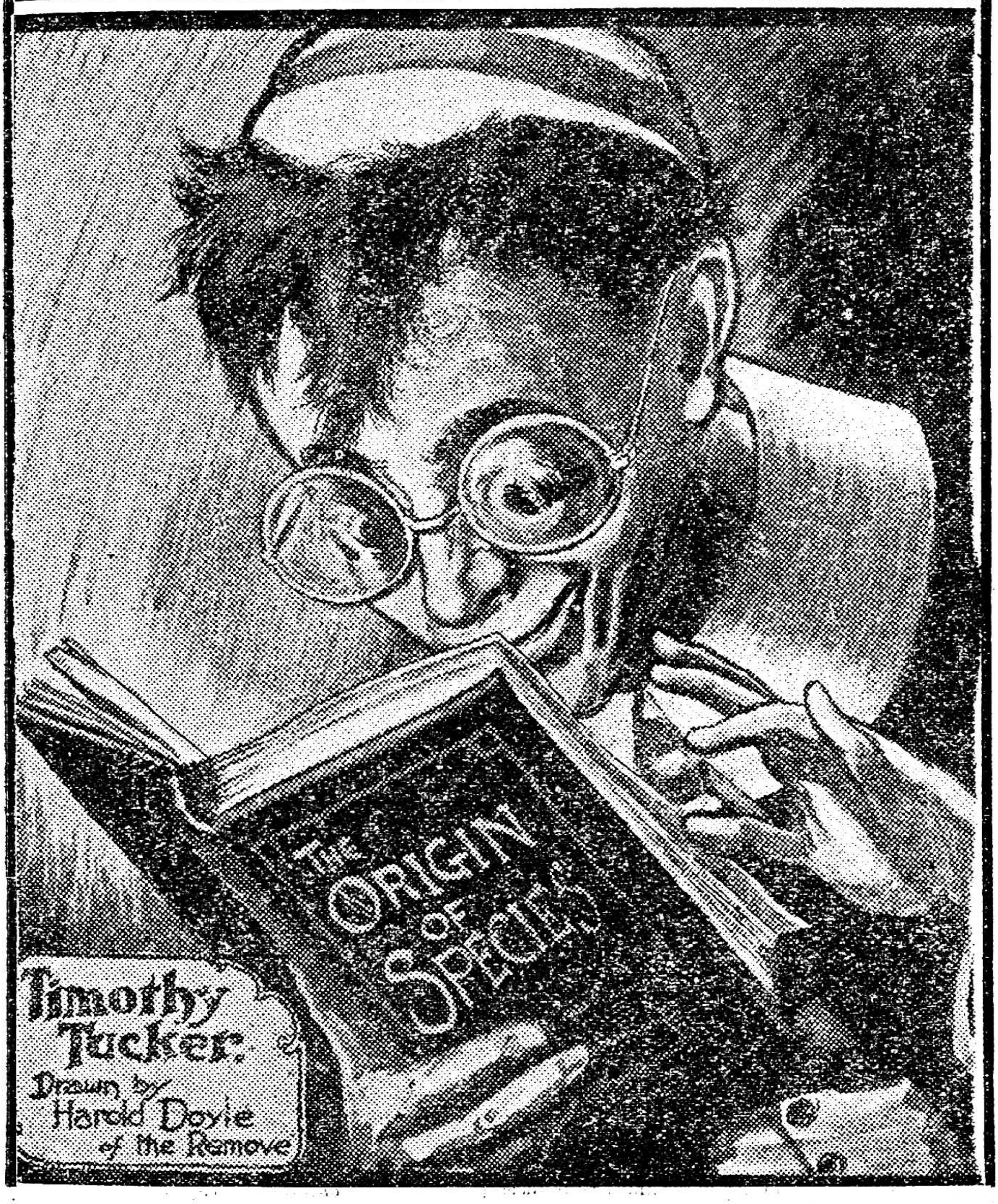
At any ordinary time the Head would not have troubled. A noise from the junior common-room was usual enough, but in the Head's present mood he could not stand any irritation, and that din irritated him beyond measure.

He had come to the junior passage, but the noise had subsided, and he had half decided to

(*Continued on page* 21.)

NIPPER'S MAGAZINE

No. 1 THE JOURNAL OF THE REMOVE OF ST. FRANK'S Nov. 26, 1921
Edited By Nipper.



THE EDITOR'S DEN

TO MY READERS.

Study C, Ancient House,
St. Frank's College.

Dear Everybody,—

Well, here it is.

I'm not going to blow any trumpets, or clash any cymbals, or anything of that sort. I feel that it is up to me to say a few words by way of introduction although I'm hoping my little magazine will speak for itself. It's now up to you to criticise it freely, and, I hope, fairly — and to send in your criticisms to the Editorial Office.

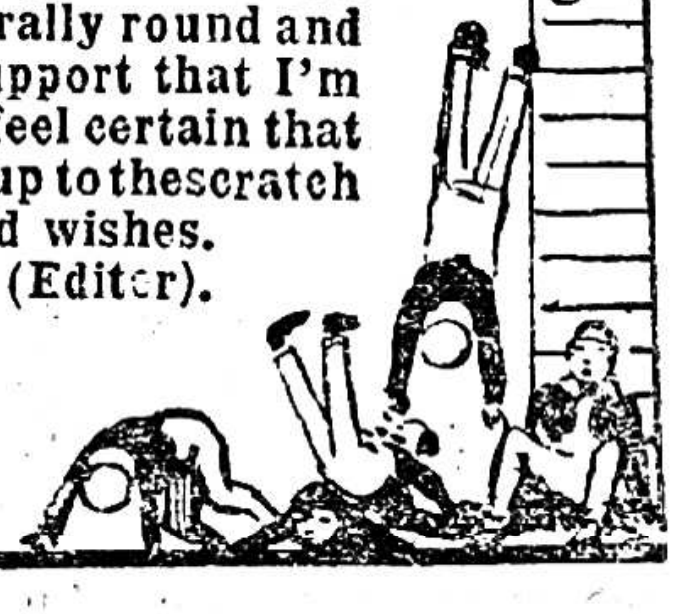
If there's anything you don't like, just say so. If there are improvements to be suggested — well, suggest them. I'm willing to do anything reasonable to please those for whom I am catering. After all, that's my job. I want this magazine to be Alive, with a capital "A," and I've done my utmost, with the assistance of a small army of willing helpers to make this first number a real bunch of energy.

Of course, it isn't possible to get any magazine to a state of perfection with the issue of No. 1, and it therefore stands to reason that there will be improvements as we go along. I have in hand an enormous assortment of contributions, some good, some passable, and some — well, let it rest at that. Any fellow is at liberty to send in manuscripts, and they can be quite sure of a fair reading. But it's no good submitting whiskery stuff. I want snappy, original articles, short stories, and topical paragraphs. I may add that there is also a good opening for sketches, cartoons or caricatures. So buck up, you authors and artists, and do your little bit to make things hum.

I have done my best to make this little journal interestiug and entertaining, and now it's left for you to rally round and give me the support that I'm hoping for. I feel certain that you will come up to the scratch

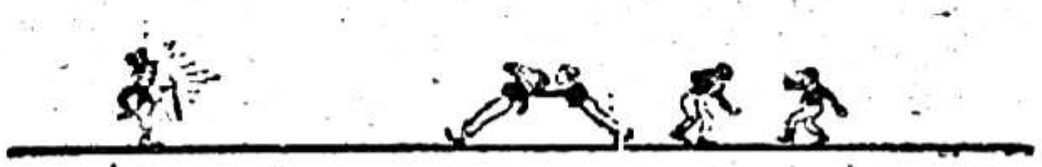
With all good wishes.

NIPPER (Editor).

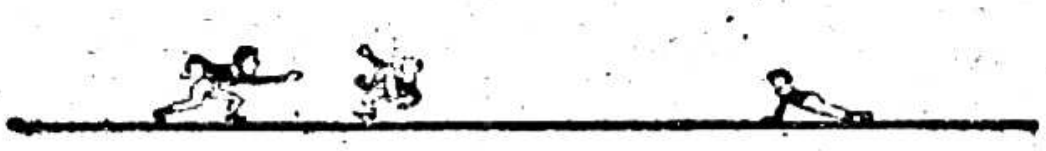


We congratulate Somerton upon his lucky escape. It was only with great difficulty that he was rescued from a party of Third Formers last week—who unfortunately mistook him for a guy, and nearly threw him upon the Fifth of November bonfire. We strongly advise Sommy to visit his tailor and outfitter!

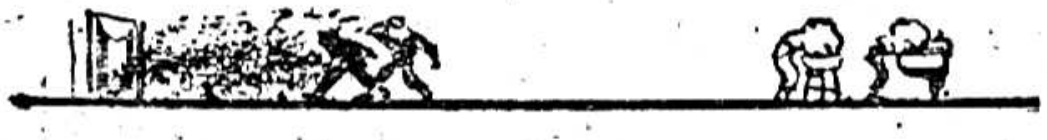
Tommy Watson's eye trouble is now quite removed. The rumour that Tregellis-West's latest waistcoat was the cause of the affection is palpably absurd, and may be dismissed without further comment.



It has been noticed that both Church and McClure are developing unusual vocal power. This, no doubt, is due to the fact that Handforth has been recently taking a course of muscular training in the gym! We extend our sympathy.

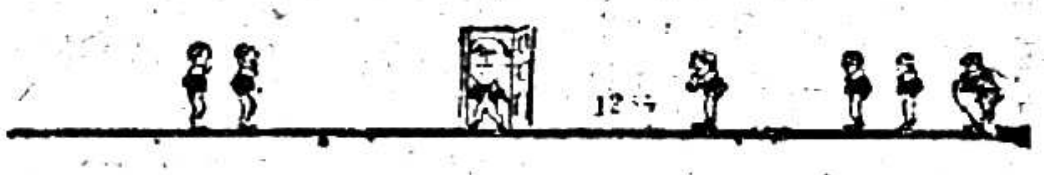


The two unknown juniors who were observed in the ranks of the Third last Monday caused much comment. We have investigated, and have discovered that they were none other than Owen minor and Heath. A fall of soot in the Third Form room fireplace compelled these unfortunate juniors to make acquaintance with soap and hot water—an experience almost foreign to them. They are now quite themselves!



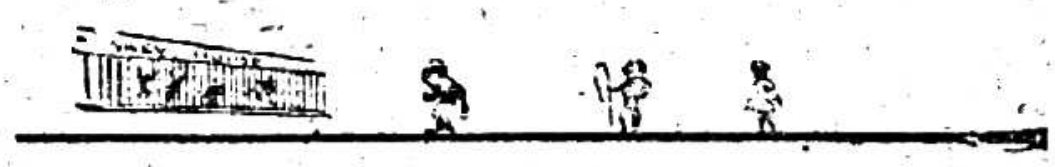
It was a matter of general comment last week that Josh Cuttle, our worthy porter, was almost cheerful on Wednesday. We now remember that it was on this particular day that a false rumour got about concerning an outbreak of small-pox in the village.

There have been remarks lately that a certain fellow in the Fifth will soon be obliged to enlarge his chambers, as his present abode is hardly large enough to accommodate his head. But we believe that this yarn, like the head, is somewhat swollen!



According to the Head's gardener, there has been a strange shortage of snails lately, not to mention sundry frogs. The peculiar odour wafting from beneath Monsieur Leblanc's study door—which has recently been noticed by many fellows—perhaps provides a solution to the mystery.

During the late visit of the big circus to Bannington, the unaccountable excitement and frenzy in the monkey-house greatly puzzled the trainer. It has now been definitely established that Timothy Tucker was there at the time. It is superfluous to add that the monkeys were offering their salutations to one whom they instantly recognised as of their own tribe!



What with undeserved impositions and punishments, the outlook for the lower School is somewhat black just now. A visit to the Form Rooms of the Second and Third would convince anybody that the outlook is not merely black, but positively grimy!

THE WORLD'S GREATEST DETECTIVE

By Edward Oswald Handforth

An Appreciation of Mr. Nelson Lee.

MR. NELSON LEE is well known to everybody — particularly the police. His famous criminal exploits are too well known to be mentioned, and his methods of investigation are very well-known. He has taken part in many well-known cases [there's a lot of "well-known" about this, isn't there?—Ed.]

Criminal investigation is a high art. It requires skill of the highest degree, braininess of the utmost quality, and quick, decisive action. As a detective of some experience, I speak from personal—er—experience. It's no good trying to do detective work unless you've got the ability.

There are all sorts of cases that detectives must undertake. And it is famous knowledge that when a detective gets to work he carries his life in his hands. Therefore, an investigator of crime must possess redoubtable courage and be as fearless as a lion.

I distinctly remember that in one case I was beset by half a dozen villainous ruffians in Bellton Lane. Did I flinch? Is it right that a detective should flinch? Such a thought never entered my head.

Clues are queer things. They stare you in the face, and unless you have the trained mind you can't see them. That's just where the real detective genius comes in. Many a time I've found clues where they don't actually exist! And to do this is a feat which no normal person could hope to accomplish.

Mr. Nelson Lee has a wonderful faculty for following scents. And now that I'm on the subject of scents, I should like to relate a little experience I once had. Scents are, if anything, more tricky than clues. To follow up a scent properly, it is absolutely essential that the detective should concentrate his whole energies upon the subject. During these great moments he forgets food, drink, and all the ordinary matters of life. Providing a scent lasted long enough, a real detective would starve to death before forsaking the trail. On many occasions I have actually missed my tea when keen upon an investigation.

It has given me great pleasure in publicly praising the undoubted abilities of Mr. Nelson Lee. It is my intention to write a series of articles for this magazine on the enthralling subject of detective work in its many phases. The first article will appear next week.

[I don't think!—Ed.]

LIFE IS WORTH LIVING!

By JIMMY LITTLE

WHEN you're hungry and tired and cold,
And you're suffering faintness untold;
Out from the rain with boots all muddy,
Into the cheer of fire-lit study;
How ripping to go to the cupboard
(In contrast to old Mother Hubbard)
And find there a shelf-full of tuck!
By gravy! It gives you a buck
To know that in less than a minute
You can yank out the grub and begin it!

Pork-pies and beef-patties in plenty,
And sandwiches—not less than twenty—
Doughnuts and custards and pastry rich
(They're all so gorgeous I don't care which).
Sardines, toast, and lovely Welsh rabbit,
Eating such things is just a habit!
You can't beat a jolly old feed
When gladness and comfort you need;
There's nothing like eating and drinking
When you feel that you're weak and sinking!

Cocoa and coffee and fresh-brewed tea
Are all alike in goodness to me.
When the air's nippy and keen with frost,
Hot drink's the stuff regardless of cost!
But when the day is muggy, I think,
You can't beat cool ginger-pop to drink.
Yes, eating and drinking is fine—
It's a regular habit of mine—
If you're feeling like a hollow tub
There's only one thing—plenty of grub!

SERIAL STORY.

THE MYSTERY OF MOOR COTTAGE!

By Reginald Pitt, Dick Goodwin, Solomon Levi, and Sir Lancelot Montgomery Tregellis-West

A Story of Thrills, Perils, and Excitement—In Four Parts

Editor's Note.—The plot and all the incidents in this exciting mystery story, which I am publishing as a serial, were worked out by myself and two or three of my assistants in the editorial office. I did not actually commission any particular fellow to write up the yarn, and I was, therefore astonished when I received four manuscripts of the same story—one by Reginald Pitt, one by Dick Goodwin, and another by Solomon Levi, and the last by Sir Montie Tregellis-West. As a novelty, I have decided to publish the story in four parts—each part by a different author. I rather think that the effect will be somewhat startling.—NIPPER.

FIRST INSTALMENT.

By Reginald Pitt.

"I AM desperate, and I won't stand any nonsense!"

The words cut through the air sharply and harshly. The wind howled and moaned across the moor, carrying with it millions of snowflakes, which cut and bit their way into one's face with cruel iciness.

There were four of us on the moor that evening—Tregellis-West, Levi, Goodwin, and myself. We had become separated from a big party of St. Frank's chaps near Bannington. The snowstorm had swooped down, and so we decided to cling together.

And then, above the roar of the gale, came that harsh voice.

We peered forward, and saw the figure of a man—a convict!

"You'd better not try any tricks with me!" rasped the fellow. "I want some clothes and some money! Give me an overcoat!"

"You scoundrel!" cried I. "We'll give you nothing!"

The convict uttered a snarl, and threw himself forward. And as he did so three figures suddenly swooped out of the night and fell upon him. They had come up unseen amid the snowflakes, their approach unsuspected until now.

"Got you!" was the shout of one of them.

And Sir Montie shouted out:

"The warders, begad, dear old boys, the warders!"

But Tregellis-West was wrong.

To our utter amazement we saw that the three men were attired in ordinary clothing. A life-preserver flashed up and descended with a dull thud upon the convict's head. He gave one groan and fell.

In a trice the unconscious man was thrown across the shoulders of one of his assailants, and the whole party moved off in the snowstorm, taking no notice of us whatever. We stared at one another in the gloom. The wind howled, and the snow beat fiercely into our faces.

"By my life!" was Levi's comment. "Believe me, that was strange!"

"Strange!" echoed I. "I only wish that Nipper was here now."

And then, out of the blackness came a figure. We all started forward, and shouted in unison as we recognised the new-comer. It was Nipper. My wish had been granted, although I had never expected it.

"What is wrong here?" asked Nipper sharply.

We told him, and at first he thought we were kidding. But at last he was convinced, and his firm face grew grim, and he knitted his brow.

"We must investigate this," he cried dramatically. "Come, my sons, we'll follow the trail."

"But how can we?" cried Sir Montie.

"The snow—the footsteps!" replied Nipper. "We must follow up this mystery."

And we hurried forward over the moor, following the footprints in the snow without trouble. And suddenly we saw a little stone cottage before us, with one light gleaming out into the night.

And then we came to a halt, staring with horror. For upon the blind there appeared a shadow. It was the shadow of a skeleton, and it was moving.

(To be continued.)

AN ANALYSIS *of the* MODERN SCHOOLBOY

By Timothy Tucker

THE modern schoolboy can hardly be described as a human being. It is with great reluctance and regret that I feel compelled to make this statement. But after careful and assiduous study, I am able to come to no other conclusion.

The boy of to-day is practically analogous to the prehistoric creature who roamed the wild spots of the earth in the Neolithic stage of history. Take, for example, the modern schoolboy's characteristics.

What is he, after all, but a savage?

His one instinct is that of brutality. On every possible occasion he is engaged in some gory battle, and is never better pleased than when he is bruising and battering some fellow-savage.

After all, what are the chief habits of the modern schoolboy? He has two, and only two. He fights and he eats. Very often he will fight in order to eat. Have I not seen with my own eyes a party of these apelike creatures fall upon an opposing party for the mere possession of a hamper of food? And the herd which wins the trophy of battle then proceeds to make wild and hideous noises, and triumphantly the booty is divided up and carried to the lairs of these battle-loving beings.

It is all very sad and appalling. I have studied this subject with laborious and painstaking patience. I have wandered amongst the creatures themselves, and have learned to know their every mood. And I may add that this process has been dangerous. Even as one takes one's life in one's hands when a primeval forest is penetrated, so it is when one enters the lair of the modern schoolboy.

Danger exists everywhere. The investigator is surrounded by perils unknown, and is often swooped upon unsuspectedly. Without the slightest warning, as one is strolling down a peaceful corridor, there will be a scuffle, a series of wild and mysterious cries, and then peril, stark and appalling, stalks abroad.

Left entirely unchecked, the schoolboy would lose even the faint trace of humanity that he now possesses. It is only by the strictest methods that he is kept in hand. During the chief hours of the day these remarkable creatures are herded together in large bodies, and placed in the care of a human being of mature years. And thus, for a certain time, the schoolboy is powerless—for he lives in dread of this mature human being, and obeys his every command—unless the mature human being happens to be looking the other way.

Released from this temporary bondage, however, true savage instinct asserts itself rapidly, and where all had been peace previously, there now breaks forth a terrible and ghastly clamour. But for these restrictions I have mentioned, the modern schoolboy would be an object of terror and fear in every path and by-way.

In many respects I feel sad when I review these facts. An analysis of the modern schoolboy only convinces me beyond all doubt that he is one of the most dangerous creatures on the face of the earth to-day. And this, to a great extent, is due to the existing conditions of society.

The whole system is wrong. Society, as it stands to-day, is rotten to the very core, and is only held in position by unsubstantial props. One day these props will fall, and then there will be utter ruin. But out of this ruin there will arise a new mode of life; and in this new mode the future schoolboy will be a being worthy of his place in civilisation. And his savagery will vanish. He will be a harmless creature, totally different to the type which roams the earth to-day. But this, after all, is merely a matter of development. It is purely a question of evolution, and one might say revolution. For until mankind revolts against the tyrannies and savageries of the modern schoolboy, there will be no change.

As my intelligent readers will have observed, the above is merely by way of introduction, and I shall now proceed to develop my theories and enlarge upon my preliminary remarks——

[Thanks, the introduction is quite enough!—Ed.]

SHORT STORY

WHEN BESSIE CAME TO STUDY Q!

By Bob Christine

RODDY YORKE suggested the idea in the first place. We happened to be going down the High Street in Bannington, when Yorke suddenly spotted Bessie in the window of an ironmonger's shop.

Perhaps it would be as well to explain that Bessie was an oil stove. You know, one of those affairs with a squat, flat base, with a funnel-like arrangement over the top—only the funnel is oblong. This is because the wick is about five or six inches wide. It looked quite a smart affair, with the name "Bessie" painted on the front in gold letters.

"That's the very thing we require," said Yorke pointing.

Yorke proceeded to point out how beneficial it would be for us to purchase Bessie, and take her home with us. Talmadge and I listened impatiently at first, but in the end we became half-convinced that Roddy was right.

As he explained, at present we often came into the study after lessons, and found the fire out, with the result that we were compelled to light it again before we could have any tea. With Bessie on the premises, it would be totally different. When the fire happened to go out and on mild days, what could be simpler than to get Bessie on the go? Within ten minutes we should have hot water for the tea, and everything would be all serene.

So Yorke and Talmadge and I clubbed together, invaded the shop, and emerged triumphantly with Bessie. We took her home very tenderly, and, having deposited her on the table of Study Q, we prepared to try how she would go. And then, of course, Talmadge suddenly remembered that we required paraffin oil. As he explained, we couldn't expect Bessie to do much work unless we gave her a good feed.

Yorke hurried off, and returned in about ten minutes with a can of oil—having obtained this by means of bribery and corruption from Tubbs or one of the scullery maids. The fact that the can leaked was rather unfortunate, but it seemed of small importance at the moment.

There was no necessity whatever for Yorke to spill about a pint of paraffin over the tablecloth, particularly as a bundle of my books were near by. And it was perfectly ridiculous of him to smother Bessie herself with oil.

The result was only to be expected. She smoked horribly, and filled Study Q with fearful fumes for half-an hour. In fact, we had to clear out, and while we were in the passage Talmadge and I made a few pointed observations on the merits of oil-stoves in general, and Bessie in particular.

However, after Talmadge had wiped the blood from his nose, I managed to restore peace. And we went back into Study Q, and found Bessie behaving herself splendidly. And, as a proof of her efficiency, she boiled a kettle of water within ten minutes.

It was perfectly mad of Churchman and Holroyd to start a fight out in the passage at that particular moment. We all rushed out, and became so interested in the scrap that we forgot all about Bessie. The fight finally ended in the cloak-room with everybody seeking concealment behind overcoats, and so forth. I'm blessed if I know why prefects choose to wander about at such important times.

Anyhow, Talmadge suddenly remembered that he'd lit Bessie, but hadn't turned the wick down. When we arrived at Study Q, we thought, for a moment, that we'd run into a London fog. The place was thick with black, choking smoke. The floor, the table, the furniture—everything was smothered with soot. And Bessie, probably growing angry at being left alone for so long, was just on the point of exploding with wrath.

She did explode—but we managed to get her through the window and into the Triangle first. Personally, I think Mr. Crowell was rather severe in giving us a thousand lines each, particularly as it cost us nearly ten bob in tips to have Study Q scoured out.

When Yorke gets another idea we're going to smother him on the spot!

GLORIOUS BRITAIN!

By Hussi Ranjit Lal Kahn

I HAVE been requestfully pressed by the vociferous Editor of this beautiful and voluminous journal to make a number of exquisite remarks concerning my ridiculous impressions of the British Islands.

I will here set down that I acquired a gorgeous and perfectly preposterous knowledge of the delicious English language before partaking from my native India. I thereupon landed in this minute and magnitudinous island extraordinarily equipped. I came knowing a superb lack of the wondrous tongue.

Possessing this knowledge, I am permitted to express myself in surprisingly inadequate sentences.

Britain is an imperturbable and impetuous country, where the inhabitants are by nature exquisitely polite and fantastically inhospitable. No matter where I have been, I have always met with kindness and discourtesy.

London is so exhilaratingly large, and filled with such complex simplicity, that I was unable to see everything during my stay there. But I was impressed by the magnitude and insignificance of its vast buildings. It was also a cause of much irresistible wonder to me to observe the rapidly sluggish traffic. The vehicles which are called cab-taxis were particularly irresponsible in their movements. The manner in which they travelled through the streets was a revelation and a nightmare of wonderful excitement to me. My complete calmness was grotesque.

And I am reluctant to be silently loquacious concerning the green fields and woods and valleys. They are more magnificently overpowering than London itself. The greenness of the country of Britain is stupendously astounding, and this greenness is always reflected on the people. They are fresh and inconceivably full of life and filled with energetic inactivity.

Regarding St. Frank's, my words of praise are of such a nature that my wonderful command of English fails me, and I find it impossible to set down what I feel. This ludicrous school is so tenaciously full of its own spaciousness that the mind reels at the thought of travelling over its insignificant length and breadth.

I am full of the disgusting hope that I shall remain at St. Frank's for many years, and I am certain that these years will be harrowing and paralysingly beautiful. My enjoyment will be far reaching and outlandish.

Indeed, it is my insolent wish that I should remain amid these surrounding haunts for a long infinitesimal period.

Who's Who at St. Frank's

STUDY C.:—

NIPPER.—His real name is Richard Hamilton, Detective-assistant to Nelson Lee, the famous criminologist. Nipper has played prominent parts in many detective dramas. He and Nelson Lee originally came to St. Frank's to escape the murderous attentions of a grim Chinese Secret Society. Nelson Lee became Housemaster in the Ancient House, and Nipper went into the Remove. After the pair had been at St. Frank's about six months, they disclosed their real identities, and decided to remain; Nipper easily possesses sufficient knowledge to gain admittance to the Sixth Form; but he chose the happy-go-lucky Remove in the first place, because as a Sixth Former he would have been more conspicuous. At the outset, Nipper found every junior literally trembling under the rule of Ralph Leslie Fullwood. Nipper was expected to tremble also, but he did not, as Fullwood soon discovered! It took a long time for Nelson Lee's assistant to defeat the young cad and oust him from his position as captain of the Form. Nipper was elected captain himself, and has occupied that position since. He is slightly under sixteen years old, and with regard to sports is ahead of the other members of the Remove.

SIR LANCELOT MONTGOMERY TREGELLIS-WEST, Bart.—Perhaps we can call him Nipper's closest chum. He is slightly over fifteen years old, and for his age this young gentleman has a surprising amount of history behind him. He was born in Merania, a tiny state in the centre of Europe. Before he was many months old, Montie became an orphan. He is the owner of Tregellis Castle, together with many thousand acres of land, which are at present under the care of Lady Helen Tregellis-West, Sir Montie's aunt. The Earl of Westbrook, a big landowner, who resides only seven miles from the castle, is Tregellis-West's uncle and guardian. Montie himself is one of Nature's own gentlemen, and, as is well known, a terrific swell. But he has the faculty of being a walking fashion plate without appearing in the slightest degree showy. He wears pince-nez, has fair hair and blue eyes. As a sportsman, Sir Montie is well to the front, and is quite useful with his fists when occasion demands.

turn back. He only took two steps before Teddy Long's yelling voice burst forth.

Dr. Stafford turned, his face working with rage.

"The young hound!" he muttered between his teeth.

With a bound that was something like a leap, he made his way to the junior common-room. This was an extraordinary move for the Head to make; he was always sedate and stately. And for him to jump down the passage at a half walk, a half run, was amazing.

He burst into the common-room like a whirlwind.

"Silence!" he thundered.

His entrance had an immediate effect.

Every boy stood stock still, every tongue remained inactive, and all hearts were beating at an accelerated pace. The juniors gazed at Dr. Stafford in wonder and something approaching fear.

The silence, indeed, was like a pall during those first few seconds; it hung heavily over the whole room. A pin dropping just then would have been heard with clear distinctness.

And then the Head broke the stillness.

"You noisy young rascals!" he shouted, his voice hoarse and thick. "What's the meaning of all this commotion? How dare you create such a noise and disturb the whole school?"

"It—it wasn't me, sir!" gasped Long faintly.

"Oh, it wasn't you?" shouted the Head, striding forward. "We'll see about that, you——"

"I—I didn't make a sound, sir," howled Long wildly.

He broke away from the other juniors, and dodged to the back of the common-room. The Head charged after him, whirling his cane carelessly and with considerable force. It swished round with a hiss.

"Yaroooh!" roared Handforth.

The cane had struck him accidentally, and the blow caught Handy on the wrist, and he was quite hurt.

"Who made that noise?" snapped the Head, twisting round. "Answer me! Who made that noise just now?"

The fellows were now thoroughly scared. There was something about the Head which made them want to rush away. He was not the Dr. Stafford they had always known. He seemed like somebody different, and yet he was the Head at the same time. It was a most peculiar sensation.

"I made that noise, sir," said Handforth gruffly. "You swung that cane round and caught me——"

"Oh, indeed!" grated the Head. "Perhaps you will make more noise if I swing the cane round again. We will see—we will see."

Swish—swish—swish!

The cane hissed down repeatedly. Twice it struck Handforth before he realised what was happening. Then, with a wild yell, he jumped backward about two yards, and dodged behind some of the other juniors.

"Oh, by George!" gasped Handforth. "I—I'm hurt!"

The Head rushed after him, knocking the

juniors down as though they had been ninepins. He seemed to go mad for the moment, and his face was now pale and drawn, and his eyes glittered with a strange fire.

"You young dogs!" he shouted. "You think you can do as you like? You think you can defy your own Headmaster? We will see about that. Every boy in this room will take two thousand lines for insubordination and disobedience of rules."

"Two thousand lines!" said Pitt blankly.

"Yes, boy, two thousand lines!" roared the Head. "If you dare to say another word I will flog you within an inch of your life! I'll show you whether I am the master of my own school or not!"

Everybody looked dazed. Two thousand lines for kicking up a bit of a din in the common-room. It was absolutely unheard of. Tommy Watson nudged me and looked into my face.

"You can understand now, eh?" he whispered.

"By Jove, rather!" I agreed softly.

I was indeed somewhat staggered. I had never believed it possible that the Head could behave in such a way as that. And then, before Watson could make any further remark, the Head went charging after Teddy Long.

Long scampered round the common-room, and the Head went in pursuit, slashing his cane about, and striking the dodging juniors here and there. They yelled with pain, and the noise in the common-room was about four times as bad as it had been originally.

And then Morrow arrived.

Morrow of the Sixth was a prefect, and he entered the common room with a gleam in his eye and a cane in his hand.

"Stop this noise!" he shouted. "What on earth are you kids making such a din for? If you don't shut up I'll——"

"Morrow!" bellowed the Head. "What is the meaning of this? How dare you interfere in this unwarrantable manner?"

Morrow nearly fell over backwards.

"I—I didn't know you were here," he stuttered. "I—I—I thought——"

"What you thought does not interest me!" snarled Dr. Stafford harshly. "Go, at once! Go, before I strike you!"

"Strike me!" repeated Morrow. "But—but——"

Swish!

The Head's cane came down with full force upon the prefect's back.

"Oh!"

The juniors panted for breath as they watched. Morrow gave one start, went as red as a beetroot, and then all the colour fled from his face. He clenched his fists and compressed his lips.

"It's not usual to strike a prefect, sir," he said, with difficulty.

The words seemed to goad the Head into an uncontrollable fit of rage. He slashed out again and again, but Morrow wisely got out of reach. And then, in the midst of it, Nelson Lee strode sharply into the room.

"Dr. Stafford!" he exclaimed. "Good gracious! Please control yourself, sir—remember that you are the Headmaster of this school!"

At the sound of Nelson Lee's voice, Dr. Stafford started. He turned, his face working curiously. His eyes blazed, but they seemed to contain a dazed look, too. Then, abruptly, his shoulders drooped.

"Why, Mr. Lee," he muttered. "What—what is the matter?"

"I think you are feeling rather unwell, Dr. Stafford," said Lee quietly. "Please come with me, and we will go straight to your study. You are labouring under some excitement, and——"

"Thank you—thank you very much!" exclaimed the Head, articulating his words with difficulty. "I need no help, Mr. Lee. It is not at all necessary for you to assist me."

"Very well, Dr. Stafford," said Nelson Lee. "But please let me urge you to calm down, and——"

"Yes, yes, of course," muttered the Head, hoarsely.

He strode away, somewhat unsteady, and went straight to his own study. The fit of rage had apparently left him now, and when he arrived in his own sanctum he sank down in his easy chair, and uttered a long sigh of weariness and acute distress.

"What has come over me?" he murmured, raising his clenched fists, and beating his forehead. "I'm going mad—mad! And yet—and yet in all ordinary respects I feel well—I feel healthy and strong. What will the boys think of me—what ghastly pitfalls am I making for myself?"

And, meanwhile, turmoil reigned in the Remove, and the sole topic of conversation in the lower school was the Head's recent astounding conduct.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CONFESSION.

MR. CROWELL glanced over the Remove carefully.

"Every boy will at once go direct into the Big Hall," he said. "You will all take your places, and remain. I understand that the Headmaster intends making a speech to the whole school."

"Oh!"

Breakfast was over the following morning, and the fellows were just thinking of being dismissed, so that they could troop out, as usual. Mr. Crowell's announcement came as a bit of a surprise.

He was not the only Form-master who gave the instruction to his boys. Every form at St. Frank's was ordered to line up in Big Hall. And, consequently, instead of the fellows trooping out, they marched straight into Big Hall, and remained there at attention—whispering together, and wondering what was in the wind. A subdued air of excitement prevailed throughout the entire school.

The Headmaster had not been seen since his extraordinary behaviour in the Remove common-room the previous evening. A great many fellows, of course, had only heard of that affair. Some of the seniors could not quite believe all that was being said. But, of course,

it was a matter of general knowledge that the Head had stormed into the junior quarters, and had behaved like a madman.

"I wonder if he'll have another outbreak this morning?" whispered Handforth. "My hat! It'll be rather rich if he goes off the deep end in front of the whole giddy school! Things are coming to a pretty pass, my sons!"

"It's no good making guesses," whispered Church. "There's no telling why we're ordered here. But we shall know before long, anyhow. That affair last night was pretty disgraceful! And it's a wonder to me how the Head has the nerve to face us at all."

Many juniors were thinking the same. But, after all, they realised that it was up to Dr. Stafford to do something—to make some sort of explanation. Would he do so, or would he only make matters worse?

There was a hush when the door at the rear of the raised platform opened. Dr. Stafford appeared, looking grave and slightly pale. And amid that tense hush, there sounded several soft, but clear hisses.

"Silence!" shouted Fenton angrily.

There was an immediate silence.

The Head came forward to the edge of the platform, and stood looking at the ranks of the various forms for a moment or two in silence. Then he coughed slightly, and held up his hand.

"Boys, I have called you together because I feel that it is my duty to say a few words to you this morning," he exclaimed in his deep, steady voice. "The fact that some of you hissed me just now is only what I expected—and, indeed, I am rather surprised that your demonstration was not even more marked."

Not a sound broke the stillness.

"I am aware, of course, that you have all been discussing me freely and openly," continued the Head. "My behaviour of last night has been the talk of the school—the boys, the masters, and the domestic staff. I have been the subject of every conversation. Knowing as I do what cause I have given you all to discuss me, I can expect nothing else. But, possibly, you have condemned me—you have accused me of unkind things."

"You behaved like a bully, sir!" shouted somebody boldly.

"Yes, I admit that that is true," said the Head, his quiet voice plainly audible in the tenseness of the big hall. "I was worse than a bully—I became a tyrant—something akin to a wild animal. I admit it freely—frankly. My behaviour in the Remove common-room of the Ancient House last night was utterly disgraceful in every way, and apparently beyond all possible excuse."

I looked at my chums in astonishment, and I noticed that the other fellows were also expressing their surprise. It was rather staggering to hear the Headmaster of St. Frank's confessing to the whole school, in this way. It was something unprecedented in the history of the college.

"No doubt you will think it singular that I should stand before you all and make these statements," continued the Head. "But I considered the question thoroughly before coming to this decision—and I decided no course could be better than to take you all into my confidence, and tell you of the fearful trouble which has come upon me."

The Head paused, and coughed slightly.

"For years, boys, I have seen many of your faces here," he went on. "Before your time I presided over a previous generation. And I would ask you to remember that I have always been fair and just to the best of my ability. Until just recently I have never given cause for any hard words of complaint."

"Rather not, sir!"

"You've been the finest Head a school could have, sir!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Thank you, boys—I feel sure that you will listen carefully to what I am about to say," exclaimed Dr. Stafford. "I have not come here to excuse myself—to make my actions appear any less black in your eyes. But, having committed these extraordinary actions, it is absolutely necessary for me to supplement them with some kind of an explanation. It is far better to talk to you frankly and freely—than to remain silent, and earn your secret scorn and contempt."

"My hat!" I murmured. "He's got some pluck!"

"Rather!"

For everybody realised that this speech was calling for every ounce of Dr. Stafford's courage. His voice quivered now and again, and his face was still slightly pale. To appear before the whole school and make such statements was, indeed, a trying ordeal.

But, under the circumstances, it was undoubtedly the best course that the Head could have adopted. He was being frank—he was putting the thing to the boys openly and candidly.

"I want you always to remember that my chief aim has been to rule you all with a kindly and considerate hand," went on the Headmaster. "At times I have been severe, but I do not think you will recall one instance where I have been harsh or arbitrary. I urge you to remember this before condemning me too harshly for the incidents which took place yesterday."

Again Dr. Stafford paused, and he could see that all the fellows were listening to him carefully and attentively. There was something about his bearing—his manner—which compelled the school to treat his speech with respect.

"Having made these preliminary remarks, I will now speak of my actions of yesterday," said the Head quietly. "My first strange and terrible deed was to take Watson to my study, and flog him brutally and callously. Watson behaved like a young hero, and I wish to express to him now—publicly—my heartfelt regret for what happened. If he can find it in his heart to forgive me I shall indeed be a happy man. But I fear that he is bitter and resentful—as he doubtless has a perfect right to be. My treatment of him was that of a brute—a savage. I know it, and I feel humbled."

Tommy Watson looked uncomfortable.

"It's all right, sir—I've forgotten it!" he shouted. "I told the chaps that you weren't

yourself, and I know you're as good as gold at heart. We all respect you tremendously, sir."

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for the head!"

"Wait—wait, boys!" shouted Dr. Stafford, holding up his hand. "I am filled with pleasure at your kindly words. But please let me finish before you make any demonstration. It is my wish to explain—if, indeed, any explanation is possible—the cause of my singular lapses. Having treated Watson so brutally, I became myself, and thought that there would be no recurrence of the terrible trouble. But then, as you all know, I came into the Remove common room and caused consternation and terror by my violence and inhuman behaviour. I performed these actions, knowing full well what I was doing—but I am speaking the absolute truth when I tell you that I could not avoid acting in that way. It was not me who punished those of you who suffered. It was another self within me—a self I had never suspected of being in existence. My own personality was swallowed—obliterated—and this demon being of mine took possession of my whole frame—my muscles, my very fibres. By some strange and uncanny influence I became transformed."

The boys were listening intently—fascinatedly.

"If you will ask me for an explanation, I cannot give you one," said the Headmaster. "I can only tell you what I felt; I can only explain how this thing took place. I struggled hard—harder than you can realise—to remain in control of myself. I used every ounce of my strength to thrust this secret self into the background. But, unwillingly, and still struggling, I was compelled to give way. And then I let myself go—since I was unable to do anything else. And while I was punishing you in that brutal manner I revelled in it. Yes, boys, I seemed to take a savage delight in every cruel action that I could perform. But I ask you to believe me when I say that I am not the man who did these things. It was my body—my form—my figure. But it was not the personality which is now addressing you here. And I ask you to forgive me for what I did. I ask you to forget, if possible, how I behaved."

The Head paused amid a tense silence. The fellows were impressed—far more impressed than they could quite understand. They could not quite grasp the meaning of everything that Dr. Stafford had been saying.

"Naturally, it would be too much for me to expect that you would comprehend the meaning of all this," continued the Head, as though he had been reading the puzzled looks upon the hundreds of faces. "Such a thing has never before come within your knowledge—or, for that matter, within mine. I nevertheless ask you to think deeply upon this subject and come to your conclusions fairly and justly. I repeat that this hidden self of mine came to the fore—casting out every good instinct and every humane feeling that is within me. How such things could come about is a dreadful mystery. I can only tell you that it is so. And I ask you to believe me when I state that——"

The Head could get no further. Somebody in the Remove started a cheer, and it was immediately taken up by the whole school. The rafters of the Big Hall echoed and trembled with the roar.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Dr. Stafford!"

"We believe you, sir!"

"Let's have three more cheers, you chaps!"

"Hip—hip—hurrah!"

"Good old Head!"

"One of the best!"

The demonstration lasted for two or three minutes—until, in fact, the Head bowed, and retired. And then the school noisily dismissed, and broke up into groups to excitedly discuss the situation.

Dr. Stafford himself retired at once to his own study—and he requested Nelson Lee to accompany him.

The Head was somewhat pale, and still rather shaky from the emotion which had filled him while making his speech.

"I have asked you to come, Mr. Lee, because I am anxious to speak to you," he exclaimed quietly. "You heard what I said to the school? Was I wrong—was I foolish? Do you think it was a mistaken policy on my part to humble myself before the whole College?"

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"On the contrary, Dr. Stafford, you raised yourself in the estimation of everybody," he said. "You were not humbled. Your speech was one of great courage and determination, and I congratulate you heartily."

"Thank you, Mr. Lee," said the Head quietly. "I considered long before I decided to make the speech. I argued the matter out with myself. What if I remained silent? After my actions of yesterday the boys would scorn me—they would hold me in contempt. Failing to understand the position, they could do nothing but heap down scorn upon my head. And, indeed, my position as Headmaster would become intolerable and impossible. I therefore decided that the only course was to be frank and open, and tell the boys the whole truth."

"You could not have done better, sir," said Nelson Lee. "I should like to question you about your sensations last night. What were your first symptoms? How did you know that this uncontrollable fit of savagery was coming upon you?"

"In a dim kind of way I felt my nature changing," said the Head. "It was gradual—insidious. Every little thing irritated me, and I found myself taking a kind of ghoulish delight in the prospect of causing human suffering. I fought against this strenuously and strongly. But, in spite of all my efforts, it continued to gain ground. And then at last I didn't seem to care a jot for my self-respect or anything. My one desire was to act in the manner of a savage."

"And can you suggest no possible explanation?"

"None."

"You have felt healthy and well in a general kind of way?"

"I have never felt better."

"Pardon my question—the subject is a delicate one, but it must be pursued," said Nelson Lee. "Have you, at any time or date,

felt pains in your head, or have you been subject to delusions or hallucinations?"

"No, Mr. Lee, I have not," said Dr. Stafford. "Indeed, my head has never felt clearer in all my life. I find that I am capable of performing long hours of study with no bad effect. If I had suffered from delusions I should have at once concluded that my mind was giving way, and that my ultimate abode would be in an asylum for the insane."

"It is terrible to hear you speak in that way, Dr. Stafford," said Nelson Lee gravely. "I have had quite a lot of experience with those unfortunate people whose minds have become unhinged. And I can safely tell you that you have not displayed one single symptom of insanity—as we know it. You are healthy in mind and body—and that makes this strange thing all the more complex. But I feel that there must be some logical explanation. I feel that some evil influence is at work—human influence."

"But what influence can it possibly be?" protested the Head. "I have no enemies—and, even supposing I had, how could they possibly tamper with my very soul? These things are beyond my comprehension, Mr. Lee."

"At the moment the problem seems almost insurmountable," said Nelson Lee. "But I will tell you this much, Dr. Stafford. I have a vague suspicion creeping into my mind. At present it is so vague that I dare not even hint at its nature. But if this suspicion turns out to be true, the explanation will soon be forthcoming. In the meantime, let me urge you to keep to yourself as much as possible."

"This morning, Mr. Lee, I shall drive into Bannington," said the Head. "An old friend of mine there is a very clever physician. I shall consult him—explain my symptoms, and ask him for his opinion. I must do something, for this worry is preying upon my mind."

Nelson Lee soon departed, and by that time morning lessons had commenced. Everybody was feeling better now, and it was generally assumed that everything would go on smoothly. Surely the Head would have no more attacks?

When the Remove was dismissed, the fellows crowded out into the Triangle. It was quite bright and crisp, and the sun was shining. Just outside the Head's private door stood a smart trap, with an ostler at the horse's head.

"Hallo!" I remarked. "The Head's going out for a drive. I'm glad to see that—this brisk air will do him good. Here he comes, too!"

The group of fags near by had raised a cheer as Dr. Stafford had appeared. The Head was well wrapped up, and he nodded to the ostler, took the reins, and climbed into the trap. Then he made himself comfortable and touched up the horse.

The animal was rather obstinate, however, and seemed restive. Instead of starting off, it pawed the ground, and gave a shrill whinny. The ostler stood aside, watching.

A crowd of juniors were watching, too. Then the Head seized his whip with a sudden savage grasp. He stood up in the trap, pulled the reins so tight that the horse's head was jerked back cruelly.

"I'll teach you, you confounded brute!" thundered the Head furiously.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

The whip came down again and again—it descended upon the horse's back with tremendous force. It was unmerciful—heartless. Everybody in the Triangle stood stock still—suddenly rooted to the ground with amazement and horror.

And the horse, leaping wildly, got the bit between his teeth, and bolted.

CHAPTER X.

WORSE AND WORSE.

"OH, the brute—the savage brute!" shouted Jerry Dodd fiercely. "By jings! It makes my blood boil to see a horse ill-treated!"

And other fellows echoed Jerry's remark. But there was not much time to think, or to say anything. The Headmaster's savage treatment of the horse now looked like leading to disaster.

There was no doubt about it; the Head was in another fit of mad rage. That second self of his had got the upper hand again. It was obvious to everybody in the Triangle.

The Head's expression—the glare in his eyes—the different note in his voice. He was a changed man. And it had come about when nobody was expecting it. This was happening only a few hours after his public speech.

The Head had gone too far in beating his horse as he had done. For the animal, far from docile, fairly took matters into its own charge, and bolted like a mad thing.

The Head was jerked back into his seat, and there clung, raving.

He made no attempt to pull the horse up. It simply came careering across the Triangle with its ears flat back, the whites of its eyes showing, and with foam dripping from its mouth.

"Look out!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Stand clear you asses!"

Fellows scuttled away on every side. The trap was making an erratic course, but appeared to be making in the direction of the gates. We all held our breath, and gazed in horror.

There was no time for anybody to dash up and seize the runaway. The whole thing happened within a few seconds. We wondered what terrible disaster would happen when the gateway was reached.

But just then one of the fellows on a bicycle came riding in. The horse swerved giddily, the trap rose on one wheel and almost overturned. But it assumed an even keel again, and rushed on—the horse now making for the playing-fields.

Chambers and Bryant, of the Fifth, had been in a position of safety. But that sudden swerving of the horse made all the difference. As it swung round, the animal came charging right on the top of them.

Chambers jumped wildly, but Bryant, who had glanced round at that very second, saw his danger a shade too late. The hub of the trap, whizzing past, caught him, spun him round, and he went hurtling to the ground, where he lay still.

"Oh!"

"Good Heavens!"

"He's killed!"

A crowd of fellows rushed towards the fallen Bryant. Others stared dumbly at the trap, waiting for the disaster which was certain to come. And it did come, before any human agency could avert it.

There was no outlet against the playing-fields, and the horse dashed right up before swerving again. The trap reeled over, and Dr. Stafford was shot out into the midst of a thick hedge.

"Oh!"

"That's done it!"

It was very fortunate for the Head that the seat of the trap came out with him. For he and the seat rose in the air together, and came down upon the hedge. In some extraordinary way Dr. Stafford slithered down, and a moment later picked himself up practically unhurt.

It was an extraordinary escape.

The horse, having broken free from the trap, was careering away with the broken shafts trailing dangerously. Fellows were rushing for safety on every side. But they needn't have worried. The horse leapt over the low hedge into the playing-fields, with the ostler in panting pursuit.

We gave no further attention to them, but turned our gaze upon the drama which was taking place within the Triangle itself. Only a bare minute had elapsed since the commencement of the whole terrible affair.

It was like a thunderbolt—swift, sudden, and appalling.

Several fellows had rushed up to the Head, fully believing that he would be badly hurt. But Dr. Stafford picked himself up and glared round with a baleful eye.

The expression upon his face was one of cold, callous fury.

"You infernal young hounds!" he rasped out. "Get out of my way—do you hear? Get out of my way!"

"We—we thought you were hurt, sir!" gasped Armstrong.

"You will be hurt, young man!" snarled the Head. "By Heavens! If you dare to answer me I will thrash you like a dog!"

The Head still retained hold of the whip. And, suddenly swinging this up, he brought it down with a tremendous swishing crack. It curled round the legs of several fellows, and they roared with surprise and pain—and bolted!

Dr. Stafford smiled evilly.

"That will teach you!" he exclaimed. "I won't allow any insubordination in this school. And what's all that—what's that crowd over there? Huh! I'll soon send the young rascals about their business!"

The Head was not in an unaccountable fit of temper now. On the contrary, he was quite calm, so it could not be said that these actions of his were performed under the stress of rage.

He was breathing hard, and it was a wonder he was able to walk about. It was only by sheer luck that he had escaped severe injury.

The crowd he had seen was, of course, the collection of juniors which had gathered about the unfortunate Bryant. The Head strode across, swishing his whip significantly.

"I say—cave!" whispered one of the juniors. "Buck up—the Head's coming!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Run for your giddy lives!"

A good many of the juniors fled, remembering their experience of the previous evening. Others remained, feeling fairly safe because a number of seniors were on the spot.

The Head marched up, glaring round fiercely.

"What's this—what's this?" he snapped harshly.

"Bryant's hurt, sir!" said Chambers, with a fierce look. "You knocked him down with that trap, and——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted the Head. "Hurt! Rubbish, sir! And don't you dare to speak to me in that fashion!"

"But it's only right that——"

Slash!

Chambers got no further, for the Head brought his whip round, and the Fifth Former found it necessary to leap wildly for safety. Crowds of Removites and fags were standing at a safe distance, looking on with breathless interest.

"Let that boy alone!" shouted the Head, striding up to Bryant. "There is nothing the matter with him: he is shamming!"

Frinton and Wilson, of the Sixth, were bending over the injured Fifth Former. As a matter of fact, Bryant was not particularly badly hurt, but he was one of those fellows who believed in making the most of everything—even if it's an injury. And he was receiving all sorts of sympathy, and he rather liked it.

Nevertheless, his arm and left side were nastily bruised, and he would certainly be required to go into the sanny for two or three days. Frinton looked up with a frown upon his brow.

"You are wrong, sir," he said quietly. "Bryant is rather badly hurt. He was knocked over by your trap——"

"How dare you have the audacity to speak to me, boy?" shouted the Headmaster. "Go—go at once!"

Frinton looked grim.

"Look here, sir, I think you ought to calm yourself!" he exclaimed tensely. "You'll do some harm if you go on at this rate—and don't forget what you told us this morning——"

"Upon my soul!" shouted the Head, thickly. "You impertinent puppy!"

In a flash the Head had whirled round. He caught Frinton by the scruff of the neck, and gave him a swift shove which sent the senior staggering over to the ground. Wilson backed away rather hastily.

"Bryant!" thundered the Head. "Get up at once!"

Bryant looked up, with his face twisted with pain. He was certainly incapable of rising without assistance.

"I can't get up, sir," he muttered. 'I—I'm hurt——"

"Don't tell such lies to me!" stormed the Head. "Get up!"

And then, to the horror of everybody who was watching, the Head strode forward and delivered a kick upon Bryant's shins. The senior uttered a gasp of agony, and his face flushed red.

"You—you inhuman brute!" he panted hoarsely.

Again the Headmaster kicked, and this time Bryant fairly shrieked with pain. He tried vainly to rise, but couldn't quite manage it.

Hissss-sss!

A long, low hiss broke out on all sides. The Head twirled round, his face working with rage.

"Silence!" he thundered.

Hissss-sss!

This time it was four times as loud as before. The whole Triangle was filled with a storm of hissing and fierce booing. The Head left Bryant's side, and rushed forward. Two juniors were unable to escape in time, and they were seized by the scruff of their necks. They were members of the Third Form.

The Head uttered no word, but swung the fags round, and threw them roughly to the ground.

"Everybody shall pay for this!" he shouted, glaring round. "The whole school shall suffer for this exhibition of disrespect and insubordination! I shall inflict a drastic punishment which will fall upon you all!"

And Dr. Stafford, hurling the whip from him, strode straight across to his own doorway. As he neared it his steps grew slower, and rather faltering. He arrived, and turned.

He passed a hand over his brow, and seemed somewhat dazed. Then he entered, and went into his study. With his hat and coat on, just as he was, he sank down into an easy-chair. It was the same kind of nervous collapse as before. And, as he sat there, he knew what he had done—realisation of his latest brutal actions horrified him to a terrible extent.

And, outside, the Triangle was filled with shouting and excited juniors.

"We won't stand it!" roared Handforth.

"No!"

"We'll jib against this kind of thing, and chuck the Head out!" roared Hubbard. "I don't believe a word of what he said this morning——"

"No fear!"

"It was all spoof!"

"He was trying to fool us!"

"But we won't take any more of it!" yelled Armstrong. "This is the finish—we'll rise up and revolt against this kind of tyranny."

"Hurrah!"

But, after all, this was only the excited raving of the younger element at St. Frank's. The more serious fellows, and all the seniors, were filled with grave misgivings.

But it could not be denied that if matters grew any worse—if Dr. Malcolm Stafford had any further outbursts such as this one—well, there was no telling what might happen. Certainly, there would be a seed of revolt sown in the lower school. For, if a revolt came, it would certainly be led by the go-ahead Remove.

There were to be some dramatic times at St. Frank's, ere long!

THE END.

TO MY READERS.

On such a momentous occasion as this, when THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY has not only added more pages, but yet more fame, to its wonderful history, I invite you to join me in wishing continued success and prosperity to our little paper, with long life to our stalwart friends, Nelson Lee, Nipper and Co., Handforth and Co., and all our other old acquaintances whom we meet here every week.

The new series which has begun in this number promises to lead on to most extraordinary developments. It has been suggested in the story you have just read that the Head's maniacal outbursts are due to some outside evil influence. Whether that be true or not we must leave it for the coming stories to explain. For the time being, we will assume that the Head has two distinct personalities—one that is good and one that is evil. His evil self brings him into grave trouble with his boys, trouble which is foreshadowed in next week's story, "Shunned by His Schoolboys."

Nipper has already promised you some good things in No. 2 of his magazine, which will be GIVEN AWAY next week, along with another fine photo-plate of a famous footballer.

Our new serial, "TOM TARTAR AT SCHOOL," should be read by every boy. It is one of the most fascinating of school stories that has ever been written.

THE EDITOR.

THE CORINTHIAN

A Fine Long Complete Football Tale

BY CHARLES HAMILTON.

CHAPTER 1.

The Slagdale Footballers.

"THEY'VE got something up their sleeve," said Jack Nelson, his boyish brow wrinkling in a thoughtful frown. "They're so cocksure about the result. But I'm blessed if I can guess what it is."

And Ted Hammond, the youthful captain of Slagdale Junior Athletic, nodded. The two lads were walking home from their place of business in Slagdale, when Jack Nelson made the remark. Slagdale Juniors were a club of working lads, mostly employed in the workshops of Slagdale.

They played football as most Lancashire lads play it, putting all their heart and all their "beef" into it. Nelson and Hammond were discussing a match fixed for the following Saturday afternoon—a fixture which had occasioned the boyish footballers some anxiety.

The Slagdale youngsters had had a most successful season so far; but in challenging Widbrook Wanderers, they had, in classic phrase, bitten off more than they were likely to be able to chew—at least, in the opinion of the greater part of the public.

For the Wanderers were much older and stronger in many ways. They ought to have been able to wipe the Slagdale boys off the face of the earth; and they had declared their intention of doing so.

Only a few keen observers noted the fact that, while the younger club were in perfectly fit condition to make a strenuous fight for victory, the Wanderers had allowed themselves to slack to a dangerous extent.

As a matter of fact, the Wanderers prided themselves to some extent on class superiority, and affected to look down on the working boys' club.

They swaggered about football, but when they played the game their play was not always up to the mark. The whole-hearted enthusiasm of the Slagdale lads was unknown in Widbrook.

Older and stronger as they were, it was quite possible that when the two sides met on the football ground, the fitness and excellent training of the younger team would carry the day Ted Hammond and his chum Jack Nelson firmly believed so; and, in fact, the Wanderers themselves had begun to experience doubts.

Their affected superiority over the Slagdalers had almost led them to decline the challenge; but they had to accept it to save their face, and they had promised to simply wipe up the juniors as a punishment for their cheek.

The Slagdale boys serenely awaited the wiping-up process, without feeling very nervous.

"They average a year or two older than we do," Ted Hammond had remarked; "but they are all gas and swagger. They ought to be able to sit on us, but I believe we shall knock them sky-high; and I believe they're beginning to think so themselves, too."

That was a week ago. But of late a change had seemed to come over the Wanderers. Their bumptiousness had returned in full force, and they were swaggering about the licking they were going to give the cheeky youngsters, and Hammond and Nelson were puzzled.

It was this that led Jack to remark that the Wanderers had something up their sleeve, as the only way of accounting for their cocksureness.

"It looks like it," said Hammond, thoughtfully. "But what is it, then? I know they haven't been training hard. If they did, they would give us the tussle of the season. But they haven't; they hardly train at all. It's all gas with them."

"But it would be a shocking come-down for them to be beaten by a junior club," said Jack. "They would be laughed at in Widbrok itself; the very kids would poke fun at them. They won't take a licking from us if they can help it."

"But I don't see how they can help it."

"I don't, either; but I feel certain they've got something up their sleeve," said Jack, with conviction.

Hammond walked on for a little way with a thoughtful frown on his face. It was Saturday afternoon, and the streets were crowded with

fellows leaving their work. Hammond spoke again abruptly after a few minutes.

"There's something in what you say, Jack, though I can't guess at their little game. Suppose we go over and have a look at them this afternoon before we turn out for practice? I know they're playing at home."

"Well, it's not more than twenty minutes' walk, Ted.'

"Then we'll go after dinner."

"Good!"

And the lads separated at Jack's door. Jack went in to dinner still with that frown on his brow. He felt convinced that Widbrook Wanderers had a surprise prepared for their rivals, but, cudgel his brains as he might, he could not guess what device they had thought of to escape impending defeat.

Jack Nelson joined his chum again in time to walk over to Widbrook, which was not a great distance from Slagdale. They arrived in time to see the commencement of the match the Wanderers were playing at home.

It was easy to see that there was a difference in position between the Widbrook club and the Slagdalers. The Widbrook fellows were far richer in worldly goods, and they had a more expensive place and better fittings generally. They carried themselves, as a rule, with an air of conscious superiority, which was not very gratifying to lads who were conscious of playing a better game.

There was a goodly crowd to witness the match on the present occasion, the friends of the Wanderers being there in strong force. They were playing a club of their own calibre, called the Northley Rovers. Hammond and Nelson hardly looked at the latter. Their eyes were fixed on the Wanderers as they lined up for the kick-off.

"My hat!" muttered Jack Nelson.

And Hammond's teeth came together with a click.

"Two new men in their ranks,' said Jack; "that's the little secret! They've taken on two new recruits to lick us, and they're trying them in this match!"

"That's it!"

"And I've seen them before," said Jack, a little bitterly. "That fellow at centre-forward is Dave Tait, who was a professional player for two years, and has played in Second League teams. And look at centre-half! That's Wright, who played as an amateur for a First League team last year."

"The cads!" said Hammond.

There was no other word for it. "Playing the game" was evidently a maxim unknown in the Widbrook club.

The Wanderers' captain, Melville, was, of course, at liberty to play anybody he chose, so long as he wasn't a professional; but to take on two experienced players for a match with a junior club was not exactly to be called playing the game.

And, as a matter of fact, both Hammond and Nelson shrewdly suspected that the two players must have received some consideration—secretly, of course.

Fellows who had played for League teams were not likely to waste their time in minor local football for nothing. That, however would be impossible for the juniors to prove even if they cared to rake up so unpleasant a subject.

"Well, I call it rotten!" said Jack, as the whistle went, and the game started. "Those two chaps make all the difference. How are we to make any headway against League players?"

"We can't."

"Then we're done in."

"Looks like it," said Ted gloomily.

"What if we objected?"

"We haven't any right, and they would say it was only an excuse for getting out of a job too big for us. They'd scratch the match."

"Then they've got us!"

"Yes," said Hammond, grimly, "they've got us!"

The two lads looked on in silence at the play. On ordinary occasions Northley and Widbrook were about equally matched, but just now Widbrook simply walked over their visitors.

The two new recruits made all the difference. A youthful amateur side was not likely to offer much opposition to fellows who had taken part in the stern struggle for League honours.

The visitors were walked over, and goal after goal was scored by Wright and Tait, till the score was four in the first half alone.

Nelson and Hammond looked on with glum faces. When the following Saturday came, they would certainly put up a better fight than the Northley fellows were now doing; but against a forward and a half like Tait and Wright; they knew that their defence would crumble. Slagdale played a fine game, but it was no use expecting miracles of them.

In the second half the success of Widbrook was still more pronounced. The match ended with the home side eight goals to one, and the Widbrook crowd cheered them as they came off the field. Hammond and Nelson were standing close to the spot where the players passed, and Melville, the Widbrook captain, nodded to them with a smile. There was a lurking glimmer of triumph in his eye.

"What do you think of the match?" he grinned.

"Oh, you were bound to win!" said Hammond, curtly.

"Feel a bit nervous about next Saturday?" laughed Melville. "We've got a couple of new recruits, as I dare say you've noticed."

"You will be playing them against us?"

"Oh, yes; I think so!"

And Melville passed on, grinning, and most of his fellows were grinning, too. The Wanderers had been uneasy, but they felt secure enough now. Their prestige was quite safe. They were not likely to be beaten by Slagdale. And the means they had used to reach that security did not trouble them. They regarded it as a praiseworthy stroke of policy on the part of their captain.

Hammond and Nelson walked home in silence. They had looked forward very much to the next Saturday's match, but now it was only a defeat that they had to look forward to.

A defeat on fair terms they would not have

cared for : but to feel that they had been overreached was not pleasant.

"Well, we'll give them a tussle, anyway," said Hammond at last. "If they had a whole side of First Leaguers we'd do our level best."

"That's all we can do," agreed Jack. "Only it's a licking."

And the lads went to their own ground, where their comrades were awaiting them for a practice match.

CHAPTER II.

The Corinthian.

SLAGDALE JUNIORS turned out a good team, and there were sufficient playing members of the club to form two elevens for a hard practice match. The Slagdale ground left much to be desired. Over in Widbrook the Wanderers had a ground of their own, with permanent dressing-rooms, and some accommodation for spectators. They had money to spend.

The Slagdale youngsters had a portion of a field fenced off, and had to take every care of it themselves. The ground belonged to Mr. Lacy, Jack's employer, one of the richest manufacturers in that part of Lancashire, whose interest in the great game was very keen. His son, Frank Lacy, was a Corinthian, and his exploits were often talked of in the Slagdale shops. Mr. Lacy was proud of his son and of his fame as an amateur footballer, and it was partly this that led him to take an interest in the game of his young employees.

The ground was lent to the boys, and the goal-posts and nets had been a present from the kind-hearted manufacturer when the club was founded. More than once Frank Lacy, when he had happened to be at home, had come over to the ground to see the youngsters play, and had often given them golden tips on the game. The boys naturally looked up to and respected the Corinthian very much.

The play had started, and the youngsters were in the thick of it, when a handsome young fellow of about twenty-two came strolling down to the ground, humming the air of the latest football song.

The boys were too busily engaged to notice him for the time, and he stood with his hands in his pockets, looking on at the play with a smile on his handsome face.

Hammond was captaining the Slagdale side, and Jack Nelson had taken command of the scratch team for the nonce.

Nelson was playing up splendidly. He was light, lithe, and active, and the way he wormed a path through opposing halves and backs was wonderful.

No one seemed able to stop him, and twice already he had slammed the ball into the net.

Hammond's eyes glistened with satisfaction at the exploits of his chum, though at the moment he was doing his best to stop him.

There wasn't a trace of jealousy in the Slagdale captain's heart. He was only too glad to see Jack in such form. It gave him a glimmering of hope for victory next Saturday when they met the Wanderers.

"By Jove," muttered the onlooker at the game, "that lad plays well! He's playing up like a young International!"

Jack had taken the ball fairly from the foot of Bert Robins, an opposing half, and was skimming away with it. He dodged the backs in masterly style, dribbling the ball fairly round their feet, and rushed for goal. He tricked the goalkeeper, and sent the leather into an unexpected corner of the net.

"Goal!" shouted the spectator, clapping his hands. His shout drew the attention of the juniors to him.

"Mr. Frank!" exclaimed Jack Nelson. "I didn't see you, sir!"

Frank Lacy laughed.

"Quite right. Keep your eyes for the game. Play up, my lads. I'm going to see the finish!"

And Frank Lacy stayed for the finish, watching the junior game with great interest.

When the match was over, and the boys had changed, the heir of half Slagdale walked part of the way home with Jack Nelson, who was naturally very proud of the honour of being seen in Slagdale streets with Mr. Frank. It was Frank Lacy, the Corinthian winger, not the heir of half a million, whom Jack respected so highly.

Frank Lacy chattered cheerily about football and kindred matters as he walked by Jack's side, and he soon referred to the next Saturday's match.

"I hear that you are playing Widbrook Wanderers next week," he said. "Aren't they a team a little above your weight?"

"They ought to be," said Jack frankly "But they are mostly swagger, sir. They could eat us if they played the game as hard as we do; but they don't."

"So you are going to eat them!" laughed Frank.

"I don't know. We expected to—and we did want to take them down a peg, after all the side they've put on, you know—but they've lately taken on new players, and they may be too strong for us, after all."

"I hope not. Play your best, that's all," said Frank, shaking hands with the lad as he parted. "Play hard, and do your level best. I shall walk over there to see the match, I think, as I am staying over next week at my father's."

And he walked away with a cheery smile. But Jack's face was a little overcast when he joined Ted Hammond.

"It's rotten!" he said. "Yesterday I'd have been jolly glad to have Mr. Frank see our match. Now he'll only come to see us licked!"

Hammond set his teeth.

"I feel jolly well inclined to tell Melville what I think about it, and scratch the match!" he said.

"Then they'd say we were afraid."

"I suppose so—the rotters!"

"We must go through with it."

CHAPTER III.

Frank Lacy Takes a Hand.

"HALLO, Nelson!"

It was a few days later. Jack Nelson was walking towards Slagdale in the dusk of the evening, after a visit to a neighbouring town, when two forms loomed up in the gloom, and he stopped as he recognised Melville, the captain of the Widbrook club, and his friend Tracy.

"Penny for your thoughts," said Melville, grinning. "You are looking pretty down in the mouth, my son."

"Thinking of next Saturday, perhaps," taunted Tracy.

"Well, I suppose he knows it's a licking for the kids!" said Melville. "I thought all along they would be sorry for their cheek!"

"Oh, yes, rather!"

Jack's eyes flashed.

The "side" the Widbrook players put on was always intolerable; but under the present circumstances it was extremely hard to endure.

"I don't know about that!" exclaimed Jack hotly. "We should have made you sorry for accepting the challenge, I expect, if you had played the game."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, if you call it fair to take on two League players against a junior club, I don't, that's all!"

"I suppose I can play any member of the club I like?"

"Yes; if they are bona-fide members of the club—though, even then, it would be sharp practice. But they're not!"

An ugly look came over Melville's face.

"So you can't take my word on that point?"

Jack shurgged his shoulders.

"What's the good of talk?" he exclaimed. "I didn't mean to say anything about this matter, but we may as well have it out. You can't pull the wool over my eyes. If you played us we should beat you hollow, and you've taken on two players who are practically professionals, simply to save your prestige, and you know it. I don't say they are professionals, but it amounts to that."

"You young cub——"

"Better language, please!" said Jack fiercely. "And while we're on the subject I'll say it all out. I believe you're playing Tait and Wright, as I know jolly well they wouldn't join a junior country club for the fun of the thing!"

"It's a lie!"

"It's not a lie! It's the truth, and you know it! We shall see whether they remain in the club after next Saturday!"

"They can leave whenever they choose, of course!"

"Yes. And they will leave when their job is done. You are going to beat us on Saturday, but it won't be by fair play".

"Yes, we are going to beat you. and make you sing as small as ever you sang in your lives," said Melville, between his teeth.

"And if you say anything more, we'll give you a hiding now to start with!" added Tracy.

Jack's eyes blazed.

"You couldn't do it! You can't fight any better than you can play football, and you can only win at either by foul play!"

The two Widbrook fellows wasted no more breath in words; they rushed straight at Jack, hitting out savagely.

Jack Nelson was ready for them.

His left came up to guard his face, and his right caught Melville under the chin, and the Widbrook captain rolled in the muddy lane.

The next moment Jack had closed with Tracy, and the two were frighting furiously.

The hardy Slagdale lad would have gained the upper hand; but ere he could master his foe, Melville had sprung up and attacked him.

In the grip of the two fellows, Jack Nelson was forced down to the ground, struggling bravely, but in vain, against the odds.

"Now, you cub, hissed Melville. "I'll give you a lesson. Roll him into the ditch, Tracy!

"Good! In he goes!"

"You cowards!" gasped Jack.

"Roll him in!"

Jack went rolling through the mud. The ditch was almost full of water, and Jack struggled desperately.

There was a sudden footstep in the lane, and an athletic figure loomed up through the dusk.

"Hallo! Fair play there!"

Jack knew the voice, and he shouted for aid.

"Mr. Frank! Help!"

Mr. Frank—for it was Frank Lacy—ran straight at the two Widbrook fellows, and grasped one in either hand.

A powerful wrench dragged them off Jack Nelson, who lay gasping in the road.

Melville and Tracy struggled fiercely, but they were as infants in the grasp of the powerful young Corinthian.

Frank Lacy, smiling grimly, brought their heads together with a "biff" that made them see stars, and then flung them contemptuously aside. Tracy staggered to the ground, and Melville against a tree. Lacy's finger pointed up the road.

"Go!" he said.

And with sullen, savage faces they went.

Then Frank Lacy turned to Jack and helped the panting lad to his feet. He looked down upon the lad, with a cheery smile.

"So it's you, Nelson! I am glad I came along just then. Which way are you going?"

"To Slagdale, sir."

"Then I'll walk with you."

"I'm much obliged to you, sir," said Jack, as the young Corinthian strode along by his side in the dusk. "They were going to duck me in the ditch."

"The rascals! I think I have seen them before——"

"They are Melville and Tracy, of the Widbrooke Wanderers, sir."

Lacy frowned a little.

"What! Quarrelling with members of a rival team, Jack?"

Jack Nelson coloured.

"It wasn't my fault, sir—well, only partly! I suppose I oughtn't to have lost my temper,

but—but it's hard to lose a footer match by sharp practice."

"How do you mean? Have you had any foul play from the Wanderers?"

Jack hesitated a moment. He did not like to place himself in the position of complaining, but he felt that he must explain.

"I'll tell you about it, sir," he said, after a pause. "You can judge whether it's a fair business or not."

"Go ahead!" said Frank Lacy tersely.

And Jack explained.

Frank Lacy's brow grew darker as he listened. He heard the boy through without any comment, and then walked on in silence for some minutes.

"These two men, Wright and Tait, are practically professionals," he said. "It is inconceivable that they would join a small local club without ulterior motives. It looks to me as if they are being paid for it."

"That's what we think, sir. But we can't do anything."

"No, I don't see how you can, unless you scratch the match."

"Then the whole neighbourhood would say that we funked it."

Frank Lacy pursed his lips a little.

"It's a difficult position," he said. "You can't scratch the match, and, at the same time, you go to it knowing you will be licked by—by sharp practice, if not actual foul play."

"They've been too clever for us," said Jack despondently. "We can play footer, but we're not up to tricks like that."

"No. But——"

Frank Lacy broke off. A smile dawned upon his face. The smile broadened to a laugh. The laugh became a roar. It was evident that something had suddenly struck the young Corinthian which tickled him extremely.

Jack looked at him in surprise.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Frank. "My hat! Ha, ha, ha! Jack, my lad, I can see a way out of it!"

"Yes, sir?" said Jack eagerly.

"They've taken on two players above your weight——"

"Yes——"

"Suppose you served them the same trick——"

"But whom could we play, sir?" said Jack, in amazement.

"Play me!"

Jack Nelson nearly jumped clear of the ground.

"You, sir?"

"Yes!" said Frank, with a roar of laughter. "I shan't be down here on Saturday—and, egad, it will be fun! If they can play Wright and Tait, you can play me. I'm an amateur, though I've played against the best teams in England. Eh, what do you say? Will your skipper play me?"

Jack grinned.

"He'd be jolly glad to, sir! But—but will you really play for a side like the Slagdale Juniors, sir—will you really?"

"There's my hand on it," said Frank. "Tell Hammond to come and see me about it, and we'll make all arrangements. It's settled."

Jack Nelson seemed to be walking on air as he hurried off in search of Ted Hammond. It was not only the prospect of licking the Wanderers, but the honour of playing a Corinthian on the Slagdale side. As for the match, that was all right now. Tait and Wright were good players, but Frank Lacy would walk ever them. With Lacy in their ranks, the Slagdalers had every reason to be confident. It was a Roland for an Oliver with a vengeance.

Ted Hammond gave a hurruh that rang the length of the street when Jack told him And from that moment the spirits of the Slagdale Juniors went up with a bound.

CHAPTER IV.

The Match.

SATURDAY afternoon was a fine, clear cold winter afternoon—ideal for football. On the Widbrook ground the Wanderers were early ready for their visitors. The kick-off had been fixed for three, and it was now a quarter to, and the boys from Slagdale had not yet arrived.

"I shouldn't wonder if they funk it, after all," Melville remarked to Tracy, as he looked out of the doorway of the pavilion. "They know they've got no earthly against us."

Tracy nodded with a grin.

"That's so—you can tell that by the fury young Nelson was in the other night. It was because he knew the Slagdale lot were done in."

Melville gritted his teeth.

"Yes. I'd have given him a hiding for his cheek, if that confounded Lacy hadn't come up. Never mind; we'll give them a licking to-day, and put the cads in their place."

"If they come!" grinned the other.

"Ha, ha! Yes! Ten minutes to three."

"Hallo, there's a brake!"

"Shouldn't have thought they could afford it," sneered Melville. "Is it the Slagdale lot?"

"Yes, look: But I say, who's that with them? Young Lacy!"

"He's come to see the match, I suppose—come to see them licked!"

"I suppose so. But—but I suppose he can't be playing?"

"Playing? Frank Lacy play for a working boys' club? What bosh!"

"No; I suppose it's impossible,"

But the Widbrook fellows soon discovered that it was not impossible; that it was not only possible, but the fact. When they learned that Frank was playing for the visitors, an extremely glum look came over the faces of Melville and his friends.

They were fairly caught!

Any objection they might have raised to an adult playing in the junior team was discounted in advance by the fact that they were playing two adults themselves.

Both Tait and Wright were older than Frank Lacy, and one at least of them had been a professional, if he were not one now.

Melville simply hadn't a leg to stand on. He could only acquiesce quietly, without a word of objection, though with deadly rage and uneasiness in his heart.

A goodly crowd had gathered to see the match, and when it was known that there was a Corinthian in the visiting side, he was loudly cheered. Every eye was turned upon Frank Lacy when the teams went into the field.

Handsome and very fit he looked in the red shirt of Slagdale, head and shoulders above his comrades, sturdy lads as they were.

Frank was taking his usual place as winger, leaving the centre to Hammond, and he had refused Hammond's urging to accept the captaincy.

To all urging he had replied with a laugh and a shake of the head. He was simply playing as a recruit, under the orders of the team's captain, with a total absence of anything like bumptiousness that more than ever endeared him to the Slagdale lads.

The sides lined up, and the home team took the kick-off. The game started, and from the first it was fast and furious.

That the Widbrook fellows' football was, as Jack had said, mostly swagger and bounce, was soon seen when they were opposed to the hard and steady play of the lads from Slagdale.

The addition of Tait and Wright to their ranks would certainly have turned the scale in their favour; but the presence of the stalwart Corinthian changed all that. Frank played up splendidly, and he gave Tait and Wright more than enough to do. As for the ruck of the home players, Hammond and his merry men were more than enough for them.

In high spirits, the Slagdale lads threw themselves into the game.

They were "on the ball" all the time, and most of the tussling took place in the home half. Frank Lacy slammed the ball in twice, and then gave his young comrades a chance.

As far as he could, he kept Wright and Tait occupied, and left the youngsters to deal with one another. Then the Slagdalers went through Widbrook like a knife through cheese.

Twice Frank had put in the leather, and then it went from Jack Nelson's foot, and then again from the toe of Ted Hammond. Bert Robins headed it in just before the whistle went for the interval.

The first half ended with Slagdale five goals up.

The spectators cheered them loudly, and the news of the game spreading through the town, fresh crowds flocked up to see the second half, so that ere long there were some hundreds of people watching the game.

The Slagdale lads laughed gleefully as they

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rested for the brief interval. They had entered for the fun of the thing, and from their point of view it was funny enough.

Had the two junior teams fought out the match without allies on either side, the home team would certainly have been licked; but the licking would not have been so overpowering as the one they were getting now.

Slagdale had taken five goals to nil the first half, and the home players had been nearly run off thir legs. What was the second half to be like?

The Slagdale Juniors poured out for the resumption of play in gay spirits. Frank Lacy wore a genial smile. Many of the spectators were laughing, too, for many of them knew the peculiar circumstances of the match, and were quick to catch on to the joke.

When the whistle went Slagdale kicked off, and again they plunged hotly into a fast and hard game. The wind was in their faces now, but it made not the least difference to them. They rushed the home team fairly off their legs, and on more than one occasion the Widbrook fellows stood gasping while the visitors slammed the ball home into the net.

Frank contented himself with a couple of goals; but he put "paid" to every effort of Tait or Wright to get at the Slagdale goal. His quickness, his grasp of the game, were wonderful, and they had not the ghost of a chance when his eye was upon them.

As for the Wanderers, they were gasping like fishes out of water. The Slagdale lads rushed them to and fro, baffling their feeble attacks, and getting through their weak defence with ease.

Goal after goal was added to the Slagdale score till the game assumed an almost farcical aspect, and the crowd were laughing too much to cheer.

When the whistle finally went for the cessation of play, it was a sound welcome enough to the ears of the Widbrook Wanderers. They were absolutely spent, and they had not taken a single goal from start to finish. Slagdale had taken eleven goals.

Eleven goals to nil!

No wonder the lads grinned as they crowded off the field; no wonder the onlookers laughed and chuckled; and no wonder the Widbrook Wanderers crept away with pink faces, not daring to meet the glances of their townsmen!

It was such a licking as the Wanderers had never dreamed of in a nightmare, and a lesson they never forgot. Jubilant enough were the Slagdale boys.

"We owe it all to you, sir," said Jack Nelson to Frank, as the brake bore them homeward. "Without you we should have been done in. The Wanderers will have to sing small after this.

Frank Lacy laughed.

"Yes, I don't think they will put on so much side again for some time to come," he remarked.

And he was right.

THE END.

CHARLES M. BUCHAN

Commences this week in "The Marvel" the story of his football career. The first article of this new series is entitled

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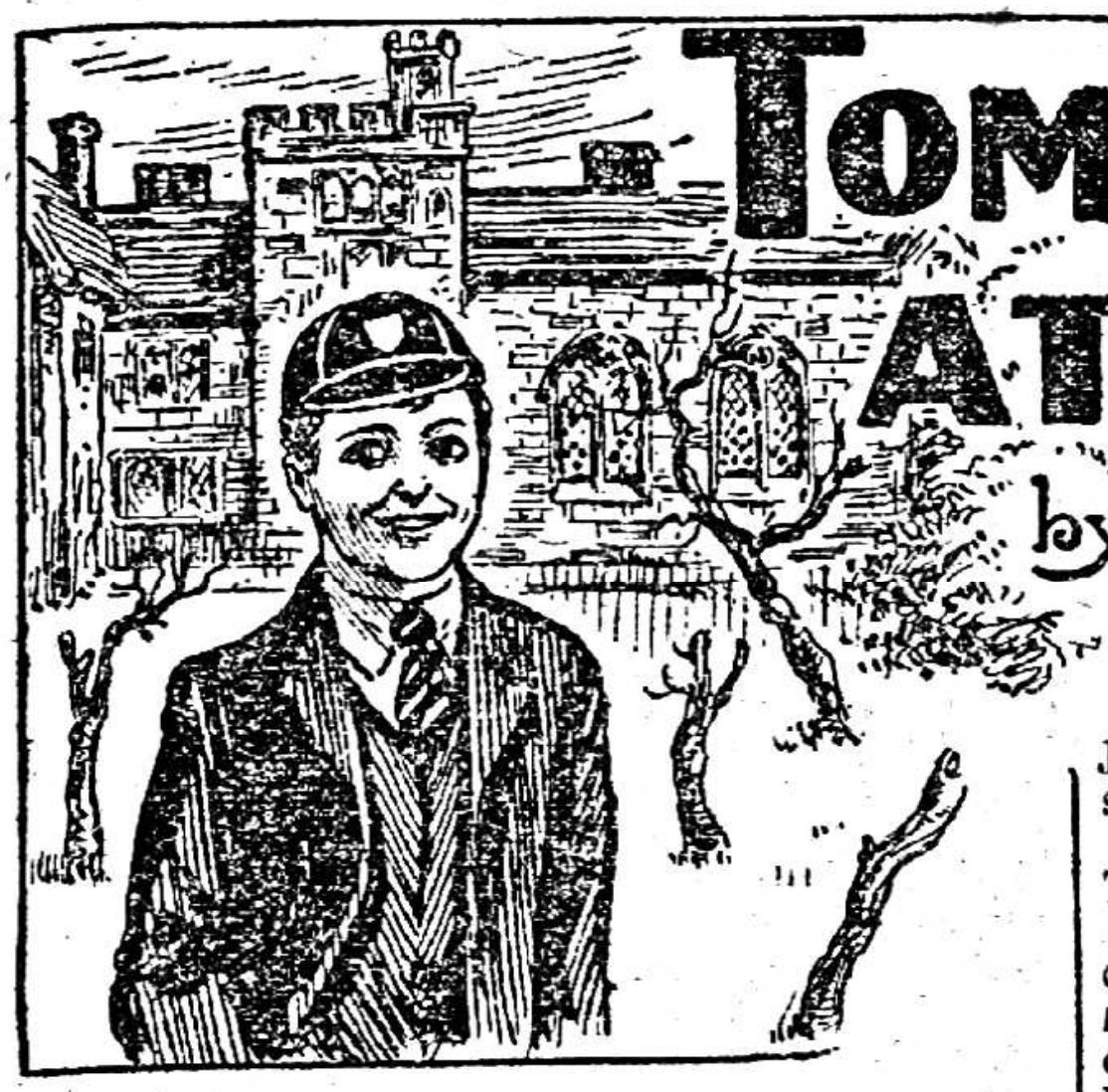

TOM TARTAR AT SCHOOL

by HARCOURT BURRAGE

(The World's Most Famous School Story).

CHAPTER I.

Tom Makes Some Friends—and an Enemy.

"PEDDLETON! Ped-dle-ton!" shouted a porter, as the train rumbled into the little station in the north-west of England which bears that name.

The door of one of the compartments opened, and a tall, good-looking boy alighted.

"Lively place this!" he muttered, after a quick glance up and down the platform.

Not one solitary passenger was waiting to board the train; while he himself was the only arrival.

"Any luggage, sir?" asked the porter.

"Yes—a couple of boxes," replied the youngster. "They've got my name on—Tom Tartar. By the way, where's the trap?"

"What trap, sir?"

"One was to meet me from Mr. Wrasper's school."

A slow grin spread over the porter's face.

"Oh," he said, "the trap'll get 'ere all right some time or another! You'll 'ave to wait patient for Wooden Jerry, sir. 'E'll turn up when 'e thinks 'e will. Wooden Jerry never hurries! 'E may get 'ere in 'arf an hour, or it may be a couple of hours afore 'e——"

"Right away!" at that moment cried the guard, after putting out Tom Tartar's boxes.

Tom waited until the noise of the departing train had subsided in the distance before he spoke again. By that time the fat station-master had waddled on the scene.

"Who is Wooden Jerry?" Tom asked.

The porter was about to explain, when the station-master, with a lofty air, waved him away.

"Which the real, rightful name of that same party, sir, is Jerry Wood," said the station-master huskily. "He's called Wooden Jerry hereabouts because that's his natur', so to speak."

"A bit wooden-headed, eh?" suggested Tom.

"Well, sir, his intellecks ain't what you'd call sparklin', and he's about as spry in his movements as a tree! He's Mr. Wrasper's coachman, gardener, butler, footman, and boots all rolled into one. As coachman, he's generally an hour or two late in gettin' anywhere. In fact, the only time he's punctual is when he brings the boys to the station here to go away for their holidays."

"Anxious to get rid of 'em, I expect!" grinned Tom.

"That's about the size of it, sir. Wooden Jerry ain't fond o' boys!"

"Well, I don't fancy hanging about here for him. Can't I hire a trap?"

"Not unless you go to the village, sir."

"And where's the village?"

"Half a mile t'other side of the school, sir!" gravely returned the station-master. "You see, sir, it's the way of railway companies to put their little country stations in out-o'-the-way spots, and Peddleton station was dropped down here like that. We're just under four mile from the village, and three and a half from the school!"

"Then I must walk it," said Tom. "Which is the way?"

"There's two ways, sir. One by the road, and t'other by the river. The river way is the nearest, and it's a pleasanter walk than the dusty, uphill road. Mebbe, you'll meet some of the young school gents—Wednesday bein' a half-holiday."

The station-master then carefully directed Tom as to how he could reach the riverside path.

"Thanks very much," said Tom. "I'll go that way. When the trap turns up, will you please ask Wooden Jerry to take my boxes, and say I've gone on?"

Tom sauntered out of the station, looking none to happy.

"The pater said he was packing me off to an out-of-the-way place," he muttered; "but I'm hanged if I expected it to be as bad as this!"

He turned out of the road presently, and, vaulting over a stile, crossed a meadow. In a few minutes he found himself on a path by the river.

It was a very narrow river, and it wound

about a valley, on each side of which were rugged hills of considerable height.

Far away ahead was a church spire, which Tom rightly surmised indicated the village, near or in which was Wrasper's School.

"I shall waste away here," said Tom to himself. "What a dull hole for dad to send me to! He said he would take steps to limit the play of my exuberant spirits, and, by Jiminy, he's done so!"

The river, as we have said, wound about, but most rivers do that, and the word scarcely expresses the form of this particular stream. It "corkscrewed" is the more correct term.

It twisted about like a wriggling worm, and Tom, as he walked along the bank, noticed certain signs showing that it was at a very low ebb.

"It crawls now," he said, "but in the winter-time it races along, I expect."

Tom had an eye for the picturesque, although he had no love for solitude. He liked moving life, with friends to share his joys and assist him in getting into the scrapes which were the outcome of his exuberant spirits, frequently dwelt upon by his father—of whom more by-and-bye.

Tom sauntered on, keeping to the river's bank, and had covered about half the distance between the station and the school when he came upon a scene that quickened his blood and step at the same time.

About a hundred yards ahead of him were half a dozen boys, and two of them, a few yards apart and facing each other, engaged in removing their coats.

Tom's eyes flashed.

"Looks as if a fight's coming off!" he muttered. "Wonder if these fellows are from Wrasper's School?"

As he neared the party he saw that there was a great disparity between the combatants, in age, height, muscular development, and general physique.

One was a fair-haired, slim lad, delicate in appearance, and yet not by any means a weakling. The other was big and burly with shoulders that some men would have been glad of, and a large, bullet head that looked as if it could stand a tolerably smart rap from a wooden mallet without coming to much harm.

One of the other boys now spoke for the first time in Tom's hearing.

"It's a beastly shame, Worrey!" he protested. "Gray isn't half your size—and besides, it was you who were in the wrong."

"Mind your own business, or you'll get a pasting, too!" growled the big fellow. "Now, then, Gray, come on—unless you'd prefer to beg my pardon instead."

"I wouldn't beg your pardon if you were three times as big as you are!" declared Gray, and squared up courageously to his burly opponent.

But at that instant Tom Tartar stepped in between them.

"Not if I know it!" he said, addressing himself to Worrey. "You must be a pretty low-down sort to take on a chap who's nothing near your own size!"

For a moment the bully looked at Tom in absolute amazement. Then he growled angrily:

"Who—who d'you think you are, interfering with what doesn't concern you?"

"Oh, I'm nobody in particular," returned Tom. "But I'm not going to stand by and see you knock this youngster about."

"Perhaps you'd like to take his place?" sneered Worrey, with a ferocious glare.

"Jolly good idea!" agreed Tom. "Nothing would please me better!"

"No, no!" interposed Gray. "I'm quite ready to take him on. I'm not afraid of him."

"I know you're not," answered Tom, "or you would not be here now; but for all that he sha'n't have the fun of knocking you about. He shall perform on me first, anyway; and I won't even take off my coat to him. Now, then, are you ready?"

"I—I don't see why I should fight you," replied Worrey, with a shifting eye.

"But you know what will be thought of you if you back out of it, I s'pose?"

"I'm not obliged to fight every blackguard I meet."

"Do you say I'm a blackguard?"

"No-o-o! I only say this——"

"You needn't say it!" broke in Tom drily. "You don't want to fight me, so there's an end of the matter. Put on your coat and go home with the knowledge that you have been as good as licked. Not that I think I should have an easy job if you had any pluck in you; but then, you see, you haven't."

Tom's cool way set the youthful spectators of the scene laughing.

Worrey glared from one to the other like a baited bull.

"I'll talk to you fellows another time," he said, "and maybe I'll get even with you. You won't always have a gang of outsiders to stand by you."

"First time I knew that one person made a gang!" laughed Tom.

The bully merely scowled; then picked up his coat and cap, and strode off without another word.

Tom Tartar felt pretty certain he had made a bitter enemy; but that didn't trouble him in the least.

Turning to the others, he first of all helped Gray on with his coat.

"Are you fellows from Wrasper's School?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Gray.

"Well, I'm going there myself. My name's Tartar."

"And mine's Gray."

They shook hands. Then Tom said:

"Perhaps you'll introduce me to your friends here. I always like to know who's who. Makes thinks more comfortable, doesn't it?"

Gray nodded, and grinned. The new boy's cool, confident, off-hand manner amused him.

"Sam Smith, Lawrence Turrel, John McLara," said Gray, introducing those who stood beside him.

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A nod and a shake of the hand all round followed. Then Tom asked:

"Why did you fellows allow this fight?"

"We tried to interfere," replied Sam Smith; "but Jonah Worrey, being the cock of the school, and Gray such a plucky little beggar, we could do nothing."

"We came to see fair play," added Turrell, "and that was as much as Gray would allow us to do."

"Well, I've interfered, and must take the consequences," said Tom lightly. "What sort of school is Wrasper's?"

The boys, who seemed to be a good-natured lot, made wry faces.

"Might be worse, I suppose," said Gray, "but not much. Wrasper is a beast."

"Licks you?"

"No."

"What then?"

"He uses moral force," said Sam Smith, "and a good licking is nowhere to it. By the way, why have you been sent here?"

"My spirits have been rather exuberant," replied Tom; "so my guv'nor thought I ought to be tamed. A firm of scholastic agents gave him one of Wrasper's prospectuses, and after reading it, he thought it was worth while giving the Wrasper methods—whatever they are—a trial."

This answer raised a general laugh.

"Half of us are here for the same reason," said Sam. "We have been sent not to a school, but to a sort of juvenile house of correction."

"A prison!" exclaimed Tom.

"No; not quite so bad as that," said Sam; "but there—you'll see."

"Hadn't we better be getting back?" suggested McLara. "It's half-past four."

The boys set out for the school. Tom felt at home with his new friends, and they on their part were already learning to look up to him.

The cool way he had temporarily disposed of the school bully had won their admiration, and in the heart of Willie Gray, at least, a feeling of warm friendship had already taken root.

CHAPTER II.

The Wrasper "System."

THE walk of a mile and a half enabled the new friends to exchange a few notes respecting their present and past lives, and Tom got an idea of the sort of school he was going to.

It was established by Mr. Wrasper as an institute for the culture of the young, and correction by moral force only.

So it was said in the circular he issued—a circular so artfully and plausibly worded that it had greatly impressed Tom Tartar's father.

One tutor only was kept, and the boys numbered thirty.

Of the tutor little was said, and Tom made no particular inquiries about him, although he had afterwards good reason to remember him.

The village of Tarn was as pretty as quaint buildings, verdure, trees, and hills could make it.

On the outskirts stood the schoolhouse, an old mansion with a record that had found its way into the guide-books, and other literature of a historical nature.

But the family that had once owned it had passed away, the last member having squandered everything, so that the old house became derelict.

It was put up for sale and the bidders were few, for it had an uncanny reputation for ghosts and other things to make the flesh creep.

Therefore it happened that Mr. Wrasper, in search of a suitable retreat for a school conducted on moral force principles, lighting on it, was enabled to secure a bargain.

In front of the house was a pair of iron gates; now closed. Behind them was an extensive garden, kept in the most slovenly manner, but very picturesque for all that.

The boys passed round to the side of the building, and opened a small door set in a high brick wall.

"Once a kitchen garden," said Sam Smith, "and now a playground."

Tom saw before him about an acre and a half of ground trodden hard, mainly by the feet of boys.

Evidence of its having once been a garden existed in the form of dead or half-dead fruit trees clinging to the walls, and stumps of other trees dotted about the ground.

"Wrasper has another garden for vegetables and fruit," said Sam Smith, "but that's on the other side of the house."

About a dozen boys were wandering about the grounds, and these, on spotting a stranger, came forward to see what he was like.

"Here, keep back a minute," said Turrell. "Anybody seen Jonah Worrey?"

"He went through the ground ten minutes ago," replied a bright-eyed youngster, "and he was looking murderous."

"Such a yarn we've got for you chaps!" said Turrell, rubbing his hands.

"Better not roar it out here," suggested McLara.

"Why not? Oh, Cautious Johnny!"

"Well, you know what Jonah is. Fair or foul is his motto."

But Turrell could not keep the story. Jonah Worrey had shown the white feather to a boy who was not so big as himself. It was too good to keep.

Tom Tartar found himself growing into a hero, and, hating a fuss at any time, cut the story short.

"I must go and look after my traps," he said. "Will one of you show me the way into the house?"

"I will," replied Gray.

They crossed the ground, which was entirely surrounded by high walls, and passed out by another small door. Then a short gravel-path led to a side entrance to the house. *(To be continued.)*

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