Grand New Feature Starting in "Nipper's Mag."—See Inside

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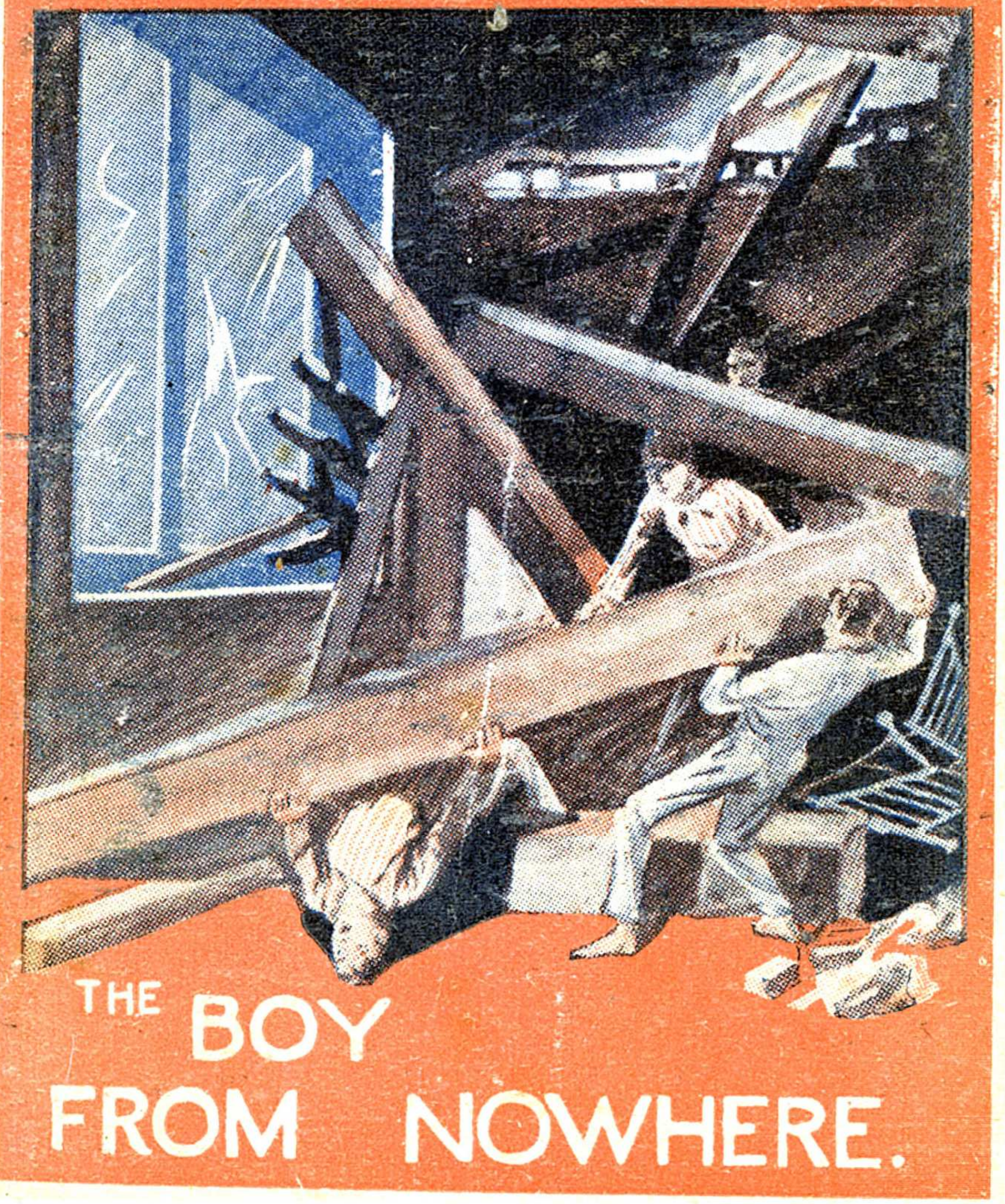
PRICE 2d.

No. 349 February 11, 1922



THE BOY FROM NOWHERE.

And so the boy did the only thing possible. He charged into the Head with all his strength. It was by no means a gentle thing to do, but it undoubtedly saved Dr. Stafford's life.

The BOY FROM NO-WHERE.

A Splendid Long Complete Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's College, introducing NELSON LEE, NIPPER, and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "The Supreme Council," "The Dismissal of Nelson Lee," "The Downfall of the Snake," and many other stirring Tales.

(THE STORY RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

THE LATEST!

"'SHUN!"

"Eh?"

"What?"

Church and McClure jumped as Edward Oswald Handforth strode into Study D, in the Ancient House at St. Frank's, and barked out the abbreviated word at the very top of his voice.

Church and McClure were engaged at prep, and they were both rather busy. A cheerful fire burnt in the study grate, and the atmosphere was warm and cosy. Peace had been within Study D for about half an hour—during the period of Handforth's absence, to be exact.

"'Shun!" repeated Handforth sharply.

"Dotty?" asked Church, dipping his pen in the ink.

"Obey orders, or I'll have you clapped into the guard-room!" roared Handforth. "Stand at attention when your commanding officer enters! And look sharp about it, too!"

"What are you supposed to be—a Prussian Hun?" asked Church curiously. "What's the idea of this bullying stunt?"

"You—you rotter, I'm only practising!" snorted Handforth.

"Practising!" repeated McClure. "Practising for what?"

"The Cadet Corps, of course," said Handforth. "It's going to be formed within a day or two; in fact, most of the chaps have enrolled. And I'm just getting my hand in, so that I shall be ready."

"Oh!" said Church. "But why should you start by barking at us, and ordering us to stand at attention? My dear chap, that won't be your job. As a private, you'll have to obey orders on your own account——"

"Private!" interrupted Handforth sourly.

"Yes."

"You pitiful fathead!" said Handforth. "Who told you that I shall be a private? I don't want to boast or brag, but you can take it from me that I shall be the commander-in-chief of the whole regiment."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Church and McClure cackled with pretended enjoyment.

"Commander-in-chief," said Church. "You'd better go to sleep, and have another dream, Handy. And who told you that a Cadet Corps is a regiment? It won't be any more than a platoon."

"Well, it's the same thing."

"A platoon is the same as a regiment?" asked McClure.

"Practically."

"Oh, of course you know, I suppose?" said McClure with a shrug. "You say that a platoon is just the same as a regiment, and you're supposed to be commander-in-chief. You ought to fill the job wonderfully."

Handforth was quite unaware of sarcasm.

"Well, I think I shall do pretty well," he said modestly. "I've been thinking it all out, and I've decided that I shall be very strict about discipline. There's no sense in putting up with any kind of rot in a Cadet Corps. I shall be hard and fast in my rules."

"But, my dear chap, you seem to forget that the Remove is going to vote to-night," put in Church. "A vote will be taken, and the commander of the Cadet Corps will be selected in that way."

"Exactly," said Handforth. "Do you think I don't know it?"

"I thought you might have forgotten it."

"You prize ass," said Handforth. "Of course I haven't forgotten it. I shall be appointed commander, of course."

"Naturally," said McClure.

"I shall get a huge majority," said Handforth. "Nine fellows out of every ten will vote for me. As commander, I shall at once institute certain regulations, and I sha'n't stick to the usual stuff. I'll make regulations of my own. This Cadet Corps will be unlike any other in the world."

"It will, if you're in command," said Church, nodding.

"If I'm in command!" exclaimed Handforth. "There's no 'if' about it, my sons. I've been making all sorts of plans," he went on dreamily. "Of course, you fellows will be privates. You haven't got enough ability to be placed in a position of command. I might make Church a lance-corporal."

"Thanks awfully," said Church gratefully.

"That's all right, you'll be given a trial," said Handforth, waving his hand. "But, of course, I shall bar favouritism. Every fellow in this Cadet Corps must be placed in positions of authority absolutely on his merits."

"And you will be commander-in-chief?" asked McClure faintly.

"Haven't I said so?" snapped Handforth. "Nipper's a good all round fellow, so I shall appoint him colonel of the general staff. Pitt will be a major, and I think it will be just as well to make De Valerie a major, too. Then there'll be three or four captains and some lieutenants."

"According to you the whole giddy Cadet Corps will consist of officers!" interrupted Church. "My dear chap, there'll only be about thirty in the whole corps. By the way, what rank will you assume?"

"Field-marshal, of course," replied Handforth promptly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What the dickens are you cackling at, you dummies?" roared Handforth.

"Oh, Handy, you don't realise how funny you are!" gasped Church. "You're simply a scream. Ow—yarooooh!"

"You're a scream now," said Handforth tartly as he reached forward and drove his fist into Church's face. "You'd better not ridicule me, or I shall jolly soon——"

"You—you rotter!" snorted Church, holding his nose. "It's just like your usual swank. There's only one chap who'll be the commander of the Cadet Corps, and that chap's Nipper."

"Hear, hear!" said McClure. "He'll get all the votes. And if I were you, Handy, I should keep mum about your generals and majors and captains. You'll only make yourself the laughing stock of the school."

"Oh, shall I?" asked Handforth. "How do you make that out?"

"Well, in a Cadet Corps of this kind it'll simply be a platoon, and the commander of the platoon is a lieutenant, as a rule. He'll be the only officer, and there'll probably be a sergeant and a couple of corporals. As for majors and generals, there isn't room for any such ornaments."

"I suppose you think you know more about it than I do?" roared Handforth. "Haven't I already told you that I shall adopt measures of my own? This Cadet corps will be something special."

"A giddy comic opera affair, if you have command," interrupted Church bitterly. "But Nipper will get that job, and he'll simply be Lieutenant Nipper. As platoon commander he'll have the same privileges as the colonel of a regiment, but that's only if the platoon is on its own. The fact is, Handy, you're pretty rusty on military matters. You'd better not air your ignorance in front of all the fellows, or they'll yell at you."

Handforth glared at his faithful chums ferociously. He was half inclined to punch them round the study, but he thought better of this. To tell the truth, he was dimly beginning to realise that Church was right.

He was somewhat vague concerning military

subjects, and he couldn't have said off-hand what was the difference between a brigade and a company. So it would be just as well, perhaps, if he took Church's advice.

He wouldn't admit even to himself that Church had given him any advice that was worth accepting. And so with a snort he turned and strode out of the study. Retreat was his best move.

Practically all the fellows in the Remove were busily talking about the formation of the St. Frank's Cadet Corps. This was not merely empty talk, but the corps would soon be an actual body.

Just to start it would consist merely of a single platoon, composed of Removites. If the experiment proved to be a success, the whole scheme would probably be enlarged.

The seniors would enter the corps, and it would become a much larger organisation. But for the present it would be confined to the Remove, and we should be allowed an opportunity to see what we could do.

It had been my suggestion in the first place, and Nelson Lee—who was the House-master of the Ancient House—agreed to let me organise the whole affair in my own way.

I had already made two or three speeches on the subject, and had invited would-be cadets to enrol themselves. And I had stated that the commander of the corps would be selected by vote, so there could be no possible argument or accusations of favouritism.

After the recent strenuous times at St. Frank's, the remainder of this term promised to be somewhat dull. But promises are not always reliable—this one certainly wasn't. For excitement and mystery and adventure were destined to crowd upon one another in quick succession.

Handforth was supremely confident.

He regarded it as a foregone conclusion that he would be elected Commander of the Cadet Corps. At the same time, he thought it just as well to assist his own ends wherever it was possible.

In the corridor he ran across Owen major, and he pulled Owen major up short by the simple method of grabbing his arm. Owen major gave a yelp—for Handforth's grabs were generally violent.

"You—you ass!" gasped Owen major. "Leggo——"

"Just a word, my son!" said Handforth. "We're going to vote about the Cadet Corps later on in the evening. Have you made up your mind about it?"

"Yes."

"You're going to vote for me, I suppose?"

"You!" yelled Owen major. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling for, you idiot?"

"Oh, nothing!" gasped Owen major. "But I thought this was going to be a real Cadet Corps—not a ragtime affair. As a matter of fact, I'm going to give my vote for Nipper. He's the captain of the Remove, and about the best chap to take command——"

"Rot!" interrupted Handforth. "Rubbish! Nipper's not so bad, but he hasn't got enough go in him to make a military commander. Take my advice, and record your vote for me."

"Nothing doing!" said Owen major.

Handforth pushed his fist under the other junior's nose.

"See that?" he asked grimly

"Take it away, you ass——"

"If you don't vote for me I'll give you the hiding of your life!" said Handforth fiercely. "That's just a warning. I don't want to influence you at all, but you'd better realise that you'll be horribly slaughtered unless you vote for me!"

Owen major wrenched himself free.

"Do you think I take any notice of your threats?" he yelled, dodging down the passage. "Not trying to influence me, eh? Why, you rotter, you know jolly well that you'll be whacked. You'll be lucky if you get any votes at all! You couldn't command a street urchin's tin band!"

Having made that remark, Owen major considered it a wise policy on his part to vanish. Handforth nearly choked, and then he went thundering down the corridor after the other junior. But when he reached the lobby Owen major had vanished. Handforth breathed hard.

"All right, my son—wait!" he said darkly. "Wait until I'm your commanding officer!"

Owen major probably didn't mind waiting—for it would certainly be a very long wait indeed. Handforth's chances of being made Commander-in-Chief of the Cadet Corps were just about as bright as a thundercloud.

However, Handforth was an optimist.

He had hardly moved a couple of yards before Reginald Pitt and Jack Grey and De Valerie hove into view. They were chatting together, and they came upon Handforth standing quite still, scowling ferociously at the wall.

"I should give it a punch, if I were you!" said Pitt.

"Eh?"

"No good glaring at it like that!" said Pitt. "Glares don't hurt anybody, and they are simply a waste of time on a blank wall. Punch it, Handy—as hard as you can go! It won't punch back!"

Handforth's lip curled.

"And that, I suppose, is meant to be funny?" he asked sourly.

"Don't take any notice of him, poor chap!" said De Valerie. "He doesn't know what he's doing, and he looks positively ill. I shouldn't be surprised if he's sickening for the 'flu."

"There's a lot of it about!" said Jack Grey, shaking his head.

"You—you prize dummies!" snorted Handforth. "There's nothing wrong with me!"

"What was that awful face for then?"

"I was thinking, you fathead!"

"My hat!" said Pitt wonderingly. "And is it really necessary for you to look like that when you think? Of course, we know that it's a tremendous effort for you, Handy. When a chap hasn't got much brain he needs——"

"I don't want any rot!" snapped Handforth curtly. "And now you're here, I've got something to tell you. Later on this evening

we're going to vote about the Cadet Corps—who's going to be Commander."

"It's a dead certainty for Nipper!" declared Pitt.

"Rats!" said Handforth sharply. "Nipper doesn't stand an earthly. I shall get most of the votes——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pitt and his two chums clung to one another and howled.

"You—you cackling idiots——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You babbling lunatics!" roared Handforth. "What the dickens——"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

Handforth glared with all the power that he could concentrate. But Pitt and Grey and De Valerie doubled themselves up and yelled with even greater hilarity. They were genuinely amused at the idea of Handforth being Commander of the Cadet Corps—but they were keeping up the laugh just now with the genial intention of getting Handy's rag out. They succeeded.

Handforth clenched his fists, and sailed in.

"Biff! Crash! Slam!"

"Ow—yarooooh! Yow—ow!"

The laughter ceased as though by magic, and Pitt and Co. reeled over, collapsing. Handforth's punches had been totally unexpected—and they were certainly very painful.

But he didn't have the chance to deliver any more.

Recovered from the first shock, the three juniors fell upon Handforth and had ample revenge. Furthermore, they told him, in the plainest of plain terms, that they would never vote for him if he was the only other human being in the whole wide world.

Dazed and bewildered, Handforth crawled back to Study D. He had come to the conclusion that any attempt to influence the fellows was not exactly healthy for him.

CHAPTER II.

NATURE GETS THE WIND UP.

OUTSIDE it was a wild evening.

A bright moon was shining, and a few ragged clouds were scuttering across the clear sky. And they were driven by a wind which seemed to be increasing in violence with every minute that passed.

This wind was just as powerful on the ground as in the upper air. It had been blowing fairly hard all day, but now that evening had come on, the wind had assumed the force and power of a full gale.

There was no frost now, and the February evening was comparatively mild, for the wind was neither cutting nor biting. And Dr. Malcolm Stafford had all his work cut out to fight his way along as he came up from the village.

The Headmaster of St. Frank's had paid a call, as a matter of fact, at the vicarage, and now he was hurrying to get back to the school, for he had a somewhat busy evening before him.

Dr. Stafford was quite his old self—brisk, active, and full of kindly thought for those over whom he ruled. His recent breakdowns, caused by the villainous Mr. Trenton, had left no mark on him.

But, in spite of his sturdiness, the Head found it somewhat difficult to get along against the force of the hurricane. The wind was sweeping down the lane with tremendous violence.

And the Head was walking into the teeth of it, so to speak. Every step that he took was an effort, and he found it well nigh impossible to keep a straight course. He was buffetted and beaten by the gale.

"Dear me!" he gasped, as an extra heavy gust whirled down. "This is quite unusual, and I am becoming anxious. I'm afraid there will be a good many chimneys blown down to-night."

The Head's fears were well founded, for it was almost certain that a few minor disasters of that nature would take place. As he walked he could see the thick hedges bending under the fury of the wind, and the treetops were roaring and crackling with a confusion of sound.

The Head noticed a figure approaching him in the moonlight. It was still some little distance off, and was the figure of a boy. The Head took him to be one of the juniors—who had probably obtained a pass out. Dr. Stafford mentally decided to advise the youngster to return to the school.

And just then a truly appalling gust roared down from across the moor, which was only separated from Bellton Lane by a few meadows. The gale came like something solid—a devastating force of air.

It caught the Head squarely as he drew opposite an open gateway. And so powerful was the thrust of the hurricane that he staggered, trod upon some loose stones, and lost his blance.

The next second Dr. Stafford was over, floundering on his back. To a younger man this mishap would have been a laughable trifle—something to be retold with a chuckle.

But the Head's young days were over, and a fall of this kind was by no means a joke. He had dropped heavily, and most of the wind was knocked out of him. He lay there, fighting for breath.

The boy paused for a second, and broke into a run. He had clearly seen the old gentleman blown over by the wind. But then, just as the youngster was drawing near, he uttered a sharp cry of horror.

That great blast of wind had not expended itself. And a big straight tree which grew just in the meadow gave several alarming cracks—cracks that were as loud as pistol shots.

And then, with a crashing and rending of timber, it came swinging over, right across the road. For scores of years it had stood there, braving every storm. But this tremendous gust had been too much for it.

And it was falling exactly over the spot where the Head lay!

It was a time for quick action—for presence of mind.

Dr. Stafford himself probably did not know of his danger. The roar of the wind was so tremendous in his ears that the crashing of the tree must have seemed dull amid the confusion of sounds. And the Head was endeavouring to rise, and his back was towards the tottering trunk.

But the boy saw it all—and went as pale as death.

Within five seconds Dr. Stafford would be killed—struck down by that huge trunk. Unless aid came to him there was no possible escape, for he was utterly incapable of getting clear of the danger on his own account.

For a fraction of a second the boy hesitated.

He was the only soul within sight or hearing. But to rush forward to Dr. Stafford's assistance would probably result in two deaths instead of one. And only the bravest would have ventured such an act.

The boy darted forward. His pause had been so brief that any onlooker would have declared that he had not hesitated at all. And now the only thought in the youngster's mind was that a human life was at stake—and that he was the only one who could render assistance.

He uttered no sound, for instinct told him that to call out would probably be fatal. It would cause the Headmaster to turn, and the slightest delay of any kind would spell disaster.

And so the boy did the only thing possible.

He flung himself at the Head with all his strength. It was by no means a gentle thing to do, but it undoubtedly saved Dr. Stafford's life. And it stamped the junior as a boy with singular courage and presence of mind.

Dr. Stafford uttered a startled gasp as he felt somebody lurch up against him from the side. He lurched forward, staggering, and fighting to keep his balance. By a miracle he managed to do so—for, at the very moment of the impact, he had succeeded in getting to his feet.

Cra-ash!

The noise created by the falling tree was positively thunderous. It filled the Head's ears, although so far he had no idea of what had really taken place. The great tree lay across the road.

Its upper branches were right in the opposite field, and both hedges were torn and battered and destroyed.

"Good Heavens!" gasped Dr. Stafford.

He understood. That first glance in his rear told him the truth. There lay the tree—in the exact spot where he had been standing! But for that violent push he would have been killed on the spot. But—who had pushed him? It was a startling mystery.

Then, abruptly, the Headmaster remembered the figure of the boy he had seen in the moonlight a moment or so before. That figure was no longer visible! And Dr. Stafford knew that he had been saved from a terrible death by the youngster.

For some seconds he was overwhelmed by the horror of it all. For he believed that his own life had been saved at the expense of another. He expected to find the boy crushed and battered beneath that fallen tree. But, even as this terrible thought occurred to him, the tree branches moved, and a figure came crawling out from beneath. The Head started forward.

"My boy—my boy!" he exclaimed huskily.

The boy was crawling on his hands and knees, and his face was racked with pain. As a matter of fact, he had been struck by one of the minor branches, and his head was grazed, his left shoulder badly bruised, and his ankle was twisted. Otherwise he was unhurt. By a miracle of good fortune he had come to no serious harm.

"It—it's all right, sir!" he exclaimed, clenching his teeth in order to speak evenly. I—I'm not hurt at all, sir! I'm sorry I pushed you like that, but it was the only thing to do——"

"My brave lad! You saved my life!" interrupted the Head, seizing the boy, and helping him to his feet. "I did not know the tree was falling. This terrible wind——"

"I spotted it, sir, and did the best I could," said the boy. "I'm awfully glad you're all right, sir. Please don't worry about me. I'm as right as rain. Oh—oh! My—my ankle——"

He nearly collapsed as he bore his weight upon his left leg.

Dr. Stafford regarded him curiously. He was not a St. Frank's boy, as the Head had at first imagined. About fifteen, he was sturdily built, with a frank, open face. The Head could see this much quite clearly in the bright moonlight. He had curly hair, and he was attired in clothing that was threadbare in parts, and considerably worn and darned. But, for all that, he looked neat, clean and surprisingly tidy.

And his speech was that of a gentleman's son. Indeed, his good looks and his good manners were in striking contrast to his poor clothing.

"You are in pain, my boy," said the Head kindly. "You must let me——"

"It's nothing, sir—really!" said the boy. "Just a twinge, you know. I'm only too glad that I was able to do something, and—and I'll be getting along now. A terribly wild night, isn't it, sir?"

"It is, indeed!" agreed Dr. Stafford. "And you must not think I shall let you run off like this, my dear lad. I want to thank you in a way that you deserve to be thanked—and I want to be quite certain that your injuries are no more than you say. Will you come with me?"

"But I've done nothing, sir," protested the boy. "And I'm not at all hurt!"

The Head said no more, but took the youngster's arm, and helped him along up the lane, against the buffeting wind. Indeed, the Head found it almost necessary to carry his young companion, for the latter's ankle was causing him excruciating pain.

They arrived at St. Frank's without any further mishap, and the Head directed the way straight across the Triangle to his own private door. Entering, he took the boy with him into his own study.

Here, under the full power of the electric

lights, he could see that his first impression was an accurate one. The boy's face was frank and singularly modest-looking. Indeed, he was very shy, and gazed about him uncomfortably.

His clothing was even more threadbare than the Head had first supposed, and he was filled with a great curiosity to find out more about the lad. It was very seldom indeed that the Head came across a boy he liked so well at the first meeting. Furthermore, he owed this youngster a debt that he could never repay.

His injuries were by no means serious—consisting of one or two grazes, some bruises, and a ricked ankle. He sat in a chair, his face expressing mingled shyness and relief.

And Dr. Stafford could see that his cheeks were thin, and somewhat pale. Sturdy he was, but it seemed that he had not partaken of a good square meal for some time. And the Head's concern increased.

"Tell me, my boy, what is your name?" he asked kindly.

"John Martin, sir," said the boy. "I—I ought not to have come in really, sir, because I must get to Caistowe to-night, and it's rather a long walk. This—this is St. Frank's isn't it, sir?"

"Yes. I am Dr. Stafford."

John Martin went slightly paler.

"You—you're the Headmaster, sir!" he exclaimed, in an awed voice.

"Exactly!" smiled Dr. Stafford. "But there is really no reason why you should look upon me as though I were an ogre. I am just an ordinary man, John, and I am thankful enough that I am still living. But for your timely aid I should have been lying crushed to death in the lane——"

"Oh, don't, sir!" interrupted the boy. "I didn't do very much——"

"You performed an act of wonderful bravery, John, and I can never thank you," interrupted the Head quietly. "I am calling you 'John,' because it seems natural that I should do so. I like you, my boy," he added simply.

John Martin seemed rather confused.

"Thank—thank you, sir!" he murmured. "But—but you won't mind if I go, will you?"

"I shall mind very much," said the Head. "I cannot think of your walking to Caistowe to-night. Indeed, I very much doubt if you could manage it, and the night is so wild that you must consent to remain here. I can easily communicate with your parents."

John shook his head rather sadly.

"I haven't got any father or mother, sir," he said, in a low voice.

The Head came over and laid his hand upon the boy's shoulder.

"I am deeply sorry," he said gently. "I'm afraid you are not very happy, my dear lad. You must tell me about yourself. I am greatly interested, and I hope you do not think that I am inquisitive."

"Oh, as if I could think that, sir!" exclaimed John quickly. "You—you—— I hardly know what to say, sir," he added, swallowing something which seemed to be in his throat. I—I've never had anybody to peak to me so kindly before!"

Dr. Stafford sat down, and pulled his chair close to the boy's.

"Now, come, come!" he exclaimed, smiling. "We are going to be friends, I am sure. Tell me who your relatives are in Caistowe——"

"I—I don't think I have got any relatives at all, sir," said John Martin quietly. "I don't remember any, and I've often been told by Mr. Jenkins that my mother died when I was a baby, and that my father died when I was about four. I was just coming back from Helmford, sir."

The Head looked at John very curiously.

"From Helmford?" he repeated. "But what are you doing here, near Bellton? Surely it would have been better to take the train straight through to Bannington?"

"I—I walked, sir," faltered the boy.

"Dear me! You walked?" ejaculated the Head quickly. "But Helmford is twenty miles away, and——"

"It cuts off a bit if you cross the moor, sir, and take the road to Caistowe through Bellton," interrupted John. "I—I went to Helmford after a job, sir, but somebody else had got it before I arrived."

The Head wondered afresh, and now he understood the reason for that wan, tired look upon the boy's face. He had just walked all the way from Helmford! And, in spite of his weariness, he had saved Dr. Stafford's life. The Head felt more and more interested—and more deeply concerned.

"Tell me, John, why was it necessary for you to walk?" he asked quietly.

"I haven't any money, sir," replied John simply. "Mr. Jenkins wouldn't give me any, and I wanted to get away from Caistowe. I—I think I shall get on better if I go somewhere else."

"You do not get on very well with this Mr. Jenkins?"

"No, sir," said the boy, hesitating.

"I should like to know more about you, and you must forgive me if I seem unduly inquisitive," exclaimed the Head. "Who is this Mr. Jenkins, and what relation is he to you?"

"No relation at all, sir; but I've always lived with him," replied John. "He keeps a little inn at the Caistowe water front, sir, and he lives all by himself. He's a brute—and I hate him!" went on the boy, with a sudden outburst of passion. "I couldn't stand him any longer, and I'll never go back—— I—I'm sorry, sir," he finished up breathlessly.

The Head nodded, and looked grave.

"I think I am beginning to understand," he said. "And I was right when I assumed that you had not led a very happy life. I take it that Mr. Jenkins has ill-treated you in the past?"

"Ever since I can remember, sir," replied John. "Many and many a time I've tried to get away from him, and if I got this job in Helmford I should be all right. But—but I was unlucky, and now I don't know what to do."

"It seems to me, John, that our meeting was providential," said Dr. Stafford softly. "I shall not question you any further just now; but you must be my guest for an hour. I will not hear of any refusal."

The Head had already touched the bell, and before John Martin could utter any protest, Tubbs, the pageboy, appeared. He was instructed to bring Mrs. Poulter without any delay.

And when the good lady arrived the Head told her to take John to his own dining-room, and to provide the boy with a substantial hot supper of the best. John's eyes glittered with eagerness, but still he hung back.

"It's—it's not right, sir!" he protested. "I—I've done nothing——"

"I want you to do as I have asked," said the Head quietly.

The boy said no more, but allowed himself to be carried off by Mrs. Poulter. And Dr. Stafford sat for some moments, deep in thought. Then he rose, and picked up the telephone directory. He turned over the pages, and gave a short exclamation of satisfaction.

"Splendid!" he murmured. "I was not hoping that I should be so lucky. So Mr. Jenkins has a telephone. Good!"

The directory gave the information that Mr. Jenkins lived at the Fisherman's Arms, and Dr. Stafford noted the telephone number.

He lifted the receiver of the instrument, and placed it to his ear. And in a very short time he was talking to the unknown Mr. Jenkins himself. His voice was rough and decidedly beery.

"What's that you're saying?" came the voice in response to the Head's inquiry. "Do I know that young varmint named John Martin? Yes, I do! What about him? I hope he's got run over!"

"I am pleased to tell you that no such disaster has occurred," said the Head sternly. "Do I understand, Mr. Jenkins, that you are the boy's guardian?"

"No, you don't!" snapped the voice. "I don't want nothing to do with the lazy young swab! He took himself off after a job, and I don't want to see him no more. Him with his high airs and graces! And who are you that you want to know so much?"

"I am thinking of employing the lad, and I should like to have some kind of reference," said the Headmaster diplomatically. "Is the boy honest, and——"

"Too darned honest for me!" said Mr Jenkins. "Like a blessed saint—that's what he is! And all he's thinking of is to stuff his head with knowledge that he don't need—buying books of learning with every penny that he gets hold of! He's no good to me, I can tell you. Why, he wouldn't even serve behind the bar because the language was too spicy for his poor delicate little ears!"

"What you have said, Mr. Jenkins, convinces me that Martin is a boy of unusually high character and morals," said Dr. Stafford. "I shall be glad if you can tell me the name of his nearest relative——"

"Willard!" interrupted the voice. "And he's six foot under the ground! Old Willard, the crank, was his father."

Dr. Stafford was astonished.

"Do you mean Mr. John Willard, the man who owned a good deal of property in the neighbourhood of Bellton?" he asked. "He spent a great deal of money on building a quaint edifice on an island——"

"You must respect me more than the other fellows. If you don't I'll punch your nose!" said Handforth threateningly. "You're a new kid, and you've got to look upon yourself as a worm!"

"That's the fellow!" said Mr. Jenkins. "Supposed to be as rich as a lord, he was, but it was nothing but debts when he died. This kid is old Willard's son."

"But I understand that his name is Martin——"

"I called him Martin, for want of a better name," explained Mr. Jenkins impatiently. "What a lot you want to know! The kid was given into my charge when he was four—just after old Willard died. The old man was a crank, and folks said as he was mad. And as this kid was his only relative, I thought I'd give him a decent chance in life, and give him another name—otherwise people would have thought him mad, too. Why, even the boy himself don't know who his father was. I've never told him. And I shouldn't have told anybody—but he's run off, and now I don't care. I hope the information'll do him harm!"

"On the contrary, I'm even more favourably inclined towards the lad," said Dr. Stafford. "Thank you, Mr. Jenkins. I am much obliged for the information that you have given me."

He hung up the receiver without informing

Mr. Jenkins of his own name, and sat for some little time deep in thought. He remembered the local sensation about old Willard and his famous "folly" on the island. Willard had died over ten years before, and it had been popularly supposed that he had been worth hundreds of thousands.

Curiously enough, however, when his papers came to be examined after his decease, it was found that his money was not sufficient to pay his debts. All his property had been sold, and his only son, a mite of four, had evidently been placed in the ungentle care of Mr. Jenkins.

And the boy had grown up without knowing that his real name was Willard, and that he was the son of the old eccentric who had made his name famous in this part of the country.

The Head saw no reason why he should enlighten the boy. But his gentlemanly bearing and manner was now more easily understandable. For Willard, notwithstanding his crankiness, had been a gentleman by birth and education. The instincts of the father were in the son.

And it seemed very hard indeed that John should be compelled to tramp about searching for work. The Head had taken a great liking to him—a sudden fondness which was quite genuine. And the indications of the boy's character from Mr. Jenkins were entirely favourable.

The Head rose after a while, left his study and went to the dining-room. John was just finishing his supper, and he looked up shyly as Dr. Stafford entered.

The youngster had partaken of a hearty repast.

"Ah, that's better!" said the Head kindly. "Do you feel better, John, my boy?"

"Ever so much, thank you, sir," said John. "I must be going now——"

"No, not just yet!" interrupted the Head. "Listen! The wind is buffetting and roaring as bad as ever. And I should like to talk to you quietly, my boy. You have no home?"

"No, sir."

"And you do not wish to return to Caistowe?"

"I—I'd rather get a job in Bannington or Helmford, sir——"

"How would you like to remain here?" asked the Head quietly.

The boy started, his eyes sparkled, and he breathed quickly.

"Oh!" he panted. "Do—do you mean it, sir? I—I'd love to—— But it wouldn't be fair!" he went on, shaking his head. "I should be taking advantage of you, sir, and it's not right——"

"I admire your spirit, John, but it is foolish of you to have such ideas," smiled Dr. Stafford, "I want you to remain. You would like to study, eh? You would like to improve your education? You may live here—in the Ancient House—and I will have a room set apart for you somewhere on the top floor, where you will be quiet. You must let me look after you in future, my boy. It will be a privilege that I shall greatly enjoy."

John Martin's breath was taken away. His cheeks were flushed, his eyes sparkled, and words failed him for the minute. When he looked up he was breathing hard, and intense gratitude was expressed in his face.

"Oh, I—I'd love it, sir!" he whispered. "But it's too good to be true—and I shall have to do some work to justify my being here. I don't mind what work it is, sir—anything——"

"Quite so—quite so," interrupted the Head softly. "But we will see about that, John. For the moment it is quite sufficient that you have decided to remain!"

CHAPTER III.

PLAYING AT SOLDIERS.

"JOINING up?" asked Reginald Pitt genially.

Hussi Ranjit Lal Kahn, the Indian junior in the Remove, showed all his dazzling white teeth in a quick smile.

"To which do you disgustingly refer?" he inquired politely.

"The Cadets, of course," said Pitt. "I've decided to join the giddy ranks, and there ought to be a lot of fun in this wheeze. Good training, too, and plenty of topping exercise."

I am exquisitely impressed with the preposterously abundant idea," said Hussi Kahn, "but would it be correctly absurd for me to become a ridiculous member of the infamous Cadets?"

"My dear chap, it would not only be correctly absurd, but it would be a ripping idea," grinned Pitt. "You might just as well be a ridiculous member as all the rest of us. There's nothing like being frank."

The Indian boy smiled again.

"Very well, Pitt, I will thoroughly ignore your astounding advice, and join the rank Cadets, as you suggestively responded," he exclaimed. "It will give me the greatest displeasure to don the uniform of a corpse!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Corps, you fathead—not corpse!" yelled Pitt. "But here's Nipper, and things will soon get busy. There's not much time before supper, so we shall have to buck up with the voting."

I bustled into the common room, accompanied by Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson. It was rather late, and, as Pitt had said, there was not very much time to spare. Practically all the fellows were animatedly discussing the suggested Cadet Corps, or were talking about the violent gale.

Christine and Co., of the College House, had been invited over for the occasion, and all House rows were distinctly off. The Cadet Corps was not to be merely an Ancient House affair, but the College House juniors had equal chance of joining up if they wanted to.

I had talked the whole plan over with Nelson Lee a week or two earlier, and he, in turn, had discussed it with the School Governors. After some little trouble, Nelson Lee had persuaded the Governors to enter into the thing

in a business-like way, and they had consented to supply all the uniforms and equipment for a force of fifty. This was just to start with, and the whole affair was by way of an experiment.

If the Cadet Corps proved to be a success, it would be extended and improved upon, and members of every Form would be able to join up. There would be a summer camp, and a fully qualified training officer, and all the rest of it. We should also be directly governed by the War Office—like all fully recognised school Cadet Corps.

But at present the thing was in the nature of an experiment, and would be a purely junior affair, with the commanding officer and the N.C.O.'s chosen from the juniors themselves.

We should have no connection with the military authorities at present, and so the Cadet Corps would be a little body entirely on its own. We were very lucky to have persuaded the school Governors to provide the uniforms and equipment. But Nelson Lee had persuaded Sir John Brent, the chairman, that it was for the good of the school.

"Bally lot of rot!" said Ralph Leslie Fullwood. "That's what I call it. I wouldn't join the Cadets if they paid me!"

"We're far more likely to pay you to keep out!" said De Valerie tartly. "Your breed is distinctly not required, Fullwood. This Cadet Corps is for healthy, sporting chaps—not for cads!"

The leader of Study A scowled.

"A rotten kid's game, that's what it is!" he sneered. "You can get on with it—an' rats to you! You'll simply make yourselves the laughin' stock of the whole district!"

There were only a few juniors who shared Fullwood's opinion, but quite a number of fellows had decided not to join up at first—but to wait a few weeks to see how things developed.

Those who were willing to become Cadets at once had their names put down, their measurements were taken, and uniforms were put in hand. I really fear that the majority of the recruits joined simply and solely for the sake of obtaining the uniform.

"All here?" shouted Pitt, looking round the crowded room. "We don't want to have any giddy preliminaries or speechmaking. We've come here to decide who's to be Commander of this cadet crowd. I think the majority of us have made up our minds."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good!" yelled Handforth. "Of course you'll vote for me?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling asses——"

"Poor old optimist!" grinned Tommy Watson. "You don't stand an earthly!"

Handforth glared.

"Everybody knows what kind of a leader I am——"

"Everybody does!" agreed Pitt, grinning.

"Then it stands to reason that I shall be chosen as Commander-in-Chief of the whole cadet regiment!" said Handforth, taking things for granted. "It's jolly decent of you fellows to elect me in this way—although, if it comes to that I don't see how you could have done anything else. I'll command you all in a way that'll surprise you——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll make things hum——"

"You'll never have a chance!" interrupted Bob Christine. "Who the dickens told this prize fathead to get up on his hind legs and spout like this? If he isn't quiet, we'll pitch him out!"

"Hear, hear!"

Handforth was on the verge of an explosion. But before he could gather up sufficient steam, so to speak, to go off with a bang, Reginald Pitt threw up one of his hands.

"Hands up all those who vote for Nipper!" he called out. "I propose Nipper as commander of the Cadet Corps. He's our Form skipper, and sports captain, and the most successful fellow who has ever taken on the job. I propose him, and it's up to you to vote at once!"

"Good."

A perfect host of hands went up, and I could easily see that the question was in no doubt. It would be idle, indeed, to take any other vote. The Remove was almost unanimous for my appointment as commander.

"Thanks, you fellows," I said, when I was able to speak. "I'm flattered—and you can take it from me, that I shall do the best I can to make this Cadet Corps a romping success. But you've got to understand that——"

"I protest!" bellowed Handforth furiously. "Stop! I object to the whole business! You haven't voted for any of the other candidates!"

"Why should we?" asked Jack Grey. "The only other fellow who stood a chance is Christine, and he must know that he's in a hopeless minority."

"Rather!" said Bob Christine. "Nipper's the commander—and he's welcome to the job. I don't want the responsibility."

"That's nothing to do with it," roared Handforth. "I demand that a vote shall be taken for me. I'll beat the lot of you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, let him have his vote," said Pitt, patiently.

There was a great deal of laughter as Pitt called for order. Then he invited all the fellows who favoured Handforth to put their hands aloft. Not a hand moved, and Edward Oswald nearly fainted. He had fully expected to see a tremendous array of uplifted fists.

"Why, what—what the dickens is this?" he stuttered. "Ain't you going to vote for me, you rotters?"

He glared at Church and McClure. They, after a moment's hesitation, gingerly held up their hands. This was recognised as an act of diplomacy, for Church and McClure had already voted on the previous occasion.

"That's enough," said Pitt briskly. "You're whacked, Handy. Two votes against two score. And we have every reason to suspect that those two votes were only obtained by means of threats."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Just for a moment it seemed that Handforth was about to go off into hysterics. But it was quite characteristic of him to suddenly become

deadly calm and collected. There was never any telling with Handforth. He looked round the common-room with a bitter sneer on his face.

"Of course, I never expected fair play," he said sourly. "Nipper's only got his votes because you're all jealous of me! That's what it amounts to—rank, rotten jealousy."

"Poor old Handy!" sobbed Pitt. "Boo-hoo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rank jealousy!" roared Handforth. "You are afraid that if I'm commander, I shall be a huge success. And you haven't got the decency to give a fellow a real chance. All right—mark my words! This Cadet Corps will come to grief. Without my help it'll collapse and wither."

The common room rocked with laughter.

"Wither commander like you it would," chuckled De Valerie.

"Slaughter him!" gasped Pitt. "Smother him!"

De Valerie was seized, and duly punished for his ghastly attempt at a pun. And by the time the commotion had subsided the meeting had practically broken up. And I had been officially elected commander of the Cadet Corps.

It had been a certainty right from the start, but it wasn't my way to take things for granted, and so I had preferred the Remove to publicly elect me.

I went back to Study C with my chums, and we discussed the matter with interest.

"Poor old Handy!" I grinned. "He's always taking things for granted. If he didn't do that he wouldn't be so disappointed when things don't come off."

"Dear old boy, he's quite hopeless—he is, really," said Sir Montie. "You really must admit that the Cadet Corps would be a shockin' farce if Handforth had sole command."

"Yes, I suppose it would be," I agreed. "At the same time, he's not such a bad sort when everything pleases him. And he's got just the right voice for drill-instructor, or an N.C.O. I think we shall have to give him a chance somewhere. That's only fair to the ass."

"What about uniforms?" asked Watson. "When will they be ready?"

"My dear chap, most of them are ready even now," I said. "They came down yesterday—all complete to the last detail. But I didn't say anything about it, or there would have been a rush for them. There's everything included. Caps, service-boots, and kit, and everything we could wish for. We've got a number of tents, for camping purposes, too. They'll come in handy later on."

Before I could get any further, the door burst open, and Handforth stalked in. He was looking grim and determined.

"Now, then, I want a word with you chaps," he said curtly.

"You're welcome to a hundred or so, if you like," I said generously. "Go ahead, Handy. We're patient fellows."

"You've done me out of the command of the Cadet Corps."

"I'm sorry."

"No good being sorry now," snapped Handforth bitterly. "But I'm used to that sort of thing—I'm hardened. I'd better tell you at once, though, that I sha'n't be satisfied unless you make me an officer."

"Can't be done," I said promptly.

"Why can't it?"

"Because there's only one officer in this Cadet Corps," I replied. "Considering that the whole Corps will only consist of about thirty fellows, there won't be room for any more."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "You'll be the colonel, I suppose?"

"Well, as platoon commander, I shall have the same privileges as a colonel."

"Then you'll need a captain and a major," said Handforth. "That job will just suit me. You can make me a major."

"My dear fathead, I shall only be a lieutenant myself," I interrupted.

"But you just said you'd be a colonel."

"I didn't," I went on. "I shall simply be Lieutenant Nipper, and I shall be assisted by a sergeant and two corporals. The sergeant will be my right-hand man—my adjutant, so to speak. And the sergeant will be responsible for almost everything in the Corps. He'll do the drilling, and order arrests when necessary, and all that kind of thing."

"Good," said Handforth. "In fact, the sergeant will have more responsibility, actually, than the giddy lieutenant."

"Exactly," I agreed. "Sergeants always have."

"Right! As a makeshift, I'll put up with being made a sergeant," said Handforth, condescendingly. "It's a rotten come down, and it's beastly humiliating for me to accept the appointment but I'm not proud."

"I was thinking of Christine for the position of sergeant," I said thoughtfully.

"Think again."

"You can be one of the corporals, Handy," I went on. "I don't mind giving you a trial as an N.C.O."

"You—you rotter!" roared Handforth. "You mean beast! I always thought you were above favouritism, but I'm evidently wrong. Just have a look at this!"

He placed his fist in close proximity to my face

"Don't!" I said, shuddering. "It's frightfully dirty, and I've seen it heaps of times."

"You'll feel it if you don't appoint me sergeant!" snorted Handforth. "That's my final word! You'd better understand, once and for all, that you can't play about with me. I'll give you until to-morrow morning."

He stormed out, and I grinned.

"An enterprising chap," I observed. "I shall have to make him sergeant in the end, or I shall never get any peace. Besides, he's just the right kind to make a good sergeant, once he's shaken down. He's got the voice, and the necessary manner. If he wasn't such a hopeless ass I wouldn't hesitate at all."

Handforth made everybody thoroughly fed up with him before bedtime. He kept up the same song without a pause. Unless he was made sergeant he would do the most appalling things.

The next day he was just as bad, and he

pestered me with his attentions to such an extent that, in the end, I was compelled to agree, just for the sake of peace. I promised him that he would be given a trial. He would have two corporals—Reginald Pitt and Bob Christine.

Handforth was satisfied—but the other members of the Cadet Corps were not. They were morally certain that Handforth would make an awful mess of things. But, as Pitt pointed out, this was all to the good, for Handy was a first-class comedian, and would surpass himself in his new appointment.

It would be interesting to see what the great Edward Oswald would do.

CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER NEWCOMER!

TOMMY WATSON looked decidedly puzzled.

"Blessed if I can make it out!" he said. "Who is the chap? And what's he doing wandering about the Ancient House? I've seen him twice to-day, but I haven't had a chance of speaking to him yet."

Morning lessons were over, and Tommy Watson had just come into Study C, and that puzzled look in his face was still eloquent.

"Dear old boy, I'm quite in the dark!" said Sir Montie, who was the only other occupant of the study. "All the fellows are talkin' about the stranger. I have seen him myself, and I must remark that he appears to be unfortunately reduced in circumstances."

"How do you know that, Sexton Blake?" asked Watson.

"Pray don't be so ridiculous, dear old boy!" protested Montie. "There is really nothin' remarkable in assumin' that the poor chap is frightfully hard up. Surely you have noticed his clothin'?"

"I didn't see anything queer about it."

"Begad!" said Montie, shocked. "You must go about with your eyes shut, Tommy boy. The chap's clothin' is nearly threadbare. Neat an' tidy, I will admit, but in a shockin' worn condition. He's awfully shabby, an' I can't help feelin' sorry for him. He looks a decent sort, too. I'm generally rather good at readin' character, and this fellow strikes me as bein' one of the right sort."

"We don't even know who he is," said Watson. "He suddenly appeared to-day, and not a soul knows——"

"I do!" I interrupted, as I entered the doorway. "You're talking about that chap we've seen this morning? I've just come from the Guv'nor's study, and he's told me all about it."

"Oh, good!" said Watson. "Who is he?"

"His name's Martin—John Martin, I think," I replied. "He's a kind of protégé of the Head's, and he's going to be a fixture in the Ancient House, I believe. Dr. Stafford met him last night and brought him to the school, and he's going to live here in future."

"What," said Tommy, "as one of us?"

"Well, not exactly."

"As a servant, then?"

"No."

"Then what the dickens——"

"As a matter of fact, I don't quite know what position he'll occupy," I said. "He's an orphan, without any relatives at all, and the Head's taken a fancy to him, I believe, because he saved his life last night."

"Begad! He saved the Head's life?"

"So I understand," I replied. "You know that tree that is lying across the lane? Well, the Head was nearly killed by it. He would have been killed if Martin hadn't pulled him out of the way in the nick of time. I don't quite know all the ins and outs of it, but the chap has got a room on the top floor—one of the attics—and he's going to live there as a kind of scholar, studying and living like the rest of us; but he won't be a member of any form. Dr. Stafford will keep his eye on the chap. He's neither a servant nor a pupil, and he isn't one of us."

"Well, there's a rummy position!" said Watson. "I'll bet some of the chaps will jib about it, although I'm not snobbish enough to make any objections. The fellow's welcome to be here, for all I care; but it seems a bit queer that he should have the run of the Ancient House the same as the other chaps."

"I think he'll be all right," I said. "I had a word with him this morning, and I rather like him. If he's any good at football, I'll give him a chance in the reserves. If the fellows don't like it, they can lump it. I'd play the boot-boy if he could make a good show."

As a matter of fact, the whole Remove, and most of the other forms, had a new subject to discuss in the appearance of John Martin. His very presence in the school had not been known until to-day, but now he had suddenly been discovered, so to speak.

Quite a number of juniors were indignant when they learned that Martin had as much right to walk about the Ancient House as themselves, and that he enjoyed privileges which they did not. He wasn't even a St. Frank's chap, in the true sense of the word, and yet he was allowed to study in his own room, instead of attending classes!

This, of course, was just a beginning—to see how John shaped. Later on, perhaps, the Head would allow him to take his place in the Remove, Dr. Stafford himself paying the necessary fees. For the Head was quite determined that John should remain.

"We ought to get up a petition about it," said Gulliver, of the Remove. "A nice thing, I must say! A rotten pauper comin' into the school an' swankin' about as if he owned it! I vote we get up a big agitation an' drive the cad out!"

"I could mention a few other cads who might be driven out," said Pitt pointedly. "They've been at St. Frank's a long time—much to the detriment of St. Frank's! There's one cad in particular, a descendant of a world-famous traveller named Gulliver. Nobody in the Remove would mind if our own Gulliver

travelled a bit, too, and the further he travelled, the better!"

Gulliver scowled.

"Oh, you can be funny!" he sneered. "But my pater does pay my fees, an' this snivellin' cad hasn't even got a pater! He's livin' on charity, an' only a rotten sponger would agree——"

"Give the chap a chance!" put in Owen major. "Dash it all, we've hardly seen him yet! If he puts on airs and shoves himself forward, I'll be one of the first to drop on him; but it's only fair to give him a chance!"

"Hear, hear!"

The subject was dropped, but there was still a great deal of speculation going on in other groups regarding the Head's strange action in taking John Martin into the school.

I came across Nelson Lee out in the Triangle, just before the dinner-bell was due to ring.

"Oh, by the way, Nipper! I forgot to tell you something when I saw you a little while ago," he said. "There is a new boy coming into the Remove to-day."

"You don't mean Martin——"

"No; Martin is not a new boy, in the sense that we use the term," said Nelson Lee. "Martin occupies quite a place of his own, and it is only by the Headmaster's wishes that the situation is so. The new boy I refer to will come down from London by the afternoon train."

"And he's for the Remove?" I asked.

"Yes," replied Nelson Lee; "I have already decided that he shall go into Study K. There are only two boys there at present, Clifton and Simmons, and there is ample room for a third. You had better tell them."

"I don't think they'll take the news with rhapsodies of joy," I said. "They've been rather priding themselves on having Study K on their own. But who's the new chap, guv'nor?"

"His name is Snipe."

"What?" I gasped.

"Snipe," smiled Nelson Lee. "Enoch Snipe, to be exact."

"Poor chap!" I said sadly. "I'm sorry for him before he arrives! I'm afraid that he'll have a fearful time of it, with a name like that. He'd far better call himself Tom Smith or Willy Jones."

"Don't be ridiculous, Nipper!" smiled Lee. "The boy must use his right name, however strange it may seem, and it is merely an exhibition of ignorance to laugh and make fun of a name. I am hoping that the Remove boys will know their manners better than to joke at the expense of the newcomer's name."

"I think I know their manners better than you do, guv'nor," I grinned. "They'll chip the poor chap until he'll want to crawl away and die. Do you know who he is, or anything about him?"

"His father, I think, is a business man in the city," replied Lee. "The boy has only just left a big school in the West of England. The climate wasn't suitable for his health, I believe, so his parents are sending him to St. Frank's."

"Oh, one of those delicate darlings!" I grinned. "Oh, well, he'll soon have some of the delicacy knocked out of him in the Remove!"

I left the guv'nor and took the unwelcome news to Clifton and Simmons, who were not only disgusted, but decidedly indignant. They had no desire to share their study with a third member. But, as it happened, they had no voice in the matter. They had to accept the inevitable.

It was a half-holiday that day, and the wind was still very high, but not equalling the fury of the evening before. And during the afternoon Enoch Snipe arrived. He fitted his name exactly.

Handforth & Co. and a few other juniors were in the Triangle when the new junior walked in through the gateway. Handforth & Co. stared. They rubbed their eyes and stared again.

"What is it?" asked Handforth faintly.

"Goodness knows!" said Church.

"It can't be—yet it must be!" exclaimed McClure weakly. "My only hat! It's Snipe—the one and only Enoch! Well, I've never known a name to be more suitable in all my giddy life!"

The new boy advanced into the Triangle. He was carrying a small suit-case, and he was attired in Etons, with an overcoat and a top-hat. In respect of clothing, he was very much the same as other boys.

But it was in the junior himself that he was so extraordinary. He seemed to be so thin that his clothes, although cut small, hung upon him like a collection of rags. His back was somewhat hunched, and he had a long neck and a head that projected forward. His hands were long and thin and bony, and his features were sharp and foxy in expression. His eyes protruded from his head, and they were red-rimmed in a most peculiar way.

Handforth & Co. advanced to the attack.

"Half-a-minute!" said Handforth briskly. "You've made a mistake, haven't you? This is St. Frank's College, not a home for freaks!"

The new boy turned his watery, pale blue eyes upon Handforth.

"Yes, I know it is St. Frank's," he said, in a thin, unpleasant voice. "It is my misfortune that I resemble a freak. I cannot help it. My name is Enoch Snipe, and I shall be obliged if you can direct me to the Ancient House."

"There's no hurry," said Handforth. "So you're Enoch Snipe, are you?"

"Yes."

"You look it!" said Edward Oswald bluntly. "You're going into the Remove, ain't you? Well, I'm in the Remove, and you'd better understand at once that I never put up with any rot."

"I hope I have not offended you——" began Snipe.

"You have," interrupted Handforth. "I'm feeling horribly bad. The very sight of you is enough to offend a blind man."

"Go easy!" muttered Church. "The chap can't help it!"

"Thank you--thank you very much!" said Enoch Snipe, turning to Church, and speaking in a soft, purring voice. "I am, unfortunately,

different from other boys, and I was afraid that my appearance would not be favourable. But I will try my best to please you."

"To begin with, you mustn't be cheeky," said Handforth firmly.

"I will try not to be," said Snipe cringingly.

"You must respect me more than the other fellows—if you don't I'll punch your nose!" continued the leader of Study D. "You're a new kid, and you've got to look upon yourself as a worm."

"I will do my best to do so," purred Snipe.

"That'll be easy enough!" said McClure contemptuously. "You seem to be several kinds of a worm already!"

"I would not presume to push myself forward," said the new boy. "I am sorry if I have offended you in any way. Will you please tell me which is the Ancient House? I am most anxious to get indoors."

"That's the Ancient House over there," said Church, pointing.

Enoch Snipe smiled, and Church felt rather faint.

"I'm awfully obliged!" said Snipe, giving a kind of writhe. "You have been very kind to me."

He walked off, and the juniors looked after him. Church took a deep breath.

"Did you spot that smile of his?" he asked. "I've never seen such a queer-looking chap in all my life! A worm, you chaps."

"Absolutely a cringing toad!" said McClure. "I've got an idea that he won't be very popular in the Remove. I don't like the look in his eyes—they're fishy. You can't find any expression in them."

"It's hard lines on Clifton and Simmons," exclaimed Church. "I shouldn't be surprised if they kick him out of Study K. A chap like that oughtn't to be allowed to come to St. Frank's."

In the meantime, Enoch Snipe entered the Ancient House, and presented himself to Nelson Lee, who was unpleasantly surprised. The famous detective was a keen reader of character,

Quick as lightning John's fist shot out. It struck Fullwood squarely in the face, and the Cad of the Remove went over like a ninepin.

and he took an instinctive dislike to this boy. Something told him that Snipe was not to be trusted. But he was the very essence of politeness and humility, and no fault could be found with him. This, in fact, was the very thing which had utterly disarmed Handforth. Snipe's humility had presented Handforth with no opportunity to start punching.

Enoch Snipe wandered about the school for the remainder of the afternoon. Yet he did not push himself forward in any way. He seemed to have an extraordinary knack of effacing himself just when he liked. He went over the Ancient House, examined the Triangle, and even ventured into the College House. Christine and Co., and the other cheerful Monks, were absent, it being half-holiday, and so the new boy came to no harm.

But all sorts of fellows came across him.

They stared, they wondered, and they could

hardly believe that this new boy was really a Removite. Snipe was causing far more comment than John Martin—"the Charity Kid," as some of the ungentlemanly fellows were already calling him.

Clifton and Simmons, of Study K, had been over to Bannington during the afternoon, and they did not arrive back at St. Frank's until nearly tea-time. They knew, of course, that the new boy was due to arrive that afternoon, and they had been discussing the matter with no little heat.

But they were certainly not prepared for the reality.

They found Enoch Snipe in Study K when they entered the Ancient House. The new boy was sitting in front of the fire, on the edge of a chair. But he instantly rose to his feet as the two juniors entered.

"I—I'm very sorry——" he began cringingly.

"Great Scot!" gasped Clifton. "What the dickens are you doing in this study? Who are you? And how did you escape from the freak show?"

"My name is Snipe, and—and I'm a new boy, sir!" exclaimed Snipe, looking everywhere but at the two juniors. "Mr. Lee told me to come here, please, and I'm—I'm here. I apologise for intruding——"

"That's all right!" growled Simmons. "No need to apologise, fathead! I don't mind telling you that you ain't wanted in this study—not that that makes any difference. We've got to obey orders. How long have you been here?"

"About two hours, sir!" replied Snipe, wriggling as he spoke.

"Then why didn't you make up the fire?" demanded Clifton.

"Please, sir, I didn't like to interfere——"

"Don't call me 'sir,' you ass!" broke in Clifton, with a grin. "I'm not your giddy master. You're going to share this study with us, and so you'd better shake down as soon a possible."

"Yes, thank you," said Enoch Snipe meekly. "If I may be allowed to voice a few words——"

"Go ahead!"

"Really, I've no wish to push myself forward," said Snipe humbly. "I—I would not presume to speak if you do not wish it. I will always do just as you tell me. I will never push myself forward. I—I wish to thank you for treating me so generously."

Clifton and Simmons stared.

"Where did you leave your giddy backbone?" asked Clifton bluntly. "Or perhaps you were born without one? Anyhow, there's no need to crawl on your giddy tummy in front of us. You've got an equal share in this study, and as much right to it as we have."

"Oh, I wouldn't presume to push myself forward——"

"Dash it all, you're more meek and mild than that charity bounder upstairs!" put in Simmons. "We've got a chap here named Martin. He isn't really a St. Frank's fellow, but he's been taken in by the Head."

"You mean he's taken the Head in!" said Clifton, grinning.

"I jolly well believe he has!" agreed Simmons. "Personally, I don't believe in it. Martin's an orphan—practically a workhouse brat, and it's a disgrace to St. Frank's that he should be here—with a room to himself, too! I've made up my mind to cut him dead whenever I pass him."

"Same here," said Clifton. "Goodness knows, I'm not a snob, but I do draw the line somewhere. You'd better understand, Tripe, that you'll have to share the exes. of this study——"

"Please, sir, my name is Snipe," said the new boy.

"Well, Snipe then! Your pater ought to be boiled for giving you a name like that," said Clifton. "It's nearly tea-time, and it's a rule at St. Frank's that the expenses should be equally shared in every study."

Enoch Snipe wriggled uncomfortably.

"Oh, but—but——" he hesitated. "Please, may I venture to speak?"

"Oh, don't be a fathead!" snapped Simmons. "Of course you can speak!"

"I—I understand that the expenses at St. Frank's are rather high," said the new boy. "My father told me that he is paying a lot of money for me. Does not the school provide tea?"

"Of course the school provides tea—in Hall," said Clifton. "But we enjoy the privilege of having tea in our own studies, if we like. It's more cosy and pally, you know. As you're a new chap, we'll treat you to-night, but after this we'll share things on an equal scale."

"Oh, no! Please, please!" interrupted Snipe quickly, his shifty eyes bolting from one junior to another. "You must not spend money on me. I—I would not think of bothering you so much. And—and I shall always have my tea in Hall, so that I shall not interfere with your present arrangements."

The chums of Study K stared again.

"Hard up?" asked Clifton bluntly.

"No! I—I have money——"

"Then you're one of those mean bounders?" asked Clifton sourly. "All right; have tea in Hall, if you like. We sha'n't interfere. You can have the left-hand corner of the shelf for your books——"

"Really, I only need a very small space," said Enoch Snipe. "They will do quite well on the floor, thank you. I'm sorry to be so much trouble, and—and I hope I have not been annoying you."

Clifton and Simmons had been half hoping for an opportunity to seize the new fellow, and "put him through the mill." But Enoch Snipe was so meek and humble that he gave the juniors no chance whatever. They had not the slightest excuse for ragging him.

A little later on, after tea, Snipe happened to be in the lobby. He walked in a peculiar way, slinking near the wall, as though doing his utmost to make himself inconspicuous. The Remove had already decided that he was the most unutterable worm that had ever entered the Ancient House. They looked upon him as a harmless insect. They didn't know Enoch Snipe.

John Martin happened to come downstairs

just as Snipe went into the lobby. John, as a matter of fact, was feeling happier than he had ever felt for many a year. His face was flushed with genuine health and good spirits. There was a sparkle in his eye, and he was just coming down to take a walk in the Triangle.

So far, he had not ventured to associate with the fellows. He knew, instinctively, however, that some of the juniors would be ready enough to chat. Others, probably, would sneer at him. The latter thought made him redden somewhat. He realised that he might have many a struggle yet.

Even now he could hardly believe that his good luck was an actual reality. He had a cosy, comfortable little room at the top of the Ancient House. Mrs. Poulter, a kindly soul enough, had taken to John from the very first. And she had fitted up his little attic comfortably and cosily. John had not known such comfort ever before.

He descended into the lobby, and found Enoch Snipe regarding him with a curious intentness. But directly John met the new junior's gaze, Snipe turned his shifty eyes elsewhere. But the first glance had told him that this was the "charity brat." John's very clothing proclaimed the fact.

Otherwise, Snipe would never have known. For John was upright, magnificently built, with a handsome, frank face, and steadfast eyes. And there was an air of refinement about him which could not be overlooked.

John gave Enoch Snipe rather a curious glance, for the new boy's appearance was certainly unusual. He stood there, trying to make himself as small as possible. And he was slowly rubbing his thin, bony hands together.

As John passed him, he smiled.

"Just—just one moment!" he said silkily

John paused.

"You are the boy who is living here on charity?" asked Snipe.

John Martin went crimson.

"Who told you that?" he demanded. "I'm not living on charity, and you'd better not say it again! I shall work for my living while I'm at St. Frank's, and——"

"Really, I—I had no desire to offend you!" murmured Snipe. "But it is curious that you should be here, is it not? St. Frank's is hardly the place for beggars and paupers——"

"Good for you, my son—that's the stuff to give him!" exclaimed Fullwood, turning into the lobby at that moment. "You seem to have some sense, after all! Tell this bally brat that he ain't wanted!"

Gulliver and Bell were with Fullwood, and the three cads of Study A bestowed prolonged stares upon John. They searched him up and down, from his shabby boots to his well-brushed hair. Their behaviour, in fact, was highly objectionable.

"Good thing we came along!" said Ralph Leslie Fullwood. "This is the first chance I've had of speakin' to you, my lad. Which workhouse were you in before you came to St. Frank's?"

"I was never in any workhouse, and I think you know that as well as I do," replied John, hotly. "It seems to me that you're trying to pick a quarrel, but it takes two for that!"

He turned on his heel, boiling with rage, and was about to walk away when Fullwood grasped his arm.

"Hold on!" said Fullwood. "No need to hurry so much. Snipe just called you a pauper, I believe. I'm going a bit further than that, and I think the Head ought to be ashamed of himself for disgracin the school by bringin' you here. St. Frank's is exclusive to young gentlemen, and you'd better understand at once that you're nothing better than a servant. You've got to call me 'sir'!"

John's lip curled.

"'Sir' is a term of respect, and it would be quite impossible for me to use it in connection with you!" he said quietly. "And I think you are mistaken when you say that St. Frank's is exclusive to young gentlemen."

"The cheeky cad!" said Bell, hotly.

"Wait a minute—I'll show him!" snarled Fullwood. "Look here, Martin, you're goin' down on your knees, an' you're goin' to apologise! Understand? Get down on your knees, you penniless brat!"

Crash!

Quick as lightning John's fist shot out. It struck Fullwood squarely in the face, and the cad of the Remove went over backwards like a ninepin, howling with pain and surprise.

"Yow—yaroooh!" he hooted. "You—you snivellin' cur! You son of a pickpocket! You workhouse orphan——"

"Another word, and I'll knock you down again!" exclaimed John, thickly.

Several other juniors had appeared upon the scene. They were Pitt, Grey, De Valerie, and a few more. And they grinned with delight as they witnessed Fullwood's discomfiture at the hands of John Martin. The manner in which John had floored Fullwood stamped him as a fellow to beware of. And he had proved that he would not put up with insults.

Fullwood leapt to his feet, shaking with fury.

"Grab him!" he snarled hoarsely. "By gad! We'll half-skin the miserable cad? Didn't you see what he did, you fellows——"

"We'd like to see him do it again!" said Pitt. "You asked for it, Fully, and you've got it. The chap was perfectly justified in knocking you down, and I admire him for it."

"A bit of a nerve, going for a Remove chap, but he had every excuse," said De Valerie. "I think I'd have done the same."

"You—you rotters!" shouted Fullwood. "This brat is living here on charity! He's a nameless puppy from nowhere! I expect his father was a burglar or a murderer, an' I'll show him——"

"That's quite sufficient, Fullwood! Be silent at once!" snapped a cold, stern voice. "Another word, and I will report you to Dr Stafford."

Fullwood turned, gasping, and found Mr. Crowell in the lobby. As a matter of fact, the Remove Form-master had been just inside the cloak-room, and he had unintentionally overheard most of the altercation.

"Yes, sir—but this chap knocked me down!" shouted Fullwood, fiercely. "He went for me

without any provocation, an' punched me in the face! Who is he, anyway? I'll write to my pater——"

"By all means do so, Fullwood!" interrupted Mr. Crowell, curtly. "And should your father make any enquiries, I should not hesitate to acquaint him with the full facts of the case. Martin knocked you down, and you thoroughly deserved to be knocked down!"

"Why, what——. I—I——" Fullwood was lost for words.

"Good old Crowell!" murmured Pitt delightedly.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood found his voice.

"But—but you don't understand, sir!" he gasped desperately. "I——"

"I know exactly what took place, Fullwood, and I am glad of this opportunity to warn you," interrupted Mr. Crowell. "Martin is certainly not a member of the Remove, but he is here, amongst us, with the full sanction of Dr. Stafford, and by Dr. Stafford's express desire. By what I have seen of him, Martin is a well-behaved, gentlemanly boy, and his action in knocking you down was his only course. You insulted him disgracefully, and without provocation. You stamped yourself as an insufferable young cad, Fullwood, and I am thoroughly ashamed of you."

"But—but——"

"I wish to hear no excuses!" snapped Mr. Crowell. "And let me warn you, boys, that Martin has every right to move about the school. He is not to be insulted or sneered at, and if I hear of any such scenes as this again I shall punish the culprits with the utmost severity. On this occasion, Fullwood, I consider that you have met with a partial reward for your caddishness, and I shall therefore give you merely an imposition of five hundred lines."

"Five hundred lines!" shouted Fullwood, thickly. "For tellin' this workhouse brat that he's not wanted——"

"How dare you?" thundered Mr. Crowell angrily. "Fullwood, I am disgusted with you! You will write me one thousand lines—and if you utter another word I shall take you straight before the Headmaster for a flogging!"

Fullwood opened his mouth, clenched his fists, and then choked back the words which were on the point of coming. He bestowed a look of malevolent hatred upon John Martin, and slunk away. The new boy moved after him.

"One moment, Snipe," said Mr. Crowell quietly.

Enoch Snipe paused, cringing and wriggling.

"Please, sir, I—I——"

"You are a new boy in the school, and I shall not punish you," said Mr. Crowell. "But I heard you insulting Martin before Fullwood appeared. That was utterly unwarrantable and ungentlemanly!"

"Really, sir, I am sorry!" said Snipe, humbly.

"Very well—you may go!" exclaimed Mr. Crowell. "But remember that I have no sympathy whatever with snobbishness in any form."

Enoch Snipe shuffled away, and his very appearance suggested a rat scuttling to its hole. Mr. Crowell turned to John Martin, and smiled.

"I am sorry, Martin, that you should have been so annoyed," he said. "I do not blame you for the action you took, and——"

"I lost my temper, sir," said John, quietly. "I don't like to think of Fullwood getting into trouble on my account, and I hope you will forgive him those thousand lines."

"I admire your spirit, Martin, but I cannot alter my decision," replied Mr. Crowell. "There are some boys in the Remove who are inclined to be exceedingly snobbish and ungentlemanly, I am afraid. I should advise you to avoid them as much as possible."

The Form master nodded, and walked away. John looked very unhappy—as, indeed, he felt. It worried him to think that he was the cause of any trouble or unpleasantness. It hurt him to know that the juniors were against him.

"Cheer up, my son!" said Pitt genially, slapping John on the back. "You mustn't take any notice of Fullwood and his rotten crowd. They're not true representatives of the Remove. Keep smiling—that's the best thing to do. The way you floored Fully was a sight for sore eyes."

"Rather!" said Grey. "You'll find that the majority of the Remove fellows are quite a decent crowd, and you'll get on as right as anything after you've shaken down. Good luck to you!"

In a way John felt relieved. But at the same time he knew that he had made several bitter enemies. And the thought was not a pleasant one.

CHAPTER V.

SOMETHING LIKE A GALE.

BOOM—boom—boom!

It was like the thunder of heavy artillery in the distance. The wind roared and bellowed with ever increasing violence. Throughout the night it had been gathering its strength, and now it was a raging thunderous gale.

It was morning now, and St. Frank's was looking strange. The trees and bushes were staggering wildly under the force of the wind, and now and again twigs and branches were swept off, and carried madly through the air.

The heavy wooden fence which divided part of the Triangle from the playing fields had been swept down during the night. And now it lay in a state of battered wreckage in the Triangle. The hedge which adjoined it was torn and ragged, and beating about desperately, as though fighting for existence.

Within the Ancient House the windows rattled, doors slammed, and every corridor and passage was filled with cold, icy draughts, which eddied and swirled in the most cuttin, manner.

Everybody in the school was talking about the gale.

(*Continued on page 25.*)

NIPPER'S MAGAZINE

No. 12. THE JOURNAL OF THE REMOVE OF ST. FRANK'S Edited by Nipper. February 11, 1922.

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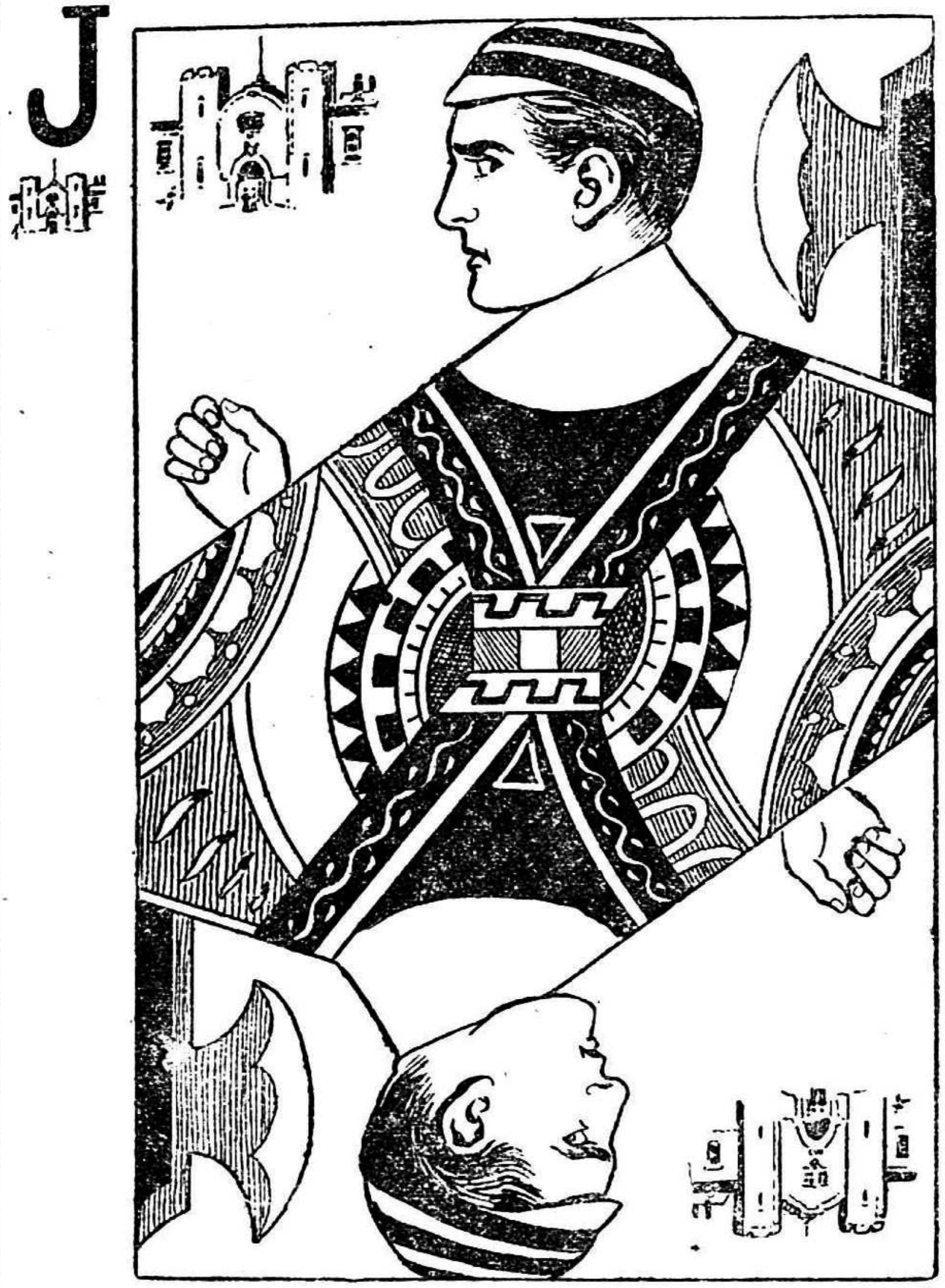


~ FULLWOOD ~ THE KNAVE OF ST. FRANK'S.

PECK'S BAD BOY AND HIS "PA".

THE BAD BOY IN LOVE!

Are you a Christian ?—No Getting to Heaven on Small Potatoes—Ma Says It's Good For a Boy to Be In Love—Love Weakens the Bad Boy—How Much Does It Cost to Get Married ?—Mad Dog !—Never Eat Ice Cream.

"ARE you a Christian ?" asked the bad boy of the grocery man, as that gentleman was placing vegetables out in front of the grocery one morning.

"Well, I hope so," answered the grocery man, "I try to do what is right."

"Then how is it that you put out a box of great big potatoes, and when we order some, and they come to the table, they are little bits of things, not bigger than a raddish ? Do you expect to get to heaven on such small potatoes, when you use big ones for a sign ?" asked the boy, as he took out a silk handkerchief and brushed a speck of dust off his nicely blacked shoes.

The grocery man blushed and said he did not mean to take any such advantage of his customers. He said it must have been a mistake of the boy that delivers groceries.

"Then you must hire the boy to make mistakes, for it has been so every time we have had potatoes for five years," said the boy.

"Oh, such things will happen," said the grocery man, with a laugh. "But don't let's talk about heaven. How's things at home ? And say, what's the matter with you ? You are all dressed up, and have got a clean shirt on, and your shoes blacked ; and I notice your pants are not ravelled out so at the bottoms of the legs behind. You are not in love, are you ?"

"Well, I should smile," said the boy, as he looked in a small mirror on the counter, covered with fly specks. "A girl got sweet on me, and Ma says it is good for a boy who hasn't got no sister to be in love with a girl, and so I kind of tumbled to myself, and she don't go nowhere without I go with her.

"I take her to dancing school, and everywhere, and she loves me like a house afire. Say, was you ever in love ? Makes a fellow feel queer, don't it ? Well, sir, the first time I went home with her I put my arm around her, and honest, it scared me. It was just like when you take hold of the handles of a 'lectric battery, and you can't let go till the man turns the knob. Honest, I was just as weak as a cat. I thought she had needles in her belt and was going to take my arm away, but it was just like it was glued on. I asked her if she felt that way, too, and she said she used to, but it was nothing when you got used to it. That made me mad. But she is older than me and knows more about it. When I was going to leave her at the gate she kissed me, and that was worse than putting my arm around her. I trembled all over just like I had chills, but I was as warm as toast.

"The next morning I went to her house before any of them

were up, and her Pa came out to let the cat in, and I asked him what time his girl got up, and he laffed and said I had got it bad, and that I had better go home and not be picked till I got ripe. Say, how much does it cost to get married ? "

"Well, I should say you had got it bad," said the grocery man, as he set out a basket of beets. "Your getting in love will be a great thing for your Pa. You won't have any time to play any more jokes on him."

"Oh, I guess we can find time to keep Pa from being lonesome. Have you seen him this morning ? You ought to have seen him last night. You see, my chum's Pa has got a setter dog stuffed. It is one that died two years ago and he thought a great deal of it, and he had it stuffed, for an ornament. Well, my chum and me took the dog and put it on our front steps, and took some cotton and fastened it to the dog's mouth so it looked just like froth, and we got behind the door and waited for Pa to come home from the theatre. When Pa started to come up the steps I growled, and Pa looked at the dog and said, 'Mad dog, by Jiminy ! ' and he started down the side walk, and my chum barked just like a dog, and I 'Ki-yi'd and growled like a dog that gets licked, and you ought to see Pa run. He went around in the alley and was going to get in the basement window, and my chum had a revolver with some blank cartridges and we went down in the basement, and when Pa was trying to open the window my chum began to fire towards Pa. Pa hollered that it was only him, and not a burglar, but after my chum fired four shots Pa run and climbed over the fence, and then we took the dog home, and I stayed with my chum all night, and this morning Ma said Pa didn't get home till four o'clock and then a policeman came with him, and Pa talked about mad dogs and being taken for a burglar and nearly killed, and she asked me if I heard any firing of guns, and I said 'no,' and then she put a wet towel on Pa's head."

"You ought to be ashamed," said the grocery man. "How does your Pa like your being in love with the girl ? Does he seem to encourage you in it ? "

"Oh, yes, she was up to our house to borry some tea, and Pa patted her on the cheek, said she was a dear little daisy. When I wanted him to let me have sixpence to buy her some ice cream he said that was all nonsense. He said: 'Look at your Ma. Eating ice cream when she was a girl was what injured her health for life.'

"I asked Ma about it, and she said Pa never paid for ice cream or any luxury for her in all the five years he was courting her. She says he took her to a circus once, but he got free tickets for carrying water for the elephant. She says that Pa was tighter than the bark of a tree. I tell you it's going to be different with me. If there is anything that girl wants she is going to have it if I have to sell Ma's copper boiler to get the money. What is the use of having wealth if you hoard it up and don't enjoy it ? This family will be run on different principles after this, you bet. Say, how much are those yellow wooden pocket combs in the showcase ? I've a good notion to buy one for her. How would one of them round mirrors, with a zinc cover, do for her. There's nothing too good for her."

"I take her to dancing school and everywhere,"

More Amusing Adventures of **Peck's Bad Boy** NEXT WEEK !

THE PROBLEMS OF TRACKETT GRIM

The Amazing and Staggering Adventures of the World's greatest Criminal Detective and his Boy Assistant, Splinter.

By EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH.

No. I.—THE CASE OF THE VANISHED TYPEWRITER.

An Astounding Mystery.

TRACKETT GRIM uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Ah, a client, my dear Splinter!" he exclaimed, in his cold, incisive tone. "Yes, without the slightest doubt, a client."

The most famous detective in the world was standing at the window of his consulting-room in Baker's Inn Road, and Splinter, his celebrated assistant, was busily cleaning his trusty six-chambered revolver.

"A client, sir?" he said briskly. "I'll let him in."

Trackett Grim nodded, and gazed out of the window. He saw the busy traffic, and a man who was dodging across the road. Nobody else on earth but Trackett Grim could have told that the stranger was making for the famous criminologist's rooms. But Trackett Grim saw all things; nothing escaped him.

A moment later the door bell rang, and Splinter ushered a panting gentleman into the consulting-room. He was attired in check trousers and a large bow, and his hair was long and wavy.

"Mr. Fountain Penn, sir," announced Splinter crisply.

"Ah, the famous writer!" said Trackett Grim, in casual tones.

"How—how did you know that I am a writer, Mr. Grim?" asked the writer, in blank amazement. "This is staggering, dumbfounding, in fact! I have heard of your marvellous powers, but——"

"A mere trifle, my dear fellow—quite elementary," interrupted Trackett Grim, fastening his piercing eyes upon Mr. Penn. "I have seen volumes bearing your name on the bookstalls. A perfectly simple deduction."

"Mr. Grim, I am undone. I am at the end of my wits." said Mr. Fountain Penn huskily.

"Ah, you have dried up?"

"No—far, far worse than that!" said the client, with the beads of perspiration streaming out of his face. "My typewriter has been stolen by some dastardly scoundrel!"

"Great heavens above!" exclaimed Trackett Grim hoarsely.

He was attired in check trousers and a large bow, and his hair was long and wavy.

The Famous Detective Investigates.

He regained his composure after a few moments, and, waving his visitor into a chair, he swept the floor with his eyes. Already he had noted the exact size and character of Mr. Fountain Penn's footprints.

"Tell me how this ghastly misfortune occurred to you?" he asked evenly.

"It is so unaccount-

able that I am nearly mad with anxiety," said Mr. Fountain Penn. "I was working late last night, Mr. Grim, and I left my typewriter intact. This morning there was no trace of it, but the window was open."

"Exactly," murmured Trackett Grim. "And, doubtless, a number of your papers were blown about?"

"This is uncanny!" gasped Mr. Penn. "You are right, Mr. Grim. But how could you possibly know?"

"It is windy this morning," said Trackett Grim absently. "These deductions are quite inexplicable to you, my dear sir, but they are child's play to such a celebrated detective as myself."

Trackett Grim opened his waistcoat and revealed a plate of steel armour.

"Yes, yes, of course," said the client. "I want you to recover my typewriter, Mr. Grim. I am lost without it. Even now I am in the middle of my latest novel, and until my typewriter is found, I can do nothing. Please get on the track, and I will pay any fee you choose to mention."

Two minutes later Mr. Fountain Penn had gone, and Trackett Grim and Splinter were preparing for the grim work in hand.

He and Splinter were soon in their fast racing car, travelling at full speed towards Mr. Fountain Penn's home in Cornwall.

Mr. Fountain Penn was pacing his study feverishly. Trackett Grim swept his eyes into every corner of the room at the same second, and so penetrating was his gaze that he gave a grim shout of triumph.

"The theft was committed by Mr. James Reprint, the publisher," he announced.

"Good heavens!" shouted Mr. Penn. "That man is my worst enemy. He tried to fix terms with me for my latest novel; but Mr. George Royalty, a rival publisher, obtained the wonderful masterpiece. But until my typewriter is recovered I cannot complete it. I shall be ruined!"

Trackett Grim gazed at a small card, and noted the address of James Reprint. He had obtained the clue. The detective's marvellous sagacity reaped its reward.

The Downfall of the Thief.

In a flash Trackett Grim and Splinter were outside. They leapt into their car, and reached London in twenty minutes. Bursting straight into James Reprint's office, they found the publisher seated at a typewriter.

"I arrest you in the name of the law!" shouted Trackett Grim.

James Reprint swung round, whipped a revolver from his hip-pocket, and fired six times at point-blank range into Trackett Grim's chest.

The famous detective did not even flinch, but James Reprint staggered over, pierced mortally. His end had come. Trackett Grim opened his waistcoat, and revealed a plate of steel armour. The publisher lay stiff and cold in death.

"Your death is on your own head!" said Trackett Grim curtly. "As you fired, each bullet rebounded from this armour-plate, and entered your blackened soul."

The case was a complete triumph for Trackett Grim. James Reprint made a dash for liberty, but was recaptured by the lightning Splinter. He was sentenced to fifty years penal servitude, and his execution took place in Brixton Gaol.

Next Week: "The Case of the Cocaine Fiend!"

SCHOOLBOY HOWLERS

(This popular feature will continue every week until further notice.)

In a Scottish school, the dominie, in walking round the corridors, heard whistling proceeding from one of the small class-rooms where a few of the youngest children were gathered. Walking in sharply the master stared at the mites of lads, and inquired who the guilty one was.

Now one of the wee things was fresh at school that day, and had never been at any school before. He was quite unaware that whistling was not allowed within school walls.

Thus, with the utmost naïveté, he said:

"It was me, sir! Didn't you know I could whistle?"

* * *

The following story exemplifies the well-known fact that children often look at things in quite a different way to their elders.

During the morning's luncheon interval a teacher was walking about the playground, watching the games and chatting with one boy or another. He came across a lad who was having a jam tart for his lunch, and seemed mightily enjoying it, too.

The teacher thought he would improve the occasion by referring to an object lesson on *sugar* which he had given some days before.

"Now," he said to the lad, "just tell me: How is it that you are enjoying your jam tart with keener relish than that boy Brown there, who has merely got bread-and-butter?"

"Why," replied the lad, glancing round at his mates, "'cose I've got more boys standing a-lookin' at me!"

* * *

During a Scripture lesson, a teacher was passing some remarks upon the verse: "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head."

"Now," said the teacher, "have fishes a place to rest in, as well as the beasts and birds? Do they go to sleep?"

"Yes, sir," answered one of the lads.

"And where do they go to sleep?" asked the master.

"In the bed of the river, sir," responded the lad.

* * *

The dominie of a village school got an equally original piece of information from one of his scholars during a lesson on the life of Jacob. The master had reached the incident of the sending of the waggons to carry the aged patriarch and his family from the land of Canaan, and he read: "And Israel (Jacob) said, 'It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die.'"

"Now, lads," the dominie paused to ask, "how was it that Jacob was so sure that it was indeed his son Joseph who had sent to fetch him?"

And one smock-coated little rustic shortly responded:

"Why, sir, 'cos he seed the name and address on the waggins!"

* * *

A certain member of a rural school board, after his election, lost no time in paying a visit to one of the local schools. The master happened to be engaged in a geography lesson, and the visitor asked if he might be allowed to put a few questions to the lads. He explained to the master that he had recently made a tour in Scotland, and he would like to see what the lads knew about that country. The master—albeit with reluctance—gave his consent and the school board member at once commenced his unofficial examination. Unfortunately, he had a certain fussy or abrupt manner with him which was not at all calculated to put the boys at their ease.

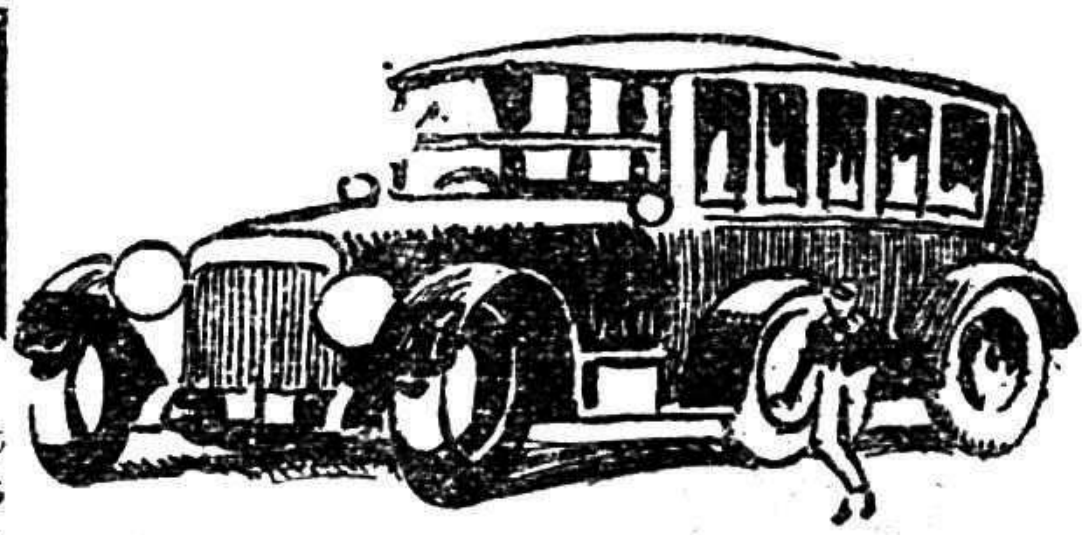
Pointing to a little fellow in front of the class, he said:

"Well, I'll start with you, my lad. Tell me where Ben Nevis is."

"Pl-pl-ease, sir," responded the urchin, quite startled out of his wits by the suddenness of the question, "I'm sure I don't know! He ain't in our class, and I ain't never seen him!"

SOME CAR!

Related by Tommy Watson.



CHAMBERS'S pater had just bought a car—at least, that was what the whole of the Fifth had been told by Chambers junior, until they all began to wish something tragic would happen to that car with Chambers and his pater in it. Finding that the other Fifth Formers either fled from him or pulled his leg whenever he began to talk motor-cars, he turned his attention to the Remove, and the possibilities of writing an article on motor-cars for the Mag. Hence he found his way to Study C to inquire whether Nipper happened to have the current number of "The Autocar." Singleton, who had come in for a chat, thought he could oblige.

"The pater, you know," said Chambers airily, "has just gone in for a a 120 horse Rawls-Roys limousine. Goes like the wind—150 miles an hour on the flat."

"But you could never travel at that speed on an English road," interposed Nipper.

"I drove the 'bus myself from London to Brighton in half an hour," went on Chambers.

"By gad, that's a record, you fellows!" remarked Sir Montie.

"Pooh! That's nothing. Only a trifle over a hundred miles an hour," said Chambers.

"I wasn't referrin' to the speed, my deah fellow," continued Sir Montie, adjusting his pince-nez; "but the amazin' way you must have dodged the police, not to mention the traffic."

"If I had gone 'all out,' I could easily have done the distance in quarter of an hour," said Chambers.

"Sounds more like an aeroplane," remarked Nipper with a grin.

"It has twin six-cylinder engines," proceeded Chambers," six wheels, and a body specially fitted with a lounge, dining-saloon, kitchen, and sleeping accommodation."

"A kind of hotel on wheels," suggested Singleton, with a sly wink at Nipper.

"Yes, of course," responded Chambers. "That was the pater's idea. He wanted to be independent of hotels and inns."

"A wonderful car, really," said Sir Monti. "Did I understand you to say that it has a swimming-bath, a billiard-room, and a drawin' room?"

The juniors chuckled, but Chambers was as serious as a judge.

"If you know anything at all about cars, you would not make such an absurd remark," he retorted. And Sir Montie was supposed to be crushed.

"In fact, when we are touring," continued Chambers, "there is no occasion to leave the car. We take the chef with us, and he provides us with our meals. There is also a night chauffeur to relieve the day chauffeur so that we can travel all through the night."

"I don't want to be rude," broke in Singleton, "but your pater must have spent a few thousands on that car?"

"A matter of twenty thousand, I think," replied Chambers carelessly.

"Phew!" the others exclaimed.

"In winter-time," pursued Chambers, "the interior of the car is superheated by electricity. It doesn't matter how cold it is outside, you never feel the cold inside the car. For the hot weather we have electric fans and dust-proof ventilators."

Sir Montie yawned, Singleton looked tired, and Nipper was languidly turning over the leaves of a book.

"In case we should get stranded in some lonely part of the country," continued Chambers—"and any car is liable to develop engine trouble—the pater has installed a wireless apparatus on the roof of the car."

Before Chambers could say any more the sound of a two-stroke engine came in through the window. Everyone listened intently, and Chambers glided from the room.

"Chambers! Chambers! You're wanted!" someone shouted. "Your pater is here, and wants to take you out in his side-car."

(Continued on next page)

(*Continued from page 23*)

"All right! There is no need to bawl my name out for the whole school to hear," the angry voice of Chambers was heard to rejoin through the open window of Study C, the inmates of whom were now very much awake.

News rapidly circulated round the school that Chambers senior had driven up to the school in his magnificent limousine. Consequently, a large concourse of the fellows had assembled to have a squint at it.

Perhaps Chambers senior wondered why such a fuss should have been made of a very ordinary, mudstained motor-bike, and why some of the boys should call it "some car."

THE EDITOR'S DEN

IMPORTANT.—Correspondence to the Editor of the Magazine should be addressed to the Editor, The Nelson Lee Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

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

My dear Readers,—I do not suppose Fullwood will be very pleased with his portrait on the cover this week. I have already received a number of anonymous letters, which, judging from their contents, I suspect to emanate from the Study A quarter. Strictly speaking, I should be shivering in my shoes, for at any moment the Editorial sanctum might be raided, the office ransacked, and the Members of the Staff subjected to the terrible vengeance of "The Iron Fist." But I have warned our special "Chucker-out" (Edward Oswald) to be on the alert against unwelcome visitors, and he has expressed great willingness to meet the sinister correspondent who dares to hide his identity under the nom-de-plume of "The Iron Fist." Somehow that nom-de-plume seems to have got Handy's back up, and I shouldn't be at all surprised if the author of "Trackett Grim" sets off at the first opportunity to beard the lion in his den.

OUR NEW FEATURE.

Some of you may have noticed from the Form-room windows a stranger within our walls—a gentleman with long, dark hair, squatting on a camp-stool balancing a board on his knees. You probably wonder who he is, where he comes from, what he is doing, and why he disappears like a ghost directly school is over. No, he is not a spy, nor a gentleman sent down by the Office of Works to take measurements. He is a famous artist, who has been commissioned from London to sketch our fine old buildings from various angles for special reproduction on the cover-page of this Magazine. The first sketch will appear next week, and will be a view of St. Frank's, as seen from the road on the Bellton Wood side. This sketch, which will be supplied with a key drawing, will show the Ancient House, the College House, the Chapel, the Clock Tower, the Head's House, the old Monastery Ruins, etc. There will be a series of these sketches—one every week—for a limited number of weeks. I should advise every one of you, my chums, to preserve these drawings of the Old School, and to make sure of the whole series by ordering your copies in advance. Remember that we cannot reprint them.

Your faithful chum,
NIPPER (The Editor).

(*Continued from page* 16.)

It was almost entirely the one topic of conversation. For it was, in truth, the highest wind that the fellows could remember. They little knew that this great gale was destined to be set down in history as the worst ever experienced in the South of England.

Most of the fellows were accustomed to sleeping soundly and well, but the buffeting of the gale had awakened many of them in the early hours. Only a few had been aroused by the rising bell, for the rest were already awake.

I was rather disappointed when I got downstairs and found the weather conditions so unfavourable. With Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson, I went out into the Triangle. It was rather funny.

The very instant that the noble Sir Montie reached the foot of the steps, disaster occurred to him—swift and dramatic. As usual, he was dressed to perfection, and he was even wearing a glossy topper. I had strongly advised him to substitute a cap, but he informed me that the topper was perfectly stable.

He reached the Triangle, and just at that moment a gust of wind came along that fairly lifted the pebbles off the ground and drove them along like hail. Sir Montie caught the full blast of the wind broadside on, so to speak.

"Begad! What—— Help! Dear old boys——"

Sir Montie got no further. He staggered wildly, flapping his arms like mill sails. His beautiful topper was lifted from his head, and it went soaring away high into the air. So great was the force of the wind that Montie's headgear was whirled along like a toy balloon.

He tried his hardest to keep his balance, and, failing, he sat down with uncomfortable abruptness in the very centre of a muddy puddle. With a gasp of dismay he picked himself up, but the wind overbalanced him again.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Sir Montie glared at us painfully.

"Really, dear old boys, this is simply frightful!" he gasped. "Begad! My clothin' is ruined! I'm in a shockin' mess—I'm utterly finished. I am, really! What an appallin' wind!"

It was only with great difficulty that he managed to get these words out, for the wind was driving into his teeth, and he just succeeded in getting to his feet, and reaching the Ancient House steps. His topper, in the meantime, had collided with a tree, and was now careering wildly across the Triangle, gathering mud as it went.

"Hard lines!" grinned Watson. "But, I say! This gale's a bit steep, you know. There'll be some awful damage done——"

"It's done already, dear fellow!" moaned Sir Montie.

He fled indoors and rushed upstairs to change. Tommy Watson and I surveyed the wild-looking scene from the safety of the doorway. But even in this sheltered position we found it difficult to stand upright.

"Rough luck!" I said. "I meant to make history this morning, Tommy."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, we were going to hold the first parade of Cadets," I replied. "All the uniforms are ready, and we were planning to make a grand affair of it. Handy meant to put the Cadets through some drilling——"

"Well, why can't we do it?" asked Watson.

"My dear chap, have your brains blown away like Montie's topper?" I asked. "We can do a fat lot of drilling in a gale like this, can't we? Why, it would be hopeless to go out into the Triangle and attempt it. We'll put it off for another time—— Great Scott! What was that?"

A loud splintering crash had sounded from the direction of the playing fields. We dashed out, and were just in time to see one of the big old trees thundering down, its branches crashing and splintering.

And just then a heavy tile came shooting down, and it splintered to fragments on the ground only a few yards ahead of us. One of the pieces, in fact, struck Watson on the arm, and he looked startled.

"My hat!" he gasped. "It's dangerous to be out here!"

"Seems like it," I exclaimed. "That was a near shave, anyhow!"

And, without a doubt, it had been. If we had moved a pace or two further forward the tile would have struck one of us with terrific violence—and grave injury would have resulted, if not death. For the tile weighed at least six or seven pounds, and came down with hurtling force.

The incident caused us to glance up rather anxiously. We at once went indoors, where a crowd of fellows were watching from the doorway.

"My only hat!" said Reginald Pitt. "This is a gale, if you like! What price our Cadet business?"

"Nothing doing," I replied. "It's absolutely impos., you fellows. By the way things are going on, the whole school will be about our ears before long. There's another tree, I believe!"

"So it is!"

"Well I'm blessed!"

But this time it was only a heavy branch from one of the old chestnuts which tore away bodily from the trunk. A great tornado-like gust had swung down, fairly volleying through the Triangle like the blast from a gigantic propeller.

"Now then, you fellows, you'd better keep indoors!" said Morrow, of the Sixth, bustling up. "The Triangle's out of bounds!"

"What?"

"Out of bounds!"

"Unofficially, yes," said Morrow. "Mr. Lee has told me to go round advising everybody to remain indoors. The other prefects are doing the same. Take Mr. Lee's advice, you kids, and stick inside."

"Rats!" said Hubbard. "There's no danger."

"Isn't there?" growled Tommy Watson. "Nipper and I were nearly killed three minutes ago by a whacking big tile that came whizzing down. It was a frightfully narrow squeak. And Tregellis-West was nearly blown away!"

Morrow went off, leaving the juniors rather thoughtful. In a gale of this sort it was indeed dangerous to go outside. At any moment another tile might come shooting down.

There were other perils, too.

Tree branches were being tossed through the air like pieces of tissue paper. Now and again one of the loosened planks from the destroyed fence would become separated, and shoot across the ground.

The juniors decided, therefore, that the interior of the school was by far the safer place. Of course, one or two foolhardy fellows persisted in going outside—just out of bravado.

Handforth, naturally, was one of these.

"What rot!" he declared. "There's no more danger outside than there is inside! How do we know that the whole blessed school won't collapse? Then where should we be? Buried! It's safer outside, I say!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" protested Church. "There's no chance of the school coming down."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Handforth. "Anyhow, I'm going out!"

He stalked outside, in spite of the warnings of his chums. He had hardly got into the centre of the Triangle before a mighty blast of wind came roaring along. Handforth was walking into the face of it.

The wind struck him like something solid. He staggered, fell back a pace, and then his cap went flying, and it was as much as he could do to keep his balance. Church and McClure watched anxiously from the doorway.

Crash!

The roof of old Josh Cuttle's woodshed lifted clean off like a piece of cardboard. The shed was a solidly built structure, too. The very fact that this roof tore away in one moment is a strong indication of the appalling fury of the hurricane.

"Good heavens!" gasped Church, faintly.

"Run, Handy!" roared McClure.

Handforth was not in a position to run. A branch of a tree smote him full in the face and chest, and he rolled over backwards in the mud. That small tree-branch probably saved his life, for over the exact spot where he was lying the parted roof whizzed, and crashed to the ground a yard or two further on. It broke to pieces, and scattered itself broadcast over the Triangle.

"Great pip!" said Handforth, dazedly.

He had received a scare, and he didn't mind admitting it. He reached the Ancient House doorway in the quickest amount of time possible. He fairly bolted across the Triangle, ably assisted by the wind.

In fact, he came at such a rate that he couldn't stop himself. He flew up the steps, tripped against the top one, and plunged head first into Church and McClure. The three juniors came like a trio of scattered ninepins into the lobby.

"You—you clumsy fatheads!" howled Handforth, breathlessly.

"I—I—gug—gugh!" said McClure faintly.

"Ow!" moaned Church. "You ass!"

They picked themselves up, and Church and McClure soon forgot their own hurts when they looked at Edward Oswald. His face was torn and scratched, there were rents in his clothing, and he was smothered in mud.

That broken branch had hit him with some force, and he was very lucky to have escaped with only a few scratches. He didn't venture into the Triangle again—neither did any of the others.

Morning lessons were a dismal failure.

Work of a serious nature was practically out of the question. At any moment Mr. Crowell expected the Form-room windows to splinter into fragments by the force of the wind, which thundered against the panes continuously. Now and again the interest was increased by a violent rainstorm.

These storms were sudden and tremendous. The rain would come down like something solid, sweeping across the Triangle, and flooding it in less than a minute. Then the sky would clear, and a wan sun would shine for a few minutes. But the wind did not abate.

Towards afternoon, however, there seemed to be signs that the gale was blowing itself out. Those tremendous gusts would not come with such force. And it was quite possible for the fellows to walk about the Triangle—not that there was much fun in this, for the ground was like a morass.

Just before afternoon lessons were due to commence, John Martin came to the door of the Ancient House. He passed outside, and walked across the Triangle, fighting against the wind. As he did so two rough looking men out in the lane paused as they were passing the main gateway.

Both were attired in a kind of seafaring garb—blue jerseys and reefer coats, and they wore peaked caps.

One of them suddenly started, and looked at John fixedly. A puzzled expression came into his face, and he stared harder. But as he did so, John turned and went indoors.

The two men did not immediately go, but hung about the gateway for some little time. The elder one of the two was still looking puzzled.

Owen major and Hubbard came out of the gymnasium, and made for the Ancient House—for the bell was sounding which indicated that afternoon lessons would commence in a few minutes.

"Just a minute, young gents!"

The voice came from the gateway, and the two juniors paused.

"Hallo!" muttered Owen major. "Who are these merchants?"

He and Hubbard went to the gate, and the two men advanced.

"Sorry to trouble you, young gents, but mebbe you'll oblige me by answerin' a simple question," said the elder of the two men.

"Anything you like," said Owen major. "But you'd better buck up, because we've got to go in for lessons——"

"I don't reckon to keep you more than a minute sir," said the man. "A few minutes ago there was a boy out in the playground——"

"Playground!" said Hubbard, indignantly.

"Well, courtyard, or whatever you call it—this 'ere place, to be exact," said the man,

indicating the Triangle. "There was a young feller walkin' about."

"A good many young fellows have been walking about——"

"That's right enough, but this one was different," said the man. "He wasn't wearin' them swell togs like you, although he was just about the same age. Kind o' shabby, I might say, but tidy enough. Well set up boy, with curly hair. I'd like to know——"

"Oh, I know who you mean," said Owen major. "That's right—he was out here a few minutes ago—I spotted him from the gym. windows. That's the kid the Head's got under his wing."

"Mebbe you'd tell me the young gent's name?" asked the man.

"I don't know whether you'd call him a young gentleman," said Owen major. "He's not one of us, you know. He hasn't been here long—the Head found him, and brought him in. His name's Martin."

"Martin?" repeated the man, frowning.

"Yes—John Martin," said Owen major. "That's the only name we know him by, anyway. Some of the chaps say he's living here on charity——"

"That's all right, young gent—thanks," interrupted the man. "H'm! So his name's John Martin, is it? I'm mighty obliged, sir. We'll be wishin' you good-day."

The two rough men passed on, still looking rather puzzled. And Owen major and Hubbard hurried indoors and thought little more about the matter.

But surely this incident was somewhat significant?

Who were these men? And what did they know about John Martin?

CHAPTER VI.

DISASTER!

"MY goodness!" said Tommy Watson. "Just listen to it!"

"Worse than ever, dear old boys—it is—really!"

Sir Montie spoke with concern in his voice—and, indeed, there seemed to be every reason for anxiety. It was nearly bedtime, and outside the weather was appallingly wild.

It really seemed that the gale was increasing in violence. The promise of the early afternoon had not been fulfilled. After that lull for an hour or so, the evening had come on to an accompaniment of worse winds than ever. The storm raged with terrifying fury.

And now, late in the evening, the wind howled and roared. It screamed fiercely round the angles of the Ancient House. And now and again the whole building would fairly shake throughout its length and breadth. A confusion of sounds came from the intense darkness outside.

Quite a number of fellows were looking scared. All sorts of rumours had got abroad during the evening. Somebody had come up from the village, and had declared that two cottages had been blown down, with disastrous results to the occupants. Haystacks and cornstacks were strewn all over the countryside, and trees and fences were down everywhere.

Along the main roads there were miles of telegraph wires lying in hopeless confusion. Many parts of the roads were blocked by fallen trees. And now everything was made doubly bad by the fact that rain was falling like a deluge.

It hissed down continuously—a pitiless, blinding wall of water. We could hear it as we sat in study C. It rattled against the windows, it swept across the Triangle like the fleeing of a thousand demons.

It was well nigh impossible to keep the fire alight, for the down-draught was fearful. In every apartment in the school great gusts of soot had come flying out from the fireplaces. And as soon as a fire was nicely going, the wind would come and send the smoke billowing into the room.

Most of the fellows were quite glad to get to bed.

But even in the dormitory, tucked comfortably between cosy sheets and blankets, sleep was not possible to many. The storm outside was so incessant and terrifying, that most of the fellows sat hunched up in bed, and speaking in awed tones.

"The place will be blown down before morning—you mark my words!" said Armstrong. "I've never known such a wind in all my life. There must be hundreds of ships wrecked along the coast."

"Never mind about the ships!" growled Bell. "What about us? How shall we look if the school tumbles down?"

"Oh, don't be so jolly nervous!" put in Handforth. "The Ancient House has stood here for three or four hundred years—and this ain't the first gale it's had. When this place was built the workmen knew how to put a house together!"

"Dear, dear, dear!" said Timothy Tucker. "Are you suggesting, my dear sir, that the present day workman is insufficiently skilled? Are you implying that he is incapable of emulating the example of his ancestors? I am shocked—indeed, I am appalled. Such a statement is lamentable——"

"Oh, dry up, T. T.!" growled De Valerie. "Don't start an argument now! Blow the British workman and his ancestors! This gale is—— Phew! Just listen to that! Something's gone!"

The wind and the rain filled the air with sounds, and it was impossible to distinguish much else. But a great crashing had come from outside—probably caused by the fall of another tree.

It was certainly the wildest night within memory. Most of the fags were too terrified to go to sleep. Some of them were openly blubbing, and a prefect had to be sent into the Second Form Dormitory to give the kids a feeling of security.

The Third Formers declared that they were prepared for anything. They would never admit that they had "the wind up."

But almost any of the juniors were justified in being frightened. Everybody in the school was anxious. The Headmaster consulted gravely with Nelson Lee. But, as the famous detective pointed out, nothing could be done. It was impossible to battle against the gigantic forces of Nature.

"Really, Mr. Lee, it makes us feel absurdly puny and helpless!" exclaimed Dr. Stafford. "Heaven help the poor souls who are at sea! This gale will cause millions of pounds' worth of damage!"

"Undoubtedly," agreed Nelson Lee. "But I do not think there is any cause for real anxiety at St. Frank's. Our buildings are strongly made, and can withstand a gale. I should not alarm yourself unduly, Dr. Stafford."

But, as the night went on, it seemed that the Head would be quite justified in giving way to alarm. The rain never ceased. The clouds seemed to be emptying themselves of millions of tons of water.

And this pitiless deluge was being driven along by the wind with truly stupendous force. It was a night when disaster would overtake anybody who happened to be out. It was almost impossible to live amid such conditions. The Triangle was already a swirling flood, several inches deep. And the water was roaring down Bellton Lane like a cataract.

Perhaps the one person at St. Frank's who really had cause to be scared out of his wits was John Martin. And John Martin was quite calm. At the same time, he was conscious of the fact that his position was perilous.

He occupied an attic at the top of the Ancient House. Even the Head, in his general anxiety, had forgotten all about his young protege. But John had not forgotten the storm.

Only a thin partition of lath and plaster separated him from a portion of the Ancient House roof. And the rain was pouring down upon the tiles with such intensity that it sounded like continuous thunder. Sleep for John was out of the question.

And when the gusts of wind came he could actually see the roof shaking, and he dimly wondered whether it would be wise for him to go downstairs to the lower floor. But he didn't want to do this—they might think that he was frightened. So John lay in bed, listening to the grim battling of the elements.

Ordinarily, his attic was a most comfortable little room, with a lattice window looking out over the Triangle. He had hung a blanket over it now, for the wind was driving the rain against the panes with such force that the water was finding its way through in many places.

And one or two ominous patches on the white plaster proved that some tiles were loosened, and that the rain was pouring through. John kept a candle burning, for in the darkness the fury of Nature seemed more terrifying.

Time after time he thought that the roof was about to collapse. But each gust passed away, and the sturdy old roof remained intact. And so, finally, the boy began to tell himself that his fears were groundless.

And human nature asserted itself.

He was beginning to feel sleepy. The howling and roaring of the wind, and the hissing of the rain formed a kind of combined roar which lulled him to sleep. Such sounds as these are disturbing at first, but they become even comforting after one has been accustomed to them.

John snuggled down between the sheets, thanking his lucky stars for such a comfortable bed. He kept telling himself how fortunate he was to be dry and warm while many others, perhaps, were cold and wet and miserable. And he was just in this condition of semi-doziness when the disaster came.

The greatest and most appalling tornado of wind came. It swooped down upon the school without warning. And the hurricane struck the Ancient House like a solid battering ram.

Boom—boom—cra-ash!

John sat up in bed, startled and confused.

He felt the floor shaking and trembling. He had not put his candle out, and then, before his startled gaze, the ceiling on the other side of the attic split into a thousand fragments, and a great mass of brickwork came hurtling through, crashing through the floor, and splintering it like matchwood.

John's bed lurched and rolled several feet from its original position. The thunderous noise was terrifying. And, to make matters worse, the candle toppled over, and went out, leaving the attic in pitchy darkness.

A great whirling gust of wind and rain struck John as he tried to get out of bed. And he felt himself almost choking with dust and grit. He was too confused and terrified to realise what had happened.

CHAPTER VII.

A NIGHT OF TERROR!

THE storm had done its worst!

That devastating rush of wind had caused a frightful disaster — a disaster which might easily have ended up in serious loss of life and injury to many.

Reaching high above the Ancient House there were several old chimney stacks—picturesque enough in themselves, and built so solidly that they had withstood the gales of several centuries.

The tallest of these chimney stacks was situated in a direct line above the Remove dormitory. And John Martin's attic lay between the dormitory and the roof.

After weathering hundreds of violent storms, the solid old mass of stonework shivered and shook and collapsed under the onslaught of that stupendous force of wind.

In short, the whole chimney stack collapsed, crashed over, and went hurtling down through the roof and through the attic. There were tons of stonework there, and a terrible disaster was inevitable.

It seemed only by a miracle that John was saved. If his bed had been placed at the other end of the apartment he would have been killed instantly. As it was, he escaped injury.

Down in the dormitory I was fully awake, and so were a good many other fellows—although the time was now between one and two in the morning. We heard that hurricane swoop down upon the school.

We felt the very building quiver and tremble. And a loud, startling report told me that several panes of glass had splintered. A violent gust of wind swept into the dormitory, carrying rain with it.

"This won't do!" I shouted, jumping up. "We shall be swamped out in no time!"

"I say, this is a bit too much!" growled Handforth, sitting up.

"Don't growl at Nipper—he can't help it!" said Church.

"Switch on a light, somebody!"

The electric light was switched on, and then we could see that the further window had practically blown in. The rain was sweeping in like water from a hose. It was driving right across the dormitory.

As we afterwards learned, it was the hand of Providence which broke that window. For every fellow in that section of the dormitory hastily scrambled out of bed, and crowded up the other side, shivering and grumbling.

Half the beds in the dormitory were now empty, for they were becoming soaked, and the rain was distributing itself throughout the apartment. I would never have believed it possible that the wind could blow with such force.

And then it was that the main gust arrived.

We heard a crash—the appalling, devastating roar from above. After that we hardly knew what happened.

The noise was so tremendous that the shouts of the juniors were all drowned. Actually, that huge mass of stonework came tearing through the attic, and through the dormitory ceiling. It crashed through, falling upon the providentially empty beds, splintering the floor, and causing general wreckage.

Many of the juniors were fairly screaming with terror, and they really could not be blamed. A blinding flash had been immediately followed by total darkness. And panic seemed certain.

I knew what had happened. The collapse of the roof had caused the electric wires to fuse, and, as a consequence, half the Ancient House was plunged into darkness.

But this was not the only trouble.

A yawning hole had appeared in the dormitory ceiling. Beams were sagging, and some of these were tumbling down in such a manner that it actually seemed that the whole building was crumbling to pieces.

Plaster from the ceiling fell in great lumps, and in the pitchy darkness the result was terrifying in the extreme.

The juniors were fighting to get outside jammed in the doorway, shouting at the top of their voices. I almost felt sick when I realised that many of them would have been killed but for the fact that the rain had driven them out of bed. For it was in that part of the dormitory that the collapse had occurred.

"Steady, you fellows!" I shouted sternly. "Don't get into a panic! We're all here!"

"The house is falling on top of us!" screamed Gulliver.

"Help! help!" sobbed Fullwood.

"Help!"

"We're all going to be killed!"

"Keep your heads! Keep your heads!" I bellowed.

But my efforts were useless. Nobody took the slightest notice of my words, and the fight in the doorway continued. I wondered how many juniors would be injured as a result of that struggle.

Wind and rain filled the dormitory, and I was already soaked. The rain came pouring down through the gaping hole, but at last the juniors succeeded in getting out on to the landing.

Confusion was almost as bad here.

Outside the storm was buffeting and bellowing. There were no lights, for one of the main fuses had gone, and the entire upper part of the Ancient House was in darkness.

Nelson Lee appeared upon the scene, and his presence soon had an effect. Mr. Crowell was there, nearly as scared as the boys. Prefects were shouting out orders, and the confusion waxed even greater.

But Nelson Lee, armed with an electric torch, bustled about and sorted out the fellows. He seemed brisk and cheerful, but inwardly the guv'nor was filled with grave fears.

He could hardly believe that the juniors had escaped, and the horrible thought kept occurring to him that several boys had perished during that first moment of the collapse.

So his first aim was to restore order, and to call the roll. He wanted to find if all the boys were there, and gradually order grew out of confusion. Some of the seniors had fetched candles, and these were being carried about, careless of the splashing wax.

The Fifth Formers were told to remain in their own dormitory, for it would only cause worse chaos if they came out; and at length the Remove was formed up into a big double line along the corridor.

Nelson Lee commenced calling the roll.

All the boys answered in turn—Armstrong, Bell, Burton, Church, Clifton, and so on in alphabetical order. But when Nelson Lee came to the "H's" there was a pause.

"Handforth!"

"Here, sir!"

"Hubbard!"

No answer.

"Hubbard!" called Lee again sharply. "Are you here, Hubbard?"

There was still no answer.

"Hubbard! Hubbard!" shouted Nelson Lee. "He's not here, sir; nobody's seen him

since we came out!" said Pitt, in alarm. "He must have been left in the dormitory!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Perhaps he's killed!"

"Don't jump to conclusions, boys!" said the guv'nor sharply. "Hubbard is probably in one of the other rooms. We will complete the roll-call before taking any further action. I must know if there are any other boys missing."

And, to the accompaniment of the raging storm outside, the roll-call was completed. Every other fellow answered promptly to his name. Hubbard was the only missing fellow.

Lee was more relieved than he cared to say. He had feared that half-a-dozen would be missing, but even one was serious enough, and it seemed impossible that Arthur Hubbard could have escaped death.

"He must have been over the other part of the dormitory when the crash came!" wailed Teddy Long. "Oh, it's terrible! Poor old Hubbard, he's dead; he's been killed!"

"Keep quiet, you young ass!" snapped Church angrily.

"But Hubbard ain't here!" sobbed Teddy, shivering with fear. "Thank goodness, we're safe, anyway! We might have been killed like that. Even now the walls may fall in!"

"Gag that young idiot, somebody!" growled Pitt. "He can't help it, poor kid; but he'll start a panic soon!"

Nobody was allowed near the wrecked dormitory. The door was blowing about noisily, and while it was open we could hear the swirling of the rain. And then came a great crashing sound.

At the same time a number of Fifth Formers burst out of their dormitory, yelling with alarm.

"The ceiling's falling!" bawled Chambers.

"It's coming down in chunks!" gasped Bryant.

The Fifth Formers came surging out, and, in the meantime, a tense little drama was being enacted in the devastated Remove dormitory. But we knew nothing about it until shortly afterwards.

In the midst of all the excitement and confusion and noise a thought suddenly came to me which made me feel rather queer. Nelson Lee was near me just then, and I turned to him quickly.

"Guv'nor," I exclaimed, "what about that chap upstairs—Martin?"

Nelson Lee started.

"Martin!" he repeated. "Good gracious, Nipper, that boy was sleeping in the attic immediately above your dormitory! I'm afraid that the unfortunate lad has perished. Surely he could never have survived, since his attic must have been wrecked during the first few moments?"

"Oh, my goodness!" I said huskily. "What a horrible thing, sir! But I'll just rush upstairs and have a look!"

Without another word, I hurried to the upper stairs and pelted up. As I did so another violent wind-storm swept down over the school. From overhead came the sound of rending and crashing, and I could guess what this meant. Further portions of the roof were being torn off.

I reached the top landing and gasped. It was like a river. Water was dripping through everywhere, and the floor was soaked and running with water. The door of John Martin's attic was twisted and warped, and half-open; and even as I approached it a gust of wind came along and swung it back with such force that it was wrenched from its hinges and collapsed.

I stood just in the doorway and switched on my electric torch. The attic itself was demolished. The floor—or what remained of it—was a mass of twisted beams, laths, plaster, and rubbish. A tremendous hole yawned in the ceiling, through which the full fury of the storm came tearing, and the floor itself had practically vanished. Only a great, jagged, uneven hole was there, with John Martin's bed jammed amidst the wreckage. There was no sign of the chap himself.

"Poor kid!" I muttered. "He didn't stand an earthly!"

But, as it happened, John Martin was very much alive.

After the first shock of the affair had worn off, he tried to make out what the extent of the catastrophe was. But this was very difficult in the total darkness, and with the wind and rain hissing and swirling all about him.

To strike a match was almost impossible—at least, quite useless, for no match would burn. John knew, however, that the other end of his little room was demolished. He could not reach the door; he was trapped up there, at the mercy of the elements.

But then, while he was still endeavouring to think of some way out, he felt that the flooring was sagging beneath him. An ominous cracking and groaning of timbers came to his ears, even above the raging of the storm. He clutched at the air and gave a sharp cry of alarm.

For the floor was collapsing!

Almost before he knew it, he felt himself precipitated downwards into the inky darkness, amid the swirl of beating rain and eddying wind. John Martin thought that his last minute had come.

Crash!

He heard the rending and splintering of wood on every side, but he was too dazed to know exactly what happened. He only knew that he was aching with pain, and that he had landed flat on his back. He was soaked through and numbed with cold. As a matter of fact, John had had a remarkable experience.

The attic floor had collapsed, hurling him down into the Remove dormitory below. The distance, of course, was comparatively slight, but if the boy had become jammed between the wrecked woodwork, he would have been terribly injured. As it was, he slithered down the sagging floor and landed in a heap on a bare space where there were no jagged obstructions.

Consequently, he was merely bruised and grazed, and the darkness smothered everything.

John lay where he was for some moments, wondering if this was actually happening, or whether he was in the midst of a terrible nightmare.

Then he thought he heard a sound.

"Help!" came a groaning voice. "Oh, you chaps, lend a hand here!"

John sat up and rose unsteadily to his feet. The night's adventures had made him sceptical of any kind of safety, and he had a feeling that this floor might collapse, too. The darkness was unnerving. He could not help wondering how many pitfalls there were on all sides.

If he could have seen he would have known that his position, although decidedly uncomfortable, was now practically safe. There was a clear way for him to the door of the dormitory—and security on the other side. And John did know of this a moment later.

For the dormitory door swung open as a mighty gust of wind shot down through the gaping hole in the ceiling. There were lights out in the corridor. John, being in total darkness, had a clear view.

The dim light in the corridor was like a beacon to him; he could see a clear way to the door, and he had just commenced making his way towards it when he came to an abrupt halt.

"Who's that?" came the painful voice. "Hi, you chaps! Help! I'm held down by this rotten beam——"

"Who's that?" asked John quickly.

"I'm Hubbard. Lend a hand, for goodness sake!" gasped the junior. "I'm up this corner—I can feel the beam giving way—it'll fall and crush me in half in a minute. Hurry—hurry——"

"All right!" said John. "Hold tight!"

The storm was raging as violently as ever, and now and again the Ancient House seemed to shake worse than ever before. John hacked his shins against several obstructions before he came upon Hubbard of the Remove. Even now he couldn't see, but had to rely upon his sense of touch.

But he could easily picture the position.

Hubbard had been caught by a great beam when the first crash came. The junior was more scared than hurt, and he was held down in such a way that he could not move. It was impossible for him to extricate himself.

"Keep calm—I'll soon have you out of this!" said John quietly.

"The whole show is going to collapse—I can feel it!" panted Hubbard. "Oh, be quick—there's no time——"

"Don't get into a panic!" ordered John sternly.

He felt about him carefully. He seemed to have no strength, for he was icily cold, and his bruises were severe. That fall through the attic floor had hurt him more than he realised.

He could feel the big beam which was holding Hubbard down. It was held precariously by some other loose beams. And when John touched it he could feel that it was partially balanced. But if he tugged at it he would probably bring disaster both upon Hubbard and himself. He might cause the whole wreckage to crash down over their heads.

John knew the danger. He realised surely enough that an attempt to save the junior might cost him his own life. But he didn't hesitate a moment. Left to himself, Hubbard would certainly perish.

John seized the great beam, and exerted every ounce of his strength. If that wrecked mass of woodwork had been solid it would have required a crane to shift it. But it seemed to be partially balanced, and so, when John's strength was exerted, the whole tottering pile moved.

Hubbard gave a sigh of relief.

"That's right—that's right!" he panted. "Keep it like that for a minute! I—I can move—I can——"

"Crawl—out!" gasped John, between his clenched teeth.

He thought that his muscles would burst. Only by the greatest effort of will power did he sustain the pressure. He never knew, afterwards, how he managed it. It seemed to him that every bone and muscle in his body was about to break.

Hubbard certainly lost no time. Numbed with cold as he was, he managed to worm his way out into safety. And, as it turned out, he was only just in the very nick of time. For he had hardly got clear before the world seemed to come to an end.

An appalling, frightful crashing and rending filled the air. Hubbard faintly heard a sharp, tense cry of alarm from John. And then silence—ominous silence. Hubbard was dazed and bewildered.

He knew that beam had collapsed, but he could not see what happened to John. His rescuer had met with disaster at the very moment of success. Hubbard staggered towards the doorway, sobbing with pain and terror.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FLOOD!

NELSON LEE uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Hubard!" he said thankfully. "My boy——"

"Help—help!" panted Hubbard desperately.

He had just emerged from the dormitory door. Outside, in the corridor, Nelson Lee was even then preparing to go in search of the missing junior. Only a few minutes had elapsed since the roll call had been taken, and Lee had lost no time.

His relief at seeing Hubbard was unbounded. He rushed forward, and took the soaking, shivering junior into his arms. Hubbard was scared out of his wits, and his left leg, just above the knee, was badly bruised—where he had been pinned down by the beam. It would be necessary for him to stay in bed for several days, until he recovered.

"Thank Heaven you are safe!" said Nelson Lee. "Why did you not come out with the other boys, Hubbard——"

"I—I couldn't, sir," said Hubbard faintly "I was held down by a beam; I—I think my leg's broken, sir. Oh, I shall die over this—I know I shall! Please—please send for my mater and pater——"

"Come, come," said Lee sharply. "Don't give way like that, Hubbard. We will soon see what is the matter with you. Come now—that's the way!"

Nelson Lee was really very kindly, but he spoke in a sharp tone in order to prevent Hubbard from going off into hysterics. Lee could see quite clearly that the junior was more frightened than anything else, and the fact that he had walked unaided out of the dormitory proved that his leg was in a fairly good condition.

He lifted Hubbard into his arms, with the intention of carrying him to his own bedroom. But the junior suddenly stared at Lee in horror.

"There's—there's that new chap, sir!" he whispered. "I—I think he's killed! Oh, it's awful—horrible——"

"That—that charity chap, Sir—Martin!" moaned Hubbard. "Oh, he's a brick—he's the bravest chap I've ever known! I shall never forget him—never! He saved my life, sir!"

"Martin!" said Lee quickly. "Tell me what happened!"

Hubbard babbled out the story between his sobs and gasps. How John had rescued him, and how the beam had collapsed immediately afterwards.

"He—he must have been buried in all the wreckage, sir," finished up Hubbard, chokingly. "Oh, it's too horrible!"

Lee looked round sharply.

"Fenton!" he called. "Take this boy, and place him in my bed. See that he is made comfortable. I will attend to him personally later on."

The captain of St. Frank's took the hysterical junior, and Nelson Lee looked round again. I caught his eye, and came over to him. The guv'nor's face was grave and set.

"Don't say anything to the others, Nipper, but I'm afraid that a tragedy has occurred, after all," he said quietly. "Hubbard was rescued by John Martin, and I have every reason to believe that Martin was killed by a collapse of the wreckage. But we must make absolutely sure."

"Oh, poor chap!" I said concernedly.

Lee strode into the dormitory, flashing the light from his torch in front of him. I followed. The wind and the rain hissed through the wrecked apartment as though it were exposed to the full open. The most dire confusion reigned. Beds were tossed about, soaking sheets lay all over the floor, and everything was smothered in mud, plaster and debris of every description.

And, at the other end of the dormitory, the floor was burst open and sagging—where the mass of stonework had fallen. Overhead, the ceiling was an absolute wreck. At any moment further collapses might take place.

Nelson Lee suddenly caught his breath in.

"Thank Heaven!" he said huskily.

Stretched on the wet floor was the form of John Martin. He was not buried as we had feared. When the beam collapsed, John had staggered back, swooning. The exertion and the pain had been too much for him. Sturdy and strong though he was by nature, he had recently suffered many privations, and this great ordeal had been more than his frame could stand.

He collapsed, utterly spent.

He had rescued Hubbard, but at grave expense to himself. He lay there, pale as death, and horribly still. Even as Nelson Lee bent down, a mighty storm of wind swept down upon the school. The timbers over our heads creaked and groaned in a startling way.

"I'll lend a hand, sir!" I said quickly.

Together we lifted Martin up, and carried him out. It was merciful that we did so. We had only just reached the door when I had an idea that the whole Ancient House was tumbling to ruin. I was deafened and confused by the appalling noise. Everything seemed exaggerated in this living nightmare.

As a matter of fact, the rest of the dormitory ceiling collapsed. The beams and plaster came thundering down. If John had been left there, nothing could have saved him from a terrible death.

As it was, he was merely exhausted and bruised. And, twenty minutes later, he was snugly lying between the sheets of Morrow's bed. And he had already recovered from his swoon of exhaustion. He looked wan and pale, but a great relief filled his eyes. He knew that Hubbard was safe. His effort had not been for nothing.

Confusion still held possession in other parts of the Ancient House.

The storm was exerting its last outburst of violence. It could never keep up this terrible intensity for long. The rain was hissing down in solid sheets, and so great was the force of the wind that practically all the tiled portion of the Ancient House roof was ripped off. That opening caused by the fallen chimney stack had given the gale the chance it needed.

And the gale made good use of that chance. Each blinding gust that came along lifted scores of tiles, and sent them scattering broadcast. Fortunately, the main part of the Ancient House was flat, with a lead roofing. And this was quite unharmed. But the whole of the wing containing the Remove dormitory was uncovered—the roof was ripped away.

And the rain, seething in, caused further widespread destruction. The whole upper floor became a flood. The water spread, with the result that the Fifth Form dormitory suffered great damage. The ceiling gave way, and crashed down—although the beams remained intact. The Third Form room, which lay immediately underneath the Remove dormitory, suffered as much as the other apartments. It was flooded out and ruined.

The juniors were never likely to forget that terrible night. They hardly slept a wink. Those who did obtain some sleep suffered from nightmares. And the morning dawned upon a strange-looking world.

It was incredible that such widespread damage could have been caused in a single night. Soon after the dawn the fellows were only too glad to dress and get downstairs—into the main portion of the Ancient House, which was unharmed.

Outside the whole landscape was pitiful to look upon.

The storm, as the fellows knew—without being told—was the worst which had ever swept over the Southern Counties. It broke all records, and caused millions of pounds' worth of damage, to say nothing of the loss of many lives. In the latter respect, St. Frank's was fortunate.

With the dawn the hurricane abated. The rain ceased, and the gale lost its deadly violence.

It was still blowing hard, but with not sufficient strength to cause any further disaster. The weather experts, in fact, declared that the gale had spent itself, and would now die down.

At least a dozen trees were down in the immediate vicinity of the Triangle. Cuttle's woodshed was demolished, practically every fence was flattened and wrecked, and the Triangle was a flood.

The water lay inches deep everywhere. Several of the stables and outhouses in the rear had suffered great damage, slates and tiles being scattered by the score. Windows were smashed, and the storm had created the utmost havoc.

Bellton Lane was unrecognisable.

The whole surface of the road had been washed away, and it now looked like the watercourse of a river. Deep gulleys zigzagged across the roadway, making it impossible for vehicular traffic to proceed. Not that there was any likelihood of any vehicles coming along.

For the disaster at St. Frank's was doubled and trebled in the village. Bellton had suffered in an appalling manner.

One of the men suddenly started and looked at John fixedly. A puzzled expression came into his face and he stared harder.

Three or four houses had collapsed, and others were battered about and partially wrecked. But this was by no means the worst. For the River Stowe had been unable to stand the appalling rush of water.

The phenomenal downpour of rain had caused the river to rise at lightning speed, and it had burst its bank without warning. The weir had broken down on pressure, the locks had given way, and a flood had resulted which was nearly as bad at the never-to-be-forgotten inundation of a year or so earlier.

Bellton High Street was like a river. The unhappy villagers were compelled to seek refuge in their upper rooms, or in other houses. Every

lane and road in the Stowe valley was flooded out. For miles the water stretched in unbroken sheets. And it was impossible to tell the full extent of the damage.

This was the scene which greeted our gaze as we stared out from the windows of the school as soon as the full daylight came. It was a scene which filled us with feelings of alarm and dismay. We were thankful that St. Frank's stood upon high ground. Our own flood was quite a local one, and would rapidly drain away. But there was no telling what would happen in the valley.

There were two topics of conversation that morning.

One was the terrible storm, and the other the heroic behaviour of John Martin. The whole school knew of John's plucky rescue of Hubbard. Hubbard himself, to give him his due, was overwhelmingly grateful, and did not mind saying so. He wasn't a bad chap in the main.

He had related the affair in all its details, and words of praise for John Martin were being spoken all over the school.

"He's one of the best—the right sort!" declared Reginald Pitt heartily. "Those fellows who sneered at him ought to apologise——"

"I'll admit that I was a bit prejudiced against him myself," said Armstrong. "But, dash it all, he's got grit! I'm going to shake his hand as soon as he comes down—dashed if I'm not!"

"Same here!" said Griffith. "What does it matter to us if he's poor? He's a giddy hero! Fullwood's a Remove chap, and his pater's as rich as a war profiteer—but I would not take Fullwood's hand for a quid!"

"Nobody's asked you to take it!" said Fullwood scurly.

"Look here—I've got an idea!" said Handforth, pushing forward. "It's absolutely the greatest idea that was ever thought of——"

"Naturally!" said Pitt.

"Well, considering I thought of it, that goes without saying," went on Handforth. "This wheeze struck me about an hour ago. I've been working it out since then. What we've got to do is to collect together——"

"Good!" said Pitt. "Wonderful!"

"What do you mean, you ass?"

"Isn't that the idea?" asked Pitt blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you fathead!" roared Handforth. "The idea is to gather round, and make a giddy collection."

"Topping!" said De Valerie. "And when we've got enough, we'll use it to provide you with a comfortable home in the asylum——"

"I'm not going to punch you now—I'll reserve it until later!" interrupted Handforth coldly. "I'm too busy to waste time on such a blithering idiot! This collection is for Martin. He's poor, and he's done some jolly brave workr We couldn't do better than raise some cash fo. him."

Pitt gently fainted in De Valerie's arms.

"Water!" he murmured faintly.

"There's plenty of it outside," grinned Jack Grey. "But what's the faint for?"

"Is it possible—can we believe it?" asked Pitt weakly. "Handy's thought of a good idea at last! He must have overheard it——"

"You fathead!" bawled Handforth. "I thought of it all alone!"

"O wise one, thou art truly endowed with mighty brains!" said Pitt solemnly. "Let the wheeze be executed!"

It was executed—and with hearty good will. Fellows from the Fifth and Sixth all contributed, and a large sum was made up. But when a deputation was sent to John's bedroom, they arrived smiling, and departed solemnly.

John gently but quietly refused the money. And his refusal had the effect of earning him even greater respect. He had not gone to Hubbard's aid for the sake of any possible reward. He did not want any.

Some of the fellows called him proud, but this was not the truth. John Martin was as true as a die, and he had started well at St. Frank's. But the future held many perils and adventures for him.

And, incidentally, the future was pretty well filled for a few others, including myself. Some stirring times were ahead.

THE END.

TOM TARTAR AT SCHOOL

by HARCOURT BURRAGE

(The World's Most Famous School Story).

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Tom Tartar arrives at Mr. Wrasper's school, where discipline is maintained by moral force only. Tom makes several friends and a few enemies. He is initiated into the "Eagles," a party opposed to the "Cuckoos," or the rotters of the school. Tom learns that Sir Claude Freshley, an influential resident of the county, has been nearly murdered. Having been a guest of Sir Claude's, Tom hastens to the baronet's house, as he thinks he can throw some light on the mystery.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER XX.

The Secret Passage.

THE two boys were both in accord as to who was the author of the deed.

Posh Powner, the poacher, was the man their thoughts naturally turned upon.

"He did it," Tom said, as the boys stood by the window of the drawing-room.

"But how will it be proved?" asked Cecil, wearily. "He is so cunning; no wolf was ever more cunning than he?"

"Who are you talking about?" asked Lady Freshley, from a seat on the other side of the room.

They told her, and she said it was possible, but only the clearest evidence would commit him.

"The Powners have always been a troublesome, vicious family," she said.

Cecil expressed a wish for Tom to remain there that night, and as he was quite ready to do so, Lady Freshley sent a polite message to Mr. Wrasper, apologising for detaining his pupil, but excusing herself on the grounds of Tom being so good a companion for Cecil at such a time of trouble.

The police made a thorough examination of the library, but found nothing to indicate the presence of a secret passage. They reported this to Lady Freshley, and one of them departed, leaving the other in case he should be needed.

"For all that," said Tom to Cecil, "there *is* a secret way in and out of the room."

"Shall we have a look for it?" returned Cecil.

"I did not like to suggest it," said Tom, 'as I do not like to interfere too much."

"Why should you not help us to solve the mystery?" said Lady Freshley. "The lamps shall be lighted in the library, and after dinner you shall go there and see if you can discover anything."

Dinner was, of course, a late meal at the Hall and that night it was later than usual.

Neither Lady Freshley nor Cecil nor Tom had much appetite, so the meal was soon over, and the boys, eager to begin their search, hastened to the library.

It was an oblong apartment, with pan-panelled walls all round, and book-laden shelves running down one end of it. The door faced the three windows that lighted the room by day. On the left was the fireplace.

Two noble lamps stood on the table, and a small hand one had been ordered by the thoughtfulness of Lady Freshley, for Tom to carry about the room when he wished to closely inspect any portion of it.

"Now, where shall we begin?" asked Cecil.

"You remember what I told you about the solitary cells at the school?" said Tom.

"Yes."

"Well, if you were me, where would you begin?"

"Near the fireplace."

"Just so. This room looks as if it were planned much on the same lines as the room at the school. One may be a copy of the other. Will you hold the lamp?"

Cecil took up the hand-lamp, and Tom began his search.

Most people would have looked for a secret passage midway in the panel work, but Tom had his experience of the solitary

cells to guide him, so he began at the floor.

First on the left side, and there, after a long, persistent search, he found nothing.

The panels not only fitted closely, but there was not the slightest projection to indicate the presence of a spring.

"Not there," said Tom, with a sigh. "Let's try the other side."

They shifted over, and he had hardly knelt down when a cry burst from his lips.

"Is it there?" asked Cecil.

"Something is," replied Tom. "See this small raising in the the corner of the panel. You would not notice it in a month if you had no knowledge of such things. If it isn't the spring I'm a——" He took out his pocket knife and pressed it against the projection. "Hey, presto! Got it!"

The panel had flown aside, disclosing a square opening so much like those in the lumber-room at the school that it was plain one was a duplicate of the other.

But now came the question. Did it also, like the others, lead only to a place of concealment in the wall?"

Tom passed the lamp through and crept after it. Cecil followed him and then they saw that their search had indeed met with a great reward.

It was a hiding-place, it is true, but on one side a flight of steps was seen leading to some chamber below.

"Shall we go on?" asked Tom.

Cecil gave an eager assent.

"Very well, then. You might fetch me a poker out of the library. There's no knowing what may happen."

Cecil scrambled through the opening, and quickly returned with a heavy steel poker, whose large, solid knob made it a most formidable weapon in case of need.

"You carry the lamp," said Tom. "Keep a step or two behind me, and throw ahead as much light as you can."

Cautiously they descended the steps, Tom counting them as they did so. There were exactly twenty.

At the bottom was a narrow passage, built of stone, with an arched roof, through which a current of fresh air was freely passing. This was pretty good proof that the passage communicated with the open air.

A few paces away from the steps they found another flight on the left. Tom judged that it led to the room in which he had slept on the occasion of his first visit—a surmise which subsequent investigation proved to be correct.

Down the passage went the two boys, to find that it led to an old disused well. There was no water in it now, and in all probability it had originally been built as a blind. Rubbish and fungus had accumulated and half-choked up the opening that served as an entrance to the passage.

Tom quickly discovered that an ascent to the upper air could be made with the aid of stout iron staples, which afforded both foothold and handhold. These had been fixed in regularly built niches in the wall, so that they were hidden from casual observation from above, and yet were every whit as useful as if they projected.

Tom and Cecil made the ascent, and found themselves in what was known as the Dutch Garden—a part of the grounds which was little frequented, and which was easily accessible from a wood behind.

Standing near the edge of the well, Tom's gaze suddenly noticed something which glittered in the light cast by the lamp.

He stooped and picked it up, and found that it was a one-bladed clasp-knife, with buckhorn handle. It was the back of the blade which glittered, for it was shut.

"Look!" exclaimed Tom, pointing to a small brass plate let into the buckhorn.

Cecil looked, and gave a gasp as he saw the initials "P.P." plainly scratched on the brass plate.

"It's that brute Posh Powner's knife!" said Tom excitedly. "He must have dropped it while climbing into or out of the well. Come along into the house! We must let the police know of this at once!"

They dashed through the garden, and quickly reached the house.

Ten minutes later a groom was riding madly away to get more police assistance to arrest the poacher.

CHAPTER XXI.

At Powner's Cottage.

JUST before midnight a police-inspector and two constables arrived at Powner's cottage, about half a mile from the village.

They knocked loudly on the door, and receiving no answer, promptly broke in.

In one corner of a wretched room lay Rosy Ralph, apparently fast asleep.

There were only two other rooms in the cottage, and these were quickly searched. But Posh Powner was not there, nor could any signs of his recent presence be found.

Returning to the first room, the inspector fixed a stern eye on Rosy Ralph, who was now yawning and blinking in the light of the constables' bull's-eyes.

"Where's your father?" demanded the inspector gruffly.

"'Aven't seen nowt o' feyther for a week," replied the boy.

"Don't tell lies! Come, out with it! Where is he?"

"Feyther said he was tired o' starvin' in these parts," said Rosy Ralph; "so he be gone north to look for work."

"Humph! And are you going north to join him?"

"No," replied the boy, shaking his head vigorously. "Feyther said as I was quite

old enough to fend for myself, and he give me a clout just afore he started, sayin' it was summat to remember him by."

"Humph!" grunted the inspector again. "I hardly know whether to believe you or not. Now, look here, youngster, you're to stop about here—understand? If I find you trying to get away, you'll be put in the look-up."

He turned to the constables.

"Come along, men," he said. "No use our hanging about here. The bird has flown."

Rosy Ralph dropped back on his shake-down, and the officers departed, slamming the door after them.

Ralph listened to their retreating footsteps; then he rose, opened the door softly, and peeped out. Satisfied that the visitors had really gone, he sat down in the dark for a few minutes, listening with all his might. Then he crept to the rickety table in the middle of the room, and pushed it aside.

Under it was a heap of litter and rubbish. This the boy cleared away, and then knocked softly on the floor.

Instantly, a roughly constructed sort of trapdoor was pushed up, and from the hole it covered emerged Posh Powner.

"Cuss it!" he growled. "I was pretty nigh stifled, waitin' all that time! 'Ave they only just gone?"

"About ten minutes ago they went, feyther."

"Then why didn't you let me know sooner, you whelp?"

"I wanted to be sure they wasn't comin' back."

"What for should they come back? Didn't you tell 'em the yarn I told you to tell 'em?"

"Yes, feyther, I told 'em," answered Rosy Ralph, and then suddenly burst into a passion of weeping. "Oh, feyther," he sobbed, "why did you do it—why did you do it?"

"Stop that snivellin', you ugly young limb!" snarled the poacher. "Let me get hold on yer. Where's the matches?"

"Feyther," said Ralph, "don't beat me! I don't mind the cuts and the blows, but I feel as I smart as if I could hang you. Then, if anybody come along, I might say summat, and I'd be sorry arterwards."

"Good lickings make a good dog!" growled the poacher. "Where's the matches, I say?"

"I dunno," said Ralph.

"You lie!" hissed the poacher. "Let me get hold o' yer."

But Ralph was already at the door, and,

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opening it, he darted forth and disappeared in the darkness of the night.

"Hang him!" muttered Powner. "I'd 'ave liked to a laid hold on 'im, being just in the mind to gie summat a licking. Blarm that hole! I've been nigh stifled in it."

Growling to himself, he went back into the room, and, throwing himself down on the couch recently vacated by his son he speedily fell asleep.

He knew he was safe for that night at least. Treat Ralph as he might, he knew the boy would never betray him.

CHAPTER XXII.

A Struggle in the Coppice.

TOM returned to school on the following day, and on the day after that a note came from Lady Freshley, saying that Sir Claude was much better and certain to recover.

Meanwhile telegrams had been sent far and wide, with a description of Posh Powner, the poacher, offering a hundred pounds for his capture.

After the first raid upon the cottage, the police did not think of going there again.

Rosy Ralph was seen about, begging for jobs to enable him to live, and people, looking on him as practically an orphan, gave him what they could.

But he avoided Tom.

One morning when he was rolling some turf, Tom went out to speak to him, and, deserting his roller, he fled.

Tom ran after him, calling upon him to stop, but he tore across the road, and would have got away, but for Noddy Berrill, who was coming down the road.

Ralph tried to dodge him, but the Quarry boy was as good as the son of the poacher at that game, and he speedily had him fast.

"What are you running away for?" he asked. "Nobody is going to hurt you."

"Let me go!" replied Ralph angrily.

"Not yet. I thought Tom was your best friend!"

Tom, at that moment, came up, and he, too, asked Rosy Ralph what he went off in that manner for.

"I don't know," replied Ralph.

"Oh, yes, you do!" returned Tom. "Now look at me. Where's your father?"

Rosy Ralph hung his head, and made no reply.

"It is hardly fair to ask you," said Tom. "Let him go, Berrill."

Noddy loosened his grasp, and Ralph fled away like a frightened rabbit.

"He knows more of his father than he chooses to tell," said Tom. "I don't believe he is out of the neighbourhood."

"I'd like to lay hold of him," said Noddy. "Father says that he's the sort that bring disgrace upon honest poor folk. By the way, I saw Diggles as I came along."

"Indeed!" said Tom. "I had clean forgotten him. What is he doing?"

"He's living, like a wild man, in the wood," replied Noddy laughing, "for he's taken to that old deserted hut in the Fir Coppice."

"But is he really mad?" asked Tom.

"Not he," replied Noddy; "but he's a bit upset by getting the sack."

"I am sorry for the fellow," said Tom, "although, perhaps, I oughtn't to be. Do you think he is hard up?"

"He may be."

"I should be sorry if he starved. I've a good mind to go and see him."

"Come along, then," said Berrill. "I'll go with you, if you don't mind."

"Why should I mind?" returned Tom.

"I'm only a quarry boy and you are the son of a gentleman and the friend of Sir Claude Freshley."

"And your friend, too," returned Tom. "Don't talk nonsense to me. I've nothing of that sort of pride about me."

Noddy's eyes flashed.

He was proud of two or three things, but of none so much as he was of Tom's friendship. Side by side, they set out together.

The Fir Coppice was a wood between the village and the quarry, and Tom reckoned he could get there and back before the breakfast-bell rang.

Of course, he ran a risk in going away at all, but Tom was used to such risks now, and thought little of it.

The boys took a short cut to the wood, and after entering it picked their way along cautiously, talking only in whispers.

The hut they were bound for was in the centre of the wood. It had originally been built for the woodcutters, but had long been abandoned, and was a frequent rendezvous of the boys of the neighbourhood prior to Diggles taking possession.

As they drew near the hut they heard a man muttering. They stopped, and listened intently.

"'Tisn't Diggles," whispered Noddy. "His voice is squeaky."

The voice they now heard was gruff, and Tom's quick ear recognised it.

"It's Powner!" he breathed.

Both went pale with excitement, and they looked at each other queerly. The same thought was in the mind of both.

"Can we do it?" asked Tom, between his teeth.

"We can try," replied Noddy. "I'm tolerable strong, you know."

As he spoke he flexed his arm, to show the muscle, which bunched up, like a small cocoanut.

"I'm game!" said Tom. "We had better pounce upon him."

"I'll collar him," said Noddy, "and you can help to throw him."

They crept forward, and presently saw the man who was believed to be the would-be murderer of Sir Claude Freshley.

Posh Powner was sitting on the ground, near an old tree. His gun lay beside him, but his lurcher dog was not there.

Tom made signs that they must creep round and get behind him. Noddy assented, with a motion of his head.

As stealthily as Redskin scouts, they worked round, and soon came into a favourable position for the job they had set themselves.

The poacher was growling out to somebody whom the boys could not see, and presently they caught the name.

"Ralph, you young thief, where are you? I'll twist your neck, if you don't come!"

"On you go!" whispered Tom. "Kick his gun out of the way and lay hold of him."

They rushed out of their hiding-place, and the poacher, hearing them, looked round.

He uttered a terrible curse, and made a clutch at his gun; but Noddy was there, and kicked it out of the way.

Then up sprang the poacher, and the boys seized him.

Noddy got hold of him behind, and Tom sprang at his necktie.

"Let go, you young fools!" hissed the poacher as he struck at Tom, dealing him a blow on the chest that he did not forget for a week.

"I've got him!" cried Noddy. "Lay hold of his legs and throw him!"

The poacher kicked out, and Tom had to dodge his heavy boots; but, by a nimble movement, he succeeded in dealing Powner a blow on the face that made him yell with fury.

At that instant Rosy Ralph appeared on the scene.

The boy stared for a moment, with wild affright in his eyes; then he caught sight of the gun on the ground, and sprang upon it.

"Let go o' my feyther," he cried, "or I'll shoot one on you!"

"Mind how you fire!" roared the poacher. "Come closer, and put the charge into the young swell!"

"Ralph," cried Tom, "don't commit murder, even for your father's sake."

"He dare not do it himself," said Noddy, as he twisted Powner's necktie tighter.

"Let go my feyther!" roared Rosy Ralph, with a terrible light in his eyes. "Ye'ar both been good friends to me, but I'll not have him took and hanged!"

"Come closer!" gasped the poacher. "It's loaded with big shot, but it'll spread. Closer—closer—let——"

He stopped short, for Tom had succeeded in getting hold of one of his legs, and he was thrown heavily.

Noddy fell with him, but he held on.

The expression of Rosy Ralph's face was now something fearful.

He had a deep love and admiration for Tom, and would have laid down his life for him, but he was still true to his father.

"Let 'un go, let 'un go," he gasped, "or I must shoot 'ee!"

He held the gun to his shoulder, and he pointed it at Tom in a way that showed he had a fair idea of handling it.

Tom looked up, and saw the blank muzzle pointing straight at his breast, and his heart for a moment felt sick within him.

Then his courage and his pride came to the rescue.

"I've got your father, Ralph," he said, "and I won't let him go while I have the strength to hold him!"

The poacher was on his face, struggling for breath and life. Noddy held him by the neck, and Tom had pinned his legs to the ground.

"I must do it!" said Ralph, in the most piteous tones. "He be my feyther, he be! Let 'un go and kill me! Will you let go?"

"No!" cried Tom.

Then Ralph staggered, rather than walked, forward, right up to Tom, thrust the muzzle close to his breast, and, closing his eyes, pulled the trigger!

(To be continued.)

Printed and Published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Limited, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Subscription Rates: Inland, 13/- per annum; 6/6 for six months. Abroad, 11/- per annum; 5/6 for six months. Sole Agents for South Africa: The Central News Agency, Limited. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Limited; and for Canada: The Imperial News Company, Limited.
No. 349. D/Y **February 11, 1922.**