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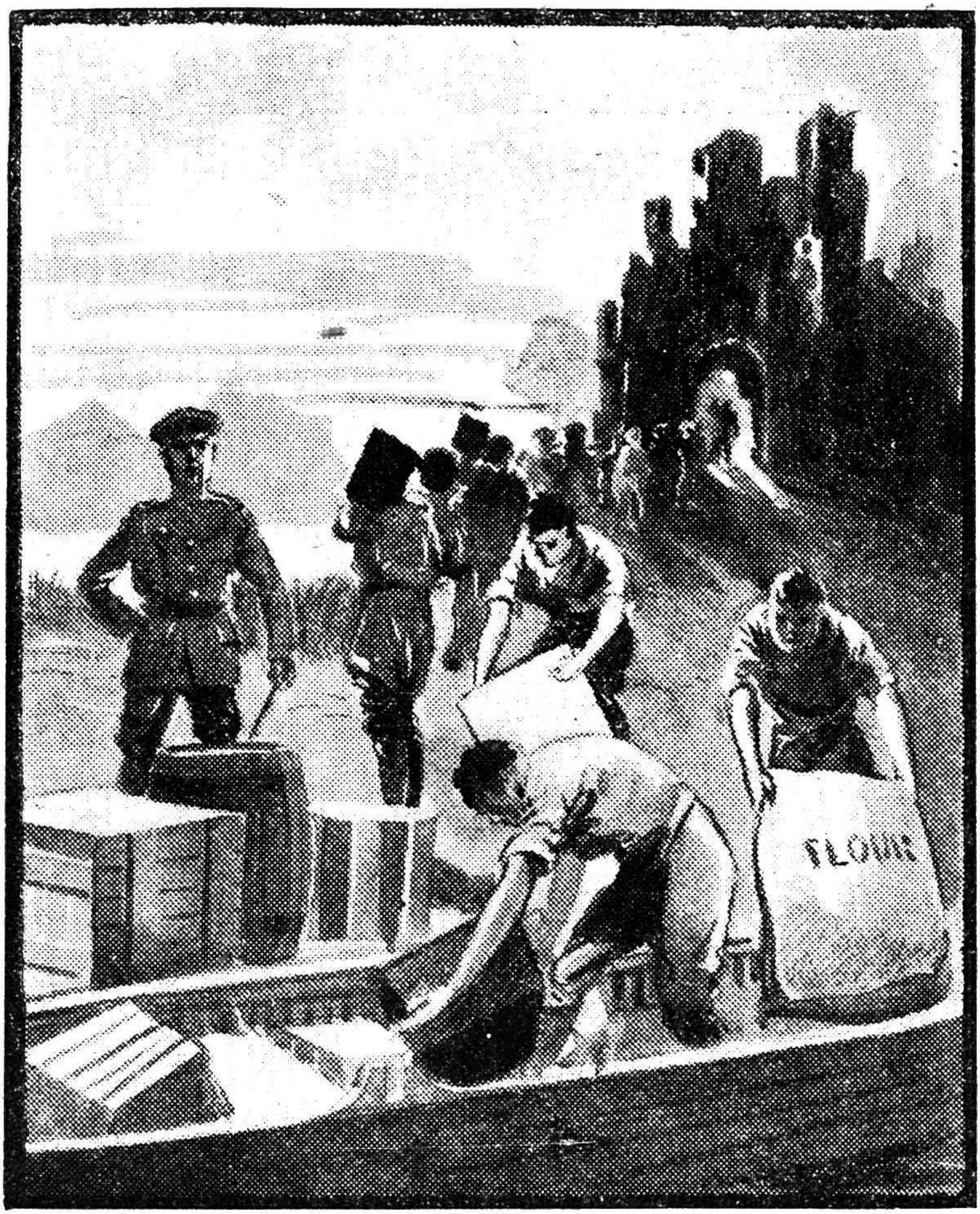
THE ISLAND CAMP.

"Now, are you going, or do you want me to use force," threatened Mr. Giddy.



The majority of the cadets were making active preparations for departure. It was awfuily galling, after we had taken such a lot of trouble to make the camp snug and cosy.

THE ISLAND CAMP.

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 Downfall of the Snake," "The Boy from Nowhere," "The Flood at St. Frank's," and many other Stirring Tales.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

ON WILLARD'S ISLAND!

SERGEANT HANDFORTH looked round critically.

"Now then, bustle about!" he ordered. "No slacking! It'll be dark before long and, there's tons to do yet! Private Grey, don't stand talking there with Private Singleton! Get on with your job!"

"Keep your hair on!" said Private Grey, grinning.

"I don't want any back answers!" shouted the sergeant. "Why, by George! What the thunder are you up to, Private Church?"

Private Church looked round and grunted.

"Can't I tie my giddy bootlace?" he asked indignantly. "You're too jolly important to live, Handy! Just because you're a sergeant of Cadets, you seem to think you can yell at everybody, and shirk all the work!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All you can do is to criticise us, and laze about!" went on Private Church rebelliously. "You haven't done a thing the whole day long."

Sergeant Handforth glared.

"I'll report you, my lad!" he snorted. "And in the morning you'll be brought up in the Orderly Room, and charged with insubordination before the Commanding Officer!"

"Rats!" said Private Church, lightly.

All was bustle and excitement, and the scene was one of tremendous activity. To put it briefly, the St. Frank's Cadets were just going into camp, and the final preparations were being made.

I was the Commanding Officer of the corps, but this little detail made no difference to me. My tunic was off, I was in my shirtsleeves, and I worked as hard as any of the privates.

Only Handforth, out of all the juniors, kept up the semi-military tactics. It was the breath of life for him to stalk about in his full capacity as sergeant, delivering orders.

Although the St. Frank's Cadet Corps was just going into camp, practically all of us were ourselves just then—Remove Fellows. We forgot that we were cadets, and entered into the work with all our heart and soul.

For a great lot had to be done, and evening was coming on.

The scene was one of tremendous liveliness. Willard's Island, in the centre of the River Stowe, was simply a hive of activity. Two or three boats were constantly crossing the river to the island, carrying all manner of camp equipment.

We had been at it all day long, and, at last, things were looking fairly tidy and shipshape. Fatty Little had been busy with the cooking utensils for the past hour, and he was preparing an extra special feed. It wouldn't be just an ordinary tea, but something much more substantial—and we certainly needed it.

At midday we had only had a bit of lunch—just a snack of sandwiches and cakes while we worked. For we had not attended dinner at St. Frank's. In the thick of the work, we had not had the time to spare.

Roughly, there were thirty of us—all Remove fellows, and the majority were from the Ancient House. Corporal Bob Christine and a few other Monks were the only representatives of the College House.

There had been some strenuous times at St. Frank's just recently.

All the trouble had started with the terrible storm and blizzard which had wrecked a portion of the Ancient House, destroying the Fifth Form and Remove dormitories. At the same time the enormous rainfall of that never-to-be-forgotten night had flooded the whole district.

The Stowe had burst its banks, and the valley became a lake. But, now, after several days had elapsed, the floods had gone down wonderfully. Indeed, in most parts the level of the water was almost normal. Only in low-lying hollows did the water remain.

The River Stowe flowed along its customary course—swollen, of course, and with a swift current. But it could be recognised as the River Stowe. A few days earlier it had looked like one great lake.

The village of Bellton was almost free from water once more, and the main road to Bannington was clear. But on every hand there were evident signs of the flood's havoc. Roads were no longer roads—they were washed out, and treacherous for vehicular traffic.

In Bellton several cottages had collapsed, rendering a number of good people homeless. But, on the whole, the damage was much less than had been feared. St. Frank's it seemed, had suffered the most.

For, during the height of that dreadful storm, a chimney stack had collapsed, crashing through the roof and bringing disaster. The situation was so serious, in fact, that Dr. Stafford decided that at least thirty boys would have to leave the school.

There was not sufficient accommodation for them. With the Fifth and Remove dormitories in the Ancient House quite uninhabitable, the result was that over threescore fellows found themselves without sleeping quarters.

Half the number had been squashed in here and there—the majority of them in the College House. But thirty still remained without any beds. And the Head made arrangements with Yexford College to take thirty juniors in for a month or five weeks—until, in fact, the repairs to the Ancient House were completed.

And that was where we came in.

The Cadet Corps had just been formed, and when the news went abroad that thirty of us were to be at Yexford, I put my thinking cap on. The net result was that I suggested a cadet camp on Willard's Island. Nelson Lee approved, and Dr. Stafford approved—and the cadets went dotty with excitement.

Not only was the Head in agreement with the scheme, but he provided everything that was necessary for our warmth and comfort. In record time, sleeping bags and blankets were obtained, tarpaulins, waterproofs, and cooking utensils galore. Everything necessary for camp life, in fact, was provided.

We had no tents, however.

This was where the cunning of my scheme came in. For right in the centre of Willard's Island there stood the old stone building known as Willard's Folly. A most picturesque pile, designed in the form of an ancient castle. It had never been completed, for old Willard, the crank, had died before his ideals were realised.

Nobody else had ever touched the building, and for the last ten or twelve years it had remained deserted and dreary. Parts of it were roofed over, but other portions were fully exposed to the weather.

But we soon made a big difference.

Those portions of the roof which were exposed were soon closed over by means of waterproof canvas and tarpaulins. Fires were set going in all the fireplaces, and the chilly coldness of years was being gradually driven out.

In any case, we need not have worried about cold or damp. For, right below, there were spacious cellars which had been wonderfully built. They were well ventilated, and perfectly dry. But we should all prefer to sleep on the ground level, if this was possible.

The rest of the fellows at St. Frank's rather envied us, and the announcement that we should go into camp had been followed by a perfect host of applications to join the cadets. I was quite ready to take new recruits—but I was compelled to point out that they would not be allowed to join the party on the island. It would be quite impossible for half the school to go into camp.

This put a decided damper on recruiting, and the juniors were not so eager to join up. But we were called a set of lucky beg-

gars—and the majority of the cadets certainly agreed.

There was something novel and exciting about all this.

To go into camp in February was most unusual. But then, of course, this was an unusual camp. By the time we finished with the island building, it was hardly recognisable as its former self.

With the bare spaces roofed over, and with the window-holes covered with canvas, the whole building became weathertight and cosy. It no longer seemed a semi-ruin. And the cheerful fires blazing everywhere added greatly to the effect.

The Head had quite agreed that it would be far better for us to stay near the school. The scheme had a double advantage. It would give the cadets a chance to get really going, and we should all be near St. Frank's—near enough, in fact, to attend lessons in the usual way. We should only sleep and eat on the island. All food supplies were provided by the school.

And, as this was the first day, the Head had granted us a whole holiday.

This was a further cause for jealous growls from the remainder of the fellows. There were a good many who wished they had joined the Cadet Corps to start with. They knew what they were missing.

And, all day long, we had worked with a will.

And now, just when darkness was about to descend, the island was in shipshape order, and Fatty's special meal was nearly ready. He was busily engaged at one of the fires, with an apron wrapped round his ample person.

Several frying pans were on the go, some containing sausages, some eggs and bacon, and others chip potatoes, which were frizzling and sizzling invitingly. Fatty did not believe in stinting anybody. His own appetite was so enormous that, by the look of things, he seemed to imagine that a regiment had to be provided for—and not merely a platoon.

However, nobody grumbled. Appetites were large, and all the fellows were only too eager to finish up the work and start on the grub.

There were no strict orders kept on this day. Handforth was the only fellow who maintained the formal discipline of military life. But as he was ignored, this didn't matter.

On the morrow, of course, things would be different.

The cadets would have to be cadets in earnest. They would drill, exercise, and all the rest of it.

But this was a free and easy day, and at last the juniors, tired out and enormously hungry, came into the main apartment of the queer stone building, which was designed after the style of an old time castle.

There were battlements and towers, and it could not be denied that crazy old Willard had given his "Folly" a certain amount picturesqueness. If he had lived, he would have spent his remaining days in this building. But Fate had decided otherwise.

The chief room was a fairly large apartment, covering two-thirds of the whole floor space. There was a huge fireplace, and in this a great wood fire roared and crackled.

Big paraffin lamps had been provided, but it was not necessary to light these yet, since there was still plenty of daylight left. And the air was full of the luscious smell of frying sausages, etc.

"By jingo!" said Corporal Pitt. "I can do with some grub now! I reckon we've got everything done with record efficiency. This is the result of everybody being enthusiastic. We've all earned a whacking great tea—with the exception, of course, of our respected sergeant."

"What's that?" said Handforth sharply.

"Oh, are you there?" grinned Pitt. "Strictly speaking, Handy, you don't deserve anything to eat. You've done nothing all day except give orders which nobody has taken any notice of! Still, it's kept you out of mischief, so things couldn't have been better."

Sergeant Handforth pushed up his sleeves.

"I'm just about fed up with this!" he said deliberately. "If any other fellow has a criticism to make, I'm ready to oblige him by a punch on the nose!"

"But the sergeant isn't allowed to inflict punishment——"

"Blow the sergeant!" roared Handforth. "All day you chaps have been saying that this is a free and easy time! All right—I'll join in with you! I'm Handforth now—not a cadet sergeant! Take that—and that!

Biff! Crash!

Without any particular reason—other than to relieve his feelings—Handforth let out with right and left. Unfortunately, it was his own long suffering chums who were nearest. Church and McClure roared with surprise and pain, and staggered away.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's just to start with!" bellowed Handforth.

"You—you dangerous lunatic!" yelled Church, holding his ear. "What the dickens is the idea of sloshing me like that? I haven't said a word!"

"Neither have I!" growled McClure.

Handforth regarded them coldly.

"That's nothing to do with the matter," he said. "You happened to be nearest—that's all. I've been storing it up all day for somebody, and now I'm fairly started. You rotters had better look out for yourselves! Yow—yarooooh! What the thunder ——"

Handforth gave a sudden howl, as some spurts of boiling fat splashed on to his face. He was standing perilously near to the fireplace, and Fatty Little, rather thoughtlessly, gave the sausages a good shake up. Handforth twirled upon the chief cook.

"Hold on!" gasped Pitt. "Don't touch him!"

"What the——"

"He's the most valuable man in the corps," said Pitt. "Where should we be without Fatty?"

"Well, we should have a lot more room!" grinned Watson.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A lot more room in our tummies!" retorted Pitt. "He's a prize cook, and we're not going to have him slaughtered by Handforth——"

"Great bloaters!" said Fatty, looking round calmly. "What's all this? I'd like to see Handforth try to slaughter me!"

"A lifelong job," said De Valerie.

"Handy couldn't get near enough to punch!" grinned Pitt. "Don't forget that Fatty has got an advance guard, consisting of one large tummy——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling lunatics!" jeered Handforth. "I'll soon show you whether I can deal with this overfed elephant! Look at him—stuffed out like a prize turkey! He's been gorging all day, and it's a wonder that there's any grub left for us!"

Handforth pushed up his sleeves again, and advanced. He didn't really want to damage Fatty, but he felt that it was highly necessary to prove that he was quite capable of knocking Fatty into the middle of next week.

The chief cook waved his frying-pan suggestively.

"Better go easy!" he puffed. "No larks, Handy! You don't want these sausages down your neck, I suppose?"

"We'd rather have 'em down ours!" grinned Pitt. "Steady, you ass! Oh, help! Our giddy tea's vanishing——"

"Take that!" roared Handforth abruptly.

He let fly with startling abruptness. But, somehow, his fist couldn't quite reach its mark, and Fatty Little, in spite of his size, was extremely nimble. He acted with the utmost calm. In fact, he was so cool and so deliberate that the whole thing was screamingly funny, as seen by the rest of us.

Fatty stepped aside, and Handforth staggered past, carried on by his own momentum. He gave a roar as he pulled himself up short. Fatty Little simply turned, grinned, and butted into Handforth. He did this quite easily, and without apparent effort.

But the effect upon Handforth was startling.

He shot forward, as though released by a gigantic piece of elastic, and he crashed against the opposite wall with such stunning force that he sat down in a heap upon the floor.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A startled, dazed expression suddenly came into Handforth's eyes. It was a look of terrible alarm. Then, with one fearful bound, he leapt to his feet, and stared down at the place where he had been sitting.

"Who—who did this?" he hooted violently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Edward Oswald Handforth's rear view was so disconcerting that every cadet simply went off in a kind of hysterics. The sergeant's breeches and the lower portion of his tunic were smothered with some brown, sticky mass, which was instantly recognised as treacle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth, still looking dazed, felt round the back of his tunic. Then he gave a fiendish yell as he found his hand covered with sticky masses of treacle. He gazed at his hand, horrorstruck.

"Who—who did this?" he asked in a hollow voice.

Fatty Little looked round carelessly.

"Well, of all the clumsy asses!" he observed. "Somebody busted a jar of treacle this afternoon, and I suppose a pool of it must have been left against the wall. What on earth made you sit in it, Handy?"

Handforth tried to speak, but failed.

All he could utter was an articulate sound, and then he rushed across at Fatty, with his sticky hand outstretched. The chief cook turned his back upon Handforth, and suddenly bent down.

The result was appalling.

Handforth went full tilt into Fatty's rear, and it was just like striking a gigantic football. Handforth rebounded, staggered, and it was somewhat unfortunate that his treacle-covered hand should flop fairly and squarely upon the face of the unfortunate Church.

"Gug-gug-guggrooooh!" gurgled Church frantically.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth picked himself up, quite spent, sticky all over, and in a most horrible mess generally.

"Don't you come near us!" said Pitt severely. "We're rather particular whom we mix with, Handy. But, still, I suppose you're a lot sweeter than you look!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The best thing you can do is to change your clobber at once, Handy," he said. "No more larking about. And you can do with a wash, Church!"

The unlucky Church was nearly invisible. His face was smothered in treacle and dirt, and he staggered away to the river to clean himself. He had just finished this task when he heard a hail from across the river. Looking up, he saw a junior, in full cadet uniform, standing on the opposite bank, in the dusk. Church stared hard.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he said. "Hi, Nipper!"

I appeared, and came to Church's side. Then I looked across the Stowe, and noticed the newcomer. He was John Martin, the "poor boy" of St. Frank's, the protege of the headmaster.

"Do you mind sending a boat over for me?" called John cheerfully.

"Right you are! I'll come myself!" I replied. "Hang tight!"

I soon slipped a boat into the water, and paddled across to the bank. And I looked at John Martin curiously. His well-set-up figure was shown off to fine advantage in the smart uniform. His handsome face glowed with happiness, and there was a somewhat anxious look in his eyes.

"I say, I hope it's all right!" he exclaimed. "My being a cadet, you know. Dr. Stafford told me I could join if I wanted to——"

"Good for you, my son!" I said heartily. "The more the merrier! And you're just the kind of fellow we need in the cadets. I'm jolly glad to see you on an equal footing with all the rest of us!"

"Thanks!" said John quietly. "I knew you'd be all right, Nipper, but—but the others might object——"

"Not they!" I interrupted. "There are no snobs in the corps!"

I could see that John Martin was uncertain regarding his reception, for some of the fellows were inclined to look down upon the "charity kid," as he was sometimes called. But John was an all round decent fellow—brave, generous, and thoroughly likeable.

"I was wondering if you would allow me to join the camp!" exclaimed John diffidently. "A lot of other fellows wanted to join, but you said they couldn't come on the island——"

"It's different with you," I interrupted. "Your sleeping quarters were entirely ruined during the storm, and, anyhow, you're not in the same position as the other fellows. Come among us, by all means."

"You're decent, Nipper—jolly decent!" said John. "Thanks awfully! I'll be pretty useful about the camp, you know ——"

"We sha'n't expect you to do more than anybody else," I told him. "Share and share alike, that's our motto. Well, jump in; I'll punt you across."

Little did John Martin realise that he was actually going over to the home of his own dead father, for, although John Martin didn't know it, he was the only son of old Willard. And his arrival on the island was to be the beginning of all sorts of excitements and adventures.

The other cadets welcomed him generously. They all liked John, for he was an unassuming, splendid fellow, and he was accepted as one of us without any argument or criticism.

CHAPTER II.

AT THE WHITE HARP.

CAPTAIN JOSHUA NIGGS shook his head.

"Shouldn't have no more, if I was you, Ben," he remarked dubiously. "You ain't strong enough to stand it, old mate. Grog's all right for them what has plenty o' strength, but, you bein' arf in the grave, in a manner o' speakin', it might snuff you out."

Mr. Ben Croke grunted.

"I reckon as I know what's good for me, cap'n!" he exclaimed. "Grog don't do no 'arm to no man, an' this 'ere rum is fust class. I will say as 'ow this 'ere quarters is very comfortable."

Captain Niggs and his mate were in the cosy back parlour of the White Harp Inn, just on the outskirts of Bellton. Their barge, the Sally, had foundered during the flood, and, as a consequence, the pair were stranded. But they were not staying in Bellton just for the sake of pleasure; they had a definite object.

Both were attired in rough blue clothing, with reefer style coats and thick blue jerseys. Captain Niggs was large and brawny, and Mr. Croke was shrivelled, wizened up, and looked little more than a bag of bones and dried skin. Actually, he was as hard as nails, and as tough as leather.

It was late evening, and getting near to bed-time. The precious pair had not yet come to any certain decision as to their movement, and they were staying on at the White Hart, hoping, like Mr. Micawber, that something would turn up.

A further supply of rum was ordered, and, after it had been brought in by Mr. Porlock, the landlord, the two bargemen sat sipping the fiery spirit and smoking their pipes. It was certainly very peaceful and quiet in the little back parlour. Outside the night was quiet and dark.

"I've got to think of my position," said Captain Niggs slowly. "Here we are, Ben, stuck 'ere in this one-hoss village. I ain't sayin' but what we've got a object in doin' so. But is it worth spendin' the time on?"

"It might be, an' it might not," said Mr. Croke non-committally.

"Not that it's much good askin' of your opinion," went on Captain Niggs. "We've lost the old tub, Ben, an', strictly speakin', we ought to be down in Caistowe, a-lookin' for work what suits us. The old barge was insured, o' course, but nothin' can't be done quick; them companies takes their time. So I reckon we might just as well stay here an' 'have a shot at that there treasure."

"There ain't no tellin'," observed Mr. Croke sagely.

"If I was alone, it would be fair easy," went on the skipper; "but, seein' as I'm hampered with a pore old man what's on 'is last legs, I reckon as there'll be some

trouble. I ain't got the heart to desert ye, Ben——"

"Queer, for you to be so durned anxious about me," said Mr. Croke. "I was just a-wonderin' how it come about that you're still alive. Why, I've been expecting you to peg out this last five year, cap'n! Appearances is deceptive, werry deceptive. Them as looks the strongest ain't got the strength of a dyin' beetle—afore you can turn round they've gorn West!"

For Captain Niggs and Mr. Croke to talk in this way was quite usual. They had a peculiar habit of making out that each was on the point of going to his last resting-place, and they talked about it so seriously that a stranger would have wondered somewhat. But it was only their little way.

"Well, I dare say you're feelin' kind o' weak an' tired," said the captain, with a prodigious yawn. "Time you was in bed, Ben. Mebbe I'll 'ave to 'elp you upstairs—p'r'aps for the last time, old mate. When you goes up to bed, I allus wonders if you'll ever come down agin!"

But before Mr. Croke could reply the door opened, and the landlord appeared, accompanied by a stranger.

"Gentlemen, let me introduce you to a noo guest!" said Mr. Porlock pleasantly. "This 'ere is Mr. William 'Udson—just come down from London. Go over by the fire, Mr. 'Udson, and warm yourself."

The newcomer shook his head.

"I prefer to get straight upstairs to bed, if you don't mind," he said. "Evenin'!" he added, nodding to Captain Niggs and Mr. Croke. "Blinking cold to-night, but there ain't any more rain!"

The stranger was a man of about forty-five, of normal build, and smartly dressed. But his was a rather common kind of smartness. He was splendidly attired, but, at the same time, he didn't wear his clothes well. His face was naturally red and bloated, obviously caused by a long and intimate friendship with spirits of a very material kind.

"Perhaps you'd like a drop o' something before going up, sir?" asked the landlord.

"Well, a drop of Scotch wouldn't do much harm, hey?" said Mr. Hudson. "Right you are, old feller! Trot it along!"

The gentleman from London seated himself, and Mr. Croke and Captain Niggs eyed him coldly. They had swallowed their rum with undue haste and a certain amount of ostentation.

Mr. Hudson could see quite plainly that their glasses were empty, but he had completely failed to invite the bargemen to "join him." Consequently, the latter gentlemen regarded Mr. Hudson somewhat balefully.

Mr. Hudson yawned, lit a cigarette, and spread a pair of large hands out towards the blaze.

Captain Niggs and Mr. Croke speculated upon the stranger's occupation. Captain Niggs set him down as a bookmaker, and Mr. Croke was just as certain that he was a pork-butcher in search of country-fed supplies.

At the same time, a close observer would have noticed that Mr. William Hudson was not common by birth. His features, before they had become bloated, had probably been refined and well-cut. He was a man who had been born in a much better sphere of life, and who had gradually drifted down—apparently owing to drink—until he had become coarse and common. But his smart clothing and a diamond ring and his general air of prosperity plainly told that he was well supplied with this life's necessities.

The whisky arrived, and Mr. Porlock set it down and retired. The stranger picked up his glass, sniffed the spirit critically, and raised the glass to his lips.

"Good 'ealth!" said Captain Niggs, wiping his mouth.

"Thanks—same to you!" exclaimed Mr. Hudson cheerfully. "Hum! I suppose this stuff will be like poison! It don't smell any too grand!"

He took a sip, rolled the spirit round his mouth, and set the glass down again. This display, of course, nearly made Captain Niggs and Mr. Croke rise up and slay him on the spot.

"Why, Ben," said the captain suddenly, "our glasses was empty!"

"So they was!" said Mr. Croke, in mild surprise.

Mr. Hudson rose to his feet, and swallowed the rest of his whisky. He stretched himself, and gave vent to a prodigious yawn.

"I'll be getting up to bed," he remarked. "Good-night!"

He passed out of the room, and the two bargemen glared at the closing door with expressions that were full of animosity.

"That's the kind o' man what would take a bone from a starvin' dog!" said Captain Niggs. "Mean skunk—that's what I calls 'im! 'E could see as we was fair gaspin', an' he took no notice!"

"An' the fuss 'e made!" said Mr. Croke disgustedly. "Fair made me sick!"

In the meantime Mr. William Hudson made his way upstairs to the first floor. This was dimly lighted by a hanging paraffin lamp. There were several doors on this landing, all of them numbered in faded, scratched lettering, which had originally been white.

Mr. Hudson went across to No. 3 bedroom, opened the door, and found a candle burning on the dressing-table. The room was not particularly large, but the bed looked comfortable, and the sheets seemed fairly clean. Mr. Hudson was quite satisfied.

He did not take much time in undressing, and he got straight into bed and extinguished the candle. Then, as he lay with his head on the pillow, he became aware of gruff voices. They seemed so surprisingly near and distinct that for a moment or two Mr. Hudson thought that Captain Niggs

and Mr. Croke had entered his bedroom, for the voices belonged to those two gentlemen.

"If there's any talkin' to be done, we can do it 'ere," said Captain Niggs clearly. "Privacy is what we need for discussin' the subject o' the treasure, an' we ain't likely to get much privacy down in that there parlour, what with whisky-drinkin' strangers comin' what don't offer to fill up a man's glass."

Mr. Hudson grinned cheerfully to himself. He was quite sharp-witted enough to realise that the allusion was in reference to himself. But he was still very puzzled about the singular plainness of the voices.

He raised a hand, and passed it over a part of the wall, for his bed was set close against the latter. Then he understood. The wall, as a whole, bent perceptibly as he pressed upon it.

It was, in fact, merely a thin matchboard partition.

This had been unnoticeable while the light was in the room, for the boarding was papered just like the other walls, and it was only by pressing upon it that one could detect the truth. It was exactly the same on the other side. And Captain Niggs and Mr. Croke were at a disadvantage.

No sounds of any sort came to them, for Mr. Hudson had ceased moving about by the time they entered their own room. Either they were unaware of the fact that only a matchboard partition separated them from bedroom No. 3, or else they assumed that the adjoining apartment was empty. At all events, they thought they were perfectly private.

Mr. Hudson was somewhat interested. He had no scruples whatever about listening to a conversation which was not intended for his ears. And Niggs' reference to privacy and treasure had caused Mr. Hudson to prick up his ears. He now lay perfectly still, trying to catch every word.

"What we got to do, Ben, is to git out some plan of haction," came Captain Niggs' voice. "It ain't no mortal good a-settlin' down in this pub an' waitin'. Nothing won't be done unless we do it."

"I don't reckon as we're in a position to do much, cap'n," said Mr. Croke, with a grunt. "Arter all, the whole thing may be a fool's game. I don't reckon as there is any treasure at all. Them kids was bluffin' you. They could see as 'ow you was arf dead, an' sufferin' from senile decay——"

It was unfortunate that his treacle-covered hand should flop fairly and squarely upon Church's face.

"You'd best talk about yerself!" growled Captain Niggs. "Seenile decay was comin' over you twenty year ago! You ain't no more use now than a dried-up mummy! I only keeps you wi' me 'cos I ain't got the 'eart to cast you adrift. I don't like to see an old pal founder!"

Mr. Hudson grinned again.

"Quite amusing old fellows, they seem to be," he told himself. "And it's pretty evident that they've got something on their minds."

In the next room Captain Niggs and his mate continued.

"Fust of all, we've got to think about that there brassbound box," said Captain Niggs. "Now, as you know, Ben, that box was found by some of the school kids when

the flood was at its 'ighest, while we was marooned on a durned tree. An' that same box fell out o' the earth when a part of Willard's Island collapsed. I don't mind admittin' as I was curious, an' it 'appened just right that the kids opened the box and 'ad a look what was inside."

Mr. Hudson suddenly sat up in bed, all his senses on the alert. The conversation had taken a turn which interested him treble-fold.

"Yes, cap'n, an' what did that blamed box 'ave in it?" grunted Mr. Croke. "Nothin'! Nothin', 'cept a piece o' paper with figures and things on it, an' a kind o' puzzle. A bloomin' rich treasure—I don't think!"

"That ain't the point, Ben," said Captain Niggs. "Them boys is boys, but, at the same time, they've 'ad smart learnin', which is more'n you an' me can boast of, old mate. The young 'uns reckon as how that piece of paper was a guide to a treasure—old John Willard's treasure. The paper, if you remember, was signed by Willard hisself."

"I see it wi' me own eyes!" declared Ben Croke. "But mebbe the old man was jest 'avin' a joke——"

"It ain't no jokin' matter," said the captain. "Besides, things look like as if there was a treasure, too. Why, ain't you heard that when old man Willard died 'is money was all missin'? Folks thought as 'ow he was a millionaire, an' yet, when it come to it, 'e 'ardly left two ha'pennies for a penny! Which all seems to show that the old buffer hid his money on the island, an' then pegged out."

Mr. Hudson breathed quickly as he listened to this talk. It was far more interesting to him than mere words themselves would indicate. For, as a matter of fact, he had come into this district for the sole purpose of making certain inquiries closely connected with old John Willard.

"But 'idin' the money an' findin' it are two different things," came Mr. Croke's voice. "We ain't even got that box, cap'n——"

"But there ain't no knowin' but what we might get 'old of it!" interrupted Niggs. "Them boys 'ave got it, an', as you know, I've bin up to the school two or three times, learnin' a few things. If we can only get 'old o' that foolscap paper an' the puzzle we'll be able to get real busy. Anyway, we can't do nothin' until we've got the secret."

Mr. Croke yawned.

"Then I reckon as we'd best go to bed," he said. "Talkin' don't do no good, cap'n. Mebbe you'll think of something by the mornin'. A man can't do much when 'e's tired, specially a man what's on 'is last bloomin' legs!"

Mr. Hudson stepped noiselessly out of bed, and then he pulled some clothing on. He had made up his mind what to do.

Going to the door, he passed out, and went to the next bedroom. He did not trouble to tap, but turned the handle and walked in. Captain Niggs and Mr. Croke were sitting on the edge of their big double bed, smoking. They had not even attempted to get undressed.

"Why, durn my hide!" said Captain Niggs, starting up. "What the——"

"Sorry to intrude, gentlemen!" interrupted Mr. Hudson. "But I felt that it was up to me to come and give a little explanation. Maybe you ain't acquainted with the fact that that wall be'ind you is only matchboardin'?"

Ben Croke started, and felt the wall.

"Strike me timbers!" he muttered. "'E's right, cap'n!"

"Furthermore, my bed's just against that partition," went on the newcomer. "I don't want to break it too quick, but it's right that you should know I've heard everything what you've just been talking about—Willard's Island, and the treasure, and the brassbound box——"

"Why, durn you, I'll break your 'ead open!" roared Niggs furiously.

He rose to his feet, clenching his burly fist. The sudden knowledge that this stranger had overheard the whole conversation completely upset the skipper. He overlooked the fact that it was rather strange that Mr. Hudson himself should impart the information.

"Steady, steady!" said Mr. Hudson. "There's no need to get excited, old feller! I come here as a friend, and not as an enemy. If I'd liked, I could have listened and said nothing. But I reckon as you two gentlemen can help me a whole heap in this little game."

"What are you a-gettin' at?" demanded Captain Niggs suspiciously.

Mr. Hudson closed the door, and then went across and sat down on the bed between the two river-men.

"Now, look here, my friends," he said softly. "Lost tempers don't do anybody a cent's worth of good. We've got to keep calm, and I can see that we three can come to some arrangement. In other words, we'll make a pretty big jump for this treasure, and, if we get it, we'll go shares."

"It's our secret—not yours!" grunted Captain Niggs. "'Tain't fair as you should take a third—not that I'm a mean cuss. An', anyways, you've got eddication, and mebbe you'll earn your third all right."

Mr. Hudson smiled.

"When I tell you who I am, I reckon you'll be more willing to let me in," he remarked. "My name's Hudson, and old John Willard was my brother-in-law. I married Willard's sister."

The two bargemen stared.

"We ain't such fools——" began Niggs.

"As to believe me, eh?" interrupted the

other. "Well, it's true, and I can prove it. I'll hand you plenty of proofs, Captain Niggs, if my word ain't enough. My wife's been dead now for six years or more, but I ain't never forgot what she used to tell me about her brother, who lived a kind of eccentric life in this district. Now, it 'appened that I was passing the school with a pal o' mine the other day. His car broke down, and we was walking—fairly smothered with mud, and looking like tramps, too. Well, anyway, we saw a boy in the big Triangle of the school."

"Wunnerful!" commented Mr. Croke gruffly.

"I don't mean an ordinary boy—one of the scholars," went on Hudson. "This boy was different, and he reminded me of my dead wife so much that I stopped and stared. I couldn't take my eyes off him."

"You ain't suggestin' as 'e was your son?" asked Captain Niggs.

"I never had any children," said Mr. Hudson. "But I certainly reckon that this kid was my nephew. And I'm certain of it now, because I've been making inquiries. Old John left a little kid when he died, and that kid ain't been seen for years. This boy at St. Frank's is named Martin—John Martin. But that doesn't deceive me. He's John Willard—the only son of the old feller what died, and my nephew."

"Yes, but 'ow does this affect us?" asked Niggs.

"It affects us very closely," said the other. "If this treasure is found—and I've got a strong suspicion that there's a lot of truth in that sceret—it would naturally become that boy's property, seeing as he's the only direct relative. But if he wasn't here, and couldn't be found, why, I'd get it all—that treasure would become mine by law! Savvy? So I'm playing for a big game. And if you men are willing, you can help me, and we'll go equal shares."

Captain Niggs and Mr. Croke pondered. They were not fully convinced that their visitor was speaking the truth, and the idea of his becoming legally possessed of the treasure did not quite appeal to them. Hudson might turn them off with only a few pounds as their share of the reward.

But Niggs soon put these thoughts aside. If Hudson tried any trickery, they would easily be able to bring him to reason, for they would be in a position to use threats of exposure.

In the end, the three men put their heads together, and they got talking. Mr. Hudson produced proofs which were quite satisfying, and Captain Niggs and Ben Croke decided that it would be better all round if the three of them searched for the treasure together.

And the three rascals shook hands on the compact.

Action was to begin—at once!

CHAPTER III.

SERGEANT HANDFORTH IN TROUBLE.

"DRILL!" said Sergeant Handforth briskly.

"Eh?"

"Which?"

"Drill!" repeated the sergeant. "It's not quite dark yet, and we might as well put in a bit of practice. I don't see why you fellows should slack about until bedtime."

The camp on Willard's Island was complete. Everything was shipshape and snug for the night. Tea had just finished, and all the cadets were feeling comfortably well filled and warm.

Handforth had not changed his clothes, for the simple reason that he had no change of clothes. But Church and McClure had done their best to remove all traces of treacle, without very striking success. Whenever Handforth sat down he stuck. On two occasions, after sitting on a camp stool, he had lifted the stool with him upon rising.

And Handforth was feeling somewhat irritable in consequence. There was no finer way, he decided, of relieving his feelings than to put the cadets through some drilling. He would be able to shout and storm as much as he liked. Being unable to punch noses just whenever he chose, Handy's only relief was to use his voice, and drilling exercises provided him with plenty of opportunities.

"Rats!" exclaimed Corporal Pitt. "This is a free and easy day, and we're not going to finish up by indulging in any drill. Besides, it's nearly dark."

"You'll obey orders, or be placed under arrest!" roared Handforth aggressively. "I'm the sergeant, and I mean to command! Now, then—the whole crowd of you! Line up, and get outside. You'll get across to the mainland, and form up in line! We'll have half-an-hour's drilling!"

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "How frightfully absurd!"

"What's that?" snapped Handforth.

"Nothing, dear old boy——"

"I don't want any insubordination!" snorted Handforth. "Are you fellows going to obey orders, or shall I take drastic action?"

"You ain't commander of this corps!" said De Valerie. "Lieutenant Nipper hasn't given any instructions that drilling is to be done to-night. The best thing you can do, sergeant, is to go and boil your face!"

I had been chatting with John Martin, but now I strolled up, and listened to the various comments which were being made.

"You'd better humour him," I said, winking to the cadets. "This corps is not a military one, in the true sense of the word. Things are a bit irregular—particularly to-day. But half an hour's drilling wouldn't do you any harm."

"There you are!" thundered Handforth. "You've got your orders, so you'd better look slippy and get on the move! 'Shun! Form into single file! Mark time! Quick march!"

Handforth rapped out the orders in such rapid succession that there was no possible chance of the cadets obeying. However, they had noticed my wink, and they all passed outside into the open. It was getting very dim. now, and was, strictly speaking, altogether too late for any exercises.

Fatty Little, of course, remained in the camp, and with him he had two orderlies, who had been told off to help with the washing-up. And another cadet was left on sentry duty at the main door.

The rest crossed over to the river-bank. There was a meadow here, which Handforth declared would do admirably as a parade-ground. We had plenty of boats, so the journey across the stream was quickly accomplished.

"Now, then, my lads, I'm going to make you move a bit!" shouted Handforth briskly. "Form into line! Now, then, Private Church, don't lag behind! What's the matter with you, Private Yorke? Hurry up!"

Handforth had no patience. He wouldn't even let a fellow pause to tie up an unruly bootlace. But, after a few slight delays, the cadets were lined up and standing to attention.

"That's better—although you look a pretty ragged lot!" exclaimed the sergeant sourly. "I've never seen such a disreputable-looking crowd in my life! Call yourself cadets? You can't even form up into a straight line!"

"It's getting dark, Handy," remarked Pitt casually.

"I don't want any rot from you, Corporal Pitt!" snapped the sergeant curtly. "Can't I see it's getting dark? Do you think I'm blind? Attention! Eyes—right! Eyes—left! As you were!"

The cadets shuffled about on the muddy ground.

"What's all that for?" demanded Handforth, swishing his cane. "Who told you to move your feet? Great pip! You're worse than a lot of street urchins! Form—fours! What the thunder—— Form fours, I said!"

The cadets formed fours neatly and with alacrity. They did it so well, in fact, that Handforth felt obliged to make some complaint. As a matter of fact, he didn't like the fellows performing their drill well, for it gave him no opportunity to storm at them.

"As you were!" he thundered. "Left wheel—quick march!"

The column of juniors marched away obediently, and Handforth watched them with satisfaction. The ground was rather sloppy, but he didn't mind this. It was quite firm where he was standing.

De Valerie was the first cadet of the column, and suddenly, without receiving any orders, he came to a halt. All the cadets behind him naturally came to a halt, too. The column remained still.

Sergeant Handforth nearly burst a blood vessel.

"What the—— How the—— You——you insubordinate rotters!" he howled. "Who told you to halt? Who told you to come to a stop? Quick march!"

"Why the dickens can't you tell us to think we're going to walk through this lot?" turn?" demanded De Valerie. "Do you

"You'll keep marching until I give you orders to stop!" retorted Handforth, striding forward. "I'll remember this, Private De Valerie! You'll be reported to the orderly room to-morrow morning, for disobedience of orders."

"You—you idiot!" roared De Valerie. "Do you think I'm going to sink in mud up to my neck? You're a dotty chump to start drilling us at all in this semi-darkness!"

"All right, my lad, all right!" snapped Handforth curtly. "We'll see! By George! We'll see! I'm not putting up with any rot, let me tell you!"

He arrived at the head of the column, and snorted.

"Mud?" he snapped. "Where? There's nothing here—it's all grass! Quick march, confound you! And you'd better get a hustle on!"

De Valerie remained still.

"Give us an order to right about turn and I'll obey!" he said. "But I'm blessed if I'm going to sink my knees——"

"That's enough!" thundered the sergeant. "Corporal Christine—'shun! Arrest this—this insubordinate dog at once! Take him to the guard-room, and——"

"Hold on, Handy!" said Christine. "Don't be an ass, you know! You can't expect any chap to walk forward into that horrible mire!"

Handforth clenched his fists.

"Am I to be obeyed or not?" he bellowed. "I'll soon show you! Afraid to march forward because of a little mud! All right—I'll lead the column! As you were! I—I mean quick march!"

Sergeant Handforth marched forward with heavy strides, fondly imagining that the column would follow. They kept quite still, and grinned with anticipation. De Valerie was particularly amused. Either his eyes were sharper than Handforth's, or the latter had not taken the trouble to look very carefully. And it was certainly very dim now.

Handforth succeeded in keeping on for about twelve yards. He only did this because he had his dignity to think of. Under any other circumstances he would have retreated as precipitately as possible.

With every stride he took, his feet sank deeper and deeper into a horrible black ooze. At a distance it was not apparent, owing to the fact that tufts of grass grew plentifully.

But when it came to the actual thing Handforth found out quite sufficient.

He was filled with inward alarm, for his feet squelched in well above the ankles. And he was just about to turn when his left foot sank right in—and kept sinking! He went in up to his knee, and he gave a wild yell.

"Help!" he roared. "I—I'm—— Great pip! What the——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The cadets, on comparatively solid ground, looked on with genuine pleasure. They all felt that this was exactly what Handforth deserved. He had asked for it in the plainest of plain terms.

The unfortunate sergeant tried hard to keep his balance. But his leg kept sinking in, and when he tried to pull it out his other leg sank, too. And then he lost his balance, and floundered. Wildly and desperately, he tried to keep in an upright position.

But it was impossible.

He staggered, gave a fiendish roar, and flopped down flat on his face. For a moment or two he practically vanished, and only a few despairing gurgles were heard.

The cadets nearly went into hysterics.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Handy—better than a giddy pantomime!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth had discovered, now that it was too late, that he had marched deliberately into a quagmire—a horrible bog of slimy mud. This, of course, was a result of the recent flood, but Handforth hadn't thought of that.

"Gug—gug—glooooooh!" he gabbled, as he managed to raise his head. "Help! I—I'm being sucked under.

"Quick march, sergeant!" yelled Tommy Watson.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you rotters!" gasped Handforth desperately. "I'll—I'll have you all court-martialled for this! By George! I—I'm sinking deeper every minute! This awful mud will suck me under in a minute!"

There was no danger whatever of this happening, but so tightly embedded was Handforth in the mire that all his efforts to move from the spot were unavailing. The most he could do was to flounder about from one position to another. In less than a couple of minutes he was invisible—a coating of thick mud had smothered him from head to foot.

In the dusk it looked as though the mud itself was heaving about. When Handforth tried to crawl his hands sank in past his elbows. When he tried to stand up his feet squelched into the ooze and stuck there, until it was almost impossible to free himself.

And it was into this bog that he had ordered the cadets to advance. Cecil De Valerie had been very wise in coming to a halt and ignoring orders. He had told Handforth in plain terms why he had halted, but Handy, pigheaded, as usual, had determined to see for himself. He was seeing!

"No, not just yet, my friend," said Nelson Lee calmly. It seemed impossible—incredible—but the detective was standing just behind him.

Corporal Christine took command of things.

"You fellows had better dismiss!" he exclaimed. "Two of you rush off and bring a long rope; you'll find one, in a coil, at the bottom of one of those willow-trees. Buck up! We don't want to lose our sergeant!"

It was not long before the rope arrived. A loop was made, and then the rope was flung, over the morass, to the unfortunate sergeant. The other end of the rope was held by five or six cadets, who were standing on firm ground.

"Get ready!" sang out Christine. "Are you right, Handy?"

"Gug—gug—gugh!" said Handforth muddily.

"That means 'haul away,' I suppose," grinned Jack Grey.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pull up, you chaps!" roared Christine. "Pull with a will!"

The six cadets on the end of the rope pulled with all their strength. And it was quite necessary to exert force, too, for

Handforth was so tightly embedded in the morass that no ordinary heave would shift him.

"Keep it up! He's moving!"

"Good!"

Handforth, at the end of the line, came out of the bog, with a peculiar sucking noise. Slime completely smothered him, and then suddenly he was completely free. The cadets who were hauling nearly collapsed.

And Handforth came slithering along over the muddy ground on his stomach. He clutched at the rope desperately.

And, at last, he found himself on the solid ground, surrounded by the rank and file. They were a heartless lot, for, instead of being duly sympathetic, they not only grinned, but positively yelled.

Handforth sat up, gasped, and spluttered.

"There you are, then!" grinned Church amiably.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth staggered to his feet, and rushed at Jack Grey, with the obvious intention of committing assault and battery. But Grey, who was unburdened by about a hundredweight of mud, had the advantage. He outdistanced his pursuer with the greatest of ease.

And Handforth gave it up and took the advice of Corporal Christine. He plunged into the river, and splashed about vigorously. The water completely lost its clarity for a radius of about twenty feet, but Handforth certainly looked a lot cleaner when he emerged, like a drowned rat, on the bank of the island.

He rushed straight in the camp, ripped off his uniform in front of a blazing fire, and vigorously rubbed himself down. Then, wrapped in a thick blanket, he rapidly recovered his usual activity and spirits.

Somebody lent him a uniform, and he dressed again. By this time he was as aggressive as ever.

"Just you wait, my lads!" he said fiercely. "Somebody's going to pay for this! You can't mess me about just as you like ——"

"My dear chap, it was the mud that messed you about!" I put in. "You've got to understand, Handy, that everything's free and easy now, and there are no distinctions between officers and privates. As I told you at the beginning, we don't become real cadets until to-morrow. To-day has been a free and easy day all the time, and it was entirely your own fault——"

"What was?"

"Walking into that bog——"

"You—you howling ass!" roared Handforth. "How was I to know? I ordered the troops to march forward, and they stopped. If they had obeyed orders, I should have seen 'em sinking, and then I should have been warned!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Thanks all the same, but we could see the bog without testing it!" said Singleton. "We told you about it, Handy, and you took no notice. I hope you're satisfied now that the ground wasn't solid enough for marching purposes."

Handforth growled out something inarticulate, and turned to the fire. He knew he was in the wrong, but he didn't like admitting it. He knew, also, that he had received exactly what he had asked for.

In the meantime, a tremendous campfire had been built on the open space in front of the building. The flames leapt up in the darkness, and all round about the cadets sprawled on their blankets. This was camp life proper—the real thing! And the day finished up quite well, all things considered.

We were snug and cosy on the island. Our sleeping quarters were prepared, and we were proof against the worst possible weather conditions.

And we all turned in, tired and sleepy, leaving two sentries on duty. These sentries, of course, would be changed at regular intervals during the night. Strictly speaking, no watch was necessary, but we felt that it would be more like the proper thing to have a couple of fellows on duty.

The island camp had started well.

CHAPTER IV.

NELSON LEE'S ADVENTURE.

MR. WILLIAM HUDSON held up a warning hand.

"Better not do any talking here," he whispered. "It's only about half-past eleven, and there are one or two lights showing yet. I reckon we ought to have waited until later on."

"Durn my hide!" said Captain Niggs. "Why in thunder should we wait? The school's silent and deserted. We don't want to go nosin' about the private quarters, matey. The boys have been a-bed this two hours past, an' I knows just where to walk to them studies."

"You're sure of that?" asked Mr. Hudson.

Captain Joshua Niggs grunted.

"Ain't I bin nosin' about 'ere for the last two days?" he whispered hoarsely. "I've watched the kids like I was a cat watchin' a bunch o' mice. I've seen 'em comin' in and out, and, what's more, I know the very winder what leads into the study belonging to the kid who took that brassbound box in."

"Sure, cap'n," agreed Mr. Croke.

"There can't be no mistake. It's the sixth winder from them steps," he added, pointing towards the Ancient House doorway. "Mind yer, I ain't exactly agreein' with this game. Breakin' into a 'ouse ain't in my line——"

"This ain't no ornery burglary," interrupted Captain Niggs. "'Tain't a burglary at all, strictly speakin'. An', anyways, we was real daft to bring you along, Ben. Why, like as not, you'll 'ave a 'eart attack jest when we're inside. Your 'eart 'as bin 'orrid weak for this five year past. Reminds me of a clock what's nigh on run down. It's liable to stop any minute. The fact is, Ben, you ain't no more good in this 'ere wicked world——"

"Cut that stuff out!" interrupted Mr. Hudson impatiently. "Ben Croke's all right—as strong as you are, Niggs. But there's no earthly reason why we should all get into the school. You fellows had better stay outside, on the watch. I'll go in and search——"

"Best let me come with yer, Mr. 'Udson," said the captain. "I've seed this 'ere box, an' I know it in a minute. You ain't seen it, and——"

"We won't argue," interrupted Hudson. "You'd better come."

They were crouching just inside the Triangle, against the outer wall. They had slipped over some minutes earlier. St. Frank's lay dark and silent, with one or two lights showing in a window here and there.

The main body of the Ancient House, however, was utterly dark, and the midnight marauders reckoned that they were quite safe in making an entry. Indeed, this was probably the best time of all.

If any unusual sound was heard by a master who happened to be working late, he would think nothing of it, whereas, if these men waited until the small hours, the slightest sound might alarm a light sleeper.

There was no moon, and the night was dark. This was all to their advantage, and they crept, like shadows, across the Triangle until they were crouching against the ivy-covered Ancient House wall. Here they paused for a few moments, in order to satisfy themselves that all was still quiet.

Then, foot by foot, they moved along the wall—until, in fact, they arrived opposite the window of Study C. Niggs had made no error. He had watched for hours, and had seen both Tregellis-West and Watson at the window of Study C on several occasions.

A quick examination told Mr. Hudson that the window presented no difficulties. He was not a professional housebreaker—indeed, he had never attempted anything like this in his life before—but, having heard all the details of the brassbound box from Captain Niggs, Hudson was morally certain that there was something big behind it all.

And he had no intention of letting such a chance slip by unheeded.

If this treasure was found by the boys, it would not be their property, but the property of old Willard's only son. But if Mr. Hudson found it, he would appropriate it himself, and risk the consequences, for, with John in the land of the living, Hudson had no claim upon it whatever.

"Do you think you can slip the catch?" whispered Captain Niggs.

"Hush! No talking!" breathed Hudson.

He was feeling for his penknife, and he soon had it out. Then, kneeling upon the wide window-sill, he manipulated the knife for some few minutes. Then a soft click sounded, and Mr. Hudson slid down.

"Done it!" he murmured. "Hold still now!"

Again they waited, in order to satisfy themselves that they would not be disturbed. Then Mr. Hudson seized the window, and gently edged up the lower sash, inch by inch.

When it was high enough up to admit his body, he wormed his way through, closely followed by Captain Niggs.

Once within the study, the two intruders carefully pulled the blind, and then Mr. Hudson struck a match and lighted a stump of candle. They gazed round the apartment swiftly.

"Better work quick; we don't want to be surprised!" whispered Hudson.

As it happened, their search was to be an exceedingly short one. Very naturally, the first place they examined was the cupboard, and there, right in front of their eyes, lay the precious brassbound box on a shelf. Hudson could hardly believe his luck.

But he wasn't lucky, after all.

The box proved to be absolutely empty. It contained nothing. The foolscap, with the cipher and the jigsaw puzzle had been removed.

"The artful young cusses!" growled Mr. Hudson savagely. "We might have expected this, if we hadn't been so cocksure. Still, we'll have a look round."

They searched the rest of the cupboard, and they searched the table drawer and every nook and cranny; but there was no sign whatever of the prize they had come after. It was apparent, in fact, that the cipher message and the jigsaw puzzle had been removed to another place.

Mr. Hudson was savagely disappointed. It really seemed as though he had expected the valuable contents of the brassbound box to be lying, open and unprotected, in the exceedingly doubtful security of a junior study. He might have known that the most careless boy would not leave such things lying about.

The question now was—where could the cipher message be? Where could the puzzle be? Captain Niggs had his own ideas on this subject, and he expressed them freely.

"I'll tell you what it is, Mr. 'Udson," he whispered. "Them things is bein' carried about by one o' the boys. I'll lay all I've got on it! There's one of the kids a bit more business-like than the rest—the fellow

took charge of the box. 'E must have them things."

"I suppose he's in bed now?" breathed Hudson gruffly.

"That's where he ought to be," said Captain Niggs. "But, y'see, some 'o these 'ere boys ain't in the school now. I told you all about that down at the inn. The artful young himps are on that island."

Mr. Hudson nodded.

"They are artful, and no mistake!" he said grimly. "They've set up this camp on purpose, I reckon. Made an excuse of some sort, I suppose, and got the headmaster to give 'em permission. And all the while they mean to search round for that treasure. We'll have to do something, Niggs."

"That's what me an' Ben was a-thinkin'," said the captain. "But it's a lot easier to talk about these 'ere things than to do 'em. Our best course, I reckon, is to get them young varmints off the island. Get 'em off, an' then plant ourselves there instead."

"We'll have a talk about that to-morrow," said Mr. Hudson. "There's no sense in staying in here, when we might be collared at any minute. Come on! You slip out first."

Within a minute or two they emerged once more into the Triangle, and the window was softly closed down. Mr. Croke gave an expressive grunt as he heard the result of the search.

"Strike me timbers! Just what I might 'ave expected!" he said. "'Tain't likely that them boys would be so durned careless. I sez all along that it wouldn't be no good."

"You allus was a man to be clever arterwards!" said Captain Niggs. "Not as you ever was clever, come to that. A man what 'as a brain three parts decayed can't do much thinkin'——"

"I've been looking at that light!" put in Mr. Hudson. "It must the window of one of the master's rooms, I reckon. Anyway, it wouldn't be a bad idea for us to creep up and have a look in."

"Too risky!" murmured Ben Croke.

"We sha'n't get anywhere unless we take a few risks," said Hudson. "And, anyway, I don't look upon this affair as dishonest. If there's any treasure, it's mine, by all rights, seeing that I'm old Willard's brother-in-law. The boy don't count. I'm hanged if I'm going to let these busybodies here take a hand in the affair! They'd best mind their own business!"

Mr. Hudson warned his companions not to speak, and they crept noiselessly forward, getting nearer and nearer to the window which was lighted up. The blind was drawn, but not completely. It was actually the window of Nelson Lee's study, and the famous schoolmaster-detective was seated at his desk.

Mr. Hudson went up close, and, bending low over the sill, just managed to obtain a glimpse of the room's interior. The electric-light was full on, and in the glass of a picture on the opposite wall the flames of a cheerful fire were reflected. In the centre of the room sat Nelson Lee.

He was sitting almost back to the window, but at such an angle that the watchers could see exactly what his occupation was. Nelson Lee had no suspicion that these prowlers of the night were in the Triangle. He believed that he had a quiet hour to himself, with no fear of any interruptions.

But Captain Niggs was strangely excited as he looked in at the window.

It was incredibly lucky—yet, after all, perfectly reasonable. Nelson Lee was puzzling over the secret cipher and the jig-saw! He was using this opportunity to fathom out the truth.

Practically the whole school was asleep, and so he had a quiet time without any fear of interruption.

Captain Niggs tugged at Hudson's sleeve after he had thoroughly satisfied himself. The three men moved off like shadows, until they were some little distance further along the wall.

"That durned cove had got 'em!" muttered Niggs tensely. "Durn my skin! I reckon he's one of the masters, an' them boys give 'im the things so as he could read the secret message."

"Things couldn't be better!" exclaimed Mr. Hudson tensely. "You don't know how lucky we are! Why, after thinking that the whole thing was hopeless, we find this fellow with the very articles we're after!"

"But 'ow are we goin' to get 'em?" whispered Mr. Croke.

"It ought to be easy," replied Hudson. "What you want here is brains. Simply breaking in and taking the cipher by force wouldn't be any good. We should only raise an alarm, and get nothing for our pains. We've got to adopt a strategy."

"An' what may that be?" asked Captain Niggs.

"Why, a ruse—a piece of bluff," replied Hudson. "It ought to be easy, too. See this window here—it's unlatched. There are bars across, but that don't matter. You don't need to get inside."

"What's the game?" asked Mr. Croke.

"It's simple—but it ought to work real well," said the other.

He gave his companions a few instructions, and then crept off once again to the window of Nelson Lee's study. The detective, in the meantime, was frowning thoughtfully over the cipher. It was very intricate—indeed, quite clever. So far the detective had found no clue, and he was acquainted with almost every form of cipher that had ever been invented. Nelson Lee had made a special study of the subject. But this message baulked him.

And then, as he was sitting at his desk, he heard a sound—faint, but quite distinct. It seemed to come from one of the other apartments in the same passage. It was as though something had fallen to the floor.

Nelson Lee looked up, and listened

intently. He judged that the sound had come from Mr. Crowell's study, which was two or three doors from his own and in the same passage. As a matter of fact, Captain Niggs was at the open window, and he had thrown a large stone into the apartment.

Lee rose to his feet as he heard a second sound, caused by another stone. He went straight to the door, and passed out. Hudson was watching at the window, and he didn't waste a second.

As quick as a flash, he pushed up the lower sash, slipped inside, and pushed back the blind. He knew that Nelson Lee might return at any moment, and, in order to be ready for any emergency, he had donned a rough mask, which he had constructed before leaving the inn.

With one reach, he possessed himself of the cipher and the jigsaw-puzzle. It was all so easy that he could hardly believe that Lee had been so simply tricked. Without troubling to put the paper and the puzzle in his pocket, he turned back to the window, and pushed aside the blind.

"No, not just yet, my friend," said Nelson Lee calmly.

It seemed impossible—incredible—but the detective was standing just behind him! He had not been fooled, after all! He had proved, on the contrary, that he was absolutely on the alert. He had left his own study, but he had slipped out into the Triangle, by means of an adjoining window, at lightning speed.

Mr. William Hudson recoiled, staggered.

"What—what——"

"You will kindly retreat into the centre of the room, and put your hands above your head!" said Nelson Lee, climbing in through the window. "And I should advise you to remove that mask; I am quite curious to make your acquaintance."

Hudson suddenly recovered the use of his limbs, and made a dash for the door. He wrenched at the handle, and cursed violently when he found that the door was locked.

"No; I was not quite as careless as all that," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "Come, I should not advise you to oppose me. I have the means to force my argument home, I fancy."

Hudson snarled out another oath as he saw that Nelson Lee had produced a revolver, the muzzle of which was pointing steadily at Hudson's chest. The man was alarmed—unnerved, in fact—and, in his panic, he took a risk which he would never have taken under any other circumstances.

Careless of the revolver—probably ignorant of it in his alarmed state of mind—he hurled himself with all his strength at Nelson Lee. The detective was not unprepared.

He met his man squarely, and the next second they were fighting.

Lee had managed to drop his revolver in his pocket, for he had never had any intention of actually using it. Since this man refused to be terrorised by the sight of the weapon, however, there was only one course to pursue.

And Nelson Lee tackled his assailant with all the strength of his wiry frame, and Nelson Lee was an extremely tough customer when it came to a scrap. Mr. William Hudson was finding this out quite rapidly.

He was a strong man himself, and he had expected that he would be able to overpower this schoolmaster in next to no time. For he did not know Lee's actual identity. If he had been aware of the fact that the Housemaster of the Ancient House was really the famous crime investigator of Gray's Inn Road—well, Mr. Hudson would probably have remained at the White Harp.

Two and fro the pair swayed. They had grappled fiercely, and each was trying to overthrow the other. Nelson Lee was the first to succeed. He secured a hold which rendered Hudson quite helpless.

Then, with a crash, the man fell on his back.

Lee retained his grip.

"Now, my friend, I think I'll have that mask off!" panted the detective. "I'm quite curious to find out who you are, and why you have honoured me with this late call. To begin with, we will take these."

Holding Hudson down, Lee dived his hand into the man's side-pocket. He produced the jigsaw puzzle and the cipher message. The puzzle was contained in a little box, and so it was easily removed. Nelson Lee tossed them on to the desk.

"Hang you!" snarled Hudson savagely.

"Temper will not improve the position," said Nelson Lee. "No; that won't do. I shouldn't advise you to attempt any more struggling. That's better—much better! Now we'll——"

Nelson Lee got no further.

He certainly had the better of Hudson, and it was not the detective's fault that things went badly for him then. He was capable of dealing with one man, but not with three, more particularly as two of the trio attacked unawares from the rear.

For, even as Nelson Lee was about to take his prisoner's mask off, Captain Niggs and Mr. Croke burst in through the window. Crouching in the darkness outside, they had seen Lee emerge from one window and get in the other, and the two bargemen knew that things were going badly for their new friend.

So they were just taking a hand in the game.

Before Nelson Lee could turn, the pair were upon him. Captain Niggs acted with promptitude. He whipped a scarf through the air, and pulled it over Nelson Lee's face and drew it tight. The next moment Lee was struggling fiercely in the grip of the three men. He found it impossible to keep his own head up against such odds.

"Good!" panted Hudson. "That's better!

I thought it was all up—— Grab that cipher message——"

"Darn my hide!" muttered Niggs abruptly. "Somebody's coming!"

The three men listened intently.

"You're right, cap'n—strike me timbers if you ain't!" said Ben Croke, making a move towards the window. "We'd best git out ——"

Footsteps were plainly audible in the passage. Alarm seized the intruders. With one accord, they rushed to the window and pushed their way through out into the night. Just at the moment of success they had been compelled to decamp—foiled! They had made off without their booty.

The next moment the study door opened, and Mr. Crowell entered. The Remove Formmaster was elegantly attired in pyjamas, slippers, and a somewhat ancient dressing-gown. A nightcap, which reposed on his head, gave him a comical appearance. He stared, horrorstruck, at Nelson Lee.

"Good heavens!" he gasped. "What—what has happened?"

"Do not alarm yourself, Mr. Crowell," said Nelson Lee smoothly, "and let me thank you for appearing at such an opportune moment. I fear that I should have got the worst of things if you had not turned up.

Lee tore the scarf away from his face, and rose to his feet. He noted, with satisfaction, that the cipher and the puzzle were still on the desk. He thanked Mr. Crowell, and briefly explained that three rough men had forced their way in—not ordinary burglars, but rascals who were just after what they could catch. The detective saw no reason why he should go into any details.

But Nelson Lee knew well enough now that he was dealing with determined foes, and he had received a very strong indication that the treasure cipher was a genuine document. Future events promised to be interesting.

CHAPTER V.

MR. GIDDY GETS GIDDY.

"SERGEANT HANDFORTH!"

"Hallo!"

"What did you say, Sergeant Handforth?" I asked severely.

"I—I—— Oh, all right!" said the sergeant. "Yes, sir? What is it, sir?"

It was afternoon, and we were in the orderly-room at the camp. I was sitting at my little table, and the various complaints of the day had been dealt with and several privates had been reprimanded for disobedience of orders or indifference to regulations.

Things had gone quite smoothly during the morning. We had attended lessons at St. Frank's as usual. But, instead of partaking of dinner in the Ancient House, we returned to Willard's Island, for we were taking all our meals in camp. And our lessons, owing to the peculiarity of the position, were somewhat curtailed. All cadets were allowed to leave the classroom half an hour before the rest of the Remove. The jealousy among the non-cadets was tremendous.

"Sergeant Handforth, I want you to take three men and run into Bannington as quickly as possible," I said, looking up from my papers. "You will conduct the party to various establishments, in order to obtain supplies. There are several items which are urgently needed. I have a list here, and ——"

"That's all right, sir," interrupted the sergeant briskly. "Leave it to me, sir! You insist upon being called 'sir,' so I'll carry on, sir. Yes, sir! You want me to go to Bannington, sir? With three men, sir? Right, sir!"

The sentry on duty at the door grinned widely.

"I didn't ask you to make an ass of yourself, sergeant!" I said sternly. "You may think it funny to talk like that, but I don't. I will allow you to choose your own men, and you had better get off as quickly as possible."

"Yes, sir," said Handforth. "By the way, shall we go by train or walk?"

"Neither," I replied.

"Oh, I suppose we shall fly!" sneered the sergeant.

"No—you will take your bicycles," I replied. "I should like you to show just a little more common sense, sergeant. Take your bicycles, and be back here in good time for evening drill."

Handforth saluted.

"Leave it to me," he said. "I'll make the asses hustle!"

I gave Handforth the list of goods which were to be obtained, and, a moment later, he saluted once more and bustled out. It was quite a bright day, although there had been a lot of rain during the night. A number of cadets were standing about on the island, chatting in groups. Some were indulging in horseplay and other recreations. Handforth let out a bellow.

"'Shun!" he roared. "Every man will cease messing about!"

"Go and boil your head, sergeant!" said De Valerie. "We ain't on duty now, you ass——"

"Private De Valerie, you'll be reported to the commanding officer if you address me in that way again!" snapped Handforth. "'Shun! I don't want any of this insubordination!"

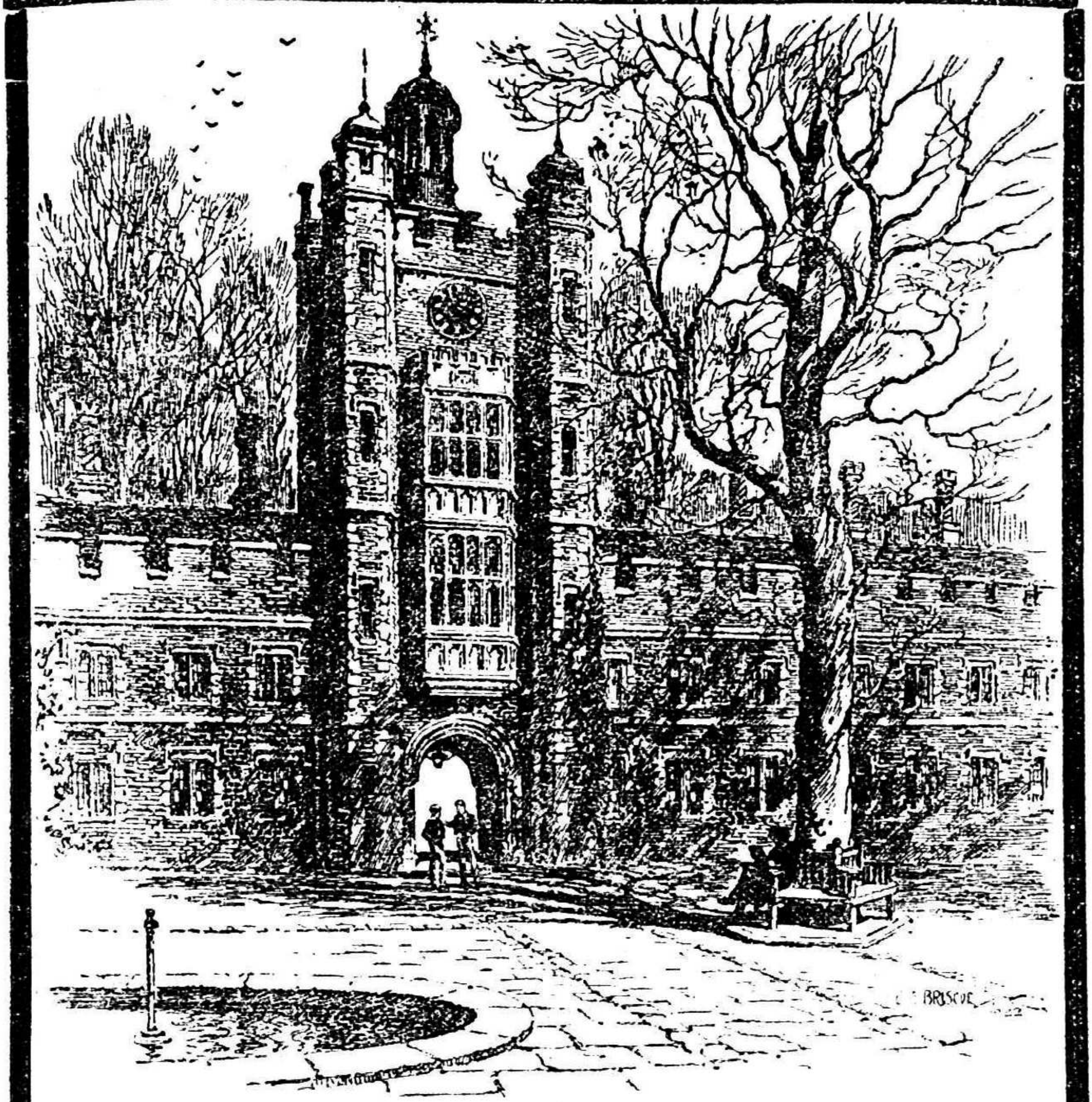
"What's biting the ass now?" asked Church. "We were distinctly told that there would be no general duty this afternoon, and now the fathead starts this!"

"Oh, he can't help it!" growled McClure. "He was born like that!"

(*Continued on page* 25.)

NIPPER'S MAGAZINE

No. 14. THE JOURNAL OF THE REMOVE OF ST. FRANK'S Edited by Nipper. Feb. 25, 1922.



The Clock Tower at St. Frank's

(Specially drawn for Nipper's Magazine.)

PECK'S BAD BOY AND HIS "PA".

HIS PA IS "NISHIATED."

Are you a Mason?—No Harm to Play at Lodge—Why Goats are kept in Stables—The Bad Boy Gets the Goat Upstairs—The Grand Bumper Degree.

"SAY, are you a Mason, or a Nodfellow, or anything?" asked the bad boy of the grocery man.

"Why, yes, of course I am; but what set you thinking of that," asked the grocery man.

"Well, do the goats butt when you nishiate a fresh candidate?"

"No, of course not. The goats are cheap ones, that have no life, and we muzzle them, and put pillows over their heads, so they can't hurt anybody," says the grocery man, as he winked at a brother Oddfellow who was seated on a sugar-barrel, looking mysterious. "But why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothin', only I wish me and my chum had muzzled our goat with a pillow. Pa would have enjoyed his becoming a member of our lodge better. You see, Pa had been telling us how much good the Masons and Oddfellers did, and said we ought to try and grow up good so we could jine the lodges when we got big; and I asked Pa if it would do any hurt for us to have a play lodge in my room, and purtend to nishiate, and Pa said it wouldn't do any hurt.

"He said it would improve our minds and learn us to be men. So my chum and me borried a goat that lives in a livery stable. Say, did you know they keep a goat in a livery stable so the horses won't get sick? They get used to the smell of the goat, and after that nothing can make them sick but a glue factory.

"You see my chum and me had to carry the goat up to my room when Ma and Pa was out riding, and he blatted so we had to tie a handkerchief around his nose, and his feet made such a noise on the floor that we put some baby's socks on his hoofs.

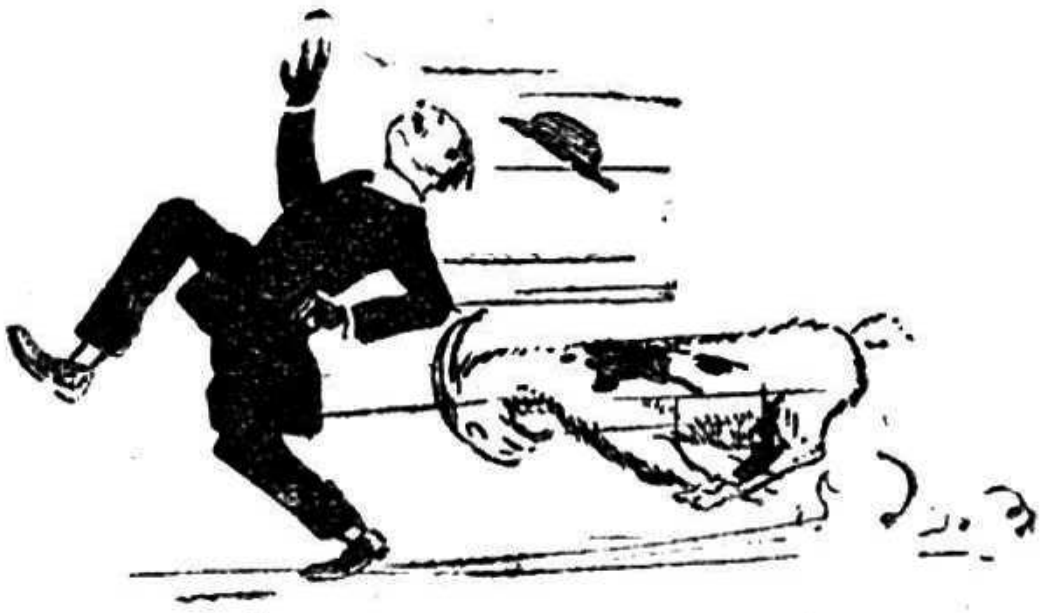
"Well, my chum and me practised with that goat until he could butt the picture of a goat every time. We borried a beer sign from a saloon man and hung it on the back of a chair, and the goat would hit it every time.

"That night Pa wanted to know what we were doing up in my room, and I told him we were playing lodge, and improving our minds; and Pa said that was right, there was nothing that did boys of our age half so much good as to imitate men, and store by useful nollidge.

"Then my chum asked Pa if he didn't want to come up and take the grand bumper degree, and Pa laffed and said he didn't care if he did, just to encourage us boys in innocent pastime that was so improving to our intellex.

"We had shut the goat up in a cupboard in my room, and he had got over blatting; so we took off the handkerchief, and he was eating some of my paper collars and skate straps.

"We went upstairs and told Pa to come



The goat thought he wanted to be nishiated too, and gave him one for luck

up pretty soon and give three distinct raps, and when we asked him who comes there he must say, 'A pilgrim, who wants to join your ancient order and ride the goat.'

"Ma wanted to come up, too, but we told her if she come it would break up the lodge, cause a woman couldn't keep a secret, and we didn't have any side-saddle for the goat.

"Well, we got all fixed and Pa rapped, and we let him in and told him he must be blindfolded, and he got on his knees a laffing, and I tied a towel around his eyes, and then I turned him around and made him get down on his hands also, and then his back was right towards the cupboard, and I put the beer sign right across Pa's clothes.

"He was a laffing all the time, and said we boys were as full of fun as they made 'em, and we told him it was a solemn occasion, and we wouldn't permit no levity, and if he didn't stop laffing we couldn't give him the grand bumper degree.

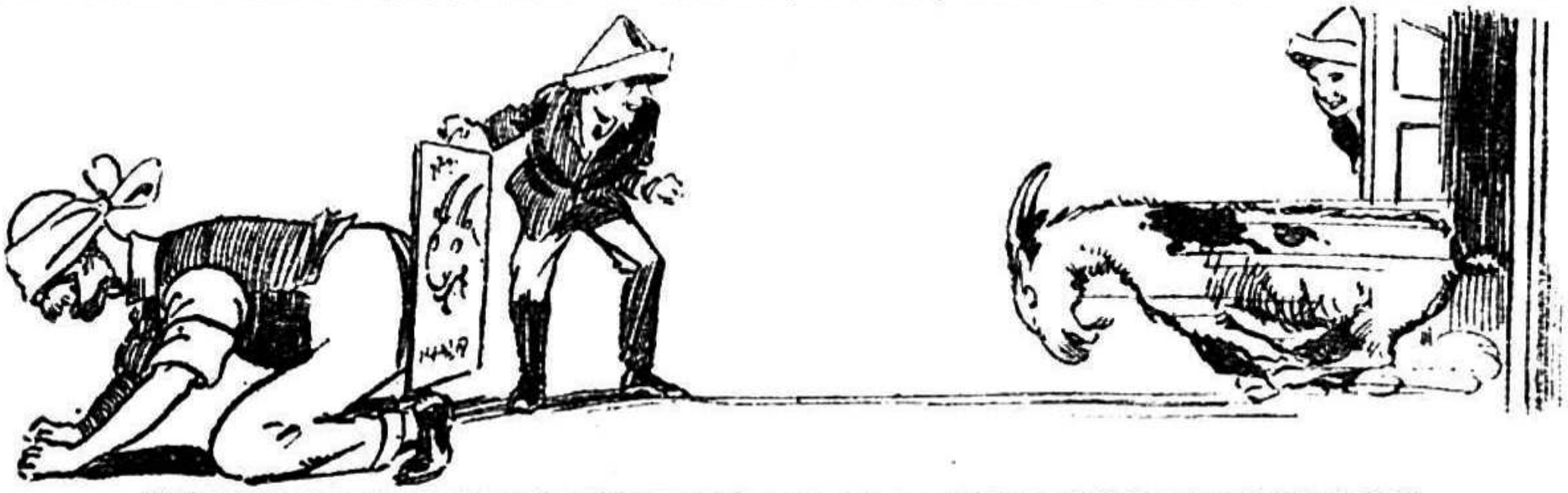
"Then everything was ready, and my chum had his hand on the cupboard door, and I asked Pa in low bass tones if he felt as though he wanted to turn back, or if he had nerve enough to go ahead and take the degree.

"I warned him that it was full of dangers, as the goat was loaded for bear, and told him he yet had time to retrace his steps if he wanted to. He said he wanted the whole business, and we could go ahead with the whole menagerie.

"Then I said to Pa that if he had decided to go ahead, and not blame us for the consequences, to repeat after me the following: 'Bring forth the Royal Bumper and let him Bump.'

"Pa repeated the words, and my chum opened the door, and then he see the beer goat sign raring up, and he started for it full steam ahead.

"Pa is real fat, but he knew he got hit, and he grunted and said, 'What you boys doin'?' and then the goat gave him another degree, and Pa pulled off the towel and got up and started for the stairs, and so did the goat; and Ma was at the bottom of the stairs listening, and when I looked over the banisters Pa and Ma and the goat were all in a heap, and Pa was yelling murder, and Ma was screaming fire, and the goat was blatting and butting, and the hired girl came into the hall and the goat took after her, and went downstairs the way we boys slide downhill, with both hands on herself, and the goat rared up and blatted, and Ma and Pa went into their room and shut the door, and then me and my chum opened the front door and drove the goat out.



"The goat started for the sign full steam ahead."

"The minister, who comes to see Ma every three times a week, was just ringing the bell, and the goat thought he wanted to be nishiated, too, and gave him one for luck, and then went down the street, blatting, and the minister came in the parlour and said he was stabbed, and then Pa came out of his room with his suspenders hanging down. My chum and me adjourned the lodge, and I went and stayed with him all night, and I haven't been home since. But I don't believe Pa will lick me, 'cause he said he would not hold us responsible for the consequences.

"He ordered the goat hisself, and we filled the order, don't you see? Well, I guess I will go and sneak in the back way, and find out from the servant how the land lays.

"She won't go back on me, 'cause the goat was not loaded for girls. She just happened to get in at the wrong time. Good-bye, sir."

As the boy went away, and skipped over the back fence the grocer man said to his brother Oddfellow: "If that boy don't beat the band then I never saw one that did. The old man ought to have him sent to a lunatic asylum."

THE H'OPINIONS OF MARY JANE

Masters.

MASTERS ain't like ordinary men, in a way o' speakin' (said Mary Jane argumentatively, as she studied her handiwork in Mr. Crowell's study). There's all sorts of things as I notice about masters. Queer things, some of 'em. Then, again, some ain't queer at all. It jest depends.

I allus cleans out these 'ere studies. O' course, I don't have nothink to do with the College 'Ouse, an' the masters over there. But I allus cleans Mr. Lee's study, an' Mr. Crowell's study, an' Mr. Pagett's study, an' Mr. Suncliffe's study. An' never did I see sech a different set o' human bein's!

The "Proprietors" must be kep' up

Strictly speakin, it ain't none o' my business for to git talkin' about the masters. If they was to 'ear me, like as not I'd be in for a rare rousin' from Mrs. Poulter. She's hot on the proprietors, like. I don't know what she means, but she's allus talkin' about it. "The proprietors," sez Mrs. Poulter, "must be kep' up," she sez. An' I allus thought them Governors what was 'ere some time back was the proprietors. Why they needs to be kep' up beats me.*

Still, in spite o' them, I don't see as 'ow I shouldn't 'ave my word. As I sez, it's me dooty to clean out the masters' studies. An' I can tell what the gents is like, simply from the litter what they makes.

What a nice gent Mr. Lee is.

Take Mr. Nelson Lee, for example. I cleans hout 'is room a-Mondays. Leastwise, that's what I ought to do. But, bless yer 'eart, there ain't never anything to clean hout! Never did I see sech a tidy gent! You could eat your dinner off 'is fireplace, so to speak. Never no dust an' mess, never no untidiness, an' his study allus lookin' as though it was a new pin. An' Mr. Lee smokes, too—smokes chronic, by what I've seed. Yet he don't smother the place wi' that there nasty ash, or litter up the floor with used matches. 'Is books is always where they oughter be. Everythink is in its right place. An' all I've got to do is to jest go round wi' me duster, an' me broom, an' dustpan, an' I've finished hinside a hour. But, there! Jest look what a nice gent Mr. Lee is!

'Ansom, too! Mind you, Mr. Lee ain't in the fust bloom o' youth, like. Neither 'e ain't gettin' old. 'E's what you might call nice and comfortable. Now, if the grocer's young man was like Mr. Lee, only youmger, I wouldn't mind 'im a-takin' me about for walks of a-Sunday. But there ain't many gents as nice as Mr. Lee. An' ain't 'e got nice eyes? As kind as a dawg's, they is, as true as I'm a-standin' 'ere! Not meanin' any hinsult, o' course.

Mr. Crowell ain't such a bad sort.

Then there's Mr. Crowell. A fair old stick, as I might say. Everythink prim and in horder. You speak to 'im, and 'e raps back like 'e was one o' them police court judges. I know, cos' I was a witness once, when my brother Tim 'ad a drop too much on 'is birthday, an' was ran in. But I don't need to speak o' that, an' disclose all my family 'istory.

An' while Mr. Crowell's a-talkin' to you, 'is eyes seem to bore 'oles. It ain't surprisin' the young gents calls 'im gimlets! But, for all that, Mr. Crowell ain't sech a bad sort. He gets 'is study in a tidy mess, an' gives me a rare old time on a We'n'sday, when I cleans it hout. 'E's such a one for leavin' his papers about. All over the study, they is, arf of them on the floor. An' yet, when I makes 'em all nice an' tidy, 'e goes an' rattles on to me for messin' of 'em up! There ain't no pleasin' some people, do what you might.

As for Mr. Suncliffe, what looks arter the Third Form, I don't 'ave much to do with 'im.

A most unpleasant gent.

But when it comes to Mr. Pagett—well, I s'pose I'd best say as little as possible. Still, 'e can't eat me, even if 'e does 'appen to 'ear what I've bin a-sayin'. But never in my born days did I come across sech a huntidy man. Ashes everywhere—cigarette ends on the floor, matches strewn everywhere, an' dust all over the blessed room! 'Ow 'e manages it in one week beats me 'oller. An' allus a-grumblin'. No matter 'ow much time I spends, a-makin' 'is study right, there's for ever somethink wrong. It don't give a gal 'eart to do anythink proper. An' 'is temper! One o' them narsty, 'orrid tempers, what makes you want to 'it somethink! An' 'is voice allus reminds me of that there thing they grinds knives on. A most hunpleasant gent, if ever there was one.

The 'Ead.

The 'Ead? Well, I don't clean out the 'Ead's study. I ain't allowed in there, an' never was. But the 'Ead's one o' them fine old gents what makes you feel kinder mean an' small. Allus reminds me of the Archbishop o' Canterbury, 'e does—or the butler at Major Browning's, where I worked afore I came 'ere, three year back. Yes, masters is a queer lot on the 'ole—though there's good an' bad everywhere—as the feller sez as 'e bought a pen'orth of 'ot roasted ches'nuts!

(* Mary Jane probably means the proprieties! Ed.)

SCHOOLBOY HOWLERS

The following humorous stories have been taken from various schools in different parts of the country.—Ed.

The Wild Cat.

On one occasion a member of the School Board for London paid a visit to a Board school in East Lambeth. In going through the infants' department he was very pleased and interested to see the variety of kindergarten apparatus, the coloured cards and appropriate pictures on the wall, and, more than all, the bright and happy faces of the little ones. Whilst standing before one of the classes, he was told by the lady teacher that if he would like to put any question to the infants he was at liberty to do so.

The gentleman felt slightly embarrassed as to what sort of question he could put to the little people; until it struck him that it would be best, perhaps, to ask them something about the pictures on the wall. So, pointing to one of the coloured picture cards, he asked:

"What animal is depicted on that?"

"The wild cat of the woods, sir!" shouted out a little six-year-old lad, with surprising confidence and readiness.

"Quite right, my child," said the gentleman, very much pleased, "and how do you know?"

"'Cos it's printed underneaf, sir!" frankly replied the wee dot.

And then the School Board member, on putting on and adjusting his spectacles, observed that the name *was* indeed printed underneath as plainly as could be.

Too Realistic.

A lady was giving to a mixed class of boys and girls a chatty lesson on certain interesting historical events and on subjects of popular legendary lore. Presently she adverted to the knights errant and fair dames of the days of chivalry, and related to the class a number of pleasing stories of Queen Matilda, Richard the Lionhearted, Simon de Montfort, and others.

As she finished this part of her subject, she said to the children, rather pensively.

"My dear boys and girls, do you know that I sometimes wish that *I* had lived in those old feudal times—in those fair and chivalrous middle ages."

"Didn't you then, mum?" cried out one of the youngsters, staring at her incredulously.

Evidently the little fellow had been so moved and carried away by the dame's realistic stories, that he had, for the time being, believed that she was describing what she had actually seen.

The Effects of Heat and Cold.

In the course of a lesson on elementary science, the master of a national school got a remarkable answer from one of the lads.

The teacher, after speaking of the various sources of heat, proceeded to speak of its ordinary effects. He told the scholars that as a rule heat expanded objects, and cold contracted them.

"Now," he asked by way of testing to what extent the lads observed and thought for themselves, "what boy can give me an example, from his own personal knowledge and observation, of expansion by heat and contraction by cold?"

A number of lads elevated their hands; and the master pointed to one who seemed particularly anxious to unburden himself.

"Yes, my lad, you may tell me," he said.

"Why sir,," answered the lad, "it's in summer we get the longest day, and in winter the shortest one!"

A Chestnut!

A schoolmaster was trying to elicit from the children what a "proverb" was. So he said:

"When a thing comes to be repeated by many persons, it is called a 'saying'! Now, when the thing is repeated by everybody and is accepted as a fact, what do we call it then?"

"A Chestnut!" promptly responded one of the scholars.

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. 3.—THE BLACK TERROR OF BLACKHEATH.

"GREAT HEAVENS!"

Trackett Grim, the world-famous detective, staggered back with a cry of horror. Splinter recoiled—mainly owing to the fact that Trackett Grim crashed violently into him.

"What—what's the matter, sir?" he asked faintly.

"Are you blind?" gasped Trackett Grim in a terrible voice. "Are you unable to see, Splinter? Look! There, right before us, there is the corpse of a man!"

Splinter staggered. He and his celebrated master were walking across Blackheath—that dreary stretch of common land situated somewhere in the south suburbs of London. They had been investigating a case in Putney, and were on their way home, having failed to get a taxi.

Trackett Grim had just completed a wonderfully successful case. He had recovered the famous rubies belonging to the Marquis of Snortski, and the latter had rewarded him with a cheque for two thousand roubles*—the marquis being a Russian.

And now, in the middle of Blackheath, Trackett Grim and his assistant came to an abrupt halt. There, before them, lying prone on the ground, was a body. It was the body of a man, lying face downwards in the dust.

Splinter stared in horrified silence.

"What shall we do, sir?" he asked.

"Do?" said Trackett Grim, in a voice which Splinter knew well. "Do? We will investigate! We will track down the murderer of this poor fellow! We will bring the miscreant to justice! I—Trackett Grim—have said so!"

With these stirring words, the famous detective knelt down on the muddy ground and examined the victim. He turned the body over, and it could be seen that he was a smallish man, and he was wearing rather dilapidated clothing. He had a moustache with long points, and he needed a shave. He was hatless.

"How was he killed, sir?" asked Splinter fearfully.

Trackett Grim filled his pipe out of his pound-tin of tobacco, and thoughtfully applied a match. The air became filled with the fumes of the strong tobacco. Trackett Grim always smoked such strong tobacco that he had to have it specially grown for him.

"How was he killed?" he repeated, frowning. "What does that matter, boy? The main thing is to get on the track of his murderer. Good heavens! What is this? Do you see, Splinter—do you see? What is this?"

Trackett Grim turned the body over, and then, for the first time, Splinter saw that which had caused his celebrated master to express such surprise.

There, on the rear portion of the victim, were a number of sinister black marks. There were none on other parts of his clothing. Just these on the rear—thick, black lines. What could be the meaning of this strange grim sign?

"Ah! I am beginning to understand!" said Tracket Grim as he puckered his high brow. "This, Splinter, is the work of a terrible gang. This murder has been committed by a dastardly secret society! Don't you understand? The vile wretches have murdered their victim, and they have stamped him with their secret sign! This crime has been committed by the Black Terror of Blackheath!"

* Twopence-halfpenny.

Tracket Grim walked along, keenly studying the ground with one hand, and carrying the corpse with the other

"Great goodness!" said Splinter faintly.

"Come, boy, we cannot waste any further time," said the great detective crisply. "Ah! What do I see? Look! This Mystic Sign was painted upon the poor fellow by means of some black paint, or enamel substance."

"Tar," suggested Splinter shrewdly.

"There is no need for you to thank me," said Tracket Grim absently. "This case promises to be interesting. There are drops of the deadly paint along the road. Do you see? We will follow them, Splinter. I will go on in advance, and you will come along at some little distance in the rear. I cannot be bothered while I am concentrating upon the mystery."

"What about the body, sir?" asked Splinter.

"Ah, yes, the body!" said Trackett Grim. "I will take it with me."

And, saying these words, the detective grasped the victim by his rear clothing, and lifted him from the ground. Then Trackett Grim walked along, keenly studying the ground with one hand, and carrying the corpse with the other.

For some little distance he walked. Now and again the body seemed to quiver slightly, but Trackett Grim was so absorbed in his investigation that he did not notice this fact. But very soon a staggering revelation was to be made. Not even the cleverest reader will be able to discover this disclosure.

On and on went the detective, still carrying the body, and still examining every inch of the ground. At intervals Trackett Grim produced his powerful magnifying lens, and gave particular scrutiny to particular spots.

But at last he came to the end of the trail.

There, right in front of him, was a seat—a park seat. He dropped the body with a cry. For the park seat was wet with black paint, and it was only too obvious that the murdered man had been sitting on it.

"We are getting on the track of the murderers!" muttered Trackett Grim triumphantly. "Splendid!"

Just then the dead body turned over, sat up, and uttered a sound. This amazing thing was too awful for words. The corpse was sitting up! Then Trackett Grim made one of those marvellous deductions for which he was justly famous. He came to the conclusion that the victim was not dead at all!

As the man rose to his feet Trackett Grim brought out his lens, and he levelled it at the victim. He examined him closely. It was necessary to find out the whole truth.

"What is the meaning of this, my man?" asked Trackett Grim sternly. "How is it that you are alive, when I thought you to be dead? You have upset all my theories!"

"Sorry, guv'nor," said the corpse. "I'm ill! I'm dying fast——"

"So I imagined," said Trackett Grim. "Tell me, who were the men who set upon you? What black gang was this which nearly murdered you? Tell me, and I will bring the curs to justice. I will take you home, and make you comfortable——"

"I'm at my last gasp," panted the man faintly. "That's right! Take me home! I need a bed for the night——"

"You shall have it," interrupted Trackett Grim curtly. "Splinter!"

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(Continued from page 23)

The assistant stepped up on the instant.

"Fetch a taxi," said Trackett Grim, waving his hand. "We must defer the investigation until later. The corpse has come to life. We will take him home."

Within a minute Splinter was back with a taxi. Then the three got into it, and within five minutes Baker's Inn Road was reached. The dying man was put into the most comfortable bed which Trackett Grim possessed.

Then, feeling that nothing more could be done until the man told his story, Trackett Grim and Splinter went to bed themselves. Unfortunately, they were obliged to sleep on the sofa.

Splinter was the first up, and soon he came rushing to his great master. His face was the colour of chalk.

"The body has gone, sir!" he cried dramatically.

"Gone!" gasped Trackett Grim.

"Yes, and your best suit, and watch, and all the valuables off the sideboard," said Splinter, horrified. "What can it mean, sir?"

"This is terrible," said the detective sadly. "Need you ask, Splinter? The Black Terror of Blackheath have tracked their victim down. While we slept they removed him, and rifled the house as well.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked Trackett Grim. "I thought you were dead."

We must set this down as one of our infrequent failures, my boy. But I am not done! The Black Terror shall be brought to justice before I rest again!"

And Trackett Grim dropped into the depths of his biggest armchair and filled his pipe. The air became filled with choking fumes from the strong tobacco. Splinter retired—he had business elsewhere.

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.

My dear Chums,—As we go to Press three weeks in advance of publication, this is the first opportunity I have to thank publicly my numerous correspondents who, at my invitation, gave me their opinions of the Mag. I have answered as many of these letters as possible personally, and I cannot over-estimate their value to me as a guide in selecting the right sort of contributions for the Mag.

NIPPER'S RIVAL.

The Handforth articles and stories seem to be very popular with a large number of my correspondents. Edward Oswald, of course, is as pleased as Punch, and I am only afraid that he will get another serious attack of swelled head in consequence. He has more than once intimated that he really ought to be editing the Mag. In fact, knowing Handy as I do, now that he has got this into his head, there will be no peace in the office until he gets complete control of the paper. I am seriously thinking, therefore, of the advisability of letting Handforth run the Mag. for one week. That will be quite long enough both for Handy and for everyone else. We might call it a special Handforth edition, for it will sure to be Handforth throughout. I do not know exactly when this will come about, but you will not have long to wait—trust Handy. Meanwhile, he will write another Trackett Grim story next week, entitled "The Case of the Red Pirates."

NEXT WEEK.

Other attractions for next week will be a special pen drawing of the Head's house, and some priceless impressions by our new ornament to St. Frank's—Archie.

(*Continued from page* 16.)

Handforth strode in among the cadets.

"I want three volunteers!" he exclaimed sharply. "You're to accompany me to Bannington on bicycles, and I don't want any arguments! You'll do for one, Church, you for another, McClure, and Private Grey for a third. Better get into your kit at once, and report for duty in five minutes!"

"Hold on sergeant!" interrupted Grey. "I thought——"

"It doesn't matter what you thought!" snapped Handforth. "Obey orders!"

"You prize ass!" shouted Grey. "Didn't you just say that you wanted three volunteers? And before any chaps have a chance to offer themselves you pick three of us out. Personally, I'm not keen on the job ——"

"I'll go!" said Singleton.

"Same here!" exclaimed three or four other cadets.

Handforth glared, and swished his cane.

"The three volunteers have been chosen!" he retorted. "Church, McClure, and Grey—that's enough. I'm not allowing any squabbling about it, and unless you dry up, I'll put you through half an hour's extra drill this evening!"

This threat effectually put a stop to all further objections. Handforth was a holy terror as a sergeant, but, on the whole, he was doing fairly well. He took a tremendous interest in his work, and entered wholeheartedly into every task that was allotted to him.

Certainly, his presence in the Cadet Corps made the whole force something of a ragtime affair, but we didn't mind this much. After all, we were not official cadets, but just a free-and-easy party among ourselves. And we all enjoyed the camp, and considered that we were lucky.

In a short time Handforth and his small party were ready. They crossed over to the mainland, and went ashore. Handforth didn't believe in doing things by halves. He wasn't having any free and easy business here.

"'Shun!" he commanded. "Form into single file! Right turn!"

The three cadets grinned, and obeyed. With Church at the head, they stood in a line at attention. Handforth walked up and down, surveying them critically, as though they were a complete platoon.

"Mark time!" he rapped out. "Good! Quick march!"

He stalked away at the head of the little column, swaggering with complete self-importance. The cadets on the island grinned amusedly as the four juniors marched out of sight. They did not go far—merely to the boathouse, in fact. This was a temporary bicycle-shed.

Four machines were brought out and inspected. They were found to be in perfect condition for immediate use.

"I suppose we can take things easier now?" asked Church.

"You suppose wrong, Private Church!" retorted the sergeant. "You'll ride just the same as you march—in single file. I will take the lead. We've got to show the people of Bannington that we're strict on discipline. We want to make an impression."

The three cadets said no more. For some distance they wheeled their machines over the meadow, until they came to a footpath. Here it was possible to mount, and in a short time they reached a lane which ultimately led into the main Bannington road.

This was in a shocking condition. The recent flood had practically washed the surface away, leaving it stony, rutty, and smothered with mud. Cycling was rather difficult.

But Handforth went at a good speed, in his usual reckless fashion. His three men lagged behind somewhat.

"Now, then—no slacking!" shouted the sergeant, turning round. "Keep pace with me, you rotters! What's the idea of getting behind like this?"

"If you want to have a skid, you're welcome to it!" exclaimed Church. "This greasy mud is treacherous, and I'm not anxious to smother myself in it. There's no need to go in such a tearing hurry!"

"There's no danger of skidding, you scared ass!" snorted Handforth, turning his head again. The road's fine—— Whoa! What the—— Hi! Great pip! I—I—— Help!"

The sergeant's front wheel had struck a loose stone, and the next second his bicycle skidded dizzily. It was only by a piece of sheer luck that he managed to keep himself upright. His fellow cadets expected him to collapse on the spot.

"No danger of skidding, eh?" grinned Jack Grey. "Not at all!"

"You—you fathead!" roared Handforth. "That wasn't a skid!"

Grey did not see why he should argue. He let the matter rest. And Handforth continued the journey at a somewhat more sedate pace. When the town itself was reached the road surface was found to be even more treacherous, for there had been more traffic here, and the mud was churned up into just that condition of slimy grease which makes a first-class skid mixture.

"Now we're all right!" exclaimed Handforth briskly. "No ruts or stones here! We can let her rip!"

"What?"

"We'll buzz through the High Street at full speed——"

"Don't be an ass, Handy!" protested Church. "The roads are horribly greasy here, and any speed would bring disaster in half a tick. You can ask for trouble if you like. I'm not going to!"

"You'll disobey orders?" thundered the sergeant.

"Yes, if you give potty orders like that!" said Private Church rebelliously.

"Same here!" agreed the other cadets.

Handforth nearly fell off his bicycle.

"All right! You wait until you get back to camp!" he roared. "I'll make it hot for you—I'll give you something to think about! You'll be reported to the commanding officer, and I'll see that you get a week's C.C.!"

"A week's which?" asked Jack Grey.

"C.C.!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You mean C.B., sergeant!" grinned McClure.

"I don't mean anything of the sort!" snapped Handforth. "You think you're clever, but you're simply ignorant. 'C.B.' means confinement to barracks. Well, we haven't got any barracks—we've only got a camp. 'C.C.' means confinement to camp. And you'll all be kept prisoners for a week for this insolence!"

The three cadets grinned, and didn't appear to be very upset. And Handforth, without another word, put a spurt on. He shot into the High Street at a somewhat dangerous speed, considering the state of the road. The other cadets came along at a more comfortable pace.

They fully expected Handforth to meet with disaster, and, sure enough, their expectations were realised within the next few seconds.

Handforth arrived at the curve in the High Street. There was very little traffic about, and only a few pedestrians were walking up and down the pavements. At this hour of the afternoon the town was quiet.

A short, stout little man emerged from a tobacconist's shop, and made his way straight across the road. He was a very self-important looking individual, with a round, red face and a figure like a football. He had short, stumpy little legs, which moved with fat, rapid strides.

And it was rather unfortunate that Handforth should come whizzing round the bend at that moment. There was really no fear of a collision, for the stout little man saw the cyclist, and paused.

But at that very second Handforth's back wheel commenced slithering on the muddy surface. It was the beginning of one of those skids which, once started, cannot possibly be checked.

"Whoa! Look out!" howled Handforth wildly. "Oh, my hat! I—I——"

Crash!

Handforth nearly turned a complete somersault as he came off his skidding machine. The fat little gentleman did his utmost to dodge in time, but found it impossible to do so.

The cyclist and the cycle bore down upon him like an avalanche, and the fat man, even as he was trying to dodge, received

(*Continued on next page*)

the full force of Handforth at his chest. They came to earth in a hopeless tangle.

Unfortunately, the little fat man got the worst of it. He was underneath, and the way he churned up the mud was frightful. He was smothered from head to foot, whereas Handforth, on the top, picked himself up with only his hands coated and a patch or two on his uniform here and there.

The bicycle lay in the gutter.

"Of all the clumsy asses!" snorted Handforth ungraciously. "What the dickens did you get in my way for? Look what a mess I'm in now!"

The other cadets had come up, and were now dismounted. Church hastened to give his bicycle into McClure's charge. Then he hurried forward, bestowing a glare upon Handforth which had no effect upon the latter.

"You ass!" whispered Church. "I knew what would come of your speeding in this grease!"

"It wasn't my fault!" howled Handforth. "If this blessed little tub gets in my way, what am I to do? I didn't ask him to plant himself——"

"Infernal young dog!"

Handforth turned abruptly as the voice came to his ears. It was a puffed voice, which was filled with fury and indignation. The fat little man had sat up, and he presented a fearsome spectacle.

Quite a number of people had collected by this time, and were standing round, looking on with interest. The fat man was purple in the face with rage, but this was hardly noticeable owing to the mud.

"What did you call me?" demanded Handforth, turning. "I should like to know what the dickens you mean by getting in my way——"

"Getting in your way?" raved the other. "You—you unmitigated young scoundrel! You confounded road-hog! I'll have the police on you for this! Can't somebody fetch a policeman? By gad! I'll——"

"Do you think I care if you fetch a policeman?" snapped Handforth. "I've got a dozen witnesses who'll prove that you got in my way. I've a dashed good mind to claim damages for this affair!"

"Steady, Handy!" whispered Jack Grey. "It was your fault, you know——"

"Do you want a punch on the nose, Private Grey?" bellowed Handforth violently. "My fault! Didn't that chap walk deliberately into my bicycle?"

"No, you skidded into him," said Church. "Why, you didn't give him a chance to move. We told you what would happen if you put on speed in this grease!"

By this time the fat little man had gained his feet. He was really a pitiable spectacle, and he deserved a full and complete apology. It was Handforth's duty to instantly admit himself in the wrong, and take all the blame for the accident. But had Handforth ever been known to admit himself in the wrong?

He stared at the fat man aggressively.

"Perhaps you're feeling nice and comfortable, eh?" he said sarcastically. "You ought to be jolly pleased that you've got off so lightly! And, before you go, I want an apology!"

The stranger seemed to be on the point of choking. Twice he tried to speak, but no words would come. His mouth opened and closed, and only inarticulate sounds came forth. And it was not to be wondered at. For Handforth to take up such an attitude was past all endurance.

But at last the fat man found his voice.

"Good gracious!" he panted thickly. "You—you young scoundrel! You infernal wretch! You shall suffer for this! My name is Mr. Horace Giddy, and I intend to write to your commanding officer——"

"Rats!" interrupted Handforth. "My commanding officer would jolly soon put you in your place, Fatty! Your name just about suits you! If ever a chap was giddy, you were just now, when you ran into me ——"

"When—when I ran into you!" gasped Mr. Giddy faintly. "Why, you confounded young idiot, it was you who ran into me! Ah! I see now! You belong to St. Frank's College. All right—all right! I shall write to your Headmaster, and make a serious complaint about this!"

And Mr. Giddy, without giving the crowd any further satisfaction, dived abruptly into the entrance of a small hotel which was near by. The crowd dispersed, and Handforth and his cadets pursued their own way.

"The nerve of the chap!" said Handforth indignantly. "Trying to put the blame on to me! He was jolly lucky to escape so lightly!"

Church opened his mouth to make a comment, but decided, on second thoughts, not to do so. There was no earthly reason why an argument should be started in the middle of the High Street. For Church held private opinions which were totally opposed to those of his sergeant.

In the meantime, Mr. Horace Giddy was fuming and fretting in a private room of the hotel, sitting before a big fire, with blankets round him. His clothing was being cleaned and dried.

Mr. Giddy was not in the sweetest of tempers. At the very best of times he was a peppery little individual, and he had a habit of glaring at everybody he came into contact with.

He was self-important, and apparently had the idea that he was the most important person in the whole of Bannington. At the best of times he was short-tempered, but now, after this affair, he somewhat resembled an enraged bull.

He declared to the hotel manager that he would have the law on the St. Frank's juniors. He told the hotel boots that he would have Handforth thrown into prison, and he told himself that his revenge would be somewhat similar to that meted out to religious offenders of the Spanish Inquisition.

The hotel people were quite smart in their work. They had Mr. Giddy's clothing cleaned, dried, and pressed in just over half an hour. This ought to have pleased the unfortunate gentleman exceedingly, but when the clothing was brought to him he grumbled and growled at the length of time which had been consumed. He was like a bear with a sore head.

But he certainly felt much more comfortable, and his fury began to abate. He stalked out of the hotel, after paying his bill, and stamped across the pavement. He made as if to cross the road, which appeared to be empty.

But he had hardly taken two steps when he suddenly heard a shout of warning. Gazing up, he saw the four cadets shooting down the High Street on their bicycles. The very sight of them made Mr. Giddy turn purple. He shook his fist.

"You young puppies!" he shouted. "I haven't finished with you yet!"

He stamped his foot in the extremity of his fury.

It was extremely unfortunate that he should have done so. Some criminally careless individual—probably a small boy—had thrown a banana-skin in the mud. Mr. Giddy's heel came down upon the banana-skin.

The next second Mr. Giddy performed a wonderful movement.

His right leg seemed to do its very utmost to rise up into the sky. His left leg followed, simply as a matter of course, and Mr. Horace Giddy squelched down upon his back, with a dull thud, accompanied by a horrible, sticky, sucking sound as he floundered in the mud.

For he was quite near the gutter, and the gutter had about four inches of swept-up mud in it. Mr. Giddy lay on his back, kicking his legs, and it really seemed as though he were indulging in a mud bath.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth and Co. fairly howled. This time it wasn't their fault. Mr. Giddy had himself to blame entirely. But he certainly didn't blame himself. Just at that moment it would have filled him with the most savage joy if he could have seen the four cadets, bound hand and foot, bubbling furiously in a pot of boiling oil. Such a spectacle would have made Mr. Giddy cheer with delight.

But, as a punishment of this kind was out of the question, Mr. Giddy could do nothing but flounder in the mud and think, and his thoughts regarding the St. Frank's cadets were positively too awful for words.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. HUDSON FIXES THINGS.

"IT ought to be dead easy!"

Mr. William Hudson made that statement as he emerged from Bannington station, accompanied by Captain Joshua Niggs and Mr. Ben Croke. It was afternoon, and they had arrived in the local town, bent upon a few investigations.

"The things what seem easy ain't allus easy!" remarked Mr. Croke. "Not as I wish to be gloomy——"

"A man what is arf in 'is grave can't be gloomy!" interrupted Captain Niggs. "The best thing you can do, Ben, old mate, is to set down in the bookin'-orfis here, an' wait till we come back. You ain't fit for walkin' nowadays."

"For goodness sake, don't start any of your nonsense now!" said Mr. Hudson irritably. "What we've got to do in Bannington is to find out who Willard's Island belongs to. Our chief aim is to get those boys off the property. Once they're off, we shall be in a better position to act. Last night's affair was a rotten frost, but I'm not discouraged yet."

Captain Niggs shook his head.

"I don't rightly know as we're safe," he muttered. "Ben an' I was reckernised by that schoolmaster——"

"Don't be a fool!" said Hudson. "He had his back to you, and you pulled that scarf over his face before he could even turn. He hasn't got the faintest idea who got into his room, but in future we shall have to be a bit more careful—that's all. An' I reckon the best thing we can do is to concentrate on getting those boys off the island."

"Mebbe they've got permission," suggested Captain Niggs.

"Well, it's quite likely. That's what we've got to find out," said Hudson. "But, according to what I could learn in Bellton, Willard's Island has been practically public property for years. Anybody could roam about the island just as they liked, without interference. Maybe those boys have just planted themselves there."

"I s'pose the island must be owned by somebody," said Captain Niggs. "How do you reckon we'd best get to work?"

"Why, we'll go into an estate-agent's," replied the leader of the trio. "They ought to be able to tell us who owns the island. This ain't a particularly big place, and everybody knows one another's business."

They walked down the road from the station, and in a few minutes found themselves in the High Street. It was looking rather dreary and deserted at this hour of the afternoon.

Mr. Hudson immediately caught sight of a corner building where there were many bills displayed in the window, most of

them announcing sales of house property, furniture, and so forth.

"There we are—right in front of us," said Mr. Hudson. "You always find an estate-agent somewhere near the station."

Captain Niggs and Mr. Croke waited outside while Mr. Hudson entered the establishment. He found himself facing a youthful clerk, whose sole occupation appeared to be that of warming himself in front of the fire. But he became active and alert as soon as Mr. Hudson entered.

"No, my lad; I'm not after any business," said Mr. Hudson. "But I'd like you to give me some information, if you can do it."

"Quite delighted, sir!" said the young man.

"Over in Bellton there's a little island in the river," said Mr. Hudson. "It's a queer little place, with a stone building on it, something after the style of a castle——"

"Oh, you mean Willard's Island?"

"Yes, that's the one," said Hudson. "Now, young man, I've got one or two ideas about that island, and I'd like to get into touch with the owner of the property ——"

"I'm afraid that's impossible just now," interrupted the agent. "Colonel Glenthorne is abroad."

"Colonel who?"

"Colonel Glenthorne, sir," said the young man. "He's one of the important landowners round here, you know—a local J.P. and quite a big man. He owns Willard's Island and thousands of acres of land between here and Bellton. But the colonel's abroad just now—in Switzerland, I believe."

"Hum! That's bad!" said Mr. Hudson, frowning. "I was hoping——"

"Wait a minute, sir!" put in the agent, as he glanced out of the window. "By a piece of great luck, I can see Mr. Giddy coming up the street."

"And who may he be?"

"Mr. Horace Giddy is the steward of the Glenthorne estate," replied the young man. I don't particularly like him, but, for that matter, nobody does. Still, he's the man you'd better see. I don't know whether he's authorised to transact any business during his employer's absence, but you can easily question him on the subject. I can't do any more."

"And which is this Mr. Giddy?" asked Hudson.

The estate-agent pointed.

"Well, you can't mistake him," he smiled. "That's Mr. Giddy—that stout little man walking along the opposite pavement. I'm not sure whether it would be advisable for you to approach him just now. He's in rather a nasty temper, I believe. Some of the St. Frank's boys, dressed in cadet uniform, bowled him over in the mud earlier in the afternoon."

Mr. Hudson looked intent.

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(*Continued from page* 29.)

"Oh, they did, did they?" he asked. "That's interesting. Well, I'm much obliged to you, young man, for what you've told me! I wish you good-day!"

He hurried out of the office, and found Captain Niggs and Mr. Croke on the pavement.

"This way!" said Hudson shortly.

He hurried across the road, and the trio had no difficulty in overtaking the tubby little form of Mr. Giddy.

The latter was in a fine rage, inwardly. He had just cleaned himself for the second time, and as he walked along he busily manufactured all sorts of horrible fates for the St. Frank's cadets.

"Pardon me, sir, but I think I'm addressing Mr. Giddy?"

Mr. Giddy turned round abruptly, and glared.

"Well, what if you are?" he demanded. "I don't know you, sir; I don't want to know you! You'll oblige me by going away!"

This was not a very satisfactory beginning. Mr. Giddy regarded Hudson and his two companions with strong disfavour. The steward of the Glenthorne estate did not like the appearance of the trio; in fact, he took a strong dislike to them on the spot.

"Just a minute, Mr. Giddy—just a minute!" said Hudson. "No need to be hasty. I thought maybe I could do you a good turn."

"I don't want any good turns!" snapped Mr. Giddy.

"But it's about——"

"Confound you!" snapped Mr. Giddy. "Let me alone!"

"It's about the St. Frank's cadets——"

"What!"

"They're trespassing on Colonel Glenthorne's property——"

"They're doing which?" gasped Mr. Giddy, his face turning into the colour of a beetroot. "By gad! What's that, sir? What did you say? How the deuce do you know that the boys are trespassing?"

Mr. Hudson remained quite calm.

"The open street ain't hardly the place for a private talk," he said smoothly. "There's a nice little saloon bar just across the road, sir, and a drop of something wouldn't do any of us any harm. What do you say?"

Mr. Giddy considered for a moment, and then nodded.

"All right; I'll hear what you've got to tell me!" he exclaimed curtly. "If you can't justify yourselves, I shall be infernally angry. Those confounded young puppies ought to be horsewhipped!"

Five minutes later the four men were snugly esconced in a corner of the saloon bar of a quiet little inn. It was one of the old-fashioned houses of Bannington and quiet and secluded.

"Now, what's this talk about the St. Frank's boys?" demanded Mr. Giddy, glaring ferociously at his companions.

"Well, I reckon that Willard's Island is the property of Colonel Glenthorne," said Mr. Hudson. "That's right enough, isn't it?"

"Yes; what about it?"

"Is that island public property?"

"Don't be a fool!" snapped Mr. Giddy tartly. "How can it be public property if it belongs to Colonel Glenthorne? The colonel generally allows people to use it, but it's always within his power to close it in if he wants to."

"Ah! But is it within your power to do that?" asked Mr. Hudson.

Mr. Giddy glared.

"I am Colonel Glenthorne's steward!" he said pompously. "I'm the sole manager of the entire estate, and I have absolute authority to do just as I please. The colonel leaves everything entirely in my hands."

"Good!" said Mr. Hudson, rubbing his hands softly together. "Then I reckon that you can turn anybody off that island just when you like?"

"Well, hardly that," replied Mr. Giddy. "I must have some sort of justification. The island is generally used for picnics and all that sort of thing, I believe. But we never interfere. No reason why we should."

"But supposing a gang of twenty or thirty boys made a camp on the island? That would be a different matter, wouldn't it?" asked Mr. Hudson.

"Quite different. But, of course——"

Mr. Giddy came to a sudden halt, and stared.

"Yes, you've got it!" said Mr. Hudson pleasantly. "These St. Frank's cadets have planted themselves on the island, and they've made a regular camp there. I was wondering if they'd received your permission."

Mr. Giddy got to his feet, and paced up and down, with short, heavy strides.

"By gad!" he whispered tensely. "This is true—quite true?"

"Of course!"

"All right—all right!" exclaimed Mr. Giddy viciously. "I've got them! I've got them—I've got the young scoundrels! By gad! The infernal nerve of the young dogs! Making a camp on the island without permission! Planting themselves there as though they owned the place! I'll turn them off—I'll pitch the whole crowd off the property!"

"You see, we thought we might be doing you a good turn by letting you know this," said Mr. Hudson carelessly. "But, see here, Mr. Giddy, how are you going to keep the boys off?"

"The young himps might come back!" put in Captain Niggs.

Mr. Giddy paused, and stroked his two or three chins.

"Yes, yes, yes!" he said impatiently. "There's that, of course! The boys might

return as soon as my back's turned. But I'll get even with the young cubs—I'll make them suffer! I shall have to set somebody on the island—somebody to watch night and day——"

"These two men here are open to a job," said Mr. Hudson cunningly. "Respectable men, Mr. Giddy—owners of a barge that foundered during the flood. I think they'd be willing to act as watchmen on the island."

Mr. Giddy was so excited that he suspected nothing. He innocently fell in with the scheme which these rascals had prepared.

"Good—splendid!" he exclaimed, rubbing his fat hands together. "Yes, yes! That's quite right! These men will do admirably! To-morrow—the very first thing—I'll be at Willard's Island with my men, and then those cadets will get a surprise! By gad! They'll certainly get a surprise!"

It seemed that Edward Oswald Handforth's reckless incident in the Bannington High Street was going to lead to quite a lot of trouble!

Crash! The cyclist bore down upon the fat man like an avalanche. Both came to earth in a hopeless tangle.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SURPRISE.

THE island camp was just getting busy.

It was early morning, and the cadets were appearing leisurely. There were no hard-and-fast rules kept regarding the exact time that the fellows had to turn out, although, of course, the sentry on duty at the rising hour saw that everybody turned promptly out of his sleeping-blanket.

No slacking was allowed. Any fellow who displayed any reluctance in rising was promptly dealt with. Fatty Little was already busy at work preparing breakfast, ably assisted by a couple of orderlies.

These latter were appointed for the day by me, and it seemed that the position of food orderly was much coveted. For it meant absence from drill, and, in addition, quite a number of extra dainties in the way of grub.

The morning was fine and quite mild, and a gentle breeze was blowing over the meadows and across the river. Everything seemed quite delightful, and almost spring-like.

Our camp was a complete success. Things were going well all round, but, of course, we had done nothing so far in the matter of the treasure. We had had no opportunity to get busy in this direction.

"How long's breakfast going to be, cookie?" inquired Pitt, putting his head into Fatty Little's quarters. "You're taking enough time!"

"Don't you be impatient!" said Fatty, turning a ruddy face from a sizzling frying-pan. "And you know jolly well you ain't allowed in here! Clear out, you silly bounder!"

Pitt grinned.

"We're nearly starving," he remarked. "This open-air life is good for the appetite, you know. Unless you get a hustle on, we'll come and raid the grub department. Can't wait for ever!"

Corporal Pitt beat a hasty retreat, for Fatty advanced upon him, with an extra frying-pan upraised. The official cook of the cadets had very strong ideas about the privacy of his department.

He had a special room all to himself, and here the food was prepared, dishes washed up, and all matters connected with the commissariat were dealt with. One side of the stone apartment was piled with tins and bags and other food stores. We had enough provisions in hand to last a month.

Pitt marched outside, and came upon Sir Montie Tregellis-West, who was gazing somewhat interestedly across the river, to a footpath, which led, through the meadows, towards a little lane. It was the footpath which Handforth and Co. had cycled along the previous afternoon.

"What gazest thou at, wise one?" asked Pitt genially.

"As a matter of fact, dear old boy, I was just wonderin' who these people could be," replied Sir Montie. "They seem to be comin' in our direction, you know, an' I believe I can see a policeman among them."

"Marvellous!" said Pitt. "What wonderful eyesight you have got, grandmama! All the better to see with, she replied, as she adjusted her spectacles!"

"Really, Pitt, old boy, you are frightfully ridiculous!" protested Montie.

"I do believe you're right!" said Pitt. "I mean about the copper—not about my

being ridiculous. That's obviously wrong. A blue-coated cop, my lad! I wonder why he's wandering aimlessly about the countryside?"

"He doesn't appear to be wanderin' at all, an' his movements are certainly not aimless," said Tregellis-West. "As a matter of fact, old fellow, the policeman is comin' straight towards the island. An' so are all the other people. I am really beginnin' to become quite curious."

"I began a long time ago," said Pitt. "It's quite a procession, now I come to look at it. Six of 'em, including the constable. The crowd appears to be led by a kind of human football on legs. My only hat! What a fat little beggar! I believe I've seen him walking about in Bannington."

Church came running up, rather excited.

"It's Mr. Giddy!" he shouted, in a tone of alarm.

"Beg pardon!" said Pitt politely.

"Mr. Giddy, you know!"

"But I don't know. I've never met a gentleman with such a flighty name," said Reginald Pitt. "It wouldn't matter very much if he did get giddy—he couldn't fall far! I should think that he would bounce back on to his feet without any trouble. He reminds me of Fatty Little's pater!"

"But—but you don't understand!" shouted Church. "That fat chap is the man that Handy knocked down yesterday afternoon in the Bannington High Street! We told you all about it—how Handy skidded——"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "It seems that Mr. Giddy is comin' here, then!"

"Without the slightest doubt!" said Pitt. "Mr. Giddy, in fact, is evidently bent upon deep and sinister revenge. Perhaps he means to plant himself in the middle of the river, and cause the waters to rise, so that the island will be flooded. A chap with a name like that is capable of anything!"

Quite a number of cadets had collected now, including Handforth and Grey, and one or two others. I joined them, and was soon acquainted with the fact that the short fat gentleman was the victim of Handforth's recklessness of the previous afternoon. They were getting nearer and nearer.

"The fat fathead had better not come over here!" said Handforth aggressively. "It was entirely his own fault——"

"According to what I've heard, it was your fault, Handy," I interrupted. "I think I'd better apologise to Mr. Giddy on your behalf——"

"You—you babbling lunatic!" roared Handforth.

"Sergeant!" I snapped. "How dare you?"

"Rats!" said Handforth gruffly. "We ain't playing at cadets now! If you apologise to that giddy rotter, I'll punch your head!"

"Somebody ought to apologise, anyway," said Jack Grey. "After knocking the poor chap down and smothering him with mud, the least he could expect was a complete apology. And yet you try to make out that it was his fault——"

"So it was!" said Handforth.

"Look here! There were four of you there," I said. "What do you other fellows say? Is Mr. Giddy entitled to an apology?"

"Yes!" said Church and McClure and Grey.

"Good enough!" I replied. "There'll be nothing degrading in giving a gentleman his due. Some people seem to think that it's undignified to apologise. But I don't. If I'm in the wrong over anything, I have a feeling of great relief when I beg somebody's pardon. I hope we shall be able to send Mr. Giddy away happy."

For it was now quite obvious that Mr. Horace Giddy was intent upon visiting us. He had four burly-looking men with him and the constable. They came to a halt on the river-bank, and stared across to the island.

"Send a boat over here at once!" shouted Mr. Giddy pompously.

"There you are! That's the kind of man he is!" snorted Handforth. "Seems to think he owns the world! Don't take any notice of him. And, anyhow, what authority has he got to come messing about here?"

"I'm the commander of this camp, and Mr. Giddy has a grievance," I said. "I'll go over and interview him."

But before I could do anything of the sort, the party on the shore discovered a small boat which was tucked away in a little inlet and almost hidden by some rushes. It had been placed there for the convenience of visitors.

Without saying anything further to us, Mr. Giddy had the boat pushed out, and he seated himself in it. Then, taking the oars, he commenced pulling out towards the island. His companions remained where they were.

Mr. Giddy was coming across alone.

Practically all the cadets had left the stone building by now, and were standing in groups, watching. Even Fatty Little had come to the door of his own department, and was gazing out. His mouth looked suspiciously full.

Mr. Giddy landed, and just pulled the boat out, so that it would not drift away. He had landed at the bottom end of the island, where there was practically no current.

He maintained his dignity with difficulty, for the ground was very sloppy, and he had to pick his way. However, at last he reached the rising, solid ground, and looked from one to the other of us aggressively. Then suddenly a flame shot into his eye. He was looking at Handforth.

"You infernal young puppy!" he snapped. "I'll soon——"

"One moment, sir, please!" I interrupted, striding forward. "I am the commander of this camp, and I shall be most pleased if you will state the reason for your call."

"Impertinent cub!" snapped Mr. Giddy, glaring at me. "Commander, eh? What ridiculous nonsense is this?"

"I was not aware that there was any nonsense about it," I replied, rather nettled by his tone. "I fancy that you were somewhat annoyed by two or three of our fellows yesterday. I think you were knocked down in the mud——"

"Nothing of the sort!" shouted Handforth. "I didn't——"

"This unmitigated young scoundrel hurled himself and his bicycle into me, and smothered me with mud from head to foot!" snapped Mr. Giddy fiercely. "Not content with that, he and his companions knocked me over a second time half an hour afterwards——"

"Pardon me, sir, but that's hardly correct," put in Jack Grey. "It was Handforth's fault at first. We're ready to admit that. But when you sat in the gutter it was a pure accident. You trod on a banana-skin, or something, and slipped. We couldn't help that. It was just a coincidence that we were passing at the time."

Mr. Giddy gave a savage grunt.

"I did not come here to listen to absurd excuses!" he exclaimed curtly. "I want to know——"

"Just a minute, sir!" I interrupted. "If one of my cadets offended you in any way yesterday, I wish to express my regret. I am sure that he had no deliberate intention of insulting you, and I apologise on his behalf. Our chief aim is to do everything we can to maintain law and order. I hope that you will be satisfied, and let the matter drop."

Mr. Giddy smiled very unpleasantly.

"This sort of thing will not influence me in the slightest degree!" he puffed. "By gad! Do you think I am made of wax? Do you think you can twist me about as you wish? You young puppies! I will soon show you who is master! You, boy!" he added, addressing me. "You say that you are the commander of this camp?"

"Yes, I am," I replied.

"Where is your authority?"

"My what?"

"Your authority?" rapped out Mr. Giddy triumphantly.

"I—I don't quite understand," I said.

"Indeed? Then perhaps I can make you understand," said the fat little visitor, puffing his cheeks out. "You may not be aware of the fact, but this island is private property, and you are all trespassing——"

"Oh, come!" I protested. "That's hardly true, although it may be correct in the strict letter of the law. We've always been allowed to use Willard's Island. Nobody has ever objected."

"But I object now!" exclaimed Mr. Giddy pompously. "This island is the property of Colonel Glenthorne, and I am Colonel Glenthorne's estate-manager. I want to see your authority for being on this property."

"You'll have to wait," I replied. "We haven't got any authority; we had no idea that we needed it. The Headmaster of St. Frank's gave us permission to come here, so you'd better go to him!"

"I shall do nothing of the sort!" replied Mr. Giddy. "You are here in possession—not your Headmaster. Having no authority from Colonel Glenthorne, you are trespassing, and I order you to vacate the island at once!"

"What!" shouted the cadets.

"Look here, Mr. Giddy, isn't this rather arbitrary?" I asked quietly. "Simply because some of our fellows offended you yesterday, that's no reason why you should turn nasty. I've already apologised——"

"That does not influence me in the least!" snapped Mr. Giddy. "I have no intention of allowing you to remain. The sooner you get off this island the better!"

"And what if we refuse to go?"

"In that case, you will be turned off by force!" said Mr. Giddy, indicating his men on the opposite bank.

"Oh, yes!" sneered Handforth, charging up. "You can do a lot of forcing! I'd like to see those four rotters try to pitch us off the island! They'd have all their work cut out!"

"Would you dare to resist?" shouted Mr. Giddy. "Upon my soul! The insolence! You will understand that I have law on my side, and I have brought a representative of the law with me. If you refuse to leave this island, the police-constable will immediately take your names, and the whole matter will result in an action in court. I do not intend to be defied!"

"Just a minute, Mr. Giddy," I said. "You've been asking about our authority. What about yours?"

"Hear, hear!" said some of the cadets.

"Mine!" exclaimed Mr. Giddy hotly. "What do you mean?"

"Has Colonel Glenthorne given you instructions to turn us off?"

"Colonel Glenthorne is abroad, and I am in sole charge of his estate," replied Mr. Giddy pompously. "I have full authority to take whatever action I choose, and I accept full responsibility for this affair. Now are you going, or shall I be compelled to use stronger measures?"

I looked round seriously. I was in a dilemma, and I knew it. Mr. Horace Giddy certainly had the law on his side, and in ordering us off the property he was well within his rights.

We had no authority to remain, and it was our place to go if we were ordered to do so. If we refused, big trouble would result. Mr. Giddy, I felt sure, would pursue the matter to the utmost limit of the law, and we certainly didn't want any law action over the matter.

It seemed, therefore, that our only course was to quit, galling as this was. As the responsible leader of the cadets, it was my duty to knuckle under. As for myself, I wanted to pitch Mr. Giddy into the river,

but I couldn't act as myself just then. I had to think of St. Frank's and the good name of the school. We certainly couldn't afford to get ourselves into disrepute.

"Look here, Mr. Giddy," I said, attempting to influence him, "there's no need to be so beastly about it. I'm sure Handforth is sorry that he accidentally knocked you down yesterday. We're not doing any harm on the island, and you might just as well let us stay here——"

"That's enough!" snapped Mr. Giddy. "You'll go—at once! I don't want to hear another word from you, you impertinent young hound!"

I flushed with anger.

"If you talk like that, Mr. Giddy, I shall probably be impertinent!" I said curtly. "Up till now I have talked to you respectfully. But I should advise you not to insult me again!"

"What's the good of Nipper?" roared Handforth abruptly. "Are we going to stand this, you chaps? Are we going to let this fat beast come here and order us about? The best thing we can do is to pitch him off the island!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I want volunteers!" bellowed Handforth. "Who'll help? Nipper's too jolly humble for my liking! We'll take quick measures with this overfed hog, and kick him out! Come on!"

"Good!"

"We're with you, Handy!"

"Hold on!" I shouted. "Don't be in a hurry——"

But the fellows took no notice of me. They had misunderstood my attitude. They only thought of the moment—they did not look into the future. But I saw quite plainly that we were hopelessly in the wrong, and that matters would only be made a lot worse if we resisted. It was far better to vacate the island without a fuss, and then get into action afterwards. I was already thinking, in fact, that we should not need to be out of our stronghold for long. For, surely, we could overrule the decision of this self-important steward?

But Handforth and a number of other fellows were creatures of the moment. They believed in direct action, and they hurled themselves upon Mr. Giddy in a body, without giving that fat gentleman a chance to escape.

"Good heavens!" he gasped. "How—how dare you? If—if you lay a finger on me—— Help! Help!"

Mr. Giddy screamed aloud—desperately and frantically—but the juniors took no notice. They swarmed round him, and he was seized in a fast grip and whirled away towards the water. My shouts were of no avail.

The men on the shore became intensely excited, shouting and waving their hands. But they, of course, could do nothing. For a few moments I feared that the fellows were intent upon hurling Mr. Giddy into the stream, and that, of course, would have been very serious.

But they had more sense than to do that.

They rushed him to his boat, and then pitched him head first into it. Mr. Giddy rolled over, sat down violently, and the boat rocked dizzily. The next moment it was given a terrific heave, and it shot out into the current.

Mr. Giddy, who was just getting to his feet, overbalanced, and fell into the bottom of the boat. His short, fat legs stuck up skywards, and he roared and panted with fearful fury.

At all events, he had been sent about his business. But what was to be the ultimate result?

CHAPTER VIII.

TURNED OFF.

MR. WILLIAM HUDSON uttered a curse.

"The young pigs!" he snarled, under his breath. "So they mean to be obstinate, eh? Well, they won't keep that up for long! Old Giddy will soon make them talk with a different tune."

Mr. Hudson was standing behind a thick hedge, two or three meadows away from Willard's Island. He was quite invisible to anybody on the other side. But he had a pair of binoculars levelled through a gap, and he could see everything distinctly.

And, much to his chagrin, he had just witnessed the exit of Mr. Horace Giddy. This had hardly entered into his calculations. He could see Mr. Giddy waving wildly as the boat was carried down the stream, and he appeared to be shouting at the top of his voice, too.

On the island the cadets were moving rapidly about, and Mr. Hudson began to have a few doubts. Would it be possible for them to turn the boys off? If they liked to be obstinate, it would certainly be a difficult task.

Then, suddenly, as he was watching, he looked more intently. He kept his eyes held tightly to the binoculars. For he had seen one of the cadets standing a little apart from the rest—a sturdy, well-built junior, with square shoulders and a handsome face.

"By thunder!" muttered Mr. Hudson. "That's him right enough—that's John! The image of his aunt! I'd know his features anywhere! John Willard's son—on the island, too, without knowing what his own name really is! Queer how these things happen, I must say!"

Mr. Hudson looked long and searchingly at John. The latter, of course, was quite unaware of this inspection. As Mr. Hudson had said, he did not even know that his name was really Willard.

Mr. Giddy, in the meantime, was getting

further and further down the stream. But at last an eddy of the current caused the boat to shift in towards the bank, and, a little further downstream, Mr. Giddy found himself against the bank. He was soon able to land. He did so, fairly fuming and raving with anger.

He had great ideas about his dignity, and he had been treated with the utmost insolence by a parcel of cadets in front of his own underlings and a policeman! It was altogether too much for the estate-manager, and for a few moments he debated whether he should return or not.

But his anger got the better of his dignity, and at last he hurried back along the towing-path, planning out all sorts of terrible schemes for the undoing of the cadets.

I was talking seriously to the other fellows.

"You've got to look at this thing seriously," I said. "It's no good calling me weak, or meek, or anything like that. The only course, as far as I can see, is for us to quit——"

"Don't you call that being weak?" demanded Handforth.

"My dear idiot, do you think I enjoy quitting?" I asked impatiently. "I'd be one of the first to resist—to set up a state of siege, and defy the whole crowd. But we can't think merely of ourselves——"

"Why can't we?"

"Because we've got to remember the school," I said. "This cadet corps has only just been formed, and, goodness knows, we don't want to get into serious trouble at the very start. This Giddy chap has got the law on his side, and he could turn us off if he wanted to——"

"He does want to!" exclaimed Pitt.

"Exactly!" I said. "If we resist, we shall be up against the law at once. Why, a rotter like this man might kick up a terrific fuss—make a County Court case of it. And we should lose—we should be in the wrong. I tell you, all we can do is to evacuate the position."

"How absolutely rotten!" said De Valerie.

"But there's really no reason why we should take it so hardly," I went on. "I can think of something by which we can defeat this rotten estate-manager. But, to avoid trouble, we'd better leave Willard's Island."

The juniors began to realise that my argument was a sound one. I was the last fellow in the world to be meek and mild, and to knuckle under. But to resist in a case like this would be merely piling the trouble up, and making the whole position twenty times worse.

And so by the time Mr. Giddy joined his companions—with muddy feet and perspiring brow—the majority of the cadets were making active preparations for departure. It was awfully galling, particularly as we had taken such a lot of trouble to make the camp snug and cosy.

We decided to leave the tarpaulins and waterproof canvas in position—where the open spaces had been roofed over. There was no need to remove these, for I was determined to get back on the island at the earliest opportunity. This evacuation would only be a temporary one.

When Mr. Giddy came across again, he was accompanied by all his men and the police-constable. They came in a boat which I sent across to them, and I assured Mr. Giddy, quite coldly, that he need not fear any further attempt at molestation.

"If you dare to touch me, I will prosecute you!" snorted Mr. Giddy. "Even as it is, I intend to make you suffer. If you do not leave this island at once I shall put the whole matter into the hands of the police!"

"Best do as the gent says," advised the police-constable solemnly. "If you don't, you'll only get yourselves into rare trouble. It ain't my business, of course, but I've got to see that things is right."

"Keep your hair on!" I said. "We are leaving the island."

"Oh, you are, are you?" said Mr. Giddy harshly. "So you have decided to knuckle under? You think it wiser to obey my orders ——"

"Whatever we think, we're going!" I said curtly. "But that doesn't prevent us from regarding you as an evil-tempered, pompous, self-important cad! That's my opinion of you, Mr. Giddy!"

The estate-manager gobbled with fury.

"You—you insolent puppy!" he roared. "How—how dare you talk to me in that way?"

"I can talk to you as I like!" I snapped. "We're quitting the island, and that's good enough for you! But you won't be grinning for long, Mr. Giddy! We don't accept this position as final!"

"I stalked away before Mr. Giddy could reply, and I found Handforth addressing a crowd of fellows within the stone building. He was very excited and flustered, and he glared at me as I entered.

"You—you traitor!" he exclaimed.

"What?"

"Call yourself a commander?" asked Handforth sourly. "Why, I could command the corps ten times as well! You knuckled under to this rotter without a word—as meek as a giddy lamb!"

"I've already explained——"

"That doesn't suit me!" snapped Handforth, "and I vote that we pitch all these intruders off the island at once and risk the consequences. What can they do, anyhow? Nothing!"

"Can't they?" I said. "You don't understand the law."

"Law!" sneered Handforth. "Do you think that Giddy would put the matter into the hands of the police? I'm not scared, even if you are——"

"Don't take any notice of Handy, you chaps," I said. "We've got to get off the island. Strictly speaking, we're trespassing, and Mr. Giddy is the manager of the property. If we leave when he tells us to do so, the matter's got to drop; but if we resist he can prosecute us in two ticks. I'm not afraid of that, but we don't want to get the cadet corps talked about in the district. You know what these gossips are. They'll exaggerate the whole thing, and we shall get a bad name."

"You're right, Nipper," said Pitt. "We'd better quit."

"It's the only thing to do," agreed Bob Christine. "Jolly rotten, of course, but there you are! I'd like to get a rope, sling it round a tree, and fix old Giddy at the other end of it! Either that, or drop him in the river and watch him drown!"

"You couldn't drown him—he'd float!" said Church.

Handforth's audience melted away, and the enraged sergeant had nobody to talk to. He was not the only fellow who was enraged. We were all boiling inwardly, but we tried to look calm and collected.

And the evacuation commenced.

With three or four boats on the go, we commenced transporting our things from the island to the river-bank. But we did not dump our stuff down anywhere. I had already decided that we would make the boathouse a kind of temporary camp until we could think of some other plan.

We were certainly not going back to St. Franks, defeated.

Fatty Little suggested that we should partake of breakfast before doing anything further. So we sat down, and ate heartily. Mr. Giddy, meanwhile, paced up and down, fuming and threatening all sorts of things. We ignored him—we took utterly no notice of him.

On two occasions he came up and threatened dire things if we did not get a move on. We continued eating and talking, as though we had never seen him. As far as we were concerned, Mr. Giddy ceased to live.

This attitude only enraged him the more. But he could do nothing. Breakfast being disposed of, we continued our work, and the remainder of the goods were transported up the river to the boathouse.

The only property we left on the island was the roofing material, which I have already mentioned. It was too long a job to pull all this down, and we didn't see any reason why we should do it.

At last the final boatload of stuff was ready, and we pushed off, leaving Mr. Giddy and his men in sole possession. We thoughtlessly left them without a **boat**, also. The party was marooned; but that, of course, was their look out.

Whether they got off the island, or remained there for good, we didn't care. It was certainly none of our business to provide them with a boat, and we busily set about making things as comfortable as possible at the boathouse.

While the rest of the cadets were at work I hurried off to the school and told Nelson Lee all the facts. He was rather serious about it, and declared that I had done quite right in leaving the island.

"But I'm rather dubious about your camping at the boathouse, Nipper," went on the guv'nor. "I'm afraid the spot is most unsuitable——"

"Morning lessons have already commenced, and so you might as well remain absent," interrupted Nelson Lee. "But this sort of thing is very disturbing, Nipper. I wish Colonel Glenthorne was at home. I would ring him up at once. But you say he is abroad, young 'un?"

"That's what Mr. Giddy says, and I don't think the rotter would act in this way if his employer was at home," I said. "But you can leave it to us, sir. We shall soon be all right."

I went back to the camp, and found that things were progressing in a fairly satisfactory manner. It wasn't half such a good camp as the island, of course, but it would do as a makeshift.

"Why shouldn't we go back?" asked Tommy. "I don't suppose Giddy will come again. We could chance it——"

"I don't think so," I interrupted. "I've just spotted a boat among those rushes over there. There's somebody on the island, I believe. Why, what—— Well, I'm hanged!"

At that moment two figures had appeared in the main doorway of the picturesque old building. They lounged out, smoking their pipes, and I recognised the pair at once.

"Captain Niggs!" I exclaimed hotly.

"And Ben Croke!" said Watson.

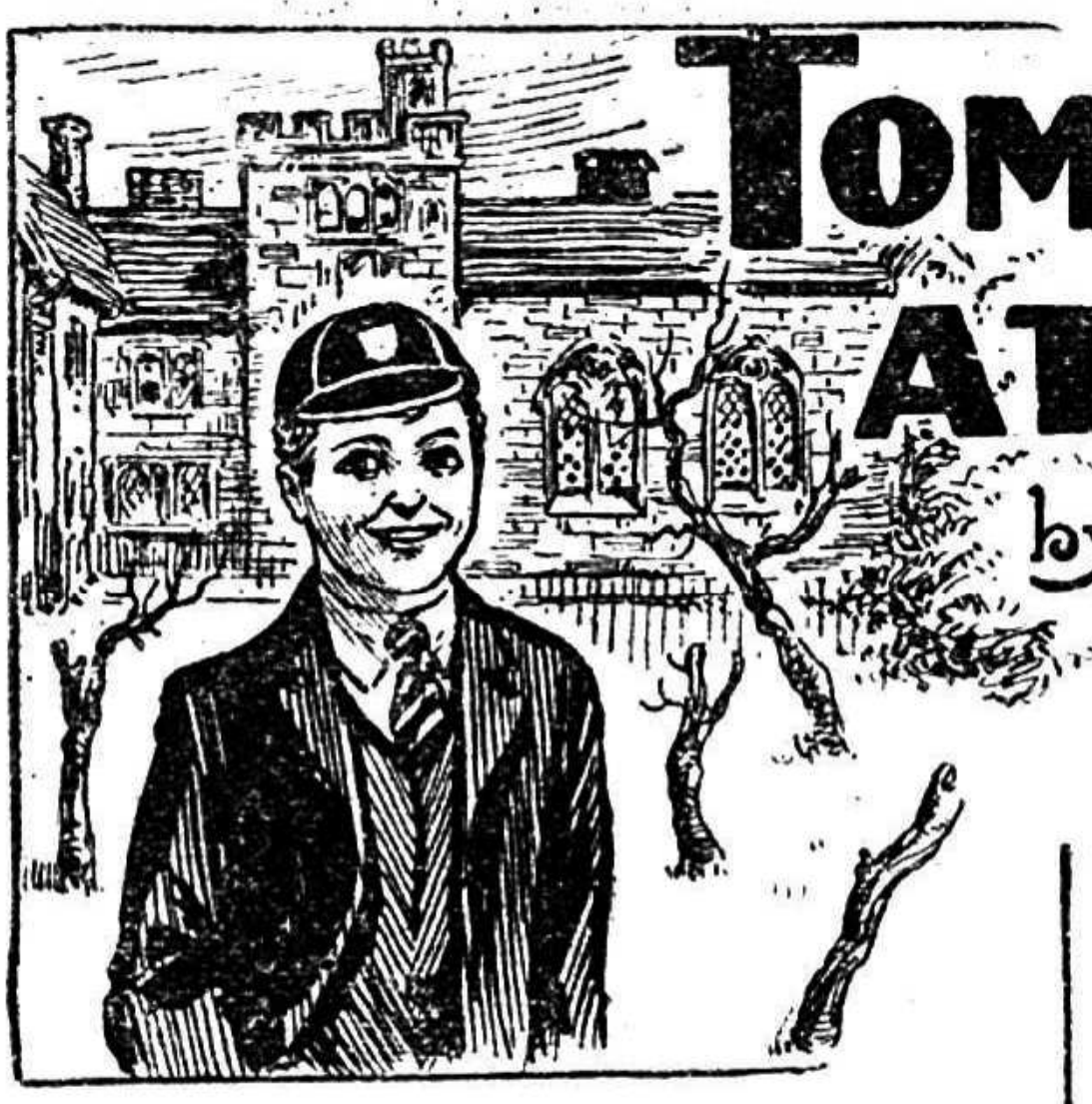
"Begad!"

"By Jove!" I said. "I'm beginning to understand. I'll warrant these rotters put old Giddy on to the job! And they've set themselves on the island as watchmen! They know something about that treasure, and this is all a scheme—so that they can be on the spot!"

The cunning of the whole plan was apparent to me. Captain Niggs and his rascally mate were on the island, and we couldn't land there. We had been expelled—turned off!

But, although the situation was utterly against us, I had a pretty keen idea that we should not be in our present position for long. As far as I could see, there was plenty of excitement to come!

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. Foster Moore, the school usher, and a man held in great awe by the boys, has been scheming to marry Miss Smatterly, the younger sister of the principal of a neighbouring girls' school, for her money. Tom upsets the scheme and has to face the terrible vengeance of the usher.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER XXVII.

Up Against Foster Moore

TOM was too chivalrous to make a song of the prank he had played on Foster Moore to stop his contemplated marriage with Miss Hatty.

He knew the tutor had been sufficiently punished by his disappointment, and thoroughly humiliated. No more did he desire.

In addition there was the lady to be considered.

She was not to be made the subject of rustic guffaws and coarse comment, if reticence would save her. Therefore Tom had imparted the whole truth to none but a few chosen chums.

He had made sure that Foster Moore was to sleep in the hut, and having bought the screws and other needed things, stole down early in the morning and effectively fastened him in. Then, in case Foster Moore might break out and carry his point, Tom had decided, at the last moment, to write a few words of warning to Miss Hatty, and put them in the letter-box fastened on the front gate of the girls' school.

Averse to anything anonymous or secret, he boldly put his name to the letter, which ran as follows:

"Dear Miss Hatty,—If you value your future happiness and peace, do not keep your appointment with Foster Moore. I am only a boy, but I can see the sort of man he is, and I believe him to be a brute.—Tom Tartar."

It was a plain letter, going straight to the point, and written as an honest, fearless boy would write. Miss Hatty, shamming illness, had not come down to receive her morning letters, and her sister, seeing Tom's envelope, without stamp or postmark, opened it, thinking it was a trade circular.

By that time Miss Hatty was gone, but Miss Smatterly was speedily on her trail. A few words of inquiry had given her the clue she needed, and the rest we know.

* * *

"If you stand here," said Noddy Berrill, "you will be quite safe, and that's the bit of stone about to be blasted. My father's got it ready, and that's him they'll leave behind alone. He'll light the fuse."

"And make a run for a place of shelter," laughed Cautious Johnny.

"Not he," said Noddy proudly—"he'll walk away."

The boys from the school numbered about a dozen. More would have been there if the great blasting had been known to them, but Noddy had stipulated that only a favoured few should be told of it.

"You get a lot of young 'uns here," he said, "and they run about like rabbits, and some may get into trouble."

The rock about to be blasted was on the very crown of the quarry, and a rough, steep road, formed of the debris of many blastings, descended from it to the valley below.

Down this road there would be a tremendous rush of shattered stone, and that was to be the chief part of the spectacle.

Having posted his friends at a point of vantage, Noddy Berrill departed, and a time of keen interest followed.

The youthful watchers saw signals exchanged and the men at work hie away to places of shelter until only one remained in sight on the summit of the quarry.

He stood alone, a tall, powerful man, then, after a pause, he was seen to stoop down and light the fuse.

Rising, he calmly walked away, leisurely climbing over some rugged rocks and disappearing.

A faint line of smoke showed where the fuse was burning, and the eyes of the boys were strained by their eager watching.

Suddenly they saw the great rock open out, and a huge mass bend forward, a sharp crack was heard, very unlike the roar of an explosion, such as the boys expected to hear, then came the rush.

That was grand indeed!

Huge masses of stone bounded like elastic balls down the incline, leaping here and there over obstacles, accompanied by a thunderous sound and many echoes.

Behind came the debris with a noise that was like the rush of the sea before a night wind.

Last of all, the dust—a huge cloud that rose up slowly in the air, expanding and thinning out until it was lost to sight.

The sound of a whistle was heard. The blasting was over, and the men came out of their hiding-places to resume work as if nothing out of ordinary interest had been going on.

"It was a fine sight!" said Tom Tartar.

Noddy Berrill was not coming back, for he with the other boys would have to resume their labours, so Tom and the others departed.

No arrangements had been made for any especial amusement that morning, and the boys soon divided up, and in twos and threes went off in various directions.

Willie Gray, Lawrence Turrell, and Cautious Johnny went bird-nesting.

Tom and Sam Smith walked on to the Hall to inquire after Sir Claude Freshley.

Sam did not want to go, but Tom insisted on it.

So they went to the Hall, and learnt the good news that Sir Claude had gone out for a short drive with Lady Freshley—Cecil was at home, and the three boys had some luncheon together.

They talked about Posh Powner, who had vanished again, and according to the police no trace of him could be found. Bills offering a reward for his apprehension were out.

"He is hiding about somewhere near," said Tom; "he is too cunning a fox to run in the open."

Tom would not stay for the return of Sir Claude, but promised to come again soon, and he and Sam departed.

(*Continued on next page.*)

If we were to say that Tom Tartar was quite indifferent to the fact that Posh Powner was at large we should be guilty of gross exaggeration.

Tom knew that under certain conditions, say the poacher having him at his mercy in a lonely place, his life was not safe.

The ruffian, in his mad anger, was capable of any crime; but Tom did not go about quaking with fear.

He, however, was wary and watchful, and as he and Sam walked from the lodge gates back to the village, he had an eye for every clump of bushes or other place that would afford concealment to the hiding man.

Sam Smith was thoughtful, very thoughtful, and admitted he did not like the look of things.

"I have had nothing to do with the fellow," he said, "and, therefore, I don't suppose he will hurt me; but with you, Tom, it's different. Powner's certain to do you a serious injury if he gets the chance.

"And then there's Foster Moore," went on Sam. "He'll have his knife into you worse than ever over this morning's affair. What I'm afraid of is that he may persuade old Wrasper to get rid of you, and then—well, it would be simply rotten! I don't think I should stick here long if you were expelled, old chap."

"Wrasper won't expel me—don't think it!" replied Tom. "My father paid him a year's fees in advance on my account, and Wrasper isn't the sort of man to return nearly all that money, which he would have to do if he sent me home."

"Well, Foster Moore will have his revenge on you somehow," said Sam uneasily.

"I'm not afraid of him," said Tom. "Let him do his worst! I shall take jolly good care to give him as good—or, rather, as bad, as he gives me! I sha'n't take things lying down, I assure you; and if he —— Great pip! Here comes Moore himself! Now for it, Sam!"

It was even as Tom said. Round a sharp bend in the road, about a hundred yards ahead, the big, lumbering figure of the assistant-master had suddenly come into view. He was walking very slowly, with his eyes on the ground, and his hands behind his back, as if in deep thought.

And evidently Foster Moore's thoughts were not pleasant ones; for his face was black as thunder, and he was grinding his teeth together savagely.

"Shall we cut through this hedge and dodge him?" asked Sam Smith.

"Not likely!" answered Tom. "He's bound to tackle me sooner or later, so I may as well get it over now."

The two boys were within thirty yards of the approaching usher before the latter raised his eyes and saw them.

Instantly on recognising Tom he stopped dead in the middle of the road; while into his face came an expression of utter ferocity. At that moment Foster Moore looked like a dangerous madman.

Tom, however, strolled calmly towards him, no whit dismayed by his threatening aspect.

In a few moments the boys reached the spot where Moore stood barring the way.

Without taking his glaring eyes off Tom, the usher said harshly:

"Walk on, Smith! I wish to speak to Tartar alone."

Sam passed on with evident reluctance, and not till he was out of earshot did Foster Moore speak.

"Tartar," he began, in a low, grating tone, "I am going to ask you a question. It is this: Do you know how dangerous it is to make an enemy of me? Answer me that, boy!"

Tom shrugged his shoulders, but said no word.

"Ah! You decline to answer. Very well, let me warn you that it is a highly dangerous proceeding to set yourself against me! I am a bitter enemy! No man—let alone a boy—can flout and oppose me with impunity. Do you hear me, Tartar?"

"Yes," said Tom quietly, "I hear you."

"Then be very, very careful how far you go with me, boy!" went on the usher, bending down and forward, so that his contorted face almost touched Tom's. "Once more I warn you of your danger in setting yourself against me!"

"Look here, Mr. Moore!" broke out Tom, with spirit. "I'm not to be frightened by your threats! From the day I first came to the school, you've hated me and been down on me. I don't know why, and I don't particularly want to know. What I do know is that I'm not ashamed of anything I've done while I've been at the school."

"No," sneered the big usher, "I don't suppose you are! You seem to be utterly brazen and shameless. Is there anything you would be ashamed of, boy?"

"There is!" returned Tom boldly. "I'd be ashamed of meanness, brutality, and cowardly scheming to get hold of the money of a woman. I am not sorry for what I did this morning. I rejoice in it, but I am not going to brag about it. If you are silent I will be."

"I can't trust you," said Foster Moore, the perspiration standing out like beads upon his brow, "I can't trust, myself. Why don't you go away?"

"Go where?"

"Home."

"No," said Tom, "you may send me there, if you like, and even then I am not sure I shall go. You've got me for a year to break me, and I wish you joy of your task."

"Break you I will," hissed Foster Moore; "body or spirit shall be shattered, perhaps

both. When I think of this morning, I——"

He stopped, and a darkening of his face came upon him, as if the shadow of a dense cloud was passing over it.

A more terrible look had never been on the face of man.

Tom involutarily shrank back, because it was too awful to look upon.

Then, with a furious snarl, the tutor dashed madly upon him.

But Tom was prepared, and sprang aside with an agility that defeated the object of his assailant.

Instead of grasping the boy he only clutched the empty air, and tripping over a stone, he fell sprawling.

The element of the ridiculous was so strong in this disaster that Tom burst into a roar of laughter.

Foster Moore scrambled to his feet and made a dash for Tom, who was not so weak and vain of his own strength as to stand up against the rush.

Once more he sprang away, ducked, dived under the tutor's arm, and came up cool, but hardly smiling, on the other side.

"Mr. Moore," he said, "you must be a coward."

"Coward or not," said the tutor with clenched teeth, "I'll punish you for your insolence."

But now the sound of wheels was heard.

A carriage was aproaching, and even the tutor, in his wild, unreasoning fury, was conscious of his being in peril of doing something he might be sorry for.

He drew back, and took up the position of a man lounging against the gate.

Tom would have walked away, but it was too late to escape the new arrivals, who proved to be Sir Claude and Lady Freshley.

They were in a carriage drawn by a pair of horses, Lady Freshley driving.

Recognising Tom she reined up, and the baronet, with a smile of welcome on his face, bade Tom approach.

Neither of them took the least notice of Foster Moore, and apparently did not see him.

He on his part doggedly stood his ground, looking at the group with a thunder cloud upon his face, until he heard Sir Claude insist upon Tom accompanying them back, at least part of the way.

"The horses are restive," said Lady Freshley, "and will not stand, and Sir Claude has a great deal to say to you."

Tom hesitated, mainly because he did not like to show the white feather to the tutor. Indeed, he had none to show, but he was not sorry when Foster Moore suddenly strode away.

"Tom," said Sir Claude, "what have you done to anger that man?"

The boy had just stepped into the carriage, and the horses were ambling on.

Tom thought he might trust the baronet, so he told him the whole story. Sir Claude smiled, so did Lady Freshley, but under that sign of amusement there was a look of apprehension.

"I am sorry you have made an enemy of him," said Sir Claude gravely, "for he has the look of being a very dangerous man."

Tom did not travel very far with his friends. Sir Claude had asked him to accompany them so as to take him away from the tutor, for he had seen that something was wrong.

"Go home by some route that will keep you out of his way," was the parting injunction from the baronet.

Tom knew of only one way, and that was round by the back of Miss Smatterly's school. He had no objection to that route, and having taken leave of his friends leaped through a gap in the fence and took a short cut across the fields.

Now it so happened that at that very hour Miss Lottie Fenn, contrary to the laws of the school was walking up and down the lane with an umbrella over her head to keep off the rays of the sun.

Had she been asked why she came there her probable answer would have been "she did not know."

It might be that she had in the depths of her youthful heart a faint desire that Tom might come along.

So at sight of him she gave a little cry of delight, and advanced with outstretched hand and shining eyes.

Tom, for his part, was equally delighted. But scarcely had they time to exchange half a dozen words when Lottie's face took on a look of alarm, and she gasped:

"Go away! Somebody's coming! Oh, it's too late now! Here, take this umbrella and hide yourself."

Tom took the umbrella in a mechanical sort of way, not seeing what he was to do with it for a moment.

But the rapid approach of a footstep he knew to be Miss Smatterly's stimulated him, and dropping into a squatting position on the ground he covered his head with the umbrella, and awaited developments.

He had a feeble hope that Miss Smatterly would think that the umbrella concealed nothing more than a patch of ground.

"Miss Fenn," said the schoolmistress, as she emerged from the gate, "may I ask how you dared to be guilty of the impropriety of leaving the garden?"

Before Lottie could reply, the sharp eyes of Miss Smatterly saw the umbrella. Also she noticed that it was swaying a little, as if held by an unsteady hand.

(To be continued.)

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