

SPLENDID PEN DRAWING OF COLLEGE HOUSE—See Inside

THE

PRICE

NELSON LEE

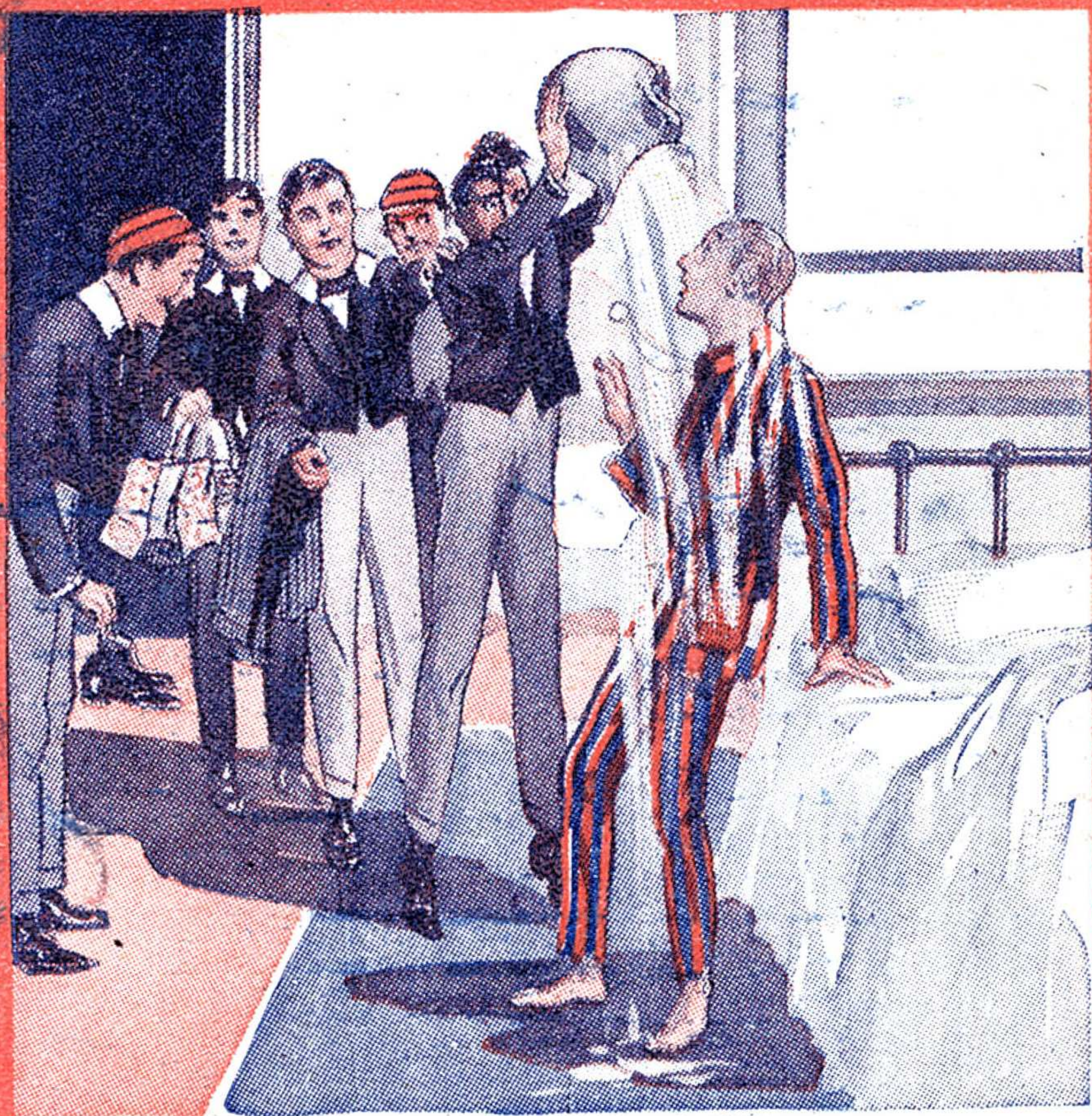
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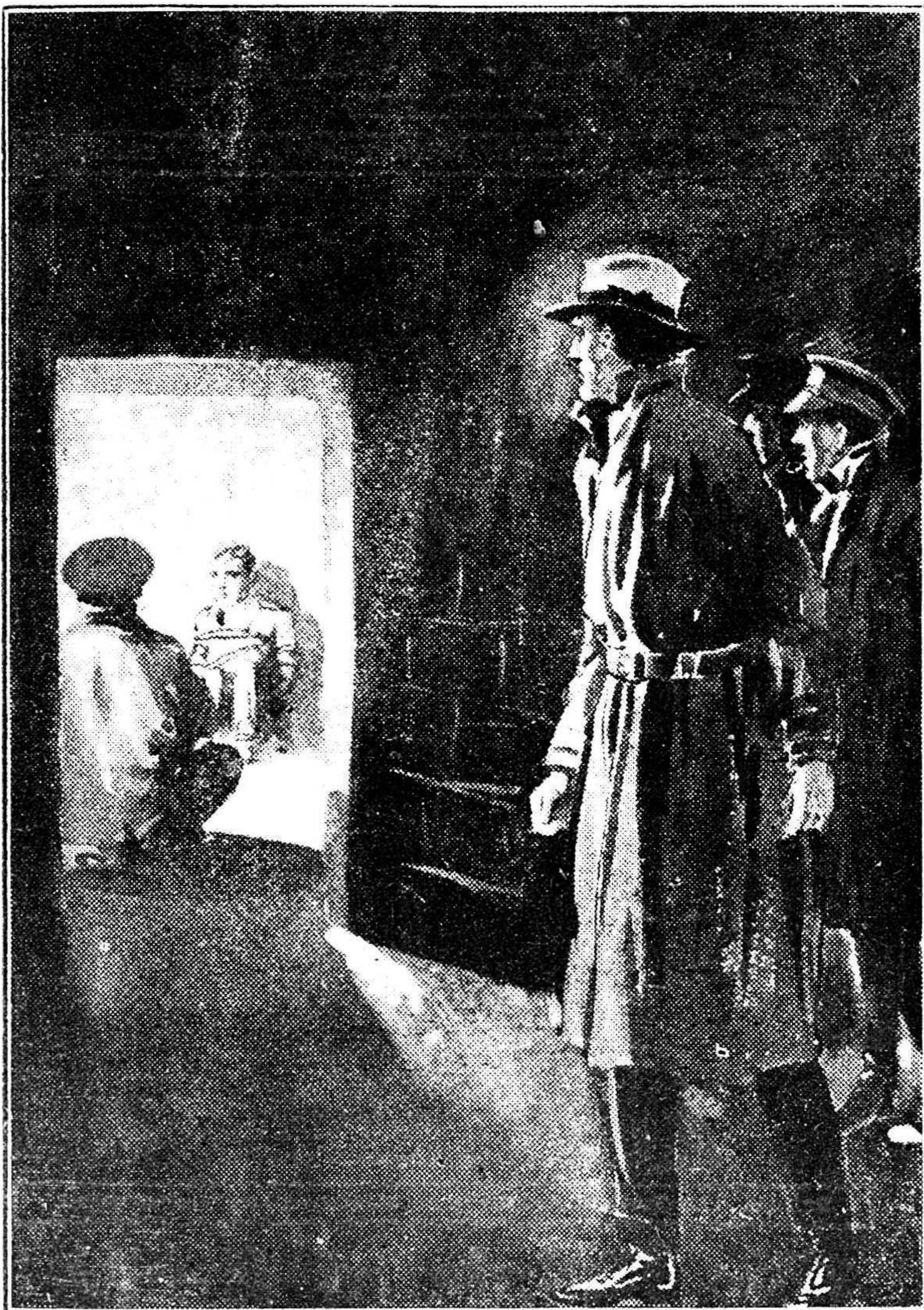
EVERY WEDNESDAY

March 11, 1922



Splash! Handforth turned the jug upside down over Archie's head.

The Trials of Archie



We had now caught the enemy red-handed, and possibly we might be able to learn something of the truth.

THE TRIALS OF ARCHIE!



**(THE STORY
RELATED
THROUGHOUT
BY NIPPER.)**

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 Flood at St. Frank's," "The Island Camp," "The Coming of Archie," and many other stirring Tales.



CHAPTER I.

ARCHIE TRICKLES ROUND.

DING-DONG! ding-dong!

The chimes from the old clock tower at St. Frank's came floating clearly and distinctly across the misty meadows in the dense gloom of the March evening. The chimes were followed by the solemn booming of the hour.

"Nine o'clock, you fellows!" I said, stretching myself. "Close upon time to turn in, you know. It's been a great day for the Cadets, taking everything into consideration, and we ought to sleep well."

Handforth nodded.

"Well, perhaps you're right," he said. "Of course, we didn't really need that prize ass of an Archie to chip in. We could have managed the Giddy bird quite easily ourselves. In fact, I could have settled him single-handed. Rather a pity I didn't!"

The other juniors grinned. They had been expecting something of this kind from Handforth all the evening. Quite a number of fellows were collected round the blazing camp fire, squatting on boxes or lolling on blankets. All of them, of course, were in uniform.

For this was a camp of the St. Frank's Cadet Corps, composed entirely of Remove fellows. I was the commanding officer of the corps, but Handforth regarded this merely as an honorary appointment. He was the sergeant. He was everybody—without him the Cadets would cease to exist.

At least, so Handforth thought; and, since it saved a lot of argument, he was allowed to keep on thinking it. Our camp was situated on Willard's Island, right in the centre of the river Stowe. Although we were quite removed from the madding crowd, so to speak, we were nevertheless within easy reach of the school. Five minutes' run across the meadows and St. Frank's could be gained.



It had, as I told the fellows, been a great day for the Cadets. It had been a strenuous day. Only that morning we had been trying to make the best of things at the boathouse, having previously been ordered off Willard's Island for trespassing; but now we were back again in full possession.

The Cadet camp only existed, to tell the truth, because of the havoc wrought by a recent storm. The Remove and Fifth dormitories in the Ancient House had been ruined and were now under repair. In the meantime, sleeping accommodation for the dormitory-less fellows had been something of a problem. Thus, the powers that were had consented fairly easily to the idea of a Cadet camp, for it relieved the situation to no small extent.

I smiled as I heard Handforth's words.

"It's all very well, Handy, to make light of Archie's good work," I said. "As a matter of fact, he performed wonders, and we ought to be grateful to him. The fellow is undoubtedly a prize ass, as you say, but not in all respects. He's decidedly there when it comes to a pinch."

"Rot!" said Handforth. "Why, there was no need to be afraid of Giddy! It was only bluff——"

"Don't you believe it!" I interrupted. "Mr. Horace Giddy is the manager of the Glenthorne estate, and he had full powers to order us off this property. Willard's Island belongs to Colonel Glenthorne, and old Giddy was well within his rights. If we had resisted him, we should have let ourselves in for a peck of trouble—or possibly a bushel!"

Handforth grunted.

"Well, what did Archie do?" he demanded. "What the dickens did the ass do? Nothing! Nothing, except lounge about and jaw! He didn't even punch old Giddy on the nose!"

"That's all you think about," I said. "You always want to punch everybody. But Archie dealt with the matter far more satisfactorily. Happening to be Colonel Glenthorne's youngest son, he has a sort of authority over Giddy. Anyhow, he told the fat bouncer that we were on Willard's Island as his guests; and, of course, Giddy crumpled up. He shrivelled like a pricked bladder!"

"And quietly disappeared, begad!" observed Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "Dear old boys, I'm most frightfully interested in Archie; I am, really! A distinctly good sort, you know!"

"Of course, you're bound to be pally with him!" grunted Handforth. "One silly ass with another, so to speak!"

"Begad! How frightfully insultin'!"

"Facts are facts!" went on the leader of Study D. "You can't get away from 'em. Besides, you've both got blue blood. If you happen to cut yourselves, the result is a flow of rich blue!"

"Pray don't be so shockin'ly absurd!" protested Montie. "I believe that Archie Glenthorne comes from frightfully good stock. His people are real aristocrats, an' have lived on this estate for centuries—since the feudal days, begad! Real old English ancestry, in

fact. One has only to look at the dear fellow to see what he is!"

"Precisely!" said Handforth. "You can see it a mile off! A pronounced fathead—a decidedly, thorough jesser!"

Sir Montie frowned.

"You are frightfully rude, Handy!" he protested. "Archie may be somewhat peculiar in his style of speech, but there is no doubt about his classy breedin'. Why, begad, just look at the way he wears his clothin'! Look at the wonderful cut of his lounge suit an' the perfect way he carries himself! The fellow is positively a model; he is, really!"

"We don't want to start a discussion about Archie's clobber," broke in Bob Christine. "The chap's all right, and I'm glad he's decided to come to St. Frank's. By the way, I've been wondering what arrangements are being made about him. Where's the chap going to sleep, and all that?"

"Perhaps Reggie Pitt will bring some news," I said. "Pitt and Grey are ashore, and they ought to be back by now, by the way. Just like the bouncers, to make things late!"

As it happened, Reginald Pitt and Jack Grey were hurrying across the meadows even then, on their way to the Cadet camp. In the darkness of the evening, they could see the camp fire beaming redly beyond the trees. Willard's Island was partially hidden from their direct view.

"Better buck up!" said Grey. "It's past nine, you know, and close upon time for turning in. Got those things all right, Reggie?"

"Rather!" said Pitt.

The two juniors had been to the school in order to obtain a few personal things—small articles which were required for everyday use—and they glowed with satisfaction as they realised that they would sleep that night on Willard's Island, in the comfortable shelter of the old stone building—the quaint structure which had been erected by old John Willard many years earlier.

The Cadets had made things very cosy and comfortable, and the camp was not of the ordinary kind. There were no tents to be bothered with—no discomforts on a rainy night. Within that building all was dry and comfortable, with accommodation for everybody.

Fatty Little, the official cook attached to the corps, had his own cookhouse and pantry, and he presided over these quarters with full sway. In that department he was it, and his word was law.

As a camping spot, the old building on Willard's Island could not possibly be beaten. It was just the ideal place.

Pitt and Grey emerged from behind a clump of willows, and the swiftly-flowing waters of the Stowe were before them; and there, beyond, lay the steeply-sloping banks of the island, with the miniature battlements of the quaint building standing out blackly against the dark sky. And in the foreground, on a level patch, the camp-fire blazed. Round it were many figures.

"Looks pretty good, eh?" exclaimed Jack comfortably.

"Wise words!" said Reggie Pitt. "Not only good, fair one, but gorgeous! I had no idea that camp life would be so jolly interesting. I don't care if they take a couple of months repairing the dormitory."

"I don't think the interest will last till then," said Jack. "It's all very well for the time being, but—hallo! I—I say! Sssh!"

He came to a halt and crouched down.

"What's the matter?" demanded Pitt curiously.

"Look! Can't you see somebody?" whispered Grey. "There he is, just against those willows! I'll bet he's a spy, sent here by old Giddy!"

Pitt could see the figure clearly now. The juniors had been walking briskly over the soft turf, their movements quite noiseless, in the direction of the little backwater where their boat lay, and there, outlined against the flickering firelight from the island, an indistinct figure could be seen. This figure was moving cautiously about near the bank.

"I'll tell you what," said Pitt grimly. "We'll spring on the bounder! We'll collar him redhanded, and ask him what the dickens he wants! Are you game?"

"Rather!" said Jack.

The juniors didn't quite like this business. It had been nice to think of the camp, cosy and comfortable, without spies prowling about. It struck Pitt that the man might be Ben Croke, for the figure was fairly slight and Croke was a small man.

Captain Niggs and his mate had been turned off the island earlier in the evening, and they had not relished the thing at all. It was quite likely that the two men were now prowling about, on the watch.

Pitt and Grey crept nearer, and then, just as they were about to spring forward, the figure turned, and peered searchingly at them through the gloom.

"I mean to say, what?" came a genial voice.

"My hat!" roared Pitt. "It's Archie!"

"Absolutely!" said the figure. "Deucedly awkward, don't you know, and all that sort of rot. Fact is, I was just trying to locate the old liner. The vessel to carry one across the old wetness, and so forth!"

Pitt and Grey grinned, and came up. The figure was undoubtedly that of Archie Glen-thorne, the genial ass of St. Frank's. The new boy was elegantly attired in a lounge suit, a soft hat, and a monocle. He swished his cane easily as he stood there.

"My dear chap, what the dickens are you doing here?" grinned Pitt. "It's bedtime, and hours after locking up! You ought to be snugly indoors—and you'll get into a frightful row."

"Well, I mean, as it were, I thought I'd just trickle round and associate with the lads!" explained Archie. "Drop in to pass the old good-night, and all that sort of thing."

"But what about getting back?" asked Grey.

"My dear old tulip, the hour is early!" said

Archie. "The time for ducking beneath the linen has not arrived. I felt a desire, don't you know, to hobnob with the masses, and so I staggered forth. Observe the populace across the gleaming water! Well, what about it? Shall we join the revels?"

"Well, it's your look-out!" said Pitt. "We'll take you across, old son, but the best thing you can do is to skip back to the school, and get indoors while you're safe. If you don't, you'll have about a dozen prefects on your track. Rules have got to be observed at St. Frank's, you know."

Archie smiled.

"I mean to say, something of that order is beginning to percolate into the old brain," he observed. "It seems fairly ob. that a chappie cannot do exactly as he pleases, and what not. Deucedly awk., as it were. Makes a lad feel somewhat of a serf, and all that sort of stuff. Orders to be obeyed, and quantities of grovelling to be accomplished!"

"Well, not exactly grovelling," grinned Pitt. "But a fellow at St. Frank's is under very different conditions to a fellow with a tutor. Up till now you've only had a tutor, Archie."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "A perfectly priceless old lad, of course. One of the best, in fact. A brainy cove, and what not. Smither—to give the chappie his handle—that is to say, his label—well, as it were—Where was I? I seem to have lost the thread, don't you know! Mis-laid the jolly old trend, so to speak. Oh, ah! That's it—absolutely! Smither! A chap with a bulging dome, containing huge assortments of knowledge. Quite a heady bounder, if you know what I mean. Well, Smither got laid low——"

"Yes, we know all about that!" chuckled Pitt. "You've already told us how Mr. Smither got appendicitis, and all the rest of it. The best thing we can do is to go across to the island. Are you coming, or will you cut back to the school?"

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "That is to say, I'm with you, old top! Every time—I might even say precisely! Supposing we cross the raging foam? How about it? Is there anything doing?"

Pitt and Grey could see that Archie was determined to cross to the island, and since it was a hopeless task to attempt any persuasion, they placed him in the boat, and were soon gliding across the Stowe to the camp. The arrival of the boat was not noticed until it pushed itself rather noisily along the reeds.

"Oh, here they are!" said De Valerie, jumping up. "You bounders! What's the idea of being so late? You said you'd be back before nine."

"Hallo!" I put in. "There are three chaps, I believe!"

They came into the full glare of the firelight.

"Well, here we are, bright and cheery, and chirping vigorously!" exclaimed Archie genially. "How goes it, old tulips? What about the glad hand? Thought I'd just stagger in and mingle with the lads!"

"Well I'm blessed—Archie!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Somewhat, the very appearance of Archie raised a laugh. And the way the Cadets jumped up and gathered round the visitor was ample proof of his popularity. The new fellow, in fact, was in the good books of one and all. His inclusion in the Remove was regarded as a great success.

"Jolly pleased to see you, of course, Archie," I said, slapping him on the back. "But what's the idea? You ought to be in bed by now——"

"A sound scheme, no doubt, but the jolly old tissues are not in need of restoring just yet," said Archie. "To be quite precise, old dear, I felt somewhat forlorn, don't you know. None of the cheery chappies knocking about. I just trickled in to gather some of the good spirits, and so forth."

"Well, squat down, and make yourself at home," I said.

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "That is to say, absolutely! What I mean is, the notion is perfectly tophole—priceless, in fact. But when it comes to squatting, don't you know! Somewhat calculated to give a chappie a hearty collection of stiff joints, what? Dampness, and so forth——"

"That's all right—here's a box!" said Pitt, shoving one forward. Lounge at your ease!"

"That is to say, exactly!" exclaimed Archie, sitting down somewhat gingerly on the box, and looking round at us through his monocle. "Not so bad. In fact, not so jolly dusty! Well, here we are, what? Round the old camp fire, in the stillness of the starry night, and all that sort of rot! Makes a laddie feel somewhat poetic, don't you know?"

"It's all very well to be poetic, but did you merely come round to have a chat?" I asked. "We're glad to see you, Archie, but it's only fair to tell you that you'll get into big trouble if you don't arrive at the school by half-past nine."

"But I mean to say, what absolute piff!" said Archie mildly. "No offence, old walnut! Yards of respect, and all that sort of thing. But as man to man, what priceless piff! Nine-thirty! Well, dash it all, a chappie must have time to prepare himself for the night's good work!"

"Rules must be kept to at St. Frank's," I reminded him.

"Oh, quite!" agreed Archie. "I grasp the scheme, old darling. But, the fact is, the old bean has been somewhat flustered, and so forth. Fifty horse-power worries, don't you know?"

"Why, what's wrong?" I asked. "Why are you so concerned, Archie? Has Mr. Lee shoved you in a study with three or four other fellows——"

"I mean to say, not at all!" interrupted Archie. "The dear old lad was quite It. I might even say that he was an absolute topholer. Right at the highest notch, and all that sort of thing. I gathered from the trend of his remarks that studies are somewhat scare."

"Well, that's quite true," I said. "We're nearly full up in the Remove. Singleton, of course, has got a study to himself, but it's only a small one, and the Hon. Duggy rather likes exclusiveness."

"Absolutely!" said Archie, nodding. "I

grasp the idea. Well, old top, it appears that I'm to be let loose in Study No. 13. Deucedly unlucky number, and what not, but I'm not superstitious, so——"

"I think you must have got hold of it wrong, Archie," put in Pitt. "The studies aren't numbered in the Remove passage—they go on the A.B.C. principle. And No. 13 is in the Fifth Form quarters."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Well, that's me! In other words, that's precisely where I shall reside."

"But you're coming into the Remove!" I said.

"That, I gather, is the idea," said Archie. "But Mr. Lee held forth on the explaining business. As far as I can grasp, the Remove is full, or something like that. The Fifth is empty, or something of that sort. Well, there you are! That, as I might say, is the posish. I, don't you know, shall ornament Study 13. That's just how we stand."

"I suppose Mr. Lee shoved you there because he knew it would be hopeless to put you in with any of the other fellows!" exclaimed Handforth. "He could see, of course, that you wouldn't get on with any of the chaps. I don't want to be nasty, but when a fellow is a decided chump——"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "Well, rather! I don't mind admitting it, old fruit! That, as it were, is me. Every time! A priceless chump, of course. My pater has told me so a thousand times. As a matter of absolute fact, he told me so one other time as well! Thoroughly impressed it upon the old brain case, as I might say. A deucedly persistent cove, my pater."

"It's a good thing you know you're a chump, anyway!" said Handforth.

"There's no need to continue these complimentary remarks," I exclaimed. "What about sleeping accommodation, Archie?"

"I mean to say, some species of trouble!" replied Archie. "A kind of deadlock, and all the rest of it. What I mean is, the jolly old slumbering apartment is somewhat off-colour, don't you know?"

"That's why we're in camp here," I said. "The Remove dormitory is undergoing repairs. Where will you sleep, Archie?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Oh, that is to say, where? Dear old tulip, I haven't the faintest idea. But I gather that a special apartment is being prepared somewhere in the jolly old east wing. But these matters don't disturb me. They leave me calm and serene. The thinking apparatus, however, is decidedly churned up regarding Phipps."

"Phipps?" repeated Tommy Watson.

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "My man, don't you know?"

"Still thinking about him?" I grinned. "Look here, Archie, it's a dead certainty you won't be allowed to have Phipps brought to St. Frank's. What is he, exactly? Where does he live, and what work does he do?"

"My dear old sportsman!" protested Archie. "Such ig., don't you know! Frightful lack of the old intelligence, and all that sort of thing! No offence, of course—absolutely! But, really!

You don't know? Phipps is positively the last word—the final paragraph, and so forth. To be precise, Phipps is the real lad!"

"He seems to be a useful bounder——"

"Indispensable, laddie; the one and only chappie for me!" exclaimed Archie. "Let me enlarge. Let me discourse on the subject. Phipps is my man—the lad who has looked after me night and day. A brainy cove who knows everything. He reels out advice like the good old oracle. Helps me to dress, don't you know, gets out the right suit for the right day, and all that sort of rot."

"A kind of valet?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "A guide and a comforter and what not. When Phipps is flowing round a fellow he casts a soothing glow into the atmosphere. Without him, I am lost—positively mislaid. I mean to say, something's got to be done. I must have Phipps—couldn't live without the bounder."

Archie was quite worried. He had been thinking about Phipps the whole evening, but he had apparently failed to mention the matter to Nelson Lee. Probably he was rather nervous about doing so.

I explained to him that he'd better get back as soon as possible, or he would only find himself in trouble, for it was past bedtime already.

And at last Archie decided that he would "stagger to the old homestead," and turn in. He informed us that he was frightfully bucked, and added the information that he would probably trickle round again in the morning to look upon our cheery dials. And off he went.

Some of the fellows saw him ashore, and then he wandered off into the darkness. I had quite a strong idea that Archie Glenthorne would be somewhat disappointed in regard to the absent Mr. Phipps.

But Archie was a fellow who had a curious way of getting what he wanted—and Phipps was Archie's most cherished want at the moment.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE NIGHT!



"ALL quiet, sergeant?" asked Tommy Watson. "Silence!"

Tommy paused, and looked hard. It was late—getting on towards midnight, in fact. The Cadet Camp was asleep, and everything in shipshape order. There were two sentries on duty—their spell would conclude at two o'clock. The sentries were Watson and Handforth.

At midnight they would awaken Bob Christine and Talmadge, whose duty it would be to remain on guard until two o'clock. The spells of "sentry go" were divided into two-hour stretches, and there were always two Cadets on the job at once. One would have been quite sufficient, of course, but with two fellows on duty there was less likelihood of the guard falling asleep, and it was not so lonely.

Tommy Watson had just finished a round. He had passed through the sleeping quarters of the camp, through the living rooms, and had now returned to the main door. Handforth should have been just outside, on duty.

But Handforth wasn't there.

"Where the dickens can the ass have got to?" muttered Watson, turning back. "I say, Handy!" he added, in a stage whisper.

Then he uttered an indignant grunt. For he had caught sight of Handforth sitting down on a box in front of the glowing fire. For all the apartments in this quaint old building had fireplaces, and a blaze was always kept going in the chief room. And there was Sergeant Handforth, with his head lowered down on his chest, snoring peacefully.

Watson hurried across, and vigorously shook Handforth's shoulder.

"You rotter!" he hissed. "If I reported this to Nipper you'd be court-martialled! It's a frightful offence to go to sleep on duty——"

"Eh, what's that?" mumbled Handforth, looking up with somewhat bleary eyes. "Oh, it's you! I—I was just thinking, you know. Planning out a few things for to-morrow—drill, and——"

"You were asleep, you bounder!" said Watson. "Asleep on duty!"

Handforth jumped up, and glared.

"Do you want a punch on the nose, Private Watson?" he roared.

"Don't make that noise——"

"Well, don't you accuse me of neglecting my duty," growled Handforth. "You—you babbling ass! Can't I be deep in thought now without you making out I'm asleep? I'm jolly down on chaps who doze off on sentry work! It's a terrible crime!"

Watson grunted.

"All right, we won't argue!" he said. "We might as well let the fellows sleep in peace. But you were asleep all right, and you can't spook me—— Yow—yaroooh! Oh, my goodness!"

"That's for being insubordinate!" said Handforth curtly.

Watson held his nose, and moaned.

"You—you violent rotter——"

"Any more sauce, and I'll give you another," said Handforth. "Do you think I'm going to stand cheek from a private? Do you think I'm going to be accused of neglecting my duty by one of the beastly rank and file?"

"You—you wait!" muttered Tommy Watson darkly. "I'm not going to wake the chaps up now, but—you wait! You may be a sergeant, but that doesn't give you permission to punch out just as you like! You don't even give a chap time to put up his hands! You ought to be stopped!"

Handforth turned away, and strode up and down with quite unnecessary vigour. He stumbled over some obstacle now and again, and what with his growls and the noise of his feet, it could hardly be said that the night was quiet.

But, fortunately, all the Cadets were sound sleepers, and these noises did not disturb them. I turned over in my blankets, it is true, but I soon dropped off again. These were not unusual

sounds. It is only unusual sounds that awaken a light sleeper.

After another fifteen minutes had elapsed, Handforth was in a good humour again. He had only punched Tommy Watson's nose because Tommy had been right. Handforth had been asleep, but never would he have admitted it. The knowledge of his own slip annoyed him. It was somewhat hard on Watson that he should be compelled to bear the brunt of Handy's annoyance.

"Nearly time for us to turn in now," said Watson, as he glanced at his watch. "Only about another five minutes. I'm glad, too. This sentry business is all very well, but it's beastly wearisome!"

"Rather!" said Handforth, yawning. "Makes a chap doze—I—I mean, don't be an ass! I'm as fresh as paint—I've felt fit ever since I came on duty. But, of course, the whole idea is potty!"

"What, keeping a watch?"

"Of course!"

"But we've got to remember old Giddy, and those other rotters," said Watson. "Unless we're on the alert, they may spring a surprise, and try to chuck us off. Besides, there's the treasure. Both Niggs and Croke know about it, and they're keen to get on the track of the gold. They might even come searching——"

"With all these chaps on the island?" sneered Handforth. "What piffle! I pity you, Watson—it must be rotten to walk about without brains!"

"Look here, it's quite likely that Niggs will do something——"

"Rot!"

"And a watch is necessary——"

"Rubbish!"

"Yes, but look what you've just been saying——"

"Piffle!"

"I'm glad you admit it!" snapped Watson.

"Eh? What the dickens——" Handforth paused and glared. "Are you making out that I've been talking piffle?"

"Well, didn't you say that it was a crime to go to sleep on duty, and now you say that sentries aren't necessary at all——"

"I wasn't asleep," snapped Handforth.

"I'm not saying—— Hallo!" exclaimed Tommy quickly. "What was that?"

"Nothing, you fathead!"

"But I heard——"

"Oh, don't be a nervous ass."

"I tell you I heard something," insisted Watson. "There you are! Do you mean to say you didn't catch that?"

The two sentries were standing quite still now, listening intently. From the sleeping quarters had come a sharp cry—but it sounded muffled and far away. Then all was silent again.

Handforth and Watson looked at one another. The Cadets were sleeping in two or three apartments of this stone building. They were all well wrapped in blankets, and thoroughly comfortable. They were dry, and protected from all weather conditions. So far as the listeners could make out, the sound had come from the furthest sleeping room.

This was situated near a solid stonework passage which led to what appeared to be a blind end. Anybody going along this passage came upon a great stone slab which seemed utterly immovable.

This was, however, a cunningly-made stone door, which opened upon a flight of steps leading into the cellars. There were extensive cellars beneath the old place. It had been built as an almost exact replica of a castle fortress of the Middle Ages. And old John Willard had carried the plan out so thoroughly that everything was included—even to the dungeons.

Handforth looked at Tommy Watson, and nodded.

"I heard something then!" he exclaimed, in a stage whisper. "That only shows how necessary it is to have your ears open. No good relying on a chap like you for sentry duty——"

"Why, you rotter, I heard it first!" said Watson indignantly. "You called me a nervous ass."

"If you think you're going to take the credit for hearing this alarm, you've made a mistake," said Handforth gruffly. "I distinctly noticed a sound—a kind of cry for help."

"Well, it's no good standing here, arguing about it," snapped Watson. "The best thing we can do is to go and investigate. Perhaps somebody is in trouble. Come on—follow me!"

Handforth snorted as Watson walked swiftly towards the doorway leading into the passage. Edward Oswald would probably have continued arguing for quite a long time. And it rather unsettled him to see his fellow sentry dashing off like this before the conversation was finished.

Watson was just passing one of the other doorways when a figure appeared. He started back, rather surprised for the moment. The figure had made no noise, and it had come upon him abruptly.

"It's all right—only me!"

"Nipper!" muttered Watson. "You fat-head! You scared me——"

"Keep your hair on," I said calmly, as I joined him in the passage. "What's wrong? Did you hear something, too?"

"Yes. What was it?"

"I don't know," I said. "I was asleep, but something seemed to wake me up—one of the fellows cried out, I believe. I just got up to have a look round, and I brought an electric torch with me."

"Good!" said Watson.

"Who's this?" demanded Handforth, bustling up. "Oh, Nipper! Who the dickens told you to interfere? You ought to be asleep, and not bothering us! We're on sentry duty, and——"

"Don't waste time, Handy," I interrupted. "We want to find out what's wrong."

It wasn't long before we did find out. Going into the sleeping quarters, we looked at every fellow in turn. Then, as soon as we got into the last apartment—the one at the end of the passage—we all started forward at once. For one set of blankets lay in a disordered heap. Round about a number of juniors were sleeping soundly—they had not been disturbed in the least.

"Somebody's gone!" said Handforth shrewdly. "Now, that's pretty keen of me, I think. Somebody's vanished."

"Marvellous!" I exclaimed. "Your brain power, Handy, is simply staggering. How do you think of such wonderful things? By Jove! I don't quite like the look of this, though," I added, becoming serious. "This pile of blankets belongs to Martin!"

"The charity kid," said Handforth.

"There's no need to call him a charity kid," I said. "John Martin is a jolly decent fellow, and just as gentlemanly and well-behaved as any fellow in the Remove. Where on earth can he have got to? And why did he shout out like that?"

"He was kidnapped!" said Handforth dramatically.

He didn't really think this, but it sounded well. And Handforth was always anxious for something startling to happen—so that he could have an opportunity of doing some investigating work. Handforth rather fancied himself as a detective. The other fellows did not.

I bent over the blankets, examined them, and then looked round keenly. It seemed to me that there might be something in what Handforth had said. The blankets were all in a heap, in a most disordered condition. John was a very methodical fellow—quiet, reserved and tidy. It was not like him to make such a mess of his bedclothes.

And there were also one or two marks on the floor which attracted my attention—a scratch or two on the discoloured wood planks, as though caused by heavy boots. And there was something which filled me with instant suspicion. It was, indeed, a very significant clue.

At first I had not looked upon it as such. It had affected my senses in a sub-conscious kind of way, but, suddenly, I became alive to the importance of it. I sniffed the air keenly.

"Can you smell anything?" I whispered sharply.

"Smell anything?" repeated Watson. "What do you mean? It seems a bit musty in here—"

"No, no!" I interrupted. "It's a faint niff of beer, or spirits—tinged with foul tobacco. Do you mean to say you can't smell it? Very, very faint, but it's in the air all right."

Watson and Handforth sniffed again and again.

"Your giddy imagination," growled Handforth, at length.

But I knew it wasn't. I had a keener scent than the other fellows—that was all. And that smell in the apartment told me clearly enough that a man—or two or three men, perhaps—had very recently been in there. They were men who had been drinking and smoking, and they had left their trade mark behind.

I instantly thought of Captain Niggs and Ben Croke. These two rascals, bargemen who had lost their vessel in the recent flood, had remained in the neighbourhood because they knew something about old Willard's treasure. Until the previous evening, in fact, they had occupied the island. But we had thrown them



Then he uttered an indignant grunt. For he had caught sight of Handforth sitting down on a box in front of the glowing fire.

off. It was quite feasible to suppose that they had returned. But how?

"I say!" said Watson abruptly, and in rather a startled voice. "This is impossible, you know."

"What's impossible?"

"Martin can't have gone!"

"But he has gone," I said, indicating the blankets.

"That's what makes it so jolly queer," said Tommy, scratching his ear. "Haven't we just come along the passage? Martin couldn't have got out without passing us, and we saw no sign of him."

"That's right," said Handforth.

"Then there's only one explanation," I said grimly. "Martin was taken down into the cellars—into the dungeons!"

"What rot!" said Handforth. "Why should he want to go down there—in the middle of the giddy night?"

"I don't suppose he did want to—he was probably forced down."

"Oh, don't be a potty lunatic!" snapped Handforth. "Do you think I'd let anybody come in? Who could take Martin away? Every other fellow is here—sound asleep, and you must be dotty to—"

"Some men got into this room!" I interrupted tensely. "I don't know how, but they managed it. There's only one explanation, though," I went on. "They must have come up from the dungeons."

"But we examined the dungeons, and they were empty," said Watson.

"I know all that—and I'm puzzled," I exclaimed. "As far as I can see, the only possibility is that the two men—supposing there were two—got through by means of a secret door. I'm pretty certain one exists, and it probably leads to a tunnel, or something."

Handforth looked at me with wide open eyes.

"By George! You've got it!" he exclaimed excitedly. "That's the idea. A secret tunnel! But why should they pinch Martin?"

"Probably because he was the first fellow they came across," I said. "His blankets are nearest the door, you see. And he might have been aroused. Anyhow, we're going down into the cellars, to have a look round."

I was thinking rapidly. I could not see any

reason why John Martin should have been taken. But, at that time, I was ignorant of a most important fact. John Martin was really the son of old John Willard. He did not even know this himself. But Captain Niggs and Ben Croke did know it—and they probably had some sinister reason for getting hold of the boy.

John was not in the same position as the other fellows. That is to say, he was not an ordinary junior. Some little time earlier he had been brought to St. Frank's by Dr. Stafford, and the Head had kept him in the school as a kind of protégé. John, to tell the truth, had saved the Head's life, and the Head had then discovered that the boy was unhappy, and anxious to get away from his home.

Strictly speaking, it was not a home, for he was simply kept by a miserable, evil-tempered man in Caistowe, who was only too glad to get rid of him. And it was through this man that Dr. Stafford had learned that John was really the son of old Willard, the eccentric, who had died ten years since.

The boy had been left utterly unprovided for when his half-mad father died, and those who had charge of him had called him "Martin," feeling that the name of Willard would be harmful. It might be suspected that the boy would grow up tainted with his father's insanity, and so it was not generally known that John was actually the son of the man who had built the quaint old "folly" on the island.

But, as I have said, I was unaware of these facts at the time, and I was also unaware that Niggs and Croke had an associate named William Hudson. It was this man who had been planning everything during the last week. It was owing to his activity that we had been turned off Willard's Island; it was owing to his cunning that the two bargemen had been placed there as watchmen. But, with the aid of Archie, we had spoilt that part of the scheme.

Just before we got to the big stone door which led down to the cellars, I came to a halt. I made up my mind. I was only half dressed, but I had my watch on me. I took it out, and glanced at it.

"Ten past twelve," I said. "Look here, Tommy, buzz off like the wind, and go to the school. Bring the guv'nor here."

"Mr. Lee," said Watson. "But he'll be in bed."

"No, he won't," I said crisply. "He told me he'd be working late to-night, and that generally means until one o'clock with the guv'nor. You'll probably find him in his study. Buzz off, and bring him back with you."

Tommy Watson didn't quite like the idea, he wanted to remain with me. But I insisted and off he went.

I knew well enough that this was a serious business, and I didn't quite care to handle it alone. It was essentially a job for Nelson Lee.

CHAPTER III.

THE CLUE OF THE MUD-MARK.



H ANDFORTH grunted. "Mad — absolutely mad!" he said cuttingly. "I've known it for months, of course, but this is about the limit! Absolutely off your rocker!"

"Talking about me?" I asked.

"Yes, I am."

"What's wrong?"

"Wrong!" snapped Handforth. "Of all the dotty ideas! What the thunder did you want to send for Mr. Lee for?"

"So that he could help us to get on Martin's track."

"Rot!" interrupted Handforth curtly. "Who wants any help? If it comes to that, you can go to bed and leave it to me. I'll show you how these things ought to be done. You ought to be boiled! I'd like to see you chucked into a vat of frying oil!"

"Quite an interesting spectacle," I said. "But there's no need for you to go off the deep end, Handy. This thing's urgent."

"Don't I know it?" roared Handforth. "The very first time I've got a chance of doing some real solid detective work, you send for Nelson Lee! When he comes I sha'n't have a look in."

"My dear chap, you needn't imagine that you're capable of handling a job like this," I said patiently. "Why, I'm not game to make the attempt myself. We don't know what's happened to Martin, and we've got to use every means to get on his trail at once. We can't waste time while fatheads like you potter about."

Handforth wanted to have a fight on the spot. He informed me that he would knock me into the middle of next week, if I said another word. But I managed to calm him down, and then we opened the stone door of the cellar.

As we paused at the top of the steps, I flashed my light down into the inky blackness, and there was something mysterious and eerie about the affair which made us pause even a bit longer.

It was only shortly after midnight, and the whole camp was sound asleep. The night was particularly still, and, somehow, it seemed to be just the right atmosphere for such a strange, sinister happening as this.

John Martin had been spirited away as though by some supernatural means. Only that one faint cry had warned us that all was not right. In some strange, unaccountable way, John had been taken from his bed, and nothing more was to be seen of him.

And, since it was impossible for him to have been taken out into the open, it stood to reason that he must have gone down into the dungeons. And I was convinced that he had been forced against his will.

"It seems a bit creepy, doesn't it?" whispered Handforth. "Not that I'm nervous, or anything like that—not likely! Who's going first?"

"You can, if you like," I said.

"But you've got the electric torch."

"Right you are," I smiled. "Leave it to me."

Handforth, although he denied that he was nervous, undoubtedly felt somewhat rocky. And I didn't blame him, for I had the same sensation myself. And I had gone through all sorts of queer adventures with the guv'nor. There was something about these dungeons which made them creepy even in the daytime. At the hour of midnight—and particularly after a fellow had been wafted away like a puff of smoke—the creepy sensation was tremendously accentuated.

What should we find down in the cellars? Would John Martin be there, for not? Should we soon find ourselves fighting desperately with the rogues who had taken him from his blankets?

After all, it was rather a waste of time to conjecture these sort of things, and I strode boldly but softly down the stone steps, flashing the light beam from my torch in front of me. Handforth followed close upon my heels. He had pushed back his sleeves instinctively.

But there was nobody to fight.

The cellars and dungeons were empty. We went over them from corner to corner, and came to the one obvious conclusion that we were the sole occupants. Down below there a narrow passage ran for some distance. And doors were set at regular intervals, each leading into a square-stoned dungeon. The doors were of solid oak, heavily studded, and fitted with massive locks and bolts.

"Thought so," grunted Handforth disgustedly as he pulled his sleeves down. "This is what comes of taking any notice of an ass like you. There's nothing here, and it's as plain as anything that Martin was never brought down."

"Then where is he?" I asked grimly.

"How do I know?" demanded Handforth. "It's a dead certainty he didn't come here, or we should find him. These walls are solid stone, with nothing but earth beyond. A worm couldn't get out of this cellar except by the stone door at the top of the steps. Martin must have gone out some other way."

"That's impossible," I said. "You or Tommy would have seen him if he tried to get out into the open. It's no good suggesting the windows, because they're all barred over. And, as it was impossible for the chap to leave the camp by any other means, it stands to reason that he came down here."

"Where he vanished into thin air, I suppose?" asked Handforth sarcastically. "Or perhaps he's hiding behind a speck of dirt?"

I thought it unnecessary to make any reply to this remark. And, emerging into the narrow passage once more, I walked slowly along. Curiously enough, the floor and walls were perfectly dry; indeed, the floor was quite dusty. There was no sign of dampness down in this strange old dungeon.

"By Jove!" I said abruptly.

I had come to a halt, and was staring down at the stone floor. Then I grabbed Handforth as he was about to move forward.

"Don't disturb it!" I said sharply.

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth. "What's the matter, you ass? Don't disturb what? Have you gone off your giddy rocker?"

"Can't you see?" I asked tensely. "Look! As clear as anything—there's been a struggle here, Handy. A pretty lively one, too."

Handforth stared blankly at the floor.

"You can't spoof me!" he growled. "I'm jolly keen at this sort of thing, but it's no good trying tricks on an old hand. There's been no struggle here, you duffer! Trying to pull my leg, I suppose!"

"I thought you rather prided yourself on being a detective?" I asked. "I rather fancy you need a few hints, old son. Well, here's a good lesson for you. Look carefully at the floor."

"I'm looking."

"Well do you see those long scratches?" I asked. "They were caused not more than half an hour ago—and you can easily see that a heavy boot made them. Then look here. What about these marks?"

I went down on my hands and knees, and then made closer examination of the floor. And although Handforth was extremely dubious, and expressed quite a large number of extremely frank doubts, I was positive that a struggle had taken place in the passage.

"You can see how it happened," I said. "They succeeded in getting Martin down here before he fully recovered from the surprise. And I suppose they were taking him into this particular dungeon when he made a break. The result was a quick scrap, in which Martin naturally got the worst of it."

Handforth glared.

"Oh, you make me tired!" he snapped. "Talking about struggles, and all that kind of thing, and there's not a soul down here. And that suggestion about a secret passage is obviously a lot of rot. Every wall down here is as solid as a giddy cliff!"

"Cliffs aren't always solid," I said shortly.

"I suppose that's meant to be smart?" asked Handforth in a kind of contemptuous tone. "Well, all I can say is—Listen! What's that? I heard something just then!"

Handforth stood stock still, and turned a shade paler.

"Nothing to worry about," I said. "It's only somebody coming down."

Handforth pulled himself together.

"Did you think I didn't know it?" he said sourly.

He was attempting to cover up his momentary confusion. The sound was, indeed, caused by someone hurrying down the cellar steps. And a moment later this somebody turned out to be Tommy Watson. He was looking flushed from rapid walking and excitement.

"He's coming!" he said quickly. "Just behind me!"

"Good!" I replied. "I thought you'd do the trick, Tommy. I'll bet the guv'nor was in his study."

"Yes—hard at work on something," said Watson.

A minute later Nelson Lee appeared. He was

looking keen and brisk, and he glanced round sharply as he saw us standing in the passage.

"You did quite right to send for me, Nipper," he said. "I understand that Martin has mysteriously disappeared?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you believe he was brought down here?"

"Nipper does, but I don't!" put in Handforth. "This place is as empty as a tub! Martin couldn't come down this way, sir——"

"We will see, Handforth—we will see," said Nelson Lee.

He listened intently while I told him all the circumstances. Tommy Watson, of course, had already informed the gov'nor as to the position. But I added a few more details.

"I've no doubt, Nipper, that Martin was seized by Captain Niggs and the man Croke," said Nelson Lee at length. "They appear to be starting on some rather desperate game—and we we must do our best to frustrate it at once. I may as well inform you that I have solved the secret of that cipher——"

"You have!" I said eagerly.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Handforth.

"Rather!" said Watson. "Mr. Lee was telling me about it as we came along. Jolly wonderful I call it!"

"And what does the message say, sir?" I asked.

"I am rather annoyed with the deceased, Mr. Willard," replied Nelson Lee, drily. "He has played a trick on me, Nipper. The message simply gives the information that a vast hoard of gold is concealed in some secret place. And the clue to this place is to be obtained by piecing the jigsaw puzzle together. It would have been far more profitable if I had spent my time on that task—since we practically knew from the very start that a treasure really existed."

"I don't know, sir," I said. "After all, it was only a surmise—and now we know for certain. That's all to the good, anyhow. We know we're jolly well working on a cert., and not wasting our time on a wild goose chase. But how did you find the key to the cipher?"

"By hard work, young 'un," replied Lee. "By trying every method of cipher reading, and eliminating those which were useless. The jigsaw puzzle, as you know, is a most intricate piece of work, and the piecing of it together will be a formidable task. But we cannot spend any more time discussing that now. We must get to work."

"Good!" said Handforth. "Now look here, sir. Nipper says there's been a struggle in the passage here. Of course that's sheer rot——"

"On the contrary, Handforth, it is perfectly true," interrupted Nelson Lee. "I have already noticed these marks on the floor. A fight undoubtedly took place on this spot."

Handforth looked rather blank.

"Why, do you think so, too, sir?" he asked.

"I do not think so—I know so," said Nelson Lee, quietly. "Yes, Martin had a bit of a tussle here, but he was evidently overpowered. I should imagine that two men were dealing

with him. He is a strong, sturdy boy, and might have got away from a single assailant."

"What's your idea, sir?" I asked.

"Probably the same as yours," replied Lee. "Martin was brought down here, and spirited away. According to the account I have heard, these two men must have made their entry into the building by means of this cellar. It follows, therefore, that there must be a second exit. The stone door at the top of the steps is not the only way out."

"You mean a secret door, or something?"

"Exactly."

"Yes, but how are we going to find it?" I asked. "Why, it might take us days before we locate a thing like that, sir. And we don't know what's happening to Martin, and——"

"We can do nothing but our best, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "Now, boys, you can leave me to myself, if you like. You are probably tired, and would like to get to bed. This matter is now in my hands, and I will deal with it."

"But we want to be here, too, sir!" protested Handforth.

"Rather!" said Watson.

"Stay if you like—you'll probably get tired of the whole business after a while," said Nelson Lee. "We will commence by examining the floor very closely. We might be able to learn things."

The gov'nor had a powerful electric torch of his own, and he cast the light from it upon the floor. I could see by his expression that he was grave and troubled. He spoke lightly, and both Handforth and Watson had no idea as to his real feelings. But I knew.

Nelson Lee was intensely worried. And the situation was certainly galling. He knew that two men at least had crept in like shadows. We knew that they had seized John, and taken him away. To rush off on the tracks of some escaping crooks is exciting enough—and it makes a fellow feel good. But this was different—this was maddening.

Here we were, stuck fast—helpless. John had been taken away by means of some secret tunnel. And the way for us was barred. We could not follow until the hidden door was found.

And, in the meantime, John was in the hands of the enemy, and we did not know what was happening to him. There was every necessity to work speedily, and to press forward in pursuit.

"Why do you think they took the chap away, sir?" I asked.

"I rather fancy the men had a specific reason for doing so," replied Nelson Lee.

"You don't think they collared Martin just by chance?"

"No."

"Why should they pick upon him, sir?" asked Watson.

"Because it evidently suits them better to do so," said Lee, somewhat vaguely. "Or, on the other hand, it is just possible that they took the first boy they came across. They may have some idea of holding him as a hostage."

"That's what I thought, sir," I said keenly.

"In fact, it seems to be the only explanation. They'll hang tight to Martin until we agree to clear off the island—some idea of that sort, I suppose. Surely they don't mean any harm to him? Any real harm. I mean?"

"I sincerely trust not," said Lee. "But we will not leave anything to chance, Nipper. If it is at all possible to rescue the boy at once, we will do so. We will not sit down and wait until the enemy makes another move."

Of course the gov'nor had no need to choose his words. For both Handforth and Tommy Watson knew all about the treasure. They were in the secret, together with two or three other fellows. The rest of the Cadets had never even heard of it.

It was well past the time when Handforth and Watson should have gone off duty. By now they ought to have been asleep, with two other sentries on the watch. The thought struck me that the camp was now left entirely unguarded.

Neither Tommy nor Handforth would hear of shifting. They meant to be down here until Nelson Lee discovered the secret door. So I slipped up the stone steps as quickly as possible, and made my way to the sleeping apartment where Tregellis-West and Church and McClure were to be found.

I awakened Sir Montie and Church. It was not their spell for sentry duty, but I thought it much better to arouse them. The proper sentries who were told off to keep watch between twelve and two were not in the secret; and they would certainly start all sorts of inquiries if they saw anything unusual afoot.

So I explained briefly to Sir Montie and Church what was happening, and told them to keep on the alert—to remain on guard until they were relieved. If anybody else woke up, Sir Montie would tell them that everything was all serene, and that they were to go to sleep again.

In this way, the whole affair was kept quiet, and in the morning the bulk of the fellows in camp would never know that anything unusual had taken place. Having received solemn promises from the two sentries that they would refrain from dozing off, I returned to the cellars.

Nelson Lee was now in one of the dungeons, and he was making his way slowly and carefully over the floor, examining every crevice and cranny. Now and again he brought a powerful magnifying lens into play.

"Anything happened?" I asked softly.

"Nothing yet!" muttered Handforth. "Proper frost, in fact. I don't think anything will happen. I'm jolly doubtful if there's any secret door at all! You'll find I'm right in the end. Just you wait!"

As it turned out, it was destined that we should not have to wait very long. At present, however, Nelson Lee's task seemed well-nigh hopeless. It hardly seemed feasible that he could find any secret door here—where the walls were of solid stone which seemed to be built as solidly as the pyramids.

Old Willard had had his plans carried out thoroughly. He had spent a vast amount of money on the island, and had spent years of time. But, until now, nobody had ever

thought that the quaint old building contained any secrets.

For over ten years this thing had remained hidden—there had been no hint or suggestion of mystery. But now, solely owing to the finding of an old brass-bound box, it seemed likely that the truth would come out.

Nelson Lee was feeling very annoyed by the fact that the enemy had the advantage. For they knew of this secret door. And it was quite likely that they knew of other things, too. The great detective had a feeling that Niggs and Co. were stealing a march on him.

While he had been puzzling over the cipher, they had been doing practical work. And perhaps they had stumbled across the treasure chamber by accident. This thought was certainly a galling one.

And then, just as Nelson Lee was raising himself, he suddenly paused. He stared hard at the wall in front of him. It was built of huge stones, each one nearly a foot square, and absolutely solid.

But Nelson Lee was not deceived.

He knew how fatal it was to judge by appearances. And this was not his first experience of underground caverns and tunnels. He knew a great deal about the game, and was on the alert for any little likely sign.

He had seen one now.

The light from his torch had revealed rather a curious thing. Standing upright, he would not have noticed it, but, in a stooping position, he had seen that a little scrap of moist earth was adhering to a crevice between two of the stone blocks.

Nelson Lee went nearer, and gazed searchingly at the tiny morsel of earth through his magnifying lens. Then he gave a soft whistle. I was by his side in a moment, anxious to know what he had discovered.

"Anything good, sir?" I asked.

"I think so, Nipper; yes, I think so!" replied Lee.

"Blessed if I can see anything!" said Handforth, staring.

"Same here!" said Watson.

I looked keenly.

"This wall seems to be as solid as the side of a battleship, sir!" I exclaimed. "Why, these stones are a foot square, and it would take a couple of men to lift one. I must confess that I'm stumped, too."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"What is this?" he inquired, pointing.

"That?" I said. "Why, a speck of earth—fairly moist, too. It seems to be jammed in between these two square stones."

"Exactly," said Nelson Lee. "Now, Nipper, just use your wits. How could this scrap of earth get here—in such a peculiar position? These cellars are dry, and the floor is dusty. No morsel of earth would remain moist for long. That clearly proves that this scrap was recently left here. And it is quite obvious that it was not deliberately placed in this crevice."

"Then how did it get there, sir?"

"I should judge that it was adhering to the instep of a man's boot," replied Nelson Lee. "After walking on spongy ground, a man is

liable to collect earth on his instep—and to carry it with him into dry regions.”

Handforth stared.

“But, hang it all, sir!” he protested. “How on earth could a man’s instep get in such a place?”

“It is quite clear that the wall was not in its present condition,” said Nelson Lee. “We will suppose that these four centre stones were removed, leaving a cavity. A man climbs through. In doing so, he scrapes his boot upon the edge, leaving a certain amount of earth on the stone.”

“By Jove!” I said tensely. “You mean that this is the secret doorway?”

“Exactly.”

“But it’s all solid stonework, sir!” protested Watson.

“Undoubtedly,” said Nelson Lee. “But these secret doors are frequently as solid as the wall itself, and so cunningly constructed that it is well-nigh impossible to detect the difference between wall and door. But this clue is a clear one, boys. That scrap of earth could have got in this crevice in no other way.”

And Nelson Lee commenced searching keenly for further signs. He had a starting point now, and the task seemed much more hopeful. He was not scouting round at a loose end, so to speak.

The crevice where the earth stuck was about eight inches from the floor; and this was apparently the bottom of the secret opening. The door, therefore, was not like an ordinary one—it was more similar to a hole in the wall.

Lee closely examined the edges of the stones. They seemed to fit so tightly that any question of moving them appeared to be impossible. But this, of course, was what was only to be expected.

A secret door is not a secret door if it can be seen or detected at the first glance. And Nelson Lee was very intent upon his task, but after ten minutes had elapsed he shook his head doubtfully.

“The door is here right enough, but I doubt if we can locate the method of opening it,” he said. “Perhaps we had better try further afield.”

“Good idea, sir!” said Handforth.

The leader of Study D, in fact, was convinced in his own mind that no door existed, and considered himself vastly superior to Nelson Lee for refusing to be spoofed by a mere speck of dirt.

The gov’nor was now giving his attention to the wall further along. And, abruptly, he gave a little exclamation, and centred his attention upon one stone near the corner. It was smaller than the others.

“Ah, what is this?” he murmured. “We have been wasting our time, boys. This, I fancy, is the key to the little problem. We will soon find out. Nipper, hold your torch so that I can see.”

I did as he directed, and he produced from his pocket a small instrument of polished steel, which looked like a miniature cold-chisel. With this he commenced to prise the stone. And, almost at once, that block became loose, and it was only by acting quickly that Nelson Lee

prevented the thing falling on his toes. The stone came right out, like a plug, and he just managed to catch it.

“My hat!” I exclaimed. “Now we’ve got it, sir.”

“At least, we appear to be getting on,” said Nelson Lee smoothly.

He held the stone and examined it. It was a square block, solid enough, and of considerable weight. Having satisfied himself that there was nothing peculiar about it, he set it down, and then gave his attention to the cavity.

An examination proved that it was quite empty. The stone fitted into it closely and snugly, filling the whole space—but there was no extra space. Indeed, it seemed that our hopes were raised for nothing.

Lee placed his hand inside the opening, and felt about. Then he exerted pressure, pushing with all his strength. As he did so, he felt something moving, reluctantly but unmistakably.

Then followed a single thud.

“What was that, sir?” I asked intently.

“I don’t quite know, young ‘un,” replied Lee. “But it seems that something shifted, and——”

Thud!

This time it came from another part of the wall, and Nelson Lee at once flashed his whole light in that direction. We stared with wide-open eyes. We gasped. For the whole aspect of the wall had changed.

There, in the centre, a black gap could be seen—a hole where previously there had been solid stonework. Nelson Lee caught his breath in, and moved quickly across to the cavity.

“Splendid!” he exclaimed softly. “When I pressed that stone, the catch was evidently released, and this door swung open as a consequence.” He bent down and examined the lower edge. “H’m! Just as I surmised. Indeed, there could have been no other explanation.”

There, on the stone at the bottom of the opening could be seen a big smear of dirt. Without a doubt it had been caused by a man’s boot scraping as he climbed through. Nelson Lee’s theory had been correct.

“Well, I’m jiggered!” said Handforth dazedly. “That’s jolly queer, you know! Of course, I thought this door was here all the time, and I was just going to suggest——”

“Dry up, Handy!” I said briskly. “We’re going on the track now.”

I gazed into the blackness of the cavity. What lay beyond? What mysterious things were we destined to discover?

CHAPTER IV.

THE WICKED UNCLE!



NELSON LEE looked at us doubtfully.

“Well, boys, you can’t all come through here,” he said. “We don’t want to make too much noise, and, more-

over, we should only hamper one another.

Nipper, you will accompany me. Do you youngsters mind staying here, on guard?"

Handforth and Watson looked rather sickly. "Oh, not at all, sir!" they said, without enthusiasm.

As a matter of fact they were fairly bubbling with curiosity and excitement to enter the tunnel. But they could not possibly refuse Nelson Lee's wish—which, of course, was practically a command.

But I saw Handforth glaring at me ferociously, just as if I had done him some personal injury.

"You rotter!" he whispered, edging up to me. "Keeping me out of it like this. Just wait until afterwards!"

I grinned, and followed Nelson Lee through the secret doorway. The guv'nor was moving along slowly, lighting his way by means of the torch. We were in a brick-built tunnel—narrow, with a low-arched roof, and stone floor. It was clean and dry, and the air quite pure.

I was puzzling myself as to where it could lead—until I remembered a little adventure Tommy Watson and I had had during the previous night. We had gone to the other side of the island, where a fall of cliff had occurred during the recent flood.

It was here that we had found the brass-bound box containing the secret cipher and the jig-saw puzzle—the clue to old Willard's treasure. And, upon investigation, Tommy and I had discovered an old tunnel which led down some steps into a stone chamber. But then we had drawn a blank. We had not been able to progress any further.

This passage, no doubt—the one that the guv'nor and I were in—joined up with that underground chamber. And as this thought came to me, I confess I felt somewhat guilty.

What an idiot I had been not to recall the facts earlier! By this time, probably, John Martin had been taken miles away. At the very first alarm I ought to have rushed out into the open, and made my way with a crowd of Cadets to the upper end of the island. We could then have headed off John's captors as they emerged. And now they had escaped!

But it is always easy to be wise after the event. And, after all, perhaps things had not happened exactly as I have outlined. In any case, I decided not to tell Nelson Lee anything about it just yet.

Presently we found ourselves turning to the left. But there were no other openings—the tunnel curved round. And then we descended a long flight of narrow steps. We went down lower and lower into the earth. The ground beneath Willard's Island seemed to be a perfect labyrinth of tunnels and caves and passages.

"Well, we seem to be getting on, sir," I whispered.

"Hush, Nipper—not a sound," breathed Lee. "We do not know what lies ahead, and we cannot be too cautious. Do not speak."

I realised that the guv'nor was right, and so we continued on our way with soft footsteps, and without a word. Then we turned another corner, and found ourselves face to face with a blank wall. The passage ended here. But at

the first glance we knew that there was something beyond.

For this was not like the other secret door. We were on the right side of it—the side where the mechanism was fully exposed, and where no concealment was necessary.

And it only took Nelson Lee about ten seconds to master the clumsy but ingenious device which served to secure the door. It was probably worked in the same way as the door we had already conquered.

Very cautiously, the guv'nor swung the stone slab open.

Before doing so, however, he switched off his electric torch, leaving us in a pitchy darkness which could almost be felt. The door made no sound. I did not even know that it had opened until something seemed to hit my vision out of the blackness.

It was fortunate that Lee had turned his light off. For, just beyond, lay a short tunnel—no longer than six or seven feet—and then a square chamber. We could see it distinctly, for a candle was burning on the floor. If Lee had kept his torch going, the bright beam would have shot across the chamber, signalling our presence in a moment.

Nelson Lee touched my arm as a sign for me to keep quiet—not that I needed any reminder. And we both stood quite still, listening. Lee opened the door just a little further, and then we caught our breath in.

For now something else was revealed.

There, squatting on the stone floor was Ben Croke! He seemed to be fairly comfortable, and he was smoking a pipe, and idly tracing a pattern on the dusty stone floor with a piece of stick. Mr. Croke appeared to be killing time.

Next to him lay John Martin. The boy was roughly bound by means of some rope. There was a defiant expression on his face, but no look of fear. A feeling of huge satisfaction swept through me.

It had been better, after all, to act as we had done. We had now caught the enemy red-handed—and, possibly we might be able to learn something of the truth.

"There ain't no call for you to look so durned glum!" said Mr. Croke, removing his pipe, and delivering a consignment of tobacco juice with much accuracy in a depression of the floor. "You won't come to no 'arm, young man. Me an' the cap'n is kind folk what wouldn't 'urt a hinsect. You're goin' to be nice an' comfortable, an' it won't be long afore we start on our little trip."

"I'm not glum!" exclaimed John curtly. "You've mistaken the expression on my face. I'm furious. And you needn't think you'll have everything your own way for long. There'll be a hue and cry after me, and then you'll wish you hadn't touched me! You won't care for prison life!"

Mr. Croke started slightly.

"Don't you be such a blame young fool!" he growled. "Even if we're copped, this ain't a prison job—it's only by way of a practical joke. Anyway, I don't take no responsibility!"

I nudged the guv'nor, and he nudged me back. Apparently he did not want to speak

just yet. We had found the missing Cadet, and that was all that mattered. We knew that we could rescue him as soon as we pleased.

And while we were crouching there in the darkness, two other figures were steadily progressing up the River Stowe in a small boat. They hardly made any sound and the little craft glided along easily under the pressure exerted on the oars by Captain Joshua Niggs.

His companion was Mr. William Hudson. This latter individual had appeared in the neighbourhood several days earlier. He had got into touch with Niggs and Croke, and the three were now working together—and all to the same end. They were hot on the track of Willard's treasure.

Mr. Hudson was—according to his own statements—John's uncle. He had married old Willard's only sister, who was now dead. Whether this was true or not, Hudson was several kinds of a rascal.

He fully intended getting the treasure for himself if this was at all possible. If it were discovered by any outsiders it would naturally become the property of John, who was the next of kin. But Mr. Hudson had plans of his own. If John could be got out of the way, things would be very different.

It is doubtful if Mr. Hudson ever really thought of going to the lengths of removing John altogether. But he certainly desired to get the boy completely out of the neighbourhood.

"Things seem to be goin' just right, Niggs," said Hudson, as the boat was headed towards the bank at the upper end of the island. "We've got everything prepared, and we'll soon have the boy here, and take him down the river. It was just as well for us to go down first and pave the way."

"You're right, boss," agreed Captain Niggs. "Ben will be lookin' arter the kid' awright. He's a pore old cuss, an' nigh to 'is grave, but 'e comes in useful now an' agin. We'll find the boy safe enough. Ben ain't the kind of bloke to let a kid like that get the best of 'im, even though 'e is as weak as a durned rat."

"It's a habit of yours to talk in that way, Niggs," said Hudson. "Croke's as strong as you are, although he doesn't look it. Well, here we are. We'd best keep quiet now. Those confounded boys are running loose on this island."

"They're all asleep," said the captain. "Perhaps so, but we can't take any chances."

The two men landed and drew the boat slightly out of the water, so that it could not drift away with the current. Then they made their way up the sloping ground to the jagged piece of cliff which marked the entrance to the underground passage.

The plans of this rascally trio had gone very smoothly. They had stolen into the very heart of the camp—making their way in by means of the dungeons—and they had seized John Martin without any trouble. Before any alarm could be raised they had taken him down through the secret door, and then they were safe. Croke had been left with the prisoner

while his companions went down the river on business of their own. The business was obviously connected with the disposal of John, once he was taken from the island.

At last the two men reached the tunnel entrance. Not until they were fairly inside did Mr. Hudson pull out a cheap pocket electric lamp. It gave a weak glimmer of light, but quite sufficient to illuminate the way.

And the pair passed down the tunnel, and then down a long flight of steps towards the square chamber, where John was guarded by Croke.

The two men were about half-way down the flight of steps, when they received a bit of a start. From below there came a sudden yell—not particularly loud in itself, but sounding tremendously so in that confined space. The voice of Mr. Croke echoed and re-echoed along the tunnel. It was immediately followed by a tremendous scuffling noise, a series of gasps, and then utter silence.

"The durned kid's bin makin' a fight for it!" snarled Captain Niggs.

He and Hudson blundered down the rest of the steps. The stone chamber was now in total darkness, for the candle had been extinguished. And the first thing that Hudson saw as he entered was the figure of Ben Croke rising dazedly from the floor. There was no sign whatever of John!

Hudson flashed the weak light from his torch into the corners of the apartment, but nothing was revealed, only dusty emptiness. John Martin was nowhere to be seen. The prisoner had vanished!

Hudson uttered an oath of fury, and entered the short tunnel which led to the other door. But this space, too, was empty. Hudson turned with blazing eyes upon old Ben Croke.

"What's happened?" he demanded, harshly. "Where's that boy?"

"Strike me timbers!" gasped Ben. "There ain't no call for you to talk in that there tone. 'Tain't my fault——"

"Hang you!" snarled Hudson. "Get it out!"

"Yes, Ben, you'd best tell us what took place," put in Captain Niggs, gruffly. "It's the fust time as you've let me down, old mate. I allus thought as I could trust you like as if it was meself. The fact is, you're getting old and used up. That's the trouble. I oughter had more blamed sense——"

"Can't you keep quiet, confound you?" snapped Hudson. "Let the man speak! That boy was here, bound hand and foot! How in the name of blazes could he have got away? I expect you went to sleep, you old fool!"

Mr. Croke looked indignant. "That there is an hinsult!" he exclaimed hotly. "I wasn't no more asleep than what you are! I was took by surprise——"

"I suppose the boy unfastened his bonds and sprang on you?" asked Hudson sourly.

"A lot of good it was leaving you in charge——"

"It wasn't nothink of the sort!" interrupted Croke. "The boy was as tightly bound as ever—an' I was keepin' guard. What'appened I don't know—it's more'n I can say. But this 'ere place ain't right, if you ask me."

"Ain't right?" repeated Niggs.

"There's somethink queer about it!" said Croke, uneasily. "I ain't no believer in ghosts, and them things——"

"Pah! You make me sick!" rapped out Hudson. "There's nothing queer about the place. What happened? Hang it, man, every minute is of value! Where did the boy go to? How did he get away? Can't you tell us that?"

Ben Croke glared ferociously.

"I can't tell you nothink!" he replied. "An' I ain't no durned slave to be barked at, neither! You an' your plans! Blowed if you don't seem to think you ken do as you like wi' me!"

Hudson controlled himself with difficulty.

"I don't mean to be like that," he growled. "Don't be a fool, Croke! Can't you understand that every minute is of importance? And yet you stand there, losing your temper, and——"

"O' course nobody else ain't losin' their tempers, are they?" demanded Mr. Croke, sarcastically. "Still, we'll let that pass—I ain't the kind of man to keep up a quarrel. Never was. Jest arst the cap'n—he'll tell you. Allus a good-tempered feller, I was."

"All right!" said Hudson, thickly. "Now, how did the boy escape?"

"That's just what I'd like to know!" replied Croke. "This is what 'appened, as near as I can tell. I was settin' over there, waitin' for you to come back, an' the kid was mopin' an' lookin' sorter down in the mouth. His ropes were as strong as ever, 'cos I took notice o' that."

"Well?" demanded Hudson. "You're infernally long-winded!"

"A man must 'ave time!" grumbled Croke. "Well, all of a sudden-like, something whizzed through the air. Come from nowhere, you might say. I 'eard it, an' give a start. Then the candle went hout!"

"Blew out, I suppose?"

"'Ow could it blow hout when there wasn't no wind?" asked Mr. Croke. "Not even a breath. 'Tain't likely there would be down 'ere. It took me fair off my feet, I can tell you! Then, all of a sudden 'ands touched me!"

"Hands?"

"Cold, 'orrible kind o' 'ands!" said Ben, with a shiver. "Ugh! Makes me go all 'orrid to think of it! Them wasn't no real 'ands, cap'n! They was cold an' clammy, like——"

"Don't be a fool!" muttered Niggs, glancing over his shoulder.

Hudson, too, was somewhat affected by Croke's eerie tale. The whole chamber, deep down in the earth, and reached by means of stone tunnels, was creepy and ghost-like. And the startling disappearance of the prisoner made the three men uneasy.

Hudson shook himself.

"What's all this fool talk about hands?" he demanded harshly. "Get on with the story, Croke! The hands were real enough—the boy's hands, I suppose——"

"That they wasn't!" interrupted Ben. "The kid was yards away, all bound hup. He couldn't have got to me in the time, even if his feet 'adn't bin fastened. These 'ere 'ands took 'old of me, and chucked me down!"

"Well and what then?"

"I 'eard scramblin' an' shufflin', an' then you come," said Mr. Croke. "That's all, mate. I don't know no more."

"Durned queer!" muttered Captain Niggs, nervously.

"Queer be hanged!" snapped Hudson. "The thing's as clear as daylight! Somebody came to that secret door, opened it, and chucked something at the candle. The light went out, and in the darkness Croke was pushed aside, and the boy taken. It ain't ghosts that have done this!"

Ben shook his head.

"It wasn't no human bein's!" he muttered. "I've done with this 'ere bisness, Cap'n. 'Tain't to my likin' at all. Stayin' all night down under the earth, like we was in our blamed graves! That boy was took by spirits, in my belief. I've read in the papers that things like that is done now-a-days. There's lots o' spirits about——"

"Quite right," agreed Hudson. "By the look of it you've had too much of one variety—rum, I judge. That's the only kind of spirit that makes you see things, Croke. We'll soon know about this for certain."

He walked over to the secret door, and just at the side of the wall he pulled out a big stone—in the very same way as Nelson Lee had done at the other end of the tunnel. Then he pressed with all his strength upon the wall at the back. But nothing happened.

"That's queer!" muttered Hudson. "It opened all right earlier."

He pressed harder—and, finally, thumped with all his strength. But the solid stonework remained in position. There was no sign of an opening.

And Hudson gave vent to a string of foul language.

"You're lettin' it fly pretty good," remarked Captain Niggs.

"Ain't there a need for it?" snarled Mr. Hudson. "This door won't open now—and they've jammed it from the other side, I reckon. Those darned boys have been up to this job, I'll guarantee. We can't get past this room now. We're absolutely done—finished!"

"Then mebbe we can get hout?" asked Mr. Croke, hopefully.

Hudson didn't reply. He was too filled with fury. He was under no misapprehension regarding what had happened. He could easily guess how John Martin had been rescued. Just when things had been going so well this disaster had taken place.

But, although it made Mr. William Hudson furious, it also made him a great deal more determined. He was not willing to give the game up because of this one set-back.

There would be other opportunities!

CHAPTER V.

THE FIGHT IN THE DARK!



JOHN MARTIN breathed a sigh of relief.

"I don't know how to thank you, sir!" he said gratefully. "It was wonderful, the way you came in and rescued me."

"Not at all, Martin," said Nelson Lee pleasantly. "One of the simplest operations imaginable, I assure you. There was only one man to deal with, and he was taken by surprise, and in total darkness. He had no chance whatever, and we were through the secret doorway before the fellow could regain his feet."

"Jolly neat, all the same, sir," I said. "That was a great idea of yours to chuck that piece of screwed-up newspaper at the candle. And what an aim! Got it first time!"

We were in the tunnel, and the secret door was closed and made secure. Nelson Lee had jammed the mechanism so that it could not be opened from the other side. He explained that it would be far better to prevent the enemy from entering on a second occasion.

John Martin himself was quite unharmed. But he was sorely puzzled. Why had he been taken away? Why had these men appeared, and why had they seized him and held him prisoner? And, above all, what possible profit could they have gained by taking him completely away? This was obviously what they intended doing—and John Martin was intensely worried.

This, of course, was only natural. He knew nothing of the circumstances. He was quite ignorant regarding the treasure. Only my own chums of Study C and Handforth & Co. knew about old Willard's gold. All the other boys had never even heard of it.

Moreover, John had no knowledge whatever regarding his relationship to the old crank who had built the miniature castle on the island. He would have been utterly astounded if he had been told that his real name was John Willard, and that he was the sole heir to any valuable property which might be found.

"Well, Martin, you are feeling quite all right?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Oh, yes, sir," said John. "Those men didn't hurt me at all."

We were still standing in the tunnel, and Nelson Lee's electric torch was brilliantly illuminating the scene. It was a somewhat curious scene, too, in that little underground passage with the low arched roof over our heads.

"Tell me exactly what happened," said Nelson Lee.

"Why, I was sleeping, and without any warning, I was awakened by somebody throwing a blanket, or a muffler over my face," replied John. "At first I thought it was some of the fellows, sir. I had an idea they were playing a joke. And just at first I didn't make any noise."

"I quite understand," said the guv'nor, "and then?"

"When they dragged me to my feet, and carried me quickly towards the dungeons, I began to suspect that it was rather more than a joke," said the boy. "So I tried to get the muffler away from my face, and I gave a yell. I couldn't repeat it, though, because the scoundrels pulled the muffler tight, and held it in position. Then I was carried down into the dungeon, and the door was closed. One of the men flashed an electric torch, and my feet and hands were bound. Then I was carried straight into the place you found me, sir."

"Did these men say anything to you?"

"Nothing much, sir," replied John. "They told me they wouldn't hurt me, and that there was no need for me to be alarmed. But that's about all. Then two of them went off."

"Did you see these men clearly?"

"Not very clearly, sir," said Martin. "When they used the torch they flashed it on me, and their own faces were in deep shadow. The only man I should know again is the one who kept guard over me."

"I see," said Nelson Lee. "Well, Martin, we will go straight back now, and the best thing you can do is to go straight to sleep. Say nothing about this to the other boys. There are two who will know, but the rest are in total ignorance of the circumstances. It will be far better to keep it as quiet as possible."

"Very well, sir," said John. "I'll remember that. But why did those men take me? I can't understand it, sir! It seems so queer to me—"

"No doubt," interrupted Nelson Lee. "But do not worry about the matter, Martin—try to think of it as little as possible. One day before long you will know the exact truth. And now we will make a move."

We passed along the tunnel, Nelson Lee leading the way, with John immediately following, and I brought up the rear. And, in due course, we arrived at the other exit. Handforth and Tommy Watson were there.

"You've got him?" said Handforth keenly. "Good business!"

"Ripping!" exclaimed Tommy Watson. "Hallo, Martin! What the dickens have you been up to?"

"In order to avoid a lot of questioning, I'll put it in a nutshell, my sons," I replied, before John could speak. "Martin was collared by Niggs and Croke, and the blighters were holding him a prisoner—probably some wheeze to get us off the island. We came along before anything further happened, and there you are!"

Handforth snorted.

"Is that what you call an explanation?" he demanded. "We want to know all the details. We want to know how you rescued the bounder, and all the rest of it! Of course, I suspected from the very first that Captain Niggs was at the bottom of it. It was obvious to any keen chap."

I chuckled.

"We won't argue," I said lightly. "As for details, we can go into them at some other time, my son. At present you'd better get straight

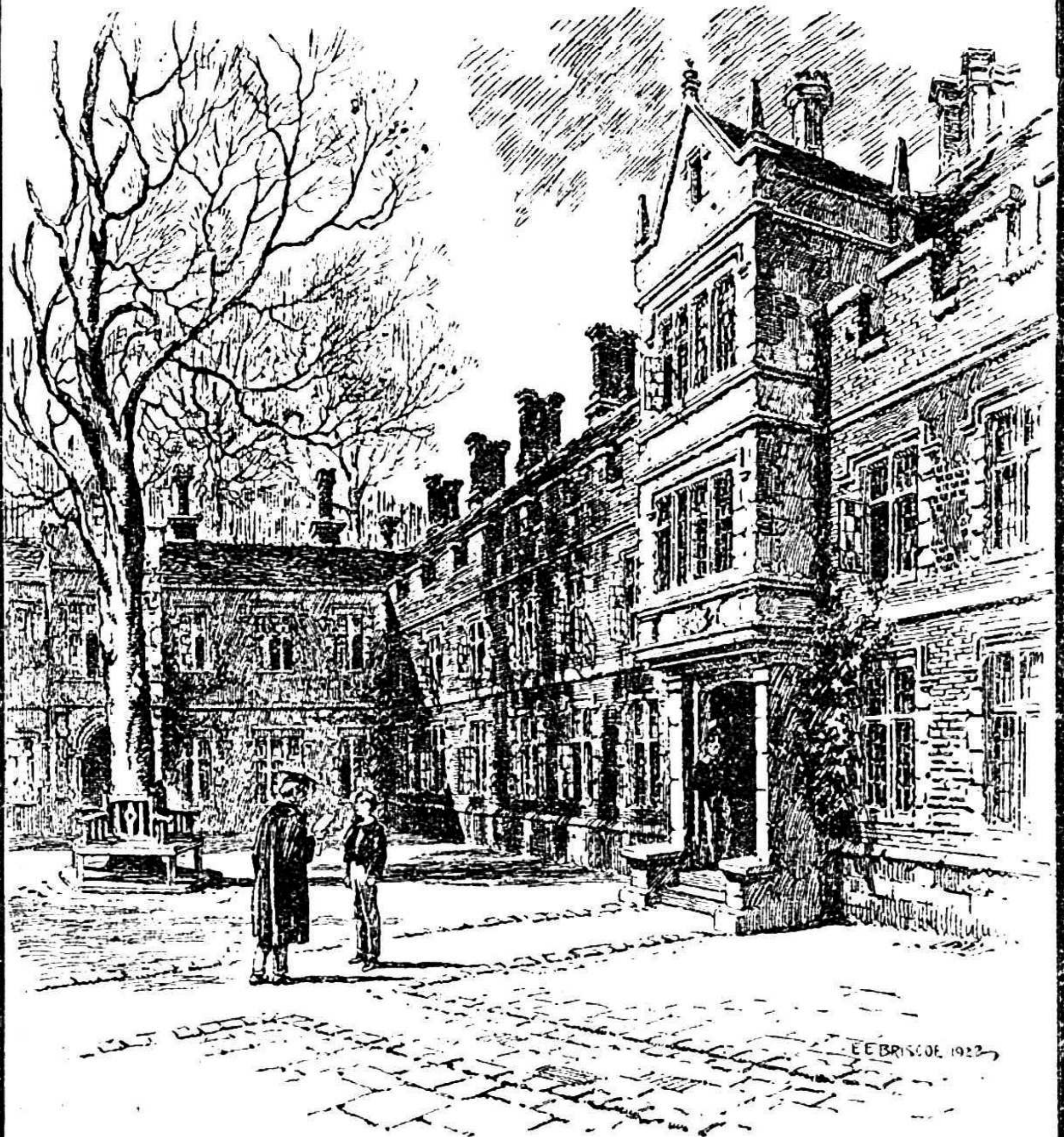
(Continued on page 25.)

NIPPER'S MAGAZINE

No. 16.

THE JOURNAL OF THE REMOVE OF ST. FRANK'S
Edited by Nipper.

March 11,
1922.



THE COLLEGE HOUSE AT ST. FRANK'S

(Showing part of Triangle, and the Head's House.)



PECK'S BAD BOY

AND HIS "PA".

HIS PA AN INVENTOR



A Patent Stove—The Patent Tested—His Pa a Burnt Offering—Early Breakfast.

"WHAT'S your Pa invented?" asked the grocer. "I saw a hearse and three carriages go up your street the other day, and I thought maybe you had killed your Pa."

"Not much. There will be more than three carriages when I kill Pa, and don't you forget it! Well, sir, Pa has struck a fortune, if he can make the thing work. He has got an idea about coal stoves that will bring him several million dollars, if he gets a royalty of five dollars on every cook stove in the world.

"His idea is to have a coal stove on castors with the pipe to telescope out and in, and rubber hose for one joint, so that you can pull the stove all around the room and warm any particular place. Well, sir, to hear Pa tell about it, you would think it would revolutionise the country, and maybe it will when he gets it perfected, but he came near burning the house up, and scared us half to death this morning, and burned his shirt off, and he is all covered with cotton with sweet oil on, and he smells like salad dressing.

"You see, Pa had a pipe made and some castors put on our coal stove, and he tied a rope to the hearth of the stove, and had me put in some kindling wood and coal last night, so he could draw the stove up to the bed and light the fire without getting up.

"Ma told him he would put his foot in it, and he told her to dry up, and let him run the stove business. He said it took a man with brains to run a patent right, and Ma, she pulled the clothes over her head, and let Pa do the fire act.

"She has been building the fires for twenty years, and thought she would let Pa see how good it was. Well, Pa pulled the stove to the bed, and touched off the kindling wood. I guess maybe I got a bundle of kindling wood that the servant had put paraffin on, 'cause it blazed up awful and smoked, and the blaze bursted out the doors and windows of the stove, and Pa yelled 'Fire!' And I jumped out of bed and rushed in, and he was the smartest man you ever see, and you'd a died to see how he kicked when I threw a pail of water on his legs and put his shirt out.

"Ma did not get burned, but she was pretty wet, and she told Pa she would pay the five dollars royalty on that stove, and take the castors off and let it remain



Pa pulled the stove to the bed and touched off the kindling wood.

stationary. Pa says he will make it work if he burns the house down.

"I think it was real mean in Pa to get mad at me because I threw cold water on him instead of warm water, to put his shirt out. If I had waited till I could heat water to the right temperature I would have been an orphan, and Pa would have been a burnt offering. But some men always kick at everything.

"Pa has given up business entirely, and says he shall devote the remainder of his life to curing himself of the different troubles that I get him into. He has retained a doctor by the year, and he buys liniment by the gallon."

"What was it about your folks getting up in the middle of the night to eat? The servant girl was over here after some soap the other morning, and she said she was going to leave your house."

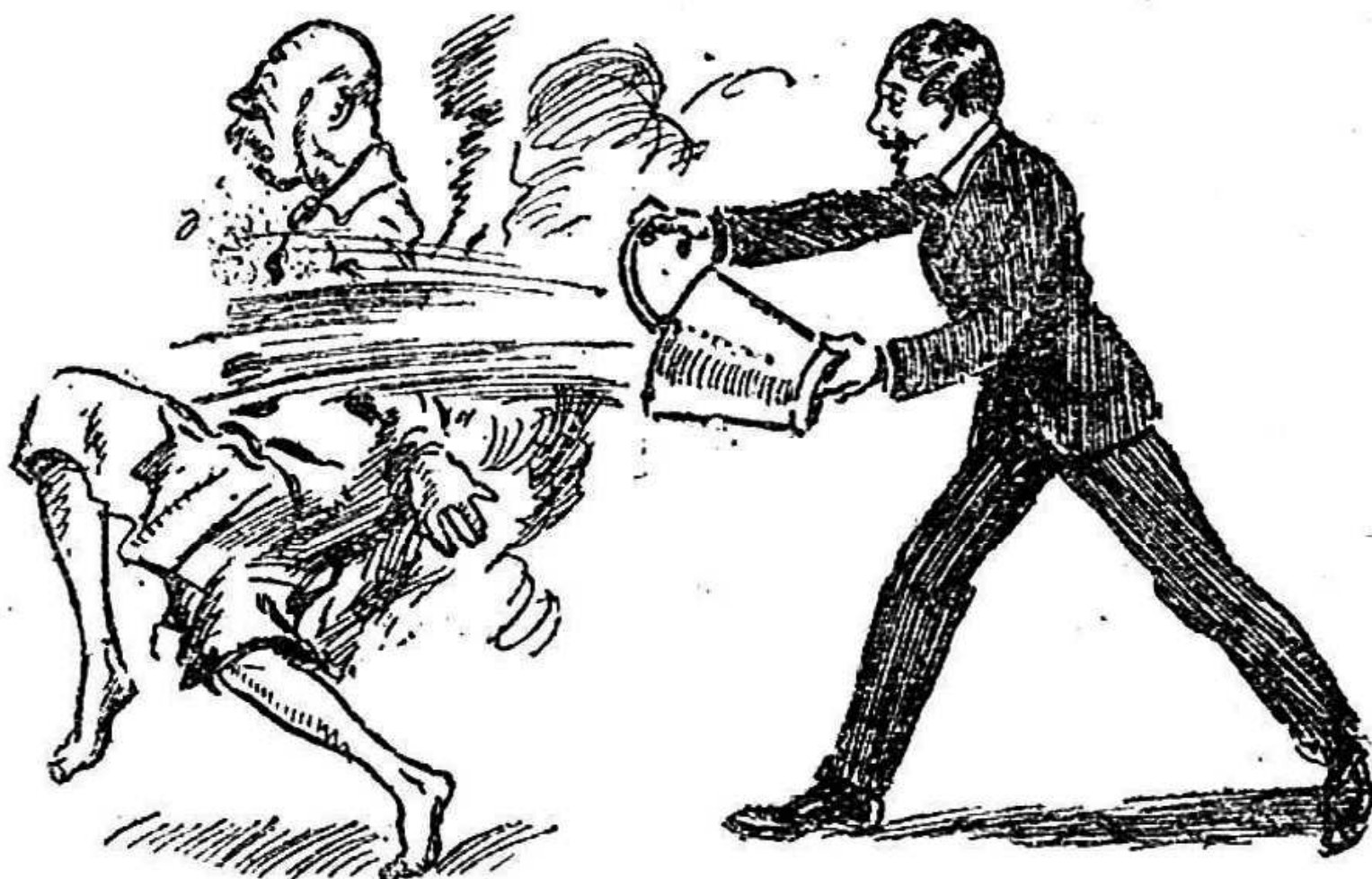
"Well, that was a picnic. Pa said he wanted breakfast earlier than we was in the habit of having it, and he said I might see to it that the house was awake early enough.

"The other night I awoke with the awfulest pain you ever heard of. It was that night that you gave me and my chum the bottle of pickled oysters. Well, I couldn't sleep, and I thought I would call the servant girls, and they got up and got breakfast going, and then I rapped on Pa and Ma's door and told them the breakfast was getting cold, and they got up and come down.

"We ate breakfast by gas light, and Pa yawned and said it made a man feel good to get up and get ready for work before daylight, the way he used to on the farm, and Ma she yawned and agreed with Pa, 'cause she has to, or have a row.

"After breakfast we sat around for an hour, and Pa said it was a long time getting daylight, and bimeby Pa looked at his watch.

"When he began to pull out his watch I lit out and hid in the store-room, and pretty soon I heard Pa and Ma come upstairs and go to bed, and then the servant



"I think it was real mean of Pa to get mad at me because I threw cold water on him, instead of warm water, to put his shirt out!"

girls, they went to bed. And when it was all still, and the pain had stopped, I went to bed, and I looked to see what time it was, and it was two o'clock in the morning.

"We got dinner at eight o'clock in the morning, and Pa said he guessed he would call up the house after this, so I have lost another job, and it was all on account of that bottle of pickled oysters you gave me. My chum says he had colic, too, but he didn't call up his folks. It was all he could do to get up himself. Why don't you sometimes give away something that is not spoiled?"

The grocery man said he guessed he knew what to give away, and the boy went out and hung up a sign in front of the grocery, that he had made on wrapping-paper with red chalk, which read:

"Rotten eggs, good enough for custard pies, for 18 cents a dozen."

Look out for first installment next week of :

**THE BAD
BOY'S DIARY.**

(SEE EDITORIAL ANNOUNCEMENT.)



The Problems of Trackett Grim

THE CAPTURE OF BLUE-NOSED HARRY!

By Edward Oswald Handforth

Among the White Lights!

"THIS," said Trackett Grim, "is New York."

The famous detective from London and his celebrated assist-

ant, Splinter, were standing on one of the pavements of Broadway—that great thoroughfare in the heart of New York City.

On all sides blazed the gigantic electric signs, and Trackett Grim and Splinter seemed to be hemmed in by skyscrapers which raised themselves right up into the heavens. The spring sun of the brilliant day shone forth somewhere in the sky—but the great buildings prevented the sunlight from penetrating into the streets.

It was a strange picture—so different from London. The horsemen, passing constantly to and fro, attired in their sheep-skin chapps, red shirts and coloured neckerchiefs. Revolvers gleamed at their belts, and they wore wide-brimmed hats. It was a true picture of American life.

Trackett Grim had come to New York on a desperate mission. He was hot on the trail of a dangerous criminal known as Blue-Nosed Harry, the Terror of Tooting. The scoundrel was badly wanted by Scotland Yard.

Trackett Grim suddenly stiffened, and he removed his great briar pipe from between his teeth. He stared across Broadway, and his eyes travelled over the road, and glued themselves firmly upon a man who had just come out of a shop.

"Blue-Nosed Harry!" said the detective tensely. "I knew it, Splinter! I was sure of it! By watching Broadway we were bound to come across our quarry sooner or later. Good! We will follow him."

A New Line of Business!

Blue-Nosed Harry walked swiftly along. It could be seen that he was a miscreant. In every line of his face he told of his villainous character. His skin was blotchy, and his nose a rich blue. He had apparently spent many years in bringing his nose to that state of perfection.

He did not proceed far along Broadway. For, presently, he turned into Fifth Avenue, and then made his way along Second Eighty-Ninth Street, and then strode down West Twenty-Fifth Street, turning finally into Ninety-Eight Avenue.

Then he entered the portals of the Queen's Arms Hotel, and made his way to the tap-room. The landlord, a genial old countryman, came forward, removing the clay pipe from between his lips.

"Say, I guess you're a stranger, pard?"



Nothing daunted, the detective gave one terrific leap, and grasped the underpart of the lift.

he exclaimed. "I guess you'd like a drink? Sure! Say the word, sonny, and I'll serve yew."

"Whisky?" asked Blue-Nosed Harry intensely.

"Waal, say, not eggzackly," replied the landlord. "We can't get whisky, I guess. It ain't allowed in the Yewnited States. I guess I'd like to get hold of some. I guess I could sell it. They'd swarm around, I guess."

The dastardly criminal leaned over the bar.

"I can supply you!" he hissed. "All the whisky you need."

The Brown Pellets!

Blue-Nosed Harry took from his pocket a small tin box. He opened it, and revealed a number of little brown tablets.

"Tabloid whisky," he whispered. "Each pellet is a pint of concentrated whisky. Five hundred dollars each! Ten thousand dollars for the box!"

"I guess they're mine," said the landlord eagerly.

He flung down the money, but before he could reach the box of concentrated whisky, a hand shot forward. The next moment Blue-Nosed Harry gave a yell of alarm, and fled.

Trackett Grim and Splinter had appeared—and it was Trackett Grim's arm which had reached out for the pellets. He did not waste a second. His quarry had dashed into the hall, and was even then leaping into the lift. It shot upwards as Trackett Grim appeared.

Nothing daunted, the great detective gave one terrific leap, and succeeded in grasping the under part of the lift. He was carried upwards at lightning speed.

Up—up—up to the very summit of the vast skyscraper. But Blue-Nosed Harry knew that Trackett Grim was clinging to the lift. A vile and horrible idea came into the miscreant's mind.

With a snarl of rage, he jumped out of the lift, and then reversed the lever.

Down shot the lift—down, to crush Trackett Grim to atoms at the bottom of the shaft. Only the mind of a fiend could have thought of this plan.

But Trackett Grim was alive to the peril. As the descending lift flashed by the first landing from the top, he swung himself out, and released his hold. Only by a hair's breadth did he escape destruction. But, quite unharmed, he picked himself up, and dashed up the stairs.



The two men gripped. They swayed from side to side in deadly embrace.

"Now I have got you," he shouted triumphantly.

And there, on that roof, thousands of feet from the ground, these two men met—the master detective and the master criminal. It was a battle of giants. Who would win? Surely the question is unnecessary. Trackett Grim, the amazing sleuth, could never fail.

The two men gripped. They swayed from side to side in a deadly embrace. And, fighting like tigers, they reeled to the edge of the abyss. Far below, like mere specks, motor-cars passed to and fro.

Trackett Grim gave a triumphant shout as he felt his opponent weakening. And then Blue-Nosed Harry suddenly gave a sound like that of a maniac. He lurched, and both he and Trackett Grim toppled over the edge and plunged down through space.

As Trackett Grim fell the thought came to him that his doom was sealed. But the faithful Splinter was on the watch. As his master shot past a window of the fifty-eighth storey, Splinter suddenly flung out a great pole. He performed his work well. The seat of Trackett Grim's trousers caught on the end of the pole—and there he hung, dangling in mid-air.

In a trice he was hauled in, safe and sound. A word to Splinter was enough. The dog-like devotion of the lad needed no thanks. And there, below, on the pavement, Blue-Nosed Harry was captured.

He was badly hurt, but had been on the point of stealing away. Trackett Grim arrested him on the spot—and the celebrated detective's mission in New York was accomplished.



SCHOOLBOY HOWLERS

Being a series of humorous stories about scholars of various schools throughout the country.

His Birthday Gift!

During a writing or "transcription" lesson, a teacher noticed that one of the lads was whispering to the scholar next to him, and also handing him something secretly under the desk.

"Hallo, Tom Wilson!" he at once said. "What mischief are you engaged in there? What are you passing under your desk?"

Tom, being caught in the act, could not possibly frame any excuse, so he answered:

"Please, sir, it's only a white mouse."

"A white mouse?"

"Yes, sir, I'm swoppin' it with Evans for a steel chain and brass ring."

"Oh, bartering in school, eh?" said the teacher severely. "And pray, what do you want the chain and ring for?"

"Why, sir, it's—it's my aunt's birthday, and—and she asked me to give her somethink!" stammered back Tom.

"I don't believe you," said the teacher. "I am sure that, whatever your aunt said, it was not that. Now then, sir, I insist on you telling me what she did say."

"Well, sir," replied Tom, evidently now telling the unvarnished truth, "I asked her if she'd like me to give her somethink for a birthday present, and she said no, she only wanted me to be a very good boy for the whole of next year. And then, sir, I—I told——"

"Well, my boy, don't be frightened. And what did you say to her?"

"Why, sir, I—I told her that I'd rather give her somethink. And that's why I'm swoppin' with Evans for a chain and ring."

Tom's Sudden Jaw-ache!

In the middle of each school session there is always about ten minutes allowed for play or recreation. During one of these

intervals or "playtimes," the master of a Board School, whilst looking from a window at his children playing, happened to overhear two lads talking to each other as follows, as they sat leaning against the wall.

"Jem," said one to his mate, who was eating an apple, "that's a beauty, I can see!"

"I can taste it is, Tom," responded Jem succulently, without lifting his eyes from the fruit.

After a pause, Tom ventured to come to the point and say:

"Just let's have a bite, Jem."

"Not me," answered Jem, with grim firmness or selfishness.

"You know, Jem," presently said the other, "you know I've got the jore-ache, so can't open my mouth wide. Look, this is the very widest it'll go!"

And he seemed to make a desperate though utterly futile attempt at moving his jaws wider than about a quarter of an inch apart.

"Can't trust you," retorted Jem, obdurately, as he churned a great mouthful between his cheeks. "Ain't your ioro-ache come on rather suddin'?"

The Adamses.

During a Scripture lesson on the creation of the world, the teacher asked a little boy:

"What was the man Adam made of, my lad?"

"Dust," answered the youngster.

"And Eve?"

The boy hesitated for a while, and then replied:

"Sawdust, teacher."

On the same subject, the teacher in an "academy" got a whimsically-worded answer from one of the pupils.

"Who lived in the Garden of Eden?" the teacher asked.

"Oh, the Adamses!" was the reply.

THE "KNOW-ALL" FIEND.

By REGINALD PITT.

A Well-Known Character!

OF course, you've all met him. He exists everywhere, and he's one of the most persistent beggars anybody could meet. He generally turns up just when he's not wanted, and he persists in offering you advice, free, gratis, and for nothing.



Only the other day, Jack Grey and I were at work on our prep. in Study E. That is to say, we ought to have been. But, between you and me and the coal-box, we were actually attempting to solve one of those jig-saw puzzle things—you know, the kind that you pay a bob for, and if you put it together properly, you get a thousand pounds. Of course, you only get the thousand pounds if you happen to be the first chap who gets his puzzle in. You stand a chance amongst something like two or three million. If you're very lucky, you may receive a postal-order for half-a-crown.

Well, Jack and I were right in the middle of this blessed thing. Then the Know-all Fiend arrived. He took the bodily shape of Handforth, and he smiled somewhat piteously as he noted what we were doing.

Nothing In It!

He pointed out to us, in a fatherly kind of way, that he'd seen the thing years ago, and that there was really nothing in it. Any fathead, in fact, could shove the puzzle together in two ticks.

So the Know-all Fiend proceeded to show us exactly how it should be done. I'd better mention that we'd got the puzzle partially completed. Nearly half the sections were fixed up in their proper places. The Know-all Fiend simply pitched the whole thing into a heap, and started again.

He was just going to show us, according to his own account, precisely how it

ought to be done. He explained that it was childishly simple, and the whole business would only take about three minutes.

After a quarter of an hour had elapsed the Know-all Fiend was still somewhat puzzled as to where the second section went. He had made a start all right. He found a corner piece, and then tried to discover the portion which fitted into it. And while he was doing this he prattled gaily on, discoursing upon the simplicity of the matter.

After Jack and I had straightened our clothes, and dusted ourselves down, we once more got fairly started on the puzzle. I will admit that we missed the genial conversation of the Know-all Fiend at first—but it was a very good miss. Talking about missing, we also missed about ten sections of the puzzle. But these turned up after a search.

Two were under the table, three in the fireplace, one under the bookcase, and the rest we found, after nearly giving up hope, in the passage. And we had just settled down quietly to work again when Jack noticed that the fire was out.

It was a bit chilly, and so we set about remaking the blaze.

Back Again!

I had just finished raking out the cinders when the door opened, and the Know-all Fiend arrived once more. He had changed his appearance somewhat, and bore a close resemblance to Armstrong. For some moments he looked on and then sniffed.

He informed us that what we knew about making fires could be engraved on a pin-head. For a brief spell, the Know-all Fiend was in great danger of being pitched out on his neck.

But as he kindly offered to show us how to light the fire, we thought we might as well pander to him. So Jack pointed out where the wood was, gave him an old newspaper, and told him to commence the demonstration.

We stood looking on while the Know-all Fiend got busy. Certainly, he appeared to do everything all right. He put the paper in, and then proceeded to lay some sticks on the top of this. I pointed out, at

this juncture, that the sticks were somewhat too close together, and I added that the coal was too dusty. I suggested that it would be far better to use some knobbly bits.

But the Know-all Fiend pooh-poohed the idea, and informed me that he had made fires before I could strike a match. I'll admit that a considerable amount of smoke came out of the fireplace. Now and again there was even a suggestion of a blaze. But after one or two sorry attempts to live, these embers threw in the sponge and reluctantly pegged out.

Something to Bear in Mind!

I wasn't particularly surprised when the Know-all Fiend calmly declared that the fireplace was all wrong. The wood was damp, the coal was rubbish, and there was no draught in the chimney.

The Know-all Fiend, of course, is never wrong. Under any and every kind of circumstance, he's perfectly right—in his own opinion. For him to admit himself otherwise would be contrary to his whole character. Because a Know-all Fiend knows everything.

I need hardly mention that the fire was

about four times as much trouble to light after all this messing about. And when I did finally get it going, the Know-all Fiend turned up again to give some advice concerning the study clock.

For some little time past this had been suffering from a fit of disgraceful laziness. Without any reason whatever it would suddenly cease work, and we would go sublimely on, thinking that we had tons of time—whereas, really, we had none at all.

I was just taking the back off the clock, with the intention of having a squint at the works. The Know-all Fiend informed me that he knew all about clocks. He would put it right in two ticks, or even less.

Quite politely, I told him to clear out. Advice was not required. And, within ten minutes the clock was ticking away merrily and happily. I had simply removed a piece of fluff from the escapement wheel. If the Know-all Fiend had tried his hand with the clock, it would have been fit for the dust-heap.

Which only goes to prove one thing. If you want anything done—do it yourself! If you want it done properly—do it yourself!

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,—The great popularity of the "Peck's Bad Boy" adventures, which conclude with this issue, has encouraged me to publish as a sequel another series of a similar kind, entitled "The Bad Boy's Diary." I think you will find them quite as funny as "Peck's Bad Boy." In fact, personally, I think they are funnier. Perhaps that is because they are written without any regard for correct spelling. Anyhow, I shall be glad to hear what you think of them. The first extract from "The Bad Boy's Diary" will be entitled "How He Began It," and will appear next week.

DO NOT IMITATE!

Of course, I don't advise any of you, my chums, to imitate the pranks and escapades you will read about in the Diary, for they are only intended to amuse. A bad boy in real life always gets the worst of it, and in the long run it pays to keep out of mischief.

OTHER FEATURES NEXT WEEK.

You will be glad to hear that Archie is contributing another article next week in the Mag. He calls it, "Impressions, And All That Sort of Rot!" which is just like Archie, and is mainly about St. Frank's, as seen through the Genial One's monocle. There will be another Trackett Grim story by Handforth, and a splendid pen drawing of the College Chapel on the cover. There are many other good things which I have not the space to describe.

Your devoted pal,
NIPPER (The Editor).

(Continued from page 16.)

to bed, and things will go along as smoothly as they ought to go on in any self-respecting Cadet camp. And we don't want the rest of the chaps to get wind of this business. It wouldn't do any good to excite them over nothing."

"Nipper is quite right," said Nelson Lee. "I trust you, boys, to keep this matter entirely to yourselves. And now I think I had better be returning to the school, or I shall get no sleep to-night."

"Well, I'm jolly glad I fetched you here, sir," I said. "Without your massive brain power we should have been beaten. And by this time Martin would have been kidnapped in real earnest."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"My share was quite a small one," he said calmly. "But there is something behind all this that is bigger than we seem to realise at the moment. I shall make it my business to thoroughly investigate—but at a more opportune time. I think that is all I need say now."

And Nelson Lee prepared for his departure. He bade us good-night, and very soon afterwards he took a small boat, and rowed silently to the mainland. The island was quiet and still. No alarm had been given, and everything was going along smoothly. With the exception of the sentries, all the fellows were asleep.

Nelson Lee arrived at the opposite bank, made the boat secure, and then set off to St. Frank's. The time was now well into the early hours of the morning, and the whole countryside was slumbering. The detective's thoughts were busy as he walked along.

He was fairly certain in his own mind as to the nature of the game which Hudson and his two associates had been planning. But even Nelson Lee did not know of Hudson's relationship to the boy.

He resolved that he would give closer attention to the whole matter in the near future. The men were desperately anxious to get hold of the secret of the treasure. Lee knew this, and he had also made up his mind to solve the jigsaw puzzle as soon as possible.

When this treasure was located, and the whole thing became public Hudson and Co. would be helpless—they would not be able to progress with their secret plans. But until the matter did become public, they were able to pursue their present tactics.

Nelson Lee realised the importance of keeping the whole matter quiet. If the news was spread broadcast that a treasure probably existed under the old building on Willard's Island, the whole neighbourhood would be aroused. People would come from all quarters, just out of sheer curiosity. And then the position would be extremely difficult.

The St. Frank's boys, too, would lose their heads with excitement, and if there proved to be no treasure at all it would all be a ghastly frost. Everything pointed to the necessity of maintaining secrecy.

Nelson Lee was thinking in this way as he walked over the meadows. He was just passing

a clump of thorn-bushes. A little way beyond was the high hedge which separated the St. Frank's playing fields from the meadows. In the gloom of the night everything seemed dim and hazy.

Lee suddenly came to a halt, and stared keenly ahead.

Just for a second he thought that his imagination had played a trick upon him. He was fairly certain that he could see three dim figures. They had appeared mysteriously and silently from the shadow of the thorn-bushes. And now, indeed, they were barring his further progress.

Only for that second did Lee suspect that he was mistaken. Then he knew that his vision had not played him false. There actually were three figures, and they were bearing down upon him. In fact, they were almost on top of him before he could guess their object.

But he knew, instinctively, that the three figures were those of Hudson, Niggs, and Croke. And as he turned to swiftly dodge, an arm was upraised by Hudson. The man was holding a rough piece of wood.

Only in the nick of time did Nelson Lee duck. If that blow had arrived home, his strength would have availed him nothing. He would have been felled to the ground in a moment.

As it was, he managed to avoid the thrust, and then he was fighting. He hit out right and left, with all the power of his muscles.

Hudson and Co. had hardly been expecting this, and they received several heavy blows in quick succession. They had obviously been lying in wait for the detective—they had prepared an ambush.

And they had considered it an easy task to deal with him.

But Nelson Lee wasn't such a simple customer to handle!

Realising the danger, he acted like lightning. And he floored Captain Niggs with a well-directed blow, and was able to give his undivided attention to the other two. And he would probably have vanquished them with ease.

But Niggs met with a bit of luck. As he fell, and sprawled full-length in the grass, he gave a gasp of pain and rage, and then rolled over. He kicked out with all his strength, and the blow happened to catch Nelson Lee fairly and squarely on the left ankle.

The agony, for the moment, was excruciating.

And, in spite of himself, the detective staggered, and lurched forward. He was just in time to meet a heavy punch delivered by Hudson. He completely lost his balance, and fell.

Then, before he could do anything else, the three men were upon him, pinning him down and holding him there, helpless. In a flash, Lee changed his policy. He ceased his struggles, and became limp.

"You've beaten me!" he muttered huskily. "Well, what do you want? What's the idea of this attack?"

"We're only arter a little cash, guvnor,"

said Hudson, in a disguised voice. "We don't mean no 'arm, but we're goin' to 'ave all you got on yer! Bill, turn out the gent.'s pockets! Mike, 'old him down!"

In the darkness Nelson Lee smiled. This attempt to hoodwink him as to his assailants' identity was somewhat amusing. But he allowed the rascals to deceive themselves, and he remained passive.

To tell the absolute truth, he could do nothing else.

Strong and active as he was, Lee was not quite capable of forcibly removing the dead weight of three men from his outstretched person. Hudson was sitting on his feet, and holding him firmly by the knees. The other two men were equally determined in their efforts.

And his pockets were quickly gone through. At least, some of them were. Then one of the men dived a hand into Lee's breast pocket. Action was now required. That pocket contained the various pieces of the all-important jig-saw puzzle.

Lee had been working on this when Tommy Watson fetched him away from St. Frank's. And he had not thought it wise to leave it behind. It would be far safer, he considered, on his own person.

Apparently he had been mistaken. Hudson and Co. were obviously after that puzzle—for it was the one true guide to the treasure. And now, within a minute, they would have the thing in their clutches.

Nelson Lee could not allow this.

He gave a sudden hollow groan—a really appalling sound. At the same moment he became as limp as a rag, and lay there without breathing. It was wonderfully well done, and for a second the three men were startled.

"Darn my skin!" muttered Niggs huskily. "He's fainted!"

"Clean off!" said Croke. "I never thought——"

"Don't talk so much!" snapped Hudson. "It's only a brief spell, I suppose, and we'll take advantage of it."

But it was Nelson Lee who took the advantage. As Hudson spoke, he shifted his weight from Nelson Lee's legs. The men had not sufficient time to suspect trickery. Possibly they would have been suspicious within a moment or two, but Lee had relied upon them acting in exactly the way they did.

The very second his feet were free, Lee acted. With every muscle on the stretch, he suddenly heaved himself round. His right foot, sweeping through the air, whizzed up, and struck Captain Niggs in the chest. The man staggered back with a groan, and fell.

Nelson Lee leapt to his feet like a jack-in-the-box.

Crash!

His fist, coming round with all his strength, thudded into Hudson's face. The man gave a wild howl, and measured his length in the grass. Then Mr. Ben Croke wished heartily that he had moved out of the picture a little earlier.

Crash!

He received a blow between the eyes which caused him to see quite a number of stars.

He, too, went over. By this time Niggs and Hudson were on their feet—somewhat groggy, but wild with fury and pain.

They soon gave the fight up.

Having once gained the upper hand, Nelson Lee was easily the master of these unskilled ruffians. His fists were like sledge-hammers. Every blow was an effective one, and Hudson and Co. had had enough before another few minutes had elapsed.

Fairly groaning with pain, they finally reeled away and fled.

Nelson Lee watched them as they staggered drunkenly across the meadow, and vanished in a clump of willows. The detective laughed softly to himself, and blew gently upon his hot and bruised knuckles.

"I rather fancy that has settled you for to-night, my friends," he murmured. "I think you have had about as much as you comfortably need. Phew! Confound that fellow with his No. 12 boot!"

Lee bent down, and rubbed his ankle with much tenderness. The ankle bone was bruised, and now that the excitement of the battle was over, Nelson Lee was discovering that he was in considerable pain.

When he walked forward, he could only do so with a pronounced limp, and every time he set his foot on the ground he suffered further agony.

But he had the satisfaction of knowing that he had defeated these precious rascals. And he finally arrived at St. Frank's, stiff and sore, but in excellent spirits. His first real brush with the enemy had ended in his favour.

At least, so he thought until he reached his study.

But once there, seated at his desk, he took out the various pieces of the jigsaw puzzle, and laid them out before him. As he did so, he suddenly became grave, and felt in his pocket.

No, there were no more pieces. Altogether, the jigsaw puzzle consisted of twenty-five intricately fashioned pieces of flat wood. Each one had been cut with a fret-saw, and they were so ingeniously devised that all attempts to piece the sections together had baffled Nelson Lee's ingenuity.

Swiftly Lee counted the pieces. There were nineteen.

"Upon my soul!" he muttered grimly. "So the brutes succeeded in their enterprise to a partial degree, at all events. They took six sections of the puzzle. If I had been one second earlier I should have avoided this. What an infernal nuisance! They hold one part of the clue to the treasure, and I hold the other. Quite an interesting situation, but confoundedly awkward."

He sat for some moments thinking deeply. He remembered that a hand had been thrust into his breast pocket, and he had believed that his own swift action had prevented the removal of any portions of the puzzle. But, apparently, the hand had grabbed six of the jigsaw pieces in the first movement.

And now those six were missing; they were in the enemy's hands.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TROUBLES OF ARCHIE.



RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD glanced at his watch.

"He'll be down before long—ought to be down now, in fact," he said. "An' then we'll collar hold of him,

an' cart him off to Study A."

"That's the idea," said Gulliver. "I believe the ass has got pots of money, an' he's bound to be a sport. I only saw him for a few

class, I mean. Plenty of the common herd, of course."

"Besides, we shall probably be able to twist this new bounder pretty easily," said Bell. "By what I can see, he's a hopeless chump. We've only got to get him on a game of nap, an' we'll have him on toast"

"Rats!" said Fullwood. "We'll use that 'Put an' Take' top of mine. I've wangled the giddy thing, an' I can make it come down 'take all' whenever I like! We might try him on that new one, too—Odds on, or whatever it's called. Anyhow, we'll lift some of the tin out of his pocket."



Lee placed his hand inside the opening and pushed. As he did so he felt something moving.

minutes last night, but he struck me as being decidedly the goods."

"Rich as a giddy lord!" said Bell.

The Nuts of the Ancient House were collected in a little group in the lobby. Outside, the morning was somewhat dull, but quite fine and mild. Fullwood and Co. were discussing the latest addition to the Remove. It was only natural, perhaps, that they should be interested in the one and only Archie.

"Oh, yes, he's rich all right," said Fullwood. "Why, his pater's one of the wealthiest land-owners in the county. Old Glenthorne owns all the land for scores of miles round here. King of all he surveys sort of thing. Simply rollin' in quids. Archie's bound to be well supplied."

"Just the kind of chap we need," said Gulliver. "There ain't many fellows in the Remove we can make pals with—fellows of our

"Rather!" agreed Gulliver. "We don't often get a chance like this. Funny thing he hasn't come down yet. Supposin' we buzz upstairs and give him a knock?"

"Let's wait another five minutes," said Fullwood. "Don't want to appear too eager, you know."

The Knuts strolled to the doorway, and were just in time to see two or three Cadets march briskly across from the playing fields. These Cadets were Handforth and Co., Tommy Watson, and myself.

We had come over early—before breakfast, in fact. It was usual for us to have brekker in camp, and then turn up at school in time to change and get into the class-room for morning lessons.

But to-day I suggested coming over bright and early—and for two reasons. I wanted to

know how the guv'nor had got on the previous night, and I was rather curious to find out if Archie was all serene. Knowing him to be a helpless kind of a fathead, I suspected that there might be a little trouble.

Just as we got to the Ancient House steps, Owen major and Hubbard came out. Fullwood & Co. lounged in the background.

"Hallo!" said Hubbard. "Early birds this morning! What's up? Short of grub, or something? Or are you fed up with Cadet life. I reckon it would feed me up in a couple of hours!"

"If you're going to make insulting remarks about the Cadets, you rotter, I'll jolly soon punch your nose!" said Handforth warmly.

"It'll only take me two ticks to oblige you——"

"For goodness sake don't start any row now, Handy," I put in. "We haven't got much time, and we can't waste any. Have you fellows seen Glenthorne this morning? Is he down yet?"

"Who, Archie?" said Owen major. "Not a sign of him so far."

"Just as I thought," I said. "I'll guarantee he hasn't half dressed yet. He'll have to put some speed on if he's going to stay at St. Frank's. Getting down late has been a habit of his, I suppose."

We passed inside, and I told the others to wait while I buzzed along to Nelson Lee's study. I arrived there, and found the guv'nor standing in front of the fire, smoking an early cigarette, and looking thoughtful. I closed the door, fished a penny out of my pocket, and dropped it on the desk."

"Hallo, Nipper!" said Nelson Lee. "Quite an early visitor to-day. What's the penny for?"

"Your thoughts, guv'nor!" I said cheerfully. "When I came in, you were looking just like a boiled owl!"

"I sincerely trust I was not!" said Nelson Lee. "But, for that matter, I have not the slightest idea of how a boiled owl would really look. These slang expressions of yours, Nipper, are quite appalling——"

"Great Scott! I didn't come here for you to start slanging me, sir!" I protested. "I just popped in to know if everything's O.K."

"I regret to say, Nipper, that everything is not O.K.," said Lee. "Six pieces of the all important jigsaw puzzle are missing. When I left the island last night I met with a somewhat entertaining adventure."

And the guv'nor without any further delay, told me just what had happened. I was looking serious by the time he had done.

"But I say, sir, this is pretty rotten!" I said. "Just fancy those ruffians lying in ambush for you!" It's a good thing you weren't bowled over altogether. I suppose it's pretty serious about the jigsaw business?"

"Well, fairly so," said Nelson Lee. "Even if I piece together the nineteen sections now in my possession, I doubt if it would be possible to make any sense out of them. I intend getting the missing portions back as soon as possible. I shall certainly not be content to let the enemy get away with them."

(Continued on page 29.)

Sir Monty's Minor

*is the title of a fine long complete story of
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(Continued from page 28.)

I only stopped a few minutes longer with the guv'nor, but I heard quite enough to convince me that Captain Niggs and Ben Croke were not the chief movers in this game. The third man was obviously the leader. He was directing operations, and Niggs and Croke were merely his tools. But their game was to locate the treasure.

I also obtained from Nelson Lee the exact location of Archie's bedroom. Then I returned to my chums in the lobby—just in time to prevent a free fight between Handforth Church and McClure. I didn't stop to ask what the argument was about, but told the asses to follow me upstairs.

We arrived outside Archie's door, and, without knocking, I opened it and marched in. I was expecting to find the genial ass practically dressed, and ready for the labours of the day.

But, just inside the door, I paused, and stared.

"Well I'm blessed!" I exclaimed blankly.

There was Archie, still in bed, fast asleep, with his mouth wide open, and with one silken covered arm on the counterpane. And the rising bell had sounded almost an hour earlier!

"Of all the lazy beggars!" said Tommy Watson. "It's a funny thing a prefect hasn't come along and hoofed him out!"

"We'll do that!" said Handforth promptly. "I expect he's escaped because the prefects don't know he's here. Good! There's a jug of cold water over there, we'll soon wake the idiot up!"

"Hold on, Handy!" I said quickly. "There's no need to be so drastic! We'll try gentle methods first."

I crossed to the bed, seized Archie by the hair, and lugged his head up and down two or three times. Archie probably didn't consider this gentle, but it was certainly an improvement on Handforth's methods.

"I mean to say— Well, dash it all!" mumbled Archie, opening his eyes, and gazing round. "What-ho! 'Tis morning! So there you are, what?"

"Get up, lazy bones!" I said severely. "Don't you know it's nearly breakfast time? This sort of thing isn't allowed at St. Frank's."

Archie sat up, and blinked.

"Well, as it were, a chappie must have his good old eight hours!" he exclaimed. "Restore the tissues, and so forth. Frightfully fagging business, getting out of the old cot! I don't like to trouble you, old tulips, but would you mind tickling the merry bell push?"

"Bell push!" said Handforth. "Where do you think you are—in the Savoy? And what you want the bell push pushed for, anyhow?"

"Well, I mean to say, there you are!" said Archie. "Just a reminder to the old lad downstairs. Phipps, don't you know. Deucedly useful chappie. Absolutely! Brainy cove, and all that sort of rot!"

I grinned.

"Phipps is not here!" I said smoothly. "And Phipps isn't likely to be here, either. Take my advice, Archie, and get Phipps off

your brain. And if you don't tumble out and get down within ten minutes, you'll be reported. It's nearly nine o'clock already!"

Archie gave a little yelp of surprise.

"Nine o'clock!" he repeated faintly. "But, my dear old sportsman, what frightful rot! I might even say, what fearful piffle, don't you know, and so forth. I've got another two hours yet!"

"Two hours!" yelled Watson. "Don't you get up till eleven?"

"That is to say, absolutely!" replied Archie. "Or, to be more exact, as it were, the fact is, I don't! You see, old top, there's such a deuced number of things to be done, and what not! A cup of the tea-juice to be considered, and then a chappie needs a blissful half-hour to aid the digestive department, and all that sort of thing. And the morning paper—well, rather! Must cast the eye over the daily chatter, as it were!"

We roared.

"You hopeless ass!" I said. "All these things may be permissible at home, with only a tutor to worry about. But at St. Frank's there's nothing doing, Archie. Absolutely nix! No tea, no paper, and no lazing in bed until eleven o'clock. You've got to be down soon after eight!"

Archie looked dismayed and flustered.

"But, dash it all, deucedly early for the game, don't you know!" he protested. "Leg pulling, and so forth! Gets a fellow down, and all that sort of thing! The old bean's fairly buzzing!"

"It'll buzz ten times as much soon," I said grimly. "Now, my lad, will you hop out of bed unassisted, or shall we lend you a hand? We'll help with the greatest of pleasure. Just say the word!"

Archie smiled in a somewhat sickly way.

"I mean to say, not at all!" he exclaimed. "It's quite ridic., old lad! A chappie can't get up until somebody comes along to do the old assisting act. Phipps is the one, you know—absolutely one of the ones, I might say. Most extraordinary cove. Absolutely!"

"Blow Phipps!" I snapped. "Up you get! I'll give you ten seconds!"

Archie groaned, and reluctantly pushed back the bed clothes, and sat on the edge of the bed. Tommy Watson clapped a hand over his eyes, and reeled back into the arms of Church and McClure.

"Help!" he gasped. "Blinded—at my tender age, too! Oh, my only hat! Where on earth did he find those giddy pyjamas?"

The pyjamas were certainly startling. They were of pure silk, and the colours were red and green of most startling hues. Archie took no notice of Watson's alleged humour, but sat there utterly lost.

"Well, when are you going to start?" asked Handforth grimly.

"What-ho!" said Archie. "That is to say, absolutely! Start? Well, rather! Anything to oblige, you know! The fact is, old top, Phipps is a perfectly priceless buffer when it comes to getting out the old rags. I suppose, as it were, something must be done?"

Something, in fact, has got to be started!"

"Why not stick a pin into him?" asked Church. "That will give him a good start, I should think! I don't believe the ass knows how to dress himself! He ought to have brought a nurse!"

"Are you going to dress yourself, Archie?" I asked severely.

Archie groaned.

"Dear old laddie, I'm in a most shocking mess, and all that sort of rot!" he confessed. "The fact is, so to speak, I've got to do the dressing act? Is that it? Then we do the genial staggering forth business into the wilds what? I'm in a most priceless fix, and I don't know how to begin."

"Can't you put your clothes on?" I demanded.

"Well, that is to say, Phipps was the chappie who used to come along and do the necessary," replied Archie. "A wonderful bounder, don't you know. In comes Phipps. He just appears, so to speak. No noise—no anything. You touch the old bell, and—zing! Phipps! There he is, like the bally old genius in the Arabian what-do-you-call-it?"

"I suppose you mean the genie in the Arabian Nights?" I grinned.

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Reels of gratitude, and so forth. Wonderful how you know all these things, and all that. Frightfully good works in the attic, I might say! All in running order, and what not."

"Oh, my hat!" I groaned. "I've met a few lazy chaps, but I'm blessed if you don't take the giddy biscuit! Come on, you chaps—we'll dress him! He seems about as helpless as a paralysed statue!"

We all advanced upon Archie, but he held up his hand. He groped under the pillow, and produced his monocle. Then he jammed the thing into his eye, and regarded us stiffly. He apparently thought that the eyeglass gave him an added dignity—but, in pyjamas, this was somewhat lost.

"Stop!" he exclaimed. "That is to say, back fire, and reverse, and all that sort of rot! There comes a time when a chappie must assert himself. Absolutely! Before I can get busy on the dressing performance, the old interior section demands a cup of tea——"

"The old interior section can demand all it likes!" I said. "No tea, Archie! And you needn't think you'll get any until you arrive in the dining-hall. Grab him!"

"I'm fed up with this!" said Handforth. "I'll make him move a bit!"

He reached over towards the water-jug, and with one movement he whirled it round towards Archie. I was just too late to prevent the disaster, but I caught sight of the expression of blank horror upon the new boy's face.

Swish!

Handforth turned the jug upside down over Archie's head. The water was cold—icily cold—and the noise that came from the drenched knut was positively fiendish. Until now we had never realised that he could shout at all.

But Handforth was always too heavy-handed. He wasn't satisfied with merely drenching his victim. The jug being empty, he jammed it

down over Archie's head, and the result was somewhat fearful.

Archie continued to roar, and his voice sounded like a gale whistling through a gutter-pipe. He was soaked to the skin, and his silk pyjamas clung to him with astonishing affection.

He staggered about the bedroom helplessly, and the other juniors clung to one another and howled with merriment. They made so much noise, in fact, that a crowd collected in the doorway and looked on with great interest.

I seized hold of the jug, and lifted it off. Archie looked very different. He was streaming with water, and his hair was all matted down with wetness. He blinked at me dazedly.

"So there you are, what?" he gasped. "We emerge, don't you know! Or, to be more exact, we strike the good old surface again! Dear old-lad, I was just going down for the third time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Archie looked round with stern disapproval. He didn't seem to be particularly angry. He was probably too lazy and easy-going to get into a real temper. But he gazed at Handforth in a fixed way.

"That, as it were, was a frightfully beastly thing to do!" he said. "I shall now proceed to tick you off, my lad! The gore of the Glen-thornes rises with the fury of ancestral pride, and what not! I must remark, however, that breezes are somewhat Arctic. Reminds a chappie of the North Pole, and all that sort of rot!"

Archie seized a blanket, and wrapped it round himself. At least, he attempted to do so. Before he actually succeeded, we grabbed him, and commenced operations. His beautiful pyjamas were ruthlessly ripped off. He was rubbed down in spite of all his protests. Then he was bundled into his clothing, gasping, objecting, and howling for mercy.

But we had none. He was dressed, and the result was not precisely a triumph. Archie looked remarkably like a scarecrow in Farmer Holt's big field. Everything we put on wrong—but he was undoubtedly dressed.

"Now bring him along!" I said firmly.

"But my dear old tulips!" gasped Archie. "My priceless old walnuts! Consider! Do nothing rash! Really, I can't trickle forth in this condition! I can't flow out into the public view——"

"We'll see about that!" snapped Handforth. "Come on!"

We whirled Archie outside into the corridor. And we were just in time to come face to face with a tall, elderly gentleman with a back as stiff as a ramrod, and with a face which was adorned by a bristling white moustache and a somewhat lurid complexion.

"By gad!" he exclaimed. "What the pepper is all that? Why, good heavens, it's Archibald!"

Archie opened his mouth, gulped, and swallowed something.

"I mean to say, what?" he stammered. "It's the priceless old pater!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE COLONEL FIXES THINGS.



COLONEL GLENTHORNE puffed out his cheeks, and breathed hard.

"Why, good gad, what's this—what's this—what's this?" he exclaimed, in a voice that might easily have been heard in Bellton High Street. "Young rascals! Young brats! Come here, Archibald, confound you, boy! What the pepper do you mean by dressing yourself up like this?"

Archie grinned weakly.

"Well, don't you know, there are some things a chappie can't help, old top!" he said. "That is to say, I have been hobnobbing with the lads, as you might say. Frightfully good time, and all that sort of thing. Enjoyment by the yard, and what not. Absolutely!"

The colonel glared.

"Upon my word, boy, you get on a man's nerves!" he snapped. "All this infernal talk! A jackanapes, sir! That's what you are—a brainless young jackanapes! A dolt of the first quality."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "What ho, and so forth!"

"You young idiot!" rapped out his father. "Can't you talk English?"

"Absolutely! I mean to say——"

"Absolutely—absolutely!" stormed Colonel Glenthorne. "I believe that's the only word you ever learned! How on earth you ever mastered the alphabet is beyond my comprehension. A man with a son like you is the most unfortunate being on the face of the earth! Don't gibber at me like that, boy!"

"Well, dash it all, nothing like it!" said Archie. "That is to say, gibbering! Somewhat near the edge, as it were! Frightfully insulting, and all that sort of thing. The fact is, pater, I'm here. Absolutely on the jolly old spot! I'm fairly planted in rich soil!"

"You look it!" snorted the colonel. "I discovered that you had had the audacity to come to St. Frank's, and I came over at once. What's the meaning of it? Eh? What's the idea of it? Upon my soul, I've a good mind to——"

"I mean to say, it's frightfully bad for the nerves, and so forth!" interrupted Archie. "Straining the tendons, and all that sort of thing! Pray don't apologise, pater, old tulip! No necessity whatever."

"Apologise!" stormed Colonel Glenthorne. "Why, you young idiot, I'm doing nothing of the sort! Is this one of your infernal jokes, or do you mean it? Have you really come to St. Frank's for the purpose of remaining?"

"Well, rather!" said Archie. "I'm like those things in Government offices, you know—a bally old fixture! That is to say, when it comes to leaving, I don't appear in the act! Absolutely not!"

"You mean that you wish to remain in this school?"

"Right on the spot, old lad!"



"Upon my word, boy, you get on a man's nerve," snapped the colonel. "All this infernal talk! A jackanapes, sir! That's what you are."

"Thank heaven!" said the colonel, fervently. "I regard this as one of the best days of my life! To clear you out of the home is the dream I have always hoped for, but I never thought the moment would come! By gad! What a relief—what peace there will be, after this!"

"As you might say, I'm not precisely at par, and so forth," observed Archie. "The good old popularity is somewhat weak and watery! Well, rather!"

Colonel Glenthorne glared for a moment or two, and then nodded.

"I'll see the Headmaster about this!" he rapped out. "If they'll allow you to remain in this school, it'll be a wonder! By gad, sir, there's only one place for you, and that's a padded——. H'm! Well, well! Precisely!"

He glared again, but this time gave all his attention to the crowd. Then he stalked off fiercely. Colonel Glenthorne was evidently a fiery old chap, and he did not possess a large amount of patience.

He made his way downstairs, and proceeded to bark at a couple of juniors in the lobby. He curtly ordered them to show him the way to the Headmaster's study. And he was not precisely pleased when the two juniors ushered him meekly and innocently into an apartment which turned out to be an empty box-room. By the time the colonel found out his mistake, the juniors had vanished.

So Colonel Glenthorne proceeded to bark at

the empty air. Finally, Tubbs came along to see what all the noise was about. The colonel seized him in a flash, and practically deafened the page boy by ordering him to lead him straight to Dr. Stafford's study.

Tubbs was so scared out of his wits that he couldn't muster up enough courage to explain that the Head was probably breakfasting, and that this was hardly an opportune time for an interview.

But, as it happened, the Head was just leaving his study for the dining-room. And he was somewhat surprised when Colonel Glenthorne burst in like a whirlwind. This was merely the colonel's habitual method of entry.

"Really, really!" murmured the Head. "My dear sir—"

"You, I presume, are the Headmaster of this school?" demanded the colonel.

"I have that honour—"

"Then you are the man I want to see," said the visitor, dropping into a chair, and blowing his nose with terrific force. "H'm! Ha! Well, sir, what have you got to say? My son—my imbecile offspring—has come to this school without any instructions from me—"

"Pardon my interrupting, but you have the advantage of me, sir," said Dr. Stafford mildly.

"Yes, yes, to be sure!" said Colonel Glenthorne. "Quite so! To be sure! H'm! My name is Glenthorne, sir—Colonel Glenthorne, of Bannington. It is quite possible that you may have heard of me? I have distinct recol-

lections, in fact, of communicating with you through the medium of the post."

"Yes, I have the correspondence quite handy," said the Head. "It is quite true that your son has come here, Colonel Glenthorne. But I assumed that he had done so with your full knowledge and authority."

"Nothing of the kind—nothing of the kind," barked the colonel. "Absolute nonsense, sir! I knew nothing about it! The young idiot came here entirely on his own initiative. Would be far better in a Home for Imbeciles!"

The Head coughed.

"I am to understand, then, that you do not wish your son to remain?" he asked.

"Do not wish it?" repeated the colonel. "But that's just what I do wish! The boy is hopeless—absolutely and positively hopeless! He's got about as much brain as a caterpillar! If you'll take him into this school I'll pay you double the usual fees, if you want me to."

"That, of course, will be entirely unnecessary," said Dr. Stafford. "If your son is here with your sanction there is no reason why he should not remain. I regret to hear you refer to him in such strong terms."

"Pah!" snapped the colonel. "The boy is a lunatic!"

"I must confess that I do not agree with you, Colonel Glenthorne," said the Head. "And, in any case, I am pained that you should speak in such terms about your own

(Continued on next page.)

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son. I talked with him last night, and examined him, and I was quite pleased to find that his knowledge on all general subjects is fully up to the standard in this school. The boy has certainly an extraordinary method of speech, but that will probably get knocked out of him after a while."

"How in Heaven's name he acquired such a habit is beyond my comprehension," growled Archie's father. "Associating with some of those young fools from London, I suppose. My other sons have some confoundedly inane friends, I might as well explain. Archibald has copied off all the ridiculous talk, and added his own absurdities to it. The boy is positively helpless. By gad, he can't do a thing! He can't even dress himself!"

"My dear sir!" protested the Head. "Surely that is inaccurate——"

"The boy cannot dress himself!" thundered the colonel, glaring. "I know what I am talking about! He's always had a man—an infernal valet fellow to look after him morning and night. He can't get on without that man—he'll be lost!"

"I'm afraid it will be quite impossible for your son to bring such a man to St. Frank's," said Dr. Stafford. "Oh, by the way, please let me apologise, while I think of it. My butler has been dismissed, and I fear you were inconvenienced somewhat in finding your way to my study."

"Not at all—not at all!" growled the colonel. "No need to apologise, sir! Dismissed, eh? What for? Up to some mischief, I'll be bound."

"He was detected in the act of purloining certain articles from the store cupboard," replied the Head. "At the moment I have no butler, and——"

"By gad!" interrupted Colonel Glenthorne, sitting forward. "By gad! An idea, sir! A splendid idea! I have the very man you want—a servant whom I can thoroughly recommend. Honest, trustworthy, and reliable. His name is Phipps—has been in my service for years——"

"It is very kind of you, Colonel Glenthorne, but I shouldn't like to rob you of such a good servant."

"Nothing of the kind—nothing of the kind!" barked the colonel. "The man is useless—that is to say, useless to me. He is the infernal fellow who has always looked after Archibald. You're welcome to him. He'll make a splendid butler—just the very man."

"It is very good of you, Colonel Glenthorne——"

"Rubbish!" interrupted the other. "Oh, by the way! Perhaps you will not object to Phipps looking after my son in his spare time? Eh? What do you say? You are agreeable? Good—good! Splendid!"

The Head felt rather breathless.

"Well, really, Colonel Glenthorne, I hardly think it would be practicable," he said. "It is utterly unprecedented for a junior boy to have a man to look after him."

"Of course—of course! I quite understand that," said Colonel Glenthorne. "I'm not a fool! I know how these schools are run, sir. But this is quite exceptional. Hang it all, I'll

pay for the man's keep, if you like—I'll pay his confounded wages! Archibald needs the fellow—can't get on without him. He's always had Phipps, and is perfectly lost without him. Hopeless young dolt—that's what he is. I'm a madman to pander to him!"

"I seriously think, my dear sir, that your suggestion is not feasible——"

"But it's got to be—it must be!" put in the colonel briskly. "What does it matter to you? Confound it all, man, you won't be bothered! My son is not the same as other boys—he's helpless. He can't button a brace on to his infernal trousers! School life will make a difference, of course—a vast difference. Let this man look after Archibald for a time, at all events. Just until he settles down. You see? That's all—that's all. Just until he finds his feet, so to say. You agree? Good! I knew you would!"

The Head hadn't agreed, but he was rather at a loss for words.

"I am sorry to disappoint you, Colonel Glenthorne, but I don't quite see how I can manage," he said. "Just to begin with, perhaps, it might be allowable—but only to begin with, you understand. I fully realise that your son is an exceptional boy, and I can appreciate that he is helpless. He appears to be that kind of a lad. But at a school like this he must learn to look after himself——"

"Naturally—naturally—naturally!" broke in the colonel, like a quick-fire gun. "That's obvious—that's quite clear. But he can't learn to look after himself all in a minute. Ridiculous to think so. Well, that's settled, then. Eh? Phipps will be sent over this afternoon, and you'll allow him to look after my son? Excellent! I don't think I need bother you any further, sir. I'll be going. Only arrived from Switzerland last night, and found everything upside down. Well, well, that's all, eh? Oh, a cheque, of course! Fees, and that sort of thing? How much? Some infernal imposition, I'll warrant!"

Colonel Glenthorne tugged out a cheque-book, and he and Dr. Stafford soon got down to business matters. And shortly afterwards the colonel took his departure. But he had gained his end.

Phipps, the invaluable manservant, was coming to St. Frank's—ostensibly to fill the vacant position of butler, but really to look after Archie. Colonel Glenthorne evidently cared more for his son than his words led anybody to suspect.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAVERN OF MYSTERY!



"NOW?" asked Tommy Watson, in surprise. "Yes, now, my son!" I said.

"But what about breakfast——"

"We shall only be a few minutes late, at the most," I interrupted. "But we're alone at the moment, and we might just as well take advantage of the fact. It won't

take us more than a few minutes to buzz down that tunnel. I want to see if those rotters left anything behind last night."

Tommy Watson and I were in a boat, and we were just coming upon Willard's Island—the upper end of it. Handforth and Co. had returned to the camp a short while earlier, and breakfast was probably proceeding.

But Tommy and I were quite alone, and I saw no reason why we shouldn't go ashore at the upper end of the island, and take a quick look down in the curious old stone chamber that had been John Martin's prison during the night.

We had rescued John from Hudson and Co., leaving the three men in that stone chamber—unable to get past the jammed door. There was just a faint possibility that I might be able to pick up a clue or two—which the enemy had left behind them. I was always a believer in the policy of doing a thing at the moment. Unless we went down into the tunnel now we should have no other opportunity until night—and then, perhaps, Hudson and his companions would be before us.

So, without any further argument, we nosed the boat into the bank and jumped ashore. Then we climbed up to the broken little cliff, and forced our way in through the smashed tunnel opening.

I had my electric torch in readiness, and we made our way along the low, narrow passage until we came to the steps. I led the way down these, and Tommy brought out the rear.

The darkness in these underground tunnels was pitchy, and even the bright beam from my electric torch seemed weak after the daylight outside. But there was plenty of illumination for our purpose.

Having reached the bottom of the steps, we went along and entered the chamber. It was quite evident that our quest had been for nothing. A keen glance round showed me that there was nothing here that would serve as a clue.

I examined the secret door, and felt fairly certain that Hudson and the others had made desperate attempts to open it. But Nelson Lee had jammed the mechanism so well that the rascals had failed.

"Well, there's nothing here," said Watson. "A waste of time—I knew it would be. We shall be lucky if we catch any breakfast now. A fatheaded idea, coming here at such a time!"

"Keep your hair on," I said. "We just came on the off-chance, my son. But we'll be getting back now, and we'll grab all the brekker we need. We've only wasted a few minutes, anyhow. Nothing to make a fuss about."

We passed out of the stone chamber, and retraced our steps. I kept my eyes well open all the time. But there was nothing whatever to

interest me. The place seemed as though it had not been entered for years.

We reached the flight of steep stone steps which led to the exit. They were difficult steps to climb, being roughly made, and awkward. And Tommy Watson was in a bit of a hurry—being hungry.

He hadn't taken two steps before he slipped and fell. As he did so, his foot shot out and caught me under the chin. I was just behind him, and, of course, lower down.

"Ow!" I roared. "You clumsy ass!"

I reeled over and skidded down about five stairs, and came to a stop with my face lying on a particularly rough piece of stone. The electric torch was in my right hand, and the light flashed fully upon the flat stonework of the step just above me. And in spite of my awkward position, and the pain, I noticed something which sent my blood tingling through my veins.

Under any other circumstances I should never have seen it. But, owing to that accidental slip on Tommy's part, I had been permitted to look fairly and squarely at the thing.

"Tommy!" I said tensely. "Look here! Quick! Just squint at this!"

"I'm hurt!" growled Watson. "Oh, my hat! I caught my shin against this rotten step! I've peeled about a yard of skin off! What's the matter? Look where?"

"Come down here—down beside me!" I exclaimed excitedly.

It wasn't often that I got excited. But this time I could hardly contain myself. Watson scrambled down, and took up his position beside me. He looked at the stone steps in his usual stolid way.

"Nothing to make a fuss about!" he growled. "I can't see anything——"

"There!" I said, pointing.

Watson looked more closely. Then he caught his breath with a sharp noise. For he was looking at a little crevice just underneath the overlapping step. I might have passed up and down the stairs a thousand times without seeing that crevice—for this step was only the third from the bottom, and, naturally, never came level with the eyes under ordinary circumstances.

And in this crevice were a number of coins. We could see the edges of them—milled edges! And the coins were of a dull, brownie yellow colour. I lost no further time, but whipped out my pen-knife and dislodged the first coin with comparative ease.

"I knew it!" I said triumphantly. "A sovereign!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Watson. "A real quid! One of the good old-fashioned sort—solid gold! But are you sure of it, Nipper? It doesn't seem to be the right colour——"

"You ass! It's been here for over ten years!" I said. "It's gold all right—a part of old Willard's hidden hoard! A part of the treasure! This is the first real clue we've ever found!"

Watson was too excited to say anything. I set to work getting out the other coins. There were nine altogether. And I was just edging

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out the last when I became aware of the fact that the stone slab of the step above, although as solid as it could possibly be, shook perceptibly when I touched it.

"Why, this step seems to be loose!" I muttered. "Perhaps we can shift it—it's quite likely the treasure is hidden somewhere—What the—Why—"

I broke off in amazement. While speaking, I had pulled at the step, naturally assuming that it would be of enormous weight. But I hardly exerted any pressure when the whole step shot up, and disappeared like one of those magical contrivances in a conjurer's box of tricks. It seemed to be on a swivel.

And Tommy Watson and I found ourselves staring into an oblong, black cavity. It was three feet wide by at least eighteen inches high, and was formed by two of the steps abruptly disappearing. It was a most ingenious arrangement, and, ordinarily, could never have been detected. This was certainly our lucky day.

"It looks to me like the entrance to the miser's treasure chamber!" I said, recovering all my calmness. "My son, we're going through here! We'll see what lies beyond!"

I wormed my way through the opening, holding the torch in front of me. The air smelt musty, but quite breathable. And the light from my torch revealed a long, high chamber formed by the space beneath the long flight of steps. But the torchlight did not carry very far.

There was practically no drop, and after getting through the opening, I found myself on solid ground. Watson came after me, fairly trembling with excitement. We had never dreamed of finding anything like this.

I experienced a feeling of some disappointment as I walked forward. For the secret chamber was not so big as I had anticipated. And it was, moreover, quite bare and empty.

For a second I had had visions of great sacks of golden sovereigns. But the floor was merely covered with dust, and the walls rose sheer. Watson gave a grunt of disgust.

"Why, there's nothing here!" he said indignantly. "It's a fraud!"

"We don't know yet," I replied. "I expect this place is here for some reason, and—Hullo! What's this?"

I noticed something which had not been obvious before. In the left-hand wall there was a kind of alcove. It was a recess, perhaps two feet deep by a foot wide. And the floor

of it was a yard from the floor proper. I flashed the light from my torch into it, and gave a yelp.

"Look here!" I shouted thickly.

As I uttered the words I shoved my hand in the recess and brought it out filled cram full of gold coins! Watson nearly fell over backwards, and his face went quite pale with the stress of the moment.

"My—my goodness!" he panted. "It's—it's the treasure!"

We both stared hard into the recess. There, at the back, lay a pile of coins—all of them sovereigns and half-sovereigns. The pile was heaped up, and, altogether, there were seven or eight thousand pounds. I could tell that at a glance. At the rear the stonework was solid.

"I don't think it's the treasure, Tommy, but it's a part of it," I said. "There's only ten thousand pounds here at the outside. And old Willard was supposed to be something like a millionaire. This is just a handful—a flea-bite. But it proves that the yarn is true."

We looked at one another, and I still held the handful of gold.

"Well, what shall we do?" said Watson, breathing quickly.

"For the moment, nothing," I replied. "This place needs examining carefully, and we haven't got time now. If we're away much longer the chaps will get curious. We'll leave it until to-night—and then we'll explore properly."

"But somebody might come——"

"Almost impossible," I interrupted. "It was only by a miracle of luck that we found the secret out. We'll leave everything exactly as it was. But I'll take one or two of these coins to show the gov'nor."

Three minutes later we had left the treasure chamber. And one heave of the step sent it back into position with a dull thud. It seemed impossible that it could ever have moved out of its original place.

We had discovered something of real value at last.

We knew now, that Willard's gold was not a myth. And our eagerness to explore more thoroughly was of a feverish nature. But we could do nothing until the night came along.

We little knew what startling adventures were to befall, and what extraordinary developments were to occur!

Events, in fact, were destined to move with amazing rapidity!

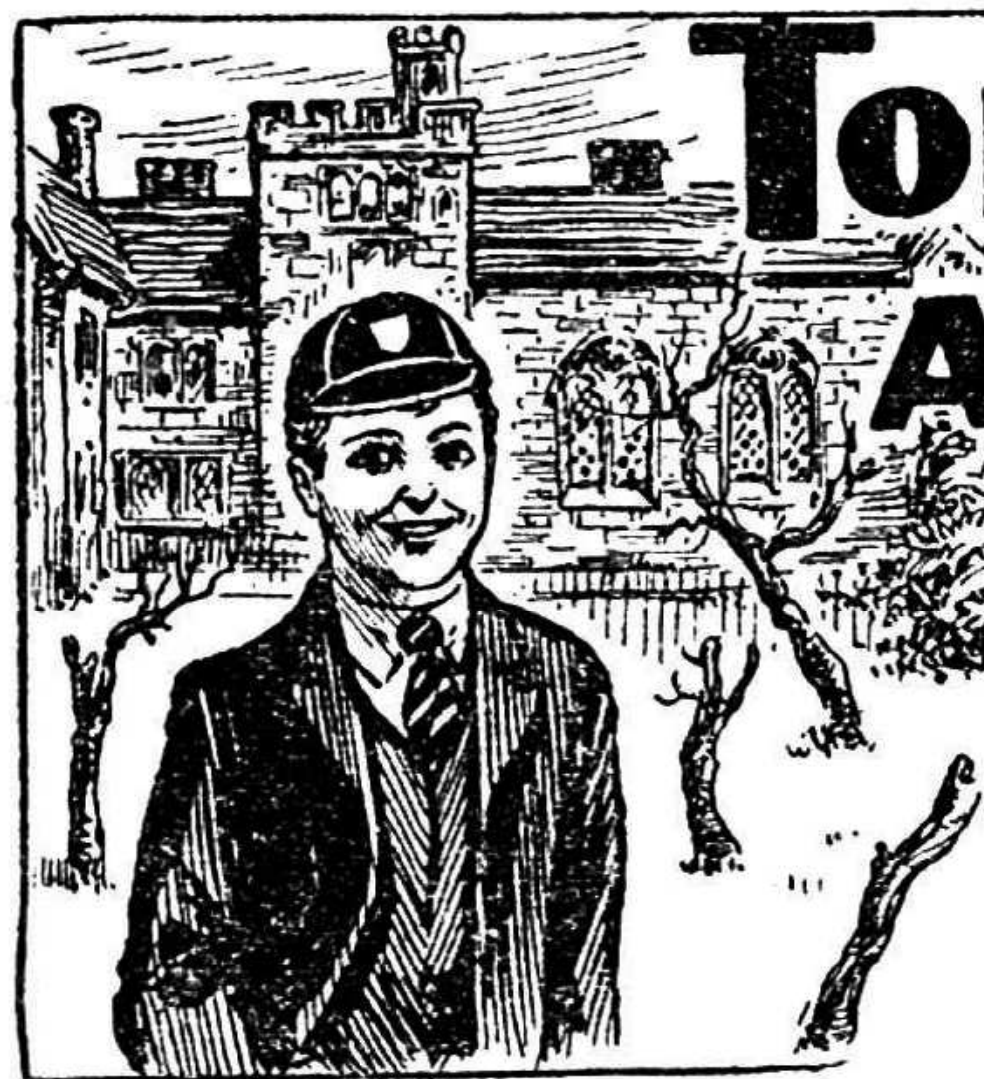
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TOM TARTAR AT SCHOOL

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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 rollers of the school. Tom incurs the bitter hatred of Foster Moore, the school usher, a man much feared by the boys. He offers Wooden Jerry ten pounds to get someone to injure Tom, so that our hero will be sent away, and the usher can proceed with his nefarious schemes without interruption.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER XXXI.

Mr. Wrasper Deposed!

TOM and his chums hurried back to school, and were in time to answer their names for evening studies. It was a close shave, however, for they were the very last in.

Great was the surprise in store for them! Foster Moore was in the schoolroom with Mr. Wrasper, the latter looking very pale.

There was nothing remarkable in both of them being present. But what was remarkable was this fact:

Each was in the other's place! Foster Moore was seated at the principal desk! Mr. Wrasper sat at the small desk hitherto used by his assistant!

When all the boys were in their places, Moore rapped a ruler sharply on the desk, and called for silence. Then he made a momentous announcement—an announcement which staggered everybody present.

"Boys," he began, "from to-night, a change takes place in the conduct of this

school. Owing to circumstances which there is no need to explain to you, I am now the Headmaster, and Mr. Wrasper is my assistant."

Mr. Wrasper's head dropped upon his breast. This humiliation was to him a terrible thing.

Pubsey Wrasper, who was sitting on Tom's right, gasped and shivered.

"The fact of the change," went on Moore, "will be communicated to your parents. I need scarcely say that the change is to my benefit, and I trust it will be to yours."

He ceased, and there was dead silence. Then he looked across at Jonah Worrey, who instantly arose.

"I congratulate you, Mr. Moore," said Worrey. "I call for three cheers for our new Headmaster!"

He uttered a cheer himself, but nobody joined in the salute. So Jonah had all the cheering to himself, and a mighty dismal performance it was, in that big school-room.

Foster Moore's brows bent until his eyes were like lights in the depths of two caverns, and as Worrey sat down looking uncommonly foolish, the Headmaster spoke.

"Boys," he said, "I perceive that I am not so popular with you as I used to be, and I am quite aware who I have to thank for that. Now then, to your work!"

He did not look at Tom, but the boy looked at him, and then, with a scornful smile, turned to his books.

Mr. Wrasper, in his new capacity as usher, remained in the room. Foster Moore departed.

Tom felt sorry for Wrasper: so did most of the others, and they showed it by being very tractable that evening, and giving no trouble.

The evening studies over, the boys were dismissed, and they went out quiet and orderly to supper. But before the meal commenced, Tom was told that Foster Moore desired to see him in the study.

Tom at once obeyed the summons, and found Moore installed in Mr. Wrasper's chair.

"Tartar," he said, as soon as Tom entered, "I have sent for you now so that we may thoroughly understand one another. Now that I am the principal of this school, I mean to be obeyed. Do you understand that, boy?"

"Yes," said Tom quietly, "I understand, and I shall obey you in everything that is reasonable. And now please let me tell you something which may help us to understand each other better, Mr. Moore."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this, Mr. Moore. I happen to know that a certain man went to another man, and offered him ten pounds to seriously injure a certain boy. That man went to another man, and the third man went to yet another, who would have done all that was required of him if he hadn't been prevented by his own son. What do you think of that, Mr. Moore?"

Foster Moore's face had gone ashen. It was clear from his guilty look that he had made that villainous offer to Wooden Jerry, and had since repented of the impulse.

He made no reply; and Tom went on:

"Please understand, once and for all, Mr. Moore, that I'm not to be bullied by any man while I'm here! I may be led, but I'll never be driven!"

"Enough of this insolence!" thundered Moore. "I will drive you yet! Get away to your supper!"

Tom departed without another word, leaving Foster Moore scowling and uneasy.

"I hate the fellow!" he muttered. "He's the gall in my cup! I've won the game, and am Head here; but it gives me no joy!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

The Turning of the Worm!

THUS was begun a new era in the school and to Tom at least it was destined to open up matters of great interest.

All the boys were, more or less, in a state of ferment.

"I've been thinking it over," said Tom the following morning, as he sat by the window in the schoolroom with Sam Smith and Willie Gray.

A heavy shower was falling, and the usual half-hour outside before breakfast had to be abandoned.

"You are speaking of the change?" said Sam.

"Yes."

"It is a puzzle to us all."

"They used to be very much together in the evening," said Willie, "in the study. One night when I could not sleep I heard Mrs. Wrasper calling downstairs to know if they meant to keep up all night."

"What time was that?" asked Tom.

"Past two o'clock."

"And I noticed another thing," said

Sam. "It was about a week ago, just after supper. I was coming down the hall when I saw Mrs. Wrasper by the study door. It was locked."

"It is often locked," returned Tom.

"Yes, but not when Wrasper and Moore are inside, as they were then."

"I can tell you another thing," said Willie. "I heard Jane say it. Foster Moore came here quite poor and shabby, and Mr. Wrasper took him on because he was cheap."

"There is some mystery in it," said Tom, "and I'd jolly well like to find out what it is."

"And having found it out, what then?" asked Sam.

"I don't know," returned Tom, laughing. "We will wait till then. Possibly I may be able to do something. What a row the other fellows are making, and look at Pubsey sitting in the corner."

Pubsey Wrasper was looking towards them with an evil look on his face. He seemed to think that Tom was rejoicing over the change in his lot.

The fact is, Tom did not know the full extent of it, and if he had would have been one of the last in the world to rejoice over a fallen foe.

Pubsey could no longer do as he pleased.

Foster Moore had commanded him to fall into the position of an ordinary pupil, and mind how he behaved himself.

"I am keeping you here out of charity," Moore had told him. "Your father's salary will not allow him to pay for you."

It was a galling position, and no wonder that Pubsey felt it.

From his chief crony, Jonah Worrey, he received no sympathy. Jonah, in fact, showed a disposition to cut him.

For Pubsey was no longer the influential son of the schoolmaster, but one boy among the rest, and a poor one into the bargain.

Nor was he much of a favourite with anyone, for he had ever been arrogant even to his friends. It was good for him, perhaps, that he should have a fall.

Tom, after a moment's reflection, crossed over to him. Pubsey rose up with increased bitterness on his face.

"You needn't come jeering at me," he said, between his teeth. "It's a cowardly thing to do."

"I am not likely to jeer at you," said Tom. "Only the meanest of curs would do that. Believe me, I am sorry for you."

"Sorry!" exclaimed Pubsey, looking wonderingly at him.

"Yes," said Tom.

"You are sneering at me now!"

"No, Pubsey. I frankly admit that I have never really liked you or your father, but I can't help pitying you now. I can see that Jonah Worrey is chucking you over. You are no longer of any use to him."

"I haven't a friend in the world," Pubsey muttered.

"Well, if you really want one at any time come to me," rejoined Tom. "Meantime, keep your pecker up, and hope for better times. Perhaps, one day, your father may again be master here."

Pubsey shook his head.

"No," he said, "we don't hope for that. I heard father say that everything was lost—gone from him. There's not a rag in this place that doesn't belong to that brute Foster Moore."

"Gone! Lost!" said Tom. "How?"

"I don't know," replied Pubsey.

"I wish you would try to find out," said Tom; "you may trust me. I think there has been foul play somewhere. My father's a pretty shrewd man of business, and he might be able to do something. Nothing pleases him better than to have the job of exposing some fishy financial transaction."

There was another person in the school on whom the sudden change of masters had a marked effect. That person was Wooden Jerry.

He became absolutely arrogant, and never missed a chance of showing open disrespect to the Wraspers. He dropped the "sir" when speaking to the deposed Headmaster; addressed Pubsey simply as "Pubsey," or "Young Wrasper"; while he bore himself towards Mrs. Wrasper as if she were the cook and he himself the butler.

Towards the pupils his bearing was as defiant as he dare make it; but his natural cunning prevented him from going too far with boys of the Tom Tartar stamp.

That Mr. Wrasper should so meekly endure Wooden Jerry's insolence was a matter of astonishment to everybody.

"Why on earth doesn't Wrasper kick the fellow?" whispered Sam Smith at the dinner one day. "Just look at him now!"

Wooden Jerry was lounging against the wall, with his hands in his pockets, just behind Mr. Wrasper's chair at the head of the table. Foster Moore, it may be mentioned, was never present now during meal-times.

Suddenly, in a voice quite audible to every boy in the dining-room, Wooden Jerry said:

"Ain't you about finished, Wrasper? You takes a bloomin' long time over your vittles! 'Urry up, old 'un! My dinner's a-waitin' for me in the kitchen, an' the quicker I sets down to it the better I shall like it."

Mr. Wrasper's haggard face crimsoned, and for a moment it looked as if he were going to tackle the insolent serving-man. But he restrained himself with an effort, and went on with his dinner.

"Well, if that doesn't fairly take the biscuit!" gasped Larry Turrell. "Fancy poor old Wrasper standing such cheek!"

"There must be some reason for it," remarked McLara.

"Reason or not," put in Tom Tartar, "it's got to be stopped! The fellow's getting simply unbearable!"

Evidently Tom's words reached the ears of Wooden Jerry, for the man's small, pig-like eyes glittered as he leant over Mr. Wrasper and remarked.

"There's a deal o' talkin' goin' on at table, Wrasper! Why don't you stop it, Wrasper? If Mister Moore was here, he'd soon stop it!"

Mr. Wrasper lay down his knife and fork, pushed back his chair, and, rising to his feet, faced Wooden Jerry.

The worm had evidently turned at last!

"Get out of this room!" he said quietly, but firmly.

"Wh-wh-what!" spluttered Wooden Jerry, fairly taken aback. "Was—was you a-talkin' to me?"

"To nobody else!" replied Mr. Wrasper. "Now, then, you impudent ruffian, make haste! Out of this room, or I will kick you out!"

"Kick me out—me!" exclaimed Jerry, as if he could scarcely credit his ears. "You wouldn't dare do it, Wrasper! What d'ye think Mister Moore 'ud say if you come any tricks o' that sort?"

"Get out—do you hear?"

"I'll go when it suits me to—not afore! Think I'm here to take orders from a man who— Oh! Owch! Murder! Help!"

But no help came to Wooden Jerry as Mr. Wrasper, with the strength of a man who has been goaded into sudden fury, gripped him by the throat and shook him as a terrier might shake a rat.

Then, twisting his victim round, Mr. Wrasper got him by the scruff of the neck, propelled him to the door of the dining-hall, and, with a final vigorous kick, sent Jerry flying into the corridor.

Then the deposed Headmaster closed the door, and, with a terribly colourless face, resumed his seat.

The boys did not openly cheer, but murmurs of approval passed up and down the table.

A few sat silent, Jonah Worrey and his bosom friend Chucks being among them.

A voice came through the keyhole:

"Look out for the sack, you Wrasper! Either you or me have got to go, and it won't be me."

Mr. Wrasper did not answer. Dinner was finished in absolute silence. Then the boys were dismissed by the unhappy man in a scarcely audible voice, and went out, marvelling what would come of the ejection of Wooden Jerry, who, as Tom had good reason to know, possessed a certain power over Foster Moore.

"A nice state of things," he said. "We shall have Jerry trying to boss us next! We've got to put the impudent beast in his proper place, and keep him there!"

(Continued on next page.)

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(Continued from page 38.)

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Wooden Jerry is Crushed!

A COUNCIL of the Eagles was called that evening, and the company assembled in Wooden Jerry's toolshed.

The muster was a strong one, and sentries having been posted, to give warning of the approach of foes, the meeting was formally opened by Sam Smith, who proposed that Tom Tartar should take the chair.

This was unanimously assented to; whereupon Tom perched himself on the top of an empty barrel, and delivered a short speech.

The gist of this oration was that Wooden Jerry's insolence was not to be tolerated any longer.

"We have just got to put our foot down upon him," said Tom, "and to make things too hot for him here. I now propose that he be outlawed—that as his hand has been raised against all of us, that every hand be raised against him."

"Hear, hear!" the listeners assented.

"Don't do anything absolutely cowardly or cruel," said Tom, "but make things lively for him. Put your brains to work, and set him dancing."

He would have said a little more, but

one of the sentries reported that Foster Moore was coming out of the house and the meeting broke up a little hurriedly, but without any signs of disorder.

Now, in accordance with the resolution passed, Lawrence Turrell and Cautious Johnny went quietly towards the kitchen at an hour when it was known that Wooden Jerry usually partook of his evening meal.

Each of the two was armed with a paper bag filled with ochre, one red and the other yellow, and their fell purpose was to push open the door and from the darkness of the outside passage hurl their missiles at Jerry.

On arriving within sight of the kitchen they saw to their great satisfaction that the door was partly open, but their joy was qualified by their learning that Wooden Jerry was not alone.

Jane, the maidservant, was with him, and her familiar voice was heard speaking in her usual quiet way, and at first they could not catch the purport of her words.

Now Jane was an immense favourite with the boys.

She had always been their friend, and all that she could do to add to their comfort had been done freely and without any hope of reward.

As a matter of fact, Jane would never

take a tip from any boy, but when offered one, would put up her hands and laughingly say, something in this way:

"Goodness gracious, don't waste your money on me. Go and buy some sweets. You may leave a few in the drawer of the hall table, if you like."

Jane being in the kitchen was a barrier to their project, for she, being a tidy soul, would be very angry with the boys if they made a mess with the ochre, and she would be sure to pop out quick enough to see who were the offenders.

But, after all, matters favoured the boys. Jane was engaged in "laying it on thick" for the benefit of Wooden Jerry.

"You mean, miserable dog," they heard her say, "how dare you speak to Mrs. Wrasper as you did just now."

"She ain't nobody," replied Wooden Jerry.

"She was your mistress before, and she is your mistress now, you ungrateful rascal."

"She ain't!"

"I say she is, and that's enough!"

"You ain't nobody, neither," said Wooden Jerry. "I ain't a-going to be ridden over by housemaids and kitchen wenches. I—Oh!"

Lawrence put his eye to the opening between the door and the lintel, and beheld a sight that made his heart glow with joy.

Jane was standing up, and leaning across the end of the table, had hold of one of Wooden Jerry's ears.

She held it simply by a finger and thumb, but that she had a good grip of it was evident from the expression of Wooden Jerry's face.

"Oh, lor'!" he gasped. "Stop it! You'll take a piece out!"

"Yes, I will," she said, quite serenely. "Now, will you ever be rude to Mrs. Wrasper again?"

"I didn't mean to be rude. A man's got a right to be independent on my wages—Oh!"

"Will you be rude again?"

"No—o—o—o—o!"

"Mind you, if I hear of it—as I surely shall—if you dare to be, I'll clip both your ears with my scissors. Now take yourself off!"

"But I ain't had half my supper," urged Wooden Jerry, as Jane set him free.

"You have had enough," replied Jane.

"You eat too much. I shall allowance you in future."

"You dursn't do it," said Wooden Jerry, getting defiant again.

"Not do it?" said Jane. "I dare do anything. Take that, and that!"

"That and that" were two sounding boxes on the ear that were like unto the smiting of strong hands together.

Jerry came staggering out of the kitchen, nearly terrified out of his life.

The boys retreated before him, and got into the lumber-room unperceived.

Holding his head with both hands he came along, muttering, "The little vixen! Who'd a thought she durst hit a man o' my size?"

His eyes were fixed, and he looked like a wild man. That much the boys could see in the faint light.

Wooden Jerry did not see them, but in his blind terror entered the lumber-room, intending to sit down there and meditate over his injuries.

Prompt action was necessary on the part of the boys, and prompt they were.

Acting upon one impulse each hurled his missile at Jerry as he rolled into the room. The aim was good, each hitting him fairly in the face, and then, as he began to roar for help, they slipped by him, and like two shadows of the night vanished.

A moment later Foster Moore was heard calling out:

"What is that noise there? What are you doing, Jerry?"

"I'm blinded and murdered!" was the answer.

From the landing above the boys heard the schoolmaster hurry down the passage and enter the lumber-room.

"What now, you fool?" he cried.

Then he was heard to assist Jerry up, and ask who had ochred him.

"It must be that Tartar chap, sir," was the reply.

"No, it is not," was the answer. "He is in the school-room. I've just left him. Look here—you had better give up trying to domineer over the boys. They won't stand it. I can't be bothered with these constant disturbances. Go and wash yourself and get away to bed."

And when that night the Eagles heard the story, great was their rejoicing. The days of Wooden Jerry's punishment had begun.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The Return of Posh Powner!

ON Thursday afternoon, Tom, Sam Smith, and Larry Turrell, went for a long country ramble. Returning by a roundabout route, they chanced to pass close to the quarries, just as the workers were knocking off for the day.

Tom quickly spotted Noddy Berrill, and at the same moment the small form of Rosy Ralph rose from behind a hedge and came forward.

"Hallo, Ralph!" greeted Tom kindly. "What are you doing over here?"

Ralph hung his head sheepishly, and fumbled with his ragged cap; but he answered no word.

"He's only come to see me, Master Tom," explained Noddy Berrill, in a low tone. "He comes very nigh every day. Ye see, I'm about the only chap he knows. He

(Continued on page iii of Cover.)

(Continued from page 40.)

has a precious lonesome time of it since his father's gone."

"But is he still living in that old cottage?" asked Tom.

"Yes," answered Noddy. "Lives there all by hisself. We offered him a home, but he won't take it."

Tom looked thoughtful, then he said to Sam and Turrell:

"You chaps walk on with Noddy. I'll overtake you presently. I want to have a chat with this poor youngster."

"Now, Ralph," Tom began, as soon as they were alone, "you've got to give up living at that tumbledown old cottage. It isn't good for you to be there all alone. You've got to move."

"I can't—I can't!" muttered Ralph, with strange agitation. "Don't 'ee ax me to do that, Master Tom!"

"Why not?"

No answer.

Tom, still holding Ralph by the arm, turned the boy gently towards him, and looked keenly into his troubled face. Then he said quietly:

"Ah, I see what it is, Ralph! You can't leave the cottage because—because your father has come back there. Now, don't deny it, Ralph! Your father has returned to the cottage!"

"Not to do no harm to anybody!" blurted out Ralph. "He'd have cleared away if he could, but the police have bin too smart for him. He found 'em on the watch for him everywhere. Oh, Master Tom, you won't say nowt about him bein' back, will 'ee?"

"You mustn't ask me to promise that, Ralph. Your father is a ruffian—a would-be murderer. He's far too dangerous to be at large."

"But he won't harm you, Master Tom. He dursn't."

"Perhaps not, Ralph; but there are others to think of besides myself. Ralph, you must take a message from me to your father."

The boy shivered.

"What be the message, Master Tom?"

"It's this. Tell him that unless he's away from the cottage before twelve o'clock to-morrow morning, the police will take him."

"D'ye mean that, Master Tom?"

"I certainly do!" replied Tom sternly. Then, in a kinder tone, he went on: "You'll be well rid of him, Ralph, you know. He's a brute, and he's always knocking you about—"

"He be my feyther," interrupted Ralph dully. "All right, Master Tom, I'll give him your message."

"That's a sensible chap! After all, I'm giving your father a chance of getting away—a chance he doesn't deserve. To-morrow the police-officers will come to your cottage, and, if I can get leave, I shall be with them. If we find you there alone, all will

be well, but if your father hasn't cleared off he will be arrested."

"It mun be so, if you say so," muttered Ralph gloomily.

"The safety of many people demand it," said Tom. "It's not myself I'm alarmed about. Good-bye, Ralph! Here's Noddy Berrill coming back to have a chat with you. He's a good chap is Noddy, and he'll cheer you up."

Tom darted off to overtake his companions. He honestly believed that he had acted for the best. Posh Powner was indeed a source of danger to many—among them Sir Claude and Cecil Freshley.

In his heart Tom knew that it would be better for Rosy Ralph if the brutal poacher were secured and safely clapped in prison for a long term of years. However, for better or for worse, he—Tom—was giving Posh Powner this final chance of escaping from the neighbourhood in which he had all his life been a pest.

Tom soon met the returning Noddy, and after bidding the good-natured quarry boy to do what he could to cheer Ralph up, went on in pursuit of Sam and Larry. That pair had, however, by this time got far ahead—had, in fact, disappeared round a bend in the road.

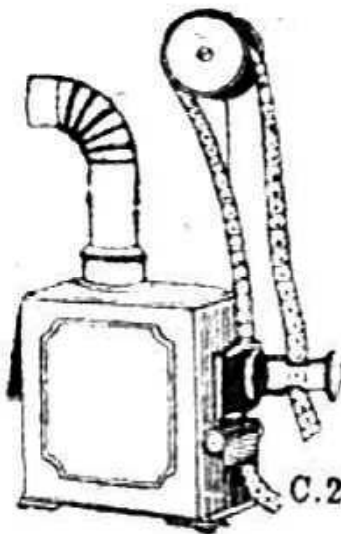
Tom had just reached the beginning of the bend, when he saw two men standing together, just on the other side of a high hedge.

Only for a moment he saw them, as they disappeared the instant he came in sight, but he felt sure it was Foster Moore and the poacher together.

As he was alone he did not venture to make sure, for he had the prudence to recognise the fact that he was no match for two dangerous men, and so increasing his pace got away from the spot.

(To be continued.)

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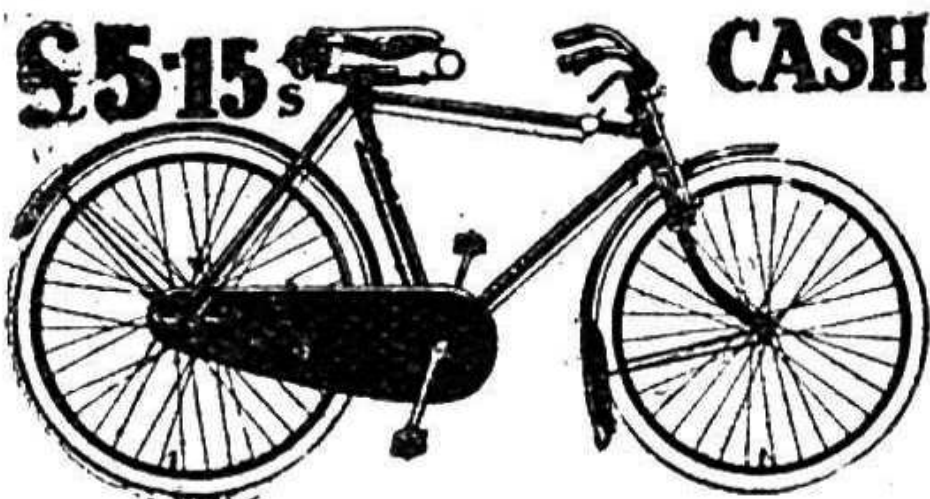
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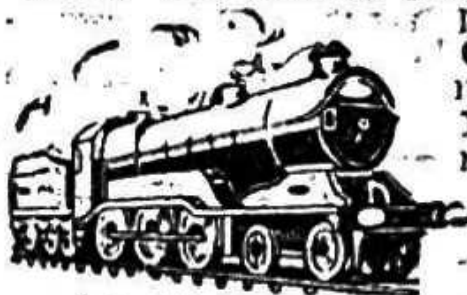
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