BAD BOY'S DIARY—This Laughable New Series Begins This Week!

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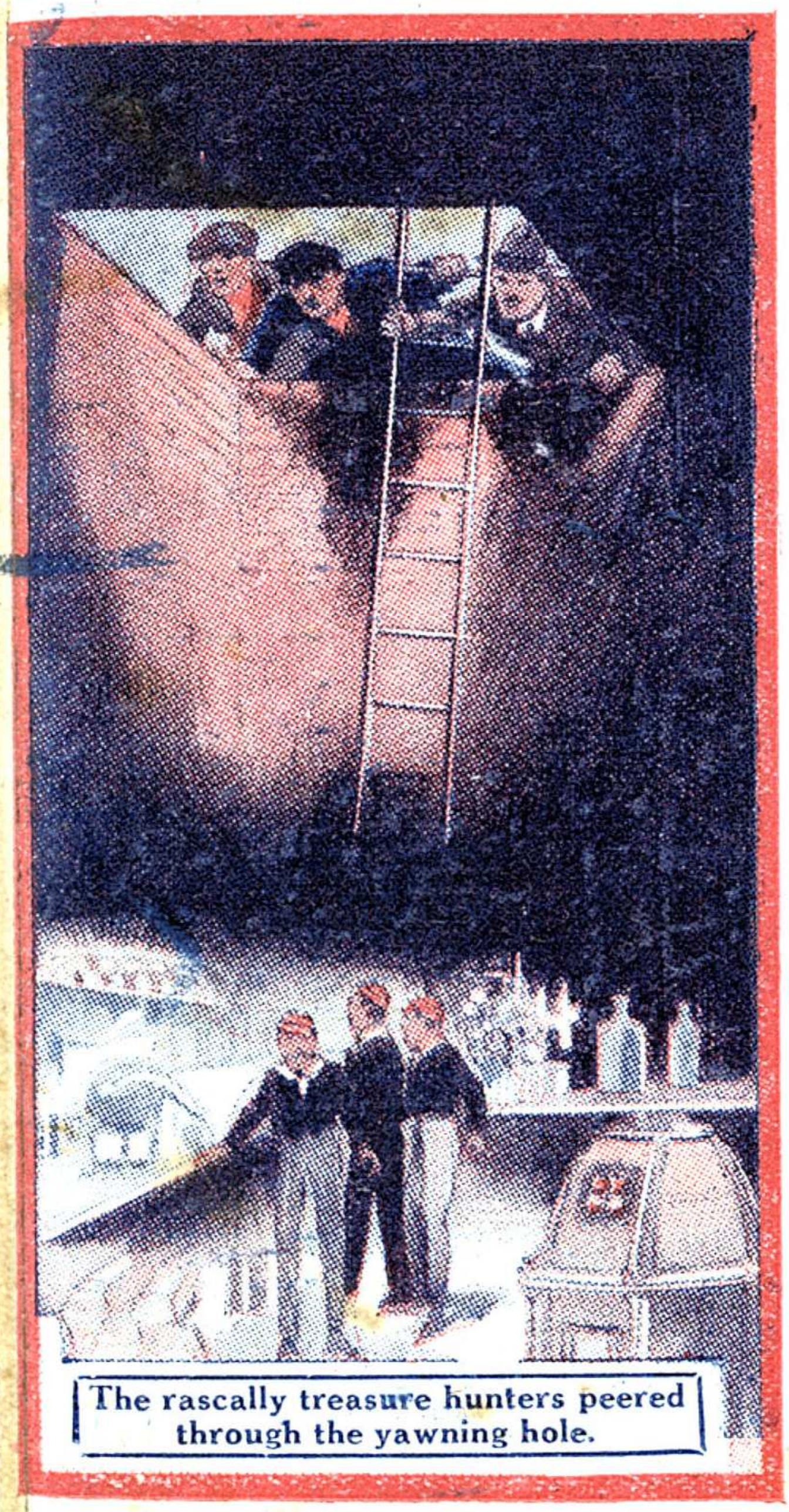


The rascally treasure hunters peered through the yawning hole.

A BAD BOY'S DIARY

has been specially secured for

Nipper's Magazine.

First instalment of this side-splitting series appears in *THIS ISSUE*

(See Inside.)

Also, Long Complete Story of ST. FRANK'S:—

THE AMAZING INHERITANCE,

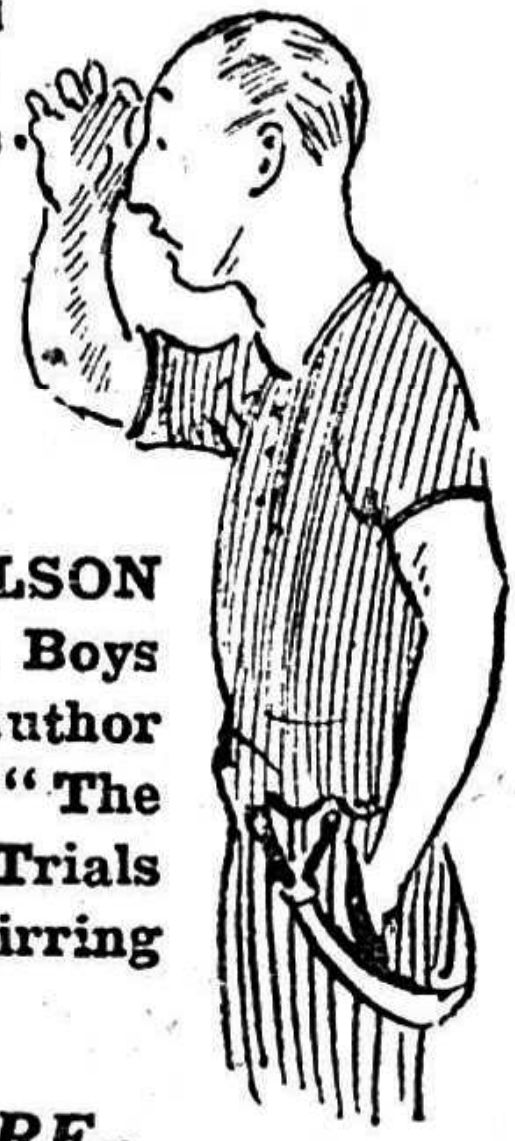
Introducing ARCHIE'S VALET, "PHIPPS," the Indispensable.

Many other attractive features, brightly illustrated throughout.

Magnificent Pen Drawing of St. Frank's College Chapel!

Archie opened his mouth, but no sounds came. And just at that moment, fortunately, Phipps glided into the room.

THE AMAZING INHERITANCE.



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 Island Camp," "The Coming of Archie," "The Trials of Archie," and many other Stirring Tales.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

PHIPPS THE INVALUABLE!

ARCHIBALD WINSTON DEREK GLENTHORNE lounged elegantly out of the Ancient House at St. Frank's and turned his monocle upon the clear blue sky. The evening was certainly a glorious one.

"I mean to say, priceless weather, and all that sort of rot!" remarked Archie. "Fleecy clouds in the offing, don't you know, and the setting sun descending in a jolly old blaze of glory. Makes a chappie poetical, and so forth!"

"Speaking to me?" asked Handforth bluntly.

Archie turned his monocle upon the leader of Study D.

"Well, the fact is, old fruit, I was just doing the decent old Hamlet act, don't you know," he said languidly. "Soliloquising, and what not. That is to say, a chappie likes to talk to himself now and again. Frightfully classy company, what? Arguments imposs., as you might say!"

Handforth grunted.

"Well, of course, you can't help it!" he said pityingly. "I suppose we've got to make allowances. It must be awful to be touched in the top storey! There's another lunatic at St. Frank's already—Timothy Tucker. I don't know what we've done to deserve a second freak!"

Archie smiled amiably.

"The insult direct, what?" he asked. "The fact is, my dear old sportsman, the lads of the village don't understand me. Of course, I'm a chump—absolutely! A most ghastly chump, to put it plainly! But, dash it all, that ain't my fault! Runs in the family, and all that sort of thing!"

"It's just as well you know all about it," said Handforth. "And what's this yarn going about that you're going to have a man? Whoever heard of such rot? I can't make out how these rumours get started."

"Why, it's the truth, Handy—cold facts!" put in Church, as he came up with McClure. "Of course Archie's going to have a man; everybody knows about it! The ass certainly needs somebody to look after him!"

Handforth stared.

"He's—he's really going to have a man?" he repeated blankly. "What absolute piffle! Why, if the chap comes here, I'll jolly soon tell him that we don't allow Remove chaps to have fags!"

"But this man isn't a fag, Handy," said Church. "He's a valet, or a butler—something like that, anyhow. He seems to be a mixture of three or four things, by what I can hear. A kind of Admirable Crichton!"

"A what?" said Handforth curiously.

"You know, the chap in the play," said Church.

"Play?" repeated Handforth. "What play?"

"Oh, my hat! Haven't you heard——"

"Pardon the jolly old interruption!" put in Archie mildly. "You've hit it, old tulip! Right on the bally apex, you know! Phipps—my man—is a frightfully useful lad. One of the ones, and all that sort of thing. Just like the old buffer in the play, as this priceless chappie just mentioned. The Admirable Crichton, don't you know; the brainy cove who did all sorts of frightfully ripping things on a desert island. Absolutely!"

"I don't know anything about admirals," said Handforth grimly, "but I do jolly well know that the Remove won't allow you to have a blessed manservant! Great pip! I never heard of such a thing!"

"But Archie is different," said Church. "We must make allowances——"

"I didn't tell you to interfere, Walter Church!" roared Handforth, turning fiercely on his chum. "Go and eat coke!"

"What's the argument about?"

I asked that question as I strolled up, accompanied by my chums of Study C, Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson. Afternoon lessons were over, of course, and it was nearly time for us to depart for Willard's Island.

The St. Frank's Cadets were in camp just at present. It was not the right time of the year for a camp, strictly speaking, but this was a matter of necessity. There were thirty Cadets, and they were enjoying camp life hugely. As soon as the repairs to the Ancient House dormitories had been effected, we should return to our usual quarters.

Handforth turned to me and looked aggressive.

"Just the chap I wanted," he said. "You're the captain of the Remove, ain't you?"

"I've heard a rumour to that effect," I replied cheerfully.

"It's a pity it isn't only a rumour!" said Handforth tartly. "If it wasn't for rank jealousy in the Remove, and rotten favouritism, I should be Form skipper! But we won't go into that now. I'm concerned with this prize dummy here—Archie! I want your opinion about it!"

"I mean to say, what?" protested Archie mildly.

"It's not polite to refer to a person as 'it,' Handy, to say nothing of the horrible grammar!" I said. "But what's Archie done? What terrible crime has he committed to make your gore rise?"

"Don't rot!" growled Handforth. "Archie's done nothing, but he's talking about having a man come to St. Frank's to look after him. A man, mind you! Some chap in the Navy, or something!"

"In the Navy?" I repeated curiously.

"Well, he used to be an admiral——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Handy's got hold of it wrong," grinned McClure. "We were talking about Archie's manservant, the fellow who's coming to St. Frank's to take care of the poor little darling—mummy's ickle pet! Handy doesn't seem to like the idea of it."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Why not?" roared Handforth. "Why not? Because the whole thing's rotten! It's absolutely unheard-of! Remove fellows ain't allowed to have servants to wait on 'em, and to pet them up!"

"But Archie's different," I explained.

"It's a fixed rule——"

"No rules are positively fixed, old son," I interrupted, "and there are exceptions to every rule. Archie's one of them. I don't think many fellows in the Remove will object to Archie having a manservant. If Pitt or De Valerie tried the game on, the Remove would squash it with one slosh, and I'd be the first to raise the voice of indignant protest. But with Archie it's quite another matter. The poor chap is just about as helpless as a Chinese mandarin with finger-nails a yard long. He can't lift a finger to do anything."

"That's all the more reason we should make a change," said Handforth obstinately. "If this chap Flipps comes along——"

"Dash it all!" said Archie. "Flipps, don't you know! The dear old lad's name is Phipps. Quite a priceless name, too!"

"I don't care if he's called Phopps!" snapped Handforth. "The principle of the thing is wrong; that's what I maintain. I'm a chap who believes in sticking to things that are right and proper. Why, what would happen if every fellow in the Remove had a manservant?"

"Such a thing couldn't happen, Handy; so it's a waste of time to talk about it," I said. "Archie is a privileged person, and I don't see why we should jib just because he wants to give us some amusement. Why, it'll be worth quids to see him with his valet! It'll be the joke of the term! Anyhow, his pater's arranged it all with the Head, so we can't do anything."

As a matter of fact, I was fairly certain that the Remove, as a whole, was looking forward to the arrival of Phipps. The fellows could see that Archie and his precious manservant would create a lot of amusement.

"Can't do anything, eh?" said Handforth. "Can't we? We can make the life of this chap a misery until he clears out! As soon as Phipps comes, I'm going to punch his nose!"

"And get birched by the Head for your trouble!" said Church. "You seem to forget that Phipps is to be the Head's butler. He'll only look after Archie in his spare time. You can't bash the Head's butler about, my son!"

Handforth grunted.

"I'd forgotten about that!" he growled. "Well, anyway, I think the whole thing's rotten! Archie ought to be boiled in oil for having such fads! A helpless chap of that sort ought to be put in a glass case!"

"I mean to say, frightfully stuffy, and what not!" protested Archie. "Heaps of sorrow, old dear, and all that sort of thing! Kindly accept the cheery old apology; but, as it were, I'm not to blame in the matter. Abso-

lutely! You laddies have always done things for yourselves, but I've been at home under the care of a tutor, and all that sort of piffle. Makes a fellow slack, as it were. But the dawn has arrived. I have emerged, and so forth!"

"Well, let's hope that you drop all these fatheaded ways!" growled Handforth. "I'm a practical chap—always have been. If you were like the other fellows, I'd jolly soon punch your nose! But a chap can't punch a piece of rubbish!"

Archie's monocle dropped out of his eye.

"Well, dash it all, what?" he exclaimed. "Somewhat terse, and all that! Don't you think so? Absolutely!"

I was just about to point out to Handforth that he was unnecessarily insulting when a stranger came in through the gateway, and our attention was transferred to the newcomer.

Handforth, of course, really liked Archie immensely, and he would probably have been very sorry if the genial ass became like the other fellows; and he would be still sorrier if Phipps failed to turn up. But it was just like Edward Oswald to make a fuss. He simply had to be different to everybody else; he couldn't live without arguing. If every fellow in the Remove had insisted that Handforth was handsome, he would possibly have declared himself to be ugly. This was just one of his little ways.

"Hallo! Who's the stranger within the gates?" said Pitt, as he joined our group. "Quite a distinguished-looking chap!"

"By Jove, don't you know!" broke in Archie, adjusting his eyeglass, and staring across the Triangle. "In fact, by Jove, twice! My dear old lads, he has arrived! He has come! To be exact, the one and only is positively on the spot! Cheers by the multitude, and so forth! What-ho! What-ho! What-ho!"

"My only hat!" said Church. "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing, my dear old walnut—absolutely nothing," answered Archie genially. "But kindly cast your vision across the jolly old sward! Observe the priceless chappie who has just trickled into the scene. Phipps, don't you know—Phipps has come amongst us!"

"Phipps!" I exclaimed, with interest. "Oh, so this is the merchant!"

"Absolutely!" replied Archie. "Dear old Phipps! The brainy lad with the good old pantechnicon. Shall we stagger towards him? What about it? Do we move, what?"

Some of the juniors were already advancing towards Phipps, for they were very curious to see what the man was like—having heard such a lot about him. He was rather small, slim, and dressed entirely in black. Quite, sombre, and highly respectable. He was clean-shaven, and his face was as impassive as that of a statue. He looked at us without any visible expression.

"I'll have a jaw with him!" said Handforth, pushing forward. "Hi, leggo! What the dickens——"

"Leave it to Archie," I said, pulling Handforth up. "Phipps is Archie's man—not yours."

Handforth was inclined to be obstinate at first, but I continued to hold him back. And, in the meantime Archie had lounged elegantly forward, and was regarding Phipps up and down in much the same manner as a man looks at a horse he is about to purchase.

"Well, here we are, what?" said Archie, pleasantly.

"Yes, sir," said Phipps.

"On the spot, and all that."

"Yes, sir."

"In other words, we've arrived," said Archie. "That is to say, You've arrived, laddie."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, what about it?" asked Archie. "What about staggering in, and getting down to something? I mean to say, I'm frightfully upside down, and all that kind of rot. Phipps, dear one, it's up to you to make things hum. Absolutely! My life is saved, don't you know."

Phipps didn't blink an eye.

"I have been given to understand, sir, that I am to take on the duties of butler to Dr. Stafford," he said. "I shall, of course, devote a certain portion of my time to you, sir. I trust that will be satisfactory?"

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "Absolutely, and so forth. A chappie mustn't be greedy, and I'm not raising the jolly old objection if you want to flow forth and extend the glad hand to the Head."

Phipps took a firmer hold on his Gladstone bag—which Archie had called a pantechnicon—and made as if to move on.

"With your permission, sir, I will proceed into the house," he said impassively. "I will arrange matters with Dr. Stafford, and report myself for duty later."

"Yes, but that is to say, you're not running away, old lad?" asked Archie, adjusting his monocle. "Deserting duty, and all that sort of rot! I need you, Phipps. You're a perfectly priceless merchant, on the quiet, and I don't mind admitting I'm lost. Positively mislaid, don't you know! I'm like the poor old chappie in the fable, or the proverb—I'm at sea, and all that!"

"Quite so, sir," said Phipps. "I fully understand. But we will soon make that all right, sir."

"Good lad!" exclaimed Archie. "Well, roll off, and see about things. Do the old arranging stuff, and what not."

"Very well, sir."

Phipps moved on, and the juniors looked after him with a certain amount of curiosity. He had scarcely moved a muscle during the whole conversation, and he had spoken in an even, unemotional voice. He walked towards the Head's door quickly, but sedately.

"Well, if a giddy wax dummy could speak, I reckon he'd talk just like Phipps," remarked Pitt. "More like a machine than a man."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "A most peculiar chappie. Well, rather! I've never known him to smile, and if he raised his voice I should faint, and so forth. Phipps is distinctly one of the boys!"

In the meantime Phipps was being ushered into the Head's presence by Tubbs, the pageboy.

Dr. Stafford regarded him with approval. For Phipps had been sent by Col. Glenthorne himself. The Head had mentioned that he was in need of a butler, and the colonel had promptly suggested that Phipps should come.

"I think you understand, Phipps, what your duties will be?" said the Head.

"I think so, sir."

"You will act as my butler, but a certain portion of your time will be devoted to looking after the son of your late master——"

"Begging your pardon, sir, Master Archibald has always been my master during my period of service at Glenthorne Manor," interrupted Phipps. "I was engaged for the sole purpose of looking after Master Archibald. I may add, sir, that Master Archibald fully occupied my time."

"Oh, indeed!" said Dr. Stafford. "Well, I can quite understand that. To begin with, perhaps, I may allow you to devote half your time to Master Glenthorne. But you must try to make him a little less helpless. In time possibly, you may get him to fully understand he does not need a man."

"I will do my best, sir."

"Very well. Tubbs will show you to your quarters," said the Head. "With regard to Master Glenthorne, I will allow you to apportion your time in the way you think best. I'm afraid your duties will be somewhat arduous Phipps, and your spare time will be fully occupied. But, of course, you will receive ample remuneration—since Colonel Glenthorne will pay you special wages in addition to the salary you will receive from the school."

"Yes, sir, thank you, sir," said Phipps. "I am well accustomed to Master Archibald's peculiarities, and I think I shall be able to fit things in admirably. With regard to this evening, sir, will you be requiring my services——"

"Oh, not at all, Phipps—not at all!" interrupted the Head. "You had better devote this evening to Master Glenthorne. I understand there was quite a lot of trouble this morning, just before the colonel visited St. Frank's. Master Archibald is appallingly helpless, I believe."

"Quite, sir," said Phipps. "A most diverting young gentleman, sir, but of a most helpless disposition. In future I will see that he causes no trouble, and I trust that my service will be satisfactory."

Phipps bowed, and a moment later he was outside in the corridor—quite alone. A slight smile appeared on the manservant's hitherto impassive face.

"And now to see about his nibs!" he said.

CHAPTER II.

LOOKING AFTER ARCHIE!

"SOMEWHAT barren, and all that!" observed Archie, waving his hand.

He and Phipps were standing just inside the doorway of Study No. 13, in the Fifth Form Passage. In the rear a crowd of juniors were watching with interest. Archie and his doings formed a splendid source of entertainment to the Remove. And the arrival of Phipps had increased the interest.

"Quite so, sir," said Phipps. "Decidedly barren, sir."

"Oh, rather!" agreed Archie. "In fact, absolutely! I mean to say, barren, as it were, is hardly the word. Hardly the term, and all that kind of rot. Something more expressive is required, what? Bring the old bean into play, Phipps, and suggest something."

"Bare and chilly-looking, sir," suggested Phipps.

"Absolutely!" said Archie.

"I mean to say, what brains! What excellent works in the clock tower, and so forth! You know, Phipps, you're a deucedly heady cove. A perfectly priceless chappie, in fact."

"Not at all, sir," said Phipps.

"Dash it all, don't argue!" exclaimed Archie. "Contradicting the young master, and what not! Fearfully bad form, Phipps."

"I apologise, sir——"

"Absolutely!" interrupted Archie. "That is to say, don't be ridic., old tulip! Don't be prepos.! Well, we're here, don't you know. What about it? What's the idea? What's the jolly old wheeze, as you might say?"

"I fail to understand, sir."

"I mean to say, what's to be done?" asked Archie, waving his hand. "This, as it were, is hardly a place of glory and comfort. Not quite the thing, what? I mean, we've got to get busy. Furniture, don't you know—carpets, rugs, and all that sort of rot."

"Oh, quite so, sir, said Phipps. "I have attended to that, sir."

"The deuce you have!" said Archie, adjusting his monocle, and regarding Phipps with new interest. "Good lad! Excellent cove! I knew you'd turn up a bally old ace, Phipps—that is to say, trumps, don't you know. Well, what about it? The goods and chattels? The fixtures, and all that?"

"They are coming, sir—in fact, they should be here," said Phipps, impassively. "I took the liberty of ordering a large van to collect the furniture out of your own apartment, sir. I thought possibly it would be more comfortable than new stuff. Homely, sir, if you understand."

"Oh, quite!" said Archie. "Absolutely! a sound scheme, Phipps. I might even say, a brainy notion. It requires a fellow with genius to get out a wheeze of that sort."

Teddy Long, of the Remove, pushed his way through the crowd.

"I say, you chaps——" he began.

"Clear off!" exclaimed Pitt. "You're not wanted, my son."

"There's a van outside——"

"A which?"

"Filled with furniture, you know," said Long excitedly. "It's just come into the Triangle, and the carman is inquiring for a chap named Phipps."

"What-ho! What-ho!" said Archie cheerfully. "The old household effects have turned up, what? The heirlooms, and so forth. The fixtures and fittings, and all the appurtenances thereto!"

"Yes, sir," said Phipps. "If you will excuse me, I will go outside and attend to the matter. I would suggest, sir, that you accompany some of the young gentlemen to one of their own studies. In the meantime, I will make your own room comfortable and tidy."

"A splendid idea, old walnut; but there is, as it were, nothing doing," replied Archie firmly. "In fact, absolutely no! Or, in other words, nix. I shall stand by, and do the jolly old superintending stunt. That's me, Phipps, old lad. I'm going to keep the weather eye open, so to speak. You waltz about, and stagger round, and all the rest of it. I'll remain in the offing."

"Very good, sir," said Phipps.

It amused the juniors exceedingly to hear a Removite being spoken to in this way. For a junior to have a man to look after him was not only a novelty at St. Frank's, but absolutely unprecedented.

Study No. 13 was, as I have already mentioned, in the Fifth Form passage, but at the extreme end. The Remove passage was a continuation, and so, to all intents and purposes No. 13 was in the Remove quarters.

It was a fairly big study, and had been empty for some time. The Fifth, unlike the Remove, was not full up, and several studies were unused, and there was plenty of spare room. Nelson Lee, therefore, had placed Archie in an apartment to himself.

Nelson Lee probably realised that Archie would be far better off by himself. Placed in a study with other juniors, trouble would automatically follow, and all possibility of that would be saved by giving Archie a study to himself.

Naturally, Chambers & Co. of the Fifth, had had a good deal to say about the matter. They regarded it as a piece of nerve that a junior should invade their own domain. But all their talk was, of course, merely hot air; for it was by the Housemaster's orders that Archie had been placed in No. 13.

A crowd of fellows gathered out in the Triangle to watch the proceedings. The van which had arrived was a large one, and there were several men with it, and it fairly bulged with luxurious furniture.

"My hat!" said Jack Grey. "Archie's going to be pretty comfy."

"He looks like beating Singleton," said Church. "The Hon. Duggy, in Study N, has had the swellest study so far. Remember the splash he made when he arrived?"

He'll fade away like moonlight before the dawn now that Archie has come," grinned Pitt. "The one-and-only Archie is a power unto himself. He'll shine like the whole giddy solar system."

The Hon. Douglas Singleton chuckled.

"Well, it doesn't affect me," he said genially. "Let him shine. My study's comfortable enough, and I don't want anything better. But it certainly seems that I'm going to be put in the shade now."

I approached the group, and glanced at the school clock.

"Time we were going, you chaps," I said briskly. "Fatty is preparing tea in camp, you know, and if we don't arrive on time he'll demolish the lot. We can't allow Archie to interfere with our schedule."

Handforth nodded.

"That's right," he said. "We've wasted enough time already. Now then, you chaps, 'shun! Form into line, and——"

"Rats!" interrrupted De Valerie. "We're not cadets until we've got our uniforms on. But, talking about tea, reminds me that I'm hungry. Let's buck up."

And, before another ten minutes had elapsed, all the Cadets had taken their departure for the river camp on Willard's Island. Archie, in the meantime, was critically watching the arrival of his furniture.

Phipps remained in Study No. 13. He gave instructions to the men as to the laying of the carpet, the distribution of the furniture, and all the other details. Phipps was a very capable man. He wasted no time, and in a surprisingly short space the previously bare apartment was looking cosy.

A glorious pile carpet covered the floor. A huge, luxurious lounge occupied one wall, a lounge into which one sank in the most peaceful ease. It was covered in some kind of expensive damask, and was supplied with an extraordinary number of cashions.

There were two deep, massive easy-chairs to match. Against one wall stood a gleaming roll-top desk of polished mahogany. A skin rug adorned the front of the fireplace, and the walls were decorated with maps. Archie regarded these latter somewhat critically.

"I mean to say, hardly the thing, what?" he remarked. "Spoils the jolly old landscape, and all that sort of thing. Ruining the bally ship for a ha'porth of black stuff and what not."

"You mean the maps, sir?" asked Phipps.

"Absolutely!"

"Very instructive, sir."

"Oh, rather," said Archie. "Absolutely, old top! Every time. But, don't you think, that is to say—— What I mean is, maps and all that. Unness., what? Hardly suitable?"

"On the contrary, sir, I consider they are most suitable."

"Oh, well, I suppose you know best," said Archie. "I always rely on you, Phipps, old bean. Seems a bally pity, though, to waste such a priceless opportunity. Ripping pictures would look topping here. You know, something decent, with gold frames, and all that king of thing."

"I agree, sir, that framed pictures would be fully in keeping with the furniture," said Phipps. "But at school it is surely better to sacrifice just a little splendour for the sake of instruction."

"Oh, quite," said Archie. "Exactly, and all the rest of it. I agree, Phipps, I positively coincide. Absolutely! I wouldn't think of arguing about the matter. Proceed with the business."

Phipps bowed, and proceeded.

The study was now practically complete, and it was undoubtedly a place of luxury and glorious ease. There wasn't another study in the whole of St. Frank's that could compare

with it for comfort and beauty. The walls, of course, were far from what could be desired. They were distempered, and somewhat blotchy. But there were plenty of maps, and these had the effect of concealing the defects.

It was growing dusk by the time the furniture men took their departure, and the majority of the juniors had strayed off into their own studies to partake of tea. Archie and Phipps were left practically alone.

"Well, everything seems to be running smoothly and rippingly," remarked Archie. "A wonderful chappie, Phipps, that's what you are. You appear, the furniture rolls up, and—zing—here we are! Absolutely fixed, and all that. Wonderful, don't you know."

"I think the room is looking quite satisfactory, sir."

"Oh, better than that!" said Archie. "Rather. And now what about it? What about the old cup of tea? Anything doing?"

"I was about to suggest, sir, that you should attire yourself in a more fitting manner," said Phipps respectfully. "I might mention, sir, begging your pardon, that you do not look quite presentable at present."

Archie looked down at himself in surprise.

"Hardly presentable, and all that. Somewhat terse, what? Rather the limit, don't you think? What's wrong, Phipps? Where do I fail? Point out the jolly old defects, and I'll remedy them.

"Your collar, sir," said Phipps. "Rather crumpled, sir."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Archie. "Crumpled? Not really? I say, you know, this is simply ghastly. I might even say, horrible! Walking about with a crumpled collar, don't you know. Somewhat frightful."

"And your necktie, sir."

"The jolly old cravat," said Archie. "A priceless beauty, what?"

"Quite an excellent tie, sir, but hardly the thing."

"What?"

"Quite the wrong colour, sir," said Phipps firmly.

"Well, dash it all, I selected this myself!" protested Archie. "It's a gem, Phipps, absolutely!"

"I agree, sir," said Phipps. "But, if I may say so, it scarcely matches the suit. And the latter is quite inappropriate for to-day."

"But it's a grey tweed."

"Precisely," said Phipps. "Rather too heavy, if I may make the suggestion, sir. I would prefer the brown serge with the faint stripe. Most effective, sir, and very smart."

"Gadzooks, you're right, Phipps!" declared Archie. "What a brainy lad you are. Here I've been walking about all day in a bally tweed, and what I really needed was a serge. Well, what next? Do we adjourn to the attiring department?"

"I think so, sir," said Phipps. "While we are absent, Tubbs will lay the fire, and I will attend to tea immediately afterwards. I regret that it will be somewhat late, sir, but we can hardly avoid that under the circumstances."

"Don't be so ridic., Phipps," said Archie. "Of course we can't avoid it. Absolutely not! Deucedly lucky to get any tea at all. At the same time, I'm quite ready for a cup of the good old brew. Makes a chappie feel bucked, don't you know. Puts new life into him, and all that. Well, let's stagger upstairs and do the changing stunt. Ghastly bore, and so forth, but I suppose it's got to be done."

And Archie wandered out, followed by Phipps. As soon as they had gone, Tubbs, the pageboy, arrived with sticks and coal and a few other things. He proceeded to light the fire, and by the time Archie returned, a cheerful blaze was burning in the grate, and the atmosphere of the study was warm and cosy. The apartment looked very enticing.

"Ah, this is the stuff, what?" said Archie, as he lounged in. "Decidedly the thing, eh? I've got an idea, Phipps, that things will be deucedly comfortable here. Absolutely. School life for me, don't you know. What-ho, and so forth! Nothing like the bally old schooldays!"

"Quite so, sir," said Phipps, as he followed Archie in.

But whether Phipps really thought "quite so" is a question. This type of school life was very exceptional. Indeed, Archie Winston Derek Glenthorne was undoubtedly the only boy in the United Kingdom who was allowed such extraordinary privileges. And he had only obtained them because of his fearful helplessness, and because his father had practically bullied Dr. Stafford into allowing it.

And, once having started in this way, the thing was going on. The Head had distinctly told Colonel Glenthorne that Archie was having these favours only as a commencement—until he got accustomed to school life. Phipps, in fact, was only a temporary affair.

But these temporary affairs are sometimes inclined to become permanent. And it was quite a certainty that Archie would cling to Phipps as long as ever he could. If the genial ass could have these luxuries, he would certainly make no attempt to cause an alteration.

He was now attired in a perfectly fitting lounge suit of brown serge, with a faint stripe. It was not particularly loud, or extremely cut, but Archie wore it with surprising grace.

Fullwood, of Study A, was a knut; but he looked cheap and tawdry in comparison to the aristocratic Archie. Sir Montie Tregellis-West had previously been the swell of the Ancient House, but Archie was a close rival. Later on, no doubt, he would be compelled to wear Etons. And then he and Sir Montie would probably be just about on a par with one another.

The study was certainly looking very nice indeed. A blazing fire was glowing in the grate, and the exquisite furniture looked enticing and alluring. Archie sank down into one of the easy chairs with a sigh.

"Resting the good old bones, what?" he observed. "How perfectly priceless! Just what I needed, Phipps, old son. And now we'll partake of the tea juice, and so forth. I mean to say, the inner man is calling. In fact, he's making quite a bally fuss! In other words, Phipps, I'm deucedly hungry."

"Very well, sir, I will bring tea at once,"

said Phipps. "I thought you would not care for the meal to be prepared in the room——"

"Oh, rather not!" said Archie, holding up his hand. "Absolutely not, in fact. Frightfully smelly, and all that. Puts a chappie off his appetite, don't you know. Preparing food must be a shocking bore."

"Accordingly, sir, I have arranged to prepare your tea in the butler's pantry," went on Phipps imperturbably. "Unfortunately, there is no bell communicating between this apartment and the pantry."

"I mean to say, no bell?" asked Archie.

"No, sir."

"But that's dashed awkward!"

"Somewhat inconvenient, sir."

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie. "No bell may be impossible, of course, but I will do what I can. You must remember, sir, that we are in a big school now. We're not at home. And there will possibly be one or two inconveniences."

"Well, there you are," said Archie. "A chappie mustn't grumble, what? We must take hard knocks with smiling faces, old tulip. This bell, for example. Frightfully rotten, don't you know."

"I will bring the tea at once, sir, and——"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Stagger away, Phipps. Do the old trot, don't you know. I'm gasping—positively shrivelling."

And the new occupant of Study No. 13 lay back among the cushions, and closed his eyes. Phipps silently retired. Archie was certainly making history in the Remove at St. Frank's.

He swished out two pound notes. Teddy Long seized them with alacrity, and gazed at them with wide open eyes.

don't you know. Somewhat rotten, and all that sort of thing. Well, Phipps, what's to be done? It's up to you to bring the old brain into play. Bells are useful, and what not. Supposing I need you, old son? Supposing I fall into a fit, or something ghastly like that? Am I to die on the door, writhing?"

Phipps didn't move a muscle.

"I do not think such an event will occur, sir," he said. "However, I will attend to the matter as rapidly as possible."

"Excellent lad!"

"I will do my best to have an electric bell fitted up, sir," said Phipps. "Such a thing

CHAPTER III.

VISITORS.

PHIPPS coughed discreetly.

Ten minutes had elapsed, and Phipps had brought the tea—an extremely appetising-looking meal set out on a tray. Phipps knew his business. The bread-and-butter was thin, the cakes were dainty and choice, and the tea was boiling hot. And everything was set out in such a way that it positively gave a fellow an appetite to just look at it.

Phipps coughed again, slightly louder.

And Archie Glenthorne, who was still lounging in the big chair, dreamily opened his eyes, and blinked. Then he gave his head a lazy nod.

"Oh, so there you are, what?" he murmured languidly. "Jolly decent of you to wake me up, old walnut. Thanks in abundance. Yards of gratitude, and so forth. What's the old trouble?"

"Your tea, sir," said Phipps.

"Oh, yes, rather!" said Archie, sitting up. "Tea? The old leafy brew? Absolutely! Just what I need, Phipps—just the very thing the interior was gasping for. Good man—brainy lad!"

"Shall I pour it out for you, sir?" asked Phipps.

"Dash it all, a chappie isn't quite paralytic, don't you know," protested Archie. "I rather think I'm up to wangling the mechanism, and so forth. In other words, Phipps, you can skate back to your own quarters."

"Thank you, sir."

"Oh, by the way!" said Archie, gazing at Phipps through his monocle. "I mean to remark, by the way. Quite so! What about the old bell, Phipps? The signal, as it were? How about if the brew gives out, or the bread-and-butter becomes somewhat scarce? What's to be done?"

"I will return within ten minutes, sir, in case you need further attention," said Phipps. "I trust that will be satisfactory?"

Archie wagged his head wonderingly.

"Absolutely marvellous!" he observed. "Positively staggering, old sport. What a bean; what a mass of machinery! What a brain! How do you think of these things, Phipps? Man alive, it's startling!"

"Nothing, sir, I assure you," said Phipps calmly.

He retired from the study like a ghost. When Phipps walked he moved just like a shadow. Anybody might have thought he was wearing felt slippers, but this was really not the case. You looked up, and he was there; you glanced away, and he was gone.

"Deucedly uncanny," remarked Archie, addressing the teapot. "The man's inhuman, absolutely. No sound—nothing! Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the commotion? What's the sudden earthquake?"

He was in the act of pouring out his tea, and glanced up at the door as a thundering rap sounded upon it. And Archie quite overlooked the fact that the tea was pouring into the sugar basin.

The door opened, and Fatty Little appeared. He couldn't help appearing, as there was such a lot of him. He rolled in, grinning all over his fat face, and looked round with a gasp of wonder.

"Great pancakes!" he exclaimed. "Great frying bloaters!"

Archie shuddered.

"I mean to say—bloaters!" he said faintly. "Dear old lad, have pity on me, don't you know. Bloaters—and tea!"

"Tea?" exclaimed Fatty, looking round. "Oh! So you're just starting?"

"Just about to make the old plunge!" agreed Archie. "Here, I say! I say! This is simply deuced, as it were! A disaster, old tulip! I might even say a catastrophe! Observe the chaos!"

Archie stared helplessly at the tray. Quite a quantity of tea had ruined the appearance of the white tray-cloth, the sugar was soaked, and Archie's teacup contained nothing. Fatty Little grinned.

"You've got a rotten aim!" he said. "But that doesn't matter! Plenty more tea in the pot! By chutney! What a ripping study you've got here! Beats Singleton's to fits! Like the palace of a giddy lord!"

Archie grinned amiably.

"Well, somewhat posh, as you might observe!" he exclaimed. "Rather dinky, what? Makes a chappie feel at home, and all that sort of thing. Prevents him getting dipped, and so forth."

Archie suddenly paused, and looked at Fatty with greater attention. The stout junior was attired in his Cadet uniform. Tea in the camp was over—had been finished for somes time, in fact. And Fatty had come to the school in order to obtain one of two very necessary cooking ingredients from the tuckshop.

"That is to say, now I come to look closely!" said Archie. "Dear old sportsman, am I wrong, or is it true that you are filling that uniform unassisted? I mean to say, padding, and what not——"

"Oh, don't rot!" said Fatty. "I know I'm a size—that's not my fault. A fellow can't help being fat——"

"Oh, absolutely not!" agreed Archie. "Hosts of apologies for commenting on the matter, old tin of fruit! The matter, what? Plenty of it, as you might say. What-ho! A joke, you observe!"

"Blessed if I can see it!" exclaimed Fatty, eyeing the cakes hungrily. "You're having tea, I can see?"

"Rather!" said Archie. "That is, something in that line is about to commence. What about it? Would you care to join in the banquet? How about drawing up the old chair, and partaking?"

"Thanks—rather!" said Fatty Little eagerly.

It was the one thing he had been waiting for. He didn't trouble to draw up a chair, but helped himself to the bread-and-butter at once. Archie was still manipulating the teapot. And he had just succeeded in filling the cup, and adding the milk and sugar, when an expression of dismay came into his eyes.

"Well, dash it all, this is deucedly awkward!" "One cup, don't you know! Puts a chappie in a fix——"

"That's all right," said Fatty, munching away. "I don't want any tea. Not thirsty, anyhow. This is what I wanted—grub! Don't bother about tea for me."

"Oh, good! Absolutely!" said Archie, with relief. "You're quite sure, old sportsman? No thirst, or—— I mean to say! Well, don't you know, the—the—— Now, that's deucedly queer!"

Archie stared at the tray blankly.

"What's queer?" mumbled Fatty.

"Well, the food!" said Archie. "The goo

old fodder! Heaps of it, and all that! I can swear Phipps brought a lot in. I saw it there—piles of it, don't you know! Uncanny, and what not!"

Archie stared at the tray more blankly than ever. It contained no food whatever. Fatty, with his usual lightning-like rapidity, had cleared off everything. He wasn't exactly greedy, but the very sight of food put him in a kind of trance. He didn't even realise that he had taken Archie's meal in its entirety.

"Oh, the grub?" said Fatty. "Yes, there was a bit here—just a mouthful! I thought that was what you'd left!"

"Left!" repeated Archie weakly. "But I mean to say—— Good gadzooks! I take it that you, as it were, destroyed the supplies? In other words, you lifted them, and so forth?"

"That's it," said Fatty. "I thought you'd finished, you know! That's why I cleared away those few crumbs."

Archie opened his mouth, but no sounds came. And just at that moment, fortunately, Phipps glided into the room. A look of intense relief came into Archie's eyes as he noticed the manservant.

"Always on the spot, Phipps, old lad!" he said. "Deucedly queer, the way you trickle in just when you're needed! Supplies have given out, Phipps. Kindly replenish the old festive board!"

"Yes, sir," said Phipps. "Would you care for much?"

"Well, don't you know, I've only smelt the stuff so far!" said Archie. "Deucedly rummy, and all that, but there it is! I should say, there it was! Buzz round, laddie, and save a deserving life!"

Phipps allowed almost a human expression to enter his eyes for a second. He glanced suspiciously at Fatty Little. Then he retired as quietly as he had entered. Archie lay back, and sipped his tea.

"Ah, distinctly the stuff!" he remarked. "As you might say, the cup that cheers, and all that sort of rot! Hallo! Hallo! Going? Trickling forth? Leaving the old home?"

Fatty had risen to his feet, and now he looked somewhat self-conscious.

"Don't want to trouble you, Archie, but there's just a little matter I'd like to touch on," he said hesitatingly. "The fact is, I'm a bit short."

"Dash it all, deceptive appearances, and all that!" said Archie. "But there's plenty of breadth, what? Yards round, and——"

"No, I mean short of cash!"

"Oh, sorrow!" said Archie. "Pray accept the apology, old chestnut!"

"I was wondering if you could—could lend me five bob," exclaimed Fatty, turning red. "I know it's rotten form to borrow off a new chap, but all the other asses are stony! I can't touch any of 'em!"

Archie held up his hand.

"Say no more, old dear," he murmured. "I've gathered what the trouble is. In other words, I've picked up the thread of the merry argument. Delighted, old bean! Anything you like! Pleasure, and all that!"

"Thanks awfully!" said Fatty gratefully.

Archie produced a bulging pocket-book, and opened it.

"Name the figure," he said. "Ten bob? A cheerful old jimmy-o-goblin? Two? Say the word, old thing, and the deed is done, as the chappie says in the play! A fiver——"

"Here, steady!" gasped Fatty, dazzled by so much wealth. "I only need a few bob—five, to be exact!"

"But, dash it all!" said Archie. "I mean to say, what? Five bally old Roberts! Ridic., old lad! Prepos., in fact! A chappie can't buy a pair of bootlaces with five bob! A Jimmy, at least!"

Fatty Little hesitated, and then gripped himself. For a moment he had visions of several magnificent feeds. With a quid he could buy enough to last him quite a time. And Archie seemed only too eager to advance the cash.

But then Fatty realised that he couldn't borrow this money with a clear conscience. Five shillings could be paid back with ease at the end of the week. But a pound! It would consume his pocket-money for a considerable time—and Fatty had sufficient strength of will to resist the temptation. He wasn't the kind of fellow to sponge. When he borrowed, he paid back.

"Jolly good of you, Archie, but—but thanks all the same!" he said. "Five bob will do splendidly. No more, really! I wouldn't bother you at all, but I'm a bit hard up——"

"No bother, my priceless old ducky!" interrupted Archie calmly. "But, really! Simply absurd, and what not! But there you are—five of the best! Solid silver, and all that!"

He produced two half-crowns, and handed them over. Fatty took them, and mumbled his thanks. Then, feeling that he had done fairly well, he retired as quickly as possible from the apartment.

As it happened, Teddy Long was just out in the passage. Fatty did not think this circumstance very suspicious. The fat junior never suspected anybody. But the sneak of the Remove had been curiously near to the keyhole of Study No. 13. And there was an expression of intense excitement on his face.

"I—I say, Fatty!" he exclaimed quickly.

"What's up?" asked Fatty. "What's the excitement——"

"No excitement!" interrupted Teddy Long. "But—but——Hallo! What's that you've got? Cash? Where did you get it from?"

Fatty pocketed the five shillings.

"It's mine, of course!" he replied, turning red. "Great pancakes! You—you inquisitive little rotter! I'll jolly well smash you if you start asking me questions! Clear off!"

Teddy Long dodged away.

"Yah! You've been borrowing!" he yelled. "Getting some tin out of Archie!"

For a moment Fatty Little seemed to be on the point of hurling himself at the other junior. But he realised that Teddy could easily get away, so he didn't trouble himself. He strode off down the passage—and made a beeline for Mrs. Hawk's tuck shop in the Triangle.

Teddy Long remained in the passage. He seemed to be having a bit of a tussle with himself. Finally he pulled himself together, tried to look careless, and opened the door of Archie's study. He swaggered in with ease.

"Hallo, Archie!" he said cheerfully.

The genial ass looked up from the easy chair.

"Hallo! Hallo! What is it? What's the trouble? Where are we?" he exclaimed, regarding Teddy with interest. "Another visitor, what? Make yourself at home, old lad! Take a couple of chairs, and lounge about! Do any old thing you like, don't you know!"

"Thanks, but—but I—I——"

"Exactly!" said Archie. "Absolutely, old top!"

"I—I don't want to bother you——"

"Not at all!" smiled Archie. "No bother whatever! Cheerful company, and so forth. What about a cup of tea or a cake? Sorry—frightfully sorry! No cakes until Phipps arrives——"

"But I don't want any tea," interrupted Long. "I—I've had tea, thanks!"

"Good!" said Archie. "Lucky man! I'm starving!"

"I was just—just wondering if—if you could lend——" Teddy broke off, stuttering. "I mean, I want to borrow some cash!" he blurted out desperately.

"Ah! the old trouble, what?" said Archie calmly. "Deucedly frightful, being short of cash! Must be a horrid sensation—empty feeling, and all that! Never had it myself, you know. The fact is, I've wallowed in the stuff. Got my own little pile, and all that kind of rot!"

"Lucky beggar!" said Teddy Long enviously. "I—I suppose you wouldn't mind advancing me a bit?"

"The old pieces of eight!" said Archie. "Useful things to have knocking about, don't you know."

"Pieces of eight!" repeated Teddy, staring.

"Doubloons, old dear! Dollars, or any old name you like!" said Archie. "In brief, cash. Ripping word, that! Short and sweet, and all the rest of it. Cash! Makes you feel chummy, what?"

"Could—could you lend——"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "How about it? A quid? Anything you like, laddie; I'm not particular. The old wallet is fairly bulging!"

Teddy gulped in order to keep himself calm.

"Well, if—if you could lend me two quid, I'd be awfully obliged!" he said, with an effort, "I—I'll pay it back in a few days, you know. I—I'm expecting a remittance on Saturday—a fiver, perhaps——"

"Don't mensh!" interrupted Archie. "Any old time, old bean! Two quid? Right on the nail! Just watch me! One, two—zing! The jolly old conjuror stunt, and all that!"

He swished out two pound notes and tossed them on the table. Teddy Long seized them with alacrity and gazed at them with wide-open eyes, hardly believing that they could be genuine currency notes.

"Oh!" he gasped. "You're a brick, Archie!"

Without another word, he dodged out of the study and closed the door; and he stood out in the passage, still gazing in a fascinated way at the two notes. Teddy Long had never possessed so much money in all his life. He could hardly believe that he was awake, and he was still staring at them when Hubbard and Merrell and one or two other fellows came along. Teddy tried to put the notes away, but was just too late.

"Hello!" said Hubbard. "Where did you get them from?"

"Which?" said Teddy defiantly. "I didn't get them at all. I—I mean, I haven't got anything! You—you didn't see any notes——"

"Rats!" interrupted Merrell. "You had a couple of quid there just now!"

"I didn't!" gasped Long. "They—they're only pieces of paper!"

"Notes generally are!" said Hubbard.

"I—I mean, a couple of letters," said Long, "that's all! I—I was reading them, you know! I haven't borrowed any money off Archie! I wouldn't dream of it! I'm not the kind of chap to borrow tin!"

The juniors looked at him sharply.

"Oh, so you've been sponging off Archie, have you?" said Hubbard. "Look here, you worm, if you don't tell us the truth, we'll search you and take those notes away! Come on—we want the truth!"

"It's not your business!" said Long defiantly. "I only borrowed a couple of quid off Archie. I'm going to pay him back at the end of the week. My pater's sending me a fiver."

"You awful little liar!" said Hubbard curtly. "More like five bob! You'll be lucky if you get that! And you've borrowed two quid off Archie! You sponging little cad! You'll never pay it back!"

"But, I say," said Merrell, his eyes gleaming, "two quid, you know! From Archie! The chap must be worth pots——"

"He's rolling in it!" said Teddy. "Positively wallowing in it! His notebook's packed with quids; there must be over fifty in it. I've never seen so much money! He'll lend you as much as you like!"

"My only hat!" said Merrell. "I'm on in this! I'm a bit short, and if Archie's so free with his cash, I'll touch him for a bit! I might as well get a fiver while I'm about it. He's a careless bounder, and he'll never ask for it back!"

"That's a bit thick!" protested Hubbard. "Look out, that servant chap's coming!"

Phipps, in fact, had glided along the passage unheard, and he was not seen until he had practically reached the little group of juniors. So far as Phipps was concerned, they didn't exist.

He entered Archie's study and closed the door. Phipps was carrying a tray, and he placed this on the table with his usual stealthy quietness. Archie looked up with a start.

"Ah, here we are!" he said. "The grub has rolled in! Phipps, dear lad, stand by!

Be a sport and remain in the offing, as it were. Allow me to consume the nourishment before the human mountain returns!"

"Yes, sir," said Phipps. "Begging your pardon, sir, there is something I would like to mention."

"Fire away! Unload yourself, laddie!"

"Touching upon the subject of money, sir——"

"What-ho! Cash required?"

"No, sir, not at all!" said Phipps. "I do not think you have ever known me to press you for money, sir. Without wishing to intrude, may I inquire if you have just advanced a certain sum to one of the young gentlemen?"

Archie nodded.

"Absolutely!" he replied. "To be exact, two certain sums. A matter of five bob, Phipps, and another matter of two o-goblins. A mere trifle, old dear! Only too delighted to be of assis.!"

"Quite so, sir," said Phipps. "You have always been most generous, sir. But if you will allow me to make the suggestion, I should strongly advise you to be cautious. I think it is quite necessary, sir."

"I fail to get you, Phipps," said Archie. "The old trend has escaped me."

"I'm afraid the young gentlemen will take advantage of your good nature, sir," said Phipps. "It is quite likely, in fact, that they will come here, one after another, for the sole object of borrowing money. They are young, sir, and thoughtless. They will borrow without thinking of repaying——"

"Don't bother the old brain-box about it, Phipps!" said Archie. "Such mundane matters worry me not! If the dear chappies can't pay back, I don't think I shall go grey with worry!"

"That is quite the wrong view, sir!" said Phipps firmly.

"But, dash it all——"

"You must be stern, sir!"

"By Jove! Stern, don't you know!" said Archie. "Somewhat icy, and all that, what? The cold eye, and so forth? I've got you, Phipps, absolutely! But what's the trouble?"

"At present, sir, there's no trouble; but I'm afraid there will be quite a lot if you do not make yourself firm."

"Good old Phipps! Always on the watch!" said Archie. "The guardian angel, and all that kind of thing! But, my dear old lad, you needn't worry. I may be a chump, but I'm not mean. I detest meanness!"

"Exactly, sir; but there is a great difference between meanness and carefulness," said Phipps. "I suggest sir that you should be careful. Some of the young gentlemen will not hesitate to sponge upon you."

"Sponge!" said Archie. "That's dashed rotten don't you know! A sponger's a frightful bounder—a toad and what not!"

"Quite so sir," said Phipps.

"Then what do you suggest?"

"I advise you to lend no more cash sir."

"But I mean to say——"

"It will be the best policy, sir," said Phipps firmly.

"You really think so?"

"I do, sir."

"You've made up the old mind, and all that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good enough, Phipps; as it were, good enough," said Archie. "I rely upon you, laddie, to dispense the necessary advice; to flow forth the words of wisdom, and what not! Between ourselves, Phipps, you're a brainy cove. I'm a bit lacking in that line—absolutely. Leave it to me, Phipps; leave it to me. You need have no fear. Let the old mind be at rest!"

"Thank you, sir," said Phipps.

He glided out, and noticed that Hubbard and Merrell and the other juniors were still hovering about. Phipps had his back towards them, and he allowed a slight smile to spread over his usually impassive face. He knew Archie, and he was quite certain that there would be distinctly nothing doing.

"Thank goodness, that chap's gone!" said Merrell. "I'll buzz in now and touch Archie for a fiver!"

"A fiver!" protested Hubbard "A bit thick——"

"Watch me," said Merrell. "I'll show you how to do it!"

He entered Study 13, and the other juniors hovered near the door, which was left ajar. Merrell went straight in, and grinned cheerfully at Archie, who was fairly in the middle of his tea.

"Charmed, old lad!" said the new boy. "Frightfully decent of you to look me up. Several furlongs of thanks! Spread yourself, dear boy. Take a snooze on the lounge! Make yourself thoroughly at home. Take a piece of bread-and-butter."

"Thanks all the same, but I'm not hungry," said Merrell. "I was just wondering if you could lend me a fiver, Glenthorne. I'll pay you back at the end of the week, and——"

"The man's got brains," said Archie. "Deucedly queer how he knows these things. Eh? Oh, yes! A fiver? Jolly decent of you to bother me. That is to say, absolutely!"

"Thanks!" said Merrell, holding out his hand.

"I mean to say, somewhat previous, what?" said Archie mildly. "Rather like the chappie who counted his chickens, or something? I'm frightfully afraid, old sportsman, that there is nothing doing. Deucedly awk., and all that. Puts a chappie in a putrid position, as it were. Most uncomf!"

"Nothing doing?" repeated Merrell blankly. "But—but——"

"Phipps was quite firm!" said Archie.

"Phipps!"

"My man, don't you know."

"Of course, he's your man—I know that!" exclaimed Merrell. "But what's he got to do with it? I've asked you to lend me a fiver."

"But Phipps is a brainy cove," said Archie wisely. "He knows, and there you are. I've got to be stern, dear old fruit. The frozen eye, and all that kind of stuff. Nothing doing in the glad hand line."

"Do—do you mean that you can't lend me anything?"

"That, dear laddie, is precisely it!"

"But—but you've just lent Long two quid," said Merrell indignantly. "He's a rotten little sneak! He'll never pay you back! If you can lend him two quid, why can't you lend me a fiver?"

Archie looked uncomfortable.

"I say, it's deucedly beastly, and quite ghastly," he said. "Puts me in a fearful posish. Makes a chappie go hot and cold, and so forth. I'm filled with sorrow, and all that. But it can't be done."

"Why not?"

"I mean to say, Phipps——"

"Is Phipps your master?" roared Merrell.

"Well, dash it all!" said Archie. "That's rather nervy, what? Phipps, my son, is the chappie who dispenses advice. A sound bounder—that's Phipps. I couldn't get along without him. Absolutely not!"

"Are you going to lend me a fiver, or——"

"Exactly," said Archie. "It can't be done, old bean."

"Because Phipps has advised you?"

"Absolutely!"

Merrell gritted his teeth.

"All right, you rotter!" he snapped. "You mean cad! Now I know what you are! Stinking with money, and won't lend a chap a bit of cash when he asks for it. Keep your filthy money—I don't want it!"

And Merrell, boiling with rage and disappointment, stormed out of the room, and closed the door with a crash. Archie adjusted his monocle, gazed at the door, and slowly shook his head.

"What brains!" he murmured. "Phipps, old top, you're a marvel. Absolutely!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE CAVERN OF GOLD.

AND now for something of a more serious nature. I've been dealing pretty fully with the genial Archie, but there are other matters which must be described, and told of in detail. For while Archie was lounging in Study No. 13 at St. Frank's, some rather dramatic events were taking place on Willard's Island.

It was here, of course, that the Cadet camp was situated. There were about thirty of us altogether—all members of the Remove. And we were only there, strictly speaking, because a recent storm had partially wrecked two of the dormitories in the Ancient House. These were now under repair.

Our camp was as comfortable as any camp could possibly be. We were certainly fortunate in our choice, for on Willard's Island there stood the quaint old building known as Willard's Folly. It was built of stone, and looked very much like an ancient castle, with towers and battlements all complete.

It had been put up, many years earlier, by old John Willard, the eccentric gentleman of great wealth who had been quite a character in the district in the past days, long before we ever saw St. Frank's.

The camp had been made right in this building, and in the wettest of weather, there was no fear of us suffering any inconvenience from the elements. We were cosy and snug.

On this particular evening a big camp fire was blazing outside on the wide space in front of the building. And most of the Cadets were grouped round about it, chatting and discussing the events of the day.

But I was in close confab. with Tommy Watson and Sir Montie-Tregellis-West. We were a little apart from the others, and our faces were serious. We were, in fact, discussing an important matter.

"Now, you chaps, we've got to get busy on something," I said. "We've got a good chance now, and we ought to seize it. It's a dead certainty that this treasure of old Willard's really exists. It's not a myth, as we thought it might be. It's an absolute fact."

"It certainly seems to be, dear old boy," said Sir Montie. "But I must admit that I'm a bit puzzled—I am, really. A lot of strange things have been happenin' lately."

"And there'll be some more strange things soon," I said. "Look here, I'd better just go over the facts—and then we shall know where we are. There's nothing like having everything straight and plain. The guv'nor always told me that it's best to get the facts clear."

"But we know most of them," said Watson.

"That doesn't matter—we might just as well know how we stand," I said. "Well, to begin with, the excitement first started when we discovered that old brass-bound box, containing the cipher and the puzzle—relating to Willard's missing gold. The old chap died ten or twelve years ago, and there was a mystery about his fortune—which was never found."

"It's buried somewhere under this island," said Watson.

"It certainly seems like it," I agreed.

"Seems like it. Why, we found piles of quids——"

"Yes, but not enough to represent a fortune," I put in. "And don't interrupt, Tommy—and don't speak too loud. Handforth & Co. are the only chaps who know anything about this treasure. We don't want the whole Cadet Corps to be talking about it just yet. Now, where was I?"

"You were talkin' about the treasure, dear old boy."

"Yes," I said. "Those two bargemen, Captain Niggs and Ben Croke, got wind of the treasure, and tried to pinch the cipher—but the guv'nor was too cute for them. Then they got another chap to help them. And these three rotters are still in the district, waiting for an opportunity to lay their filthy paws on the gold."

"They'll never do it," said Watson.

"They might—unless we're careful," I said grimly. "Then there's something queer about that chap Martin. He's one of the best—as straight as a die—although he's only a protege of the Head's. He's in the Cadet Corps, but he's not really a St. Frank's fellow, in the ordinary way. Niggs & Co. kidnapped him for

some reason, but Nelson Lee managed to dish them."

"Oh, my hat!" said Watson. "This is all stale——"

"Of course it is," I interrupted. "But I'll soon get down to the finish. The last bit of excitement we had was when we went down that mysterious underground tunnel which leads from the old dungeons here to the other end of the island. Remember?"

"Considerin' that it only happened this mornin', dear old boy, I don't very well see how we could forget it!" said Sir Montie mildly. "Begad! An' it really seems days ago. What a frightful lot of things have been happenin' just recently."

"Yes, only this morning," I said thoughtfully, "we went down that tunnel, and down the old steps. And then we found the secret chamber, with a whole pile of sovereigns in it! That's a part of the treasure, anyway. And I believe that we shall find a lot more things if we explore that chamber properly."

"Have you told Mr. Lee about it?" asked Watson.

"No."

"But you said you would."

"I know I did, but I thought it better to leave it for a bit," I said. "I want to discover something really important, and then I'll tell the guv'nor all about it. I'll give him a bit of a surprise. It would be rather ripping if we could locate the real treasure while the guv'nor's still puzzling over that clue to the treasure. I'd like to steal a march on him."

"You'll have a job to do that," said Watson. "I'll bet Mr. Lee knows as much as we do—he's always as keen as mustard, although he pretends not to be. And he's got his eye on Niggs and those other rotters."

"What's all the jaw about here?"

Handforth came up, and joined us. He was "in the know," and we allowed him to enter into the discussion. We couldn't very well do anything else. Handforth had a knack of forcing himself anywhere he liked. And if we refused to put up with him, he would immediately start shouting. And then, of course the whole thing would become public. And we didn't want that.

"Well, I don't believe in jawing," said Handforth. "I'm all for action. Why shouldn't we go and explore this tunnel again, and find the treasure? You can leave it to me, if you like. I'll do it!"

"Thanks all the same, but we'd rather not," I said. "And, talking about action, I've already suggested that we should do some exploring this evening."

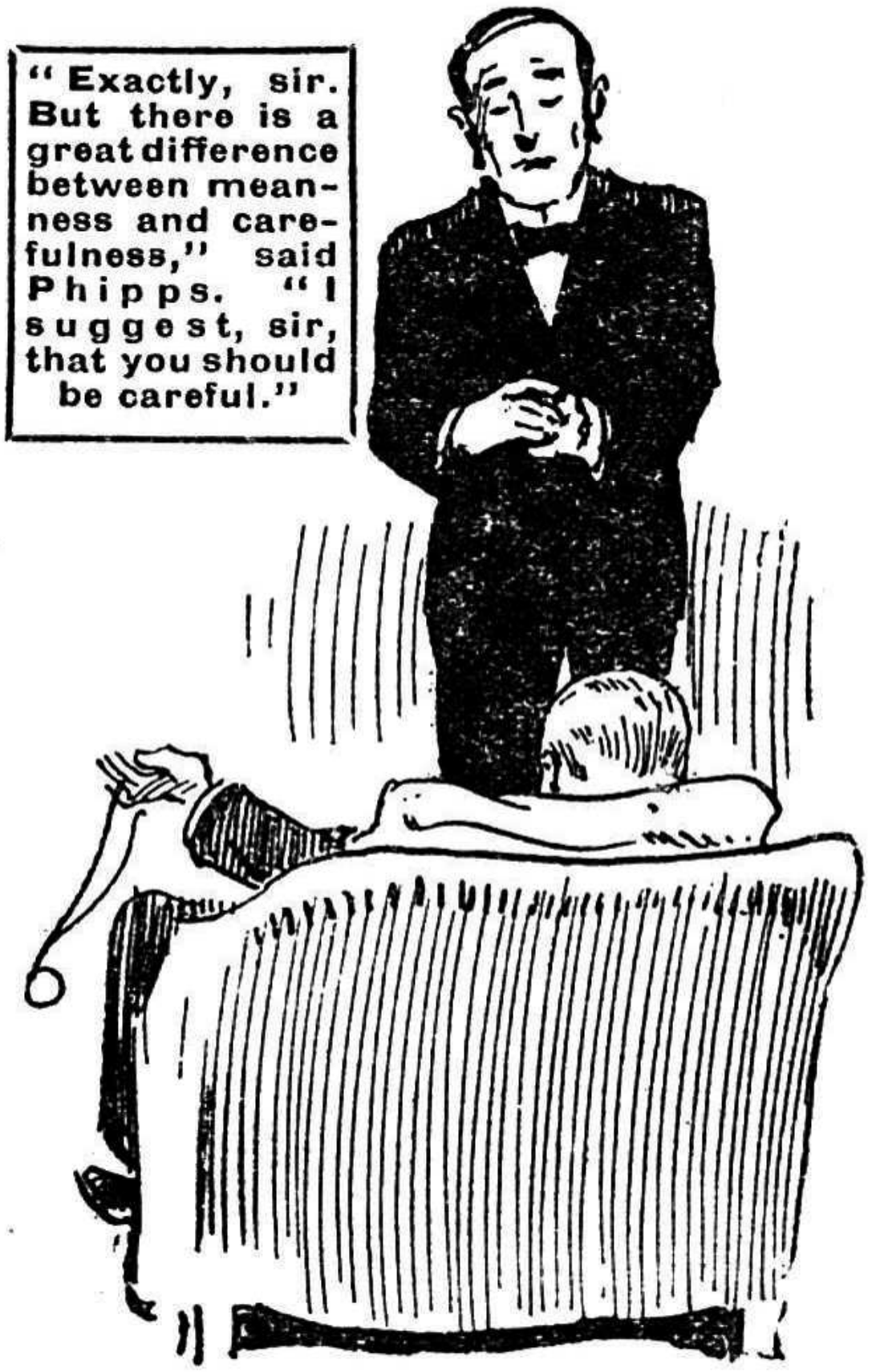
"Why, you rotter, it was my idea!" snorted Handforth.

"All right—have it your own way," I said patiently. "We won't argue. But if we're going, we'd better slip off at once, while the other chaps are round the camp fire. We don't want to start any talk. We shan't be noticed if we buzz away now. Who's coming?"

"All of us, of course," said Tommy Watson.

"Rather, dear boy," agreed Montie.

"Right you are!" I said. "Then let's get a move on."



We walked carelessly away from the vicinity of the fire, and went into the camp. None of the other cadets took much notice of us. There was an hour, at least, before supper would be prepared. At that time, of course, there would be considerable activity. Two or three orderlies would be told off to serve out the food, and help Fatty Little with the cooking. But just at present the Cadets were taking things easy.

We left the old building by means of another door, and then quietly walked round to the rear, and set off towards the top end of the island. The ground was rising, for the centre of the island was a kind of hill, with steep slopes leading down to the water.

On every side of us the River Stowe flowed silently and smoothly on its course. Beyond the water, the countryside lay in deep darkness. The March evening was rather chilly, but quite fine, with just a breeze in the air.

At length we came upon the broken cliff where the secret tunnel started. This was a curious, brick-built passage, which led into the bowels of the earth, and right beneath the island. Its very existence was not generally known, and we had kept our exploration quiet.

"Well, here we are!" said Handforth. "Who's going in first?"

"No need to speak so loud," I said softly. "We don't know who's listening, Handy. Niggs and his pals may be on the watch——"

"Rot!" said Edward Oswald. "And what does it matter if they are? I'm not afraid of those rotters! I wish they were here—I'd jolly soon show them the shape of my fist!"

I groaned inwardly.

"Oh, what's the good of bringing a fathead like you on a trip of this sort?" I growled. "We've got to be careful, Handy. You don't seem to realise how important it is to keep everything quiet. Now, look here. I'll go first, because I've got an electric torch. You chaps come behind in single file."

"I want to go first!" said Handforth. "Leave it to me——"

"You're not going first!" I interrupted grimly. "Look here, Handy, I'm leading this exploring expedition, and if you start any of your nonsense, I'll chuck up the thing altogether."

"You ass!" said Handforth. "If you do that, I'll go down the tunnel myself! I don't care about you chaps after all, it's only jealousy. Just because I'm the finest leader in the Remove you all conspire against me to shove me aside! All right! I don't care! Do as you blessed well like!"

I didn't argue. I led the way into the tunnel, and for the first ten or twelve feet we stumbled on in pitch blackness. I didn't want to flash on my torch until we were well inside—for the light could have been seen right across the meadows.

I touched the switch, and the bright beam of light gleamed out. There was no danger now. The sudden illumination was quite dazzling after the intense blackness. And we could see the quaint old stone tunnel stretching away ahead, with its arched roof and uneven floor. But it was quite dry, and the air was pure enough, although somewhat musty.

We progressed in single file. This, indeed, was the only way in which we could go, as the tunnel was so narrow that I am doubtful if a fellow like Fatty Little could negotiate it—unless he went sideways.

Handforth brought up the rear. He explained that this, after all, was the best position for him, as he would be able to deal with any enemies who happened to creep up from behind.

Handforth was always on the lookout for a scrap, and he was probably quite disappointed because no enemies appeared. We had the tunnel absolutely to ourselves. It was as quiet as the catacombs down there. After a while the tunnel sloped, and then we commenced the downward descent of a flight of steep, roughly made steps. It was really a continuation of the passage, leading right down into the bowels of the earth.

Tommy Watson and I had been down here before, and we had discovered the secret of a peculiar chamber that was hidden away beneath those very steps. We had only found the secret of it by pure accident. The entrance was most cunningly contrived. It was, in fact, two of the steps themselves, near the bottom of the flight, which were made to go back on a kind of swivel.

There was no secret catch, or anything of that sort. You merely had to heave up the steps, and the opening appeared. Yet it was so perfectly made that a hundred people might have passed up and down the steps twenty times a day for twenty years, without even knowing that a secret entrance existed.

"Well, here we are," I said at last. "I'm going in first, and the chap who comes in the rear had better close the door after him. We might as well be private while we're doing the exploring. There's not much fear of anybody coming down here, but I always believe in taking every precaution."

"I'm blessed if I can see anywhere to get in," said Handforth. "There's no door here, you ass! These steps are as solid as the ground, and the walls—great pip! What the dickens—well, I'm jiggered!"

Handforth fairly gasped as I heaved at the step, and sent it sliding back. Two steps had disappeared in fact, and now a fairly large opening was revealed. When Tommy Watson and I had explored the place earlier, we had been pressed for time, and had been unable to do the job thoroughly.

But now we meant to complete our work. If there was anything further to discover in this old chamber, we should discover it now. And, without waiting for any comment from the others, I worked my way through.

Tommy Watson immediately followed, Sir Montie came after him, and Handforth entered last. By the time Handy wormed through, Sir Montie was holding a handful of gold in his fist, regarding it wonderingly.

"Begad!" he said, in a breathless voice. "Dear old boys, it's real—it is, really! Gold! The good old-fashioned sovereigns! I haven't seen them for years!"

Handforth pushed forward eagerly.

"Lemme look!" he explained. "You're spoofing, you rotters! Well, I'm jiggered! Quids! Real quids!"

In his anxiety to see the gold, the careless Edward Oswald had completely forgotten my strict instructions to close the secret entrance. Perhaps it was partially my fault for not remaining to see—but I had surely considered even Handforth capable of attending to a simple matter like that.

It is trivial details like this which often lead to big developments.

The chamber we were in was not particularly large, and at first sight it seemed quite bare. But, in a kind of recess lay a great loose pile of sovereigns. It seemed as though they had been placed there haphazard—left there for a time, and forgotten. Most of them were discoloured with age. But there was no doubt about their genuineness.

Altogether the pile probably represented about seven or eight thousand pounds. This, of course, was a considerable find—but a mere

nothing compared to the treasure which was supposed to exist. Old John Willard had had the reputation of being immensely rich, but when he had died not a penny of his wealth had been found. And a man with eight thousand pounds cannot be considered particularly wealthy.

I was convinced that the bulk of Willard's treasure was hidden somewhere else. And it was for that reason that we had come down into this old chamber now. I had originally intended telling Nelson Lee about my find, but I finally decided to delay doing so until I had something more startling to relate.

"My only hat!" said Handforth. "Why, this is the treasure! There must be hundreds of thousands here! Look at that great pile—"

"Don't be an ass, Handy!" I interrupted. "There's not such a big amount here, after all. Under ten thousand, in fact. And you can bet your boots that old Willard left a lot more money than that. Now, we're going to explore this giddy old place thoroughly."

"Leave it to me!" said Handforth, promptly.

"Thanks, I'd rather do it myself," I said. "We'll go over the walls thoroughly, and look for any sign of another secret door."

"Wait a minute," said Tommy Watson. "What about this gold? Don't you think we ought to do something with it?"

"When we go out, we'll take it with us," I replied. "It's a bit heavy, but we can easily carry it, and we'll give it into the guv'nor's charge. He'll know the best thing to do with it. But we needn't bother about that now."

Before leaving the recess, I satisfied myself that there was no hidden door at the back of it. I thought possibly that this was the secret, and that a certain proportion of the treasure had been accidentally left outside.

But, after spending ten or fifteen minutes on that particular spot, I came to the conclusion that the wall was absolutely solid. I knew, of course, that I might be mistaken. It is always easy to make bloomers of that kind in these old places. The most solid part of the wall is possibly the very spot where an entrance exists. The men who contrive these things do so with the deliberate intention of putting any possible searchers off the track.

I was still examining the wall, when Sir Montie uttered an exclamation. He was almost in the middle of the chamber, and he was gazing down at the floor.

"Just a minute, dear old boy," he said. "This looks queer to me. There might be somethin' in it, you know. Shockin'ly obvious, begad, but I think we ought to have a close look at it."

"Don't be an ass!" said Handforth. "There can't be anything in the floor!"

I turned round, and went to Sir Montie's side. The floor was composed of big stone slabs, and it had evidently been placed down very thoroughly. It was not merely rough earth, or rock. The floor had been laid with great care.

And, looking down, I could see that this particular slab that Montie had directed my attention to, was not quite so tightly fixed in as the others. Indeed, it seemed to be fairly loose. I also noticed that it was smaller.

"Yes, this looks a bit rummy," I said. "Seems to be just as solid as the rest, though—although we can't judge by that. We'll soon find out if it's anything."

I had come well prepared, and I took a cold chisel from my pocket. And, with this, I commenced to prise at the stone slab. Almost at the first touch it moved slightly. And, within a couple of minutes, we managed to raise it up.

We expected to find solid ground beneath.

But, when we had got the slab laid back, a black cavity yawned at our feet—an abyss like a well.

"My only topper!" breathed Watson. "What—what is it?"

"Nothing much!" said Handforth. "Looks like a well, and I expect there's only water at the bottom of it."

I went down on my hands and knees, and bent low over the opening. Then I flashed my electric torch down into the depths. When I looked up, my face was flushed, and there was a gleam of excitement in my eyes.

"My sons, this is it!" I said tensely.

"Begad!"

"What do you mean—it?" asked Handforth.

"This must be the entrance to the real treasure chamber," I said. "We were looking for something that was hidden and obscure. Yet the thing was obvious all the time. I can understand it now."

"Why?"

"Because old Willard evidently thought that the other entrance was cunningly enough concealed," I replied. "This one didn't matter so much. Anyway, we don't need to waste any further time."

"But how do you know it's the entrance?" asked Watson, excitedly.

"Look here!"

I moved aside a bit, and the others gazed down. With the light shining squarely down the shaft, it could be seen that it was not merely a well, but a square pit, built of brick, down one wall of which ran a ladder. It was not a particularly strong ladder, and it was made of iron, and looked rusty with age.

"My goodness!" said Watson. "I—I don't think I should care much about going down there, you know. It looks mysterious, and pretty awful. Don't you think we'd better wait until Mr. Lee——"

"Not likely!" said Handforth. "We'll explore the place ourselves. If you're afraid, Watson, you can stay behind."

"I'm not afraid!" roared Tommy, indignantly.

Handforth pushed forward as though to descend the shaft, but I held him back.

"There's no hurry," I said. "The air may not be pure, and we can't afford to take any risks!"

"It's safe enough——"

"My dear chap, don't be an ass!" I said. "Haven't you ever read about people being killed in wells? The air may be absolutely foul at the bottom of this shaft, and you'd be overcome in a tick. We'll test it first."

"How the dickens can you do that?" asked Handforth, impatiently.

"I'll soon show you," I replied.

I pulled a stump of candle out of my pocket, and a length of string. I tied the candle in such a way that it could be lowered, burning, without scorching the string. Then I lit it, and slowly dropped it down the shaft.

The candle flickered a bit, but did not go out. And I was somewhat surprised to find that the bottom of the shaft was reached after the candle had descended about twelve feet. I had expected the descent to be much lower.

The candle reached the bottom, and still burned brightly.

"Good enough!" I said briskly. "We'll go down now."

"Fathead!" said Handforth. "I knew it all the time!"

"It's all very well to be wise—but there's nothing like caution," I replied. "Now, then, I'll go first, and you chaps can follow. What the dickens we shall find down here I don't know, but I've got an idea that it'll be something pretty dramatic."

I lowered myself somewhat gingerly, and tested the ladder before putting my full weight upon it. It seemed to be merely hung by a couple of hooks from the top, and it clattered somewhat as I rested my feet upon it. The sound echoed in a dull, metallic way.

But it seemed quite strong, and I lowered myself down.

The others followed swiftly—they didn't want to be left out of it. Reaching the foot of the shaft, I turned round, and found that a short tunnel lay in front of me. Beyond there was complete darkness.

I strode cautiously forward, and soon emerged into a great cavern—and this, as I noticed at the very outset, was not a man-built affair. It was a natural cavity in the earth—a curious rock formation which had probably been there for centuries and centuries.

"Come on, you chaps!" I said tensely.

I started. About twenty voices thudded down upon my ears, and every voice said "you chaps." It was the echo, or a multiplication of echoes which came from all sides of the cavern. The effect was uncanny.

The other fellows joined me. And now I flashed my light up and down, and in every direction. My first impression that the cavern was a huge one proved to be wrong. For, in reality, it was somewhat small.

The roof was about twelve feet above our heads, sloping down in irregular walls to the floor. But what interested us most of all were the contents of the place. Right in front of us lay a number of strange-looking objects.

Everything was smothered with dust, and it was obvious that nothing had been touched for many years. On one side stood a large thing consisting of wheels and cogs and metal rods and bars.

It was some kind of a machine, but a machine such as I had never seen before. A little further along stood a charcoal furnace. This is what I took it to be at first, but I was possibly mistaken. The furnace was of a much more intricate pattern—a high-power affair capable of attaining stupendous heat.

And there, on a kind of long bench, stood large numbers of great bottles, containing coloured liquids—obviously chemicals. What could it mean? What were these chemicals doing here?

"Why, the place seems to be a laboratory, or something of that kind!" I exclaimed. "I never expected anything like this! It's positively extraordinary. What on earth could old Willard have done down here?"

"Goodness knows!" said Watson.

"By George!" exclaimed Handforth, suddenly. "By George! I've got it—I've absolutely hit it! Now, don't you chaps say afterwards that you guessed the thing first! I've solved the mystery!"

"Let's hear what it is!" I interrupted.

"Why, old Willard was a coiner!" said Handforth, triumphantly.

"What?"

"A coiner!"

"Begad!"

"Don't be an ass, Handy——"

"All right—wait and see!" said Handforth, knowingly. "All this machinery—a cavern under the island—coins! Why, all those quids upstairs are fakes! They're counterfeit!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Watson, blankly.

"Don't believe this idiot," I said. "Do you think I don't know a counterfeit coin from the real one? I've seen plenty of duds in my time—the guv'nor and I have rounded up more than one coiners' gang. There's nothing counterfeit about those coins in the upper chamber. Handy, you've made a bloomer. As usual, you've jumped to a wrong conclusion."

Handforth glared.

"Rot!" he exclaimed. "You'll find I'm right, in the end! Old Willard was a coiner! How else can you explain all this machinery?"

"It could be explained in twenty different ways," I replied. "Probably the old chap was a bit dotty on chemicals, or had some cranky wheeze of his own. These eccentric men often have wild ideas like that, and spend a fortune over nothing. But there's no reason why we should argue about the matter. Let's have another look round."

"That's the idea!" said Tommy Watson. "We mustn't waste too much time—we've got to get back. The fellows will probably be wondering what's become of us."

I flashed the light from my torch round the uneven rock-walls. And then, abruptly, I brought the light into steady play on some wide shelves which practically filled up the deepest corner of the cavern.

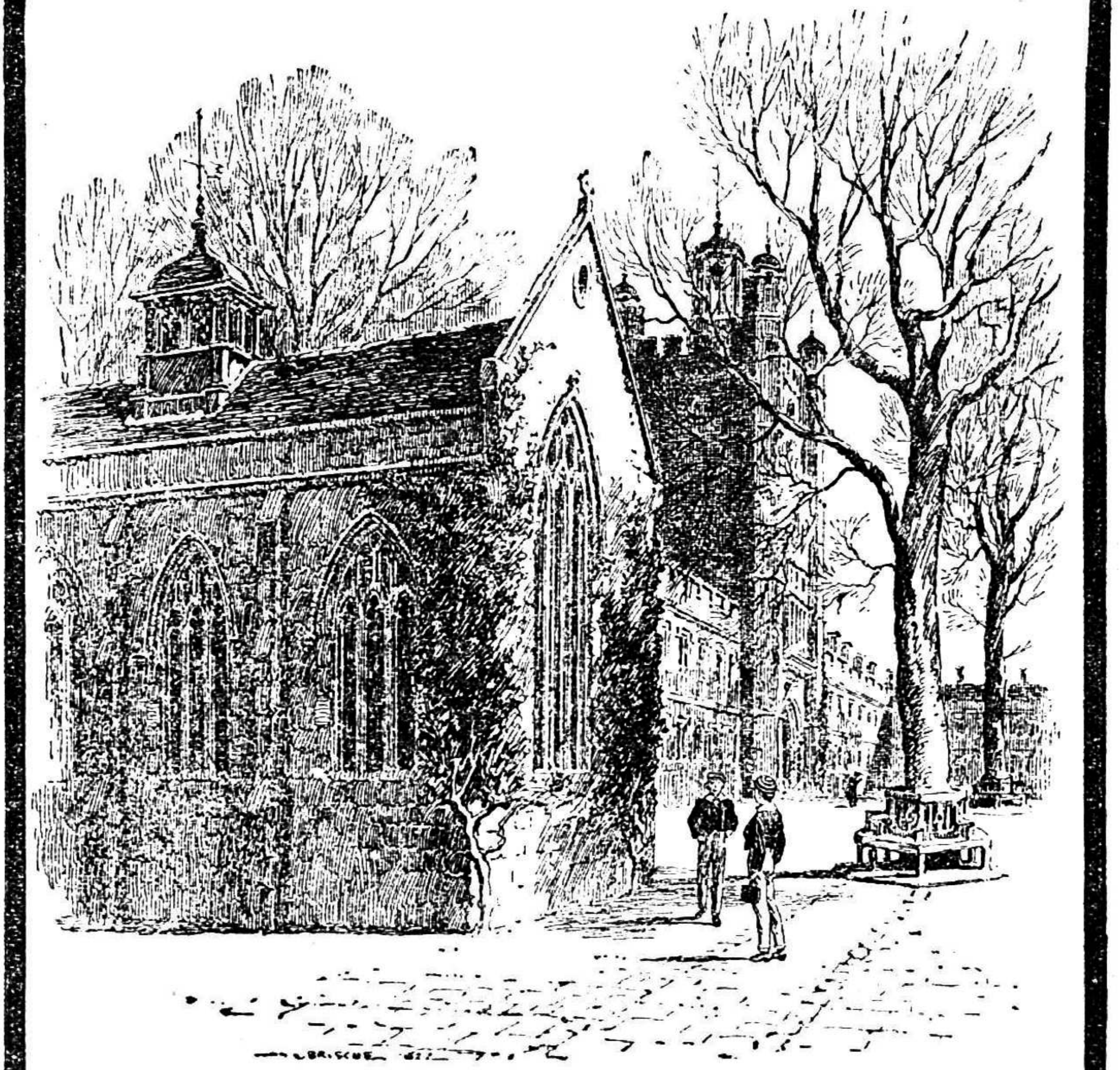
These shelves were made of solid slabs of stone, and were very deep. There were three or four of them, rising upwards nearly to the cavern roof. And they were filled—packed, in fact—with large quantities of dull metal bars. Each bar was about a foot long, and an inch square. They looked like chopped-up railings, at first sight.

(*Continued on page 25.*)

THE "BAD BOY'S" DIARY BEGINS THIS WEEK!

NIPPER'S MAGAZINE

No. 17. THE JOURNAL OF THE REMOVE OF ST. FRANK'S Edited by Nipper. March 18, 1922.



The Chapel, St. Frank's College

(With Ancient House & Clock Tower in background.)

The Bad Boy's Diary

HOW HE BEGAN IT.

I WAS ate years ole yesterday, an' mamma she says to me:

"Georgie, wot would you like for a burthday present?"

So I said a "diry," cause all my growed-up sisters keep a diry, an' I thought it would be about the figger. So mamma she got me one. I wanted to begin it all rite, so I stole up to Lily's room to copy suthin out o' hern; but she keeps it locked up in her writing-desk, an' I had a offal time getting a key that would fit. At last I found one, an' set down when Lil was out a calling, an' copied oph a page good as I could.

I've got three sisters what all keepes their dirys an' writes into 'em every night after their hair is took oph an' put in the buro drawer, 'xcept what is put in crimps. So to-nite Mister Wilyem Smith he come to see Lil, like he does most every evening, a big, ugly ole bashlor that my sisters makes fun of behind his back, an' I was in the parlor with my diry in my hand, an' he ast me wot I got, an' give me sum candy, an' I showed him my diry, an' he red this out loud to Lil and Bess, which was in the room all fixed up to fits:

"I wish that stupid ole Bill Smith would keep hisself at home. He came agen Sunday night. I never, never, never never shall like him one bit, but mother says he's wrich an' I must accept him if he offers. Oh, how crewel it is to make me practis such dooplicity! It seems as if my heart would brake. What awful grate big red hands he's got an' can't talk about nothin' but how many houses he owns, an' his cravats is in retched taste. I wish he'd stay away an' done with it. He tried to kiss me when he was goin' Sunday night, but I'd just as soon have a lobster kiss me. Oh! he is so different from my sweet, sweet Montague De Jones. Wot a pity Montague is a poor clerk! I can not baro this misery much longer. Montague is jellus an' reproaches me biterly. Oh, wot a fraud this life is! I'm wery of it."

Lil she was a screechin' an' a tryin' to snatch it all the time, but Mr. Smith he

Lil, she was a-screechin' an' tryin' to snatch it all the time.

held it up high, an' red it all; then he sed to me wot made you rite such stuff? I sed it wasn't stuff—I got it out of my sister Lily's diry, an' I gess she knew enuff to keep one, an' he took his hat an' went, and Bess she sez to me:

"Now you've done it, George Hackett!"

Lil made a grab at me, but I dodged an' run.

I never see such a boy as I am for gettin' into scrapes. The hull family is down on me, an' say I've spiled the match an' lost 'em a hundred thousand, but I can't see how I am to blame for jest takin' a few lines out of Lily's diary.

One thing is sure—the rest o' this book will be my own composishun good or bad. I'm disgusted with the fool-stuff in them girls' dirys.

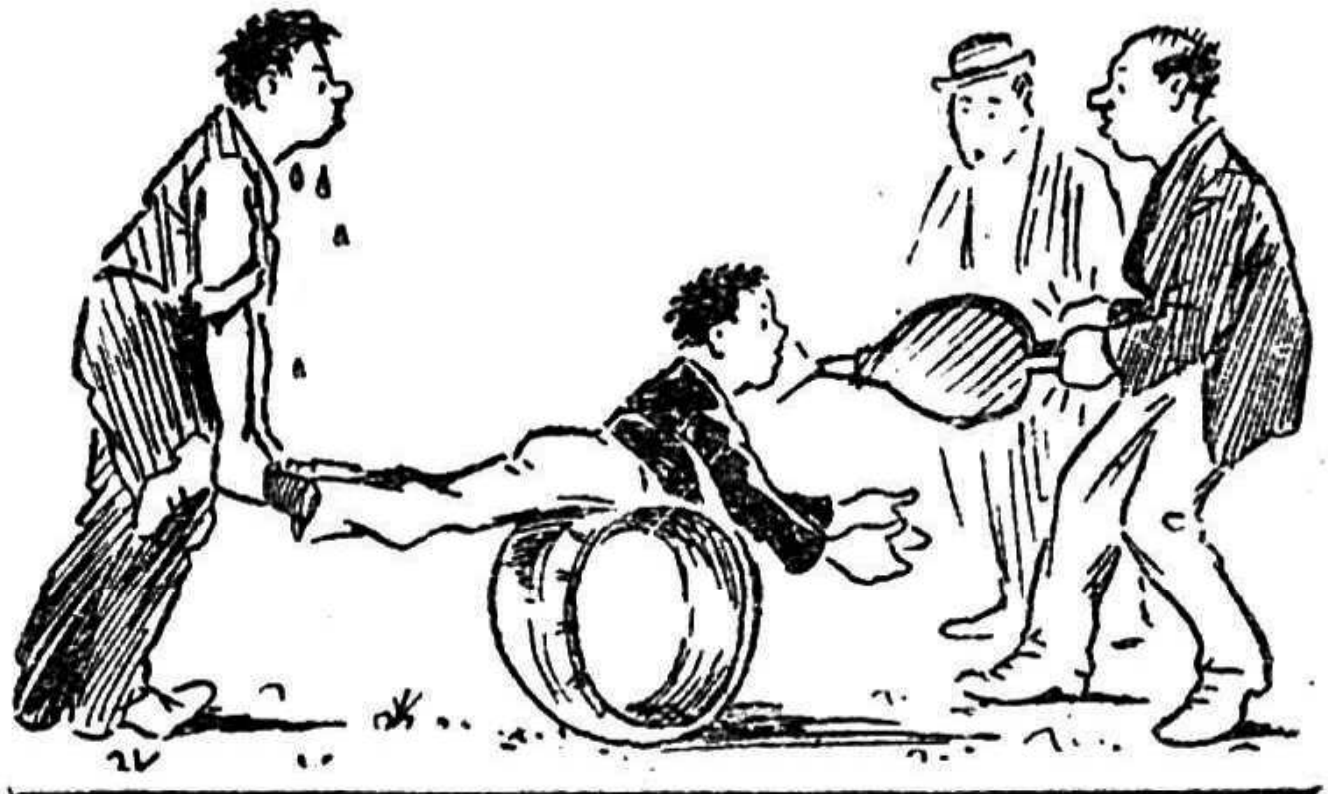
There was such a row at home 'bout it to-day I didn't seem to want my dinner so I went fishing.

After a bit I got a bite, an' I leaned over too far an' fell in. You oughter seen me go over that dam an' shoot into the mill an go right over the wheel, but it wa'n't until after I got into the shute that I thought I guess they'd be sorry, now they'd never have Georgie to scold no more. I don't know what I think wen they got me out, coz I was drowned dead as a door-nale but they rolled me on a barel, an' blowed into my inside with a bellows, an' I come to an' ast 'em if they'd saved my fishing-rod.

I don't know wot made mamma cry wen they brought me home, coz I was all right then, an' I told her so. I was awful glad I fell in, coz they got over bein' mad at me.

Lil made me some real good toaste an' tea, an' 'bout dark they all went down to supper an' left me rapped up in blankets that I thought I should smother, so I got up an' put on my best sute—my other one was gettin' dry. I betted they'd scold me for gettin' up, an' I crawled down into the parlor, an' got behind the curtains of the bay winder.

I was that tired I fell asleep, an' wen I woken up I heard voices, an' I made out 'twas Susan an' her bow a settin' together on the sofy. Bess she was rattling away at the peano t'other end o' the room. Lil was upstairs, 'cause she knew Mr. Wilyem Smith wouldn't come no more.



They rolled me on a barel, an' blowed into my inside with a bellows.

"We'll haf to wate," says he, "at leste a year. Old Docktor Bradley wants a younger man to do the ridin', an' he's promised to take me in as pardner this fall. Can you wate for me, my darlin'? You'll haf to half lots of pashunts," sez he.

"An' so will you," says Sue, and then they laughed.

"We'd better kepe it a profound secret for the present," sez he.

"Yes," sez she, "of course. It's the best policy to kepe long engadgements secret, suthin' mite happen, you know."

And then she jumped up as if she was shot, an' run acrost the room, an' set down in a chair jist in time, for some folks come in, and then some more. Everybody wanted to know how poor little Georgie was, an' then mama came in an' said I'd run away—she was awful 'fraid I was dellerius out of my head, my brane might be effected. So I jest gave them curtains a whop, an' jumped right out as if I was a playin' leap-frog, an' the way they hollered would a made you laught.

"Oh, Georgie, Georgie!" groaned poor mama. "You'll be the deth of me, I know you will."

"Were you in the bay-winder all the time?" ast Sue, a turnin' red an' pale.

"You bet," sez I; an' then I wunk at her an' wunk at him. "I knowed honesty was the best policy," I begun; "but wot makes it the best policy not to let on when your engaged, lik you was a talkin' about?"

Then Sue she yerked me out o' the room, an' jis as we got to the door I hollered:

"Let go my arm! I'll go without bein' grabbed. Say, Sue, I wonder wot made

you hop off the sofy when those folks rung the bell? Did Docktor Moore——"

But she put her hand right over my mouth and slammed the door.

"I have as good a mind as ever I had to eat to whip you, Georgie!" she sez, beginning to cry. "You have let the cat out of the bag, you horid, horid boy!"

"Wot cat?" ast I.

"Docktor Moore will never forgive you"—sobbin' as if she'd dropped her only stick o' candy in the well. "We didn't want a sole to dreme of it for the next six months."

"Ime sorry I did it, sis," sez I. "I'll never do it agane if you'll stop blubberin'. What did I do, anyhow? If I'd a knowed he was so easy fritened I wouldn't a jumped out so sudden for the world. I wouldn't marry a feller wots so 'fraid o' things. He might get scart into a fit some time if he saw a white sheet on the close-line in the night. I don't believe in gosts, do you?"

By that mamma she came an' took me up to bed agane, an' tole Betty, the chamber-made, to stay by me till I fell aslepe, an' I got Betty to write this in my diry for me, cause I felt so tired and sleepy

Betty's bow's got red hair and a crost eye. I peked through the ary winder onest, and seen him kepe one eye on the cook—that's ill-tempered as she can be—an' one on Betty, an' I wished I had crost eyes, so I could keep one on my book, an' one on Tommy Fuller wen he puts pins in the schollars' seats.

Crost eyes would be the convinyuntest things fur boys that have to go to school. Betty yawns like the top of her head would fall off. So I must close.

So I jist gave them curtins a whop, an' jumped right out.

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,—What do you think of the first instalment of the "Bad Boy's Diary?" Drop me a postcard and let me have your opinions. Next week's extract will be entitled "The Photographs," and will be quite as funny as the one you have just read.

Very reluctantly I have had to hold over Archie's "Impressions" this week, but I hope to be able to include them in our next issue. "Cunning Carl, the Coiner King" will be Handforth's forthcoming Trackett Grim story. Handforth assures me solemnly that these yarns of his are all true to life, and that Trackett Grim is really a character study of himself, while Splinter is intended to be me. Apart from their merit as detective stories—and the less said about that, the better—no one but their author (modest fellow!) will deny that they are decidedly humorous.

Our pen and ink drawings of St. Frank's would be sadly incomplete without a view of the Big Hall, for here we have memories of great occasions, the place of assembly of the whole school. A magnificent interior impression of Big Hall will appear on next week's cover of the Mag. Do not miss it, my chums!

Always yours,
NIPPER (The Editor).

SCHOOLBOY HOWLERS.

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

A Youthful Artist.

As is well-known, schoolboys are much given to making drawings of animals —horses, donkeys, etc.—on their slates or exercise paper. Sometimes, to prevent any possibility of anyone mistaking what the picture represents, the young artist will write underneath, "This is a horse," or donkey, etc.

A schoolmaster sends me the following story in this connection :—

A lad had drawn a very indifferent representation of a cow on his paper; though it was the best the young artist could do. Presently, he showed the drawing to one of his schoolfellows.

"Hallo! what do you call that?" the lad asked.

"A cow of course," replied the little artist.

"A cow?" cried his mate, "well, I never seed a cow like that before!"

"Who said you had?" retorted the lad. "*You've* not seed all the cows in the world, have yer?"

* * *

That Ain't a Fair Sum!

In a certain village school, a new master had been appointed in place of the old dominie who had recently died. In the course of the first morning's session the teacher had occasion to take the third class boys in arithmetic.

"Now, boys," he said, "I shall commence by giving you an easy little problem in multiplication of money. Get out your slates, and take down the sum as I dictate it."

Accordingly the lads drew out their slates from under the desks, spat on them vigorously, rubbed them over with their coat sleeves, and then sat quietly prepared to take down the problem.

"Now, ready," said the master. "The question is, if I can buy nine herrings for a shill——"

"Please, sir," cried out a little urchin in the front row, "please, sir, that ain't a fair sum!"

"You naughty little fellow!" said the master, very angry at the interruption. "What do you mean? Why is it not a fair sum?"

"Why, sir," answered the young urchin "'cos we ain't got up to herrin's yet. Our other master was only doin' marbles and apples!"

* * *

Cold Comparisons.

In an examination-paper on Grammar some adjectives and adverbs were given to be "compared." Amongst them was the adjective *cold;* and one young hopeful compared it thus :—

"Cold, very cold, freezing."

In connection with this same word "cold" a teacher in a private school got a very witty answer from a pupil, though, possibly, the witticism was unconscious.

"Can you tell me the Latin word for *cold?*" the teacher asked.

"No, I'm sorry I can't," replied the pupil, after a pause, "though, sir, I have it at my finger ends."

* * *

Naaman, the Leper.

As a specimen of the naïve and homely way in which children describe Scriptural incidents, I give the following extract from a fourth standard boy's essay on *Naaman the leper.*

"Naaman was healed of the leprosy by Elisha. How Naaman came to know about Elisha was by his little servant girl, and he became captain of the King's army. And Elisha's servant told that he had three friends came, and he said that Elisha would like two shekels of silver. He sent a few men to carry the money, and when he got near, he took it from them and hid it. And his master see him. And he said, Where have you been? And he said no where. And Elisha said Ye shall have Naaman's leprosy. And he went away as white as snow, and his children cought it, and his wife so."

THE PROBLEMS OF TRACKETT GRIM

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

By EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH.

THE CASE OF THE RAJAH'S RIPPING RUBY.

Cutting Off to Calcutta!

TRACKETT GRIM threw the cablegram aside, and reached for the time-table and shipping list. Ten seconds later he turned to Splinter, his faithful assistant. With one hand he beckoned to the lad, and with the other he looked at his watch.

"Come, Splinter!" said the celebrated detective. "We must leave at once. Pack the big trunk, and be ready within two minutes."

"Yes, sir," said Splinter. "Where to, sir?"

"India!" replied Trackett Grim curtly. "Calcutta—and the jungle!"

"An important case, sir?"

"Probably the most important I have ever handled," said Trackett Grim, as he paced up and down his consulting room, smoking rapidly, with brisk strides. "The Rajah of Bomdelhipore has cabled me that his famous ruby has been stolen, and he wants me to recover it. This stone is worth five million quid, and it weighs two and three-quarter pounds. It is said that the radiance from this ruby is so terrific that at night it looks like a bonfire, and illuminates the whole countryside. We have got to get on the track of this priceless ruby, Splinter!"

Into the Jungle!

Several days later, Trackett Grim and Splinter stepped off the boat at Calcutta, and made their way through the throng of coolies to the waiting train of servants which had been sent by the Rajah to meet the liner. It was a magnificent caravan that soon started off into the jungle—a blaze of colour and pomp and majesty, as one would expect for a Rajah.

The caravan itself was a wonderful one, drawn by two huge elephants. It was painted red and blue and gold,

"Welcome to the paleface magician of crime!" exclaimed the rajah. "Heap plenty of truth, O chief of magic!"

with ornamental wheels—far superior to any caravan seen at a circus.

The famous detective was enjoying the novelty of this experience. He had come to India to make his name more celebrated in the annals of crime. Splinter fairly revelled in the wonderful scene.

Through the jungle they went, where snakes lurked, and where man-eating tigers crossed the trail every two or three hundred yards. The sun blazed down with the heat of the tropics, and with pitiless intensity.

Trackett Grim Takes Up the Case.

And then, in a great clearing, the end of the journey was reached. There lay the Indian encampment—the home of the Rajah of Bomdelhipore. The Rajah himself, Chief Twisted Face, came out of his wigwam to welcome the distinguished visitor from far-off England. The Rajah was attired in full war paint, with a superb head-dress of feathers, gay blankets, and silken mocassins.

"Welcome to the paleface magician of crime!" he exclaimed deeply. "Heap plenty much trouble, O Chief of Magic! I have spoken!"

"It is good!" said Trackett Grim. "I am your friend, Chief Crinkled Face! I will recover the great ruby."

"Plenty much jewels if you do!" said the Rajah. "Heap rich man you'll be—with diamonds and pearls by the giddy ton! Get busy on the job, O thou man of mystery and miracles! Thy fame has spread far—heap plenty into the jungle."

Trackett Grim nodded, nudged Splinter, and then started on the case. The famous pair were escorted to the Temple of Buddha by the Rajah and his chief advisors. They entered the sacred building.

The Footprints Through the Jungle

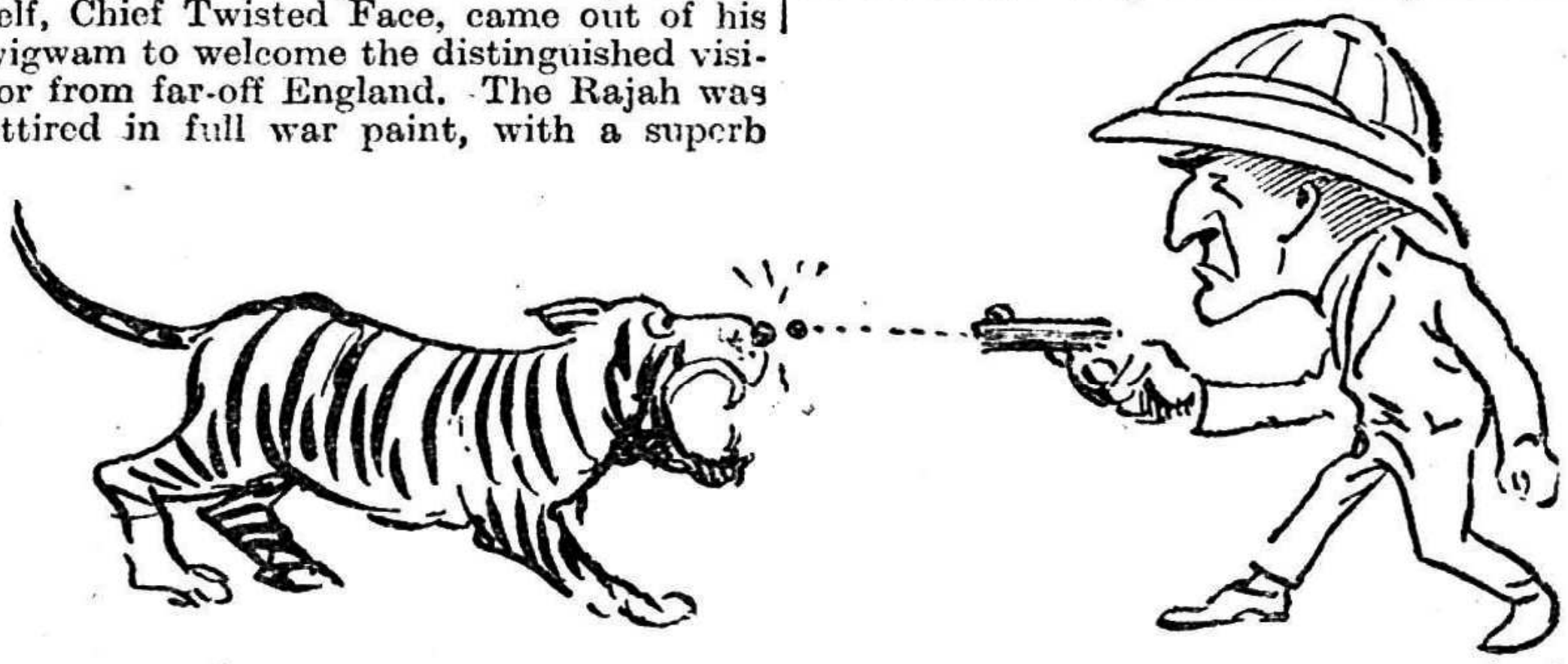
Within, all was magnificent. Incense burned, and the High Priest, Lightning Feet, was hobbling about on crutches, for he was over a hundred and fifty years old. He pointed sadly to the great idol which rose nearly to the roof.

"See!" he cried. "Our great ruby has vanished!"

And he sprang forward with swift strides to indicate his meaning. Trackett Grim could see plainly. The single eye of the great idol was missing. A great gap only remained.

"Leave the case in my hands!" said Trackett Grim. "Come, Splinter!"

Already the keen eyes of the celebrated investigator had spotted some footprints on the floor. They were the footprints of a man with bare toes. And they led straight outside.



Trackett Grim whipped out his revolver and fired a dozen rounds at at the tiger.

"The thief was a man who wore no shoes!" said Trackett Grim curtly.

"How—how do you know, sir?" gasped Splinter, in amazement.

"A simple deduction, my boy," replied his great master. "Your mind is not sufficiently trained to grasp these things, but you will learn. Ah! We go into the jungle. We will soon have our man, Splinter!"

The jungle was dense and impenetrable. The creepers and grasses formed an impassable barrier. Trackett Grim and Splinter strode through grimly, and made excellent progress.

And, all the time, the detective's eyes were on the ground. He was constantly sweeping the horizon with his gaze. The

jungle hemmed them in. Snakes hung from every tree, and wild beasts roared all round.

Then they came to a clearing, and Trackett Grim paused. Without a fault he had been following the footprints. But now there lay ahead a gruesome spectacle. There, bleaching in the sun, which could not penetrate to this depth, lay a pile of human bones.

"Ha!" cried Trackett Grim triumphantly. "A clue, Splinter! The thief was eaten by a tiger! We must alter our search. We must now look for the tiger, and recover the ruby——"

Before Trackett Grim could finish, a great, tawny monster leapt out of a pear tree near by. Only in the nick of time did Trackett Grim dodge. He whipped out his revolver and fired a dozen rounds while the tiger was still in mid-air.

The great animal gave one ghastly roar, and thudded to the ground, and uttered a choking grunt. Something red and brilliant shot out of its mouth, and lay in the grass like a ball of fire.

"The Rajah's ruby!" shouted Trackett Grim. "I was right! Our quest is over!"

The Rajah's Gratitude.

Back through the jungle went Trackett Grim and Splinter. They soon arrived at the Indian encampment, and passed through the wigwams until they came upon Chief Twisted Face. He shouted with joy as he saw the ruby.

And, then and there, he seized it and gave it into the care of Lightning Feet, the Medicine Man. And when Trackett Grim and Splinter set off back to Calcutta, their canoe was filled with precious stones to the gunwale.

They were rich for life, but Trackett Grim declared that this made no difference. He would still continue to hunt criminals and use his marvellous powers for the good of humanity. To such a man as Trackett Grim, idleness was impossible.

WHO'S WHO AT ST. FRANK'S

REMOVE PASSAGE. STUDY L.

NICODEMUS TROTWOOD AND CORNELIUS TROTWOOD.—The twins are the sons of Admiral Trotwood, and both occupants of the same apartment. In appearance, in character and in actions the pair are about the most peculiar couple who have ever entered St. Frank's. The twins are as alike as two peas. Their facial expressions, the peculiarities of their figures, the colour of their hair and eyes, are all precisely the same. They both clothe themselves in the same identical manner, and if any fellow chanced to encounter the pair at the same moment he would not be able to tell one from the other. They are both amazingly thin, and would strike anybody as being all legs and arms.

Both Cornelius and his brother look exceedingly soft, but Nicodemus is by no means a simpleton. He is what is commonly termed a "dark horse." He possesses sufficient wits to be able to deceive anybody whom he may choose with his daft appearance, and in general detective work he has proved himself an exceedingly useful fellow.

Nicodemus has a memory which he has developed to an abnormal degree, and is able to perform wonderful feats with it. He can listen to a long conversation and repeat it practically word for word hours afterwards. In the field of sport, however, Nicodemus has never shone, but he is physically wiry and astonishingly tough, for all that.

Cycling is Nicodemus's chief outdoor pursuit, and he is an ardent stamp-collector. Both Nicodemus and Cornelius have a peculiar manner of speech, reminding one of a human dictionary, but in characteristics and actions no larger contrast could be possible than the one which exists between the twins.

Cornelius is afflicted with an exasperating malady of deafness, a peculiarity which enables the boys to discern which is one or the other of the pair. He is not intellectual in the least, or blessed in any way with such a generous measure of tact and judgment as his brother.

Nicodemus and Cornelius first appeared in "Nelson Lee Library" No. 187, "The Soldier Housemaster," "The Freak of St. Frank's," "Discipline Let Loose," "Under the Heel," "Dr. Stafford's Ordeal," "The Schoolboy Sleuth," "The Colonel's Secret," and "The Treasure of El Safra."

(*Continued from page* 16.)

I went close, and examined them more carefully. They were dull and tarnished, and apparently made of bronze.

"These look rummy things," I said. "It seems that old Willard was planning to make something out of all these brass bars. But they seem so ridiculously short—— Why, great Scott! Phew! What a weight!"

I had lifted one of the bars up, and it was of an enormous weight. At first I thought it fixed to the others; but, with an extra heave, I pulled it away, and held it in my hand.

Then I felt the blood rush to my face with excitement.

"Good Heavens!" I shouted thickly. "It's—it's gold!"

"Gold!"

"Begad!"

"Impossible!"

The juniors crowded round me, trembling with eagerness and incredulity. I shoved the torch into Watson's hands and told him to hold it steady. Then I took out my pocket-knife with quivering fingers, and scratched the surface of the metal bar. And then I knew that I had made no mistake.

"Yes, it's gold—pure gold!" I exclaimed, in an awed voice. "Why, just think! This one bar, an inch square and a foot long! It's worth hundreds of pounds! And there are thousands of these bars packed away on these shelves!"

"Then—then there must be hundreds of thousands of pounds' worth of gold here!" gasped Watson blankly.

"I'll guarantee there's nothing short of half-a-million sterling facing us at this minute," I replied, becoming calm. "Gimme that torch, Tommy. Why, look!" I added, as I flashed the light round. "There are some more stone shelves in that other corner—and they're filled with these ingots, too! My goodness! This gold is worth over a million pounds!"

The others were almost stupefied by the revelation. It was possible, of course, that I had made a big miscalculation in the excitement of the moment. But, however wide I was of the mark, there was not the slightest doubt that the gold in this cavern was worth a fabulous fortune.

Handforth found his voice at last.

"Of course, it's all rot!" he said, trying to speak calmly. "Nipper's an ass! These bars ain't real gold—they're all dud stuff. Old Willard made them with this machinery and chemicals. It couldn't be real gold——"

"Look here, Handy," I interrupted. "It's all genuine—absolutely twenty-two carat! And what does it mean? How in the name of wonder did old Willard get hold of the stuff in the form of ingots? So far as I can see, there's only one explanation. For years and years he hoarded up his money in this cavern, and melted it down from currency into ingots."

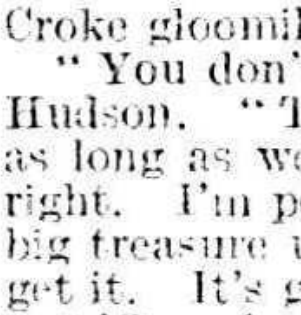
The whole thing was staggering, and it was hardly surprising that we were feeling rather shaky. A doubt crept into my mind for a moment or two. Was Handforth right, after all? Were these ingots made of imitation gold? But, of course, it was impossible. There was nothing wrong about the stuff.

And we still stood there, staring at it, almost too awed by the presence of such wealth to speak.

And then, from above, came a sound—clearly and distinctly.

CHAPTER V.

THE ENEMY MAKES A MOVE.



"THESE 'ere questions needs talkin' over," said Captain Joshua Niggs, taking his pipe from between his uneven teeth. "It's all very well to mess about down 'ere, day arter day, without doin' nothin'. The game ain't worth the durned candle."

"Strike me timbers!" said Mr. Croke. "No more it ain't!"

"'Tain't as if we was workin' to a hend!" went on Captain Niggs. "So far as I can see, we sha'n't get nothin' for our trouble—not even a blamed cent! We're simply wastin' time, an' layin' ourselves open to be run in! When we tried to get 'old o' that kid last time, the young brat slipped away somehow. An' any minit the coppers might come an' pinch us!"

Mr. William Hudson grunted.

"I thought you had more sense, Niggs!" he said gruffly. "There's no evidence against us, and there's no need to be afraid of the police. We're as safe as houses, my friend!"

"'Ouses ain't allus safe!" observed Mr. Croke gloomily.

"You don't need to talk so loud," went on Hudson. "This place isn't any too private, but as long as we keep our voices down we're all right. I'm positively convinced that there's a big treasure under that island—and I mean to get it. It's going to be mine!"

"'Ow about us?" asked Niggs. "Don't we touch none of it?"

"Not if you don't help me—without grumbling all the time!" replied Hudson.

The three men were sitting round the fire in the little private bar parlour of the White Harp Inn, just outside Bellton. It was evening, and the tap room was filled with its usual complement of villagers and agricultural labourers from the labouring district. The chink of glasses and the rough voices of the company came through to the parlour as a dull murmur.

Hudson and his two rascally associates were quite free from eavesdropping. They were talking in low voices, and they were not looking any too cheerful. Success had not been crowning their efforts of late.

"I still reckon that the chief thing is to get hold of the boy," went on Hudson. "They call him Martin, but he's really the son of old Willard—and, strictly speaking, the sole heir to any fortune that may be found. And we've got to remember that these confounded schoolboys are doing their best to locate that treasure. We shall have to look alive if we want to touch it!"

"You an' me can look alive all right, but pore old Ben can't manage it," said Niggs, with a pitying glance at Mr. Croke. "Pore old cuss, he's arf dead—'as bin for the last five year! What I can't understand is why 'e ain't bin in 'is grave for long past——"

"Ben's likely to outlive you, Niggs!" broke in Hudson. "There's no time for you to start any of that nonsense now. We've absolutely got to move—and move quickly. Something must be done this evening."

"Such as what?"

"Well, I've pretty nearly made up my mind to give up all idea of finding the direct clue to that treasure," said Hudson grimly. "That schoolmaster chap at St. Frank's is the fellow who's messing everything up. He's got that jigsaw puzzle—the direct clue. We managed to go for him the other night, but he was too good for us."

"The cap'n ain't strong enough for fightin' nowadays!" said Ben Croke.

"Why, you wizened up lump of sinew!" snapped Captain Niggs. "I could twist you round like you was a bit of rotten string!"

"Don't argue—don't argue!" snapped Hudson. "I never knew such men for wasting time with arguing! We won't try any more tricks with that schoolmaster. We'll go straight down into that old tunnel, and search."

"What's the good of that?" demanded Niggs. "We might be at that game for ten years without findin' nothin'!"

"Yes, but on the other hand, we might be at it for ten minutes and find something!" said Mr. Hudson. "In a game of this sort we've got to take chances—there's nothing certain, anyway."

Niggs and Croke agreed to the proposal. They couldn't very well do anything else. And Hudson himself, although putting forward the suggestion so confidently, had no definite idea of success. It simply meant that the rascals were deciding to adopt the only scheme which was left open to them.

Hudson was particularly anxious to make a swift move. Delay might spell disaster to his plans and hopes. According to his own statement, he was John Martin's uncle—having married old Willard's sister. Thus, if the boy could be got out of the way, Hudson would become the legal heir to the treasure.

Whether Hudson contemplated any serious crime is somewhat questionable. He was certainly a rascal, and quite ready to do something drastic with regard to John. His chief idea, at the moment, was to get hold of the boy, and spirit him away.

But, for this particular evening, there was other work to be done. Hudson was convinced that a treasure existed, and it was extremely galling to hang about, without discovering anything definite.

It was, therefore, a kind of desperate chance that he was taking now. He had no real hope of success. But, as events turned out, his suc-

(Continued on next page.)

cess was a thousand times greater than he had ever dared hope for.

Within five minutes Mr. Hudson left the White Harp, Captain Niggs and Mr. Ben Croke accompanying him. It was quite mild outside, and dull, the sky being overcast. There was no complete darkness, however, for somewhere behind the clouds lay the moon.

It was comparatively early in the evening, so the three conspirators walked without undue haste, in order to avoid attention. Once they were off the road, however, they improved their speed.

Proceeding along the towing-path, they came within sight of Willard's Island in due course. The camp-fire was burning brightly, and the figures of the cadets could be seen moving about in the flickering light.

Hudson & Co. took care not to show themselves along the river bank. They made a slight detour, and then came back to the river at a spot where the willows grew rather densely. Here, tucked away in a little backwater, lay a small rowing-boat. This had been hired from a villager by Mr. Hudson, and it was always kept handy, so as to be ready for instant use.

The three men got in and pushed off; then cautiously they edged out into the centre of the river, and dropped down with the current upon Willard's Island, which was now below them.

They were unaware of the fact that two pairs of eyes watched them for a brief spell. These eyes belonged to Church and McClure of the Remove. The two juniors were not with the other cadets, but had wandered off quite by themselves, and, happening to glance out across the river they saw the boat, and wondered who it belonged to, and what it could be doing there. Then it appeared to sheer off towards the other side of the river.

Church and McClure concluded that the occupants had decided to take the other channel past the island, and thought no more about the matter. They did not know that the boat had grounded on the island at the upper end.

The three men mounted the steep ground until they arrived at the broken cliff which marked the entrance to the secret tunnel. Here they paused for a few moments, and Hudson took out his electric torch. He had bought a new battery, and the lamp was now giving a fairly good light.

He did not switch it on until they were well inside the tunnel, then the beam of light shot out, and they proceeded along in single file, Hudson leading the way.

"Durned if I can see the good of this 'ere," said Captain Niggs gruffly. "I reckon we're on a fool's errand, matey. We've been down here afore, an' there ain't nothin' to see but an old stone chamber at the bottom o' some steps, which is just about as bare as the hinside of a sucked hegg."

"A blamed fool game, that's what it is!" said Mr. Croke, from the rear. "'Taint as as if there was anythin' beyond. There's only a passage what leads to the cellars of that old place where the boys are campin'. An, we can't use that passage, neither, seein' as the door is jammed an' won't open."

"I wish you men wouldn't grumble so much," said Hudson. "I've come down here with a definite object. That treasure's here—somewhere hidden underground. And I mean to search every inch of the place until I can find some clue to it."

Niggs and Croke said no more but followed. The tunnel soon resolved itself into the flight of stone steps, which led steeply downwards further into the depths of the earth.

They descended, and Hudson, in advance, had nearly reached the bottom when he seemed to stumble, and fell headlong. He went down with a nasty jar, but managed to keep hold of the torch which did not go out.

Captain. Niggs, who was following, came to an abrupt halt.

"Infernal steps!" grated Hudson, scrambling up. "I seemed to miss one altogether, and —— Why, what the——"

He broke off, and stared. The light from his torch was playing fully upon a big opening in the stone stairway. It was an opening large enough for a man to pass through. It had certainly not been there before.

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Hudson quickly. "Look here, Niggs! There's an opening here, a hole right through the steps. That's why I stumbled just now. It looks rather queer."

"The whole darned place is crumblin' to bits!" growled Captain Niggs. "If we ain't careful, the roof 'll come crashin' down on top of us."

"Don't be a fool!" said Hudson. "Come and look here."

Niggs and Croke jumped past the gap, and then stared at the opening. It was obvious that this was no accidental collapse. The place was a kind of door, leading to a dark cavity beyond.

One after another the three men crawled through. They found themselves in a bare place where a big slab of stone lay upon the floor. Beside it yawned a black hole leading right down into the earth.

The rascally treasure-hunters had hardly known what to expect, and they had been half hoping that this place would prove to be the treasure-chamber. Its bareness, however, somewhat disappointed them. The feeling was only momentary, however, for their attention was attracted by that yawning hole in the floor. They collected round it curiously.

"By thunder!" exclaimed Hudson. "There's an iron ladder here—leading down! This is the place where the gold is hidden!"

"But somebody's been here first," said Niggs.

"Those boys, I expect, hang 'em!" replied Hudson. "But they haven't had time to touch anything. But I don't believe anybody's been here at all," he added. "I'm certain of it, in fact. I must have hit something on those stairs and caused the door to fly back. I remember hearing a kind of thud."

"Darn my skin, mate, you're right!" breathed Niggs.

And the men concluded, then and there, that they had accidentally stumbled upon the secret, and that they were the only ones who knew it. And while they stood at the top o the shaft complete silence reigned below.

Of course, I was there, and so were Tregellis-West and Watson and Handforth. After hearing that first sound we had become as quiet as mice. We could hear the voices of Hudson & Co. above. The enemy had come.

On the instant I realised that we owed this to Handforth. Like the careless ass he was, he had left the secret door open. It was just like Edward Oswald to ask for trouble.

At the first hint of possible danger I had glanced round, and I could see that there was enough concealment for us behind the big mystery machine which stood in one part of the cavern.

"Don't breathe a word, you chaps!" I hissed. "Not a sound. We can't hope to fight these three men and win; they're as strong as horses, and the game's not worth risking. If they come down we'll slip behind that machine."

Handforth tried to argue, but I wouldn't let him. It would, of course, have been foolhardy in the extreme if we had tempted Fate by offering fight. Even if we got the better of it, the position would be bad, for we should have shown our hand to the enemy, and that was what we wanted to avoid.

Hudson and his companions came down the iron ladder, and then into the cavern.

I had expected them to do so, and they saw no indication that the place was already occupied. My chums and I were all in concealment, and we had left no trace of our late presence.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Hudson as he looked round. "Now we're getting to it, Niggs, now we're nearer the mark. By thunder! These things weren't put down here for nothing!"

"Seems to be a reg'lar workshop," said Captain Niggs. "What the blue Peter are these things, anyway? An' look at them shelves. They're filled with something. Iron bars, by what I can see."

I held my breath, knowing full well what was to come. The three men crossed over, and Hudson picked up one of the bars. There was a tense silence for a few seconds, then the man uttered a wild kind of shout—a shout of hysterical excitement mingled with gloating triumph.

"Gold!" he gasped. "Don't you understand, Niggs? It's gold—gold! Absolutely pure gold! It's the treasure! There's hundreds of thousands of pounds here!"

"Strike me timbers!" panted Mr. Croke faintly.

Captain Niggs was staring with wide-open eyes. The men went off their heads for a time—shouting, swearing, and acting like madmen. The greed of gold had entered their souls, and the sight of so much of the precious yellow metal bereft them of their senses.

But at last they calmed down, and after five minutes or so left the cavern, and ascended the shaft. Their departure brought great relief to us, for we had hardly dared to breathe.

Hudson was deadly calm now, and a light of fierce determination shone in his eyes. His evil mind had been working rapidly, and he had come to a definite conclusion.

"What's the idea?" demanded Niggs hoarsely. "We've got to get that gold out."

"Don't be a fool!" snapped Hudson. "We can't do it now, and there's no hurry. We're the only ones who know about this secret cavern. And, anyway, we can't make a move until the middle of the night. What would happen if we were spotted carting this stuff away in a boat? We've got to make plans, too. We shall have to find a place where we can stow the stuff.

"You're right, mate," said Niggs slowly as he nodded.

"And there's something else," went on Hudson. "We've got to get hold of that boy, John Martin. We're going out of this place now, and we'll grab that kid somehow or other. Shove him down in that cavern, and he'll never be found. It's the one way out of all the trouble."

And then Mr. Hudson did something which fairly "put the lid on it," as Handforth afterwards said. He closed down the great stone slab over the shaft!

Not five minutes later I ascended the shaft, and made this discovery. It filled me with blank dismay. In spite of all my efforts, the slab refused to budge. We were imprisoned in this subterranean cavern!

The disaster was as appalling as it was unexpected.

CHAPTER VI

PHIPPS DOESN'T APPROVE.

STUDY A, in the Remove passage at St. Frank's, was looking cosy.

A bright fire burned in the grate, the air was warm, and Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell were lounging near the fireplace. They had finished their prep., and were just discussing what to do with the remainder of the evening.

"We've got a chance to make a nice bit of cash," said Ralph Leslie Fullwood. "I suppose you heard about Teddy Long? The young cad went into Glenthorne's study, an' borrowed a couple of quid!"

"That's only a yarn!" said Gulliver.

"Rats! It's the truth!" exclaimed Fullwood. "I heard it from Merrell, who tried to touch Archie for a fiver. But that Phipps chap had been jawin', or somethin', an' Archie wouldn't part. But the silly fool is simply wallowin' in cash. He's got a pocket-case fairly stuffed with notes!"

"What's the good of that to us?" asked Bell. "If he won't lend any money, it's no good us tryin' to touch him——"

"Who's suggestin' anythin' of the sort?" interrupted Fullwood. "Look here, Glenthorne's an ass—a hopeless mug! He's a greenhorn, and probably knows as much about Nap or Poker as those giddy fireirons! We've only got to get him in this study, an' we can soon relieve him of some of that wealth!"

"By gad!" said Gulliver. "That's not a bad idea!"

"It's a jolly good idea!" said Fullwood. "I'm going across to arrange it!"

He rose to his feet, and passed out of the study. Going along the passage he soon arrived at No. 13, which was just at the end. Without troubling to tap, he walked in.

The one and only Archie was lounging in front of the fire, with his feet on the mantelpiece, and he was idly turning over the pages of an illustrated weekly. He adjusted his monocle, glanced at Fullwood, and nodded.

"Welcome, old tulip!" he said genially. "Squat down, and all that sort of thing. Don't mind me! Perfectly priceless of you to look me up. Thanks frightfully. Absolutely!"

"That's all right," said Fullwood, seating himself on a corner of the luxurious table. "Thought I'd just drop in, you know. How's things?"

"Oh, better than that!" said Archie. "I mean to say, I'm positively enjoying the life! Well, rather! Deucedly topping, and so forth!"

Fullwood glanced round.

"Yes, you look all right here," he said. "We can't expect to have such luxuries. We ain't all millionaires!"

"Well, dash it all, hardly, don't you know!" said Archie. "Somewhat flush, and all that kind of rot, but scarcely in the millionaire class. The jolly old pater is a decent bird when it comes to shelling out. Absolutely! I've just got to say the word, and out come the jimmy-o'-goblins!"

"Lucky bounder!" said Fullwood. "Well, I just came along to invite you to Study A, Glenthorne. Gulliver an' Bell an' I would rather like it if you popped along for a little social hour. What do you say?"

"Oh, absolutely!" replied Archie. "Just the very idea, old lad! Precisely the business, as you might say. Thanks fearfully for the honour. Makes a chappie feel deucedly important. Social lion, and so forth, what?"

"That's the idea!" said Fullwood. "Shall we make a move?"

Archie looked rather startled.

"I mean to say, so sudden!" he protested. "Must give the old bones a little more rest, you know. Quite ripping of you to be so thoughtful, and what not, but there you are! I'll trickle along anon, dear old walnut!"

"In about five minutes?" asked Fullwood.

"Absolutely!" replied Archie. "Right on the spot, old dear! Return to the fold, as it were, and Archie will stagger in, and do the old social stunt. Well, what about it? All serene?"

"That'll do fine, Archie," said Fullwood. "We'll expect you in about five minutes, then?"

"Good!" said Archie. "I might even say, jolly good! Absolutely! Frightfully sorry to let you go, old top! Toodleoo, and all that kind of thing! Close the jolly old portal, won't you?"

(*Continued on page* 30)

(*Continued from page 29.*)

Fullwood nodded, and passed out, leaving Archie gazing languidly into the fire. Fullwood went down the passage, and was just turning into Study A when he caught sight of Gulliver entering the lobby. He hurried on.

"I say, Gully!" he called. "Where are you off to?"

"Only just upstairs," said Gulliver. "I want to get some cigs out of my box. Sha'n't be long."

Fullwood looked round, and saw that they were alone.

"Well, don't mess things up," he said. "Archie will be along in a few minutes, and we want to clear him out. In fact, you needn't bother about those cigs. I've got plenty."

"Oh, good!" said Gulliver promptly.

They turned back together, and entered Study A. And a silent figure glided out of the cloakroom into the lobby. The figure belonged to Phipps, and there was a very thoughtful expression upon his face.

He had been in the cloakroom, attending to Archie's overcoat, and it was quite by accident that he had overheard the few words between Fullwood and Gulliver. Phipps was not an eavesdropper—but he was quite determined to profit by what he had just heard.

He went along to Study No. 13, tapped discreetly upon the door, and entered. Although his face expressed nothing, he was nevertheless relieved to find that Archie was still there.

"Ah, so here we are, what?" said Archie, rising to his feet. "Just in time, Phipps, old lad! The fact is I'm just about to roll forth and pay a call, as it were. Do the jolly old social stuff, and all that!"

"So I understand, sir," said Phipps.

"I mean to say, so you understand?" said Archie. "Oh, rather! Deucedly queer the way you understand things, Phipps! I knew you were a brainy cove, but I'd be frightfully interested to know how you understand that I'm just starting out to mingle with the dear old lads!"

"The fact is, sir, I chanced to overhear a few words, spoken by two of the young gentlemen," said Phipps. "I should advise you, sir——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Archie, wagging a finger. "What's this, Phipps? What, so to say, is this? Listening, what? Lending the old ear to youthful conversations, and so forth!"

"It was quite accidental, I assure you, sir," said Phipps. "I had no intention of eavesdropping. I simply chanced to overhear——"

"Dear old sportsman, nothing further need be said," interrupted Archie, holding up his hand. "I grasp the idea. I positively get the good old wheeze. Any chappie is liable to overhear a few words spoken by two other chappies. Such things are bound to occur. Absolutely!"

"They are sometimes unavoidable, sir," said Phipps. "I understand that you are thinking about visiting some of the young gentlemen?"

"Absolutely!"

"I trust you will not think that I am presuming, sir, but I should advise you to refrain from going, sir," said Phipps. "I suggest that you should cancel the engagement, sir."

"But, I say, don't you know!" said Archie. "Deucedly bad form, and all that kind of rot! Dash it all, Phipps, a chappie can't go back on his pals. Absolutely not!"

"I do not think the young gentlemen are your friends, sir."

"Eh? What's that? In other words, what's the idea?" asked Archie. "The cheery lads ain't my friends? But, look here, Phipps, you're wrong! You're absolutely off the track! You've side-slipped, and so forth! These chappies are frightfully decent. Sports, and what not!"

"I hardly think so, sir."

"I'm sorry, Phipps, but I must be firm!" said Archie, drawing himself up. "Yes, old lad, I must be quite firm! I mean to say, I've got to show the hand of authority, and all that sort of stuff."

"Nevertheless, sir, I do not approve," said Phipps.

"Good gadzooks! You don't approve?"

"No, sir."

"I mean to say, what the deuce is wrong with you, Phipps?" asked Archie. "You're putting me in a fearfully difficult posish., don't you know. The whole thing's ridic. In fact, it's prepos.!"

"Strictly speaking, sir, it is not my business——"

"Absolutely not!"

"You are your own master, sir——"

"Absolutely not—that is to say, absolutely," said Archie. "My own master? Well, rather! You may be a brainy sort of buffer, Phipps, and your attic may be bulging with the right kind of stuff, but you're distinctly in the shade. No offence, of course. If I decide to hobnob with the lads—well, there you are! I decide! Absolutely!"

Phipps remained as calm as a statue.

"So there you are!" said Archie again, for want of anything else. "That, Phipps, is that! Frightfully rotten, as it were, to tick you off in this way. But it's got to be done. A chappie must be firm now and again!"

"I'm very sorry, sir, if I've caused offence——"

"Not at all!" said Archie quickly. "Why, don't be so frightfully ridic., Phipps."

"Thank you, sir," said Phipps. "At the same time, I repeat that the young gentlemen who have invited you to their study are not the kind of young gentlemen for you to associate with. They are not your friends, sir. You must not go to this little social party."

"What-ho!" said Archie. "Further ticking off required, what? I must not go? Is that it?"

"Yes, sir!"

"You've made up the old mind?"

"I have, sir!"

"But, dash it all, Phipps——"

"I should prefer you not to enter Study A at all, sir!"

Archie looked rather helpless.

"But, I mean to say, what's the idea?" he

asked. "What, to be more precise, is the scheme?"

"I am convinced, sir, that the young gentlemen are after your money," said Phipps respectfully. "They wish to entice you into a game of cards, and then cheat you."

"I say!" protested Archie. "Really, Phipps! I say, you know! Somewhat frightful, and so forth! Cheat, what? Dash it all, rather going the limit, isn't it? These chappies wouldn't do that, Phipps!"

"It is their intention to hoodwink you, sir," said Phipps. "They consider that you are a greenhorn—if you will excuse me, sir, a mug!"

Archie adjusted his monocle, and looked severe.

"A mug!" he repeated. "That's sailing somewhat near the edge, isn't it? Rather perilous ground, and what not! Right-ho, Phipps—absolutely! Right-ho, old lad! It's done! That is to say, it won't be done! You get the idea?"

"I understand, sir, that you won't join these young gentlemen?"

"You've hit it, darling—absolutely!" said Archie, sinking back into his chair. "You've fairly struck it, don't you know. Right on the old mark, and all that sort of business."

"I'm glad, sir."

"Oh, rather!" agreed Archie. "Yards of relief, and so forth. No, Phipps, we won't go. We'll give the lads the go-by! The fact is, Phipps, I always rely on you. You're the dickens of a heady merchant. You know things, as it were. About that ticking off stuff just now. Don't take any notice of it, Phipps. Rub it out. Wipe it off the dashed slate. You catch the scheme, what?"

"Precisely, sir," said Phipps. "Is there anything I can bring you, sir?"

"I mean to say, rather a decent idea, what?" said Archie. "Something to bring me, as it were? Well, rather! A cup of coffee, Phipps, old lad. You know, steaming hot, and all that. In the meantime, I'll drop off into the old dreamless!"

"I think it will be most beneficial, sir," said Phipps.

"Absolutely!" murmured Archie languidly.

"By the way, sir, I should just like to drop a word of warning," went on Phipps. "If you happen to go to the common-room during the evening, I should advise you to be well on your guard."

Archie looked up, and felt for his monocle.

"What's this? What's this?" he exclaimed. "I mean to say, what's this? Be on guard, Phipps? What's the idea? The common-room, don't you know! Deucedly low-down name, what?"

"It is not regarded in that light at St. Frank's, sir," said Phipps. "It simply means that the apartment is for the general use of all the junior boys. I have reason to suspect, sir, that some of the young gentlemen of a frivolous turn of mind have prepared to play a joke on you. You must be careful, sir."

"Good enough!" said Archie firmly. "In fact, good enough! A word, Phipps, is plenty. Absolutely! Just breathe the old whisper, and there you are. I'm alive! I'm all agog,

We expected to find solid ground beneath. But when we got the slab laid back, a black cavity yawned at our feet.

and what not! Leave it to me, Phipps—worry not, sweet one!"

And Archie lay back again, and closed his eyes. When he looked up, a few seconds later, Phipps had mysteriously vanished. Like a shadow he had passed out of the study.

Looking after Archie was something very closely resembling hard work!

CHAPTER VII.

NOT QUITE A SUCCESS!

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD glanced impatiently at his watch.

"The lazy bounder doesn't seem to be coming!" he snapped. "Twenty minutes, an' no sign of him! I've a good mind to fetch the fool!"

"It's about the only way," said Gulliver.

The Nuts of the Remove were waiting in Study A—all prepared to fleece the genial Archie as soon as he turned up. They had the cards handy, plenty of small change, and they were just feeling fit for "a flutter." The playing cards were rather well known to them—they were old friends.

"Yes, that's the best thing!" said Bell, getting to his feet. "Come on! We'll buzz along, and bring the idiot here. Or, I'll tell you what, let's have a game in his study. Then, if we're copped, we'll blame him—say that he enticed us into it."

"Rats!" said Fullwood. "There's no danger. It's a lot better in this study. I've got that mirror fixed up just right!"

They passed out, and burst into Archie Glenthorne's study a minute later. They found the genial ass lounging at the table,

sipping a cup of steaming coffee, and making a pretence of writing a letter.

"What's the meaning of this?" demanded Fullwood. "I thought you were coming into our study, Archie? Have you forgotten?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "I should say, absolutely not!"

"Then why didn't you come?"

"Well, don't you know, a chappie is entitled to change the old mind, what?" he said. "Frightfully sorry, and all that. Hope you won't mind, dear lads. Pray accept a deucedly big apology."

"That's all very well!" said Fullwood. "Come along with us now, and we won't say any more about it. We want to make a fuss of you in our own quarters. Buck up, old son! Get a move on!"

Archie shook his head.

"There is, as it were, nothing doing!" he remarked.

"You're not coming?" demanded Gulliver.

"No," said Archie. "Absolutely not! It can't be managed, old tulip. Sorrow, and what not, but there you are. Phipps was quite firm."

"Phipps!" shouted Fullwood.

"Absolutely!"

"But what's Phipps got to do with it?" asked Fullwood. "He's your man—your servant! You don't let him order you about, do you? Come along with us, Archie, and——"

"But Phipps doesn't approve, laddie—distinctly not!"

"But look here——"

"Sorrow once again, but it can't, as it were, be done!" interrupted Archie calmly. "It puts me in a frightfully difficult posish. Deucedly awk., and all that. Kindly do me a terrific favour by dropping the old subject. Pray allow it to subside."

"You must be mad to take any notice of Phipps!" sneered Fullwood. "He's only a menial—a beastly valet! We want you in Study A. If you don't come, you'll be a rotter."

"Well, I mean to say——"

"A snivellin' cad!" roared Fullwood, disappointed, and enraged by the knowledge that Phipps had intervened. "Do you call yourself a sportsman? Afraid to risk a little cash on a quiet game—— I—I mean, it's beastly off-side to back out of a thing after you've fixed it!"

Archie screwed his eyeglass firmly home.

"An apology has already been bunged across!" he said, with dignity. "That is to say, the apology has been delivered, if you know what I mean. Absolutely sent home. That being so, it's rather priceless for you to do the shouting business. Dear lads, please depart. Be good enough to fade. In other words, don't you know, join the populace elsewhere! Slide into other territory!"

Fullwood & Co. looked at one another, and then glared at Archie. They were keenly disappointed. And, vaguely, they were beginning to understand that Archie was not quite such a mug as he made himself out to be. And to use violent methods with him was impossible. He was such a helpless ass that a fellow simply couldn't lift a finger against him.

"You—you rotten funk!" snapped Fullwood. "Afraid to play a game of cards! You cad! You brainless——"

"I think, sir, that Master Archibald is desirous of resting!"

The voice came from the doorway. Fullwood & Co. swung round, and found that Phipps had entered in his usual noiseless manner The cads of Study A glared at the man ferociously

"Who the dickens told you to interfere?" roared Fullwood.

"Not at all, Phipps—not at all!" put in Archie quickly. "No interference, old tin of fruit! Carry on, laddie. Proceed! I'm most frightfully flustered, don't you know. All messed about, and what not! The old bean, in fact, is buzzing like one of those bally saw mills!"

"Yes, sir," said Phipps. "Now, young gentlemen, will you please be good enough to retire?"

"No, we shan't!" yelled Fullwood. "You clear out, you—you rotten lackey! Who the deuce do you think you are——"

"I regret, sir, that I should annoy you," said Phipps smoothly. "But I am compelled to inform you that you are becoming unnecessarily insolent."

"What-ho!" said Archie, clapping his hands. "The stuff, Phipps, old dear—distinctly the stuff!"

"Insolent!" shouted Fullwood. "Why, you menial——"

"Pardon me, sir, but it will save much trouble if you will depart at once," interrupted the long-suffering Phipps. "It may be my painful duty to report to the Housemaster that you have been attempting to entice Master Archibald into a game of cards. I understand that such a thing is totally opposed to the school rules and regulations."

"Good gadzooks!" said Archie. "Is that so? Really, Phipps, is that positively so? Against the old rules, what? Dashed rotten—absolutely! A chappie mustn't start off by crashing against the old regulation list. Rather not! Beastly form, don't you know!"

Fullwood attempted to speak, but he was so full up with rage that the words he wanted wouldn't come. With a snarl he turned on his heel, and strode out of the study, followed by Gulliver and Bell.

Archie gazed wonderingly at Phipps through his monocle.

"You know, Phipps, you're fearfully hot!" he observed.

"Yes, sir!"

"The old mustard pot, and all that!"

"Thank you, sir."

"Don't mench.!" said Archie. "In fact, don't breathe the old word! Those chappies, to revert back to the old trend. Somewhat the limit, what? You were right, Phipps, old walnut. You were positively on the mark."

"I rather fancy so, sir," said Phipps. "Be very careful not to mix with the young gentlemen of that type, sir. I have already observed that the majority of the young gentlemen are

quite exemplary, if somewhat frivolous. There are a few, however, decidedly the opposite. You must be careful, sir."

"From now onwards, Phipps, the young master will take heed," said Archie. "No further warnings are necessary. Absolutely not. Right-ho, Phipps. Leave it to me. Let the jolly old mind rest content."

Archie rose to his feet, and straightened himself. Then he strolled languidly towards the door.

"You are thinking of taking a walk, sir?" asked Phipps.

"Well, a chappie must associate with the populace, don't you know," said Archie. "Join the lads, and what not. The fact is, Phipps, I'm just about to trickle down into the congregating department—you know, the section where the dear boys hobnob, and so forth."

"You mean the common-room, sir?"

"Absolutely."

"Remember what I told you, sir."

"Oh, yes, by Jove—exactly!" said Archie. "The warning, what? You know, laddie, a fellow's got to be deucedly keen in this place. All sorts of perils stalking about, what? Well, leave it to me, Phipps—leave it to the young master!"

Archie wandered out. He strolled elegantly down the passage until he came to the lobby. Here, for some reason or other, Hubbard, of the Remove, was pacing up and down, with his hands in his pockets, looking rather fed up. But he brightened considerably as soon as Archie appeared.

"Hallo, ass!" said Hubbard. "Where are you off to?"

"I mean to say, rather terse, what?" suggested Archie. "However, we'll let it pass. Absolutely. We'll put it down to ig., and all that. The fact is, old top, I'm just skating along to the jolly old lads—the common-room, don't you know!"

Hubbard didn't wait to hear any more. To Archie's mild amazement, he fled. He fairly burst into the common-room, and found a number of juniors collected round a contrivance consisting of a zinc pail, ropes, wires, and other things.

"Quick!" gasped Hubbard. "He's coming!"

"Oh, good!" said Owen major. "Buck up, you chaps."

Archie Glenthorne, in the meantime, having recovered from his surprise, strolled towards the common-room. He became aware of a form which crept up alongside him, and he found Enoch Snipe by his side.

"Somewhat noiseless, and all that, eh?" said Archie halting. "I mean to say, you remind me of Phipps, don't you know. One minute a chap is alone, and the next minute—zing! Phipps!"

Enoch Snipe stood there smiling at Archie, and Archie had a most peculiar feeling within him. Snipe's smile was really awful to look upon. It was enough to make anybody feel bad. The Worm of St. Frank's was a most detestable character in every way, and was just about as popular as a fog on a big football match day.

He rubbed his hands together constantly—a habit of his. And he had a crouching attitude, and hunched his shoulders up. His red-rimmed eyes looked positively fishy.

"I hope you won't mind me speaking to you, Glenthorne," said Snipe obsequiously. "I'm very sorry to be a bother, sir. I look upon it as a great honour to talk to you."

"Frightfully decent, and all that," said Archie. "Large numbers of thanks, old son. Absolutely. Well, what about it? Shall we do the old Toddle? Shall we proceed to the common apartment?"

"Yes, of course," said Snipe cringingly. "You know, Glenthorne, my people will be delighted when I tell them that you are my friend."

"That is to say, as it were, exactly!" said Archie. "Friend, what? Just as you like, laddie. No harm in saying it, not at all. Well, let's slide, what?"

They proceeded another few yards. Archie was thinking to the best of his ability. As he would have said "the old bean was buzzing somewhat."

And his monocle dropped from his eye quite suddenly.

"Deucedly cute, and all that!" he murmured. "A sound scheme, in fact. I'm getting brainy, by Jove! Must be Phipps!"

"I beg your pardon?" said Snipe. "You spoke, I think?"

"Nothing, old top—absolutely!"

"I should like to be more friendly, Glenthorne," went on Snipe eagerly. "I should like to be with you a great deal. My people are always particular about the friends I choose——"

"Well, rather!" said Archie. "The old boy—that is to say, the pater—is deucedly strict about my pals, don't you know. He's a cheerful old tulip as a rule, but he's got his queer little ways. Well, here we are. Absolutely, as you might say. Politeness required. Enter, laddie—enter!"

They had arrived at the common-room door, and Snipe fairly glowed with joy as he realised that Archie was allowing him to pass into the apartment first. It was an act which proved that Archie recognised Snipe's equality.

At least, so it seemed to be at the moment.

The Worm opened the door, and strode in. As a matter of fact, he only took one stride. Then he uttered several fearful howls, and sat down on the floor with a thud. A wild yell of laughter roared out from the common-room.

Disaster had overtaken Enoch. Without warning, a ghastly mass of stuff had fallen upon his head—a mixture which made Snipe shudder through his whole frame. It was sticky, horrid to the feel, smelly, and generally awful. It seemed to be composed of treacle, glue, soot, cinders, ink, and a few other similar ingredients.

Anyhow, Enoch Snipe sat on the floor with his head and shoulders buried in the horrible mess. He was unrecognisable. And his yells were smothered. He clawed at his face, getting the stuff on to his hands, and in about fifteen

seconds he was an object to steer well clear of.

Archie backed away hastily.

"Well, there you are, what?" he said mildly. "Dashed awkward, as you might say. Many cries for help! Assistance urgently wanted! I say! I say! The smell—the jolly old aroma! Absolutely torrid and sultry!"

The juniors in the common-room ceased roaring with laughter as they saw Archie standing out in the passage, quite unharmed. Somehow, the joke had gone wrong. The genial ass had escaped!

But was he quite as innocent as he looked?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PLOTTERS!

OWEN MAJOR strode forward, looking indignant.

"Glenthorne ain't touched!" he shouted, glaring at Archie. "Why, you rotter! What's the meaning of this?"

"Awfully sorry, and all that, don't you know, but there you are!" said Archie. "I gather that a few gallons of disappointment have been let loose? What? Sorry, old sportsmen—beastly sorry, as it were. The fact is, this cove waltzed in first. Absolutely did the forestalling act!"

"Who is he?" demanded Hubbard, staring at the ghastly object on the floor.

"One of the lads!" replied Archie. "A perfectly priceless chappie who appears to imagine that he is standing over the wash-basin, don't you know! Most curious bounder! Red eyes, and what not!"

"Snipe!" shouted Owen major. "Ha, ha, ha!"

The other juniors roared in chorus. Knowing that Snipe was the victim made all the difference. For one terrible moment the Removites had believed that a member of their own clique had suffered the disaster.

"Bally funny!" said Archie. "Oh, rather! Several yells! The only chappie who doesn't see the joke is this merchant on the floor. Great gadzooks! He's getting up! Make way, dear ones; clear the decks, so to speak!"

Enoch Snipe scrambled to his feet. He was blubbering profusely, and his sobs contained a note of savage rage.

"You—you mean fellows!" he snivelled. "Oh, I'll write to my father about this! I'm smothered—I'm nearly suffocated! It's too bad—it's not fair! I'll tell Mr. Lee——"

"Clear off, you worm!" snapped Hubbard. "If you sneak, we'll bump you until you can't sit down for a week!"

Snipe, still snivelling, crawled away. He was crying with helpless temper. He knew he couldn't do anything against the juniors. And he went upstairs, and washed himself, and changed his clothes. Then he came down and went straight to Study K, which he shared with Clifton and Simmons.

These two juniors were absent, and Enoch Snipe felt glad. He had got over his rage to a certain extent, but there was a bitter feeling of resentment in his heart. It was more than he dare do to complain to Mr. Crowell or Nelson Lee. He knew that he would be ragged by the juniors if he sneaked.

A more cunning idea had come into his petty mind. He sat down, and wrote a letter to his father, describing the occurrence, and asking Snipe senior to do something. He begged to be taken away from the school; and added that his life was a misery.

Having completed this, he felt more comfortable, and he set off at once to post the letter. The school box had been cleared, but there was still just time enough to run down to the village. Snipe set off down the lane at a trot. It was gloomy, but not entirely dark.

He had not proceeded far before three dark forms suddenly confronted him. Snipe came to a halt, gasping and trembling. Pluck was not one of his strong points. He gazed fearfully at the three figures.

"Pup-pup-please, I—I——"

"Steady on, kid—steady on!" came a whisper. "No need to get scared. You know us all right!"

Snipe gulped with relief. His momentary scare over, he could see that the three figures belonged to Mr. Hudson and Captain Niggs and Ben Croke. The three rascals had been on their way to the school.

They had just come straight from the island—straight from the chamber which contained John Willard's amazing treasure. And, as Hudson had stated, his chief intention was to get hold of John Martin.

This meeting with Snipe was more than fortunate—it was amazingly lucky. For Snipe was the one junior the men knew. He had assisted them on one other occasion, and they knew that they could count upon his help.

"Please don't keep me!" said Snipe, cringing. "I—I'm in a hurry."

"That's all right, young 'un," interrupted Hudson. "You don't need to worry about that. How would you like to earn a quid for yourself? I might as well be more generous, though—I'll make it two quid!"

With the prospect of so much treasure in store, Mr. Hudson felt justified.

"Two pounds!" said Snipe eagerly. "Oh, but you'll want me to do a lot for that! I can't——"

"Yes, you can!" said Hudson. "What we want is nothing. At least, nothing much. There's a kid among your lot named Martin. He's on the island at present, with those cadets."

"Martin is a cadet himself, sir," said Snipe.

"Yes, I know that," said Hudson. "Well, this is what we want you to do. Go to the island on some pretext—that'll be easy—and get Martin away. Bring him to us just against that old wooden footbridge which crosses the river lower down. We'll be waiting there. Can you do it?"

"I—I think so," said Snipe, his cunning mind working fast. "Yes, yes! It will be easy to get Martin away. I can take him a message—he won't know that it's not a real one. And I'm to bring him to the old bridge?"

"That's it," said Hudson. "You're a cute youngster, and you'll do the trick all right. Now, here you are; here's a quid to be going on with. If you bring the kid all right, I'm darned if I don't give you another two quid!"

"You can trust me," said Snipe softly. "I'll go at once. But why do you want to see Martin? He's only a poor boy, living at the school on the Headmaster's charity. He's nobody——"

"Never you mind about that," interrupted Mr. Hudson. "We just want to have a quiet talk with the young man, and we don't want to do it publicly. That's all."

"Oh, I see," said Snipe. "I'll go at once. Yes; I can get through this hedge, and run across the meadows."

He left, without waiting for the men to say anything further. They heard him crawl through the gap, and his swift footsteps died away. The three men remained there, hidden in the shadows.

But, cautious as they were, they did not suspect Enoch Snipe of such cunning as he displayed. For the Worm had only gone twenty yards before he halted and dropped in the grass. Then, silently, he crept back to the hedge. He was so close that he could hear everything that the men were saying.

"Do it? Of course he'll do it!" said Hudson's voice. "That kid may look a miserable specimen, but he's there all right. Just the kind of youngster for our job, too."

"Seems a durned pity we couldn't get hold of the other kid ourselves!" growled Captain Niggs. "This 'ere business needs careful 'andling, mate. We don't want to give none of our secrets away."

"Don't be a fool!" said Hudson. "We've given nothing away. This boy just thinks that we want to speak to Martin, that's all. He doesn't know anything about the treasure—hasn't even heard of it!"

"Strike me timbers!" muttered Ben Croke. "I reckon as 'ow we must be dreamin', cap'n. Treasure! We seen it, too—bars an' bars o' gold! Darn my skin if the stuff ain't lyin' there like it was cast iron!"

"Yes; and the whole blamed lot belongs to this kid Martin!" said Captain Niggs. "That's the curse of it, Ben. Martin bein' old Willard's only son, he's the heir by law. That's why we're gettin' 'old of 'im. If we can get 'im out of the way, all well and good. We can ship 'im off to South America, or somewhere. I know two or three skippers wot are leavin' for the Tropics between now an' next week-end. Oh, we'll do it all right."

"It's easy!" declared Hudson. "Well, we'll be getting to that bridge. The boy may be there sooner than we expect, and we don't want to miss him. We failed the last time, but this time we can't afford to."

They moved off, and Enoch Snipe still crouched in the grass behind the hedge. He was quivering with excitement now—intense, tremendous excitement. He had learned something which thrilled him through and through. John Martin was Willard's only son! John Martin was the owner of a vast treasure in gold—a treasure which had actually been found!

And Snipe's cunning brain was set to work. He was determined to play his own hand in this game. It was a game which had suddenly become enormously big.

He sped towards Willard's Island at the double, his wits working hard all the time. But he didn't cross to the island, for he found a number of juniors on the river bank, talking excitedly together. They had apparently just come across. Reginald Pitt was one of them, and he looked at Snipe quickly as the latter came up.

"Hallo, what are you doing here?" he asked.

"Oh, please, I—I just—just came for a walk!" whined Snipe.

"Oh, all right—don't snivel!" snapped Pitt. "My hat! I've never known a chap irritate me as much as you do! Have you seen anything of Nipper?"

"No, I haven't," said Snipe.

"Or Watson, or Tregellis-West, or Handforth?"

"They are not in the school," said Snipe. "I thought they were here."

And then the Worm began to understand what the excitement was about. Four juniors, including myself, were missing. We had not been seen for over two hours—and the island had been searched in every corner. Church and McClure were the fellows who had started the scare. And a search had disclosed the fact that we were missing, and that we had not left the island.

Of course, we were down in that cavern—the unwitting prisoners of Hudson & Co. It was scarcely surprising that we could not be found by the various search parties.

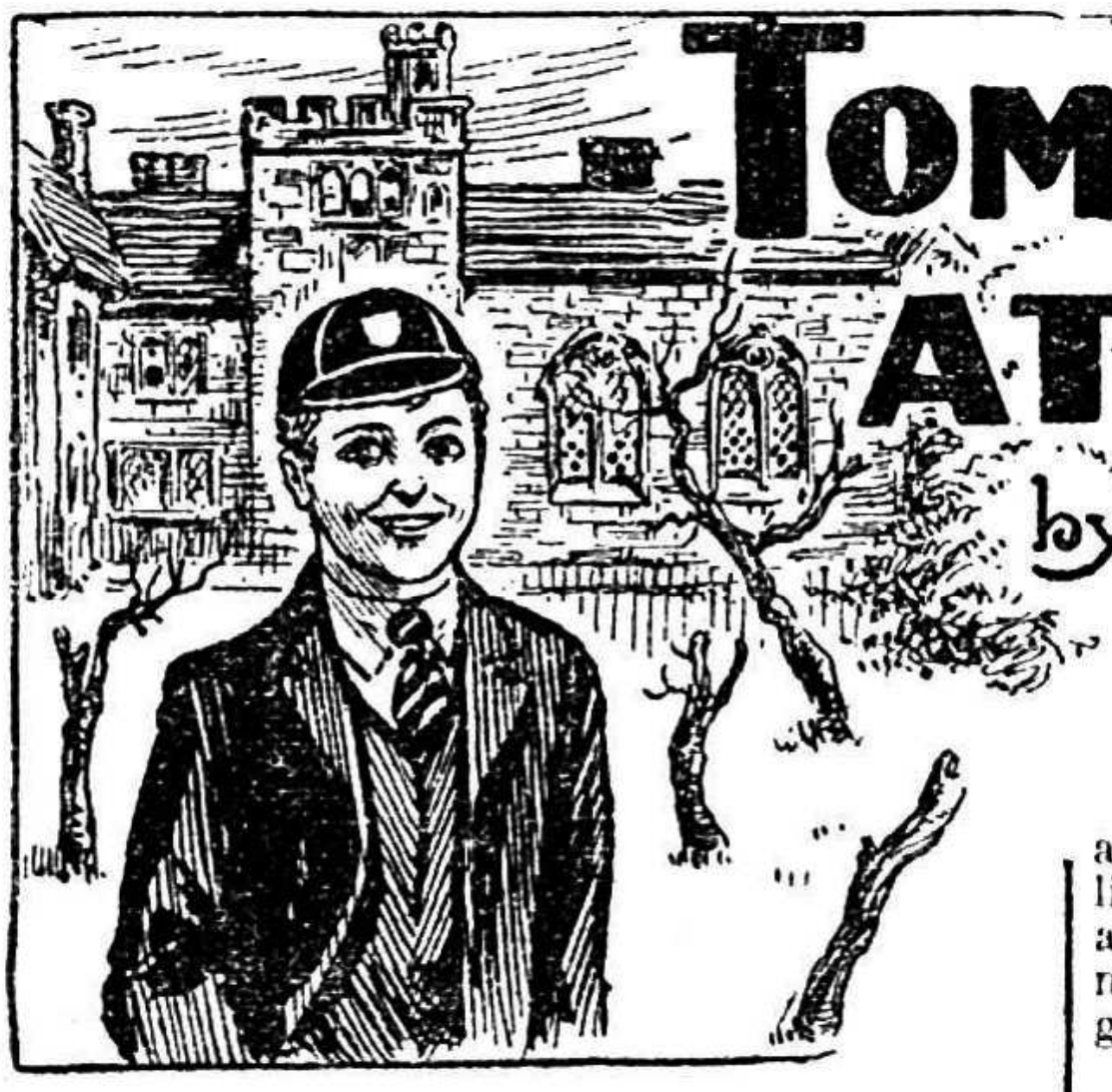
But, naturally, it need not be supposed that we were left to die of starvation in the old cavern. Before rescue came, many thrilling events were destined to occur—many exciting incidents took place.

Things were developing in such a way that before very long there would be all manner of unexpected happenings. But a climax was rapidly being reached.

The treasure was a fact now—not just a myth.

And, although we didn't know it at the time, the one and only Archie was booked to come very much to the fore in the immediate future!

THE END.



TOM TARTAR AT SCHOOL

by HARCOURT BURRAGE

(The World's Most Famous School Story).

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Tom Tartar arrives at Mr. Wrasper's school where discipline is maintained by moral force only. Tom makes several friends and a few enemies. He is initiated into the "Eagles," a party opposed to the "Cuckoos," or the rotters of the school. Foster Moore, the school tutor, has succeeded by scheming and intriguing in changing places with Wrasper. The latter, being in Moore's power, becomes school tutor. Moore has his knife in Tom, and is trying all he can to get rid of the boy, who knows too much about the ex-tutor's villainy.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER XXXV

A Terrible Discovery!

"I quite commend your zeal in this case, Tartar," said Foster Moore, "Powner is a dangerous fellow, and the neighbourhood must be rid of him."

Tom had already communicated with the police, and was in the study, into which he had entered with many doubts as to his getting the leave he wanted.

But Foster Moore had been quite pliant, almost agreeable. Quite agreeable he never could be, for it was not in the nature of the man.

He readily assented in the manner given above.

"You will take care of yourself, of course," he added. "Powner is a dangerous man, and if he is in hiding, is sure to have his gun with him. He may use it."

"I am quite certain he is here," Tom said.

"Indeed, how?"

"I saw him last night."

Foster Moore did not ask him "where?" and that, coupled with the fact of the little colour Moore possessed fading quite away, convinced Tom that he had not been mistaken when he fancied he saw them together behind the fence.

"Well, Tartar," said Foster Moore, looking at him with half-closed eyes, "you have a knack of tumbling over people who do not want to see you. Quite a gift in that direction, but not one to be desired. You are a clever boy, Tartar; but beware lest you trust too much to your own powers. Some men are dangerous to deal with—very dangerous."

"No doubt, sir," replied Tom calmly. "So I may go—the police will be there at twelve o'clock."

"How many?"

"I understand there will be three."

"If Powner is at home," said Foster Moore coolly, "these will be needed."

Tom had got the leave he wanted, and at half-past eleven he was on his way to the poacher's cottage. He had arranged to meet the police at a quarter to twelve, outside the village. If he were not there by that time they were to go on without him.

He was there five minutes before time, and was quickly joined by the three officers—an inspector, a sergeant, and a constable.

He ascertained that they were quite prepared for resistance, and meant to put an end to it with scant ceremony.

If Powner had his gun they had little fear of his attempting to take the life of any of them.

"He is a bold fellow," said one, "but I know he has a mortal dread of hanging."

"Not an unusual feeling in men like him," said Tom, who was not without a misgiving that the poacher would make a mark of him.

When the poacher's cottage was in sight they halted a moment.

"We must go up very quietly, and make a rush of it," the inspector said—"one the back door, the other two in front. The doors can easily be kicked in, for the lintels are old and rotten."

They all counselled Tom to remain behind until they had searched the cottage, but Tom declined to do so.

"I'm stronger than you think," he said, "and may be of some use to you."

"You've got what is as good as strength, anyway," said the inspector, "and that's pluck."

One thing they all insisted in, and that was that he should remain with the two, and go in with them by the front door.

With swift, quiet steps they drew up to the cottage.

The sergeant got through a gap in the fence, and passed through the neglected garden to the back door.

The others, with Tom, made a rush at the front door, and the inspector was about to kick it in when he saw that it was ajar.

This was what he now least anticipated, and he drew back.

Were they expected, and was the unfastened door a trap?

Tom thought it possible that Foster Moore might have given the poacher a warning, but how he could have done it he had not the remotest idea.

To his knowledge he had not left the school that morning, and there was no trustworthy messenger to send.

Anyway, trap or not, hesitation was not to be indulged in, and the inspector, recovering from his surprise, dashed in.

No resistance was offered.

The room was empty, but in a frightful state of disorder.

Evidences of a terrible struggle were to be seen, in the form of the coarse bedding tossed about, and the table and chairs broken up.

What did it mean?

Had other members of the police ascertained that the poacher had returned to his lair, and been there before them.

The back door was soon burst in, and immediately a cry from the lips of the sergeant was heard.

They dashed into the little room behind, half scullery, half kitchen, and there they looked upon a scene that drew from their lips a cry of horror.

Scattered around were all sorts of odds and ends, sticks, a broken sieve, some empty baskets, torn nets, and lying in the midst of them was the form of Rosy Ralph, stark and still.

CHAPTER XXXVI

At Powner's Mercy!

THE horror and grief Tom felt nearly overpowered him.

In any case, the scene would have been horrible to him, but the thought flashed upon him that he was, in a measure, responsible for the dreadful affair.

He had sent a message by Ralph that had led to the poacher's wreaking his brutal vengeance on his own son.

Like some picture that leaps up in the darkness and goes out again, Tom, in his mind's eye, saw the whole thing.

The boy giving the message to his father—the mad fury of the ruffian ready to wreak vengeance on anybody—anything.

Like some despairing monster surrounded in a jungle, he had done all the mischief he could without caring whether there was reason in it or not.

The brutal blows the boy had received, the coarse language from the father whom he loved. Tom heard—saw it all, and he felt as he had been the boy's murderer.

All this passed through his brain while the inspector was in the act of raising the boy.

"Is he dead, sir," asked the sergeant.

The inspector put his ear to poor Ralph's mouth, and his face brightened.

"Not quite. There may be hope. Run for a doctor."

"Shall I go?" asked Tom.

"No, you stay here," replied the officer. "I may want a delicate hand to assist me to bind up his wounds. Fenton, you go."

The constable darted away.

The sergeant was set to putting the torn and disordered couch into as fit a state as possible to receive the injured boy.

Tom and the chief officer carried him to it.

One sign of life he gave out while they were doing it—a faint moan.

"A more brutal case I never heard of," said the inspector. "The poor lad seems to have been pounded to a jelly."

Tom, his eyes nearly blind with tears, knelt down by the side of poor Ralph. Oh, what a pitiful sight it was!

The boy must have struggled against his maltreatment, for his clothes, always ragged, now hung in shreds. There were bruises and cuts all over his face.

"I sent him to it," said Tom, looking up. "It was all my fault."

"How is that?" asked the officer, as he proceeded to make bandages of some of the torn pieces of the bedclothes.

"I knew his father was here—at least, I guessed it—and I sent a message for him to get away."

The inspector looked very gravely at him.

"You are only a lad," he said, "and I suppose you don't know the risk you ran by conniving at the escape of that man?"

"I did it for the boy's sake," Tom said. "Poor Ralph! I remember now how he looked and spoke when I told him what to do. He knew he would be beaten, but he obeyed me."

The other officer, who seemed dumb with horror, was sent to get some water to bathe the wounds that were still bleeding.

It was little they could do for Ralph, and there was no change in his condition prior to the doctor's appearance.

Happily he was soon found, and drove up with the policeman in his pony chaise.

The moment he looked at Ralph his face shadowed. He laid his finger on his wrist.

"Not dead," he said, "but sinking, I fear."

Country doctors seldom travel without some form of restorative about them, and a few drops from a small phial were poured into the boy's mouth.

Their effect was soon apparent, for he opened his eyes and stared wildly about him.

"I maun do it if you say so," he muttered.

Well did Tom remember these words, and they hit home.

"His life hangs upon a hair said the doctor. "The least agitation would be fatal. I think you had better retire."

"I should like to help him, if I could," replied Tom.

"You can do nothing that cannot be done as well by others," the doctor said. "I have heard of this boy's devotion to you, and your presence would not fail to be injurious. He must have no excitement."

Ralph did not recognise anybody, nor did he appear to know that anybody was in the room.

In a wild, vacant way he stared about, muttering something about "he maun do it if he die."

The doctor despatched one of the police for a certain old nurse in the village. Moving Ralph just yet was out of the question. The inspector also left to raise a hue and cry for the poacher.

There was no actual evidence that he was author of the deed, but the moral certainty of it stopped all thoughts in any other direction.

Tom, sick at heart, left the cottage, and, in the ordinary course, he ought to have returned to school, but he could not do it.

He wanted to be alone for awhile, to think over what had happened, and to find, if he could, some way to free himself from the self-accusation that tortured him.

After walking a little way up the high-road, he turned into a lane that was used only by those who had business at the lime-kiln.

On either side of this lane there was a close-growing wood. It was a capital hiding-place for a man who did not wish to be seen; and among the bracken on the right of the lane there now lay a man, who had strong reasons for keeping out of the way.

It was Posh Powner!

In his fury he had beaten and left for dead the only creature in the world who cared for him—his own son, Rosy Ralph!

And now repentance had set in—not so much on account of the crime itself as the folly and injudiciousness of it.

For he now realised that he had half-killed the one being on earth who would at least have tried to shield him from justice.

Without Ralph's assistance the poacher was a lost man. The hue-and-cry was out against him; at all the ports keen-eyed officers were watching for him. To show himself was to be captured and thrown into prison!

Posh Powner cursed his fate as he lay in the bracken at the side of the lane. Then, suddenly, he heard a footstep, and, cautiously peering out, saw that it was Tom Tartar.

A ferocious gleam came into Powner's eyes.

"He's the whelp who's brought me to this!" he muttered savagely.

His first impulse, as he recognised his "enemy," was to rush out and kill him there and then; but when he saw that the boy was sauntering along towards the lime-kiln, a frightful idea came to the ruffian.

"That's it—that's it!" he snarled between his set teeth. "That will be summat like a revenge, that will! I'll do it—blow me if I don't! I'll burn the whelp! In an hour, he'll be nothin' but a handful o' ashes!"

Tom, all unconscious of his peril, sauntered on, thinking of Ralph. How he hoped that the youngster might recover, so that he—Tom—might do something to make his future life worth the living!

"Poor kid—poor kid!" he muttered softly. "He's never had a real chance! Nothing but hardship and brutality from that beastly father of his!"

The lane was not a long one, and at the end of it, a little to the right, was the limekiln, sending up a heavy white vapour.

The kiln was like a huge, low-built well, and the burning lime reached nearly to its brim. By day it looked white on the surface; but on being stirred the glowing mass beneath was made visible. So intense was the heat, that a few minutes contact with it would turn any animal or human body into a charred mass, and in an hour would reduce it to ashes.

His eyes glittering with maniacal fury, Posh Powner crept stealthily on Tom's trail, until the boy was clear of the lane and close to the limekiln.

And then suddenly Tom heard a sound, and, turning swiftly, saw the poacher close upon him.

No time had he to do anything. The rush of the infuriated man was irresistible, and Tom was hurled to the ground.

He felt a steel-like grip about his throat, and saw Powner's evil face thrust close to his own.

"Now, you whelp!" rasped out the ruffian. "It's my turn—d'ye hear? I've got ye, and ye don't get away! I'm a-goin' to burn ye—body, bones, an' all!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Where Is Tom?

DINNER was over, and Tom had not returned to the school. No comment was made upon his absence by Foster Moore or Mr. Wrasper; but the boys were whispering, and wondering what had become of him.

"Doesn't anybody know anything?" asked Sam Smith anxiously. "Have they collared the poacher?"

"No, they haven't!" said Jonah Worrey, with a malevolent grin.

"How do you know?" demanded Sam sharply.

"Wooden Jerry told him," put in Pubsey Wrasper.

"That's a lie!" denied Worrey.

Pubsey's face flushed. He and Jonah were cronies no longer—were, in fact, bitter foes.

"Well, anyway, I saw you talking to Jerry," declared Pubsey.

"That's another lie!" snarled Jonah.

"It's the truth!" retorted Pubsey. "You call me a liar again, and I'll knock you down!"

"What'll you do?" blustered Jonah, looking very fierce.

"Knock you down--or try to, anyway," answered Pubsey.

"That's better! Trying is more in your line."

"And lying in yours!" put in Sam Smith.

Jonah turned towards Sam with a threatening gesture. Sam pushed him away contemptuously; but further developments were cut short by the appearance on the scene of Foster Moore.

The new Head of the school was deathly pale, but there was a queer, contorted smile on his lips that was very ugly to see.

"Boys," he said, "I have some rather disquieting news to tell you. Young Ralph Powner, the poacher's son, has been brutally knocked about by somebody, and is not expected to live!"

"His father will have done that, sir," put in McLara.

"What makes you say that?" snapped Foster Moore, swinging round on the speaker. "Have you any proof that the boy's father is responsible for what has happened?"

"N-no, sir," admitted McLara; "but, you see, Posh Powner is such a brute that ——"

"Don't accuse the man of the deed until you have some grounds for it," interrupted Moore. "It is possible that the boy's father may have been guilty of the crime. At the same time others may have had an object in committing it."

He paused, and moistened his lips with his tongue. With eyes that shifted a great deal he looked here and there for a moment or two, and then said:

"Had not Tartar quarrelled with the boy?"

"No—no!" cried a dozen voices.

"He was always fond of him," said Sam Smith.

"So he might be," said Foster Moore, "but friends quarrel, and their quarrels are always the most bitter. I am given to understand that Ralph has lately shunned Tartar. Is it so?"

That could not be denied, and the boys were silent.

"Last night, as I also understand, Tartar forced himself upon Ralph, for some purpose. Does anybody know what it was?"

Nobody could tell, or if they could, declined to do so. All were silent as before.

"I ask these questions," continued Foster Moore, "because Tartar was so very anxious to go down to the cottage. He left the cottage nearly two hours ago, and hasn't been seen since."

The silence was broken by murmurs of surprise and terror. One laugh was heard, and that came from Jonah Worrey.

"He's run away, sir," he said.

"That is the natural inference," said Foster Moore. "Of course I don't know. All I can say is that I fear he had reason to go. Tartar is a boy subject to fits of passion"—murmurs of dissent—"to fits of passion"—more murmurs. "Boys, how dare you give me the lie? I say he was a violent and dangerous boy."

"We never saw it," said Sam boldly.

"But I did," said Jonah Worrey, "he is a regular bully."

"Rot! He isn't!" came from several boys.

"Well, I will not go into the matter with you," continued Foster Moore. "All I want to know is, where is he?'

To this they could, of course, say nothing. It was indeed strange that Tom had not returned.

"Perhaps he's been attacked, too," suggested Sam. "Ralph's father would kill him if he got hold of him——"

"Ralph's father is not in the neighbourhood," said Foster Moore—"at least, I think not, for it's impossible for me to know. I—I——" Here he became confused with so many inquiring eyes upon him. "I hope he isn't. You will keep close in the grounds to-day. Mr. Wrasper will conduct school alone this afternoon. I want to investigate Tartar's strange disappearance."

There was a curious trembling in his voice as he spoke these words, and it was noticed as he walked away that his step was unsteady.

Not a word was spoken until he was gone. Then Jonah Worrey said:

"Tartar's bolted, of course. He got wild with young Powner about something and half-murdered him."

"Rot!" said Lawrence Turrell hotly.

"Of course, it's rot!" agreed Sam Smith. "What I'm afraid of is that Tom himself has met with foul play."

"Perhaps you wish to accuse Mr. Moore of it," sneered Jonah Worrey.

"He might do such a thing," said Sam incautiously.

"All right," said Jonah; "I'll tell him what you say."

"You sneak!" cried Sam. "Get out of my sight, or I'll hit you. Bothered if I don't hit you now! Take that!"

Down went Jonah, right upon the flat of his back, and there he lay, holding his nose in his hand.

"A nice thing," he gasped, "to hit a fellow when he wasn't looking!"

"You were looking," said Sam. "Get up, and have it out."

"Fighting in the playground is forbidden," said Jonah.

Sam laughed and turned away.

"All right," he said; "anybody knows it is forbidden when you dare not fight. Hallo! Here's Wooden Jerry! What's raised your spirits, Jerry?"

Wooden Jerry, who had his hands under his coat-tails as he came strutting up, looked at Sam, with a grin on his unwholesome face.

"Did you ever hear of such things as hours of wengeance?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Sam.

"Then one on 'em have arrived!" said Wooden Jerry. "Ha, ha! Ho, ho!"

There would have been something very ludicrous in his appearance and manner if things had not been so serious.

Sam looked at him curiously; then asked abruptly:

"Jerry, where's Tom Tartar?"

"He's—a—a—how should I know?" returned Jerry. "I ain't his keeper!"

"All right, Jerry," said Sam. "You just remember this. If anything has happened to Tom, you will be asked to give evidence."

"Evidence o' what?" blustered Jerry.

"Of all sorts of things," said Sam. "So will Diggles. Oh, you won't have things quite your own way."

So saying, Sam ran off in response to the school bell, which just then began to ring.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A Fright for Wooden Jerry.

WOODEN JERRY waited till all the boys had left the room; then he began to talk to himself.

"One way it's satisfactory, and one way it ain't," he muttered. "He's got rid of Tom Tartar, and that's all right. But the hevil part comes in when he says he's ready to swear that he was set on to do it, and we've got to keep him close till the breeze blows over."

He stopped short, and something like a shudder passed through him.

"After all," he went on aloud, "it had better ha' been let alone. It's murder—you can't make it no less. Burnt! It's a horrible thing! Chucked into a limekiln like a dead dog, and that 'ere Powner got the boldness to come round to me and say as he done it! I wonder if they can hang me? Mr. Moore says they can, for bein' a hack—hackcess'ry arter the fact. He won't see Powner, so, o' course, it's me as have got to look arter him an' keep him out o' sight! Bust me, if I don't wish as I'd never mixed meself up in it! I'll get into trouble if—— Oh, lor! Help! Help!"

It was only a hand that had been laid on his shoulder, but it scared Wooden Jerry half out of his wits.

Turning, he saw Foster Moore standing there, with a cold, glittering look in his eye.

"Are you in the habit of soliloquising like this?" demanded the master sharply.

"Sol—sol—liquorisin'!" gasped Jerry. "I—I don't unnerstand you, sir!"

"Talking aloud to yourself," explained Moore. "It's a bad habit—a dangerous habit! You were mumbling something about wishing you hadn't mixed yourself up in some affair, and about having to keep somebody or other out of sight."

"I was thinkin' of——" began Jerry; but Foster Moore hastily interrupted.

"No names!" he hissed. "I don't want to know who the somebody is, or where he is! That's your business! All I say is, keep him close—very close, or you'll find your neck in a hempen noose!"

"I won't have it all shouldered on to me," grumbled Wooden Jerry. "What do I get for it? What's a pound hextra on my wages, and knowing what I know. Look you here——"

Foster Moore had risen, and Wooden Jerry also got upon his feet.

The schoolmaster's face was contorted with fury. Two strides brought him close up to Jerry.

"You have threatened me before," he said. "Dare to do it again!"

Then, with a lightning-like blow that would have done credit to a prize-fighter, he knocked Wooden Jerry down.

Foster Moore looked at him for a moment with a face that was fiendish.

"The next time you show your teeth to me," he said, "will be the last!"

Jerry did not answer him, for the plain reason that he was knocked clean out of time.

Fully three minutes elapsed ere he recovered himself sufficiently to sit up and recall exactly what had taken place.

Then he rose, with a malevolent scowl upon his face, to find that the schoolmaster had left the room.

"All right, Mister Moore," he growled.

(Continued on page iii of Cover.)

(*Continued from page* 40.)

"I'll knock you down, one day—and when I do, you won't get up again!"

. . . . .

At about half-past three that afternoon, Jerry was chopping up wood in an outhouse with the listlessness of a man to whom such labour was uncongenial.

And as, slowly and reluctantly, he split the sticks with his billhook, he once more began to indulge in soliloquy.

"Bust me, if this ain't slavery!" he grumbled aloud. "Fancy havin' to chop up firewood on my wages! I'm gettin' fair sick o' everythink! What wi' one thing and another, I shall be druv to do somethin' desp'rit!"

"If you do, you'll probably get yourself into trouble!" said a voice at his elbow.

The billhook dropped clattering from Wooden Jerry's hand, and there was a look of absolute terror on his face as he turned and saw Tom Tartar at his side.

"Hallo! What's the matter with you?" asked Tom, who was looking rather pale.

"Mercy! Mercy!" half-shrieked Wooden Jerry, dropping to his knees and clasping his hands. "I didn't have anything to do wi' it—so why should you come an' haunt me like this? I didn't know a word about it until 'twas all over!"

"Until what was all over?" demanded Tom sternly. "Now then, speak up, you whining cur!"

"But ain't—ain't you dead?" faltered Wooden Jerry.

"Do I look it?" returned Tom. "Who told you I was dead—eh?"

"Why—why—nobody in partic'lar. Only—only Mister Moore thought as you wouldn't come back no more, and—and you havin' gone to the limekiln, I—I——"

He stopped short, and looked wildly about him like some cornered rat seeking a way of escape.

Tom bent over the quaking wretch, and scrutinised his face closely, as he said:

"There's only one man who could have told you that I went down to the limekiln. Where is he now?"

"I dunno who you means," answered Jerry sullenly. "I dunno nothin'!"

"Where is Posh Powner?"

"I tell ye I dunno!"

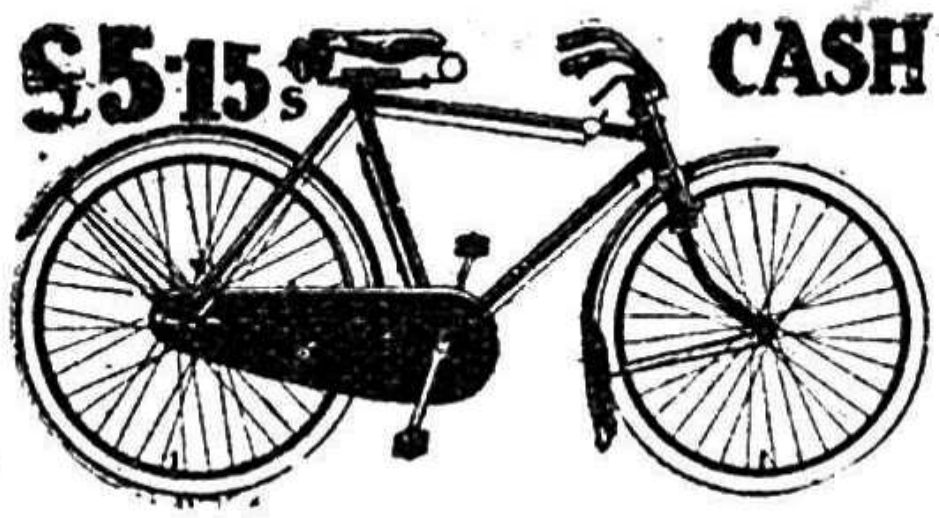
"That's a lie!" exclaimed Tom. "You do know where he is! Get up and see if you can't shake yourself into something like a man!"

"I'll get up when I like," replied Jerry, who had now somewhat recovered from his fright. "I ain't your servant!"

"No," said Tom quietly; "but you are somebody's paid creature! Look out for yourself if I can find out the whole truth about this business!"

And with a scornful gesture, Tom turned away and walked leisurely towards the school.

(To be continued.)



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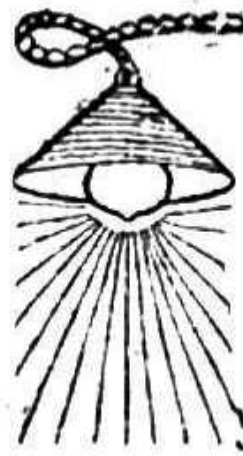

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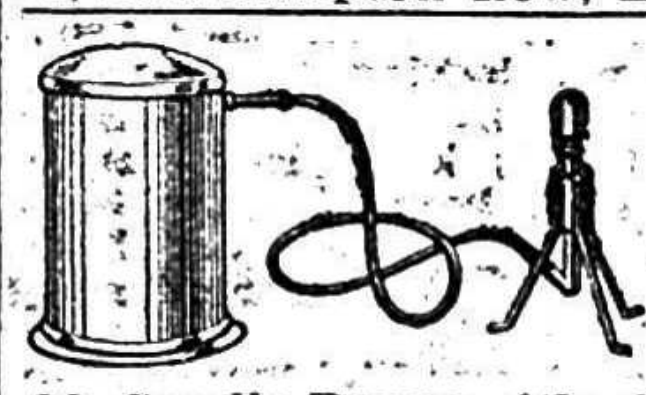

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