SHALL ST. FRANK'S BE RUN BY WOMEN? SEE THIS WEEK'S TOPPING YARN!

THE NELSON LEE 2D LIBRARY

Every trench was a miniature river. We were being gradually flooded out of our positions.

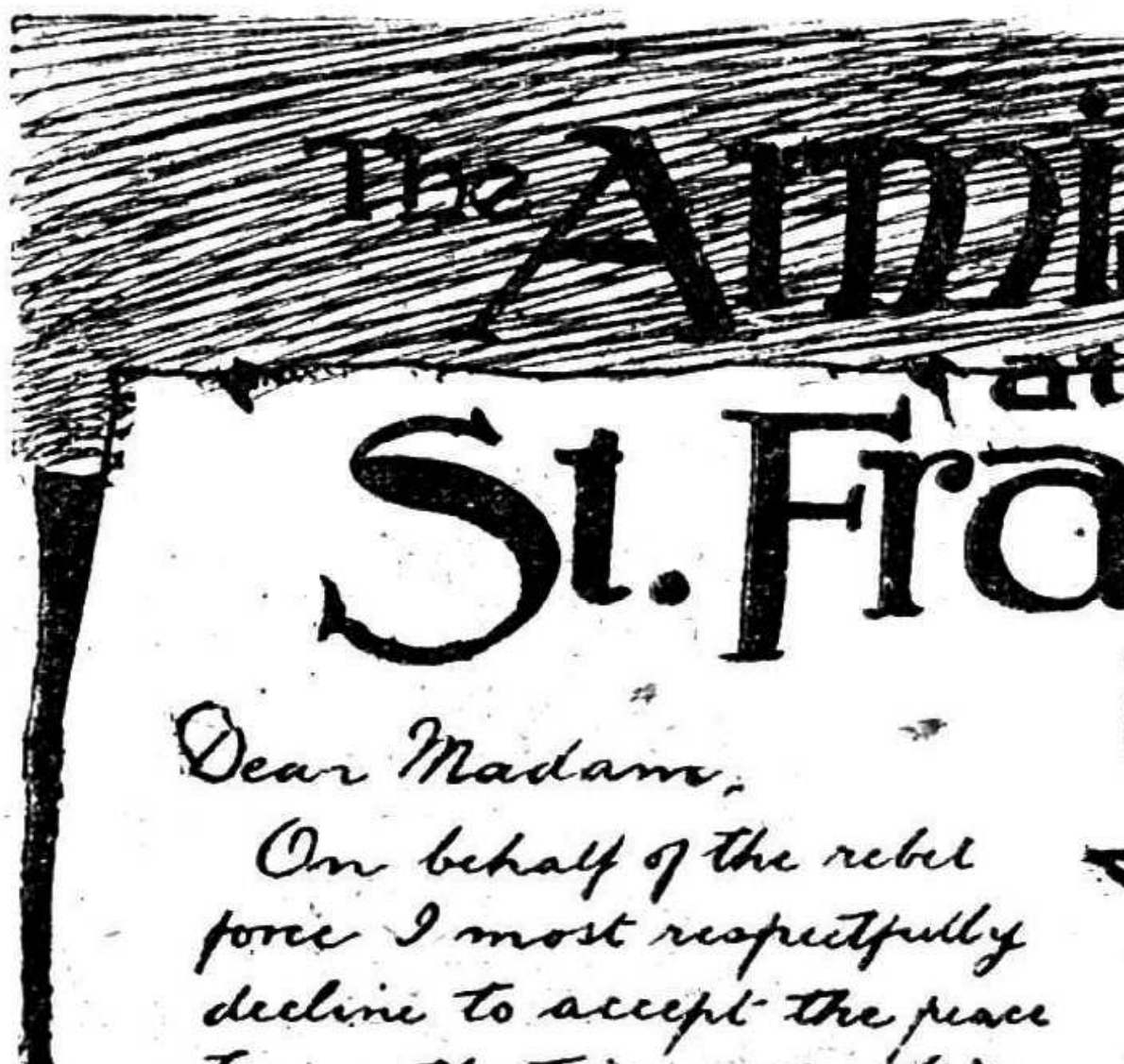
The Picture Above occurs in This Week's Exciting Story:—

THE ARMISTICE AT ST. FRANK'S!

No. 406. EVERY WEDNESDAY. MARCH 17, 1923.

Willy peeped round the bush, and gazed at a few men who were hard at work on a patch of ground not more than thirty yards away. As he watched he grew suddenly excited.

The Armistice at St. Frank's!



Another fine story of the rebellion at St. Frank's. Victory at last is within sight of the Remove. The attempt to starve the juniors into submission having failed, a deadlock has been reached. Every day of inaction brings Miss Trumble nearer defeat. News of the chaos resulting from the lady Head's administration has at last reached the ears of the governors, and they are expected to visit the school within the next few days. Events are therefore moving towards a crisis.

Miss Trumble is beginning to fear that she will be compelled to resign unless she can restore order before the governors arrive. She is at her wits' end to deal with the situation. Only one thing is possible, and that is to call a truce to arrive at a temporary settlement. But this is not the end, for Miss Trumble means to make one more desperate attempt to retain her position at the school, as you will read in the following story.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE GALLANT BAND!

"VICTORY!" said Reggie Pitt.

"In large and considerable chunks!" agreed Archie Glenthorne. "That is to say, laddie, huge quantities of triumph will shortly proceed to surge over the entire Remove. Good! In other words, bally good! Absolutely!"

"All's quiet, and all's well!" grinned Pitt. "The battle front is at peace. The cannon have ceased to roar, and the barrage is lifted!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie, nodding. "In about fifteen seconds, old darlings, the jolly old armistice will be signed. Then we shall have peace and revelry and all that kind of rot."

The two juniors were standing in the front line trench facing Fort Resolute. All was quiet in the war zone, and the March sun shone down brilliantly on the scene. It was

quite early morning—so early, in fact, that only a few rebels were on the move.

All the sentries were on duty, of course, and Archie Glenthorne strolled out, blithe and gay, in order to pass a cheery word or two with the lads of the village—as he insisted upon calling them.

As far as we could see, the war was nearly over.

And there could be little doubt that we should be able to dictate the terms of peace The enemy had done everything possible to drive us out of our strong position—and the enemy had failed.

As Commander-in-Chief of the rebel forces, I was feeling very light-hearted. As Reggie had told me, I deserved to pat myself on the back for the manner in which I had conducted the whole campaign. But this was a gymnastic performance which I made no attempt to accomplish.

I was certainly feeling very elated at the manner in which events had gone.

There is no need for me to go into a pile of details about the business. The Remove Form at St. Frank's was in rebellion—had been for quite a time. We had seized the old barn behind Little Side, had converted it into a fortress, with a complete trench system encircling the entire stronghold.

And although the enemy had resorted to all sorts of tricks and subterfuges to drive us out, we were now in a stronger position than ever. But the last attack of all had come very near to bringing us to the point of surrender.

The enemy was no less a person than Miss Jane Trumble—the self-appointed Head mistress of St. Frank's. She was also the Chairman of the Board of Governors, and a few weeks earlier she had descended upon St. Frank's like a ton of bricks. Having upset all the masters, including Dr. Stafford himself, they resigned as a protest.

And Miss Trumble, to everybody's amazement, had taken control herself—and, what was nearly as bad, had women installed in the place of all the masters. Petticoat rule had held sway until St. Frank's was fed up to the neck.

And as the Remove had "copped out" more than any other Form, the Remove had taken action.

In fact, it was always the Remove that did take action in an affair of this kind. The fags were too young, and the Fifth and Sixth were too lordly. So it was up to the Remove to save the entire school.

That's what we were doing.

We had rebelled against Miss Trumble's authority, and had refused to come back until we had a solemn promise that the masters would return. And we had stuck to our guns through thick and thin.

There had been all sorts of excitements and adventures, culminating in a big siege of the Fort. Miss Trumble had descended to cheap trickery in order to get the best of us, and it had availed her nothing.

Finding it impossible to keep her dignity and to attack us at the same time, she had sold the meadows to Farmer Holt. And Farmer Holt had literally brought an army of farm labourers and roughs on the scene. We had not feared them, and had rather revelled in the excitement.

But the siege had been touch and go. Owing to the rank carelessness of Fullwood and Co., the enemy had crept in, and had stolen all our food. Then we had discovered that the whole position was surrounded and fenced in. We couldn't get out—we were being starved into submission.

When most of the fellows were on the point of surrendering—for hunger makes weaklings of us all—I had gone out on a desperate expedition. I didn't know what I was going to do—but I had to get food.

I got it.

I seized a motor-van load of biscuits, and dashed at full speed through the enemy lines—arriving in the very centre of our own defence system. And now the Remove had food in plenty.

Of course, Miss Trumble had planned the affair. She had failed, and we should not be caught napping again. On the top of this, we had learned that all the other school governors had decided to come to St. Frank's and hold an inquiry.

Rumours had been getting about—paragraphs had appeared in the newspapers—and in the neighbourhood there was quite a big sensation. It was not good for the name of the school that these stories should get to the ears of the general public.

So the governors had decided on this inquiry.

Miss Trumble would not dare to let them find the Remove in a state of rebellion when they arrived. It would be a significant indication of her own misrule.

And so we were fully satisfied that victory would shortly be ours. Having played her last trump card, the Headmistress's only course now was to capitulate with as good a grace as possible.

Because the Remove was in a strong position.

We had food enough to last us for at least four days—and during this time we could easily make fresh arrangements for further supplies. Farmer Holt was getting tired, too. He couldn't afford to have his men watching at defences night and day.

So we should have plenty of opportunities to make new arrangements.

Handforth and Co. appeared from Fort Resolute—which, of course, was really an old thatched barn. Handforth was looking very important and self-satisfied. He usually did.

"Well, you chaps, what about it?" he asked genially.

"What about what?" said Pitt.

"Any signs of surrender yet?" asked the leader of Study D. "Hasn't Miss Trumble sent an envoy to say that we can all go back—and that the masters will be reinstated?"

"Not a sign yet," said Bob Christine.

"Huh!" sniffed Handforth. "She'd better buck up!"

"What will you do if she doesn't?" grinned Pitt.

"What will I do?" repeated Handforth. "I'll tell you what I'll do! I'll give her until nine o'clock, and if nothing has happened by then, I'll jolly well march straight to the school, and tell her she's got to surrender. I'll put it to her straight."

I chuckled.

"That's very interesting, old son," I remarked. "When were you appointed to the position of Command-in-chief?"

"Eh?"

"You seem to be making your plans, and giving your orders," I went on. "I thought perhaps you'd been dreaming——"

"Oh, don't rot!" growled Handforth. "Strictly speaking, I ought to have been in command long ago—but I don't want to gush you out, Nipper. Taking everything into consideration, you haven't done so bad."

"Thanks awfully!" I said gratefully.

"Don't mention it!" exclaimed Handforth, waving his hand. "Of course, you've made some bloomers—but none of us are perfect. I'm not jealous, either. As long as you haven't made a mess of the whole business, I don't mind. I think we're pretty certain of victory now. Of course, if I had taken command first, it would all have been over long ago."

"Of course it would," agreed Pitt solemnly.

"Oh, you admit I could have done the trick, then?" said Handy.

"It would have been over—and we should have been suffering tortures under petticoat rule again," explained Pitt blandly. "The fact is, you would have made such a hopeless muck of the whole game that we shouldn't have lasted a single giddy day!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The expression on Handforth's face was comical.

"You—you rotters!" said Handforth bitterly. "I'm not going to get wild—that's simply a waste of breath. But I think you chaps ought to be ashamed of yourselves!"

He stalked off in a huff, and the rebels howled. Handforth's dignity was always distinctly amusing.

"Good old Handy!" chuckled Pitt. "There's not much wrong with him—but he always thinks he's being treated badly. Well, let's hope that this whole business is soon over."

"Rather!" agreed Jack Grey. "I'm getting tired of it."

And, truth to tell, most of the other fellows were tired, too. The warfare had lasted just long enough—if it went on, things would become monotonous. We were all now eager to get back to normal conditions—with the Head in his proper place, and with Nelson Lee in command of the Ancient House, and Mr. Stockdale in command of the College House—with Mr. Crowell presiding over the Remove in the Form-room.

And we were anxious to get back to football, too. We had missed several important matches, and it was getting on towards the end of the season. We should have every half-holiday booked right up from now onwards to the end of term in order to complete our fixture list.

And so we waited—many of us gazing over towards Little Side, and the school. We were expecting some move from Miss Trumble. There was a growing conviction among all the rebels that this was the last day of the war.

Were we right, or had Miss Trumble still another card up her sleeve?

CHAPTER II.

FATTY'S SPECIAL BREAKFAST!

FATTY LITTLE gazed round him disconsolately.

"Rotten!" he grunted. "I'm jolly well dished out of my job! It's all very well, having biscuits by the ton—but what the dickens can a cook do with biscuits? Great pancakes! Oh, for a good old bloater! Oh, for some nice, juicy kippers!"

"This chap's never satisfied!" said Cecil De Valerie. "Yesterday he was starving, and nearly on the point of death, and this morning he's fairly surrounded by grub, and yet he can't do anything else except grumble! I think we ought to put him in the guard-room, and starve him again!"

Fatty Little glared.

"Don't be funny!" he snorted. "I'm not grumbling at the grub. But just think of my position! I'm the camp cook—the chap who's provided you with stews and puddings and bread and all the rest of it. And now I've got nothing to do! I can't cook tins of biscuits, can I?"

"Well, hardly," agreed De Valerie. "I suppose it's a bit rough on you, Fatty. But it'll be all right—your job's practically over, in any case. By this evening we shall all be back in the school, and things will be going on in the same old way."

Fatty Little's eyes gleamed.

"By gravy," he breathed. "I hope so! I'm simply dying for some of Mrs. Hake's special beef patties! I've forgotten what it's like to taste a pork pie! I've lost the flavour of smoked haddock! And as for old Binks' cream buns—I'd give ten bob for a couple on the spot!"

And Fatty stood there, clasping his hands, and gazing dreamily into the distance, his mind full of cream buns and jam tarts and other delicacies which generally adorned the village tuck shop.

And Fatty sighed. They were only in his mind. He would have much preferred to have them in a more solid form. And the thought of going back to normal conditions bucked him up wonderfully.

He moved about among the biscuit tins, opening one after the other, and sampling the contents. After that he set out the rations for the cadets. It was practically

breakfast time, and we had already decided upon a fixed amount of biscuits for every fellow.

Fatty, of course, was an exception. It was no good giving him a ration. Unless he had all he required, he would not be comforted. Some of the juniors declared that the biscuits would all be gone by the end of the day—because Fatty wouldn't stop eating, once he started. But I didn't worry. We had plenty of stock.

Fatty was in the middle of a large chunk of gingerbread—for our capture included some boxes of gingerbread and Dundee cake—when he suddenly came to an abrupt halt in his chewing.

"Great bloaters!" he murmured.

"What's the matter?" asked one of the others.

"I've got an idea!"

"About grub?"

"Rather!" said Fatty, his eyes gleaming. "By chutney! It's a stunner! I'm going to provide you chaps with some real breakfast, after all! What about some soup?"

"Made out of biscuits?"

"Don't be a fathead!" exclaimed the camp cook. "There are plenty of plain biscuits that we can soak in the soup, and that'll be gorgeous. I'll make a huge boiler full—enough for everybody."

"I expect it'll be that thin soup that you read about in ancient times!" said Armstrong. "In fact, it'll be so thin that it'll be nothing but hot water!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty looked round, grinning.

"All right—just wait!" he said mysteriously. "You needn't think I'm dished! I'm a cook; I've got all sorts of brainy ideas. And by the time I've finished this soup, you'll say it's the best you've ever tasted!"

Nobody could understand exactly what Fatty meant.

He vanished somewhere. He was observed going down one of the trenches, and then somebody saw him crawling out into the grass. But as to what he was doing, the juniors were quite in the dark.

"The ass won't be able to find anything to make soup out of," grinned Griffith. "I expect he's got some idea of vegetables. But you can't make soup out of grass and thistles——"

"I've got it!" interrupted Singleton. "Rabbits!"

"What?"

"Rabbits!" repeated Singleton. "I saw one yesterday, dodging about near those holes at the back. I'll bet Fatty's trying to catch one. I say, that's a good wheeze, you know!"

"Rather!" agreed Goodwin. "Even if he only gets one, it'll make some champion soup, with plenty of flavouring."

"And the ass thinks we don't know!" grinned Owen major. "It's a wonder to me that nobody else thought of catching rabbits. But I'm very doubtful if he'll be able to succeed. Rabbits need a bit of collaring!"

Most of the juniors were down by this time, and they lost no time in getting busy on the biscuits. They saw no reason why they should wait for Fatty's problematical soup. If it developed into something substantial, there would still be plenty of room for it afterwards.

The life of the camp went on as usual.

The guard was changed, and fresh fellows came on duty. Others were released for a period of freedom which they thoroughly appreciated. And Fatty Little arrived back—flushed, but obviously triumphant.

He carried with him a small canvas bag—and it bulged.

"Got it?" inquired Singleton, with a chuckle.

"Got what?"

"That rabbit?"

"Why, you—you rotter!" said Fatty. "Who told you I went out to catch a rabbit?"

"There was nothing else you could catch," replied Singleton. "All right, my son, get busy on it. Nobody will grumble if you produce a good old boiler full of rabbit-soup. It'll slide down lovely."

Fatty grinned, and in a very short time he was busy. But he decided, after all, that the soup would be for dinner. It would give him more chance to make it thoroughly. And breakfast was over, in any case. Besides, soup was more suitable for dinner.

In the meantime an anxious look-out was kept for the expected enemy envoy.

But no sign came from Miss Trumble.

The morning dragged slowly by. As far as we could see, we were forgotten—we were left entirely to ourselves, as though we didn't exist. We could see the school buildings in the distance, but throughout the entire morning we did not catch sight of a soul.

Even Farmer Holt and his men had gone—at least, they had withdrawn to a point where they were beyond our observation. We took no risks; we did not venture out.

As I explained to the fellows, we had to keep within our trenches; it was more important now than ever before. On the very verge of victory we could not afford to take any rash chances.

One or two scouting parties went out a short distance, as far as the barbed wire fence which entirely surrounded our position. But they came back, reporting that all was quiet and silent. And many of the juniors began to get doubtful.

Would Miss Trumble surrender, after all?

In the midst of these doubts and queries there came a violent diversion. Several juniors reported that a most appetising odour was proceeding from the barn. Fatty had cleared everybody out. He wouldn't let a single junior enter. He was cook, and he meant to be complete master of his own department. He was getting a surprise ready, and the juniors waited with much

expectation. The smell from the barn was luscious.

"Rabbit soup!" exclaimed Griffith, smacking his lips. "I don't care for rabbit, as a rule, but the very thought of it makes my mouth water now. That only proves what starvation can do! If we went far enough, I dare say we could eat rats!"

"Or frogs!" said Armstrong.

Griffith shuddered.

"If I was on the verge of starvation, I might manage a couple of rats; but don't talk about frogs!" he said, shivering. "Ugh! Just fancy! Those people in France eat frogs as a matter of course——"

"Dry up!" roared Singleton. "Do you want to make me sick? The thought's enough for me."

The juniors dried up, and very soon afterwards Fatty appeared at the door of the barn with an empty tin. He proceeded to hammer the bottom of this with a stick.

"Dinner!" he roared triumphantly.

The rush that followed seemed to indicate that the Remove was still in a starving condition. The fact was, biscuits were all very well; but the thought of some good hot soup put all the fellows into a fever of impatience. They wanted to get busy on the job.

"My hat!" said Handforth, as he strode in. "If it tastes as good as it smells, we shall have to give Fatty a medal! There's a most appetising niff about it!"

"Good!"

"Serve it out, cookie. Don't jabber so much!"

The juniors were eager and happy as Fatty Little, with the assistance of three or four others, proceeded to dish up the soup. The basins were soon filled and handed round, steaming hot.

Fatty had a final taste—about half a basin full.

"Gorgeous!" he announced. "Good enough for a giddy king!"

"I should say so!" agreed Singleton, having a taste. "I say, this is great! But I'd never believe it was made from rabbits! It tastes too good for that!"

"Rather!" agreed Griffith, between spoonfuls. "Best soup I've had for weeks! I can't quite get the flavour, but it's too lovely for words!"

Handforth paused in his meal.

"I don't want to say too much, because Fatty might get swelled head," he remarked. "But I've got to admit that this soup is absolutely thumbs up! There's a flavour about it that fairly grabs hold of you! I hope there's plenty more."

"Gallons!" said Fatty, proud and delighted.

The juniors voted the dinner to be a huge success. Naturally, the rebels enjoyed it far more than they would have done under ordinary circumstances. They hadn't tasted any soup for many days, and after the recent diet of dry biscuits and cold water, well, anything hot and savoury was acceptable.

"By the way, how many rabbits did you catch?" asked Singleton.

"Rabbits!" grinned Fatty. "There are no rabbits in here."

The diners paused and stared.

"No rabbits!" said Griffith. "Then what's the soup made of? You must be a bit of a marvel——"

"Rats!" said Fatty.

"Rats!" howled Handforth wildly, dropping his soup-basin with a crash. "Do you mean to say we've been eating rat soup?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, you dotty chump!" snorted Fatty. "I said 'Rats' to Griffith."

"Thank goodness!" breathed Handforth. "I thought——"

"Blow what you thought!" interrupted the camp cook. "Can't you trust me to give you some really good, decent soup? You don't think I'd boil rats, do you?"

"That's just it!" said Handy. "You'd boil anything!"

"Well, you can rely on me to know what's good!" exclaimed Fatty, as he went on with his dinner. "This is a special soup—a kind of mixture. I had some once at a Continental restaurant in London. It was lovely, and I've always meant to make some since."

"Well, what's it made of?" asked Griffith, as he devoured the last spoonful.

"Frogs, of course," said Fatty calmly. "Frogs, and a pretty good number of snails. I found 'em down in the ditch——"

"Frogs!" howled Griffith, with a gulp.

"Snails!" roared Singleton.

Crash! Crash! Crash!

Basin after basin fell to the floor as the dismayed juniors listened to the dread words. Fortunately, I had not partaken, although I came in just then with Archie, wondering who was smashing up the happy home.

"Yes, that's it," went on Fatty. "I tasted the stuff in a French restaurant first. Frogs' legs, you know. They're ripping, fried! But I wanted to make a lot, so I thought soup would be better."

"Is—is this true?" asked Singleton feebly.

"Of course it is."

"Honour bright?"

"Yes."

"Oh! Oh!" groaned Griffith. "I've been drinking frogs! I've been eating boiled snails! Quick! Lemme get outside!"

He was not the only junior who made a wild dash for the exterior. The fellows had enjoyed the soup all right, under the serene impression that it was made from rabbit. But the awful truth was too much. Their stomachs couldn't stand it.

I won't go into painful details. But ten minutes later some of the fellows were feeling just well enough to crawl back. They were led by Handforth. Calmly, grimly, they went to the great boiler. There was still plenty of soup left—fairly cool by now. The juniors shuddered as they came near, but by a manly effort they seized the boiler.

Fatty rolled up in alarm.

"Hi!" he exclaimed. "What's the idea——"

"This!" roared Handforth.

Swish!

With one accord, the juniors lifted the boiler. The entire contents were emptied on the top of the unfortunate Fatty. He fairly wallowed in his own soup—and the boiler was left over his head. He sat on the floor, literally obliterated.

And the juniors, gulping afresh, fled. They felt that they had done everything possible under the circumstances.

And in future they would stick to biscuits!

CHAPTER III.

MISS TRUMBLE'S DECISION!

MISS JANE TRUMBLE was looking grave and troubled.

She was sitting at the desk in her own study at St. Frank's. Her face was rather drawn and worried—it was angular enough at the best of times. There was still a light of defiance in her eyes, but it was dying out somewhat.

There were two other people in the study, Miss Babbidge, the Housemistress of the Ancient House, and Miss Rice, of the College House. They were both as serious as their principal.

"Don't you see, Miss Trumble, that it is quite impossible to carry on?" urged Miss Babbidge seriously. "The boys have got the upper hand. That affair of last night was disastrous."

"I agree—I agree!" said Miss Trumble. "The young rascals now have enough food to keep them well supplied for three or four days. And yet the boys must be back in the school by to-morrow."

"Indeed, by this evening!" put in Miss Rice.

"Yes, it would be all the better if they came this evening," agreed the Headmistress. "It is terrible—terrible! Am I to be forced into surrendering to them? The very thought is appalling."

"I hardly think it is a question of surrender," said Miss Babbidge. "Would it not be possible to settle the whole matter amicably? The way this rebellion has gone on is dreadful."

"The boys are so determined that we can do nothing," added Miss Rice. "And we must think of our posts, Miss Trumble. If Sir John Brent and the other governors come here to-morrow and find the boys out in those trenches——"

"Really, Miss Rice, there is no need for you to talk like that!" interrupted Miss Trumble testily. "I know it is impossible—quite impossible. The boys must be brought back! They must!"

"But they will not come unless you agree to their own terms."

The Headmistress clenched her fists.

"Their own terms!" she said, her voice quivering. "Good gracious me! Their own terms! It is galling—degrading for the Headmistress of a school to be compelled to descend so far!"

"Really, Miss Trumble, I think you are taking it too much to heart," said Miss Babbidge gently. "I am just as angry as you are. It is appalling that these boys should be so wicked and wilful."

"But what can we do?" asked Miss Rice. "They have got fresh food, and there can be no question about their determination."

"No question at all!" agreed Miss Babbidge.

"So the only thing is to bring the whole thing to an end," went on Miss Rice. "If we do not, it will mean that we shall lose our posts. When there is only one way, Miss Trumble, the position is fairly clear."

The two Housemistresses did all the talking for about ten solid minutes. As soon as one finished, the other picked up the thread. And Miss Trumble sat listening until they were breathless.

"Yes, there is only one way!" said Miss Trumble at length. "The boys must be here by to-night—it is imperative that the school should be normal when these interfering men come down to-morrow. An inquiry! It is disgusting—disgraceful! I shall protest in the strongest terms!"

The others were silent—for a change.

"The boys are so obstinate and self-willed that they will never come back if I only offer them half measures," continued the Headmistress. "But if they imagine for one moment that I shall leave, they are mistaken!"

"They want to make us go away, too," said Miss Babbidge.

"Never!" declared Miss Trumble curtly. "Never will I consent! I will go to a certain length, but no further."

"That is what we have been saying all along," put in Miss Rice. "If you offer the boys liberal concessions, I am certain they will return peacefully, Miss Trumble. They are not bad at heart. They will be only too willing to jump at a chance."

"Quite so—quite so," agreed Miss Babbidge. "I think it would be advisable to restore the normal bed-time—nine-thirty—and to let the boys have their studies again."

"And there is football," added Miss Rice. "They were particularly indignant because football was stopped. Also, there is the question of the two boys who were expelled——"

"Nipper, the leader of the whole rebellion, and Glenthorne!" interrupted Miss Trumble. "Yes, I must reinstate them. There is no other way out of the difficulty. Very well, I will decide. I will write a message at once, and have it dispatched."

"And you will agree to all the terms the boys demand?"

"Yes," said Miss Trumble coldly.

It made her writhe in her chair to come to this decision, but she knew that she was beaten. It had to be. And, without giving herself time to change her mind, she at once drew up a long document.

Miss Babbidge and Miss Rice read it with feelings of inward satisfacton. Secretly, they had consdered that Miss Trumble had been absurdly obstinate. She ought to have made these concessions days ago.

But it was not too late, even now.

If only the rebels could be brought back at once—so that all would be normal on the morrow—no harm would result.

And ten minutes afterwards Tubbs, the page boy, received the sealed package—with instructions to take it at once to the rebel stronghold. He went off at a fast run.

Miss Trumble had capitulated!

CHAPTER IV.

SURRENDER!

"HALLO! Who's this?" Handforth was in the front line trench, and he stared out over the top in the direction of Little Side. A figure was approaching at a fast run. Other cadets had seen it, too.

At first it was thought that the figure was that of a Third-former. But then Tubbs was recognised. I came along into the trench, and Pitt moved up, and several others.

"Looks like something doing!" remarked De Valerie.

"Let's hope so," growled Handforth. "After that rotten soup, we need something to buck us up My tummy's still going round in circles."

"Oh, don't talk about it!" said Church, who was rather pale.

But Fatty Little's famous soup was completely forgotten as Tubbs ran up to the trench, and stood looking down at the cadets. Tubbs was breathless. He had been running hard, and he held a big envelope in his hand.

"Letter from Miss Trumble, young gents!" he announced excitedly.

"A letter, eh?"

"Good!"

"Perhaps she means to call a peace conference!"

"Quick—open the letter!"

"Now then—don't get excited!" I exclaimed, taking the letter from Tubbs. "Yes, it's addressed to me all right. It may be something good, and it may not. So hold yourselves in a bit until we find out."

I quickly tore open the package, and extracted a big sheet of foolscap paper. It was covered with Miss Trumble's small handwriting, and as I commenced reading I felt a certain glow of satisfaction.

But I was not allowed to finish.

"What does she say?" demanded Handforth.

"Read it out!"

"Let's hear it, Nipper."

"Don't keep it to yourself, you mean bounder!"

"Read it out loud!"

It was impossible for me to peruse the document under these conditions. Other juniors were running up now, too. The

Fatty fairly wallowed in his own soup —and the boiler was left over his head. He sat on the floor, literally obliterated.

trenches were being choked by the rebels as they came pushing along.

Chambers, of the Fifth, made himself prominent. He was particularly keen upon knowing what all the excitement was about. He was the only Fifth-former in the camp, and had an idea that he ought to be in command.

"Steady—steady!" I shouted. "Now, don't interrupt. I'll read the thing out, and then we shall all hear it at once."

"That's the idea!"

"Go ahead!"

"All right—listen!" I shouted. "This is how it begins: 'To the Boys of the Remove Form. I am grieved beyond measure that you are remaining so obstinate and self-willed. At the same time, I am greatly shocked and astonished at your very disgraceful behaviour. You have been revealing much more determination than I had ever believed possible. And, against my will, and against all reason, I feel myself compelled to approach you in a spirit of peace. There has been enough of this pitiful bickering and quarrelling——'"

"She's coming round!"

"Rather!"

"She's getting as mild as milk!"

"Don't interrupt, you asses!" I said severely. "'There has been enough of this pitiful bickering and quarrelling, and under all the circumstances I feel that it is my duty to the school to sacrifice my own personal feelings. It is quite impossible for the present state of affairs to continue. You have won your battle. I can do nothing but admit this——'"

"Hurrah!"

"She's thrown up the sponge!"

"Victory for the Remove!"

"Go on, Nipper—let's hear the rest!"

"I'll tell you the rest if you'll only listen, instead of keep making these dotty interruptions!" I exclaimed warmly. "Now then—dry up!' I could do nothing but admit this. Consequently, I shall allow you all to return to the school, but I must insist upon quietness. I shall not countenance any unruly behaviour, or any rough demonstrations. You must all come back quietly and in perfect order——.'"

"But doesn't she say anything about conditions?"

"Yes—if you'll listen," I replied.

"Go ahead, then."

"We're not going back unless she gives in."

"No fear!"

"We want all our demands met!"

"Every one!"

"'You must all come back quietly and in perfect order,'" I went on, reading out once more. "'I have held a consultation with Miss Babbidge and Miss Rice, and I have come to the conclusion that certain concessions shall be made. The bed-time will be fixed at nine-thirty, as formerly. The Remove studies will be available for the boys at once. Football will be allowed throughout the school generally. The bread and water punishment will not be used in future. Nipper and Glenthorne well be reinstated without punishment. Chambers, of the Fifth Form, will be allowed to return without punishment. And the school will be conducted in exactly the same manner as it has been conducted hitherto. There will be no cause for further grumbling. The conditions that you enjoyed under the Headmastership of Dr. Stafford, you will enjoy under my control. I cannot possibly concede more than this. I have surrendered fully to your demands. It pains me—I feel humbled. But I have the honour and the good name of St. Frank's at heart, and I am willing to swallow my own personal pride in the matter. You must be sensible, and you must return in orderly fashion at the earliest possible moment. I need say no more than this. I rely upon you to refrain from noisy demonstrations.

"'JANE TRUMBLE, Headmistress.'"

I ceased reading and took a deep breath. The juniors were yelling like mad.

"Hurrah!"

"She's surrendered!"

"It's victory for us!"

"You bet it is!" declared Handforth, grinning. "Absolute surrender, you know! We'll jolly well go back this afternoon, and surprise all the other chaps. Tea in Study D again!"

"Won't it be gorgeous?" said Church, hugging himself.

"Oh, hurrah!"

"We're going back—we've won the battle!"

"Let's buzz off at once!" shouted Armstrong excitedly. "We don't care a snap for old Holt now. He can go and eat coke!"

"Rather!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fellows yelled with laughter at nothing. They were so excited that all they could do was to dance round in circles, and perform impromptu cakewalks in and about the trenches.

They were celebrating the victory.

And then there was a rush to leave.

But I jumped up, and held up my hand.

"Hold on!" I shouted. "Come back, you idiots!"

"What!" shouted De Valerie. "We're going off——"

"You're not going off!" I interrupted grimly. "Am I in command here or not? Don't forget that you are still cadets! Now then! Attention! Every fellow right turn, and march over here!"

Most of the cadets obeyed without question—although very surprised.

"Rot!" said Handforth. "What's the meaning of this? Don't be so dotty, Nipper! All this cadet business is over now——"

"It's not over!" I shouted firmly. "We're not going back!"

"What!" yelled a dozen voices.

"I don't agree to these peace terms!" I said quietly.

"You—you don't agree!" gasped Armstrong.

"No, I don't!" I replied. "They're not good enough for me! Miss Trumble has only partially surrendered, and we're fighting for unconditional surrender! The rebels stay here!"

And the Remove gazed at me as though I had gone mad.

CHAPTER V.

STICKING TO THEIR GUNS!

THE fellows crowded round, all shouting at once. By this time the whole cadet force had collected in a big semi-circle. They did not see the necessity for further duty in the trenches.

Victory had come; the battle had been won for the rebels!

So why should they care about sentry work any more? The only thing now was to hurry off to the school, and enjoy the full fruits of their complete triumph. That was what the Remove thought.

I waited for the excitement to die down.

"Look here, Nipper, are you quite dotty?" demanded Chambers truculently. "How much more do you want? Miss Trumble's given you every blessed thing you demanded. She's going to reinstate Glenthorne and you and me. We're going to have football again——"

"I know all that," I interrupted.

"Then what the thunder's the idea of saying we're not going back?" said Chambers. "Goodness knows, I'm not the chap to accept a crumb! If I start a thing, I see it right

through! But Miss Trumble's done the proper thing; she's given you kids your own way in everything."

"Of course she has," agreed Bob Christine. "I can't make you out, Nipper. Haven't we got all we demanded?"

"No!" I replied calmly.

"What about the football and the studies, and bedtime and——"

"You needn't go over them all; I've got the list by heart," I interrupted. "Most of you fellows are too excited to appreciate the difference between partial victory and complete victory. Miss Trumble has offered us partial victory. It's not good enough for me."

The fellows stared.

"But she's agreed to everything!" shouted Handforth.

"Exactly—everything, except the most important point of all," I replied. "In your present state you fellows can't see it; and I daresay Miss Trumble was relying on that. Well, she can't pull that game off with me!"

"What game, you ass?"

"Explain yourself!"

"Certainly, if you'll let me get a word in edgeways!" I exclaimed. "Why did we rebel?"

"Because of all the rotten restrictions," said Reggie Pitt. "Because we hated the petty vindictiveness of these women teachers ——"

"Exactly!"

"What do you mean?"

"We rebelled against petticoat rule," I exclaimed grimly. "We held this barring-out because we came to the conclusion that petticoat rule was an absolute failure in a big public school for boys. And yet you fellows are talking about rushing back, with petticoat rule still holding full sway."

"By George!" said Handforth blankly.

"You—you mean that the women are still there?" asked Pitt.

"I do!" I retorted. "You fellows had overlooked that point at first. Because Miss Trumble promises to restore the regulations to their normal condition, that's no victory for us! That's no reason why we should fall over ourselves to get back to St. Frank's. We want victory, not a compromise!"

"A which?"

"A compromise!" I shouted. "That's all Miss Trumble offers us! And it won't do! We're not having any!"

"By jingo!" said Pitt, taking a deep breath. "He's right, you chaps! It's a good thing we've got somebody who keeps a level head. We might have let ourselves into the cart, but for Nipper."

"But—but the old girl offers everything that we demanded," protested Armstrong warmly. "What's the good of quibbling?"

"Let's go back!"

"There's no sense in being obstinate! We've had enough of this sort of thing!"

"Rather!"

"I vote we go back at once!"

I faced the grumblers squarely.

"You won't go back; I won't let you!" I replied. "If any of you fellows want to become traitors, I'm ashamed of you!"

"Traitors!" shouted Armstrong hotly.

"Yes, traitors!" I replied. "That's what you'll be if you tamely return to the school and again submit to Miss Trumble's dictation. Look here, you chaps, be reasonable! Why did we leave St. Frank's? Why did we hold this barring-out? Because we were against petticoat rule—because we had made up our minds that the masters had to come back."

"Hear, hear!" said Pitt.

"We want the masters back!" declared Watson.

"Every one of them, including Mr. Lee and Mr. Stockdale and the Head!" I went on. "These concessions of Miss Trumble's are hollow—nothing more nor less than a mere pretence."

"But she wouldn't dare to make such promises unless she meant to keep them!" said Bob Christine. "Draw it mild, Nipper ——"

"She'll keep them, I dare say—for a time," I agreed. "I'm not worrying about that at all. But I maintain they're a pretence. Do you call it a concession for the school to be run on its normal lines? What benefit do we gain? Miss Trumble calmly tells us that we can go on as usual. That's not victory! It merely amounts to the fact that she realises her own helplessness."

"By George!" said Handforth again. "That's true enough!"

"True—of course it's true!" I said, warming to my task. "We started out on this job to get the masters back—and we'll have 'em! If they return, everything else follows as a matter of course."

"How do you mean?"

"Explain yourself."

"I shouldn't think it would need any explaining," I declared. "As soon as the Head steps into his old position—as soon as the masters come back to their old posts—football is automatically restored. The Remove can use their studies; bedtime will be nine-thirty. Every one of these so-called concessions of Miss Trumble's will become a mere nothing. They are simply part of the every-day life of the school. If you want the thing put in a nutshell, she makes a lot of bluster about giving in, and tells us to come back. The very thing we've been fighting for she ignores."

"Doesn't even mention it!" agreed Pitt.

"She ignores the masters!" I repeated, raising my fist. "She wants to get us back, and still remain in power! We have been fighting for an important thing, and if we return now we shall have failed. Instead of having this glorious victory, as you chaps seem to think, we shall go back defeated. And we're not going; we're sticking to our guns to the bitter end!"

"I'm with you!" roared Handforth. "I hadn't thought of it like this before, but

now it's as clear as daylight! We should be a set of dotty chumps to go back!"

"I'm glad that some of you are coming round!" I declared. "Try to think of what would happen if we went back. With the mistresses still in power, the restrictions would probably creep back, one by one, in an insidious kind of way. And it would be done so cunningly that no second revolt would be possible. Our teeth would be drawn, and we shouldn't have a bite left! If you can't see this argument, your heads must be made of turnip! We're fighting to get the masters back, and we'll stick to our principle! Either Miss Trumble surrenders completely, or we remain here!"

Hurrah!"

"Nipper's right—absolutely right!"

"Good man!"

"We'll stick to our guns!"

"The masters back, or we remain in the trenches!"

"Hurrah!"

Just like boys, they veered round with astonishing rapidity. But I had pointed out the truth to them, and they had not been able to see this earlier. In their excitement they had heardly realised the truth.

It was a cunning scheme on Miss Trumble's part.

She had taken it for granted that we would jump at those fake concessions, which, when analysed, became no concessions at all. The one important point of all—our demand for the return of the masters—was not even mentioned in the Headmistress's communication.

"Well, what are going to do?" inquired De Valerie.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to restore order at first," I replied tartly. "Who was on duty when this message came?"

A number of juniors answered.

"All right; you'd better get back to your posts!" I said. "We mustn't take it for granted that we're safe. There may be another attack developing, for all we know. It's not probable, but we want to be on the safe side. Buzz off, my sons!"

The juniors returned to their posts rather reluctantly.

"But you're not going to ignore that offer, surely?" asked Pitt.

"Not at all," I replied. "I'll send a reply at once."

"Good!"

"That's the style!"

"The reply was very brief, but to the point. It took me about four minutes to write, and I enclosed it in an envelope which I had in my pocket-book. Tubbs was still waiting, and I handed it to him.

He promised to speed back without a second's delay. And, in the meantime, Miss Trumble was pacing up and down her study, occasionally going to the window, with an anxious light in her eyes.

Miss Babbidge and Miss Rice had gone, for the Headmistress wanted to be alone. And at last she caught her breath in sharply. A figure was speeding across the Triangle.

It was Tubbs.

A minute later he had delivered his message, and had retired, eager to find out what Miss Trumble would do. He had been told to hold himself in readiness, in case he was required again.

Miss Trumble took the letter in her hands, and quickly opened the flap. She glanced over the pencilled words which were contained on the small piece of paper:

"Dear Madam,—On behalf of the entire rebel force, I must respectfully decline to accept the peace terms that you have to offer. We can only resume our normal place in the school on the condition that all the masters are reinstated, including Dr. Malcolm Stafford.

"Yours respectfully,

"NIPPER, Commander-in-Chief."

Miss Trumble screwed the note up, and threw it down.

"The insolent young puppy!" she stormed. "Oh! That is too much—too much! Why should I have to bear this indignity?"

She fairly boiled with rage.

"Including Dr. Malcolm Stafford!" she exclaimed, holding her hand to her throat. "Including Dr. Malcolm Stafford! The insult! The base, deliberate insult! These wretched boys mean that they demand my removal!"

Miss Trumble paced up and down, almost on the point of hysteria. But, after about fifteen minutes, she calmed down. She sat at her desk, drew a piece of paper towards her, and wrote rapidly.

Very shortly afterwards Tubbs was again speeding on his way to Fort Resolute.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ARMISTICE!

TUBBS arrived, even more breathless than on the first occasion.

"My word!" he gasped, as he tumbled into the trench. "This 'ere ain't 'arf a game, young gents! A-runnin' up an' down all the blessed arternoon! Strikes me I won't have no breath left, by the time I've done."

"All right; you'll come to no harm," I said briskly. "Why are you here this time? Another message?"

"Yes, sir."

He handed it over. This time it was only a very short note. Miss Trumble desired me to go to the school at once—alone. She gave a guarantee that I should not be molested in any way, and I could return at any moment I chose. She also guaranteed that Fort Resolute would not be attacked during my absence.

I thought over the matter for a minute or two.

"Well, it's safe enough," I said at length. "She couldn't possibly break faith. I shall have to go."

"But what's the idea of it?" asked Pitt.

"Obviously she's got such a lot to say that she can't put it in a letter," I replied. "After all, the chiefs of two armies generally confer before peace terms can be arranged. This is only in accordance with all precedent. I'll go."

"Don't you think you'd better have an escort?" asked Handforth. "Or, if you like, I'll go instead. I don't mind a bit."

"I don't suppose you would mind; but we want this matter settled," I replied. "If you went, Handy, nothing but ructions would follow. Every man to his job, and diplomacy isn't one of yours."

Handforth snorted.

"Of course, I never expected for a minute that you'd agree!" he said bitterly. "There's never an end to favouritism here! Everybody knows I'm the best chap for the job."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth was laughed into silence—at least, he has laughed at so much that he strode off, grumbling to himself. And Church and McClure met with strange misfortunes immediately afterwards. Whenever Handforth was wild, he always made his chums suffer.

I lost no time in getting off.

I went back with Tubbs, and found the Triangle quite deserted. It was still mid-afternoon, and all the fags and seniors were in school. So there was practically nobody about.

I was glad of this—I did not want to be pestered by all sorts of questions. I went straight to Miss Trumble's study, and found her seated at her desk—evidently all ready for me. Nobody else was present.

"I am glad you have come, boy!" said Miss Trumble icily. "Close the door, and come over here. I wish to talk to you seriously and quietly."

I obeyed her wishes, and went to her side.

"Nipper, you have been expelled from this school in disgrace," said Miss Trumble, looking at me severely. "I have offered to overlook your many faults, and I have decided that you shall be reinstated. Good gracious, child! Do you realise what you are doing? Have you any conception of the scandalous nature of your actions?"

"I have done nothing, Miss Trumble, without careful preparation and studied thought," I replied. "I shall be very pleased if you will cease to regard me as a naughty child."

"I am astounded!" said Miss Trumble curtly. "Your precocity is quite startling. As for that letter you had the audacity to send me, I find it difficult to select words that can adequately describe my feelings. I need hardly add that the letter is an abominable piece of effrontery."

"It was not intended as such madam," I replied.

"Do not dare to quibble with me!" said Miss Trumble sharply. "I say that the letter was an effrontery! But we will overlook that for the moment. Why is it that you have refused these concessions——"

"Pardon me, Miss Trumble, but I do not quite understand," I interrupted. "Which concessions do you mean?"

"Which?" she repeated. "Are you attempting to bandy words with me, child? You know well enough that I have made the most generous offers."

"I am sorry, madam, but I fail to appreciate them," I replied. "So far as I can see, you have only told us that the conditions of life in the school will be normal. There are no concessions there."

"Upon my word!" ejaculated the Headmistress. "There is no pleasing you; there is no knowing what you want!"

"We want the return of the masters, that is all, Miss Trumble," I replied quietly. "Please do not imagine that we are deliberately insulting yourself, or any of the other mistresses. But I would like to respectfully suggest that it is hardly in keeping for ladies to have control of a boy's school. We insist upon our demands being met. We want the masters!"

Miss Trumble compressed her lips.

"I cannot decide this point in a moment!" she said curtly. "That is why I have brought you here. I would prefer a truce."

"A truce?" I repeatedly curiously.

"Precisely," said Miss Trumble. "I have thought the matter out carefully, and there is no reason why it should not be arranged. You will all return in orderly fashion at six o'clock—we will say six o'clock, for the sake of argument. And there will be a truce of twenty-four hours' duration."

"Until to-morrow evening?"

"Yes."

"And what will happen to-morrow evening, Miss Trumble?"

"That largely depends upon the way in which you boys behave yourselves," she replied. "If I am very pleased with your conduct, I shall admit myself completely beaten, and make arrangements to leave the school. I shall, in fact, see about the immediate return of the masters."

"Cannot you decide that now, and give me your promise?"

"That is quite impossible," returned the Headmistress.

"And what if you will not agree to our terms by to-morrow evening?" I inquired.

"In that event, you will be allowed to go back to your ridiculous trenches—back to your childish fort!" replied Miss Trumble. "I will give you my word that you will not be molested in any way. There will be a truce for just twenty-four hours. If there is peace at the end of that truce, so much the better. If it must mean a resumption of hostilities—well and good. For twenty-four hours we will have a complete cessation of warfare."

"With the possibility of your agreeing to our wishes at the end?"

"Exactly," she said. "It will depend upon your behaviour in the meantime."

I considered for three or four minutes, going to the window, and gazing out into the Triangle. Miss Trumble grew impatient.

"Well," she asked sharply. "Have you no answer?"

"I will agree on one condition, madam," I said, turning.

"Conditions again?" she sneered, her voice filled with sarcasm.

"A condition is absolutely necessary," I replied. "You must sign a written statement—here and now—giving your word of honour that no boys will be subjected to punishment, and that if peace is not settled by six o'clock to-morrow evening, we shall all be allowed to return unmolested to our trenches."

"Well?"

"In addition, Miss Trumble, you must add to the statement that Fort Resolute and our trench system will not be touched," I declared. "You must arrange that with Mr. Holt. Our entire defence-works must not be entered by a living soul. Unless you can agree to these conditions, there will be no armistice."

Miss Trumble thought for a moment.

"Sometimes I can almost find it possible to admire you!" she said, with a burst of frankness. "You are a really remarkable boy, Nipper. There is not one point that you neglect. You safeguard yourself and your comrades at every turn."

"That is the duty of a commander, madam," I said quietly.

"One day, Nipper, you will become a great man," said Miss Trumble sourly. "At present you are nothing better than a precocious boy. But I must give you the credit that you deserve. At every turn you have met me—and you have beaten me. We will see who finally wins."

She turned to her desk, and wrote out the document I dictated, for I insisted upon having it worded in my own terms. She signed it, and I folded it up, and placed it in my pocket.

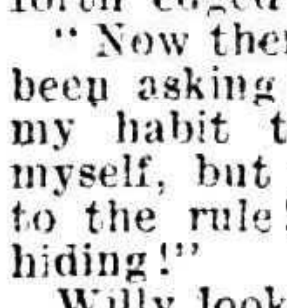
I had no fear. I was certain that I was safe in accepting her signed word. It was more than she dared do to break faith, for this document—if published, in the event of her treachery—would disgrace her before the eyes of the whole world.

And I was thrilling with victory within me. This could mean only one thing. There would be an armistice—a truce for twenty-four hours. And after the school had been running normally for one day, she would see the importance of keeping the boys back at St. Frank's.

In my opinion this was the end of the fight. And the rebel Remove had won all along the line.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RETURN OF THE VICTORS!



"HERE he comes!" exclaimed Reggie Pitt expectantly.

"He's not hurrying himself, either," growled Handforth. "Just like him! He knows we're fairly busting with anxiety, and he comes strolling along as though next year would do! I'll jolly well give him a piece of my mind."

"Don't!" said Pitt. "You can't spare any!"

Handforth glared.

"You—you insulting bounder!" he roared. "I'll——"

"Oh, don't start now, Ted!" put in Handforth minor impatiently. "All you can do is to row! If you're not punching somebody's nose, you're squabbling! Never knew such a chap! Dry up!"

Handforth turned to his minor, breathing hard. Willy was the only fag in the rebel camp. He moved aside warily, and Handforth edged towards him.

"Now then, my lad!" said Handy. "You've been asking for it for a long time! It's not my habit to go for a chap smaller than myself, but this time I'll make an exception to the rule! I'm going to give you a good hiding!"

Willy looked at him pityingly.

"Queer how you get these delusions, old son," he said, shaking his head "Take my advice, and calm down. Nipper's coming, and he's bringing news that we've won. This isn't the time for quarrelling!"

Handforth was about to carry out his threat when I jumped down into the trench. And there was such a burst of excitement that Edward Oswald completely forgot about his minor, and came pushing through the throng.

"What's the news?" he demanded quickly.

"There's going to be an armistice," I replied.

"A which?"

"A truce!"

"I know that an armistice is a truce, you ass!" said Handforth. "But you don't call that victory, I suppose? What's the good of an armistice?"

"Well, every good, I should think," said Pitt. "Whenever there's a big war, an armistice always means peace; armies don't start fighting again after a truce. We can look upon this as the end of the conflict."

"Yes, I think we can," I agreed, after I had explained. "The truce starts at six o'clock, so there's no hurry. If we leave before six, Miss Trumble may have our trenches smashed up. After six she can't touch 'em!"

"Why can't she?"

"Because she would be breaking her word of honour," I replied. "Oh, there's no need to worry about that; we're safe enough. Miss Trumble wouldn't dare to resort to any kind of treachery."

"I wouldn't trust her a yard!" growled Handforth.

"Neither would I!"

"She'll only break her word!"

"Well, personally, I would be half inclined to agree with you," I said. "Miss Trumble has behaved so strangely that she has forfeited the right to expect any kind of trust."

"Then what's the idea of trusting her?"

"I have got a written document, signed in my presence," I replied. "If she doesn't keep faith, we shall have a stronger case than ever. If she refuses our demands, and then mucks up these trenches, so that we can't come back to them, we shall have her on toast."

"How do you make that out?"

"My dear chaps, I shall simply take this document to the other governors," I replied. "What are they going to say about a woman who makes a faithful arrangement, and then breaks it? Why, it'll be a lever in our hands that'll gain us complete victory. The governors would pitch her out in two minutes—and all the other women, too."

"Yes, we're safe enough, as long as we keep that document," agreed Pitt. "But I'm a bit puzzled about this armistice. Why does she want us back at the school so urgently for the next twenty-four hours?"

"The governors," I said briefly.

"What about them?"

"Didn't we hear that they're coming down to make an inquiry?" I asked. "I deduce from all this that the governors will show up to-morrow, and Miss Trumble wants everything to be in order by them. And by tea-time the whole matter will be settled."

"And we shall be the victors?" asked De Valerie.

"You bet we shall," I agreed. "If there's any attempt at trickery, we'll come straight back to these trenches, and carry on. And we'll take good care to bring a good supply of grub back with us."

"Would it be fair to bring grub, dear old boy?" asked Tregellis West.

"Fair?" I repeated. "I have made no stipulation that we won't do that. Of course, it would be fair. But I don't think it's necessary to discuss the matter at all."

"Of course not," agreed Pitt. "We shan't need the trenches any more."

"Good!"

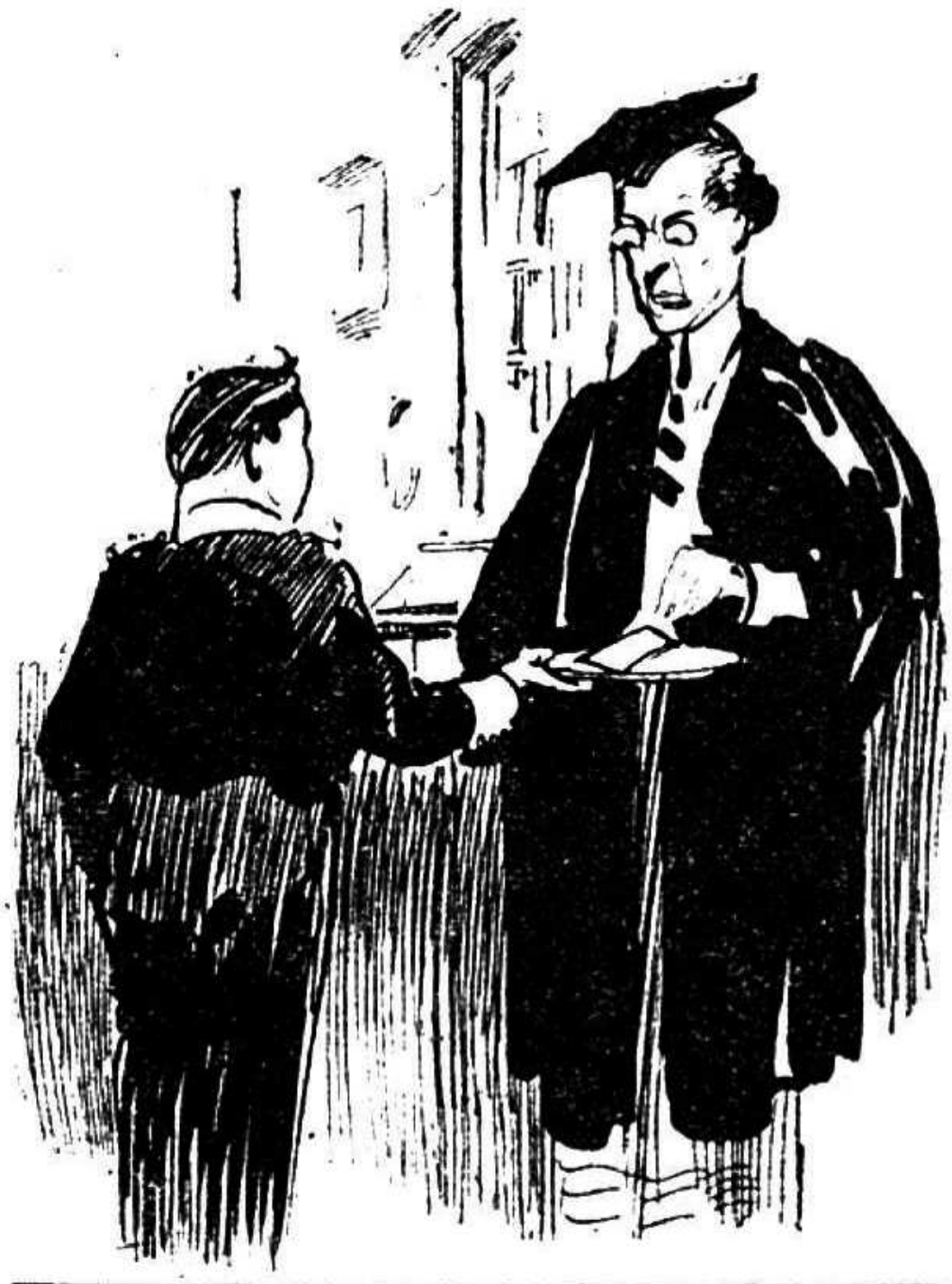
"No more biscuit diet!"

"No more frog soup!"

"Help! Don't talk about that!" groaned Pitt.

There was plenty of activity in camp soon after that. I got all the fellows hard at work making everything ship-shape. We saw the beds were properly made, and the food supply all packed neatly away.

We cleared the trenches, packed ammunition away in the dug-outs, and by six o'clock everything was in apple-pie order. If we had to come back on the morrow we should find the defences ready to be occupied at a moment's notice. And we should be able to deal with any attack that might develop.



A minute later Tubbs had delivered his message. Miss Trumble took the letter in her hands and quickly opened the flap.

And then the cadets lined up.

"We don't want to go back in a kind of rabble," I told the fellows. "That wouldn't look well. We'll march in properly—in real military style. Then we'll go straight upstairs, change into Etons, and carry on as though nothing unusual had happened."

"Good!"

"That's the idea!"

And the victorious rebels marched away. Chambers of the Fifth took care to come along shortly afterwards. He thought it rather below his dignity to be seen with the juniors.

And when we got into the Triangle we found crowds and crowds of fellows waiting to welcome us. Fenton of the Sixth stopped me as I was mounting the steps of the Ancient House.

"A truce, eh?" he said. "That's not what you wanted, is it, young 'un? I can't see that it's going to do you much good."

"If Miss Trumble doesn't agree to all our demands, we shall go back to the trenches," I declared. "You needn't think that we've come back for good, Fenton."

"The whole thing's becoming a bit of a farce," said Fenton frowning. "Miss Trumble ought to have more sense. She's going the wrong way to work, in my opinion."

"Of course she is," I agreed. "It would be far better for her to clear out and let the masters come back."

"Well, try not to be too noisy," said Fenton, as he passed on.

Considering the nature of our return there was very little demonstration. The juniors were quiet on the whole and although there was a great deal of discussion, there was practically no noisy celebration.

Fatty spent most of his time in the tuck shop during the first hour—partaking of Mrs. Hake's special beef patties and pork pies. And Fatty wasn't the only fellow there, either.

When we got indoors, we were delighted to find that all the junior studies were open, and fires alight in each. This was a surprise to most of the fellows. They hardly expected that Miss Trumble would go to such a length as this.

And in the dormitory there were fresh mattresses and bedding, and everything was in perfect order.

But it would be absurd to say that the school was not excited. It was. Even the seniors were in a kind of fever—which they did their utmost to suppress. Was this really the end of hostilities, or would there be a resumption at the end of the armistice?

It was generally known that the governors were coming down on the morrow, and in the words of one fellow, there was going to be an unholy bust-up. Something ought to come out of it.

And the school hoped against hope that this big inquiry was to lead to the immediate departure of Miss Jane Trumble and all her lady assistants.

Willy Handforth, of the third, was by no means satisfied.

In fact, he was so uneasy that later in the evening he slipped off in the gloom, and had a look at the trenches. He wasn't taking any notice of a written document. He had an idea that Miss Trumble had some kind of game on hand. And Willy meant to keep his eyes open.

He found Fort Resolute and its surroundings in a state of complete quietness. There wasn't a soul there. Nothing had been touched. But when he returned, the fag looked thoughtful.

"I don't like it!" he murmured. "Tomorrow I'll keep my eyes skinned!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GOVERNORS ARE SATISFIED!

MORNING lessons commenced as usual for the whole school.

When the Remove woke up in the old familiar surroundings of the dormitory, our days and nights of warfare in the trenches seemed rather like a dream. For here we were, back as of yore. We went down to breakfast, and we were now in Etons. The cadets were almost a thing of the past. Most of the fellows hoped against hope that there would be no resumption of hostilities.

For, secretly, they were getting a bit tired of the game—and would welcome a return to the usual conditions. They had got behind with reading and letter writing and a hundred and one other things.

But the Remove was still firm. If they didn't get their way, they would be willing enough to go back to the state of warfare. The majority were with me. The others didn't count—for they had to agree. It was impossible for them to remain at the school on their own.

Miss Teczer, the mistress of the Remove, was particularly pleasant in the Form-room. She was so sweet that the fellows even enjoyed lessons. And it was a great relief to be free from worries and responsibility.

And in the middle of the morning, when the school was all quiet, a huge limousine rolled up, and glided in through the gateway. It came to a stop just in front of the Head's house.

And four staid and elderly gentlemen got out. They were Lord Walberry, Mr. Alexander Stevens, Sir James Henson, and General Milton—the four leading members of the Governing Board.

"H'm. By what I can see, there is no trouble here!" remarked Sir James, as he adjusted his spectacles. "Everything quiet—everything in perfect order. Splendid!"

"We can't judge by appearances, Sir James," said Mr. Stevens.

"No, no—possibly not," agreed Sir James "But, at the same time, the newspapers led us to believe that the whole school was in a state of warfare. Preposterous! And the rumours, too—ridiculous rumours!"

"Well, we shall know the truth now, gentlemen, at all events," said Sir James. "Miss Trumble will doubtless give us all the facts, including the details."

"Quite so—quite so," grunted Lord Walberry. "Rather a pity Sir John isn't here. Fine man, Sir John. Nuisance his being out of the country on business. That's the cause of all this infernal trouble."

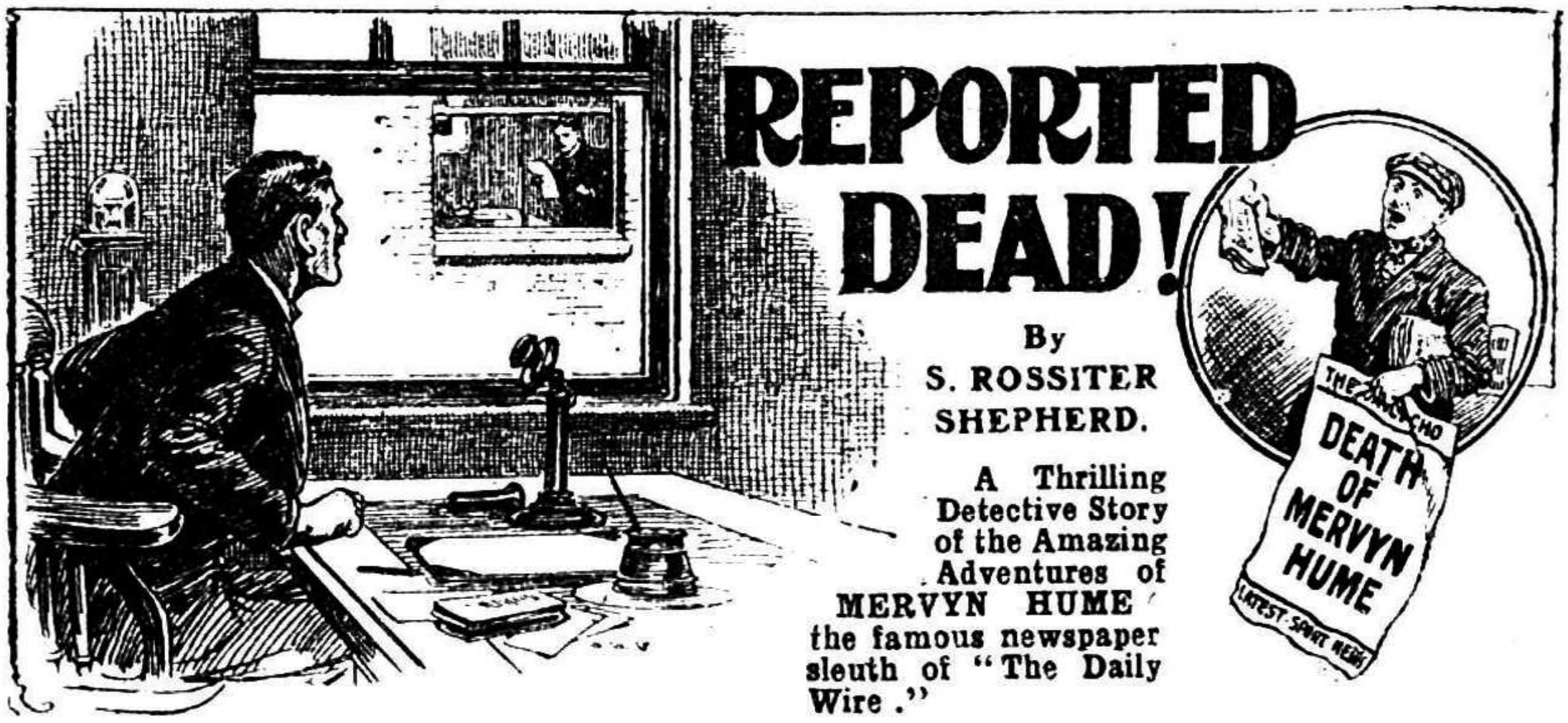
His lordship was referring to Sir John Brent, who, strictly speaking, was the leading member of the Governing Board. If Sir John had been in England, it is doubtful if Miss Trumble would ever have been in her present position. For Sir John was a business man to his finger tips—a wealthy London contractor—and not the kind of person to allow any nonsense. The other governors, to quote Willy Handforth, were a set of "whiskery old fogeys, straight from the ark!"

This was rather a severe description, but there could be no doubt that the four governors who had descended upon St. Frank's were hardly the type of men to deal drastically or effectively with any difficulty.

(*Continued on page* 15.)

EVERY WEEK—TWO GRAND COMPLETE DETECTIVE STORIES!

No. 15. PRESENTED WITH "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY." March 17, 1923



REPORTED DEAD!

By S. ROSSITER SHEPHERD.

A Thrilling Detective Story of the Amazing Adventures of MERVYN HUME the famous newspaper sleuth of "The Daily Wire."

THE crowd of fashionably-dressed shoppers were slowly disappearing from Oxford Street, their places being taken by tired office workers crushing into the tube stations and 'buses as a powerful two-seater car threaded its way silently through the dense mass of evening traffic, and proceeded in the direction of Holborn.

A close observer would have recognised the keen, clear-cut face of the man at the wheel as that of Mervyn Hume, the celebrated crime expert of the "Daily Wire," known to both Pressmen and public as "The Man Who Gets the Scoops."

By his side sat a sharp-looking red-headed youth of some fifteen summers, whose real name was William Whitehead, but who more generally answered to the nickname of Nunky.

The red-headed youth, who was obviously unaccustomed to riding about in motors, glanced up at the great newspaper sleuth and grinned.

"I wouldn't mind a little trip down to the seaside in this 'ere old 'bus, Mr. 'Ume," he said. "I wish a story would turn up so you could take me with ya, sir."

"I may do that yet, Nunky," returned Hume with a thoughtful frown. "There's something rather curious happening down at a small costal town called Craigscliffe I may look into. However, I must call at the office first. I'm expecting a message from our old friend, Inspector Marsham, on this very subject."

Hume swung the little two-seater down a side turning leading from Holborn into Fleet Street. But half way he slowed up, and the car stoppped with a jerk outside the imposing offices of the "Wire."

Hume and the lad alighted and made their way upstairs to the crime expert's private room. As they entered, the small, well-knit figure of Detective-inspector Marsham himself rose from the depths of an armchair and greeted them.

"I telephoned you half an hour ago, Mr. Hume," he explained, "but since you were out I decided to come right along. There's something dashed funny going on down at Craigscliffe, and the chief asked me to look into it right away——"

"Do you mean in connection with the disused lighthouse which stands on the top of the cliffs?" interrupted Hume.

"Yes, that's it—but I suppose you know all about it?"

The newspaper man shook his head.

"Well, I'd better tell you what I know

then," resumed Marsham, pulling his chair forward. "It's a curious yarn, and we got it from the local chief of police, who has asked for the help of the Yard."

The Scotland Yard detective accepted one of Hume's cigarettes and glanced inquiringly in the direction of the red-headed office boy, who had seated himself quietly in a corner of the room, where he hoped his presence would pass unnoticed.

"Never mind about Nunky," said Hume, translating the meaning of the police officer's glance. "He has helped me once or twice before, and he may come in useful this time—only I expect I shall get into a row one of these days," he concluded, "for taking him away from the office too much."

Thus assured, Detective-inspector Marsham plunged into his story.

"As perhaps you may know," he said, "Craigscliffe is a pretty quiet sort of place, and the old lighthouse which stands on the top of a cliff just outside the town or village, or whatever you prefer to call it, has not been used for the past thirty years.

"It is reckoned to be about a hundred and fifty years old, and when it went out of commission, thirty years ago, the Government tried to sell it, but did not succeed.

"The place was kept locked up, of course, and no one thought much about it until some fellow, who writes love stories for a living, made an offer for the place. He said it was just the sort of thing he was looking for; somewhere where he could settle quietly down and write.

"Well, soon after it became known he had made this offer, a number of curious yarns started to circulate about the place being haunted. One of the natives of Craigscliffe swore that he had seen a light blinking out to sea—yet, as I say, the place has been locked and bolted these thirty years.

"One or two other people then reported that they had seen the light, too, until at last the local police thought something fishy must be going on there, and that the place was worth watching.

"They stationed a couple of constables outside the lighthouse for several nights to see whether they could confirm the yarn about the light up in the lantern-room blinking out to sea. And what do you think happened?

"They heard a wild shriek from the lantern-room at the top of the tower. Then a light appeared. Once, twice, three times it blinked and then vanished. The two constables, who had been given the keys of the place, let themselves in through the little door in the foot of the tower——"

"And they found nothing?" broke in Hume.

"Well, that's the curious part of the whole affair. They searched every hole and corner of the place, but not a sign of a human soul did they see. It was as quiet as the very grave, and the lantern at the top of the tower was stone cold and rusty. It was obvious that it hadn't been used for donkey's years.

"Curious, dashed curious, the whole blessed lot of it," went on Marsham. "Where did that light come from, and where did the person or persons manipulating it go to? There's no way out but by the door, the windows all being too narrow to permit the passing of a human body."

"And that's one of the reasons the natives consider the place to be haunted, I suppose?" murmured Hume.

He selected a cigarette from his gold-mounted tortoiseshell case and carefully lighted it. As the rings of blue smoke curled lazily to the ceiling he started forward in his chair and half rose.

Marsham and Nunky watched him curiously.

"Did either of you hear anything?" asked Hume, in a low voice. "I thought I heard a sort of scraping noise."

Marsham shook his head.

"Perhaps it's that yarn getting on your nerves," he suggested. "I heard nothing."

Hume remained in a listening attitude for some moments. Then, apparently satisfied that the noise he had heard was caused by something quite commonplace, he settled himself back in his chair and regarded the police officer with a puzzled frown.

"All this funny business in the old lighthouse has only commenced since this author chap started negotiations for the purchase of it," he resumed, as though nothing had happened.

"That's right, Mr. Hume."

"It seems simple on the face of it," went on the newspaper man. "I should say someone was either having an absurd practical joke at the expense of the local inhabitants and the police—which seems unlikely—or that something criminal is going on in the lighthouse, and this tale about it being haunted has been put round to choke the author from making his purchase.

"In either case it seems worth looking into. I'm inclined to the latter theory personally. And if that is right, who are the people behind the scenes, and what are they trying to hide. Marsham, for all we know, we are on the track of a pretty clever gang of crooks, and I think there will be a story in it yet——"

Once again Hume paused and listened. And this time, distinctly to them all, came a faint sound as of stealthy movements somewhere outside the room.

Hume rose suddenly to his feet and flung open the door. But no one was in sight save a compositor who was busily engaged in unearthing some old type frames from behind some lumber stored along the passage.

The man looked up from his task and blinked inquiringly at the crime expert. But Hume made no comment, and after staring at him for a moment he retired into his room again.

"Curious," he muttered. "I could have sworn I could hear someone moving about near the wall outside. But there's no one there but a comp., and he's doing something over the other side of the passage."

Hume picked up his hat and stick.

"I'm inclined to agree with your chief that there's more in the affair of this old lighthouse than meets the eye," he said, "so if you're ready you can come along with me. I've got my two-seater outside, and there's a dicky seat at the back for Nunky. With luck, we can reach Craigscliffe to-night. We might even be able to see this mysterious light flickering before we turn in."

And so saying, Mervyn Hume led the way from his room to the street outside. Nunky jumped into the dicky seat at the rear of the car, and Marsham joined Hume in the tonneau. With a loud honk of the Klaxon horn the little two-seater moved off into Fleet Street, and was soon clear of the metropolis.

Once on the main road outside the town Hume let her all out, and a two hours' journey brought the trio into the quaint little High Street of Craigscliffe, just before the inns closed. They stopped at one of them, and made a hasty meal of bread and cheese, followed by a tankard of brown ale, while the read-headed office boy contented himself with some ham sandwiches and two bottles of ginger beer.

After this they moved on to one of the three small hotels the place boasted, where they arranged for rooms and garaged the car. Hume and Marsham decided to take a walk out to the cliff about two miles away, and have a look at the haunted lighthouse before retiring to bed.

Much against his wish, Nunky was compelled to stay at the hotel instead of accompanying the two men; but his disappointment was softened by the promise that he should go with them the following night.

The clocks were softly chiming the hour of eleven as the newspaper man and the detective left the town to commence their two-mile tramp in the dark. But it was a dry night, and the journey was finished almost before they realised it.

"This must be the lighthouse," exclaimed Marsham, pointing to a tall, gloomy pile which loomed up before them. "It looks pretty weird in the dark, I must admit. Jolly wild sort of days they must have been when that was put up a hundred and fifty years ago."

The next moment Hume felt himself falling down, down, down! He had toppled over the edge of the cliff into the sea below.

Hume motioned the Yard man to silence, and together they made their way to a clump of bushes on the right.

"I don't suppose anything will happen to-night," whispered Hume.

"Something has every night since that author chap made his offer to the Government, anyhow," muttered Marsham. "That is the curious part of it. I don't see why we shouldn't see something to-night."

For several moments the two men stood in the shadow of the bushes, neither speaking a word.

OUR DETECTIVE STORY SECTION

Midnight boomed slowly from the distant clocks of Craigscliffe. In silence they continued to gaze at the old-fashioned lantern-room at the top of the lighthouse. And then, even as they did so, a single flash of white light blinked out from the lantern-room across the sea.

A quarter of a minute passed, and then another flash—darkness once again: fifteen seconds later came the third. Marsham gripped Hume's arm.

"They're signalling to someone," he whispered.

Hume felt the grip on his arm tighten until he almost shouted with pain.

"Look, look!" gasped Marsham, waving a rather shaky forefinger in the direction of the small gallery running round the outside of the lantern-room. "My only sainted aunt! What on earth is it?"

Hume stared.

And for a moment he felt himself in the grip of some nameless fear. But quickly pulling his startled wits together he dropped quickly to the ground, pulling the Yard man with him.

In awed silence they stared at the small iron balcony where, moving slowly, with hands extended before it, they saw a weird figure, clad in knee-breeches and a three-cornered hat, garments of long gone-by days move along.

From the figure itself there seemed to emanate a ghastly greenish light, quivering and unearthly against the dark background of the night.

"It's a—a ghost!" stuttered Marsham between his teeth.

But the next moment the figure had vanished as suddenly as it had appeared.

"By Jove, there's a story for you, Mr. Hume," cried Marsham, his feeling of apprehension past. "The yarn certainly has some foundation then, we've seen that much with our own eyes."

Hume lighted a cigarette before replying. Then:

"I think we will get back now," he said.

The two men returned to Craigscliffe in silence. Half an hour later they were both in bed and asleep. Hume was astir early the following morning, and by the time Marsham and Nunky appeared in the dining-room he was finishing his meal with marmalade and toast.

While his two companions were attending to the needs of the inner man, Hume made a few inquiries among some of the townspeople as to when the flash of light from the lantern-room of the disused lighthouse had first been seen.

He discovered, somewhat to his surprise, that the three curious flashes had been reported as long as twelve months ago. But at that time little notice was taken of it, and the whole business was put down to someone's imagination.

But recently the flashes had been seen more frequently, and by quite a number of people at that. But by careful questioning, Hume ascertained that, so far, no one but Inspector Marsham and himself had seen the weird, glowing, old-world figure in knee-breeches and the three-cornered hat.

And although Hume had discovered this, he took good care that none of the townspeople should share his knowledge. Eventually he called back at the hotel, and, together with the Scotland Yard man, visited the local police headquarters. But even here, neither Hume nor Marsham made any mention of what they had seen. After discussing the case generally, they borrowed the lighthouse keys, promising to return them later.

Back in the hotel, Hume acquainted the red-headed office boy with the previous night's happenings. He then explained that he was going to spend the coming night in the lantern-room of the lighthouse, in an endeavour to discover by what means the weird figure came and went, and was about to turn away when he was arrested by a call from Nunky.

"Oh, by the way, Mr. 'Ume," said the lad, "I went into the telephone cabinet to 'phone the office for the space you told me to ask them to reserve, and I discovered something rather interesting scrawled on the wall in pencil."

"What was it?"

"The telephone number of our paper. Not much in that, sir, but just beneath it, and written in the same hand, was the name of one of our compositors—that fellow Crofts."

"Crofts?" echoed Hume, suddenly interested. "Are you sure?"

"Quite, Mr. 'Ume. I thought it might only be a coincidence, finding it down here in this little out-of-the-way place, but I thought it worth mentioning."

Hume nodded thoughtfully. The mention of the compositor's name had set him thinking, for Crofts, curiously enough, was the man he had discovered in the passage outside his room at the "Daily Wire," following the stealthy movements he had heard while Inspector Marsham had been telling his story.

What did it all mean? Had the compositor been eavesdropping on him, and, if so, why?

Hume was rather puzzled; he decided to go into the affair later; so, nodding briefly to Nunky, he went upstairs to his own room. But no sooner had he entered than his sharp eyes detected that someone had been in the apartment since he had left it. Hume quickly glanced round, and arrived at the conclusion that someone had also searched the place during his absence.

Careful inquiries elicited from the hotel proprietor the information that none of the staff had, as yet, been in the room. Hume said no more about the affair, but decided that the mysterious visitor must in some way be connected with the telephone call which had been sent or received between the hotel and the offices of the "Daily Wire."

Marsham spent most of the day following up clues on his own, Nunky accompanying him for the sake of something better to do. And at about eleven o'clock that night

Mervyn Hume once again set off in the direction of the disused lighthouse on the top of the cliff. This time he was provided with the keys of the place, and with them he let himself in and commenced a thorough investigation.

He discovered, as he had already been told, that the lamp in the lantern-room had not been used for many years. Therefore, how to explain the three flashes he had seen the previous night he did not know.

He carefully searched every room in the tower, hoping to find some clue which would indicate the ingress and exit of the mysterious figure in the knee-breeches and three-cornered hat. All his efforts proved futile, however, and eventually he decided to return to the hotel.

As he descended the stone stairs to the room at the bottom of the tower his mind reverted to the information Nunky had given him about the telephone message that had apparently been sent to Crofts, the compositor of "The Wire." For no logical reason, he associated the message with his own visit to Craigscliffe. And how right this intuition was, he was shortly to discover.

He emerged from the old lighthouse and carefully locked the door behind him. He was about to turn in the direction of the town when a figure loomed up before him out of the dark. There was something vaguely familiar, and something distinctly sinister in its movements; but in the dark Hume could not see who it was.

"Mervyn Hume, I believe?" said a voice.

"Porkinson!" echoed Hume. "What are you doing down here?"

The crime reporter of the opposition paper, the "Daily Echo," regarded Hume with a sneer.

"I suppose you thought you had seen the last of me when you tricked me over that last story you were on?" he said.

Hume did not reply. The sudden appearance of the opposition man had rather startled him. Porkinson and Hume were not good friends.

It was only a week or so before that Porkinson had attempted to bribe Hume into selling him a story in order to save his reputation with his chief, who had threatened to sack him for allowing himself to be beaten by the "Wire" so often.

Needless to say, Hume had indignantly refused, and hot words had been exchanged. Smarting under the rebuff, Porkinson had contrived to beat his rival by stealing his pocketbook and publishing the story he had found in it, only to find, later, that the story in question was pure fiction, written for the express purpose of deceiving him.

The affair had caused the "Daily Echo" to look very foolish, especially when the story was officially denied by the police, and the denial appeared in the other papers.

In consequence, Porkinson was under notice to go. But he had determined to get even with Hume before he finally quit Fleet Street. In order to do this he had bribed one, Crofts, a compositor on the "Wire," to inform him of any story Hume might go out on.

And Crofts, as we already know, had nearly been caught in his eavesdropping. Nevertheless, he had managed to put Porkinson on to the story at Craigscliffe, which previously no Fleet Street men knew of with the exception of Mervyn Hume.

"Yes, I tricked you over the last story," said Hume. "And if you have come to steal this from me by your confounded trickery, you will find yourself beaten again."

"Well, I had intended to offer you the chance of working with me and sharing the story between us," snarled the "Echo" man. "But, on second thoughts, I'm hanged if I will."

"Very well," replied Hume. "And now I will trouble you to let me pass."

Porkinson glared. If there was one man he hated more than another it was Hume. All his trickery had gone for nothing before the clever steady work of his rival, and the thoughts of past defeats, together with Hume's apparent contempt of him, stung him to the quick.

A wild, bitter desire for revenge surged up within him, and suddenly losing all control of his beastlike temper, he hit out with all his strength at the face before him.

Crash!

Hume stopped the blow full on the point. But dazed though he was he closed with his cowardly adversary, and together the two went rolling over and over on the ground towards the edge of the cliff.

But Hume managed to extricate himself, and landed a blow which caught Porkinson squarely on the jaw. The rival reporter howled with pain. Then, gritting his teeth, he went for Hume head down, and kicked him with all his might in the lower part of the stomach.

Hume staggered back beneath the cowardly blow, his face paling in the moonlight. But before he could regain his balance Porkinson struck him full in the face again. A myriad of yellow lights danced before his eyes, and the next moment he felt himself falling, down, down, and down.

He had toppled over the edge of the cliff into the sea below!

His cowardly assailant, an icy fear gripping his heartstrings, watched him disappear, too terror-stricken to render any assistance.

"Hume!" he called in a wild frenzy. "Hume, Hume!" But the only reply he received was the gentle lapping of the waves against the sides of the cliff.

Trembling like the craven he was, sick at heart by the tragedy his cowardly attack had caused, Porkinson stared fearfully over the edge of the cliff into the black waters below. But Hume had completely vanished.

His mind working frantically to invent an excuse to clear himself, Porkinson returned to the town and reported the matter to the local police. He did not, however, mention his attack on the missing man, but stated he had met him outside the lighthouse fighting with a couple of roughs

He had gone to his assistance, and had received the injuries which they could see; but, unfortunately, before he could do much, Hume had slipped up and toppled over the cliff, his assailants afterwards escaping into the night.

The police listened to the story without comment, but apparently they saw no reason to doubt it, and advised Porkinson to return to London until he was sent for.

This the "Echo" man did willingly enough. And by the time he arrived at Waterloo Station most of his fear had left him, and he was able to congratulate himself on the plausible yarn he had told to the police.

Indeed, so secure did he feel that he resolved to write the story up for his paper. The death of a man of Mervyn Hume's fame was sure to cause a sensation. That in itself was a point to be considered. Then, too, if anything, it would add strength to the tale he had told the police if it appeared in print, and other papers copied it.

Porkinson's line of action was thus decided on, and ten minutes after his arrival at his office he had the story neatly typed ready for the printers, himself figuring as the hero who had vainly, but gallantly, endeavoured to save his colleague with whom he had been working.

Porkinson had not the nerve to face his chief that night, however, so he left the story with the printers and returned home, leaving his chief to see it when it should appear in proof. The next day, after a good night's rest, he hoped his nerve would be stronger.

To say that this story caused a sensation throughout London when it appeared would be to put it very mildly indeed. London was astounded. And Porkinson, when he reached the offices of the "Echo," from whence a special edition had been published on Hume's account, was besieged with eager questions mixed with congratulations for his supposed pluck, from all quarters.

Special placards were issued on its account, which, in heavy black type, announced:

"DEATH OF MERVYN HUME!"

And on the front page of the paper itself appeared the following story:

"DEATH OF FAMOUS JOURNALIST.

"Mervyn Hume Falls From Cliff Into the Sea.

Cowardly Attack in the Dark.

From our Special Correspondent, Craigscliffe, Thursday.

"'The Daily Echo' regrets to announce the death of Mr. Mervyn Hume, the well-known London journalist, who fell from the cliffs into the sea at Craigscliffe on Wednesday night, and was drowned.

"Mr. Hume had been working on a case with one of our representatives, and towards the later part left the town to make some investigations in a disused lighthouse.

"He was about to return to his hotel, when he was suddenly set upon in the dark by a party of roughs. Our representative, who had only recently arrived at Craigscliffe, was on his way to meet him. On observing what was happening, he immediately dashed to his assistance and closed with his colleague's assailants.

"In the sharp fight which ensued, Mr. Hume was knocked over the edge of the cliff, and fell into the sea, which was running at high tide some fifty yards below.

"He was not seen again, and since the nearest point to the shore is some two miles away, little doubt remains that he was drowned.

"Meanwhile, our representative succeeded in getting the better of the roughs, who made off in the dark, and have not been seen since.

"The motive for the attack is believed to have been robbery."

The story concluded with some details, some true and some fictitious, of Mervyn Hume's career, gathered from the office reference library, and from members of the staff of the "Echo" who had been acquainted with him.

On another page was a special article written and signed by Porkinson, dealing with the more intimate side of the late crime investigator's character.

It was certainly a sensational story, and the "Echo" had made the most of it.

* * * * * * *

On the third day after the publication of the story announcing Hume's death, Porkinson was sitting quietly in his office staring out of the window at the "Wire" offices across the road. No news had come from the police as yet, and the rascally reporter now believed himself to be well out of the wood.

"It seems strange," he muttered, half-fearfully, "that I shall never see Hume standing in his room over the way again. Anyhow, it was——"

He broke off short and started from his chair, his eyes fixed fascinated and fearfully on the room of the opposition paper, dead in line with his own. The next moment a wild shriek broke from him.

"Take it away, take it away!" he screamed like one possessed. "Oh, take it away!"

The wild cry of terror brought a number of his colleagues dashing into his room. Fearfully they stared at him, as ashen-faced he pointed a trembling forefinger to the room across the road, still wildly imploring them to take it away.

And there, in the offices of the "Wire," they saw a figure, standing perfectly still, looking out across the road at them.

It was Mervyn Hume!

"Take him away!" screamed Porkinson again. "It's his ghost, I tell you. Hume's ghost come back to haunt me. I didn't mean,

to do it. I kicked him, and he toppled over the cliff, and now he's come back!"

Gibbering, and heedless of what he was saying, the frenzied and terror-stricken man was led gently away, his colleagues doing their best to soothe him.

There was no doubt about it; the man in the window opposite was Mervyn Hume. The man whom Porkinson had reported dead! The puzzled employees of the "Echo" quickly informed their chief, Mr. Marlinson, of the strange affair. Telephone wires were soon working, and a moment or so later it was established beyond a doubt that the man at the window was in very truth Mervyn Hume, the man they had never expected to see again, alive and well.

Ten minutes after that the unhappy Porkinson had revealed to his shocked colleagues the true story of his cowardly attack on his rival, and had confessed that what he had given his paper to publish was nothing but a tissue of lies invented to make things look better for himself.

In a state of considerable agitation, Mr. Marlinson, the editor of the "Echo," lost no time in visiting the "Wire" office. And there from the lips of Mervyn Hume himself Porkinson's story was confirmed.

"Fortunately for myself, it was high tide when I toppled over," explained Hume, "and I managed by luck to reach shore again."

"But why didn't you let us know, or at least let your office know as soon as you were safe?" asked the agitated Mr. Marlinson.

"For the simple reason," replied Hume, "that Porkinson would have denied the story when I turned up again, and since there were no witnesses, his word would have been as good as mine. I, therefore, resolved to give him a little scare. And how I have succeeded you now know, since he has of his own accord confessed the whole part he played."

And with that Mr. Marlinson had to be satisfied. But when he returned to his own office he was greeted with the information that Porkinson had bolted. His disappearance was regretted by no one, and never more was he seen in Fleet Street.

It was with great satisfaction that shortly afterwards Hume published the solution of the mystery that had taken him to Craigscliffe. When he had toppled over the cliff into the sea he had managed to crawl into a cavern, cut in the side of the cliff, which eventually led him by an underground route into the old lighthouse.

Here, in a room beneath the ground floor, cunningly concealed by a trap-door, he discovered a considerable quantity of smuggled goods, a powerful electric lamp used for signalling to the smugglers' boats out at sea, as well as a suit of clothes heavily smeared with phosphorous.

"And there is not the slightest doubt," remarked Hume to Marsham, some time later, "that had I not been pushed into the sea the subterranean passage by which the lighthouse was entered from the side of the cliffs would never have been discovered. So, in a sense, I owe my last scoop entirely to Porkinson, of the 'Echo,' who reported me dead."

THE END.

Next Week's Story of MERVYN HUME:

THE SCHOOLBOY REPORTER!

Describes how the great newspaper sleuth investigates a case of bullying at a big public school. NUNKY, the office boy, is sent to the school as a new boy and takes a leading part in the case.

THE BLACK MASK

Grand New Serial Detective Story of Nelson Lee and Nipper.

The Opening of the Story.

Olive Brent, the beautiful young ward of Mr. Matheson, has disappeared under singular circumstances from her guardian's London residence, after returning from a visit to the theatre. Her French maid, who was the only person in the house when Olive left so mysteriously, is found drugged. At the time, Miss Brent was wearing a valuable necklace, which had been lent her by Mr. Matheson. There is evidence that the missing girl had departed in a hurry and had taken the necklace with her.

(Now read on.)

THE LETTER FROM THE MISSING GIRL.

NIPPER hastened to the door, and threw it open. A few seconds later the street door below was opened, and Mr. Douglas Matheson ascended the stairs, mounting them three at a time. He was breathless when he entered the consulting-room. He dropped into a chair, and mopped his brow with his handkerchief. Nelson Lee glanced at him shrewdly.

"So you have had news of your ward?" he quietly remarked.

"How—how did you know?" Douglas Matheson panted.

"I merely guessed," said Lee. "It is obvious that nothing else could have brought you here."

"Well, you are right. I have had news from Olive, not of her."

"From Miss Brent? Indeed?"

"Yes, a letter from her! Only a couple of lines! It came this morning! It was posted last night—somewhere in the West Central district, which covers a wide area. I will show you——"

Reaching into his pocket, Mr. Matheson produced separately the envelope and the letter, and handed them to Lee.

"There you are!" he said. "You will readily understand what it means!"

Nelson Lee looked at the postmark, and observed that the envelope was addressed to Coburg Square. Then he unfolded the sheet of paper it had contained, and read aloud what was written on it, as follows:

"Dear Mr. Matheson,—Don't worry about me, and don't try to find me, for it would be useless. I am safe and happy. I will take good care of the jewels. I am going abroad almost at once, and will write to you again in a week or so, and explain everything.

"Affectionately,

"OLIVE."

The detective shrugged his shoulders.

"What do you make of this?" he asked.

"It is as clear as daylight!" Douglas Matheson excitedly declared. "It is just as I supposed! You were wrong, Lee, and I was right! Olive eloped with that fellow Halford! They were married in London—probably in assumed names. Up to last night they were living somewhere in the West End, and by now they are crossing the Channel, or have landed at some French port!"

"Nothing of the sort! Your ward is in London, I dare say, but Mr. Halford is at Bournemouth."

"At Bournemouth? And alone?"

"Yes, alone. It was young Halford who was seen by the constable on Monday night outside your residence in Coburg Square, but he did not entice Miss Brent away. He knew she was at the theatre that night, and he waited for her to return. He begged her to marry him, and she refused. And he was so upset by her refusal that he left town early the next morning."

"Where—where did you get this amazing information, Lee?"

"From Nipper. I sent him down to Bournemouth, and he has just come back."

Continuing, Nelson Lee repeated all that had been told to him by the lad. Douglas Matheson stared blankly, and shook his head in bewilderment.

"It is an absolute mystery to me," he said. "The girl in London, and Lester Halford in Bournemouth! What on earth can it mean? I can't imagine, unless—unless Olive has eloped with somebody else."

"No, she hasn't," Nelson Lee replied. "Your theory is wrong. I have a different one, and I will mention it presently. I want to put some questions to you first. Are you positive that this letter was written by Miss Brent?"

"Yes, I am," Mr. Matheson answered. "I could swear that it is her handwriting."

"Was it usual for her to address you as she has done?"

"No, it wasn't. For several years she has been in the habit of calling me Uncle Douglas, though I am no relation to her."

"Exactly! Yet she addressed you as Mr. Matheson. It is evident, then, that she did not write the letter of her own free will. It was dictated to her, word for word. She wrote it under compulsion."

"Under compulsion? I—I believe she did, Lee. Yes, it would seem so. But how do you account for it?"

"The explanation is simple. Miss Brent is in the power of some scoundrel, perhaps two. She is a prisoner somewhere in London, but not necessarily in the West End."

"A prisoner?" cried Douglas Matheson. "In the power of a couple of scoundrels? Good heavens, can it be possible?"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"There can't be any doubt about it," he replied. "That is my theory, and the circumstances indicate it to be correct."

"But—but how could Olive have——"

"Never mind about that now, Matheson. At this stage of the case I had rather not speak of what I know. I have certain suspicions, and that is all. Leave the matter in my hands. Be patient, and trust to me to solve the mystery. I expect to find and rescue Miss Brent, and the chances are that I shall recover the jewels as well."

"Is Olive's life in danger? Will any harm be done to her, Lee?"

"She will not be harmed. I am sure of that now, though at first I was gravely apprehensive. You need not worry."

"Is that all you have to say? Won't you tell me more? Don't conceal anything from me."

"I have nothing more to say at present, Matheson. In the course of two or three days I may have news for you—and good news."

"Very well! If you won't tell me, you won't. I'll have to wait, I suppose. It is terrible to think that the poor girl is a prisoner somewhere, but it is a comfort for me to know that she is not in any danger. How did it happen? I can't understand it, Lee. It is a most baffling mystery."

Mr. Matheson rose as he spoke, and paced to and fro. His features were twitching, and there was a look of distress in his eyes.

"It is terrible!" he muttered. "Terrible! My poor Olive!"

"Calm yourself," bade Nelson Lee. "I told you not to worry. By the way, did you send to Chorley Wood for your servants?"

"Yes, without delay. They are at Coburg Square. I sent for them yesterday morning, and they arrived in the afternoon."

"And the French maid—what of her? Have you obeyed my instructions?"

"I have, Lee. The police are keeping watch on Diane Merode, and will see to it she does not leave the house. Is it necessary to watch her, though? I don't doubt the statements she made to you and me were true, for she seems greatly distressed about it."

"Yes, Matheson, I dare say she is. She has reason to be."

Douglas Matheson tried again to get some information from the detective.

Nipper closed the door behind him, and glanced at his master.

"It strikes me you know a lot, guv'nor," he said.

"I have certain suspicions, as I admitted to Mr. Matheson," Nelson Lee replied.

"What are they?" asked the lad. "What were you doing yesterday while I was in Bournemouth?"

Nelson Lee's eyes twinkled. He seated himself comfortably in the depths of the big chair, filled his pipe, and held a match to it until the tobacco was aglow.

"I was not idle during your absence, my boy," he said. "I called on Madame Bonnard, the aunt of the French maid. She has a small laundry in Greek Street, Soho, and from what I could judge she is a thoroughly respectable woman. I rather expected to get some interesting information from her, and I was not disappointed.

"It appears that for a year or so there has been lodging with her a young Frenchman, Alphonse Lefroy by name, who was employed as a waiter at the Restaurant Tabarin, in Jermyn Street. Diane Merode called on her aunt now and again, and some months ago she made the acquaintance of the young waiter. The two fell in love with each other, and they recently became engaged.

"Furthermore, during the past month, Alphonse Lefroy has frequently been visited by a friend of his, a man of about his own age. Madame Bonnard never saw him, as she and her lodger used the side-door of the dwelling. But on one occasion, when the two men were in Alphonse Lefroy's bedchamber over the laundry, the woman distinctly heard Lefroy call his friend by the name of Jarvis Carey."

Nipper gave a quick start.

"Jarvis Carey!" he exclaimed. "The crook?"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I should think so," he replied. "It isn't likely there are two persons of that name."

"No, I should say not. It must be the same fellow, guv'nor. Go on—what else?"

"I also learned from Madame Bonnard that her lodger was no longer with her. On Monday morning he paid what he owed, and left with his bag, explaining that he had

got another room, closer to his place of employment. She had not seen or heard of him since.

"My next step was to call at the Restaurant Tabarin in Jermyn Street, where I saw the manager. He told me the waiter was gone, and he could tell me no more than that.

"Alphonse Lefroy left on Sunday evening, having given notice a week previous. So there you are! That is the extent of my information. What deductions would you draw from it?"

"Jarvis Carey and the waiter meant to steal Olive Brent's jewels, of course, and they succeeded in doing so. They made their plans beforehand. That is why Alphonse Lefroy gave notice to the restaurant more than a week ago, and why he left his lodgings in Greek Street on Monday morning."

"Quite right, my boy. Can you see any deeper into the case?"

"Yes, the two men are hiding somewhere in London, and Miss Brent is a prisoner with them. But surely they couldn't have got her away by force from the house in Coburg Square on Monday night? How did it happen, guv'nor?"

"Ah, that is the question!"

"And what of the French maid? She must have been an accomplice in the robbery. She left the kitchen door unlocked, so the thieves could quietly enter the house. She was to have drugged Miss Brent, and she drank the wrong bottle of stout by mistake."

"It would appear so, Nipper. That will do for the present. We won't discuss the matter any farther. Though I doubt if an attempt has yet been made to dispose of the jewels, or any of them, I will make inquiries of pawnbrokers and fences. And you will try to find Jarvis Carey. You have often seen him, and even if he should be disguised—as I dare say he is—you would be able to recognise him by the tiny mole under his left eye.

"His favourite haunts, you will remember, were in Chinatown, and in the vicinity. That is where you will search. You will probably get on the track of the fellow in the course of a few days, and if you find him, if you learn where he is living, you will also have found Alphonse Lefroy and the missing girl.

"As for Miss Brent, I am sure no harm will come to her, as I said before. But she must be in great distress, and I am anxious to rescue her as soon as possible."

"Why are the men keeping her a prisoner, guv'nor? What is their object? I can't guess."

"No, it isn't easy to guess. I have a shrewd idea, though, that they propose to——"

Nelson Lee paused.

"Ring the bell, my boy," he added. "We will have our luncheon now. We will have another talk later, and I will give you full instructions. You had better start on your task to-night."

IN THE OPIUM DEN.

BETWEEN ten and eleven o'clock on Saturday night, five days after the mysterious disappearance of Olive Brent from her home in Coburg Square, a youth, who wore shabby clothes and had a swarthy complexion, turned off the West India Dock Road into Pennyfields, the principal thoroughfare of Chinatown.

He stepped to the south side of the street, and presently he bore into a narrow alley, and came at the bottom of it to a door, above which was a green lamp. An inscription in a strange language was painted on the lamp, and the door led to the Café of the Lotus Flower, the Chinese proprietor of which was Wang Foo.

The youth paused for a moment, opened the door, and descended a flight of steps. He paused again and threw open another door. And as calmly as if he was familiar with the place—as indeed he was—he entered a long low-ceilinged room slouched to the farther end of it, and seated himself at a small table which was unoccupied.

There were many other small tables, and the people who sat at them, drinking and smoking, and talking in strange tongues, were mostly foreign sailors. Wang Foo, a fat and dirty old man, moved to and fro amongst his customers. Paper lanterns hung from the ceiling and the walls, and the air was blue with the reek of vile tobacco.

At the rear of the café was a heavy curtain. It led to a short passage, and at the end of the passage another curtain gave access to an opium den. The shabby youth was Nipper. While Nelson Lee was making inquiries concerning the stolen jewels—and futile inquiries at that—the lad had been scouring this quarter of the East End, searching for the crook who was believed to be the accomplice of Alphonse Lefroy.

His quest had failed. He had met with no luck up to the present. On two previous occasions he had been to the Lotus Flower, and to-night he had come here again, in the faint hope of being successful. Nobody was paying any attention to him. He leaned back in a negligent attitude and took a furtive survey of his surroundings. His gaze wandered from table to table, resting for a few seconds on each person, and finally his heart gave a quick throb.

"There he is!" he murmured. "My word, I'm in luck!"

Three or four yards to the left of him, sitting alone, was a man of about thirty, with sinister features and keen black eyes. His complexion was of a high colour, and he had a scrubby moustache. The cap that was pulled low over his brow; and the dark blue handkerchief that was tied loosely around his neck in place of a collar, gave him the appearance of a typical hooligan. Jarvis

Carey, it may be said, was clean-shaven and had a sallow complexion. But as he had a tiny mole beneath his left eye, and as this man had a similar one, Nipper was quite satisfied that he was Jarvis Carey.

"That's who it is, I'm certain!" he reflected. "He has the same kind of eyes as Carey, and he is of the same build. The fellow is disguised, but the mole gives him away. I'll follow him when he leaves, and find out where he is lodging. And to-morrow he and Lefroy will be caught, and Olive Brent will be rescued, and the jewels will be found. My word, won't the guv'nor be pleased!"

There was no doubt in the lad's mind. He was elated by his success, and confident that it would not be long before he had got the information which Nelson Lee wanted. He lit another cigarette and idly watched the occupants of the café, paying no heed to the crook. A quarter of an hour elapsed. Jarvis Carey was smoking a drinking-bottle pipe.

A Japanese and a lascar began to quarrel, both drawing knives. Wang Foo promptly hastened to them, and flung them apart before a blow could be struck. They settled their dispute, and a moment later the door at the front of the room was thrown open and a Chinese youth appeared.

"The police!" he bawled, at the top of his voice. "The police are coming! Many of them! They'll soon be here!"

A police raid! The youth had no more than given the warning when there was a

"The police!" bawled a youth. Everybody jumped up. Tables went crashing to the floor, glasses were shattered to fragments and chairs were overturned.

frightened clamour. Everybody jumped up. Tables went crashing to the floor, glasses were shattered to fragments, and chairs were overturned.

There was panic and confusion, a blind dash to escape. Old Wang Foo, caught in the wall of seething humanity, was knocked down and trampled upon. From every lip, in different languages, burst the shrill cry:

"The police! The police are coming!"

Jarvis Carey had been the first to rise.

He had at once slipped under the curtain at the rear of the café, with seven or eight of the sailors at his heels, and Nipper next to them. By the time they got to the end of the short passage and entered the opium den beyond it the mob were pressing them from behind, trying to push by them.

Little tables, containing brass pipes and tills of opium, were upset in the rush. The air was heavy with the sickly smell of the drug. The light, burning dimly, showed the recumbent figures of the smokers on the wooden platforms to the right and left.

They were mostly Orientals—brown and yellow men from China, and Japan, and Malaya. Some of them lay still in drugged slumber. Others, partly roused from their stupor, lifted themselves on their elbows, and stared with vacant faces. Nipper was jostled and squeezed, pushed this way and that. It was with difficulty he kept on his feet. His arms were clamped to his sides, and he could not move them. Frenzied yells and curses rang in his ears.

He could see the crook, several yards in front, and he made strenuous efforts to get closer to him. He fought like the rest, bearing hard with his knees and shoulders. Slowly, inch by inch, he was forced through the inner room by the maddened crowd.

"I mustn't lose Jarvis Carey!" he said to himself. "I mustn't!"

At length, bruised and dishevelled, and half-dazed, he was propelled from the opium den into a passage on the left, where a paper lantern was burning. He was running now, in blind haste, and others were running with him. He heard shouts from the rear, the crack of a revolver, the blast of a police-whistle. He looked for Jarvis Carey, and saw him in the lead. He lost him, got another glimpse of him, lost him again. Many of the panic-stricken people from the café were ahead of him, and others, running faster than he was, overtook him from behind. He got in the way of a Japanese sailor, who struck at him.

"Curse you, Entils boy!" he snarled.

The blow sent Nipper reeling. He tripped and fell, scrambled to his feet, and continued his flight. Now he was out in the fresh air, in a narrow alley. He tore on, his heart pounding against his ribs. He was in murky gloom, and, what was more, he had lost sight of the crook. He was scarcely aware of it. His sole thought for the moment was to escape from the police. He was sure they were in pursuit, and he was afraid of being caught and arrested. If that were to happen, it would spoil what chance he had of learning where Jarvis Carey lived.

He glanced about him. There was no sign of the crook, as he had expected.

"Confound the luck!" he muttered. "I've lost the fellow, and I don't suppose I'll have another chance of getting on his track. It isn't likely that he will return to Wang Foo's place, after the police raid to-night That's what upset my plans."

As he spoke, the door of a public-house, close to his right, swung open, and out came the dusky figure of a tall, lean man who wore a cap. He stopped on the pavement to fill and light a pipe, and the glow of the lamp shone on his face, revealing his highly-coloured complexion and scrubby moustache, and a tiny mole beneath his eye. Nipper shrank back into the shop door.

It was Jarvis Carey. There could be no mistake about it. He approached, passed by the lad without a glance at him, and bore to the left into the causeway. Nipper waited for a short interval and stole after the man. He could dimly see him ahead of him, walking at a slow pace. For some distance the two went on, separated by a space of twenty yards or so. Jarvis Carey did not once look back, and if he had he probably would not have noticed the lad, who kept to the shadow of the dwellings. The crook presently crossed the gloomy street, and turned the corner of another street. Nipper hastened to the spot, and, peeping around the corner, he saw that the man had already disappeared. He warily advanced for some yards, going by the closed doors of three or four small dwellings, and paused by the open doorway of a large tenement house. Within was thick darkness, except for a faint glimmer of light which seemed to be at the far end of the hall, beyond the staircase. All was quiet. There was not a sound.

Was this where Jarvis Carey and Alphonse Lefroy were lodging, with the stolen jewels in their possession, and Olive Brent a prisoner in their power? Most likely the crook had gone in here, but there was no certainty of it. It was possible, on the other hand, that he had entered one of the small dwellings. At all events, it was necessary that Nipper should settle the question, and he could do so only by listening at the door from which the light shone.

"Here goes for it!" he murmured. "There won't be any risk."

He mounted the steps and slipped into the building. Slowly and cautiously, with stealthy tread, he glided along the dark hall towards the glimmer of light. Of a sudden he stopped, startled by a creaking noise. And the next instant two muscular hands fastened on his throat, and a voice hissed savagely in his ear:—

"You young whelp! I thought there was somebody shadowing me!"

The lad had walked into a trap. He realised at once that he was in the grasp of Jarvis Carey. His desperate struggles were of no avail. He could not call for help, could not break the suffocating grip. He was choking. His senses reeled. As if in a dream he saw the near-by door thrown open, and saw the vague, black figure of another man. Then a flat weapon rapped him on the head, and he remembered nothing more.

(To be continued.)

(*Continued from page* 14.)

They were ushered into Miss Trumble's study, and she met them with smiles, and with full assurance. Everything the visitors saw indicated that St. Frank's was in a perfect state of harmony, without a single note of discord.

"Really, gentlemen, I am pleased to see you but my time is valuable—I am a busy woman these days," said Miss Trumble pleasantly. "I really cannot understand why you have come."

"Ahem! Well—er—it appears, Miss Trumble, that there has been a slight amount of—ahem!—trouble!" exclaimed Sir James Henson nervously. "Trouble, and unpleasantness, eh?"

"So we have heard, Sir James," said Lord Walberry.

"I am afraid you have been misinformed, gentlemen," exclaimed Miss Trumble. "Surely you have not taken any notice of the ridiculously exaggerated reports which have been appearing in the newspapers? The trouble was nothing—a mere passing phase. I dealt with it drastically—and at once."

"There is no rebellion now?"

Miss Trumble laughed.

"Rebellion!" she exclaimed. "My dear Mr. Stevens! How absurd! I think it would be as well, before going into any details, if you will be good enough to make a short tour of the school."

"H'm—ha—possibly so," said Sir James, stroking his beard. "Possibly so, madam. A look round, eh? Just to satisfy us that everything is in order. A good suggestion—what do you say, gentlemen?"

The gentlemen thought it was.

As a matter of fact, there was something about Miss Trumble that rather put them off their stroke—as Archie would have expressed it. She was so capable, so calmly confident. The governors rather felt that they were at a disadvantage. Miss Trumble had a most exasperating way of enforcing her own wishes.

Indeed, it was mainly this quality in her character that had resulted in her being elected Chairman of the Governors, If Sir John Brent had been on the Board at the time it is doubtful if she would have gained the honorary post.

She could deal with these four "old fogeys" practically as she liked. And they were greatly impressed by her air of absolute command. The confidence in her very manner was self-apparent.

"Please follow me, gentlemen," she said, going to the door. "Please let me remind you again that my time is very fully occupied—being in control of a school like St. Frank's is no light undertaking. And I am pleased to tell you that I have now gained complete mastery over those few boys who were inclined to be insubordinate."

"Splendid—splendid!" murmured Sir James.

"Capital!" agreed Lord Walberry.

They all followed the Headmistress out into the passage. And then commenced a tour of the school. Anything more peaceful could not be imagined. The very idea of a rebellion seemed utterly ridiculous.

Throughout the whole tour there was not a single sign of trouble.

From the Sixth Form-room down to the smallest class of fags, lessons were going on quietly, earnestly, and with an air of perfect harmony and peace. Even in the Remove—which was always more or less noisy—there was an atmosphere of charming quietude. Miss Teezer had seen to that.

Thus, the governors returned to Miss Trumble's study, feeling slightly uncomfortable. They had an idea that they had come down absolutely for nothing. They had cast doubts upon Miss Trumble's capabilities—and they had been proved wrong.

And now the Headmistress adopted a fresh tone.

"Well, gentlemen, you have seen," she said quietly. "Is there any justification for these stories of fighting and rebellion and unruliness?"

"No justification at all, Miss Trumble," said Lord Walberry.

"None whatever," added General Milton.

"In fact, we feel that we owe you an apology!" said Sir James gruffly.

"Quite so—quite so!" muttered Mr. Stevens.

Miss Trumble looked at them severely—and they felt more uncomfortable than ever. When Miss Trumble looked severe she was by no means pleasant

"Under the circumstances, gentlemen, I think that an apology would not be out of place," she said, with quiet dignity. "I may inform you that I resent this inquiry in the strongest possible way."

"Well, Miss Trumble, you see——"

"It is positively scandalous!" interrupted Miss Trumble indignantly. "Am I not the Chairman? Could you not trust me to conduct the school in a fitting manner? Why should I be doubted? Why should you assume——"

"Really, madam—really!" broke in Sir James, in distress. "I trust you will accept our apology in the right spirit. We had no idea—no idea whatever! I can see that our journey was quite needless."

"Quite!" agreed the others.

"In fact, gentlemen, I think we can pass a vote of confidence in Miss Trumble, eh?" went on Sir James, polishing his spectacles. "Personally, I am fully satisfied that Miss Trumble has the school under perfect control."

"Oh, quite!" said the others, again.

The vote of confidence was passed—and, to put it bluntly, the four old gentlemen were very neatly fooled. For Miss Trumble, in her extremity, had descended to nothing more nor less than cunning.

She had mentioned nothing about the armistice! She did not tell them that the trouble was only in abeyance—she did not explain that the Remove was really at the school because a truce had been called.

No. She had decided to settle this question independently—after the Governors had gone. And Miss Trumble believed that she would be able to bring the Remove to its knees in the immediate future.

And she was clever, too.

"Well, gentlemen, I am delighted that you are satisfied," she exclaimed. "But it would be far more satisfactory to me if you made arrangements to stay—say until the end of the week. I want you to be fully satisfied. By all means remain at the school."

Of course, this was the very last thing that Miss Trumble desired. But she knew with whom she was dealing, and she also knew that there was practically no risk.

Sir James Henson shook his head firmly.

"Not at all—not at all!" he declared. "For us to stay would be in the nature of an insult, Miss Trumble. Good gracious! We have no desire to spy upon you—none whatever! We are fully satisfied in every possible way. We will go at once, without hindering you further."

"Splendid!" said Lord Walberry, rising.

The Governors were only too glad to get away, and a moment later they were escorted out, after bowing to their hostess, and Miss Trumble was left alone in her study.

She sat there, at her desk, her face glowing with triumph.

"The greatest difficulty of all is overcome," she murmured. "And now I shall deal with the other! It will be easy! The battle is won!"

CHAPTER IX.

WILLY ON THE WATCH!

REGINALD PITT was one of the first fellows out in the Triangle when morning lessons were over.

He emerged, and saw the big limousine which had brought the governors to the school. It was still standing there, waiting for its cargo of distinguished passengers.

"This looks as though the gang means to hop off pretty soon," Pitt told himself. "Of all the old buffers, they take the cake! If they ever had any brains, they died long ago!"

There had been a considerable amount of whispered discussion in the Form-room after the governors had gone. And it was generally agreed that the old gentlemen were harmless enough, no doubt, but they were

certainly not fitted to be in a position of responsibility such as this.

Pitt strolled over, and had a look at the car. He was just examining the rear of it when the four governors came bustling out. They went straight to the car, lighting cigars as they paused at the door.

"Yes, yes! An excellent suggestion, Sir James!" Lord Walberry was saying. "The Bannington races, eh? I have no objection. Might as well make a day of it now we're here, eh?"

"Certainly!" said General Milton, nodding. "The races at Bannington are particularly good, too. Friend of mine there—two horses entered. Excellent hotel in the town—The Grapes. First-rate dinners, I've heard."

"That's all right, then," said Sir James Henson. "We'll go to the races, dine at the Grapes, and catch the night express."

The others stated their approval, and all piled into the car. Pitt grinned to himself as the limousine moved out of the Triangle.

"Gay old dogs!" he murmured. "Going to the races; and dinner at the Grapes afterwards! Hallo, Nipper. Did you hear?"

I had strolled up at that moment.

"Hear what?" I asked.

Pitt told me what he had overheard. Of course, there had been nothing private in it. But I listened to the news with particular interest. It struck me that the information might be highly valuable.

"Of course, we don't know what's happened here," I said thoughtfully. "I expected the governors to stop longer——"

"They look merry enough, anyhow," interrupted Pitt. "It's my belief they've had that conference, and Miss Trumble has arranged for the masters to return. That's why the old chaps look so pleased. We shall be hearing something from Miss Trumble before long, I suppose."

"I hope so," I replied. "But I don't quite like the governors going so quickly. It seems to me that Miss Trumble has been throwing dust into their eyes. Not that that matters much. We're safe. And it's good to know that the governors will be at The Grapes this evening."

"Why?"

"Because there's never any telling!" I replied vaguely. "If the governors were going straight back to London it would be a different thing. But they are practically on the spot, and that's a comforting thought."

"You evidently expect some trouble, then?" asked Pitt curiously.

"I'm blessed if I know what to expect," I replied. "But we can't be too careful, Reggie. I don't suspect Miss Trumble of treachery, but I'd like you to pop over to the trenches soon, and have a look round. Just see that everything is exactly as we left it."

"Right you are," agreed Pitt. "I'll go now."

"I didn't shift, because I wanted to be on the spot, in readiness for Miss Trumble. At any moment a summons might come. I was fairly certain that she would send for me before the time for dinner.

"But half an hour passed, and I heard nothing.

There was no word from Miss Trumble, and St. Frank's might have been quite normal, to judge by appearances. A group of fellows here and there, talking together, were the only indications that something unusual was afoot.

The Remove had thoroughly enjoyed itself that morning.

To be free from the duties of remaining on guard, to eat ordinary food again, all these things were a boon. And there was scarcely a fellow who wasn't convinced that we should now stay for good. Miss Trumble would never dare to let us go back.

Pitt returned shortly before dinner.

"Anything happened?" he asked.

"Nothing," I replied. "She hasn't made any move yet."

"Oh, well, give her time," said Reggie. "Everything's quiet. As far as I can see, nothing has been touched. The trenches are exactly as we left them. Not a soul in sight."

This, at all events, was a relief. And I was not the only one who believed in taking precautions. Willy Handforth, although only a Third-former, was exceedingly cute.

And he made it his business to visit the trenches directly after dinner. He, too, had nothing to report. At the same time, Willy was far from satisfied. He didn't trust Miss Trumble an inch.

"After all, there wouldn't be anything happening now!" he told himself shrewdly. "If there's going to be any treachery, it'll take place during the afternoon, while all the chaps are at lessons. I shall have to come back. I'm not going to let those Remove fatheads be caught napping.

It was practically time for lessons now, and when the bell rang I went to the Remove Form-room with a sense of slight disappointment and uneasiness. Surely Miss Trumble would have made some move before now if she intended to bring the masters back?

However, I did not worry. With that signed paper in my possession it was impossible for the Headmistress to interfere with the trenches. She simply couldn't risk it.

If we had to go back, well, we would go.

But the suspense was rather galling. Afternoon lessons were trying in the extreme. And none of the fellows were able to settle down properly. Yet, during the period of the truce, we could not take any sort of action. We should keep faith.

In the Third-form room, Willy jumped up an hour after lessons had started.

"Please, Miss Nixon, can I hurry outside for a drink of water?" he asked innocently. "I think the dinner must have been very salt!"

The Form-mistress looked up, frowning.

"Surely you can wait until lessons are over, Handforth minor!" she asked.

"Of course I can, miss," replied Willy coolly. "But you're not going to be so jolly mean, I suppose? A chap can't do his work properly if he's gasping for a drink all the time."

"How long will you be?" asked Miss Nixon.

"About two shakes!" said Willy.

"That is an absurd expression!" said the Form-mistress severely.

"Well, you know what I mean, miss," said Handforth minor. "It doesn't take long to get a drink of water, does it? I'll buzz out, and then buzz back. Shall I bring a glass for you?"

"No, certainly not!" exclaimed Miss Nixon. "You may go!"

"Thanks muchly!" said Willy. "How about a bottle of pop?"

He didn't wait to hear Miss Nixon's reply, for she didn't seem any too pleased. The other Third-formers looked at him enviously. They all wished that they possessed his calm assurance.

"'Tain't fair!" growled Chubby Heath. "He can do anything he jolly well likes! He's got cheek enough for twenty!"

Willy was marching down the deserted corridors, with a very set expression on his face. He paused to have a drink; he felt that he was compelled to do that, and he was a bit thirsty, too.

So, his conscience satisfied, he hurried outside. Mrs. Hake, glancing out of her tuckshop, caught sight of a streak in the Triangle. She couldn't understand what it was; it looked something like an extra big rabbit. But it was only Willy.

He thought it far better to get out of the Triangle with all speed. He couldn't risk being pulled up.

"That's good!" he muttered, as he reached Little Side. "Now to have a good old squint!"

He had come out because he was still far from satisfied regarding Fort Resolute. He had a very uneasy conviction that all was not right.

But when he approached the trench-system there was nothing to indicate that Miss Trumble was attempting any trickery. The old barn lay there in the weak March sunlight. Not a soul could be seen anywhere in the vicinity. The trenches were quiet and empty.

Willy gave a grunt of disappointment..

"Well, there's a swindle!" he muttered. "I was expecting all sorts of things. Seems that the old girl's keeping her word, after all! H'm! I shall have to have another look around yet."

He was still doubtful, and he worked his way round towards the rear, and in the direction of the River Stowe. Then, just as he was going round a bush, he drew back, all his nerves on the stretch. A flush had come into his face, and his eyes were sparkling.

"Great guns!" he breathed tensely. "What ho!—as Archie would say. What ho!—in large chunks! This is where I see a few things!"

He peeped round the bush, and gazed at a few men who were hard at work on a patch of ground not more than thirty yards away. After all, there was nothing very sinister in this.

There was no reason why men shouldn't work if they wanted to, and they were nowhere near Fort Resolute and the trench system. They were, in fact, well outside the bounds of it.

But, as Willy watched, he grew more excited than ever.

"The dirty dogs!" he said fiercely. "Oh, the filthy bounders! And Miss Trumble isn't any better! I'll bet she's wangled this! I'm jolly well going to tell Nipper! I'll burst into the giddy Remove room, and tell him everything! Blow the truce! We're not going to be dished!"

He turned round and gave one bound forward, intending to start off for the school at a run. He ran right into the arms of Farmer Holt, who was just coming up round the bush.

"Now then, my lad, hold on a bit!" exclaimed Farmer Holt harshly.

"Lemme go!" yelled Willy.

He struggled desperately; he struggled and twisted like an eel. Farmer Holt gasped and grunted, and found it quite impossible to hold his prisoner. Willy got away.

But it was too late.

Two other men had come up, and even as Willy tried to speed off, he was held once again. And this time there was no chance of getting away. Agile though he was, he couldn't fight against such odds.

Farmer Holt—who was hand and glove with Miss Trumble—looked at the Third-former grimly and angrily.

"A spy, hey!" he exclaimed roughly. "Come prowling about to see what you could spot, I s'pose. All right, young man. We'll soon deal with you. We can't let him go back to the school now," he added, turning to the others.

"No, I reckon he's seen too much, sir," said one of the men.

"You—you treacherous rotters!" gasped Willy. "Help! Help! Hi! Remove!"

"Close his infernal mouth!" snarled Holt.

Willy's screams were of tremendous power. He wasn't a bit afraid; he hadn't cried out on that account. But he wanted to give some kind of warning to the rest of the rebels. And this was his only chance.

A hand was clapped over his mouth before he could say anything else, and then he was lifted off his feet, struggling furiously, and carried down across the meadow to the River Stowe. Arriving at the back of the stream, he was held there by two men, while a third brought a boat. Willy was dumped into it, still held.

"Take him over to the island, and keep him there," said Holt. "Don't need to be rough; he's only a nipper, and can't do no

harm. You can take care of him, Bigge. If you let him get away, you won't get a penny out of me for this job. But look after him all right, and I'll give you an extra quid."

"Right you are, sir," said Biggs promptly.

And Willy, to his fury and chagrin, was carried in the boat down stream until Willard's Island was reached. Nobody saw this disaster to the hero of the Third, for all was quiet on the river at this time of the afternoon.

Willard's Island was quite a small affair, but it was peculiar because there was an old stone building in the centre of it, almost hidden among the high trees. It was locally known as Willard's Folly, and had been erected years and years earlier by an old eccentric.

And Willy was taken into this castle-like building, and forced down into one of the small cellars at the bottom of a stone staircase. His feelings were too deep for words.

From the very start he had been convinced that something was afoot.

He had proved that he was right—but before he could give any warning he had been taken a prisoner by the enemy. And this, several hours before the truce had ended!

It was treachery of the worst possible type. And the outlook was black.

CHAPTER X

THE END OF THE TRUCE!

"FIVE o'clock!" I said grimly.

I was standing on the Ancient House steps with Pitt, Tommy Watson, Handforth and one or two others. Lessons had been finished for over half-an-hour. And the truce would be at an end by six. I had already sent word round the entire Form that nobody was to move out of the school grounds. Every fellow was to hold himself in readiness for instant action.

And so great was the interest—so big the issues at stake—that even cads like Fullwood and Co. and Teddy Long and Merrell obeyed me. They had no desire to be left out if the Remove went back to the trenches.

"Unless Miss Trumble sends for me within five minutes, I'm going to her!" I declared firmly, "and we'll get back to Fort Resolute before the hour trikes."

"Wouldn't it do if we left here at six?" asked Handforth.

"Of course not!" I replied. "Holt and his men might be waiting—at some point between here and the Fort. And as soon as six strikes, the armistice is finished, and the enemy can act. We've got to be right in the trenches, with our defences ready, when the hour goes."

Tubbs came up through the crowd.

"Please, Master Nipper, Miss Trumble says as how she wants you in her study!" he

Willy turned round and gave one bound forward, intending to start off for the school at a run. Instead, he ran right into the arms of Farmer Holt, who was just coming up round the bush.

announced. "Will you kindly go straight away, sir?"

The summons had come!

I couldn't help feeling just a little excited inwardly. Had Miss Trumble left the interview until the last moment for some purpose? Was she going to give us our way, or would hostilities be resumed?

It was not long before I knew the truth.

I followed Tubbs across the Trangle, and into the Head's House. The other fellows had stood watching us curiously. They would do nothing until I returned.

I entered the Headmistress' study, and found her seated at her desk. She seemed quite calm and collected, but I noticed a rather dangerous gleam in her eyes. She looked at Tubbs, and nodded.

"You may go!" she said curtly.

Tubbs went, and I waited.

"Well, Nipper, the truce is nearly at an end," exclaimed Miss Trumble, her voice thin and rasping. "It will greatly interest you to know that I have changed my mind."

"Changed your mind, madam," I repeated.

"Yes. You must remain in the school," said Miss Trumble. "You and your companions must accept any conditions that I choose to impose. There will be no football, and every other regulation that I have made will stand good. My only concession will be to reinstate Glenthorne and yourself."

I stiffened.

"You mean that we must remain on your conditions?" I asked.

"Exactly."

"Isn't this rather sudden, Miss Trumble?"

I inquired, quietly. "Yesterday you offered us——"

"This is not yesterday!" broke in the Headmistress sourly. "Since then I have reviewed the whole situation, and I have come to the conclusion that I have been quite foolish. Yesterday I was weak—to-day I am strong."

"You have definitely refused our demands?"

"Definitely!"

"The masters will not be brought back?"

"Do not be absurd, boy!" said Miss Trumble, with an unpleasant laugh. "There will be no masters in this school. You are at liberty to go back to your trenches if you wish. But I advise you to stay."

I looked at her rather contemptuously.

"Do you think this is playing the game, Miss Trumble?" I asked quietly. "Do you think you have dealt fairly with us?"

"Perfectly fairly," she replied, with icy calmness.

"You consider it fair to allow the governors to come here, and to deceive them?" I asked, my voice quivering with indignation. "Do you consider it fair to——"

"Silence!" commanded Miss Trumble. "That is not your business. I have stated my terms—and if you do not accept it will be the worse for you and your young friends. Since I have been at St Frank's I have learnt much. I am beginning to know how to deal with insubordinate schoolboys."

I bent across the table.

"You need not imagine, madam, that the Remove will remain in the school!" I said. "We shall go at once—we shall return straight to our trenches. And we shall fight this thing out until the masters are brought back. We like to have this school run cleanly."

The Headmistress rose to her feet.

"You impertinent puppy!" she said shrilly. "How dare you?"

"Possibly, Miss Trumble, you have overlooked the document which is now in my possession," I went on, ignoring her tirade. "That document will not do you very much good if I deliver it into the hands of the school governors. In fact, I think that——"

"You may do as you wish, you absurd child!" exclaimed Miss Trumble sourly. "I am not afraid of the document—I have kept my word in every possible way—strictly to the letter. Not a soul has entered your ridiculous defence system. Nothing has been touched. You may go back if you will."

"We shall go," I declared.

"Very well," said the Headmistress. "But let me give you some advice, my boy. Consider carefully before you renew this hostility. You are back in the school now—you have a chance to remain. Is it worth reviving all the old trouble? Will you gain much?"

"We shall gain what we have been fighting for," I broke in grimly. "I can well imagine, madam, that some ladies would be entirely successful in your position. But ever since you took control of St. Frank's you have mismanaged the school, and you are concluding your activities by unscrupulous treachery which would be beneath the contempt of——"

"Stop!" shouted Miss Trumble. "I will listen to no further insults! Go! You have had your chance—I will hear no more!"

I went out of the study fairly boiling with rage. I knew well enough that she had deliberately tricked us. She had got us into the school so that the governors would believe that everything was all right.

And now that she had fooled them, she calmly thought that we should knuckle under.

It was merely another proof of her utter incapacity to judge the temper of the Remove. Every time she thought that we should give way—and she never learned. She was obstinate to the backbone, and did not seem to possess the common sense that any man would bring to his aid.

I decided, on the spur of the moment, that whatever happened I would place that document—signed by Miss Trumble—in the hands of the governors before they left Bannington.

That would bring them back! And then they would be able to see exactly the kind of peace that was reigning at St. Frank's! They would come and have a look at us in our trenches. And, unless I was mistaken, there would be a very great change within a few hours.

This foolish move on Miss Trumble's part did not worry me—it only made me angry and amazed.

I could not possibly understand how she could be insane enough to hope that victory could now come her way. I supposed it was because she was a woman, and didn't try to reason things out.

I got outside in the Triangle, and was at once surrounded. The fellows seemed to understand that something was wrong.

"Well?" demanded Pitt quickly.

"Miss Trumble has chosen war!" I replied.

"What!"

"War again!"

"Yes!" I said. "The armistice will be at an end in forty-five minutes—and we've got to get into our trenches. There's not much time to spare. We shall have to rush."

"But—but what did she say?" asked Tommy Watson.

"She said that her original concessions are cancelled!" I replied. "If we come back, we must accept her own conditions—no football, no studies, no supper! Bed at eight o'clock, restrictions here and restrictions there——"

"Never!"

"We won't stand it!"

"Not likely!"

The excitement grew rapidly.

"Don't get carried away!" I shouted sharply. "We've got to rush! Sound the

whistle! Then we will clear out Mrs. Hake's tuck-shop and hurry back to the trenches."

"Let's hope they're still all right!"

Handforth and Pitt and one or two others at once commenced blowing a number of whistles—signals that we had previously agreed upon. And by twenty minutes past five all the rebels were marching indoors to go to the dormitory. And the juniors were excited—but grim and calm as well.

Chambers came hurrying in.

"I say, is this true?" he asked.

"Quite true," I replied. "There's no peace! Miss Trumble prefers war, and she'll have it. But it won't be for long, Chambers. This is the last lap. By to-morrow our victory will be complete."

"I've heard that before!" grunted Chambers. "Look here the best thing we can do is to stay! I'm not weakening, but if these women carry on just the same as the men, it won't matter. We shall have football——"

"Miss Trumble is not willing to make any concessions now," I broke in. "We've got to come back on her own terms."

"What!" roared Chambers. "Oh, all right! That's settled it! I'm with you!"

My greatest anxiety was to get back to the Fort. I was afraid that Miss Trumble had been even more treacherous than we knew of at the moment. I should not be sorry if we found all the trenches smashed in. For that would give us the best possible lever.

It was not long before we hurried off. We paid Mrs. Hake all the money we could rake together, and carried off large supplies of food. Then, all loaded up, we marched away towards the Fort. All the juniors were intensely relieved when they found that nothing had been touched.

Miss Trumble had kept her word.

Within half an hour the camp life was going on as usual. The trenches were manned, and the position was now altogether better, because we had brought big supplies of food.

But, somehow, the cadets were uneasy. They could not help thinking that Miss Trumble had something up her sleeve. But what? How could she hope to beat us now?

In spite of that signed document in my pocket, I could not help feeling worried deep down in my heart. Miss Trumble's confidence had been so great, that I had a sort of fear that something like disaster was near at hand.

And then came a piece of news which made me wonder. Willy Handforth was not to be found. Edward Oswald had searched high and low—all over the camp. And he had ascertained that Willy had not been seen since dinner-time. What had happened to the hero of the Third?

CHAPTER XI.

THE PRISONER ON THE ISLAND!

WILLY, as a matter of fact, was fed up. It was getting on in the evening now, and he knew that the armistice was already at an end. Yet he was still held a prisoner. There was no escape for him.

He had been told by one of his captors that he needn't worry. No harm would come to him if he kept quiet. And he would be set free by seven-thirty, at the latest.

The one man, Biggs, was now in charge of him. And Willy had no opportunity of getting away from his prison. He had made one or two attempts. But had only hurt himself. And now he had come to the conclusion that it was useless. What could he do single-handed against a hulking brute of a man who barred the door?

Willy was not even allowed to be alone. He was kept in a little cellar, far below the level of Willard's Island, with Biggs sitting in the doorway on an upturned box. A lantern stood just outside. It was impossible for Willy to escape, for he had to pass the man.

And he had found that Biggs could not be passed.

If only he had had some sort of weapon—even a handful of dust—he might have stood some kind of chance. But this little cellar was bare. And all Willy could do was to stand in there, fuming.

He wasn't bound or tied in any way. After all, he was just a kid, and if a big man couldn't look after a mere Third-former, it was a pity! Biggs was inclined to be pleasant, too.

"There ain't no need for you to get excited, my young shaver!" he said pleasantly, as he stood up to stretch himself. "It won't be long now afore you can go."

"You'll get chokey for this!" declared Willy fiercely.

The man laughed.

"That will be nice, won't it?" he asked. "Don't you make any mistake, my lad. It ain't a criminal offence to 'ave a lark with a young schoolboy. An' who d'you think's goin' to take your word, anyhow? D'you 'appen to be the Lord Mayor o' London, or a blinkin' Cabinet-minister?"

Willy felt bitter.

"I should hope I've got more brains than either of them!" he said, with heavy sarcasm. "And you needn't look so jolly pleased with yourself! I give you fair warning, I'm going to escape in about five minutes!"

"Thanks! I shall know when to be on the look-out!" grinned Briggs.

He sat down again, filled his pipe, and then produced an automatic petrol-lighter—finding that his matches had given out. He pulled the cap off the thing, and gave the little notched wheel a sharp push over. There

was a spark, and a tremendous burst of flame.

It was only a trifle; the lighter had been overfilled with spirit. But it gave Biggs a bit of a start, for the petrol spurted on to his hand, and blazed there.

"Crikey!" he shouted, jumping up.

Willy was an opportunist. He didn't wait to stare; he didn't say a word. He only knew that the man's attention was distracted for a flash. And during that flash Willy seized the chance that the fates had offered.

Swish!

In one moment Willy had dived down like an eel, and he slithered between the man's legs, and out into the passage. At the same second the fellow dropped the petrol-lighter with a clatter.

"What the thunder——"

"Good-bye-ee!" exclaimed Willy, with a cackle.

Biggs gave a roaring curse, and went blundering up the steps after his late prisoner. A rowing-boat might just as well have tried to chase a destroyer. Willy was at the top of the stairs before Biggs had moved a yard.

The Third-former skipped out of the building dodged past a man who was standing near by, and arrived in the open. It was broad daylight, being only a little after six.

But Willy was slightly surprised at first. He had been down in the dark cellar so long that he had been imagining that it would be night-time out in the open. One glance showed him that a small boat was tied to a willow sapling, just against the bank.

"Couldn't be better!" said Willy. "This is a bit of luck!"

He whizzed down to the river bank, gave one leap, and landed in the boat with a crash that was enough to send him clean through the bottom boards. He was aware of shouts in his rear.

The force of his jump was so tremendous that it sent the boat shooting out. The painter snapped like a piece of string, and Willy collapsed on to his back.

The man he had passed had been right on his heels. Even as Willy jumped, he prepared himself, and jumped, too. But when he arrived at the end of his leap the boat was no longer there. The result was rather unfortunate for the man. He splashed into about four feet of water with a noise that sounded like a miniature Niagara.

Willy sat up in the boat, grinning.

"Do that again!" he said calmly. "I didn't see it!"

Then he seized the oars, and just as Biggs came dashing down to the bank, Willy started pulling up river with all his strength. He made a zig-zag course, and splashed fearfully. For when it came to rowing, Willy was very much like his elder brother. He didn't care how he did it as long as he kept going. And at length he arrived at the nearest point to Fort Resolute.

Jumping out of the boat, he could just see the roof of the barn over the trees. He leapt ashore, and raced away across the meadows.

A couple of minutes later he dropped into the front line trench, and found Armstrong and Griffiths and one or two others protecting this particular section. He gazed at them excitedly.

"Anything happened?" he panted.

"Yes; we're back again," said Armstrong "Can't you see? Miss Trumble has refused ——"

"Blow Miss Trumble!" snapped Willy. "What about the trenches?"

"What about 'em?"

"Are they still all right——"

"You young idiot!" snorted Armstrong "Can't you see they're all right. If you're looking for a thick ear, you'd better say so. I'm not going to stand any of your tommy rot, my lad!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Willy

He dashed by before the Removites could touch him. And a moment or two later he ran full tilt into Edward Oswald. The leader of Study D grasped him firmly.

"Oh, here you are, my lad!" said Handforth. "Where have you been?"

"I want to see Nipper——"

"That's not an answer to my question!" said Handy. "Where have you been to? Don't you know that you're liable to be shot at dawn for neglecting your duty?"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Willy. "Here we stand, with doom staring us in the face, and all you can do is to talk piffle! That's not surprising, because you can't talk in any other way!"

"Why, you young sweep—"

"Oh, lemme go!" snapped Willy.

He tore himself away, and ran on.

"Hi!" bawled Handforth. "Come back, you blessed little fathead! I'm not going to be checked like this——"

His voice died away, for Handforth slithered as he gave chase, and he collapsed into the bottom of the trench. Willy dashed on, and arrived outside Fort Resolute. I was standing there, talking to Reggie Pitt and Tommy Watson and Singleton.

"Oh, at last!" gasped Willy, as he dashed up to me. "Quick! You've got to come and help me to shift something——"

"Shift something?" I broke in. "What on earth do you mean?"

"We've been betrayed!" yelled Willy. "Holt and his gang have been at work!"

"What!"

"All the afternoon!" gasped Willy. "I came here and spotted 'em, and they took me prisoner! I've been kept on Willard's Island, and I couldn't escape until about ten minutes ago."

I knew that Willy was not trying to fool

me. I looked at him grimly. And I was beginning to understand. Miss Trumble had given her word that nobody would interfere with our trenches. But, apparently, Holt's men had been working beyond the bounds of our defence system.

"But what has been done?" I asked quickly.

"These men were digging away like mad!" panted Willy. "I believe they've made a kind of stoppage in that small stream that runs nearly parallel with the second meadow. I couldn't quite see——"

Bo—oom!

At that moment Willy was interrupted by a startling, deafening explosion. It came from comparatively near by, and that was why it sounded so loud. Glancing round, I saw large pieces of earth hurtling into the air, not far behind the barn. And then came a surging, rushing sound.

A big cloud of smoke rolled over on the evening breeze!

CHAPTER XII.

THE WRATH OF THE REMOVE!

"GREAT Scott!"

"Begad!"

"My only hat!"

"What—what was that?"

All the juniors came tearing along from all parts of the trenches. For they were quite startled by that resounding boom which had broken so unexpectedly upon the evening air.

"Gadzooks!" said Archie, appearing out of the barn. "I mean to say, large and frightful bangs, and what not! It seems to me, laddies, that somebody has an idea that the good old Fifth has come round again!"

"That wasn't a firework, Archie," shouted Church. "There's been some foul play."

"I mean to say, what?" gasped Archie. "Foul play? But that's frightful! Absolutely! In other words, filthy work at the cross roads. Putrid doings, and so forth!"

Nobody took any notice of Archie, but pushed past him, in order to see what was happening.

The excitement was general.

In the meantime, I was questioning Willy, who was getting out his story as quickly as he could possibly manage.

"I saw those men working on that part of the stream!" he panted. "They were digging up a huge trench, and some others were making a kind of dam. I couldn't quite get the hang of it—and they collared me. But it means something——"

"Hi!" came a roar in Handforth's voice. "Help! Quick—quick! This way, you chaps! Yaroooh!"

"What's the matter with that fathead?" yelled Armstrong.

"Help!" howled Handforth. "There's water rushing in here—coming along at a terrific speed! I can't stop it!"

And at the same moment shouts came from other trenches further along. The fellows

came rushing down towards the Fort as hard as they could pelt. Hurrying down the slope, I gazed upon a sight that filled me with rage.

The whole trench system was being flooded!

Brown, muddy water came surging along at a great speed—a rapid flood which rose higher and higher with every minute that passed. Many of the juniors only just scrambled out in time to escape a soaking.

"But—but what can it mean?" gasped Reggie Pitt.

"Mean?" I repeated, as we stood watching. "Isn't it clear? These men that Willy spoke about were preparing this. Our trenches are flooded, and our entire defence system isn't worth a penny!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"But—but can't we do something?" yelled Handforth, rushing up, smothered with mud. "I tried to stop it, but——"

"It's no good, Handy," I interrupted. "We might as well try to push the tide back. All we can do is to stand here and watch it."

And there we stood, with the flood rising higher and higher.

After that first rush the movement was not so rapid. But the water crept up and up, inch by inch and foot by foot. And all the fellows could do was to stand there and see their defences rendered useless.

"It's—it's a shame; a rotten, wicked shame!" shouted Bob Christine fiercely. "This must have been planned while we were in school to-day. It was done during the truce!"

"Of course it was!"

"We've been betrayed!"

"And now Miss Trumble's got us whacked—beaten to the wide!" yelled Armstrong. "We can't do a thing to defend ourselves. We shall have to admit defeat, and crawl back with our tails between our legs!"

"Yes, that's about it," sneered Fullwood. "We ought to have tails, too! We're nothing but a set of monkeys for not acceptin' Miss Trumble's first offer. It was generous enough, and we should have been all right."

"Hear, hear!"

"It was Nipper's fault for urging us to refuse the terms!"

"Of course it was!"

"And now the whole thing's messed up—and we're as good as beaten!" groaned Armstrong. "Oh, what fools we were not to take the chance while we had it. I expect Holt and his men will attack us soon!"

"Oh, that's bound to happen!" said Hubbard, looking scared. "And without any trenches, we can't do anything. Those men 'll sweep up, and we shall be driven clean off the place. That means we've got to go back to the school—beaten and disgraced!"

"A fine ending to the whole affair!" said Merrell tartly.

"Look here, you grumblers, if you can't say anything better than this, you'd better not speak at all!" I exclaimed quietly. "If it comes to an attack, we can't defend ourselves. I know that well enough. But how could we tell that Miss Trumble would resort to such low-down methods?"

"You ought to have been prepared——"

"I was prepared!" I retorted. "I insisted upon her giving me a signed document that she would not have the trenches interfered with. She kept her word; but, morally, she's guilty of the basest kind of treachery."

"Rather!" said Tommy Watson.

"It's no good beating about the bush," I went on. "The thing's done, and we can't alter it now. While that truce was on, Miss Trumble had Holt and his men manufacture that dam and the trench. It couldn't be done at any other time, because we have always been on the watch."

"Still, we're helpless, aren't we?" asked Christine. "I mean, we're practically at Miss Trumble's mercy. As soon as we're attacked, we shall be beaten. It's a shame—a rotten shame! We ought to go to the school in a body, and pitch all the women out!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's go!"

"Anyhow, we can pitch everybody out of the College House, and take possession of that!" roared Handforth. "It's only a mouldy kind of place——"

"Is it?" yelled a dozen College House juniors.

"Well, you know what I mean!" said Handforth. "It's not so big as the Ancient House, and we might be able to seize it——"

"Now, then, you chaps, don't get so excited!" I said, pushing forward. "You've got every reason to be angry, but there's no need to get into such a state as this. The position's a bit serious, but not half so bad as it might be."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that we're nearly at the end of the campaign."

"We are at the end!" said Hubbard. "We're whacked!"

"Not at all!" I declared. "Victory was never more certain than it is at this moment. This is just about the finish!"

The juniors crowded round me, quite unable to understand what I meant. And as I looked round, I caught sight of Farmer Holt, standing several hundred yards away, gazing at the scene with clear satisfaction. He and his men had done their work well, and they had every reason to congratulate themselves.

The water was still pouring in.

And all the trenches were now flooded to the very brim. Where everything had been trim and orderly before, there was now nothing to be seen but a swirling expanse of muddy water. Every trench was a miniature river, and the majority were overflowing their banks. All kinds of odds and ends were floating about in this sudden flood.

If an attack came now, it would be sheer idleness to defend ourselves. We only had the barn—and a number of determined men could smash their way in after a very short time.

And, sooner or later, we should be driven out. For, with our trenches gone, and with most of the heart taken out of the cadets themselves, a fight would be nothing more than a sheer farce.

"You're a queer sort of a chap, Nipper!" said Armstrong. "How can victory be near, if we're driven out of this place? You know well enough that we can't defend ourselves."

"And we've got nowhere else to go, either," put in Hubbard. "If we're beaten now, it'll be the end of everything. We shall have to submit to Miss Trumble's rot all along. We shall have to knuckle under."

Archie Glenthorne nodded.

"Without wishing to be frightfully pessimistic, old lads, I must observe that the posish appears to be poisonous in the extreme!" he remarked. "I mean to say, the dear old lads of the village can hardly fight while they're wallowing in sundry gallons of fluid!"

"Of course we can't fight!"

"Then, under the circs, it appears to me that the jolly old scheme is somewhat kyboshed!" said Archie. "That, of course, is ghastly! Absolutely! I might even say that it's worse than putrid! All this wetness oozing about in various directions. Now, water is not so bad. But this vile material—don't you know!—liquid mud——"

"I'm sorry, Archie, but we haven't got time to listen to you now!" I put in grimly.

"Absolutely not!" said Archie.

"There's something more important on hand——"

"Carry on, laddie—carry on!"

"You idiots seem to have got the idea that we're at the end of our tether," I exclaimed, addressing the whole crowd. "I know well enough that you are angry—and you've every reason to be."

"We've been tricked!"

"Miss Trumble' spoofed us!"

"Yes, that's exactly right!" I agreed. "She gave an undertaking that she wouldn't have these trenches touched. Well, she kept her word. But she took other action which was really worse. And, by so doing, she has practically signed her own dismissal. To be exact, we've never been more certain of complete triumph than we are at this minute."

"Well, I'm blessed if I can see it!"

"I'll bet you mean the governors!" exclaimed Pitt. "They're still in Bannington, and if we can only bring them to the school now, we shall be able to show them the true state of affairs."

"That's one thing, certainly," I agreed. "But there are others."

"Others?"

"Yes."

Willy whizzed down to the river bank, gave one leap, and landed in the boat with a crash that was enough to send him clean through the bottom boards. He was aware of shouts in his rear.

"I wish you wouldn't be so jolly mysterious!" snorted Bob Christine. "Personally, I can't see what good it'll do to tell the governors anything. They're only a set of silly old jossers! As soon as Miss Trumble gets them alone, she'll twist them around her little finger!"

"Of course she will!"

"But—but it seems so hopeless," groaned Armstrong.

"It may seem so; but it isn't!" I retorted. "So far, I've led you pretty well, haven't I? Are you willing to follow my lead now? Will you back me up right along the line?"

"Yes, rather!"

"We're with you, Nipper!"

"Good enough!" I declared grimly. "Then you needn't worry yourselves. If I've got your whole-hearted support, Miss Trumble and her mistresses will leave St. Frank's to-night!"

"To-night?" yelled the juniors.

"Yes!" I roared. "And the things that we've been fighting for will be in our possession. You'd better get some grub now—and be sharp about it. Because in less than an hour we shall act!"

I had succeeded in putting fresh life into the fellows.

And I was glad; because I knew well enough that what I had said was true. Miss Jane Trumble was practically at the end of her tether. She believed that she had gained the triumph; but in a very short time she would get the biggest shock of her life.

For the Remove was up now—grim and desperate. And things were going to happen!

They did happen, too; but exactly what took place, and how we gained the day, makes another episode altogether.

THE END.

Editorial Announcement.

My Dear Readers,

It must be owned that Miss Trumble played very skilfully into the hands of the visiting governors of the school. The truce had worked admirably. It had successfully fooled the governors—not that they needed much fooling—moreover, it had done what she had been vainly attempting for weeks to achieve. By means of the armistice she had brought all the juniors back to the school. True, she had had to bargain with Nipper; she had been obliged to accept the Juniors' terms for a cessation of war. In so doing she had admitted defeat; she had sacrificed the dignity of her position as a Headmistress, and, what is more, she had committed herself to certain very definite promises that left her no loophole to escape.

Stooping to Conquer.

After the governors had gone, apparently quite satisfied with the way Miss Trumble was running the school, the Headmistress began to take a more reassuring view of the present situation. The main thing, she told herself, had been to get the boys back to the school. If she had been obliged to stoop to conquer, the means, she thought, justified the end. She marvelled that she did not think of it before. It was an instance of the old saying, that necessity was the mother of invention. As she thought of it in this light, she even felt quite pleased with herself. What could be easier now than to find an excuse for rescinding the truculent conditions put forward by Nipper?

The Broken Pledge.

That was how Miss Trumble argued with herself when she went back on her word. In the eyes of the boys of St. Frank's a broken pledge could never be tolerated. It stirred up a feeling of greater resentment and disgust against Miss Trumble than anything she had done before. Of all things the boys of St. Frank's prized most, it was their sense of honour. It had been instilled into them most sedulously by Dr. Stafford and by the ancient traditions of the school. This public flaunting of a pledge by one who aspired to rule the destiny of St. Frank's was viewed with unspeakable contempt.

The Barred Out Mistresses!

The Juniors were back at the school again, and their trenches had been flooded and made uninhabitable by Farmer Holt. What was to be done? A swift decision had to be made, and Nipper, who had led the Remove throughout the recent struggle, was equal to the occasion. This time he decided to reverse the position by holding the school, and barring out the mistresses. This will form the last and most exciting story of the great rebellion series. It will appear next week under the title of "THE BARRED OUT MISTRESSES!"

Another Attraction Next Week!

Another leading attraction for next week will be the further adventures of Mervyn Hume and Nunky. The latter will figure more prominently than hitherto in this next story, for it is an investigation of alleged bullying at a well-known public school, and the office-boy comes in very useful as a temporary new boy at the school.

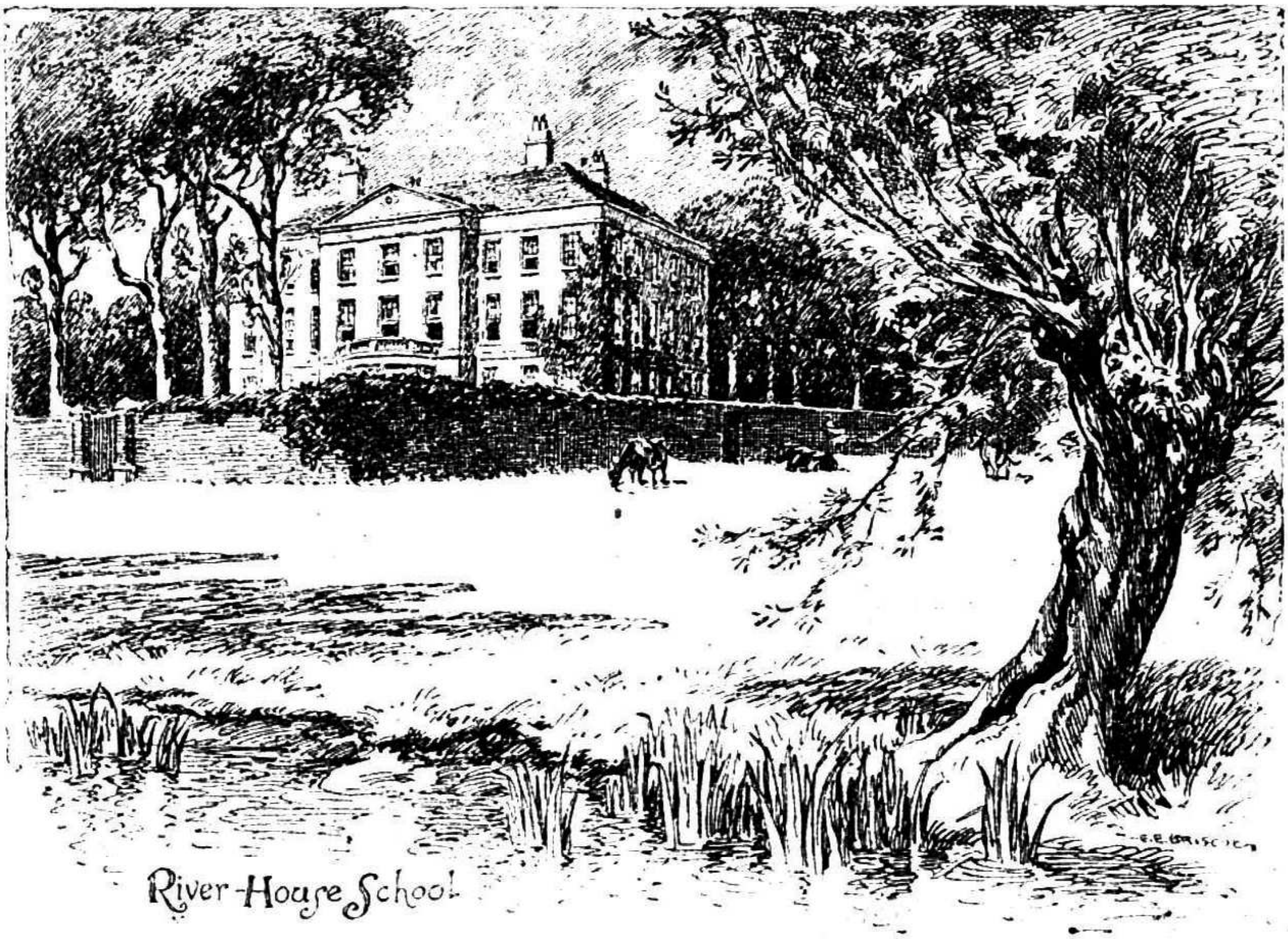
More Praise for Mr. Briscoe's Sketches.

I have had quite a number of letters from well-wishers in praise of our special pen-and-ink sketches of well-known scenes in the locality of St. Frank's. The drawing of the Old Mill on Bannington Moor was a great favourite. I am consequently commissioning Mr. Briscoe, our artist, to do several more of these sketches, and I hope in future to have his sketches drawn large enough to fill the greater part of a page, instead of only half a page.

With very best wishes,

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.



River House School.

RIVER HOUSE SCHOOL

The River House School is the nearest rival of St. Frank's, for it almost faces Bellton Village, and is quite close to the River Stowe, from which it derives its name.

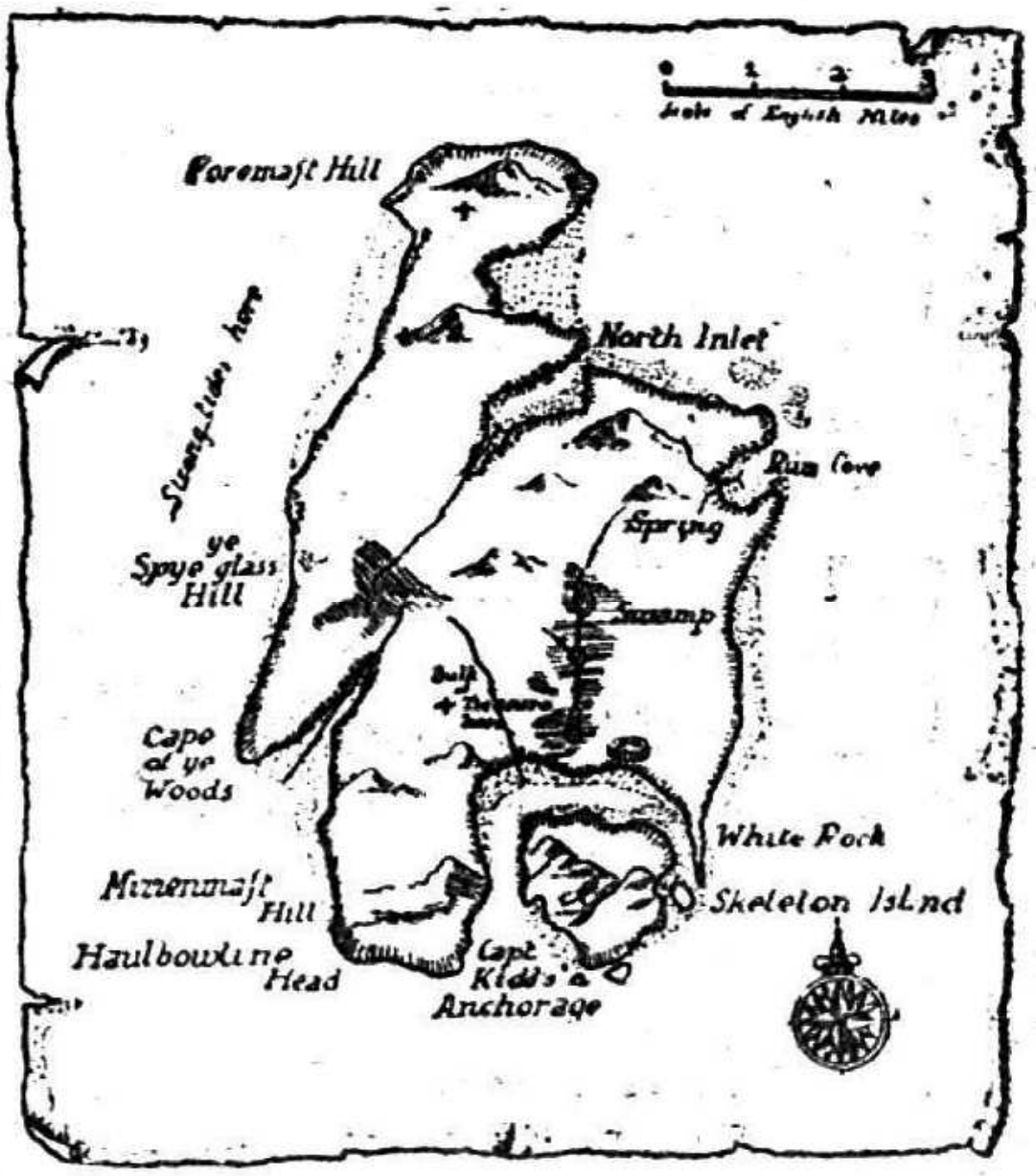
It is nothing like so large or so old a school as St. Frank's. Nevertheless, it likes to pride itself as being an exclusive academy for young gentlemen, this being by way of an apology for the limited number of its pupils.

The school is administrated by Dr. Molyneux Hogge, M.A., who is assisted by an under-master called Mr. Wragg.

Altogether there are not more than thirty boys in the whole establishment, among whom the best known are Hal Brewster, Georgie Glynn, and Dave Ascott.

In spite of its paucity of numbers, the River House School is able to put in the field quite a formidable "Footer" and Cricket team, and many an account has been recorded by Nipper in his narratives of the lively contests between the Remove of St. Frank's and the River House First Eleven.

Doubtless we shall hear much more about the River House School during the year.



Printed and Published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press (1922), Ltd. The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Subscription Rates: Inland, 13/- per annum; 6/6 for six months. Abroad, 11/- per annum; 5/6 for six months. Sole Agents for South Africa: The Central News Agency, Limited. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Limited; and for Canada: The Imperial News Company, Limited.

No. 406. D/Y **March, 17, 1923.**