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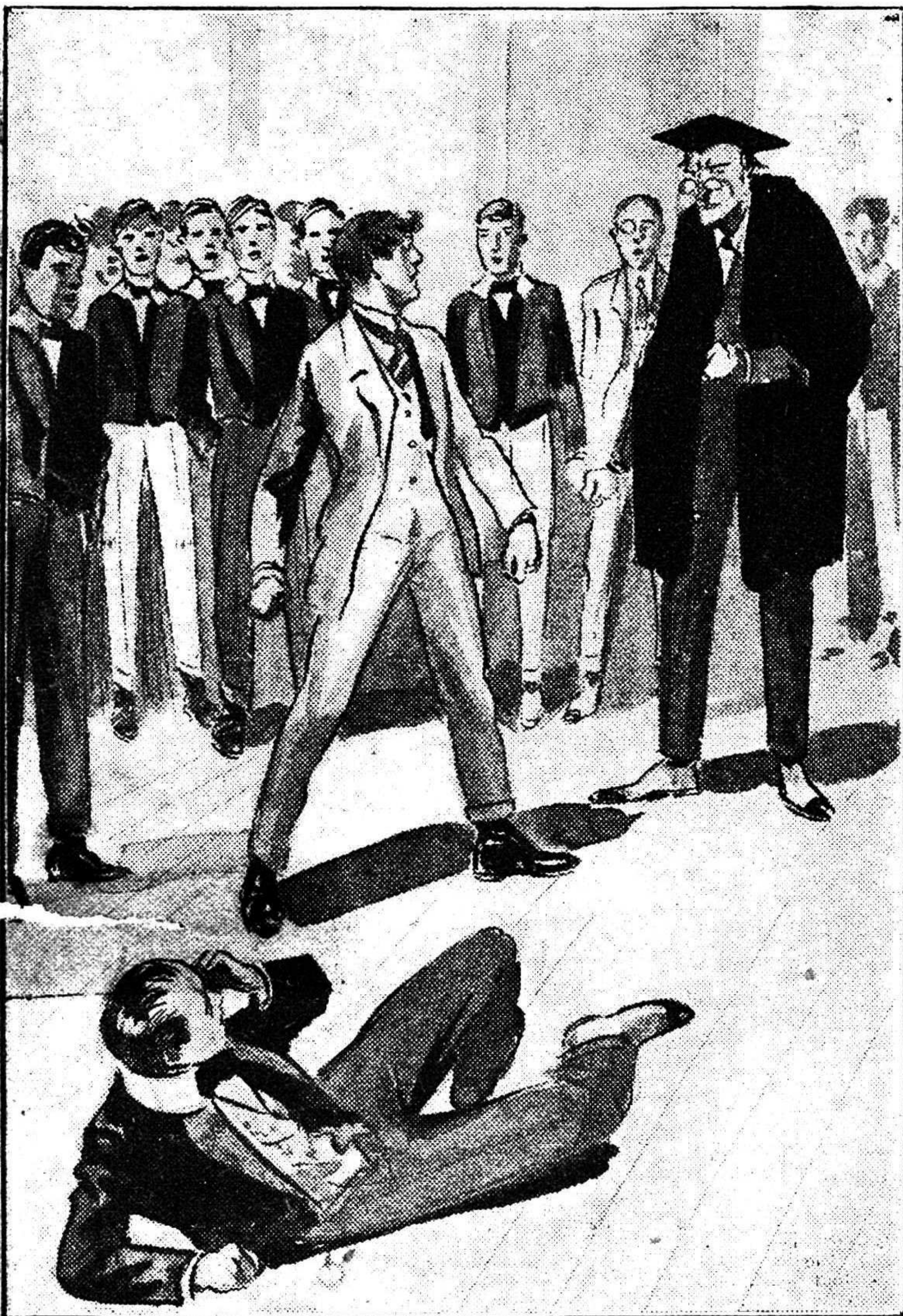


ALF 'UGGINS ARRIVES;

or, The New Boy
at ST. FRANK'S

**DO NOT MISS THIS
STORY!**

It is the First of a Grand
New Series Dealing With
the Famous Juniors
of St. Frank's



"Oh, indeed!" came a rasping voice from the doorway. "Indeed! And so this is what I find when I glance into the Common-room!"



ALF HUGGINS ARRIVES!

or, The New Boy at St. Frank's



This story, the first of a Great New Series, sees the Boys of St. Frank's back at school again after their exciting Easter Holiday Adventures. These new stories will be chiefly centred around Alf Huggins, whose arrival at St. Frank's in this story synchronises with the appearance of a new master, Mr. Snuggs, who has come to replace, for the time being, Mr. Crowell of the Remove.

Alf Huggins is a cockney, born and bred, but in spite of his humble origin, he is a character one cannot help liking. His reception at St. Frank's is rather mixed, for he has to live down much prejudice. Unfortunately for Huggins, the new Remove master is a snob of the first degree, and it is not long before he singles out the new boy as a butt for his biting sarcasm and contempt. In addition to the strong human interest attaching to Alf's uphill fight, the author has not neglected the humorous side of the picture.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE COMING OF ALF HUGGINS!

"POISONOUS!" declared Archie Glen-thorne firmly. "Absolutely poisonous, Phipps!"

"As bad as that, sir?"

"In fact, slightly worse!" said Archie. "Of course, I've got nothing to say against the dear chappie as a dear chappie, but there you are! The low order, what? I mean to say, the lower strata, and so forth!"

The genial ass of the Ancient House at St. Frank's, lay back on the soft lounge in his study, and placed his feet comfortably upon a handy chair. Archie was attired with all his usual elegance. It was morning, and Archie was taking a short spell of rest before lessons.

There was plenty of time yet, and Archie felt lazy.

This, of course, was no unusual feeling with him. It was only seldom that he felt anything else. And he had been having a chat with Phipps, his faithful valet, concerning the events of the holidays. For the school had gathered together for the new term, only the previous day.

This morning, in fact, was the very first working day of the new term. And the school was in something like order.

Most of the Remove fellows, including myself, were rather curious about work. For Mr. Crowell, our respected Form-master, was not with us this term. The unfortunate gentleman had met with a serious accident.

Mr. Crowell, in short, had broken his leg, and the latest news to hand was that he was as well as could be expected, but would certainly not be fit for duty for many a week. In the meantime, the Remove would have to put up with a substitute.

It was this gentleman that we particularly wanted to see.

So far he had not even appeared in public, and although many of the Remove fellows had watched diligently the previous evening, they had caught no sight of the new master of the Remove—who, by the way, suffered from the rather appalling name of Mr. Snuggs. He couldn't possibly have rejoiced in it.

This term it seemed that St. Frank's would be peaceful and quiet. The previous term had ended up amid much excitement, and now the old school was settling down to normal conditions.

"Of course, sir, one meets with strange people at times," remarked Phipps, as he moved about the luxurious study, putting things straight here and there. "But I am sorry that you should have been so pestered on Bank Holiday."

Archie dropped his monocle.

"Pestered!" he repeated. "Why, great goodness! What on earth put that bally idea into your head, Phipps?"

"You made use of the word poisonous, sir—"

"Oh, absolutely!" agreed Archie. "At the same time, laddie, it appears that you have obtained a slightly wrong impress. The young master did not mean to imply that he was pestered."

"I am afraid I am still somewhat in the dark, sir."

"Then, Phipps, it seems that it is up to me to throw large quantities of light upon the old sub.," observed Archie. "You see, it was this way. We were at the jolly old Zoo—that is to say, all the lads of the village and myself. In fact, we were doing a kind of revelry stunt. Dashing about hither and thither, and seeing all the good old sights!"

"I quite understand, sir."

"Well, while we were at the Zoo some awfully dashed scoundrel buzzed along and actually whizzed off with the young master's wallet!" said Archie indignantly. "What about it, Phipps? The cove positively took it out of my pocket, and proceeded to fade into the offing!"

"That was very awkward, sir."

"Awkward!" echoed Archie. "It was ghastly. There was I, left stranded, while that pickpocket—that dashed blister—buzzed into the distance, carrying large and goodly supplies of fivers and pieces of eight and what not!"

"I trust the man was captured, sir?"

"Dash it all!" protested Archie. "Dash it all! Not five minutes ago I distinctly told you that the chappie was whizzed off to the police-station. He was nothing more or less than a blot on the landscape—an ugly patch on the tablecloth, as it were. You grasp my meaning, Phipps?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Well, this blighter—this stain—having oozed away with the cash department, was well on the way to freedom, when up dashed Alf."

"Alf, sir?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "It has since occurred to me that the chappie's name was probably Alfred. But he called himself Alf. Absolutely terrible, and all that, but there you are. The common crowd, Phipps. Rather wonderful how they mess about with good names!"

"It is certainly remarkable, sir."

"Well, to proceed!" continued Archie. "Alf Huggins—to give him his full name—collared hold of this blister with the cash, and proceeded to let him have it in large and severe quantities. In other words, they fought like the jolly old knights of the past. A grim and gory struggle, Phipps, in the midst of which two lads in blue proceeded to roll up."

"Policemen, sir."

"Absolutely," said Archie. "As usual, the

dear, darling old blunderers wandered into the landscape when the job was over. No need to go into frightful details. I got the pocket-book back, and this chappie, Alf Huggins, discovered that his ankle was in a somewhat bruised condish."

"An injury received in the fight, sir?" asked Phipps.

"As you say, old scout," said Archie. "The pickpocket bouncer kicked Alf in the ankle department at the last minute. And there he was—unable to walk—and I was under an obligation to him. But I must say he behaved dashed well. Wouldn't take a bally quid!"

"That was rather extraordinary, sir."

"It was, until I learned that his pater was a bricklayer!" said Archie. "You see, this bricklayer is worth pots—tons and tons of money. Rolling in it, in fact. Wallowing in wealth, Phipps."

Phipps looked doubtful.

"I have sometimes heard, sir, that bricklayers receive high wages, but I hardly thought—"

"Gadzooks!" interrupted Archie. "I don't mean to say that the chappie amassed large quantities of bullion by laying bricks! Absolutely not! Some decent cove pegged out and left Mr. Huggins large bagfuls of the good old stuff!"

"Ah, now I comprehend, sir!"

"In other words, Phipps, the brain department is beginning to awaken," said Archie. "Good! That's a rather decent piece of news. Well, this bricklayer chappie was quite decent. I will say that. No blessed swank about him, and no spoof. He just assisted me in a time of sore distress, and there you are! No reward—nothing!"

"In fact, Master Huggins was an excellent fellow, sir?"

"There, Phipps, you have it," agreed Archie. "An excellent fellow, but dashed common. And, as you know, the young master is somewhat partick. I hate being snobbish, but one must draw the line, don't you know?"

"I quite agree, sir," said Phipps firmly. "It is not at all possible for those of the lower order to mix with those of the upper order. There is a distinct dividing line between the two classes."

"You think so, Phipps?" asked Archie.

"I am positive, sir."

"Well, in a way, perhaps so," agreed Archie. "But there are differences, no doubt. I mean to say, a chappie can be a bally common cove, and yet rise to be a dashed Prime Minister! Of course, that's not rising far, I know, but a Prime Minister is supposed to be just a shade better than a bricklayer—what?"

"I have heard so, sir," said Phipps solemnly.

"The experience is now blotted out," said Archie, with a sigh. "I might say that I'm fearfully glad. Alf wasn't so bad. I mean, I could have stuck him for a bit longer."

But his people were poisonous, Phipps. Actually and absolutely poisonous!"

"In what way, sir?"

"Well, we saw this Alf chappie home to 'Oxton—"

"No doubt you mean Hoxton, sir?"

"Good gracious! I knew I should get mixed up with it!" said Archie, in alarm. "Alf said 'Oxton, and I wasn't quite sure. Well, we arrived there, and we were ushered into the kitchen. Phipps, believe me or believe me not, but at that moment the young master was in dire peril of instant extinction."

"You met with some danger, sir?"

"The atmosphere, Phipps! Gadzooks!" murmured Archie, with a shudder. "Fried onions and kippers! To say nothing of large and hefty clouds of shag tobacco smoke! This, by the way, was proceeding from the clay pipe of Alf's father. Can you imagine it?"

"I find it most difficult to do so, sir," said Phipps gravely. "I can well understand your horror."

"In fact, I'm getting so dashed worked up, that the very subject makes me feel queer," said Archie, rising to his feet. "The morning is sunny, Phipps—the air is laden with sundry lumps of ozone. I think I shall trickle forth into the old Triangle and proceed to inhale a few lungfulls."

"The fresh air will undoubtedly be beneficial."

"So I believe, Phipps—so I believe," said Archie. "And never refer to Hoxton again! The very word makes cold creeps dash up and down the spinal department. Alf was a ripper, but hardly in my line."

"Well, sir, you are never likely to see him again."

"Oh, absolutely not," said Archie. "In fact, such a thing is quite imposs."

And the Genial Ass of the Remove strolled down the junior passage, passed into the Triangle, and came face to face with Alf Huggins!

Considering the nature of Archie's very last spoken words, this meeting was little more than extraordinary. To come out into the stately old St. Frank's Triangle, and meet the boy from Hoxton was a shock that Archie had never prepared himself for.

It brought him up all standing, so to speak.

He was in the centre of the Triangle at the moment, and nobody else was near by. And Archie was just inhaling the breezy atmosphere when he observed a figure striding towards him from the gateway.

It was with a feeling of blank amazement and dismay that Archie recognised the figure as that of Alf Huggins. The Hoxton boy was attired in the same ill-fitting, ready-made suit as before. He looked broad, clumsy, and his face was even more freckled than ever.

His fair hair escaped from under his cheap looking cap, and he wore big, clumsy boots on his feet. In every possible way, Alf

Huggins looked what he was—the son of a bricklayer.

He grinned at Archie, and came to a halt.

"Whot cher, matey!" he exclaimed cheerily.

"Absolutely!" said Archie, with a gulp.

"I—I mean, greetings, dear old one! This, don't you know, is a somewhat stunning shock. I hardly expected to see you whizzing about in the picture!"

Alf Huggins grinned.

"I reckoned as 'ow you would be a bit surprised!" he remarked. "Still, I'm glad I met you fust! Just the bloke I wanted to see!"

"The—the bloke!" said Archie, in confusion. "Oh, quite! I mean to say, at your service, dear old sportsman! If there's any dashed thing I can do, let the old word pass!"

"There's nothink as you can do, not as I knows of," said Alf. "Leastways, not now. Y'see, I've come."

"Oh!" said Archie. "You've come?"

"That's the hidea!"

"And a dashed good hidea, too—I—I mean to say—"

"Fact is, I've come to St. Frank's for good," went on Huggins confidentially. "'Ow do you like the bloomin' hidea? I'm going to stay here."

"Stay!" gasped Archie, holding his heart.

"Yus!"

"Yus?" repeated Archie, in a tone of horror. "But—but— Gadzooks! In about five seconds I shall yelp for assistance! But let us get this quite correct! You, as it were, have arrived?"

"Well, any bloke can see that!" remarked Alf.

"Absolutely," said Archie. "Which reminds me, dear old tulip, I haven't done the old greeting stuff! How do you do? I mean to say, how do you jolly well do? Extend the old flipper, and we'll shake!"

Archie thrust out his hand, and the pair gripped.

"Thanks!" said Alf quietly. "Some'ow, I didn't reckon as you'd do that. I 'ad a hidea as you might be too huppish."

"Dash it all!" said Archie, looking injured. "That's rather steep, laddie! Nobody can accuse me of being huppish—I should say, uppish! Sorrow—sorrow! But do I gather that you have absolutely come to stay?"

"Yes, I've come to stay—I'm goin' to work 'ere."

Archie breathed an enormous sigh of relief.

"A large and frightful lump has arisen from the depths of the heart!" he breathed.

"Work, what? Ah, a dashed fine idea. Alf, old onion, allow me to offer huge congrats. I wish you joy, and hope you'll do bally well!"

"Thanks, matey!"

Archie looked at Alf with new interest. So the bricklayer's son had been engaged for the domestic staff. That was rather interesting. But it was a strange coincidence that he should come so shortly after the

other meeting at the Zoo. And Archie was puzzled, into the bargain. If Alf's people were so rich, why was it necessary for him to come to St. Frank's in a menial's job?

"Of course, it's not my business, but I had an idea that things were blooming in the old homestead!" said Archie. "I mean to say, fortune smiled, and so forth?"

"Rather!" said Alf, nodding. "But that's the very reason I'm 'ere! I daresay I'll see something of you later. So-long, matey! Cheerio!"

Alf nodded, and walked away. And Archie, in a bit of a dream, wandered off under the chestnut trees, and tried to compose his thoughts. Alf Huggins arrived at the steps of the Ancient House, and he was just about to mount them when he came face to face with Handforth & Co.

At the moment, Edward Oswald Handforth was engaged in a fierce argument with Church and McClure. The famous leader of Study D was starting the term well. In fact, he had started the previous day. McClure's left eye was showing signs of damage, and Church had an ominous looking cut at the corner of his lip.

"I'm not going to argue any more!" said Handforth gruffly. "If you asses can't see common sense when it's put before you, that's not my fault! I've never known such a pair of fatheaded chumps in all my puff!"

"Oh, rats!" growled Church.

"Dry up, for goodness sake!" said McClure. Alf Huggins grinned.

"At it agin?" he asked cheerfully. "Lummy! I'm blowed if you blokes don't do it as a blinkin' pastime! You was a-goin' on like that at the Zoo on Bank 'Oliday. Go it! I'll be humpire!"

Handforth & Co. turned, holding their breath. They knew that voice! They knew that common, uneducated way of speaking! For they, of course, had been in Archie's party at the time of the adventure at the Zoological Gardens.

"Great pip!" said Handforth, turning. "It's—it's the Hoxton chap!"

"The bricklayer's son!" ejaculated Church. Huggins nodded.

"Yus!" he agreed. "Ain' you smart? Pleased to meet you, old pals! I reckon as 'ow you an' me ought to get on well in this 'ere school."

Handforth clutched at the stonework.

"Get—get on well!" he stuttered faintly. "But—but what are you doing here?"

"Nothink—except looking at you," replied Alf.

"You—you silly fathad!" howled Handforth. "I mean, what have you come for?"

"Why, wot did you think?" asked Huggins, in surprise. "I've come 'ere as a new boy—I've joined the blinkin' school! And if you blokes can tell me which is the Hancient 'Ouse I'll be obliged. I've got a sort of notion that I'm a-goin' to be shoved in a class wot they calls the Remove!"

Handforth & Co. fainted weakly into one another's arms!

CHAPTER II.

TOO STEEP FOR WORDS!



ALF HUGGINS had exploded a bombshell.

For the chums of Study D to suddenly learn that this boy from Hoxton had come to the school as a pupil was nothing more nor less than a shock of the very first order.

It seemed utterly impossible.

And now a number of other fellows were coming out—Reginald Pitt, Cecil De Valerie, Jack Grey, Armstrong, and a few others. Many of these, of course, had never set eyes on Alf before.

They gathered round in a throng.

Handforth pulled himself together with an effort.

"Of course, it's rot!" he said. "You funny ass! What's the idea of trying to spoof me like that?"

"I ain't a-spoofin' of yer," said Alf. "Strike me pink, it's true!"

"True!" yelled Church.

"You bet yer life!"

"True that you're coming into the Remove—in the Ancient House?"

"Yus!"

The juniors collected round, excited.

"Don't try to be funny!" exclaimed Armstrong. "You've made a mistake, I think. Haven't you come to the wrong entrance? Perhaps you're going to be the new boot boy, or scullery help?"

Alf Huggins flushed.

"Look 'ere, matey, I don't want to 'ave no quarrellin', but you'd best stow that kind of stuff!"

"What!" said Armstrong blankly.

"Stow it!" said Alf. "I'm a bloke wot likes peace—but if there's any fightin' to be done, it don't take me 'alf-a-minit to swipe a bloke across the jaw! So you'd best be careful."

The juniors listened, more and more amazed.

It had been startling enough at first. The very appearance of the new boy was enough to indicate what he was. But his talk was terrible! He used the language of the gutter itself—denoting an upbringing of the worst possible type. And it sounded absolutely incongruous at St. Frank's.

It could hardly be possible that he was really coming into the school as a pupil. Already, some of the boys were beginning to feel indignant. There was nothing about the fellow's appearance to call for criticism. He was good looking enough, in a big, common sort of way. He had a frank smile and eyes that showed nothing but honesty.

But he was a bricklayer's son!

And he had come to St. Frank's without the least word of warning—although the juniors were fully aware of the adventure that had happened at the Zoo. That had

been told throughout the Remove several times already.

In the middle of all the opening excitement, I came out, accompanied by Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West. I was very astonished to see Alf Huggins, and I listened in even greater astonishment as I heard the facts being shouted about.

"Is this true, Huggins?" I asked, as I went up to him.

"Wot, another of yer?" asked Alf. "Lummy! You don't 'arf want a lot of tellin'! I shan't 'ave no breath left arter a bit more of this. Of course it's true! My dad sent me here to get a good eddication!"

"By George!" said Handforth. "You need it!"

"Ho, an' supposin' I do?" demanded Alf, flushing. "Don't I know it as well an hanybody? If you fellers 'adn't been 'ere all these 'ere years, you wouldn't be like wot you are! It's heddication wot counts! And my dad says to me, he says, I've got to come here and make good! An' I'm bloomin'-well goin' to have a big shot at it."

"In other words, you're a new boy?" I asked.

"That's it."

"For the Remove?"

"So I hunderstands."

"All right, Huggins, let me welcome you to St. Frank's," I said, taking his hand, and shaking it. "I'm the Remove captain—"

I turned round, as I heard several comments.

"What's the matter with you fellows?" I asked quietly.

"Well, I don't think much of you for shaking hands with that low cad!" said Merrell sourly. "He's not one of us! He's nothin' but a common gutter brat! He can't be in the Remove—the chaps wouldn't allow it!"

"Rather not!"

"Too jolly steep!"

"Don't take any notice of what they say!" I said, turning back to Huggins. "If you've come here as a new fellow, it's good enough proof for me that you're all right. The Head wouldn't allow it otherwise—neither would the Governors. I hope you'll make good, as you want."

"Thanks, mate," said Alf. "I can see you ain't like some o' them others. I knows well enough that I'm common in me talk. But talk ain't everythink, is it? A bloke can't help his heddication. Arter I've bin 'ere a year, I dessay I shall show signs of himprovement."

"A year!" sneered Fullwood, pushing forward. "You low idiot! The Remove won't stand you for a day! You'll get kicked out on your neek if you dare to come into the Ancient House."

"An' pretty quick, too!" said Gulliver.

"Hear, hear!"

"Steady, Fullwood!" said Armstrong.

"There's no need to talk like that. Goodnes knows, I'm not a snob, but I'm not standing

for this chap in the Remove. I'll kick pretty hard, if it's an absolute fact. Still, there's no need to talk about hoofing him out!"

"That won't be necessary—he won't come in!" said Hubbard.

Alfy Huggins looked at the contemptuous crowd with calm eyes, and a set expression.

"My dad told me somethink like this would 'appen!" he said quietly. "I don't blame you—'tain't likely as you'd be any different. Still, I reckon you might wait until I've done somethink disgraceful afore you talk about kicking me hout!"

"Hout!" jeered Fullwood. "Why, the chap's impossible!"

"Oh, rather!"

"And, what's more, we'll get up a petition!" said Armstrong. "We'll do it quietly, and without any big demonstration. As I said before, I'm not a snob, but I know where to draw the line!"

"If you fellows had any decency, you'd hold your tongues for a bit!" I said curtly.

"Can't you give the chap a chance to turn round? For all you know, there may be a mistake."

"There ain't no mistake!" said Alf quietly. "Still, I don't bear no malice. 'Tain't my way. I ain't your sort, an' you ain't mine. Mebbe we shall be able to 'it it off arter a bit—but at fust it'll be queer. Now, if you can shew me the way hinddoors—"

"Not likely!" interrupted Owen major. "You're not going indoors, you cad! We wouldn't let you soil the place."

"No fear!"

"Keep the beat out!"

"If he tries to get in, knock him over!"

"The best thing is to chuck him out into the road!"

"Indeed!" came a cold voice from the doorway.

The juniors turned round, and saw that Nelson Lee was standing there. And the Housemaster of the Ancient House was looking rather grim and determined. I turned to the guv'nor, and nodded.

"This is Huggins, sir," I said. "By what I understand, Huggins is coming to St. Frank's as a pupil."

"That is quite right, Nipper," said Nelson Lee.

"Shame!"

The murmur came from two or three boys on the outskirts of the crowd.

Nelson Lee looked in their direction.

"I will not inquire the names of the boys who uttered that word just now," he said quietly. "I will content myself by saying that those boys are unsportmanlike and caddish. Huggins will be in the Remove, and I sincerely trust there will be no antagonism. He may be of a different class, but that is a matter of minor importance."

"But he's not fit to be at St. Frank's, sir!"

"He's not our sort at all, sir!"

"He's only a bricklayer's son!"

Lee waited until the interruptions had died down.

"Boys, I would like to have a few quiet words with you," he said. "I do not think Huggins requires any champion—and I shall certainly not act in that capacity. All I ask is that you should give him a fair chance. He wants no favours—he would not accept any if they were offered. But until Huggins proves himself guilty of some disgraceful conduct, he is worthy to receive the same treatment as yourselves. Don't be down on him because of his upbringing. That would be most unfair and unsportsmanlike. Judge him by his actions at St. Frank's—and treat him accordingly."

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the idea, sir," said Pitt. "I'm game!"

"So am I!"

"There is no necessity for me to give any sort of explanation, but you will be probably interested to know one or two facts," said Nelson Lee. "This lad's father—a most respectable citizen—has persuaded the Governors to let the boy come to this school—for one term, at least. In a way, it is something of a trial. Do not let it be a failure. Give the lad every opportunity to show what he can do for himself. That is all I have to say. Huggins, I should like you to come to my study as soon as possible."

"I'll be there right away, sir," said Alf.

Nelson Lee passed into the Ancient House with a nod. And the noisy demonstration broke out again practically at once. For a great many other fellows had come up by now.

And they were looking at Alf as though he was some kind of insect. They walked round him, sneering and laughing.

"What a suit!" said Merrell. "I reckon he must have got it from a pawnshop!"

"Or from a stall in Petticoat Lane!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look at his boots—made for his father!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Alf stood this sort of thing for a minute or two, and then clenched his fists.

"Anythink else to say?" he asked quietly.

"Yes—we've got lots of things to say!" said Armstrong. "But we don't know what anythink means. There isn't such a word!"

The juniors yelled.

"That's right—funny, ain't it?" said Alf.

"Lor' lummy! You blokes ain't arf got a lot o' brains! It don't take much to make you cackle! I ain't never seen such a 'opeless set!"

The laughs died away.

"Look here!" roared Hubbard. "Are we going to stand that?"

"Not likely!"

"Serag him!"

There was an ugly rush, but I jumped forward.

"Don't be so rotten!" I shouted. "You

goad the chap on, and when he answers you back you get wild! What do you think he is? A dummy? Why can't you give him a fair chance? You ought to be kicked—the whole crowd of you!"

"Oh, you'd stick up for him, of course!" jeered Fullwood. "Only a few years ago you were a gutter brat yourself—"

Crash!

My fist shot out, and Fullwood went down, howling.

"Yow—yarcocoo!" he roared wildly.

"I've kneccked you down for the same thing more than once before, Fullwood, and if you say it again, I'll have the same pleasure!" I said quietly. "Huggins has only been at the school for ten minutes—and nobody knows what sort of stuff he's made of. If he's a cad, I shall be as much against him as I am against you. If he's decent, he'll be one of my pals."

"That's the way to speak!" said Handforth. "But it's a pity you knocked Fullwood down—I was just going to do it!"

"Better do it again—he's just getting up!" suggested Pitt.

And while the fellows were arguing, Alf Huggins passed indoors—escorted by Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West. Just in the lobby they passed Archie—who had entered by means of a rear door.

Archie came out, looking astonished.

"It appears, laddies, that trouble of some kind is brewing," he observed. "May I inquire what—"

"It's that new kid—Huggins!" said Church. "Most of the chaps don't like him being here. And I must admit that it's a bit off side. The Governors ought to have more sense. Huggins isn't the kind of fellow to be in a school of this sort."

"What, are you a snob, too?" demanded Handforth.

"No—I'm not a snob!" growled Church. "I'm thinking about Huggins. He'll have a rotten rough time of it. Over half the chaps will give him beans. His pater ought to have more sense."

"Well, that's true enough," admitted Handforth.

Archie stood looking on, rather dazed.

"Then—then the chappie is absolutely in the school as a bally scholar?" he asked.

"Of course!"

"Gadzooks! And I wished him joy!" breathed Archie faintly.

"Well, that wasn't a crime, was it?"

"I—I mean to say, I wished him joy in his work!" ejaculated Archie. "I thought he was going to be a bally bootblack! I hadn't the faintest nosh he was a pupil! It seems to me that I must dash after the chappie, and tender a somewhat large apology!"

"You're going to apologise?" asked Armstrong, staring.

"Absolutely!"

"To that—that cad!"

"Absolutely twice," said Archie. "But I must say that you are quite wrong. In fact, frightfully wrong. As far as I know, the chappie is a somewhat priceless cove! He's a ripper at whizzing after pickpockets and grabbing wallets!"

"He's far more likely to pick pockets himself!" said Gulliver. "That's why he was able to get yours back so easily, Archie. He knows all about the game! The cad's only a gutter snipe!"

"Of course he is!"

Archie gazed at the juniors stiffly.

"I can only say that I'm bally well shocked!" he exclaimed. "You ought to be dashed ashamed of yourselves! The chappie's absolutely one of the ones, and I'll jolly well stick to him all through! He can always rely on me as a pal—absolutely!"

And Archie, with his nose in the air, turned and went back into the lobby.

It seemed that Alf Huggins would have one friend, at least—but there was not the slightest doubt that he was in for a rough time!

CHAPTER III.

MR. CROWELL'S SUBSTITUTE!



"**N**EVER!" said Fullwood. "Not blessed likely!"

"We don't mind goin' to a certain limit, but when it comes to a low-down, common cad like Huggins, we start jibbin'!" went on Fullwood. "His name's enough, without anythin' else!"

"An' his father's a bricklayer!" jeered Gulliver. "I expect he's goin' to work now—takin' a pint of beer in a can! My hat! An' we've got a chap of that sort in the Remove! We'll never stand it!"

All the cads had collected together in the lobby. Only an hour earlier they had been idle—so early in the term there was no gossip for them to get hold of, and no mischief to make.

They had absolutely nothing to do.

But now, in this brief time, they were full right up to the brim. Here was something after their own heart. A boy of the lower class had come to St. Frank's as a pupil!

What was more, he was in the Remove—and would have to be in contact with the juniors morning, noon, and night. They would even have to sleep with him! No wonder the cads found plenty to talk about!

"Of course, that's all piffle, givin' him a fair chance!" said Merrell. "You can trust Mr. Lee for sayin' a dashed silly thing like that! The chap's a cad—a hopeless, rotten gutter brat!"

"Hear, hear!"

"It doesn't matter what happens here, it won't alter his character!" said Full-



"What cher, matey!" Huggins exclaimed cheerily.

"Absolutely!" said Archie, with a gulp. "I—I mean, greetings, dear old one! This, don't you know, is a somewhat stunning shock. I hardly expected to see you whizzing about in the picture!"

wood. "An' the sooner we get rid of him the better. Life won't be worth livin' with a low beast like that in the school!"

Without any reason whatever these juniors had taken such a dislike to Alf Huggins that it amounted almost to hatred.

Of course, the whole thing could be put into a nutshell.

It was an exhibition of prejudice—class prejudice. The juniors considered themselves to be far and away above a boy like Alf Huggins. They looked upon it as an insult to themselves that he should be sent among them. And they instinctively agreed that things should be made very hot indeed for the new boy!

This was very hard on Huggins.

He had done nothing—he had not even come to St. Frank's from his own choice. He had been sent by his father. How, then, could he be treated as though he were a leper? If the fellows had only taken the time to reason it out, they might have been a little more tolerant.

This, at least, applied to the ordinary juniors. Fullwood and Co., of course, were

ends of the worst type, and no amount of reasoning would alter them.

And then another subject came up.

"What about the beast's study?" said Merrell suddenly.

"By gad, yes!" said Fullwood. "I suppose he'll be bunged on somebody! If Mr. Lee tries to shove him in Study A there'll be ructions!"

"Why, we'd hoof him out in about three seconds," said Gulliver.

"On his neck!" added Bell.

But further discussion was out of the question, for just then a great clanging sounded. It was the signal for morning lessons. And the juniors reluctantly broke up the conference.

There were now two important subjects of interest for the Remove.

Never had a term started so well. There was not only Alf Huggins to create interest, but also Mr. Snuggs, the new Form master. All the fellows were enormously keen upon seeing him. For Mr. Snuggs, so far, was a kind of mystery man. He had only arrived at the school late the previous day, and had not yet made his appearance in public.

The Remove went to the Form room full of anticipation.

For the moment, Alf Huggins was forgotten.

This was mainly because he was not present. He had gone to Nelson Lee's study, and it was generally agreed that he would be excused from morning lessons. The juniors were not likely to see him until midday.

And so, although there were a few whispered comments, the main interest of the Remove now centred upon Mr. Snuggs.

"I'll bet he'll be a giddy washout!" said Handforth, as he took his place. "Oh, rats! Lessons again! Sticking in the rotten Form room for hours! Holidays ain't half long enough!"

"It's a shame, dragging us back like this!" said Church mournfully.

"We're treated like slaves!" agreed McClure.

They felt depressed. And this depression had fallen over the entire Remove. Now that the actual moment had arrived, the full realisation came upon the boys that the holidays were at an end.

It was work again—the same old daily grind.

The juniors talked to one another glumly, the only spark of consolation being the fact that they would have a new master—and that promised to be rather interesting. Naturally, he would be a beast—simply because all new masters were beasts.

"A severe old bounder, I suppose," whispered Pitt. "You know, one of those touchy chaps, who start up if there's the slightest sound. Old Crowell was bad enough, but—"

"Look out, you chaps, he's coming!" exclaimed Morrow, of the Sixth—who had seen the Remove into the Form room. "I

don't envy you much. Mr. Snuggs seems to be a bit of a prize!"

Morrow said this confidentially, and with a grin. He stood aside as the new Form master entered.

The Remove looked at Mr. Snuggs, and Mr. Snuggs looked at the Remove.

And in about five minutes the Remove had sized Mr. Snuggs up completely. There was one general impression at the end of that brief period.

Without a doubt, Mr. Snuggs was a worm.

Under the circumstances, it was a somewhat swift summing up. But the Remove could hardly be blamed. For Mr. Snuggs was undoubtedly a man of unprepossessing appearance. He was thin, weedy, and there was a most unpleasant expression on his face.

It was a kind of permanent sneer, intermixed with an expression of supreme self-satisfaction. His lips were extremely thin, and met in a straight line. Upon his nose were perched a pair of spectacles. His hair was thin and wispy, and his shoulders were stooping.

Mr. Snuggs might have been anything between forty and fifty. His gown hung about him like a blanket round a scarecrow, and when he walked his feet pointed outwards.

He took up his position at his desk, and beamed upon the Remove. At least, Mr. Snuggs apparently intended to beam. He only succeeded in distorting his face.

"Good morning, boys—good morning!" he said, in a thin and weeding voice. "This is our first meeting—quite so! You may sit down. Good! I sincerely trust that we shall get on well together."

The Remove maintained a stony silence.

"I have come to St. Frank's knowing that it is one of the most magnificent schools in the whole country," went on Mr. Snuggs, in a self-satisfied tone. "St. Frank's is one of the schools where only the best may congregate. There is no room here for the second rate articles, eh? Am I right?"

The Remove didn't feel inclined to answer. They considered that Mr. Snuggs was a decidedly second rate article.

"Unfortunately, I am only here for a brief spell—probably for one term!" continued Mr. Snuggs. "However, one never knows. Needless to say, I appreciate the honour greatly—for it is indeed an honour to be a member of such a distinguished staff. And I am pleased to see, boys, that you are all well behaved and good-mannered. If there are a few among you that I must reprimand, I shall do so in accordance with your station."

"Thank you, sir," said some of the juniors.

"And now we must get on with lessons," said Mr. Snuggs. "I have an idea that we are here for that reason, eh?"

A few fellows sniggered—much to Mr. Snuggs' delight.

"Quite so!" he went on, encouraged.

"You did not congregate in this room to

hear me lecture. We must work, my boys—and work is not always pleasant. I have not the slightest doubt that we shall agree famously. For am I not dealing with the sons of distinguished people? Titled people—ahem! You are all cast in the same mould—all boys of the finest type.”

“The giddy toad!” whispered Handforth. “All he can think about is titles and high breeding! My pater’s got a title, but I wouldn’t give tuppence for one! Now-a-days it’s far more distinguished to be a plain mister.”

Mr. Snuggs turned, and gazed severely at Handforth.

“Silence!” he said. “The boy who was talking will stand up!”

Handforth promptly stood up.

“Don’t you know, my lad, that it is wrong to speak during lessons?” asked Mr. Snuggs, wagging a finger at Handforth.

“Lessons haven’t started, sir,” said Handforth.

“That is an impertinence!” replied Mr. Snuggs. “What is your name?”

“Handforth, sir.”

“Ah, to be sure!” he exclaimed softly.

“Am I right? Surely you are the son of Sir Edward Handforth, the great business man?”

“Yes, sir,” admitted Handforth.

“Splendid—spendid!” said Mr. Snuggs. “I am most delighted to meet you, my boy. I am most delighted to meet the son of such a distinguished gentleman. You may sit down, Handforth.”

Handforth sat down, and glared at Church.

“See that?” he growled. “My pater’s title!”

“Well, it comes in handy!” whispered Church, with a grin.

Mr. Snuggs was not impressing the Remove. All the decent fellows had sized him up as an extra large sized type of snob. It was clear that he was ready to fawn upon the juniors who were fortunate enough to have titled parents. The others were in the mere common ruck.

And as Mr. Snuggs gazed over the ranks of the Form, he suddenly held one of his thin fingers out, and pointed to Somerton.

“Boy!” he said severely. “Stand up!”

Somerton stood up.

“What is your excuse for coming into the Form room in that perfectly disgraceful condition?” demanded Mr. Snuggs tartly. “How dare you? Answer me at once! I demand an explanation!”

Somerton gazed down at himself.

“What’s the matter with me, sir?” he asked.

Mr. Snuggs danced out from his place, and stood in front of Somerton. Then he proceeded to pull the junior about.

“What is the matter?” he said. “Look! Your trousers are smothered with mud! Your waistcoat has two buttons missing—your collar is smudged with ink—and there is a large tear upon your left sleeve!”

“Oh, that’s nothing, sir,” said Somerton.

The Form sniggered again. For Somerton

these little defects were quite normal. He was about the most untidy fellow in the whole Remove. He never cared a jot about his personal appearance.

He could have worn the finest clothes obtainable had he chosen. He could have been as great a dandy as Archie Glenthorne. But Somerton preferred to go about looking like a tramp.

“I’m amazed—quite amazed!” said Mr. Snuggs, his voice filled with bitterness and sarcasm. “Of course, there is no necessity for you to tell me your name! I have not the slightest doubt that you are quite a common sort of boy!”

“Of course I am, sir,” said Somerton. “Well, I’m just the same as any other boy. There’s not much difference, is there?”

“Not much difference!” snapped Mr. Snuggs sourly. “Good gracious me! Upon my soul! Hark at the boy! From your very appearance—from your very attitude—I have no difficulty in concluding that your parents are exceedingly poor. I am surprised that you should be at the school at all!”

“My fees are paid, anyway, sir,” said Somerton calmly.

“Do not be impertinent, boy!” retorted Mr. Snuggs. “A youth of your type should not be at St. Frank’s at all—although we will not go into that. You are a boy of obviously low breeding!”

The Form giggled loudly.

“Thank you, sir,” said Somerton. “May I sit down?”

“Not yet—not yet!” said Mr. Snuggs. “I have by no means finished!”

That giggle had spurred him on. He was one of those kind of masters who evidently took a great delight in making himself important—who seized every opportunity of being funny.

“I shall not tell you about your appearance again!” said Mr. Snuggs. “If you come into the Form room for afternoon lessons in this condition I shall be most severe. You will change your clothing at the first chance—that is, of course, providing you have a change of raiment?”

“But I don’t see—”

“Do not dare to quibble!” interrupted Mr. Snuggs acidly. “You will do as I command! And if you have no better clothes, I shall see that your parents are written to—I shall see that new clothing is obtained. That is, if your parents can afford new clothing,” he added sarcastically.

Somerton was rather pale.

“Have you finished, sir?” he asked quietly.

“When I have finished I will tell you so,” snapped Mr. Snuggs. “You are impertinent! A boy of your low breeding should know how to treat your betters! I shall certainly write to your father—”

“That will be impossible, sir,” interrupted Somerton quietly.

“Indeed?”

“My father is dead, sir!”

“Oh, ah!” said Mr. Snuggs. “Ahem! I—I am sorry! No doubt that accounts for the

fact that you are needy—that you are lacking in the articles of clothing that every high-class boy requires. You may sit down."

"Thank you, sir."

"One moment," said Mr. Snuggs. "What is your name?"

"Somerton, sir."

Mr. Snuggs staggered, and clutched at his gown.

"Somerton!" he shouted thinly.

"Somerton! Are—are there two boys named Somerton in this Form?"

"No, sir."

"Then—then—Good gracious!" gasped Mr. Snuggs. "Can it be possible? Is it actually

next. Knowing that Mr. Snuggs was a toady—he had shown it in every action—the boys were very curious to see how he would act now.

"My boy—my boy!" said Mr. Snuggs, going over to Somerton, and placing a hand on his shoulder. "I am deeply sorry! You must allow me to apologise for the thoughtless—"

"There's no reason why you should apologise to me, sir," growled Somerton. "Wouldn't it be better to get on with the lessons?"

Mr. Snuggs was not offended in the least.

"Yes—yes, to be sure!" he exclaimed,

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true? Are you—are you the youthful Duke of Somerton?"

"Yes, sir—although there's no need to call me that," growled the schoolboy duke. "I'm just Somerton here—the same as any other fellow. Titles don't count at school."

The Form sniggered louder than ever.

And Mr. Snuggs stood there, trying to pull himself together. He was horrified. He could have almost bitten his tongue out! The things he had said! He had talked to Somerton as though the boy were a labourer's son. It was dreadful! And Somerton was a Duke—with an estate that made him a millionaire! Mr. Snuggs felt desperately angry with himself.

And the Remove watched, waiting for the

beaming. "Good gracious! How thoughtless of me to make such a terrible blunder! Of course, you need take no notice whatever of the orders I gave you."

Somerton looked surprised.

"No notice, sir?" he asked.

"None whatever, "I am quite sorry I offended you."

"The oily, greasy pig!" said Handforth, in disgust. "Look at him! Absolutely slobbering over the chap!"

"He'll be licking his boots next!" said Church.

"I shouldn't be a bit surprised," said Handforth. "My hat! We've lost Crowell—and look what they've sent us! It's like

losing a quid, and finding a threepenny-bit!"

Mr. Snuggs was absolutely fawning upon Somerton now. He even apologised again. The youthful duke was not only disgusted, but three parts of the Remove was disgusted, too. The snobs and their set—Fullwood and Co.—regarded Mr. Snuggs as a distinct acquisition. They could see that he would be helpful to them. He was just the kind of master they liked.

Mr. Crowell had been impartial, as all good Form masters should be. One boy was just the same as another boy to him. But Mr. Snuggs was a very different type. He would make favourites—he would have certain boys who could do practically as they liked.

A little flattery, and the fact that their parents were well-to-do, would gain the snobs privileges that they had never previously enjoyed.

At last Mr. Snuggs had finished with Somerton. And then he observed Archie Glenthorne, sitting in solitary state up one corner. As a matter of fact, Archie was nearly asleep.

The proceedings did not interest him in the least. Lessons, of course, had to be done. Lessons were a hateful necessity, and Archie generally bucked up wonderfully when he really started to work. He was by no means a slacker. In fact, Archie's languor was mainly assumed.

"Ah!" said Mr. Snuggs, rubbing his thin hands together. "Ah!"

"Gadzooks!" said Archie, startled. Mr. Snuggs was standing in front of him, adjusting his spectacles.

"I think you are Glenthorne, eh?" said Mr. Snuggs softly. "The very distinguished son of a still more distinguished father. Splendid—splendid! How are you, Glenthorne? I am delighted to meet you, my boy."

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie. "Greetings, old bird! I—I mean to say, how do you do, sir?"

"Your father is Colonel Glenthorne, I believe?"

"Absolutely, sir."

"I thought so!" beamed Mr. Snuggs. "Colonel Glenthorne—the amazingly wealthy landowner, and the famous soldier—"

"Dash it all!" said Archie. "There's no need to drag the bally old family history out, what?"

"You have a family to be proud of, my boy," said Mr. Snuggs.

"Well, of course, in a way, I suppose so," said Archie. "But, there you are! Every jolly old family has a dashed skeleton! Of course, we've got dozens in ours, don't you know! It's all very well to be distinguished, but there was my great-uncle."

"Ah, he no doubt was a wonderful man?"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie, nodding. "Wonderful! I mean to say, he positively

dashed into a bank, and robbed the bally place! Chokey for five years, don't you know——"

"Ahem!" said Mr. Snuggs hastily. "That, of course, is most distressing! A very distant branch of your family, no doubt?"

"Not so distant, sir," said Archie calmly. "Then, of course, there was my grandfather. A priceless sort of cove, but he was only a private in the army—started as a bally drummer-boy—came out of an orphanage! So, you see, old lad, the family ain't so distinguished, after all!"

"Good old Archie!" I breathed. "That's a knock for old Snuggs! But it won't have any effect—he's a proper worm!"

Mr. Snuggs coughed, and went back to his desk. He was not exactly satisfied with his conversation with Archie. He loved to hear about the important relations, but he had no desire to learn of the others. Mr. Snuggs didn't seem to realise that Archie had delivered a distinct snub in his own delightful way.

But the Form saw it, and silently applauded the Genial Ass—who wasn't such an ass, after all.

And then, just as the Remove was settling down to lessons, the door opened, and Alf Huggins came in.

CHAPTER IV.

THROUGH THE HOOP!



MR. SUNGGS adjusted his glasses, and gazed at Huggins severely.

"Indeed!" he said, that sarcastic tone creeping back into his voice. "Indeed!"

And so we walk in just as we please, eh? We stroll in twenty minutes late, and appear to be quite comfortable about it!"

"Sorry, sir," said Alf.

"Sorry! And so you should be sorry," said Mr. Snuggs sourly. "And I should like to have an instant explanation! How dare you appear in the class-room for lessons at such a time as this?"

"It was Mr. Lee wot kep' me back, sir," said Huggins.

Mr. Snuggs started.

"Mr. Lee what kept you back!" he repeated, agnast. "Good gracious! What sort of grammar is that?"

"Blowed if I know, sir," said Huggins.

"I never was much good at grammar Fair 'ated the stuff, I did."

"You what?"

"'Ated it, sir!"

"'Ated it!" shouted Mr. Snuggs. "'Ated it! Upon my soul! This is extraordinary! For a boy belonging to this school to talk in that fashion——"

"He doesn't belong to the school, sir," put in Fullwood.

"What?" said Mr. Snuggs, turning. "Then who is he?"

"He's Alf Huggins, sir—the bricklayer's son!" sneered Fullwood. "He's a new boy—only arrived this mornin'. It's more than we can understand, sir. We don't know why the Head allowed it, sir."

Mr. Snuggs looked appalled.

"Huggins—the son of a bricklayer!" he exclaimed blankly.

"Yes, sir."

"Is—is this some ridiculous joke?"

"No, it ain't a joke!" said Huggins bluntly. "Lummy! You ain't goin' to make a fuss, are you? It's bad enough for these 'ere young snobs to start on me—without the masters chippin' in!"

"Silence, you young brat!" snapped Mr. Snuggs tartly.

"Oh, go on!" said Alf, with a sigh.

"He oughtn't to be in this school, sir," put in Gulliver. "His father's come into money, I think, an' so he's been sent here. We're goin' to kick up a fuss about it, I can tell you. Our people are all rich and of good breedin'."

"Who told you that?" roared Handforth. "Good breeding! Huh! I should say your people came out of convicts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Boys—boys!" protested Mr. Snuggs appealingly. "This is dreadful! Handforth may I request you to sit down?"

Handforth sat down with a grunt.

"May he request me!" he muttered with disgust. "This chap Huggins is just the same as I am—and yet he'll be sat on! He's an unlucky beast not to have a lord for a father!"

"I'll bet there are plenty of bricklayer's better than lords!" murmured Church.

Mr. Snuggs turned back to Huggins.

"We are getting on—we are getting on!" he said, rubbing his hands together. "And so, Huggins, your father is a bricklayer?"

"I don't see 'ow my father's got anythink to do with it, sir!" said Huggins stoutly. "'E ain't at St. Frank's, is he? I'm the bloke who's come to be eddicated—not my father! It's a pity you can't leave 'im out of it!"

Mr. Snuggs smiled, and turned to the Form.

"You see—you see?" he asked. "The boy's very lowness comes out in the first words he utters! It is what I expected—it is what anyone would expect of such as he!"

"Are we going to do any work, this morning, sir?" put in Reggie Pitt calmly.

"Yes—yes, to be sure!" said Mr. Snuggs. "Work? To be sure! But I must attend to this boy first. Now, Huggins! Per-

haps you'll be good enough to explain why you were late?"

"That won't take me long, sir—"

"I am very glad to hear it!" said Mr. Snuggs. "I am quite delighted that you are willing to entertain the Form by telling us how it comes about that you, a bricklayer's son, can calmly walk in at your own leisure! We are positively on tenterhooks, Huggins. We hang upon your words!"

Fullwood and Co. and many of the others giggled, and Mr. Snuggs fairly hugged himself.

"Oh, the crawling worm!" said Tommy Watson, with disgust.

"I ain't goin' to make no song about it!" said Huggins, quietly. "Mr. Lee told me to go upstairs and change into these 'ere Etons. That's all!"

"Ah! And so that is all?" exclaimed Mr. Snuggs unpleasantly. "That is all, eh? Mr. Lee told you to go upstairs to change into these 'ere Etons? A delightful expression, Huggins! A charming selection of perfect grammar!"

Again the Form cackled.

"These 'ere Etons!" said Mr. Snuggs. "How delightful!"

"That ain't my fault, is it?" demanded Huggins defiantly. "I ain't never 'ad proper teaching, and you can't expect me to know as much as these other fellers! 'Tain't fair, sir! You ain't givin' me a chance! Lummy! I thought as how the masters would be square!"

"How dare you?" shouted Mr. Snuggs. "This is dreadful! The very instant you come into this Form room you start insulting me! You become impertinent! But what else can one expect? Go to your place boy! I shall take very good care to keep a sharp eye on you!"

"I ain't surprised to 'ear that, sir," said Alf.

"Do not presume to answer me back!" said Mr. Snuggs. "Boys, I advise you all to look after your desks well. You must not be careless with any valuables. They can easily be lost!"

Alf turned round, his face red, and his eyes blazing.

"Was that meant as a jeer at me?" he shouted hotly.

"Good—good gracious!" gasped Mr. Snuggs.

"Tellin' the blokes to keep their desks looked arter!" shouted Huggins. "That's as much as sayin' that I might be on the pinch! You said it in such a way as it could be took different! But I knowed wot you meant! An' I ain't a bloomin' fool, neither!"

We all looked on with interest. There was not the slightest doubt that Huggins had been greatly provoked. Mr. Snuggs had certainly intended that advice as a direct jeer at the new boy. And it was a caddish, contemptible thing to 'do. Every decent fellow in the form was utterly fed up with

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Mr. Snuggs by now. They set him down as what he was—a crawling kind of worm.

"You—you wretched youth!" he shouted. "I am astounded that you should have the audacity to shout!"

Alf cooled down.

"I didn't mean to shout, sir!" he said gruffly. "It wasn't right, and I know it! I'm sorry, sir—I apologise! 'Tain't right for a boy to talk like that to a master. But a chap says things he don't mean when he's riled."

This was rather handsome of Huggins, but Mr. Snuggs did not appreciate it.

"Oh, you imagine that you can conciliate me by soft words?" he sneered. "I can assure you, Huggins, that such trickery will have no effect. Your place is in the second row on the left. Go to it at once! I will deal with you later. Lessons must not be kept waiting any longer."

And, at last, the Remove started work.

And there could be not the slightest doubt that Mr. Snuggs was an eminently capable man. In less than half-an-hour he proved that when it came to a question of work, he was an excellent scholar—and quite equal to Mr. Crowell himself in the matter of qualifications.

He was painstaking, too—and once he was thoroughly into the work he took great interest in the boys themselves. But they hated him, nevertheless. He was full of carping criticism—full of bitter sarcasm. And he loved to play to the gallery.

If he could possibly make the Remove giggle, he made it giggle. It was only the rich fellows and the ones with titled parents who escaped from Mr. Snuggs' attentions. They were left severely alone. Mr. Snuggs was as mild as milk to fellows like Handforth and Archie and Somerton and Fullwood.

Upon the whole, he proved to be rather easy going. The Remove would probably get on with work all right—even better than under Mr. Crowell's supervision. As a master, Mr. Snuggs was capable.

As a man, he was detestable.

And Alf Huggins came in for Mr. Snuggs' sneers every few minutes.

In the geography lesson Alf went through the hoop.

He was very vague when answering questions concerning the positions of continental towns, and Mr. Snuggs thought that here was a good opportunity to amuse the Form.

"I can see, Huggins, that I shall have to give you some very particular attention," he exclaimed. "For example, I should like you to tell me the exact position of Constantinople."

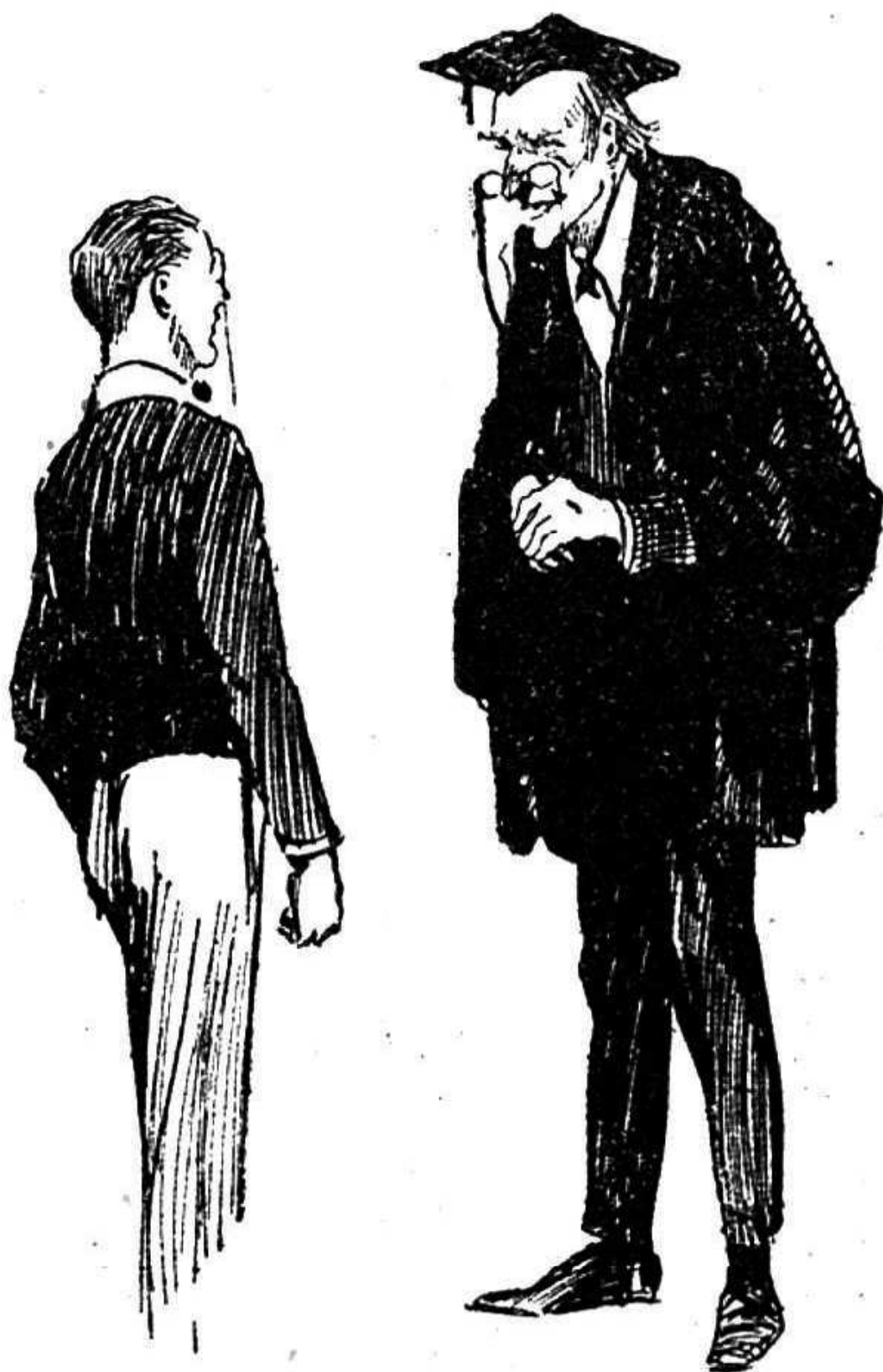
Huggins thought for a moment.

"It's in Greece, ain't it, sir?"

"Greece!" shouted Mr. Snuggs. "Do you hear that, boys? Greece! This—this ignorant nincompoop calmly assures us that Constantinople is in Greece!"

The Remove chuckled heartily.

"We are learning!" said Mr. Snuggs.



"I think you are Glenthorne, eh?" said Mr. Snuggs softly. "The very distinguished son of a still more distinguished father. "Splendid—splendid! How are you, Glenthorne? I am delighted to meet you, my boy."

"This is distinctly enlightening! So Constantinople is in Greece? Possibly, Huggins, you are so well acquainted with the subject that you can tell us how to spell Constantinople?"

"I—I don't know as I could, sir," said Alf.

"Really?" asked Mr. Snuggs, in surprise. "Dear me! You know so much on the subject, and yet you cannot spell such a simple word! Just one of your little jokes, Huggins! We are quite amused! Ha, ha!"

Mr. Snuggs giggled, and the Remove giggled with him.

And at that very moment the door opened, and Nelson Lee walked in.

"Yes, we are quite amused," said Mr. Snuggs, unaware of the Housemaster's arrival. "Your crass stupidity is perfectly amazing! But then, of course, we must not overlook the fact that you have come to St. Frank's straight from the gutter. And so you are somewhat handicapped, eh? Quite so, Huggins—quite so! I am indeed sorry for you!"

"I want no pity, sir," said Huggins sullenly.

"Pity, indeed!" said Mr. Snuggs. "Good gracious me! You are nothing more nor less than a low, common——"

"Ahem! Just one word, if you can spare the time, Mr. Snuggs," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I am sorry to interrupt lessons——"

"Oh! I—I—" Mr. Snuggs paused, and gulped. "Really, sir! This—this is somewhat surprising! I had no idea!"

"You were engaged with Huggins, Mr. Snuggs," said Nelson Lee smoothly.

Mr. Snuggs breathed rather hard. He had an instinctive feeling that Nelson Lee had overheard some of those sarcastic remarks. And Mr. Snuggs didn't like it.

That sarcasm was only intended for the Remove.

"As a matter of fact, my very mission here is connected with Huggins," went on Nelson Lee. "He is a new boy, Mr. Snuggs, and he has come from an entirely different sphere of life. I should like you to be particularly patient with the lad and give him special attention. He is quick and will soon catch up with his studies."

"To be sure, sir—to be sure," said Mr. Snuggs, cringing. "You may be quite certain that I shall give Huggins very special attention—very particular care."

"And if possible, Mr. Snuggs, will you please be patient?" asked Lee. "The boy is strange to his new surroundings, and it will be some little time before he shakes down. Have I your word on this little point?"

"Absolutely, sir," said Mr. Snuggs, rubbing his thin hands together. "You may be quite sure that I shall treat the dear lad with every possible consideration. To be sure!"

"Very well, Mr. Snuggs, I shall rely upon you," said Nelson Lee, turning to Huggins. "I trust, my boy, that you will do your utmost to please Mr. Snuggs, and obey him without query."

"Yes, sir," said Alf quietly. "I'll allus do my best, sir."

"No boy can do more than that," said Lee.

He went out of the room, and closed the door.

"So you see, Huggins, you are to be privileged!" exclaimed Mr. Snuggs unpleasantly. "Have you not every reason to congratulate yourself? Here you are, a boy of a distinctly lower grade, and yet you are to be treated with very special consideration! Indeed, it is quite an advantage to be born under a lowly star!"

Huggins said nothing.

"You may sit down, Huggins," said Mr. Snuggs. "It is a pity that Mr. Lee should think it necessary to treat you as though you were wrapped in cotton wool. Delicate child! I must take care to be very, very careful!"

And Mr. Snuggs, with a smirk, turned back to his desk. He just missed seeing Hand-

forth bend over towards Church and McClure. "I'll tell you one thing!" breathed Handforth grimly.

"Shush, you ass——"

"Rats! He won't touch me!" sniffed Handforth. "My pater's titled! I'll tell you one thing!"

"Well?"

"In less than a week I shall be hauled before the Head!" said Handforth, in a growling voice.

"Hauled before the Head?"

"Yes—and I shall be flogged!"

"Oh, well you know best!" murmured McClure.

"Flogged!" repeated Handforth impressively. "I shall be shoved on the giddy carpet for punching Snuggs on the nose! A week! By George! He won't be spared for a week! I've a good mind to do it now!"

But Handforth refrained—which was just as well, perhaps!

CHAPTER V.

NOT WANTED!



LESSONS were over.

And in the passages, and in the lobby, and the Triangle, the Remove had formed itself into groups. The Remove was keenly discussing two very important subjects—Mr. Snuggs and Alf Huggins.

"There's no doubt about it—the chap's a giddy reptile!" said Reginald Pitt, with a sniff. "He's nothing better than a crawling worm! My hat! He made me squirm."

"The rotter!" said Jack Grey warmly. "The way he talked to Huggins! Mind you, I think the chap is a bit off for the Remove—but to be treated like that was too bad."

"Don't you like Huggins?" asked Pitt.

"I haven't had time to like him or dislike him," replied Jack. "He's common—there's no doubt about that. But he'll soon shake down—he'll soon improve. When I say he's off, I mean the chaps will chip him to death. It's hardly fair to Huggins himself. I shan't sneer at him. My hat! Wasn't I in pretty rotten circumstances when I was a kid?"

The other fellows were talking just as keenly.

Handforth was vehement.

"If that cad goes on the same this afternoon, I'll get up and punch him on the nose!" he snorted. "I shan't be able to help myself! I was on the point of doing it this morning! He's a toad—a blessed tadpole!"

"Hear, hear!"

"All the same, he's pretty capable!" said Church. "I loathe him like a pest, but I think we shall have a pretty easy time this term."

"Easy!" snapped Handforth. "Why, it was torture to sit in the giddy Form room! There's nothing I hate worse than that sneering sarcastic voice of his!"

(Continued on page 15)

THIS WEEK—SPECIAL GRAND LONG COMPLETE DETECTIVE MYSTERY!



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OUR DETECTIVE STORY SECTION

No. 18.

PRESENTED WITH "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."

April 7, 1923



A Thrilling Long Complete Mystery Story of
Abel Link, the famous detective.

Paul Hartsen Gets a Double Shock—The Man with the Fierce Eyes—Oliver is Trapped—The Mystery Deepens.

PAUL HARTSEN, commonly known as the Diamond King, sat in his office glancing at a copy of a South African journal. Suddenly, as his eyes rested on a paragraph, he gave a start. The cigar dropped from his lips, and every vestige of colour faded from his florid face.

"Escaped!" he muttered. "By heavens, escaped! No trace of him a fortnight after! And this paper is more than a month old! If he fled the country, he might easily be in England now. It has come at last—the blow that I have dreaded all these years!"

For a time the diamond merchant sat with his head sunk on his chest, a picture of fear and consternation, with the newspaper crumpled in his hands. He did not hear the door open, nor the sound of footsteps. Not until his name was called did he look up, to see before him a lad of about seventeen, with honest and intelligent features.

"Are you ill, sir?" inquired Oliver Heath.

"No, no—it's nothing!" replied Paul Hartsen, as he hastily composed himself. "A touch of headache—that's all. But what brings you back at this hour? I had given you up until to-morrow."

"I sailed last evening," said the young clerk, "and the boat was delayed by an accident to her machinery. I safely delivered the uncut diamonds to Bogardus & Co., at Amsterdam, and here are the cut stones"—laying a small packet on the desk. "Mr. Bogardus also sent this to you," he added, producing a letter from another pocket.

Paul Hartsen opened the envelope, and when he had read the few lines that it contained he went ghastly white again, and sprang to his feet with a stifled cry. He thrust the letter into his pocket, letting the newspaper fall to the floor. Oliver stared at his employer in alarm.

"You are surely ill, sir," he exclaimed.

"I—I don't feel quite myself," was the stammering reply. "Tell me, my lad, did a tall, lean man cross over on the boat with you—a man with fierce eyes and dark moustache and beard?"

"There was such a passenger," admitted Oliver. "and I fancied that he was keeping an eye on me most of the time."

"Ah! And what became of him? Did he travel up to Liverpool Street with you?"

"Not that I know of, sir. I saw nothing more of him after I landed at Harwich."

Paul Hartsen stepped to a cabinet and

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poured out a glass of brandy, but the fiery stuff did not seem to steady his nerves.

"I have had bad news—of a loss in business," he said, "and it has naturally upset me. I shall probably have to leave town. Take this half-crown, my boy, and buy me a coil of stout rope."

"Hadn't I better fetch a doctor?" asked the lad.

"Certainly not," was the sharp reply. "Do as I tell you. Go!"

Oliver departed, wondering why his employer wanted the rope, and what could have happened to cause him such agitation.

The lad's quest proved a difficult one, and twenty minutes elapsed when he returned. As he drew near the building, he heard a muffled report, and he had no more than entered the hall when a man brushed against him, colliding violently, and took to his heels.

"By Jove, that's the fellow who crossed to Harwich with me!" thought Oliver, as he got a glimpse of the vanishing figure.

He hesitated for a moment; then hurried into the front office, to find it empty. He opened the door of the private office at the rear, and recoiled with a sharp cry. Stretched full length on the floor was his employer, apparently lifeless.

But the diamond merchant was not dead. He rose to his feet before the lad could run for assistance, and, after fumbling in his breast-pocket, he produced a silver cigar-case that was flattened and dented.

"It saved my life," he declared. "The bullet glanced off. But that scoundrel doubtless believes he has killed me. Where is he? Did you see him?"

"He passed me in the hall," cried Oliver. "He can't be far off. I would know him again, and if I can find a constable——"

"No, no; I won't have the police," interrupted Paul Hartsen. "This is not a matter for them. The man is a half-witted fellow named Andrews, who has an imaginary grievance against me. It is all right. He won't try again."

"And you mean to let him go free, sir?"

Paul Hartsen did not answer. He stepped into the front room, and for a few seconds peered through one of the windows under the blind. When he turned away, he was shaking like a leaf. He drank another glass of brandy, and it seemed to compose him.

"Did you bring the rope?" he inquired.

"Yes, that's right. Now go to your supper, my boy. Don't hurry. Walk along as calmly as if nothing had happened. As I told you, I may have to leave town. Come back in an hour, and if I am not here you will find instructions for your guidance. But I will tell you one thing now, lest I should forget it. I don't want you to sleep on the premises during my absence. Can you get a bed where you lodge?"

"No doubt I can," said Oliver.

"Then do so," replied Paul Hartsen. "You had better arrange it at once. You have

been a trusty clerk. Continue to serve my interests faithfully, say nothing of what has occurred, and you will not regret it. That is all for the present."

Oliver's father was a solicitor, of Cambridge, and when he died after a failure caused by an unfortunate investment, leaving his little family almost destitute, the lad considered himself lucky in obtaining a clerkship with the Diamond King—a title that Paul Hartsen had acquired by the magnitude of his dealings, and the superlative quality of the gems he handled.

Chosen out of a score of applicants, Oliver had started at a liberal wage that allowed him to send a small weekly amount to his mother and sister. And not only was his salary increased with six months, but he was entrusted with the important duty of taking parcels of uncut diamonds to Amsterdam, and bringing back cut stones, ready for the market.

A year had passed since he left home, and in all the twelve months his relations with his employer had been of the most placid nature, so the events of this evening came as a shock to him, and he was puzzled and alarmed, worried by vague doubts for the future, as he walked to the Red Lion Square boarding-house where he took his meals. Why the mysterious stranger had tried to kill the diamond-merchant, why the latter was unwilling to inform the police, what he could possibly want with the coil of rope—to these questions the lad could find no answer.

"It is a big mystery," Oliver told himself, "and it will be bigger still if Mr. Hartsen disappears. I have never known him to leave town before. One thing is certain. He was disturbed by something in that newspaper before I came in, and the letter I brought him added to his fright."

Oliver ate his supper, arranged with the landlady for a bed if it should be needed, and returned to Hatton Garden at half-past seven o'clock. The hall-door was unlocked, and the door of the front office stood open. The room was empty, but the electric light was turned on, and pinned to the lid of the roll-top desk, where it could not escape attention, was a large sheet of paper. The lad bent over it, and read the following message:

"I have gone abroad, and may be away some days. You will keep the usual hours, and inform all callers that no business can be done during my absence. See that the premises are made secure each night before you leave, for the safe contains property to the value of many thousands of pounds. Your salary will be posted to you at the end of the week. Meanwhile, adhere strictly to my instructions."

Oliver was staggered. It was a heavy responsibility that had fallen upon him, and his heart sank as he thought of the big safe in the private office.

"I don't understand it," he muttered. "This is the very time when I ought to be sleeping here, to protect the place. Why did Mr. Hartsen tell me to get a bed outside? And he knows that I have a set of keys. Why, then, did he go off, and leave everything open? It looks almost as if he wanted that man Andrews—or whatever his real name is—to walk in and read this message. But, of course, that is too ridiculous for—"

A creaking footstep cut short the lad's reflections, and he turned with a start to see a revolver pointed at his head. Behind the weapon was the tall, dark-bearded stranger, and from the wild, restless gleam of his eyes—it was easy to believe that he was not altogether of sane mind. He had evidently been hiding behind a screen in a corner of the room.

"Don't move!" he said in a hoarse whisper. "If you open your mouth to cry for help, I'll blow your brains out. Where is the black-hearted scoundrel who employs you?"

"Mr. Hartsen has left town," Oliver answered, with forced calmness. "That's all I can tell you."

"Left town? I'm not to be fooled by such a trick. I've read the letter, and I don't believe it. Have you the key of the safe?"

"No, I haven't," the lad told him. "It's not likely. And what's more, you couldn't open the safe if you tried for a week."

"I don't want to open it," was the cunning reply. "I'm here for revenge—not money. Paul Hartsen lives in the house, as I happen to know. Which floor?"

"The second," Oliver admitted.

"And what use is the first floor put to?"

"It is let to a lodger—a German."

The man hesitated for an instant.

"Show me to your employer's rooms," he bade, with an oath.

"You won't find Mr. Hartsen there," assured the lad.

"I'll make sure of that. Yonder is a candle on the desk. Light it, and lead the way. And remember that I hold your life in my hands, you tool of a treacherous cur. Try to escape—utter a sound—and you die! I'm desperate, boy."

Oliver could well believe it. He dared not disobey. He was alone in the house with a possible madman, for he knew that the lodger, Fritz Muller, was always absent from early morning until late at night.

"I can't get out of it," he told himself. "I wonder what this fellow will do when he finds that Mr. Hartsen is really gone?"

The street door was closed, and at this hour Hatton Garden was comparatively quiet and deserted. The lad started upstairs with the lighted candle, and the man followed closely, with the revolver still in his hand. They reached the first landing, went on to the second and top one. They listened, but

could hear nothing. The man quivered with excitement.

"Open the door, boy—quick!" he whispered.

The door swung wide as Oliver turned the knob. The two entered, and the light showed them a back room, comfortably furnished as a sleeping chamber.

Paul Hartsen was not there, but an open window and a rope dangling over the sill told a plain tale. One end of the rope was tied to the bed-post, and the other hung invisibly down in the darkness.

"The coward!" exclaimed the man, with an oath. "He's gone! What lies below?"

"A court," replied Oliver.

"It leads to the street?"

"Yes, by a passage at the side of the house."

The man peered under the bed, examined the cupboard and wardrobe, and meanwhile Oliver, who had stepped to the window, discovered something that made him catch his breath for an instant. Incredible though it seemed, he knew that he must be right. He hauled up the rope coil by coil, lowered the sash, and then watched his companion's search with covert eagerness.

"No use!" muttered the latter at length. "He's given me the slip. There's another room on this floor?"

"An unfurnished one," said Oliver.

The man was not satisfied until he had looked into the front apartment—the door was unlocked—and then, sending the lad downstairs ahead of him, he paused at the end of the hall.

"I'm off now," he said. "If Paul Hartsen has gone abroad, I know where to find him. As for you, boy, I'm going to give you a chance. But if you raise an alarm, or tell anybody that I've been here, I'll come back and kill you."

With that, still keeping his revolver pointed, the mysterious Mr. Andrews opened the street door with one hand, darted through, and drew it quickly shut behind him. And the next instant with a sigh of relief, Oliver had shot the bolt and turned the key.

"I'm well out of that scrape," he told himself. "I was afraid the scoundrel meant to shoot me, and then tackle the safe."

The lad had no intention of summoning the police. His first step was a curious one, for he returned to the top floor again, thoroughly searching that and afterwards the ground floor, calling his employer's name in every room. Then he sat down and pondered for a time. Strange things had happened, and he felt himself unable to cope with the situation. The sense of his responsibility, and a dread of he knew not what, weighed heavily upon him.

"It's the biggest kind of a mystery," he thought, "and I ought to confide in somebody, though that would be contrary to my

orders. But for my own sake it must be done. I'm not going to run such a risk, with thousands of pounds worth of diamonds in the safe. But where can I look for a friend? I have none in London—not even a trustworthy acquaintance."

Suddenly he saw a way out of his difficulties. He remembered the famous private detective who stood at the head of his profession.

"I'll go to Abel Link," he decided, "and tell him all. This is just the sort of case for him, and he won't betray my confidence."

Oliver knew the detective's address. He picked up the South African newspaper from the floor, and put that and the letter of instructions in his pocket. Then he left the building, locking office and hall doors, and walked rapidly towards Holborn.

Abel Link is Interested—The Scrap of Writing—Oliver Plays Detective.

ABEL LINK happened to be at home that night when Oliver called. He listened without comment to the whole story, which Oliver told him clearly and lucidly, beginning with the circumstances that had led him to enter the diamond merchant's employment.

"This is certainly a mysterious affair," said Abel Link, "and the more so because of Paul Hartsen's prominent position in his line of business. You did well to come to me, my boy. And now let me see the paper which you think was at the bottom of your employer's agitation. He was first upset by something in that, I understand, and his alarm was increased by the letter you brought him from Bogardus & Co., his agents in Amsterdam?"

"That is the way it struck me, sir," replied Oliver. "I may be wrong."

"No, you are probably right. Mr. Hartsen's questions about the dark man who crossed to Harwich with you, and the latter's murderous visit to Hatton Garden shortly afterwards, point to that theory."

Having carefully read the letter of instructions, the detective turned to the copy of the "South African Courier." He glanced down the columns, and had not gone far when his attention was arrested by the following paragraph:

"Though a reward of £500 is outstanding, nothing has yet been heard of the convict Kelsey, who escaped from the Cape Town breakwater a fortnight ago, and it is feared that he has managed to leave the country in some vessel. Kelsey had served five years of a twenty years' sentence for shooting a police-sergeant."

Abel Link's thin lips tightened, and his indolent expression was gone as he put the paper aside. His professional instinct was thoroughly aroused.

"How long has the Diamond King been in London?" he asked.

"About three years, I think," said the lad.

"And he came to Hatton Garden from Amsterdam?"

"So I have heard, sir."

"This German lodger—is he a friend of your employer's?"

"I think not, sir."

"Mr. Hartsen, I believe, leases the whole house, and has been living on the top floor?"

"Yes, sir."

"And how long has the German been there?"

"I can't tell you that, sir," replied Oliver. "He was there when I came."

For some minutes the detective sat in deep thought, puffing at his pipe until he was half hidden by a cloud of smoke. Then he arose, consulted a bulky scrapbook, and took from it a scrap of paper, which he showed to the lad.

"Do you recognise that writing?" he asked.

"By Jove, I should say I do!" exclaimed Oliver. "It is Mr. Hartsen's writing."

"You are sure?"

"I could swear to it, sir. I know by the peculiar turn of the capital letters, B and K. But what does this mean? How did you—"

"Never mind that now," interrupted Abel Link, with a gleam of triumph in his grey eyes. "The case grows interesting. Much hangs on your letter of instructions, which seems to contain a hidden meaning. Let us go partly over the ground again. When Mr. Hartsen had inquired about the dark man he sent you for a rope, and during your absence his life was attempted. Then, after peering from one of the front windows, he told you to go to your supper, to walk slowly, and to come back in an hour. He fastened the street door after you, but when you returned it was unlocked, the light was turned on, and you found this letter in a conspicuous place. The man Andrews—we will call him that—was hidden in the office. You led him to the bedroom on the top floor, and found that your employer had escaped by lowering himself from the window."

"No, he did not do that," broke in Oliver.

"Why not? What do you mean?"

"I will tell you, sir, and you can judge for yourself. I forgot to mention it before. There was a coating of grime and dust on the window-sill, but it had only been disturbed where the rope touched it. A lot of it would have been rubbed off if Mr. Hartsen had climbed out of the window."

"Very good!" said the detective. "You are a smart boy. So you think that your employer concealed himself in the house?"

"He was not in the house," declared Oliver. "I am sure of that. And there's the mystery, sir. If Mr. Hartsen left by some

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other way, as he must have done, why did he wish the man Andrews to believe that he had escaped by the window?"

Abel Link smiled.

"We are getting on," he said, rubbing his hands. "We are getting on. And now for a few more questions. Are the stock of diamonds still in the safe?"

"They are, so far as I know."

"Have you ever seen your employer and Fritz Muller together?"

"Not once, sir."

"Have you ever seen Muller pass in or out, or heard him overhead, when Mr. Hartsen was in his office?"

which I have been in the habit of sleeping. The safe is in the private office, and there is a window opening on to a paved court, surrounded by blank walls. From the court is a passage which leads to Hatton Garden."

"That is enough," said Abel Link. "I intend to get to the bottom of this mystery, and I shall want you to help me."

"I hope I won't get into any trouble, or lose my berth," Oliver replied doubtfully. "I have a mother and sister who look to me for—"

"You would have been more likely to get into trouble if you had kept silence. Don't



He staggered for an instant, hit in the shoulder, then struck out blindly and grappled with his enemy.

"I never have, sir, that I can remember."

"Ah, we are getting on famously. Describe both men."

Oliver did so, and the detective reflected for a moment.

"Give me a plan of the house," he said.

"There are Mr. Hartsen's two rooms on the top floor," replied the lad, "and Muller's two on the floor below. On the ground floor are the hall and three rooms. There is the front office, with two rooms behind it. One is the private office, and the other, to one side of it, is a small room in

worry, my boy. You have done quite right. If this matter turns out as I think it will, you will share in a large reward; moreover, I will find you another and a better berth."

"Then you can count on me, sir," vowed the lad. "What am I to do?"

"I'll tell you," replied Abel Link. He put a ragged cap on Oliver's head, pulled his coat-collar up, and with a few touches of pigment altered his features. "Here are your instructions," he added. "Go back to Hatton Garden, and if the man Andrews is lurking about, follow him secretly and learn where he is stopping, then send his address

to me from the nearest telegraph office. Don't watch for him longer than midnight, and whether you fail or succeed you must sleep at your lodging in Red Lion Square."

"And what about Mr. Hartsen's premises?" asked the lad.

"I shall keep an eye on them to-night. To-morrow morning you will open the office as usual and remain there during business hours. In the course of the day—if nothing happens in the meanwhile—you will receive further instructions from me. That is all, my boy."

"I'm off," said Oliver.

"A smart boy and an honest one," muttered Abel Link, as the door closed. "It was fortunate, indeed that he thought of me and came here to-night."

He smoked another contemplative pipe, refreshed his memory from the scrap-book, and then began to don one of his numerous disguises.

"It is a fairly clear case," he told himself. "That newspaper paragraph, the writing I wisely preserved, the attempt on Paul Hartsen's life, and his cunning preparations—yes, I am certainly on the right track. There can be no doubt of it. It won't be long, I think, until I have the irons on Tom Kelsey, and on another famous criminal who has been badly wanted for five long years."

Oliver's Visit—The Burglar Trapped—Fritz Muller Unmasks.

WHAT success Oliver Heath met with, after he set out to play the part of amateur detective—and vastly proud he was—may be told in a few words. It was a dark and misty night, with a fine rain falling, else his task might not have proved easy. As it was, he loitered about the neighbourhood of Hatton Garden from ten o'clock until twelve, and then, getting a glimpse of his man, he shadowed him for another half hour, taking care not to be seen.

Over and over again the mysterious Andrews slouched past the premises of the diamond merchant, looking into the passage leading to the court, and glancing up at the darkened windows of the upper floors; but whatever his purpose was, he wisely concluded to postpone it when he observed that he had attracted the attention of a constable. He started off at a brisk pace, walking north, and Oliver furtively dogged his steps.

"It's all right," the lad reflected. "He has had enough of it, and is going to turn in now."

The chase was not a long one. Andrews struck through Clerkenwell and along Amwell Street, crossed the Pentonville Road, and

finally entered a dingy-looking house in Albert Street, Islington. Then Oliver sought a telegraph-office, sent a wire to the detective's address in Buckingham Street, and went off to bed in Red Lion Square.

The next day was mild and sunny. At the usual hour the lad opened the office, and having looked about the premises—he was relieved to find everything all right—he seated himself at his employer's desk as if prepared for business. It was difficult for him to realise what had occurred on the previous night, and he half expected to see the Diamond King's familiar figure appear at any moment.

"I can't imagine what it all means," he told himself; "but Abel Link seemed to have a sort of a grip on the case. Shall I hear from him to-day, I wonder? Will he want me to shadow the man Andrews again to-night?"

The morning wore on, but no message came from the detective. Several customers called, inquired for Paul Hartsen, and went away disappointed. At one o'clock Oliver walked round to Holborn for lunch, and he had not long been back when, to his surprise, Fritz Muller stepped into the office. The German lodger was a thick-set man of apparently forty, with a pasty complexion, tawny moustache and beard, and a shaggy head of hair. His eyes were supposed to be weak, and he incessantly wore blue goggles.

"Vere is Mr. Hartsen?" he inquired.

"Out of town," replied the lad; "and I don't know when he will return. Can I do anything for you?"

"Nodings, my boy. I shust vished to ask Mr. Hartsen to haf dinner mit me dis evenings."

And with a nod the German vanished, ascending the stairs to his apartments.

"Queer!" thought Oliver. "He has never turned up before at this time of day."

The afternoon passed monotonously, with still no sign from Abel Link. At four o'clock the lad went out to tea, and on the way back, at the corner of Holborn and Hatton Garden, a box of matches was thrust at him by a ragged-looking mendicant, who begged in whining tones:

"Please buy, kind sir. Help a poor man who is crippled by rheumatism."

"I don't want any, thank you," Oliver told him. "No; I mean it. Let me pass!"

"But you must buy," the man replied, suddenly altering his voice. "Don't you know me, my boy?"

"Abel Link!" exclaimed the lad.

"Hush! Be careful! Someone may be watching you. Take the box on the right, and put a penny on the tray."

Matches and copper changed place. The disguised detective limped off, crying his wares, and when Oliver returned to the

office he opened the box, and found inside a folded scrap of paper that read as follows:

"Before you go to dinner unfasten the window of the private office. Lock the front as usual, as if you were leaving for the night. Come back at nine o'clock, and slip into the court when no one is looking. Enter cautiously by the window, and secure it again. Then remain in the little bedroom, make no noise, and do not go to sleep. If you have a pistol keep it by you. Something is likely to happen to-night, and I may need your assistance. One thing bear in mind: I shall be at hand, and you are to do nothing until I call for you. Carefully destroy this."

Oliver read the message several times over, until the instructions were impressed on his memory; and then, setting the paper alight, he tossed it into the grate.

"It means business," he reflected. "If Abel Link thinks there is something going to happen, something will happen. He expects a visit from the man Andrews, of course, and he wants me to help to capture him. I hope we'll succeed, so that Mr. Hartsen can safely come back."

The short afternoon faded into the dusk of the autumn evening. At seven o'clock, having done as he had been told, Oliver locked up the premises and went to dinner. A little after nine o'clock found him in his old quarters, in the small room adjoining the diamond merchant's private office, waiting in darkness with a loaded revolver in his pocket. He had unlatched the door, so that it could be opened without noise.

The vigil was to prove long and monotonous. The lad at first sat up in a chair, and then settled himself more comfortable on the bed. For a couple of hours he heard nothing, except a faint rumble of traffic that still lingered in the neighbouring streets; but after a clock had struck eleven, a peculiar, scraping sound reached his ears. He could not tell where or what it was. It was continued for a little time, seeming to draw nearer from above, and finally ceased altogether.

"Mice in the wall," Oliver told himself. "It couldn't be the lodger. He must be out, for I haven't heard him come in."

Twelve o'clock struck, and then one. Fritz Muller—if he was out—had not returned. The lad was becoming drowsy, and the feeling gradually conquered him, though he fought hard against it. Twice he fell into a doze, and he would soon have been asleep had he not been aroused by a noise close at hand. He sat up, all his senses on the alert. What he had been expecting had come at last. He listened for a quarter of an hour, and from the various sounds he judged exactly what was taking place.

"It is a burglar—no doubt Andrews," he thought. "He has cut a piece out of the ground-glass window, put his arm through and unfastened the catches of the sash. There goes the grill," he added to himself a

little later. "He has managed to unlock that and slide it back. And now he is inside."

The window-sash was softly lowered, and footsteps crossed the private office. Oliver waited a little longer, and then, having removed his shoes, he crept to the door and drew it open an inch. This gave him a view towards the rear wall of the room, at one side of which was the window, with the safe next to it, and beyond that a corner cupboard. The upright form of a man, vague and indistinct was thrown into black relief by the glow of a dark lantern that he held in front of him with one hand, while with the other he attacked the lock of the old-fashioned safe. Once he flashed the lantern quickly to right and left, and Oliver saw that the circle of glass from the window had been deftly fitted into place again.

"It is Andrews, of course," the lad vowed, "and he is after the diamonds. He has chosen the time well, for he knows that the constable on duty don't look into the court more than once in a couple of hours. But where can Abel Link be! He promised to be on hand, and yet there is no sign of him. Something must have gone wrong, or this fellow would not have been allowed to accomplish so much. I might capture him, if I could turn on the light without his hearing me. I wouldn't be afraid to try, if I dared."

Oliver was in a dilemma. He was reluctant to disobey his instructions but, on the other hand should he do as he had been told, and trust to the detective, he feared that Andrews would get away with the diamonds. He decided to wait, however, and for a few minutes he kept his eyes on the shadowy form, listening to the sound of the steel tools that were trying to pick the lock.

"Where is Abel Link?" he asked himself again. "Why don't he come?"

There was a low murmur of satisfaction, the creak of hinges, and then a swift and startling thing occurred. The electric light was suddenly whipped on, flooding the room with silvery radiance, and revealing two men standing face to face. One was Fritz Muller, and he was pointing a small, odd-looking pistol at the head of the astounded and trembling burglar, who was, indeed, Andrews. The safe was open and empty—absolutely bare. The door of the cupboard was also open, and from that hiding place the German must have emerged.

For a second or two neither spoke, and in the silence, Oliver feared that the beating of his heart would betray him.

"I haf you, my man," said Muller, with a cunning smile. "Do not move, or you die. You come to steal, is it not?—to rob my friend Hartsen of his diamonds? It is a good thing that he tell me to watch them."

Andrews stood helpless, the dark lantern in one hand, his tools in the other.

"Are you going to call the police?" he asked sullenly.

"Not so," was the reply. "I have no need of the police."

The burglar gave a start, peering intently at his captor.

"Hartsen's friend, are you?" he exclaimed, with an oath. "You thief, you treacherous, black-hearted hound, do you suppose I don't know you? It's a neat disguise, but your voice betrays you. You can't fool me, Ross Raymond."

"Can't I?" said Muller, dropping his German accent. His face twitched with rage, and he thrust his weapon closer. "Well, have it as you like. You are in my power, you revengeful dog."

"I know that," muttered Andrews, "and I am willing to make terms with you. Give me half of the diamonds, let me go, and we'll call it quits between us."

"I think not," sneered Muller. "You fool, to imagine, that you could get the upper hand of me! I set a trap for you, and you have tumbled into it. Now I mean to kill you, to be rid of you for good and all. It is no crime to shoot a burglar, and the law won't—"

"You'll kill me, you scoundrel?" snarled Andrews.

As he leapt forward, the weapon—it was an air-pistol exploded with a dull, muffled report. He staggered for an instant, hit in the shoulder, then struck out blindly and grappled with his enemy. They fell to the floor, and a brief, desperate struggle ended in the defeat of Andrews, who was disabled by his wound. The German pinned him down, clutching his throat, and silenced his choking cries by beating him on the skull with the butt of the pistol.

The burglar's writhing limbs relaxed, and he lay still. Fritz Muller slowly rose, but he was Fritz Muller no longer. His blue goggles had dropped off, he had lost his wig and false beard, and he stood unmasked, his true identity revealed, before the startled eyes of the watching lad.

"Paul Hartsen!" gasped Oliver. "By heavens! What does it mean?"

Unconsciously he spoke half aloud. Paul Hartsen looked round, saw the shadowy face staring at him from the adjoining room, and as quickly threw himself against the door, hurling it back on its hinges. Oliver was upset, crushed against the wall, and as he got to his feet, he was immediately seized.

"Utter a sound," threatened Hartsen, "and I'll kill you!"

Cunning Preparations—In a Death-Trap—Abel Link Arrives.

THE lad fought hard, realising his peril; but he was like a child in the grip of the infuriated man. He gave one husky shout, and it was stifled as a hand tightened on his throat. Then he was dragged from the bed-room into the private office where Hartsen thrust him into

a chair and glared at him with the face of a fiend—with a livid countenance that was scarcely to be recognised.

"So it's you, Heath!" he exclaimed. "You have been playing the spy! You were hiding in there! You saw and heard all! Why did you disobey me?"

Oliver could not speak, for the muscular fingers were still pressing his windpipe; nor, as he well knew, could he have offered any explanation that would appease his employer after what had just occurred.

"Answer me! What does this mean?"

"Let me go," the lad managed to whisper. "I was watching in your interests——"

"You young fool!" snarled Hartsen. "I warned you. Didn't I tell you to keep away from here? You disobeyed me, and it will cost you your life. You know too much!"

He loosened his hold, and with that, seizing the opportunity, Oliver jerked free and sprang to his feet. He made a dash for the outer door, but was overtaken before he could reach it. He felt a stunning blow, reeled, and remembered nothing more for a time.

The lad was not much hurt, for it was the barrel of the pistol that had struck him. When he came to his senses with a throbbing headache, a gag had been forced between his teeth, and his wrists and ankles were tightly bound. He was sitting half-upright in a chair. The electric light had been turned off, and Paul Hartsen was standing by the window, apparently listening, with the dark lantern in his hand.

"What can have become of Abel Link?" Oliver asked himself in despair.

Hartsen left the window. He put the lantern down, and with a knife, prised up a trap door in the middle of the floor. Then he drew the dead or unconscious body of Andrews to the edge of the hole, and, with a dull thud it fell into the cellar below. Having put on his goggles, and adjusted the wig and false beard, the disguised diamond merchant approached the trembling lad, who naturally feared that he was to be sent after Andrews.

But Hartsen had a different plan in view. He was a strong man, and, taking his prisoner by the collar, he dragged him through the front office to the hall, and thence up the staircase, flashing the lantern ahead of him. He went on to the top of the house, entered the rear bed-room, and dropped his burden to the floor.

"There you lie," he said. "You've spoilt the game, and you've got to suffer for it. I must destroy the place, and you with it."

"It's your own fault, for spying on me. You know too much, and I daren't let you live. I couldn't trust to you to hold your tongue."

With that he hurried away, closing the door, and Oliver was left in darkness, helpless and speechless, to ponder on what he had just been told. As yet he did not realise the

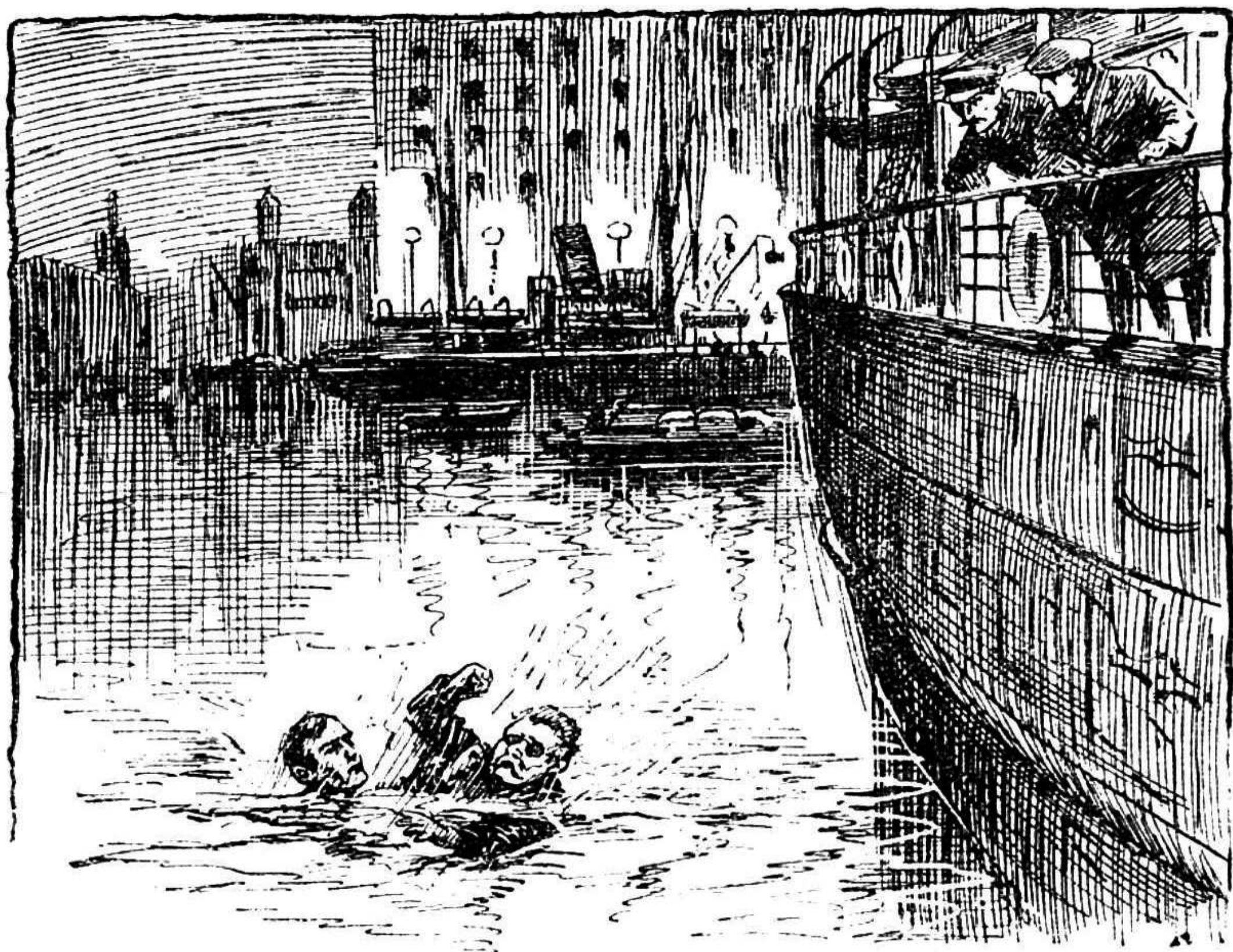
meaning of the words. For a time he tried to loosen his cords, and to eject the gag from his mouth; but he could do neither. He lay still, listening to faint sounds on the floor below. They presently ceased, and receding footsteps on the lower staircase told him that his employer had gone.

"He has fled," thought the lad, "and taken the diamonds with him. He must have removed them from the safe last evening. But what does it all mean? Why has Paul Hartsen been playing the part of Fritz Muller, and why was he so anxious to trap and kill the man Andrews? Is his real name

"I am lost!" he groaned. "The scoundrel has set fire to the house, so as to destroy the evidence of his crimes! And I shall be burnt to death! Heaven help me!"

The lad soon knew, beyond a doubt, that his suspicions were correct. Sick with horror, maddened by his helpless plight, he strained every nerve to break his fetters.

He writhed and tugged, but the ropes were tightly tied, and his struggles only made them cut into his flesh. He had to give up. Exhausted, racked with pain, he lay panting for breath. He could hear the angry splutter of the spreading flames, and could



With a furious oath, he struck at Oliver, who dodged the blow and fastened on to his collar.

Raymond? Andrews called him that. It is too deep a mystery—I can't fathom it. And what will become of me? What can have happened to Abel Link? Unless he turns up and looks for me—"

Oliver's reflections were suddenly broken off. He heard a hissing, crackling noise, and detected a smell of burning paper. Then the ghastly truth flashed upon him—he realised what Paul Hartsen's threat had meant, and the awful discovery seemed to turn his blood to ice.

already feel the heat. Little puffs of smoke spurted through the crevices of the floor, coming faster and faster, and his eyes began to tingle. No shouts of alarm rang from Hatton Garden, for the hour was late, and the fire was at the rear. It was not likely to be discovered until the building was doomed.

"I won't die like this," vowed Oliver. "I must escape—I must!"

Again he tried, and again the knotted cords baffled him. The smoke was growing

suffocating, and the floor seemed to scorch his body. He worked his tongue against the gag, and, by a desperate effort forced it out of his mouth.

"Help!" he cried frantically. "Help, help!"

Did a voice answer him, or was it only imagination? No, he was right. He heard rapid footsteps on the stairs, and the next instant the door was burst open, and a man dashed into the room.

"Where are you?" exclaimed a familiar voice. "Where are you, my boy?"

"Is it you, at last, Mr. Link?" cried Oliver. "You are just in time, thank Heaven! But be quick!"

Abel Link groped over to the spot, and, drawing a knife, he knelt by the lad.

"Yes, I am just in time," he said, as he fumbled for the cords and severed them. "It was fortunate that I thought of coming up here, after I discovered the fire. I looked for you below first. I should never have forgiven myself if you had come to harm. For once my plans miscarried badly. I lost the man Andrews. I have been shadowing him half the night, and he had been gone for some time before I discovered how I had been tricked. Then I hastened to Hatton Garden with Inspector Hart, whom I had meanwhile met by appointment, and we entered by the broken window. I was aware that Andrews meant to tackle the safe to-night, and I hoped to catch him in the act. My object in putting you on guard was twofold. I knew I might need your assistance, and I wanted you to see for yourself——"

"That Fritz Muller was Paul Hartsen?" broke in Oliver, as he rose to his feet and stretched his cramped limbs. "Had you guessed that?"

"I suspected as much from the first."

"Well, you were right. I found that out by myself. I have had a terrible adventure. But where is Hartsen? Has he escaped?"

"He has," replied the detective. "I have seen nothing of him. But we'll talk of that later. The first thing is to get away from this death-trap."

"Can we do it?" asked Oliver.

"Yes: don't be alarmed. The fire was started on the first floor, and it is confined to one room as yet. Come! Every second increases our peril."

They were very nearly too late. Dense volumes of smoke surged in their faces as they groped from the room, and along the passage. It grew worse as they started down the staircase.

"I'm choking!" gasped the lad.

"We must go on!" cried Abel Link. "Hold your breath! Give me your hand! Now, then!"

They stumbled blindly down the first flight of stairs, dashed by a lurid red flare, that shone from the door of Fritz Muller's

apartments, and on reaching the lower hall, where they could breathe more easily, they were met by a constable with a lantern. In the private office to which they hurried, were another constable and a police-inspector. The light was turned on, and the window had been thrown up. Out in Hatton Garden men could be heard running and shouting.

"So you've found the lad!" exclaimed the inspector. "I was beginning to be worried about you. I've sent Wilson to the fire-alarm at the corner. We had better be off, for the flames are eating their way through the ceiling!"

"Have you searched this floor?" inquired Abel Link.

"Thoroughly. There is nobody here. Both Hartsen and your burglar must have——"

"Andrews is here, in the cellar under your feet," Oliver interrupted.

And in a few words he told of the tragic scene he had witnessed from his hiding-place in the bed-room.

The trapdoor was at once lifted. The detective descended with a lantern, followed by the two constables, and the victim of Paul Hartsen's rage was hoisted up the steps and placed on the floor.

He was a ghastly sight, with clotted hair and battered face, but he was not dead.

He stirred and groaned, opened his eyes, and looked consciously at the little group bending over him.

"We've got you, Kelsey!" said Abel Link.

"That's all right," was the faint reply. "The game's up. I'll go back to Cape Town, if I pull through. But where's Raymond?"

"We'll get him, too, depend on it. You'll give evidence against him, Kelsey?"

"Will I?" snarled the man, trying vainly to rise. "Will I? Just give me the chance! I'd hang gladly if Ross Raymond could stand on the gallows with me. The black-hearted cur and traitor! When I think how he served me in South Africa, how he set a murderous trap for me to-night——"

His head dropped back, and his eyes closed.

"He is badly hurt," said Abel Link, "but I hope he will recover. About that trap——"

He stepped to the cupboard, thrust the lantern inside, and showed his companions an open panel, and a glimpse of a narrow ladder behind it. "I thought so!" he exclaimed.

"A secret shaft leading to the floor above, and probably to the top floor as well. Hartsen must have discovered it after he leased the building, and it helped him to play the double role."

"That accounts for the scraping noise I heard," Oliver told himself. "It was Hartsen descending the shaft to hide in the cupboard."

"It's risky to stop here any longer," urged the inspector.

"Come along, then," said Abel Link. "Bring Kelsey, and handle him carefully. If

you have the keys, my boy, unlock the front. The firemen will want to go in."

Oliver had the keys, and as the party left by the front office and the hall, feeling their way through eddying smoke, a fire-engine came dashing up. The two constables put the unconscious man in a taxi, and started off for the nearest hospital, and by then flames were bursting from the first floor of the house.

"That fixes Kelsey all right!" said the detective, as he hailed a taxi. "And now for the other and worse scoundrel! In with you officer; and you, my lad! You shall see the finish."

"You think you can catch Hartsen?" asked Oliver.

"I am almost sure of it," was the reply. "I shadowed him yesterday, and learned his plans. He intends to sail for South Africa, to the River Plate, by the cargo-steamer Montezuma. She leaves the Pool in the early hours of the morning, with the ebb tide, so we have but little time to spare."

On the Trail—Oliver's Struggle—The Mystery Revealed

DURING the ride Oliver gave a graphic account of his adventures, and in return he hoped to hear a full explanation of the mystery; but that had to be put off for the present.

The cab rolled through the lonely City, crossed London Bridge, and stopped a short distance beyond. The three got out, and for a few hundred yards Abel Link led his companions parallel with the river, and downstream; then they bore to the left, and by a dark and narrow passage reached a wharf fronting a warehouse.

They paused for a moment in shadow, none observing them. Within a few yards, at the water's edge, lay a big steamer, with smoke pouring from her stack.

The three men hurried across the gang plank and on board the vessel.

On the farther side of the deck a thick-set figure, muffled in a travelling-rug, could be seen standing with his back turned.

The three stepped noiselessly over to him, and the detective tapped him on the shoulder with one hand, while with the other he drew a revolver.

The man swung round with a start, showing the disguised features of Fritz Muller, and for an instant he stared incredulously, uttering a gasping cry, as he recognised the lad whom he believed to have been burnt to death.

"I'm not a ghost!" Oliver told him calmly. "Your fiendish little plan didn't, succeed that's all!"

"Hands up!" Abel Link, said sternly. "Ross Raymond, alias Paul Hartsen, I hold a warrant for your arrest! You had better

come along quietly. Nothing can be gained by resistance."

"There's no help for it, I suppose," Hartsen muttered. "The game's up, and I may as well—"

With that, risking a shot from the levelled weapon, he suddenly threw the rug over the detective's head, and as quickly turned and leapt overboard. The splash and the inspector's shout woke a clamour of voices, bringing captain and crew to the spot.

"The daring scoundrel!" cried Abel Link. "Where is he? Stand aside! If I can cripple him with a bullet—"

"Don't shoot!" broke in Oliver—"don't shoot! I see him! Leave him to me, while you lower a boat! I can swim like a duck!"

As the lad spoke he sprang erect to the rail, clasped his hands, and dived into the river. He went deep under, and as he rose he caught a vague glimpse of the fugitive.

He struck out rapidly, and a dozen strokes brought him within reach of Hartsen, whose heavy clothing prevented him from swimming fast.

With a furious oath he struck at Oliver, who dodged the blow and fastened on to his collar.

A terrible struggle ensued, and to Oliver, holding grimly to his prisoner, the minutes seemed as many hours. With difficulty he kept his head above water, avoiding the clutch of the desperate man.

Twice the two sank, rising again as the ebb-tide swept them downstream, and then, as strength was failing them, a boat that had been hurriedly lowered from the vessel dropped alongside, and they were dragged into it.

A few moments later, shivering and exhausted. Paul Hartsen and his young captor stood on the deck of the Montezuma.

Abel Link searched the subdued prisoner, took from around his waist a heavy belt, and held it up with an exclamation of triumph.

"The diamonds!" he said. "There are hundreds of them! The haul is complete."

The fire in Hatton Garden, was not extinguished until the building had been completely gutted, and when morning dawned the wildest rumours were rife among the crowd that gazed at the diamond merchant's premises.

Oliver was none the worse for the adventures, and on the afternoon of the same day, at the detective's chambers in Buckingham Street, the whole mystery was revealed to him.

"It is a very simple story," said Abel Link. "Paul Hartsen was Ross Raymond, and Andrews was Tom Kelsey. For a long period, up to five years ago, the two men were partners in the I.D.B. trade, which means illicit diamond buying. They purchased for a mere song jewels stolen from the Kimberley

mines by the Kaffir labourers, until they had amassed a stock worth many thousands of pounds. At last they got into trouble—they had been suspected for years—and Kelsey shot a police-sergeant while trying to avoid arrest.

“His hiding-place was basely betrayed by Raymond, and he was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. Meanwhile, Raymond succeeded in getting away from South Africa with the stock of diamonds. He went to Amsterdam, entered the employment of Bogardus & Co.—to whom the partners had previously been in the habit of sending stones—and after three years came to London and launched out in business.

“He lived in dread of his partner's vengeance, and for that reason he doubtless invented the role of Fritz Muller. His fears were well founded, for a few weeks ago Tom Kelsey escaped from the penal settlement at Cape Town. He went shrewdly to Amsterdam, got on the track of his old partner through Bogardus & Co.—who sent a warning to Hartsen—and crossed to England.

“Such was the situation when you came to me with your strange story, and it did not take me long to get to the bottom of the matter. The first clue was the newspaper paragraph, and I was convinced that I was right after you identified the scrap of Raymond's handwriting, which the South African authorities had sent to me several years before. From the attack on Hartsen, from his apparent flight, and his peculiar instruc-

tions to you, I judged what would happen. Kelsey returned and read the letter, as he was meant to do; he searched the upper rooms, and was satisfied that his treacherous partner had fled, leaving the diamonds behind.

You can imagine the rest. Hartsen, having arranged the false evidence of his flight, became Fritz Muller. His object, of course, was to trap Kelsey in the act of burglary and shoot him under the cloak of the law, thus ridding himself of a determined foe. But, fortunately, the affair did not come off as he had planned. All has turned out well, and you, my boy, need not fear that you will be a loser by your plucky conduct.”

Abel Link was right. Tom Kelsey, who had been injured internally by falling into the cellar, ultimately died in hospital. But his evidence was not necessary, for Ross Raymond, alias Hartsen, was convicted on the charge of arson, and sentenced to twenty years' penal servitude.

When in due course the rewards were paid—£200 for the apprehension of Kelsey, and £1,000 offered by the South African Miners' Association for the arrest of Raymond—Oliver found himself in possession of a third of the total amount.

And by then, through the detective's influence, he had obtained a fresh and lucrative berth in one of the big London banking houses, where he had every reason to feel that his future was assured.

THE END.

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OUT ON THURSDAY! ORDER NOW

(Continued from page 14)

"He can't help his voice——"

"Yes, but he can help the tone!" retorted Handforth. "If I punch his nose, he'll turn round and slobber over me! That's because my pater's Sir Edward Handforth. I believe he'd wash Somerton's feet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's no limit to what a rotten snob'll do!" growled Handforth. "The chap isn't a bully—and when it come to ability, I dare say he's got a spark of sense!"

"As a Form-master, he's pretty well all that could be desired!" exclaimed Armstrong, who was in the crowd. "Anyhow, we've got nothing to grumble about. What I like about Snuggs is his capacity for wasting time! If the Remove laughs, he goes on wasting it! And that's all to the good!"

"Rather!"

"Well, I'd prefer Crowell any day," said Handforth. "Crowell may be a bit of a beast, but he's not a worm!"

This was the general opinion in the Remove.

Mr. Snuggs was bitterly down on all the poorer boys of the Remove, and it was easy enough to see that he would be particularly spiteful and venomous against Alf Huggins.

On the other hand, he would allow the snobs of the Form to do pretty well as they liked. As long as they flattered him, and deceived him, he would be easy-going.

And all the decent fellows regarded him as a rotter. This being so, Fullwood & Co. naturally set Mr. Snuggs down as the finest master the Remove had ever had.

There was still a considerable spell before dinner, and out in the Triangle a shower was in progress. The April weather had started early, and although the day was mild and pleasant, these showers were a bit of a nuisance. They kept the fellows indoors.

The Remove passage happened to be deserted—for the juniors were either in the lobby, in their studies, or in the Common-room. And Alf Huggins came along, with a collection of books under his arm.

Alf was feeling pretty cheerful now.

Morning lessons were over, and the influence of Mr. Snuggs had worn off. By nature, Alf was a most sunny dispositioned junior. He wanted to be cheerful at all times. And, like many another, he was rather quick tempered, and a little inclined to be sulky if things upset him.

But these spells did not last long. And now, with his books under his arm, he set out in search of a study. As a member of the Remove Form, he had a perfect right to a place in one of the studies.

Alf was rather dubious about it. After the way the fellows had treated him, he had an idea that he should have some difficulty. But, although some of the fellows were

snobbish and down on him, there were a good few who were not.

Upon the whole, Huggins was not very disappointed. He had quite enough sound common sense to know that this treatment was to be expected. In a great public school like St. Frank's it would have been very curious if he had been accepted without question.

He arrived at Study G, and tapped.

"Come in!" sang out a voice.

Alf entered, and found Merrell and Marriott sitting on two corners of the table, in the middle of a discussion. As a matter of fact, the pair had been talking about Alf himself—and also about Noys. Noys had been their study mate the previous term, but he had left the school. His people had taken him away for some reason. Merrell and Marriott didn't mind much because they had never cared particularly for Noys.

They stared at Alf aggressively.

"Who the thunder told you to come in here?" snapped Marriott.

"You did!" said Huggins. "I 'eard you, not two seconds ago!"

"Oh, you 'eard me?" sneered Marriott. "Well, you're not wanted. This study isn't for the purpose of sheltering low bounders! Clear out, and if you shove your nose in here again you'll get kicked!"

Alf flushed. There was utterly no reason for Marriott to talk to him in that way. He had never done Marriott any harm, and it was extraordinary that the junior should speak so contemptuously. But Marriott took quite a delight in doing so.

"I didn't come 'ere to pick no quarrel!" said Alf steadily. "I thought as 'ow I was goin' to share this study with you blokes."

The two juniors gazed at Alf in horror and alarm.

"Share it with us!" shouted Merrell. "Did—did Mr. Lee tell you to come here?"

"Mr. Lee says as 'ow I was to come to Study G!"

"It's the limit!" declared Merrell hotly. "Look here, Marriott, are we going to stand this? We can't live here with this filthy bounder! I'm not going to share a study with a cad like this!"

"You'd best be careful!" said Alf quietly. "What?"

"I said you'd best be careful."

"Oh!" said Merrell. "And why?"

"I'll stand a bit, but I'm blowed if I'll stand too much!" replied Huggins. "I ain't a block o' wood! An' I won't stand 'ere an' be called a filthy bounder agin'!"

"And what will you do if I do call you a filthy bounder again?" sneered Merrell.

Huggins lifted his fist, and held it up.

"That's what you'll git!" he said quietly.

"An' when I 'its, I 'its 'ard!"

"That's interesting!" said Marriott.

"When he 'its, he 'its 'ard!"

"An' I'll stand your sneers up to a certain point," went on Huggins. "I'm keeping my temper back—I'm doin' a good bit o' swallerin'. But there's some things as I sha'n't swaller. See? If I can git through to-day without fightin', I'll do it—'cos I told my dad I wouldn't ave no fights on the fust day. But, crikey! You blokes ain't 'arf askin' for it!"

And there was something in Alf's tone that made Merrell and Marriott slightly nervous. They decided that it would be a somewhat unwise proceeding to call him a filthy bounder again.

"We've got something better to do than to talk to you!" said Marriott curtly. "Clear out of this study—and be quick about it! You needn't think we're going to have you shoved on to us."

"Mr. Lee says——"

"I'll go and see Mr. Lee myself about this," put in Merrell.

"Keep your 'air on!" interrupted Alf. "I wouldn't stop in this 'ere study if you arst me to! A couple o' blinkin' snobs—that's wot you are! I'll clear out without no tellin'!"

"Oh, that's good!"

"Y'see, I 'appen to 'ave a choice!" said Alf. "Mr. Lee told me as 'ow I can go into either Study G, or Study I, or Study J. I reckon it won't be G! Lumme! You blokes make me sick!"

And Alf walked out, disgusted.

"The low down cad!" said Merrell hotly. "I'm not going to let him talk to me like that. A rotten bricklayer's son, calling me——"

"Don't go after him!" interrupted the other. "He's not worth it. The best thing is to ignore him!"

And they decided that this course should be adopted. It was far safer, too. Neither Merrell nor Marriott were famous in fighting.

And so Alf Huggins passed along the passage and presented himself in Study I. This was occupied by Skelton and Ellmore. They were at home, and they stared at Alf aggressively as he entered. Skelton and Ellmore were not quite so caddish as the two juniors of Study G. But they had taken a firm dislike to the new boy.

They looked upon him as an outsider.

"Mr. Lee says as I can come into this study if I likes!" said Alf. "Do you fellers object?"

"Yes!" said Skelton.

"We do!" said Ellmore.

Alf looked at them steadily.

"I say, mates, wot's wrong wi' me?" he asked quietly. "I ain't diseased, am I?"

"You don't look it!" said Skelton. "In fact, you look pretty well fed."

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"Then why do you coves stare at me as though I was as hugly as sin?" asked Alf. "Wot's the hidca of tellin' me to clear out as soon as I show my nose inside the door?"

"Oh, you're not the same as us!" growled Ellmore.

"Ain't I?" asked Huggins. "Wot's the difference? Ain't I made o' flesh an' blood? Ain't I got feet an' ands? Mebbe I don't talk the same, but there ain't a crime in that, I s'pose? Lumme! You blokes ain't 'arf a queer lot!"

Ellmore and Skelton went a trifle red.

"Look here, we don't want to argue," said Skelton gruffly. "We've got nothing against you personally—you may be all right, but we don't believe in mixing with a chap of your sort!"

"Ho, that's it, is it?" said Alf. "Down our way the chaps ain't the same. They judge a feller by what 'e does—not by 'ow 'e talks! In 'Oxton they ain't so blinkin' pertickler!"

"St. Frank's isn't Hoxton!" exclaimed Ellmore. "And if you think it is, you'd better get the idea out of your head. The sooner you leave St. Frank's the better for everybody. Your pater ought to have had more sense than to send you here, and the governors ought to have had more sense than to let you come!"

"Now, let's get this 'ere thing clear," said Alf. "You ain't got nothink agin me personal?"

"Well no."

"You don't 'ate me like pizen?"

"We've got no reason to hate you," said Skelton. "At the same time, we don't want to mix with you. And as for living in the same study, the thought's impossible. We'd rather die!"

"Then you don't want me?" asked Alf steadily.

"No, we don't!"

Skelton and Ellmore were most emphatic.

"All right; that's good enough for me!" said Alf. "I ain't the kind o' bloke to stay where I ain't wanted! Never was. So I'll bung off, an' you can keep the blinkin' study to yourselves! I 'opes as 'ow you gits tired of your own faces!"

And Alf Huggins walked out, and closed the door.

He was angry—furious—but he managed to keep himself in check exceedingly well. He had one chance left—and that was in Study J. But he had very little hope. Of course, it would be easy enough to go to Mr. Nelson Lee and explain what had happened.

And then, no doubt, the Housemaster would come along and force one certain study to accept the new boy. But Alf wasn't a sneak. He wouldn't dream of going to Nelson Lee with his troubles.

If he wasn't wanted in any of these studies, he wouldn't stay. After all, a study wasn't an absolute necessity. He

could get along without one—and would prefer to, if the fellows disliked his presence.

He arrived at Study J, and entered. It was empty at the moment, and Alf looked round with approval. It was quite a comfortable little study, and had been occupied during the previous term by Armstrong, Griffith, and Doyle. But Doyle had had a tiff with the others, and had transferred to Study K., so there was a vacancy there. It was to be filled by Huggins—provided, of course that Armstrong and Griffith were agreeable.

Alf approved of the study. It would suit him down to the ground. And he was just considering how the two juniors would take him when they arrived. He was disappointed. He recognised them as a pair who had been decidedly antagonistic earlier in the morning.

"Hallo!" said Armstrong, staring. "What are you doing here?"

"Just 'avin' a look round."

"Like your infernal nerve!" growled Griffith. "When we want you in this study, we'll tell you. Clear!"

The same treatment as before!

"Oh, all right!" said Alf. "It's the third time I've bin chucked out! I ain't grumblin'—because I don't want to be nowhere if my room's preferred to my company!"

"What the dickens do you mean?"

"Mr. Lee told me to come to this 'ere study."

"You—you've been shoved on to us?" gasped Armstrong, in dismay.

"Keep your bloomin' 'air on!" said Alf bitterly. "I ain't stayin'! Leastways, I won't stay if you don't want me. If I was shoved in 'ere by force, we should only 'ave rows twenty times a day. Look 'ere, let's 'ave a kind o' compromise. Supposin' I stay for a week——"

"You won't stay for five minutes!" shouted Armstrong.

"Not likely!" agreed Griffith. "In these studies we've got to pay our whack—we've got to share and share alike——"

"You needn't worry about that," said Alf. "I may be common, but I've got all the cash I need. I'll pay equal shares in everythink that's goin'. But, as I says afore, if you fellows don't like me—I'll clear out. An' glad to! I'm gettin' fed up with the 'cle blinkin' crowd o' you!"

"Well, that's one good thing," said Armstrong. "If you're getting fed up with us, we're jolly well fed up with you! In fact, if you don't clear out quickly, we'll kick you out!"

"We're rather particular!" added Griffith.

"So am I!" retorted Alf. "By wot I can see of it, you ain't nothin' better than a set of rotten snobs! If we 'ad chaps like you in 'Oxton, we'd use you to clean up the bloomin' roads!"

"You—you insulting cad!" roared Armstrong. "And if you go snivelling to Mr. Lee, we'll——"

"There ain't no need to say wot you'll

do. I ain't the kind that snivels!" broke in Alf hotly. "But I'll tell you one thing. If any o' you blokes was to arst me on yer bended knees to come into your studies, I'd rather go outside an' sit in the dorg's kennel!"

And Alf strode outside, and slammed the door.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COLD SHOULDER!



WITH feelings of disgust and anger, Alf paused in the Remove passage.

He had no study now, and practically no hope of getting into one. His books were still under his arm, and they were getting weighty. His thoughts were bitter and fierce.

Was it fair that he should be treated in this way?

Why should the whole Remove be so much against him? It was not playing the game—it was totally averse to Alf's own code of honour. At least, they could have given him a chance—they could have given him a kind of trial trip.

But instead of that, without a single thing against him, they decided that he was a cad and a worm—they barred him! Fair play? Alf laughed bitterly at the very thought.

He was beginning to see that he was not likely to get much fair play at St. Frank's. The whole place was seething with snobbery and little-mindedness.

It came as a bit of a shock to Alf.

He had been prepared for a certain amount of it—but hardly all this!

And as he paused there in the passage, he began to reconsider his views. In the heat of the moment, he had decided that he wouldn't stay in either of the three studies.

But why should he be kept out?

What right had these snobs to bar him from a study that was as much his as theirs? In fact, he began to consider the possibility of going back and insisting upon his rights.

Certainly, he wouldn't go to Nelson Lee. That wasn't to be thought of. But he could use his fists! There was no reason why he should knuckle under, and allow these rotters to jeer at him.

He would go back, and stay! If they tried to put him out, he would show them what he could do with his fists. In a fair fight he would be content. If they succeeded in putting him out, he would accept it—but Alf knew that the snobs would have a pretty stiff job. Then, as he continued his cogitations, his momentary fire died down.

"No, it wouldn't do!" he told himself. "I don't want to start no bloomin' trouble! Blow the lot of 'em. Cuss the 'ole crowd! If I fights 'em, they'll only say I'm a kind of 'ooligan. Blokes like them'll grasp at the first straw they can!"

It was a wise decision, and proved Alf's

sound common sense—and his courage. He knew that he could lick these rotters into a cocked hat—and yet he refrained. And it needed courage.

He was just moving along the passage, his face sullen and sulky, when I happened to come along on my way to Study C. Alf was so engrossed, that he didn't even see me.

"Anything wrong?" I asked, as I paused in front of him.

"Eh? Oh!" said Alf. "All right, matey. There ain't nothink wrong. Leastways, not as you can put right."

"I don't know about that," I said. "I was going to look for you in a few minutes, as it happens."

"Well, you've found me," said Alf.

"About your study, I mean," I went on. "You see, I'm the Remove captain, and it's a sort of unofficial duty for me to see that a new fellow gets comfortably settled down."

"Oh, you knows about that?" asked Huggins.

"Yes, of course."

"Well, it's just as well you didn't come along afore!" said the new boy. "I've saved you a 'ole lot o' trouble. It so 'appens that I ain't goin' inter no study."

I stared.

"But, my dear chap, you must!" I said. "A study is necessary. You can't do your prep. in the Form-room. You can't—"

"Can't never didn't do anythink!" interrupted Alf. "You can stop all that worryin', mate. I tells you I ain't got no study. I've bin in them three already. I've seen an 'eard all I wants."

I frowned.

"Did those cads give you the cold shoulder?" I asked sharply.

"They told me as plain as plain can be that I ain't wanted," replied Alf. "They're partickler! They don't want me!"

"The rotten set of snobs!" I exclaimed.

"An' I don't want them neither!" went on Alf. "I've bin a thinkin' of it over. You seem to be different to the rest—an' I likes you. Blowed if you ain't one of the right sort!"

"My dear ass, we're getting away from the point," I interrupted. "If you mean I'm not a snob, you're right. If there's one thing I hate more than another, it's snobbery. It seems to me that I've got to assert my authority as Remove skipper. I don't like to, but it's necessary."

"I don't foller," said Alf.

"Well, it's my duty to see that you have a study, and you're going to have it," I replied. "If these cads object to you, I'll put them in their places. Come on! We'll start with J."

"But look 'ere—"

"Well?"

"I don't want it!" said Alf uncomfortably. "Crikey! D'you think I'm going to shove myself in on these blokes? Not likely! I'll be without a study—"

"Don't be a silly ass!" I broke in. "This isn't a question of personal feeling at all."

I'm not doing this for your sake—at least, not mainly. It's right that you should have a study, and you'll have it. But if I let a thing like this slide, I should be neglecting my proper duty. As Captain of the Remove, I've got to."

"Oh, well, if it's like that——"

"It is like that!" I said grimly. "Come on!"

Alf didn't seem to like it, but I took him along to Study J. Instead of entering with me, he remained outside. In a way, I was rather glad. Armstrong and Griffith were looking out of the window at the rain.

"What's this about Huggins?" I asked sharply.

"Eh?" said Armstrong, with a sneer. "Has that common cad been sneaking?"

"No, he has not!" I retorted. "And Huggins may be common—he's the first to admit it—but he isn't a cad. So don't misrepresent! He's coming in this study!"

"Who said so?" demanded Griffith.

"I said so!"

"Oh! And who the dickens are you?" roared Armstrong.

"I'm not going to pick a quarrel—I'm not going to start any kind of row!" I said quietly. "I always had an idea that both you fellows were decent. I thought I could count upon you to do the right thing at the right time. Why can't you be sportsmen?"

"Look here——"

"Why can't you treat Huggins with a little decency," I demanded. "Mr. Lee gave him permission to share this study with you two. It's rather a pity that the gov'nor gave Huggins a choice—he doesn't quite know where he is. Let's settle it by having him in here."

"Not likely!" said Armstrong warmly.

"He's not coming in!" snapped Griffith.

I looked at them contemptuously.

"Stop here a minute!" I said. "I'll go and fetch the others from Study G and Study I. This matter's got to be threshed out at once—it can't wait."

I hurried out, and found Alf in the passage.

"Chuck it!" he said gruffly. "It don't matter——"

"It does matter!" I said. "It matters a lot!"

And I passed along, and soon returned with Merrell and Marriott, and Skelton and Elmore. We all entered Study J. Huggins still remained outside—far more uncomfortable than he had been before.

"What's this—a conference?" asked Skelton, looking round.

"Nipper wants to talk some lot of rot about that bricklayer cad," said Armstrong.

I looked round the room.

"I'll tell you what I'm doing!" I exclaimed. "I'm gazing at six snobbish rotters who ought to be downright ashamed of themselves."

"Oh, don't start any rot——"

"I mean it!" I interrupted. "Six of you! Huggins was told that he could come into one of your studies—and all you can do



Alf Huggins was angry, furious, but he managed to keep himself in check exceedingly well. He had one chance left, and that was in Study J. But he had very little hope.

is to give him the cold shoulder. Haven't you got any decency? Haven't you got any better feelings?"

"Oh, don't preach!" growled Armstrong.

"I'm not preaching!" I retorted. "Here's this chap, new to the school—and new to his surroundings, too. Everything's strange—everything's totally different to anything he's experienced before. Why on earth can't you give him a chance?"

"It's a bit thick when he's shoved on us—"

"Mr. Lee gave the orders, and you ought to have obeyed them," I exclaimed. "Anyway, he's going into one of your studies."

"Oh, is he?"

"He is!" I declared. "And since you can't agree on it, the best thing you can do is to draw lots. Or you can toss, if you like. Come on—Griffith, Skelton and Marriott. Toss up, and the odd man—"

"I'm hanged if we will!" broke in Merrell sourly. "We're not going to take a risk like that!"

"I'll make you!" I shouted.

"You're jolly concerned about the low-down cad!" sneered Marriott. "Why don't you take him in your own study?"

"That doesn't enter into the question!" I said quietly. "Mr. Lee gave instructions that Huggins was to go into either G, I, or J. But if you fellows are such utter cads, I'll ask Huggins to share Study C with Watson and Tregellis-West and ~~Archie~~!"

"Good!"

"But that's wrong—and you know it!" I went on. "These studies are built to accommodate three fellows—not four. You've only got two in each of yours and—"

"'Ere!" exclaimed Alf, from the doorway. "'Old on!"

We turned, and looked at him.

"Blow me, if you ain't a funny lot!" said Alf. "A snappin' at one another like a lot o' bloomin' Tom cats! An' all over me! I don't like it—an' I don't want it!"

"Then we're all of the same opinion!" said Armstrong.

"You can keep your studies—you can boil yourselves!" exclaimed Huggins. "I'll go off on my own—an' rats to you!"

"Look here, Huggins!" I said. "You've got every right—"

"This ain't a question o' right!" interrupted Huggins. "When it comes to that, I'm safe. But wot's the good o' me comin' into one o' these 'ere studies, if these blokes 'ate me? Life wouldn't be worth livin'! Crikey! I'd rather find a cupboard somewhere!"

"Well, we'll settle it now," I said curtly.

"I'd like you to come along to Study C, Huggins."

He looked at me warmly.

"You're a brick, Nipper!" he said quietly. "You're one o' the real good sort. Thanks all the same, but I'd rather not. Don't think I'm ridin' the 'igh 'orse. I ain't. But Mr. Lee didn't tell me anythink about Study C. Besides that, I don't want no favours!"

"Yes, but look here—"

"As for these 'ere hugly lot, they can 'ave their own way!" went on Huggins. "I'm just as pertikler as them! I'll do without a study!"

And Alf turned away, and walked out. I couldn't blame him. It was merely a repetition of what had happened before. And all my efforts had been in vain. I looked at the six juniors with utter contempt.

"You deserved that snub!" I said grimly.

"Snub!" sneered Marriott. "What snub?"

"Oh, I suppose you're too obtuse to have noticed it!" I snapped. "But if I was in Huggins' shoes, I'd have done exactly the same thing. You look upon him as a common cad. But, compared with you chaps, he's gold! He's worth the whole crowd of you lumped together."

I went out of the study, boiling.

CHAPTER VII.

NOBLESSE OBLIGE!



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE strolled into the Ancient House languidly.

The shower was over, and Archie had just come in from the gymnasium—where he had been sheltering. And now Archie was going to his own study to spend twenty minutes there before the dinner bell rang. Archie felt in need of a little rest.

And Alf Huggins was in the Remove passage—still with the books under his arm—feeling very sulky.

He had been scorned by three different studies, and on the top of that his own pride had stopped him from taking advantage of an offer that had been made to him. The result was that Alf was, so to speak, all dressed up and nowhere to go.

It was an awkward position.

"I ain't 'arf enjoyin' of meself!" muttered the Hoxton boy. "Lumme! This is wot comes o' being sent to a swell school!"

He went along the passage moodily, deciding that he would find the Form-room, and put his books there, in the cupboard.

It was the best thing he could do. And he was just turning the corner when he ran full-tilt into Archie.

"What ho!" said the latter. "How goes it dear one. Allow me to offer a large quantity of condolences. I mean to say, regarding the bally old Snuggs bird—"

"Oh, I'm not thinking about Snuggs now," said Alf. "I'm blowed if I ain't lost my way! I'd like to find the Form-room."

"Absolutely," said Archie. "The scheme, don't you know, is to keep to this passage, and then whizz round to the left, and branch off at a tangent, and then—"

Archie paused, and looked at Alf thoughtfully.

"Gadzooks!" he observed. "That's dashed queer! Without being frightfully

inquisitive, old tulip, what's the priceless idea of trickling away to the Form-room just now I mean to say, cold and deserted benches, and what not! Nothing doing——"

"I want to put my books there," said Alf.

"Ah, the choice collection under your arm?"

"Yes."

"But, my dear old sport, you're quite wrong," said Archie. "It appears, you know, that you are considerably off the rails. I mean, what about the old study?"

"I ain't got no study."

Archie stared.

"No study!" he repeated. "But, dash it all! That's somewhat foul! No study, by gad! How on earth can a chappy proceed on the even tenour of his way without a study?"

"Look 'ere, matey—you're a queer sort o' cove, but you ain't like the rest of 'em," said Alf. "You're different."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "So some of the other chappies tell me."

"You ain't one o' them snobs—although, takin' a fust look at you, one might think you was one o' the worst kind. That ain't no kind of insult, but you know what I mean. The heye-glass, f'rinstance!"

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie. "But, of course, you mustn't judge by appearances. I should bally well hope I'm not like those frightful snobs who think that some chappies are dirt beneath their feet! But, I say! I say! What about it?"

"Hey?"

It seems to me that we're wasting good and valuable time," went on Archie. "Standing about in the jolly old passage, as it were. Somewhat draughty and dashed fagging. Proceed with me, Huggins, and we'll continue the confab surrounded by goodly portions of comfort."

They went along to Archie's study. Alf was not averse from the idea, for he had taken a liking to Archie, and felt that he could safely unburden himself to a certain degree. It was rather incongruous that this should be so. The biggest dandy in the Ancient House and the bricklayer's son!

Alf had done Archie a service during the holidays, but he was not presuming on that. In fact, he was not asking any favours at all. But it was good to know that Archie was his friend.

Having arrived at the study, they made themselves quite comfortable.

Archie placed himself on the lounge, and Alf sat in one of the easy chairs. And he looked round with a mild kind of astonishment. He was, in fact, surprised at the great splendour.

"My!" he exclaimed. "You ain't 'arf got a torf's place 'ere!" he exclaimed.

"A torf's place?" repeated Archie. "Sorrow dear one, but I fail to grasp the trend——"

He paused, and then looked up.

"Ah, torf—you mean toff?" he went on.

"Absolutely! Pardon, Alf, old tulip, but your accent is somewhat steep at times. Pray forgive me mentioning it. No harm done, what?"

"Ow could a bloke 'elp it?" asked Alf. "But look 'ere. It ain't right that I should be intrudin'."

"Absolutely rot!" interrupted Archie. "Kindly allow me to point out that you are talking the most frightful piffle. Dash it all, can't one chappie have another chappie in his study? I mean to say, what you've got to do is to bung all such thoughts of intruding out of the good old mind!"

"Thanks," said Huggins. "But this fair takes my breath away. I didn't know you was allowed this 'ere kind o' thing! The other blokes ain't got 'arf such nice studies!"

Archie smiled.

"The fact, is, I've got a sort of pull on them!" he said confidentially. "Well, not exactly a pull, but you probably know what I mean. You see, I'm a helpless sort of chappie. Absolutely! When it comes to doing things, I'm just about as useful as a chunk of gingerbread!"

"Garn!" said Alf. "You ain't so 'elpless as wot you seems!"

"Well, possibly not," said Archie, brightening up. "It's dashed interesting to hear you say so—dashed interesting. Most of the chappies seem to imagine that I'm a bally walking dummy! But there you are. I mean to say, let them imagine! We don't care, what! And there's Phipps. Of course, you don't know Phipps."

"I ain't never 'eard of 'im!" said Alf. "Your dorg, I s'pose."

"Great gad!" said Archie. "Dorg? I—I mean dog! It's a frightfully good thing that Phipps isn't whizzing about at the moment. You see, Phipps is my valet—the chappie who does all the buzzing about, and the dashing to and fro. He's here, there, and everywhere, and here and there again! In fact, the chappie's bally well ubiquitous!"

"Wot, some kind o' disease?" asked Alf.

"Ubiquitous!" repeated Archie. "I mean to say. Well, hardly a disease, old lad! It simply means that the cove is always knocking about in the offing. A useful chappie. Dashes in with tea, and shoves out the old clobber in the morning. In fact, he's a part of my life. If Phipps went, I should wither away like a bally leaf in the Autumn blast!"

Alf looked at Archie with more interest than ever.

"Strikes me, you an' me are just about hopposite!" he said.

"Well, nearly!" said Archie. "If you shift your chair just a trifle——"

"I don't mean hopposite one another as we're sittin' 'ere," said Huggins. "We're at the two extreme ends, so to speak. You get me?"

"Dear lad, I'm dashed afraid that the brain cells are weak!" said Archie, in distress. "The trend absolutely waltzes past, and I can't grab it!"

"Well, you and me are just hopposites," repeated Alf. "'Ere you are, surrounded with hevery sort of luxury, an' with a valet, an' all the rest of it. An' I'm a bricklayer's son—scorned by most o' the blokes, an' without even a bit of a study of me own!"

Archie looked up, with concern.

"But—but that's pretty ghastly!" he observed.

"Oh, it don't matter—I s'pose I shall get used to bein' kicked about," said Alf. "These 'ere chaps don't seem to like me. An' yet who are they? The very coves wot would like to spit on me ain't worth tuppence! An' 'ere's you an' me a pallin' up together! Strikes me as bein' rummy!"

Archie nodded.

"Well, of course, rum things do happen, what?" he said. "But to hark back to the old sub. About the study? Can it be possible that you haven't got one?"

"Well, Mr. Lee did put me in one, but them chaps don't want me."

"Good gracious!" said Archie. "But that's somewhat vile!"

He listened with real concern as Alf told him all about what had happened in the Remove passage, a little earlier. Archie sat forward, awakened into unusual activity.

"Well, it seems to me, Huggins, that something's got to be done," he said firmly. "I mean, some frightfully brisk business must be accomplished. Absolutely! We can't let it rest at this."

"You see——"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "I see quite clearly that you are receiving large packets in the neck! Dear old scout, my heart bleeds! In fact, the blue blood of the Glen-thornes flows rapidly! How frightfully shocking! And, at the same time, how shockingly frightful!"

"You mean about me?"

"Every time!" said Archie. "These bounders give you the icy shoulder—in other words, the glassy optic. And then there's that blister. I think that describes him, you know."

"Blister?"

"I am referring, dear lad, to the chapple who presides in the Form-room," said Archie. "Mr. Snuggs, to be exact. Now there, as it were, is a perfectly poisonous worm who ought to be bally well thrown to the sharks! He's nothing more nor less than a weed on the lawn, don't you know! A dashed thistle in the midst of a cornfield!"

"Somethink like that," agreed Alf.

"He's down on you, and the chappies are down on you, and it seems that you're in for a dashed awful time!" went on Archie.

"You haven't got a study, you haven't got anything!"

Alf grinned.

"In fact, I've made what you might call a bloomin' good start!" he said. "It's my fust day, an' I'm 'ated like I was a dose o' medicine! Queer, ain't it? And yet I'm a good-tempered chap."

Archie fell silent.

He considered for a few moments. His heart had softened towards this junior who was scorned by nearly everybody in the Remove. And Archie's heart was very soft, too.

It seemed that the new boy was booked for a rough time, and if Archie could help to make the passage any smoother, he would do so. And he remembered that Alf had done him a big service.

Archie knew well enough that Huggins was not presuming on that in the slightest degree. And, in the enthusiasm of the moment, he came to a decision. He bent forward, and tapped Alf on the knee.

"What about it?" he asked.

"Eh?" said Alf.

"I mean to say, how does it strike you?" asked Archie. "I'm dashed, lonely, dear old lad."

"Lonely?"

"Absolutely!"

"But I don't quite get the 'ang!"

"You see, this study is frightfully big," said Archie, waving a hand round. "There's nobody here who can share it with me. What about it, Alf, old darling? You and I, what?"

"You—you mean that you'd like me to come in——"

"Absolutely!"

"Oh, but—but——"

Alf paused, and took a deep breath. He had been expecting nothing of this kind, and it rather took his breath away at first. As for Archie, he had put the invitation in a very nice way.

From the very first, he had gloated in the fact that he had a study to himself. And now, in order to make Alf comfortable, he had given him to understand that he was lonely.

Alf bent forward.

"Look 'ere, I ain't the kind o' bloke to tell no lies!" he said earnestly. "Some-how, I've got a idea that you an' me understands one another. We ain't the same class, an' we ain't wot you might call real pals. 'Tain't likely. You an' me can't be pals."

"But, my dear old onion——"

"All the same, we sort of 'it it orf," said Alf. "I don't s'pose for a minute that we shall ever be friends—I don't want to shove myself on you, and 'tain't likely that you'll want to pal on to me. Still, I'll tell yer straight—I'd like to accept that there offer!"

"You'll come into the old study?" asked Archie.

"Yes, if you really want me."

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"Then, old lad, it's settled," said Archie, with relief. "That, I mean to say, is that! Absolutely! The sub, in fact, is brushed aside. In future this study belongs to you and to me. How frightfully decent to know that the bally question is settled!"

"Blow me!" said Alf. "You're the only gent among the 'ole crowd."

"Absolutely not!" protested Archie. "There's Nipper, and Pitt—"

"Oh, some o' them are real good 'uns," admitted Alf. "But as for the rest—They're snobs—all the lot! Now look 'ere, mate. Is it real? Do you mean it? About the study, I mean?"

"Of course I do—I mean to say, rather!" said Archie. "Rather!"

"Honest Injun?"

"Honest absolute Injun!"

"Then I'll just go out for a walk in the Triangle, and 'ave a breath of fresh air," said Alf, rising. "Crikey! You ain't 'arf a brick!"

And Alf went out, leaving Archie lying rather limply on the lounge.

"A dashed peculiar expresh," murmured Archie. "The dear cove absolutely called me half a brick! At least he said I wasn't half a brick! I'm trying to fathom the bally thing out!"

And he was still thinking when Phipps came in. Phipps proceeded to put a few books upon the shelf.

"Oh, there you are!" said Archie, open-

ing his eyes. "What ho! Phipps, dear old chappie, have you ever heard of a fellow being called half a brick?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"Neither have I," said Archie. "A whole brick—yes—but never half a brick! And when you come to think of it, it's a rummy thing to say! Because bricks, don't you know, are made of clay!"

"Precisely, sir."

"So that when one chappie calls another chappie a brick, it's just as good as saying that he's soft!" went on Archie. "Good gad! Logic, what? Tracing down the old facts to their source, as it were! But it seems that we are wandering, Phipps. I have news!"

"News, sir?" said Phipps. "By the way, may I inquire what these books are doing here, sir?"

"They belong to Alf."

"Alf, sir?"

"The very same cove I was talking about this morning," said Archie. "You heard about it, of course? He absolutely rolled up this morning, and I'm dashed if he isn't here, on the spot! In the Remove! And, what's more, positively sharing the old study!"

Phipps looked startled.

"Sharing the study, sir?" he asked quickly.

"Absolutely!"

"But, Master Archie!" ejaculated Phipps.

"You cannot mean to assure me that you have invited that—that bricklayer's son to live with you here? It cannot be possible!"

Archie sank back limply.

"It's not only possible, but it's arranged. I mean to say, I've fixed it! Absolutely! You see, the poor old chap was homeless! Wandering about like one of those lost sheep you hear about."

"Nevertheless, sir, I am amazed—shocked—that you should have been so extremely rash," said Phipps severely. "I cannot possibly imagine what you were thinking of."

"Well, to tell the truth, I'm dashed if I know!"

Archie gazed across the room with a glassy expression. Phipps had brought him to earth with a shock.

"I do not think you considered all the possibilities, sir," went on Phipps. "You will be obliged to partake of tea with this—this common creature."

"Tea!" said Archie, in a tired voice.

"Yes, sir, tea," said Phipps. "Master Huggins will probably make a loud noise when he drinks—he will undoubtedly eat sardines with a knife! And there is not the slightest question that he will use a saucer instead of a cup!"

"Don't!" pleaded Archie. "Don't!" It's frightful, Phipps—absolutely foul! I must admit that I did not think of these awful possibilities. You have made the tissues absolutely quake like a jelly! Phipps, I'm all of a dither! The young master is wobbly at the knees!"

Phipps looked quite stern.

"I'm astounded, sir," he said, with dignity. "I am astounded that you should have forgotten yourself to such an extent. May I inquire if this matter is really definitely fixed?"

"My dear lad the contract is signed!"

"Then, sir, the only course for you is to retract," said Phipps firmly. "You must make some excuse——"

"Absolutely not!" declared Archie, rising and appearing to recover with great rapidity. "Retract? I'm dashed well ashamed of you! Noblesse oblige, don't you know!"

"But, Master Archie——"

"Noblesse oblige!" said Archie. "In other words, noble actions are expected from those of noble birth! And, upon my soul, it would be a bally ignoble action to turn this poor cove out. He stays, Phipps!"

"But, sir——"

"He stays!" repeated Archie, with dignity. "Gadzooks! How dare you? How dare you criticise the young master? I don't mind telling you, that I'm bally glad I made the offer. As for Alf, he's priceless—one of the absolute ones!"

And Archie sat down and glared at Phipps defiantly.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE REMOVE AGAINST HIM!



INNER was over. Outside another shower had caused the fellows to remain indoors. And quite a number of them had collected in the Common-room—for there was well over half an hour before afternoon lessons would begin.

Alf was the one subject of conversation.

"Just like a giddy navvy!" said Armstrong, with contempt. "Did you notice his manners at table?"

"Absolutely made me sick!" said Griffith.

"The rotter was like a pig!" declared Hubbard. "Why, he actually shoved potatoes in his mouth with a knife!"

"Awful!"

"I don't see why we should stand him!" put in Fullwood. "He's nothing more nor less than a common beast—a brat out of the gutter. The best thing we can do is to tell the Head that we won't let him mix with us."

"That's the idea!"

"Let's hoof him out of the school!"

"Hear, hear!"

I entered the Common-room, and stood listening. I didn't interfere. It wouldn't have been much good even if I had done. The fellows were in such a mood that I should only have made matters worse.

There was a certain amount of excuse for them. I had to admit to myself that Alf's table manners had been shocking. He had shown himself to be untrained in every way. But, as Pitt had pointed out, the fellow couldn't help it—he had never known anything better.

The time to judge him would be after about a month—it wasn't fair to size him up now. That's what the majority of the juniors couldn't see. They were only too ready to drop on the new boy on the very instant.

Alf himself came into the Common-room, and looked round. He had not wanted to come—but Archie had invited him to do so. Archie reckoned it was far better for the new fellow to show himself. It would look peculiar, in fact, if Alf avoided the Remove. And his arrival at that moment was somewhat unfortunate.

Fullwood seized upon him at once. Fullwood was feeling very bold. He was surrounded by his own pals—and he always delighted in showing off. Here was a chance to indulge in a little amusement at the expense of the "common cad."

"Here he is!" exclaimed Fullwood jeeringly. "Gaze upon it, you fellows! The rotter who shoved his way into the school where he ain't wanted! He can't even eat decently!"

"Shoves his knife into his mouth!" said Gulliver, with contempt. "That's what he learnt off his father—I suppose."

"Rats!" said Fullwood. "I don't suppose his father uses a knife at all! His father goes to work with his dinner wrapped up in a red handkerchief!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And when the bricklayers knock off work, old Huggins runs into a pub to have his pint!" went on Fullwood jeeringly. "Then he rolls home drunk, as likely as not!"

Alf strode forward, his eyes blazing.

"Look 'ere—I'll give you a warnin'!" he said tensely.

"I don't want to talk to you!" said Fullwood. "Clear off!"

"Mebbe you don't want to talk to me, but I want to talk to you!" snapped Huggins. "It don't matter a cuss to me wot insults you say—about me! But I ain't goin' to hear no hinsults agin my father!"

"Hinsults?" said Fullwood.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, go hon—cackle!" shouted Alf passionately. "Bloomin' funny, ain't it? Lumme! It don't take much to make you blokes go orf! It seems to me that all you need is a lot of nasty, vindictive——"

"Steady on!" put in Armstrong. "Better be careful what you say!"

"Be careful what I say!" shouted Alf. "I mustn't speak, eh? I'm different, I s'pose? You fellers can say anythink you like—you can hinsult me an' my dad to your 'eart's content! And yet I mustn't say a word! Is that wot you call bein' fair?"

"Give the chap a chance!" said De Valerie gruffly.

"Mind your own business!" snapped Fullwood. "As for his father, I'll say what I like. What is he—a rotten bricklayer? And he's come into some money—won it in a sweepstake, or probably backed some winners! Either that, or he got hold of it by thieving——"

"Stop that!" shouted Alf thickly.

"By George!" roared Handforth. "I'll jolly well slaughter that cad! Lemme get at him!"

But before Handforth could rush at Fullwood, he was seized by Pitt and Watson and myself.

"What's the idea?" demanded Handy hotly. "I don't believe in Huggins being here, but that's no reason why Fullwood should be such a filthy cad! I'm going to smash him up!"

"No, you're not!" I said quietly.

"Lemme go——"

"Don't be such an ass, my son!" I interrupted. "If Huggins hasn't got enough gumption and pluck to go for Fullwood himself, he doesn't deserve any support. Let's see how much Huggins will stand!"

"Oh, well, that's not a bad idea," growled Handforth. "I suppose he ought to stick up for himself. If he doesn't he's not worth much. But Fullwood makes me absolutely boil. The blessed beast!"



"I don't want it!" said Alf uncomfortably. "Crikey! Do you think I'm going to shove myself in on those blokes? Not likely! I'll be without a study——"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood was as full of confidence as ever.

"Of course, we're supposed to stand by, and say nothing!" he exclaimed. "This son of a street cleaner walks into the school, and gets shoved into the Remove! I don't see why we should stand it. It's an insult—it's too thick for words! And as for his rotten father——"

"Are you going to stop that?" demanded Alf fiercely.

"No!"

"Well, I give you warning!" said Huggins. "If you mention my father's name agin, I'll swipe you acrost the jaw!"

Fullwood laughed in his face.

"What lovely language!" he sneered. "You'd swipe me acrost the jaw, would you?"

"Yus!"

"If I mention your father again?"

"You'd best not drive me too far, you gleatin' scum!" shouted Alf. "I won't be responsible if you drives me to it. I come with the intention of bein' good-tempered. But I ain't goin' to stand——"

"It's not a question of what you'll stand—we're the ones who have to stand it!" interrupted Fullwood. "Why, you low-down brat, you daren't touch me! You daren't lay one of your filthy paws on me!"

"Daren't I?" exclaimed Alf tensely.

"No, you son of a dustman——"

Crash!

It was more than Alf could stand. All his good resolutions went to the winds. Flesh and blood could put up with a lot, but this was too much. And Alf's right fist thudded into Fullwood's sneering face, and the leader of Study A went crashing over backwards with a fearful smash.

"Yow! Ow!" he moaned.

He lay on the floor, groaning in agony.

"That's what some more o' you'll get if you ain't careful!" shouted Alf, white with passion. "Just drive me a bit further——"

"Oh, indeed!" came a rasping voice from the doorway. "Indeed! And so this is what I find when I glance into the Common-room!"

There was a sudden, tense silence, and Mr. Snuggs strode into the centre of the room, and looked round. His face was distorted into a grin of sheer pleasure. This kind of thing just suited Mr. Snuggs. He seized Alf by the shoulder and shook him.

"You murderous young ruffian!" he said fiercely.

"Look 'ere, sir——"

"Not one word!" shouted Mr. Snuggs. "You—you wretch! This is what I discover when I just happen to pass by! I look into this room, and what do I find? What do I find?"

He glared round, and shook Alf once more.

"I find that you cannot spend your first morning in the school without indulging in some of your hooligan tactics!" he went on. "Your first object, it appears, is to pick a quarrel with the son of a gentleman! I am amazed and disgusted——"

"It wasn't me wot picked the quarrel!" shouted Alf hotly. "It was 'im! 'E called my father a thief——"

"Sneak!"

"Oh, that is not at all surprising to me!" said Mr. Snuggs sarcastically. "Can you expect this boy to be anything else but a sneak? Brought up amid the surroundings of the gutter, he naturally retains his——"

"Hold on, sir!" I interrupted. "I think it only right that you should know that Fullwood absolutely goaded Huggins into attacking him. If these cads like to accuse me of sneaking, they can do so——"

"Silence, boy!" said Mr. Snuggs. "I do not wish to hear one word in defence of this wretched young hooligan. Indeed, there can be no defence. What is he but a common clod?"

"That's about all he is, sir!"

"This—this common clod!" repeated Mr. Snuggs, relishing the words. "He has dared to touch a boy of gentle upbringing. Huggins, you will go to my study at once. I will be there shortly, and I will administer a severe caning. Do you understand?"

Alf was now absolutely calm.

"Yes, sir," he said quietly.

"Go to my study, and wait!" repeated Mr. Snuggs. "You have no excuse—no defence! I entered this room, and caught you red-handed in a most blackguardly at-

tack—an attack which was utterly unprovoked. Go!"

Just for one moment Alf seemed as though he were about to speak. But he probably realised the futility of any protest. He dropped his hands limply to sides, and walked out of the room.

"Sizzzzzzz!"

A low, sibilant hiss followed the new boy out of the Common-room.

It made me boil to hear it, for nothing was more undeserved than this treatment. As for Mr. Snuggs, I longed to punch him. The man was absolutely insufferable.

But what could we do? He was the master of the Remove, and he had already made up his mind to treat Alf Huggins with contempt and unfairness.

Fullwood had asked for that blow, and I was immensely pleased that he had got it. For it proved that Alf was not a worm. He had stuck up for himself, and I liked him all the better for it.

And then I felt rather sick.

For Mr. Snuggs bent over Fullwood, and fawned upon him, and was much concerned about his injury. Fullwood, like the cad he was, pretended to be badly hurt.

"I—I shall be all right soon, sir," he muttered. "The young hooligan flew at me like a tiger. I wasn't prepared. I didn't know he was coming."

"My dear, dear boy, I quite understand," said Mr. Snuggs gently. "The attack was most appalling. I am shocked. I am quite shocked."

"And I never said a word to him," went on Fullwood indignantly. "In fact, I was trying to be pally——"

"You liar!" roared Handforth.

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Mr. Snuggs. "My dear Handforth! Such language! Really, I must protest!"

Handforth relapsed into grim silence. And Mr. Snuggs passed over towards the door, and then turned back.

"There is just one other thing," he said. "I do not believe in this nonsense which prevents a boy from informing a master of a grievance. There is no such thing as sneaking. If Huggins dares to lay fingers on any one of you again, please acquaint me of the facts without delay."

And the Form-master strode out of the room.

"The—the ugly, lop-sided beast!" said Handforth fiercely.

"Oh, I don't know!" said Armstrong. "If Huggins gets a caning, he'll deserve it."

"Deserve it!" roared Handforth.

"Yes," replied Armstrong. "I'm not a pal of Fullwood's, but how dare this common gutter brat lay hands on one of our class? He ought to be shown that he can't do that sort of thing!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Armstrong's quite right!"

"The low-bred bounder ought to be taught a lesson!"

"Rather!"

I listened grimly. There was no doubt about it, the rank and file of the Remove was dead against Alf Huggins. Yet, in their hearts, the fellows must have known that he had been fully justified in knocking Fullwood down.

He had been provoked to a point almost beyond endurance. And for Mr. Snuggs to come crawling in, and to drop on him like that was the culminating indignity. The whole affair was shameful. And there was just one word to explain everything.

Prejudice!

That's all it was—just class prejudice. These young idiots considered themselves to be on a higher plane than Alf. Whether they were cads or not made little difference.

Even Fullwood's natural enemies sided with him in this affair.

And while the matter was being discussed in the Common-room, Alf Huggins came out of Mr. Snuggs' study. He was hot, sullen, and in agony. But he walked proudly down the passage, with a firm stride.

He had done nothing—nothing!

And yet he was despised and scorned and loathed! Was it fair? Was it giving him a chance?

The bricklayer's son could almost have cried aloud with the dreadful injustice of it all.

But Alf Huggins' time of trial at St. Frank's was only just commencing. He was in for a fight—a bitter, uphill fight!

THE END.

Editorial . . . Announcement.

My dear Readers,—The manner in which Alf Huggins was received by the boys of St. Frank's in the above story may give you the impression that the Old School is seething with snobbishness. In the following few lines at my disposal I feel I must say something, if not in defence, at all events in extenuation of the treatment accorded to the new boy by the school in general. We must make allowances in the first place for the natural disposition of all schoolboys to give voice to their opinions with a frankness that does not spare the feelings of others, and a new boy is invariably subjected to an ordeal in which any peculiarity he may display is brought home to him. This is really only a schoolboy's form of introduction, at the same time being a test of the new boy's good and bad points. It will be here noticed that the decent fellows do not pursue their attentions towards the new boy as soon as they get to know him. They either chum up to him or leave him alone. It is the bully and the rotter who persists in annoying, and subjecting his newly found victim beyond this stage. St. Frank's, like any other school, is not free from rotters, and it is from these that Huggins chiefly suffers. If this were all Huggins could easily fight his own battle. But his lot at the school is made immeasurably harder by the attitude of Mr. Snuggs towards him. Mr. Snuggs is a detestable kind of snob, for he is not content with only favouring boys of high social standing, but he goes out of his

way to insult and bully those boys under his charge who come of humble origin. We shall hear a great deal more of Mr. Snuggs, and of the effect of his bad example on the Remove in another fine story next week, entitled "ALWAYS IN THE WRONG; or The Snobs of St. Frank's."

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THE EDITOR.

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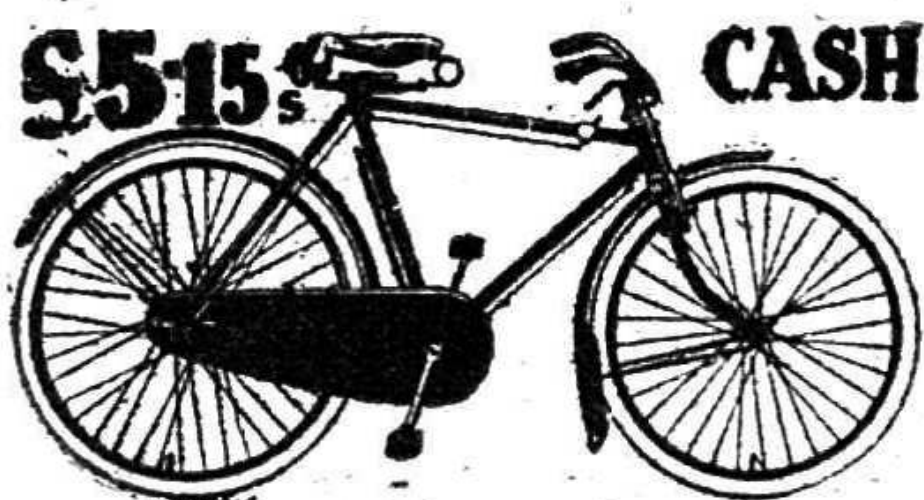
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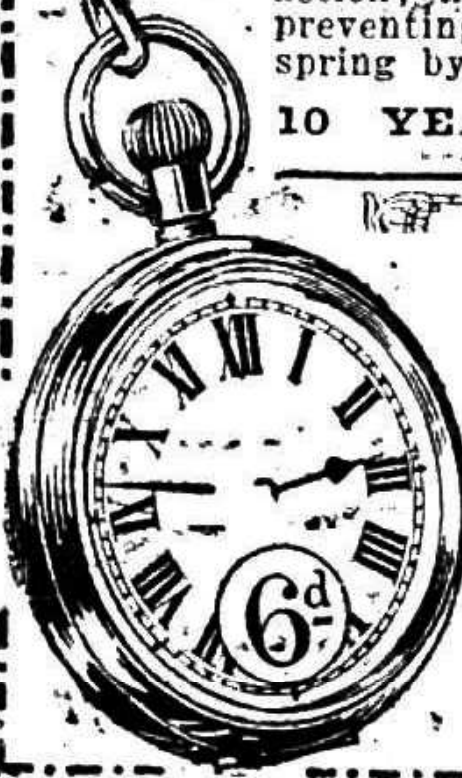
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