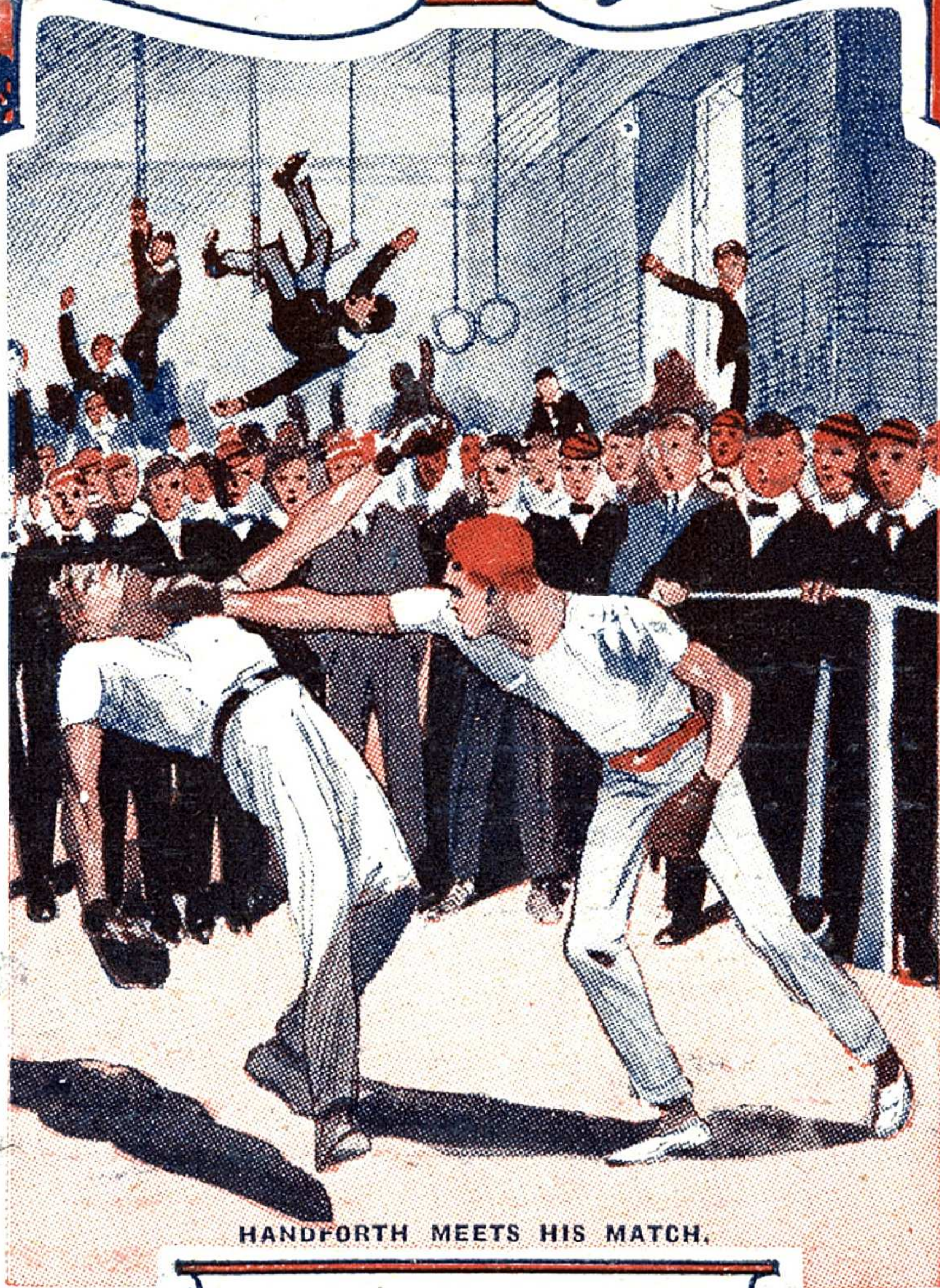


ROUSING NEW ST. FRANK'S SERIES BEGINS IN THIS NUMBER!

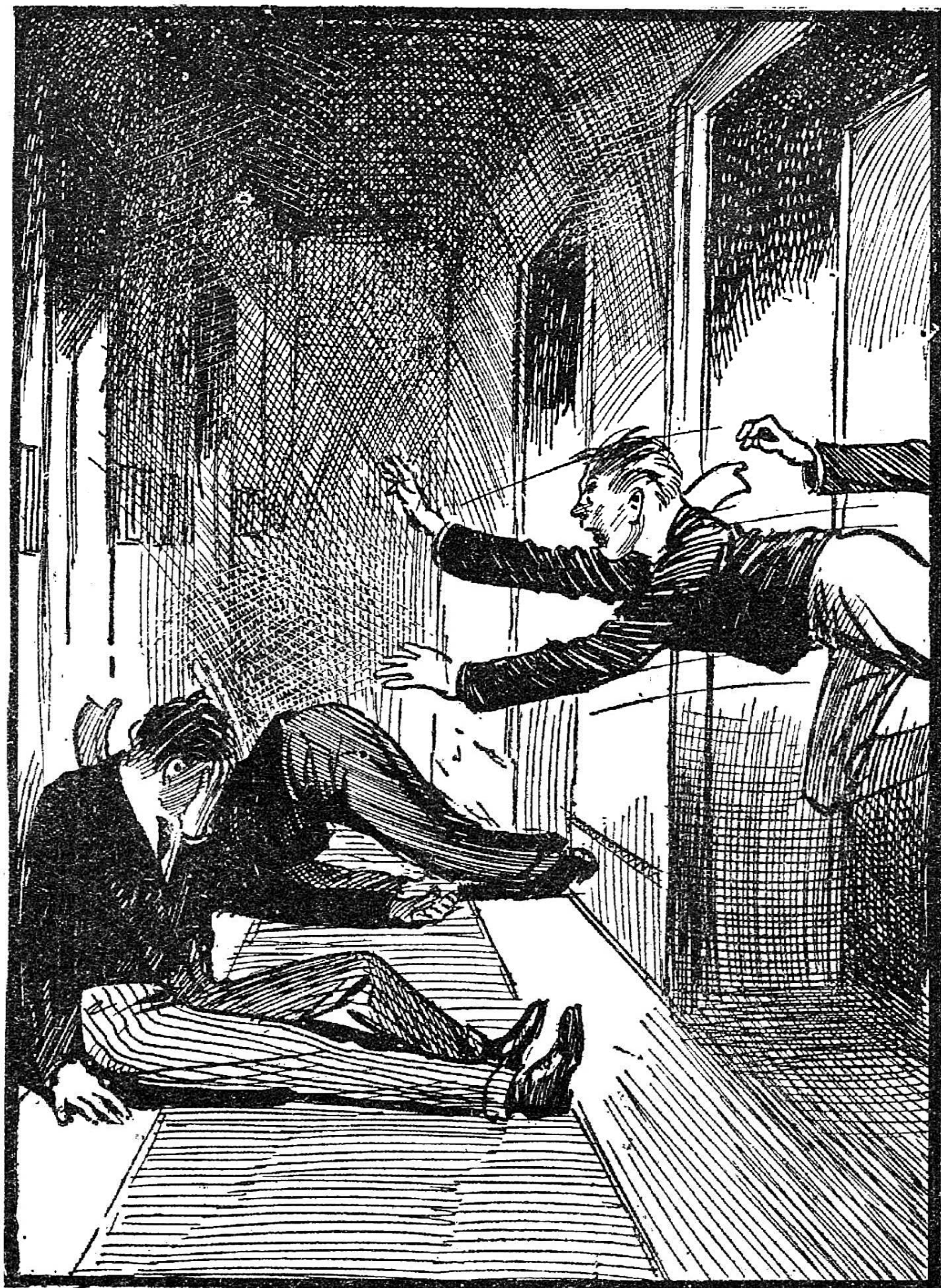
The NELSON LEE 2d LIBRARY



HANDFORTH MEETS HIS MATCH.

Absorbing New Series of St. Frank's
starts in This Number with:—

BUSTER THE BULLY!



Christine was in much pain, but through a kind of haze he saw John Busterfield Boots grasping Yorke by the seat of his trousers and by his neck. And Yorke came out like a shell from the mouth of a cannon.

Buster. The Bully!



The grand, holiday adventure series came to an end last week with the famous Remove of St. Frank's on their way back to the old school to begin the autumn term after many weeks of travel and adventure in America, finishing up with some thrilling experiences on a Pacific island. The arrival for the new term of a band of new boys, led by a dominating youth of Samsonian physique called John Busterfield Boots, who becomes known as Buster Boots, will come as a surprise packet for the globe trotters. Buster Boots has already made up his mind to rule the Remove. War, feuds, a reign of terror are in the air, and Handforth will have to look to his laurels when he meets the blustering Buster Boots, the self-elected cock of the College House. This new series is going to be exceptionally exciting.

Attention is directed to the fine series of full-page sketches of famous public schools, with badges inset, which we are starting in this issue. Every boy should make a point of collecting these sketches, as they are being specially drawn for "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" by the talented artist, Mr. E. E. Briscoe, No. 1 of the series is a magnificent drawing of ETON COLLEGE, and will be found at the end of the book.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

BACK TO ST. FRANK'S.

"EVERYBODY here?" asked Reginald Pitt briskly.

"Seems like it," I replied. "The station's swarming with St. Frank's chaps, anyhow. My hat! It's just like old times! I'll bet we have plenty of fun this term."

"Rather," said Tommy Watson. "After

all, it's not very wonderful to be travelling about all over the giddy world! I'm jolly glad to be back—with the prospect of a quiet term at St. Frank's."

"Begad, yes," said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "Dear old boy, I agree with you—I do, really! We've had a fine time, but there's no bally place like home! An' I'm longin' for some football, too!"

Reggie Pitt's eyes sparkled.

"Football!" he echoed. "We'll do great things this term!"

The Remove was at Victoria Station, London. It was a Tuesday, and the new term at St. Frank's had started just over a week earlier. The Remove, in fact, was late in getting down to the famous old college.

This was because we had been away abroad for our summer holidays, and had only arrived in England on the second day of term. So the Head, in the goodness of his heart, had given us all a week's extension.

But now that time was over, and we were all glad enough to be on our way to St. Frank's. After spending weeks and months abroad, it is a wonderful pleasure to be back in England.

The train was a fast one to Bannington. There we should have to change into a local to Bellton, arriving at St. Frank's in the afternoon, just at about the time when lessons would be over. We shouldn't start any actual work until the following morning. And as Wednesday was a half-holiday, our first week of term would be a somewhat easy one.

"Better buck up, you fellows," I said, as I hustled round. "Got your tickets all right? Train's in; it'll be off in five minutes. We'd better go and grab an empty compartment."

"Good idea!" said Edward Oswald Handforth.

Church and McClure were with him, and so far they were unmarked. They had met their famous leader an hour before, and it was rather remarkable that neither were showing signs of hard wear. As a general rule, Handforth and Co. entered into a fierce and gory combat within the first hour.

We all got on the platform, and piled into an empty compartment. Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey followed, and Handforth and Co. squashed in, too. There were now eight of us in the one compartment.

"Full up!" said Handforth curtly, as De Valerie appeared at the door.

"Rats!" said De Valerie. "These compartments are made for ten."

"We're not going to jolly well be squashed by anybody!" declared Handforth firmly. "Plenty of room further forward. Buzz off! Eight's enough in here!"

He remained at the window all the time, turning all comers away. He claimed a great amount of credit for keeping the coast clear; but, as a matter of fact, Handforth's face at the window was quite sufficient. All the other fellows immediately set that compartment down as within the danger zone.

For Handforth generally managed to cause untold commotion in a railway carriage. He wouldn't have much chance this time, however, because we should see that he was kept in order.

"After all, I think these compartments are better than the giddy American trains,"

said Tommy Watson, looking round. "Here we are, all together—just a little private party. Can't do anything like this in the States."

"Blow America!" said Handforth. "We're home now, and we've got plenty to discuss, without bringing America in! What about Clapson?"

"Well, what about him?" asked Pitt.

"Clapson, of the College House," proceeded Edward Oswald. "He went straight on to St. Frank's, as you know. He's been there nearly a week now."

"There were four of them! Freeman and Clapson, of the College House, and Dodd and Farman of the Ancient House," I said. "At the present moment they are the sole representatives of the St. Frank's Remove. They must have had a pretty lonely week."

"Lonely?" sniffed Handforth. "What about that letter?"

"What's the idea of asking riddles?" demanded Pitt. "How do I know anything about a letter? And what's that you were saying about Clapson? Speak out, my son, and don't be such an ass!"

"Didn't Clapson write a letter to Christine?" snorted Handforth. "Didn't he say that there are six new chaps in the College House? Six awful bounders who seem to be ruling the roast?"

"First I've heard of it," said Reggie Pitt.

"Well, it's a fact," said Handy. "Six new kids, mind you, and all from the same school, I understand. They've done all sorts of rotten things. Pinched somebody's study, and generally behaved like rotters! Something ought to be done about it."

I grinned.

"Something will be done," I replied. "But it's not our business."

"Not our business?" repeated Handforth.

"Not at all."

"But ain't we in the Remove?"

"I believe so," I smiled. "But we don't happen to belong to the College House, old man. It wouldn't be playing the game for us to interfere. A sort of slight upon Bob Christine, you know."

"Oh!" said Handforth.

"Christine's the leader in the College House," I went on. "He's the fellow to deal with these new kids. It's nothing to do with us at all. The Ancient House never meddles with the doings of the College House. So there's no need to even discuss the giddy question."

"That's right enough," said Church, nodding. "Christine would only get touchy, if we gave any advice. He's the leader, and he thinks he can lead! But, between you and me, he's not much of a success."

"Oh, Christine's all right," I said. "He's been successful for two or three terms, and things go on pretty smoothly in the College House. And we haven't had any big rows for a tremendous time."

Handforth grunted.

"Not so very long ago House rivalry was

keen at St. Frank's," he said, with a sniff. "But that's all dead now. College House chaps and Ancient House chaps hobnob together all over the place. Strictly speaking, it's not right. The rivalry ought to be revived."

"Rivalry's all right so long as you can remain friendly," I said. "But I don't believe in any real antagonism. It's not good for the school, and it's bad for sport. A friendly rivalry is healthy; but bitter rivalry is liable to lead to all sorts of petty spitefulness."

It was rather curious that we should be talking on this subject, for this new term was destined to develop in a way that we didn't dream of, particularly in the matter of House rivalry.

We were mildly interested in the news that six new juniors had arrived for the College House. It was rather an unusual number, but as I had pointed out to the others, it was no concern of ours.

These new boys had arrived, and had found that the Remove was not present. So it was only natural that they should consider themselves to be lords of all they surveyed. When the famous Remove turned up—well, that would put a different complexion on the matter.

Christine and Co. would soon stop any little games that the newcomers had started. A leader like Christine was not the sort of fellow to take any cheek, especially from a bunch of raw new kids.

To-day was the first time we had all met together since our arrival in England, a week earlier. I had been with Nelson Lee in London, and the gov'nor and I had spent a delightfully quiet time, seeing old friends, and looking over old haunts. Nelson Lee had gone down to St. Frank's by an earlier train.

We were soon speeding over the countryside, where the first signs of Autumn were beginning to show. England, indeed, was looking at its best—mellow, beautiful, and supremely peaceful.

There was only one stop between London and Bannington. And soon after the train had pulled into the station, Reggie Pitt, who was at the window, noticed a certain gentleman in uniform visiting each compartment. Reggie turned.

"Tickets ready," he said briefly. "The inspector's coming."

"Always this giddy bother!" grumbled Handforth, searching in his pockets. "Just as if they can't trust people to—Hullo, I can't find my rotten ticket! I know I put it in this pocket!"

The other juniors, including myself had found their own tickets without difficulty. And we all smiled at Handforth's efforts to locate the missing slip of pasteboard. Pitt took the collection.

"No need for all of us to hold 'em," he said. "I'll show the lot."

"Wait a minute!" gasped Handforth. "Mine's lost!"

"Rats! You've got it somewhere—"

"I tell you I haven't!" hooted Handforth, flustered and red. "I expect these fatheads have been playing a joke, or something!" he added, glaring at Church and McClure.

"Well, I like that!" said Church warmly. "My hat! It's a pity if you can't look after your own railway ticket. You'd better chain it up next time!"

Handforth began to search frantically on the floor, and then among the cushions, and he had the whole compartment in a flurry. Everybody was obliged to stand up, shake themselves, and Handforth became more excited than ever.

"Better buck up!" said Pitt. "Inspector's nearly here!"

"Great pip!" said Handforth blankly. "I've lost it, I tell you! What's going to happen?"

"Why, you'll have to pay again!" said Watson cheerfully.

"Pay again!" howled Handforth.

"Of course. If you haven't got a ticket—"

"But I had one when I started!" roared Edward Oswald.

"My dear chap, that's nothing to do with the inspector," I said sweetly. "If he finds you without a ticket, it's his duty to make you pay. Sometimes they prosecute you for trying to defraud the company!"

"Good Heavens!" said Handforth, in a hollow voice.

"And that may mean prison!" said McClure, with a kind of relish.

Handforth had a scared look in his eye.

"Of course, I shall explain," he said weakly. "Any chap is liable to lose his ticket—"

"I've got an idea—quick!" whispered Reggie Pitt. "Buzz under the seat!"

"Under the seat!" gasped Handy.

"Of course!" said Reggie. "The inspector will never notice you—we can crowd together on this side. It's not defrauding the company. You paid your fare all right. Buck up! In two seconds it'll be too late!"

Handforth gave one despairing glance round and then dived under the seat. It was, indeed, his only chance. It was a terrible thing to do, frightfully undignified. But it was better than paying again.

The door opened sharply.

"Tickets, please!" said the inspector, eyeing us closely.

I could see him mentally count us—seven juniors altogether. Handforth had completely vanished from sight, and Pitt and Church and McClure were gazing about them with an air of exaggerated innocence. This, I believe, was what caught the inspector's eye at first.

Pitt handed him the tickets, and the inspector opened them out like a hand of cards. He looked at the tickets, and then he looked at us again.

"There's another young gentleman somewhere else, I suppose?" said the inspector.

"No—all here," replied Pitt.

"But there's seven of you—and eight tickets!" declared the official.

Pitt calmly nodded.

"Oh, yes!" he said blandly. "You see, one of our chaps likes to travel under the seat! Just a little fad of his!"

We heard a kind of gurgle from under the seat. Church and McClure and the rest stared blankly, and the inspector opened his eyes, too.

"Likes to travel under the seat!" he echoed. "What's the idea, young gent?"

"Some chaps have queer ways, you know," said Pitt gravely.

"He got up, and pulled one of Handforth's feet into view. And then the rest of Edward Oswald came out—dusty, dishevelled, and with his face as red as a beetroot. His confusion was almost painful.

"Eight—right!" said the inspector briskly.

He went out and closed the door.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Reggie Pitt howled, and the rest of the juniors howled with him. We all saw the joke—except Handforth. He rose to his feet, with a cold, deliberate look in his eyes.

"You—you cackling lunatic!" he bellowed. "What the——"

"You see, I found your ticket on the seat!" said Pitt genially.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Reggie had worked the thing deliberately, and there was no question about it being a good joke. We roared until the walls of the compartment nearly buckled. And Handforth biffed Church in the eye with sudden violence, just because Church happened to be nearest.

"Yaroorh!" howled Church wildly.

And then Handforth was seized, before he could do any further damage. He was held in his seat, and we proceeded to yell in safety.

CHAPTER II.

THE SUPREME SIX.



STUDY Q, in the College House at St. Frank's, was full up.

This select apartment was the rightful home of Bob Christine, Roddy Yorke, and Charlie Talmadge, the three recognised leaders of the Monks, as the College House juniors were termed.

But at present Study Q was full of strange faces.

Invaders were on the premises, so to speak. And it seemed that a curious kind of formality was in progress. There were six boys, and they were all holding hands in a circle.

One fellow was freckled, with snub nose and glaring red hair.

"We all stick together!" he said solemnly.

"All stick together!" echoed the other five in one voice.

"No backing out—no breaking away from the sacred ranks!" continued the red-haired boy. "In all things we are as one!"

"As one!" said the rest stoutly.

"You will continue to regard me as your leader, and you will back me up in all things!" said the freckled boy.

"We will back you up in all things!" chanted the five.

"Finally, you pledge your solemn word that you will assist me in maintaining my supreme authority over the entire Remove!"

"We pledge our solemn word!" declared the ring.

John Busterfield Boots nodded.

"Good!" he said languidly. "Now we can talk about things in general."

The circle broke up, and the six juniors took seats in various parts of the study—on the table, the chairs, and even on the coal-box. The leader, John Busterfield Boots, looked quite pleased with himself.

He, in fact, was the cause of that urgent letter from Len Clapson to Bob Christine. And it looked very much as though John Busterfield Boots was a fellow to be seriously reckoned with.

He had a powerful face. His jaw was square, but the fair skin and freckles and the red hair lent him a cheery, amiable look. Among his intimates—who were all present—he was familiarly known as "Buster."

And this young gentleman, apparently, had high ideals.

His own particular chum was Percy Bray, who shared study Q with him. Percy Bray was a boy with dark hair, well plastered back, exquisite clothes, and decidedly loose joints.

The other four juniors occupied the studies next door, on either side—Horace Crowe and George Webb in Study P, and Albert Crooks and Walter Denny in Study R. They were all well set up fellows, with heaps of confidence. There was no appearance of the "New kid" about them.

"My sons," said John Busterfield Boots, "the Remove arrives to-day, and it's up to us to start properly. There mustn't be any weakening. We've got to take the lead from the very start."

"Hear, hear!" said the Faithful Five.

All these boys had been at Kendis College, Richmond. They were chums of long standing. And Buster Boots had wielded his authority for so long that the other five were almost like echoes.

There was a reason for their staunch loyalty.

And a very good reason, too. It would have gone badly for them, indeed, if they had dared to disobey the edicts of J. B. B. They knew him—they were acquainted with his every mood.

But the Remove didn't know him—although it soon would!

"At Kendis we were always known as the Supreme Six," said Buster Boots. "Just because we come to another school, are we going to bow down to the orders of the St. Frank's fellows?"

"Never!"

"Of course not," said Buster. "Naturally, the Remove will kick. The Remove will regard us as a set of cheeky bounders. They'll think that we've got no right to push ourselves forward, or assert ourselves in any way."

"The asses!" said Percy Bray.

"Old man, you're wrong," declared Buster Boots. "For the Remove to feel that way will be perfectly natural. If they're ordinary healthy chaps, they're bound to feel that way. It's not likely that they'll allow us to assert authority without making a fuss. But we've always had what we've been after——"

"Always!" said the others.

"And we have gained our success because we use different methods," said Buster Boots. "We stick together—we are organised. And we shall continue to be organised. And a good deal depends upon the element of surprise."

"Surprise?" repeated Crooks.

"As I said, surprise!" said J. B. B. "At the very first I shall proclaim myself the leader. Fireworks will follow. There'll be a big packet of trouble. And I shall look upon you fellows for support."

"You'll have it," said Bray—"in chunks!"

"Good!" replied Buster. "And now, my faithful pals, we'll sally forth into the Triangle. Unless I'm greatly mistaken, the vanguard has arrived. In other words, the Remove begins to appear!"

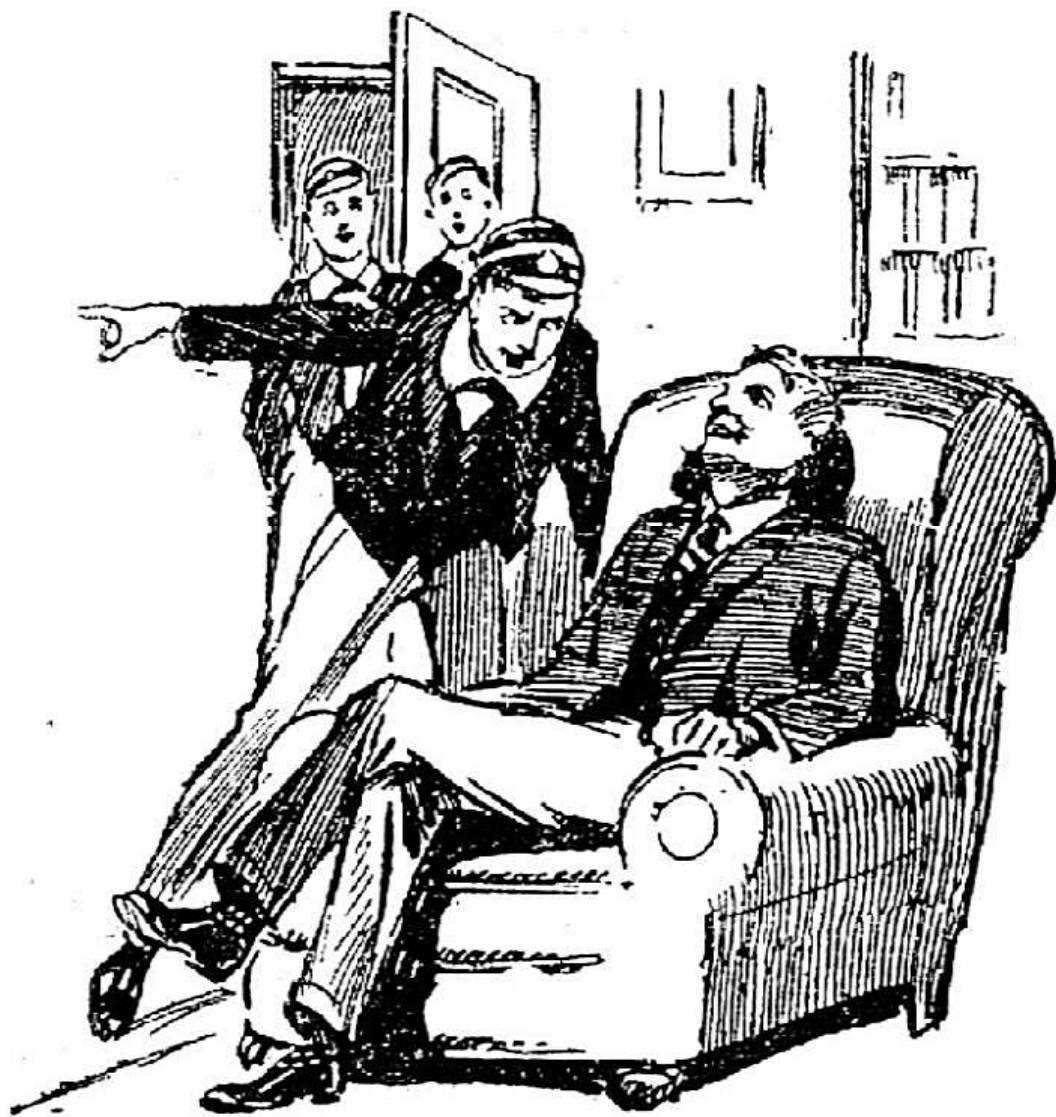
Buster Boots glanced out of the window, and saw a number of juniors entering the Triangle. They were strangers to the Supreme Six—therefore, without question, they belonged to the Remove.

Buster was very keen upon seeing what these new arrivals looked like. From Clapson and Freeman—who had been at St. Frank's during the past week—the new boys had learned that the Remove consisted of grim, determined fellows who would wipe up the floor with the carcasses of all funny idiots—these same funny idiots being the Supreme Six. And not only the floor would be wiped up, but the whole Triangle, and the unfortunate Supreme Six would furthermore be completely knocked into the middle of the forthcoming week.

The prospect, according to Clapson, was not exactly a cheery one. But John Buster Boots and his friends regarded it with complete equanimity. They believed, somehow, that Clapson had been slightly exaggerating.

Bob Christine, for example, was a fire-eater. He was the leader of the College House juniors, and the rightful owner of Study Q. Buster Boots had heard frightful stories concerning Bob Christine.

Bob was a fellow who could knock six



"Look here, my son, I haven't come here to talk nicely, or to beat about the bush," said Bob Christine hotly. "You're going outside!"

chaps out with one blow. Bob was able to lead his section of the Remove into deathless deeds. In short, if Clapson was to be believed, Bob Christine was no human boy at all, but a sort of high speed fighting machine.

And Buster Boots was keenly looking for Bob Christine.

He didn't find him at first. The first fellow that the Supreme Six actually came in contact with was the one and only Edward Oswald Handforth.

Handforth & Co. had just entered the Triangle, with Pitt, Grey, Tommy Watson, and myself just behind—to say nothing of a few more who were entering the big, imposing gateway.

"By George!" said Handy. "Ain't it fine to be back!"

We all stood there, drinking in the scene. Fatty Little was making straight for Mrs. Hake's tuck shop—he was far more keen upon drinking in some lemonade. The finest scenery that he could look at was a big pile of sandwiches and some bottles of pop.

"Just the same as ever!" said Church dreamily. "I don't know, though—it looks a lot better! I suppose that's because we've been away so long—in America, and out in the Pacific——"

"Blow the Pacific!" interrupted Handforth. "Here we are, my sons, back in the good old spot. And this term we're going to make things hum! Little Side! Look! All ready for footer! By George! We'll be having a game to-morrow afternoon!"

"By jingo, rather!" said Church enthusiastically.

We were all thinking the same. And we stood there, regardless of the crowds of fags that came bustling round. It was getting on in the afternoon, and the sun was getting lower in the sky. And St. Frank's, if anything, was looking much better than we had expected.

A certain screaming noise sounded near by—a screeching kind of din. Upon investigation, I found that this was merely Chubby Heath and Lemon and a few other fags welcoming Willy Handforth. The whole crowd of Third Formers whizzed off towards the tuck shop to celebrate; concealing themselves behind a kind of dust screen, they vanished into the tuck shop, leaving a haze behind.

serve this sign. Handforth strode forward, with the fixed intention of making a swift example of this new kid.

Obviously, these six chaps were the new College House fellows. Handforth knew that he had no right whatever to interfere. But it didn't matter a jot to him whether he was within his rights or not. If Handforth made up his mind to do a thing, he did it.

Just for a few seconds Buster Boots had suspected that Handforth was the great Bob Christine. He looked something like Clapson's description of Bob—big, powerful, and aggressive. But the first impression was wrong, obviously, for Handforth was wearing the Ancient House colours.

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And Handforth still gazed at the noble old piles. Then, allowing his glance to wander round, he suddenly gave a little start. He found himself gazing at John Busterfield Boots and his five faithful adherents. And Buster Boots was capless.

Handforth shaded his eyes.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "What's that—the sun?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth felt duly encouraged.

"Hi, you chap!" he commanded imperiously. "Come here!"

He pointed an accusing finger at Buster Boots. Unfortunately, the latter was gazing in another direction, and didn't ob-

"Hi!" said Handforth curtly. "You!"

He jabbed John Busterfield Boots in the ribs. This was Handforth's favourite method with new boys. He invariably poked the unfortunate junior in the ribs, and said: "Hi, you!" in a fierce, commanding voice. Handforth had the idea that this was impressive. The main thing, as he always declared, was to get the chap thoroughly scared to begin with.

But John Busterfield Boots didn't seem to be at all scared.

"Don't do that!" he said severely. "I allow no person to dig me in the waistcoat! Please remember that in future."

Handforth stared.

"You cheeky rotter!" he snorted. "I'll do as I jolly well like! And what the dickens do you mean by calling me a person?"

Buster Boots bowed.

"I apologise, he said smoothly. "I can now see that you are not a person. I should really hate to describe you. The details, I am sure, would be most painful to any delicate ears."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Faithful Five laughed with dutiful alacrity. Even some of the newly arrived Remove grinned, too. But they pulled themselves up shortly. Humorous though this new kid might be, it wasn't the thing to encourage him.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" roared Handforth. "Listen to him! A blessed new kid talking to me like that! I always make it a rule never to biff a new chap on the first day, so I'll spare you!"

"My heart," said Buster Boots, "beats again!"

"You've got a dashed lot too much to say!" snorted Handforth. "You've got to learn that new kids must keep quiet when they're being addressed. All they've got to do is to answer questions. What's your name?"

"Boots!" said the new boy obligingly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Remove thought it was another joke, and laughed accordingly.

"Boots!" rapped out Handforth. "Look here, if you're trying to be funny, I'll forget all about my rule! Or are you one of the chemists?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My name is John Busterfield Boots," said the red-haired boy. "Greatly as I appreciate this honour, I fear that I must break up the little conversation. You are not a member of my own House. And your face, if I may say so, rather worries me. Taken by degrees, I might grow accustomed to it—but at the present moment I fear that my eyesight is becoming strained!"

John Busterfield Boots turned, and languidly walked away. Handforth gave one mighty bellow, and charged forward. But even as he did so he was grabbed on both sides. Church and McClure, Pitt, Grey, and myself, held him in an iron grip.

"Lemme go!" hooted Handforth wildly.

"Not at all!" I said. "Just a minute

"I'm going to smash him!" howled Handforth.

"Exactly—but later on!" I said gently.

"Later on!" repeated Handforth, struggling. "Not likely! That chap says that my face worried him! Now I'm going to make my fist worry him! I'm going to make it produce some stars, too!"

"Leave it until later on, my son," I insisted. "This chap Boots seems to be a fellow with too much to say. Let Bob

Christine deal with him—it's Bob's privilege."

"Eh?"

"Christine's the leader of the Monks, and it wouldn't be right for you to start any biffing," I pointed out. "After Christine's had his go, you can sail in as much as you like. But don't deprive Bob of the honour."

Handforth grunted, and ceased struggling.

"Oh, all right!" he growled. "Perhaps you're right. Goodness knows, I don't want to dish Christine out of anything. I hope I'm a sportsman! But to-morrow, when I see that funny idiot, I'm going to slosh him until he goes grey!"

And Handforth stalked into the Ancient House with grim tread.

We followed him, chuckling—but rather annoyed with John Busterfield Boots at the same time. The new fellow would have to learn that he couldn't display such a large amount of coolness. In an old hand it was admirable, but in a new kid it savoured of being cheeky.

John Busterfield Boots calmly strode into the College House. Practically the whole Remove had arrived by this time. The Supreme Six clung together. Somehow, they had a vague inkling that trouble was in the air.

CHAPTER III.

A SURPRISE FOR BOB CHRISTINE!



BOB CHRISTINE looked very grim.

"So these new rotters have started with Handy, eh?" he

asked. "I'm glad the ass didn't biff them! That's left to me! This chap Boots

is going to get it in the neck! He's asked for trouble, and he'll get it!"

"Rather!" declared Yorke. "I never heard of such nerve! And what a name, too! I don't know how the chap could dare to come here with a name like that! He ought to be boiled for it!"

"I'm not worrying about his name—he's not responsible for that," said Bob Christine. "But no new kid is going to be cheeky in the College House! Of course, it was Clapton's little joke about Study Q."

"Naturally," said Talmadge. "Nobody would have the nerve to pick our study. Clapson always was an exaggerating ass. But now that we're on the spot we'll soon know."

Christine & Co. had just entered the Triangle. They were glad enough to be back at the old school, but their interest in John Busterfield Boots was rather more than their appreciation of the picturesque view.

They marched towards the College House, and were in time to run into Clapson and Freeman as the latter pair hurried out. They came dashing up.

"Oh, here you are!" said Clapson. "I thought you were in that first batch, and I've been looking all over the show! Get my letter?"

"Of course I did," said Christine. "Thanks. But you needn't have been so funny about my study."

"Funny?" said Clapson, staring.

"Yes, those new chaps haven't dared to pinch Study Q—"

"Oh, haven't they?" interrupted Clapson grimly. "So you thought I was trying to be funny, eh? You ass! Those new kids have not only taken Study Q, but the next two studies as well!"

Bob Christine turned red with rising wrath.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he ejaculated. "Why, it's—it's not possible! It's too mad for anything! They can't possibly believe that we'll let them stop there! Who's in my study, Clapson?"

"Boots himself, and a chap named Bray."

"All right—we'll go and kick the rotters out, and give 'em a piece of our minds," said Christine indignantly. "This is just about the limit!"

Bob Christine was highly incensed.

Study Q was the best "den" in the whole junior passage. It was recognised that this study should be occupied by the leader. Even fellows like Clapson or Freeman or Oldfield couldn't get into Study Q as permanent residents.

And for two raw, new kids to plant themselves there in the absence of the Remove was a piece of unadulterated nerve. Obviously, John Busterfield Boots and Percy Bray had taken advantage of the exceptional circumstances.

Well, they had to be taught a lesson.

And the only thing to be done was to hurl them out forthwith, to the accompaniment of much violence. It was always a good thing to use violence with new kids. They then become properly awed.

Bob Christine forgot all about his other little matters—going round the school, renewing acquaintance with Mr. Crowell, having a look at the Third, and so forth. All Bob wanted to do was to get straight to Study Q.

He went there.

And when he arrived he found the door closed. Bob didn't waste any time upon formalities—he didn't think it at all necessary to knock upon his own door. He opened it by the simple method of giving one mighty kick.

The door flew open, and Christine & Co. marched in.

They paused inside the doorway and stared. The room was strange to them. The old familiar landmarks were no more. The dilapidated old bookcase in the corner had gone and a neat roll-top desk stood in its place. The somewhat rickety table, upon which many cups of tea had been upset, was a thing of the past. There now

stood in the centre of the room a solid oak table.

And the two easy chairs were occupied by John Busterfield Boots and Percy Bray. Buster looked up with an air of mild annoyance.

"I don't like to protest," he said smoothly; "but the next time you enter, be good enough to knock!"

"My only hat!" gasped Christine faintly.

He gazed at Boots wonderingly. The chap didn't look so bad—rather a decent sort, in fact. His red hair, of course, was a drawback. But a fellow couldn't help his hair. But his nerve was unbearable.

"Look here, my son. I haven't come here to talk nicely, or to beat about the bush," said Bob Christine hotly. "You're going outside!"

"Outside?" repeated Buster.

"Outside!" roared Christine. "And, what's more, I'll give you just ten seconds to do it!"

"I'm afraid the time limit is too brief," said J.B.B. "I couldn't possibly manage it, so I won't even make the attempt. Besides, it's much more comfortable here. And what, may I ask is all the bother? What's the commotion? What's the idea of this roaring lion stuff!"

Christine gulped.

"This is my study!" he howled.

"Our study!" bellowed Yorke and Talmadge.

John Busterfield Boots raised his eyebrows.

"Of course, a chap is always hearing news in these enlightened days," he said, in his cool, exasperating way. "And I must say that it's news to me that this study is yours. I was under the distinct impression that it was mine."

"Yours?" shouted Christine furiously.

"Exactly!"

"But this is Study Q!"

"Not being blind, I have already observed the fact!" said Buster Boots.

"But—but—"

Bob Christine paused, seeing the utter uselessness of continuing the argument. This red-headed fellow was simply egging him on. There was no attempt whatever on the part of Boots to deny the charge.

"Look here!" said Bob, calming himself with great effort. "It's no good me losing my temper. I hope I'm a reasonable chap, and I won't biff you without giving you a chance to understand."

"Your generosity," said Buster, "is as abundant as your good looks!"

"My hat!" breathed Christine. "You're enough to make a chap see red!"

"I fancy you are seeing red," smiled Buster Boots. "My hair, I am sad to say, is my only misfortune. I have attempted to live it down in vain. When I grow up, I shall employ a dozen specialists to turn it black!"

"Do you think I care anything about your rotten hair?" howled Christine.

"No, I don't suppose you do," said Buster. "So sorry—my mistake!"

"You're a new kid—and jolly cheeky at that!" went on Bob, breathing hard. "At St. Frank's we don't treat a new kid badly until he gives us reason to. And it's always considered bad form to start any fighting on the first day."

"The respite will be useful to you," said Buster.

"To me?" hooted Christine. "To you, you mean?"

"Just as you like; we won't argue!" smiled the new boy.

"Under the circumstances, I'm willing to let you off if you clear out of this study at once, and shift out all your rotten furniture," said Bob Christine generously. "But I'm not going to be kept waiting. I'll give you half an hour to do the whole job."

"That is very thoughtful of you; but I really fail to see why I should shift the furniture out of my own study," said Buster Boots calmly. "Please let me rid you of the absurd impression that Study Q is yours."

"Absurd impression!" gasped Christine.

"Quite so!" said Buster. "I am ready to admit, freely and frankly, that this study was yours last term. But times, like the weather, change. I have already informed you that Study Q is now mine. Oh, by the way, I haven't introduced you to Percy Bray. Pardon the omission. Bray and I are sharing Study Q, and we like it immensely. I appreciate your good taste in selecting this room for yourself last term. I hope you will find another one that will please you."

Christine nearly choked.

"Are—are you telling me that you've pinched my study?" he stuttered.

"It may be my dull wits, but it seems to me that you are very dense," said Buster. "I have been telling you for the last five minutes. Once and for all, this study is mine. And I may as well add that you are making yourself a nuisance. Kindly clear out, and stay out!"

"You—you mad idiot!" roared Bob. "I thought I'd give you a chance, but I'm blessed if I'll have any more mercy! I'm going to smash you to smithereens! I'm going to slaughter you!"

"That will be most entertaining," said Buster Boots, without moving.

Bob Christine had lost all patience, and little wonder. He simply hurled himself at the red-haired boy. He dragged at him, and attempted to haul him out of the chair.

"Stand up and fight!" he gasped breathlessly.

"Fighting is undignified, to say nothing of being strenuous," said Buster Boots, rising leisurely to his feet. "And if there's one thing I hate more than another, it is to

be pestered by noisy juniors! The door, I think is in this direction."

And then Bob Christine thought that an earthquake had happened.

He didn't exactly know what took place. He was suddenly seized as though by a man with a physique like Jack Dempsey. He was whirled towards the door, his arms and legs waving wildly.

He had a vague impression of being shot out in a horizontal position. He struck the wall on the other side of the corridor with a dull, sickening thud. And as he rose to his feet, Talmadge came hurtling out.

Christine was in much pain, but through a kind of haze he saw John Busterfield Boots grasping Yorke by the seat of his trousers and by the neck. And Yorke came out like a shell from the mouth of a cannon.

"Yooooooooop!" said Yorke, as a kind of a parting word.

He thudded into Christine as the latter was attempting to rise. Incidentally, Yorke placed one of his boots into Talmadge's mouth. The three unfortunate juniors were lying in a wild, disordered heap in the corridor.

And the door of Study Q quietly and sedately closed.

CHAPTER IV.

BUSTER'S LITTLE WAY.



DISASTER had come.

In fact, it was little short of an actual tragedy. He—Bob Christine—had been hurled out of his own study on his neck! And Charlie Talmadge, and Roddy Yorke, his faithful followers, had been hurled out on theirs!

As Bob Christine sat up, he gazed dazedly up and down the corridor, and one grateful gasp of relief came from his mouth. At least, none of the other fellows had seen!

Nobody had witnessed this horribly humiliating catastrophe.

For a catastrophe it was, of the most supreme order. The three leading juniors of the College House had been hopelessly beaten by John Busterfield Boots! A raw new kid, utterly unaided, had done this deed.

Bob Christine half expected the school to collapse, and the earth to move out of its orbit. He wouldn't have been at all surprised if the sun had suddenly turned cold. Such details as that seemed trivial compared to this cataclysm.

With great difficulty, Bob rose to his feet. He stared at the door of Study Q, and wondered. For a second it seemed to him that three "Q's" had been painted on the door. But this, apparently, was an hallucination, probably brought about by the dizziness which still caused his head to feel like a peg-top.

And there was that unbelievable thing that

had just happened. Bob Christine gave two or three gulps, and inwardly prayed that the nightmare would soon end. He wanted to wake up, and find that this thing was all wrong.

He didn't wake up.

Instead, he gazed down upon Yorke and Talmadge. These unfortunate youths were just sorting themselves out. With great difficulty Yorke removed Talmadge's watch-chain from his left ear, where it had become painfully entangled. And Yorke staggered to his feet, showing every sign of shell-shock.

"Great guns!" he breathed hoarsely. "What happened?"

"Sound the fire alarm!" moaned Talmadge faintly.

"Get up, you idiots!" hissed Christine. "Somebody might come along!"

"All I want is the ambulance!" croaked Talmadge, spitting out a sticky caramel paper which had somehow become wrapped round his tongue. He dimly remembered licking the floor as he fell, but all this was very vague.

"Quick!" gasped Christine. "If anybody sees us now they'll ask questions! We can't explain that we were chucked out by that—that—"

"There's no name for him!" murmured Yorke, coming to the rescue. "Great Scott! I can't believe it! He picked me up like a feather! I've never moved so fast in all my life! I don't even remember coming through the doorway."

Talmadge was assisted to his feet. On his face there was a dreamy, sloppy kind of look. It was an expression of half-idiocy, and he really seemed to be somewhat cross-eyed.

Without protest, he was led like a lamb down the corridor, limping painfully, and offering no resistance. The trio turned into Study T, which was the rightful den of Ernest Lawrence. But Lawrence, as Christine knew, had not yet arrived. The study was empty.

Christine and Co. entered, and Bob closed the door.

"Thank goodness!" he breathed. "Nobody saw us! And now we can talk, and decide what's got to be done!"

Deprived of all support, Talmadge swayed like a leaf in the wind. If the situation had not been so grave, what followed would have been funny. Talmadge simply sat down with a thud, and lay there.

He was gently assisted into a chair, and he beat the air feebly. The unfortunate junior was really dazed. But neither Christine nor Yorke were in any mood to give him the attention he required. The poor chap had to come down by degrees.

"Wake up, you ass!" snapped Christine, looking at him.

"Water!" sighed Talmadge. "Anything you like! I—I'm dying! Where's mother? I must see mother before I go!"

But Talmadge, much to his regret, did not see his mother. Instead, sitting up, he saw two faces that he scarcely recognised. He

stared at them in a dreamy, bleary kind of fashion. In his eyes there was a glassy look.

The faces looked a bit like those of Bob Christine and Roddy Yorke. They were very blurry, and had three or four outlines. But apart from these defects, they were greatly changed. Christine, for example, had a lump on the side of his ear that stood out like a knob. And Yorke's lower lip was pushed outwards as though he had a huge brandy-ball just inside his mouth.

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Talmadge. "I'm—I'm seeing things!"

"I don't care what you're seeing—we've got to talk about this horrible affair!" said Bob Christine, pulling himself together with an effort. "Do you realise that we've been kicked out of our own study by a new kid?"

"Kicked?" repeated Talmadge dazedly. "I thought he used a cannon!"

"Don't be funny!" said Christine unfeelingly. "I tell you, that chap's a terror! He's the worst specimen we've ever had in this house! Clapson was right! Everything he said was true!"

"Everything he said was untrue!" moaned Talmadge. "Why didn't he tell us the chap was a human sledgehammer? Why didn't he warn us that—"

"Clapson warned us all right—but we didn't take any notice," said Christine. "But we've got to take notice now. The one solid fact emerges from all the painful details—Boots kicked us out!"

"It's too awful for words!" said Yorke.

"I know, and we've got to do something," went on Christine. "If it had been anybody else, I wouldn't have minded much. In fact, a fellow like this might be a distinct acquisition to the Monks."

"He's dangerous!" said Talmadge. "He's worse than a bomb!"

"We ought to go straight to Mr. Stockdale, and complain!" declared Yorke. "In fact, that's the only thing we can do. I vote we go right away and tell the House-master. He'll soon have these intruders chucked out."

"No," said Bob, shaking his head. "Can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Wouldn't be fair—"

"Oh, don't talk rot!" said Talmadge, who was gradually recovering. "Do you think we're going to be kept out of our own study?"

"No, I don't," replied Christine grimly. "But there's no reason for us to bring Mr. Stockdale into it. If we can't deal with this affair on our own, we're not worth our salt. And we've got to realise that Buster Boots is a holy terror. As far as I can see, the only method will be to grab him, and pitch him out."

"Oh, that's a fine idea!" said Talmadge bitterly. "The next time I grab Boots I'll do it when he's asleep! Or I'll stun him with a brick first!"

"I don't mean alone, you ass—we'll take a crowd," said Christine. "It's a horrible

admission to make, but there it is! I think we'd better go straight to Study Z, and talk it over with Clapson and Oldfield."

"They'll jeer at us for being whacked!" said Yorke doubtfully.

"No need to go into any details," said Christine. "We'll just say we want to get up a force to give these intruders an idea of our power. Anyway, we'll go and talk it over."

And, having tidied themselves up somewhat, and showing only a few signs of damage, Christine and Co. passed down the corridor. In the meantime, John Busterfield Boots was languidly stretching himself.

"Well, Percy, old son, I think I'll go for a trot," he said. "I want to give some of these chaps a look over. Christine, as you know, has proved to be a mere name. The ogre of the story is a myth."

Percy Bray grinned.

"And Clapson told us that Christine was a fire-eater!" he chuckled. "Why, you could wipe him up in one go!"

"I daresay," agreed Buster Boots modestly. "At all events, he's no worry to us. Would you care to come, or are you going to see about some tea?"

"I think I'll be preparing for tea," said Bray.

John Busterfield Boots nodded, and strolled out. He opened the door, and as he turned down the passage he beheld the doubled up rear portions of two juniors. They happened to be Churchman and Holland, of Study R. Exactly what they were doing, Buster Boots didn't know. As a matter of fact, the two juniors were testing an argument they had just been having. Holland had declared that Churchman couldn't touch his boots without bending his knees, and Churchman was showing that such a thing was easy.

"Out of my way!" said Buster Boots curtly.

Churchman and Holland turned round blankly.

"Speaking to us?" demanded Holland, aghast.

"Unnecessary questions are tiresome!" said Buster Boots languidly.

"You—you cheeky new kid!" roared Churchman. "We'll get out of your way when we choose! For two pins I'd—"

Crash! Biff!

Holland and Churchman sank to the floor. For the space of ten or twelve seconds they ceased to take any interest whatever in their surroundings. And John Busterfield Boots calmly walked on.

He had punched Holland with his left, and Churchman with his right, and they both had about the same power. The two juniors were fully prepared to swear on oath that those punches were fifty horse power.

By the time they sat up, dazed and bewildered, J.B.B. had gone. He was, in fact, in the lobby, taking a large amount of interest in a certain dirty collar. This article of linen was fastened round the neck



J. B. B., calmly dusting his hands, walked out. And Study O contained wreckage—human and otherwise.

of Cobb, one of the cheerful trio who occupied Study P. Cobb was not an extremely tidy youth. He always thought that he was doing wonders if he made a collar last for one whole day. And it could generally be asserted with safety that if no crease appeared in Cobb's collar by dinner-time, then Cobb was ill.

At the present moment, Cobb's collar was not only creased and rumpled, but grimy. It bore distinct traces of raspberry jam and red ink, with one or two splashes of mud to keep the other two colours company.

And John Busterfield Boots was gazing at Cobb disapprovingly.

"I hope you'll know me next time!" said Cobb tartly.

"Without question," said Boots. "But, at the moment, your face is not interesting me. That collar of yours is disgraceful."

"Eh?"

"I don't like to see dirty collars walking about," said J.B.B. "The masters here may allow it, but I don't!"

"You—you don't allow it?" stuttered Cobb dazedly.

"I'm rather particular about collars," went on Buster. "I always make it a rule to see that fellows wear clean linen. It's

a fad of mine. Everybody who doesn't wear clean linen meets with my disapproval."

"My only aunt!" said Cobb faintly.

He stared at John Busterfield Boots in that same dreamy kind of way that various other juniors had used. There was something about Boots that made you stare dreamily. He was too much to be believed all at once. For a raw new boy to order an old timer to change his collar was without precedent in the history of St. Frank's.

"Go upstairs," said Boots, "and put a clean collar on."

"You idiot!" shouted Cobb. "Do you think I'm going to take orders from you?"

"I do," said Boots.

Crash!

He delivered one punch that knocked Cobb flat. Cobb seemed to lift completely off his feet, and descend on the back of his neck. He then did his utmost to close himself up like a pocket knife.

"Now, go upstairs, and change your collar," said Buster Boots lazily.

He walked on, without seeing if Cobb obeyed the order. John Busterfield Boots was not very severe to begin with—he was giving the fellows an inkling of what might follow. And his serene and complete confidence and imperturbability was staggering.

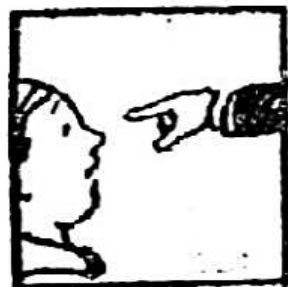
But J.B.B. was not destined to have everything his own way. He had hardly moved two yards before there came a swift rush of feet. Fierce war cries accompanied the other sound, and Buster was grabbed from the rear. He was pulled backwards with a terrific jerk, and he found himself surrounded by a dozen grim-faced juniors.

Helpless in their midst, he was rushed away at lightning speed into the deserted lecture hall.

Retribution had swooped down upon the offender!

CHAPTER V.

ORDERS MUST BE OBEYED!



BOB CHRISTINE was looking very grim and determined.

"Now, my son, you're going through it!" he said fiercely. "You've apparently had the idea that you could do just what you liked. But now we're going to show you that you're nothing better than a cheeky new kid!"

"Hear, hear!" said Yorke and Talmadge, with great heartiness.

"Frogmarch him!" said Clapson.

"Make him run the gauntlet!" advised Oldfield.

"Bump him!" said Turner.

"Quite excellent suggestions, but hardly applicable to the present situation," said John Busterfield Boots calmly. "May I ask why you fellows are so interested in my welfare?"

"Look here, we're fed up!" exclaimed

Christine hotly. "Understand that? Fed up!"

"Merely because you don't understand," said Buster. "When you learn to appreciate me, you will be greatly altered in your views. It is my misfortune that I should be misunderstood!"

"My hat! He talks like a gramophone!" said Clapson. "He's been like that all the week! I've been waiting for you fellows to come so that you could hear him! Absolutely gets on my nerves! A new chap, too!"

"That's just it," said Christine. "Look here, Boots, we're going to teach you a lesson. It seems that you've come to St. Frank's with the idea that you can rule the roast—"

"Exactly," said Buster Boots.

"What?"

"That is my intention."

"Your intention!" roared Christine. "You pitiful ass! Do you think for a moment that you can rule the roast?"

"Not for the moment—but permanently," said John Busterfield Boots. "You must permit me to say that you are all very foolish."

"Great Scott!"

"We're what?"

"Very foolish!" repeated Buster obligingly. "You evidently imagine that you'll be able to harm me in some way—teach me a lesson, as you call it. I can assure you that I don't require any lessons. I know exactly what I'm doing, and I shall continue my campaign. I fully intend to become the supreme leader of this Form within the course of two or three weeks."

The cool confidence with which this was said completely took the breath away from Buster's captors. He knew well enough that he was powerless. Whatever his fighting ability, he couldn't possibly get away from a crowd like this.

But Buster didn't seem to care.

"Talking's no good!" shouted Bob Christine. "The chap's hopeless! Grab him!"

"You bet we'll grab him!"

Buster backed away, and managed to get out a shrill, piercing whistle—a whistle of a most peculiar note and character. It sounded very much like a signal, and must have been heard over half the building.

The next second he was seized, and held. Curiously enough, he made no attempt at resistance. He didn't even struggle. John Busterfield Boots was a fellow who remained calm under all circumstances. He knew that he couldn't get away from this crowd, so he didn't try.

"Frogmarch him!"

"Yes, that's the idea!"

"Go it!"

J.B.B. was whisked over. But before the actual frogmarching could commence, the door abruptly opened. The Faithful Five marched in in close formation, and with a soldierly air.

Percy Bray led the other four, and they came to a smart halt.

"Charge!" commanded John Busterfield Boots.

The Faithful Five charged. It was a terrific affair. In that one swift rush they cut clean into the centre of the startled crowd of juniors. They grabbed their leader, and yanked him to his feet. And then they closed up once more into a solid kind of block.

The Supreme Six turned towards the door. "Hold 'em!" gasped Christine. "My hat! This is too much!"

All the juniors charged. But they might just as well have attempted to stay the progress of the tide. Hitting out right and left, the Supreme Six marched out of the lecture hall, still in that close formation.

They got outside, leaving several fellows holding their eyes and noses. And they disappeared down the corridor. Christine and Co. looked at one another, they gulped, and they breathed hard.

"This is too much!" said Bob Christine huskily.

"Those—those other chaps must have come at the sound of the signal!" muttered Clapson. "They always stick together, you know. I never saw anything like it! What the dickens shall we do?"

"I don't know!" said Christine blankly. "That's the truth! I've never been so flummoxed in all my giddy life! These new chaps fairly take the biscuit!"

"Well, you're the leader—it's up to you!" said Turner.

"Absolutely!" agreed Oldfield.

"Buck up, Christy—show what you're made of!"

"It's the leader's job to lead!"

"Hear, hear!"

Bob Christine looked round, and compressed his lips.

"All right—all right!" he said. "Don't all shout at once! Leave it to me, and I'll see that something drastic is done. But it's got to be carefully thought out. For the moment we'll leave the bounders alone—we'll let 'em think that we're beaten. In the meantime, I'll get out a scheme."

It didn't strike the others as being very satisfactory, but as they had no suggestions of their own to offer, they had to abide by the decision.

In the meantime, the amazing John Busterfield Boots was proceeding to give a few more orders. This new boy had undoubtedly made a tremendous impression in the College House.

He had made his mark already, and it seemed to be his aim to show the juniors that he was there to be obeyed.

The Faithful Five had vanished, and Buster Boots was left in the Remove corridor. He strolled along into the lobby again, and came upon Holroyd. This young gentleman was just on his way outside.

"Just a moment!" said Buster Boots.

"What's your name?"

Holroyd stared.

"Mind your own business!" he replied rudely.

"A most awkward name to possess!" said Buster Boots. "Well, we won't bother. I want you to go over to the tuckshop and bring me some doughnuts, a loaf of bread, a pound of butter, a tin of sardines——"

"Hold on!" said Holroyd. "What do you think I am?"

"I wouldn't like to say," replied Boots. "But that's neither here nor there. The one burning question is, will you go, or must I impress upon you the mark of authority?"

"No; I jolly well won't go!" retorted Holroyd hotly. "I suppose you're Boots? I've heard about you and your giddy nerve! Go and do your own dirty work! You cheeky rotter!"

"It's a pity," said J. B. B., "but these lessons must be learned!"

Crash!

Out came Buster's right. Holroyd received it in his left eye, and he staggered back, really hurt. But Holroyd wasn't a coward, and he possessed a fiery temper. After the first shock, he fairly flew at Boots.

It was all over in five seconds.

Holroyd toppled over like a ninepin. He got one in the jaw, one on the chest, and another on his ear. He crashed over, quite hurt. And he lay there, moaning. At that moment Munroe came along—and Munroe shared Study P with Holroyd and Cobb. Munroe had just been listening to Cobb's tale of woe.

"You—you rotten bully!" he shouted hotly.

Biff!

John Busterfield Boots swung round like lightning, grasped Munroe, and delivered a fearful right-hander. Munroe thudded against the wall, and caught his head a terrific crack.

And Boots walked calmly away, whistling.

He went to Study Q, and found Bray there.

"These chaps want a good deal of teaching," said Buster regretfully. "All they can do is to refuse everything I order—it'll be some time before they've learnt their lesson."

"More trouble?" asked Bray.

"A trifling amount," replied Buster. "Merely a little argument about obtaining the supplies for tea. Perhaps you'll go, Percy?"

Bray agreed, and was soon off. And ten minutes later the pair were sitting down to a well-filled table.

From a study a little way along the passage came strange sounds. The guilty study was next door but one. It was Study O, occupied by Freeman, Dallas, and Steele. And Freeman was celebrating the return of

his comrades by giving a little solo. This, let it be added, was quite his own idea. Dallas and Steele had not been rash enough to ask for it.

John Busterfield Boots sighed.

"I object to these weird noises during tea," he said. "I shall have to go along and stop it."

"Better let 'em rest for a bit," suggested Bray.

"My son, that idea is all wrong," said Buster, shaking his head. "The only way to succeed is to persist. There's nothing like intensive methods. Slacken somewhat, and all the good work is undone. You see the point?"

"Well, yes, I suppose so," grinned Bray.

"Good! I shall leave you for a moment to deal with this matter."

"I hope you have more success than you had last time," said Percy Bray. "All this biffing doesn't seem to have done much good yet. Anyhow, the chaps haven't obeyed any of your orders!"

Buster Boots gazed at his chum reproachfully.

"My good ass, we can't expect results so early," he said mildly. "It would be most unreasonable to believe that these misguided youths would heed me straight off. They must learn. I am now in the process of teaching them. Within a day or two I shall have them so tame that they will eat out of my hand."

"Just the same as at Kendis!" grinned Bray.

"Just the same as at Kendis!" agreed John Busterfield Boots. "But it takes time. Only a short time, of course. To-day I am simply performing the preliminary movements, as it were. I expect no results."

And this remarkable new fellow strode out of the study, and walked into Study O. Freeman was still warbling. He was cutting bread-and-butter, and this process was being aided by the song—which included some mention of Carolina at a certain period of the morning, when buttercups were being kissed by butterflies. A somewhat extraordinary place, no doubt, but Freeman seemed to know all about it. Steele and Dallas were suffering in silence. They felt compelled to do so, because this was really Freeman's treat, and it wouldn't do to offend him. Steele certainly did make some remark to the effect that the song had whiskers, and that the whiskers were grey; but Freeman did not hear this remark.

And then John Busterfield Boots arrived.

"Stop that horrible noise!" he said curtly.

The horrible noise stopped. Freeman turned round, and gazed at the intruder in astonishment. Dallas and Steele were quite prepared to agree that the noise had been horrible, but they resented this interruption.

"Who told you to come here?" demanded Freeman.

"I object to having my tea disturbed by

a sound that resembles the creaking of unoiled wheels!" said Buster Boots calmly.

Dallas nearly laughed—the simile was so apt.

"Unoiled wheels!" howled Freeman. "Are you talking about my voice?"

"I am! Don't let it occur again!"

"Why, you—you cheeky beast!" roared Freeman. "I'm getting about fed up with your rot! You've had it pretty easy this week, but now that all the other chaps are here, you'll find a difference! Clear out of here!"

"Will you stop that noise?"

"No!" bellowed Freeman defiantly.

John Busterfield Boots walked forward, pushed the table over with a deafening crash and approached Freeman. That table had contained crockery, delicacies for tea, and all sorts of other things. They lay in a smashed heap upon the floor.

Freeman and Dallas fairly hurled themselves at Boots. Steele joined in. And for the space of thirty seconds the commotion in Study O was terrific. But it didn't last longer.

J. B. B., calmly dusting his hands, walked out.

And Study O contained wreckage—human and otherwise.

Dallas was sitting in the middle of a plate of bread-and-butter, and Steele had just taken his face out of some cream-puffs. He liked cream-puffs, but not in this style. Freeman was disentangling his left leg from the coalbox.

And John Busterfield Boots had created all this damage with the greatest of ease. It had seemed no effort to him whatever. The three juniors, hurling themselves at the new boy, had been brushed aside as though they were mere infants.

Buster walked back to Study Q and entered.

"They'll soon begin to understand," he said smoothly, as he sat down at the tea table. "But I'm afraid they're all a bit obstinate. Pour some tea out for me, Percy. Good! That's the idea!"

Sounds certainly trickled in from various quarters, including high words from Study O. Freeman, Dallas and Steele were deciding what they would do with John Busterfield Boots.

But they didn't do it. They thought it better to wait a bit. They were beginning to realise that Boots was a hard nut to crack. It wouldn't be wise to do anything rash.

In due course tea was over in Study Q. Bray strolled next door and chatted with Crowe and Webb. And the leader of the Supreme Six passed out in the corridor for a few moments.

He didn't have long to wait.

Page and Harron came into view, talking earnestly on the subject of football boots.

(Continued on page 15)

EXCITING NEW NELSON LEE SERIAL JUST STARTED!



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No. 42.

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(Now read on.)

BUSH BILLY AT WORK.

"GO and stand there till we've finished with the rest," he said. "As soon as we've done, you can take yer seat again, and proceed with yer journey."

"Thank you for nothing!" said the detective, shrugging his shoulders. "This is as far as I was going by coach. With your permission, I'll bid you good-morning now."

He turned on his heel and began to walk away.

"Come back!" roared Bush Billy, raising his revolver. "Where are yer goin'?"

"To Macpherson's station," said Nelson Lee.

Bush Billy reflected. Macpherson's was the nearest station, and was eight or nine miles away. The detective was on foot. It was impossible for him to reach the station and return with help before they had completed their work.

"All right, yer can go!" he said.

Once more the detective turned away, and

a moment later he had crossed the bridge and had vanished into the wood.

The work of plundering the rest of the passengers was then proceeded with. As each man alighted from the coach he was taken in hand by two of the bushrangers, who first disarmed him, and then rifled his pockets. A third member of the gang received the booty, and stored it away in a capacious sack, whilst the rest overhauled the parcels in the coach.

It was not until the last passenger had been robbed and the last parcel had been broken open that Bush Billy remembered Mark Rymer.

They hurried into the wood, loosed the professor's bonds and removed the gag from his mouth.

"Sorry to 'ave kept yer waitin' so long, mister!" said Bush Billy, with a grin. "But we've been too busy to attend to yer before. 'Owever, we shan't detain yer very much longer now. 'And over all you've got, and be as quick as yer can, for the coach is just about ready to start, and you'll be wantin' to go with it, I expect."

"That was my intention," said Mark Rymer, as he handed over his purse and his watch and chain. "But I've changed my mind."

"Then where are yer goin'?" asked Bush Billy.

"That remains to be seen," replied the professor. "It all depends upon whether you and I can come to terms."

"Terms?" said Bush Billy, with a puzzled air.

The professor nodded his head.

"I have a proposal to make to you," he said—"a proposal that will put five hundred pounds in your pocket. But we won't discuss the matter now. You haven't told any of those fellows on the coach that I am here, I hope?"

"No," said Bush Billy; "I'd forgotten yer till this minute."

"All the better!" said Mark Rymer. "Send them away, and then I'll tell you what my proposal is."

More mystified than ever, Bush Billy returned to the road.

"Finished?" he asked, addressing one of his men.

"Yes," said the man, pointing to a couple of well-filled sacks. "The best haul we've had for many a year."

Bush Billy turned to the passengers, who were huddled together at the end of the bridge.

"Take yer seats, my worthy gents," he said, waving his hand towards the coach. "A pleasant journey, and better luck next time!"

The passengers scrambled back into the coach, taking the dead body of the trooper with them. The driver mounted the box, the bushrangers raised an ironical cheer, the horses dashed away, and in five minutes time the coach was out of sight.

BUSH BILLY DICTATES TERMS.

"NOW, mister, we 'aven't too much time to spare," said Bush Billy, returning to Mark Rymer. "Wot's this 'ere proposal of yours?"

The professor answered the question with another.

"You remember the man who was sitting on the box-seat of the coach, on the right-hand side of the driver?"

"The chap wot said he was goin' to Macpherson's station?"

"Yes. Do you know who he was?"

Bush Billy shook his head.

"He was Nelson Lee."

"The English detective?"

"Yes. He and I are deadly enemies. To be perfectly frank with you, he's trying to find the missing heir to a fortune of over a hundred thousand pounds a year. If he fails to find the heir the fortune comes to me. If he finds him, it goes to the heir."

"The heir is now in New Zealand," continued the professor. "If I can get to New Zealand first, before Nelson Lee, the fortune is as good as mine."

"I see," said Bush Billy. "You're a man after my own 'eart. You'll go to New Zealand, find the heir, and quietly wipe 'im out of existence?"

"You have described my intentions to a T," said the professor. "In the meantime, you will readily understand that it would be a very great relief to me to know that Nelson Lee was out of the way, and incapable of giving me any further trouble. To put the matter in a nutshell, I want to stop him going to New Zealand. He is now on his way to Macpherson's station. He is on foot, and unarmed. You are mounted, and armed. You can easily overtake him before he reaches Macpherson's. If you'll follow him and put a bullet through his head, I'll give you five hundred pounds."

"Rats!" said Bush Billy. "'Ow are yer goin' to give us five hundred quid, when we've just cleared you out of all you've got?"

The professor shrugged his shoulders.

"It's quite true that you've taken all my cash in hand," he said, "but I've plenty more in the Commercial Bank of Sydney, which has a branch at Nymagee, I believe. When you've shot Nelson Lee, one of your men can accompany me to Nymagee, where I'll write out a cheque of five hundred pounds, cash it at the bank, and give the man the money to bring to you."

Bush Billy laughed scornfully.

"Wot d'yer take me for?" he asked. "Think yer can fool me with a dodge like that—eh?"

"I don't understand you," said the professor loftily.

"Oh, don't yer?" snorted the bushranger. "Well then, I'll speak plainer. Supposin' as we did shoot this 'ere Nelson Lee, wot's to stop yer breakin' yer contrack? Why, yer could snap yer fingers at us, and, as like as not, yer'd give my man inter custody

the moment yer got to Nymagee with him!"

The professor bit his lip. As a matter of fact, he had, for once in a way, intended to "play fair"; but he plainly saw that it would be impossible to persuade the bush-ranger to take his word for that.

"I'll tell yer wot we'll do, if yer like," went on Bush Billy, after a moment's pause. "We'll ride after Nelson Lee and capture him. But we won't shoot him—not yet awhile. We'll jist fetch him back to Barnby Coppice, and then one of my men shall go with yer to Nymagee to git the money. The rest of us 'ull wait for yer till five o'clock this afternoon. So if yer git the money to-day, yer can come back 'ere with my man, and, if yer like, yer can then shoot Nelson Lee yourself, so's to be sure as the job's well done. 'Ow's that strike yer?"

"But supposing I can't get the money until to-morrow morning?" asked the professor.

"Why, then, yer'll jist 'ave to pervide my man wi' board and lodgin's at Nymagee, at the same 'otel yer stays at yerself. Then to-morrow yer'll both 'ave to foller us to our snug little 'ome in the mountains."

"I see," said Mark Rymer slowly. "You mean that your man will conduct me to your secret retreat?"

"That's my meanin' exac'ly!" replied Bush Billy. "Nelson Lee will be there waitin' for yer, and as soon as yer've forked out the five hundred pounds, yer'll be free to put a bullet through his 'ead, and go off to Noo Zealand in search o' the missin' heir. Will that suit yer?"

"Excellent!" replied Mark Rymer.

"Good! Then away we go after Nelson Lee!"

So saying, Bush Billy untethered his horse, and vaulted into the saddle. His accomplices followed suit, and a few moments later the whole gang of fourteen, with Professor Mark Rymer in their midst, were in hot pursuit of the lone and unarmed detective.

THE SQUATTER'S DISQUIETING NEWS.

IT was a quarter to nine when Nelson Lee, with light pockets and a heavy heart, set out to walk to Macpherson's station after the "hold-up" of the coach at Barnby Coppice.

For over an hour he trudged along amid perfect solitude and silence; then all at once the sound of a horse's hoofs fell on his ears, and a moment later a typical Australian squatter, mounted on a sturdy-looking chestnut, cantered round a turn in the bridle-path about twenty yards ahead.

"Am I right for Macpherson's station?" shouted Nelson Lee.

"Yes," replied the squatter, pulling up and regarding him with a somewhat curious expression. "You've only to follow this stream for another five or six miles, and it'll lead you straight to the house."

"Do you know Mr. Macpherson?" queried the detective.

"Slightly!" said the squatter, with a peculiar smile.

"Do you happen to know if he's at home?"

"No, he isn't."

An expression of annoyance crossed the detective's face.

"Is it any use asking if you know where he is?" he inquired.

"Yes," said the squatter. "He's here!"

"Here!" The detective's face grew radiant again. "Are you Mr. Macpherson?"

"I am," said the squatter. "And you?"

"My name is Nelson Lee."

"The great detective?"

"The detective, without the 'great'!"

Macpherson sprang from his horse and wrung the detective warmly by the hand.

"I'm proud to make your acquaintance, Mr. Lee," he said. "Did I understand you to say that you were going to my house?"

"Yes; I hope I am not too late."

"Too late for what?"

"To save Dick Seymour."

Macpherson started.

"What! Are you hunting for Dick Seymour, too?" he said. "But what do you mean by asking if you're too late to save him?"

"Professor Rymer arrived at your house last night," said Nelson Lee.

"Not to my knowledge!" replied Macpherson. "The only visitor I had last night was a man named Shaw, who is one of Dudley Sinclair's agents. You know Dudley Sinclair, the Sydney detective, of course?"

"Very well, indeed," said Nelson Lee; "but the man who was at your house last night was no more an agent of Sinclair's than you are! What was he like?"

Macpherson described the man. The description, of course, was that of the professor.

"And he told you his name was Shaw, did he?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Yes; he said that Sinclair had sent him to ask me to allow him to take Dick Seymour back to Sydney with him."

"That was another lie! The man who came to your house last night was Professor Mark Rymer, and he came to your house for the sole purpose of luring Dick Seymour into his clutches and murdering him!"

"Then he came on a fool's errand!" said Macpherson. "Dick left my place three years ago, and when last I heard of him he was junior partner in a frozen-meat concern in Napier, New Zealand."

Briefly the detective told Macpherson of Lord Easington's secret marriage, of the hunt for the Silver Dwarf, of the discovery that Dick Seymour was Lord Easington's son, and of the race between himself and the professor to find the missing heir. Following this, he described how Mark Rymer had fired the bush in Dingo Gulch, how, he—Nelson Lee—had fought his way through to Nymagee, how he had caught the Eauabalong coach, and how the coach had been "stuck up" by Bush Billy's gang in Barnby Coppice.

"Then surely you must have seen Professor Rymer," said Macpherson, when the detective had finished his tale.

"When?"

"This morning, at Barnby Coppice."

The detective shook his head.

"I've never set eyes on Mark Rymer since yesterday afternoon," he said. "Where is he now?"

"That's just what I'm wondering myself," replied Macpherson. "He arrived at my house about sunset last night, and spun me that yarn about Sinclair having sent him to fetch Dick Seymour back to Sydney. He seemed awfully put out when I told him that Dick had gone to New Zealand; but the only thing he said was that he must return to Sydney at once, and cross to New Zealand as quickly as possible."

"He stayed at my house all night, and at a quarter to seven this morning he mounted his horse and started for Barnby Coppice with the intention of joining the coach and proceeding to Eauabalong. Before he left he sold me his horse for twenty pounds, the arrangement being that he should tether the beast to the bridge and leave him there, and I would send one of my men for him later in the day. After he had gone, however, I found that it wouldn't be convenient to send one of the men, so I decided to go for the horse myself, and I was on my way to Barnby Coppice when I met you."

"Now, as Mark Rymer left my house at a quarter to seven, he ought to have been at Barnby Coppice in plenty of time to catch the coach. Then why didn't you see him? Had the bushrangers shot him and robbed him, and collared the horse before the coach arrived? Or did he see them lying in wait for the coach and sheer off towards Eauabalong before they noticed him?"

"It is impossible to say," said Nelson Lee. "All I know is that there was no Mark Rymer waiting for the coach, and no horse tethered to the bridge. He may have been murdered, as you suggest, or he may have given the bushrangers the slip, and joined the coach a few miles farther along the road. In either case my duty is clear; I must take no risks. I must act as though it were absolutely certain that Mark Rymer was now on his way to Sydney. In other words, I must lose no time in returning to Sydney myself."

"Then you'll have to follow the coach to Eauabalong," said Macpherson. "The bush-fire is still raging on the north side of the mountains, and it will be several days before anybody will be able to get through to Nyngan."

"That isn't the only difficulty," said Nelson Lee. "Before I can follow the coach to Eauabalong I must have a horse and some money, for those confounded bush-whackers have cleared me out of every penny I possessed."

"There need be no difficulty about that," said Macpherson promptly. "If you'll come with me to my house I'll provide you with a

fresh horse and as much money as will see you through to Sydney. You can sell the horse at Eauabalong, and send me the money, together with what I lend you, whenever it suits your convenience. Now, no thanks, if you please. Not another word. I've helped Mark Rymer—unwittingly and innocently—and now I'm going to make amends by helping you."

He wheeled his horse round, and sprang into the saddle.

"Jump up behind!" he said, holding out his hand to assist the detective to mount. "It won't be the first time by any means that old Roger has carried a double load."

The detective obeyed, and a moment later they were cantering back towards Macpherson's station. On the way the squatter repeated to Nelson Lee the information he had previously given to Mark Rymer—that is to say, he told the detective that Dick Seymour had left his employment three years before; that he had emigrated to Napier, in New Zealand, and had invested his savings in a small frozen-meat concern; and that he had written to Macpherson some months later informing him that his partner had absconded, and had left him with a bankrupt business on his hands.

"Then he may not be in Napier now?" said Nelson Lee.

"Possibly not."

"Do you remember the name of the frozen-meat concern which he was running?"

"I don't. But I'll tell you what I've remembered since Mark Rymer left. In the first letter which he wrote to me Dick mentioned the name of a certain Dr. Irving, who is one of the surgeons at the Napier Hospital. He said that he and the doctor had struck up a tremendous friendship, and that he spent nearly all his spare time in the doctor's company. In his second letter—the only other letter I received from him—he referred to the doctor again, and said how awfully kind he had been in advancing him money, and all that sort of thing. It seems to me, therefore, that if anybody will be able to tell you where Dick is, and what he is doing, it will be Dr. Irving; so that if I were you the first thing I should do when I got to Napier would be to call upon Dr. Irving."

"I will," said Nelson Lee. "Thanks very much for such a valuable hint."

"It is well that Rymer is without that information," said Macpherson. "But here we are! This is my house. Ahoy!"

In answer to his summons a lanky, red-headed youth appeared.

"Take this horse round to the stables," said Macpherson, when he and the detective had dismounted. "Saddle Charlie, and bring him round to the front door in half an hour."

The lad led the horse away, and the two men entered the house, where Macpherson ushered his companion into a cosily-furnished sitting-room.

"Now, just sit down and make yourself at home whilst I run upstairs and fetch

the money," he said, waving the detective towards the couch. "How much do you think you'd better have?"

Before the detective had time to reply Macpherson suddenly uttered an exclamation of alarm and sprang to the window. He had just caught sight of a couple of his stockmen, who were racing towards the house at breakneck speed.

"Something's amiss!" he gasped. He threw up the window and thrust out his head. "What is it?" he cried, when the two men came within hail.

"Yes, sir—me and Jim. We crawled on our hands and knees to where the beggars were palavering, and as soon as we found that they were making plans for attacking this station, we crept away and rushed off here to— Look, there they are!"

It was only too true.

About a couple of miles away, yet clearly visible in the dazzling sunlight with which the downs were flooded, and a troop of fifteen horsemen, who were advancing towards Macpherson's station at a brisk canter.



Scarcely had these preparations been completed ere the bushrangers came thundering across the narrow strip of lawn in front of the house. The moment they were in range a couple of rifle shots rang out, and two of the scoundrels bit the dust.

"Bush Billy's gang!" was the panting reply.

"Where?" gasped Macpherson, turning pale.

"They were half-way between here and Barnby Coppice when we spotted 'em," said one of the stockmen, mopping his brow. They'd off-saddled, and were jawing to that fellow who was here last night."

"Did he appear to be a prisoner in the bushrangers' hands?"

"Lord bless you, no, sir! He was jawing away to Bush Billy as free and easy as if he was a regular member of the gang!"

"You heard him, then?"

THE RAID ON MACPHERSON'S STATION.

DO any of you fellows know what time it was when Nelson Lee set off?" asked Bush Billy, as he and his followers, together with Mark Rymer, rode out of Barnby Coppice.

"Yes," said one of the gang; "I 'appened to look at his ticker, when I pulled it out of his pocket, and it was then twenty minutes to nine. It was about five minutes after that when he walked away."

"Then he's got about three-quarters of an hour's start of us," said Bush Billy. "Reckonin' that he's walkin' at the rate of four miles an hour, he'll be three miles ahead by now. It's nine miles, more or

less, from 'ere to Macpherson's. Nelson Lee's on foot, and we're on 'orseback. With decent luck we oughter catch 'im up about 'arf-way between 'ere and the station."

They rode on for the best part of three miles; then one of the gang pulled up with an explanation of surprise.

"Look 'ere, you chaps! Wot d'yer make of them?"—pointing to a number of impressions in the ground.

His companions dismounted and examined the tracks to which he had drawn attention.

As the reader has doubtless guessed, the bushrangers had arrived at the spot where Macpherson had met Nelson Lee, and the tracks were those of the squatter's horse. Long residence in the bush had taught Bush Billy's followers to read such signs as these as easily as an ordinary individual can read the printed signs in a book.

In less than a couple of minutes the whole story of the two men's meeting was as familiar to the bushrangers as though they had witnessed it.

They rode on quickly for a couple of miles, then Bush Billy called a halt.

He handed a pair of field-glasses to one of his men, and pointed to a lofty eucalyptus-tree growing by the side of the bridle-path.

"Shin up that tree, and see if you can see anything of 'em," he said.

The man dismounted, and swarmed up the tree. A moment or two later he slid to the ground, and handed the glasses back.

"Yes; there's two men on a chestnut about three miles ahead," he said. "One of 'em's Nelson Lee, and the other is Macpherson 'isself. They're 'eading straight for the 'ouse, which is only about a mile in front of 'em, so it's no use trying to catch them afore they get there."

"Then the deal is hoff, mister?" said Bush Billy, turning to Mark Rymer.

The professor stared at him in undisguised dismay.

"Surely you don't mean to say that you're going back on your bargain?" he gasped.

"That's not a fair way of puttin' it," said Bush Billy, in an injured voice. "When I accepted yer offer, it was understood that all we'd got to do was to ride after Nelson Lee and capture him. It was no part of the bargain that we should risk our lives by raiding a station in broad daylight."

The professor's face grew ashen-grey with mingled rage and disappointment. The rest of the rascally gang stared at their leader in open-mouthed amazement and chagrin. They could hardly believe their ears. Here were five hundred pounds to be earned simply by raiding a lonely, out-of-the-way farmhouse, and Bush Billy was refusing the job.

"Look 'ere, guv'nor," said one of them, sidling up to Bush Billy, and addressing

him in a low, expostulatory whisper, "wot are yer playin' at? Surely you're not goin' to chuck up the chance of five hundred quid just because——"

"Shut up, yer silly fool!" retorted Bush Billy, in the same low tone of voice. "I'm only kiddin' 'im! We're not goin' to chuck up nothing; only we might as well squeeze a bit more money out of 'im by pretendin' to funk the business!"

Mark Rymer, of course, heard nothing of this; but, nevertheless, it was not long before it began to dawn upon him that Bush Billy's reluctance to attack the station was only assumed for the purpose of inducing him to offer better terms. As soon as he had grasped this fact his spirits rose by leaps and bounds, and after a quarter of an hour's chaffering it was finally arranged that the five hundred pounds he had originally offered should be raised to seven hundred.

In other words, he was to give the fourteen members of the gang fifty pounds apiece, in return for which they were to raid Macpherson's station, capture Nelson Lee, carry him off to their mountain stronghold, and keep him there until the professor and one of their number rode over to Nymagee for the money.

When all this had been arranged, the bushrangers mounted their horses again, and rode off towards the station at an easy, swinging canter. When they came within sight of the house, at a distance of perhaps a couple of miles, Bush Billy raised his glasses to his eyes, and rapped out a furious oath.

"What's up?" cried a dozen voices.

"There's two stockmen talking to Macpherson through the sitting-room window, and pointin' in this direction," said Bush Billy. "The've spotted us, and given the alarm. We shall 'ave to gallop for all we're worth, or the beggars will have time to barricade the doors and winders! Come along!"

Suiting the action to the word, he drove his spurs into his horse's sides and dashed away. The rest of the gang, with the exception of Mark Rymer, followed his example.

In the meantime the inmates of the house—Nelson Lee, Macpherson, the two stockmen, and the red-haired stable-boy—were not idle. The boy was placed on the squatter's speediest horse and told to ride to Nymagee as fast as he could and give warning to the troopers. The front and back doors were locked and bolted, and barricaded with heavy chests of drawers. Sacks of flour and bales of wool were piled up inside two of the windows at the front of the house, and two at the back, and behind each of these barriers a man was stationed with a rifle and a revolver and an ample supply of cartridges.

Scarcely had these preparations been completed ere the bushrangers came thundering across the narrow strip of lawn in front

of the house. The moment they came within range a couple of rifle-shots rang out, and two of the scoundrels hit the dust.

Somewhat dismayed by this hot reception, the rest of the gang beat a hasty retreat, and held a council of war. As a result of their deliberations, they decided to try an attack in the rear; but, on finding that a similar reception awaited them there, they once more retired to cover.

Whilst they were conferring they were joined by Mark Rymer.

"If I might be so bold as to offer a word of advice," he said, when the situation had been explained to him, "I would suggest that you divide yourselves into three parties of four apiece. So far as we know, there are only four men in the house, and two of these are apparently defending the front, and two the back. But there is a window at the side of the house—the window of the bed-room in which I slept last night—and the probability is that it will be undefended. Now, if four of you keep blazing away at the front of the house, and four of you at the back, just to distract the attention of those inside, what's to prevent the other four creeping round to the side of the house and breaking in through the window I have described?"

The professor's plan was promptly put into execution. Four of the scoundrels, including Bush Billy, took cover in front of the house, and opened fire on the windows which were defended by Nelson Lee and Macpherson. Four others crept round to the back of the house, and blazed away at the windows where the stockmen were stationed. The remaining four crawled away on their hands and knees, with instructions to make a wide detour, and to fire a revolver as soon as they reached the window the professor had described.

For nearly ten minutes nothing was heard save the rifle-shots of the attackers and the answering shots of the defenders. Then suddenly, above the din, was heard the short, sharp crack of a revolver, followed an instant later by a perfect pandemonium of yells and shouts inside the house.

"They're in! Come along!" yelled Bush Bill, leaping to his feet.

Followed by his three companions, he dashed towards the house. A solitary rifle-shot rang out as he raced across the lawn, but the bullet merely grazed his cheek, and a moment later he had reached one of the windows, and was smashing both the glass and the woodwork into splinters with his axe.

By the time he had effected a breach the four men at the back of the house had joined their comrades at the front, and in less time almost than it takes to tell, the eight scoundrels crawled through the shattered window and rushed into the sitting-room, where Nelson Lee and Macpherson were engaged in a desperate hand-to-hand

struggle with the four men who had broken in through the bed-room window.

As afterwards appeared, the four men just mentioned had first attacked the stockmen, and had rendered them hors de combat by the simple process of shooting one of them through the head and clubbing the other into insensibility. They had then burst into the sitting-room, and had flung themselves upon Nelson Lee and the squatter, who, in spite of the heavy odds against them, had defended themselves with such desperate valour that if they had been left to themselves for a few minutes longer it is more than probable that they would have achieved a handsome victory.

Even after the arrival of Bush Billy and his seven accomplices, the two men still continued to show fight, planting themselves with their backs to the wall, and keeping their cowardly assailants at bay with no other weapons save their fists.

But the issue of the conflict was never really in doubt. A shot from Bush Billy's revolver pierced Macpherson's chest and stretched him at the detective's feet. A rush was then made at Nelson Lee, who was borne to the ground.

Whilst three of the scoundrels held him down, Bush Billy clubbed his revolver and dealt him a sledge-hammer blow between the eyes. A second and a third followed in quick succession; and then, with a stifled groan, the detective ceased to struggle, and lapsed into unconsciousness.

(This thrilling narrative continued next week!)

THIS WEEK'S PLUCK.

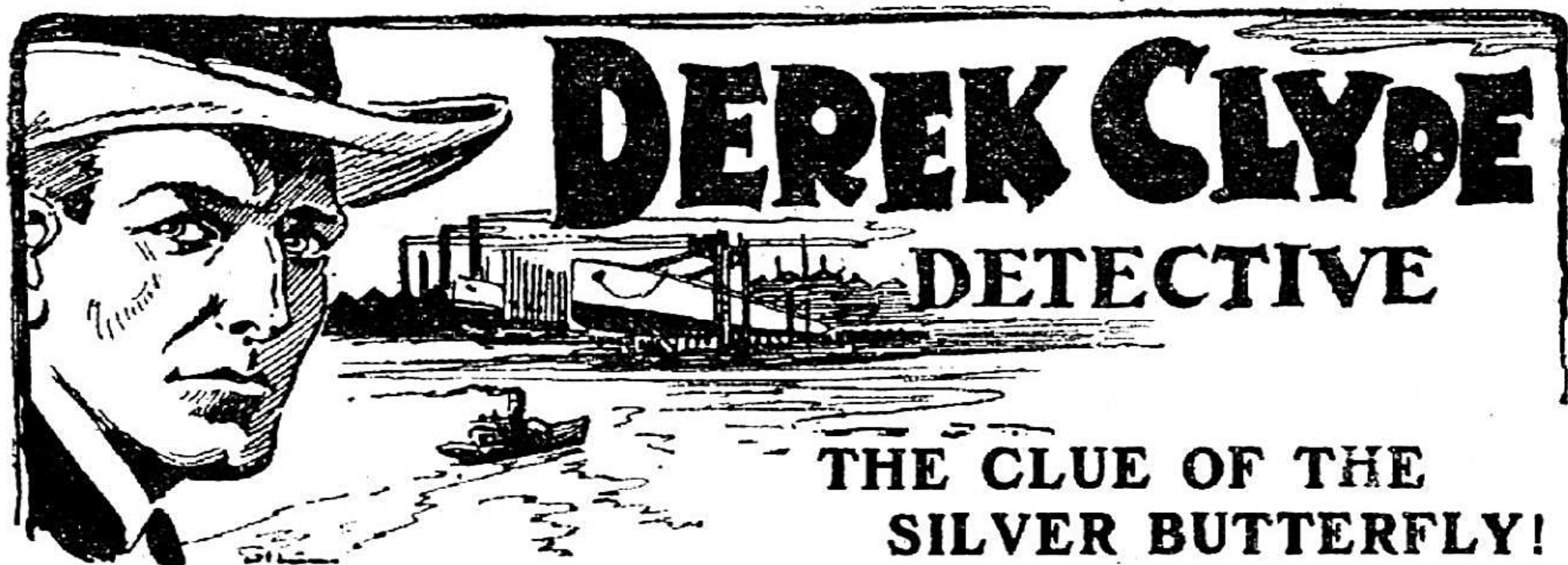
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OUT ON TUESDAY
TWOPENCE.

GRAND NEW COMPLETE TALES OF THE FAMOUS SCOTS DETECTIVE!

DEREK CLYDE had run down to Newcastle that morning on a matter of professional business, to make inquiries regarding a certain person for a client in Glasgow. And in the evening, his work for the day finished, he went to the Empire Theatre in Grey Street to see the performance of "Lohengrin" by the Rosalba Opera Company. He had a desire to hear Edgar Leigh, the celebrated young tenor whose fame had spread from London throughout the country.

A great many other people had the same desire, for the house was packed from top to bottom. But shortly after the detective had taken his seat in the stalls, and just before the time for the curtain to rise, Mr. Illingworth, the manager of the theatre, stepped to the front of the stage, and made a brief announcement.

"It is with much regret, ladies and gentlemen," he began, "that I have to tell you that Mr. Edgar Leigh is indisposed, and that it is doubtful if he will be able to appear to-night. His place will be filled, and I ask for your forbearance in these trying circumstances."

The manager withdrew, and there was a confused buzzing of voices. It was a keen disappointment to all. Some of the audience grumbled, and some rose and left, loudly vowing that they would have their money back. But the most of them, Clyde included, accepted the situation without complaint.

Edgar Leigh had not been heard in Newcastle, and his absence did not detract from the enjoyment of the opera, except to those who had heard him elsewhere. The singer who took his part did very well, on the whole, though he had not the famous tenor's voice.

There was hearty applause when the curtain fell on the first act, and during the interval a page-boy came to the detective and told him that Mr. Illingworth would like to speak to him in private. Guessing that something was wrong, Clyde followed the youth, who con-

ducted him behind the wings, and into a comfortably-furnished dressing-room. Mr. Illingworth was waiting here, pacing to and fro in obvious agitation.

"It is very good of you, Mr. Clyde," he said, as he shut the door on the boy. "I saw you at the front, and I felt that you would be interested in what has occurred, and that you might be inclined to give your assistance should the affair take a more sensational turn. There is the deuce to pay."

"It would seem that there has been some trouble," Clyde remarked, pointing to a chair that had been upset, and to a short riding-whip that was lying on the floor. "This is Mr. Edgar Leigh's room, I suppose."

"Yes, it is," the manager assented.

"And has Mr. Leigh been in the habit of using that whip in Lohengrin?"

"That whip has been used on Mr. Leigh, sir. Or at least an attempt has been made to use it."

"So the gentleman has been assaulted. What has become of him?"

"He has disappeared, Mr. Clyde. He has been gone for considerably more than an hour, and I don't know what to make of it. The facts are mysterious."

Clyde seated himself on a couch, and listened to Mr. Illingworth, who told the story briefly and clearly.

"It was about half-past seven o'clock," he said, "when a well-dressed gentleman came to the stage entrance, and told Halkett, the doorkeeper, that he must have a few words at once with Mr. Edgar Leigh. His face was in shadow. A soft hat was pulled over his brow, and his chin was muffled in the collar of his overcoat."

"Halkett had only a dim glimpse of his features, and he doesn't know whether he was a stranger to him or not. He refused at first, but he yielded to the request, as he has admitted, when a ten-shilling note was slipped into his hand. The gentleman ascended the stairs, walked into Mr. Leigh's room, and shut the door."

"Persons in an adjoining dressing-room

heard angry voices, the crack of a whip, and the sounds of a blow and a fall. Nobody interfered. Word was sent to me, and when I got here the fracas was over, and the gentleman was gone.

"He had closed the door of the room behind him, and as I opened it Edgar Leigh rushed out. He was white with anger. 'I can't stop to talk!' he exclaimed. 'I must go after that scoundrel, Mr. Illingworth, and I'm not coming back! They will have to fill my place!'"

"I tried to stop him, but he brushed by me, and sped down the stairs. I hastened after him, and by the time I had reached the stage entrance he was running along the street. I followed for a short distance, lost sight of him in the darkness, and returned.

"I first had a talk with Halkett. He was the only person who had seen the gentleman, and he could not give any clear description of him. I then came up, and questioned the staff and the members of the opera company, in the hope that some of them would be able to throw some light on the affair. Not one of them, however, could tell me anything that would account for what has happened. Those are the facts, Mr. Clyde. What do you think of them?"

"Well, we'll let it rest at that for the present," Clyde replied. "If Mr. Leigh is still missing in the morning, and the police haven't made any discoveries, I may be inclined to investigate the case. And now I'll go back to my seat, Illingworth," he added. "I shall be in time for the last act of the opera."

THE POLICEMAN'S STORY.

MR. LEIGH had not come back, and nothing had been heard from him, when Clyde left the theatre that night. He found no mention of the affair in the papers the next morning, and he dismissed it from his mind. The work that had brought him to Newcastle was finished by noon, and after he had had luncheon at his hotel vague curiosity took him to the Central Police Station. Inspector Raymond gave him a hearty greeting.

"I'm glad to see you, Clyde," he said. "I have just been talking to Mr. Illingworth on the 'phone. Edgar Leigh is still missing. He has not been to the theatre, and he did not return last night to the Royal Hotel, where he was staying. Illingworth tells me that you are interested in the matter, and it will be a relief to me if you will take it off my hands."

"I daresay it will be," Clyde remarked with a smile. "You have no clue, and you want me to find one."

"No, I can give you a lead," the inspector replied. "I have a clue for you."

"You have learned something about Edgar Leigh, then?"

"I think I have, from the circumstances. You shall judge for yourself. It comes

from one of our men, Brymer by name, who was on duty in the north-western part of the city last night. He was relieved at six o'clock this morning, and went home to bed. He reported here for duty again half an hour ago, and when I had spoken of the Leigh affair to him he informed me that —"

Inspector Raymond paused, and rose from his desk. "I'll have the man in," he added, "and you shall hear his story from his own lips."

He left the room, and returned with Constable Brymer, who repeated to Clyde the statements he had made to the inspector. It was a queer story that he told.

"It was between eight and nine o'clock last night, sir," he began. "I was walking up Rostrevor Road, towards Jesmond Dene, when a cab passed me. It ran on to the corner of the Denmark Road, a hundred yards and more beyond me, and stopped there close to a lamp-post.

"At the same moment I observed a motor-car, with two persons in it, approaching from the opposite direction. A gentleman got out of the cab and paid the chauffeur, who swung into the side street and drove away. By then the gentleman had darted in front of the car and stopped it. Another gentleman jumped from it, and the two at once rushed at each other and engaged in a struggle.

"A woman who was in the car screamed, and the fight was over in less time than it takes to tell—before I had got near the spot. One of the gentlemen received a blow that knocked him down. The other gentleman called to the woman, who got out and hurried to him. And the two of them quickly picked up the fallen man, thrust him into the car, turned it round, and drove off as fast as they could in the direction from which they had come.

"They had disappeared by the time I reached the scene of the struggle, and there I found, lying in the road, a large silver buckle which the lady must have dropped. That's all I can tell you, Mr. Clyde.

There was no more information to be had from the constable. He left the room at a gesture from Inspector Raymond, who took from a drawer of his desk the buckle that had been found, and handed it to the detective.

"Here you are," he said.

It was such a buckle as ladies wear on their belts, and was in the shape of a butterfly. It must have cost two or three pounds, for it was of sterling silver and artistic workmanship.

"Can I keep this?" Clyde inquired, when he had examined it closely.

"Certainly," the inspector assented. "Perhaps you will be able to find the owner."

"There's a good chance of it. This is an uncommon and expensive buckle, and there may not be any others like it in Newcastle."

"And what of the constable's story, Clyde? What he saw is of course connected with the disappearance of Edgar Leigh."

"There can be little or no doubt of that, considering the time at which the affair happened. Have you any theory, Raymond?"

"No, I haven't. The facts related to me by Mr. Illingworth, and Brymer's statements, have tied my brain in a knot. What of the letters that were delivered last evening to the singer, who was a stranger to Newcastle, and had arrived only on the previous day? And why did he tell Illingworth that he was not coming back? No, I am utterly baffled. All I can suggest is that Leigh was one of the two gentleman who fought."

"Which one, Raymond?"

"The one in the cab, I should say."

"That may be. But I am more inclined to think that he was the man who was in the car with the lady."

"I don't see it," said the inspector. "Edgar Leigh rushed after the gentleman who had assaulted him in the theatre, and he didn't have a car. So it is to be presumed that if he was one of those two men he was the one in the cab. What has led you to your conclusion?"

"I hardly know," Clyde replied. "It is more a guess than a deduction, though it is partly the latter. To be candid, I am nearly as much at a loss for an explanation of the mystery as you are. But I will get to the bottom of it. I shall stay in the city and work on the case, and meanwhile you might find that cabman. I doubt if you will get any information from him, though."

"Why not, Clyde?"

"Because I imagine that he has been paid to hold his tongue. But that also is a guess, Raymond."

Clyde stepped to the door as he spoke. It swung shut behind him, and Inspector Raymond, leaning back in his chair, shook his head in perplexity, and remarked to himself that if anybody could see through a millstone it was the Glasgow detective.

THE MISSING MAN.

IT was on a Monday night that the famous tenor disappeared, and for three days Clyde patiently pursued his inquiries in Newcastle, finding his task to be more difficult than he had expected, yet picking up slender threads that led him gradually to stronger ones. In the meantime nothing had been heard of Edgar Leigh, and the police, having questioned all of the licensed cabmen in the city, had failed to find the one who had driven a fare to the corner of Rostrevor Road and Denmark Road on the Monday night.

It was on the Thursday that Clyde's efforts were crowned with success, when he learned to a certainty to whom the silver buckle belonged from a resident of the

Jesmond Dene district. From the same person he obtained other information of interest and value, and at the close of the afternoon he went to a large building in the heart of the city that was known as Manor Chambers, and spoke to a porter who was on duty in the doorway.

"Mr. Frank Morgan has a flat here, I think," he said.

"Yes, sir," the hall-porter assented, in a tone of indifference. "But he isn't here now, if you want to see him."

"I am very anxious to see him," said Clyde. "Can you tell me when he will be back?"

"I haven't any idea, sir. Mr. Morgan is in London."

"Indeed? When did he go?"

"It was on Monday night, sir."

"I hardly think that he meant to go. Wasn't his departure unexpected?"

"It might have been, sir. He wouldn't have told me anything about it. All I know is that I had a message from him over the telephone, saying that—"

The porter broke off abruptly. "I've seen you before, sir," he said, in an altered tone of voice. "It was in Glasgow. You're Mr. Derek Clyde."

"Yes, that's right," Clyde admitted.

"And what's wrong, sir? Why do you want to see Mr. Morgan?"

"I have no particular reason for wishing to see him. I merely wanted to know if he was here."

"Well, Mr. Clyde, since it's you I'm speaking to, I'll tell you something that has been puzzling me. It was about half-past nine o'clock on Monday night that Mr. Frank Morgan rang me up on the telephone, and said that he had to go to London on urgent business, that he was leaving by a late train, and that he might be absent for some few days. But I doubted if it was Mr. Morgan who was speaking to me. I've often talked to him on the telephone before, and this time it didn't sound a bit like his voice."

Clyde did not appear to be surprised. He was not, as a matter of fact. He had expected to learn something of the kind, and he had called here to see if he could get confirmation of his theory.

"Did Mr. Morgan also say to you that if anybody inquired for him you should tell them where he was?" he asked.

"He did say that, sir," the porter replied.

"You don't know where it was he rang you up from, I suppose?"

"No, sir, I don't know."

A couple of coins were slipped into the porter's hand, and Clyde departed.

He hailed a cab, and was driven in the dusk of the evening to Sydenham Lodge, a large detached dwelling at Jesmond Dene that was the residence of a wealthy gentleman.

Having dismissed the cab, the detective walked up a gravelled drive to the house, and rang the bell. The butler, a man

named Wilkinson, opened the door, and regarded the visitor with an uneasy expression.

"Is Mr. Camborne at home?" Clyde inquired.

"No, sir, he is in Edinburgh on business," the servant answered, his face showing relief as he spoke. "But you will find him here if you will call back later, in an hour or so. He will be back at about eight o'clock this evening. I had a wire from him this afternoon."

"Can I see Miss Betty Camborne?" Clyde continued.

Clyde stood here for a little time. The small door was locked, and he was about to attempt to force it open when he heard footsteps approaching. He whipped behind a tree, and peered towards the house.

From that direction appeared in the gloom the dusky figure of a man who was walking stealthily and quietly. It was Wilkinson, the butler, and he was carrying a laden tray that was covered with a napkin. He came slowly on by a gravelled path, and he had nearly reached the garage when the detective stepped suddenly out in front of him.



A woman in the car screamed, and the fight was over in less time than it takes to tell. One of the gentlemen received a blow that knocked him down.

"She isn't at home either, sir. She has gone to London to visit her married brother."

"When did she go?"

"On—on last Monday night, sir."

"When do you expect her to return?"

"She will be back this evening, too, sir. At nine or ten o'clock."

"Very well. I will probably call later."

"If you will leave your card, sir—"

"It doesn't matter about that. I haven't a card with me."

The butler shut the door, and Clyde walked briskly down the drive to the gate. But he did not go any farther. He slipped into the garden, amongst the trees.

"Hold your tongue," he bade. "Don't raise an alarm!"

Wilkinson uttered a startled gasp, and shook like a leaf. He let go of the tray, and it dropped with a muffled clatter on to the grass, scattering its contents in every direction. Clyde grasped the frightened, trembling butler by the arm, and, drawing him to a rustic bench that was near-by, he forced him down on it.

"Now for an explanation, my fine fellow," he said in a low voice. "To whom were you taking that tray of food? Calm yourself, and tell me all about the disappearance of Mr. Edgar Leigh. No lies, or it will be the worse for you."

THE GIRL IN THE CASE.

BETWEEN nine and ten o'clock that night a motor-car rolled through the gateway of Sydenham Lodge, and up the gravelled drive. There got out of it a very pretty girl who wore a travelling cloak, and a tall, handsome young man with a fair moustache.

The butler opened the door, and the girl at once rushed by him, and went straight to the library, followed by her companion. Mr. Hugh Camborne was standing by the fireplace, his features cold and grave.

"Well, Betty, here you are at last," he said. "What does your long absence mean? Who is this person you have brought into my house?"

"He is Mr. Edgar Leigh, of the Rosalba Opera Company," the girl tremulously replied, "and—and he is my husband."

"Your husband, Betty? You have dared to——?"

"Yes, I am married. Don't be angry, father. Oh, please don't! I never liked Frank Morgan. You compelled me to be engaged to him. I met Mr. Leigh in London, a couple of months ago, when I was visiting my brother, and we fell in love with each other. He wouldn't marry me when I told him that I was engaged to somebody else, but I was determined that he should. When he arrived in Newcastle with the company on Sunday he sent me a note. On Monday I had luncheon with him at a restaurant, and that afternoon, after you told me that you had to go to Edinburgh that night on business, I wrote to Edgar saying that I was coming to the theatre, and that afterwards we would go to London and be married by special licence——"

The girl stopped abruptly as a curtain that screened an alcove was drawn aside, and a man who was a stranger to her stepped out from behind it.

"Who is this, father?" she gasped.

"He is Mr. Derek Clyde, the Glasgow detective," Mr. Camborne answered. "He has been here for half-an-hour, talking to me of what had occurred. He knows all."

There was a breathless hush. The young wife clung in agitation to her husband's arm, white to the lips. He did not flinch, though the colour had ebbed from his cheeks.

"I am quite willing to tell you everything," he said, after a brief pause. "I have a clear conscience as far as Mr. Morgan is concerned, and in other respects as well. At about seven o'clock on the Monday evening I had a visit from Mr. Morgan in my dressing-room.

"Having informed me who he was, he said that he had seen Betty with me at luncheon at the restaurant, and angrily forbade me to have anything more to do with her. He tried to strike me with a whip he had with him, and when I had wrenched it from him he dealt me a blow that stretched me on the floor.

"I hastened downstairs and ran after

him, but lost sight of him in the darkness. Then, still resolved to go London with Betty, I rode on a tram to Jesmond Dene, and walked a short distance to Sydenham Lodge. Betty was just coming out of the gate in her car. I got in with her, and we had driven as far as the Denmark Road when we met Mr. Morgan in a cab. He jumped out and stopped us, after sending his cab off.

"He was in a furious rage. He at once attacked me, and after a brief struggle I gave him a blow that knocked him down and stunned him. We were greatly alarmed. We were afraid that by some means Morgan would contrive to prevent us from being married.

"We picked the man up, placed him in the car, and drove back to Sydenham Lodge. We had a talk with Wilkinson, the butler, who helped us to carry Frank Morgan to the bedchamber over the garage, and promised to keep him a prisoner until we returned. Betty and I then drove into the city.

"At her suggestion, so that Frank Morgan's disappearance should not rouse any suspicions, I telephoned in his name to the porter of the block of flats where he lived, stating that he had been called out of town on urgent business. We then went on to a railway station ten miles distant, where we left the car and travelled up to London. We were married there yesterday, and to-day we returned to Newcastle by train and car."

"Wilkinson has released your prisoner, Mr. Leigh," Clyde interrupted, as rapid footsteps were heard in the hall. "I instructed him to do so."

The door was flung open, and a dishevelled and flushed young man of thirty, with dark hair and clean-shaven features, burst into the library.

"Ah, here you are, both of you!" he cried, shaking his fist. "I have most outrageously treated, Mr. Camborne! I have been shut up in your garage, kept a prisoner there by your rascally butler, at the instigation of your daughter and this scoundrel! I'll be even with you, Leigh! I'll put you in prison for——"

"That will do," Edgar Leigh broke in. "I am not afraid of your threats. As for Betty, she is my wife.

"I have documents here relating to your past life, which I will read out if you wish, showing what a scoundrel you are."

Frank Morgan was dumb. He bit his lip, and his eyes flashed venomously. He hesitated for a second or two, and then, with a muttered oath, he slunk from the room like a whipped hound.

Clyde shrugged his shoulders and smiled. The finish of the little drama was a surprise to him. Mr. Camborne slipped his arm around his daughter's waist, and clasped Edgar Leigh's hand.

(Another Thrilling Derek Clyde Story Next Week.)

(Continued from page 14)

They hardly noticed Buster Boots until they were practically upon him. Then they found that he was standing right in their path.

"Hallo!" said Page, staring. "What's the idea?"

Buster pointed into Study Q.

"See those dirty things on the table?" he asked.

"Of course I see them!" said Page. "What about 'em?"

"You two fellows are going there, and you're going to wash up," said John Busterfield Boots. "Tidy up the study generally, and make everything shipshape. Do it well, and——"

"You—you hopeless ass!" interrupted Page hotly. "Do you think we're going to do your filthy work?"

"I think you're going to wash up!" said Boots. "And it will be far better if you do it quietly, and without objections. It'll certainly be far less painful. Now, then—inside!"

He pointed curtly, and Page and Harron went red with wrath.

"You mad lunatic!" shouted Page. "Some of the other chaps have been saying that you've been ordering 'em about. But you're not going to start any of those tricks with us! Clear out of the way, you new bounder!"

"While you're safe!" added Harron.

John Busterfield Boots sighed.

"It's a great pity," he said regretfully.

He reached out with both his arms. Before Page and Harron could dodge they were seized in a vice-like grip. There was something about Buster's grip that was almost superhuman. He didn't look so very big or burly, but he was as powerful as a giant.

Howling, Page and Harron were sent lurching into the study. Buster Boots kicked the door to, and then deliberately banged the heads of Page and Harron together. The crack was loud and distinct as the two heads met.

"Yow-ooooop!" howled Page.

"Yaroooh!" yelled Harron.

"Will you wash up?" demanded Boots grimly.

"No!" they hooted.

Crack, crack, crack!

Three times Buster Boots knocked the heads of the two juniors together. They struggled in vain. And Boots did it all with an air of calm indifference, as though he were thoroughly bored.

"Yow! Bully!" panted Page. "You—you awful cad! You bullying beast!"

"Going to wash up?" inquired Buster Boots serenely.

"No!" panted the two, in desperation.

"All right—I'll change my methods," said Buster. "I'll kick you round the study until you give in. You've got to learn, once and for all, that I'm master."

"Master!" breathed Page faintly.

"Yes—master!"

Buster had planted his foot forcibly on the seat of Page's trousers, and Page nearly ascended a yard into the air. Harron was treated in the same way. They fairly flew at their tormentor. But this was worse than anything, for he floored the pair with two direct drives—a swift right and a lightning left. They collapsed weakly, dazed.

"Apparently you're no good!" said Boots disdainfully. "But in time I shall probably knock some sense into you."

He languidly opened the door, and then hurled Page and Harron outside. He sent them whirling out with great force. This was his favourite method of getting rid of unwelcome visitors.

Christine & Co., coming down the passage, were just in time to see the unfortunate Page and Harron shoot out. They landed in a moaning heap, and the door of Study Q quietly closed.

Bob Christine rubbed his eyes.

"My only hat!" he muttered. "This new chap's a living terror!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE INDIGNATION MEETING.



REGGIE PITT grinned.

"It seems that the Monks are having a bit of trouble with those new chaps," he said.

"Particularly with John Busterfield Boots. What a mouthful! And what a head of red hair!"

"He didn't strike me as being a bad sort," remarked Jack Grey. "Rather a decent-looking fellow, in fact. But you can't always tell. I heard from some of the Monks that Boots is a cad and a bully."

"Who's he been bullying?" asked Reggie.

"Why, lots of the chaps——"

"In the Remove?"

"Yes."

"Well, they ought to be boiled for letting him!" said Reggie. "I heard something like that myself, but it seemed too mad to be believed. Why, Boots isn't any bigger than Christine or Clapson, or most of the others. They ought to be jolly well ashamed of themselves!"

"But, my dear ass, you don't know what he's like!" said Grey. "I've heard that he's got a punch like a giddy steam-hammer. He can simply do as he likes! And he's got the nerve of a hundred!"

"If he was on this side, we'd deal with him drastically," said Reggie. "And unless Christine puts his foot down soon, these new fellows will cause a lot of trouble. New kids ought to be squashed at the beginning."

It was easy enough for the Ancient House fellows to criticise their unfortunate comrades across the Triangle. They only knew what had happened by sundry rumours that constantly trickled over. The Ancient House

had had no actual contact with John Busterfield Boots yet.

Tea was only just over, and the Remove was making first attempts at settling down. Studies were being put into shipshape order, books being sorted out, cupboards cleared, and so forth.

And trunks were arriving, needed unpacking. All sorts of personal belongings had to be shifted out, including such important items as tins of toffee, chocolates, biscuits, and similar delicacies. So the Remove was quite busy. And the Ancient House did not have much time to give to the rumours that came across the Triangle concerning the self-styled Supreme Six.

But in the College House it was different. Here there were no thoughts of unpacking. Many juniors, indeed, had even gone without their tea—and things had to be very serious before a Remove fellow forgot about his inner man.

The College House Remove was in a ferment.

Something had to be done with these outrageous new juniors—particularly with John Busterfield Boots. But what? That was the question—what? It was one thing to say that something had to be done, and another thing to do it!

It seemed difficult to do anything to Buster Boots. So far he had had everything his own way. Christine & Co. had attempted in vain to squash this extraordinary new boy.

He was already regarded as one of the worst bullies that the Remove had ever seen. His exasperating cheek was of such an order that all the Monks were raging with wrath. The very mention of Buster's name made juniors go red with rising anger. And that name was reviled in the most violent terms.

That Buster Boots was a bully was clear. Anybody could see it—not by looking at Boots, but by looking at his victims. Buster himself looked quite genial and harmless.

But most of the members of the Remove were marked. In the course of that one afternoon at least four black eyes were apparent, to say nothing of swollen noses, thick ears, and bruises too numerous to mention. And John Busterfield Boots was the culprit in every case.

The Monks were getting absolutely desperate.

They went about the passages, and from study to study, gnashing their teeth and uttering threats of the most murderous description. If they had their way, Buster Boots was doomed to a most diabolical end. He would not only be slaughtered, and smashed to bits, but his remains would be boiled in oil, and then cast to the wolves.

But, somehow, none of these dire threats were uttered in Buster's presence. The juniors thought it rather unwise to do so. They went about telling one another what they meant to do. And the demands for a

general meeting became more and more insistent.

Bob Christine was called upon to take prompt action.

He was the recognised leader—he was the captain of the Monks. Therefore, it was up to Christine to evolve some wonderful scheme whereby the Supreme Six would be sat on and squashed, and reduced to pitiful helplessness.

That was one disadvantage of being a leader. The unfortunate Bob Christine, just as puzzled as any of the others, was expected to think of great ideas at a moment's notice. Unless he did so, his powers of leadership were questioned. Boys are hard taskmasters; unless they get what they want on the instant, they are liable to throw a faithful leader aside without the slightest compunction. They are hard-hearted and callous in such matters.

And Bob Christine knew that he would have to do something at once.

First and foremost, the Monks wanted to let off some steam. An indignation meeting, therefore, would be a good means to this end. So Bob promptly announced that the meeting would be held in the common room at once.

Everybody turned up.

There was not a single absentee—except, of course, the Supreme Six. All the other Remove juniors of the College House were on hand. The famous scene at the Tower of Babel was a mere cipher compared to this din.

"Can't you fellows dry up?" shouted Bob Christine, jumping on the table, and glaring round. "It won't do any good to jaw like this! Unless there can be order at this meeting, you might as well clear out at once!"

"Down with Buster Boots!"

"Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!"

"Down with the cad!"

"Bully!"

"It's up to you, Christine, to wipe him up!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Come on, Bob, let's hear your scheme!"

"Good! What's the idea?"

Bob Christine gazed at the crowd grimly. He had no idea, or no scheme, but these fellows had to be subdued somehow. He even began to regret having caused the indignation meeting. For now that all the Monks were in a clump, they were getting more excited than ever.

As Christine looked at them, he pursed his lips. He was feeling pretty sore on his own account, but many of the others had suffered worse. They were a sorry looking bunch.

The unfortunate Talmadge was hardly recognisable. One side of his face had puffed out so much that his left eye was nearly closed, and the skin in the near vicinity was tinged with a soft, delicate

greeny blue. His mouth seemed rather out of position, pointing to the north on the left side.

Yorke was marked, too, and so were many of the others. It was hardly surprising that they hurled all sorts of insults against the name of John Busterfield Boots. And Bob Christine listened grimly.

"Come on, Christy, out with the scheme!"

"We've got to smash that rotten bully!"

"Hear, hear!"

"He's a cad, a beast, a bullying rotter!"

"Yes, we know all about that!" shouted Christine. "This new chap is a bully and a cad, but that's not the main point. We've got to deal with a more important side to the question. These six fellows are all together, they were at the same school, and they cling tight. They banded themselves together into a little club of their own. And we mustn't forget that they've been here for a week. They got settled down during our absence."

"Yes, and they think they can do as they jolly well like!"

"Exactly," said Christine. "Boots, in particular, is an aggressive bounder. He seems to think he can do just as he likes without being questioned or stopped. What we've got to do is to pull him up short!"

"Hear, hear!"

"How's it going to be done?"

"I don't know—yet," admitted Bob Christine. "I've got to think—"

"Haven't you got any suggestions to make?" demanded Page warmly.

"No, but—"

"Then you're a rotten leader!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Come on, Christine, you've got to think of something!"

The crowd glared at Bob, and Bob glared at the crowd.

"Do you think I can get an idea at a minute's notice?" demanded Christine wrathfully. "I've never seen such a set of unreasonable rotters! Can't you give a fellow a chance? Before long I'll have a scheme all ready—"

"That's no good!"

"We want it now—this very minute!"

"Yes! Down with Buster Boots!"

The door of the common room opened, and John Busterfield Boots lounged in, with the Faithful Five in close attendance.

CHAPTER VII.

REEDS IN THE WIND!



JOHN BUSTERFIELD BOOTS looked round with languid interest.

"Good!" he said easily. "Nothing could be better. In fact, just what I wanted. Don't trouble to

move, you chaps. Just take things calmly and smoothly. I can't bear being flustered."

The Monks stood looking on in a dazed

kind of way. A deadly silence had fallen upon the whole crowd. They had never dreamed that the very object of their animosity would walk in in this way.

Buster's action took the wind out of their sails.

And, furthermore, he calmly proceeded to go to the table, which was being used as a platform, and he climbed up upon it. The Faithful Five followed close at his heels, and ranged themselves round the table like a bodyguard.

Bob Christine swallowed hard.

"Who the dickens told you to come here?" he asked thickly.

"I had an inkling that my presence might be beneficial," replied Buster Boots evenly.

"Kindly remove yourself from this table, Christine. I want to address the meeting."

"What?" gasped Christine faintly.

"Thank you!" said J.B.B., giving Christine a sudden shove.

Bob flew off the table, and landed with a thud on the floor. He picked himself up, too startled to speak. And the Monks went red with new anger. This affair was getting beyond all reason.

Not only had John Busterfield Boots created havoc during the afternoon, but he had now had the utter and staggering audacity to come to this meeting, and push the speaker off the platform!

There seemed to be no end to his astounding nerve.

"Wait!" said Buster, as several fellows were about to burst out into violent shouts.

"Let me speak! I realise that my five chums and myself are in a position of peril. But we came here, feeling certain that we should meet with fair play. Let me speak! We're outnumbered four to one, but I rely upon your sense of justice to hear me out!"

The Monks listened, but did not interfere.

There was something about Buster Boots that compelled attention. At the present moment these fellows hated him; they regarded him as a beast, a cad, and a bully. He was a cheeky outsider.

And yet they didn't rush at him. In some strange, magnetic way, the new boy held them, and they listened for his next word—rebellious, all the time, against it. They wanted to grab Buster, and vent their wrath upon him.

"I want you to give me just two minutes?" exclaimed J.B.B. "Time me if you like—but let me speak for two minutes without interference. What about it? Are you game enough?"

Bob Christine glared.

"Yes!" he retorted defiantly. "We'll give you just two minutes, and we guarantee not to touch you. I speak for the whole crowd."

"Hear, hear!" said the others.

"But after two minutes—look out!" warned Christine darkly, as he took out his watch. "Go ahead—I've got you timed! I don't know why the dickens we're so jolly easy with you, but you're lucky!"

John Busterfield Boots bowed.

"Good for you!" he said languidly. "Somehow, I had a pretty keen idea that you were good sportsmen. Now I know it, I'm glad. If we get to understand one another properly, we shall all pull well together."

Sundry howls, and a few catcalls.

"Of course," went on Buster, "you all realise that I am the leader of the Monks. From this moment I take the supreme control of the Remove on this side of the Triangle——"

"Yah!"

"Go home!"

"Bully!"

"Nearly a minute gone!" said Bob Christine warningly.

Buster Boots withstood the storm of derision without flinching. The Monks fairly howled at him in unison. But he didn't seem to mind.

"All this trouble has come about because you don't understand me," continued John Busterfield Boots. "Several times you have referred to me as a bully. You've called me a cad. You've even gone so far as to say that I'm a beast."

"So you are!" roared a dozen voices.

"Yah, bully!"

Buster smiled.

"The word, bully, is a somewhat peculiar one," he said. "Perhaps your understanding of it is different to mine. I have always regarded a bully as a particularly contemptible kind of cad, a fellow who hits little kids, who twists their arms, and who does all kinds of mean, rotten things!"

"You've got another twenty seconds!" said Bob Christine.

"Thank you," said Buster. "To continue about the meaning of the word bully. Have I ever done anything caddish or mean? I'll freely admit that I've knocked a few of you fellows about. But I've always given you fair warning, and I've punched straight from the shoulder. And we're all about the same age and the same size. You say I'm a bully. I say I'm not!"

"Time's up!" snapped Christine.

"Rats! Let him speak!" yelled Clapson.

"Yes, go on, you rotter!"

"What else have you got to say, you outsider?"

Bob Christine looked round him in surprise. The Monks were actually requesting Buster Boots to continue! The fellows didn't know, even themselves, exactly why they wanted this boy to keep on talking. They still hated him. But, at the same time, there was a certain fascination about him. If the Monks had only known the truth, it was simple.

John Busterfield Boots was a born leader, and he knew it.

His perfect and unfailing confidence was always on hand. Boots was never at a loss—never in a flurry—never nonplussed. Always remaining cool, he appeared out-

wardly languid while his brain was actually working at lightning speed.

"Every fellow among you who has felt the weight of my fist, asked for it," continued Buster. "I gave certain orders, and those orders were disobeyed——"

"Orders!" roared the Monks.

"That is what I said—orders!"

"You—you mad rotter! Do you expect us to obey your rotten orders?"

"The awful nerve!"

"He ought to be boiled in oil!"

"I not only expect you to obey my orders, but I shall see that you do obey them!" continued Buster calmly. "You may not know it, you may not believe it, but I am the leader of you all. And I demand complete and absolute obedience in all things. Defiance will lead to painful results!"

"My only hat!"

"He's—he's the hottest stuff we've ever had!"

"The cheeky beast!"

But the Monks were beginning to have just a little respect for John Buster Boots now. The audacious way in which he was demanding obedience completely took the breath of his listeners away. And before they could go into any big outburst, Buster continued.

"If you will analyse the facts, you will come to the conclusion that none of you need have suffered," he said. "If you had obeyed me at my first word, you would not have been hurt in the slightest degree. Therefore, I am not a bully. I simply rule by force. A very simple method when you come to understand it. I give an order—you obey! All right! I give an order—you refuse! That means trouble, to say nothing of pain."

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"He talks like a giddy politician!"

"Referring back to the subject of leadership," pursued J.B.B. "I have proclaimed myself the future leader of this section of the Remove. We will leave that for the moment, and make a few observations concerning our friend, Mr. Robert Christine."

"You leave me alone," growled Bob, glaring.

"My son, I have no intention of harming you," said Buster. "I merely wish to delve slightly into your past record."

"You're going to do which?" demanded Christine hotly.

"I have been at considerable pains to gather all my facts together," said Boots. "If I make any misstatements, please correct me. But I think I am right in remarking that the Ancient House has always been the top dog at St. Frank's."

A silence fell upon the Monks.

"Nipper and his particular friends have led the way in everything, not only last term, but for a period longer than we care to remember," went on Boots, "the Ancient House section of the Remove has been duly recognised and accepted as the

leaders. We the Monks, have always played second fiddle. Am I right?"

The Monks continued to remain silent. Then, at last, Clapson glared up at the speaker.

"You know you're right!" he growled. "The College House has never been able to beat Nipper's crowd. They've always held the lead."

"Exactly!" exclaimed J.B.B. "It has been going on so long that you have meekly accepted it as a natural thing. You allow the Ancient House to lead, and never dream

to be a leader," said Buster. "By what I can understand about Nipper, he's one of those fellows who can make a crowd follow him anywhere—into danger, and anywhere else. In a nutshell, Nipper is a natural leader. And leaders are not made, but born!"

"By gum! He's about right there!" muttered Oldfield.

"Yes, rather!"

"Without wishing to hurt Christine in any way, I am stating an absolute fact when I declare that he has never shown



John Busterfield took it—a mighty crash in the chest. He hardly staggered an inch, although he certainly felt that blow. Boots was discovering that this antagonist was of a very different calibre to any of the others he had tried.

of bringing about an alteration. And why? Shall I tell you? Because your own leader is unfitted for his task!"

"You—you insulting bounder!" said Bob Christine hotly.

"Don't misunderstand me," continued Boots quickly. "Don't imagine for a moment, Christine, that I am criticising your personal character. Not at all. I have no doubt that you are a very fine chap, and one of the best."

"Oh, thanks!" said Bob sarcastically.

"At the same time, you were not cut out

himself to be a powerful leader," went on John Busterfield Boots. "What outstanding feat did he perform last term? Tell me anything of importance, if you can."

"Look here, I've had enough of this!" said Bob Christine angrily. "I'm the leader of the Monks, and if you don't look out——"

"Shut up, Christy!"

"Let him speak!"

"He's right—you're no giddy leader at all!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Bob Christine.

He stared at the crowd, aghast. Just this short speech from Buster Boots had apparently antagonised a good proportion of his own staunch supporters! This meeting had been called to decide what Buster's fate was to be—and here was Buster, calmly turning the audience against Christine!

"In time of war, certain officers will prove themselves to be wonderful leaders," said Boots smoothly. "An insignificant lieutenant, for example, will lead a company of men into an absolute death-trap. The men will follow him blindly—and in nine cases out of ten they will win through against hopeless odds. What's the reason for this miracle? The answer is simple! The lieutenant happens to be a fellow with a magnetic personality—a chap who can lead men anywhere! I don't want to boast, and I don't want to mislead you—but if you all stick to me, there'll be some marvellous changes at St. Frank's almost at once!"

"My goodness! He's got a nerve!"

"A nerve—yes!" flashed back Buster. "That's what you say—but is it true? It's really a question of confidence. I'm ready to lead you to absolute victory. Follow me, and I'll make the Monks top dogs of St. Frank's! I'll reduce the Fossils to such a state of subjection that they'll crawl at our feet!"

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, Buster!"

"Christine has never been able to lead you—and that's the only reason the Ancient House has always been ahead of us!" shouted Buster. "If you all stick to me there'll be no trouble—there'll be no looking back. As for calling me a bully, the idea's ridiculous. Obey my orders, and you'll never be touched. A leader has got to be supreme. I'll show you the way to beat Nipper & Co., and make the Ancient House look as small as a minute!"

And Buster went into a long, eloquent speech. Within two or three minutes he had the whole audience with him. He swayed them just as he wished. From the very start he had known that he could do this.

And by clever, diplomatic phrases, he succeeded in winning the Monks over to him. Within fifteen minutes John Busterfield Boots was being cheered! It was little short of amazing.

The Monks had come there to determine his fate. And now they were cheering him as their leader! Boys are proverbially changeable—they alter their opinion like reeds waving in the wind.

"I leave it entirely to you!" said Buster, by way of conclusion. "I'm a new chap, I know—and if we go by precedent, it's a piece of awful nerve on my part to suggest anything like this. New kids are supposed

to efface themselves—they are expected to be meek and mild. But there are exceptions to every rule. I should hope that you are all broadminded enough to realise that."

"Rather!"

"I've come to St. Frank's, and I'm jolly pleased that I've been put into the College House," declared J. B. B. "I'm proud to be here—I'm proud to be a Monk! And my one aim is to make the Monks the supreme leaders in all things at St. Frank's. The College House must be the top-dogs!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Buster!"

"He's right—blessed if he isn't!"

"Hurrah!"

Even those fellows who had been severely marked by the new boy now cheered him. His personality was so magnetic that he could do practically as he liked. And he smiled with contentment as he jumped down off the table. He was at once surrounded by an excited crowd who shook him by the hand, slapped him on the back, and displayed their approval in a few other ways.

Bob Christine leapt on to the table. He was surging with inward alarm, and he was really angry. The way in which these asses listened to Buster was disgusting. The unfortunate Bob could see his leadership slipping away before his very eyes.

"You're all mad!" he roared. "This chap's mesmerised you in some way! If you break away from me you'll all be—Hi! Can't you listen? Come back, you cads! You—you traitors!"

Christine fairly shouted himself hoarse.

For, to his stupefaction, the Monks proceeded to follow John Busterfield Boots out of the common room! The Supreme Six had formed themselves into their usual solid square. They marched out of the common room, and the Remove, greatly excited and elated, followed them.

Bob Christine found himself talking to empty air. He shouted, he raved, but it made no difference. The tragedy had come. Bob Christine, the leader for so long, had been cast aside without a pang.

"You—you deserters!" said Bob feebly.

He couldn't manage anything else—he was too hoarse and exhausted. But there was one slight consolation. Two juniors remained behind—Charlie Talmadge and Roddy Yorke. His own chums had remained true blue.

If the truth must be told, Yorke and Talmadge stuck to Christine out of sheer friendship. In their hearts they knew that Bob was a spent force. And they looked to John Busterfield Boots as their future leader.

The new Boy's progress was meteoric!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SCRAP IN THE TRIANGLE!



HANDFORTH pushed his chums aside roughly.

"If you try to hold me back, I'll jolly well biff you on the nose!" he declared. "I'm going to

find that chap Boots, and I'm going to give him a licking! You can go and eat coke!"

Church and McClure still clung to their leader.

"Look here, Handy, be reasonable," said Church. "You know jolly well it's not our business——"

"That's nothing to do with it!"

"Yes, it is!" insisted Church. "This chap Boots belongs to the College House. Until he interferes on this side we can't touch him. Nipper distinctly said so."

Handforth sniffed.

"Who cares about Nipper?" he snapped. "This new kid belongs to the Remove, and he's been chucking his weight about! I don't allow it! And I'm going to give Boots something to be going on with!"

Church and McClure gave it up as hopeless. They had done their best, and nobody could do more than that.

Edward Oswald Handforth strode out into the Triangle, and glared towards the College House. It was evening, and the September twilight was settling over the old school.

The scene looked very peaceful and serene in the dusk, with the handsome old elms and chestnuts outlined against the evening sky. The turrets and towers of the school, too, with a few lights showing in some of the lower windows. Altogether, it was a very peaceful picture.

But it had no effect whatever upon Handforth.

He had come out here with the sole object of fighting John Busterfield Boots, and giving John Busterfield Boots a good hiding. And Handforth wasn't going to be stopped by the peaceful aspect of the scenery.

But he paused as he gazed towards the College House. After all, it might be unwise to invade that domain. There was no real rivalry between the two Houses nowadays, but if a junior was rash enough to venture into the enemy camp quite alone, he stood a distinct chance of being hurled forth on his neck. This was not a vindictive process, but just a piece of fun. And even fun can be painful at times. The average schoolboy's idea of fun is frequently unfunny.

But Handforth wouldn't admit for the world that he was thinking of altering his plan. And Fate came to the rescue. For, as Handforth moved slowly forward, a figure appeared on the College House steps.

It was the figure of John Busterfield Boots.

"Aha!" said Handforth dramatically, as he caught sight of his prey.

"Look here, Handy—go easy!" muttered Church. "I don't see any reason why you should butt in. It's not playing the game, you know."

Handforth started, touched to the quick.

"Not playing the game!" he echoed.

"Look here, don't be an ass! I should think I'm above interfering in something that doesn't concern me—but this thing's different. Christine's had plenty of time to deal with this chap, and now he's my game!"

"Yes, but——"

"Any Monk is fair game to a Fossil!" continued Handforth. "That's one of the oldest traditions at St. Frank's. Just because the rivalry has died down a bit, it doesn't mean to say it's dead. And I'm going to teach this chap that he can't swank about as he likes!"

Handforth didn't wait any longer, but strode across the triangle. Buster obligingly came forward to meet him. The new boy was feeling exceedingly elated. His success in the College House had been phenomenal.

Although he had hoped for big things, he had hardly dared to believe that he would be the leader of the Monks on the very first day. But such was his volcanic personality, he had gained his end.

Feeling completely content, he strolled towards Handforth.

"So here you are, you cheeky bounder!" said Handforth aggressively.

"Quite so," agreed John Busterfield Boots. "As you say, here I am. A glorious evening, eh? Weather of this kind always makes me feel peaceful."

"Oh, does it?" snapped Handforth. "Well, it makes me feel like punching your nose!"

"That's serious," said Buster gravely. "A fellow with a desire for punching noses just because the evening happens to be fine—well, he's a pretty hard case. Pray don't let me detain you."

"I'm not going to stand any of your rot!" snorted Handforth. "Understand? I may not belong to your House, but I'm in the Remove—and I'm jolly well not going to allow a chap like you to throw your weight about."

"Splendid," said Boots.

"What?"

"Wonderful!"

"You—you funny idiot!" roared Handforth. "You're a new kid, and there's only one way to deal with you! I'm going to biff you!"

Handforth still had the misguided idea that he could treat this new boy as he had treated other new boys in the past. Edward Oswald had one way with newcomers—he gave them a fair chance to be humble, and if they weren't humble he biffed them. In this way, he considered, he instilled into them a right sense of proportion. He

made them understand, at the very outset, that his word was law, and any defiance was perilous in the extreme.

But, somehow or other, John Busterfield Boots didn't quail—he didn't shiver as Handforth fixed his warlike gaze upon him. That famous Handforth glare had no effect.

"I may be wrong, of course," said Buster, "but it seems to me that you are somewhat ill."

"Ill!" howled Handforth.

"Your face has an unhealthy flush, and your eyes are protruding far more than is necessary," continued J. B. B. calmly. "Now, I suggest a quiet lay down. Go indoors, and sit on the sofa, and avoid any mental excitement. Brains require complete rest at intervals."

"I'm fed up with this!" shouted Handforth hotly. "Take that!"

Swish!

Handforth lunged out with all his might. He felt that his dignity had been ruffled. For a new kid to even answer back was an insult. And the only thing was to squash him straight away.

That lightning left of Handforth's had never been known to fail. But this time, for some extraordinary reason, it got nowhere near its mark. In mid-air something hit against Handforth's arm, and the next second a fist thudded upon Handforth's nose.

He staggered back, pained and startled.

"Great pip!" he gasped blankly.

"It was the first time he had been biffed by a new boy within memory. Handforth was such an aggressive fighter that he always won his battles. He was like a whirlwind—and he knew a great deal about boxing, too. As a rule, his defence was perfect, and his attack was volcanic.

He had never been known to fail. Many a fight had Handforth had, and he had always won. He had wiped up new kids by the dozen. And for him to receive a punch on the nose was a very novel experience.

After that first start of surprise, he gave one terrific bellow of outraged dignity. He fairly hurled himself upon John Busterfield Boots.

"My hat!" roared Handforth. "I'll show you."

Church and McClure stood by, helpless. The scrap looked like developing into something pretty severe. And this, of course, was lamentable. Fighting of any kind was not allowed in the Triangle, and it would go hard with the Removites if a prefect or a master should happen to drop down. And prefects and masters always seemed to appear when they were least wanted. Just a little habit of theirs.

"Take that!" said Handforth breathlessly.

Biff!

John Busterfield Boots took it—a mighty crash in the chest. He hardly staggered an inch, although he certainly felt that blow. Boots was discovering that this an-

tagonist was of a very different calibre to any of the others he had tried.

Boots was an unknown quantity in the fighting line—but Edward Oswald Handforth was absolutely famous. There were only one or two fellows in the whole junior school who could even hope to stand up to him.

And Boots was discovering that he had taken on a pretty tough job.

In the course of two seconds he received four punches, but he succeeded in delivering three of his own. And the fight was just developing into a real whirlwind affair when I appeared on the scene.

I was accompanied by Tommy Watson, Tregellis-West, and Reggie Pitt, and some more. We had arrived from the playing fields, after making a round of Little Side. We were delighted to find that the playing fields were in wonderful order.

And then we spotted Handforth and Boots scrapping.

"The idiots!" I exclaimed. "This is asking for trouble, if you like!"

"Better separate 'em," suggested Pitt.

"That's what I'm going to do," I replied grimly. "Can't allow fighting in the Triangle. A prefect might appear at any moment—and that would mean a week's gating for the pair of them."

We rushed up, and Handforth was grabbed. At the same time the Faithful Five appeared. They seized John Busterfield Boots, and hauled him back.

"Lemme get at him!" gasped Handforth frantically.

"Wait a minute—wait a minute!" I interrupted. "No need to get so excited, Handy. You can't fight—"

"I'm going to smash him!" roared Handforth.

"You can smash him all you like somewhere else—"

"He biffed me on the nose!" howled Handy.

"Steady!" I exclaimed, shaking him. "What's the idea of all this, anyhow? It's a pity if you can't spend the first evening here without having a fight! Calm down, you ass."

Handforth managed to calm himself somewhat.

"I can't help your troubles!" he growled. "First evening, or no first evening, I'm going to fight this rotter! He biffed me in the face, and he's a new kid! I'm going to slaughter him!"

"Better not try it," said Buster Boots languidly. "Take my advice, my son, and give it up."

"Afraid to fight, eh?" sneered Handforth heavily.

Buster's eyes gleamed.

"No!" he replied. "I'll fight you as soon as you like, with or without gloves!"

"Good!" said Handforth. "Then we'll fight this out at once—in the gymnasium! Come on, you rotter! I'll teach you to biff me!"

They marched towards the gymnasium, escorted by the excited crowd. And within two minutes the word was going the rounds at lightning speed.

"A fight—a fight!"

"My hat, where?"

"Gym.—Handy and Buster Boots!"

And in a miraculously short space of time the gymnasium was packed with thrilling, expectant juniors. A real fight was not a frequent occurrence. But here was one on the very first evening of the Remove's arrival.

It promised to be interesting!

CHAPTER IX.

HANDFORTH'S WATERLOO!



"TIME!"

Reggie Pitt called out the words sharply and decisively.

All the seconds had agreed upon Reggie as referee—for Pitt was known to be as straight as a die, and absolutely impartial in his decisions. He would conduct the fight with absolute honesty.

Church and McClure, of course, were Handforth's seconds, and John Busterfield Boots had selected Bray and Crooks. And the two principals were all ready for the fight.

They stood there in the improvised ring, stripped to their undervests and trousers. They wore rope-soled gymnasium shoes, and looked a well-matched pair.

Handforth's physique was well known. Big, powerful, and brawny. Now that the upper portion of his body was practically stripped, his muscles stood out in a formidable manner. His jaw was set, and he was full of confidence. Edward Oswald was always happy in a fight.

And he was quite convinced that this one was going to be a great victory for the Ancient House. It was now known that John Busterfield Boots had made himself leader of the Monks. And it was Handforth's distinct aim to lower Buster's pride into the dust. By George! He would show this cheeky outsider what was what! He would teach him to come here and throw his weight about!

If Handforth was confident, so was John Busterfield Boots.

The latter, indeed, looked almost bored. And he, too, revealed a magnificent physique. In his full clothing, nobody would have guessed his muscles were so perfect. He was one mass of whipcord. His chest was big, broad and powerful. He seemed to be in the pink of condition, and was bubbling with good health.

"Time!" said Reginald Pitt.

Handforth and Buster left their corners, and advanced towards one another in the centre of the ring. The crowd was packed

round with the closeness of sardines. Fellows occupied every inch of available space. They were jammed together all round the ring, they clung to the window sills, and many of them had even climbed on to the iron girders.

Willy Handforth was there, of course—he had squashed in somehow. And he was gloating over the fact that his major was going to wipe up the new kid. Willy was precariously perched upon a trapeze, high above the heads of a section of the audience. They were so excited that they didn't notice him there, otherwise he would never have been allowed to remain.

"Go it, Ted!" roared Willy encouragingly.

"You'll win, Handy—wipe him up!"

"Yah! Old Fossils!"

"You're the chap, Buster—you'll beat this Fossil!"

Handforth and Buster Boots took no notice of the many shouts of encouragement. They were confining themselves solely to the business in hand. Handforth had firmly made up his mind on one thing.

He would knock out this boasting bouncer in the first round!

It was a pity, because Handy would have much preferred to play with his victim, as a cat does with a mouse. It wasn't often that Handforth had the supreme delight of a fight. But he was willing to sacrifice his own desires for the honour of the Form.

And Handforth considered that it would certainly be for the honour of the school if he delivered a knock-out in the first round. It was highly necessary to take this newcomer down a peg instantly. The sooner the better. His fate would be short and sharp.

So Handforth started the fight like a whirlwind.

He rushed in, and struck at Boots with his left. It was only a feint, for the next second Handforth brought his right round with terrific power.

Thud!

It went home, but not where Handforth aimed. He had meant to deliver that blow on Buster's chin. But Buster's eyes were like those of a lynx, and he leapt sideways. The blow struck him on the shoulder, and he half spun round. But even as he did so, he struck out.

Handforth staggered back drunkenly as Buster's fist caught him on the side of the head. And then, before he could recover, the new boy was attacking with extraordinary force and skill.

Biff! Crash! Thud!

Handforth backed away under a perfect hurricane of blows.

Coolly, calmly, but with deadly effect, John Busterfield Boots was pressing the attack. As I watched, I opened my eyes with amazement. For Boots was displaying a skill—a perfect knowledge of boxing—that fairly took my breath away. The fellow was a wonder.

And Handforth was finding it out, too.

He had never suspected that this fellow knew so much. Handforth had set him down as a bragger and a boaster. But Handforth was finding out his mistake. What Buster didn't know about boxing wasn't worth learning.

"Go it, Buster!"

"You've got him beaten—he's yours!"

"Hurrah!"

"College House for ever!"

The Monks howled in unison, and the Fossils replied.

"Pull yourself together, Handy!" roared Church desperately.

"Buck up, old man!"

Handforth was bucking up. But it was only with difficulty. He was well nigh breathless from the effect of that shower of blows. At the very edge of the ring he made a partial recovery, and started on the offensive.

And when Handforth liked, he could do great damage.

He lashed out right and left—not wildly, but with deadly scientific skill. But every one of his blows seemed to go astray. The new boy's defence was magnificent.

"Time!"

Handforth was glad enough for the respite. He went to his corner, a very different youth. And the crowd broke into an excited buzz of talk. Everybody was startled.

Buster calmly went to his corner, and allowed his seconds to swab his face down with cold water, and massage him gently. Handforth was being similarly treated by Church and McClure.

"He's hot stuff, old man!" whispered Church anxiously.

"By George! He is!" muttered Handforth. "But I'll whack him!"

"Better go a bit more easy," suggested McClure. "You don't want to let in one of those lightning rights of his! Watch him carefully, Handy! He's a dark horse! Unless you're on your guard——"

"Dry up!" growled Handforth. "I don't need any giddy advice!"

And they went on bathing him and massaging him.

"Time!" said Reggie Pitt.

The pair came out of their corners again, and this time there was a marked change in Handforth's attitude. He made no rush. He warily approached Buster, and waited for an opening. Boots was quite calm and collected, and there was an amused smile on his face. Somehow, that smile exasperated Handforth, and he suddenly dashed in.

He was beaten off with ease.

Buster was a different person in this round. He was quicker, more deadly, and his blows were terrific. Handforth only escaped a knock-out by reason of his own splendid defence.

His attack, so effective in any ordinary fight, seemed to dwindle away to nothing by comparison. Buster held him off with perfect ease. And the new boy's footwork was superb.

In fact, the Remove awoke to the startling fact that John Busterfield Boots was merely playing with the renowned Handforth. He did exactly as he liked. And Handforth was helpless.

And yet he was fighting with every ounce of his strength and skill now. Handforth was no longer attempting to knock his opponent out at once. He would feel satisfied if he landed even one direct blow! Because, extraordinarily enough, he couldn't even find Buster's face or chest.

His deadly lunges seemed to go astray.

And then something startling happened. Buster Boots gave a display of unbelievable skill. He completely lost that bored, careless look. And he went into the fight with a grim purpose.

Crash!

Handforth's guard was swept aside as though it had never existed. Something that felt like a sledgehammer struck him on the point of the chin. The leader of Study D went over backwards with a terrific lurch. He had been lifted practically off his feet by that one terrific blow.

"Oh, my hat!" screamed Willy.

He fell from the trapeze in his dismay and excitement, and landed on the heads of Archie Glenthorne, Jack Grey, De Valerie, and a few others. They all sprawled on the floor in a heap.

But the confusion in this section was hardly any more than in the others. The whole gymnasium was shouting and yelling with excitement.

"One—two—three—four——" counted Pitt deliberately.

"Handy!" wailed Church. "Get up, you ass!"

"Pull yourself together, Handy!"

"Five—six—seven——" said Pitt inexorably.

And Handforth lay there, utterly still. The Ancient House fellows roared at him in one solid voice, and the Monks howled with victory. John Busterfield Boots stood there, quite calm and unmarked.

And then, at the count of eight, Handforth half raised himself on his elbow. There was a terrific burst of cheering, but as Pitt counted nine Handforth sank back again, and lay still.

"Ten—out!" said Reggie grimly.

And then pandemonium was let loose.

Handy's beaten—whacked—knocked out!" said Church dazedly.

"Oh, my goodness!" breathed McClure, with a gulp.

John Busterfield Boots pushed aside a number of fellows who rushed at him. He walked across to Handforth, and assisted the latter to his feet. Then he held out his hand.

"Old man, I whacked you, but we needn't be enemies!" he said, quietly.

"By George!" gasped Handforth faintly.

"Yes, you whacked me all right! Good man! I thought I was going to biff you into the middle of next week! The best chap won, I suppose!"

They shook hands, and then Buster was whirled away by the triumphant Monks.

Handforth, surrounded by his own supporters, was gradually brought round. And the great Edward Oswald was subdued. For once in his life he felt absolutely sane and sober.

He had met his Waterloo!

John Busterfield Boots, a raw new kid, had beaten him with a knock-out!

CHAPTER X.

THE DECLARATION OF WAR!



"THINGS are getting serious!" said Church, shaking his head.

Handforth and Co. were at tea in Study D. Three days had elapsed, and Edward Oswald had completely recovered from his fight with Buster Boots. But during these last three days he had been rather less aggressive than usual.

For Handforth's pride had received a nasty jolt.

He had believed himself to be capable of beating any fellow in the Remove with the exception of myself. Everybody believed that I was the champion boxer of the Remove, and there had been a great deal of talk of my challenging Buster to a fight. But I saw no necessity for adding to the animosity which was already showing signs of gaining power by leaps and bounds.

Events had moved rapidly during the last few days.

The Monks, on that evening of Handforth's defeat, had celebrated wildly and uproariously. It was the first time that the College House had had a victory of that kind for terms.

They had never hoped for anything like it, and it turned their heads a bit. And since then the Monks had been almost insufferable. The way in which they stalked about the Triangle was a kind of open insult to the Fossils.

"Yes, things are getting serious," repeated Church, as he thoughtfully stirred his tea. "These rotten Monks are getting more cocky every day. Only this afternoon Clapson and Oldfield openly jeered at us."

"Yes, and the fags are complaining, too," said McClure.

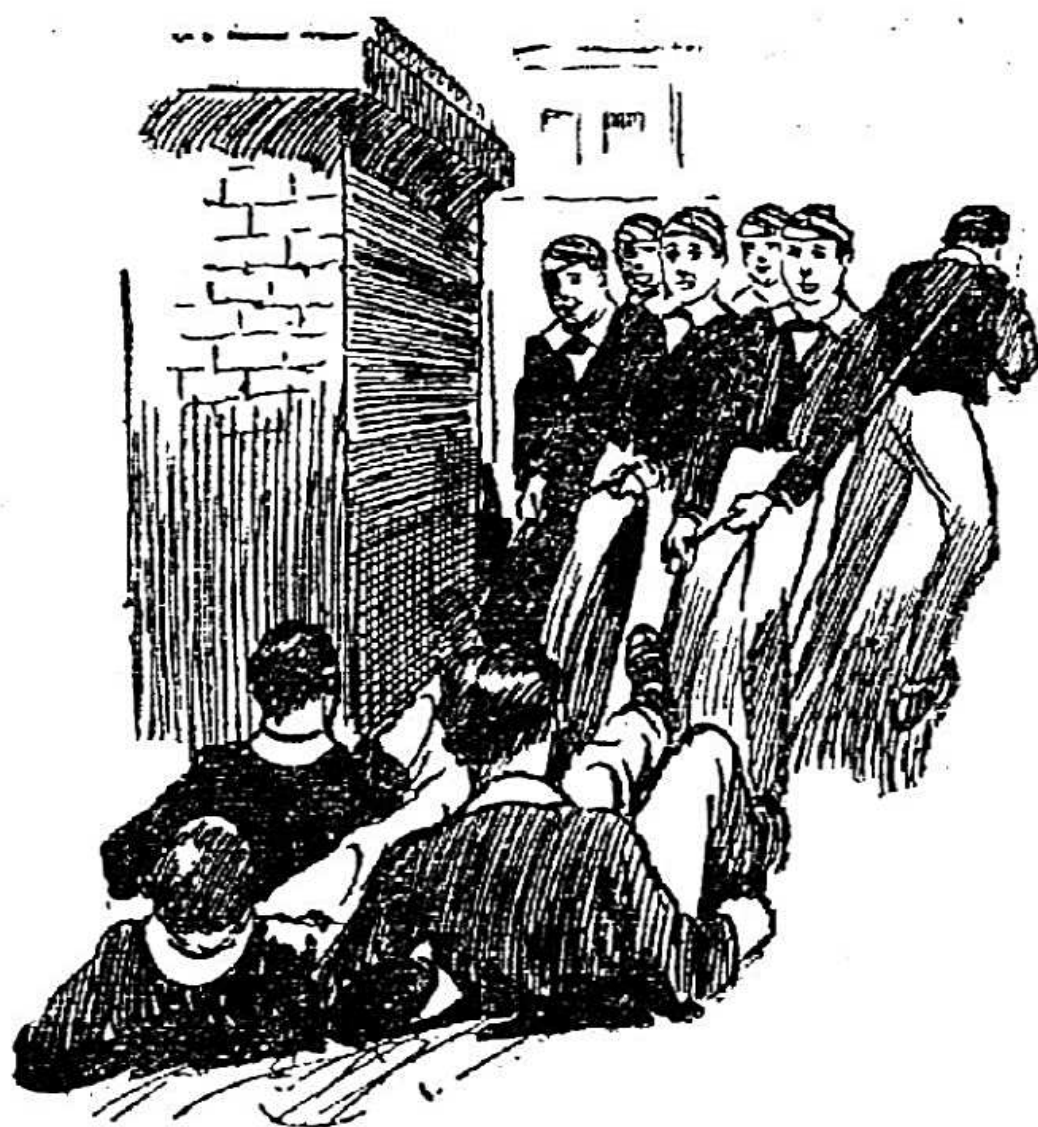
"The fags?" repeated Handforth.

"Yes."

"What do you mean—complaining?"

"Why, the Monks seem to think they're everybody now," said McClure. "They're catching our fags at every opportunity, and putting them through the mill. Not because they dislike the kids, but just because it's sporty. They're trying to make out that the College House is the top House at St. Frank's."

Handforth grunted.



"But wait a minute!" broke in Owen major. **"The rotters tied a rope round our feet, and then dragged us along the road! It was a beastly, caddish thing to do!"**

"And all because that chap knocked me out!" he growled. "I suppose it's my fault, really—"

"Rats! You couldn't help it!" said Church. "You put up a magnificent fight, old man. This chap Boots is a living marvel. And he ought to be, too. You've heard about his pater, I suppose?"

"Yes."

One of the cleverest amateur boxers in the country—in his day," said McClure. "No wonder Boots is a bit of a champion! His pater's beaten all sorts of famous professionals. Not many years ago he was known as the boxing miracle! A gentleman, of course—and an amateur. And he's been teaching his son all the giddy tricks of the trade."

"It wouldn't matter so much if Buster was a decent chap," said Handforth. "He seems all right in a way, but he's too self-important. He thinks he's everybody now—and he's even talking about making the College House top in everything. He's boasting that he'll wipe us off the map!"

"Yes, it's serious," said Church.

"And, what's more, Boots has been heard to say that he'll soon be skipper of the Remove!" said McClure.

"What's Nipper doing?" growled Handforth. "It's about time something was done! Are we going to stand this? Are we going to allow these beastly Monks to sit on us?"

"Not likely!"

"We ought to get up a big protest—"

The door opened, and Reggie Pitt looked in

"Oh, having tea?" he said. "All right—buzz down into the common-room as soon as you've finished."

"What for?"

"Meeting," said Pitt briefly.

"What kind of a meeting?"

"Nipper wants to discuss affairs in general," replied Reggie. "We're going to make plans about the Monks, too. Nipper reckons that it's just about time that we asserted ourselves. Those College House chaps have got to be brought up with a jerk. They're getting too bumptious!"

"Good!" said Handforth briskly. "We'll be there!"

Reggie nodded, and departed.

"That's the style," said Handy, with approval. "I thought Nipper wouldn't keep quiet much longer. Things have been too steep these last two days. I suppose it's my fault, really, but it's no good talking about that now. I'd like to have another slosh at Boots——"

"Oh, don't be an ass, old man," protested Church. "You're a ripping fighter in your class, but Boots is the better man. You've got to admit it—you can't do anything else."

Handforth grunted, and tea was resumed.

In the meantime, active preparations were being made for all the Fossils to collect together. The meeting in the common room was to be a general one—compulsion. No absentees would be allowed.

In an informal meeting it wouldn't matter much if a few juniors were absent. But when the captain passed the decree that all were to be present, a junior would stay away at his own peril.

So, soon afterwards, the common room was thronged with eager juniors.

Hubbard and Owen major were very excited. They had just come in, and they were looking dusty and dirty, and Hubbard's trousers were badly torn. He was vastly indignant.

"The rotten cads!" he said fiercely.

"Hallo! What's the matter?" I asked, striding up.

"Those beastly Monks!" snorted Hubbard.

"What have they done now?"

"Why, Owen major and I were coming along the lane," replied Hubbard. "We'd been to the village, and had just got near the gates when Oldfield and Clapson and half-a-dozen other Monks sprang on us. We didn't have a chance."

"Well, you must expect that sort of thing, you know," I said. "The Monks are getting very aggressive just now, and——"

"But wait a minute," broke in Owen major. "The rotters tied a rope round our feet, and then dragged us along the road! It was a beastly, caddish thing to do! Look at my hands?"

He held out his palms, and revealed the fact that they were grazed, torn and gashed. And Hubbard's hands were in a similar condition.

"Yes, this sort of thing has got to stop!" I said grimly.

"It's all very well to talk like that, but what are we going to do?" demanded De Valerie. "Ever since Buster Boots has been at the head of affairs in the College House, those Monks have got worse and worse. Why, last term there was nothing of this sort."

"I know," I replied. "House rivalry was more or less of a joke. But it's reviving now, and we've got to cope with it! A thing like this generally always happens at once—it springs into life, and grows like lightning. If things go on at the present rate, we'll be bitter enemies by next week."

"We're bitter enemies now!" said Owen major hotly.

"I wouldn't mix with any of those Monks for a fiver!" snapped Hubbard. "They're nothing but a set of rotten cads!"

A good many other juniors expressed similar views.

Events had, indeed, moved apace. And John Busterfield Boots was the prime ring-leader in the new movement. It wasn't his policy to lead the Monks in a friendly combat against us; but his scheme was to use aggressive methods at every opportunity.

Force was his motto.

And the Monks were falling into his ways with surprising alacrity and speed. They were ready enough to obey his every order.

Buster Boots had taken up the reins, and was driving the Monks with full control. And it was up to the Fossils to take quick action, or matters would become really serious.

"It's a difficult position," I declared, as I addressed the throng. "So far we've stood still and said nothing. We've done nothing. We've adopted a policy of passive resistance."

"It's all wrong!"

"I know it is, but it's coming to an end now," I declared. "I didn't advocate any change, because I thought it was possibly a flash in the pan."

"A which?"

"I thought that it was simply the result of that fight," I continued. "I believed that the excitement would die down, and nothing more would happen. But, instead of dying down, it's grown more pronounced. And now it's up to us to step in and retaliate."

"Hurrah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I haven't suggested this before, because I didn't want serious trouble," I continued. "Don't forget we're taking a serious step——"

"Rats!"

"Don't talk rot, Nipper!"

"A serious step!" I repeated. "Some of you fellows don't realise it, but I'll just point out what I mean. We've decided to retaliate, to give back these Monks as good as they've given us——"

"Rather!"

"So long as we kept passive we could be friendly with the really decent chaps," I continued. "But this declaration of war will mean complete severance. It'll be a feud, a grim battle for supremacy. And you can bet that the Ancient House will come out on top, if we really go into the thing with a will."

"Hear, hear!"

"Rather!"

"Down with the Monks!"

"Ancient House for ever!"

"There's football, too!" I shouted, above the din. "There'll be a great difference in that respect. Christine and Clapson, Yorke and a good few others have always been in the Remove Eleven——"

"Kick 'em out!"

"We won't have College House cads in the team!"

"Out with the Monks!"

"Of course, we needn't go into that point just now," I continued. "Perhaps there'll be some sort of solution to the problem. But I'm determined on one thing. The Ancient House is no longer prepared to allow these Monks complete authority. We're going to put our foot down, and we're going to retaliate!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"From this moment it's war," I declared. "When the Monk's try their next dodge on us, we'll pay them back with great interest. As I told you, it'll mean bitter warfare, but we didn't start it. Whatever happens, the Monks will have to take the blame. They brought it on entirely themselves."

"Absolutely!"

"As for the Supreme Six, they're the chaps we've got to squash first," I said grimly. "Boots and his gang are the chief culprits——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Down with Buster Boots!"

"They came to St. Frank's, and they evidently made up their minds to stir up trouble at the very outset," I continued. "Well, they've stirred it up, and they'll find it's a bit hotter than they expected!"

And the Remove cheered to the echo.

All friendly rivalry was at an end.

And in future it was to be a feud, a grim feud to determine the mastery!

THE END.

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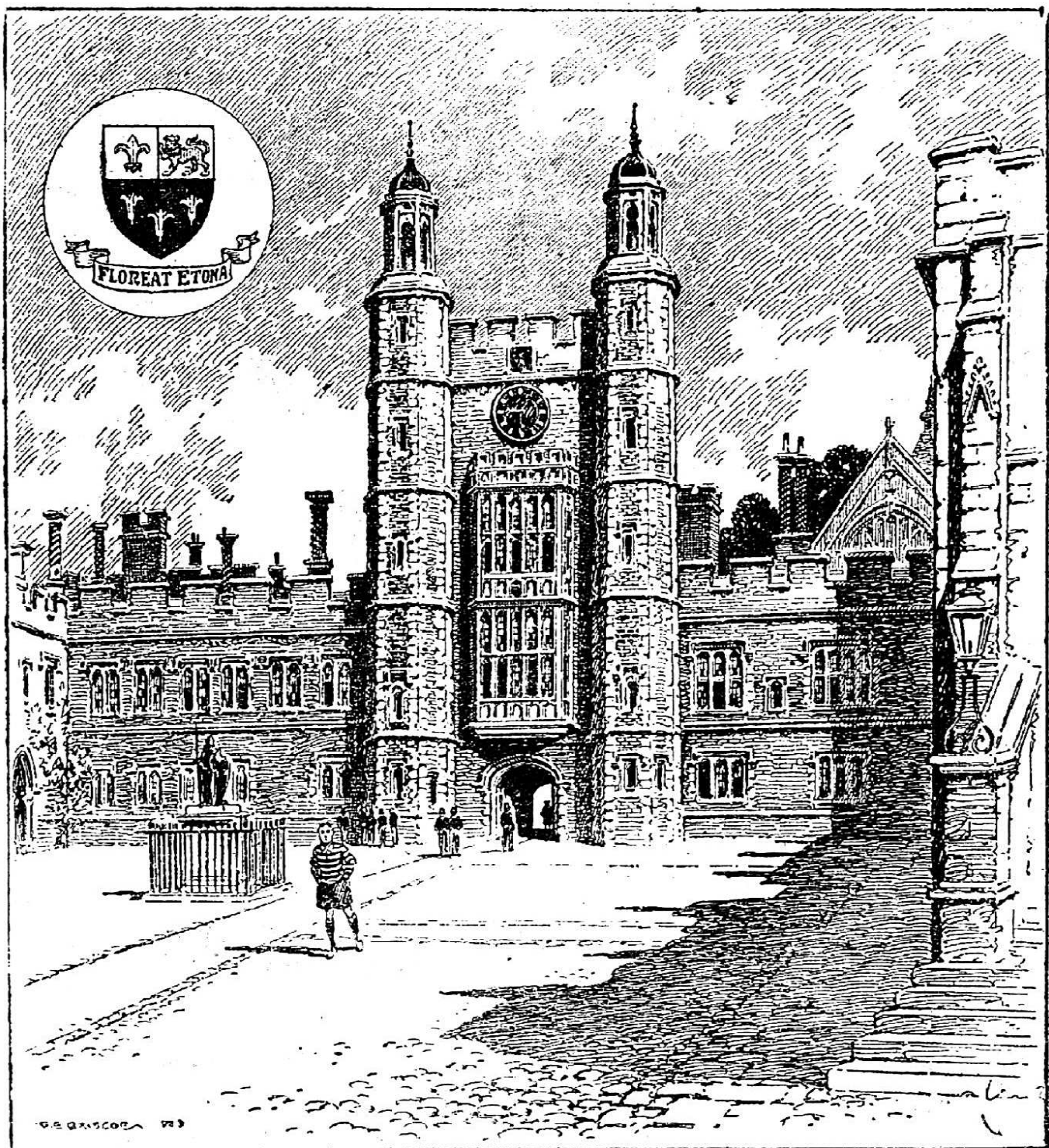
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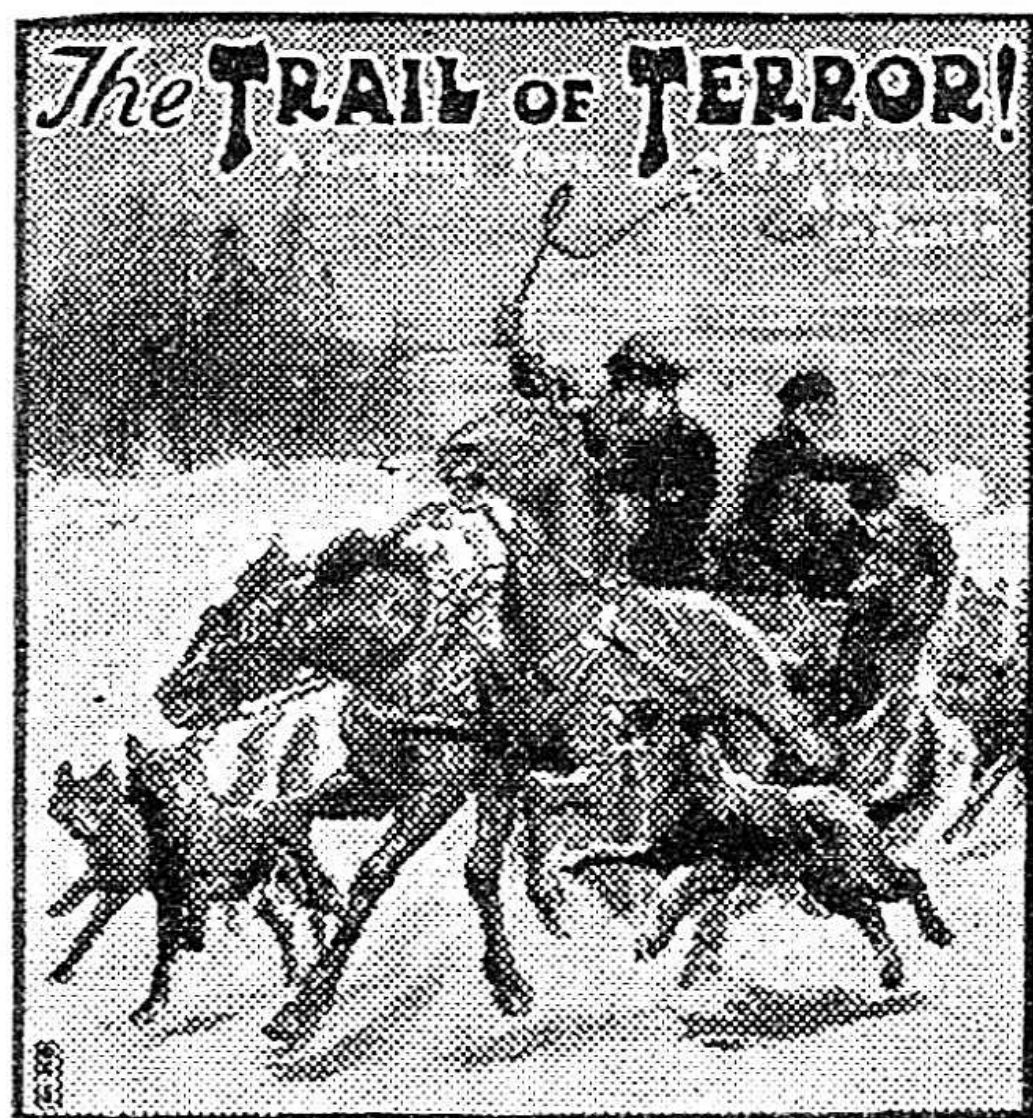
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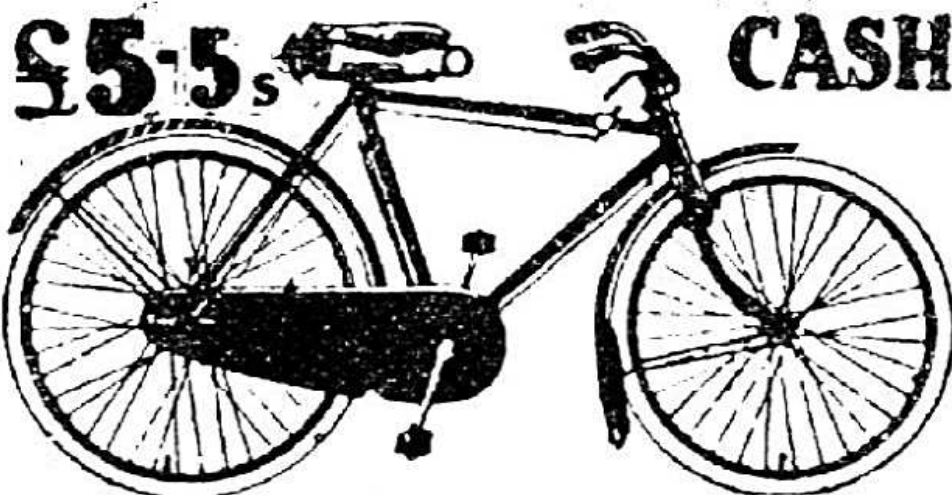
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