

Footballers' Names Competition Starts Inside

(See page viii.)

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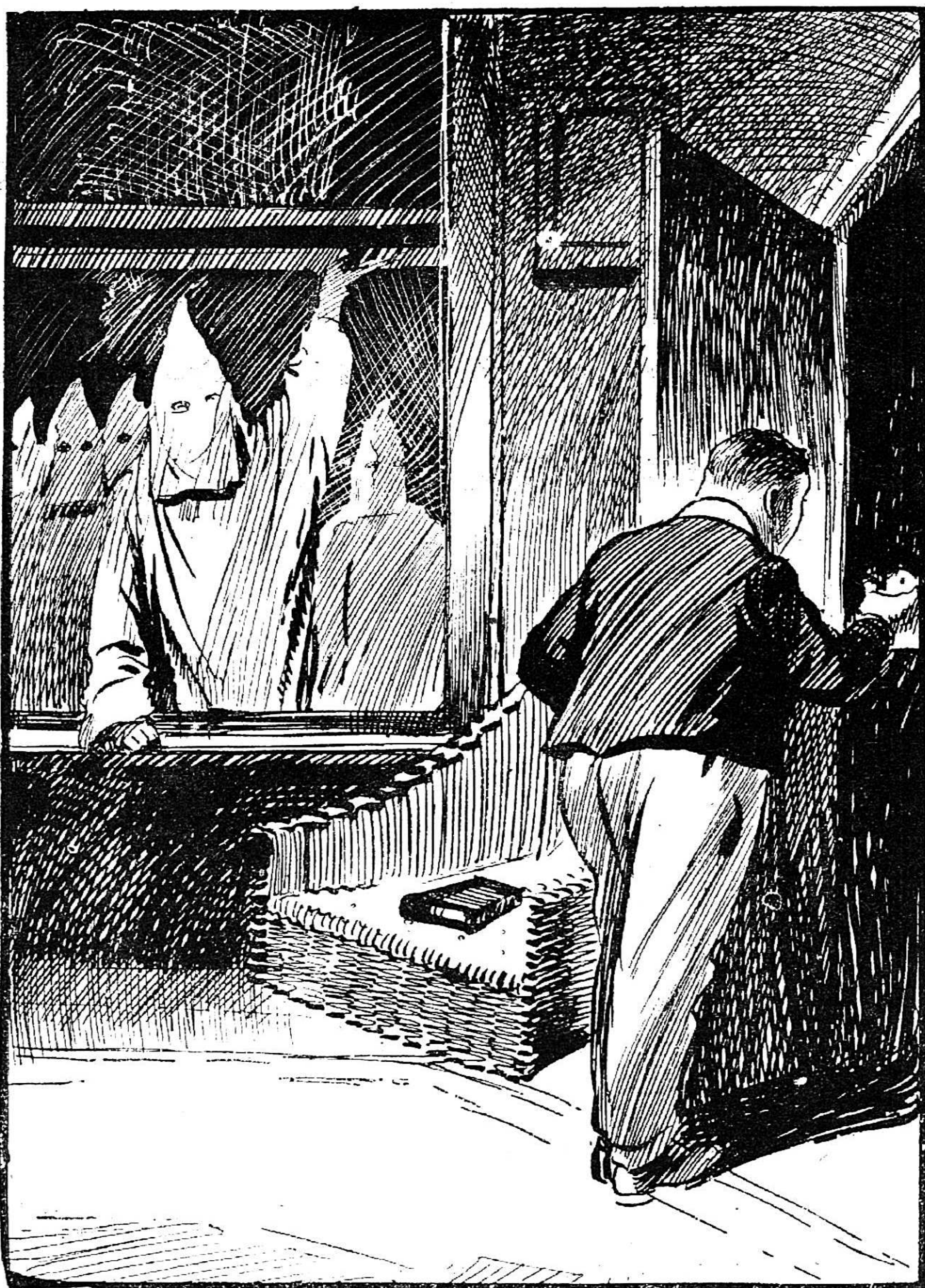
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**THE DESPOT OF THE REMOVE ;
or, The Ku Klux Klan at St. Frank's !**

A Magnificent School Yarn, introducing NELSON LEE, NIPPER &
CO., HANDFORTH & CO., and BUSTER BOOTS, the Amazing New Boy.



The very instant Fatty's back was turned the window slowly and silently rose until the lower sash was completely up. And then six figures appeared—six extraordinary figures!

THE DESPOT OF THE REMOVE!

The Ku Klux Klan. at St. Frank's



John Busterfield Boots has now gone a long way towards achieving what he set out to do. That object was to make himself boss of the Remove. As a matter of fact, that is what he now is. He has a study in both the Ancient and College houses, a thing unprecedented in the annals of St. Frank's. He and the Faithful Five, as his chums are called, have raised themselves to a position of the utmost power. Buster himself will scarcely discuss affairs with the rest of the Remove. He sits aloof in his study, and can only be interviewed by appointment. In addition, he has practically "scrapped" the old Remove footer eleven. At the moment he seems to have complete sway over the destinies of the Removites. But Nipper is not yet beaten. Boots is now full of ideas and schemes. These and the results that follow make a gripping yarn full of incident and humour.

With this week's issue commences our Wonderful New Footer Competition. It is safe to say the Prize List is one of the most magnificent ever offered. You will find complete particulars on page viii. of Our Detective Story Section. My advice

to you is to set about straight away to win one of the splendid prizes, and get your friends to enter as well.

THE EDITOR.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

THE REMOVE RECREATION CLUB!

"NOT so bad, eh?" said John Busterfield Boots.

There was a pleased note in his voice, and the other College House juniors who were with him nodded their heads with approval. They looked around with expressions of satisfaction.

"Jolly fine!" declared Bob Christine.

"Great!" said Clapson.

Buster Boots was quite cool as he accepted these compliments. The new captain of the St. Frank's Remove was always ready to accept praise.

"It's been a bit of trouble, and it's cost the Remove a pretty penny," remarked Boots. "But there's no doubt about the

result. All the chaps will fall over themselves with enthusiasm when they see what we've prepared for them."

"The Remove Recreation Club," said Bob Christine. "It sounds pretty good, you know. We've never had anything like this at St. Frank's before. When Nipper was skipper we merely had the common rooms and the gym—the same as we have now. Nipper gave most of his attention to the sports."

Buster Boots nodded.

"That's where I'm different," he said. "I think a captain ought to take a keen interest in the pleasures and recreations of the whole Form—not merely in football, and such like."

The others juniors glanced at one another rather significantly.

"You're certainly not strong on football," said Bob Christine, after a short pause. "Unless you make an alteration in that respect, Buster, you'll have a crowd of chaps getting pretty restive. And I might as well tell you that I shall be restive, too. You may not think so, but football's an important thing in this school."

Buster looked at Christine, and his eyes glinted.

"I'll trouble you not to give me any advice," he said curtly. "When I need any suggestions, I'll ask for them. And we came here to look at this club-room—not to discuss football."

By this remark the leader of the College House juniors intimated that the discussion was at an end. And any intimation of Buster's was law. The juniors defied him at their own peril.

For an instant Bob Christine flushed slightly—but then he shrugged his shoulders and strode across the room. The once-popular Bob had deteriorated a great deal lately. Since he had come under Buster's influence he had lost a certain amount of his own assertiveness. Perhaps it was only a temporary phase. At least, his former friends hoped so.

There were eight or nine Monks in the party. They were in the old laboratory annexe, with its windows overlooking the quiet cloisters. It was, indeed, one of the most secluded spots within the grounds of St. Frank's College—a place where peace reigned supreme.

It was afternoon, and lessons were just over for the day. Buster had brought his companions straight to the laboratory annexe to show them the club-room before the rank and file of the Remove was admitted.

The enthusiasm of the juniors was quite easy to understand for the Remove Recreation Club looked like being an entire success. Hitherto, as Christine had remarked, the juniors had only the common rooms to congregate in. But with the opening of this club everything would be different.

Buster had succeeded in getting up a large subscription the previous week, and since then a number of fellows had been very busy in the annexe—to say nothing of various workmen from Bannington. The whole idea of the Recreation Club was a bid for popularity on Buster's part.

The place had been in disuse as a laboratory ever since the erection of the new junior "lab," several months earlier. It was quite a large place with pink-washed walls, and bare tables and benches.

This, at least, was what it had been.

It was very different now. In place of the benches there were cunningly contrived nooks—tastefully upholstered in red leather cloth. This imitation leather was of such a good quality that it looked like the actual thing, and was perhaps better from the point of view of wear and tear.

Bright linoleum was on the floor, with a rug here and there. There were easy-chairs and little tables all over the place. On one side there were bookshelves, containing quite a library of light reading matter.

And stacked away on another shelf were chess-boards, draught-boards, boxes of men, etc. There were harmless games of all descriptions, including such exciting diversions as table-tennis, parlour-football, and so forth.

Altogether, the club-room looked very cosy and comfortable, and was generously heated by means of steam radiators. There were electric lights in plenty, and the whole Remove would be able to seek light enjoyment there at one time without any overcrowding.

"Yes, I think the fellows will be pleased when they're admitted—after tea," said Buster. "The Fossils haven't even seen the place yet—they don't know what's been going on."

"Some of the chaps in the Ancient House have been asking what's happened to their subscription money," remarked Percy Bray.

"Well, they'll be satisfied when they see this," remarked Buster.

They made their way out. The door was fitted with a latch-lock—so that when it was closed nobody could enter from the other side. Indeed, this place was very private altogether.

The windows, which had formerly been of clear glass, were now gaily decorated with window paper in imitation of stained glass. There were all colours, and exquisite designs. The effect, from the inside, was quite pleasing in the day-time—and would be just as pleasing from the exterior at night, when the lights within were all glowing. But the opaqueness of the paper would effectively prevent anybody from peeping in through the windows.

Buster and his companions passed out through the doorway—not directly into the cloisters, but into a passage. This was quite short, and ended up in the true outer door. This, too, was provided with a

latch-lock. There was no other entrance of any kind into the club-room.

The juniors passed out into the cloisters, and looked round at the club-room windows.

"Marvellous how they get that paper up now-a-days," said Crooks. "At this distance, it looks like real stained glass. The old lab. might be a chapel, judging from those giddy window panes."

John Busterfield Boots chuckled.

"A chapel, eh?" he repeated. "By Jiminy, that's good!"

The idea seemed to strike him as being somewhat humorous, but he made no further comment. And presently the Monks reached the Triangle, after passing through the great arch under the Ancient House clock-tower.

Bob Christine was very thoughtful as they went towards their own quarters in the College House. He hadn't quite liked Buster's tone when the latter had talked about football. But of late Bob had been losing his own individuality. He had become a devotee of the great Buster.

But what Bob had said was perfectly true. Boots had gained the captaincy of the Remove—he had made himself the supreme boss of the Junior School, ruling both the Ancient House and the College House.

And Buster had done this through sheer personality—to say nothing of sheer brute force. He was a born fighter—a fellow who would lash out calmly and deliberately, and with deadly intent. Any junior who dared to butt up against him was positively booked for one of three things—a black eye—a thick ear—or a swollen nose. Sometimes he got all three of them.

For Buster Boots was a holy terror. He was not to be denied. He was captain, and he meant to be obeyed. And by this time the juniors all realised it, and there were very few fellows who disregarded Buster's autocratic edicts.

But Buster was not relying altogether upon his fistic prowess. He had five faithful followers who were always ready to do his bidding. And Buster knew, also, that he would set the seal upon his popularity if he did something for the Remove which would be universally enjoyed. Upon gaining the captaincy he had declared his intention of improving all conditions for the Remove. So far he had done nothing, and the Form was becoming rather restive.

It had grown even more since the fiasco of the football match against Bannington Grammar School on the previous Saturday afternoon. Buster had made a great mistake there, and he knew it now. Instead of choosing an eleven according to their merits, he had placed himself and all his favourites in the team. The game had been a farce, ending up in the middle of the second half, with the Grammarians disgusted. The visitors had left the field, refusing to finish the game.

And then matters had been made worse

by me. I had formed a scratch eleven, and we had played the Grammarians—giving them a clean, rousing game. In the midst of this the girls from the Moor View School had watched. These young ladies had just come into the neighbourhood, and this was their first informal introduction to the Remove.

By great ill fortune, Buster had chosen this very moment to bring a crowd of his own supporters on to the field, in order to stop the game. A kind of free fight had resulted.

And, horror of horrors, the young ladies had witnessed the whole thing. They had seen the Remove fighting like a crowd of young hooligans—and had gone away in disgust. All the decent fellows in the Form had been infuriated when they realised the damage that had been done. For it had been Buster's fault all along the line.

The indignation had died down somewhat since then, and for a day or two things had been going fairly smoothly. The girls from the new school had not been seen. They had not been allowed out, presumably. Quite a number of fellows had been on the look out for the young ladies—for Archie Glenthorne had declared that many of them were peaches of the finest quality. Archie had seen them at close quarters, and Archie was considered to be a bit of a judge. If he said they were "dashed pretty," it stood to reason that they were well worth looking at. Unfortunately, the girls hadn't been seen since that first day. And not a single member of the Remove, excepting Archie, had had a chance to meet the girls at close quarters.

Buster had been lying low. He had taken no drastic action of any kind. He knew that many fellows in the Ancient House were antagonistic, but they had not taken any action. Buster was relying on the Recreation Club to develop a good general feeling throughout the Form.

Directly tea was over, Boots presented himself at Mr. Stockdale's study.

The Housemaster bade him enter, and looked at him inquiringly. The Housemaster of the College House was not such a bad sort, when you got him in a good humour.

"Well, Boots?" he asked, laying down his pen.

"You remember you gave me permission to use the old laboratory annexe for our Recreation Club, sir?" asked Boots. "I spoke to you about it last week, and you said you had no objection——"

"Quite so, my boy—what of it?" asked the Housemaster.

"Well, the club-room is all ready, sir, and I'd like you to come and have a look round," replied Buster. "Suit yourself, of course, sir, but I was rather anxious to take all the fellows round to the club in about half an hour. And I thought it would be rather in order if you gave the place your seal of approval as it were. I

wouldn't like to do anything against your wishes, sir."

Mr. Stockdale smiled.

"That is very thoughtful of you, Boots, and I appreciate it," he said. "Yes, certainly I will look over the place for you, and give you my opinion. If you will be in the annexe in about ten minutes time, I will join you there."

"Oh, thanks, sir—it's awfully good of you."

Buster went, highly pleased, and reported to several Monks who were waiting about in the passage. Without wasting any time they hurried away to the club-room, and switched on the lights.

But the door was kept closed and locked, so that none of the other Remove fellows could get in before the appointed time. Percy Bray was stationed at the outer door, ready to admit Mr. Stockdale.

The Housemaster soon turned up.

He was instantly admitted by Percy Bray, who conducted him along the passage, and then into the club-room itself.

"Here we are, sir," said Buster cheerfully. "Before we start any of these par-lour games we'd like you to look round and give us the O.K. Chess, draughts, table-football, and all that sort of thing, sir."

Mr. Stockdale gave the club a full inspection.

"Boots, I must congratulate you," he said, at length.

"Thank you, sir."

"Splendid!" declared the Housemaster. "You have not been captain of the Form for long, Boots, but you have performed quite a remarkable achievement by instituting this Recreation Club. It is a distinct acquisition to the Remove, and I trust that all the boys will appreciate your efforts for their general comfort. You are performing your duties as captain in a most creditable way."

"I'm glad you think that, sir," said Buster smoothly. "I've been trying to do my best all along, and I hope the fellows will appreciate me in the same way. Then everything's all right, sir?"

"More than all right, Buster—it is quite wonderful," declared Mr. Stockdale. "It is this spirit of companionship and good feeling that I heartily approve of. I am hoping that it will lead to a better understanding between the boys of the two Houses. We want no rivalry or antagonism."

Mr. Stockdale went off, quite delighted—Boots inviting him to pop in at any time he liked. The Remove captain assured Mr. Stockdale that any of the masters or prefects would be highly welcome, whenever they took it into their heads to look in.

"I think that's made him feel pretty comfortable," chuckled Boots, after the Housemaster had gone. "About as unsuspecting as you could wish for. He probably won't come round for weeks—and even if he does we shall be ready."

Percy Bray looked a bit doubtful.

"I'm not worrying about Stocky, or any of the masters," he said. "But I've got an idea that some of the chaps will cause some trouble. Nipper and Pitt and Tregellis-West, and a few of that gang. They're inclined to be goody-goody."

"Don't you believe it," said Buster calmly. "When they know the thing's absolutely safe, they'll jump over themselves to join in. Besides, where's the harm? What's wrong with chess, or ping-pong?"

And Boots, chuckling, passed out.

Ten minutes later word was sent round to the Remove that the Recreation Club was now formally open, and that all subscribers would be welcome. The club was for Removeites only. Fellows of any other Form were not to be admitted under any circumstances.

And in a very short time the Remove commenced crowding in—eager to take a look at this new club of Buster's.

For days they had been hearing rumours about it. Boots had been questioned by all and sundry, but he had given evasive replies—telling the inquisitive ones to adopt the precedent of a once-celebrated statesman, and wait and see. And it had come as quite a surprise to most fellows to find the Recreation Club open this evening.

But the surprise which was to follow was ten times as great. Indeed, it was more akin to a shock.

CHAPTER II.

GOING A LITTLE TOO FAR.



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH set his tea-cup down and snorted.

"Buster Boots can go and eat coke," he said deliberately. "As for his rotten club, I don't care if it burns!"

"But look here, old man——" began McClure.

"I don't want to hear any argument," interrupted Handforth. "I'm not going to the place! Understand? If Buster organised the blessed club you can safely bet it's no good!"

Both Church and McClure looked impatiently at their leader. They were in Study D, in the Remove passage in the Ancient House, and Edward Oswald was just finishing his tea.

"We only wanted to take a little squint," said Church. "I thought you might be interested, Handy. But never mind. We won't press you. Clurey and I will go alone——"

"Oh!" said Handforth darkly. "Oh! So that's the game, is it? You and Clurey will go alone? You—you rotters! If I don't go, you're not going! I wouldn't let you disgrace Study D by appearing in the beastly place! That's final! I've said my last word!"

He banged the table and made the crockery rattle.

"Boots is a cad," he went on fiercely. "He licked Nipper by foul means, and gained the captaincy. Then he messed up the game between St. Frank's and Bannington Grammar School! He's dragged the fair name of this college into the mud! And this Recreation Club of his is a swindle!"

"I thought you said something about a last word——"

"Never mind what I said!" roared Handforth. "Whenever I think of Boots I get wild! That chap makes me see red! And I won't allow you to encourage him by visiting this club."

"But we paid our subscriptions," protested McClure. "We're members——"

"I don't care!" snapped Handy. "Dry up! I'm finished!"

He picked up his tea-cup and raised it to his lips so aggressively that about a quarter of a pint of hot tea swilled out en route and splashed upon Handy's waistcoat.

"Yaroooh!" he howled. "You—you silly fatheads!"

Church and McClure, quite disgusted at this unjust outburst, sat down on the other side of the table, and gazed at their leader with expressions of resigned martyrdom. But Edward Oswald had failed to observe a brief wink that had passed from Church to McClure. They wanted to go and have a look at the club, and they knew exactly how to deal with Handy.

"That's right—blame us for everything!" growled Church. "All right, we'll take your advice about Buster's club. I expect it's no good, anyhow. We'll take up a lofty attitude, and completely ignore it."

Handforth mopped himself with his handkerchief.

"That's the idea," he agreed gruffly. "Let those rotten Monks rip!"

"Fine!" declared McClure. "What do we care about Buster's club? Of course, it'll be a bit awkward later on, because we shan't be able to discuss it with the other fellows. Never having been inside the place, we shall be at a disadvantage. Still, it's better to let those Monks rip, as you say."

"Rather," said McClure. "I didn't realise it at first, but Handy's absolutely right. I wouldn't walk into that club if you paid me! Blow the place! It's bound to be no good."

Handforth grunted, demolished a cake, and then pushed his chair back. After sitting still and sulien for a minute or two, he rose to his feet and glared at his two chums.

"Come on!" he said curtly.

"Where to?" asked Church, in surprise.

"We're going to have a look at that giddy Recreation Club," said Handforth, as though the subject had never been discussed. "If you chaps object, I'll jolly well biff you!"

"But—but——"

"I don't want any objections!" roared



Fatty Little opened the door of Study L. The next moment a zinc bath containing soot, ashes, mud and other rubbish descended upon his head.

Handforth. "What's that you chaps were saying just now? You don't want to go to the club? Oh! I'll soon show you whether you'll go or not! I'm not going to have you fatheads opposing me!"

"Oh, well, Handy, if you insist," began Church weakly. Handforth did insist, and he passed out of the study—Church and McClure following him with another exchange of winks. This was quite a favourite occupation of theirs. One of these days Handforth would probably catch them at it, and then the result would be painful and tragic.

They passed out of the Ancient House, and found Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey just crossing towards the cloisters. Other juniors were also bound for the new club. I was coming along with Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson. Archie Glen-thorne and Alf Brent were in the rear of us.

"Come along—the more the merrier!" said Reggie Pitt cheerfully. "Gentlemen, we shall now be introduced to the wonderful club. According to Buster, it's going to beat everything that's ever happened."

"Absolutely!" said Archie, joining the others. "But I must admit, old screams, that I'm dashed doubtful. I mean to say, this Buster chappie is something of a blot on the landscape. It wouldn't be inaccurate to describe him as a nasty growth."

"Are you talking about his red hair?" grinned Pitt.

"The whole chappie—absolutely intact!" replied Archie. "And it seems to me, laddies, that this club might not be all that it's

cracked up to be. A few well assorted doubts are whizzing about in the compartments of the old grey matter!"

"Well, we'll soon know, anyhow," I said briskly.

And a few moments later we had passed into the cloisters, and could see the gaily decorated windows of the Remove Recreation Club. All was quiet and sedate. It was strictly understood that there would be no noisy demonstrations in the club-room. It was essentially a place for quiet amusement.

We arrived, and found Denny, of the Remove, on duty at the door. He directed us straight down the passage, where we

But I failed to observe Crooks or Denny. For some reason these latter had remained outside—one guarding each door. And I further noticed that the doors themselves were fitted with latch locks.

John Busterfield Boots was looking very pleased with himself.

"Well, you fellows, we're all here," he said genially. "The Recreation Club is now open, but before we begin any amusements, I'd like to address the whole crowd of you. I want to explain things in general."

"Go it, Buster!"

"Speak up, old man!"

Buster ascended to the top of a table, and stood there looking over the throng—

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found Crooks. The latter appeared to be on duty, also. He opened the door for us, and we all entered.

The room was only half filled, for it was a huge apartment. Juniors were looking round with great approval. Some were already playing draughts, and others were examining the books on the shelves.

"H'm not so bad!" said Tommy Watson critically. "Pretty comfy, in fact. There's nothing wrong with this place."

And I had to confess that I was agreeably surprised. Even Haydforth had no adverse criticism to make. And by the time we had looked completely over the place, all the club members had arrived.

In short, the whole Remove was present.

quite calm and collected, and as cool as ice.

"As a preliminary, I'd like to make a few remarks concerning the amusements and recreations which have hitherto been available for the Remove," he said easily. "In my opinion, you've all had a pretty dull time. Things have been so jolly slow, with nothing else but football and fives and a few other outdoor sports. Of course, you've been able to indulge in reading and 'snap' and 'snakes-and-ladders' and blowing bubbles and all that sort of thing, but you can't call these amusements very thrilling."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Buster was inclined to be facetious, and the fellows chuckled.

"I think we ought to have something more exciting," continued the skipper. "We ought to have a place where we can congregate privately, and indulge in a few harmless but exciting recreations. That's the object of this club. Within this building we are absolutely cut off from the rest of the school—away from such nuisances as masters and prefects, who have a habit of butting in just when they're not wanted. In this club we're really private."

"Then smokin' will be permitted?" asked Fullwood eagerly.

"What?" roared Handforth.

"Don't get excited," said Buster gently. "Fullwood is unduly optimistic. Smoking will not be permitted, under any circumstances. Not that I'm against smoking. If any of the fellows like to indulge in the pastime I shan't interfere. I believe in letting my supporters have perfect freedom. But they must smoke in their own quarters, or out in the open. Then the risk will be their own. We can't have any rules broken in this place."

"But if we're absolutely private——" began Fullwood.

"That makes no difference," interrupted Boots. "Smoke has a way of hanging about, and any prefect or master suddenly coming into this club would smell it at once. Of course, we're well protected. There's a passage outside, and any intruder has to pass two doors before actually entering this club. At the outer door a sentry will always be on duty, and another sentry on duty at this door, here. In addition, I've rigged up an electric bell, which you can see over in the far corner."

A good many juniors looked at the bell.

"What's that for?" asked Pitt.

"To give us the warning, in case a master appears unexpectedly," replied Buster coolly. "The outer sentry will press the hidden bell-push, and we shall get the signal. The outer sentry will then delay the intruder for a few moments, and finally conduct him into the club. Thus, by the time the master or prefect gets here, everything will be normal and peaceful. The smell of cigarette smoke would be fatal—so smoking is strictly prohibited."

I looked at Buster keenly. There was something behind all this. I felt certain that the Recreation Club was not all that it professed to be. Otherwise, why all these elaborate precautions?

"Why do we need the sentries at all, Boots?" I asked quietly.

"I'm coming to that," said Buster. "As I was saying, the Remove has never had the opportunity of indulging in something really thrilling. Well, I've solved the problem. In a minute I'm going to reveal the secret of this club to you all; but I would like to strike a note of warning first."

"Warning?" repeated De Valerie.

"Exactly," said Boots. "Some of you fellows may not entirely approve of my

scheme at first. It is new—revolutionary. And all reformers have to suffer. They are misunderstood. But I would like all you chaps to be patient, and you've got to remember, too, that everything is perfectly harmless."

"It looks like it, anyhow."

"What's the idea, Boots?"

"About the warning," continued Buster calmly. "If any fellow disapproves and sneaks to his Housemaster, it will be quite futile, for our safeguards are such that not a single atom of evidence can ever be discovered. And the sneak himself, although unable to harm us, will be dealt with severely by the Club Committee. His life will be made absolute torture."

The Remove was impressed.

"What's all this about evidence?" demanded Handforth bluntly. "I knew all along that you were up to some filthy game, but I can't get the hang of it yet."

"Oh, I expect Boots is going to suggest card-playing—for money," said Pitt.

"Good idea!" declared Fullwood enthusiastically.

There were a few calls of approval and disapproval intermingled. Buster waited for the commotion to die down. Then he looked at the throng with all his usual composure.

"There seems to be a mixed opinion regarding card-playing for money," he resumed coolly. "I'd like to address a few words to those fellows who regard card-playing for money as gambling. I'm afraid they're rather old-fashioned and short-sighted. To be prejudiced against cards, just because the game has a little money on it, is nothing else but narrow-mindedness."

"Certainly—among adults," said Reggie Pitt. "Everybody knows there's no harm in a game of bridge, for example, with a few pence per hundred points, just to give the score an added interest. My own people play like that, and most others, too. That's not wicked. But it's a very different thing here, at school. It's a totally different matter for St. Frank's fellows to indulge in card-playing for money. Boys are usually hot-headed and reckless, and they don't know when to draw the line. So any game with money on it is absolutely rotten—rotten to the core. All decent fellows should shun it like the plague."

"Hear, hear!" I said heartily.

"Good man, Reggie!" declared Handforth.

But there was a storm of jeers from Fullwood, Merrell and the others.

"Yah! Goody-goody Little Erics!"

John Busterfield Boots held up his hand.

"Peace—peace!" he said calmly. "Take a tip from me, and always keep cool. 'I'll just continue my address, if you'll allow me. I dare say that fellows like Pitt and Nipper and Handforth would regard a game of poker as gambling. Poker's no good unless you have a little money on it. But that's the game—it's not even worth playing with—

out cash. But it isn't gambling at all, it's a perfectly harmless amusement. The same with roulette, and similar pastimes. Taken moderately, there's nothing to beat roulette for real, genuine interest and mild excitement. And in my opinion the Remove needs something to buck it up—the Remove needs some pep. Well, I'm going to supply it."

"By providing roulette?" asked Pitt sarcastically.

Buster Boots looked round and nodded.

"Exactly!" he said, with perfect composure.

CHAPTER III.

THE SPLIT IN THE REMOVE.



WITH a grim face, I strode forward through the crowd.

"Do you mean that, Boots?" I asked tensely. "Do you mean that you're actually suggesting roulette here—in this club—for any fellows of the Remove to indulge in?"

"That's the idea," said Boots easily. "As I've said before, you fellows have never really had a chance of getting out of your skin. You've been hemmed in and hampered and compelled to stick to the same old rut. Now, at Kendis College—my last school—I instituted a club very much like this one. Crooks, Denny, Crowe, Bray, and Webb were with me in that scheme—"

"And I suppose you all got expelled together?" inquired Pitt.

"No, we didn't!" snapped Buster. "The school closed down, because it wasn't paying. So we all came here together."

"That was pretty rough on St. Frank's!" snorted Handforth. "Why, for two pins, I'll come up there and punch you on the nose! You—you dangerous maniac! You rotten cad! If you start any roulette here, I'll smash up the whole show!"

"And we'll help you!" said Church and McClure loyally.

"Wait a minute—wait a minute!" said Buster, still patient. "Don't get into such a flurry. I knew that I should meet with opposition of this kind, so I'm not surprised. But you'll soon get used to it, and there's no need for you to play if you don't want to. There are all sorts of harmless amusements for those fellows who haven't got any cash or who disapprove of so-called gambling. There's ping-pong, chess, and—"

"Hold on!" I interrupted. "That's not the point at all, Buster. If I remained in this place while roulette was being played I should be as guilty as the actual players. And I'm going to warn you straight away that you'd better not start suggesting any iniquity of that kind."

"Iniquity?" repeated Buster, with some heat.

"Yes," I retorted. "If you look in the dictionary, you'll find that iniquity means

wickedness and crime. And it's absolute crime to open up a gambling den for the use of schoolboys."

"Don't talk such wild nonsense," said Boots contemptuously. "Any fellow with a grain of sense knows when to stop—"

"Exactly," I interrupted. "If I was playing roulette—which is unthinkable—I should do it moderately. And I think you've got enough sense to do the same thing. But what of the other fellows? What of chaps like Hubbard and Merrell and Marriott and Long and Gulliver, and others of the same calibre?"

"What of us?" demanded the fellows I had named.

"They've got no will power at all!" I went on, ignoring the interruption. "As soon as they got hold of any money they'd gamble it away. And even if they started small, they'd rapidly go in for bigger stakes. It's always the way with those gambling games. It always leads to evil results."

"You're infernally squeamish!" said Buster.

"It's quite natural for you to say that," I retorted. "But don't think I'm one of those soft fellows who pretend to be everything that's good and righteous. Thank Heaven, I'm not! I suppose I commit as many petty misdeeds as anybody else. A fellow wouldn't be human if he didn't. But I know when to draw the line against rank, absolute rottenness."

"Hear, hear!" said Pitt.

"Good!" declared Jack Grey. "We don't hold ourselves up as saints, but we do try to be decent. And no fellow can be decent who goes in for gambling while he's still a junior at school."

"This is developing into a Sunday-school lecture!" said Buster Boots sarcastically. "I've had my say, and now I'm going to show you all the preparations I have made for your amusement. Afterwards we'll take a vote of the Form. And I look forward with confidence to a majority."

"If you get one, it'll be the biggest disgrace the Remove has ever brought upon itself!" I said, with suppressed fury. "Good heavens! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Boots! You—the skipper! The captain of the Form—who is supposed to set a good example to all the other fellows! You stand up there, actually asking for support in a filthy venture of this kind."

Boots smiled.

"The vote will be a true index of the Remove's feeling in this matter," he replied.

"If I do get a majority I shall consider myself fully justified in instituting this recreation club. And I'll be perfectly fair about the whole matter. If I'm beaten by this vote I'll abandon the whole project, and the club will be just as harmless as it professes to be. But if I win by a good majority—then all those who disapprove

must hold their tongues and put up with it. If that's not fair, tell me what is!"

"Good for you, Boots!"

"Splendid, old man!"

"Go it!"

Buster came down from his table, and proceeded to reveal the hidden secrets of the club room—the Remove fellows looking on in a fever of excitement. Personally, I was grim and angry.

Buster was quite safe about that vote—and he knew it.

He had acted cunningly. It had been a good move on his part to make his preliminary speech—to get the fellows in a right humour before springing his bomb-shell. He was certain, at least, of the College House votes. The Monks had never had such an aggressive leader as Boots before, and they were certain to back him up. And there were heaps of fellows in the Ancient House who would be only too delighted to indulge in petty gambling if they thought they could do so without undergoing any risk.

The whole scheme was rotten to the core—just as Reggie Pitt had said. The more I thought of it, the angrier I became. Juniors, like Hubbard and Armstrong and Griffith, who considered themselves to be pretty doggish, would be quite ready to join in the "fun." They had never done so hitherto because the risk was altogether too great.

They hadn't possessed the necessary pluck to go gambling in the village, or in Bannington, after lights-out. They had never risked a game in their own studies. It had been left to Ralph Leslie Fullwood to do that kind of thing. Fullwood and his two chums were the only members of the Remove who had really and truly dared. And Gulliver and Bell had done so just because Fullwood was their leader. Cad though he was, Ralph Leslie nevertheless possessed heaps of daring and pluck. He was game enough for any questionable enterprise. And he viewed this new scheme with entire approval.

It wouldn't make much difference to Fullwood and Co.—this club. They indulged in gambling, and had done so for terms. But it would affect all the other fellows—the juniors who had had a secret longing to be "sporty," but who had never had the opportunity.

Buster's Recreation Club, in a nutshell, was designed for the express purpose of making gambling easy! Here, in this club-room, the young blades would be able to indulge themselves without any danger of being caught. That was the whole idea of the club.

Buster proceeded to take his stand in front of a substantial table which stood in the centre of the room. To all appearances it was just like any other table. It was heavily constructed of deal, stained

a mahogany colour, with a top covered with American cloth. It was evidently there for the purpose of playing table tennis or table football. It was the only big table in the room, and thus occupied the central position.

"Let's have the table tennis set," said Buster crisply.

It was brought to him, and the net was fixed up with special metal posts and screw clamps. The other fellows looked on, wondering.

"Who's goin' to play that kid's game?" demanded Fullwood.

"Don't be impatient—watch," said Buster.

When the table tennis apparatus was all set, Boots took hold of the table edge. He held it firmly, and swung it upwards. To the astonishment of everybody the top of the table raised itself as though on a swivel. By means of steel arms it was supported from below; and after performing a kind of eccentric movement the top of the table descended—but with the underside now topmost.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Gulliver blankly.

"Pretty neat, eh?" smiled Buster.

"Rather!"

"I saw that table in London weeks ago," went on Buster coolly. "I paid a small deposit on it—because I meant to bring it down here when the time was ripe. After you fellows had paid your subscriptions, I sent the balance of the payment—and here we are."

"You used our money to buy that thing?" hooted Handforth.

"Don't shout like that!" said Buster sternly. "If any fellow wants his subscription money back—he can have it. But that won't do any good, because this thing is going on in any case."

The juniors did not pay much attention to Buster—they were looking at the table. It was, indeed, a cunning contrivance. I had no doubt it had been expressly designed for use in a disreputable gambling club. The top now exposed to view was a perfect miniature reproduction of the great roulette tables at Monte Carlo. And there was the big roulette wheel itself, in good condition. In an instant the club had been converted into a gambling den.

"How does it work?"

"Let's have a try!"

"My hat! This is exciting!"

"Go on, Boots—show us how it works!"

There were all sorts of excited, eager exclamations, and Buster Boots smiled serenely to himself. He had known all along how the majority of the fellows would take this new venture.

Glancing underneath the table, I saw no sign of the American cloth top with the table tennis set in position. There were plain boards in view. The top of the table possessed a kind of hidden cavity. Unless

subjected to an extremely close examination the truth of the table would never be discovered.

"Now," said Boots calmly, "we'll have a little rehearsal. We'll suppose that a game's in progress. Just litter this table with money—or anything will do. Good!"

All sorts of objects were flung on the table.

"Now then, Clapson, just pop outside and tell the outer sentry to tinkle the bell. We'll suppose that the warning's just been given. All you chaps gather round as though you're playing."

Buster's orders were quickly carried out, the fellows flushed with excitement. And then came a tinkle of the electric-bell, immediately after Clapson had gone out.

"Now then—quick!" commanded Buster. "Grab everything!"

In a flash the table was cleared.

Buster turned the top over in less than two seconds. Then he grabbed a table tennis racquet, and instructed three others to do likewise. And a keen game of table tennis was in progress when Clapson walked in.

"You see," said Buster smoothly, "with all the precautions that I've arranged for, there's no possibility of us being caught on the hop. We can always make things look absolutely straightforward and above board in less than one minute. And now we'll have some sport, eh?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Rather!"

"Let's see how the giddy table works!"

"Wait a minute!" said Buster. "A good many of you don't know how to play roulette—but it's as simple as A.B.C., and you'll soon learn. Fullwood's pretty expert, so I suggest that he acts as the bank, or croupier."

"Good idea!" grinned Fullwood.

"As a general rule, the advantage is with the bank—that is, the fellow who spins the wheel has the best chance of winning money," continued Buster. "Therefore, as soon as you all learn the game we'll have the thing absolutely fair. Before we start any particular evening's amusement, we'll draw lots for the privilege of holding the bank."

"That's fair enough."

"Rather!"

"There's only one proviso," went on Buster. "Nobody will be eligible for drawing lots unless he has at least a quid to open the bank with. No sense in a fellow opening with less. And the banker, of course, can name his own limit. To begin with, I think Fullwood had better act as general instructor."

"Good!"

"Wait a minute!" I broke in sharply. "What about that vote, Buster?"

"Oh, yes!" said the skipper. "We'll take it straight away. Hands up all those who approve of this club, and who want to take part in the spree. Take time; consider the thing properly before voting. There'll be practically no risk, and you'll all have heaps of fun. Just because the Head looks upon this kind of thing as wicked, it doesn't mean to say it is wicked. Headmasters are always so jolly narrow-minded. Now then—hands up those who vote for the club and me."

I watched the forest of hands fly upwards from seven-eighths of the Remove. I'd expected it. Buster had put things so skilfully to the juniors that they didn't even realise that there was anything wrong in it.

Quite a number of the chaps were decent enough ordinarily. But the excitement of the thing had got into their blood, and they were eager enough to test this game of roulette. And once they "fell for it" they would be ardent supporters of the game—for roulette, once tried, holds a fascination over its victims which is most difficult to shake off. Only a person of strong will can rid himself of the lure.

Most of the fellows didn't know what they were doing—I was convinced of that. But this, of course, made little difference. Buster's smooth tongue had done the trick. And talking to the crowd would be worse than useless. In their present state of excitement they would not listen to any reasonable advice.

"Well, I think that's good enough, isn't it?" smiled Buster. "At the same time, we'd better take a vote of the objectors—just to see who they are. But I fancy I could pick them out, anyhow."

I held my hand up at once, as a lead to the other level-headed fellows in the Remove. Without hesitation eleven hands shot up. And these eleven belonged to Reggie Pitt, Jack Grey, Archie Glenthorne, Alf Brent, Fatty Little, Tommy Watson, Tregellis-West, Handforth, Church, McClure, and Somerton.

I waited, looking at such fellows as De Valerie, Singleton, and Bob Christine. They had not voted for Buster, so I naturally expected them to vote on my side. They saw me looking at them, and flushed.

"Well?" I asked.

"Oh, let's give it a trial, anyhow," said De Valerie awkwardly. "Goodness knows, I'm not in favour of that kind of thing, but there's no harm in looking on. Don't be an ass, Nipper."

"Every fellow who votes on my side will not do any looking on at this kind of rottenness," I said curtly. "Either you vote for Buster, or you vote for me—one or the other. Are you on my side?"

The juniors I was addressing made no

reply. I knew them to be waverers, and for the moment they were more inclined towards Buster.

"So there are exactly twelve of us," I said grimly. "Well, that's better than we might have expected. I'm glad to see that at least a dozen members of the Remove are still in possession of their full wits. Will all you chaps stick to me?" I added, addressing the eleven.

"You bet we will!" said Handforth grimly.

"Oh! And what are you going to do?" sneered Buster. "The goody-goody twelve!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Thanks!" I said quietly. "Well, Boots, let me tell you straight away that all members of my party look to me as their leader. We don't recognise you in the slightest way. We don't take orders from you, or regard you as captain in any way. We're a party to ourselves. Any other fellows are welcome, and I call upon every decent chap to break away from this filthy business and come in with me. I'm out for a clean Remove—not a gambling den!"

But there were no further additions to the trusty twelve. And, without another word, I led the way, and we all marched out. The split in the Remove had come at last, and the position was acute.



While Fatty was busy washing his face, a hand cautiously came through the open window and groped for the towel rail.

"What do you think you can do against the majority?" went on Boots. "If any of you dare to sneak——"

"You needn't worry—we shan't sneak!" I said curtly. "But I tell you frankly we'll do the utmost we can to induce fellows into our party. This is a split, Buster—serious and lasting. There are twelve of us in this new party——"

"And we vote Nipper our leader!" shouted Pitt.

"Hear, hear!"

"Good!"

"Absolutely!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE DIE-HARDS!



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH snorted like an outraged rhinoceros.

"We can't let this go on!" he thundered. "Something's got to be done now—at once! It's absolutely disgraceful! Buster Boots ought to be sacked from the school! He's nearly as bad as Fullwood!"

"He's a hundredfold worse than Fullwood, you mean!" I said. "Fullwood did, at least, confine his gambling activities to

himself and his two chums. But Boots has dragged the whole Remove into this rotten thing!"

"Don't forget us, dear old carrot!" Archie reminded me.

"No, I'm not forgetting that twelve of us are still in possession of our senses," I said. "But, after all, we're only a small proportion. All the other fellows are under Buster's sway. And once they get into that roulette grip, the fascination will take hold of them. Heaven only knows how it will end."

"Probably by a public inquiry, and the sacking of a dozen chaps," said Pitt. "That's what Buster will lead the Remove into unless he's pretty careful."

"But—but we can't allow that!" roared Handforth. "We've got to go into that place, and smash up the roulette table—"

"Don't yell like that!" said Church hastily. "No need to tell everybody! Keep cool, old man. Leave it to Nipper—he'll fix it. My hat, I'm jolly glad to have Nipper as a leader again. We're all fed up with Buster!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Absolutely, old yell!"

"And before long, Nipper will be skipper again!" declared Tommy Watson.

"Begad, rather."

The twelve of us who had broken away from the ranks of the Remove were squashed into Study C, in the Ancient House. We had just arrived—to find the Remove passage unusually still and deserted. And it was likely to be very quiet during the ensuing evenings.

"It's good of you fellows to back me up like this," I said, as I addressed the eleven. "It was particularly decent of Handforth not to make a tremendous din in the club room. I was expecting him to attack Buster—"

"Blessed if I know what I was thinking of!" growled Handforth, with a start. "I was so surprised at the whole rotten game that I hardly knew what I was up to! Of course, I ought to have smashed Buster, now you mention it! Wait a few minutes—I'll go and do it!"

"No you won't, old man," I said quietly. "That's the very worst policy. It will only enrage the rest of the fellows, and make them all the more staunch to Buster. Human nature's queer. Do you know why these idiots are so much in favour of this infernal roulette game?"

"Because they're a set of cads!" said Church.

"Not at all," I disagreed. "Many of the chaps are decent—we know them to be thoroughly O.K. Singleton, for example—Dodd, Trotwood, Christine, and all those. They're bright enough at ordinary times. But they've been carried away by Buster's eloquence, and by the fact that this roulette business is forbidden. That's human nature again."

"To do something that's forbidden?"

"Of course," I said. "Take any example you like. Prohibition in America—there's one. When the United States were 'wet,' a large proportion of the people never thought of tasting a drop of intoxicating liquor. But as soon as the country became dry, these very same people were going to all sorts of pains in order to get hold of whisky or gin."

"That's true enough," said Pitt, with a nod.

"It's just the same with this roulette," I went on. "If the Head suddenly announced that we could all play roulette to our heart's content, the majority of the chaps wouldn't care a snap about it. But it's forbidden—it's against the rules. And there's a certain fascination about the whole thing which can't be denied. The idea of running a roulette club at St. Frank's seemed about the maddest thing possible. But Buster, by his cunning, engineered the thing. And the fellows are going dotty with excitement and enthusiasm about it. It doesn't mean to say they're rank rotters—they're just blithering idiots to be carried away like that. They've temporarily gone off their balance, and it may be weeks before they regain it."

"Yes, and in the meantime they'll be seriously harmed, morally," said Grey.

"We'll try to prevent that, if we can," I declared grimly. "There's no doubt about it—Buster knows what he's doing. As soon as he gained the captaincy he determined to make a bid for popularity. And his idea was to appeal to the baser emotions. As you see, it was a success. But a skipper who does that kind of thing is booked for a very short lease. Buster may be popular with the crowd, but his popularity isn't of the lasting kind."

Handforth took a deep breath.

"When it comes to talking, Nipper, you ain't such a bad hand at it!" he admitted. "But what's the idea of all this giddy chin music? What we want is action—not words! And I've got an idea—"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Watson.

"So have I—a good idea, too!" said Fatty Little. "Instead of jawing here, why not go into the tuckshop? We can be having a few of Mrs. Hake's special beef patties, and a few sandwiches, and—"

"If you talk about grub here, I'll pulverise you!" snorted Handforth. "Now, my idea is to get up a huge party, attack the club, and smash that roulette wheel to bits!"

"That's certainly one way of doing it, Handy—but it happens to be about the most futile suggestion of all," I said. "It might end up in the smashing of the roulette wheel, but it wouldn't stop the gambling."

"How could they gamble without the wheel?"

"There are plenty of other ways," I replied. "Once having got the fever, they'll keep it up—particularly if they're thwarted."

It's a very delicate situation, and we mustn't do anything in a hurry."

"Hear, hear!" said Reggie. "Wise words, O my father! It's jolly easy to butt in, and do a tremendous amount of damage, instead of good. Handy's idea to smash up the roulette table is no good—"

"Why not?" demanded Handforth.

"Because the affair would end up in a free fight," said Pitt shrewdly. "Masters would come, and prefects, and then the whole giddy thing would be exposed. That would mean the sacking of Buster, for a cert. We can't take any risks of that sort. Far better to cure him, and bring out his decent qualities. I've got an idea there's a certain amount of good in him."

"Buster's leading the fellows just where he likes," I said. "We can't do anything yet. Better lie low, and prepare our campaign at leisure. Hasty action would be fatal. And I think it'll be a good scheme to give Buster a run. He's going too fast, and he's bound to trip up, sooner or later."

"That's my opinion," said Alf Brent, nodding.

"Couldn't we make a raid on the club after lights-out?" suggested Church.

"Easily," I replied, nodding. "We could raid the club, burn up the roulette wheel and the table and everything. But, as I explained before, it wouldn't do any good at all. Not only Buster, but all his supporters would be raving in the morning. They'd go in for some other kind of gambling, and get a new roulette wheel in the meantime. They're easy enough to buy—you can get them at scores of places in London—have them sent down by rail, too. If we smashed up that table, they'd have another one here within a couple of days. No, old chaps—violence is absolutely the last thing I should advise."

The others agreed that I was quite right, and it was decided that we'd stand by—aloof. For a day or two we'd wait and see what happened, doing our utmost to gain more and more supporters. We would try and strengthen our party. And, with luck, we might be able to gain the majority. Buster's doom would then be certain. But at present the Remove was under the iron hand of the self-styled Boss.

"Well, it's a big advance to have organised an opposition," said Reggie Pitt.

"That's the first step. We ought to get a good name for ourselves. What about the Amalgamated Lovers of Freedom?"

"Rotten!" said Handforth bluntly. "Sounds like a trade union!"

"We couldn't do better than follow the example of the politicians," I grinned. "We're the only members of the old, original Remove. All the rest have gone over to the new party. So we call ourselves the Die-Hards!"

"The Die-Hards, eh?" said Reggie. "Great!"

"Absolutely!"

"Who wants to die?" growled Handforth. "That's a silly name—"

"It doesn't necessarily mean that we're going to die!" I grinned. "Put into a nutshell, the actual interpretation of the expression, I suppose, is that we stick to our principles—and make a hard fight for them. In fact, we'll only allow our principles to die hard."

"That was a pretty big nutshell!" said Handforth tartly. "Well, I suppose you're right. Thank goodness we haven't lost our giddy principles! Of course, I was about to suggest that name myself, only you managed to get it out first. What shall we do now?"

"Prep!" I said crisply.

"Prep?" snorted Handforth. "Why not try to get some more members of the Die-Hard party?"

"I'm afraid you're too volcanic, old man," I chuckled. "More haste less speed, you know. Leave it to me, and we'll do some big things before long."

"Absolutely!" said Archie, with enthusiasm. "I mean to say, we'll dashed well stick together like anything! The Die-Hards, what? Sounds like business, and all that sort of rot! It seems to me that we've got to whizz about, hither and thither, and seize supporters, and draw them into the old fold. In other words, there's going to be a dashed lot of rallying round stuff!"

But the Die-Hards were in for a grim, desperate fight! Even I didn't realise the lengths to which John Busterfield Boots was prepared to go!

CHAPTER V.

BUSTER MEANS BUSINESS!



TIME!" said Buster Boots crisply.

"Eh?"

"Eight o'clock!" said Buster. "Can't stay here any longer—we've got to do our prep, and be ready in time for supper. Eight o'clock's closing time, and we can't make any alterations. Look alive!"

"Hold on!" growled Gulliver. "I've lost a quid on this rotten table, and I want to get something back. Plenty of time yet —"

"When I say that the club's closed—the club's closed!" retorted Buster curtly. "I'll give you just one minute to clear up. Get a hustle on! Any fellow who jibs will feel the weight of my fist!"

There was no mistaking Buster's tone, and the juniors gathered round the roulette table were reluctantly compelled to "pack up." Within two minutes the club room was looking as innocent as it could possibly look. Some of the fellows wanted to depart, but Buster stayed them.

"I want to say a few words," he declared. "I'll only keep you a minute—you needn't worry. No long speeches. I'd

just like to know how you've all been getting on, and what you think of the general scheme."

"It's fine!" said Armstrong, looking flushed.

"Rather!"

"Never had such an enjoyable evening before!"

"Tophole!"

Practically everybody was enthusiastic. Even the fellows who had lost a few shillings didn't mind. They felt convinced that they would be able to make up their losses on the following night.

The fever, in fact, had got hold of them. Even a generally level-headed fellow like De Valerie was quite entranced with the new form of amusement. He had won a matter of three shillings during the evening.

"It's not the money at all," he declared. "As long as a chap's careful, he needn't win or lose more than five bob in a week. But there's the thrill of the game—and that's wonderful. Taken in moderation, it's the best kind of indoor sport I know of."

If all the juniors had been like De Valerie the gambling would not have been so great. But even De Valerie was wrong in his assertion. Once a fellow begins playing roulette, it is almost a matter of sheer impossibility to stop after a loss of a few shillings.

"Then you all think it's a success?" inquired Buster.

"Rather."

"And you don't want the club closed?"

"No—never!"

"Best thing we've ever had at St. Frank's!"

"You've a wonder, Buster!"

"That's all I want to know," said Buster, smiling. "Always remember one thing—I've got your interests at heart, and as long as I'm skipper I'll do everything in my power to make life enjoyable. My idea of a Form captain is that he ought to be always thinking of his supporters. He ought to study their interests week in and week out. This is only a beginning. I've got other ideas in store—some of them even better than this."

Buster knew how to talk. There wasn't a fellow there who wasn't ready to follow him blindly. He had got the Remove into just that condition he wanted it—when everybody was ready to accept him as the boss unquestionably—blindly. His power, just at present, was absolute.

Not only roulette had been played, but card games as well. Some of the fellows had formed themselves into little parties.

And at the smaller tables they had indulged in nap, poker, and so forth—Fullwood introducing a choice game which he termed "ponton." It was very easy to learn, and some of the fellows found that their money went very easily, too. Fullwood had finished up the evening in a very satisfied frame of mind.

But Buster frowned as he prepared to finish his speech.

"There's only one other thing I want to say," he declared. "It's about those twelve fellows who cut themselves adrift from us. Of course, Nipper's at the bottom of it—he's the root cause of the trouble. I was expecting something of the kind. Those twelve fellows are the opposition I had been expecting. But you needn't worry. We'll make them all fall into line, whether they like it or not."

"Good!"

"We don't want any goody-goody rotters here!"

"By the time I've finished with them, they won't be goody-goody," asserted Buster. "I want to warn you fellows not to listen to any of their dope. They're bound to try persuasive methods—they'll attempt to convert you to their side. Don't listen to 'em. Follow my lead, and you'll have the best time of your lives. There's just another point. The first fellow who goes over to Nipper's party will live to regret it—that's all!"

The change in Buster's tone as he uttered the last few words was significant. There was a threat in his voice—a grim, deadly threat. And the foolish young gamblers fled out of the Recreation Club, and went to their various studies.

One result of their gambling was soon made manifest. They took no interest in their prep.—they skipped it badly. After all, what did prep. matter? Rats to it! Their thoughts were elsewhere—their brains in a fever of subdued excitement. But when their prep. was examined on the morrow they would probably be in a different frame of mind.

In Study Q, in the College House, Buster Roots had gathered his chief lieutenants about him—those fellows who occupied the adjoining studies, and who were known as the Faithful Five. Whenever there was a matter of ultra importance to be discussed, Buster confided in these juniors.

"Anything urgent, Chief?" asked Denny.

"Yes—very urgent," replied Buster. "You heard what I said in the club room? About Nipper and his gang, I mean?"

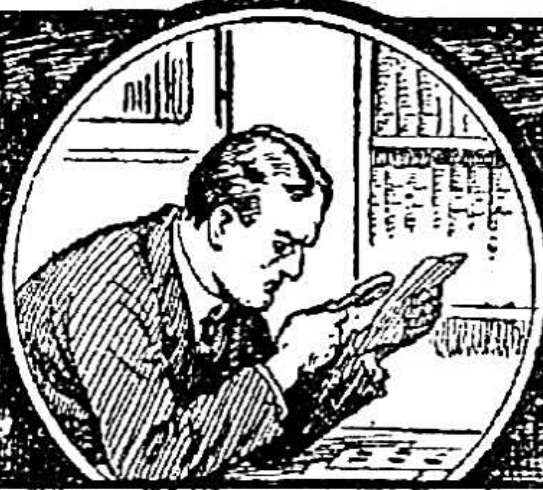
"Yes, of course."

"Five minutes ago I learned that they've called themselves the Die-Hards," said J. B. B. "It's a good name for the party, and I'm not delighted. And there's one danger—a very real danger, too. This Die-Hard Party will gain some recruits unless we're very careful."

(Continued on page 15)

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But for a son by a secret marriage the heir to Lord Easington would fall to Professor Mark Rymer, the crafty and unscrupulous cousin of the late peer. The story opens in Sydney, Australia, with Nelson Lee and his opponent, Rymer, setting off in search of the missing heir who, as Richard Seymour, is employed as a stockman in the interior of New South Wales. Rymer's intention is to get Seymour out of the way of the inheritance. The detective and the professor reach Garoo Downs within a few hours of each other. Exciting experiences from bush fires and bushrangers delay their progress. At length, Rymer discovers that Seymour has been gone two years, and was last heard of in New Zealand. Rymer disappears and Nelson Lee decides it is useless to look for him.

(Now read on.)

A SURPRISE FOR THE PROFESSOR!

WHAT had become of Mark Rymer he did not know, and could not learn. Nevertheless, he determined to lose no time in proceeding to New Zealand, and on Monday afternoon—there being no passenger steamer until the following Saturday—he embarked on a cargo-boat, which landed him at Napier a few minutes before seven o'clock in the evening. With characteristic promptitude he at once set to work. Having engaged rooms at the Masonic Hotel, he interviewed the proprietor.

"I am searching for a young Englishman who goes by the name of Richard Seymour," he said. "He was formerly employed as a stockman by a Mr. Macpherson, who runs a station on Garoo Downs, in New South Wales. He left Australia a little over three years ago—and came to Napier, where he bought a partnership in a small frozen-meat factory. A few months later his partner absconded, and left him with a bankrupt

business on his hands. When last he was heard of he was struggling to pull the business round; but whether he succeeded or whether he failed, whether he is still in Napier or whether he has left, we do not at present know. Can you give me any information about him?"

"I'm afraid I can't," said the proprietor. "To the best of my belief, I never heard of such a person."

"Then I must inquire elsewhere," said Nelson Lee. "Mr. Macpherson has informed me that when Dick Seymour used to write to him he mentioned the name of a Dr. Irving, of this town. Do you know him?"

"Very well indeed, sir. He is on the staff of the Napier Hospital."

"So I understand," said the detective. "Where does he live?"

The proprietor gave him the address of the doctor's house, which was situated on the high ground behind the town, and a couple of miles or more from the hotel.

Despite the distance and the lateness of the hour, however, the detective sallied forth, and at half-past eight he was ringing the front-door bell of a handsome modern villa, surrounded by a neat little plantation of orange and lemon trees.

"Is Dr. Irving at home?" he asked of the housemaid who answered his ring.

"No, sir," she replied. "He was called out a few minutes ago to attend to a young gentleman at the Clarendon Hotel, who has broken his arm."

The Clarendon Hotel, as the reader may remember, was the hotel at which Mark Rymer was staying. Needless to say, the detective had no suspicion of this. He retraced his steps into the town, and made his way to the Clarendon.

"Is Dr. Irving here?" he asked a waiter in the entrance-hall.

"Yes, sir," said the waiter.

"Is he still engaged with his patient?"

"No, sir. He finished with him ten minutes ago, and he and the young gentleman's father have just gone into the smoke-room."

The detective thanked him, and strode off towards the smoke-room, little dreaming that Mark Rymer, at that very moment, was imbibing a brandy-and-soda at the very next table to Dr. Irving!

The professor, as already explained, had arrived at Napier on the Thursday night—it was now Saturday—and had taken up his quarters at the Clarendon Hotel. On Friday he had visited all the frozen-meat establishments in the neighbourhood, and had interviewed the managers or proprietors. Many of these had assured him that they remembered "young Dick Seymour" very well; remembered him buying a partnership in the "Southern Cross Freezing Works"; remembered his partner absconding; remembered the whole concern "going smash," and leaving Dick without a penny to bless himself with.

But none of them had been able to tell Mark Rymer what had become of Dick—

whether he was still in Napier; whether he was in some other part of New Zealand; whether he had returned to Australia; or whether he had emigrated farther afield.

Nothing daunted, the professor had resumed his inquiries on Saturday morning, and had interviewed the leading merchants and tradesmen of the town.

None of these, however, had been able to give him the slightest information of importance, and at nine o'clock at night he had returned to his hotel, where he strolled into the smoke-room, and had asked the waiter to bring him a brandy-and-soda.

Five minutes after his arrival a couple of men—one of whom was Dr. Irving—had entered the room, and had taken their seats at the table just behind him. Five minutes later still the door swung open, and Nelson Lee walked in.

For one brief fraction of a second the professor was absolutely paralysed with consternation. If Nelson Lee had only known Dr. Irving by sight, and had glanced round the room in search of him as soon as he opened the door, Mark Rymer would infallibly have been discovered.

The detective, however, had never seen Dr. Irving in his life, so that the first thing he did when he entered was to turn to a waiter standing just inside the door and ask him to point the doctor out. This the waiter did; but by the time the detective glanced in the doctor's direction the professor had recovered from his momentary stupefaction, and had concealed his face behind his newspaper.

"Only just in time, by gad!" he muttered to himself, as he cautiously peered round the edge of the "Hawke's Bay Herald." If I'd been two seconds later—

His musings ended in that quick, spasmodic intake of breath which is so eloquent of terrified dismay.

The detective had closed the door, and was coming straight towards him!

PICKING UP THE SCENT.

FOR half a dozen agonising moments the professor thought that Nelson Lee had discovered him, and was coming to arrest him. An icy shiver ran down his spine, and his right hand swiftly stole into the pocket in which he kept his revolver.

Then a sigh of relief burst from his lips; his grip on the "Hawke's Bay Herald" grew less convulsive; his right hand was withdrawn from his pocket. He had been alarming himself without cause. Nelson Lee had not discovered him. The detective, in fact, had halted at the table just behind Mark Rymer, and had raised his hat to the two men who were sitting there.

"Dr. Irving, I believe?" the professor heard him say.

The younger of the two men bowed. The elder of the two rose to his feet and held out his hand.

"Then I'll wish you good-night, doctor."

he said. "You'll look in again in the morning, of course?"

"Certainly," said the doctor. "I'll be round about half-past ten. Good-night!"

"I hope I haven't driven your friend away," said Nelson Lee, as the doctor's companion left the room.

"Not at all," said Dr. Irving. "He was just going when you arrived. But whom have I the honour of addressing?"

"My name is Nelson Lee," said the detective, as he dropped into the vacant chair, with his back almost touching Mark Rymer's.

"Nelson Lee!" cried the doctor, grasping him warmly by the hand. "The famous detective?"

"Knock out the 'famous,' and I plead guilty," said Nelson Lee, with a smile. "I've just been up to your house, and the maid directed me here. Can you spare me five minutes?"

"Fifty-five, if you like!" said the doctor. "What is it? A badly-wrenched knee, I should say, by the way you limped across the room just now."

"Your diagnosis is correct," said Nelson Lee. "As a matter of fact, according to the Cobar doctors, I am suffering from the effects of a dislocated internal semilunar cartilage! But that isn't what I wish to consult you about. It is on quite a different errand that I have come to you."

Briefly, but none the less clearly, the detective related the story of the dead Lord Fasington's missing heir, and of how the quest of Dick Seymour had taken him to Macpherson's station in New South Wales.

"It was from Mr. Macpherson," concluded Lee, "that I learned of your friendship with young Seymour. I have therefore sought you out, doctor, in the hope that you may be able to help me. Do you happen to know where Dick Seymour is to be found?"

"I do."

"Where is he?"

"In the Sandwich Islands."

Upon hearing these words, Mark Rymer came near to betraying himself by the groan of dismay which burst from his lips. Nelson Lee, on the other hand, received the news with comparative indifference.

"In the Sandwich Islands," he repeated. "That's rather vague, isn't it? There are so many of them—Nihau, Kauai, Oahu, Molokai, Hawaii, Maui, and goodness only knows how many more! Do you know which of these islands he's in?"

"Yes. He's in Hawaii."

"That, again, is rather vague. Hawaii is such a big place, you know; four or five thousand square miles in area, I believe. Can you tell me anything more definite?"

The doctor laughed.

"You're in such a hurry that you don't give a fellow time to finish!" he said. "If you'd waited half a minute I was going to give you his exact postal address. If you've got a slip of paper handy, you'd better write it down."

The detective took out his notebook. Mark

Rymer whipped out a pencil and tore off a corner of his newspaper.

"Ready?" said Dr. Irving. "Richard Seymour, care of Pryde and Co., Kalapana, near Hilo, Hawaii, Sandwich Islands. Got it?"

"Yes, thanks," said the detective, as he jotted the particulars in his notebook and replaced it in his pocket. "How long has he been there?"

"About eighteen months," replied the doctor. "He came to Napier, as you know, a little over three years ago. He had saved a bit of money, as you also probably know, and he invested it all in a rotten concern known as the Southern Cross Freezing Works.

"About three months after I became acquainted with him, his partner absconded, and left poor Dick to make his peace with an army of angry creditors. For upwards of a year he struggled hard to pull the business round, but the odds were too great, and at last he had to go under."

"He went bankrupt?"

"No; he was too proud to do that. By dint of hard work and frugal living, and by selling all his plant and stock-in-trade, he managed at last to pay off all his creditors in full. When he had done that, however, he was a ruined man—absolutely penniless."

"So he emigrated to the Sandwich Islands?"

"Yes. Three months after he left I received a letter from him telling me that he had obtained employment on a big sugar, rice, and banana estate, owned by a wealthy Englishman of the name of Pryde, who trades as Pryde & Co. A few weeks later he wrote to say that Mr. Pryde had promoted him to be a sort of overseer. Later still he wrote and told me that he had been appointed manager."

"Manager!" exclaimed the detective. "That's quick promotion, isn't it?"

"It is," said the doctor; "but if you knew Dick Seymour you wouldn't be surprised. He has the most winning disposition of any man I ever met. Everybody who comes into contact with him immediately likes him. I often used to wonder how it came about that a young fellow from the backwoods of Australia had such refined and gentlemanly instincts; but now that I know the true history of his birth, the mystery is explained."

"Then you don't think he will disgrace his new position when I have found him, and have restored him to his rightful inheritance?"

"He will be a credit to it!" said the doctor enthusiastically.

"I am glad to hear it," said Nelson Lee. "In the meantime, if I have understood you aright, he is now the manager of Mr. Pryde's estate?"

"Yes."

"At Kalapana, near Hilo in the island of Hawaii?"

"Yes."

"When did you hear from him last?"

"A few days ago."

"And he was still there?"

"Yes."

"And not likely to leave?"

"Not at all. Why should he? He has a comfortable and well-paid billet, he is in favour with his employer, and, between you and me, I rather fancy that he's in love with old Pryde's daughter."

"That's the best news of all!"

"Why?"

"Because if he's in love with his employer's daughter there's not much fear of him running away before I can find him!"

"You will go to Hawaii?"

"I must. I can't cable to him, I suppose?"

"No. There's no telegraphic communication between New Zealand and the Sandwich Islands."

"Is there any steamship communication, or must I go back to Sydney and start from there?"

"You can sail from New Zealand."

"How and when?"

The doctor called to one of the waiters and asked for a shipping-list.

"You're in luck!" he exclaimed, after consulting it. "The American and Australian liner Sonoma calls at Auckland next Saturday, and arrives at Honolulu, the capital of the Sandwich Islands, on the following Tuesday week."

"But this is Napier! How do I get to Auckland?"

"Partly by coach and partly by train. There's a coach leaves this hotel every Monday morning for Rotorua, which is the terminus of the line from Auckland. If this had been Monday night instead of Saturday night you couldn't possibly have got to Auckland in time to catch the boat, and you would have had to wait three weeks for another. That's why I said you were in luck. If you start from this hotel by coach on Monday morning you will arrive at Rotorua on Wednesday night. Leaving Rotorua on Thursday morning, you will reach Auckland on Thursday night, embark on the Sonoma on Saturday, and land in Honolulu ten days later."

"From Honolulu you will have to take a local steamer to Hilo. There is only one steamer a week. It starts from Honolulu on Tuesday—the day you arrive—and the voyage lasts about twenty-four hours. From Hilo to Kalapana is a short day's journey, so that with ordinary luck you ought to be face to face with Dick Seymour in three weeks from to-day at the very outside. By the way, you've never seen him, have you?"

"Never," said Nelson Lee.

"Then why not come back with me to my house, and I'll show you his photo?"

"Isn't it rather late?" suggested the detective.

"Not a bit of it," said the doctor. "It isn't ten o'clock yet."

"But it's five minutes to," said the detective smilingly. "Suppose I call to-morrow?"

"I'm off into the country at sunrise, and shan't be back until early on Monday morning."

"Then I'll go with you now," said Nelson Lee.

He put on his hat and rose to his feet. Dr. Irving followed suit, and a moment later they had quitted the room.

For an instant—but only for an instant—Mark Rymer hesitated how to act. Then a look of malevolent determination crossed his face, and he stealthily glided after them.

"It's too good a chance to be missed," he muttered between his clenched teeth. "Even if I fail to make an end of him, I ought at least to be able to prevent him catching the Sonoma."

RE-ENTER BUSH BILLY.

WITH consummate skill Mark Rymer shadowed the detective and the doctor along the road from the hotel, up the hill at the back of the town, and through the outlying suburbs beyond.

When he saw them enter the doctor's house, he set to work to review the situation.

He had heard every word of Dr. Irving's story. The missing heir was in the Sandwich Islands. The next steamer for the Sandwich Islands was due to leave Auckland on the following Saturday. If he—Mark Rymer—could murder Nelson Lee, or even cripple him, and thus prevent him leaving Napier on Monday morning, then he—Mark Rymer—would be able to proceed to the Sandwich Islands alone, and would have three clear weeks in which to find Dick Seymour and make an end of him before Nelson Lee could possibly arrive.

He took out his revolver and examined it. It was loaded in every chamber. The night was dark, and the road deserted. One shot at close quarters, and the trick would be done!

"But not here!" he murmured to himself, as he replaced the weapon in his pocket. "It is too near the house."

He sauntered back towards Napier. About three-quarters of a mile from Dr. Irving's house he halted.

"The very spot!" he exclaimed.

He was right. No better or lonelier spot for his contemplated crime could have been selected. Trees fringed the road on both sides, and there was not a house in sight.

He planted himself with his back against one of the trees, and waited. A few minutes after twelve o'clock his quick ears caught the measured tread of approaching footsteps coming from the direction of Dr. Irving's house.

OUR DETECTIVE STORY SECTION

"It's a thousand to one it's Nelson Lee," he mused, as he stole into the middle of the road. "But I can't afford to run any risks. It would spoil everything if I fired at the wrong man, and if I wait until I can see his face it will be too late to take him by surprise. I must resort to strategy, and if it isn't Nelson Lee, I can pass it off by pretending to be drunk."

Chuckling softly to himself, he flung himself face downwards on the ground, with his right arm underneath him grasping

Suddenly Nelson Lee—for he it was—caught sight of the outstretched form in the middle of the road. He hurried forward and with a startled cry, bent over it. The cry betrayed him. Mark Rymer recognised his voice, and, leaping to his feet, thrust the muzzle of his revolver into Nelson Lee's face, and pressed the trigger.

There was a short sharp click, but no report. The revolver had missed fire. Before the professor could fire again the detective lashed out with his fist and dealt



Taken completely off his guard, Bush Billy staggered back and lost his footing on the slippery rock. The next instant, with an ear-splitting yell of despair, the bushranger went hurtling down through the curling mist of steam into the boiling lake.

his revolver, and his left arm outstretched on the road.

The deception was perfect. To all appearance he had fallen down in a fit, or a drunken stupor, or had been stunned by footpads and left for dead. His face, being pillowed on his arm, was invisible.

There was no fear of Nelson Lee recognising him until it was too late.

Nearer and nearer came the footsteps.

the scoundrel a blow on the wrist that sent the weapon flying from his grasp.

With a scream of fury the professor hurled himself at Nelson Lee and seized him by the throat. Nothing daunted, the detective grappled with him at close quarters, twining his leg behind the professor's knee, locking his hands behind his back, and exerting all his strength to throw him.

For a second or two they wrestled in

grim and desperate silence. Then a cry of triumph burst from the detective's lips, and the next instant Mark Rymer was lying on his back, whilst Nelson Lee was kneeling on his chest and gripping him by the throat.

"Foiled again, Mark Rymer!" cried Nelson Lee. "For once you have overreached yourself. At last the day of reckoning has arrived. At last——"

The sentence ended in a gasp of alarm, for at that moment a dark form bounded from behind the trees at the side of the road, and a well-known voice cried:

"Stick to 'im, professor! I'll 'elp yer to settle 'im!"

Both men recognised the voice. It was the voice of Bush Billy, the erstwhile leader of that gang of outlawed desperadoes, who in New South Wales, had contracted to murder Nelson Lee for the sum of seven hundred pounds.

It would be hard to say which of the two, Nelson Lee or Mark Rymer, was the more surprised at finding Bush Billy in New Zealand. Their surprise, however, was of vastly different qualities, for the professor's surprise was mingled with exultant delight, whilst that of the detective was alloyed with dismay. To Mark Rymer, the arrival of Bush Billy meant an unexpected ally in his hour of need; to Nelson Lee it meant that he had two implacable foes to deal with instead of one.

Notwithstanding this, the detective's courage never failed him. The instant he heard the bushranger's voice he clenched his fist and dealt the professor a sledgehammer blow between the eyes that partially stunned him. Following this, he loosed his grip on his rival's throat, and leaped to his feet; but even as he did so, Bush Billy charged into him from behind, and skilfully "spread-eagled" him.

The detective once more attempted to scramble to his feet, but ere he could accomplish his purpose Bush Billy flung himself upon him with a whoop of triumph, and pinned him to the ground by the simple process of planting his knees in the small of the detective's back, grasping his collar with his hands, and embedding his bony knuckles in the nape of his neck.

"Now's yer chance," he cried, turning his head and addressing the professor. "Look alive, man! Don't lie groaning there all night. Pick up yer pistol, and shoot him while I hold him down!"

Half-dazed by the detective's blow, the professor staggered to his feet and groped in the darkness for his revolver. Before he succeeded in finding it, however, the rumble of approaching wheels was heard, and a moment later the twinkling lights of a dogcart came into view round a turn in the road, about a quarter of a mile ahead.

"What are yer after?" demanded Bush Billy, in a low, excited whisper. "How much longer are yer going to be?"

"I—I can't find my revolver," stammered the professor, whose head was still "swimmy" from the effect of the detective's blow.

"Then shove yer 'and into my hip-pocket, and you'll find a life preserver," said Bush Billy.

Trembling with excitement and anxiety, Mark Rymer thrust his hand into the pocket and drew out a short, thick cane, weighted at one end with an egg-shaped lump of lead. Gripping this by the unloaded end, he dropped on one knee and dealt the helpless detective a savage blow on the back of the head.

"Another!" gasped Bush Billy, with backward glance at the approaching trap, which was now but a hundred yards away. "That's only stunned him. Hit harder this time!"

The professor obeyed. But still Bush Billy was not satisfied.

"'Ere, give me the thing!" he growled, springing to his feet. "You don't know how to use it!"

He snatched the loaded cane from the professor's trembling hand, swung it aloft, and brought it down with a sickening crash on the side of the detective's head, an inch or two behind his left ear.

"That's the way to use a life-preserver!" he chuckled. "Now come with me, and I'll show you a short cut back to Napier."

He seized the professor by the arm and dragged him into the shelter of the trees by the side of the road. Scarcely had he done so ere the trap rattled up, and a moment later a double-voiced shout of alarm told them that their crime had been discovered.

By the time the occupants of the trap had pulled up and alighted, however, the two confederates had scaled a low stone wall, and were racing down a deserted lane. A quarter of an hour later they had gained the outskirts of the little town, and were walking through the lighted streets with the sober gait of a couple of law-abiding citizens returning to their homes.

"This is where I'm staying," said Mark Rymer, halting outside the door of the Clarendon Hotel.

"Tell me something I don't know!" replied Bush Billy.

"You knew I was staying here?"

"Why cert'nly."

"How did you know?"

"Dash my buttons, if you ain't the queerest cove I ever struck!" Bush Billy exclaimed. "You've never even asked me yet how I came to be so near at hand when yer tried to nobble Nelson Lee!"

The professor passed his hand across his aching brow.

"I'm not myself to-night," he said. "That blow Lee gave me between the eyes has thoroughly unnerved me. I seem to have been living in a sort of dream for the last half-hour. Tell me all about it."

"About my being in Napier?"

"Yes."

"You heard 'ow I escaped from the troopers in the Wangonilla Valley?"

"Yes. You mounted one of Bellamy's horses and galloped off before they discovered you."

"That's so. Well, I galloped the nag as far as Bobalong, turned him adrift, walked into Nyngan at dark, and then took train to Sydney. On the Saturday morning I was strolling along the Circular Quay, when I 'appened to catch sight of you. I shadowed yer, and found as you had booked yer passage to New Zealand in the Waihora, so I promptly did ditto."

"You came to New Zealand in the same boat as myself?"

"Aven't I just said so?"

"But I never saw you."

"Of course you didn't! 'Cause why? You was saloon, and I was steerage. Besides, I kept out of yer way as much as possible. I thought you'd mebbe cut up rough if I claimed acquaintance with yer on the steamer."

The professor's deep-set eyes contracted to the merest slits. Something in the tones of Bush Billy's voice had galvanised his flagging faculties into life again. He looked the ex-bushranger full in the face.

"Let us understand each other," he said. "Why have you followed me to New Zealand?"

"That's a straight question, and you shall 'ave a straight answer," said Bush Billy. "I'm a ruined man, with a price on my head, and all through 'elping you! It's you wot's got me into my present scrape, and it's you wot's got to get me out of it! I'm tired of this side of the world. I'll try the other. To put the matter in a nutshell, you've got to take me with yer to dear old England, and set me up on a nice little farm, with a couple of thousand or so as working capital."

"And if I refuse?" asked the professor, blinking his eyes and arching his round shoulders.

"But yer won't," said Bush Billy cheerfully. "I know too much about Macpherson's station, and Barnby Coppice, and the Glen, and the Wangonilla Valley, and that little affair to-night."

"In other words," said the professor quietly, "you are going to levy blackmail on me, and if I refuse to pay you sufficient hush-money you are going to denounce me to the police?"

"Spoken like a book!" said Bush Billy.

The professor shrugged his shoulders.

"Finish your story," he said. "You have already told me that you came to New Zealand in the Waihora. In that case, you would arrive at Napier on Thursday night. It is now Saturday night, or, rather, Sunday morning. Why have you not made yourself known to me before?"

"Bad luck," said Bush Billy curtly. "I lost yer in the crowd at the railway-station on Thursday night, and couldn't find no trace of yer until I saw yer walk into this

hotel about nine o'clock to-night. Whilst I was waiting outside I saw Nelson Lee walk in. A bit later I saw him come out again with another fellow; and then I saw yer glide out after 'em. I guessed yer was up to some mischief, so I followed yer."

"You followed me to Dr. Irving's house?"

"Every inch of the way. Then I follered yer back to them trees, and saw yer lying in wait for Nelson Lee. I kept quiet till I saw yer was getting the worst of it, then I bounced out of my hiding-place and gave yer a 'elping 'and. I should 'ave been better pleased if yer could 'ave settled him on yer own, without my help, and then I should 'ave had another hold on yer."

"You have quite sufficient hold on me as it is!" said the professor grimly. "But that by the way. I won't pretend that I shall be p'leased to have your company all the way to England; but I have no choice but to accept your terms. In the meanwhile, however, you will probably be surprised to learn that I am not thinking of returning to England just yet. You know why I came to Napier?"

"To hunt for yer cousin's missing heir."

"Exactly. Well, I haven't found him, but I've found out where he is. He is a policeman in Masterton, which is about two hundred and fifty miles south of this place."

This statement, as the reader knows, was a deliberate lie, for nobody knew better than Mark Rymer that the missing heir was in the Sandwich Islands. But although he had pretended to accept Bush Billy's terms, he was firmly resolved to give that ruffian the slip at the earliest possible moment. And this was the means by which he hoped to do it.

"Then you'll be goin' to Masterton afore you returns to England?" asked Bush Billy.

"Of course," replied Mark Rymer. "It is no use my returning to England before I have—er—settled with my cousin's heir. Will you come with me to Masterton, or do you prefer to wait here at Napier till I come back?"

"Where you goes, I goes!" declared the bushranger. "Now I've found yer I ain't goin' to lose sight of yer in a hurry!"

"Very well," said the professor calmly. "I'm glad you're willing to accompany me, for I may possibly want your help. We can't leave for Masterton to-day, as no trains run on Sunday. I propose, therefore, to start by the first train on Monday morning. It is due to leave at a quarter to nine. Meet me at the railway-station a few minutes before that time, and we'll discuss our future plans in the train. Is that agreeable?"

"Quite," said Bush Billy.

"Good-night, then!" said Mark Rymer;

(Continued on page x.)

First Prize
£100

FOOTBALLERS' NAMES COMPETITION.

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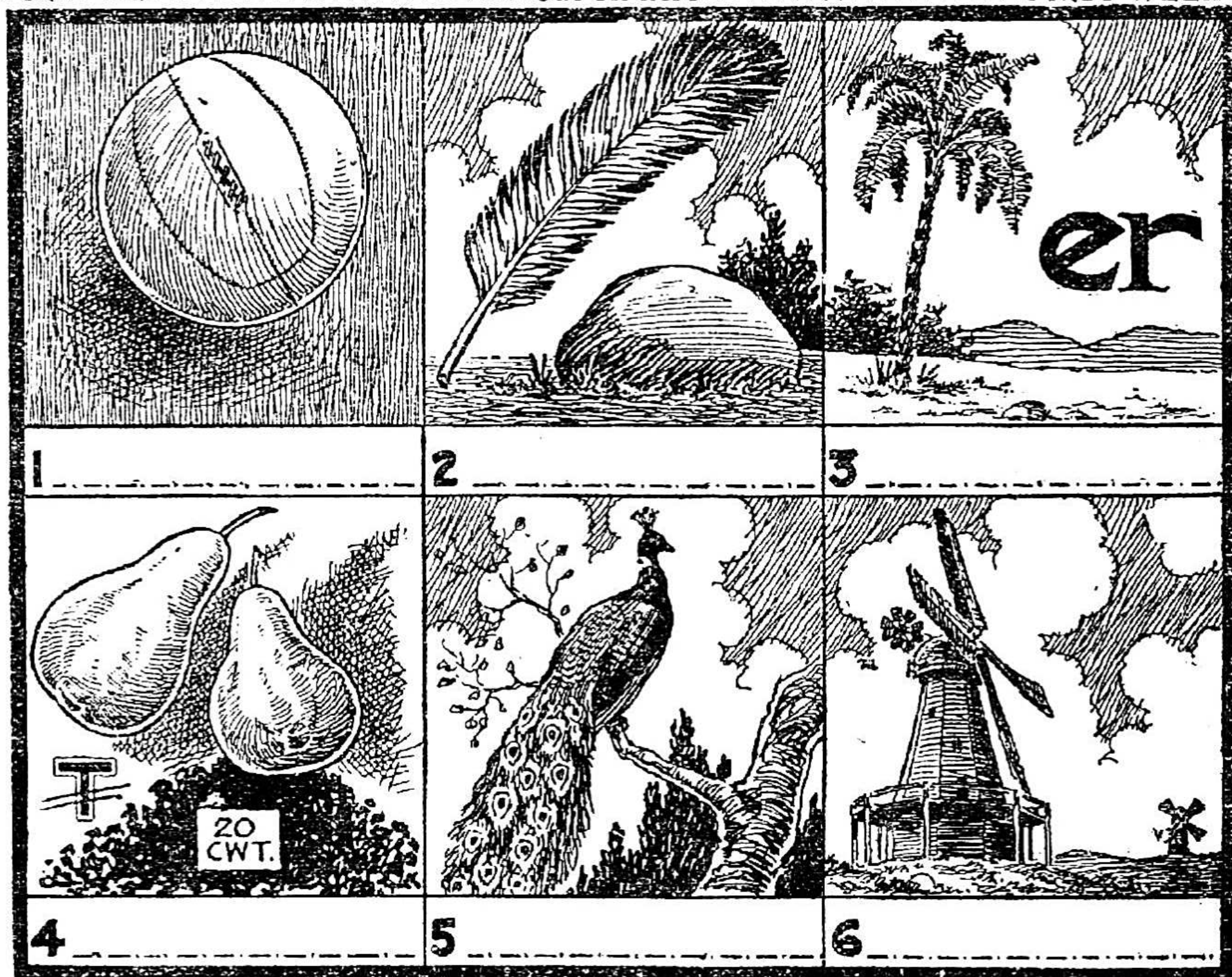
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ALL YOU HAVE TO DO.

is to write IN INK in the allotted space under each of these puzzle-pictures the name of the Footballer which you think the picture represents. Thus in No. 1, here, the picture clearly means Ball. In the same way you have to discover the names indicated by the other five pictures. In all, there will be EIGHT SETS OF PICTURES, so keep your solutions until the other sets appear.

DO NOT SEND IN YOUR ENTRIES YET.

FIRST SET!.....Cut off here.....FIRST WEEK!



20th October, 1923.

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RULES AND CONDITIONS

which must be strictly adhered to.

5. The names under the pictures must be written IN INK.
6. Employees of the proprietors of this journal are not eligible to compete.
7. Entry to this competition is on the full understanding that the Editor's decision is final and legally binding throughout.

Readers of the "The Champion," "Boys' Friend," "Union Jack," "Boys' Realm," "Pluck," "Magnet," "Young Britain," "Gem," "The Popular," "The Rocket," and "Boys' Cinema," are also taking part in this Contest, so that additional attempts may be made with the pictures from these allied journals.

TO HELP YOU STILL FURTHER THIS LIST CONTAINS ALL THE NAME USED IN THE PUZZLE PICTURES.

Ashurst, Anderson, Armstrong, Aitken, Adams, Amos, Alderson, Allen, Armitage, Archibald, Ashmore.

Brett, Broadhead, Blyth, Boreham, Blackburn, Bradford, Bassnett, Brittan, Blair, Ball, Barkas, Birrell, Bradley, Barnes, Bulling, Burton, Branston, Buchan, Blake, Bowser, Bishop, Barnes, Barras, Braithwaite, Bullock, Bliss, Bateman, Best, Bagge, Barson, Broadhurst, Broad, Bolam, Brelsford, Blenkinsopp, Beedie, Birch, Bellamy, Bainbridge, Bowen, Burnham, Boyle, Blackwell, Bennie, Ballantyre, Buchanan, Bamber, Byers, Banks, Brooks, Blood, Baker, Bird, Bromilow.

Cockle, Crosbie, Cross, Clennell, Cameron, Chedzoy, Cock, Chadwick, Clough, Curry, Cookson, Cope, Cook, Crilly, Chaplin, Collier, Crockford, Campbell, Crown, Chance, Chipperfield, Crompton, Charlton, Conner, Craig, Cosgrove, Cherrett, Crossley, Carter, Clarke, Cotton, Cunningham, Cairns, Clunas, Connolly, Cassidy, Carr, Cowan, Chapman, Chambers, Clay, Cresswell.

Dunn, Dickson, Dorrell, Dawson, Davies, Donaldson, Dinsdale, Dimmock, Duckett, Duncan, Dominy, Davison, Duckworth, Dockray, Danskin, Dreyer, Denoon, Denyer, Duffus, Dunlop, Dixon, Doyle, Doran, Dale.

Emerson, Evans, Ellerington, England, Ellis, Edelston, Edgley, Eggo, Elliot, Edge, Edwards, Emmett, Ewart.

French, Ferguson, Ford, Forshaw, Fletcher, Flood, Flint, Feebury, Fleming, Fleetwood, Flynn, Fox, Foxall, Fort, Forbes, Folwer, Fazackerley, Findlay, Featherstone, Forsythe, Frame, Fyfe, Finney, Forster, Fitton, Fairclough, Fern.

Grimshaw, Gill, Gilchrist, Gough, Gillespie, Grimsdell, Gittins, Gibson, Graham, Goldthorpe, Grundy, Gallogley, Gibbon, Gomm, Gregory, George, Getwood, Groves, Greig, Gardner, Gallagher, Glancy, Greenshields, Gourlay, Goodechild.

Howarth, Haworth, Hampton, Harrow, Harland, Hopkin, Hudspeth, Harris, Hamill, Hill, Hardy, Hamilton, Hawes, Handley, Hufton, Hine, Hughes, Heap, Higginbotham, Hoddinott, Hebden, Hilditch, Howson, Hunter, Hayes, Hutchins, Hannaford, Harrold, Howie, Henshall, Hodges, Hasteed, Hugall, Hogg, Henderson, Harper, Hulton, Hillhouse, Hair, Hart, Haines, Hole.

Irvine, Islip, Iremonger, Irwin.

Jennings, Jack, Jackson, Johnson.

Kirton, Kelly, Kneeshaw, Keenor, Kay, Knowles, Kane, Keenlyside, Kidd, Kilpatrick, Kean.

Linfoot, Longworth, Low, Lindsay, Little, Lonsdale, Lockhead, Longmuir, Lea, Lievesley, Lane, Lockett, Legge, Loithouse, Lenny, Lyner, Lawson, Lambie, Lacey.

20th October. 1923

OUR DETECTIVE STORY SECTION

Moss, Mort, Mosserop, Meehan, Maitland, Mitchell, Murphy, Morgan, Milton, Mercer, Marshall, Magee, Moore, Martin, Mills, Mason, Mew, Matthews, Moule, Myers, Marsden, Middleton, Maidment, Mehafty, Mee, Moody, Musgrove, Malcolm, Morton, Manderson, Meiklejohn, Muirhead, Moffat, Mutch, Meredith, Marriott, Mackie, Menlove, Mitton, Marks, Marsh, M'Intyre, M'Neil, M'Kinlay, M'Nabb, M'Intosh, M'Donald, M'Call, M'Grory, M'Cluggage, M'Candless, M'Coll, M'Lacklan, M'Stey, M'Lean, M'Alpine, M'Kenna, M'Inally, M'Nair, M'Minn, McBain, McCracken.

Nuttall, Neesam, Neil, Needham, Nash, Nisbet, Nelson.

Osborne, Ormston, Orr, O'Hare.

Pym, Pringle, Price, Parker, Poolé, Pater-son, Pearson, Penn, Plum, Page, Preston, Probert, Pagnam, Peel, Potts, Palmer, Prouse, Puddefoot, Pender, Pape, Peacock, Pantling, Partridge, Peers.

Quantrill, Quinn.

Robson, Rollo, Raitt, Richardson, Rawlings, Russell, Robbie, Rigg, Radford, Ridley, Reay, Ramsay, Robb, Ritchie, Ranskin, Reed, Rooke, Roe.

Spiers, Smart, Stephenson, Seddon, Sewell, Smelt, Smith, Scott, Slade, Spencer, Seymour, Spaven, Sampy, Seed, Storer, Stage, Shea, Steele, Simms, Smailes, Symes, Sturgess, Sayles, Spottiswood, Scattergood, Sinclair, Stuart, Sayer, Sutcliffe, Salt, Summerfield, Shaw, Sillito, Sneddon, Sommerville, Shone, Streets, Sampey, Stannard, Skinner, Sage.

Townrow, Turnbull, Tremelling, Thain, Troup, Tunstall, Tresaderu, Tonner, Thoms, Torrance, Tompkin Titmuss, Tempest, Timmins, Thorpe, Templeton, Townsley, Toner.

Urwin.

Voysey, Vizard, Vallis, Voisey, Vigrass.

Womaek, Walsh, Weaver, Wilding, Whitton, Wadsworth, Woosnam, Woodhouse, Walters, Walden, Watson, Wainscoat, Wood, Williams, Winship, Wolfe, Whitehouse, Whalley, Whipp, Wolstenholme, Waterall, Worrall, Williamson, Weston, Wigglesworth, Ward, Webster, Whitehurst, Waddell, Wright, Wilson, Wren, Widdowson, Wylie, White, Welsh, Walker.

York.

THE MISSING HEIR

(Continued from page vii.)

and he turned into the hotel, muttering softly to himself:

"The simple-minded fool! The coach leaves here at half-past six on Monday morning, so that whilst he is cooling his heels at the station I shall be speeding north towards Rotorua!"

THE CHAMPAGNE POOL.

FOR the whole of next day, which was Sunday, Mark Rymer remained indoors at the Clarendon Hotel. Shortly before noon one of the waiters asked him if he had heard of the "attempted murder of Mr. Nelson Lee." On the professor replying in the negative, the waiter informed him that the great detective had been found shortly after midnight lying unconscious on one of the suburban roads. The two men who had discovered him—so the waiter said—thought at first that he was dead; but it had afterwards been found that he was merely suffering from severe concussion of the brain. He had been carried to Dr. Irving's house, which was quite close to the spot where he had been found.

He was still unconscious, and likely to remain so for several days, but the doctor thought that he would eventually recover. There was no clue to the identity of his assailant, and the whole affair was a mystery.

It was a bitter disappointment to Mark Rymer to learn that his rival was not dead, though there was some compensation in the news that he was unconscious, and likely to remain so for several days. For it would

have been very awkward indeed, from Mark Rymer's point of view, if Nelson Lee had recovered consciousness, and had revealed the names of his assailants, before the professor had time to clear out of the neighbourhood.

"As it is," mused Rymer, "I shall be well on my way to Auckland before he finds his tongue."

It never occurred to him to wonder what would happen to Bush Billy when Nelson Lee recovered consciousness and informed the police that the fugitive outlaw was in Naples. The ex-bushranger had served his purpose. The professor had no further use for him, and neither wished nor expected to see him again.

In this expectation, however, he was once more doomed to be bitterly disappointed.

As already explained, the journey from Napier to Auckland was covered by coach as far as Rotorua, and the rest of the distance by rail. The coach started from the door of the Clarendon Hotel at half-past six every Monday morning.

In view of this early start, Mark Rymer retired to rest soon after ten o'clock on Sunday night, and on the following morning, at twenty minutes past six, he emerged from the hotel, carrying his travelling-bag, and took his seat on the four-horse charabanc which was waiting outside.

And almost before he had settled himself into his seat, Bush Billy clambered up beside him, and greeted him with a cheerful wag of his head.

"Fine mornin'," he observed, with a grin. "Jist the day for a forty-mile drive, ain't it?"

For a few moments the professor was speechless with chagrin. Then he snarled:

"Curse you! Why are you dogging me like this?"

"I've set my 'cart on that nice little farm in ole England, wi' a couple o' thousand pounds to stock it," murmured Bush Billy, as he calmly lit an evil-smelling pipe. "I 'ope as 'ow you've got a hextry sleepin'-suit in yer bag, becos I come away in sich a hurry that I quite fergot to bring me pyjammers!"

With an effort, Mark Rymer curbed his wrath. The coach was due to start in a few minutes' time. There was not a moment to be lost if he wanted to get rid of this ruffian.

"Look here," he said, with an air of pretended candour, "I'm quite willing to admit that I deceived you on Saturday night."

"Oh, but yer didn't!" chuckled Bush Billy. "Yer tried to deceive me, but it didn't come off. I knew all the time yer was lying, so I jist kep' watch on this hotel till I see yer come out this mornin'."

The professor bit his lip in exasperation, then demanded:

"Do you know where I'm going?"

"No, and I don't much care," was the reply. "All I knows is that where you goes, I goes likewise."

"I'm going to the Sandwich Islands—four thousand miles from here."

"Pleased to 'ear it. A nice long sea v'yage 'ull do me the world o' good."

"But it's impossible for you to make such a trip without any baggage, without even a change of clothes."

"Oh, that's all right, mister. You can buy me all I wants in Auckland."

A gleam of vindictive fury illumined Mark Rymer's eyes, but it died away before Bush Billy observed it, and when the professor spoke again it was in the same calm, even tones.

"Be reasonable," he said. "I haven't treated you badly up to now. Don't embarrass all my plans by insisting upon following me."

"Who's going to embarrass yer plans?" growled Bush Billy.

"You are," said the professor. "I don't want to say anything offensive, but surely you must admit that a man in your station of life cannot possibly travel with a man of my position without arousing attention and exciting suspicion, both of which I particularly wish to avoid."

"I would cheerfully give you double the sum you have mentioned," he continued; "but unfortunately I have only just about enough money in my possession at present to see me through to the end of my journey. If you will only think for a moment, you will see that I shall be just as much in your power when I get back to England as I am now. You have nothing to lose by waiting. Be reasonable, then. Remain in Napier, and as soon as I arrive in England and succeed to my estates, I

will send you sufficient money to enable you to join me."

"No, thanks; I ain't havin' any!" said Bush Billy, with a touch of insolence in his voice. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush! Whether yer like it, or whether yer don't, Mister Professor, I'm going to stick to yer till we gets to England."

Mark Rymer shrugged his shoulders and calmly lit a cigar. Black murder was in his heart, but his face was as serene as that of a cherub. Never for an instant did he entertain the idea of taking this ruffian with him to England; but he was shrewd enough to see that there was nothing to be gained by arguing the point just then. He must bide his time—wait his opportunity, and when the opportunity came, he would know how to make use of it.

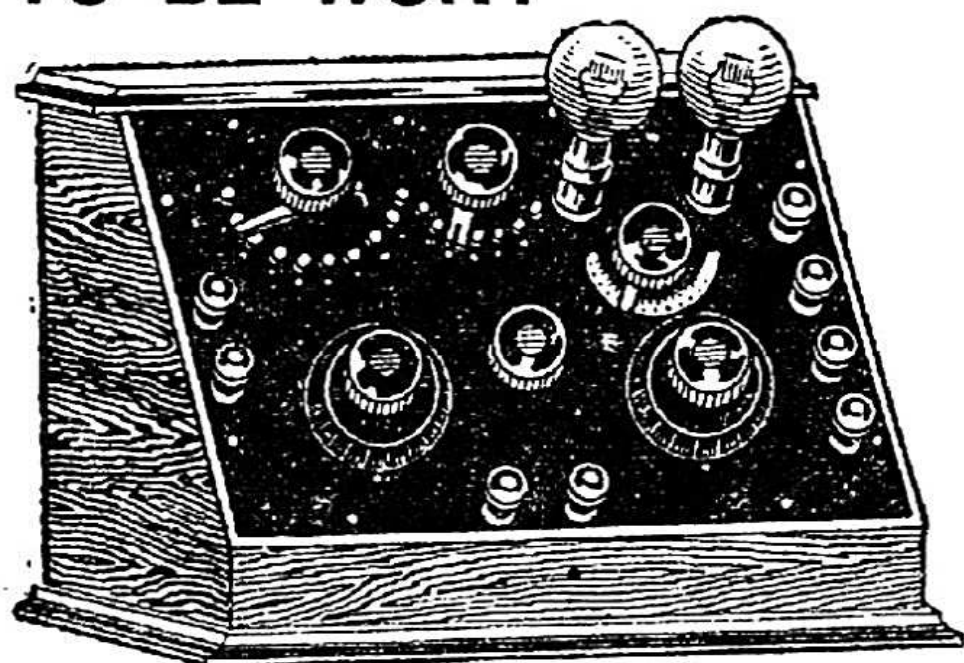
Punctually at half-past six the coach started off on its forty-five miles' journey to Tarawera, which was reached about six in the evening. There were only half a dozen passengers in addition to Mark Rymer and Bush Billy, but most of them were gentle-folk, and the bushranger's full-flavoured language, coupled with his disgusting manners, and the tone of insolent familiarity which he adopted towards the aristocratic professor, were a source of scandalised amazement. Never in his life before had Mark Rymer known such shame and humiliation as he experienced during that twelve hours' drive from Napier to Tarawera. And when he went to bed at the only hotel which Tarawera boasted, he swore to himself that before another sunset he would make an end of a situation which was becoming unbearable.

At half-past seven next morning the coach resumed its journey, and at half-past four in the afternoon it drew up in front of the Lake Hotel at Taupo.

Now, Taupo is situated in the very heart of the "Hot Lake District" of New Zealand. For hundreds of miles around the country abounds in hot springs, boiling lakes, spouting geysers, mud volcanoes, and roaring "steam-holes." Six miles from Taupo is the little town of Wairakei, and a mile beyond is the famous "Geyser Valley," a romantic gorge, enclosed between precipitous banks, beautifully wooded, and carpeted with the choicest ferns and mosses. Thousands of tiny steam-jets issue from the ground in every direction, in addition to which there are numerous hot springs and pools, which make their presence known by the dense clouds of vapour which constantly hang over the valley, and by the mysterious, rumbling noises which accompany the rushing of the waters and the escape of the steam.

One of the most remarkable sights in this wonderful valley is the "Champagne Pool," an enormous, natural cauldron of boiling water, about twenty yards in diameter. The water in this pool is in a perpetual

10 TWO-VALVE WIRELESS SETS TO BE WON!



state of ebullition, in some places with bright, clear bubbles, like champagne; in others, with sudden upheavals of vast masses of water to a height of nine or ten feet. On rare occasions, the action of the volcanic fires beneath become so violent that the surface of the little lake is convulsed with foaming billows.

"I'm going to Wairakei," said the professor, when he and his companion had finished their teas at the Lake Hotel at Taupo. "It's a six-mile walk. You would rather stay here, I suppose, until I come back?"

"No fear!" said Bush Billy, shaking his head. "If you are going to—wotever yer calls the place—then I'm going, too, and don't yer forget it!"

The professor averted his face in order to conceal a grim, sardonic smile of triumph. It was absolutely necessary to his plans that Bush Billy should go with him to Wairakei; but he had not wished to suggest such a thing himself lest his companion should "smell a rat," and be on his guard.

"Come along, then," he said, as he put on his hat. "I've been to the place before, so we shan't need a guide."

Bush Billy accordingly donned his cap, and the two started out.

It was close upon seven o'clock when they reached the Geyser Valley, where Mark Rymer promptly led the way to the edge of the Champagne Pool. A projecting spur of rock—narrow, slippery, and perpetually drenched with steaming spray—juts out for some distance over the pool, and is a favourite coign of vantage for adventurous visitors.

"'Ere, 'old on; where are yer going?" gasped Bush Billy, as the professor strode on to this projecting spur.

The professor made no reply until he reached the far end of the spur, when his tall, gaunt form was almost lost to view in the writhing wreaths of ascending steam. He glanced all round, to make sure that they were alone, then he turned and faced Bush Billy, who had halted on the bank at the other end of the spur.

"Can you guess why I have brought you here?" Rymer asked. "No? Then I will tell you. I have brought you here in order that you may witness the downfall of all your hopes."

He raised his voice, and threw a touch of maniacal ecstasy into it. He was acting his part superbly. He wished to lure Bush Billy on to the projecting spur by pretending that he was going to commit suicide.

"Do you think I'm so simple as to believe that you will be content with a farm in England, and a couple of thousand pounds?" he continued. "No, no! If I were to take you with me to England my life would not be worth living. You would bleed me at every end and turn—you would render existence unbearable by your continual extortions and threats. But it shall not be. Rather than submit to such a fate, I prefer to end my life—to terminate my troubles by plunging into this boiling lake!"

Bush Billy stared at him in horror-stricken dismay.

"Don't be a fool!" he gasped. "I don't mean yer no 'arm. Come back, and—"

"Never!" cried the professor. "You have ruined my plans, and now I will ruin yours! Farewell!"

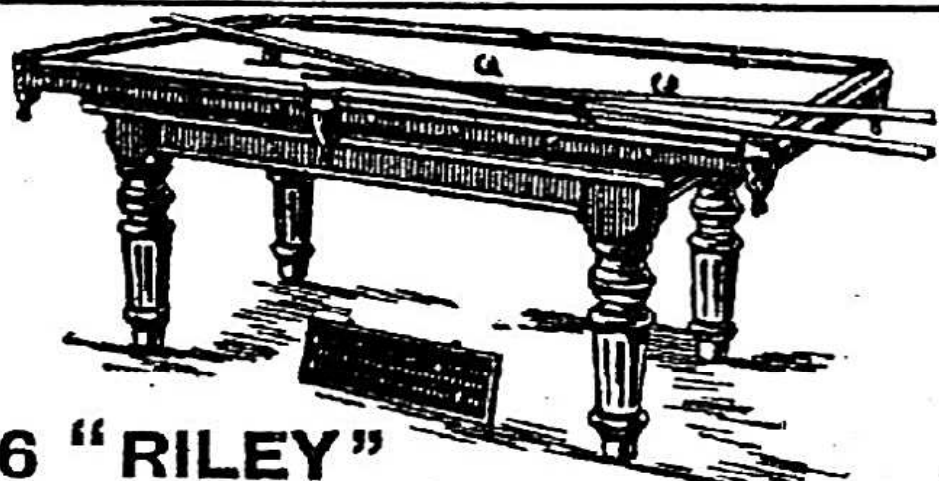
He turned round and raised his arms above his head, as though he were about to take the fatal plunge. Half crazy with fear and anxiety, Bush Billy darted forward and made a grab at the professor's coat-tails.

Then, at last, Mark Rymer dropped the mask. With a wild, exultant cry he spun round on his heel, lashed out with his fist, and dealt his victim a stinging blow on the side of the head.

Taken completely off his guard, Bush Billy staggered back and lost his footing on the slippery rock. The next instant, with an ear-splitting yell of despair, the bushranger went hurtling down, through the curling mist of steam into the boiling lake.

For one brief fraction of a second the struggling form was visible, tossing in the bubbling foam. Then the seething waters closed over him, and he vanished for ever from human view.

(Another Gripping, Extra-long Instalment of this fine yarn will appear next week.)



**6 "RILEY"
BILLIARDS TABLES—GIVEN AS PRIZES**

(See Footballers' Names Competition on page viii)

(Continued from page 14)

"Don't you believe it," said Percy Bray. "Nipper's got no power now——"

"No?" interrupted Buster smoothly. "My dear man, don't fool yourself! I know Nipper better than you do. It was only by a fluke that I gained the captaincy—and I don't mind admitting it to you chaps. Nipper's got tremendous power if he likes to use it. He hasn't used it just recently because he was letting the Remove see what I could do."

"Oh, rot——"

"I'm talking nothing but the literal truth!" went on Buster curtly. "That period of inactivity is at an end now. Nipper's at the head of this Die-Hard party, and he'll move Heaven and earth to get me overthrown. And don't lose sight of this—if the Die-Hard Party gains supporters quickly, it'll be all up with us. There's only one thing to be done—and I shall do it! These Die-Hards must be dealt with drastically. They must be forced, by sheer terrorism, into submission. It's the only way. We'll take them one by one, and subdue them!"

"It sounds easy—but how are you going to do it?" asked Crooks.

"Ever heard of the Ku 'Klux Klan?"

"The what?"

"The Ku Klux Klan!"

"Some American secret society, isn't it?" asked Crowe.

"Yes."

"What's that got to do with us?" said Crowe. "The Ku Klux Klan died donkey's years ago—soon after the end of the Civil War in the States. I've seen something about it recently in the newspapers——"

"Of course you have—because the Ku Klux Klan has been revived of late years," said John Busterfield Boots. "Well, my sons, it may interest you to know that the Ku Klux Klan will soon be getting very busy at St. Frank's."

"Eh?" gasped the Faithful Five.

"Fact!" said Buster coolly. "But this Ku Klux Klan won't be officially connected with the American branch," he added, with a dry chuckle. "It'll be a separate little organisation of our own. In short, we six will be the K.K.K. of St. Frank's. And we can use precisely the same methods as the big organisation over the Pond. And we'll do the trick—we'll take the Die-Hard Party one by one, and compel them to knuckle under to our orders."

"My hat!" said Percy Bray admiringly. "You're a live wire, Buster, and no giddy mistake! When you get going you're like an electric shock!"

"Thanks!" said Buster. "But I'm not asking for compliments. I'm skipper, and I mean to be obeyed. Those fellows who defy me will live to regret it."

It certainly seemed that some big trouble was in store.

"And when do we start this?" asked Webb.

"We shall have another council of war later," replied Boots. "And before we begin any actual Ku Klux stuff, we'll try a little intensive persecution. We'll take one particular member of the opposition and persecute him from morning till night. To-morrow we'll give him the time of his life, and crown it all by the K.K.K. stuff in the evening. If he doesn't knuckle under, my name's not the same as the cash chemists!"

And the Supreme Six, after a few words more of discussion, broke up. There was no doubt about their determination.

But who was to be the first victim?

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST VICTIM.



FATTY LITTLE lounged comfortably out of the Ancient House doorway.

It was morning, and the October sun was shining with unusual warmth. The Triangle was looking very picturesque with its autumn coat—with the chestnuts and the elms shedding their brown leaves.

Fatty was just wondering how he could drag away the time before breakfast. His gaze wandered suggestively towards Mrs. Hake's little tuckshop, in the corner of the Triangle. Very pretty it looked, with its quaint, old-fashioned window, and the ivy clinging to the stone walls round the doorway.

The fat junior had made up his mind that he wouldn't give way to the impulse which always led his footsteps in the direction of the tuckshop. He resolutely looked the other way.

"Half an hour," he muttered in a hollow voice. "I don't believe I can wait all that time. Why don't they have brekker earlier?"

There were a few suspicious crumbs clinging to his fat cheeks and a few more adorning his ample waistcoat. Fatty, in fact, had raked out the cupboard in Study L, and had left it bare.

Unconsciously he found himself jingling some silver in his trousers pocket. Ninety per cent. of all the money that Fatty ever owned ultimately found its way into Mrs. Hake's till. At present Fatty was rather more flushed than usual, but he had come to a new resolution.

He would make his money last longer—he would eke it out in regular portions until the end of the week. As a rule, the last two or three days of any week were barren days to Fatty. He invariably got through his supply of pocket-money in the early part of the week.

According to his mental schedule he couldn't really buy anything in the tuck-

shop until tea-time. On the previous day he had given way to an impulse, and had used half a crown of to-day's money. This left him rather short, so he had decided to wait until tea-time.

He turned again and looked over at the tuckshop with an expression in his eyes that was very akin to that of a hungry dog. There was a mournful aspect about that look.

Suddenly Fatty stared, and unconsciously he licked his lips.

"Great doughnuts!" he murmured. "How can a chap stand it?"

Mrs. Hake was busy in the little window setting out an array of freshly baked mutton pies, beef patties, sausage rolls, and other of her famous delicacies. There they were, in fact, steaming hot—straight from the oven. Mrs. Hake didn't expect any customers as early as this, but she believed in starting the day well.

And Fatty suddenly looked reckless.

All his good resolutions were gone to the wind. After all, what did it matter? Why not live while he had the chance? After the money was gone he wouldn't be able to worry. He'd simply be compelled to wait until the next supply of cash came along. Besides, he was daily expecting a letter from one of his aunts. The letter, in fact, was overdue. And these fond epistles, warning him against the dangers of getting his feet wet, and so forth, always contained at least a ten-shilling note—and sometimes a pound note.

Fatty had looked vainly in the letter-box that morning. But like the celebrated Mr. Micawber, he was always waiting for something to turn up. Perhaps a letter would arrive in the morning. It was sure to. It ought to have been here days ago.

Fatty made a rapid calculation of dates, and even began to get slightly nervous—half believing that two or three letters might have got lost in the post. Anyhow, he resolved to spend all his available cash to-day. It was a silly idea to portion it out into dribs and drabs.

"Great bloaters!" he murmured, his mouth watering. "Hot beef patties!"

The close proximity of breakfast was nothing—Fatty would be able to do his share, beef patties or no beef patties. Into his eyes there came an expression of angelic anticipation.

"Why this gaze of far-off dreaminess, O human elephant?" asked Reggie Pitt genially, as he strolled out of the Ancient House.

"Eh?" said Fatty absently. "Two dozen! Oh, they're tuppence each—"

He paused, and turned red.

"He even dreams of beef patties," grinned Pitt. "I may be wrong, but I'll bet you what you like he was thinking of those succulent morsels. Take my advice, Fatty, and leave 'em alone."

"I—I just thought about having a snack

before breakfast," said Fatty weakly. "I don't think I shall be able to last out, you know. I feel a bit faint. Something in the air, I suppose."

He rolled away hurriedly—fearful that Pitt would persuade him to give up the idea. He walked away towards the tuckshop, and Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey looked after him, grinning.

Quite abruptly Fatty came to a halt and jumped wildly into the air.

"Yow!" he howled. "What—what was that?"

"Must have been stung by something," said Pitt. "It's a bit late for wasps, though. What's the matter with the chap?"

Fatty was standing there, in the middle of the Triangle, furiously rubbing his left ear. He gazed round, bewildered. For no apparent reason his ear had received a stinging, painful lash. And there was nobody near him.

Hisssss! Ping!

Something came out of the atmosphere and struck Fatty violently on the nose.

"Yaroooh!" he hooted.

In a flash he knew what it was—a pea, sent with unerring aim from a hidden pea-shooter. Fatty glared round, rubbing his nose.

"What's the idea?" he roared. "Who's trying to be funny? Better stop that game, or I'll—"

He broke off with further yells, for the tiny missiles came from several quarters at once, fairly bombarding him. Every portion of his face was attacked. Fatty stood there, warding off the stinging pellets.

To Pitt and Grey the whole affair was unaccountable. They saw no sign of the peas, and it seemed to them that Fatty was doing a kind of war-dance—that he had suddenly gone into some kind of fit.

"What's the matter with the ass?" asked Grey, puzzled.

"Goodness knows," said Reggie. "Let's go and assist him."

The Triangle was apparently deserted—except for Willy Handforth and Owen minor of the Third, who were settling some intense argument over by the gymnasium wall. They were so busy that there was no possibility of them being the culprits.

In all other directions the Triangle was serene and peaceful.

Pitt and Grey approached Fatty, and found him jumping round in circles, holding up his hands to his face, as though warding off imaginary blows.

"Better go easy," murmured Jack. "He's got 'em bad!"

"Did—did you do that?" howled Fatty, glaring.

"Do what?"

"Pelt me with peas!"

"My dear chap, you're dreaming," said Pitt. "Pelt you with peas? We might just as well attempt to attack a mountain with toothpicks. What's the idea? I

don't think you're properly awake yet—"

"You—you silly ass!" roared Fatty. "Some funny idiots have been pelting me with pellets. I'm stinging all over!"

Pitt and Grey stared. There seemed to be absolutely no justification for Fatty's statement. Reggie gazed closely at the ground, but could see no sign of any peas—which was not very surprising. It would need a very close scrutiny to find such tiny objects among the gravel.

"Yow!" yelled Fatty abruptly.

He jumped a yard, and slapped a hand to his left eye.

"I'm blinded!" he gasped desperately.

"Let me look," snapped Reggie.

He seized the fat junior and stared closely at the injured eye. Sure enough the lid was showing a fierce red spot, and was already beginning to swell. Fatty was in intense pain.

"I—I can't understand it," he said. "It's a mystery!"

"Not such a mystery as you believe," said Pitt grimly.

He looked round keenly, gazing towards the shrubbery, and then turning his attention to the study windows of the College House. But he could see no sign of anybody. There was nothing to account for these pellets.

Again Pitt looked at the ground. This time he bent down and picked something up. He whistled softly to himself as he slipped a tiny object into his pocket. Then he turned to Fatty.

"We'll look into this later," he said. "Where are you going, old man?"

"Tuckshop," said Fatty, who was recovering.

"What a silly question—I might have known it," said Reggie. "All right, old son; make a dash for it, and take care to shield your face."

The fact that Pitt and Grey had not been attacked was significant. Fatty was the only fellow who had suffered. Yet the other two juniors provided just as easy a mark.

Fatty took Reggie's advice and made a dash for the tuckshop. Two stinging, burning pains assailed the back of his neck as he finally blundered over the threshold. Inside, Fatty turned, safe at last.

"The—the caddish rotters!" he gasped. "I'm jolly well going to find out who's playing that game. They ought to be boiled!"

He completely forgot his aches a second later. He was in the shop, and his nostrils were attacked by a most glorious odour. The smell of freshly cooked pastry! The aroma of hot mutton pies and beef patties!

He turned towards the counter; and gazed hungrily at Mrs. Hake.

"Gimme half a dozen patties; Mrs. Hake," he said desperately.

The old lady looked very uncomfortable. She was flustered, too, and hastily drew

away a big dish of pastry which was within Fatty's reach.

"I—I'm sorry, Master Little, but I can't serve you," she said awkwardly.

Fatty stared.

"Can't serve me?" he repeated blankly.

"No, Master Little."

"By gravy! So you think I haven't got any money, eh?" roared Fatty, slapping down two half-crowns. "I think it's pretty rotten of you, Mrs. Hake, to doubt me like that. There you are! Six patties—quick!"

He jingled the coins in his hand, but Mrs. Hake still shook her head.

"Really, Master Little, I can't serve you," she said mournfully. "It's—it's not the money, young gentleman; I'd let you have the patties in a minute if I could—you're one of my best customers, Master Little. I'm sorry!"

Fatty stared in absolute amazement.

"You're mad!" he declared. "Can't serve me? I'm willing to pay for the grub. Look here, Mrs. Hake, what's the idea? Why won't you let me have anything?"

"I—I can't tell you, Master Little," said Mrs. Hake miserably.

"Can't tell me?"

"No; I—I just can't serve you, that's all."

Fatty was bewildered. Such a thing as this had never before occurred in his whole experience. Frequently enough he had attempted to wheedle five shillings' worth of credit out of Mrs. Hake, but had never succeeded. She knew her customers all right, and she knew that it was a very risky thing to give Fatty any credit—besides being a cruelty to Fatty himself. He would have mortgaged his entire supply of pocket-money if he had been indulged in this way.

But to refuse him tuck that he had the money to pay for was a new experience.

"Look here, Mrs. Hake, don't be funny!" he said wrathfully. "This shop's open to the public, and you've got to serve me. I'm not going to be fooled about like this. I want six beef patties, and here's the money!"

There was such an expression of alarm in Mrs. Hake's eyes that Fatty stared.

"Please, Master Little, don't press me," she pleaded. "Really, I can't serve you; I'd like to, but it's impossible."

"Impossible?"

"I—I've had orders—I mean, I can't let you have any, Master Little," said Mrs. Hake desperately. "Oh, I'm so sorry—"

"You must be dotty," said Fatty, forgetting his manners in his indignation. "I'm going straight to the Housemaster, and I shall complain."

"Oh, Master Little, please don't do that!" exclaimed Mrs. Hake in great alarm. "You wouldn't sneak, I'm sure. Perhaps I shall be able to sell you something to-morrow—but not to-day. Do be generous,

young gentleman, and go away. And please don't tell Mr. Lee!"

Fatty was too bewildered to speak. And, very fortunately for Mrs. Hake, a bell clanged out at that moment—the bell which indicated breakfast was ready. Fatty dashed out of the tuckshop, and made a beeline for the Ancient House. He held the record for being the first junior to sit down at table, and he didn't want to spoil the sequence.

But in the lobby he ran into Reggie Pitt and me. We had just come out of the Common-room, and were looking thoughtful. Reggie had been telling me about the unexplained attack upon Fatty.

"Look here," said the fat junior quickly, "something else has happened——"

"Leave it until after breakfast," I said crisply. "We want to discuss this matter privately—not here."

And we went in to breakfast.

In the meantime three juniors hurried across the Triangle and entered Mrs. Hake's shop. They were John Busterfield Boots, Percy Bray, and Denny. They would be rather late for breakfast, but they didn't mind.

"Did you serve Little with any grub?" asked Buster bluntly.

"No, indeed, Master Boots," said Mrs. Hake, her eyes gleaming with indignation. "I think it's perfectly outrageous, that I do! I don't know what's come over you, young gentlemen!"

"Oh, don't make a song!" said Buster. "Only a joke. It'll be all right to-morrow. But to-day you mustn't let Fatty have a single crumb, even if he offers you treble the correct money."

"But—but, Master Boots——"

"Sorry, Mrs. Hake, but I haven't got time to listen," said Buster brusquely. "I'm the skipper of the Form, and my orders are that Fatty isn't to have any tuck. It's a lesson to him not to stuff himself so much. As captain, I look after all the fellows."

"But it's so unusual, Master Boots!"

"I'm an unusual chap," interrupted Boots coolly. "Now, don't forget, Mrs. Hake—if you serve Fatty Little with a single patty or a single cake—or even if you give him anything free of charge—we'll cut you out completely. You'll lose the custom of the entire College House Remove. And you'll lose it not for to-day, but for always. So you've got something at stake."

"It's not fair, young gentlemen," said Mrs. Hake hotly.

"Fair or not, I've given the order," declared Buster, with a lordly air. "That's enough. I shall find out if you serve Fatty—and I shall find out if you serve any other fellow who is buying things for him. Be careful. The custom of twenty or thirty fellows is at stake. That's my last word!"

And Buster & Co. marched out, leaving

Mrs. Hake gasping with anger and indignation.

John Busterfield Boots was certainly an unusual fellow.

CHAPTER VII.

ROUGH ON FATTY!



"SUSPICIOUS—very suspicious!" I said thoughtfully.

"As they remark out in New York—you said a mouthful!" agreed Reggie Pitt, nodding. "It certainly

is suspicious, and I don't mean maybe!"

"Don't start that stuff here, for goodness sake," I growled. "I'm talking about Fatty Little. He's being persecuted—and I'm willing to wager that Buster Boots is at the bottom of the whole business."

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

"Why, to break his spirit," I explained. "If Buster can do that, Fatty will probably knuckle under and join the majority. That'll mean one member the less for the Die-Hard Party—and we can't afford to lose any supporters. We want to gain members all the time. You can be sure that Buster will work like a Trojan to smash up our Opposition."

"And he's starting on Fatty?"

"Exactly!" I replied. "Fatty's just the first. You might be the next—or Montie, or Archie. Buster's a quick worker. But we won't do anything yet; we'll wait a bit, and see how things go. In any case, we can't do much, because we don't know Buster's exact game."

"Well, there's no question about this pellet," said Reggie, holding a tiny object in the palm of his hand. "I picked it up in the Triangle—it's just an ordinary pea, but it's been dyed a reddish brown. It looks just like a speck of gravel until you examine it closely. Buster's pretty acute, you know."

"He is—but that doesn't worry me," I observed. "Oh, here's Fatty, I expect—I told him to come straight here."

Fatty Little entered Study C—where we were holding the conference. He had lingered behind in the dining room, hoping for further supplies of grub. He was generally the last junior to leave. Nobody could drag him away until all traces of food had disappeared.

"Oh, here you are!" said Fatty, as he entered. "Look here, Nipper, I want to know what's going to be done! Do you know that Mrs. Hake won't serve me with any tuck?"

"That's because you haven't got any money, I suppose?"

"Nothing of the sort!" snorted Fatty. "I slapped two giddy half-crowns in front of her face, and even then she wouldn't

serve me! I've a good mind to complain to the Housemaster—"

"No, don't do that," I interrupted. "This is all a part of Buster's campaign. We'll do everything we can to help you, Fatty. It's as clear as anything that Boots has made up his mind to victimise you."

"To do what?" asked Little.

"He means to persecute you so much that you'll break away from the Die-Hard Party," I went on. "You know well enough that Mrs. Hake wouldn't refuse to serve you of her own accord. I'll make a few inquiries, and I'll bet it won't take me long to discover that Buster is the cause of the trouble. You see, he wants to make you suffer, and he knows that tuck is one of your weak spots."

"The—the awful rotter!" said Fatty indignantly.

"I think it would be far better to take no notice just now," I continued. "We don't want to show our hand—let Buster think that he's got the best of it."

"And what am I going to do about tuck?" demanded the fat junior.

"I'll keep a supply in this study," I said. "Instead of going to Mrs. Hake's, come here, and you can have as much as you like. Accept the hospitality of Study C, old man."

"By gravy! That's ripping of you!" said Fatty, hungrily eyeing the cupboard.

"There's nothing there yet!" I grinned. "Besides, you've just had breakfast, and you can't need anything as early as this. But we'll soon have a supply on hand. If you get any pangs of starvation before lessons, just trot along here. And don't let this persecution affect your determination. Stick to the Die-Hards, old son, and—"

"Oh, you needn't worry!" interrupted Fatty. "Great cocoanuts! You don't suppose I'd join those filthy cads, do you? Not likely! I'm going to stick to you, Nipper, and snap my fingers at those beasts!"

"Good man!" I said heartily. "We can't afford to lose any supporters."

Fatty went to the door, opened it, and then turned back.

"You don't mind if I come back in about twenty minutes for a snack?" he asked casually.

"You'll be as welcome as the flowers in May," I replied.

"Thanks."

Fatty went out, his face beaming, and Pitt chuckled.

"I've got an idea that the Die-Hard Party will have to muster its resources," he grinned. "We've got to keep Fatty supplied with grub, and we shall need all Archie's wealth, and—"

"No—this is Study C's affair," I interrupted. "I daresay it'll cost us a few shil-

A STARTLING DISCOVERY!



As the girls turned the bend they caught sight of a boy standing in the road, and at his feet something lay motionless.

lings, but it's worth it. The main thing is to make Buster believe that we're baffled."

In the meantime, Fatty Little went happily along the Remove passage. He didn't care a snap about Mrs. Hake now. He had just turned the corner when he jumped wildly, and clapped a hand to the back of his neck. Again, from apparently nowhere, had come one of those mysterious stings.

"Yow!" howled Fatty. "Who—who—"

He spun round, but the passage was deserted. Dashing to the end, he looked into the lobby. Nobody was there. Breathing hard, Fatty strode away to his own study. At almost every other step he twisted round to see if the coast was clear.

The thing was becoming nerve-racking.

He didn't seem to be safe anywhere—even indoors. There is something very trying in the knowledge that a stinging missile might come whizzing from nowhere at any moment. Fatty didn't feel safe at all.

But he'd be all right in his own room.

He opened the door of Study L, and a fearful discharge of soot, ashes, mud and other choice rubbish descended fully upon his head. To cap it all, a bath—one of those small affairs made of zinc—tipped over and fell upon him like a crown. Mud and ashes and soot oozed into his hair and ears and down his neck.

"Gug—gug—gurrh!" gurgled Fatty incoherently.

He was utterly startled. He had never dreamed of a booby trap. The attack was so unexpected that he was in a terrible condition in a couple of seconds. He tore the

zinc bath from his head, and flung it down.

"The—the cads!" he gasped. "Oh, great doughnuts! This is getting too awful for words!"

It was a nightmare already. Who had put the booby trap into position? And when had it been done? The very secrecy of the whole campaign was making Fatty quite nervous.

The bath had been carefully poised above the door—on the top of a small shelf. A string had been fastened to one handle and the door itself. Thus, as soon as the door was opened it jerked the bath off the shelf. And it couldn't have worked better.

For a few moments Fatty stood there, vainly attempting to clean himself. He only made matters far worse. He was simply in a shocking condition, and the study floor was a sight. Glancing at himself in a mirror, Fatty got a shock. He was black all over, and his suit was ruined.

His first impulse was to rush out, demanding vengeance.

But, fortunately, he choked his own impulse down. There was always the possibility of running into a prefect or a master. That would mean unpleasant inquiries and questions. Besides, the juniors themselves would probably laugh at him. They would see something highly amusing in his unfortunate condition.

"No!" he decided. "I'll creep up to one of the bathrooms and get clean. Then I'll tell Nipper about this. By limejuice! Somebody's going to pay!"

He peered cautiously under the door. Greatly to his relief, nobody was in sight. He crept out, whizzed down the corridor, and made a dive for the rear stairs. There was only one chance in a hundred of his meeting anybody in this quarter.

And he was very relieved when at last he dived into an empty bathroom, and locked the door.

"Thank goodness!" he murmured again.

He soon proceeded to clean himself. Stripping off his jacket and waistcoat, and removing his collar and tie, he was gratified to discover that the rest of his person was comparatively unharmed. He would merely have to change his shirt, and don a clean collar and tie, and the upper part of a spare suit.

He ripped his shirt off, and proceeded to wash. His ablutions were necessarily extensive, for he had been in a truly frightful condition. He splashed about vigorously, swamping his face and head again and again.

And while he was engaged in this task something happened.

There was one big towel rail on the wall—quite close to the window. The window was slightly open at the bottom, and while Fatty was busy with his face far in the wash-basin, a hand cautiously came through the open window and groped for the towel rail.

There were three towels, and they all vanished.

A moment later the hand reappeared. One towel was put back, and left hanging there. And Fatty went on with his washing, totally unconscious of the silent, sinister activity.

At last he had finished, after rinsing himself again and again. It was second habit for him to grope for the towel rail. He knew exactly where all the towels were kept. With closed eyes, he groped—as he always did.

He grasped the towel, and rubbed his face vigorously and briskly. He was feeling a great deal better now. His face emerged from the towel at length, and he opened his eyes, gazing at himself in the mirror.

Fatty Little gave a wild gasp, and stopped still.

His eyes bulged—he stared at his reflection dazedly. For he saw something which filled him with utter and absolute consternation. He was amazed—bewildered—indeed, frightened.

For Fatty was green!

A staring, awful green! His face—his neck—his hair! He stared at his hands, and they were green, too!

"Oh, good Heavens!" he panted. "I—I must be ill, or something!"

All sorts of alarming thoughts ran through his fevered mind.

Green!

He had never heard of such a thing. He had never known any illness where a fellow turned a staring green—particularly when he felt so fit. And then his eyes happened to fall upon the towel.

This was green, too!

A dawning flash of suspicion came into Fatty Little's brain. The alarm left him, to be replaced by a tremendous fury. It was a trick—a practical joke of somebody's. Holding the towel out, he turned it over and over. One side was comparatively white, but the other was brilliant green.

While the towel had rested over the rail it had looked quite ordinary—for it was folded in such a way that the green side was invisible. The green appeared to be some kind of powdery pigment. It had now become smeared over the towel generally.

"All right—I'll find out who did it!" muttered Fatty aggressively.

He filled the wash basin again, and grabbed the soap, inwardly fuming. He came to the conclusion that the towel had been on the rack all the time. He didn't think of looking out of the open window. For there was a drop right down into the rear courtyard.

But there was a ledge out there, too—a wide ledge which led to other windows, including those of several box-rooms. But even if Fatty had looked, he would have seen nothing. Those who were working against him were performing their task with utter silence and mystery.

Fatty Little had been feeling quite relieved. When he discovered that there was nothing wrong with him he was simply angry. He didn't like being compelled to wash all over again.

He rubbed and rubbed, and finally gazed at himself in the mirror, hoping that the worst would be off. But his eyes goggled open even wider. There was not an atom of difference!

He was just as green as ever!

"Great frying kippers!" gasped the unfortunate junior thickly.

Frantically now, he rubbed and rubbed. He confined his attentions to his hands. Turning on the hot water, and grabbing the scrub brush, he scrubbed for all he was worth.

At the end of five minutes he desisted, perspiring from every pore—and utterly alarmed. The green had come off slightly, but only slightly. His hands were still a perfect sight.

Fatty was hard at his task when he heard the first school bell ring. He nearly went mad. Rubbing and rubbing, and changing the hot water every few moments, he at length succeeded in taking off the startling brilliance of the green.

But the effect was made even worse.

For it looked like some stage ghost—an awful, sickly green, washed out and blotchy. And his face was so sore with rubbing that it felt as though it had been boiled.

He was afraid to go down—but he knew that he would have to.

And, at last, he dashed into the dormitory, grabbed some clean linen and donned it. Then, with another coat and waistcoat on, he descended the stairs. He felt fearfully self-conscious.

As luck would have it, he ran into me on the landing—just as the second bell was due to be rung. I had popped upstairs to get a clean handkerchief. I stared at Fatty, aghast.

"Great Scott!" I ejaculated. "Are you ill, Fatty?"

"Ill!" snarled the fat junior hoarsely. "No, I'm not ill! This stuff's dye—I've been trying to get it off for ages!"

"But, my dear old chap, you're a sight!"

"Don't I know it?" hooted Fatty wildly.

In disjointed sentences, he explained to me what had occurred. He told me about the booby trap, and all the rest of it. I listened grimly. There was no doubt about the determination of Buster Boots. This intensive system of persecution was liable to break the strongest will. Unless Fatty exerted all his determination, he would surely succumb.

"Well, you'd better go down," I said. "It wouldn't do to miss lessons—There goes the bell, now."

"But—but what can I say to old Crowell?"

"Tell him it's a mystery—you can't explain it," I replied. "He'll realise that some fat-

head's been having a joke, and won't press you too much. Anyhow, you'll have to chance it."

And we went downstairs to lessons.

CHAPTER VIII.

INTENSIVE METHODS!



MR. CROWELL started as he caught sight of Fatty Little.

"Good gracious!" he ejaculated. "Little!

What on earth have you been doing to yourself? How dare you come into the Form-room in that extraordinary condition?"

Fatty gulped and swallowed hard. A good many members of the Remove cackled loudly. I gave particular attention to John Busterfied Boots and the Faithful Five. But there was no sign from them. They simply smiled like the rest of the fellows, as though mildly amused.

"Answer me, Little!" commanded Mr. Crowell.

"I—I can't explain, sir," said Fatty miserably. "I don't know how it happened! I think it must be some kind of dye, or something—"

"You don't know how it happened?" thundered Mr. Crowell. "What preposterous nonsense! This, no doubt, is some new form of practical joke! Go at once to the bathroom and wash yourself!"

Fatty staggered. Wash himself! And he'd been scrubbing away at his hands and face for the last half-hour, until he felt absolutely raw.

"It's no good, sir!" he said. "I've tried everything—hot water and the scrub brush—and it won't make any difference!"

Fatty was so distressed that Mr. Crowell softened somewhat.

"I can scarcely believe, Little, that you deliberately made your face so appallingly disfigured," he exclaimed. "You are unfit to be seen! And you positively assure me that soap and water had no effect?"

"Well, practically none, sir," confessed Fatty. "I suppose it helped a little, because I was a lot greener than this at first. But I can't wash any more, sir, I'm as sore as anything."

"Tell me, Little—how did you get this atrocious dye on you?"

"I—I'm sorry, sir, I can't tell you" replied Fatty.

Mr. Crowell looked at him closely, and nodded.

"Go to your place, Little," he said quietly. "I will inquire into the matter later. I cannot allow you to delay lessons further."

"Thank you, sir," said Fatty Little, with relief.

He went to his place, conscious that all eyes were turned upon him. He sat down, and there was a splintering, crashing noise.

Fatty Little descended to the floor with a thud that shook the whole room, and floundered there amid the remains of his seat.

"Yow!" he howled. "What—what happened?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Remove roared. There was something excruciatingly funny in seeing Fatty there. But to the stout junior himself there was nothing humorous in the situation. I didn't smile, either. This was another indication of Buster's persecution. That seat had been deliberately weakened.

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Crowell, striding forward. "Stand up at once, Little! Good gracious me! The seat is utterly demolished!"

"It—it collapsed directly I sat down, sir," gasped Fatty.

"Have you noticed the seat weakening at all lately?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Crowell pursed his lips.

"Get another seat, and sit down, Little," he said. "I am beginning to suspect that you are the victim of a succession of practical jokes. If I find the culprit, I will punish him with the utmost severity."

Fatty Little got another seat, and sat down very gingerly. He was in a state of "nerves" by now. The day was still young, and yet the unfortunate Fatty was rapidly weakening. One thing after another, like this, was altogether too much.

Every moment or two he turned his head sharply, as though half-expecting some kind of attack. He was constantly on the jump. But at length he grew more peaceful in mind.

The first lesson passed off without incident. Fatty's face was still burning painfully, but there seemed no chance of his suffering from any ill effects. The pigment was of quite a harmless variety, although very difficult to remove.

Fatty was greatly relieved, and when he had to change his books, he opened his desk, and found himself staring at three glorious looking beef patties. He started, and his mouth watered.

Still holding the flap of the desk up, he grabbed one of the patties, and took a deep mouthful, mentally deciding that I was a good sort for providing him with grub in this way.

"Of course, Nipper shoved them there," Fatty told himself. "He promised me he'd provided—"

Fatty's thoughts became jumbled. An expression of horror came into his face. His mouth felt as though it were absolutely on fire. He swallowed hard to get rid of the awful sensation.

Any ordinary junior would have been fully warned by the previous happenings of the day. He would have thought twice before biting into one of those inviting looking patties. But Buster Boots had proved his

cunning by placing the pastry inside Fatty's desk. Buster knew his man.

Fatty had not been able to resist the temptation. Suspicions or no suspicions, the sight of those patties had driven all fears from his mind. And now he was suffering the penalty.

Crash!

The flap of his desk descended with a clap like thunder. And Fatty staggered to his feet, gasping, spluttering, and spraying out crumbs.

"Help!" he gurgled. "I—I'm poisoned!"

Mr. Crowell turned from the blackboard, startled.

"What—what on earth is the matter with you, Little?" he shouted.

"I'm poisoned, sir!" exclaimed Fatty. "Oh! My mouth—my throat! I—I can't breathe, sir! I'm all burning up!"

Fatty danced about, gasping hoarsely. He dashed up and down the room, as though demented, fanning his mouth with his hands. Mr. Crowell was genuinely alarmed. He ran to the agonised junior.

"What is wrong, Little?" he demanded huskily.

Fatty couldn't answer. In the meantime, I had dashed to Fatty's desk. I had seen him bite into that patty, and I guessed things. But surely it wasn't possible that Buster and Co. had done anything to really harm the fat junior?

I seized the remains of the bitten patty, and sharply sniffed it. Then I tore off the top, and exposed the interior—which should have been minced beef. Instead, it was a curious looking reddish paste. Suspicious, I put my tongue to it, and the next moment my whole mouth was burning.

"Red pepper!" I exclaimed.

"What did you say, Nipper?" shouted Mr. Crowell, turning to me.

"It's all right, sir—you needn't be worried about Little," I said. "He's in no danger, although his mouth must be in agony."

Mr. Crowell strode across to me, and grasped the patty.

"Another practical joke, sir," I said grimly. "Somebody must have put these patties in Fatty's desk. You see, sir—instead of being filled with beef, that stuff is a kind of paste made out of red pepper and Worcestershire sauce. Fatty's mouth must be burning horribly. He swallowed some, too!"

Mr. Crowell went red with anger.

"Upon my soul!" he shouted. "This is altogether too much! Little! Go out at once, and drink some cold water! Ask the matron to relieve you, and don't come back here until you are quite recovered."

Fatty gurgled an unintelligible expression of gratitude, and dashed away. And Mr. Crowell regarded the Remove sternly.

"I demand to know who is responsible for this dastardly trickery?" he demanded. "Somebody has been deliberately persecuting Little. I call upon the culprit to stand forward."

But Mr. Crowell called in vain.

CHAPTER IX.

WORSE AND WORSE.



"FEELING better, old man?" asked Pitt sympathetically.

"Yes, thanks,"

replied Fatty, as he took a sip of water. "Oh, my hat! I'll never touch red pepper

again as long as I live! My mouth's still burning like a fire, but it's not as bad as it was."

"There's no question about it, Buster is at the bottom of all this," I said. "His scheme is to weaken you, Fatty, and I expect it's just a beginning."

"A beginning!" said Fatty, with a start.

"I mean—you're the first victim," I said. "If you knuckle under, Buster will be encouraged to try the same game on some more of us. In short, old man, he's using you as a kind of test case."

"Oh, is he?" growled Fatty aggressively.

"But you can't do anything, you can't accuse him of it, because you haven't got an atom of proof," I went on. "My advice to you is to be very cautious. Keep your eyes wide open, and always think before you do anything. After what happened this morning you were mad to bite into that beef patty. But Buster knows your weak spot, and he took a chance. I think you'd better go for a walk until dinner-time, so as to be out of the way. I'll get two or three chaps to go with you as a kind of a bodyguard."

Fatty looked relieved.

"As for Mr. Crowell, he's still unsatisfied," I went on. "If anything else happens this afternoon he'll probably gate the whole Remove. But I expect Buster will see the danger, and ease up. If the Remove gets gated, Buster's supporters won't love him for his pains."

Five minutes later Fatty started out for a walk, with Handforth and Co. as a stern bodyguard. The chums of Study D had willingly consented to act in this capacity for the good of the cause.

"Better keep our eyes pretty well skinned," said Church, as they passed out of the main gateway. "We've only got half-an-hour, but there's no telling what Boots and gang can do in that time."

"Don't you worry," said Handforth confidently. "Fatty's all right with us. He won't come to any harm. That's the idea of bringing him out for a walk. Goodness knows what would happen to him if he stayed in the school!"

"Something awful, I'll bet," declared McClure.

"Of course, he looks pretty ghastly," went on Handforth, glancing at Fatty with a critical air. "If we meet anybody, my son, you'd better dodge into the hedge. In the full daylight you look unearthly."

"I—I'd better not come out at all,"

muttered Fatty, glancing apprehensively up and down the lane. "It'll be horrible if some of the village people come along—"

"That's all right—we'll go the other way," said Handy. "When you come to think of it, we're asses to come at all. We ought to walk you round and round the Triangle, or Little Side. It's a bit too public out here. You look like a nightmare. If a horse comes along you'll scare it stiff!"

Handforth's remarks were not very comforting, but he wasn't aware of this. Edward Oswald was never particular about a fellow's feelings. Such thoughts never entered his mind.

After progressing a few yards, Handforth paused and looked round with an air of exaggerated caution. This job suited him well. He loved to look upon himself as a guardian of the weak.

"What's the idea?" asked Church, staring. "Hear something?"

"No," said Handy. "But we can't be too careful. Those rotters might be up to something. For all we know they'll chuck a brick at Fatty."

"A brick!" said Fatty, with a start.

"There's no telling," proceeded Handforth, with a nod. "Or they might be lying in ambush for us with catapults. And there's just a chance that they'll come and grab Fatty, and chuck him in the ditch."

"That's right—be cheerful!" said McClure. "You're a fine guardian, ain't you? All you can do is to make the chap nervous!"

But it wasn't necessary to make Fatty nervous—he was in that condition already. In spite of the fact that Handforth and Co. were protecting him, he had a haunting fear that something was going to happen. Considering how he had been persecuted during the morning, this was not at all surprising.

The juniors walked on, turning a bend in the lane, and coming within sight of the corner of a red roof, in the distance—nestling amid some tall, stately trees. At the sight of that red spot, Church paused.

"My hat!" he said, with a startled look.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Handforth.

"The girls!" said Church briefly.

"Eh?" yelped Fatty. "Are—are they coming? Oh, great doughnuts! If they see me like this, I'll never get over it! Lemmie hide somewhere—"

"Dry up!" growled Handforth. "We've got the lane to ourselves. At the same time it's a bit risky going in this direction. I'd forgotten about that giddy new school. We might run into a crowd of those girls at any minute."

Fatty halted, and turned a sickly bluey-green.

"We—we'd better go back!" he faltered. "Oh, I say, ain't it awful to be in a state like this? Why, if those girls saw me they'd talk about it for years! I couldn't bear to think of such a thing."

Fatty didn't move another yard forward.

Only a short distance ahead, just round the next bend, lay the Moor View School. Until a week previously it had been an empty dwelling—a private residence known as the Mount. But it had been purchased by the owners of a high-class girls' school. Many additions had been made to the premises, and on the previous Saturday, the girls had arrived.

There were about fifty of them, and they were in the care of Miss Charlotte Bond, M.A., the Headmistress. She was assisted by two under-mistresses, and the whole establishment was fairly extensive.

And it was a tip-top place—classy to the last degree. The young ladies themselves ranged from fourteen to seventeen in age; the majority being in the neighbourhood of fifteen.

And the very thought of meeting any of these sweet young things was horrifying to the temporarily disfigured Fatty. He stared ahead, at the bend. Then he turned round, and tried to glance round the curve they had just negotiated. But the lane seemed quite deserted.

"Oh, it's all right," said Church. "We might as well—"

"Great Scott!" interrupted McClure. "Listen!"

They held their breath, standing in tense attitudes. And the sound of girlish laughter came floating on the breeze. And at the same second a spot of bright colour appeared along the road.

Fatty Little didn't wait for more, he gave one headlong dive into the nearest hedge. It was thick there, and he was certain of complete concealment. He hadn't dared to run back, for fear of encountering any other strangers. The hedge was the only safe place. He felt angry with himself for having consented to coming out at all—but it was too late to return.

"All right, Fatty; we'll stick here!" murmured Church. "We won't leave you in the lurch, old man."

"Be sports!" pleaded a voice from the hedge. "Don't desert me!"

Handforth was looking down the lane, and there was rather a startled expression on his face. There was no bolder fellow on the face of the earth when it came to punching a fellow in the eye, or knocking him flat. But in the presence of girls, Handforth was very akin to a jellyfish. One pretty girl could reduce him to a state of utter helplessness.

"We—we'd better do something!" he said, looking round wildly. "Can't stand here in this way! Why, they—they'll think we're waiting for them!"

Handforth turned a brilliant red at one thought. And, certainly, the situation was somewhat embarrassing. There was nothing in walking along the lane. But Fatty was in the hedge, and Handforth and Co. were obliged to stand by him. The girls, knowing nothing about the hedge, would probably jump to wrong conclusions.

And the young ladies were coming along briskly now, in full view. There were three of them, arm in arm. All were about fifteen years of age. They were attired in short skirts and gaily coloured sports coats. With glittering shoes, silk stockings, and smart attire in every detail, they were certainly good to look upon; a quite unaccustomed spectacle in Bellton Lane.

And beneath their school hats, trimmed, dainty straws, were three very pretty faces. The girl in the centre was the pick of the bunch. She had fair bobbed hair, blue eyes, and dimpled cheeks. And when she laughed she revealed two rows of pearly teeth that would be difficult to match.

"Quick—pretend to tie your giddy bootlace!" hissed Handforth desperately.

It was the only thing to do. But unfortunately, Church and McClure both obeyed the order at the same time. And it was rather unusual for two bootlaces to come unfastened simultaneously.

As the three girls approached their smiles vanished, and they held their chins slightly higher in the air. They saw the bootlaces being hastily fingered. And they at once jumped to the conclusion that this was a deliberate stoppage. And the girls from the Moor View School had every reason to regard the Remove with scorn.

For they had seen the Remove on the previous Saturday afternoon, engaged in a kind of free fight on Little Side. This had been Buster's doing. And the girls had gained a totally wrong impression of the juniors.

As they came by, Handforth felt his heart thumping wildly. He only glanced at the two outside girls—most of his attention was attracted towards the girl in the centre with the fair hair. Handforth's taste was excellent. Not that the other girls weren't pretty—they were.

Some impulse led Handy to raise his cap. He did so awkwardly, and Church and McClure instantly copied his example. But they were mortified when the three girls merely raised their chins higher, and walked past tossing their heads, and looking straight ahead of them.

Handforth gave a gulp as he gazed at their rear view. The three trim figures were walking rather more quickly now. Handforth felt like a wet rag, and Church and McClure were in a similar condition. But, gradually, Handy's jaw stiffened, and his eyes blazed.

"The—the blessed rotters!" he exclaimed fiercely.

"Draw it mild! Handy!" protested Church. "You mustn't talk about girls like that—"

"I'm talking about Buster and his rotten gang!" snorted Handforth. "Did—did you see the way those girls turned their noses up at us? Buster's fault! I've a good mind to smash him for this!"

"It was a bit rotten!" said McClure,



Handforth & Co. found Fatty Little upright in the ditch. He was bound hand and foot, blindfold, and stuck there like an animated post!

flushing. "They absolutely cut us dead. We might have been so many insects."

Handforth and Co. were deeply humiliated.

And, in the meantime, the three girls turned the corner, and felt rather relieved. Among Miss Bond's pupils there had been a good deal of discussion about St. Frank's, and all the girls had come to the conclusion that the Remove was no good. Such is the lasting power of a first impression.

But the girls couldn't talk much, for just as they turned the bend they caught sight of another boy standing in the road. And, at his feet, something lay motionless. As the girls appeared, he half ran towards them.

"Help!" he shouted. "Oh! Quick!"

Buster Boots' tone was very urgent. The girls half paused for a moment, rather startled. Buster ran up, flushed and excited.

"You'll excuse me, won't you?" he asked breathlessly. "I was out for a walk with a pal of mine, and he came over faint, or something. He's lying in the road, there—and I can't get him to speak to me!"

The girl with the fair hair went rather pale.

"Oh! We—we must do something!" she said crisply.

Without a second's hesitation she ran forward, followed by the other girls. Percy Bray was lying in the road, his eyes closed, perfectly still. Two minutes earlier Bray and Buster had raced to the spot like mad

on the other side of the hedge, and Buster had warned Percy to keep perfectly still.

"I don't know what came over him!" said Buster, in deep distress. "I can't carry him back to St. Frank's alone—"

"We passed three boys a minute ago," said one of the girls. "Quick, Edith—you run back and tell them!"

"All right, Irene!" said Edith breathlessly.

Exactly as Buster had foreseen, they had done the one obvious thing. The whole scheme was to get Handforth and Co. on the spot. And Buster had used the unsuspecting young ladies for his base purpose.

It was so easy. A fellow had come over faint, and three others down the road. Edith raced round the bend, and found Handforth and Co. still standing there. Fatty Little was just bobbing out of his place of concealment, but he dodged back like a frightened rabbit.

"Hallo!" said Church. "What the dickens—"

"Oh, quick!" called out Edith, as she ran up. "You're all wanted, there's a boy fainted round the corner, and you've got to carry him back to the school. Come quickly, please—please! Oh, do come!"

Handforth and Co. acted with alacrity. All thoughts of Fatty Little vanished. They completely forgot their charge. And, with one accord, they raced back with Edith to the spot where Percy Bray was lying.

By this time, Irene—she of the fair hair—was kneeling down in the lane, holding Bray's head up, and bathing his temple with a water-soaked handkerchief. She looked up in a business-like way as Handforth and Co. dashed into the scene.

"Oh, here you are!" she said sharply. "I don't know what's the matter with him, but you've got to carry him back to the school."

Handforth gave one look at Bray, turned to Buster, and he emitted a growl. His expression was one of acute suspicion.

"You—you rotters!" he exclaimed. "What's the idea of this sham, eh? I'll jolly well bill you—I—I mean—"

Handforth paused, flushing deeply.

"Sham?" repeated Buster in an aggrieved voice. "Percy's fainted, I tell you! Help to carry him back—"

"I don't believe it!" said Handforth. "Look here, Miss, these chaps are trying to kid you! I know 'em! There's nothing wrong with that ass!"

Irene flashed a glance of indignation at Handforth, a glance which made him wilt as he stood.

"How can you?" she asked scornfully. "Oh, it's too bad! Please! He may be really ill, and he must be carried back at once!"

Irene was quite concerned, and she placed a pleading hand on Edward Oswald's arm, and looked straight up into his face with her big blue eyes. Handforth went hot and cold all over.

"Of—of course, if—if you really want me to!" he said lamely. "But—but— Come on, you chaps!"

That one look had conquered Handforth completely. He always professed that girls were of no interest to him—but when it came to an absolute test, Handy was exceedingly susceptible.

But just as the chums of Study D were about to lift Percy Bray from the ground, the other four members of the Supreme Six appeared round the bend. They were grinning, and looking highly pleased.

"O.K., old man!" sang out Crooks. "All over!"

Percy Bray sat up with astonishing alacrity, considering that he was very ill. He jumped to his feet, yelling with laughter. And Buster Boots roared, too. They seemed to think it a splendid joke.

"What did I tell you?" roared Handforth. "I knew it!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Irene, with withering contempt. "Oh! You—you cads!"

She turned her gaze full upon Buster and Co., and then took in Handforth and Church and McClure. She stamped her foot, and walked away—the other two girls accompanying her.

And Buster and Co., still yelling, dashed through a gap in the hedge and vanished. The chums of Study D gazed at one another blankly.

"She—she called us cads!" said Handforth hoarsely. "Us! When I meet Buster

again I'm going to smash him to pulp! I'm going to make him smaller than sausage-meat!"

"I—I say!" gasped Church. "I—I believe it was a trick, you know! They did it on purpose to get us away from Fatty."

"What!" howled Handforth.

They dashed back.

And they found the unfortunate Fatty Little upright in the ditch—which, at this point, was very deep and full of mud. He was bound hand and foot, blindfold, and stuck there like some animated post—too deep in the mud to extricate himself.

And when Handforth and Co. had released him he was unable to explain who committed the outrage. He had been sprung on from behind, blindfolded, and the rest had happened in a few seconds.

So, although Handforth and Co. knew perfectly well that Buster and Co. were the culprits, they had no proof of it. As for Fatty Little, by the time he got back to St. Frank's he was feeling weak and dispirited. His determination was being worn down grimly and persistently.

CHAPTER X.

THE HOODED FIGURES!



INDIGNATION ran high through the members of the Die-Hard Party.

We had heard the news about Buster's mean trick with rising anger. It was bad enough that he

should commit such an outrage upon Fatty Little—but ten times more reprehensible that he should use three of the Moor View girls for the furthering of his scheme.

He had fooled those three young ladies—and he had fooled them in a particularly heartless way, making them believe that Percy Bray was ill. And the girls, of course, naturally jumped to the conclusion that Handforth and Co. were mixed up in the petty plot.

If the girls had been antagonistic before, they were trebly so now.

As for Fatty Little, he was allowed some peace during the afternoon. There were no further demonstrations. And as soon as tea was over, Fatty was advised to remain in his study, where he would be safe. For Trotwood promised to remain on guard, and to yell for help if anything happened.

Fatty was weary to such an extent that he even wasn't so hungry as usual. He lay back in an easy chair, wondering how long it would be before he regained his own complexion.

"Cheer up, old son," said Trotwood. "I don't suppose there'll be any more trouble. Those rotters have just about finished with you by now. There's nothing else that they can do."

"I—I'm getting indifferent!" murmured Fatty despondently.

He was full of aches and pains. He had

been handled very roughly before being thrown into the ditch—and he had the constant fear that something else would happen. Fatty's intuition was not much at fault.

Trotwood, it must be admitted, was rather careless—but not deliberately. Somebody looked in and told him that he was wanted by Mr. Crowell, so he had to go.

"Shan't be a minute, Fatty," he said. "You'll be all right till I get back."

Fatty grunted, but made no intelligible reply.

He was confident that he was safe, too. How could the enemy get at him here, within earshot of his own friends? So the fat junior rose from the chair, and proceeded to investigate the cupboard. Feeling weak, he decided that a few doughnuts might improve matters.

The very instant his back was turned, the window slowly and silently rose until the lower sash was completely up. And then six figures appeared—six extraordinary figures.

They wore long, flowing gowns of a most peculiar design. And their heads were completely concealed by great hoods, with head-pieces which rose to a sharp point.

Each hooded figure looked out from two little eye-holes. And upon these extraordinary costumes were weird symbols. They acted so silently and deliberately that they were all in the room before Fatty was aware of the fact.

And then, with one accord, they seized the unfortunate junior.

Quickly, a muffler was thrust over his mouth, and tied round his head. Fatty only succeeded in making one short outcry—too slight to attract any attention. And then he was roped up—for the second time that day.

He was swiftly hauled out of the window, and rushed across the dark Triangle in the midst of his captors. An unpleasant drizzle was falling, and the air was murky with fog.

There was no fear of these night workers being spotted, for the Triangle was completely deserted. The six hooded figures rushed their victim across the monastery ruins, and then disappeared among the piles of tumbling old masonry.

Down the winding stairs they went, with Fatty helpless in their midst. And at last they arrived in the old monastery vault—that grim old place where many an exciting adventure had taken place.

But the old vault was transformed.

Candles were burning in various places. Up one side of the vault there was a draped bench—black and forbidding, with more of those strange symbols. Fatty Little was held by two of the hooded figures, and the others grouped themselves upon the bench.

The gag was removed and Fatty stared about him wildly—for that muffler had covered his eyes, too. Fatty was quite a

(Continued on next page)

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plucky junior, as a rule, but his experiences of to-day had unnerved him. And as he caught sight of this sinister place, with the hooded figures, he gave a scared gasp.

"Who—who are you?" he panted fearfully.

"We are the Ku Klux Klan!" came a deep voice from one of the figures.

"The—the what?" panted Fatty. "Oh! I—I must be dreaming—"

But suddenly he paused, and some of his confidence returned.

"Great bloaters!" he gasped. "You—you rotters! I know who you are! Buster and all the rest of the rotten gang! You can't fool me—"

"You're in the hands of the Ku Klux Klan!" went on the voice evenly. "Throughout the day you have been persecuted with a set purpose in view. And now you shall be given your chance of choosing one way or the other. Will you remain a member of the Die-Hard Party, or will you give yourself completely and absolutely to John Busterfield Boots?"

"No!" shouted Fatty hotly. "You're Boots! I know your voice, even though you're trying to disguise it! You can't scare me! I wouldn't join your party for anything? You're a lot of cads and brutes!"

"Let me explain what your punishment will be if you remain obstinate," went on the spokesman. "You need not imagine that this persecution will cease. Refuse to obey the Remove captain in all things, and the persecution will continue—intensified in a far greater degree."

Fatty Little started.

"You—you mean you'll keep on with that awful rot?" he asked huskily.

"Yes—but what we have performed so far is mild in comparison to what will be in store," replied the hooded figure. "Furthermore, you will suffer now—and you will suffer horribly."

"Oh, you beasts!" gasped Fatty. "You daren't touch me! Help! Help! Die-Hards to the rescue!"

"Shout—make all the noise you please!" roared the deep voice. "It will not carry any distance. You are in our hands, and you are helpless. And we, the Ku Klux Klan, are not disposed to waste any time. Do you, or do you not, agree to sever your connection with the Die-Hard Party?"

"No, I don't!" shouted Fatty.

"Comrades, place the prisoner to the torture!" said the voice curtly.

"Torture!" muttered Fatty Little, with a start.

No more words were spoken. Fatty was taken over to the other side of the vault, and placed upon a second bench. There were straps fixed to this, and the next moment Fatty was held there securely.

"Comrade, the scissors!" exclaimed the Chief grimly.

A big pair of scissors was handed over, and they were clicked suggestively. Fatty

twisted his head, and looked at them in alarm.

"What—what are you goin' to do?" he asked hoarsely.

"Unless you agree to our terms within the next thirty seconds your hair will be cut from your head!" replied the Chief. "This is merely a beginning. After your hair is cut, you will be stripped of your clothing, and painted with tar!"

The unfortunate Fatty panted with alarm. All sorts of wild thoughts ran through his mind. Was it worth it? He weakened—he was on the point of giving way. After all, what was the good of sticking to the Die-Hard Party at such a cost as this?

"The time limit has expired!" exclaimed the Chief slowly.

He clicked his scissors again and grasped one of Fatty's locks and prepared to cut.

"Stop!" shouted Fatty Little desperately.

He prided himself on his hair—he had long, curly locks that added greatly to his general appearance. And he was quite certain that these determined captors would cut his hair from his head.

"You succumb?" demanded the hooded figure tensely.

"Yes!" hissed Fatty, his voice vibrating with fury.

"You agree to sever yourself from the Die-Hards?"

"Yes!"

"And you will swear your allegiance to John Busterfield Boots?"

Fatty Little gulped.

"By gravy, no!" he shouted thickly. "I—I mean—"

"Well?" asked the Chief, again seizing the lock of hair.

"Yes, you—you cad!" groaned Fatty. "I'll agree!"

"You'll agree to the leadership of the Remove captain?"

"Yes, confound you!"

"Good!" said the hooded figure. "Swear it!"

What do you mean—swear it?" demanded Fatty.

"Repeat, after me, these words—'I hereby faithfully promise to leave the Die-Hard Party and transfer my loyalty to John Busterfield Boots—honour bright.' Go on—say that!"

Between his gritted teeth, Fatty Little ground out the words.

"It is well!" said the hooded figure. "Release the prisoner."

In a moment Fatty was unstrapped and allowed to go. He went stumbling up the stone steps into the open air. And the hooded figures revealed themselves as the Supreme Six.

(Continued on page iii of cover)

CRICKET COMPETITION

The Editor regrets that owing to pressure on space the results of above are unavoidably held over till next week.

"There's no guarantee that the fat ass will keep his word," said Percy Bray. "I think we ought to have done something else—"

"Not a bit of it," replied Buster. "Fatty is a chap of his word. He promised, honour bright, that he would leave the Die-Hards. And we can be absolutely satisfied that he'll do so. And now we've got to hustle—he might tell some of the fellows, even though he had joined our party."

Which proved that Buster was not intending to take any chances. The Supreme Six hurried up the steps, carrying their gowns with them.

And in the meantime, Fatty Little staggered into the Ancient House, and ran into Reggie Pitt and Tommy Watson and me in a body. We looked at him in astonishment. Fatty was dishevelled and wild-looking.

"Hallo!" I said, in surprise. "What on earth—"

"I've decided to join Buster's lot!" exclaimed Fatty dully.

"What!"

"I—I can't stand this torture any longer!" went on the fat junior. "I'm leaving the Die-Hards, and I'm one of Buster's supporters from now on. Sorry, Nipper, but there's nothing else to be said."

I seized Fatty's arm

"But look here, you idiot!" I said sharply. "There's no need to do that—stick to me a bit longer, and—"

"I—I can't!" muttered Fatty brokenly. "I can't! Oh, don't talk to me—it's no good! I've left the Die-Hards for good!"

He wrenched himself away, and vanished down the Remove passage. And Reggie Pitt and Tommy Watson and I looked at each other grimly.

"The traitor!" said Watson. "I thought he was made of better stuff!"

I took a deep breath.

"There's nothing wrong with Fatty!" I said quietly. "Something's happened—something he daren't tell us. I expect he's been forced to give his word of honour!"

"That's about the size of it," said Reggie Pitt. "But you can't get away from the fact that we've lost one of our men. Buster's still all-powerful—he's still winning!"

And, although it made me inwardly boil, I had to admit John Busterfield Boots was gaining. As affairs stood at present, it looked as though the Remove skipper was in a stronger position than he had ever occupied before.


But appearances are sometimes deceptive.

And it would not be long before the first crack appeared in Buster's armour—and then his downfall would be swift and complete. But although the skipper's doom was not far distant, there was plenty of fight in him yet!

THE END.

NEXT WEEK:—The Die-Hards of the Remove.

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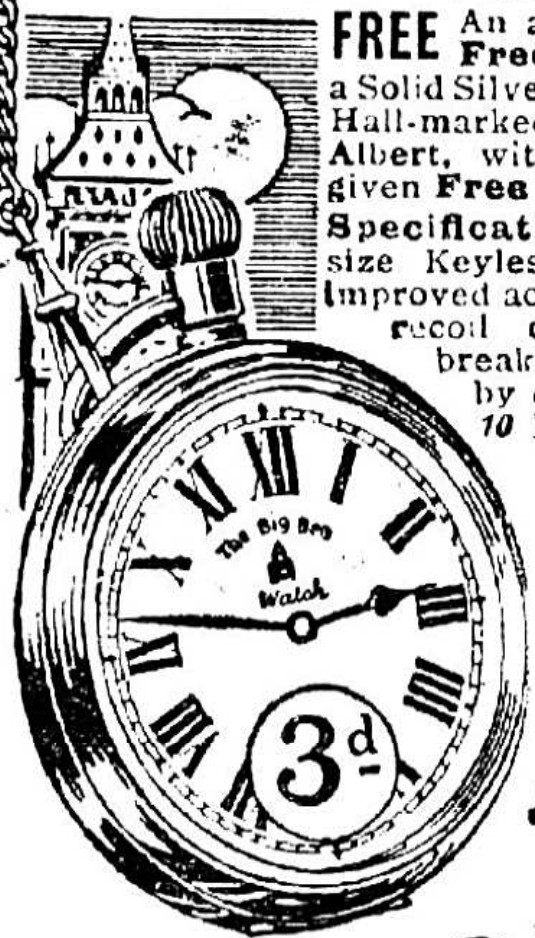
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