ROUSING STORY OF THE SCHOOLBOY ACTORS!

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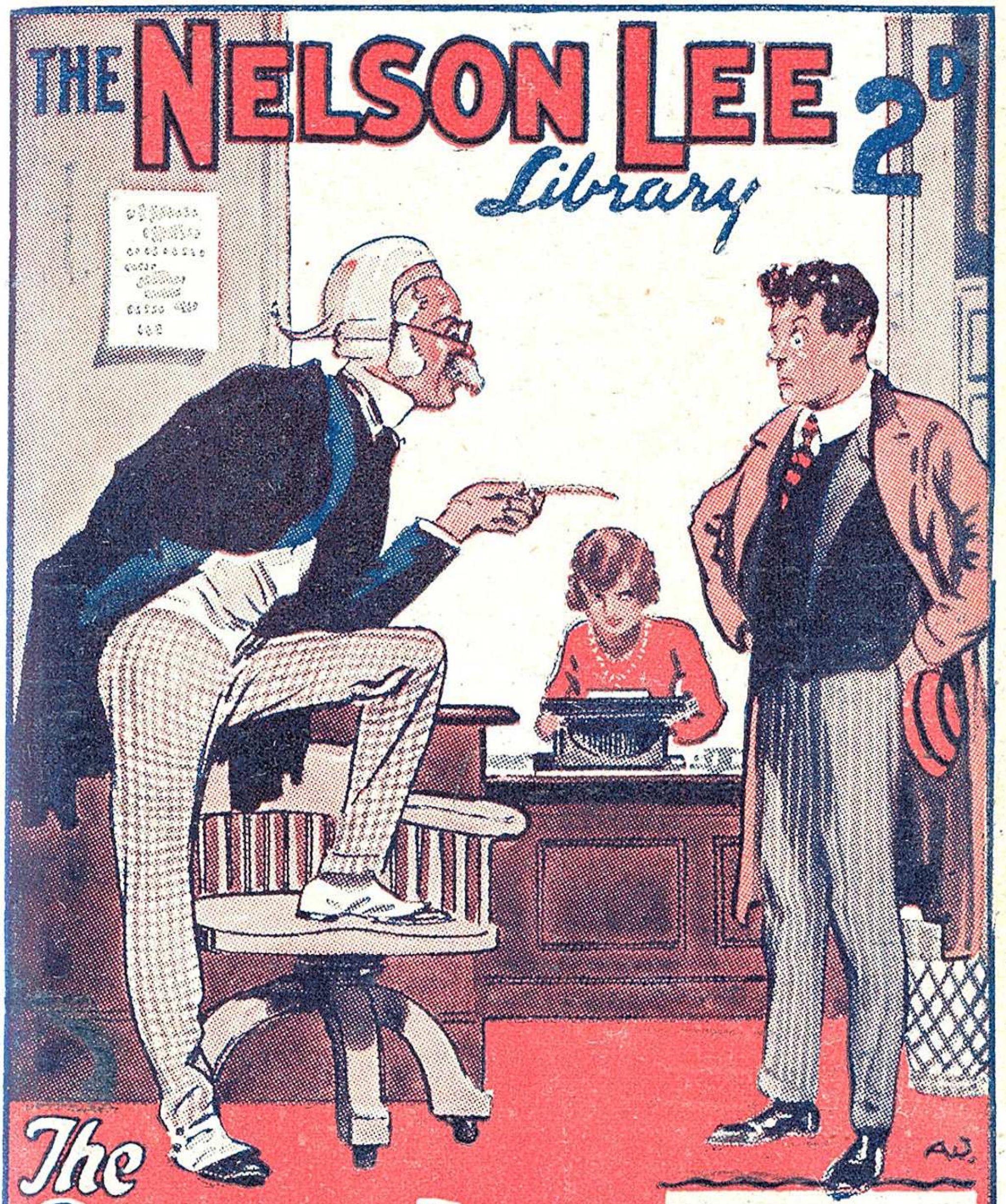
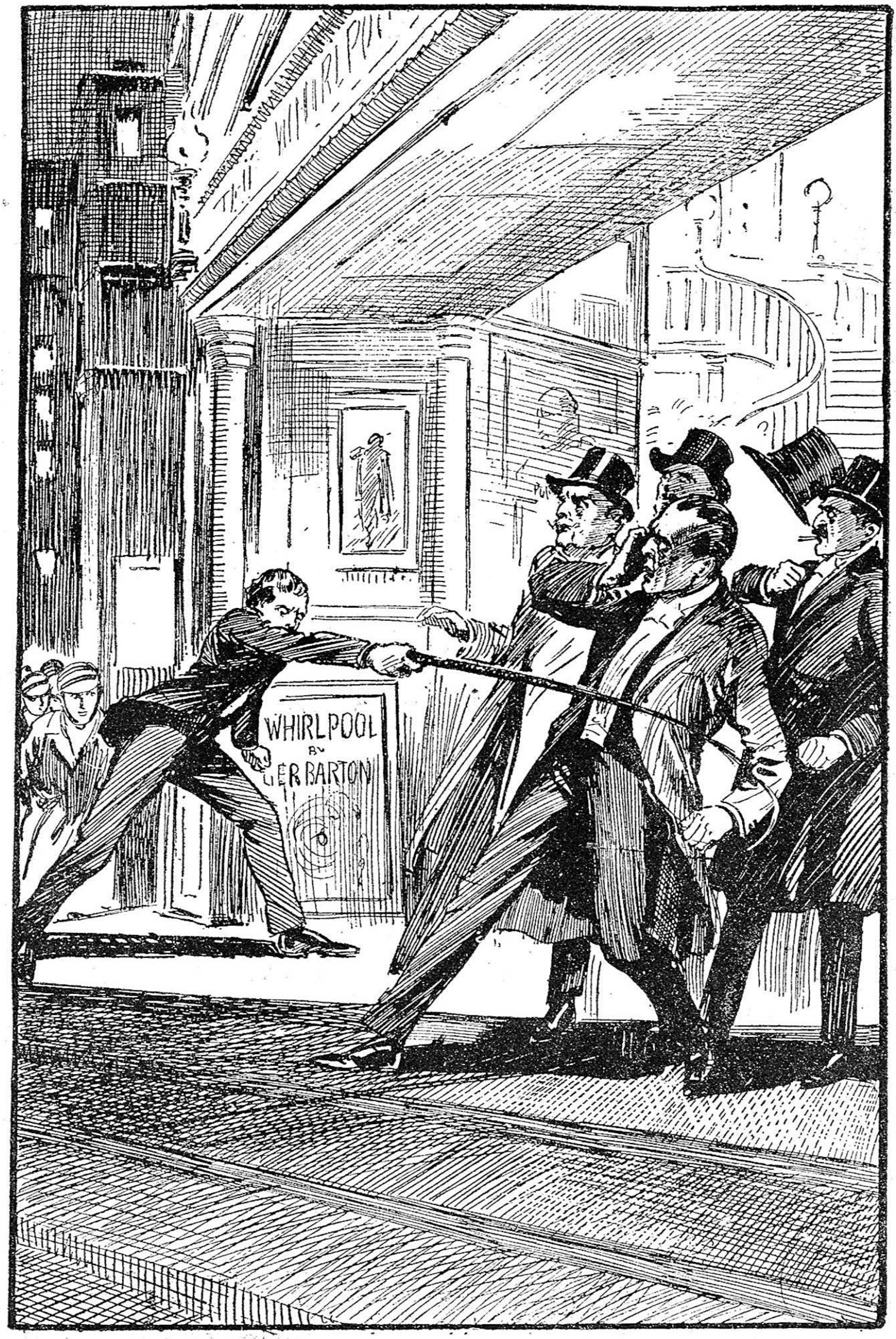


The STOLEN PLAY

A Top-hole Story of the Boys of St. Frank's.

HANDY CALLS FOR HIS £500,000 FORTUNE!

No. 565. OUT ON WEDNESDAY. April 3, 1926.



Slash! Roger Barton gave a wild yell of anguish as the horsewhip licked round his legs.

THE STOLEN PLAY!

A Lively Story of the Schoolboy Actors of St. Frank's.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

HANDFORTH'S REGISTERED LETTER.

WALTER CHURCH gave a startled jump.

"What the—— You—you dotty ass, Handy!" he gasped. "What the dickens is the idea of roaring like that?"

Study D, in the Ancient House at St. Frank's, never exactly a silent apartment, was now filled with wild and animal cries. It wasn't breakfast-time yet, and Handforth & Co. had only just got down. They were feverishly busy, and Study D hadn't seen such activity since the corresponding day of the previous term.

It was, in fact, the last morning before the Easter holidays, and there were no lessons. Soon after breakfast the school would begin its homeward trek, leaving in various batches, by train or road.

Edward Oswald Handforth had paused in his packing, and was staring fiercely at McClure's dictionary. Loud shouts proceeded from him, but his chums were at a loss to understand his sudden and unexpected violence.

"What's the matter, Handy?" asked McClure, in surprise. "What's the idea of glaring at my dic. like that?"

Handforth looked round wildly.

"Where's Browne?" he hooted.

"Browne of the Fifth?" said Church. "You'll probably find him in his study. I'm blessed if I can understand——"

"I'll smash him!" thundered Handforth furiously. "The rotter! The insulting bounder! The—the——"

He broke off, at a loss for words.

"But why start on old Browne now—without any reason?" asked McClure. "One minute you're calmly packing, and the next minute you rave about the study like a wounded rhinoceros!"

"I've just been looking at your dictionary!" raved Handforth.

"That's no reason to go off the deep end——"

"Yesterday," interrupted Handforth, "old Browne was praising my play—my 'Trackett Grim' burlesque! He said it was marvellous stuff—just what he'd expect to proceed from my molecule brain."

"Well?" asked Church.

"I've just found out what a molecule is!" bellowed Handforth.

He stared at the dictionary again, as though he couldn't believe it. Church and McClure glanced at one another in bewilderment. They were a bit hazy about "molecule" themselves, but it didn't sound particularly insulting. It reminded Church of a shell-fish, but he was probably thinking of "mollusc."

Handforth's chums remembered the inci-

dent well. William Napoleon Browne, the genial, smooth-voiced skipper of the Fifth, had been particularly charming, and had eulogised Handforth's famous play unreservedly. Both Church and McClure thought that his reference to Handy's "molecule brain" was uttered by way of a compliment. Edward Oswald had thought so, too.

"What does it mean?" asked Church tentatively.

"Molecule!" breathed Handforth, his voice quivering. "Here it is—as clear as daylight! Molecule—'A very minute particle of matter.'"

"Eh?" gasped Church.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared McClure. "Ahem! Sorry!"

"'A very minute particle of matter'!" hooted Handforth. "'The smallest quantity of any substance which is capable of existing.' That's what it says here. By George! And that's my brain!"

"My hat!" gurgled Church weakly.

"Old Browne knew what he was talking about—— I—I mean, he must be pretty well read!" exclaimed McClure.

"What?"

"That is, he couldn't have known what molecule meant!" went on McClure hastily. "I shouldn't take any notice if I were you, Handy. It's a delicate position. You'll only prove that you're ignorant."

"Ignorant!" gasped Handforth. "Why, you—you——"

"Well, you didn't know what it meant yesterday, when he said it!" argued McClure. "And if you go shouting it out in the Fifth-Form passage, the chaps will begin to get the wheeze. Everybody will be calling your brain a molecule next."

Handforth breathed very hard.

"'A very minute particle of matter'!" he repeated dazedly. "That's the worst of old Browne! You never know when he's pulling your leg! The next time he uses a long word, I'll look it up in the dic. before he can get away!"

"Well, don't bother about it now," said Church pacifically. "It's the last day of term, and you don't want any bother. Browne's a good sort, really—only he tries to be funny. We've got to admit that he knew what he was talking about—— I mean, he knew there was such a word, anyway. I thought it was an oyster, or something."

"My brain's not like an oyster, fathead!" retorted Handforth tartly. "I won't see old Browne about it now—but I'll jolly well tax him before we leave! He'll either apologise, or take that word back!"

"They're both the same," said McClure. "Well, if you've done with my dictionary, I'll pack it up. Hi, what the—— You destructive rotter!" he howled. "You've torn that page out!"

Handforth folded the page up, and put it in his pocket.

"I want it for Browne—in case he denies the thing," he retorted coolly. "No need to get into a stew, Mac. Don't be so jolly greedy! There are four hundred pages in that dictionary, and I've only pinched one! You'll never miss it!"

"You—you hopeless chump!" wailed McClure. "The very first time I want to look a word up it'll be on that page. Nearly a new dic., too! You hand it back, blow you! I'll paste it in again——"

"Not until I've finished with it!" said Handforth firmly. "Not until—— Go away!" he added, with a sudden bellow. "My hat! Look at this! Look what's pushed in!"

His minor was standing in the doorway, cheery and bright.

"It's all right, Ted—you needn't scalp me this time," he grinned. "I've brought you something——"

"Half a tick," interrupted Church. "I say, Willy, what's a molecule?"

"Handy's brain!" replied Willy promptly.

"What!" thundered Handforth.

"That's what Browne told me, anyway," said Willy, in surprise. "He's right, too—I looked it up in the dictionary."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Church and McClure nearly collapsed.

"Funny thing about Browne," went on Willy, shaking his head. "He always knows these things. A jolly clever sort, if you ask me. Before he told me, I'd no idea that a molecule was something so small that you couldn't see it without a microscope."

"You—you—you——"

Roaring ferociously, Handforth charged. But Willy was quite prepared. He whisked out an important-looking registered letter, and held it out. Judging by the way Handforth pulled up, one might have thought it to be an automatic pistol.

"Yours!" said Willy briefly. "Found it in the rack!"

Nothing could have provided a better defence. Registered letters were not commonplace, and when they did arrive they generally meant one thing—cash. Handforth was not exactly short, but Willy was. And Willy had thought it quite a good idea to bring that registered letter along in person.

Handforth forgot all about the insulting references to his brain, and he took the registered letter eagerly. It was a very important-looking one—rather different from others that he had received. The envelope was blue and official-looking, and made of heavy parchment. There were two important-looking seals on the back, too.

"By George," said Handforth. "What's this?"

"Looks like a registered letter," said Willy.

"I—I mean, who's it from?" asked his major. "The pater never sends tips in these envelopes! He always uses the Post Office ones. It isn't the pater's writing, either. It's typewritten! And it was posted in the City!" he added, examining the postmark. "Who's it from?"

"My goodness!" sighed Willy. "The blessed thing is addressed to him as clear as daylight, and he stands there gassing! Old Browne knew what he was talking about! Why don't you open it, Ted?"

"Open it?" repeated Handforth. "Oh, yes! Rather!"

He hesitated. It seemed a pity to spoil those seals. But a moment later he ruthlessly shattered the flap. The letter was certainly addressed to him, for the typewritten superscription was perfectly clear: "Master Edward Oswald Handforth, Remove Form, Ancient House, St. Frank's College, Bellton, Sussex." There was no possibility of a mistake.

Handforth extracted a folded sheet of paper—of the same blue parchment as the envelope. He shook it open, and looked on the floor. But nothing had fallen out. Then he looked into the envelope.

"Nothing!" he said blankly.

"There's the letter, isn't there?" asked Willy.

"No money, I mean," said Handforth. "Who the dickens would send a registered letter without any money? I mean, it's a dotty thing to do! Why waste threepence on registration?"

He shook his head at the foolishness of people, and unfolded the letter. Willy and his chums watched with interest—although it must be confessed that Willy's own particular concern had apparently died down.

"I'll bet it's from one of those weekly papers," said Handforth tensely. "I've won the first prize in that Cross Word Competition—— Hallo! No, it doesn't seem to be —— Great pip! A solicitor's letter! My goodness! What the——"

Handforth's eyes suddenly grew larger, and he sat down abruptly—so abruptly, indeed, that he neglected to ascertain if a chair was immediately behind him. It had been, but Church had thoughtlessly removed it. Handforth crashed to the floor with a fearful thud.

But the extraordinary thing was that he didn't seem to even notice it. He sat there, with a dazed, far-away look in his eyes.

"A fortune!" he breathed. "Somebody's left me a fortune!"

CHAPTER II.

THE LAWYER'S SUMMONS.

WILLY shook his head. "Somebody's been pulling your leg, old man," he said firmly. "That letter can't be genuine—I'll bet it's only spoof. Nobody's left you a fortune. Why should they?" he added.

"Why shouldn't they?" countered his major tartly.

"Because I'm here!" said Willy. "If there's any question of cash, I wouldn't be left out in the cold. Let's have a look at the letter, anyhow. I'll bet it's from one of the chaps."

Handforth picked himself up, and Church hastily backed away. But his leader had completely forgotten the chair incident. In fact, he hadn't even noticed it. A crash more or less was nothing to Handforth.

"There's no jape about this!" he said grimly. "It's from a solicitor in Lincoln's Inn Fields. He's made an appointment for 1.30 to-day. I've got to go and see him. My Uncle Nathaniel has left me all his money."

"Uncle who?" asked Willy.

"Uncle Nathaniel."

"Never heard of him," said Willy, staring.

"Neither have I, but that doesn't matter," went on Handforth excitedly. "I expect he's a great uncle, or something. We've got scores of 'em, you know—they're dotted about all over the world. We've got heaps of Handforth's in Australia."

"Good old Australia!" said Willy heartily. "But I'm blessed if I can remember all these uncles and great uncles, old man. Of course, I haven't kept count of 'em. Too much bother. That's the worst of a big family—if you keep in touch with the lot you've got to be writing letters every day of the week."

Handforth hardly heard him. He was reading that astonishing communication again. And this time his chums and Willy looked over his shoulder. They were certainly impressed by what they read. For the letter ran thus:

"5, Merlehurst Chambers,
"Lincoln's Inn Fields.

"My dear boy,—We have been given to understand that you will be coming home on your holidays to-morrow, Thursday, and we, therefore, request your presence in these chambers at the hour of 1.30 p.m.

"It is difficult to explain the exact position by letter—and, indeed, unnecessary. The recent death of Mr. Nathaniel Handforth, the Australian millionaire, has led to a considerable amount of litigation, as you may, or may not, know.

"It has been definitely established, however, that a legacy of £500,000 (five hundred thousand pounds) devolves upon a junior schoolboy in an English public school. We do not think it necessary to be more explicit.

"If you will call upon us at the hour suggested, our Mr. Partridge will have pleasure in examining you for the purpose of identification.

"We beg to remain,
"Yours very truly,
"PARTRIDGE, HACKETT & PARTRIDGE."

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Church breathlessly.

"Five hundred thousand!" gasped McClure. "It's—it's impossible!"

"It's not impossible, but it's jolly unlikely!" said Willy practically. "Why

didn't these solicitors write to the pater? Perhaps they have, though," he added. "It's a bit of a nerve for Uncle Nathaniel to leave all the money to Ted, isn't it?"

"We don't know Uncle Nathaniel—and I don't suppose we've ever seen him," said Handforth. "I didn't even know we had a millionaire in the giddy family! But this is as plain as your nose on your face. There's no getting away from an official letter like this. Nathaniel Handforth must have been an eccentric old boy who shoved a lot of his relatives in his will at random."

Willy nodded.

"Perhaps he made out a list of us, and then stuck pins in at random," he suggested. "Some of these millionaires do rummy things, you know! I've often read about people coming into fortunes, or titles, without knowing anything about it. I suppose you'll go and see these solicitors, won't you?"

"Go and see them?" retorted Handforth. "I should think I will! Why, with all that money I can buy a wireless—— Great Scott!" he breathed. "My play!"

"You don't want to buy your own play," said Willy. "You couldn't even sell it!"

"My play!" repeated Handforth, his eyes gleaming. "If I've got pots of money like that I can have it produced in London. I can rent a giddy theatre, and get my own company, and put the thing on as a real drama! None of your silly burlesque!"

"Oh, my goodness!" groaned Church and McClure.

"Take my advice, Ted, and go easy," said Willy. "In fact, I'll come along to those solicitors with you. I believe the whole thing is a spoof. Somebody's pulling your leg——"

"No fear," said Church. "If there was any spoof about it, they wouldn't ask him to go up to Lincoln's Inn Fields. That letter is from a proper firm of lawyers, and those sort of people don't play practical jokes. Five hundred thousand! That's half a million! It's—it's marvellous!"

"Well, there goes the breakfast bell," said Willy. "If I were you, Ted, I wouldn't say anything about this letter. You'll be pestered with heaps of chaps if it gets out that you're a bloated capitalist. Anyhow, on the strength of all this money, what about five bob?"

"Five bob?" repeated Handforth contemptuously.

"Well, ten bob," said Willy. "Or a quid, say."

Handforth took out a handful of money—coppers, silver, and crumpled currency notes. He regarded it as though it were so much dust.

"A quid?" he said. "Here you are—what do I care? I'll pay your fare, too, my son. I was going to keep this cash for the holidays, but I shall have heaps more when I get to London."

"A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," murmured Willy, as he pocketed the money. "Ted, old man, you're a brick. Thanks. I suppose we'll go up by the early train?"

"Rather!" said his major. "That'll get us in London by a quarter to one—heaps of time to keep this appointment. But I shan't want you," he added, with a frown. "You'd better keep away!"

Willy vanished, without committing himself one way or the other. And before breakfast was over, the entire Ancient House was talking about Handforth's amazing luck. Fellows came crowding round him, heaping him with congratulations.

Juniors he had never chummed with became singularly affectionate, and claimed him as a friend for life. In fact, Handforth became somewhat suspicious. This sort of thing savoured of cupboard love.

"You can all clear off!" he said loftily, when he found himself surrounded by a crowd in the Triangle. "Wait until I've got the money before you try to borrow any of it."

"Money's nothing to you now, Handy," said Armstrong. "You're practically a millionaire! I suppose you'll come back to St. Frank's in your own car!"

"That's quite likely," admitted Handforth.

"You couldn't bring me a motor-bike, I suppose?" asked Owen major. "I say, what about a Form treat? Come on! There's plenty of tuck in the school shop! Good old Handy! He's going to stand treat!"

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for Handy!"

The crowd pressed round more affectionately than ever.

"I say, is this true?" asked Hubbard. "Are you treating us?"

"Every one of you!" replied Handforth promptly. "But not now, my sons! Wait until next term!"

"What?"

"I haven't got much cash until I see the lawyers," continued Handforth, much to the crowd's mortification. "But next term I'll treat you to a spread that you couldn't even dream about."

But this seemed a very poor substitute for a mere ordinary feed on the spot. The first day of the next term seemed a long way off, and the enthusiasm for Handforth died away rapidly. In a very short time Handforth found himself practically alone except for Church and McClure.

"I knew it!" he said tartly. "A lot of giddy cadgers—that's all they are! I shan't mind when I've got my pockets bulging with tin. We'll all have a ripping time in London," he added carelessly. "Weren't you saying something about a new bike, Church?"

"Well, yes——"

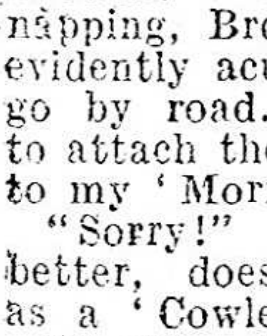
"That's all right—I'll get you one of the latest motor-bikes," said Handforth generously. "We'll buy it to-day—after the lawyer's have given me two or three hundred pounds on account."

But, somehow, Church did not seem particularly thrilled. Handforth took it for granted that he was going to obtain unlimited supplies of cash, to be spent exactly as he pleased.

But his chums had an uncomfortable feeling that there was a catch in it somewhere.

CHAPTER III.

HORACE STEVENS' LOSS.



WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE, of the Fifth, glanced at the study clock.

"I have no wish to be an alarmist, Brother Horace, but the time flies on fleet wings," he observed. "In half an hour we must leave for the train—for, strangely enough, the train will refuse to wait for us. A sad, deplorable fact, but one that we must boldly face."

"I shall be ready," said Horace Stevens.

"At the moment you appear to be totally unprepared," continued Browne. "Your packing? Have you tackled this grave problem? I have no wish to alarm you unduly——."

"I've practically finished, you ass," interrupted Stevens. "Just one or two more things to get from the box-room, and I shall be ready. But why go up by train? I understood that you were driving by road, in your Morris?"

"Alas, my efforts to pep you up into a semblance of speed are of no avail," sighed Browne. "I thought I should catch you napping, Brother Horace, but your brain is evidently acute this morning. Yes, we shall go by road. But, pray, let me urge you to attach the word 'Oxford' when you refer to my 'Morris.'"

"Sorry!" grinned Stevens. "It sounds better, doesn't it? Nothing so common as a 'Cowley' for you, eh?"

"I did not say so," replied Browne. "At the same time, I must confess that there is a distinction. Well, brother, when you are ready you will find me adorning the Triangle. The car will be at the door, straining at the leash, and champing at the bit."

He strolled out, and encountered Dick Hamilton and Co. in the lobby.

"Ah, Brother Nipper," he observed. "What is this strange story we hear concerning Brother Handforth?"

"It seems true, by all the reports," replied Nipper. "But we shall know for certain by this evening, I expect. There's no telling with Handforth. He gets all sorts of queer notions, and——"

"The whole thing's a mystery to me," put in Tommy Watson bluntly. "Even if he has come into a lot of money, he won't be able to touch it. I've heard of these things before!"

"I am very much afraid, dear old boy, that you are right," agreed Sir Montie Tregellis-West, nodding. "There'll be a frightful snag somewhere. The legacy will be surrounded with barbed wire, or somethin' equally fearful, until Handforth reaches the age of twenty-one. The frightful ass imagines that he can get the money now, you know."

"Yes, he's made a blunder there, I'll bet," agreed Nipper. "It's no good talking to him, either—he won't listen. He's talking about producing that play of his in a London theatre."

Browne shook his head.

"In that case, and purely in the interests of London, I trust that Brother Montie's reference to barbed wire proves correct," he said. "Surely there are enough tragedies in London already? Why torture an unsuspecting public? Brother Handforth, I fear, is in need of a few yards of chain and a padlock."

"Well, we've got to get off," said Dick Hamilton briskly. "You can take your time, Browne, but we're going by train—so we'll toddle off. I suppose we shall see something of you in London?"

"Unquestionably," replied the captain of the Fifth. "You will probably notice the decorations when you arrive. The flags—the bunting—the fairy lights. It is a great day for London when I burst upon it in all my glory."

The juniors went off, and Browne patiently waited. After about ten minutes of it, he went back to the study, and failed to find Stevens. He went upstairs, and even the dormitory was deserted. So he tried the box-rooms, and found his chum bending over a trunk.

"Splendid!" said Browne. "It is cheering to note that you have made a start, Brother Horace. But I trust you are not nursing the illusion that that trunk is to be tucked away in the tool box, or beneath the bonnet?"

Stevens scratched his head.

"Can't understand it!" he said, frowning. "That parcel, Browne. It's not here!"

"No?" said Browne. "A sad tragedy, I must confess. At the same time, I can doubtless condole with you to greater purpose if I know what this parcel is. A camera, brother? A pair of slippers? A selection of books? I fear that you are meagre in your information."

"It's that play of my pater's," said Stevens worriedly.

William Napoleon Browne started. It took a great deal to make this cool young gentleman start. But, without the slightest doubt, he started very distinctly. His whole manner changed.

"Your pater's play?" he repeated. "Come, brother—come! This cannot be! The loss of that manuscript would be a tragedy indeed! Let us search diligently until the parcel is found."

Careless of his elegant attire, he dropped upon his knees and rummaged in the trunk. His concern, indeed, was acute.

"It's no good, old man—I've looked through those things three or four times," said Stevens. "Confound it, I don't seem to remember! I'll swear I put the parcel in this trunk. I only came to it to get a book or two. Then I noticed that the parcel wasn't there——"

"Was the trunk locked?"

"Of course."

"You always keep it locked?"

"Always."

"Then there appears to be no cause for distress," said Browne, rising to his feet. "If the trunk was locked, it stands to reason that nobody could venture to unlawfully ransack it——"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Stevens, staring. "Ransack it? You're not suggesting that somebody has been here—— Oh, that's a bit too thick, Browne! None of our men would do that in this House! I was just puzzling about the parcel, that's all. I suppose I put it somewhere else."

Browne regarded him sorrowfully.

"You suppose?" he repeated.

"Well, we've got lockers, you know, in another part of the House," said Stevens. "I was certain I'd put the parcel in this trunk, but as it's not here I must have shoved it in my locker. That's the only thing to think."

"It is a matter that can quickly be decided."

"No, it can't," replied Stevens. "Those lockers have got special keys, and you've got to go to the Housemaster. And Mr. Lee's gone—he warned us yesterday to go to him if we wanted anything, you know. We shan't want that play before the new term, shall we?"

"I fancy not," said Browne. "If you are convinced that the parcel is safe——"

"My dear man," protested Stevens, "it must be safe! Nobody would borrow a thing like that—it's of no value to anybody but me. It's in the locker, of course. Only I wish I could remember," he added, frowning. "Oh, well, let's forget it. It's bound to be all right."

They went downstairs. Browne, knowing Stevens as he did, thought no more of the matter. Stevens was notoriously careless, and of late he had been atrociously forgetful. There was some excuse for this latter weakness, for he had been full up with theatrical rehearsals during every minute of his spare time.

Stevens was a remarkable actor—indeed, a sort of prodigy. He had recently given an amazingly clever performance in the part of "Hamlet" at Mr. Noggs' travelling theatre, in Bannington. The whole town had raved over Horace Stevens' part, and the show had been presented on three consecutive nights. It had been a triumph for the schoolboy actor.

A famous London manager—Mr. Augustus Crowson—had witnessed the show, and had insisted upon Stevens coming to see him in London. Mr. Crowson had promised to present Stevens' "Hamlet" to London, at a special matinee.

But Browne was merely awaiting the opportunity to present his chum in "The Third Chance"—the great play which had been left behind by Horace Stevens' dead father. In Browne's opinion, the play was a masterpiece, and he was naturally anxious concerning its safety.

But he felt no qualms, for he took it for granted that the play was safely within Stevens' locker. It was the very place where he would stow it for security. And it was perfectly consistent that Stevens should forget where he had put it. He was an absent-minded sort of fellow, anyway.

And so they left for London—never dreaming of the shock which Fate held in store.

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE SOLICITOR'S.

"HERE we are!" said Handforth eagerly.

It was precisely one-thirty, and the juniors had been in London for three-quarters of an hour. Most of this time had been spent in getting from Victoria, and in locating No. 5, Merlehurst Chambers, Lincoln's Inn. But now, precisely at the hour of the appointment, the firm of Partridge, Hackett & Partridge, solicitors, had been run to earth.

Willy was present, the others being merely Church and McClure. A host of other juniors had desired to be present at the interview, but Handforth had put his foot down.

"Doesn't look very imposing," murmured Church.

"That's nothing," said Handforth. "You can never tell with these solicitors. They generally grub along in musty old offices."

The Chambers were situated on the second floor, and there were two doors leading into this particular set. One of them was plain, but the other had a big card on the upper portion of it, bearing the name of the firm, and the invitation, "Walk In."

Handforth & Co. and Willy walked in.

They found themselves in a dim, gloomy outer office—dim and gloomy in spite of the sunshiny April day without. The room was empty, but an inner door stood half-open, and the sound of someone moving about could be heard.

"Ahem!" coughed Handforth loudly.

His chums examined the outer office with interest. It was quite a well-appointed apartment—a trifle shabby, a trifle old-fashioned, but suggestive of solid, well-established business. There was something

about it which inspired confidence. It was the office of a sedate and substantial firm.

The inner door opened wide, and a smartly-dressed young lady appeared. Even in the sombre light of the office, the juniors could see that she was attractive—but, nevertheless, smart and active in her movements. Her dark, bobbed hair, and her alert eyes did nothing to alter her businesslike aspect.

"Good-morning!" she said inquiringly.

"Mr. Partridge in, miss?" asked Handforth. "He wrote me a letter, you know. "I'm Handforth, of St. Frank's——"

"Yes, you had an appointment, I believe?" said the girl.

"Yes—one-thirty."

"Mr. Partridge is in, and is waiting for you," said the young lady, with a smile which almost made Handforth forget the purpose of his visit. "Will you come this way, sir?"

"Eh?" said Edward Oswald. "Oh, rather! By George, do you live in this dingy old office all day, miss?"

"Why, does that surprise you?"

"It's a shame!" said Handforth indignantly. "A jolly pretty girl like you—— I mean, no girl ought to be bottled up in a dim place of this kind! It would give me the pip if I worked here!"

"Will you please come this way, sir?" she said firmly.

Church and McClure exchanged glances of mingled surprise and astonishment. That letter was genuine, then! Handforth was expected—and Mr. Partridge was waiting for him! In spite of the obvious authenticity of the letter, Handforth's chums had had a lingering fear that there was some spoof about it.

"My hat!" murmured Church. "Then—then it's the real thing!"

"We'd better go in with him," suggested Willy. "In about another two minutes he'll be smitten! Isn't Ted awful? He can't meet a girl without succumbing to her giddy charms!"

Willy was looking at the young lady closely.

"H'm!" he added. "Pretty good, but—— I don't know—— Somehow, it seems to me—— Eh? Right-ho—we'll come along."

Handforth was ushered into the inner office, and his minor and his chums followed him. The girl stood just within the door, and Willy grinned as he passed her, and actually gave her a wink. The young lady became frigid—and Church felt almost scandalised. He hadn't suspected Willy of such frivolous propensities.

"Young bounder!" he muttered, giving Willy a nudge.

"That's all right!" grinned Willy. "I know her!"

Church failed to understand this remark—for he couldn't see how on earth Willy could have ever met the girl before. Church hardly glanced at her again, for he was interested in Mr. Partridge, the solicitor.

Handforth crashed to the floor with a fearful thud.
"A fortune!" he breathed. "Somebody's left me a fortune!"

Mr. Partridge was a fussy little man—grey-whiskered, with grizzled hair and a boisterous manner. He was pumping Handforth's arm with considerable energy.

"Delighted to meet you, young man—delighted!" he was saying affably. "So you are Master Handforth? Splendid! A typical British schoolboy! Rugged, aggressive, and unhandsome."

"Yes, rather!" agreed Handforth. "Eh?"

"A true type of British bulldog pugnacity," went on Mr. Partridge, standing back and admiring Handforth through his big spectacles. "I detest these handsome, dressy schoolboys. Give me the ugly type every time! The plain, untidy, inky-collared variety! There is nothing to beat your type, my boy! I am proud to meet you."

Handforth gave a sickly smile.

"Yes!" he said feebly. "But, hang it, I didn't know I was quite so plain, Mr. Pheasant! Oh, sorry—I mean, Mr. Partridge! But aren't we going to talk about some money, or a legacy, or something?"

"Yes, to be sure," said the solicitor genially. "Forgive me for dealing with a purely personal subject. But, to tell the truth, your face gave me a shock——"

"It always does that, sir," remarked Willy, nodding.

"Not an unpleasant shock—but a thrill of pride!" continued Mr. Partridge, eyeing Handforth's face as though it were some exhibit. "Those rough and uncouth features

—bearing the marks of many a lusty fight! I get few such faces inside these sombre walls. Indeed, I can never remember having seen such a face before!"

Handforth turned red.

"I say, can't you leave my face alone?" he asked gruffly. "I came here to collect five hundred thousand quid. It's like your nerve to—— I mean, can't we get down to business?"

Mr. Partridge was still looking at Handforth in a dreamy way.

"A face to be remembered," he muttered. "A face that may possibly return to haunt me—— But to business!" he added, coming to himself with a brisk start. "The legacy, my boy. Yes, yes, to be sure!"

"I've come for the money!" said Handforth bluntly.

"Money?"

"I don't want it all, of course," went on the leader of Study D. "Just a bit to be going on with, you know—say, ten thousand."

"Can't you say anything less than that?" asked Mr. Partridge.

"Well, five thousand——"

"I am afraid the matter is rather hazy in your mind," interrupted the solicitor kindly. "Not that I am surprised. I understand that your mind is not particularly robust. One glance at you is sufficient to assure me of that distressing fact."

"He seems to have got Ted taped beautifully!" murmured Willy. "Now listen for the snag! If Ted comes out of this office with a ten-bob note, I'll eat my hat!"

"Money, of course, is a very different matter from a legacy," continued Mr. Partridge cheerfully. "Under no circumstances can you touch anything. You surely know that solicitors only part with money when every possible avenue of evasion has been explored? Dear, dear! What an extraordinary idea! So you really thought you could get some money?"

Handforth stared.

"What about that letter?" he demanded. "Didn't you tell me that I've come in for a fortune of five hundred thousand pounds? You can't spoof me like this! I want some of it!"

"Ridiculous!" said the solicitor jovially. "A pure delusion on your part. What next? You forget that there are formalities to be gone through—identities to be proven—documents to examine, and so forth. We legal people make a practice of prolonging these preliminaries to the last limit."

"Oh!" said Handforth, in dismay.

"But don't let that dishearten you," continued Mr. Partridge. "With luck we may be able to dispose of these little obstacles before you reach the age of twenty-five. And then, of course, these financial questions can be easily settled, since there will be practically nothing left to hand over. Our charges, of course, go on continuously. We are not lawyers for nothing. A fine profession, my lad!"

Handforth was rather confused by Mr. Partridge's rapid talk. But it certainly seemed to him that the interview was panning out badly.

"But look here, don't I get any money?" he asked indignantly. "I want to rent a London theatre! I'm going to produce my own play there! I've got it all fixed up."

Mr. Partridge considered for a moment, and then nodded.

"That, of course, is a totally different matter," he said. "A London theatre? Why not? We need not quibble over such a trifle. Which one would you like? The Queen's? The Globe? Drury Lane? The Haymarket——"

"You—you mean I can rent a theatre, then?" asked Handforth breathlessly.

Mr. Partridge smiled.

"Since you have abandoned the idea of obtaining any cash, we must see what we can do by way of compensation," he replied. "Just one moment, my boy. If I cannot find a theatre within five minutes, I shall be very surprised."

He turned to his telephone and unhooked the receiver.

CHAPTER V.

HANDFORTH RENTS A THEATRE.

CHURCH scratched his head, and McClure rubbed his chin. Willy Handforth was looking dreamily out of the window.

"My hat! Something rummy about this, isn't there?" murmured Church into McClure's ear. "The old boy knows Handy like a book! I believe he's been pulling the poor chap's leg!"

"Strikes me, he's dotty!" breathed McClure. "All that talk about lawyers! He's given himself away! No sane solicitor would tell his client that the whole legacy is being swallowed up in fees!"

Mr. Partridge, having listened at the telephone for a moment or two, awoke into activity again.

"Hallo!" he said crisply. "The Dominion? Good! Is that the manager? Splendid! I have a client who is anxious to rent a theatre for one night. He is desirous of producing his own play."

"But I want it for a run!" broke in Handforth.

"Exactly!" said Mr. Partridge. "We cannot anticipate a longer run than one night—as it is your own play. But we are quite agreeable to a longer period. A week? Two weeks. A month?"

"Nothing less than a month," said Handforth firmly.

"Are you there, Dominion Theatre?" said Mr. Partridge. "Our client suggests a

month. How much? Dear me! Impossible! You really cannot consider less? H'm! This is serious."

He turned from the telephone and shook his head

"I am afraid the figure will be too much for you, my boy," he said sadly. "They want seven hundred pounds a week for this theatre. It is probably worth fifty. Not, of course, that any West End theatre can be obtained at a reasonable price. It is a risky business to——"

"Seven hundred pounds a week?" interrupted Handforth, with a scoff. "That's all right! Go ahead! I'll take it!"

"You—you hopeless ass!" gasped Church. "That's nearly three thousand quid for the month! You can't chuck money about——"

"What's three thousand quid to me?" interrupted Handforth tartly. "Take it, Mr. Partridge! I give you my full authority!" he added, with a wave of his hand. "In fact, you'd better take it for three months."

"Our client is ready to rent the theatre for three months," said Mr. Partridge at the telephone. "Naturally, that will mean a reduction. How much? Splendid! Yes, he will come round at once."

He hung up, and beamed upon Handforth.

"Your suggestion of a quarter's tenancy was brilliant," he said. "They are willing to accept six hundred and ninety-nine pounds weekly. A liberal reduction for any renter of a West End theatre!"

"And—and it's all fixed?" asked Handforth breathlessly. "I've got the Dominion Theatre for three months? Why, it's one of the biggest in London—one of the newest, too! I'll have my name right across the front in electric lights!"

"Of course, there are a few formalities to settle," said Mr. Partridge. "Our own fee must be added to the rent—but there is no need to bother you with such trifles as that. It will be quite reasonable—merely a matter of twenty thousand or so."

"But—but that's more than the rent!" said Handforth, staring.

"Pouf! Why worry?" asked Mr. Partridge breezily. "If you will go round to the Dominion Theatre at once, and ask for the manager—— But I can see you are impatient. Good-bye, my boy. Come back to me afterwards, if you like. Perhaps you won't think it necessary. We shall see."

He swept Handforth out of the inner office in an excess of genial effervescence. The other juniors followed. Handforth had no time to bid good-bye to the pretty girl clerk—although he tried to catch her eye. But somehow, it seemed to Church that she distinctly winked at him. They all found themselves outside. And they all found themselves considerably breathless.

"My hat!" ejaculated McClure. "I've never known such a speedy old buffer in all my life! He fairly rushed us off our feet!"

"All these business men are full of push and go," said Handforth. "Like me. That's why I shall be a great business man when I grow up."

"I thought you were going to be a great actor?" asked Willy.

"I shall be a great actor, too!"

"And a great detective by way of recreation, I suppose?" asked Willy. "You're going to be a busy man, Ted! I like to see it—I like to see this desire for hard work. There's too much slackness nowadays."

Handforth sniffed.

"Anybody might think you were eighty-five, by the way you talk," he said tartly. "Well, come on—let's get to the Dominion Theatre." He looked away with a far-off expression in his eyes. "Mine! Mine for three months! At last my ambition has come true!"

"You don't expect that 'Trackett Grim' play to run for three months, do you?" asked Church. "I shouldn't be too optimistic, old man——"

"It'll run for a year!" interrupted Handforth. "You fellows haven't got any idea of business at all. You can't see an inch beyond your giddy noses! What does it matter about the rent of the place? If it's packed at every performance, I shall make thousands of pounds."

"You're mad!" declared McClure. "I believe old Partridge is mad, too! The whole thing's a swindle. No genuine lawyer would say the things that Mr. Partridge said. Can't you understand, Handy? You're the fellow who can see beyond your nose, aren't you? Can't you see that it's a colossal fraud? You've come into no legacy!"

Handforth regarded him witheringly.

"It takes a clever chap to pull my leg!" he retorted grimly. "Only this week I was saying to Nipper and Pitt that I could see through any disguise that ever happened! And I told 'em that they'd never spoof me if they lived until they were a hundred."

"Oh!" said Willy slowly. "Oh!"

"What?"

"Nothing!" replied his minor, with a happy smile. "Nothing at all! Good old Ted! So you're the chap who can't be spoofed? H'm! And to-day's Thursday!"

"Thursday?" repeated Handforth. "What's that got to do with it?"

"Being the celebrated author of 'Trackett Grim,' you oughtn't to ask those questions," retorted Willy. "By jingo! Thursday! Of course, that explains the milk in the coconut! That accounts for the juice in the grape fruit."

"Eh?" gasped Church, with a startled expression. "Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm jiggered if I can see——" began McClure.

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Church.

"You—you cackling dummy!" roared Handforth. "What's the joke? Anything particularly funny about to-day being Thursday?"

"It's a scream, old man," smiled Willy gently.

"And all this talk about coconuts and grapes!" went on Handforth, with a glare. "I'm blessed if I can see where they come in! What's Thursday got to do with it?"

"Thursday?" breathed McClure, looking startled in his turn. "You—you mean—— Eh? Oh, yes! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good!" said Willy. "Go up one!"

"I didn't see it at first," gurgled McClure. "I'd forgotten—— Handy, you chump, don't you know that to-day is——"

"Yes!" howled Handforth, exasperated. "If you tell me that to-day's Thursday I'll slaughter you! You—you blithering chump! D'you think I don't know what day of the week it is? I'm fed up with all this piffle! We're going to the Dominion Theatre to take over control!"

Church and McClure collapsed into one another's arms.

"Shush!" said Willy mysteriously. "He's asking for it, so why should we deny him? Go ahead, Ted! We don't want to spoil your great plans for taking London by storm."

"Another word, and I'll leave you all behind!" said Handforth darkly. "No, that's enough! If you say anything, Mac, I'll biff you! You can't pull my leg! Nobody can pull my leg!"

"The idea!" said Willy, horrified.

This simple remark, for some reason, sent Church and McClure into fresh convulsions. Handforth was not merely exasperated, but furious. He didn't see anything funny in it at all.

He led the way out into the busy thoroughfares and hailed a passing taxi. What did he care about such expenditure now? Normally, he would have jumped on a 'bus, but 'buses had suddenly become ridiculous in his eyes.

"Dominion Theatre!" he said curtly to the driver.

And a moment later they were being whirled through the London traffic at at least five miles an hour.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THURSDAY.

THE DOMINION THEATRE was a palatial edifice of white stone—one of London's very latest theatres, situated in the heart of the theatrical district. It was so imposing, in fact, that any other fellow but Edward Oswald Handforth would have hesitated to rent it.

But the leader of Study D marched boldly in, curtly commanding his attendants to follow. For some reason, they hesitated. Even the redoubtable Willy scratched his head and hung back.

"H'm!" he muttered. "I'm not so jolly sure!"

"What's that?" said Handforth, pausing as they got into the magnificent foyer. "Come on! Don't lag behind!"

"I—I think we'll wait for you here, old man," said Church uneasily.

"Not likely!" retorted his leader. "We'll all go into the manager's office together. None of your rot! Come on!"

"All right!" said Willy, with a wink at the others. "Lead on!"

Fortunately, there was a beautiful mahogany door in full sight—a door bearing the legend, "Manager." It stood at the top of some marble stairs—a few shallow stairs of immense width.

Handforth marched up them, and strode straight into the manager's office. Willy, followed by Church and McClure, veered past the door, and continued straight on. It wasn't until the door closed behind him that Handforth realised that he was alone.

He had, of course, intruded upon the inner privacy of the manager, barging in without the least ceremony. The manager, a stout, genial-looking gentleman, was engaged in a particularly urgent interview with an advertising expert. He looked up, frowning.

"Well?" he asked sharply.

"I've come!" said Handforth, advancing.

"I can see that!" retorted the manager. "What do you want? Who on earth told you to come in without an appointment?"

"But I made an appointment—at least Mr. Partridge did," replied Edward Oswald. "It's fixed up. I've come here to take control."

"Control?" said the manager. "Control of what?"

"This theatre, of course."

Both gentlemen stared at Handforth blankly.

"Mad!" said the advertising expert candidly.

"Forgive me, Mr. Richardson," said the manager grimly. "Awfully sorry to have this interruption. Now, young man," he added, rising. "What's the exact idea of this joke?"

"Joke?" said Handforth. "Don't talk rot——"

"What?"

"Don't be an ass!" said Handforth coldly. "This appointment was fixed by Messrs. Partridge, Hackett & Partridge. Didn't Mr. Partridge ring you up on the telephone?"

The manager was surprisingly patient.

"I am well aware that most public schools are home for the holidays to-day," he said grimly. "My own son returns, as a matter of fact. And I know the date, too. Young man, you'd better not pursue this nonsense——"

"The date!" interrupted Handforth, staring. "Are you going to tell me it's Thursday, too? I've rented this theatre!"

"You've done what?"

"I've rented this theatre for seven hundred pounds a week," said Handforth. "But I'll tell you what—I'll make it a thousand pounds if I can take possession at once. I'm not particular about a hundred pounds or so. I'm going to produce my own play here."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" said Mr. Richardson.

"So you've rented this theatre, have you?" asked the manager, his voice cool and smooth, but his expression grim. "A splendid idea, my boy. Unfortunately, I've never heard of Mr. Partridge, and still more unfortunately, my contract makes it absolutely impossible to rent the theatre to anybody."

Handforth turned red.

"Look here, that's not playing the game," he said indignantly. "This is my theatre, and I'm going to take over the management from this minute."

The manager took him gently by the shoulder.

"Of course, of course!" he said suavely. "But I'm not quite so green, young man. No, you haven't caught me napping this time. I am fully aware of the fact that to-day is the first of the month."

He moved Handforth towards the door, edged him outside, and closed the door again. The key turned, and the dazed Edward Oswald, bewildered and confused, heard the sound of hearty laughter. He saw his chums at the bottom of the stairs, in the foyer.

"The first of the month!" he said dreamily, as he joined them. "Thursday! What the dickens—— I'm blessed if I can understand——"

"Poor old Ted," sighed Willy. "Didn't we tell you it was a spoof? You've had heaps of chances to reveal your deductive powers—and you've thrown every one of 'em away!"

"Deductive powers!" gasped his major. "Thursday! The first of the month! I can't see——"

"The month," said Willy, "is April."

Handforth gave a violent start.

"April 1st!" he yelled. "You—you mean —— What! All Fool's Day! Then—then ——"

He broke off, aghast.

"Exactly!" said Willy sweetly.

"Who did it?" thundered Handforth. "Who did it? I've been fooled! It's a jape! Somebody's spoofed me!"

The box-office attendant appeared from his lair.

"I say!" he protested. "You can't make all this noise in here, you know! You can't shout about the place——"

"I've been fooled!" hooted Handforth.

"My dear kid, I can't help that——"

"It's all right—we'll take him out!" said Church hastily. "My goodness! It's a wonder he wasn't chucked out!"

"That's where the jape's gone wrong!" said Willy, shaking his head. "I was expecting to see him come down these stairs with the manager's boot in the rear. I'm blessed if I can understand how these good people keep their tempers! The theatrical profession is full of patient mortals!"

Somehow they manœuvred Handforth outside, and the first thing they saw was a taxicab immediately opposite—with two faces looking out of it. The two faces were those of Mr. Partridge and his pretty girl clerk.

"By George!" breathed Handforth thickly.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Mr. Partridge in his breezy way, as Handforth rushed up. "Jump in, my boy! And always remember that he who brags is liable to be japed. How do you like your new theatre? A wonderful building! A magnificent home for 'Trackett Grim'!"

"You—you rotter!" gurgled Handforth.

He wrenched the door open, and leapt into the taxi before the occupants could prevent him. Church and McClure and Willy piled in, too—much to the indignation of the driver. But Mr. Partridge waved a peremptory hand.

The taxi moved off, and the occupants glared at one another. At least, Edward Oswald Handforth glared at Mr. Partridge. Willy was wearing an expression of admiration.

"Jolly good!" he commented. "I'm blessed if I could see through the disguise at first, Nipper, old man. One of the cleverest bits of make-up I've ever seen ——"

"Make-up!" gurgled Handforth.

Mr. Partridge gingerly pulled off his whiskers, and then he removed a wig, and applied some spirit liquid of some kind. Gradually, the features of Dick Hamilton made their appearance.

"Nipper!" panted Handforth, staring.

"Didn't he do it splendidly?" asked the girl. "Oh, Ted! Why didn't you kiss me good-bye when you left the office?"

"Eh?" said Handforth feebly.

She pressed his arm, and gazed fondly into his eyes. The other juniors watched with ecstatic amusement—particularly when the young lady removed her bobbed hair, and pulled off half an eyebrow.

"Reggie Pitt!" said Handforth, with a wild gulp.

"April fool!" said Reggie Pitt cheerfully. "Didn't we do it well, Handy? Nipper was simply a scream as the dud lawyer! He pulled your leg until it nearly came off! And you didn't guess a thing!"

"But—but that letter!" breathed Handforth.

"Spoof!" explained Nipper. "You said that we couldn't pull your leg, Handy, so we thought we'd try! And it's the first of April, too. Could any day have been better? If you'll read that letter again, you'll find that it's perfectly truthful.

There was a Mr. Handforth died, but I don't think he's any relative of yours—and he left half-a-million to a public schoolboy, too. But the letter didn't say that it was you!"

"You—you rotters!" snorted Handforth indignantly. "Not that you fooled me!" he went on, with a sniff. "I saw through your make-up in the first minute! I was just keeping up the joke—to spoof you!"

The other occupants of the taxi nearly collapsed.

"Of course, I borrowed that office for the luncheon hour," explained Nipper. "It belongs to a pal of the guv'nor's. There's no firm as 'Partridge, Hackett & Partridge.' Handy, it's no good. We've made an April Fool of you, and you've got to admit it."

Edward Oswald Handforth's indignation faded, and a slow grin overspread his rugged features.

"By George, I have!" he said handsomely. "You bounders! You spoofed me up to the giddy neck! As a matter of fact, I'm glad—that half million would only have been a beastly nuisance! Money's more trouble than it's worth!"

"Spoken like a man!" said Reggie Pitt cheerfully.

CHAPTER VII.

HORACE STEVENS AT HOME.

HORACE STEVENS shook his head.

"Thanks all the same, old man, but I'd rather not go in," he said. "The mater is expecting me, you know—I'm pretty late already. It's nearly tea-time, and I told her I'd be home soon after lunch."

"As you will, Brother Horace," said Browne. "Do not let me keep you from a mother's loving arms."

"Ass!" said Stevens.

"Alack, sentiment is always misunderstood!" sighed Browne. "As you refuse to enter the Browne mansion, I shall insist upon driving you to Regent's Park. No, make no protest——"

"But I do make a protest," interrupted Stevens. "You're home now, old man. I don't want to drag you across London again. I can easily get on a 'bus, or the Underground."

But William Napoleon Browne wouldn't hear of it. They were both seated in his saloon car, and it was at a standstill opposite an imposing, stately-looking mansion in Curzon Street, Mayfair.

This was the London home of Sir Rufus Browne, K.C.—William Napoleon's eminent father. Stevens was reluctant to go in. It was nearly tea-time, and he felt that he would be pressed to stay. He was always welcome there, and, indeed, he felt quite at home—for during the holidays he usually spent half his time with his chum. In the Browne household Stevens was regarded almost as one of the family. In just the same way, Browne had the privilege of walking into Stevens' home at any hour of the day or night.

Stevens wanted to get home to his mother—and he was particularly keen upon being alone with her. Just recently a curious little note had crept into her weekly letters. Nothing very tangible—nothing that Horace could get hold of. But he felt, rather than understood, that everything was not exactly as it should be.

The journey from Curzon Street to Regent's Park was quickly accomplished in the handy little car. But what a difference in the neighbourhood! Not that Regent's Park was by any means common. Quite the contrary. At the same time, it struck a different note to Curzon Street, Mayfair. And Stevens could hardly help comparing the shabby genteel exterior of his own home with that of Browne's. It was an old house, facing the Park—old, but nevertheless cheery. It needed painting, it needed quite a number of renovations, but Stevens' eyes were warm as he regarded it.

It was home. Browne's place might be palatial, but—— Well, it was Browne's.

"You'll come in, old man?" he asked, out of politeness.

"No, Brother Horace, you can't work that chestnut on me!" said Browne firmly. "You refuse to enter my own shack, so I shall therefore refuse to enter yours. Let us nestle in the bosoms of our respective families for an hour or so. Later, at an appointed time, we will mingle. A theatre, perhaps. A humble cinema, perchance. It has always been one of my joys to know that you are on the telephone. Thus, though we may be parted, we are still within call of one another. A cheery thought, brother."

He waved his hand, and the car glided off. Stevens gripped his suit-case, pushed the gate open, and walked up the gravel. A minute later, he was embracing his mother—who had, of course, been watching for him from one of the front windows. Mrs. Stevens was not exactly a modern mother. When her son came home from school, she was there to welcome him.

She was rather a fragile lady, slim, pale-featured, and showing the faded traces of a former beauty. And there was something inexpressibly charming and gentle about her. Stevens seemed to envelope her, with his bigness and clumsy embrace.

"Awfully decent of you to be at the door, mother," he said happily. "But, I say. You're not looking too well, you know!" he added, with concern. "You're awfully pale, and I don't like those lines under your eyes. Have you been sitting up till three o'clock in the morning at bridge parties?"

Mrs. Stevens smiled.

"That's only your fun, Horry," she said gently. "I don't think I even know how to play bridge. I suppose I'm dreadfully old-fashioned, but I prefer to live quietly."

"Yes, it's rottenly quiet for you, mother," said Stevens, as he accompanied her into the drawing-room. "It wasn't so bad when Uncle Peter was here, with Jack and Muriel. Just like them to barge off to the South of France. You ought to have gone with them."

"I haven't been to the Riviera for years," said Mrs. Stevens a trifle sadly.

Tea was all ready, and for ten minutes or so Stevens chatted volubly about the gossip of St. Frank's. About Browne, and about the school's position in sports, and suchlike trifles. But later, after the maid had gone, he and his mother sat in the drawing-room alone. And then Stevens told her all about his recent acting experiences.

And gradually his enthusiasm increased. He was modest concerning his achievements, but there was no misunderstanding his trend of talk.

"I tell you, mother, it's been simply wonderful!" he said joyfully. "Everybody's been so decent. Browne, particularly. He's a corker. I shouldn't have done anything but for him."

"Must you call him by his surname?" asked his mother.

"Who, Browne?" he chuckled. "Nobody calls him anything else, mother. It sounds a bit rummy to you, perhaps, but I can't picture him as 'William,' or 'Napoleon.' He's generally 'old Browne.' You ought to have seen the way he produced 'Hamlet,' with Mr. Noggs. And that play of dad's, too. By jingo, mother, it was wonderful!"

"Your letters were wonderful, too," said Mrs. Stevens.

"When we have the next show—the public performance—you've got to be on the spot," declared Horace enthusiastically. "None of your excuses, you know. I can see a glorious time ahead, mother. And later on, when I'm at the 'Varsity, I shall have other chances. Think what I shall be able to do in the O.U.D.S. It's simply too good to think of."

"What is the O.U.D.S., dear?"

Stevens looked utterly shocked.

"Oh, I say!" he protested. "You'll have to run yourself up a bit, mother. The Oxford University Dramatic Society, you know. I'm hoping to—— Hallo! What on earth—— Is anything wrong, mother?" he added, with sudden concern.

"Nothing, Horry—nothing!" she said tremblingly.

"Here, dash it!" shouted Stevens. "Oh, I say!"

He noted with acute alarm, that his mother was crying. Not very noticeably, but her eyes were distinctly dimmed. He ran over to her, and caught her in his arms.

"What's the matter, mother?" he asked breathlessly.

"It—it was your references to the University, dear," said Mrs. Stevens in a whisper. "Your enthusiastic talk about Oxford. Horry, dear, I'm afraid—— Oh, but it seems so cruel! I knew I should have to tell you before you went back, but I was hoping——" She paused.

"Tell me what?" he asked, with a catch in his voice.

"I don't think you'll be able to go to Oxford, Horry dear," said Mrs. Stevens, looking at him with sad eyes. "I didn't want to tell you——"

"Not—not go up to Oxford!" ejaculated Stevens aghast. "But—but I'm expecting—— I've always thought—— Mother! You—you don't mean that we can't afford it?"

"Yes, Horry—that's what I mean," she said quietly.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BLOW.

THE shock was a stupendous one.

Horace Stevens had never given much thought to financial matters. He knew, of course, that money had never been particularly plentiful. He had been obliged to go easy at school, although, even so, whenever he had written home for extra cash it had always arrived.

He had dimly appreciated the fact that his father had left them with a safe, comfortable income. Nothing lavish, of course, but plenty to get along with smoothly and easily. He hadn't really thought about money at all. He had taken it for granted. His mother had never made any reference to it before. Yet she had always given him to understand that he would go up to the 'Varsity when the time came.

In a flash many things were revealed to him.

Those queer little unaccountable phrases in his mother's recent letters. Of course she hadn't told him anything, but he could read between the lines now. In some way that he couldn't possibly understand money wasn't so plentiful as he had supposed.

He hadn't the faintest idea, and perhaps he would never know the actual truth, that his mother had been denying herself consistently and rigidly for his sake. He was all that she had. And Horace had always come first. His wants, his little requirements; there had always been money for those things.

He didn't know how she had screwed, how she had sat for hours at times, wondering how she could meet her regular monthly

bills, and keep on the right side. And lately certain things had been happening which even Mrs. Stevens was afraid to think of.

"Can't afford it!" he muttered dully. "But—but, mother! I thought—— We're not really short of money, are we?"

"No, dear, of course not," said Mrs. Stevens quickly. "Not—not short. But things aren't quite as prosperous as they were with us. I didn't want to tell you anything about it, but—— It's best that you should know, Horace. If I allowed you to go back to St. Frank's next term without telling you I should only worry. I'm glad you know, dear. It will give you more time to settle your mind."

Stevens' brain was dulled.

"I—I suppose I shall be able to go back to St. Frank's," he asked bitterly.

"Yes, of course," said Mrs. Stevens. "How absurd, Horry. Of course you'll go back to St. Frank's. But it will be different at Oxford. There are such heavy expenses, and I don't see how we can meet them. I have tried to work it out, dear—oh, I've tried until it all seems confused and tangled. But I know it's impossible, Horry."

"But why?" he burst out. "Didn't dad leave us with a regular income? How is it different now to what it was before?"

"You wouldn't understand, dear——"

"Oh, that's rot!" he burst out. "Sorry, mother. I—I mean, I'm not a kid, you know. If there's anything worrying you, I ought to know about it, especially if it's money. I'll even chuck up St. Frank's if I have to," he added, with a deep breath. "I'm not going to have you worrying yourself ill and pale over financial affairs——"

"It's not so bad as that," interrupted Mrs. Stevens. "You know father left us with comfortable securities, and until a year or two ago the income was very regular. Of course, it has been a struggle since the war, for expenses are so much higher now, and the money hasn't been greater. People like us are hit very hard, Horace. Before the war we were able to live in comparative luxury——"

"Yes, mum, I know!" muttered Stevens. "But—but what's happened within the last year or two?"

"I don't exactly know," she replied. "I can only tell you that some of our investments have lost their value. And so our income is proportionately less. And Mr. Tudor tells me there is no hope of improvement."

"Old Tudor wouldn't say that unless he meant it," said Stevens, with a gloomly nod. "He's been our family lawyer since grandfather's time, hasn't he, and he's a bit of a crock himself by now——"

"Mr. Tudor is old, but he's as keen as ever," interrupted Mrs. Stevens quickly. "And he's been good, too. You don't realise, Horry. I found that he was paying us more money than was due to us. Of course I stopped it at once. I couldn't allow a thing like that."

"Good old Tudor!" said Stevens. "That's just the sort of thing he would do. But just imagine. I never thought—— Hang it, this is awful, mother! Short of money. It's not fair to you——"

He broke off, and paced up and down the drawing-room. The shock wasn't quite so bad now. The cruel edge of the blow had worn off a trifle. All his ambitions were suddenly blighted; but he was a good-natured sort of fellow, and calm and generous, too.

"I'll tell you what, mother," he said suddenly. "I'll go into this acting business stronger than ever. By Jove, I've got a chance, you know! There's Mr. Crowson, he wants me to appear at a special matinee in London. Something decent might come out of that, too. It's just on the cards that I could get a real engagement—with a real salary." The thought made him breathless. "A real salary, mother! Wouldn't that be topping?"

She smiled at the absurdity of it.

"Horry, dear, you mustn't get these ideas into your head," she said gently. "There's no need for you to earn your living yet——"

"I'm over seventeen, mother."

"Yes, and a fine, healthy boy," she nodded proudly. "If you had to, Horace, I know you'd go out to work. But I'm going to keep you at St. Frank's until you are through the Sixth."

"All the same, mother, I'll seize every acting chance I can!" he declared. "And then, when I DO have to earn my living I shall have something tangible to start with. I hate business. I couldn't stick in an office, mum. I'm as keen as mustard on going on the stage!"

He was so thrilled with the idea that he couldn't keep still. His pacing continued, and he even came to the conclusion that there would be a lot of compensation if he had to leave St. Frank's. He had revelled in his recent stage experiences, and the possibility that they would become real stirred his every fibre.

"There's dad's play, too," he went on. "You don't know how marvellous it is, mother. Browne says he's going to produce it at old Noggs' Theatre next term—within the month too. I say, you know, we might be able to sell it!" he added, with a sudden

thought. "Perhaps Mr. Crowson would put it on in London."

This was a fresh thrill.

"It would be a success, too," he said eagerly. "I tell you, mother, it would make a tremendous hit. I know it. People make tens of thousands out of plays, you know. Think what it would mean if we could sell father's play, and have it produced——"

"You mustn't get these ideas, Horry," interrupted Mrs. Stevens, looking at him anxiously. "They're all wild—they're all hopeless. You mustn't get so excited."

you have been wonderful. I'm only thinking of what other people will say. They are so hard, dear. You must remember that your father died practically unknown. Do we ever hear his name mentioned now? Yet years ago he was one of the most talented actors on the British stage. His plays"—Mrs. Stevens sighed—"his plays were better than any I've ever seen on the stage, and yet they only cost him a lot of money. Your father lost heavily, Horace. So why should you get such hopeless ideas about this one you have been acting in?"

Handforth had, of course, intruded upon the inner privacy of the manager's office, barging in without the least ceremony.

"I'm not excited!" denied Stevens, flushing.

"But you are talking of dreams, dear," said his mother. "Life is a very different thing from what you have been led to imagine. As a schoolboy, you have created quite a big impression. People think you have acted wonderfully in that little theatre. But that's because you ARE a schoolboy. It would be very different if you went after a real job."

"I say, that's hardly fair, mother."

"I'm not trying to belittle what you have done, Horace," she said quietly. "I know

"But it's different, mother," he insisted. "'The Third Chance' was never produced in London—or anywhere else. Browne nearly went mad about it, and old Noggs was full of enthusiasm, too. Browne means to have some big people at that first public show, and perhaps——"

"No, Horace, you mustn't think of it," said his mother gently. "You mustn't get these ideas. They'll only lead you to a terrible disappointment later. But we can't talk like this all the evening, can we? Let me hear about your work at St. Frank's—your games and your sports."

Somehow she managed to get him off the subject of the stage, but, although he talked of other things, his mind was still centred upon matters theatrical.

When he went to bed that night, however, he felt depressed and miserable.

His mother's words came back to him, her doubts and her warnings. He had half expected her to encourage him, to urge him on with his stage work. But it seemed that she was anxious to divert his mind from it.

And to Horace Stevens there was nothing else that really mattered. He was troubled, and the immediate future wasn't particularly rosy, either. He would be afraid to ask for a shilling; he wouldn't be comfortable in using his ordinary pocket money.

And yet he daren't breathe a word about it to Browne, because Browne would immediately offer him some cash. And that, of course, was unthinkable. Besides, he couldn't possibly tell a living soul about his mother's financial troubles.

He went to sleep at last, his final waking sensation being one of gloom and unhappiness.

CHAPTER IX.

A SURPRISING DISCOVERY.

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE glanced at his watch and shook his head.

"Late, Brother Horace—late!" he said severely. "What is this? Has my old college chum developed procrastination as one of his vices? Have you been putting off matters at my expense? Always remember the good old saying: 'Procrastination is a banana-peel that has caused the downfall of many a man.' I should hate to see you skid on it, brother."

Stevens grinned.

"How late am I?" he asked bluntly.

"I will confess the lapse is not serious," admitted Browne. "To be exact, you are one minute late."

"Then don't rot, old man."

"Always remember, Brother Horace, that a minute is a period of time that can never be recovered. A golden minute, set with sixty jewelled seconds! They flash sardonically as they flit by. Never lose those precious jewels, brother."

"You've lost about two hundred and forty of 'em since I arrived," said Stevens pointedly.

Browne heaved a sigh.

"That, of course, is where we fail to run in parallel grooves," he replied. "I have spent those valuable seconds in attempting to give you a dose of wisdom. But, alas! you are a negative subject, Brother Horace."

They were standing in the lofty hall of Mr. Justice Browne's Mayfair residence. It was Saturday morning, and it could be fairly accepted that the Easter holidays had commenced. Good Friday was over, with its enforced quietness, and not many of the St. Frank's fellows were sorry.

"Ah, Horace, how do you do?"

Stevens turned, and found Sir Rufus shaking hands with him. Browne's pater was a very distinguished-looking gentleman—tall, upright, and immaculate. He was clean-shaven, with a firm jaw which gave him an appearance of hard relentlessness. But his humorous eyes and his genial smile were a true indication of his real character.

"Awfully pleased to see you again, sir," said Stevens. "I just came along to meet William, I mean, Napoleon. That is, old Browne, sir." Stevens paused, confused. "Sorry, Sir Rufus! I mean——"

"Just so!" smiled Sir Rufus Browne, famous at the Bar as Mr. Justice Browne, the eminent judge. "I will agree to the name William. But my enterprising son was never christened 'Napoleon.' That is entirely an addition of his own, and one which I refuse to recognise."

"But one which, at the same time, is singularly fitting," put in Browne calmly. "Think of Napoleon's attributes, pater—and think of mine. What is the result? Merely one thought!"

"It is fortunate that Horace understands you, Billy," said his father. "I fear that most strangers regard you as an extraordinary boy. They would not be far wrong," he added drily.

He went off, and Browne shook himself. At the mention of the name "Billy," he had distinctly winced.

"These parents are difficult people to get on with," he said gravely. "Perhaps you have noticed it, Brother Horace? The pater is a good sort—one of the best. Indeed, since I take after him, how can he be otherwise? But he possesses these curious and unaccountable habits. He insists upon calling me Billy. Billy! Unquestionably the most scarred and worm-eaten name that could be applied to such an imposing personage as myself. You might also have observed that he referred to me as a boy. Ah, Brother Horace, there are moments when we suffer acutely."

He reached for his hat, and they sallied out into the bright morning sunshine. It was nearly eleven o'clock, and they had an appointment with Mr. Augustus Crowson at the Pall Mall Theatre at eleven-thirty. Stevens was all agog to hear what Mr. Crowson would have to say. A wild hope had taken possession of him that that special matinée would be possible during the holidays. Then his mother would be able to see what he could do!

There was every indication that the Easter would be a fine one. It was typical April weather, and London gloried for once in a dazzling blue sky, with patches of soft, white, fleecy clouds.

"We might get a shower or two, but they'd only be seasonable," remarked Stevens, his spirits responding to the brilliance of the day. "By Jove, I'm impatient to see Mr. Crowson. I hope to goodness he'll fix things up, Browne."

"We must be prepared for a few sandbanks, Brother Horace," said Browne warningly. "We must be on the look-out for a rock or two. I have every reason to regard Brother Crowson as a man of integrity, but it is remotely possible that he may place other business before ours. These theatrical people are of a rare and remarkable vintage. One must be prepared for anything."

"I've got an idea he'll turn up trumps."

"Let us trust that your prophetic faculty is in full working order this morning, Brother Horace," said Browne. "You will observe the gay decorations along the routes," he added, indicating a number of flags which flew bravely in the breeze. "It is gratifying to see that they have recognised our presence."

Stevens grinned. There were certainly a number of flags about, but Stevens had a vague idea that royalty was about, too. It suited Browne's mood to attribute these decorations to himself.

They walked to the Pall Mall Theatre—a mere stroll down Piccadilly—and then a cut through Lower Regent Street. And they arrived practically on the stroke of eleven-thirty.

Browne was resplendent in striped trousers, morning coat, and topper. In such attire, he looked much older than his actual years, and his manner was that of a full-blown man about town. Once or twice he had glanced at Stevens with a pained look in his eye. For his chum was clad in somewhat baggy flannels, with a sports coat — free-and-easy holiday rig. Hardly the costume for a rising young actor.

But Browne forbore any comment. With a rare intuition, he seemed to know that Stevens was not in a position to startle London as he himself was doing—or as he assured himself he was doing

Stevens' spirits remained high. On the previous day, after that fit of depression had worked off, he had spent many quiet hours at home, and by now he was resigned to the prospect of starting life without going up to Oxford. His whole interest was centred in the theatre.

And then he received a jar.

Mr. Augustus Crowson sent down a message, accompanied with his extreme regrets, to the effect that unforeseen business forbade him interviewing the two callers. Would they look him up after the holidays?

"After the holidays?" said Stevens, when he and Browne found themselves out in the street again. "But—but he hasn't made any definite appointment." His face was almost pale with disappointment. "I say, Browne, how utterly rotten! That matinée, you know! I—I thought——"

"Ah, these managers!" said Browne, frowning. "These theatrical people. Are they not all the same? A mottled lot, Brother Horace! A piebald race! As unreliable as the April weather," he added, as a shower commenced. "I fear this has been a nasty jab in the ribs for you. Accept my heartfelt condolences, brother. But always remember that life is full of such blows. Fate is ever waiting with a mallet."

Stevens had a heavy, solid lump within him.

"I thought we were going to fix things up," he muttered. "And now it's left unsettled. We might not get a chance—— Oh, hang! And I told the mater that I was going to fix the date!" His mouth assumed a rueful twist. "Of course, she'll just smile and say nothing. Confound it! I shall simply look an awful ass!"

"Nature," said Browne, "cannot, of course, be denied. You must learn to accept these sad facts, brother. We can only look as we are made. Why remind yourself of such painful realities? I could make many observations concerning your appearance, but I will forbear. You are already suffering."

Stevens hardly heard him. The shower turned out to be a mere drop or two, and they were now walking into the Haymarket. They were, in fact, passing the Emperor Theatre, and Browne paused.

"What have we here?" he asked, glancing at one of the attractive playbills. "Ah! A first night, Brother Horace! A singular day for such an event, but by no means unprecedented. To-night we are to have the first performance of 'The Whirlpool,' by——"

He broke off, and for once he allowed himself to be surprised.

"But what is this?" he said softly. "'The Whirlpool,' by Roger Barton. Surely that name brings vivid memories flooding back? Roger Barton! A name that is synonymous with such terms as 'dirty dog,' 'filthy Richard,' and 'artful dodger.'"

"Roger Barton!" ejaculated Stevens. "Well, I'm hanged!"

CHAPTER X.

"THE WHIRLPOOL."

ROGER BARTON! The name, indeed, conjured up memories. For it was Roger Barton who had been closely associated quite recently with Mr. Andrew Sylvanus Noggs, the picturesque old showman who owned the travelling theatre.

Barton it was who had attempted to fleece Mr. Noggs out of his lawful property. But the St. Frank's fellows, by their timely

aid, had ruined Barton's scheme, and they had literally kicked him out of the district.

And here was his name outside the Emperor Theatre, one of the best in London! And his name appeared as the author of the forthcoming play! Neither Browne nor Stevens had ever regarded Roger Barton as a playwright.

"It can't be the same man," said Stevens, at last.

"I will confess the name is not exactly unique, but I fear there is no doubt regarding the point," replied Browne. "This Roger Barton, brother, is undoubtedly our Roger Barton. While despising the creature with a healthy vim, I am nevertheless curious regarding his play."

"I don't believe he ever wrote a play!"

"In that belief, I am inclined to join you," said Browne. "Brother Barton is the type of reptile who would purloin another man's brains as airily as a fag will demolish a doughnut. We already know that Brother Barton is devoid of any moral sense—we have discovered that he is lacking in every honest attribute."

"And here we find his name outside one of the leading West End theatres," said Stevens grimly. "How is it, old man, that these people get on? It seems to me the wickeder you are, the luckier you are!"

Browne shook his head.

"A fatal philosophy, Brother Horace," he said firmly. "It may appear that such rascals flourish like dandelions on a lawn, but it is a false impression. Similarly to dandelions, they are soon plucked out by the roots. Ere long, an earthy gentleman with a trowel comes along and ruthlessly hurls them into the weed pile. Such is life, brother. The unscrupulous may have a meteoric rise, but their fall is just as speedy. An honest man, on the other hand, advances slowly, laboriously—but when he reaches the summit, he stays there. Philosophy by William Napoleon Browne. I make no charges for these wise remarks."

"I expect you're right, though," said Stevens nodding. "There's not much fun in going crooked, old man. A chap may meet with success for a time, but it doesn't last. I'd like to see this play, you know," he added. "Just out of curiosity. I can't believe Barton would write anything decent."

"You would like to see it?" observed Browne. "In that case, Brother Horace, you shall see it. I have spoken. Let us venture within, and see what the fates can offer us."

"It's no good," said Stevens. "We shan't get any seats. You know what these first nights are—they have special crowds in the stalls. Everybody's invited, or——"

But Browne was already striding into the foyer. He placed his head against the box-office, and beamed benevolently upon the gentleman who presided therein.

"Kindly show me an assortment of your best tickets," he said genially.

"For to-night, sir?"

"For to-night!"

"Sorry, sir, but I'm afraid we're booked right up——"

"Then let me urge you to think again," said Browne firmly. "I require two stalls. Or a box. Or two seats in the dress circle. You see, I give you a choice. Allow me."

He presented his father's card, and the box-office keeper stared.

"My father," said Browne smoothly.

"Just a minute, sir!"

The man vanished, and returned after a minute or two, discovering that he had a couple of stalls left. They were at the end of a row—for which he apologised—but they were the best he could manage. Browne took the tickets, paid for them, and uttered a few gracious words of thanks. Then he rejoined Stevens, and announced the triumph.

"A murky piece of work, I fear, but we, at least, have the tickets," he added. "You will observe, Brother Horace, that the unhappy man in the street has little or no chance. But the magic of a great name is not to be denied. It is sad. I must confess that I feel guilty."

"Well, we've got the tickets—and that's the main thing," said Stevens. "Fourteen bob each, eh? I say, that's a price! You shouldn't——"

"Enough!" interrupted Browne. "Let us wend our way sedately to the pater's club, and partake of luncheon. Then a riotous hour in a picture theatre, and so on, home for tea. A hectic programme, brother."

They had previously decided to go to some theatre or other that night, so it was doubly interesting to attend a "first night," and to see what Roger Barton could place before the public.

And they were not the only St. Frank's fellows who displayed this interest.

Later on in the day—at about six o'clock, to be exact—Dick Hamilton & Co. met Archie Glenthorne and Alf Brent in Piccadilly Circus. They were joined almost at once by Handforth, Church and McClure—and then by Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey. Almost before they had exchanged greetings, John Busterfield Boots, Ernest Lawrence, and Bob Christine appeared.

"There's half the giddy school here!" said Handforth, as he looked round. "Good! Just what we wanted! How about descending upon one of the theatres, and booking some seats?"

"That's the very idea of this muster," said Nipper, nodding. "We thought it rather a good idea to have an evening out. Later on, we'll make plans for Bank Holiday. What about suggestions for to-night?"

"I vote for 'A Cuckoo in the Nest,'" declared Handforth.

"'Is Zat So!'" said Archie Glenthorne firmly.

"Yes, it is!"

"Good gad!" said Archie, starting. "I wasn't commenting upon your choice, old article! I was merely suggesting that we

should see 'Is Zat So?' I've heard that it's a frightfully juicy piece of work. I mean to say, one of those bally affairs where a chappie expires after every dashed act!"

"The best thing we can do is to see which theatre has got any seats left," said Nipper practically. "I don't suppose we shall find many. It's holiday time, don't forget. Let's stroll round."

"A frightfully brainy suggestion," agreed Archie.

"Come on, then!" said Handforth.

During the course of that stroll, they happened to pass the Emperor Theatre. And it was Nipper who caught Roger Barton's name, and halted.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated. "Look at this!"

They were just as surprised as Browne and Stevens had been. Handforth, indeed, was inclined to be highly indignant. It was like Roger Barton's nerve to have his beastly name outside a West End theatre!

"There's something fishy about this!" said Reggie Pitt, shaking his head. "It's only a week or two ago that Barton was trying to twist poor old Noggs. I was reading in to-day's paper that this show —'The Whirlpool'—had been rushed through rehearsals at express speed, but I didn't know Barton was the author. I wouldn't credit him with writing a play at all!"

Curiosity impelled the juniors to apply for seats—for they, too, thought it would be an excellent idea to witness this first night. They are not so lucky as Browne, however. There were no seats to be obtained. Even Nipper failed in the quest. Several hours had passed since Browne's success, and a duke himself couldn't have bought a seat now.

"There's only one thing for it," said Nipper briskly. "We shall have to get into the pit queue. Come on—we may just be in time."

"The queue!" said Christine. "But I thought they'd abandoned queues?"

"They're having a little game at present," explained Nipper drily. "They abandon them one week and start them again the next! One of their little jokes, I expect. Anyhow, there's a queue here, so we'll get into it."

"Odds, horrors and shocks!" said Archie Glenthorne. "Not really, laddie? I mean to say, this is frightfully sudden. I object to these dashed queues on principle. I shan't have the bally strength to last out, old darlings! The dashed tissues won't stand the strain."

"It'll only be a short wait, Archie," said Pitt cheerfully.

"What-ho! That sounds somewhat better."

"Ten past six now," said Nipper. "They'll probably let us in at eight o'clock. Under two hours."

This struck Archie as being utterly and absolutely poisonous, but he protested in vain. With the rest, he was hustled into the queue—which, fortunately, had only just commenced to form. So the St. Frank's crowd was certain of front seats in the pit. The exceptionally fine weather—and the close proximity of Easter Monday—were probably accountable for the poor attendance. The public has a habit of neglecting the theatres just before any big national holiday.

Thus it came about that a very representative gathering of St. Frank's fellows were in the Emperor Theatre before the rise of the curtain that night to witness Roger Barton's play.

They were destined to receive a staggering shock.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BOMBSHELL.

HANDFORTH stared.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated, standing up. "Look there!"

He and his chums were in the front row, and thus were in a position to examine all the smartly attired first-nighters as they came into the stalls. And at this moment two young gentlemen in evening dress appeared. One of them, judging by his demeanour, appeared to be under the impression that the theatre belonged to him.

"Browne!" grinned Nipper. "Browne and Stevens! This is where we retire into our little shells, my lads! We're only the rank and file. Nothing so common as the pit for those Fifth Form bounders!"

"The nerve of it!" roared Handforth indignantly. "They've got stalls, and we've got to be satisfied with the pit! Of all the giddy sauce!"

William Napoleon Browne, about to seat himself, glanced at Stevens, and placed a hand to his ear.

"Hush!" he said. "What is that, Brother Horace? Surely it is the cry of the Handforth bird in full song?"

Stevens looked round, grinning.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he said. "There's about half the Remove in the pit! Cheerio, you fellows!" he added, waving his hand. "I admire your pluck! How long did you have to wait in the queue?"

"You lucky bounders!" sang out one of the juniors.

"Evening dress, too!" shouted another.

"While deprecating this exchange of compliments across the theatre, I can do nothing but join in the general greeting," observed Browne genially. "Hail, brothers! I gather that you were drawn into this edifice by the same eddy which swirled Brother Horace and myself along? Splendid! Later, and under more convenient circumstances, I trust that we shall compare notes."

"I'll bet the show's going to be rotten!" said Handforth loudly. "It's bound to be rotten if Barton's written it."

"Shush, you ass!"

"Rats!"

The pit, on the whole, regarded this unexpected cross-talk as a welcome diversion. But it must be confessed that the stalls felt shocked. Browne and Stevens came in for a number of severe, cold stares. It pleased Browne's mood to disregard them entirely.

"Let us be truly democratic!" he said smoothly. "There may be a barrier between this section of the house and that at the rear—but who are we to make distinctions? Brothers, I congratulate you upon the company you are keeping."

"Dry up, you chump!" muttered Stevens, with a chuckle. "Everybody's staring at us."

Browne sat down, and smiled.

"An experience which is by no means uncommon to us," he said, as he opened his programme. "At times, this hero worship is somewhat embarrassing, but we must be brave, and endure it. If you will glance discreetly round, you will observe the young ladies whispering to one another. What are they saying? Is it not obvious? They are whispering. 'Look! There is Browne! How I wish I had a seat next to him!' It is sometimes distressing to be so good looking. You have no idea of the flutters which are even now disturbing so many feminine hearts."

"You hopeless idiot!" grinned Stevens.

He examined his own programme, and became thoughtful. There was something curiously familiar about the characters in the play, and about the arrangement of the scenes. Then he suddenly jumped to it.

"H'm! This play of Barton's is on the same style as my pater's," he commented. "Nothing rummy in that, of course—but I couldn't help noticing it. Just about the same number of characters, and the acts are similar, too. If the resemblance goes any further I'll eat my hat!"

"Pray do not devour mine by mistake," said Browne concernedly. "Remember, brother, that the weather is showery."

Browne was struck by the curious similarity, too. He had produced "The Third Chance," and had played an important part in it. He knew every character and every scene by heart. And there was something remarkably reminiscent in the arrangement of Roger Barton's cast. In fact, Browne permitted a sudden, startled expression to shoot into his eyes, but he did not let Stevens see it.

All the same, he was remarkably silent until the curtain went up. A tenseness seemed to have come over him—a curious expectancy. Stevens had given himself up to the task of investigating a box of chocolates, appreciating the orchestral music in the meantime.

"Old Barton saw that play of mine, didn't he?" he remarked, after a while. "I wonder if the rotter pinched the general idea of it? I don't suppose so, though," he added. "He only saw a part of it, and there wasn't time ——"

"Hush!" said Browne softly.

The lights had been lowered, and the curtain was just going up. The captain of the Fifth was gripping his seat with strange intensity. He had a presentiment that a shock was coming—and he was acutely afraid of Stevens. He held himself ready to act at a second's notice.

The curtain rose, revealing the bright, cheerful interior of a country house lounge-hall—a splendid set, with the sunlight streaming through an open doorway, with flowers growing round the latticed windows, and with a stately staircase leading upwards.

There were two characters already on the stage—an aged manservant, carrying a silver tray, and a fresh, young girl in a bright summer frock. She was swinging a tennis racket, and had just come indoors.

"Oh, there you are, Parsons," were her opening words. "Is the post in? You've got a letter for me, haven't you?"

"I am sorry, Miss Edna——"

"But you must have, Parsons!" the girl insisted. "In fact, you've got two! They're bound to be here by this morning's post."

William Napoleon Browne grasped Stevens's arm as it rested upon the stall, and gripped it hard. He felt his companion's muscles tauten.

"Steady, brother—steady!" he murmured.

Horace Stevens uttered a choking, inarticulate sound. He sat there, his nerves stretched, and his eyes staring. He had gone as white as a sheet. And he was gazing at the stage in a sudden blind frenzy of amazement.

At the first sight of the "set" he had started—and at the sight of the two characters he had felt a curious tremor ripple down his spine. Then those opening words had come—words which burned themselves into his brain. He sat there, dumbfounded.

"It's—it's my father's!" he suddenly burst out. "Browne! This—this play! It's—it's 'The Third Chance'!"

But Browne needed no telling.

He had guessed the truth, even before the curtain rose—but now he was convinced. The same scene, the same characters, the same words! Nothing altered except the names, the places, and the title.

Stevens was like a fellow in a trance. He half rose in his seat, staring at the stage—staring. He heard the words dimly. And they seemed to throb upon his consciousness like the blows of a hammer.

"Hush!" breathed Browne, his voice full of calm restraint. "Be careful, brother; I appreciate your feelings, but I urge you to contain yourself."

And then, suddenly, Stevens came out of that trance. Something seemed to break in his brain. He hadn't heard Browne at all. He didn't even know that his chum was sitting next to him. The whole theatre was something apart. He staggered to his feet, and stood there, panting.

"My father's play!" he shouted.

"Hush! Hush!"

"Sit down, you young fool!"

From every section of the stalls came the angry outbursts. For a second the action of the play was held up. People were turning round in their seats, staring. There was something intensely dramatic about this boy—this young fellow who stood there, his eyes blazing, and his face like chalk.

And from the pit came an echoing uproar—a murmuring of amazed voices, with one raised in particular.

"It's Stevens' play!"

"Quiet, Handy!"

"I tell you, it's 'The Third Chance'!" came Handforth's voice. "Barton pinched it! The rotter! The thieving blackguard!"

"Keep quiet, there!"

"Hush!"

From every quarter of the house, now, came the angry command.

"Stop!" shouted Stevens thickly. "Stop this show! I won't let it go on! I won't allow——"

But his voice was drowned in the storm of indignant protest.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STOLEN PLAY.

THE atmosphere of the theatre was electrical.

Within two minutes of the rise of the curtain the action of the play was held up—the unfortunate people on the stage were helpless. Attendants were staring, aghast. Somebody was rushing for the manager.

But it was William Napoleon Browne who saved the situation.

"Brother Horace, sit down!" he said quietly.

As he spoke, he dragged Stevens down into his seat. He held him there. Gripping his arm, he forced him back.

"But—— But——" Stevens gulped helplessly.

"Nothing can be done by creating a scene!" whispered Browne steadily. "I urge you to control yourself, old man. These people on the stage are not to blame. Do not cause them unnecessary pain by a thoughtless act. The audience has a right to quietness, too."

The calm words, accompanied by Browne's actions, restored Stevens to a semblance of sanity. He suddenly became limp, and lay back, breathing hard.

"Keep quiet, Brother Horace!" whispered Browne. "Promise me that you will keep quiet."

"I'll keep quiet!" muttered Stevens.

"On your honour?"

"On—my—honour!"

The words came out in such a low tone that Browne could scarcely catch them.

Stevens rushed over to his mother, and caught her in his arms. "What's the matter, mother?" he asked breathlessly.

But he was satisfied. He was intensely relieved too. A scene would have been distressing—and utterly valueless. The play had started, and nothing on earth could alter this outrage now. Browne was further relieved to note a smothered confusion of small sounds from the pit. The juniors, too, had managed to hold themselves in.

The play went on—and the audience calmed down. The brief sensation was forgotten. It was merely thought that some young fool had been admitted in a semi-intoxicated condition.

Horace Stevens sat in his stall, trembling in every limb. The first mad rage had passed. He had seen red during that moment, and it was only Browne's strong personality which had won.

Browne himself was nearly blind with anger, but he had a wonderful control. In a burst of dazzling realisation, he knew the truth. And his whole being throbbed with fury.

Roger Barton was no playwright! The blackguard had stolen this play, word for word! It was "The Third Chance"—that wonderful work of genius written by Horace Stevens' dead father! And it was being presented by a reputable management, under a new title, with Roger Barton's name attached to it!

Stevens was like a fellow in a nightmare. He heard every word that was being spoken on the stage, but they came to him through a sort of mist. He couldn't even see clearly. He only knew that every word hit him with the force of a blow.

He remembered, now—vaguely, remotely. He hadn't been able to find the script of his father's play. Of course not! Barton had stolen it. In some unaccountable way Barton must have gained access to the school, and robbed it like any burglar. He had stolen the one thing in all the world that Horace Stevens valued.

Of all the people in that theatre Edward Oswald Handforth was the only person who could have thrown some light upon this mystery. A few weeks earlier he had surprised a strange figure in one of the corridors in the Ancient House at St. Frank's. He had chased that figure—but without success.

But that mysterious intruder had been Roger Barton—bent upon his unscrupulous act of burglary. The incident did not occur to Handforth now. He and the other juniors were too inwardly excited about the bombshell which had exploded among them. They all knew this play—none better! For hadn't many of them acted parts in it? Hadn't the show been produced in Noggs' Theatre, the entire cast being composed of schoolboys and schoolgirls? They sat there, fascinated—and quivering with pent-up anger.

"I can't stand it—I tell you I can't stand it!" muttered Stevens, gripping Browne's arm. "This is my father's play, Browne! Do you hear me? I can't stand it!"

"Your word of honour, old man!" breathed Browne.

"But—but——"

"You cannot break your word, brother."

Stevens gripped himself hard.

"All right—I'll hold myself in!" he breathed thickly. "But I shall have to go out, Browne—I can't stay here! What can we do? I tell you I can't stay here——"

"Come!"

Browne was indeed thankful that he and his chum occupied seats at the end of a row. Gripping Horace Stevens' arm, he pulled him, and they slipped out through an exit door without attracting much attention. Their nearest neighbours were more than ever convinced that Stevens was under the influence of drink.

They found themselves in a deserted corridor—under the full glare of the electric lights. A great contrast, compared to the dimness of the darkened auditorium. Browne was shocked by the utter pallor of his companion's face, and the shaking of his limbs.

"Pull yourself together, Brother Horace," he said, in alarm. "It's serious, I know—but——"

"The hound!" burst out Stevens, a sudden flush whirling into his countenance. "The blackguard! The infernal scum! He's—he's stolen my father's play, Browne! My pater's masterpiece. He's stolen——"

The words broke on his lips, and he seemed to choke. He stood there, wild-eyed, a pitiful, tragic figure. For once in his life, Browne was trembling in every limb, too. His chum's distress caused him agony.

"Yes, old man—yes!" he muttered. "It's horrible! The man's as vile as the vilest thing that ever crawled! But you can't do anything now—you can't stop the play to-night!"

"He's stolen my pater's play!" sobbed Stevens brokenly.

He swayed as he stood, and Browne gripped him.

"Dear old man, you mustn't take it like this!" he muttered miserably. "Pull yourself together, for Heaven's sake! Courage, brother—courage! What of the staunch blood of the Stevens? Don't break down—don't give in at such a vital moment!"

"But—but——"

"It's your duty to see this play through!" insisted Browne. "It's a duty you owe your dead father! See it through, brother—see how the public accepts it. Never mind Barton for to-night—we can deal with him in good time. I know an excellent place where horsewhips can be purchased."

Stevens felt himself growing calmer. There was something wonderfully soothing about Browne's personality. And now that he had got out of that auditorium—now that he had been able to release that pent-up fierceness—Stevens was suffering from a reaction.

"Yes, we ought to see how the play goes!" he whispered shakily. "It's my dad's play, Browne! London's getting it, after all! I wonder if it'll be a success?"

"Give it a fair chance," urged Browne. "Go back quietly to your seat, brother, and thrust Barton out of your mind. For the moment, imagine that it is your father's name on the programme. Make no mistake, that infernal dog will never carry this thing through! While I've got life, I'll fight for you, Brother Horace."

And so, slowly, Browne managed to calm his chum—and to get him back into his seat. And during the rest of the play Horace Stevens controlled himself.

At the end of the first act the applause was not merely loud, but thunderous. The curtain was raised again and again. At the end of the second act there was a succession of roaring cheers.

And now the last act was holding the audience enthralled—gripped by the magic of its genius.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RAGE OF THE SEASON.

TO the St. Frank's fellows, the play was particularly magnetic.

They had played these parts themselves, and they found, as the play proceeded, that there had been absolutely no alterations. None, at least, that would be

noticed. Roger Barton, with barefaced effrontery, had stolen the play word for word, and scene for scene. It was unquestionably the most impudent robbery conceivable.

Even Stevens himself lost his fury.

The play gripped him—gripped him as it had gripped him when he had been acting in it. But then all the parts had been played by juniors—amateurs at the best. Acted by the cream of the West End talent, the play became a marvel of scintillating brilliance.

It was good in every department. The dialogue was witty and dazzling. The construction of the plot was supremely clever. The last act was the best act of all—working up to a smashing, glorious climax. There was nothing melodramatic in the show—it was just a clean, wholesome slice of life. A play that held the audience entranced.

And at last the final curtain fell.

The scene which followed was amazing. Indeed, such a scene had scarcely been witnessed in a London theatre for many years. The success of the play was staggering, and the entire audience seemed to go mad.

Cheer after cheer roared out from every section of the house. There was a unanimous note in that outburst of enthusiasm. And nobody attempted to leave the theatre. The people just stood in their seats, clapping and shouting. And the curtain rose repeatedly.

Horace Stevens was standing with all the others, but he was numbed.

He had found that the play was unchanged—it was "The Third Chance," in a new guise, but virtually the same. The success of it thrilled him to the marrow—the knowledge that it was a triumph sent the blood surging madly through his veins.

His father's play!

And it had taken London by storm! Already the critics in the audience were saying that this play would run for three years—that it was the greatest success that the West End had known for two decades. It was a fortune in itself—a goldmine for the theatre and for the author.

These were remarks which Browne picked up, and which Stevens heard in a dim, detached sort of way. But he knew the truth, without hearing anything. There could be no mistaking the reception.

Nipper & Co. and the others in the pit were clapping and cheering as heartily as any of the others. They couldn't help it. They were so worked up that they half-forgot Horace Stevens' tragedy. And they told themselves that this wrong could never be allowed to proceed. The play belonged to Mrs. Stevens and her son. Roger Barton, the thief, would never be allowed to reap the fortune which the play would bring in.

And then, from all over the theatre, came the shouts for the author.

They were insistent.

"Author—author!"

At the word, so often repeated, Stevens stiffened, and his eyes glinted. The mocking tragedy of it horrified him. They were shouting for the author—and the author had been dead for years! There was something infinitely paralysing in the very idea of it.

And then—the manager appeared upon the stage, smiling, bowing. With him came Roger Barton. And Roger Barton was left in the centre of the stage—to acknowledge the tumultuous storm of cheering.

"Speech—speech!"

"I can't stand it!" muttered Stevens thickly. "Look at him! Bowing and smirking! The cur! The ugly, thieving toad! Look at him, Browne!"

"I urge you to remember your promise——"

"Hang my promise!" panted Stevens "That's over now, anyhow! I gave you my word I'd keep quiet during the play—and the play's finished! I won't keep quiet now, Browne—I swear on my oath I won't! This is more than flesh and blood can stand!"

"Brother, brother—I beseech you——"

Browne paused, for Roger Barton was speaking.

". . . wonderful reception . . . nothing I can say will express my gratitude for your kindness . . . can only assure you that I wrote what I thought to be a clean play . . ."

The words came to Stevens disjointedly, but he heard enough to make him cry aloud with rage. But the shouting cheers of the audience drowned his own small voice.

"London has had many unclean plays," went on Roger Barton. "I think the time has come for better and more wholesome fare. So I have done my little best to supply——"

Stevens saw red for the second time that evening.

Staggering blindly, he pushed his way down towards the stage—butting into people, and pushing them roughly. In full view of the audience, he pointed a quivering, accusing finger at the figure which stood in the full glare of the footlights.

"Liar!" he shouted, his voice almost a scream.

"Alas!" sighed Browne. "This is what I had feared!"

He was watching Barton, and he saw the man start and change colour. The whole house was stilled into dumbfounded silence. During that tense moment a pin might have been heard to drop.

"You—you lying hound, Barton!" came Stevens' voice, audible from the floor to the roof of the theatre. "This play was written by my father. And you've stolen it! You've stolen it! You cur!"

Barton stood there, utterly aghast.

"This—this is outrageous," he managed to stammer. "The boy's mad. I don't understand——"

"Liar!"

This time the voice came from the pit—and it was Handforth's voice. He was

almost as worked up as Stevens himself—but in a different way. Edward Oswald suffered none of the torturing agony which racked Stevens in every fibre.

"You rotter!" hooted Handforth. "Listen, everybody! This man's a fraud, a swindler, a thief! It's not his play at all! It's Stevens'! We can prove it, too! That beast ought to be horsewhipped!"

"Hear, hear!" yelled all the other St. Frank's fellows.

But by this time the audience had recovered from its momentary shock. A perfect roar of protest went up. This play was a masterpiece—and the author was on the stage. Nine-tenths of the audience believed written by his father! And Roger Barton, the thief, was accepting the plaudits of the throng!

William Napoleon Browne found his chum somewhere in the street—leaning against the wall of the theatre—with people brushing past him, and staring with rude curiosity. Perhaps they weren't to be blamed, for Stevens was very much of a wreck—dusty, dishevelled, and so flushed that he seemed half-intoxicated.

"Browne, old man," he sobbed, "they've thrown me out! And Barton—that—that dirty hound——"

"Yes, old man, I know," murmured Browne. "But it's no good. You made a

that the disturbance was nothing more serious than a schoolboy rag. If Horace Stevens' protests had been allowed to stand alone, the effect would have been much greater. But when so many schoolboys joined in, it changed its character. It became an organised attack—a mere first night rag.

And even while Stevens was attempting to speak further, he was howled down. Attendants gripped him from behind, and hauled him away. He struggled madly—shouting, gasping and panting.

But it was useless—he was dragged from the theatre, and ejected—flung out as a nuisance. And yet that play had been mistake by creating that scene—a grave, tactical blunder. Not that I blame you. I am ready to grant that human flesh and blood can stand a certain amount and no more."

"I wanted to smash him!" panted Stevens fiercely.

"A laudable desire," nodded Browne. "In one way, Brother Horace, my admiration for you is intense. You have done well of the great and noble Stevens family. You have carried out their traditions with the true spirit of courage. But, alas, in another way, I deprecate this publicity. It would have been better had Brother Barton been left in ignorance of our presence. Then we

would have been able to leap upon him at our own moment. But now he is upon his guard."

"I couldn't help it, old son," muttered Stevens. "I just couldn't help it. What will the mater say when she knows? What will she saw when she hears——"

"She will not know—she will not hear," interrupted Browne quietly. "At least, not just yet. This news must be kept from her. Your mother is far from strong, brother, and caution is the watchword. You must keep the press notices from her—the title will tell her nothing."

Stevens looked at him with gleaming, feverish eyes.

"You're right, Browne," he muttered. "She mustn't know! Good heavens, she mustn't know a word! It would kill her!"

CHAPTER XIV.

FACE TO FACE.

BEFORE Browne could make any further remark there was a surge in the crowd. The pavements were packed by the outcoming audience—everybody talking excitedly about the play and about the extraordinary disturbance.

Nipper & Co., Handforth, and the others, came round Browne and Stevens like a tidal wave. They had just escaped from the pit, and were keen upon exchanging notes with the two Fifth-Formers. They all managed to press out of the throng, and they found themselves drifting towards the comparative quietness of Trafalgar Square.

They talked in a confused way—everybody, in fact, shouting at once—until they reached the lee side of one of the famous lions in the Square. And here they halted, flushed and tense.

"I beseech you, brothers, to go quietly home, and to let matters rest for the moment," urged Browne. "Brother Horace is distraught."

"By Jove, I don't wonder at it!" said Nipper grimly. "Barton has stolen that play, word for word. It's an outrageous thing, Browne! Can't we do something?"

"We can do many things," replied Browne. "We shall do many things. But not now, Brother Hamilton. I venture to suggest that any drastic action to-night would be a strategical blunder."

"But Barton's claimed the play as his own!" roared Handforth.

"That," said Browne, "is a detail. The play is a success—as I always predicted. It has been presented in one of London's best theatres, by one of London's best companies. That is all to the good. The true authorship will soon be broadcast to all and sundry. But for the moment we must allow Brother Barton to bask in his temporary glory."

"He ought to be horsewhipped!" snapped Nipper.

"Horsewhipped!" muttered Stevens dully.

"Poor old Stevens!" went on Nipper, giving him a compassionate glance. "It must have been an awful time for you, old man! But we all understand—and we all want to help. If there's anything we can do——"

"Let's go and slaughter Barton!" suggested Handforth.

"I must pass a vote of censure upon this impulsive desire to annihilate Brother Barton," put in Browne firmly. "I uphold the sentiment, but such a course would be a fatal mistake. We should do our cause illimitable harm. We must act slowly—deliberately—cautiously."

"Why?" demanded Edward Oswald.

"Because Brother Horace's mother is a lady of delicate health," replied Browne. "We must do nothing to give her pain, or a sudden shock. She must know nothing of this matter—until we are ready to strike."

"But why can't we strike now?" asked half a dozen juniors.

"Alas! Such hot-headed thoughtlessness!" said Browne. "Must I go into details——"

"Browne's right, you fellows," said Nipper. "Barton has probably safeguarded himself—he's surrounded himself with barbed wire defences. We can be absolutely certain that he's destroyed the original script of the play—and there's nothing to prove the true authorship. That's the worst of it. Before we can do anything, we've got to produce proofs."

"I am glad, Brother Hamilton, that you have pointed out the difficulties so concisely and neatly," said Browne, with a nod of approval. "You have stated the problem in a nutshell. You have laid your finger upon the critical spot. Without proofs of Barton's guilt, we are as helpless as a rudderless ship in a sea of golden syrup."

"But we can drag Barton out, and smash him, can't we?" demanded Handforth fiercely. "We can get some satisfaction that way."

"And enable Brother Barton to gain the sympathy of the public," said Browne, shaking his head. "No, we must remain level-headed. Kindly distribute yourselves to your various habitations. I will take Brother Horace, and see him safely home."

Browne was insistent, and so, five minutes later, they parted—the juniors going off, indignant and disappointed. Nipper and Pitt were about the only ones who saw the wisdom of Browne's policy.

Alone, Browne tried to persuade Stevens into a taxi-cab. But the schoolboy actor was not to be drawn.

"I've got to see Barton!" he said, in a curiously grim voice. "I want to see him, I tell you. I want to hear what he's got

to say. We're going back to the Emperor Theatre, Browne."

"I beseech you, Brother Horace——"

"You can beseech all you like—I'm going!" vowed Stevens. "I tell you I'm going to face him. I've got to. I've just got to! I couldn't sleep unless I did, old man—I should go mad!"

"But it will do no good——"

"I can't help that—I want to hear what he's got to say," insisted Stevens, his eyes glittering feverishly. "If you won't come with me, I'll go alone! And if you try to stop me, I'll knock you down!"

Browne realised the futility of further argument.

"Since you are thus determined, Brother Horace, I will accompany you," he said quietly. "Perhaps you are right. Who am I to question your actions? You are the only one who can fully appreciate this outrage. If your father could know of this, I venture to predict that he would approve of your action. Forward, Brother!"

Stevens heard nothing. He was in his right senses, but he hardly seemed to be. He was filled with the obsession of meeting Roger Barton face to face. Until he had done so, he would be like a fellow in a nightmare. William Napoleon Browne could understand.

They reached the stage door of the Emperor Theatre, and Stevens led the way in. But it was Browne who addressed the doorkeeper—a big, important-looking man who barred the way.

"What's this?" he asked sharply. "You can't come in here——"

"We want to see Mr. Roger Barton," said Browne smoothly. "We insist upon seeing Mr. Roger Barton. And, brother, I have a slim idea that we shall succeed in our enterprise."

The stage door-keeper thoughtfully pocketed the pound-note which Browne had slipped into his hand.

"Yes, young gent, I think you can see him," he said, nodding. "As it happens, Mr. Barton's only just come off the stage—he's been talking to Mr. Arrowsmith for the last five or ten minutes."

"Be good enough to lead on, Brother Macduff," said Browne.

The stage door-keeper led on, and after proceeding down a long passage with a concrete floor, the two Fifth-Formers found themselves near the stage. It was dark now, and some of the stage hands were making everything snug for the night. Browne and Stevens found themselves alone, waiting.

Perhaps it was by chance that Roger Barton came hurrying by at that moment—a light overcoat flung over his shoulders. He halted at the sight of the pair, and then attempted to walk on.

"One moment, Mr. Barton!" said Stevens tensely.

Roger Barton smiled.

"What can I do for you?" he asked contemptuously.

"You cur!" breathed Stevens. "How did you get hold of my father's play? What are you going to do about it? You've got to explain now—do you hear me? I won't leave this theatre until——"

"You're mad!" interrupted Barton harshly. "I seem to remember having seen you before—in connection with that miserable theatre of old Noggs', I believe. But I don't know you. And I had no idea that your father had written a play. I am sorry that you should confuse it with mine ——"

"You liar! This play that you call yours was written by my father!" shouted Stevens. "I'll make you acknowledge it, too! You hound! I'll force you——"

"Get out of my way!" snarled Roger Barton. "I know nothing of your play—or of your confounded father!"

Horace Stevens quivered.

"My father is dead!" he said tensely.

"A good thing, I should say!" sneered Barton.

"You—you——"

The sneering words, uttered with such contempt, caused Stevens to lose every ounce of his self-control. With a low cry, he flung himself at Barton.

Crash!

The man staggered back, a hard fist having thudded into his neck. Stevens was hammering at him madly, and Browne stood by, helpless. But then the stage doorkeeper and several other men flung themselves upon the demented boy, and dragged him off.

The next minute was hectic.

Both Browne and Stevens were thrown out of the theatre—Browne coming in for as much rough treatment as his chum. They were flung out, and threatened with the police. And Browne managed to take Stevens away. They had done their best, but it seemed that Roger Barton held the whip-hand.

CHAPTER XV.

EXACTLY WHAT HE DESERVED.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH halted.

"I'm going back!" he said firmly.

"Look here, Handy——"

"I'm going back!" said Handforth.

They had reached Piccadilly Circus—Handforth, Church, McClure, Nipper, and Tommy Watson. The others had gone their various ways home.

"It's no good going back, Handy," said Nipper. "We can't do anything. Old Browne was quite right——"

"We can wait outside the theatre, and

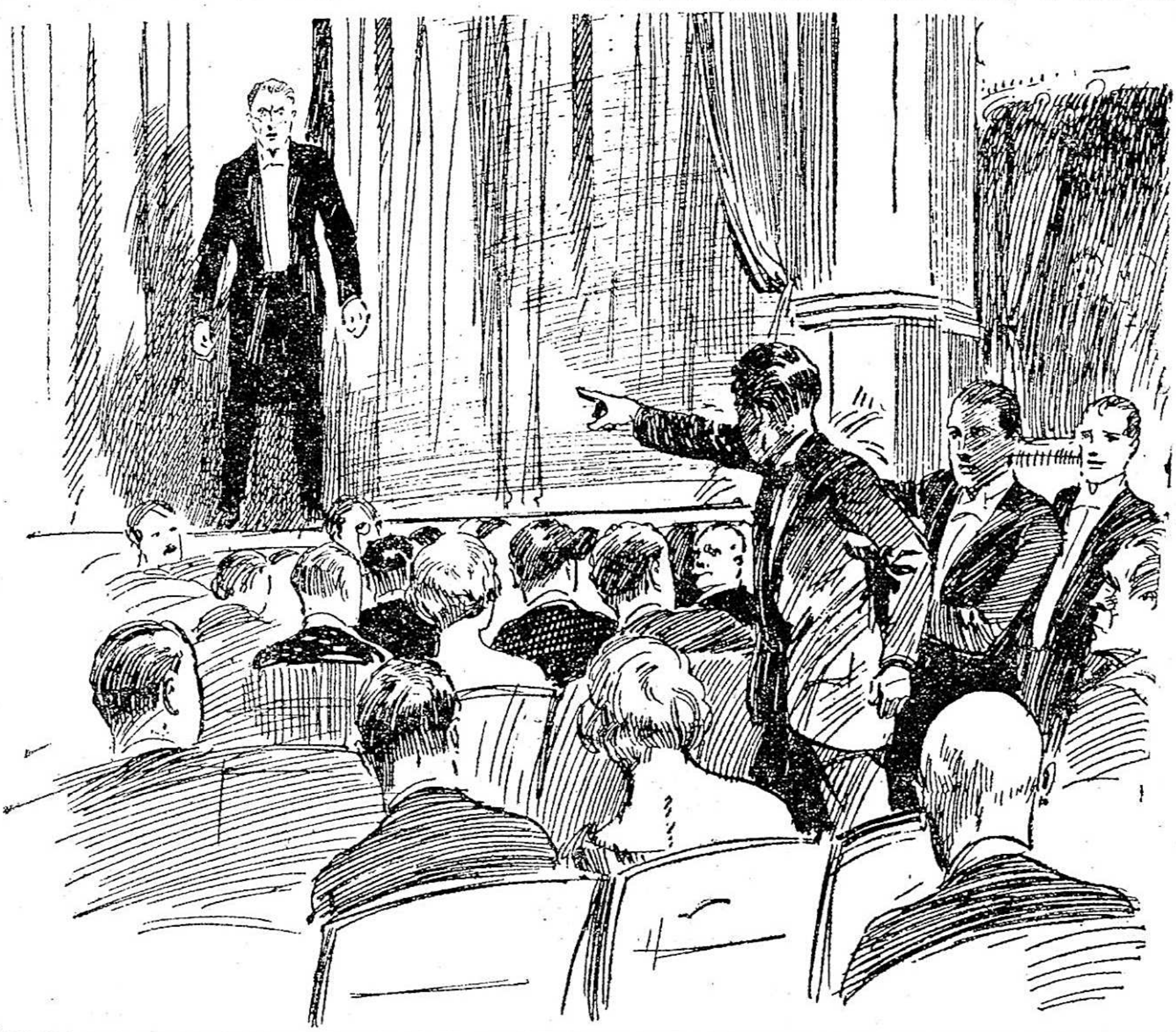
give Barton a groan when he comes out," said Handforth grimly. "I don't like to leave the thing like this. Church! McClure! You'll come with me, even if the others don't!"

For once, Church and McClure were ready. They were inwardly excited, and were quite prepared to give Roger Barton a groan. Nipper and Tommy Watson decided to get off home—they didn't exactly relish another dose of publicity. Handforth was obstinate, and he wouldn't be denied.

"I don't care," said Edward Oswald. "We're going to wait."

And in the meantime, William Napoleon Browne was acutely alarmed. He had taken Stevens home to Curzon Street. It had occurred to Browne that he would put the whole case in front of his father—and get Sir Rufus to say a few calm words to Stevens.

Unfortunately, Browne's father was out, so they had waited. For just a minute Browne had left his chum—only to find that



In full view of the audience, Stevens pointed a quivering, accusing finger at the figure which stood in the full glare of the footlights.
"Liar!" he shouted, his voice almost a scream. "It is not your play!"

Half an hour later the chums of Study D were still waiting near the Emperor Theatre—in such a position that they could keep their eyes on the front entrance, and also on the stage-door. So far, there had been no sign of Roger Barton.

"Hadn't we better be shifting?" asked Church, yawning.

"No fear!" snorted Handforth.

"But perhaps the rotter's gone!" argued McClure. "I expect he went before we got back——"

Stevens had suddenly gone. Something else had gone, too—something that Browne had seen in a corner of the hall. At full speed, he hurried away, a vague idea as to Stevens' intentions in his mind.

Mr. Roger Barton appeared from the Emperor Theatre at last, a boisterous figure surrounded by several happy gentlemen in evening-dress—all of them connected with the production. They had every reason to feel happy. Such successes were not won every day.

Mr. Samuel Arrowsmith, the man who had put the show on, was concerned about the disturbance, but Barton had assured him that the boys had been lying—that the whole affair was nothing more nor less than a senseless rag. And now Barton and the other gentlemen were off to a supper party—to celebrate the victory.

But Barton had scarcely appeared before a figure moved out from an opposite doorway. And the figure was that of Horace Stevens—and in his hand he gripped the thing which Browne had missed.

It was nothing very alarming—in fact, a horse-whip.

Stevens had seen it as he had entered Browne's house. He had remembered a remark by somebody earlier. What Barton needed was a horsewhipping!

Stevens hardly remembered anything that night. He was like a fellow in a nightmare. Only one fact throbbed through his brain. Barton had stolen his father's play! The law could do nothing, since the cur had safeguarded himself. But there was another law—and Horace Stevens took it into his own hands.

He ran across the road with fleet steps.

"Now!" he panted triumphantly, as Barton and his friends were coming out of the theatre.

Slash!

Roger Barton gave a wild howl of anguish as the horse-whip licked round his legs like the sear of a red-hot iron. He leapt a clear foot into the air, and those who were with him scattered in a panic.

"Hurrah!" yelled Handforth, rushing up. "Go it, Stevens! Good man! Let him have it!"

"Police—police!" howled Barton desperately. "You infernal young dog. If you touch me again——"

"I've got you now!" breathed Stevens. "I'm going to make you smart, Roger Barton. I'm going to horsewhip you until you howl for mercy!"

"You mad young fool! Don't dare——"

Slash! Slash! Slash!

The horsewhip curled round the man's body viciously, cuttingly. He ran blindly, panic-stricken. He ran into the Haymarket, tearing across the road like a demented thing.

"Help! help!" he screamed.

Slash! Slash!

Close in the rear Stevens followed up, wielding the horsewhip with all his strength. If Barton had never felt pain before, he felt it then. The cruel whip hissed round his legs like something alive. Like lightning a crowd came up, and shouts were echoing up and down the street.

"Police!" shrieked Barton. "You young devil——"

He broke off with another scream, for Stevens was relentless in his punishment. He was filled to the brim with burning anger and indignation. And he was reckless. He didn't care what happened.

Church and McClure managed to hold Handforth back or he would have rushed into the scrap himself. Not that it lasted long. The police were soon on the scene, and the public took an interest in the affair, too. Stevens was dragged back, and the horsewhip was torn from him. But not before he had made Roger Barton a living agony.

Barton himself was held by several excited passers-by.

"The boy's mad—mad!" he gasped. "Take him away; don't let him get at me——"

"What's it all about?" demanded a constable grimly. "Look here, young fellow, you'll have to come to the station!"

He gripped Stevens like a vice.

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth. "They've arrested him. Come along, you chaps, we can't allow this!"

"You idiot!" panted Church. "If we interfere we shall be arrested, too. Let's keep out of it, for goodness' sake. We can't do any good by butting in. Look at the crowd; it's growing all the time!"

Stevens was as cool as ice. Somehow, the horsewhipping of Barton had completely changed him. He had got rid of his pent-up rage. He had made Barton suffer. And now his brain was clear.

"All right!" he said eagerly. "I'm arrested, eh? Good!"

"He likes it!" gasped Handforth.

"No more nonsense, young man," said the constable. "You'd better come along with me quietly. You'll have to come, too, sir," he added, turning to Barton. "I shall require you to charge this young fellow with assault."

"By Heaven, I'll come!" snarled Barton thickly.

"There's nothing I'd like better!" said Stevens. "It's publicity. That's just what I want. Come along, Barton—come to the police-station and charge me. We shall be up in court on Monday, and——"

"What!" muttered Barton. "Yes, I suppose—— Hold on, officer. Hold on. Don't be in such an infernal hurry!"

Several of Barton's companions were talking at once, urging him to press the charge. The crowd was growing bigger. And it was at this moment that Browne breathlessly arrived. He pushed his way through the crowd fiercely, guessing at once that Stevens would be in the centre.

"Well," asked Stevens, "aren't we going?"

"Hang it, I don't want to get the boy into trouble!" said Roger Barton thickly. "I don't make any charge, officer. Let him go. He's half mad, or something. Let the kid go!"

Horace Stevens' words had chilled him. Publicity! The very thing he wanted least

of all. If he pressed this charge the whole of London would know that he had been horsewhipped, and the whole of London would want to know why. There would be inquiries; some uncomfortable truths might break out—— Barton almost got into another panic.

"Let the kid go!" he repeated tensely. "I don't make any charge."

"But look here, sir," began the constable.

He found something crisp in his hand, and he came to the conclusion that the affair had better drop. It wasn't a bribe, although Barton had meant it as such. Without Barton present to make the charge the policeman could not arrest the culprit.

Barton pushed his way through the crowd, smarting in every limb, shivering in every limb, too. And Stevens, feeling suddenly faint, found himself supported by William Napoleon Browne. Handforth & Co. were there, too, congratulating him with breathless enthusiasm.

CHAPTER XVI.

BROWNE'S ADVICE.

HOWEVER, the attentions of the crowd were too energetic to be comfortable. People were pressing round in inquisitive throngs.

The St. Frank's fellows found themselves the centre of an excited, gaping circle. And when they moved, the circle moved. They were obliged to fight their way out. By a piece of luck they secured a taxi and were soon carried away from that scene.

"Brother Horace—Brother Horace!" said Browne severely. "What have you done? What, I ask, have you done?"

"I've horsewhipped Barton!" replied Stevens quietly.

"Jolly good luck to you!" said Handforth & Co. in one voice.

"I've horsewhipped Barton, and he was afraid to give me in charge," said Stevens, his voice afire with triumph. "He was afraid to give me in charge. By Jove, he knew what it would mean!"

Browne nodded.

"An admission of weakness, Brother Horace," he agreed. "While confessing that the horsewhipping of Brother Barton fills me with joy, I must, at the same time, pass my vote against this sort of rough stuff. It is very effective, and very spectacular. But it is in a court of justice that we shall defeat Brother Barton—not in a police-court."

"What's the difference?" asked Handforth.

"Criminal proceedings will, I fear, be out of the question, at least to begin with," replied Browne. "We must go to work with greater subtlety than that. A civil action—a fight in a civil court—that will be the only way in which to commence our activities against Brother Barton. But nothing whatever can be done until after the holidays. We must possess ourselves in patience."

"It seems an awful long time to wait," said Stevens quietly.

"This hotheadedness of yours is a sad mistake," continued Browne. "You have adopted the wrong policy, Brother Horace. Think. Pause before you proceed with this drastic method of punishment. You will only antagonise people who might otherwise be friendly."

"There's something in that," admitted McClure. "Barton's had a horsewhipping, but I noticed that he had the sympathy of the crowd. Practically everybody was against us. We were even hissed."

Stevens gave a bitter laugh.

"Can we expect anything else?" he asked. "There's no such thing as justice. This cur has stolen my father's play, and it's worth a fortune. And what can we do? Nothing! Absolutely nothing!"

Browne said very little, and presently Handforth & Co. got out of the taxi, and went home. They were quite satisfied. They had been well repaid for their wait. For they had seen Roger Barton horsewhipped, and that sight had given them a surprising amount of pleasure.

Alone, William Napoleon Browne took hold of his chum's arm and pressed it affectionately. The taxi was meandering round the houses, the driver acting upon Browne's instructions.

"Now, Brother Horace, listen to me," he said smoothly. "This has been an eventful evening—an epoch-making evening. Your father's great play has been produced amid scenes of triumph. That play will run for years. A fortune is there."

"And Roger Barton will reap it!"

"He will reap the reward for his sins!" said Browne. "At first, perhaps, he will wallow in the wealth which is not his. But later, take it from me, Brother Barton will splash about in the soup. He will indeed be submerged in this liquid."

"But what can we do?" asked Stevens. "I say, Browne, old man, I'm frightfully sorry, you know," he added penitently. "I suppose I've made an awful fool of myself, haven't I? I don't seem to remember, quite. Everything's blurred. I only know that I horsewhipped him, and, by Jove, I made him smart, too!"

Browne nodded.

"Brother Barton will bear the weals for many a day," he agreed. "It is just as well that you acted in that way, since it allowed your surcharged frame to get rid of its excess energy. But now the time has come

for cool action, brother, for well-considered manœuvring."

"I'm thinking about the mater," said Stevens slowly. "Poor old mater. Couldn't she do with the money from——" He paused, suddenly realising what he was saying. "I mean——"

"Surely, Brother Horace, you have no secrets from me?" asked Browne reproachfully. "Let me assure you that I have long since known of your mother's lean purse. I have been told nothing, but I have eyes in my head, to say nothing of ears. Also, although I have never seen it, I believe there is a brain somewhere within me."

"You mean——"

"Hitherto speech has been denied me," continued Browne gently. "I could say nothing, Brother Horace. I could merely look on, and silently sympathise. Poverty is no crime, but I fear it can be heartbreaking. But now you are rich; you and your mother are the rightful owners of this play. And there is a fortune in it."

"But—but Barton has stolen it!" burst out Stevens.

"Which does not mean to say that Barton will keep it," Browne reminded him. "To-morrow I will place the facts before my father. And let me assure you, Brother Horace, that my father is a man after our own heart. Further, he has some slight influence in legal matters."

"By Jove!" gasped Stevens. "Your father's a K.C., isn't he?"

"To say nothing of being a judge," smiled Browne.

"A judge! I—I say, do you think——"

"Precisely what I think, Brother Horace, is neither here nor there," interrupted William Napoleon. "You are cool now. Remain cool. Go home, be cheerful with your mother, and say nothing to her concerning this night's production. The actual truth would prostrate her, and that, I venture to say, would be a most unhappy complication. We must set our wits to work. We must get the wheels revolving. My father will do his bit, and Brother Barton will find himself, after all his plotting, the owner of a particularly sour lemon."

"Browne, old man, what should I do without you?" breathed Stevens, pressing his chum's arm. "You're a brick. What in the name of goodness should I do without you?"

The Captain of the Fifth smiled.

"We need not discuss impossibilities," he replied. "I have long since come to the conclusion that you would be lost without your little Napoleon. My suggestion is to lie low. We will drop all activities for a small period, and we will watch from afar. Brother Barton will think that we have given him up as hopeless, and thus he will be lulled into a sense of false security. And then we shall cause the chopper to descend."

Horace Stevens could see that Browne's advice was sound, and not only sound, but full of hard, commonsense. When he went home to his mother he was happy, supremely, deliriously happy.

His depression had vanished. His father's play was a roaring success—and although Roger Barton was reaping the benefits for the time being, his spell of victory would be brief. Stevens could glimpse into the future. It would mean Oxford, after all. It would mean——

But Horace Stevens dared not allow his thoughts to run too far. He only knew that, in spite of immediate appearances, the future promised everything that was wonderful. And the future promised some excitement, too!

THE END.

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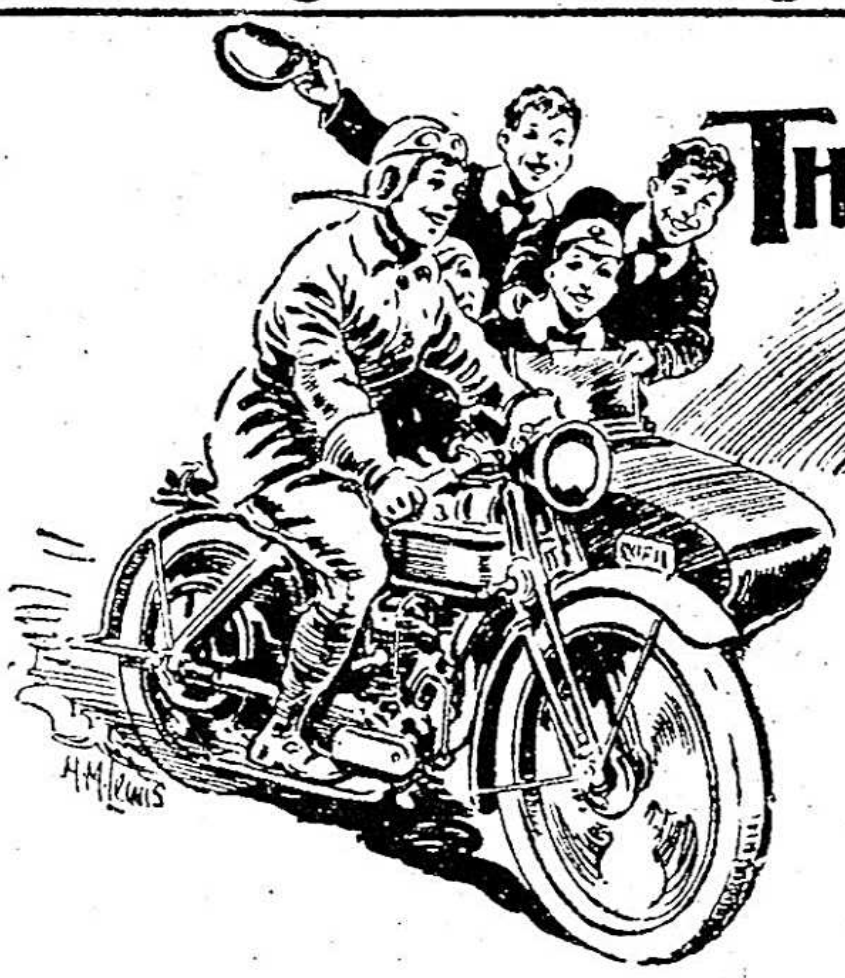


THE CALCROFT CASE.

Another Clever Story of Sexton Blake, Tinker and the Boys of Calcroft School.

By

SIDNEY DREW

FOR NEW READERS.

While on a visit to Calcroft, his old school, Tinker, the clever young assistant of Sexton Blake, the celebrated detective, witnesses a motor-car tragedy, in which Aggsby, a bookmaker, is mysteriously shot. Tinker believes that Aggsby was murdered in mistake for a man who is missing from a neighbouring hospital. Sexton Blake comes to Calcroft as the new sports master, but in reality to investigate the crime. After a thorough search of the river near the hospital, Blake finds a pair of pyjamas belonging to the missing man. Subsequent events indicate that a wealthy man, named Roath, whose nephew is a senior boy at Calcroft, is associated with the murder.

(*Now read on.*)

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ATTACK IN THE RAIN.

TINKER purchased more than he had come for in the little bow-windowed shop so familiar to all Calcroftians. It was an unusually sharp shower, and in the dusk the pond on the green was covered with bubbles, and puddles formed in the road as he waited. Suddenly the door opened and a man came into the shop and asked for a packet of cigarettes.

"When is the next 'bus to Calcroft Town?" he asked.

"They go every forty minutes," said the old lady who was in charge. "I don't know the real time, for my clock's started losing and gaining and gaining and losing, so you can't trust it not for an hour together. The 'bus don't come this way, but down the Barren Tor road. If you go round the corner and wait at the school gates, you'll see it coming down the road and can stop it."

"You've got twenty-five minutes to wait," said Tinker.

"Thanks," said the man. "Beastly coming on like this, isn't it? Dark as midnight nearly, and as wet as the bottom of a river."

The shop was filled with gloom and the swish of falling rain. The man struck a match to light a cigarette, and for an instant the yellow flame flickered on his face. He was a small man and wore a short, fair beard and thin moustache. The old lady also struck a match and lighted the gas. She uttered an exclamation of annoyance, for the mantle was broken, and its light barely made darkness visible.

"Them silly things is always breaking," she said irritably. "Dear and nasty, that's what they are, and I'm always buying them. And you never find out they're broke till it's dark. Now I suppose I'll have to put up with this till my son comes in and puts on another, for I can't do it."

The man stood with his back to the open door, and Tinker volunteered to put on a new mantle for the old lady. She brought a lighted candle, and standing on a packing-case he soon made things right. A clear, white light illumined the little shop, and as Tinker stepped down, the sound of hoof-beats was heard. The next moment the man with the fair beard flung away the cigarette and leapt into the road. Through the light that streamed from the shop, silvering the rain till it looked like shining ramrods falling aslant, Tinker saw the man hurl himself at the bridle of a horse which neighed and reared with fright. There was a mad plunging of hoofs, an angry yell, and the rider hammered down savage blows with the butt-end of a riding-whip. A moment later the bearded man was rolling over in a puddle,

and the horse, urged forward at a gallop, had vanished in the gloom and rain.

The old lady uttered a scream of terror, and Tinker ran out. The man sprang to his feet and snatched up his sodden cap. Giving himself a shake, he raced up the road. He was a good runner, but Tinker kept close up with him. Then, suddenly and unexpectedly, he swung round on Tinker with an oath and a blow so well delivered that Tinker, who had only one leg on the ground when the blow came, spun round and fell. He could not tell how long he was down, but when he got up, unpleasantly wet and with his head ringing, the faint sound of hoof and the clatter of human feet of the man still running had died away and were drowned in the swish of the rain.

"I was an ass to keep so near the beggar," thought Tinker, wiping his bruised mouth. "Spiteful little beggar! Anyhow, I had no right to chase him, so having asked for it, I got it and—— Oh, gosh!"

He felt for his handkerchief and found his pocket filled with water, but luckily it was not the pocket in which he had placed Bindley's hardbake. As he was too wet now for anything to matter, he turned back. There were cottages and houses on the other side of Calcroft Green, but the little shop opposite the pond stood almost isolated, and would soon have been in bankruptcy except for the boys of Calcroft, whose pocket-money made it quite a profitable business.

The terrified old lady had locked the door, but she had not put out the gas. Tinker had not recognised the rider of the horse, but his idea was that it was the elder Roath, for he had seldom seen anyone on horseback in the neighbourhood except the elder Roath and his nephew. The rain had washed out the traces of the brief struggle, but Tinker searched about. He found nothing, so he went home. He did not know what his face looked like after the blow in the mouth, but knew his clothes were wet and dirty, and he wanted to get up to the dormitory and change without causing a sensation. There was nobody in the hall, so Tinker dashed up the staircase and then surveyed the long corridor. All the doors were closed, and the usual din came from the Rag. All looked hopeful, and Tinker thought all was safe until the door of the Rag was wrenched open and Beilby, shrieking deafeningly, was hurled out by several hands aided by several feet, and his clutching arms closed round Tinker's neck.

"E-e-e-e-ee-eee!" shrieked Beilby, who had, as usual, been getting himself disliked. "Pigs! Cads! I'll bash the lot of you! E-e-e-e-ee-eee!"

The door had closed. The chums had fired Beilby out, and they took no further interest in him. Feeling that he had got hold of something wet, Beilby swiftly unlocked his arms. Tinker might have been wet and dirty, but the blow could not have disfigured him very much, for Beilby recognised him immediately as a person to whom he owed money.

"Wow!" he yelled, and left. "Booh! Go and wash your dirty neck!" he added when far enough away to feel safe. "Oh, you dirty 'kite!"

It had been a glorious chance, for Tinker had had the elusive Beilby in his grasp, but again that artful youth had been lucky, for Tinker was not in a condition to argue the point about the half-sovereign note. In the dormitory, Tinker examined his face in the mirror. His mouth was rather puffy, and the inner side of his lip was cut, but he was not disfigured.

"Another suit to go to the cleaner's!" he thought. "That chap looks like getting quite fat out of us."

He dressed, and then sat down on the edge of his cot, and thought hard for five minutes. When he had sponged his face again, it looked fairly normal. He intended to go across at once to see Sexton Blake, but he had to give Bindley his hardbake, and it was still raining.

"Cheerio!" said Pye as Tinker came into the study. "Did you get wet?"

"We're not worrying about that if the hardbake didn't get wet," said Bindley. "Don't tell us you've been teaching it to swim, Tinker."

"Catch!" said Tinker. "Here's your stick-jaw, and the next time I go on your silly errands I'll pick a fine day for it."

"What's the matter with your face, old top?" asked Fane. "You look as if you'd got a gumboil coming."

"Oh, I slipped down and trod on it," said Tinker. "Don't look at me so cross-eyed, Bindley, for if it looks a bit swelled, it's not a lump of your hardbake that's puffing it out. Besides, we don't eat such common stuff, do we, chaps? Almond rock and chocolates for us, old dears. Have a go at these, and let's hope his cheap hardbake will choke him."

"No such luck, old dear," said Manners. "Nothing will choke Bindley till the hangman gets him and does the job properly, and it makes one a bit cheerful to know it's bound to happen. You're an extravagant bounder, Tinker. Only that we know almond rock and chocolates are bad for you, we wouldn't eat them. It's only out of kindness to you we do it."

"By the way you wolf 'em, you're kinder to me than any guys I ever met." grinned Tinker. "Now I must beetle off to see the guv'nor. Anybody want a ten-shilling note? Because if you do, Beilby owes me one, so get it out of him."

"Chucked it up as hopeless, then?" asked Fane, with a grin. "We knew that kid would beat you, Tinker. Have you chucked in your hand?"

"Not yet, but I thought perhaps you'd like to have a try. You can share the loot if you can squeeze it out of him."

"You'd have more chance trying to squeeze lemonade out of a brick, old top,"

said Bindley. "Oh, my hat! There goes the ghastly old bell for prep. Look out for squalls, and don't take any of that tosh down with you to eat in class. I heard Pycroft tell his fat pal that he had a twinge of rheumatism in his knee, and when he's got that he's always likely to go off the deep end, so be jolly cautious."

"No use offering him a bite to soothe his savage breast and all that, I suppose?" said Tinker.

"He'd bite, but it wouldn't be the tosh or the choc.; he'd bite our heads off," said Fane. "Come on, you miserable cripples! I haven't got rheumatism, but I can feel it in my bones that Pycroft is going to jump on some of us with both feet this jolly evening. Let me touch wood for luck. Push your head a bit this way, Pye, and let me touch it, for they say soft wood is luckier than hard wood."

"I suppose that's why so much sawdust falls out of yours when you comb your hair, which isn't very often," said Pye. "Come along then, you tykes. If it clears up, Tinker, and you feel you'd like to be nice to us, you might run down to old Bloomby's shop at Calcroft and buy us a few lobsters for supper. Bring a few dozen oysters, too, if they're not too heavy to carry."

"Absolutely," said Tinker. "I'll run all the way, I don't think. Scuttle off while you're safe. My dearest wish is that the learned Mr. Pycroft will jump hard enough on the whole bunch of you to flatten you all out for keeps."

There was no telephone in Sexton Blake's room, so Tinker could not communicate with him from Mr. Pycroft's house.

He waited till all was quiet, and then crossed the quadrangle in the drizzle. It was a wasted journey, for Sexton Blake was not there. Tinker looked about for some message. There was a stump of a cigar in the ash-tray, which Tinker inspected.

"Dedgard left that thing behind," he thought. "Perhaps the guv'nor has gone to spend the evening with him."

The weather was clearing, and there were stars in the sky. Tinker set out for Calcroft Town on foot, knowing that if he failed to find Sexton Blake he could get back to the school by motor-'bus before the dormitory bell rang, and the house was locked up. He put Sexton Blake's flash-lamp in

The door of the Rag was wrenched open, and Beilby, shrieking deafeningly, was hurled out by several hands, aided by several feet.

his pocket, and at the gates he turned to the left instead of the right.

Opposite the old-fashioned little shop, now closed for the night, Tinker switched on the light, and began to search the wet road. He picked up something and slipped it into his pocket, and quite aware of the approach of Constable Blagg, he went on with his search. Though the constable approached noiselessly in his rubber-soled boots, Tinker had seen the glitter of his oilskin cape, and heard it rustle. Suddenly Blagg turned on his own flash-lamp, a big, cylindrical affair, that would have knocked a man down quite as effectively as a truncheon, and turned its powerful beam on Tinker.

"Good-evening," said Tinker. "Clearing up nicely, isn't it, Mr. Blagg? Do you mind moving back an inch or two while I explore that puddle."

"So it's you, is it, sir?" grunted the constable. "I didn't exactly take you for a glow-worm, but what's it about? Lost anything, sir?"

"Nothing," said Tinker. "I'm only trying to find something. And there it is."

It was the stag-horn handle of either a walking-stick or riding-crop, and except for the water and road-grit on it, it was quite clean. Tinker had not expected it to be in any other condition, for if the man with the beard had been struck on the head with it hard enough to draw blood or remove any hair, he would not have been able to run so fast or hit out so lustily. In any case, the heavy rain would have obliterated any traces after such a long interval.

"So that's what you were looking for, though you say you hadn't lost it," said Blagg. "How do you make that out?"

"Seen it before?" asked Tinker.

"I might have and I might not," grunted the constable. "I've seen lots like it before. A nice handle, but the ordinary sort. And if you hadn't lost it, how is it you were looking for it, sir. Did the person who lost it tell you he'd lost it, then?"

"He didn't," said Tinker. "I often look for things I haven't lost and find them. This is a case in point. And, I say, I suppose you've heard about young Martin Roath getting smashed up? That was Roath who came shouting past us on that mo'-bike going umpteen million miles an hour. If you'd yelled after him, stopped him and warned him, he'd have ridden carefully and kept out of hospital. Of course, I'm not going about telling people, so don't forget that if you catch me on the hustle. Good-night, constable."

Constable Blagg remained with a thoughtful hand on his chin as Tinker walked away, whistling. At the first gas-lamp Tinker stopped to examine a broad gold ring. The ring fitted the horn-handle which had broken away from the stick, and was engraved with the initials of the owner, "M.R."

"That doesn't stand for Midland Railway, which doesn't exist now, or anything but Martin Roath," thought Tinker. "I don't know what the uncle's Christian name is, but I know the Fifth-Former's is Martin. We are now coming to things. I wonder, I wonder!" Tinker was not quite sure where he could find Dedgard, with whom he also hoped to find Sexton Blake, but he was lucky enough to run against Sergeant Siler in the High Street, and the smiling sergeant obliged with the necessary information.

"He's at the Sloop down the side of the quay," he said. "It's quieter there and not so expensive. They'd have told you if you'd asked at the Calcroft Hotel, but, anyway, I've saved you the trouble."

The Sloop was an old-fashioned inn in Quay Street, and Quay Street was filled with a curious mingled aroma of fish, tar, oranges, salt and cheese. Calcroft had quite a busy shipping trade, but as the harbour was not large or very deep only vessels of moderate size could put in. In the upper portion of the town, a stranger, especially a well-dressed one, might attract a certain amount of attention, but round the harbour it was different.

Tinker pushed open the swing-doors a few inches and had a peep into the noisy tap-room. A piano of the penny-in-the-slot type was playing loudly and the place was filled with sea-faring men, drinking and smoking. He went to another door with "Hotel Entrance" painted over it and walked through to the billiard-room. Dedgard, with his coat off, was chalking his billiard-cue.

"Hallo, Tinker!" he said. "Like a game? I'm just knocking the balls about on my lonesome to kill time."

"I'm not feeling like it," said Tinker. "That sergeant with the everlasting smile told me you'd shifted your quarters. I trailed you down, thinking the guv'nor might be with you. Hasn't he been along?"

"Not yet," said the man from Scotland Yard. "I moved because there was a bit too much of a crush at the other place, and the bills were too steep. The guv'nor did go out, then? I didn't expect him, for I thought he'd lie low till he'd got rid of those poultices."

"You mean the bandages. You don't expect the guv'nor to sit about for a week with yards of cloth wrapped round his brain-box, do you?" assured Tinker indignantly. "If they hadn't to put any stitches in the cut, a silly thing like that wouldn't keep him still for minutes. What did I tell you?"

As Tinker spoke Sexton Blake walked into the billiard-room. The private detective had discarded the bandages and had his pipe in his mouth. He nodded briskly to Detective Dedgard and his assistant.

"Just the man I want," said Dedgard. "Tinker won't play, so I'll order something to eat and I'll play you a game while they're getting it ready. Gosh! This is a noisy sort of show. Is that a Dreadnought coming up?"

Tinker went to the window, pulled aside the curtains and looked out. A tug was coming up the harbour with some vessel in tow, and the tug's syren was going full blast.

"Looks like a steam-yacht they're bringing in," he said, wiping the damp pane with his handkerchief. "I can't see her very well, but she looks a fine one."

"It ought to be a fine one by the beastly row they're making," grumbled the man from Scotland Yard. "What about grub? It will have to be chips or cutlets, or steak, or something plain, but good, for this isn't exactly the Savoy Hotel."

"We don't want anything at all, Dedgard," said Sexton Blake.

Dedgard insisted and went away to give his orders. The moment they were alone Tinker quickly told his story and placed the gold band with the engraved initials and the horn top of the whip or riding-crop in Sexton Blake's hand.

"You seem to be having most of the excitement, young 'un," said Blake. "You're not certain that it was Roath."

"Not actually certain, guv'nor. I couldn't see for the rain, but that gold band looks like evidence. If it was Roath it must have been the older chap, for the young 'un is in hospital."

"And the man?"

"A little chap with a fair beard, quite a little chap, but with a decent punch for his size, and nimble on his feet."

"Try and imagine him with his beard off, young 'un. Was he anything like Aggsby?"

"I'm not going to jump in and say 'yes,'" said Tinker, after some reflection. "It was a real beard. He was like Aggsby in build."

"You see what I'm driving at, Tinker?"

"Absolutely," answered Tinker, nodding. "It's been at the back of my head for some time. Yes, guv'nor, I know what you're driving at."

"Right, but I don't know what Dedgard is driving at," said Sexton Blake, with a quiet laugh. "He didn't leave the other hotel just for motives of economy, for he's allowed first-class expenses, the good-natured old blunderer. Choose your time and search young Roath's study when you have a chance, young 'un. You've not forgotten what you've told me, that you saw young Roath come back to the school late on the night of the murder."

"I'm not forgetting that he locked us out," said Tinker. "That may mean nothing, though. He wouldn't be the first senior to break bounds at night."

"But he hadn't a key, had he?"

"I don't think so," said Tinker. "I suppose he just pushed at the door—great Pip! If we could only think of the right thing at the right time, we'd be worth our bread and butter. My stars! If I'd broken bounds and come strolling back to school at midnight or the early hours of the morning and found the door open, I'd have fits expecting old Pycroft to be waiting up for me in the hall to poleaxe me. That's just what I didn't think of."

"What do you think now, young 'un?"

"The beggar had something on his mind," said Tinker. "For all we know, he may have had the key and permission to be out, but that doesn't alter the fact that an unfastened door didn't worry him. I'm a bit hazy. I know I had to get through the fanlight to open the——"

Dedgard's return put a close to the conversation.

"Soup and Calcroft soles and a steak and chips to follow, and a bit of Stilton cheese and a biscuit," said Dedgard. "That's the best they can do, and it might be a lot. The yacht they've just fetched in is the Southern Lily. She's come round from Shorehaven, and belongs to Roath."

"Who's Roath?" said Tinker innocently.

"One of the cold meat bosses," answered Dedgard. "He's bought a lot of property here. I don't think he's actually in the trade, for I fancy he sold clean out to the American crowd for huge bags of dollars. If he spends freely enough, and they say he does, he'll soon be a big pot in these parts. Now, how about that game. The table's rotten, and so are the cues and the balls, so watch me do rottenly, Tinker."

"You'll do that right enough," said Tinker, "but why do you stop in such a rotten place? Can't they afford a billiard-marker here?"

"I don't know, but you can have his job," said Dedgard.

"Nothing doing," said Tinker. "Your play always bores me stiff. I'm going to have a walk round the garden to get an appetite."

Tinker raised the window, which had a low sill. It was more a yard than a garden, and the incoming tide lapped the stone wall at the bottom of it. The tide ran up to within a mile and a half of Calcroft School, where a weir with a lock and sluice-gates barred its further advance, except when an unusually high spring tide followed heavy rains, and then the swollen river, unable to pour its flood water into the sea, occasionally slopped over, and had once or twice actually invaded the quadrangle, to the joy of the juniors and the disgust of everybody else.

The yacht had come to her moorings, and Tinker peered at her through the gloom. Suddenly he heard the splash of oars and the creaking of rowlocks. A boat showed dimly through the gloom, keeping close inshore. It slid along under the wall, and was made fast to a rusty iron ladder. Tinker drew back as a man climbed up.

He seemed to know the way, for he walked through and down a passage on the left of the inn, and pushed open a door that led into the street.

There was nothing at all suspicious in this, but a moment later a larger boat put off seemingly from the anchored yacht, and also made fast to the ladder. Keeping out of sight behind a pile of wooden cases containing empty beer-bottles, Tinker saw eight men climb over the wall one by one, and go through the gate. Tinker followed.

Evidently the men had gone into the tap-room of the Sloop inn, for they were not in the street. The next moment he heard the shrill sound of a police-whistle, one blast and no more, and dashed through the hotel entrance into the billiard-room. The men were there. Tinker saw Dedgard, who had blown the whistle, drop in a heavy heap, struck between the eyes by a billiard-ball.

Sexton Blake was keeping half a dozen men at bay with a broken billiard-cue, swinging it butt-end on like a flail. The men were masked, but they had not been masked when they had passed Tinker. They were of the sailor type, and most of them wore plain blue jerseys, and were armed with short life-preservers.

"Clear out!" shouted Sexton Blake, as he caught sight of his assistant.

Tinker was momentarily too astounded to obey. Before he could recover his wits, one of the masked men swung round at him. Tinker dodged a fist-blow aimed at his ear, but before he could recover the man was between him and the door, and had turned the key in the lock. Tinker made a headlong dive under the billiard-table, and he slid across the linoleum, and butted his head against Detective Dedgard, who lay there, either lifeless or unconscious, and scraped his chin on the police-whistle.

Tinker blew the whistle with all his might, and then, scrambling up, he tore a tin cue-case from the wall. The cue inside the case made it a heavy and dangerous weapon, but as Tinker fought his way to Sexton Blake's side, at the second or third stroke the catch of the cue-case broke, and, shooting across the room, the cue crashed and struck a mirror advertising somebody's beer, smashing it to fragments, and the case doubled up in his hands.

There was no shouting, only a trampling of feet, and the noise of hoarsely drawn breath. Then came a hammering at the door, and, knowing that help was at hand, the attackers made a desperate effort to close in, but Sexton Blake still kept them at bay. Three of them had dropped back, one with a broken wrist and two with broken heads.

All at once one of them rushed in on Blake shielding himself behind a chair, with the legs pointed at the private detective, and the cue proved no defence against this weapon. He dropped it, yelled to Tinker, and wriggled away along the edge of the wall.

As Tinker scuttled through the open window followed by Sexton Blake, the landlord of the Sloop Inn shattered the lock of the door with a hammer, and stood there as astonished as Tinker had been, a little crowd of his customers peering in behind him with amazed faces.

"Boat, boat!" shouted a voice. "No good, boys! Boat, boat! This'll keep 'em back!"

Something was hurled back into the billiard-room, something that spluttered and hissed and poured out clouds of dense, choking smoke, and made the landlord and his customers beat a hurried retreat into the purer air of the passage. Detective Dedgard heaved himself up, his big head and massive shoulders showing for a second or two above the evil-smelling vapour, and then dropped out of sight again with a resounding thud.

Then Sexton Blake appeared at the window, his face smeared with blood, and vaulted over the sill. Shutting his eyes and holding his breath, he fumbled about till he found Dedgard, and then, taking the big man by the heels, he dragged him to the door through the hot fog of smoke. Leaving Dedgard there, he struggled back again to where his overcoat hung.

In a second he was through the window again with his automatic pistol.

"Gone?" he asked.

"Yes, guv'nor," said Tinker. "They're the other side of that fishing-smack. Got your gun now, eh? If you'd had that before there might have been a different yarn to tell. Very amusing, isn't it? I've got a notion that somebody round these parts doesn't like us!"

CHAPTER XIV.

BEILBY'S BAD TIME.

DETECTIVE DEDGARD had a lump on his forehead the size of an orange, and was put to bed. Sexton Blake left the rest to the police, and the patrol boat went out to search the vessels in the harbour, and to look especially for two men with damaged heads, and one with an injured wrist. If Dedgard's dinner was ever cooked it was not eaten by those it was intended for. Sexton Blake and Tinker caught the motor-bus to Calcroft and scarcely spoke a word until they were nearing the school gates.

"The police will make a big song about this, guv'nor," said Tinker at last. "Why didn't we go with them when they asked us."

"For one reason, young 'un, I've got a sore head like Dedgard. That bit of a scratch opened again in the row. I couldn't have identified any of those fellows positively, though one or two of them must bear marks. Were you followed?"

"Not to my knowledge. If I'd thought of such a thing I'd have been more wide awake. Why should I be followed?"

"I don't know why, young 'un, but it looks like a fact that they knew where we were or, at least, where I was, so perhaps I was the one who was followed," said Blake. "It isn't only the police and a few people at the school who know our real identity."

"Sure as eggs," said Tinker. "I couldn't swear that the boat came from the yacht, but I should have told the inspector she had if you hadn't given me the office to keep my tongue still. Roath's yacht, too. You remember he was dining at the hotel the night we went pyjama-fishing. I've got it fixed up that he was the chap who was watching us from the hospital grounds, and that he lost his head and control of his machine. You remember the photograph of me that was found on the stairs. We are not going too far in thinking that the elder Roath brought that particular photograph to show his nephew."

"And that we're getting so jolly much in the way that Roath thought he'd better kidnap one or both of us, guv'nor," said Tinker. "That's what those rogues came ashore for, and I'm positive they came from his yacht. There's a black yarn behind all this. Do you think he'll bolt?"

"Not without the boy. Go in and 'phone, Tinker. Ring up Wisthorpe Hospital and

Instead of putting the ball over the net at hurricane speed as he had intended, Pye hit Wilberforce on the nose with it.

also the tender-hearted guy who dropped that rock on us from the bridge."

"I've held that opinion for some time, but it has to be proved," said Blake. "We're very much in the way, Tinker."

"But you don't think it's so desperate that young Roath wanted to make a murder and suicide job by running into you deliberately and killing you and himself at the same time, do you?"

"I don't think that, and I don't know what took him to Wisthorpe in such a hurry after you'd given him that note. I think in a way it was an accident. It's as plain to me that he had discovered who I was, and that the sight of me scared him so much ask how young Roath is from me. I'll wait till I hear the answer, and then I'll go back to Calcroft and have a look round the pubs and lodging-houses, before they shut, for your little man with the fair beard."

Tinker hurried back to the quadrangle with startling news.

"He's gone, guvnor," he said.

"Gone? Not dead, surely, young 'un?"

Tinker grinned.

"No, I don't think you've got to face another inquest just yet or perhaps a charge of manslaughter," he said, "so you needn't get nervous, guv'nor. The kid can't be actually dying or the house-surgeon wouldn't

(*Continued on page* 40.)

CAREERS FOR BOYS

— By A. C. HORTH —

TRADES ASSOCIATED WITH PLUMBING

THE work of the plumber is closely connected with the cold and hot water supply, the gas supply, with sanitary appliances and drainage fittings, and with telephone constructional work. Nowadays the plumber deals with water supply and drainage in connection with sanitary work, the gas fitter with gas fittings, but the division is not arbitrary, as the two sections of the trade are intimately connected in such work as the fitting of geysers and gas-boilers. The tendency of late years has been to combine the various departments of the work of the plumber and call it sanitary engineering, and to associate the work of the plumber and gas fitter in the profession known as heating engineering. Whatever branch of the work is undertaken, a considerable amount of skill is needed, and plumbing is classed as one of the highly-skilled trades.

THE WORK DONE BY A PLUMBER.

A large variety of work is undertaken by plumbers, and it includes the bending of pipes, jointing of all kinds by screwing and solder, the working of sheet lead for roof work, flashings, gutterings, and the making of seams by lead burning; the connection of pipes to mains, cisterns, flushing-tanks, baths, sinks, lavatories, etc.; the fitting of valves, taps, boilers, tanks, ranges, etc. connected with the hot water supply; the covering of domes, turrets, finials, etc., with copper and lead; the fitting of pumps, filters, rams and hydraulic work, and lining cases with lead and zinc, etc. Not only is plumbing connected with building, but it is closely connected with modern ship-building, and a plumber is as necessary on a large liner at the present day as on a building.

THE WORK OF THE GAS FITTER.

The work of the gas-fitter includes the construction of meters, the installation of pipes and fittings, pressure-gauges, incandescent and other burners, the fixing of gas cookers, gas fires and radiators and gas-heated boilers and circulators for domestic and other hot water supplies. It is more closely allied to the work of the engineer, on account of the various metal working processes involved, than that of the worker in lead such as the original work of the plumber was concerned with. The higher branches of gas-fitters' work deals with problems connected with the reflection, radiation and concentration of light and such work as is undertaken by the lighting engineer, and also with effects of radiant and convected heat on air. The action of explosive gases in the internal combustion engine and the means of obtaining effective ventilation is dealt with by the heating engineer. These are included also in the work of the gas engineer, but this profession covers the whole process of the manufacture of gas and its many valuable by-products and in itself includes many different trades.

THE WORK OF THE SANITARY ENGINEER.

The work of the sanitary engineer embraces much more than the actual work of plumbing. It includes a knowledge of sanitary science and law, of water supply, drainage, sewerage and sewage disposal, of refuse disposal, of building construction, surveying, lighting, heating, and ventilation. It includes many forms of practical work, but in the main it can be considered as theoretical rather than practical as far as the training of the sanitary engineer goes.

THE PRACTICAL AND THE THEORETICAL WORKER.

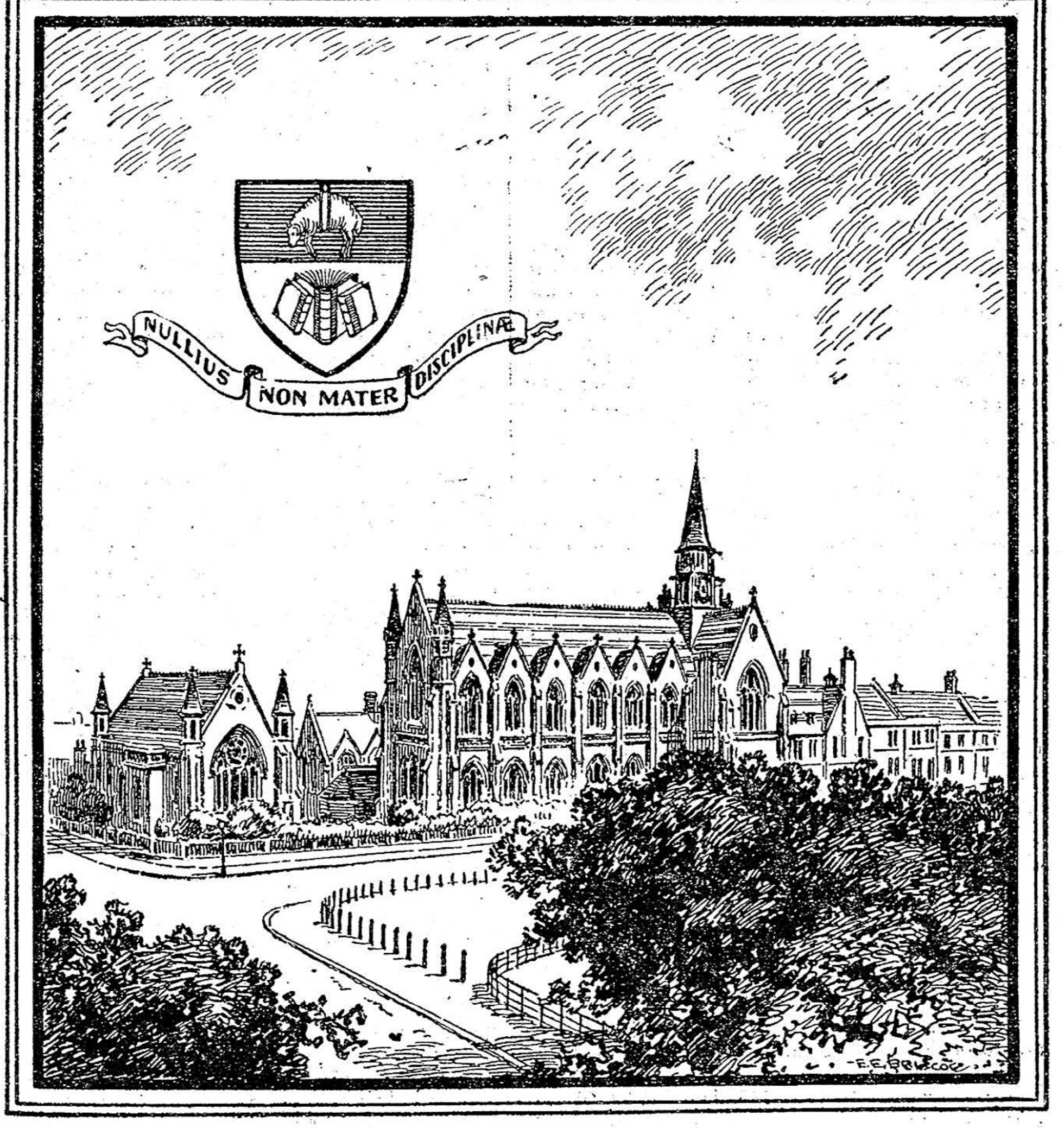
The term "engineer" is rather misleading, as it is often applied to the metal as well as to the manual workers in a trade, and it is used to indicate a profession as well as a trade. For example, in the mechanical engineering trade, the designer and theorist is an engineer, and the fitter and turner is also known as an engineer, and this rather loose method of indicating members of a profession and the actual workers in a trade by the same name is being used in sanitary engineering, which is a new profession compared with mechanical engineering. A plumber who specialises in sanitary fittings is often known as a sanitary engineer, and the same

(*Continued on page* 40.)

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Special Sketch by Mr. Briscoe, for "The Nelson Lee Library," of

LEEDS GRAMMAR SCHOOL.



Leeds Grammar School was founded in 1552 by Sir William Sheafield. The school has splendid accommodation for its 650 boys, including fine chemical and physical laboratories, a lecture-room, gymnasium and an art-room. Additional new buildings are being erected. The school has an excellent Scout Troop and an O.T.C.

(*Continued from page* 38.)

name is applied to the man whose work deals with the designing of sanitary fittings, the planning of sanitary works, or the overlooking of sewerage works.

THE PLUMBER AND THE WATER ENGINEER.

In quite a similar manner is the work of the plumber bound up in that of the water engineer, and although the plumber may only be connected with the actual work of joining up water-pipes in various kinds of ways and the fitting of various appliances, the work of the water engineer may deal with the whole question of the supply of water at the source, the methods of filtration and pumping at the storage works as well as the methods of distribution and supply.

"THE CALCROFT CASE"

(*Continued from page* 37.)

have let him go. It was the matron who spoke to me. Roath—the old 'un—got a loan of the motor-ambulance from the county hospital, to which I expect he subscribes, and they took young R. home."

"That would be to Roath's place here."

"Or to the yacht," said Tinker; "if not direct, later on. You can take it from me, guv'nor, if we don't get a move on it will puzzle you to get paid for that punch to our car. Those two are going to beat it. The old 'un hasn't merely got the wind up, but a regular gale of it. It's such a blizzard that he imagines we know twenty times more than we do know. In fact, I believe he thought you'd gone to see Dedgard to arrange for his arrest to-night, and he tried to pounce first and kidnap you before you could pounce. You'd better take me with you and watch that yacht."

"What's the use of that, young 'un. We've got no evidence worth calling evidence, for strong suspicions won't do against a man in his position. You stay here for the present, but don't go to bed. Can you hear the 'phone from your study."

"I might if it was dead still and I left the door open," answered Tinker, "but it's doubtful, and I don't relish the idea of sitting on those draughty stairs for hours waiting for a ring. Why, of course, I can borrow Mr. Pycroft's room. It's nice and cosy in there, and I'm right on top of the thing."

"Right. Don't wait up after one o'clock."

Tinker knocked at Mr. Pycroft's door to ask that learned gentleman to be allowed to sit in his private room.

"Er—of course, of course," said Mr. Pycroft amiably.

Mr. Pycroft seemed to be in such a good temper that the fears earlier expressed by Fane and some of the other juniors that he would go off the deep end that evening did not seem to be justified. As Tinker and Sexton Blake had not waited for the last 'bus there was still nearly an hour to go before the bell sent the juniors to their dormitories.

Tinker discovered a good deal of furniture in the corridor, for Pye and Fane were playing ping-pong, and when this game was played in the study it was necessary to remove some of the furniture to make room. It was a terrific encounter, for both the youngsters were experts, and the rallies were so long and fierce, and they kept the ball on the table so well, that Wilberforce Stott, who was acting as picker-up, was not greatly over-worked.

A wild slam at a ball with a nasty spin on it lost Pye the match. Instead of putting the ball over the net at hurricane speed as he had intended, he hit Wilberforce on the nose with it, and the game ended in a roar of mirth, in which Wilberforce did not join. Tears welled into his eyes behind his spectacles, and he tenderly held his stinging nose.

"Really," he said, still as forgiving and good-tempered as ever, "I ab sure you did nod do thad indendionally, Bye, but id is bosd bainful. I ab quite subrised thad a lighd thig like a bing-bong ball could addain sufficient velocidy do hurd so budch. Id is a wodder by boor dose is nod bleeding. Is id bleeding, Biddley?"

"Not a single spot of gore, my son, not a trace of claret disfigures your noble countenance," said Bindley. "You are just as beautiful as ever, but if you will push your face in the way, you must expect to get it punched. Now the rotten exhibition is over, let us do a bit more furniture-shifting, for the old show looks as if we'd had the brokers in."

"Not so much of your rotten exhibition," said Fane. "We put up a clinking good show. What's your opinion, Jack?"

"I only saw the wind-up," said Tinker, "and for that last smite Pye ought to get at least fourteen years. Perhaps it's his eyesight, for it must be in a shocking state to make him mistake Wilberforce's face for the table."

"Hi!" yelled a voice through the keyhole, "if you lout want to sell this rag-and-bone stuff, I'll give you tup'pence for the lot."

It was the voice of Beilby that made this generous offer. Knowing Beilby, the juniors did not rush out to avenge the insult, which was just as well, for Beilby had pulled the easy-chair across the door and piled the fender, fire-irons and kettle on it in such a way that a mere touch would have sent them down with a tremendous clatter.

(*To be continued.*)

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

The following is a list of names and addresses of Organising Officers who have qualified recently.—C.O.

681. Alfred Milner, 38, Sandringham Street, Anlaby Road, Hull; 815. Walter James Dane, 58, Beale Road, Bow, E.; 952. Sydney C. Gibbons, 39, Catherine Road, St. Ann's Road, Tottenham, N.15; 1795. Victor Kay, 101, Seedley Park Road, Seedley, Manchester; 2238. Bertram Lawrence, 29, Histon Road, Cambridge; 2303. Foster Francis Paul Archer, 1, Burton Terrace, St. Luke's, Cork; 2457. H. Aspinall, 6, Mount Street West, New Pellon, Halifax; 2562. Percy Kenyon, 54, Sandy Lane, Middleton, Manchester; 2612. Maurice Gooch, Crookes, Newent, Gloucestershire; 2722. William Stanley Kinchin, 7, Cambridge Street, Lower Broughton, Manchester; 2829. George Reid, 34, Sandywell Street, Higher Openshaw, Manchester; 2901. William Frederick Dunnings, 16, Netley Road, Walthamstow, E.17; 2935. Leo Donnelly, 35, Prospect Villas, Limerick; 2952. Geoffrey Partington, 16, Finghall Road, Urmston, near Manchester; 2992. Stanley Stevens, 79, Ritching's Avenue, Walthamstow, E.; 3063. Thomas Carentieri, 36, Clerkenweil Green, Holborn, E.C.1; 3103. Humphrey Jeffers, Coolmore, Carrigaline, Co. Cork; 3111. Stanley Pilkington, 203, Emmanuel Street, Preston; 3135. Stanley Lindon Oliver, 46, Margaret Street, Everton, Liverpool; 3140. William John Walker, 156, Stroud Green Road, Finsbury Park, N.4; 3284. Walter Symonds, 25, Row 118, Great Yarmouth; 3314. William Benton, "St. Ursula," 53, Englewood Road, Balham, S.W.12.

COLONIAL.

1022. N. R. Clifton, 72, Assiniboine Drive, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada; 1066. Charlie Dennill, 2, First Street, Boksburg, N. Transvaal, South Africa; 1188. Peter Frederick Blake, 3, Prince Street, Grahamstown, Cape Province.

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